

# HABITAT HERALD

Wildlife Austin's monthly Newsletter



VOL 1 . ISSUE 2

## Wildlife Austin

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**May 5th** Austin Butterfly Forum Annual Workshop  
To register, please call Jeff Taylor (255-0368) or [kscjtaylor@prodigy.net](mailto:kscjtaylor@prodigy.net). The cost is \$35.00, payable at the door.

**May 10th** "Selecting Native Plants for Your Wildlife Garden" a talk by Meredith O'Reilly Williamson Cty NPSOT @ the Georgetown Public Library (7pm)

**May 12th** Wildflower Center Garden Tour  
[www.wildflower.org/gardentour](http://www.wildflower.org/gardentour)

**May 15th** Wildlife Austin talk @ NPSOT monthly meeting - at Wild Basin (7pm)

**May 19th** Habitat Steward Cathy Nordstrom talk at the Natural Gardner @ 9am  
[www.naturalgardeneraustin.com](http://www.naturalgardeneraustin.com)



## May 2012 - Get Certified Today!

Greetings everyone! I hope you are all enjoying the beautiful weather and are planting like crazy! The 2012 Neighborhood Habitat Challenge officially began on April 15th! Do you think your neighborhood has what it takes to win? Follow in the footsteps of Windsor Park, Jester, Crestview, and Copperfield and sign up today! Just click on the following link for more information:

[www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/Wildlife\\_Austin/neighborhoodhabitatchallenge.pdf](http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/Wildlife_Austin/neighborhoodhabitatchallenge.pdf)



It's a great way to get to know your neighbors and help wildlife all at the same time!

Even if you don't participate in the Neighborhood Habitat Challenge, it is still important to get your yard certified! It's easy, fun, and will cut down on your water bills and landscaping efforts. A great place to start is the City of Austin Watershed Protection Department's Grow Green webpage. Visit [www.growgreen.org](http://www.growgreen.org) to learn about gardening, plant maintenance, garden pests, available trainings and more! You can create your very own happy place right outside your doorstep. The wildlife will thank you.



White-eyed Vireo



Mantidfly

Remember you can get a **FREE** application! Just contact [Wildlife Austin!](http://www.WildlifeAustin.com)

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## Notes from Erin



One of my favorite parts of Wildlife Austin is spending time with all of the amazing Habitat Stewards! Wildlife Austin is truly blessed to have great group of volunteers that come from a variety of different backgrounds.

I always appreciate volunteers for Wildlife Austin events, and I am working on making it easier for everyone to log their volunteer hours. Be sure to check out this step-by-step guide to logging your hours, and ordering NWF material online:

[www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/Wildlife\\_Austin/volunteers.pdf](http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/Wildlife_Austin/volunteers.pdf)

Let me know if you have questions!

## Focus on Austin Wildlife

### Red-eared sliders on a Mission!

By David Papke

With springtime in full swing, it is almost impossible to resist hitting the trail, jumping into Barton Springs or paddling the river in a canoe. With all this activity in our green spaces, folks are beginning to ask why there are so many turtles wandering around. The red-eared slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) is one of the most common members of our riverside reptilian fauna. Springtime is the beginning of nesting season for these animals so don't be alarmed if one happens to wander across your path. She is not lost; she is on a mission! Like a salute to the days of the dinosaurs, these animals venture out of their watery homes and dig nests in the riverbank. The female goes into a half-trance and begins the task at hand.

Often, passersby will think that the animal is in distress and attempt to catch it and take it back to the water. This event is not a time for a person to panic. Instead, this is a golden opportunity to observe and maybe even photograph an event in Nature that has been going on for millennia. Red-eared sliders can lay as many as 23 eggs in these 4-inch pits before the job is done, so they may stay in the same spot for a few hours or more.

The eggs will hatch in about two and a half months and the baby turtles will start their treacherous adventure of life. Typically only about four percent of the lucky ones will survive to adulthood and grow up to the seasoned age of 30 years old. Unfortunately many other animals from wading birds to largemouth bass find the hatchlings to be a tasty morsel on the menu. Additionally, many unfortunate animals must cross roadways in order to return to the water.

While you're out there enjoying this priceless Austin spring weather, be sure and stop by your local river, creek or pond in your park and wish the turtles a safe journey.



