

**EL CAMINO REAL PARKS**

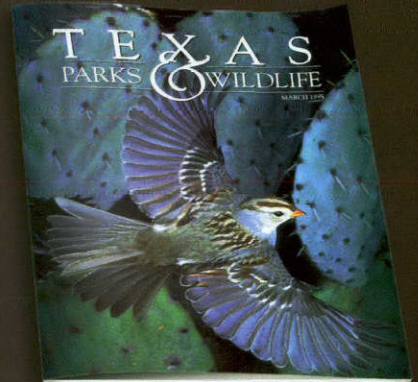
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# 34 Texas' Royal Road

Traveled by explorers and settlers, El Camino Real gets new attention at state parks.

by Emily Moskal

**ON THE COVER:**

*A great kiskadee, a tropical bird found in South Texas, takes flight, displaying its bright yellow belly. Photo © Alan Murphy / BIA / Minden Pictures*

**BACK COVER:**

*Surf's up at Horace Caldwell Pier, a surfing hot spot in Port Aransas. Photo by Sonja Sommerfeld / TPWD*

## 28 Sky Island Hummingbirds

Fort Davis opens gates to hummer heaven every fall.

by Madge Lindsay

## 30 West Texas hummingbird guide.

by Eva Frederick

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Texas' eight border-turns offer habitat diversity and birds galore.

by Russell Roe



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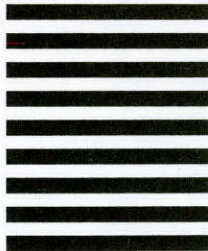


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— CLIFF SHACKELFORD



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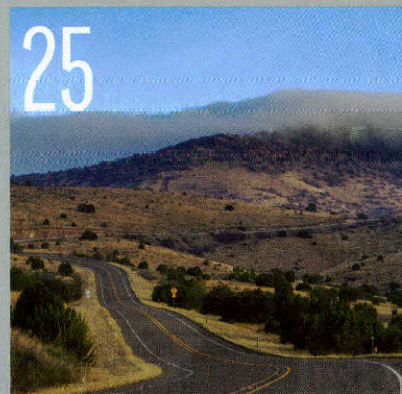


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**FROM THE EDITOR**

**TEXAS, YOU NEVER LET ME DOWN.** Year after year, issue after issue, we have the delightful honor of telling Texas stories — tales of nature and conservation and history and adventure. You'd think we'd run out of topics, but with a piece of land so grand and diverse to cover, we never do. While perusing our archives decade by decade during this year of our 75th anniversary, we have found themes that we enjoy revisiting through the years, but the plot twists and eclectic characters make old stories feel new each time.

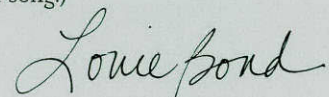
This issue is no exception. While we dug deep into stories told by maps in our June issue, a map again inspires a story this month — Emily Moskal's feature on El Camino Real. The Royal Road connected the capital of Coahuila in Mexico with Los Adaes, the capital of the Spanish province of Texas, just across the Sabine River in what is now Louisiana. Imagine, you can visit a state park or historic site and walk the same pathways as the wagons filled with early Texas adventurers and settlers. While enjoying swimming or mountain biking or camping fun, you can also daydream about being a Spanish explorer or a member of a traveling party finding a new home in an untamed land.

New Texas Parks and Wildlife Department projects will help bring El Camino Real history to life for our state park guests with exhibits and artifacts and more.

Managing Editor Russell Roe takes us across the state this month as well, but just to the particular spots where sharp border turns help define our state's iconic shape. What's so special about these geographical pivots? They're great places to spot many of Texas' abundant bird species, but also to reflect upon the state's diversity of habitat. Roe relates the tale of two avian enthusiasts in their quest to visit and document the species, corner by corner. A brand-new way to broaden your Texas bird watching!

And while folks have been watching hummingbirds — those tiny buzz-bombs ever in search of nectar — for many years, there's still room for exciting discoveries like a new species spotted in West Texas in 2016. Visit the Davis Mountains Hummingbird Migration Celebration August 24–27 to see the spectacle of so many visiting hummers for yourself. In Madge Lindsay's feature this month, veteran bird photographer Larry Ditto even shares a few tips on catching those blurred wings at a standstill.

As we continue to count down the decades of *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine's publication, we draw closer to the actual 75th anniversary date in December. While we're guarding the details, rest assured that we have something planned for the December issue that is unlike anything we've ever done before! (Your hint for this issue: We'll be humming a very familiar Willie Nelson song.)



Louie Bond, Editor

# PASSIONS RUN HIGH ON RED SNAPPER

**THE WORK OF THE TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT** engenders many sentiments among many people. Pick your activity, species, place or issue, and bar none, there is a constituency or, more likely, multiple constituencies, all informed, engaged, vocal and loaded with feedback.

Sportsmen, as a group, tend to be anything but dispassionate when it comes to sharing their considerable opinions and advice on any and all things fish and game, fishing and hunting. In jest, I sometimes refer to the department as the land of 1,000 hills to die on.

At times and to some observers, like my wife, some of those hills may appear bigger than others. But, then again, her obviously misplaced priorities in life don't include a near-religious zeal about when the second split of duck, dove and goose season should open and close, whether a five- or 10-trout limit on the coast is too many or too few, or whether a 13-inch antler rule should or should not be enforced, much less enacted in the first place.

But, as I'll tell anyone who will listen, I'll take that passion over complacency any day of the week.

One of those proverbial hills is the red snapper fishery. A reef fish found among the rocks and the rigs of Gulf waters, red snapper are a favorite quarry of offshore anglers. They're delectable table fare and an economic driver for Gulf communities from Brownsville to Pensacola.

They are also the subject of a longstanding, contentious and seemingly intractable battle about how best to manage them. Much of the challenge rests in the question of jurisdictions, state versus federal authorities, and who and what influences them.

Texas, in keeping with our authority to manage fish and game within our borders, sets the seasons and bag limits for snapper within our territorial seas, a designation that extends from our coastline out to 9 nautical miles in the Gulf. The ultimate responsibility lies with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, which bases its decisions on the biological recommendations of departmental scientists and input from affected recreational, commercial and conservation interests. The process is transparent and eminently comprehensible to anyone with a stake in the fishery.

The process for managing red snapper in federal waters, not quite so much.

The feds' oversight occurs from the end of the Gulf states' territorial seas out to 200 miles. The regulations across the Gulf are governed by a mishmash of federal fisheries law through

the Magnuson-Stevens Act, litigation-driven court decisions, a multi-state and multi-stakeholder advisory council, competing and divergently aligned (commercial, environmental and recreational) interests, catch quotas for commercial anglers, federally permitted charter and head boats, private recreational anglers, and ultimately an algorithmic-based fisheries model that attempts to predict management actions necessary to recover snapper stocks across the Gulf by 2032.

The result is a kind of zero-sum game approach that seemingly pits everybody against everybody. In recent years, recreational anglers have been the ones left at the dock. Imagine this: Just over 20 years ago, anglers enjoyed a full 365-day season in federal waters. Ten years ago, it was down to two and half months. This year (as described on Page 11 in the magazine), it started out as a whopping three-day season. It ultimately was extended on a one-year basis for an additional 39 days.

In short, it is a real mess, which is the only thing everyone agrees on. That is too bad, because at least in our part of the Gulf, snapper stocks have soared, reproduction and recruitment are strong, and catching them off the Texas coast is easier than ever.

So, what is the fix? Population differences between the eastern and western Gulf red snapper stocks must be recognized and delimited. Additional data across all sectors needs continued monitoring. Recovery models, and hence sector allocations, need to be adjusted accordingly for regional variations. And, ultimately, authority for establishing seasons and bag limits across both state and federal waters needs to rest under clearer and closer jurisdictions, namely state fish and wildlife commissions. The TPW Commission's successful history with trout, redfish, flounder and other marine species would offer, I believe, a pretty good harbinger of what could come.

The ultimate authority for this fix? Our U.S. Congress.

Thanks for caring about our wild things and wild places. They need you now more than ever.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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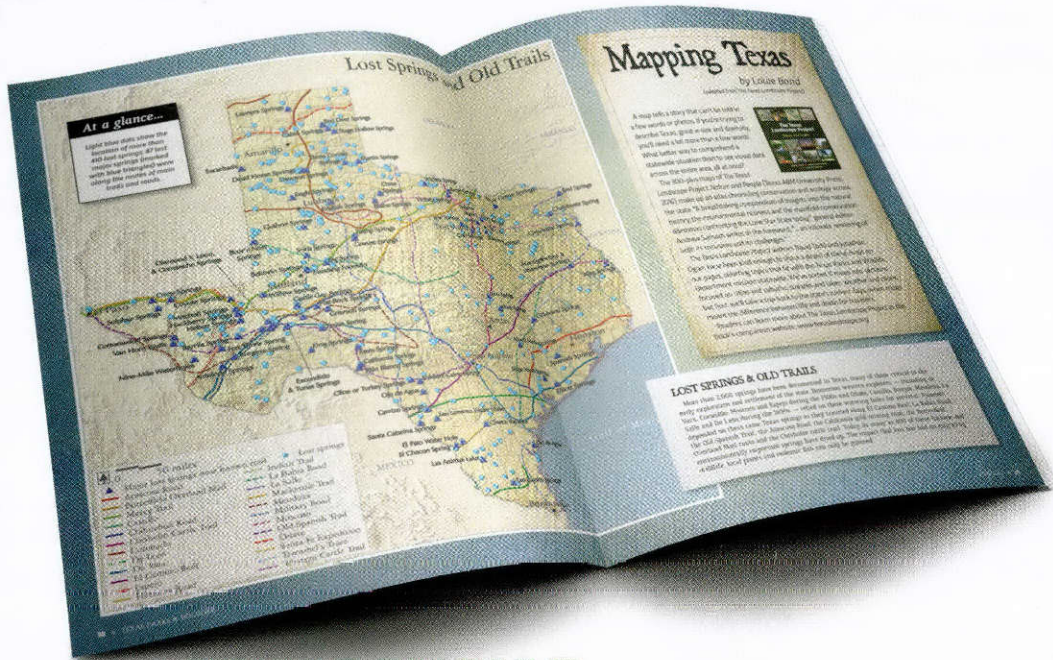
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## TEXAS BY MAP

I wanted to thank you for the article “Mapping Texas” (June 2017). I moved to Texas from Australia 18 months ago after falling in love with a Texan, and — in no small way thanks to the wonderful Texas state parks — I have been falling in love with Texas ever since.

As I have discovered more and more about this terribly interesting and incredibly varied and beautiful place (which is not all desert and saguaros, despite my prior misconceptions) I have been sharing my appreciation and love for it with my friends and family back home.

This article and the clear and informative maps gave me a wonderful visual aid to my explanations, and it was with great joy that I shared them with my parents and sister during their recent visit. I could see as they read the article that these maps helped many of my stories and adventures make sense for them too.

**FREYA MCGREGOR**  
San Antonio

### WOWING THEM IN JUNE

Well, wow! Your June 2017 issue is great! Piece after piece, story after story, I inhaled it all in one sitting.

I tore out and saved the waterfall “centerfold” and made notes for future trips to Big Bend and for a picnic lunch in Fort Worth. I enjoyed the trailer-size camera piece and will watch for exhibits by this photographer.

The maps, though, stopped me in my tracks. They were very informative on multiple important issues and were just plain fascinating.

I always enjoy your magazine, but you hit this one outta the park for June 2017. Well done.

**MARTHA BERRY**  
Rowlett

### TARPON DAYS

The articles in the June 2017 edition concerning the Golden Triangle and tarpon brought back great memories.

I grew up in the Golden Triangle (Port Arthur), and as a youngster I tried to catch the huge “silver kings” that I frequently saw cruising in the Gulf off McFaddin Beach. I didn’t have any luck catching one, although I did hook several.

Younger fishermen may not know that tarpon used to be present in huge schools at the mouth of the Neches River. My dad told me of the great times that he and his dad had catching them. They said they used long Calcutta poles and a piece of red rag on their hooks for bait. This must have

been back in the 1930s. He had pictures to back up his stories.

**STUART L. BATTARBEE**  
Jewett

### GETTING IT RIGHT IN BIG THICKET

We’re writing in response to the “Golden Triangle” article in your June 2017 issue. We welcomed the opportunity for the Big Thicket National Preserve to be highlighted in the article but were disappointed by inaccuracies. The article states that the Big Thicket Association is “a nonprofit organization tasked with preserving nearly 110,000 acres of diverse habitats collectively called the Big Thicket National Preserve.”

Big Thicket National Preserve is managed by the National Park Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior. As a federal agency, we strive to preserve, conserve, protect and enhance the integrity of the natural ecological systems in the Big Thicket, while offering both scientific and recreational opportunities for public enjoyment.

**WAYNE PROKOPETZ**  
**JASON GINDER**  
Big Thicket National Preserve

**Texas Parks & Wildlife responds:**  
We regret the error regarding Big Thicket National Preserve. The Big Thicket Association was founded in 1964 to save the Big Thicket forests, and its efforts led to the establishment of the preserve. It continues to work for preservation of the Big Thicket.

### WRITE TO US

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# Zebra Mussels Found in Canyon Lake, Lake Travis

**INVASIVE ZEBRA MUSSELS** were positively identified in June in two Central Texas river basins: on June 8 at Canyon Lake in the Guadalupe River basin and on June 22 at Lake Travis in the Colorado River basin.

"It really hits home how important it is for boaters to take the appropriate steps," said Brian Van Zee, Inland Fisheries regional director for TPWD. "They need to clean, drain and dry their boats every time they leave a lake."

In Texas, it is unlawful to possess or transport zebra mussels, dead or alive, and that applies to all types and sizes of boats, whether powered or not. With more than 1,500 boat ramps in Texas, it will take the concerted effort

of boaters, marinas and concerned citizens to help prevent their spread.

Zebra mussels can cover shoreline rocks and litter beaches with treacherously sharp shells, clog public-water intakes and damage boats and motors left in infested waters. Zebra mussels can colonize on the shells of native mussels; threatened freshwater mussels that could be negatively affected include the Texas pimpleback, the golden orb and the Texas fatmucket.

Since zebra mussels were first found in Texas in 2009, 11 lakes in five river basins have been classified as infested. More information at [tpwd.texas.gov/ZebraMussels](http://tpwd.texas.gov/ZebraMussels).

## Red Snapper Season Extended in Federal Waters

ILLUSTRATION BY TPWD



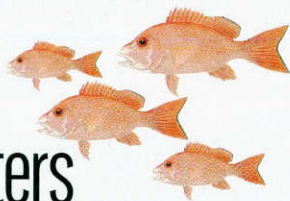
**THE TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT**, other Gulf states and the U.S. Department of Commerce have agreed to allow private recreational anglers to catch red snapper in federal waters on

weekends this summer, from June 16 through Labor Day (Friday through Sunday, plus July 3-4 and Sept. 4).

After a disappointing three-day federal fishing season for private recreational anglers in June, discussions developed between the states, their state congressional offices and the Department of Commerce to explore ways to extend the season this summer.

TPWD sought public input on different options, settling on closing some days of fishing in Texas waters from the shore out to 9 nautical miles in exchange for more fishing days on which both state and federal waters would be available for recreational anglers.

Texas state waters will remain open for the duration of the fall season starting Sept. 5.



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#### JULY 30–AUG. 5:

Creel survey; hiking dogs; mobile storytellers; paddlefish; grasslands.

#### AUG. 6–12:

Historical magazine; Texas landscape photos; outdoor photo tips.

#### AUG. 13–19:

Fishing promoter; Atlanta State Park; memorable picture; catfish crazy.

#### AUG. 20–26:

Kangaroo rats; student host; LBJ's Hill Country legacy.

#### AUG. 27–SEPT. 2:

Coastal birds; bobcat city; refocused ranch; behind-the-scenes support.

#### SEPT. 3–9:

Wildlife cameras; blue sucker study; wood ducks; nature photos; camping tips.

#### SEPT. 10–16:

Lionfish threat; Attwater's prairie-chickens; gar fishing; Enchanted Rock.

#### SEPT. 17–23:

Youth and nature; Kickapoo Cavern; Caddo paddle; fishing local.

#### SEPT. 24–30:

Purtis Creek; leave no trace; horned lizards; teaching young hunters.



**A FILM TOUR** showcasing wildlife, adventure and conservation stories will come to 11 Texas cities in September and October. Filmmaker Ben Masters and producer Hillary Pierce are launching the tour in hopes of raising awareness of local conservation issues, inspiring viewers to engage in grassroots efforts and increasing recruitment for local conservation organizations.

