



April 2020 Newsletter

Welcome to the Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas (FOSANA) e-newsletter! We share natural areas news, the Friends' efforts, and opportunities to get involved in volunteering or educational programs at San Antonio's natural areas parks. Please check our website, www.fosana.org, for periodic updates and program information.

Masterpieces of Collaboration: Nature and Nests

By Jyotsna Sharma and Jayne Neal

As we shelter in place, it is easy to get cabin fever and develop heightened anxiety as we follow the news and updates on COVID-19 in our city and around the world. With the restrictions on socializing in large groups, we can be overwhelmed with social media and news coverage of the pandemic. While walking may have physical benefits, the [benefits to mental health](#) are also well documented. Thus it is reasonable to believe in the dual benefits of walking in nature as recognized in Japan as [Forest Bathing](#).

Dr. Ruth Bergstram, an infectious disease specialist at the UTHSC said on [TPR](#), "So you don't need to be worried about those outdoor surfaces, and, by the very nature of what you do outside, you're going to be farther away from people than when you're sitting inside, and the air is going to be moving, so you're not going to be breathing each other's air." The contagious nature of the virus suggests that we must maintain a 'social distance' of 6 ft as it is an airborne virus and one may be infected but not show any symptoms.

When walking, pay attention to the wind swaying in the trees and the fragrant smell of TX mountain laurels; notice the blooms of Texas redbuds. Listen for the songs and calls of birds. Allow your senses to excite, soothe, whatever you need.

Take a moment now and imagine this: you have to build a structure and it has to be strong enough to endure wind, rain, lightning, maybe even an unexpected snow. You will be starting your family in this place and you or your mate will have to spend several days, even weeks, sitting in this place. You live in San Antonio, TX, and have to work primarily with whatever you find in nature. Your main tools are your mouth and modified hands called wings. If you have not already guessed it, we are talking about our area's native songbirds, and right now most are doing their individual nest building rituals.

Many people have seen birds collecting twigs to build nests, but they also use mud, spider webs, old feathers, and animal hair/fur. Pretty much you name it, and you will find a bird who has used it. So how does a bird choose what to use to build his/her nest? Think function first: nests have to hold eggs, the weight of the adult birds as they incubate the eggs, and the developing chicks. Clearly these temporary homes have to be strong, durable, and at least somewhat invisible. The construction design of these amazing

creatures' nests is described in the [New York Times](#) as, "when the elements are packed together randomly, they behave collectively, in a process called jamming." Perhaps a more eloquent description is that "... a nest has a certain chemistry — an alchemy, almost. From humble parts, a greater sum emerges and coheres."

As exquisite as the construction may be, birds also consider many other factors when they construct their nests. For example, these temporary homes need to be safe from predators. This is accomplished by making the nests invisible to brood parasites such as cowbirds that will remove song bird eggs from the nest when the parents are out foraging and replace it with their own eggs. The host birds cannot distinguish the cowbird eggs from their own and continue to incubate them. The results can be disastrous for the songbird as he/she struggles to feed progeny that are not his/hers.

Parasites come in all kinds of forms. At least one study by [Enslow et al. \(2019\)](#) suggests that blood parasites can have such an impact on birds that as the parasitic distribution changes, this affects a species' breeding range and natal dispersion patterns. The researchers proposed that "factors that may influence parasite distributions are land cover and host dispersal patterns, which may result in exposure of a host to novel parasites, or escape from parasites of their origin." When they did their study, the study authors found that the spatial and temporal distributions of blood parasites did indeed match the historical range expansion and natal dispersion patterns of golden-winged warblers.

So, in this time of uncertainty, try to think like a bird. Spend time in nature, be adaptable: collect only what you need and use just what you collect. Believe that all of us working together will, like a bird's nest, find that "from humble parts, a greater sum emerges," and we too can mystically live and adapt to even the novel coronavirus.

About the Authors

Jayne Neal is a wildlife biologist and naturalist who was forced to retire unexpectedly because of a neurological condition. Jayne served for more than 19 years as a Park Naturalist for the Natural Areas. As Jayne writes this article she is humbled and delighted to have a female cardinal building her nest right outside her window!!!! The male could be helping but Jayne cannot see well because of the solar screen. Jayne continued to collaborate with Jyotsna Sharma and together they have been writing the articles for the FoSANA newsletter since Jayne's retirement. Both Jayne and Jo are volunteers who believe passionately in volunteering and in nature.

We all travel the Milky Way together, trees and men... In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks. The clearest way into the universe is through a forest wilderness. - John Muir



Golden-cheeked warblers on nest ([Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#))

PHOTO Gil Eckrich

As you practice social distancing, check out these 10 ways to engage your little ones in nature right now!

