



TEXAS
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THE OUTDOOR MAGAZINE OF TEXAS • NOVEMBER 2020

SAVING PRIVATE LANDS

Lone Star Land Stewards
reflect on program's impact

WEST TEXAS REST STOPS

Pause for outdoor fun
in Sonora and Ozona

TASTE OF THE COAST

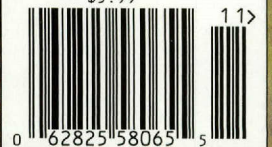
November angling brings
saltwater table fare

THE WHITETAIL ISSUE

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NOVEMBER 2020

VOLUME 78 • NUMBER 7



*A white-tailed deer
pauses in the fog at
Hillingdon Ranch in
the Hill Country.*

DK LANGFORD | TAMU PRESS

21 Everything Whitetail


Whether you're a hunter filling the family freezer with fresh meat or a wildlife watcher charmed by the sight of a whitetail's power and regal beauty, you likely know what it means to have "buck fever."

**by Russell Roe, Steve Hall,
Landry Allred, Louie Bond
and Benjamin Flores**

38 Saving Private Lands

Lone Star Land Steward winners reflect on the program's impact after 25 years.

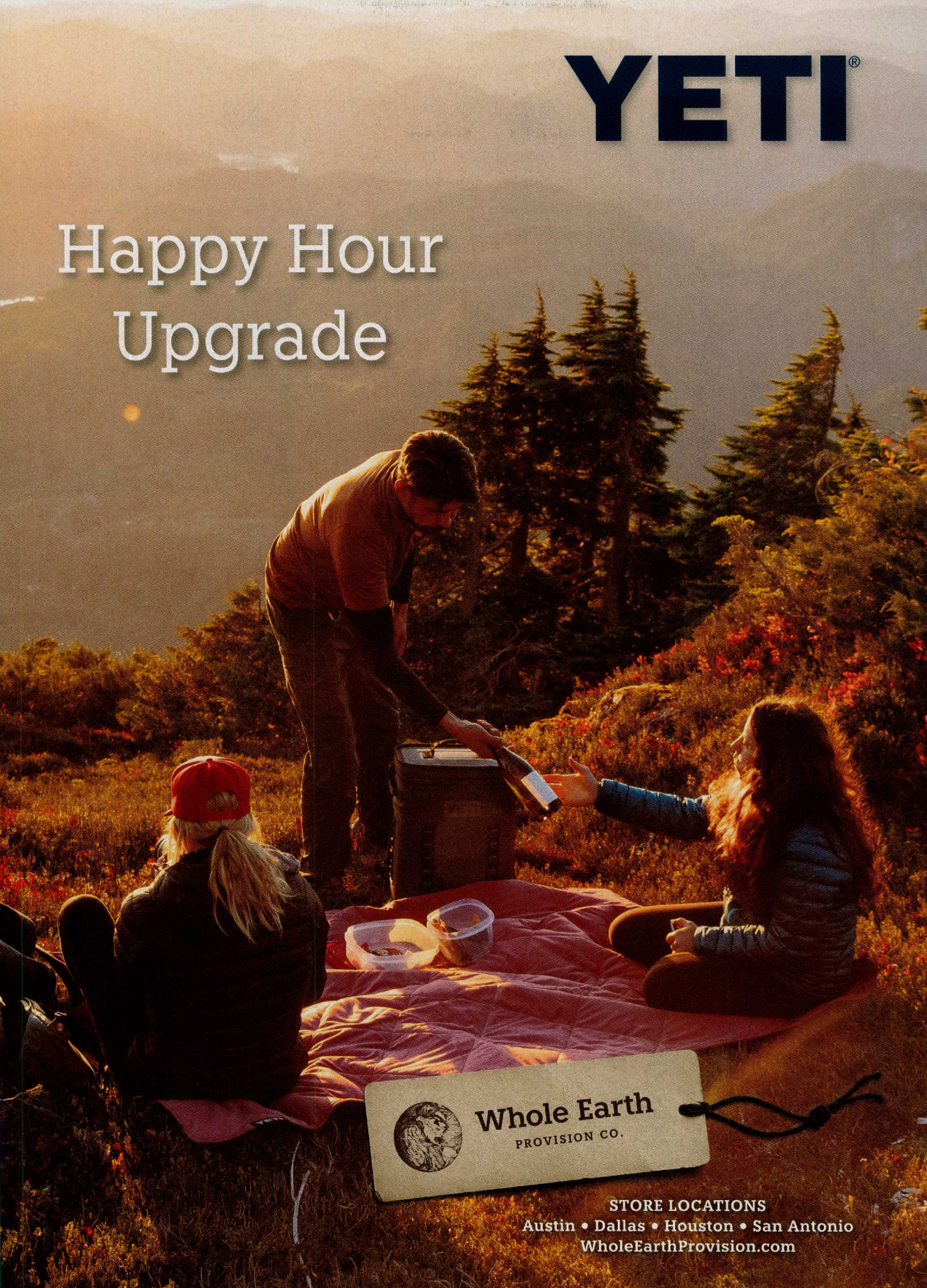
by Megan Radke

ON THE COVER: Good management can produce spectacular deer such as this nontypical whitetail at the DaVine Springs Ranch near Salado.  Earl Nottingham

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MAIL CALL



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TRAIL MIX

Answering harvest questions helps conserve **migratory game birds**; TPWD acquires more room at **Balmorhea State Park**; these trees put on a display with **fall color**; six steps to **improve your archery**; hiking the **Aztec Cave Trail** at Franklin Mountains; **fragrant mistflower** provides fall meals for monarchs.

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Pull off the highway for West Texas fun in **Sonora** and **Ozona**.

By Traci Anderson

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WHERE IN TEXAS?

FROM THE EDITOR

TEN-YEAR-OLD DEER-HUNTING AUTHOR. Honestly, I have to stop right there. What a glorious phrase!

When I conferred with TPWD Hunter Education's Steve Hall about a recreational component to this issue's "(Almost) Everything Whitetail" extravaganza, he moved straight to the top of my Christmas list by suggesting we include the voice of a youth hunter, Benjamin Lazo Flores. I held my breath until Steve sent the essay; it did not disappoint.

Benjamin's writing shines with the honesty of his emotion. He's alternately excited and nervous, but as he learns and prepares, he starts to feel the confidence of a hunter. Spoiler: After the hunt, Benjamin fully realizes his new confidence, and his usual shyness fades as they share stories around the campfire.

We can't publish every pre-teen's hunting story in these pages, but we can take a few moments to sit in the blind (in our imaginations) with Benjamin. In the same way, hunting is passed on by each hunter taking a few moments to literally sit in the blind with a new hunter, young or old.

Hunting (and fishing, hiking, camping, paddling, bird-watching and more) can be COVID-safe with proper precautions. Being out in nature helps lift the depression of unsettling times. Who

can resist the allure of crisp autumn day out in the wild after the searing oppression of Texas' endless summer? Not me, and certainly not my puppy.

Whether you hunt or not, there's plenty to enjoy about our state's beloved (and plentiful) white-tailed deer, so we offer whimsy as well as practical information this month. Hunters are some of the best conservationists, as are the Lone Star Land Stewards, celebrating 25 years of saving private land.

Archery is a timeless pursuit that can be enjoyed by all ages. Let us help you aim for success with six tips from our TPWD experts. If you're traveling the state, you can aim to see all the giant wildlife statues in this month's Wanderlist.

And as you head to the polls this month, celebrate Texas' 20 Wild Women of Conservation with this issue's "ladies of politics": Ima Hogg, Lady Bird Johnson and Terry Hershey. They sure knew how to get things done.

Louie Bond

Louie Bond, Editor

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Chinati Mountains State Natural Area

EARL NOTTINGHAM | TPWD

NEW PARKS ON THE HORIZON

I enjoyed your summer feature on future state parks and natural areas that will open in Texas. However, I find it unfortunate that TPWD feels that properties which were mainly ranches beforehand require such expensive improvements before they can open to the public. Texans don't need gift shops, visitors centers, interpretive signage or even blacktop to enjoy their natural heritage. On properties that already have dirt roads, they simply need that rarest of things in Texas: an unlocked gate.

COVID-19 has increased the need for social distancing on Texas' increasingly crowded trails. As the state with the fewest acres of public land per capita and almost no opportunities for dispersed camping or wilderness outside of the Big Bend region, let's get these parks open first and build improvements later (if at all). Those who don't enjoy the rugged experience will in turn see smaller crowds at their favorite parks. The budget hole that COVID-19 will create is surely going to further delay infrastructure the state already couldn't afford. Texans can't wait that long for access to their public lands.

ERIK IVERSON

Austin

TPWD's State Parks Division responds: *Like you, we understand the importance of a primitive experience with nature and agree not everyone needs major facilities to enjoy the outdoors, as seen in several of our minimally developed state natural areas. It may seem that an "unlocked gate" is all it would take to provide this experience; however, many variables must be considered before opening a park gate for safe and sustainable access.*

To be successful stewards, we need the protection provided by park rangers, the science behind our natural and cultural resources program, the inspiration and connection from our interpretive services program, and, most importantly, the support of volunteer efforts provided by local communities. Unfortunately, we have learned that not everyone is a responsible steward.

TPWD is committed to providing an outlet for responsible outdoor recreation, especially now when time outdoors is a welcome reprieve. We are actively planning and managing lands for new parks whose openings are on the horizon when all necessary components are in place. As guardians of these parks we are honored to protect these special places and remain dedicated to preserving and protecting the resources of this great state for present and future generations.

BEST OUTDOOR MAGAZINE

I have been enjoying your magazine for many years. As a lifelong Texan, I started hunting and fishing with my father at 6 or 7 years old. I'm now in my late 80s, so I've been at this pastime for a good while.

Let me say that I don't think you have any competition as the very best outdoor publication as per Texas. I look forward to each new issue.

NEAL MEARES

Kerrville

THANKS FOR CLEAN PARKS

We RV a lot and spend plenty of time in Texas state parks. Recently we took an RV trip to an adjacent state (name withheld) and stayed in one of its state parks. The site was pretty — in a woody setting and right on the lake. However, the site was littered with bottle caps, pop tops, candy wrappers, etc. On one of our trips into town we purchased a grabber and came back and cleaned the trash off our site.

Our Texas state parks are normally pristine. Rarely do you see any trash anywhere. So, kudos to TPWD — keep up the great job!

LOIS LAMBERTY

Jasper

WHERE IN TEXAS?

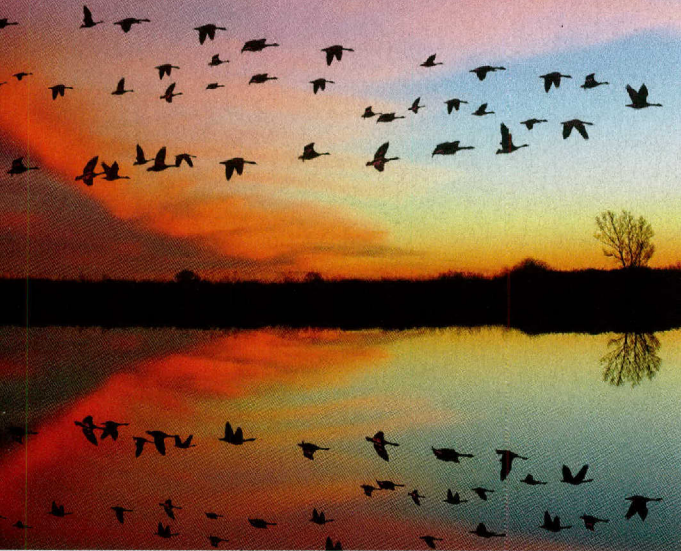


This Hill Country park offered a dramatic setting for viewing the comet Neowise this summer. Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, the answer to October's Where in Texas?, is good for stargazing, hiking, rock climbing and more. These boulders, known as the Lunar Rocks, can be found on top of the Main Dome. Look for this month's Where in Texas? on Page 58.

CONSERVATION

How Many Ducks?

Answer harvest questions while buying your license to help conserve migratory game birds.



TERRANCE EMERSON | DREAMSTIME.COM

Migratory game bird hunters may wonder why they're being asked a few questions when they buy their hunting licenses every year.

The answers to those questions, collected by the Harvest Information Program, allow biologists to estimate how many migratory game birds — for example, ducks, geese and doves — hunters harvest this year and how many hunters pursue each species.

With a half-million migratory game bird hunters, Texas has more duck and dove hunters than any other state. We play an important role in conservation, so accurate information gathering is crucial.

"Without question, Texas hunters have always answered the call to meet our shared stewardship of our cherished wildlife resources in this state," says TPWD Executive Director Carter Smith. "Without HIP, we would not be able to protect our migratory game birds, manage their habitats and provide quality hunting opportunities within this state. It is an important and critical part of the license purchasing process for our migratory game bird hunters."

HIP certification also contains a later, important, second part. A small number of randomly selected hunters are asked to complete an in-depth national harvest survey.

A still smaller subset of hunters will be asked to provide one wing from each bird harvested during the season for the wing survey. Researchers can determine species, sex and age for birds harvested, as well as other limited information. This gives managers important indications of the health of bird populations.

Once HIP certification is complete, hunters must carry proof of that completion in the field on your hunting license and must present it to a game warden, upon request.

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EARL NOTTINGHAM | TPWD

FLORA

It's Fall, Y'all

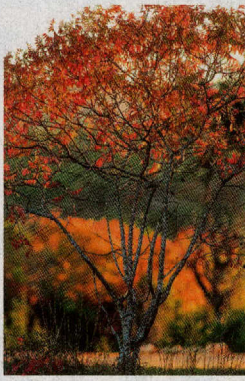
Fall isn't just a time for pumpkin-spiced everything, cool-weather hikes and Thanksgiving overindulgence. It's also when nature shows off the autumnal art display of trees clad in brilliant colors. Here are some trees to look for this fall and where to see them.



TIM FITZHARRIS | MINDEN PICTURES

SWEETGUMS

Unique sweetgums show a variety of colors during fall: bright oranges, soft yellows, dark purples, vivid reds. **Big Thicket National Preserve** and **Sabine National Forest** provide natural habitats for these trees. You can find these gems of nature at **Daingerfield**, **Tyler** and **Lake Bob Sandlin** state parks. Anytime in November is a prime time.



ERIC W. POHL

SUMACS

Displaying a vivid red, these trees can be seen throughout the hiking trails of **Lake Livingston State Park** and **Huntsville State Park**. Western-ranging flameleaf sumacs are peppered through **Inks Lake State Park**. Mid-November is the best time to visit.



SONIA SOMMERFELD | TPWD

BALD CYPRESS

These copper-red trees can be observed in a variety of places. **McKinney Falls State Park** is famous for Old Baldy, one of the largest bald cypress trees in Texas, or look along the waterways at **Garner**, **Guadalupe River** and **Martin Dies Jr.** state parks. Late October to early November days provide the best views.



LARRY DITTO

SYCAMORES

Find this orange-leaved beauty in places such as the well-watered areas of **Cleburne State Park** and **Colorado Bend State Park**. **Mother Neff State Park** displays some throughout its hiking trails. The prime time for viewing is early to mid-November.

There's More Balmorhea to Love Now

Balmorhea State Park is gaining some elbow room after a 643-acre land acquisition was completed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. This acquisition, which was seven years in the making, will increase the size of the 108-acre park seven-fold to a total of 751 acres and increase future opportunities for nature trails, nature watching and scenic overlooks.

"This is an exciting acquisition not only from a conservation standpoint but also for the opportunity to increase recreational activity for our visitors," says Rodney Franklin, director of Texas state parks. "Wildlife viewing and hiking are core activities at our parks; providing more space for these is critically important, particularly at Balmorhea State Park."

Access to this new land will not be available for some time, but, one day, visitors will enjoy the view from Carpenters Hill and explore new trails through the West Texas landscape.

This acquisition was purchased through federal Land and Water Conservation Funds and land sale proceeds.

