

Arlington Conservation Council

POST OAK

ACC works to protect Arlington's natural environment through education, community service, and advocacy for a sustainable future

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July-August 2015

www.acctexas.org

AUGUST MEETING

Smart Design for Hot-Humid Climates

A video presentation by
Peter Pfeiffer, F.A.I.A.

Peter Pfeiffer is a LEED accredited professional architect, interior designer, and building scientist who has spent the past 33 years designing and developing pragmatic high performance buildings and homes.

He has been a guest on National Public Radio, the HGTV network, The Discovery Channel, as well as on This Old House and This New House.

This program will be hosted by Roy Milner, our own resident architect who has worked on airport terminal construction and on several LEED certifiable projects.

If time allows, Roy will also present one or two short videos about green building in East Tennessee, plus an example of projects done green.

Bring Something for the Raffle!

Bits & Pieces

Southern Edition

Let's forget the MetroMess just long enough to consider the Groove-billed ani. This remarkable cuckoo lives in groups of one to five breeding



pairs that defend a common territory and lay their eggs in a communal nest. The whole group incubates the eggs and helps raise the young.

Maybe the best thing about anis is their resemblance to decomposing flying feather dusters. They're a treat for the eyes, and they often sound awful, too.

Thoughts from Our Float Inspiration Artist

"...the more I learn about nature, the more I am troubled by unanswerable questions about human exploitation of plants and animals and our casual assumption that the natural world is here only to serve people. I see all living things as fellow creatures with as much right as I have to be here and to continue living. I have to ask myself how man, the predator with a conscience, can live without carrying a burden of guilt for his existence at the expense of other creatures. Where does one draw the line between preservation of nature and preservation of self? Can a nature lover ever find true happiness at the top of the food chain?"

Charley Harper,
Charles Harper's Birds & Words

From the President Danny Kocurek



Can Religion Save the World?

While I have always appreciated organized religion's work to keep people from hurting each other too much, I have mostly found it frustrating. I have no tolerance for extremists, whether Christian or Muslim. As a survivor of nine years in parochial school, I have had a special annoyance with all of Catholicism's silliness. But then came Pope Francis.

I have never understood organized religion's opposition to sustainability. The argument that God put man on this planet to waste its resources as fast as we can, and hopefully bring on Armageddon as soon as we can,

has never made any sense to me given the teachings of the Bible and the Koran. It seems a perfect fit for all religions to practice and preach sustainability. While there are a few organizations working on this concept, it has never caught on.

That's why I have been shocked by the new pope. It makes me wonder how he got elected. It's like a hippie sneaked into the chamber of commerce and they accidentally elected him president. For the first time in my life, I actually pay attention to, and mostly agree with, what a religious leader is preaching. He may be the first pope in history who actually helps mankind.

Post oak

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Blackland Prairie Preserve Jan Miller

Third Saturday Stewardship Day: On hold until September, with cooler temps and fewer chiggers.

