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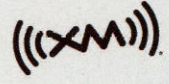
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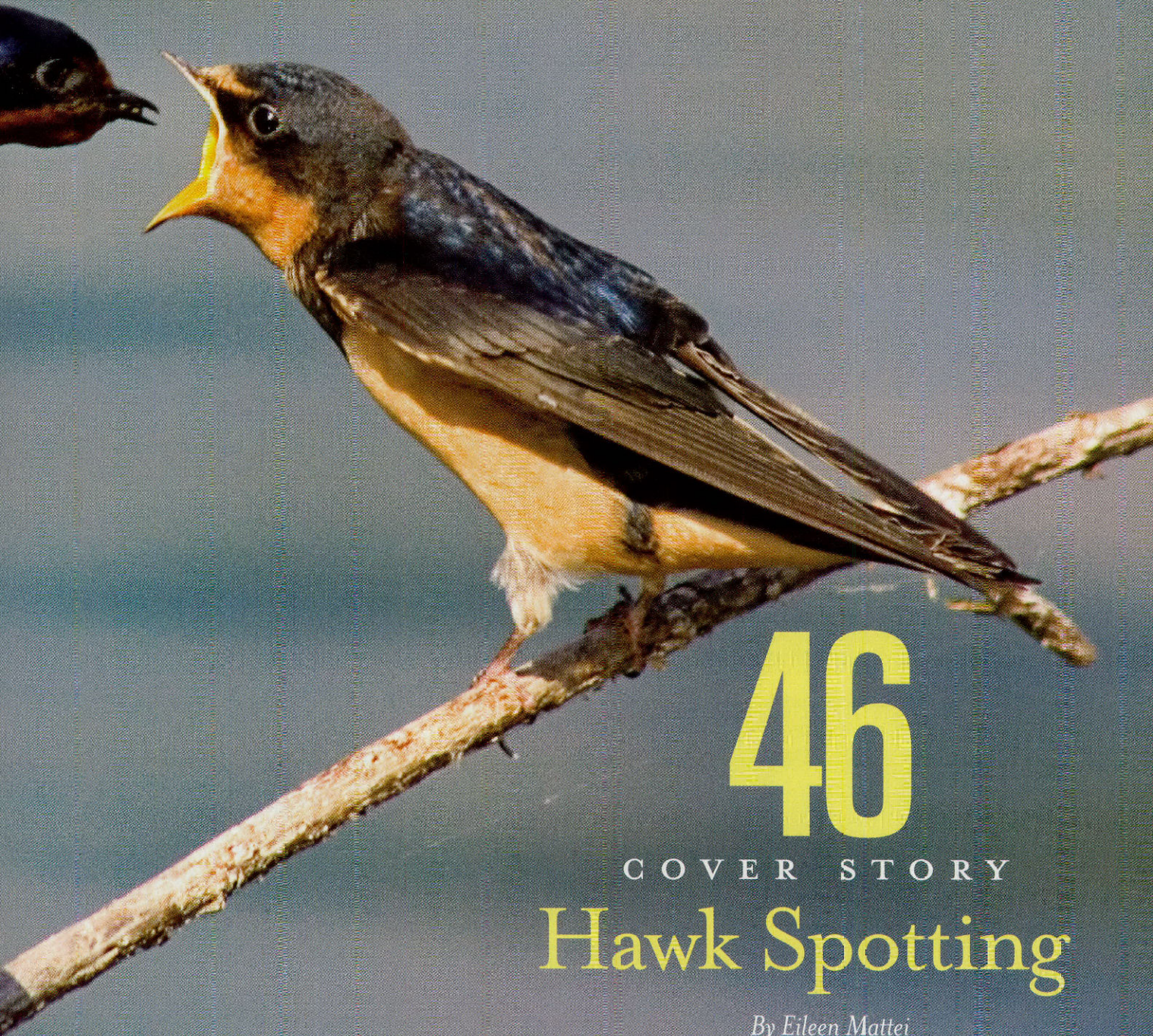
By Larry D. Hodge

Jug-fishing and limblining let you fish many places at the same time — and they work.

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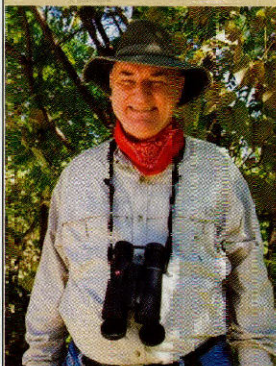
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In the Field

GARY CLARK, who provides a primer on the orioles of Texas this month, leads bird photography tours with his wife, professional photographer Kathy Adams Clark. He has been active in the birding and environmental communities for more than 30 years. He founded the Piney Woods Wildlife Society in



1982 and the Texas Coast Rare Bird Alert in 1983. He is a past president of the Houston Audubon Society, a director for the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory and the Houston Audubon Society, and a dean at North Harris College in Houston. Gary's nature writing has been featured in numerous magazines and books, as well as in a weekly nature column for the *Houston Chronicle*.

DALE WEISMAN, who penned this month's article on the Texas piñon pine, is an Austin-based freelance writer and a member of the Capital Area Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists. Dale says his writing provides him with an opportunity to explore his affinity for the natural world. Dale first encountered the piñon species in the early 1990s while researching an article on Kickapoo Caverns State Park, with help and insights from the late Dave Stuart, the park's first superintendent. Dale is now hooked on Texas piñon pines and has planted a piñon seedling in the yard of his South Austin home.



MARY O. PARKER has been passionate about conservation issues since she was a child. "I remember doing a report in grade school about American alligators and how our human activities were responsible for their then-endangered status," she recalls. As an adult, after moving to Texas, the awe of being able to see a live alligator had a profound effect. Knowing that the species had moved from endangered to threatened in its status, she



realized that our power to destroy a species has a flip side and that "we also have the power to save." Today, Mary is a freelance writer and a teacher, and whenever possible, she explores environmental topics in her articles and class projects. Mary lives in Smithville with her husband, Jeff, who is a nature photographer.

AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF ROBERT L. COOK

I want to tell you and the thousands of Texans who believe in and stand with our Texas game wardens about our new Game Warden Training Center. I want to personally invite you to join us in supporting a capital campaign that will secure the future of fish and wildlife conservation law enforcement in Texas.

Texas game wardens are widely recognized as the best-trained corps of fish and wildlife conservation officers in the nation. As we enjoy the great outdoors, we must not take for granted the role that a well-trained game warden force plays in ensuring that our hunting, fishing and other outdoor pursuits are safe and available for future generations. As my on-the-job work experience and personal friendships with game wardens has accumulated and increased over four decades, so has my respect and admiration for their professionalism and dedication. They do a great job and are good citizens in communities across the state.

Since the 1970s, the game wardens of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department have received their required seven-month specialized training at our present training site, which is located on four acres in a very urban setting of homes and businesses in Austin. We need a larger, more modern facility that will enable us to provide advanced training to a greater number of game wardens.

Recently an ideal site for the training facility was donated to TPWD by our friends at the Police Activity League. About three years ago, TPWD was approached about a possible partnership opportunity that would include the donation of the 200-acre Hamilton County youth ranch operated by PAL. TPWD leadership immediately began discussions that involved leaders in the Law Enforcement Division, the Texas Game Warden Association, game warden rank and file, the local community and PAL. All were enthusiastic, and the Texas Legislature supported the idea by approving the sale of the central Austin facility, with proceeds earmarked for development at the new site.

At full capacity, the new Texas Game Warden Training Center will train 60 game warden cadets annually; the 200-acre rural site will include all the needed facilities to accommodate their rigorous seven-month training curriculum.

Outreach to the youth of Texas is one of the missions of Texas game wardens. One of the conditions of the donation was that PAL be allowed the option to host youth activities on the site for six weeks in the summer. We believe that the partnership between PAL, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Game Warden Association will result in enhanced outreach to the youth of Texas.

Along with our partners, we recently began our fundraising efforts to raise \$9 million in private funds to make this dream a reality. To date, we have received approximately \$2.5 million from supporters to begin the development and construction of this great undertaking. Working together, we can make the Texas Game Warden Training Center the best in the country. All donations are tax deductible and can be made to either the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department c/o the Texas Game Warden Training Center account or to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation c/o the Texas Game Warden Training Center.

This is a wonderful example of what can happen when we work together on a great effort that will positively impact fish and wildlife conservation and make this a better world for future generations of Texans. I hope that you will join us in this effort, knowing that your donation will produce many benefits for all Texans. Thank you for your support of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas game wardens.



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MAIL CALL

PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

FOREWORD

In my backyard last year around this time (see "Foreword," May 2006), there were squirrel babies falling from the sky. This year, things have taken a more sinister turn. On a recent Saturday morning, I was sitting at the kitchen table, sipping coffee and staring out the window, when I noticed a commotion near the back of the yard.

I stood up and walked closer to the window to get a better look. A huge hawk was standing on top of what appeared to be a pile of feathers. Every few seconds, its powerful beak disappeared into the mound of white feathers and popped right back up again amid a cloud of feather parts. Pluck. Pluck. Pluck.

Grabbing a pair of binoculars, I stared in morbid fascination. I could just make out the feet of the hapless victim. They were facing up, so somehow the hawk had attacked the bird and turned it on its back before commencing breakfast. At first, I thought it was a chicken, which seemed plausible because the yard catty-corner behind mine is full of them (backyard poultry is fairly common in my part of south Austin).

Suddenly, the plucking stopped and the hawk looked in my direction. I'm guessing it didn't enjoy being watched while eating. Holding the bird in its claws, the hawk flapped its wings but flew only a few feet onto a pile of logs. Only then could I see that the deceased was a pigeon — apparently a heavy one. It took two more attempts for the hawk to fly up and out of the yard with its quarry dangling from one claw. A group of about a dozen pigeons sat on a power line nearby, seemingly observing a moment of silence for their fallen comrade. I couldn't help but wonder if pigeons had more of a glass-half-full or glass-half-empty kind of attitude. Were they saddened to lose a member of the flock or simply happy to remain among the living?

I went out to survey the scene, and all that was left were a few blood-stained feathers. I've always enjoyed wildlife documentaries, but it's something else to have a National Geographic moment in your own backyard. It's easy to forget that life-and-death struggles are happening around us all the time — from lizards snacking on moths to raptors stalking pigeons — and that these moments, however brutal, are just a normal part of nature's way.

We humans enjoy a pretty cushy spot in the planetary food chain. Think about it. Taking a hike or walking the dog on a beautiful spring day would be a lot less enjoyable if you had to constantly keep checking the sky for avian predators. We have a lot of problems in this world, but at least we don't have to worry about being dive-bombed, plucked and eaten for breakfast.

See? The glass is half-full. Have a great spring...

Robert Macias

ROBERT MACIAS
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

LETTERS

STOP HARVESTING TURTLES

No wild animal species can tolerate commercial collection, including Texas turtles. Have we learned nothing from our past history?

Our Great Plains once contained 70



No wild animal species can tolerate commercial collection, including Texas turtles. ... If turtles are to be commercially harvested, they must not be usurped from the public waterways but raised on farms, like catfish.

Greg & Susan Mauz Christoval

million buffalo, 20 million pronghorns, 1 million wolves, etc. Before the arrival of Caucasian Europeans, this country contained more big game numbers than the wilds of Africa. Good luck finding any of these animals in the wild now.

Need contemporary Texas examples? Quail are down from 60 million birds in 1980 to less than 20 million now. Those on the brink of disappearing include the box turtle, tortoise, horned lizard, red wolf (gone), Texas black bear, ocelot, etc. Even common animals like rabbits, toads and frogs are

declining or disappearing in many areas. Even the freshwater turtle's cousin, the sea turtle, was almost hunted to extinction. Need we repeat the same old mistakes?

Despite the incredible bounty of our oceans, there are limitations. Hence, the commercial farming of salmon, shrimp and other seafood. If turtles are to be commercially harvested, they must not be usurped from the public waterways but raised on farms, like catfish.

GREG & SUSAN MAUZ

Christoval

MAIL CALL

VIVA EL PASO!

In "Viva la Diferencia" (February 2007), Rob McCorkle truly captured the essence of El Paso. A native El Pasoan now living in San Antonio, I find myself missing the "spicy food, rich history and jaw-dropping views at the western tip of Texas." The city has much to offer and is often overlooked and under-appreciated. Rob's descriptions of places he visited, coupled with the photos, made for a nice trip down memory lane. I hope this article will inspire many to visit and explore the wondrous and picturesque jewel this city really is.

CYNTHIA BINDMAN ALLEMAN
San Antonio

BIRD ISLAND NEIGHBORS

The north shore of North Deer Island is 1/2 mile due south of our home on Tiki Island and we have greatly enjoyed the annual colonial bird cycle since 1996. Even though the actual sights and sounds we have enjoyed cannot be captured in a magazine article, the article ("Baby Bird Island," April 2007) is very well written and informative and the pictures are outstanding. We look forward to your magazine each month as it introduces us to the great outdoor diversity of our adopted state.

JERRY DRYDEN
Katy

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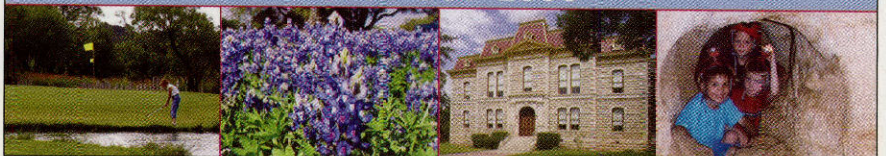
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SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

OAKS AT RISK

New initiatives are aimed at protecting Rockport's rapidly disappearing windswept oaks.



