

Friends of Friedrich Wilderness Park Report July 6, 2011

It is not even Halloween yet and the Natural Areas has been experiencing something spooky lately. Bats! They have been finding their way into structures, crawling through the smallest nooks and crannies. Searching for cool air and a source of water, these creatures have been found in the most unlikely places, including hanging from the inner lip of a toilet at Rancho Diana. Despite their spooky connotation, bats play an important role in the ecosystem and in our Natural Areas. For example, one million Mexican free-tailed bats in Central Texas have been reported to remove a thousand tons of insects in one summer night (Tuttle, M.D. 2003. *Texas Bats*. Bat Conservation International). Bats eat a wide variety of insects including mosquitoes, moths, beetles, crickets, leafhoppers, and the ever crop damaging corn earworms and armyworm moths that migrate north from Mexico. Mexican free-tailed bats can eliminate millions of these crop damaging insects in just one night (Tuttle 2003). Two bat species have been observed in the Natural Areas, the Mexican free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) and the cave myotis (*Myotis velifer*). The Mexican free-tailed bat is a grayish brown bat that has a long tail that extends beyond its tail membrane and has large rounded ears (Tuttle 2003). These bats are spectacular flyers, flying at speeds of up to 60 miles per hour and flying at altitudes over 10, 000 ft (Tuttle, M.D. 1997. *The Lives of Mexican Free-tailed Bats*, Bat Conservation International). Most of the Mexican free-tailed bats migrate to Mexico for the winter and return in March to mate and raise their young. However, some Mexican free-tailed bats stay year around and enter torpor where they wake to feed on warm winter nights (Tuttle 2003). Females give birth to one pup and pups are usually born in June. Most of the Mexican free-tailed bats roost in caves but they can also roost in buildings, under bridges, and even old mining tunnels. They readily use bat houses as well (Tuttle 2003). Sometimes these bats are found roosting with the cave myotis, a smaller bat who is a permanent Texas resident. The cave myotis mates from September to March and gives birth to a single pup by early May. These bats too roost in caves, buildings, bridges, and bat houses. When found roosting together with Mexican free-tailed bats, cave myotis bats have been known to wait and let their larger roost mates emerge first. Cave myotis typically fly nearer to the ground than the Mexican free-tails and they typically have a more erratic flight pattern (Tuttle 2003). They too are responsible for keeping insect populations in check and commonly eat ant lions, weevils, and beetles. So, the next time you see these unusual mammals fluttering through the night sky know that they serve an important purpose from the crops we eat to the mosquitoes we swat and spray for and that these spectacular creatures will always find a home in the Natural Areas.

Ecosystem Notes

Staff and volunteers observed the following birds: western scrub jay (*Aphelocoma californica*), black-crested titmouse (*Baeolophus atricristatus*), Carolina chickadee (*Poecile carolinensis*), common raven (*Corvus corax*), northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*), greater roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*), ladder-backed (*Picoides scalaris*) and golden-fronted (*Melanerpes aurifrons*) woodpeckers, Carolina wrens (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*), Bewick's wrens (*Thryomanes bewickii*), eastern phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*), northern cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), turkey vulture (*Cathartes*

aura), black vulture (*Coragyps atratus*), several warblers including black and white (*Mniotilta varia*), golden-winged (*Vermivora chrysoptera*), chestnut-sided (*Dendroica pensylvanica*), and golden-cheeked (*Dendroica chrysoparia*) (GCW), white-eyed vireos (*Vireo griseus*) and black-capped vireo (*Vireo atricapilla*) (BCV), painted bunting (*Passerina ciris*), rufous-crowned sparrows (*Aimophila ruficeps*), turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), red-shouldered hawk fledglings (*Buteo lineatus*), several doves including mourning (*Zenaida macroura*), white-winged (*Zenaida asiatica*) and common ground (*Columbina passerina*), black-chinned hummingbird (*Archilochis alexandri*), blue-gray gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*), green heron (*Butorides virescens*), yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), Great crested (*Myiarchus crinitus*) and ash-throated (*Myiarchus cinerascens*) flycatchers, western kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*), summer tanager (*Piranga rubra*), brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*), and lesser goldfinch (*Carduelis psaltria*).

