

FRIENDS



OF GUADALUPE RIVER STATE PARK
HONEY CREEK SNA



FALL NEWSLETTER 2021

A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Come on out - the birding is GREAT

by Linda Gindler

Fall is on the way. Plentiful spring and summer rains have left behind a bounty of grass seeds and berries just waiting for the arrival of winter avian residents. They will arrive slowly over the fall months, but while we wait there are plenty of year-round residents to enjoy. One family that is active throughout the year are the Jays.

The jays are a colorful, rowdy, mischievous and aggressive bird family. Like their cousins (crows and ravens) they are known for their intelligence. Of the eleven jay species in North America the Park enjoys two. You will undoubtedly hear one before you see it as the family is known for their loud raucous squawks. But the jay family are also skillful mimics. While they can mimic a variety of birds, they prefer mimicking larger avian predators. In the Park that typically comes out sounding like a red-shouldered hawk. A very useful skill when you want to clear a feeder of smaller birds—did I mention they are intelligent.

Jays have a varied diet including grains, fruits, insects, frogs, lizards, eggs, and even young of other birds. They have a remarkable memory allowing them to cache acorns and nuts in dozens of locations for retrieval months later when food is scarce. They all have a stout allpurpose beak that they use as a hammer and probe. No nut is too hard to crack for this bird.



Woodhouse Scrub-jay (photo by John Prentice)

While you explore the Park, the first jay to seek out is the Woodhouse Scrub-jay – a Park rock star! The Woodhouse occurs in the western part of Texas as well as five nearby western states making it a must-see bird for visitors from the east. Until recently they were called “western scrub-jay” and the species included birds along the Pacific coast.

Further study of the Pacific coast birds revealed differences in ecology, morphology, genetics, and vocalizations so the species was split in 2016 and now called



Blue jay (photo by John Prentice)

California Scrub-jay (Pacific coast states) and Woodhouse Scrub-jay (interior western states). The Woodhouse is 11-12” sized crestless jay. Adults are light blue and gray on the back with a grayish belly. The Woodhouse calls the park home year-round. You might encounter one anywhere in the Park but try the Day Use Area as they are known to frequent the Woodland Blind. They often sit higher in trees. Mating pairs stay together year-round.

The other Park jay is the Blue Jay. The Blue Jay has a much more expansive range covering from Texas north into Canada and eastward to the Atlantic coast. Blue Jays are about the same size as Woodhouse Scrub-jays, but they have a bright blue back, crest and black necklace. They are not as common as the Woodhouse in the Park, but you can encounter them any season especially in the Winter or Spring. Interestingly, the two jays don't seem to like each other and when you see them together, they are usually quarreling.

If you encounter a jay, take a few minutes to observe its behavior. They can be loud aggressive bullies around a food source and their territories. Other times they act as the resident security force for small birds as they warn of predators. They actively pester owls, hawks, snakes, and cats by dive bombing them and screeching out warnings. An amazing thing to watch.

So, head on over to the Park and look for a jay and other birds too. You won't be disappointed as Mother Nature is always a delight to watch. To learn more about birds in the Park, pick up a birding checklist at the entry ranger station or Discovery Center. Watch the park calendar and join in on a birding program. Or take a seat at the Woodland Blind in the

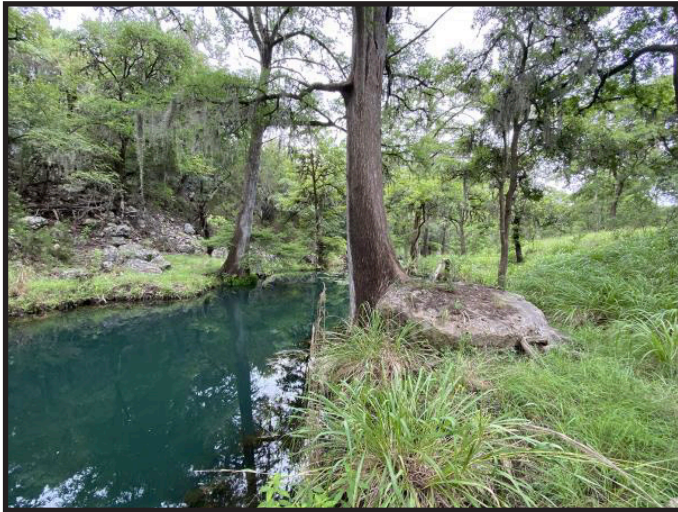


New Savannah Blind as of 8/2021 – a work in progress (Photo by Linda Gindler)

Day Use Area for some quiet time. And watch for progress on the new Savannah Blind located along the Painted Bunting Trail. The new blind is funded by the Friends and is being built by volunteers.

