

# HABITAT HERALD

Wildlife Austin's monthly Newsletter



VOL 1 . ISSUE 1

## Wildlife Austin

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**April 4th:** "An Introduction to Bird Watching" by Jane Tillman @ REI Gateway 7pm

**April 14th:** "Cultivate Your Backyard Birds" by Jane Tillman @ Hampton Branch Library from 10am to 12pm  
<http://travis-tx.tamu.edu/horticulture/>

**April 14th:** LCRA Earth Day festival @ McKinney Roughs  
[www.lcra.org/parks/earthdayfestival/index.html](http://www.lcra.org/parks/earthdayfestival/index.html)

**April 14-15:** Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center Native Plant Sale!  
[www.wildflower.org/plantsale/](http://www.wildflower.org/plantsale/)

**April 17th:** Native Plant Walk & Talk at St. Edwards University @5pm

**April 22nd:** City Earth Day Festival @ Mueller from 12-6pm  
<http://earthdayaustin.com>



## APRIL 2012— Spring is in Full Swing!

We are happy to present to you the first ever Wildlife Austin newsletter! This newsletter will be an opportunity for volunteers to learn and contribute. We will have a "Garden of the Month" section, where we spotlight one of the many wonderful certified habitats in the Austin-area. We will also have sections focusing on Austin wildlife and invasive species that are common in Austin. If you would like to contribute to the newsletter let us know at [wildlife@austintexas.gov](mailto:wildlife@austintexas.gov).

On February 15th we awarded prizes to the winners of the 2011 Neighborhood Habitat Challenge! It was a great event and we were fortunate to have Mayor Lee Leffingwell and Mayor Pro Tem Sheryl Cole join us at Zilker Botanical Gardens. First place was Windsor Park with 11 total certified habitats, second was Northfield with 8 habitats, and third was Dawson with 2 newly certified habitats. Congratulations to everyone!



Windsor Park



Northfield



Dawson

The 2012 Neighborhood Habitat Challenge officially begins April 15th, but it's never too early to start planning (and planting)! If you would like a pre-paid certification application let us know (first come first serve). Make sure you visit our new website for the details at:

[www.keeperaustinwild.com](http://www.keeperaustinwild.com)

Enjoy our newsletter and start planting!

*Special thanks to Treefolks, Zilker Park Boat Rental, and Wildwoode Landscaping for their help with the prizes.*

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## Notes from Erin



Hi everyone! I am so happy to be part of Wildlife Austin as the new Wildlife Austin Park Ranger. I am looking forward to our upcoming project and events, and I am committed to keeping Austin wild!

I am originally from Delaware, and in August 2011 I completed my masters degree in Rangeland and Wildlife Ecology from the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M-Kingsville. I studied invasive grasses and arthropods for my thesis. I think Wildlife Austin is a great fit for me and I look forward to working with all of you!

## Focus on Austin Wildlife

### Lesser Goldfinches Brighten Austin - By Jane Tillman

The Lesser Goldfinch is a fairly common year round resident in Austin in their favorite habitat – open woodland like oak and juniper slopes, close to water. They move around in flocks, and the brightly colored Texas black-backed male is quite distinctive. You will probably hear them before you see them. Listen for a rather squeaky, plaintive call as the birds stay in contact with each other. Visit ([http://identify.whatbird.com/obj/194/\\_/Lesser\\_Goldfinch.aspx](http://identify.whatbird.com/obj/194/_/Lesser_Goldfinch.aspx)) to hear their call. Austin is at the eastern edge of the Lesser Goldfinch's range. They are seed eaters and foliage gleaners.



You can attract Lesser Goldfinches to your yard if you plant daisy-like flowers such as Plateau Goldeneye (*Vigueira dentata*) that blooms along FM 2222 from Mesa to Loop 360 in the fall. Just don't deadhead the blossoms, and chances are the birds will appear. They also enjoy their version of vegetables by stripping some leaves from another fall blooming shrubby native plant, White Mistflower (*Ageratina havanensis*). Since they are primarily seed eaters they need a ready source of water, and it is fun to watch five or six gather at a bird bath. One way to attract Lesser Goldfinches is to hang up a thistle feeder. Purchase niger (thistle) seed at a local big box store, or from a specialty store. The main thing to remember is that the seed must be fresh – goldfinches are somewhat finicky, and they will turn up their beaks at old seed. Some people recommend tying a yellow ribbon on the feeder to attract the birds initially. As with all feeders, it is important to clean them periodically.

