

Definitive Destination

Barton Creek Greenbelt Austin, Texas

*text and photos
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Austin may be the best place in the country

to find Rawson's Metalmark and Lacey's Scrub-Hairstreak. I want to take you on a tour of several surprisingly productive urban parks located just minutes from downtown. The star attraction is the Barton Creek Greenbelt, a city park that follows the riparian corridor of Barton Creek for 7 miles from Zilker Park, close to downtown, to the western suburbs and the streamside path that snakes along beside it. You can walk that entire distance without crossing a road or you can sample several stretches at access points. I live next to the greenbelt and I have treated it as my backyard for 20 years.

There are some lonely stretches, but often you will compete for space on paths with mountain bikers and others. Rock climbers

give nicknames like Seismic Wall and Urban Assault Wall to their favorite cliff faces. And there's a cave that spelunkers have explored for miles beneath a nearby shopping center.

There are four basic habitats in the park: cliff; stream bed; floodplain; and dry upland juniper-oak.

The canyons walls and base have shade and water seeps that support Ashe's Juniper, Texas Red Oaks, live oaks, Texas Persimmon, and Mexican Buckeye. This habitat is unique and this is where caterpillar foodplants for Rawson's Metalmark and Lacey's Scrub-Hairstreak grow.

The stream edge has sycamores, elms, and bald cypress. The creek bed is often dry and supports an odd mix of exotic plants washed down from gardens and native plants. Many species like crescents come to the creek bed for courtship.



Opposite page: A section of the Greenbelt near the Camp Craft road entrance. Most of the green trees are Ashe's Juniper. The cliff provides perfect habitat for Rawson's Metalmarks and Golden-cheeked Warblers. You can almost hear the Canyon Wrens calling! March 8, 2003.