COMMONS FORD RANCH METROPOLITAN PARK

field guide

exploration & investigation

note to park visitors

We invite you to bring your family to Commons Ford Ranch Metropolitan Park in Austin, Texas. Studies show that spending time in nature has positive effects on brain development in both children and adults.

www.childrenandnature.org

Commons Ford Park is free and open to the public.

Commons Ford Ranch Metro Park is part of the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department.
More information about the park can be found at **www.austintexas.gov/department/commons-ford-ranch**

Travis Audubon merged with the Commons Ford Prairie Restoration Organization in 2016.

Travis Audubon continues to partner with the City of Austin to manage the 40 acre restored prairie and offer guided bird walks and other programming in the park. The prairie has become an excellent bird watching destination in the Austin area.

Travis Audubon promotes the enjoyment, understanding and conservation of native birds and their habitats through:

- Land Conservation
- Habitat Restoration and Management
- Environmental Education
- Conservation Advocacy

Enjoy the Park and Remember:

- Pack it in, pack it out-take your trash with you when you leave
- Pets on leash at all times
- Collect and dispose of pet waste in proper receptacle
- Watch for snakes

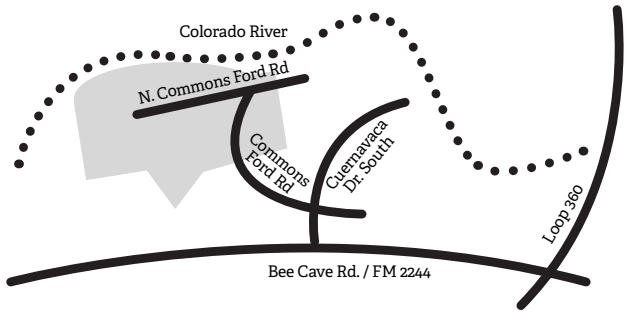
TRAVIS AUDUBON
Listen. Look. And Learn.

Travis Audubon
3710 Cedar St., Box 5 Austin, Texas 78705
512-300-BIRD (2473) * travisaudubon.org

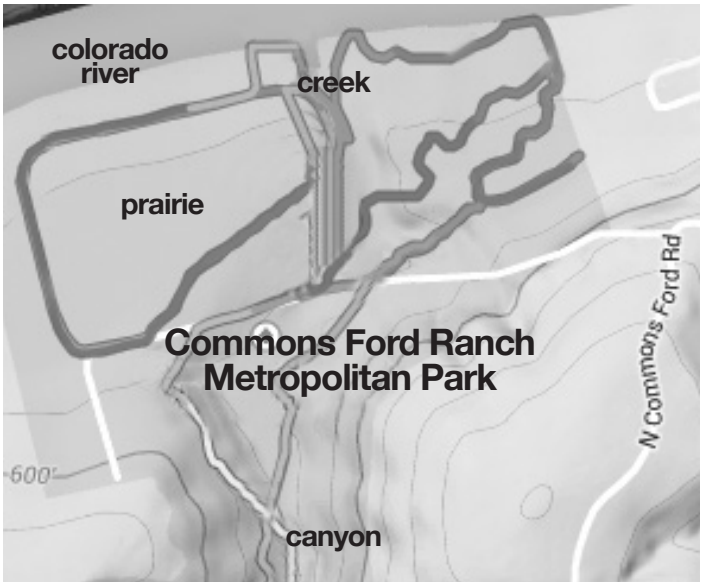
PHOTO CREDITS
George Cates: Front cover left, 10, 17
Ed Fair: Front cover center, 1, 3, 6, 11, 12, 14
Vincent O'Brien: 26, 34, 43
Isaac Sanchez: 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, back cover right
Lee Wallace: Front cover right, 15, 16, 21, 30
Janice Sturrock: Back cover center
EDUCATIONAL CONTENT Janice Sturrock **GRAPHIC DESIGN** Design Farm Creative

directions

From Austin take Bee Caves Road/FM 2244 west to Loop 360. Continue west on Bee Cave Road for 3 miles to Cuernavaca Drive. Turn right/north on Cuernavaca Dr for 1 mile to Commons Ford Road. Turn left on Commons Ford Road and travel 3 miles to N. Commons Ford Rd. Turn left into the park and drive for 1 mile to parking areas near the Big House and Barn.



trail map:



What weather conditions do you observe?

