



Get Kids Outdoors for Healthy Bodies and Minds

The Nature Conservancy of Texas recommends the following free or low-cost nature-related events and resources for getting children and their families outdoors this summer. All provide opportunities for nature interpretation for a better understanding of the natural world. Experts say that allowing kids to play in nature promotes their physical and mental health and helps foster a commitment to environmental conservation.

Nature Conservancy Upcoming Events

June 7: Picnic on the Pedernales River. Join Austin-area members of Generation Conservation for a picnic on a private ranch from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Generation Conservation is open to Conservancy members or prospective members under 50 and their families. Free, with reservations required by June 2 by calling (512) 494-9559, Ext. 103.

June 20: Clive Runnells Family Mad Island Marsh Preserve, Matagorda County. Feathered Friday: Conservancy education coordinator Cathy Porter will lead a bird and wildlife tour from 8 a.m. to noon. Free; call for details and directions, (361) 920-3298.

June 28: Davis Mountains Preserve, Jeff Davis County. Open preserve day: Hike, picnic, watch birds from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Free; call (432) 426-2390, Ext. 6, for details and directions.

July 12: Independence Creek Preserve, Terrell County. Open preserve day: Fish, swim, hike and explore all day. Free; call (432) 345-6773 for details and directions.

July 18: Mad Island Marsh Preserve, Matagorda County. Feathered Friday: Conservancy education coordinator Cathy Porter will lead a bird and wildlife tour from 8 a.m. to noon. Free; call for details and directions, (361) 920-3298.

Aug. 15-17: Davis Mountains Preserve, Jeff Davis County. Open preserve weekend: Camp, hike, bring your horse to ride and more. Free, with reservation required for camping. Call (432) 426-2390, Ext. 6, for details and directions.

Aug. 15: Mad Island Marsh Preserve, Matagorda County. Feathered Friday: Conservancy education coordinator Cathy Porter will lead a bird and wildlife tour from 8 a.m. to noon. Free; call for details and directions, (361) 920-3298.

Nature Conservancy Open Preserves

Created to conserve wild nature and not specifically as public parks, the Conservancy's open preserves provide a truly natural experience but generally lack "civilized" amenities such as restrooms and drinking water. Visitors are welcome but are advised to bring water and sun protection, wear sturdy shoes and long pants, stay on trails and give wide berth to wildlife. Camping is not permitted, and families are strongly

encouraged to call before visiting at the phone numbers provided below. To find out more about the Conservancy's preserves in Texas, visit nature.org/texas.

- **Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve**, west of Fredericksburg in Mason County, provides a close-up view of the nightly emergence of more than a million Mexican free-tailed bats, with interpretation of the bats' natural history provided by the Conservancy's bat cave steward. Open 5-9 p.m. each Thursday through Sunday from mid-May to mid-October. Entrance fee is \$5 per person; children 5 and younger, free. Call (325) 347-5970.
- **Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary**, 20 miles north of Beaumont in the Big Thicket of East Texas, conserves one of the last remaining longleaf pine forests in Texas and harbors a remarkable variety of plants. Enjoy self-guided nature trails, bird watch or rent canoes from nearby vendors and float through the preserve on Village Creek. Open year-round during daylight hours. Free; call (409) 385-0445.
- **Lennox Woods Preserve**, in Red River County north of Clarksville, is one of the most beautiful, pristine, old-growth forests remaining in Texas, home to rare plants and animals and supported by the waters of Pecan Bayou. Hike the Martha Lennox Memorial Nature Trail, recently rebuilt after an ice storm damaged the woods and made the old trail impassable. Open year-round during daylight hours. Free; call (903) 568-4139.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

General information about TPWD state parks and programs can be found at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/ or by calling (800) 792-1112.

- **State parks** can be found throughout Texas and within a day trip of every major city. For a list of state parks near you, visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/.
- **Life's Better Outside:** To learn where and how to participate in a variety of outdoor activities in Texas, from bicycling to fishing to stargazing to finding fossils, visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/exptexas/.
- **Texas Junior Naturalists** is an online TPWD resource for young people to find out how to experience nature at home or further afield, at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/junior_naturalists/.
- **Outdoor Learning:** Other TPWD resources for outdoor education for kids and adults may be found at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/.

City and County Parks and Other Resources

Most Texas cities and counties maintain public parks and recreation areas and many offer summer programs for children. Contact your city or county government, or local chapters of conservation organizations, to find out about community resources. Contact information for outdoor kids activities in a sampling of Texas cities is provided below.

- **Austin:** Austin Parks and Recreation Department, playground and day camp programs and other activities for families, children and teens, www.ci.austin.tx.us/parks/, (512) 974-6700. Travis County Department of Transportation and Natural Resources, www.co.travis.tx.us/tnr/parks/park_programs.asp, (512) 854-7275.

- **Dallas:** Dallas Parks and Recreation Department, www.dallasparcs.org, (214) 670-4100. Cedar Ridge Preserve, Audubon Dallas, www.audubondallas.org/cedaridge.html, (972) 709-7784.
- **Fort Worth:** Fort Worth Department of Parks and Community Services, www.fortworthgov.org/pacs/fwpcsd/, (817) 871-7277. Fort Worth Nature Center, www.fwnc.org, (817) 237-1111.
- **Houston:** Houston Parks and Recreation Department, summer activities, www.houstontx.gov/parks/pdf08/08SummerCatalog.pdf, (713) 865-4500. Houston Arboretum and Nature Center, www.houstonarboretum.org, (713) 681-8433.
- **San Antonio:** San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department, natural areas, www.sanaturalareas.org, (210) 564-6400. San Antonio Botanical Garden, www.sabot.org, (210) 207-3250.
- **Rio Grande Valley:** World Birding Center, Edinburg Scenic Wetlands, www.worldbirdingcenter.org/sites/edinburg/index.phtml, (956) 381-9922; World Birding Center, Quinta Mazatlan, McAllen, www.worldbirdingcenter.org/sites/mcallen/index.phtml, (956) 688-3370; Gladys Porter Zoo, Brownsville, <http://www.gpz.org/ed.html>, (956) 548-9453; Valley Nature Center, Weslaco, www.valleynaturecenter.org, (956) 969-2475.
- **Texas Panhandle:** Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument, Fritch, interpretive tours, www.nps.gov/alf/, (806) 857-3151; Wildcat Bluff Nature Center, Amarillo, www.wildcatbluff.org, (806) 352-6007; Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, www.panhandleplains.org; (806) 651-2249; Lubbock Lake Landmark, Lubbock, www.depts.ttu.edu/museumttu/lll/programs.html, (806) 742-1116.