

ARLINGTON
CONSERVATION
COUNCIL

POST OAK

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MARCH 2018

WILDSCAPE ENTRANCE

Molly Hollar Wildscape at Veterans Park • Photo by Bob Brennan

March Meeting

Green features of the new Arlington Central Library and how its Sun Club will promote Arlington's sustainability

Yoko Matsumoto, Director of Libraries

Wednesday, March 7, 7:00 pm

Fielder Museum

1616 W. Abram Street (corner of Fielder and Abram)

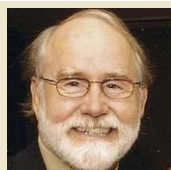
Imagine a library with a butterfly garden, an edible garden, a seed library, photovoltaic lighting, and more. This is what our new library is offering Arlington residents with the help of \$400,000 from Green Mountain Energy (GME) Sun Club.

It's the Sun Club's largest grant ever! Yoko will explain the green features of the library and its sustainable programs made possible by the GME Sun Club. The mission of the Sun Club is to enhance the quality of life through long-term, sustainable solutions that focus on people and the planet. Yoko's presentation will have you ready to enjoy your new library when it opens on June 9, 2018.



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From the President

Dick Schoech

Thanks to Jan Miller for leading ACC as President for the last 2 years. Her knowledge and energy set a high bar for me to follow. I will do my best, but will need help and support from our board and membership.

This column is where ACC presidents get to say what's on their minds. Here's what is on mine currently.

Are you tired of donating, writing letters, signing petitions, and protesting with seemingly little effect? That's the feeling I and many of my colleagues have. But rather than becoming disillusioned and bitter about the current lack of environmental progress at the state and federal level, take out your frustration by taking actions that benefit your neighbors and your community. Start by just getting outdoors several hours a month. Maybe stop watching a half hour of TV or computer screen each day. Simple options could be walking around your block several times a week and observe, talk to your neighbors, pick up trash, or plant a small garden of foolproof quick-growing food like spinach or kale. Adopt a shelter dog if you need that extra incentive to walk every day. A more involved option could be joining a local organization. While we prefer you join environmental organizations like ACC, Master Naturalists, Native Plant Society, or community gardens, your options are unlimited in Arlington. Our February speaker, Sarah Grella at [Texas Wildlife Association](#), presented some excellent ways to volunteer, gain the admiration of kids, and get a free meal in the process. If you are already actively involved, perhaps you could volunteer to take a leadership position in a program, for example, joining a board like ACC (we are always looking for good volunteers willing to help).

The best part of local action is that it is easy to see progress and it benefits your community as well as you. Research confirms that getting out with Mother Nature is as helpful as any talk therapy or drug. Getting out into nature with others makes you feel good physically and mentally, reduces your weight, improves your mood, reduces your dependence on pills, and benefits others around you. It's a win/win. If you're the social type, see what your friends are getting out and doing and join them.

Local organizations like ACC are needed now more than ever since our national and state governments are sacrificing the environment and sustainability of the planet to fund economic development. Organizations like ACC take the long view and work for future generations. Your children and future generations will appreciate your hard work for the environment when they are older, just as we appreciate city parks and other accomplishments by ACC members years ago. Books and articles always chronicle the hard work and many battles that were fought to save and promote the environment in Arlington.

Spring is the time for beautiful warm weather and greening landscapes and wildflowers. It is also the time to take stock of our accomplishments and gear up for more involvement. Make a resolve to give back to Mother Nature, or, as some call it, "give it forward to the next generations." We all can do a little more to benefit our environment and ourselves. So, get out, enjoy nature, give forward, and reap the re-



ACC POST OAK

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

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John Darling, Editor
ldarling@sbcglobal.net

Contributors

John Blair, Bob Brennan,
Grace Darling, John Darling,
Jan Miller, Wesley Miller,
Dick Schoech, Marylee Thomason

Proofreaders

Marian Hiler, Grace Darling

Deadline for submissions is the
15th of every preceding month.
Please send them to
ldarling@sbcglobal.net

Bits & Pieces

The Terse Treehugger

Tree good. Bag bad.



In Praise of Mess

As we think more and more about approaching spring, it's probably too late to consider the values for wildlife of a disorderly winter landscape. We received the email notice for the messy winter garden a while ago but might not have stopped to read the article. Well, we should, because it's an enjoyable lesson in helping backyard creatures effortlessly. And of course it's not too late at all to help our wild residents throughout the year with even a little mess, maybe just around the edges or in the quiet corners of our landscapes. As we look around at all those sterile yards we must wonder how (or if) the fence lizards, hoverflies, grass snakes, and swallowtails can possibly make a living. We know what to do.