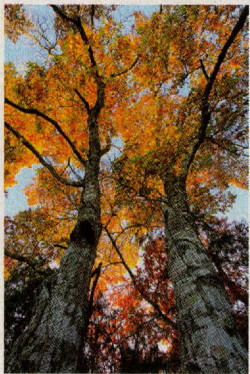
Balmorhea State Park has been undergoing multiple construction projects, including removal and replacement of all existing septic systems, replacement of the chain-link fence surrounding the pool to one made of wrought iron and limestone, reconstruction of the CCC pergola, completion of repairs to the campground and San Solomon Courts, and renovations to the manager's house and concession building.

Details about an expected reopening date will be announced later.

Located north of Fort Davis, Balmorhea is home to a unique aquatic environment, the San Solomon Springs. The springs are perfect habitat for numerous species of aquatic animals, including two small, endangered desert fishes — the Pecos gambusia and the Comanche Springs pupfish.



ERIC FOSTER



ERIC W. POHL



SONIA SOMMERFELD | TPWD

COTTONWOODS

Bright golden-yellow cottonwoods are found in the lower elevations of **Caprock Canyons State Park** or along the banks of Limpia Creek at **Davis Mountains State Park**. If you're hiking on the trails of **Palo Duro Canyon State Park**, look around to see a yellow fall wonderland.

TEXAS RED OAKS

These oaks with red, orange and yellow autumn leaves can be found at **Lake Mineral Wells State Park**, along with **Pedernales Falls** and **Dinosaur Valley** state parks. It's best to go in early November to catch a glimpse of these beauties.

BIGTOOTH MAPLES

The bright red leaves of these West Texas natives can be found along the banks of the Sabinal River in **Lost Maples State Natural Area**. **Boerne** also has a collection along Cibolo Creek. Try to visit in mid-November, peak time for these maples.



On TV

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NOV. 1-7

With over 650 species of birds, Texas is a birding hot spot.

NOV. 8-14

Experience Texas terrain while exploring state park trails by bicycle.



NOV. 15-21

Fish the coast by boat or on foot; see how fish are stocked in bays.

NOV. 22-28

Meet the biologists and see the science that helps support wildlife.

NOV. 29-DEC. 5

Go on the job with game wardens and see how they protect wildlife.

On the Podcast



November's new segments include "Families Camping" and "Game Warden Ride-Along." Plus, check out fresh magazine Wanderlist episodes on fall color parks and parks with Native American ties. Download at underthetexas.org or major podcast platforms.

On the Blog

Want frequent content updates from *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine? Join us for tips to enhance your outdoor experiences! Check out our blog at tpwmag.com as we help Texans find joy in the outdoors.

TAKE A HIKE

Aztec Cave Trail

Franklin Mountains State Park



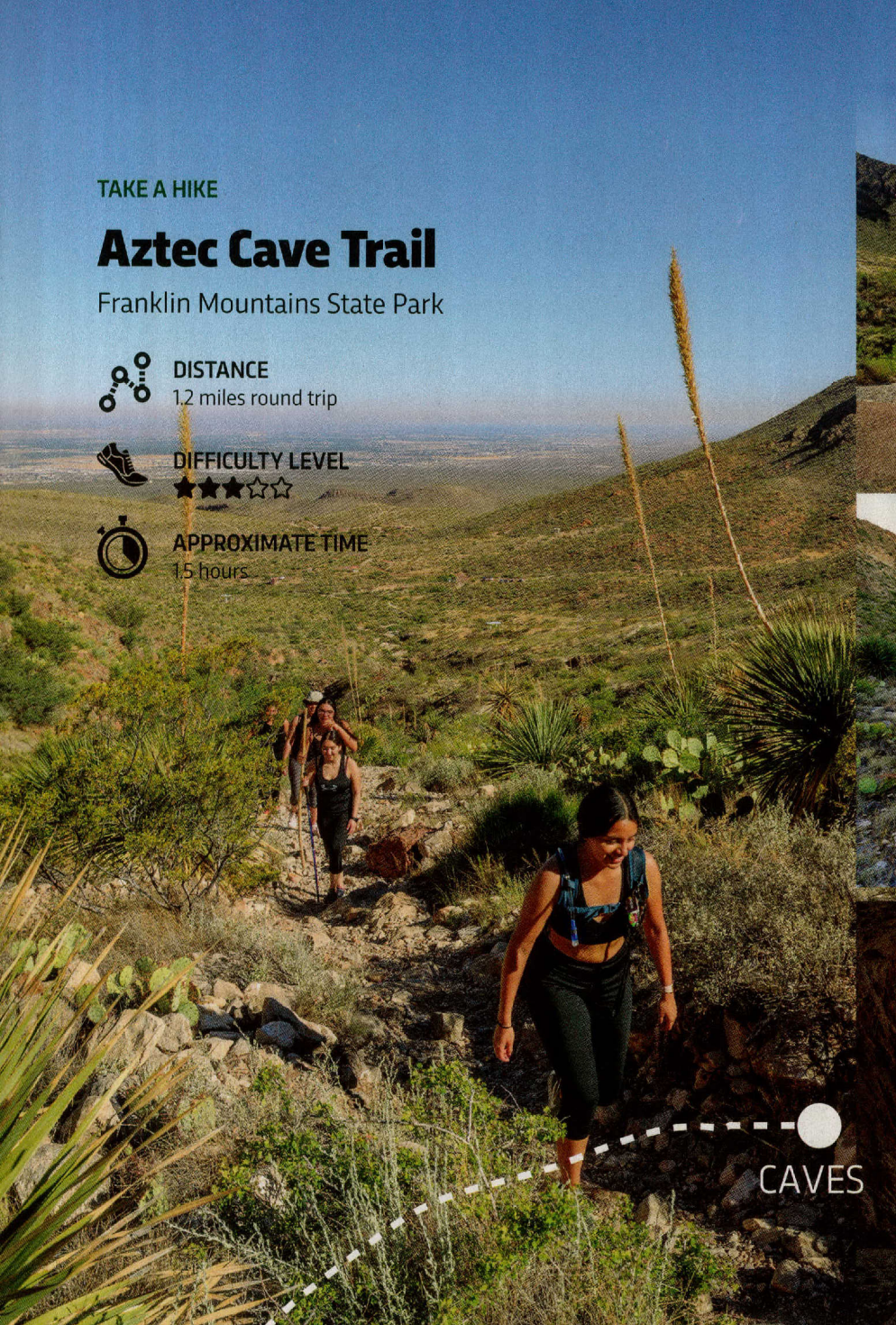
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CAVES

ALL EARL NOTTINGHAM | TPWD

Sometimes it's about the journey, sometimes it's about the destination. With the Aztec Cave Trail, the destination is the main draw — in this case, caves perched on a hillside in the Tom Mays Unit of Franklin Mountains State Park. The caves have a remarkable history: They are thought to have formed as gigantic air pockets in ancient lava.

The Franklin Mountains, contained within the city limits of El Paso, cover almost 27,000 acres and contain more than 100 miles of trails. The Aztec Cave Trail is one of the most popular hikes in the park.

The trail is not long, but it's uphill and steep at the end. From the trailhead (the caves can

be seen from the parking lot), the trail crosses an arroyo before beginning its gradual ascent, passing a couple of campsites along the way. A half-mile into the hike, the trail becomes increasingly steep, and footing can be tricky on loose rocks. The trail gains 500 feet of elevation in its 0.6 miles. This is Chihuahuan Desert country, and the vegetation along the trail reflects it, with lechuguilla, sotol, ocotillo, cactus and mesquite trees, adapted to survive the rigors of desert life.

The payoff comes at the end once the caves are reached, offering a cool respite from the desert heat.

"The view is great," says park Superintendent Cesar Mendez. "You get a

panoramic view of the Rio Grande valley — the Texas/New Mexico section. You can see the Organ Mountains in the distance, and you can see the northern Franklin Mountains."

The view is so good, it's the cover shot of Laurence Parent's revised *Official Guide to Texas State Parks*.

Swifts, swallows and canyon wrens can sometimes be seen near the cave entrance. Smoke on the ceiling of the cave and markings on the wall reflect the presence of humans over many years. The Aztec name derives from artifacts, misattributed to Aztecs, found in the cave in the early 1900s.

Once you've enjoyed the caves, head back down the way you came.

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Randy Brudnicki, Publisher • September 29, 2020

FLORA FACT: NATIVE POLLINATOR PLANTS

Meals for Monarchs

Fragrant mistflower provides a late-season food source for pollinators.

After a hot, dry Texas summer, there aren't a lot of nectar and pollen choices for hungry monarchs during their fall migration south to their winter home in Mexico. Nature does provide some amazing native plants that can help provide sustenance each November; one you may see (and smell) right now is the fragrant mistflower.

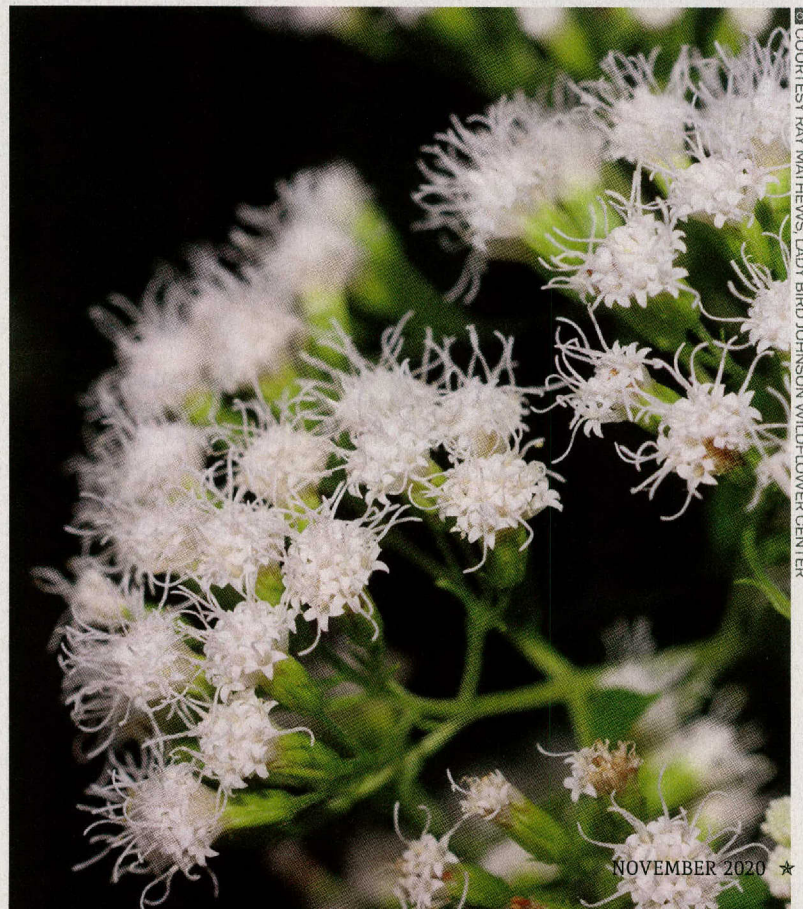
Fragrant mistflower (*Ageratina havanensis*) can grow to 6 feet, massed with clusters of small, fuzzy, snow-like blooms from fall through early winter (and, occasionally, in spring) in Texas. The buds sometimes blush a bit of pink. Mature flowers attract monarchs with their nectar; bees, hummingbirds, other butterflies and many other insects are also drawn to this beauty, which makes a splashy late arrival to the Texas blooming season.

Found in the rocky Edwards Plateau and the Trans-Pecos, the semi-evergreen plant has many other names: Havana snakeroot (because it's also found in Cuba), shrubby boneset, thoroughwort or Barba de Viejo (old man's beard). The genus name derives from the Greek *agera* (to never grow old) because the blooms last a relatively long time.

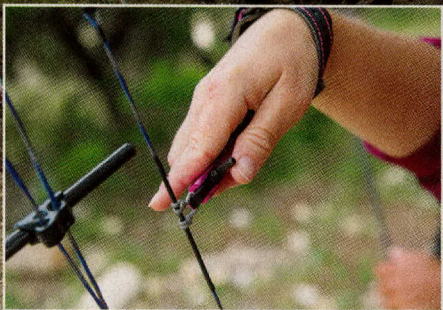
Only new growth provides flowers. In some parts of Texas, the fragrant mistflower may die back significantly each winter but grow back in spring.

This fall beauty proves its drought resistance by the very timing of its bloom. It's also attractive to our plentiful white-tailed deer, who find little tender growth to nibble in this late season.

Keep on the lookout for this rare source of late-season nectar and pollen. You might see a monarch stopping for quick meal.



COURTESY RAY MATHEWS, LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDFLOWER CENTER



SKILLS

Become a Better Archer in Six Steps

Maybe you've never held a bow but bought one on impulse at the sporting goods store last month. Maybe you've had some fun with archery, but your skills are rusty. Whether you're a bowhunter or a tournament archer, target success with these tips from TPWD community archery specialist Immanuel Salas.

TAKE A CLASS OR FIND A COACH

An archery class or coaching session is essential to setting you up for success, teaching you the fundamentals of shooting and creating great archery habits. New to the sport? Focus on each step of shooting. Take notes or (even better) video your session. Self-taught? If you were taught by a noncertified instructor or "learned the hard way," a formal training session can help you pinpoint inefficiencies in your shooting and make you a better archer. A good instructor should be experienced, but also open to new techniques, able to communicate clearly and willing to help you attain your stated goals.

SET YOUR BOW TO THE RIGHT DRAW WEIGHT

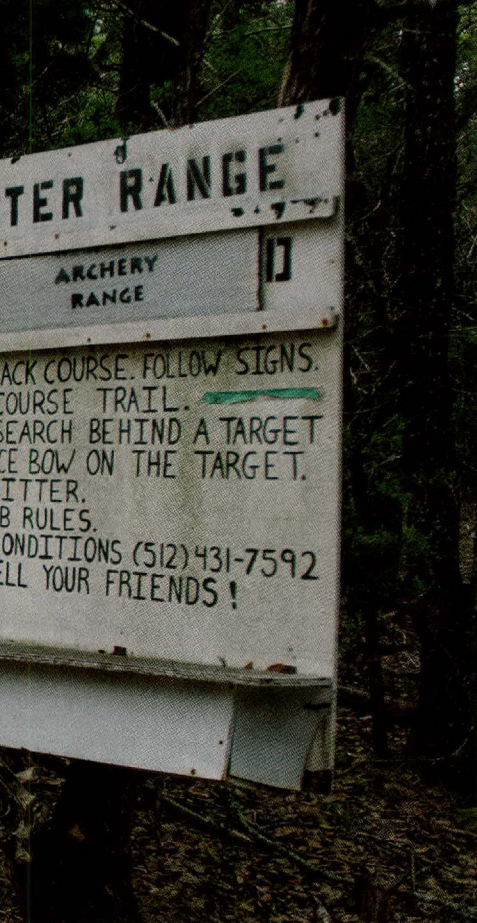
If your draw weight is too light, you won't get the best performance out of your equipment; too heavy and you'll risk bad shooting form, reduced practice time and physical injury. You should be able to fully draw smoothly, without excess movement and without compromising proper form. Hold that full draw for 5 seconds (or more, depending on your ability and activity) and lower the bowstring under control without jerky movements. Your goal is quality practice; proper draw weight allows you to perform the necessary steps with control.

WARM UP, COOL DOWN

Begin every archery session with dynamic warmups or calisthenics that mobilize the shoulder, arm and back muscles. Conclude every session with stretches that help with flexibility, range of motion and recovery of those same muscles. Warm up and cool down your mind as well by visualizing success, the arrow in flight and the shot process while you set up the archery range and prepare your gear. These steps help prevent injury, set you up for a healthy archery career and mentally and physically prepare you for a productive shooting session.

PRACTICE LIKE IT'S REAL

Train in environments, in situations and with equipment you'll be using. For tournament archers, consider factors such as indoor and outdoor venues, natural or fluorescent lighting, crosswinds, distances and proximity to the audience or other shooters. If bowhunting, practice shooting at optimal distances for your proficiency, from seated and kneeling positions, from blinds or tree stands, all using your customary broadhead. Will you wear a hat, sunglasses or bulky jacket? Will you use shooting aids, a bow-mounted quiver or rangefinders? Incorporate those into your practice.



ALL © CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD

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MAKE EVERY SHOT COUNT

Treat each shot as the one that will win the tournament or harvest your dream game animal. Work through the shooting steps you've learned and the set-up sequence you've created. Release the arrow only when everything is perfect. Build only successful habits. Recognize that archery is a lifelong pursuit, not a singular accomplishment. Relish the process.

