

ARLINGTON CONSERVATION COUNCIL

POSTOAK

WORKING TO CONSERVE ARLINGTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES
VOLUME 15, NUMBER 5

JUNE 2014

www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org

June Meeting

Conservation Biology in North Central Texas

Derek Broman,
Urban Wildlife Biologist DFW Metroplex,
Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Wednesday, June 4, 7 pm
Fielder Museum, 1616 W. Abram St
(corner of Fielder and Abram)



Derek has been with TPWD since January 2013 and is originally from rural Iowa. He has worked with numerous wildlife species throughout the Midwest and was in New England for 3 years before coming to Texas. While there, he studied bobcats for his Master's Degree in Wildlife Ecology from the University of New Hampshire and then studied black bears with the State of Connecticut. He offices out of Cedar Hill State Park, and works throughout the DFW Metroplex.

Bits & Pieces

Faster Than a Speeding Fly

If you look fast, you might spot a tiger beetle like this one in sandy places at SW Nature Preserve. But be quick: They can run the equivalent of a person going 480 mph and they have reaction speeds of houseflies.

Tiger beetles are good indicator species and are used in ecological studies of biodiversity.



Today's Inspirational Moment



Nature does not compromise; a pelican is not a compromise between a crow and otter, it is just a pelican. Nature makes no compromises; any inefficient products are recalled to the manufacturer!

Amory Lovins

Check This Out

Looks like we're headed for a new downtown library. At a meeting the other day, someone asked if the new building would be green, maybe LEED certified. It might have been an oversight, but the answer lacked any mention of LEED certification. Aren't we overdue?



Thanks Again, Neil

Recently local expert Neil Sperry told us that cutting our grass tall was not the best thing for our ecological nightmares. We ought to keep it short despite the words of numerous authorities who advise cutting no more than 1/3 of the leaves at a time to promote good root systems.

From the President Danny Kocurek



Let the Climate Change War Begin

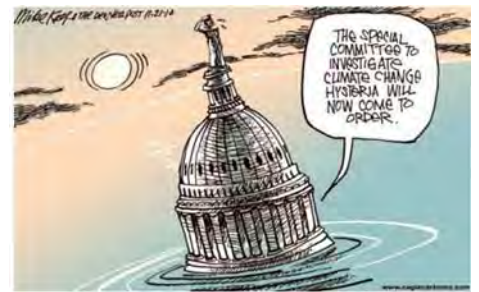
Although many forward-thinking folks have been fighting the Climate Change War for years, it looks like it is about to get serious. We have finally reached the

point where over half of our citizens realize that climate change is real and believe we need to do something about it. Of course this doesn't apply to Texas due to our War on Science, but it looks like the rest of the country is getting tired of paying for Texas' unsustainable strategy. The first really substantial salvo in the War is the EPA's rules on CO₂ emissions.

Although they are not finalized, it is estimated that the proposals will save US taxpayers \$7 in healthcare costs for every \$1 spent making changes to our power plants. Additionally, they will save upwards of 6000 lives a year. The estimated 230,000 jobs that will be lost in the coal industry will be replaced with 250,000 jobs in the clean energy industry. Add to this the enormous costs of dealing with the damages of climate change, estimated at \$30 billion a year,

there is no reasonable argument against the proposals.

That won't stop politicians and the fossil fuel industry from arguing, and I am sure Texas will be spending millions of dollars fighting and losing legal battles like we have been doing for the last 10 years, but these proposals actually have a chance and that is why this is the beginning of the Climate Change War. There may be hope for the human race after all.



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conserve Arlington's
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Blackland Prairie Preserve Jan Miller Photos by Wesley Miller



State of the Prairie Conference – “Prairies in a Changing World”

Both Blackland Prairie Nature Preserve and Southwest Nature Preserve were included

in one of several fieldtrips showcasing local ecosystems as the opening of the State of the Prairie conference, May 29 - 31 in Fort Worth. After the first day of fieldtrips to prairie sites around North Texas, conference participants began two days of presentations and networking — lots of networking. All of the presenters shared energy, enthusiasm and expertise, but a real highlight was the keynote

address by Urban Shaman, Dr Tony Burgess. Many new contacts were made and links restored, kind of like in a healthy, functioning prairie.

