

The Sabal

March 2011

Volume 28, number 3

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March Meeting of the Native Plant Project:

“Plants of Deep South Texas”

by Dr. Al Richardson & Ken King

Tuesday, March 22nd

at 7:30 P.M.



Valley Nature Center, 301 S. Border, (in Gibson Park), Weslaco.

The Native Plant Project is honored to host a book signing and presentation by Alfred Richardson and Ken King of their new book *Plants of Deep South Texas, A Field Guide to the Woody and Flowering Species*. This user-friendly guide includes photos and descriptions of more than 800 species, many of which are not currently included in available field guides. Alfred Richardson is professor emeritus of biological sciences at the University of Texas at Brownsville. Ken King is a member of the NPP Board of Directors and our go-to expert on RGV native plants. The long-awaited book can be purchased at the Valley Nature Center after Al and Ken present it. *Plants of Deep South Texas* is sure to become an often used guide that all Valley gardeners and naturalists will treasure. Come have your copy signed by the authors. (Dr. Richardson's photo collage provided by Stan O. Sterba.)

The Sabal is the newsletter of the Native Plant Project.

It conveys information on native plants, habitats and environment of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas.

Previous **Sabal** issues are posted on our website [www.NativePlantProject.org].

Electronic versions of our **Handbooks** on recommended natives for landscaping are also posted there.

Change of address, missing issue, or membership: <bwessling@rgv.rr.com>

President - Chris Hathcock - (956)-369-1744; <Chris_Hathcock@yahoo.com>



Fieldtrip Report: The Barretal. (part 1)

On Sat., Feb. 26th, members of the Native Plant Project and RGVC Texas Master Naturalists met at La Puerta Tract, located between La Joya and Rio Grande City on Hwy. 83. A number of plant experts attended the trip, and assisted with plant identification, including Ken King, Dr. Al Richardson, Dr. Andrew McDonald, Kim Wahl and Ann Vacek.

Tom Patterson of South Texas College (photo lower left) led the tour, beginning with a view of Barreta, Helietta parvifolia, visible from the parking lot. The 1989 freeze-damaged wood was still visible amongst the yellow-tinted foliage (photo left). Tom explained that barreta typically shows this winter color in the western Valley.

The large group (photo below) trekked through a wide trail of exotic Buffle Grass to reach inspiring views of the unique geography of the Bordas Escarpment. La Puerta tract is one of few areas where this special geological formation and the unique natural flora is protected.

Much of the vegetation was dry and leaves in the western valley are typically reduced in size, as compared with plants growing more easterly. Many small cacti of several species were noted, as participants began to look closely amongst the rocks and beneath thorny branches.



Mortonia greggii, another species unique to the Barretal, showed interesting orange-pink coloration on branches (photo above). On closer inspection, one could see a layer of bright orange just beneath the surface. Where branches had rubbed together, the exposed layer of orange tissue was striking. This feature is unreported elsewhere.

continued on p. 3.





Fieldtrip Report: The Barretal. (part 2)

Part 2 of the Barretal/Bordas Escarpment fieldtrip was a trek up La Santa Cruz (hill of the cross) which overlooks Rio Grande City. This hill bears the weight of many souls seeking divine intervention. Hundreds of prayer candles fill a small grotto near the hill's summit, with thousands of the discarded glass columns and an equal number of snack wrappers cascading down the hillside.

Following consternation regarding such wanton desecration of what would seem to be a holy place, our intrepid explorers found delightful botanic diversity, much of which grew on craggy outcrops amongst the thorns.

Dry, brown, Barreta seeds were found on several specimens and collected for possible propagation by Susan Thompson, NPP board member and native plant grower.

Condalia spathulata, Squawbush or Knifeleaf Condalia, grew on the rocky hillside. This component of western Valley brush is featured in an article on page 4.