Several short documentary films will be presented at each event, along with conversations with filmmakers and a reception.

The film tour will come through Amarillo, Austin, College Station, Corpus Christi, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, Marfa, Midland and San Antonio. For dates and venue information: [wildfilmtour.com](http://wildfilmtour.com).



PHOTO © LAURENCE PARENTE

**DEEP WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES** of the 300,000-acre Big Bend Ranch State Park, elevated high above the distant banks of the Rio Grande and nestled in a valley, you'll find Madrid Falls. Determined hikers can grab a trail map and binoculars and head straight for one of three designated spots overlooking Madrid Falls to enjoy the view. It's a destination unlike any other.

# SECRET WATERFALL

*Madrid Falls is Big Bend Ranch's loveliest surprise.*

**BY CYNTHIA BRANDIMARTE**



PHOTO BY EARL SCOTTINER/M/TWID

Of course, I'm not the first to encourage explorers to view the falls. Forty years ago, before Big Bend Ranch was a state park, writer and photographer Griffin Smith Jr. wrote about "The Forgotten Places in Texas," including Madrid Falls as one of a chosen handful.

Smith opined that the falls "may be the closest thing to Eden West Texas will ever know." His descriptions included a catalog of species of trees filling the narrow canyon. He rhapsodized about the luscious vegetation fed by the water and the abundant animal life cooled by it.

You'd think that crowds would flock to it, but that's not the case. Madrid Falls,



PHOTO © WYMAN MENZNER

The second-largest waterfall in the state, has historically been a highly coveted but secret place. Despite being one of the rare watered parcels of land in the area, the falls have been known to only a few. In the 1870s, one person who did know this magical place was Father Joseph Hoban, Presidio County's first deputy land surveyor. With close knowledge of the area, he drew the boundaries of the land and corralled its most desirable features for his own holdings. There is oral testimony that Hoban, in his clerical role, established a boys' school near the location of the falls.

The Madrid family, for whom the falls were named, had long resided in nearby Polvo, and they may have used the site on a seasonal basis. Oral tradition relates family stories of Rancho de Madrid operated by its members from the mid-1890s to 1916, yet no official records place them there. (If you are puzzled that ownership records are hazy, such were the land practices at the time. Without fences, people could simply settle on one of the watered sections of land and graze animals there. You did not have to own a place to occupy it. Folks just kept mum about who owned what.)

Madrid Falls — this hard-to-reach site of abundant springs and waterfalls, lush vegetation and varied animal life — has always been someone's secret. Let it be yours, too.

Please help us protect the fragile ecosystem of Madrid Falls by viewing the falls and the canyon from one or more of three overlooks. With a Fresno West Rim Trail Map in hand, you can find these viewing spots, each with a unique view. ★

*In keeping with this month's 1990s theme, our Park Pick features a park from the '90s: Big Bend Ranch opened in 1991.*

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# SNOUT SWARM

Butterfly explosion? Chances are they're snouts.

BY BEN HUTCHINS



PHOTO © ROB CURTIS / THE EARLY BIRDER

**IF YOU ASK TEXANS** to name a butterfly that migrates, chances are good they'll name the monarch.

Yes, few butterflies are as iconic and beloved as our dear monarch, but it is not the only butterfly that migrates en masse. Indeed there's another, albeit less regal, butterfly with a migration that's nothing to turn your nose up at. That's right, if you put your nose to the grindstone and do a little digging, you can find astounding reports of a butterfly migration that rivals or even surpasses that of the monarch ... if you have a nose for that kind of thing.

Enough with the "nose" idioms?

The American snout butterfly (*Libytheana carinenta*) is aptly named and instantly recognizable by its very long, namesake facial feature. The species is not unique among butterflies in its sizable schnozz: three other snout butterflies occur in the Caribbean. But in Texas, if you see a snout, you can be sure that it's an American snout. The American snout butterfly should be better known to all Texans, not only because of its singular morphology but also because of its remarkable migrations during which butterfly densities reach plague-like proportions, particularly in South Texas.

Consider a report from the late 1800s, for example, when swarms of the butterfly were observed stretching from Fredericksburg to Karnes City — a distance of more than 100 miles. And don't think for a minute that we're using the term "swarm" lightly. A swarm in 1916 was reported to be sufficiently



## COMMON NAME

*American snout*

## SCIENTIFIC NAME

*Libytheana carinenta*

## HABITAT

*Forest edges, thorn scrub, shrubby fields, roadsides*

## DIET

*Hackberry leaves as caterpillars; nectar from flowers such as aster, dogwood and goldenrod as adults*

## DID YOU KNOW?

*Adults imitate dead leaves by clinging to branches.*

PHOTO © BRYAN E. REYNOLDS

dense that the butterflies clogged vehicle radiators and caused engines to overheat. The butterflies usually fly close to the ground, but a swarm in 1966 was so thick that streetlights had to be turned on after the daytime sky was darkened with butterflies.

In 1921, an estimated 75 million butterflies per hour passed through South Texas in a particularly large wave that stretched for nearly 250 miles. To put that in perspective, the entire eastern monarch population during the winter of 2016–2017 was estimated at just over 81 million individuals. That's essentially every monarch in North America east of the Rockies, save for a few snowbirds that hang out around the Gulf Coast, compared to 75 million American snouts passing by in a single swarm, in a single hour. The flight lasted for 18 days.

The verdict is still out on what causes these incredible butterfly aggregations, but population size appears to be correlated with the intensity and duration of droughts that precede drought-busting rains. In other words, if big rains follow big droughts, big snout populations may be on their way. Intense drought periods may help

reduce parasites that impact snout populations, and when heavy rains follow, snout caterpillars are assured to have an abundant supply of their favorite foods: fresh hackberry leaves. When conditions favor an explosion of American snout butterflies, the chance for a young male to successfully find a mate is low because of competition with other, older males. So it may be that mass migrations are triggered by amorous young males moving in search

of potential mates, but again, no one knows for sure.

No matter the causes for the bewildering numbers of American snout butterflies that can periodically dominate the skies in South Texas, there is no question that the butterfly with a prodigious proboscis is a special part of the Texas landscape. Yes, it should be as plain as the nose on your face that the American snout butterfly is certainly no butterfly to look down your nose at. ★



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# SUMMER SNOW

*Poinsettia's cousin, Euphorbia features picturesque names and peculiar blooms.*

BY DYANNE FRY CORTEZ

**IN THE LAST** hot, dry days of a Texas summer, two native wildflowers brighten landscapes with a touch of “snow.”

Snow-on-the-mountain (*Euphorbia marginata*, top) and snow-on-the-prairie (*E. bicolor*, below) are easy to recognize. They populate pastures, prairies, gravel flats and roadsides. Erect stems stand 1 to 4 feet tall and are lined with stalkless oval leaves. Near the top, stems typically divide into sets of three branches, topped with white flower clusters that catch and reflect the sun's rays.

Appearances can deceive. Viewed at close range, those blooms aren't pure white, and the most visible parts aren't flowers.

To appreciate these wild *Euphorbias*, it helps to think of their tame cousin, the Christmas poinsettia. The bright red “petals” of a poinsettia aren't really petals, but modified leaves called bracts. The real flowers are small and inconspicuous, clustered within special structures called cyathia, which are unique to this genus of plants.

*Euphorbia's* true flowers are so tiny, you may need a magnifying lens to see them. Each cyathium contains a single female flower and up to 30 male flowers. Nectar glands at the edge of the structure have rounded appendages that resemble petals.

The showy bracts below the flower clusters are green with white margins.

In *E. bicolor*, bracts can be up to 4 inches long and quite narrow. Bracts of snow-on-the-mountain tend to be shorter and wider. Aside from that, the two species look much alike. They are annuals, completing their life cycle in one season. If successfully pollinated, the female flower will produce a distinctive green, three-lobed fruit.

Blooming late July through October, these plants can be seen most places in Texas. Snow-on-the-mountain is more common in the western half of the state, while snow-on-the-prairie prefers the hard clay soils in the eastern half. They often form large colonies, partly because they can grow in poor soils where many other plants won't, and partly because their stems contain a milky latex that discourages grazing animals. The latex is slightly toxic if eaten, and can irritate skin and eyes. However, mourning doves can safely eat the seeds of these wildflowers, and butterflies enjoy the nectar.

Does a crop of *Euphorbia* in bloom, with white-edged bracts flashing in the sun, really look like a snow-covered pasture? Most Texans would not be fooled. But these flowers do tell us that summer is progressing into fall, and cooler weather can't be too far ahead. ★

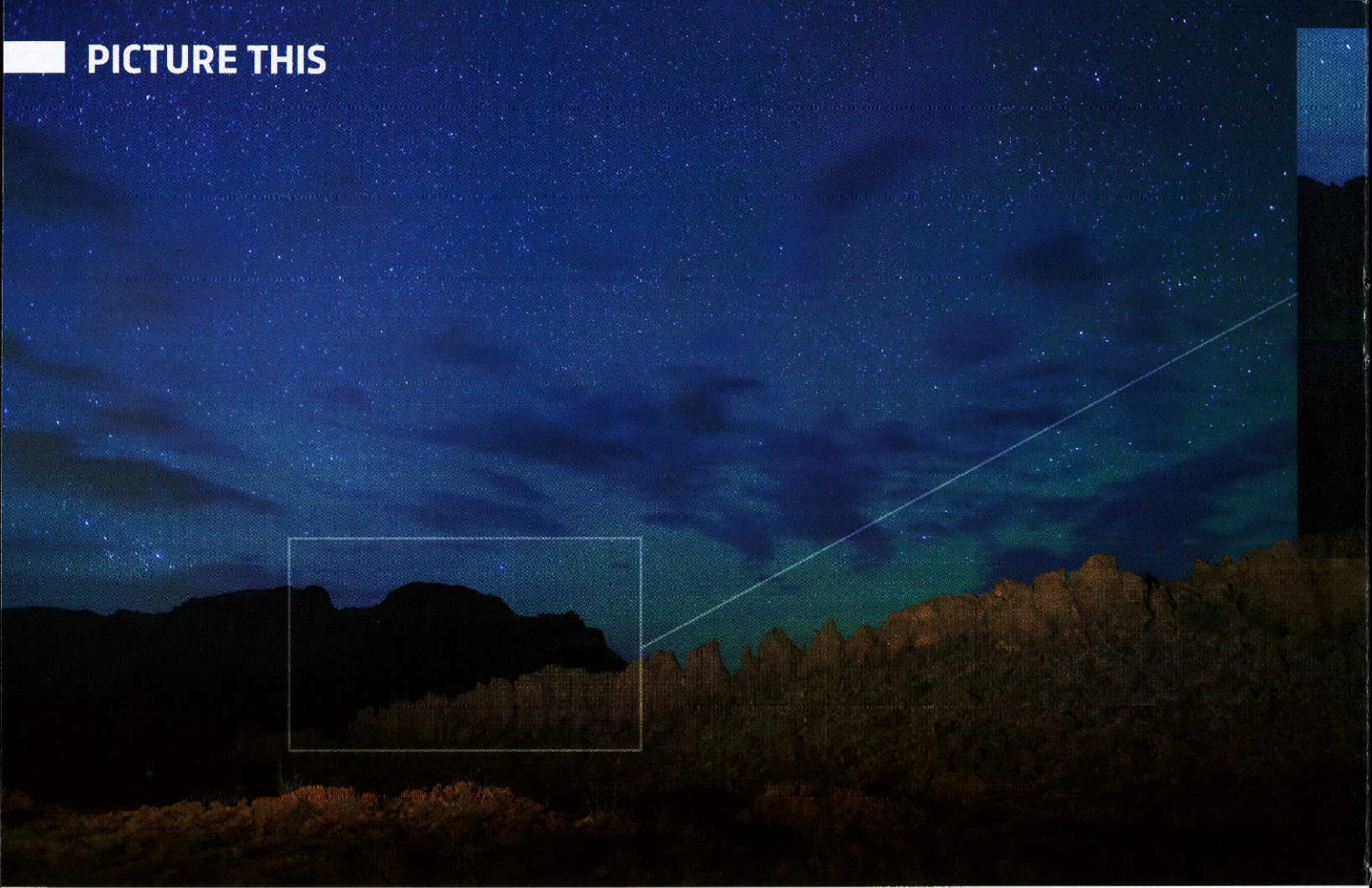


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# CRANK IT UP

*Opportunities expand for shooting in low light.*

**BY EARL NOTTINGHAM**

**BACK IN THE OLDEN DAYS** of photographic film, one of the first things I was told as a cub photographer was that to obtain the sharpest photo possible, a serious photographer needed to use a film that had a low ASA (American Standards Association) number — referring to the sensitivity of that particular film to light, also known as film “speed.”

A low ASA number meant low speed and low sensitivity; a high number meant high speed and high sensitivity. The sharpness of the lower speed film is due to smaller grains of silver salts in the film emulsion. Conversely, faster films have larger and clumpier grains of silver that

make them more sensitive to light. Faster films allow photos to be made in lower light situations but result in a granular or “grainy” appearance in the final image. Typically, films in the 25–125 ASA range were considered low speed, with anything over 400 classified as high.

The trade-off was apparent. You could shoot a slow film and get very sharp images, but that might require you to use a tripod because of the longer exposures. You could use a faster film for faster exposures, but the result might be a grainier image. As film emulsions improved over the years, manufacturers could increase ASA speeds yet keep grain down.

Beginning in the 1980s, the ASA standard was superseded by ISO (International Organization for Standardization). Both standards still referenced the sensitivity/speed of a film. As digital sensors replaced traditional film, ISO speeds remained as a useful measurement of sensitivity to light. The difference is that while a film is limited to one ISO speed, the digital sensor can be set to a wide variety of ISOs, ranging from very low to extremely high, opening a new world of possibilities for creative photography. You can now have the equivalent of an unlimited number of traditional film emulsions available in one digital camera.

With digital images, film grain has now been replaced by its electronic



PHOTOS BY EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD



**Opposite and above.** Setting the camera to a higher ISO (12,800 in this case) opens up new opportunities for shooting nighttime scenes. Enlarged, the “digital noise” becomes more visible.

**Left:** This black-and-white film negative shows the coarse grain pattern inherent in high-speed film emulsions.

equivalent — digital noise — which has an uncanny resemblance to grain. While digital noise increases as the camera is set to higher ISOs, it doesn't approach the degraded resolution of a high ISO film. This means that the photographer can now venture to ISOs from 100 to roughly 12,000 (and higher) and still get good image quality. The quality increases with each new camera model that comes out. (Photographers shooting in automatic modes may not be aware that the camera is changing ISO speeds behind the scenes.)

Despite the ability of digital cameras to shoot at higher ISOs, many photographers are still reluctant to embrace the higher speeds for various reasons. Many traditionalists still cling to the idea that “low is best,” not realizing that images from a typical newer camera using an ISO of, for example, 400 are as noise-free as those recorded by previous

models shooting at 100.

On my previous camera, for instance, I wouldn't venture past ISO 3,200 due to noise. Now, I find that ISO 12,800 is my acceptable limit. That type of sensitivity makes photographers rethink the limits of what can be considered good shooting light. Every starlit sky, moonlit night or candlelit room becomes a backdrop for a potential masterpiece. You will need to test your own camera at various ISOs to see where noise becomes unacceptable. The bottom line is that shooting at a high ISO is no longer a barrier to getting sharp images.

There will always be instances (such as portraiture and daylight landscape photography) where shooting at a low ISO is still preferable. However, once you have ventured into the hours of waning light, cranked up that ISO and seen the photographic possibilities that exist on the dark side, you may never go back. ★

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Please send questions and comments to Earl at [earl.nottingham@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:earl.nottingham@tpwd.texas.gov).  
For more tips on outdoor photography, visit the magazine's photography page  
at [www.tpwmagazine.com/photography](http://www.tpwmagazine.com/photography).



## PORT A WITH THE CAPTAIN

*The best way to see Port Aransas' fish and birds is from a boat.*

BY MELISSA GASKILL  
PHOTOS BY  
SONJA SOMMERFELD



### AUSTIN

3.75 hours

### DALLAS

6.5 hours

### EL PASO

10.25 hours

### SAN ANTONIO

2.75 hours

### BROWNSVILLE

3 hours

### HOUSTON

4 hours

Bobby Grumbles has boating and fishing roots reaching back to his early teens — not an unusual story for a Port Aransas native. He recently shared a taste of life in this Texas coastal town for those of us without the good fortune to grow up there.

