

ARLINGTON CONSERVATION COUNCIL

POSTOAK

WORKING TO CONSERVE ARLINGTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES
VOLUME 10, NUMBER 7

JULY-AUGUST 2009

www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org

August Meeting

Water Quality in Arlington's Streams: What it means to you

**Robert Ressler,
Environmental Engineer,
City of Arlington**

**Wednesday, August 12, 7:00 pm
Fielder Museum
1616 W. Abram St
(corner of Fielder and Abram)**



**Remember to bring
something for the raffle**

Bits & Pieces

Cicada Summer

Now that temperatures are high enough to melt flesh, that relentless cicada noise is back. And, not to be ugly about it, so are the cicada killer wasps, thank goodness. The female wasps dig burrows in sandy soil to hold paralyzed cicadas. They lay an egg on each victim, and the larva feeds on it, molts several times, then pupates. Not the Disney version of nature, but that's okay.



Today's Inspirational Moment



Man is a blind, witless, low-brow, anthropocentric clod who inflicts lesions upon the earth.

Ian McHarg

Not Too Soon for Fall

A few Stilt sandpipers were stopping off at the Village Creek drying beds on their way south in late June, and there are reports of more as these and other early migrants move south. Stilts were still heading north through here in May, and now some are already back — but only for a while. Get out and enjoy them while you can.



Anti-environmental coffee?



Green Mountain tells us at length how socially and environmentally responsible they are while selling coffee in unrecyclable single-serve plastic cups that discourage collecting the grounds for compost. The Keurig machine at left was spotted in a UTA office. Guess they won't be joining the Maverick Green Team anytime soon.

From the President John Darling



Environmental adventures don't require departure lounges, game drives, or even a good pair of binoculars. The oddest things are

ready to pounce right here in our tranquil patch of suburbia.

It was just another sweaty day of slopping smelly food waste and leaves together while hoping for compost when I got a call from a nice lady at a local charity. They had been given broken bags of fertilizer and she wondered if I could use them. So, just to be agreeable, I took a look and discovered about 50 bags of Turf Builder 23-3-3 with Plus 2® Weed Control.

Weed Control? Sounded bad for compost production, but there were serious questions: Fertilizer with insecticide would surely hurt tender compost organisms. But herbicide? How would



that interfere? Composting is known to break down some of the commonly used junk added to fertilizers, but what about Plus 2® Weed Control? What is that anyway? The company's Web site doesn't say.

All that free nitrogen blinded me, so I sought professional advice from a landscape architect. He had a fit and confirmed a nagging feeling that this stuff was not for me.

So I asked a prominent member of the Parks Department. After initial politeness, the answer was something like, "Heck no. We're trying to be organic. Go away." Another rejection came from UTA groundskeepers, but it was less animated.

My last try was a landscape company where the negative answer contained a shocker: They don't apply the product on turf under native trees because it can damage or kill them.

Okay, so I can't even give away about \$750 worth of fertilizer that could kill native trees and is no good for compost. Would they destroy it at the hazardous waste center, or do I have to rent a barge and cruise the seas looking for a bribable official in a developing country?

THE POST OAK

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DAN HILER

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New York Avenue Blackland Prairie Park Jan Miller



The prairie bonanza continues, thanks to recent rains...and the heat goes on. More distinctive prairie blooms have taken their bow on NYABP's mid-summer stage this

season. In addition to a glorious cast of grasses, the small but elegant troupe of bluebells (*Eustoma exaltatum* subsp. *russellianum*) found last year once again made an appearance. They were joined



(in a surprise appearance) by a boisterous group of roundhead prairie clover (*Dalea multiflora*). Like last year's bluebell find, Wesley Miller photographed the prairie clover, realizing later that it was a highly desirable prairie "talent" and a new name for the NYABP plant list.

According to some texts, mid-summer blooms are rare because the flowers are so beautiful and have been picked into near-oblivion. That's probably true, but the few left these days are seemingly more at risk from contract mowers than from suburban Martha Stewarts. (Not to malign Martha: She did a great job promoting the glories of our native prairie habitats in American Treasure: Wild at Heart in her July 2008 *MS Living* magazine.) Seemingly all of the known bluebell colonies around Tarrant county have been mowed in mid-bloom, despite admiring and watchful eyes waiting to collect mature seed. With many property owners mowing soon after the spring bloom season, most bluebells never



manage to bloom in July, but incredibly, mowers tend to take down the few that manage to mature in mid-bloom, preventing colonies from spreading by seed.

