

Looks Like Spring A-Coming...

Hasn't it been just a beautiful week? Sure the mornings are a bit cool (brrrr!) but you can't complain about the afternoons! All I can say is that waking up to singing birds—though in my case I think much of the singing here is just a bird's way of saying "fill the feeders, you idiot"—is sure a whole lot more inspiring than the howling wind.

There are other unequivocal signs that spring is just around the corner. The meadows and lawn are alive with the Bluets or Star-Violets that are often the first wildflowers of the season. And the number and size of the basal rosettes of spring bloomers like the Sandyland Bluebonnet, Old Plainsman and the endemic Texas Groundsel have quadrupled lately and obviously aren't too far from bolting blooms.

A walk out to the pond—scaring up many large "bird" grasshoppers along the way—on a sunny Sunday afternoon revealed that the Ring-Necked Ducks that have been there all winter long have fled. Now if that's not a sign of spring, I don't know what is—when the ducks disappear you know Spring can't be too too far away.

There's been a bit more activity in the insect world, especially among the butterflies, on these warm and sunny afternoons. Although I've

yet to see my first Falcate Orange-Tip, I expect I'll see one this week or next by the latest. Together with the Henry's Elfins, the Orange-Tips are some of our earliest new butterflies after a winter of little but Orange and Dainty Sulphurs and some sap feeding brush-foots.

In the warm spell at the beginning of January—lest we forget, winter was late this year, and by the looks of it, will also be short (do you know how lucky you are to have gotten that prediction from two different Phils?)—I had been surprised to find 4 species of Odes (two dragonflies and two damselflies) flying at the pond. Since the ice-storm and accompanying freeze there's been no activity at all...until now.

The pond was empty of ducks and, as it turned out, of odes as well. In fact it was p-r-e-t-t-y quiet out there and I was a tad disappointed by the lack of dancing dragons and damsels. But I got an unexpected treat, and a bit of a surprise, when I came upon some insect activity along the trail just before I left the woods.

I expected an early long-bodied wasp since it was flying slow and low to the ground and was typical of the trailside, wooded habitat. The surprise was when it turned out to be a male Southern Spreadwing Damselfly, *Lestes australis*,



An unexpected treat on a mid-February day, a male Southern Spreadwing Damselfly, *Lestes australis*, perches on a Yaupon twig.

posed just as pretty as can be on a low Yaupon twig. Don't know what it was doing there away from the pond but it made my day.