

SAND and the Winter Naturalist

Being a naturalist is hardest at this time of year. Here we are at the end of January, barely a month before a typical central Texas spring will commence (or so we hope), and the winter doldrums—that time between times when there’s almost nothing to see or do (except maybe freeze your eyeballs in their sockets)—have finally set in.

Yep, I’ve got SAND (loosely defined as Seasonal Affective Naturalist Disorder). SAND, like the more common SAD, is also characterized by sadness and despondency, but also the growing pessimism that spring may never arrive. Bummer, eh?

Don’t get me wrong, there are always things to see and do, but it takes more energy to find ‘em and more varied interests to get excited about them. Maybe it’s just the bias of my “nature-view” (yep, that distinct lack of flying insects) but I’m most depressed at this time of year. Your mileage may vary.

Botanizing is not exactly exciting (unless you’re into less-than-usual



Ring-necked Ducks, Aythya collaris, on the pond at the Biology Station. Why do they always name critters by their least distinguishing field mark?

plants, basal rosettes or bark, twigs and buds). I know some folks like that. Never understood ‘em, but I

do know a few. Mind you, they probably don’t understand us entomophiles either.

The few insects that are around are not very exciting and you have to work for ‘em. The bat that I saw flying over our head while I tossed the Frisbee for the pooches last night seemed to be working way too hard. Turning over rocks or tearing into downed logs all day has never been my idea of a good time.

Of course, there are always birds, the last hope of the feeder-centric nature watcher. Guess what I’ve been doing all week? Finally saw my first Pine Siskin this past week—I watched as it got mobbed by the Goldfinches. But the feeder birds have gotten predictable, a tad bland (can you say “sparrows”?) and colorless—pale Goldfinches notwithstanding. Thank God for Pine Warblers.

I should get out more (no, walking the dogs out to the pond, even if there are a few dozen ducks on it, doesn’t really qualify). But even if I could get out more I’d probably end up “car-birding.” Using an auto as a mobile blind can be fun if the location is right. Of course, you have to drive there...