JOIN A CLUB, LEAGUE OR TOURNAMENT

Competing hones your archery skills and provides access to a variety of ranges and shooting conditions. Participation in leagues and clubs expands your social circle and introduces you to like-minded individuals to trade knowledge and get involved in conservation. Testing yourself allows you to gauge your progress, improve in areas of your game and attain a sense of accomplishment earned through dedication, perseverance and discipline.

To find out more about TPWD's archery programs and get connected with local resources visit the Community Archery Program, Texas-NASP or Bowhunter Education pages on the TPWD website.

PROTECT THE LAKES YOU LOVE.

CLEAN Remove all plants, mud and debris from boat, trailer and gear.

DRAIN Drain boat, motor, gear and other water-retaining compartments.

DRY Let boat and gear dry for a week or more before visiting another lake, or wash everything thoroughly with high pressure water.

STOP INVASIVE SPECIES LIKE GIANT SALVINIA
TPWD.TEXAS.GOV/GIANTSALVINIA

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

NICE CATCH

Taste of the Coast

November angling brings saltwater table fare.

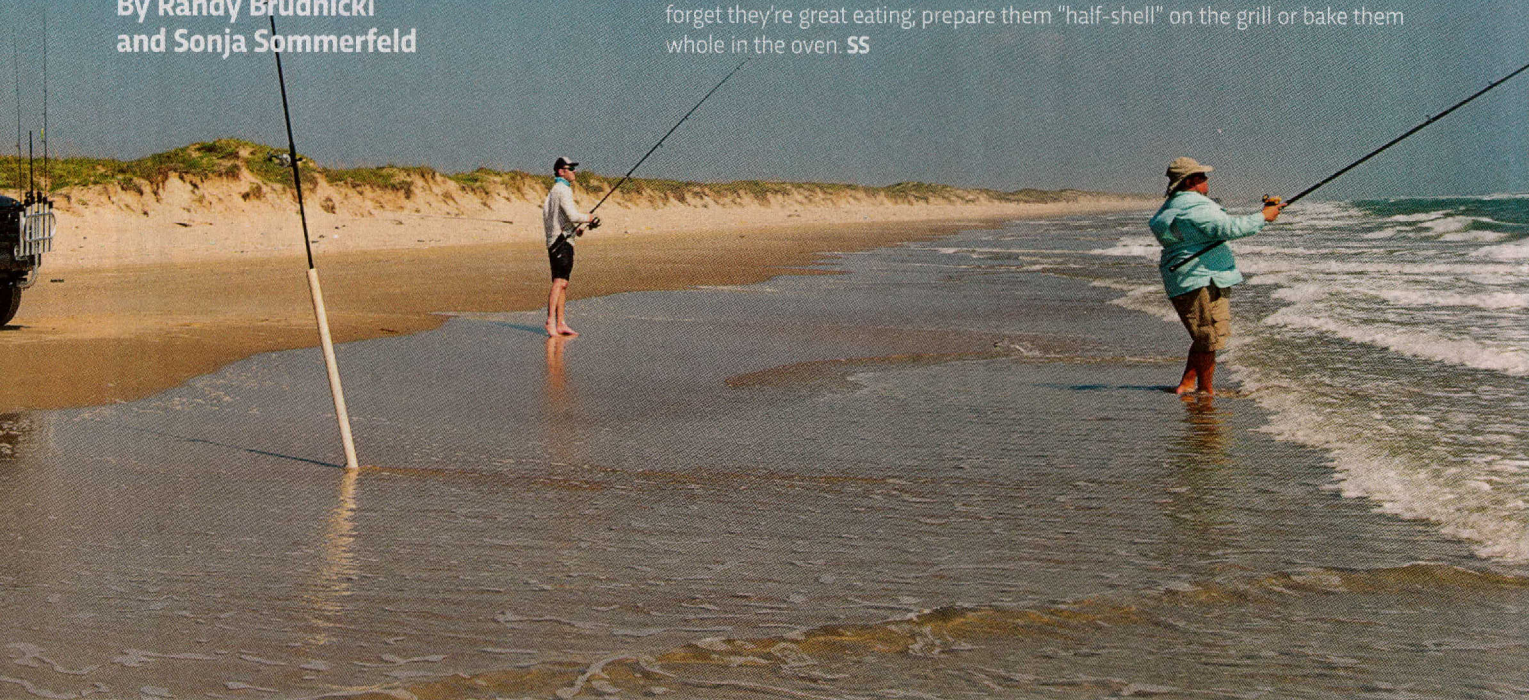
By Randy Brudnicki and Sonja Sommerfeld

GULF COAST, FLORIDA POMPANO

Florida pompano are a favored table fare all along the Gulf Coast. Here in Texas, they can be locally abundant in the fall along beaches and pass areas. The average fish weighs between 1 to 3 pounds here, and there are no size or bag limits. Most "pumps" are found in sandy areas, where they pick off sand fleas and other critters near the bottom.

Anglers typically use rigs fished near the bottom with small hooks baited with shrimp, but will also use small spoons, jigs and mullet-looking artificial rigs. A common method along the beaches is to fish double-drop leaders with FishBites and peeled shrimp out over the second sandbar.

Long rods are a necessity to reach fertile pompano grounds. The most popular area to target pompano is in the surf — south of Corpus Christi from **PACKERY CHANNEL** and on the beaches of **PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE**. As the month gets colder, the better fishing is farther south toward South Padre Island. Don't forget they're great eating; prepare them "half-shell" on the grill or bake them whole in the oven. **SS**



SONJA SOMMERFELD | TPWD

COLETO CREEK, LARGEMOUTH BASS

South Texas' **COLETO CREEK** is a largemouth bass angler's favorite winter destination. Popular baits include spinnerbaits, rattletraps, crankbaits, jerkbaits and soft plastic baits. When fish are less active, try pitching with jigs or plastic worms in cover. Heavier rods and lines are necessary when fishing thick cover. As the winter temperatures drop, deep-water bass fishing will be better using crankbaits, Texas-rigged worms, Carolina-rigged plastics or jigging spoons.

The water at this reservoir is generally clear throughout the year, while the bigger creek channels are typically stained. Small coves and protected creek channels stay fairly clear.

Habitat includes rocky banks, flooded timber, shallow brushy flats and creek channels. Additionally, stands of native aquatic vegetation and hydrilla provide excellent habitat in most areas of the reservoir in some years. Artificial fish habitat structures were recently added to Coledo Creek. **RB**

SONJA SOMMERFELD | TPWD



UPPER GULF COAST, SOUTHERN FLOUNDER

Southern flounder, a great-tasting fish, are commonly found in the silt and clay bottoms of the upper Texas coast, especially in **GALVESTON BAY** and **SABINE LAKE**. After the first cold front in the fall, they move through the channels and pass to the Gulf for spawning: the “flounder run.”

During November, you are allowed to catch flounder only using a rod and reel. When trying to hook a flounder, most anglers use mud minnows or small shrimp and mullet, the flounder’s favorite meal. Others have great success with soft plastics on jig heads, especially when scented like their prey. Use a heavy, braided line since this species has sharp teeth and will bite through thinner line. Remember to slowly bounce your bait or jig along the bottom, since flounder like to lie in wait and strike their prey.

Look for slow-moving currents in grass and mud/silt mix. Fishing is usually more productive during this time along the bayou mouths, marsh drains and shorelines as flounder move toward the pass to the Gulf. Around Galveston, fish along the rocks, ship channel and structures — flounder accumulate here before heading out to the Gulf. On the south end of Sabine Lake, fish the mouths of bayous where flounder feed and stage before leaving the bay.

The daily bag and possession limit in November and early December is two fish, 15-inch minimum. **SS**



ROY HEISTERMANN

CLEMENTE GUZMAN | TPWD



LAKE HOLBROOK
LARGEMOUTH BASS

This small but overlooked East Texas reservoir is a fun largemouth bass fishery. Cover consists of flooded timber, brush piles and limited docks and boat houses. Cattails and other emergent aquatic species can be found in areas along the edge of the reservoir. Volunteers and TPWD staff have been supplementing cover and habitat with aquatic species such as pickerelweed and waterwillow. Artificial fish habitat structures can be found, too.

Crankbaits are fished on main-lake points; spinnerbaits are fished around the flooded timber. Popular soft plastic baits include worms, tubes, grubs and soft jerkbaits.

Crappie are also prevalent in **HOLBROOK**. Fish the standing timber in the upper end of the reservoir and in the vicinity of boat houses, brush piles and bamboo “crappie condos” with live minnows and crappie jigs. **RB**



EARL NOTTINGHAM | TPWD

PICTURE THIS

Long-Distance Shooter

For hunting trips, consider “bridge” cameras to zoom in on wildlife and landscapes.

by Earl Nottingham



Many hunters will agree that a camera is an essential part of the outdoor experience. From the snapshots of fellow hunters relaxing around the firepit to the photos of two bucks sparring in the morning fog to, ultimately, the image of the lucky hunter with his or her trophy, the photograph is the permanent record to preserve and share those experiences. However, we often miss some of the hunt’s best photo opportunities because of one factor — the lack of a telephoto lens makes us unable to take pictures of distant scenes or animals.

How often have you photographed wildlife with a smartphone or small point-and-shoot camera, only to be disappointed that the animal looked like a speck in the distance in the resulting photo? Unlike the human eye, which is keen to see detail in animals at relatively long distances, a camera or smartphone with a normal or even slightly zoomed lens cannot bring long-distance subjects close

enough. This is where a camera with a long telephoto or super-zoom lens shines.

If you’ve ever watched hunting shows or animal documentaries on television, you’ve seen the results of these type of lenses by how close the animals appear. You might think that the cameras and lenses used for photos and videos on these shows are expensive — and you’d be right. They’re very expensive! However, the good news is that there are relatively inexpensive cameras from various manufacturers referred to as “bridge” cameras that pack a big zoom lens into a small package and are what I consider to be the perfect hunting cameras.

The bridge camera is simply a design that “bridges the gap” between a small point-and-shoot camera and a full-size digital SLR (DSLR). Depending on the model, the camera’s built-in, non-interchangeable optical zoom lens can range from wide angle up to 60X. That’s the

rough equivalent of a 20mm to 1200mm lens on a 35mm camera but in a small, lightweight and easy-to-carry package. Most of these cameras come with extra features such as wireless connectivity, high-definition or 4K video and optical stabilization to help eliminate camera shake.

In essence, bridge cameras are an affordable alternative to expensive DSLRs or pro video cameras. They feature many of the same manual and automatic controls but with a large built-in zoom lens that will cover everything from wide-angle to super-telephoto photography. It's like having a whole camera bag for shooting everything from landscapes to wildlife in one compact package.

So, you might be wondering, why don't all photographers use bridge cameras all of the time? Well, there are a few drawbacks to be considered. As previously mentioned, the lens is fixed and non-interchangeable, so there is no way to swap out lenses for creative effects. The other drawback (which, in practice, is not that much of a drawback) is the smaller size of the sensor compared to full-size DSLRs. However, these smaller sensors can produce great quality 12-20 megapixel images as well as 4K video. They also don't gather light quite as effectively as more expensive lenses — a result of their more compact design. Despite these drawbacks, the photo and video quality from these little powerhouses is excellent and can result in images that were previously unattainable.

Every camera maker offers several models of bridge cameras with a variety of specs. Here are just a few to consider.

PANASONIC LUMIX DC-FZ80

Pairs a 60x zoom lens with high-resolution stills and 4K video shooting functionality. Features an 18.1-megapixel high-sensitivity MOS sensor and a Lumix DC Vario lens, which provides a 20-1200mm equivalent focal length range, along with optical stabilization to minimize the appearance of camera shake for sharper handheld shooting. Built-in Wi-Fi allows you to pair the FZ80 with smartphones or tablets running the Panasonic Image App for wireless image transferring and remote camera control. **\$298**



SONY CYBER-SHOT DSC-HX400V

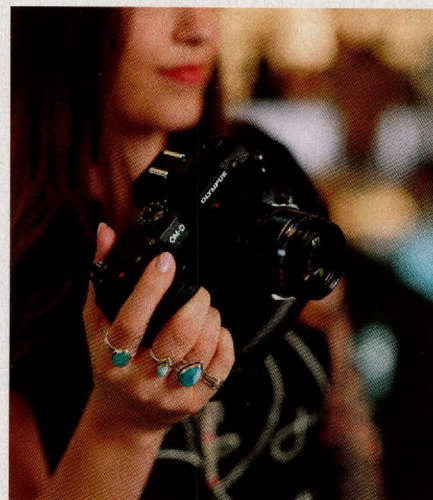
Features a 20.4-megapixel 1/2.3-inch Exmor R CMOS sensor as well as a 50x optical zoom Carl Zeiss Vario Sonnar T lens with a 100x Clear Image Zoom. A 4.3-215mm focal length with a 35mm equivalent of 24-1200mm allows significant wide-angle and super-telephoto shooting abilities. Notably, it also features a constant 2.8 aperture, which is especially useful in low-light shooting situations. **\$449**

CANON POWERSHOT SX740 HS

Although this camera is more of a compact point-and-shoot design, its 20.3-megapixel, 1/2.3-inch CMOS sensor and 40x optical zoom are on a performance par with other bridge models. Helping the far end of its 24-960mm zoom range (35mm equivalent) is optical image stabilization, which keeps photos sharp and in focus. Built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth pairs the camera to your mobile device for quick editing and sharing. **\$399**



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



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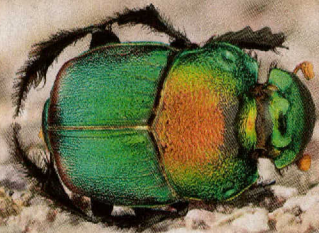
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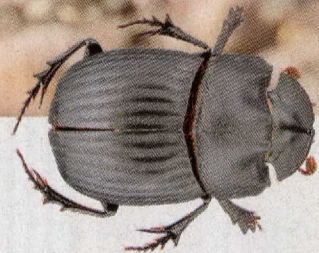
Dirty Job

Dung beetles roll away all that animal ... stuff.

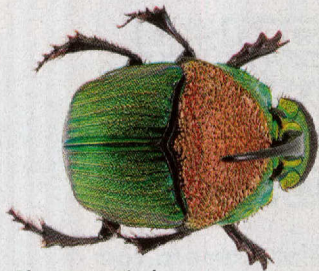
By Ross C. Winton



Phanaeus difformis



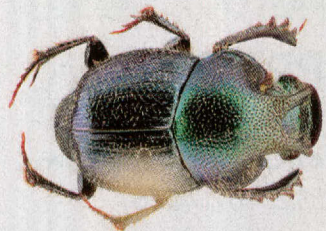
Corpus fricator



Phanaeus vindex



Onthophagus hecate



Onthophagus orpheus pseudopheus



We don't like to talk about what happens to our waste. Whether household garbage, sewer content or old vehicles, waste is removed from our thoughts as soon as it's out of our sight.

As we search for better ways to recycle, we're reminded that nature has been helping us repurpose our waste (and that of other animals) for thousands of years.

Some beetles fill a nasty niche of processing animal waste, our dung. Without creatures like dung beetles and flies (and even bacteria), we would be surrounded by it.

Dung beetles utilize excrement as a part of their life cycle and make those nutrients available to plants and other organisms. Bison and other grazers once roamed the prairies and savannas of Texas, foraging on grasses, but how were the nutrients from the waste they left behind reintroduced back to the vegetation?

Quite a few nutrients remain in animal dung, due to digestive inefficiencies. Creatures like dung beetles utilize and process that material to provide nourishment to their growing young. Dung beetles will lay their eggs in this nutrient-rich excrement; their larvae will feed on it until they emerge as full-grown adult beetles.

Believe it or not, there can be a lot of competition for dung, and these beetles have adapted behaviors to keep some for themselves.

Meet the *rollers*, *tunnelers* and *dwellers*.

- **Rollers** move it away from the pile and others who might steal it. They are entertaining to watch and have a very good sense of direction, despite their aimless behavior.
- **Tunnelers** move dung underground directly below where it was deposited. Flip some dung over and see if there are small holes in the ground. That's tunneling.
- **Dwellers** live and reproduce in the dung itself. They're often quite small but visible if you break open the dung.