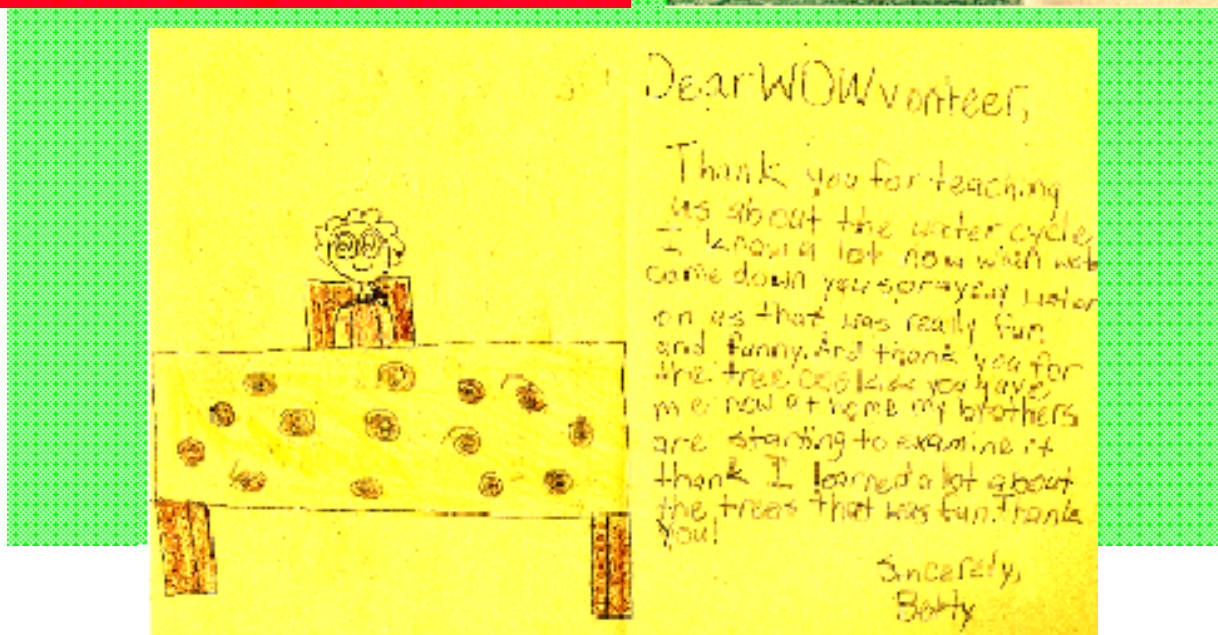
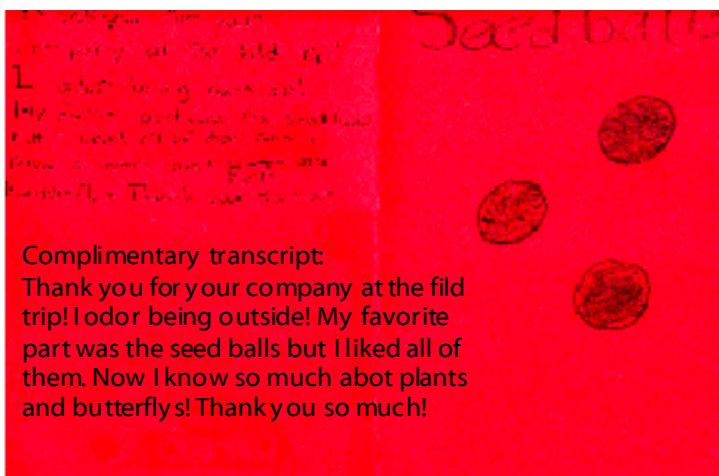
See the link for more information and latest updates:

www.theprairie.org Friends of the Prairie

info@theprairie.org Friends of the Prairie e-mail

Wildscape Extra

Here is some feedback from participants in the most recent Walk on the Wildside event. We promise to carefully consider all constructive criticism.



Wildscape Education Department Marylee Thomason

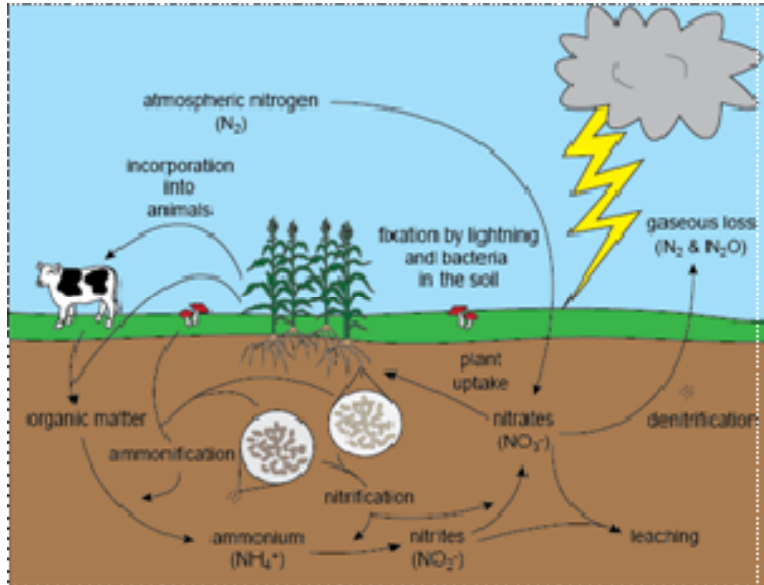
Arlington is on track to have one of the wettest years since record keeping began. Plants are growing taller, leaves are greener, flower colors and fruits are more vibrant. Much of this bounty comes courtesy of the extra rain. However, opinions differ on rain versus tap water and what the benefit of rain-water really is.

