

# texas parks & wildlife news

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT • AUSTIN, TEXAS 78744

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## PESTICIDE BIRD KILL INCIDENT SETTLED

AUSTIN--The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department recently settled a case against the second of two men charged in connection with two separate bird kill incidents involving the illegal use of the pesticide Bidrin in December 1988 and January 1989.

A south Travis County man pleaded guilty and paid \$200 in fines and court costs. He paid the department \$800 in civil restitution. In an earlier case in Williamson County, a man was fined \$1,000 after pleading no contest in 1989.

The two incidents occurred within two weeks of each other. The men were filed on for violations of the regulations protecting nongame and migratory game birds and for misapplying pesticides. Bidrin, which is labeled for cotton, was fatal to about 1,500 birds in southeast Travis County and 200 birds near Granger in Williamson County.

Affected species, common to both kills, included red-winged blackbirds, mourning doves, western meadowlarks, Brewer's blackbirds, brown-headed cowbirds and house sparrows. A northern harrier (marsh hawk) and a great horned owl were killed in Williamson County, while a northern harrier, several pigeons and killdeer were killed in Travis County.

"We don't know how many landowners are doing it," said Jack Ralph, department contaminants biologist in San Marcos. Bidrin is used on cotton prior to the seed coming up. "Bidrin was the product of choice. They both used it on wheat, not cotton. It's a controlled pesticide; you must have a license to use it.

"It happens every year, but we don't get many calls on it," he said.

The Travis County case was reported by a woman who watched as birds began to fall out of trees near her home. Many of the birds died in the wheat field where they were poisoned.

The public is encouraged to report any illegal use of pesticides to both state and federal agencies. Anyone seeing game and fish law violations can call TPWD's Operation Game Thief at 1-800-792-GAME.

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#### TPWD ACQUIRES COASTAL WETLANDS

AUSTIN--The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has acquired a 38-acre tract of coastal habitat on the Laguna Madre in the Flour Bluff section of Corpus Christi.

The tract includes an 8-acre freshwater pond that is used by large numbers of wintering waterfowl, especially redhead ducks. At least 13 other species of ducks use the pond with as many as 5,000 present at times during the winter. The area also serves song birds, wading birds and shore birds, and locally, is a popular bird watching area.

The department acquired the tract in cooperation with the Texas Nature Conservancy of San Antonio. Ducks Unlimited and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation also contributed funds to the project under the auspices of the Gulf Coast Joint Venture of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

"The area will be called Redhead Pond Wildlife Management Area," said Dr. Dan Moulton, program leader for waterfowl habitat acquisition and development. "It will be managed by Parks and Wildlife for appreciative (nonconsumptive) uses such as bird watching, photography, nature walks, etc., and will provide good opportunities for holders of the new conservation passport."

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## SPECIAL STAMPS BOOST PROGRAMS

AUSTIN--You've heard of Larry McMurtry's novel 'Lonesome Dove, but how about the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department version, "Lonesome Dove Hunter?"

There were 197 towns in Texas having a single (that's right, only one) hunter who purchased a white-winged dove stamp in 1990. Talk about rugged individualism. Other notable loners included 186 cities having only one duck or goose hunter 197 towns with a single freshwater trout fisherman, 101 cities with one saltwater fisherman and 142 towns with a single resident Robin Hood bow hunter

All this comes from TPWD's latest round of demographic research. The city of Houston was the front runner in the special stamp category with 19% of the total statewide saltwater stamp buyers, 8% of the archery stamps, 11% of the freshwater trout stamps, 21% of the waterfowl stamps and was second place in white-winged dove stamp purchasers (11%) behind San Antonio. All totaled 115,536 special stamps were purchased by hunters residing in Houston.

All stamp revenue except that from nongame stamps goes into Fund 9, which covers part of the department's operating budget. Whitewing, waterfowl, saltwater nongame and the new turkey stamps are dedicated stamps, meaning the funds received from the sale of stamps and prints must be spent in that area. Archery and freshwater trout stamps are not dedicated, however those programs are supported by funds from these stamps.

Saltwater stamp sale net receipts must be spent for coastal fisheries enforcement and management.

Waterfowl revenue may be spent only for research, management and protection of waterfowl and for the acquisition, lease or development of waterfowl habitats in the state. The money also may be used for grants. Not more than one half of total revenues may be spent for research, management and protection.

Turkey stamp revenue may be spent only for research, management and protection of turkeys and for acquisition, lease or development of turkey habitats in the state.

Whitewing receipts may be spent only for research and management for the protection of white-winged doves and for the acquisition, lease or development of white-winged dove habitat. Not more than one half of the receipts may be expended for research and management.

