

## PLUME MOTHS

By John Lampkin

Houdini made an elephant disappear. Not to be outdone, Penn & Teller made Elsie the Cow disappear. Even more impressive is a disappearing act on the Sun City Center Nature Trails starring of all things, plume moths!

Imagine that you're a dragonfly or Blue-gray Gnatcatcher looking for your next morsel. You spot a promising little moth moving through the clearing and just as you are about to pounce, it's gone. Poof, it is now a twig or piece of dried grass.

And even more maddening is when the flying fluff is a mated pair, a tasty twofer, as in the photo above.



*Can you spot the mated pair of plume moths?*

*(answer below)*

Camo in one form or another is a main line of defense for many species. Moths especially are masters of duplicity, mimicking tree bark, bird poop or debris. In fact, one large group is called "grass veneers" because they hug the stems and disappear as just part of foliage. Others mimic terrifying predators with huge owl-eye spots, but that's a topic for another day, another column.

There are 147 maddeningly similar species of plume moths in 26 genera in North America and it's safe to say that our pair is one of those. Hah! All plume moths are T-shaped at rest and in the photo, they are hanging upside down. Each head is immediately under the twig and each has one wing hanging down and one wing angled upwards at an angle. Who needs an elephant or Elsie the Cow? This is magic!

The Nature Trails is an ongoing project of the SCC Audubon Club in cooperation with the SCC CA. The trailhead is located opposite North Lake on Del Webb West between Vincennes and Seton Hall. Join us for interpretive walks on the first Tuesday of the month at 9 am.