



JULY 2018 VOLUME II, ISSUE 7

A Newsletter for the Residents of Legend Oaks II

NatureWatch

by Jim and Lynne Weber

Whiptails & Racerunners



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 *Aspido* from the Greek *aspid* 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, 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 (*Aspido**scelis gularis*) and Six-lined Racerunner (*Aspido**scelis sexlineata*).

The Common Spotted Whiptail has a brownish-green body with 7 to 8 longitudinal yellowish-white stripes and similarly colored spots



Six-lined Racerunner

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.

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

(Continued on Page 2)

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(Continued from Cover)

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.



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PATRIOTIC TRIFLE

Ingredients:

1 pkg Jello Instant pudding (prepared according to directions on the package)

Strawberries

Blueberries

Angel Food Cake

Cool Whip

Directions:

Tear apart about a third of the angel food cake and put in bottom of a trifle bowl. Cover with about a third of the vanilla pudding. Next layer the strawberries and then add a layer of blueberries. Repeat with layer of cake, pudding, strawberries and blueberries two times. Top with Cool Whip.

This is a great dessert to take to a Fourth of July party!



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MUD DAUBERS

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

SPIDER MITES

Mud daubers are a great wasp to have around. They are solitary, generally docile, and can help to reduce various bugs in the landscape. Mud dauber wasps are $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1" in size and come in a variety of colors. They have a very thin, thread-like waist.

Mud daubers create a mud structure that they provision with insects and/or spiders; they lay an egg on each prey item within a cell in the nest, and then seal the nest off. When larvae hatch from eggs, they eat the items provisioned for them, pupate, and then emerge as adults to begin the process over.

Management is not usually needed for mud daubers as they do not guard their nest like other wasps. While they are capable of stinging, they are not considered to be aggressive. If you do not like the look of the mud nests, you can remove them with a putty knife.



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 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 This work is supported by Crops Protection and Pest Management Competitive Grants Program [grant no. 2017-70006-27188 / project accession no. 1013905] from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The information given herein is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service or the Texas A&M AgriLife Research is implied. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service provides equal access in its programs, activities, education and employment, without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity.

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.

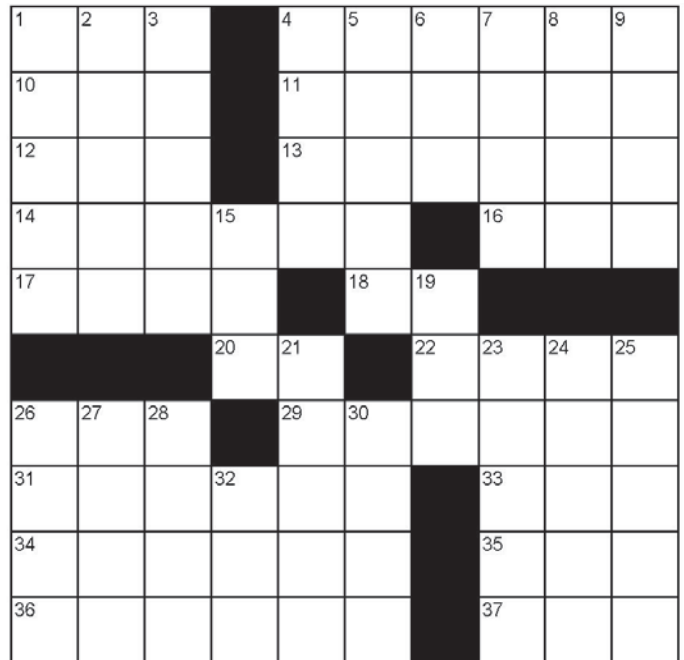
Other tasks:

- 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.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS

- Food and Agriculture Organization (abbr.)
- Scales
- Hovercraft
- Type of phone
- Regret
- State capital
- Indian weapons
- Part of a min.
- Information
- Hey!
- Fire department (abbr.)
- Captain (abbr.)
- Pouch
- Woman in the Old Testament
- Absence of values
- Time period
- National capital
- Official canine registry (abbr.)
- Pseudonym
- Change hue

DOWN

- Unit of electric capacitance
- Sporty car brand
- Unconcealed
- Animal stomach
- Crummy
- Possessive pronoun
- Welcome rugs
- Cheese
- In __ (together)
- Clod
- Fall mo.
- Divinity
- Leading
- Jaunty
- Draw over
- Baby's "ball"
- After awhile
- __ girl
- Sew together
- First day of wk.

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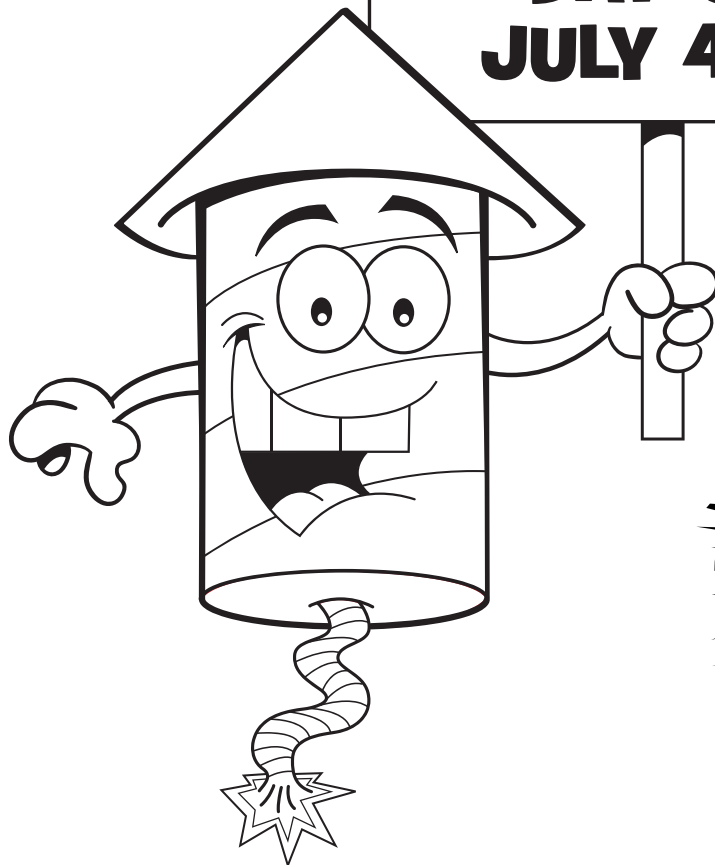
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