

ARLINGTON  
CONSERVATION  
COUNCIL

# POSTOAK

WORKING TO CONSERVE ARLINGTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES

VOLUME 9, NUMBER 10

NOVEMBER 2008

Note Meeting Place & Time:  
Montessori Academy,  
6:30 pm

[www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org](http://www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org)

## November Meeting Growing Our Membership

### Program:

Who we are, what we do, and how much  
your friend(s) would enjoy joining us

Wednesday, November 12, 6:30 pm  
Montessori Academy  
3428 W. Arkansas Lane

It's our first fall community awareness  
drive, and we hope you'll be there with a  
friend. We'll provide light dinner selec-  
tions, desserts, and beverages.

All memberships expire January 1st.  
It's time to renew,  
so do it today.  
We need every one of you.

## Bits & Pieces

### The Eating of the Shrew

We seldom encounter one of our smallest local mammals, the 3-inch-long Least shrew. Yet they must be unbelievably common: Some time ago a student studying Great horned owl pellets found that they ate great numbers of these tiny insectivores. So how can a 3-pound owl afford to spend time and energy catching creatures that weigh less than a nickel each? Least shrews must be abundant and really easy to catch. The owls are eating them like popcorn.



### Today's Inspirational Moment

Drive Nature forth by force, she'll turn and rout  
The false refinements that would keep her out.  
Horace, *Odes*

### Leaf Recycling Dropoff Sites

Beginning November 14, bagged leaves may be recycled by taking them to one of four collection sites listed below, free of charge. Arlington residents only.

- Water South Service Center - 1100 SW Green Oaks Blvd.
- UTA baseball parking lot on Mitchell Street east of Fielder Rd.
- JW Dunlop Park - 1500 NW Green Oaks Blvd.
- Bowman Springs Park - 7003 Poly Webb Rd.

### Winter Butterflies



It's an odd time to be thinking about butterflies, especially after a warm season in which we saw so few. But we do have some interesting species during winter. Keep your eyes open on mild days and you may see American snouts (left) and a number of other hardy species.

Learn more about our winter butterflies in the November issue of the North Central Chapter Native Plant Society of Texas newsletter at [txnativeplants.org](http://txnativeplants.org).

# From the President John Darling



A while ago, someone who works in an office building asked if I could pick up her office's coffee grounds for use at the UTA compost site. As

we talked, she thought about all the coffee pots scattered throughout that building. Maybe she could organize a way to collect lots of coffee grounds.

Sounded good to me because we always need more nitrogen in the piles, but we don't want to drive a lot, and we do want to get big globs of compostable nitrogen at every daily stop. Maybe I should have known what would happen. After e-mails and meetings, the idea just couldn't work.

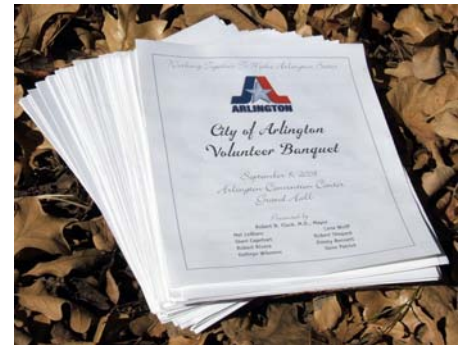
Little issues grew into big ones: Who would be responsible for each pot's grounds? What about flies and roaches and malingering fungi? Spontaneous combustion? Ebola? Creeping socialism? Complications poured out of the

woodwork, and a simple idea died a slow bureaucratic death.

I thought about this the other day when city staffers visited the compost site. They were working toward sustainable practices within our city government, so they seemed automatically virtuous to me. I assured them at length that compost was the obvious way to postpone the looming environmental apocalypse. But when I paused for breath, someone stumped me with a simple question. Something like, "If I were in their shoes, what kind of practical things would I do to make city government greener?"

I was stumped for two reasons: They already knew about the obvious things. And I thought of the coffee clash — how it resembled a tiny tugboat trying to turn an ocean liner. Maybe the more people, the bigger the organization, the harder it is to change anything. (Is it possible that everybody but me already knows this?)

I guess that's why it's so easy to do the little things that admittedly have little impact. At a city event in September I noticed programs left on tables everywhere, so I picked up 56 of them



for recycling. How easy it was (except for the odd looks) for me. How much harder, I wonder, would it be to organize city staff to do the same thing there and at every event where something can be recycled?

## THE POST OAK

Published 10 times a year by the Arlington Conservation Council  
P.O. Box 216, Arlington TX 76004-0216.  
[www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org](http://www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org)

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## New York Avenue Blackland Prairie Park Jan Miller



Well, doesn't that stand out like a sore thumb?