In addition to being productive nutrient recyclers, these beetles can also be quite beautiful. The most charismatic of our Texas species is the rainbow scarab, multicolored and sculptured. The males also possess a very distinctive horn.

Texas has 58 dung beetle species and hundreds more beetle species that utilize dung. All have close relationships with many species of mammals and sometimes birds. Keep your eyes open when you are outside — you may be lucky enough to see these beneficial insects doing a job that many of us wouldn't touch.

THE TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE MAGAZINE GUIDE TO

white-tailed deer



In the Wild

PHOTOGRAPHING DEER; THE RUT

Before the Hunt

DEER RESEARCH; HUNTER ED

The Hunt

GETTING STARTED; PUBLIC LAND

The Harvest

ANTLERS AND TAXIDERMY

The Feast

RECIPES AND COOKING TIPS

The Stories

BUCK FEVER AND OTHER TALES

*almost EVERYTHING



Lifespan

Average 7 years



Speed

up to 30 mph



Height

±3 ft at shoulder



Length

up to 7 ft



Weight

175lb (m); 110lb (f)



Gestation

201 days



Diet

forbs, shrubs,
acorns



If you spy a flash of white under that buck's tail when he turns to slip away, you've encountered a white-tailed deer, the most sought-after big-game species in Texas.

Whether you're a hunter filling the family freezer with fresh meat or a wildlife watcher charmed by the sight of

a whitetail's power and regal beauty, you likely know what it means to have "buck fever." An estimated 5.5 million white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) inhabit all but two of Texas' 254 counties and can be seen everywhere, from urban green spaces to the most remote wilds.

White-tailed deer hunting generates



WHITETAIL

by Russell Roe, Steve Hall,
Landry Allred, Louie Bond,
Benjamin Flores

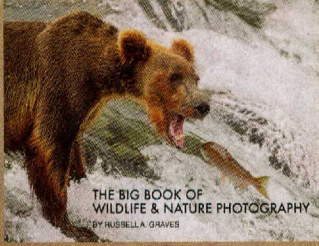
an estimated \$1.2 billion in economic output (think gas, gear, lease fees, hotels, restaurants and small-town retail businesses) in Texas and \$15.7 billion nationwide. Even those admittedly impressive numbers can't convey the depth of Texas' enduring attraction to the whitetail and the culture that surrounds

it, from art to cooking to writing — not to mention the thrill of the hunt itself.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department handles the weighty responsibility of regulation, conservation and management of deer populations throughout the state, as well as the education and safety of

hunters. The agency sold more than 1.24 million hunting licenses in 2019; license sales are up in 2020 as Texans see hunting as an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors while staying COVID-safe.

There's not enough space to tell you literally everything about white-tailed deer, but we love a challenge!



*As a hunter, wildlife photographer and writer, Russell Graves has traversed the Texas landscape in search of wild things. He recently published a photography book, *The Big Book of Wildlife and Nature Photography*.*



FOCUS ON THE EYES

by Landry Allred

RUSSELL A. GRAVES

WHAT'S YOUR TYPICAL PROCESS OF PHOTOGRAPHING WHITETAIL?

Graves: "I approach it like a hunter. I grew up in a hunting family and learned early on how to get close to animals, utilize tools available like camouflage, and the techniques of wind and scent control. I study maps and make a plan of where the deer will be, identify food sources and bedding cover. Once you identify those, you need to think from a photography standpoint of being in a place where you can see the animals coming, have a good background, and the wind and lights. All those things combined jumpstart the process.

"To get a good picture of deer, you have

to be on the ground and in their element. It takes a good amount of biological knowledge as well. Whatever you photograph, take time to learn about its habits and nuances. From there, you put the odds in your favor of getting good photographs."

WHY IS THE "HERO" SHOT SO IMPORTANT AND COMMON IN DEER PHOTOGRAPHY?

Graves: "It shows the power and gracefulness of the animal. For as long as there have been people and deer in the same habitat, deer have fascinated people. Anytime you get a mature, heavy-antlered deer and have them in a power pose where his ears are alert, his

head's up and he's looking, that attracts people to the animal."

ANY OTHER TIPS ON WHITETAIL PHOTOGRAPHY?

Graves: "One of the key tips for wildlife photography, especially deer, is to focus on the eyeball. If the eyeball's not in focus, the picture's not going to be that great. Then, make sure you have a good understanding of your camera equipment because whitetail deer are dynamic and always on the move. Capturing shots that show dynamic behavior happens quickly. The less time you spend fumbling with your camera, the more you can concentrate on capturing the behavior that make whitetails so endearing."



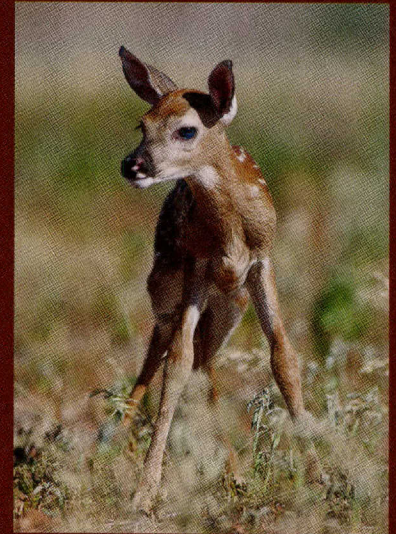
What the Rut!

BULL'S EYE PHOTOGRAPHY

The rut is the time when white-tailed deer, especially bucks, are more active and less cautious than usual, making them easier to hunt. The buck has one thing on his mind at this time of the year: to find as many does as he can. Males often create rubs or scrapes before and during the breeding season as a form of communication with other deer in the area. Hunters may witness bucks having mock battles with shrubs or small trees to prepare them for real-life battles with other bucks as they fight for dominance.

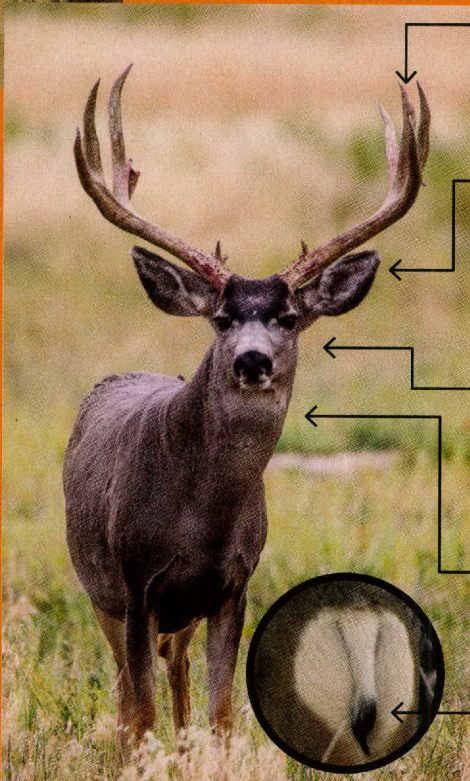
LEAVE FAWNS ALONE

Does give birth from late spring through summer, often leaving the well-camouflaged fawns alone while foraging for food. Resist the urge to "help" the fawn, as the mother is usually nearby.



RUSSELL A. GRAVES

Mule Deer vs. White-Tailed Deer



Mule deer antlers fork, dividing in two.

Mule deer have longer, pointier ears set at an angle of about 30 degrees from the head.

Mule deer generally are whiter on their faces than whitetails.

Both have a white throat patch.

Mule deer have a dark color at the end of their tail.



White-tailed deer antlers have a single main beam, with tines growing out from it.

A whitetail's ears are usually more vertical.

White-tailed deer are a bit redder than mule deer.

Whitetails have a showy white tail that they use to communicate.

RUSSELL A. GRAVES, INSET TWILIGHT | DREAMSTIME.COM

RUSSELL A. GRAVES, INSET BRUCE MACQUEEN | DREAMSTIME.COM

before the hunt



CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD



THE EPICENTER OF DEER RESEARCH

Kerr WMA work leads to a bountiful herd across the state.

by Russell Roe

Texas deer are thriving, but that wasn't always the case. The white-tailed deer population has rebounded from an estimated 232,000 in 1938 to today's 5.5 million. The Kerr Wildlife Management Area (and a deer named Big Charlie) gave us the road map to get us where we are today with a productive, healthy deer herd across the state.

The Kerr WMA has been the epicenter of deer research in Texas, with extensive work done on deer habitat, genetics, nutrition, antler growth, selective harvest, carrying capacity and more.

"What we've learned on the Kerr is that production and quality of white-tailed deer is genetically based and environmentally influenced," says Ryan Reitz, project leader for Kerr and Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Areas. "There's a whole lot

that goes in that statement."

Decades of research and dozens of studies have provided scientifically based principles on everything from a deer's preferred diet to the effects of early weaning. Hunters and land managers have implemented the lessons learned at Kerr over the past 50 years, leading to improvements in both the quantity and quality of deer in Texas.

Some of the best-known research that's come out of the Kerr involves antlers.

That's where Big Charlie comes in.

The Kerr was established in 1950 in the heart of the Hill Country west of Kerrville. In the 1970s, the Kerr established a deer research facility with deer gathered from all over the state and started studying the roles of genetics and nutrition on antler development. Big Charlie made his contribution to deer research by being the sire of many of the fork-antlered deer in the Kerr's groundbreaking study on spike-antlered deer vs. fork-antlered deer. The multi-decade study concluded genetics are involved in antler production, leading to multiple succeeding studies revealing a road map of how age, nutrition and genetics fit together.



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF FIREARM SAFETY

Keep muzzle pointed in safe direction.

Treat every firearm with the respect due a loaded firearm.

Be sure of the target and what is in front of it and beyond it.

BURLESCK | DREAMSTIME.COM



Stay Safe in Deer Camp

Because of COVID, it's more important than ever for hunters to practice social distancing as they head out to the fields this hunting season.

"I want my friends to keep me in mind by wearing a mask, using sanitizers and washing up around hunting camp, especially in the blinds and the cabin," says avid "senior" hunter Harris Greenwood, who lives near Hye and has been thinking about best safety practices in the field and at the camp.



GLEN MILLS | TPWD

"One thing is clear that although the foundation for antlers is based on genetics, sound management of range and habitat systems is critical to production of quality bucks that hunter and landowners strive to produce each year," Reitz says.

Studies such as these coupled with harvest data collected by TPWD biologists across many parts of the state provided strong support for the antler restriction regulation now in effect in 117 Texas counties. The restrictions are intended to limit the number of young bucks taken (resulting in older, bigger-antlered bucks). A second buck tag was also added to the bag limit in antler restriction counties to encourage the harvest of unbranched-antler/spike bucks.

"A lot of hunters and landowners know the Kerr for research on nutrition and genetic components that affect antler development," says Alan Cain, TPWD's white-tailed deer program leader. "A big part of their research has also been on habitat management and range management, especially in the context of providing quality nutrition and quality habitat for white-tailed deer. A lot of those guiding principles and management practices we use all over the state were validated through the research at the Kerr."



CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD

- Practice "responsible recreation" before, during and after your hunt.
- Consider a COVID "waiver of liability" as part of lease agreements this hunting season.
- Consider the health and age of other hunters and landowners.
- Take your temperature and check your overall health before departing on your hunt.
- It is easy to practice social distancing at the hunting camp, but don't let your guard down.

LEARN BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Every hunter born on or after Sept. 2, 1971, must successfully complete hunter education (minimum age is 9). Hunter ed covers the core standards in firearm, hunting and outdoor safety, hunting responsibilities and wildlife conservation. Some classroom courses are extended to cover additional topics such as bowhunting, muzzleloaders, outdoor survival and first aid.

Beginning in 1972, the hunter education program was voluntary for 15 years. At first only a few thousand of nearly a million hunters participated in the program, but it did result in some decreases in fatalities and injuries. Since it became mandatory in 1988, nearly 1.25 million Texas students have been certified in hunter ed. Training numbers tripled; accidents, injuries and fatalities all began to drop dramatically.

Keep your finger outside the trigger guard until ready to shoot.

Check your barrel and ammunition.

Unload firearms when not in use.

Point a firearm only at something you intend to shoot.

Don't run, jump or climb with a loaded firearm.

Store firearms and ammunition separately and safely.

Avoid alcoholic beverages before and during shooting.



EARL NOTTINGHAM | TPWD

BECOMING A DEER HUNTER

Texas youth hunt participants learn to carry on the legacy. **by Benjamin Lazo Flores, 10**



COURTESY BENJAMIN FLORES

I was excited and nervous when my mom told me about the deer hunt. Excited for the experience and the joy of the outdoors because I love doing stuff outside, but also nervous about what to do on a hunting trip. This stuff is new to me.

I took hunter education certification training and went to the shooting range to learn how to shoot a rifle. I took

Public Hunting

Since up to 95 percent of Texas is privately owned, TPWD provides low-cost access to more than 1 million acres of land for hunting through its public hunting program.

The available properties include most wildlife management areas, some state parks and many leased properties. Mentored hunts and youth hunts, as well as hunts for game besides deer, are available.



CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD

“For those individuals who don’t have a place to go, the public hunting program offers that, through the drawn hunts we do every season or the Annual Public Hunting Permit that we issue every year

for hunting on lands we administer,” says Kelly Edmiston, TPWD public hunting coordinator.

TPWD’s drawn hunt program offers a chance to apply for a wide variety of hunts. Applicants can pick a species they’d like to hunt, an available hunting area and hunt date for that species, then fill out a special permit application (\$3 fee) and hope to get drawn. If drawn, participants are assigned to specific areas to hunt at the property. The odds of being drawn vary; most deer drawings wrap up September 15.

TPWD’s Annual Public Hunting Permit (\$48, valid from September 1 to August 31) provides walk-in hunting on



lots of shots to get comfortable. I wanted to be good at shooting a rifle. I did pretty well for my first time. Now, I was starting to feel like a hunter, more confident.

Finally, the weekend came. As we drove to Stonewall, my mom and I talked about where to shoot the deer and safety procedures; my mom is ex-military. When I first saw the campfire, I became mesmerized and it calmed my nerves. The other kids were very cool and encouraging and welcoming. I felt at home. I wasn't the only first-time hunter.

At 5 a.m., my huntmaster, David Baxter, a school administrator from Houston, woke us up by blowing a horn and singing a song (*Pass It On*).

"Benjamin, are you up?" he yelled.

"Yes, I am. I'm ready!"

I hoped I was.

After breakfast, we got ready to go. In the blind, Mr. Baxter and I practiced how to search for the deer with the binoculars and how to get the proper sight picture in the scope.

I wanted to take a practice shot, but he said he saw me shoot the day before and I didn't need it. He told me I was ready. I believed him!

Mr. Baxter kept whispering to me about how lucky I was, how smart I was to be able to hunt, how quiet I was being and how to make a good harvest. I was afraid I wasn't going to see anything, but after about an hour of daylight, here they came!

Mr. Baxter and I looked to see which deer was best to shoot.

"OK, that's the one!"

I looked in my scope and focused on the vital zone.

"When you're ready, shoot, but only if you want to,"

he whispered.

I took a deep breath and squeezed the trigger.

"Yeah, man, she's down!" Mr. Baxter yelled.



TPWD

I watched the downed deer through my scope. I was excited and a little sad for the deer. My mom had this big smile on her face. I think she did cry, just a little, but I could tell she was happy for me.

Once we were able to go out and tag my deer, I said a little prayer for her and thanked her for feeding me.

Back at camp, we started dressing her. I was a little hesitant, but Mr. Baxter taught me that my hunt is not done until my harvest is processed.

I'm usually very shy and like to be by myself, but, on this hunt, I felt at home. I felt safe and comfortable enough to explore and talk to people and ask questions and just be myself.

I am truly grateful to Mr. Baxter and TPWD and the Texas Youth Hunting Program for teaching me good values and showing me the proper way to hunt.

My next hunt, a turkey hunt, was canceled because of the virus. But as soon as I can, I'm going back.

