

ARLINGTON CONSERVATION COUNCIL

POSTOAK

WORKING TO CONSERVE ARLINGTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES
VOLUME 13, NUMBER 5

MAY 2012

Note:
**Special meeting place
and time.**
See below.

www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org

May Meeting Another Field Trip! Introduction to Beekeeping in Your Own Backyard Danny Kocurek

Wednesday, May 9, 7:00 pm
Danny's house
(Meet at Veterans Park Wildscape
parking lot at 7:00 and carpool or
walk to the location.)



We will review the basics of beginning beekeeping in suburban backyards. Topics will include hive location, equipment, getting bees, costs, and everything you need to know to become a suburban beekeeper. Visits to the hives will be possible for those who wish.

Bits & Pieces

That Stinging Sensation

Our recent wet spell produced a bumper crop of caterpillars. Some of them, like larvae of the fabulous Io moth, can produce a painful sting. Turns out that caterpillars are overwhelmingly baby moths: Texas A&M tells us that there are 4700 moth species in the state and fewer than 500 kinds of butterflies.



Today's Inspirational Moment



When the well's dry,
we know the worth of water.
Benjamin Franklin,
Poor Richard's Almanac.

Easy Being Green

Our prettiest frog? Hands down it's the green tree frog, one of several mostly southeastern species that lives this far west thanks to its distribution along the Trinity River. Look for this beauty at night in froggy spots.

Photo by Terry Hibbitts



Local Wisdom



Arlington has a puny but noisy faction that likes to get attention. Last week a few rambling speakers bullied the City Council into relenting on a regional water agreement. They act as if using water is an entitlement.

*Bud Kennedy,
Star-Telegram column
April 28, 2012*

Urban Wildlife John Darling

The other day a snake crawled across a sidewalk in Veterans Park and nobody killed it. I guess it was just dumb reptilian luck that the serpent (maybe a youthful rat snake?) was spotted by wildscape volunteers, admired and photographed. Is it too rash to suppose that a lot of the regular folks out there would have done their best to club the beast into tiny twitching bits?

I hope I'm wrong, but about that same time someone was telling me all about the many water moccasins lurking around her Arlington house, apparently just waiting to do terrible things that involved fangs dripping with venom. (I'd bet that every one of those moccasins was a harmless water snake.)

That took me back to an earlier life as a museum guy who answered way too many panicked calls about nightmarish suburban snakes usually rendered



headless with garden implements. After years of trying to convey facts, you get more than a little tired of the astounding ignorance and spend all your telephone effort stifling laughter or worrying seriously about the extermination of all Metroplex snakes. Or both.

On a happier note, my job takes me to a hospital loading dock every day where I finally noticed a mourning dove nesting almost overhead, just inches away from an unbelievably noisy fan that is triggered by opening a door. Amazing contrast between the apparent tranquility of the dove and the violent roar of the fan. When I finally took its photo, several custodians noticed and began talking to me for the first time, assuring me that a dove nested there for many years. Not exactly a National Park moment, but it's nice to know that even here a bird is adding a little richness to otherwise humdrum daily lives.

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



April 2012: Two, count 'em, two workdays last month! Even with the full April calendar, volunteers got in two workdays in April: Yes, even with Earth Day activities and

a tornado. The usual 3rd Saturday was Earth Day weekend and APRD was overwhelmed with other activities, including cleanup from the April 3 tornado in SW Arlington and the resulting Mountain of Mulch distribution. Nevertheless, faithful volunteers John Darling, Wes Miller, and Ed Pischedda cut brush and pulled out long forgotten trash and automotive junk. Then, on the 4th weekend, another workday with



New York Avenue Blackland Prairie Park

**3rd Saturday
workday
May 19, 2012
9 am – noon**

Volunteers needed! APRD employees will be cutting brush and small trees, then applying herbicide. Volunteers are needed to remove the brush as it's cut. There's always an opportunity to pick up litter, too.

Bring your handsaws, loppers and gloves and wear thick-soled boots/shoes and long pants. Also, warmer weather means sunscreen, bug spray and water. Bring your own container; refills will be provided.

Please RSVP: You are essential! We need enough volunteers to assist APRD employees who will be operating the chain saws and applying herbicide. Reply to:
prairie@arlingtonconservationcouncil.org

APRD employee Donna Holmes who did a great job keeping up with volunteers' loppers. Big thanks to Bonnie Bowman (and her "prairie dog"), Julia Burgen, John Darling, Wes Miller, Ed Pischedda, Dick Schoech, Jeanne-Marie and Steven Smith, and Ann Trenton.

