

RAIN! It Changes Everything

As I am writing this on June 2, I can look back on the past 23 days and see that we have received over 9 inches of rain at our house, on top of the over 4 inches we received in April and about 3.5 inches in March! And I know a lot of people who got more rain than that—unfortunately some folks also had flood/high water damage or other storm damage, so these heavy rains are not without downsides.

Given how unusual these events are and how significant the effects are to everyone, it might be expected that a naturalist would have something meaningful to write about it, but the only thing that comes to my mind right now is WOW! What a difference these spring rains have made to the vegetation everywhere.

Of course, not all of that 9+ inches in the last three weeks soaked into the ground. A couple of times in the past few weeks I have walked around the pasture a day or so after a good rain and found a lot of water still standing on the surface, although mostly only about ¼ inch deep or less. When the soil is that saturated that water can't soak into the ground 24 or more hours after a rain, you can be sure that if we get another rain within 2 or 3 days, virtually none of it will soak in and most all of it will run off. That is, of course, what leads to so much flooding in rainy times.

For those of us with full rainwater tanks, every time we get even more rain makes us wish for more tanks, but at least we know the vegetation is getting watered and maybe even some aquifers are being replenished and we won't be needing the rainwater in the tanks for a while longer.

Walking around inside our high fence the vegetation looks like a jungle in places now with a combination of cool-season grasses at all-time heights as well as all the shrubs putting out new growth and the plethora of blooming wildflowers. The downside is that this time of year the chiggers that live in the tall grass will be jumping onto your legs and leaving you a reminder that they are there.

It has been a long time since we have had this long a stretch of time without even thinking about needing to water anything. On the other hand, especially for those that like to keep their gardens neat (unlike yours truly), all this rain means that if there is anything in your garden that you don't like, you have even more of it now and it may be growing faster than you can keep up with. Actually, we have a few things like that as well.

The wet weather is not only good for vegetation but for lots of animals also. Wet soil made it easier for our barn swallows to find mud to make their nests. Many insects need moist times to hatch their eggs and/or transform from one life form to another. Interestingly, fireflies like to have two wet springs in a row, the first so they can lay their eggs in soft, damp soil and the second so the newly hatched fireflies can emerge from the soil. This has been a good year for them.

Animals that dig for insects such as armadillos, skunks and possums have an easier time finding food when the soil is moist and the digging is easy—and there are more insects to find then also. Turkeys have an easier time finding nest sites and hiding them from predators when the grasses are high. Does can hide their fawns easier as well.

There will of course be another issue to deal with later in the year. When we have unusual growth early in the year, we will have more dead or dormant vegetation and leaves to deal with later in the year. This is a good thing most of the time as we need the mulch effect to shade the soil and reduce evaporation as well as to become degraded and incorporated into the soil over time. However, when such vegetation accumulates over time near your house or other buildings it can become a fire hazard that you will want to mitigate.

Let's hope we get at least a little of this rain during the summer as well.

Until next time...

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