

FALL NEWSLETTER



NOVEMBER 2021

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Nov 20: Longhorn Caverns
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Nov 30: Giving Tuesday
Nov-Dec: Refuge Hunting
Dec 4: Membership Meeting
Dec 14: Christmas Bird Count
Jan 1: First Day Hike
Feb: SparrowFest

MEET OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The FOB Board of Directors is delighted to welcome Sarah Meyer as the first Executive Director of the Friends of Balcones National Wildlife Refuge!

With nearly two decades of experience with non-profit organizations as well as academia, Sarah comes to FOB with a passion for the Hill Country. As she put it, "From my perspective, the beauty of the Texas Hill Country is unparalleled. I am honored and proud to work to support the mission of the Friends of Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge and hope to be a helpful force in securing and expanding the land, the habitat and an authentic connection to nature for future generations. After all, we each benefit from regular doses of Vitamin N (Nature)!"

As to volunteers and members that support FOB, Sarah expressed her high regard, saying, "Volunteers continuously amaze and inspire me - and the Austin area is filled with them. I look forward to getting to know the Friends of Balcones volunteers and members and I celebrate all they have brought to the organization thus far. I'm also excited to help widen the circle of partners, supporters & Friends!"

Sarah also shared her commitment to inclusion and diversity. "I aim to build a culture of belongingness at the Friends of Balcones Canyonlands in which uniqueness is valued and all are welcome. Innovation, creativity and growth are all enhanced and increased when individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, knowledge and perspectives are able to come together and learn from one another," she said.

She continued regarding the growth of FOB, "The Friends of Balcones, thanks in large part to an active and committed Board of Directors, have already accomplished great things and have garnered critical member, volunteer and donor support. However, we're just getting started! I'm excited to help guide the organization as it continues to grow and evolve, much like our community has!"

Sarah can be reached at sarahmeyer@friendsofbalcones.org.



MOBILE RANGER STATION COMING SOON!

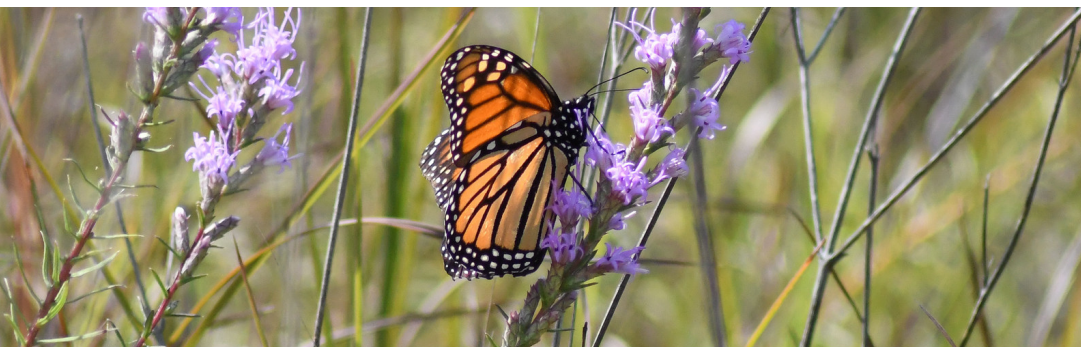


Thanks to donations from Friends of Balcones, the Refuge now has a Mobile Ranger Station. It will make its debut at Doeskin Ranch and Warbler Vista trail heads later this month. Friends contributed to the purchase of the trailer, the buildout of the shelves / interior storage and the design of the outside wrap (Thanks for the artwork, Allie Leto!).

Once complete, it will be staffed by volunteers on weekends. Volunteers will be able to check out Jr. Ranger Backpacks to young visitors and be available to answer questions about trails, the Refuge and the surrounding area - we get asked everything from the location of the nearest gas station or RV park, to where's a good place for pizza!

It's a great volunteer opportunity and a fun way to share your love of the refuge with visitors. We hope to have it available for a tour at our upcoming Membership meeting on December 4.

Let Jennifer Brown (jennifer_brown@fws.gov) know if you'd like to volunteer and help visitors get the most out of their visit to the Refuge.