*David Papke is a City of Austin Park Ranger and long time reptile enthusiast*

## Focus on Austin Invasives

### Wild Basin Preserve Fights the Good Fight!

By Mitch Robinson

Dating back to its earliest settlers, the Wild Basin area has been noted for its distinctive floral display. Early historians note that the majority of the Westlake peninsula was thoroughly overgrazed and its soil depleted throughout the early 20th century. However, known Comanche war paths and 'cedar-chopper' encampments, dissuaded early ranchers like Cal Roy and the Walsh brothers from allowing their cattle and goats in the Wild Basin area.

As a result, Wild Basin retains a species abundance and diversity that is unparalleled in the local region. The Basin's greatest threat today stems from the history of landscaping urban surroundings with invasive ornamental plants. Maintaining this ecosystem so that hikers can experience the native splendor of the Texas hill country requires our greatest efforts and the education and support of local neighbors, volunteers, and the Austin community.



According to the National Environmental Coalition on Invasive Species, an invasive species is an organism that someone moved, on purpose or accidentally, from its native habitat to a new environment, where it thrived and multiplied to the detriment of native species or ecosystems. In addition to harming our ecosystems, invasives can serve as fuels that increase the risk of wildfire.

Austin seems particularly vulnerable to aggressive plants from East Asia, so much so that we have forgotten how native Texas landscapes once appeared. If Austin is to remain a jewel for Texas wildflowers and biodiversity, we must halt the flood of Chinaberry, Privet (*Ligustrum*), Nandina, and other invasive species that are overwhelming our landscape. For more information on invasives visit [www.texasinvasives.org](http://www.texasinvasives.org). You can also help Wild Basin fight against invasives by joining our land management work days, every third Saturday of the month from 8:30 am – noon.

*Mitch Robinson is the Wild Basin's Education and Land Management Coordinator*



# Garden of the Month

This month we feature the beautiful and wild garden of Habitat Steward and owner of Sans Souci Garden Landscapes, Cathy Nordstrom:



A happy Cathy in her garden

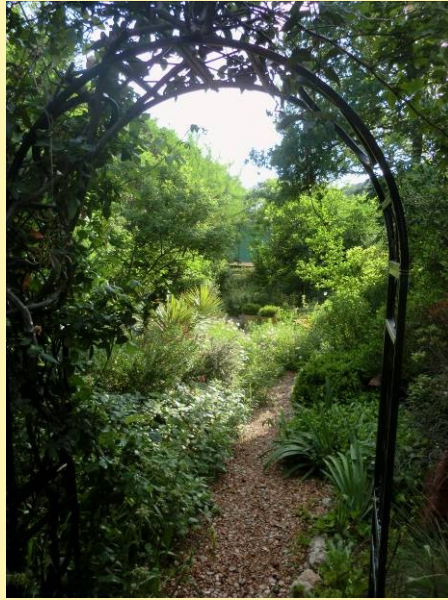


Who wouldn't want to hang out here?!



A vegetable garden right in the middle of this wonderful wildlife habitat!

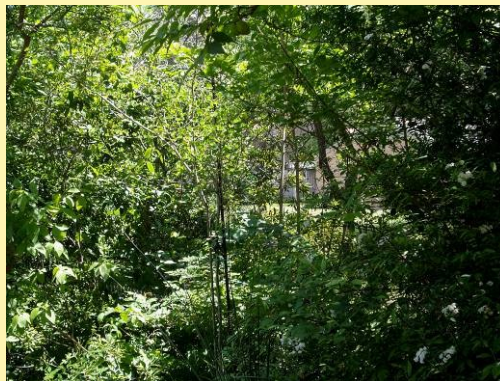
Cathy embraces the natural additions of native plants to her garden!



This beautiful trellis marks the beginning of Cathy's backyard paradise



Beautiful Gulf Coast Penstemon and Zexemenia



This "natural fence" divides Cathy's property from her neighbors, and it's much better looking than the old fence - plus the birds love it!

## Questions for the Gardner...



**Question:** How long have you been gardening with native plants?

**Cathy:** As Grounds Chair in my neighborhood I was responsible for plant replacements after a record freeze in 1983. We needed tough plants. This coincided with the founding of the Wildflower Center and the City offering classes in Xeriscaping, and I've continued to take classes and trainings since then.

**Q:** What do you like best about your garden?

**C:** I love the constant change as the landscape evolves. 'Volunteer' plants are always a welcome surprise, as long as they are native, and in an OK location. It doesn't always work that way!

**Q:** What non-natives do you have the biggest problem with?

**C:** Bermuda grass is by far the most difficult plant I deal with. When folks have Bermuda as their lawn, and they want to convert to a native landscape they have a long row to hoe. In my opinion this grass should never be used in suburban landscapes.

