



June 2021 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.

Natural Resources Update

San Antonio is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States, and for good reasons; with rich culture, history, fantastic food, and unique outdoor experiences, who wouldn't want to live here?

One exciting new feature of San Antonio is the Robert L.B. Tobin Land Bridge which connects the two sides of Phil Hardberger Park over Wurzbach Parkway. This bridge is one of only two multi-use land bridges in the world, connecting both people and wildlife to both sides of the park.

But why is it important for wildlife to access both sides of the park? Wildlife have four main requirements for life: food, water, shelter, and space. And with increasing development, those necessities are becoming more and more fragmented. Habitat corridors like the land bridge, greenways, and greenbelts connect wildlife to suitable habitat, like parks or tracts of undeveloped private land. It is important for us to remember that plants and wildlife provide critical ecosystem services, so we need to continue to protect these corridors and undeveloped habitat.

Because of human habitation and rapid fragmentation, some wildlife have learned to adapt to urban life. Think white-tailed deer, squirrels, raccoons, rodents, opossums, or more recently, coyotes. These species may tolerate human activity and can adapt to us to meet their needs. For example, a raccoon might eat pet food left outside, a rodent may find shelter in a garage, a white-tailed deer might be found eating supplemented corn/bread/etc., or a snake could be seen slithering along a fence. And while these activities meet one or more of their needs, most of the time, they are not the best option for wildlife. Of all else, supplemental feeding of wildlife is the probably the most upsetting to an ecosystem. When wildlife habituates to supplemental food, it feeds on natural resources less frequently, changing the plant and animal composition. Moreover, when wildlife is fed by humans it can increase a population to a point past the capacity for the natural ecosystem - you have too many animals, and not enough natural food, water, shelter, or space.

So, what should you do if you encounter wildlife? While most wildlife is harmless and will flee from you, some can carry diseases, venom, or feel threatened. The best thing to do is walk the other direction, and never touch or approach wildlife. If you find an injured animal, you can contact a local rehabilitator, like [Southern Wildlife Rehab](#), who is equipped to take care of the animal until it can be released. If you feel you are in immediate danger, seek safety and do not hesitate to call 9-1-1.

What can you do for wildlife? While supplemented, unnatural food, can be bad for wildlife, planting native vegetation in your yard (or pots) is a good way to feed wildlife. Not only do these plants provide food, but they can also create shelter for small animals, like insects, spiders, birds, and reptiles. It also creates an opportunity for wildlife watching from the comfort of home.

Outside of your home, you could volunteer to pick up trash in your local park or along the greenway. There are also opportunities within Parks to remove non-native plants or be part of habitat restoration. For more information about these volunteer opportunities contact [Meredith Tilley](#).

Take care, and take care of wildlife habitat!

Casey Cowan, CWB

Parks Naturalist



Robert L.B. Tobin Land Bridge - Justin Moore, Texas By Air

Photographing Nature: Elements of a Good Nature Photo

Fred Loxson

We always want our nature photos to be "good" photos. Three elements contribute to making any photo a "good" one: content, artistic composition, and image sharpness. As an example, consider the photo of a mating pair of Dainty Sulphur butterflies (*Nathalis iole*) that I snapped with my iPhone 8 recently.



Pair of Mating Dainty Sulphur Butterflies 5/15/2021 F. Loxson

Subject. Dainty Sulphur butterflies are attractive little insects that flutter around in the spring season. They are small (about 1 inch across) members of the Sulphur group. Although they are resident in Central Texas all year round, some migrate as far north as Canada in the summer. I was very lucky to have spotted this mating pair. I have returned to the location where I took this photo to look for eggs and larvae for this species on typical host plants. Because this is an interesting species at an important point in its life cycle, I think that I can check the "good content" box for this photo.

Artistic Composition. The composition of the image also involves quite a bit of serendipity. The butterflies are perched on a leaf and the size and shape of the leaf roughly matches the size and shape of the butterfly's wing. So, the dark leaf and the light wing give a nice symmetry in size and shape and a sharp contrast in shade and color. This produces a dramatic effect. It almost looks like a strange butterfly/plant creature flying down and to the right in this photo. This compositional feature was just luck on my part while taking the photo, but when I examined the original photo, I cropped the photo to emphasize this dramatic effect. I learned two lessons from this photographic experience. The first is to pay attention to the surroundings (the leaf) of my main subject (the Dainty Sulphur butterflies). I wish that I had taken a few more photos of the surroundings so that I could ID the plant that the butterflies are on. The second lesson is to look carefully at the original photo during the post-processing stage. Post-processing usually involves cropping and brightness adjustment of the original image. This stage may offer the photographer opportunities to enhance the composition and attractiveness of the photo. For this image, partly due to good luck, I feel confident that I can check the "good composition" box.

Image Sharpness. I used my iPhone with a clip-on lens to get this image. The lens allowed me to get very close to my subject and it produced a crisp image. Details of the butterfly's antennae and eye can be clearly seen. The lens also causes the background to go out of focus. This is an advantage because the photo emphasizes the butterfly and the leaf so that they

stand out clearly in the photo. For this image, I think that I can also check the “good image sharpness” box. Next month, we will look a little more deeply at how to produce sharp images.

