

ARLINGTON
CONSERVATION
COUNCIL

POSTOAK

WORKING TO CONSERVE ARLINGTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES

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JULY – AUGUST
2010

www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org

July Meeting

Urban Wildlife

Jessica Alderson
Urban Biologist
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Wednesday, July 14, 7:00 pm
Fielder Museum
1616 W. Abram St
(corner of Fielder and Abram)



Come hear about wild animals that live in Arlington. We'll hear facts about our common wildlife species and learn how to live among them.

Remember to bring something for the raffle

Bits & Pieces

Crazy Like a Urocyon

Sometimes we glimpse a gray fox in town and think it's the introduced red fox because it has so much reddish fur. The gray is our only native fox, and we must admire its ability to live under our noses despite habitat loss, human persecution, and even predation by coyotes. Rules for success: the gray fox climbs trees well, lives almost anywhere, and eats just about everything, including insects, crayfish, acorns and persimmons.



Today's Inspirational Moment



One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds.

Aldo Leopold

Tough Times for Antlions

Surely our doodlebugs have been wishing for life preservers lately. All those little conical pits in our previously desiccated sandy soil have been seriously flooded, but all too soon we'll dry out and they'll be back in business.



Thirty Years of Neil Sperry and Bad Plants



The Garden Guru's July 3rd column in the Star-Telegram featured a look at how his "industry" has changed during the 30 years he's been broadcasting on KRLD. True to form, there's no mention of organic gardening, native plants, or even xeriscaping. You'd think 30 years would be enough time to figure out some of this stuff.

Witness Tree Awards: An Arbitrary, Occasional Series

Here's a completely random selection:
Worst Idea for a Teabag (synthetic noncompostable bag from World Market), Most Massively Overdone Packaging (flea stuff from Costco), Least Contaminated Recycling Dumpster (central library), and Most Dramatically Butchered Powerline Tree (West Division Street). Next time, let's try for more Good and fewer Horrible. Submissions welcome.



THE POST OAK

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New York Avenue Blackland Prairie Park Jan Miller. Photos by Wesley Miller

Red, White, and Blue Times



Summer's swelter and budding drought has been temporarily but gratefully broken with cooler temps and tropical rains. That's great news, though it will delay mowing yet

again. Maybe the rains will allow for more blooms this fall. Maybe they will support another generation of frogs...or grasshoppers...or maybe even a prairie-nesting bird. Or maybe falling seeds will rot in the soggy clay. Truth is, we don't know.

And yet, we are continually interacting with natural systems. Aldo Leopold said something like, "The first rule of intelligent tinkering is to keep all the parts." And the corollary to that is to watch, observing how those parts work together. That's often forgotten in the rush for efficiency, or greater profit, or greed.

Kind of like what happened with the great Gulf oil "spill." This "too-big-to-fail" operation's emergency management plans were horrifically lacking. Efforts to stem the flow have been pathetically

"Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe."

Albert Einstein

"Man is the only animal that blushes ...or needs to."

Mark Twain

"We have to do the best we can. This is our sacred human responsibility."

Albert Einstein

lame. Yet while BP muddles on, a decisive Asian businessman, Mr. Su, ordered that one of his new massive tankers be modified to skim oil like a

whale. The so-named tanker and its crew are on site and, grateful for Mr. Su's insight, initiative and generosity, we hope for their success.

Locally, NYABP is one of our "last best places," struggling to maintain its long-standing way of life. Marvel at its extravagant show of biodiversity, its sensory delights, its inter-relationships and functions. We are the stewards, the observers, and the witnesses for this tattered natural world, so keep all the parts and take good notes. And when opportunity calls, for NYABP or any of our local natural resources: "Tell them who you are...why you care...and what you want."¹

¹ *Bosque Watch*, newsletter of the Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Volume 17, Number 3. July 2010. Sandy Seth, "The Gulf Oil Spill: A Disaster for Birds and Everyone"



Wildscape Update John Dycus



Trees, trees and more trees were installed this fall and winter at the wildscape, and until they're established, all need to be watered, either by Mother

Nature or volunteers (Mollyminions). It was a particularly hot and dry late spring and early summer, so Molly Hollar has been frantic to make sure these wonderful gifts from the city don't go roots up. This has been her No. 1 priority, and she's been going nearly daily to thoroughly douse everything in sight.

