

## Backyard Observations

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The Texas Master Naturalist classes offer insight into what's going on in my own backyard. For example: mutualism. Years ago I noticed carpenter bees spending time at the base of the flowers in our backyard as opposed to entering the front door, so to speak. My son who studies entomology at Texas A&M said the bees were puncturing the base to draw out nectar.

Fast forward to Ecologist John Brush's presentation to the RGVCTMN Class of 2023 in February. Brush spoke about third party mutualism: how nectar-robbing carpenter bees might actually be of benefit not only to the plant, but to third parties. The day after that presentation I noticed an Orange-crowned Warbler darting in-and-out of the cape honeysuckle; it appeared to be taking advantage of the easy access to nectar from the blooms. My husband asked what I was looking at, and instead of naming the bird I said, "I think it's third-party mutualism!"

Brush had invited the class to share observations to his on-going research projects on [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org). I submitted photos of the warbler with notes on the observation to which he responded, "I think there's a good chance it is opportunistically taking advantage of the nectar access."

If it hadn't been for Brush's presentation I would have simply wondered what the warbler was doing. Instead, I was able to take a class lesson and apply it to my own backyard.



Orange-crowned Warbler seen taking advantage of nectar at the base of a cape honeysuckle flower.