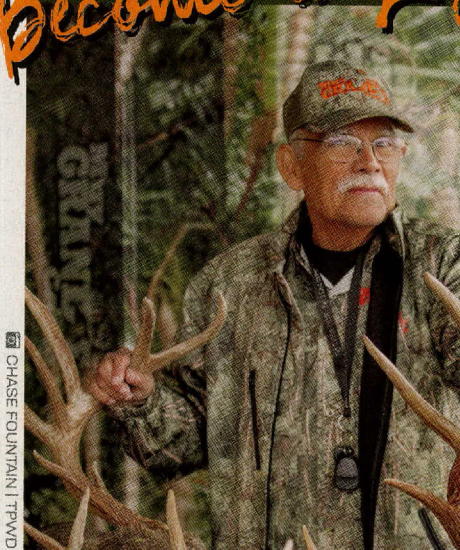
Benjamin participated in the Texas Youth Hunting Program (tyhp.org) annual Super Hunt, held for 60-plus youth at Cave Creek Schoolhouse near Stonewall/Fredericksburg.

approximately 1.2 million acres of land. The public hunting map booklet provides maps, directions, dates to hunt, allowed firearms and types of game. These are do-it-yourself hunts, with planning and sometimes scouting needed.

"If you've got a deer lease out in the Hill Country, you might not have access to pheasant there, but by getting an Annual Public Hunting Permit you get access to areas in the Panhandle where you can go pheasant hunting, or quail hunting," Edmiston says. "You can hunt gray squirrel in East Texas or chachalaca down in the Valley."

For information, go to tpwd.texas.gov/publichunting.

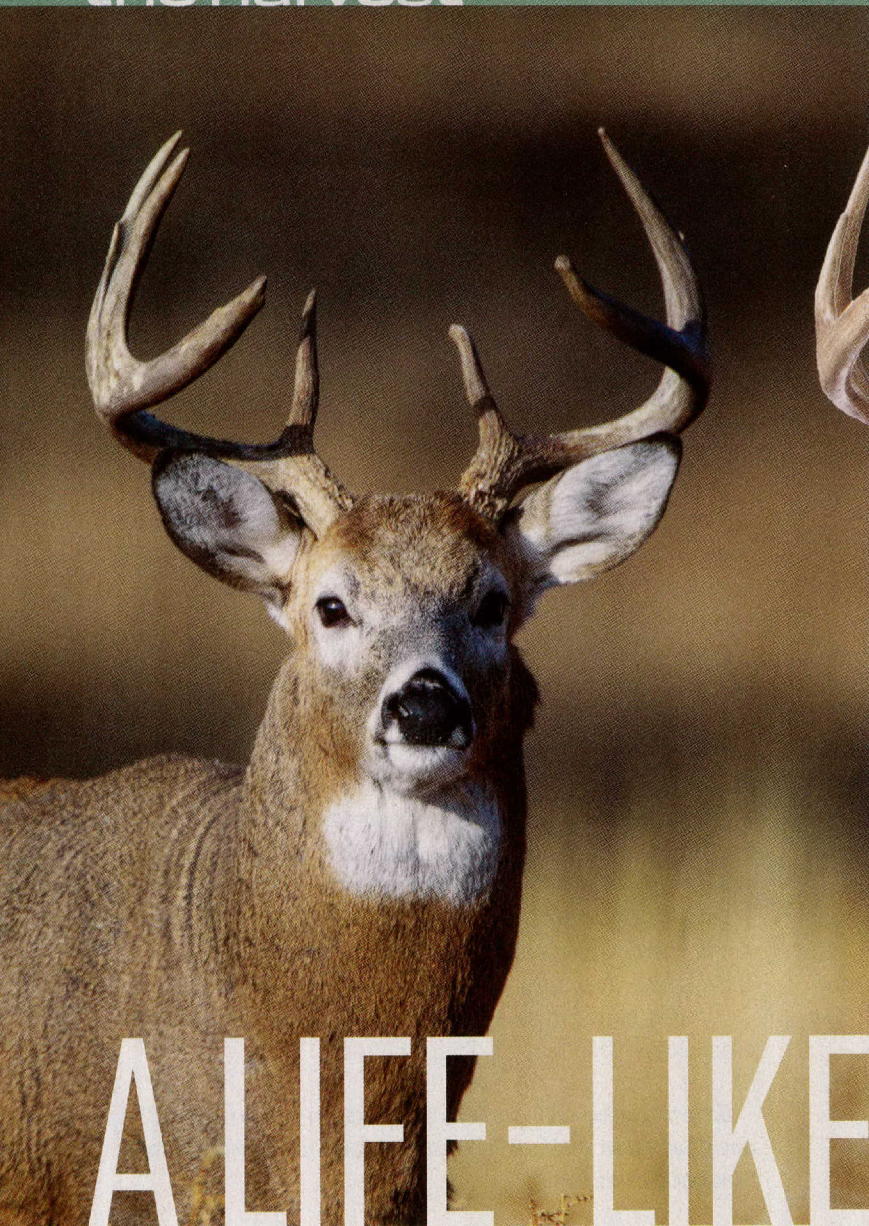
Become a Legend



CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD

Hunters match skills in the South Texas town of Freer each fall at the granddaddy of all Texas hunting contests, the Muy Grande, celebrating 55 years in 2020. Founded by Leonel "Muy" Garza in 1965, the decades-old deer contest was once called "the little filling station deer contest." Muy is still one of the judges.

It's pretty straightforward: bring your harvest in to the store for official scoring, then wait till the season ends to see if you get this year's bragging rights in any category.



A LIFE-LIKE VISION

by Landry Allred

Derek Dieringer has been surrounded by taxidermy ever since his father, Jimmy Dieringer, started Woodbury Taxidermy in 1977 in Ingram. In 2005, Derek took over the company and has spearheaded it since. White-tailed deer is one of the most common species they do.

WHAT FIRST FASCINATED YOU ABOUT TAXIDERMY?

Dieringer: "I'm a little different from some because it was part of my life (growing up). But what drew me was trying to take that animal back to its natural state by looking at reference and anatomy. Every animal is different. We try to re-create that lifelike vision somebody saw when they were hunting that deer. Then, somebody gets to take it home and enjoy it for the rest of their life."

WHAT'S YOUR TYPICAL TAXIDERMY PROCESS?

Dieringer: "It comes in and we skin it. We do all the ear, eye and nose turning to save the skin and prepare it for the tannery. Once you do that, you salt the skin, which sets the hair so the hair doesn't fall out. Then, you dry the skin and send it to a

commercial tanner to tan into leather, basically. When we get that skin back, we rehydrate it in water and the skin stretches. That's when we mount it because it gives a little bit of flexibility. We find the proper mannequin for the right size of that skin and start the mounting process. It takes a couple of days to dry as we rework the head because that skin dries and shrinks. Once it dries, we do our painting and it's ready to go home."

HOW DO YOU GIVE WHITETAILS A PERSONALITY?

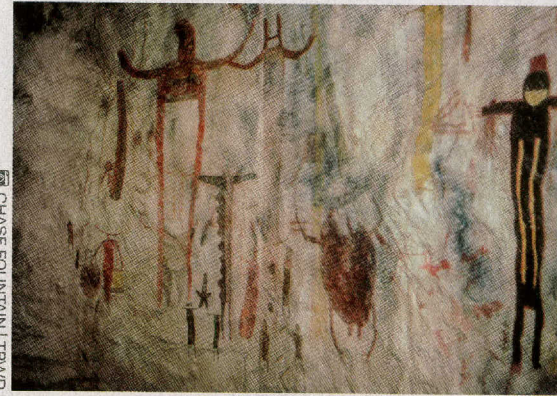
Dieringer: "Spend time in the field looking at them alive to pick traits that emphasize what will bring that lifelike look. Anybody can put (skin) on a piece of foam and sew it up. But by finding little details, a vein or the ear position, it seems more lifelike. You emphasize that and, all of a sudden, you start getting this piece of art that looks real."



EARL NOTTINGHAM | TPWD

WALL-TO-WALL ANTLERS

Want to see antlers of every size and shape? Head to the Buckhorn Saloon and Museum, where they line every wall and ceiling in the Hall of Horns. Back in the late 1800s, not every traveler had money for a refreshing beverage, so owner Albert Friedrich accepted antlers, horns and snake rattles in lieu of payment, starting an amazing collection that turned the establishment into one of San Antonio's most famous attractions.



CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD

ANCIENT ROCK STARS?

Deer hunting was a defining aspect of prehistoric life 11,000 years ago in Texas plateaus and canyonlands — economically, socially and ritually. Their symbolic and ritual importance is displayed in the vivid rock art of the Lower Pecos, with deer commonly depicted. Human figures, perhaps shamans, are shown wearing deer antler headdresses.



HUNTERS FOR THE HUNGRY

At the time of purchase, license buyers can add a donation of \$1, \$5, \$10 or \$20 to help support the Hunters for the Hungry program or the Fund for Veterans Assistance. Donations to the Hunters for the Hungry program provide hunters with a way to donate legally harvested deer to participating processors. The processed meat goes to local food banks to feed Texas families in need. Monetary donations to the Fund for Veterans Assistance program provide grants to veteran service organizations and nonprofit charitable institutions, assisting veterans and their families at the community level throughout Texas.



Venison Backstrap Stuffed with Pecan and Cranberry (serves 4)


Courtesy of chef Jess Pyles • As featured in her book *Hardcore Carnivore*.

INGREDIENTS:

- ¾ cup pecans
- ½ cup dried cranberries
- 5 thyme sprigs
- 2 shallots
- 3 Tbsp dried breadcrumbs
- ¼ tsp ground nutmeg
- ¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- ½ tsp salt
- 2¼ ounces butter, melted
- 2 pounds of venison backstrap
- Olive oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

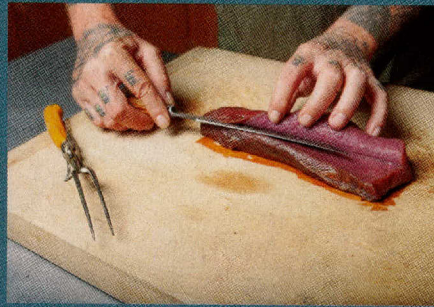
1. Pan roast the pecans in a skillet without any oil. Make sure not to burn them by tossing them regularly. Remove from heat and chop the nuts. Add the chopped cranberries, thyme (removing the stalks), shallots, breadcrumbs, nutmeg, salt and pepper. Stir together with melted butter.
2. Butterfly the backstrap so it's flat and even. Place the pecan and cranberry stuffing mixture in a log lengthwise down the middle. Pull the backstrap back together to encircle the stuffing and truss the meat by securing it with butcher's twine.
3. Salt and brush olive oil on the outside.
4. Outdoors, grill with indirect heat for 10 minutes (or internal temperature of 130 degrees).
5. For indoor cooking, sear the outside of the backstrap on all sides in a super-hot skillet, about 2 minutes per side. Then, place the oven-proof skillet in a preheated oven at 350 degrees for 4–6 minutes for perfect rare to medium-rare.
6. Rest the meat on a cool plate covered loosely with aluminum foil for 8–10 minutes before slicing into it.

ALL  SONJA SOMMERFELD | TPWD



How to Butterfly and Truss a Loin

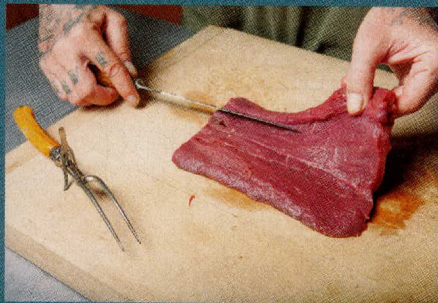
You will need a boning knife and some butcher's twine. Butterflying will take place with three major cuts, which will resemble a very narrow "U" shape when viewed from the end. Tips courtesy of chef Jess Pryles.



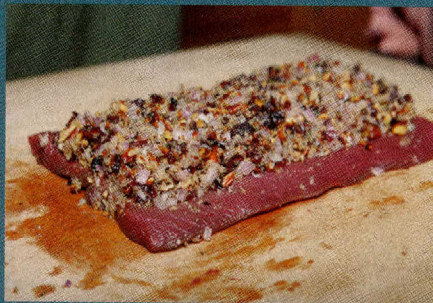
1. Start by making the first cut about ½ inch from the bottom of the loin, stopping before you cut all the way through.



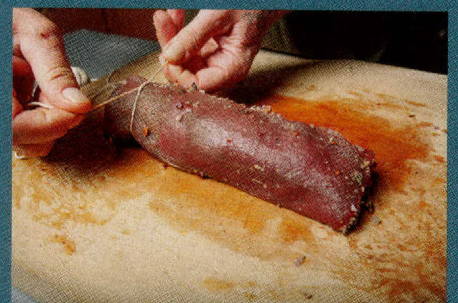
2. Follow the curve of the loin to cut into the middle of the top part.



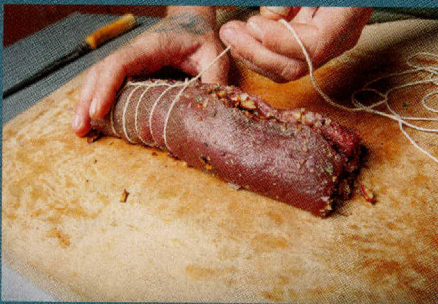
3. Make the final cut, which will open up the piece into one even slab.



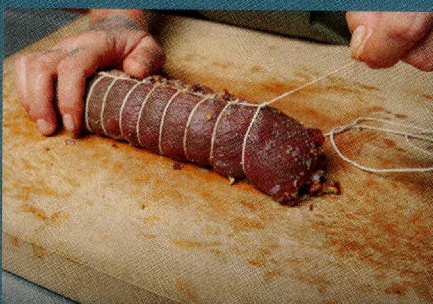
4. Arrange the stuffing across the length of the loin.



5. Measure and cut a section of twine at least three or four times the length of the loin. Make the first loop about ¼ of an inch from the end. Tie a loop and knot it securely.



6. Make a second loop around the loin about ½ inch down, then pass the end of the twine from left to right underneath the loop, pulling to tighten.



7. Continue the process, spacing the loops evenly.



8. When you reach the end of the loin, tie the final loop to secure the other end.

Deer-ly Delicious • Cooking tips from Tim Love

- Venison's a **very lean meat**, so primal cuts such as the loin/tenderloin are best cooked over a fire for a very short time.
- When processing venison, it's always good to **age it for at least 21 days** to allow the meat to relax.
- **The flavor of the venison will improve dramatically** if the animal is processed as quickly as possible after it's harvested.
- **Venison likes really bold flavors:** cumin, chilies and garlic, and pungent finishes like citrus.

Oh-So-Spicy Venison Rib

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 rack of venison ribs, at least 3 inches long, at least eight bones on the rack
- 2 carrots, roughly chopped
- 1 jalapeño, split
- ½ celery stalk, roughly chopped
- 2 white onions, roughly chopped
- ½ tsp dried thyme
- 1 tsp whole black peppercorns
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- 6 cloves garlic
- 2 Tbsp red chile powder
- ½ tsp dried sage

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Place all ingredients in a roasting pan and cover with water.
2. Cover the pan with plastic wrap and then aluminum foil.
3. Place in a 250-degree preheated oven for eight hours.
4. After eight hours, remove from roasting pan and place in fridge to cool for at least two hours.
5. Once ribs have cooled, strain juice and reserve for future use.
6. Slice cooled rack into individual ribs and serve.



Venison Loin with Salsify Purée, Hen of the Woods Mushrooms, Swiss Chard and Candied Grapes (serves 4)

Courtesy of chef Tim Love • Lonesome Dove Austin

INGREDIENTS:

- 5 ounces venison loin x 4
- Salsify puree (see recipe)
- 12 pieces chard, cut 3 inches x 2 inches
- 12 Hen of the Woods mushrooms
- 20 candied grapes (see recipe)
- Chef Tim Love Game Rub

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Take the chard pieces and fry them in peanut oil at 350 degrees until they stop bubbling; take out of oil and allow to dry on a paper towel. Fry the mushrooms in the same fryer until crispy and golden brown.
2. Season the loin liberally with Chef Tim Love Game Rub and sear in a pan for 1.5 minutes each side; let rest for 3 minutes.

CANDIED GRAPES INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Take one egg white and beat it with a whisk until frothy. In a separate bowl combine 2 cups of sugar and 1 tablespoon of chili powder.
2. Brush the egg whites onto the grapes, just barely enough to coat them. Toss the grapes into the sugar mixture and toss until well coated.
3. Allow them to dry in the sugar mixture for a couple of hours before needed.

