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THE OUTDOOR MAGAZINE OF TEXAS • DECEMBER 2020

125 YEARS OF TEXAS GAME WARDENS

BRINGING A PARK TO LIFE

Palo Pinto blooms into our newest state park

LET IT SNOW (MAYBE)

Will this year bring a white Christmas to Texas parks?

THE BIG SNOOZE

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DECEMBER 2020

VOLUME 78 • NUMBER 8

Palo Pinto Mountains State Park is under development west of Fort Worth. It will feature a lake, trails, campsites and scenic hilltop views.

EARL NOTTINGHAM | TPWD

28

A Long Winter's Nap

Some Texas animals unplug when the weather turns cold.

by Russell Roe

32

Bringing a Park to Life

Palo Pinto blooms into our newest state park, with a tale as wild as Texas itself.


by Lydia Saldaña

40

Off the Pavement

From the frontier to the front line, Texas game wardens have answered the call for 125 years.

by Stephanie Salinas Garcia

ON THE COVER: Game warden Raymond Kosub in the bottomlands of East Texas.  Earl Nottingham

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8

MAIL CALL



ANDREE CHAMBERLAIN | TPWD

10

TRAIL MIX

Dreaming of a state park Christmas; Wildflower Center's Fortlandia invites outdoor play; a land bridge connects a park in San Antonio; make a paper game warden; how to stay safe from bears; Drummond's aster provides winter blooms for pollinators; Laguna Atascosa expands acreage; hike the Paluxy River Trail at Dinosaur Valley State Park.



20

RUSSELL A. GRAVES

WILD THING

Sandhill cranes seek our warmer marshes for their winter getaway.
by Landry Allred

22

NICE CATCH

Texas' mild winters mean good fishing for blue catfish and more.
by Randy Brudnicki

24

PICTURE THIS

Winter's gray days hold their own photographic opportunities.
by Earl Nottingham

26

WILD WOMEN

Telling Texas' stories with Shannon Davies and Margaret Pease Harper.
by Louie Bond

52

TRAVEL

Each December, Abilene transforms into a storybook Christmas.
by Nathan Adams



CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD

56

WANDERLIST

Will this year bring a white Christmas to Texas parks?
by Julia Jones

58

WHERE IN TEXAS?

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FROM THE EDITOR

IF YOU'RE READING THIS, congratulations. You're near the finish line of the wildest, weirdest, most alarming and unsettling year any of us can remember. Texans are no strangers to disaster; we weather hurricanes, rise up from wildfires, rebuild after tornadoes and hold on through record droughts and floods. But this seems different, as if, overnight, everything tipped upside-down.

Like you, we have found solace in nature. In the stillness of a starry night or the silence of the deer blind, we can quiet our thoughts and calm our worries. With the splash of a bobber in the water or the crunch of our boots on an isolated trail, we feel that thrill of being in proximity to wild things.

We're getting by, Texas. We're leaning on our neighbors and offering them a shoulder in return. We're growing fall gardens and remembering how to put up vegetables and preserves — just like Grandma. We're filling our freezers with venison and hog and feeling a bit more like our hardy ancestors than we did in 2019. If tough times build character, we should have a good bucket full by now.

Texas game wardens come from sturdy stock, too. Their 125th anniversary went by pretty quietly this year, but we

wanted to honor them by sharing their remarkable story. On Page 40, Stephanie Salinas Garcia starts us off in the wild frontier days of the wardens and through the evolution to the modern, multifaceted outfit we see today. "Law Enforcement Off the Pavement" is more than a catchphrase.

Someday, we can look back at this crazy time and see a silver lining: the creation of a new state park, which will offer day-trip respite to the more than 6 million people in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex and more. Palo Pinto Mountains State Park (Page 32) is a monumental achievement in hard times, thanks to partnership and a twisted tale sure to make you say, "Only in Texas!"

During this season of gratitude and celebration, we thank you, our readers and contributors and advertisers, for your continued support. May you have a holiday filled with love and joy. And nature.

Louie Bond

Louie Bond, Editor



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SNAKE ENCOUNTER

Back in September, I had the pleasure of photographing a western diamondback rattlesnake in Lubbock (see photo above). I have always been terrified of snakes, but I decided to face that fear and do something daring.

I asked a colleague of mine, a herpetologist at Texas Tech, to assist me with this project. I wanted to be in a safe environment for myself and the snake. I was able to get up close and personal with this snake, and it was one of the most memorable moments of my life. It's funny to say that about something that is so venomous and could cause me a great deal of harm, but what I realized is that this rattlesnake was more beautiful than I could ever imagine. I feared this species because of years of people telling me how horrible they are and how they are better off dead.

More Texans should read about why these snakes should not be killed unless they pose a direct threat. The rattlesnake plays a very important role in the ecosystem by controlling small mammal populations. This is extremely important in West Texas because eating those rodents prevents crop damage and the spread of diseases that those critters carry.

HEATHER EATON
Lubbock

PHOTO FUN

Have you guys announced any winners for the In the Wildhood photography contest? Thank you for holding such a fun contest during a not-so-fun time. I had a lot of fun with it!

ELIZABETH MOSS
Wimberley

TPW MAGAZINE RESPONDS

We've enjoyed looking through the more than 7,000 submissions received — we have a lot of talented readers! Thank you to everyone who entered. Look for our favorites in next month's issue.

BREAKFAST WITH ANDY

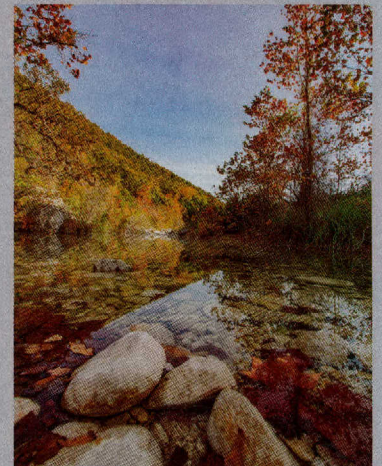
I'm not just saying this because I'm in the article (of all the people who slid into Andy Sansom's booth at the Magnolia, I'm honored), but this was a terrific idea and magnificently done ("My Breakfast with Andy," October 2020). I'm so glad you have preserved this very special part of Andy's life in conservation and in such a fun and memorable way.

Will we ever forget those early (and, yes, sometimes too early!) morning confabs and all the good that resulted? It was an experience that can't be duplicated. I'll bet you hear from others who are applauding the fact that this

little piece of Austin history has been recorded for posterity. Congratulations on a fine piece.

SHANNON DAVIES
Austin

WHERE IN TEXAS?



The river, the canyons and, yes, the trees — these distinguishing natural characteristics attract people to Lost Maples State Natural Area, the answer to November's Where in Texas? The park's bigtooth maple and other trees produce spectacular fall foliage, making the park a popular autumn destination. It's "a beautiful spot I've hiked and camped and loved for years," says reader Don Gardner of Houston. Find this month's Where in Texas? on Page 58.



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GET OUT

I'm Dreaming of a State Park Christmas...

Christmas is a great time to get out and visit a Texas state park!



GOLIAD STATE PARK

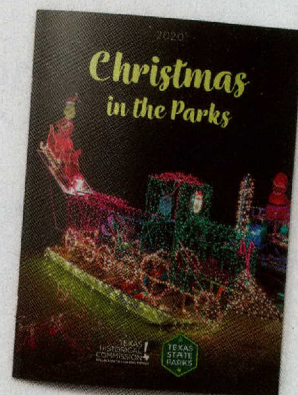
Guide Us to Thy Perfect Light

DECEMBER 1 - 31 • 6 - 8 PM

Enjoy the holidays with a beautiful evening stroll through the grounds of Mission Espíritu Santo. Light and shadow tell the story of this remarkable site as visitors walk the same paths taken by Native Americans and Spanish Franciscan priests so long ago. Park entrance fees apply.

There's something for just about everyone this time of year when you visit a state park. Before attending any event, please check with the park to confirm applicable fees and availability, and to ensure the event is still taking place.

Visit TexasStateParks.org/holidays for the most up-to-date information on state park holiday events and promotions.



FALCON STATE PARK

I Saw Three Ships...

DECEMBER 12 • 7 - 10 PM

Head to Falcon Lake for the third annual Christmas Boat Parade. Find a spot by the day-use area and watch the beautifully decorated boats float by.

GET OUT

Welcome to Fortlandia

If your idea of Holiday fun leans more Tim Burton than Bing Crosby, swing by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin through January 31 and discover Fortlandia, a series of play structures celebrating the flora and fauna of Texas. As part of the exhibit, a team from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department created Snake, Rattle & Roll, a larger-than-life rattlesnake made with upcycled materials, including tires, climbing rope and wood decking.

The design, one of several around the park, celebrates the importance of nature play in children's lives — and the lives of grown-ups, too.





GALVESTON ISLAND

Here Comes Sandy Claus

DECEMBER 19 • 10 AM & 3 PM

A trip to the coast feels different in the winter. Join park staff for a Coastal Tidings Hike, or spend the day exploring the park's paddling trails or hiking the bayside trails and boardwalks (the park's beach side is closed until 2022). Winter is also a great time to look for coastal birds, or to cast a line for redfish — you don't need a license to fish from shore in a state park.

ABILENE STATE PARK

Fa La La in the Forest

DECEMBER 12 • 6 – 9 PM

Every December, Abilene State Park turns into a winter wonderland as campers adorn their campsites, screen shelters and yurts with festive lights and decorations. Drive through the park and experience the holiday spirit for yourself. A \$5 cash donation to the Friends of Abilene State Park is appreciated.



ANDEE CHAMBERLAIN | TPWD



On TV

Winner of 30 Emmy Awards, our television series is broadcast throughout Texas on local PBS affiliates. Also available on YouTube and PBS online. tpwd.texas.gov/tv

NOV. 29–DEC. 5

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

DEC. 6–12

Discover the state by canoe or kayak on the network of paddling trails.

DEC. 13–19

Explore the experiences available at Texas state parks and historic sites.



DEC. 20–26

Texas hosts a variety of wildlife, from big bison to tiny butterflies.

DEC. 27–JAN. 2

Jobs at Texas Parks and Wildlife are as diverse as the state.

On the Podcast



December's segments include "Water Conservation," "Stream Teams" and "Conservation Easements." Plus, check out fresh magazine Wanderlist episodes on parks where it might snow and great parks for kids. 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.



JUSTIN MOORE OF AIRBORNE AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY | PROVIDED BY THE PHIL HARDBERGER PARK CONSERVANCY

CONSERVATION

Land Bridge Connects Park in San Antonio

In December, the largest U.S. land bridge in an urban setting designed to accommodate both people and animals will open in San Antonio. The completed structure will connect and restore valuable remaining pieces of the city's oak savanna landscape and serve as a safe passageway for native wildlife.

