

ARLINGTON
CONSERVATION
COUNCIL

POSTOAK

WORKING TO CONSERVE ARLINGTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 5

MAY 2007

Note
meeting place:
Fielder Museum

www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org

May Meeting

Service Learning Partnerships

Shirley Theriot,
Director, Center for Community Service Learning,
University of Texas at Arlington

Shirley will explain service learning and its objectives.
She will bring forms and other information
to help us define projects for students.

Wednesday, May 9, 7:00 pm.

Fielder Museum
1616 W. Abram St.
(corner of Fielder and Abram)

WE NEED RAFFLE ITEMS!

Bits & Pieces

We Can Count on Him

"I will be an active part of any leadership effort to prevent [global warming legislation] passing in the House."

— *Outgoing chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX), at an event hosted by the American Petroleum Institute, December 4, 2006.*

It's a Gas [Well] at UTA

A recent *Star-Telegram* article happily informs us that UTA is about to cash in on the natural gas boom with its own well somewhere around the SE corner of the campus. As luck would have it, your editor lives near the SE corner of the campus, so you may anticipate several lurid features on living with a gas well in the future.

Time for Chuck-will's Widows

Every year around this time, we might hear the marvellous sound of our local version of the Whip-poor-will. It's tougher now with all our carefully insulated, double-paned windows, but just open those things up; at dusk and a little later you might hear a chuck-will's widow, too. They nest on the ground where they're nearly invisible and catch bugs in midair—probably invented the notion of "gaping maw." Great bird. Be glad it's here.



Barton Antidote?

Until man duplicates a blade of grass, nature can laugh at his so-called scientific knowledge. — *Thomas Edison*

Earth Day Thanks

Jo Ann Duman and her committee worked tirelessly on all those details we needed to make it happen. ACC's first Earth Day at the Wildscape looked good, and it was Jo Ann and her 70 volunteers who did it. Now how about next year? Jo Ann?

From the President John Darling



Only a hard-core wet blanket would spoil April's Earth Day mood, but I suppose I'm it, so here goes: It's the Wal-Mart that so

many of us didn't want down by I-20 and Little Road. The clearing was particularly nasty; people were upset about the possibility of killing nesting birds; and Council member Sheri Capehart got it stopped temporarily.

Four days after Earth Day I took a few pictures, thought dark thoughts, and watched a young Bewick's wren jump around on pushed-over trees as it begged for food from its parent. For me it's not so much the dead baby birds; it's the permanent loss of habitat. The adult birds (and every other creature) won't just move someplace else. The places they need are already occupied, so those animals and plants are gone for good.



God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand tempests and floods. But he cannot save them from fools.
- John Muir



If people destroy something replaceable made by mankind, they are called vandals; if they destroy something irreplaceable made by God, they are called developers.
- Joseph Wood Krutch



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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 Jan Miller



Wow, what a spring and what a weekend! On April 29 there was Prairie Fest II, a great community festival celebrating prairies at Tandy Hills Nature Preserve in east Fort

Worth. There were walks to show off all those fabulous wildflowers, plus booths featuring local environmental and nature organizations, art, music, food, beer, a beautiful day and a gorgeous setting. A super find was meeting Alton Bowman and JoAnn Hanson of The Mound Foundation and learning of Flower Mound's prairie. Their 2004 book *The Flower Mound, Flower Mound, Texas, A History and Field Guide to the Flowers and Grasses* is excellent.



Early evening at Tandy Hills

ACC's new display featuring Arlington's New York Avenue Blackland Prairie attracted lots of attention. A big THANK YOU to Marian Hiler and Ann Knudsen,

who inspired and produced a masterful design. Thanks also to ACC volunteers Julia Burgen, John Darling, Jo Ann Duman, Marian Hiler, Wesley Miller, and Dan Van Bosc for staffing ACC's booth.

The display was instrumental in advertising the next day's Spring Wildflower Walk at New York Avenue Blackland Prairie. About 40 folks visited NYABP to walk and talk with our leader, Master Naturalist Jim Varnum. Thanks to winter and continuing spring rains, we got to admire the many miracles of floral diversity, waded through gilgai and what may very well be tallgrass this year, and discussed the best ways to maintain prairie remnants when controlled burns and grazing buffalo aren't options. Several new observations were added to the growing plant list, now up to 111. Perhaps best of all, we saw the heavenly blue of prairie celestials (right).

