



TEXAS
**parks &
wildlife**

MARCH 2020



Guess whooooo?!
**Discover Texas'
parliament
of owls**

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BIRDING'S TAILGATE PARTY

Texas' Big Sit is fun for all, not just hard-core birders.

STRIPER FISHING

Anglers' gripe about Lake Texoma? Too many big fish.

TROPICAL TRAVELS

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MARCH 2020

VOLUME 78 • NUMBER 2

Delaney Kempf and other Texas bird watchers participate each year in the Big Sit category of the Great Texas Birding Classic.

 DELANEY KEMPF



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Size Matters

Anglers have one complaint about Lake Texoma: too many big fish.

by **Larry D. Hodge**

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Birding's Tailgate Party

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Whooo Gives a Hoot?

Texas' 17 species of owls provide nocturnal pest control.

by **Cliff Shackelford**

ON THE COVER: Burrowing owls — small owls with long legs — often perch on fence posts while hunting prey.  Lee Hoy

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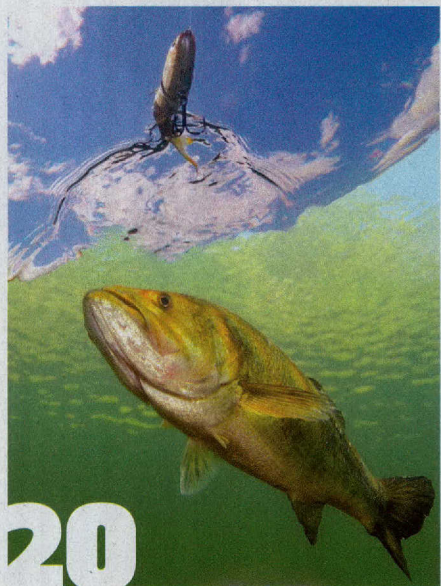
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TRAIL MIX

Texas state parks offer **bounteous blooms** away from busy highways. Hike the **Island Trail** at Martin Dies Jr. State Park. State parks enlist **artists** to help celebrate anniversary. Anglers reel in **record-setting fish**. Butterflies and birds flock to the **hummingbird bush**. Is that a **wasp, bee or hornet?**



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GOVERNOR OF TEXAS
Greg Abbott

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FROM THE EDITOR

“**SPRINGTIME IS** the land awakening. The March winds are the morning yawn,” writes Southern humorist Lewis Grizzard. You can feel it in your bones, right? That primal urge to dash out the door into the sunshine, still cooled by sweet breezes and perfumed with the scent of new blooms. We’re eager to dust off our fishing gear, unearth the picnic basket and air up the bicycle tires. The comfort of winter’s cozy couch is now abandoned and forgotten.

Spring fever hits our wild friends as well, and we delight in sightings of spotted fawns and tiny bunnies and newly constructed nests holding the promise of cardinal babies. We dig our hands into the rich earth and plunge seeds and sprouts into it, the promise of our future feasting. When a sudden shower drives us reluctantly indoors, we get out the maps and guides and plan warm weather adventures for spring break and summer vacation, the promise of future fun.

Late evening light lingers and invites us to spend more evenings outdoors, perhaps joined by an owl hooting in a nearby tree, adding to the ethereal symphony of the night, before they are drowned out by the summer cicada

chorale. Read about Texas owls (Page 42) from our favorite ornithologist, Cliff Shackelford, who helps us distinguish the common from the rare. And speaking of birds, start your plans to see even more birds, as many as you can count, during the upcoming Big Sit (Page 36), also known as the 5K of birding. Form a team of friends and spend congenial hours looking through binoculars and guides. Don’t forget the breakfast tacos!

Larry Hodge takes us fishing at Lake Texoma (Page 30), where they have the enviable “problem” of too many big stripers. With a hot tip like that, we expect Highway 75 to be jammed with trucks and boats very soon. Join the fun at the Oklahoma border or find your own hot spot with the help of Nice Catch (Page 20), our monthly guide to “what’s hot” in angling.

Travel with us to South Padre, wander off to visit musical Texas and learn about Texas’ earliest female botanists, then get outside and enjoy the weather!

Louie Bond

Louie Bond, Editor

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RULES FOR DRONES

Regarding the article “A View From Above” (December 2019) and the wonderful aerial photos of our state parks, I have a concern about the legality of flying drones within Texas state parks. With no mention of any laws, readers may assume it is OK to take their drone into a state park and fly it.

Texas law prohibits flying a drone within a state park unless the drone operator has obtained a permit from the park superintendent (only Lake Whitney and San Angelo state parks have designated areas for flying drones). Federal law prohibits flying of drones within any national park. The reason for these federal and state restrictions is the adverse effect the flying of unmanned aircraft may have over people and animals, including safety of visitors, migratory habits of animals and the peaceful enjoyment of being in the park.

TOMMY HASTINGS
Trinity

EAST TEXAS MEMORIES

I just finished reading your December 2019 issue. In it were several good articles, especially the one about the small town of Cushing, by Kathryn Hunter (“East Texas’ Lost History”). I grew up in another small East Texas town, Huntington, and had many similar experiences. It brought back many fond memories of growing up and visiting my grandparents’ small farm a few miles out of town.

My sister Winnie Graham was enamored enough by that lifestyle that she put her memories in writing and had them published as *Under the Blackgum Tree*.

FRED GRAHAM
Corpus Christi

ON THE HUNT FOR RED WOLVES

I read with interest your article about the red wolves in Texas (“Mystery

Canines of Galveston Island,” December 2019). As a biology major at Austin College from 1968-1972, I had the privilege of assisting Howard McCarley with his research on the red wolf in Texas. McCarley would take students to remote rural locations and would spend the night recording calls from coyotes and other canines and compare the recordings to those of red wolves. He hoped this might provide information about red wolf populations in Texas.

We also would collect skulls from coyotes for comparison with red wolf skulls to see if there were any common characteristics that might indicate red wolf genetics.

Thanks for the memories!

WAYNE M. PARKS
Waco

WHERE IN TEXAS?



A rainbow splashed across the West Texas sky in our January/February Where in Texas? photo. Readers correctly guessed it was Davis Mountains State Park — Skyline Drive, to be exact. Anthony Alvarado definitely knew the spot. He got married there in October (photo above). A little rain got the bride and groom wet, but they were then treated to a double rainbow. “How about this for a rainbow?” Anthony says. Reader Annie Le Norman of Tyler says she has spent many weekends camping at the park. “It is a beautiful area,” she says. “Love it!”

AN INSPIRING STORY OF ONE OF THE MOST UNLIKELY YET INFLUENTIAL AND
POLITICALLY POWERFUL WOMEN OF THE 17TH CENTURY.

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PARK SPOTLIGHT

Parks in Bloom

Texas state parks offer a chance to enjoy bounteous blooms away from busy highways.

Spectacular displays of blue, pink, red and yellow will soon be blanketing the state. Texas state parks offer picturesque settings for family photos of this year's parade of wildflowers away from busy roadways.

Texas is home to nearly 6,000 species of plants; spring rains spur a colorful wildflower explosion from spring through late fall. Eighty-eight Texas state parks, stretching across the state from the mountains of West Texas to the wetlands in the east, offer some of the best and safest places to view and photograph nature's bounty of wildflowers, blooming shrubs and trees.

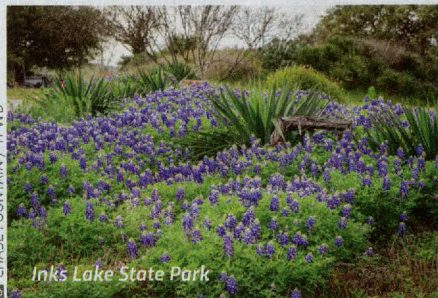
Park visitors should always remember to exercise caution when taking wildflower photos. Use your vehicle's emergency flashers on busy roadways and be mindful of disturbing wildlife resting or hiding in the vegetation, such as nesting birds. Avoid undesirable encounters with venomous snakes and fire ants.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Flickr page is regularly updated with wildflower sightings from state parks and wildlife management areas across the state, including Franklin Mountains State Park, Government Canyon State Natural Area and Matador Wildlife Management Area.

Park visitors can share their wildflower pictures — and see what's blooming around the state — on TPWD Instagram, Facebook and Twitter accounts.



South Llano River State Park



CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

Inks Lake State Park



TPWD

Chaparral WMA



EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD

Caddo Lake State Park

In **CENTRAL TEXAS**, common wildflower sightings include the iconic bluebonnet, Texas star, blue sage, Indian blanket, Mexican hat, winecup, perfume ball, antelope horn milkweed, sundrop and white rain lily, to name just a few.

The **COASTAL TEXAS PRAIRIES, BARRIER ISLANDS AND SOUTH TEXAS SAND SHEET** can expect many types of flowers, including the prairie nymph, betony-leaf mistflower, silverleaf sunflower, seaside goldenrod, woolly white, longbract wild indigo, coralbean, Rio Grande greenthread, saltmarsh mallow, beach morning glory and side-cluster milkweed.

The Pineywoods' hardwood slopes and bottomland forest in **EAST TEXAS** provide a home for trout lilies, violets, wisteria, flowering dogwood, yellow jasmine, jack-in-the-pulpit, hawthorn, Canada garlic and blue iris. Upland and wetland pine savannas are usually dominated by old plainsman, candy root, prairie snoutbean, Queen's delight, false dragonhead, Carolina larkspur, bullnettle and toad flax.



TIM FITZHARRIS / MINDEN PICTURES



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

MARCH 1-7

Trailer camera; mapping habitats; traveling photographer; Nueces River.

MARCH 8-14

Water bugs; Lake Colorado City State Park; next generation ranchers.

MARCH 15-21

Sea Rim State Park; tracking dinosaur tracks; mule deer; dogwoods bloom.



MARCH 22-29

Chicken turtle punk; Lake Mineral Wells State Park; Goliad illumination.



TPWD

Cedar Hill State Park



EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD

Big Bend Ranch State Park

In **NORTH TEXAS**, the landscape can be generous with brown-eyed Susan, American basket-flower, Barbara's buttons, American wild carrot, showy evening primrose, Texas prairie parsley, buttercups, snakeherb and green milkweeds.

The Big Bend region of **WEST TEXAS** can display several crinklemat species, yerba raton, dogweed, paperflower, limoncillo, several species of salvias, purple woolly locoweed, lechuguilla, fragrant yellow huisache, cenizo, yuccas and many cactus species along the Rio Grande's River Road and at Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park.

On the Podcast



Our podcast takes listeners to the great Texas outdoors. Find episodes on Guadalupe bass, turkeys, pollinators and more. New episodes return in April. Download at underthetexas.org or major podcast platforms.

On the Blog

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

TAKE A HIKE

Island Trail

Martin Dies Jr. State Park



DISTANCE
0.75 Miles



DIFFICULTY LEVEL
★★★★☆



APPROXIMATE TIME
30 minutes

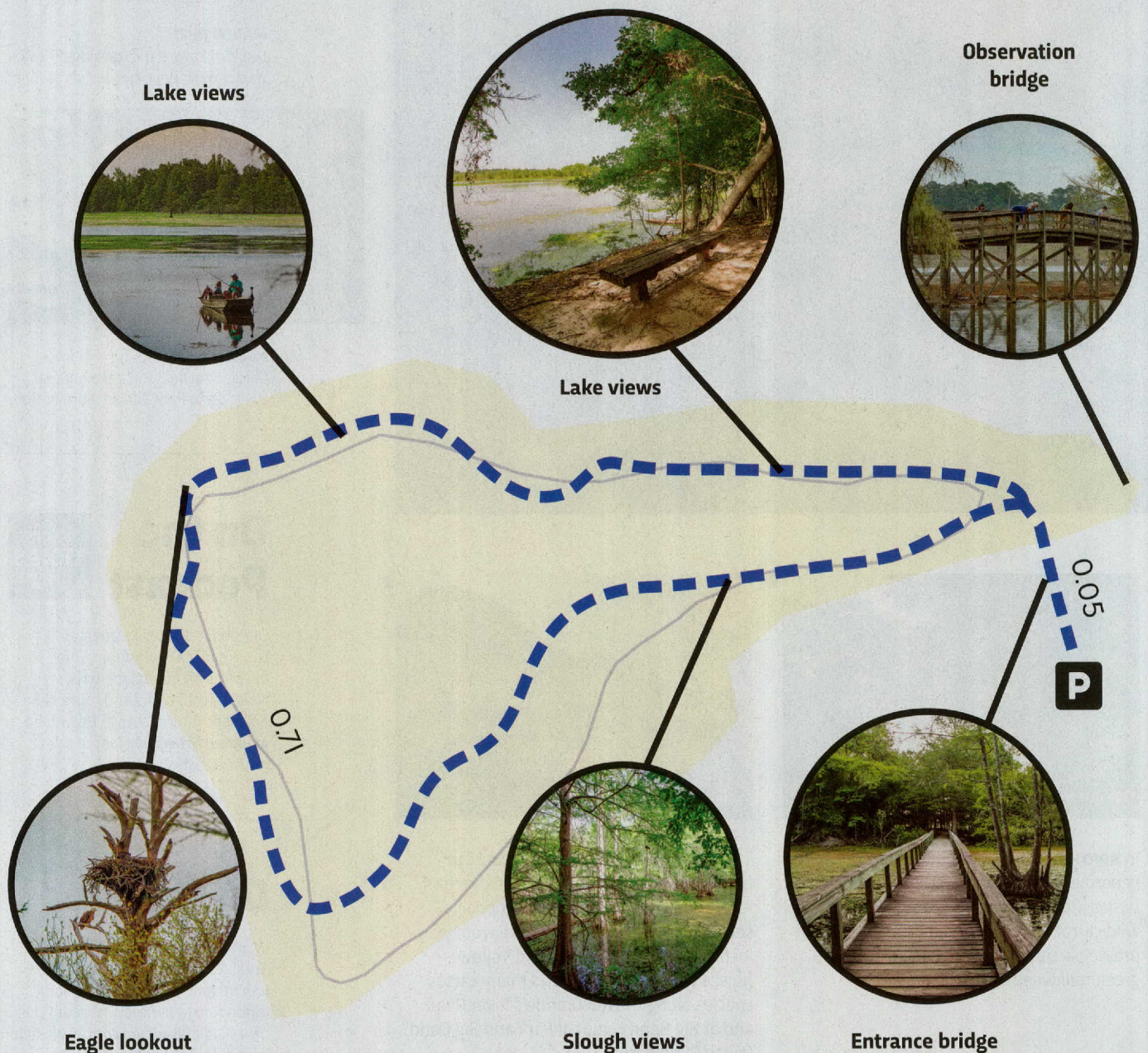
The Island Trail, which circumnavigates a small island on the north side of Martin Dies Jr. State Park, is a naturalist's delight, especially for those who love birds and plants. Wild and diverse habitats cover the island, offering explorations of the lake, sloughs and forest that define the park, at the edge of the Big Thicket in East Texas. An extraordinary web of life exists here.