Visit us on the Web
www.acctexas.org



Reminder

The ACC members email group is only for ACC business such as meeting announcements. The ACC Yahoo group is for general discussion of environmental and sustainable ideas and issues. To join the ACC Yahoo group, go to <http://www.acctexas.org/> and click on "Send/receive messages from our Yahoo group." This will take you to the ACC Yahoo group site (<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/arlingtonconservationcouncil/info>) where you can subscribe and unsubscribe under the Group Email Addresses heading.

**Join us and act locally.
Use the handy
application form
on the back page.**

AISD's New Agricultural Sciences Center



From MyArlingtonTX, posted Feb 20:

The district-wide Agricultural Science Center opened in November 2017 and is providing students from all AISD high schools a state-of-the-art facility for agricultural education and a place for agricultural science projects.

The 23,000-square foot building includes 54 flexi-

ble-fencing pens for goats and sheep, 14 heifer pens, rabbit pens, an animal exercise area, a metal construction lab and two classrooms.

As AISD's first net-zero facility, the Agricultural Science Center features solar panels, a wind turbine and rain water collection, allowing the facility to operate completely on its own energy production.

Question Corner John Darling

What's wrong with native plant landscaping? (Spoiler alert: No clear answer this month.) Virtually all of us might say, "Nothing, we should all do that." But do we? Drive through any Arlington neighborhood and estimate the percentage of yards with significant numbers of more-or-less native plants. What's your guess? Surely a lot less than 10 percent. Those of us who have embraced the many arguments in favor of native plant landscaping must be baffled by the clear lack of success.

The question was prompted by a thoughtful landscape architect who returned discouraged from a recent national conference where he heard only negativity on the topic from many prominent professionals. Apparently their objections were centered on aesthetic considerations that ignored environmental benefits. I wonder if it's just harder to get it right if you stray from the limited palette of standard exotics. If you google today's question, you tend to get results that ignore it and instead tout the benefits of natives. However, [one insightful exception](#) describes pitfalls in useful ways.

The topic has been festering ever since I read Michael Pollan's [negative article](#) a while ago. Beautiful writing. Hated almost every word. Okay, he's real smart, but does that make him right in rejecting and even vilifying the native plant movement? Or is he just a super-successful variant of Neil Sperry who doesn't want our landscapes to clash with neighborhood norms? (And who has spent a lot of recent ink on assorted pre-emergent herbicides.)

Surely there's one simple, practical argument for the landscapes I crave, one that even the most talented critics can't ignore: water. What will Pollan and Sperry grow in the coming years when our cities turn into [Cape Town](#)?

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shane@goetzlaw.com
Local: 817-274-2905
Metro: 817-265-2902
Fax: 817-861-8909
www.shanegoetzlaw.com

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Blackland Prairie Nature Preserve photos by Wes Miller



The Blackland Prairie Nature Preserve got its annual mowing, right on time, in mid-February. The timing was ideal: before the prolonged and heavy rains that left the prairie water-logged, and after the worst of winter's bitter cold (maybe).

Jan Miller



More Bits

Thanks to Our Last Speaker



ACC President Dick Schoech with Sarah Grella

Sarah Grella, North Texas Education Program Specialist from Texas Wildlife Association, spoke to us last month. Her topic was “Texas Wildlife Association and how you can get involved.”

Surely this must be the largest Texas wildlife organization that many of us hadn’t heard about before. We learned from Sarah’s wide-ranging presentation that TWA provides public programs for young hunters as well as in-the-field education for school children. These include popular units on aquatic invertebrates.

Sometimes we’re lucky enough to hear from a skilled presenter, and Sarah Grella is one of those — a public education specialist without a doubt.



SQUIRRELS AT MY WINDOW

Squirrels at my window
Wrap around the feeders,
Picking out the sunflower seeds
As if born for that.

And perhaps they were:
I’ve been feeding squirrels here
For thirty years.

I wonder what effect I’ve had
On squirrel society in my vicinity.

Squirrels evolved across millennia
To forage forests, scavenge shrubs,
But in a single generation
Learned these plastic tubes
Are restaurants, cafes —

Much as the local bobs
Have learned to like
The taste of puppies, cats,
So conveniently corralled
Behind suburban fence,

An unintended lesson
Made all the more effective
Since the student motivation
Mates hunger with convenience.

