Our mission statement states that we develop public awareness and stewardship of the Texas Hill Country’s environment and natural resources through education, information, and example. As I interact with the public, our board members, our volunteers and our staff, I am repeatedly reminded that it is the next generation that we are serving. We often talk of building a bridge from the younger generation’s world of interactive technology to the world of nature. As I reflect on the past few months, I am very pleased with our progress.

This spring, we hosted another Junior Naturalist class, family nature nights, monthly Family Nature Walks on the River Trail, and spring field trips for preschool and school-age children. June was a month of intense preparation for the opening of our new exhibit, WICKED (Wild in the City of Kerrville Every Day). We could not have been more pleased with the wonderful crowd composed of more children than adults who attended the July 2nd opening! This summer we have also hosted all the day camp attendees from the YMCA and the Kroc Center. And our president, Judy Ferguson, has finished leading the 2nd annual Intergenerational Adventure Day Camp. Based on the bracelets we are giving away to children, we know that over 300 kiddos have delighted in our critters, displays, and grounds since the first of July.

If you have not come into the Visitor’s Center since the WICKED grand opening, I encourage you to do so! We have quite a menagerie of native critters for you to meet including the turtles, Sunshine, Leo, and Rocky; a visiting Texas rat snake who goes by the handle Tejas Slim (who we hope will become as winsome as Chunker); a couple of lizards; a black widow spider tenderly caring for her egg sac; and Martha the tarantula who has returned from her visit to Schreiner University. Across the atrium we created an urban Wildscape diorama complete with almost 70 critters for you to find. We have a checklist to tell you what all you may discover.

Good things are happening here at Riverside Nature Center, and it is all thanks to you – our members and especially the generous donors who we acknowledge by name in this newsletter for participating in our recent rather painless fundraiser. (No tickets to buy, no auction items to bid on, no time taken except for a cup of coffee and writing a check... As I said, it was pretty painless.)

I know of no other organization that is as member-driven as Riverside Nature Center. Our members do it all: they get the work done inside and out, arrange educational programs, provide financial support, and make policy (such as whether to allow dogs onto our grounds). Thank you for all you have done and will do for the current and next generation of Hill Country residents.

Stepping Lightly on this Earth,

Mary Muse

In Memoriam: Edith Bettinger (1924-2013) was a charter member of Riverside Nature Center and the Native Plant Society of Texas. She also founded the RNC Gleaners, the volunteer group who plants, studies and cares for our wildflower meadow and butterfly garden. Edith established a plant identification library for RNC and also produced pressed flower note cards and bookmarks sold in the RNC gift shop. The programs that she founded here are now continued under the leadership of one of her protégé’s, Barbara Lowenthal. In her memory, Barbara will be starting an educational program entitled, “The Edith Bettinger Wildflower Series.” We are honored that her family has suggested donations to Riverside Nature Center in lieu of flowers.
The following are open to all Kerrville-area residents and visitors. No reservations required for these particular events, but RSVPs are appreciated. Drop by the center, or call 257-4837, for further information.

AUGUST 2013 EVENTS

WICKED

‘WICKED,’ THROUGH SEPTEMBER
Daily through September, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., weekdays; 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturdays; 1-4 p.m. Sundays. “Wild in the City of Kerrville Every Day” exhibit, celebrating the environment shared with the critters and creatures living within the city limits. Find out how to plan an excellent environmental habitat and to peacefully coexist with all that is wild. Meet the center’s newest residents, a menagerie of those wild things, and then check out a miniature wildscape diorama and take the “Find the Critters” quiz. Free, but donations appreciated.

TUESDAY, AUG. 6, Family Nature Night
‘This one’s for the birds’
7-8 p.m. Presented by Kerrville dentist, Dr. Rob Carpenter, the filmmaker and producer of the bird video that plays in the Visitors Center. Learn to recognize the sight and song of many city-dwelling birds, from the mockingbird to the hawk, with flocks of other feathered neighbors in between. This family-friendly seminar is indoors. Arrive in time to meet or to visit with the resident critters in the WICKED exhibit, from Sunshine the diva turtle to hissing ol’ Tejas Slim, a rat snake. Free, but a family donation of $10 will be appreciated.

THURSDAY, AUG. 15, Native Healing Garden
11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Learn about native medicinal herbs, then plant and tend the garden. Led by certified herbalists Amy Coward, R.N. and Sally Garrett, M.S. Bring a healthy dish to share and your own eating utensils. Donations fund the garden.

THURSDAY, AUG. 22, Herbs at Twilight
6-8 p.m. “Wild edibles, meet and eat” is an introduction to the nutritional value of foraged plants, then a chance to try them. Presented by certified herbalists Amy Coward, R.N., & Sally Garrett, M.S. Cost is $25 per class, $20 RNC members. Reservations suggested. Meet indoors, in the Visitors Center.