"It's one of my favorite trails and the trail where I do most of my interpretive walks.

It's very scenic," says park interpretive specialist Amy Kocurek. "It's surrounded by water, there are huge cypress trees, and you can see all kinds of water birds such as egrets and herons."

How often do you get to hike around an island? Not very often, and that by itself holds special appeal. A bridge connects the Walnut Slough Day Use Area to the trail. From there, it's a short distance to the park's larger Observation Bridge, a popular spot for bird watching or fishing.

The north side of the island provides views of B.A. Steinhagen Lake and wetlands, with chances to see the many water birds that call the place home. The island's trees harbor woodpeckers and other forest birds. The south side of the island is bordered by a slough, a narrow channel of water where bald cypress trees grow (alligators may be present). The northwest point of the island offers a rare opportunity to see nesting bald eagles in the distance (bring binoculars or a spotting scope).



TOP ROW SONJA SOMMERFELD / TPWD X 2; CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD; BOTTOM ROW CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD; SONJA SOMMERFELD / TPWD X 2

VISIT CORPUS CHRISTI

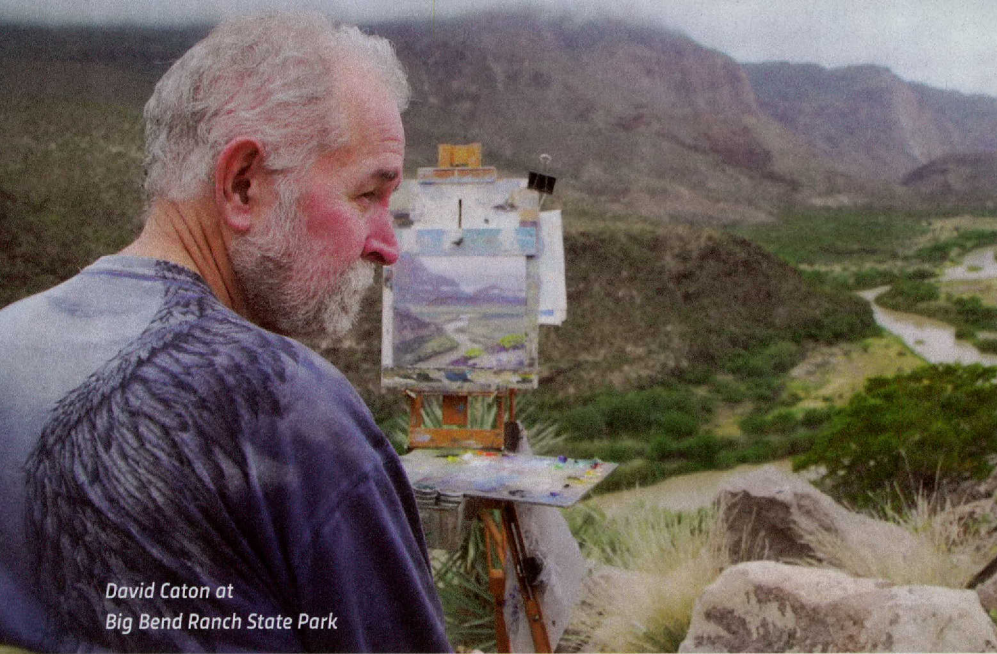
GO cars

Did you know that Corpus Christi has more than 60 miles of golf cart-friendly beaches? (Or gulf carts, as we like to call them!)

Get away to the Coastal Bend and drive, ride, or stroll your way along the sand and waves to find the perfect spot. For more action, head downtown to the **Texas State Aquarium's** award-winning exhibits and visit the flight deck on the **USS Lexington**. Wrap up the day with some straight-from-the-Gulf shrimp. See you soon! *memories made here*

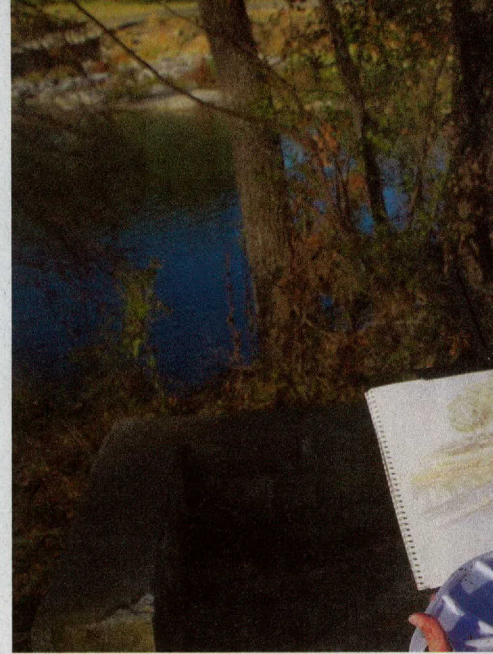


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David Caton at
Big Bend Ranch State Park

ALAN FISHER / TPWD; COURTESY CLEMENTE GUZMAN



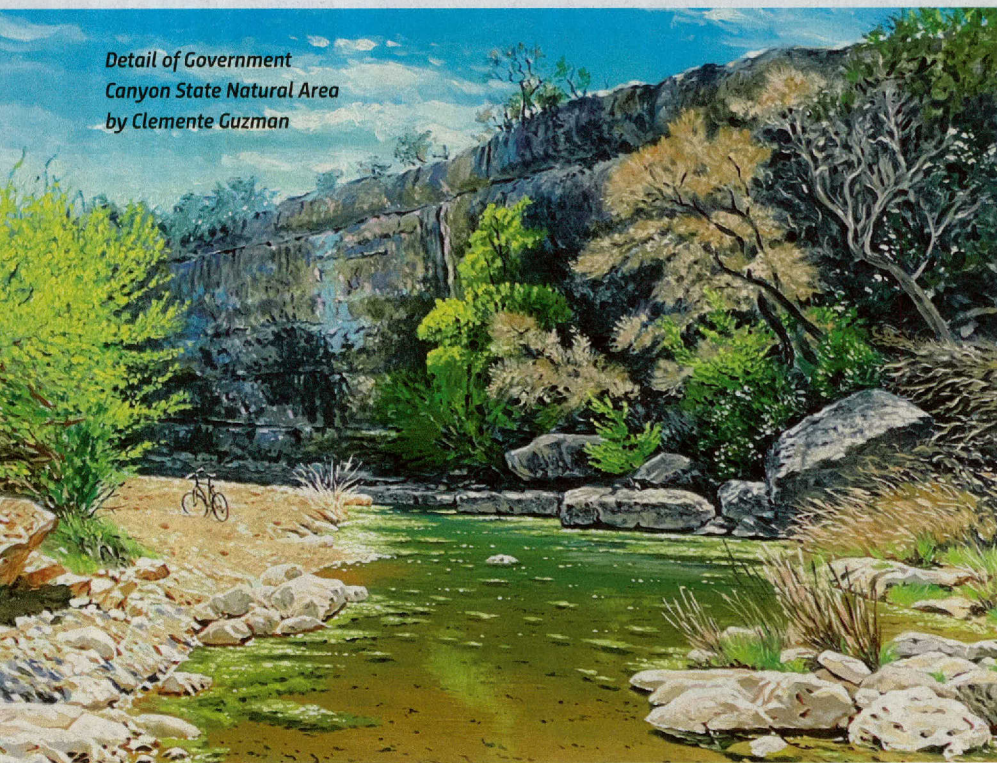
PARKS

State Parks Enlist Artists to Help Celebrate Anniversary

The 100th anniversary of the Texas state park system is coming in 2023, and the planned celebration will feature an artistic component.

Thirty artists have been chosen to paint at least 60 state parks. Parks such as Caddo Lake, Brazos Bend, Galveston Island and Palo Duro Canyon will get the artistic treatment, along with future parks such as Chinati Mountains and Palo Pinto Mountains.

The list of notable Texas landscape artists who have signed on to the project include Billy Hassell of Fort Worth, Randy Bacon of Albany, Mary Baxter of Marfa, David Caton of Utopia,



Detail of Government
Canyon State Natural Area
by Clemente Guzman

FISHING

Anglers Reel in Record-Setting Fish in 2019

Since 1971, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Angler Recognition Program has recognized fishing excellence by maintaining the fish record lists for all public and private water bodies across the state. Participation in the program has

continued to grow every year, and 2019 was no exception with anglers receiving more than 638 official awards for their big fish.

"With 47 new state fishing records and 434 new water-body records set at lakes, rivers and bays across the state, it's clear that 2019 was a great year for fishing in Texas," says Ron Smith, TPWD Angler Recognition Program director. "In addition to providing bragging rights and a lifetime of memories for anglers, these achievements showcase the world-class fishing opportunities that can be found in every part of Texas."

Junior anglers under 17 set 14 state records and 108 water-body records in 2019. A few notable junior records include the junior state freshwater rod and reel record largemouth bass caught by Gavin Mikeska at Oak Creek Lake on April 20; the junior state freshwater rod and reel record blue catfish caught by Brayden Rogers at Lake Tawakoni on March 16; and the junior state saltwater rod and reel record bull shark caught by Johnny Garner in the Gulf of Mexico on Jan. 25.

All-ages anglers set 33 state records and 326 water-body records in 2019. Some notable all-ages records include the state



Fidencio Duran at
LBJ State Park

Noe Perez of Corpus Christi, former TPWD artist Clemente Guzman of San Antonio and Margie Crisp and William Montgomery of Elgin.

The paintings will go on exhibit in 2023 at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin, the Witte Museum in San Antonio and the Houston Museum of Natural Science. They will also be featured in a book to be published by Texas A&M Press.

Twenty-five percent of the profits from the sale of the paintings will go to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation.

"There's a wonderful legacy of art in support of the environment," says Andy Sansom, former executive director of TPWD who is helping spearhead the project for Texas A&M Press. "This is a stunning example of that. Beyond the dollars and cents, it's inspirational."

Some artists have begun their paintings, and some are still formulating their artistic visions.

"I love the state park centennial painting idea, and I'm excited about my two parks — South Llano River State Park and Franklin Mountains State Park," says Margie Crisp. "We want the project to be a roaring success."

freshwater fly fishing record Alabama bass caught by Smith Swinburn at Lake Alan Henry on April 5; the state freshwater fly fishing record bowfin caught by Stavros Cotsoradis at Lake Conroe on June 1; the state saltwater fly fishing record red drum caught by Candace Kern in Matagorda Bay on Aug. 14; the state saltwater rod and reel record silk snapper caught by Tyler Young in the Gulf of Mexico on July 6; and the state saltwater rod and reel record scamp caught by Brice Sanchez in the Gulf of Mexico on Jan. 6.

Find out more at www.tpwd.texas.gov/fishawards.

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COURTESY STEPHANIE BRUNDAGE / LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDFLOWER CENTER

When you think about planting to attract pollinators, it's all about color and shape. Bees seem to be attracted to blues and violets, while butterflies are more drawn to reds, oranges and yellows. Some creatures collect pollen on their bodies, so they need a wide-open flower to roll around in. Flowers with small, tubular centers appeal to moths and butterflies with long, thin tongues. Sturdier blooms with deep tubes attract hummingbirds.

Flame acanthus is known by many names: Wright's desert honeysuckle, Wright acanthus, Mexican flame and Texas firecracker plant. The nickname that provides a good clue to this plant is hummingbird bush, because these red-orange tubular flowers are favorites of those jeweled fliers. (The name Wright honors 19th-century botanist Charles Wright, who collected extensively in Texas.)

This prolific bloomer bursts forth during summer through the first frost across most of the state up to Dallas, though only the roots survive the frost that far north. It's both drought- and deer-tolerant. Those who aren't lucky enough to enjoy native sprouting can plant their own.

Flame acanthus doesn't mind being tamed a bit, so cut it back in early spring and you'll have a low, dense hedge, if you prefer. Otherwise, it grows to 3 or 4 feet in height and width. This plant's not picky about soil type or water and enjoys a lot of sun.

This profuse bloomer (especially after a rain) sends out retinaculum (hooked capsules attached to seeds for propagation) each fall. The capsule breaks open and flings the seeds many feet away. Soon, your yard will be filled with these slender, reddish-orange flowers, along with happy hummingbirds. Other birds and butterflies (especially the crimson patch and the Texan crescentspot) love them, too.

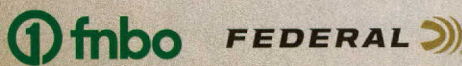


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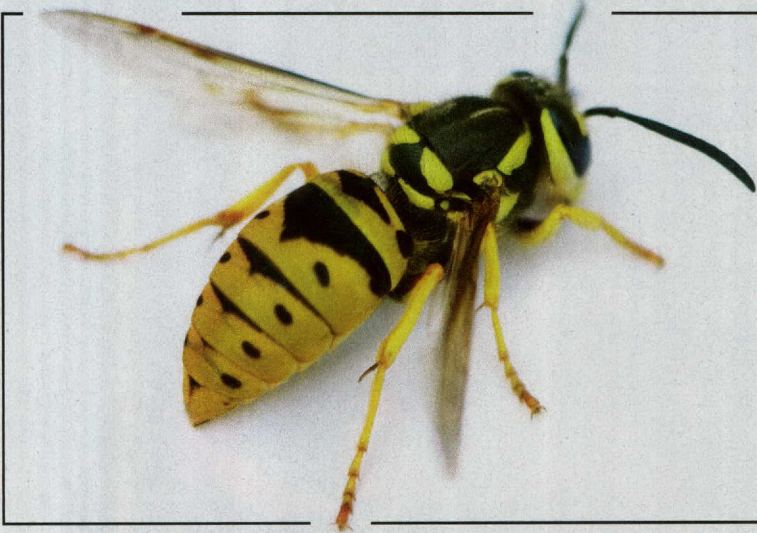


WILDLIFE

Wasp, Bee or Hornet

While we focus on filling our yards with pollinator plants, it's good to know who's buzzing around and occasionally giving us a sting. No more guessing; here are some characteristics to help you distinguish wasps, bees and hornets, all of which belong to the order Hymenoptera. Fun fact: A honeybee produces only 1/12 teaspoon of honey in its lifetime.

