

HABITAT HERALD

Wildlife Austin's monthly Newsletter



January 2015



In This Issue...

Living in an WUI

Upcoming Habitats:

African American
Cultural Heritage
District

McNiel High School

Wildlife Austin

City of Austin
Parks and Recreation
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Austin, TX 78705
(512) 978-2606
wildlife@austintexas.gov

UPCOMING :

Tree Folks:

Tree Planting in Austin's Watersheds

1/17/2015 9am - 12pm

Dottie Jordan Park and Bartholomew Park

1/22/2015 9am - 12pm

Blunn Creek Greenbelt -
1951 Eastside Dr

01/31/2015 9am - 12pm

Battle Bend Greenbelt

For more information and to sign up visit: <http://www.treefolks.org/volunteer-opportunities/>

Volunteer Orientation Sustainable Food Center

Tue, 01/14/2014 - 5:30pm - 6:30pm

Come learn more about what it's like to volunteer with SFC! Volunteer Orientation takes place from 5:30-6:30pm at the SFC Training Facility, 2921 E. 17th St, Building C (off MLK Blvd and Miriam Street). RSVP to rebecca@sustainablefoodcenter.org.

Happy New Year! As the new year unfolds now is the perfect time to find innovative ways to help preserve Austin's wild spaces. Wildlife Austin's mission is to maintain our urban landscape as a viable habitat for native wildlife. This mission cannot be disconnected from our quality of life or our economic goals as we face epic growths for our city. With this in mind Wildlife Austin and the Habitat Herald would love to know what you are doing in your community to increase wildlife Habitat. If you have ideas or projects you would like to share please email wildlife@austintexas.gov.

In this first 2015 edition of the Habitat Herald we will look at the benefits of the rodents as well as helpful ways to avoid negative interactions with rodent populations. We will also highlight two upcoming habitat work days hosted by Habitat Stewards. We also have a host of volunteer opportunities hosted by sponsored by Tree Folks, Sustainable food center and various City of Austin Departments.

Would you like to receive the newsletter?

E-mail us at

wildlife@austintexas.gov



Living In a WUI

Rodentia

With the January weather turning cool, there is an increased need for food and shelter in the Austin Wild land Urban Interface (WUI). In the late winter months some Austin residents report seeing more rodents scurrying to collect precious resources to ensure their survival in the coming months. As winter sets in and temperatures drop it is not unusual to see the fuzzy faces of Rodentia (rodents) burrowing, scurrying or gnawing at the Wildlife Habitats that provide food, shelter, water and a place to raise young for Austin's wildlife. It is important to remember that wildlife everywhere has inherent value



but there are steps we can take to ensure that our wildlife habitats and properties attract the wildlife we intend.

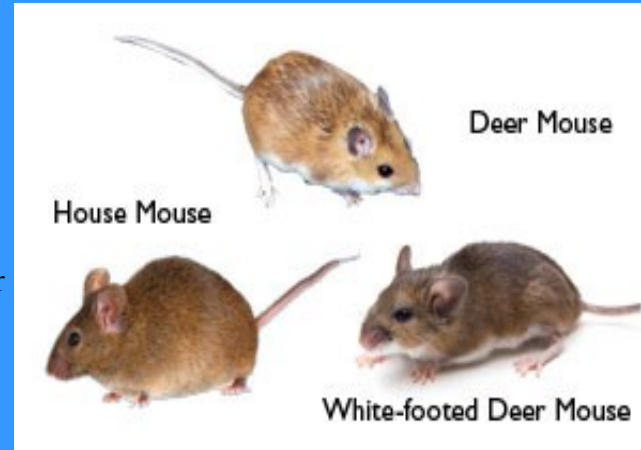
Rodentia taken from the Latin *rodere*, meaning to gnaw, are an order of mammals distinguished by their teeth. Rodents have a single pair of incisors in each jaw that grow consistently throughout life. The incisors are protected on the front by a hard enamel, the back however has less protection, this variation in protection causes the incisors to grow in a chiseled shape. Rodentia make up the single largest most diverse group of mammals; some are burrowing, tree dwelling, and semi-aquatic. They can be both herbivores and omnivores and are extremely resourceful. Ecologically Rodentia perform many different natural services. With their vast populations they service as a key food source for many of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians and reptiles. In addition to providing a food source, they also spread seeds which increases overall biological diversity in an area. Another key service performed by Rodentia, is the distribution of fungi spores. Many underground fungi rely heavily on rodents to spread spores for reproduction ; the spreading of fungal spores in many instances is the foundation of healthy soil.

Living In a WUI

Rodentia

Even with the ecological benefits of Rodentia, their destructive power is all too familiar to homeowners and farmers.

