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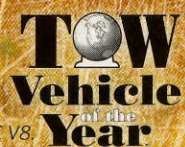


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THIS PAGE: Movie set at Big Bend Ranch State Park. Photo © Al Braden.

Celebrating 65 Years
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AUGUST 2007, VOL. 65, NO. 8

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Sarah Bond Editorial Intern

Mindy Gieselman Marketing Intern

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:

Larry Bozka, Saltwater; Henry Chappell, Hunting; Larry D. Hodge, Freshwater; Gibbs Milliken, Products

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS:

Grady Allen, Wyman Meinzer, David J. Sams

EDITORIAL OFFICES:

3000 South IH 35, Suite 120, Austin, Texas 78704

Phone: (512) 912-7000 Fax: (512) 707-1913

E-mail: magazine@tpwd.state.tx.us

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES:

STONE WALLACE COMMUNICATIONS, INC.:

3000 S. IH 35, Suite 120, Austin, Texas 78704

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Jim Stone, Advertising Director (512) 912-7007

or (512) 799-1045.

E-mail: jim.stone@tpwd.state.tx.us

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In the Field

MELISSA GASKILL

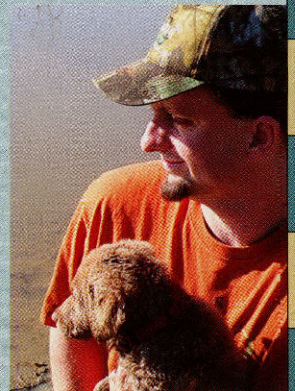
studied both biology (at Texas A&M) and journalism (at UT) and has been writing about the outdoors for some 15 years. She spends as much time as possible enjoying hiking, kayaking, and camping with her husband and



three children. "When you camp as much as we do, you end up with a lot of weather-related disaster stories. We've been flooded out, hailed on, run off by tornado warnings, and had our tent blown over. So cabins can be a nice respite, and we were especially glad to be in one during an ice storm at Devils River last January." Melissa is also the author of a guide book on hiking with dogs.

CHESTER MOORE JR.

is an award-winning outdoor writer, author and radio host from Orange. His most recent book is *Texas Waterfowl*, detailing his passion for duck hunting. He and his wife, Lisa, share their home with a German shepherd, chocolate Labrador and Chesapeake Bay retriever. Some of their first dates were garfishing trips. In fact, Chester knew Lisa was the girl for him when he accidentally threw a five-foot gar on her while trying to land the beast in a marsh near Bridge City. "She wasn't too happy, but she didn't complain much, either. Lisa not only went fishing with me but managed to survive a face-to-face encounter with an alligator gar without freaking out."



GIBBS MILLIKEN'S

passion for art, natural science and outdoor sports spans more than six decades. His research and writing assignments — as well as his fishing, hunting and photography trips — have taken him from the Alaskan tundra to the South American rainforests. Gibbs recently retired from the University of Texas at Austin after 41 years as a professor to continue doing research and creative projects in painting, drawing and photography. Gibbs is a monthly TP&W contributor, field-testing and reviewing outdoor products and compiling a holiday gift guide for the outdoor enthusiast every December. In this issue, Gibbs shares his lifelong interest in using slingshots as a practical method to maintain instinctive shooting skills.



AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF ROBERT L. COOK

We have never failed to ask the Texas Legislature and state leadership for additional funding for the much needed staffing, maintenance, operations and expansion of our state parks, or the other programs at this agency. Likewise, we have never failed to point out when we didn't get as much money appropriated as we thought we needed. Texans really care about their state parks, the state's fish and wildlife resources, and the great outdoors of Texas. Sometimes they get stirred up about these issues and these resources and how they are being cared for. We would, therefore, be remiss if we failed to recognize the Texas Legislature and state leadership when they appropriated sufficient funds for state parks and our other operations at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Well, Texans, listen up and let there be no doubt: Your legislators and your state elected officials absolutely did a wonderful thing for Texas and for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department during this last legislative session and we are very appreciative. We asked for what we needed and they delivered. It is that simple, that straightforward. I have always said that they would do all they could for us, and they did it.

They funded almost all of our requests for additional state park staffing, maintenance/minor repairs, equipment replacement and basic operations — a total of just over \$23 million per year in additional “operational” funding. They funded an additional \$44 million for maintenance and major repair projects. They appropriated \$15.5 million per year for our local park grant program plus an additional \$16.7 million for specific local park projects around the state. In addition, the 80th Texas Legislature appropriated \$4.1 million of general revenue for our Texas game wardens; an additional \$12.3 million from our freshwater fisheries stamp to rebuild and renovate our hatcheries; an additional \$25 million to “dry-berth” the Battleship Texas; and \$12 million to support the transfer of the Texas State Railroad to a newly created local rail authority in East Texas. The legislators appropriated \$13.9 million for land acquisition to expand existing parks and to add new parks.

Now, we must, and we will, do a good job of effectively and efficiently utilizing the funding that has been made available to us to get our state parks back in tip-top shape, properly staffed and available for the safe and enjoyable use by all Texans and out-of-state visitors. We will replace worn-out equipment and fill our empty positions where needed. We will immediately reinstate our wonderfully popular local parks grant program. We will permanently dry-berth the Battleship Texas, where it will be clean, safe and secure, and out of the waters of the Houston Ship Channel. We will add another 15 Texas game wardens in the field along the Rio Grande and on the Texas coast, and we will continue to refill vacant game warden positions. Our Texas game wardens will continue to be the best-educated, best-trained, and best-equipped game wardens in North America. We will build and open the new East Texas Freshwater Fish Hatchery in Jasper County, which will include over 60 acres of hatchery and rearing ponds. We will do these projects and we will do them right.

Therefore, I ask you to make a point to contact your local and statewide elected officials — including Governor Perry, Lt. Governor Dewhurst and Speaker Craddick — to say, “Thank you, we appreciate what you did for Texas state parks and for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in the last legislative session.”

Finally, “thank you” to all Texans who support and appreciate the great outdoors of Texas.

Get outdoors. Get involved.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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MAIL CALL

PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

FOREWORD

The last time our large family camped in tents, a drive-through window attendant asked us where we were moving. Just spending a week at Garner State Park, we told him, as he gave the old Suburban stuffed with preteens and gear another puzzled scan. Tents, tarps, sleeping bags and pillows, ice chests, towels, suitcases, fishing poles, boxes of groceries and utensils ... you get the picture. The kids hardly had room to elbow each other.

Experienced campers all, we didn't really mind the heat, the mosquitoes, the rocks that dug into our backs under our sleeping bags or the dirt that crept into all our belongings. After all, the chilly waters of the Frio River were only a few steps away. We were too excited to sleep much anyway, and the fish were biting early.

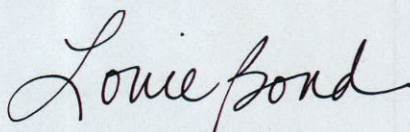
In those days, I used to think cabins were for amateurs, but when special circumstances led me to try cabin camping for the first time, well, I was hooked. After a death in the family, my husband and I decided that some family togetherness time might help the healing process begin. The kids' understanding teachers gave their blessing to a few days of playing hooky. The weather report wasn't favorable, though, so we booked one of Garner's 17 cabins.

Due to the chilly fall weather (and the fact that most good little boys and girls were sitting at their desks learning algebra, poor things), we practically had the place to ourselves. The limestone cabin provided a homey respite from the elements. We played cards in front of a cozy fire in the fireplace and slumbered blissfully on real mattresses. The few insects that still survived this late in the year buzzed fruitlessly at our windows.

Ever since, I've remained thoroughly spoiled, and my neglected tents have continued to slowly disintegrate on the shelf of our shed. No longer am I the rugged Big Bend backpacker of my youth. No longer am I the enterprising Girl Scout leader who taught junior high girls cast-iron cooking beneath the granite dome of Enchanted Rock. No longer am I the foolish mother trying to pack up a collapsed tent in the middle of the night in a thunderstorm with an infant and a toddler in tow.

No, I've embraced my softer side and decided it's well worth the advance planning and extra money to have a little air conditioning on a scorching August campout or to have a hot shower after hiking to the Lighthouse formation in Palo Duro Canyon. Is it wrong to prefer food without a dusting of dirt, or a bed without bugs?

Read this month's cover story by Melissa Gaskill and you, too, may become one of us — the cabin people.



LOUIE BOND
MANAGING EDITOR

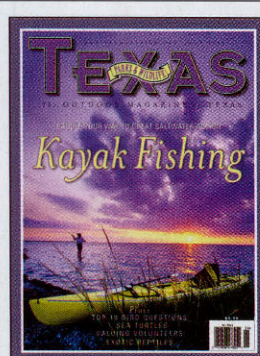
LETTERS

BEST BIRTHDAY GIFT

Kayak fishing ("Stealth Fishing," June 2007) has been a part of my life for three years now. I hit home base on May 31, one week before my 47th birthday. I anchored

my 10-foot Pelican kayak to my double rod holder in two feet of Port Mansfield water. Fishing was slow, so I decided to go for a walk to collect horse crippler cactus. It took me 25 minutes to get back, and I noticed then that one of my lines was loose. As I reeled in, the line got tight and I felt a little tug. A 25-inch speckled trout had been hooked for at least 10 minutes and couldn't fight any more. That was almost the best birthday gift I've ever had.

JOEL GARCIA
Mercedes



A 25-inch speckled trout had been hooked for at least 10 minutes and couldn't fight any more. That was almost the best birthday gift I've ever had.

Joel Garcia
Mercedes

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REMEMBERING TY PATTERSON

On May 30, Game Warden Teyran “Ty” Patterson, 28, died in the line of duty while trying to recover a drowning victim from the flood-swollen Paluxy River.

Patterson and his partner, Game Warden Danny Tuggle, were swept into floodwaters when their boat capsized. Tuggle was transported to a Fort Worth hospital, where he was treated and released in good condition.

On June 4, some 2,000 people, including hundreds of game wardens and other peace officers, friends and family

members, filled the Seguin-Guadalupe County Coliseum to standing-room-only capacity for Ty’s funeral.

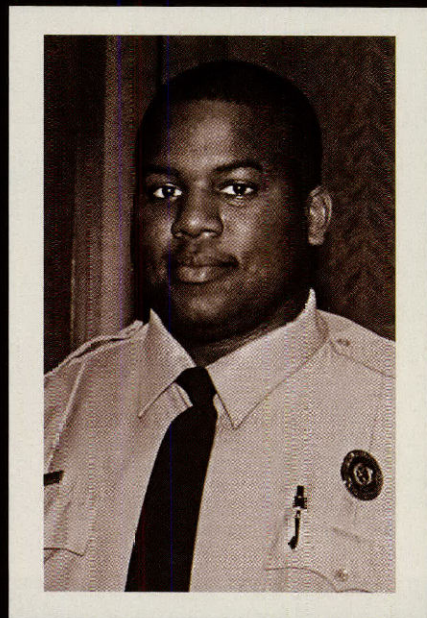
Afterward, Ty’s father Joe reflected on his son’s legacy.

“Teyran was a dear, sweet, loving person who in some ways may not fit the peace officer’s role, because in a lot of cases peace officers have to be hard, but he showed that a peace officer can be kind and still get the work done,” Patterson said.

“He was never a real outdoorsman growing up, but as he got older, he became more interested in the outdoors and what it had to offer, wildlife and water resources and so forth, and being part of an organization that was protecting these things was important to him.”

Game Warden Kevin Frazier became friends with Ty’s older brother Joe when they played college football together. Ty was already planning a career in law enforcement when he ran into Kevin one day on the Guadalupe River.

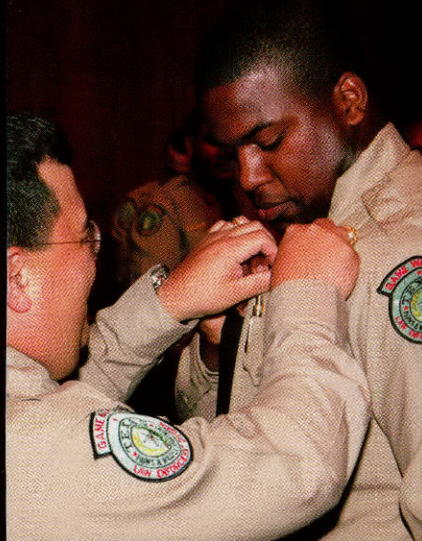
“I told Teyran, ‘You can either drive a car or you can have a big four-wheel-drive pickup, you can report to an office or your office could be in the outdoors,’” Frazier said. “That night he called me and said ‘What do I need to do to get started?’ And within a year, he was accepted.



“I’ve been a game warden a little over five years, and Teyran was one for just under two years, but I believe he touched more people in his career, just by the way that he handled himself and his business,” Frazier said. “He was a positive person, a great role model all around. I never heard him raise his voice, ever.”

Anyone who wishes to make donations to support the Patterson family may send a personal check made out to Operation Game Thief, with “Ty Patterson Memorial Fund” noted on the check, to 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, TX 78744. To make donations by credit card, call OGT at (512) 389-4381.

— Tom Harvey



SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

DETAILS IN THE DEVIL'S

Digital imaging offers a new perspective on a 350-foot-deep geologic wonder.



Team members spent three weekends rappelling into and out of Devil's Sinkhole to digitally map the entire cavern.

It was back in 1955 that Fritz Holt first cast his eyes upon the cavernous hole, known as Devil's Sinkhole, on the surface of the Edwards Plateau. Twenty years old at the time, Holt and a buddy descended on a crude, steel cable ladder into the 350-foot-deep geologic wonder outside Rocksprings to explore what most people will never see.

"Climbing up and down was a real highlight," Holt recalls. "But what I enjoyed more were the two lake rooms on the sinkhole floor, which bells out at the bottom. The water, which was probably 20 feet deep, was so clear you could see the bottom and couldn't tell where the limestone shelf met the water."

The 72-year-old Houstonian recently went back to dance with the Devil's Sinkhole one more time. Holt is a member of the Texas Cave Management Association, which is working with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the University of Texas to digitally map the entire cavern. He was on hand to observe and to perhaps get a chance to descend again into the state's largest single-chambered cavern.

Over three weekends, members of the Light Detection and Ranging project team set up a makeshift camp and spent days rappelling into and out of the collapsed limestone pit that sits at the heart of the Devil's Sinkhole

PHOTO © LAURENCE PARENT

State Natural Area. Team members used state-of-the-art laser mapping equipment to record the interior's details so a three-dimensional map can be produced later to serve as an educational and management tool. But unlike most conventional maps, the team's rendition of the sinkhole will be linked to digital photographs to create an unprecedented three-dimensional virtual view of the cave.

In addition to producing eye-popping images, the effort has many practical implications, according to project leader Geary Schindel, the aquifer science manager for the Edwards Aquifer Authority.

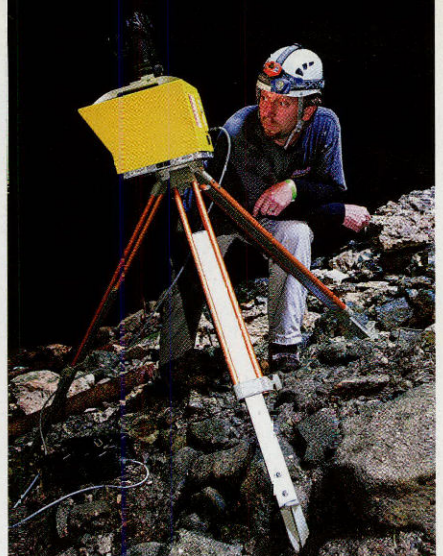
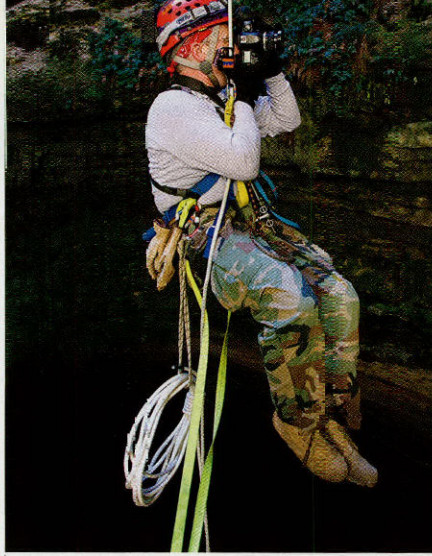
Already, a water-level monitoring device placed inside the sinkhole more than a year ago has been taking measurements every four hours and registering the data in a log. Schindel says TPWD wants to know how rainfall affects the sinkhole's lakes so it can better understand how water levels fluctuate in the Edwards Aquifer at this westernmost edge of the Edwards Plateau as compared to water levels in the Edwards Aquifer around San Antonio. The initial project was undertaken for a Witte Museum World of Water exhibit to demonstrate how water flows through the surface karst, or fractures in the limestone surface, and into the underground reservoir.

Park superintendent Randy Rosales asked the crew to return last November to map the entire cave. He hopes to use digital imaging to give Devil's Sinkhole visitors, who can only peer into the abyss from a platform on its edge, another perspective of the geologic wonder.

"We may be able to create a 3-D movie where they could 'fly down' the cable into the cave and fly around the interior," Rosales said.

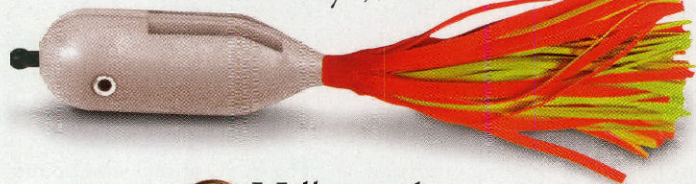
And, yes, Fritz got to see the sinkhole from down below once again. This time, though, it was much easier. The self-described "young man in an old body" was lowered in and out of the gaping hole in a harness, letting the young whippersnappers above provide the muscle. ★

— Rob McCorkle



Digital photos will give visitors a safe look into the depths of Devil's Sinkhole.

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Toyota Texas Bass Classic Wrap-up

Lake Fork event proved it's possible to hold a successful tournament on a lake with strict, fish-friendly rules.

Some said it couldn't be done, but the first major bass fishing tournament held on Lake Fork proved that holding tournaments on lakes with slot limits can be not only possible but also highly successful — and perhaps change the way all tournaments are held.

Despite Lake Fork's reputation as perhaps the best bass lake in the United States, major tournaments avoided it because the lake's 16- to 24-inch slot limit, coupled with a daily limit of one fish over 24 inches, meant that most fish caught — especially crowd-pleasing lunkers — could not be brought to weigh-ins.

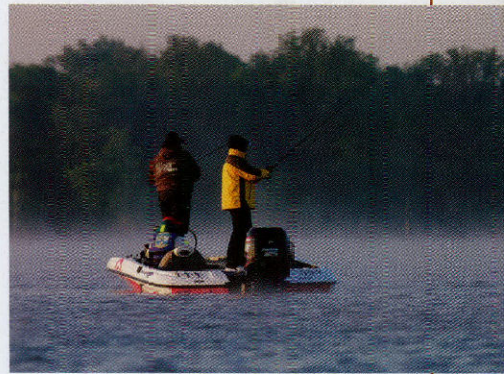
After fishing on Lake Fork with Professional Anglers Association member Kelly Jordan, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Commissioner Donato Ramos enlisted the help of Commissioner Dan Friedkin to find a way to hold a tourna-

ment on the lake while observing the regulations that made the fishery what it is.

The result was the first Toyota Texas Bass Classic, a three-day event in which 160 anglers competed against each other in 40 four-member teams. Financial support from Toyota and other sponsors made possible a \$1 million total purse, with \$250,000 going to the winning team, while anglers paid no entry fee.

Survival of tournament-caught fish was maximized by limiting the number of fish brought to the weigh-in. An official observer in each boat measured and weighed each fish caught using a Boga-Grip fish handling device with built-in scale. Fish caught were immediately returned to the water, with the exception of fish longer than 24 inches, which were brought to the weigh-in.

The team concept was also new to major



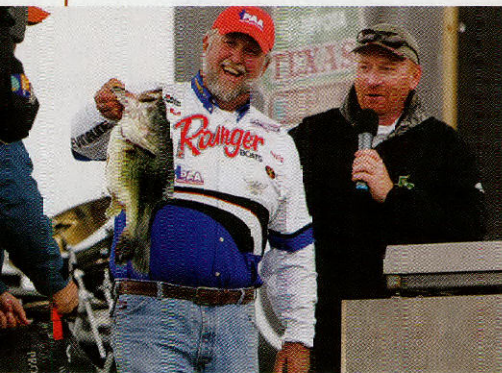
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tournaments. Instead of fishing against all the other entrants, each angler was a member of a team that competed against the other teams, with every angler's catch contributing to the team's total. Numerous anglers expressed positive opinions about the team format, since it allowed them to learn from each other and also to get to know other anglers better.

The tournament was designed with both on-site spectators and television viewers in mind. Teams fished in two shifts each day and held strategy sessions between shifts to share information and plan their next move. Spectators were allowed to listen in on these sessions, which were also videotaped, as was the on-the-water action, for broadcast on Versus and CBS. Hands-on activities, fishing industry displays and free concerts by top-name entertainers such as

Clay Walker and Tracy Lawrence meant the fun went on all day.

The team of Terry Scroggins, Chris Daves, Frank Ippoliti and James Niggemeyer caught 54 fish weighing a total of 244 pounds, 12 ounces, over three days to take home the top prize. One of the biggest surprises of the tournament came when Scroggins revealed where the team caught some of its fish — off a point near the dam, in sight of the weigh-in area.

Lake Fork is known for producing big fish, including 230-plus fish weighing 13 pounds or more that have been entered into the Budweiser ShareLunk-

er program. While no ShareLunkers were caught during the tournament, John Sappington was happy to win the big fish award — a Toyota Tundra and a pair of Lucchese boots — with his 11-pound, 2-ounce fish.