Wonder what we might gain by "neglecting" to mow...or mowing less often...or higher...or less...just a little bit:

- More habitat for prairie-nesting birds, insects, etc.
- More bluebells, prairie clover, compass plant (*Silphium albiflorum*)
- More beautiful roadsides
- More topsoil
- More (and cleaner) groundwater
- More breathable air
- More petroleum

But it's not just here: Americans seem to have a universal affiliation with mowing. A friend confessed she couldn't get her husband to give up his lawn for wildscaping. A blogger on the Garden Rant (www.gardenrant.com) calls it recreational mowing: Her family moved to 10 country acres in the great prairie

state of Kansas. They delighted in the recovery of native grasses, mowing only an acre or so around their house but received "strong hints" from neighbors that they didn't know how to "properly" care for country property. "They are apparently upset that we are not mowing our 10 acres of grass to lawn height, like they do. It's bizarre. We're 5 miles from the nearest small town and 10 from the nearest bigger city, surrounded by wheat fields, pastures...and country yards, where the main form of 'decoration' is several acres of grass mowed to carpet height."



What's up with this...do we really not have anything else to do? Or any better use for the time and resources involved? Or consideration for the resources spent?



Well, Garden Rant indeed. It's time for the annual summer read of Aldo Leopold's "Prairie Birthday" or "Silphium*." He had difficulty with mowers, too.

* If you don't have a copy of *Sand County Almanac*, read it online at: <http://gargravarr.cc.utexas.edu/chrisj/leopold-quotes.html#silphium>

Wildscape Update John Dycus



What's this and where's that, and if I go over there what will I find? Wildscape devotees, from long-timers to the newly enchanted, may know the place like the back

of their spade, but others might need a little orientation. Linda Zombeck, CTMN, has been working on just that, a self-guided tour that when complete will be on the Web site for anyone to print and enjoy the wildscape on a new level.



Linda is one of the countless volunteers without whom the wildscape could be just an unimaginative patch o' thatch. These dedicated volunteers have been busy recently watering the newly installed plants to keep them alive during this hot and extra dry weather. It is so important to water deeply, to 6 inches; the roots follow the water, extending farther into the soil for greater drought tolerance. Once these new native plants are established they won't have to be babied and can usually survive on rainfall alone.



Count among those volunteers several participants in the scouting program. For his Eagle Scout project Alex Guerra has submitted plans to install water bars and steps on the steepest trail to improve drainage and make it easier to climb, and to prevent erosion. This is the wildscape's most difficult trail, so Alex's work will make it much easier for visitors walking up that hill. He also intends to replace the rotted railroad ties with stone curbing along the trail edges. See a pattern here? Alex wants the tough tasks. Good for him. He is much appreciated.



As are Josephine Keeney and her crew, who continue to propagate plants for installing this fall and winter as well as for the fall plant sale Saturday, Sept. 26.

Leeann Rosenthal taught the June mini-class on wildscaping at home, and many volunteers commented on how much they learned about attracting wildlife around their house. At the July mini-class Ann Mayo amazed participants with how important soil critters are to keeping gardens healthy and how, not that long ago, the prevailing view was to rid our gardens of ... earth-worms! How far we've come, and still so far to go.



Mini-class schedule:

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
Dec. 5, Working with Children, Hester Schwarzer

Southwest Nature Preserve: Just Another Victim of Progress?

Editor's note: A threat to part of the Southwest Nature Preserve is summarized in the message below that Grace Darling recently sent to one of our city council members. Also below: several photos by Wesley Miller of the potentially affected area.

Arlington Conservation Council has just become aware of a Public Works project, in conjunction with the City of Kennedale and TxDOT, to widen and lower Bowman Springs Rd from I-20 south to the Kennedale city limits (Pennsylvania Ave). The proposed redesign will remove a minimum 100 feet from the western edge of the Southwest Nature Preserve, at the cost of at least 226 native trees, most of them oaks, with a diameter of 6" or more (average DBH, 11 + "). Lowering the roadway without a retention wall necessi-

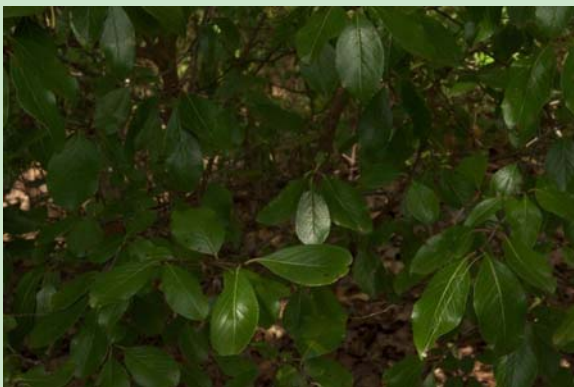
tates a 3:1 grade, with the potential loss of another 24 to 30 feet of SWNP property, exposure of critical root zones, increased erosion, etc.

