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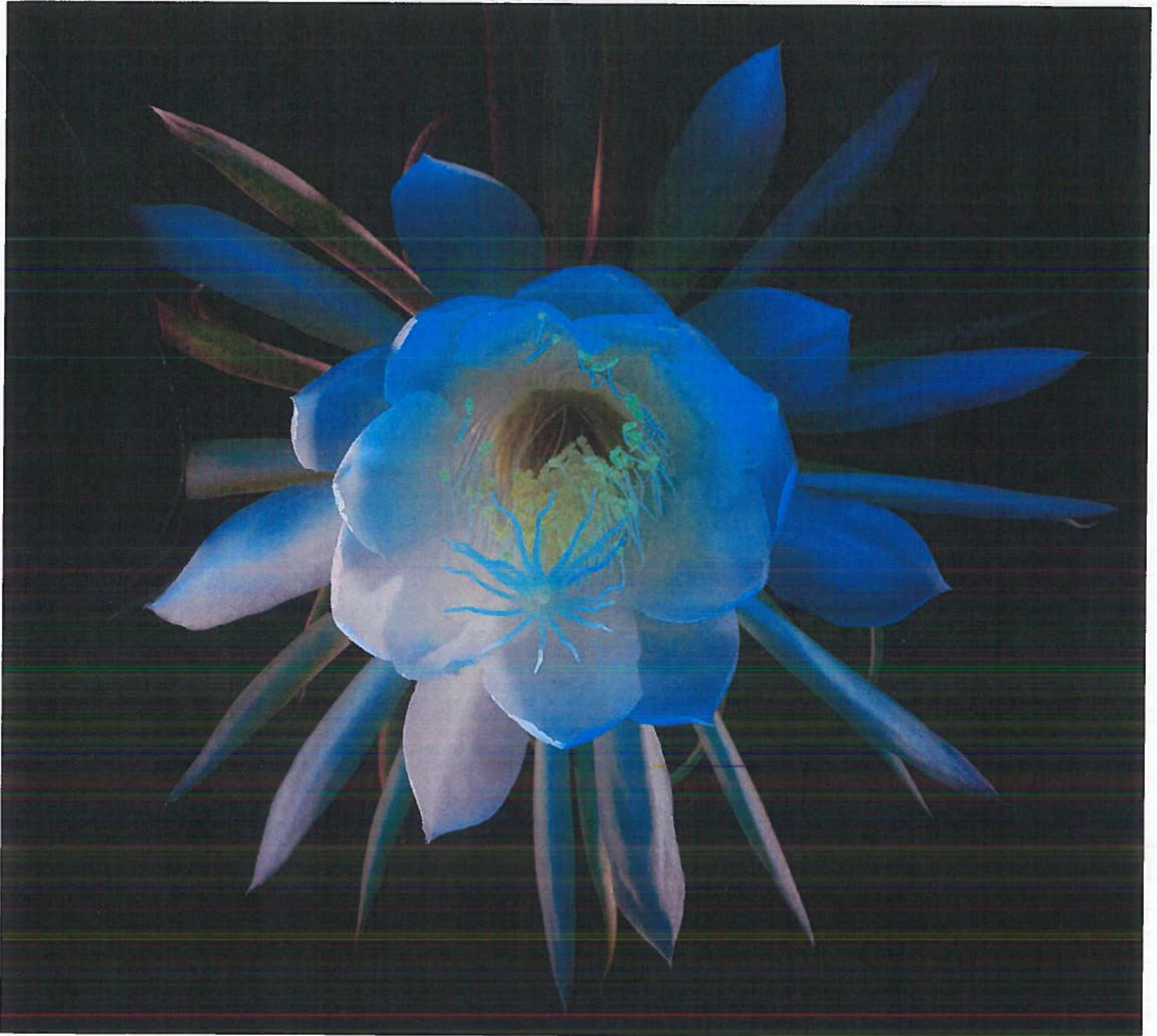
Thorny Task

Scientists, landowners and plant lovers work to preserve hundreds of threatened Texas natives

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS • APRIL 2024



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The flower of the rare night-blooming cereus can be seen just one night a year.

