

Wasp Moth May Be More Common Than Rare

Last weekend, while perusing the late blooming wildflowers for rare or unusual butterflies, I found something unusual, though not what I was looking for. What I found was a day-flying moth, one of the wasp mimic moths, nectaring at flossflower (*Eupatorium*). Being on the alert—always—for anything different or unusual, and being the camera-toting fool that I am, I took some pictures of the beast and sent them off to my moth guru, Charles Bordelon, of Beaumont (now in Houston).

Charles, along with Ed Knudson, runs the Texas Lepidoptera Survey, the clearing house for moth and butterfly information in the state, and is also the Texas Zone Coordinator for the annual Season Summary published by the Lepidopterists' Society. Giving proof positive to the naturalist's dictum of "never close your eyes for a second," Charles tells me that, once again, I've managed to find a critter that's just not supposed to be here.

The paper wasp mimic, *Carmenta armasata* (Sesiidae), is most commonly seen in south TX and is best known from Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy Co. in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, but with other records from Uvalde, Medina and as far north as Bexar and Travis Co. It is a new county record for Bastrop Co.

Al Hook of St. Edward's University, an expert on wasps and hornets, suggests that this moth is a good but general mimic of the common paper wasps, *Polistes exclamans* or possibly *P. fuscatus*. My perusal of some photos of these wasps suggests a fairly good resemblance, with similar yellow, red and black body banding, dark-tipped antenna and dark-tipped, but partially transparent wings.

Of course, both the wasp and the moth visit flowers so behavior is not a useful delineator of which is which. The best indicator is to look at the antennae. The antennae of moths are longer and tend to be "feathery" looking, even when trying to mimic a wasp's antennae, which are shorter and don't look at all "feathery."

The ultimate test, I guess, would be to see which one stings you. Probably not the best test in the world so unless you have some clue that what you're watching is in fact a moth and not a wasp, it might be best to leave them alone. Just a suggestion...



A wasp mimic, the Paper Wasp Mimic moth, Carmenta armasata, mimics common paper wasps, Polistes exclamans and P. fuscatus, but is not usually found in central Texas.