

The Sabal

February 2012

Volume 29, number 2

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articles and/or photos
are welcomed.

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February Meeting of the Native Plant Project: **Tuesday, Feb. 28th, 2012, 7:30pm**

James Lovegren:

“Growing Native Seedlings for Wildlife Habitat Restoration in the LRGV”

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

James Lovegren is co-owner along with his wife, Suzie Lapeyre Lovegren, of L&L Growers in San Benito. The Lovegrens specialize in growing native seedlings for the revegetation program of the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge system. This process aims to restore habitat for the Valley's indigenous wildlife population. The Lovegrens' venture into growing massive numbers of seedlings began with a Eagle Scout project undertaken by one of their sons. It remains an endeavor in which the entire family participates. (See photos by Mrs. Duylinh Nguyen Lovegren & Terry Sasser on pg. 2.)



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>

A Family Affair, Growing Seedlings for Revegetation

—Photos by Mrs. Duylinh Nguyen Lovegren and Terry Sasser.



CLOCKWISE, from TOP LEFT: Aerating Snake Eye seeds. Jesse and Phil, with Missy reading aloud. Missy weeds Amargosa. Moving the shade structure. August packing plant bands. James Lovegren with the soil mixer.

Find out more about this process on Feb. 28th, as James Lovegren is our speaker.



Rain in the Western Valley!

email from:

Betty Perez bettygraceperez@gmail.com

on Feb 16, 2012

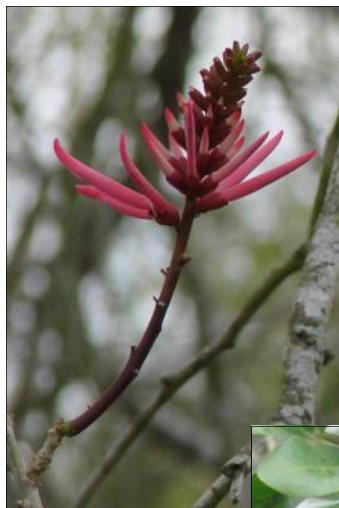
In the last several days, we've had over 3" of very slow-falling rain, which means it's mostly sinking in. Another .04" last night and it's looking like more on the way. The dryland farmers are delighted; cultivated sunflowers coming up already; they'll be planting the sorghum in the next two weeks.

We ranchers are waiting for the sun to come out so we can get the grass to grow for our poor thin cattle or what's left of them. I've had to sell most of the herd. So yes, we've had significant rainfall. I was never worried about the monte--lots in bloom right now--huisachillo, huisache, blackbrush, guajillo, yucca--seeming like an early Spring.

continued on Feb. 17th:

Also, wolfberries are full of berries that the mockingbirds are eating.

In the Eastern Valley: Blooms appearing in the eastern valley bring forth a similar hope that wildlife will find sustenance in the new growth of leaves and blooms, illustrated by photos below. (Ramsey Park may have received over 6" of rain during Jan. and Feb.) At Ramsey Park, where some areas are watered, there are few ripe fruits to be found, except remaining blackened huisachillo seedpods. Nectar is not abundant, except from huisache and huisachillo. Temperatures remained around the 50's until Feb. 18th, warming to 70's. Invasive Guinea grass is growing quite well, even at low temp's.



Clockwise from BOTTOM LEFT:
(C.Mild photos)

Huisache blooms,
Coyotillo green fruit,
blooming Yucca treculeana,
blooming, leafless Coralbean
tree (Colorin),
blooming Cortez' Croton, and
Mountain Laurel with
aromatic purple blooms.



Effects of Early Spring Rain In Harlingen's Arroyo Park System —
photos & text by Christina Mild, taken on 2/18/2012 in The Harlingen Thicket and at C. B. Wood Park.



Clockwise from TOP LEFT:

Many plants remained virtually leafless. Crucillo was an exception, with unusually large leaves. This phenomenon was noted also on Coyotillo. Some plants were producing bloom buds, such as Texas Torchwood and various ladyfinger cacti (lower left). The most amazing finding (right) was fruits forming on some specimens of Oreja de Raton (Mouse Ear), which were just beginning to grow new leaves.



Habitat Improvement to Promote Rare & Endangered Plants; Hazards & Complications

Following Bill Carr's excellent presentation for NPP in January, one might ponder actions which could promote the growth of uncommon native plants. Here's one example occurring at Harlingen's



Thicket. Pointy-leaved Texas Stonecrop, in the white circles (left) is shown at life-size; i.e. it's a small plant which forms colonies. In Harlingen Thicket, a massive invasion of exotic kalanchoes has taken place (probably begun by dumping over-aggressive house plants on the property long ago). Texas Stonecrop is a hostplant for the Xami Hair-streak Butterfly and eaten by tortoises and rabbits. Tiny plantlets of a poisonous, fast-growing Kalanchoe species are circled in red. When pulled from the ground, any small leaf which falls off may form a towering new adult. Fortunately, colonies of cacti grow interspersed (unfortunately, it's difficult to avoid collecting spines and glochids when working in such an area).

A Short Photo Report on Some “Rare & Endangered TX Plants” in Ramsey Park —by Christina Mild

For many years, Ramsey Park in Harlingen has been a place where rare and endangered plants were transplanted, protection was attempted and seeds were collected for revegetation. Beyond the ravages of weather, mosquitoes, wasps, plant thieves, wild hogs, and old age, volunteers have persevered to provide a place for special plants which aren't found in abundance in the wild. Diann Ballesteros has been an essential volunteer in providing care to these special plants.