Increased tourism and a rapidly growing population may be good news for Rockport, but not for its trademark oak trees.

The laid-back, artsy community of Rockport enjoys an enviable tourism business, buoyed by its picture-book beauty. At the heart of the Aransas County town's natural charm are its thick stands of gnarly live oaks, sculpted into fantastic shapes by the south-southeasterly Gulf breezes. But Rockport's trademark oaks and wildlife-rich undergrowth are disappearing. And that has longtime residents and part-time visitors as hot as a jellyfish sting.

Caught in the middle of this civic maelstrom is Rockport Mayor

Todd Pearson. Pearson explains that Rockport is being loved to death by vacationers and urban refugees. A rapidly growing population, combined with a multimillion-dollar tourism trade, leads to interest from commercial real estate developers.

Diane Probst, president and CEO of the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce, worries about Texas A&M University's projections that Aransas County's population of 24,000 will double in 20 years.

A drive down State Highway 35 through the heart of Fulton and Rockport shows you that population growth has spawned a Wal-Mart Super Store, an H-E-B, a Walgreens, an American Bank and even a new Starbucks. Acres of parking lots have replaced oak forests where deer, birds and other critters once lived. The clear cutting of some of that land has locals worked into a frenzy: "Save the Live Oak Trees of Aransas County" petitions circulated; the city council held a series of public meetings to hear grievances; and citizens groups organized to protect the old-growth oaks from being mowed down.

In response, last August the city amended its landscape and tree ordinance to tighten up development rules to afford more protection for the trees.

Ordinance 1349 purports to "enhance real estate and economic values; to ensure that excessive tree cutting does not reduce property values" and encourages the "preservation and enhancement of natural areas and habitat on public and private property."

But will that be enough?

Some Rockport folks doubt it and question the feasibility of enforcing the ordinance with only one landscape official. The ordinance prohibits removal of "protected trees" (those over six inches in diameter), some of which have stood on this strip of coastal land for more than 500 years. It requires those who intend

to clear a lot for commercial or large-scale residential development to apply for a tree removal permit, and submit a tree survey and site plan before a building permit will be issued.

“There aren’t many places along the Gulf Coast where you have native oak trees like this,” says Jay Tarkington, who directs the Aquatic Education Program at Texas A&M–Corpus Christi. “The oaks in Aransas and surrounding counties exist only in an approximate three-mile-thick strip that stretches from the Aransas Wildlife Refuge in Tivoli to Corpus Christi Bay.”

Live oaks that fall to the bulldozer or chain saw on Live Oak Peninsula, where Rockport and Fulton are located, won’t be easily replaced.

“Anything growing here has to be able to stand salt spray, windy conditions and slightly alkaline and deep sandy soil with a fluctuating water table. Most of the habitat here is not protected by federal law,” explains Kay Jenkins, a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department natural resources coordinator based in Rockport. That’s why she is seeking grant money from federal agencies such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to protect the unique “live oak red bay community.” She also believes state wildlife conservation easements might be a way to protect threatened coastal habitat.

The city council is working on an Environmental Master Plan that would set forth community standards for trees, habitat and drainage to help guide development throughout the county, not just within Rockport city limits. And the city is cooperating with local environmental group Aransas First in preserving and managing a portion of Tule Creek to minimize erosion and tainted runoff into Rockport’s main creek that feeds into Little Bay.

“Frankly, people come to Rockport for the environment. It’s the look and feel that draws people here. It’s a difficult compromise,” Pearson admits. “We encourage developers to be very, very sensitive to environmental issues.”

Only time will tell if the live oaks — an essential part of Rockport’s heritage — will become an endangered species. ★

— Rob McCorkle



Large, windswept oaks are a dominating feature of the Rockport-Fulton area.



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Water Lab

Baylor's miniature streams may help scientists improve water quality around the state.



The recently opened Baylor Experimental Aquatic Research (BEAR) facility, a joint venture between Baylor University and the City of Waco, was designed to help Baylor scientists understand how pollution moves through streams.

The only one of its kind at an academic institution in the United States and one of a few in the world, the BEAR facility is outfitted with 12 miniature streams, which can be manipulated to look and act like streams found across Central Texas and in other

regions. The streams are 60 feet long and allow researchers to test aquatic contaminants in a controlled setting. In addition to the streams, the research facility is outfitted with 24 model wetlands.

Water managers will be able to use the data collected at the facility as the scientific basis for improved water quality management strategies. The first studies identify nutrient levels that are protective of the quality of source waters flowing into Texas reservoirs.

"This experimental facility allows us to ask and answer some questions that can't be fully understood in the field or in the lab," says Bryan Brooks, Baylor assistant professor of environmental

studies. "When we couple what the research tells us at BEAR with observations in the field, we will be able to link cause and effect."

For example, Waco's drinking water has had taste and odor problems for several years, stemming from algae blooms caused by high concentrations of a common nutrient found in Waco's reservoir, Lake Waco. BEAR could help in the effort to unravel that issue.

"BEAR allows us to look at different alternatives on a pilot scale," says Tom Conry, water quality administrator for the City of Waco. "We can look at biomanipulating certain factors that could ultimately lead to the better protection of our drinking water."

Researchers also are able to study how long a certain contaminant, like a pesticide or another chemical, stays in the stream, how it breaks down and the overall impact on wildlife and water quality. To date, there is little research into the environmental effects of many new aquatic contaminants.

"We can identify critical concentrations of a certain nutrient or contaminant," says Ryan King, Baylor assistant biology professor. "We will be able to know that if we have X amount of a certain contaminant, what the impact would be on the stream and wildlife."

The BEAR lab was constructed by Baylor students, faculty and city workers, using city-donated and Baylor-purchased supplies. The project is funded by a grant from the Altria Foundation, with significant matching support from Baylor and Waco. ★

—Matt Pene

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Saving Gator Babies

Eggs laid in a dry lake bed had to be gently relocated before habitat restoration could begin.

When the rain clouds once again passed up the protected wetlands of Brazos Bend State Park in spring 2006, TPWD naturalist David Heinicke suspected that the American alligators living in the park were going to have a difficult breeding season. He was concerned that an ongoing drought would interfere with the alligators' reproductive cycles.

His concern proved valid: While breeding season arrived in April as usual, it did not arrive with the same gusto. "Because of the drought, we didn't see as much activity as we do in some years," Heinicke says.

For American alligators (*Alligator mississippiensis*), as much yearly breeding activity as possible is always desired. The alligators have rebounded well since they were placed on the endangered species list in 1967, but not without an ongoing struggle. Today American alligators are still included on the U.S. Department of Interior's list of threatened species.

By the time many of the females laid their eggs, two key lakes at the state park, Elm and 40-Acre, had dried up to critical points. In response, park officials decided that water would need to be pumped back into the lakes from a lesser-used source.

There was one problem. The drought had allowed mother alligators to create four nests in areas of the lakes where



Nearly 100 alligator eggs were rescued by volunteers at Brazos Bend State Park, resulting in a hatch of 47 babies.



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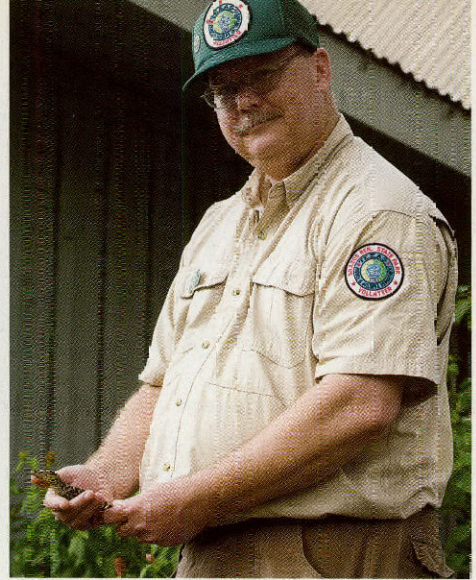
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"When they were ready, they just shot out like little rockets," said volunteer James Blankenship (right), who assisted with the hatching.



there was historically water, and pumping water back in would threaten the eggs in these nests. It was decided that before setting to work restoring the aquatic habitat that nature was destroying, park staff would set to work rescuing as many eggs from the nests as possible.

Early on the morning of July 24, a small group set out on their very special egg hunt. Spotters with long wooden poles kept vigilant lookout for mother alligators while the group collected the eggs. The eggs were put under incubation and the first ones began hatching a mere 18 days later.

"It was an incredible experience," says park volunteer James Blankenship, who assisted with the hatching. "I was helping to open the eggs so that the babies could get out, then when they were ready, they just shot out like little rockets. I don't know how

else to say it, but being a part of this experience was awesome."

Of the 97 American alligator eggs rescued, 47 of them hatched. The babies that survived and thrived were tagged and most were returned to the wild within a couple of weeks. Reintroduction was done by adding them in groups of five or six to already existing nests. Heinicke explained that this is common practice and that foster alligator mothers very rarely raise objections.

"Before releasing the babies," says Heinicke, "we made sure they were eating well and had a belly full of food."

For more information about conservation efforts at Brazos Bend, call (979) 553-5124 or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/brazosbend. ★

—Mary O. Farker

OKLAHOMA MAGIC

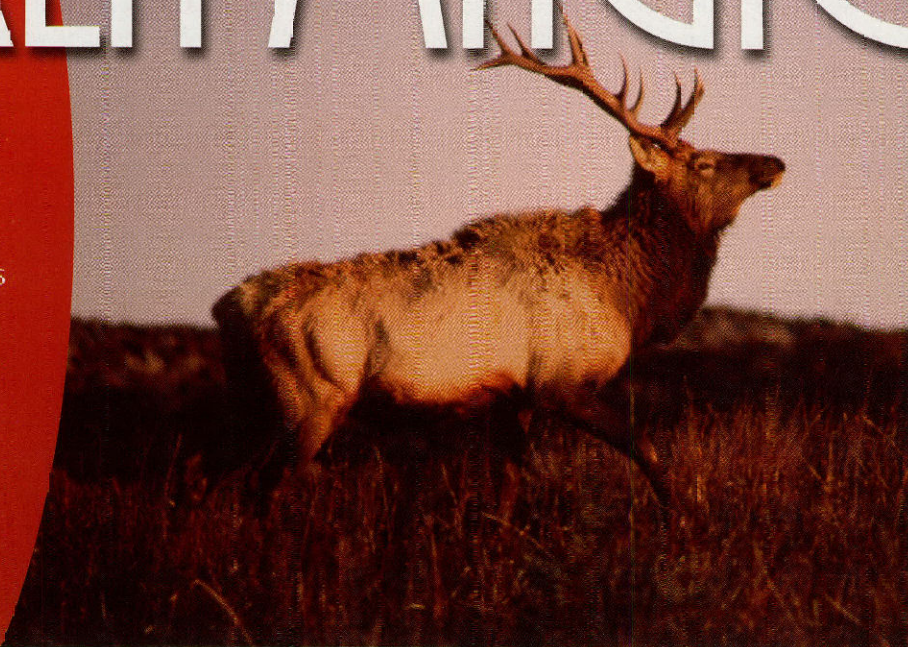
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Pole Fishing

In certain angling situations, nothing beats a good old-fashioned pole.

Long before the advent of modern rods and reels, everything from topwater plugs to live bait was fished on “poles.” Even after casting tackle became mainstream, cane and willow switches were still being employed on ponds, creeks and rivers throughout Texas. This was often due to the fact early entries in the casting reel category were somewhat clumsy, cumbersome and generally considered more trouble than they were worth on small bodies of water.

Today’s reels, of course, are precisely engineered and their use is easily mastered. As a result, the use of poles has fallen dramatically over the past few decades. In fact, at least two generations of anglers have now matured without considering a simple pole as their primary fishing tool.

However, the truth of the matter is, regardless of how far casting tackle advances, there will always be spots a pole can place a bait that a rod and reel cannot safely reach. And fishermen wishing to become well-rounded anglers are best served learning the basic techniques involved in pole fishing in addition to mastering the use of casting tackle.

Types of poles

Poles can be made from either natural materials, such as cane, or synthetics like fiberglass or graphite. Homemade cane poles are generally heavy due to their large diameter and somewhat awkward to transport since they are usually made as single-piece poles. Commercially made cane poles are typically made from smaller diameter cane, making them lighter, and fitted with ferrules which allow them to be taken apart for ease of transport.

Fiberglass and graphite poles are lighter and more sensitive than cane models. Additionally, poles forged from these graphite materials are usually multi-piece or telescoping, making them very portable. Telescopic models also can be adjusted to various lengths to accommodate different fishing situations.

Basic rigging

Poles of every type are simple enough to rig. It is best to use Dacron or nylon main line, as it has less memory than monofila-

ment, meaning it is less likely to tangle after being wound around the pole. However, since Dacron and nylon are highly visible, use about 2 feet of monofilament as a leader.

To rig a natural cane pole, tie the line about two feet from the tip. Then, loosely wrap the line up to the tip and tie a half-hitch at the tip, allowing a length of line approximately as long as the pole to hang from the tip. If less line is needed during certain fishing situations, the length can be adjusted by wrapping additional line around the pole.

To rig synthetic models tie the line either to the eye at the tip of the pole or to the cleat at base of the pole and run the line through tip-top guide. The advantage of tying to the cleat comes with line length adjustment, which can be made easily by wrapping the necessary amount of line on or off the cleat.

Techniques

Dabbling — This involves “dabbling” baits alongside stumps, riverbanks, holes in moss beds and other tight spots. In these situations, a pole allows bait to be presented and retrieved over structure a rod and reel could not reach without fouling. This technique can be used with a variety of artificial lures and natural baits and with or without a bobber.