I'm sure I don't have to tell you how unhappy we are at the prospect of losing so much valuable habitat and canopy cover even before the preserve has been realized. At a time we are urging citizens to plant trees and trying to demonstrate with inventories and public campaigns the immense value of trees to a community, it seems that we are poised to give away with one hand what we are encouraging with the other.

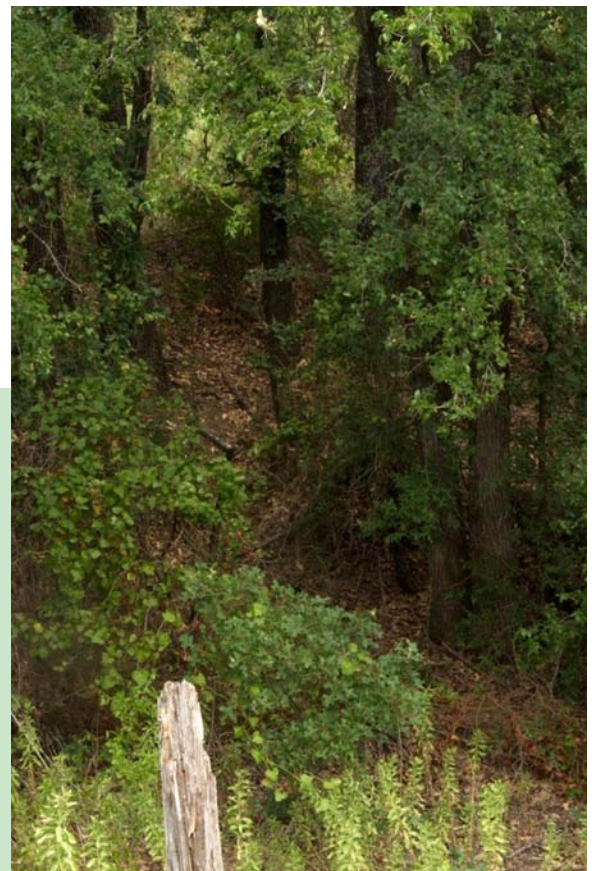
As you no doubt will recall, the land for the SWNP was purchased by the Trust for Public Lands and later sold to the city for the purpose of creating a nature preserve. I'd expect them to be wary of future property acquisitions for

Arlington if this breach of good faith (or is it a contract?) is allowed to go forward. Council authorized the engineering service contract on March 24, Project Number ST09-03. The staff report cites a resolution authorizing execution of an Interlocal Agreement with Tarrant County for this construction. TxDOT is involved supposedly because of the bridge at the extreme SW corner of the property.

For the life of me, I cannot see a benefit to Arlington from this project and have not heard any explanation of why we should make this gift to Kennedale. The Parks Dept has also expressed concerns about several aspects related to it, and Mr. Venables has some issues of his own with the project. I'd be very grateful if you could look into this and help us save SWNP — all of it.



Not all of the affected area is heavily wooded, but the planned road widening would destroy a number of large rusty blackhaw viburnums.



Treehuggers on Parade Marian Hiler

ACC Float Wins Third Place, Non-Commercial Category, in 4th of July Parade



Celebrating 40 years of hugging trees! What ACC member wouldn't have been proud to march alongside this float? Not a one, I say. It featured the John Muir Woods and the Giant Sequoia Forest to go along with the parade's theme of honoring National Monuments.



A 40th anniversary float wouldn't be complete without Julia Burgen (center), who was instrumental in reviving ACC in 1994. By her side are Bonnie Bowman's niece, Golda, and John Dycus. Wesley Miller is graciously providing the shade.

As always the float was made almost entirely from recycled and reusable materials.



The float also highlighted our own local nature areas – the Molly Hollar Wildscape at Veterans Park, the Southwest Nature Preserve, and the New York Avenue Blackland Prairie.