MELINDA FAWVER / DREAMSTIME.COM



WASP

- Smooth body, slender waist
- Waxy, cylindrical legs
- Smaller colonies
- Nest generally made from chewed wood and saliva
- Can sting multiple times, more likely to sting us than bees (only females sting)
- Prey on other insects

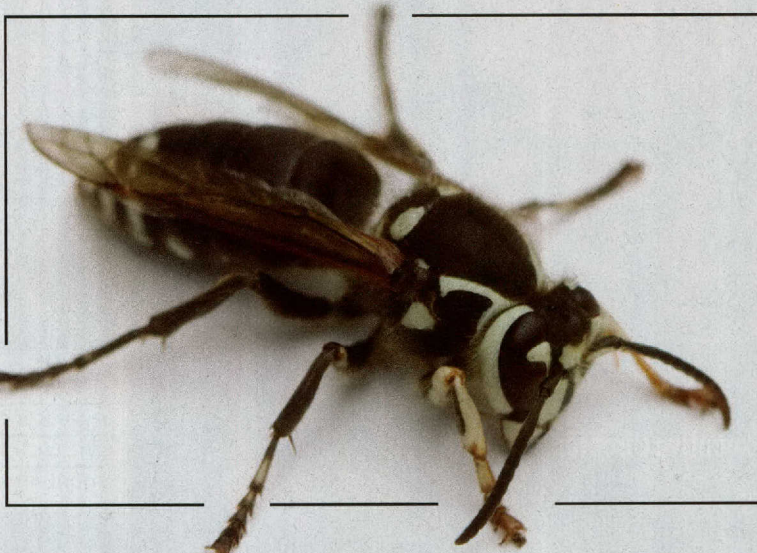
DANIEL PRUDEK / DREAMSTIME.COM



BEE

- Fuzzy, round, robust body
- Hairy, flat legs
- Big colonies
- Nest made from beeswax
- Honeybees have barbed stinger that sticks in flesh (die when they sting us)
- Interested mostly in pollen/nectar collection

MELINDA FAWVER / DREAMSTIME.COM



HORNET

- Actually a type of wasp
- Only one variety — the baldfaced hornet — known to exist in Texas
- Nests high in trees
- Term "hornet" often used incorrectly to describe other wasps
- Less aggressive than other wasps since their nests are more remote

SPRING ISN'T THE ONLY THING IN THE AIR.



Discover the hundreds of bird species that visit Texas each year.



BIRDING THE BORDER FESTIVAL APRIL 15 – 18, 2020

Join us in Val Verde County, Texas, for a birding experience that connects birders with local landowners! At the border of two countries and three ecoregions, you can seek golden-cheeked warblers one day and tropical parulas the next. The festival begins with a Kickoff Social full of local flavor. Then choose from guided birding tours on public and private lands in a variety of habitats, with seminars and a trade show during the heat of the day.



Del Rio Birding the Border
wildlife.tamu.edu/birding/birding-the-border/

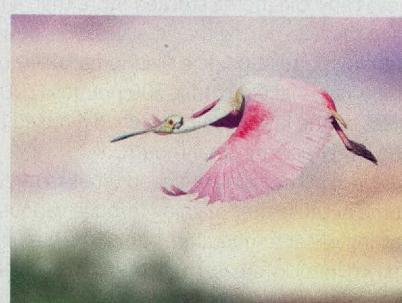


FEATHERFEST APRIL 16 – 19, 2020

Galveston is one of the top locations in the country for birding because it hosts a wide variety of habitats in a small geographical area where some 300 species make their permanent or temporary home throughout the year. Mark your calendar now to attend the largest birding festival on the Upper Texas Coast, and the only one with a dedicated nature photography track!



Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council
GalvestonFeatherFest.com



BIRDIEST FESTIVAL IN AMERICA APRIL 22 – 26, 2020

The 2020 Festival features keynote speaker David Sibley, guided field trips to regional birding hot spots and private ranches, Nature Photography, vendor trade-shows, bird walks, The Raptor Project presentations, and lots of South Texas hospitality. Last year (2019), birders spotted 262 species, showing why Corpus Christi was named the "Birdiest City in North America."



Corpus Christi
BirdiestFestival.org

Spring Spawn

Warmer temps beckon, as does the hunt for bass and crappie.

By Greg Cummings,
Randy Brudnicki and
Dusty McDonald



COURTESY TXDOT

Springtime usually means spawning largemouth bass for anglers in Texas, but it's a great time to target their bronze cousins, too. **Lake Texoma**, on the northern border, offers abundant numbers and trophy-sized smallmouth bass. The 75,000-acre reservoir contains deep water, rocky habitat and ample forage, creating perfect conditions for growing large bronzebacks.

Texas and Oklahoma stocked more than a million smallmouth bass in the lake during the '80s and '90s; now, smallies have a self-sustaining population. The Oklahoma lake record is 78 pounds (2003), and the Texas lake record is 70.6 pounds (2006). Bass tournament anglers on the lake usually weigh in a mixed bag of black bass; some of the larger fish are smallmouth.

March, April and May are good times to target smallmouth bass on Texoma because they're going through various stages of spawning. Warming water temperatures bring the bass from their winter haunts to spawn in rocky areas. They relate to relatively shallow gravel substrate near boulders and riprap (rocky material placed along shorelines), accessible to watercraft and bank anglers. Fishing can be good through fall, when water temperatures start dropping.

The lower third of the lake is best for smallmouths. Anglers should look for hard bottom, clear water and relatively shallow water (8 feet or less). Rocky shorelines, riprap, bluffs, gravel banks, sandy beaches with scattered rock, sand dropoffs, points and offshore rocky humps are key areas to target.

Areas on the lake to find these features include Eisenhower State Park, Denison Dam, West Burns Run, the shoreline between Caney and Soldier Creeks and up the Washita River arm to Willow Springs. Marinas and docks can be good places to find smallmouths, too, since they provide shade, overhead cover and submerged objects. Many smallmouths caught in tournaments are released near marinas.

Crawfish and shad imitation lures are best for targeting smallmouths. Jerkbait, crankbait, skirted jigs, Carolina rigs, tube jigs, grubs, swim baits, flukes, drop shots, spinner baits, shaky heads and Alabama rigs are typical options for spring smallmouth bass. Some nontraditional lures can be used, too. Sassy shads and spoons typically used for striped bass are good for catching smallmouth this time of year. Lighter line (8- to 12-pound test) should be used in the clear, open water. **GC**



TPWD

LAKE TEXANA SPRING CRAPPIE

Lake Texana is a hidden gem if you're on the hunt for crappie. Nestled in south-central Texas, just 20 miles north of Matagorda Bay and controlled by the Lavaca-Navidad River Authority, this water-supply lake can offer a freshwater adventure to folks accustomed to bay fishing. Crappie have always been a popular pursuit around the north side of the lake, where submerged timber is plentiful; the southern portion of the lake has been devoid of habitat. A recent collaborative effort between LNRA and TPWD resulted in the construction and deployment of 24 Georgia-style fish attractor structures situated in the lower half of the lake to expand fishing opportunities throughout the lake.

Fishing during the winter may offer some opportunities for crappie anglers in deeper water, but the spring season is the preferred time to harvest these fun-to-catch fish around their spawn. Keep in mind that this lake is muddy, mainly from its windswept position of north to south. Aim for days with low wind and be observant of submerged timber.

Find a map to locate these structures and other fish habitat structures across the state: tpwd.texas.gov/fishattractor. **DM**

ALSO BITING



COURTESY RONNIE KELLEY / CAP'N RONS GUIDE SERVICE

LAKE PALESTINE LARGEMOUTH BASS

"Winter fishing has been good on the south end, with water temps in the mid-50s and the water slightly stained," says Lake Palestine guide Ronnie Kelley (CapN Rons Guide Service). With warming spring temperatures, fishing is improving.

Kelley says to fish points with rock and brush on the south end. After locating baitfish, try jerkbaits, shaky heads and crankbaits. Boat houses in deeper water and brush can be good, as well. Fish those areas with a drop shot, jerkbait or jig.

The north end temps were a little cooler over winter, but warm quickly this time of year. Focus on the timber that lines the creek channel — the creek bends will be the primary spots. Spend time looking for baitfish. White/chartreuse spinner baits with big blades and a black/blue jig are commonly used. **RB**

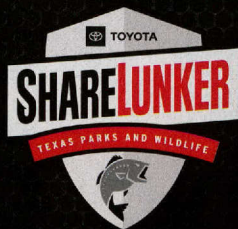


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WILD THING

Hiding in Plain Sight

The lesser-known round-tailed horned lizard uses camouflage to look like a rock.



By Charles Jacobi

A lizard seldom seen and sometimes sought after by enthusiasts, the round-tailed horned lizard is a lesser-known cousin of the Texas horned lizard that we all know and love. It's likely that if you've done some outdoor exploring in the Trans-Pecos, you've stepped right over one.

No surprise that this lizard's name comes from its tail, rounded on the end (with dark banding along its length). Up close, the tail easily distinguishes the round-tailed horned

lizard from our other two *Phrynosoma* lizards: the Texas horned lizard and the greater short-horned lizard. Its habitat can be described as desert-scrub or arid grasslands with sandy soils and lots of pebbles. The round-tailed horned lizard is diurnal (active during the day) and can be found in open flat areas in the spring and early summer. This lizard likes it warm, though when summer temperatures are too much to bear, they'll seek shady areas under cover.

The round-tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma modestum*) measures 2 to 6 inches long and varies in color. The base color can be light gray or brown, even a bleached yellow, with a pale underside. It lacks the enlarged scales that border the abdomen and dorsum like other *Phrynosoma*, and has four smaller, conspicuously aligned horns behind the head.

The most interesting thing about the round-tailed horned lizard? It utilizes



ANDREW MCINNIS

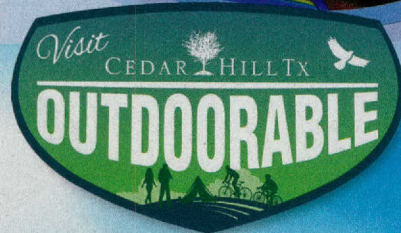
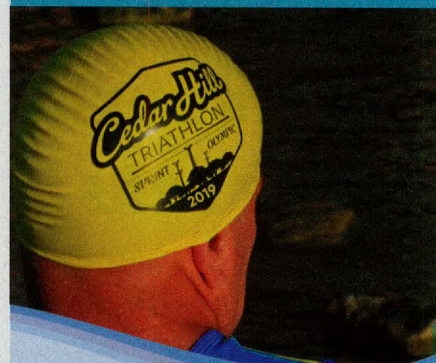
eucrepsis, or concealment through coloration or pattern, to appear as a stone or pebble. Behavioral studies show that round-tailed horned lizards flee from predators sooner in sandy areas compared to rocky ones, indicating the lizards may be aware they're more visible in these areas. The lizard relies on this amazing mimicry to avoid predation, while other lizards rely on speed and evasion.

Round-tailed horned lizards start their breeding season in spring, after their winter

emergence. Clutches of five to 12 eggs are laid in burrows excavated by the lizard. Females have been observed guarding these nests, butting and biting at predators that approach. Their diet consists primarily of ants, though they also consume beetles, termites and butterfly and moth larvae.

If you encounter a round-tailed horned lizard, submit your observations to the Herps of Texas Project on iNaturalist (www.inaturalist.org/projects/herps-of-texas).

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PICTURE THIS

Life Through a Clear Lens

Your camera lens is worth protecting. Here are steps you can take to keep it clean and safe.

by Earl Nottingham

BUTSAYAPICS | DREAMSTIME.COM



You spent a lot of money on that new, tack-sharp lens for your camera, and now you have a long-term investment. Chances are, the lens will outlast your current camera body and will be compatible with future camera bodies. As a delicate optical device, your lens deserves the same sense of care and protection that you would give your own eyes. Sadly, over time, most lenses are exposed to dust, grit, fingerprints, dings, drops and scratches. The old saying “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is especially true in the care of lenses because, with minimal prevention, your investment will perform flawlessly for years to come.

There are simple, inexpensive steps you can take to protect your lens. But first, you need to make sure your lens surfaces are clean. Always start by using a lens blower brush to gently blow and brush any loose particles off the surface. Avoid canned air products! If smudges or fingerprints remain they can gently be cleaned with a good quality lens cleaning cloth. Never use a shirt or other clothing — especially polyester cloth. Also avoid using solvents to clean a lens; they will deteriorate the delicate lens coatings. A gentle breath onto the lens followed by a lens cleaning cloth is usually all that is needed to get the job done.

Once clean, consider these items for lens protection. If possible, use them all.



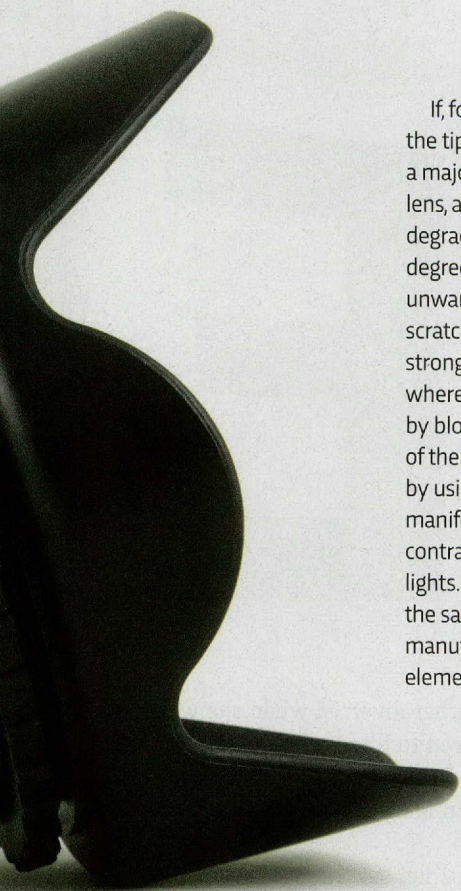
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LENS FILTER: Invest in a good quality clear or UV filter for protection. If the camera is dropped or hit, it is much cheaper to replace the filter than to have the lens repaired or replaced. Use the same cleaning technique for the filter that you would for the lens. Avoid using a polarizing filter for general protection.