TPWD received \$250,000 for its inland fishing and youth outreach programs, but in the long run, bass and bass fishing stand to be the big winners. The Toyota Texas Bass Classic proved that it is possible to hold a tournament that furnishes ample entertainment while being fish-friendly. Bass tournaments may never be the same again. ★

—Larry D. Hodge

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TEXAS' LARGEST RURAL LENDER



59 Years Ago in Texas Game and Fish

Comparing the dietary benefits of fish and meat.

In the everyday language of the 1940s, fish was not considered a type of meat. "Meat" apparently referred to beef, chicken and other land-based animals. Scientists of the day presumed that fish was nutritionally inferior to beef and chicken. But the excerpt below shows a growing realization that, hey, maybe fish is good for you — or at least as good as meat.

From the October 1948 issue of *Texas Game and Fish*:

Tests Prove Fish as Good as Meat

Fishery foods are as good as meat for the human body.

Tests conducted by Dr. Hugo W. Nilson, pharmacologist at the Fish and Wildlife Laboratory in College Park, Md., and Miss Shirley J. Wilson, a graduate assistant in fisheries, to show the effect of a fish diet on the red cell count and hemoglobin value of human blood have proven that fishery foods are the equal of meat.

The experiment was made in coop-



In 1948, readers learned that fish is as nutritious as meat.

eration with the University of Maryland's College of Home Economics. It was the first of its kind in this laboratory to use human subjects. The results were announced today by the Fish and Wildlife Service's Branch of Commercial Fisheries.

Six University of Maryland co-eds, 19 to 24 years of age, participated in the eleven-week experiment. They consumed a standard diet of their own choice for three weeks. Blood tests taken once a week during this period reported their red cell counts and hemoglobin values.

During the next seven weeks, four of the girls stopped eating meat, and consumed fishery foods as the big noon-day dish of their diets. They are fresh-water fish, salt-water fish, and shell fish — broiled, baked, steamed, and fried. The two other girls continued on their regular diets on which meat was a chief item for the duration of the test.

The four girls on the fish diet returned to their standard food fare in the last week of the experiment to provide a second check.

Dr. Nilson and Miss Wilson noted that the red cell count and hemoglobin value of the four girls on the fish diets remained the same as when they were eating meat. The counts

and values were the same in relationship as the two girls' on the standard diets during the seven-week period. There was even an increase in the cell count and in the hemoglobin value for the four girls on the fish diets for several weeks.

As a result of his experiment, Dr. Nilson says that fishery foods maintain as good a red cell count and hemoglobin value in human blood as does meat. Hemoglobin is the chemical substance that forms the blood's red color and carries oxygen from the lungs to all parts of the body.

Dr. Nilson says that protein and mineral content of fishery foods is also the equal of meat. Protein and mineral values of all animal foods are probably the same, regardless of species, he says.

One of his recent experiments showed that from 89 to 96 percent of fishery foods are digestible, while 87 to 90 percent of beef and chicken is digestible.

Editor's note: This is the second installment in an eight-part series commemorating the 65th anniversary of *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine (formerly *Texas Game and Fish*). ★

—Jon Luksinger



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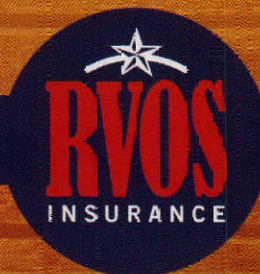
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Miner's Path

Big Bend Ranch's new Contrabando Dome Trail offers a peak at the region's rugged history.



With the help of the nonprofit Big Bend Trails Alliance, Big Bend Ranch State Park recently created a new 4-mile spur off the Contrabando Trail network. A raucous roller-coaster named the Dome Trail, it rides roughshod over a cinnabar prospect mining region known as the Contrabando Dome. The new multi-use Dome Trail sports a serpentine network of sandy arroyos, stony jeep tracks and bright yellow humps and hilltops that interlace a cross-section of Chihuahuan Desert low country. Along the way, hikers, bikers and equestrians benefit from colorful orientation kiosks and interpretive signs that provide lessons in the area's history of mining, smuggling and ranching.

The Dome Trail highlights the area's cinnabar mining sites and includes waysides detailing prospectors' struggles

to bore over 2,000 feet of drill holes in their search for the red ore cinnabar. When heated in furnaces and then allowed to cool and condense, the mineral produces the quicksilver of legend — mercury. During World War II quicksilver was worth almost as much as gold is today, bringing nearly \$200 per flask. But the dome prospectors struck out. It is likely the dome area gave up its mercury veins before mining began by allowing it to escape via evaporation through faults in the dome's strata. Not so, however, for a number of other mines nearby, such as the Whitroy and Fresno mines, which yielded a fortune for a few lucky Big Bend prospectors.

Dome Trail travelers have the opportunity to imagine the hardscrabble desert life of these early-20th-century laborers

by examining the ruins of the miners' living quarters (as well as their outhouse) along the trail. But the challenges of rough and rugged living are most apparent at the Contrabando Waterhole. Dome travelers must pass this site once they complete the Dome Trail spur and converge onto the main Contrabando Trail for their return to the main trailhead. Here, Lajitas founder H.W. McGuirk made his second foray into Big Bend ranching by building stone fences, corrals and an elegant limestone home. However, a contamination of his sole water source — the beautiful green *tinaja*

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The Contrabando Dome Trail features stunning views of the Big Bend landscape, including cinnebar mining ruins and ocotillo blooms.

that can be seen far below the trail — forced him to abandon the site after only two years.

The Dome Trail can be reached by starting at the west trailhead of the main Contrabando Trail system just off FM 170 and west of Lajitas, then by following the Contrabando Trail to the west Dome trailhead. The Dome Trail leaves the main Contrabando Trail here and continues in an up-and-down semi-circle of fun before converging back onto the Contrabando Trail at the east Dome trailhead 4 miles later. The route is well-marked, although the total mileage for a complete loop (beginning at the west Contrabando trailhead, traveling the full 4-mile Dome Trail and then returning to the west Contrabando trailhead) is approximately 10 miles. Planning for a full day of hiking or an entire afternoon of biking, including carrying enough water, snacks and sunblock for the adventure, is suggested. Be sure to obtain a permit and a map at Barton Warnock Environmental and Education Center at the eastern entrance to the park, adjacent to Lajitas. And remember, as you hike, bike or ride horseback through the Contrabando region and admire its ruins, its scatter of artifacts, and the native plants and wildlife that abound, the century-old law of the historic region still applies today — no smuggling allowed! ★

— E. Dan Klepper

TEXAS READER

On the Wing

The story of peregrine falcon migration inspires awe — and a little envy.

Alan Tennant, author of the briskly selling nonfiction tale *On the Wing*, now out in paperback, is at this very moment halfway across the country signing books. Other than scribbling his name, Tennant has been sitting inactively for days. In fact, his entire 130 pounds of muscle and sinew are slowly atrophying from lack of use.

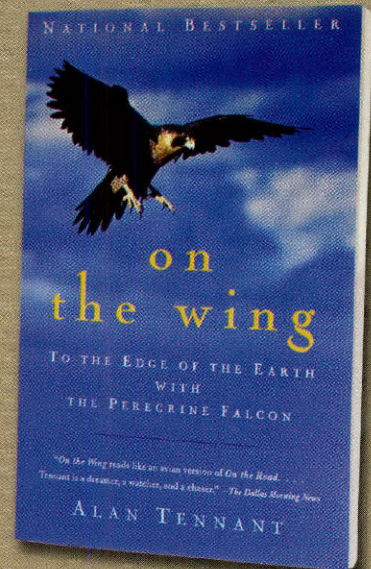
In his absence, I've been spending hours and hours furiously pedaling a bicycle down a stretch of empty, West Texas blacktop that Tennant and I frequently share whenever he is not traveling — that is to say, when he is at home in the chew-spit of a town we also share called Marathon.

You see, Alan Tennant is my neighbor. He is also my bicycling nemesis. And while I am a writer as well, I don't begrudge him his success with *On the Wing*. I don't mind that it has led to some great writing assignments for Tennant while I'm still pitching unsolicited GORP recipes to *Backpacker Magazine*. I am deluged with his *New York Times* best-seller listing and his number-three rating on Amazon.com, his high-dollar publisher, his guest appearances and his string of movie deals. Because the book — a true high-stakes adventure that follows Tennant and his scrappy pilot buddy as they track the migration of a peregrine falcon across the North American continent, is really a satisfying read. What I do mind is the fact that Tennant, who is at least a decade my senior and bereft of powerhouse quads like mine that have been years in the making, is faster and stronger on a bicycle — a fact that absolutely drives me mad.

So, by all means, buy the book. Keep Alan Tennant sitting on his buttocks writing his name over and over again. All I know is that Tennant is still just a man, just a simple man who can only pedal so fast.

According to his busy but sedentary schedule, Tennant is due back home next week from this latest, monthlong book-signing tour. In the meantime, I am going to keep riding long and hard until I am able to leave Tennant in the dust. In fact, I am going to get back on the bike right now and ride at a speed and strength more powerful than Alan Tennant with his big entertaining story of beautiful raptors, breathtaking adventures, ramshackle airplanes and crazy characters will ever hope to match. OK, maybe not right now. But definitely right after I finish watering his plants and feeding his cat. ★

— E. Dan Klepper



Reading Strange Water

The hunt for where bass live starts where you live.

Pro angler Ray Hanselman Jr. of Del Rio knows Lake Amistad so well he doesn't even have to use electronics to find his fishing spots. But when it comes to fishing unfamiliar lakes, he's in the same boat as the rest of us — he has to hunt for the fish. Here's how he does it.

"Start with the basics and go from there," he advises. Much of the information you need can be found using the TPWD Web site. Start at <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fishboat/fish/recreational/lakes/> and follow links for current conditions. "This will give you an idea to start on," Hanselman says. "Find out what you can about what kind of structure the lake has and consider the time of year, water clarity and water temperature when you will be fishing. Then go to a map and look for areas that should be best suited for that time of year and those conditions.

"As a rule of thumb, seasonal patterns for bass are pretty standard on all lakes," Hanselman continues. "In spring, before the spawn, look for creek channels leading to the backs of coves, where fish will be staging to move in to spawn. During the spawn, look for protected creeks. Start on the north side of the lake, because the water usually warms up first there. You may see a creek and say, 'There are four or five other areas like that I need to check.'"

Post-spawn, Hanselman keys on main lake structure on flats and points. This can be flooded timber, rocks, submerged roadbeds, vegetation — anything that will provide cover where a bass can hide, feel safe and ambush prey. "Look for open-water structure, which is what most lakes in Texas have," he says. "In fall, fish will start moving to the backs of creeks following shad. In winter, look for deep structure. Bass may not be in the same place every year, but they will be on the same kind of structure."

Modern electronics that let you download lake maps into your fish finder/GPS unit can be your best pre-trip fish-finding tool, though it may make your neighbors think you've



Use planning, not just luck, to catch fish in unfamiliar water.

lost your mind. "Study the lake maps on your unit while sitting in your driveway at home," Hanselman says. "When you find structure or lake features such as channel bends or contour changes that look promising, you can pop waypoints on those places right in your driveway and go straight to them the next day. Then if you find fish in those places, you can look for similar spots and go right to them, too."

It sounds too good to be true, but Hanselman says it works.

"I fished a tournament in Arkansas on a lake I'd never been on," he reveals. "It was a fall pattern, with fish moving back into the creeks, so I pulled out a map and circled every creek, then started with the big ones. I caught fish and did very well in the tournament — and I'd never been there before."

A popular comedian once cracked that the opposite of déjà vu is "vuja de" — the feeling something has never happened before. You may experience that when you follow these tips and catch fish on a lake you've never fished before. It's a good feeling. ★

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Slingshots

Advanced models can be used for varmint control or as a bait launcher.

Homemade slingshots are well known around the world as toys of youth. Only in the past 50 years has this small rubber-powered missile-thrower dramatically changed into a modern target and hunting instrument made and sold commercially in many variations.

No longer are thin-cut rubber strips from old car tire inner tubes used for power bands, but instead slingshots are now made from matching lengths of resilient pure latex surgical tubing. These lightweight, compact catapults can shoot round projectiles of steel or glass for hundreds of yards at speeds up to 170 mph. The energy storage principle is the same as the traditional bow. In fact, many archers use them for practicing sight-free shooting techniques. In the hands of a skilled marksman, they are silent, very accurate and deadly on small varmints.

Many shooters enjoy just roving or target shooting with precision ball-bearing ammunition of either 1/4-inch or 3/8-inch diameters. Also popular are special 1/2-inch white glass tracer marbles that can be followed in flight. Like any kind of instinctive shooting, this is a skill that must be developed with practice, but it is lots of fun and an inexpensive method of developing both quick reflexes and excellent eye/hand coordination.

The most advanced slingshots are very different in design from old Y-shaped wooden frames. Over 50 years ago, two Nebraskan youngsters developed the idea of bending a steel rod into a rigid wide-yoke shape with an extended frame providing arm support to eliminate wrist fatigue. Today, still one of the best designs is the **Trumark Folding Slingshot** featuring the above concept plus a pistol grip, in-handle ammo storage and foldaway padded arm brace. (\$12.95, Trumark Model FS-1, Trumark, 800-878-6272, www.slingshots.com)

The heavy-duty **Crosman Firestorm Slingshot** is equipped with a folding arm brace, non-slip molded handle and removable ammo dispenser. This powerful unit is difficult



From top: Fox Swinghead Method Catapult; Crosman Firestorm Slingshot; Trumark Folding Slingshot.

to pull while holding the small shot-pouch with two fingers and requires a strong adult to reach a full draw at the corner of the mouth. In some models, the strength of the rubber power bands can be exchanged for ones with less tensile strength. If a unit is too strong, it will cause fatigue and loss of accuracy. (\$12.50, Firestorm Model FSS, Crosman Corporation, 800-724-7486, www.crosman.com)

Fishermen use a specialized **Fox Swinghead Method Catapult** with an oversize mesh pouch to lob wads of compacted bait far out into lakes and rivers to attract carp and buffalo fish to specific locations. Some bow hunters use this same instrument to place a series of small scent-impregnated pellets to lure game like deer or wild hogs to a tree stand with a wait-

ing archer. (\$17.99, Swinghead Catapult, Fox, Big Carp Tackle, 918-331-9047, www.bigcarptackle.com)

For practice, an easy target range can be set up using any cardboard box mounted with a target face and loosely filled with shredded newspaper or a suspended scrap of old carpet hung inside to stop spent ammunition for reshooting. Start practicing at a distance of about 10 feet and gradually extend the range up to 30 feet while maintaining a 4-inch grouping in the target center.

Warning! A hunting slingshot is not a toy. Adult supervision is strongly recommended. Always wear shooters' protective eyewear. Frequently check for wear and cuts in the rubber power tubes and replace with new ones at the first signs of age or damage. Careless use of these weapons may inflict property damage or serious injury. ★

3 Days in the Field / By Karen Hoffman Blizzard

DESTINATION: FORT DAVIS

TRAVEL TIME FROM:

AUSTIN – 6.5 hours / BROWNSVILLE – 10 hours / DALLAS – 7.75 hours

HOUSTON – 8.5 hours / SAN ANTONIO – 5.75 hours / LUBBOCK – 5 hours / EL PASO – 3.25 hours

Call of the West

Once you've been to the Fort Davis area — with its sky-high mountains and offbeat culture — you'll feel the tug to come back soon.

A sign reading “Lacayo’s Cajuns of New Orleans” beckons road-weary travelers passing through the isolated West Texas town of Sonora. It’s the last thing you might expect to find along this lonely stretch of I-10 connecting the Hill Country to West Texas. Exiting I-10 at Sonora and cruising along Loop 467 in search of a lunch spot, my husband, Mike, and I happened upon Lacayo’s and were drawn in by the prospect of a Cajun meal.

The interior was awash with Mardi Gras décor, and the food was tasty, especially considering how far the shrimp in our po’boys must have been transported. Owner Diane Lacayo told us that she and her husband, Dennis, had evacuated from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and moved to Sonora because they were ready for dry ground. “All our other relatives lived on the water, including the ones in Florida, so we decided to take a road trip,” Diane says. After a year and a half in Sonora, their business has doubled and they are basking in the Texas hospitality. “People in Texas are great,” she says. “We have never met anyone so nice in our lives.”

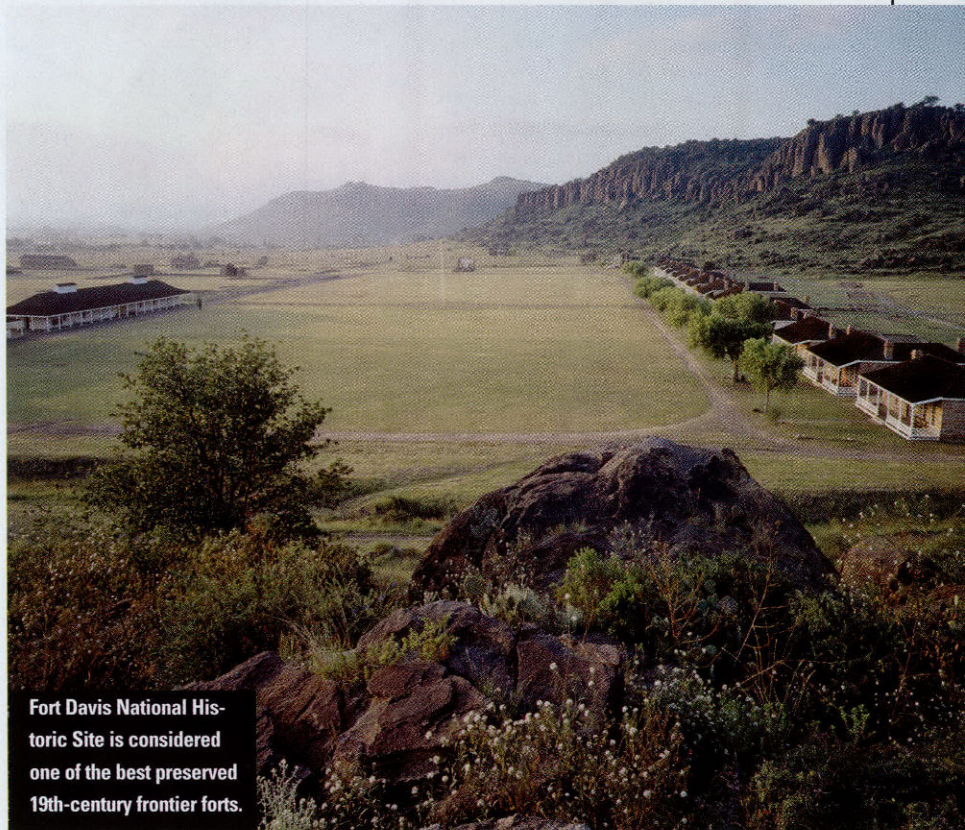
With the imagined sounds of Mardi Gras revelry in our heads, we left Lacayo’s and continued our journey to the mile-high town of Fort Davis, which we had chosen as “home base” for excursions to Balmorhea State Park, the annual open house art bash in Marfa and Davis Mountains State Park. We were drawn to Fort Davis because of its proximity to all the places we wanted to visit, as well as for the town’s colorful history as a military

post in the mid-19th century, its healthful mountain air and its wide selection (by West Texas standards) of vegetarian-friendly restaurants.

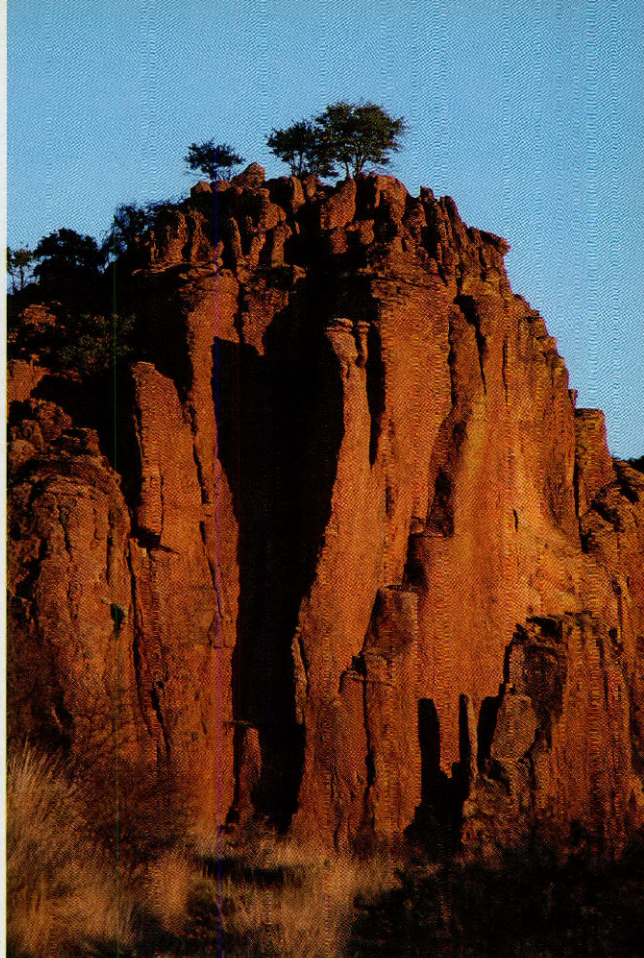
About halfway between Ozona and Fort Stockton, we passed numerous wind farms that in recent years have given a new look to the West Texas landscape. As our minds gradually emptied themselves of urban cares, our thoughts began to merge with the countless wind turbines spinning atop desert mesas,

creating a surreal dreamscape across an otherwise monotonous canvas.

