



NATURALIST NOTES

September 2024

“People cannot be healthy if nature is sick” – Jaime Gonzalez

Orb Web Spiders Eat Pollen

Spiders are carnivores. At least that’s what I always thought. However, that may not be true for all spiders at all life stages.

Orb Web spiders trap pollen in their web. By consuming their web every night, they also ingest the pollen stuck to the strands.

Spiderlings emerging in the Spring, when insects are not yet abundant, may also survive on pollen and fungal spores trapped by a web.

Sources: Mirror, Eggs and Sanders
doi: [10.1371/journal.pone.0082637](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0082637)



American Snout Migration

American Snout butterflies that become too numerous may migrate north. Drought reduces parasitoids while hackberry trees produce more leaves with higher rainfall.

Check out our website

<https://txmn.org/gulfcoast/>



Patterns in Nature - Cracks

Whether it's paint drying or the bare patch in the front yard during a drought, cracks are a common sight. Cracks form when the surface dries out while the subsurface remains wetter. Cracks effectively release stress in the drying layers.



Cracks intersect at steep angles and produce polygonal shapes. If cracks penetrate further into the substance, honeycombs form.

When a cut tree trunk dries, cracks originate in the center and propagate outwards. Cracks are narrower in the center and wider at the edges.



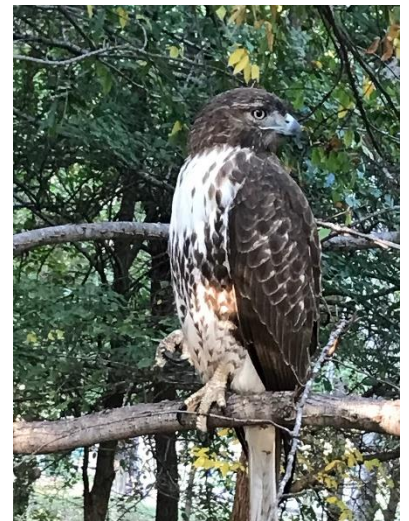
Organism of the Month

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Red-tailed hawks are common year-round. Adults are 18 to 24 in tall with a 4 ft wingspan. Reddish tail with or without black stripe is easily seen in flight.

Juvenile red-tailed hawks fledge after 6-7 weeks but aren't strong flyers until 1-2 weeks later. This juvenile chased and was chased by fox squirrels on the ground, then flew up to a branch 5 ft up. Only 20-30 % of juveniles survive their first year.

Sources: Audubon, Sonoran Images



New Species of Parasitoid Wasp Discovered on Rice Campus

Scott Egan's group at Rice University published the new species' description in the journal *ZooKeys*. Undergraduate Brendan O'Loughlin noticed the tiny (~ 1 mm long) insect zigzagging across Live Oak leaves on campus. After both catching adults in the wild as well as rearing them from Cynipid galls, Brendan named the wasp *Chrysonotomia susbelli*. *Susbelli* is Latin for "war pig", the mascot of Rice's Wiess College.



The image on the left shows the galls produced by *Neuroterus nr bussae* on live oak leaves. These galls are found on both upper and lower leaf surfaces between the leaf veins. They are not detachable.

Other Cynipid wasps produce larger, more prominent galls that resemble yellowish marbels.

The behavior that caught Brendan's attention is performed exclusively by females. While walking back and forth across the leaf's surface, they tap potential host galls with their antennae. In contrast, most tiny insects move slowly to avoid being eaten.

The images on the right show the female. Although only 1-1.2 mm in length, note the intricate pattern on the thorax and abdomen.

Adults emerged from galls in April and May.

Source: Wikipedia, Houston Chronicle

O'Loughlin B, Brandão-Dias PFP, Gates MW, Egan SP (2024) Description of a new species of *Chrysonotomia* Ashmead from Houston, Texas, USA (Hymenoptera, Chalcidoidea, Eulophidae). *ZooKeys* 1212: 241-254.
<https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.1212.127537>