Internet forums and gardening Web sites often cite liquid nitrogen carried in rainwater as the main reason that tomatoes or beans or whole gardens practically glow after a shower. Some people make a slurry of nitrogen-rich chicken droppings and water their plants with it.

Another excellent source of nitrogen is urine. Donna posted that she wondered what she would tell her husband if he caught her squatting over their envy-producing phlox some evening.

One government Web site, which will go unnamed for its own protection, declares that nitrogen "often comes from fertilizer applications and from the air (legumes get their N from the atmosphere; water or rainfall contributes very little nitrogen)." With the authority of a ".gov" the site recommends applying bags of substances formulated to correct the shortcomings of the soil after cultivation.

To counter this, avid gardeners swear that rainwater works a magic and that it is far superior



to any artificial fertilizer, certainly better than tap water. Where does the magic come from?

It is tempting to speculate that water vapor forming into drops and falling through the atmosphere snags a plethora of nutrients that it then delivers in liquid form to plant roots. What could be simpler? However, science tells us those nutrients are already in the soil and are collected passively by leaf litter, insect detritus, bird droppings or by active feeding with compost and fertilizer. But this plant food can be locked up and unavailable.

Plant roots can be prevented from absorbing nutrients by what is called the "osmotic effect." Salts in the soil attract water and compete with plants for it. As salinity rises, plants expend more energy to take in water (energy that would otherwise be used for growing, flowering or fruiting). The result is negative: stunted growth, wilting and other damage.

Tap water contains a high proportion of chemicals in the form of salts added to protect human health. Some of these ingredients (chlorine, fluoride) are poisonous to plants. States vary, but in Texas the dissolved minerals added to tap water range from 500 to 700 parts per million. Rainwater is only 5-15 ppm.

The availability of some plant nutrients is greatly affected by soil pH. Most plant nutrients are optimally available within this 6.5-7.5 pH range, plus this range is generally very compatible to plant root growth. The pH of tap water is formulated for optimum taste, which is more alkaline. Rainwater is slightly acidic, which restores the balance of soil pH. That helps roots absorb nourishment.

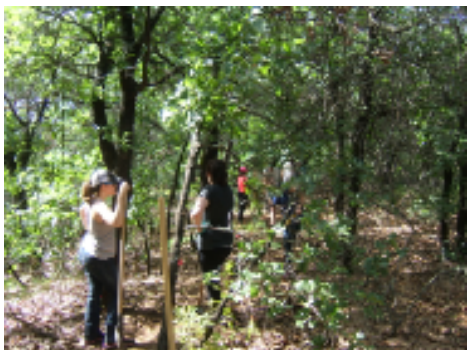
Rainwater makes plants' lives better in other ways, too. It washes their leaves to enable foliar feeding. It arrives from the sky highly oxygenated, helping keep roots from suffocating.

All plants need water. Sometimes you have to tap the tap, but rainwater is better. Collection barrels do more than just reduce your water bill. Using their bounty helps lower the pH in your soil and leaches out salts that build up and prevent the roots from feeding.

If your plants look refreshed after a rain, they are. You don't even have to do a clandestine squat!

Trail Building at Southwest Nature Preserve

On June 13, a great group of volunteers from Cummins Equipment showed up to continue work on a professionally designed trail that should stop the serious erosion (*below, left*) that has been growing ever since the preserve was officially opened. Arlington Parks & Rec's Jay Falgout (*below, center*) once again led the effort, and his crew did a lot of the heaviest work. A couple more sessions like this one and the new trail will be finished — and we can watch that slope begin to heal itself.



Southwest Nature Preserve Jan Miller

Friends of Southwest Nature Preserve monthly meeting
Tuesday, August 18, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
Southwest Branch Public Library* 3311 SW Green Oaks Blvd.
(west of Bowen Rd, east of Park Springs)

*** This event is not sponsored by the Arlington Public Library.**

Volunteer events:

8/20 3rd Thursdays, 8 - 11 a.m.

8/22 4th Saturdays, 8 - 11 a.m.

Volunteer projects focus on habitat restoration and trail management.