"This is all part of our program to learn more about our customers, the hunters and fishermen of the state, said Bill Rutledge, director of conservation communications. "We depend on the support of the sportsmen for these programs. Everyone from the 1,900 trout fishermen in Houston to the lone bow hunter in Tarzan. By the way, Tarzan also has a single individual that owns a saltwater fishing stamp. Could this person be the lone bow hunter as well?"

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#### OFFICIAL CLEARS UP REGULATIONS QUESTIONS

AUSTIN--Texas Parks and Wildlife Department officials say every hunting season brings some confusion concerning hunting regulations, and this year is no exception.

Ron George, program leader for migratory shore and upland game birds, said many of the questions he has answered this season involve teal hunting, steel versus lead shot requirements for sandhill crane hunting and hunting access to Conservation Reserve Program lands.

George said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service closed the *September* teal season this year because of low populations resulting from drought on the breeding grounds in the northern U.S. and Canada. However, the USFWS did not close teal hunting during the *regular* fall duck season. The regular season is open in the High Plains Mallard Management Unit from Nov. 16-Jan. 5. The rest of the state is open Nov. 23-Dec. 1 and Dec. 7-Jan. 5.

This season, a person may legally take blue-winged, green-winged and cinnamon teal as well as all other ducks in any combination as part of his aggregate daily bag limit of three ducks with a few exceptions, he said. The aggregate daily duck bag may include no more than two mallards (only one of which may be a female), two wood ducks, one pintail, one redhead and one mottled duck. The season is closed only on canvasback ducks.

Steel shot currently is not required for sandhill crane hunting in Texas, George said. However since no person, while hunting waterfowl (duck, geese and coots) anywhere in the state, may possess shotgun shells containing lead shot or loose lead shot for muzzleloading shotguns, a hunter who is in the field hunting sandhill cranes *and* waterfowl must use nontoxic shot. The only approved nontoxic shot is steel shot, including copper and/or nickel plated steel shot.

George has received several questions about hunting access on CRP lands. Texas landowners have taken about 3.4 million acres of highly-erodible cropland out of production and planted it in some type of permanent vegetative cover for a 10-year period. Many of these fields, which are located primarily in the High Plains and Rolling Plains of Northwest Texas, provide good wildlife habitat and hunting opportunities.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture regulations that established the CRP allow the landowner who enrolls his land in the program to continue to control access to his land, he said. The landowner may prohibit all hunting on his CRP acreage, allow anyone he wants to hunt for free or lease the hunting rights to anyone he wishes.

"A hunter cannot legally hunt on any CRP field he wishes without first obtaining the landowner's permission," George said.

Hunters have an obligation to know their hunting regulations. This information can be found in the 1991-92 Texas Hunting Guide and the Texas Early Season and Late Season Migratory Game Bird Hunting Digests which should be available any place that hunting licenses are sold.

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## WHARTON ANGLER SETS NEW STINGRAY RECORD

AUSTIN--Rick A. Jansky of Wharton set a new state record when he caught a 241-pound rougtail stingray in the Gulf of Mexico on Sept. 2.

The stingray, caught 12 miles southwest of Matagorda, measured 7 feet long. This is only the second entry in the rougtail stingray category.

Jansky's fish smashes the previous state record of 92 1/2 pounds. That stingray, 5 feet 3 5/8 inches long, was caught Sept. 21, 1989, by Robert B. Elliott Jr. of Mission in the Lower Laguna Madre.

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## PRESIDENT HONORS PROJECT WILD

AUSTIN--Project WILD, a conservation and environment education program for teachers of kindergarten through high school students, was one of three recipients of the President's Environment and Conservation Challenge Award for Education and Communication during a ceremony recently at the White House.

"In bestowing this honor the President is recognizing Project WILD as an organization that best exemplifies the cooperative, innovative spirit of the new environmental era in the area of education and communication," said Dr. Cheryl Charles, Project WILD executive director.

Project WILD (Wildlife In Learning Design) is designed to educate youth in making informed decisions affecting the quality of the environment for people and wildlife, she said.

Project WILD, which is available in all 50 states and five foreign countries, has provided free conservation education materials and workshops to more than 300,000 educators in the U.S. alone. There are more than 18,500 Project WILD educators in Texas. "These educators have used Project WILD to teach more than 20 million students in the U.S. about the importance of wildlife, its habitat and the responsible actions that humans can take to protect the quality of the environment for people and wildlife," Charles said.

Project WILD is sponsored in Texas by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. For more information contact Ilo Hiller, Project WILD coordinator 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744, or call 1-800-792-1112, ext. 4791 or (512) 389-4791

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### FERAL HOGS IMPACT WILDLIFE, LIVESTOCK

AUSTIN--Wildlife professionals don't know what impact feral hogs have on wildlife as far as diseases are concerned, but they do know that the animals compete directly with wildlife for food.