6TH ANNUAL BIOBLITZ BY: LORI MALLOY

One of the first signs of fall is a steady stream of Monarch butterflies funneling through our area on their way to their wintering grounds in Mexico. Another sure sign of fall is the annual Texas Pollinator BioBlitz which takes place for two weeks in early October. If you were out on the Doeskin Ranch during that time, we may have crossed paths as I photographed the many native plants and pollinators that call the refuge home for inclusion in the BioBlitz.

From October 1-17, more than 55,000 observations were shared on iNaturalist, a free app/website that allows users to upload photos and crowdsource species identifications. The data, captured during peak fall migration, helps biologists learn how pollinators and plants are distributed throughout the state and identify areas in need of greater attention and protection. (Cont. Top Right)

BIOBLITZ CONT.

The Texas Pollinator BioBlitz was brainstormed into existence by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and partnering agencies as a way to support the Texas Monarch and Native Pollinator Conservation Plan, a document that outlines TPWD's strategy for reversing the decline of eastern migrating Monarchs.

In addition to the Monarch, 30 species of pollinators have been designated as "Species of Greatest Conservation Need" by TPWD. Native butterflies, bees, moths, bats, hummingbirds, wasps, flies and beetles are essential to maintain healthy ecosystems and sustain native plant species, human food crops for both humans and livestock.

There's no need to wait for next fall's BioBlitz to get started. You can download the free iNaturalist app on your phone or use your home computer and get started today. I started by wandering around my yard, photographing and uploading photos of plants, animals, fungi and other organisms for identification. Fair warning: it's addictive! You may find yourself gathering observations everywhere you go, and you may even find a record first species for Texas!

HUNTING ON THE REFUGE?

People are sometimes confused, or even shocked to learn that there are several hunting events conducted each year on the Refuge. But, the rationale for the hunts is sound.

Hunters, through very tightly controlled and well organized hunts, help maintain wildlife populations that can potentially destroy habitat important to many other wildlife species, including the Golden-cheeked warbler and Black-capped vireo. While enjoying this traditional, recreational activity, hunters help manage these lands for the benefit of wildlife and you.

More information about the various hunts allowed on the Refuge is available [here](#).

LAUNCH OF GUIDED HIKES PROGRAM

This year we launched a Guided Hikes Training Program in which we trained 25 Volunteer Hike Leaders. Our wonderful team of Hike Leaders is excited to share their love of nature through hikes on both public and closed trails throughout the Refuge.

The Training Program contained wide-ranging topics from water and watersheds to native peoples and early settlers, from the geology that created the Canyonlands to birding basics, and from native plants to hiker safety.

We've already started Guided Hikes on the Martin Tract and will be adding interpretive hikes at both Warbler Vista and Doeskin Ranch this Fall. Next spring, we will offer Guided Hikes that traverse the Flying X and Peaceful Springs trails, both closed tracts.

All scheduled hikes will be posted on our website. We hope to see you out on the trails soon!

If you'd like to become a Hike Leader, our next class starts in August 2022.



JOIN OUR BOARD

Do you love the Refuge? Would you be interested in working with some talented, dedicated people on worthwhile projects and activities that support the Refuge?

Friends of Balcones Canyonlands NWR currently has open positions on the Board of Directors.

If you are interested and would like to discuss this further, please contact Dave Bell at dave@friendsofbalcones.org.

OTHER WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

- Become a Member
- Tell Your Friends
- Advocate for the Refuge
- Volunteer
- Donate
- Take a Hike
- Attend an Event
- Follow us on Social Media

FRIENDS RECEIVE \$2,500 GOOD NEIGHBOR GRANT

Recently Adam Maingot called with questions about hunting on the refuge, and about venomous snakes as he prepared to take his kids on a hike at Doeskin Ranch. He was most appreciative of all the information and kind support. In return, he submitted the Refuge as a potential recipient for a Good Neighbor Grant.



Corey Ward, the supervisor at Wink to Webster Pipeline's Cherokee Pump Station, presented the check to Wayne Collins, FOB President, and Chris Harper, Deputy Refuge Manager. The money will go towards completing the build out of the Mobile Ranger Station. The Ranger Station will be operational this month. A huge thank you to Adam, Corey and the folks at the Pump Station.



ONGOING EVENTS

Guided Hikes will be hosted throughout the Fall/Winter. Head to our website for info and registration details.

Environmental education opportunities are regularly being added, as well. Keep an eye on our Events page. Have ideas for Programming? Contact us!