

VERNAL POOLS

AT

Enchanted Rock

STATE NATURAL AREA

A Threatened Natural Resource

The “islands” of vegetation on the bare granite summit of Enchanted Rock are some of the most ecologically significant and severely threatened features of this state natural area. Known as soil islands, weathering pits, gammas or vernal pools, these patches of vegetation on bare rock develop in depressions formed by weathering over thousands of years.





The depressions shelter an assemblage of plants and animals uniquely adapted to a harsh environment. In fact, by studying weathering pits, ecologists learn: (1) how plants and animals colonize a newly formed habitat; (2) how those organisms modify their environment and help develop soils; and, (3) how plant and animal community structure and composition change over time.

At Enchanted Rock you can see the progressive development from bare rock-bottom pits, to annual plant establishment, to miniature prairies with grasses like little bluestem and even trees like live oak. Vernal pools also support an interesting species of invertebrate, the fairy shrimp. These tiny animals survive total desiccation as fertilized eggs, and hatch into larvae and grow into adults each time water collects after sufficient rainfall.

Because of the fragile nature of weathering pits, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department wants to make sure visitors are aware of their significance. Too often they are perceived as nothing more than convenient rest areas or even “bathrooms” and are subject to trampling, littering and other forms of waste. **PLEASE REFRAIN FROM ENTERING WEATHERING PITS UNDER ANY CONDITION.** Enjoy and observe these special features only from their granite margins – **STAY ON THE ROCK.** Thank you for protecting an important part of the Enchanted Rock experience.



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