Perhaps the most exciting news from the conference is that a new chapter of NPAT (Native Prairies Association of Texas) may be forming in Fort Worth, only the second in the state. Please watch for an organizational meeting to be held in our area in late June or early July. If you'd like to be involved, contact NPAT President Kirsti Harms at kirsti_harms@texasprairie.org.

Organizational Meeting: Friends of the Prairie (BPNP)

Thursday, June 12, 7:00 pm

Location: TBD

Mark your calendar! Now that the master plan is in place, it's time to strategize on our next steps for the preserve. Please e-mail prairie@acctexas.org if you'd like to participate.



3rd Saturday Workday

June 21, 9 am – noon

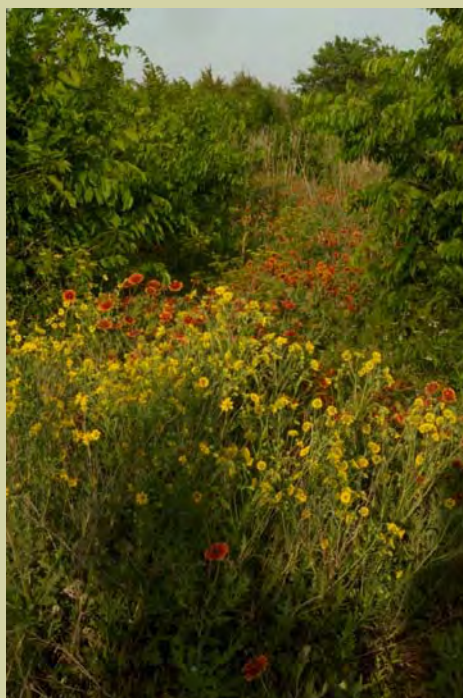
Please bring handsaws or loppers. Also, bring gloves and wear thick-soled boots/shoes and long pants. Highly recommended: water (refills provided), sun protection and bug spray.

RSVP to prairie@acctexas.org; appreciated in case of bad weather.

For map and directions: <http://goo.gl/maps/W01P9>.



Blackland Prairie Preserve Photos by Wesley Miller



The Wildscape in May



Left, Wes "Poison Ivy" Miller. Above, Frank and Bryan Keeney, Peggy Quinn, and Susan Marchbank. Upper right, Dave and Anita Ferman. Lower right, Josephine Keeney with three volunteers from Summit High School.



Southwest Nature Preserve Jan Miller

As the first phase of a grant project, volunteers recently joined TPW Fisheries Specialist Raphael Brock for an aquatic plant survey of SWNP ponds. Survey results will determine what will be needed to optimize the aquatic ecosystems. Thanks to Michael McCorkhill and FW Fly Fishers for taking on this project and acquiring the grant.

Friends of Southwest Nature Preserve

Meeting Tuesday, June 17, 6:30 pm at Southwest Branch Public Library (or at SWNP, weather permitting)
3311 SW Green Oaks Blvd (east of Park Springs and west of Bowen)

There are many ways to participate: (invasive plant management, trail management, erosion control, communication/IT, public outreach, organizational planning and more. Or if you'd just like to be part of the Friends group, please contact prairie@acctexas.org.



2nd Thursday workday
June 12, 9 – noon

4th Saturday workday
June 28, 9 – noon

For information contact
prairie@acctexas.org

In Love with Flowers

Why am I so in love
With flowers and gardens?
Easy answers won't do:
Sweet smells, bright
Hues, soft shapes –
This goes beyond.

Something in a garden
Bonds my soul again,
Moves me near to ecstasy,

Reminds me that my tissue,
The stuff of which I'm formed,
Is not that far from garden stuff,

Not that far from stamens,
Anthers, petals, stems, roots.
Oh I'm made of stars too;

But flowers are closer,
Flowers and leaves and seeds.
I need them as communion every day.

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Ansel Adams: Masterworks at Arlington Museum of Art Julia Burgen

Arlington is indeed fortunate to have an exhibit of the caliber of the current Ansel Adams: Masterworks. It opened on May 3 and continues through August 3. The exhibit showcases 48 images printed by Adams himself that he considered among his best work. At the urging of Maggie Weston of the Weston Gallery in Carmel, California, in 1979 Adams selected these images as indicative of his very best work and then printed them anew.