Dealin' Rock: How Honey Creek SNA Came To Be

by Mackenzie Brown and Charleen Moore



Dealin' Rock on the bank of Honey Creek (July 8, 2021)
Photo by C. Mackenzie Brown

Lady Bird Johnson easily hopped up onto the large, flat limestone rock nestled into the roots of a large bald cypress on the bank of one of the most scenic stretches of Honey Creek. She was one of many such visitors that Andrew "Andy" Sansom, then Executive Director of the Texas Nature Conservancy (TNC) back in 1984, had brought to Honey Creek in search of donations for the purchase of this pristine creek and almost 2,000 acres of ranchland. Andy had also chosen the rock for the site of sensitive negotiations between the Conservancy and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), then headed by Charles "Dicky" Travis, the Executive Director. Because of this activity, Duncan Muckleroy, superintendent of the brand-new Guadalupe River State Park at the time, coined the term, "Dealin' Rock," now also known as "Negotiation Rock." Lady Bird had been an intensely interested follower of the negotiations. Her well-known concern for conservation had already been demonstrated in the role she played in the State's purchase of Enchanted Rock. The TNC had also bought that property from a private individual back in 1978, later selling it to the State. History was repeating itself.

As one might expect, the negotiations were mainly about money. The TNC in 1984 was in a real predicament, as they were in debt to the tune of \$2 million. In 1981 they had borrowed \$3 million from the national Nature Conservancy's special emergency fund to purchase one of eighteen unprotected plant communities in the US, specifically some 1,825 acres of Ashe Juniper-Oak Savannah, an ecosystem occurring only in Texas, located some 30 miles north of San Antonio (Paris News, January 11, 1981, p. 26). The loan, with interest, was due at the end of 1984.

The TNC had bought the land from W.O. Bartle, Jr., a non-resident investor from Nueces County. Bartle in turn had bought the land in 1973 from the heirs of the Doeppenschmidt-Weidner Ranch. The heirs, despite having no mortgages on the land, could not afford the debt incurred in borrowing money to pay the federal estate taxes of \$51,000 and the state taxes of \$3,000 when their parents, Otto (d. 1961) and Meta Weidner (d. 1971) died (Martha Doty Freeman 2002, 35-36).

The TNC's motivation for purchase of the Bartle property was in line with the mission of the national Nature Conservancy. The national organization and its state branches seek out for purchase unique sites that contain species and habitats that are not protected elsewhere, or that simply occur nowhere else. Honey Creek, as reporter Dyanne Fry noted back in 1982, shelters the Honey Creek blind salamander (an endangered species) in the spring that emerges from Honey Creek Cave, the source of the creek itself. Further, "Species found along the length of the creek include the endangered Guadalupe Bass and the Texas shiner, Cagle's map turtle and the four-lined skink. Dwarf palmettoes grow along the bank, and the threatened golden-cheeked warbler flits through the baldcypress [sic], sycamore and box elder trees that shade the creek. A rare combination, according to conservancy records" (New Braunfels Herald Zeitung, May 23, 1982, p. 14). The property was thus to become the poster child for a nature preserve: the new name for the ranch was the Honey Creek Preserve.

The Conservancy goals include not only finding and purchasing vanishing ecosystems, but also restoring them "for the education and enjoyment of future generations" (New Braunfels Herald Zeitung, February 20, 1983, p. 13). We see this in action several months later, in February, 1983, when Luke Thompson, caretaker of the newly purchased land and living with his wife in the old Doeppenschmidt ranch house, oversaw a crew of volunteers in removing barbed wire fences and uprooting hundreds of fence posts. The fences, grazing, and farming by the old ranchers had altered the natural habitat and Thompson was implementing a master plan to "'manage' the ecosystem back to what it was originally—a juniper-oak savannah."

