

FRIENDS



OF GUADALUPE RIVER STATE PARK HONEY CREEK SNA



**Reminder:
Annual Meeting/
Holiday Party
Saturday, December 6**

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2025

A Message from the President

by Bob Morris

Howdy Folks,

I recently led a walk down to Honey Creek. Seeing the leaves of the Cedar Elms turning gold and the Bald Cypress turning that reddish brown with the eastern sun pouring down through the leaves was quite a sight. It was quite fabulous seeing all those colors alongside the crystal-clear Honey Creek.

A few weeks ago, we spotted a healthy Cotton Mouth a few steps away on the bank. It was not very interested in us and quickly slithered away into the creek and calmly rested on a bald cypress knee on the opposite bank. Personally, I am not all that fond of snakes, but I do enjoy watching them swimming in Honey Creek. I confess I imagine seeing them before they see me, but I know they will always sense me before I sense them.

Bob Hansen, one of our Honey Creek guides, spotted and photographed an unusual but very small fossil on the trail to Honey Creek (see photo at bottom of next column). In all the years we have been giving walks at Honey Creek, Bob is the only one who has spotted it. Our resident geologist and fellow Honey Creek guide, Ed Van Reet, suspects it is a colonial coral of the Cretaceous Period. I do not know how rare these are, but it was pretty cool to see it on the Honey Creek trail.

After long discussions with TPWD, the Friends Group is remodeling the interior of the Rust House. We will be replacing the toilet, sink, some stained flooring, doorknobs, and adding wallpaper that once graced the house. All will be period pieces except the commode, and we will be adding a grab bar. When possible, all will be period pieces. Superintendent Brandon Lopes-Baca has graciously agreed to have the maintenance crew do all the work as time allows.

Another exciting project we are working on with Park Staff is to have Guadalupe River SP compliant with Dark Skies. This is a 2-to-3-year project. Upon completion, Guadalupe River will be the first Park in Texas to be fully dark sky compliant.

On behalf of the Board, I wish to thank each of you for your continued, generous support of the Friends of Guadalupe River State Park / Honey Creek State Natural Area.

Please join us for our annual meeting and dinner that will be held at Honey Creek Ranch on December 6 (for details, see p. 7 of this Newsletter).

New Members of the Park Staff

by James Kennedy and Marlin Horton

The new **Lead Ranger for the Park, James Kennedy**, tells us a little about himself:

"I am thankful and blessed to be a part of the team here at Guadalupe River SP & Honey Creek SNA. I grew up in San Antonio mainly and graduated from Texas State University with a degree in Wildlife Biology. I actually started my almost 14-year career with TPWD here at GRSP/HCSNA as an Intern in 2010 and worked another summer as a Seasonal Maintenance Assistant. I then took a Maintenance Specialist position at Lake Corpus Christi SP and also served as their Safety Officer before moving to Garner SP as their Back-up



Utility Plant Operator. Excited and honored to take on the position of Lead Ranger, I can honestly say I am the man I am today because of TPWD. I look forward to a bright future and appreciate everyone's warm welcome to this wonderful team!"

Our new **Site Safety Officer (Maintenance III), Marlin Horton** gives us this short bio of himself:

"Born in Los Alamos NM, raised since 1997 in Granite Shoals TX, Marlin enlisted in the Marine Corps in 2001 as a Construction Equipment Mechanic, later commissioning as an Engineer Equipment Officer in 2010. After 24 years of honorable and faithful service, he retired with distinction, carrying forward the values of leadership and dedication. This December marks 20 years of marriage to his wife Lindsay, with whom he proudly raises three sons—Rylan (18), Barrett (16), and John (11). Outside of his professional and family life, Marlin enjoys fly fishing, smok'n meats, and exploring the art of pottery."

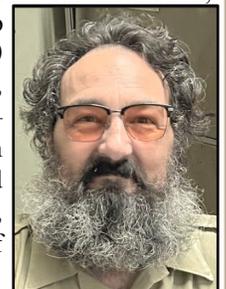


Fig. 1. Possible colonial coral, 110-116 million years old, about 1 inch in diameter.