Grumbles and I met at Fisherman's Wharf. He started working on these docks as a kid, graduated to deck hand on the catamaran party boats Wharf Cat and Scat Cat and became a certified captain for ocean-going passenger vessels in 1975. He met his wife, Sharon, when she came to work here. In 1993, he and Hefner Appling Jr. bought out the business. One of the Grumbles' daughters, Tara, is now general manager.

Grumbles moved on to bigger boats — he pilots ships into Corpus Christi harbor for the Aransas-Corpus Christi Pilots, which assists ships in the port — but keeps close tabs on goings-on at Fisherman's Wharf.

He takes me aboard the Scat Cat, which runs half- and full-day fishing trips into the Gulf of Mexico for snapper, king mackerel, cobia and reef fish in season. Passengers also enjoy birds and dolphins along the way.

"The catamaran-style boat gives a smoother ride," Grumbles says. "Just show up with sunscreen and a towel." The wharf even offers fish-cleaning service.

"I was fishing about 280 days a year when it was my job, but I still like to go out on boats and fish with friends and family for fun. It may be kind of like a mailman taking a walk, but fishing is the

thing here,” Grumbles says.

He tells me that Port A was called Tarpon at one time, but it became Port Aransas in 1911. Tarpon trivia: President Franklin D. Roosevelt caught a 77-pounder here in 1937, and the once-disappearing fish have made a comeback.

Grumbles points to marshes and flats across from San Jose Island, a barrier island just north of Mustang Island, which Port Aransas occupies. He likes to chase redfish and trout here.

“We have one of the finest bays and estuaries along the Gulf right out of Port Aransas. I love when everybody pulls their boats up for floating parties on the backside of Saint Joe,” he says,

Back on land, we hop in his truck and head down the beach to the 1,200-foot-long Horace Caldwell Pier, named after a Nueces County commissioner who served from 1945 to 1960. A small shop rents fishing rods and sells bait and tackle; lights on the pier at night create good chances to catch trout, redfish, whiting and cobia.

“You can catch all kinds of stuff if you’re geared up for it right,” Grumbles promises. “Ask at the bait shops what to use or hire a guide.”

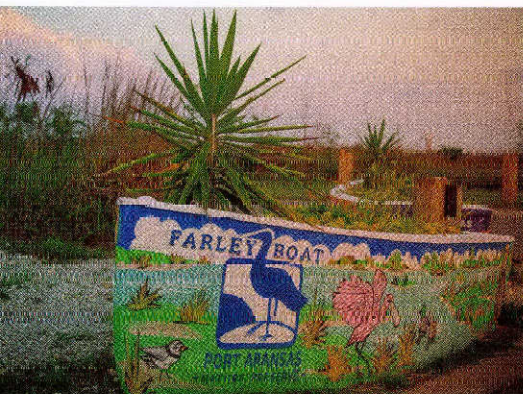
Port A offers miles of beach for surf fishing, too. Grumbles gestures toward the expanse of sand stretching as far as I can see and says,

an active community member and avid outdoorsman who lived nearby and kept an eye on the park. Grumbles grew up with I.B.’s son, Pat Magee, who used to have a surf shop in town. They spent a lot of time on the beach.

“I wish I had a dollar for every mile I drove on the beach looking at the scenery,” Grumbles says. “I also spent a lot of time on the beach with my girls. My favorite month is September. The island gets kind of quiet, fishing is good, the beach is pretty, and the weather is nice.”

Fisherman’s Wharf runs sunset cruises on the Scat Cat every evening from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

“We go down the channel toward



## FEATURED ATTRACTIONS (LEFT - RIGHT):

- ★ Bobby Grumbles on the deck of the Wharf Cat, Fisherman’s Wharf
- ★ Farley Boat replica at Port Aransas Nature Preserve
- ★ Mustang Island State Park
- ★ Roberts Point Park fishing pier

using the local moniker for San Jose.

We pass people fishing from boats in the channel and others casting from the jetties that line it. Folks get good-sized redfish and trout off the jetties, Grumbles tells me. Fishing is good here year-round, but peaks between February and April. In summer, people may catch Spanish mackerel and, with the right gear, king mackerel. Sometimes those on the jetties reel in snook.

“Just choose a spot.” Many fishermen also like the jetties at Mustang Island State Park at the far end of the island.

People fish off the jetties on Saint Joe Island, too. Most of them arrive on the Jetty Boat, which travels back and forth from Fisherman’s Wharf throughout the day. The island is private property, and its owners still run cattle there, but all beaches in Texas are public to the high-tide mark. Just don’t miss the last boat back across, Grumbles advises.

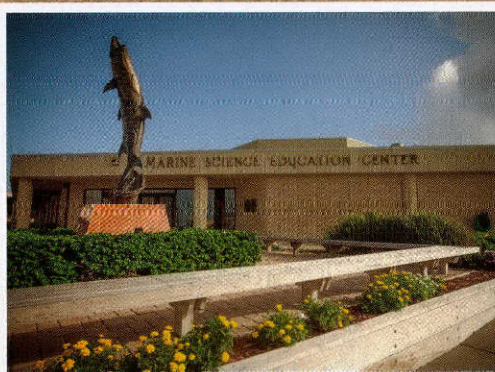
Port Aransas offers plenty of non-fishing diversions, of course. People go birding and shelling on Saint Joe and Mustang Island beaches. The state park offers ranger-led birding and shelling walks and has campsites.

I.B. Magee Beach Park also has campsites, a beach house with showers and an observation deck right on the edge of town. Created in 1952 as Holiday Beach Park, the park was renamed in 2004 in honor of the late I.B. Magee Jr.,

the Gulf and up Lydia Ann Channel to catch sunset behind the lighthouse for people to take pictures,” he says. The 1850s Lydia Ann Lighthouse guided ships safely through an ever-moving Aransas Pass — one of only three natural passes in Texas. The lighthouse, shut down in the 1950s, shines again thanks to its purchase and restoration by H-E-B’s Charles Butt in 1988.

Sunset cruises also pass the wreck of the SS John Worthington, a tanker that served in World War II. It took a torpedo off the coast of Brazil in 1943, and the crew sailed their badly damaged ship all the way to Galveston. Deemed beyond repair, the ship was stripped and abandoned here; a buoy marks its location.

Afternoon dolphin tours on Fisherman’s Wharf’s Jetty Boat explore the ship channel and Lydia Ann Channel, where pods of bottlenose dolphins live year-round.



These sleek gray mammals with erect dorsal fins and distinctive tails feed and play in the water and surf the bow waves of large ships in the channel.

The Wharf Cat tours Aransas National Wildlife Refuge near Rockport to see whooping cranes from November to March. Grumbles narrated that trip himself for years.

Birding goes on year-round at Port A's Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail sites: Paradise Pond, Port Aransas Nature Preserve, Port Aransas Jetty, Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center and Port Aransas Wetland Park, plus Mustang Island State Park to the south.

At the 1,217-acre Port Aransas Nature Preserve, formerly known as Charlie's Pasture, early island residents once grazed cattle and a teenaged Grumbles and friends may or may not have shot skeet from a trailer. It includes 3 miles of hike and bike trails, boardwalks and two towers overlooking wetland areas.

Another good place to see birds is the University of Texas Marine Science Institute Wetlands Education

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*From top: Horace Caldwell Pier at I.B. Mueye Beach Park; on board the Jetty Boat to San Jose Island; "Interdependency" statue at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute; Port Aransas water tower at sunrise; boardwalk at the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center.*





**MORE INFO:**

**PORT ARANSAS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

[portaransas.org](http://portaransas.org)

**MUSTANG ISLAND STATE PARK**

[tpwd.texas.gov/mustangisland](http://tpwd.texas.gov/mustangisland)

**FISHERMAN'S WHARF, WHARF CAT**

[fishermanswharfporta.com](http://fishermanswharfporta.com)

**VENETIAN HOT PLATE RESTAURANT**

[venetianhotplate.com](http://venetianhotplate.com)

**MOBY DICK'S RESTAURANT**

[mobydicksporta.com](http://mobydicksporta.com)

**PORT ARANSAS NATURE PRESERVE**

[cityofportaransas.org/nature\\_preserve.cfm](http://cityofportaransas.org/nature_preserve.cfm)

**UT MARINE SCIENCE INSTITUTE**

[utmsi.utexas.edu](http://utmsi.utexas.edu)

Center. A trail circles a saltwater pond and features illustrated information boards; water- and beach-related treasures fill its indoor visitor center, including aquariums displaying seahorses, hermit crabs, flounder and other local fish.

The last order of business is where to eat; Grumbles rattles off a list of places it would take us weeks to work through.

"For a town this size, we have a variety of really good restaurants," he says. We settle on dinner at Venetian Hot Plate, owned by Linda and Maurice Halioua, transplants from Venice. I enjoy *linguine nel golfo*, pasta tossed

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Roberts Point Park

with shrimp and scallops sautéed with garlic, parsley and fresh basil, with a rich white wine sauce. My dining partner has *braciola di maiale*, a grilled 16-ounce pork chop with a portobello, honey and marsala demi-glaze.

The next day, I take his suggestion for breakfast at Moby Dick's, ordering Texas eggs benedict: two fried eggs

on biscuits covered in sausage gravy, green chiles and cheese. The sizable serving gives me plenty of time to search the walls and ceilings, bedecked with everything from a string of puffer fish lights to boat and fishing gear and tackle, pirate paraphernalia, shark jaws, impressive fish and mermaids.

I've barely scratched the surface of the restaurant list, so I tuck it away for next visit. My brief time with Grumbles has me feeling almost like a Port A native, and I wave at people on the way to the ferry. To paraphrase a popular saying, "I'm not from Port Aransas, but will come here as often as I can." ★

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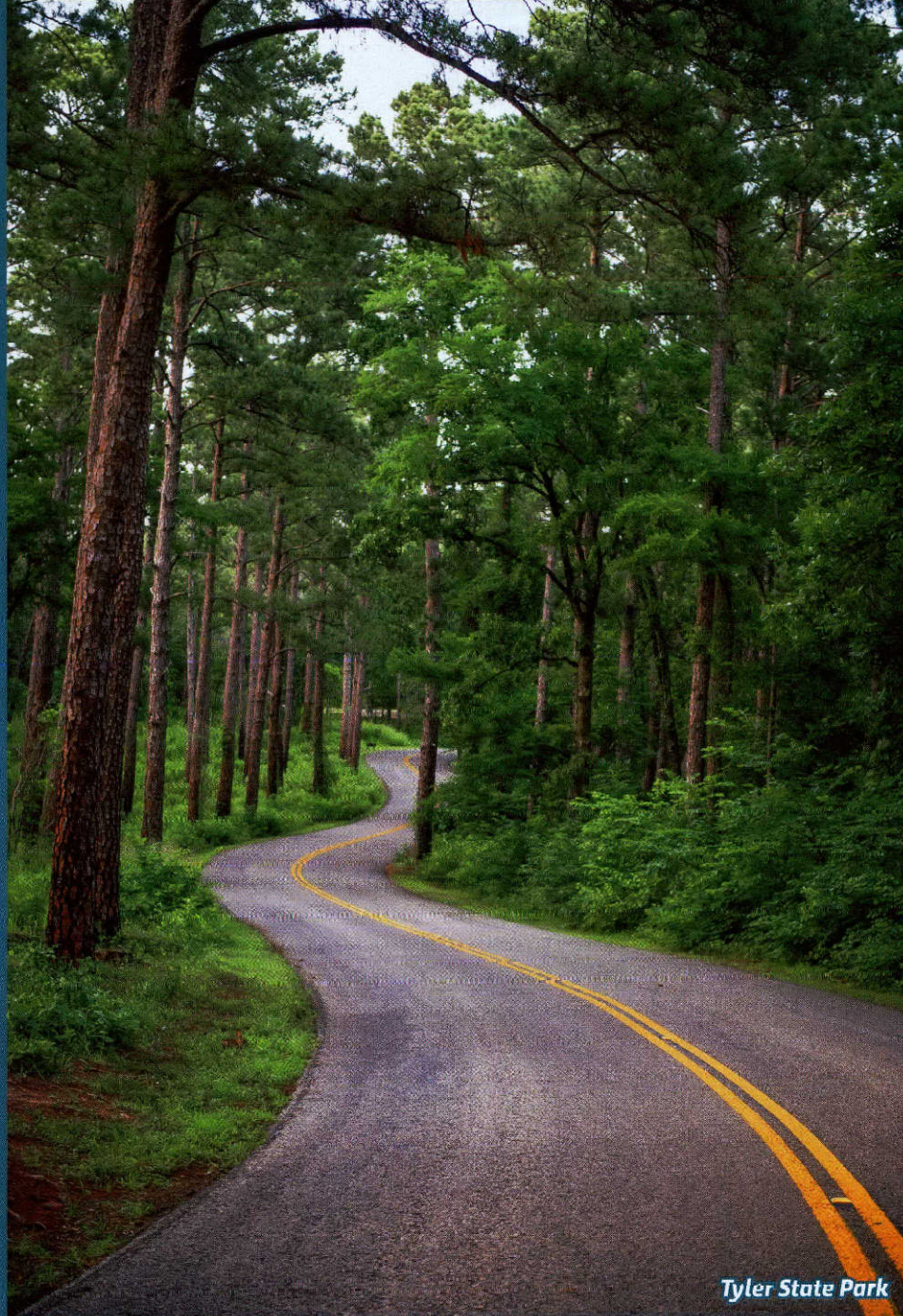
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**SAN MARCOS**



Tyler State Park

PHOTO BY CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

If you straightened out Texas' 80,000 miles of highway and set them end-to-end, they would lap the Earth more than three times. But the real fun of Texas roads is the endless variety. The winding drives of East Texas are lush with roadside forests, while on the other side of the state, stretches of West Texas highway cast shimmering mirages in the heat. Wildflowers festoon roadsides through the Hill Country, and the allure of endless ocean is the backdrop for beach drives. Wherever your Texas road trip takes you, you'll be sure to find the diverse and beautiful scenery you crave, and probably some surprises as well — you never know what lies around the bend in the road. *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine photographers Earl Nottingham and Chase Fountain take us down a few of their favorite byways this month.

#### TYLER STATE PARK

Park Road 16 in Tyler State Park loops around the 985-acre park, showcasing the picturesque, peaceful 64-acre Tyler State Park Lake at its center. Towering 100-foot pines shade the scenic drive, where you can spot wildlife and watch paddlers and anglers.

# Scenic Drives

BY EARL NOTTINGHAM & CHASE FOUNTAIN

*Palo Duro Canyon State Park*



PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD

*Padre Island National Seashore*



PHOTO BY CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

## PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK

The drive into one of Texas' most iconic state parks gives you the feeling of being transported back into time, historically and geologically. Park Road 5 rapidly descends from flat and rolling High Plains grasslands down to the canyon floor, surrounded by multicolored layers of sandstone, carved over the eons by the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River.



PHOTO BY SONIA SOMMERFELD / TPWD

## PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

This 60-mile beach road runs along the longest stretch of undeveloped barrier island in the world. After mile marker 5, the road is accessible only by four-wheel-drive vehicles. See a variety of wildlife, including Kemp's ridley sea turtles, coyotes and many bird species, and the resting place of three Spanish ships that sank here in 1554.

## BURNET COUNTY

A true Texas country road, FM 340 takes you south from Burnet on a winding drive through expansive farmlands. There are several low-water crossings and two bridges. After 10 miles, take a left onto FM 341, which crosses Hamilton Creek and goes over several hills with breathtaking vistas of the Hill Country, including a glimpse of the Highland Lakes.



PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD

## CADDO LAKE STATE PARK TO DAINGERFIELD STATE PARK

After leaving the mysterious bayous of Caddo Lake, this drive takes you through the historic town of Jefferson and leads past scenic Lake O' the Pines before reaching Daingerfield State Park. Framed by towering East Texas woods, narrow Park Road 17 winds and undulates through the park before coming to an end at Lake Daingerfield. In autumn, the trees turn brilliant yellows, oranges and reds.



PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD

## HUNT

Starting at Hunt and traveling west, FM 1340 snakes through the heart of the Hill Country, crisscrossing the peaceful, cypress-lined North Fork of the Guadalupe River several times. Start the drive with a visit to the historic Hunt Store.

## MARFA TO CHINATI HOT SPRINGS

Pinto Canyon Road (FM 2810) is about 50 miles long, and the last 20-mile section is unpaved, steep and rough. But it's well worth the effort for the feeling of leaving civilization far behind. See majestic Chinati Peak and the occasional javelina. Use of a high-clearance vehicle is advised.



