

Herald-Zeitung Column

By Frank Dietz

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A Pandemic Window That Had Lessons & Meaning

Here on a Comal County legacy ranch where we are privileged to abide, the day of radical public shutdown to seek control of the spreading Covid-19 remains quite vivid in my mind. It was akin to the sudden silence that hovered throughout the country on infamous 9-11. Infrequent flights in the flyways above us were notable for an extended period. Our own going and coming was at a sustained minimum along with the flow of traffic on the roadways nearby. We have settled into some of the social and family modifications that came with covid protectiveness and we are beginning to explore modified future activities cautiously.

Upon reflection, the pandemic has provided us with a window to any number of things long taken for granted or barely noted. In particular, both in the open grazing areas and the wooded stands for wild and pasture life a rich new world has emerged. In reverence and celebration, I want to take note of some of what our "pandemic window" has provided. Imagine a trek with me for observation and wonder purposes.

The acres available to us reveal habitats and dwellers often taken for granted. You might be surprised when I point your attention toward the opening in an aged live oak where a branch long ago has fallen and left an opening. Every late winter or early spring a pair of buzzards establish a nest. Their success is revealed when two young ones come up to the cusp of the opening and over time explore the nearby terrain and limbs. Usually, a third guard companion assists the parental pair in keeping them safe and a wary eye on my comings and goings. Similarly, near the base of another great tree we noted the checking out of a potential birthing site for a fox that frequents our surrounding area. Soon we see the nursing female scouting for food. Some days later she brings her kits out to cautiously explore. In the period when we had no dog frequenting our fenced yard, she even brought them in as if to show us her offspring who remained quite playful. Another such presentation took place when the wild turkey hens brought poult to discover fallen birdseed from the feeders above. How frolicky and fun to watch!

When we look up to the highest reaches of the trees around us, we see nests for squirrels and a likely sizeable nest for a resident hawk. The nests and roosts for birds various and numerous with abundant songs are everywhere. If we remain very quiet, the golden cheeked warbler among some cedars may be apparent. In another wooded stand we see and hear the painted buntings making their annual extended visit. The cardinals that reside year-round decorate the trees and grassy areas with constant activity. Near a prickly pear cactus we notice a fawn curled up to be carefully camouflaged while its doe grazes. In the blooms of the cacti are honeybees and other imbibers finding treasured nectars. A woodpecker sounds his percussion pecking above us and a few yards away in trees and grasses we note the cooing of doves. Upon careful inspection we see a tiny cocoon-like pod swaying with a hummingbird egg.

These are but a select few of our wild neighbors that often went unnoticed until the quiet pause of the pandemic.

Hopefully these acres and some others in Comal will remain protected flourishing habitat. Toward that end Comal County Conservation Alliance strives to encourage preservation of acreage. Note these efforts at www.comalconservation.org.