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Southwest Nature Preserve

Molly Hollar Wildscape Update Marylee Thomason



Left to right: Anne Alderfer, Molly Hollar, and Ann Knudsen

Molly Hollar turned 90 in February. Wildscape volunteers gave her a privet pull. She says winter is the best time to snare the wily weed since it's easy to spot in the mostly brown forest.

It was a cold, windy day, but when the word went out, everyone who could do so bundled up and hit the trail.

President John Kennedy urged the nation at his inauguration Jan. 20, 1961, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." Molly embodies that historic line. Doing what she can for her community (and inspiring others to join her) is one of the things she does best.

Sometime after the wildscape came to be, she was asked what she wanted for her birthday. She replied: help to eradicating privet, a persistent invasive plant that will shade out all undergrowth if allowed to go wild.

Response was enthusiastic, and it has been every year since.

In the invitation this year, Ann Knudsen e-mailed, "Celebrate 90 years of Molly Hollar at the annual Molly Hollar Privet Pull. Please honor this remarkable lady by joining the party. Removing this persistent invasive has always meant a great deal to Molly because it protects



Part of the City Hall plant rescue crew: Marylee Thomason, Kay Sekio, Teresa Day-Fickel, Ann Knudsen, Jane Oosterhuis, Carol Shinsky Marcotte

the wildscape from becoming a monoculture." Ann encouraged: "Take out all your aggressions on this bully of a plant, as well as the Japanese honeysuckle. It's truly a satisfying experience."



Molly Hollar with John Snowden

Local nurseryman and native grass expert John Snowden, a longtime friend of the wildscape, presented February's First Saturday mini-class. The surprise

topic was native grasses for the pocket prairie, a section that has been in the plans since the wildscape's inception. John brought a truck piled high with native grasses carefully selected for sun or shade exposure. Truck parked on the sidewalk, he identified the grasses and discussed height, size, color and bloom time in the new area.

Planting had to be delayed until Wednesday because of Molly's birthday party after the class. John agreed to come back to help lay out and plant the grasses.

That project was a party of its own with tales of mistaken identity and poison ivy. One of the best was about a father who was dragged to see the fort his son and other neighborhood children had built burrowed under a big stand of the stuff. Everyone laughed even as they cringed.

.....
Arlington intends some changes to City Hall that will engulf the current landscaping. Through Josephine Keeney, Wendy Pappas at the Parks Department invited wildscape volunteers to rescue as many plants as desired.

continued on page 9

Wildscape Update continued from page 8



More of our rescuers: Carol Shinsky Marcotte, Teresa Day-Fickel, Joe Martinez, Jane Oosterhuis, Josephine Keeney, and Larry Norris. Not pictured: Bill Fickel and Glenn Troutman.

Well! We not only showed up on the designated day with the required tools, but some rescuers even brought spouses.

A crew supplied by Parks Department loaded a large truck to the brim with plants stuffed into pots and many others bare-rooted. Josephine and the greenhouse gang immediately watered and prepared the lot for potting. Josephine's follow-up e-mail tells the story: "The City Hall plant rescue was a great success. We saved many plants that would otherwise have been wasted.

I don't know how many plants we rescued, but it was a lot."

In other good news, the city does not see a problem getting repair and replacement of kiosks and signs around the wildscape completed within a year, in agreement with the grant from the Arlington Tomorrow Foundation. The new wood frames for the kiosks should last 10 years.

The city of Arlington and wildscape volunteers make a great team.



The Real Fox News Grace Darling



I am moved to shine a spotlight on foxes in Arlington because this group of mammals, like squirrels, raccoons, and opossums, is close to my heart. I am attracted to the foxes' dog-like features, their denning habit, secretive nature, and intelligent expression; I find them irresistible.

But first, let us be clear. Two species of foxes supposedly occur in North Central Texas: the red fox, *Vulpes vulpes*, he of the dark forelegs and white tail tip, and the gray fox, *Urocyon cinereoargenteus*, with a blackish mark on the sides of its muzzle and a black tip to the tail. Although red foxes are theoretically possible in Tarrant County, in fact not a single specimen has been documented anywhere in the DFW Metroplex for many years, according to *The Mammals of Texas* and to iNaturalist. So any fox you are lucky to see will almost certainly be a gray fox.

Unlike its red cousin, which is a European native introduced to this country "for purposes of sport"

around 1895, the gray fox is indigenous to the New World. A carnivore of the family Canidae, it is kin to wolves, coyotes, and dogs. Davis and Schmidly describe him thus:

"The gray fox is essentially an inhabitant of wooded areas, particularly mixed hardwood forests. It is common throughout the wooded sections east of the shortgrass plains and in the pinyon-juniper community above the low lying deserts.