PHOTO BY CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

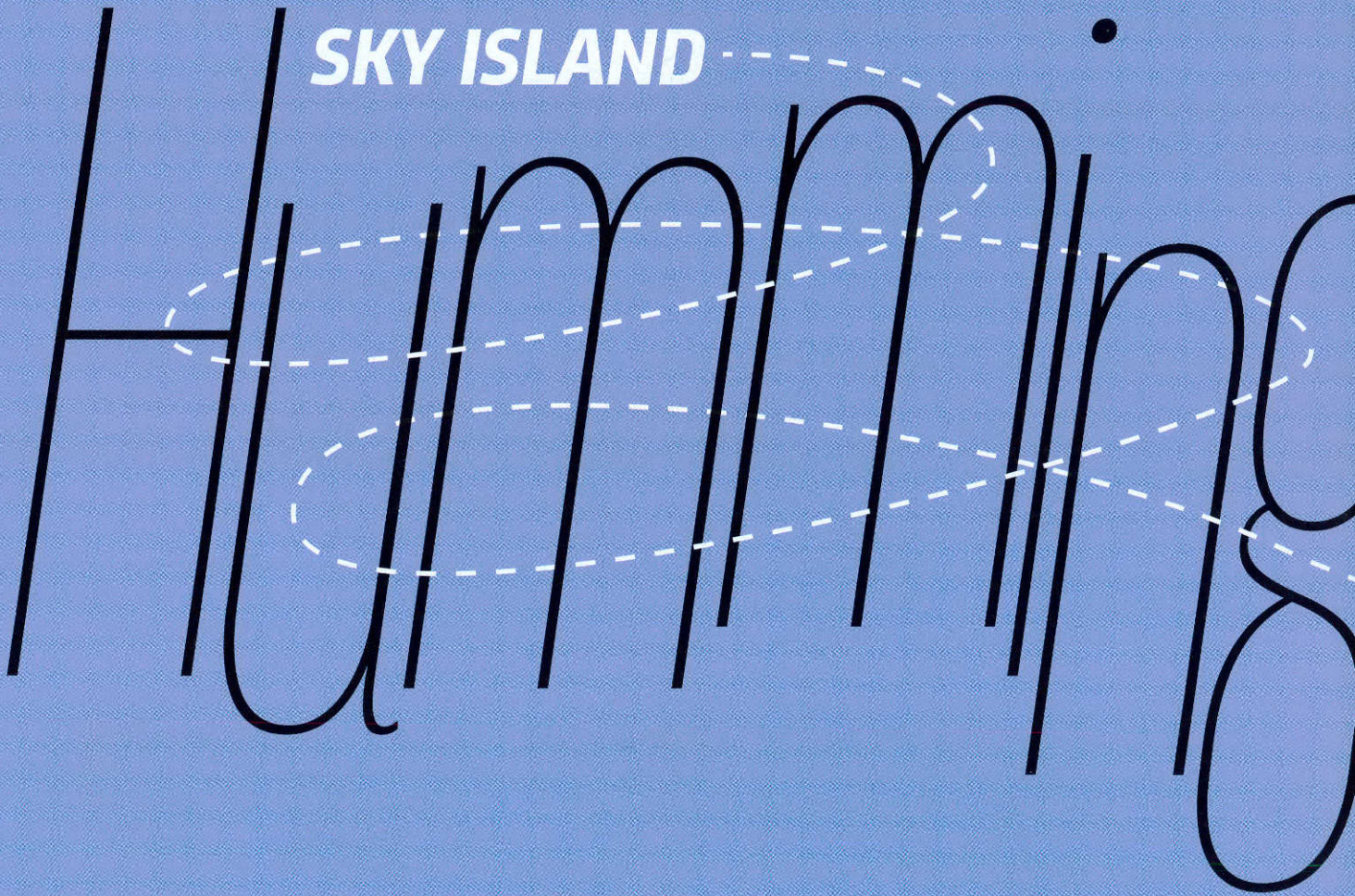
Burnet County

Daingerfield State Park

FM 1340 near Hunt

Pinto Canyon Road

The tiny, iridescent speed bomb buzzes past with a loud *hummm* that inspires his name, stopping in midair, pivoting right and diving down to the bobbing blossom.



As blurred wings keep the diminutive dandy aloft, he thrusts his long, slender bill deep into the flower's corresponding shape for a drink of nectar and a dusting of pollen. Intent on gathering the large amounts of food needed to fuel his zippy metabolism, he pauses only to chase off a competitor.

# Hummingbirds



Lucifer hummingbird  
[shown actual size]

*This avian favorite can turn on a dime, and he's scarcely larger than one.*

# Hummingbirds

## OF THE TRANS-PECOS

BY EVA FREDERICK

Hummingbirds are birds of extremes. They can fly up, down, forward and backward with amazing dexterity, yet they can barely walk — the most their tiny legs can do is shuffle from side to side on perches. During the day, they maintain staggeringly high body temperatures, sometimes up to 107 degrees, but drop into a chilly torpor at night, bottoming out at a body temperature of around 70 degrees. And for their minuscule size, they make some of the longest migrations of any birds, with some species flying almost 4,000 miles from Mexico to Canada each year. The Trans-Pecos region boasts 18 species of these opalescent powerhouses; the 15 documented in Kelly Bryan's West Texas hummingbird banding study are listed below.



### ALLEN'S HUMMINGBIRD

*Selasphorus sasin*  
3.5 inches  
July – November  
Study's 10-year total: 141

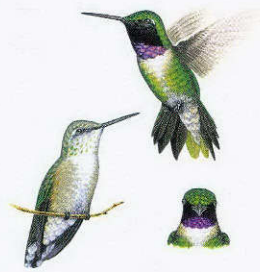
*In addition to the nectar they drink, Allen's hummingbirds also have been known to pluck trapped insects out of spiderwebs — or even snack on the spiders themselves.*



### ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD

*Calypte anna*  
3.9 inches  
September – January  
Study's 10-year total: 496

*Anna's hummingbirds maintain a body temperature of around 107 degrees. That's 8.4 degrees hotter than a human's body temperature.*



### BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD

*Archilochus alexandri*  
3.5 inches  
March – October  
Study's 10-year total: 7,518

*Black-chinned hummingbirds line their nests with soft plant down and insect and spider silk. This provides a cozy cup-shaped space for their eggs, which are tiny — about the size of a coffee bean.*



### BLUE-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD

*Lampornis clemenciae*  
4.3 – 4.7 inches  
April – October  
Study's 10-year total: 5

*The largest hummingbird breeding in the U.S., this species often dominates other hummingbirds, chasing them away from food sources, and has also been known to chase large predators like the northern goshawk.*



### BROAD-BILLED HUMMINGBIRD

*Cyanthus latirostris*  
3.9 inches  
March – October  
Study's 10-year total: 12

*Male broad-billed hummingbirds are one of the most colorful U.S. hummingbirds, with a bright red bill and brilliant blue gorget fading into a shimmering green breast.*





**BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD**

*Selasphorus platycercus*  
3.1 – 3.5 inches  
March – December  
Study's 10-year total: 3,826

Male broad-tailed hummingbirds use the feathers on the tips of their wings to produce a loud, metallic-sounding trill as they fly.



**BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD**

*Amazilia yucatanensis*  
3.9 – 4.3 inches  
October, single record  
Study's 10-year total: 1

Mostly a South Texas bird, the buff-bellied hummingbird gets much of its nectar from Turk's cap and ball moss.



**CALLIOPE HUMMINGBIRD**

*Selasphorus calliope*  
3.1 inches  
July – September  
Study's 10-year total: 562

Weighing in at only 2.6 grams and measuring 3 inches from bill tip to tail, the calliope hummingbird is the smallest bird in the United States.



**COSTA'S HUMMINGBIRD**

*Calypte costae*  
3.5 inches  
Occasional (spring, fall, winter)  
Study's 10-year total: 5

This tiny desert-dweller copes with chilly nighttime temperatures by slowing its 500-900 beats-per-minute heart rate to a rate of around 50 beats per minute.



**LUCIFER HUMMINGBIRD**

*Calochorax lucifer*  
3.5 inches  
March – October  
Study's 10-year total: 855

Male lucifer hummingbirds boast a brilliant magenta throat and lustrous green feathers on the head, wings and tail. Another fun fact: the bird's name means "bearer of light."



**MAGNIFICENT HUMMINGBIRD**

*Eugenes fulgens*  
4.3 – 5.5 inches  
March – November  
Study's 10-year total: 213

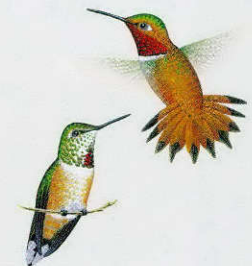
Magnificent hummingbirds' hearts can beat at a rate of up to 1,200 beats per minute — one of the fastest vertebrate heart rates in the world.



**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD**

*Archilochus colubris*  
2.8 – 3.5 inches  
August – October  
Study's 10-year total: 605

Ruby-throated hummingbirds' feeding preferences match the males' vibrant coloration: they prefer nectar from red or orange flowers.



**RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD**

*Selasphorus rufus*  
2.8 – 3.5 inches  
July – December  
Study's 10-year total: 4,576

This hummingbird makes one of the longest migrations of any bird, based on body size, flying almost 4,000 miles from Alaska and Canada to Mexico.



**VIOLET-CROWNED HUMMINGBIRD**

*Amazilia violiceps*  
3.9 inches  
Occasional (summer, fall, winter)  
Study's 10-year total: 1

This hummingbird has been recorded in Texas only 19 times, with sightings throughout the year. The genus *Amazilia* is named after Amazili, an Inca heroine in a French novel.



**WHITE-EARED HUMMINGBIRD**

*Hylocichla leucotis*  
3.5 – 4 inches  
May – September  
Study's 10-year total: 18

The male white-eared hummingbird sports a violet forehead and chin, with a glittering green throat. The female is a duller green. Both sport white ear stripes.



All 300 species of hummingbirds, some of the world's smallest birds, occur in the Western Hemisphere; only a small sampling make their

way to North America. Incredibly, most U.S. hummingbird species can be found in West Texas during the fall migration from July through October, so it's no surprise that bird watchers trek to the mile-high mountains of Fort Davis for the peak-season festival that allows access to myriad viewing hot spots: the Davis Mountains Hummingbird Celebration.

*By Madge Lindsay • Photos by Larry Ditto*

Broad-tailed, black-chinned and rufous hummingbirds are common sights here at this time, but attendees can add new species such as lucifer, ruby-throated and tiny calliope, the smallest of all North American hummingbirds and, at 3 inches long, the smallest migrating bird in the world.

### DAVIS MOUNTAINS HUMMINGBIRD CELEBRATION

Location, location, location is the key to this festival's popularity. Private landowners open up their hummingbird sanctuaries for peak viewing and photography. Public spaces like the McDonald Observatory and the 33,000-acre Nature Conservancy Davis Mountains Preserve stock feeders at bird-viewing stations during peak season, too. The area, populated with abundant wildlife in addition to hummingbirds, is known as a "sky island" because the higher elevation and special climate (with more rainfall) bring a mix of species different from the surrounding area.

Rain doesn't dampen spirits at this event, as it actually brings more birds to the viewing sites. At a private garden outing during the 2016 festival, participants who were sheltered under a porch roof during a light rain had a fantastic view of a garden filled with hummingbirds, with Blue Mountain as a backdrop. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department ornithologist Cliff Shackelford provided expert assistance and information.

"Be sure to keep your binoculars aimed and ready," he advised. "These birds don't like to stay still for long."

Those who followed that admonition were soon

rewarded with a rufous sighting, a bird he described as “shiny as a newly minted penny.”

Another group outing focused on capturing imagery of these wildlife-viewing moments with renowned bird photographer Larry Ditto, who leads the Christmas Mountains Oasis Hummingbird Photography Workshop.

“Most of our time is spent in the field learning the best techniques and equipment for capturing great wildlife images, mostly birds,” Ditto says.

While his personal goal for the 2017 festival is a “perfect” photo of the magnificent hummingbird, Ditto enjoys sharing his tips with those just learning how to catch the motion of the festival’s tiny jewel.

“For hummingbird photography, I use a special setup with four or five high-speed flashes that allow the camera to capture photos at almost 1/12,000 second,” he recommends. “Of course, that is plenty fast enough to stop a hummingbird’s wings and to get those unbelievable aerial acrobatics hummingbirds are known for. Some will be shooting at more conventional shutter speeds, but either way, the reward can be eye-popping.”

Back in town, activities include workshops on tropical hummingbirds, hummingbird gardening and proper feeding of these tiny nymphs. Linda Hedges, retired TPWD biologist, shared her experience with native plants and garden design in a session.

“If you want to have hummingbirds in your yard, you have to provide food, water and cover,” Hedges says. “The best way to accomplish this is by using native flowers and trees common to your area, especially those providing natural nectar and tiny insects.”

An opening reception and evening get-togethers at the Limpia Hotel offer a chance to socialize and discuss the day’s observations. Pre-session excursions provide additional opportunities. It all winds to a close with a Saturday evening banquet.

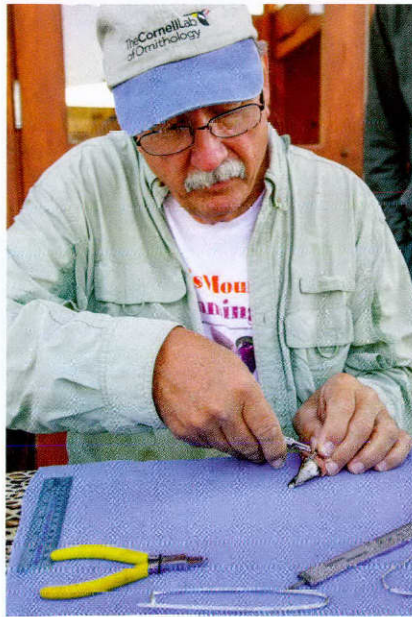
While the festival offers an entertaining, jam-packed schedule for visitors to view and photograph hummingbirds at feeders and gardens, there’s a chance to watch real science happening as well.

## BANDING HUMMINGBIRDS

At the Davis Mountains Preserve, surrounded by field trip participants, retired TPWD biologist Kelly Bryan held a tiny bird in hand and called out size measurements, weight and condition assessments to an assistant, who recorded that data. Bryan attached a numbered metal band to one foot, then held the ruby-throated hummingbird up for everyone to see. He told the group that the hatching-year male bird fledged from a nest that summer somewhere within its breeding range and was now migrating south to Mexico for the winter.

“We are gathering valuable data about these birds,” says Bryan, who works this and several other West Texas Avian Research banding sites. “When banded birds are recovered or found by other banders, we have evidence of the bird’s flight path, recovery location and condition, which helps us better understand the migration and life cycle for these birds.”

Over the past decade, Bryan’s work has revealed where



and when most hummingbirds occur in the region at the time of capture and, as banded birds are recaptured, their destination. The project’s banded hummingbirds have been found in Alaska, California, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Louisiana and several Texas locations. After banding almost 19,000 birds, Bryan (with help from wife Donna and experienced volunteers) has collected data documenting 15 species in the Trans-Pecos region; 13 of these are seasonal residents in the Jeff Davis County sky islands. Three additional species have been documented by photograph, bringing the regional total to 18 species. Only southeastern Arizona rivals West Texas for U.S. hummingbird diversity.

## A NEW SPECIES DOCUMENTED

Two months after the 2016 Davis Mountains Hummingbird Celebration, there was something new to celebrate — a first U.S. record, the amethyst-throated hummingbird. The mountain gem arrived in October and perched right on the Cornell Lab’s West Texas hummingbird live cam ([youtu.be/JAAXKSsKKPk](http://youtu.be/JAAXKSsKKPk)). Bryan and others watched for nearly a day and photographed its amethyst gorget. This species normally occurs only in the mountains of eastern and south-central Mexico and is not known to be migratory, except for one other occasion when a male wandered all the way up to Quebec in July 2016. Texas now boasts 19 hummingbird species on its official state list.

See [westtexashummingbirds.com](http://westtexashummingbirds.com) to follow the progress of the hummingbird project.

The 2017 Davis Mountains Hummingbird Migration Celebration is August 24-27. For more information, visit [www.fortdavis.com](http://www.fortdavis.com) or call (800) 524-3015.

