

**ARLINGTON
CONSERVATION
COUNCIL**

POST OAK

VOLUME 22, NUMBER 3

APRIL 2021

BLACKLAND PRAIRIE SITE • MARCH 28, 2021 • PHOTO BY GUY RANDOM

April Zoom Meeting
Texas Blackland Prairie: Past, Present, Future
Brandon Belcher,
North Texas Preserves Manager, The Nature Conservancy
Wednesday, April 7, 6:30 p.m.

Did you miss this great talk?
Watch it any time by clicking on [this link](#).

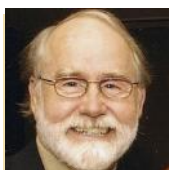
Brandon Belcher manages five North Texas preserves and more than a dozen conservation easements for The Nature Conservancy. His focus is protecting and maintaining grasslands, including remnant prairielands. Conservation of these rare ecosystems is accomplished through partnerships with private land owners, other nongovernmental organizations, and local cities and counties, as well as state and federal agencies.



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From the President

Dick Schoech

Spring is here. Take advantage of it.

Ah, SPRING! A time of energy and renewal. Spring brings some of the best Texas weather, plus folks have a lot of pent-up energy. They are Zoom-fatigued and want to interact face to face (F2F) with other people and with Mother Nature. It feels so good to be outside.

This spring is special because environmentalists have a newfound optimism. Vaccines are providing a path out of the pandemic. The “old normal” is coming back but enhanced by what we learned during the pandemic. For example, the ACC board is exploring a return to our traditional F2F meetings at the Fielder House but also Zooming them to those unable to attend physically.

We need to build on other lessons. We learned that systems such as healthcare are fragile and we must continue the respect and appreciation of essential heroes willing to risk their lives to help us. We learned that people have a very strong need to see and touch others and that some will risk catching the virus to interact. We learned that denying science-based solutions does not solve the problems our planet and its people face. We learned that working together cooperatively is one of the best ways to solve complex problems.

Spring demonstrates that native plants survive much better than non-natives following a February deep freeze and even come back with a vengeance. Nature experts are predicting a spectacular wildflower season. Like native plants, people seem ready to blossom. If you don't feel this new enthusiasm, get outside to find it. Visit your local park or the pollinator gardens that Josephine Keeney and her crew have worked on all winter. Google “DFW wildflowers” to find displays like those at Tandy Hills Natural Area and Stella Rowan Prairie.

Plan a day trip or overnight campout. Google “Texas Outdoor Family” to easily find a campsite and take advantage of camping gear they loan. Take some kids with you. Solid research proves that getting out in nature improves our mental health about as well or often better than pills or therapy. Start that long-planned project like a raised garden bed

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

Bits & Pieces

The terse treehugger

Crossvine's coming back.

So are many other natives (and near natives). That's good.

But some big places are replanting exotics that froze. Huh?

Wake up.



visit us on the web
www.acctexas.org

Just another darned environmentalist

From the Star-Telegram, April 4:

"We've had clear cutting on other properties before. Crickets. Nothing. And for some reason, this one because it's right next to their precious Oak Harbor neighborhood...if it was anywhere else, they wouldn't care."

Tom Muir, Azle city manager, commenting on reaction to loss of forest cleared from 97 acres for homesites.

Probably not related to that other Muir.



Lyreleaf sage pushing through oak leaves.

Wanted: Still in Arlington?

Thirteen-lined ground squirrels ought to be out of hibernation (about 240 days/year!) and looking for seeds and bugs in our golf courses, cemeteries, and parks. But [Chris Jackson](#) noted a while back that he hadn't seen any for some time. The population is said to have declined dramatically in Central Texas. Have you noticed any here recently? Please let me know at 1darling@sbcglobal.net. Thanks.



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



Question Corner John Darling

Q: Can you manage a serious question for a change? Today on Abram Street I saw a crew excavating for one of those sidewalks to nowhere. They had already cut some big roots of a post oak at the Fielder House Museum and were just starting to dig more or less near a huge post oak on a vacant lot just to the east. Everybody already knows post oaks can't stand soil compaction, but in this case they're not doing that; they're cutting roots. What's going to happen to them?

A: Serious? Sure, just watch and learn. The first step is to say I don't know, then obfuscate freely. Let's begin with hope. It's encouraging that they are not driving heavy equipment on the soil under those trees. Also in terms of hope, at Fielder House and the vacant lot, nobody appears to be watering or fertilizing. All the big horticulture guys have one post oak rule: Leave. Them. Alone. There's mowing in both spots, but we can

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Fielder House post oak closest to new sidewalk. Circle shows location of two large severed roots.