Since 2010, 330-acre Phil Hardberger Park in San Antonio has provided a refuge for those seeking an outdoor haven, but the property has one drawback: it's divided by the Wurzbach Parkway. The new land bridge will connect the two sides.

Pedestrians and wildlife will now traverse a nature-immersed bridge, avoiding traffic below. The vegetated bridge will be 150 feet wide and will add more than an acre of parkland.

The park's division by the roadway makes it difficult for wildlife

survival and daily movement because animals can either get hit by oncoming traffic or fail to cross out of fear or intimidation, says Laura Zebehazy, TPWD program leader for wildlife habitat assessment.

Before it was a park, the land was Max and Minnie Voelcker's dairy farm. When the couple passed away and the land went up for sale, it became the perfect opportunity for Phil Hardberger — who had recently started his second term as San Antonio's mayor — to create more city green space.

"I'm happy we bought it when we did because if we hadn't, that land would have been filled with houses and developments," Hardberger says. "From that day until now, I have never seen any other land come on the market that was perfect for a park. We'd probably still be waiting."

The bridge project cost \$23 million, pulling from the Hardberger Park Conservancy's donations and grants along with funds from a 2017 city bond. Features will include a rainwater system to irrigate the bridge and park, a disability-accessible walking trail and newly planted trees and grasses.

In the past few decades, wildlife crossings have been built in several western states and Canada as a way to restore wildlife connectivity across roadways.





INDOOR FUN

Make Your Own Game Warden

Not everyone is cut out to make it as a Texas game warden. But if you've got scissors, a glue stick and a little patience, you can cut out and make a game warden!

In honor of the 125th anniversary of our game wardens (see Page 40), we've created three free paper toy wardens you can print and make at home. Visit tpwmagazine.com/paperwardens to download full instructions and patterns, then set them up to patrol your desk, room or Christmas tree.


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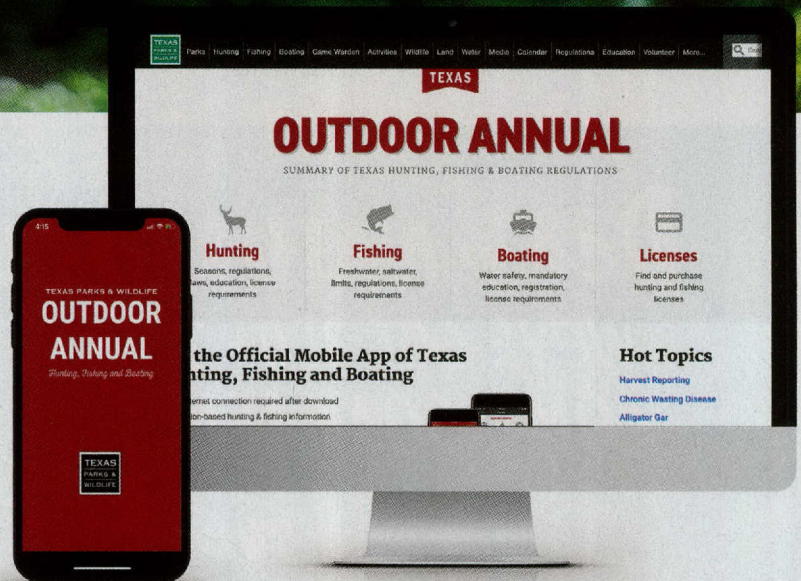
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WILDLIFE

Bears Are Back: How to Stay Safe

As occasional bear sightings continue to crop up in the western and southwestern portions of the state, the likelihood of spotting a bear in a populated area increases. Black bears are native to Texas and are a part of our natural heritage and the Texas ecosystem.

In October, a black bear sow and her cub were spotted in the city limits of Del Rio. TPWD employees use standard hazing methods — loud noises and annoyances — to scare bears like these out of residential areas and into more wildland environments. If hazing is unsuccessful, and the bears have been allowed time to relocate themselves but haven't done so, trapping and physically removing the animals is the next step.

"Our bear hazing protocols provide the best chance for the bear to live wild and relocate itself naturally," says Jonah Evans, TPWD mammalogist. "Trapping and relocating a bear is extremely invasive and puts a lot of stress on the animal, sometimes resulting in mortality."

Evans says that if bears are relocated, they may not stay in the new area. Once bears associate people with food, they're more likely to stick around.

That Del Rio sow and cub may have been drawn to cat food left out by residents to feed strays. Residents in areas where bears have been spotted should secure anything that could be a potential attractant (garbage, pet food, bird and deer feeders, etc.).

Unfortunately, the sow was shot and killed by a Del Rio resident; it's under investigation by Texas game wardens. The cub was moved to a New Mexico wildlife center.

"Bears, in most instances, are not a danger to people," Evans says. "In 120 years in the lower 48 states, there have been fewer than 20 fatal attacks by bears. Compare that to 20 fatal attacks yearly by domestic dogs. Other cities throughout the country have found ways to peacefully live with area bear populations, and we can do the same in Texas."

Black bears are a protected species in Texas. If you see one, please stay away and don't try to feed it. If a bear exhibits aggressive behavior toward humans or causes property damage, notify your local police immediately.

RUSSELL A. GRAVES



A vertical graphic advertisement for San Angelo, Texas. At the top, it says "DISCOVER SAN ANGELO!" in a stylized font, with "An Oasis in West Texas, Off the Beaten Path" below it. The background is a colorful, stylized map of the city and surrounding area, with a river winding through it. In the foreground, a person with long blonde hair, wearing a yellow shirt, is seen from behind, paddling a canoe on the river. At the bottom, the phone number "877-655-4136" and the website "DiscoverSanAngelo.com" are displayed in white text on a dark background.

FLORA: NATIVE POLLINATOR PLANTS

Drummond's December Blooms



PHOTO COURTESY JANICE LYNN | LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDLIFE CENTER

Flowers in December are a welcome sight, especially if you're a bee or butterfly searching for nectar and pollen. Drummond's aster, a member of the sunflower family, can be seen blooming into the new year from Dallas-Fort Worth south.

This fantastic pollinator plant — the last installment of our 2020 series of native pollinators — typically grows in forest understory or along woodland edges. The Latin name of *Symphyotrichum drummondii* comes from Greek roots meaning "growing together" and "hair." Other common names include blue wood aster and hairy heart-leaf aster.

Thomas Drummond (1790-1835), for whom the flower is named, was a Scottish naturalist who came here in 1830 to collect specimens from the western and southern United States. A few years later, he began collecting at Velasco in Texas. He spent 21 months working the area between Galveston Island and the Edwards Plateau along the

CONSERVATION

Laguna Atascosa Refuge Expands Acreage

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service completed a land acquisition of 3,500 acres of former farmland this year for Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge — the latest tract the agency has added to the South Texas refuge as part of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlement.

Since the oil spill in 2010, the refuge has grown by about 15,000 acres through a succession of acquisitions large and small, including sales of land that had been passed down through family generations. The refuge hopes one day to complete a coastal corridor, a stretch of conserved land stretching from the refuge to the border.

The wildlife refuge was not directly affected by the oil spill, but Texas has been able to use settlement funds for various coastal restoration projects.

The 110,000-acre refuge is home to the highly endangered ocelot and also hosts the Aplomado falcon, a fast-flying raptor that thrives in grasslands ranging from South Texas into South America. The refuge is a stop for migrating waterfowl, too. Ducks Unlimited estimates that as many as 250,000 migratory waterfowl stop there annually, including pintails, teals, snow geese, redheads and more.

Separate from the oil spill deals, nearly 6,300 acres on South Padre Island were acquired for the refuge in 2019. The preserved wildlife habitat protects sea turtle nesting areas and ranges from beaches along the Gulf of Mexico to vegetated dunes and tidal flats adjacent to the Laguna Madre.



Brazos, Colorado and Guadalupe rivers.

His Texas collections — 750 species of plants and 150 specimens of birds — were the first extensively distributed among the museums and scientific institutions of the world. Drummond died in Cuba in 1835, before accomplishing his dream of making a complete botanical survey of Texas. Many plants bear his name.

Stems of Drummond's aster grow 3 to 4 feet tall and can topple when top-heavy with flowers. Each flowerhead is about a half-inch across, consisting of 10-15 ray florets that surround 10-15 congested disk florets. Look for lavender or light violet (less often, white) petals.

After the bloom fades, the florets are replaced by achenes with small tufts of white hair that can be distributed by the wind.

This Texas native is usually easy to cultivate under partial sun, with soil containing loam, clay-loam or some rocky material.



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ALL © CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD

TAKE A HIKE

Paluxy River Trail

Dinosaur Valley State Park



DISTANCE
1.9 miles one-way



DIFFICULTY LEVEL
★★★★★



APPROXIMATE TIME
1.5 hours (allow more time for exploring)

At Dinosaur Valley, the Paluxy River Trail isn't so much of a destination trail — it's more utilitarian than that. It's practically the mass transit system for the park. People hop on and hop off the trail as they visit various dinosaur track sites and swimming holes and walk from campsites to other park areas. The trail passes by most of the park's main features as it follows the river's course through the park, including the tracks,

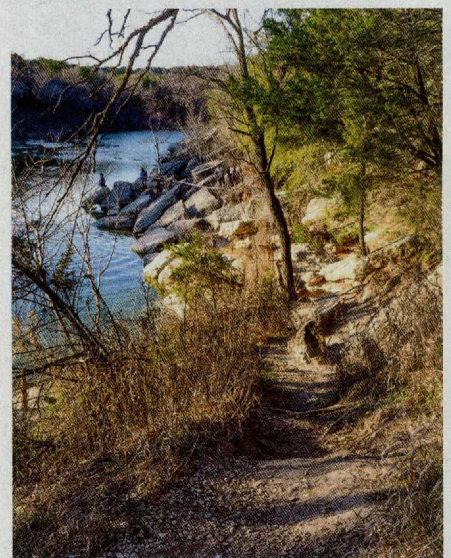
the campground, the picnic area and the trailhead for across-the-river trails. If you visit the park, you'll probably be on this trail at one time or another, whether you know it or not.

The Paluxy River is your constant companion on this trail as it flows over hardscrabble limestone terrain. The trail takes visitors through wooded areas, developed park areas and meadows filled with prairie grasses.

Experiencing the dinosaur tracks is a treat for all ages and provides a palpable link to these giant reptiles that roamed our world millions of years ago. The Main Track Site is where Roland T. Bird made the world's first discovery of a sauropod trackway. Upstream, the Ballroom Track Site contains hundreds of tracks moving in all directions. In between, Blue Hole features more tracks and a swimming hole that's been used by locals for generations.

All the action happens in the middle section of the trail. However, if you take time to venture to either end of the trail, you'll discover more remote sections of river that are inviting, relaxing and rewarding.

Whether you walk just a portion or the entire thing, the Paluxy River Trail is your gateway to Dinosaur Valley.