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*Madge Lindsay, formerly with TPWD, lives in the Davis Mountains. She launched the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, the first birding trail in the U.S., and later served as state director for Audubon Mississippi.*

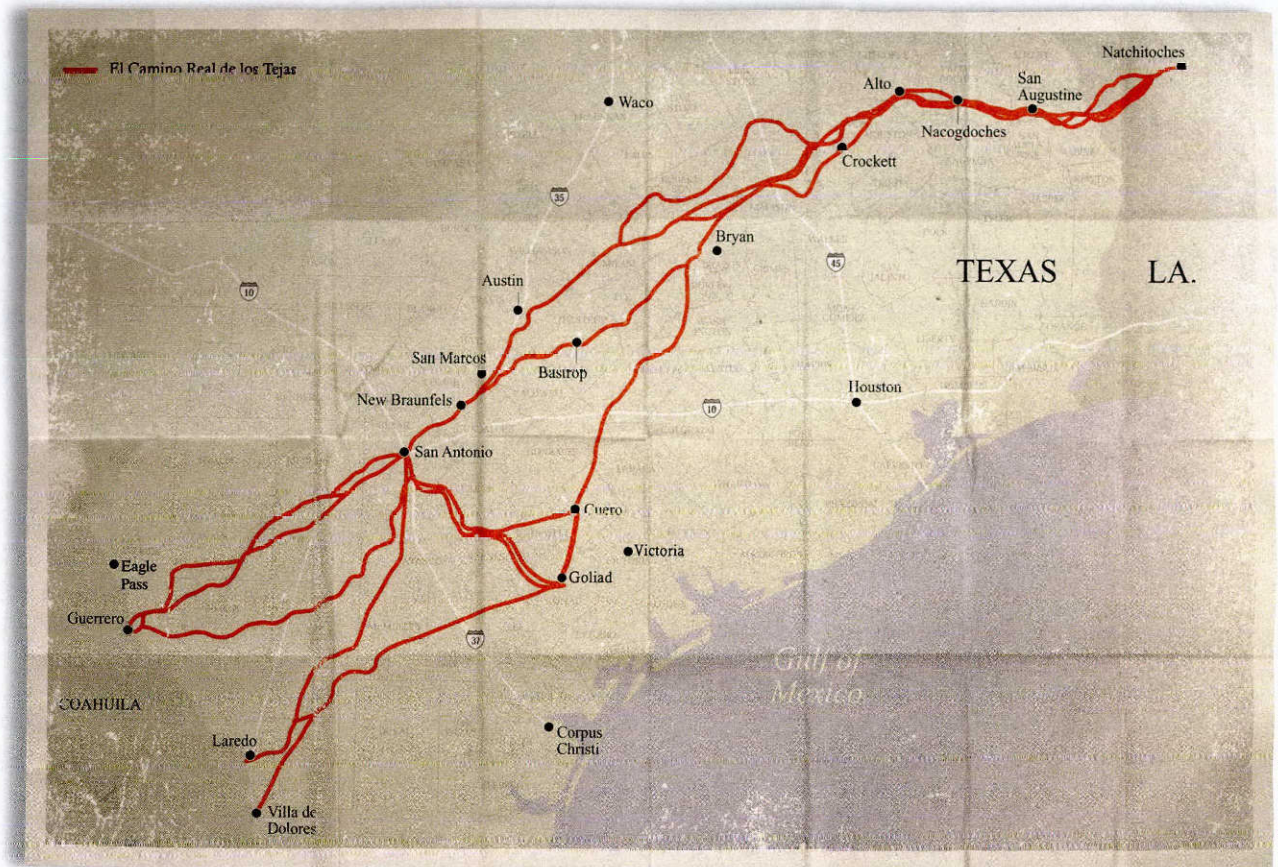
*Above: Kelly Bryan puts a band on a hummingbird during the Davis Mountains Hummingbird Celebration.*

*Opposite: Hummingbirds whirl around feeders at one of the festival viewing sites near Davis Mountains State Park.*



PHOTO BY SONJA SOMMERFELD/TWIG

*Thomas McKinney built his homestead in 1850 near the spot where El Camino Real crossed Onion Creek in what is now McKinney Falls State Park in Austin.*



# TEXAS' ROYAL ROAD

Traveled by explorers and settlers,  
El Camino Real gets new  
attention at state parks.

**BY EMILY MOSKAL**

EL CAMINO REAL IS TEXAS' OWN ROUTE 66; it's the mother highway that carried travelers from Mexico to Louisiana long before concrete strips or railroad ties crisscrossed the state. As with that famed route, some communities along the way morphed into population centers we inhabit today, filled with varying cultures from those who traversed this camino, or road. Some communities just vanished, abandoned when railroads chose different courses.



PHOTOS BY CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

Spanish explorer Alonso de León entered Texas in 1689 on what would later become known as El Camino Real de los Tejas. A suspected French interloper, Robert de la Salle, had landed on the north Gulf Coast near Matagorda Bay with the intent of establishing settlements, and the Spanish crown in Mexico thought they'd better send de León to remind la Salle that the land belonged to them.

It's thought that the route followed Native American trails. El Camino Real de los Tejas would eventually expand and become a path of overland travel that runs through today's Laredo, San Antonio and Austin, then northeast to Nacogdoches.

A *camino real*, or royal road, connected two Spanish capitals. El Camino Real de los Tejas runs from the interior of Mexico at Santiago de la Monclova (colonial capital of Coahuila province) to Los Adaes, capital of the Spanish province of Texas from 1729 to 1773 (near Robeline, Louisiana, 30 miles from the Sabine River and the Texas border), connecting the missions and presidios in between.

Despite the "royal" connotation, everyone — affiliated or unaffiliated with the Spanish crown — traveled El Camino Real. In later years, traffic flowed the other direction as the road, also known as the Old San Antonio Road, became a key route of immigration into Texas. Texas heroes like Davy Crockett, James Bowie and Sam Houston used the road to come to Texas. Stephen F. Austin traveled El Camino Real to sign the first colony land grant. Frontiersmen, pioneers, settlers and fugitive slaves — all with different motives, yet taking the same path — traversed El Camino Real de los Tejas.

"El Camino was always a place and is a place that brings peoples, places and cultures together," says Steven Gonzales, executive director of the El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association. "The trail is elemental to the state's history, and we would not be calling Texas 'Texas' without it."

Today, it remains the oldest marked trail in the United States — older than the Oregon Trail.

Many highways still follow the original route of El Camino Real, though remnants of the original road have faded with time. Some of the only physical remains of the road remaining today are elongated U-shaped depressions called swales created by the tracks of many

carts and wagons and their draft animals.

The oldest road retains its ability to lure us to travel, camp and seek adventure in Texas state parks that now lie along its path, and the historic road adds a fascinating historical component to consider when visiting those parks.

"People have traveled El Camino for hundreds of years. It crosses changing landscapes, follows natural features and fosters communities," says Jennifer Carpenter, TPWD state park historian. "Then and now, the road offers the intrepid a chance to explore."

State parks along El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail received \$1.5 million in federal funding and \$3.5 million in state funds in 2016 to construct interpretive projects and conduct long-deferred renovation; those projects should be completed this year. Let's visit the three Texas state parks and historic sites along El Camino Real de los Tejas to immerse ourselves in the world of Spanish explorers and the cultural influences that followed.

## MISSION TEJAS STATE PARK

On his fourth expedition into Texas, de León led a group of 114 men to establish a mission in East Texas.

De León founded the first mission in the Spanish state of Texas, Mission San Francisco de los Tejas, in 1690 near a Caddo tribal village. In October 1693, disease and failing crops caused those friars, frustrated by failing conditions and inhospitable lands, to bury the mission bell and cannon, and burn the mission to the ground. Two decades would pass before Spanish settlement efforts resumed in East Texas.

The mission was founded on San Pedro Creek, which still flows on the north end of present-day Mission Tejas State Park. The Civilian Conservation Corps claimed the land for reforestation in the 1930s and built a commemorative log chapel during the Texas centennial in 1936.

Today, remnants of El Camino Real and earthen berms where teamsters dug wagons and carts out of the mud are still visible (as well as the old forestry trail). Swales at the north end of the park run roughly parallel to Texas Highway 21 and in the direction of Caddo Mounds State Historic Site 6 miles away. (Highway 21 follows the original El Camino Real as Old San Antonio Road for 300 miles between San Marcos and the Texas border.)

**Left:** Traces of El Camino Real are visible at Mission Tejas State Park in East Texas. Spanish explorers blazed the trail as they established the first mission in Texas among the Caddo people, who lived in thatched huts, as seen at Caddo Mounds State Historic Site.

**Right:** Modern-day hikers can follow the well-worn path taken by soldiers, missionaries and traders along El Camino Real at McKinney Falls State Park in Austin. Road signs mark the route of El Camino Real between Austin and San Antonio.

Mission Tejas State Park, at the north end of Davy Crockett National Forest, is marked by a predominance of loblolly pines. The Rice Family Log Home, a stopover for many travelers in the 1800s, represents the quintessential “dog-trot” log home of pioneers.

Today, a newly constructed three-building interpretive center with timber siding and pine-needle-textured footpaths will include an exhibit hall with artifacts, photographs and artwork, along with interactive exhibits. There’s an El Camino Real hiking segment in the park, too.

“I think it’s another element of connecting people to their shared heritage,” says Eric Ray, lead interpretive planner at TPWD. “You still do all the same things — you play in a creek, you go fishing, you camp, you go hiking. People did those things 300 years ago, too.”

## MCKINNEY FALLS STATE PARK

Along the outer rim of the Hill Country (or, as the Spanish called it, *Lomería Grande*), at the base of the Balcones Escarpment, abundant springs gush from the ground in San Antonio, New Braunfels, San Marcos and Austin, an irresistibly cool offering for parched travelers. These rest stops, or *parajes*, later bloomed into settlements.

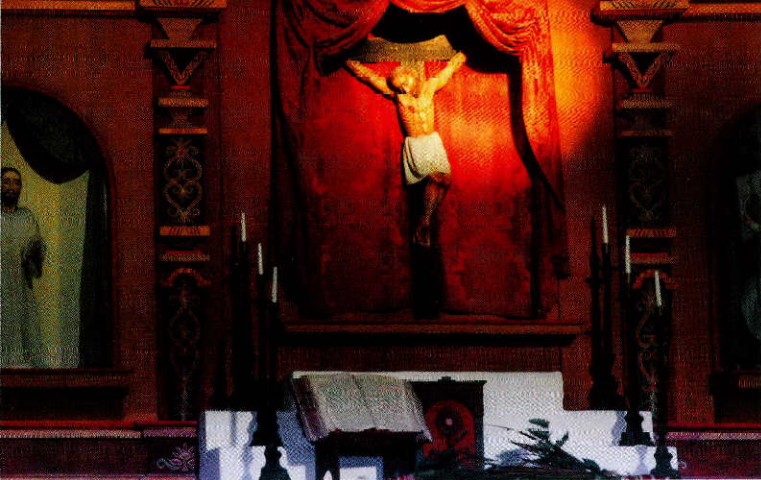
In 1716, Domingo Ramón’s expedition brought the first full-scale colonizing venture into Spanish Texas. Women and children came, along with a thousand head of goats, sheep and cattle, scores of oxen with two-wheeled carts and 4,000 horses and pack mules. After passing San Pedro Creek near present-day San Antonio, the caravan skirted the Hill Country past the Guadalupe River and crossed the San Marcos River. Later, they followed the west bank of the swift-flowing Arroyo de las Garrapatas (named after the ticks that plagued travelers), until they could cross it on a ribbon of stones that provided solid footing across the swollen creek.

Today, that creek has been identified as Onion Creek, and that crossing is at the Upper and Lower Falls of McKinney Falls State Park in Austin. The sounds made by those traveling parties — hammering hooves, bleating goats, clanking bells and groaning wheels — can be imagined at the Lower Falls, where spidery arteries of worn wheel-ruts stretch across the wide swaths of limestone, and soil swales run on the opposite bank up to the old ruins of the McKinney homestead.

A half-dozen expeditions crossed the falls in the 18th century. Throughout the second half of the 19th century,



PHOTOS BY SONJA SOMMERFELD, TPWD



PHOTOS © EMILY MOSKAL

the McKinney homestead served as an informal meeting place at the crossing, with one of the first gristmills in the area. Thomas McKinney recognized the value of land at El Camino Real crossings and purchased the land in 1850.

Today, visitors can travel the Homestead Trail to see the homestead and gristmill remains and walk the Rock Shelter Interpretive Trail to learn about the Native American presence in the area. They can swim the same cypress-lined emerald waters or stargaze under the same skies the Spanish used for navigation.

"It's quite exciting to have a piece of the Camino in McKinney Falls," says Tommy Cude II, superintendent of McKinney Falls State Park. "It sparks the imagination to think about the people who traversed through the park on the trail so many years ago."

Renovations this year to the park's Smith Visitor Center, damaged by floodwaters, will include El Camino Real interpretive exhibits.

## GOLIAD STATE PARK AND MISSION ROSARIO

Marqués de San Miguel de Aguayo, a later successor to de León as Coahuila and Texas governor, returned to Texas in 1722 to establish a mission along Matagorda Bay (they called the bay La Bahía del Espíritu Santo, or Bay of the Holy Spirit). The mission was called Mission Nuestra Señora del Espíritu Santo de Zúñiga, and its companion presidio was the Presidio de Nuestra Señora de Loreto de la Bahía.

In 1749, the mission moved to its present-day location in Goliad. Branded as Texas' first great cattle ranch, the mission raised 40,000 head of cattle in its heyday. In 1768, the mission grounds held livestock and grew crops — a tempting bounty for local tribes during periods of scarcity. Paired with its companion presidio, La Bahía, a quarter-mile to the south, the complex administered a 1.5 million-acre area, nearly the size of Delaware. Any additional supplies the mission population needed were acquired through trade with San Antonio. La Bahía became one of the most important forts on the Spanish frontier and along El Camino Real.

"Goliad was a destination, a big deal," says TPWD interpreter Ray.

But by the 1830s, the mission had declined; by

the 1900s, all that remained of the mission was the foundation of the walls outlined on the land. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps rebuilt the mission walls from the ground up, using the ruins as a blueprint.

The walls were built so that on one day in mid-April, visitors can witness an illumination event. On only that day, a sunbeam shines through a small circular window above the choir loft and illuminates the altar crucifix.

Today, at this and other TPWD parks, interpreters help bring culture and history to life. Volunteer interpreter Ernest Barnes demonstrates the weaving methods Native Americans used to make blankets, a valuable trade item.

Spanish cattle still thrive on Texas ranches, as does the Tejano and vaquero culture.

"The classic Texas cowboy and the ranching industry really had their beginnings in the Spanish missionary period, when the missions were being founded and they needed beef," says Gonzales. "[El Camino Real de los Tejas is] really elemental to our history and the sorts of things that we consider 'quintessential Texas.'"

Presidio La Bahía, Zaragoza Birthplace State Historic Site and the ruins of Mission Rosario are just down the road. Presidio La Bahía was one of the most disputed sites on Texas soil, with every attempt to change the order of government in colonial Texas involving a capture of the fort, as evidenced by the nine flags whipping in the wind at the entrance.

Goliad State Park's custodian house, built in 1937 by the CCC, will serve as a new visitors center for El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail. Mission Rosario may be visited only by appointment, but new interpretive panels are open to the public outside the gate.

## SAN ANTONIO MISSIONS NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

After the East Texas missions failed, a royal order was issued in 1772 to abandon all missions and presidios except those at Goliad and San Antonio. Some missions were ultimately moved to and remain in San Antonio, the center and capital of the province for many years.

To colonize the town, Aguayo suggested that families from the Canary Islands be moved to San Antonio in 1731. The 56 immigrants formed the nucleus of San



*Left: Sunlight shines on the altar crucifix during an April illumination event at Mission Espíritu Santo in Goliad State Park. The Spanish mission was reconstructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s, its white plaster walls standing out amid the South Texas plains.*

Fernando de Béxar, the first regularly organized civil government in Texas. The villa layout began as the Plaza de las Islas (Main Plaza) and the Plaza de Armas (Military Plaza) to the east. The presidio captain named them *hijos dalgos*, persons of nobility. The oldest families in the city can still trace their lineage to these original settlers. San Antonio became the major crossroads of El Camino Real, the gateway to the other three major destinations of Laredo, Goliad and Nacogdoches.

The trail features have remained in use here for three centuries. The layout of downtown San Antonio still matches old Spanish blueprints. The 1720s Military Plaza at Spanish Governor's Palace still faces City Hall, the modern seat of government, and at the center of the Main Plaza stands San Fernando Cathedral. Today, tourists saddle up on Segways as they pause briefly in front of the cathedral's facade, and people dine at the still-bustling activity center of the city.

San Antonio became one of most fought-over cities in North American history during the Texas Revolution, and the Goliad-to-San Antonio segment of El Camino Real was key to defense. The Goliad Massacre and the Battle of the Alamo provided impetus for the final victory over the Mexican army at San Jacinto, where the battle cry, "Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!" was coined. Civilians fled east on the trail during the Runaway Scrape, and Sam Houston traveled part of the trail to the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836.

