

Member Profile: Wendy Elias

By Lydia Saldaña, Friends Board Member

[Editor's note: Each issue, we will be profiling a Friends member whom the Nature Center has impacted in some way. Would you like to share your story? Contact us at info@naturecenterfriends.org.]

Wendy Elias grew up as a child of the 1970s in South Carolina where her mom told her to go outside and play. So, she did, romping in the woods near her childhood home. Her life's journey brought her to Fort Worth as a young adult, but a busy life as a career woman and single mom kept her away from nature and the outdoors. A few years ago, Wendy realized that she needed a little "me" time, and that led to visiting nearby parks.

"You get caught up in working and being a mom, and you don't make time for yourself. I really wasn't doing anything just for me. So, I decided to start exploring and trying something new. That's where it started."

Wendy began traveling to state parks all over North Texas and spent a lot of time on the Trinity Trails. She learned that every trip into the natural world means new discoveries.

"Every time I go outdoors, I see one thing that makes the day worth it. Whether it's a cool stick bug that catches my eye, or I see an alligator in the Trinity River, or I spy something as simple as a squirrel in a little nest, anything like that just makes my whole day."

Her quest for nearby nature adventures led her to the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge. She was delighted to find a place to explore nature so close to home.

"At first, I had no idea what was going on, but now, it's a totally different story. I kept going back because I love the different ecosystems that are out there, from prairies to limestone cliffs, forests, and river bottoms. There's so many different places to explore."

She got to know the staff and quickly realized that she should become a member of the Friends of the Fort Worth Nature Center.

"It's economical, for one thing. I go so often, and free unlimited entry is a great member benefit. I feel safe there, too. It's a marvelous place! There's so much diversity there. There's always wildlife to see—and wildflowers and champion trees as well. There's also a wonderful network of people whose knowledge is astounding. I've learned so much from Michael Perez and Laura Veloz."

Her newfound passion also unleashed the desire to give back. A visit during Canoe Fest a few years ago resulted in her becoming a Nature Center volunteer.



Wendy Elias hiking on Canyon Ridge Trail at the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge. Photo by Wendy Elias.

"I tried my first kayak that day and had the most amazing experience. As I was paddling back to the dock, I saw a doe and her two fawns swimming across the river from one side of the bank to the other. I had no idea they did that! That made me want to learn more, so I signed up for one of Michael's Saturday morning kayak tours. I had such a good time on the tour that I said, 'Hey, I think I'm going to sign up to volunteer.' So, I did."

Wendy makes good use of her Friends membership with frequent visits, and she volunteers as often as she can. With every visit, she learns something new.

"It's important to keep learning every day. Learning something new and understanding that nature is perfect in its imperfect state makes every visit a treasure. Experiencing the Fort Worth Nature Center fills you up with everything you need."

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