Sling-shot — In order to get a bait or lure under overhead structure like docks or limbs, hold hook by the bend, pull back to put tension on pole and release. The lure is “shot” ahead in what-

ever direction the pole is aimed. This technique is best performed with artificial lures.

Strolling — This is basically “manual trolling” along a bank that is free from obstructions. To do so, simply walk along water’s edge with pole extending at a right angle over the water. Be sure to extend the pole in or out to work around structure as you pass. This can be done with a variety of natural baits and artificial lures.

Granted, pole fishing is not complicated. However, sometimes anglers find success in simplicity. Knowing how to properly use a pole can help you be ready for any situation. ★



Ready for an old-time fishing experience? Try your luck with a simple pole.

PHOTO BY TPWD

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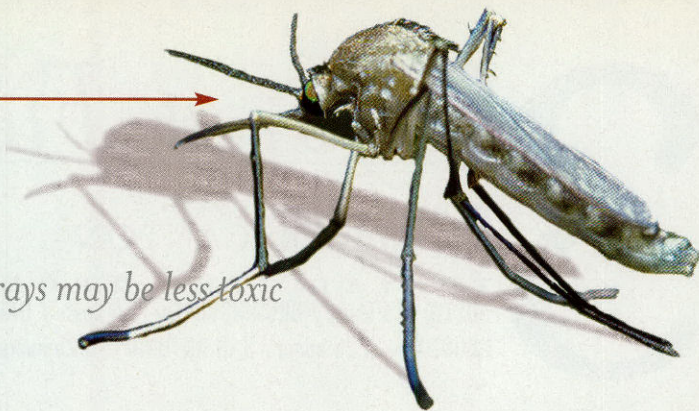


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Bug Repellents

Deet remains the most effective, but new sprays may be less toxic and almost as good at keeping pests at bay.



Being “bugged” by mosquitoes, flies, ticks and chiggers is never fun. At times these swarming hordes of tiny biting critters become so thick and noxious that they cause us to abandon our outing and head, slapping furiously all the way, to the nearest enclosed shelter.

These seasonal pests are best controlled by using one of the hundreds of commercial repellents that come in the form of lotions, sprays or burning coils. Some are made with natural ingredients like citronella, cedar oils or pyrethrum, but many contain synthetic products. One of the most common of these is a chemical called deet, which is found in a wide range of scents and concentrations.

The easiest repellents to apply are sprays in aerosol cans or pump bottles. One of the most effective is **Off! Deep Woods Sportsmen**. This brand has been around for many years and the formula of 98 percent deet has proven to keep away every form of biting insect, spider or mite. Some individuals may be allergic to this strong chemical and a small test spot should be tried before coating larger areas of skin. Avoid getting deet in the eyes, scratches or cuts, as it burns. Also, it can permanently damage some plastic or rubber surfaces and, if applied with the hands, cause them to stick to and texture your gear. (\$4.99, 1-ounce pump-spray, Off! Deep Woods Sportsmen, SC Johnson Brands, 800-558-5252, www.scjbrands.com)

Many individuals with sensitive skin or contact allergies have found that applying liberal amounts of **Avon Skin-So-Soft Bug Guard Plus** works well. Resisting most ticks and insects, this lotion contains a combination insect repellent/skin moisturizer with an SPF 30 UV sun protection rating. To show treated skin areas, it has a distinctive blue color that turns clear shortly after application. Other features include the addition of

vitamin E and aloe vera for skin conditioning, plus a mild fragrance of flowers. (\$10, 4-ounce bottle, Skin-So-Soft, Avon, 512-736-8923, www.youravon.com/nicoledixon)

Also available are natural bug repellents with sunscreen, like the Texas-made **SmartShield**. This product is water-resistant, and comes in either individual towelettes or pump-sprays containing cedar oils and lemon grass extracts for those preferring organic-based protection. A coating on exposed skin is long lasting, eco-friendly and will not harm live bait, your outdoor gear or the environment. (\$12.49, 4-ounce bottle, Smart Shield SPF 30, 800-343-1504, www.smartshield.com)

If possible, wear long pants and shirts made of tightly woven but breathable fabrics. These garments can be pre-treated with a new non-toxic synthetic called **Sawyer Permethrin Spray** that is odorless and colorless with excellent repellency. It should never be used for direct skin applications. Bug-proofing any clothing requires periodic reapplication to exterior surfaces and air-drying for best results. In some locations — like coastal marshes — the mosquitoes and midges can become so thick that a fine mesh head-net and gloves may also be necessary to keep the aggressive swarms away. (\$6.99, 6-ounce Sawyer Permethrin #56624, Campmor, 800-525-4784, www.campmor.com)

Tucking long pants into your socks and then spritzing your lower legs with repellent products discourages the entry of ticks and chiggers. Don't forget that many of these bloodthirsty little “devil-bugs” carry and transmit dangerous diseases, so take all the necessary precautions to ensure your health in the outdoors. ★



Clockwise from top left: Off! Deep Woods Sportsmen; Avon Skin-So-Soft Guard Plus; SmartShield; Sawyer Permethrin Spray.

3 Days in the Field / By Elsa K. Simcik

DESTINATION: CANTON

TRAVEL TIME FROM:

AUSTIN – 4 hours / BROWNSVILLE – 9.5 hours / DALLAS – 1.25 hours

HOUSTON – 4.25 hours / SAN ANTONIO – 5.25 hours / LUBBOCK – 6.5 hours

Tradin' Up

Scenic drives, phenomenal fishing and a whole lotta shopping make this region road-trip worthy.



First Monday Trade Days began in 1850, when the circuit judge stopped in Canton on the first Monday of each month.

Even though I've lived in Dallas on and off for the last six years, I had never been to Canton's world-famous First Monday Trade Days. My reasons for resisting? Distance (sounds far away), timing (who shops on a Monday?) and the name (a flea market? I don't even like garage sales!). Then my neighbor Carrie informed me that I was incorrect on all accounts: Canton is barely over an hour's drive from the Metroplex; the trade days are actually the Thursday-Sunday prior to the first Monday; and most importantly, this ain't no garage sale. So one crisp Friday morning, Carrie, our neighbor Susan and I headed east for our shopping pilgrimage.

Day One

Carrie was right. A quick hour-and-10-minute drive and we're cruising past people toting carts with canvas lining. After parking and crossing the road to enter the market, we spot an unattended cart. "Oh, I guess we can just take these," I say. "It's like the grocery store." A serious shopper quickly corrects me: "That's mine,"

she says. "You can rent your own for \$12." We decide to pass on this investment, which means we may as well be wearing signs saying, "Canton Newbies!"

The acres and acres that make up the market include indoor and outdoor booths, new items, old items, crafts, dishes, jewelry, clothes, rugs, furniture and antiques. I am surprised by a few things:

- The number of "chip buffets" (as Susan calls them): About every fifth booth is a vendor peddling some sort of salsa or dip. They allow us to sample so much that it's almost unnecessary to spend money on lunch.
- The surplus of scented candles: We sniff hundreds of candles with names like "spring rain" and "twigs and berries." Partial to the ones that smell like food, I stock up on several "banana nut breads."
- The abundance of signs: Many booths showcase hand-painted wooden signs, some that are good for a chuckle ("We don't



Shoppers converge on Canton the weekend before the first Monday of every month to buy one-of-a-kind items. Organizers estimate that 100,000 to 300,000 attend each month, buying products from approximately 7,500 vendors.

skinny dip, we chunky dunk!” and some that are more sentimental (“Live well, laugh often, love much.”)

But most of all, I am shocked by how upscale this flea market is. It’s like a garage sale gone glam.

Unlike the hardy shopping veterans we see around us, the three of us grow weary after only six hours. Pleased with our purchases, we drive to the Pecan Tree Inn where I will be meeting up with my husband, Frank, to continue our tour of Canton and Northeast Texas. As my shopping companions head back to Dallas, I settle in at the quaint bed-and-breakfast in Edgewood, just 10 miles from Canton.

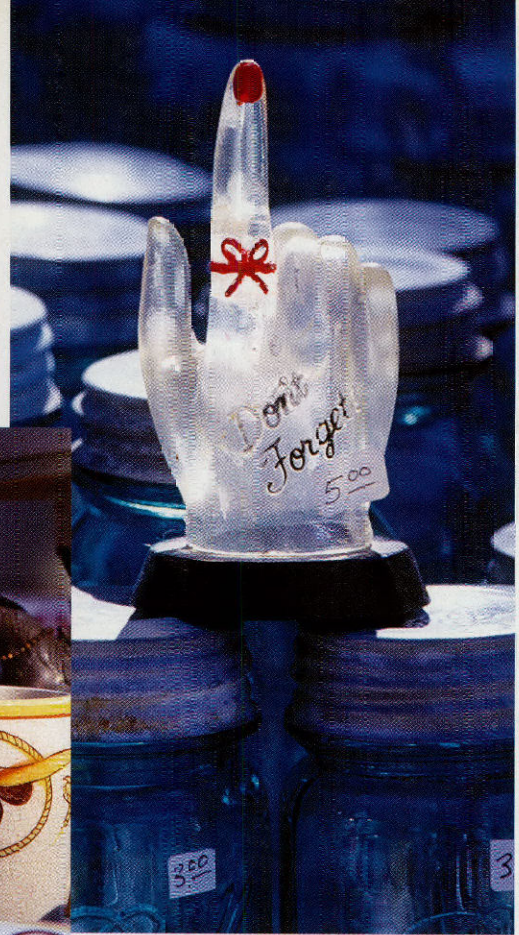
I was lucky to find this B&B lodging in Canton fills up fast for the trade days — sometimes months in advance. But this early 1900s home — with three bedrooms, two baths and a Texas-sized breakfast — is still a little-known hideaway. The owners, Ray and JoAnn Horton, opened in November of 2005, so it’s a little bit of a shopper’s secret. Still, on that night, we share the accommodations with four other women, all trade day die-hards (They definitely had the carts.) Before Frank and I leave for dinner, JoAnn treats us to hot cocoa and the best cookies in Texas (my name for them, not hers).

We head back to Canton and stroll around the town square before dining at Robles, a Mexican restaurant. Because the place is packed with hungry shoppers, the service is slightly slow. Still, we forgive them because they get the Tex-Mex right.

After dinner, we hit “The Mountair,” which is sort of the trade days after-party. It’s a section that allows shoppers to browse and buy long after the regular market closes and even offers entertainment and food. By small-town standards it’s late (9:30 p.m.), so we drive back to the B&B for some R&R (and some bedtime cookies)

Day Two

In the morning JoAnn cooks us up a breakfast of biscuits and gravy, eggs and sausage. As we load up, she says, “That’s what I like



to see, a full plate!” So pleased was she with our ability to gorge, she sends us on our way with more of those delicious cookies.

Armed with full bellies and plenty of snacks, we could have ventured back to the trade days (Saturdays promise more crowds and possibly more sales). We opt instead to make the five-minute walk to Heritage Park, a charming little preserved area from the late 1800s. They have an old school, a church and several houses once inhabited by influential Texans. We arrive too early for one of their daily tours, so after a quick glance around, we get going on the rest of our Northeast Texas road trip.

We drive 15 miles south to Eustace (pronounced Use-Tiss), home of Purtil Creek State Park. The 1,500-acre park includes a lake that’s big enough for fishing (mostly largemouth bass, on a catch-and-release-only basis), kayaking and canoeing. But at just 355 acres, it’s too small for major water sports like skiing.

Since it’s a little too chilly for water activities anyway, we opt to hike the 1.5-mile trail that park manager Justin Rhodes tells us about. Along the way we see the park’s primitive camp sites. They’re shaded and secluded, but that’s not what sets them apart from other sites we’ve seen. They’re also accessible via canoe, so campers don’t have to haul their gear along the trail; they can simply float it in.

While camping (primitive and otherwise) continues to be a popular attraction for Purtil Creek, Rhodes says that they’re working on increasing their day-use activities by adding a sandy beach and expanding the trails to allow for bikes. Plus, from March through July the park offers interpretive canoeing tours.

All that hiking makes us hungry, so we jump back in the car and head north on Highway 47 towards Wells Point. The 45-minute drive is a scenic one, full of sprawling grasslands, enviable houses and quaint towns like Phalba and Fairview.



When visitors get their fill of shopping for bargains, they turn to quieter pursuits, like fishing at Purtis Creek (above) or watching the sun set at Lake Tawakoni (right).



As we drive into Wills Point we're pleased not only to see that this "bluebird capital of Texas" has a historic town square but that they're holding a festival. We join in, listening to the rockin' tunes of a local band and consuming street-fair-style food like turkey legs and corn dogs. I even help out the Wills Point economy by purchasing a couple of handmade dish towels.

We hop back in the car and make the quick five-mile drive to Lake Tawakoni State Park. (Tawakoni is an Indian name, loosely translated to mean "river with the red banks.") Just like Purtis Creek, this park is known for its bass fishing. And even though the lake is low, the park has hosted 30 tournaments in the last three years, including ESPN Bassmasters and Bass Champs.

Unlike Purtis Creek, this park is a hot spot for day-users. Park Manager Ken "Doc" Watson tells us that about 70 percent of his visitors come from the D/FW area and most don't stay overnight. They come for the mountain biking, hiking and the sandy beach. As Doc says: "It's the only beach on the lake. It's nowhere near the water, but it's a beach." Doc says that on holiday weekends, they'll have 1,200 to 1,400 people just for the day.

Because we have reservations at a cabin on the other side of the lake, we say goodbye to Doc so we can get there before dark. Turns out we timed it perfectly: The drive around Lake Tawakoni is beautiful as the sun sets. At our cozy cabin at Anchor Inn Marina, the view over the water is even more picture-perfect.