"They are very opportunistic in their feeding habits, eating anything from corn to carrion, said David Rideout, wildlife biologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Private Lands Enhancement Program in College Station. "Deer seem to dislike feral hogs and will leave an area when one or more of these hogs appear

Free-ranging wild pigs have increased substantially in numbers and distribution the past 10-15 years, especially in East and South Texas. Rideout said they occupy almost all counties in Texas with suitable white-tailed deer habitat. Only the Trans-Pecos and parts of the High Plains are unoccupied by feral hogs.

Feral hogs are considered the most prolific large mammal in the U.S., he said. A sow can produce two litters a year averaging four to six pigs per litter and they can begin breeding at seven months old.

"A recent study estimated the feral hog population at more than one million in Texas and about another million in the rest of the country, primarily in Florida and other southeastern states, Rideout said. "In recent years feral hogs have been trapped where they are plentiful and released by hunters on their hunting leases to provide additional hunting opportunities without realizing or taking into consideration the negative impact they have on wildlife habitat and native wildlife.

Most landowners dislike the animals because they can destroy crops and root up pastures. "I advise landowners and hunters to shoot or trap them whenever possible," he said. "Landowners and hunters should be aware that feral hogs can harbor and transmit infectious diseases that can be harmful to domestic livestock and humans. A localized study several years ago in southeast Texas revealed that 14 percent of the feral hogs tested positive for swine brucellosis and 18 percent tested positive for pseudorabies."

Swine brucellosis can cause abortions in sows and infertility in boars, both domestic and feral swine. It can be transmitted to cattle if they are exposed to the afterbirth of infected wild pigs, Rideout said. Humans that contract swine brucellosis usually have flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, sweating, aching and headaches. Pseudorabies does not infect people, but the virus infects the nervous system of domestic livestock, wildlife mammals and dogs. This disease weakens animals, leaving them susceptible to other problems, and can be fatal.

"Hunters should take precautions by always wearing rubber gloves when field dressing or cleaning wild pigs," said Dr. Don Davis, assistant professor of epidemiology and wildlife diseases in the College of Veterinary Medicine at Texas A&M University. "Avoid direct contact with blood and reproductive organs.

Davis advises farmers and ranchers to feed no more than cattle can eat at one time because excess feed can attract feral hogs. Free-flowing self feeders should be discouraged if hogs have access to them.

Wild feral hogs are much leaner than domestic hogs and many hunters enjoy eating them. Rideout said despite any infection the hogs are edible as long as the meat is thoroughly cooked, the same as with any pork.

"Future field checks and research on feral hogs in Texas hopefully will give us a better indication of the number and distribution of these wild swine that are infected with swine brucellosis, pseudorabies or any other disease that could affect domestic livestock and native wildlife," Davis said.

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## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT SCHEDULE

AUSTIN--Seven Christmas bird counts have been scheduled in the Lower Rio Grande Valley for anyone wishing to participate in the annual event.

Counts are scheduled for daylight to dark and prospective participants need to contact the count coordinator for the particular count of interest as soon as possible in order to be placed in a group. Cost is \$5 per person for each event.

Except for counts at Falcon Lake and the coastal tip of Texas, any person who has not received an assignment may attend the morning meeting of the particular count and still participate.

Counts are scheduled for:

- \* Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Dec. 14; participants meet at visitor's center at 6:30 a.m., coordinator, Joe Ideker, (512) 787-7861

- \* Laguna Atascosa NWR, Dec. 15; meet at visitor's center at 6:30 a.m. coordinator Thea Ulen, (512) 748-3607

- \* Anzulduas-Bentsen, Dec. 17: meet at Bentsen State Park office at 6:30 a.m. and at noon at Bentsen park pavilion for sack lunch (bring your own); recount the day's events afterward over supper: coordinator Gary Waggerman, (512) 686-1403 (evenings).

- \* La Sal Vieja, Dec. 19; meet at store on the west corner of Highways 88 and 186 at 6:30 a.m. and at noon at Delta Lake park for sack lunch (bring your own); recount the day's events over supper: coordinator Waggerman.

- \* Brownsville, Dec. 21 meet at corner of International and Boca Chica Blvds. at 7:30 a.m., coordinators Rose Farmer and Rey Ramirez, Sabal Palm Grove, (512) 541-8034.

- \* Falcon Lake and dam area, Dec. 22; call coordinator Victor Emanuel before the count at 1-800-328-VENT or write P.O. Box 33008, Austin, Texas 78764; sack lunch (bring your own) at 1 p.m. at Falcon Park headquarters.

- \* Coastal tip of Texas, Dec. 28; call coordinator Ideker at (512) 380-0310 or write P.O. Box 1433, Edinburg, Texas 78540.

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