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Hours 10 - 6 Mon - Fri,
9 - 6 Sat, 12 - 5 Sun



Redbud unfazed by the recent arctic blast.

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Thanks A.C.C. for working to conserve Arlington's natural resources.

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From the President continued from page 3

or an herb garden of basil, parsley and cilantro in a sunny window. Even tackling a spring-cleaning project can lift one's spirit. Buy a few native plants at the many local sales to replace the non-natives that bit the dust during the harsh winter freeze.

Many other ways exist to celebrate the energy of spring. Go for a walk with someone you haven't seen for a while. Southwest Nature Preserve, OS Gray, Randol Mill Park, and others have natural areas with dirt paths that immerse you into nature. To enhance the good feeling, pick up trash or pull some small invasive plants along the way. Yet another way to feel good is to vote in the May 1 election for environment-friendly candidates. Since feeling good is contagious, do a random act of kindness (word or deed) for a friend or stranger. You can probably think of many more ways to celebrate spring.

I'm optimistic. I feel better after writing this column than most previous president's messages over the last year. I'm going outside now to plant datura, agarita, and tomatoes.



It's **Past** Time to Pay Your Dues

Please make us bigger so we can be better.

ACC's size is important when voicing members' environmental interests and concerns to municipal policymakers on issues such as new gas wells.

Plus, it will just make you feel better to increase ACC's environmental voice in Arlington.

See the last page of this newsletter for information on submitting your 2021 dues.

Through with writing checks? You can now pay your dues via PayPal.

Paypal.me/ACCtexas

Randol Mill Park Carol Marcotte

The pond is alive and doing well. I was troubled by the year-long dredging project, but signs of life abound. Even after the freezing temps in February, the pond seems to be thriving.

Pulling trash from the creek and pond is an ongoing activity. Organized by Joanne Stewart, Neighbors of Randol Mill Park volunteers held clean-ups on March 6 and April 5. Josephine Keeney was there, giving out information on the pollinator garden. The garden as well as the bluebird nest boxes are part of a grant from Fort Worth Audubon Society. The bluebird nest boxes are being monitored twice per week. One box has a bluebird nest under construction. Our fingers are crossed for complete success.

Dick Schoech, Wayne Halliburton, and I have been busy pulling privet from the nature area in recent weeks. We also cut back overgrown shrubs along the Oakwood Street sidewalk.

Bur oaks, possumhaw, elderberry, and bald cypress have been planted in the nature area and around the pond.



It's not just the start of spring, it's the relief we feel seeing all those animals that rely on our pond for a living. Somehow animals above and below the water have survived. Some noted critters: red-eared slider, *left*, great egret and mallards, *below*, dragonfly nymph, *right*.

Also seen recently: ring-necked duck, crayfish, snapping turtles, leopard frogs, and dragonflies.



Dick Schoech, left, and volunteer Jim Roe discuss a prototype bluebird nest box.

In Case You Missed It Grace Darling

The local environmental news is decidedly upbeat. Late last month, the Arlington Citizens Environmental Committee issued its [2020 annual report](#), which includes a number of recommendations for expanding the urban tree canopy and suggestions for strengthening the [recently amended Tree Preservation and Mitigation ordinance](#). Among our favorites: to “include trees as a part of storm water runoff and erosion mitigation tools in capital improvement projects”; incorporate “trees in the design of new or rebuilt street and sidewalk projects”; aggressively educate property owners on the many ecological, financial, and health benefits of trees; and publicize tools for calculating the dollar value of individual trees over time, with emphasis on preserving large native specimens. Fingers crossed that



city leaders will embrace these ideas before too long.

At about the same time, the Arlington City Council unanimously approved an amendment to the city’s [gas drilling ordinance](#) affecting the minimum distance required between new gas wells and protected areas, known in the oil and gas industry as setback

requirements. Hospitals, homes, and schools fall under the city’s “protected uses,” but the latest amendment only applies to day care centers. Under the amended ordinance, operators in Arlington will be required to measure 600 feet between the day care building or the area designated for a playground. Whichever is closest to the drilling zone will be used as the boundary line, according to the amendment proposal. Marvin Sutton, District 3 council member who brought the issue to the city’s municipal policy committee, said he hopes Arlington is able to further test the limits of HB 40, a state law that limits localities’ ability to impose tougher restraints on companies than those required by state restrictions. [*Star-Telegram*, March 31, 2021]