After sundown we head to Big D's Steak and Bar-B-Que (a recommendation from

Doc). There, we enjoy East Texas hospitality ("You want some more tea, honey?") and delicious barbecue. The place, adorned with Texas flag curtains, is full of locals — one lady still in her curlers. As I snap pictures she holds her hands up to her head and exclaims, "I'm a mess!" The waitress explains my behavior by telling her, "Oh, she's just a tourist, sweetheart."

Day Three

It doesn't get much better than waking up to the sunrise on Lake Tawakoni. As it pours through our cabin window, I make Frank wake up so we can take pictures. Since we're awake anyway, we get on the road and drive through West Tawakoni. Soon after getting on the highway we spot a sign — The West Tawakoni Trade Days. "Now this is what I call a flea market!" I tell Frank.

If Canton's First Monday Trade Days were the high-end, this was the other end. While some expert antiquers may find treasures if they dig, we aren't willing to do that. We stay only a few minutes and then drive southeast towards our final destination, Terrell.

Our first impression of Terrell is that it's a sleepy little town with lots of interesting historical buildings. Because it's Sunday, most of the city is shut down. Lucky for us, though, this doesn't apply to the Tanger Outlet Center. Since we're not quite ready for lunch — we had polished off the rest of JoAnn's cookies in the car — we stop in for some souvenirs.

After this final shopping spree, our hunger draws us to a sign that says "Seafood." The restaurant is Fat Catz, and it's a Cajun place with big, beautiful

murals on the wall of ships and fish. Plus, the staff is full of that East Texas hospitality we've grown to love. One of the owners, Bill Ashley, comes up to our table and introduces himself, not because I'm writing an article, but because it's our first time. We scarf down gator wings (really the same as buffalo wings), salmon (for me) and a chipotle crawfish wrap (for Frank). With our hunger satisfied it's time to leave Terrell and our three-day journey behind.

After all the shopping and eating we feel a little bit poorer. But after finally getting a taste of this part of Texas, I'd say we're a little bit richer, too. ★

DETAILS

Lodging:

Pecan Tree Inn Bed and Breakfast, Edgewood, (903) 896-4545, <www.pecantreeinn.net>
Anchor Inn Marina, West Tawakoni, (903) 447-2256, <www.anchorinnmarina.com>

Restaurants:

Robles Mexican Restaurant, Canton, (903) 567-3533

Big D's Steak and Bar-B-Que, West Tawakoni, (907) 447-9993

Fat Catz Kitchen, Terrell, (972) 563-6201, <www.fatcatzkitchen.com>

Parks:

Purtis Creek State Park, <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/purtiscreek>, (903) 425-2332

Lake Tawakoni State Park, <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/laketawakoni>, (903) 560-7123

Shopping:

First Monday Trade Days, Canton, <www.firstmondaycanton.com>

Tanger Outlet Center, Terrell, <www.tangeroutlet.com>



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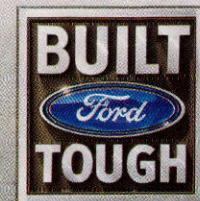


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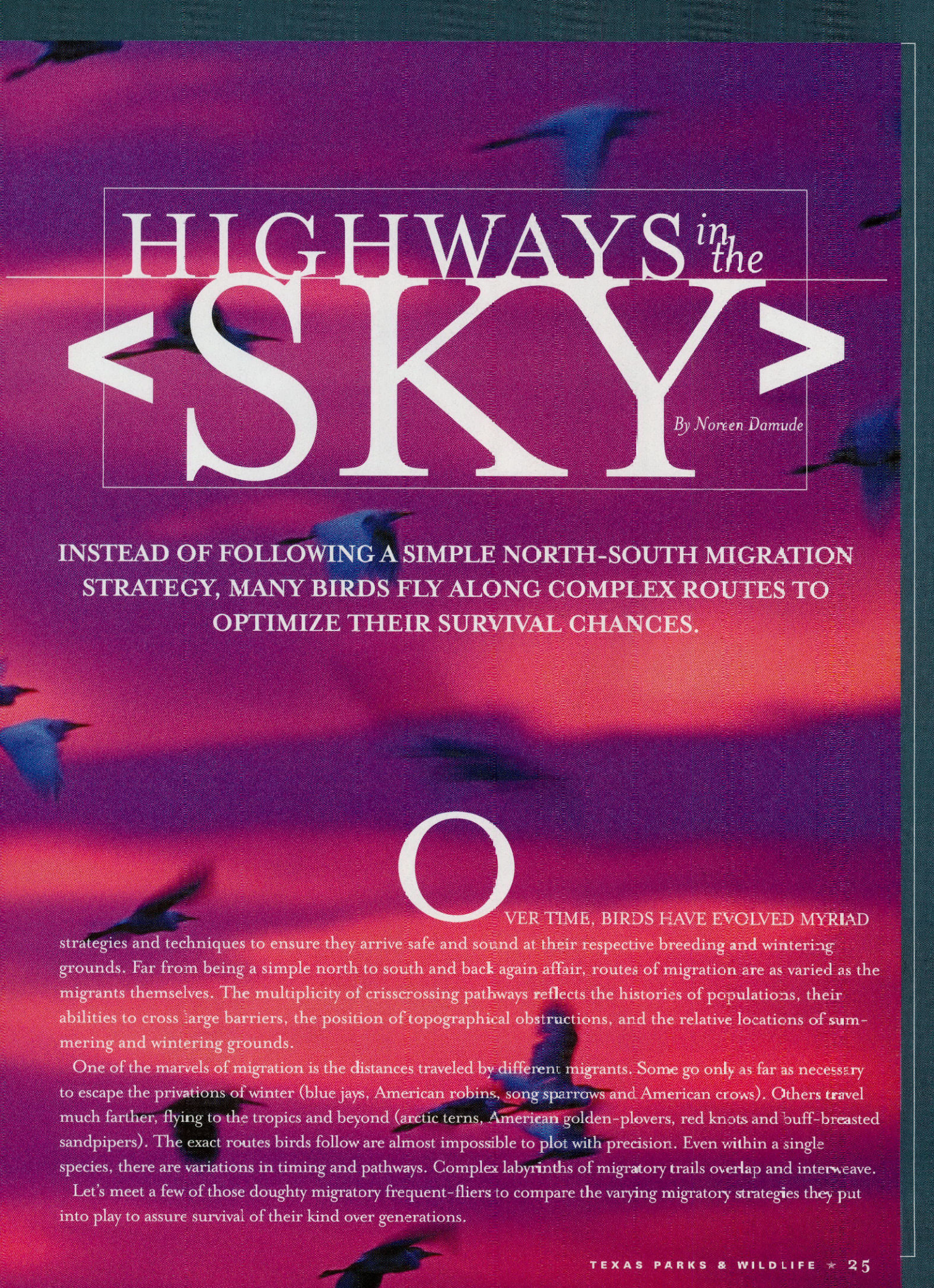


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HIGHWAYS *in the* SKY

By Noreen Damude

INSTEAD OF FOLLOWING A SIMPLE NORTH-SOUTH MIGRATION STRATEGY, MANY BIRDS FLY ALONG COMPLEX ROUTES TO OPTIMIZE THEIR SURVIVAL CHANCES.

OVER TIME, BIRDS HAVE EVOLVED MYRIAD strategies and techniques to ensure they arrive safe and sound at their respective breeding and wintering grounds. Far from being a simple north to south and back again affair, routes of migration are as varied as the migrants themselves. The multiplicity of crisscrossing pathways reflects the histories of populations, their abilities to cross large barriers, the position of topographical obstructions, and the relative locations of summering and wintering grounds.

One of the marvels of migration is the distances traveled by different migrants. Some go only as far as necessary to escape the privations of winter (blue jays, American robins, song sparrows and American crows). Others travel much farther, flying to the tropics and beyond (arctic terns, American golden-plovers, red knots and buff-breasted sandpipers). The exact routes birds follow are almost impossible to plot with precision. Even within a single species, there are variations in timing and pathways. Complex labyrinths of migratory trails overlap and interweave.

Let's meet a few of those doughty migratory frequent-fliers to compare the varying migratory strategies they put into play to assure survival of their kind over generations.



SWAINSON'S HAWK

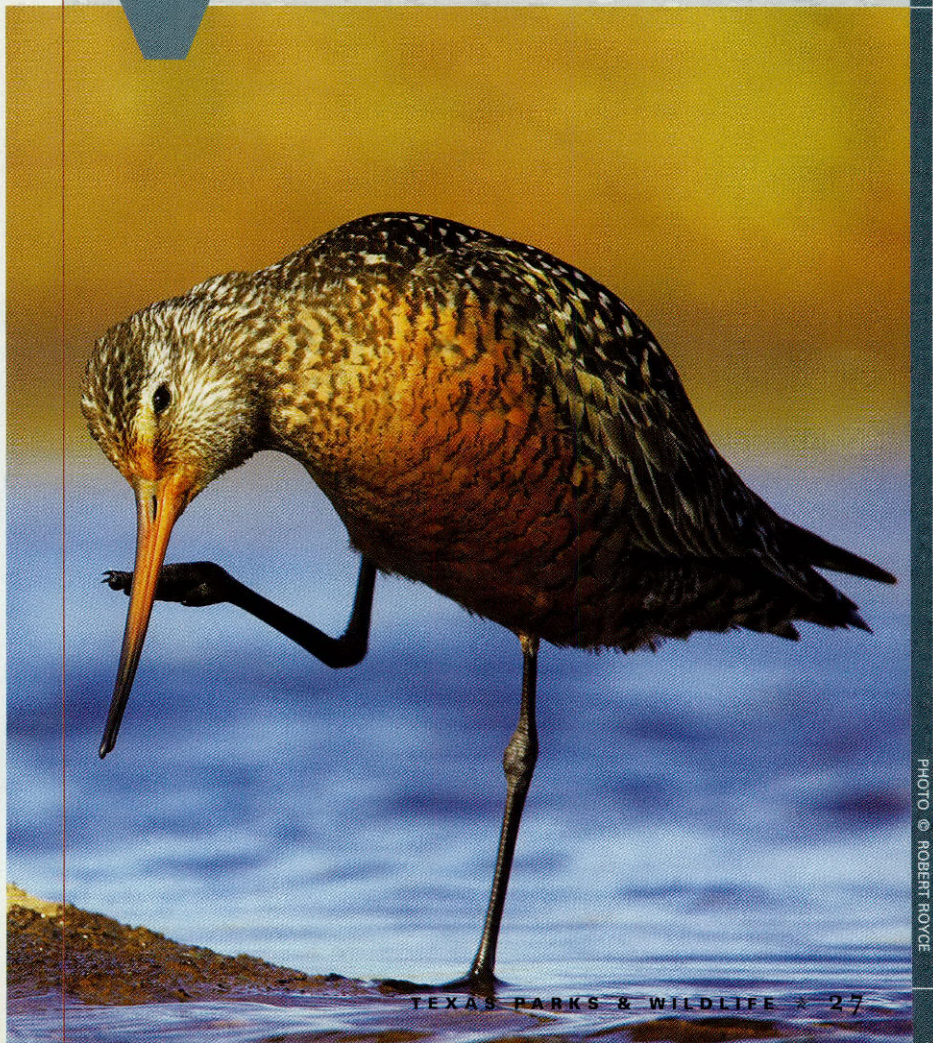
(*Buteo swainsoni*) — long-distance, Neotropical migrant

K Soaring birds such as raptors frequently migrate along narrow corridors defined by mountains, on whose flanks updrafts provide the motive force for their travels. Broad-front migrants may also be funneled into narrow paths by the nature of the territory over which they pass. This is clearly the case with the slim and graceful Swainson's hawk, a long-distance Neotropical migrant, second only to the peregrine falcon in distance traveled by a bird of prey. Averaging nearly 124 miles per day, they complete the 6,500-mile trip from Canada to southern Argentina in less than two months. Dubbed the "the harrier hawk" for its hunting style, this long-winged prairie buteo with a rounded head and long tail dines on small mammals, reptiles and birds, but has a special yen for large insects. Observed feasting greedily on crickets, grasshoppers and caterpillars in summer and during migration, Swainson's hawks have earned another sobriquet, the "grasshopper hawk." Come autumn, birds congregate in huge flocks sometimes numbering in the thousands as they prepare for "the grand passage." Once aloft, they move across the landscape by sliding from one thermal to the next. Clouds of hawks swirling like cyclones make their way south on turbulent winds. Caught in a bottleneck south of Texas between the mountains of Veracruz and the Gulf of Mexico, thousands upon thousands of Swainsons squeeze into thick narrow bands like sands in an hourglass across the sky.

HUDSONIAN GODWIT

(*Limosa haemastica*) — long-distance migrant, elliptical pattern

V Following the same migration route as the once incredibly abundant Eskimo curlew, the boldly patterned, rich chestnut Hudsonian godwit is a classic long-distance migrant. Sturdy and exquisitely built for flight, the "ring-tailed marlin" of early naturalists first migrates west then south nonstop from James Bay, Ontario, to northern South America, a daunting trip of several thousands of miles. From major staging areas in Alaska and western Canada, post-breeders converge along western lakeshores to feed on invertebrates before moving well east to the Canadian Maritimes. Gorging on berries and final fall flushes of insects, they lay down gobs of fat to fuel the nonstop, transoceanic trip. After pre-migratory drills, restless flocks take to the skies, find the right winds and stream inexorably toward their ancestral wintering grounds. Juveniles make the trip on their own. First-timers are not led by experienced elders to their southern cone destination. They rely, instead, on genetically programmed cues to get them to their final destination. Come spring, they fly overland through the midsection of both hemispheres, stopping regularly along the way, thus exploiting a much better food supply.



