

THE ATASCOCITA FOREST COMMUNITY GAZETTE

VOL 2 ISSUE 7 | July 2018



THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ATASCOCITA FOREST COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

GUESTS IN YOUR ATTIC

By Cheryl Conley, TWRC Wildlife Center



Who doesn't enjoy seeing squirrels scamper from tree to tree? Everyone loves seeing birds at their feeders. Who doesn't love seeing the does with their fawns? We live side by side with wildlife. Is it any wonder that conflicts arise between humans and the animals?

This is baby season for raccoons. You may find that a mama raccoon has taken up residence in your attic or garage. The best advice we can offer you is to leave her alone. Within a couple of weeks, she will lead her babies out of your attic or garage to live in the wild. If you just can't wait, here are a couple of things you can try. Put a bright light in the area at night and play some LOUD music. Some say talk radio is best. You can throw some moth balls in the area or ammonia-soaked cotton balls. She will probably choose to move the babies to a darker, quieter place outside. When she moves out, it's your responsibility to find out how she got in and block the entrance or your attic will always look like an apartment for rent to wildlife.

We often receive calls from homeowners asking for advice on how to stop raccoons that are getting into trash cans. Solution: try using some bungee cords to secure the top. Another issue we hear about

is that raccoons are eating food that is being put out for feral cats. Since raccoons are nocturnal, simply removing the cat food at night will fix the problem except in the spring when mama raccoons can be seen looking for food during the day. No, they are not rabid! They are just hungry. Some homeowners ask about trapping and relocating. While removal may seem like a solution, it usually only creates an enticing vacancy for another animal in search of a meal. Remove raccoons from an area and it's only a matter of time before others move in to take their place. Additionally, the survival rate of relocated raccoons is very low. Raccoons are territorial and putting a lone raccoon into an area already populated with other raccoons can often result in death as the other raccoons will consider him/her as an intruder.

There are products available that may help not only with raccoons but other animals as well. One such product is the motion-activated sprinkler. When an animal gets close to the food source, the sprinkler goes off and scares them away. Just do an internet search and I'm certain you'll find other products that may work as well.

With urban sprawl and loss of habitats, we need to learn to live in harmony with wildlife. TWRC Wildlife Center can often help you find solutions to your issues. Check our website at www.twrcwildlifecenter.org or call us at 713-468-8972.

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AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

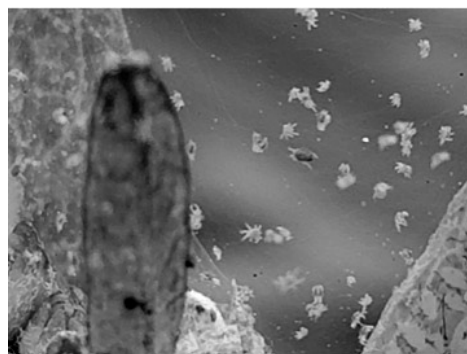
Spider mites

It's hot. It's dry. It's time for spider mites. Spider mites are very small to microscopic in size and depending on how good your eyesight is, you may not be able to see them without a good hand lens or microscope.

While spider mites are not insects- they are arachnids and more closely related to spiders than insects- they are pests in the landscape. Most spider mites produce a webbing around their colony. It starts on the underside of leaves and will expand out as the population increases.

Feeding can cause leaves to discolor, creating a speckled appearance on foliage. With severe infestations, leaves discolor to a silver or bronze color which may result in leaves dropping from the plant. While mites feed on the underside of leaves, damage is more apparent on the tops.

Spider mites lay their eggs along the leaf vein during the growing season. Eggs are round and large in size when compared to adult mites. Some species of spider mites peak during warmer months of the year while others become more active in the cooler months of the year. The mites are able to develop more quickly when



temperatures are warmer, with some spider mites going from egg to adult in less than 1 week. Spider mites thrive in dry conditions while their natural enemies require more humid conditions. Dry conditions allow

spider mite populations to grow with little predation or parasitism that would help to keep the population at an acceptable level.