The national Nature Conservancy's emergency fund had allowed for the quick purchase of the Doeppenschmidt-Weidner Ranch, before Bartle could seek other buyers. The TNC started fund-raising immediately, on January 8, 1981, just one day after Bartle conferred title to the Conservancy by an affidavit executed on January 7 (Comal County Deed Record 304:871-877). But repaying the loan proved to be quite a challenge. When Sansom became Executive Director of TNC in 1982, he inherited the fund-raising efforts and began inviting prominent politicians, influential leaders, and wealthy potential donors to tour the Honey Creek property. These efforts included trips to Dealin' Rock by Lady Bird Johnson, mentioned above, Edwin "Ed" L. Cox (from Dallas), Tim and Karen Hixon (from San Antonio), Jan Jarboe Russell (biographer of Lady Bird Johnson, reporter for Texas Monthly), and Belton Kleberg (B.K.) Johnson (San Antonio rancher and part owner of the Hyatt Regency, Fairmont Hotel, and other real estate investments). For another example, a "motley group of visitors" (in the words of reporter Dyanne Fry), consisting of the Board of Governors for the national Nature Conservancy, came from all over the US on the weekend of May 22-23, 1982 to get a first-hand look at the ranch, carrying cameras, binoculars, and birding and wild flower field guides (New Braunfels Herald Zeitung, May 23, 1982, p. 1).

By the fall of 1983, however, the TNC project at the Honey Creek Preserve seemed lost, with just over a year to go before the loan was due. Paul Burka, editor of the Texas Monthly column, "State Secrets" (October, 1983, p. 256), noted that "Texans love the land and hate the government. That explains why so few of Texas' natural areas are preserved as state parkland. What it doesn't explain, though, is why private efforts to save the land have met with so little success." He then bemoaned "the sad case of Honey Creek Ranch [the

Dealin' Rock: How Honey Creek SNA Came To Be

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Weidner-Doeppenschmidt Ranch, not to be confused with the Honey Creek Ranch owned by Terry and Ronnie Urbanczyk], 1,825 acres of pristine Hill Country." He noted that the TNC had only raised \$1 million since 1981, comparing the TNC results unfavorably with those of the California state organization, and concluding with the question, "What's wrong with Texas?" Such dismal prospects clearly weighed on the mind of Andy Sansom.

By the end of the year, however, there was a bit more optimism. As Dyanne Fry reported (*New Braunfels Herald Zeitung*, Dec. 11, 1983, p. 2): "The Texas Nature Conservancy's Honey Creek Preserve isn't finished by a long shot, and it isn't paid for either.... Still, a mood of optimism prevailed there last Saturday [December 10], as the Gulf Oil Corporation dished up steak dinners for the people who have given time and money for the project thus far." But the situation was actually close to desperate. The deadline for repayment of the loan was looming ever closer, and \$2.1 million was still due to the national organization. In June of 1984, Luke Thompson, manager of the Preserve, noted that "The money that we thought was going to come never materialized" (*Odessa American*, June 10, 1984, p. 25). He further noted that the TNC had "spent several hundred dollars for building improvements." To be sure, individuals and corporations had donated some \$800,000 to \$900,000 in Texas, and a challenge grant from a New York foundation offered \$2 million for every \$1 million the conservancy could raise (*Galveston Daily News*, June 14, 1984, p. 18). But how to raise the remaining \$2.1 million? How could Honey Creek be saved?

Early in 1984, the *Caldwell Burleson Star* (February 2, 1984, p. 14) reported that "explorers crawling around a recently discovered cave near the creek found a new variety of blind cave salamander." In June, the *Odessa American* (June 10, 1984, p. 25) reported: "a tiny salamander discovered in a cave deep under the [Honey Creek] nature preserve now may be a key in its continued preservation." Apparently, surveys of the surface flora and fauna had not discovered any whose rarity would merit government protection. But the blind salamander might. As Thompson noted: "When we discovered the salamanders, the conservancy realized we would not ever be able to have an open-market sale, with no restrictions on the property. He continued, "There are some things worth saving here" (*Baytown Sun*, June 10, 1984, p. 11). As the *Port Arthur News* headlined the next day, "Blind salamander may save a ranch" (*Port Arthur News*, June 11, 1984, p. 16).