Mid-afternoon that Friday, we reached Balmorhea State Park, the “jewel of the desert” and a true desert oasis for humans, fish and turtles alike. The park’s location near the junction of I-10 and Highway 17 makes it the ideal stopover for travelers on their way to or from Fort Davis, Alpine, Marfa and Big Bend. Overnight visitors can stay at San Solomon Springs Court, a Spanish-style adobe-brick motel that was



Fort Davis National Historic Site is considered one of the best preserved 19th-century frontier forts.



Fort ruins at Fort Davis State Historic Site (top left). The 1 3/4-acre artesian spring pool at Balmorhea State park (left). The mile-high altitude provides cool weather and crisp evenings in the summer months (above).

built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s, along with the other park buildings and the pool itself. The motel sits adjacent to the park's *ciénega*, a desert wetland that was reconstructed in the 1990s and where visitors can observe many species of birds and fish, including the endangered Pecos gambusia and Comanche Springs pupfish.

The centerpiece of the park is the spring-fed swimming pool, filled from the pure artesian waters of San Solomon Springs that rush in at a rate of 22 to 26 million gallons per day. The water temperature is a near-constant 72 to 76 degrees—ideal for year-round swimming. Weekdays are the best time to swim, as the pool can become crowded on the weekends. Wear swimmer's goggles, or a mask, snorkel and fins, in order to fully explore the pristine waters teeming with small, translucent fish that will swim right up and nibble at your legs, as well as numerous catfish, turtles,

and other varieties of fish that hide among the plants at the bottom of the pool. Ah, paradise!

After swimming and communing with the fish for well over an hour, we drove five miles to La Cueva de Oso (the Bear's Den), which rightfully advertises itself as "the cutest restaurant in Balmorhea," for delicious Tex-Mex food and a cold beverage. After dinner, replete and relaxed, we headed south on Highway 17 along the final 35-mile stretch of road to Fort Davis. The winding road could probably be described as scenic by day. In the moonlit darkness, however, it was downright spooky, with menacing rock formations jutting out of the mountains as if they were about to come alive and advance on us like something out of *Lord of the Rings*.

In Fort Davis we pulled up to the Hotel Limpia, a charming historic hotel built near the courthouse in 1912. Over time, the hotel has expanded to include the original hotel, the

Limpia Suites located just behind the hotel, and assorted guest houses and cottages on or near Court Avenue, several blocks to the west. The guest houses differ in character, and each has one or more features to surprise and delight travelers, such as a fireplace in the bedroom, renovated bathroom, jacuzzi or wraparound porch. The completely renovated Grerson House is the newest addition to the Hotel Limpia. For a real treat, ask for a room in the Trueheart House, a restored 1898 home that later became a doll museum until its acquisition by Hotel Limpia in 2005.

We stayed in the Limpia Suites building. Our suite had a separate living area and kitchenette, a clawfoot bathtub and — our favorite part — a covered porch with rockers and a hammock. The next morning, we had coffee and bagels on our fabulous porch and walked around the hotel gardens and pool area. We noticed several of the guests walking their dogs and made

a mental note to bring our two guys with us on our next visit to Fort Davis.

After a leisurely Saturday morning, we drove about 20 miles south along Highway 17 to Marfa to experience the weekend-long 20th Annual Chinati and Judd Foundation Open House. Each year, the open house draws more than 2,000 international pilgrims from all corners of the United States and abroad, creating a mix of people even more diverse than the usual West Texas potpourri of artists, cowboys, hippies, vegetarians and urban refugees. This means that all of the hotels within about a 90-mile radius of Marfa book up quickly for the event, so it's a good idea to make a reservation several months in advance.

The annual Open House event showcases the work of artist and Chinati founder Donald Judd (1928–1994) and features exhibitions by Robert Irwin, and Josef Albers, among others. Throughout the weekend, visitors are treated to all the free art, food, music, readings and artist talks they can possibly cram into two days. The exhibitions occupy various buildings and locations in Marfa, and one of the weekend highlights is the Saturday Night Open House Dinner, a free dinner and dance held outside on the main street in downtown Marfa.

As we drove into Marfa, we were relieved not to encounter any traffic snarls. Apparently the gently sprawling town had absorbed its visitors with ease. We decided to head first to the Chinati Foundation museum because most of Donald Judd's art is there. Formerly the site of a U.S. Army post, the museum occupies 340 acres and consists of six army barracks, several other buildings and an open field, all of which are staging grounds for the foundation's art installations and exhibitions. We wandered through the compound and in and out of the buildings, experiencing Judd's minimalist aluminum sculptures and his giant concrete sculptures in the field, and visiting Dan Flavin's wonderful fluorescent light installations in the barracks, among others. Everything seemed large-scale, appropriate to the vast West Texas openness surrounding Marfa.

After spending the afternoon feeding our souls on art, we wandered downtown to feed our bellies at the down-

town open house dinner, compliments of Fort Davis restaurant Cueva de Leon. The sun was setting as we walked, casting its palette of pinks and oranges over the horizon. As we turned onto Highland Avenue, we were treated to the festive sight of lights, buffets of steaming food, an eclectic crowd of partygoers and rows of long tables and chairs stretching down the street, with a musical stage at the opposite end. Hosting a dinner for 2,000 is no small feat, but despite the long lines at the buffets, there was plenty of food and drink to go around. After dinner, we joined in the dancing in front of the stage to the music of Mariachi Aguila.

As the dinner and dance started to wind down, many of the local artists' galleries around town were still open to the public. By chance, we walked into the newly opened gallery of Julie Speed, one of my favorite artists, who had recently moved to Marfa from Austin. She was there along with Mark Smith, the co-director of Flatbed Press in Austin, where Speed created many of her etchings. At another gallery, we met an artist named Steve Dubov, whose work we liked a lot. According to the program, a band called the Dandy





Clockwise from top: The Presidio County Courthouse in Marfa; wind turbines catch the West Texas breeze; hiking in the Davis Mountains; the historic Hotel Limpia in Fort Davis.

Warhols would be playing later at a venue called the Ice Plant, but we decided to head back to Fort Davis and those wonderful front-porch rockers.

On Sunday morning, after enjoying breakfast and art at the Twin Souls gallery and coffeehouse, Mike stayed behind to try out the porch hammock with a good book in hand while I went hiking at Davis Mountains State Park, about four miles down the road. I had not been to the park since coming with my family on a summer vacation years ago. Feeling nostalgic, I drove through the park to the Indian Lodge, where we had stayed. The stunning white Southwestern Pueblo-style lodge, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933, nestles cozily in a basin at the foot of the Davis Mountains. Within the last several years, the lodge has been extensively renovated, with the addition of new amenities and the preservation of its original style. Otherwise, the place was pretty much as I had remembered it, and I could practically see my younger sister and brother trying to run all the way up one of the mountains surrounding the lodge without stopping.

Although the sky was overcast, the air felt refreshing and I decided to hike a

portion of the 4.5-mile trail that begins near the interpretive center, crosses the state park boundary and ends at the Fort Davis Historic Site. The trail winds its way quickly to an overlook at the top of a mountain from which you can look down at the town of Fort Davis and enjoy stunning views in all directions. From there, the trail continues along the mountain ridges, somewhat rocky but otherwise good for trail running. Since we were driving back to Austin that day, I turned back after only a couple of miles but was already planning to run the entire trail on my next visit — preferably with my husband and a vehicle waiting at the other end. Fort Davis, I had discovered, has a way of calling you back even before you've left. ☆

Details

Chinati Foundation (432-729-4362, www.chinati.org)

Davis Mountains State Park (432-426-3337, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/davismountains)

Balmorhea State Park (432-375-2370, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/balmorhea)

Hotel Limpia (800-662-5517, www.hotellimpia.com)

More West Texas lodging (www.lonestarlodging.com)



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PHOTO BY CHASE FORNAINI/TPWD

HELPING HEROES

The 100 Club
supports families of fallen
game wardens.

By Tom Harvey

Two days after Game Warden Justin Hurst was killed March 17 by a suspected poacher, a soft-spoken man in a dark suit arrived at the Hurst home, asking to see Hurst's widow, Amanda.

About 20 uniformed game wardens were in the yard and around the front porch, all there to support Amanda and her young son Kyle.

The caller was Rick Hartley, executive director of the 100 Club of Houston. Two days earlier, he'd been in northeast Texas, comforting the widow of a 29-year-old DPS trooper. The trooper had been working on Highway 59 near Marshall when his vehicle collided with an 18-wheeler and he was instantly killed. He left behind a pregnant widow and two small boys.

Justin Hurst was killed on his 34th birthday, leaving a legacy of conservation achievement and generating a statewide outpouring of condolence and support.

Such tragic situations are a constant and typical part of Hartley's job. Almost every week or two he visits a stricken family in similar circumstances. Nothing in particular prepared him for this career path, but several things seemed to point to it.

Hartley grew up on a farm near Brenham, but wound up in the big city working in Houston TV news. That role led the city police chief to recruit him as the first public information director for the Houston Police Department. He was later assistant director of the state prison system for five years.

As a youngster, he “never dreamed” he’d be doing this, but he’s since come to believe his purpose in life is to be a source of comfort for the families of slain peace officers.

“It’s very emotional work,” Hartley says, “but I’ve been doing it for 14 years. I believe this is what God wants me to do with my life. It’s my job to be there and be strong and do what we do.”

Hartley recalls his visit with Amanda and Hurst’s parents and brother as brief and formal.

“Amanda? She is a very strong lady,” he says. “She knew who we were, knew we were coming, was appreciative of our support. It was a very short visit, maybe 5 to 10 minutes. She was devastated and still in shock over what happened. Mainly we wanted her to know that we care about her and we love her, that there are 26,000 people in the 100 Club who care about her.”

Hartley presented Amanda with a check for \$10,000, said he’d be back later to discuss the family’s needs in greater detail and quietly retired from the scene.

“We try within 48 hours to give the surviving spouse \$10,000 to help with any immediate needs and

expenses. When some of the trauma of the tragedy subsides, we’ll go back to see what the family needs are. Game wardens are no different from most people — they’ll usually have mortgages, they’ll have car debts, there’s usually a youngster or two who will need support for college or trade school. What we try to do is take the family totally out of debt, pay off the house and cars and provide for the youngsters’ financial needs, and we’re usually successful.”

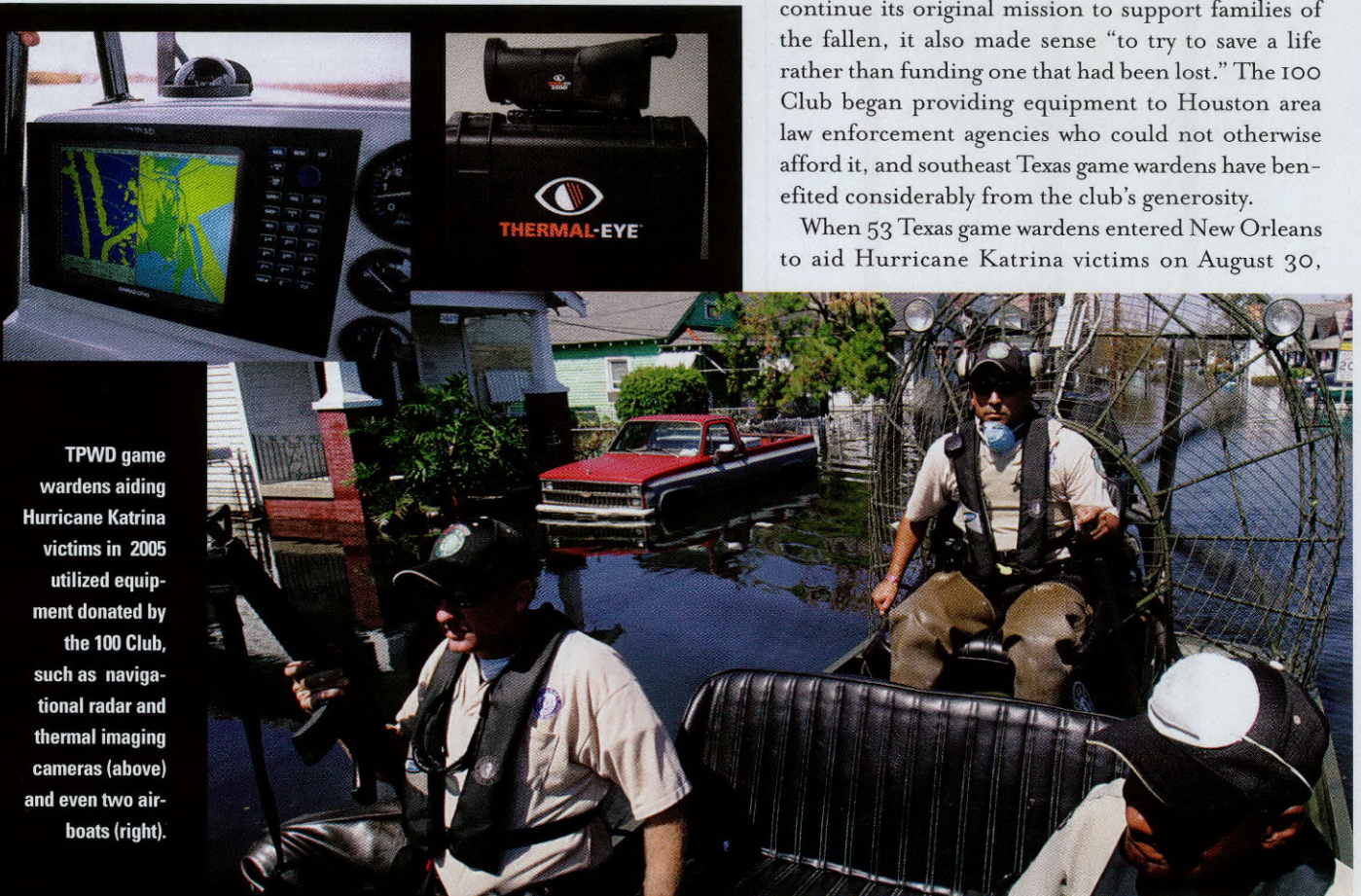
The 100 Club began in 1953 when 100 people each contributed \$100 to help the families of Houston police officers killed in the line of duty. Today the group focuses on 18 counties around greater Houston. A 31-member board of directors governs the organization, and directors often accompany Hartley to visit and comfort the families of slain officers.

In 2006, the board extended line of duty death benefits statewide to include Texas Parks and Wildlife Department game wardens, Department of Public Safety troopers, Alcoholic Beverage Commission agents and Department of Criminal Justice officers killed anywhere in Texas.

There are about 15 other 100 Clubs across Texas doing similar work, typically focusing on a particular city or region. But the Houston group is the oldest and largest in the state and is believed to be the second oldest in the nation (one was formed in the Detroit area two years earlier).

In the 1970s, the group decided that while it would continue its original mission to support families of the fallen, it also made sense “to try to save a life rather than funding one that had been lost.” The 100 Club began providing equipment to Houston area law enforcement agencies who could not otherwise afford it, and southeast Texas game wardens have benefited considerably from the club’s generosity.

When 53 Texas game wardens entered New Orleans to aid Hurricane Katrina victims on August 30,



TPWD game wardens aiding Hurricane Katrina victims in 2005 utilized equipment donated by the 100 Club, such as navigational radar and thermal imaging cameras (above) and even two air-boats (right).

TOP PHOTOS BY CAPTAIN EDWARD TANUZ/TPWD; BOTTOM BY EARL NOTTINGHAM/TPWD

“What we try to do is take the family totally out of debt, pay off the house and cars and provide for the youngsters’ financial needs, and we’re usually successful.”

— 100 Club executive director Rick Hartley

2005, two of the 50 boats they were hauling had come from the 100 Club. These were Air Ranger airboats worth about \$55,000 each.

“The 100 Club equipment donations are for items that can’t be obtained through normal means, things that are not in our budget, and they have been incredibly significant,” says Lt. William Skeen, a longtime supervisor in TPWD’s Houston law enforcement office. “During our lean years, they provided essential equipment for our wardens to do the job and do it safely, items we would not have been able to buy if not for the 100 Club and its members.”

Skeen says the 100 Club has also provided navigational radar for night boat patrols, thermal imaging cameras, radios and Zodiac inflatable boats with outboard motors for use in flood rescues. Also, before TPWD set a policy making bullet-proof vests mandatory wear, the 100 Club was providing them to game wardens. All told, Texas game wardens have received donations totaling \$369,455 since 1997.

The equipment donations are invaluable, yet Skeen emphasized how deeply enforcement officers appreciate the line of duty death benefit.

“It gives every officer I know some comfort that if you do go down in the line of duty, there are organizations like the 100 Club who will step in to take care of your family,” Skeen says. “It’s hard to put into words how important that is.”

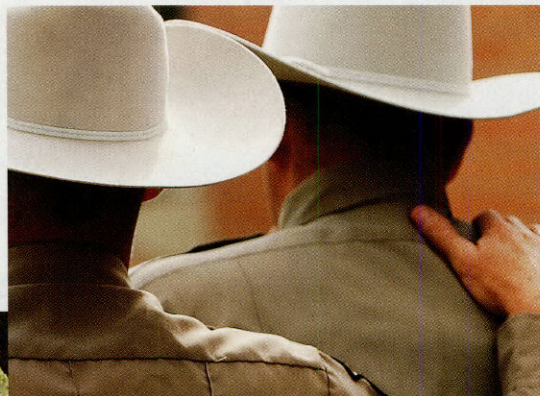
Alongside the 100 Club, Operation Game Thief also provides survivor benefits to the families of game wardens killed in the line of duty, as well as equipment grants.

“The work of the two organizations is complementary, and both are needed,” Skeen says. “Equipment donations for the Houston 100 Club are for that region, so wardens in North Texas or other areas are getting equipment through OGT.”

Operation Game Thief is Texas’ wildlife Crime Stoppers program, offering rewards of up to \$1,000 for information leading to arrest and conviction for a wildlife crime. The OGT toll-free hotline number is (800) 792-GAME.

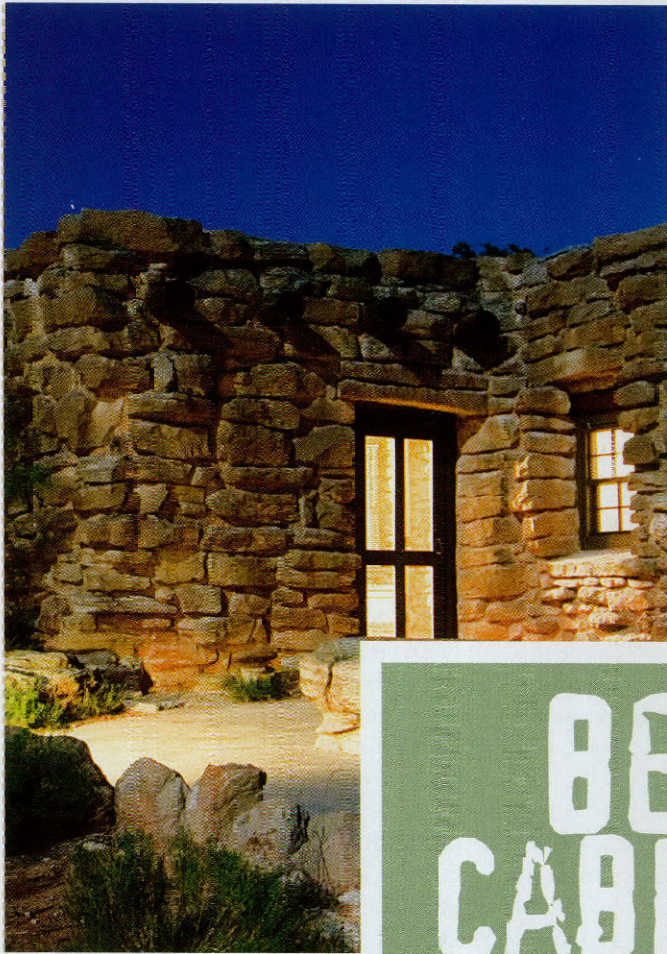
Since its inception in 1981, OGT has fielded more than 28,000 phone tips, filed more than 9,000 cases with a 98 percent conviction rate, netted more than \$1 million in fines and paid out rewards totaling more than \$200,000. OGT is privately funded, entirely dependent on financial support from the public through the purchase of memberships and merchandise, donations, sponsorships and gifts.

For more information about the 100 Club, call (713) 952-0100 or visit <www.the100club.org>. To contact Operation Game Thief, call (512) 332-9880 or visit <www.ogttx.com>. ☆



The funeral for slain game warden Justin Hurst was held March 21. Game warden Ty Patterson died in the line of duty two months later.





