

The Heat is On!

For anyone who slept through the past week (wouldn't it be nice?), here's a clue: summer has begun and the heat is on. I know that, officially, summer doesn't start until the solstice in the third week of June but since when has Texas climate followed the rules? Summer starts *much* earlier here, that's for sure.

The world around us is, once again, on one of those magical cusps between seasons. There are still a few spring holdovers—like late Green Milkweeds and some late Annual Sundews—but the summer wildflowers are coming on strong. I've never been able to understand summer wildflowers—why would anything choose to live, grow and bloom during the dry heat of a Texas summer (though, isn't it a good thing that they do)?

Still, the blooms of the Rose Gentians, Lemon Bee-balm, Rosemary Sun-Rose, and Black-Eyed Susans scream "summer!" And the critters seem to agree, especially the many Racerunners that flash across the trail ahead of us, the gulping Yellow-Billed Cuckoos and rattling Summer Tanagers calling from the trees, the burgeoning crop of summer grasshoppers (there's going to be a LOT of these this year), and the welcome sight—at least to these eyes—of the wealth of butterflies flitting from flower to flower.

On Saturday I had a close encounter with an Eastern Yellow-Bellied Racer out sunning itself beside the trail. It figures that it would



A serene scene of a fresh, roosting Monarch butterfly on the old, dried spring Vetch climbing a field fence.

be while I'm on the mower without a camera but there you go. The week before last I found a Banded

Water Snake doing the same thing (but had my camera) though I'm still not sure what it was doing so

far from the pond. Two snakes in two weeks? Can the appearance of the Copperheads be far behind?

Speaking of the pond, the pond here at the Biology Station is full—completely, totally and overflowing full—for the first time since “the summer of '98” (do I sound like an old-timer, or what?). And there's going to be a bumper crop of Odes this year—the edges of the pond are abuzz with activity. What will I do when I've got both butterflies and damselflies to chase? A predicament for sure, but an enviable one, I think.

Another sign that spring is over are the fresh Monarch butterflies that I see everyday. The good crop of fast-growing Green and Antelope Horn Milkweeds this spring has yielded a hardy crop of Monarchs. The spring Texas Groundsel has given way to summer's Coreopsis but the butterflies are still visiting the yellow flowers. Take advantage of the Monarchs this month 'cause they'll be gone by the second week of June and it's rare to see another one before mid-September.

Last Sunday was our first 90-degree day and a harbinger of days to come. The “all-day spring naturalist” will soon give way to the “early-morning-and-evening naturalist” of summer. In case you missed the point, it's too late for spring cleaning (Aahh! Missed it again!), and it's past time to make sure the air conditioners are working—the heat is on!