In the end, it seems that the blind salamander was not the critical factor. Rather, it was especially the efforts of Andy Sansom that brought about the successful preservation of the Honey Creek Ranch. He worked diligently to strengthen relations with TPWD, with the idea of having the State purchase the Ranch from the TNC. At first, TPWD showed little interest in the property as it was too expensive, being valued at \$6 million. But Andy had a plan. He was aware of the rapidly escalating land appreciation in the Texas Hill Country in the early 1980's and realized that IRS rules (section 170), "Charitable Contributions and Gifts," allowed a landowner to take the difference between selling price (at less than market value) to a non-profit charity or government entity and the market price as a tax-deductible donation.

The plan, then, was to find a buyer for the Ranch for \$3.5

million, (paying off the TNC debt), who would then sell it to TPWD at that price but take the appreciated excess value as a donation of 2.5 million. A second part of Andy's plan involved Duck Stamps: the money earned from the sale of the stamps was to be used by the State for purchasing and protecting wetlands. There happened to be a coastal wetlands at the mouth of the Brazos River, owned by Conoco, Dow, and Exxon, that they had bought for \$3.5 million to build a super port there, but the project had failed. The property was now worth \$6 million and they wanted to sell. Andy arranged for an exchange of the coastal wetlands for the Honey Creek Ranch, using Duck Stamp money to buy the wetlands and allowing TPWD to purchase the Ranch, worth \$6 million, for \$3.5 million. The State could not resist. Thus, in April of 1985, the *Eagle Pass News Guide* (April 18, 1985, p. 4) reported that the TPWD Commission, on March 13 in a public meeting, authorized the Department to purchase two natural areas, the Honey Creek Preserve, and the Devil's Sinkhole.

Finally, we find the following report, from the *New Braunfels Herald Zeitung*, October 6, 1985: "A tract of Texas Hill Country in its natural state officially became state property Friday afternoon [October 4] at a ceremony on Honey Creek Ranch Lady Bird Johnson was one of the dignitaries present as the ranch changed hands from the Texas Nature Conservancy to the Texas Parks Department." The celebration, culminating in the sale of the old ranch by the Texas Nature Conservancy (TNC) to the State, capped off years of struggle to conserve this special land and protect its unique ecosystems from destruction due to the exploding urban-suburban development of the Hill Country.

In summing up the impact of the Nature Conservancy's ownership of the Honey Creek Ranch, historian Martha Doty-Freeman writes: "The Conservancy's ownership laid the groundwork for both the benefits and the controversies that came to characterize management of the state natural area." She further notes that the promotional literature put out by the Conservancy in the early 1980s described the property as Edenic and a "natural treasure." Writers frequently used phrases such as "natural treasure," a "virgin landscape," likening it to a Germanic romantic-utopian paradise. They further enthused that despite some overgrazing and farming, the area was a "sea of grass" and an "oak/juniper savanna" that was "unique 'in the whole world.'" Such emphasis on the pristine nature of the land was at the expense of preserving the historic structures and landscapes, she concludes. But on the positive side, it was helpful in fund-raising efforts, creating an "enthusiastic response of the public, who participated in tours of the property." Another positive outcome was "the formation of an active volunteer group that evolved into the present-day Friends of Guadalupe River, Honey Creek, Inc." (Martha Doty Freeman 2002, 37)

Next time, we will report on new activity at Dealin' Rock.

Reference

Freeman, Martha Doty, "Historical Background," in L. McNatt, et al., *Archeological Survey and History of Honey Creek State Natural Area, Comal County, Texas*, 2002.

Guadalupe River State Park's First Ever 4th of July Campground Parade!

By Holly Platz, Park Interpreter

On Sunday, July 4th, the park held what will hopefully become an annual tradition: a patriotic parade around the Cedar Sage campground loops!



Kids decked out their bikes with red, white, and blue streamers, and clipped playing cards to the spokes of their bicycle wheels for a “clickety-clack” sound as they pedaled. Those who were walking instead of riding bikes helped toss candy to the campers who gathered outside their tents or RVs to cheer on the parade. We even had dogs dress up for the occasion! Our dedicated group of parade marchers and bike riders made the entire circuit around the three small campground loops, totaling about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile.