What do you smell?

What do you hear?

What do you see?

recycling

We take recycling seriously! Practice good stewardship:

- Leave natural objects where you find them
- Be considerate of other visitors
- Respect wildlife
- Dispose of waste properly

recycling after eating

It's as easy as 1, 2, 3...

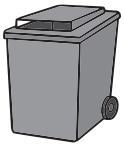
1. Collect and flatten any cardboard boxes or items
2. Collect empty glass and plastic containers
3. Collect food waste and keep separate from "trash"

Thank you!

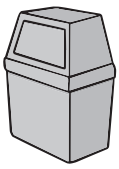
what goes where?

Draw a line from each item to where it should be placed when you are finished with it:

Cardboard lunch box
Plastic fork/spoon/knife
Paper napkin
Bread/bun
Lettuce/tomato
Turkey/ham/roast beef
Cheese
Chips/pretzels
Granola bar/cookie
Fruit
Plastic fruit cup
Condiment packets
Plastic bags & wrappers
Plastic water bottle
Tinfoil
Glass bottle
Juice box


Recycle


Compost


Landfill

flora

Commons Ford Metropolitan Park is home to many interesting plants including prairie grasses and wildflowers. Prairie grasses have deep root systems that assist in purifying water as it passes through the soil. Beautiful colors of various wildflowers attract birds and insects to the prairie. Botanists, or scientists who study plants, use Latin names to identify and classify plants. **Put a check in the circle next to your sightings.**

1 Purple Coneflower
Echinacea angustifolia

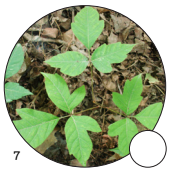
2 Antelope Horn Milkweed
Asclepias asperula

3 American Basketflower
Centaurea americana

4 Texas Paintbrush
Castilleja indivisa

5 Texas Bluebonnet
Lupinus texensis

6 Horsemint
Monarda citriodora



7 Poison Ivy
Toxicodendron radicans

8 Prickly Pear Cactus
Opuntia sp.

9 White Prickly Poppy
Argemone albiflora

10 Texas Thistle
Cirsium texanum

11 Coreopsis
Coreopsis sp.

12 Common Sunflower
Helianthus annuus

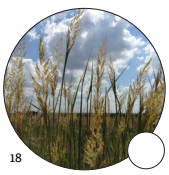
13 Engelmann's Daisy
Engelmannia pinnatifida

14 Mexican Hat
Ratibida columnifera

15 Sideoats Grama
Bouteloua curtipendula

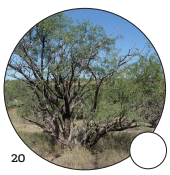
16 Little Bluestem
Schizachyrium scoparium

17 Big Bluestem
Andropogon gerardi



18 Yellow Indiangrass
Sorghastrum nutans

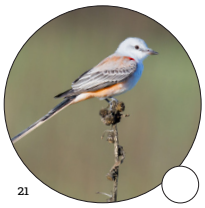
19 Indian Blanket
Gaillardia pulchella



20 Mesquite Tree
Prosopis pubescens

birds

Commons Ford Ranch Metropolitan Park is home to many interesting birds. To identify different birds, look for features such as size, color and beak shape. Ornithologists, or scientists who study birds, call birds by their Latin names. **Put a check in the circle next to your sightings.**

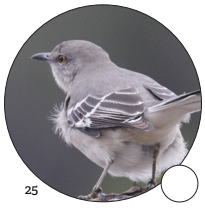


21 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
Tyrannus forficatus

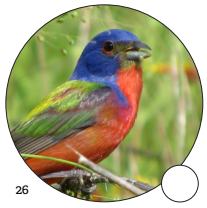
22 Cooper's Hawk
Accipiter cooperii

23 Northern Cardinal
Cardinalis cardinalis

24 Carolina Chickadee
Poecile carolinensis



25 Northern Mockingbird
Mimus polyglottos



26 Painted Bunting
Passerina ciris

27 Lesser Goldfinch
Carduelis psaltria

28 Great Horned Owl
Bubo virginianus

29 Golden-cheeked Warbler
Setophaga chrysoparia

30 House Finch
Carpodacus mexicanus

31 American Kestrel
Falco sparverius

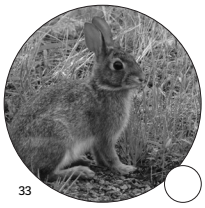
32 Lark Sparrow
Chondestes grammacus

did you know?