Staff also observed porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*), gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*), and a coyote (*Canis latrans*).

Friedrich Wilderness Park

BCV presence/absence surveys are complete and there were no observations of BCVs in the any of the 3 designated BCV Management Areas, or anywhere else in the park. According to USFWS protocol, it is permissible under certain limited conditions for a permitted biologist to play tapes in order to elicit a response from BCVs. Even playing tapes did not result in any BCV observations. The Management Areas are clearly showing the effects of drought, with many bare branches in the ground to 1 m height. Since BCVs typically nest at doorknob height, the bare vegetation is likely negatively affecting the quality of BCV habitat. There also appeared qualitatively to be fewer butterflies and other insects in the Management Areas as compared to other years so a reduction in avian food supply may be another factor. BCVs typically form colonies in their breeding habitat, and since the FWP colony has been so small (most years 1-4 individuals), it is possible that other birds that occupy niches similar to the BCV, such rufous-crowned sparrows and painted buntings, have out competed the BCVs at FWP.

Bexar Audubon Society funded surveys for GCWs as part of the Important Bird Area initiative. Preliminary results suggest that there may have been as many as 12-13 GCWs at FWP this spring.

Staff has worked on removing invasive, woody species, especially *Ailanthus* or Tree of Heaven.

Hand watering of landscape and tree installations at Friedrich, Eisenhower, Crownridge Canyon and Rancho Diana is occupying considerable staff time.

Trail repair work is also being performed in the three parks. Extremely dust-dry conditions are almost as hard on trails as too much rain.

Rancho Diana

Volunteers are surveying for BCVs. These surveys cannot be considered USFWS protocol presence/absence surveys because the volunteers only have time to survey most areas once or twice (instead of the minimum 5 surveys at least 5 days apart). With most of the northern habitat patches complete, it appears there are about 25 BCVs in just these patches. The results of the work done on the southern part of RD are still outstanding.

Staff did USFWS protocol surveys for GCWs in the compound area and within about 90 m of the compound. There were 5-6 GCW territories documented. Staff also conducted GCW surveys at three locations near the border of the property. These areas are either experiencing significant development and, thus, staff would like to monitor impacts on GCW's on Rancho Diana or these areas adjoin future development sites.

Significant tree die-back and loss was experienced in the drought of 2009. With little time for recovery, trees are again dying with the current drought. Although this seemed to be most noticeable at Rancho Diana, some tree loss has been experienced on all Natural Areas properties. The 2011 drought is shaping up to be worse than 2009.

Eisenhower Park

Volunteers surveyed golden-cheeked warblers in two sections of the park. They were successful in locating and documenting birds in more than one location.

It was a disappointing year for the bracted twistflower population. On April 6th, 6 plants were alive, 3 of which were about to bloom. All were noted as being shriveled, barely alive, and extremely drought stressed. By May the 3rd, the remaining 3 were dried up and one was noted as having buds that never opened and dried on the bloom stalk.

The old caretaker's trailer home has been removed.

Crownridge Canyon Natural Area

Crews are working on removing woody species in savannah restoration areas along Red Oak Canyon Trail. Also removing nandinas as they keep "popping up."

Southern Edwards Plateau Habitat Conservation Plan

The first draft of the SEP-HCP was released and comments from the Biological Advisory Team and members of the public submitted. USFWS also held a series of related Environmental Impact scoping meetings in order to receive public comment from throughout the 7 county proposed plan area. Both the first draft of the SEP-HCP as well as all the comments can be viewed at <http://www.sephcp.com/>. The Citizens' Advisory Committee has not yet taken formal action on either the recommended plan or any of the alternatives suggested. A second draft of the SEP-HCP is expected to be available in September.

Education

Field Tours and Special Events (including Wild Week)

3 Field trips	228 participants
Nature Challenge opening	30 participants
Growing Up WILD workshops for parents and children	55 participants
Wild Week Session 1	20 participants
Wild Week Session 2	26 participants

Trainings

Field guides	Bird adaptations of zoo animals	6 participants
Field Guides	Insects with Molly Keck	12 participants
Field Guides	Camp Training	11 Participants

Total Education participants in May and June: 470 youth and adults