Why are these perky birds "lesser?" They are about ½ inch smaller than American Goldfinches which visit Austin in winter months. If you see a slightly larger bird at your feeder, look closely. Chances are it is an American Goldfinch in its winter plumage.

## Focus on Austin Invasives

### Raspberry Crazy Ants - By Mike Quinn

A new invasive species is on the near horizon. The Raspberry crazy ant (RCA) has been found in a few locations from Bexar to Williamson county, but it appears to be common in many location along the Gulf coast from Miami to Brownsville. (Note that after 10 years of study, entomologists still can't definitively say whether or not all these introduced ant populations are the same species or where they came from).

This ant is an EXTREME nuisance as it forms colonies composed of millions of individual ants. They are small, long-legged, pale brown ants that forage quickly and in seemingly random directions, thus the name 'crazy' ant. 'Raspberry' comes from Tom Rasberry who first discovered the ant near Houston. Crazy ants are omnivorous feeders. They also "tend" aphids, scale insect and mealybugs which draw moisture out of the vegetation. Although they don't sting, crazy ants are so aggressive that they out-compete fire ants. The EPA has only approved a couple of insecticides for combating this new pest, but neither have proven effective for more than a month or two, even though they are potent pesticides that have to be applied by a licensed pest control professional. Note that once established, no colony in Texas has ever been exterminated.

The RCA prefers moister habitats than we normally have in central Texas, but RCA colonies are maintained locally where automatic sprinkler systems are employed. Crazy ants are known as "tramp ants" due to their association with boards, rocks, and other yard debris. They are frequently moved to new sites via potted nursery plants. In the years to come, this ant could potentially threaten the numerous endangered natural resources of Central Texas.

To learn more, including what you can do, visit: [urbanentomology.tamu.edu/ants/raspberry.html](http://urbanentomology.tamu.edu/ants/raspberry.html).



Mike Quinn is the President of the Austin Butterfly Forum

# Garden of the Month

This month we are featuring the beautiful garden of Lynn Hill (Habitat Steward and Co-Chair of the Travis Audubon Urban Habitat Committee):



Lynn's garden in all it's glory



Beautiful coral honeysuckle with cedar post trellis



Lynn never planted a single bluebonnet, but the birds had other plans!



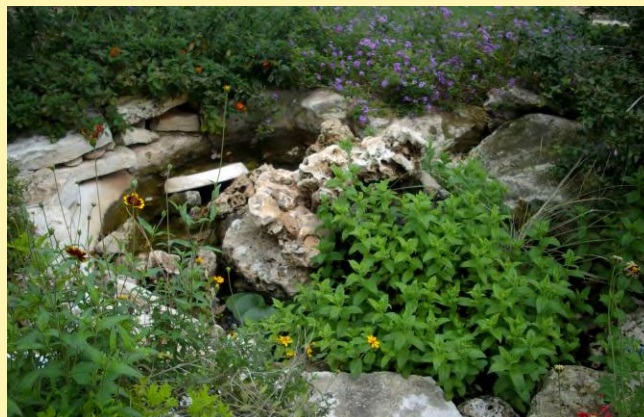
The local's moved in! (Carolina wren nest)



The tropical sage is blooming!



Lynn utilizes mulch provided by nature: live oak leaves!



A nice peaceful pond

## Questions for the Gardener...



Habitat Steward (and Co-Chair of the Travis Audubon Urban Habitat Committee) Lynn Hill was nice enough to answer some of our questions about her garden:

**Question:** When did you start gardening with native species?

**Lynn:** Spring 2009, when I took the Wildflower Center series of classes on gardening with native plants.

**Q:** What is your favorite plant?

**Lynn:** Live oak trees. They are beautiful, majestic, and (practically) evergreen. According to Douglas Tallamy (<http://bringingnaturehome.net>), oaks support a more diverse array of wildlife than any other native plant.

**Q:** What is the theme of your garden?

**Lynn:** Biodiversity and bird-gardening.

**Q:** What advice would you give to a person just starting to garden with native plants?

**Lynn:** Don't be afraid to try new plants! Let a few interesting unidentified "weeds" grow until you can determine whether they are really weeds or valuable plants. Among others, the birds introduced the following plants to my yard: Bluebonnets, Inland Sea Oats, Lyreleaf Sage, Gray Vervain, Goldeneye, Pokeberry, Snapdragon Vine, sunflowers, and peanuts.

