The farewell phrase of the day seems to be “Stay cool!” Some of you may think your friend is bolstering your “groovy” attitude but I think this is a reference to the near 100° temperatures we have been experiencing. Ahhh...the “dogs days of summer!” A time when a walk to the mailbox is a chore and some folks get downright irritable. Many people today use the phrase to mean something like that—but originally, the phrase actually had nothing to do with dogs, or even with the lazy days of summer. Instead, it turns out, the dog days refer to the dog star, Sirius, and its position in the heavens. It turns out that the rise of Sirius does not always correspond with the hottest part of the year. According to Bradley Schaefer, professor of physics and astronomy at Louisiana State University, “Roughly 13,000 years from now, Sirius will be rising with the sun in mid-winter.” What will be said then, ahh...the dog days of winter? “Stay warm, my friend”. In spite of the heat, we nature conscious souls find ourselves out in the elements taking care of business. Riverside Nature Center joined 400 people in the 13th Annual Guadalupe River Clean Up. It was a great success thanks to our friends and colleagues at UGRA. RNC also took our road show to the Belk’s Kid Fest at River Hills Mall. Who better to tweak young curious minds than our beloved Susan Sander. The Thursday evening Nature Nights continue to be a big hit with the young ones. They don’t seem to mind being outside netting dragonflies or digging in the compost. If you have not attended yet you still have a few opportunities left. The Nature Night series is coming to a close mid-August. Do you still need a bit more incentive to get outside? Watch your mailbox for an invitation to our Beat the Heat fundraiser, August 13th from 8:30 -10:30 am. Join us for breakfast alfresco and mimosas. Proceeds will benefit the renovation of the nature lab. Both the M.E. Hart Foundation and the Community Foundation have generously granted us funds but we are still short $10,500 to complete the full plan. Ticket price for the event is only $35.00 but we would gladly accept additional donations. Hopefully September will see the temperatures a bit cooler making it a perfect time to join the 2nd Annual Run for Riverside 5K Run/Walk on September 10th. You can register at www.riversidenaturecenter.org and be guaranteed a newly designed t-shirt.

But if you just cannot stand the heat and still want to have an outdoor experience, pay us a visit and explore our “What’s in Your Yard?” exhibit.

Stay cool, my friends.

Until next time.....
AUGUST 2016 RNC Events Calendar

Thursday, August 4, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.
“Who’s been here?” a CSI Nature Night with Susan Sander. Explore evidences of wildlife.

Tuesday, August 9, 9:30-10:30 a.m.
“Walk with Shucks the Corn Snake” and Karen Millikan

Thursday, August 11, 6:30-7:30 p.m.
Nature Night “Who is in the river?” with UGRA Tara Bushnoe & Nate Smith

Saturday, August 20, 8:00 – 9:30 a.m.
“Bird Walks & Talks” with Paul & Deloris Sellin

Tuesday, August 23, 9:30 – 10:30 a.m.
“Walk with Shucks the Corn Snake” and Karen Millikan

Saturday, August 13, 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.
“Beat the Heat” Enjoy a morning in nature having breakfast alfresco, entertainment and mimosas. $35 per person. All proceeds with be used to match a grant for the renovation of the Nature Lab. RSVP today.

Saturday, September 10, 8:00 a.m.
Run 4 Riverside 5K. Register today: https://www.athleteguild.com/running/kerrville-tx/2016-run-for-riverside-5k-run-and-walk

For more information and upcoming events, check our website www.riversidenaturecenter.org

If you have not noticed, the block wall hiding the water tanks at Riverscape is no longer just a blank canvas. Mural artist, Russ Cushman from Navasota, designed and painted an impactful image on the wall. It depicts a storm over the headwaters of the Guadalupe River. One is to imagine the rains giving life to the springs which flow along our Riverscape.
The Nature Nights on Thursday evenings at Riverside Nature Center have been fun and very informative. We would like to thank all of the presenters who have shared their knowledge and expertise:

Susan Longacre and her grandson Gavin, Paul & Deloris Sellin, Tara Bushnoe & Travis Linscomb Bill Morgenstern, Deborah Windham, Morgan Williams, Judy Ferguson, Susan Sander & Karen Millikan
Asking questions
by Susan Sander,
RNC naturalist

“What is a naturalist?” When I ask kids, I might get a hesitant, “a person who studies nature?” The other day I was asked that question while opening a savings account. Apparently there is no code in their system for my job at RNC. Hmmmm. So what is it that I do with my life?

“How does one become a naturalist?” I’m often asked by kids. And I’m glad to tell them that I teach myself, something they can do, too: just be observant and see if they can figure out what is going on.