Current activities may include restoration seed collection, trail building, trash/debris pickup, invasive plant removal, etc. Please wear sturdy shoes or boots and long pants and bring gloves and water (refills provided). For more information and latest updates, see links below.

www.facebook.com/Friends-of-Southwest-Nature-Preserve

www.swnp.org

info@swnp.org

www.facebook.com/SouthwestNaturePreserve

Friends of SWNP Facebook

Friends of SWNP website

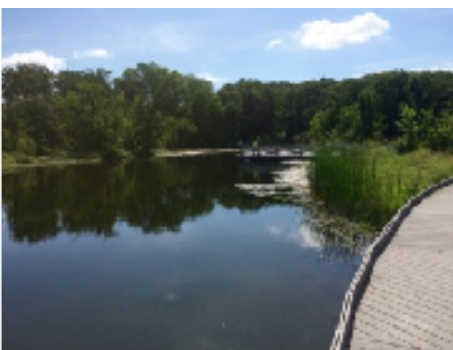
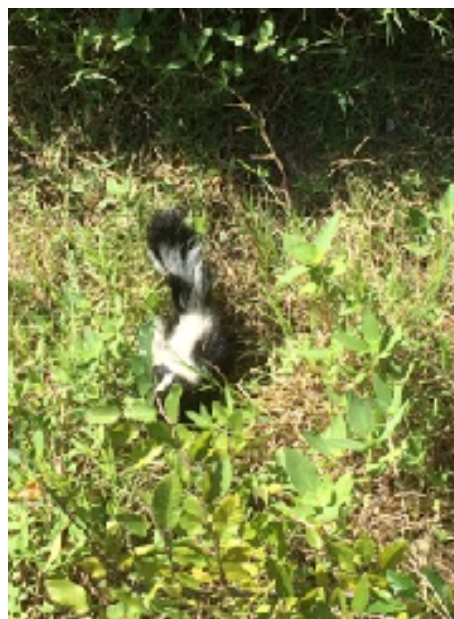
Friends of SWNP e-mail

APRD Facebook



On July 11, the best-yet bird identification class led by Walter Berk and Jim Frisinger started in Kennedale and continued at the Southwest Nature Preserve. It was a full class with a waiting list. These birders were rewarded with great views of a painted bunting, also yellow-billed cuckoo, yellow-crowned night herons, western kingbirds, red-bellied woodpeckers, and others. And distracted a little by a pair of striped skunks.

Dates for the next quarterly series have just been announced: Oct 4, 2015; Jan 16 2016; Apr 23, 2016; and Jul 16, 2016. Also of note: a herp walk could be coming in September or October.



Mystery of the Missing Migrants Marian Hiler

Source: <http://charleyharper.com/>

Inspiration for the ACC 4th of July float came from wildlife painter and environmentalist Charley Harper:

“For centuries, the neo-tropical migrants in this picture have shuttled between winter homes in the tropical rainforest and nesting sites in our woodlands. Now their populations are plummeting. Why? Habitat destruction Down There? Up Here? Is *your* favorite songster in this flock? Each April, I listen anxiously to the dawn chorus for the return of *my* favorite, that world-class flutist, the wood thrush. Are silent springs forthcoming? Remember the canary in the coal mine?”



Migrating across hundreds of miles without rest is an exhausting journey filled with natural perils. Add the increasing impact of human activity, it's not surprising that populations of migratory birds are diminishing rapidly. Habitat loss is by far the greatest threat from development in breeding habitat to land conversion of staging areas and stopover habitat along the way and on to deforestation in Latin America and the Caribbean. Hundreds of millions of birds die annually colliding into man-made obstacles such as buildings, wind turbines, power lines and communications towers. DDT may have been banned, but plenty of pesticides and toxins still in use are killing birds. Free-roaming domestic cats kill up to-3.7 billion birds every year.

You can minimize threats on the home front by keeping your cats indoors, preventing bird-window collisions, keeping bird feeders and baths clean, creating bird-friendly landscaping and learning more about bird conservation. For additional information see:

Environment for the Americas <https://www.birdday.org/birdday/themes/2012-twenty-years-of-imbd/20-ways-to-protect-birds>

American Bird Conservancy <http://www.abcbirds.org>

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/>



Arlington Conservation Council's upcycled bird float misses flight in Fourth parade

Julie Thibodeaux



*Reprinted from Green Source
DFW, July 14, 2015*

Every year, the Arlington Conservation Council tries to top themselves with their creative floats bearing sustainable themes for the Arlington Fourth of July parade.

Last July, ACC rolled through downtown Arlington with real solar panels powering their sound system and a working wind turbine, touting renewable energy.



Unfortunately this year's float played its swan song before ever leaving the parking lot.