Today, in San Antonio, the 8-mile Mission Trail follows some of the original El Camino Real route and connects five missions in San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. The Mission San Francisco de la Espada is the legacy of the burned 1690 San Francisco de los Tejas from East Texas. What became Mission Concepción and Mission San José were moved to Austin from East Texas before ultimately ending up in San Antonio. Together with other missions they represent the largest concentration of Spanish colonial missions in North America and were named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2015, the first such designation in Texas.

The Old San Antonio Road segment of El Camino Real de los Tejas can be roughly followed along Interstate 35 between San Antonio and Austin. Along Texas Highway 21 from San Marcos to Nacogdoches, many granite markers tip a hat to the trail's history and contributions to the colorful state we know today.

*Emily Moskal is an editorial assistant for Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine.*

## TRAVEL THE TRAIL

### MCKINNEY FALLS STATE PARK

**SIGNIFICANCE:** Onion Creek crossing, swales and limestone wagon tracks, McKinney family homestead.

**PROJECT:** The flood-damaged Smith Visitor Center, which has been closed since the 2013 Onion Creek flood, will be renovated to protect it from future flooding and will feature new media exhibits and interactive elements on El Camino Real's influence on Texas settlement and continuing Spanish influences in Texas.

**WEBSITE:** [tpwd.texas.gov/mckinneyfalls](http://tpwd.texas.gov/mckinneyfalls)

**CONTACT:** (512) 243-1643

### MISSION TEJAS STATE PARK

**SIGNIFICANCE:** Original segment of trail and swales, a log building commemorating Mission San Francisco de los Tejas, Rice Family Log Home.

**PROJECT:** A three-structure interpretive center will include an exhibit hall and gift shop. The new exhibit hall will feature artifacts, photographs and illustrations, along with interactive, touchable exhibits. The building will feature wood similar to that of the Rice Family Log Home, plus pine-needle-textured paths.

**WEBSITE:** [tpwd.texas.gov/missiontejas](http://tpwd.texas.gov/missiontejas)

**CONTACT:** (936) 687-2394

### GOLIAD STATE PARK AND HISTORIC SITE AND MISSION ROSARIO

**SIGNIFICANCE:** Mission of Nuestra Señora del Espíritu Santo de Zuñiga, Mission Rosario.

**PROJECT:** The custodian's cottage — built in 1937 by the CCC — will be adapted to serve as a new visitors center for El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail. Mission Rosario can be visited only by appointment, but new interpretive panels are open to the public outside the gate.

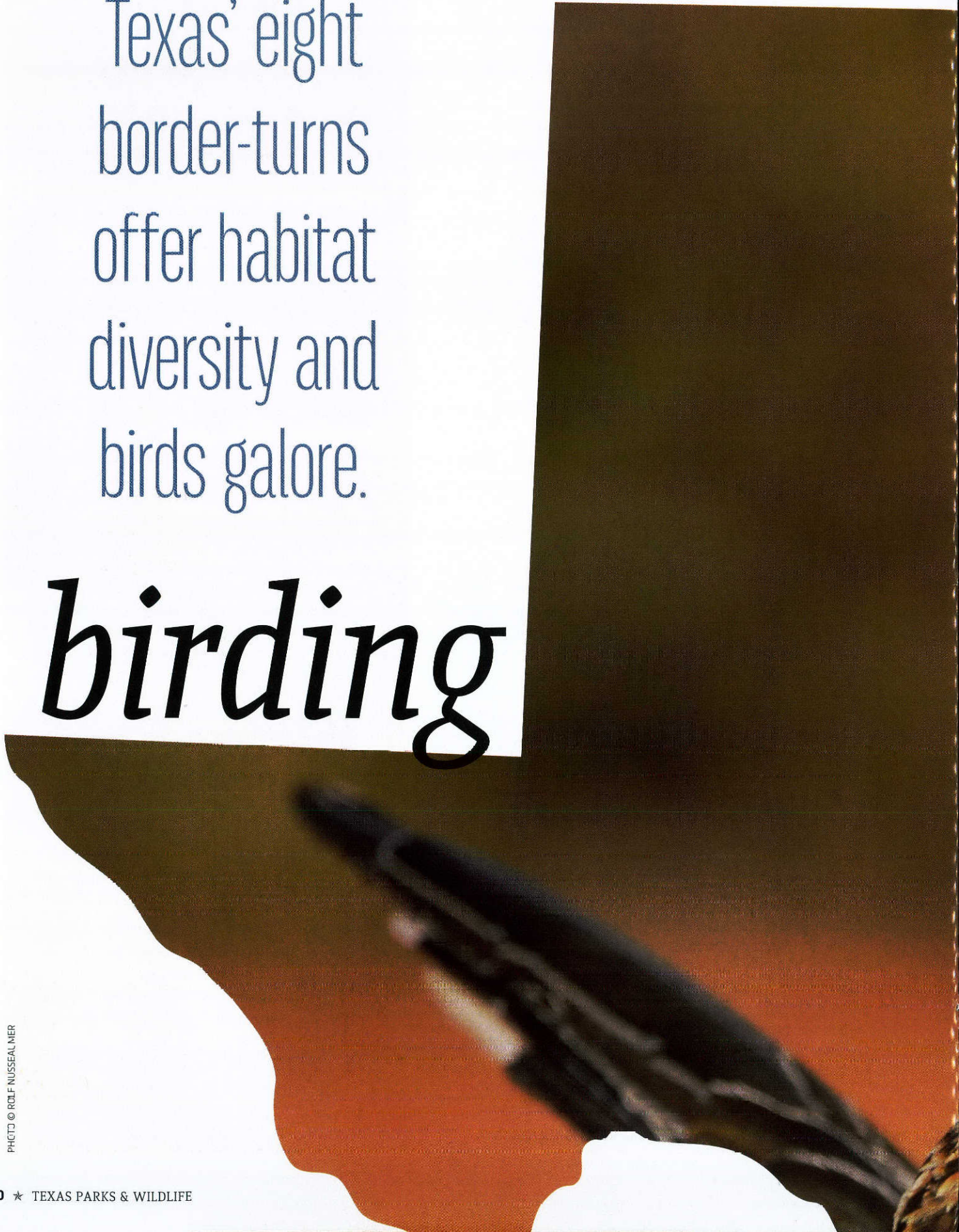
**WEBSITE:** [tpwd.texas.gov/goliad](http://tpwd.texas.gov/goliad)

**CONTACT:** (361) 645-3405

Texas' eight  
border-turns  
offer habitat  
diversity and  
birds galore.

# *birding*

PHOTO © ROLF NUSSEAL MIER



*the*

**By Russell Roe**

Photos by Greg W. Lasley

*CORNERS*





*Greg Lasley, left, and Chuck Sexton at the spot where Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico meet.*

## **Birders in Texas tend to go to the same places: the upper Texas coast, Big Bend, the Rio Grande Valley. For veteran bird watcher Chuck Sexton, that wasn't enough. In his quest to explore Texas bird life, he resolved to visit every far-flung corner of the state.**

Texas has eight corners — places where the state boundary takes a sharp turn in one direction or the other. Sexton, a retired wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, had visited several of the corners already. He'd birded El Paso. He'd been to Sabine Pass, South Padre and Dalhart. Six or seven years ago, he decided to bird all the corners, inspired by the Texas Ornithological Society's Texas Century Club challenge of finding 100 bird species in 100 different counties.

Corners are often places overlooked or unseen, where dust tends to accumulate and the unwanted residue of daily life builds up. What did Sexton find when he started poking around these angular outposts of Texas?

In visiting all the corners, Sexton deepened his appreciation for the wildly varied habitats of the state.

"As a biologist I've long known about the diversity of habitats in Texas," Sexton says. "I have worked and studied the whole state for decades. Getting to the corners emphasizes that in spades. When you go from salt marshes and deep East Texas forest to shortgrass prairie or absolutely flat desert or subtropical woodland, getting to those corners really emphasizes how diverse this state is

from end to end. It's pretty amazing."

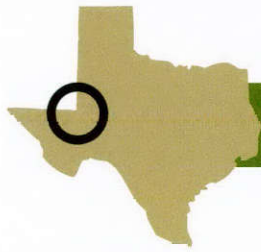
Plus, traveling to the corners gets you plenty of birds. Texas has recorded 645 species of birds, and the eight counties at the corners contain 545 of those species. (By the way, Big Bend doesn't count as a corner. "There's a bend, but not a corner," Sexton says.)

Sexton traveled to many of the corners with his good friend Greg Lasley, a noted Texas naturalist and wildlife photographer. When they get together, Sexton and Lasley quickly fall into the familiar back-and-forth of old friends who have built up the patina of friendship through decades of time spent together. They interrupt each other, finish each other's sentences, reminisce about memorable trips, point out each other's good qualities and don't hesitate to give each other a hard time.

"We've spent a lot of time chasing around Texas over 39 years," Sexton says. "Damn, we're getting old."

"You are. I'm not," retorts Lasley, who, at 67, is two years younger than Sexton.

These quests for the corners provided them with a series of geographic adventures that tested their navigational skills, offered prime bird-watching opportunities and gave them an excuse to hit the road together. On to the corners!

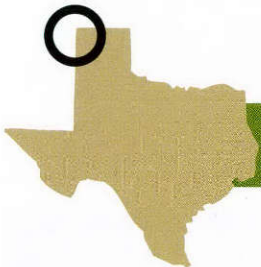


## KERMIT CORNER

A modest beginning will allow a spectacular finish, so we start with the last corner that Sexton visited, a corner that ranks low in bird diversity. Sexton traveled to this West Texas corner in April 2016 to complete his corner project. Kermit is the closest town to the corner in the Permian Basin, a land of oil wells and sand dunes. The arid land contains mesquite and Havard shin-oaks, the same type of low-growing oak found at Monahans Sandhills State Park.

The lack of water inhibits bird diversity, but there are hidden treasures even here. It's a good place to find a couple of dry-climate species that aren't easy to find in other parts of Texas: the crissal thrasher and **sagebrush sparrow**. Sexton found water, an important factor for birds, at the Winkler County Country Club, where he spotted 15 bird species.

In adjacent Loving County, the U.S. county with the lowest population, birders have the opportunity to amass a bird list longer than the list of human residents in the county (82 people in the 2010 census) — one of the only places in the U.S. with that distinction.



## PANHANDLE - NW CORNER

Sexton and Lasley have been birding in the Panhandle on several occasions to see raptors, especially in winter. Ferruginous hawks, **rough-legged hawks**, golden eagles, prairie falcons, American kestrels and more make for excellent winter viewing along Panhandle county roads.

Shortgrass prairie once stretched for miles in this part of the state, where bison roamed and prairie dogs dug underground homes; now, much of it has been converted to cropland. Today, nesting birds in the grasslands provide a treat for birders:

**Western meadowlarks** sing their sweet-tuned songs from the tops of fence posts, long-billed curlews probe for food with their oversized beaks, and burrowing owls pop out from their holes in the ground.

"There's a road up there called the High Lonesome," Lasley says. "That's what this area is. It's High Plains grassland. 'High Lonesome' is a great term for that area. In winter, there are snow flurries blowing, and there's not a person anywhere. It's hard to believe you're in modern Texas."

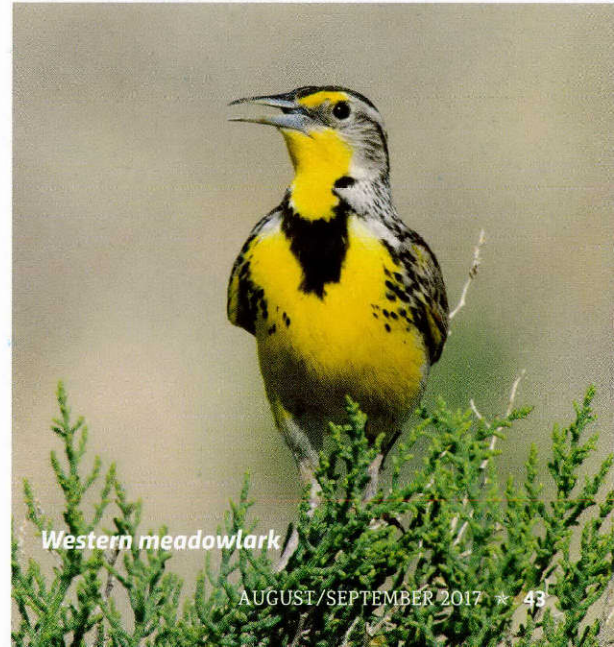
Fun fact: The place where New Mexico and Oklahoma meet is actually a couple of miles east of the northwest corner of Texas.



Sagebrush sparrow



Rough-legged hawk



Western meadowlark



Lapland longspur



Lesser prairie-chicken



Bullock's oriole



Black-crested titmouse



## PANHANDLE - NE CORNER

Of all the corners, the Panhandle's northwest and northeast corners have the most similarities, but differences do exist. The northeast corner sits at a lower elevation, and the grasslands are a little more intact. Sexton and Lasley navigated the straight-line county roads up in that part of the state to get as close as they could to the corner, within a few hundred yards.

With intact grasslands, the area remains a stronghold for the threatened **lesser prairie-chicken**, legendary for its showy courtship displays. Sexton, unwilling to pay a rancher to see a lesser prairie-chicken, failed to see one for years (he's been birding in Texas almost a half-century). Finally, in April 2016, using Google Earth to look for appropriate habitat and keeping track of reported sightings, he saw some lesser prairie-chickens fly overhead at a Panhandle location he declines to disclose.

On one Panhandle trip, Sexton and Lasley came across a massive flock of **Lapland longspurs**, numbering in the thousands, in a sorghum stubble field. The long spurs nest in Alaska and winter in the Panhandle. Sexton and Lasley decided to play a Lapland longspur call; before long, they were swarmed by the birds.

"It's a real special experience to watch 10,000 birds swirling all around you on a cold winter day in the Panhandle, to realize all of them came from Alaska and Canada and are here to spend the winter in Texas," Lasley says.



## GARDEN VALLEY CORNER

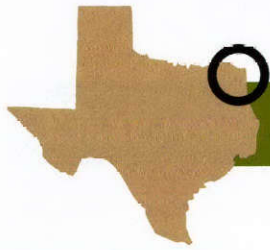
The Red River leaves the Panhandle and becomes the state's northern border near Childress at this corner of Texas. The nearest place to the corner on the map is the ghost town of Garden Valley.

"This is an interesting region because it's a blend zone," Sexton says.

Eastern species meet western species at this ecological crossroads. The western **Bullock's oriole** might cross paths with the eastern Baltimore oriole. Indigo buntings from the east might share a tree branch with lazuli buntings from the west. **Black-crested titmice** have been known to mate with tufted titmice in this area, producing hybrids.

The region was historically prairie but now contains mostly mesquite woods. The human-induced alteration of the landscape has produced a situation where the two different species of titmice are able to meet and hybridize; scientific papers have been written on the topic.

"Boy meets girl, and the story continues," Sexton says.



## NE CORNER AT ARKANSAS

The Red River connects the Garden Valley corner to this corner north of Texarkana, dominated by pine forests and river bottomland.

“When you get to the northeast corner with the Red River, that’s when you know you’re in the eastern United States,” Sexton says. “You’ve left the grassland behind, you’ve left the Panhandle behind, you’ve left the desert behind, you’ve left the tropics behind. You’ve got eastern phoebe, **eastern bluebird**, eastern wood pewee, eastern towhee — all these birds that breed there. The loblolly pine and oak-hickory woodlands literally go all the way to the Atlantic coast. And you’ve got woodpeckers. You’ve got such a diversity of woodpeckers.”

Six nesting species of woodpeckers can be found: hairy, downy, red-bellied, pileated and **red-headed woodpeckers** and the northern flicker.

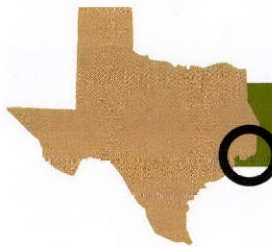
A century ago, birders might have seen some now-vanished species: ivory-billed woodpeckers, Carolina parakeets and passenger pigeons.



*Eastern bluebird*



*Red-headed woodpecker*



## SOUTHEAST CORNER

It’s birds, birds, birds in this corner, where the Sabine River meets the Gulf, with the bird diversity increasing dramatically compared with the northern corners.