Here in Texas we have a total of 17 native mice species all in the family *Muridae*. Of the 17 native Texas species the four most common are found in the genus *Peromyscus*. In Austin around our homes occasionally we encounter the *Mus musculus*, also known as the house mouse which is not native to Texas. *Mus musculus* is thought to have originally landed in the Americas from nautical trade. In winter months when some Rodentia species are nesting, wildlife habitats and even our homes provide easy access to the habitat essentials: food, shelter water and a place to raise young. Even with the cooler weather there are steps we can take to ensure that our encounters with this diverse species of mammals is pleasant.



The most attractive elements of backyard habitats during the winter months are food and shelter. Keeping these areas clean and fortifying your home can keep Rodentia visits to a minimum. Bird feeders and unsecured refuse is a quick way to attract hungry squirrels, mice and rats. Although bird feeders can provide critical winter food for desired bird species, check around the feeder to clean any excess seeds. Purchasing sturdy trash containers with secure lids can keep out unwanted guests. If you compost in large piles keeping the compost away from the home can keep any visiting rodents, who love to snack on greens away from your house. Another critical element in winter months is to inspect your home for breaches, rodents can borrow holes into sheetrock and around windows. Keeping a keen eye on these areas helps to catch any intrusion before it turns into an infestation. If you already suspect you may have a rodent in your home, research ways to remove or capture the critter without using blanket poisons that could harm other wildlife or house pets. Removing food sources, as stated before, is a great start if a rodent has already entered the home. Adopting a house can be one way of controlling a rodent issue. Many eco-friendly pest control companies recommend strong scents such as peppermint oil is a natural deterrent for rodents. Whichever method you research and determine is best for your home be sure to follow up to close any areas that were exposed by the rodent to be sure it cannot return by the same route. Photo credit: <http://www.minnesotawildanimalmanagement.com/wild-animal-management-mn-deer-mice-mice-rodents->

Habitat Highlights



McNeil High School By: Tina Vick

Well the courtyard planting at McNeil HS was a success! We had 15 Green Club members, 1 Habitat Steward (Alice Marcom), and 2 City of Austin Employees (cave biologist, Mark Sanders and landscape designer, Vivian...) come out on Saturday Dec 8 from 9-12. The City of Austin was kind enough to donate 84 young trees, shrubs and forbs. All are native, and many are very hard to come by and are not even sold in retail nurseries. All 84 plants were planted and drip irrigation was installed. We ROCKED!! (no literally...that soil was rocky!! Thank goodness for my strong students and a pry bar. The job would have been impossible w/o them!)

Now for a little back story....We didn't just have a random tree planting because Green Club loves trees (although it's very true!). We had this tree planting to save the bone cave harvestman. The bone cave harvestman is a tiny arachnid that has no eyes and never leaves the cave. It sounds weird, but it's true. It has been a long journey to the point of planting in the McNeil HS courtyard because the McNeil HS courtyard is home to this endangered cave species. In order to plant in area with an endangered species, we had to show that we can help the species not harm it. (4)

Habitat Highlights

What makes this wildlife restoration project even more complex is that we are creating wildlife habitat above ground to improve the cave ecosystem below. These caves just happen to be very insulated from "nature" because they are enclosed by 4 walls in the middle of a high school. Many years ago, the courtyard had been an open space used as a student hangout and lunch area, but when a rare and endangered invertebrate called the bone cave harvestman (*Texella reyesi*) was discovered to live in the cave, the area was shut off to students in order to minimize litter from entering the cave. The courtyard was locked off to everyone except the landscapers who mowed the courtyard on a regular basis.