That weekend brought great opportunities for sharing successes as well as frustrations: As we celebrated our prairies, the Dallas Morning News reported that 10 or so acres of native blackland prairie on Campbell Road in Garland are to be lost to development within a week. Dr. Ken Steigman of Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area and volunteers are scrambling to dig and relocate the rarest examples to LLELA's 2000 acres. "It's



Prairie walkers enjoying our bit of blackland

something as valuable as our cultural history" says Jim Eidson, manager of the Nature Conservancy's 1300-acre Clymer Meadow. Many of the region's native plants haven't been fully studied, he says. Ditto for the vanishing North Texas prairie ecosystems, Dr. Steigman says, "We don't understand them completely, and they are almost gone."

For anyone who wants to explore spring on the Texas prairie, there are still more opportunities:

Stella Rowan Prairie - self-guided, on Tarrant Resource Connection campus. Exit I-20 at Campus Dr. in south Fort Worth. Go north on Campus about 1/2 mile, turn left into the TRC campus, then follow the

loop road to the right.

May 19 - Clymer Meadow (Nature Conservancy) and nearby prairies. RSVP to Jim or Stephanie Varnum at JEVarnum@aol.com or 214/543-2055.

May 19 - LBJ Grasslands. RSVP to Jeff Quayle at s-quaylei@earthlink.net or 817/729-0283.

Clean Air Marianne Herrmann

At the last Blue Skies meeting, we had a Toxic Pollution Workshop, which was presented by Public Citizen and Downwinders at Risk. We learned about air toxics from diesel engines, from cement kilns and the legislation for addressing them pending in Austin.

On-road and off-road diesel engines and locomotives produce a tremendous amount of toxic soup, and the most deadly component of this is particulate matter (DPM). We regularly inhale tiny, toxic particles during our everyday activities, especially during commuting.

These create obstructions that slow down the diffusion of oxygen in the blood and this strains the lungs and heart, damages the respiratory and cardiovascular systems, causing myriad diseases, including cancer, chronic bronchitis, asthma, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and more. Texas consumes more diesel fuel than any other state, and of course congested metro areas like ours are especially polluted.

Nine hundred Texans and 70000 Americans die prematurely every year from exposure to diesel particulate

matter. But a lot can be done about this. Trucks can be required to install filters and use ultra low sulfur diesel, and idling by long-haul trucks can be addressed.

We also heard the presentation about the cement kiln pollution from Jim Schermbeck. All his efforts are now paying off, since the Brimer bill might actually come to a vote by the legislature.

You can easily do your own toxics research on the computer: The Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) is on EPA's TRI Explorer - www.epa.gov/triexplorer

Wildscape Update John Dycus



Pimping for the possumhaw, shilling for the shrubs. Didn't we have a grand time with Earth Day at the Wildscape. Pick a goal for the event, and I think we met it.

Copious and content volunteers? Check. Almost 70 of them. From high school students to seasoned wildscape workers, we weren't hurting for help.

Broad-based community support? Check. Close to 100 people came out for the guided tour or just to mingle, or both. Young couples, older couples, families, children in strollers. Didn't see a frown. Not one.

Folks who can make a difference heard the message? Check. City Council members Kathryn Wilemon

and Lana Wolff did the full experience. We appreciate their interest.

Shared useful information? Check. John Bridges on invasive plants was a hit, as was Anne Alderfer on wild-scaping. Bob Smith and his stately falcon engaged visitors from underneath a tall shade tree, while Julia Burgen captivated with her bird sounds and bird's nest collection. Jan Miller and Bill Lawrence praised our pocket prairie, and Parks and Wildlife's John Davis kicked off the grand tour. And the Native Plant Society of Texas handed out great information.

Kids had a good time? Did they ever. Check. Tiny tots with their face-painted cheeks all aglow, and all that. And making seed balls proved quite the thing to do.

No jockeying for space with the disc golfers? Check. A disc golf club official made a point to meet ACC beacon John Darling and pledge a little peace in the valley. The golfers even had a tournament that day, but there was plenty of park land (parking, too) to go around.

Follow-through publicity? Check. *Star-Telegram* coverage ran on page 1 of the Arlington section. Thanks, Cynthia Neff and Aaron Lambert, for the words and picture.

Hats off to everyone who made Earth Day at the Wildscape such a treat.

It was almost enough fun that we should do it every weekend.

Almost.



Clockwise from upper left: Visitors were treated to lots of wildscaping information. John Davis (Texas Parks & Wildlife Urban Biologist) started off the grand tour. Fort Worth Audubon added considerable interest with a peregrine falcon. Master Naturalist Bill Lawrence discussed our pocket prairie. Native Plant Society President John Bridges warned visitors about invasive exotic plants. ACC's recycling game was a hit. Julia Burgen entertained kids with her bird sounds and nature collection.



