



December 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.

The Buck Moth

A particularly striking moth with a 3-inch wingspan, colored black and marked with a white band, takes flight in the fall. The adult buck moth does not feed, so these flights are made with the singular goal of finding a mate. Once successfully mated, the female will find a host plant to oviposit her eggs for overwintering. In central Texas, the host plant tends to be an oak (*Quercus*) species. In Spring when the larvae emerge, they will voraciously feed and do so gregariously.

If you have oak in your yard or spend time around the species, you'd be keen to become familiar with the buck moth caterpillar since they pack a painful sting. One characteristic that you will immediately notice are the caterpillar's branched spines. And if you learned anything about caterpillars as a child it was probably: don't touch the spikey ones. You'll also notice the spiked orange puffs dorsally atop the black body. Thankfully, at this time of year, you get to enjoy this species in its final, harmless, adult phase. On your next walk in the woods, make sure to look along the blades of dried grass, or the tips of a sparse shrub, you just might get an up close look at this lovely ephemeral moth.



Dorsal View
Photos: Casey Cowan



Two individuals suspected to be mating

Casey Cowan, AWB
Parks Naturalist

The Story of the Poinsettia

Ever wondered why and how the poinsettia is connected to the winter holidays? The poinsettia flowers we typically see in shop displays are native to Central Mexico and are a member of the Euphorbiaceae or Spurge family. It was introduced to the United States by botanist and diplomat [Joel Robert Poinsett](#), the first U.S. Ambassador to Mexico who noticed the plant blooming in the region and brought it back to South Carolina. He also gifted it to Andrew Jackson for a Christmas display in the White House, making it a holiday tradition. The cultivated ornamental variety we see in nurseries was given the Latin name, *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, by a German botanist, which translates to “the most beautiful euphorbia”. The genus name likely honors Euphorbus, a first century physician to the King of Mauretania (a Roman province in what is today Algeria).

The Aztecs called poinsettias ‘[Cuetlaxochitl](#)’ and were said to have used it as a red dye and to reduce fevers. Because poinsettias could not be grown in the high altitudes of Tenochtitlan (or Mexico City), Moctezuma had caravans of poinsettias brought in to decorate palaces and temples.

Although this well-known poinsettia isn’t native to Texas, there are [four poinsettia species native to Texas](#), the Painted poinsettia or Fire-on-the-mountain, (*Euphorbia cyathophora*), Snow-on-the-mountain (*Euphorbia marginata*), [Snow-on-the-prairie](#), (*Euphorbia bicolor*), and a fourth species, called Green poinsettia which is sometimes categorized as a noxious weed (*Euphorbia dentata*). As you walk through the parks this holiday season, look for our native poinsettias.



[Snow-on-the-prairie, Euphorbia bicolor](#)



Green Poinsettia

Education: Fall leaves, nature scavenger hunt, and the weather!

Hope everyone had a restful Thanksgiving holiday. As we continue to move forward during these uncertain times, I hope you'll take the time to enjoy all that nature has to offer, especially during these cooler months! For younger kiddos, check out the ['Tis the Season Scavenger Hunt](#) and learn why leaves change colors and look for all things RED in the park! You may be surprised on what you find during the winter months. For the youngest "wild ones," we've added the theme, [How's the Weather](#). If you've ever attended the Growing Up Wild or Starting Out Wild classes, then you know movement and stories are always a part of learning new concepts! While learning about the weather, kids can act out a storm, sing songs about the water cycle, learn about rainbows, and talk about the seasons!

It's also important to note that November is Native American Heritage Month. In prior years, the Natural Areas hosted programs that often partnered with local groups, emphasizing contributions made by indigenous groups in Texas. With programming on hold, we've developed a simple [Ethnobotany guide](#) to highlight some of the important plants across San Antonio. While this list only scratches the surface, there are many other important South Texas plants that were used as medicine, food, dye, or other utilitarian or ceremonial purposes. Check out one of my favorite websites, [Beyond Texas History](#) to learn more. This site is a public education service of the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory at the University of Texas at Austin, and in partnership with the Department of Anthropology at Texas State University. We invite you to discover some of these important plants and enjoy a walk through one of the Natural Area parks in search of historically significant plants. And finally, this guide is not to be used as medical advice, rather a simple introduction to ethnobotany for those interested in knowing a little more about San Antonio's important cultural past.

Enjoy!

Covid-19 in Parks

When the city imposed a strict lockdown in early March to stay at home unless working in essential services, normal social interactions came to a halt with the closing of gyms, coffee shops, bars and restaurants. We were encouraged to stay home and walk in our neighborhoods. For most people who are accustomed to going to work, the [lockdown has been stressful](#), but to cope with the lockdown it helps to be resilient, broadly defined as the ability to recover from or adjust easily from adversity. Though there are certain [traits of resilient people](#), a good way to build resilience is by [walks in nature](#) but stay with a small group, wear a mask, and maintain a social distance from others.

IF you feel you MUST hike on trails, keep group size very small, and ALWAYS stay on the designated trails. Failure to do so endangers yourself, others, and the ecosystem.

If you're unable to do so, enjoying nature right where you live is recommended. Discover nature in your neighborhood and you may notice that with less traffic noise you can hear the sound of birds. Take time to identify the trees in your neighborhood using this [TAMU identification guide](#).

If you see people failing to maintain 6' distance or vandalizing parks properties, please call 311 and/or the police non emergency line at 210-207-SAPD.



We hope that you will follow the recommendations of the National Recreation and Parks Association that emphasize the importance of social distancing in Park trails.

Please pick up your own trash and deposit it in trash bins at park entrance.



Thank you for helping us protect the Natural Areas and the health of our San Antonio community.

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](#)