Thank you to the Friends of Guadalupe River State Park/Honey Creek State Natural Area for supporting this parade, and to the volunteers that day who helped with all the set-up, decorating, and more!



Prescribe Yourself Some Nature

by Thea Platz

In our last newsletter I was hopeful that we were turning the corner on the pandemic and yet things are not as far along as we had hoped. Plenty of other things are happening in the world right now to cause concern as well. These are certainly stressful times and there is no better cure for stress than nature. So prescribe yourself, your friends and family some nature immersion soon and there is no better place than right here at Guadalupe River State Park.

These hot days are begging for you to take a dip in the cool waters of the Guadalupe River, have a picnic shaded by the branches of a deep-rooted tree or enjoy the night sky from your cozy campsite. Hot or not, there are plenty of opportunities to enjoy nature. The Friends of Guadalupe River State Park / Honey Creek State Natural Area (Friends) are always busy creating activities for you to enjoy throughout

the year. Nature Hikes in the pristine Honey Creek State Natural Area are available at 9 a.m. every Saturday, and an additional tour is available at 9:30 a.m. on select Saturdays (all by reservation). Special themed hikes for groups are also available. The Saturday morning nature hikes begin at the historic Rust House, with the help of the Friends group and park staff much needed repairs and refurbishing have been done and are set to continue in and around the special homestead. In order to offer a self-guided option during the pandemic we began offering a story trail for families to enjoy as they make their way to the scenic overlook. We invite you to read the pages of Finding Wild by Megan Wagner Lloyd as you enjoy the shaded trail ad-

acent to the Discovery Center. In the Discovery Center volunteers assist our youngest visitors in exploring the fascinating items and interactive displays found there, as well as in checking out the junior back packs loaded with tools for continued exploring in the park. The Friends are organizing a great event coming up on October 23rd, the Monarch and Friends Pollinator Fiesta, there will be activities for all ages to enjoy including speakers, games, crafts and more. We have helped to make the Woodland Wildlife Blind more accessible so that even more people can now enjoy the antics of the beautiful birds and other wildlife that visit there. The Woodland Blind is located just off the back side of the day-use parking area. The Friends have been hard at work creating a new viewing blind that will be in the savanna area. Having this blind in a different type of habitat will attract many more species for park visitors to enjoy. It is our goal to provide the best experience possible to our park visitors and to support the needs and activities of the park and park staff. Your volunteer and financial support is critical and so appreciated, nothing we do would be possible without it!!!

Renew or become a member Make a donation today.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to Barrett Durst our former park superintendent. We wish you the very best in your new position at Inks Lake State Park. Thank you for your leadership, support and friendship!

Interpreter Update

by Holly Platz, Park Interpreter

Fall is one of my favorite seasons at the park. The weather finally starts to cool down, the first hint of yellow begins to show through the green leaves, and the wildlife begins to change right around us. In mid-October, our state insect, the Monarch Butterfly, travels through Texas on its journey to the mountains of Mexico, where it will spend the winter. Fall-blooming flowers give the park a splash of bright color, in addition to supplying Monarchs and other pollinators some much-needed nectar.

We have some fun activities planned at the park this fall, including Night Hikes, Bat Walks, and now that the weather is cooling off, guided nature hikes at the Bauer Unit.

Make sure to always check our online calendar to get the latest details on park events, including any updates or cancellations. As we all know, things can change quickly, and the health and safety of our visitors, volunteers, and park staff will always be our highest priority.

Check our calendar here: https://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/guadalupe-river/park_events or just do an online search for “Guadalupe River State Park events”.

Discovery Center:

Bring your family out and take a closer look at the park’s nature through unique interactive exhibits and hands-on displays. Check out a FREE Junior Ranger backpack with tools like magnifying lenses, binoculars, sketchbook, and more to make your own discoveries on the trail! Also, make sure to check out our brand-new Book Nook when you visit! Sink into a comfy beanbag chair, read one of our many kids’ storybooks to your heart’s content, and check out our terrific selection of animal puppets to play with! The Discovery Center is always open 10 am to 4 pm on Saturdays and Sundays, and open 12 to 4 pm on Thursdays and Fridays.

Save the Date!

