

A history of Mitchell Lake

From its place on a map dated 1764 to its current role as a birding destination and a leading environmental education location, Mitchell Lake has played an important role in the development of our region.

Designated as a Wildlife Refuge in 1973 by the City of San Antonio, the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center is located on about 1,200 acres and is owned by the San Antonio Water System (SAWS).

The Refuge includes several habitat types common to south-central Texas, but its centerpiece is 600-acre Mitchell Lake itself and the adjacent wetlands.

Our native plant garden is a showcase for wildlife friendly and drought resistant plants and the site is renowned among birders as one of the top birding spots in the region – over 300 species have been recorded.

The information contained in this pamphlet was derived from The Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center at Uvalde Texas. (www.uvalde.tamu.edu) and from Aggie Horticulture (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>)

The Mission of Mitchell Lake Audubon Center is dedicated to instilling a shared appreciation and sense of stewardship for the natural world through hands-on nature education, citizen science and conservation of the Mitchell Lake Wildlife Refuge.

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To download a version of this pamphlet please visit

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None of the information in this pamphlet should be considered a recommendation or endorsement of any medical or nutritional usage of the plants profiled therein. This information is presented only for informational purposes and should not be used for any other reason.



Visitor Center Nature Trail Plant Guide

**Learn about South Texas
trees and shrubs!**

**Learn how to identify them
as well as their benefits to
wildlife and people.**

Visitor Center Nature Trail completed by
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Troop 358 Summer 2009
Trail Guide developed by
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1. Granjeno/Spiny Hackberry

(*Celtis ehrenbergiana*)

Spiny hackberry is a medium-sized shrub. It can be found growing in a variety of soils of the Edwards Plateau. It has smooth gray branches that are strongly zig-zagged and armed with various sizes of thorns. The small, round fruits are yellow to orange in color and are considered an important water source for birds and small mammals. The fruit is eaten by doves, quail, wrens, cardinals, coyotes, raccoons and rabbits. The foliage is browsed by white-tailed deer and livestock. Spiny hackberry is also used by butterfly larvae and bees make honey from the nectar.

2. Sugar Hackberry (*Celtis laevigata*)

Sugar hackberry grows across the eastern two-thirds of Texas; the only hackberry that occurs in all ten vegetational areas of the state. It will grow in almost any type of soil as long as it has fair drainage. The bark is generally smooth and devoid of the wart-like projections on trunks of sugar hackberry, *C. occidentalis*. It is frequently found in mixed to pure stands in abandoned fields where it is a colonizer. It is a tough durable tree - fast-growing, drought tolerant and an important food source for birds.

3. Coma (*Sideroxylon celastrinum*)

Medium-sized, semi-evergreen spiny shrub or small tree with dark green, teardrop-shaped leaves. Appears similar to a live oak tree with thorns. Fruit and seeds eaten by various species of birds and mammals. In Mexico, the fruit is eaten by people.

4. Retama (*Parkinsonia aculeate*)

Retama is a shrub with smooth, green bark; droopy leaves; a slightly rounded top; and ten to fifteen feet in height. It lies in wet, disturbed, sandy or limestone areas of the South Texas Plains and the Edwards Plateau. It flowers after rains during the summer. Retama is used by birds, deer, small mammals and insects as a food source and songbirds find a place to nest under its cover. Food and medicinal uses include: flour, which can be made from seeds and a retama tea that can treat diabetes and fever. Other uses for retama include ornamental landscaping as it needs little maintenance.

5. Vara Dulce (*Aloysia macrostachya*)

Vara dulce has fragrant purple flower spikes from spring through fall. It has a strong scent similar to thyme or oregano when crushed. In Texas it grows only in the Rio Grande Plains, on rocky hillsides and dry arroyos. It is a tall, erect shrub with many branches, sometimes growing as high as 12 feet. The flowers are a favorite of bees and butterflies.

6. Whitebrush (*Aloysia gratissima*)

Also called 'beebrush,' this shrub has small vanilla-scented white flowers spring to fall, generally after rains. The flowers are a great nectar source for butterflies and bees. The plant provides cover for birds, mammals and reptiles.

7. Honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*)

The most common tree found throughout South Texas. Very important to wildlife, providing browse for white-tailed deer, bean pods and seeds for birds & mammals. It also provides nesting, roosting and loafing cover for birds. The flowers are a good bee & butterfly food. Bean pods were ground into flour by Native Americans. Bark was eaten to treat dysentery, sore throats and open wounds.

8. Wild Blue Sage

(*Salvia azurea grandiflora*)

A shrub-like cactus that grows best under the protection of other vegetation. The many small, bright red, juicy berries are a good food source for white-tailed deer & small mammals.

9. Shrubby Blue Sage (*Salvia ballotiflora*)

Shrubby Blue Sage is a multi-stemmed shrub which stands two to six feet tall. It is usually found on shallow, rocky, sandy, gravelly or limestone hillsides or brushy areas of the Edwards Plateau and South Texas Plains. Its small bluish flower can be seen throughout the summer following rainfall. Shrubby blue sage is not grazed by wildlife but does provide cover for small mammals. The leaves have been used to flavor meat

10. Lotebush (*Ziziphus obtusifolia*)

A deciduous, spiny, multi-branched shrub, it commonly associates with brasil, mesquite, and prickly pear cactus. The small black, solitary fruit is eaten by many birds and mammals. It's also used as a cover by rodents and quail.

