

Nature Notes



Caterpillar's Warning ... Don't Touch!

story and photo by Connie Blakley

GINA AUTRY LEARNED THE HARD WAY that some caterpillars have a nasty sting. During November visitors weekend at LTNS, Gina was clipping undergrowth beneath a picnic table when she suddenly shouted, "Ouch ... something stung me!" She and Thomas went searching and found this colorful caterpillar on a sassafras twig that she had trimmed. Thomas carefully picked up the twig holding the caterpillar and moved it to another sassafras tree where everyone could get a closer look and good photos. Gina was left with a nasty sting that ached for a couple of hours.

This beautiful creature is aptly named the Saddleback Caterpillar and is the larva of a moth by the same name (*Acharia stimulea*) in the slug moth family. The adult is not very colorful—dark chocolate brown with black shading—as is the case with many moths where the larvae are much more colorful. The bright, lime green saddle and two white spots on the rear are distinctive; you will never mistake this caterpillar for another species.

Eggs are laid in clutches of up to 50 and initially the larvae feed in groups, becoming more solitary as they ma-

ture. The sting of this caterpillar is thought to be one of the most potent in North America, probably due to the length, diameter, and large quantity of spines. Even the cocoons should be handled with care since larval spines can also be found around the cocoon.

Host plants of the Saddleback Caterpillar are numerous, including dogwood, maple, oak and many others. When placed back on a sassafras, this guy immediately began chomping on the leaves, proving he was not a picky eater!

Saddleback Caterpillar Moths range in the eastern U.S. and can be found in fields, gardens, and woodlands. The larva is more commonly found than the adult, although adults do reportedly come to lights. Flight season is June-July with larva maturing in the fall.

I have always admired photos of this beautiful caterpillar but never hoped to see one in the wild, so I'm grateful that Gina found it (sorry you got stung!). We never know what surprises await us at the Little Thicket, which is why we encourage everyone to visit the sanctuary. Hope you can join us for our next visitors day on January 22.

Group Activities — See websites for additional details

(www.outdoornatureclub.org or www.ornithologygroup.org)

ONC Contacts

ONC General Information

Calvin Blakley, 281-358-5407

Botany/Entomology Group

Russell Jeffords, 713-504-9215

Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary

Aaron Stoley, 713-781-1372

Ornithology Group (OG)

Pam Smolen, 832-212-1368

OG Field Trips

Adam Wood, 713-515-1692

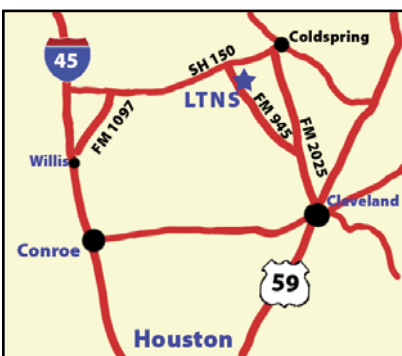
Meeting Place, Bayland Community Center

Unless otherwise noted, all meetings are held at Bayland Community Center, 5400 Bissonnet at Hillcroft (see map)



Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary Events

All LTNS events are held at the sanctuary, 2001 FM 945, Cleveland, TX (see map)



January 2011

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16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

February 2011

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28					

8 Botany-Entomology Twelfth Night Party

NOTE: It's on **SATURDAY!** Noon-4pm at the Blakleys; bring your favorite covered dish and join us for our annual holiday party.

10 Ornithology (OG) Meeting

6:30 pm—Learning Corner
7:00 pm—Program: *Citizen Science in Texas*, by Fred Collins

13 ONC Meeting

7:00 pm—Social; 7:30 pm—Program
Kayaking on the Upper Texas Coast, by David Heinicke. See details next page.

15 Ornithology (OG) Field Trip

Brazos Bend State Park with Leader Bill Godley.

22 LTNS Open House & Highway Pickup

Join us to help pick up trash along our adopted highway, FM 945. Bring gloves, hat, water, etc. Bags provided by the state.

After the work, we'll hike the trails or take a tractor ride to the back meadows. Bring lunch if you plan to stay all day.

