

**ARLINGTON
CONSERVATION
COUNCIL**

POSTOAK

WORKING TO CONSERVE ARLINGTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES
VOLUME 10, NUMBER 2

FEBRUARY 2009

www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org

February Meeting Wildspeak

**Beverly Guthrie
DFW Wildlife Coalition
Beverly will discuss the reptiles
that share our cities
and backyards with us.**

**Wednesday, February 11, 7:00 pm
Fielder Museum
1616 W. Abram St
(corner of Fielder and Abram)**

**DFW Wildlife Coalition staffs a hotline to
respond to inquiries about injured wild-
life and humane treatment for animals
that get into our houses:
972.234.WILD (9453) or
info@dfwwildlife.org**

**Remember to bring
something for the raffle**

Bits & Pieces

Our Other Skunk



The Eastern spotted skunk could be a perfect cartoon animal if it weren't for the stench and the fact that we never see it. It's cute as a button and does handstands right before settling down to spray scent up to 11 feet. This small skunk probably lives all over Arlington, at least where we can still find woody or brushy spots.

Today's Inspirational Moment

People make a lot more work out of controlling lawn weeds than they really should.

Neil Sperry, edging toward the truth before embarking on a detailed tour of pre- and post-emergent herbicides. Star-Telegram, Jan 31, 2009

In the Star-Telegram, January 21

Something old: "Drought may bring restrictions on water"
Unhappy news, but here's yet another opportunity to boost native plant landscaping.

Something new: "Ideas meant to enhance recycling"
A representative from the Citizens Environmental Committee gave city council 15 recommendations to encourage apartment and commercial recycling. Perhaps the most important one — fund a full-time commercial recycling coordinator. That will be tough in these hard times, but we can hope.



**February 12:
200th anniversary
of the birth of
Charles Darwin**

See page 2

From the President John Darling



Charles Darwin was born 200 years ago, and I can't help but think about his work as I put this newsletter together.

Like many others I first learned about natural selection through the story of the peppered moth. Here's a summary from Wikipedia: Originally, the vast majority of peppered moths had light coloration, which effectively camouflaged them against the light-colored trees and lichens upon which they rested. However, due to widespread pollution during the Industrial Revolution in England, many of the lichens died out, and the trees which peppered moths rested on became blackened by soot, causing most of the light-colored moths to die off due to predation. At the same time, the dark-colored moths flourished because of their ability to hide on the darkened trees.

Since then, with improved environmental standards, light-colored peppered moths have again become common, but the dramatic change in the peppered moth's population has remained a subject of much study and has given us the concept of "industrial melanism," the genetic darkening of species in response to pollutants.

It's a great story: Birds mostly eat the moths that stick out. More of the others live to reproduce and become relatively common.

This issue of your newsletter has more to do with Charles Darwin than you might think. His major contribution, that species evolve through natural selection, gives us a way to think about things we value and work on.

Why should we worry about the consequences when our prairie park becomes a tiny island? Island populations suffer from inbreeding as dangerous recessive genes increase in fre-



quency. The selection pressures that keep a normal prairie healthy may well have negative effects on our future inbred prairie plants and animals.

Why are invasive plants at the wildscape so aggressive? In its natural home, privet is just another plant, not a rampaging monster. Here, freed from its normal selection pressures, it runs wild and must be fought tooth and nail.

And back to insects: We can suppose that even fire ants are just another ant in tropical South America, responding to a host of environmental pressures. The special feature on butterflies demonstrates how local species cope with winter: It's fascinating that differences in their various selection pressures results in some species overwintering as adults, as larvae, as pupae, or as eggs.

THE POST OAK

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

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New York Avenue Blackland Prairie Park Jan Miller



Warm thanks to prairie stalwarts John Darling, Wesley Miller and Donna Piercy who braved frigid temperatures and bitter winds for our workday on January 24. Due to

the cold conditions, we limited activities to walking the site, picking up litter and discussing APRD's plans for mowing the prairie.

Since NYABP has neither grazing animals (like bison) or fire, which historically maintained it as a prairie, mowing is the next best thing. Mowing (or grazing or fire) kills trees and brush that compete with prairie grasses and forbs. Although not nearly as fast as fire or grazing, mowing mulches the previous year's plant stubble and starts the decomposition process that returns minerals and nutrients to the soil. Mowing also removes tall plants that would otherwise shade new plant growth.



Along the northern edge of our bit of prairie: A substantial fence should soon be installed to separate us from the adjoining giant warehouse complex.

APRD is planning to mow at an optimum time, during the dormant winter period from November 15 through February 15. This is the time when all the plants are most dormant and animals are least active. (Mowing around July 1 is also good; this allows spring wildflowers and cold-season grasses to mature and sow their seeds and yet it's early enough that most fall

wildflowers and warm-season grasses have a chance to grow, bloom and set seed before winter.) Another benefit of mowing now is that the prairie is dry, which minimizes chances of the mowing equipment making ruts, compressing the soft clay soil or damaging the gilgai.