Return of the Tonkawa

by Mackenzie Brown and Charleen Moore

Hiding in the dance lodge of the Tonkawas, the young Indian Agent Robert Neighbors who had lived with the tribe for a year in the 1840s, eagerly awaited the commencement of the sacred Wolf Dance. The dance, shrouded in secrecy, was forbidden for outsiders to see. He knew he was risking his life should he be discovered. To be sure, he had been concealed in a dark corner of the lodge by the Tonkawa chief himself, but the young Tonkawa warriors would have been outraged and lashed out violently.

Soon the agent heard growling and howling as some fifty Tonkawa warriors dressed in wolf skins came crawling into the dimly-lit lodge. The wolf-clad men began sniffing and scratching the ground, until one stopped and began digging into the earth. After a few minutes of excavating the ground, the warriors unearthed a live Tonkawa man, buried there shortly before in anticipation of the dance. The agent was incredulous. The warrior-wolves acted astonished and delighted to see this strange new creature that walked on two legs. They smelled and examined him for several minutes, until a council of elders was called to figure out what to do with this peculiar being—a human person.

At the same time, the man began to speak, protesting his abduction from the underworld where he had been happy and contented. The man feared he would starve or freeze to death in this higher world as he had no food or clothing. But the warrior-wolves refused to rebury the man, telling him instead that he must adopt the livelihood of the wolves themselves, going out into the wilderness and stealing or killing whatever food he could find. They gave him a bow and arrows, and finally admonished him that he must always wander, like wolves, from place to place, and never build a house or cultivate the soil, as this would lead to death. This first man, according to the traditions of the tribe, was the ancestor of the entire Tonkawa tribe. The Wolf Dance, then, is the mythic reenactment of the creation story of the Tonkawas (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. The Tonkawa Wolf Dance: Reenactment of the Tonkawa creation story. Engraving from Tonkawa Tribe of Oklahoma, "Tonkawa Tribal Creation Story," in *Tickanwa•tic: Informational Guide to the History and Culture of the Tonkawa Tribe*, 4.

The creation story explains the passionate adherence to their hunting and gathering mode of life, which they pursued throughout much of the Hill Country and surrounding regions. The Tonkawas were the main Indigenous tribe inhabiting the Hill Country in the modern period, since Europeans first came to Texas in the sixteenth century.

The name *Tonkawa* comes from the Waco language, meaning "they who come together." Their name thus points to the fact that the Tonkawas were not a single group of Native Peoples, but rather an amalgamation of peoples speaking, for the most part, a common tongue. The Tonkawa name for themselves, *Tickanwa•tic*, means "the real or genuine humans."

Tragedy soon befell these genuine humans at almost every step. Originally tolerated by the early Anglo settlers in Texas led by Stephen F.

Austin, because of their excellent tracking skills that helped the colonists track down and kill Native Americans, especially the coastal Karankawas and Comanches of the western plains, who opposed Anglo settlement. But once Texas became a part of the U.S. in 1845, both older settlers and European newcomers from the other states conveniently forgot or were ignorant of the former help of the Tonkawas. It was not long before cries of extirpation (relocation) or extermination of any Indigenous Peoples living in the state were echoing throughout Texas. And politicians catered to these ideas.

The motivation behind such a call is obvious: the settlers wanted the land that the Indigenous Peoples occupied. Countless negotiations were attempted to relocate the Natives in exchange for food and farming tools, but broken treaty after broken treaty followed. Meanwhile, Agent Neighbors was faced with a dilemma: he realized that the Tonkawas would be repeatedly hunted down by land-hungry Anglos, so extirpation, he came to believe, was the only realistic plan going forward. But he knew he would have an uphill battle in convincing the Tonkawas to relocate and adopt a sedentary lifestyle—their creation myth made clear that the Tonkawas would fiercely resist efforts by the US government to have the Tonkawas settle down and adopt a "civilized" way of life, tilling the soil as farmers. It is a sad irony of history that Neighbors, who had secretly witnessed the Wolf Dance, who was a passionate defender of the rights of the Tonkawas, should be the person who oversaw the relocation of the Tribe from their homeland in the Hill Country into north Texas and finally into Indian Territory (Figure 2).

