



The Sabal

October 2010

Volume 27, number 7

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articles and/or photos
are welcomed.

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October Meeting of the Native Plant Project:

Tuesday, Oct. 26th at 7:30 P.M.

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

**“Varied Uses of Native Plants”
by Mike Heep**



Mike Heep will present some of the many ways that native plants can be used by people. Mike is widening his topic to include uses beyond the obvious and often-covered food and medicine. Mike studied botany, horticulture and chemistry in college and has been in the nursery/landscaping business since 1978. He has been growing native plants since 1983 and is a well-known native-plant expert. His observations of Arroyo Colorado brush and its inhabitants extend back to the newspaper delivery route of his youth, along the present-day Harlingen Thicket. (PHOTOS above (and on pg. 8 lower left) are *Ibervillea lindheimeri*.)

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>

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Indicator Species: Predominant Species of *Disturbed and Seasonally-Flooded Areas.

First in a series. By Christina Mild, with Mike Heep, Al Richardson & Ken King.

Introduction: Over the past 20 years, my husband and I have looked at many properties in the Harlingen area, seeking mature, diverse habitat. Our desire was to build a home surrounded by such diversity, where we could escape the madding crowd of civilization and soak up the beauty of creation.

We were always accompanied by real estate agents, who were quick to show us a varied assortment of properties they felt would meet our desires.

It quickly became apparent that most of these professionals were ill-equipped to recognize mature native brush and quite often clueless regarding diversity.

The properties we were usually offered would have been alarming, had we made the decision to buy, as they were typically land which would seasonally flood.

Beyond the obvious pitfalls of a flooded house, one imagines we'd have been besieged by mosquitoes.

During the fall of 2010, potential buyers would have become rapidly aware of places where seasonal flooding makes human habitation a bad idea, as their shoes and socks became soggy and they rapidly became stuck in the mud.



LEFT: Retama in drought (or other stress). Frequent on poorly-drained sites.



RIGHT: Retama, *Parkinsonia aculeata*, after rain.

It's a bit more difficult to recognize flood-prone areas during a seven-year drought (by far the more usual situation here).

Here are some simple guidelines for recognizing an area which will seasonally flood:

- ~ Wherever one finds a predominance of a few "flood indicator" woody species, it's sensible to assume that such a place will flood whenever rain is abundant.
- ~ (These species aren't terribly hard to recognize.)
- ~ These same species will, of course, also occur in some areas with good drainage. Most do not require flooding to survive. M. Heep explains their nature as: "they don't mind havin' their feet wet."
- ~ They usually will not predominate (comprise the most prevalent species) in undisturbed, drier areas with better drainage.

(*Long-undisturbed, mature, areas which flood will include a more diverse range of flood-tolerant species, such as brush holly and cedar elm.)

Here on pages 2 and 3 are photos of some telltale (indicator) woody species of places which seasonally flood:



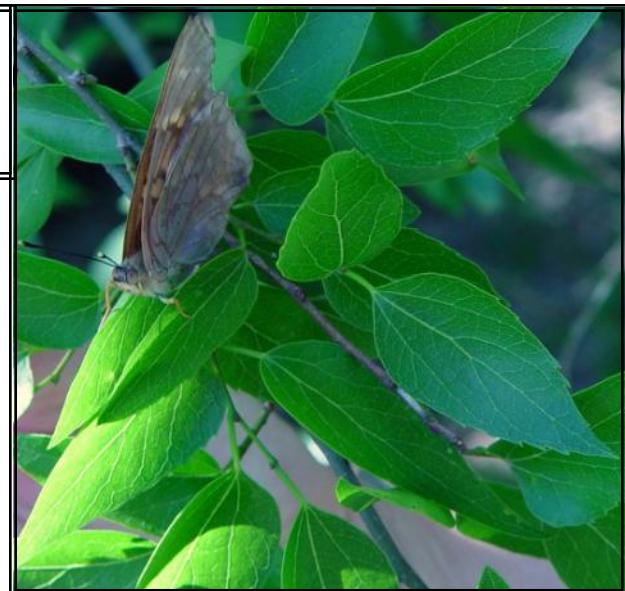
LEFT: Huisache,
bearing mature seedpods.

RIGHT: Huisache,
Acacia farnesiana,
in spring.