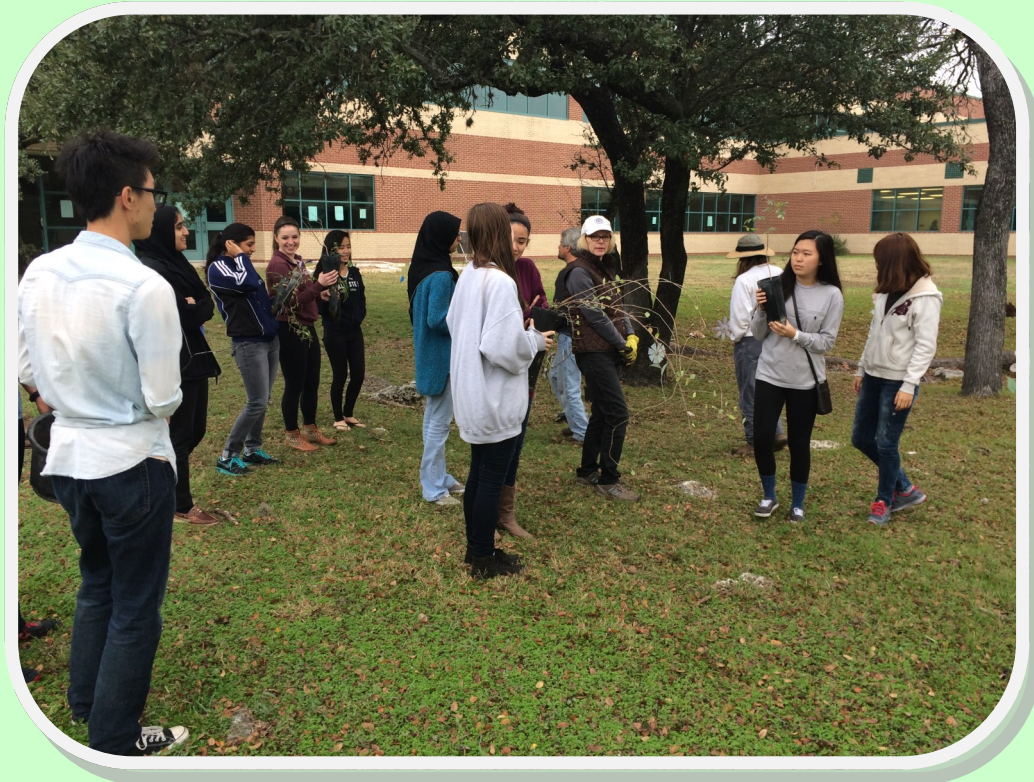


Skip ahead 15 years. An environmental science student of mine and Student Council officer came to me and asked about opening the courtyard back up to students. At a minimum, he wanted to create a cut-through path in the courtyard as an alternate route to get around campus. Ideally, he wanted the space opened up to students again as a hangout. Because of the endangered species limitations, neither of those suggestions were possible. The chance of "take" was too great. So instead, we decided to create an outdoor classroom that highlights the cave ecosystem and provides habitat to enhance the natural ecosystem that usually surrounds Central Texas caves. With a lot of planning and "red tape," we finally got approval from the USFWS to plant around the caves.

Habitat Highlights

In addition, we got permission to build garden beds that will be planted in spring. Environmental science students will research native plants and gardening for wildlife and then design the gardens. We will also install a shallow stock tank pond. This pond will provide a water source for our wildlife visitors and will serve as a water quality test site for my environmental classes. So stay tuned! There is more to come.

Now that the trees have been planted, all the efforts to restore this habitat must be monitored on a regular basis. This includes cave cricket exit counts and invasive RIFA and Tawny crazy ant monitoring. According to the most recent exit counts, the cave ecosystem is severely impaired. Cave crickets are at the base of the food chain for a



troglobite (obligate cave species such as the bone cave harvestman) ecosystem. Crickets exit the caves at night to forage on live and dead vegetation and then supply nutrients to the cave organisms in the form of feces, cricket eggs, and dead cricket matter. The higher the cricket population, the more nutrients are supplied to the animals underground. Our hope is to find increased numbers of crickets exiting over time because we have planted 84 native trees shrubs and forbs that the crickets can use for forage. We will be counting crickets the January and would love my fellow habitat stewards to help out with the research.

Habitat Highlights

Becoming a Habitat Steward was a big of that journey by providing me with the knowledge I needed to make this project a success. The course changed my focus from creating a space for students to creating a space for wildlife. Understanding the four elements required for wildlife habitat was used to guide the project. Now I truly understand the interconnection of these elements in regards with the space. I would love other Habitat Stewards join me in my journey. Hope to see you soon!

Tree Hugs,

Tina Vick

APES and Env Sys

Green Club Sponsor

McNeil HS



Habitat Highlights



African American Cultural Heritage District Center Office

The African American Cultural Heritage District (AACHD) , encompasses approximately six square miles of central east Austin and is home to numerous historical sites that celebrates African Americans and others who played important roles in the vibrancy of Austin. The AACHD represents the legacy of the Austin's 1928 city master plan, which essential institutionalized racial segregation by forcing African Americans (who historically lived through the city) to live only in Central East Austin. In 2005 the then City Manager Toby Futrell asked African Americans to help find solutions to the racial disparities of Austin. In this vein and through the hard work of several prominent members of the Austin community the AAHD was formed.

With the assistance of Blackshear Bridge and dedicated Habitat Stewards, Phase I of a Wildlife Habitat has been complete in the front yard of the AACHD center. Wildlife Austin would like to recognize the hard work of Habitat Stewards and partners who have made Phase one I possible: Donna Hoffman, Julia Heskett, Ed Travis, Caree Gellink, Jane Tillman, Jackie Davis, David Littlewood, Neal Hagood, and Diane Larson. Future plantings for the back and side areas are scheduled for Spring.



School Yard Habitat Update

Donations and volunteers needed!

Campuses are looking for donations of the following materials for fall workdays:

Compost and/or soil
Native seeds, plants, shrubs and trees
Tools
4 inch pots
Limestone blocks
Cedar logs
Decomposed Granite
Bird Feeders and/or bird seed



Schoolyard Habitat Success Depends on Volunteers Like You!

For more upcoming volunteer opportunities, please contact:

Anne Muller AISD Outdoor Learning Specialist amuller@austinisd.org or 841-5070