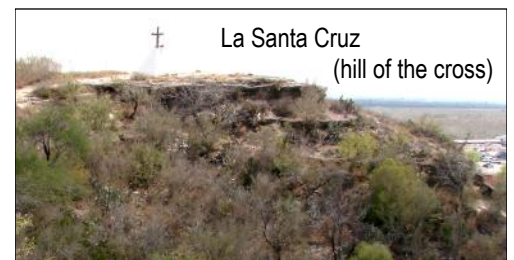
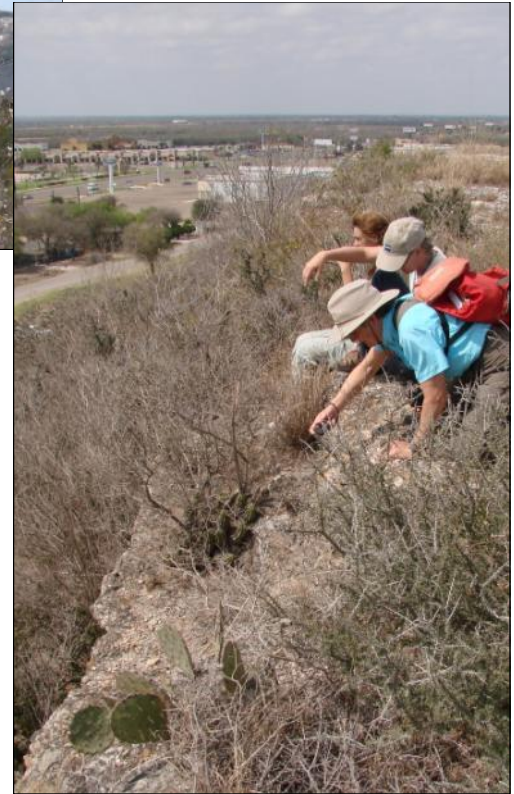
Special thanks to Dr. Al Richardson and Ken King for leading this adventure. We were able to admire an especially bright ray of sunshine, Yellow Rock Nettle, Eucnide bartonioides, which overhung the same grotto where religious candles burned in profusion.

This species was unreported in the LRGV before Al and Ken discovered it on La Santa Cruz. They have not found it growing elsewhere. Flowers open by mid-morning. Seeds are tiny, like reddish powder, formed in roundish capsules up to 1/2" long. It is thought that seeds are carried in updrafts where they lodge in rock crevices. The plant in this photo was growing in drought conditions following a hard freeze.

Close relatives include Stinging Cevalia sinuata, Mentzelia incisa, and M. lindheimeri (Stickleaf). All are members of the Family Loasaceae, plants characterized by hairy leaves which adhere to whatever touches them.

Thelocactus bicolor, Glory of Texas, was abundant. This cactus blooms off and on throughout the year. This location is the furthest eastern point at which Al and Ken have observed Glory of Texas cactus. Photos on pg. 6.

A scorpion new to science was also found on this rocky hill, in the mid-80's, by Jan Nillson. See page 6 for a photo and more detail.





Knifeleaf Condalia, Costilla, Squawbush. *Condalia spathulata*, Family Rhamnaceae. Close relatives include Brasil and Lotebush.

Found on dry, rocky hillsides of the Edwards Plateau and South Texas Plains, including Starr county.

Photos from: [<http://uvalde.tamu.edu/herbarium>] & [www.texasbeyondhistory.net] .

Left to right: Entire plant, with grey branches. Bloom. Ripened black fruit. Newly-emergent thorns and leaves.

Because Knifeleaf Condalia has not been widely propagated, information about it is limited. Ken King relates that the name Squawbush probably indicates the usefulness of this spiny plant in spreading laundry to dry. The thorns keep fabric from flying off in the wind. This could be useful information for your next camping sojourn in the desert.

From [<http://uvalde.tamu.edu/>]: “(Knifeleaf Condalia) is a spiny shrub growing up to 10 feet in height. The leaves are grayish-green, 1/5 to 1/2 inch long and 1/25 to 1/12 inch wide. The greenish flower has no petals, but has sepals that measure 1/8 inch in diameter. The small black fruits are eaten by small mammals, quail and some song birds. The young shoots are browsed by livestock and white-tailed deer. Knifeleaf Condalia blooms during the summer and fall.”

From “Trees, Shrubs & Woody Vines of the Southwest,” by Robert A. Vines, 1960:

Very spiny, grayish green, divaricate branches. Fruit is an edible, black drupe which stains purple. Knifeleaf Condalia is a common species in the Chisos Mountains of Brewster County, ascending to altitudes of 5500 ft. It is found in New Mexico and Arizona; west into southern California. Southward it enters the Mexican states of Sonora, Zacatecas, Tamaulipas, and Coahuila. Additional vernacular names include: Mexican Crucillo, Chamis, Abrojo and Tecomplate.

