

ARLINGTON CONSERVATION COUNCIL

POSTOAK

WORKING TO CONSERVE ARLINGTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES

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OCTOBER 2013

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October Meeting

Sustainability Initiatives at UTA

Meghna Tare,
Director of Sustainability
The University of Texas at Arlington

Wednesday, October 2, 7 pm
Fielder Museum, 1616 W. Abram St
(corner of Fielder and Abram)



The university is striving to become a leader in campus sustainability through greening facility operations, championing innovative research, encouraging student projects, promoting an environmentally and sustainability focused curriculum, and sponsoring public service activities.

Bring Something for the Raffle

Bits & Pieces

Gopher It

It's all up front with the Plains pocket gopher — big head and huge front claws. And it's all about sand, too: No sandy soil, no pocket gophers. They dig to eat, sometimes burrowing over 300 feet. Keep an eye out for sandy crescents around the mounds that mark the places where gophers push soil out of their burrows.



Today's Inspirational Moment

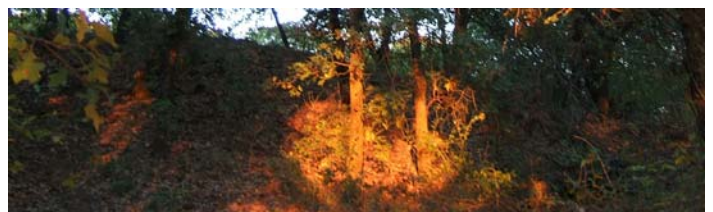


If we surrendered to earth's intelligence we could rise up rooted, like trees.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Too Late to Say Goodbye

Here's a perfect Arlington story at a glance: This is how the western edge of the SW Nature Preserve looked on September 22. Less preservation, more destruction — our environmental narrative in a nutshell. You can hear lots of reasons why this just has to happen, but they all come down to more people, more suburbs, more traffic, bigger roads. Bah.



From the President Danny Kocurek



I received a fairly frantic call from a friend about bees that had established a colony in a small birdhouse in his backyard, asking if I knew anyone who could remove it. Although I have never done this, I have heard some talks and

read about it and it seemed pretty straightforward, so I said I would come by and take a look. I'm always looking for new adventures.

I cannot tell you there is a lot of scientific data on how to move a colony, but there are some fairly well agreed-upon guidelines. First, move the colony at night when all of the foraging bees are home, otherwise you will lose a lot of bees. Second, move the colony at least a couple of miles away, or many of the foraging bees will return to the old site. Third, if you can get the bees out of the structure, you have to seal it completely. Otherwise a new colony will probably start again. Bees are attracted to the scent of comb and propolis when looking for a new place to begin a colony. (*Propolis is a resinous substance collected from the buds of certain trees by bees and used as a cement or sealant in the construction of their hives.* – Ed.)



Luckily, my friend's bees were in an easily moveable object so the process was simply putting the birdhouse into a box and putting it into my trunk. Even

continued on page 5

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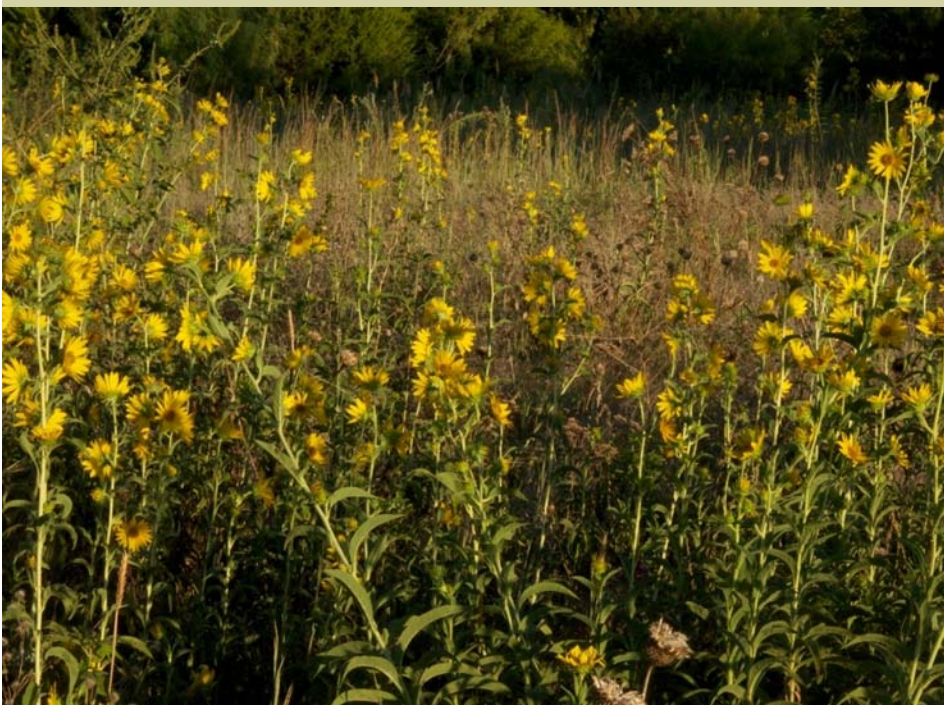
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New York Avenue Blackland Prairie Park Jan Miller. Photos by Wesley Miller



