

**ARLINGTON
CONSERVATION
COUNCIL**

POSTOAK

WORKING TO CONSERVE ARLINGTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES

VOLUME 10, NUMBER 6

JUNE 2009

www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org

June Meeting

**Mindy Mize,
North Central Texas
Council of Governments
Clean Air Team Member**

**Wednesday, June 10, 7 pm
Fielder Museum
1616 W Abram St
(corner of Fielder and Abram)**



**Remember to bring
something for the raffle**

Bits & Pieces

Our Other Squirrel

Flying squirrels live in the eastern third of Texas and don't get much farther west than Tarrant County. They're nocturnal so we rarely see them, and that's a shame. They usually glide from 20 to 30 feet but can go up to 100 feet.



Today's Inspirational Moment

When you've spent half your political life dealing with hum-drum issues like the environment, it's exciting to have a real crisis on your hands.

Margaret Thatcher

It's Official: "Going Green" is a Meaningless Fad

A big grassy lawn is basically bad for the environment and your pocketbook, but what's the worst grass you can have? It's got to be St Augustine, king of the water wasters.



Our Reddest Bird



What's the country's only solid red bird? It's the Summer tanager, found breeding locally in open woodlands. It specializes in eating bees and wasps, usually catching bees in flight — a good trick.

From the President John Darling



For some time the members of the ACC board have thought it would be a good idea to institute some special programs.

These programs could take several forms, including speakers of particular importance and training sessions for Parks Department staff and other interested people. To set the programs off, we got permission from past ACC president and former city council member Julia Burgen to lend her name to these events.

We thought it appropriate that the first Julia Burgen Sustainability Lecture should be the May 13 presentation by SMU clean air researcher Al Armendariz. However, you could tell we're new at this because several of us, operating independently, left the series name out of the newsletter, and the flyer, and omitted it at the meeting.

Remarkably, I was there at all three junctures and somehow failed to correct the obvious omission. I apologize to Julia and the board.

Organizations name things for people as an honor — in this case richly deserved — and to assign import as a lure to attendance. Thirty of us heard Dr Armendariz, a respectable group, but how much larger might it have been if people had known that Julia had allowed her name to be attached to the presentation.

We hope to have another Julia Burgen Sustainability Lecture this year, and when that happens, we won't keep the namesake a secret.

Here's a major point from the May program as summarized in the Fort Worth Business Press: "In the study, Armendariz reports that on-road motor vehicle emissions from five North Texas counties — Denton, Tarrant, Parker, Johnson and Ellis — was estimated at

121 tons per day, according to an August 2007 report prepared for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

'Summer oil and gas emissions in the five counties of the D-FW metropolitan area with significant oil and gas production was estimated to be 165 tpd, indicating that the oil and gas sector likely has greater emissions than motor vehicles in these counties,' according to the report."

Of course this conclusion generated rebuttal from the oil and gas industry, but even the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has come up with similar numbers.

This leads us to think that municipalities will now drastically reconsider their anti-pollution requirements when granting permission to drillers. But will they? Certainly the last legislative session failed to address the issue. Can the cities do any better?

THE POST OAK

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New York Avenue Blackland Prairie Park Jan Miller



Sunshine + rain + prairie LIFE = summer bonanza.

This reminds me of an old cartoon where a couple of professorial-looking types are standing before a blackboard covered with complex mathematical equations. (No computers, I told you it was OLD.) The older guy is rubbing his head and pointing to a spot near the end of the calculations where it says 'and then a miracle happens.' The caption reads: "I think you need a little more detail here." Well, we've had the rain and the sun and the prairie is reveling in an early summer bonanza of growth. Grasses are booming and the relatively wet, mild spring extended the bloom season for many spring wildflowers. That growth spurt extends on up the food chain to insects, reptiles, birds, and mammals. How it all links together is beyond our grasp, but as top of the food chain and sometime stewards of this planet, humans enjoy exploring what makes a prairie 'happen.' Two May events brought that into focus:



Jeff Quayle's wildflower walk at NYABP on May 7 brought out a good crowd for a leisurely early evening stroll, some from ACC, some from the neighborhood, some adults and some kids. Blooms were plentiful and thanks to the kids, we got to see a walking stick camouflaged in the grass. Thanks, Jeff!

A group of blackland prairie enthusiasts got together for a regional confer-

ence courtesy of the North Texas Master Naturalists (Dallas area). Some interesting notes:

- Prairies are like upside-down rainforests in that their biomass is underground. They have built some of the richest soils in the world.
- As chief architects of this soil-building enterprise, 20,000 invertebrate species may live in a thimble of prairie soil.
- Some leafhoppers and other insects may live only in prairies. Insect



surveys are excellent indicators of prairie quality and diversity.

- Compost tea using prairie soil microbes is being studied as a restoration tool.
- Management by 'benign neglect' is not an option. Without fire or grazing, thatch accumulates, even with mowing. Haying provides some help.