**Q:** What is your favorite plant?

**C:** I love the berries on the Possumhaw tree on a misty Winter morning. Their color and form are a must for every landscape.

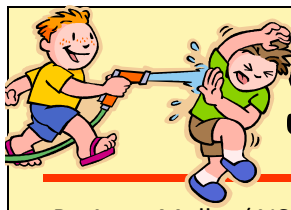
**Q:** Do you find it difficult to maintain a vegetable garden within your wildlife habitat?

**C:** Before my thicket filled in along my property line, deer wandered in and had their own personal salad bar. I've had to resort to a fence around the garden in the past.

**Q:** Do you have any advice for someone who has just begun to garden with native plants?

**C:** The WFC offers comprehensive training through their Native U programs. Gardening with natives is a new way of thinking about landscaping and they provide the knowledge and guidance.





# Schoolyard Habitat Update



By Anne Muller (AISD Outdoor Learning Specialist)

The Austin Independent School District (AISD) is proud to partner with the National Wildlife Federation to install Schoolyard Habitats on many of our campuses. Campuses are working hard to finalize their spring planting and are now turning their attention towards summer maintenance and upkeep. Many schools have developed a phase 2 for the fall where they will focus on planting more trees and shrubs in addition to expanding their habitat areas.

## Spotlight Campus: Murchison MS

Murchison Middle School celebrated the completion of their habitat with a ribbon cutting ceremony on April 21<sup>st</sup>. Teachers and students have transformed their schoolyard into a bustling habitat full of native plants and wildlife!



Before



After

Looking for volunteer opportunities? Summer's almost here and the following schools may need your help with summer watering and weeding.

Bedichek MS  
Pleasant Hill ES  
Covington MS  
Garcia MS  
Martin MS  
Brooke ES  
Zavala ES

Fulmore MS  
Gorzycki MS  
Murchison MS  
Webb MS  
Paredes MS  
Widen ES  
Ortega ES

For campus contact info or work day information please contact Anne Muller AISD Outdoor Learning Specialist:

[amuller@austinisd.org](mailto:amuller@austinisd.org) or 841-5070



## Gardening Tips

By Erin Cord

Want to have a wildlife garden but don't have a yard? No problem! You can create an amazing container garden on your porch or balcony. Here are a few good resources:

[www.wildflower.org/collections/collection.php?collection=centex\\_container](http://www.wildflower.org/collections/collection.php?collection=centex_container) - The Wildflower Center's comprehensive list of suggested container garden native plants

[lifeonthebalcony.com/10-questions-to-ask-yourself-when-planning-your-container-garden-this-year](http://lifeonthebalcony.com/10-questions-to-ask-yourself-when-planning-your-container-garden-this-year) - a good place to start thinking about your container garden

[suburbanwildlifegarden.blogspot.com/2007/04/container-water-garden.html](http://suburbanwildlifegarden.blogspot.com/2007/04/container-water-garden.html) - a cool idea for a container water garden!

[www.centraltexasgardening.info/container.html](http://www.centraltexasgardening.info/container.html) - another great website resource!





If you haven't been to Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve, then you are missing out! The preserve is 227 beautiful acres of forest and trails. Come take a stroll or volunteer!

Check out their website for more information:

[www.wildbasin.org](http://www.wildbasin.org)

Would YOU like to receive the Wildlife Austin newsletter electronically?

Simply e-mail us at [wildlife@austintexas.gov](mailto:wildlife@austintexas.gov)!

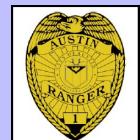
## Become a Texas Bee Watcher!

Bee's are extremely important in our environment. There are several possible reasons, including increased pesticide use and disease, that have led to a dramatic decline in many species of native bees as well as the imported honeybee. Pollinators are a key component of our ecosystem, and without them we will be in serious trouble. As the great entomologist and ecologist E. O. Wilson put it, "If human beings were to disappear tomorrow, the world would go on with little change, but if invertebrates were to disappear, I doubt that the human species could last more than a few months." Luckily there are things you can do! Check out the Texas Bee Watcher's website: [www.bee watchers.com](http://www.bee watchers.com). This is a great resource where you can learn about bee-friendly plants, different types of Texas bees, and how to install a bee nest box. You can do your part to help the bees, and your garden will benefit too!



"Like"

[Austin Parks and Recreation](https://www.facebook.com/austinparksandrec) on Facebook and look for the Wildlife Austin posts!



The City of Austin is proud to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you require assistance for participation in our programs or use of our facilities, please call (512) 974-6700.