



November 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.

Thanksgiving Symbols in Natural Areas

Jayne Neal and Jyotsna Sharma

Thanksgiving is a time to reflect and give thanks. Despite the pandemic and climate change events, nature goes on giving us respite from our problems and reasons for gratitude. Turkeys, gourds, pumpkins, and leaf color changes are some of the symbols associated with Thanksgiving.

Did you know that there are still wild turkeys at Crownridge Canyon Natural Area? There are also species of gourd that can be found in our Natural Areas. These include stinking gourd (*Curcubita foetidissima*) and balsam gourd (*Ibervillea Lindheimeri*). Interestingly enough, these gourds just happen to be in the same family as pumpkins (*Cucurbitaceae*). Although the fruit of the stinking gourd is not edible, its dried roots may have some [medicinal uses](#).



[Stinking Gourd \(*Curcubita foetidissima*\)](#)

Spend some time outside and look for signs of transition as it gets cooler and the days get shorter. This is the time of the year when deciduous trees drop their leaves. Before leaves are shed, they often change color to yellow, orange, or even red. These color changes occur because leaves have [different pigments that absorb light](#) in the process of photosynthesis. Shorter days mean less sunlight and [chlorophyll, the pigment responsible for leaves' green color](#), begins to break down. Once this happens, other pigments, like reds, oranges, and yellows that were [masked by the chlorophyll](#) become visible. However, leaf color change is unpredictable and weather-dependent.

As you look for fall colors at Friedrich or Crownridge natural areas, notice a shrub belonging to the sumac family, Anacardaceae. The flameleaf sumac, *Rhus lanceolata*, is found as a shrub or tree in central Texas. The common name reflects the bright red

foliage that usually appears in the fall. It also forms red-brown berries in [tight conical terminal clusters](#) on female trees. Flameleaf sumac is host to the larvae of the Red-banded Hairstreak and Banded Hairstreak butterflies. The berries are food for birds in winter, and deer browse on the foliage. The berries can also be used to make a [lemony drink by soaking them in water](#).



[Flameleaf Sumac \(*Rhus lanceolata*\)](#)

Other Natural Areas plants with fairly reliable color change include Texas red oak (*Quercus texana*), cedar elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*), and Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*).



[Texas red oak](#)

If there is drought or an early frost, it's more likely that leaves will just turn brown and drop. However, even if there is little or no color change, the leaves will still fall and in time will help build soil. Nature is always renewing herself.

White-tailed Deer: Rut, Safety, and Management

If you live in central Texas you are no stranger to the white-tailed deer. We see deer in just about every setting imaginable: urban neighborhoods, rural ranches, dry creeks, and un-fragmented natural areas. In fact, deer are so successful at breeding, it's no wonder they are so abundant. In one study, scientists found that even when buck numbers were low, 92 of 100 does sampled were pregnant with over half carrying twins.

Like other mammals, there is a specific period when does are ready to breed. This time of year is referred to as 'the rut' or 'rut,' which in the eastern part of the Edwards Plateau peaks on November 7th. During rut you're likely to encounter more deer, since bucks are actively looking for receptive does. You might even witness an antler-smashing sparring match between two bucks, vying for a doe. It is wise that you use caution if you encounter bucks during rut since they are known to be less careful, probably due to an increase in testosterone.

Encounters with deer in our natural areas vary. In some parks the deer are quite abundant, as in Phil Hardberger Park. In other parks, like Friedrich Wilderness, you hardly see deer. The difference in encounters probably has to do with the amount of cover, proximity to urban infrastructure, water, and supplemental feeding. Unfortunately, too many deer in one area can have negative effects on forest health, in most part due to the over-browsing of vegetation. A deer's first food choice are forbs. When forbs are limited, they eat new growth on woody plants. Some browsing on woody plants is good, but when a plant has too much growth removed it can be stunted and subsequently die. We see this happen in areas with high numbers of deer; there simply isn't enough vegetation to support the number of biting mouths.

To quantify the browsing pressure in our natural areas, Parks Naturalists performed stem count surveys throughout all properties in 2020. These surveys required counting 40,100 stem tips from 401 plants across all sites. The results indicated that nine natural

areas are exhibiting 'moderate' or 'heavy use', which can have negative effects on habitat.

While there are few management practices we have to control white-tailed deer in urban settings, one is educating the public regarding feeding deer. It seems counter intuitive that feeding deer would increase browsing pressure, but it's true. Supplementing food can increase the population and since deer need more nutrition than what is being fed to them by humans, they will continue to browse on plants. Pretty soon you have sites with almost no understory, hosting only the most undesirable food for deer, e.g. agarita, juniper, and prickly pear – the diversity diminishes. The consequences of high populations of deer go beyond forest health, affecting things like water quality, disease transmission, vehicle collisions, and even songbird success.

This fall, stay safe during rut - and if you have time, help educate your neighbors about the negative effects of feeding deer.

Happy Holidays,
Casey Cowan, AWB
Parks Naturalist



White-tailed deer at Hardberger Park

Education: Bats & Butterflies

Did you know October 24th through 31st is International Bat week? We hope you'll take some time to enjoy some of the exciting games and activities on Bat Conservation International's [website](#) as well as [Batweek.org](#). You'll find fun recipes, coloring sheets, a seasonal guide to bats, origami, building a bat cave and my personal favorite—the bat hero coloring [page](#)! It's no surprise we have so many wonderful resources—bats are extremely important pollinators and the only flying mammal. In fact, one insect-eating bat can consume thousands of insects in a single night! We still have much to learn about bats but these resources will give you plenty of activities for a full week of fun with your kiddos! And don't forget to check out the latest Parks and Recreation bat video at [FOSANA.org](#) where Park Naturalists Casey and Jewell visit Elmendorf Lake Park in search of bats using an echometer touch.

In addition to bats, we've also posted a [checklist](#) of common butterflies in San Antonio—you can check off directly from your phone, or you can download a printer-friendly version. As we continue to navigate through Covid-19, we hope these online learning tools provide some inspiration for you and your families.

Nicole McLeod
Education Coordinator

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.

Although park trails remain open, we should continue to practice social distancing and avoid groups. Walking in parks also reminds us of the resilience of ecosystems to extreme temperatures we experience in South Texas. With the exception of a few sprinkles, the past few weeks have seen little rain in Bexar County, yet the parks are blooming with several native plants that can tolerate the heat and drought. The wildflower gardens and the open grassy areas always have some flowers blooming.

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 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](#)