Although conservation efforts have concentrated funds and efforts on larger, less expensive (per acre) tracts, smaller remnants (like NYABP) are more accessible ambassadors for urban populations and serve as sources of valuable species.

Bottom line: While it is difficult to maintain a prairie remnant given the changes of urbanization, it's easier than restoring one. Of the 12 million acres of native blackland prairie we once had, less than 5000 acres (<0.05%) remain. But at NYABP, we've got about 10 acres of that 5000 (that's 0.20%). So, in case we needed a reminder, our little prairie remnant at NYABP is a good thing: to study, to appreciate, and to enjoy.

Good news: The final stretch of the boundary fence on the east side of the prairie was being installed this week. The hope is that this will secure the prairie and prevent unauthorized dumping. Also, the final remains of the derelict trailer have been removed.



Wildscape Update **John Dycus**



"I luvvvv this place," a boy remarked on Earth Day this year at the wildscape. On another occasion volunteers overheard a man walking on a trail, talking on his

cellphone: "I've just discovered this wonderful place, a wildlife habitat in Veterans Park in Arlington. You've got to come see it!"

Part of the wildscape mission is to provide a place to connect with nature, and proof abounds that the mission is being accomplished. All manner of park visitors — walkers, joggers, stroller-pushing moms, bicyclers and even disc golfers — frequently thank the volunteers as they toil in the wildscape, which just energizes the volunteers to work harder. Call it an upward spiral.

Many volunteers, led by organizers Hester Schwarzer, Dawn Hancock, Peggy Quinn, Callie Mitchell, and wildscape coordinator Ann Knudsen, helped make this year's Goodman Elementary School "Walk on the Wildside" the best yet, in the view of Carrie Donovan, the school's

lead science teacher and a longtime wildscape fan. Ann has mastered the multifaceted task of making these excursions run smoothly for the volunteers, teachers and 80-plus students. Quite an accomplishment.

The third-graders learned on the tour that the post oak forest was so dense when settlers came through that it was dubbed the Cast Iron Forest. The kids were shown an iron skillet as a visual aid. At the next stop they were asked if they knew what kind of forest they were in. After a pause, one excited student shouted, "Frying Pan."

Popular activities included learning about birds of the wildscape and the parts of a flower, and observing butterflies and caterpillars and other critters, including anoles and ladybugs. One child exclaimed dramatically with arms wide open, "I just stepped into the world of butterflies."

Expect an exciting summer, with the Arlington Parks and Recreation Department forestry camp filling the second and third weeks of June. Some of the camp will be in the wildscape with volunteers assisting. Leading the camp will be

wildscape favorite Heather Dowell and Hester Schwarzer, a longtime super volunteer who always has outstanding ideas for hands-on activities for children.

A large group of Boy Scouts and their families also trooped through recently, with Callie Mitchell and a few volunteers showing them around. Callie reports that the parents were especially interested. They were asking questions about where to buy native plants and where to get good trees, and some said they were coming back to volunteer.



Dawn Hancock discussed insect pollinators during the May mini-class.



Third graders from Goodman Elementary School received the full Walk on the Wildside treatment, thanks to another remarkable effort by Molly and the many wildscape volunteers. And we learned (or confirmed) that kids in third grade are just about the most wonderful audience we could hope for.



Wildscape Update continued from page 4

Can't resist just a few more shots of those marvellous Goodman third graders. Thanks to Ann Knudsen for all the great photos.



Wildscape Mini-class schedule:

July 11, Soil Critters, Ann Mayo
 Aug. 1, Nifty Native Perennials, Laura Miller
 Sept. 12, Post Oak Woodland Preservation, Steve Chaney
 Oct. 3, The Importance of Backyard Wildscapes, Jessica Alderson
 Nov. 7, No Child Left Inside, Heather Dowell



Birding in Central Park Julia Burgen

We visited Jack's brother in New York City the last week of April. The city was beautiful, with millions of flowers and the fresh green of trees leafing out. As we ate dinner on Columbus Avenue our first evening, the tiny blossoms of the crab apple trees blew around like snow flurries. The cherry trees on the grounds of the American Museum of Natural History were in full pink bloom as we arrived. A day before we left, their blossoms also began to fly off, making pink snow. I watched as a boy about age 5 played for over 15 minutes with a pile of blossoms, down on his hands and knees, picking them up and tossing them.

I noticed all week that even adults walking by would pull down the low-hanging branches and smell the flowers.

The highlight of our trip for me was birding in Central Park on April 29 with a group and a leader who knew the birds. We saw 33 species in 4 hours. We had wonderful close-up looks at an ovenbird and a black-crowned night heron. I saw my first palm warbler, and had major warbler neck problems as so many of the little guys really like to hang out in the tree tops. Thank goodness for ovenbirds that forage down low. Most memorable was our stop in the Maintenance Meadow, so-named because it is close to the Maintenance Barn in the south

central part of the park. The open meadow is ringed by trees of all sizes, which makes for a really good birding spot.