Sometimes things change. Please call 257-4837 to confirm event times and/or dates.

RECURRING EVENTS

GROUND & BUILDING MAINTENANCE, Every Wednesday a.m.
Volunteers needed to keep the grounds & improvements in working order and looking nice.

FAUNA CENSUS, 1st Fridays, 9 a.m.
Walk the property for about an hour, recording the fauna census. Meets 2nd Friday in January. ALWAYS check for date changes.

MEADOW TENDING, Every Wednesday, 9-11 a.m
Meadow restoration progresses, with help of dedicated volunteers. A demonstration garden also needs tending.

NATIVE HEALING GARDEN, 3rd Thursday
Learn about native medicinal herbs, then plant and tend the garden. Bring a healthy dish to share. 11:30 a.m.

TOWN CREEK CLEANUP, Quarterly, Saturday a.m.
Work with Upper Guadalupe River Authority on quarterly cleanup of Town Creek. Job takes about 2 hours. Must register in advance.
Email: info@riversidenaturecenter.org or call 257-4837.

SAVE THE DATES

Tuesday, Sept. 10, Second Tuesday Brown Bag Lunch & Learn. Butterfly expert Cathy Downs will talk about the Monarch.

Thursday, Sept. 19, Native Healing Garden.

Sunday, Sept. 22, 9 a.m. Celebrate the equinox with an informative stroll on the River Trail, led by Susan Sander.

Thursday, Sept. 26. Herbs at Twilight, ‘Fall herb garden.’

Saturday, Oct. 5. Down by the Riverside celebration and native-plant sale, with lectures and experts, exhibits and information, and ongoing, informative strolls on the Kerrville River Trail with Susan Sander. Children’s activities spotlighted. Food and beverages available for sale. Free admission.

Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2nd Tuesday Brown Bag Lunch & Learn. Paul Fleming presents on the Guadalupe bass.


Saturday, Oct. 26, 7 p.m., Harvest Moon celebration with wine and music.
A Big, Big ‘Thank You’ for Enjoying Coffee on Your Back Porch

Karen Argence * Bob & Joyce Barton * James & Marguerite Belec * Joseph & Verna Benham
Doug & Pam Bresler * Elena L. Brineman * Mike & Karen Burkett * William & Betty Dole
Linda Doll * Wes & Marci Dorman * Fane Downs * Lindsay Duff * Rick & Stephanie Ertel
Larry & Natalie Fagarason * Henry Foote III * William Furnish * Tracy Crawford Gournay
Mary Lee Gowland * Larry & Amelie Hagen * Antoinette Hamilton * Carl & Joann Hintze
Richard & Meg Johnson * Sam & Adele Junkin * Kerrville Junior Service Guild Friends * Brad & Aimee Laughlin
Linda Mauer * Mimi McMillen * Wes McComb * Sue Meek * Pete & Martha Miesch * John J.F. Miller, Jr.
Bill & Mary Muse * Pat & Frank Nelson * Michael & Barbara Oates * Gloria Olsen * Edna & Howard Platte
James & Lula Potter * Harriet Redwine * Suzanne Roberts * Frank & Angela Santagata * Ernest & Paula Smith
Arthur Stokes * Mary Ellen Summerlin * Sheldon & Mary Ann Tucker * Paul Urban * Mary Q. Vann
Jim & Melinda Wasson * Irwin & Loreta Weinstock * Lisa & Chuck Williams * Sarah Wilson

Thanks to the above donors, Riverside Nature Center received over $11,000!

This One’s For the Birds

Dr. Rob Carpenter
HOW TO HUG A CACTUS  
By Martha Hix

Have you ever noticed, when you first drive into Riverside Nature Center, just how nice the cactus garden looks?

Cactus garden? The volunteer in charge of that area takes exception to the name. John Farmer, MBA, retired IBM executive and serious bicycler, said, “It’s important to know this is not just a cactus garden.”

Cactus is a subspecies of succulents. There are in excess of 10,000 succulents, and only 1/5 are cactus. Riverside’s entrance holds 55 species of (mostly) deer-resistant succulents. It’s meant to be that way, a mix. “Because of droughts,” Farmer added, “we have a variety of plants that are native or adaptive to our Edwards Plateau environment.”

The objective is to demonstrate how the succulent family can be used, planted, and shown, to create a natural habitat. One might assume that maintaining such a garden stops at planting. Not so. Weeds take hold. Then there’s wintertime. A gardener must cover certain plants, to protect against our petulant temperature drops. He explained, “That’s why a lot of the natives died in 2011. It was just too cold.”

He’s heard people complain about the perils of working with succulents: the spines and sharp leaves. That’s an easy fix. “Wear gloves.”