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LENS CAPS (FRONT AND REAR): When not shooting, get in the habit of replacing the front lens cap, even over the filter. This will give an added level of protection and keep the lens filter clean. When storing a lens in a bag, always attach a rear lens cap. The rear lens element is just as important as the front.



If, for some reason, you have not employed the tips mentioned below and end up with a major scratch on the front or rear of the lens, all is not lost. Typically, a scratch will not degrade your photograph to a noticeable degree. However, you could notice some unwanted flare or reflection from a large scratch when shooting in the direction of a strong light source such as the sun. Here is where our friend the lens shade can help out by blocking the sun from the front element of the lens. Small scratches and rubs caused by using improper cleaning cloths usually manifest themselves by lowering image contrast and adding soft halos around lights. Fingerprints or smudges will have the same effect. As a last resort, most lens manufacturers can replace the front lens element — for a price. A filter is cheaper.



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LENS SHADE: One of the most underutilized protection methods is something you should be using at all times anyway — a lens shade. A shade does double duty by not only shading extraneous light off of the lens and filter but also absorbing the shock that would normally go through the camera and lens if the lens is dropped.



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LENS BAG/POUCH: Always try to store your camera and lenses in a good-quality padded camera bag or dedicated lens pouch when not in use. This helps avoid potential dings and drops while in the field. Protective bags and pouches come in all styles and sizes for any photo assignment.



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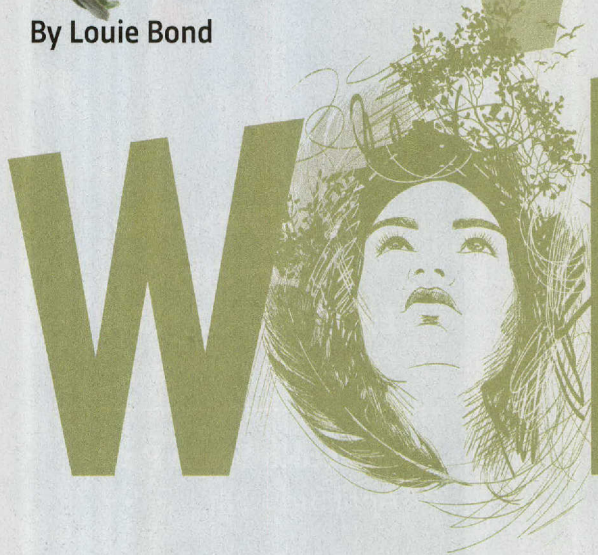
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Seeds of Knowledge:

Ynes Mexia and
Maude Young

By Louie Bond



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"In the scientific world of the day, there was still a strict division between 'botany' (the study of plants by men) and 'polite botany' (the study of plants by women) — except that one field was regarded with respect and the other was not — but still, Alma did not wish to be shrugged off as a mere polite botanist."
— Elizabeth Gilbert, *The Signature of All Things*

BLAZING HER OWN TRAIL

The path of a Texas "wild woman" of conservation is never easy and rarely linear, and Ynes Mexia exemplifies this notion. Though her family name graces a Texas town, her time here was limited, and she came to her passion for plants late in life, after two marriages and a nervous breakdown. Yet Ynes' achievements as one of the greatest botanists of her time and her family's long-lasting ties to Texas give us the right to brag.

Ynes' botanical treks through Latin America made her a legend. In her lifetime, she collected at least 150,000 plant specimens, discovering as many as 500 new species and two new genera. One genus, *Mexianthus*, a type of sunflower in Jalisco, was named after her, as were at least 50 species.

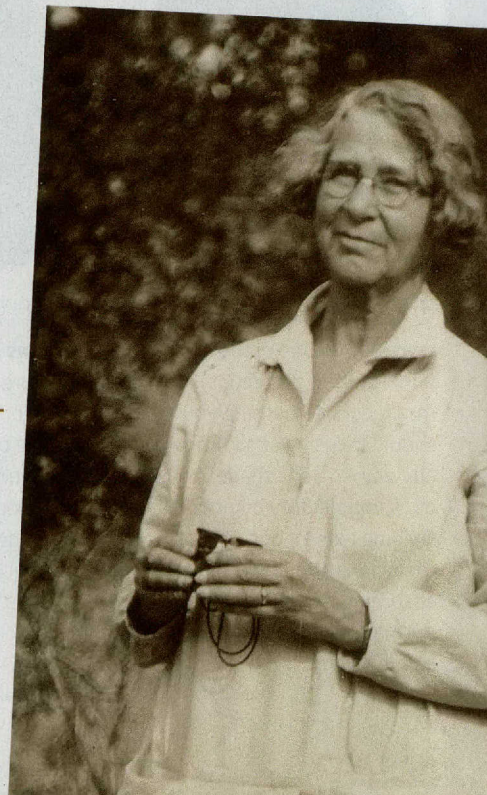
Much of Ynes' early life is shrouded in mystery, leaving us wondering how long she lived in Texas because accounts vary. But Ynes' ties to Texas run deep: The town of Mexia was named for the Mexia family, who in 1833 received an 11-league land grant that included the townsite. While Ynes was born in Washington, D.C., in 1870, her American mother

and Mexican diplomat father divorced when she was 3. Her mother moved the children to Limestone County, but it's unclear how long young Ynes lived and studied in Texas before attending school in Maryland and later following her father to Mexico City.

Ynes wanted to become a nun but changed her mind when her father threatened to cut her out of his will. After his death, she successfully fought her father's mistress in court for that inheritance, then married twice in rapid succession. Ynes' first husband died after a long illness; she divorced her second husband in 1908 after he mismanaged her poultry business in Mexico City.

In the following months, she fell apart both physically and emotionally, and moved to San Francisco to seek medical care. For the next decade or so, in her 40s, Ynes found solace in the beauty of Northern California's

Ynes Mexia, who didn't start formal study of botany until her 50s, became one of America's most accomplished plant collectors.



mountains, where she hiked on excursions with the Sierra Club. By 1921, at the ripe old age of 51, she enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley, older than the other students but cheerful, as tough Ynes didn't care what anyone thought of her.

Ynes soon took off on scientific expeditions, first to Mexico in 1925, where she quickly abandoned her classmates to work on her own. She stayed for two years, collecting 1,500 specimens and making a name for herself, never completing her degree. She spent the next decade traveling solo (at a time when women didn't do this) across North and South America. Clad in pants and astride a horse, she loved sleeping under the stars. She traveled by canoe on the Amazon to its source in the Andes and collected plants throughout Alaska.

Photos from those times show daring Ynes in action: legs dangling over the rim of the Grand Canyon, cross-country skiing in a long dress and tiptoeing across a log spanning a chasm. These adventures, along with the serenity of solitude in the wilderness, finally healed Ynes' broken spirit. She became ever more bold and fearless, totally dedicated to her passion, unconcerned about breaking society's norms.

"A well-known collector and explorer stated very positively that 'it was impossible for a woman to travel alone in Latin America,'" Ynes wrote. "I decided that if I wanted to become better acquainted with the South American Continent, the best way would be to make my way right across it. Well, why not?"

A mid-1930s Ecuadorian trip led Ynes on a mission to find a tall tree, the wax palm, that tolerated extreme cold and thrived at high elevations. U.S. biologists needed a specimen, and Ynes was determined to bring one back. The trip's challenges included the ingestion of poisonous berries (which the indigenous people helped her bring back up with a chicken feather down the throat), earthquakes, terrible mud, steep ravines and more. Through it all, Ynes was content, collecting rare specimens and taking it all in stride. Her efforts paid off when she negotiated a hair-raising path and found herself face to face with her holy grail, the wax palm, its white trunk rising like a monument to her struggles.

"I photographed the great spathe and flower-cluster, so heavy the two men could hardly lift it; made measurements and notes; and took portions of the great arching fronds," she later wrote in the Sierra Club *Bulletin*. "Then we started on the long journey back, arriving after dark, very tired, very hot, very dirty, but very happy."

During a 1938 expedition to Mexico, Ynes fell ill; she was diagnosed with lung cancer and died a month later. She left much of her estate to environmental causes.

"All who knew Ynes Mexia could not fail to be impressed by her friendly, unassuming spirit," wrote William E. Colby in a Sierra Club memorial, "and by that rare courage which enabled her to travel, much of the time alone, in lands where few would dare to follow."

FLAGS AND FLOWERS

Texas' other noted 19th-century female botanist followed a more traditional route to her career than Ynes Mexia. But Maude Jeannie Young (born Matilda Jane Fuller) was also ahead of her time, serving as state botanist and publishing the first textbook on Texas botany.

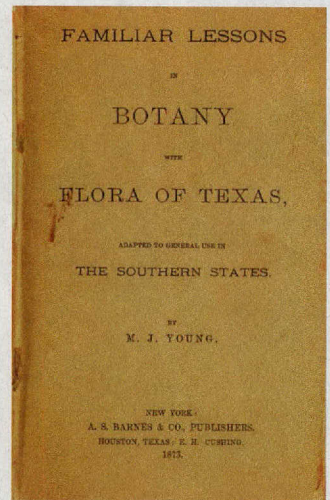
Born in North Carolina in 1826, Maude moved with her family to Houston in 1843 (her father became mayor) and married a doctor four years later. When he died after nine months, Maude moved back in with her family and delivered their only child, a son named for his late father.

During her early career, Maude wrote poems, fiction and essays that were published in the Houston paper and various magazines. The Civil War ignited Maude's patriotic fervor, changing her writing topics to those she deemed inspirational for Confederate soldiers, using pen names like *The Confederate Lady* and *The Soldier's Friend*.

Maude, who was related to Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg, also designed a flag for her son's brigade, Hood's Texas Brigade. Gen. John Bell Hood designated it as their official flag at the battle of Gettysburg.


After the war, Maude became interested in botany and taught in Houston's public and private schools. Natural history found its way into her writing, and she penned articles on singing mice and forest culture, encouraging conservation. She became one of the first Texans to write a textbook, *Familiar Lessons in Botany, with Flora of Texas* in 1873 as state botanist. The book was more than 600 pages long and was used by Texas students for years.

Maude died in 1882, and her son became the caretaker of her works. Sadly, her herbarium of ferns and flowering plants and her writings were all lost in the great Galveston hurricane of 1900.



Maude Jeannie Young was an author, teacher and botanist. She served as state botanist and published the first textbook on Texas botany.

In honor of the ratification of the 19th amendment 100 years ago, we'll spotlight 20 Wild Women of Texas Conservation during 2020.

 *We
will not
be
Tamed*



TEXAS IS BLESSED WITH A DIVERSITY OF WILDLIFE, WATERS AND ICONIC LANDSCAPES THAT ARE THE HEART AND SOUL OF OUR NATURAL HERITAGE. WILD THINGS AND WILD PLACES DEFINE WHO WE ARE AS TEXANS.

TAYLOR COLLINS' and **KATIE FORREST'S** life journey has taken them from restoring their bodies to restoring their land.

The once-vegetarian Austin couple went vegan about seven years ago after health issues got in the way of endurance sports training. When things got worse, they consulted a holistic health practitioner who urged them to add clean meat protein to their diet. They did, and things turned around almost immediately.

The entrepreneurs then founded EPIC Provisions, creating the world's first grass-fed meat, fruit, and nut bar. The company was immensely successful and they sold it to General Mills in 2016. Passionate about healthy land that rears healthy animals, Taylor and Katie invested some of their newfound wealth in a ranch near Fredericksburg to demonstrate the potential of regenerative agriculture.

The ranch soil was severely depleted after decades of extractive farming techniques, but after just a few short years of careful land management, the land at Roam Ranch is starting to heal.

"We look to Mother Nature for answers," said Taylor. "If we just create the stage for her to do what she's been doing for hundreds of thousands of years, the healing will happen and it can happen really fast. And that's what we're seeing out here, which is really encouraging."

Taylor and Katie are thrilled to join the ranks of TPWF's *We Will Not Be Tamed* ambassadors. Some of their most meaningful experiences together have happened in state and national parks.

"The park system has been critical for our development as individuals and as a couple," said Katie. "We were engaged at Davis Mountains State Park, and being in parks has been the most inspirational thing in our lives."

"That's where we learned to love nature and where we learned to appreciate wild places and habitats that were untouched by humans," agreed Taylor. "To be a part of a program that supports the things that we love and that had been so meaningful and impactful in our lives is a real honor."

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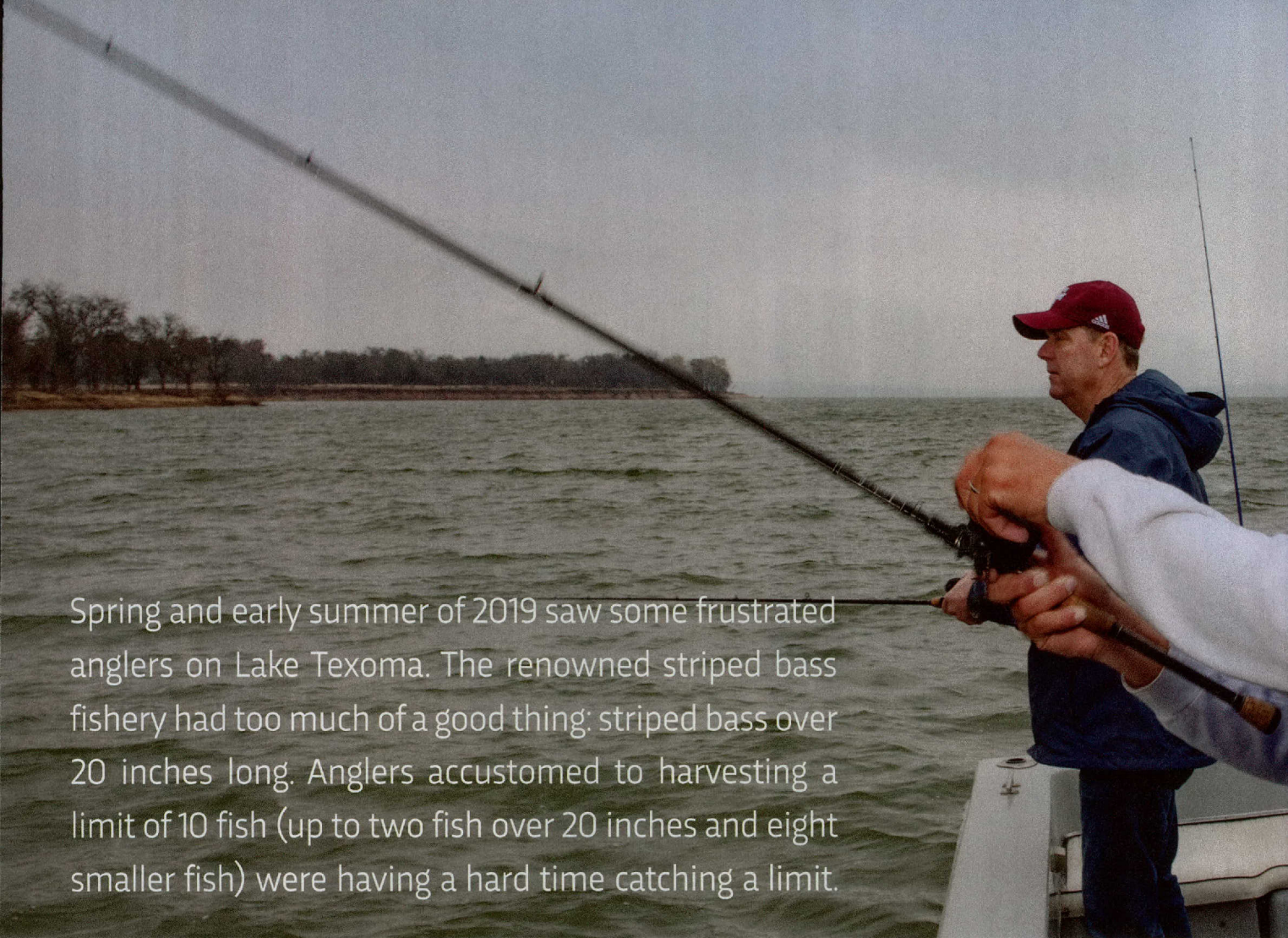


SIZES

ANGLERS HAVE ONLY ONE COMPLAINT ABOUT LAKE TEXOMA: TOO MANY BIG FISH.

WHAT MATTERS

by Larry D. Hodge • Photos by Chase Fountain



Spring and early summer of 2019 saw some frustrated anglers on Lake Texoma. The renowned striped bass fishery had too much of a good thing: striped bass over 20 inches long. Anglers accustomed to harvesting a limit of 10 fish (up to two fish over 20 inches and eight smaller fish) were having a hard time catching a limit.

Internet wisdom put the blame on the flooding of 2015, when rainfall sent water over the spillway. It seemed logical that the water took the striped bass with it. Not so.

"It was actually the 2014 drought that was the culprit," says Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Inland Fisheries biologist Dan Bennett. (Striped bass are a marine species that spawn in rivers — at Texoma, migrating as far as 60 to 90 miles up the Red and Washita rivers to do so. Striper eggs must remain suspended in flowing water for about 48 hours in order to hatch.) "The drought resulted in record low lake levels, and the Red River was cut off from the lake except through a narrow secondary channel. Fish from 2014 were virtually absent — we have caught only one fish from that year class in our gill nets."

Two-year-old fish make up the majority of the 16- to 19-inch fish that wind up on the cleaning table, so fishing was poor in 2016 and early 2017 — at least by Texoma standards. However, the flooding had an upside.

"Due to the flood of 2015 and high inflows in 2016, we had some particularly good spawns those years, and we also saw record densities of shad in the lake," Bennett says. "Without competition for forage from older 2014 fish, growth rates of the 2015 and 2016 fish were tremendous. We are now seeing many fish caught in the 10- to 20-pound range from those years. Those fish reached the 20-inch mark so quickly, anglers and guides are struggling to find the 'box' fish to fill out their 10-fish bag."

Zoe Ann Stinchcomb and I join Striper Express guide Chris Carey to sample this upside-down fishery. Carey has been guiding on Texoma for 26 years, and it's an understatement to say he knows the lake and where to find fish better than almost anybody. He cranks the 300-horsepower Yamaha four-stroke and heads across the lake, not even bothering to turn on the navigation system. He's heading for a place where he's been catching fish, but what he's looking for is birds.

Shad tend to congregate in large

numbers near the shore in early morning, and concentrations of herons, egrets and gulls are a sign that feeding stripers are pushing shad into the shallows along the bank. Stripers are transient opportunists, like a school of hungry teenagers at a food court, and during feeding frenzies they will bite almost anything they see. Topwater lures like the Cordell pencil poppers favored by Carey will catch fish almost every cast.

Carey soon spots what he's looking for, and as he brings the boat close, we can see stripers breaking the surface as they feed. The school is moving parallel to the shore almost as fast as a person can run, and Carey positions us ahead of them and hands us rods. As soon as our lures hit the water, all three of us hook up. Zoe Ann's fish is 28 inches, and Carey and I bring in ones three or four inches shorter — all "overs," as 20-inch or longer fish are known.

By the time high-fives and pictures are done, it's over. Topwater fishing is exciting, but as soon as the sun climbs a



Chris Carey of Striper Express guides clients on Lake Texoma.



little over the horizon, shad go to deeper water and the stripers follow. Now the catching is over and the fishing begins.

Carey turns on the fish finder and takes us to one underwater hump and point after another, looking for fish holding near the bottom. We trade our pencil poppers for soft plastic swim baits and try to tempt the fish to bite. They're not having it, despite Carey's coaxing.

"Come on, striper; come on, baby," he pleads. When that doesn't work, he resorts to trash-talking. "You're not big enough, striper."

My rod bends. It seems the stripers are listening, but it's only a catfish. Carey points to the fish finder.

"Stripers layered on the bottom in 19 to 20 feet of water. It should be a no-brainer," he laments.

We can see fish chasing our baits, but they just aren't biting. Like the shad, we decide to get out of the sun.

Come January, we'll be back. The fish that eluded us today will be six months fatter and easier to find.

"In winter the fish are structure-oriented, and we run a route," says Bill Carey, Chris' dad. With more than 50 years of experience on Texoma, the Careys know where the fish will be and how to catch them.

"In winter it's all bucktail jigs and Roadrunners," Chris Carey says. "I also like spinner heads, green with a fluke, that run along the bottom kicking up a trail of mud."

Stripers think it's a shad and ... *bam!*

As exciting as the summer topwater fishing is, winter fishing may actually be better.

"We have twice the typical number of stripers in the lake right now," Bennett said last summer, "and they have eaten themselves out of food and are skinny. We are just now seeing the shad numbers bounce back after the May spawn, and the stripers should fatten up quickly. Barring a drought with severe high temperatures this summer that could result in some bigger fish dying, we should make it into the fall and winter with a good number of

fish in the 15-pound range."

If your bucket list includes catching a 15-pound striper, 2020 is your year.

The striper fishing on Lake Texoma is no accident. It's the result of many years of cooperation between Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. The two agencies jointly manage the lake, which the two states share.

"The Red River channel is considered the state line," Bennett says. "We partner with the ODWC to conduct a striped bass gill-net survey each February. This survey is done using nets set overnight in the same 30 sites and has been done since 1993. We pool the data to give us a very precise picture of the population. This gives us an idea about the number of fish in each size range, as well as the general health of those fish. Some years we also do an extensive age and growth analysis to determine what year classes are most prevalent and how long it took those fish to get to certain sizes. It typically takes three to four years for a striper to reach



the 20-inch mark. Following the 2015 flood, stripers have been reaching that length a year faster than normal."

As mentioned earlier, striped bass are a marine (saltwater) species. So how did they wind up in Lake Texoma? Therein lies a fish story.

Stripers were so abundant along the East Coast of the United States in colonial times that they were harvested by the thousands and used for fertilizer as well as food, helping the early colonists survive. Captain John Smith of Pocahontas fame wrote in 1614 that stripers were caught in fish traps in such numbers that it seemed possible to walk across a river on their backs without getting his feet wet.

By 1639 the Massachusetts Colony banned their use for fertilizer due to overharvest. In 1670 Plymouth Colony funded the first public school in America using taxes on the striped bass fishery.

Stripers were assumed to be restricted to saltwater until the 1940s, when the Santee-Cooper Reservoir was impounded on the Cooper River in South Carolina, trapping stripers on a spawning run up the river. They were soon found to be reproducing, and fisheries biologists across the nation, including Texas and Oklahoma, began experimenting with stocking striped bass in new reservoirs being built following the drought of the 1950s.

Lake Texoma was one of the lucky lakes to be stocked, and it has an advantage over many other lakes: It has enough river miles above the reservoir for the fish to ascend and spawn successfully. Oklahoma and Texas stocked more than 2 million striped bass into Texoma in the 1960s and 1970s. The population is now self-sustaining. However, that doesn't mean the fishery couldn't use a little help now and then, and that's the focus of a project currently underway.

The issue is the notoriously variable rainfall in the Texoma watershed. Drought and flood seem to be more the norm than "average" rainfall, and that plays havoc with streamflows and the

Bill Carey of Striper Express (left) has been finding fish at Lake Texoma for more than 30 years. Opposite page: Striped bass are a marine species but are able to reproduce at Texoma; guide Chris Carey seeks out different parts of the lake to see where the fish are biting; Carey promises "one more cast."

spawning runs.

“Since the early 2000s we have had five years with poor river flows and subsequent poor recruitment of striped bass, most recently 2011, 2013 and 2014,” Bennett says. “The high-catch-rate, high-harvest striped bass fishery on Texoma relies heavily on the typically most-abundant, 2-year-old class fish, so if we have poor river flows one spring, we are sure to have subpar fishing two years down the road.”

The catch (pun intended) is that poor recruitment doesn’t become obvious until it’s too late to do anything about it. Bennett hopes to change that.

“The goal of the research I’m currently doing is to determine hatch dates of juvenile striped bass from the Red and Washita rivers and correlate those hatch dates with river conditions at the time,” he explains. “There is a fairly narrow window when those fish hatch. This data, along with historical data on river conditions and our data on adult striped bass collected annually since 1993, will be used to develop a model to predict year-class strength by the river flows we observe in April and May each year.”

Bennett and his fisheries management crew use seines to collect juvenile striped bass each June and then spend hours peering through microscopes at 100X magnification to count daily (yes, daily) growth rings on the bass’s otoliths (ear bones). By counting backwards, they can determine what date the fish spawned.

“It’s pretty boring, tedious work,” Bennett says, but it’s essential. “If we observe poor conditions in the rivers one April and May, we can predict year-class strength, and it may be possible to supplement a poor year-class with fry or fingerlings produced by our hatcheries. We certainly will not be able to produce the numbers of young striped bass produced naturally during a good year, but we may be able to reduce the severity of a bad fishing season two years later. If we follow this plan, we will chemically mark the stocked fish so we can determine later just how much stocking contributed to the number of fish in the lake.”

The goal is to keep enough fish in the lake to keep everybody happy, whether they like big fish or little ones.



Larry Hodge enjoys fishing for stripers because they fight all the way to the boat.



Texas' Big Sit contest is fun for all, not just hard-core birders.

BIRDING'S TAILGATE PARTY

In the Great Texas Birding Classic, one of the top birding events in the country, bird watchers fan out across the state to do just what their name implies: watch birds.

Sometimes, the birds watch them back.

by Russell Roe



ADAM GRASON



Big Sit Rules

- 🦋 Birds can be identified by sight or sound.
- 🦋 Observations must be made from within a 17-foot diameter circle. If a bird is seen or heard from within the circle but is too distant to identify, a team member may leave the circle to get a closer look. If a bird is observed while outside the circle, it must also be observed from inside the circle.
- 🦋 Only one team member needs to identify the bird (other categories require more teammates to make IDs).
- 🦋 The same circle must be used for the entire day.
- 🦋 Any date between April 15 and May 15 can be selected, and teams may participate for up to 24 hours on their chosen day.

CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

Who knows if the people watching is as satisfying as the bird watching? We come in all shapes and sizes, just as birds do, and exhibit some pretty odd behaviors, but there's only one species of us. That checklist is pretty short.

By contrast, 2019's top Birding Classic team logged 357 species of birds.

Each spring, the Birding Classic attracts dozens of teams across the state to view and enjoy our rich and varied bird life. Birders venture out on frenzied Big Days or comprehensive statewide weeklong forays or traverse the boundaries of a state park. In addition to those state-trotting categories, there's a category that caters more to the lounge-chair birding set. It's the Big Sit, described as "a tailgate party for birders," though some teams take it quite seriously (they can't help themselves).

In the Big Sit, teams establish a 17-foot diameter circle and see how many birds they can identify from inside the circle in a single day. It's one of the most popular

and accessible (and snack-friendly) categories of the Birding Classic.

Shelly Plante, nature tourism director for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, calls the Big Sit the "5K run of birding."

"You pay your money, get a T-shirt and go bird-watching for a good cause," she says. "I have always been interested in the Birding Classic being for everyone. It's not just for the 'listers' or the hard-core birders. For people who just enjoy looking at birds, the Big Sit is a wonderful opportunity to bring them to the Classic."

For myself and my TPWD team that participates in the Big Sit each year, it means doughnuts, breakfast tacos, camaraderie with co-workers and a day of watching and learning about birds. And ... yeah, I was just making sure I mentioned the doughnuts and breakfast tacos.

For Port Aransas, the Big Sit gives the coastal community a chance to show off the nature-oriented side of the town and the region's incredible bird life. Organizers

invite city officials, locals and visitors to view resident water birds and whatever birds are migrating through at the time.

For the Kempf family of San Antonio, the Big Sit is a chance to spend a day together, talk about birds and bond as a family in a natural setting.

Being in one place all day allows for close observation of birds, says 19-year-old Delaney Kempf, whose family does its Big Sit in Seminole Canyon State Park each year. In a case of the birds watching the bird watchers, some of the birds also engage in close observation of the Kempfs.

