

## Neil Sperry's e-Gardens News

### Tree Tips: A Certified Arborist's View on the Storm

By Steve Houser

*Steve Houser, speaker at February chapter meeting, has offered some of his articles to Naturalist News. This is first in a series that will be appear periodically. The following article is apropos because even though it is March, in Texas there are no certainties about the weather! Ed. NN*



Since snow, sleet, ice and cold hit big parts of Texas last week, certified arborists like Steve Houser of Arborological Services have been working long hours. Our thanks to a former Texas Arborist of the Year for getting busy right away and sharing his wisdom with our e-gardens family. See his [important information](#)



While we delight in the sight of snow-covered trees, too much of a good thing can lead to severe damage. Photo by Steve Houser.

### Snow and Ice Damage to Trees

It is the time of year when all good arborists start to worry about ice and snow damage to our trees. The weather events of the past week justify those concerns. Often times, we are so excited to actually get a little snow, we overlook the potential damage that can occur. The dramatic change of a little snow is welcome, until it just keeps coming down. Joy quickly turns to fear as your live oak snaps a limb — and it falls on your favorite holly. If you were a tree, your biggest concern beyond the effects of humans, would be the effects of Mother Nature.



Deciduous trees that have not dropped their leaves have a difficult time supporting the weight of ice and snow accumulations and are likely to suffer broken limbs. Photo by Bill Seaman.

If your landscape has only deciduous trees, those that lose their leaves, you may think you have no worries. However, the recent ice storm tells us otherwise. Enough ice can build up on limbs without foliage to cause breakage. A half-inch of ice on a limb will dramatically increase the weight load on limbs, trunks, and roots, leading to structural failure.

Although we had great fall color and warm fall weather, the mild weather slowed the drop of the leaves. As a result, trees that did not lose their leaves had more surface area for the ice or snow buildup, increasing the odds of breakage. The same situation applies to some deciduous trees, such as Texas red oak and blackjack oak, which go dormant but may tend to hold their leaves all winter. Although the tree is dormant, it is much more susceptible to damage.

Sleet, following cold rain, is also a problem because the sleet sticks to wet limbs and foliage, causing the rain to freeze. If you already have snow buildup on limbs and leaves, the sleet adds to the weight.

The best defense against ice and snow damage is to work diligently now to minimize any future impact. Extremely severe weather can cause the loss of most, if not all, trees in an area, regardless of any efforts to reduce the damage before it occurs. Damage from less severe weather can be lessened by inspecting trees for weak branching habit that is likely to fail. In some cases, weak areas can be reinforced with cables or bracing rods. Ideally, poor branching structures — tight V-shaped forks or attachments, should be removed when the tree is small. Doing so eliminates the risk of that fork splitting as the tree matures.



For trees with spreading canopies, selective end-weight reduction pruning can significantly reduce damage from heavy snows and ice. Photo by Bill Seaman.

Beyond resolving weak branching habit, be aware that longer limbs in trees that tend to have broad, spreading canopies, should have the end-weight reduced to lessen the surface area exposed to ice, snow, sleet, or high winds. Professional tree climbers are trained to climb out to the ends of the limbs to reduce the weight.



Bur oak trees have stout limbs and a branching habit that supports the load of ice and snow with minimal damage. Photo by Bill Seaman.

Arborists also consider the strength of the wood for each species of tree when determining corrective actions for structural deficiencies. An oak will typically have strong wood, whereas a maple will be weaker-wooded and

Ice, sleet, and snow buildup can cause tree limbs to bow to a great degree without breaking. The affected branches will return to their previous position once the ice and snow melts. In some situations, however, the limb can contain internal cracks that are difficult to see, or the vascular system may be damaged to the point that the limb permanently retains a bent shape.

Once you have an ice or snow problem, little can be done until the weight load melts. Low limbs on larger trees or smaller ornamental trees can sometimes be braced with wood or other materials. However, doing so can put someone at great risk should the tree or limb fail during the process of propping it up.

Once the severe weather event is over, standard tree care practices should resume. This includes removing broken and damaged limbs by making proper pruning cuts, evaluating any splits or cracks in trunks or branches, inspecting and adjusting any cables or bracing rods on mature trees, and adjusting staking hardware on newly planted trees

The snow and ice can be beautiful, but when it comes to the risk it may present to your trees, the adage “Be careful what you wish for” applies.

Posted by Steve Houser • December 11, 2013

### About the Author

Steve Houser is a Dallas native with more than 33 years of experience as a consulting arborist and tree climber. He is the president of a DFW tree care expert firm.

## SNAKES ALIVE *cont'd from page 1*

Corey has always been a very docile and “NICE” snake. I called the pet store the very next morning after Jeff brought him home and the young man at the pet store kept telling me, “Ma’am this is a very NICE snake.” I don’t think I believed him then. But Corey has won me over. I’ve grown fond of him and enjoy taking him with me to the Interpretive Center when I volunteer. He’s a nice conversation piece and everyone seems to have a natural curiosity about him, not to mention he is a good looking snake.

About six months ago, I purchased another young snake that looks almost identical to Corey. I believe this one is a female and the young man I bought her from said she too is a NICE snake. I named her Chloe.

Both Corey and Chloe are non-venomous tri-color milk snakes (black, red-orange and white) that mimic the coloration of the very venomous Coral Snake.



Remember the old snake rhyme:

**“Red touches yellow, kill a fellow. Red touches black, friendly jack.”**

There are many different ways to say this rhyme. We can probably all recite a little different version.

### **Do they have fangs?**

No they don’t. But they do have two rows of tiny, razor sharp teeth to hold onto their prey. They are constrictors and rather than using venom to kill or paralyze their prey, they suffocate them with their strong body. A snake has about 4,000 muscles in its body compared to our 600-800 in our bodies depending on which expert you talk to. The strength in that slender, sleek body always amazes me when I hold one of them in my hands.

These two domesticated snakes don’t even constrict their food any longer. I think they realize the mice are not live.

### **Have I been bitten by my snakes?**

Sure, a few times. But it’s nothing serious. It usually does bring blood since I have been told they have an anti-coagulant in their saliva. So it always looks worse than it is. To be honest with you, I have had worse injuries from my kitty cats, especially when they were young.

### **Why share the snakes?**

The objective of my talks is to dispel some of the myths and fears of snakes. I had a grown, body-built man hold Corey and tell everyone that was a big hurdle for him. He has always been terrified of snakes. Most fears are based on a lack of knowledge. I would like to help people realize that not all snakes are bad, vicious creatures that want to tear them to shreds. And that most snakes fear us more than we fear them.

**Would I pick up a snake in the wild?**

**No ma'am!** I'm not a snake expert and I'm quick to let everyone know that. I would never pick up a snake in the wild simply because I don't know enough to be comfortable with my identification skills. If I come across a snake in the wild I will redirect my route to go around the snake. After all, we are in their home when we go for a walk in the wild.

I also try to point out how many more nonvenomous snakes there are compared to venomous and that every snake they come across doesn't need to be killed and how beneficial snakes are to rid our world of pesky rodents. The world has an order and every creature has its duty and place.

I sure hope you have enjoyed hearing about my lovely pets and sure hope I get the opportunity to share Corey and Chloe with you some time. Aren't God's creatures wonderful!



*Sharon shows Chloe and Corey after hike at Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center*



*Photos — Dorothy Thetford*

*w. odum*

*Sandhill crane preening*



**National Wildlife Federation**

**CRANE MIGRATION** — Sandhill cranes winter in Texas, California, Arizona, New Mexico and Mexico. In the early spring, the cranes begin the migration to their breeding grounds. Throughout the spring, the cranes can be seen resting and feeding along rivers and wetlands throughout the Great Plains and Pacific Northwest. The largest congregation of sandhill cranes occurs from February to early April along the Platte River in Nebraska. (*National Wildlife Federation*)

Crane nomenclature is borrowed from horse terms. A mother crane is called a mare, the dads are roans. A male starts out braying, likely calling for its mate. (*Smithsonian Magazine, March 2014*)

Great Blue Herons are often mistaken for Sandhill Cranes. (*Cornell Lab of Ornithology*) *Ed. Note: See "Great blue" on page 15.*

Don't miss this video on the crane migration at Platte River Nebraska:

<http://visitgrandisland.com/cranes-wildlife/cranes/index.html>

## Beware! Impending battle!

**R**ed fire ants have a rival . . . “crazy ants”! Crazy ants are moving into fire ant territory in areas across the southeastern U.S. According to a study out of University of Texas at Austin published in the journal *Science Express* in February 2014, the crazy ant secretes a compound that neutralizes the fire ant venom.



Anyone who has been bitten by a fire ant can attest to the painful sting. Up to now fire ants have dominated their environment by dabbing most other ant victims with powerful, usually fatal venom. This venom is two to three times as toxic as DDT on a per weight basis.

However, when a crazy ant has fire ant venom smeared on it, the crazy ant begins an elaborate detoxification procedure. This study is the first to describe the phenomenon. Cleansing involves a secretion of formic acid from a specialized gland at the tip of its abdomen. The secretion is transferred to the mouth and the crazy ant smears it on its body.

This invasion by the crazy ant is likely to have dramatic effects on the southern hemisphere’s ecosystems. It was reported last year that where crazy ants move in, the number and types of arthropods – insects, spiders, centipedes and crustaceans – decrease. This reduces food sources for birds, reptiles and other animals. It has also been observed that crazy ants often nest in homes and damage the electrical equipment.

Crazy ants and fire ants are native to northern Argentina and Brazil. Their ranges there have overlapped for a very long time. Researchers believe this “detoxification behavior is the result of an ancient evolutionary arms race”.

The good news is that crazy ants spread very slowly – approximately 600 feet per year. The unpleasant news is they can spread through the transport of potted plants and RV’s. Never buy plants if there is evidence of nesting in the pots and check for “stowaways” after a home move or traveling a long distance.

Source of original article—MLA APA Chicago: University of Texas at Austin, “Crazy ants dominate fire ants by neutralizing their venom,” *ScienceDaily*. *Science Daily*, 13 February 2014. [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/02/140213142233.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/02/140213142233.htm)

*Bird house. . .*

**“FIELD NOTES IN FOCUS”**



*Great Blue Heron — from the gallery of Alex Lieban*

*Featuring Master Naturalist photographers—  
flora and fauna as you see them*

*Hysterical . . .*

— LAST



A man was relaxing with his evening paper, when there was a knock on the door. He opened it, and saw nobody, so he closed the door and went back to his paper. There was another knock, so he opened the door again. This time, he looked down and saw a small snail.

"Mister, could you spare some change?" the snail said.

The man picked up the snail, threw him into the bushes, and went back to reading.

A year later, there was another knock at the door. It was the snail.

"What'd you do that for?"

WORD —

*If you would like to have the  
"last word", please send:  
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Keep it "light"!*

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From beginning to end—another perspective—photo Dorothy Thetford

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### **Monthly Chapter Meetings**

**9:30 a.m. preceded by a social time at 9:00 a.m. on the third Thursday of each month. Chapter meetings are open to the public.**

**Next meeting March 20, 2014—Kelly Reyna: Saving Northern Bobwhite Quail**

**Meeting April 17, 2014—Will McClatchey and Karen Hall: New Research at BRIT**

**Location: Joseph A. Carroll Bldg., 401 W. Hickory Street, Denton, TX 76201-9026**

### **Board Meetings**

**The Board meets each second Thursday of the month at 9:30 a.m. The Board last met March 13, 2014. Next meeting April 10, 2014.**

**Board meetings are open to members.**

### OUR MISSION . . .

*“to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers who provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within our community”*