SALSIFY PURÉE INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Peel five pieces of salsify and cut into 1-inch pieces. Place the salsify into a pot and cover them with heavy cream. Bring to a boil then reduce to a simmer until the salsify is tender.
2. Take some of the cream out of the pot to ensure that the puree is not too runny; set it aside because you may need to add it back.
3. Puree the salsify and cream mixture until smooth; if needed add the cream back in so that it is the consistency of gravy. Season with salt and pepper.
4. Place ¼ cup of the salsify on a plate in a line and arrange the candied grapes on either side of the line.
5. Slice the hot loin into four pieces on a bias, making sure to cut against the grain. Take each piece of the meat and place it on the plate with one piece of chard and Hen of the Woods; repeat process.



Venison Sourdough Toast

Courtesy of chef Jesse Morris
www.killerchefs.com

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 venison tenderloin, from the inside cavity close to where the ribs meet the spine
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- 2 Tbsp butter (Kerrygold preferred)
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 8 ounces chanterelle mushrooms
- 8 ounces sun-dried tomatoes
- ½ cup mayo
- 4 jalapeños, diced
- ¼ cup sugar
- ¼ cup white vinegar
- Lemon
- Sourdough bread



@KILLERCHEFS

JALAPEÑO RELISH INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Dice jalapeños. Leave seeds in if you like a spicier relish or remove for a milder relish.
2. In saucepan add ¼ cup sugar and ¼ cup vinegar and diced jalapeños. Bring to a boil, taking care to not overcook the jalapeños to retain the color. Remove from heat and refrigerate.

SUN-DRIED TOMATO MAYONNAISE INSTRUCTIONS:

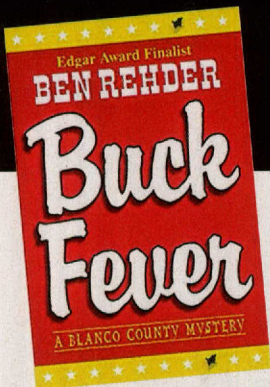
1. Fine-chop the sun-dried tomatoes and mix with mayo.

VENISON TENDERLOIN AND MUSHROOMS INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Season tenderloin with salt and pepper.
2. In a sauté pan over medium-high heat, add 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Add tenderloin. Brown all sides.
3. Add mushrooms and 2 tablespoons butter. Continue to cook, basting tenderloin until internal temperature reaches 125-130 degrees. Remove from pan and let rest for 15 minutes, then slice thinly.
4. Slice sourdough into ¼-inch slices and toast in a pan with butter until browned on both sides. Spread mayo mixture on toast. With a small torch sear the mayo mixture; you can also put in the broiler for a minute or two (this is optional but a great touch).
5. Assemble the toast, rolling slices of tenderloin and alternating venison and mushroom until toast is covered. Spoon some of the relish over the top along with a bit of the juice. Squeeze a small wedge of the lemon over the top and enjoy.

A FEVER FOR FICTION

by Landry Allred



BILL & SHARON DRAKER | ROLFNUSSBAUMER.COM

Writer Ben Rehder started in the advertising field before turning to novel writing. His first book, **Buck Fever**, is a comic crime novel set in Blanco County. **Buck Fever** and subsequent books in the series follow game warden John Marlin and his adventures solving mysteries involving white-tailed deer, both real and fake.

HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE BOOK'S PLOT?

Rehder: "I used to listen to the radio in the deer blind. I heard about a story about a drug mule — people who smuggle drugs — coming from some country. This particular person had swallowed a lot of condoms filled with drugs, gotten on an airplane and flown into the U.S., but got busted when one of them ruptured. Back then, you could still import deer from Mexico into Texas, so I began to wonder, couldn't you do something similar with a white-tailed deer? You make a little incision, stuff him full of drugs, sew him up and bring him across the border? That's where the idea came from. It wasn't long after that TPWD said you can't import deer anymore, but fortunately, I wrote the book before that law went in place."

HOW DO YOU ACCURATELY PORTRAY WHITETAILED AND HUNTING?

Rehder: "When writing scenes that involve hunting, game wardens and deer, it's as factual as I can make it. I've been a hunter for at least 35 years. I know a lot about deer. If I'm going to describe it, I try to have a grasp for how a deer might behave, how large it might be, how many antlers, how much it weighs

when it's field dressed, what sort of Boone and Crockett score it might get. I've written articles about deer for *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine. I (also) wrote about game wardens over the years.

"Other times, I'm being hyperbolic. My books are meant to be almost farcical. They may not necessarily reflect reality because that's the nature of them. In *Buck Fever's* opening scene, a man is dressed in a deer costume, and he ends up getting shot by poachers. In real life, it would be very difficult for someone to dress in a deer costume enough to be convincing. But in the world of fiction, you create the world you want to create."

DO YOU HAVE ANY CHARACTERS WHO YOU TEND TO RELATE TO MORE?

Rehder: "It's funny because John Marlin is the stand-up, respectable game warden, and there might be a tiny fraction of me in there, but my wife says I'm more like Red and Billy, the rednecks who are known to skirt the laws on occasion and do some things they shouldn't be doing. I think a lot of people can relate to them because they're not just outlaws. They've got good hearts, and they're funny and fun. I kind of relate to them, to be honest."



Be the one they remember.

They may not remember everything you ever did for them, but they will *always* remember who took them hunting.



Find helpful resources like youth/adult hunts, hunter education and mentored hunting workshops at

tpwd.texas.gov/youth-hunting

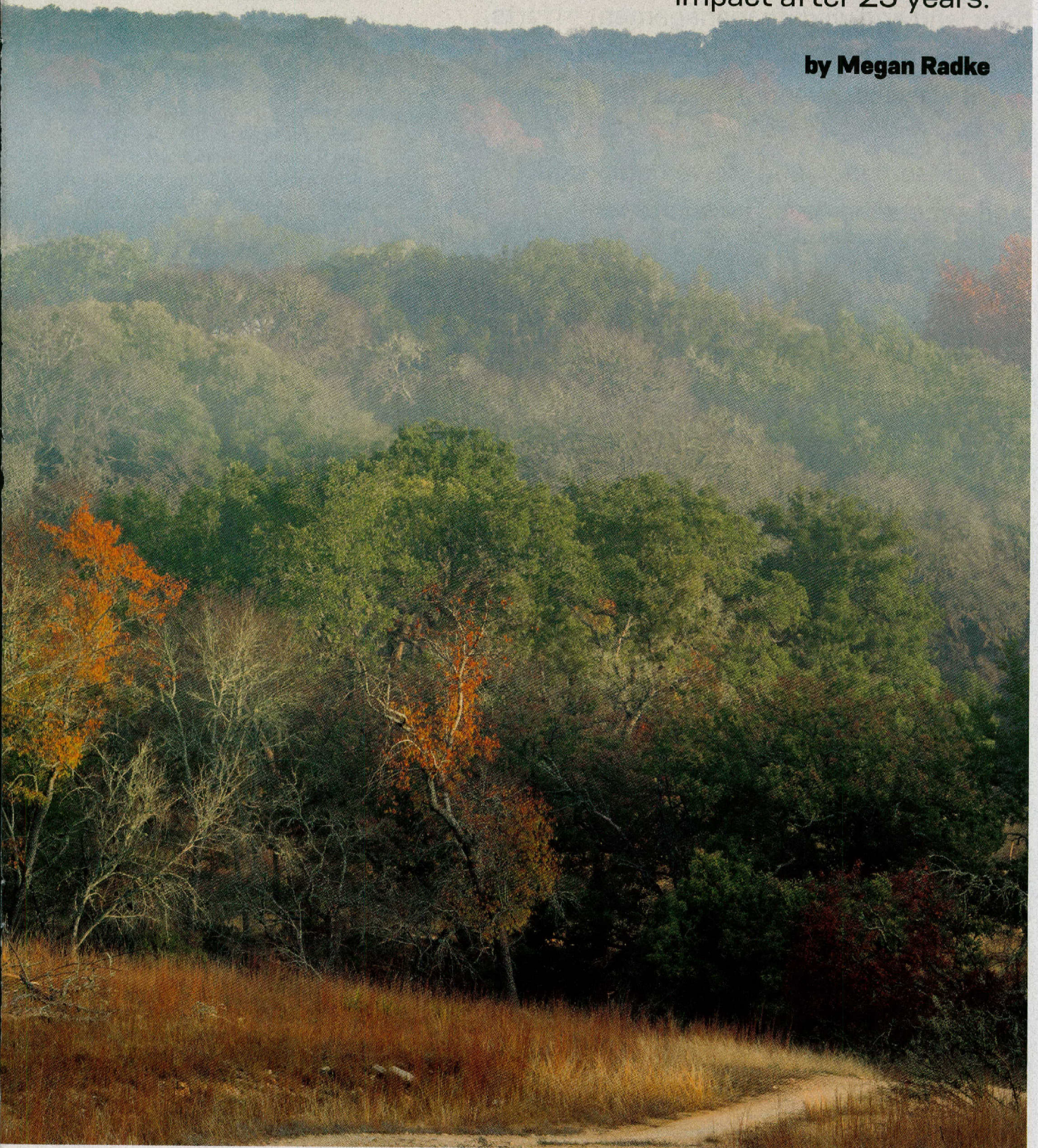


SAVING PRIVATE LANDS

LONE STAR LAND STEWARD WINNERS

reflect on the program's
impact after 25 years.

by Megan Radke




2020 would have been the 25th year of the annual Lone Star Land Steward awards banquet, where private landowners from multiple Texas ecoregions are celebrated for their land and wildlife management efforts. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the event was postponed.

The conservation and stewardship work by landowners, however, never stops.

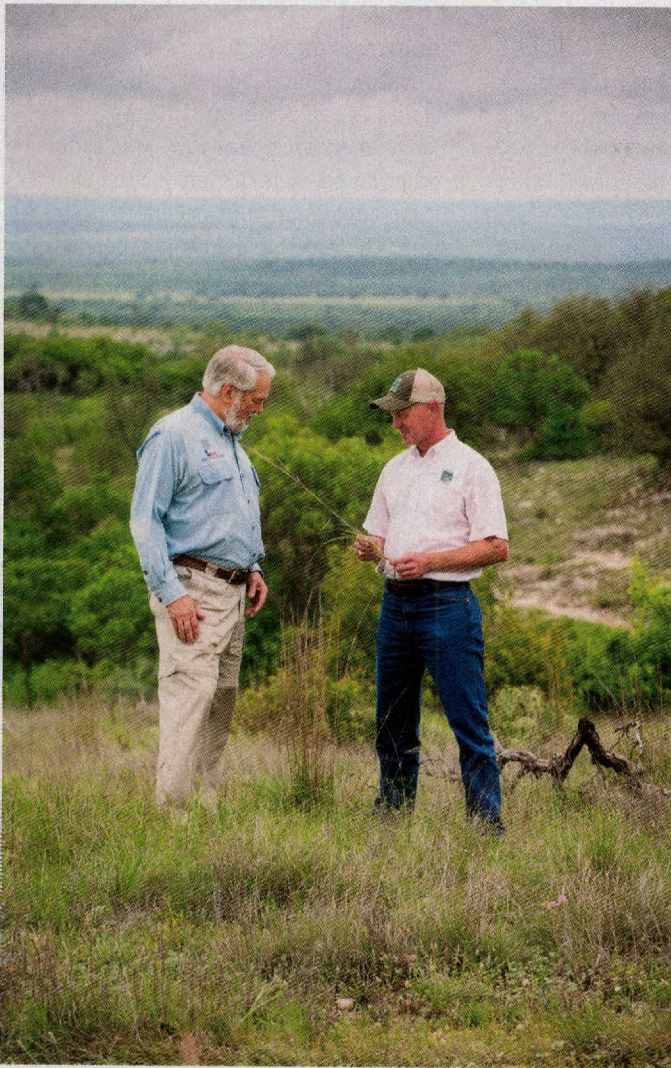
“Lone Star Land Stewards aren’t just doing great things on their land — these landowners can tell you how and why they’re doing it,” says Justin Dreibelbis, private lands and public hunting program director for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. “They want to take care of their land and steward it. They do their research. They’re being an example for other landowners and want to be able to tell their story.”

The Private Lands Advisory Committee was formed to advise TPWD in 1992. The Lone Star Land Steward program that sprang out of it began simply as an idea to shine a light on private landowners who were doing good work for Texas habitats.

In 1996, the first event took place at the Capitol, a small group gathering held in the lieutenant governor’s chambers. Over the years that meeting grew into

THIS SPREAD  CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD





“With this property being on top of the aquifer, we’re at the top of the watershed. We can do good stuff, all while making sure we’re improving the aquifer.”

2016 Lone Star Land Steward statewide winner Richard Taylor of Blue Mountain Peak Ranch



a ceremony that typically welcomes some 400 guests, including landowners, biologists and more.

“The mission derived from that first meeting remains the same,” Dreibelbis says. “This is a celebration of land stewards who are doing the right thing for the land, wildlife and people of Texas.”

The Private Lands Advisory Committee recognized that private landowners, by taking care of their own property, were contributing to the well-being of the general public through soil and water conservation and grassland restoration, as well as the management of fish and wildlife species and other ecosystem services.

“Texas is predominantly privately owned. Irrespective of who you are and where you live, if you care anything about where the raindrops fall and where our aquifers are recharged and where our springs, creeks and rivers flow, our fish and wildlife habitats, where our clean air and water are derived, those places are largely found on private lands in Texas,” says

Carter Smith, TPWD executive director. “Private landowners are the ones who wake up every day and work on stewarding those things that we all get to enjoy — sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly.”

Smith says that one of the best ways for the public to appreciate private lands stewardship is to simply go for a drive in the country and experience the drop in blood pressure that comes from admiring the diversity and richness of the Texas landscape.

Richard Taylor and his partner Suzie Paris own Blue Mountain Peak Ranch in the heart of the Texas Hill Country. Their property, originally purchased by Taylor and his late wife, sits atop blue-gray limestone hills, the highest reaching more than 2,000 feet in elevation. Blue Mountain Peak Ranch received the Lone Star Land Steward award for the Edwards Plateau ecoregion in 2011 and then received the Leopold Conservation Award, the highest honor bestowed in the program, in 2016.

Thanks to the extensive Ashe juniper

(often called cedar) tree removal Taylor initiated on the ranch, more rainwater is able to fill the Edwards Aquifer. The aquifer supplies water to a large portion of south-central Texas, including San Antonio.

“Back in the day, when my wife and I went on this quest to find a place, we were looking for ‘interesting’ land, and this property fit the bill,” Taylor says. “With this property being on top of the aquifer, we’re at the top of the watershed. We can do good stuff, all while making sure we’re improving the aquifer.”

Taylor says that when they first began work on Blue Mountain Peak Ranch in 2002, they saw many signs of water on the land in the way of calcified rock, tiny streams and “frozen” water, as Taylor describes the evidence of where water used to flow. Because of the dense Ashe juniper throughout the ranch, though, any and all rain and spring water was being absorbed by the tree’s roots before it had a chance to contribute to the aquifer, much less feed the ravines Taylor found strewn

across the property.

"So, we began the process. We sectioned off 200 acres, above the frozen water, started cutting cedar, and low and behold, the water started to flow," Taylor says. "I would guess in the ravines we have 50 springs that connect together and stay running now regardless of rainfall. It's a miracle, the most amazing part of the process that we've done, to see all of this water."

Taylor says he and Paris drive or hike the property almost daily to see what work needs to be done next. Over the years, the couple have utilized the help of multiple agencies to assist with land management techniques, including prescribed fire, to reach their overall goal: increasing species diversity and providing clean water to the Edwards Aquifer.

In addition, Blue Mountain Peak Ranch, similar to many Lone Star Land Steward award-winning properties, serves as a place where nearby schoolchildren, older

students aspiring to work in a wildlife or forestry-related field and others can come and experience a natural, native landscape at its best.