LEFT: The almost heart-shaped leaves of *Ayenia limitaris* grow on reddish stems. They are easily confused for common types of mallows. A major clearing of guinea grass and granjeno was required in Fall 2011 to allow the leafless stems of *Ayenia* some chance to rejuvenate. With recent rain, granjeno (far left) is once again encroaching on the small colony of *Ayenia limitaris*. The difficulty in recognizing leafless *Ayenia* makes it difficult for the uninitiated to protect the plant.

RIGHT: *Capraria mexicana* was discovered in the LRGV by Joe Ideker in 1996. In 2006, several additional populations of the plant were discovered in Cameron County. A large population grew across from Ramsey Park in an area where plant rescue was allowed. Rescued specimens have done well and reproduced.

BELOW LEFT: Several seedlings of Barreta, *Helietta parvifolia*, have grown rather slowly in Ramsey Park and seed has been produced. The need for good drainage limits the available planting areas. Seedlings are not generally available from local growers.

BELOW RIGHT: *Capparis incana* was rescued from Brownsville's Gloor Woods, which is now taken over by residential development.



Leaf Litter, More Reasons to Leaf It Around!! Most of us realize that Thrashers find edibles in leaf litter and that the decaying process enriches our soil greatly. Mary Anne Borge in “Butterfly Gardener,” Winter 2011 issue, provides other benefits of leaf litter: winter butterfly habitat. According to Borge, Great Spangled Fritillaries and Baltimore Checkerspot are among the species which spend the winter in or under this natural insulation. She includes brush piles, logs, standing dead trees, tree cavities and loose bark as additional butterfly shelters and lists Eastern Commas, Question Marks and Mourning Cloaks as species which utilize such shelter.



Hunting the Yellow Lotus—by Christina Mild

On July 22, 2004, Suzanne Conway and I set out looking for colonies of the Yellow Lotus, *Nelumbo lutea*, driving north on Hwy 77. Spotting the plant from the road, we parked and approached the marshy unknown depths to view our prey close-up. A delightful jumping of many unseen frogs began immediately around us.

Most folks with ponds are reluctant to plant the lotus, as it is known to rapidly cover entire ponds rather quickly.

Ken King and Al Richardson found only 2 colonies of Lotus on their long search for the LRGV’s native plants. Ken noted much evidence of feral hog digging for tubers in the drying ponds.

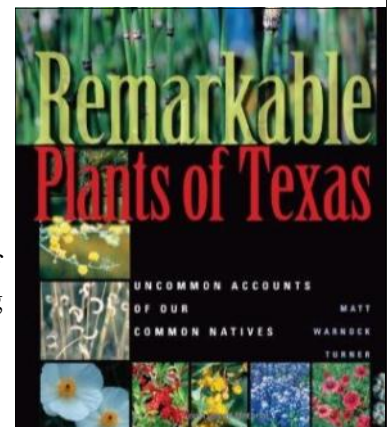
With the recent publication of Matt Warnock Turner’s “Remarkable Plants of Texas,” pond-owners have some pretty good ideas at-hand of what use to make of an overgrown lotus pond. The immature seed, containing up to 19% protein, can be eaten raw, boiled or roasted. Early settlers and Amerindians gathered them by the sackful. Within the mud of the lotus pond lies the greater food source, banana-shaped tubers reaching 10” in length. Tubers can be baked, boiled, fried, or as a starch for making crude cakes.

Oriental cooks use many parts of the lotus; they are called for in such recipes as “Hot and Sour Soup,” and various lotus products can be found in Oriental grocery stores. With the expansion of the worldwide web to include recipes, the ability to safely explore new foods is increasing. A search on “recipe lotus” brings forth many recipes from a variety of cultures.



“Remarkable Plants of Texas” covers a limited number of plants, but each article is captivating. For example, one lotus seed aged at 1000 yrs. successfully germinated. There are only 2 species of lotus, the other being the sacred lotus of Asia, *N. nucifera*.

“Remarkable Plants of Texas” is an intriguing selection for your bookshelf.



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

(Betty Perez & Susan Thompson)
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]

Sponsors

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.
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Sue Griffin



email <sue_griffin@sbcglobal.net >

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NPP Board & General Meetings 2011: (no Dec. mtg.)

(Fourth Tuesday each month)

Board Meetings at 6:30pm. Speaker at 7:30pm.



Here are a few upcoming programs for 2012:

March 27, 2012. Ken
King: our annual Wild-
flower program.

(LEFT: Toadflax)

April 24, 2012. John
Goolsby: the role of in-
sects on native trees.

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

www.NativePlantProject.org

Native Plant
Project presents:

Tuesday, Feb. 28th, 2012, 7:30pm



James Lovegren:
"Growing Native
Seedlings for
Wildlife Habitat
Restoration in the
LRGV"

Valley Nature Center,
301 S. Border
(in Gibson Park), Wes-
laco.
956-969-2475

Photo above: Transplanting coyotillo seedlings.



ABOVE: The Lovegrens' son Jesse thins coyotillo seedlings, one of myriad tasks required to provide material for widespread revegetation of native plants.

Photos of the seedling growing process found in this issue were taken by Mrs. Duylinh Nguyen Lovegren and Terry Sasser.

TO: