

Cattail

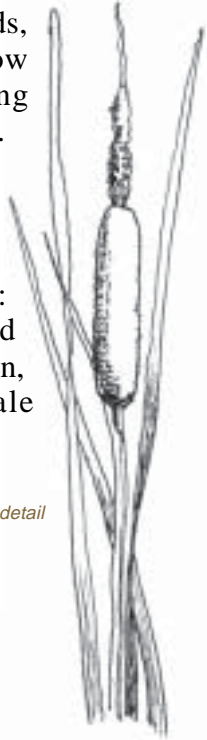
Typha domingensis
Typhaceae – the Cattail Family

Emergent plants of wetlands, cattails can tolerate the low oxygen content of standing water 6 to 12 inches deep. They readily colonize wet areas.

The tall inflorescences resemble hot dogs on a stick: male flowers on top covered with masses of yellow pollen, and brown, velvety female flowers below.

Flower detail

Cattail cluster in shallow water



Left: Indian Rushpea compound leaves with flowers and seedpods



Indian Rushpea / Hog Potato

Hoffmanseggia glauca
Fabaceae – the Pea Family

This low-growing native perennial colonizes disturbed alkaline soils. Attractive yellow to orange flowers produce pea-like pods containing dark reddish-brown seeds.

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Wetlands and riverside forests once graced the banks of the Rio Grande in the Paso del Norte region. They were the area's most productive natural habitats, but today they are virtually gone. At Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, the environment is still changing, but in a new way. Here, a diverse partnership is working to bring back meaningful examples of the unique and valuable ecosystems once found in our river valley.

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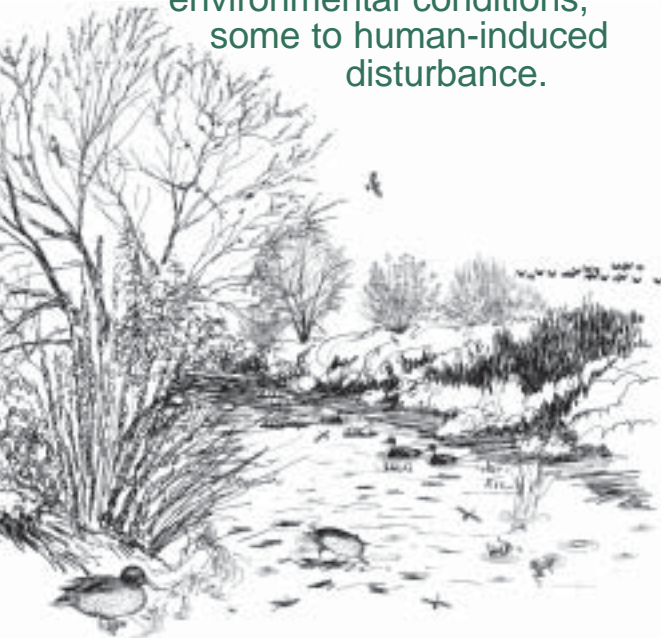
PLANTS of the Rio Bosque

Rio Bosque Wetlands Park

El Paso, Texas



Plant communities at the Rio Bosque change from year to year, for a variety of reasons. Some changes are due to year-to-year variation in environmental conditions, some to human-induced disturbance.



The Rio Grande once passed through the park. The diversion of water away from the historic river channel in the 1930's greatly influenced Rio Bosque's plant communities. So did the extensive soil movement during construction of the park's wetland cells and waterways in 1997. Seasonal fluctuation in the supply of water to the park has a major influence on its plant communities today.

Some plants like cottonwood and four-wing saltbush have been purposely introduced at the park. Others like saltcedar and perennial pepperweed are routinely removed. Most, however, get established on their own and thrive or falter depending on site-specific environmental conditions.

Right: Saltcedar branch



Exotic Plants at the Rio Bosque

The same disturbances that trigger a new cycle of plant-community succession also create conditions that invite invasion by non-native plants. Free from the insects and diseases that keep them in check in their home territories, these exotics can proliferate virtually without restraint and thereby edge out native species. These are some of the exotic plants found at the Rio Bosque:

Saltcedar/Tamarisk

Tamarix spp.
Origin: Mediterranean, Middle East

Tree Tobacco

Nicotiana glauca
Origin: Argentina

Perennial Pepperweed

Lepidium latifolium
Origin: Southern Europe

Tumbleweed

Salsola kali
Origin: Central Asia

An important component of restoration work at the Rio Bosque is controlling non-native plants and replacing them with the species that evolved with and helped shape the natural habitat of the Rio Grande valley.

Four-Wing Saltbush

Atriplex canescens
Chenopodiaceae – the Goosefoot Family

Look at the fruit of this plant and you'll see how it gets its name: each single-seeded bladder has four "wings" that help it disperse in the wind. Many animals, notably Gambel's quail, eat the seeds and take cover in the dense silvery foliage of these large shrubs.



Detail of "winged" fruits



Four Wing Saltbush branch with furry insect galls on lower branches



Detail of branch bearing mature "winged" fruits

Plant-community succession drives many of the changes. Pioneer species gradually alter the environment to permit new communities to occupy the park. The numbers and kinds of animals living at the Rio Bosque also change in response to plant-community succession as overall habitat diversity increases.

This brochure describes some of the plants growing at the Rio Bosque (other than trees, covered in a separate brochure). The ones you find on your visit will vary according to the season and recent environmental conditions. An updated list of plant species in the park is available at the Visitor Center.



Tornillo sapling

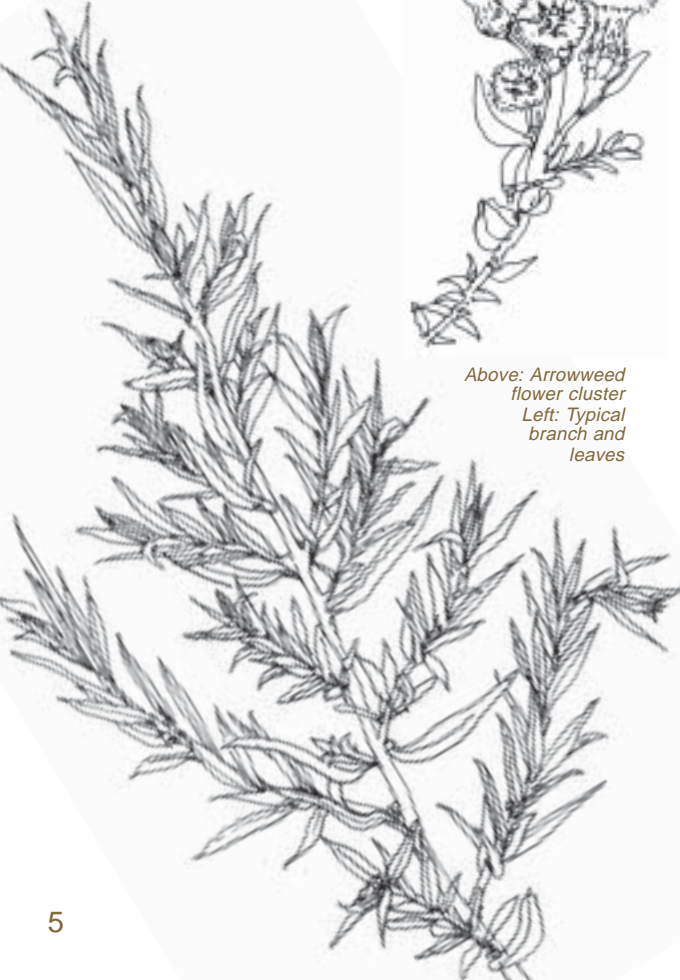
Arrowweed

Pluchea sericea
Asteraceae – the Sunflower Family

Thick hedges of arrowweed are found scattered through the park, their pinkish flower heads attracting crowds of bees and butterflies. Native Americans stripped the gray-green foliage from the straight slender stems to make arrow shafts and baskets.



Above: Arrowweed flower cluster
Left: Typical branch and leaves



Right: Bitterweed branch and flowers



Bitterweed

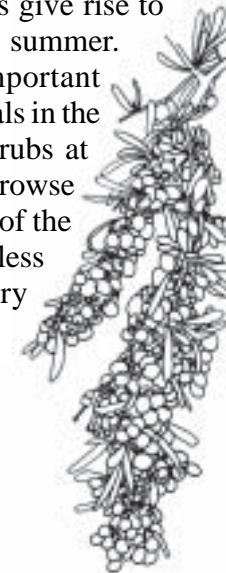
Hymenoxys odorata
Asteraceae – the Sunflower Family

In early spring thick carpets of bright lemon-yellow flowers seem to appear out of nowhere, covering large open stretches in the north end of the park and popping up as smaller clusters in other spots. By early summer, the dream-like vision has dissolved, leaving behind only the seeds for next year's pageant.

Wolfberry

Lycium spp.
Solanaceae – the Nightshade Family

Small, pale purple flowers give rise to bright red berries in early summer. The sweet fruit is an important food source to many animals in the park. Most wolfberry shrubs at the park have a distinct "browse line" – the lower portions of the plant are kept trim and leafless by the nibbling of hungry jackrabbits.