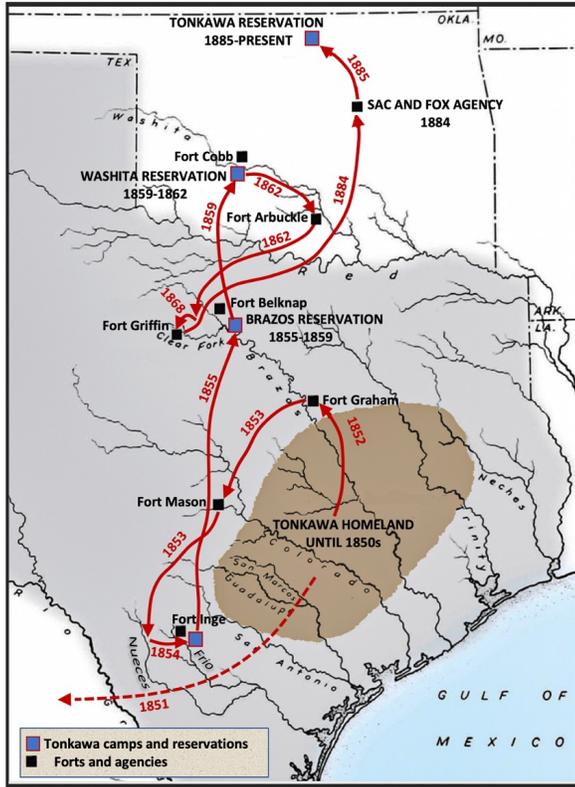


Fig. 2. Map showing removal of the Tonkawas from their homeland in the Hill Country and northeast to the Neches River, first into South Texas, then to the Brazos Reservation, and finally into Indian Territory, to the reservation that is their present home.

The initial removal of Tonkawas from Texas was completed on September 4, 1859. At this point, his mission completed, Neighbors resigned from the US Indian Service. Ten days later, on September 14, on his way back to his home in Texas, he met with an assassin’s bullet—his reward for his efforts in assisting the Tonkawas. Thus was fulfilled an unwitting prophecy he had written to his wife on May 17, 1859, indicating that “It is my destiny to sacrifice myself for others.”

How did Anglos, and Texas politicians, in particular, justify the extirpation of Indigenous Peoples from Texas? One European lawyer-philosopher late in the 18th century laid the intellectual groundwork for such policies: “Those nations...who inhabit fertile countries, but disdain to cultivate their lands and choose rather to live by plunder...deserve to be extirpated as savage and pernicious beasts” (Emer de Vattel, *The Laws of Nations*, 1792, Chapter 7, section 81). Half a century later, William Kennedy, who visited Texas in 1839 and served as British consul to the US in 1841, quoted de Vattel in his *The Rise, Progress, and Prospects of the Republic of Texas* (341-42, 1841), adding:

“The Divine command to ‘multiply and replenish the earth’—the necessities of over-populated countries—the law of social progress, which decrees the absorption or extermination of all stationary or regressive races—alike forbid their unsettled habitation in immense regions to be accounted a true and legal possession.”

The problem facing many Indigenous Peoples, especially hunters and gatherers, was that they had no way of establishing “legal” ownership to their traditional homeland. These wandering tribes had no concept of private property (they were often accused of being Communists!). They assumed that the land could not possibly belong to any individual.

A near-fatal blow to the traditional Tonkawa lifestyle was the passing of the Dawes Act on February 8, 1887. The official name of the Act is “*An Act to Provide for the Allotment of Lands in Severalty to Indians on the Various Reservations* (Statutes at Large 24, 388-91, NADP Document A1887). The cruelty of the Act lies in the seemingly bland expression, “the allotment of lands in severalty to Indians.” The term *severalty* refers to ownership of a property by a single individual, not by a community or tribe. As historian F. Todd Smith notes, “Supporters of the Dawes Act hoped that the allotment would force the Indians to end their ties to the tribe, realizing instead the virtues of individual ownership of private property” (F. Todd Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*, 249). By the 1930s, only about 36 Tonkawas survived, and tribal culture was almost extinct.