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In Case You Missed It continued from page 8

In remote Patagonia, the indigenous Mapuche tribe is paying a high price for Argentina's effort to overcome its financial collapse [*The Guardian*, 14 Oct 2019]. Fracking accidents happen regularly in Vaca Muerta (Dead Cow in Spanish), one of the world's largest shale oil and gas reservoirs. In 2018 alone, there were an estimated 934 incidents at 95 wells. There have been leaks from drilling sites, and claims from local people of water pollution and increased ill health affecting them and their livestock. But Argentina's leaders see a bigger picture. They believe the shale reservoir can rescue the country from its ongoing economic crises. "This province will transform us into a world power," said former President Mauricio Macri, referring to the nearly 2,000 fracking wells that have been drilled there since the discovery of the deposits was announced in 2011. The oil companies say their work does not contaminate water sources because it occurs 3,000 meters (9,850 ft) below ground, while the water tables are at a depth of only 200 meters. But Mapuche elders claim the problem is not seepage from below, but from above. "They drilled about 400 wells, contaminating everything. They dug pits next to the wells where they dumped the waste

without any treatment and threw limestone on it to cover it up. Greed is killing the world."

5 May 2020 Update: Fracking activity in Argentina's Vaca Muerta shale play slowed to zero in May, as low demand, low prices, and limited storage capacity discouraged new developments [*S&P Global, Platts*]. It is uncertain how long it will take for demand to recover.

Just happening: Closer to home, the governor of [Florida](#), Ron DeSantis, declared a state of emergency after a significant leak at a large pond at the old Piney Point phosphate mine threatened to burst a system that stores water polluted with radioactive materials [*The Guardian*, 3 April 2021]. The pond sits in a stack of phosphogypsum, a waste product from manufacturing fertilizer that is radioactive. It contains small amounts of naturally occurring radium and uranium. The stacks can also release large concentrations of radon gas.

This is not the first time the state has confronted a gypsum-related environmental disaster: In 2016, more than 200 million gallons of contaminated waste water from another fertilizer plant in central Florida leaked into one of the state's main aquifers after a massive sinkhole opened up in a pond of a phosphogypsum stack. Officials this time brought in rocks and materials to plug the hole but were unsuccessful. "We are talking about the potential of about 600 million gallons within a matter of seconds and minutes leaving that retention pool and going around the surrounding area," said one administrator. A Manatee county commissioner said he was at the plant with other officials and had to clear the area quickly. "We determined that it was no longer safe to be anywhere near Piney Point, so we all kind of raced off the stacks as fast as we could."



Question Corner continued from page 5

suppose that even big mowers don't compact the soil much. If they did, that oak near Jimat could not have lasted over 100 years.

It's hard to find out how far the shallow roots of post oaks spread out from the trunk. Probably far beyond the dripline. The sidewalk digging is happening under the driplines of the oaks, so at least some of the Jimat oak roots are being cut. It's always the same question: How much damage can you get away with? At our house we lost two post oaks that were closest to the street months after we moved in. We didn't understand it until we learned that the street had been widened a couple of years earlier. Post oaks generally don't die right away, so if this sidewalk is a tree killer, we won't know for a while. Meanwhile, all we have is hope, refuge of the



Two large post oak roots severed for a sidewalk on north edge of Fielder House Museum property.



Excavation for the sidewalk on the south side of West Abram Street near Jimat Drive. The post oak in the background is shown below.



The remarkable post oak on the south side of West Abram Street just east of Jimat Drive.

Blackland Prairie Site Guy Random



Did we doubt that uncountable multitude of roots and seeds under the snow? A lot of this delicate greenery works on genetic memory that knows 10,000 years of weather.



Molly Hollar Wildscape Update Marylee Thomason

*I think that I have never seed
A weed that I didn't need
To snatch up by the roots before
It disperses millions more!*

It is a battle royale at the wildscape every spring. Ann Knudsen alternately prods and encourages, saying she is sure that this year we're getting the weeds early enough to prevent reseeding.

The best thing about the wildscape is always the camaraderie. Last month it netted a good joke delivered with an appropriate pause. "I always knock on the door to the refrigerator before I open it (pause) because I never know if salad's dressing."

From Katie Thomason came a response via cellphone. It works best if you add the drama. "Mwahaha! I hope there aren't any peeping Tom-atoes."