Inspired by Paul Brandon and his Arlington Parks and Recreation Department crew, Molly decided she wanted to

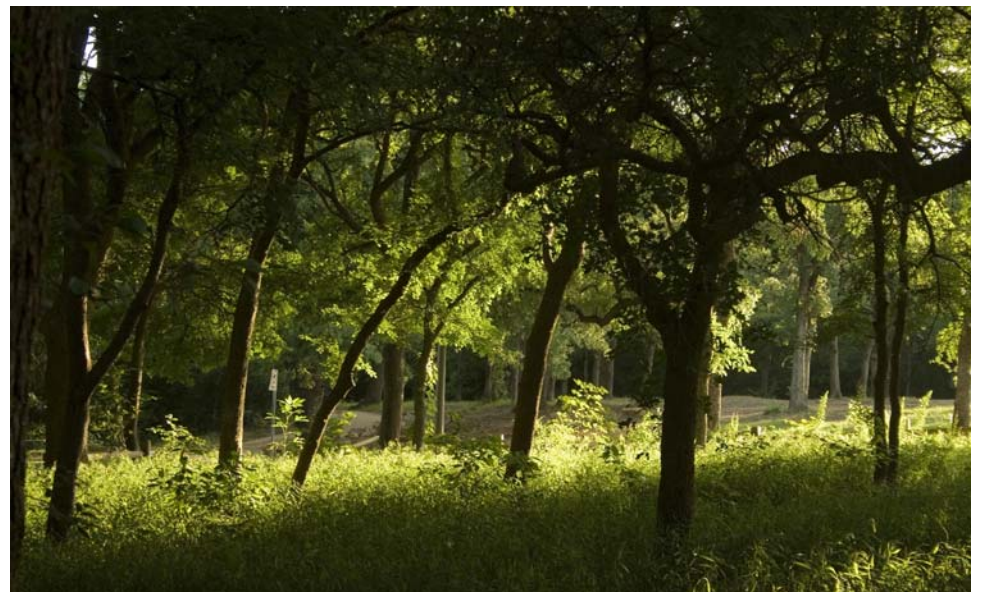
save 50-70 percent of irrigation water by installing more drip irrigation in beds with new plants. Three more beds were set up, with plans to do more. She was beside herself when the sweet sound of gurgling water came from the first volunteer-installed drip.

More beds are awaiting their fitting. In the meantime, Mother Nature came through big time with the recent rains. Everything at the wildscape is looking refreshed and happy. Interesting fungi have popped up, and midsummer delights — partridge pea, ironweed, sunflowers — are blooming. If you look closely, you will see the cute little nubbins of the American beautyberry that will become gorgeous purple berries in the fall.

All kinds of visitors come to enjoy the wildscape flowers and other offerings,

even during the hottest time of year. Joggers take their exercise surrounded by nature and fresh air. Moms and dads bring their children, sometimes on small bikes. One little girl, asked if she was having a good time, replied, "Yep, I love this place." An older gentleman likes to bring his dog in a little covered wagon. Wildscape volunteers love to see others enjoying the fruits of their labor.

And after they labored last month, they listened to and learned from Suzanne Tuttle, Fort Worth Nature Center director, about native ground covers. Suzanne is so popular, she even attracted folks who showed up just to hear her. We appreciate Suzanne on so many levels.



Anatomy of a Boondoggle Grace Darling

June was cruel to friends of green spaces. We learned that Bowman Springs Road south of Interstate 20 would be widened from two to five lanes, and the extra lanes would be carved out of the Southwest Nature Preserve. The following is a brief account of how this dog of a project got started, was kept afloat, and eventually won the support of our elected officials.

A few years ago the Texas Department of Transportation, during its periodic review of all Texas bridges and roadways, identified as “unsafe” the bridge where Bowman Springs Rd. (Arlington, running north-south) and Pennsylvania Avenue (Kennedale, running east-west) meet – see inset map. TxDOT engineers originally wanted to smooth out the acute angle of the road leading to the intersection and have two bridges to accommodate a divided roadway. Later the bridge realignment project morphed into a one bridge structure for five lanes because of access issues in Kennedale and a visibility safety concern noted by TxDOT. Arlington followed suit for the short segment of Bowman Springs roadway from I-20 to the bridge.

Along the way, a request for Tarrant County funds for the project was submitted jointly by the cities of Arlington and Kennedale, and was approved with the proviso that the expanded roadway and bridge must increase vehicle capacity.

With the interlocal agreement for funding in place, the design contract was approved by the Arlington City Council in March 2009. It included a continuous center turn lane “because of the number of driveways on the Kennedale side of the roadway” and changes on the vertical profile of the roadway that would require substantial cuts outside the designated right of way to eliminate the hills and valleys now present in this stretch of road.

Throughout this process the public was unaware of the impending threat to the Southwest Nature Preserve. Despite the certain negative effects to the western side of the preserve property, Arlington officials apparently did not feel it necessary to inform the citizens who had fought so hard years before to save the

land from development, arrange for its purchase through an agreement with the Trust for Public Land, and set it aside as a natural place. We were stunned.