A master plan is being developed for NYABP that will establish the design for the preserve's management and improvements. Please watch for notice of a public meeting, likely to be held in October. If you'd like to be notified by e-mail, contact prairie@acctexas.org.



**No workday in October.
Instead, please celebrate
at Southwest
Nature Preserve.
See you on the prairie
in November!**

SOUTHWEST NATURE PRESERVE DEDICATION

Saturday, October 19, 10:00 am

Celebrate the dedication of this beautiful 58-acre preserve! Lots of activities will be offered: Take a nature walk led by Master Naturalist Jim Varnum or try out the fishing and geocaching demonstrations. Free hot dogs, chips and refreshments will also be available.

Be sure to check out the new Phase I improvements, which include a pond boardwalk for fishing, small amphitheater for educational programs, permeable-paved parking area and picnic areas.

This preserve is worth a special celebration: The city of Arlington had long recognized the site as a great example of Eastern Cross Timbers ecosystem but continued attempts to buy it for a preserve were unsuccessful and the site had been platted for residential development. With citizen support, late negotiations by the Trust for Public Land resulted in an agreement with the owner.

In 2005, purchase of the land was subsequently approved by voters as part of a bond package. Read more here: <http://www.tpl.org/news/press-releases/58-acres-protected-for-future.html>

Volunteers are helping to ready the preserve for its big day. If you'd like to help with cleanup or are interested in being part of a friends group, contact prairie@acctexas.org.

Location: just south of I-20 at 5201 Bowman Springs Road.

<http://naturallyfun.org/southwest-nature-preserve>

Hours: gates open from 5:00 am to 10:00 pm.

Special note: Big thanks to everyone who responded on short notice to salvage plant material at SWNP before the Bowman Springs Road widening project began. Grace and John Darling, James Fuhr, Wes Miller, Sandy Smith, and John Snowden dug loads of little bluestem, liatris, etc. and also collected seed.

The road-widening project has now begun and the right-of-way area has been cleared. If you plan to visit SWNP, the preserve will remain open. Be aware that during early stages of the project, traffic is restricted to one-way, southbound.



Wildscape Update **John Dycus**



Let's hear it for the Boy Scouts, who last month placed boundary stone for the remaining beds along the sidewalk all the way to the east-end arbor. A "fabulous job," namesake Molly Hollar called the work, and a "very large step" for the wildscape.

Volunteers will plant the beds in October. Molly declares this is the last

expansion and that from now on it'll be maintenance only. We'll see.

It's difficult to whip up expansion lust when there's no moisture to grace the ground (and the soul). Molly says this third consecutive summer of drought is the most trying period the wildscape has experienced. Joyce Duty and a team of volunteers have run hoses under the sidewalk to make life easier for walkers and eliminate having to put out warning cones at watering time.

Joyce is now redoing soaker hoses that have been damaged by wear and tear

and sun. The goal is to make watering less volunteer intensive and more effective, substituting the soaker hoses for handheld watering.

Old, deteriorating benches also have been taken down. New ones — they've been ordered — will spruce up the wildscape and be more damage resistant. Meanwhile, Molly has two new coordinators — Joyce Duty, a Master Naturalist, and Master Gardener Bev Crawford. They bring a world of expertise and energy and new ideas. Who knows, maybe they can bring a little rain, too.



From the President continued from page 2



though we only saw a couple of bees coming in and out of the birdhouse, there were probably 2000–3000 bees inside when I opened it up. They had started 3 sheets of comb that I transferred into a small hive box. I shook as many bees as I could out of the house and into the box hoping the queen would go over and not get hurt. I then left them with some sugar water and wished them well. We'll see what happens.