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*We work when the boss is near ...
(Ann Knudsen, left, and Robin Agee weeding along sidewalk)*



*... but play when she is not!
(Robin Agee sitting in flowerbed playing on her phone)*



Back to front, Jane Oosterhuis, Ramona Gratton, and Carol Marcotte brave a cold morning to pull offending shoots from around more desirable plants.

Wildscape Update continued from page 12



Even the First Saturday volunteers are assigned weeding tasks. Denise Pederson, left, and Kay Sekio consult each other about what is and is not a weed.



Josephine Keeney gathers bucketsful of weeds for the greenhouse compost pile.



Joe Martinez detests weeding, so Ann saves him for special projects. He eagerly relieved the poor prickly pear of its dead pods. Waiting to see if his work is appreciated or if the cactus resents its haircut.

Elections Coming Up Grace Darling

Arlington will be holding elections for mayor and city council representatives for districts 3, 4, 5 and 8 on
Saturday, May 1, 7 am to 7 pm,
with early voting opportunities in April as follows:

April 19 – 23 Monday- Friday 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

April 24 Saturday 7:00 am – 7:00 pm

April 25 Sunday 11:00 am – 4:00 pm

April 26 – 27 Monday – Tuesday 7:00 am – 7:00 pm

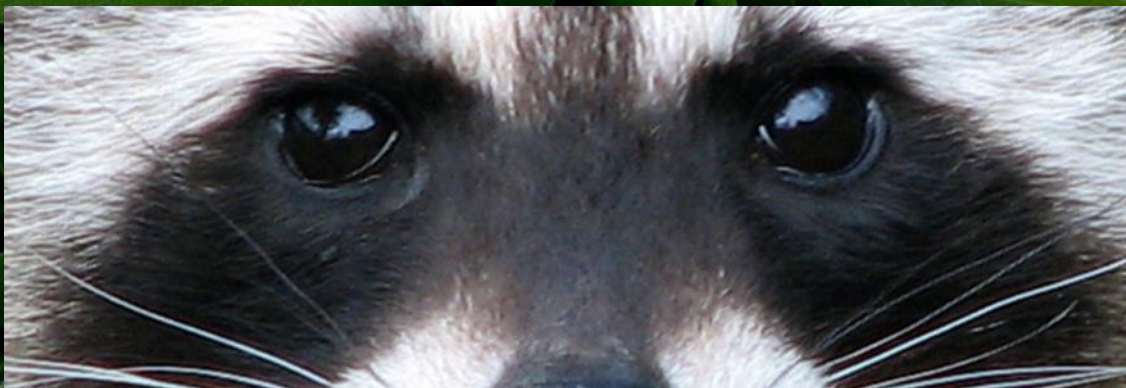
Your board of directors has prepared a set of questions designed to gauge the candidates' familiarity with issues important to our members and how they would vote if they were to be elected. The responses will be published on our website, [ACCTexas.org](https://www.acctexas.org), and on our Facebook group page as soon as received. A Google search will also help inform your vote in each case.



The Watchdog Needs You

watchdog@acctexas.org

**We try hard, but we can't keep up with every environmental thing.
So if you see something we should know about,
email a message to the watchdog.**



The Pond and Poem Page

SPRING 2021

After bitter cold
And seeming endless nights
Spring has come again.

Goldfinches galore
On their journey north
Are flocking to my feeders.

Bluejays hop around
In the holly hedge
Questing for a nest site.

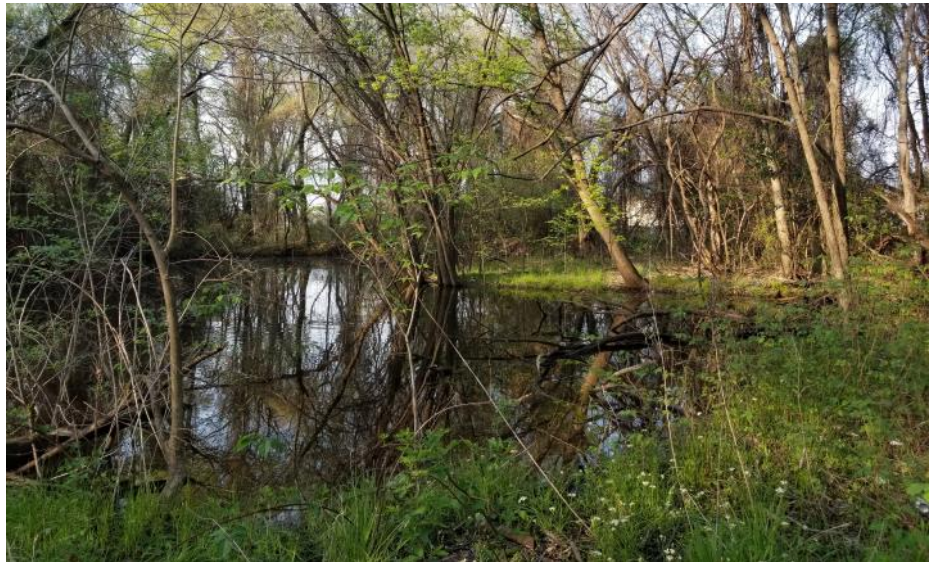
The ancient quince
Out by the garden shed
Sports crimson blooms.