Adams, who had considered being a concert pianist, often used the comparison of his negatives as the score and the prints as the performance. He maintained his negatives and reprinted and revised his work on several occasions. These images reflect his mature decisions of his best work.

Adams was born in 1902 in the outskirts of San Francisco and died in 1984 in his beloved Carmel. As a youth he had difficulties in formal schooling, but he taught himself to play the piano and later had a teacher. It was his parents' wish that he become a concert pianist, and he thought that was his destiny. However, along the way the new world of photography beckoned. When Ansel's Aunt Mary came to live with them, she helped with school lessons as did his father. Aunt Mary gave him a book about Yosemite, and the following spring Ansel begged his parents to go there for their summer vacation. To top things off, his dad gave him a Brownie box camera for the trip in 1916. From

that trip came his love of both Yosemite and photography.

Annual trips back to Yosemite ensued, and in 1919 Ansel at 17 joined the Sierra Club. In summer 1920 he became the seasonal custodian at Sierra's LeConte Lodge in the Valley, spending any spare time exploring and photographing. He continued his association with Sierra for several years, often leading their summer camping excursions in the park. Later Adams was president of Sierra for a while and served on their board of directors for 37 years where he was "...an unflagging champion of environmental protection." (Time Magazine, May 7, 1984 obituary)

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Make Arlington better: Join ACC today. Use the form on the back page.

ACC under the Knife **Dick Schoech**

While writing this article for the ACC newsletter, I keep thinking, “Are newsletters a dying art form in this age of digital communications?”

This and other intriguing questions were sparked by a serious examination of ACC by four teams of masters' level UT Arlington students from Dr. Christie's class on Public Relations. Student teams functioned as public relations firms with ACC as the customer.

ACC board members explained to the teams that ACC needed to increase awareness of environment and sustainability issues and to find ways to attract new energetic members. Also, ACC is especially concerned that many of its founding members (excluding Molly Hollar) are not as young as they used to be. Consequently, ACC's survival requires new blood or it might simply age out of existence. Our situation is not different from many volunteer community organizations that sprang up from the activism and idealism of the 1960s and '70s.

The students' examination of the ACC “patient” followed procedures similar to those we experience when seeing a new doctor. Key ACC board members were asked many questions. Key areas of the organization were poked and inspected. The students performed a SWOT analysis, which is not as painful as it sounds. The SWOT procedure simply involves looking at ACC's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. The weaknesses part is the most painful as no board wants to publicly admit and verbally discuss the weaknesses of their organization.

After getting our SWOT, ACC was Googled, our Facebook likes and dislikes tallied, our newsletters inspected, and our public image scrutinized. The students

used tools such as online surveys with potential members, focus groups of representatives of people ACC might attract, interviews with people in parks and malls, and content analyses of ACC's Web site, Facebook page, newsletter, press coverage, etc. All this information was analyzed and summarized into reports filled with charts and graphs. Just as some doctors may perform more tests than needed to impress patients and justify reimbursements, the four student teams may have produced the 235 pages of analyses partly to impress their professor and justify their expected A grade.

The final — and most painful — phase was getting ACC to study and understand the four reports well enough to make critical decisions about the future. This phase involved the student teams telling the ACC patient the good and bad results they found during their final class. One team came to the May ACC board meeting and bravely told us how healthy ACC was and the future medicine we needed to take to have a long and healthy future life. I will mention three of the highlights in the reports that the board is mulling over.

Change the ACC newsletter into an online blog.

Yikes, this idea to cut our stately Post Oak newsletter into a lowly blog and use Twitter to tweet the newsletter articles all over the Internet was a big pill to swallow. We wondered, “What is a blog anyway?” What's the matter with keeping the beautiful newsletter just as it is? Just what do these students know about ACC and its members! After the shock from this recommendation wore off, we were able to understand that newsletters are print communication era relics that need to be transformed in the current age of digital social media. Most people do not have the time to read 10+ pages of a newsletter no matter how well written and beautifully formatted they

are. People are into fast food and fast everything with little time to digest a long newsletter. Also, ACC newsletters are emailed out, then posted online. Consequently, they are essentially dead, historical relics whose content is hard for people to find. Content in a blog is typically living and growing as people comment on what they have read and what others think about what they think. Some ACC newsletter content, such as monthly meeting topics, need to be tweeted far and wide to attract new members who use their computer, smartphone or tablet to find local environmental and sustainable information. ACC can keep the newsletter as is for those who like its current format, but at the same time can unlock the content and get pieces of the newsletter out on social media platforms like Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram so all potentially interested can benefit from ACC's work. This increased visibility on social media is especially important for attracting a younger audience who has limited time but browses several social media outlets for topics of interest.

