



# The Sabal

September 2010

Volume 27, number 6

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Christina Mild  
 <mild.christina@gmail.com>  
 Submissions of relevant  
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### **Editorial Advisory Board:**

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## September Meeting of the Native Plant Project:

**Tuesday, Sept. 28th at 7:30 P.M.**

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

“Invasive Plants of the  
 Rio Grande Valley” by *Kim Wahl*

Below: Guinea Grass and Castor Beans. Both are invasive locally.



Ms. Wahl is the Plant Ecologist for Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge. She received her B.S. degree in Biology from Iowa State University in 2007 and began working on grassland restoration research and implementation projects for the University. She has also worked for Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, the Chicago Botanic Gardens, and the National Park Service working on a variety of invasive species research and treatment projects.

**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](http://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](mailto:bwessling@rgv.rr.com)>

President - Eleanor Mosimann - (956)-748-2564; <[mosimann@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mosimann@sbcglobal.net)>

## Fall Fruits Follow the Floods

Several species of trees and shrubs are bearing fruit in September (at Ramsey Park in Harlingen) as floodwaters continue to recede from the innermost parts of the nature park. Periodic rains have fallen in August and September as the result of tropical storms of varying strength and duration.

Floodwaters lasting for several weeks covered many of the park's oldest trails. These were the result of floodwaters arising in Mexico, which were released by IBWC into the mid-valley floodway, raising the Arroyo Colorado to levels unseen in almost 50 years.

Fruit on some tree and shrub species appears to be relatively plentiful.

Fiddlewood and Sugar Hackberry (below) are typically fruit-laden in fall. In addition, Anacua, Granjeno and (to a lesser extent) Brasil are now in fruit.

BELOW: *Mammillaria prolifera*. Also called hair-covered cactus or grape cactus. A synonym is *Mammillaria multiceps*. "Texas Cactus" by Loflin and Loflin give the variety as *texana*. (Data provided by Diann Ball-esteros.) A large colony of this 1-2" tall cactus grows beneath a mesquite in Ramsey Park. It seems to bloom after every rain and often produces plentiful fruit. Thrashers hang about the area and likely eat the fruit, which is tasty and edible for humans, and sometimes called "chilitos."



LEFT: Sugar Hackberry (**Palo Blanco**, *Celtis laevigata*) 1/4" fruits taste like dates. A thin, hard outer shell covers a tiny layer of sweet fruit, surrounding a rather large seed. Fruits are edible for humans and relished by birds, including the cardinal, mockingbird and chachalaca. Occurs in seasonally-flooded areas. Seeds out easily. Not recommended for planting near buildings, as disease often weakens this tree.

RIGHT: **Negrito** (Fiddlewood, *Citharexylum berlandieri*). Clusters of orange fruit will ripen to black and tasty. Mockingbirds guard these fruits. Easily grown, fast growing. Thornless shrub to small tree. Leaves exhibit attractive shades of orange during stressful weather.



Lower RIGHT:  
**Mexican Bluewing** butterfly siphons off the sugary contents of ripe Negrito fruit.



## Seedlings Emerge After Fall Flooding

It has been interesting to see which species have germinated after floodwaters receded from Ramsey's arroyo banks and planted gardens.

BELOW: *Cleome gynandra* is an introduced species in the Caper Family. Seeds from *Cleome* and closely-related *Polanisia dodecandra* (below right) have been collected from the wild and introduced to Ramsey Park, as a replacement for guinea grass. Only *Cleome* has formed extensive colonies (this year, in the thousands!) It is also called Cat's Whiskers, Spider Flower and Clammyweed. Leaves, young shoots and even flowers are eaten in Africa, India and Thailand. Raw leaves are rich in vitamins A and C, calcium and iron. In Asia, the plant is cultivated for seed oil. It is known to have medicinal, insecticidal and repellent characteristics.

INSET: Larvae on *Cleome*. Note the plant's hairy stems.