The 40-plus-year-old environmental group started out with a grand idea to complement the parade's 50th anniversary. In keeping with the 50 theme, longtime ACC member Marian Hiler suggested depicting all 50 state birds. It was a timely topic with recent reports showing the decline of many U.S. backyard birds.

As in years past, the conservationists didn't want to buy any new materials for their creation. To set an example, they prefer using only borrowed, found and scavenged items.

In addition, they wanted to recycle the float after the parade was over. That meant they couldn't



use paint to illustrate the birds. "We found out the hard way, you can't recycle used cardboard that's been painted," said Hiler.

So instead they used old magazine pages to fill in the feathers. They modeled the birds on famed illustrator's Charley Harper's geometric bird paintings.

Using his illustrations as a guide, Hiler drew outlines of all 50 state birds plus a bald eagle with computer software. She printed them out on paper and traced the outlines on old pizza boxes.

"Volunteers helped cut them out and looked through magazines for the right colors," said Hiler.

Continued on page 9



Missed Flight on July 4 continued from page 8



Meanwhile, Hiler's sister, Ann Knudsen, drew a paint-by-number design on the cardboard and she and volunteers filled in the color with magazine clippings.

Hiler said she learned a lot about birds during the process. They were able to find most of the birds among Harper's works. However, they had to wing it with obscure birds such as Hawaii's endangered nene and Alaska's willow ptarmigan. While many states have opted for such popular birds as cardinals and bluebirds, she was surprised to learn that two states had chickens as their official state bird – the Rhode Island Red rooster and Delaware's Blue Hen.

With nearly 20 volunteers, they worked for a month on their flock.



But despite its wing power, the float never got off the ground. Out of 150 entries, the ACC float was about 20 from the end. When it came time for the group to peel off into the parade, they discovered the batteries of the truck that was supposed to pull the trailer were dead and couldn't be revived despite attempts to resuscitate it.

"We tried to get another truck but by the time the truck did get there the parade had literally passed us by," said Hiler.

The birds never got their day in the sun.

"It was disappointing," said Hiler. "I think I would have been broken hearted if it had rained. That was my biggest fear."

As it is, some of the birds will be salvaged and like the phoenix may rise again for another parade.

"That's the fun of doing a float every year," said Hiler. "We try to use some of things that we've used before."

Julie Thibodeaux is the Managing Editor for Green Source DFW. Previously, she worked as an editor and writer at the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Contact her at Julie@greensourcedfw.org. Sign up for the weekly Green Source DFW Newsletter to stay up to date on everything green in North Texas, the latest news and events. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest.



Growing Milkweed: Can We Restore the Monarchs? Jo Ann Duman



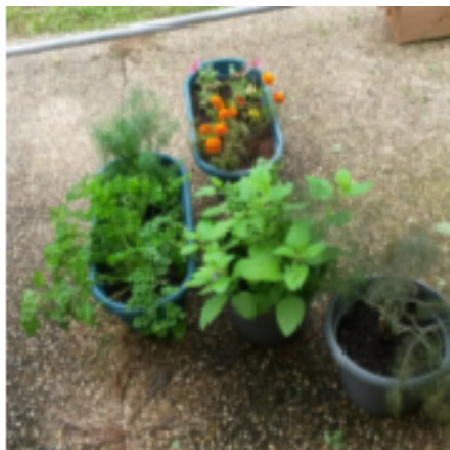
The two milkweed seedlings above were as good as forced on me by the garden club ladies of Texarkana at their annual flower show in May. All milkweeds are genus *Asclepias*. The one on the right is *A. tuberosa*, commonly called "butterfly weed." With its orange flowers and compact stalky growth, it is the most popular one for home gardens. The one on the left is, I think, *A. variegata*, the redring milkweed. I am told *A. viridis*, or greenhorn milkweed, is the most common in Northeast Texas and used to be found all along fence rows and in pastures; it is not as showy a plant for the home garden.

I started a butterfly garden in containers on my patio this year with nectar flowers (like zinnias) for butterflies and herbs for their caterpillars (dill, fennel, parsley). But I was scared off milkweed because I was told its long taproot won't succeed in containers. With two actual seedlings, though, I made a flowerbed next to the patio where the pictured seedlings are now five times larger and thriving. Without the activism of the garden club ladies and the free seedlings I would not have ventured into this.

