

Crawlies with Cri: by Christy Solo

This week’s “Crawlies” is a reminder that nature never runs out of awesome weirdness.

What the heck is going on in this photo? This is an example of a hyperparasite in action.

Now, what the heck is a “hyperparasite?” A hyperparasite is a parasite whose host, often an insect, is also a parasite, often specifically a parasitoid.

A “parasitoid” is an insect (e.g., the ichneumon wasp) whose larvae live as parasites that eventually kill their hosts (typically other insects).

Now that we have our definitions, here’s exactly what’s going on: the small (under one-quarter of an inch) conura chalcid wasp is laying her eggs into the cocoons of a braconid wasp, which in turn had laid her eggs into a saw fly caterpillar.

Buckle up, this gets even weirder.

The braconid wasp originally found the saw fly caterpillar by sniffing

it out as it leisurely munched on chokecherry leaves.

This makes sense, as wasps of all types sniff out smaller soft-bodied insects for direct meals for their larvae, or indirectly as hosts for eggs.

Fun Fact: Wasps “sniff” via their antennae.

How then, does the conura find the braconid brood? She sniffs out a chemical emitted by the chewed chokecherry leaf.

The braconid injects a virus into the host saw fly caterpillar along with her eggs. The virus suppresses the caterpillar’s immune system and protects the braconid’s young against everything but the conura.

The injected virus creates a distinct chemical odor from the chewed cherry and the conura hones in on that specific scent; just when the braconid thought she had all her bases covered.

Braconid wasps



Hyperparasite in action

are beneficial insects. They keep populations of caterpillars (and other types of larvae) down so the chokecherry can keep

most of its leaves and fruit.

So, isn’t the conura wasp messing with a good ‘pest control’ system?

Nope. The world of parasitoids and hyperparasitoids is one heck of a niche market, and one that works

perfectly.

If there weren’t hyperparasitoids of braconids, like our conura wasp, the braconids would be too successful at eliminating caterpillars of all types and there would be a breakdown in the chain. Braconids would

eliminate too many hosts and then braconids would die off and surviving hosts would make a massive comeback and it would be ‘pest central’.

Nature is full of weird, but it’s weird that works.

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Weather Watch

Cave Junction

Thursday, May 14
Rain
High -- 57 Low -- 43

Friday, May 15
Partly Cloudy
High -- 71 Low -- 49

Saturday, May 16
PM Rain
High -- 67 Low -- 47

Sunday, May 17
Rain
High -- 57 Low -- 44

Monday, May 18
Light Rain
High --58 Low -- 42

Tuesday, May 19
Showers
High -- 63 Low -- 43

Wednesday, May 20
Partly Cloudy
High -- 68 Low -- 44

Following are the high & low temperatures, and rainfall recorded at The End of the Road in O'Brien by Cheryl Johnson:

May	High	Low	Rain
2	56.3	42.1	0.93
3	64.3	35.2	
4	72.5	32.6	
5	71.1	40.2	
6	66.9	37.4	0.06
7	80.0	37.4	
8	92.4	41.8	

May Rain: 0.99" YTD Rain: 36.73"

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~ Bill Landis, Former Chief, Grants Pass Department Public Safety

“In the House District 3 race, Michelle is the only candidate that has direct experience with the hard work of running a small business and therefore understands what it takes to help businesses get back on their feet in these crushing economic times in Josephine County.”

~ Cameron Camp, Owner Illinois Valley Data Center

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