DAVE SHAFER

Randy Deming often walks his 10 acres of rural land in Callahan County, near Abilene, always on the lookout for a flower, insect or bird he hasn't spotted before.

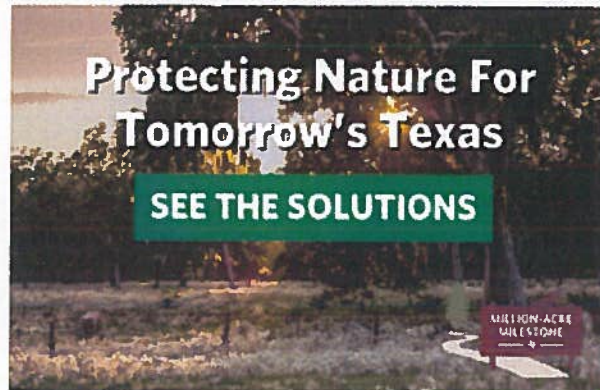
Using an app called [iNaturalist](#), he documents the native grasses, yuccas, Ashe junipers, live oaks and other plants that grow there. Thanks to the app, Deming learned in 2021 that one of his flowering species could be one of only a few remaining populations in Texas.

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[beardtongues.](#)

“When they told me how rare they are, I was excited,” Deming says. “I could have mowed them down! Now I’m watching over them.”

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In the future, large-flower beardtongues—a tall, erect perennial with tubular purple blooms—could be legally protected if researchers collect enough ecological data to substantiate the designation. In the meantime, 437 other Texas plants have already been designated by the state as “species of greatest conservation need,” meaning they’re in decline and need attention. Some of those species require even more urgent measures. These are further labeled as threatened or endangered.

The two legal terms stem from the Endangered Species Act, a federal law enacted in 1973 to protect and help recover the nation’s imperiled plant and animal species and their habitats. The [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) oversees the federal list and partners with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, which manages the Texas list. A species can be federally and state protected, such as shrubby Texas snowbells in the Hill Country, or just one or the other.

However, the process for federally listing a species can stretch out for years. Consider the [bracted twistflower](#), a tall annual with lavender flowers that has been increasingly lost to urban sprawl and hungry herbivores. Found only within the Edwards Plateau, the wildflower has been marked as imperiled since 1975 and was petitioned for federal listing in 2014. In May 2023—nine years later—the USFWS finally listed the bracted twistflower as threatened. In Coryell County, the imperiled [Texabama croton](#) faces similar challenges.

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The Hinckley oak is an evergreen shrub in the Chihuahuan Desert.

KEEPER TROUT | LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDFLOWER CENTER

Grassroots Efforts

The Texas Department of Transportation monitors for rare plants prior to road construction and along state highways and rights of way. Edd Paradise, a TxDOT environmental planner in Pharr and a Magic Valley Electric Cooperative member, worked with USFWS to relocate endangered [Zapata bladderpods](#) in Starr County.

Aaron Lincoln—a biodiversity manager with **Lhoist**, a global corporation—oversees a pilot project to restore grasslands and a pocket prairie at a 3,000-acre chemical lime plant and quarry in Bosque County. So far, he's documented [glandular blazing stars](#), [Hall's prairie clover](#), [lemonscent](#) and other declining species. Lincoln also hopes to set aside 122 acres as a refuge for [white troutlilies](#) and morel mushrooms.

The Friends of the [Warren Ferris Cemetery](#) in Dallas rallied to transform the historic cemetery's neglected grounds into native habitat. Today, the [Constellation of Living Memorials](#) pilot project includes eight old cemeteries and will serve as an example for

Plants of all kinds in Texas face many pressures. Every year, development scrapes away one natural area after another. Invasive plants, agriculture, poaching, mining, weather, loss of pollinators, and land and water management also negatively impact the state's flora.

But does it really matter if a few of Texas' estimated 5,000-plus native plant species go away? The answer is yes.

"We have biodiversity for a reason," says Anna Strong, a rare species botanist with TPWD. "Each organism interacts with others in specific ways. Regardless of whether it's rare or common, if we take out one organism, we don't know the implications amongst all the organisms. If we take out one flower, we may take a food source away from a specific insect that relies on that species."