Re-brand ACC with a modern logo, a Web site with more pictures and video, and more social media coverage.

In essence, ACC could use a modern makeover. The students recommended that we invite a UT Arlington communications intern to help us with this makeover task. One advantage of this digital and social media approach is that it is much easier to track what ACC information and events appeal to what audiences. For example, we could get reports on who visits the ACC Web site, which pages they visit and for how long. Other online platforms have similar measures of interest, i.e., Facebook postings and likes, Twitter tweets and

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Ansel Adams continued from page 6

In the 1920s he met Harry Best, who had a studio in the Valley and a daughter, Virginia, who would eventually become Ansel's wife. The Harry Best Studio is now the Ansel Adams Gallery. The rest of Adams story is equally amazing and fascinating, with his development as a photographer and

interactions with other famous photographers and artists: Edward Weston, Dorothea Lange, Paul Strand, Alfred Stieglitz at An American Place in New York City, whose wife was Georgia O'Keeffe. Adams also developed Washington, D.C. connections where he influenced designations of new national

parks. Kings Canyon, south of Yosemite, was the first.

Hours at Arlington Museum of Art:

Tuesday - Saturday 10 am - 5 pm.

Sunday: 1 - 5 pm.

Admission: Adults \$8, Seniors and Students \$5. Children 12 and under free.

ACC under the Knife continued from page 7

retweets, number of posting on an ACC blog topic, etc. With more and better information about our communications, ACC can better communicate with the audiences it wants to attract.

Do some organizational restructuring.

The students recommended that ACC consider a committee structure with board members chairing committees in

areas such as membership, communications, volunteerism, etc. These committees would seek members from the general membership who are interested and have the time to become more involved in specific ACC activities. This suggestion seems like it would formalize and strengthen what currently exists as most ACC projects have a leader and pull resources from any available and interested ACC member or anyone else for that matter.

While the ACC patient feels probed and prodded, we also feel pleased that the examination is over and the results are not as bad as we feared. We have a lot of discussion and thinking to do as we digest many of the good ideas we were given. Our gratitude is extended to Dr. Christie and his students for having to do the unpleasant task of examining ACC's bare facts and making recommendations for it to become a healthier and more sustainable organization.

Renewable Energy Revisited: Part 2 Grace Darling

Solar Energy Potential

Thanks to its vast expanses of open land and year-round sunshine, Texas has the largest capacity to support solar energy in the country. Sadly, most of that capacity goes untapped because of unfavorable economic policies in a deregulated market that favors the status quo.

Solar Power Basics

From Solar Energy Industries Association's Web site, the following facts related to solar energy in Texas last year:

- There are more than 284 solar companies employing 4,100 workers. (Nationwide the figures are 6,100 companies and 143,000 workers.)
- The total invested in solar power among homes, businesses, and utilities was \$174 million
- Our state ranks 13th in the country in installed solar capacity, just enough to power 18,700 homes
- The average installed price of a residential or commercial photovoltaic system fell 23% last year and is expected to continue dropping
- The average cost for installed PV system is \$2.59 per watt
- Several electric utilities operate on solar energy and typically generate



between 22 and 40+ megawatts (MW) of electricity (enough to power 2,000 to 3,800 homes)

Economics of Solar Power

On a one-to-one comparison with natural gas, the state's predominant means of generating electricity, solar power cannot compete on purely economic grounds. In fact, people who choose the "green option" offered by their energy provider are paying slightly higher rates to help fund renewable energy sources within the state, wind farms as well as additional solar installations. One such plan is Green Mountain Energy's SolarSPARC, which allows Texans to receive 100% of their electricity from solar power without having panels on their rooftop.