Today, 140 years after their final expulsion from the state, the Tonkawas of Oklahoma are returning to Texas. They were able to buy (back) 60 acres of Texas land that included Sugarloaf or Red Mountain near Gause TX, on December 12, 2023. Regarding this site, former Tonkawa chief Virginia Combrink commented back in 1994: “Sugarloaf Mountain was the spot where...a divine wolf turned a tortoise on its back and opened a hole in the earth where the Tonkawa people emerged. The tortoise was then transformed into Red Mountain....” The mountain looks like the hump of a tortoise. The Tonkawa president in 2023, Russell Martin, at the December 12 ceremony celebrating the purchase, declared, “We’re home.” Martin added, “You know we want to be a part of Texas. We know we’re from Texas, but we want to be part of the community and everything that goes on in Texas down here.”

Sixteen months later on April 26, 2025, at the base of Red Mountain, the Tonkawas celebrated their homecoming, reclaiming part of their ancient and sacred homeland. They invited fellow Texans of whatever ethnic background to come and dance and eat with them. The authors took up the invitation, traveled to Red Mountain, and shared in the dancing, chanting, and food that the Tonkawas provided for all the guests. Figure 3 shows Virginia Combrink and her niece, Princess Kaedyn Warrior, sharing native foods (fry-bread, beans, and corn soup) with Charleen Moore. For more photos of the celebration, see p. 6.



Fig. 3. Princess Kaedyn Warrior, Charleen Moore, and Virginia Combrink. Photo by Mackenzie Brown.

Where East Meets West: Meadowlarks in the Park

by Linda Gindler

And with the snap of our fingers, it's winter. Snow or temperatures below 30° don't happen every year and even if they do it is only for a few days making the park's change to winter a small event. But birds seem to know and are on the move. Summer rock stars like the Golden-cheeked Warbler, Painted Bunting, and Summer Tanager left months ago, a big clue to expect winter soon. One family to set your sights on this winter is meadowlarks.

With a name like meadowlark, you might think these birds are part of the lark family, but they are not. Despite a few similar color patterns to the Horned Lark, a true lark, meadowlarks are not larks. Instead, they are part of the Icterids family and closely related to blackbirds, cowbirds, orioles, and grackles. From October to March the park enjoys two species of meadowlarks, Eastern and Western. Mostly the two species stick to their respective eastern or western half of North America, but they do overlap in Texas including the park. Where their territories merge it is tricky to tell them apart even for experienced birders, so it is a good idea to study photos, drawings, and sound recordings before embarking on a meadowlark search (Figures 1 and 2).



Fig. 1. Eastern Meadowlark
Photo by Doris Brookens; Cornell Lab of Ornithology | Macaulay Library.



Fig. 2. Western Meadowlark
Photo by Alix d'Entremont; Cornell Lab of Ornithology | Macaulay Library.

In the field, the most reliable method of distinguishing the two is by voice. Meadowlarks are well known songsters with each species having its own unique sound. The Eastern Meadowlark song is a simple, flute-like series of whistles ending in a rapid high-pitched trill. The Western's song is a more complex series of warbles and whistles descending slightly at the end with a warbled trill. It is longer and more melodious. The Eastern Meadowlark call is a short harsh chatter and sometimes just a single sharp "*dzert*". The Western Meadowlark call is a low bell-like "*pluk*" or "*chupp*."

Listening to a few on-line recordings before starting your search is a big help. Another good aid is a birdsong app, such as Merlin (from Cornell Lab), which can sort out vocals in the field. A birdsong app literally turns your phone into a listening device that compares the sound to thousands of recordings to help identify it. And best of all it does not require playback in the field. If a bird is not vocalizing, you can still make an identification with careful binocular study. But be warned, physical characteristics do vary between individuals so you still may not be able to make a positive identification. Patience is your friend in this challenge, if you can make out two or more physical attributes you can be more confident in your identification.

