

ARLINGTON CONSERVATION COUNCIL

POSTOAK

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

JUNE 2012

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

www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org

June Meeting Another Field Trip! Tierra Verde Environmental Tour Mark Claburn, Director of Superintendents

Wednesday, June 13 6:00 pm
Tierra Verde Golf Club
7005 Golf Club Dr, Arlington 76001
(See map at ACC Web site)



Join us for a behind-the-scenes look at Arlington's greenest golf course and learn what makes it special from one of its stewards.

Tour carts will depart promptly at 6:00 and will return around 7:30, so please arrive early. We will meet on the back porch next to Ventana Grille.

Directions: Take Hwy 287 south, exit Eden Rd, go west to the Tierra Verde sign, then turn south.

Bits & Pieces

Oooh, Snakes!

Back on May 8 the Star-Telegram got us all exercised about an increase in venomous snakes following the spring rains. Well, here's an antidote from the UTA Herpetology Web site: ...more people in the United States die from vending machines falling over on them (after being shaken), being struck by lightning, or due to an allergic reaction from an insect sting.



Today's Inspirational Moment



Always carry a flagon of whiskey in case of snakebite and furthermore always carry a small snake.
W. C. Fields

(Disclaimer: This is very bad advice. - Editor)

Guilt by Association

We'll probably (and rarely) see only two venomous snake species in Arlington, almost entirely in our parks — copperheads and water moccasins (above). So what are we killing needlessly? In wet places, lots of nonvenomous snakes like the Broad-banded water snake, which can be aggressive and is basically not pretty.



Not to Mention...



Any other big scary snake, like the Rat snake. The irony is that virtually all of our snakes eat things that cause real damage — rats and mice. Just remember: The great majority of victims are bitten while messing with the snake. Such an easy group to avoid.

Our Little Screech Owl Josephine and Frank Keeney

On May 26, I was taking care of the backyard garden when, to my surprise and delight, I saw this little guy in the middle of the yard where it had evidently fallen from one of our trees. Some of the trees are in the process of dying and have been serving as nesting sites for woodpeckers, but we had no idea they were also hosting owls. Don't tell me snags don't work! They do a great job of hosting.



Well, I was so excited and afraid it was going to run away before I got a picture, so I ran to get Frank and the camera while hoping the little guy wouldn't disappear in the meantime. The young owl just sat there and let me take pictures to my heart's content. I was so excited and happy, I kept saying, "Look at how precious he is."

Unable to find his parents and not knowing whether to shoo him into our urban thicket, Frank grabbed the magnetic sticker from the refrigerator and called 911 Wildlife. Taking their advice, he gathered up the little guy, put him in a makeshift cage, and headed to Rogers Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, which is off I45 just south of I20. After giving him a clean bill of health, the volunteer returned with a small cage that contained another baby owl. She then treated both to a tiny mouse lunch.

Knowing he was in good hands, Frank toured the very large grounds. There were

at least 25 to 30 ten-foot-high cages full of ducks, vultures, various waterfowl, turkeys, etc. There were also several birds that just wander around free, including peacocks, pelicans, geese and others. A big thank you to places like Rogers WLRC and the great work that they do.



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conserve Arlington's
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New York Avenue Blackland Prairie Park Jan Miller Photos by Wesley Miller



May 18 was another beautiful day to help our prairie, and it helped us in turn with an exuberant wildflower show. Thanks to dedicated prairie

volunteers we continued our progress in the war on encroaching woody plants.

Brandon Byrd from Arlington Parks & Rec solidified our gains by carefully applying herbicide to freshly cut stems. What a difference it has made this year, knowing that we won't keep cutting the same saplings again and again.

May's stalwart crew at right: Mary Roberts Turner, Brian Rowe, Brandon Byrd, Wes Miller, and Jan Miller.



Wildscape Update John Dycus



It was the Molly Hollar Convention and Visitors Bureau in May as several groups — Unitarians! special needs kids! high school students! —

excursioned through the wildscape to merely tour or to get down at shoe level and eradicate something.

Outreach leader Peggy Quinn had the turnstiles spinning (figure of speech) showing off the place. “OUTREACH is the reason for the wildscape’s existence and the most important part of the wildscape,” soft-spoken Molly said in all caps, “so these group tours and visits are top priority.”

Marianne Herrmann and ladies from her Unitarian church in Fort Worth had a fine time at the wildscape, as did the special-needs young people and their teachers, overseen by Peggy and Beverly

Crawford. Over three mornings the students weeded pathways, watered and mulched — significant contributions.

