



Letters to Nature Kids



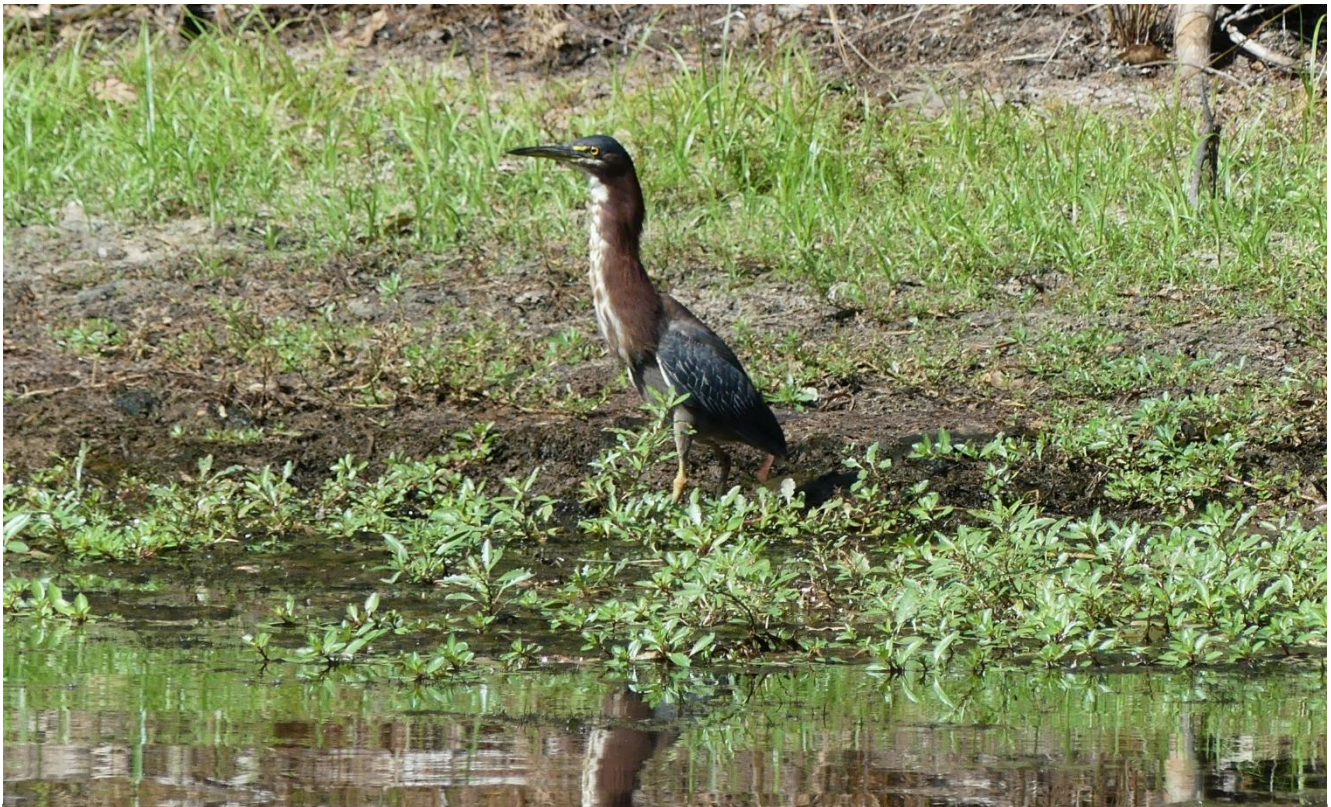
August, 2026 ❖ Number 26

Dear Nature Kids,

Hello from the woods and prairies! I hope your summer is going well. It's the end of August, so I hope school is going well, too. Both of those things can be great, and they can be hard.

I think of summer as a great time because I remember summers when we had lots of free time and it could be hot but almost never *too* hot. It was the best time of the year! And going back to school meant new people, new beginnings, and another year older – but it meant the loss of all that summer fun. And sometimes it meant a little worry that just maybe the new school challenges would be too much.

This summer has become too hot, like a lot of our past summers. How can we still enjoy a summer day when it is hot enough for an extreme heat warning? There are several things we can do, starting with getting outside in the morning before it gets too hot, and drinking lots of water.



A green heron at Sheri Capehart Nature Preserve

I spend a lot of time at Sheri Capehart Nature Preserve. In the last few weeks, I started each walk in the morning. Sometimes I should have started even earlier, but mostly I got going around 9:00am. I brought a bottle of water every time. And each walk has been great! Hot, but great.



On July 31st I watched two green herons at the preserve's north pond. I spotted the first one, crouched low and hunting by the water's edge. Each step it took was slow and deliberate, and the bird hardly seemed to move. When the heron found something, it jabbed its beak down into the shallow water and speared some small creature which it ate.

These herons don't look very green, do they? The dark colors along the bird's back are bluish-green. They are relatively small for a heron and their necks are not very long. They don't look at all like their cousins, the great blue herons.

On August 19th I got a late start and walked up the hillside to the bluff. This takes me along deep sandy trails and through oak, juniper, and other trees. I bent down to take a photo, and I noticed something coming toward me along the trail. When I turned to look and stood up, I saw three very

surprised young raccoons trying to stop. The third one may have bumped into the first two, I'm not sure. All three turned and ran back down the trail where they came from.



(left) The three raccoons, coming to a surprised stop. (right) Raccoons retreating down the trail.

One explanation might be that these youngsters have not yet learned the safety skills they need to avoid trouble with things like big humans.

Raccoons seem to live everywhere. They come into our backyards at night, knock things over, and eat any dog or cat food that accidentally got left out. [Texas Parks & Wildlife Department](#) describes raccoons as intelligent and adaptable. They use their fingers to explore and try to catch food, which can include fruit, nuts, insects, crawdads, frogs, bird eggs, mice and other things. They are cute, but they are **not** for touching or trying to catch. A wild raccoon would bite and scratch to defend itself.

On the rest of that walk I saw dragonflies, a beautiful blue wasp hunting for insects along the ground, and a few beetles. At the bee tree, I noticed that the honeybees were gathered around the opening of the hive and fanning their wings. By doing that, they can help cool the hive. On these hot days, that helps.

On August 22nd, a group of us met at the preserve to take a walk. The theme of the walk was dormancy and resilience, because many plants are becoming “dormant,” shutting down their activity and losing their leaves so that they can survive the heat and drought. Other plants and animals have ways of being “resilient,” able to be pretty healthy and to successfully cope with the heat. The oak trees seemed resilient, with deep roots finding some moisture deep underground. Other plants were losing their leaves and turning brown, some of them looking dead above ground while the roots survived and waited for rain. They are becoming dormant.

We saw several Mississippi kites flying overhead, looking resilient. This kind of “kite” is a bird, in the same family with hawks. These are fairly small raptors, very skilled at flying as they hunt insects or small animals like frogs, lizards, or mice. They will soon fly south, spending the winter in South America.

Today is the 21st day in a row when the high temperature has been 100° or more. We have extreme heat warnings that keep us inside, because people get sick if they are out when it is 110° like it will be later this afternoon. So be careful, drink plenty of water, and get in a cooler place if you feel overheated and faint or dizzy, have a headache or feel nauseous.

✍ Michael



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