

THIS ISSUE

Upcoming Events

Humming Bird Study

Birds of Prey

Conservation Champion

Refuge Spotlight



UPCOMING EVENTS

With the Texas summer being what it is, we're focused on scheduling things that can be done indoors. Interpretive Hikes will begin again starting in late September, with invitations going out the first week.



Birding by Ear Webinar:
Saturday, July 24th

Migration Magic Webinar:
Saturday, August 14th

Inviting Nature into your Backyard Webinar:
Saturday, August 7th

Longhorn Caverns Tour:
Mid-September

Guided Hikes will resume
at the end of September

HUMMINGBIRD BIRD STUDY

This month, we have the opportunity of speaking with Professor Kira Delmore of Texas A&M University regarding a Hummingbird Hybridization study conducted partially here at the Balcones Canyonlands. Professor Delmore and her team of four students are tracking the hybridization between the Ruby Throated and Black Chinned hummingbird species and the effects of hybridization on their mating rituals demonstrated through their "dives." A dive is a method of courting used by male hummingbirds where they dive down on potential mates creating a megaphone effect in hopes of charming the female with a high pitched chirp. The Ruby Throated and Black Chinned hummingbirds have distinctive dives, but what Professor Delmore is trying to determine is what happens to these species dives when they cross breed. And lucky for us, the Balcones Canyonlands is expected to be located near the center of the hybrid zone.

For a few weeks this summer, Professor Delmore and her team walked the trails at the refuge in search of spots that are suitable for hummingbirds. Particularly, they needed to find locations with plenty of wildflowers and wide open space. Upon arrival, they tried to listen for the hummers. It's a much more difficult task than listening for songbirds because as we know hummingbirds don't sing – but hum... relatively quietly. Once spotted, their team would quickly mark the male hummingbirds territory and set up cameras to record their dives. Subsequently, their team would catch the males, take a small blood sample from their toe nail, and immediately release the male hummingbird back into his territory.

As for their findings, Professor Delmore and her team unfortunately only found Black Chinned hummingbirds at the refuge. The lack of species does not completely eliminate the chance of hybridization in that area. They still need to examine the blood samples collected from the Black Chinned hummingbirds as they may have a bit of the Ruby Throated hummingbird species already in them. With that Professor Delmore and her team remain optimistic as this is only one part in a study that has many years to come.



REFUGE SPOTLIGHT MOUNTAIN PINKS

Those of you brave enough to venture out in the Texas heat to Doeskin Ranch had the incredible opportunity to see these beautiful pink flowers draped all over the rolling hills. These little unassuming flowers pop up every year along the dry rocky slopes to bask in the Texas summer sun. Loved by butterflies, bees, and every insect in between at the refuge! If you move quickly there is still time this summer to see them in bloom!



Photographer: Claire Hassler

WE'RE ON INSTAGRAM

The Friends Group is officially on Instagram! Follow us to stay up-to-date on all things friends!

Follow us @friendsofbalcones

Have a topic you want to read about in the next newsletter?
Send a suggestion to: newsletter@friendsofbalcones.org

BIRDS OF PREY

From owls to hawks, eagles to falcons, Texas is home to a wonderful variety of birds of prey and we had the incredible opportunity of connecting with them on a much more intimate level this past June. The Birds of Prey event hosted by Wildlife Rehabber, Ed Sones, had the Doeskin Ranch Pavilion packed with people of all ages eager to learn about these captivating carnivores and their awe-inspiring stories of rehabilitation. Not only was this event an extraordinary learning experience, but also quite the opportunity for photographers to get the perfect up-close shot of powerful birds they wouldn't have the opportunity to see otherwise. With over 30 years of experience rehabilitating raptors, Sones has personally saved over 4000 birds. And has given over 120 species of birds a second chance at life.

Missed the event? Join us next time with your friends and family by visiting the FriendsOfBalcones.org and see Ed Sones and his Birds of Prey next year at the refuge!

CONSERVATION CHAMPION ROMEY SWANSON

The Friends of Balcones would like to recognize Romey Swanson as this quarter's Conservation Champion. Swanson is incredibly accomplished in the field of conservation as Director of Conservation Strategy for Audubon Texas and former Conservation Project Manager for Hill Country Conservancy. He graduated from Texas State University with a Master of Science in Wildlife Ecology. You could say wildlife conservation is his forte. As he continues his fight to preserve Texas' most fragile and important ecosystems, his aspirations for the Friend Group and the Balcones Canyonlands are to preserve the intactness and the functionality of the hill country's landscape.

"As opportunities arise, I hope that we continue to apply pressure and use the tools we have to expand the scale and impact that the Friends Group is seeking to accomplish," Swanson said.

Thank you for all that you do, Romey!