At the San Antonio Botanical Garden, botanist Michael Eason works to conserve and propagate rare Texas plants. "We have more than 90 species in our collections," Eason says. "Some are displayed in our gardens, which helps to educate the public. Others are seed collections, which haven't been propagated yet."

One of those species, [prostrate milkweed](#), a low-growing perennial, is endemic only to Starr and Zapata counties and northeastern Mexico. Since at least 1980, invasive buffelgrass, road construction and development have drastically reduced its numbers. After several petitions to the USFWS, prostrate milkweed—an important monarch butterfly host plant—was federally listed as endangered in March 2023. The agency also designated 661 acres as critical habitat needed by the species to survive.

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Turner's Cliff Thistle

MICHAEL EASON | SAN ANTONIO BOTANICAL GARDEN

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Texas Snowbell

CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD

For his part, Eason spent five years tracking down the scarce milkweeds and collecting seeds, then having a milkweed specialist grow the plants to maturity. “We ended up with 150 plants,” he says. “We passed some to other botanical gardens. We’ll install some in our rare plant gardens. The remainder will be kept for perhaps reintroductions in South Texas and donations to other institutions with the [Center for Plant Conservation](#).”

Headquartered in Escondido, California, the CPC is a nationwide network of organizations working together to save imperiled native plants. The [San Antonio Botanical Garden](#) partners with the CPC, as do the [Botanical Research Institute of Texas](#) at the Fort Worth Botanic Garden, [Mercer Botanic Gardens](#) in Humble and the [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#) in Austin.

As part of its conservation efforts, the wildflower center stores seeds of 575 Texas plant species for research and sharing with botanical gardens and conservation organizations. The seed bank, housed mostly in freezers, also serves as an insurance policy against the loss of imperiled species.

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priority is to conserve the plants in their natural habitat.”

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Glossary

An endangered species is defined under the Endangered Species Act as “any species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.”

A threatened species is defined under the ESA as “any species which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.”

Imperiled is not a legal term. Biologically, it refers to unprotected species that are in decline and may be in danger of extinction.

Rare plants have very limited ranges or exist in low numbers.

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purple flowers grows in deep sandy soils along the Colorado River in four counties.

In 2010, some conservation-minded landowners asked that a population of poppy-mallows be removed from a future construction site on their property. That summer, wildflower center staff and other colleagues extracted 54 plants and fostered them in pots for three years.

“We harvested more than 3,000 seeds from them for our seed bank,” Flickinger says. “Then we identified another site where they were reintroduced.”

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Prostrate Milkweed

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is privately owned. When threatened or endangered plants grow on private land, landowners are not legally required to manage them under the Endangered Species Act (the law differs for listed birds and animals).

Botanists and other officials must always ask permission before accessing private land. Typically, they want to survey plant species, perhaps harvest a small amount of seeds and collect plant material for herbarium vouchers.

The Fish and Wildlife Service offers a program that provides property owners with free technical and financial assistance for improving wildlife habitat on their land. “We’re always looking for opportunities to work with landowners,” says Chris Best, USFWS botanist. “Most of the ones I’ve met want to protect their land’s natural resources.”

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Texabama Croton

RAY MATHEWS | LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDFLOWER CENTER

Noah's Arks for Seeds

Just as the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin stores seeds of 575 Texas plant species for research, national and global seed vaults do the same—preserving plant types in case they are wiped out by natural or human-made disasters.

The National Laboratory for Genetic Resources Preservation on the campus of Colorado State University is run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It houses more than 850,000 plant seeds and materials, as well as DNA samples from about 160 breeds of livestock.

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault, located about halfway between the North Pole and the coast of Norway, is more than 300 feet inside a mountain, where the permafrost

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That aptly describes attorney Liz Rogers, a Medina Electric Cooperative member. For more than two decades, she's welcomed researchers onto her family's 8,000-acre cattle ranch in southeastern Brewster County, along the Mexico border. "They always show me cool things, which has made me appreciate our ranch even more," she says.

