

Nature Notes



New Critter at LTNS

by **Connie Blakley**

Whoa ... what was that? ... my very words when I spotted this quick-flying insect landing on a twig of grass in Cullinan Meadow at Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary in early June. My first thought was dragonfly, but something wasn't right. So I took lots of pictures intending to find an ID when I returned home. My search through the field guides led to owlfly (*Ascaloptynx appendiculata*).

This interesting critter resembles a dragonfly but closer observation reveals very distinguishing field marks. The give-aways are long—nearly as long as the abdomen—clubbed antennae and huge buggy eyes. Another similar species is antlion, also with clubbed antennae but much

shorter than those of the owlfly. When perched owlflies tend to tip up their abdomens, as seen in the above photo, resembling a broken twig.

This particular species is reportedly fairly common in the south and feeds on other insects. Owlflies are fast fliers and well camouflaged once they light on a twig. I was able to motivate its flight during mid-morning by dragging a stick through the grass. The parasitic larvae resemble dead leaves and lie in wait for prey among ground debris or on twigs.

If you haven't seen one of these unusual flies, try leaving a porch light on. Some observers have reported owlflies coming to lights during the evening. Happy hunting!

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)



September 2010

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	29	30		

October 2010

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	29	30
31						

9 ONC Meeting

7:00 pm—Social; 7:30 pm—Program

Prescribed Burns, by Mark Kramer, Stewardship Coordinator for Armand Bayou Nature Center

11 Ornithology (OG) Field Trip

Beginning Birding I: Willow Waterhole with leaders Adam Wood and John Schneider

13 Ornithology (OG) Meeting

6:30 pm—Learning Corner
7:00 pm—Program

Texas Christmas Bird Counts, by Brent Ortego

14 Botany-Entomology Meeting, 7:30 pm

Rare Flowers in Special Habitats of East Texas Forests, by Joe Liggio

18 Ornithology (OG) Field Trip

Smith Point Hawk Watch led by a Hawk Watch Count Volunteer

18 LTNS Adopt-A-Road Trash Pickup

Trash pickup begins 8:30 am; bring gloves, hat, water, etc. Bags provided by the state.

18-19 LTNS Open House Weekend

Come for the day or plan to camp in The Cove (primitive camping).

4 Ornithology (OG) Meeting

6:30 pm—Learning Corner

7:00 pm—Program

The Next Decade of Research and Monitoring in the southwest Region, by Mike Neal, Hawkwatch International

9 Ornithology (OG) Field Trip

Beginning Birder II: Kleb Woods, led by Adam Wood & Fred Collins

12 Botany-Entomology Meeting, 7:30 pm

Flora of the Texas Trans Pecos, by Dr. Larry Brown

14 ONC Board Meeting, 7:00 pm

All members are encouraged to attend board meetings

16 Ornithology (OG) Field Trip

Seabrook (Pine Gully/Robinson Park) & Armand Bayou, led by Adam Wood

23-24 LTNS Open House Weekend and HALLOWEEN Celebration

Bring your costumes and scary masks! Trick-or-treat around the campfire Saturday night.

28-31 OG Quarterly Field Trip to Austin

Other Notes of Interest

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

Notes from Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary (LTNS)

Summer is a quiet time at LTNS but, perhaps, one of the most beautiful seasons. Cullinan and Big Meadows burst into bloom with gayfeather (*Liatrus pyncnostachya*) and snakeroot (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), attracting numerous butterfly and dragonfly species.

This summer seemed to produce an unusually large number of tiger swallowtail butterflies in all forms, even the less common dark form female (see photo). Other butterfly species found during three different visits were queen, fiery skipper, juniper hairstreak, lace-winged roadside skipper, white-striped longtail, and silver-spotted skipper.



photo by Connie Blakley

We continue to have “leaky” problems with the skylights in the building. Charlie Smith and Aaron Stoley spent a morning in June up on the roof scraping and resealing the skylights. It has since rained a couple of times and no leaks ... yeah! Nice job, guys.

Continuing our tradition of trying to reduce the amount of gumweed on Kings Hill, Calvin Blakley mowed the hill in early August. Some of the plants had already gone to seed, but hopefully more than a few were eliminated.

Have you visited ONC’s website lately? We’ve added checklists of species found at Little Thicket. Members have been recording species for many years and we’ve finally summarized everything and posted the lists on the web. So far, we have the following lists: birds, butterflies, mushrooms, flora, and moths. We will soon be adding odonata.

Speaking of moths, several members have become inter-

ested in observing and photographing moths at LTNS. On visitors weekend, we usually set up a sheet and lights near the Cove and have attracted numerous species. If you’re interested in moths, please join us. There are some beautiful moths, and we’ll highlight a few of them in a future issue of *Nature Notes*.

Election of Officers

At the May 13 ONC general membership meeting, a short business meeting was held to elect officers for the ensuing year. Terms are staggered so only half the positions were up for election. The following were duly elected by those members present:

Executive VP Sergio Henao
VP–Membership Margret Simmons
Treasurer Farrar Stockton
Custodian Russell Jeffords

Dick Whanger Receives Award

At the May 13 meeting, ONC recognized Dick Whanger’s contribution to nature education and conservation by presenting him with the Greenbelt Award. Calvin Blakley presented the award. During his acceptance speech Dick told some amusing stories about his experiences while presenting programs to schools and clubs over the past 20 years. [photo by Connie Blakley]





Outdoor Nature Club
 P.O. Box 270894
 Houston, TX 77277-0894
www.OutdoorNatureClub.org

Nature Notes

May/June 2010, Volume 61 • Number 5
 Published bimonthly September through May

Editor:

Connie Blakley (nature_notes1@outdoornatureclub.org)
 2007 Wilderness Pt Dr
 Kingwood TX 77339

Address Changes:

Margret Simmons (member1@outdoornatureclub.org)
 6111 Bayou Bridge
 Houston TX 77096

Memorials:

Gwen Kunz (memory1@outdoornatureclub.org)
 2001 Holcombe Blvd. #2901
 Houston TX 77030-4231

Officers and Board of Directors

President (acting)Calvin Blakley
 Executive Vice PresidentSergio Henao
 Membership Vice President.....Margret Simmons
 Sanctuaries Vice President (acting).....Aaron Stoley
 Secretary.....Flo Hannah
 TreasurerFarrar Stockton
 CustodianRussell Jeffords
 Botany•Entomology RepresentativeLeland Day
 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.

Field Trip to LTNS ... beautiful bluebells

On June 19 several members and guests gathered at LTNS to look at the bluebells on Cullinan Meadow. There were fewer blooms this year than in the past, possibly a result of our long, cold winter, but the flowers were beautiful as always.

After trekking around the meadows, we went to the farthest northeast corner of the property. Very few visitors go to this section but it is always productive in the form of some new species. An intermittent creek meanders through the area so it is always wet — good for plants and insects. We found a beautiful Red-spotted Purple butterfly, an ominous looking dagger moth caterpillar and a few mushrooms, but the most exciting find was a moth, the False Crocus Geometer Moth (*Xanthotype urticaria*)!

Wanda Smith (who must have eagle eyes) spotted the moth and got a fantastic photo (see below). After submitting the record to BugGuide.net we learned this was the first time the species has been reported in Texas.



Snakeroot was just beginning to bloom on Big Meadow in June during ONC's field trip to LTNS. [photo by Calvin Blakley]



*False Crocus Geometer Moth (*Xanthotype urticaria*) found at LTNS in June. [photo by Wanda Smith]*