"Sometimes you get these birds that'll get used to you and sit there for hours on end," she says. "There's a Say's phoebe and a rock wren at Seminole Canyon in our 'sit circle.' Year after year, these two birds will sit there. They'll check you out. They'll watch you, and you'll watch them. It's a cool, special privilege. One of my favorite things about the Big Sit is that you can watch these animals for an extended period of time."

TEAM TPWD

I arrive for my shift at the Big Sit around midmorning at McKinney Falls State Park, not far from TPWD headquarters. The bird activity has died down quite a bit already. Thankfully, there are some breakfast tacos left.

"We've got 20-23 birds so far," says TPWD biologist Tania Homayoun. "Not bad. It has slowed down in the past hour. The morning chorus is where we get the most."

Let's see what's on the list: black-crested titmouse, white-eyed vireo, yellow-billed cuckoo, egg and cheese, egg and bacon. Sorry, I can't concentrate on birds when there are breakfast tacos to be eaten.

Our TPWD team started when the Great Texas Birding Classic, which began as a coastal tournament, went statewide in 2013. Folks from TPWD's communications group formed a team and recruited birders from other parts of the agency to help.

Each year, we pick a spring day to get together in our 17-foot circle in an area park and tally some birds.

"I think the people who join want to learn more, or maybe just want a couple of hours out of the office," says Julia Gregory, who captained the team for several years. "Some want to find out if birding is something they want to do. There's camaraderie. We always have a lot of fun. We always have food. We see birds."

Peering through her binoculars, Tania points out a yellow-rumped warbler.

"They're getting ready to migrate north," she says. "You can see a yellow band across the back end near the tail."

Julia says that having a work team is a good way to meet co-workers and do some team-building. She's right. Being with co-workers whom I don't normally see on a daily basis and engaging with them in a shared activity outdoors has helped me build new work relationships.

Julia also says the Big Sit always helps her learn more about birds.

"I think it's a good way to learn," she says. "The best way to learn birds is to go birding with good birders."

Tania, one of our expert birders, tells us there's a broad-winged hawk overhead.

"What clues me in is a really strong black band and really strong white on the tail," she says as we raise our binoculars to see what she's seeing. "The bands on the tail are very bold."

For me, it's always a crash course in birding. Our group will see a bird, I'll read about it in one of our colorfully illustrated guides, and the wide, wonderful world of bird watching starts to open a little more.










The TPWD Big Sit team searches for birds at McKinney Falls State Park (top) and looks in a book for bird identification help (right). The team often tallies 50 species, including birds such as the red-winged blackbird (above).




ALL PHOTOS BY TPWD



Big Sit Tips

-  Decide who will make up your team. Teams can consist of one person or dozens (other categories require three to five members).
-  Invite good birders, especially if you're not an experienced birder yourself.
-  Bring binoculars and field guides.
-  Find a good site. The best sites have multiple habitat types, including water. But a backyard works fine, too.
-  Make your circle visual with tape, rope or some other signifier.
-  Plan your day. Have people sign up for shifts, or consider a partial day of 7-10 a.m. and 4-7 p.m.
-  Bring food and drinks to fuel your birders. Snacking is encouraged.



ALL  KUHLEN PHOTOGRAPHY

TEAM PORT ARANSAS

"We want to reach 100 species by noon — that's our goal," says Scott Holt.

"We're up to 65 so far," adds Joan Holt.

The husband-and-wife Holts and a handful of others have set up for their Big Sit with spotting scopes and binoculars in an elevated gazebo at the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center in Port Aransas, with a vast area of wetlands stretching out before them.

The Holts have been leaders in the Port Aransas bird-watching community for decades. When they started hosting Big Sits in the early 2000s, they invited city leaders and community members to join them.

"We get realtors, bankers, the mayor to come," Scott says. "I had no idea if people would come out or not. It's become a community event."

"Usually the sheriff comes," Joan says. "He comes after church."

The Big Sit has been a way for the

Holts and others to show off the birds and other natural assets of a place that's known mainly as a beach town.

In 2019, their Big Sit coincided with the Texas SandFest sand castle contest, which attracts thousands of visitors to the beach. In the afternoon, several sunburned festgoers found their way to the birding center, where the Holts and others were happy to share their binoculars and offer impromptu lessons in birding.

The Big Sit has raised awareness of the value of bird watching and nature tourism in the city.

"Towns like Port Aransas have done a great job in using the Big Sit to promote birding at their nature centers while also using this event as an opportunity to engage and educate city leaders," says Shelly Plante. "The event shows the value of nature tourism to city leaders in a very clear way while still having fun."

Port Aransas sits in the migratory

flyway, and hundreds of migrating species pass through each year. In addition, coastal birds such as the roseate spoonbill, reddish egret and black-bellied whistling duck keep bird watchers busy.

"We need somebody to see a green heron," says Joan, looking at the team's list. "We still need cliff swallow and tree swallow."

Former Mayor Georgia Neblett has been staking out a corner of the gazebo with her binoculars trained on an area near the parking lot. She saw an orchard oriole while walking in and is determined to see it from the Big Sit circle.

Georgia attended the Big Sit when she was mayor and has been back most years since.

"Bird watching has added a whole other element to spending time outside," she says. "Here, I learn birds that I don't know well and enjoy the camaraderie and excitement."

The Port Aransas Big Sit (left) attracts dedicated birders and members of the community to the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center to count birds such as the common gallinule and black-necked stilt.

TEAM KEMPF

Lauren and Garrett Kempf wanted to foster their daughter Delaney's love of birds. They didn't realize they'd get hooked themselves.

In 2019, the family came in third place in the Birding Classic's statewide weeklong category and participated in two Big Sits.

They've been doing Big Sits together for the past three or four years at Seminole Canyon State Park in West Texas.

"My mom and dad have always gone birding with me," Delaney says. "We found birding as a really cool way for the three of us to get together."

At Seminole Canyon, they mark their viewing circle with rocks and make a day of it with reclining chairs and an ice chest full of food and drinks.

"Definitely the highlight of the Big Sit last year was a red-tailed hawk flying overhead with a snake," Delaney says. "We were watching it for a little bit and realized the snake was still alive. At the same time, a group was walking by on a rock art tour. We were pointing out the red-tail, watching it through binoculars, and we all realized the snake was actually a diamondback rattlesnake. My mother jokingly said she thought it would be funny if the bird dropped the snake, and everybody just scattered."

Delaney started birding at age 12 in a San Antonio youth birding group and now, at 19, keeps birding as an adult.

Their Big Sit trips to Seminole Canyon have become a family tradition.

"It's great to sit with my parents, now that we've done it a few years, and to remember, like, what we saw two years ago," she says. "We joke around. I think it's a great way to bond with your family and connect with them."

She says her parents are improving as birders.

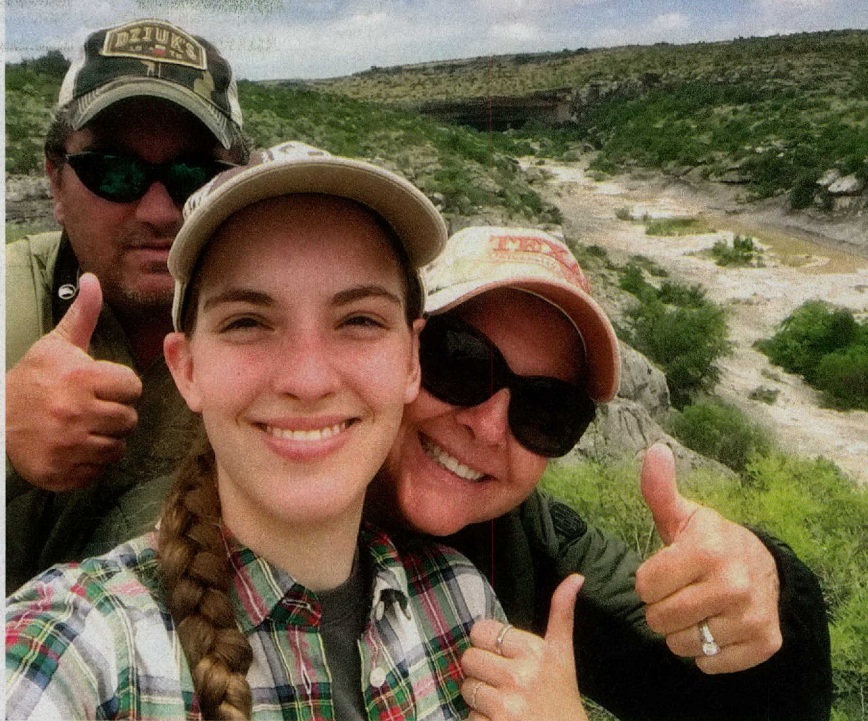
"My parents like to say they're bird watchers but not birders," Delaney says. "They love to watch the birds but don't really know them. They're wonderful at ID'ing them now. Now that they've gotten to learn more about them, I think they really enjoy talking about them, learning things like what does this bird do, where does it come from."

The rock wren and Say's phoebe that show up have practically become part of the family, too.

"It's a cool way to observe those birds," Delaney says. "They'll call, preen, hunt for insects. It's great to watch them."

They may even be watching you, too.

Russell Roe is managing editor of Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine and an aspiring birder.



The Kempfs of San Antonio (above) travel each year to Seminole Canyon State Park for their Big Sit, where they might see scaled quail, house finches and other West Texas birds.

How to sign up

To sign up for the Great Texas Birding Classic or to learn more about it, go to birdingclassic.org.



ALL PHOTOS BY DELANEY KEMPF

Whooo Gives a Hoot?

*Texas' 17 species of owls provide
nocturnal pest control.*



by Cliff Shackelford

Who gives a hoot about owls? For me, they're special.

I once wooed a fellow biologist by taking her on an owl prowling to see screech and barred owls. My success must have impressed her, since we've been married for more than 20 years.

Apparently, I'm not the only one who loves owls. In a recent national study, researchers found that owls, more than any other group of birds, were the "subject of public curiosity." Owls are a frequent topic for questions called in to my live radio show on birds.

We hear owl sayings all the time, such as "wise old owl" or "night owl." Remember Woodsy Owl? The U.S. Forest Service's mascot gave us the 1970s slogan, "Give a hoot, don't pollute!"

Owls also serve as mascots, including both Rice and Temple universities, high-IQ society Mensa and sorority Chi Omega. An owl was the companion animal for Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom. A picture of an owl can be seen in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics for the sound "m." More recently, owls were used as couriers in the *Harry Potter* books and movies.

In some cultures, owls are associated with evil and sorcery, likely due to their nocturnal habits. Some Native Americans refuse to look at an owl because they believe it carries their elders' spirits. In Romanian culture, the call of an owl means that someone's going to die. Aztecs and Mayans also considered the owl a symbol of death and destruction and used the phrase "when an owl cries, someone dies." In Finland, the owl is viewed paradoxically as both wise and dimwitted (for its perceived "dumb stare" when spotted by an observer). In India, a white owl is a sign of wealth and prosperity.

There are approximately 225 species of owls, and they occur on every continent except Antarctica. Oddly named owls include the laughing owl of New Zealand (extinct 1914), the powerful owl of Australia, the barking owl of Australia and New Guinea, the fearful owl of the Solomon Islands, the morepork owl of Tasmania and New Zealand, and the Sumba boobook owl from Sumba Island of eastern Indonesia.

With all the superstition surrounding owls, what's actually so special about them? For starters, they are nature's pest control for rodents and insects. They're also fun to watch. Most owls are nocturnal (active at night) or crepuscular (active at twilight), while very few are chiefly diurnal (active during the day).

There are many threats to owls: conversion of native habitat, poisoning by pesticides, flying into utility lines, getting hit along our roadways, and loss of mature trees (or dead trees with cavities) used for nesting by some species.

Speaking of nests, owls aren't engineers. None construct a nest but instead use old cavities, rock ledges, scrapes on the ground, abandoned stick nests used by other large birds, and other creative sites. Typically, females incubate at the nest site while the males find food for them. (Perhaps females get this treatment because, in most species of owls, the females are 10 to 15 percent larger than their mates.)

Owls have facial discs and asymmetrically placed ears that receive different "readings" of sound, called triangulation, to assist in pinpointing the sound's exact location, possibly a tasty rodent. By design, owls are silent in flight, thanks to velvety feathers that absorb flight sounds, allowing them to sneak up on skittish prey.

Speaking of prey, owls have a predatory diet that includes invertebrates like wood roaches and other insects, spiders, crabs, snails, earthworms and scorpions, plus vertebrates like fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals and birds. Since owls take big, gulping bites or swallow prey whole, they regurgitate pellets of indigestible items like bones, hair, hard exoskeletons and feathers.

Texas has 17 documented species of owls: 12 regularly occurring and five others so unusual they require proper proof (photograph or sound recording) for verification. Those rare five include the northern pygmy-owl, northern saw-whet owl, mottled owl, stygian owl and snowy owl.

← FERRUGINOUS PYGMY-

OWL Head to South Texas to see a ferruginous pygmy-owl, or anywhere southward to Argentina. Two decades ago, few knew that the oak mottes in the so-called Wild Horse Desert of Kleberg and Kenedy counties in South Texas hosted numerous pairs of this small, mostly diurnal, owl. Nature tourists pay to enter some of the big ranches in order to see this little woodland owl. To find one, they listen for a long monotonous series of short whistle bursts separated by brief breaks. Songbirds that mob these owls should beware — this little owl is active by day, and it's not uncommon to see them plucking and eating mobsters that get too close.



© RICHARD BUQUOUI

↓ **FLAMMULATED OWL** This is our state's only small owl with dark eyes. Reliably occurring in far West Texas, this species also has made appearances across much of Texas except the Pineywoods. This little guy can fool you with its deep baritone hoots, making it sound like a much bigger owl calling from farther away. Highly migratory, this species retreats to Central American wintering grounds, like so many of our songbirds.

↑ **SPOTTED OWL** This owl barely makes it into Texas. When it does, it's typically at the higher elevation forests of the Guadalupe and Davis mountains. Sightings away from there are likely hatch-year birds floating around searching for the proper habitat to call home. The areas occupied by this species in both of those mountain ranges are (thankfully) protected areas, but a stand-altering wildfire or an outbreak of a destructive forest insect pest could wipe out their habitat.



