

## City Nature Challenge 2022 & Spiders

Article and photo by Joseph Connors, South Texas Border Chapter

The City Nature Challenge is an annual global competition to document urban biodiversity and engage people with nature in its many forms. Birds, plants, insects, and fungi are some examples of the observations that are uploaded to iNaturalist.org.

Observers in the 15 participating Texas regions identified 7,500+ species over the two phases of the challenge. Phase 1 was four days to photograph and make observations. Then we had the next week to finish uploading and get things identified on iNaturalist. The Rio Grande Valley finished fifth in the state with 1,868 documented species and 10,956 observations thanks to our region's abundant biodiversity. This year, 2022, was our best year by far in observations and species count.

In the Valley, at least 23 of the top 30 observers for this year's City Nature Challenge were TMN members, relatives, or friends of our two TMN chapters. The more eyes we have out there the more we can document. You don't have to go as crazy with over 1000 observations like Roberto Gaitan and I did. You can post a bit of everything or just focus on your favorite subjects. This year, I concentrated mostly on insects and spiders. Many of our members specialize in birds or butterflies. You can do bioblizes alone, but it is more fun with friends. I spent a lot of time at Oleander Acres Butterfly Garden with Seth and Candi Welliver. Seth did mostly plants while Candi did some of everything. The three of us documented 771 species in their park.



*Varacosa shenandoa* wolf spider

During this challenge, I recorded about 30 species I hadn't documented before. My favorite is a species of wolf spider that wasn't even listed on iNaturalist yet, *Varacosa shenandoa*. It looked just like a regular wolf spider to me out in the field, but when I uploaded it, Eric Neubauer, a wolf spider enthusiast from El Camino Real Chapter TMN commented that it looks unusual and tagged someone who was able to identify it.

I got excited when nearing my previous challenge's arachnid totals. I picked up several on the last day and once things got identified, I had more than I realized. There were 53 species of spiders and four other arachnids, including a tick that came home on me. It was great to see the entire RGV recorded a total of 79 species of arachnids this year. This is nearly four percent of our total species and more than half a percentage point higher than the rest of Texas.

John Brush, Urban Ecologist at Quinta Mazatlan, is our local coordinator for the challenge. You can check out his report at the link below:

<https://cuefornature.wordpress.com/2022/05/10/summary-of-the-city-nature-challenge-2022-lower-rio-grande-valley/> the end