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WILD THING

Winter Texans

Sandhill cranes seek our warmer marshes for their winter getaway.

by Landry Allred

Wintertime in Texas brings cooler weather, holiday spirit and family time, as well as some of the most magnificent birds in the country.

Rising 3 to 4 feet tall, sandhill cranes are gray, heavy-bodied birds with slender necks, long legs and a red, beret-like patch of skin atop their heads. Sometimes their feathers appear rust-colored because they preen themselves by rubbing iron-rich mud on them.

There are two migratory subspecies, greater and lesser. Sandhill cranes start migrating south in October from Canada and northern states. Roughly 700,000 spend the winter along the Texas coast and in the Panhandle.

Sandhill cranes' broad wings (5-foot wingspan) beat slowly and steadily, making it seem as if they're gliding through the air. While flying, their famous bugling calls can be heard from miles away. This surreal trumpeting sound is a result of long windpipes that coil into their breastbone, creating a deep, rich sound.

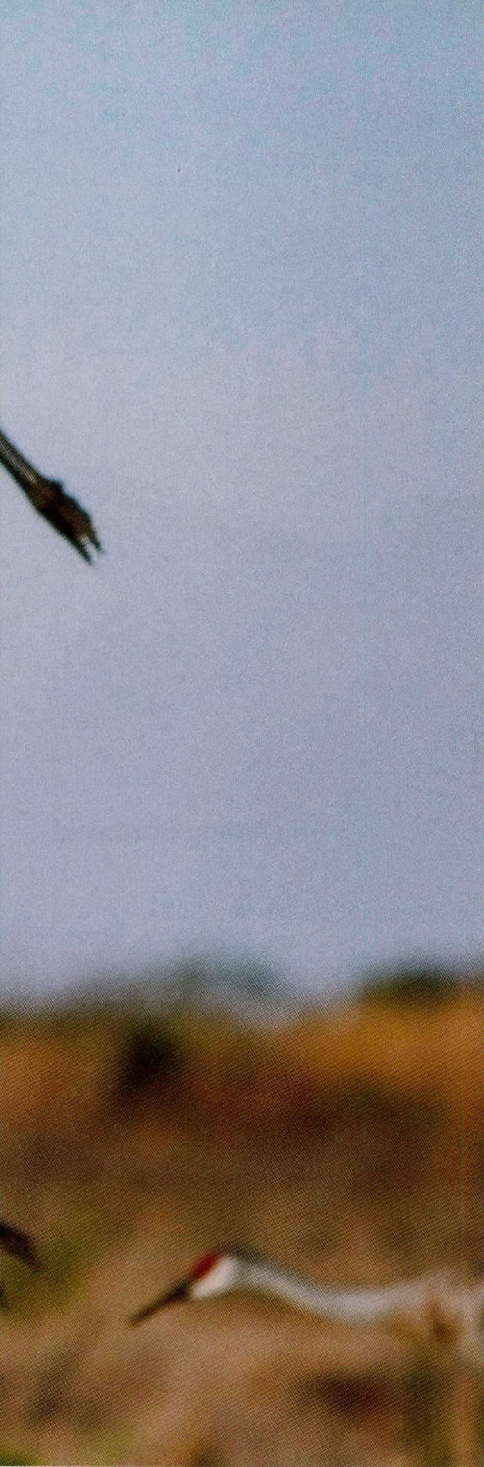
"Kar-r-r-o-o-o...."

In Texas, they prefer open areas such as wetlands, prairies and grasslands. Some hot spots include wet fields around Houston and in Brazos Bend State Park and Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. Large numbers can also be seen at Muleshoe National Wildlife

Refuge in the Texas Panhandle.

Sandhill cranes winter in gigantic flocks, sometimes numbering in tens of thousands. Typically, they are opportunistic feeders, preferring roots, grains and insects and occasionally snacking on small mammals, reptiles and amphibians. December to February is the peak time to see them in Texas.

When they're not enjoying their Texas getaway, it's breeding time. Since they don't breed in Texas, we often don't get to see their impressive mating dance moves. Courting cranes will stretch their wings, pump their heads and energetically bow and leap into



CHRIS LORENZ | DREAMSTIME.COM

the air. Sometimes they'll throw plants and dirt on each other.

The adults form long-lasting pair bonds. After the chicks hatch, it takes two months for them to become independent. By fall, juvenile cranes can be seen migrating with their parents.

Some people confuse sandhill cranes with whooping cranes, another big bird that visits Texas in winter. While sandhill cranes are legal to hunt in Texas, whooping cranes are federally endangered and therefore illegal to hunt. The only endangered subspecies of sandhill cranes are the Mississippi and Cuba sandhills; they do not occur in Texas.

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Target: Blue Catfish

Texas' mild winters mean good fishing for blue cats and more.



TPWD

by Randy Brudnicki

It's winter and temperatures are dropping, but don't put away that fishing gear. Here are some tips to keep you on the water. This is a great time of year because there are enough warm days to be pleasant and the blue catfish are eating — a lot.

As a predator, blue catfish are prowling for their primary forage of shad — threadfin shad and gizzard shad, if available. Blues are more mobile than other catfish species, but the bottom line is “find the bait, find the fish.” Look for massive schools of shad, which narrows searching. Of course, not all schools of shad will have blues around them, but when you find shad, your success increases.

It's a good idea to learn about threadfin shad. When you know their habits and habitats, finding game fish becomes easier. When you know the area and depth these baitfish are in, you've unlocked the secret.

Blue catfish fishing is popular because you have the opportunity to catch quantity and quality. Whole or cut shad are very effective baits.

Here are a couple of blue catfish hot spots for this month.



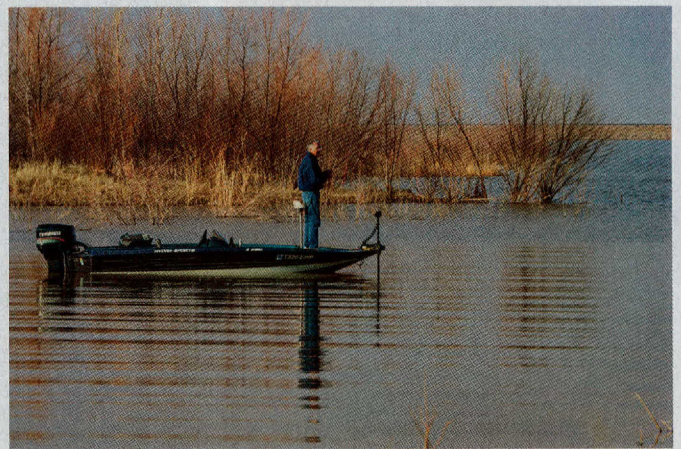
SONJA SOMMERFELD | TPWD

LAKE WACO

Cold weather means big blue catfish at **LAKE WACO**. The lake has a slot limit to protect big blues; all blues between 30 and 45 inches must be released. One blue 45 inches or longer may be retained daily. The lake record is an 84-plus-pound behemoth.

Fish with large (8/0 to 10/0) circle hooks to help with unhooking (so slot fish can be released easier). Bait up with cut shad or other fresh-cut bait. As with many winter catfish hot spots, fish shallower on sunny days. Look for shallow flats warmed by the sun; they could be full of baitfish.

The reservoir is located on the Bosque River just off Texas Highway 6, within the Waco city limits. The surface area is 8,465 acres with a maximum depth of 90 feet.



LARRY DITTO

LAKE ARROWHEAD

This lake is known for blue catfish success in winter months, with a record of nearly 75 pounds.

Located southeast of Wichita Falls off U.S. Highway 281, the 14,000-plus acres offer good depth for winter catfish hangouts. Graph for schools of shad to determine the depth to fish for the day.

On warmer days, move shallow. Try drifting with lightest-possible weight but make bottom contact.

Expert tip: Look for cormorant roosts in trees on the upper part of the reservoir. The waste dropped into the water by cormorants attracts catfish. (This applies to other lakes, too.)

ALSO BITING

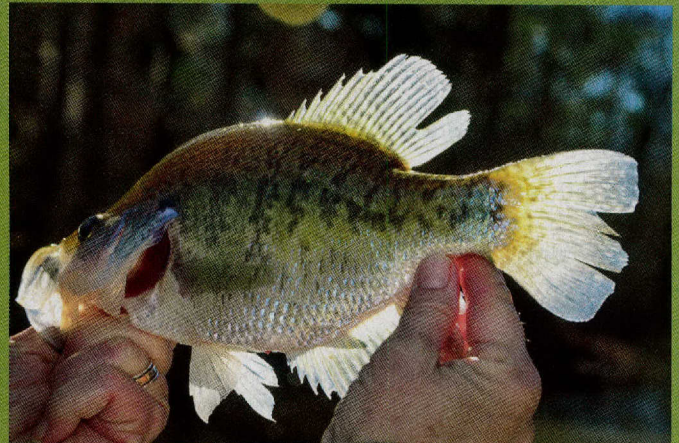


ENGRETSON UNDERWATER PHOTO

LAKE CORPUS CHRISTI, WHITE BASS

LAKE CORPUS CHRISTI'S white bass "run" is highly anticipated each winter. Located in the Nueces River watershed 20 miles northwest of its namesake, Lake Corpus Christi has a surface area of 18,256 acres and a maximum depth of 60 feet. The white bass begin congregating in the main lake near the mouth of the Nueces River channel in December. They frequent that area until late February or early March, when they will make the spawning run up the river.

Although live minnows are popular baits, anglers can also use small lipless crankbaits, shad raps, small spinnerbaits or in-line spinners, small plastic twister-tail "grubs" and other minnow-imitating artificial lures.



TPWD

OAK CREEK RESERVOIR, CRAPPIE

Another favorite winter fishing species is crappie, which attracts anglers to 2,375-acre **OAK CREEK RESERVOIR** in Coke County. About 8 miles north of Bronte on Texas Highway 70, the small lake has a maximum depth of 51 feet.

Many crappie are caught at fishing piers, in submerged timber along the river channel and along the pilings at the Highway 70 bridge, says TPWD's Lynn Wright. Crappie are caught with standard fare of minnows and small jigs fished along steep drop-offs and rock ledges.

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PICTURE THIS

The Dark Days of Winter

The gray season holds its own photographic opportunities.

by Earl Nottingham

As the seasons change, so does the light. Winter's shorter days combined with frequent gray skies and overall loss of natural light can make outdoor photography challenging. Combine that with being cooped up at home on frigid days and you might find yourself losing interest in creative photography. However, it doesn't have to be that way. Winter presents its own opportunities for building your photo skills and getting some great shots.

If the cold and bleak weather outside is not conducive for getting out and shooting, one of the most productive things you can do in the downtime is to get that owner's manual out of the bottom of the box your camera came in and read it cover to cover — you know, that little booklet you promised you'd look at someday. The goal is to become comfortable with every button, dial and menu setting that your camera has to offer, especially those settings that control exposure, such as shutter speed, aperture and ISO.