While removing bee colonies from moveable objects is pretty easy, removing a colony from a fixed structure is very

challenging. The colonies are often quite large when they are discovered, with tens of thousands of bees. Some people try to poison the entire colony, which is essentially like killing a medium-size dog and leaving the carcass in your wall with several pounds of honey. To remove these colonies, the structure must be opened up, everything removed and then the area must be completely sealed or left wide open so that a new colony won't form because it cannot be defended.

There are people who do this work and they often can be found by consulting the local beekeepers club. In our area, Metroplex Beekeepers maintains a list at <http://www.metrobeekeepers.net/swarmpickup.htm>.

Editor's note: Recently, Grace Darling consulted President Kocurek on this topic and through him found an excellent beekeeper who collected the queen, masses of bees and a bunch of honey. Photos below.



Thanks to Our Last Speaker

At our September meeting (following considerable technical adventures), Al Armendariz addressed us via computer on the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign. The main objective of this initiative is to replace dirty coal with clean energy by mobilizing grassroots activists in local communities to advocate for the retirement of old and outdated coal plants and to prevent new coal plants from being built.



Birding 101 Grace Darling

The May-June issue of The Nature Conservancy Magazine lists the following facts about "the beloved affliction" of birdwatching in the U.S. today:

- more than 48 million Americans identify themselves as birders
- in 2001 birding was 232% more popular than in 1983, and it has gained steadily since
- birdwatchers contributed \$36 billion to the economy in 2006, created 671,000 American jobs, and generated \$10 billion in state and federal revenues
- renowned migration spots like Cape May, New Jersey, the Everglades and Florida Keys, and the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas depend heavily on ecotourism for their financial health
- today's birders are younger and older than ever before, span diverse ethnic and economic ranges, and increasingly live in cities
- birding requires little exertion or equipment and is accessible to anyone with a decent pair of binoculars (~\$100)
- the greatest threat to bird life is deforestation and loss of habitat
- to be a birder is to be a conservationist; you can't be one without the other



A Residential Rooftop Solar Energy Array in Arlington Ed Pischedda

You don't see many in Arlington yet, but there're a few of them out there: rooftop solar energy panels on homes. And after talking to one of the proud owners, my American-Airlines-employed neighbor George (who asked that his last name not be used), it seems likely that you will see more residential solar panels installed in the coming years. They already make economic sense to the residential customer, and if media reports are to be believed, their manufacturing costs continue to come down, portending the immediate utility cost savings they already provide to become even greater.

While he's not a numbers-and-records guy, George, who had his solar-energy panels installed in mid-2010, says he's very happy with his choice. After a check of his credit-worthiness, for \$6,000 (financed over 15 years by the installation contractor, SolarCity) he leased a solar-energy system valued at \$40,000, fully installed, with maintenance and insurance handled by the contractor.

The monthly leasing cost to George works out to about \$36, which increases by a little over a dollar every year; he pays this to SolarCity separately from his utility bill. George says he halved the



George's solar-panel-equipped south-facing home in far north Arlington.

monthly net kilowatt usage of his 2,000 square-foot, pool-equipped home compared to what he'd been using immediately prior to the installation of his rooftop solar array. If he'd been, say, a Green Mountain customer, he could've easily been paying an average of more than \$200 per month for electricity. Thus, for his \$36 per month lease cost, he would've cut \$100 per month in electricity costs.

And just how is it that one can receive a \$40,000 utility-cost savings system for

only \$6,000, fully installed and insured? The answer is: federal subsidies to the installers that make it appealing to them to do this work for this price.

In a future *Post Oak* we'll get into the prospects remaining for 2013 and beyond for subsidized residential solar energy projects, and maybe another of George's ideas for getting rid of the rest of his utility bill: residential geothermal cooling.

Now about that lawn

My Day at Ecofest Kevin Donovan

On Saturday, September 21, I volunteered to help staff the Fix it Green exhibit at EcoFest. I had such a nice and interesting time I thought I'd share my experience with *Post Oak* readers.

I arrived at the Fest at 7:30 am to help my colleagues set up the displays in the tent provided to us by the city. Upon my arrival I was pleasantly surprised to see that we had the largest tent of all!

But, I thought, the largest tent probably also meant the largest display with a lot of stuff to set up and put together. Fortunately, the clever organiz-



ers, Danny Kocurek et al, had designed every display for maximum ease of assembly. Soon, with the help of a

swarm of handy volunteers and the 30 or so cordless drills that Danny brought along, we were knocking the displays together. About 9:45 people were already starting to come into the tent looking around, casting curious looks from faucet to toilet to thermostat, wondering what we were all about.

