



Rare Velvet Ant found at LTNS

story and photos by Wanda Smith



This rare nocturnal velvet ant species was found at LTNS in September.

Last summer I became interested in velvet ants so when a species I wasn't familiar with showed up on the moth sheet at the September campout, I pointed it out, and we all took photographs. I emailed a couple of the photos to an authority on velvet ants, and he said it was something extremely rare. He said, though, that the only way the species could be identified positively would be under a microscope. But before I continue with his response, let me tell you a little about velvet ants.

Most of us are familiar with one velvet ant species, the Cow Killer, *Dasymutilla occidentalis*, which is the largest velvet ant species in the eastern United States. Its sting won't actually kill a cow but the name warns us of how painful it can be. Fortunately, velvet ants won't sting unless they are handled. Even though velvet ants look like furry ants scurrying around singly, they are parasitic wasps in the family Mutillidae, and their sizes range from less than 1/2" to 1-1/4" and vary in color. The males have wings, look very different from the females of their respective species (sexual dimorphism), and can't sting. The females are wingless, can sting, and parasitize solitary bees and wasps as well as flies and beetles; the Cow Killer, however, parasitizes bumblebees. Mutillids can be diurnal, nocturnal, or both and are more common in spring and summer even though a few can still be seen in autumn. Unfortunately, very little is known about this large family. Many species and several genera are known only by the description of one sex, and specifics about their life history are sparse.

So, with that bit of background, let's get back to the Mutillid found at LTNS. The person I have been in contact with emailed that he was "very surprised to see this nocturnal wasp" in our part of Texas. He added that the Texas A&M collection has about 15 medium sized "odd-looking females" from Leon County and that possibly this male might go with them. The two genera he suggested were *Odontophopsis* or *Sphaerophalama*.



"Cow Killer" velvet ant (Dasymutilla occidentalis) is the largest velvet ant species in the eastern United States.

Outdoor Nature Club Upcoming Activities

ONC Contacts

ONC General Information

Olga Beishir, 832-492-9174

Botany/Entomology Group

Katy Emde, 713-628-7575

Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary

Aaron Stoley, 713-781-1372

Ornithology Group (OG)

Marcy Brown, 713-664-5206

Meeting Place, Bayland Community Center

Unless otherwise noted, all meetings are held at Bayland Community Center, 5400 Bissonnet at Hillcroft.



Little Thicket Nature Sanctuary Events

All LTNS events are held at the sanctuary, 2001 FM 945, Cleveland, TX (map is available on our website).



January 2013						
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		



LTNS ACTIVITIES

- 19 Visitors Day & Hiway Trash Pickup**
9:00 am — Meet at the entrance gate to LTNS for trash pickup along our adopted highway. It normally takes about 30-45 minutes.
10:00 am — Meet at The Cove for a nature walk along one of the LTNS trails. Winter is a good time to practice tree identification. Also, we will most likely encounter a few wintering birds. Bring lunch, water, and other amenities for an outdoor adventure.

Study Group Activities

- 05 Botany-Entomology Twelfth Night Party**
 This year's party will be at the home of the Blakleys. For more information, contact Katy Emde (713-628-7575) or Connie Blakley (281-358-5407).
- 07 Ornithology (OG) Meeting**
6:30 pm—Learning Corner
7:00 pm—Program
American Oystercatcher Stewardship in Texas, by Susan Heath, PhD, with GC Bird Observatory.
- 19 OG Field Trip — Brazos Bend SP**
7:30 am — Meet at 40 Acre Lake Parking Lot. Leader: Bill Godley

February 2013						
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	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	



LTNS ACTIVITIES

- 16-17 Visitors Weekend**
 Join us for a winter weekend in the woods. We might find some early bloomers and if we're lucky we'll see the Falcate Orange-tip Butterflies. Weather permitting, we will be camping and we will erect the moth sheet on Saturday night. Check our website for last minute updates.

Study Group Activities

- 12 Botany-Entomology**
 See our website for program details.
- 04 Ornithology (OG) Meeting**
6:30 pm—Learning Corner
7:00 pm—Program
Picture This: Digital details—the struggles of online bird identification, by Kendra Kocab, Staff Naturalist, Kleb Woods Nature Sanctuary
- 15-24 OG Field Trip**
 Winter Quarterly Trip to the Panhandle Region, Albuquerque and El Paso. Trip is limited to 12; to register contact Adam Wood, 713-515-1692.

Other Notes of Interest

ONC Appreciates Your Donations

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

in memory of Chuck Bauer

*Dennis Johnson &
Timmie Boutin
Milton Reim
Charles/Wanda Smith*

for LTNS Sanctuary Fund

*Priscilla Bauer
Sheryl Marquez*

for ONC General Fund

Karen/Phil Beekman

HELP! ONC needs a new Publications Chair

At the end of May, Connie Blakley will be resigning as Publications Chair, a position she has held for over 15 years. We are looking for someone to fill this position and hope one of our enthusiastic members will step forward.

Duties include assembling and distributing Nature Notes five times per year and assembling the Yearbook & Membership Directory during the summer break. Connie will be happy to provide more information. Please contact ONC's president Olga Beishir if you can help.

Botany members share resources

Katy Emde, chair of the Botany-Entomology Group, is encouraging members to share their resources. If you have a favorite plant book or insect book, others may not be familiar with it. Why not bring it to a meeting and share your find with fellow members. We're always seeking new sources of information about our favorite subject!

Botany-Entomology program attracts large crowd



Common Eastern Bumblebee (Bombus impatiens) photographed in northern Harris County, September 2009. [photo by Connie Blakley]

Over 30 members and guests came to the December BE meeting to learn about bumblebees. Our special guest speaker was Michael Warriner, invertebrate biologist with Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, who has initiated the new Texas Bumblebee Watch to assess populations in Texas.

Bumblebee populations are declining, but biologists don't know if they are declining in Texas because there is very little historical data. The last time a species review was published in our state was in 1913!

There are actually several hundred

bee species that are native to Texas and that are essential to the state's diverse native plant communities. With their black and yellow bodies, bumblebees are among the most familiar native Texas bees.

If you would like to assist in the study of our bees, you can become a citizen "bumble watcher." Mr. Warriner has established a website (www.texasbumblebees.com) where you can submit photos of bumblebees. The site has tips on identifying Texas bumblebees and information on the nine species that occur in our state.

TIME TO RENEW

If you've already paid your 2013 ONC dues, THANK YOU! If you haven't yet renewed, a membership form is included with your newsletter. Please take a few moments to complete the form and mail your dues. We appreciate your continued support of ONC.

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

Nature Notes

Jan/Feb 2013, Volume 64 • Number 3
Published bimonthly September through May

Editor:

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

Address Changes:

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

Memorials:

Karen Terrell
(memory1@outdoornatureclub.org)
c/o Outdoor Nature Club
P.O. Box 270894, Houston TX 77277-0894

Officers and Board of Directors

PresidentOlga Beishir
Executive VP vacant
Membership VP Margret Simmons
Sanctuaries VP(acting)..... Aaron Stoley
Past PresidentSergio Henao
Secretary/TreasurerMike Correll
Botany•Entomology Rep..... Leland Day
Ornithology Rep Marcy Brown

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.

Nature Sightings

Each time we venture outdoors to enjoy nature, we encounter something new. It might be an insect, a plant, a snake, a bird, or any other of the myriad species that inhabit our natural world. This back page is usually devoted to highlighting our encounters. 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 spend more time exploring!



Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*)

This year has seen an irruption of Red-breasted Nuthatches in the southern states with numerous birds being reported in the Houston area. This bird and one other has taken up residence in the Blakley's back yard in Kingwood. We're thrilled to have them and hope they will stay throughout the winter.



National Champion Tree (*Carya texana*)

In the Sept/Oct issue we noted that LTNS is honored to have the State Champion Black Hickory tree. The same tree has now been recognized as the National Champion and is listed in the National Registry of Big Trees!