7 Ornithology (OG) Meeting

6:30 pm—Learning Corner
7:00 pm—Program
Vultures, by Ken Kramm

8 Botany-Entomology Meeting, 7:30 pm

Grasses, Sedges, and Rushes and Their Wetland Associations, by Carolyn Fannon

10 ONC Board Meeting

7:00 pm — Bayland Community Center

19 Ornithology (OG) Field Trip

West Harris County (Bear Creek/Barker Reservoir/Eldridge Retention Ponds). Leader TBD.

26 LTNS Open House

Join us for a day of hiking and nature study. Possible early bloomers are cardamine (host plant to Falcate Orange-tip Butterfly) and twayblade orchids.

Camping Saturday night if weather is suitable (that means warm enough!).

Membership Renewal Time

ONC membership runs from January to December and we encourage everyone to renew early. A Membership Form is enclosed, so please take a few minutes to mail your dues today. If you've already renewed, please pass along the form to a friend. You can also pay your dues at any of our meetings. Thanks to everyone for your continued support!

Other Notes of Interest

(Submit news and articles to editor – see back page for contact info)

ONC Appreciates Your Donations

Donations to ONC are always appreciated and gratefully acknowledged. Thanks, everyone, for your generosity.

Donations for LTNS Sanctuary Fund

Imogene Cummings

Lois Lentz

Milton Reim

Aaron/Karen Stoley

Donations for General Fund

Jennifer/Andy Lopez

Edith Waxman

Notes from LTNS

November Trail Maintenance

November was trail maintenance month at LTNS. We had a good turnout of volunteers who worked hard all weekend to clean up some of the more popular trails. On Saturday morning, Calvin & Connie Blakley worked on Little Jordan Trail—Calvin cleared the creek of debris and downed limbs while Connie trimmed stray branches along the trail. Wanda Smith trimmed the entrance road. Charlie Smith and Aaron Stoley cleared downed trees from Big Tree and Dillo Wallo Trail. Saturday afternoon, Aaron, Calvin & Charlie re-opened Beech Tree Cutoff Trail. It had been impassable due to downed trees and limbs since Hurricane Ike. We now have access to a beautiful stand of Cranefly Orchids along the creek near the trail.

On Sunday, Mary Jane McCartney and Sergio and Wanda Henao cleared overhanging branches along the tractor road on the north side of Cullinan Meadow while Aaron fixed yet another leak in one of the skylights in the building.

Thanks to all our volunteers who contribute many hours to keep the trails passable so all of us can enjoy the Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary.

November Mushroom Foray

Our mushroom foray on November 13 led by David and Pat Lewis was well attended (about 15) and very productive despite the dry weather. In the morning we split into two “hunting” groups and met back at The Cove with our treasures. After lunch, everyone went to the Triangle and Panhandle Trail in search of more species.

Upon returning to The Cove, David tagged all the specimens with identification, a total of more than 25 species. David and Sergio Henao are updating the LTNS Mushroom List which will be posted on our website soon. We extend our thanks to David and Pat for taking time from their busy schedule for this foray. It was fun and educational for all who participated.



David Lewis identified more than 25 mushroom species found during the November mushroom foray at LTNS.

January Membership Meeting Kayaking on the Upper Texas Coast

Our January 13 program will be presented by David Heinicke of TPWD, who will share his love and knowledge of kayaking, covering kayak types, supplies and equipment, locations to paddle and safety.

David has been the head naturalist at Brazos Bend State Park, a unit of Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, for the past fifteen years. He is in charge of environmental education, assists in coordinating research projects, and oversees volunteering at the park. David is also responsible for Law Enforcement at the park, and holds a commission as a State Peace Officer.

David is a ACA certified kayak instructor, Leave No Trace Instructor, federally permitted bird bander, certified Wildland fire fighter, and law enforcement instructor. His interests include hiking, biking, paddling, backpacking and just about anything outside.



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Nature Notes

January/February 2011, Volume 62 • Number 3
 Published bimonthly September through May

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 Ornithology Representative Pam Smolen

our charter...

A nonprofit educational and scientific organization established in 1923 to protect and conserve natural resources by fostering an interest in nature study.

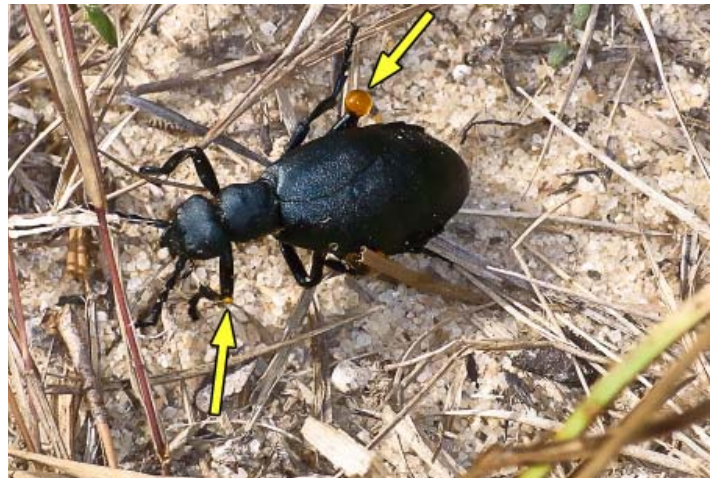
our sanctuary...

ONC owns a 700-acre nature preserve, Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary (LTNS), 11 miles northwest of Cleveland, TX. All members and guests are invited to attend monthly open houses.

Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary Sightings

Each time we visit the sanctuary we encounter something new, whether it be an insect, a plant, a snake, a bird, or even new people visiting LTNS for the first time. In future issues of *Nature Notes*, this back page will be devoted to highlighting our encounters. Next time you're at the sanctuary, if you find an interesting species and would like to share, please send your photo with a brief description to the editor.

We hope you will learn something here and also be encouraged to visit the Little Thicket!



Short-winged Blister Beetle (*Meloe angusticollis*)

This beetle, also commonly called oil beetle, was prevalent on Martin Flat and Kings Hill in late November. When agitated, it exudes orangy-red fluid (oil) from its knees that irritates one's skin, thus the name.



Buttermilk Racer (*Coluber constrictor*)

This snake gets its common name from the milky colored scales on its skin, although these are highly variable. It inhabits pine/hardwood forests in the Eastern U.S. and is one of our fastest snakes, although this one—found on Kings Hill—didn't seem to be in a hurry and posed for quite some time. These snakes are non-venomous.

OUTDOOR NATURE CLUB
New/Renewal Membership Form

(please mail your check to: Outdoor Nature Club, PO Box 270894, Houston TX 77277)

NOTE: Dues are paid January 1 of each calendar year. Dues structure & membership forms can be found at our website: OutdoorNatureClub.org

CATEGORY 1 – ONC Parent Organization (please circle one)

- \$8 Individual
- \$15 Family
- \$40 Supporting
- \$250 Life Member

SUB TOTAL Category 1

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CATEGORY 2 – OG Ornithology Study Group (optional - please circle one)

- \$14 Individual OG — with mailed "Spoonbill" newsletter
- \$19 Family OG — with mailed "Spoonbill" newsletter
- \$10 Individual OG — e-mailed "Spoonbill" newsletter
- \$15 Family OG — e-mailed "Spoonbill" newsletter

SUB TOTAL Category 2

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CATEGORY 3 – Botany/Entomology Study Group (optional)

- \$2 Individual

SUB TOTAL Category 3

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CATEGORY 4 — DONATIONS (please specify)

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|----|-------|
| ONC | \$ | _____ |
| ORNITHOLOGY (OG) | \$ | _____ |
| Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary | \$ | _____ |

SUB TOTAL Category 4

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TOTAL ENCLOSED (Add Categories 1+2+3+4)

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NEW MEMBERS: How did you hear about us?

- Friend told me
- Saw newsletter in library (which one? _____)
- Saw poster at Bayland Community Center
- Found you on internet
- Other (please specify: _____)

Thank you!

We appreciate your support and hope to see you at our next meeting.

Name(s) _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

City/ST/Zip: _____ Email: _____