

YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO LIVE IN HOLLYWOOD PARK

You have chosen to live in HP. This packet will provide educational and entertaining information about the wildlife you will find here. You will appreciate how all of nature interacts and become a better informed citizen. Over the past couple of decades we have become more aware of the ecological crises caused by oil spills, over fishing, pesticides, population growth and habitat destruction which endanger our environment, wildlife and ourselves.

Ecology (Greek for house or home) is the study of animals in their habitats. Included are all levels of the organization of life from individuals, the community and their effect on the physical environment. Plants, animals, insects, amphibians, reptiles and fish live where they do for many reasons: food and water needs, climate, enemies, visible barriers such as rivers, mountains and oceans and ponds. Cold-blooded animals can't control their body temperature thus they must seek out a proper environment; some hibernate. Warm-blooded animals keep a constant body temperature thus they can live in any climate.

The habitat is the specific niche where the animal lives along with its way of life. Another determining factor of where an animal lives is that only one species can occupy a habitat at one time. A community includes all of the organisms that live together in a particular place and time. As HP developed, over 50 acres of habitat were destroyed. Before the Park's rapid growth of green areas, we had no complaints about animals. Humans and other animals lived side by side without problems.

Now all of us need to learn to share our environment so let me entertain you with some fun things about the critters you could encounter in HP.

As I am writing, I just noticed a lot of little black spots in the corner of my window; I also see an ant, a fly and 70 gnats in a spider's web. I also noticed lots of insects in spider webs around the inside and outside of the house. What marvelous exterminators. Yes, spiders are good hunters and trappers who eat many harmful insects. Some will eat frogs and snakes. There are no vegetarians! I don't know the name of the spider in my window but HP is home to tarantulas, wolf spiders, black widows, orb and more. Spiders have been around for about 400

million years belonging to a class called Arachnida that includes mites, ticks, and scorpions. Only spiders can spin silk. So entertain yourself and watch your exterminator at work. Oh, by the way, they are cannibalistic.

We also are home to fleas who will suck the blood of your cats, dogs and you. I recommend that you visit your vet to get flea medications. Scorpions abound; their sting is quite painful. You will find wasps, various beetles, grasshoppers, butterflies, moths, praying mantis, and others.

Cockroaches are everywhere here so having them in your home doesn't mean you have a dirty house. Most live on the ground among decaying vegetation. Their flattened bodies give them the ability to creep into cracks. They do not convey any disease but foul with their droppings far more than they actually eat. In your home, they eat any kind of human food as well as book bindings, whitewash, and ink.

According to the Encyclopedia Smithsonian fun facts about bugs, they say that houseflies find sugar with their feet which are 10 million times more sensitive than human tongues. A bee may fly up to 60 miles in one day while gathering food. And insects have been present for about 350 million years; humans for only 10,000 years.

Give the insects a break. They are fascinating, pretty and important. They provide food for birds and other animals; they help pollinate. Just watch them in their microscopic world.

Native white-tail deer hold a special place in the balance of nature. They browse eating grass, twigs, bark and shoots of trees. Some say that deer prune lower branches of trees thus allowing tall trees to grow. They will also enjoy your gorgeous flowers and vegetables if you plant what they like. To solve your problems about feeding deer, HP has a list of preferred foods that deer like should you choose to feed them. Or, you will learn what not to plant if you want to deter deer. This list is available at city hall as well as in your initial packet. HP deer live along side us and you will see them at any time of the day or night.

Deer life expectancy is up to 20 years. A doe can have up to 31 young in her first 14 years.

To distinguish antlers from horns: Antlers are living tissue resembling true bones that you see on bucks. As antlers develop they become covered with a soft hairy skin called velvet that has nerves and blood vessels and bleeds when injured. Antlers, at this time, are sensitive to pain and are fragile. As time progresses, the antlers harden, velvet sheds and you will see the bare tines of the bone. Usually in December, the antlers are shed and start to grow a new set in a few months.

Horns, as seen on cattle and other Bovidae, are made mostly of keratin like hooves, hair and nails and is not living tissue. Horns slowly grow and are permanent on the animal. If the horn is cut off it will not regenerate. Briefly, antlers renew yearly; horns are a permanent fixture. One exception is the pronghorn that both male and female possess; their horn is covered with an outer sheath with a forward projecting prong and is shed yearly.

To maintain a healthy balance of deer in HP, we have a deer manager who studies the activities of the deer here and makes recommendations as to how to help control their population. Our deer committee might be able to answer other questions about the wildlife in HP.

Birds generally making a home in H.P. are hawks, vultures (aka buzzards), Crows, woodpeckers, grackles, blue jays, titmice, chickadees, owls, finches, cardinals, mocking birds, starlings, doves, pigeons, roadrunners and, seasonally, other birds.