Farmer says the dominant color of cacti flowers is yellow. There are several colors in the center’s garden, with a number having been transplanted from other parts of the Hill Country. Some hail from southwest Texas. Others are from the southwestern Sunbelt, New Mexico to California. “If we planted only native cactus, we’d have a smaller garden.”

His favorite is the Astrophytum ornatum. This zaftig, luscious cactus is star shaped and bears a number of yellow flowers on its crown, showing them off rather like a lady’s over-the-top chapeau on race day. Race day in Chihuahua City, perhaps. But that’s not what John Farmer finds striking. “I like it because of the outside skin, and the neat dots on it.”

The center’s best example has already bloomed and shed 7 flowers this summer. “It’s not native to the Edwards Plateau, but it survives well here.”

As for his opinion of succulents in general, he said, “I’ve never met a cactus I didn’t like.”

Farmer is not one of those guys who brags. He matter-of-factly pointed out that the xeriscaping in the RNC garden is meant to replicate the wild, the native rocks and bushes. These succulents grow proud and tall in a blanket of gravel, dirt, and rocks. “They find nourishment, somewhere in there.”

This garden has been around for several years, more than the “8 or 10” that John Farmer has been tending it. He said, “Lots of volunteers have worked it, and hopefully it will always be maintained.”

He wasn’t always so knowledgeable. When he and his wife first arrived in Kerrville, Barbara Quinby, his friend of many years—from their days at IBM in Milwaukee, along with her husband, John—suggested he contact RNC to learn how to master Kerrville landscaping. This man who had once considered studying for a doctorate in computer science found a new calling. Riverside’s succulents. “I had strong, highly knowledgeable mentors,” he said, mentioning Dr. Larry Fagarason as primary among them.

Recalling his responsibilities these past years, he grinned, a sparkle in his clear hazel eyes. “I couldn’t resist the pay.”

Some (But Not All) of John Farmer’s Tips for Happy Succulents.

- Plant succulents (especially cactus) in well-draining soil. Use 1/3 decayed granite, 1/3 soil, 1/3 gravel. Do NOT overwater. Cacti lack the mechanism to understand when they have had enough to drink. Thus, they can continue to fill up, get mushy, and die.

- Succulents usually find what they need to survive, even planted in gravel and/or poor soil. Don’t make them compete with weeds for nutrients. Keep the bed weeded.

- Know the plants before you commit.

- Et cetera.
Oh ye of little faith!

What an amazing transformation has taken place in the meadow this spring! After several years of severe drought, nature has blessed the meadow with gentle rains and cool temperatures. This combination caused the meadow to burst into a blaze of color. This has been a great reward to the meadow volunteer workers who have labored to remove the non-native species, nurtured the native species, and wondered if the meadow would ever recover.

Our spring forbs survey indicates that our diversity is still intact with approximately 150 different species of native forbs (wildflowers). The seed bank in the meadow seems to be healthy.

Our meadow restoration project progresses. After the solarization efforts last summer, we have had to turn to chemical eradication of the few undesirable species still remaining in the areas where native grasses and forbs will be reseeded; this process will continue through this current growing season.

In the pollinator areas, the clustering of plants continues. We have added a few new species, Lindheimer’s crownbeard (*Verbesina lindheimeri*) and the native golden-eye (*Viguiera dentate*). Both are late summer/fall bloomers, which can tolerate dappled shade or full sun and will die back in the winter. We have begun to add some clusters of more delicate perennials like the limestone gaura (*Gaura calcicola*), skeleton-plant *Lygodesmia texana*), golden dalea (*Dalea aurea*), rockflax (*Linum rupestre*) and Navajo tea (*Thelesperma simplicifolium*). Their behavior is rather whimsical with their long stems which tend to swirl around in a breeze. All of these will attract pollinators to the meadow.

At the moment, many of the early blooming plants have gone to seed, while the summer blooming plants have begun. We invite you to meander on the trail and enjoy the diversity.

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**June’s ‘Do You Know Me’ mystery volunteer contest winner**

The winner is new RNC member Harriet “Hootie” Redwine of Phoenix, Arizona. Hootie was quick to identify Sunshine the turtle, one of our newest volunteers. Hootie is loving it, how she knew the answer, while in Phoenix!