There are many predatory arthropods that feed on spider mites. Some of these include predatory mites, spider mite destroyers (a type of ladybug), minute pirate bugs, big-eyed bugs, and predatory thrips. Proper watering of plants may help to reduce spider mite outbreaks as it can reduce stress brought on by drought. Using

(Continued on Page 2)

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

EMERGENCY911
Harris County Animal Control 281-999-3191
Poison Control 800-222-1222

NON-EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Pct 4 Constable Non-Emergency Dispatch..... 281-376-3472
Atascocita Volunteer Fire Dept. 281-852-2181
Harris County Precinct 4 281-376-3472
Texas No Call List Registration 866-TXN-OCAL
Emergency Roadside Assistance..... 800-525-5555

SCHOOLS

Humble ISD 281-540-1775
Whispering Pines Elementary..... 281-641-2500
Humble Middle School..... 281-641-2500
Humble High School 281-641-6300

UTILITY NUMBERS

Report Power Outage - Centerpoint..... 713-207-7777
Report Street Light Outage - Centerpoint 713-207-2222
Report Gas Leak - Centerpoint 713-659-2111
Centerpoint (Gas) 713-659-2111
Call Before You Dig 811
Water - SiEnvironmental..... 832-490-1600
Emergency Number 832-490-1601
Electricity - Multiple Providers..... www.powertochoose.org
Trash - RR&R of Texas..... 866-516-9805
MUD District www.TrailoftheLakesMUD.com

PUBLIC SERVICES

Humble Post Office..... 281-540-1775
DPS Office..... 281-446-3391
Harris County Clerk (Will Clayton Pkwy.) 281-540-1173

NEIGHBORHOOD MANAGEMENT

Community Asset Management
www.CommunityAssetManagement.com
Pam Valentine..... pvalentine@cam-texas.com

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Email the Board board@atascocitaforest.org
Website Questions/Problems..... website@atascocitaforest.org
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(Continued from Cover)

strong jets of water directed on plants can also help to dislodge spider mites. Miticides or acaricides can be used to manage spider mite outbreaks. Look for active ingredients such as horticultural oils (watch temperature when you use oils), insecticidal soaps, spinosad, abamectin, bifenthrin, dimethoate, or acephate.

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

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July Gardening To Do List

Plant:

- Succulents
- Container plants

Prune:

- Dead head flowering plants
- Last chance to cut back fall blooming perennials (like aster) that are setting buds

Fertilize:

- Bougainvillea with high nitrogen
- Container annuals

Insects:

- Watch for aphids and spider mites. It's easy to spray them off with a hard blast of water. Be sure to get the undersides of the leaves.
- Aphids and other insects can plague crape myrtles and

other trees in summer ("raining trees" are due to the honeydew secretions). Blast with water hose on regular basis.

Lawn:

Keep the lawn mower setting up to high. Keep the roots cool by leaving the grass long. Don't remove more than 1/3 of the top at a time. Leave clippings on the lawn to naturally fertilize.

Other tasks:

Deeply water new plants. Even if rain comes, check the soil to 3" deep to make sure their roots have water. A brief shower doesn't mean it penetrated to the roots.

Tips:

- Prune herbs often to encourage new growth
- Avoid over-watering perennials and annuals in hot, humid conditions. To avoid root rot, check soil moisture. Water deeply and then let dry out.



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Fill remainder of glass with club soda
Squeeze of lime

STIR AND ENJOY!

NATURE WATCH

WHIPTAILS & RACERUNNERS

by Jim and Lynne Weber



Common Spotted Whiptail

Small to medium-sized slender lizards, whiptails and racerunners can be distinguished from other lizard species by their generally granular dorsal (topside) scales, larger rectangular ventral (underside) scales arranged in transverse rows, long tails, and forked, snake-like tongues. Additionally, these species belong to the genus *Aspidoscelis*, from the Greek *aspidos* or 'shield' and *skelos* or 'leg', relating to their well-developed limbs that enable them to sprint at rapid speeds. Terrestrial and diurnal, these lizards are primarily carnivorous or insectivorous,

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actively foraging for food while temperatures are warm, and quickly skirting between objects for cover. Of the 22 species occurring in the southwest, Central Texas is home to the Common Spotted Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis gularis*) and Six-lined Racerunner (*Aspidoscelis sexlineata*).