When ACC learned of the project in August, we sought an explanation from District 2 Council Member Sheri Capehart, who promptly organized a meeting of stakeholders, neighbors, and interested parties to learn the facts from Public Works. At the September meeting the audience was overwhelmingly opposed to the bridge/roadway expansion, not only on environmental grounds – loss of precious habitat and mature trees, virtual elimination of wildlife



corridors, increased traffic and noise, inappropriate land use adjacent to a nature preserve – but also because of numerous flaws with the concept: (1) the extra lanes would all come out of the Arlington (east) side of the road; (2) access to Bowman Springs Rd. is only from westbound I-20 via a two-lane bridge over the interstate, which will remain unchanged for the foreseeable future; (3) exit from the redesigned road is either north across the two-lane bridge over I-20 and through a narrow, shoulderless two-lane road winding through residential areas, or east on the I-20 access road to Little Road, then north to the interstate and along the frontage road past Green

Oaks Blvd. until it merges with I-20 some 2+ miles from Bowman Springs Rd.; (4) after only 0.7 miles south of I-20, the roadway curves away from Arlington and into Kennedale, with no obvious benefit to Arlington residents; (5) ceding parkland for road construction is bad public policy, contrary to the city’s stated goal of increasing the urban canopy, and a failure of council members’ stewardship of our natural resources.

Subsequent to this meeting, Public Works announced it would undertake a traffic study to see if the anticipated increase in vehicular density would support the proposed road work. The results were inconclusive: by 2019, the study projected 9,500 vehicles/day; by 2030, 13,500. As others pointed out, there was time enough for any road expansion if and when the number of vehicles reached the projections.

But it was too late. The engineers who drove this misguided project and the politicians who abetted them would have their way.

After months of silence lulling us into complacency, we hear that a developer plans to build a high-profile monument in Kennedale, around the corner from the preserve. The Fallen Heroes Memorial is meant to honor casualties of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and “will be visible from I-20.” The land acquisition is complete, a design contest is underway, and operators expect 25,000 to 50,000 visitors a week – all the justification city officials wanted and then some. Never mind that all the negatives about the road/bridge project will be magnified by such heavy use, or that Arlington will reap few profits but will bear all the environmental cost – it was a done deal before we even knew of it.

Meanwhile, a dedicated group of Park Board members are looking for ways to minimize the impact of road widening on the preserve, and rumor has it that the Kennedale property owners along Bowman Springs Road may be persuaded to give up some of their land for the expansion. We are grateful for any crumbs.

4th of July Parade: We're Red, White, and Blue — and Green

ACC volunteers came through for the seventh year, producing a unique, striking float for Arlington's big parade that won 3rd place in the noncommercial category. Mike and Joanne Kolanko graciously hosted the construction crew, while the usual suspects labored to produce our latest trophy-winning float.

Thanks to everyone who helped make it happen — especially the kids who played a crucial role in conveying our environmental message.

And thanks again this year to professional photographer Paul Knudsen (PortfolioStudio.ExposureManager.com/g/july_4_2010_-_arlington_conservation_council_float_) for capturing us at our greenest. Most of the photos here were taken by Paul.



City Water Program Wins Award

Here's part of a note from our May speaker, Dustan Compton, Arlington Water Utilities Conservation Program Coordinator:

I am proud to announce that our Water-Efficient Landscape Education Program has earned an "Outstanding Achievement" City Livability Award from the United States Conference of Mayors. To read more about this recognition, below are links to the City of Arlington and U.S. Conference of Mayors press releases:

http://www.arlingtontx.gov/news/2010/archive_0610_05.html

<http://www.usmayors.org/pressreleases/uploads/CityLivabilityAwards2010Final.pdf>

Thanks to Our Last Speaker



We are grateful to Elizabeth Anna Samudio, owner of Elizabeth Anna's Olde World Garden, for speaking to us about permaculture at the June meeting. It was a fascinating topic, and the audience responded with a barrage of questions. Perhaps the high point was the story of the transformation of her business from abused urban land to productive organic green space using permaculture principles and practices. Thanks again.

Southwest Nature Preserve: Unexpected Green Oasis

In May, botanist Jeff Quayle led a group on his latest plant walk through our most unusual natural area. The Southwest Nature Preserve continues to provide scenic as well as botanic surprises: A pond near the northwest corner seemed altogether magical; the area just under the rock outcrop held pockets of real beauty; and the Glen Rose yuccas promised masses of creamy blooms. You should see this place.



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Memberships are good for one year, renewable each January. Your dues go directly to our public education efforts.

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Arlington Conservation Council

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Don't Forget!

Wednesday, July 14

7:00 pm

Jessica Alderson

Urban Wildlife

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