Green Building Danny Kocurek

We have discussed many of the structural aspects of a house that save electricity without actually changing the electrical devices in the house. Although eliminating phantom loads is the easiest way to save energy, there are other things we can do.

In Texas, the biggest use of electricity is for air conditioning, but that is a topic we will have to save for its own installment. For most people, lighting is the next highest consumer of electricity. Interior lighting these days is a no-brainer. Compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) save money compared to regular incandescent bulbs in three different ways. First, they last over ten times longer. Second, they use 80% less electricity. Third, they do not generate significant heat compared to the 350 degrees that an incandescent can put out, so you even save a little in air conditioning in the summer. Needless to say, we will have almost all CFLs in our house.

Even the regular fluorescent bulbs (the big long tubes) are better these days. The color is better due to new coatings on the bulbs. They don't hum due to a change to electronic ballasts instead of the old magnetic ones. The electronic ballasts even save electricity compared to the old ballasts.

When new homes are built, even green ones, they are traditionally filled with new appliances. While we will have

some new appliances, we are trying to "recycle" some old ones. It is easy to find relatively new appliances these days on Craig's List or eBay and my garage is getting pretty full these days. Energy-efficient appliances are also easy to find. The easiest way is to look for Energy Star labels. Energy Star rating means the appliance meets certain criteria set by the EPA that place it among the most efficient devices of its kind. If the appliance does not have an Energy Star rating, you can look at the yellow energy rating on the appliance. It will tell you how efficient the appliance is compared to similar appliances and how much money it will cost you to use each year so you can compare the cost savings over time compared to "cheaper" appliances. Unless they break down and you throw them out in the first 5 years, Energy Star-rated appliances will always save money in the end.

When it comes to appliances, refrigerators are most people's largest user of electricity. In terms of energy efficiency, the most common fridges are the most inefficient. Side-by-sides with ice-makers can use 30% more electricity than top or bottom-freezer models without ice-makers. Even worse are through-the-door ice dispensers. If you think about it, there is essentially no insulation along the path that the ice is taking from the ice-maker out the door; just a plastic, unsealed door on most models. This convenience, which I love, is very costly.

Is it worth buying a new fridge before the old one dies? If your fridge was made before 1980, it costs on average \$150 more a year to operate than a new Energy Star model. If made before 1993, the average is \$50 a year more. If you do decide to get a new one, try to get the smallest model that you can live with. As you can guess, those giant Sub Zeros and Vikings use a lot of electricity.

Regardless of whether you keep your old fridge or buy a new one, there are a few things you can do to make it more efficient. Make sure there is good air circulation around your coils and vacuum them regularly. They collect a lot of dust and it makes them less efficient. Also, try to keep your refrigerator between 35 and 38 degrees Fahrenheit and your freezer at 0 degrees Fahrenheit. I was quite surprised at our current fridge's temperature when I finally got around to checking it.

An extremely common waste of electricity is using an extra refrigerator in the garage. People seem to feel a little guilty throwing away that old refrigerator and decide to keep it for drinks or parties. Unfortunately, in Texas that poor fridge is sitting in a 100-degree garage all summer long, churning away with a few cans of Dr. Pepper and Shiner inside. Its energy use can rival all of the other appliances in the house put together. Sadly, it is better off at Goodwill or even the landfill.

Thanks to Our April Speaker



We're indebted to Parks & Rec VIP Gordon Robertson for giving us a look at the projects under preliminary consideration for funding in the next parks bond election. Gordon and Parks Planner De'Onna Garner fielded quite a lot of questions from a very interested audience.

They discussed a comprehensive mix that includes some land acquisition and park renovation, construction, maintenance, and environmental

restoration. Acquisition never seems to receive enough attention, but it's clear that the department has responsibilities in many other areas, alas.

Clean Air continued from page 3

- Right to Know Network - www.rtk.net.
- Toxmap/U.S. National Library of Medicine - <http://toxmap.nlm.nih.gov/toxmap/main/index.jsp>.
- Toxmap also has links for researching reported health effects of chemicals and federal superfund sites.
- For daily environmental health updates, research, news, opinions: www.environmentalhealthnews.org.
- For more information on the Midlothian cement plants: www.downwindersatrisk.org and www.dfwairplan.org.

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Don't Forget!

Wednesday May 9,
7:00 pm
Shirley Theriot,
The University of Texas
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Service Learning Partnerships

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