A recent study by the Pecan Street Research Group* of a small number of

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Renewable Energy Revisited: Part 2 continued from page 8



homes with south-facing rooftop PV panels in place reports that these buildings pulled 54% less electricity from the grid during peak times (3 to 7 PM) of the peak season for electricity use (June 1 to August 31) in Texas. Houses with west-facing PV installations fared even better, with a reduction in grid demand of 65%. The authors conclude that (1) rooftop solar power could go a long way toward relieving summertime demand concerns; (2) the funds currently being invested in traditional energy production would be better spent on incentive programs for rooftop solar; and (3) utility companies should extend rebate programs to houses with west-facing solar installations.

Shortcomings of Solar Power

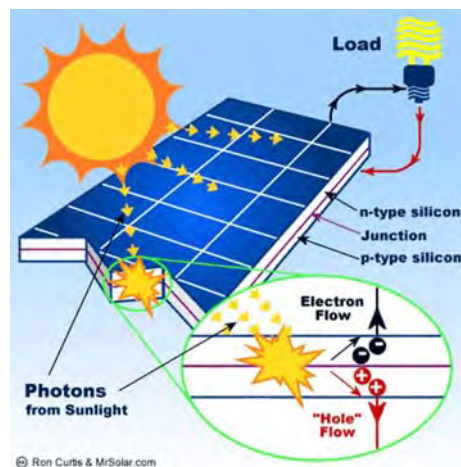
Like wind, the tides, and other natural sources of potential electricity, sunlight is intermittent. The main obstacle to the commercial development of solar power is how to store the sun's energy so it can be used at night.

The Andasol 1 solar-thermal power plant in Spain uses salt—actually a mixture of sodium and potassium nitrate—to store the sun's heat. It goes like this: Sunlight strikes a field of parabolic-trough mirrors focused on tubes filled with oil, which warms to more than 752 degrees F. The extra heated oil is sent to a heat exchanger, where cool molten salt is superheated and sent to a vat for storage. After dark, the hot salt is pumped back through the heat exchanger, where it transfers its heat to the oil that will generate steam. Because the plant collects almost twice as much sunlight as it needs to operate on sunny

days, the salt-storage method allows it to operate in the dark, running twice as long as other solar power plants and generating 50% more energy than its competitors. Unfortunately, this technology is not available for residential applications.

How Solar Panels Work

This is the admittedly elementary, very brief version of a complex physico-chemical process: Silicon-based photovoltaic cells absorb sunlight and convert it to direct current. Assemblies of photovoltaic cells in an integrated group, all oriented in one plane, constitute a solar photovoltaic panel or module. A group of connected solar panels is called an array. An inverter is used to convert the generated DC into AC (alternating current) to match what comes over the electric lines and be used in the home.



The efficiency of solar panels varies with size and application. Most residential panels are currently about 15% efficient, though some commercial arrays approach 36%. More efficient cells save on panel manufacturing and shipping costs—that is, you get more electricity for the same space on the roof, the same amount of frame and cover glass, the same cost of time and labor, packing material, and handling.

Solar Panels in the Home

Photovoltaic panels can be used to power your entire home, but that can be an expensive proposition without first using other energy efficiency measures (appliances, insulation, energy efficient lighting, etc.) to reduce the amount of energy needed in the home and help reduce the size and cost of the PV system needed.

Residential solar PV systems can cost from \$5 to \$8 per watt or \$5,000 to \$8,000 per kilowatt installed. A typical home system can cost from \$25,000 to \$50,000 depending on the size of the system and whether batteries are used to store some of the electricity for use at night or on cloudy days. This equates to an average kWh cost for a PV system that can range upwards to \$0.20 per kWh or more, not including maintenance costs for batteries.

On an annual basis each installed kilowatt of solar PV capacity in our climate will produce approximately 4.5 to 5 kilowatt-hours per day. So a 4-kilowatt system can produce up to 600 kilowatt hours per month, about half of the needs of the average Oncor residential customer, and cost between \$25,000 and \$40,000 installed. Homeowners can use one of the free online tools to calculate the size of the system they need based on their average electric usage from their monthly bills and average hours of sunlight at their location—e.g., <http://www.affordable-solar.com/residential-solar-home/Residential-Calculator>.