- Less than 1% remains of the tall-grass prairies which once covered large sections of the central and southern United States including Texas.

fauna

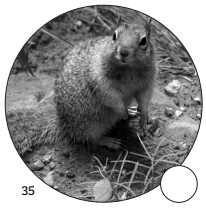
Commons Ford Ranch Metropolitan Park is home to many interesting animals including mammals, reptiles, insects and amphibians. To identify different types of animals, look for signs like tracks and scat. Zoologists, or scientists who study animals, use Latin names to classify different kinds of animals. **Put a check in the circle next to your sightings.**


33

Eastern Cottontail Rabbit
Sylvilagus floridanus


34

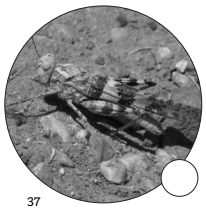
Coyote
Canis latrans


35

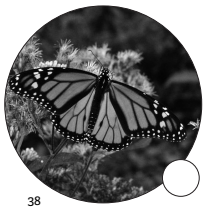
Rock Squirrel
Spermophilus variegatus


36

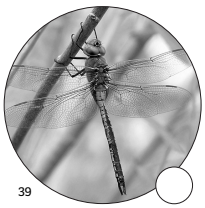
Texas Spiny Lizard
Sceloporus olivaceus


37

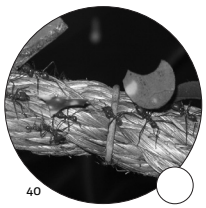
Grasshopper
Orthoptera caelifera


38

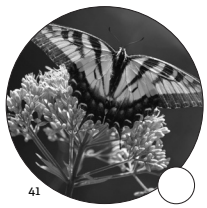
Monarch Butterfly & caterpillar
Danaus plexippus


39

Common Green Darner Dragonfly
Anax junius


40

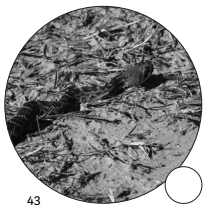
Texas Leaf Cutting Ant
Atta texana


41

Eastern Tiger Swallowtail
Papilio glaucus


42

Gulf Fritillary
Agraulis vanilla


43

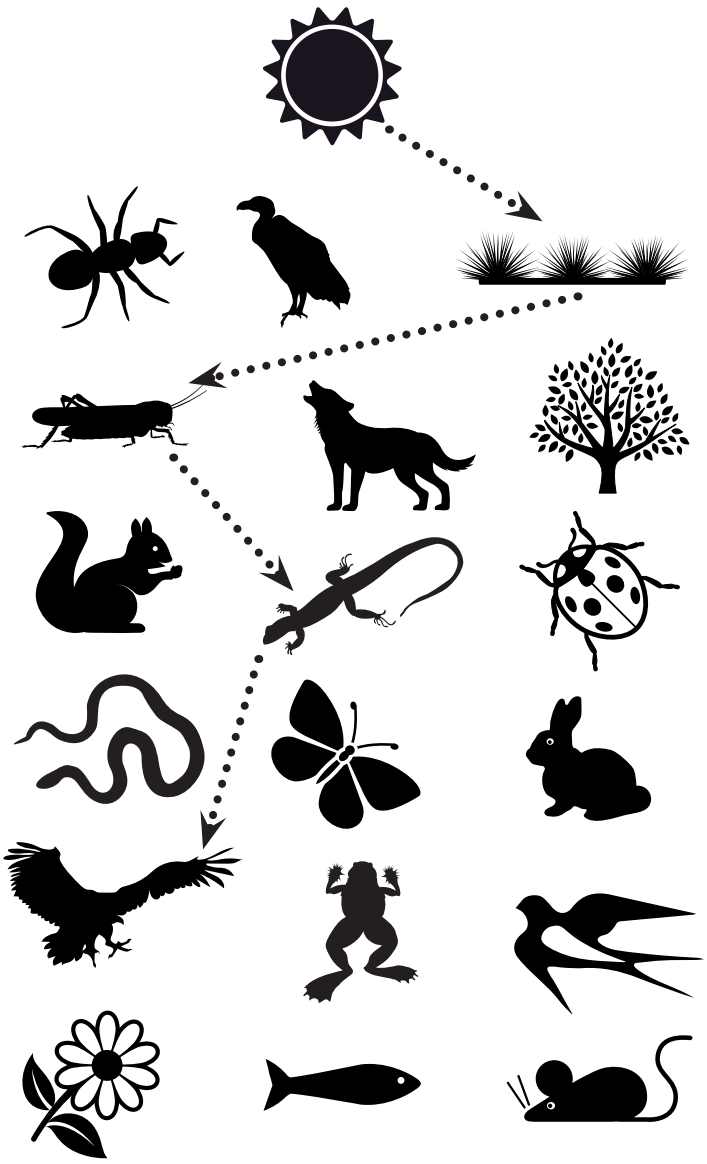
Western Diamondback Rattlesnake
Crotalus atrox