Squirrels chase each other
Through the treetops,
Mating on their minds.

Cats yawn and stretch
On warm windowsills,
Blinking at the sunshine.

And I, at 80 years,
Still cherish thoughts
Of planting flowers once more.

©2021 John I. Blair,
3/20/2021



Whatever happened to the battered but environmentally valuable land on Mayfield near Cooper? Nothing yet. It seems to be caught up in that real estate game where investors buy, announce big plans, then sell and sell again. Meanwhile, people who think Arlington needs every pond and bit of ragged green space that's left can only watch and wonder what the players will do next.

Pay your ACC dues today.

(Application form on the last page.)

Why?

We're all counting on YOU.

And lots of us are cute.



Southwest Nature Preserve Annabelle Corboy, Jim Frisinger, Jan Miller

Friends of SWNP Events & Programs

Friends of SWNP events and programs are free and open to the public.

For more information about Southwest Nature Preserve and to sign up for email updates, see www.swnp.org or email info@swnp.org.

Friends meetings, programs and activities continue to be on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. You will enjoy much more about the preserve when you take a look at the [December newsletter](#).

Upcoming Programs hosted by Friends of SWNP

Saturday, April 10, 8 am at SWNP - Birdsong Walk



Learn to ID birds by their calls at the preserve.

Charley Amos will guide us in our April 10 bird walk to ID birds using their calls. "I'm primarily a birder," he says. But he's also a curious sort. "I also go nuts trying to put a name on everything that I see. I'm tired of just making up names so I became a member of the Cross Timbers Master Naturalist Class of 2015."

A frequent visitor to the Southwest Nature Preserve, Charley has posted more than 600 sightings on iNaturalist here.

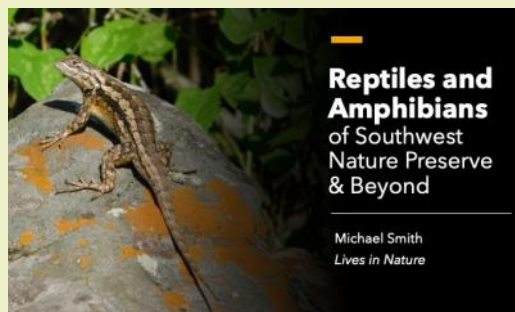
The bird walk begins at 8 am, Saturday, April 10. Gather in the parking lot of the preserve at 5201 Bowman Springs, Arlington. The walk is free and open to the public. No sign-up needed. Plan to wear a mask, bring binoculars and dress appropriately.

Tuesday, April 20, 7 pm via ZOOM - Reptiles and Amphibians of SW Nature Preserve and Beyond

Michael Smith is the author of two books on herps: *Herping Texas: The Quest for Reptiles and Amphibians*, authored with Clint King, and *The Wild Lives of Reptiles and Amphibians: A Young Herpetologist's Guide*

We will have photos and stories of the frogs and toads, turtles, lizards and snakes found at the preserve and in the surrounding area. Get answers to questions like, "where can you find them" and "are they harmful or helpful?"

We will include some information about venomous snakes, even though they have not been seen at the preserve.



[Access the meeting via this ZOOM link](#), or find the link at swnp.org

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Southwest Nature Preserve continued from page 16

Sunday, May 2, 7 pm at SWNP - a Yucca Moth Evening Walk

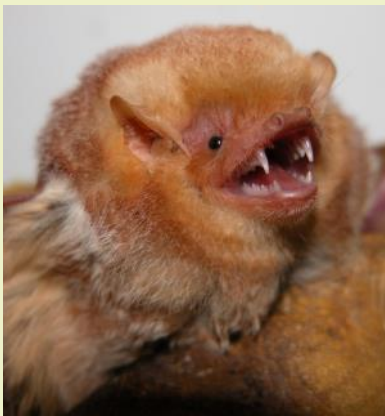
Grace and John Darling will lead us on a walk through SWNP with emphasis on finding some active yucca moths. There is an extraordinary partnership between the yucca moth and the yucca plant. They are so interdependent that one cannot live without the other.