© GREG LASLEY



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← **BARRED OWL** The barred owl is named for the streaking (barring) across the bird's undersides. Barred owls are often very loud when hooting and hollering, and when a territorial pair is challenged by another, the vocalizations turn to caterwauling reminiscent of a couple of monkeys. On rare occasions, this species will emit a loud human-like scream. I'm fairly certain that many Bigfoot hunters have misidentified this owl's scream as the call of the mythical monster. With dark eyes and no ear tufts, this bird is roughly the size of a football. This year-round resident occurs typically in low-lying areas like creek edges, swamps or bottomland hardwood forests near rivers and lakes, where they search for tasty crawfish, snakes, frogs, birds and rodents. It rarely eats anything larger than a squirrel.

→ **BARN OWL** The barn owl is the most widely distributed owl on Earth. Owls typically breed once a year unless their food supply is abundant; this species can nest two or three times per year. Barns and abandoned buildings aren't the only structures barn owls use; deer hunters learn quickly to board up their deer stand when not in use. Barn owls are messy and leave lots of smelly treasures behind, such as piles of poop and morsels of uneaten carcasses.



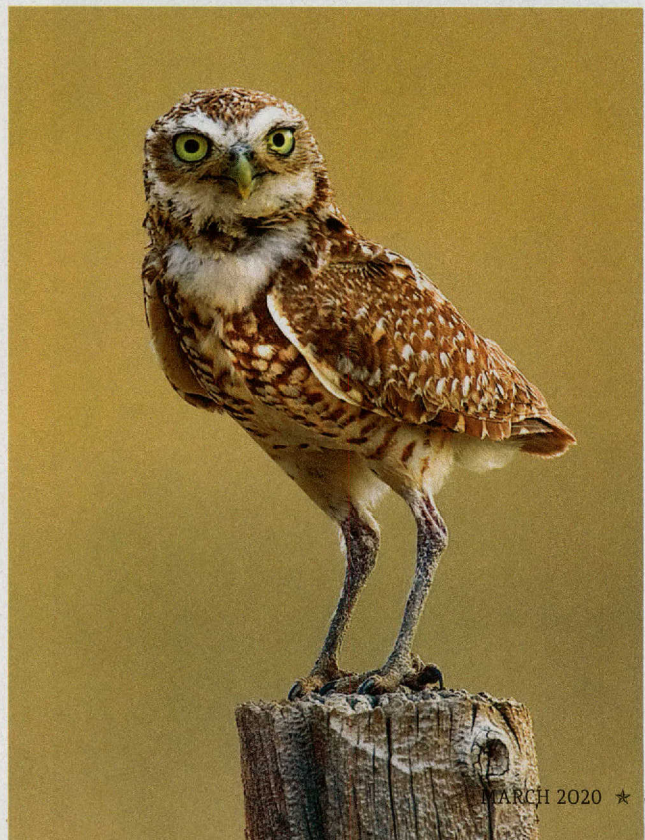
ALAN MURPHY / BIA / MINDEN PICTURES

↓ **BURROWING OWL** This largely insectivorous owl is unique and very charismatic. It occupies burrows and underground structures built by mammals, mostly either prairie dogs or humans. This owl lives harmoniously with prairie dogs, adding an extra set of watchful eyes against predators in a prairie dog town. It also uses manmade culverts. I remember a burrowing owl in the Dallas/Fort Worth area years ago that attained local fame by using a street gutter under a curb and sidewalk. Lois Balin, TPWD's urban biologist in El Paso, demonstrates how burrowing owls use artificial burrows made of PVC pipe and other equipment on YouTube.



HAROLD STIVER | DREAMSTIME.COM

↑ **SHORT-EARED OWL** This is an owl of open grasslands and prairie, visiting Texas only during the colder months of the year. My all-time most incredible sighting of this species in Texas was about a decade ago when two biologist buddies and I kicked up 16 short-eared owls that were roosting, as they do, on the ground in a remnant tallgrass prairie in far eastern Collin County. At one point, all 16 were aloft, circling around, confused and wanting to go back to sleep, so we decided to leave them alone and give them peace and quiet.



ROB CURTIS



KATHY ADAMS CLARK

← **EASTERN SCREECH-OWL** The eastern screech-owl is inappropriately named: they don't screech. Instead, they make a whinny sound that's often monotone or an up-and-down tremolo. The adult is about the size of a 12-ounce soda can — this owl is small! They're mostly nocturnal and are found in a wide variety of open woodland habitat, including urban backyards. Songbirds that discover screech owls (or other owls) at their daytime roost will often scold or mob the owls. What's unusual about the eastern screech-owl is that it comes in two color morphs — rufous and gray — with rufous being dominant in the denser, wetter forests of East Texas while gray is found more in the drier upland forests of Central Texas. Some authors identify a third color morph, brown, found south near the Gulf Coast, while other authors refer to that as simply a diluted variant of the rufous morph. Whichever color your backyard screech owl might be, that bird lives its entire life in that specific color morph — it never changes color with the seasons or with age.

↓ **LONG-EARED OWL** Owls are usually solitary or found in pairs, rarely flocking. In winter, this species (along with the short-eared owl) often forms communal roosts, mostly due to limited habitat availability or a bumper crop in available prey. This winter resident roosts mostly in thick cedars or junipers where the greenery shields them from cold wind and keeps them hidden from mobbing songbirds. The long-eared owl might look like a great horned owl on a diet, but it has more facial color and more black blotching on the underside.



LEE HOY



ABBOTT NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

↑ **WESTERN SCREECH-OWL** The western screech-owl looks a lot like its eastern gray counterpart. As with other woodland owls, this bird's pattern is well camouflaged — it looks like the rough bark of a tree. Found primarily in the Trans-Pecos region, this western species occurs eastward into the Hill Country and Concho Valley. Differing voices help us distinguish the western screech-owl. A great reference can be found at Cornell Lab of Ornithology's allaboutbirds.org; give a listen to the two screech owls there.

↓ **ELF OWL** This tiny owl, almost sparrow-sized, occurs in West Texas. It's roughly in a tie with a South American species, the long-whiskered owlet, as our planet's smallest owl at just 5.7 inches tall and 44 grams (less than 1/10 pound). This cavity-loving owl enjoys old woodpecker cavities carved into telephone poles or fence posts. To me, their calls sound like a small lap dog attempting to bark.



ROB CURTIS

ALAN MURPHY / BIA / MINDEN PICTURES



↑ **GREAT HORNED OWL** The great horned owl has one of the largest distributions of any native bird in the Western Hemisphere, found from Alaska all the way south to Argentina. You can hear them at night, with a deep, hooting that sounds something like, "Who's awake? Me, too!" Great horned owls eat a variety of midsized mammals; for some odd reason, they really enjoy skunk. The owl's ear tufts, like those on other owls, are simply showy plumes unrelated to hearing. They begin their nesting cycle during the colder months; find their nests in abandoned hawk, heron, raven or crow nests.

→ **SNOWY OWL** There are only 13 documented records of a snowy owl in Texas in over a century of recordkeeping. Of the five rare Texas owl species, this is the only one I'm choosing to feature. Some observers, in low light, see the all-white undersides of the barn owl and misidentify it. Anyone claiming to see a snowy owl in Texas needs to snap a photo as proof. This might not be our nation's largest owl by length (that honor goes to the great gray owl far to our north), but the snowy owl is the largest by weight. In winter, this tundra owl rarely dips down into the lower 48 states except when populations of their favored prey crash, forcing the birds to fill their bellies elsewhere. The strangest record in Texas goes to one photographed sitting on a balcony railing at an apartment in downtown Dallas in February 2012. It's a good thing their wandering occurs during the cool of winter because I doubt this owl, covered in heavy down feathering, could survive a long stretch of warm Texas weather. Heading north before the hot Texas summer begins is a very smart thing to do. What a wise old owl!



ROB CURTIS

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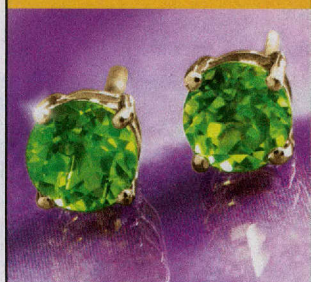
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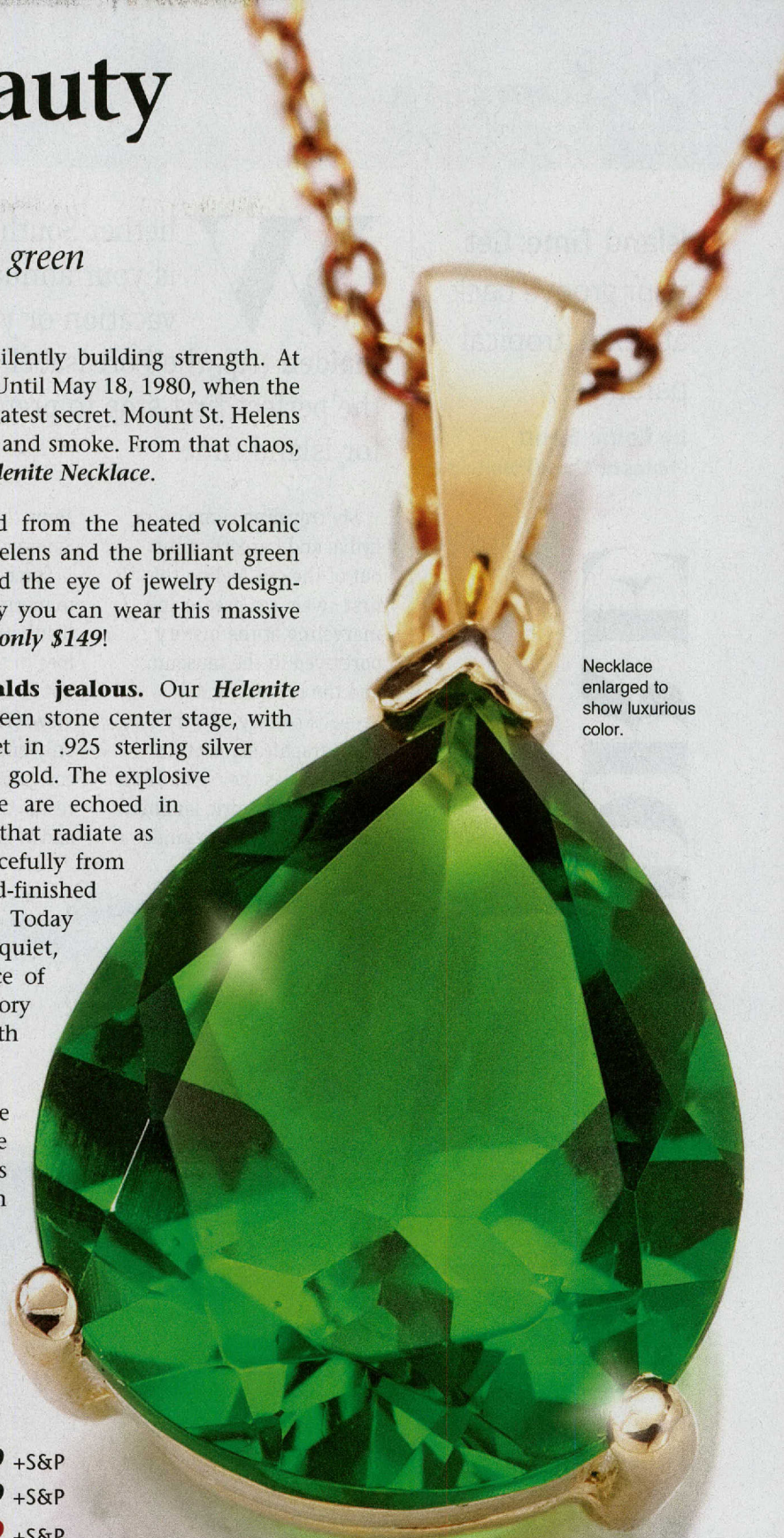
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Island Time: Get your groove back at Texas' tropical paradise.

by Louie Bond
Photos by Chase Fountain

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND

Whether South Padre Island is your annual beach vacation or you're on your maiden trip, the Port Isabel Lighthouse is the perfect first stop to prepare yourself for island time.

My traveling companion, Lydia, and I eagerly jump out of the car, feeling that first sweet sea breeze and marveling at the history portrayed in the museum and the reconstructed keeper's cottage. We try to photographically capture sunbeams as they peek from behind the historic landmark, first built in 1852 to guide

ships through the Brazos Santiago Pass.

Some couples choose to marry at the top of the lighthouse. Eager to get our toes in the sand, we decide not to climb up to see the view. (The lighthouse, the only one of 16 along the Texas coast open to the public, was restored by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in

2016-17 and was recently transferred to the Texas Historical Commission.)

Back in the car, we now need only to cross the beautiful Queen Isabella Memorial Causeway to get to the southernmost tip of the nation's longest barrier island. At nearly 2.4 miles, the bridge is one of the longest in Texas and rises to 85 feet. After a tragic collapse of the original causeway killed eight in 2001 (only four days after 9/11), it was rebuilt and reopened. Brown pelicans (once endangered) now soar around the curving roadway as if they haven't a care in the world.

After all, they're on island time.



It doesn't take long to pick up on that island-timey kind of mood as we cruise down the main drag, Padre Boulevard, checking out the many restaurants, gift shops and attractions. We drop our bags off at our hotel (choose from several classic options, including the newly updated Isla Grand, or find an eclectic bed and breakfast), then take off for our first of many seafood feasts, tonight at the island's famous Blackbeard's. We plan our activities and research a little island history.

Formerly Isla de Santiago and then Isla Blanca, the island was inherited in the 1820s by Padre José Nicolas Ballí, and renamed Padre

Island on his death in 1829. In 1962, the Mansfield Cut was dredged; no longer could anyone drive the entire length from Corpus Christi to South Padre (the town was incorporated in 1975).

While South Padre's famous for its beautiful beaches, with water as azure as the Caribbean, I want to meet some notable residents as well. After all, who better to give us the inside track on island life than the locals?