If you're not into reading, there are tons of video tutorials and resources for your particular camera that can be found online. You may also want to get familiar with your photo editing software or even explore other available photo software products.

However, if you can bundle up and head outdoors, you will find a whole new world of visual opportunities that can push your creativity to a new level.

From steel-gray clouds to orange sunrises and sunsets, winter skies offer their own mood-creating palette of colors, especially when illuminating the varied hues and textures of nature. On clear days, the sun's lower position in the sky adds an aesthetically pleasing warm tone and longer shadows during most of the day, especially at sundown.

Conversely, blue-gray overcast skies impart their own emotional "feel" by emphasizing the cold. There is one important caveat about getting the best color in these lighting situations. Get in the habit of NOT using the automatic white balance (AWB) setting on your camera. Instead, either use the sun icon or manually set your daylight

balance for around 5600 Kelvin temperature. The automatic white balance will try to "correct" your beautiful orange sunrise back to a neutral color. In the same manner, automatic white balance will "correct" your moody blue scene toward a neutral color.

Again, go to that owner's manual and learn about white balance settings. While some color correction can be made after the fact in your editing software, it's always best practice to get the color right in-camera.

The lack of light during this period can also be very educational, forcing us to embrace the photographic potential in those dark areas where small pools of light do exist — especially indoors. Thanks to the sensitivity of the current digital sensors in most of our cameras, we can now shoot at those high ISOs needed for low-light situations, such as the last light of day filtering through bare trees or a shaft of sunlight streaming into a dimly lit room. Cranking up the ISO sensitivity will let your camera record subjects that even your human eye has trouble seeing. Just for fun, try using other light sources such as candles, flashlights, table lamps and even illumination from smartphones. If it puts out light, it can be used to create a photograph.

Back outside, you'll find some of the best hidden-gem locations for winter photography at your local and state parks due to the seasonally smaller crowds. In some instances you may even have the whole park to yourself. Photography can become a scavenger hunt in a silent world as you walk down the trails or crunch through the leaves searching for your next composition. Nature's winter wardrobe is ready for its close-up.



Above: The bluish color of an overcast winter sky adds to the feeling of bitter cold at Caprock Canyons State Park.

Below: An orange sunrise illuminates Daingerfield State Park.



Please send questions and comments to earl.nottingham@tpwd.texas.gov.

For more tips on outdoor photography, visit the magazine's photography page at www.tpwdmagazine.com/photography.



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WILD WOMEN

by Louie Bond

COWGIRL: ALEUTIE, BOOKS: OLGA KURBATOVA | BOTH DREAMSTIME.COM

"To my right, the Caprock Escarpment rises long and low, indigo blue against the pale wash of early afternoon sky. Before me, the rolling terrain is sculpted by the creeks that join like fingers on a hand to form the Colorado River..." — **Margie Crisp, *River of Contrasts***

THE STORYTELLER'S MUSE

Unless they are coaxed into the light, the stories of humble Texans who spend their lives dedicated to passions for the state's natural science and history might fade away before ever having the opportunity to inspire and educate others. Winsome Shannon Davies, recently retired from three decades of filling bookshelves with these stories, has proven to be the Pied Piper of those who champion the Texas outdoors.

"The authors that I've dealt with are so committed and so dedicated, knowing they're not going to get any financial gain," she says. "They've reinforced for me the importance of books. It's amazing in this age, where there are all kinds of ways to communicate, that there are still people who really want to write books. And, of course, there are still people who really want to publish books."

Shannon's love of natural science began early, and quite naturally, with family camping excursions in Wyoming's Snowy Range and other remote wilderness areas. Mom loved wildflowers and Dad was an avid angler; Shannon and her brothers waded down miles of chilly creeks in the endless days of childhood.

Maturity and a move to Texas opened young Shannon's eyes to the stories of the natural wonders of her new home state. Her



early affinity for wild things and places grew into a consuming passion for publishing books about every aspect of them when a little-known gem about the dedication of Texas conservation heroes, *Land of Bears and Honey: A Natural History of East Texas*, by Joe Truett and Dan Lay, rocked her world.

"That book introduced me to the idea that there were people in Texas who were very attached to a certain place, so attached that they committed their whole lives to taking care of it and trying to save it," Shannon says.

At the time, 1988, she had just started at the University of

Texas Press for an editorial fellowship established by James Michener, having completed her doctoral studies in American Studies as a Fulbright scholar. She soon became the science editor and searched out these Texas stewards, wooing them with her warmth and charm to write their stories as books, filling a significant void in the Texas lexicon.

"I began to then benefit from getting to know these really, really interesting, committed people," Shannon says. "Their work and writing (often with the staunch support of series editors, foundations, state agencies and other generous institutions) have contributed massively to the natural history literature of Texas, in both quantity and quality."

Shannon switched university presses in 2000; in the interim, putting out *Texas Birds* magazine for the Texas Ornithological Society from 1998-2001. She was now a natural history editor

thrilled by the new possibilities at Texas A&M University Press in College Station (eventually becoming director).

"It started me on a new path because of the university's huge emphasis on agriculture, meaning wildlife biology, natural resource science, range ecology," she says. "It opened up a world of new

authors, new thinking, new books, new exposure to what land conservation and preservation meant in this state."

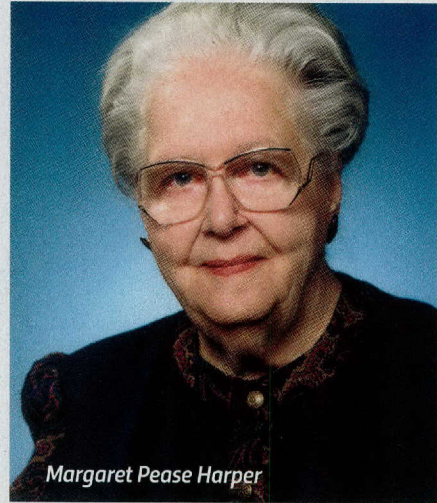
University presses differ from other presses. The authors aren't paid except for royalties, if the book sells well. The academic review process is grueling, and production values are high. The emphasis is quality, always quality. Foundations and donors fund series of books such as the River Books, sponsored by the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State University, spotlighting the Brazos, the Colorado, the Neches, the Nueces and more.

Imagine being the finger on the pulse of a newly hatched concept by a Texas icon such as Stephen Harrigan, Andy Sansom or the late John Graves, or being the outstretched hand to a biologist or artist who is uncertain he or she can write a book. (It's hard to tell which thrills Shannon more.) She has shepherded them all to completion and can now look back with pride at all the awards and, more importantly, the body of work itself.

"While Graves' memorable trip down the Brazos will forever remain the classic Texas river book, paddling the Colorado with Margie in *River of Contrasts* and canoeing the Rio Grande with Ben in *The River and the Wall* sit very well on the same shelf," she says of artist Margie Crisp and filmmaker Ben Masters and their books for the press.

Someday, on that shelf, and many more, tomorrow's storytellers will find Shannon's collection of knowledge, woven into the fabric of Texas itself through language and imagery. They'll learn from these books, live their lives and add their own stories. These books have brought to the rest of us an understanding of natural Texas, how to respect and care for it.

"These books are benchmarks of what has happened in the latter part of the 20th and the early part of the 21st century — they will always be that record of where we were," Shannon says. "This is where we were in conservation. This is where we were in climate change. This is where we were in endangered species. This is where we were in acquisition for public lands. Whatever the topic, it is just a mark of where humanity and, in this case, Texans were."



DRAMA QUEEN OF TEXAS

Nearly every Texas bucket list includes a trip to the scarlet gash of the Panhandle's Palo Duro Canyon, with its mysterious hoodoos and candy-striped cliff walls. No visit to the country's second-largest canyon is complete without staying till sunset on a summer night for the no-holds-barred, epic musical set against the backdrop of those walls.

In the park's natural amphitheater, using pomp and pageantry, special effects and dancing waters, *Texas* tells the story of Panhandle settlers in the 1800s and ends with a fireworks display. Patrons filter back to their campsites or drive back to nearby Canyon or Amarillo.

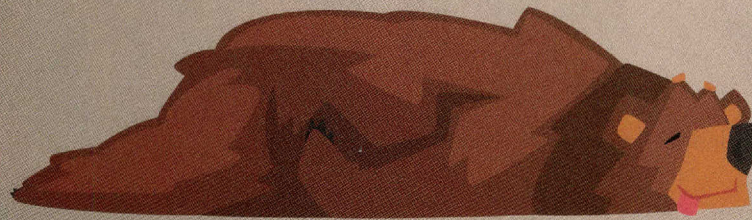
Interestingly, the woman who conceived a show filled with so much Texas pride didn't even get here till she was 35. Born in 1911 in Minnesota, Margaret Pease Harper spent her childhood in Illinois. After earning her master's degree, she spent some time accompanying her father, a famed oratorio singer who sometimes performed in historical pageants.

She married in 1939, following her husband first to Peru and eventually to West Texas State Teacher's College (now West Texas A&M University) in Canyon, where she taught piano lessons and followed a dream that now lives beyond her lifetime.

Margaret loved the history and beauty of her new home, visualizing the canyon as the perfect setting for a historical drama. Her enthusiasm garnered support for the idea, and she persuaded Pulitzer-winning playwright Paul Green to write it. Six years later, the first performance hit the Pioneer Amphitheater stage in July 1966. Two million attended during the first 25 years; Margaret also led marketing efforts.

Margaret helped found the Lone Star Ballet and received many honors before her death in 1991. *Texas* carries on her dream.





A LONG WINTER'S NAP
*Some Texas animals unplug
when the weather turns cold.*

When winter comes around, some animals go underground. While humans can keep warm with a blanket and hot chocolate, some Texas wildlife must take more drastic measures to survive.

Texas has a few true hibernating animals (rare because of the mild climate), and it has several species — mammals, reptiles and even one bird — that go into states of inactive torpor when it gets cold.

“Universally, hibernation is about two things: buying time during a period of resource scarcity and escaping harsh weather conditions,” says Texas Parks and Wildlife Department mammalogist Jonah Evans. “In Texas, we sometimes have harsh weather conditions, but we don’t get socked in three months with snow like some other areas.”

When insects go away in winter, certain animals have a choice.

“For animals that depend on insects for food, there are two basic ways to handle the winter: hibernate, or migrate to where more insects can be found,” Evans says. “Insectivorous bats do both. Species such as Brazilian free-tailed bats migrate, while cave myotis and tri-colored bats hibernate.”

by Russell Roe



JEROD FOSTER

TORPOR, DORMANCY AND BRUMATION

Torpor is a temporary state, lasting hours, days or weeks, deployed as a way to save energy or deal with harsh conditions. Some animals may slow their bodily systems and go into torpor just for a night or go into torpor during times of drought.

Hibernation typically is a seasonal state of long-term torpor — consecutive, multiday bouts of torpor. In both cases, animals find a safe place to hang out and lower their metabolism.