1. **Bug hunt anyone?** Overcome your fear of insects and go on a bug hunt to discover the many types of insects living around you. Click [here](#) to start learning! All you need is your curiosity, a magnifying glass if you have one, a notebook, a pencil, and an optional field guide, or check out this [bug guide](#) from Texas Parks and Wildlife. Remember to Leave No Trace—nearly every insect

has an important job to do in nature such as pollination and decomposing, so please observe using only your eyes.

2. **Discover legends and folktales** of some of Texas' coolest wildflowers like the Indian Paintbrush, Bluebonnet, and Indian Blanket! Not only do these wildflowers teach us about the natural world, they can teach moral lessons too. Take a step outside, look for wildflowers, and read some of these fun [folktales](#) to your curious kiddos.

3. **Love the prickly pear cactus?** Did you know cochineal bugs can be used for food, textiles and make up? Step outside and search for a prickly pear cactus and look for the white "fluff" on the cactus pads—you'll be amazed at all the uses of [cochineal](#). For a more extensive hands-on cochineal activity, check out the National Park Service about life in the missions and using cochineal for dye [here](#).

4. **How can you tell which direction the wind blows?** Use your finger as a weathervane and learn about evaporation! Click [here](#), but remember, this activity depends on how much evaporation is in the air and won't work as well at helping you estimate wind direction on humid or muggy days. When the weather is humid, it means that the air is already filled with water vapor which will carry away the additional moisture from your finger more slowly.

5. **What kind of bird is THAT?** Most of us can't always identify birds by their call, but there are definitely some cool apps to help us get started! Check out [All About Birds](#) for learning songs, as well as watching live bird cams! Don't miss the barred owl, red-tailed hawk, and the royal albatross live! [E-bird](#) is especially important for recording what you're observing or hearing around you. For more resources on birding, and other activities, check the link [here](#). As you enjoy your bird walk, listen and watch for all the different birds and remember to document on E-bird.

6. It's Springtime and that means the birds are singing and deciduous trees are leafing out again! We love leaves but especially love leaf hunts and making cool things with the fallen leaves we find on the ground. **Explore leaf shapes** on your next nature walk and check out this [site](#) for the younger kiddos to see and do. Pro-tip: we once made our own Fiesta confetti by hole punching fallen leaves—recycle, reuse, and reduce is our motto!

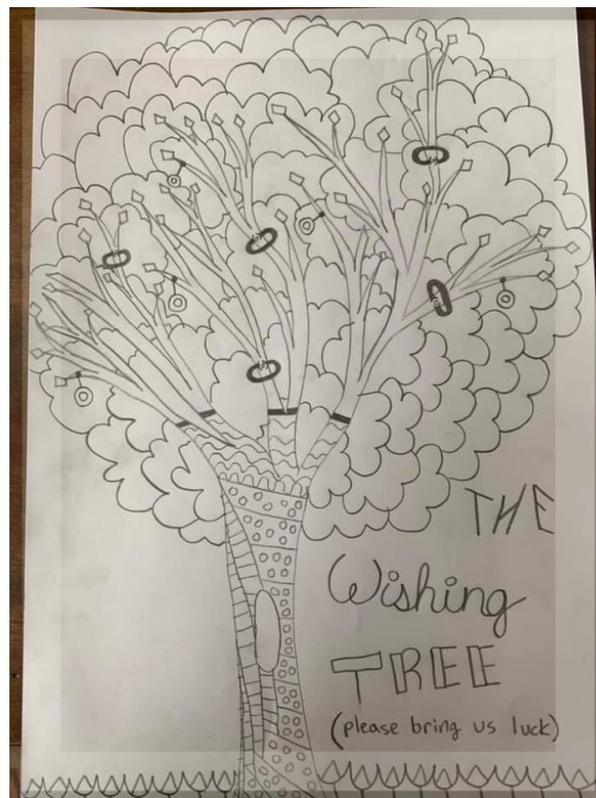
7. **Thinking of planting a garden?** Whether it's a veggie garden or flower garden, it's important to determine what type of soil you're working with. Of course, you can send it into a lab for soil testing, or you can give it the old tried and true mason jar test to determine how much sand, silt, and clay you have. Check it out [here](#)! Besides, who doesn't love playing in dirt? Dig in and have fun!

