

# The Minute Effect on the Vast Landscape

By Gabriela Blake

The dirt is brown, the grass is yellow. It dances to the rhythm of the wind and contrasts with a tall plant standing rigid with little visible movement. This was the sight the Spanish conquistadors first came upon. The tall plants looked like stakes, or estacas in Spanish, and the sight made such a great impact on the conquistadors that they named the area after it: the Llano Estacado. As they made their way north, south, east and west, the land continued to extend as far as the eye could see. The roundness of the earth continued to be perceivable, and the yucca plant continued giving human scale to the immensity of the Llano. As I make my way through the Llano, the yucca is everywhere. The dirt is brown and dry, the trees are gray, and the grass is yellow. The yucca is green and spiky with a tall stake growing from its base. Crowning it are the silky white flowers that impressed the conquistadors. Along the dirt road the yucca plant marks the edge between the road and the vegetation. Bordering the playa lakes and its surroundings, the yucca is present once more. The dirt turns red. The land turns rocky. Green and gray pointy plants appear on the scene. There is a slight change in topography and still the yucca is there. In every step of the way, it serves as a reference point in an otherwise endless landscape. I ask myself how it manages to survive throughout the Llano even when the other vegetation changes. As I come closer to the beautiful white petals of the yucca's flower, I reach out to touch one. My question is answered. One of its best kept secrets, the Yucca Moth lands on my hand. The minute white insect stares at me with its big, black eyes. It flies up and into the center of one of the yucca flowers in order to continue its pollination job. Gary Paul Nabhan's *Forgotten Pollinators* examines the special relationship between plants and the bugs that pollinate them. The yucca flower takes this relationship a step further by only allowing pollination from the Yucca Moth. Each spring the female and male moths meet up with each other on the yucca plant in order to mate. Right before the female lays its eggs, it collects sticky pollen, rolls it into a ball and sticks it under her head. She flies to another yucca flower in order to lay eggs. She goes straight to the center of the flower, opens a small hole and lays them inside. Once she has safely deposited them, she walks to the

flower's stamen and packs the rolled up pollen within a tiny opening. This provides food for the larvae and provides for the reproduction of the plant. Once the eggs are hatched, the larvae feed on the yucca seeds. They finish eating and make their way onto the ground. The process is complete. The larvae have grown up and the flowers slowly start dying. In the end, the flower and the moth depend on each other to survive. The loss of one or the other represents the loss of both.