First let's study the similarities between the two and how to know if you are looking at a meadowlark. Both are 9-10" birds about the size of an American Robin but chunkier with a shorter tail. Both have intricately patterned brown and black backs with a bright yellow breast and a black "V" shaped band across the upper breast. With a name like meadowlark, you might guess they love open grasslands and both species do. Think of fields, savannahs, and pastures when out looking. Neither is a fan of dense woodlands. Both like to forage on or near the ground using their long slender bills to grasp and probe for their favorite foods of grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, and seeds. They both perch on fence posts, utility wires, or the top of a bush where they sing and watch the surrounding area.



When disturbed both species take flight low over grasses with a series of quick flaps alternating with short glides. Both have white outer tail feathers easily spotted when flying (Figures 3 and 4). In the park, you will find them in the open savannah areas along trails such as Painted Bunting, Prairie, or Bamberger.



Fig. 3. **Western Meadowlark**
Photo by Fyn Kynd; Cornell Lab of Ornithology | Macaulay Library



Fig. 4. **Eastern Meadowlark**
Photo by Michael Stubblefield; Cornell Lab of Ornithology | Macaulay Library

Now that you know you are looking at a meadowlark you will need to study finer details to determine if it is eastern or western. First, look carefully at the moustache stripe area (i.e., from the lower bill sweeping down the neck). If there is a white line bordered with a yellow throat it is an Eastern Meadowlark. If the bird has a yellow moustache and throat, it is a Western Meadowlark. But individual birds of both species may have just a small white dot (or patch) at the base of the bill instead of a stripe and that could be either Eastern or Western. So yes, this is tricky.

Next check out the tail, sides, and flanks. Eastern Meadowlarks sport a wider white area on the outer tail feathers, a tail with a darker center, heavier barring on the tail, yellowish flanks, and heavier streaks on the sides. Western Meadowlarks also have white outer tail feathers, but the white is narrower, a tail with a lighter center, narrower tail barring, whitish flanks, and lighter streaks on the sides. Other differences include that Eastern Meadowlarks tend to prefer taller grass while Westerns favor shorter. Admittedly, these are subtle differences, and you will need to look at several birds before you get the hang of vague terms such as “darker,” “lighter,” “wider,” “narrower,” “taller,” and “shorter.”

Learning to tell the differences between Eastern and Western Meadowlarks is a rewarding experience on your birding journey. So, head on over to the park to work on meadowlark identification. With their striking pattern and beautiful vocals, they are a joy to encounter. If you want to learn more about the park’s natural wonders, join a ranger lead program or hike. Contact the park for current details or watch for updates on Facebook. Take a seat in one of the two wildlife viewing blinds for up close looks. The Savannah Wildlife Viewing Blind located along the Persimmon Path is an ideal location for spotting meadowlarks. Hope to see you soon at the park.



Honey Creek Ranch Update

by Gilbert Martinez, Site Superintendent, Honey Creek SNA

You may have noticed some construction along PR 31 on the way to Guadalupe River State Park. What you are witnessing is the construction of the day use area of Honey Creek SNA! This project is part of the 515-acre expansion that was acquired in 2023 to help protect Honey Creek and associated habitat. Construction started in late September 2025 and will run through late summer 2026. The day use area will include a small pavilion and restrooms along with an ADA trail and 2 large trail loops that will meander through grasslands, hillsides, and shaded oak/juniper motts. This trail experience will showcase the beauty of the mosaic of habitat that is Honey Creek SNA to the trail user. These trails will not provide access to the actual creek, but we will continue to provide that opportunity through the weekend guided walks led by the GRSP/HCSNA friends group.



Future driveway to trailhead in Honey Creek Ranch.



Future parking lot at the trailhead.



A future trail in Honey Creek Ranch.

Reflections Past and Present (continued from p. 3 - Return of the Tonkawa)



Virginia Combrink (center) joins in the Scalp Dance.



Tonkawa women preparing fry bread.



The Tonkawa Seal. The red earth and red hill represent the birthplace of the Tonkawa. The sacred pipe symbolizes spiritual connectedness to the Creator. The sacred water bird reveals the rising up of the spirit and flesh of the Tonkawa. The rising sun represents a new dawning of the Tonkawa. (Summary from [https://tonkawatribe.com/language-culture/.](https://tonkawatribe.com/language-culture/))



Tonkawas and guests participating in the Scalp Dance.



