The Hills Above Possum Kingdom Nature Committee Newsletter
Spring/Summer Season 2019

INTRODUCTION: We are on the cusp of Spring and then will be moving into Summer. Spring officially started Wednesday, March 20 and summer will be HOT on its heels on Saturday June 22. Winter brought some new things our way which included the first documented record of a Golden Eagle. That joins in competition with the Bald Eagle's we see from time to time. One of the articles in this newsletter will give some ID hints on these birds so that we can all be on the look-out for them.

The Nature Committee has been working with the Board on establishing some guidelines that would allow property owners interested in managing their properties as Natural Habitats and as Wildscapes. A natural habitat would include 75% of the area being managed being planted in native grasses, trees, shrubs, flowers, etc. that encourage and support the natural wildlife and birds we have in our midst. And wildscapes provide lovely settings close by that provide water and natural plants for our birds to feed and drink on. Enjoy the following articles which give you more information on all of this!!

EAGLES – BALD OR GOLDEN????: (Lynne Aldrich)

Bald Eagle (adult)

Golden Eagle

Now that was easy. But wait!!! What if we have an immature Bald-eagle, which doesn't have that white head, and need to sort it out from a Golden-eagle.

The Hills has added another bird species to its list this year and it is in fact a Golden-eagle - calling upon all of us now to hone our skills in making a determination of which species we are viewing when the Bald-eagle we are seeing may be young and lacking the distinguished white head of the adult. So, here we go.

The plumage of an immature Bald-eagle is a dark brown with no white head just as in a Golden-eagle. The plumage of a Golden-eagle is a warmer brown with a reddish-golden patch to its nape as in the bird above. In flight telling them apart is a little easier but still takes some careful studying.

Golden-Eagle (adult)

Golden-eagle (imm)

Bald-eagle (immature)

Study carefully the patterns of white on the Golden & Bald eagle and how more mottled that is in the Bald Eagle. Golden has white only at the base of the flight feathers while bald has mottling on feathers and wing lining. And notice the dark band in the tail of the immature bald eagle while the immature Golden has more of a white rump with thick dark band. When seen well, the golden nape of the Golden-eagle can separate them out but note that the more immature Golden-eagle will have a more mottled nape than true golden.

If you see them perched or on the ground you can study carefully the feathering on the legs. The Golden-eagle will have feathering to the feet while the Bald-eagle leg area is totally un-feathered with yellow ankles.

In flight you should also notice that a Golden-eagle will have a slight dihedral - a slight up-turned V shape while the Bald-eagle will have a flat look. It's also important to be aware that both Eagles are MUCH larger than our resident vultures (Black & Turkey) so when you see a super sized 'hawk' type bird you are probably onto one of the Eagles. You're more apt to see the Golden-eagle in winter when it is migrating while the Bald-eagle is around year round.

Both eagles acquire adulthood in four to five years and each of those years they are changing in what they look like, SO – this is a true ID challenge and one worth taking on. Keep in mind that bald eagle is much more likely around PK than golden. Below is the immature Golden Eagle sighted in our community!!

PROMOTING AND PROTECTING OUR TEXAS WILDFLOWERS: (Lynne Brown)

We are very fortunate in The Hills to have such an abundance of native Texas wildflowers to enjoy. As property owners we can do much to enhance that beauty, by planting new seed and protecting those that we already have.

Recognizing the difference between a wildflower and "weed" can be difficult. Really no distinction is necessary as long as the flower is pleasing to the eye. Enjoy it and let it grow!

Wildflower seeds can be planted in the Spring or Fall. It is recommended in most cases that Fall is the better season for planting, as that gives time for roots to establish. Prepare the ground by lightly raking and wetting. Scatter the seeds on top of the ground and press in very firmly (do not cover with dirt). Water in well. If possible, continue to lightly water. Remember, in either case it often takes a season or two for flowers to bloom from your seeds. Don't give up. Often seeds will be moved by wind or rain and will end up surprising you with flowers in a different location.

