

WHAT'S HAPPENIN' ON THE HILL NATURAL HISTORY OF HAYS COUNTY

Beacon Hill, Texas
November 2022

WHO YA FOOLIN'?

In the Animal Kingdom there are many creatures that have been blessed with the art of deception. Through camouflage or mimicry, animals can avoid detection or appear to be something they are not. Some predators rely on camouflage in order to capture their unsuspecting prey. Other animals avoid predators by looking undesirable or nonedible. These plants play host to both kinds of deceptive actors.

SHRUBBY BONESET, *Ageratina havanensis*, is a perennial small to medium-sized shrub found growing from our Hill Country south and west across the Rio Grande and into northern Mexico. It has also been reported from Cuba (thus the species name) and the Bahamas. This very drought tolerant plant grows in sun or part shade and is often found on slopes or ledges with rocky limestone soils. The smallish leaves are arranged oppositely along the arching branches which are tipped with clusters of fragrant white flowers from late summer well into autumn. This late bloomer is popular with hummingbirds and many species of insects, including butterflies, moths, bees and wasps. One curious insect that visits this fragrant flower looks like a stinging wasp, but is actually a harmless moth. Called a **Texas Wasp Moth, *Horama panthalon***, seen at right, this daytime feeding moth relies on mimicry to avoid wary predators hunting in the light of day.

aka White Mistflower is a member of the Aster family (Asteraceae)



FROSTWEED, *Verbesina virginica*, is a perennial herb found growing in shade to part shade from the Edwards Plateau and across the south to Florida, then northward to Iowa and Pennsylvania. This 3-6' tall plant, with large alternately arranged leaves, is often found at edges of woodlands or under large shade trees. The upright stems are frequently arranged in large colonies that can be rather showy, especially when in bloom late in the growing season. These large panicles of creamy white flowers are attractive to butterflies, such as Monarchs, and a host of other insects. This includes predatory insects like the praying mantis at right. This is a well camouflaged adult female **Carolina Mantid, *Stagmomantis carolina***, looking at the photographer while poised to ambush its next insect meal. Watch for the Frostweed after the first hard freeze when its stems erupt into ribbons of ice.

aka Indian Tobacco is a member of the Aster family (Asteraceae)



By Eric Beckers, Natural Heritage Committee
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