John Snowden, Bluestem Nursery, generously loaned us the prairie grasses.



Congratulations to ACC and a big thanks to everyone who helped make this year's float a winner. Special acknowledgements go to: Ed and Danny Kocurek for making sure the trees stood tall on the float and for constructing the signs; the cut ups Ann Knudsen, Molly Hollar, Jean Hiler and Peggy Quinn for making the scores of signage letters; Roy Miliner for not giving up until Aaron Copland's music could be heard; Benjamin and Nick Kocurek for letting their forest critters ride on the float; and Lee Hollar and John Darling for loaning ACC the trailer and truck, respectively.

Adventures in Urban Poultry Wrangling Danny Kocurek



My lovely wife had wanted chickens for a long time, pretty much ever since a friend gave us some fresh eggs from their backyard coop and she discovered how flavorful they are. So I researched chickens and coops and talked to the guy down at Handley Feed and came up with a plan. I used leftover lumber and siding that I pulled from the trash pile when they were building our house, found a roll of hardware cloth at a garage sale and used some other salvaged materials to make a coop. Then I went looking for chickens.

Like any valuable purchase one would make, I turned to Craig's List. I found a guy in Grand Prairie who wanted to get rid of 4 of his chickens and arranged to pick them up one cold January morning. Although I had done a lot of planning on how to take care of the chickens, I hadn't really thought too much about how to get them transported and transferred into the coop. As I was walking out the door, I grabbed four Rubbermaid storage bins and tossed them into my car, figuring I would wing it, so to speak.

The owner, an experienced chicken wrangler, deftly placed each of the chickens into her bin and into the car and I raced back home. I figured I would open the bin, grab the chicken and place her into the coop. Quick and easy. Unfortunately, I failed to communicate my plan to my little chicken friends. Sure enough, lid comes up, chicken flies away, and I now have 3 birds. I quickly look around to make sure no one saw me get outsmarted by a chicken and proceeded to bin number

two. I decided to place the bin in the coop this time and then close the coop lid real quick after I opened the bin lid. Honestly, it really seemed like a good idea at the time. I don't know if it was the cold weather slowing my brain or what, but you can guess the outcome. Chickens 2, Danny 0. There comes a time in every person's life when you have to face the question, "Am I smarter than a chicken?" I hope you are able to give a different answer when it is your turn.

Somehow I managed to get the other 2 hens into the coop and then the real fun began. After some slapstick-worthy attempts at catching my "free range" chickens, I watched them wander off into the woods and I could swear they were laughing at me. Comforting myself with the fact that I still had two really nice chickens, I then had to come up with a believable story, for when my family came



home, to explain what happened to the other birds. Unfortunately, I cannot lie to them. I did mention several times that this breed of chickens is one of the fastest on the planet, but they didn't buy it.

Resigned to downsizing my chicken empire, I moved on to other projects until two weeks later when I was working in front of our house and thought I heard a chicken. I looked over into the park next door and, sure enough, both runaways were standing there. This time I was certain that they were laughing at me. I recruited my wife, who, as you recall, was the one responsible for all of my misery and embarrassment, and the two of us tried to corral them towards the coop. I figured if I could get them near the coop, the chickens inside would tell them how great the food was and what a nice guy I

was and they would ask me to please let them inside. If you thought watching one person chasing after a chicken was funny, imagine what happened next. And because they were in the woods near a patch of greenbrier, we walked away embarrassed and bleeding this time.

Undaunted, I decided it was time to redeem myself and formed a new plan worthy of Wile E. Coyote. I moved the coop over near the woods, left the confined hens inside the coop, placed some food and water in the run, and left the run open on one side as a trap. After several days, I managed to surprise one of the escapees who had wandered into the run. I closed the opening and herded the confused bird into the coop. My celebration was quickly tempered by the realization that I had only proven my mental superiority over an animal with a brain the size of a pistachio, but I was still prouder than I should have been.

However, despite my ingenious plan, the other chicken was never captured. A week later she took off for good. I tell the boys that she is living happily ever after in a retirement village and it might be true. Regardless, I am happy to announce that the other three have remained happy in their new home and have provided us with lots of delicious, organic eggs. If you are considering joining the rising ranks of urban chicken wranglers, I highly recommend it. Just don't underestimate your clever, feathered colleagues in the venture.



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Robert Ressler

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