One of the best sites for identifying and purchasing seeds is the Ecological Solutions catalogue from the Native American Seed Company. Flowers that help sustain all of our beautiful butterflies and birds are listed here by region. See the list of resources at the end of this article.

Once your wildflowers are established, the question arises about safeguarding them so they come back (and spread) year after year. Mowing an area where flowers may bloom should take place in December or early January. After that, flowers need to have seeded before mowing or cutting them down. Once the seed pods are on the ground they can pop and growing can continue. Timing for that varies from year to year, depending on the weather. The hotter and dryer the summer, the sooner mowing is acceptable. The last week in June is a benchmark, but a cooler, wetter summer would indicate a later mowing schedule.

Don't forget to learn the identity of our native milkweed plants. The antelope horns is the most common in our area and is a vital link to sustaining our monarch population. Milkweed blooms on our roadsides and fields in the Spring, but will often bloom again in the Fall.

Resources for growing and identifying wildflowers:

Native American Seed Company (request a catalogue)

www.seedsource.com 800-728-4043

Turner Seed Company – Breckenridge

www.turnerseed.com 800-722-8616

www.wildflower.org Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center has many links on their website to help with wildflower planting and protection

MANAGING AS NATURAL HABITAT AND WILDSCAPE IN THE HILLS: (Nature Committee)

One of the Nature Committees goals is to help in making our community aware of the beauty that surrounds them here. As the POA advertisement in the recent Chamber of Commerce publication states **"The Hills Above Possum Kingdom Lake contains some of the most breathtaking and unspoiled private land in Texas. We are surrounded by breathtaking landscapes and dramatic elevation changes".**

So true and a key word is perhaps unspoiled. So, how do we manage our properties in ways that help in retaining and re-establishing the natural habitat of our community and still maintain the standards of the community itself?

We think this can be done in ways that are consistent with maintaining properties in a neat and tidy way and supporting the Wildfire Mitigation guidelines while at the same time incorporating practices that allow the incorporation of natural areas that are replete with native plants and vegetation, that continue to be maintained in ways that do not allow them to become a nuisance within our community but retain the natural beauty of The Hills themselves.

Incorporating the Wildfire Mitigation guidelines (zones 1 & 2) that are incorporated into our governing documents are a great start and with some modifications could have both fire safe management and environmentally sound practices being utilized.

Cutting or mowing to a maximum height of six inches up to 30 feet from any structure is the recommendation of the Wildfire Defensible Space document for zone 1. Having some low flammability plants that are well spaced but might include some plants that exceed the six-inch limit but should be low growing within this zone could be part of that management.

The remaining properties, including zone 2, can be managed with natural vegetation (native plants) that support our wildlife. Many of these are taller than the limits established in POA guidelines (12 inches) but add natural beauty and color to the environment while providing habitat for our wildlife AND act as soil stabilizers and filtration systems. Inter mixed (layered) with other low growing plants these taller plant could be maintained still within the standards of our community.

We can work to develop wildscapes and natural habitats – areas that incorporate native plants and provide food, shelter and water for the birds and wildlife. The first step is learning about the plants and soils that characterize our region, remembering that the fact that something is growing here without our interference does NOT make it native. We should select plants that provide for shelter and for food – layering in heights and density while remembering that shrubs are bushes are important layers but that we have a role to play in protecting our homes and our community. Managing our properties as wildscapes and natural areas does NOT relieve us of the responsibility of following the guidelines and regulations of our community. So, up to 75% of those things planted being "native plants" coupled with the work it will take to maintain that wildscape and natural habitat will be critical to your success.

Maintaining our properties in ways that retain and continue to develop our unspoiled lands can be hard work and takes diligence but working with our POA, the ACC and our neighbors we can have a lot of fun doing so and then reaping the continual wonders of what we see around us.

