Changes

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I've hesitated to speak aloud the word drought, in case it would make it real, but without an abundance of water, things "they are a-changin,'" as Bob Dylan wrote in a 1963 folk song.

The abnormally hot June and July temperatures, lack of rain and persistent wind have caused many water sources to dry up. In place of the water is a veritable sea of new vegetation. Two species particularly noticeable where the edge of our resaca once was, are described below.

A **Camphorweed (***Heterotheca subaxillaris)* is using the retaining wall for support. Camphorweed is widespread across much of the United States, so no surprise it's taking advantage of a void. It is in the Asteraceae family, described as a perennial, aromatic herb. Even in the early morning the plant appears stressed. I've not seen any of its flowers fully open. It's a multi-branching, gangly looking plant. For the first few weeks, I thought it was a common cow thistle, *Sonchus oleraceus*, long past its due date, until I realized how many and how long the branches were.

Camphorweed **(***Heterotheca subaxillaris)*

Camphorweed is a composite plant with both yellow disk and yellow ray flowers. It produces two different seed types, according to uswildflowers.com. One type, produced by the disk flowers, can germinate immediately; the seed produced by the ray flowers requires a period of dormancy and must undergo a period of high temperature before germinating, thus germinating in the fall – a daunting prospect. Both kinds of seeds are distributed by the wind.

The plant can be mistaken for other species until the leaves are crushed. I put mine to the test and it had a distinct camphor-like aroma. Foraging value is rated as fair, and it is unpalatable for grazing livestock on open ranges, but it attracts pollinators, according to rangeplants.tamu.edu.

Behind the camphorweed, a spindly vine, looking too delicate to withstand the heat and surrounding new wilderness had wended its way across what appeared to be a prolific stand of Southern annual saltmarsh asters (*Symphyotrichum divaricatum)*. Pale yellow "mouse ear" blooms gave rise to the plant being in the pea family (pun intended of the flower stalks reaching toward the top of the aster bushes). The vine is **wild cowpea (***Vigna luteola)* also called yellow cowpea and hairypod cowpea. It is a perennial vine found on many continents in tropical areas, generally in moist soil.

Wild cowpea vine **(***Vigna luteola)* is also known as yellow cowpea or hairypod cowpea.

The leaves are in groups of three. The flowers are one large standard petal, two lateral wing petals and two lower keel petals, creating bilateral symmetry, a predominant, common and highly elaborate trait in legumes. Wildflower.org site suggests the stems scramble, an interesting description of plant locomotion. The vine can reach six feet or longer. The fruit, or seed pods are flat legumes about two inches long with fine hairs, containing numerous large black seeds; the pod twists spirally when the seeds are dispersed, according to Wikipedia.

Wild cowpea is a larval host for Cassius blue, grey hairstreak, long-tailed skipper and Dorantes skipper butterflies. Ground-feeding birds eat the seeds.