Sometimes things just stand out from the background... just don't look right somehow. That was

the case earlier this month when a volunteer noticed that a load of brush had been dumped at Arlington's New York Avenue Blackland Prairie. Apparently someone finally got sick of their red tip photinia hedge and some sickly boxwood and euonymus shrubs, so they cut down the whole mess, then dumped it at a convenient, but really, really wrong spot.

Well, all that stuff was out of place with the bluestem, Maximilian sunflowers, and asters, at least until volunteers moved it. But it also demonstrated the biodiversity difference between urban landscapes and natural ones: The dumped mess consisted of the three shrub types, then for comparison let's add a couple of trees, grass, weeds and a few ornamental flower species (likely all non-native) for maybe a dozen total for the urban landscape. In contrast, over 120 plant species have been counted (so far) at our native blackland prairie. Typically, blackland prairies host 200-300 plant species, so it's quite likely they're not all recorded yet.

The high degree of plant diversity typical of blackland prairies is primarily based on the types of soil. In our North Central Texas area that was once mostly prairie, the major types are:

**Vertisols** (think 'vertical' or rising soil) are rich, highly fertile black clays that swell and shrink depending on moisture. Gilgai are characteristic.

**Mollisols** are rich and fertile, but less so than vertisols and generally more shallow and also more stable.

**Alfisols** are less fertile clays with more sand. They are found along rivers and creeks, especially along the eastern side of the blackland region and along the Red River. Mima mounds are characteristic.

Depending on the soil type, moisture, pH and texture, a variety of grass and forb communities are possible, but in general, the following grass-based plant communities are typical. Shinner & Mahler's *Flora of North Central Texas* counts three to seven (depending on the researcher) different grassland communities on these three soil associations.

Three of the grassland communities cover most of the blackland prairie



region and are similar, having little bluestem as the predominant species, and differing only in the secondary grass species. Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) and Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) are frequently the dominant species on Blackland Prairie alfisols and vertisols. Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) is frequently a dominant species on Blackland Prairie mollisols, but variable on vertisols.

The other two blackland plant associations are more limited in coverage and area:

Gamagrass-switchgrass-Indian grass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*-*Panicum virgatum*-*Sorghastrum nutans*) prairies are associated with lowland sites throughout the region, and are also

found on upland vertisol sites along the Red River.

Silveanus dropseed - Mead's sedge (*Sporobolus silveanus*-*Carex meadii*) prairies are found over low pH soils with more moisture in the northern main belt and frequently associated with mima mounds.

That's just the grasses. Then the community relations get really involved with secondary grasses and forbs. All that's great for researchers but ultimately the blackland prairies are a rich patchwork of mutual support, with an equally mind-boggling diversity of critters: insects, other arthropods, birds, herps, mammals, even the soil micro- and macro-flora/fauna. It's the kind of diversity that's just not found in urban landscapes.

Then sometimes there's the other kind of "stand out." After leaving a local drive-through, a sideways glance caught an ugly mish-mash of construction debris, fast food litter...and a funny-looking bloom spike. Curiosity and a closer look found that the bloom was a native *mirabilis* species, along with some agalinis and a nice stand of purpletop (*Tridens flavus*), all in bloom. Got to wonder: Not too long ago, what kind of plant community was there and what did that prairie look like?

### References:

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
*Flora of North Central Texas*, Shinner & Mahler



## Wildscape Update **John Dycus**



Sunrise, sunset. Now that the native plant sale is over, volunteers have gotten busy so there'll be something to sell next fall. Since mid-September more than 1,600 plants

rescued or propagated at the Arlington Parks and Recreation Department greenhouse in Randol Mill Park have been added to several areas of the four-acre wildscape.

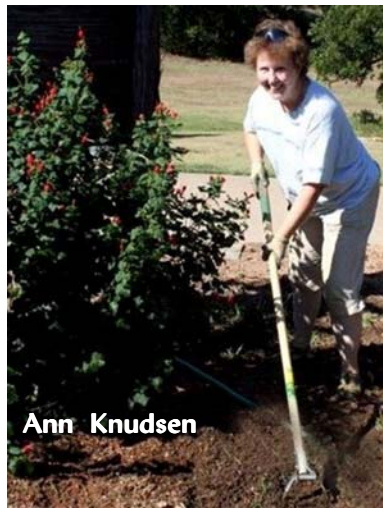
Fresh lantana horrida, turk's cap, *Salvia coccinea*, white mistflower and purple coneflower now grace the butterfly garden. Butterflies have been scarce everywhere this year, but they're still in the wildscape, as are the amazing hummingbirds gathering nectar.

Newly planted riparian and bog plants have nearly completed the restoration of the vandalized area of the stone bridge crossing the creek. Wide stone steps and boulders have been installed, and spider lily, wood fern, columbine, white avens, obedient plant, white mistflower, lizard tail and turk's cap replace the plants that were destroyed.