More frequent on heavier, wetter clays of low-lying areas in the southern third of Texas, especially the Rio Grande Plains. This pioneer plant thrives in disturbed areas such as livestock pastures. Huisache resprouts readily when disturbed and tolerates many soil types.



RIGHT: Sugar Hackberry, *Celtis laevigata*, with Hackberry butterfly alight. Sugar Hackberry is found primarily on rich, moist alluvial floodplains. It is mostly confined to areas with a constant water supply.



Lower LEFT: *Mimosa pigra*, Zarza, forms dense, impenetrable shrubby thickets. Zarza prefers the seasonal wet areas of clay soils in otherwise dry lake beds and lower areas at the edges of water courses or resacas, in the lower Rio Grande Delta in Cameron and Hidalgo counties, and into Mexico. Note paired white prickles emerging from the blackish stem.

The many, tiny leaflets close in reaction to stress; lending the name Giant Sensitive Plant.

A Texas native, this short, prickly shrub emerged as a serious weed of wetlands in the 1970s in Australia and Thailand and a decade later became an invasive pest in Florida.

Germinates best on damp soil, but will also germinate under water.

Note the segmented seedpods which break apart, scattering hundreds of individual seeds. Groups of seedpods form "hands".

Differentiating Nealy Sprangletop & Guinea Grass ... It's no easy task!!

by Christina Mild

Walking along Ramsey Park's Upper Mown Trail with Mike Heep, I was surprised when he pointed out large colonies of a wonderful native grass, Nealy Sprangletop (*Leptochloa nealleyi*).

Two species of Sprangletop were featured in the February 2010 issue (Vol. 27 No. 2) of "The Sabal," which can be found on the NPP website. Both occur near wet areas. The colonies Heep and I discovered this month were growing along the receding edge of the Arroyo Colorado, in areas where guinea grass has been the dominant species (and the bane of my existence) for many years.

A year earlier, Heep had contributed a few dozen specimens for the Wetland Shrubs Garden, because Nealy Sprangletop naturally occurs near wet areas. The new colonies appeared up-river from the planted specimens. How they arrived there is anybody's guess.

It isn't easy to differentiate Nealy Sprangletop from Guinea Grass in the vegetative state. Both are close in height. Thankfully, Nealy Sprangletop doesn't continue upward growth to emerge from treetops. Each has a red tinge near the basal nodes and wide leaves. Even their coloration is similar.

The easiest character to differentiate is the seedhead. Guinea grass' seedhead opens as it matures, like a Christmas tree. Nealy Sprangletop has a compressed seedhead which doesn't flare out, even when fully mature.

Be on the lookout, especially when you're out and about with RoundUp.

Sprangletop is a grass you **don't** want to wipe out! Close examination of the seedhead clearly differentiates it from guinea grass.



ABOVE: Enlarged view of a robust Nealy Sprangletop.
RIGHT: Matthew Heep, at work on ID.