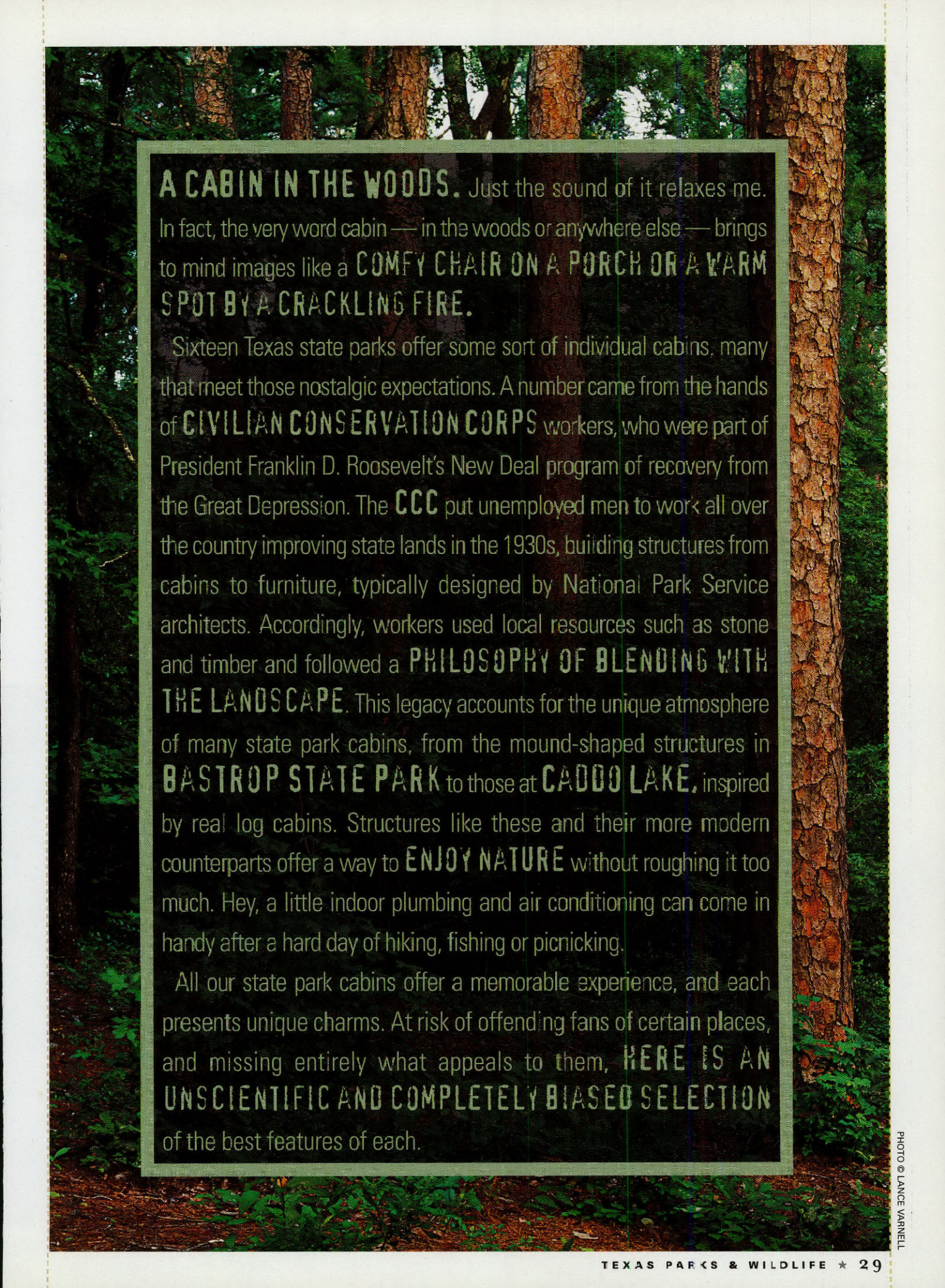
**BEST
CABINS IN
STATE PARKS**

HOW TO TAKE THE ROUGH CUT OF "ROUGHING IT"

By Melissa Gaskill



PHOTOS BY TPWD



A CABIN IN THE WOODS. Just the sound of it relaxes me. In fact, the very word cabin — in the woods or anywhere else — brings to mind images like a **COMFY CHAIR ON A PORCH OR A WARM SPOT BY A CRACKLING FIRE.**

Sixteen Texas state parks offer some sort of individual cabins, many that meet those nostalgic expectations. A number came from the hands of **CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS** workers, who were part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program of recovery from the Great Depression. The **CCC** put unemployed men to work all over the country improving state lands in the 1930s, building structures from cabins to furniture, typically designed by National Park Service architects. Accordingly, workers used local resources such as stone and timber and followed a **PHILOSOPHY OF BLENDING WITH THE LANDSCAPE.** This legacy accounts for the unique atmosphere of many state park cabins, from the mound-shaped structures in **BASTROP STATE PARK** to those at **CADDO LAKE**, inspired by real log cabins. Structures like these and their more modern counterparts offer a way to **ENJOY NATURE** without roughing it too much. Hey, a little indoor plumbing and air conditioning can come in handy after a hard day of hiking, fishing or picnicking.

All our state park cabins offer a memorable experience, and each presents unique charms. At risk of offending fans of certain places, and missing entirely what appeals to them, **HERE IS AN UNSCIENTIFIC AND COMPLETELY BIASED SELECTION** of the best features of each.

BEST ATMOSPHERE>>>

Bastrop State Park

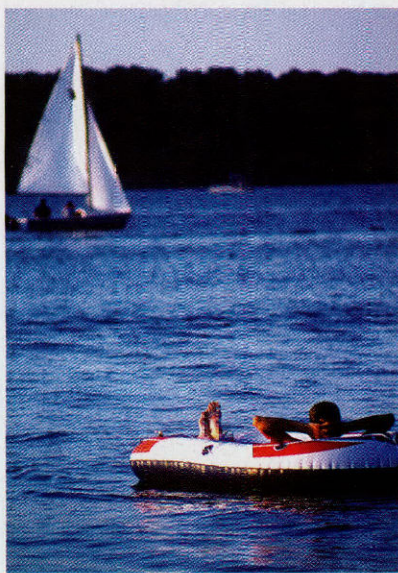
The park is situated beneath the canopy of the Lost Pines, an isolated 70 square miles of loblolly pine and hardwoods in the midst of rolling, post oak woodlands. In their quiet shade lie 13 wood and stone cabins built by two Civilian Conservation Corps camps between 1933 and 1937. Fireplaces in each cabin sport substantial wood mantles on which CCC craftsmen carved quaint words of wisdom, such as "The beautiful is as useful as the useful," "Old friends are the best," and "A man is as big as the things that annoy him." The largest cabin, Number 12, has four bedrooms and a screened porch overlooking a pond. The rest sleep from two to six people. All have heating and air conditioning, complete kitchens and outdoor grills. Linens provided. The park has a swimming pool, a golf course, canoe rentals, miles of trails and a scenic drive also good for cycling. (512-321-2101, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/bastrop).



BEST TREES>>>

Daingerfield State Park

Trees tower over the rolling hills of this park, and its three cabins. One two-bedroom structure overlooks a tree-rimmed lake the CCC created with an earthen dam. So does Bass Lodge, which has five bedrooms, two baths, a fireplace and backdoor steps leading right down to the water. These and two other cabins all have kitchens, air conditioning and heat, and bathrooms. The CCC also put in a swimming beach, picnic area and boathouse, where visitors can rent pedal boats and canoes. The lake holds crappie, perch, catfish and bass, and two and a half miles of hiking trails traverse wooded hillsides. Dogwoods, redbuds and wisteria paint these hills in spring, and sweetgum, oak and maple take over in fall, with pines doing their green thing year-round. Linens and towels furnished. (903-645-2921, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/daingerfield)



BEST VARIETY>>>

Lake Brownwood State Park

Three CCC companies used local timber and stone quarried nearby for an impressive roster of structures in this lakeside park. Today, nine two-person and seven four-person cabins with a variety of floor plans remain along a wooded ridge overlooking the lake. Other options are the two-bedroom Oak and Loma Vista Lodges, five-bedroom Fisherman's Lodge, and behemoth Beach Lodge, two dormitory wings holding beds for 26 and two baths around a central kitchen and living area. Cabin renovations circa 1978 added air conditioning and heat, modern appliances, and new windows, but left the atmosphere intact. All cabins have kitchens, fireplaces, and outdoor picnic tables and grills. Linens provided.

Other NPS-design CCC structures scattered throughout the park include firepits, benches, culvers, picnic tables, and the Clubhouse, which originally housed concessions, a hardwood dance floor and park headquarters. Today it is a day-use facility popular for weddings and reunions. Possible diversions here include swimming, fishing, boating, hiking and picnicking among the oak, hawthorn and cedar elm trees. (325-784-5223, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lakebrownwood)

TOP PHOTO © LANCE VARNELL; BOTTOM BY TPWD



A HUNTER'S CALENDAR

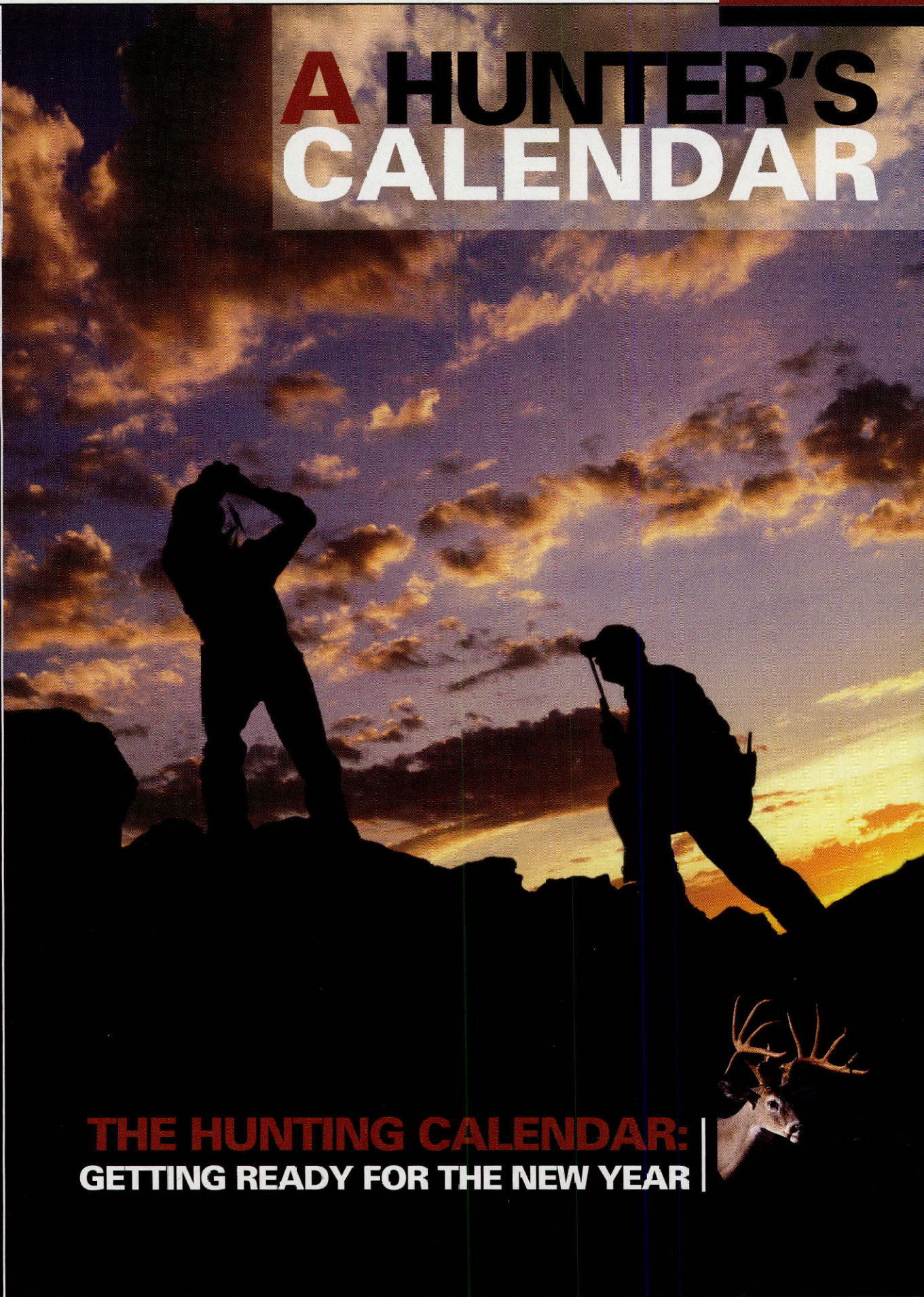


PHOTO BY CHASE FOUNTAIN/TPWD

THE HUNTING CALENDAR:
GETTING READY FOR THE NEW YEAR



barely acknowledge January 1. Certainly, I don't observe the beginning of the calendar New Year. After all, it's just another day in early winter. Solstice and equinox feel far more significant to me. In fact, many hunters consider opening day of dove season in September their New Year's Day. I'll give the official opening day a passing nod, but my new year begins in late September or early October, on the first day of the first real cool spell, when bird dogs begin to shake off their summer languor.

I enjoy shotgunning, of course, and I love dove breasts under mushroom gravy, but I wouldn't hunt dove for those reasons alone. Mostly, I hunt dove because Maggie, my German shorthaired pointer, loves to retrieve them.

I leave September to the serious dove hunters. I won't subject my dogs to the heat and rattlesnake danger, and the big field shoots aren't conducive to dog work.

But as I'm anticipating that first cool day, I'll take the "dog bag" from the gear closet. First things first. I'll get around to guns, boots and vests later.

Inevitably, leads, travel dish, toenail clippers and water bottles will have migrated, often as not in service of Annie, my daughter's beagle. I'll need batteries for the beeper collar. A few dog boots will need replacing; I'll pick last season's sand burrs from boots I plan to keep. I'll check and sort eye drops and ointments, first aid creams, clotting powder, bandages, tweezers and hemostat for cactus and porcu-

pine encounters. What else? Spare whistles and lanyards. Duct tape. Two small training dummies. And everything smells wonderfully doggy.

Once that first breath of cool air snaps through North Texas, Maggie and I are ready to do our dove hunting. We'll jump-shoot resident stragglers or October migrants, or stake out a few stock tanks. The cool mornings portend the real reason we have to be in the field. Quail season is coming. But for the time being, it's enough to be celebrating the new year, and doves will do nicely.



GOING PUBLIC: HUNTING WITHOUT A LEASE

Despite its reputation as a private land state, Texas has some superb public hunting. Here are a few suggestions. Consult TPWD's Web site (under Hunting and Wildlife for Public Hunting Lands and Public Hunt Drawing System) for details on seasons and regulations. www.tpwd.state.tx.us

White-tailed Deer

Chaparral WMA
(830) 676-3413
Gene Howe WMA
(806) 323-8642
Granger WMA
(512) 859-2838
James E. Daughtrey WMA
(830) 676-3413



Woodcock

Alabama Creek WMA
(936) 639-1879
Moore Plantation WMA
no phone
Bannister WMA
(409) 639-8620



Doves

Las Palomas WMA
(956) 565-1223

DEER YEAR

For a certain tribe of Texas hunters, the beginning of dove season is like New Year's Eve — a bit of frivolity to blow off steam before next year's work begins. For those up to the challenge, the real new year begins in October, with the opening of archery season. For the rest, it comes a month later. The first Friday in November, highways fill up with convoys of pickups and SUVs headed for hunting camps and motels. Small-town diners fill up with camo-clad patrons. Next morning is like New Year's Day — opening day of the general white-tailed deer season.



Texas' whitetail herd stands at about 3 million. If you simply want the best possible chance to bag a deer, head for the Hill Country. The area around Mason and Llano has traditionally held the highest deer densities in the world, though drought and other habitat conditions have lessened fawn production in recent years.

Historically, trophy whitetail hunters headed for the South Texas Brush Country and more recently to the Rolling Plains. Those regions still produce their share of record-book bucks, but according to Mitch Lockwood, TPWD's Whitetail Deer Program leader, hunters should pay more attention to management programs than specific regions.

"We've found that nearly every region in the state produces big bucks on lands where owners practice excellent management," he says. "Those Hill Country deer have the same genetic potential as the big bucks down in La Salle or Webb County."

Lockwood predicts excellent 2007 fawn production due to ample spring rain.

Mule deer are most plentiful in the eastern Trans-Pecos (western Edwards Plateau), where the eastern edge of their range overlaps whitetail country. However, the rough, sparsely-populated northern Trans-Pecos — Hudspeth, Ward and Culberson counties, and especially the Delaware Mountains — and the sand hill counties — Lamb, Winkler and Bailey — produce most of the big mule deer bucks. The Panhandle can produce some monster mulies.

Mule deer fawn production and antler growth have been fair to poor the past few years due to drought, but



Turkey

White Oak Creek WMA
(903) 884-3800
Gus Engeling WMA
(903) 928-2251
Pat Mayse WMA
(903) 982-7107

Waterfowl

Caddo Lake WMA
(903) 679-9817
Ray Roberts Lake WMA
(940) 627-5475



Squirrels

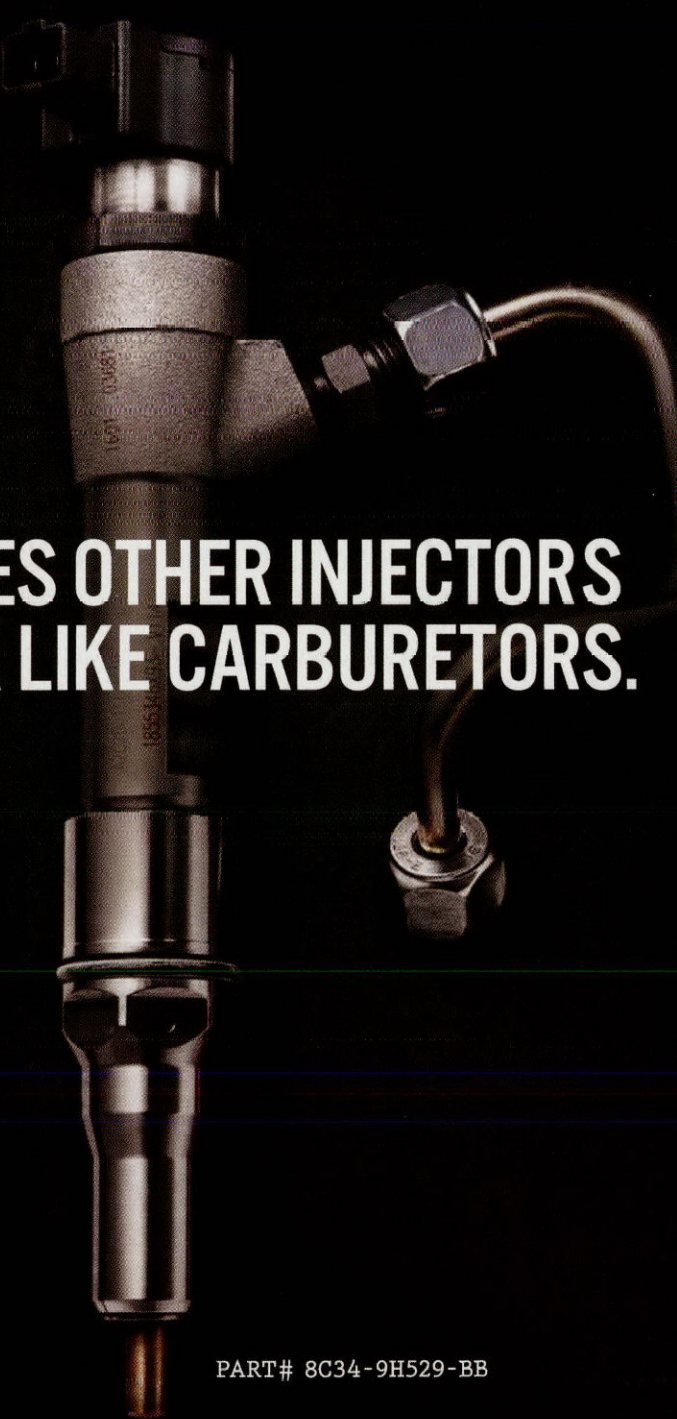
Gene Howe WMA
(806) 323-8642
Gus Engeling WMA
(903) 928-2251
Kerr WMA
(830) 238-4483
Granger WMA
(512) 859-2838



Quail

BOBWHITES
Matador WMA
(806) 492-3405
Gene Howe WMA
(806) 323-8642
Chaparral WMA
(830) 323-8642
BLUE QUAIL
Black Gap WMA
(432) 837-3251

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late-winter and spring rains promise a much improved 2007-08 season. "If the habitat gets good rainfall right before the deer drop their antlers and again before peak antler growth, then you can pretty much count on a good year," says TPWD biologist Calvin Richardson.

In the weeks prior to Deer New Year, responsible hunters sight in their weapons and practice shooting from likely positions and ranges. Too many hunters sight in their rifles at the shooting range and consider themselves ready to go. Of course, you should use a good rest whenever one is available, but field conditions often call for shots from prone, kneeling or sitting position, or, as a last resort, off-hand. Practice them all.

If you'll be hunting from a tree stand, work on shots from the heights and angles you'll be likely to see come opening day. This practice is especially important for bow hunters.

Also consider practicing in hunting clothes. You'll sweat and feel ridiculous, but the new recoil pad that feels just right when you're wearing only a T-shirt might hang up on your hunting coat. Make the needed adjustments before opening day.

Work on range estimation. If you hunt from a fixed stand or blind, step off or measure the distance to

GAINING AN EDGE: THE RIGHT KNIFE

As a hunter's tool, a good knife ranks just after gun and boots. Forget the Arkansas toothpick or Rambo-style pig-sticker. With a stout pocket knife or short fixed-blade, you can clean a quail, dress a buck and whittle a toothpick.

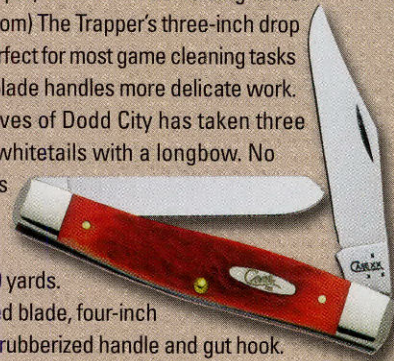
I asked two experienced outdoorsman about their hunting knife preferences.

Donny Lynch, a retired heavy-equipment operator in Marshall, hunts small game and deer nearly every day of the season. He's far and away the best squirrel hunter I've ever known. Lynch prefers the bone-handled Case Trapper, a dual blade folding knife. (www.wrcase.com) The Trapper's three-inch drop point blade is perfect for most game cleaning tasks while the spey blade handles more delicate work.

William Graves of Dodd City has taken three Pope & Young whitetails with a longbow. No gears or pulleys for this hunter.

His average range? About 10 yards.