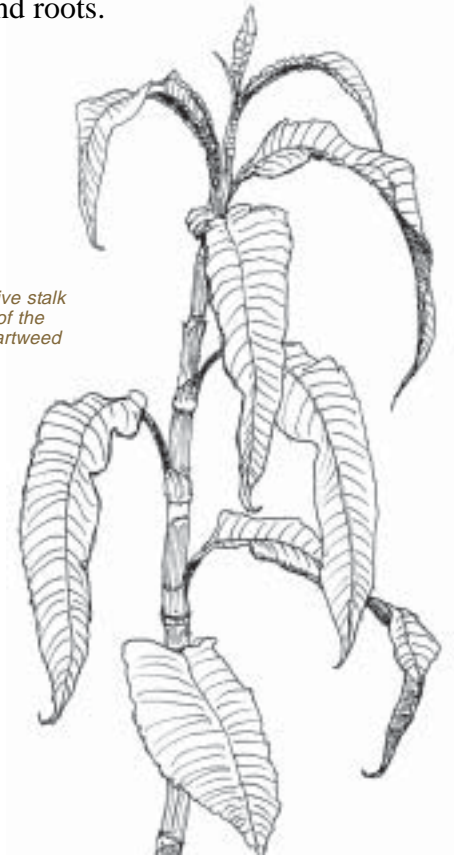
Above: Wolfberry branch with fruit
Left: Typical branch and leaves



Curltop Smartweed

Polygonum lapathifolium var. lapathifolium
Polygonaceae – the Buckwheat Family

Growing on the edge of water channels and wetland cells, smartweed has alternate, lance-shaped leaves and dense spikes of cream- to rose-colored flowers. Ducks eat the shiny brown seeds, and muskrats dine on the leaves, stems and roots.



The distinctive stalk and leaves of the Curltop Smartweed



Seepwillow
Baccharis salicifolia
Willow Baccharis

Baccharis salicina
Asteraceae – the Sunflower Family

These large shrubs grow in moist soils and resemble willows, but unlike true willows they flower well into late summer. Male and female flowers are borne on separate plants. The leaves of seepwillow are generally longer and broader than those of willow baccharis.



Seepwillow branch and leaves with flowers



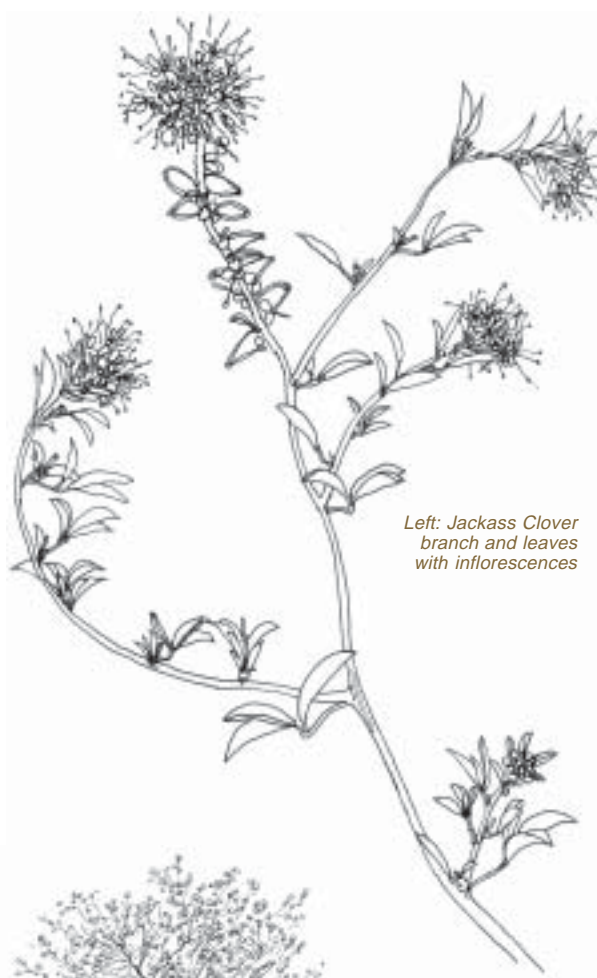
Seepweed

Suaeda spp.
Chenopodiaceae – the Goosefoot Family

The fleshy leaves of seepweed shrubs are soft to touch and salty to taste. Members of the genus *Suaeda* are “halophytes” – tolerant of saline soils – and are found on the margins of lake beds and river flood plains in the Southwest.



Left: *Suaeda* leaf detail
Below: *Suaeda* branch and leaves



Left: Jackass Clover branch and leaves with inflorescences

Jackass Clover

Wislizenia refracta
Capparaceae – the Caper Family

This native annual grows to 4 feet tall and is topped with clusters of yellow flowers. The palmately compound leaves resemble those of true clovers (*Trifolium*) of the pea family, but these species are only distantly related.

Left: Seepwillow plant shape
Below: Willow Baccharis plant shape



Willow Baccharis branch and leaves with immature flowers

