

Spring Wildflowers, Winter Butterflies



*A Gulf Fritillary, *Agraulis vanillae*, nectars at the flowers of the endemic ephemeral Curve-pod *Corydalis*, *Corydalis curvisiliqua*.*

It's been another lovely—if a bit too obviously dry—week. All that sunshine but so little rain. Spring is just beginning and the lack of rain may bring it to an early end before we get a chance to see very much of it. I urge you to get out and see some of it before it ends...and this year is providing a number of unusual scenes!

As I'm writing this, early on a Monday morning, it's below freezing outside. The sun has yet to rise (but it'll still be dark at this time next week, eh?) but I suspect we'll get to 70 or so by mid-afternoon. What a strange time of year, the cusp of Spring, not really Spring yet and still too close to Winter for my liking.

But Nature loves this awakening and at this time of year we see a number of flowers and other organisms that we cannot see at any other time. The Spring ephemerals, as they are most commonly known, are those once-a-year species that wake as Winter ends but fade long before Summer arrives.

Many of the Spring ephemeral wildflowers are familiar to you, like the Bluebonnets, Phlox and Paintbrushes, but others, like the endemic Texas Groundsel and Curve-pod *Corydalis*, are not. The trees, too, use this time of year to

bloom and the Redbud and fruit trees will shortly be alive with flowers, if they're not already.

As you might expect, there are a number of plant-feeding insects that must share the ephemeralness (if there is such a word) of their hostplants. These include some of the bud or flower-feeding butterflies, like Henry's Elfin (feeds on buds of Redbud or Buckeye) or the charismatic Falcate Orangetips (buds of mustard and rock cresses).

This week I was struck by the juxtaposition of an unusual Winter butterfly, a Gulf Fritillary, and one of our Spring ephemeral endemic wildflowers. The Gulf Frit is usually a Summer butterfly since it's caterpillar hosts, the passionflowers, die back in the winter, but this winter has been so mild that I've been seeing caterpillars all winter long.

Now there are butterflies—I've seen as many as three at the same time—visiting flowers that they don't often meet. I'll probably never get another chance to photograph a Gulf Frit at a *Corydalis* bloom! That's the thing about Nature, as Forest Gump's mother would say, "life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're going to get."