"The native stuff is so beautiful," Taylor says. "To me, it's the little things — finding tadpoles, watching them grow. We have bullfrogs and leopard frogs in all the springs; because we have frogs, we have snakes. It just keeps waterfalling with all the improvements. We have harvester ants, a much smaller population of fire ants, so we find horned toads now. Black-capped vireos [delisted in 2018]. It's just fun to know we are providing an ecosystem that allows for species to come back."

Daniel Kunz is a TPWD technical guidance biologist who works with landowners daily, answering their questions and providing them direction on ways they can better manage their properties based on their goals.

"We rely on landowners to maintain the habitat of the state. This program

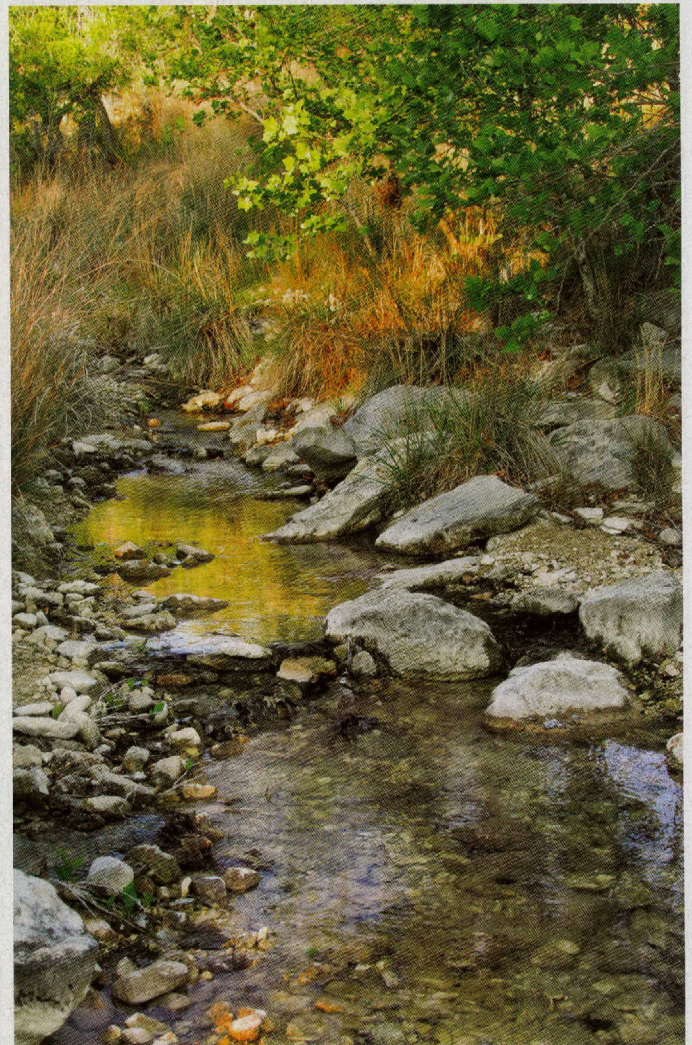
showcases those who are spreading a conservation and land ethic message across Texas," Kunz says. "These landowners are acting as examples to other landowners. It's my job to give them advice and guidance on things that might be good for the habitat, potentially point out a lack of management practices on some lands and sometimes advise that just leaving it alone is the practice."

Landowners, no matter how many acres they have on their property, can reach out to a TPWD biologist in their county should they have questions or need advice. Kunz encourages owners to investigate all the resources that are available to them so that they can do what's right for their specific habitat and ecoregion, as one size does not fit all.

Properties across the state that have earned the Lone Star Land Steward title are just as unique as Texas itself. Land and habitat management efforts on a ranch in the Trans-Pecos region of far

"We have to care for the natural landscape to make sure those things under our care do well, and that includes the wildlife, the flora and the fauna of all kinds."

2014 Lone Star Land Steward winner
David Langford of the Hillingdon,
Laurels and Leslie Ranches





West Texas will vary significantly from practices implemented on a parcel of land in the Pineywoods. Similarly, work done to manage land where cattle graze will differ from land that isn't a working ranch.

The Hillingdon, Laurels and Leslie Ranches are just such a working property. The ranches are all owned and operated by the same family and have been since 1887. Founded by Alfred Giles after he moved to Texas from Hillingdon (Middlesex, England), the land is named for Giles' homeland. The Hillingdon Ranch family is committed to preserving their heritage and the land they occupy, all while raising cattle, sheep and goats.

"There are two philosophical cornerstones that were laid down by my great-grandfather: always plan for drought so that you're surprised when it rains, and if you have to feed, you have too many," says David Langford, referring to the practice of keeping only as many cattle as your land can support. The ranches are in Langford's family, and he, along with many others, continue the

necessary work to make sure the property is functioning and healthy.

"Our cattle, sheep and goats have to get by on what the natural landscape provides for them," Langford says. "We have to care for the natural landscape to make sure those things under our care do well, and that includes the wildlife, the flora and the fauna of all kinds. The cattle have been here as long as we have. My great-grandfather acquired three Angus in 1890, and the cattle on the ranch now are descendants from those."

The Hillingdon, Laurels and Leslie Ranches were named a Lone Star Land Steward winner in 2014. Langford's work and advocacy for land and habitat management dates back many years, as he served on the original Private Lands Advisory Committee.

Langford hopes to show others that the footprint of private lands management goes far beyond property lines. The Hillingdon family of ranches, like Blue Mountain Peak Ranch, lie in a contributing area of the Edwards Aquifer. In addition, Block

Creek, a stream that flows through the ranches and for another four miles outside the property, is a major tributary to the Guadalupe River. The Guadalupe River empties into San Antonio Bay on the Texas coast, which serves as an overwintering site for whooping cranes. This endangered species relies upon clean water and a pristine habitat to survive.

"In my case, it's easy. I just want my heritage to continue," Langford says. "Those of us who care about it — all seven generations of us — or those of us who still hang around, this is our heritage and we're going to do the best we can."

The Lone Star Land Steward recognition banquet is expected to resume in 2021, honoring a new set of private landowners who work tirelessly to take care of Texas.

As Langford says, "It's your responsibility to be the best steward you can be. You're supposed to do the best you can do for the land. Our gift is our heritage."

Megan Radke covers land and wildlife issues in TPWD's press office.

WILD WOMEN



IMA HOGG

TERRY HERSHEY

LADY BIRD
JOHNSON

By Louie Bond

"Women belong in all places where decisions are being made." – Ruth Bader Ginsburg

THE FIRST LADY OF TEXAS

She's a beloved native daughter widely admired for her philanthropy, so it's a shame that her unusual name makes laughter the first reaction to Ima Hogg. What were her parents thinking?

The family says Ima, born in 1882, was named for the heroine of an epic Civil War poem, *The Fate of Marvin*, composed by her uncle, Thomas. Her parents did not provide a middle name for Ima, quite unusual for the time, so she resorted to measures such as signing her first name illegibly.

Ima's father, "Big Jim" Hogg, was elected Texas governor when she was 8. She and her brothers enjoyed life in the mansion, sliding down the banisters until tacks were installed to stop their shenanigans.

These golden years ended when 13-year-old Ima had to care for her mother, who contracted tuberculosis and died. Ten years later she took care of her father, after a train accident that eventually proved fatal.

Big Jim left Ima a large inheritance, but another life event left her wealthy beyond imagination. Big Jim stipulated in his will that the siblings couldn't sell the family's West Columbia property, the Varner Plantation, for 15 years. Twelve years later, oil was discovered on the property, lots of it. Eventually, oil income amounting to \$225,000 a month (equivalent to \$3.3 million a month today) was shared among the four siblings.

The Hogg siblings felt the money came from the land and not their own hard work, so they gave it away, becoming some of the state's greatest philanthropists, providing huge impacts on the arts, education and mental health, as well as conservation and historic preservation.

Ima restored the Hogg family home at the Varner Plantation. In 1958 she presented it to the state; it's now the Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historical Site. In the 1960s she restored the Winedale Inn, a 19th-century stagecoach stop at Round Top, and donated it to the University of Texas. The Winedale Historical Center is a center for the study of Texas history and hosts an annual fine arts festival.

As a member of the Houston school board in 1943, Ima worked to remove gender and race as criteria for determining pay and established art education programs for Black students. Ima never married and died in 1975 at 93.

Texas first lady Nellie Connally once declared, "The governor's wife is usually called the first lady of the state, but Ima always has been and always will be the first lady of Texas."

A FORCE OF NATURE FOR HOUSTON

President George H.W. Bush once described Terese "Terry" Hershey as "a force of nature for nature." It's an apt accolade for a woman who served on countless boards, moved the highest political mountains and earned so many conservation honors, they'd fill a bayou.

Charming but persuasive Terry settled down in Houston with husband Jack in 1958. In 1966, she heard that Buffalo Bayou was being straightened and lined with concrete. Terry didn't like the sound of it, so she gathered up her friends and went to examine it.

She and her growing circle of friends (including the two Georges: newly elected Congressman Bush and billionaire Texas oilman George P. Mitchell) continued to challenge

the Corps of Engineers, the county commissioners and the Harris County Flood Control District.

Their work culminated with the passage in 1972 of the National Environmental Policy Act. Not long after that, the Buffalo Bayou project was dead.

From this now-legendary conservation victory, Terry Hershey founded numerous organizations dedicated to environmental protection, as well as the Jacob and Terese Hershey Foundation.

Hershey served on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, as well as many other boards, and helped found the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin. Houston's Buffalo Bayou Park was renamed Terry Hershey Park; Audubon Texas established the Terry Hershey Women in Conservation Awards.

The "environmental godmother of Houston" died in 2017 on her 94th birthday.

"That's what Mother said I ought to do and I'm still doing it," she said. "Ought' is a big thing with some people, I think. A sense of ought."

And what is a sense of ought?

"You ought to do things because they ought to be done. And, if possible, by you."

WHERE FLOWERS BLOOM, THERE IS HOPE

That lovely thought is part of a longer quote by the former first lady of the country, Texas' own Lady Bird, Claudia Alta Taylor Johnson.

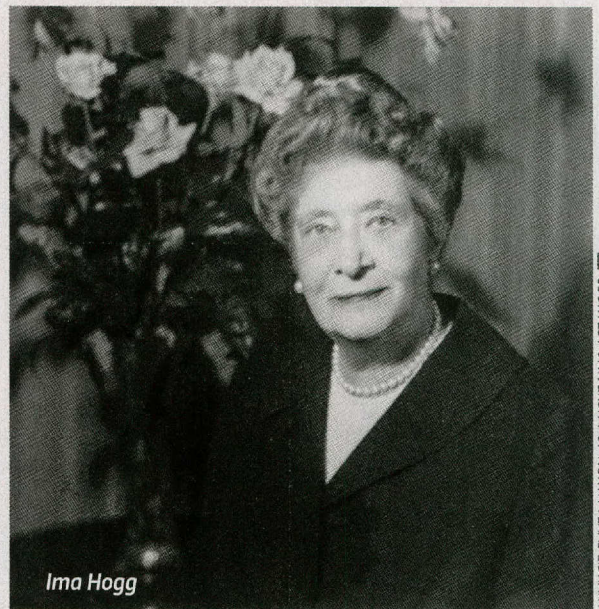
"Even in the poorest neighborhoods you can find a geranium in a coffee can, a window box set against the scaling side of a tenement, a border of roses struggling to live in a tiny patch of open ground," she said.

Many books have been written about Lady Bird's life and work and her influence on conservation legislation during LBJ's administration. Among the major legislative initiatives were the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Program, the 1965 Highway Beautification Act and many additions to the National Park system.

For 50 of those major initiatives related to conservation and beautification, President Johnson thanked his wife in 1968 for her dedication by presenting her with 50 pens used to sign these laws and a plaque that read: "To Lady Bird, who has inspired me and millions of Americans to try to preserve our land and beautify our nation. With love from Lyndon."

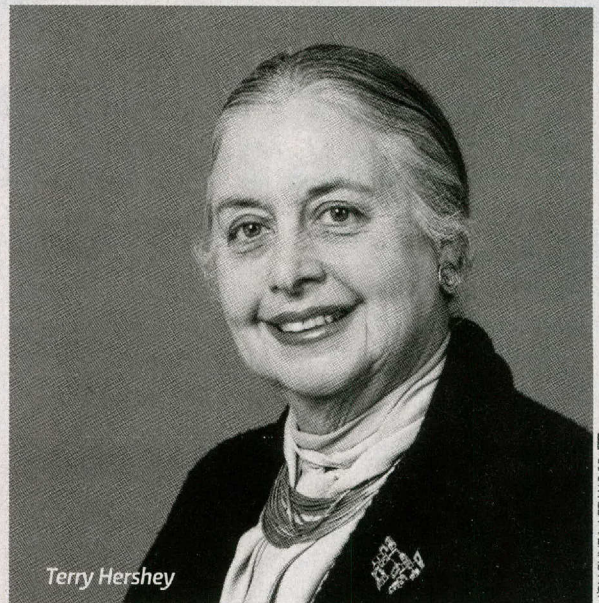
In Texas, the abundant wildflowers along our highways bloom in testament to her vision and hard work to achieve it. At Lady Bird Johnson's urging, Enchanted Rock was purchased by The Nature Conservancy, later to become a beloved state natural area. She established the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin on her 70th birthday and was influential in the creation of Austin's hike-and-bike trail around the lake that now bears her name.

She died in Austin in 2007, but her legacy lives on.



Ima Hogg

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One of the most popular ways to buy silver is the Silver Eagle—legal-tender U.S. Silver Dollars struck in one ounce of 99.9% pure silver. When the COVID-19 pandemic began sweeping the world, demand skyrocketed. But there was a problem...

U.S. Mint Halts Production

West Point, the U.S. Mint branch that normally strikes Brilliant Uncirculated (BU) Silver Eagles, went into lockdown. Prices quickly shot up, and freshly struck Silver Eagles became much harder to find at an affordable price. To meet the rising demand, the U.S. Mint knew it had to act—and act fast.

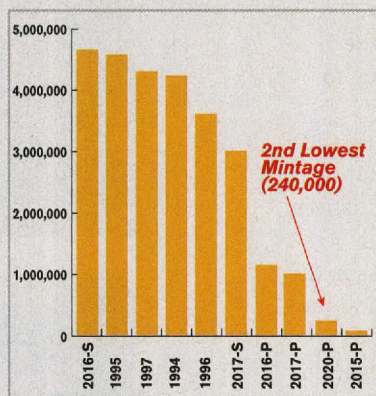
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Eagles were also produced in Philly—so few (a scant 240,000) that they are now the second smallest mintage of Silver Eagles ever struck! So how do we tell a 2020(W) Silver Eagle from a 2020(P)?