From “A Field Guide to Common South Texas Shrubs” by Taylor, Rutledge & Herrera, 1997. This source describes the plant as having a clump growth form, which is nicely descriptive. They also point out that: “...thickets provide excellent protective cover to many small mammals and birds.”



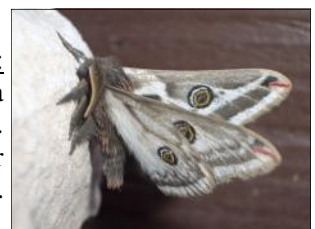
Left (magnified view): Knifeleaf Condalia following drought and hard freeze, Feb. 2011.

Propagation Notes:

Knifeleaf Condalia would make an attractive landscape plant in rock gardens or other full-sun areas where it would not be shaded out by other species. One specimen was planted at the Edinburg Historical Museum, where it grew adjacent to the parking lot. Benito Trevino of Rio Grande City has offered the plant for sale in the past. Martin Hagne of Valley Nature Center has also grown the plant from seed. It is hoped that native growers will continue to offer the plant in the future.

Larval Host Plant:

Knifeleaf Condalia is a host plant for the Mexican agapema or Greasewood Silkmoth, *Agapema anona* (photo left). It is uncertain whether this moth has been recorded in our area, though the range includes the South Texas Plains.



A Profusion of Pollinators — Celebrating Pink Mint

—photos and text by Christina Mild

Ramsey Park in Harlingen has burst into spring during early March, following an inch of rain and shirt-sleeve temperatures.

Several trees, shrubs and wildflowers are in bloom, but none host a wider diversity of pollinators than the herbaceous Pink Mint, Stachys drummondii, of the Family Lamiaceae.

In the LRGV, butterflies are most diverse and abundant in the fall. Yet many butterfly species may be encountered in spring wherever good nectar sources are in bloom.

LRGVC Texas Master Naturalists have rescued Pink Mint for Ramsey Park revegetation from a number of places where development threatened sections of arroyo brush and mature ebony woods.

Colonies have expanded and are especially dramatic this year. This herbaceous bloomer appears in early spring and dwindles as temperatures soar and soil moisture becomes scarce. Pink Mint will reappear and bloom, almost throughout the year, after sufficient rain.

Pink Mint is typically found growing in the few and scattered areas where humus is present, such as damp roadside ditches and ebony woodlands. In Ramsey Park, bags of dry leaves collected from residential streets have been spread in many areas of the park over several years. The resultant increase in soil organic matter may have contributed to the expansion of pink mint colonies.

Eleanor Mosimann reports that pink mint colonies are blooming at Santa Ana NWR at this time, as well.

Photos of butterflies nectaring on pink mint continue on pgs. 7-8.





Diplocentrus diablo,
a resident of La Santa Cruz grotto.
Photo by Seth Patterson ©.



Thelocactus bicolor, Glory of Texas cactus has an interesting distribution in the U.S. It is found locally in Starr and Zapata counties. Elsewhere in Texas, it is found in the Big Bend area and Trans-Pecos. It is one of our most beautiful cacti. Photo on lower right is a very young specimen.



LRGV Native Plant Sources

Heep's Nursery (& Landscaping)

(Mike Heep)
1714 S. Palm Court Drive
Harlingen, TX 78552
(956) 423-4513 * By appt. only

Valley Nature Center

301 S. Border Ave.
Weslaco, TX 78596
(956) 969-2475
<info@valleynaturecenter.org>
[www.valleynaturecenter.org]

Perez Ranch Nursery

(Susan Thompson & Betty Perez)
12 miles north of La Joya, TX
(956) 580-8915
<PerezRanchNatives@gmail.com>

Mother Nature's Creations

(Billy & Sue Snider)
2822 Nueces; Harlingen, TX 78550
Nursery open by appointment:
(956) 428-4897

NABA Butterfly Park
Old Military Hwy & Butterfly Pk Dr
Mission, TX 78552
(956) 583-9009

Rancho Lomitas Nursery

(Benito Trevino)
P.O. Box 442
Rio Grande City, TX 78582
(956) 486-2576 *By appt. only

