

# THE BULLETIN

*Belterra Community News*

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News for the Residents of Belterra

## NATURE WATCH

### A GAINFUL GRAPE

*by Jim and Lynne Weber*



Few plants have a higher ecological value to wildlife than the Winter Grape or Spanish Grape (*Vitis cinerea* var. *helleri*). This hardy deciduous vine, which can grow to 72 feet long, is common in east, north, and central Texas, and is primarily distinguished from Mustang Grape (*V. mustangensis*) by the smooth surface on the underside of its leaves. It makes for an excellent wildlife plant as its fruit is a food source to both mammals and birds, its dense climbing foliage

provides cover and nesting habitat, and it is the host plant for more than a dozen species of moths. Common in woodland areas and thickets near streams and riverbanks, it thrives in part shade while clambering over other plants, even in the heat of summer.

When mature, the leaves of the Winter Grape are up to 4.5 inches long and 5 inches wide, and have white cobweb-like hairs only on the leaf veins. Roughly heart-shaped, the leaves have two broad lobes, a pointed tip, and serrated edges. While this vine does produce palatable, reddish-purple



fruits in clusters up to 8 inches long that ripen from August to October, it is its leaves that provide the food for the larval stage of notable moths such as the Nessus Sphinx (*Amphion floridensis*), Vine Sphinx (*Eumorpha vitis*), Eight-spotted Forester (*Alypia octomaculata*), and Mournful Thyris (*Thyris sepulchralis*). In addition to nectaring on flowers in the adult stage, these moths often pollinate those flowers at the same time.

Both the Nessus and Vine Sphinx are members of a family of moths called the Sphingidae are more commonly known as hawk moths, hummingbird moths, and sphinx moths. Generally speaking, these moths are named not just for their streamlined bullet-shaped bodies that have long narrow forewings and short hindwings, but also for their distinct behavior that comes in the form of swift, hovering flight. The leaf-feeding caterpillars or larva of these moths typically

have a smooth body with a characteristic horn near their posterior end, hence the common name hornworm. They pupate in an earthen cell or loose cocoon at or near the soil surface.

The Nessus Sphinx has a stout abdomen with two bright yellow bands and a tuft at the end. The upper side of its wings are a dark red to chocolate brown, and its hindwings have a red-orange band with a yellowish fringe. Its wingspan is 1.5 to just over 2 inches, flying during



the day and at dusk, from March to May and July to September. The Vine Sphinx has dark brown forewings with a striking pattern of thick, pale bands and three fine pinkish veins, and hindwings with a pink patch along the inner edge. Its wingspan is

3.5 to just over 4 inches, flying mainly at dusk, from April to May and July to October.

Part of the Noctuidae family, the Eight-spotted Forester has black forewings with two pale yellow spots and inconspicuous metallic blue bands, and hindwings that are black with white spots at the base and in the middle. Its black body has pale yellow at the base of the forewing, and orange fringe on its front and middle legs, and like many species in this family, when perched it holds its wings above its body like a roof. With a wingspan of 1.0 to 1.5 inches, it flies during the day, most commonly from February to May. With black wings and body spotted with white, the Mournful Thyris is a member of the Thyrididae family, generally small moths with stout bodies and relatively short wings, that perch in a distinctive position with a raised body and outspread wings. Its wingspan is just over 0.5 to just under 1.0 inch, flying mainly during the day, from April to August.

Whether you are looking for a hardy vine for your summer garden, or just a profitable plant for serving the needs of several species of native wildlife, look no further than the gainful grape!

Send your nature-related questions to [naturewatch@austin.r.r.com](mailto:naturewatch@austin.r.r.com) and we'll do our best to answer them. If you enjoy reading these articles, check out our books, *Nature Watch Austin*, *Nature Watch Big Bend*, and *Native Host Plants for Texas Butterflies* (all published by Texas A&M University Press), and our blog at [naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com](http://naturewatchaustin.blogspot.com).

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## OTHER

Oak Hill Post Office ..... 512-892-2794  
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# SKUNKS

## ARE THEY GOOD FOR ANYTHING?

Actually, yes, they are. For most people, the only thing they know about skunks is that they stink but they are very beneficial to farmers and homeowners. They eat garden and agricultural pests in large numbers. They feed on larvae, worms, fruit, eggs, reptiles, small mammals, bees, wasps and fish.