PAINTED BUNTING

(*Passerina ciris*) — medium-distance, Neotropical migrant

Seed eaters are much less likely to migrate long distances than insect eaters and tend not to go as far when they do. Painted buntings are seed eaters par excellence, and find the brushy, grassy habitats of Mexico and Central America much to their liking as a winter home. Come spring, though, these medium-distance, Neotropical migrants will need an abundance of insects to feed their young. Riding the prevailing winds, they join the successive waves of insectivorous birds heading north around the Gulf. They start to appear in significant numbers along Texas shores in mid-April, later than many other Neotropical migrants that must travel much further north. The painted bunting nests in the southern portion of the country. Sometimes called the “nonpareil” for its incomparable good looks, the painted bunting is a small, sparrow-like bird that looks nothing like a sparrow. The multi-colored red, blue, chartreuse and yellow male is unmistakable, and his glistening lime-green consort is equally stunning. Though shy and sometimes difficult to see, birds forage on the ground, in weedy fields or in grassy marshes during migration and on their breeding grounds.

EARED GREBE

(*Podiceps nigricollis*) — medium-distance, seasonal Nearctic migrant

Early springtime brings lines of white pelicans, ibis and anhingas snaking high over marsh and beach, weaving and undulating, as they make their way from Texas coastal wintering grounds to breeding areas farther north. Just offshore or on coastal bays we often spot enormous rafts of eared grebes, by the thousands, bobbing buoyantly on choppy waters. These high-riding, compact, petite-featured birds with red eyes and upturned bills join the ranks of other medium-distance seasonal Nearctic migrants as they move northward. Nearctic migrants move north in the summer to breed in the northern portion of the Nearctic region (northern Canada, Alaska, northern U.S.) and return south in the fall to winter in the southernmost points of that same region. Biogeographers usually use the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mexico as the cut-off between

the Neotropic and Nearctic regions. Those that winter here in Texas begin to don their nuptial plumage just before departure, going from a somber gun-metal gray above and buff below to snappy black and tan set off by gold-feathered ear fans. Sometimes called the “crazed grebe” for its high-pitched piping bugle and splashy courtship display, the eared grebe loves company, even on its breeding grounds. Birds forage mainly by diving and swimming underwater, propelled by their powerful lobed feet. They feed mostly on small fish, crustaceans and aquatic insects. Eared grebes leave their Texas coastal wintering grounds from late February to late May. The less conspicuous horned grebes and common loons, also medium distance Nearctic migrants, disappear quietly under cover of darkness as well.





PHOTOS: RUTH PAPER, © LARRY DITTO



EVENING GROSBEEK

(*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) — irruptive, opportunistic wanderer



Few of us in Texas welcome the icy blasts of winter weather that, on rare occasion, sweep across the state between December and February. But with these infrequent bouts of howling winds and swirling snow, a golden winter surprise may appear. The copper evening grosbeak of northern forests is the occasional bright mustard-colored “irruptive,” whose invading flocks take our breath away. By definition, irruptive species are opportunistic wanderers that vacate their traditional home range only rarely and then under extreme duress. When food resources crash, nomads forced to flee their usual haunts strike out in waves in search of more hospitable grounds. The saffron yellow males are unmistakable, with their blackish hood, wings and tail and a white saddle on the lower back and yellow under-tail coverts. Though totally unpredictable, the thick-billed finches take refuge from adversity more often in the northwestern portion of the state than elsewhere. On four occasions, though, the East Texas Pineywoods was regaled with large nomadic flocks of evening grosbeaks that spent the winter gobbling seeds of box elders and other maples. Descending in colorful, noisy flocks, they thrilled “feeder-watchers” who watched them consume prodigious amounts of black sunflower seeds.

DARK-EYED JUNCO

(*Junco hyemalis*) — short-distance latitudinal migrant

Known in many parts of the south as “snowbirds,” the dark-eyed junco deploys several different migration strategies. They are common denizens of the coniferous forests and forest edges, clearings, as far north as the muskegs. As cool-weather birds, they barely reach extreme northern Mexico during the non-breeding season. While the birds prefer coniferous forests in which to nest, they breed both in northern Canada and on mountaintops in the U.S. Most juncos are migratory, but the degree, distance and type vary greatly from year to year and from population to population. Some populations move long distances south in winter, others move only a short distance down the mountain to the valleys below, still others hardly at all. In mild winters, most remain well north. Unquestionably, the urge to migrate is much greater when food is in short supply. Dark-eyed juncos show up around woodland edges, suburban yards and winter bird feeders across Texas — some winters in profusion. Exhibiting various color morphs depending on the population, they all are easily recognized by their white outer-tail feathers, which show conspicuously in flight. The young of montane juncos move down-slope at the end of breeding season while the adults follow later on, exemplifying age-biased migration. Juncos, like red-winged blackbirds, likewise migrate in sexually segregated flocks. In fact, most of the dark-eyed juncos that winter in Texas are largely females and birds of the year, males tending to remain further north — perhaps staying closer to the breeding grounds.

V



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER



CANVASBACK

(*Aythya valisineria*) — molt migrant

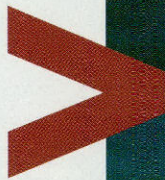
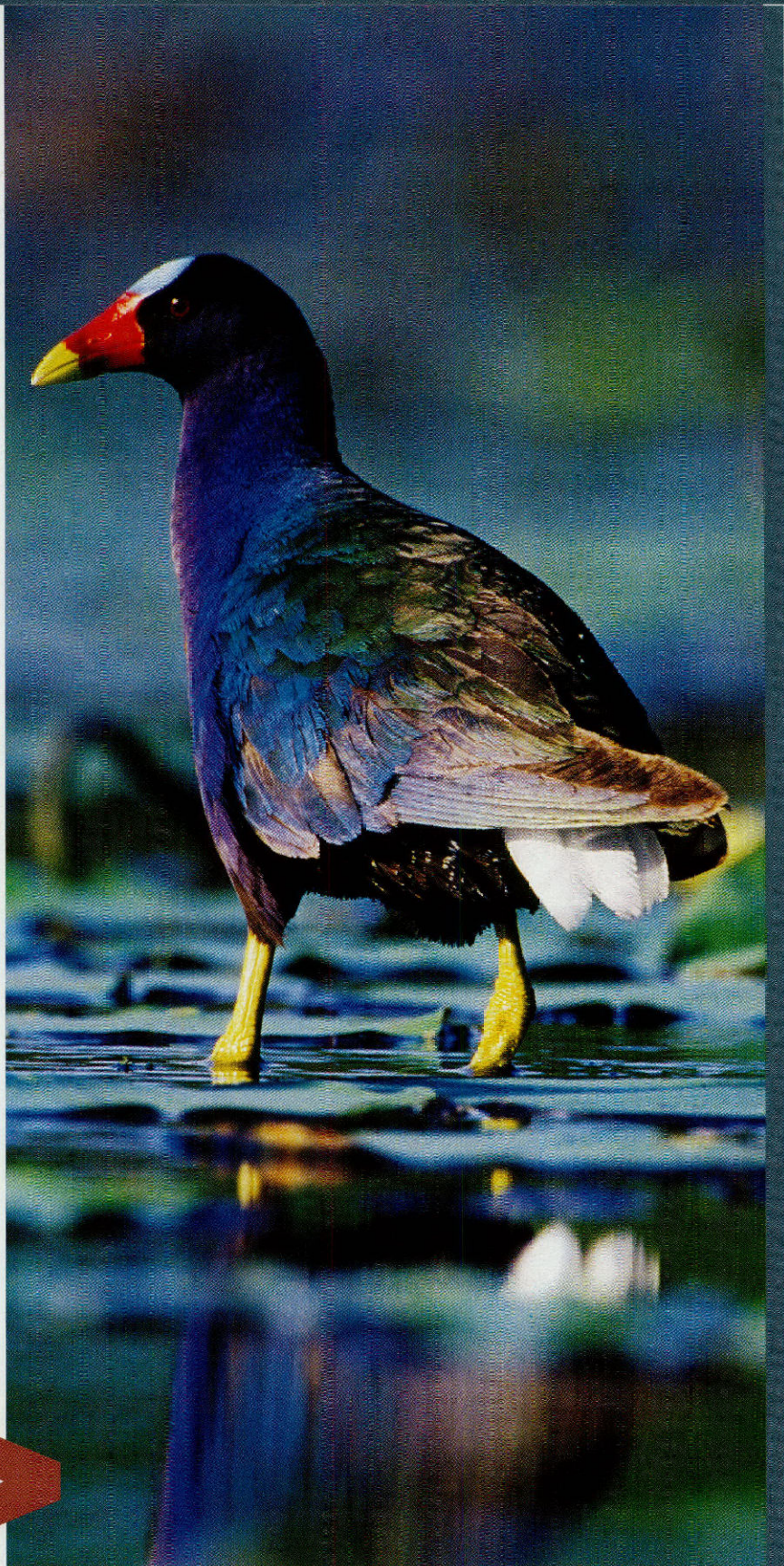


One of our largest diving ducks, the gregarious canvasback is wary and swift in flight, earning the respect of seasoned sportsmen everywhere. A handsome diving duck characteristic of prairie marshes in summer and saltwater bays in winter, the canvasback occurs almost exclusively in North America. Canvasbacks display a type of migration pattern called the molt migration that turns the usual linear north-south trip into a three-legged affair. Most waterfowl molt all of their flight feathers almost at once after breeding as they go into eclipse. Eclipse plumage renders the males as drab and camouflaged as the females. During the time they are unable to fly, they must hide away in secluded marshes to feed and rest until their feathers have grown in. The males of many species make special migratory legs to reach these traditional molting safe havens, before flying south for the winter. While post-breeding canvasbacks across North America use multiple routes to reach their wintering grounds, individuals of the prairie breeding population fly south on a broad front to the Texas Gulf Coast. These are the birds we see best at the Laguna Madre, typically in the company of redheads as they forage together on the bays. When migrating or traveling short distances, canvasbacks fly in a well-regimented V-formation. They prefer marshy habitats bordered by dense vegetation, where they dive for their food in shallow water. Birds forage largely on the roots and bases of underwater plants, with wild celery a particular favorite.

PURPLE GALLINULE

(*Porphyrio martinica*) — migrant in spite of itself

Despite their seemingly floppy flight, purple gallinules are consummate migrants and travel long distances to reach breeding and wintering grounds, sometimes in the wrong direction. Strays have been known to cross the Atlantic, showing up in Europe and southern Africa on several occasions. Vagrants may reach as far north as Canada at any season. Nicknamed the “swamp hen,” reflecting its watery habitat preferences, this gaudily plumaged bird with iridescent green back and royal purple head and neck, yellow-tipped red bill and ice-blue frontal shield is an unlikely-looking flying machine. But despite the dubious flight profile, purple gallinules totally withdraw from the northern parts of their breeding range and fly to the Neotropics for the winter. With their lanky and somewhat “wilted” silhouette, long yellow legs and dangly toes, they complete long-haul migratory treks worthy of distinction. Their flight may seem weak, but it is steady, and wing-beats are quick and regular. On long flights, they fly with their legs raised instead of letting them dangle. During migration, individuals occasionally show up in the oddest of places — they may even plop down in the middle of a busy city intersection. Clambering over marshy vegetation, or trotting spryly over lily pads, the birds eat a wide variety of plant and animal matter, including seeds, fruits and leaves of aquatic and terrestrial plants. Jerking their tail nervously while walking, they climb easily to the tops of marsh plants and even into trees, where they are typically seen in the evening.



For further information on patterns of bird migration, see the chapter on migration in Frank Gill's textbook *Ornithology: Living on the Wind* by Scott Weidensaul; *Bird Migration: A General Survey* by Peter Berthold; and *Bird Migration* by Robert Burton. ★

A whole year's worth of birding fun

By Shelly Scroggs Plante

YEAR-ROUND EVENTS

Available Daily

King Ranch Nature Tours — King Ranch, Kingsville. Guided birdwatching and nature-related tours on the famous King Ranch. Focus of tours, length and cost will vary. (361-592-8055, www.king-ranch.com)

Available Daily

Pontoon Boat Eagle Tours — Lake Conroe. Boat tours to observe bald eagles, waterfowl, kingfishers, wading birds and many others. \$40 per person. (936-851-1114, www.christmascreek.com)

Second Saturday of Each Month

Beginner's Bird Walk — Judson Nature Trails, Alamo Heights. Binoculars are provided. All are welcome. 8 a.m. each month except June, July and August, when groups meet at 7:30 a.m. Free. (210-342-2073, www.saaudubon.org)

Third Saturday of Each Month

Monthly Bird Walk — Lake Houston Park, New Caney. Guided bird walk for ages 13 and up. Bird enthusiasts of all experience levels are welcome.

