

# *The* **RANCH REVIEW**

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News for the Residents of Legends Ranch

## **NATUREWATCH**

*by Jim and Lynne Weber*

### *Whiptails & Racerunners*

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*scelis, from the Greek *aspid*o 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 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 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](mailto: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](http://naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com).

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**Conroe ISD** ..... 936-709-7751  
Birnam Woods Elementary ..... 281-863-4200  
Cox Intermediate ..... 281-465-3200  
York Junior High ..... 832-592-8600  
Oak Ridge High ..... 832-592-5300

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# RANCH REVIEW

## 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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## 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.

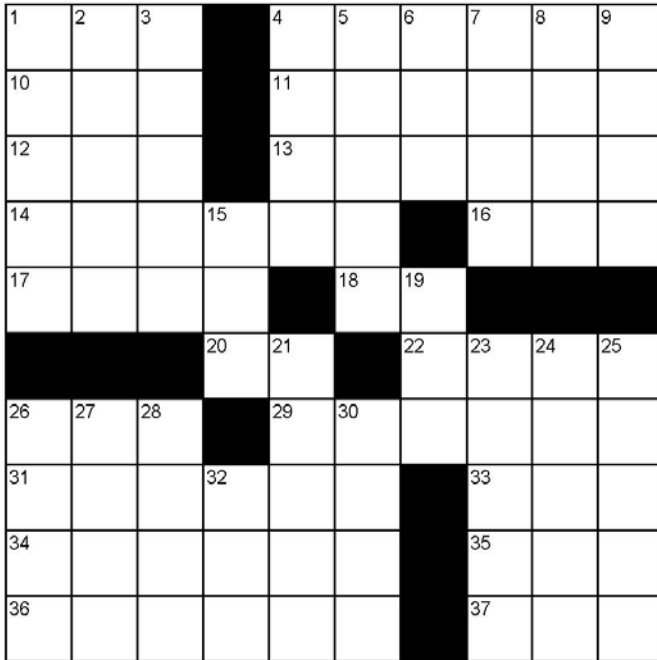


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## CROSSWORD PUZZLE



### ACROSS

1. Food and Agriculture Organization (abbr.)
4. Scales
10. Hovercraft
11. Type of phone
12. Regret
13. State capital
14. Indian weapons
16. Part of a min.
17. Information
18. Hey!
20. Fire department (abbr.)
22. Captain (abbr.)
26. Pouch
29. Woman in the Old Testament
31. Absence of values
33. Time period
34. National capital
35. Official canine registry (abbr.)
36. Pseudonym
37. Change hue

### DOWN

1. Unit of electric capacitance
2. Sporty car brand
3. Unconcealed
4. Animal stomach
5. Crummy
6. Possessive pronoun
7. Welcome rugs
8. Cheese
9. In \_\_ (together)
15. Clod
19. Fall mo.
21. Divinity
23. Leading
24. Jaunty
25. Draw over
26. Baby's "ball"
27. After awhile
28. \_\_ girl
30. Sew together
32. First day of wk.

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