The flower show display was for Monarch Watch

(monarchwatch.org), which promotes seedling propagation and transplantation as the surest way to get milkweeds established in school and home gardens. Monarch Watch encourages us to plant milkweeds by the dozen in place of some other bedding plants like petunias.

My friend Anne, upon seeing my *A. tuberosa*, showed me that in autumn before the first freeze she cuts the top of the stalk, puts it in water in a narrow glass container (not plastic), and carries the cuttings through the winter in her garage in front of an uncovered window that provides bright light. The cuttings develop roots in the water and she plants them in spring with a big head start over new plants.



Next year I plan to adapt the Monarch Watch specifications for a Monarch Waystation to my yard. They recommend 100 square feet, which does not have to be all in one place. You can put plants in several small patches in your yard to reach that total and existing flowering plants count. Have at least two kinds of milkweed, 5 to 6 plants of each. The rest of the square footage needs to be in nectar flowers that can be annuals, or



better yet, perennials that come back for you (and the butterflies) year after year.

Monarch Watch is a source for both seeds and ready-to-plant seedlings. Free seeds are available from Live Monarchs (www.livemonarch.com). You may find milkweeds in more native plant nurseries in the coming year. You can always grow your own if you collect seeds yourself or get some from a friend.

Many of us, well at least me, had flowers that Monarchs used on migration but we didn't think much about milkweed. Even the non-native wax-leaf ligustrum hedge, which came with the house I bought in Arlington, would be covered with Monarchs each spring the first 5 years I was there (2001 to 2006). I didn't see the Monarchs like that during the last 5 years. Indeed, the Monarch population has crashed from 1 billion 20 years ago to less than 2 million or so this year. Habitat loss is the main cause. Agricultural practices now use far more herbicides and pesticides that keep milkweed (and other plants) from growing anywhere near crop lands. What used to be a co-existence of native plants in the edges,

continued on page 11

Milkweed continued from page 10

ditches and byways near crops has been destroyed.

The fastest way to restore the habitat would be to undo the chemicalized farming practices, but coming between people's income for the health of the environment is difficult and takes a long time — if it ever happens. As a stop gap measure the White House recently announced a pollinator research strategy:

1. Reduce honey bee colony losses to economically sustainable levels;
2. Increase monarch butterfly numbers to protect the annual migration; and
3. Restore or enhance millions of acres of land for pollinators through combined public and private action.

The First Lady's Million Pollinator Garden Challenge has 15,000 schoolyard gardens

enrolled, and grant money available for gardeners, horticulturalists, municipal and state agencies to achieve 1,000,000 gardens by 2016. Partners like National Wildlife Federation will encourage new gardens, and revise information for its existing 200,000 certified wildlife habitat gardens to have more milkweeds.