8 a.m. Free with \$3 park admission. (281-354-6881)

Third Saturday of Each Month

Passerine Bird Banding — Gulf Coast Bird Observatory Headquarters and Sanctuary, Lake Jackson. Usually held the third Saturday of every month, the bird banding station is open to the public for observation. 8 a.m.–12 noon. Free. (979-480-0999, www.gcbo.org)

APRIL

Every Weekend

Birdwalks — Blucher Park, Corpus Christi. Audubon Outdoor Club of Corpus Christi members lead walks through Blucher Park and the expansive lawns of the homes across the street from the park. Blucher Park is the site of large migrant fallouts during spring migration. 7:30 a.m. Free. (361-443-0744, www.ccbirding.com)

April 13–15

18th Annual Spring Native Plant Sale — Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary, McKinney. Check out more than 300 varieties of native Texas plants such as trees, shrubs, perennials, vines and grasses. All sales are tax-free. Free

entry. Friday: 4–7 p.m. (members only); Saturday: 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; Sunday: 1–5 p.m. (972-562-5566, www.heardmuseum.org)

April 14

Birdathon 2007 — Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, San Antonio. Annual birding fundraiser features guided birding tours of the refuge. Call for details on fees. All day, beginning at 7 a.m. (210-628-1639, www.tx.audubon.org/mitchell.html)

April 14

14th Annual Bluebird Festival — Wills Point. Wills Point celebrates its birds with entertaining and educational programs. Driving tours give festival attendees access to hundreds of

bluebirds and nesting boxes lining the roads into town. Arts and crafts, games and food booths are set up throughout the brick-lined streets of downtown. (800-972-5824, www.willspointbluebird.com)

April 14 and 21

Fennessey Ranch Spring Migration Tour — Fennessey Ranch, Refugio County. Guided full field day on 4,000-

acre private ranch. Includes lunch and possibility of spotting more than 100 species of birds. \$58/person. (361-529-6600, www.fennesseyranch.com)

2007 GREAT TEXAS



Eastern bluebird

BIRDING CALENDAR

April 4-15

Attwater's Prairie Chicken Festival — Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge, Eagle Lake. Experience the beautiful courtship dance of the critically endangered Attwater's prairie chicken and virgin coastal prairie habitat through several guided tours by van or on foot. Free. 7 a.m. (979-254-3021)

April 4-15

14th Annual Migration Celebration — Lake Jackson. This event will have information booths and expert speakers, but the key to this festival is the birding field trips. Home to over 250 species of birds, the area's diverse habitats

include coastal prairies, hardwood forests and southern bayous along the Central Flyway. (888-477-2505, www.refugefriends.org)

April 15 and 21

Yellow Rail Walks — Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, Anahuac. Search for the elusive yellow rail on foot through salty prairie habitat. Interested participants should bring waterproof boots, binoculars, insect repellent and drinking water. All tours begin at the refuge's Visitor Information Station. Free. 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. (409-267-3337, www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges)

April 15-22

11th Annual Great Texas Birding Classic — Texas Coast. This weeklong birding tournament gives birders the opportunity to compete for the chance to award \$50,000 to habitat conservation projects along the Texas coast. 400 species possible! Entry fees vary. (979-480-0939, ext. 303, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/gtbc or www.gcbo.org)

April 16-21

Earth Week 2007 — Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, Orange. Enjoy a visit to the center's herbarium and take guided nature walks or boat trips down the bayou. Special presentation by nature photographer Wyman Meinzer on April 19. Free. (409-670-9113, www.shangrilagardens.org)

April 17, 21, 24 and 28

Walking Bird Tour — Lost Maples State Natural Area, Vanderpool. Experienced birder will accompany you on trails. Often-seen species include golden-cheeked warbler, black-capped vireo and green kingfisher. 8:30 a.m. \$8/adult, \$4/child. (830-966-3413, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lostmaples)

April 21

Early Morning Birding Walk — Armand Bayou Nature Center, Pasadena. Biologist George Regmund will lead an extended birding tour of Armand Bayou Nature Center as a part of the nature center's Earth Day Celebration. The walk will cover the extensive woodland and prairie grasslands that the nature center manages. Expected species



Birdwatchers at Brazos Bend State Park

MAY

May 4-6

WildFest San Antonio — Bexar County and surrounding area. WildFest San Antonio is an exciting birding and nature festival that will be held at numerous venues in San Antonio and surrounding areas from May 4 to 6. Price varies based on activity or event free to \$20. (210-886-9991, www.wildfestsa.com)

May 5

Nature Center Festival — Matagorda County Birding Nature Center, Bay City. Nature Center Festival highlights

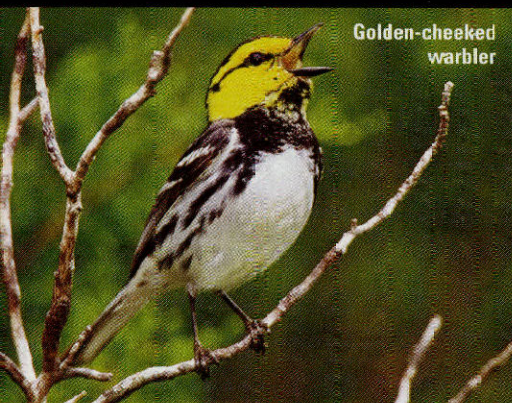
families and wildlife. Activities include kayaking, fishing, a carnival area with games for kids and six wildlife speakers. Entrance fee: \$7/armband. 2 p.m.-8 p.m. (979-245-3336, www.mcbnc.org)

May 17-20

Dragonfly Days — Valley Nature Center, Weslaco. Guided field trips to Valley wetland destinations to watch dragonflies and damselflies. Speakers and keynote banquet. Pre-registration required. (956-969-2475, www.valleynaturecenter.org)

May 26

Warbler Woods Bird Sanctuary Open Gate — Cibola. A renowned inland stopover location for migrating birds, especially songbirds. Thirty-six species of warblers identified on this property, and on their peak day in May, 19-20 species of warblers were identified in a single day. Free. Gates open at 8 a.m. (210-653-0089, www.warblerwoods.com)



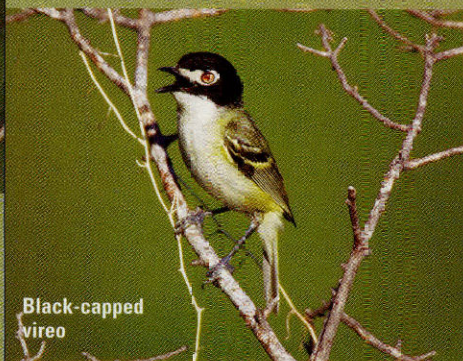
Golden-cheeked warbler

include warblers, thrushes, flycatchers and vireos. \$3/adult. 7-10 a.m. (281-474-2551, www.abnc.org)

April 21
Earth Day-Bay Day 2007 — **Cole Park, Corpus Christi.** A free family fun event that educates citizens about environmental and conservation issues. Free. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. (361-882-3439, www.baysfoundation.org)

April 24-29
Nature Quest 2007 — **Concan.** Enjoy birding at its best with field trips to various hill country sites and other programs and field trips for butterflies and dragonflies. Workshops and seminars will be held covering a wide variety of nature topics. Fees charged for field trips. (800-210-0380, www.therr.com)

April 27-30
Balcones Songbird Festival — **Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, Lago Vista.** A celebration of birds, butterflies and wildflowers. Join birding



Black-capped vireo

nature walks and enjoy family events at Balcones Canyonlands NWR. You may get to see the endangered golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo. Located about 30 miles north-west of Austin. Nature tours: \$20/person. (512-955-2473, www.balconesscngbirdfestival.org)

April 28
Kids Birding 101 — **Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, San Antonio.** Learn about bird identification, habitat, behavior and how to use binoculars. Free, but RSVP required. 9-11 a.m. (210-628-1639, www.tx.audubon.org/mitchell.html)

April 28 and May 5
Early Opening for Birders — **Armand Bayou Nature Center, Pasadena.** The nature center will open its gates early for birders on these two Saturdays. These are self-guided birding opportunities. \$3/person. Open at 7 a.m. (281-474-2551, www.abnc.org)

April 30
Birdathon 2007 — **Statewide.** Last day to participate in the Houston Audubon Society's Annual Birdathon, the



Prothonotary warbler

Olympics of Texas birding. Bring your team to win terrific prizes and help raise money to support education and conservation work along the Upper Texas Gulf Coast. Free. (713-932-1639, www.houstonaudubon.org)

Whooping crane



GOLDEN-CHEEKED WARBLER © LARRY DITTO; VIREO & PROTHONOTARY WARBLER © GREGG ASI EVKAC PRODUCTIONS; CRANE © MIKE CLOAT

AUGUST

August 8–11

11th Annual Davis Mountains Hummingbird and Nature Festival — Fort Davis. Plans for this year's festival include seminars, workshops, field trips of local birding sights and great hospitality as you look for as many as ten species of hummingbirds seen in this area at this time. General birding and bird banding will also be featured. See Web site for registration fees. (432-364-2499, www.cdri.org)

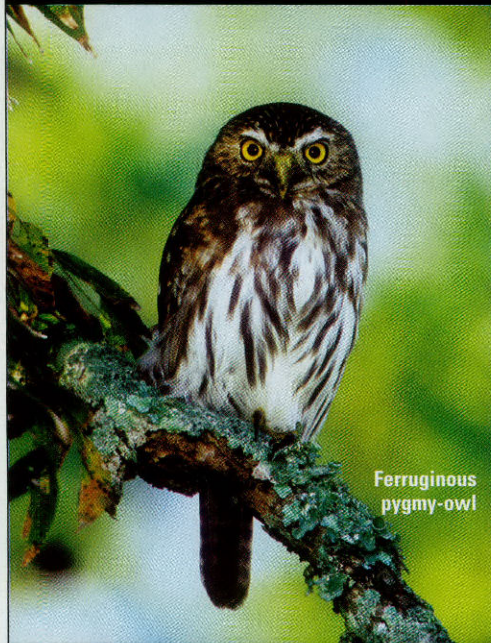


Summer tanager

August 15–November 15 (daily)

Smith Point Hawk Watch — Hawk Watch Tower, Candy Abshier Wildlife Management Area. Come observe and/or volunteer with the Hawk Watch staff as they identify and count the raptors making their way along the coast heading to Latin America for the winter. Free. (979-480-0999, www.gcbo.org)

SEPTEMBER



Ferruginous pygmy-owl

September 10–December 3 (Mondays)

Beginning ID Series — South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, Corpus Christi. Designed for beginning birders, with acclaimed birder and naturalist Gene Blacklock. Includes 12 Monday evening class sessions (6:30–8:30 p.m.) and 6 field trips. Prepaid registration by September 5 required. \$175/person for entire series; \$150/members. (361-852-2100, www.stxbot.org)

September 13–16

Fennessey Ranch Fall Hummingbird Watch — Fennessey Ranch, Refugio County. Fennessey Ranch and Rockport Hummingbird Festival partner up to offer a tour of the private ranch in

search of hummingbirds. Two trips daily. \$40/person. (361-529-6600, www.fennesseyranch.com)

September 13–16

Hummer/Bird Celebration — Rockport-Fulton High School. A celebration of the migration of thousands of hummingbirds through Rockport and Fulton. Fees vary for speakers, bus tours and boat trips. 8 a.m.–8 p.m. (361-729-6445, www.rockport-fulton.org)

September 14–16

Second Annual Fall Nature Quest — Concan. Enjoy birding at its best with field trips to various hill country sites and other programs and field trips for butterflies and dragonflies.

OCTOBER

October 5

Texas Bluebird Society Dinner and Auction — McKinney Roughs near Bastrop. Silent auction and casual dinner (with speaker) on the night before the annual Texas Parks and Wildlife Expo. Some campsites available at nearby McKinney Falls State Park. Cost TBD. (512-268-5678, www.texasbluebirdsociety.org)

October 6–7

Texas Parks & Wildlife Expo — Texas Parks and Wildlife Headquarters, Austin. Presented by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Expo gives visitors an opportunity to try out and learn about a wide range of outdoor sports and pastimes. The birding area offers nature walks, workshops and information about birding in Texas. (800-792-1112, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/expo)



Crested caracara



Golden-fronted woodpecker

Workshops and seminars will cover a wide variety of nature topics. Fees charged per field trip. (800-210-0380, www.therr.com)

September 14-16

Texas Gatorfest — Fort Anahuac Park, Anahuac. A celebration of the alligator

August 18

Bluebird Symposium — Camp Chaparral, west of Wichita Falls. Keith Kridler (author of *The Bluebird Monitor's Guide*), Denise Townsend, Laura Packer and John Cys will give presentations. Registration and nature walk begin at 8 a.m. \$10-\$25/person. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. (940-691-5702, www.texasbluebirdsociety.org)

and its wetlands habitat, this family-oriented festival offers unique attractions like airboat rides, Trinity River boat tours and, of course, lots of alligators. \$10/adult, \$5/student (18 & under). (409-267-4190, www.texasgatorfest.com)

September 22

Fennessey Ranch Fall Hawk Watch — Fennessey Ranch, Refugio County. Guided field trip in 4,000 acres with 9 miles of Mission River. Learn to identify hawks and witness kettles of thousands of hawks. \$59/person. (361-529-6600, www.fennesseyranch.com)



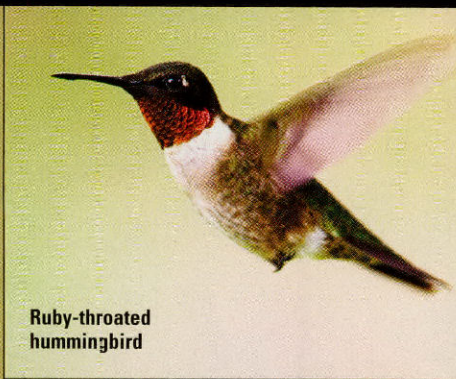
Black-bellied whistling-duck

October 12-14

Fall Native Plant Sale — Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary, McKinney. Choose from hundreds of native plants ideally suited for Texas weather, including woody lilies, trees and vibrant colorful perennials and wildflowers at the third annual fall native plant sale. Get expert advice to help you find the right plant for you and your landscape. Friday: 4-7 p.m. (members only) Saturday: 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday: 1-5 p.m. (972-552-5566, www.heardmuseum.org)