There are several on line sites you will want to investigate as you begin to plan your landscaping. Here are a few.

a. http://www.txsmartscape.com/ (highlights native plants)
b. https://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife
c. https://www.cleanwateraction.org/features/xeriscape-styles-texas
d. Tpwd.texas.gov/wildscapes (Texas Parks & Wildlife)
e. Npsot.org/wp/crosstimbers (Native Plant Society of Texas)
f. Www.wildflowers.org (Lady Bird website- highlights "how-to")

THE SKIES OVER THE HILLS: (Peter Gottschling)

There is an article in this April's Texas Parks and Wildlife discussing the designation of The Devils River State Natural Area as a dark sky sanctuary by the International Dark Sky Association. This is the first such designation in Texas. This got me thinking about how dark the sky was in The Hills when we moved here in November 2010. When I compare notes about the detail I saw back then with what I can see now I realize that our sky has gotten more light polluted over the last 9 years. Of course part of this is the relentless development to our east in Weatherford and the DFW metroplex. You can see the bright light dome rising in the east almost 40° up into the sky.

The only way to keep our sky dark out here is to follow sensible lighting guidelines part of which are in our original ACC guidelines.

Here is what the original text in the ACC guidelines says about lighting in The Hills (page 18 of ACC, or page 85 of 88 in our original filed CCRs).

19. Exterior Lighting. Landscape uplights are effective for accentuating plant material and other features. Except for holiday season lights (which are appropriate from Thanksgiving through the first week of January). Light fixtures and standards should be chosen to blend into and enhance the Lot it is illuminating. Spillage of light or glare from one property to another should be avoided. Light shields and timer/sensor systems should be used in areas where spill-over is a potential problem. No high or low pressure sodium light shall be permitted.

This is kind of a weird paragraph. It encourages lighting up the sky with outdoor lights and then cautions not to let the light shine or glare on your neighbor and to use light shields to control your lighting. We should definitely follow the section highlighted in yellow to preserve our night sky and our night vision when we go outside. I think the lighting guidelines should be expanded with good examples and information about preserving the night sky. Keeping the sky dark does not mean you can't have exterior lights, it just requires the right kind of lights that are shielded and only shine down and not up or sideways. Don't use any lights brighter than you need. An example of poor lighting is at our gates. Besides illuminating the gates and walls they also shine into a driver's eyes and prevent good seeing of curbs and the road. They look like

aircraft landing lights when viewed from the Canyon Wren Loop hills and up on Shooting Star, Honeysuckle, Blazing Star and other areas.

But enough preaching. So what is happening in the sky (assuming you can see it) this spring? Unfortunately, the Lyrid meteor shower will be a no show April 14-30 and peaking on 22nd due to the bright moon. Although not spectacular, you might see quite a few meteors May 6 during the peak of the Eta Aquariids. The Eta Aquariids are caused when the Earth moves through the dust trail left by Halley 's Comet which comes around every 76 years or so. Because this is such a big dust trail you can see meteors on any clear night during the two week period centered on May 6. Meteors are almost always more frequent after midnight.

The big planets are rising for us. Jupiter, the brightest planet in the south, rises about 1:30AM in early April but will be up by 9:30 PM and shine all night by the end of May. Saturn, much dimmer than Jupiter will be about an hour or so behind Jupiter's rise.

Mars, the red planet, is visible in the west right now after sunset and will be close to the Pleiades and the reddish star Aldebaran from April 5-12. Venus is the bright morning star.

See the dust in space lit up in the west about an hour after sunset. On clear dark evening after sunset watch for the broad glow of the zodiacal light https://earthsky.org/tonight/look-for-the-zodiacal-light-in-the-west-after-sunset . This pyramid shaped sky glow is just left of the rising milky way and the light tip is canted to the left (not sure why). If our sky gets any more light polluted out here we may not have many years left to see the zodiacal light so check it out one evening soon.

We're busy organizing a late summer Star Party in The Hills so STAY TUNED!!!