The 2012 workdays are making a big improvement. The record drought and heat of 2011, followed by this past winter's heavy rains, have prevented mowing and allowed trees and brush to flourish. But due to volunteer and APRD efforts, almost 40% of the prairie has been cleared and is looking good!

Don't miss the next workday on Saturday, May 19, and let's meet for lunch after: It's a great opportunity to refuel and rehydrate—and to brainstorm on prairie restoration. Location will be determined by group vote.



Wildscape Update **Rosalie Rogers**

It's a time of change: It's only early May but the wildscape is starting to feel a little hot and dry around the edges. We're removing tree gator bags for cleaning and repairs, to be put back into service when rains fail to keep the soil moist, probably within a week or two, since another parched summer is predicted. Our tree watering teams may have to get busy again soon.

We have just about finished planting the area west of the sidewalk near the parking lot, adding evening primrose, fall aster, Cherokee sedge, and zexmenia. On the east side of the sidewalk we have planted some winecup and yarrow.

The area bordering the sidewalk by the pavilion boardwalk has been blooming and colorful, with phlox, yarrow, wild foxglove, and mealy blue sage. In this area we couldn't dig because of nearby gas lines, so we mounded soil in front of boulders to plant native baby trees, including post oaks dug from Callie Mitchell's yard and growing in the greenhouse during the winter. Other trees planted there are rusty blackhaw viburnum, cherry laurel, and Mexican plum.



Clockwise from above: Phlox and yarrow still going strong. Full, lush coralberry along the boardwalk. Truman and Glenda Thompson and Callie Mitchell fighting the weeds. Foxglove. Joe Martinez, Paige King, Peggy Quinn, and Rosalie Rogers ready to lock the storage vault after putting tools away.



Unique Downtown Dining Jo Ann Duman

I finally made it to Potager (our local organic cafe, 315 South Mesquite Street) and want to go again. Give me a call if you can meet me for lunch there someday. I sent out a broadcast to ACC members for others to join me for lunch the day I had a morning class at the central library. John Darling joined me for his very strictly limited lunch hour. John would have made it back to his office on time, but just as we were leaving, owner Cynthia Chippindale stopped us for a lovely chat.

You can get the daily menu on the Potager Facebook page or at www.potagercafe.com. It's open 11 am to 3 pm Tuesday through Saturday, and Thursday through Saturday 5 pm to 9 pm. Cynthia's mission is serving real, local food and it is delicious. I arrived at 11:30 am and almost all the tables were full. By the time John arrived at noon the tables were open for another seating, and as we left the tables were filling up again.



(It just happens that way – there's no set time for you to arrive and join the line to make your selection from the handwritten menu of the day. But even if it looks full, a place will open for you soon.) Cynthia told us her trade was somewhat less the week we were there as it was spring break.

You must pay with cash, and you decide how much to put in a lovely, reusable paper envelope that you then deposit in a watering can. I think it took us longer to figure out how to pay after our meal than it did to order it and be seated. Out back is the garden where part of the menu offerings are grown, which I found worthy of photographing. In French, the word "potager" has a long history and plenty of meanings but mainly it means a vegetable garden. You really should try Potager soon, but be aware that the building is not handicapped accessible.

Selected Excerpts from *The Cast Iron Forest* compiled by Grace Darling

The Cast Iron Forest: A Natural and Cultural History of the North American Cross Timbers, by Richard A. Francaviglia. University of Texas Press, Austin; 2000.

I am still upset about the Arlington City Council's lack of gumption to adopt year-round watering restrictions and refuse to talk about it until after the election, when we must hope our leaders will regain their senses — and their backbones.

Meanwhile, so you don't forget how lucky we are to live in North Central Texas, I offer the following reminder courtesy of Dr. Francaviglia, emeritus professor of history at UTA. My thanks to Dr. Christopher Morris for reacquainting me with the book.



The Cross Timbers of the south central United States are a forested archipelago largely surrounded by a sea of prairie. Even today, the Cross Timbers typically appears as dense stands of post oak and blackjack oak trees that rarely exceed 30 feet in height but that are visible for a considerable distance across the prairie.