**Q:** How did your garden fare during the drought this past summer?

**Lynn:** Some non-natives died and I happily replaced them with natives last fall. The natives hunkered down and - although I thought a few in the sunniest part of my yard had died - they are back stronger than ever this year. For example, the Cedar Sage looks like it is on steroids!

**Q:** What is the best thing about your garden?

**Lynn:** It's full of life, but at the same time very peaceful.





# Schoolyard Habitat Update



By Anne Muller (AISD Outdoor Learning Specialist)

The Austin Independent School District (AISD) is proud to partner with the National Wildlife Federation to install Schoolyard Habitats on many of our campuses. Schools that are participating receive a \$1,500 or \$2,000 stipend for implementation of the habitat. Teachers also receive a 2-3 day training from the National Wildlife Federation, access to nature based curriculum and ongoing support throughout the school year.

## Spotlight Campus: Bedicheck MS

Check out the progress made by our very own Habitat Stewards and community members in the Fall of 2011!



Before



After

Looking for volunteer opportunities? The following schools are recipients of grants through NWF and are currently installing Schoolyard Habitats!

Bedichek MS  
Pleasant Hill ES  
Covington MS  
Garcia MS  
Martin MS  
Brooke ES  
Zavala ES

Fulmore MS  
Gorzycki MS  
Murchison MS  
Webb MS  
Paredes MS  
Widen ES  
Ortega ES

For campus contact info or work day information please contact Anne Muller AISD Outdoor Learning Specialist [amuller@austinisd.org](mailto:amuller@austinisd.org) or 841-5070.

## Gardening Tips

By Meredith O'Reilly

Keep It Simple! What is great about wildlife gardens is they are easy to start – just remember these simple tips:

- Plant a diversity of native Texas plants.
- Kick-start your soil toward being healthy by revitalizing it with compost or other organic matter, and stay away from chemicals.
- If you use a saucer or birdbath as a water source, be sure to replace the water every 3 days and keep it clean.
- Use mulch to protect your plant roots – even a layer of leaves will do the trick.
- Maintain, but don't manicure. Over-pruning plants takes away valuable wildlife cover and keeps birds from enjoying the seeds.

Remember, it's okay to start small – the important thing is just to get started!

Meredith is an NWF Habitat Steward, check out her wonderful garden-related blog: [www.greatstems.com](http://www.greatstems.com)!



## Organizations/Programs you should check out:

- Austin Butterfly Forum - [www.austinbutterflies.org](http://www.austinbutterflies.org)
- Austin Parks Foundation - [www.austinparks.org](http://www.austinparks.org)
- Austin Pond Society - [www.austinpondsociety.org](http://www.austinpondsociety.org)
- Capital Area Master Naturalists - <http://camn.org>
- COA Watershed Protection Dept's Grow Green Program - [www.austintexas.gov/department/grow-green](http://www.austintexas.gov/department/grow-green)
- Keep Austin Beautiful - [www.KeepAustinBeautiful.org](http://www.KeepAustinBeautiful.org)
- Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center - [www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org)
- Native Plant Society of Texas (Austin chapter) - <http://npsota.wordpress.com>
- Sierra Club (Austin) - <http://texas.sierraclub.org/austin>
- Texas Monarch Watch - [www.texasento.net/dplex.htm](http://www.texasento.net/dplex.htm)
- Travis Audubon - [travisaudubon.org](http://travisaudubon.org)
- Travis County Master Gardener's Association - <http://tcmastergardeners.org>

# Would YOU like to contribute to the Wildlife Austin newsletter?

Simply e-mail us at [wildlife@austintexas.gov](mailto:wildlife@austintexas.gov)!

## Get your yard certified today!

It's easy! Any size yard can be considered a wildlife habitat. Certifying a site is as simple as providing the four habitat components (food, water, cover, and places to raise young) and practicing sustainable gardening practices (like composting). Visit [www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife](http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife) for more information!



Wildlife Austin has a certain number of pre-paid habitat certification applications. They are offered to anyone in the Austin area, first come first serve. E-mail us at [wildlife@austintexas.gov](mailto:wildlife@austintexas.gov) for more information.

Besides having an awesome wildlife habitat all to yourself, there are other great benefits to certifying including:

- A certificate for your wildlife habitat
- A free one-year membership to NWF which includes a free subscription to the National Wildlife magazine (and a 10% discount on all NWF merchandise)
- A subscription to *Wildlife Online*— Habitat edition newsletter
- Inclusion in the NWF's National Registry of Habitats
- Eligibility to purchase and post an attractive yard sign



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