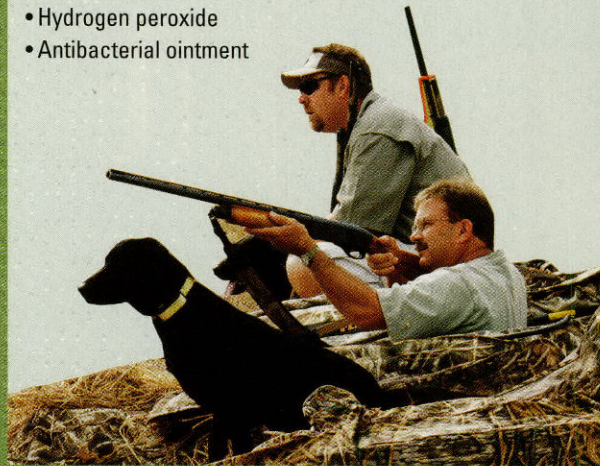
He carries a fixed blade, four-inch Buck knife with rubberized handle and gut hook. (www.buckknives.com)



FOR THE DOGS

In the Truck:

- Sterile, non-stick gauze pads
- Rolled gauze
- One-inch waterproof tape
- Clotting powder
- Ophthalmic ointment
- Toenail clippers
- Tape scissors
- Hydrogen peroxide
- Antibacterial ointment
- Duct tape
- Self-adhering sports wrap
- Buffered aspirin (5 mg per pound, twice daily, for elderly dogs)
- Extra batteries for electronic collars
- Phone number of local veterinarian



KNIFE PHOTO COURTESY W.R. CASE AND SONS CUTLERY CO.; ALL OTHERS BY TPWD

In the Game Vest:

- Hemostat
- Tweezers
- Small roll of duct tape
- Spare dog boot
- Canteen or water bottle
- Small water cup



Hunting Dog Equipment:
 Gun Dog Supply - www.gundogsupply.com
 T.E. Scott - www.scottsdog.com



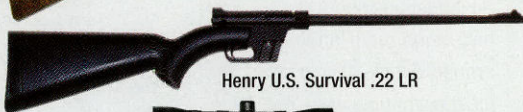
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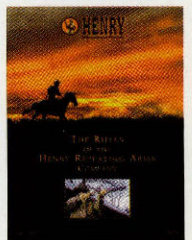
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landmarks along likely shooting lanes. Lightweight rangefinders are especially handy for this task.

An understanding of ballistics goes hand-in-hand with range estimation. If you sight in your rifle to hit an inch or two high at 100 yards, where will the bullet strike at 200 yards? Know the trajectory of your chosen loads, and consider terrain, cover and likely shooting ranges.

Need I mention preseason scouting? Keep in mind that a deer's routine changes throughout the year, depending on availability of food, water, cover and breeding activity. The big buck you're seeing at the stock tank just before dark in August probably will be somewhere else come November.

Still, field time is never wasted. Impressive shed antlers tell you that a big buck made it through the previous deer season. Chances are, he's still in his home range of 1,500 to 7,000 acres. By late summer, you may recognize his new headgear. Look for sheds along creeks and smaller drainages, along game trails and in openings amid dense brush.

Though rubs — wounds on small trees caused by bucks rubbing velvet from their antlers — may never be re-visited, they tell you that bucks have been working the area.

Scrapes indicate the presence of breeding age bucks and the onset of rut. Look for scrapes in openings in dense brush, along the edges of mottes and at intersec-

tions of game trails. Scrapes will nearly always lie beneath low overhanging limbs, which the buck licks, chews and mangles with his antlers.

Most Texas wildlife management areas offer year-round access for hiking, fishing, camping, birding and scouting. If you hunt public land, take off-season opportunities to head afield with binoculars and bird guide. When you're not eyeing warblers or testing your plant identification skills, keep an eye out for shed antlers, rubs, game trails, food and water sources and likely fall and winter habitat.

Increasingly, serious big buck hunters are using digital scouting cameras, which trigger on a passing animal's thermal signature. These can be set up along game trails or near scrapes or licks. More than a few hunters who thought they'd seen every good buck on their lease have been a bit shaken by images of what walked by the previous night.

Your quarry knows his home range intimately. Make sure you know it, too.

Texas boasts some of the most productive and varied deer hunting in North America — from deep woods whitetails to desert mule deer. With a little planning and preparation, you can start the New Year right. Otherwise, you'll be making resolutions on opening morning. ■

SHOOT AND RELEASE: PHOTOGRAPHY ON THE HUNT

Most hunters start the season with good intentions. This year, they'll take lots of well-planned photos and even learn what those knobs and buttons — other than the shutter release — on their digital cameras are for. Then, in the excitement of the hunt, cameras get left in duffel bags.

Photographic Rule Number 1: Carry the camera afield. *TP&W* magazine contributing photographer Wyman Meinzer believes that the average hunter would be better off with a lightweight, moderately-priced point-and-shoot digital camera than with a more complicated and expensive SLR. "People are a lot more likely to actually take a lightweight camera out," he says. "Just stick it in a pocket or game bag and go. It'll be there when you need it."

For those who prefer a digital SLR, Meinzer again recommends simplicity. "Most folks won't need more than 6 to 8 mega pixels, and a 28mm–85mm zoom lens will handle most situations," he says.

Photographer and writer Russell Graves, another frequent *TP&W* magazine contributor, encourages hunters to tell a story with their photos, as opposed to snapping the standard "grip and grin" shots. Camp scenes, hunt preparations, cooking and mealtime scenes, and even guide and

client introductions can be as meaningful as hunting shots.

For photos of harvested game, Graves urges hunters to clean up and arrange the animal in a respectful manner.

"Get the deer off the bed of the pickup, and use prickly pear or some other scenic brush or feature as a background," he says. "Harvested fish and game always look better at eye level."

For SLR users, Graves recommends a fairly wide-angle zoom lens in the 24mm–85mm range for landscape shots and a mid-range zoom lens around 75mm–300mm for most everything else.

Hunters serious about learning digital photography basics may be interested in Graves' latest book, *The Kodak Most Basic Book of Digital Nature Photography* (\$15), scheduled for release in December 2007.





BEST VIEW >>>

Palo Duro Canyon State Park

At 120 miles long and up to 800 feet deep, Palo Duro is the United States' second largest canyon, carved by the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River about a million years ago. Dizzying views right out the windows await guests in three rock cabins perched on the canyon rim. The structures have dual indoor fireplaces and outdoor eating areas with picnic tables and grills. To better enjoy those aforementioned jaw-dropping vistas, be sure to ask about the Sorenson Cabin, featuring a large wooden deck that allows the sunrise and sunset to fill the dining area. The other two cabins are named Lighthouse, for the famous Palo Duro rock formation (see photo), and Goodnight, for the original rancher of the canyon.

Constructed by several CCC companies in the 1930s and remodeled some years ago, the cabins sleep four each, with heat and air conditioning, indoor bathrooms with shower, refrigerator, microwave and coffee pot. Linens, pillows and towels provided. While you could easily spend an entire visit just soaking up the scenery visible from your cabin, the park also includes a museum and store, horseback rides at Old West Stables, and hot meals and camping supplies at the Palo Duro Trading Post. The well-known *Texas* musical drama is performed in the Pioneer Theater during summer (June 4 – August 18, 2007). Visitors can also enjoy almost 40 miles of hiking trails and nearly 15 miles of equestrian trails through this geologic wonderland. RV, tent, primitive and equestrian camping and limited service cabins in the canyon. (806-488-2227, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/facadeast/parks/palo_duro)

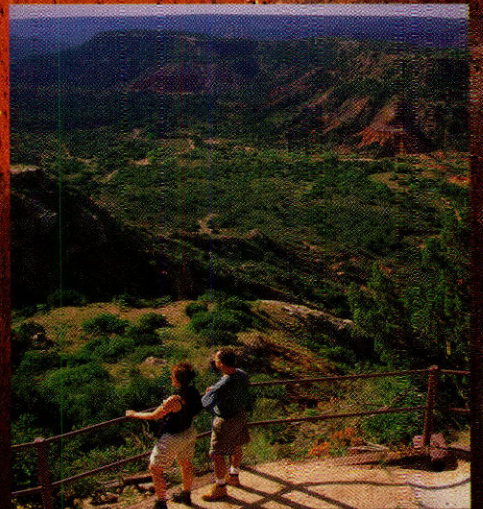


PHOTO © LAURENCE PARENT; INSET BY TFWO

BEST PORCHES>>>

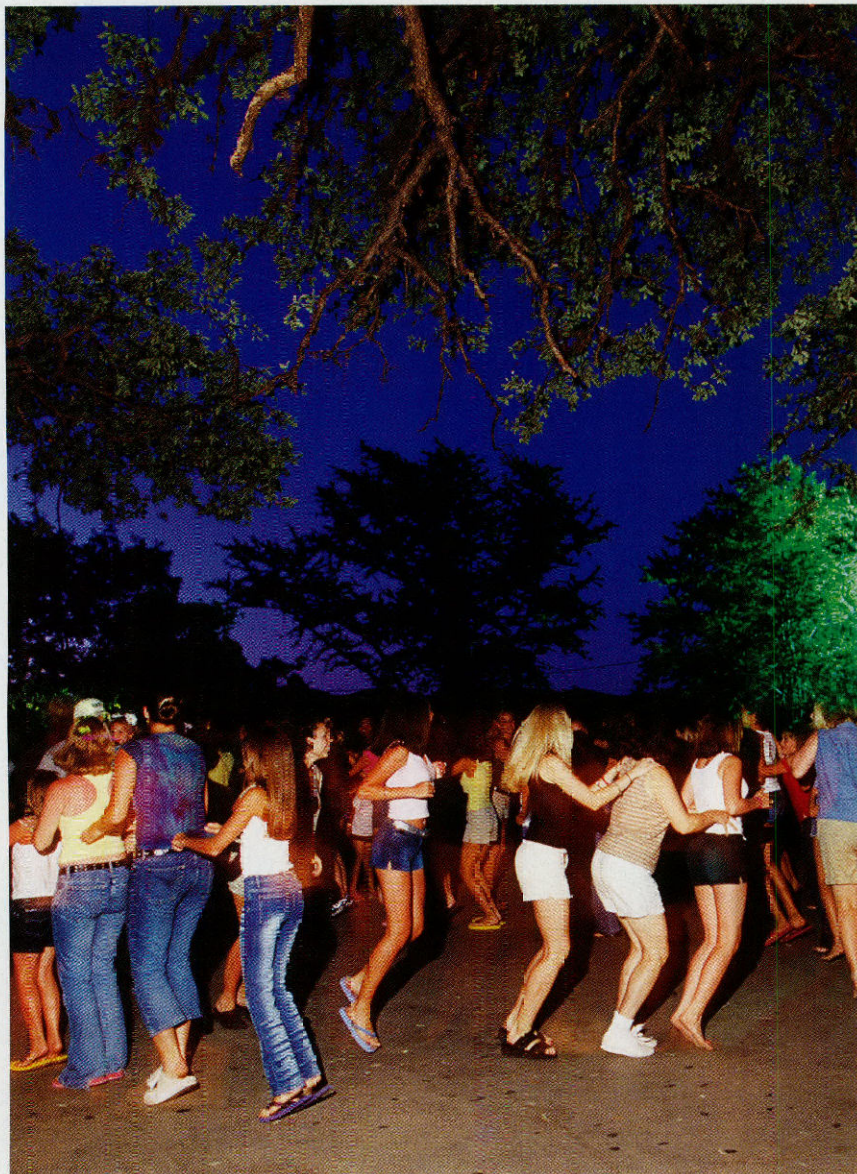
Caddo Lake State Park

Beneath tall trees, nine stone cabins form a semi-circle, each with a wide covered porch from which to enjoy the unspoiled view. Remodeled in 2001, they retain historic, CCC-built charm, including giant rock fireplaces (several of which have been converted to gas-burning, although most became merely decorative), built-in storage and substantial furniture. Two one-bedroom cabins sleep two, four two-bedroom cabins sleep four, and three two-bedroom cabins hold six (additional bedding required). Kitchens in all but the two-person cabins include refrigerators, microwaves and stoves; all have picnic tables and grills outdoors.

This heavily wooded, deep East Texas park curves around Saw Mill Pond, connected by Big Cypress Bayou to Caddo Lake. The swampy water reflects the droopy bald cypress trees rising from it, lending the place an eerily beautiful air. Fish from a lighted dock, rent canoes or sign up for a guided pontoon boat tour (903-930-0075) to explore the shallow maze of bayous and sloughs, or ford streams and clamber up slopes on hiking trails through the forest. (903-679-3351, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/caddolake)



TOP BY TPWD; BOTTOM © JIM OLIVE



BEST NIGHT LIFE>>>

Garner State Park

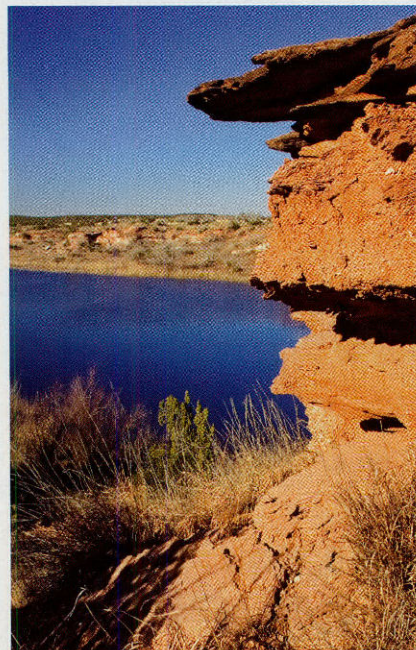
Thirteen CCC-built cabins (plus four more built in the '50s) mimic the limestone architecture of early Alsatian immigrants to central Texas. They sit just a few boot-scoots from the park's concession building, fondly known by many generations of Texans as the Pavilion, where on summer nights the jukebox fires up at dark and folks from 1 to 95 hit the dance floor. (Yours truly was first asked to dance right there, way back in sixth grade.) Many dancers take a break at the neighboring lighted miniature golf course, or grab a frozen lemonade or juicy burger in the snack bar. During the day, there's swimming, tubing or paddle-boat chases in the aptly named Frio River, along with hiking, fishing, bike riding, or just resting up for another night of two-stepping. All cabins have kitchens, attic fans and heat; 13 have fireplaces. (830-232-6132, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/garner)

BEST DECKS>>>

Cooper Lake State Park — South Sulphur Unit

Cooper Lake is one of Texas' youngest bodies of water. South Sulphur River water began collecting here in 1991; the park opened for boat access in 1992. It quickly became known for largemouth and white bass fishing, and as a popular destination for boaters, water skiers and other water enthusiasts, although low water levels have temporarily curtailed some of those activities.

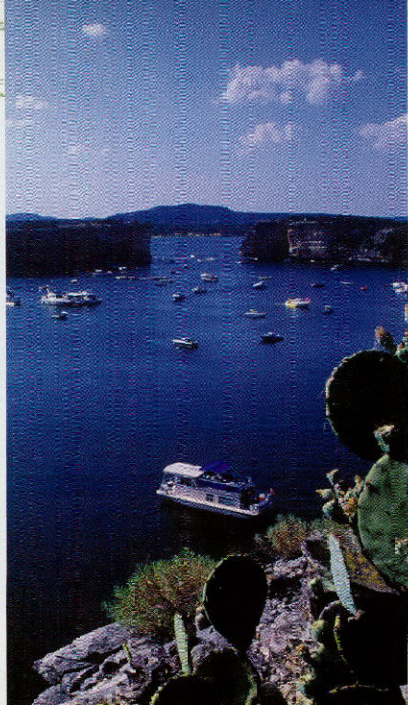
Fourteen wood-frame cabins scattered on a thumb of the lakeshore sleep from four to six in one bedroom, with bathroom, kitchen, living area, air conditioning and heat. Raised outdoor decks have grills, picnic tables, and, thanks to the area's rolling hills, views of the lake. Because the park is the only lakeside development, wildflowers cover those hills in spring and wildlife is abundant. The park also offers boat ramps and a sandy swimming beach (open when lake levels allow), hiking and equestrian trails, a playground, picnic areas, sand volleyball court, an amphitheater and a group pavilion that holds 100 of your closest friends. (903-945-5256, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/cooperlake)



TOP BY TxDOT; BOTTOM © LARRY DITTO



PHOTOS © WYMAN WEINER



BEST ACCESS TO WATER SPORTS >>>

Possum Kingdom State Park

The wide-open, clear-blue waters of this 22,000-acre lake beckon. Answer the call with your ski boat, bass boat, personal watercraft, canoe, kayak, raft, scuba gear or just your swimsuit. If you don't have any of those, a privately operated marina in the park rents non-motorized and motorized boats, including a 24-foot, 16-person pontoon boat. Reservations are recommended for rental of motorized boats and marina slips. There are six four-person cabins and a two-bedroom Longhorn Lodge, which sleeps eight. All are close to the water, and have kitchens, bathrooms, air conditioning and heating, and outdoor grills and picnic tables. When you need to dry out, try the two miles of hiking trails, playgrounds or fishing pier, or look for the dozens of species of birds spotted here, including hummingbirds that pass through in early spring. (940-549-1803, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/possumkingdom)

All state parks have entrance fees. Pets and smoking are not allowed in cabins or other park buildings. Cabin rental fees are subject to local hotel taxes and some restrictions, such as requiring rental of both weekend nights during peak seasons. Cabins with kitchens typically do not include cooking and eating utensils, and linens are not provided unless noted. Call (512) 389-8300 for information and reservations.

<<<LIMITED USE CABINS>>>

These generally newer structures accommodate sleeping only — with minimal or no kitchen and separate bathroom facilities. There is often room for small trailers, pop-up campers or tents next to the cabins, allowing you to bring the whole family.

• Buescher State Park

Three cabins sleep four people each; two have accompanying camp sites. Connected to Bastrop State Park by scenic Park Road 1C, and also graced with Lost Pines, this park offers an alternative (though with fewer amenities) to Bastrop's hard-to-book cabins. Enjoy fishing or non-motorized boating in a small lake, hiking and biking. (512-237-2241, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/buescher)

• Inks Lake State Park

Twenty-two lakeside cabins have two sets of bunk beds, dining table and chairs, air conditioning and ceiling fans. Grills, fire rings and picnic tables outside. What to do here? Biking, hiking, boating, fishing, swimming, scuba diving and even golfing. (512-793-2223, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/inks)

• Lake Bob Sandlin State Park

Located in far northeast Texas, not far from Daingerfield State Park, this woods-encircled lake hosts eagles during winter months and has impressive fall colors. Eight primitive air-conditioned and heated converted screen shelters have beds for five and allow eight persons. No electricity available for campers. (903-572-5531, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lakebobsandlin)

• Lake Colorado City State Park

Eleven nearly new stone structures line an inlet of Lake Colorado City, each with refrigerator, microwave, air conditioning and heat, ceiling fans and two bunk beds (bring your own bedding for up to eight). Spacious covered porches shelter a picnic table, and each has a fire ring and grill. The park has a four-lane boat ramp, a designated swimming area, two fishing piers and a covered fishing barge. (325-728-3931, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lakecoloradocity)

• Martin Creek Lake State Park

Each of two ranch-style cabins have a/c and heat, one bedroom with two double beds, bathroom, kitchen, living/dining area, and screened porch with picnic table, outdoor barbecue and fire pit. No pop-ups or trailers allowed, although tents are. This park also has two converted screened shelters with a/c and heat and five beds. Bring additional bedding for up to eight. The wooded, power-plant-warmed lake provides great fishing year-round. (903-836-4336, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/martincreek)

• Martin Dies Jr. State Park

This heavily forested park near the edge of the Big Thicket has two mini-cabins (in the Walnut Ridge and hen house Ridge camping units) with heat and a/c, bunk beds and a screened porch, and an outside fire ring, grill and picnic table. Canoe rental, fishing and swimming are popular when lake levels permit, plus hiking, biking, wildlife and bird-watching are popular year-round. (409-384-5231, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/martindiesjr)

• San Angelo State Park

Six log cabins have two bunk beds in one room and one double bed in another, with covered front porches overlooking O.C. Fisher Lake. The park is home to some members of the official state Longhorn herd, hiking and biking trails, and equestrian trails. Outdoor grills and picnic tables allow for cooking with a view. (325-949-8935, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/sanangelo) ★



ILLUSTRATION © GEORGE TOOMER



GARZILLA

BY CHESTER MOORE JR.

THE ALLIGATOR GAR, TEXAS' LARGEST FRESHWATER FISH, MAY NOT BE AS TOUGH AS IT LOOKS.

IT ROSE OUT OF THE TEA-COLORED BAYOU WATER LIKE SOMETHING FROM A 1950s SCIENCE-FICTION MOVIE. A bright yellow, spotted tail gave way to a drab green, cylindrical body longer than a man and built like some sort of alligator/dinosaur hybrid. Its head was particularly sinister, with rows of sharp teeth and reptilian looking eyes the size of 50-cent pieces.

This "it" was a monstrous alligator garfish my father, Chester Moore Sr., battled in Orange County's Cow Bayou back in 1978. For 30 minutes, I watched in fascination as he fought this huge fish, but when it came time for him to land it, I climbed onto the truck for safety and began to pray the gar would not hurt Dad. I had just seen the movie *Moby Dick* on television and fittingly named the gar after the iconic white whale.

"Moby" weighed 196 pounds and measured 7 feet, 2 inches in length. Getting an up-close and personal look at this huge fish at such a young age spawned a fascination with garfish that I still carry. For a kid whose favorite movies were *Star Wars*, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* and anything involving *Godzilla*, gar were a natural for me.

Life history and biology

Garfish are truly ancient fish that existed alongside the dinosaurs when Earth's environment was very different. Scientists believe they have changed very little since then. The reason for their survival is largely due to their rugged nature and some interesting adaptations.