Right about 10:00 am, Fest start time, we had it all set up and ready to go. With our toilet in place and faucet shining in the sun, signs set up, and light bulbs all lined up, Danny gave us a quick orientation on how to describe each of the displays.

continued on page 7

Ecofest continued from page 6

Now we were ready to meet and greet our guests.

As people came through we escorted them through the displays while giving them a spiel on how, just by performing a few simple fixes — change the aerator on faucets, fix a leaky commode flapper,



caulk and weather-strip windows and doors, install a programmable thermostat on heating/air conditioning units, change incandescent light bulbs to LED or CFL light bulbs, unplug phone chargers, install a drip valve on a shower, add a blanket to their hot water heater, insulate hot water pipes or set the water heater to 120 degrees — they could save up to several hundred dollars a year on energy.

It was fun to engage with the folks as they came through the exhibit. I got some really good questions, many of which I didn't know how to answer so I just pointed to the poster above the display and said, "This will explain all." It was a real good feeling having people thank us for pointing out how they could save some money so easily.

After about two and a half hours of pretending to be an energy-saving consultant guru, it was lunchtime and a chance to go see the rest of what EcoFest had to offer. Walking through the exhibits I saw animals, face painters, a clown walking on stilts, free trees, food and drink vendors, skateboarders, and heard some good music. After a quick lunch from one of the vendors on Abram Street I walked over to the Levitt Pavilion to listen to the band that was playing, then back to the booth.



Since we had a great turnout of volunteers I was allowed to take the rest of the afternoon off with the provision that I return to help break down the



exhibit. After a nap and completing some chores at home, I returned about 5:00 pm to help take apart the exhibits. As with the setting up, the taking down was made easy by the clever design of each of the exhibits. It took us about 45 minutes to take it all down and load it onto Danny's truck. After our goodbyes the happy but tired volunteers headed home.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only

thing that ever have has." Usually when I read this Margaret Mead quote I take it to mean that a small group effected some fundamental or fantastic change in the world. But the day I volunteered at EcoFest it began to take on a more intimate, personal meaning. We — our small group of thoughtful, committed volunteers — by talking with the people who came through the ACC exhibit had made a change in the world by simply pointing out a few easy ways they could save some money and save some water, or use less electricity or natural gas in their homes. And if just a small percentage of them made just one change, then that's a change to the world. And that was really why I had fun at Ecofest.



Effects of Climate Change in Colorado Marianne Herrmann

Here in still beautiful Pagosa Springs in Southwest Colorado, where we spent a couple of months in the summer, we expected to see the effects of the gigantic wildfire that happened earlier in the summer, but it looked just as gorgeous as always from the town! Curious as we are, we went driving around to finally see something, yet found only closed roads. Then we came up to Wolf Creek Pass and were really shocked to see what damage the spruce beetles had done. The spruce and fir forest has been devastated! A very depressing fact! We had enjoyed the scenery up there very much through the years skiing, hiking and picnicking.

Yesterday we made our final trip before returning to Texas and went over the pass to a reservoir on the east side and finally saw the burnt forest. I don't

think it's any worse than looking at the beetle damage. Fireweed and yellow flowers are already sprouting. The terrain is very difficult and my admiration for the brave fire fighters is great.

The effects of climate change are really very drastic here in this part of the world. Although we did not have disastrous flooding like that in the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains, we have had lots of rain and thunderstorms almost every day since the end of July. Since there has been prolonged drought, the natives are welcoming all this moisture.

Many people here are very active environmentally. Upon arrival, we were lucky to be able to experience an International Environmental Film Festival which was held for the benefit of a Geothermal Greenhouse Partnership the town is working on. The goal is to use the Great Pagosa Hot Spring as a resource to create sustainable agriculture, environmental education, renewable energy, fresh local food and an attraction year-round for visitors, as well as nurturing local business and create jobs. Even though we don't have a resource like that in Arlington, I thought you might find it interesting to know what is going on in this small town.



Devastating Spruce Beetle Outbreak in Colorado Linked to Drought, Climate Change



Editor's note: Here's a little background for Marianne's observations. It came from Treehugger.com on October 12, 2013 and was written by Michael Graham Richard.

A new study published in the journal *Ecology* shows that a massive outbreak of Spruce Beetle is linked to drought conditions in the Colorado mountains, and this drought is tied to "long-term changes in sea-surface temperatures from the Northern Atlantic Ocean, a trend that is expected to continue for decades." While causality can never be 100% certain in these kinds of things, it certainly seems like climate change is indirectly making these insect outbreaks more likely and/or more severe.

