

# LONG CANYON

## Gazette

APRIL 2018

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE RESIDENTS OF THE LONG CANYON

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## NATURE WATCH

### LITTLE ARMORED ONE

by Jim and Lynne Weber

Spanish for 'little armored one', the armadillo is one of the most interesting mammals in North America. All but one of the 20 different species of armadillo live in Latin America, but the Nine-banded Armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*) makes its home as far north as Texas

(except for the western Trans-Pecos), Oklahoma, and Louisiana. In fact, this armadillo is the official state small mammal of Texas!

A cat-sized, insect-eating mammal, armadillos have bony plates that cover their back, head, legs, and tail, protecting them from predators. No other living mammal wears such a shell, but contrary to popular belief, the Nine-banded Armadillo cannot roll into a ball and encase itself with its shell. Only the Three-banded Armadillo can accomplish this, by curling its head and back feet inward and contorting its shell as protection. No amount of armor can protect them from the cold, however, and because of their low metabolic rate and lack of fur and body fat stores, cold weather can wipe out whole populations of these little creatures.

Armadillos have a pointy snout and small eyes, and are prolific diggers. They dig for food and dig many burrows, mostly along creekbeds in Central Texas, and they do not survive in areas where the soil is too hard to dig. Armadillos spend up to 16 hours a day digging, mainly active in the dawn and dusk hours, looking for beetles, ants, termites, and other insects. Their eyesight is quite poor, but they use their keen sense of smell to locate food, and utilize their long, sticky tongues to grasp berries, caterpillars, grubs, fungi, and sometimes even carrion.



*Nine-banded Armadillo*

Armadillos are quite fond of water, visiting water holes and streams to drink, feed, and even take mud baths. Their specific gravity is high, which means they normally ride low in the water when swimming. For short water crossings, they often just walk underwater across the bottom, but for deeper and longer crossings they voluntarily ingest air to inflate themselves and increase their buoyancy by retaining the air in their digestive tract!

Armadillos are thought to be a pair during the breeding season, sharing the same burrow. Due to their bony shells and the underside location of their genitalia, copulation occurs with the female lying on her back. While breeding occurs in July, the embryo remains in a dormant state until November. Always of the same sex, identical quadruplets develop from the single egg, and four young are born in a grass-lined burrow in March.

While the Nine-banded Armadillo is a unique mammal whose range is expanding northward, there is reason to be concerned about their conservation status in Texas. Encroaching human civilization, overgrazing, and progressive climatic change may be keeping them on the move, and many mammalogists agree that armadillos are rare at best when compared to populations of a few years ago. This decline also appears to be correlated with increasing populations of feral hogs, as well as the propensity for people to make trinkets from armadillo shells. Perhaps our state motto should read 'Don't Mess with Texas Armadillos!'

Send your nature-related questions to [naturewatch@austin.rr.com](mailto:naturewatch@austin.rr.com) and we'll do our best to answer them. If you enjoy reading these articles, check out our books, *Nature Watch Austin* and *Nature Watch Big Bend* (published by Texas A&M University Press), and our blog at [naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com](http://naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com).

# LONG CANYON

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## Coffee-Chocolate Chip Cookies

### INGREDIENTS

1 ½ cups flour  
¼ tsp baking soda  
¾ cup butter softened  
¾ cup sugar  
½ cup brown sugar  
3 tbsp cool strong brewed coffee  
1 egg  
1 tsp vanilla  
2 pkgs (8 ozs.) semi sweet chocolate, chopped  
1 ½ cups chopped walnuts

### DIRECTIONS

Heat oven to 325 degrees.  
Combine flour and baking soda.  
Beat sugars & butter until light & fluffy.  
Blend in coffee, egg & vanilla.  
Gradually beat in flour mixture until well blended.  
Stir in chopped nuts & chocolate. Refrigerate 30 mins.  
Roll dough into 60 x 1” balls, place on cookie sheet 2” apart.  
Bake 10-12 mins. Enjoy!

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# IN THE GARDEN

by Pamela Kurburski

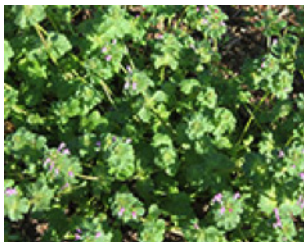
Although the severe freezes of the past winter may have done a number on all those flowers you love, I guarantee they did not have the same impact on the weed seeds that have been lying in wait. They are always the first to spring forth as the weather warms. There are an amazing variety of plants that are considered weeds and all of them will show up in my yard no matter how hard I tried to eradicate them the year before.

