



Shoal Creek Wildlife Guide

*Created with Shoal Creek Conservancy to
celebrate and protect the wildlife supported by
our urban watershed.*



Welcome to the Shoal Creek Wildlife Guide



This guide was created to help you explore and appreciate the unique wildlife can be found along Shoal Creek and in the greater Austin area. As our city grows, it's more important than ever to understand and protect the animals and ecosystems that call this area home.

Inside you'll find:

- **Interesting facts about local wildlife species**
- **Where and how to spot them**
- **Tips for observing nature responsibly**
- **Ideas for how to get more involved**



As you explore, use this guide to check off the animals you see— like a nature scavenger hunt! Want to learn even more? Scan the QR Codes below to:



***Log your sightings
with iNaturalist***



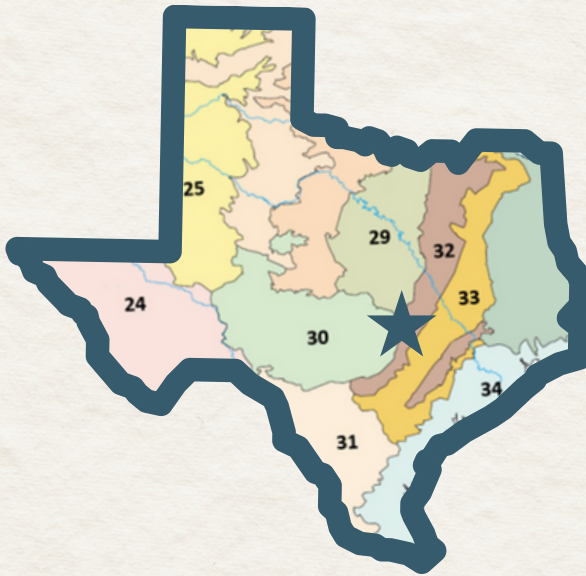
***Get involved with Shoal
Creek Conservancy***

Austin's Ecoregions

Blackland Prairie ⁽³²⁾

A flat or gently rolling region with rich, dark soil and tall grasses. It used to be a wide open prairie, but now it's covered in farms, neighborhoods, and parks where wildlife coexists with humans.

Look for species like the Eastern Cottontail or Northern Cardinal!



Edwards Plateau ⁽³⁰⁾

A rocky, hilly area with limestone, oak trees, and clear spring-fed creeks. It's drier than Blackland Prairie, so the plants and animals that live here are more adapted to these conditions.

Look for species like the White-tailed Deer or Great Horned Owl!



Wildlife Calendar

JANUARY

Raccoons are foraging more in the daylight.

Don't forget to secure your trash!



FEBRUARY

Coyote mating season begins.



Listen for their calls at night!

MARCH

Great Horned Owl nesting season begins in high trees and cliffs.



Look for them flying above Shoal Creek!

APRIL

Gulf Coast Toads call after spring rains.



Listen for them near creeks!

MAY

Baby bird season!



Peak nesting time for **Cardinals, Blue Jays,** and more.

JUNE

Armadillos enter the peak of their breeding season.



Watch for them foraging at night!



JULY

Mexican Free-tailed bats make their nightly flight in record numbers to search for food.



*Check them out
under Congress Ave!*

AUGUST

Snakes love hot weather and basking near creeks.



Watch your step on trails!

SEPTEMBER

Monarch butterflies begin their fall migration to Mexico.



*Look for them on
native milkweed!*

OCTOBER

Rutting, or breeding, season begins for **White-tailed deer**.

*Spot them
around dusk!*



NOVEMBER

Red-tailed hawks migrate south to Texas for the winter.

*Listen for their loud
calls during the day!*



DECEMBER

Fox breeding season begins.

*Look out for them
foraging at dusk!*



Key



Diurnal

active during the day



Carnivore

only eats meat



Nocturnal

active at night



Herbivore

only eats plants



Crepuscular

active at dawn and dusk



Omnivore

eats both meat and plants



Pollinator

helps plants reproduce by moving pollen



Insectivore

primarily eats insects

Mammals

Mammals play key roles in our ecosystem—from seed dispersal to pest control. In Austin, you'll find a wide range of mammals from armadillos to bats to squirrels. Spotting them often means looking for tracks or other signs.

Common Tracks:



Raccoon



White-tailed Deer



Gray Fox

Tips for Spotting:

- Look for **footprints and scat** along trails.
- Visit **early in the morning** or **just before sunset** for best chances.
- **Don't leave out trash!** Urban mammals are healthier without human food.



Raccoon

Procyon lotor



Size: 16-28 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau



Raccoons are clever, adaptable mammals often found near water or urban areas. They're very curious and great problem-solvers, thriving alongside humans.

Fun Fact!

Raccoons often "wash" their food- but it's really to explore it better with their sensitive paws!



Virginia Opossum

Didelphis virginiana



Size: 21-36 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau

Fun Fact!

Opossums can eat thousands of ticks each year!

Virginia Opossums are the only native marsupial in North America.

They are shy, adaptable, and are often seen waddling through backyards and brushy areas at night.





Eastern Cottontail

Sylvilagus floridanus



Size: 14-17 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau

Fun Fact!
Cottontails
can run up to
18 miles per
hour!

Eastern cottontails are small, quick rabbits often found in grassy fields and wooded areas.

They're incredibly fast and will run in a zig-zag pattern to avoid predators.



Eastern Fox Squirrel

Sciurus niger



Size: 18-17 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau

Fun Fact!
Their tail keeps
them warm and
helps them
balance!

Eastern fox squirrels are large, active tree squirrels often seen leaping from tree to tree.

In Austin, you'll see them throughout parks, neighborhoods, and even downtown.





Coyote

Canis latrans



Size: 3.5-4.5 feet long
Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau

Fun Fact!
Coyotes are
social animals
and can live
alone or in
family groups!

Coyotes are
opportunistic predators
that thrive in wild and
urban landscapes.
They use keen hearing
and a sharp sense of
smell to hunt at night.



Gray Fox

Urocyon cinereoargenteus



Size: 32-45 inches long
Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau

Fun Fact!
They're the only
canine in North
America that can
climb trees!

Gray foxes are small, agile
canines that prefer woods
and brushy fields.
They are shy animals and
you might see their dens at
the base of trees around
Shoal Creek!





Nine-banded Armadillo

Dasypus novemcinctus



Size: 24-32 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau



Fun Fact!

They're great swimmers and can hold their breath for up to 6 minutes!

Nine-banded armadillos are unique mammals known for their armored shells and digging skills.

They use their strong claws to search for insects in soft soil. You might see the small holes they leave behind!



White-tailed Deer

Odocoileus virginianus



Size: 5-7 feet long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau

Fun Fact!

When alarmed, they'll raise their white tails to warn others!

White-tailed deer are cautious mammals found throughout fields, forests, and green spaces.

They are highly alert and use their excellent hearing and strong legs to escape predators.





Mexican Free-tailed Bat

Tadarida brasiliensis



Size: 3.5-4 inches long, 12-14 inch wingspan

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie and Edwards Plateau



Mexican free-tailed bats are the most famous bats in Austin, known for their massive evening flights from under the Congress Avenue bridge.

These fast, agile flyers travel miles each night to hunt insects, **using echolocation to find their prey in the dark.**

Emerging in large swarms at night, they're one of the fastest flying mammals, reaching **up to 60 miles an hour.**

These bats eat mostly moths, beetles, and flying insects, helping to **control pest populations naturally.**

One bat can eat thousands of insects in a single night!



Scan to learn more about Austin's bat colonies and how to watch their flights!



Birds

Birds keep ecosystems in balance by eating pests, dispersing seeds, and pollinating plants. You can hear or see birds almost anywhere in the city- from backyard feeders to the shady creekside canopy.

Signs to Look for:



Birdsong



Feathers



Nests

Tips for Spotting:

- **Use your ears!** Learn a few calls like the White-winged Dove or Northern Cardinal.
- Bring **binoculars** to spot them from far away.

*Hear a bird sound
you don't recognize?*



*Use the Merlin
app to ID them!*



Red-tailed Hawk

Buteo jamaisensis



Size: 18-26 inches tall

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau

Red-tailed Hawks are powerful birds of prey that use their keen eyesight to spot small prey from high above and dive down in swift flights.



Fun Fact!
They're monogamous and return to the same nesting site every year!



Great Horned Owl

Bubo virginianus



Size: 18-25 inches tall

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau

Great Horned Owls are nocturnal hunters known for their striking presence. They can take down prey larger than themselves, using their sharp talons and silent flight to surprise their targets.



Meet Athena! Scan to watch a resident great horned owl at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.

Fun Fact!
They don't build their own nests, they prefer ledges and tree hollows!



White-winged Dove

Zenaida asiatica



Size: 11-12 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau

Fun Fact!

They can survive in very dry areas by feeding on cacti!

White-winged Doves are fast-flying birds commonly seen in Austin parks, neighborhoods, and green spaces.

They get their name from the bright white stripe on their wings.



Northern Cardinal

Cardinalis cardinalis



Size: 8-9 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau

Fun Fact!

Males sing to defend their nests!

Northern cardinals are bold songbirds that can be easily spotted around Austin.

Males are bright red, while females are a warm brown with hints of red.





Golden-fronted Woodpecker

Melanerpes aurifrons



Size: 8.7-10.2 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau

Golden-fronted Woodpeckers are vibrant birds known for their bright coloring and sharp calls. They are frequent visitors to tree trunks where they tap their beak for insects or fruit.

Fun Fact!
Males are known for their bright red crown!



