Nalle Bunny
Run Wildlife
Preserve
Nalle Bunny Run Wildlife Preserve is an environmental treasure located along the banks of the Colorado River. It was named for and run by its matriarch Anne Byrd “Bunny” Nalle. She bought the land in 1947 with her husband George “Tex” Nalle as a beautiful weekend retreat.

Their tranquil surroundings were eventually threatened as development crept closer. Before her death in 2000 Anne was planning to preserve her cherished Bunny Run for the public to enjoy. Motivated by Anne’s strong sense of conservation, her husband, “Tex,” and son, Bill, donated 35 acres of the land to the Hill Country Conservancy in December 2000.

To balance this gift an additional 12 acres was developed into Nalle Woods Condos. The developer worked out an agreement in partnership with the Hill Country Conservancy to minimize the impact of the development and assist in their future stewardship efforts.

The Preserve provides refuge for many kinds of animals and is being managed primarily for the benefit of songbirds, small mammals, and migratory, wintering, and breeding waterfowl.
Importance of Nalle Bunny Run

Located in a beautiful and desirable part of the Texas Hill Country, Nalle Bunny Run Wildlife Preserve is a relatively undeveloped marvel amongst a growing city. Nalle Bunny Run serves as a link between Balcones Canyonlands Preserve to the north and Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve to the south. As such, it provides a stepping-stone for juvenile bird dispersal and resting grounds for native and migratory bird species.

Nalle Bunny Run is situated along the banks of the Colorado River. Therefore the land acts as a buffer to help protect the quality of water flowing into the river. Preserving drinking water quality is much more cost effective than treating water once it is contaminated. In addition, having buffers to protect water quality helps ensure we all have clean water in which to fish, swim, and play.

The preserve is located near two major city school districts, Austin and Eanes Independent School Districts, as well as two large private schools. Therefore, Nalle Bunny Run Wildlife Preserve may provide environmental education for many urban students.

Many people love the Preserve for a variety of other reasons such. Why is Nalle Bunny Run important to you?
Ecology of Nalle Bunny Run

Nalle Bunny Run Wildlife Preserve has several different ecosystems including wetland, grassland, woodland, and riparian zones. A thorough understanding of how an ecosystem functions can help ensure the survival of all things that are a part of it.

Ecosystems provide valuable services and are important economically as well as ecologically. They supply food and medicine, clean our water and air, provide recreation for people and homes for animals, and help keep life as we know it running smoothly. At Nalle Bunny Run each ecosystem plays a critical role in creating and conserving soil as well as water quality and conservation. Also, each ecosystem is crucial to the creation and maintenance of biodiversity.

Look for the connection! Without healthy soil the plants would not thrive. Without plants the soils would erode into the waterways. If the waterways are dirty and laden with sediment then people and animals do not have clean drinking water. Without animals many plants would not be able to reproduce. If you protect the ecosystem then you protect all the resources: land, water, air, and living things.
Woodland Ecosystem

A woodland is an area dominated by trees. The canopy cover is thin enough to allow adequate light to enter and support an understory of shrubs, herbs, and grasses. Juniper breaks (nearly pure stands of juniper trees) help to protect shallow soils on rocky slopes where other plants do not grow as well. Woodland ecosystems are important for various reasons:

- Filters greenhouse gases
- Guards against soil erosion
- Protection and shelter for wildlife

Grassland Ecosystem

A grassland is an area dominated by grasses. Wildflowers, which draw butterflies, also grow in the grassland areas at Nalle Bunny Run. The extensive root systems of the grasses in this ecosystem help hold deep soil in place, regulate floodwaters, and filter pollutants and impurities from water. Grassland ecosystems have many other vital functions:

- Helps control flooding
- Guards against soil erosion
- Helps regulate carbon-dioxide
- Habitat for wildlife
Wetland Ecosystem

Wetlands are waterlogged lowland areas often found near a river or seep. These ecosystems are some of the most productive. Wetlands help control flooding by storing then slowly releasing water. Wetlands have many other functions:

- Helps control floods
- Filters surface water
- Helps control erosion
- Rest area for migratory birds
- Nursery for amphibians and invertebrates

Riparian Ecosystem

Riparian ecosystems occur along waterways. Riparian zones serve as buffers that filter nitrogen before it enters the water, preserving water quality. The riparian zone also helps maintain water quality by trapping sediment. Riparian zones tend to be vulnerable to invasive species. Riparian zones provide a variety of other important roles:

- Corridor for migratory birds
- Guard against soil erosion
- Regulates water temperature
- Filters pollutants
- Helps control flood damage

Can you identify a wetland area; a riparian area?
Flora of Nalle Bunny Run

**Grasses**

The types of grasses in an area can tell you about the condition of the land. Increasing grasses are short and not very appetizing to animals so they are last to be eaten. Decreasing grasses are tall bunch grasses that are first to be eaten by wildlife. Desirable grasses decrease and undesirable grasses increase when the land has exceeded its carrying capacity, the number of herbivores such as whitetail deer and cows that it can support.

- **Decreasing**
  - Sideoats grama
  - Big & little bluestem
  - Indiangrass
  - Switchgrass
- **Increasing**
  - Three-awns (left)
  - Texas grama
  - Six-weeks grama
  - Red grama

**Wildflowers**

Nalle Bunny Run is a great place to see a variety of wildflowers. They are important because they supply food and shelter for many animals and insects. Wildflowers also provide medicines, protect soil, and help keep our water clean.

- Above: sunflower
- Above: wine-cup
**Shrubs**

Large shrubs like mountain laurel, sumac, and yaupon holly and small shrubs like twist-leaf yucca (left) and agarita make up the understory in a woody area. The **understory** provides short and intermediate layers of dense vegetation for animals to forage and hide.

**Trees**

Hardwood trees are very heat and **drought tolerant**. Deer enjoy browsing on the seedlings of these trees, which may be eaten before they have the chance to become established.

Bald cypress is a large riparian tree that forms roots called “**knees**” which break the surface of the water to provide oxygen to the tree. Early pioneers kept a look out for cottonwoods, another riparian tree, because it meant water could be found nearby.

![Above: Cottonwood; Top right: Cedar Elm; Bottom right: Bald Cypress](image)

**Hardwood**
- Texas live oak
- Cedar elm
- Pecan

**Riparian**
- Bald cypress
- Cottonwood
- Black willow

*Can you find any of these trees at the Preserve?*
Juniper, locally called cedar, is a native tree that usually grows on rocky slopes where other plants have trouble growing. It has become overabundant due to overgrazing and fire suppression, and is blamed for many problems. However, this tree is a symptom of a larger land degradation problem that desperately needs to be addressed.

**Biodiversity** is important because it allows ecosystem services to function efficiently and recover from damage easily. Invasive species can out-compete native species because they may not have predators, competitors, or susceptibility to disease. Usually invasive species are escaped ornamental plants from someone's garden, however some native species such as Juniper can become problematic if conditions are right.

**Common Invasive Plants**
- Ligustrum
- Elephant ears (right)
- Chinaberry
- Chinese tallow (below)

**Non-Native/Invasive Species**

**Benefits** (when controlled)
- Prevents soil erosion
- Food and shelter to animals
- Endangered species habitat

**Problems** (when not controlled)
- Increased runoff
- Crowds out hardwood species
- High water consumption
Fauna of Nalle Bunny Run

Non-Native/Invasive Species

Several invasive animal species make their home at Nalle Bunny Run Wildlife Preserve. These animals can out-compete their native neighbors as well as damage crops and native flora.

**European starlings**
- Can damage buildings
- Can damage crops

**Axis deer**
- Can cause soil erosion
- Can damage vegetation
  (HCC is working to decrease the number of Axis)

Our actions can impact the behavior of animals. Humans have exterminated many large predators and destroyed bison herds. This has lead to many problems with native species.