“What’s to see here?” is often asked by visitors to RNC. In the day of quick “nature” at our remote’s command, people expect easy answers. Some do go wandering; most are answer-oriented. Nature isn’t that easy. You have to be as wily as the creatures you are hoping to see. It takes patience and time; it means being quiet and still.

Recently I went to a Wisconsin nature center with my four-year-old nephew, Zack, for a frog program. One little girl shot up her hand to answer all the docent’s questions. Yet once outside she fell apart when all frogs eluded her. Frustrated to tears and mad, she was determined to catch one (dad telling her to “get it” as she crashed about). “Zack, can you hear the frog?” I asked. He stopped and listened for the frog’s call and found it, although it hopped beyond reach. He saw that frogs are really good hoppers and that helped them escape. As he told me “they’re like super heroes,” and he was good with that.

“Does nature exist in the city?” became the theme for an issue of Orion magazine years ago. Sadly, many people don’t see the city as a habitat. That ah-ha moment changed my approach: If you don’t expect to see wild, you won’t look, and if you don’t look, you won’t see it.

In July 1992, 24 years ago, Riverside bought this site and the question was “What can live in our yard?” For seven years, Tom Collins, a Hill Country Master Naturalist, did wildlife surveys listing at least 340 species to date. I may not have seen all the creatures but knowing that they are out there shows that we have habitat even in the city. I’ve even learned to look up at vultures in case one is really a zone-tailed hawk.

Six years ago as I bought a house in town, a zone-tailed flew over. I wondered at the time, “What wildlife lives in my yard?” Today the cardinals that were nest building when I left July 3rd are now feeding three babies.* Protein-packed grasshoppers are shoveled down wide open mouths plus something tan, juicy, and bigger than the parent’s beak. Maybe gulf fritillary chrysalis? Mom stands with her mouth and wings slightly open to shade the kids while dad flies in with more food, at least 30 trips in an hour. It went on for 12 hours! Meanwhile the wren is also hunting. In the back yard a tiny spiny lizard dashed for cover. The hummingbird did some tricky maneuvers to get nectar from a purple leather flower that hangs straight down. A golden-fronted woodpecker checks the pantry in a dying box elder.

During the night great-horned owls, cliff-chirping frogs, katydids make music; someone left scat packed with tiny seeds. In predawn, bats circle overhead. My wild neighbors have very busy lives.

Being a naturalist is a way of life for me, not a job. Asking kids “what can you find?” peaks their curiosity to take a closer look – be it outdoors or in our inside-out exhibit. It’s far more rewarding then just telling them factoids. Asking them leading questions allows them to figure out their own answers to Nature’s questions. And it instills in them that Nature is everywhere to explore, even in their yard.

*(A sad note. Four days later all the baby cardinals were gone. They did not fledge. Now the questions are: What happened: Was the drought impacting the parents’ ability to find bugs? A hard reminder that drought is hard on wildlife.)

Zack and Tante Su go frogging’
Memories from a Hill Country Garden: Flowers, Stones, and Critters

by Jim Truchards

Memoires from a Hill Country Garden is an amazing compilation of photographs, and the story about the transformation of the author’s Austin yard into the beautiful all-season garden that it is today.

The photography of many beautiful plants that are especially appropriate for our area, as well the hummingbirds, bees and other critters are the highlight of this book. The landscaping utilizes the natural features of the land as well the diverse plants that grow so well in the Hill Country.

There are brief discussions of weather, stone, soil, photography and landscaping with hints and antidotes about the plants and their growth. Photographs are divided into the four seasons when individual plants are the most colorful.

This book will be an inspiration to everyone who wants beautiful natural landscaping for their home or land and to understand the amazing diversity and color of the Hill Country.

Copies of this stunning book are available to purchase at the RNC gift shop. Get your own copy today.
Thank You

Donors: June 24 - July 25
(Does not include renewals)

Nancy & Paul Gross
Harriet Redwine
Tracy Crawford-Gournay
Judy & Warren Ferguson
Elena L. Brineman

Members Joining: June 24 - July 25

Elsa Roberts

Hello We are pleased to introduce you to Matthew Thurlow. He is the new part time Building & Grounds Assistant here at Riverside Nature Center. Just say hello to him and you will immediately hear his wonderful accent and realize he is not from around here. Matt hails from Massachusetts. It was in Amherst where he attended the Stockbridge School of Agriculture, majoring in arbor culture and park management. Matt retired in 2015 from state service for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a landscape architect. He and his wife relocated to Kerrville to assist family members already living here. Luckily for us, Matt wanted to get involved with the community and share his love of trees and landscaping expertise. A more perfect match could only be found in fairy tales. Please welcome Matt to the RNC family!