Eason has been among many plant conservationists who have botanized the ranch's Trans-Pecos deserts, canyons and mountainsides. "Liz has an assortment of rare plants found along cliff faces and other protected areas," he says. "We've collected plants such as [Turner's cliff thistle](#), [rockdaisy](#) and [Barton's dalea](#). She also has a small population of [night-blooming cereus](#)."

Whether rare or not, showy or inconspicuous, every native plant matters. "We shouldn't focus conservation merely on species that have declined so far that they're teetering on the brink of extinction," Best says. "We should be working to keep common plants common."



Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

[Sheryl Smith-Rodgers](#) once found a [crestrib morning-glory](#), an uncommon Edwards Plateau species, on a vacant property in Blanco set to be paved for a church parking lot.

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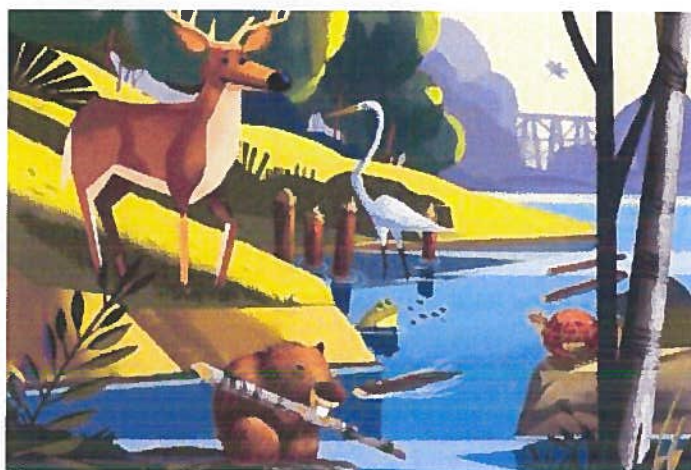


This article appeared in the April 2024 issue

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Recommended Reading



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Later, Gators?

Finding everything else during a search for the elusive alligators of the Mineola Nature Preserve



FEATURE

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Composting at home doesn't have to be complicated, and it's great for plants, your wallet and the planet

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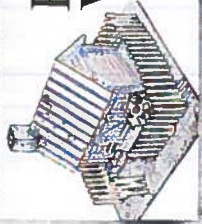
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Our Mission

Located in Dallas' s Forest Hills neighborhood on the original homestead of Warren Angus Ferris, the 1847 Ferris Historic Cemetery is the final resting place of early settlers and possibly indigenous folk. It is the mission of the Friends of the Warren Ferris Cemetery to recognize those buried there and honor those who came before them, evolve an ongoing landscape restoration plan, and to beautify and maintain the landscape to the standards of a certified wildlife & monarch butterfly way station, and to promote environmental stewardship.

Cemeteries are important keys to history. They are tangible reminders of the indigenous, settlement patterns and reveal information about historic events, religion, lifestyle, and genealogy. By tying together historical, educational and native wildlife components, our ultimate goal is to support other neighborhoods across the state in revitalizing their own fallen cemeteries.

The Friends of the Ferris Cemetery will secure the funds, report historic findings, and hire the necessary staff to continue ongoing projects.

The Warren Angus Ferris Cemetery was established in the mid-1800s on the Ferris 640 acre homestead and was used by the Ferris family and the neighboring community. There is historical evidence that it also contained the graves of freedmen and possibly Latino residents. The last person buried there was Rev. R.F. Taylor, 1901, an African American minister who lived nearby.

Due to vandalism over the past 100 years, all headstones have been removed, only a few names of those buried there are known. Genealogist Donald Payton (

apartheidmovementinnorthtexas/biography/don-payton/) has completed a one year research into finding the other people buried on the property, see list below. (<https://warrenferriscemetery.squarespace.com/what-we-do>) A marker naming all those found, including Warren Ferris, has been installed. It has been documented that Warren Ferris never enslaved African Americans.