Truth to tell, she was visiting her pal, Fane Downs, when the fellow brought in the beautiful turtle that he’d found under his truck wheel. Fane, being a good friend, has offered to hand-deliver Hootie’s prize, a green Riverside Nature Center coffee mug.
The **TOWN CREEK CLEANUP TEAM** joined with hundreds of others for UGRA’s annual river cleanup, the final Saturday in July. According to team leader **TIM LEWIS**, “a HUGE thanks” goes to these RNC/TCCT members: **ROSE CANASCO** (first time), **STAN COBBS** (first time with TCCT but "old-timer" to river cleanup), **JENNIFER COLVIN** (first time), **JAMES DALZELL** (first time and a "guest" family member of Becky Etzel & James Noe), **GINNY de WOLF** (first time with TCCT helping UGRA with the river cleanup; RNC’s manager of publication information), **BECKY ETZLER** (third time and the course director for the 2013 class of Texas Master Naturalist), **KAY HARTER** (second time; Riverside Nature Guide), **RICK HARTER** (first time), **DAN MEINEKE** (third time), **SANDRA MEINEKE** (fourth time and the recipient of a TCCT personalized, embroidered denim shirt and cap for making all four team cleanups in October, January, April and July), **JACK MILLIKAN** (third time with TCCT but a seasoned river cleanup veteran), **JAMES NOE** (second time). Tim said, “Thanks to each of you for giving your valuable time to our community, our creek, and our river.”

**Herbal News**

**Native Healing Garden.** The topic for July was Cenizo, or Leuconyphyllum frutescens. August’s subject TBA.

**What’s growing in our garden: OCOTILLO, Fouquieria splendens**

Also known as coachwhip, candlewood, Jacob’s staff

**MEDICINAL USES**

As an EXPECTORANT, ocotillo increases bronchial secretions for easier mucus release. It is also sedating to a dry, spasmodic cough.

Ocotillo has a general decongestant effect on the lymphatic and venous circulation of the pelvic region, making it applicable to hemorrhoids, pelvic lymph enlargements, and benign prostatitis. Overall it enhances movement of trunk and pelvic congestion.... It has an overall warming and relaxing sensation in the pelvic region, and is beneficial to both men and women.

It stimulates bile production and it release, thereby improving digestion of fats. It moves stagnant qi, energy, blood, mucus, and fluids.

Traditional use of ocotillo among Hispanics in New Mexico is for sore throats, tonsillitis, and to stimulate menses.

**Herbs at Twilight.** The meeting has moved indoors until autumn. July’s topic, herbs for relaxation, was a hit, and folks were glad to be inside. As usual, there were plenty of samples on hand, ending with the tastiest, kava colada. August brings “Wild edibles, meet and eat.”

**Basic Herbalism.** Stay tuned for information on joining the next accredited class.
PLANNED GIVING

MAKE RNC YOUR BENEFICIARY

If you’re reading this article, then it’s a given that you care about Riverside Nature Center’s mission to develop public awareness and stewardship of the Texas Hill Country’s environment and natural resources through education, information, and by example. It takes much to fulfill our mission. Much effort on the part of our volunteers and staff, and much money to fund our programs and events. That in mind, have you ever considered making RNC a beneficiary under your will, life insurance, or retirement plan?

Please consider joining FRIENDS OF RIVERSIDE. If you’d like more information, call Mary Muse at 257-4837, or leave a call-back number for Wes Dorman. You can also reach Mary by email: director@riversidenaturecenter.org.

ESTATE PLANNING TIP

What about your beneficiaries? How long has it been since you put your wishes in writing? Time changes everything, as the saying goes. According to former RNC president Jack Millikan, MBA, “Your retirement assets may never reach your intended loved ones if you’ve failed to update your beneficiaries. Beneficiary legatees trump your will when it comes to passing along your 401(k), IRAs, and life-insurance policies. Without updates, your assets could pass to a deceased parent, a former spouse, or an organization whose purpose has changed.” Please consult with your personal tax or legal advisors for specific instructions.

THE DOC IS MAKING HOUSE CALLS

Several nature center members were quick to take the “house call” offered by Dr. Shannon Smith, RNC’s ace botanist. For a $50 tax-deductible donation to RNC, members receive “at least an hour” of evaluation and consultation about their horticultural concerns. His offer is still good. Call the office, 257-4837, and leave your contact information.

Not a member? No problem. Just join the nature center. Individual and household memberships start at $60 a year. Credit cards accepted for membership AND for donations.

Congratulations!

- Sandra Meineke, Town Creek Cleanup Team award
- J. David Bamberger, ‘Mothering Nature’ profile, TP&W magazine
- RNC for stellar press coverage by Kerrville Daily Times & HC Community Journal
- RNC for Rob McCorkle’s article, ‘Down by the Riverside’ in TP&W
NEW MEMBERS IN JUNE
Harriet Redwine * Janice & Daniel Naredo * Judy Gausnell * Lisa Fitzsimmons
Sarann & Morgan Williams * Scott & Sandra Magee * Steve Peters

COMING ATTRACTIONS in September’s issue...

🌟 Our seasonal exhibit opening in October
🌟 Down by the Riverside & Harvest Moon details
🌟 A profile of our top gleaners