With weed control, the best defense is a good offense. Weeds do not like soil rich in organic matter. Adding compost is one of the best organic ways to stop weed seeds from germinating. Using corn gluten as a pre-emergent is also favored by those who don't like the idea of adding poisons to the landscape. For spot treatments, a combination of 20% vinegar, orange oil, and a dash of dishwashing soap is very effective. Be careful about applying the latter. It can kill almost anything it touches. Of course, just pulling the \*@#% invaders up by the roots is also an option. Just try and get to them early because some have roots that seem to be seeking a direct route to the other side of the world. Plus you don't want them to set seed.

Knowing the enemy may not be as effective as some of the things listed above when it comes to getting rid of them. But it does give you a name to add to your expletive of choice when you are in the heat of battle. Here are a few of the most common in our area.



**Vetch** - Has clinging tendrils and climbs all over other plants making it hard to remove without causing some damage to its host.



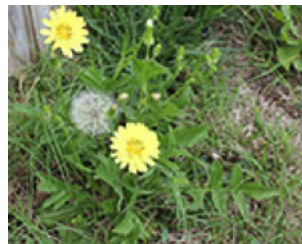
**Henbit** - Easy to pull but seeds prolifically. When you pull up one of the big plants, you'll find a bunch of little ones hiding underneath and eager to take its place.



**Texas Thistle** - Probably will need to dig this one out. The root has a tendency to snap off. That means it will just be back to annoy you in a couple of weeks. Use gloves because it is very prickly.



**Yellow Nutsedge** - You can try to dig this up but, as my grandfather used to say, the only way to really get rid of nutsedge is to move. That said, you can at least let it know it's not welcome in your garden. Although the vinegar spray mentioned above will brown the leaves, it won't touch the roots and the nuts that generate new plants.



**Dandelion** - Another tap-rooted weed that needs to be dug up. Those fluffy balls that are fun to blow on are actually the plant's seed dispersal system. Think twice before aiding and abetting this activity.

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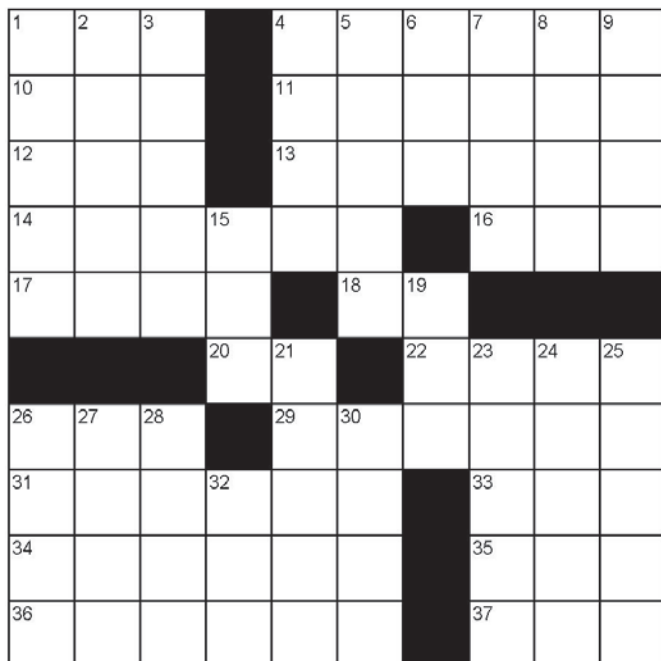
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### ACROSS

1. Owns
4. Short people
10. Grain
11. In the air
12. Single
13. Nun's headwear
14. Musician (3 wds.)
16. Homesick
17. Booty
18. Horsepower (abbr.)
20. Cincinnati locale
22. Hasten
26. Mountain Standard Time
29. Eras
31. Cover
33. Eccentric
34. Beaches
35. Vane direction
36. Hug upon greeting
37. Danish krone (abbr.)

### DOWN

1. Coat hangers
2. Root beer brand (3 wds.)
3. Stone
4. Aurora
5. Ponder
6. Build up
7. Holes
8. Syllables used in songs (2 wds.)
9. Sledge
15. Gone by
19. Not against
21. Cycles per second
23. Pimpled
24. Glob
25. Organic compound
26. Soft mineral
27. Prig
28. Tyrant
30. Mexican money
32. North American country

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