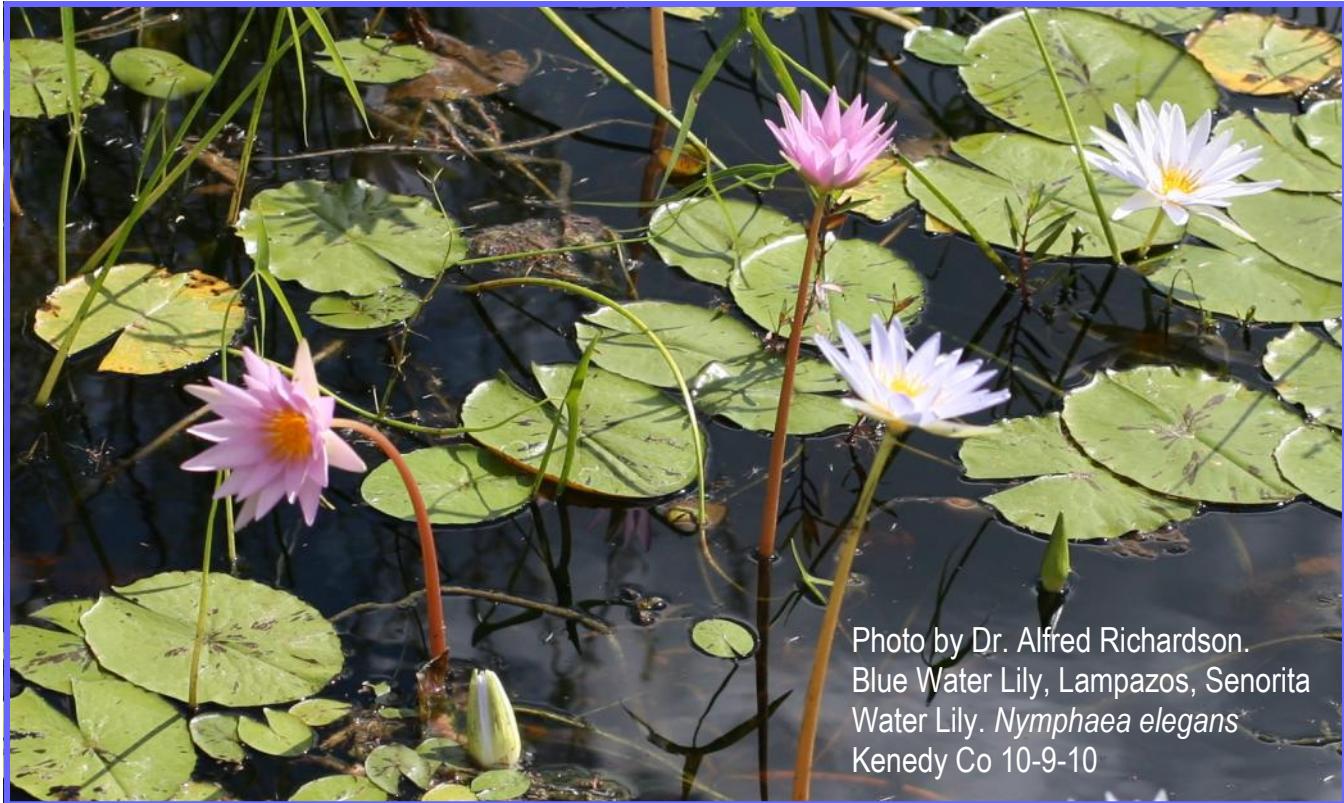


Photo by Dr. Alfred Richardson.
Blue Water Lily, Lampazos, Senorita
Water Lily. *Nymphaea elegans*
Kenedy Co 10-9-10

Pink *Nymphaea elegans* by Ken King

While botanizing in early October, Dr. Al Richardson and I stumbled across pink-blooming water lilies, the first which we've encountered. The site was in Kenedy County, north of the Willacy County Line. Only three individuals of *Nymphaea elegans* in the whole population exhibited pink instead of the normal blue or white flowers.

Past attempts at transplanting Blue Water Lilies by many local enthusiasts have been unsuccessful. Beyond their use in ornamental ponds, this water lily would be an excellent addition to species used in local wetland restoration projects. Several municipalities, including San Juan and La Feria, have initiated such projects.

To successfully transplant individuals of *Nymphaea elegans*, sufficient root mass must be collected to include the tuber that allows the plant to regenerate after dormancy.

In the past, the plants which I collected had plenty of healthy white feeder roots that the lily used for growth in the current season. The following spring there was no reemergence. The original plant had died.

On a recent trip to attend the International Water Gardening Society Convention at San Angelo, I was told by Ken Landon that *N. elegans* needs the storage tubers to regenerate. When *N. elegans* is collected from the field, tubers usually break off in the mud, leaving the plant with no stored food to fuel regeneration.

Landon said that *N. elegans* needs to be grown from seed to be sure the plants have a chance to form a set of these tubers. So now I have another quest and am excited about growing different variations of *N. elegans* in some of my Tractor Supply (stock-tank) ponds as a seed source for wetland restoration.

In San Angelo, TX, Ken Landon has amassed the world's largest collection of water lilies. He has discovered several new species, rediscovered several species thought to be extinct in the wild, and created many new hybrids for the aquatic ornamental trade.

Landon's work can be seen at the International Waterlily Collection (IWC), which has put San Angelo on the map as a destination for viewing the most extensive collection in the world. Landon engineers, designs and maintains the ponds, and provides the plants. IWC is situated in a city park. It's well worth a visit.

For more information, see:
<http://www.internationalwaterlilycollection.com>

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

Highlights from the NPP Board of Directors Meeting **Tuesday, Sept. 28th, 2010**

NPP is one of the sponsors for Valley Nature Center's fund-raising event to be held on November 20, 2010. Proceeds will go towards construction of a new Nature Center building in Weslaco.