The new study is important because it shows that drought is a better predictor of spruce beetle outbreaks in northern Colorado than temperature alone, said lead study author Sarah Hart, a CU-Boulder doctoral student in geography. Drought conditions appear to decrease host tree defenses against spruce beetles, which attack the inner layers of bark, feeding and breeding in the phloem, a soft inner bark tissue, which impedes tree growth and eventually kills vast swaths of forest.

The Mountain Pine Beetle is getting more press because of the havoc it is causing in the Southern Rocky Mountains, but the Spruce Beetle has the potential to be equally or even more devastating in Colorado, says the lead author of the study.

The Wisdom of Birds Grace Darling

I recently came across Tim Birkhead's *The Wisdom of Birds — An Illustrated History of Ornithology* (2008), and am having a wonderful time with it. It's the kind of book you can pick up, choose a page at random, read for a while, and then put down until the itch leads you to it again. (For me this is a form of decompression therapy akin to stroking the cat; I use it often.) Here are a few sample paragraphs from the chapter on bird sex:

"First, Aristotle pointed out that in mammals there is a pronounced association between longevity and the time spent in utero. . . . Intriguingly, Ray and Willughby felt that it might also be true in birds in the sense that "time in utero" was equivalent to the duration of incubation . . . [and] it turned out that they were correct — birds with longer incubation periods do indeed tend to be longer-lived.

"Second, Aristotle suggested that larger birds lived longer lives than small ones. [This] also turns out to be broadly true, as shown by simply comparing the short-lived zebra finch, one of the smallest of birds, to albatrosses, which are among the largest. However, body size on its own is not a particularly good predictor of how long a bird of a particular species might live.

"Third, Aristotle confidently assumed a link between lifespan and sexual activity, including the notion that excessive



copulation left males at least vulnerable to rapid ageing and early death. In addition, he thought that those species vulnerable to predators 'compensate' for their reduced lifespan by producing more offspring, either reproducing more frequently and/or having larger broods — and as a consequence, dying young. . . . [The idea] that too much sex or reproduction results in early death made such

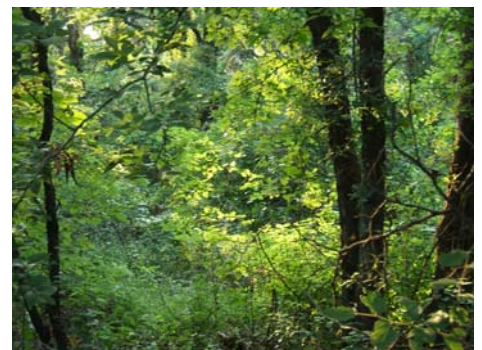
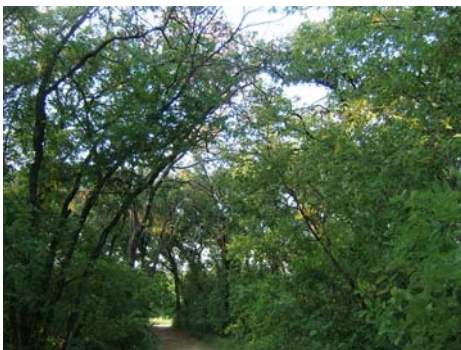
a deep impression that it has remained the focus of attention for centuries.

"The debilitating nature of sex was most strikingly confirmed by the extraordinary longevity of castrated individuals. . . . Eunuchs, both natural and man-made, live longer than intact individuals. . . . With the recognition that females as well as males might bear the cost of too much reproduction, the issue switched from the act of copulation itself (mainly with respect to males) to the broader issue of reproduction in general. But it was not until the 1970s that researchers began to think about the link between reproduction and longevity from an evolutionary perspective."

The rest of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of the so-called "balance of nature," or why animal numbers tend to remain similar over time, underlain by the assumption that survival and longevity correlate with evolutionary success. The contributions of early evolutionary biologists, most notably David Lack, are detailed, along with a fascinating history of the methodology used in intricate calculations of the average lifespan of wild-living animals. The chapter concludes with a thorough exploration of the environmental conditions leading a species to adopt one of two main lifestyle strategies: frequent reproduction and short lifespan, or modest reproduction and extended life.

This book is a great read. I highly recommend it.

Don't Forget: SW Nature Preserve Dedication Saturday, Oct 19, 10:00



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