Goodbye You may have met Will Deleery, our summer intern from Schreiner University this summer. Will has enthusiastically assisted us with many projects and learned a lot about working in a non-profit organization setting. We have enjoyed his talents. He is soon back to his curriculum as a History major this fall.
Spoiled with the May rains? Keep in mind that the 13.63 inches that fell in Kerrville was three times the 30-year average (two events added up to 7.55 inches). June was average but in July the faucet was turned off.

*Now comes the test:* how to survive summer long droughts with just spits of rain, or none at all. And it’s not just lack of rain but also the heat. Take a lesson from the original Texans – they have some remarkable adaptations worth noting.

1. **Know your location.** The Edwards Plateau (our home ecoregion) is the mixing ground of surrounding plant regions. We have a rich diversity but not all plants will be featured every year. Know the original locale of your plant choices to match the growing conditions (including climate). Remember, the Chihuahuan Desert is just to the west of us.

2. **Limestone rules.** There’s not much soil on top of the bedrock due to erosion but also limestone breaks down organic matter fast. So plants in the wild may seem more stunted than those pampered in your yard.

3. **Conserve water.** Plants sweat (transpire), and the overall evaporation rate for the Hill Country is twice our rainfall! When it’s hot, some plants close down their stomata to keep moisture in (leaves droop). IF they start the day wilted they need a drink. Put rocks to work as mulch, a trick used by Southwestern Native Americans. Limestone reflects sunlight and moisture condenses underneath. Plus even small amounts of rain or condensation can slide off to the root zone.

4. **Retain water.** Lacey oak leaves have a (bluish) waxy coating as do prickly pear – that seals in moisture. Live oaks, yuccas, agaves and agarita have tough leaves that help retain moisture.

5. **Reduce exposure.** Dry winds suck out moisture so many of the toughest plants have a reduced leaf surface. Instead of a single leaf blade, most of the native legumes have a double or triple compound leaf: the smaller leaflets allow air to move around and keep it cooler. Some fold up during the day to reduce exposure to sunlight. Yuccas and sotols have long, narrow, tough blades. Cactus spines are super narrow leaves. Check out the leaves on summer wildflowers for this adaptation.

6. **Wear white.** A fashion statement yes, but light colors help reflect sunlight and heat. Gregg’s dalea (right) is a combo of light color, slightly scented, fuzzy, tiny leaflets. This drought-hardy ground cover is also ever-gray. Cenezio’s light gray leaves are very hairy that helps insulate too.

7. **Drop non-essentials.** When it gets really dry, retama will drop its tiny leaflets; it can photosynthesize through its green branches. Yellow buckeye drops leaves by August. Baldcypress will drop needles in extended droughts.

8. **Make shade.** Trees and shrubs naturally keep lower branches that shade the root zone (very important here with our shallow soils). And Nature doesn’t “rake” up the dead leaves; dropped in place they decompose and replace nutrients and keep the soil cooler. Hot soil can destroy the vital macro-critters at work.

9. **Time out.** Summer is siesta time for spring perennials (mealy blue sage) although a dash of rain can spark a quick flush of blooms. Autumn sage (*Salvia greggi*) grows naturally in the Solitario, one of the harshest places in Texas. It’s scraggly, not the lush plant we see in nurseries. It can handle the worst of Texas summers. Just don’t prune it or water it all the time; both will prompt new growth which is tender to the heat and stresses the plant.

10. **Embrace the heat.** Rose pavoia, wild sunflower, palafoxia, cowpen daisy, kidneywood even Turks cap are hardy summer bloomers. Meanwhile, gay-feather, Maximilian sunflower, thoroughwort are slowly growing for fall bloom.

11. **Don’t expose your bare spots.** Bare ground can become scorched earth. Even dead wildflower stalks shade and anchor the soil (think dust devils) and provide seeds and cover for critters. Mow high if you must. It takes soil a long time to recover its vitality. Protect it.

[If you really want to mimic Nature - take a look at 30 years of weather data for Kerrville on the USDA website: http://www.ars.usda.gov/Main/docs.htm?docid=14131. A month’s 1-inch rain total might mean seven rain events!]
What is a Riverside Nature Center?
Located at the confluence of the Guadalupe River and Town Creek in the Hill Country town of Kerrville —2010 population, 22,347— Riverside Nature Center is a 501[c][3] nonprofit organization, owned by its members and primarily operated by volunteers.

Our mission is to foster greater public awareness and appreciation of the Texas Hill Country's natural resources through education, information, and by example. We provide quality educational experiences for the community's children, adults and families; and we serve as a resource center for the community on native plants and nature related information.