**Brown-headed cowbird**
- Parasitic bird
- Increased range
- Increased impact on other birds

**White-tailed deer**
- Increased population can decrease food and shelter for other animals

Keep an eye out for these animals!
Urban Wildlife

As our urban areas spread, the land available for wildlife shrinks and wildlife must find places to fit into the urban surroundings. Natural areas such as Nalle Bunny Run Wildlife Preserve functions as a wild place amongst the growing urban area in which wildlife can find refuge. These animals generally pose no threat to humans and prefer to keep their distance. Below are facts about urban wildlife that may be found at Nalle Bunny Run Wildlife Preserve:

**Virginia opossums** are the only native marsupials of North America, and are not related to rats. They are omnivores and scavengers.

**Common raccoons** are nocturnal scavengers usually found near water. These omnivores are not good hunters.

**Squirrels** are the most common urban animal. Types include the eastern fox and eastern grey squirrels. They build nests called dreys.

**Nine-banded armadillos** prefer to be near water. They have large strong claws that are great for digging their dens and for food such as grubs, insects, and small invertebrates.
Skunks are crepuscular (active at dusk and twilight) mammals that live nearby humans and eat grubs, mice, insects.

The common gray fox is the only fox native to Central Texas. They are good at climbing trees. Their numbers decrease when coyotes numbers increase.

Coyotes are very adaptable animals that have increased in areas where wolves have decreased. They are omnivores and scavengers.

Rock squirrels are dark-colored, less common ground squirrels that live in canyons and other rocky areas.

Carolina wrens and northern cardinals are both native songbirds that have easily adapted to urban life.

The common grackle is a native songbird that has increased its numbers in response to increased agriculture and ornamental trees.
Restoration Projects

Volunteers have helped preserve biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and water quality by assisting with many different restoration projects at Nalle Bunny Run Wildlife Preserve. The work of these volunteers supports the health of our environment, economy, and future. Below are descriptions of some projects that have taken place at Nalle Bunny Run Wildlife Preserve.

**Trincheras/terraces** (right): These are wooden structures (juniper logs) strategically laid across steep slopes. Terraces help prevent erosion by slowing runoff. They should be checked yearly to determine the effectiveness of their placement.

**Brush piles/windrows** (below): These are carefully constructed to provide shelter for wildlife, especially during winter months when vegetation is sparse. The piles will decay and should be checked yearly.

**Exotic removal**: Removing non-native species improves ecosystem health and biodiversity. Exotic removal is an ongoing project that requires regular maintenance.
**Bank stabilization structures:** These long-lasting concrete structures (left) help prevent erosion by protecting the banks from intense water flow. By preventing erosion they help keep the water clean from too much sediment.

**Bat (far right) and bird (right) boxes:** These provide shelter for birds and bats that feed on insects like mosquitoes and flies.

**Native planting:** Planting native trees, shrubs, and grasses increases biodiversity. Native grasses can improve water quality, while native trees improve wildlife habitat. They must be protected from damage while they are young and becoming established.

**Spring box:** This is a simple, long-lasting, low maintenance structure that protects spring water from contamination and sediment (right).

**Brush removal:** Brush removal, especially Juniper, is being done in a mosaic pattern to best benefit wildlife. Removing unwanted brush is a never-ending task.
**Rock berm:** These are structures used in gullies. They serve as small check dams by intercepting sediment and trash. Rock berms should be checked periodically to be sure sediment is not building up behind it. There are a couple different types of rock berms in use at the Preserve.

**Future Projects**

Restoration projects are ongoing at Nalle Bunny Run Wildlife Preserve. Hill Country Conservancy is always working to protect the land for the benefit of the people, wildlife, economy, and the environment.

Future projects include the continued maintenance and monitoring of existing restoration projects, a possible education center, and the possible restoration of a wetland area. Volunteers and contributions are vital to achieving these goals.

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