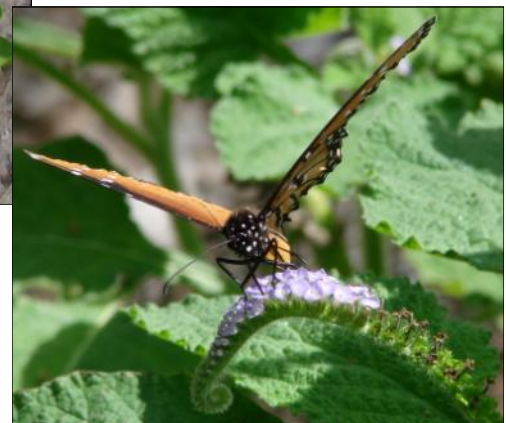


ABOVE & BELOW: **Purple Heliotrope**, *Heliotropium indicum*, has seeded out by the hundreds. In less than a month after floodwaters receded, many seedlings have grown to an approximate height of one foot. Blooming has begun in the past week. Dr. Al Richardson points to "day length" as the possible environmental factor which has acted as a trigger for seedlings to begin rapid growth and flowering. This species is typically found in areas which flood.

It is a wonderful butterfly nectar plant, beyond the fact that it's amazingly beautiful.



LEFT: *Polanisia dodecandra's* pink blooms attract butterflies, especially the Giant Swallowtail pictured here. *Polanisia* is a larval host for several less-flashy butterflies, the Cabbage, Checkered and Great Southern White.



## Wetland Shrubs and Long-Term Flooding

Ramsey Park in Harlingen provides a unique area in which to study methods for reestablishment of natives along the banks of the Arroyo Colorado. The arroyo's banks have been disrupted in many ways, for many years, repeatedly, by man and beast. Thus, most of the biomass and species growing on banks accessible to man and his machines are aggressive invaders, exotic species.

Some sections of Ramsey's banks are within reach of water hoses (i.e. within 300 ft. of a faucet). Thus, plantings have been established, even during times of relative drought. In May 2009, a garden of ten species of native shrub were planted in one such area. It was hoped those species might spread along the arroyo by means of seed or vegetative reproduction. The URL below points to an article giving the details of species included in that garden:

[[http://nativeplantproject.com/SABALS/wetland\\_shrubs\\_FINAL.pdf](http://nativeplantproject.com/SABALS/wetland_shrubs_FINAL.pdf)]

During winter 2009-2010, a killing frost brought havoc to most of the planted specimens. The notable exception was *Buddlei sessiliflora*, Teposan, Rio Grande Butterfly Bush, which was gorgeous in early spring 2010. Most of the planted species experienced die-back from many inches to many feet of growth.

To add to the environmental pressures experienced by the relatively young "Wetland Shrubs" garden, floodwaters covered the entire garden for almost a month from mid October to mid September of 2010. Rapid currents swept trash, debris and silt over the area for weeks. Most of the 10 planted "wetland" species experienced worse damage from raging floodwaters than from freeze. Indeed, most are unrecognizable dried stalks in mid-September 2010.

One notable exception is Sprawling Lippia, Hierba Negra, *Lippia alba*. This aromatic shrub is recommended by Mike Heep to stabilize riparian edges. Sprawling Lippia demonstrates an ability to root at the nodes and a tendency to form vast colonies. This aromatic beauty is full of blooms and new growth, while most of the Wetland Shrubs garden appears to be in ruin.

Mexican Buttonbush, *Cephalanthus salicifolius*, is one of our rarities, and it is doing beautifully, as well!

Rio Grande Dewberry appeared to be dead for several weeks after floodwaters receded. By mid-September, healthy new growth is arising from the roots.

Only time will tell if other species will rebound.

(See photos below and on page 5.)



*Lippia alba*, Sprawling Lippia. Probably called **Hierba Negra** for the older, dark stems. This colony-former is excellent for stabilizing edges of ditches, ponds and streams.

BELOW: Rare, **Mexican Buttonbush** appears healthy after the garden site was underwater for almost a month.



BELOW: Newly-sprouted **Anacua**. Although 2-yr. old Anacua trees were drowned by floodwaters, many Anacua seedlings are in evidence nearby. Note the “ginkgo-like” “seed leaves”, the first leaves to appear. These tiny leaves are already formed inside the seed. Also note notched edges on the second set of leaves. These are quite different from “entire” or unnotched edges of mature Anacua leaves.



### Other Native Species Badly-Impacted By Long-Standing Floodwaters At Ramsey Nature Park

Floodwaters within Ramsey Park were not confined to areas generally accepted as the “arroyo bank.” Water flowed through many areas, “drowning” some planted gardens and sparing others.