The leader heard a Nashville warbler and tracked the sound to a medium sized crab apple tree. Our group proceeded to peer into the fairly dense tree and finally located it. It took me a little longer, but when I did see it, I said, "Gosh, but it is kind of drab, more like the orange-crowned warbler that spends the winter with me." This caused the leader to look again and reconsider since both Nashville and orange-crowns can have an

continued on page 7

Cowboys Stadium Opens. Reporter Rubs Salt in Wound.

It's very old news now: Arlington's leaders and its fun-loving residents will spare nothing in their race to make us Amusement Central. But now we suffer the ignorant comments of Mitchell Schnurman, business columnist for the Star-Telegram. On May 31 he wrote of the land around the stadium in glowing terms, indifferent to the irreplaceable habitat the city sacrificed to the god of mass entertainment. Did he ever see it *before*? Well anyway, who wants a beer?



“Approaching from the exits on I-30, the hills, trees, and water from Johnson Creek come together to create a scene unlike any other in the area.”



“My favorite surprise is how it's comfortably placed on the sprawling land.”



“By comparison [with Texas Stadium] the new sports center in Arlington seems almost bucolic.”

Bad News on Solar Legislation **Luke Metzger, Environment Texas Director**

Well, the Legislature finally wrapped up its 81st session on Monday, with mixed results for the environment.

This session, our top priorities were to create a statewide solar rebate program and to boost energy efficiency by improving building codes and increasing requirements on utilities to invest in efficiency programs. We enjoyed enormous support at the Legislature, winning super majorities in both the House and Senate and getting priority placement in the order bills are taken up. This support is due in no small part to your work — signing petitions, donating money, attending local events, and calling your legislators. Unfortunately, partisan

fighting over the voter ID measure sank all of our priority legislation on solar power and energy efficiency.

I can't sugarcoat it — this is bad news for Texas' chances to become a world leader in solar power. Already, a powerful lawmaker in Tennessee has told the media, "To any company that had an eye on Texas, we say come on up to Tennessee."

However, there are a few things that give me hope. First, Rep. Mike Villarreal of San Antonio did pass HB 1937, legislation allowing local governments to provide low-cost loans to consumers to install solar on their rooftops. More on this soon. Second, there is a chance the

governor will call a special session of the Legislature, to which he could add solar to the agenda. Last, this summer the U.S. Congress is taking up major clean energy legislation, which could accomplish nationally even more than we were working for locally.

It was a roller coaster of a ride this legislative session, particularly the last two weeks. It didn't turn out the way we planned, but we have built a strong foundation for the future. And to paraphrase American revolutionary John Paul Jones, we have not yet begun to fight!

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Birding in Central Park **continued from page 5**



orangish cap. I've actually never seen the orange spot before, but I did get a hint of it in the tree. Then the leader declared the bird to indeed be the orange-crowned, which she had not seen in the park in 25 years of birding! Most of those in the group were ecstatic as they don't often see that warbler in the Northeast. It was a first sighting for many of them. As we moved on, another group came in sight and our leader told them, "There's an orange-crowned warbler in the crab apple tree on east side of Maintenance Meadow." She gave the same message to the next group that came by. I know that clearly it is a coup to be able to alert others to a goodie! After about 15 more minutes I had to leave and started walking back across the park to 77th

Street at Central Park West. I came upon the Museum's birding class just as someone who had not been in our group walked by and shouted to them, "There's an orange-crowned warbler in the crab apple tree on the east side of the Maintenance Meadow." I chuckled all the way back to the apartment.

After birding in the park on another morning, we caught the subway. A man standing next to us saw my binoculars and proceeded to let me know the latest on the hawks. Seems there is another nest in addition to the one on Fifth Avenue, now on Central Park South. He said he often sees people stop and look up at Columbus Circle as the hawks do wheelies overhead, scoping out pigeons, I guess.

My final nature-related event was to visit the library at the American Museum of Natural History where I asked to look at some of C. William Beebe's books from the first half of the 20th century. He was an outstanding naturalist who wrote many articles and books. Among them:

The Book of Naturalists, an Anthology of the Best Natural History, Alfred A. Knopf, 1944. At that time Beebe was the Director of the Department of Tropical Research for the New York Zoological Society.

The Log of the Sun: A Chronicle of Nature's Year, Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1926 edition. First edition, 1906.

The Bird: Its Form and Function, Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1906, which contains my favorite quote about endangered species.

Thanks to Last Month's Speaker

Dr Al Armendariz spoke to us about air pollution from oil and gas well operations. His talk was a model of clarity, and his conclusions should be front-page news.

Jim Schermbeck (left) from *Downwinders at Risk* and Dr Al Armendariz.



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