Great-tailed Grackle

Quiscalus mexicanus



Size: 15-18 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie

Great-tailed Grackles are loud, flashy birds commonly seen all throughout Austin. Males are glossy black with long, V-shaped tails, while females are brown and smaller.

Fun Fact!
They're very smart and can recognize humans—especially females!



Blue Jay

Cyanocitta cristata



Size: 9-12 inches long

Ecoregion: Edwards
Plateau

Blue jays are smart songbirds known for their loud calls and bright blue feathers. They often travel in noisy family groups.

Fun Fact!
They're great mimics and imitate hawks to scare or alert other birds!



Reptiles & Amphibians

Reptiles and amphibians are vital for pest control and tell us a lot about water and soil health. These cold-blooded animals thrive in hidden corners of Austin's green spaces.

Signs to Look for:



Toads

damp hiding spots under logs



Lizards

basking on rocks or fence posts

Tips for Spotting:

- **Find sunny spots**— cold-blooded animals love to bask in warm areas.
- After rain, listen for amphibian **calls near creeks**.
- **Stay on trails and watch your step**— many species are well camouflaged!



Gulf Coast Toad

Incilius valliceps



Size: 2-4 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau

Fun Fact!
They'll burrow
underground
until rain
returns!

Gulf Coast Toads are tough amphibians that hang out near creeks and ponds.

They have brown bumpy skin and are especially active after rain storms.



Common Snapping Turtle

Chelydra serpentina



Size: 8-18 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie

Fun Fact!
They've been
around for over
90 million years!

Common Snapping Turtles are large freshwater turtles known for their strong jaws and prehistoric appearance.

They spend most of their time in the water, but may travel on land after periods of heavy rain.





Plain-bellied Watersnake

Nerodia erythrogaster



Size: 24-40 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland
Prairie

Fun Fact!
They can stay
underwater
for over an
hour to avoid
predators!

Plain-bellied watersnakes are non-venomous snakes often seen basking near or gliding across water. They have solid-colored bellies and may move onto land to hunt or escape predators.



Red-eared Slider

Trachemys scripta elegans



Size: 5-12 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau

Fun Fact!
They're known
for *sliding* off
rocks and logs
when startled.

Red-eared Sliders are common turtles, especially in the Shoal Creek area. They get their name from the bright red stripe behind each eye.





Spiny Softshell Turtle

Apalone spinifera



Size: 5-17 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie

Fun Fact!

They can pump water through their throats to breathe underwater!

Spiny softshell turtles are fast swimming turtles with flat, flexible shells that feel like leather.

They often bury themselves in sandy or muddy creek bottoms, leaving only their head above water to breathe and watch for prey.



Texas River Cooter

Pseudemys texana



Size: 8-12 inches long

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie

Fun Fact!

They breathe underwater through a sac on their tail!

Texas River Cooters are bright patterned freshwater turtles often seen basking on logs or rocks. They have yellow markings and strong legs for swimming.



Insects

Insects are the hidden heroes of the ecosystem.

They pollinate plants, break down waste, and serve as food for nearly everything else. Some, like bees and butterflies, are essential to local biodiversity— and fun to observe up close!

Signs to Look for:



Webs



Leaves with
chewed holes



Mud nests

Tips for Spotting:

- Visit **native wildflower areas**, especially in the spring and summer.
- Get out **early** in the day when it's still cool.
- **Avoid pesticides!** They harm helpful bugs.



Monarch

Danaus plexippus



Size: 3.5-4 inch wingspan

Ecoregion: Blackland Prairie
and Edwards Plateau



Fun Fact!

They're the only butterfly known to make a two way migration!

Monarch butterflies are famous for their bright orange wings and black and white patterns.

Each year, they migrate thousands of miles between Canada, the United States, and Mexico, passing right through Austin.



Gulf Fritillary

Dione vanillae



Size: 2.5-3.7 inch wingspan

Ecoregion: Edwards Plateau

Fun Fact!

The caterpillars feed only on passionflower vines!

Gulf Fritillaries are bright orange butterflies with narrow wings and silver markings. You might find them throughout wildflower patches.



Giant Swallowtail

Papilio cresphontes



Size: 4-6 inch wingspan

Ecoregion: Edwards
Plateau

Fun Fact!

Their markings mimic bird droppings to trick predators!

Giant swallowtails are the largest butterflies in North America.

They glide through open green and woodland areas. Look for them near wafer ash trees around Shoal Creek!



Field Notes



Shoal Creek Conservancy is a proud steward of the 13-square-mile Shoal Creek watershed and the creek and trail running through it. We engage in thoughtful public and private partnerships, lead fun and meaningful educational programming, and spearhead on-the-ground improvements that make Shoal Creek and the Shoal Creek Trail safer, more accessible, and a more inspiring place to be.

The Shoal Creek Watershed Action Plan is a cooperative project funded in part by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality through a Clean Water Act, Section 319(h) Nonpoint Source Management grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency