

FLORA



Silverleaf Nightshade (*Solanum elaeagnifolium*)

This delicate plant was growing with abundance in open fields, blossoming cheerfully despite the blistering heat in the sunshine. It is very hardy, considered an aggressive weed, and is poisonous, like most nightshades.



Western hornnettle (*Solanum dimidiatum*)

This very thorny fruiting plant is certainly another species of nightshade, though the abundance of species native to the area make its exact identification unclear. The hard yellow fruits resemble tomatoes (another species of nightshade) but all parts of the plants are poisonous.

Texas prickly pear (*Opuntia engelmannii* var. *lindheimeri*)

This prickly pear cactus is fruiting. The broad leaves and fruit of this cactus have many culinary and material uses.



FAUNA



Twin flagged jumping spider (*Anasaitis canosa*)

The most common animal I saw that day, this spider is 5-6 mm in length and spends its time in leaf litter. It has a unique strategy for hunting ants. It aligns itself directly in front of the ant, then leaps and punctures the top of the head or thorax, in a position that prevents the ant's mandibles and stinger from damaging the spider.



Showy grasshopper
(*Hesperotettix speciosus*)

This striking grasshopper, found in the great plains region, has white bands rimming its eyes and a brilliant red stripe down its back. Its host plants are sunflowers and ragweeds.

Common earwig (*Forficula auricularia*)

This earwig was found under a crumbling log. It was moving very quickly, and I was lucky to get this shot. You can tell it is a female by the size and curvature of its pincers - they are relatively short and straight. Female earwigs care for their young for about a month.



Common whitetail dragonfly
(*Plathemis lydia*)

This dragonfly is common across North America. This was one of many dragonflies I found seeking shade in more open clusters of trees, but was the only species that let me get close enough to snap a picture. This male sports a chunky white abdomen. All dragonflies need plenty of oxygen to fly; this species facilitates oxygen intake with a uniquely complex tracheal system.