Since mowing even a dormant prairie has some risk for wintering wildlife, and especially because NYABP is now an



Bad job on a bitterly cold day: Wesley Miller and Jan Miller collect trash, much of it from the nearby construction.

island surrounded by development, APRD will try a new technique. The plan is to mow in strips, or "candy-stripes", so that only part of the prairie is mowed at a time. Leaving the margins and alternating strips unmowed will save winter cover for small rodents, birds and insects. To see how this new practice affects the prairie, we'll need to monitor plant growth. Are there any volunteers out there for planning and performing surveys?

Calendar

Workday at the Prairie SATURDAY, February 21

9:00 am – noon

We'll plan for plant monitoring (see above). Also, cut small trees and brush, so please bring loppers and hand saws if you can. Gloves, boots (or sturdy-soled shoes), long sleeves and pants are recommended. Water will be provided, but please bring your own container. Please RSVP to jgmiller5594@sbcglobal.net, for late info on weather, etc.

Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)

February 13-16, 2009

This is a national program and anyone can participate from any location. The plan is to count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count and submit the results for inclusion in a nationwide database.

More info: www.birdsource.org/gbbc/howto.html

Here's a link to the 2009 poster: www.birdsource.org/gbbc/gbbc-bro-pos-081204-lr.pdf in case you might want to print it instead of the above.

SW Nature Preserve Bird Walk February 14, 9:00 am - noon

This year, let's trek Southwest Nature Preserve for a good variety of cross-timbers and maybe some water birds.

Due to limited parking, please be sure to RSVP to jgmiller5594@sbcglobal.net for more information.

River Legacy activities (from GBBC website)

GBBC Family Fun Saturday: **We Love Birds!** February 14, 10:00 am-2:00 pm River Legacy Living Science Center, 703 NW Green Oaks Blvd.

This fun event for adults and families with children of all ages will feature guided bird walks, story time and activity, Valentine bird feeder building, information on children's books about birds, and recipes for making food to feed the birds. Free. Contact: (817) 860.6752, or visit www.riverlegacy.org for more info.



More warehouses on the east side mean that the NYA prairie will be more endangered than ever.

Wildscape Update *John Dycus*



My dad used to say it's hard to get rain in a drought. Usually the fall rains give new plants a great start, but not this time around. Volunteers have had to water all the new plantings regularly during the cold

weather. This delayed the ongoing privet eradication, which needs to happen after the trees have dropped their leaves. The small evergreen privet is difficult to find until most of the other green has disappeared.

Even though wildscape friends came out in force to yank and hack, snatch and whack all the visible privet last winter, birds always bring in a new crop. Privet can grow six feet in a year, and then it's a double handful to address. Left to its own devices, it's a tree in several years and better addressed with a chainsaw. So you pull it now. Or you'll need a tractor to pull it later.

Japanese honeysuckle is another invasive Asian species that the volunteers are removing. Without due diligence, the entire area will be retaken by the invasives and become a mass of privet, Japanese honeysuckle and poison ivy, eventually killing even the trees by shading out their seeds so they can't get enough light to germinate (and thus grow new trees). Invasive species are the biggest problem of all preservation and restoration projects.

In addition to pounding privet, wildscape volunteers continue to increase their knowledge at the mini-classes. APRD forester Heather Dowell showed the volunteers in December how to plant, prune and care for trees. Last month,

former wildscape greenhouse manager Pat Lovejoy demonstrated propagation techniques for 20 volunteers at the APRD greenhouse in Randol Mill Park. Thanks to the Arlington Parks and Recreation Department, the volunteers can use the greenhouse to grow native plants for the wildscape and for plant sales to provide funds for tools and supplies.

Wildscape coordinators Ann Knudsen and Molly Hollar are attending the 72-hour 2009 Master Gardeners class. Nancy Swan, herself a Master Gardener and another dedicated volunteer, used the wildscape tabletop display and passed out brochures as one of the MG projects for the required volunteer hours by the 36 class members.

Outstanding Master Gardeners have contributed many hours and added greatly to the wildscape over the years, as have Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, church and school groups, young people from Tarrant County Juvenile Services, park visitors and the Arlington Organic Garden Club, and you know we're accidentally leaving some folks out. Without all this help from so many people, the four-acre wildlife habitat never would have happened.

It's all about outreach, and to further extend it, Rosalie Rogers is perfecting a PowerPoint presentation that she will give to a Lions Club in March and have available for other organizations. In

addition, the web site will soon have more information to impart as part of the wildscape's mission: to educate the community to use native plants to conserve resources, attract wildlife and connect with nature.

Left, Paige King, Sandy Fountain, and Frank Keeney planting in the erosion area. Right, Pat Lovejoy, propagation specialist.



Heather Dowell at the December mini-class.