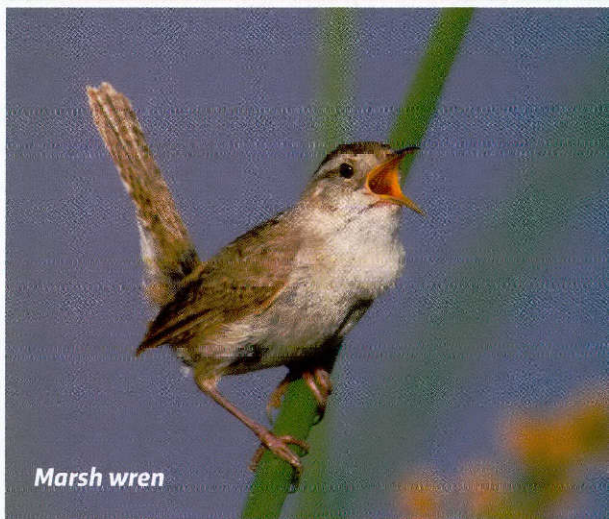
“This is one of those areas where you get the phenomenon of Texas birding like the winter flocks of geese and waterfowl,” Sexton says. “It’s one of those places where you see 100,000 birds in a day, and it’s par for the course.”

Freshwater marsh, brackish marsh, salt marsh and patches of woods provide a wide range of habitat for birds, with plenty of water to go around. Herons, egrets, gulls and **terns** are common throughout the year. Clapper rails, seaside sparrows and **marsh wrens** are permanent residents. The spectacular spring migrations are a big draw for birders, bringing in colorful warblers, orioles and huntings.

The actual corner of the state is beyond the well-trod hot spots such as Rollover Pass and High Island, and that’s one reason Sexton and Lasley like it.

Jetty Road — potholed, half underwater and still showing damage from hurricanes — heads south from Sabine Pass through Texas Point National Wildlife Refuge and finally dead-ends. There, they see lots of birds and almost no people.

“Only fishermen and crazy birders go there,” Sexton says.



*Marsh wren*



*Royal tern*



*Steller's jay*



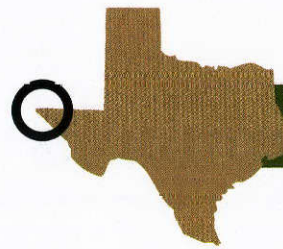
*Gambel's quail*



*Great kiskadee*



*"Mangrove" yellow warbler*



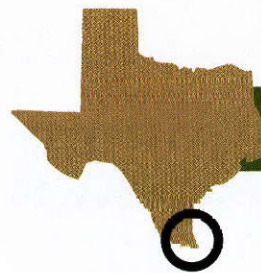
## EL PASO CORNER

No one would guess that El Paso would have almost the same number of bird species as the upper Texas coast, but look at the numbers: El Paso County has tallied 362 species, while Jefferson County in the southeast has tallied 380. That's pretty remarkable for such an arid region of the state. The bird life is very different, but tremendous diversity exists there.

"It's a really, really interesting area," Sexton says.

El Paso has desert, parks, tree-filled neighborhoods, the Franklin Mountains, the Rio Grande and nearby reservoirs. It's on a migration corridor, and the city works as a magnet for stray birds that find themselves in the desert and want to find cover. That combination of factors has led to an amazing bird list.

Greater roadrunners, **Gambel's quail**, pyrrhuloxia and cactus wrens nest in the area. Rocky Mountain birds such as **Steller's jays**, Lewis's woodpeckers and pygmy nuthatches often come down for the winter, making El Paso one of the few places in Texas to see some of these mountain species.



## SOUTH TEXAS CORNER

We've saved the best for last. The Lower Rio Grande Valley is a birder's paradise, with the greatest diversity of birds in the state.

"The bird life of the Valley is one of the real gems of Texas birding," Sexton says. "Almost any day of the year you can amass a huge bird list."

The Valley marks the northern edge of the range for many subtropical species, making it the only place in the U.S. where some birds can be found—green jays, plain chachalacas, groove-billed anis and **great kiskadees**.

Plus, it's on a migration corridor, with birds moving through each spring and fall. Migrating broad-winged hawks have been reported in the thousands, and dozens of warbler species pass through.

To get to the true corner, Sexton and Lasley left the brushlands of the Valley behind and traveled to the saline marshes and beaches east of Brownsville, where the Rio Grande empties into the sea. The usual terns and gulls are there, and mangroves provide nesting spots for herons and egrets. Lasley helped document the first Texas record of a "**mangrove" yellow warbler** in the area.

Reintroduced aplomado falcons may be seen soaring overhead, and a sighting of this elegant bird would make a fine finale to a tour of the far-flung corners of Texas.

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*Russell Roe is managing editor of Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine.*



# Looking back at... THE 1990s

**PLEASURES TO CELEBRATE,**  
*treasures to preserve*  
BY LAURA BUSH, FIRST LADY OF TEXAS

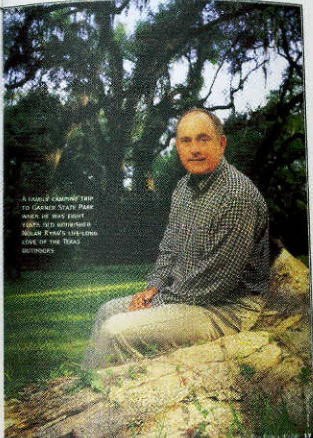


**T**he pleasures of celebrating the past are many. They are the memories that live on in the hearts and minds of those who have lived and loved in Texas. They are the stories that are passed down from generation to generation, the stories that give us a sense of who we are and where we come from. They are the stories that inspire us to live our lives to the fullest and to make the most of every moment.

**AS A NATIVE**  
TEXAN WHO HAS  
HAD A LOT OF  
FUN IN TEXAS STATE  
PARKS, IT HAS BEEN  
AN HONOR TO SERVE  
AS CHAIRMAN OF THE  
TEXAS ADVENTURE  
CELEBRATION.

It has been an honor to serve as the chair of the Texas Adventure Celebration. This event is a celebration of the state's natural and cultural heritage. It is a chance for us to come together and enjoy the beauty of Texas. I have had a great time participating in the event and meeting so many wonderful people. I hope you will also have a great time participating in the event.

**CONTINUING THE LEGACY**  
*for the next generation*  
BY NOLAN RYAN, TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE COMMISSIONER



**A** legacy is something that is passed down from one generation to the next. It is a part of our identity and a source of pride. It is something that we should all strive to preserve and pass on to future generations. In Texas, our legacy is our natural and cultural heritage. It is the beauty of our state parks and the stories of our people. It is something that we should all be proud of and something that we should all work to protect.

**THE HISTORY**  
OF TEXAS STATE  
PARKS HAS BEEN  
LONG AND GLORIOUS.  
FROM THE FIRST  
PARKS ESTABLISHED  
IN THE 1800S TO  
THE PRESENT DAY,  
THEY HAVE BEEN  
A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION  
AND ENJOYMENT FOR  
MILLIONS OF TEXANS.

As Texas Parks and Wildlife Commissioner, I have had the honor of working with many wonderful people. I have seen the state parks grow and thrive. I have seen the legacy of Texas continue to be passed on to future generations. I am proud to be a part of this legacy and I am committed to making sure that it continues for many years to come.

## FAMOUS PEOPLE LOVE US

JUNE 1995 (BELOW), DECEMBER 1998 (ABOVE)

First lady Laura Bush, pitcher Nolan Ryan and Eagles singer Don Henley shared their thoughts — and their love for Texas parks.

Fish weren't the only ones "on line" anymore in the 1990s — the rise of the internet revolutionized how people and organizations (TPWD included) worked and communicated. Off-line, the '90s proved a quirky, colorful decade for entertainment and culture. Music got grungy, and Tejano queen Selena Quintanilla catapulted Latin music into the American public eye. After Selena's untimely death in 1994, Texas Gov. George W. Bush designated her birthday as Selena Day in Texas. Another Texas Bush was on the scene in the '90s: President George H.W. Bush ushered in the decade, then handed the country's reins to President Bill Clinton in 1993. The economy soared. Conservation efforts, such as the Texas Conservation Passport and catch-and-release fishing, soared as well, as did birds along TPWD's new Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail. The decade that brought us *Jurassic Park* was also a good one for Texas state parks — several new parks opened from 1990–1999, including Cooper Lake, Village Creek and Ray Roberts Lake.

## OUTDOOR HERITAGE SERIES

"The concepts for the 21st century will be 'renewability' and 'sustainability.'" —

DON HENLEY

by Sue Gold

**H**is name may be synonymous with hit records, but Don Henley never has forgotten his Texas roots. The Grammy-winning singer, who recently reunited with the '70s supergroup Eagles, grew up in the Northeast Texas town of Londen, caught his first fish in Caddo Lake and spent four years in Texas colleges before moving to Los Angeles to pursue his music career.

As his career flourished, so did his love for the land and nature. Inspired by his father, who farmed part-time and

the creatures that live in nature, so that is probably one influence that steered me toward founding the Walden Woods Project," Henley explained. "But through my work on the Walden Woods Project, I've gained a great deal of technical skill and political knowledge that has enabled me to go back to my home and help preserve what is valuable there. So I've come full circle."

While the battle to stop the U.S. Army

The program received such high praise from local, state and federal officials that almost a dozen colleges and universities now are involved, as well as primary and secondary schools. Awards intern candidates training program also has been initiated to teach technical skills to students and teachers so they can become resource managers. "This will be an ongoing project I hope will serve as a model that can be implemented all over the world. It's an enormous undertaking that is still in the formative stages that needs to be

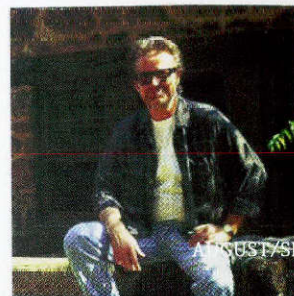
of a healthy economy can be sustained only if natural resources are sustained, balance is the key."

Henley always has had strong emotional ties to Caddo Lake, but he has renewed respect for the area since becoming involved in the recent battle. "This lake and the area surrounding it make up the type of ecosystem that is fast disappearing in the United States," he said. "It's a beautiful area and a resting area for many rare and endangered species of migratory birds and waterfowl. It's home to the American bald eagle and the American alligator. It's also very important archeological site because the Caddo Indians once lived here. I'm appreciating the lake area on a much broader scope than just when I was a child."

While Henley has lived in Southern California and Colorado for the past 24 years, he said he never has forgotten Caddo Lake and is much more likely to "keep up with what's

detrimental and provide only a short-term gain, if any, for the economy of the region. We have already had far too many 'boom and bust' cycles in Texas because people don't think long-term."

"Unfortunately, in many parts of Texas, the old frontier mentality still lingers," he continued. "Some people are still caught up in the delusion there



business. I am a businessman. The question is what kind of businesses are we talking about? Some communities are so desperate for economic growth that they sometimes invite irresponsible industry. Any industry should be a good neighbor to its community. There must be some thought given to corporate responsibility. Otherwise, in terms of the environment, we often kill the goose that laid the golden egg. Texas has been through some rough economic times, but the answer to creating jobs and reviving the Texas economy is not to continue to over-build and overdevelop. That's one of the things that got Texas into trouble in the first place. Now, when people are looking for a community in which to locate, they are concerned more than ever with the quality of life. The concepts for the 21st century will be 'renewability' and 'sustainability.'"

Henley admits these and other projects are part of the reason he

**A TIMELINE  
OF THE TEXAS  
OUTDOORS**



**1990**  
The Texas Artificial Reef Plan is adopted.



**1992**  
The first Texas Wildlife Expo is held by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

**HEADLINES OF  
THE DECADE**

JULY 1994

Twang of Beauty

Flying Skein,  
Paddling Gaggle

WALKIN' IN A  
WINGER  
WONDERLAND

GENTLEMEN,  
START YOUR  
TURTLES

JULY 1995

APRIL 1998

A CALL TO H  RNS

MAY 1996

NOVEMBER 1996

**CRAZY ABOUT THAT HEADLINE ... NOT!**

JULY 1998

*We're still crazy about seafood. This layout illustrates just how shrimp-crazy we were.*



**THAT'S RIGHT, WE SAID IT...**

"Philosophically, where do we get off thinking we're the most important species in the world...?"

—DAN LAY

**SAY NO TO DRUGS, YES TO FISHING**

APRIL 1995

*Arian Archer, Miss Texas 1994, was all about that buss in this "say no to drugs" campaign.*

**Get Hooked on Fishing—Not on Drugs**

Arian Archer is equally at home on a beauty pageant stage or in a bass boat.

That's why the former Miss Amarillo, now Miss Texas 1994, is an appropriate spokesperson for the "Get Hooked on Fishing—Not on Drugs" campaign for Texas school children.

Archer and a number of other celebrities have volunteered their time to take the anti-drug message to schools across Texas. The campaign is part of a program that includes a school curriculum created by the Future Fishing Foundation and used by drug prevention educators and other teachers and volunteers. Officials said more than 10,000 youngsters have participated in poster and essay contests based on the Get Hooked on Fishing—Not on Drugs theme.

Miss Texas and about 20 other celebrities will visit schools in East Texas during the last week of April to talk about drug and alcohol abuse, goal-setting and self-esteem. Then on April 29, hundreds of

young anglers will participate in a fishing derby at Shirley Hill Marina on Sam Rayburn Reservoir.

Paul Hinton, director of the campaign, said corporate sponsors are providing fishing-related products as prizes for poster and essay winners as well as participants in the fishing derby.

About 250 school districts in Texas are using all or part of the Hooked on Fishing curriculum, according to Holt Taylor, head of the volunteer coordinating committee for the program. Schools wishing to participate may call Taylor at 1-800-945-6044, or write or call Steve Hall, education director, TPWD, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744, 800-792-1112.

The Get Hooked on Fishing program is tax-deductible, and contributions can be sent to Hinton at Route 1, Box 926, Hemphill, Texas 75948, 409-787-3110.



*Arian Archer, Miss Texas 1994, will participate in "Get Hooked on Fishing—Not on Drugs" activities during the last week of in East Texas.*



**1994**  
TPWD debuts  
its website.

**1996**  
Sea Center Texas opens in Lake  
Jackson, and the Texas Freshwater  
Fisheries Center opens in Athens.



**1999**  
TPWD introduces the first  
conservation license plate.  
The star? A horned lizard

## GOOD EATING: RECIPES FROM THE 1990s

From venison stroganoff to squirrel jambalaya to Dutch oven delights, Texas stayed well fed.

### Some Favorite Venison Recipes

The following recipes are from "The New Texas Wild Game Cookbook" by Jeffrey and Richard Horned, published by Eakin Press, Austin, Texas.

#### VENISON S TROGANOFF

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 small clove of garlic, minced
- 1 cup regular all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 cup chicken stock
- 1/2 cup venison, cut into small pieces
- 1/2 cup mushroom slices
- 1/2 cup mushrooms
- 1/2 cup cream cheese
- 1/2 cup cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup parmesan cheese
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup salt
- 1/2 cup pepper

Melt butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion, garlic, and flour. Cook for 5 minutes. Add milk, chicken stock, and venison. Simmer for 10 minutes. Add mushrooms, cream cheese, and cheddar. Simmer for 15 minutes. Add parmesan and heavy cream. Season with salt and pepper. Serve over rice or noodles.