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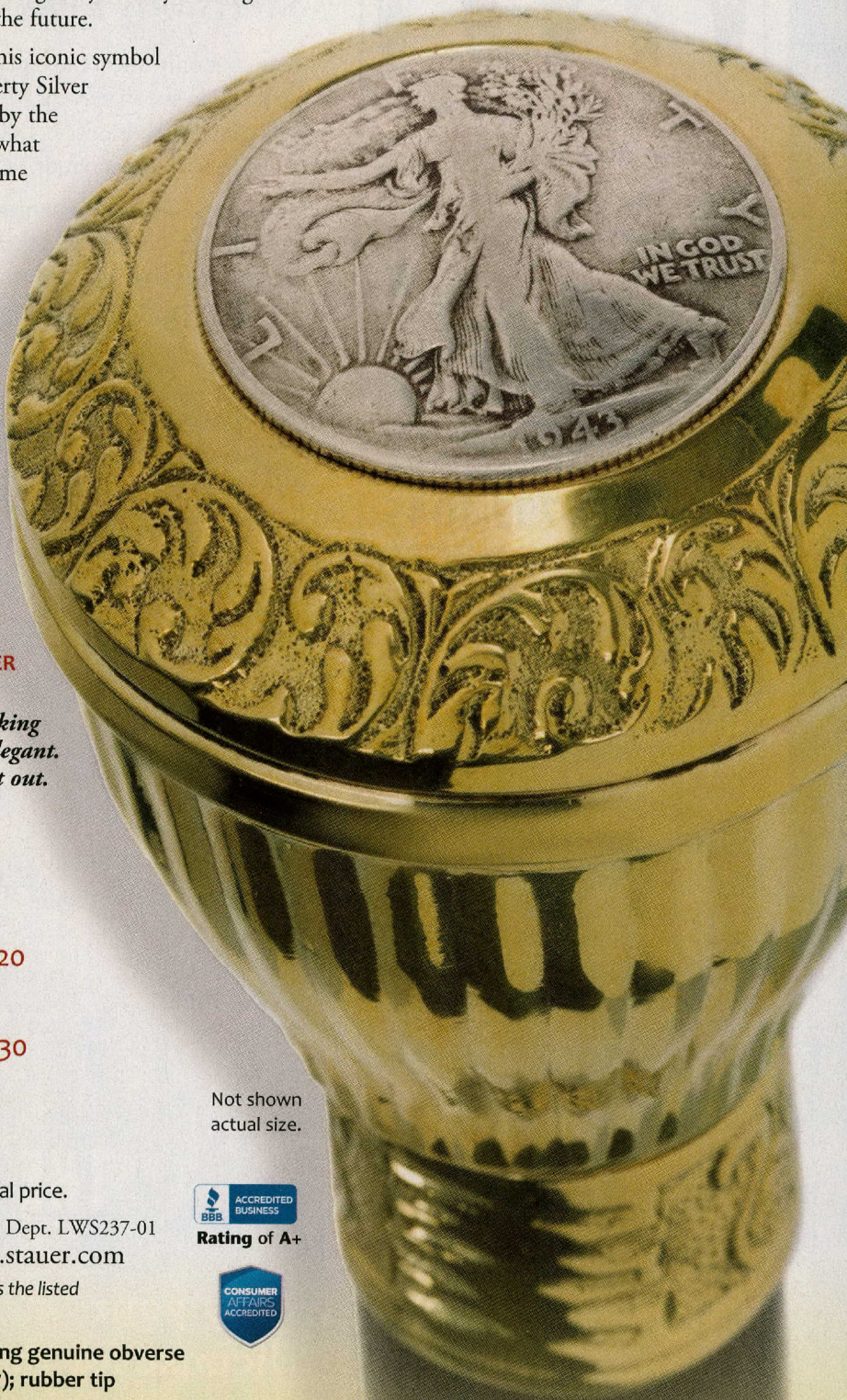
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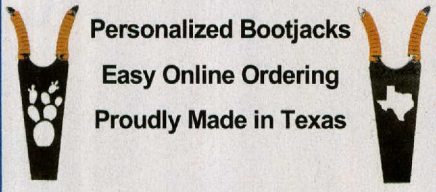
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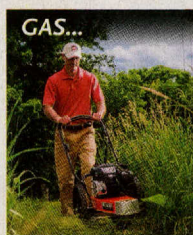
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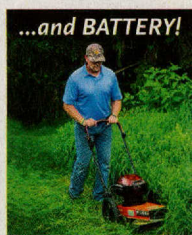
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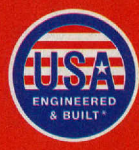
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West Texas

Rest Stops:

When the road goes on forever, pause for fun in Sonora and Ozona.

by Traci Anderson
Photos by Sonja Sommerfeld

SONORA & OZONA

The first time I headed out to West Texas, my mother-in-law pressed jugs of water into my hands.

“Porque no hay nada, es desierto,” she told me. Because there’s nothing, it’s desert.

Her memories of driving along migrant worker routes in her youth didn’t include the smooth, well-maintained highway that has run the width of Texas since 1959. Still, driving west on Interstate 10 can make you feel as if you’re entering deserted territory.

The highway is hewn from plateaus and dips into

ravines and washes, with opposing lanes so separated that they seem like different roadways. It’s by turns exciting and monotonous. The 200 miles between Junction and Fort Stockton would look completely absent of settlement if it weren’t for the twin cities of Sonora and Ozona. They are the biggest towns in their respective

counties and appear as beacons to travelers looking for gas, a bite to eat or a place to get out and stretch their legs.

Shanon Biggerstaff, president of the Ozona Chamber of Commerce, says her community depends on this highway tourism.

“The big three of our economy are hunting, oil and gas, and tourism, in that order,” she tells us.

My husband, Roy, and I wander through an interpretive trail at Ozona’s well-appointed visitor center to view red yucca and purple sage before Shanon loads us up with maps, pamphlets and fliers.

The History on the Square



walking tour catches my eye, and we head over and find the square filled with high school students. It's lunchtime and, with picnic tables and gazebo shaded by stately trees, the square is clearly a popular destination. It's decorated with purple-and-gold streamers, balloons and flags. An October Friday is game day in Texas, where football is king.

The tour covers a century of history and includes Gothic architecture, historical markers and a tale of a bank robbery gone awry. We also visit the Crockett County Museum, a small rock building that has served as church, hospital

and courthouse annex and now houses three stories of exhibits, including my favorite, a room displaying the frothy, multi-petticoated skirts of decades past.

We're staying at the X Bar Ranch, midway between Ozona and Sonora and about 13 miles north of the highway. Sitting on several thousand acres, the X Bar is a century-old working ranch and nature retreat.

In addition to trails that spread out from the main lodge, trails and observation points can be accessed through a second gate farther down the country road. The communal swimming pool is sadly closed for the season. There's a bench facing east where the land drops steeply into the ravine below. The view is stunning. Sunrise will be a thing of beauty.

We head back into Ozona for dinner at The Cafe Next Door. The offerings are hearty, home-style dishes, and the tables around us are filled with folks sporting the now-familiar purple-and-gold game day swag. We grab snacks to take back to our cabin. Twilight is approaching, and we want to be back in time for the show.

The night is clear, and we can see the stars in glorious numbers. X Bar prides itself on its dark-sky efforts for good reason. The middle of nowhere is the best possible place to gaze into the sky. Tonight, we search for the meteors produced by the nascent Draconid shower. And we are not alone.

Adrian Gutierrez has stopped for the night on a road trip from Mexico and tells us that he hopes to see meteors.

"It's a happy coincidence



Above: An interpretive trail at the visitor center in Ozona features a wide variety of native plants.

Left: Eaton Hill Nature Center and Preserve offers a hilltop view of Sonora and Interstate 10.



that this place is perfect for this to be enjoyed," he says. "It's what I was looking for."

The Thomas family from New Zealand is on a stopover from El Paso.

"X Bar appealed because of its remoteness and a chance to be amongst nature," the dad, Andrew, tells me. In the morning, they're taking their son to the Caverns of Sonora.

It's a good choice. While we don't have plans to visit the caverns on this trip, we have been there in the past. Underneath the dry landscape southwest of Sonora, tours take visitors more than 150 feet below the surface into a subterranean world of crystalline formations that are actively growing. Each room opens into more wonders. It's



an amazing experience, and I'm sure their son will enjoy it.

After a night of stargazing, we turn in. Tomorrow is going to be a long day.

We wake with the sun, grab coffee and a muffin in the lodge, and head to our morning's destination, a scenic overlook west of Ozona and about 10 miles south of I-10. The vista is breathtaking and overlooks historic Fort Lancaster sitting in the Pecos River valley. Our descent to Fort Lancaster is a roller

coaster of hairpin turns and cool morning breezes. The idea that anyone ever did this in a wagon seems absurd.

Ruins lying beneath a blazing Texas sun are all that's left of the 82-acre outpost that once protected a crucial military route on the 1850s frontier. Docent Jesse Medina tells us that stones removed from the site a century ago can still be seen in buildings in the nearby town of Sheffield.

We don't venture that far,

Clockwise: A 1933 truss bridge spans the Pecos River; the Sutton County Courthouse in Sonora was built with local limestone; Fort Lancaster was established in 1855 as a frontier outpost.

Opposite: Pugh Park in Christoval welcomes swimmers.

but we do take a quick detour to the Pecos River to drive across a 90-year-old metal truss bridge spanning the water. It's Instagram-worthy.

Heading back the way we came, we find a lone cow blocking the road. Can you get more Texas than that?

We drive east, passing Ozona and entering the neighboring city of Sonora. Tonight, the Sutton County Fairgrounds will be alive with lights and music, but for now we take the guided tour

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Ruffini a decade prior to the Crockett County Courthouse we'd admired the day before.

Nearby is the old jail. It's old and dark and disquieting. And possibly haunted, we've been informed. On the first floor, cramped rooms with little light served as living quarters for the jailer's families. On the second floor, individual cells sit next to an impenetrable barred door leading to larger iron cages covered in bold graffiti. This jail, built in 1891 and designated a Historic Landmark in 1975, continued to serve the community as a working jail as late as 1980.

The gates are open for the Dry Devils River Music Flood, a free annual music festival. The first acts are taking the stage, ringed by food trucks and vendor booths. It's still hours until the main acts go on, and it's fast becoming hotter than we can handle. We need to cool off.

North of I-10 is the community of Christoval and our destination, Pugh Park. It's a bit farther afield, taking 45 minutes to arrive, but well worth it. The park sits on the bank of the South Concho River and is free to the public. The water's deliciously chilly, the current brisk and curiously flowing south to north. I hook my feet over the trunk of a pecan tree growing low into the water and let myself float.

Hours later our fingers are pruned, our stomachs are rumbling and the light is starting to fade. We drive south, back to Sonora.

The food trucks offer us a little bit of everything. We settle in to eat and listen to the music. To be honest, I

don't have huge expectations, but the company is fun, the food is good and the music is free — all things I like.

A new band launches into a song I know, *That's What I Love About Sunday*. This free festival in tiny Sonora has a *Billboard* No. 1 recording artist, Craig Morgan, headlining. How about that?

As the applause dies on the final song, we head back to the X Bar. We've been up since dawn, and we fall asleep fast.

The next morning, we load up the car and head back into Sonora for an early morning visit to Eaton Hill Nature Center and Preserve.

Two miles of trails wind their way around and up Eaton Hill. Water features, including natural ponds and windmill-supplied tanks, are everywhere. Animal tracks make it clear that wildlife visit regularly. As we top the hill, we can clearly see how I-10 has cut through the topography.

It's a fitting end to our stay here where the Hill Country meets the desert, where appearances can be as deceiving as the shimmer of a mirage on a hot West Texas day. There's plenty to see and do when you're making the drive along I-10. Take an exit and find out.



of the heart of Sonora.

We start at the Old Ice House Ranch Museum and wander through exhibits as we wait for our tour to begin. On the west side of the square, the Historical Society maintains the Miers Home Museum, with period furniture and artifacts, as well as the Cauthorn Depot, a restored Santa Fe train depot decommissioned in 1977.

The standout of the tour is the historic Sutton County Courthouse, designed by Oscar

LARGER THAN LIFE

Why do Texas towns erect giant wildlife statues? Why not?!

by Mary Schmidt

ARACHNOPHILIA • AUSTIN

This statue named for the love of spiders, *Arachnophilia*, was created by sculptor Dixie Friend Gay. The 23-foot-high giant spider straddles the hike-and-bike trail, adding a bit of fun to a run.

Directions: Southwest Greenway at Mueller Development (former airport), Manor Road and Berkman Drive. Look carefully, may not be easily seen from the road.



KIRSTEN HAHN



SONJA SOMMERFELD | TPWD

KILLER BEE • HIDALGO

Hidalgo is the place where the first colony of Africanized “killer bees” was discovered in the U.S., in October 1990. While many people in the United States feared the arrival, the city celebrated this historic moment by erecting a 2,000-pound, lifelike statue of a massive Africanized honeybee and dubbing itself the “Killer Bee Capital of the World.” The city even sells posters and postcards that feature the bee.

Directions: Ramon Ayala Drive, near Hidalgo city hall.

PAISANO PETE • FORT STOCKTON

Erected in 1980, Paisano Pete, a giant roadrunner, was the world’s largest for many years. At 22 feet long and 11 feet tall, Pete serves as Fort Stockton’s town mascot.

Directions: Intersection of U.S. Highway 285 and Main Street.



EARL NOTTINGHAM | TPWD



THE RAVEN • HUNTSVILLE

Weighing more than 7,000 pounds and standing 21 feet tall, a massive raven sculpture spreads its wings over a plaza at Sam Houston State University. In 1809, Sam Houston ran away from home and developed a deep, lifelong affection for the Cherokee tribe, considering them his surrogate family. Artist Ed Wilson created the statue as a tribute to Houston's Cherokee nickname, "The Raven."

Directions: In the plaza next to the Life Sciences Building at Sam Houston State University.



CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD

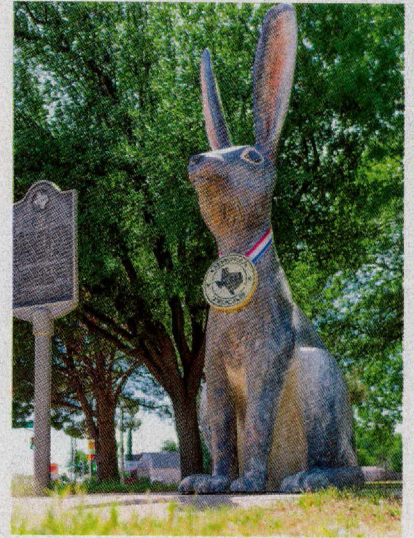


CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD

MS. PEARL • CEDAR CREEK

Ms. Pearl, the world's largest squirrel, stands on the side of Texas Highway 71. She's 14 feet tall and clutches a pecan bigger than your head. She's perched at Berdoll Pecan Candy and Gift Company, a family-owned business that includes a gift shop and a pecan orchard. The statue was constructed in 2011 by Blue Genie Art Industries.

Directions: 2626 Texas Highway 71, between Bastrop and Austin.



EARL NOTTINGHAM | TPWD

JACK BEN RABBIT • ODESSA

An Odessa landmark, Jack Ben Rabbit is the world's largest jackrabbit. Built in 1962, the 8-foot jackrabbit was inspired by the Odessa Chamber of Commerce president, John Ben Shepperd, hence the name. In recent years, Jack Ben has been joined by 30-plus brightly colored Jamboree Jackrabbits around town as a public art project.

Directions: Near the school district administration building at Eighth Street and Sam Houston Avenue.



CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD


MUSTANGS AT LAS COLINAS • IRVING

Installed in 1984, Robert Glen's bronze sculpture of wild mustangs commemorates their historical importance in Texas. The mustangs are larger than life, running through a watercourse, with fountains giving the effect of water splashed by the animals' hooves. The horses are intended to represent the ambition, initiative and freedom of the state's pioneer days.

Directions: Williams Square in Las Colinas.

Where in Texas?

TRAVEL



Autumn leaves steal the show and bring out the crowds each fall at this Hill Country park. It is, after all, a park named after its trees. But there's more to this place than foliage: The scenic river and canyons make it a great place to visit any time of year.

If you recognize this place, send us a note at *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, TX 78744 (write "Where in Texas?" on the envelope); email us at magazine@tpwd.texas.gov; or let us know on Facebook. We'll reveal the answer in a future issue.

Photo by Sonja Sommerfeld
TOOLS: Canon EOS 5D Mark II,
16-35mm f/2.8L II USM lens, f/10
at 1/80th of a second, ISO 250



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HONDA POWER OF LAKE JACKSON
CURETON AND SON-NEDERLAND
EL CAMPO CYCLE-EL CAMPO
SMALL ENGINE SUPPLY-HUMBLE
SOUTHWEST MOWER-HOUSTON
SOUTH-WEST MOWER-MISSOURI CITY
BLAND'S LAWN EQUIPMENT-SPRING
EASTSIDE HONDA-BAYTOWN
HONDA OF ORANGE-ORANGE

CENTRAL TEXAS

AUSTIN OD POWER - AUSTIN
TRAVIS TRACTOR - AUSTIN
MCCOYS LAWN EQUIPMENT-AUSTIN

EAST TEXAS

BAGLEY TRACTOR - LONGVIEW
WALDEN OUTDOOR POWER - KILGORE
HONDA OF TYLER - TYLER

WEST TEXAS / PANHANDLE

SMITH OD POWER - ABILENE
CONCHO POWER - SAN ANGELO

SOUTH TEXAS / RGV

JOHN SOROLAS INC-SAN ANTONIO
35 NORTH HONDA-NEW BRAUNFELS
MUSTANG EQUIPMENT-SAN ANTONIO
TOPS-HARLINGEN

NORTH TEXAS

PLANO POWER-PLANO
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