All our events are posted on our online

calendar each month (link above), but here are some of our recurring activities:

Honey Creek Nature Hike:

Join experienced Honey Creek interpretive guides to discover the nature and history of Honey Creek State Natural Area. This hike is sponsored by the Friends of Guadalupe River State Park/Honey Creek State Natural Area. Come experience the beauty of this protected area, and find out why it’s important.

- Every Saturday at 9 am, with additional weekend dates and times posted online – Registration is currently required for this program; check the park online calendar (link above) for details on hike dates and how to sign up.

Star Parties with San Antonio Astronomical Association:

The experienced and knowledgeable members of the San Antonio Astronomical Association come out to the park every month to share their knowledge and their telescopes with park visitors! Join us as we look at the stars, moon, planets, nebulas, and more!

- Saturdays: September 11th, October 16th, November 13th, and December 11th (winter and spring dates coming soon). Drop in anytime during the 2-hour star party; no registration needed. Times vary based on sunset; check the online calendar for details!

Scenic Overlook Nature Hike:

Every Thursday, 9 to 10:30 am. Join us every Thursday for an easy walk to the beautiful Scenic Overlook! Along the way we’ll discover all types of nature. All ages welcome!

Interpreter Update

by Holly Platz, Park Interpreter

Other ways to connect with the park’s nature:

- Make sure to check out the latest installment of the Story Trail, our park’s version of a StoryWalk®. This fall we are featuring the children’s book, Finding Wild by Megan Wagner Lloyd. The Friends of Guadalupe River State Park/Honey Creek SNA sponsor this exciting self-guided program in partnership with Northeast Independent School District. The StoryWalk® Project was created by Anne Ferguson of Montpelier, VT and developed in collaboration with the Kellogg-Hubbard Library. Storywalk® is a registered service mark owned by Ms. Ferguson.
- If you have kids in your family, make sure to pick up their FREE Junior Ranger activity book! This is a great way for your family to explore the nature of the park on your own. Once a child has completed the number of activities based on their age, stop by the Discovery Center and they will earn their Junior Ranger badge! (You can also download the Junior Ranger activity book—just type “TPWD Junior Ranger” into your favorite search engine and you’ll find it right away).
- Follow the park’s Instagram Instagram.com/guadalupeiverstatepark and Facebook Facebook.com/guadalupeiverstatepark to see park updates and news, as well as fun and educational videos, photos and stories!

A note to all park volunteers:

Thanks to all of you, both new volunteers and returning, who do so much for the park. Whether you are filling bird feeders at the bird blind; talking to kids at the Discovery Center; cleaning a campsite to get it ready for the next visitor; or doing one of many other tasks that often go unseen—the park would not be the same without you. You make the park better; you help make park visitors’ experiences more meaningful, and you encourage and support park employees with all you do. Thank you.

2022 Membership Dues Are Now Payable

Become A Friend / Renew Your Friendship Today:

Memberships at all levels directly support Guadalupe River State Park /Honey Creek State Natural Area. You will be kept up to date on all the upcoming programs, events and park news as well as information on volunteer opportunities through our quarterly newsletter and park updates. As a Friends member you and your family will also have access to member only events.

Fill out the section below and mail to the address below:

Name(s): _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip: _____ Email: _____

Membership Type: _____ New Member _____ Renewal

Student or Senior (over 62) Friend \$20.____, Individual Friend \$25.____,

Family Friend \$40.____,

Best Friend Forever (lifetime level) \$1000. +____ Other____

If you are also interested in helping the park through volunteering, please tell us your areas of interest: _____

Make checks payable to Friends of GR/HC, Inc. Mail to:

3350 Park Road 31, Spring Branch, TX 78070

Friends of Guadalupe River/Honey Creek, Inc. is a 501(c) 3 organization.

All donations are tax deductible. Membership dues renew in January.

We will not share your information or clutter your inbox.

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Director / Co-Historian

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Charleen Moore

Director at Large

Ryan Bass

**Friends of Guadalupe River
and Honey Creek, Inc.**

3350 Park Road 31
Spring Branch, Texas 78070

We're on the web!

<https://friendsofgrhc.org>

**The Friends of Guadalupe River and
Honey Creek, Inc. is a
non-profit organization working with
Guadalupe River State Park and
Honey Creek State Natural Area.**

**The "Friends" meet monthly at the Park.
Please join us on the first
Thursday at 5:30 pm.
And bring a friend!**