THE FOREST CREEK FORUM

A Newsletter for the Forest Creek Community

The Forest Creek forum is a monthly newsletter mailed to all Forest Creek residents. Each newsletter will be filled with valuable information about the community, local area activities, school information, and more.

If you are involved with a school group, play group, scouts, sports team, social group, etc., and would like to submit an article for the newsletter, you can do so online at www.PEEInc.com. Personal news (announcements, accolades/honors/celebrations, etc.) are also welcome as long as they are from area residents.

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One of the most common lizards in the Austin area is the Texas Spiny Lizard (Sceloporus olivaceus). It is also one of the largest, averaging 7.5 to 11 inches in length, with the females being larger than the males.

A Texas spiny lizard is often hard to spot, as its dorsal pattern can vary by locality, serving as adequate camouflage in its chosen habitat. Typically grey in color with black, white, or reddish-brown blotches or crossbands down its back, it blends in perfectly against the bark of resident trees. Its underside is usually uniformly light grey, and males commonly have bright blue patches on either side of the belly. The scales appear particularly pointed and spiny, and it has long toes and sharp claws suitable for climbing.

All of these features serve this lizard well, as it is diurnal and arboreal, spending much of its time in trees. While it prefers larger tree species with a significant amount of leaf litter below, such as live oaks, post oaks, red oaks, pecans, hackberries, and elms, it may also be found in brushy trees such as mesquites and junipers. This lizard can also be seen climbing on man-made structures such as fence posts, walls, and telephone poles, especially when the base of these objects is covered in brush.

Typically shy and wary, this lizard quickly retreats to the opposite side of a tree trunk in the presence of a predator or human observer. If startled when approached closely, it will suddenly jump from a tree trunk and flee noisily into the leaf litter below, making it almost impossible to locate. Trees not only provide protection for this lizard, but they also provide for its food. Being insectivorous, it can find cicadas, crickets, grasshoppers, beetles, ants, butterflies, and caterpillars in the leafy canopy.

Male Texas spiny lizards are territorial, often defending a single tree from encroachment by other males. When challenged, the two males will have what appears to be a push up contest, until one is intimidated enough to give up and scurry away. Active on the surface from March to November, these lizards are reproductively active throughout the warmer months of the year. Females lay up to four clutches of eggs in a shallow depression in leaf litter, with hatchlings emerging 45-60 days later. In the cooler months of the year, they take cover for weeks at a time under rocks, logs, and in deep leaf litter, and are occasionally seen basking in the sun on warmer, sunnier days.

So when you're out and about in your yard or at a park, and you hear something skittering in the leaf litter or retreating up a tree, it most likely is a Texas Spiny Lizard!

Send your nature-related questions to naturewatch@austin.rr.com and we'll do our best to answer them. If you enjoy reading these articles, check out our book, Nature Watch Austin (published by Texas A&M University Press), and our blog at naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com.

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Texas Spiny Lizard

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Pictures will appear in color online at www.PEELinC.com.

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There are numerous ways to manage fire ants, but they are often broken into two categories—broadcast treatments and individual mound treatments. Individual mound treatments are used to treat one mound at a time and can be labor intensive and may result in more pesticide being spread into the environment. Broadcast treatments will spread product (granular or bait) over a large area.

Individual mound treatments include pouring boiling water onto the mound, using insecticide mound drenches, spreading insecticide granules onto the mound and watering them in, sprinkling insecticidal dusts on top of the mound or using bait-formulated insecticides around the perimeter of the mound. There are also many “home remedies”, but be advised that many of these do not kill fire ants. Many home remedies make the fire ants move to a new location (often 1-2 feet away), but do not kill the ants.

Bait-formulated insecticides most often consist of a defatted corn cob grit coated with soybean oil; the soybean oil is where the active ingredient (what kills the pest) is dissolved. Worker ants collect bait as a food source and take it back to the colony to share with other ants, including the queen. Depending on the active ingredient, the bait may cause the queen to die or be unable to produce viable eggs, which gradually kills off the colony. When using baits, results are often slower to observe when compared to individual mound treatments, but can provide 80-90% suppression for 12-18 months. A bonus to broadcasting baits is that the amount of active ingredient is generally very small, which places less chemical into the environment.

With any pesticide treatment, read and follow all label instructions. Make sure to water in the pesticide if the label instructs to do so. Failure to water in chemicals when recommended by the label does an inadequate job of killing the ants. Baits should not be watered in or used before a rainfall event; baits will not be picked up by ants if they get wet.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com.
The Forum

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