Buying the cheapest solar panels for the kilowatts you want is not necessarily the right way to go. Efficient panels mean you need fewer of them, and that is important because when it comes to residential solar panels, only 22% of the total cost is in the panels; the rest is spent on installation, interconnection with the grid, and solar inverters.

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Renewable Energy Revisited: Part 2 continued from page 8

Net Metering

Net metering allows homeowners and businesses who install solar panels to get paid a fair price for any surplus electricity they feed back to the grid. Currently in place in 44 states, net metering policies “provide a market-based incentive to install distributed generation (read: non-power plant energy-generating systems), to fairly compensate those that have already installed systems, and to provide market certainty to allow financing and growth in the [renewable energy] industry” (Public Citizen, 2011). Typical net metering pays full retail rate on a kWh to kWh basis for energy produced or consumed, sometimes varying with time of use. Modern “smart” meters simplify record-keeping by totaling consumption and generation separately.

A few statistics from the Interstate Renewable Energy Council: As of last year, 44 states and the District of Columbia have adopted net metering policies. More than half of all PV installations in the U.S. today are in California, Arizona, and Nevada. California has the largest number of net metering customers, with 72% of the national total. In Texas, however, net metering is voluntary and the PUC has not set a net-metering standard. According to the IREC, “utilities are not required to net their distribution charges and retail providers are permitted, but not required, to compensate customers for electricity exported to the grid by distributed generation systems. . . . This lack of a uniform policy in the state is preventing renewable energy technologies from reaching economies of scale.”

A 2011 report by David Power of Public Citizen further describes the situation in the state as follows:

- only about 5% of retail electricity providers, electric co-ops and municipality-owned utilities offer net metering to their customers
- the programs that are in place are complicated and vary enormously by region and electrical provider



- most munis and co-ops still have policies that actually discourage renewable energy generation by and compensation for customers

To add to the confusion, compensation varies with retail energy provider, system capacity limit, aggregate capacity limit, percentage of net excess generation, applicable sector (e.g., residential for Green Mountain Energy; commercial for Austin Energy), renewable energy credit ownership, time of use (9am to 4pm for Reliant), and whether meter aggregation is allowed. For example, Reliant’s E-Sense plan sell-back price is equal to the peak energy charge for the first 500 kWh put back onto the grid each month, or 5 cents/kWh for any surplus electricity. In contrast, TXU Energy DRG buy-back program is limited to 10 kW of consumer-generated electricity fed back into the grid.

If you are not discouraged yet, consider the fact that in certain markets in Texas, such as the Rio Grande Valley, the electricity distributor (in this case, AEP TCC) does not purchase energy inflows and no retail electric provider servicing the RGV participates in net metering (remember, it’s voluntary), effectively leaving this extremely sunny part of the state with zero economic incentives for installing renewable energy devices.

Legislative Progress

In 2007 Gov. Perry signed into law House Bill 3693 that provided for net metering to be deployed as rapidly as possible, but when the utilities protested,

legislators gave in and the law was compromised. Later that year, ERCOT’s interpretation of the law was that compensation for the distributed renewable energy should be negotiated between the retail customer and the retail electric provider [as if the parties had equal resources under the law]. In December of 2008 the PUC ruled that payment to customers would be at a utility’s “avoided cost,” an amount significantly lower than what is typically part of net metering. Subsequent efforts during the legislative sessions of 2009, 2011, and 2013 to pass more traditional net metering rules were unsuccessful.



Value of Solar Tariff

A recent alternative compensation scheme to net metering was introduced by Austin Energy in the fall of 2012. The “value of solar tariff” (VOST) consists of a standardized formula for calculating the value of customer-generated solar power. The formula takes into account some of the externalities often ignored in power generation, such as the depletion of fossil fuels and the pollution associated with burning those fuels. In other words, VOST calculates not just how much solar power is worth to a utility and its customers, but also to society and the environment—a huge leap forward. As Bill Ehrlich says in his blog, “this provides much reason for optimism that solar power will eventually be compensated for what it’s truly worth.”

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THE POST OAK

Arlington Conservation Council
PO Box 216
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Don't Forget!

Wednesday, June 4

Fielder Museum

7:00 - 8:00 pm

Derek Broman
Conservation Biology
in North Central Texas