“There’s a slowing of all systems,” Evans says. “Heart rates slow way down. Respiratory rates slow way down. Body temperature goes way down. The digestive system basically shuts off. All the systems just slow way, way down.”

In Texas, some bats and ground squirrels hibernate. Bears, typically associated with hibernation, don’t hibernate but go into a type of torpor. Reptiles such as snakes, alligators and turtles also go into a state of dormancy.

“They call it brumation in reptiles,” says TPWD wildlife biologist Nathan Rains. “They’re cold-blooded. Their metabolisms just slow down with the environment.”

During hibernation, mammals experience occasional periods of arousal when they may eat, drink or even mate.

“Hibernation is a dynamic period,” says TPWD bat specialist Nathan Fuller, who got his Ph.D. in bat hibernation. “A lot of people think of it as a time when animals go to sleep and wake up six months later. Bats will be down in hibernation for two weeks or so at a time. Some kind of trigger causes them to arouse from their hibernation and do some stuff — they go to the bathroom, fly around a little bit. This cycle can go on for months. That whole process is called hibernation.”

Before hibernation, mammals search for suitable hibernacula (overwintering sites) and bulk up on food.

During the fall “swarming” before hibernation, little brown bats visit caves and fly in and out of the caves from dusk till dawn as they explore. They eat a lot of bugs, and they mate. When they start hibernation, they find a humid spot in the cave and settle down.

Hibernating little brown bats can reduce their metabolic rate to about 1 percent of the normal rate.

“Their metabolic rate is basically nothing,” Fuller says.



JOHN C. ABBOTT & KENDRA K. ABBOTT | ABBOTT NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

Heart rates for the bats — normally around 210 beats per minute at rest and 1,365 beats per minute in flight — fall to 20 beats per minute. They commonly go for 45 minutes without taking a breath. Their body temperature matches the surrounding temperature.

WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME

Unfortunately for bats, hibernation can now be a time that proves fatal.

Hibernating bats, including those in Texas, are facing the deadly threat of white-nose syndrome. The syndrome has caused millions of deaths in bats across North America. The fungus that causes white-nose grows on hibernating bats, acting as a chronic disturbance and possibly causing dehydration.

“The leading hypothesis of why they suffer from greater periodic arousal frequency has to do with water balance,” Fuller says. “The fungus starts to grow on their wings and put holes in their wings, and that increases evaporative water loss. They lose water and become dehydrated, and they have to arouse to drink water. There are other ideas out there. Maybe they are just irritated by the fungus and want to groom it off.”

Bats are weakened by disrupting their hibernation cycles and using critical body reserves to combat the fungus. Even before white-nose syndrome, a bat’s arousal cycle was where it spent most of its energy. One arousal cycle costs as much



RUSSELL A. GRAVES

Heart rates slow way down. Respiratory rates slow way down. Body temperature goes way down. The digestive system basically shuts off. All the systems just slow way, way down.

energy as 67 days of torpor.

“When white-nose syndrome starts taking effect, the period between arousals starts to shrink,” Fuller says. “Instead of arousing every 14 days, they start to arouse every three to five days. They’re using many more times the amount of energy they should be using. They can’t make it to the end of hibernation, and that’s when you start seeing dead bats.”

BATS

Several species of bats hibernate in Texas, including the big brown bat, tri-colored bat, cave myotis and southeastern myotis. Hibernation can last for months. Bats spend time before hibernation packing on the calories, but it’s a balancing act — their need to fly limits how much they can bulk up.

Bats need roosts that are cool and remain at a constant temperature, such as caves. Bats mate in the fall before hibernation, and the females store the sperm until spring.



BELLA LATASTE | OUH LA LA PHOTOGRAPHY



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Wintertime, and the living is sleepy: Ground squirrels are some of the longest winter sleepers; snakes get lethargic and retire to a den; black bears go through a period of dormancy; alligators slow down and stop eating; common poorwills go into torpor to survive harsh conditions.

BLACK BEARS

Bears go into a period of dormancy for three to four months but do not exhibit the characteristics of true hibernation; their temperature does not drop markedly and their heartbeats and respiratory rates are only moderately reduced.

“Sometimes they just curl up on the ground in the thicket during a cold spell,” Evans says.

They may awaken and move around at times. Pregnant females may wake up to give birth and then go back into torpor.

GROUND SQUIRRELS

Several species of ground squirrels hibernate, including the 13-lined ground squirrel, Rio Grande ground squirrel and rock squirrel, and some of these squirrels are the longest sleepers around. The 13-lined ground squirrel has been found to hibernate for 240 days of the year.

ALLIGATORS

Alligators slow their metabolic rate and stop eating. Brumation typically lasts from October to March. Some alligators create mud holes for warmth and shelter. Others reside underwater, surfacing occasionally to breathe.

SNAKES

Snakes find a crevice or burrow to crawl into and escape the elements for a few months. They become lethargic as temperatures drop. They may share dens with other snakes. On warm days, snakes may come out of their den to bask in the sun.

COMMON POORWILL

The common poorwill, found in the western half of the state, is the only Texas bird known to go into torpor. The other birds in its family of nightjars migrate each year, but the common poorwill sticks around for the winter. The lowest naturally occurring body temperatures in birds have been recorded in poorwills in torpor.

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

BRINGING A PARK



PALO PINTO BLOOMS INTO OUR NEWEST STATE



TO *Life*

PARK, WITH A TALE AS WILD AS TEXAS ITSELF.

by Lydia Saldaña



A new chapter unfolds in Palo Pinto County. For the first time in nearly two decades, a new state park is being created in North Texas.

The story of how Palo Pinto Mountains State Park came to be is many years in the making, with a multifaceted cast of characters and a convoluted plotline. There's even a subplot that tells a Texas tale of a fatal shooting that ended with this very land changing hands.

The place itself is a well-rounded character with many pleasing attributes. Located 75 miles west of Fort Worth, the site encompasses rolling hills, a beautiful creek and a quiet lake surrounded by more than 4,800 acres of varied habitat that is home to a diverse array of wildlife.

Soon there will be backcountry trails to explore on foot or by horseback. Many stands of live oak, mesquite, cedar elm and native pecan shade the park, some of which will shelter campsites overlooking the waters of Tucker Lake.

"This is the Hill Country of North Texas, with a history that is just as rich as the terrain," said Palo Pinto Mountains State Park Superintendent James Adams.

"People have been roaming this land for ages; there's a rich prehistoric and Native American legacy here. There's also a robust cattle ranching heritage, and the railroad came through in the 1890s bringing industry, jobs and people. The first oil well in the famed Ranger Field was drilled here, too. There's just so much that happened around here, and this is an amazing place to experience that history."

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Executive Director Carter Smith is one of the characters who has played a role in this story's unfolding, from its very earliest chapter.

"I was still at The Nature Conservancy when (former TPWD Executive Director) Bob Cook and (former TPW Commission Chair) Joseph Fitzsimons called me in 2007," recalls Smith. "They said, 'We've got this problem on our hands with Eagle Mountain Lake and we have got to find a replacement state park near Fort Worth. Can you help us?' That kicked

off the whole search for the replacement park. We were literally turning over rocks everywhere within two hours of Fort Worth."

The "problem" Smith is referring to is the somewhat complicated tale of how property for one would-be state park in Fort Worth ended up as a two-for-one park deal that took several years to consummate. That property, 400 acres on Eagle Mountain Lake near Fort Worth, was purchased in 1980 for a state park but never opened; in more recent years, it was deemed too small for a proper state park.

TPWD officials sought permission to sell the land to generate dollars to buy something bigger. They got permission by promising that the proceeds from the sale would be used on a state park within a short driving distance of Fort Worth. State and local officials did not want to see the land originally slated for the lakeside park to be developed, and through an ingenious arrangement



JONATHAN VAIL | TPWF



studioOutside

BENNETT BENN PARTNERS

Clockwise from left:
The hills of Palo Pinto;
rendering of the future park
headquarters; Russell Creek,
as it winds through the park.

involving the Trust for Public Land, private philanthropic partners in Fort Worth and the Tarrant County Regional Water District, a deal was made. The land changed hands and is now a local park operated by the water district.

With several million dollars realized from the sale of the Eagle Mountain Lake site, the search for a new park site near Fort Worth intensified. By this time, Carter Smith had gone to work for TPWD. Meanwhile, a complicated subplot was brewing that would culminate in the acquisition of the land that is becoming Palo Pinto Mountains State Park.

In late 2008, a shooting at the Mule Lip Bar in Mingus ended with a man dead. As detailed in a front-page story in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, the “deadly encounter started the wheels turning on a bizarre Texas tale of lawsuits, family feuds, rich real estate deals and the seeding of land for a nearby state park.”

The shooter, Will Copeland, served time for criminally negligent homicide in the death of Kevin Parsons. An ensuing lawsuit by the family of the dead man resulted in 1,330 acres of the Copeland Ranch being transferred to Parsons’ father, who immediately offered it for sale. The Nature Conservancy (TNC), at TPWD’s behest, was actively searching for property in the area, and got wind that the land was available.

JONATHAN VAIL | TPWF



*90-acre Tucker Lake
sits at the heart of
the state park.*





EARL NOTTINGHAM/TPWD

However, the parcel wasn't large enough, and TNC staff began exploring the purchase of other adjacent tracts, which, as it turned out, belonged to other members of the Copeland clan. After protracted negotiations with feuding family members, several real estate deals closed on the same day in October 2011, creating the footprint for the park.

A fitting end to a classically colorful Texas tale.

But the acquisition of the land was just the beginning. The park still needed substantial funding to build the infrastructure that would enable Palo Pinto to welcome visitors. Roads, utilities, campsites, hiking trails and other amenities must first be funded before they can be built. In 2019, the Texas Legislature came to the rescue with a \$12.5 million appropriation for the park, but there was a caveat.

"Senator Jane Nelson is a strong advocate for the importance of outdoor access for our urban families," says Ralph Duggins, former chair of the TPW Commission. "With her leadership on the Senate Finance Committee and the support of her colleagues, we were successful in getting the appropriation that we did, but it was conditioned on a private fundraising effort to be conducted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation."