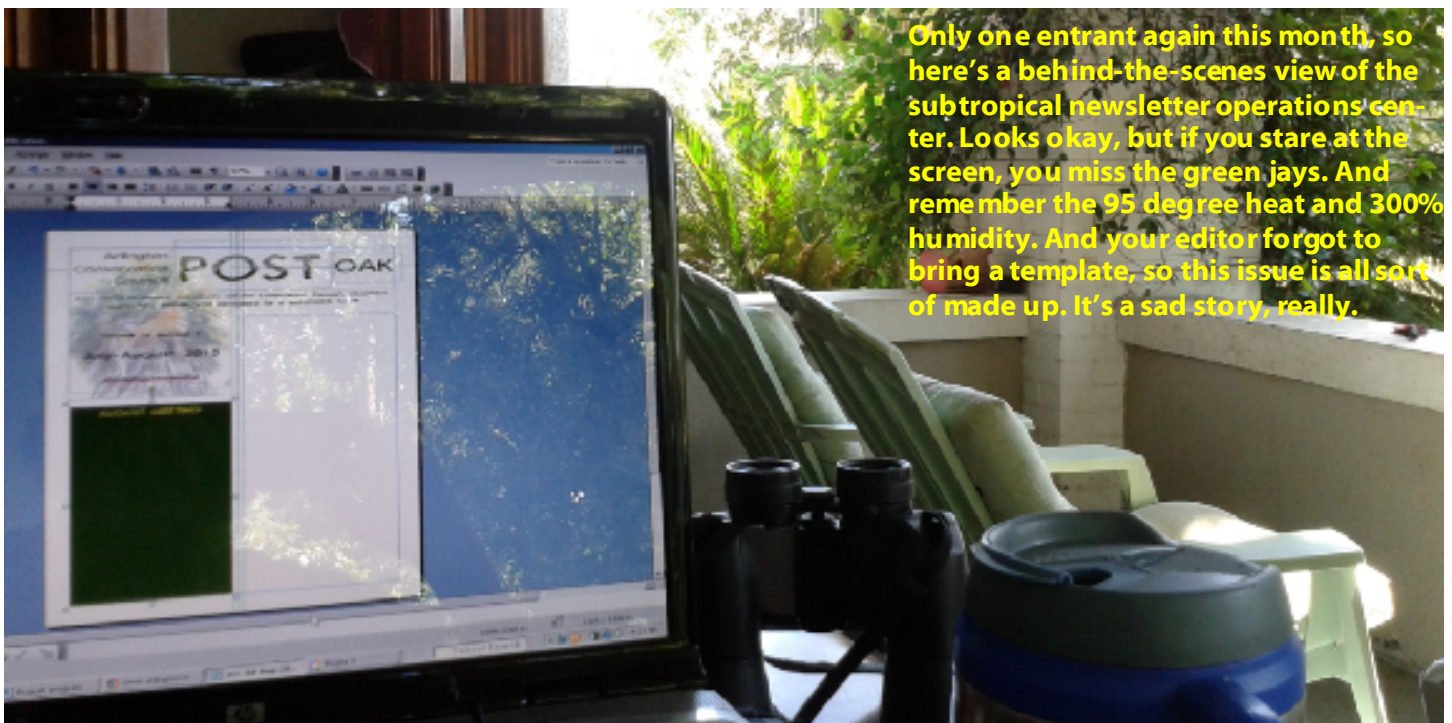
The Environmental Defense Fund surveyed all state highway departments on practices that might be changed to support milkweeds on their rights-of-way; the results are being summarized now.

The Natural Resources Defense Fund is working with the Illinois Tollway Board to establish a flyway along 268 miles of interstate on 700,000 acres in that state. The Texas I35 Flyway project is in the works, but the biggest lack is enough seeds.

The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center is working with volunteers to responsibly collect seed to provide to local nurseries to increase native milkweed plants available to the public and possibly for the flyway. If you want to collect seeds, contact the Center before sending them anything.

Norway is creating a "bee highway" to provide food for pollinators as they pass through urban areas. This is in addition to planting flowers along all highways outside cities. Norway's goal is a plot every 800 feet as shown on an interactive map that gardeners can use to enter their location. Wouldn't every 800 feet be about one out of four residential lots? That seems a worthy goal to keep Monarchs in our lives.

Photo of the Month: Suffering for You



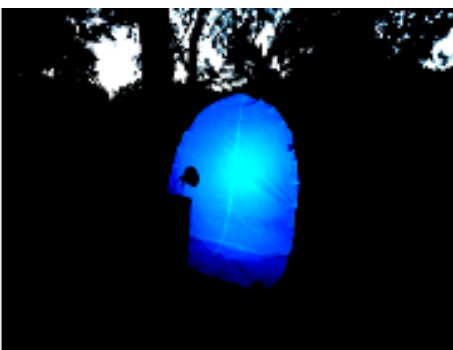
Only one entrant again this month, so here's a behind-the-scenes view of the subtropical newsletter operations center. Looks okay, but if you stare at the screen, you miss the green jays. And remember the 95 degree heat and 300% humidity. And your editor forgot to bring a template, so this issue is all sort of made up. It's a sad story, really.

Crystal Canyon Plant Walk & Moth Mania

On July 12, the formidable Master Naturalist Jim Varnum defied the heat and led a plant walk at Crystal Canyon Natural Area. As always, it was an inspiration to watch while Jim conveyed his botanical knowledge — and his keen interest — in plants of every description.



Moth Mania at Oliver Nature Park in Mansfield on July 17 featured a large crowd and two very talented people: Naturalist Sam Kieschnick and Dr Chuck Sexton from Austin. It was a beautiful evening and lots of fun, despite a general lack of cooperation by moths.



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

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Don't Forget!
Wednesday, August 5
Fielder Museum
7:00 - 8:00 pm

Smart Design for Hot-Humid Climates
A Video Presentation by
Peter Pfeiffer, F.A.I.A.