The HOBY (Hugh O’Brien Youth Leadership) students returned for virtuous environmental duty, aided by a dozen wildscape volunteers. Forty-five HOBY cats were expected but 60 arrived, necessitating a scramble to borrow more tools and wheelbarrows from Arlington Parks and Recreation. Peggy, a noted quick thinker, adjusted the order of service to put the extra students to work yanking the invasive wild carrot from an inner trail.

In addition to deep-sixing multiple wheelbarrows’ worth of weeds, the HOBY volunteers planted the last remaining bare areas bordering the main sidewalk with Turk’s cap, violet ruellia and coralberry. They also removed loads of Japanese honeysuckle, a robust exotic as bad as privet, so a trail could be rerouted to skirt the planted areas.

The HOBY students attend high schools throughout North Texas and are chosen for their leadership qualities to attend the expenses-paid conference. They stay in area university dorms and hear speakers on personal and community growth. Occasionally they pull weeds.

Speaking of outreach, Master Gardener and super volunteer Callie Mitchell frequently gives PowerPoint presentations using the wildscape as an example of native plant use. Another wildscape PowerPointer, Rosalie Rogers, often is invited to give programs to Rotary and other groups. As a result of these efforts, some folks have come to visit and stayed to volunteer.

Outreach continued with the mini-classes on the regular first-Saturday workdays. Retired UTA educator John Dycus explained the fine points of journaling at the last mini-class.



ACC Member Survey 2012 Jo Ann Duman

Note: Your editor misplaced this article; it should have run some time ago. Now Jo Ann has relocated to Texarkana, but her valuable efforts on our behalf continue.

The Board is using the answers you provided on our survey earlier this year to consider changes in activities for this year. Here's a summary of the results for your information. We appreciate your effort to let us know what you think. Remember, everyone is invited to the Board meetings the first Wednesday of the month at 7 pm, usually at the Fielder House, but call one of the board members to confirm location. We would welcome your participation in making ACC better.

We collected 23 completed survey forms, 14 from the January potluck brunch and 9 from the February regular meeting. A couple of people turned in forms from both meetings and their data were used both times.

Question 1 was, What is the most important thing ACC does for you? Most people marked more than one item so all responses were counted (this is also the reason the numbers below add up to more than 23).

Monthly programs, 10
 Newsletter, 5
 Web site, 1
 Email Info/Alert, 4
 Letters/Statements to City Council, 2
 Workdays, 6
 Float, 2
 Booths, 4
 Field Trips, 2
 Socials, 6
 Litter/Other Events, 2

"Monthly programs" was the most frequent response (14 of 23 or 60 percent). Tied for second most frequent with 6 (over 25 percent) were "workdays" and "socials." For one of the 2 people who marked "float," that was his only ("most important") response, giving that answer particular strength.

Although "newsletter" came in fourth in responses under Question 1 as the most important, when asked (Question 4)



how often they read the newsletter 17 of the 23 said "every month," and 5 said "every other month." In the space for suggestions to improve the newsletter, almost everyone wrote effusive statements of praise about how great the newsletter is. (I hope that cheers up our editor during the midnight hours when he is going to press for us.) Four people did offer suggestions (Question 5): (1) Provide more seasonal info such as "when and how to." (2) Be more positive; it is so negative I want to share but don't because of negativity. (3) List of area-wide events or business, not every time but now and then. (4) More info on city conservation efforts.

Separate from the survey efforts, when we emailed members in March with reminders to pay dues, almost half of the reply messages volunteered the newsletter as a reason they would renew. We estimate at least half of our dues-paying members are unable to attend monthly meetings but remain important supporters of ACC. If we do another member survey in future years, we will try to



include an on-line or email option for responding to get their ideas as well.

Question 2 asked how often the member attends regular monthly meetings. About half the members estimated they attend "almost every time," with about one-fourth making it "every other month," and remaining responses split almost evenly between "once or twice" a year and "never." Responses to Question 3 on how to improve the programs indicate people like variety and don't favor any one thing over another. One person checked have city officials, another checked have big names, and one person checked info on pollution.



Three people who attended the brunch but not the evening meeting recommended "have morning meetings."

Though only 2 members marked "litter" events under Question 1, 10 people listed "litter pickup" under the things they are willing to do for ACC this year (Question 8).

Note for Question 6 on Field Trips, 16 said "yes" and 1 said "maybe." Field trip ideas were offered by 6 people: plants and wildlife, native and natural areas, gas wells, Lake Arlington, waste disposal, and Tandy Hills Natural Area. The 6 people responding "yes" to Question 9 on Task Forces said they'd work on tree ordinance, ban plastic bags, and air quality.

How can we use these results? First, the board has already put renewed emphasis on monthly programs because that is the number-one interest of those

continued on page 6

Survey continued from page 5



who responded to the survey. Each month a different board member is arranging the program. We are also trying to get earlier publicity about each program. In March we had two new people attend the presentation on solar power based on the Community Calendar item in the Star-Telegram.