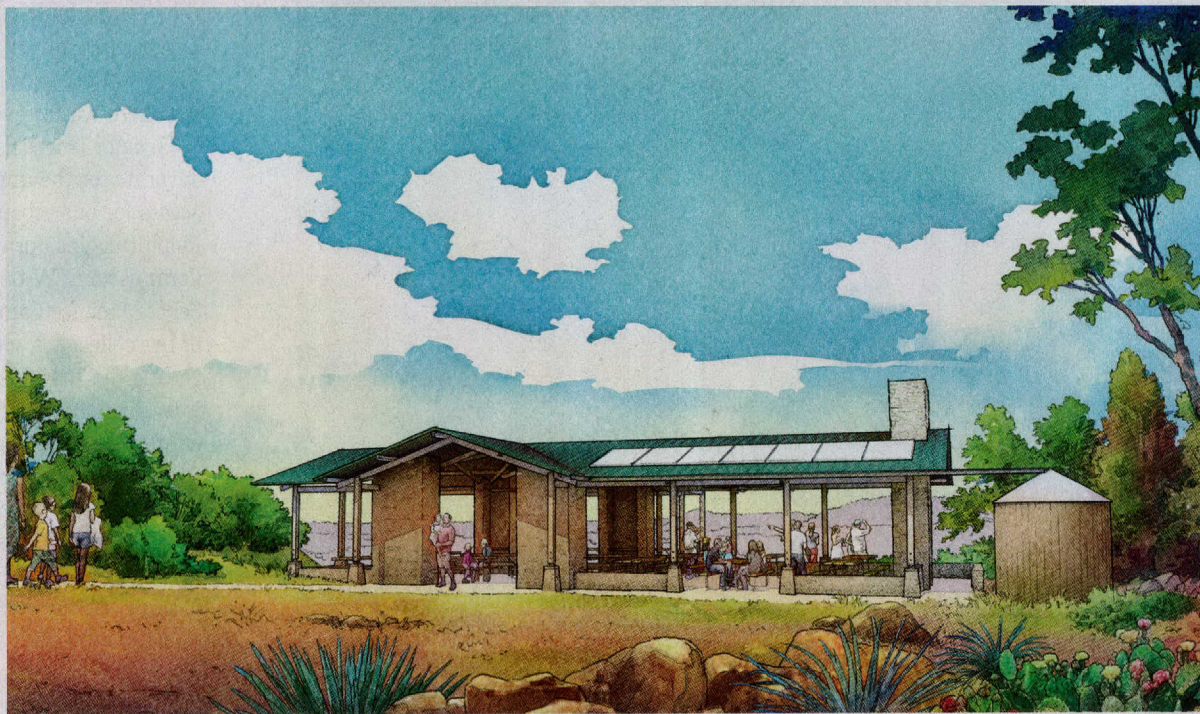
And so, another plotline is woven into the story. Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation (TPWF), the official nonprofit funding partner for TPWD, is in the midst of a \$9 million private fundraising effort that will make the park a reality. The \$12.5 million appropriated by the Legislature will be used to fund utilities. TPWD is allocating additional TxDOT funds for road construction.

"Thanks to a \$3 million challenge grant, we're about halfway to our \$9 million fundraising goal that will amplify what the Legislature has provided," says TPWF Executive Director Susan Houston. "When the pandemic hit, we were concerned about how the fundraising would go, but what we've seen is that COVID has changed the way people value the outdoors — we've all learned that we definitely need more parks. When we take potential donors to Palo Pinto Mountains State Park, they understand immediately why this project is important."

In another plot twist, TPWF will also

This page: State park visitors will have fishing, paddling and picnicking opportunities at Tucker Lake. Palo Pinto's group pavilion will offer panoramic views of the park's unique topography. The children's playscape will feature natural materials such as logs and boulders, while picnic shelters and trails will invite visitors to enjoy their natural surroundings.

Opposite: Palo Pinto Mountains State Park Superintendent James Adams visits with Anne Brown and Susan Houston of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation and Texas State Parks Director Rodney Franklin at a future campsite overlooking Tucker Lake.

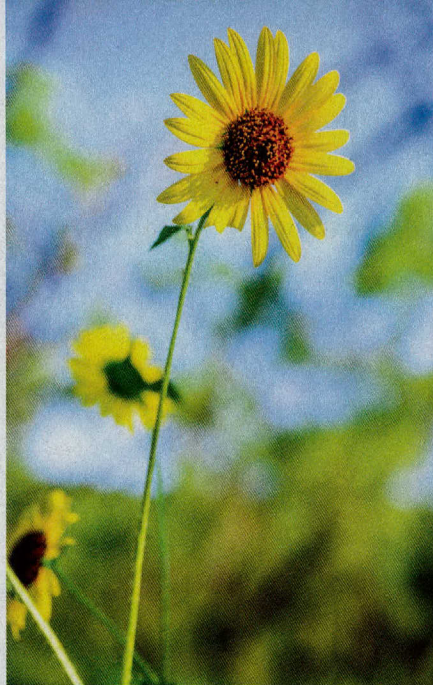


be building the park facilities.

“In addition to raising the private dollars for this project, we will also be managing all of the vertical construction for park facilities,” explains Anne Brown, who is managing the project for TPWF. “We’ve developed a track record by building facilities at Powderhorn Ranch, Palo Duro Canyon and the Game Warden Training Center. These experiences have demonstrated that we can develop high-quality facilities on time and at a significant cost savings. We are committed to working with TPWD to make Palo Pinto Mountains State Park a stellar example of this proven public-private partnership.”

The development footprint of the park will cover about 200 acres of the 4,800 acres of the site. The buildings are designed to be light on the land and blend in with the landscape. A visitor center, pavilion, playscape, equestrian campground and camping loop will be among the offerings for visitors. An accessible boat ramp and fishing pier will also be built at Tucker Lake.

“It’s been a long time since we’ve built a park with this many amenities and this diversity of facilities,” says Rodney Franklin, Texas state parks director. “To have the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation help us create it is



JONATHAN WALL, TPWF

You can help write the next chapter in Texas state park history by donating at tpwf.org/palopinto.

phenomenal. It’s going to be fantastic to have these kind of outdoor recreation opportunities taking place here at Palo Pinto Mountains State Park, especially so close to a major urban area.”

The timeline for completion of the park hinges on meeting the \$9 million fundraising goal. Those involved are

hopeful the park can be open in time for the centennial celebration of Texas state parks in 2023.

“The planned opening of Palo Pinto Mountain State Park would be a wonderful capstone for the centennial celebration of the state park system,” Smith says. “It’s also a wonderful kickoff to the next hundred years. For so many reasons, we believe Palo Pinto Mountains State Park is going to be an extraordinary generational gift to the people of Texas.”

In the process of making the park a reality, state leaders are rewriting the book on how state parks will be built in the future.

“Having a public-private partnership is a wonderful opportunity to take the best of both worlds, innovate, and fortify revenue sources,” says Senator Nelson. “We are fortunate to have Texans privately contributing to the preservation of our state parks, which will help stretch our limited state funds. I am excitedly optimistic that Palo Pinto Mountains State Park will serve as a shining example of how a public-private partnership can benefit our parks for future generations of Texans.”

Lydia Saldaña is the communications director for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation.



JONATHAN WALL, TPWF



PA

EARL NOTTINGHAM | TPWD

SOLIS



FROM THE FRONTIER

TO THE FRONT LINE,

OFF THE VENEMENT

TEXAS GAME WARDENS

HAVE ANSWERED THE

CALL FOR 125 YEARS.

BY STEPHANIE SALINAS GARCIA



For 125 years, “Law Enforcement Off the Pavement” has been more than a motto for Texas game wardens — it’s the core of what they do day and night to protect Texans and the state’s natural resources.

In a state this size, it’s a massive, coordinated operation. More than 550 game wardens (stationed in all 254 counties) patrol about 11 million miles of roads and coastline and everything in between.

“Our game wardens have a long and storied history of conservation law enforcement in our state, beginning with the first wardens hired to stop the overexploitation of oysters in Galveston Bay,” says Carter Smith, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department executive director. “I am proud to say that our game wardens are still working to protect oysters in Galveston Bay, plus a whole lot more, 125 years later.”

THE FRONTIER YEARS

Utilizing a variety of new techniques, teams and technology, the game wardens we know today have evolved dramatically since the first ones were commissioned in 1895.

During Texas’ frontier days, most people lived in rural areas and spent their days ranching and farming; Texas became a leading producer of cotton and cattle at the time. Major oil deposits were discovered in Texas in 1894, and oil became a profitable industry.

Our game wardens in 2020 stand tall because of those who came before them. Above, from top: Texas game wardens around 1911; a game warden camp in 1929; the first game warden graduation class at Texas A&M in the 1940s.

In the midst of this boom, Texans enjoyed the state's bounty of game animals without limit. The resulting overharvesting caused pressure on the fish and wildlife populations, so the Texas Legislature established new regulations to help manage these resources.

The state's first game law in 1861 established a two-year closed season for quail. Thirteen years later, state fishing regulations were adopted on coastal seining and netting. There was an immense amount of local pushback — in 1883, 130 Texas counties claimed exemption from all game laws.

The Texas Legislature stepped in to create a regulatory office, the Fish and Oyster Commission, in 1895. I.P. Kibbe was appointed commissioner by the governor; a handful of deputies became law enforcement agents to help regulate the harvesting of shrimp, fish and oysters in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Legislature expanded the oversight of the Fish and Oyster Commission to include the responsibility of managing game animals and laws in 1907, and the agency morphed into the Game, Fish and Oyster Commission.

By 1919, six game wardens enforced the regulations protecting fish and game in Texas; in the next decade, the number grew to 80.

Radios were introduced in the 1930s, a revolutionary way for wardens to communicate and conduct law enforcement. Most game wardens patrolled on horseback or in personal vehicles. They were outfitted with their first official uniforms in 1938.

In 1946, the first game warden cadet class graduated from a school held at Texas A&M University. The class consisted of 17 cadets, who studied wildlife law and more. By the end of the 1950s, 210 game wardens were patrolling the state.

As the commission became the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 1963, life as a game warden evolved as well. Game wardens were assigned state patrol cars with the comforts of automatic transmission and air conditioning, along with firearms and other equipment.

The 1970s ushered in a new era for game wardens as they received peace officer status. This new designation allowed game wardens to enforce not only game laws, but all state laws. They

also began patrolling for violations of the Water Safety Act, helping Texans safely recreate on the water.

MODERN TECHNIQUES

Through the remaining decades of the century, the Texas game wardens not only grew in numbers, but also in patrol techniques. They began using new methods (like using deer decoys to catch poachers), new defensive tactics

and new handcuffing procedures. New patrol vessels enhanced their presence on waterways, and game wardens were equipped and trained to use new firearms for the first time.

The new training and equipment came just in time, as modern game wardens face new and increasingly complicated duties. Although wardens continue to focus on conservation law enforcement, they have adapted to stay at the forefront



EARL NOTTINGHAM | TPWD

WOMEN JOIN THE RANKS

Thirty-nine women are Texas game wardens today, serving in counties across the state.

In the 1920s, Cordelia Jane Sloan Duke became the first (appointed) female Texas game warden. The land around her homestead was designated as a wildlife sanctuary that annually hosted thousands of wild ducks.

In 1979, Stacy Bishop Lawrence became the first female game warden to graduate from the Texas Game Warden Academy. This was one of the first years the academy was held in Austin.

"The first time I applied I was rejected, because I would not have been 21 by graduation," Bishop Lawrence says. "I had to wait almost four years for the next application process. Back then, TPWD received approximately 3,000 applications for 30 to 40 positions. Competition was brutal. Somehow, somehow, I made it through the application process."