#### VENILOB

- 1/2 cup venison, cut into small pieces
- 1/2 cup mushrooms
- 1/2 cup cream cheese
- 1/2 cup cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup parmesan cheese
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup salt
- 1/2 cup pepper

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### BUCKHORN

#### INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup venison, cut into small pieces
- 1/2 cup mushrooms
- 1/2 cup cream cheese
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#### POSSUM CAKE

- 1/2 cup venison, cut into small pieces
- 1/2 cup mushrooms
- 1/2 cup cream cheese
- 1/2 cup cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup parmesan cheese
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup salt
- 1/2 cup pepper

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#### POCKET STEW

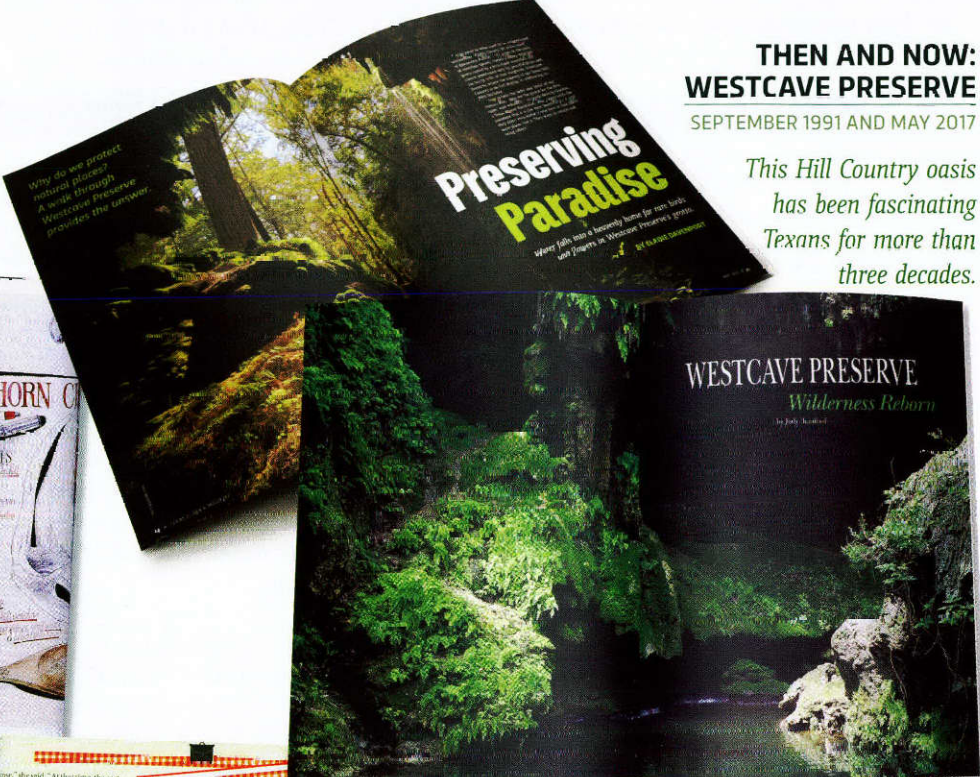
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#### SQUIRREL MULLIGAN

- 1/2 cup squirrel, cut into small pieces
- 1/2 cup mushrooms
- 1/2 cup cream cheese
- 1/2 cup cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup parmesan cheese
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup salt
- 1/2 cup pepper

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### WESTCAVE PRESERVE

Wilderness Reborn

By Jay Hooper

## THEN AND NOW: WESTCAVE PRESERVE

SEPTEMBER 1991 AND MAY 2017

This Hill Country oasis  
has been fascinating  
Texans for more than  
three decades.

## SQUIRREL RECIPES

For hunters get as much pleasure from eating squirrels as they do from hunting them. The following recipes have pleased palates all over Texas.

#### SQUIRREL DUMPLINGS

- 1/2 cup squirrel, cut into small pieces
- 1/2 cup mushrooms
- 1/2 cup cream cheese
- 1/2 cup cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup parmesan cheese
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup salt
- 1/2 cup pepper

Melt butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion, garlic, and flour. Cook for 5 minutes. Add milk, chicken stock, and squirrel. Simmer for 10 minutes. Add mushrooms, cream cheese, and cheddar. Simmer for 15 minutes. Add parmesan and heavy cream. Season with salt and pepper. Serve over rice or noodles.

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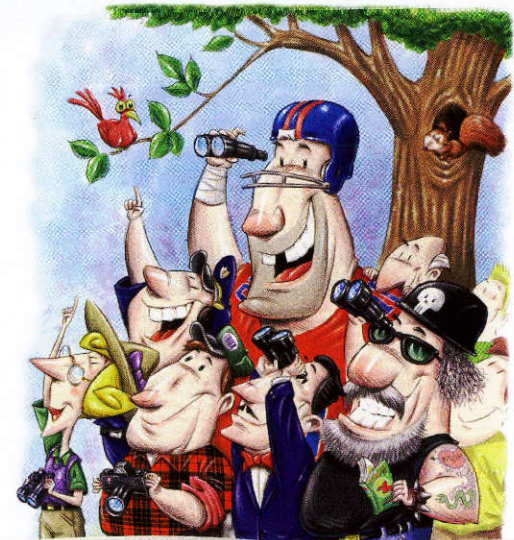
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## WATCHING BIRDS

APRIL 1999



Horned lizards are a Dutch oven favorite.

## PICTURE THIS

### Outdoor Portraits

Article and photos by Earl Nottingham

To the serious landscape photographer, Texas is a never-ending source of images. Just when you think you've photographed it all, the seasons change and bring new subjects and lighting conditions.

Those same landscapes also create great natural backdrops for photographing people as well, providing not only opportunities to take great outdoor portraits, but a good excuse to explore the outdoors.

Since the first amateur camera became available, Texans have been seen on a half-billion half-dozen-line happily working order, regardless of film size, is capable of producing a beautiful portrait. Although most professionals use medium-format cameras that produce photos better suited for retouching and bigger enlargements, there's a lot to be said for the ease and spontaneity of the 35mm and smaller cameras. A sturdy tripod is necessary not only for slow shutter speeds, but as a way to anchor your composition.

Regardless of the camera used, the key to a good portrait is either to wait for, or create, an artistic quality of light to illuminate the subject. When those first cameras were introduced, and a few years later, they were used to capture portraits in a way that was very different from what we see today. The high-contrast, black and white portraits of the 19th century were characterized by the use of a light source, often a window, that cast long shadows and created a dramatic, almost theatrical effect. The subjects were often posed in a studio, and the lighting was controlled by the photographer. This was a far cry from the outdoor portraits of today, which are often characterized by the use of natural light and a more relaxed, candid atmosphere. The subjects are often in motion, and the lighting is often softer and more diffused. The result is a more natural and intimate portrait.

Another pleasant light is created by the use of a light source that is positioned at a low angle, creating long shadows and a dramatic, almost theatrical effect. This was a far cry from the outdoor portraits of today, which are often characterized by the use of natural light and a more relaxed, candid atmosphere. The subjects are often in motion, and the lighting is often softer and more diffused. The result is a more natural and intimate portrait.

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## HELLO, EARL!

JUNE 1995

Before he became Texas Parks & Wildlife chief photographer, Earl Nottingham made his magazine debut — as a freelance writer.

*It's been almost 20 years, and we still get asked these questions. Well, except for the pigeon one...*

## Trail Mix

# TPWD's Top 10 List Of Frequently Asked Questions

*"No, we don't pay insurance deductibles and you can't keep the deer!"*

**O**n average, the Wildlife Information Hotline at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department rings about 2,000 times a week with questions ranging from what to do with a stray alligator in the backyard to where to find a place to hunt.

Most of the calls are fairly routine, says Vickie Fite, who coordinates the Wildlife Information phone bank, but you never know what questions might pop up. Here's TPWD's Top 10 list of some of the most popular questions being asked lately:

**No. 10:** "I've found an orphaned (or

injured) deer (squirrel, owl, etc.), what do I do with it?" Call TPWD, they will give you names and phone numbers of wildlife rehabilitators in your area. It is illegal for you to keep it to raise as a pet. You cannot obtain a permit to keep the animal after the fact.

**No. 9:** "There's a wild animal in my attic/backyard/etc. and it's tearing up my garden, what do I do?" Contact Animal Damage Control (website address: [www.wildlife.state.tx.us/advocacy/advocacy.html](http://www.wildlife.state.tx.us/advocacy/advocacy.html)) in your area. (Exception: When dealing with game animals and alligators you must contact TPWD because game animals and allig-

ators are protected species and a permit is required.) You also can contact your local Animal Control Officer (dog catcher) for assistance, or hire a pest control technician that handles the particular animal that you are having a problem with.

**No. 8:** "This pigeon landed on my window and has a band on its leg, what do I do?" Call the American Racing Pigeon Union at: 800-755-ARPU or call the International Federation of American Homing Pigeon Fanciers Incorporated at 800-888-4339 for assistance. You'll need the information from the leg band to find out who owns the bird.

## Trail Mix

**No. 7:** "Do you have information on licensed hunting guides?" To obtain information about hunting guides, guided hunts, or hunting leases, contact the Texas Wildlife Association at 913-885-8888.

**No. 6:** "I'm 65. Do I still need a hunting or fishing license?" If you turned 65 years of age before September 1, 1995 (were born before September 1, 1930) you are not required to have a fishing license or special stamps, but you will need a Special Resident Hunting License (\$6) and the applicable stamps to legally hunt. Also, if you want to take a trophy red drum, you will need a Special Resident Fishing License (\$6). If you became 65 years of age on September 1, 1995 or later (born September 1, 1930 or later) you will be required to have a Special Resident license to fish and hunt.

**No. 5:** "I lost my hunting (fishing)

license. What do I do?" You can get a replacement wherever hunting and fishing licenses are sold. (It doesn't have to be where you purchased the original.) Sign a form certifying you lost your license and list the status of any tags at the time of loss. You will be reissued a license at replacement fee. (Fees vary but for most hunting/fishing licenses it's \$6, for stamps \$1.)

**No. 4:** "Do I have to give my Social Security number when I buy a license?" The law requires the license issuer to ask you for your SSN, but the license may be issued without this information being entered.

**No. 3:** "Does my kid need a hunting and fishing license?" Children under the age of 17 are required to purchase a Special Resident Hunting license (\$6). No state stamps are required until they turn 17. Fishing licenses and fishing stamps are not required until they turn 17.

**No. 2:** "I just hit a deer with my car, what do I do?" If the deer is just injured, call your local game warden or local sheriff's office. If you are absolutely sure the deer is dead, try to move it off the roadway and leave it there. The Texas Department of Transportation will remove the dead animal. And, no you cannot keep road-kill deer. It is illegal to tag the deer and take it with you.

**And... the No. 1 question:** "Will TPWD will pay my auto insurance deductible to have damages repaired from hitting a deer?" TPWD does not pay the insurance deductible for people who have hit deer with their vehicles.

If you have a question about hunting, fishing or the great outdoors, write to TPWD, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744 Or, if you prefer, you can call 1-800-792-1112.

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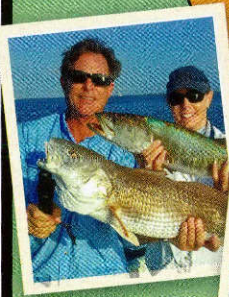
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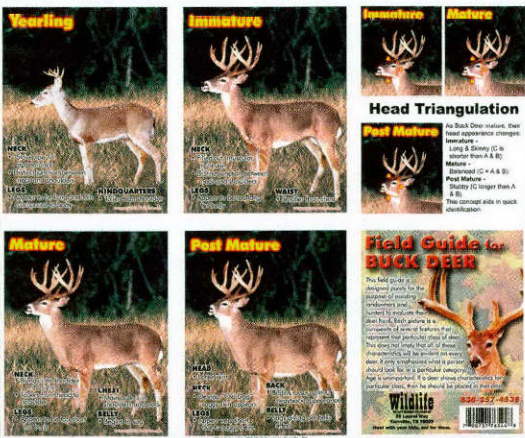
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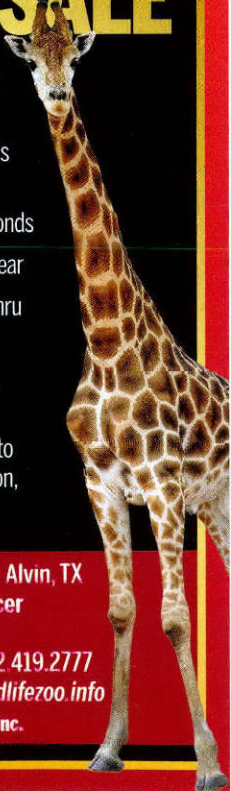
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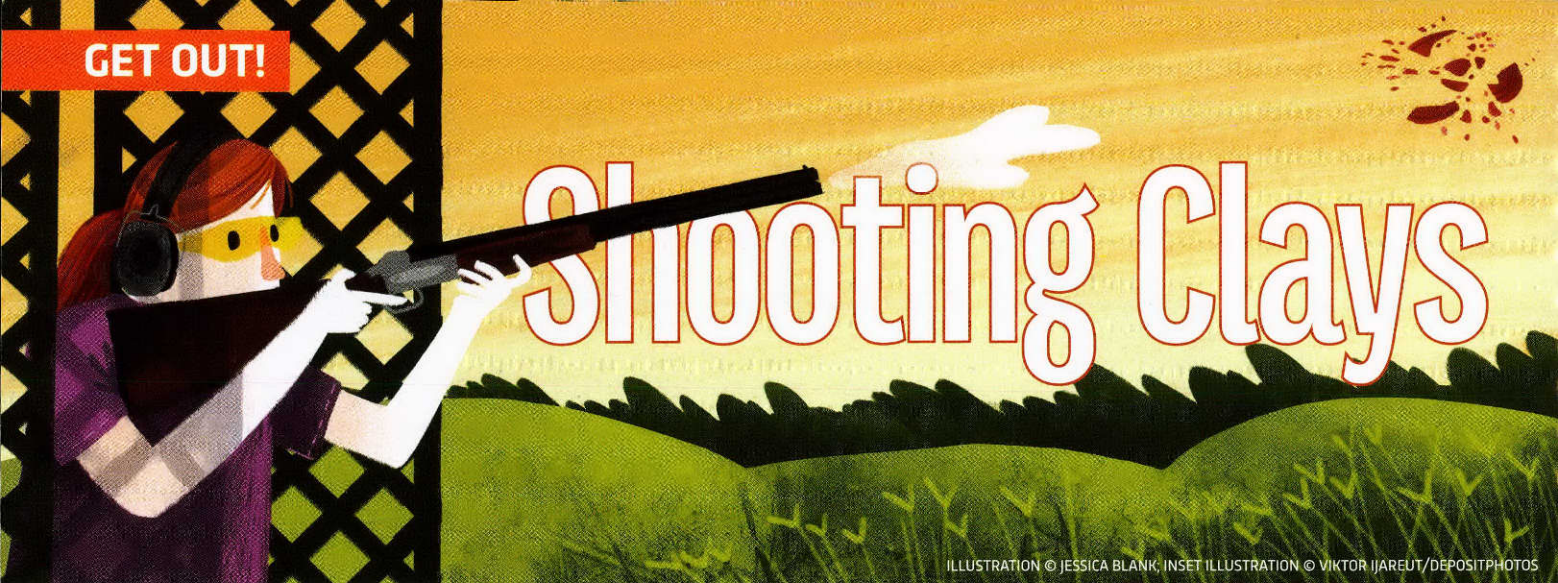


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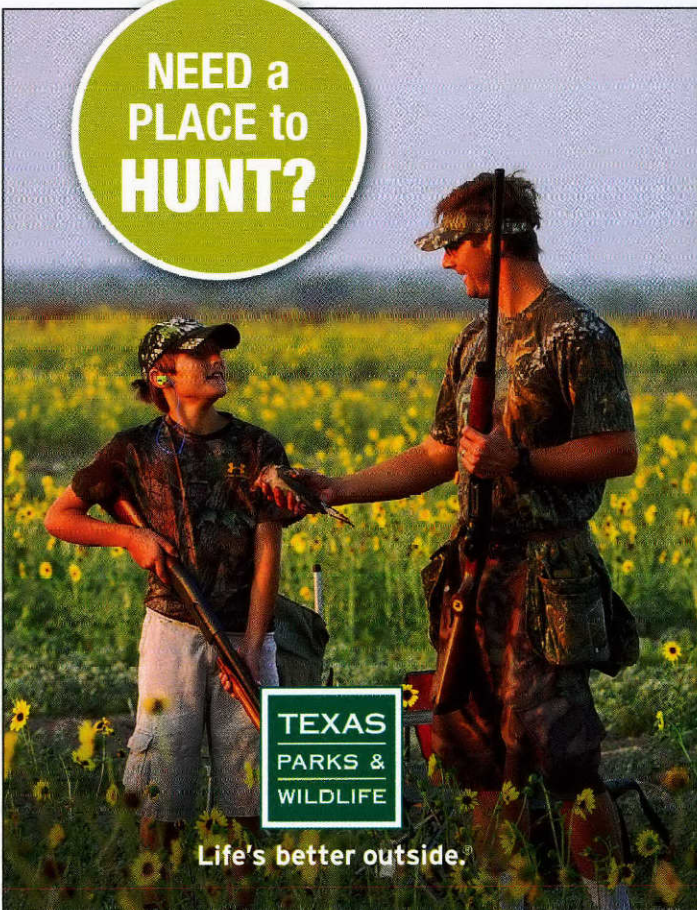


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Photographer Larry Ditto has spent years photographing hummingbirds. He even teaches workshops on how to do it. He says a truly successful hummer image must show the gorget (throat) color and sharp feather detail, while the wings should be in the full down or up position or arched forward. Ditto typically sets up four or five flashes and uses a fast shutter speed to freeze the bird's wings. Ditto's photo here of a lucifer hummingbird in the Christmas Mountains shows how a clean, uncluttered background helps set the bird apart from its surroundings. Finally, Ditto says, a great hummer photo captures the bird in an unusual position or feeding at a colorful flower.

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