44

White-tailed Deer
Odocoileus virginianus

field activity:
energy flow

The sun is the main source of energy for every living thing on earth (both plants and animals). For example, in the chart below, the sun provides energy for grasses to grow. This energy flows to a grasshopper that may eat the grasses. A grasshopper may be eaten by a lizard, that lizard may in turn be eaten by a hawk. This is the way energy flows through a food chain. **Create your own energy flow on the chart below: draw arrows that show how energy flows from the sun to create different food chains on the prairie.**



did you know?

- Restoration of wildlife habitats like prairies, support and help sustain native grassland species of birds and other wildlife by providing nesting, shelter and food sources.

field activity:
observation

A prairie is an ecosystem dominated by grasses and low woody broad-leafed plants (forbs) with less than 10% tree cover. Elements of a prairie such as plants, animals, fungi and soil are interdependent. All types of prairies are drought tolerant and developed with natural disturbances including fire and grazing. Most plant growth is below ground level in deep root systems.

Describe a prairie.

Why are prairies important?

field activity:
canyon trail

As you walk along the trail in the canyon, notice how it is different from other parts of the park. What kinds of animals might live in this habitat? How is it different from the prairie habitat? Listen for rushing water in the creek and waterfalls. Do you think there are plants that grow here that have roots 15 feet deep? Do you see deep soil or rocky outcroppings?

Describe what you notice about the canyon trail.

List 3 differences between the canyon trail and the prairie:

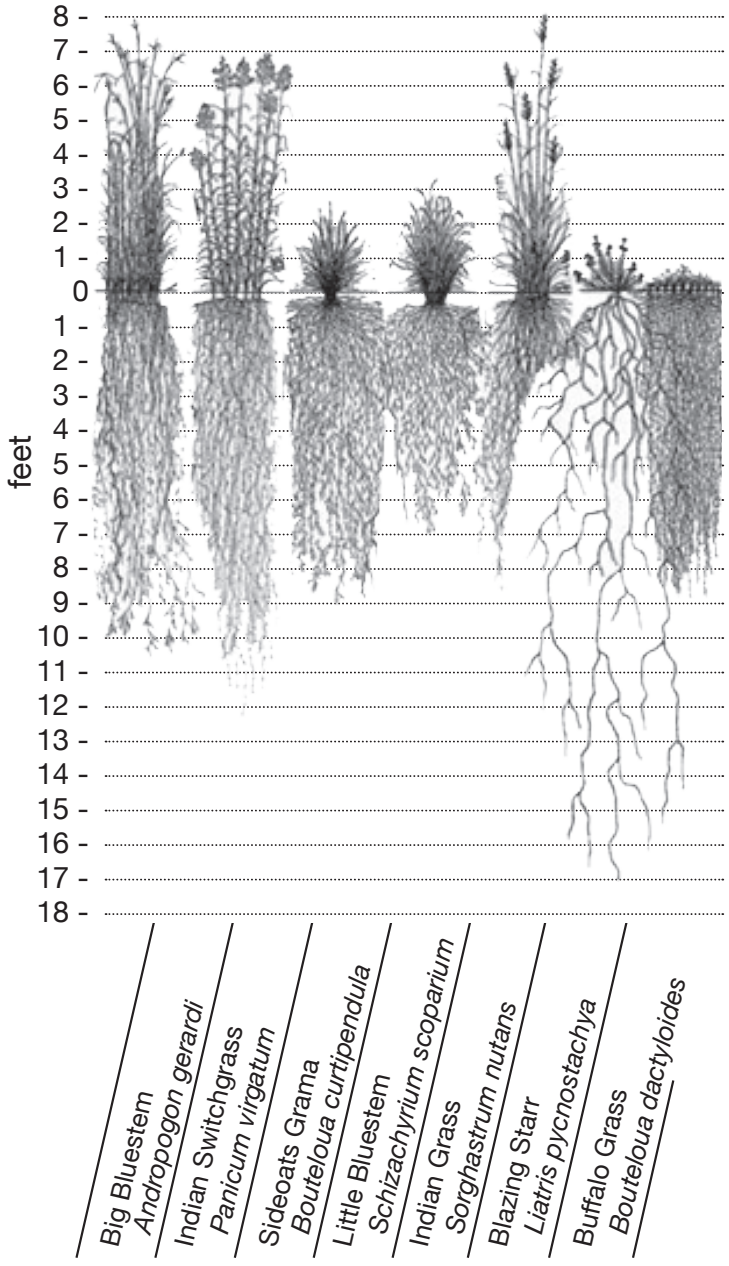
Sit by the waterfall for a few minutes, write down the sounds you hear; describe what you see and smell; write down your thoughts.