NOTE: Following is a handy file for you to print out that we found at the Cross Timbers site (Native Plant Society of Texas) showing some of the recommended Native Plants we can use in our area organized by type and where/how they best grow. This is a handy tool for getting you started when you begin to select native plants.

Recommended List of Native Plants for Landscape Use in North Central Texas

CROSS TIMBERS CHAPTER
Native Plant Society of Texas

The purpose of the the Native Plant Scociety of Texas is to promote the conservation, research and utilization of native plants and plant habitat of Texas through education, outreach and example.

CROSS TIMBERS CHAPTER meets the second Thursday of each month, except July and December, at 6:30 pm at Mt. Pleasant School, 213 Raymond George Way, Weatherford, Texas. Website: http://npsot.org/wp/crosstimbers

KEY: E=Evergreen / **D**=Drought resistant in full sun with reflected heat / **P**=Tolerates poor drainage, can be used in parkways and other places where roots are confined and drainage periodically may be poor / **S**=Shade tolerant / **B**=Attracts birds or butterflies / **F**=Very showy in flower, fruit or fall foliage / **X**=Cross Timbers or Trinity sands only, not Blacklands or limestone.

Flowers for the Garden

Common Name	E	D	P	S	B	F	X	Scientific Name
Barbara's Buttons					B	F		Marshallia caespitosa
Bergamot/Beebalm			P		B	F		Monarda fistulosa
Big Red Sage					B	F		Salvia penstemonoides
Black Eyed Susan					B	F		Rudbeckia hirta
Blackfoot Daisy		D			B	F		Melampodium leucanthum
Blue-eyed Grass				S		F		Sisyrinchium spp.
Butterflyweed					B	F		Asclepias tuberosa
Sundrops		D		S		F		Calylophus spp.
Cardinal Flower				S	B	F		Lobelia cardinalis
Chile Pequin				S	B	F		Capsicum annuum
Lanceleaf Coreopsis	E	D		S	B	F		Coreopsis lanceolata
Jimsonweed				S		F		Datura wrightii
Engelmann Daisy		D	P		B	F		Engelmannia peristenia
Engelmann's Sage		D			B	F		Salvia engelmannii
Fall Obedient Plant			P	S	B	F		Physostegia virginiana
Four-nerve Daisy	E	D			B	F		Tetraneuris scaposa
Fragrant Phlox				S	B	F		Phlox pilosa
Gayfeather		D			B	F		Liatris mucronata
Texas Green Eyes				S		F		Berlandiera betonicifolia
Gulf Coast Penstemon			P	S	B	F		Penstemon tenuis
Halberdleaf Hibiscus						F		Hibiscus laevis
Maximilian Sunflower			P		B	F		Helianthus maximiliani
Mealy Blue Sage		D			B	F		Salvia farinacea
Prairie Onion				S	B	F		Allium stellatum
Prairie Verbena		D		S	B	F		Glandularia bipinnatifida
Purple Coneflower					B	F		Echinacea spp.
Rockrose		D		S	B	F		Pavonia lasiopetala
Common Wild Petunia				S	B	F		Ruellia nudiflora
Scarlet Sage			P	S	B	F		Salvia coccinea
Shrubby Skullcap		D			B	F		Scutellaria drummondii
Skeleton Leaf Goldeneye		D		S	B	F		Viguiera stenoloba
Spiderwort				S		F		Tradescantia spp.
Spring Rain Lily						F		Cooperia pendunculata
Standing Cypress	E	D			B	F		Ipomopsis rubra
Texas Bluebell					B	F		Eustoma exaltatum
Texas Lantana		D			B	F		Lantana urticoides
Turk's Cap		D	P	S	B	F		Malvaviscus arboreus
Two-leaved Senna		D		S	B	F		Senna roemeriana
Wild Ageratum			P	S	B	F		Conoclinium coelestinum
Wild Foxglove					B	F		Penstemon cobaea
Wild Red Columbine	E			S	B	F		Aquilegia canadensis
Winecup	E	D		S	B	F		Callirhoe involucrata
Yellow Columbine	E			S	B	F		Aquilegia chrysantha
Zexmenia		D			B	F		Wedelia acapulcensis