In September 1978, Bishop Lawrence began her study with the 33rd Game Warden Academy; only three of the 38 cadets were female.

"The training was tough," Bishop Lawrence says. "Unfortunately, one of the females quit soon after training began; the second left about a third of the way through."

Alone in a class full of guys, she says she was "too stubborn" to try to be friends.

"It took one of my classmates to break the ice, and the door was opened," she says. "To this day, I deeply appreciate the friendships and the camaraderie that evolved."



Game wardens have diversified their ranks and expanded their tools and training over the years, including swift-water rescues, a new helicopter, specialized water patrols and a K9 unit. Col. Chad Jones, bottom right, became TPWD law enforcement director in summer 2020.

of all modern law enforcement strategies.

Game wardens are now “The Texas Navy,” designated as the primary enforcement agency in Texas public waters, enforcing resource violations, promoting boating safety and investigating boating accidents.

The Special Investigations Unit focuses on conducting web-based investigations of illegal wildlife trafficking. Through the Operation Game Thief program, people who notice illegal wildlife activity online can submit tips for investigation.

Game wardens have always assisted in search-and-rescue efforts across the state, but new technology and techniques increase their effectiveness.

TPWD incorporated a new K9 team in 2013 to assist in search and rescue, cadaver search, narcotics enforcement and detection of illegally taken or smuggled game and fish.

The new game warden helicopter, added in 2014, has a rescue hoist, thermal imager, searchlight, public address system,

satellite communication and night vision. In 2018, game wardens expanded their arsenal further with a new search-and-rescue drone.

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

New training techniques focusing on swift water have enabled wardens to respond during floods and natural disasters.

These skills were instrumental when wardens responded to some of the most destructive natural disasters to strike the Gulf Coast, including hurricanes Katrina and Harvey.

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. For several days, the powerful storm flooded the city. On August 30, wardens crossed the Louisiana state line to help, marking the first time Texas game wardens were deployed for disaster relief out of state. Game warden Chris Davis was part of that first wave.

“We really didn’t know exactly where we were going, where we would stay or what the conditions would be like,” Davis recalls.

The wardens used 4X4 trucks and shallow-water vessels to reach and evacuate residents in the hardest-hit areas of New Orleans. By the end, more than 100 Texas game wardens rescued more than 5,000 people from their homes.

“We witnessed the devastation of a historic city and how it brought out the best and worst of human behavior,” he says.

Davis says the wardens hold on to personal stories about the people they met, and still think about the people rescued and the ones who didn’t make it.

“I’ll never forget the dedication and tireless efforts of each and every game warden who answered the call,” Davis says. “They persevered through unimaginable challenges and made a difference when it counted the most.”

Twelve years later, it was Texas’ turn to feel the wrath of Gulf weather. Hurricane Harvey hit the Texas coast near Rockport, causing widespread flooding across most of the state’s coastline. Game wardens



ABOVE EARL NOTTINGHAM, ALL OTHERS CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD

leapt into action to help with search-and-rescue efforts throughout Texas. When it was over, 368 wardens had rescued more than 12,000 from floodwaters.

"Harvey was originally set to hit my hometown of Corpus Christi," says game warden Carmen Rickel. "I had spent the day before preparing my own home, and helping my neighbors board up their houses. I worried about getting my husband to a safe place and making sure our extended family was prepared."

Rickel's unit was deployed first as part of the Incident Response Assessment Team, assigned to the hardest-hit areas to report the immediate needs of that community to the State Emergency Operation Center.

"We drove into Rockport and it was still dark and raining," says Rickel. "As the daylight started to creep up on us, so did the magnitude of the devastation. We worked all day into the night in Rockport and by then, Houston was literally drowning."

Her unit left for the Houston area the following morning.

"We arrived in Fort Bend County to never-ending rain and thousands of people needing help and evacuation," she says.

Rickel says the wardens never stopped until every person was safe.

"I drove home at the end of the week in awe of my partners and with a new respect for the resiliency of our people in this great state," Rickel says. "The most important lesson learned is not about responses and tactics but that when we are hit the hardest, the police and the people come together as one."

MEET COL. CHAD JONES

The chief officer of the Texas game wardens achieves the rank of colonel. Many of the past colonels have dedicated their time in leadership roles toward striving to push the organization forward. Colonels Pete Flores, Craig Hunter and Grahame Jones brought new elements into the role in recent years.

"Throughout their history, our law enforcement team has been well served, and well led, by an exceptional group of colonels who have set the bar high for those seeking to follow in their footsteps," Smith says. "Collectively and individually, their leadership has been defined by their unassailable integrity, altruistic service, deep resolve and inexorable commitment to doing what is right and best to protect the bountiful natural resources of our state."

In July 2020, game warden Chad Jones became the latest director of the Law Enforcement Division for TPWD. Col. Jones became a game warden in 2004 and has held duty stations in Brazos and Trinity counties. He led the Forensic Accident and Reconstruction Team and served at the Game Warden Training Center and in Uvalde, Corpus Christi and the Pineywoods region of East Texas.

"For 125 years, Texas game wardens have been the example for agencies across the nation to follow when it comes to a successful conservation law enforcement model," Jones says. "We've been fortunate to benefit from a long line of exceptional service-oriented leaders who promoted inspiration and innovation throughout our culture."

During his tenure as a game warden on patrol, Jones says he has gained insight that will assist him in leading an ever-evolving law enforcement team.

"We continually strive for an inclusive, diverse, accountable and highly trained workforce," Jones says. "We will represent all Texans and continue to provide proactive, accountable, professional conservation law enforcement off the pavement."

Looking ahead, Jones hopes to build on the strong foundation laid by his predecessors.

"There will never be a caprock on this foundation," said Jones. "It will never be cemented with 'Chad Jones stood here.' We strive to have those following in our footsteps lay down an even stronger foundation for the next generation. We will continue to strive, to inspire, to never settle for less and always look to improve."

Stephanie Salinas Garcia works in the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department press office.

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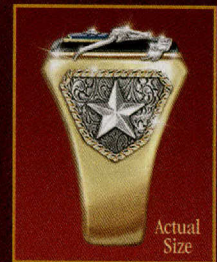


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SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

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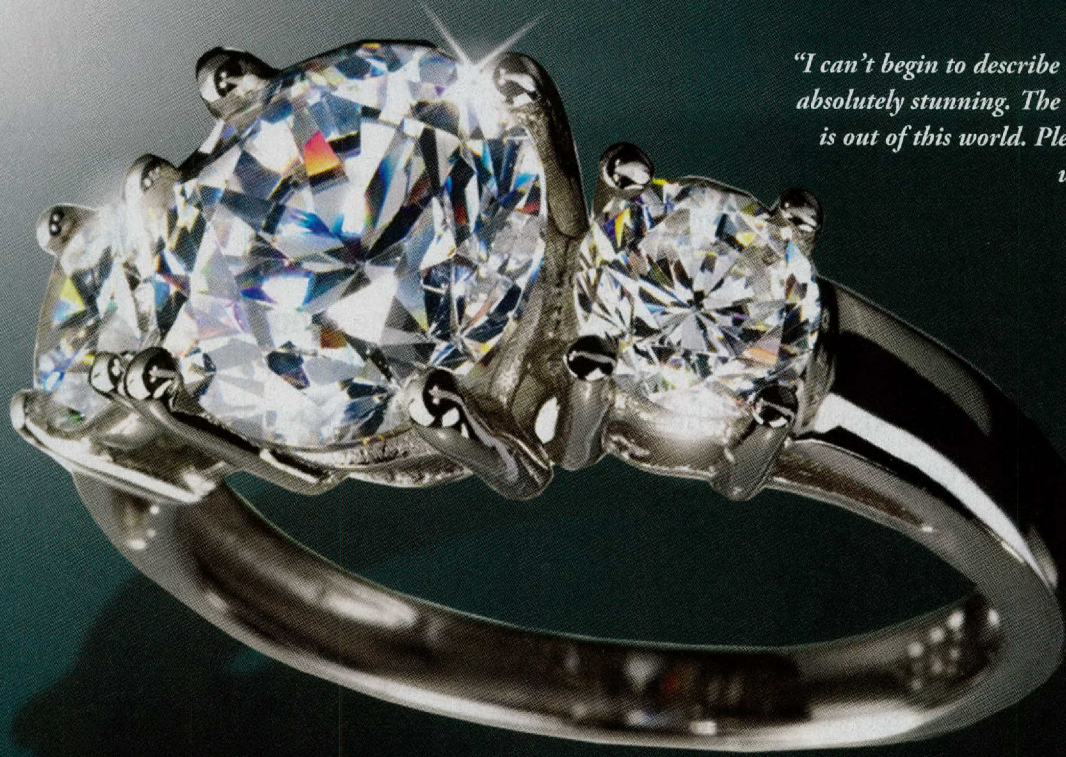


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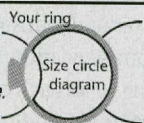
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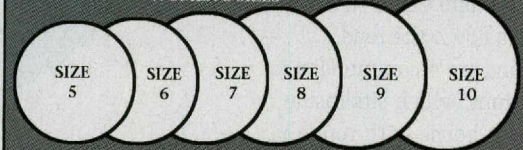
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WOMEN'S SIZES



Storybook Christmas:

Abilene transforms into a charming holiday destination every December.

by Nathan Adams
Photos by Sonja Sommerfeld

ABILENE

In the winter of 1908, a mysterious package addressed to young orphan Art Atchinson Aimesworth arrives at the Abilene ranch home where he lives with his aunt, uncle and little sister. Attached to the package is a note reading “Open the box. Assemble the contents. Come NORTH. Yours, S.C.”

So begins William Joyce’s 1993 picture book *Santa Calls*. This year, like young Art, my wife Laura and I are also heeding Santa’s call to come north. But Abilene isn’t our point of departure, it’s our destination.

Our adventure in Abilene begins not at a ranch, but at the state park. After a long drive, we’re met in the late afternoon at the entrance by

she says as she opens the door. Inside, the yurt’s wooden frame crisscrosses the circumference of the walls. Unmade bunkbeds (we brought our own bedding), a futon-style couch, two electric lights, a mini-fridge, microwave and small dresser make up the room’s furnishings. Restrooms and warm showers are just a short walk away.



Superintendent Ryan Hunter, who guides us through a series of turns to what may be the park’s most storybook setting.

A small grouping of yurts, with their round frames and conical tops, are nestled into a wooded corner of the park like a cul-de-sac of gnome homes. Assistant Superintendent Candyce Johnson is waiting outside our yurt with a key and a smile.

“I’ve turned the heat on for you,”

It’s not fancy, but it’s charming and comfortable.

With the dinner hour approaching, both Hunter and Johnson give the same recommendation; looks like we’re going to a ranch after all.

