



June 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.

Summer in the City: Insect Friends and Foes

By Jayne Neal

June 20, 2020 is Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year and the official start of summer. One of the phenomena we in San Antonio associate with summer is insects. True, insects are around all year long, but humans notice them more in summer. Maybe this is because we are outside, or because insects are more active in warmer weather. Insects are wondrous in their diversity and adaptations. Here are some examples from our own San Antonio area.



This is the larval form of the Calleta silkmoth (*Eupackardia calleta*). Observations ([Stomlins](#), April 2020) suggest that this moth is expanding its range, perhaps because of urban development and the widespread planting of its larval food, Texas sage (*Leucophyllum frutescens*). The primarily green caterpillar develops into a stunning [black moth with a red collar](#) and white triangles on its wings.



This is a grasshopper. Species doesn't really matter because there are so many different ones that it is easiest to say they are members of the order Orthoptera, suborder Caelifera. Although I respect grasshoppers, as a gardener I do not like them because they are so ubiquitous and they chew up my plants with abandon. However, I also appreciate that birds eat grasshoppers, they are capable of amazing camouflage, and I even saw one swim briefly across a shallow pool of water in my yard. I also understand that grasshoppers can jump up to [25 cm high and around 1 m long](#). If humans could jump as far as grasshoppers do, relative to size, then we could leap more than the length of a football field!



This is a newly molted cicada. Note the beautiful moist green appearance of the body. In time it will change into the darker color that is seen more commonly. Adult cicadas only live for a short period of time, so it is essential that they find mates quickly, and to do this they use sound. The loud sound of cicadas [is produced by organs called tymbals](#). The tymbals have a series of ribs that buckle one after the other in quick succession. Hence those sounds (some more than 100 db) that reverberate continuously on summer nights: another example of the wonders of the insect world!

What you see above is a blank space—this is what many of us wish we would see and feel instead of the mosquitoes in our yards and gardens. Before you decide that mosquitoes are all “bad” and provide no ecological services, consider that they provide food for birds, fish, and even some plants (like the pitcher plant). They also are known to pollinate some species of plants. We may sometimes wish for a [World Without Mosquitoes](#) but, “there are 3,500 named species of mosquito, of which only a couple of hundred bite or bother humans.” Still, those that do bite humans are mighty irritating and some are vectors of diseases like malaria and Zika.

Years ago I spent a summer assisting in mosquito research; and worked on a project aimed at learning more about a species of mosquito that actually eats other mosquitoes and does not bite humans. *Toxorhynchites rutilus septentrionalis* (Tx. *rutilus*) I learned was a huge iridescent mosquito. Imagine my delight when I recently read that they are still researching the potential for Tx. *rutilus* to aid in problem mosquito control. This mosquito species may be a good biological control as according to a [report in Entomology Today](#): ‘Larval Tx. *rutilus* voraciously hunt and gorge on the larvae of disease-vector mosquitoes sharing the same water. One of them can consume up to 5,000 prey larvae before it matures, which can take several weeks to six months. While the

larvae are fierce cannibals, Tx. rutilus adults—large mosquitoes with a wingspan of almost half an inch and legs that would overlap a U.S. quarter—feed peaceably on nectar from flowers. They need sugars from nectar to produce eggs.

The Tx. rutilus research has had setbacks including urban development (destroying TX rutilus habitat) and Hurricane Harvey damaging research facilities; still, this scientific work continues making essential contributions.

Welcome to summer in San Antonio: a time of wonder and a time to continue respecting diversity, adaptations, Nature, and the work of scientists.

Author's note: All photos courtesy of Jayne Neal.

Should You Rescue Baby Birds?

This is nesting season for many birds and you may notice birds on the ground. It may seem compassionate to try to rescue these birds. Please DO NOT. Instead follow the lead and detailed directions of the scientists at [Cornell Ornithology Lab](#).



[Nestlings \(left\)](#) [Fledglings \(right\)](#)

Photos via Birdshare: Mountain Bluebird nestling by Anne Elliot (left);
American Robin fledgling by Central Jersey Wildlife (right).

Education

As the social distancing rules continue, we cannot have educational activities in the park. Parks and Recreation continues to post educational videos and hands-on activities on their [YouTube channel](#), be sure to check them out and subscribe if you haven't already! This week learn about [5 Interesting Plants](#) at Crownridge Canyon Natural Area, Eisenhower Park, and Friedrich Wilderness Park. Stay tuned for more activities coming during the month of June, including make dyes from nature, using oak galls and cochineal.

The [restrictions by the City of San Antonio and Bexar county](#) allow people to walk outside to get exercise but maintain a safe distance of 6 ft. 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.

It has come to our attention that many people are flooding Friedrich Wilderness Park and Crownridge Canyon Natural Area, and they are doing this in a way that puts themselves, Park staff, and possibly first responders at risk. As you undoubtedly know, Friedrich and Crownridge are nature preserves that are home to wildlife, including federally listed endangered species, snakes, poison ivy, and a host of other plants and animals. The trail systems cover hundreds of acres, and some of the trails are quite remote from the entrance.

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 that, 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 with this [TAMU identification guide to trees](#).

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.

COVID-19: SOCIAL DISTANCING IN PUBLIC PARKS AND TRAILS



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.

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

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.

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**](#)