Frank Wiseman provides this data: Some interior gardens on the main caliche loop were flooded from July 16—25. The Wetland Shrubs garden was probably covered from July 10 to August 15, in parts.

Several (4 of 5) Barretas planted on what were thought to be “well-drained” slopes were apparently drowned by floodwater. One wonders if a very accurate altimeter might be necessary to determine best planting sites for species which require excellent drainage.

Ramsey volunteers provide this list of additional species hard-hit by floodwater:

- Prickly Pear Cactus
- Twisted-Rib Cactus
- Desert Yaupon
- (Heartleaf) *Hibiscus martianus*
- (Mexican) *Trixis inula*
- Bernadette, *Isocarpha oppositifolia*
- White and Purple Heliotropes
- Lantana (several species)
- Leatherstem, *Jatropha dioica*
- Crucita
- Large Alkali Sacaton (grass)
- Vines: including Marine Ivy, Twine Vine, *Clematis drummondii*, Morning Glory
- Bush Morning Glory
- Cowpen Daisy
- Croton humilis* (low/dove croton)
- Viguiera stenoloba* (skeleton-leaf)
- (Cortes) *Croton cortesianus* (some, not all)
- Fiddlewood (*Citharexylum berlandieri*)
- (Yellow) *Sophora tomentosa*
- Kidneywood (*Eysenhardtia texana*)
- Anacua
- Anacahuita

As of Sept. 19, the Arroyo Colorado has risen once again and rain is predicted for the entire week. Fall 2010 has certainly brought lots of rain to the Rio Grande Delta.



**More tiny plants from formerly-flooded areas:**



ABOVE: **Chamaesyce**

LEFT: **Mollugo**

**Highlights from the NPP  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Tuesday, May 25th, 2010**

The board of directors set up an advisory board with members appointed at the discretion of the elected board of directors.

Mike Heep and Benito Trevino agreed to serve on the new NPP advisory board.

The board also reviewed a list of endangered and threatened plants from 1986. Thanks to propagation efforts, some of those plants are now readily available in the local nursery trade.

**NPP volunteers will be selling Mike Heep's plants  
at the Green Living Festival at the  
McAllen Convention Center  
on Sat., Oct. 9th from 9:30 a.m. -6 p.m.**

**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

www.williamswildscapes.com

**Pérez Ranch Nursery**  
 Plants native to the Lower Rio Grande Valley  
 On the Pérez Ranch -  
 11 miles north of LaJoya  
**Betty Pérez & Susan Thompson**  
 (956) 580-8915

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Billy Snider, Jr.  
 Sue Griffin