The board of directors has finalized revisions to the Native Plant Project by-laws. The new by-laws are available on our website, [www.nativeplantproject.org].

NPP will sell Mike Heep's native plants at:

RGV 17th Annual Birding Festival

Thurs., Nov. 11th & Friday, Nov. 12th ~ Noon – 6 p.m.

Saturday, Nov. 13th ~ 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Sunday, Nov. 14th ~ Noon – 4:00 p.m.

Festival Location: Harlingen Municipal Auditorium

~ 1204 Fair Park Blvd. Harlingen, TX 78550

[<http://www.rgvbirdfestival.com>]

Sedges and their relatives are appearing in many places as flood waters remain in seasonal ponds and playas.

Many sedges (though not all) have triangular stems, thus the saying "sedges have edges."

It is no easy task to correctly identify the many species which might occur in South Texas.

Mike Heep's comments on identifying this sedge: "That sedge could be any of about 10 different species. They give me a headache sometimes."

A comprehensive treatment of Sedges and other Monocots is found in: "Illustrated Flora of East Texas," Vol. One, by Diggs, Lipscomb, Reed and O'Kennon. Published by BRIT, 2006. Digging through a bunch of sedges in that volume definitely gave your editor a headache!



Cyperus sp. A sedge.
A representative of the
family Cyperaceae.
(A family of 5000 species
in 104 genera.)

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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
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1714 S. Palm Court Drive Harlingen, TX 78552
By appointment. Phone: (956) 457-6834
[\[www.heepsnursery.com\]](http://www.heepsnursery.com)

NPP Board & General Meetings, 2010:

Oct 26, Nov 23

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

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
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Report from Bentsen State Park: *by Javier DeLeon*

Observations on effects of flooding on native species.

- 
- ◆ Immediately after the flooding, there was a distinct line where the water had risen. Above the line was green, and below the line was brown as many trees' leaves died or rotted under water. Interestingly, Guayacan bushes did not lose their leaves under water.
 - ◆ There was an area where Crucita, *Chromolaena odorata*, was planted in a butterfly garden which flooded for 1-2 days. All the Crucita shrivelled up and perished. Other plants in the garden such as Turk's Cap, Brush Holly, TX Torchwood, Kidneywood, and TX Lantana were fine after being underwater for more than a day.
 - ◆ Many or most of the Coyotillo plants in the park died during the flooding.
 - ◆ Bermuda grass came back after the flooding like nothing ever happened. The same is true for small patches of Buffalo grass that we have in the park.
 - ◆ We were **hoping** that Guinea grass would all be killed off, but it is coming back. All of the adult guinea grass that was completely submerged died, but new Guinea Grass came in as seedlings a few weeks after the ground began to dry out.
 - ◆ Texas Ebony and Cedar Elms are flourishing after flooding. There is lots of new growth on young and older trees.
 - ◆ All but a handful of Anacua trees have apparently died. They may have been shocked into a dormant state or have succumbed. Their roots were starved of air for over a month. I'm beginning to work with a few local foresters to see if they are still alive. Luckily, many Anacua saplings are sprouting up beneath the older trees.
 - ◆ Retama seedlings are popping up in many many places where there are currently no adult Retamas. Retama seeds most likely floated into the park from elsewhere. We originally thought they were mesquite, but they are Retamas. I will be working to eradicate these saplings in order to preserve some areas as Hackberry/Anacua/Coma/Ebony woodland.
 - ◆ Blue Passionvines are also appearing in numbers. There is an area near the park's pavilion with dozens of these vines popping up.
 - ◆ Lots of sedges arose where there weren't sedges before.

Spike Rush, *Eleocharis* species. Most common local Spike Rushes are:
macrostachya
& smaller *austrotexana*.

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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Please mail this form with dues check payable to:

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

www.NativePlantProject.org

Can you identify this plant? (See pg. 1)
Do you have any idea what it's useful for?



**Tues., Oct. 26th at 7:30 p.m.
"Varied Uses of Native Plants"
by Mike Heep**

Valley Nature Center, 301 S Border, Weslaco, TX

Error correction from September SABAL:

The seedling below is Anacahuita, Mexican Olive, *Cordia boissieri*.

This photo was incorrectly labeled as Anacua. Anacua seedlings are darker in color and rough to the touch.



ABOVE: Adult specimen of Anacahuita.
Compare the mature & immature leaves.

TO: