May 4 – Heard Hike – 6:30pm Start

Our May 4 NPSOT meeting beginning at 6:30 will be our annual tour of the prairies, woods, wetlands and gardens at The Heard. Visitors to The Heard are required to wear masks indoors and outdoors and we will our attendees into groups of 10 or fewer to lessen the risk of viral transmission. Carol, Lorelei, Valerie, and Fran have each volunteered to lead a group.

What to Wear: Long pants, closed-toe shoes, and insect repellent are recommended.

What to Bring: Your camera and water.

May 4 – Heard Hike – 6:30pm Start

The 17th Annual Stiff Creek Wildflower Walk is Saturday May 8 at 9 AM. We will assemble as in previous years on the Leplante farm at 4545 CR 412, McKinney, 75071. From there we will go by a few vehicles to the Buckner farm and to the historic cemetery at Chalk Hill Farm. We will have at least four people to lead so that we can again divide up into groups of 10 or fewer.

The February storm, Uri, set back some of the shrubs but the annuals and perennials growing here seem to have possibly received a boost from the unusually extreme cold and there are some gorgeous plants to be seen. Unfortunately we will have to navigate around the large water pipes that are yet to go underground but that shouldn’t be a problem.

There will be no potluck brunch this year as not everyone is fully vaccinated and we will not do a hayride.

What to Wear: Long pants, closed-toe shoes, and insect repellent are recommended.

What to Bring: Your camera and water.
Reflections on Earth Day
by Valerie Dalton
President, Collin County Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas

“Our mission is promoting research, conservation, and utilization of native plants and habitats through education, outreach, and example.”

In 1970 when the first Earth Day event was held, although media and printed resources were minimal, the event was covered by national journalists such as Walter Cronkite. The United States had three major networks – ABC, NBC and CBS. National Educational Television which had been established in 1954 became PBS in October of 1970. If you wonder what was shown on those limited channels, Wikipedia offers a daily schedule of shows – think Hawaii Five O, Bonanza, and The Carol Burnett Show. You could visit the local library and search the shelves and the card catalogs for resources. Many newspapers were in circulation and most every family subscribed to daily delivery of at least one.

In contrast, Earth Day 2021 seemed crowded out by the thousands of distractions that fill our modern lives. We were in North Carolina visiting our son and daughter in law when I realized that I had not even thought about this upcoming event. Oh, I had seen a few emails from various environmental organizations suggesting I participate in a fund raiser or sign a petition. When I realized Earth Day 2021 was rapidly approaching, my first thought was why an Earth Day? Shouldn’t we consider every day “Earth Day”? Jane Goodall’s word’s resonated with me:

“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”

Our family considers events through the lens of history, searching for the effects over time so I began by searching for information on the inaugural event of 1970. I asked myself what was happening in my life fifty-one years ago? I was twenty years old, married, living in Houston and working as an accounting clerk for M. D. Anderson Hospital. Not only were we not thinking about fuel efficiency or any other impacts on the environment, but we were also not part of the 10% of the American population who joined in the activities of April 22, 1970. With some research on the internet, I found numerous images and references to events around the first Earth Day which occurred in the United States. The occasion did not occur again until 1990 when it became global.

The First Earth Day

“The 1962 publication of Rachel Carson’s book Silent Spring—about the effects of pesticides—is often cited as the beginning of the modern environmental movement in the U.S. Sustainability, organic eating and the “back-to-the-land” movement continued to gain steam throughout the 1960s. The first Earth Day indeed increased environmental awareness in America, and in July of 1970 the Environmental Protection Agency was established by special executive order to regulate and enforce national pollution legislation. Earth Day also led to the passage of the Clean Water and Endangered Species Acts.”

The first Earth Day celebration took place on April 22, 1970. In New York City, some 250,000 people flooded Fifth Avenue.

Santi Visalli/Getty Images
Students march through the business district of suburban St. Louis on April 22, 1970, protesting against smog caused by automobiles.  

Bettmann Archive / Getty Images

Left: Kurt Amuedo displays a poster about air pollution for Earth Day at his school.  

Ernie Leyba/The Denver Post/Getty Images

Right: Demonstrators in Boston wore masks to remind people of the perils of air pollution.  

The Boston Globe/Getty Images

Notice the sky appears polluted. Back in the day, the city of Pasadena, south of Houston was labeled, “Pasadena, where the air is greener” due to the concentration of chemical companies within the municipality.

Memorial High students in Houston left their cars at home and the first Earth Day.  

Tom Colburn/The Houston Chronicle via AP

An estimated 7,000 people gather at the Independence Mall in Philadelphia, on the first Earth Day.  

AP Photo

Collin County Chapter – Native Plant Society of Texas
The first thing I noticed from many of the images were the number of people wearing masks. Air pollution was thick in many cities. I found it ironic that fifty-one years later, we are wearing masks for yet another reason. Although it seems that a side effect of our pandemic was a temporary reduction in air pollution, there is a link between the environmental changes that have occurred and the increase in pandemic risks. In 2021, most of us did not need a mask for protection against air pollution. Instead, we were concerned with airborne pathogens.

“As the planet heats up, animals big and small, on land and in the sea, are headed to the poles to get out of the heat. That means animals are coming into contact with other animals they normally wouldn’t, and that creates an opportunity for pathogens to get into new hosts.

Many of the root causes of climate change also increase the risk of pandemics. Deforestation, which occurs mostly for agricultural purposes, is the largest cause of habitat loss worldwide. Loss of habitat forces animals to migrate and potentially contact other animals or people and share germs. Large livestock farms can also serve as a source for spillover of infections from animals to people. Less demand for animal meat and more sustainable animal husbandry could decrease emerging infectious disease risk and lower greenhouse gas emissions.”

A search for First Earth Day in North Texas or simply within Texas resulted in little information. At the University of Texas at Austin, students organized a "three-day environmental teach-in" for April 20-22, 1970. Eleven years ago, the Austin Chronicle wrote about the first Earth Day in Austin and the event atmosphere of 2010:

“On its 40th anniversary, Earth Day has become a rather warm and fuzzy event. But at its inception in 1970, the first Earth Day was a radical uprising – born of anger over unregulated air and water pollution and directly inspired by the mass anti-Vietnam War demonstrations of the late Sixties.

Earth Day caught fire across the country; it turned into the ultimate "happening." Altogether some 20 million people – 10% of the U.S. population – participated in 1970 Earth Day teach-ins, marches, and rallies. About half were students, at nearly 2,000 colleges and 10,000 elementary and high schools.

The group's Earth Day purpose: ‘that each individual may become aware of the interlocking web of life that controls the destiny of all creatures that share the thin film of the biosphere that surrounds Spaceship Earth.’"

Thinking back on the 1970s, air and water pollution were the primary foci of concern. Rachel Carson’s book Silent Spring, published in 1962 was a clarion call to action, specifically regarding the chemicals we were pouring into our environment and the disastrous effects. The New York Herald Tribune hailed her book as “A smashing indictment that faces up to the disastrous consequences, for both nature and man, of the chemical mass-warfare that is being waged today indiscriminately against insects, weeds and fungi...”

As a relative newcomer to Native Plant Society of Texas, I wondered when NPSOT organized and if there was a correlation between interest in native plants and Earth Day. I found that NPSOT formed a decade later. The Native Plant Society of Texas was formed in 1980, and events surrounding its formation are chronicled in the online archives of the Texas Wildflower Newsletter published by Carroll Abbott. Perhaps someone who has been a member of NPSOT for many years knows the answer to my question.

I asked myself, has anything changed since 1970? I found this National Geographic article from 2018.

“When Earth Day was first created in 1970, it rode the coattails of a decade filled with social activism. Voting rights were strengthened, civil rights were outlined, and women were demanding equal treatment.

But there was no Environmental Protection Agency, no Clean Air Act, or Clean Water Act.
Collin County NPSOT Newsletter

May 2021

Fast forward 48 years and what started as a grassroots movement has exploded into an international day of attention and activism dedicated to preserving the environment. Officially, the United Nations recognizes this upcoming April 22 as International Mother Earth Day.

Across the globe, millions of people take part in Earth Day. According to the Earth Day Network, one of the largest activist bodies organizing Earth Day events, people celebrate by holding marches, planting trees, meeting with local representatives, and cleaning up their local environments.”

“The two most pressing issues we face today are habitat loss and climate change, and these issues are interrelated,” says Jonathan Baillie, chief scientist of the National Geographic Society.

“One of our biggest obstacles is our mindset: we need people to emotionally connect to the natural world, understand how it works and our dependence on it,” Baillie says. “Fundamentally, if we care about the natural world, we will value and protect it and make decisions that ensure the future of species and ecosystems.”

As I pondered what humanity has learned in the past 51 years, I found this article outlining 50 Things We’ve Learned about the Earth since the First Earth Day.

“When Gaylord Nelson stepped up to the podium in April 1970, his voice rang with powerful purpose. The Wisconsin senator set forth a challenge for America—a call to arms that he declared a “big concept”: a day for environmental action that would go beyond just picking up litter.

‘Winning the environmental war is a whole lot tougher than winning any other war in history,’ he said. ‘Our goal is not just an environment of clean air and water and scenic beauty. The objective is an environment of decency, quality and mutual respect for all other human beings and all other living creatures.’”

Some of the discoveries mentioned in the article most relevant to native plants are:

- Pollinators are critical to ecosystems
- When it comes to trees, size matters
- Fungi are fun to have around
- Bees must be saved

Coming back to my initial reaction to the idea of a single Earth Day versus every day being Earth Day, I looked for reasons to feel hopeful. Earth Day 2021, I was at The Heard Museum along with several other Blackland Prairie Texas Master Naturalists, Collin County NPSOT Chapter members and Heard employees, setting up for the Annual Native Plant Sale. Participating alongside a dozen or more enthusiastic and dedicated folks is always a joy. I was out of town the preceding week during the busy days of preparation when most of the plants were delivered, organized and watered regularly. Inventory for the sale was significantly reduced by the lack of available wholesale plants due to increased focus on gardening activities in 2020 and nursery losses due to recent extreme weather events. The sale began Friday at noon for members only. I left at 2 pm when told the sale was going to close due to thunder in the area. However, as often happens in life, there was some confusion and instead the sale continued. Carol Clark was one of several volunteers and Heard employees who stayed until 7 pm as shoppers came despite storms that included hail.

Saturday morning revealed two downed canopies, wet tables and just a few remaining plants. The area was quickly reorganized and readied for customers. We decided to set up a NPSOT chapter table with a few handouts and offer the native plant seed packets for sale that Carol Clark had prepared. Saturday opened at 9 am and all Plant Sale inventory was gone by 10:30 am. Carol, Lorelei Stierlen, and I along with a few others remained, fielding many questions about monarch gardens, milkweed and why there were no plants to purchase. Seed sales were brisk!

I found it hopeful that we met people passionate about habitat restoration and changing government policies that impact our environment. It was particularly inspiring to meet
young people who are determined to make a difference. Several ardent conversations occurred, and connections were made with folks wanting to focus on significant change. Although I am relatively new to NPSOT and Master Naturalists, I feel a strong need to pass the torch of environmental stewardship to the generations to come. I find inspiration in the dedication and determination of fellow Blackland Prairie Master Naturalists and NPSOT members who are too many to name. Thanks to one of these friends, I recently learned of Dr. J. Drew Lanham.

J. Drew Lanham is a conservation ornithologist and endowed faculty at Clemson University, where his work focuses on the intersections among race, place, and nature. He is the author of The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man’s Love Affair with Nature and Sparrow Envy: Field Guide to Birds and Lesser Beasts. His words reminded me of the importance of hope:

“I eventually realized that to make a difference I had to step outside, into creation, and refocus on the roots of my passion. If an ounce of soil, a sparrow, or an acre of forest is to remain then we must all push things forward. To save wildlife and wild places the traction has to come not from the regurgitation of bad-news data but from the poets, prophets, preachers, professors, and presidents who have always dared to inspire. Heart and mind cannot be exclusive of one another in the fight to save anything. To help others understand nature is to make it breathe like some giant: a revolving, evolving, celestial being with ecosystems acting as organs and the living things within those places -- humans included -- as cells vital to its survival.”

In the press of daily chores and everyday minutia, I hope each of you take time to connect with the smallest flora and fauna that await your discovery. May you be inspired by Margaret Mead:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Word of the Month: Since I have already asked John Worley to wait well beyond reason for this month’s newsletter contribution, consider this:

Nature Word of the Month – October 2015: PSITHURISM – Green Acorns (wordpress.com)
Inland Sea Oats - Your “Can I grow anything in that shady spot” Plant

by Tim Castelli

Inland Sea Oats (Chasmanthium latifolium) is a hardy perennial grass best suited for the shade. For the native gardener, it is an unusual grass due to its preference for shade. Their height is about three feet, with a “clump” usually around two feet wide. Visually its golden chevron-shaped seed heads are its most distinguishing feature. It is resilient, not only able to thrive in the shade, but also tolerant of drought and heat.

Native to North Central Texas, Inland Sea Oats endemic range extends from the east coast to a western edge near Wichita Falls, and from the gulf coast to a loose border running from northern Kansas to Virginia. They are indigenous to riverbanks, floodplains, limestone glades, and edges of moist woodlands.

The common name derives from its resemblance, but not relation, to Sea Oats (Uniola paniculata), which are native to the coastal sands along the east coast and the gulf coast. Creativity was not in abundance when it came time for coming up with its most popular common name. Other less popular common names for the plant are more reflective of the plant’s habitat – Indian Wood Oats, Wild Oats, and River Oats.

Seasonal Color Changes

Sea Oats are low maintenance and transplant easily. The leaves are nearly evergreen, turning golden brown in the fall and early winter, before eventually succumbing in mid-winter, and in what feels like a matter of days, it begins again. For a tidier look, a shearing at this time down to the basal rosette does the trick. In addition, Inland Sea Oats seeds also go through color changes, with hues often dependent on the amount of light - from a translucent green to ivory, before darkening and dropping in the winter.

Not surprisingly, it is tolerant of a wide variety of soils and moist areas. One of its strengths is its strong root system. It is an excellent shield against soil erosion. They are a wise choice along streams or water features.

Inland Sea Oats is a friend to a host of wildlife. Small mammals and granivorous birds eat the seeds. The leaves are grazed by some mammals and are often used as nesting material by birds. Three Skipper butterflies utilize it as a host plant for their caterpillars.

Below are some ideas for companion plants for Inland Sea Oats - primarily boldly colored perennials that can tolerate some shade:

- Black-eyed Susan (Rudbeckia hirta)
- Butterfly Milkweed (Asclepias tuberosa)
- Cardinal Flower (Lobelia cardinalis)
- Pigeon Berry (Rivina humilis)
- Purple Coneflower (Echinacea angustifolia)

Now, we come to the one area that needs to be addressed directly regarding Inland Sea Oats. If they receive more light than partial shade and plenty of moisture, they have a tendency to...aggressive. In comparison, they are not as aggressive as invasive plants. However, if they do get assertive, cutting back on water and collecting the seeds in the fall will reduce their rambunctiousness.

If you lack shady spots or want to contain, a good solution is planting in pots. It will help control them and create a mass of deep green that can complement colorful potted plants.

For beginners to native plants, Inland Sea Oats is a great choice for those tough shady spots in your landscape. With its combination of low maintenance, nearly evergreen leaves, and colorful seeds, it’s a can’t-miss plant for your native garden.
Due to complications with computer file access during our trip to North Carolina, several planned tasks were not accomplished. Truthfully, most days were filled with tasks that left me too exhausted to make much progress even if I had been able to access the files.

As I see it, my priorities as President of Collin County Chapter of NPSOT are to cement relationships with people who express interest in native plants and improving the environment. I strive to provide people with educational information and offer seeds and plants whenever possible. My strong suit is connecting people and sharing my passion which sometimes means that procedural and parliamentary tasks may be postponed.

Pending:

**Budget submission and approval:** The board approved a suggested budget on March 25, 2021. It remains for me to complete and submit to chapter members for approval.

**Amended Bylaws:** The board discussed the need for updated chapter bylaws at our March 25, 2021 meeting. This task remains and will be submitted to the chapter members for approval upon completion of edits.

**Field trip to Randy Johnson’s Organic Native Plant Nursery in Forney:** I am hoping to schedule a trip in the next couple of weeks. It would most likely be a weekday. An appointment with Randy is required. Currently the following people are listed as interested:
- Sue Silver
- Cynthia Alexander
- Carol Clark
- Janice James

If you want to be informed and your name is not on this list, please email Valerie.

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**Completed:**

**Website Logo:** In March, our webmaster, Tim Castelli, created a list of requirements and offered to shepherd a design of a chapter logo through a contract service he uses. After many iterations, we finally arrived at a logo design on April 9. Many thanks to Tim and the designer who endured my numerous vacillations/changes and downright reversals. Huge thanks to Susan Smith, fellow BPTMN member, who assisted with a lovely rendition of the Side oats grama when I became frustrated with my inability to find a line drawing that could be used by the designer.

April 3, 2021, Side Oats Grama, drawn by Susan Smith

Collin County Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas logo

An anonymous donor paid for this service so it was accomplished at no expense to our chapter. Thank you Anonymous! The design includes the Adobe Illustrator file in the event we need to modify it in the future.