Grasses

Common Name	E	D	P	S	B	F	X	Scientific Name
Switchgrass			P		B	F		Panicum virgatum
Big Bluestem		D			B	F		Andropogon gerardii
Buffalograss		D						Bouteloua dactyloides
Bushy Bluestem			P		B	F		Andropogon glomeratus
Eastern gamagrass	E		P	S	B			Tripsacum dactyloides
Gulf Muhly			P			F		Muhlenbergia capillaris
Indiangrass		D	P	S	B	F		Sorghastrum nutans
Inland sea oats			P	S	B	F		Chasmanthium latifolium
Lindheimer muhly		D				F		Muhlenbergia lindheimeri
Little bluestem		D			B	F		Schizachyrium scoparium
Seep muhly		D	P			F		Muhlenbergia reverchonii
Sideoats grama		D		S	B	F		Bouteloua curtipendula
Splitbeard bluestem		D			B	F	X	Andropogon ternarius

Groundcovers

Common Name	E	D	P	S	B	F	X	Scientific Name
Cedar Sage				S	B	F		Salvia roemeriana
Frogfruit		D	P	S	B			Phyla nodiflora
Golden Groundsel	E	D		S	B	F		Packera obovata
Horseherb		D		S	B			Calyptocarpus vialis
Lyreleaf sage	E	D	P	S	B	F		Salvia lyrata
Missouri violet				S		F		Viola missouriensis
Pigeonberry			P	S	B	F		Rivina humilis
Virginia creeper			P	S	B	F		Parthenocissus quinquefolia
Wood fern			P	S				Thelypteris kunthii

Shade Trees

Common Name	E	D	P	S	B	F	X	Scientific Name
American elm (local stock)		D			B	F		Ulmus americana
Bald cypress			P			F		Taxodium distichum
Bigtooth maple						F		Acer grandidentatum
Bur oak		D			B			Quercus macrocarpa
Caddo maple		D				F		Acer barbatum
Cedar elm		D	P		B	F		Ulmus crassifolia
Chinquapin oak		D			B			Quercus muehlenbergii
Live oak	E	D			B			Quercus fusiformis
Loblolly pine	E				B		X	Pinus taeda
Honey mesquite		D			B	F		Prosopis glandulosa
Pecan					B			Carya illinoinensis
Post oak		D			B		X	Quercus stellata
Shumard red oak		D			B	F		Quercus shumardii
Southern magnolia	E			S		F	X	Magnolia grandiflora
Texas Ash		D		S		F		Fraxinus albicans
Texas red oak		D				F		Quercus buckleyi

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SHRUBS

Common Name	Key							Scientific Name
Agarito	E	D			B	F		Mahonia trifoliolata
American beautyberry			P	S	B	F		Callicarpa americana
Apache plume		D			B	F		Fallugia paradoxa
Autumn sage	E	D			B	F		Salvia greggii
Canyon senna		D				F		Senna wislizeni
Coralbean		D			B	F		Erythrina herbacea
Coralberry				S	B	F		Symphoricarpos orbiculatus
Dwarf wax myrtle	E	D	P		B			Morella pusilla
Flame acanthus		D			B	F		Anisacanthus quadrifidus
Fragrant sumac		D			B	F		Rhus aromatica
False indigo bush			P		B	F		Amorpha fruticosa
Mountain sage		D		S	B	F		Salvia regla 'Mount Emory'
Pale-leaf yucca	E	D			B	F		Yucca pallida
Red yucca	E	D			B	F		Hesperaloe parviflora
Smooth sumac		D			B	F		Rhus glabra
Texas barberry	E	D			B	F		Mahonia swaseyi
Texas mock orange						F		Philadelphus texensis
Texas sage, Cenizio	E	D			B	F		Leucophyllum frutescens
Turkscap		D	P	S	B	F		Malvaviscus arboreus
Virginia sweetspire			P	S	B	F		Itea virginica
White honeysuckle bush					B	F		Lonicera albiflora