At the nearby wooden zig-zag bridge, horsetail rush, lizard tail and water locust were planted. Outfitted in knee-high rubber boots, Danny Kocurek waded into the creek and planted the lizard tail on the edges of the creek bank. The Magic K, a super volunteer, also recently cut and installed Plexiglas to repair the kiosks broken by vandals.



**Danny Kocurek**



**Ann Knudsen**

A few days later vandals struck again, and this time APRD heroes Frank Rivera and Greg Wilson repaired the kiosks that same day. Thanks to Martin Sanchez and his dedicated crew, wildscape progress continues.

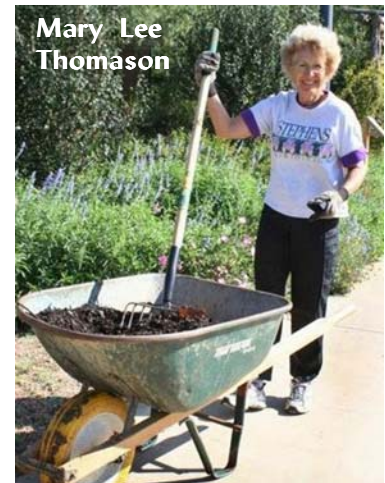
In the erosion area, white avens, golden groundsel, white mistflower, lyreleaf sage, sideoats gramma and more than 100 coralberries have been planted. Nancy and Danny Hiler donated hundreds of *Salvia coccinea* plants to complete planting in this area. John Snowden at Bluestem Nursery remains the big-dog donor, giving thousands of dollars worth of grasses to the wildscape since the mid-1990s.

Volunteers attended two annual state meetings last month. Members of the North Central chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas spent a weekend in the Big Thicket pondering the damage from Hurricane Ike. The next weekend, Cross Timbers Master Naturalists met at Mo Ranch near Kerrville for workshops on how to ensure that there is "No Child Left Inside."

Then they came home and spread the smarts around. The wildscape mini-classes keep getting bigger. Josephine Keeney's great butterfly presentation drew 17

friends of the soil, and Lucy Harrell's class on native landscape maintenance had 20. Volunteers arrive at 9 am, work until 11:30, then break for a mini-class and snacks. Landscape architect Greg Schadt will lead the Nov. 8 mini-class on water conservation in landscaping.

If the weather allows, volunteers will keep at it Tuesdays and Saturdays in November, hoping to finish planting perennials and small shrubs in the erosion area. December and January are ideal for planting trees, so Heather Dowell, head of the APRD Forestry Division, will demonstrate how at the



**Mary Lee Thomason**

Dec. 6 mini-class. Meanwhile, the propagation volunteers will move plants back inside the greenhouse after spending the summer outside. After the holidays, seeds and cuttings will be started for next year's sale.



**Lucy Harrell and class**

# ACC Kicks Off Recycling at Levitt Pavilion



On Friday, October 10, downtown Arlington witnessed the biggest change in years as the new Levitt Pavilion opened a series of free concerts. And we were there with our recycling bins. *Left*, a big crowd on opening night. *Right*, John Dycus, Deputy City Manager Trey Yelverton, Grace Darling.



## Whole Foods Event

A couple of Saturdays ago ACC was invited to have a table at Whole Foods Market. Marian Hiler and Jan Miller (*right*) were there and talked to lots of people. Also present were (*far right*) the city's Commercial Recycling Coordinator, Tim Yatko, Whole Foods Green Team leader, John Pickett, and Suzen Fyffe, Business Recycling Consultant for Abitibi Bowater. The best part: John Pickett let us leave a bunch of our newsletters — and this is a great place to reach concerned residents. Thanks, John, and Whole Foods, of course.



## Thanks to Our October Speakers



Last month Arlington's Landscape Administrator Kevin Charles (*left*) spoke to us about plans for trees at the Cowboys stadium. Kevin's most amazing statement: The massive parking lot will be surrounded by trees, but there won't be any tree islands within it. We certainly can't blame Kevin, but this will be a ridiculous expanse of unrelieved asphalt. Pete Jamieson, Director of Parks & Recreation, gave us the latest information on the first phase of work on Johnson Creek in the vicinity of the stadium. You can picture it: Pete, the voice of reason caught in an environmental nightmare, and an audience once furious, now resigned to something so many of us hate.



**LEAF MANAGEMENT**

**Compost Bin Giveaway**  
 Arlington Residents Only  
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 UTA Parking Lot - SE corner of Cooper & Mitchell



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# Don't Forget!

Wednesday, November 12  
6:30 pm

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Be sure to visit us at  
[arlingtonconservationcouncil.org](http://arlingtonconservationcouncil.org)