Take breathing, for example. Gar breathe through both a set of gills and surface air. In fact, when water temperatures are above 70 degrees, gars get most of their oxygen by "rolling" toward the surface and taking a gulp of air. This allows them to be able to survive in pollution-laden waters with very little or no dissolved oxygen.

Back when Hurricane Rita spawned major fish kills, there were lots of bass, catfish, carp and gaspergou floating around the waters of Southeast Texas but very few gar. Their unique breathing apparatus was likely their saving grace.

This rolling action also creates an impressive sight.

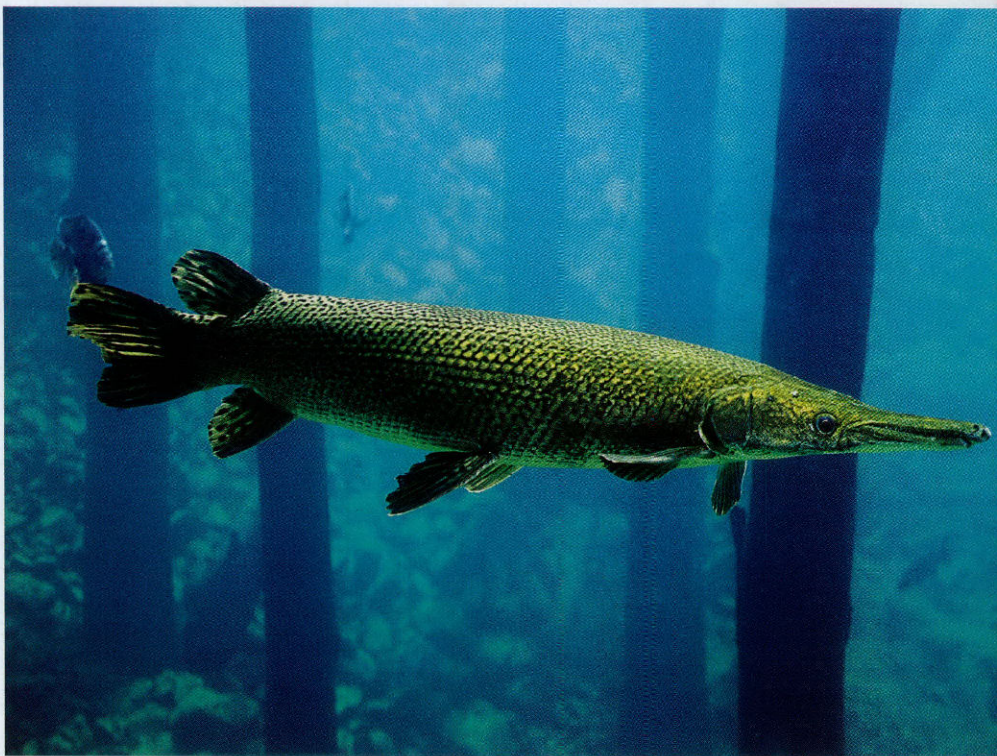
"Watching a big gar roll is a neat thing to see. We see some pretty big ones down the Sabine River. The first time someone sees one, it always seems to shock them that something that big is out there in the water," says Kenny Pigg, who owns land along Adams Bayou, a well-known gar haunt.

Another gar trait contributing to its long-term survival is the toxicity of its roe. Their eggs are poisonous; some scientists believe this is an adaptation to fight against small fish devouring the eggs.

A study conducted by Kenneth Ostrand of Sam Houston State University in 1995 shows a different take on this issue. The study involved feeding gar roe to green sunfish and channel catfish at a rate of two eggs per gram of body weight for 14 days, which is a rate shown to kill crawfish and small mammals. The result was that no fish died.

"Consumption of gar roe by potential natural predators establishes the basis for the argument that gar roe toxicity has not been evolutionarily selected as a protective mechanism. Gar roe may simply be toxic to small mammals and crayfish by chance," Ostrand concluded.

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW: Gar are easily recognizable by their long, slender, cylindrical bodies and long snouts. The alligator gar possess a double row of large teeth in the upper jaw. Alligator gar prefer slow-moving water like Houston's Buffalo Bayou.



"Watching a big gar roll is a neat thing to see. We see some pretty big ones down the Sabine River. The first time someone sees one, it always seems to shock them that something that big is out there in the water."

— Kenny Pigg, Adams Bayou landowner



The alligator gar is the largest of four subspecies of gar found in Texas. Besides size, the chief factor distinguishing alligator gar from their cousins is that they possess a double row of large teeth in the upper jaw, which gives them a very alligator-like profile. Their scales are as hard as bone, and Native American tribes such as the Chitimacha and Coushatta used them as both arrowheads and armor.

Alligator gar prefer slow-moving waters like the bayous that run through the eastern southern parts of the state but are present statewide. Alligator gar dwell in places like the Sabinal River near Hondo as well as under the shadow of skyscrapers in Houston's Buffalo Bayou. The species also does well in brackish and saltwater and is occasionally caught on beaches on the Upper Coast.

These fish are the second-largest freshwater fish in North America, next to the white sturgeon. And, as

if there were any doubt, the largest ones live right here in Texas. The world record for rod and reel was caught by angler Bill Valverde in the Rio Grande in 1951. It weighed a whopping 279 pounds. The all-tackle record came from the Nueces River in 1953 and was taken by angler T.C. Pierce, Jr. This Leviathan weighed 302 pounds and was seven and a half feet long.

More recently, a state bowfishing record came from the Trinity River when archer Marty McLellan arrowed a 290-pounder that measured a full eight feet in length.

It takes many years for gar to reach those impressive sizes, as proven in a study conducted by the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. During a four-year catching survey, they found that the oldest fish caught was 50 years old; overall, the fish mature at around 14 years of age. In comparison, largemouth bass mature within a couple of years. Additionally, the fish grow slowly, with an average growth rate of 4.1 inches and 3.2 pounds per year. For a fish to reach the weight of McLellan's, it could be more than 90 years of age.

Alligator gar are not popular among rod-and-reel anglers in most of the state, although they do have a strong cult following in the Beaumont/Port Arthur/Orange area, where they are a well-liked food fish. They are, however, popular among bow fishermen because of their tendency to move on the surface and spawn in shallow water in the spring. In parts of Texas, there is a thriving commercial fishery for gar, which is sold to the public in some specialty markets but is more frequently used for fish sticks and other frozen fish dinners.



Damaging misconceptions

For many years, the alligator garfish has been considered a possibly dangerous fish that occasionally would take a bite out of humans and that ate its weight in game fish every day, particularly largemouth bass. The reputation of gar as a game-fish population destroyer is almost as unfounded as rumors of human attacks. In 1987, TPWD biologist Paul Seidensticker conducted a study called "Food Selection of Alligator Gar and Longnose Gar in a Texas Reservoir" on Lake Sam Rayburn. By using juglines and gill-nets, from September through October he and his team captured 209 alligator gar weighing from 18 to 156 pounds. Most of their stomachs were empty.

Of those that did have food in their bellies, gizzard shad made up 26.4 percent of their diet; channel catfish, 14.9; freshwater drum, 12.6; bluegill, 7.9; spotted sucker, 6.8; white bass, 4.5; largemouth bass, 3.4; spotted gar, 3.4; crappie, 2.2; lake chubsucker, 2.2; and carp, 1.1. Other items included two coots, 11 fish hooks, an artificial lure and a plastic bag.

"Gar really are outcasts that are misunderstood. They have unlimited potential as sport fish but have unfortunately suffered in the court of public opinion," says Craig Springer with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Gar tournaments were once common as a means of ridding waterways of them, to "save" game-fish populations from their predatory wrath. Author Smokey Crabtree used to win many of these tournaments by fishing in the Sulphur River bottoms in Arkansas.

"We would catch them six and seven feet long and have them all stacked like cordwood. It was a sight to behold," he says.

Crabtree utilized juglines baited with live carp in the 2- to 5-pound range to catch gar sometimes in excess of 200 pounds.

While the official status of alligator gar in Texas is unknown, those of us who grew up fishing for them have seen tremendous declines in catches in some areas and found some waters that were formerly loaded with gar to be almost barren. My father, who is still a dedicated rod-and-reel gar fisherman, believes there may be trouble in what used to be gar paradise.

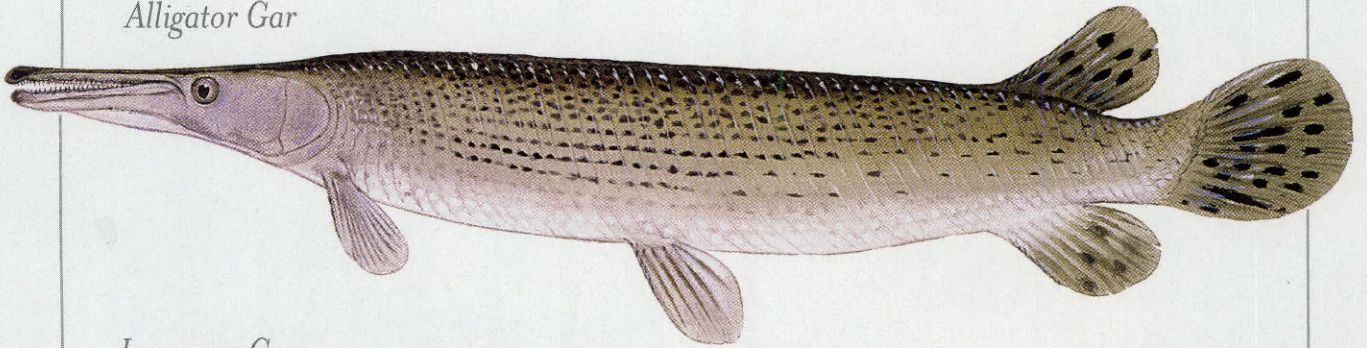
Perhaps more troubling is that little is known about the habitat needs for gar. The effects of increased channelization and reservoir construction remain unclear.

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW: Gar are popular with bow fishermen because of their tendency to move on the surface. Four subspecies of gar can be found in Texas waters: alligator, longnose, spotted and shortnose. The alligator gar is the largest of the four species, with record-setting sizes of nearly 300 pounds in weight and seven to eight feet in length.

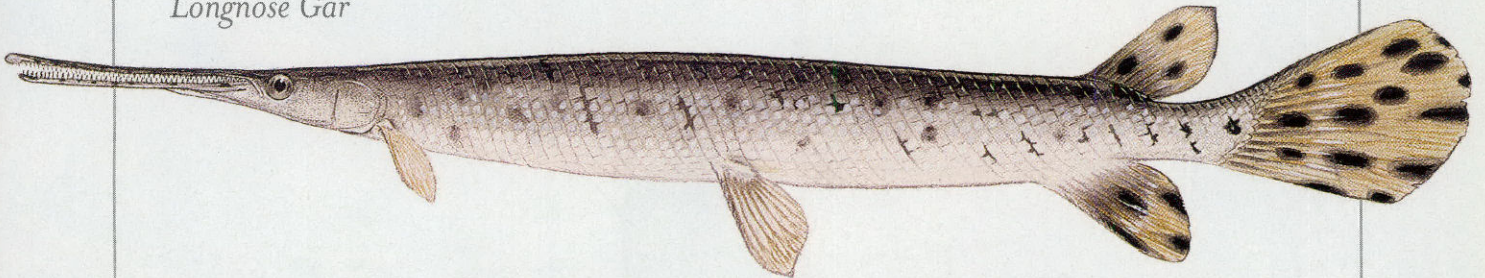


GAR SPECIES FOUND IN TEXAS

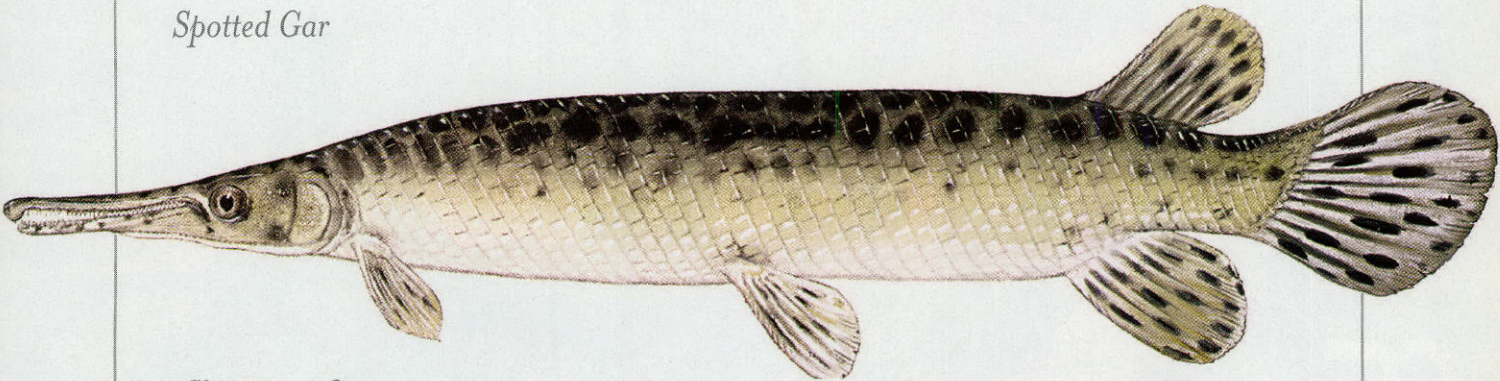
Alligator Gar



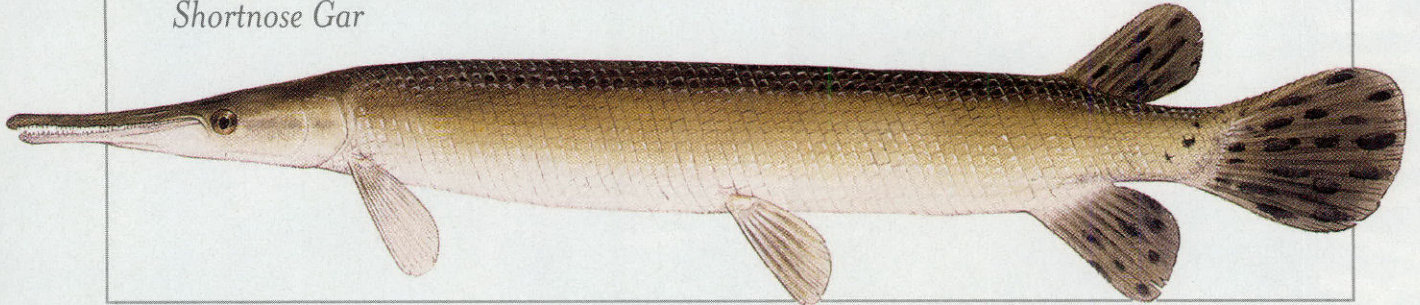
Longnose Gar



Spotted Gar



Shortnose Gar



Hope for the future

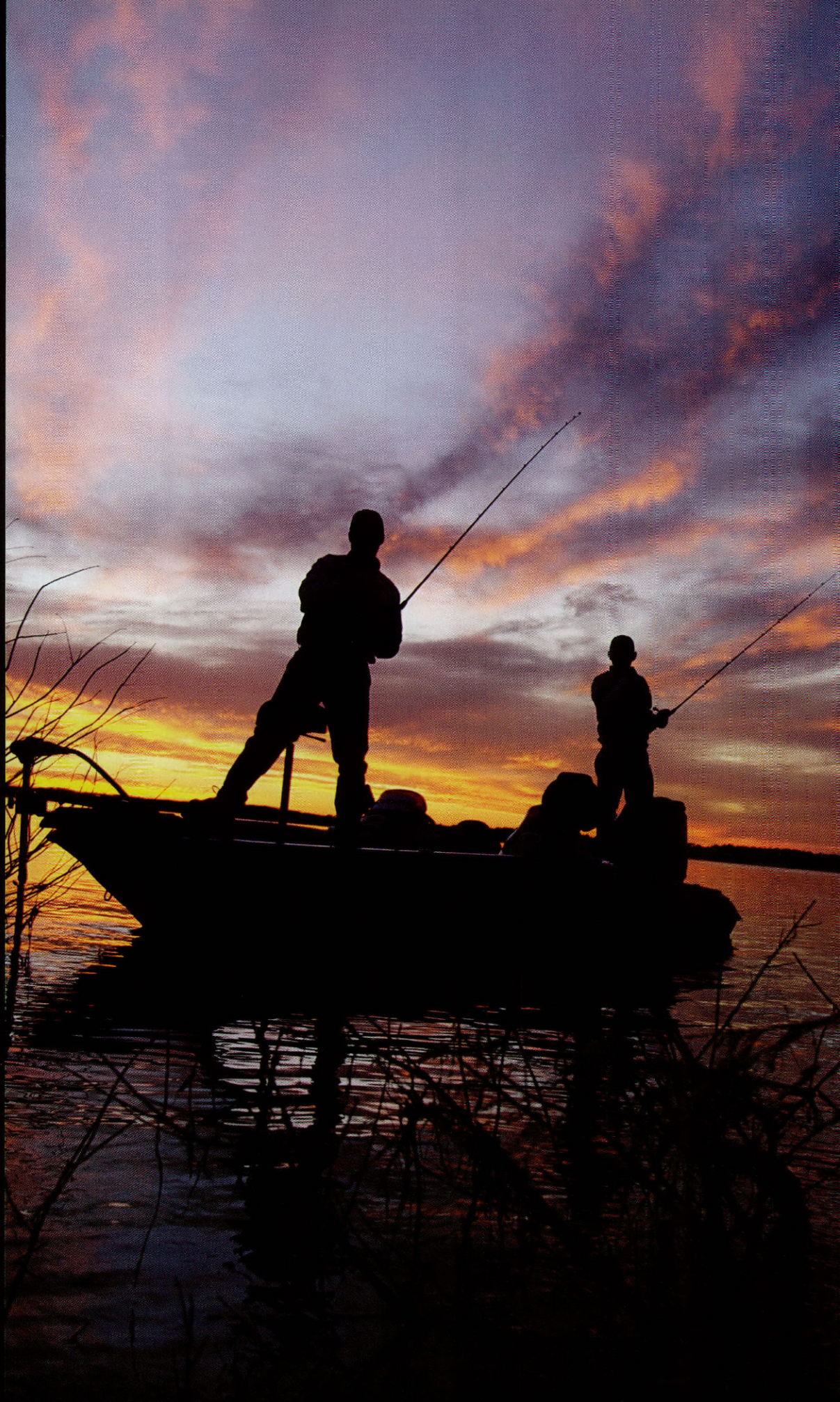
A few hatcheries are raising alligator gar in captivity to begin stocking programs. In Texas, the Uvalde National Fish Hatchery has been involved in the effort, but the Tishoming Hatchery in Oklahoma and the Private John Allen Hatchery in Mississippi are leading the way. They have successfully spawned gar several times and released the offspring in the Obion River in Tennessee.

In preparation for this article, I took a drive down to the spot on Cow Bayou where Dad caught "Moby." It is now home to a thriving bait camp and boat ramp. Concrete covers the marsh grass and reeds we used to cut to fish there. I sat for a good hour watching for garfish, looking for the telltale "roll." Though I had hoped to spot one of Moby's super-sized offspring, I finally left disappointed, without seeing a single alligator gar of any size. ★

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TPWD

RESERVOIR ROVERS

Caught up a creek without a white bass run? Make a run for the reservoir. By Larry D. Hodge



THE STANDARD METHOD of catching white bass is to fish creeks and rivers during the annual spawning run in the spring. After spawning, white bass (sometimes called sand bass or sandies) migrate back to reservoirs and spend their summer days in large schools feeding on small gizzard and threadfin shad in open water. These roving schools of voracious predators provide fast-paced summertime angling from the Panhandle to the Mexican border.

And they are just as much fun to catch in the middle of a lake as they are in the bend of a creek.

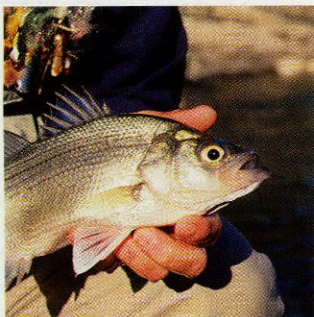
BIRDING FOR FISH

Summer white bass fishing is all about the birds. The bass chase the baitfish to the surface and attack from below; frenzied predators and prey alike make the water boil. Birds know that surface activity means easy pickings and appear as if by magic. A pair of binoculars can be as important for catching white bass as a rod and reel. Look for birds and go to them.

Bob Holmes guides on Richland-Chambers Reservoir, a 41,356-acre lake near Corsicana. "In summer, watch for common terns or gulls," Holmes says. "About the first hour of daylight, there will be a top-water bite. Throw Zara Spooks, chugging lures or popping lures. When the top-water bite stops, fish humps and points in 15 to 30 feet of water."

White bass often will suspend about 3 feet off the bottom, and you can fish for them straight down under the boat. Use a white or silver slab free-spoiled to the bottom and then cranked up two turns. Don's Minnow Slab, a one-ounce chrome and silver lure made in Temple, works particularly well on Richland-Chambers. Be ready to reel from the time you drop the lure into the water, as fish will often grab it on the way down.

If your lure does make it to the bottom, you may get more than you bargained for. On lakes with populations of striped bass and hybrid striped bass, it's not uncommon for these bigger fish to hang out below schools of feeding white bass, waiting for stunned or wounded baitfish to rain down. A white slab waffling down amid a maelstrom of feeding white bass looks just like a wounded minnow to a striper. You'll know if you hook one. When a white bass takes your lure, it's bam. When a striper or hybrid hits, it's *bam!* There's no need to set the hook; just start reeling.