Texas is home to five species of skunks—the eastern spotted, striped, two types of hog-nosed and the hooded skunk. The hooded skunk is considered a Mexican species and can only be found in a few Texas counties near Mexico. The striped skunk is the most common skunk in North America. It has a white stripe on either side of its back that extends over the head and down the sides of the tail. The spotted skunk can only be found in eastern Texas, the Panhandle and the eastern United States. It gets its name from having a small white spot on its forehead and a spot in front of each ear. The American hog-nosed skunk is the largest skunk in the world. They have one broad white stripe from the top of the head to the base of the tail and a long, bushy white tail. They can be found in southern and central Texas.

The eastern spotted skunk is small and unlike the other species of skunks, its movements are similar to that of the squirrel. They are very active and can even climb trees. Due to threats such as habitat loss, pesticide use and vehicle strikes across the spotted skunk's entire range, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is evaluating the species' status and will determine if it should be listed as threatened or endangered. It plans to make a listing recommendation in 2023.

Skunks are very docile animals and they will warn predators before releasing the oily substance from their anal glands that contains the active ingredient, n-butyl mercaptan. They'll do a little dance, stomp the ground, slap their tail on the ground and may even stand on their back legs. They're giving you fair warning. Once they spray, they are unable to do it again for ten days. If you encounter a skunk, stop immediately and slowly back away.

1. If your pet gets sprayed, here's what the American Kennel Club recommends. It may not completely remove the smell but it'll get rid of most of it.

2. Check the eyes. If affected, flush with cool water or purchase an eye wash from your vet and keep on hand if you live in an area with a high population of skunks.

3. Mix 1 quart of 3% hydrogen peroxide solution (found at any pharmacy or supermarket), 1/4 cup of baking soda and 1 teaspoon of liquid dishwashing soap.

4. Wear rubber gloves and thoroughly wash your pet. Don't leave the solution on too long. You may have to repeat the process.

5. Use a regular pet shampoo and wash your pet again to remove any residual solution.

6. Towel dry your pet.

If you need to wash your clothes, use 1/2 cup of baking soda with your regular detergent.

DO NOT STORE solution for later use. If kept in a covered container, it can explode. Do not get the solution in your pet's eyes. Don't use a peroxide solution stronger than 3%.

TWRC Wildlife Center is available to answer your questions and guide you through the rescue process should you find an animal needing help. Sometimes animals don't need help and are better left alone. We will help you make that determination. Call us at 713-468-8972 or check our website for helpful information: [www.twrcwildlifecenter.org](http://www.twrcwildlifecenter.org).

## TEENAGE JOB SEEKERS

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If you are a teenager and want to be included on the babysitter/pet sitter/house sitter list or if you are on this list and want to update your information, contact [advertising@peelinc.com](mailto:advertising@peelinc.com).

# CICADA KILLER WASPS



Cicada killer wasps are very large wasps reaching up to 1 ½ inches long and can be somewhat frightening if you see them flying about your lawn. These wasps have a reddish-brown head and thorax, a black and yellow abdomen, and wings with a rusty tinge. Females are capable of stinging, the stinger is a modified egg laying structure, but are rarely aggressive. Males look similar to females and are territorial; they will buzz near you if you enter their territory. Once you leave the male's territory, the wasp will ignore you.

Cicada killers can be considered beneficial insects since they help to control cicada populations. Cicadas, common in Texas trees in the summer, are stung and paralyzed by female cicada killer wasps then carried back to a burrow dug in the ground by the female wasps. The female wasp pulls the cicada into the burrow where it is tucked into a side tunnel and has an egg deposited upon it. When the egg hatches, the cicada killer larva eats the cicada(s) provided.

Cicada killers usually do not warrant any control methods. If people are uncomfortable with large wasps flying over their lawn or do not like the holes caused by the wasps, then insecticidal dust can be sprinkled around the opening of the burrow. Tamp the dust around the opening with your shoe and as the wasps work on cleaning out the entrance to the burrow, they will pick

up the dust on their body and eventually die.

Please note that cicada killer wasps are often mistaken for Asian giant hornets (AGH), also referred to as “murder hornets”. AGH have not been found in Texas and have only been located in Washington state within the U.S.

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](http://www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com)

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## WELCOME

Oak Hill United Methodist Church is excited to welcome our new pastor, Stephen Sanders. We would love to have you join us in worship and fellowship each Sunday morning at 10 a.m. on [facebook.com/OakHillUMC](https://facebook.com/OakHillUMC). You don't need a Facebook account to join the service. All are welcome.

*COVID-19 and so many other things seem to make this a particularly difficult time. This month we'll be exploring how to "Thrive in the Wilderness."*



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