Valley Garden Center

701 E. Bus. Hwy. 83
McAllen, TX 78501
(956) 682-9411

Landscaper using Natives:

Williams Wildscapes, Inc.
(Allen Williams)
750 W Sam Houston
Pharr, TX 78577
(956) 460-9864

Heep's LRGV Native Plant Nursery

Owned and operated by Mike and Claire Heep
We grow plants suited to landscaping
and revegetation in south Texas.
1714 S. Palm Court Drive Harlingen, TX 78552
By appointment. Phone: (956) 457-6834
[\[www.heepsnursery.com\]](http://www.heepsnursery.com)

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Billy Snider, Jr.
Sue Griffin



email <sue_griffin@sbcglobal.net >

Native Plant Rescue:

Valley Nature Center will rescue native plants slated for destruction by construction or development, or natives no longer wanted by home owners. Call 956-969-2475.

Come visit the
VNC
301 S. Border Ave.
Weslaco, TX 78596

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NPP Board & General Meetings
2011: Mar. 22, April 26, May 24

(Tuesdays) Board Meetings at 6:30pm. Speaker at 7:30pm.
Most meetings held at Valley Nature Ctr.

*A Secret Garden
in the Heart of the
Rio Grande Valley*



Butterfly Photos: (ID by David Dauphin) Left to Right: Gray Hairstreak, Southern Broken-dash (female), White-striped Longtail. Below: Queen.

**Highlights from the
Board of Directors Mtg. Feb. 22nd, 2011**

The Native Plant Project will again sell plants and handbooks at
the **RGV Home and Garden Show.**

The event will be at the McAllen Convention Center
from Friday, April 1st through Sunday, April 3rd.

Plan a wildflower garden for next spring!
NATIVE AMERICAN SEED of Junction, TX,
has released their newest catalog.

To receive a free catalog, call 800-728-4043 or fax 800-728-3943.
Or visit their informative & beautiful website [www.seedsource.com]



The **Native Plant Project (NPP)** has no paid staff or facilities. NPP is supported entirely by memberships and contributions. Anyone interested in native plants is invited to join. Members receive 8 issues of **The Sabal** newsletter per year in which they are informed of all project activities and meetings.

Meetings are held at:

Valley Nature Center, 301 S. Border, Weslaco, TX.

Native Plant Project Membership Application

__Regular \$20/yr. __Contributing \$45/yr
 __Life \$250 one time fee/person
 Other donation: _____

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Phone _____ Zip _____ - _____

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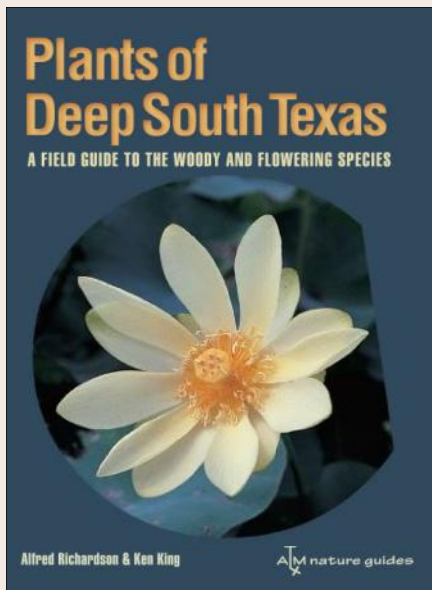
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Please mail this form with dues check payable to:

Native Plant Project, POB 2742, San Juan, TX 78589-7742

www.NativePlantProject.org

*book
signing* →



“Plants of Deep South Texas”
by Dr. Al Richardson & Ken King

Tuesday, March 22nd at 7:30 P.M.
 Valley Nature Center, 301 S Border, Weslaco, TX
 (956)969-2475

Edinburg World Birding Center announces:

Wildflower tour.

Saturday April 2nd. 9 am to 3 pm.

Snacks, drinks and transportation included.
 Please bring a sack lunch.

Reservations required 2 days in advance.
 \$22 for EWBC members, \$25 for non-members.

For more information or to register,
 please call (956) 381-9922
 or visit [www.EdinburgWBC.org].

Space is limited.

Please call early to reserve your seat!



Southern Broken Dash
(female)

TO: