

# Sun and Wind Bring More Signs of Spring

A warm, sunny weekend was sure a welcome break from the dismal cold and grey that gripped the Lost Pines through much of last week. We had a freeze out here at the Biology Station on Thursday morning and were closer than we'd like to be the day before and again the day after. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> year in a row that we've had late season freezes.

It was a good weekend for spring cleanup in the gardens—removing the dry, old stalks of the shrubs and vines and getting a bit of early weeding done, along with moving some “volunteer” sprouts to better locations. The maypops, *Passiflora incarnata*, for example, expand through underground runners and their expansion needs to be checked early on. I try to move as many of the new sprouts as possible to another location along the fence. In my view you can never have too much passion vine!

Working close to the gardens also made us very aware of some more signs of Spring returning to central Texas. While removing the old frostweed stalks from one of the gardens (yes, we grow frostweed in the butterfly gardens) I heard the whirr and buzz of a hummingbird but it was gone by the time I turned my head. That I wasn't going completely mad was shown shortly thereafter when Pat yelled out “The Hummer's are back!” Of course, this meant a break for cleaning and re-deploying the feeders (which was much preferred to weeding, I'll tell you).

The Monarch migration continues (those strong south winds don't hurt). The groundsel patch that has developed over the septic drain field was attended by half a dozen Monarchs, a couple of American Ladies, a Buckeye or two and the first Hoary Edge skipper that I've seen here since 2003. That the Monarchs were migrants was pretty evident by their sex and condition—most of the males have already passed through and the majority of the individuals I saw on Saturday were old, damaged females.

At least there's lots of milkweed around for them to lay eggs on. I went searching on Friday morning in the company of the lecturer and TA of UT's Native Plants course and found quite a few young plants just emerging above last year's dried grasses. Hopefully this means we'll be seeing Monarchs well into May (by which time it'll already feel like summer, I'm sure).



*A migrating female Monarch butterfly, Danaus plexippus, nectars at Texas groundsel, Senecio ampullaceus, blooms. Note the missing club on her right antenna and the small notch in the trailing edge of her right hindwing, an indication of her age and experience.*