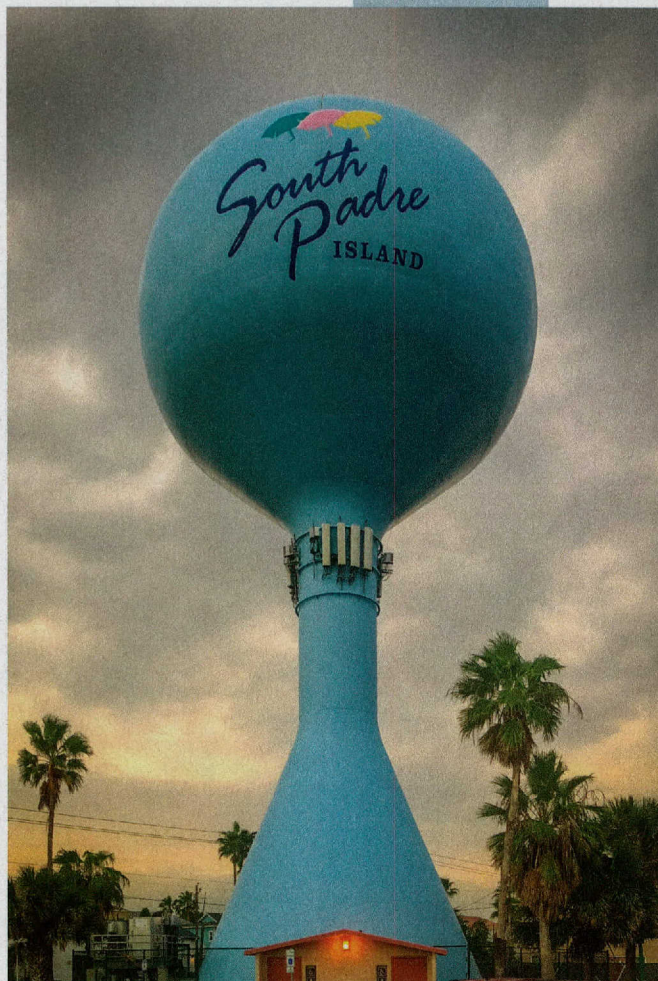
I slip out of bed before dawn to meet Amazing Walter, who holds court at his usual table at Ted's every morning at 7. The walls of the modest cafe are lined with photos of the fantastical sand castles he's been creating for four decades.

Walter has a last name, McDonald, but most folks here just call him Walter or simply Amazing. He's talented enough to deserve that moniker, with countless sand castle titles under his belt. He wasn't hard to recognize, with snow-white curls atop iconic black-rimmed round glasses. When I take a seat, he introduces me to welcoming folks at the other tables, obviously the regular morning crowd.

He skips over one young man, so I promptly inquire: "What's wrong with you?"

"I'm new," he declares with a shy grin. We all laugh. You're not a stranger here for long, apparently.

The friendly waitress keeps our coffee cups full while Walter regales me with tales about the castles he's built in shopping malls and his travels around the world as a master of his craft. I have lots of questions: how you get



the sand into the mall, how you build walls that stand tall, what kind of sand is best and how in the world do you make a living at this?

The answers? Wheelbarrows, clay in the water, definitely not playground sand in a bag and, well, Walter supplements his castle building by making balloon animals for waiting customers at Blackbeard's.

Walter and I discover we share some mutual friends, including Scott Wade, known as the Dirty Car Artist, who draws masterpieces on dusty car windshields. We laugh at this concept of artists building careers from dust and sand. From humble beginnings comes the finest of art.

"I'm the oldest sand

Sand spills over the road north of town on South Padre Island, where surf and sand beckon visitors to the southern tip of Texas.





ABOVE COURTESY OF WALTER MCDONALD

sculptor in captivity” is how Walter likes to describe himself. It’s only one of his countless quotables.

One hour turns into two, and I regretfully leave Ted’s to gather my companion, but not before promising to try to attend Walter’s party that evening to play a song with his ukulele pals, The Happy Band. Now famished for breakfast, Lydia and I head over to the Palms Cafe, tucked behind a homey hotel on the Gulf side of the island. South Padre cuisine marries seafood and Mexican food, so we share plates of migas and salmon Benedict. The open-air terrace is separated from the beach by masses of

wildflowers, and we linger in this enchanting setting.

Fortified, we head over to Sea Turtle Inc., eager to check out the new center, open since 2018. I recognize some of my favorite turtles from previous visits, and they seem quite happy in their new digs. We’ve just missed the feeding but enjoy reading the stories of each injured turtle, and we marvel at the apparatus designed to keep the turtles with missing fins from swimming in endless circles. Rescue is the main work here, but more capital improvements and additional programming are on the horizon.

“We’re adding a small stingray touch tank

Clockwise from top left: Boardwalks extend into the bay and marsh at the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center; sea turtle art adorns the wall at the new Sea Turtle Inc.; sand castles built by the Amazing Walter can be, well, pretty amazing; breakfast is served at Grapevine Cafe.

[anticipated opening in April 2020] and adding native fish and bonnethead sharks to our large turtle tanks,” Executive Director Jeff George tells us. “Additional daily children’s educational programs will also begin this summer, along with newly designed summer camp programs.”

Those who haven’t visited in recent years won’t find the familiar rehabilitation building out front — it’s being demolished in August.

“A new state-of-the-art rehab center will be constructed on the same location, enabling us to handle more injured sea turtles and provide a better experience for our visitors,” George

explains. “Plans are underway to include our own CT scan machine with public window viewing. We hope to have it completed by May 2021.”

Our turtle time is interrupted by a breathless call from Scarlet Colley, known by all as the island’s “dolphin whisperer.” We had a meet-up scheduled for early afternoon, but Scarlet has found a lovely pod of dolphins while out on a morning bird tour.

“Where are you?” she asks me excitedly. “Can you come right now?”

Though I’ve never met Scarlet in person, we’ve corresponded for years, and I know she has something special to share, so we race back across the causeway to meet her at her boat. We quickly jump into the boat with Scarlet’s canine “crew” of Rozzie and Shugie, two adorable mutts, and scan the blue expanse for dolphins. The pod she’d spotted has moved on, but the gentle sea breeze in our faces and sightings of ospreys more than offset our disappointment.

Undeterred, Scarlet decides to go pick up her “mermaid pal” Judy to bring us luck. Judy gladly ditches her window washing to jump in the boat with us and soon has us all calling out to the dolphins in our sweetest voices, beseeching them to come play with us. It doesn’t take long for Judy’s mermaid magic to work, and we’re thrilled to find several dolphins jumping through the waves.

“*Liebchen! Liebchen!* Come to us, my *Liebchen!*” Scarlet calls, reverting to her native German. On cue, our little boat becomes the center of a

magical ballet. The dolphins leap high, solo and in pairs, and we clap our hands and squeal in delight. In response, the dolphins seem to leap even higher and execute ever flashier moves. Scarlet notices another dolphin staying farther away, and then spots the explanation through her camera lens.

“She has a baby with her!” she shouts with glee. “Wait, there’s another one — she’s got two!”

We keep a respectful distance while Scarlet explains that dolphin mamas will babysit other juveniles so another mother can take a break. Sensing that we pose no threat, the babies show themselves, to our delight. Scarlet revs the motor a bit and drives in a big loop, creating a frothy wake. As I hang over the back of the boat, dolphins jump joyfully through the foam, just inches from me.

Blissfully windblown and content, we say goodbye and head back to the island to clean up for our evening’s activities. We’re set to meet frequent magazine contributor Danno Wise for dinner, and he recommends Lobo Del Mar on the bay side of the island. As we walk in, we notice the place seems crowded for an off-season weeknight, with a band enthusiastically playing old country favorites by the dance floor.

The host, Lars Thanem, helps us find seats by booting a polite young man from a table with a lovely view of the water.

“It’s OK,” Lars assures us, when we feel bad about it. “He’s family. He just played the bagpipes at sunset.”

Turns out, everyone at

Lobo Del Mar is part of the Buntin family — the band, the host, the servers, the bartenders and, on this night, some lovely dancers everyone’s waiting to watch.

“You’ve got to get up close to see them,” Lars tells me with pride. “You don’t want to miss the little ones.”

Sure enough, folks leave their tables to crowd the stage as tiny girls in bright costumes belly dance adorably, followed by their older counterparts who take the performance to a master level. The crowd understandably goes wild. (Each March, the dancing turns Celtic for St. Patrick’s Day festivities.)

We eat and talk about the island and eat some more. Danno regales us with island stories till we run out of steam, driving past Amazing Walter’s party nearby with regret, too tired for any more adventure today.

Lydia’s curious about Walter, though, so I promise her breakfast at Ted’s, but we’re thwarted by some sort of mechanical problem in Ted’s kitchen and head over to another spot recommended to us, the Grapevine. Wonderful aromas entice us to order a Mexican breakfast, with homemade tortillas and salsas made from scratch.

Running out of time, we grab binoculars and traverse the 3,300-foot-long boardwalk at the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center. Making friends with tourists taking advantage of the amazing photo opportunities, we watch brown pelicans swooping down for their breakfast, giving a little

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cheer when they succeed. Roseate spoonbills and great blue herons parade for our pleasure, and we take turns feeding tortoises and alligators back at the beautiful multistory center.

It’s time to head back home, and just like that, a norther blows in to chase us off. Island time was magical, but too short. Next time, we’re going to try a bed and breakfast, spend some time fishing and make it over to the hermit crab races. We’ll drive to the place where the dunes spill over the road and maybe even fly high over the beach in a parasail.

After all, with Padre’s moderate temperatures most days of the year and activities to choose from in both high and low seasons, island time is always waiting.

MUSICAL TEXAS

It's no secret that Texas has produced a multitude of great musicians — think Buddy Holly, Willie Nelson and Bob Wills, for starters — but the Lone Star State is also the topic of many musical compositions.

Some refer to the entire state, such as Ernest Tubb's *Waltz Across Texas*, Lyle Lovett's *That's Right (You're Not From Texas)* and Asleep at the Wheel's *Miles and Miles of Texas*, but others narrow their focus to a particular town. Here's a handful to get you started.

by **Julia B. Jones**
and **Louie Bond**

EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD



LUCKENBACH, TEXAS
WAYLON JENNINGS

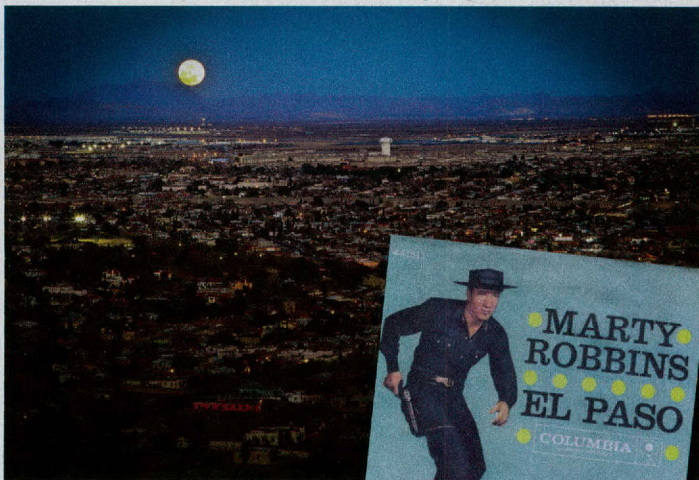
"Out in Luckenbach, Texas/There ain't nobody feelin' no pain," Waylon Jennings (with a little help from Willie Nelson) sings in this 1977 ode to a tiny Hill Country town penned by Chips Moman and Bobby Emmons. None had ever visited Luckenbach, but Waylon says, "Every state has a Luckenbach, a place to get away from things."

SONJA SOMMERFELD / TPWD



GALVESTON
GLEN CAMPBELL

"Galveston, oh Galveston, I still hear your sea waves crashing/While I watch the cannons flashing/I clean my gun and dream of Galveston." This 1969 anti-war hymn was penned by hitmaker Jimmy Webb and recorded by Glen Campbell. Webb says the song is "about a guy who's caught up in something he doesn't understand and would rather be somewhere else" so he dreams of the girl and hometown he left behind.



KATHY ADAMS CLARK

EL PASO
MARTY ROBBINS

“Out in the West Texas town of El Paso, I fell in love with a Mexican girl” begins the 1959 murder ballad written and popularized by Marty Robbins. This first-person Wild West narrative tells the tragic story of a cowboy who falls in love with saloon girl Felina and kills a rival for her affection. He flees but one day returns for Felina, only to be shot by a posse and die in her arms after “one little kiss.”



CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

NEW SAN ANTONIO ROSE
BOB WILLS AND HIS TEXAS PLAYBOYS

“Moon in all your splendor knows only my heart/Call back my Rose, Rose of San Antone/Lips so sweet and tender like petals falling apart/Speak once again of my love, my own.” Bob Wills penned these words and performed the song with his Texas Playboys in 1940 (Tommy Duncan on vocals). Wills developed the melody by tinkering with a previous hit, *Spanish Two-Step*.



KATHY ADAMS CLARK

DOES FORT WORTH EVER CROSS YOUR MIND?
GEORGE STRAIT

“You left me here to be with him in Dallas/And I know it hurt you at the time/Well I wonder now if it makes a difference/Does Fort Worth ever cross your mind?” George Strait may be the modern king of Texas songs with his recordings of *I Can't See Texas From Here*, *All My Exes Live in Texas*, *Take Me to Texas* and more. This 1984 song (by Sanger D. and Darlene Shafer) is a bootscotin' Cowtown classic.



COURTESY AMARILLO CVB

AMARILLO BY MORNING
GEORGE STRAIT

“Amarillo by morning, up from San Antone/Everything that I've got is just what I've got on.” While George Strait had a megahit with this rodeo cowboy ballad in 1983, it was first written in 1973 by Terry Stafford and Paul Fraser. Stafford had been playing a rodeo gig with his band in San Antonio and was driving back home to Amarillo when inspiration hit. The song is a staple at Texas rodeos.



Wind and water shaped the landscape of this Panhandle state park, which contains 90 miles of trails. The park is home to a historic herd of Plains animals. The escarpment that runs through the park serves as a transition zone between the High Plains to the west and the Rolling Plains to the east.

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.

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TOOLS: Canon EOS 5D Mark III with EF16-35mm f/2.8L II USM lens, f/11.0, 1/125 second, ISO 400.

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