

Nature Keeps Naturalists Interested in Nature



It seems that a day can't go by without seeing or "discovering" something new in the wilds of the Lost Pines. Of course, "discover" is something of a *non-sequitur* but my view is that if I ain't never seen it before then it's MY discovery. If you see it before I do, then please don't tell me—I hate it when my bubble bursts and reality sets in (don't you?).

Naturalists will recognize those things that they've previously encountered as "old friends," but, like most people, we look forward to seeing and doing new things, or meeting "new friends." Yep, us naturalists are just like real people (sometimes). In the past week I've revisited with a lot of old friends, those species and events in nature that return year after year, but have also met many "long-lost friends" who've been away for a few years and met some new ones, to boot.

The contrast between this wet spring and last year's dry one is spectacular to say the least. We've not seen a spring this wet since 1998, though '04 and '05 were close (within an inch or two for the first 4 months of the year). Consequently, I'm noticing things

that have either been missing for a long while or occurred at such low frequency that they're not seen. Some examples include many (many!) Oak Hairstreak (*Satyrium favonius*) butterflies, many Caterpillar Hunter (*Calosoma scrutator*) beetles, and more Wavy-Leaf Gaura (*Gaura sinuata*) and Flax (*Linum* sp.) than I've seen in a long time.

But we pine (please excuse the pun) for new experiences—new critters, new wildflowers, anything we've not seen before. And this spring is delivering, in spades! One of my most intriguing finds this past week, though they're probably around all the time, if fewer in number, and I've simply never noticed them before, is the Unicorn Caterpillar.

This cat (butterfly-speak for caterpillar) is an eye-catcher, one of those too-weird-to-be-real critters that boggle our imagination. Kind of like Painted Buntings, because who could ever imagine a bird that was indigo blue, hot pink and lime green all at the same time—I submit that Painted Buntings are direct evidence that the Creator has a sense of humor. The moth that



The "strange-but-true" Unicorn Caterpillar of the moth *Schizura unicornis* is an attention grabber. This one was feeding on a Farkleberry (*Vaccinium arboreum*) leaf though they can be found on a startling variety of trees.

results from the cat is as drab as the cat is spectacular.

Another new find for the week, found Sunday on Gordon Walton's property off Cottle Town Road, and a NCR for Bastrop Co. was a strong population of Calico Pennant (*Celithemis elisa*) dragonflies, along with some very different wildflowers, including Standing Cypress (*Ipomopsis rubra*), Mealy Sage (*Salvia farinacea*), Large-Flowered Coreopsis (*Core-*

opsis grandiflora), and Goat's Rune (*Tephrosia virginiana*), that don't occur here at the Biology Station.

The old adage that "a change is as good as a vacation" suits this old naturalist perfectly (how else would I know all those old adages?). I urge y'all to get out and see something new and different—it may not change your life but it sure will feel good for awhile!