8. **Collect acorns and grow oak trees!** Will it grow into a mature oak tree in your lifetime—maybe, but it depends on the species (there are over 600 species!). With some basic supplies, a lot of patience, and some soil, air, and sunlight, you might see a tiny seedling soon! Check out this [website](#) to learn the parts of an acorn, along with a super fun craft activity for your little ones. Still

curious about how acorns become trees? Watch this short video and learn the process of seed germination [here](#).

9. **Listen for Golden-cheeked Warblers!** These elusive songbirds are singing a special song these days as they return to San Antonio and their Hill Country nesting sites. If you live where there is plenty of Ashe Juniper, a nice complement of deciduous trees, and the canopy is generally at least 30 ft tall, you might be lucky enough to hear these special birds. If you want to hear their songs (and they have more than one), first be sure and close all windows because it is important not to distract these endangered birds by playing their songs where they might even accidentally hear them. Listen [here](#) for the songs and calls of the golden-cheeked warbler, and remember them as you walk through nature. For more hands-on learning about Texas birds, click [here](#).

10. **Did you know Monarchs travel thousands of miles** to their overwintering spot in [Michoacán, Mexico](#)? In Spring, typically mid-March, they leave Mexico and head north again and begin laying eggs on milkweed during their journey. They fly along what we call the monarch [superhighway](#). Now is the perfect time to spot Monarchs as they head north. Enjoy these assorted [activities](#) as you begin to learn more about butterflies and the Monarch.



Drawing of a wishing tree by Ruby, age 11: "I drew it because, in these times, everyone needs some luck"

Do you have a nature-inspired drawing or artwork you'd like to share with others? Please send to friendsofsanaturalareas@gmail.com and we may feature yours in the next newsletter!

Please note that the **Big Give has been moved to September 10, 2020.**

We understand that there are many [local organizations that need immediate help](#), we would appreciate your membership and donation to [Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas](#) also.

From the Board, Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas



FoSANA is dedicated to promoting stewardship of San Antonio's Natural Areas, and to the understanding and appreciation of nature through educational and scientific programs.

The FoSANA Board has been blessed to have many dedicated members over the past 20 years. They have included many Master Naturalists, but also individuals with formal training in Botany, Zoology, Environmental Planning, Economics, Accounting, and Law.

But Time has taken a toll. Our Board is now small—**we are looking for dedicated individuals to contribute to our mission.**

What do we do? We raise money through membership fees and donations, and work closely with San Antonio Parks' Natural Areas staff to invest that money in:

- Bus Reimbursement funds to eliminate barriers for schools visiting the SA Natural Areas
- Monthly Early Childhood Education Programs such as Starting Out Wild and Growing Up Wild
- Guest Speakers to provide training opportunities for staff and volunteers
- Building Natural Areas facilities
- Improvement of Natural Areas Trails through grant acquisition
- Publicizing Parks' events
- Maintaining our Website, fosana.org to facilitate communication with our citizens

Would YOU like to make contributions to these services ?

- We need individuals who have special interests and skills in
 - Accounting
 - Advertising & Marketing/Social Media
 - Community Outreach
 - Educational Program Support
 - Environmental Grant Writing
 - Natural Area Improvement

Board Members must invest one night a month in oversight and planning and some weekends or weekdays in support of Natural Area programs. These activities occur primarily in San Antonio's northwest Natural Areas.

If you are serious and want to make a contribution, please contact us at <https://fosana.org> or <https://fosana.org/contact/>. Under the Contact tab you will find our mailing address or you may use the provided E-Mail Form. Let us know your area of interest and/or expertise and ask any questions you may have. We will answer every inquiry.

We Serve our Natural Areas – You can too.

Are you connected to San Antonio Natural Areas on social media?

You can like us on [Facebook](#).

Find us on [Instagram](#) @sanaturalareas.

Are you a member of Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas (FoSANA)?

Please support FoSANA on the preservation and educational outreach of natural areas around San Antonio by joining or renewing your membership [online](#) today.

Your membership this year will help us continue to

- offer over 400 environmental programs for families and adults at the Natural Areas.
- serve over 14,000 families and adults through education and outreach programs.
- coordinate over 400 volunteer programs and 7,500 volunteer hours supported trail maintenance, habitat conservation and restoration, and native landscapes and gardens.

Plus, when you renew your membership, you'll receive our monthly newsletter that provides updates on natural areas happenings and timely information on upcoming events. Should you need any assistance or have any questions or comments about your membership, please feel free to email us at friendsofsanaturalareas@gmail.com.

Sincerely,
FoSANA Board

Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas is dedicated to promoting stewardship of San Antonio's Natural Areas, and to the understanding and appreciation of nature through educational and scientific programs.

For the latest updates and more activities, please see the calendar on the FOSANA website.

[Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas Website](#)