The Common Spotted Whiptail has a brownish-green body with 7 to 8 longitudinal yellowish-white stripes and similarly colored spots in the margins. Its tail is up to twice the length of its body, reaching a total length of just about 12 inches. It is found in prairies, grasslands, rocky hillsides, dense thickets, and canyon bottoms, often near water. Males are larger than females, having a red, orange, or pinkish throat and sometimes a blue or light blue belly. Females have a white or cream-colored underside, and lay 1 to 8 eggs in July, typically in a separate chamber of their underground burrow, sometimes as deep as 11 inches. These lizards scare easily and often retreat in a straight line, but can best be viewed from April through August when their insect prey are most abundant.



Six-lined Racerunner

Just over 10 inches long, the Six-lined Racerunner has seven light dorsal stripes with a greenish wash on the head and upper body that fades to brown posteriorly. Males may also have a blue throat and belly, and juveniles often have more distinct stripes, lack the green wash, but have a bright blue tail. Females lay clutches of 1 to 6 eggs from May to August. Associated more with sandy soils, this lizard can occupy a wide variety of habitats, including grasslands, riverbanks, floodplains, and juniper woodlands. Spiders and grasshoppers are their chief prey, and adults actively forage during the day, but as summer temperatures rise by July, their activity becomes bimodal, peaking in the morning and late afternoon to avoid the hottest parts of the day.

Like many lizards, whiptails and racerunners have developed the ability to allow the tail to break free of the body when grasped by a predator. Called tail autonomy, this process involves wriggling the detached tail to distract the predator while the lizard itself is able to escape. Complex adaptations have evolved to enable the tail to be released along a series of fracture planes, which usually occur through weakened vertebrae, and not between them. Most amazingly, these species also have the ability to regenerate the tail, albeit slowly, so it can be lost again if necessary.

*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 books, *Nature Watch Austin* and *Nature Watch Big Bend* (published by Texas A&M University Press), and our blog at naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com.*



THE HISTORY OF FIREWORKS

I can't imagine the Fourth of July without fireworks! Fireworks displays actually have a history. According to scholars, war rockets and explosives were first made in China during the 6th century. The first fireworks were probably firecrackers, also known as Chinese crackers. Firecrackers are still used in China - and elsewhere - to celebrate weddings, births and Chinese New Year.

In the 14th century, Europeans began using gunpowder for weapons, as well as for pyrotechnics shows for entertainment; Italians and Germans were recognized as the masters of the fireworks game. Some medieval fireworks featured living people holding sky rockets and other fireworks. They were called "green men" because they placed leaves and greenery all over their bodies to ward off burns.

In England, a fireworks display helped celebrate the 1486 wedding of Henry VII, and by 1749 fireworks were such the rage that composer George Friedrich Handel created a symphony called *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. Fireworks finally made a big bang in the U.S. before the Revolutionary War and fireworks displays have been synonymous with the Fourth of July since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The biggest U.S. fireworks display ever was staged for the centenary of the Statue of Liberty in 1986, which brought together Zambelli, Grucci and Souza, the biggest names in modern-day American pyrotechnics.

GO GREEN GO PAPERLESS



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Moisture Meters



online at Amazon or most likely at Home Depot or Lowes.

One of the quickest and simplest ways to determine how much water to give your garden and/or potted plants is to purchase a moisture meter! It will prevent overwatering and help you monitor the length of time to run each zone in your irrigation system. There are many different types, but the one pictured is easy to use and can be purchased

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The goal is to fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9. Each digit may appear only once in each row, each column, and each 3x3 box.

WATERPROOF SUNBLOCK FOR YOUR CHILD How Safe Is It?

Those of us with small children are very familiar with waterproof sunblock - after all, the day at the beach or in the pool requires some serious protection from the sun for our youngsters. However, if your child gets waterproof sunblock in their eyes how are you going to get it out? You can't flush it out with water - it's waterproof!

It has been reported that 1 out of every 100 children using waterproof sunblock is temporarily blinded when they get the sunblock in their eyes by rubbing their eyes with sunblock coated hands or the sunblock being wiped into their eyes from other parts of their face.

Remember: Check the ingredients and choose sunblocks that are water-based NOT oil-based; don't apply waterproof sunblock to the child's hands and try to use another sunblock on their faces. Also, ask your pediatrician if they can recommend an eye wash solution that can counter the waterproof sunblock if it gets in your child's eyes.

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