In the mid-19th century, the term Cross Timbers referred to a large area covered

by a swath of trees stretching north of Waco along the Brazos River, across the West fork of the Trinity River, and far north into present-day Oklahoma. It was the geologists who would help delineate the Cross Timbers as a distinctive natural region. These 19th-century geologists were the predecessors of modern ecologists in that they often noted the close relationship between geology and other features, such as climate and vegetation. A longitudinal transect along the Texas and Pacific railroad line revealed the surprisingly close correlation among geology, topography, and vegetation. It was through detailed studies of the topography that a peculiarity of the Cross Timbers in Texas—the fact that they comprised two separate belts of forest separated by a large prairie—came to be understood. Because the eastern belt was on lower-lying land, it came to be

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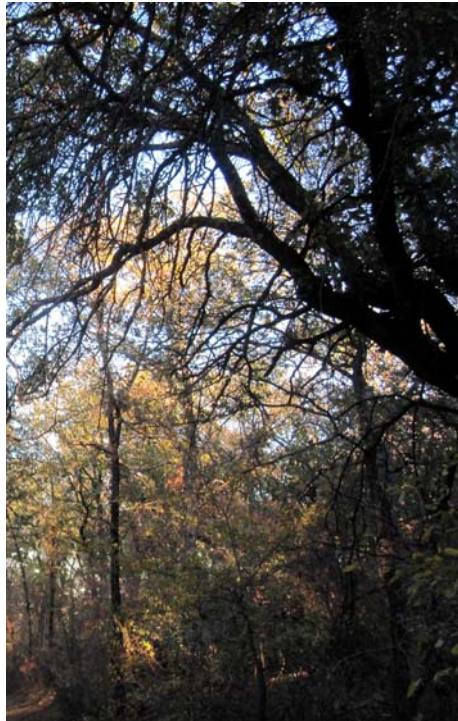
Selected Excerpts continued from page 5

called the Lower Cross Timbers, while the more elevated forest to the west was called the Upper Cross Timbers.

In the Cross Timbers region, a dark brown siliceous iron ore was commonly found in the more elevated topography—the low, wooded, erosion-resistant hills and isolated “iron-ore knobs,” part of the Woodbine formation that underlies the Eastern Cross Timbers. This forested strip of land lying between the Blackland Prairie to the east and the Grand Prairie to the west promised great mineral riches, notably iron and coal for industry.

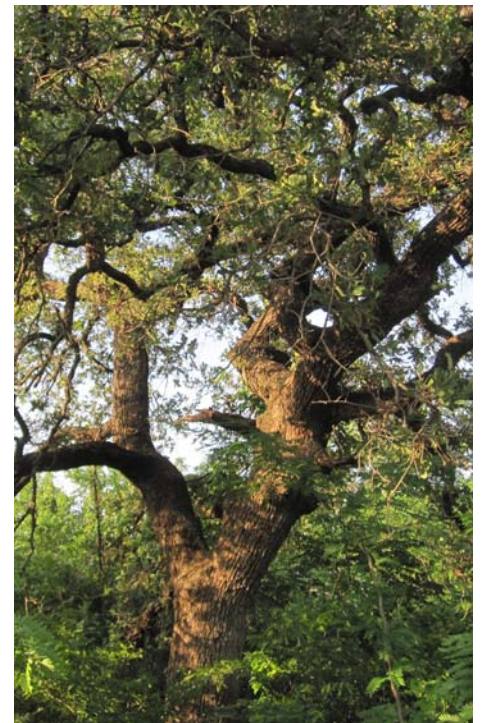
The oaks of the Cross Timbers often grow on fairly thin soils, their tenacious roots working their way down into the sandstone, which may lie just a few inches below the surface. This process causes myriad cracks to develop, allowing the sandstone to act as a reservoir, holding quantities of water in its fractured, somewhat porous beds. [An early geologist] noted that sandstone affords “a suitable matrix for the penetration of the roots of trees, and a constant reservoir for moisture, thus furnishing two of the greatest essentials to forest growth.” The Cross Timbers of Texas lie on the Trinity Aquifer.