Surface fishing action under birds can go on all day on cloudy or rainy days, says Lake Tawakoni guide Joe Read. "Tawakoni is probably one of the best lakes around for white bass," he says. "The lake has large numbers and large fish — fish weighing two pounds or more are common. You can catch them all around the lake, from the spillway all the way up north. There are lots of humps, ridges and old roadbeds in Tawakoni that attract them. You can catch them on just about anything, but I use spoons and slabs a lot — you can fish them on the bottom for suspended fish or throw out, let the lure sink a little, then reel it in. You'll usually catch a mixture of stripers and hybrid stripers along with sand bass." (See sidebar on page 47 for tips on how to tell the fish apart.)

My first experience with catching white bass on big water came under birds on Lake Amistad. Guide Charlie Rumfield eased the boat into Zorro Canyon and quietly approached gulls hovering over the water. Plain white slabs dropped straight down usually fell only a few feet before a white bass smashed them. We caught fish until our arms were tired, and we quit far short of our limit of 25. The birds were still working over the spot when we left.

Like stripers, white bass will follow schools of shad around the lake as they flee, so you have to be prepared to move to follow the fish. If no bird activity is visible, use your electronics to find fish, keying on main-lake structure. "Many times there will be big schools of fish working certain areas," says Read. Keep in mind that white bass, unlike large-mouth bass, are open-water fish that will normally be found in deeper water. While you might expect to catch a large-mouth bass off a certain fallen log on a ledge near a creek channel every time you go, white bass can be anywhere, and you have to hunt them.

SUMMER SCHOOLS

Expect good white bass schooling action in early summer, especially around the mouths of major creeks and on main-lake points. Some white bass spend their entire lives in the main portion of reservoirs; instead of migrating into flowing creeks and rivers to spawn, they do so on rocky, wind-swept points. It's thought this mimics the water flowing over a rock or gravel substrate where river-running fish prefer to spawn.

As summer progresses, follow the birds as described above. From mid-summer into fall, look for schooling fish boiling on the surface at dawn or on cloudy days. When the fish go deep to find cooler water, use electronics to locate them. This pattern will continue into early fall. When the water cools, white bass will begin gorging at the surface. If the day is cloudy with a little wind, look for birds around creek mouths and major points.

WHITE HOT SPOTS

White bass are native only to the Red River drainage in Texas, but they have been introduced into most of the state's major waterways. To locate a white bass fishery near you, visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fishboat/fish/recreational/lakes/. In addition to those mentioned elsewhere in this article, try the reservoirs below recommended by TPWD Inland Fisheries biologists.

Canyon Lake. This 8,240-acre reservoir is on the Guadalupe River near New Braunfels. As spring fades into summer, concentrate on the mouths of major creeks. During summer, fish the island near Comal Park and humps near the dam.

Choke Canyon Reservoir. White bass school in deep water along the northern shore during the warmer months in this 25,670-acre lake south of San Antonio. If they aren't on the surface, troll jigging spoons or small vibrating lures deep near points and humps.

Greenbelt Reservoir. Small at 1,990 acres, this lake near Clarendon lets you find schooling white bass quickly. Use shad-imitating lures or live shad or minnows in either arm of the reservoir or near the dam.

Lake Arrowhead. Southeast of Wichita Falls you'll find this 14,969-

acre lake and state park. Lake Arrowhead State Park will loan you fishing gear, and bank and pier fishing are available. As the water warms in late spring and summer, schooling fish spend most of their time in the lower part of the reservoir chasing schools of shad. Cast shad-imitating lures toward shore or troll. When you locate a school of feeding white bass, anchor and start catching. As the water cools going into fall, look for schooling fish early and late near flats and throw silver spoons or shad-imitating crankbaits.

Lake Bridgeport. This 11,954-acre impoundment northwest of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex has both white and hybrid striped bass. In summer fish the open water west of Rattlesnake Island, the west shoreline south of the Stripling Island causeway, Windy Point, Captain Kidd Point and points along the West Fork of the Trinity River.

Lake Lavon. This 21,400-acre reservoir northeast of Dallas is known as a great crappie lake, but white bass fishing near the dam can be good in summer. Look for surface feeding activity and expect to catch some striped bass along with whites.

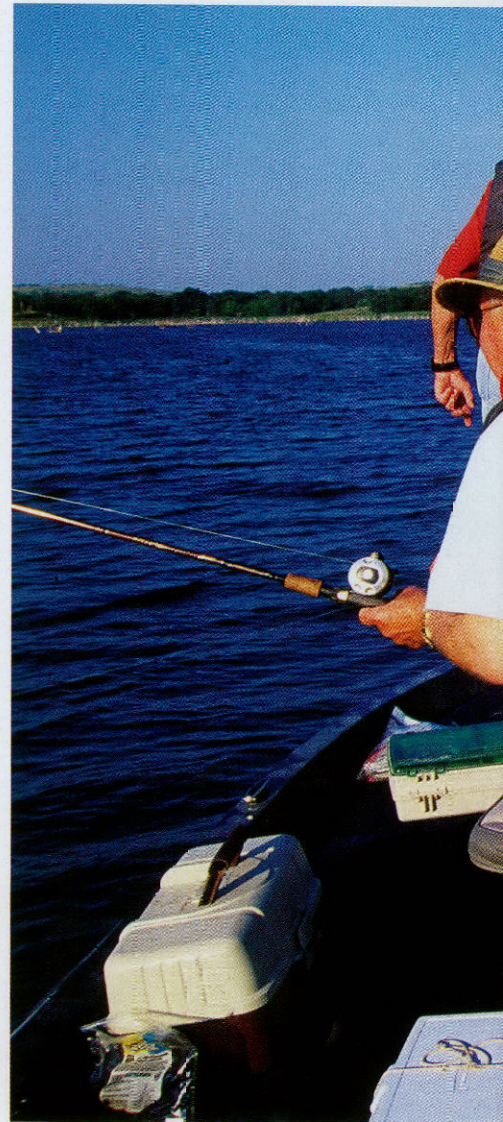
Lake Limestone. Located 50 miles east of Waco, Lake Limestone's 12,553 acres goes largely unnoticed except by locals. Look for summer schools on windy main lake points.

Lake Meredith. For active fishing, troll noisy shad-imitating lures offshore in this 16,411-acre lake northeast of Amarillo. You may also find surface-feeding schools near the mouths of canyons.

Lake O.H. Ivie. Water levels in West Texas reservoirs like this 19,149-acre lake near San Angelo can fluctuate widely, but the deepest water will always be near the dam, and that's where to troll crankbaits for white bass.

Lake Ray Roberts. There's lots to like about this 25,600-acre reservoir north of Denton, not the least of which is great white bass schooling action near the dam during the summer. The west end of the dam seems to be the hotspot, and if the fish aren't schooling on the surface, use your electronics to look for them deep.

Lake Somerville. Fish humps and main-lake structure for white and hybrid striped bass during the summer



in this 11,460-acre lake between Giddings and Bryan/College Station. Welch Park provides access for bank and wade-fishing.

Lake Texoma. Huge at 74,686 acres and shared with Oklahoma, this Red River reservoir is a premier striped bass fishery, but white bass are present as well. Both species can be found under seagulls, feeding on shad. Use small top-water baits in shad colors, silver spoons or slabs. When you find fish, expect to have company shortly. The only thing that draws anglers on this lake faster than feeding birds is bent rods in other boats.

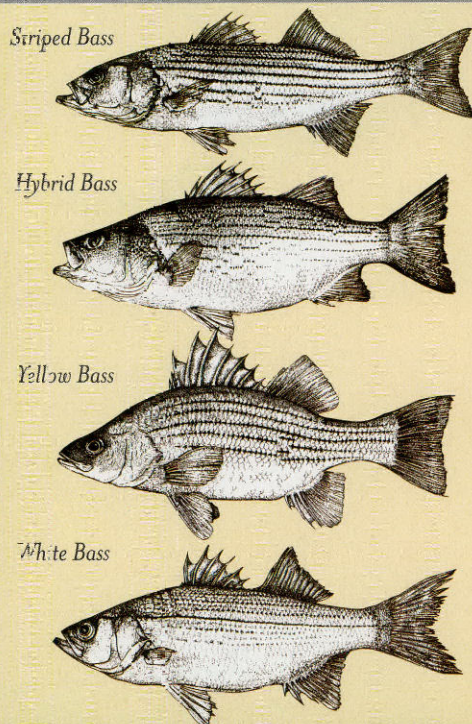
Lake Whitney. Fish for white bass in the main lake from spring through fall on this 23,500-acre lake near the town of the same name. If the sandies are not schooling on the surface, look for them along sandy beaches, on roadbeds and near submerged timber in shallow water. ★



After spawning in creeks and rivers each spring, white bass spend their summer days challenging anglers in reservoirs across the state. The yellow bass (below) is characterized by its silvery-yellow color. Chugging and popping lures and Zara Spooks work well for top-water bites during the first hour of daylight. When fish go deep to find cooler water, use electronics to locate them.



WHITE BASS, STRIPED BASS OR HYBRID?



White bass look very much like their cousins, the striped bass and the hybrid striped bass (which is actually produced by crossing striped and white bass), and all three species may be present in a given body of water. However, size and bag limits for strippers and hybrids are quite different than for whites, so anglers need to be able to tell the species apart.

Whites, strippers and hybrids all have lines or stripes on the sides of the body, all are a silvery color and young strippers look a lot like white bass. One way to tell the difference is by looking (or feeling) inside the mouth while you are removing the hook. Striped bass and hybrid striped bass have two tooth patches on the back of the tongue. White bass have one. However, this method is far from foolproof. Tooth patches may be hard to feel, and hybrids can have two patches touching, so they feel like one. "Probably the best way to tell them apart is the lines to the tail," says Ken Kurzawski, TPWD's freshwater fishing regulations coordinator. "If there is only one line all the way to the tail, it's a white bass. If there are multiple lines, it's a hybrid or stripper."

Occasionally you'll catch a yellow bass, which is a silvery yellow color and has stripes down its sides. Yellow bass have no tooth patch on the tongue, and the two dorsal fins are joined at the base.

Statewide regulations for strippers and hybrid strippers provide for a daily bag limit of five fish in any combination, with an 18-inch minimum length. For white bass, the daily bag limit is 25 fish and a 10-inch minimum. There are no size and bag limits on yellow bass. However, many lakes are managed under special regulations for one or more of these species, so be sure to check the Outdoor Annual or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/annual/fish/ before you go.



*Newborn little brown myotis
(Myotis lucifugus)*



BAT REHAB

By Eileen Mattei

STARTING WITH ONE INJURED BAT, AMANDA LOLLAR TRANSFORMED AN OLD FURNITURE STORE INTO BAT WORLD SANCTUARY.

PHOTO © BILL BEATY/ASKIM IMAGES

Like

barely perceptible
phantoms, fruit bats
flit past Amanda Lollar
in the twilight of the

bat cave she has created inside a former furniture store in downtown Mineral Wells. The large, dimly lit flight cage, created from camouflage netting and artificial leaves, simulates a natural habitat for unreleasable bats that Lollar has rescued as founder, president and head chef of Bat World, a nonprofit bat rehabilitation facility and sanctuary and the world leader in bat rescue.

The bat order name, *Chiroptera* — hand wing — refers to the four elongated fingers with a clawed thumb that support bats' thin wings. Texas has 32 species of bats. Their population is threatened even though bats are one of the most useful, intelligent and under-appreciated mammals in the state, Lollar says.

Early each morning, she responds to rescue calls from people who have found a bat and need advice. Then she gives medical treatments to bats temporarily housed in the Bat World hospital. Wearing a jungle print scrub top with jeans and sneakers, she tackles cleaning up after Bat World's 150 permanent residents. These bats, either retired by zoos, confiscated from the illegal pet trade, or wild bats healed from an injury, are not releasable. Two living-room-size cages, one each for insect-eating bats and fruit eaters, hold 10 species of bats ranging from pallid and mastiff bats to the huge Egyptian fruit bat.

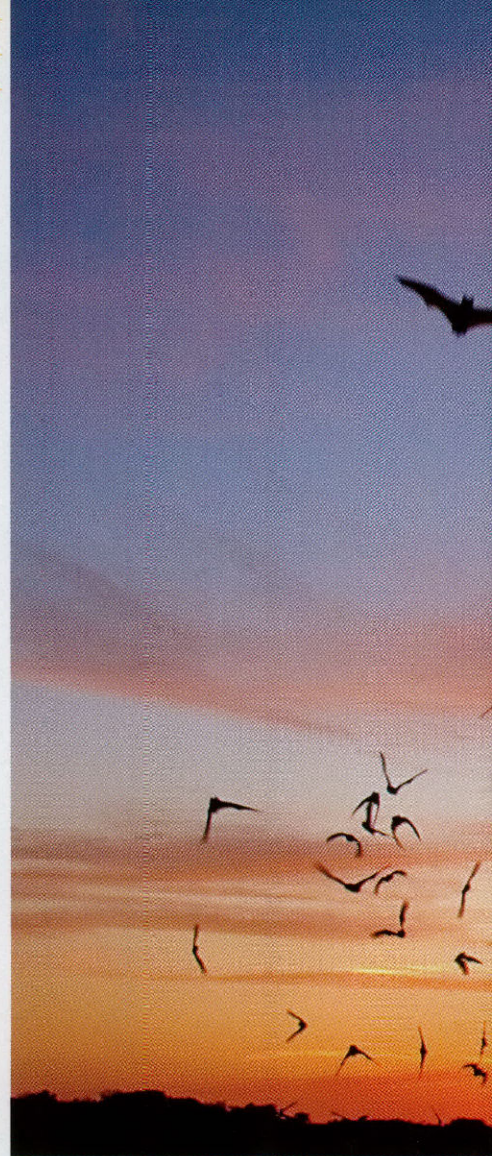
In the fruit bats' enchanted forest, Lollar picks up plastic jacks and squeaky toys littering the floor and retrieves nearly empty bowls of chopped fruit and water, indicating that no bat went to bed hungry. "They eat up high, like they would in the wild. We try to make it as close to the wild as we can. Bats are curious and affectionate. At night you can hear the toy bells ringing. They love new things to investigate." Rolling up the long strips of newsprint that protect the floor mats during the night, Lollar explains, "These bats are flying juicers."

Crevice-dwelling and foliage-roosting bats have niches to call their own here.

"I'd give anything to be one of these bats for just one night and learn their social structure. There are so many things we don't understand about their social needs," Lollar says as bats zip past like figments of the imagination. "I try to pretty much leave them alone and let them form their own families." She admits, as a little leaf-nosed bat, a 12-year sanctuary resident, plucks a piece of fruit from her hands, that the bats are very spoiled.

It all started when Lollar found an injured Mexican free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) on the sidewalk in front of the furniture store she ran with her mother. Rescuing and then bonding with the tiny mammal she named Sunshine, Lollar began learning about bats and realized the public's misconceptions about them. Always the champion of underdogs, she wrote *The Bat in My Pocket* to describe her transition from bat buff to sanctuary provider with the launch of Bat World in 1994.

In Bat World's large kitchen, equipped with a king-size food processor and a pantry full of sweet potatoes, peaches and bat supplements, Lollar listens to messages on a headset while loading dirty fruit cocktail dishes into the dishwasher and sorting through mealworms before sticking them in the refrigerator. With the bats eating about 600 pounds of fruit monthly, the organization spends up to \$1,000 per month on food. To keep costs down, Luther Lollar, Amanda's father, buys fruit wholesale, and volunteers help with cutting up the apples and tropical fruit. The bats' diets,





The evening flight of Mexican free-tailed bats can be enjoyed in several locations across the state. The second-floor rafters of the Wild Sanctuary in Mineral Wells (left) provide nesting sites for 30,000 free-tailed bats who migrate north each spring to give birth.

arrived at by trial and error, appear to be nutritionally sound, because they've reproduced at Bat World. Males who stay are now neutered.

Insect-eating bats, which devour over 50,000 mealworms monthly, creep out of their padded roosting pouches behind fake rocks as Lollar places a tray of squirming mealworms on a shelf. She hand-feeds 25 of these "fairies of the woods," including a big brown bat with a harem of females, a scorpion-eating pallid bat and a silky dark mastiff bat named Wendy.

Bat World hosts school field trips to introduce kids to its amazing, useful, intelligent and, yes, cute bats. The kids sit on the

floor in the low light between the bat flight cages while Lollar points out that Texas bats eat lots of mosquitoes, beetles and insect pests in one night. Kids learn that bats have highly developed brains, keen senses, exquisite fur and are the only flying mammal. "Children realize they have to be quiet so they don't stress the bats," Lollar explains. "The bats fly low to get a look at the kids and see what is going on, attracted by soft, low noises." The bats themselves make a squeaky noise, less high pitched and less grating than a cricket's chirp.

Early on, Lollar learned the importance of vaccinating each bat for rabies on arrival and isolating it from others while observing it for symptoms. A bat incubating rabies shows signs rapidly and she humanely euthanizes it. She herself has been vaccinated and gets boosters as needed.

In the small, clean Bat World hospital, where seven wild, injured or dehydrated bats are under her care, Lollar sits at a Formica-topped lab table facing compartments filled with syringes, needles, scalpels,

Clockwise from right: A lesser long-nosed bat prepares to enjoy century plant blooms; an orphaned free-tail receives her first meal of milk formula on an eye shadow applicator tip; Bat World founder Amanda Lollar holds Barney, a rescued African straw-colored fruit bat; Bat World headquarters and the Wild Sanctuary, a century-old sandstone building that serves as a home for thousands of bats, are located in Mineral Wells.

slides, New Zealand honey, skin glue and medical tools. She wraps each injured bat in baby blue cloth as she treats it and hand-feeds it, occasionally squeezing a drop of formula onto her wrist to test the temperature. A newly arrived eastern pipistrelle bat is vaccinated, examined and wiped with an alcohol-coated cotton swab to kill fleas and mites. "He's totally releasable, but this injured muscle has a lot of healing to do."

The tiny hospital enables the bat lady to work on bats humanely and chart the results. When one dies, she is braced by the knowledge gained that might help save the next bat. Lollar gives Mineral Wells veterinarian Tad Jarrett much credit for his generous advice on care routines and antibiotics. "I wouldn't have found out so much on my own. He has been so willing to participate in trying to conserve bats."

Lollar refutes the perception that rehabilitation is not worthwhile. "Look at the ones we've released," she says, with each of those bats eating half to two-thirds of its body weight in insects each night. The collected information has resulted in her books *Captive Care and Medical Reference for the Rehabilitation of Insectivorous Bats* (with Barbara Schmidt-French of Bat Conservation International) and *Diagnostic and Treatment Update for the Rehabilitation of Insectivorous Bats*. They cover everything from feeding foliage and cave-roosting orphans to administering anesthesia and diagnosing ailments like frostbite, insect stings, parasites and broken bones. "Before the first book, there was nothing, no guidelines for research," she says. Now the books are used globally for treatment of bat diseases and injuries.

In mid-summer — bat nursery season — the Bat World hospital shelters about 200 bats, mostly orphans, in a pair of cages that cover about 10 square feet. "Bats crowd up as well as any creature, and 200 free-tail bats can fit neatly in a square foot."



With Barbara French, Lollar tackled behavioral studies that led to discovering 25 different vocalizations used by Mexican free-tailed bats. The research resulted in a CD with the "language" of that species.

Amanda and her husband, whom she met when he e-mailed her about a bat, live upstairs from Bat World. "He understands all animal care has to be done before anything else, even shopping," she says. Bat World's kitchen, on the other hand, inspired her to compile *Bats in the Pantry*, a cookbook filled with recipes made from ingredients that bats love. Some of the ingredients include apples and peanuts (which bats protect in the wild by eating insects that destroy the crop), cocoa and mangos (bats help disperse the seeds), and avocados and bananas (bats pollinate these plants).

Wild bats roost under the eaves of the Bat

World building and adjoining stores on Oak Avenue, marked by guano droppings that Lollar and her neighbors sweep up every morning. "The town has grown very supportive and protective of bats. The city doesn't even spray for insects downtown," she says. Given Lollar's fierce advocacy and educational programs, Mineral Wells is definitely pro-bat, although the sight and smell of bat droppings in a downtown trying to revitalize provokes some grumblings.

Mineral Wells' skyline is dominated by the fabulous 14-story Baker Hotel, once known for its mineral spa but now abandoned and filled with an estimated 100,000 bats. Across the street from the derelict resort, Bat World owns an 1899 sandstone building, which it uses as a wild sanctuary and nursery, sheltering a colony of 30,000 mostly Mexican free-tailed bats, which come north in the spring to give



birth. The second floor's ceiling has been removed to expose the rafters and is atwitter with bats. Despite frequent cleaning, the floor is littered with soft pebbles of guano. Unfortunately, Bat World has yet to find a market for guano.

When healthy orphans in rehab are about seven weeks old, just about ready to fly, Lollar transfers them to the wild sanctuary to hone their flight and insect-finding skills in the colony. A bat hanging apart from the others catches her attention, so she uses a long-handled net to capture it. Back at the bat hospital, she diagnoses a badly injured ear, an organ critical for foraging and flying. She injects the rabies vaccine subcutaneously and cleans the ear, murmuring, "That doesn't feel so good, does it." After administering an antibiotic and pain medication, she tucks the bat into a soft pouch and places it in an isolation cage.

Bat World has a small corps of volunteers and a board of directors, but the biggest help during the busy baby season comes from Bat World Boot Camp held in July. The week-long dawn to late night immersion courses in bat rehabilitation draw bat fans from the United States and Europe. Graduates have helped open 15 bat rescue centers.

"I'm so lucky to have all the help I've got," Lollar says as she checks the bat drop-off box at her back door. "Even if it's 18 hours a day, it's not 18 frantic hours." A few all-nighters have rewarded Lollar with glimpses into bat behavior, such as the sight of a trail of bats, none able to fly, scurrying along the flight cage wall like a trail of ants. "It looked like they were partying to me," she acknowledges. Between other chores, she fills orders generated by the Bat Bazaar on the batworld.org Web site, sending out batty items ranging from bat t-shirts, books and calendars to totes and adopt-a-bat certificates.