First Saturday mini-class schedule:

February "Using Native Plants to Conserve Water" with Gailon Hardin

March "Landscaping with Native Grasses" with John Snowden, owner of Bluestem Nursery

April "Compost, the Gardener's Black Gold" with John Darling

May "The Necessity of Insect Pollinators" with Dawn Hancock

June "Wildscaping Your Own Backyard" with Leeann Rosenthal

July (second Saturday), "Soil Critters" with Ann Mayo

August "Working with Children" with Hester Schwarzer

Sept (second Saturday), "Saving Our Post Oak Woodlands" with Steve Chaney



Frigid E-cycling Event Yields Big Haul

Our city recycling people are concerned about the influx of toxic televisions into the landfill as the changeover to digital broadcast nears and many people replace their old TVs. So, on Saturday, January 24, the city opened its dumpsters to residents who wanted to safely dispose of their old electronic items.

The weather was nasty, but people turned out in droves. A rough count yielded about 8.5 30-cubic yard dumpsters full of TVs and 4.5 of mixed e-waste. Was it a monument to our extravagant consumer culture, a testament to our desire to keep toxic material out of the landfill, or both?



Above: The ultimate e-cycler: There ought to be some sort of award for not consuming gasoline while safely disposing of e-waste and freezing in the process.



Habitat is Where You Find It

There's a scruffy space only a few feet wide near Cooper and Park Row that no naturalist would give a second glance to. But the other day, four Yellow-rumped warblers and a Ruby-crowned kinglet acted as if it was their winter home.

Not the same at the Pecan Street apartments, where a dense tangle of trees and shrubs was needlessly cleared and "landscaped." No birds spotted here.



Butterflies in Fall and Winter Joann Karges



Many people are under the impression that when cold weather comes there will be no more butterflies. This is true in northern latitudes, but in this area we can always expect to find some species, not as many as we find in spring and summer but nearly always some.

The sulphur butterflies (Pieridae) for the most part can withstand some quite cold weather and may be observed in open fields and gardens throughout the season. Most common of these are the Orange Sulphur (1), the Sleepy Orange (2), and the Dainty Sulphur (3).

In addition, the Goatweed Leafwing (4) and the Questionmark (5) flash brilliant orange as they flit through the woods. The Red Admiral (6), which for the most part has bred north of here, is a frequent visitor, sometimes numerous.

One can almost always expect to see the Buckeye (7), the Variegated Fritillary (8), and the little American Snout (9). Look also for the gorgeous Mourning Cloak (10), a cold-weather visitor here.

How do they manage when there are no flowers? Some have stored up reserves of nourishment in their bodies. Others will partake of tree sap, fallen rotten fruit, and protein and minerals from animal droppings or even from carrion.



How do they survive freezing temperatures? After finding some shelter among rocks, fallen logs, tree hollows, or thick grass and shrubbery, they go into a kind of torpor state, glycerin in their bodies acting as antifreeze. On warmer, sunny days with temperatures about 60°, they will be flying.

Can we help them find food? Yes, by putting out fruit, such as bananas, peaches, pears. And one non-native plant that I must recommend because it blooms in December and January with abundant nectar: *Lonicera fragrantissima*, which, because it is an evergreen shrub, also provides shelter.

continued on page 7

Reprinted with the author's permission from the newsletter of the North Central Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas, November 2008 and February 2009.

Butterflies in Fall and Winter continued from page 6

In the last issue I enumerated the butterflies that fly here in winter even after the first frost and times of freezing temperatures. Some of these, such as the Goatweed Leafwing, the Red Admiral, and the Orange Sulphur, may have migrated from areas farther north as the days became short and cooler. Most of these will not have swirled down in flocks like the Monarch but one by one simply drifting down, though among the sulphurs (Pieridae) there are occasionally massive migrating flocks. Still, except for the Monarchs, most of our resident

butterflies are here, invisible in other life forms.

For instance, the swallowtails are all snug in their chrysalids, hanging in low braches and almost invisible. Others that overwinter in pupal form are Checkered Whites (1,2), Cabbage Whites, and many of the Hairstreaks. The Silver-Spotted Skipper (3) is also in chrysalis within a folded leaf of amorpha or wisteria.

Larval form is the winter state of a number of butterflies. The Hackberry Butterfly (4) larvae (5) are tiny, early instar caterpillars that will spend the winter "asleep" in a folded hackberry leaf, ready to surface as soon as the hackberry leaves come out in March. The Viceroy, Red-Spotted Purple (6,7), all of the checkerspots and crescents, the satyrs and skippers (except for the Silver-Spotted) are likewise in larval form.

If one searches the trunk of a soapberry tree one might find the eggs of the Soapberry Hairstreak, deposited in the preceding May or early June. Overwintering in egg stage is true also of the Banded Hairstreak, the eggs most likely to have been laid on oaks in spring.

Is it worth the time to go searching for butterflies during our winter months, that is, after the first freeze? Definitely. It's not likely that one will find eggs or larvae, or even the comparatively large chrysalids of the swallowtails, but on a sunny day, with temperatures at least in the 60s, there will be butterflies flying. Many will feed on dandelions and filaree in the yard or on the cultivated pansies in the garden.

Find back issues of the Native Plant Society newsletter at npsot.org/wp/. Go to Chapters, then click on North Central Texas, and you'll see a list of back issues.



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THE POST OAK

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Don't Forget!

Wednesday February 11
7:00 pm

**Beverly Guthrie
Wildspeak**

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