The difference in fertility between the sandy loams of the Lower Cross Timbers and the dirty sands of the Upper accounts for their different flora. The percent of sand in the Cross Timbers decreases from south to north, with the southern portion of the Western Cross Timbers having the highest percentage of sandy soils. Tree height in the Cross Timbers decreases to the west, a result in part of the clay soils encountered there. This factor—soils—explains the relatively



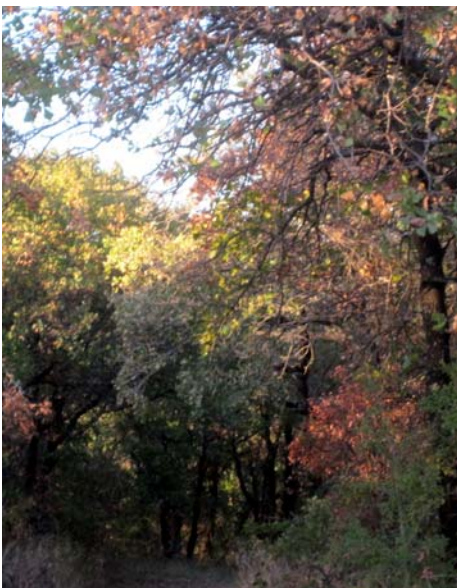
lusher vegetation of the Eastern Cross Timbers and the scrubrier growth of the Western Cross Timbers. Throughout the Cross Timbers, then, the distinctive oak forests are framed by prairie and developed on sandstone. The alluvial deposits along the rivers that cut across the region are much younger, but are also derived from sandstone and support Cross Timbers vegetation in many places.

Average annual temperature decreases from south to north, and precipitation decreases from east to west. In other words, the climate tends to be warmer to the south and drier to the west.



The Cross Timbers make up a distinctive vegetation type based largely on the joint presence of post oaks and blackjack oaks. These oak trees grow in close association over a large area, often with other species, and so close together that their crowns intermingle. These two oaks account for about 75% of the tree species and 90% of the forest canopy in the Cross Timbers. The term Cross Timbers is especially applicable where sandstone forms the underlying geology.

In the Cross Timbers region, post oaks (*Quercus stellata*) are likely to be the oldest trees in the forest—up to 500 years old in cases. Some of the oldest specimens appear confined to nutrient-limited, rocky locations. The post oak grows especially well on dry, gravelly or sandy uplands. It has a distinctive shape, with branches that are often gnarled and grow at right angles to the trunk. The wood of the post oak is very hard, close grained, and durable in contact with the soil. Post oaks tend to be hardy trees that can



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survive the region's frequent droughts. The acorns are a valuable food plant for wild game, including prairie chickens, quail, wild turkeys, bluejays, woodpeckers, raccoons, squirrels, and deer.

Scattered among the oaks are hickories, elm, hackberry, and Osage orange, with sumac in the forest margins and cottonwoods and willows lining the riparian areas. Common evergreen trees in the Cross Timbers are live oak and eastern red cedar. Understory species typically consist of persimmon, sassafras, wild grape vine, Virginia creeper, smilax, and other vines. Substantial areas of the Cross Timbers have a cluttered understory rich in shrubs, vines, and brambles that form a complex and rich habitat for wildlife, but which have long deterred human travel through parts of the Cross Timbers.

As a crucial part of the past and a vital link to the future in a vast section of the south central United States, the Cross Timbers should be better understood and appreciated than they are currently. Better understanding requires that the region be considered as both an ecological and a cultural region—and this is difficult to do in a society that considers people and nature as two separate entities. Although it is tempting to think of the Cross Timbers as a purely “natural” region, evidence suggests that its landscape has been shaped over the centuries by both people and nature. That sometimes abusive relationship continues to the present.

Perhaps it is time that we recognized the Cross Timbers by acknowledging people's long association with it. The deeply held American penchant for unrestricted private property development means that those seeking to protect the Cross Timbers will have their work cut out for them.



Thanks to Our Last Speakers

Our field trip last month to UTA's new College Park Center was a big success, and the extra-large crowd seemed to enjoy it tremendously. Our tour guides were Bill Amendola, Office of Facilities Planning and Construction, UT System; Ellen Mitchell, sustainable design coordinator, HKS; Janna Tidwell, Landscape Architect, Schrickel Rollins; and Keith Schobert, assistant director, UTA College Park Center. They patiently explained the sustainable features of the special events center (which might receive a gold LEED certification) and the surrounding landscape (one of the first three to be certified nationally in the Sustainable Sites Initiative program). Thanks very much for a special program — we're indebted and proud to have such projects in our community. And of course, thanks to UTA for its commitment to sustainability.



Above, Bill Amendola introduces the center. Upper right, Janna Tidwell explains the landscape. Bottom left, Ellen Mitchell discusses sustainable features of the building.



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