Critters you will see in H.P. are deer, foxes, coyotes, armadillos, possums, raccoons, squirrels, rabbits, cacomistle (ring tailed cat), lizards, snakes, skunks, mice, bats, frogs, fleas, ants, wasps, bees, scorpions, tarantulas and other spiders, praying mantises, and walking sticks.

Native trees commonly found growing naturally in H.P. includes several varieties of oak, mountain cedar, hackberry, wild persimmon, Texas elm, mountain laurel, mesquite and huisache. Other plants include numerous wild flowers, native grasses, several varieties of cacti, purple sage and lantana to name a few.

Hawks are predators and you will hear them screeching during the day. We have red-shouldered and red tailed; the red shouldered have striped tails and eat

other birds and mammals; the red-tailed eat mammals. These hawks have wide wings and fan-shaped tails. We also have the kestrel - a small hawk also called a sparrow hawk. They have pointed wings and long tails; they can hover in one spot.

There are two kinds of vultures; the turkey vulture has a red head and hunts by smell; the black hunts by sight. These guys have long wide wings and short tails. They like to sit on electrical towers and the tops of telephone poles.

Mice are one of our most destructive animals but they occupy an important niche in that they are dinner to our owls, hawks, snakes, amphibians, other birds and fish.

We have three kinds of owls in HP - the barred, screech and great horned. They sit silently on their perches blending into their environment. The head appears to swivel but it just moves its head from side to side with lightening speed. You can see these gorgeous birds along creek beds; the screech owls are found in tree hollows. Early in the morning and at dusk you can hear them hooting. Owls usually swallow their small prey whole; later regurgitate the fur and indigestible bones; they tear apart larger prey. Often you can find pellets on the ground from what they have regurgitated.

Skunks have their well-known perfume called eau de skunk. This perfume is their only means of defense. They are found in tree hollows, burrows and will feed under your outside bird feeder at night. They will keep the rodent population under control.

Armadillos are unique because they have armour shields on their fore and hind quarters and nine hinged bands gird the midsection. They have small, rootless, ever-growing teeth. Armadillos are mainly nocturnal spending the day in a shared burrow. With their acute sense of smell, they can locate insects 6" underground. Their long claws make them excellent diggers -finding and eating insects, larvae, small reptiles and amphibians.

Opossums are the only marsupial in North America and the only mammal in N. America that can hang by its tail. It is known for "playing possum" (falls on its side and lies limply, its mouth hanging open looking as if it is not alive) when danger

threatens it. When the possum is disturbed, it may threaten the enemy with its mouth and 50 sharp teeth; don't worry, they usually run away.

Raccoons are all over HP. You will find them on your bird feeders or pet food at night. They look like bandits and some folks try to make them pets because they are intelligent and appealing. When kept in a house, they get into mischief and they are like several two year olds running around. These are wild animals so please leave them be wild.

If you are lucky you might see a painted bunting from April to September.

San Antonio is home to about 20 million Mexican free-tailed bats. Most live in Bracken Cave but you will also find them in other areas around the Hill Country. According to Kelly Bryan, the 20 million bats in Bracken Cave eat more than one million pounds of insects in 3 nights. So just enjoy watching them eat all those nasty bugs and get rid of your bug zapper - leave the zapping to the bats.

We have a good representation of reptiles including rattle snakes, copperheads, water moccasins, garden snakes, coral snakes, lizards, turtles, toads and frogs. When you go into your yard, shuffle you feet to scare the snakes away.

Although not an animal, cactus are important in the ecosystem; they are known as drought resistors and stay green year round. Most cacti have protective spines which discourage browsing herbivores. Most of the cacti have beautiful flowers and edible fruit and pads that some animals, including deer, will eat as an important source of moisture during dry conditions. How they avoid getting the spines stuck in their mouth and tongue is a mystery; however, perhaps they might have thick mucus as do giraffe which might protect them from the spines.

Just capture innocent delight in our other species neighbors. We share the planet with them so please just observe and learn and appreciate them whether or not you live in Hollywood Park.

WILDLIFE REFERENCE WEBSITES

Misc. National Deer News & Info: <http://www.deerfriendly.com/home>

Texas Parks & Wildlife: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/>

Texas Master Naturalist program(TPW):

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/programs/txmasnat/>

AgriLife Extension (TX A&M): <http://wild-wonderings.blogspot.com/2008/04/urban-deer-management-in-texas.html>

Citizen Scientists: <http://www.texasinvasives.org/invaders/>

Cibolo Nature Center: <http://www.cibolo.org/>

Bexas County Extension website: <http://bexar-tx.tamu.edu>