Fry bread in basket ready to serve guests.



Tonkawas stepping to resounding drumbeat.



Tonkawa preparing corn soup and beans.



View of farmlands from top of Red Mountain.



Dear Friends and Park Staff,

You are cordially invited to attend the Annual Meeting / Holiday Party on the evening of December 6 for the Friends of Guadalupe River State Park / Honey Creek State Natural Area. Come join us and meet others who have liked-minded interests in supporting our Park and State Natural Area. **If you plan to attend please let us know the number in your party by November 30**, so we can plan appropriately. **Reply directly to Dave Kibler at djkib@gvtc.com.**

The venue is the Honey Creek Ranch Park Barn off HWY 46. Directions are given below.

Please plan to arrive around 6 PM to socialize with fellow Members, Park Staff, and local volunteers, and participate in the Silent Auction. The Gate will open at 5:30 PM. The Annual Meeting will begin promptly at 6:40 PM. The agenda is provided below.

At 7 PM All Friends Members, Park Staff, and Guests are welcome to break bread and enjoy Smokey Mo's BBQ with all the fixins'. Bring a dessert for all to enjoy if you wish. (BYOB is allowed.) And lastly feel free to participate in our Silent Auction. If you would like to submit a gift for the Silent Auction, please contact John Lack directly at jclack@aol.com. We hope to see you there, but if not, I want to express our genuine appreciation on behalf of the Board for your generous support this year as we look forward to an outstanding 2026.

Wishing You and Your Family a Safe and Joyful Holiday Season!

Bob Morris

President, Friends GRSP / HC SNA

210-505-2936

bxxmorris@frontier.com

Directions to Honey Creek Ranch Party Barn

- Pretty easy to find. It lies on the North Side of HWY 46 east of Park Road 31 (Guadalupe River State Park). Big Entrance Gate with Stone Gate Posts ... the only one in the area.
- Entrance lies about 1.1 miles east of Blanco Rd and HWY 46, and 5.9 miles west of HWY 281 & HWY 46.
- Once you enter just travel the Paved Road. No left or right turns. When you get down to the bottom you will see a parking attendant.
- If you or your passengers have special needs, no problem. The parking attendant will assist.
- Any issues Text:

Bob Morris – 210-505-2936

Ed Van Reet – 432-553-8806

Mary Habib – 210-859-3429

Annual Meeting Agenda

December 6, 2025, 6:40 PM – Honey Creek Ranch

- Welcome – Bob Morris, President
- Remarks from Brandon Lopes-Baca – Complex Superintendent
- Acknowledge Current Board Members & Transitions – Bob Morris
- Call to Order – Bob Morris
- Determine Quorum – Lucy Cruz Hudson, Secretary
- FY 2025 Financial Review & Projects– Mary Habib, Treasurer
- Election to Appoint Wendy Harter to the Board – Ed Van Reet, Vice President
- FY 2026 Budget / Initiatives – Bob Morris
- Adjourn

Friends of Guadalupe River/ Honey Creek, Inc.

3350 Park Road 31
Spring Branch, Texas 78070

Visit us:



<https://www.facebook.com/share/18hSKnam1t/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

Visit us on the web:
<https://friendsofgrhc>

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

The Board Members of the Friends meet monthly, usually on the third Thursday at 2:00 p.m. at Honey Creek Ranch.

To request to attend the Board Meeting, contact us at:
friendsofgrhc@gmail.com

To submit articles for publication in the Friends Newsletter, email them to one of the Co-Editors:
Mackenzie Brown, mbrown@trinity.edu
Charleen Moore, mackandchuck@gmail.com
Deadlines are the 20th of Feb, May, Aug, Nov.

Join Us!

2026 Membership Dues

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. Membership dues renew in January.

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) \$20 _____ Individual \$25 _____

Family \$40 _____ Lifetime \$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.

We will not share your information or clutter your inbox.

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