"The public helps quite a bit once they learn we're doing this. What amazes me is this started with one little bat, Sunshine." And one dedicated, batty woman. ★

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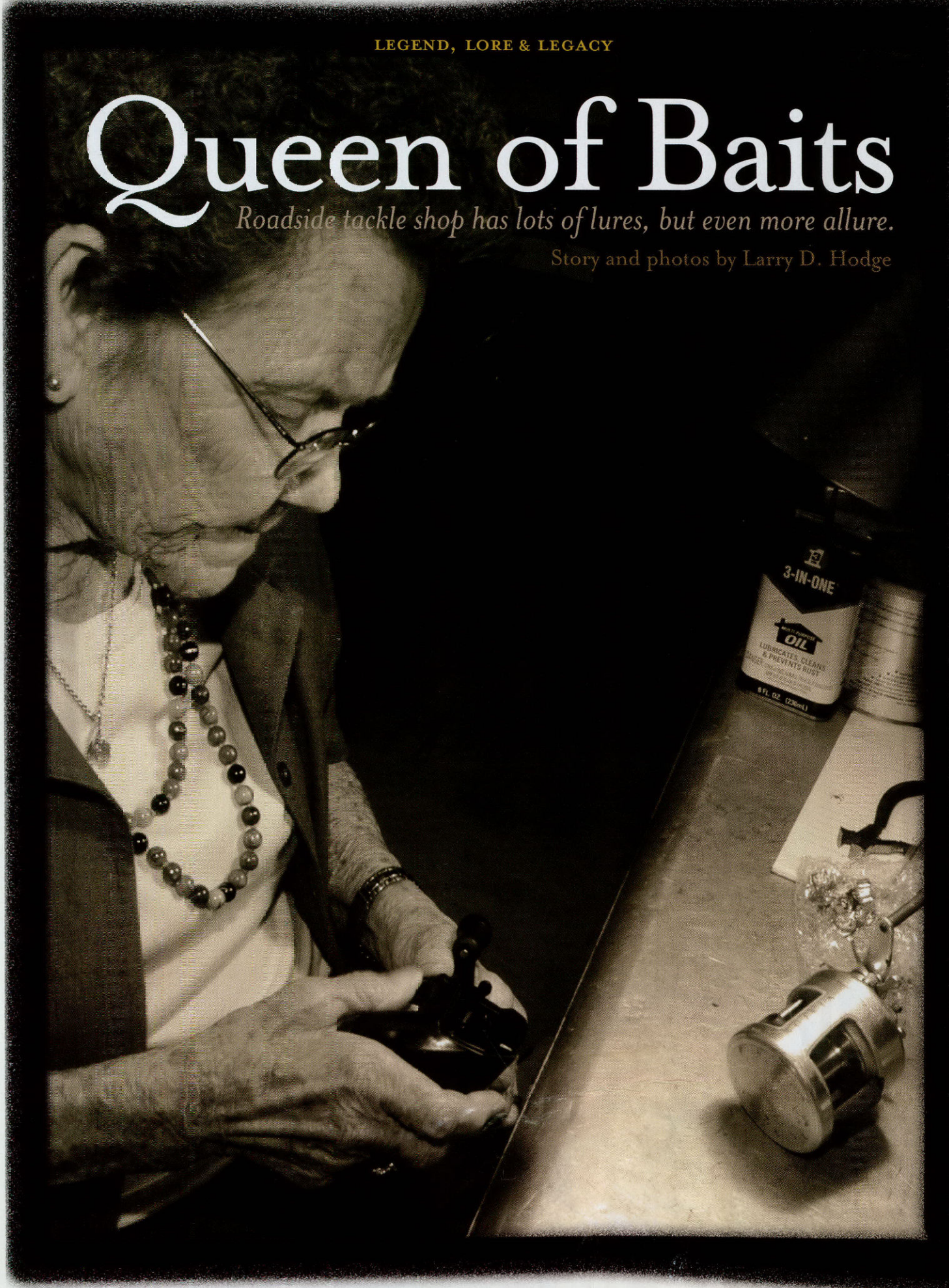
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LEGEND, LORE & LEGACY

Queen of Baits

Roadside tackle shop has lots of lures, but even more allure.

Story and photos by Larry D. Hodge



It's easy to drive right by Sabine Tackle Supply on U.S. 69 between Greenville and Lone Oak and not notice it. The sign on the front of the small white building blew off in a recent windstorm, and the string of Christmas lights around the outline of a minnow shines no more. Only a sign on the south side of the building tells you you've found it.

Once you enter, there's no doubt you are in a major-league bait and tackle store. Rods by 40 different makers stand at attention just inside the entrance. Display racks and cases bulge with hooks, bobbers, sinkers and lures. Aerators hum in the minnow room on the left, and on the right a reel repair person hunches over a workbench, immersed in the innards of a sick Shimano.

But before you notice all that, three other features catch your eye. One is the wood floor stretching out among the organized clutter of fish-catching devices, giving the tackle shop the feel of an old-time general store, which in a way it is. Adding to the homey feel is Shelby, the store's yellow Labrador retriever, who greets customers with a cold nose and wagging tail. Most arresting is the diminutive woman behind the counter, leaning over a copy of a recent fishing magazine with a customer twice her height, telling him what's biting and where and how to catch it.

He's paying attention, and for good reason.

Betty Evans has spent 46 years in the tackle business, the last 23 at this location, but her connection to fishing goes much farther back. On the wall behind the cash register is a 1938 picture of a young girl and a man holding two large yellow catfish with the Lake Bridgeport Dam in the background — Evans and her grandfather, Van Harris, a commercial fisherman.

Evans is a living link between the Texas of yesteryear, when the state had few lakes and few people and most anglers fished for food, and the Texas of today, a state with hundreds of reservoirs and tens of millions of people and anglers who fish mainly for the thrill of catching a fish and releasing it rather than eating it.

"As a child I spent my summers with my grandfather," she says. "I went with him every morning and helped him bait the hooks. He always thought that cattle and fish traveled the same way, had their trails. I had to keep the boat between the big red barn on this side and the big oak tree on the other. I also helped him cook the bait in my grandmother's washpot. It looked like big dumplings and was flavored with sweet oil of anise and asafoetida. We would catch a lot of fish. Rough fish like drum, buffalo and carp. I remember coming in almost to my knees in fish in the bottom of his little boat, and sometimes we would have to unload and deliver and then go back."

Evans has operated a wholesale tackle business since 1978, and that accounts in part for the sheer volume of merchandise on display. Or maybe she just likes fishing stuff. Whatever the

TIME WILL NOT ERASE SABINE TACKLE SUPPLY, BUT A PLANNED WIDENING OF U.S. 69 WILL. "THE NEW ROAD WILL RUN RIGHT THROUGH THE MIDDLE OF THE FRONT ROOM," EVANS SAYS. THERE'S NO BITTERNESS IN HER VOICE.



Betty Evans (with grandson Matt Prince) holds a photo of herself as a young girl, fishing with her grandfather.

reason, this store that looks so small from the outside appears much bigger on the inside. "This is pretty much the only place you can find what you need unless you want to go clear to Bass Pro Shops," says customer Shawn Pickering.

Browsing the shelves turns up some items that are, frankly, a bit dusty. "You have to buy for business whether you are going to have it or not," Evans explains. "You are at risk at times. Terminal tackle — hooks, lines, sinkers — is the least at-risk purchase. It will be sold. Lures and plastic baits are the hardest to stay ahead of, since they are always changing. I have a lot of items in here that are old enough to vote."

The merchandise for sale changes regularly, but the building where it's housed does not. "I went to my banker one time and told him I was thinking about improving my building — which is an old service station — or even building a new one," Evans recalls. "I asked what he thought about that, and he said, 'I wouldn't fix what's not broken. Your building has character. It has an old wood floor and is laid out like an old country store. If you really want my opinion, I wouldn't change it much.'"

Evans took his advice, putting on a new roof and adding a room on either side of the original. And she never forgot who made it possible. "Every time a customer came in and said, 'Look what you did,' I said, 'No, we did it, with your money.'"

When Evans says we, she includes her four children and eight grandchildren

(continued on page 63)

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS



THE FRONT LINE OF NEWS AND VIEWS



T E L E V I S I O N

LOOK FOR THESE STORIES IN THE COMING WEEKS:

July 29 - August 8:

Cleaning water the wetland way; humming along with the flying photographers; summer tubing on the Guadalupe River; fishing and family at Fairfield Lake State Park; improving land for wildlife and economics.

August 5 - 12:

Bass camp communicators; San Antonio's early Tejano influence; balancing agriculture, cattle and wildlife; Pedernales River flash flood; historical reenactors enliven state parks.

August 12 - 19:

Exposing Texas wildlife; digging history with TPWD archaeologists; wildlife management areas; Hill Country hideaway; Alpine adventure on the Wyler Aerial Tramway.

August 19 - 26:

Two sides to Galveston State Park; rediscovering the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon; West Texas water issues; photographing Falcon State Park; hands on direction at TFFC.

August 26 - Sept. 2:

Getting hooked on coastal fishing piers; saving an Edwards Plateau ranch; birding paradise at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park; Hill Country thunderstorm; brewing battle over Caddo Lake water.



Learning to communicate about conservation through the Bass Brigade. Watch the week of August 5-12.

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DIMMITT: KDHN-AM 1470 / 10:30 a.m.

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EL PASO: KTEP-FM 88.5 / 12:15 p.m. Thurs.

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PARK PICKS

RECOMMENDED STOPS ALONG THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED



Mustang Island State Park

Come for the beach, stay for the birds.

From swimming to sailing to fishing to eating, there's never a shortage of things to do in the scenic town of Port Aransas. If your clan is planning on heading to "Port A" this summer, you should definitely venture 14 miles south, to picturesque Mustang Island. Located on the island is one of Texas' few beach state parks. You can't miss the park; it's more than 3,900 acres with a five-mile stretch of beach. And as you get a little closer, you'll see that there's more to this park than just sand dunes, saltwater and the great fishing the area is known for. There are all sorts of other creatures that inhabit Mustang Island, and some of the most interesting ones are in the sky above it.

The area could be called "the nest of Texas" for a good reason: Mustang Island has one of the highest bird counts on the Gulf Coast. Expert and amateur birders alike know that summer is not the most ideal time to spot birds. They usually prefer the migratory seasons of the fall and spring. However, even in the hot summer months you can spot plenty of birds on Mustang Island — both on the bay side and the beach side.

David Newstead, a waterbird biologist with the Coastal Bend Bays

& Estuaries Program and the president of the Coastal Bend Audubon Society, says that summer is the time when a lot of birds are breeding. "Most of the birds on the beach will be waterbirds that breed in the area," he says. Visitors could expect to spot the brown pelican, snowy egret, tricolored heron, reddish egret, great egret, great blue heron, roseate spoonbill, white ibis, royal tern, sandwich tern, least tern and laughing gull. Newstead adds that birders may also see the snowy plover and Wilsons plover.

And those are just the birds on the beach side. "On the bay side of the park is a different group of birds," Newstead says. There you'll have the mottled duck, seaside sparrow, willet and black-necked stilt. "The plovers also probably breed back there," he says.

As you search for birds, you may want to put your binoculars down for a minute and listen. "You should be able to hear eastern meadowlarks singing in the coastal prairie grasses behind the dunes," says Newstead.

If you make the excursion to Port Aransas and Mustang Island State Park, you might as well stay for a night or two on the park's grounds. They've got plenty of campsites — even primitive ones right on the beach. It's an ocean-front view you can afford. And if you're into birding (or just curious), you can't afford to miss it.

For more information on Mustang Island State Park call (361) 749-5246 or visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/mustangisland>.

—Else K. Simcik



Hueco Tanks State Historic Site

Ancient rock art and world-class climbing make this site a West Texas favorite.

← **Austin Ramos gazes at granite giants that surge up** from the Chihuahuan Desert, baring their pockmarked, red-brown backs to the sun. Though these unusual mountains are only 32 miles northeast of his home in El Paso, the 12-year-old has never seen them before.

Ramos isn't the first to be awestruck by the unique landscape that makes up Hueco Tanks State Historic Site. The mountains are riddled with pits — *huecos* — that retain rainwater. Huecos can be as small as a fist or as large as a backyard swimming pool, and the water they hold cultivates life in this desert environment.

"Hueco Tanks is an amazing oasis of nature and culture," says site superintendent Wanda Clszewski.

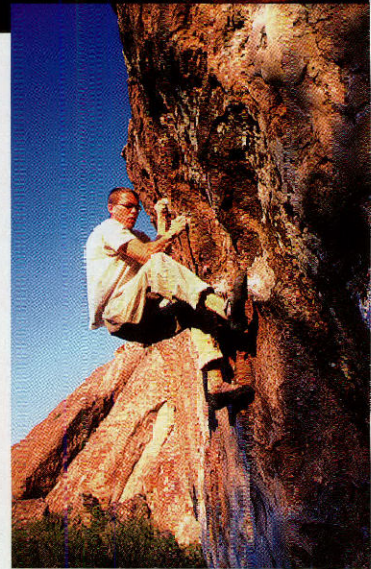
Humans have lived in the area for 10,000 years, and different American Indian cultures have left about 3,000 paintings on the rock walls. Guided tours to rock art sites put visitors up close and personal with art created by the Jornada Mogollon, Mescalero Apache, Comanche, Kiowa and Tigua cultures. Visitors can see handprints, dancing scenes, people on horseback and other symbols. Hueco Tanks also has more than 200 paintings of masks, which look similar to Pueblo Indian kachina masks. The 860-acre site has the largest concentration of mask paintings in North America.

"The face is the gateway to the secret thoughts of people, and I think that is part of what the masks represent," says volunteer guide Heinz Daerkop. His favorite rock art site is the Cave of the Masks on West Mountain which features art from different cultures, including nine or 10 masks and a tiny jaguar figure.

From 1858 to 1859, Hueco Tanks was a stop on the Butterfield Overland stagecoach trail, where wagons stopped for food and water. The company built a stone and adobe station there, and ruins near the site's interpretive center may belong to that stage stop, though there is some uncertainty as to the precise location.

"It's amazing how much history there is in this park," says Ramos.

More recently, the site has become a mecca for rock climbers from all over the world. Hueco Tanks has hundreds of unique and challenging routes for bouldering — climbing without ropes. Climbers should bring a crash pad, a thirst for adventure and respect for the land. The routes at Hueco Tanks promise to leave you exhausted but hungry for more at the end of the day.



Sadly, Hueco Tanks' remarkable history and environment have not always been appreciated. Unchecked recreational use during most of the 20th century led to graffiti, rock art abuse, littering and landscape deterioration. But in 1992 the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department enacted a public use plan that focuses on educating visitors about the site. As a result, there has been extremely little damage to rock art since 1992 and plant and animal life have revived faster than expected, says Olszewski.

"We're sharing our rock art with people and banking on their stewardship," she says. "To the extent that people are aware, there is a payoff seeing a lizard, a cactus flowering, a bird."

Hueco Tanks has 20 campsites with water and electricity, as well as hiking trails and an interpretive center. Visitors can enjoy free guided climbing, rock art and birding tours, but reservations are required. To be guaranteed access, visitors must make reservations to access the self-guided North Mountain, as the number of people allowed on the mountain at one time is limited. For more information, call Hueco Tanks headquarters at (955) 857-1135 or visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huecotanks>.

— Katie Armstrong

For information about upcoming events in all your state parks, visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/calendar>.

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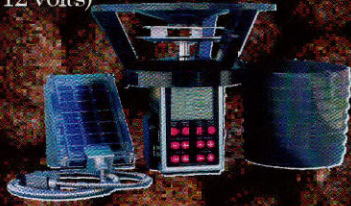
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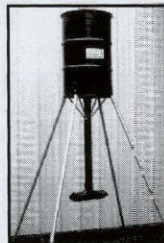
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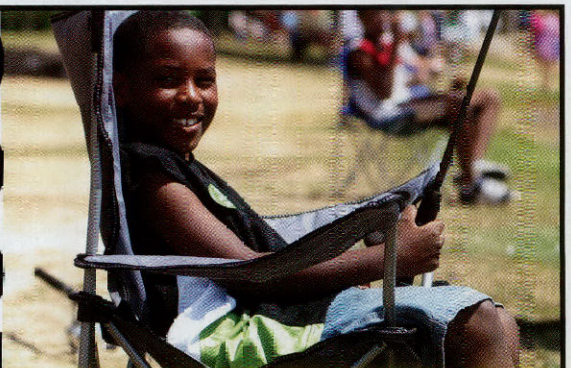
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(continued from page 55)

"All of them have worked here at some time," she says. "It was a joy to be able to help them with a part-time job while they were in school. Three of my grandsons still spend a lot of time in here." One is Matt Prince, now a railroad conductor, who still helps with reel repair from time to time, relieving Evans of that duty.

Evans passes on her fishing heritage and knowledge to customers as well as family. "You meet a lot of people today who don't know how to tie a hook on the line," Evans says. "The 1940s babies' parents didn't have as much time to teach them things. You'd be surprised how appreciative they are to be shown. But unless they ask my advice, I normally don't offer it. I don't try to sell people bait. I give them what they ask for unless they ask me for advice."

"We don't force anything on anybody," Prince says. "That's one of the things our customers like." You're much more likely to get a cold nose from Shelby than a hard sell from Evans or clerk John Adair.

"We carry everything from low-end to the best you can buy," Evans points out. "In my little country store I can put together a \$500 rod and reel in just a minute, or I can sell you a \$15 rig."

Evans says she has never had any trouble being a woman in a traditionally male line of business. "At first I was really concerned about it. I didn't know if I would be accepted," she says. "But customers just kind of put their arms around me. I found if you have what they want, they don't care what you are."

Watching Evans wait on customers, including sending some to a competitor for minnows because her delivery has

not arrived, makes me realize people do care what Betty Evans is: the genuine article. She speaks their language, shares their passion. "I love to fish, especially for crappie, because I love to eat crappie," she says. "I love to catch catfish or crappie or anything in the water. It's very therapeutic and relaxing."

Evans finds kindred souls in all walks of life. "I don't have a lot of money, but I have a lot of tackle," she smiles. "Sometimes I turn tackle into money. I paid for my teeth and my orthopedic shoes with tackle, because both those doctors are fishermen. There's no way I can tell you who or how many, but through the years there have been lots of electricians, plumbers and yard workers who've said, 'Look, I'll take a rod and reel instead of money.'"

A bait and tackle shop with atmosphere, a great selection of merchandise, fair prices, a store dog with a cold nose and a knowledgeable staff is sometimes hard to find, and one wishes Sabine Tackle Supply could last another few decades. It won't. Evans has no plans to retire, but none of her children or grandchildren have the desire to take over the business. "They all have their own careers," she says proudly and without a trace of regret.

Time will not erase Sabine Tackle Supply, but a planned widening of U.S. 69 will. "The new road will run right through the middle of the front room," Evans says. There's no bitterness in her voice. After all, she still has a lot of fishing to do, and anyone with a wholesale tackle business has plenty of gear, none of it old enough to vote.

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A close-up underwater photograph of a diver wearing a black mask and a blue long-sleeved shirt. The diver is surrounded by a dense school of small, silvery fish, likely Mexican tetras, which are swimming in all directions. The water is clear and blue, with some bubbles visible. The diver's hands are visible, holding a camera or housing. The overall scene is vibrant and dynamic.

Writer/photographer/school teacher Russell Graves took this underwater shot, at a depth of about 15 feet, at Balmorhea State Park's spring-fed pool after he noticed a school of Mexican tetra following a fellow diver. The man behind the mask is Reeves County game warden Jared Self (who used to be one of Graves' students).

IMAGE SPECS:

Canon EOS-1D Mark II N with EF20-35mm f/2.8L lens, shutter speed of 1/400 at f/9, using Ikelite underwater housing.

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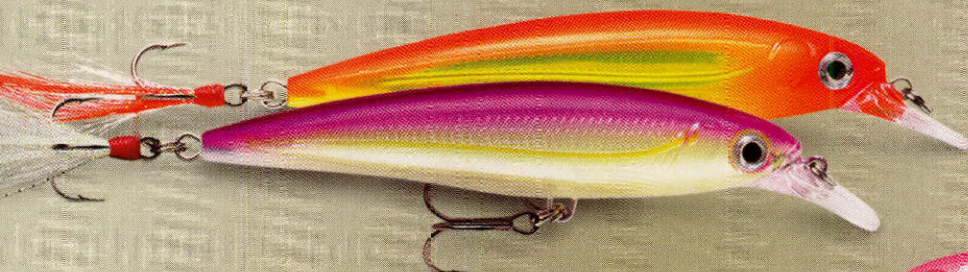
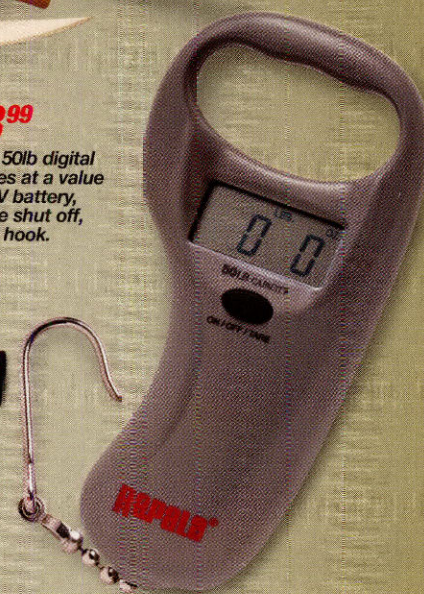
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