The Perini Ranch Steakhouse in nearby Buffalo Gap is just a few miles down the road. Reservations are recommended for the restaurant, which sits inside an old ranch house with rough-



COVID-19 may affect many seasonal celebrations. Check before you go.



This page: A festive storybook dinosaur lights up the Adamson-Spalding Storybook Garden.
Opposite: Yurt at Abilene State Park.

hewn wooden walls and a plank floor. The furniture is a rustic hodgepodge — the dining chairs don't match the table, and they may or may not match each other — but it all comes together in a comfortable, pleasing whole.

In addition to making award-winning steaks and hamburgers, proprietor Tom Perini, who runs the restaurant with his wife Lisa, is a convivial host, checking in on his dinner guests as he makes his way around the restaurant. He joins us at our table for a few minutes, first inquiring about our meal (it's delicious), then adding flavor to our dining experience by peppering it with delectable anecdotes.

My favorite was about the time when several men in suits came to visit. Perini thought they were from the insurance board looking for violations. Instead they were restaurant entrepreneurs trying to discover — and copy — what it was that made his steakhouse “real Texas.”

“What makes it real Texas?” he asks. Perini gestures broadly around his restaurant and laughs, a hearty, rich baritone.

“It just is,” he says. “They didn't get it. I'm sure somewhere they probably have a chain of restaurants now with Texas stars all over the decorations and Longhorns on the back of every chair. That's not Texas.”

Then he leans back and grins. “They'll *never* get it.”

As we walk to our car, a full moon crests the nearby tree line, the bright-white light complementing the warm orange glow of the incandescent string lights in the parking lot. The ranch exudes its own kind of magic, and we drive off, a little bewitched.

The night is still young, so we drive into Abilene in search of magic of a different sort. We find it among the more than 100 outdoor displays at Christmas Lane.

Celebrating its 30th year, Christmas Lane (canceled for 2020) is a real community event, with handcrafted displays from local businesses and organizations. A low-powered FM transmitter lets us tune in to the holly-jolliest of music as we drive around to see it all, from the plywood cut-out Charlie Brown Christmas scene (whoever painted Pigpen did an incredible job) to Abilene State

Park's reindeer-pulled camper. The sense of community is so delightful that we drive through the displays twice, discovering new wonders.

Filled with holiday cheer, we head back to the comfort of our yurt. As we approach the state park, we find that the darkness has transformed distant windmills into a chorus line of synchronized Rudolfs, their red noses blinking in unison. It's a perfect ending to the day.

In the morning, after breakfast at the nearby Gap Cafe — their griddled gingerbread is spectacular — we head back in time at the Frontier Texas museum.

While the museum showcases the expected collection of artifacts and taxidermied wildlife, the things that make it unique are its "spirit guides" — holographic actors who, in character, tell the stories of the Comanche and Kiowa



MORE INFO:

CITY OF ABILENE

storybookcapitalofamerica.com

ABILENE STATE PARK

tpwd.texas.gov/abilene

PERINI RANCH STEAKHOUSE

www.periniranch.com

THE GAP CAFE

www.thegapcafetx.com

FRONTIER TEXAS

www.frontiertexas.com

VAGABOND PIZZA

www.vagabondpizza.com

NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ILLUSTRATED LITERATURE

www.nccil.org

chiefs, buffalo hunters, Buffalo Soldiers, cattlemen, lawmen and outlaws who left their mark on this part of Texas.

Laura and I spend more than two hours exploring the museum. A museum photograph lingers in my memory: a small group of men dwarfed below a literal mountain of buffalo bones bleached white by the sun. These bones were what remained of the millions of buffalo slaughtered here a century and a half ago.

It's a haunting visualization of the steep price that others — of all races and species — have paid to bring us to this point. Laura suggests it's also a call to action, a charge to future generations to learn from the mistakes of the past and to leave this world better than we found it.

A few blocks from the museum, we spot a hand-drawn chalkboard sign touting "Pizza on Earth." Vagabond Pizza's pies are delicious, but the highlight is the appetizer: a toasty baguette warm from the wood-fired oven — its crust crisp and flaky, its center chewy and hot — smothered in hand-made basil butter.

Full of history and pizza, we head back to Abilene State Park. Laura wants an afternoon yurt nap; I'm looking forward to exploring the park's trail system. I ask the park's Kyla Gust for the inside scoop.

"You'll want to see the old water tower," she tells me, "and Buffalo Wallow. The Elm Creek Nature Trail is the prettiest walk in the entire park."

Being in the park off-season has advantages. With so few visitors, the only human

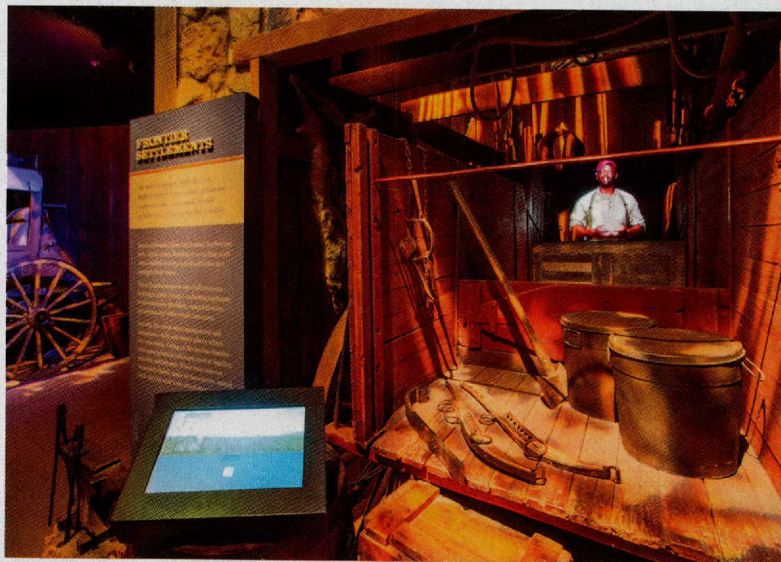
sounds I hear are self-made: the gentle huff of my own breath, the dull thud of each footfall — plus the occasional car passing on the highway.

Recent rains have left shallow pools across sections of the trailway, but I don't mind wet feet. Based on tracks left in the soft dirt, a deer and a raccoon were of a similar mindset. I won't see them — a carpet of dried leaves covers the trail ahead, making stealth impossible. But Gust is correct: the bird songs, the waterway, the trees and the plants along the trail are lovely.

Crossing a small bridge over a spring-fed rivulet, I am caught off-guard by the loud *whoosh* of a great blue heron taking flight. While it soars off to more private places, I walk on, awestruck and inspired. Twenty minutes later my reverie is broken with a buzz from my cellphone. I make a mental note: next time, leave the phone in the yurt.

I emerge from the trail's end to discover a different sort of flora: a 10-foot Christmas tree of colored lights. Campers have begun setting up for the park's annual Fa La La in the Forest. Started by the Friends of Abilene State Park in the early 2010s, the Saturday-evening event sees park visitors dress up their campsites with festive lights and decor. Park admission is waived for the evening, though a \$5 donation per carload is suggested.

"It's a big deal," says Dustyn Anders, the park's office manager. "We'll have 300–400 visitors drive through this weekend to see all the campsites aglow with lights."



Above: Holographic figures tell tales of settlers and outlaws at Frontier Texas. **Opposite:** Statues of the Grinch and other Dr. Seuss characters populate Everman Park. Christmas Lane features more than 100 outdoor displays.

That evening we return to Abilene to visit the Storybook Art Adventure Trail, which begins outside the convention center at the Adamson-Spalding Storybook Garden. Here, statues of beloved storybook characters — including Stuart Little, the Three Little Pigs and a stubborn Tyrannosaurus who doesn't want to go to bed — stand bedecked in Christmas lights and festive decorations. The trail proceeds down Cypress Street (a sign proclaims it Storybook Way), wraps around North First Street and ends outside the National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature.

Along the way, statues and stone benches line the street. Each bench is engraved with storybook quotes from books whose art has been featured at the NCCIL, colloquially dubbed The Nickel.

As we travel down the trail, reading quotes from favorite stories and passing statues of the Tooth Fairy and

the Sandman, we arrive at Everman Park. Here, statues of Dr. Seuss' most famous creations stand illuminated under the lights of a giant Christmas tree.

All save one: on this night, the Grinch's spotlights are mysteriously dark. I'm delighted by this turn of events; considering the season, it seems like the grinchiest thing ever.

As we continue toward Cedar Street, we pass by Abilene's original storybook sculpture and come face to face with none other than Art Atchinson Aimesworth, sitting aboard the Yuletide Flyer, heading north. Looking up, I notice that nearby Cedar Street also bears an honorific title: Santa Calls Lane.

And there, on the corner outside the NCCIL, stands Santa himself. William Joyce's Nicholas St. North, carved in bronze, smiles out at us.

"Merry Christmas," he seems to say. Merry Christmas, indeed!

PARKS WHERE IT JUST MIGHT SNOW

Will this year bring a white Christmas to Texas parks?

by Julia Jones





TPWD

All those holiday songs about snow — why does this beautiful, gentle gift from the sky elude us here in Texas? We're always dreaming of a white Christmas, but it rarely happens. Sometimes, there's magic, and we get to see our landscapes blanketed in white. The best chances of snow occur in West Texas and the Panhandle.

↑ DAVIS MOUNTAINS STATE PARK AND INDIAN LODGE

This West Texas park sits at more than 5,000 feet above sea level. Because of the higher elevation, it is cooler and wetter than the surrounding desert. The Davis Mountains range contains some of the highest mountains in the state.

← CAPROCK CANYONS STATE PARK

Caprock Canyons sees snow more often than most of Texas and has the added allure of the Texas State Bison Herd. They're sure to look majestic in a wintry setting.

PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK

Head to the northernmost park in Texas, where the winter low temperature is frequently in the 20s. The red-skirted walls of Palo Duro Canyon are even more spectacular when dusted in sugary snow. Nearby Amarillo receives an average 17.8 inches of snow every year.


FRANKLIN MOUNTAINS STATE PARK

Elevation is the key here in one of the largest urban parks in the nation, enclosed in El Paso's city limits. Park headquarters are at 4,750 feet, with the highest peak reaching 7,192 feet, sometimes topped with snow.

BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK

Snow in the Big Bend is rare but not impossible. Check the park's higher elevations; areas above 3,500 feet are sprinkled a couple of times a year.

CHASE FOUNTAIN | TPWD



A rare dusting of snow coats the ground on a winter day at this Hill Country state park. The park is named for a unique feature of its river as water flows over stairsteps of limestone. The river's name comes from a Spanish term for the flint rocks that characterize the riverbed.

If you recognize this site, 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 Chase Fountain
TOOLS: Nikon D300 camera, Nikkor 17-55mm f/2.8 lens, f/16 at 1/60th of a second, ISO 100



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