SMALL TREES

Common Name	Key							Scientific Name
American smoke tree		D				F		Cotinus obovatus
Bigelow oak		D			B			Quercus sinuata var. breviloba
Carolina buckthorn			P	S	B	F		Frangula caroliniana
Carolina cherry-laurel	E				B	F		Prunus caroliniana
Desert willow		D			B	F		Chilopsis linearis
Eastern red cedar	E	D		S	B	F		Juniperus virginiana
Eve's necklace		D		S	B	F		Styphnolobium affine
Goldenball leadtree		D			B	F		Leucaena retusa
Lacey oak		D			B	F		Quercus laceyi
Mexican buckeye		D			B	F		Ungnadia speciosa
Mexican plum		D		S	B	F		Prunus mexicana
Mexican redbud		D		S	B	F		Cercis canadensis var. mexicana
Possumhaw			P	S	B	F		Ilex decidua
Prairie flameleaf sumac		D			B	F		Rhus lanceolata
Roughleaf dogwood			P	S	B	F		Cornus drummondii
Rusty blackhaw				S	B	F		Viburnum rufidulum
Texas persimmon		D			B	F		Diospyros texana
Texas redbud		D		S	B	F		Cercis canadensis var. texensis
Wax myrtle	E		P	S	B	F		Morella cerifera
Wright acacia		D			B	F		Senegalia wrightii
Yaupon holly	E	D	P	S	B	F		Ilex vomitoria

FLOWERS FOR MEADOWS

Common Name	Key							Scientific Name
Bitterweed			P		B	F		Helenium amarum
Blue flax		D			B	F		Linum lewisii var. lewisii
Bluebonnet		D			B	F		Lupinus texensis
Cowpen daisy		D			B	F		Verbesina encelioides
Diamond petal primrose		D			B	F	X	Oenothera rhombipetala
Eryngo		D			B	F		Eryngium leavenworthii
Greenthread		D			B	F		Thelesperma filifolium
Horsemint		D			B	F		Monarda citriodora
Indian blanket		D			B	F		Gaillardia pulchella
Indian paintbrush		D			B	F		Castilleja indivisa
Mexican hat		D			B	F		Ratibida columnifera
Partridge pea		D			B	F		Chamaecrista fasciculata
Pink evening primrose		D			B	F		Oenothera speciosa
Snow-on-the-prairie		D	P			F		Euphorbia bicolor
White milkwort		D		S		F		Polygala alba
Wild foxglove					B	F		Penstemon cobaea

VINES

Common Name	Key							Scientific Name
Carolina jessamine	E		P		B	F		Gelsemium sempervirens
Climbing prairie rose				S	B	F		Rosa setigera
Coral honeysuckle	E		P		B	F		Lonicera sempervirens
Crossvine	E		P	S	B	F		Bignonia capreolata
Purple passionflower			P	S	B	F		Passiflora incarnata
Virginia creeper			P	S	B	F		Parthenocissus quinquefolia

These books, a few of our favorites, offer practical ideas about native plants and their use in your landscape

Native Texas Plants
Wasowski, Sally and Andy

Range Plants of North Central Texas
Ricky Linex

Texas Wildscapes: Gardening for Wildlife
Damude and Bender

Wildflowers of the Texas Hill Country
Marshall Enquist

How to Grow Native Plants of Texas and the Southwest
Jill Nokes

Illustrated Flora of North Central Texas
Diggs, Lipscomb, and O'Kennon

Grasses of Southern Oklahoma and North Texas: A Pictorial Guide
Coffey and Stevens

Plant Identification Terminology
Harris and Harris