The yucca moth is a non-descript, small, whitish moth that blends well with the color of the yucca blossoms where it spends most of its brief adult life. Males and females emerge from the ground in the spring, timed with the blossoming of the yucca plant. The best time to find the moths is around dusk or later.



Yucca moth

Tuesday, May 18, 7 pm at SWNP – Bats of the Area and How to Find Them



Eastern red bat

Local bat experts Ellen Ravkind and Anne Alderfer, along with Kate Rugroden from the Bat World Sanctuary will provide the program. Kate will speak first, showing some of her bat friends. Then Ellen will educate us on the echolocation devices from Wildlife Acoustics (Echo Meter Touch 2) as a prologue to Ellen and Anne's leading a hike looking for bats. Check www.swnp.org for further details as we get closer to the date.

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Southwest Nature Preserve continued from page 17

SWNP iNaturalist Observations and Species

Since December (January - March 31, 2021) iNaturalist has recorded 144 species from 295 observations by 18 observers. That's a little lower than last year at the start of the pandemic, when we had 340 observations by 21 observers.

Totalling all the observations in iNaturalist through 3-31-2021, we have records on 1,045 species from 7,775 observations! And we keep finding more, in fact there were 9 new species observed – a couple of these had multiple observers. Photos for some are attached.

Eupeodes volucris, Large-tailed Aphideater by annikaml
Leiothlypis celata, Orange crowned warbler by joshmols
Lynx rufus, Bobcat by joshmols
Passerculus sandwichensis, Savannah sparrow by sydneydragon
Penthimia americana, a leafhopper by annikaml
Pleurotus dryinus, Veiled oyster fungus by pynklynx
Sphyrapicus varius, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker by joshmols
Spinus pinus, Pine siskin by joshmols
Stiretrus anchorago, Anchor stink bug by annikaml Photo

In addition to these new species sightings, we are beginning to see some of our favorite signs of spring:

continued on page 19



Large-tailed aphideater



Savannah sparrow



Eastern bluebird



Texas paintbrush



Coral honeysuckle



Yellow-bellied sapsucker



Sandyland bluebonnet



Mexican buckeye



Anchor stink bug

Southwest Nature Preserve continued from page 18

Reviving a Cross Timbers Prairie Under Way

Can volunteers at the Southwest Nature Preserve restore the former glory of a Cross Timbers prairie in Arlington? A hardy crew launched the initiative in March during a reconnaissance field trip. They marked invasive species for later removal. The aim was to learn more about removal techniques and survey the grassland to develop long-term land management policies to revive this habitat.

The preserve is in the Eastern Cross Timbers, known for its ecotones — the intersection between upland post oak forests and prairie habitat. Invasive species — both natives and non-natives — are encroaching on the prairie after a century of fire suppression and the end of ranching on the site decades ago. Of particular concern are such invasive species as Chinaberry, Chickasaw plum, honey locust, sumac, and mesquite, which can outcompete desirable native species that make up the prairie ecosystem.

This prairie is home to two treasured species preserve volunteers want to protect. One is the preserve's healthy collection of Glen Rose yucca. They are unique to only four counties in the country, all in Texas, according to the National Resource Conservation Service Plant Database.

Also of concern is preserving the health of some very old post oaks — once the kings of the post oak savanna here. These include the Caddo Oak, a 200-year-old post oak, given historic status in 2019 by the Texas Historic Tree Coalition. These oaks are threatened by nearby woody species, which compete for water during stressful droughts. In addition, the leaf litter from Chinaberries, which crowd around several of these oaks, changes the soil chemistry.

This is a long-term effort, led by volunteers with the Friends of Southwest Nature Preserve, in partnership with the City of Arlington Parks & Recreation.

Left, Kim Courtney marks an invasive Chinaberry for removal near one of the old oaks in the prairie ecotone of the Southwest Nature Preserve. Center, The rare Glen Rose yucca, with its white-bordered leaves and curly strings, has a home at the Southwest Nature Preserve. Right, Jim Domke and Lynn Healy remove a large vine to help protect a big oak in the Eastern Cross Timbers.



ARLINGTON CONSERVATION COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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POST OAK

Arlington Conservation Council
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Arlington, TX 76004-0216

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Watch it any time by clicking on [this link](#).