Second, the importance of workdays to members is good information for those who schedule and publicize them. It was dedication to the prairie and not the survey results that buoyed Jan Miller, our New York Avenue Blackland Prairie “angel,” to make time in her busy schedule to coordinate monthly Saturday workdays with city staff. We ask that as many of you as possible turn out to help (usually the 3rd Saturday of the month).

The Wildscape group has maintained its now years-long tradition of workdays at both Veterans Parks and the greenhouse, and Friends of OS Gray Nature Area are faithful to their 2nd Saturday of the month workday every month. We could improve by having up-to-date info on the Web site for all workdays and more reminders before each workday.

Third, it’s not surprising that responses from members attending a brunch and regular meeting would reflect a desire for social events. The annual potluck is well attended, and adding back either a summer or fall picnic or a December holiday event would be a good idea. The float for the annual 4th of July parade is a “two-fer.” That is, there are workdays for the dedicated team of float builders and a social event for everyone who comes to hang out in the parking lot and then walk in the parade. Field trips are also popular. Because members asked for it, we looked into a visit to the local recycling center and found that the operations there can’t accommodate visitors due to space limitations. The city recycling coordinator does have a video

tour you can view on the city Web site. The board would appreciate a volunteer to help arrange a field trip that interests you or to coordinate ACC participation in a city-scheduled litter clean-up event.

Finally, we know from activities like last year’s telephone calls to city council about the gas drilling permit next to the Southwest Nature preserve that members do respond to requests for actions. So it is important to the effectiveness of ACC in our mission to protect and enhance Arlington’s natural resources that we have a strong organization. Maintaining good programs and having activities for members is the basis for strength — and fun, too — for all of us.



Bad Air? Grace Darling

Local citizens turned out in Midlothian on a recent Thursday night to question ATSDR (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry) staff regarding the first phase of their health consultation dealing with emissions monitoring by three cement manufacturing facilities and a steel mill. The goal of this review is “to determine if chemical releases from local industrial facilities could or have affected the health of people and animals in the area.”

ATSDR identified substantial gaps in the monitoring data provided by TCEQ and industry. Of serious concern is a complete absence of monitoring for years 1986-1991, when all three cement plants were burning hazardous waste. In 1991-94, a disproportionately high number of

Down syndrome babies were born in the area—an epidemiologic cluster still unexplained. Another glaring omission in the data is the total lack of monitoring for hydrochloric acid, sulfuric acid, vapor-phase mercury, formaldehyde, and many other toxic chemicals like dioxins, furans, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and numerous polluting volatile organic compounds (VOCs), as well as carbon monoxide and ozone.

Despite these shortcomings, ATSDR concluded that “the available ambient air monitoring data for the Midlothian area are sufficient to support public health evaluations.” The agency plans to use modeling of worst-case air quality impacts and site-specific information to fill in gaps in the emissions data and

issue its final report, expected by the end of the year. Citizens present expressed their lack of confidence in TCEQ and industry as sources of the environmental data, and questioned the reliability of the collected samples as the basis for any health outcome assessment.

Note: The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), based in Atlanta, Georgia, is a federal public health agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. ATSDR serves the public by using the best science, taking responsive public health actions, and providing trusted health information to prevent harmful exposures and diseases related to toxic substances.

Crystal Canyon Dedication Julia Burgen

Editor's Note: We are fortunate to have the remarks delivered by Julia Burgen at the dedication of our newest natural area on May 19. Julia, former ACC president and city council member, was one of those who most closely followed the story that ended in saving this wonderful spot from development.



This is a special day for opening this 37-acre preserve of Cross Timbers habitat.

It rests on formations of Woodbine Sandstone, laid

down many millions of years ago when this was an old ocean delta.

Geologist Bob Gilbert looked at the site in 1997. The canyon walls rise 100 feet with the lowest and oldest 20 feet being near-shore environments of fine-grain sandstone — once possibly a beach or bar. The upper 80 feet are deposits of marine shales, siltstones and mudstones containing inner beds of calcareous fossil clams, gypsum layers and fine-grain sandstones. Gypsum crystals (selenite) weather from the shale slopes of the canyon.

This material was deposited during periods of sea inundation. The last few million years have seen river action that created the wide floodplain north of the Trinity River until it bumped up against harder formations along Mosier Valley Road. On this south side, the river ran against the hardened Woodbine sandstone to form these bluffs or Trinity



Mayor Cluck speaks at the dedication.



Crystal Canyon plant walk with naturalist Jim Varnum (left) on June 2.

terraces. Drainage outflow from above carved mini-canyons down through the terraces.