This fox is adept at climbing trees, particularly if they are leaning or have branches within 3 m of the ground, and it is not unusual for it to use this escape device when pursued by hounds. Contrary to common belief, gray foxes are not strictly animals of the night, but they are much more active then. They have been observed on many occasions in the daytime under conditions that suggested they were foraging.

Gray foxes usually den in crevices in the rocks, in underground burrows, under rocks, in hollow logs, or in hollow trees. In eastern Texas, one was

found denning about 10 m above the ground in a large hollow oak. In central Texas, a den was found in a hollow live oak with the entrance about 1 m above the ground. Two unusual den sites which have been documented include a pile of wood and a field of sorghum into which a fox had 'tunneled.'

The gray fox is omnivorous; the food varies with season and availability. Based upon the stomach contents of 42 foxes from Texas, the winter food consisted chiefly of small mammals (cottontails, cotton rats, pocket gophers, pocket mice), 56%; followed by insects, largely grasshoppers, 23%; and birds (doves, quail, sparrows, blackbirds, towhees), 21%. In the spring the diet was but slightly changed In late summer and fall, persimmons and acorns led with 30%; insects, 26%; small mammals, 16%; birds, 14%; crayfish, 14%.

In Texas, the breeding season begins in December and continues on into March. Most females captured in March and April are gravid. Three to six pups are born in April or May after a gestation period of about 53 days. At first they are blind and helpless, but they grow rapidly and soon leave the home nest, possibly because of the heavy infestation of fleas characteristic of such nests. Then they seek shelter in rock piles, under rocks, in piles of brush, or in other sites that offer concealment and protection.

Of some interest is the possible relationship between gray foxes and coyotes. In sections of Texas where coyotes formerly were numerous, the gray fox was scarce; now, after elimination of the coyote, the gray fox has become abundant.

Gray foxes are thought to live six to 10 years in the wild. Major factors causing mortality include predation, parasites, diseases, and man."

Southwest Nature Preserve Jan Miller

Friends of SWNP Monthly Meeting

Free and open to the public

Tuesday, March 20

Informal Class on iNaturalist

In advance of the City Nature Challenge in April, we'll review how to use the iNaturalist app to record observations. Please bring your phone, and be sure you have downloaded the free iNaturalist app before the meeting

West Arlington Police Service Center Community Room

2060 W Green Oaks Blvd, Arlington, TX 76013

Parking is available in front of the building via Ron McAndrew Drive

For more information about Southwest Nature Preserve, see www.swnp.org or e-mail info@swnp.org.

Coming Up

Saturday, March 24, 8:00 am

SWNP

Bird Walk with Walt Berk

Walt Berk has been birding in this area for the past 23 years and has taught birding classes at TCC and at SWNP. He will guide us as we look for birds at SWNP, hoping to catch some of the spring migration as well as some of the year-round residents.

Saturday, April 14: UTA's Big Event at SWNP

Tuesday, April 17, 7:00 pm

April program meeting

"Scat & Tracks: What Animals Leave Behind"

Kayleigh Medeiros (Audubon Conservation Treks Manager for the State and Academic Programs Manager for Trinity River Audubon Center) will be discussing animal evidence, specifically scat and tracks. Participants will learn how to safely examine scat and how to identify it. We will then discuss the tracks of an animal; participants will discover where to look for tracks, the parts of a track, and how to measure. Held in the Community Room at the West Arlington Police Station.

Friday – Monday, April 27-30 (Date & Time TBD): City Nature Challenge at SWNP

Saturday, May 5, 10:00 am

Tree Walk with Jeremy Priest

SWNP

Jeremy Priest (Forester for the city of Arlington) will lead a walk along the trails, identifying trees with a focus on historic trees. One of our post oaks may be 200 years old.

Update: Pollinator/Restoration Project

The winter wheat cover crop is germinating and some of the wildflower seed may also be starting to emerge. We know that re-establishing a functional grassland for pollinators and other critters won't happen this year (it'll take several), but it's still exciting. Planting Day #3 is still on hold due to all that rain in February. As soon as soil dries enough we'll plant potted milkweed and grasses, hopefully before weather gets too warm. We'll also be making seedballs and chopping non-native invasive weeds.

Late Winter at SW Nature Preserve photos by Grace Darling



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

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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 e-mail and the ACC Web site.

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POST OAK

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**Green features of the new Arlington Central Library
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