October 13

Annual Fall Wildlife Festival — Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, San Antonio. Annual event featuring educational activities and displays on birds, plants and wildlife. Birding tours, rap or show and children's activities. Free. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. (210-628-1635, www.tx.audubon.org/mitchell.html)



Ruby-throated hummingbird

October 18-21

Texas Butterfly Festival — Rio Grande Valley, Mission. The festival celebrates the Valley's 280-plus species of butterflies. Learn from internationally renowned speakers and explore the area's natural habitats on expert-guided field trips. (800-580-2700, www.texasbutterfly.com)

October 26-27

Wild in Willacy/Heritage Nature Festival — Raymondville. Ranch tours, cook-offs, trade show, music, food, games and fun for all ages. Free. (956-689-3171, www.wildinwillacy.com)

October 31-November 4

El Cielo Butterfly Festival — Ciudad Mante, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Get a true taste of the tropics beyond Texas' southern border. Local bird and butterfly experts lead tours of this Biosphere Reserve in northeast Mexico. The all-inclusive festival package trip departs from the Texas Valley (boarding choices: McAllen, Harlingen, Weslaco or Brownsville). \$520/person (two people per room). (www.elcielofestival.com)

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER

November 3

Kids Birding 101 — Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, San Antonio. Kids learn about bird identification, habitat and how to use binoculars. Free, RSVP required. 9-11 a.m. (210-628-1639, www.tx.audubon.org/mitchell.html)

November 7-11

14th Annual Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival — Harlingen Municipal Auditorium, Harlingen. The Rio Grande Valley's premier birding festival is set

in Harlingen for a simple reason: great birds. Five action-packed days of expert-led field trips, seminars and the exciting Birding Bazaar. (956-423-5440, www.rgvbirdfest.com)

November 15-18

8th Annual South Texas Wildlife and Birding Festival — Life Center, Kingsville. The festival presents a unique array of birding and nature tours led by renowned guides as well as a variety of seminars hosted by academics, natu-

ralists and guides. On Saturday, the festival hosts a wide variety of educational activities for adults and children from the Valley Nature Center, Last Chance Forever Bird of Prey Conservancy, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Zoo, in addition to fun games with prizes. Free admission; tours \$25-\$60/person. (361-592-8516, www.kingsvilletexas.com)

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2008

January 14-May 3

Advanced Birding ID Series — South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, Corpus Christi. Designed for advanced birders (who have taken a beginners' course) with renowned birder and naturalist Gene Blacklock. Includes 12 Monday evening class sessions (6:30-8:30 p.m.) and 6 field trips. Prepaid registration by January 9 required. \$175/person for entire series; \$150/members. (361-852-2100, www.stxbot.org)



Lucifer hummingbird

Audubon Society and the Laredo Convention and Visitors Bureau. Cost TBD. (800-361-3360, www.visitlaredo.com)

February 9-10

Eagle Fest — Emory. Rains County bills itself as the "Eagle Capital of Texas."

February 7-10

Laredo Birding and Butterfly Festival — Laredo nature trails. One of the few places where you have a good chance to see over 400 species of birds and close to 100 types of butterflies. Hosted by the Monte Mucho



Neon skimmer

MARCH - APRIL 2008

Vermilion flycatcher



March 1

Birds of the Texas Coastal Bend Short Course — South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, Corpus Christi. Study some of the more than 450 known bird species in South Texas with well-known, entertaining birder and naturalist Gene Blacklock. Pre-paid registration by February 24 required. 8:45-11:30 a.m. class; 1:30-4:30 p.m. field trip. (361-852-2100, www.stxbot.org)

March 27-30

Texas Tropics Nature Festival — McAllen. The McAllen Chamber of Commerce's 12th Annual Texas Tropics Nature Festival offers field trips to birding hot spots and seminars by popular speakers, in addition to a nature marketplace. Costs vary. (956-682-2871, www.mcallenchamber.com)



December 7

GCBO Holiday Sale and Open House — Gulf Coast Bird Observatory Nature Store.

Enjoy a holiday treat while shopping for your birder or nature lover. Great selection of birding books and nature guides at a 10 percent discount for GCBO members. Free entry. 10 a.m.—6 p.m. (979-480-0999, www.gcbo.org)

Nature and birding field trips, live bird exhibits, speakers and Native American programs. \$1/person; \$5/person bus tours; \$15/person boat tour. (903-473-3913, www.eaglefest.org)

February 17–21

El Cielo Nature Festival — Ciudad Marte, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Get a true taste of the tropics beyond Texas' southern border. Local bird and butterfly experts lead tours of this Biosphere Reserve in northeast Mexico. The all-inclusive festival package trip departs from the Texas Valley (booking choices: McAllen, Harlingen, Weslaco

or Brownsville). \$580/person (two people per room). (www.elcielofestival.com)

February 22–24

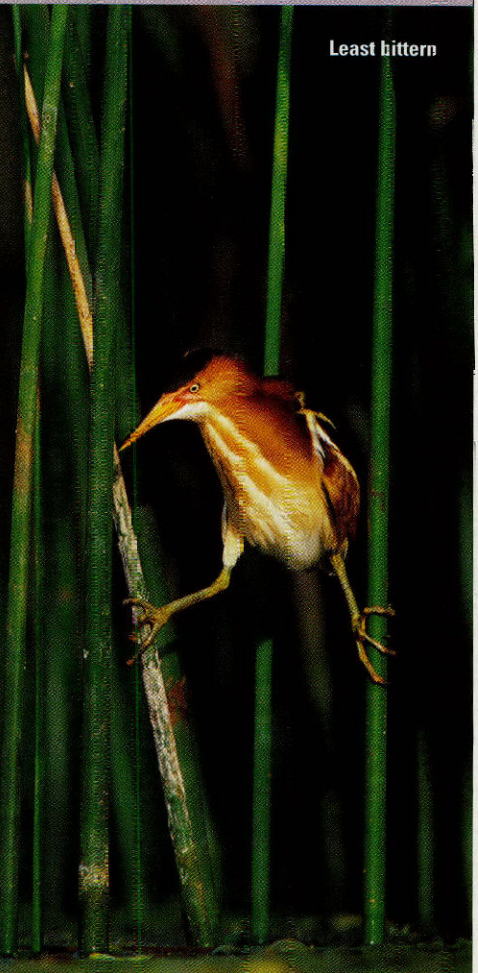
12th Annual Celebration of Whooping Cranes and Other Birds — Port Aransas.

Pack your binoculars and flock to the coast to observe the endangered whooping crane and listen to lectures by birding experts, attend birding tours both by land and sea, go to photography workshops, and browse a nature-related trade show and the International Children's Art Exhibit. (361-452-6278, www.portaransas.org)

April 5–6

FeatherFest 2008 — Galveston. A birding and general nature festival focusing on the birds of the Upper Texas Coast during early spring (late wintering

birds, early spring trans-Gulf migrants and many all-season birds). Expert-led seminars on many topics, field trips by bus, boat and kayak, activities for non-birding spouses and



Least bittern

Roseate spoonbill



social events. Registration: \$30/person; cost varies for specific activities. 5 a.m.—5 p.m. (409-392-0841, www.galvestonfeatherfest.com)

April 11–13

19th Annual Spring Native Plant Sale — Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary, McKinney.

Check out over 300 varieties of native Texas plants such as trees, shrubs, perennials, vines and grasses. All sales are tax-free. Free entry. Friday: 4–7 p.m. (members only); Saturday: 9 a.m.—5 p.m.; Sunday: 1–5 p.m. (972-562-5566; www.heardmuseum.org) ★

MAGNIF

Altamira oriole

THIS PAGE © ROLF NUSSBAUMER, ORIOLE WITH NEST © LARRY DITTO/KAC PRODUCTIONS



ICENT SEVEN

In spring and summer, seven kinds of orioles emblazon the Texas landscape with fiery hues.

Most migrate from Latin America in the spring to nest in Texas and other parts of North America. But two species — Altamira and Audubon's — reside in the state throughout the year.

They all share straight bills that taper to a dagger-like point, which pegs them as members of the Icterid family. Other family members include blackbirds, meadowlarks and grackles. Specialized muscles in the skull enable Icterids to pry open their beaks like opening a pair of scissors poked into soft earth. This helps them find buried insects. Orioles in particular possess powerful leg muscles that allow them to forage acrobatically among tree limbs in order to snatch bugs like caterpillars, or to dance on the edge of an orange half while plucking out the fruit.

The most striking difference between orioles and their Icterid kin is color, a striking orange, yellow and black cloak of plumes. Beyond brandishing bold colors, orioles have the curious habit of building a strange pendulous nest that looks like a dirty athletic sock strung up in a tree. On closer inspection, the nest reveals itself as an elegant, complex, gourd-shaped woven stocking. The female oriole weaves the nest from such materials as plant fibers, grass,



Striking orange and black feathers — plus nests that look like hanging socks — make **orioles** easy to spot this time of year.

By GARY CLARK

string and Spanish moss and typically suspends it from a high branch on the outer edge of a tree. An entry hole at the top allows her to slip in unobtrusively to lay her eggs. Inside the surprisingly sturdy nest is a lining of soft fibers to protect the hatchlings. Male orioles contribute little to building the nest, but do assist with feeding duties.

In nesting territories, orioles feed themselves and their chicks a primary diet of insects, especially caterpillars and spiders. But orioles also go for the ripe fruit of mulberries, loquat and citrus.

When Texans think about orioles, they often visualize the Baltimore oriole if they live in the eastern half of the state, or the Bullock's oriole if living in the western half. Yet Texas is also a nesting home for orchard, hooded and Scott's orioles, as well as Audubon's and Altamira orioles. The only regularly occurring North American oriole that doesn't show up in Texas is the spot-breasted oriole of Florida, a species that is normally resident in Mexico but was introduced into Florida in 1949 from captive populations.

The Baltimore oriole

(*Icterus galbula*) is the most conspicuous of the magnificent seven orioles of Texas. Male birds sport a bright orange body, which is offset by a black hood, black back and black wings with a prominent white wing bar. Females resemble males, but with muted orange tones and

an incomplete black or brownish hood.

Baltimore orioles come streaming across the Gulf of Mexico onto Texas shores in spring as they migrate from wintering grounds in southern Mexico and Central America. Following a sudden springtime cold front, the birds make a quick onshore landing and dapple coastal



Baltimore oriole

woodlots and shrubs with glorious orange. At other times, they festoon backyards with their display of splashy colors. But few stick around to breed, and those that do stay prefer the north central or eastern panhandle region of Texas. Most journey to the eastern and midwestern regions of the United States and southern Canada to breed. Wherever they nest, they pick woodlands with an open understory, city parks and tree-lined suburban neighborhoods.

In 1973, scientists merged the Baltimore oriole, an eastern bird, and the Bullock's oriole, a western bird, into a single species called the northern oriole. They lumped the birds together under one pedestrian name because the two birds hybridize where their ranges overlap in the Great Plains. Further physiological evidence, however, showed the Baltimore and Bullock's orioles to be indeed separate species, and their original names were restored.

The Bullock's oriole

(*Icterus bullockii*) certainly looks like a cousin of the Baltimore oriole but is distinguished by a black cap rather than a black hood on its head and a distinct black line running horizontally through the eye. What immediately grabs attention is a big white wing patch, which looks like a smear of white paint on the wings, as opposed to the Baltimore's more delicate ribbon-like wing bar. Females are rather plain looking with a yellow-orange wash on the face and throat. The English ornithologist and bird illustrator William Swainson (1789-1855) named the bird after his friend William Bullock (1773-1849), an English naturalist.

The Bullock's oriole moves overland from its winter home in Mexico to Texas and then into other western



states. The bird nests in West Texas with a few nesting on the Edwards Plateau and Southwest Texas. It favors riparian woodlands, orchards and ranch homes surrounded by cottonwood trees.

The male **orchard oriole** (*Icterus spurius*) looks as if it was made from a piece of red brick, burnt at the edges. Almost sparrow-sized, the bird appears to be a pixie sitting atop a bush or a tree with its deep orange body, black hood and black wings. But the yellow-green body of the female is markedly different. The orchard oriole gets its name for its propensity to nest in orchards.

An observer would be hard-pressed not to find orchard orioles along the Texas Coast during spring migration. Like the Baltimore orioles, the birds speed across the gulf in large numbers to Texas shores from their winter homes in Mexico, Central and South America. They nest in a vast portion of Texas, particularly in the eastern half of the state in places with open woodlands and orchards. They also find mesquite trees throughout Texas quite attractive for nesting, which led the 20th century Texas ornithologist Harry

Bullock's oriole**Hooded oriole****Audubon's oriole****Scott's oriole**

Oberholser (1870-1963) to call the bird “the little mesquite oriole.”

Audubon's oriole (*Icterus graduacauda*) is the only other oriole besides the Altamira oriole that calls Texas home all year, and it lives mostly in the brushlands of South Texas. The male and female are identical, with lemon-yellow bodies shrouded on the head and neck by sleek black hoods. The Audubon's oriole looks like a flying work of art, so it's appropriately named after the great 19th century bird artist and ornithologist John James Audubon (1785-1851).

The bird's range covers the eastern and western parts of Mexico, as well as South Texas. Due to clearing of thorn forests and riparian lands for agriculture in the 20th century, the bird is much less common than it was a hundred years ago. The Audubon's oriole is frustrating to glimpse due to its notorious penchant for skulking among tree branches and singing teasingly in a soft whistle.

The **hooded oriole** (*Icterus cucullatus*) is a handsome yellow-orange bird with a prominent black bib. It got the moniker “hooded” sup-

posedly for the resemblance of its black bib to a monk's cowl. The female hooded oriole is drab gray on top and pale yellow below.