**Flower Selection for Membership Pins**

Ten members of our chapter submitted votes for flowers to be used for membership pins. Our top five plants were submitted to Pam Lienhard, VP Administration, NPSOT. The following five plants were chosen by our chapter:
- *Asclepias Asperula* (Antelope-horns)
- *Baptisia australis* (Blue Wild Indigo)
- *Callirhoe involucrata* (Winecup)
- *Echinacea spp.* (Coneflower)
- *Eryngium leavenworthii* (Eryngo)
Native Plants – Your Best Defense against Weather Extremes

by Tim Castelli

If you have lived in North Central Texas for any time, you know that frequent and dramatic weather changes are inevitable. For any plant, this presents many challenges – floods, droughts, record heat, freezing temperatures – and that can just be one week in March. Okay, that was a slight overstatement; nonetheless, our weather extremes can make your landscaping efforts a great challenge.

But we have readily available a group of plants with built-in defenses that can enable them to flourish despite our irrepressible weather - plants native to our area. These plants have evolved over eons to adapt to all that Mother Nature can throw at them.

We are one big state, so just because a plant is native to Texas does not mean it is well-suited to North Central Texas. It may be native to east Texas and suited to the higher precipitation and more acidic soil of that region compared to the DFW area. Or it could be a more tropical-like plant native to south Texas and the gulf coast, therefore less tolerant of the colder weather in our region.

Adaptation often starts with the root systems of our native plants. These plants’s deep root system gives them a distinct advantage through the ability to seek out water when it is in short supply. Their depth also gives them protection from deep freezes and helps to hold the soil during deluges, plus improves the ground’s water-holding ability.

Prairie plants include highly adaptable grasses and other perennials. Below are some hardy grasses and perennials for our area:

- **Englemann's Daisy** (*Engelmannia pinnatifida*)
- **Little Bluestem** (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)
- **Prairie Verbena** (*Verbena bipinnatifida*)
- **Sideoats Grama** (*Bouteloua curtipendula*)

Our native trees are likewise adapted over millennia to our conditions, toughening them to the vagaries of our weather. Natives are typically less susceptible to disease and pest problems, as they have built up defenses, and often the pest’s natural predators are likely to keep them in check. They are also much more beneficial to our local wildlife than exotics. Our native trees provide wildlife with nourishment, shelter, and nesting material. They are suited not only to our microclimate but also to our soil types. Below are some local native trees of note:

- **Cedar Elm** (*Ulmus crassifolia*)
- **Mexican Buckeye** (*Ungnadia speciosa*)
- **Yaupon Holly** (*Ilex vomitoria*)

Native shrubs, like the above plant types, have adapted to our environment over thousands of years to survive the elements. Some hardy native shrubs you may want to consider include:

- **American Beautyberry** (*Callicarpa americana*)
- **Coralberry** (*Symphoricarpus orbiculatus*)
- **Fragrant Sumac** (*Rhus aromatica*)

You can find more information on plants native to the DFW area in Sally Wasowski’s very helpful listing by plant type done exclusively for the Native Plant Society of Texas.
Plants that are not native to our area can often survive for some time, but eventually, our weather extremes will make them succumb. Our February storm was the first time since the mid-1980s that we had temperatures around zero. Then as now, these low temperatures killed many of them.

Non-native plants can be a tempting choice due to their easy availability in many large nurseries and home improvement centers, fast-growth cycles, variety of colors, or unique foliage. Many of these plants are invasive in our area, like the Ligustrums (also known as Privets). They will quickly spread out of control and push out the native plants.

A related problem, for both natives and non-natives, is an affliction known as “zone denial”. Which is rationalizing the planting of tropical or cold-sensitive plants, such as agaves or hibiscus, in our area. The USDA plant hardiness zones, while not perfect, give you solid guidance on a plant’s cold tolerance. However, remember there are other factors that go into a native plant’s suitability to a location, not just cold tolerance. But since it is in widespread usage, knowing our zone is a good starting place. North Central Texas is in zone 8a.

The old gardening adage of “right plant – right place” applies not only on the micro-level to the best location in your yard but also on a macro-level regarding the right plant for your ecosystem. With resources like our NICE (Natives Improve & Conserve Environments) plant of the season, the Native Plant Society of Texas has a variety of valuable material to help you choose the native plant that is right for our area and for your landscape.