Updated List of Those Persons Buried in the Ferris Cemetery - 2022 by Donald Payton,

Susanne Starling and Marilyn Kosanke

Bell family - 2 Afro-American females, sister Lucretia and infant daughter Lizzie of William "Bill"

Bell who worked for the Tuckers and/or the Caruths. The 1870 Census shows they worked for

Abe Freeman on land near Turtle Creek.

George T. Boyette - June 10, 1843 - July 29, 1903

Boyette infant - 1886-1886

Elizabeth Hatfield Chenault - May 9, 1820 - Sept. 12, 1858 - died of typhoid fever

Chenault infant - 1858 - typhoid fever

Lucy Jane Sage Chenault - 1838-1863

Wesley Marshal Chenault - 1819 -1896. Probably buried in Ferris Cemetery

Frederick M. Dean - 1810 - Sept. 17, 1867

Benjamin Dye - 1793 - July 20. 1852

Sarah Cozear Dye - 1798 (or 1801) - May 24,1879

Emily Ferris - Aug. 16, 1848 - Apr. 15, 1853

Price Ferris - 1862 - July 6, 1867 - kicked by a horse

Sarah Frances Moore Ferris - Sept. 1, 1829 - Mar. 21, 1869 - died after childbirth

Warren Angus Ferris - Dec. 26, 1810 - Feb. 8, 1873

Warren "Bud" Ferris, Jr. - Mar. 8, 1844 - Aug. 7, 1847 - 1st burial in cemetery

William Ferris - Dec. 13, 1850 - July 12, 1866

Jennie Allis Herndon - July 24, 1880 - June 16, 1899

Clarence Linden Pemberton - Oct. 25, 1867 - July 26, 1869

Louisa Jane Ferris Rutledge - 1858 - 1886. Probably buried in Ferris Cemetery

Daniel Harrison Sage - Nov. 5, 1802 - Feb. 10, 1866

Jane Dye Sage - Jan. 17, 1816 - 1892

Lucy Sage - year of birth? - 1863

Charles T. Tabor - Nov. 10, 1878 - Oct. 8, 1878. Same as infant Tabor.

Rev. Robert F. Taylor - Aug. 22, 1867 - Apr. 11, 1901

Robert T. Taylor - (1842-1906). Farmer who owned land on White Rock Creek, Father of R. F.

Questionable, possible burials in Ferris Cemetery:

Kuben Kirby - dates unknown, worked for the Caruth family.

Perhaps Sarah Sage, Mary Sage, Jeff Sage, James Henry Chenault.

Arwood children, two children, no dates

J.M. or J. W. Tucker - dates unknown



“

The Prairies are boundless and present a most beautiful appearance being

extremely fertile and crowned with flowers of every hue.”

— Warren Angus Ferris, Quote from Land is the Cry!: Warren Angus Ferris, Pioneer Texas Surveyor and Founder of Dallas County, by historian Susanne Starling

FERRIS CEMETERY ACHIEVEMENTS & ONGOING PLANS

Ultimate Goal

In our third year as a 501C3, we have guided four other historic cemeteries in the process of becoming non-profits and developing native landscape plans for the benefit of wildlife. We provide a template for other neighborhoods to establish wildlife habitats as a means of honoring those buried in historic cemeteries across the state.

“It is estimated that there are roughly 15,000 + cemeteries in Texas. There are have roughly 5,000 historic cemeteries locations mapped in our Texas Historic Sites Atlas. Based on feedback from our county historical commissions, we believe about one-third of these have no caretakers responsible for their care.”

Carlynn Copeland Hammons, Cemetery Preservation Program Specialist, Texas Historical Commission

Current Status

- State Historic Cemetery Designation
- State historical marker present
- No historic headstones on-site
- 1980 SMU archeological survey
- Numerous artifacts and field-stones found

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.....Dallas Native Wildlife.....

Barred owls, Cut-Leaf Engelmann Daisy, Box Turtle, American Beauty Berry tree, Red-breast Hummingbird

All content © Friends of the Warren Ferris Cemetery 2020.

501C3 EIN #: 84-3868043

Thank you to our neighborhood kids & parents for their time to be in our photos: Xavier, Vivienne, Mason & mom, Melissa; Lilian & mom, Dana, Mathew and dad, Aaron.