email <sue\_griffin@sbcglobal.net >

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]**

**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

(956) 969-2475  
 info@valleynaturecenter.org  
 www.valleynaturecenter.org



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 for Sale

Watch Birds  
 & Butterflies

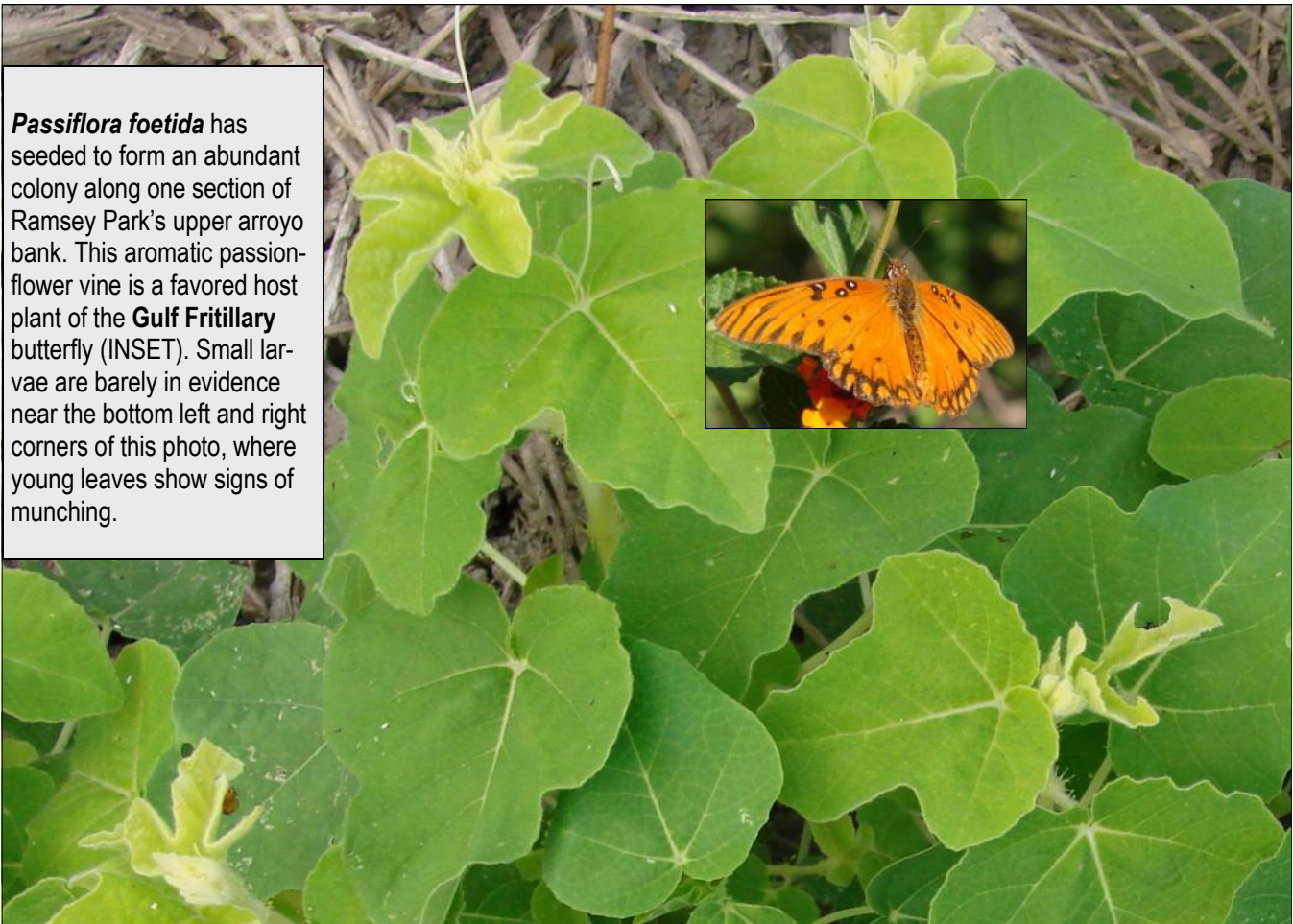
**Valley Nature Center**

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

· 6 ac Nature Park & Trails · Book & Gift Shop ·  
 · Native Plant Nursery · Meeting Room ·  
 · Environmental Education and Exhibit Hall ·

NPP Board & General Meetings, 2010:  
 Sep. 28, Oct 26, Nov 23  
 (Tuesdays) Board Meetings at 6:30pm. Speaker at 7:30pm  
 Most meetings held at Valley Nature Ctr.

***Passiflora foetida*** has  
 seeded to form an abundant  
 colony along one section of  
 Ramsey Park's upper arroyo  
 bank. This aromatic passion-  
 flower vine is a favored host  
 plant of the **Gulf Fritillary**  
 butterfly (INSET). Small lar-  
 vae are barely in evidence  
 near the bottom left and right  
 corners of this photo, where  
 young leaves show signs of  
 munching.



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 \$15/yr.    Contributing \$35/yr  
Life \$250 one time fee/person  
Other donation: \_\_\_\_\_

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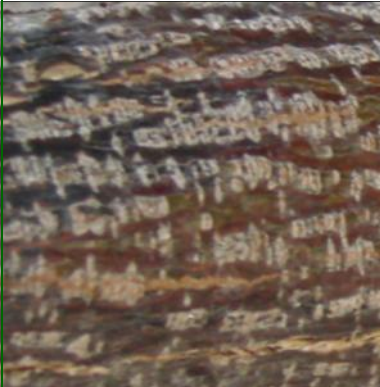
Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please mail this form with dues check payable to:*

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

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

BELOW: Bark & blooms of a locally-invasive tree.  
Can you guess which one?  
ANSWER on page 3.



**Tues., Sept. 28th at 7:30 p.m.**

**"Invasive Plants of the  
Rio Grande Valley" by Kim Wahl**

Valley Nature Center, 301 S Border, Weslaco, TX



Purple Heliotrope is an excellent butterfly nectar plant. See pg. 3.

**TO:**