did you know?

Native prairies are generally self-sustaining, requiring minimal maintenance once established.

field activity:
grass roots

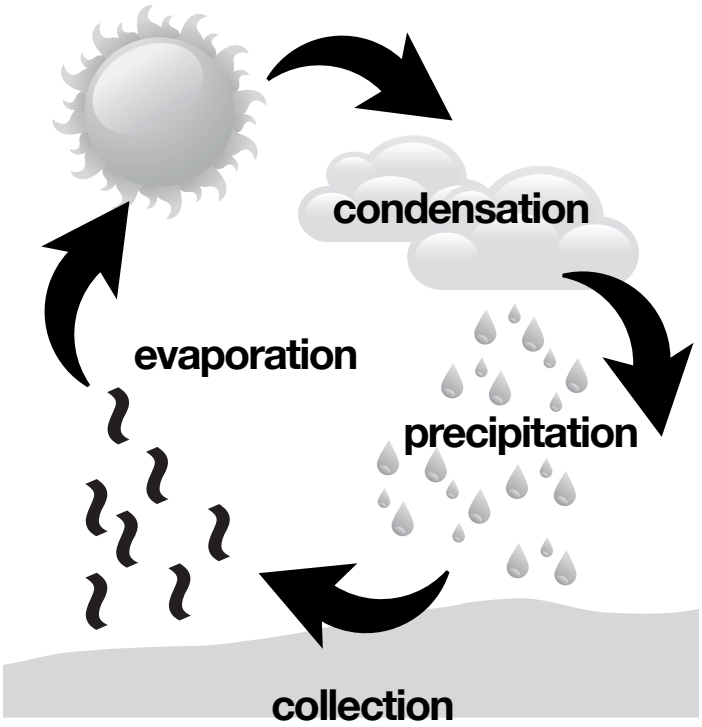
Native grasslands are an important and natural form of erosion control. Grasslands provide an efficient means of capturing and storing precipitation (rain) within the soil. Native grass areas reduce storm water runoff and pollution. Deep roots of prairie grasses help to filter pollutants out of water. Some grasses have root systems that extend below the ground for over 15 feet.



water cycle

All living things need water. All the water that is currently on earth has always been here. In the water cycle, there is no beginning and no end. The water cycle is a series of repeating events in which water circulates naturally through surface water, ground water and the atmosphere.

As energy from the sun heats liquid water on the earth, the liquid rises or evaporates into the air and changes to water vapor (a gas form). This is called "evaporation." When this warm gas cools in the sky, it condenses and forms water droplets. This process is called "condensation". When the condensation gets heavy it falls or precipitates back to the earth, this is called "precipitation" (rain, snow or sleet). Water collects on the earth in oceans, rivers, streams and lakes and can be stored underground in aquifers. The process begins again and water evaporates, condenses and precipitates over and over again. This is the water cycle.



did you know?

- Commons Ford Ranch Metropolitan Park was purchased in 1983 by the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department. It had previously been a farming and ranching operation known as Resaca Ranch.