



RIPARIAN RECOVERY NETWORK NEWS

Riparian: wetlands adjacent to rivers or streams



" Texas weather consists of droughts interrupted by intermittent floods. "

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All summer the question on everyone's tongue was "Where is the rain?" A week or so ago it was "When will the rain stop?" We need to remember in the Texas Hill Country droughts and floods are normal. Our ecosystem has, over a long period of time, adapted to such conditions. Native plants put down deep roots providing access to water even in thirsty times. And this past August, as deep down moisture diminished, those plants appeared to be dying. In truth, many were simply turning brown or shedding their leaves early in order to reduce dependency on water, an adaptation that enables them to survive until the rains returned. Look at them now.

Likewise intermittent floods are normal and riparian vegetation has come to depend on the periodic extension of flow beyond the stream's banks. Normal flow floods (i.e., those non-catastrophic floods that occur every few years) drop sediment onto the floodplain and in the process increase the water storing capacity of the riparian area. This increase in water storage capacity encourages growth of vegetation that thrives in places where the water table is readily accessible all or most of the year and whose roots store that water for release in times of drought. At the same time, plants that like drier soils die out or simply move further uphill.

What native plants are growing where tells you a lot about what is happening water-wise under the surface. Five categories of Wetness Indicators (see table on the left) enable experts to use vegetation as a parameter in accessing the health of a riparian area. If the riparian area is effectively storing water, there will be an abundance of OBL and FACW plants such as Bushy Bluestem, Emory Sedge, Buttonbush, etc. Likewise the lack of such plants indicates that a riparian area is not storing water effectively and may be a sign that groundwater levels are in decline.

OBL – Obligate Wetland Plants
almost always found in very wet locations
FACW – Facultative Wetland Plants
usually found in wet locations
FAC – Facultative Plants
found equally in wet and non-wet locations
FACU – Facultative Upland Plants
usually found in non-wet locations
UPL – Obligate Upland Plants
almost always found in non-wet locations

So now that the weather is cooler, take a walk and observe the plants close to a creek or river. Note how what's growing there is different from plants you normally see in the uplands. And, if you are wondering what something is, send a picture to riparian@haysmn.org.

Late Summer/Early Fall Stars

Most of us love flowers. We tend to think of spring as the time nature puts on a show for us. But plenty of things bloom in late August through the early fall. Here are some things that you want to watch out for.

Shrubby/Tall Water Primrose



Plants often have multiple names. The sign at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center says “Shrubby water primrose” and the Remarkable Riparian listing is “Tall water primrose.” Another common name is Mexican primrose-willow. That’s why plants have scientific names- in this case *Ludwigia ocovalvis*. This particular example was observed growing alongside the Blanco with its feet practically in the river. That’s where you are likely to find this species as it likes moist soils. Well described as tall and shubby, this perennial grows to 3 feet and blooms from July thru October.

Late Boneset



Late boneset is a perennial that likes the moist soils found in disturbed riparian areas, even areas recently covered by gravel deposits. Thus it is an excellent, highly deer resistant early colonizer. Boneset often grows in small colonies and can get as tall as three to five feet. The clusters of white flowers appears in late summer or early fall and are an excellent source of nectar for butterflies. An added bonus is that once the flowers have turned to seed, the waning plants provide food for the birds we love.

Leavenworth’s Eryngo



Leavenworth’s eryngo looks like a thistle, but it’s not which explains another name - False purple thistle. Rather this plant is a member of the parsley family - Apiaceae. The photo on the left is a young plant found on a property along the Blanco. The second photo on the right is a mature plant growing at the Wildflower Center. This annual grows to two or three feet tall on a single or multi-branching stalk.



Marsh Fleabane



A lover of moist soils, Marsh fleabane grows from one to three feet tall and is an excellent nectar plant for butterflies. The plant has a wide range across the United States, Canada, and northern South America, but is considered invasive in Hawaii. Like Frostweed, Marsh fleabane can exhibit “*crystallofolia*” which refers to the formation of ice from water emitted along the stem during a hard freeze.

Sometimes the leaves or berries, not the flowers are what we fall in love with.

Snow-on-the-Mountain



Snow-on-the-mountain begins to appear in July and stays around through the fall. Like its close relative the poinsettia, the flowers are inconspicuous, but the leaves sitting towards the tops of the one to three foot stalks provide a pleasing display. This slow growing, self seeding annual is poisonous which likely explains why the deer leave it be. And be careful about touching any part of the plant as the milky sap can cause dermatitis. But it is a great addition to the drier soils on the upland side of a riparian area.

American Beautyberry



American beautyberry is one of the species Treefolks is planting along the Blanco. True to its name, its purple berries are the most striking aspect of this shrub which can grow to five to eight feet tall and gets almost as wide. The berry clusters form along the stem and persist long after the leaves are shed. That is assuming the berries are not devoured by birds and other wildlife. While not a favorite, deer nibble on the leaves if better alternatives are unavailable. It is said early 20th century farmers placed crushed leaves under their horses harnessed and rubbed them on themselves to protect against mosquitos.

Upcoming Events

Fall 2018 Schedule - Cypress Creek Watershed Walks - Jacob's Well Natural Area

This fall, Master Naturalist Tom Jones will again lead tours of a portion of the Cypress Creek Watershed that lies within the Jacob's Well Natural Area. The tour will focus on the geology, stream characteristics and groundwater flow that shaped the waterways within the Wimberley Valley and through the Texas Hill Country. The walk is open to the general public and will be offered once a month throughout the fall as follows:

Friday, September 21 - 10:00-11:30AM

Saturday, October 20 - 10:00-11:30AM

Friday, November 16 - 10:00-11:30AM

Saturday, December 8 - 10:00-11:30AM

Advanced reservations are recommended. For more information or to sign-up for this very informative event, contact Tom Jones, 281-380-2802, wimberleytom@gmail.com.

The Riparian Recovery Network News is a periodic Hays County Master Naturalist publication covering topics of interest to the Riparian Recovery Network community. Please share this newsletter with friends and neighbors who would enjoy information on restoring and enjoying their riparian zone. Send any questions you might have or ideas for future topics to riparian@haysmn.org. And, if you are not currently on our mailing list, use this same address to request