With development and population growth, the first call for some preservation for the Trinity terraces was in 1971 in a planning document for the Arlington



City Council. A second mention came in 1975 with a North Central Texas COG document on critical areas for Open Space. In the 1995 Parks and Open Space Plan the area was listed as Brown Boulevard Woodlands. By then this was the last undeveloped canyon terrace, and it too was approved in 1996 for 250 townhouses, despite a long, contentious effort by many citizens to preserve this location.

In a most fortuitous turn of events, the developer for this site had started another apartment complex in South Arlington near I20, where they had agreed on a plan to preserve a creek drainage area and its trees. Sadly, the crew clearing the land did not do that and a public outcry

ensued. The result was that the developer agreed to transfer this site to the city in lieu of the fine they would have to pay for violating the plan at the other location.

Crystal Canyon has one serious problem: rampant privet, a most invasive alien plant. It is flowering now and soon the latest seeds will form and birds will continue to spread them everywhere.

I urge as many of you as possible to adopt this special place, and hopefully to form some kind of support group. We have such groups in Arlington for the Wildscape at Veterans Park, O.S. Gray Park, the Blackland Prairie and South-



west Nature Preserves, and perhaps some others that I do not know about. Projects could be privet removal, compiling flora and fauna lists, participating in Audubon and Cornell bird counts, North Texas Native Plant Society projects, field trips and more.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to share my passion for Crystal Canyon with you.

Highly recommended reading: *The Cast Iron Forest: A Natural and Cultural History of the North American Cross Timbers* by Richard V. Francaviglia, University of Texas Press, 2000.

Thanks to Our Last Speaker

At our May meeting, ACC board member Danny Kocurek hosted a large crowd at his house, which happens to be filled with sustainable features. Danny's topic was backyard beekeeping, and he gave us an excellent presentation laced with valuable background information and practical details. Thanks, Danny.



Danny has kindly provided some highlights of his talk:

Beekeeping 101 – Followup Resources

Our local beekeeping club is www.metrobeekeepers.net, and it meets on the second Monday each month. The club is a great resource for local beekeeping resources and knowledge.

Used supplies are hard to find and there is always a concern about contamination, so most people purchase new equipment. There are no local beekeeping supply stores, but there are many online/mail order options, including Dadant, Beepkeeping Etc, Mann Lake, Walter Kelley, etc. Other than the hive, you will need a bee suit, a smoker, and a hive tool, which can be purchased through the same suppliers.

You don't need a lot of space to keep bees. A quiet spot, 20 feet from places people normally hang out, with some sun and afternoon shade in summer will suffice. My hives have over 30,000 bees right now and I have not noticed any more bees in my yard than before I had hives. And despite having a native plant landscape, I rarely see bees anywhere except in the hive. The bees travel up to 3 miles to gather pollen, water, and nectar.

Full hives can rarely be purchased but are sometimes available. Most people start with a nucleus (nuc), which is 5 frames or half of a box of bees and they can be purchased locally at times. I purchased mine through a member of Metroplex Beekeepers. The benefit of a nucleus is that you start with drawn frames ready to go, but the hive has to build up to about 20 frames before winter. You can also start with a package of bees. This is a box of 3 pounds of bees that can be purchased by mail order. Since you get no drawn frames, they have to go into an empty hive and start from scratch. All of these options come with a queen.

If any ACC members are interested in learning more about bees or would like to visit my hives, I have one extra bee suit and would be happy to help.

Prairie Fest 2012

ACC was invited to have a booth at the new, more tranquil Prairie Fest, so on May 27 we were there on a beautiful Saturday, talking to people and enjoying the wildflower walks. It's inspiring to see the dedication of Don Young and all the Tandy Hills supporters. The area is surely worthy of their efforts, and we were glad to soak it in.



ACC volunteers Jan Miller and Grace Darling discuss environmental matters with Ann Mayo.



Naturalist Jim Varnum led plant walks on the prairie.



Behind-the-scenes glamour is always part of the outreach process.

Arlington Conservation Council Membership Application

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

Membership Information

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

E-mail _____

First-year member \$10.00

Individual \$15.00

Family \$25.00

Supporting \$40.00

Sponsor \$100.00

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Other \$ _____

New member ☐

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How did you hear about us? _____

Make checks payable to Arlington Conservation Council. Mail to ACC, Box 216, Arlington, TX 76004-0216. Contributions and dues are not tax-deductible. Note: If you cannot pay, please let any board member know. The only available newsletter format is electronic, and it can be obtained via email and the Web site.

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Don't Forget!

Wednesday, June 13

6:00 pm

Field Trip!

Tierra Verde Environmental Tour



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