Checking subject, composition, and sharpness is a rewarding exercise for judging a good photo, but it is an even more useful exercise for understanding why a bad photo is bad. After a field trip, try going through all your photos, rating each photo for these three elements. This process might help you to improve your photography skills so that more of the photos from future field experiences will be “good photos”.

Mushrooms: A Rainy Day's Best Friend

Gretchen Maddock, FoSANA Intern

In the last few weeks, San Antonio has been seeing a lot of rain. Along with those spring rains comes a number of things we might not like—flash flooding, muggy weather, and mosquitos, to name a few. However, that rain is also great for our Texas plants, giving much-needed moisture to our soil, and refilling ponds and streams for wildlife.



A few examples of Texas mushrooms (Photos: Casey Cowan)

Another friend of the rain that Texans might not see much of throughout the dry months is the mushroom. Also known as toadstools, these strange spongy organisms are actually the fruiting body of fungi that remain mostly unseen for a good portion of the year. The types of mushrooms you may see after the rain really only emerge once the right conditions for reproduction have been met—namely, plenty of food and water. The “invisible” part of the mushroom, the mycelium, is typically located underground, but can also be found in decaying wood and roots. When it rains, the mycelium, like the roots of a plant, can collect this water and transfer it to the fruiting body. This is why some mushrooms seemingly appear overnight, and also why if rain is followed by a hot, sunny day, they’re gone soon after. Even when their fruiting bodies aren’t visible, the mycelium of these fungi perform numerous tasks for their natural community—such as breaking down decaying organisms into fertilizer. Some even form mutualistic relationships with plant roots and trade their collected water for the plant’s sugar. A pretty wild fact is that the [largest organism in the world](#) (by area) is the mycelium network of a fungus in Oregon, which covers over 965 hectares and is at least 2400 years old.

There are plenty of [mushrooms](#) to see around San Antonio—some of which you might even be able to find in your backyard. After rainy weeks like we’ve had, it’s a great time to take a walk around your neighborhood or a few of San Antonio’s parks and see what you can find. Although, it goes without saying that you should be extremely wary of eating any mushrooms you discover. After all, some poisonous mushrooms may look very similar to edible ones. Without proper identification from a professional mycologist, it’s best to enjoy these mushrooms with your eyes only!

During these outings, you can also help contribute to citizen science databases like [iNaturalist](#). Both this app and its more casual counterpart, [Seek](#), can help you identify mushrooms or other organisms you discover—and iNaturalist keeps a log of whatever has been sighted near you. If you’re ever curious about what other people have been documenting nearby, just use the Explore function! You can even filter for certain categories, like only fungi. Seek also has fun nature-sighting challenges and quests, which are fun for the whole family!



False Parasol mushrooms in Austin, Texas. They look similar to the edible Shaggy Parasol, but cause severe gastrointestinal distress. They're actually the most-consumed poisonous mushroom in North America... so be careful with mushroom ID! (Photo: G. Maddock)

As the hottest Texas months are right around the corner, it's a great time to get outside. Even in the middle of the city, nature can be right at your doorstep—and in this digital age, learning more about the natural world around you can be as easy as downloading an app. Stay safe, and have a wonderful start to your Summer!

Education Classes & A Family Guide to Friedrich Wilderness Park

June is chock full of outdoor events, including Starting Out Wild and Growing Up Wild classes. Not only have we restarted limited in-person events, Saturday, June 5 is also [National Trails Day](#) AND [World Environment Day](#). This year, trails and greenspaces have been more important than ever with much needed connections to our natural spaces.

Here are our upcoming classes for June:

Starting Out Wild: Blooming Blossoms (ages 1-3)

10:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m. | Friday, June 4 | Friedrich Wilderness Park outdoor classroom

Identify wildflowers and learn the parts of a flower through stories, songs, a guided nature walk, and hands-on activity. These high-energy, engaging programs are a perfect way to foster an appreciation of the natural world for our youngest wild ones (ages 1-3). All classes will take place outdoors. Suggested donation: \$3 per person, or \$6 per family. [RSVP Here](#).

Growing Up Wild: Wildlife is Everywhere (ages 4-7)

10:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m. | Friday, June 18 | Friedrich Wilderness Park outdoor classroom

What signs of wildlife can you find? Come visit Friedrich Wilderness Park and look for signs of wildlife, including insects and flowers. Growing Up Wild builds on a child's sense of wonder about nature and invites them to explore wildlife and the world around them. All classes take place outdoors. Suggested donation: \$3 per person, \$6 per family. [RSVP Here](#).

In addition to these events, we are finally releasing our [field guide for young explorers](#)! We hope you find time to explore this guide with your little ones on your next visit to Friedrich. Not only will you find activities and trail suggestions, there are fun facts and a pro-tip section as well. Happy hiking, and we hope to see you at the park soon!



Nicole McLeod
Education Coordinator
nicole.mcleod@sanantonio.gov

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 activities, please visit FOSANA.org.
[Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas Website](#)