The bird migrates overland from northern Mexico into Texas and the desert southwest of the U.S. It nests in Texas among the wooded edges of the Rio Grande from Brownsville to Big Bend National Park and, to a lesser extent, in the Hill Country around Uvalde and Concan. In recent years, some have remained in South Texas for the winter rather than migrating back to Mexico, perhaps due to the prevalence of backyard hummingbird feeders and tall ornamental palm trees.

The **Altamira oriole** (*Icterus gularis*) lives in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas and no place else in North America. Almost the size of a blue jay or the Valley's green jay, it is the largest oriole in North America, with a yellowish-orange body and coal-black throat. Male and female birds look alike. The name derives from Altamira, Mexico, but its former name was Lichtenstein's oriole, in honor of the German zoologist Martin Henrich Lichtenstein (1780-1857).

The Altamira oriole, which ranges south of the border from Mexico to Nicaragua, was first documented in Texas at Brownsville in 1938, and the first Texas nest was discovered in the Rio Grande Valley in 1951. The bird has since become a relatively common

It often perches smartly atop a yucca or century plant, singing a cheerful set of whistled notes. The bird occasionally wanders out of its normal range in the desert southwest to places like the Texas Gulf Coast and Panhandle. Recent evidence indicates the bird may

Orioles possess powerful leg muscles that allow them to forage acrobatically among tree limbs.

year-round resident throughout the Lower Valley.

Scott's oriole (*Icterus parisorum*) is a look-alike to the Audubon's oriole except that it possesses a black rather than a yellow back and shows up in a dramatically different area of Texas — the Big Bend and Edwards Plateau regions. The female differs from the male by having a washed-out appearance to its black hood. The name is in honor of Winfield Scott (1786-1866), the commanding American general in the Mexican-American War.

The Scott's oriole is a bird of arid deserts and mountains, such as the ones found in the Chihuahuan Desert of Texas and Mexico.

be expanding its nesting range farther into western states such as Colorado, Utah and Idaho.

In December 2004, a streak-backed oriole (*Icterus pustulatus*) was spotted in oak trees at Brazos Bend State Park near Houston. The bird normally lives in arid and semi-arid regions of western Mexico and Central America, showing up on rare occasions in Arizona and southern California. Could this mean that Texas now has a Magnificent Eight? The sighting may have been a one-time vagrant, but keep your eyes peeled for flashes of orange and black. You never know what might show up in the springtime skies over Texas. ★

ORCHARD, BULLOCK'S & AUDUBON © ROLF NUSSBAUMER; HOODED © KATHY ADAMS
CLARK/KAC PRODUCTIONS; SCOTT'S © RICK & NORA BOWERS/KAC PRODUCTIONS



Harris's hawks
(immature)

PHOTOS BOTH PAGES © LARRY DITTO



HAWK

S P O T T I N G

FIELD GUIDE AUTHOR **BILL CLARK** SHARES TIPS FOR IDENTIFYING RAPTORS ON THE WING.



BILL CLARK MEASURES THE BEAK OF AN IMMATURE WHITE-TAILED HAWK.

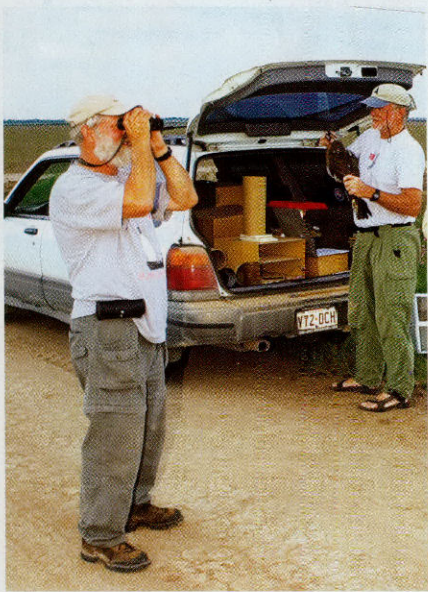
AT SANTA ANA NATIONAL Wildlife Refuge, Bill Clark identifies a distant speck soaring in the sky as a Swainson's hawk. "You can see what that is at this distance?" asks Susan Thompson, standing next to the raptor expert on a levee near the Rio Grande. "How can you tell?"

"By its shape," Bill explains. "The whole wing curves up." Tracking the hawk through binoculars, Leo Garrett says, "I've got floaters in my eye bigger than that!"

Susan, Leo and I are in a group of nine taking a weekend Raptor Field Identification workshop with William S. Clark through the Valley Nature Center in Weslaco. Each of us signed up for the workshop because we have been frustrated when, field guide in one hand and binoculars in the other, we couldn't identify a hawk or falcon in front of us.

"Raptors are some of the most misidentified birds. They are

By Eileen Mattei



often too distant to be able to see field marks. The best way is to use jizz,” Bill tells us. An old Air Force acronym for general impression, shape and size, “jizz” takes into account characteristics such as wing and tail shape, wing attitude and behavior. Each species has two sets of field marks (perched and flying) and often more plumage patterns than get listed in field guides. In fact, Bill tells us, the three most popular birding field guides have inaccurate illustrations of raptors and faulty range maps for them as well.

“One of my pet peeves is range maps in field guides, because there’s no habitat information or population density listed.” On the other hand, David Sibley’s books portray raptors very well, according to Clark, who himself has written or co-authored the *Field Guide to Hawks of North America*, *Field Guide to Raptors of Europe, the Mideast and Africa*, and *A Photographic Guide to North American Raptors*.

Starting with two hours of slides on Friday night, we study raptors aloft and grounded, trying to get a sense of their shapes, as Bill flips images at us, briefing us like we’re air raid wardens learn-

ing to ID aircraft by shape. We try to remember how the plumages change as they mature, how their shapes and feather patterns differ.

“You need to go out in the field, stumble and fumble, and learn by doing,” declares our instructor, his long, lean hands always in motion. The workshop’s plan consists of two dawn-to-dusk immersions in learning to recognize the differences between the border’s diurnal raptors: the osprey and harrier, falcons, kites and the hawks known as accipiters (short, rounded wings and long tails) and buteos (long, broad wings and short tails). Plus, we must remember what species are seen here in the spring.

Meanwhile, back on the levee, more raptors are hooking onto the spiraling thermals that lift them higher, like kids circling an old-fashioned maypole. Because of their longer wings, turkey vultures are the first up, around 9:30 a.m., with Swainson’s and broad-winged hawks soon moving up the on-ramp to migrate north.

“Turkey vultures can ride the thermal as high as 5,000 feet,” Bill says. We dis-



A WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT SCANS THE SKIES FOR HAWKS (ABOVE). BILL CLARK DISPLAYS AN IMMATURE WHITE-TAILED HAWK'S WINGSPAN.



Turkey vulture

cover that raptors require different binocular work than other birds, which you spot and then focus on. Instead, like plane spotters, we take to running our binoculars across the sky, searching for spots invisible to the naked eye.

Being in the field with the man who wrote the birding guides you're using is slightly intimidating initially, but everyone in our group is as questioning as a 2-year-old. Why do you say that? What is the difference? Bill responds in detail, pleased to share his passion and his knowledge.

Clark learned about birds by immersion. Graduating from Georgia Tech with a degree in nuclear engineering, he was in the Navy 35 years ago when he realized he'd rather be studying birds. He taught himself about birds, became the founding director of the respected Cape May Bird Observatory, ran the raptor banding project there and was the director of the National Wildlife Federation's Raptor Information Center. Five years ago he left Washington D.C., for Harlingen because of the abundance of breeding, migrating and wintering raptors in the Rio Grande Valley.

"I haven't regretted moving here," Bill says. In the winter he traps and studies white-tailed hawks, researching their molts and plumages as well as studying the raptors' age-class differences, using DNA to determine sex. Bill drills us on the white-tailed hawk's plumages for its

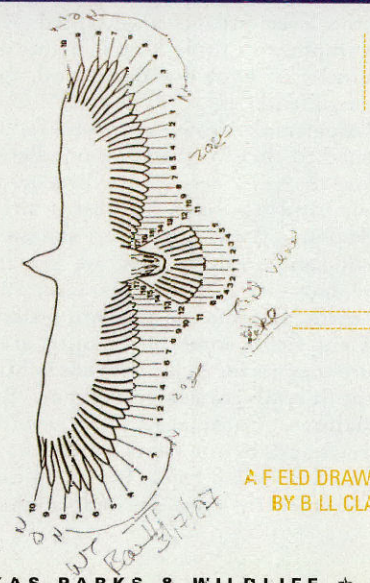
Peregrine falcon



first four years, with the white on the chest increasing as the bird matures.

Between writing articles for scientific journals and popular magazines, photographing and researching for his books in progress (raptor field guides for Africa and Mexico/Central America), he lectures and leads field trips for his company Rapturs. Of about 325 raptor species worldwide, Bill Clark has seen 210. While he aims to see them all, reaching the magic number is not what drives him. "It's not the end goal, it's the getting there," says Bill, anticipating a trip to Argentina for a raptor meeting and then field play, er, field work.

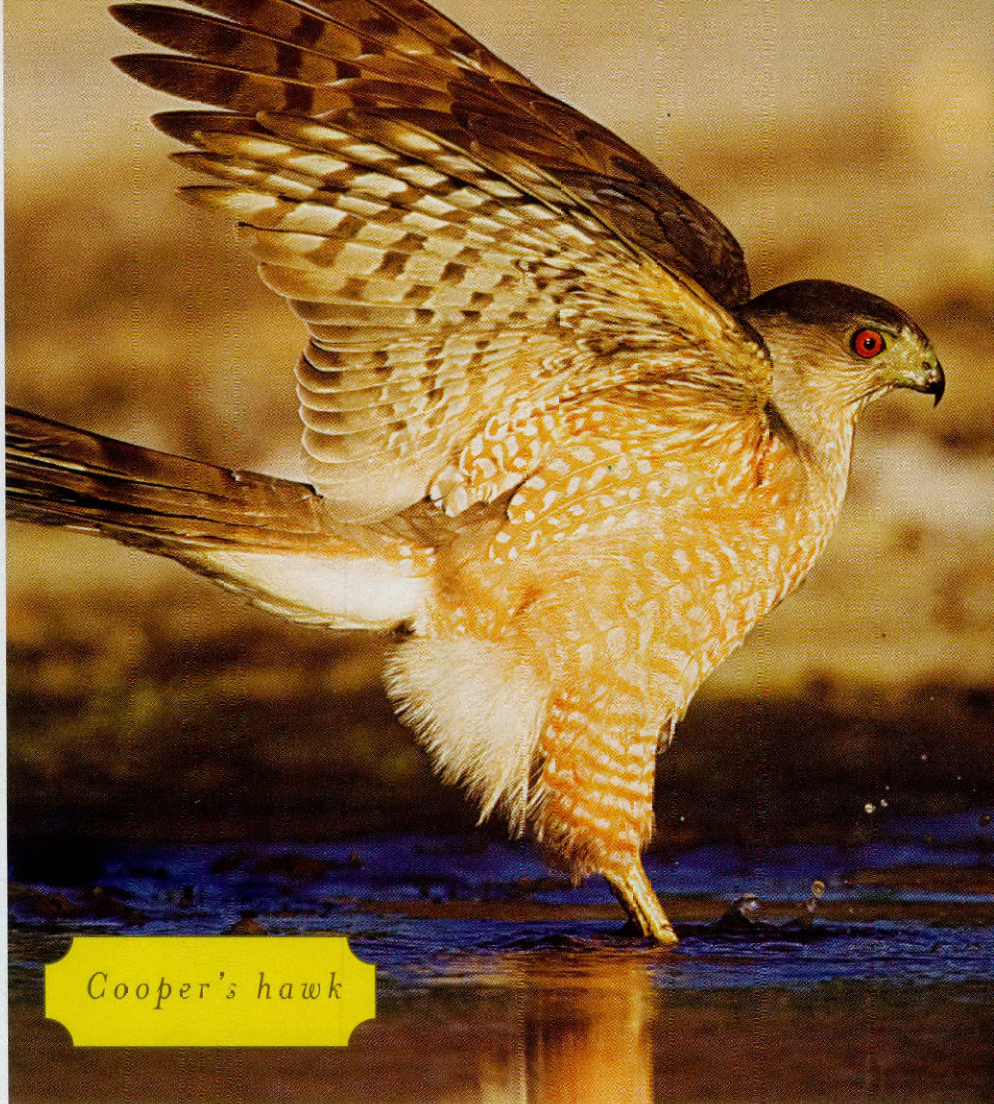
We page through field guides as Bill explains that hawks lift off in flocks to



A FIELD DRAWING BY BILL CLARK.



Red-tailed hawk



Cooper's hawk

increase their chances of finding a thermal. A tardy broad-winged arrow over to others who have found the up-escalator to the migration route. Watching hundreds of hawks overhead, we begin to gain confidence in our identification, even as Bill reminds us that the wing shapes of raptors vary with the flight methods — hovering, gliding, flapping, kiting.

By noon, the Hawk Watch volunteers on the levee with us have tallied over 400 raptors in three hours, including Swainson's, broad-winged and two hook-billed kites.

Rising smoke from sugar cane fields, burned to remove grasses immediately before harvest, acts like a beacon to hawks and to hawk-watching sites. Parked on a flood levee where the sweet burnt-cane scent lingers, we see the cane-harvesting machines churning the earth. Raptors see a rodent buffet.

"Cane fields combine an open area, where they prefer to fly, with something to eat. It really concentrates them," Bill explains. Caracaras, Swainson's, Harris's and, to our secret relief, lots of adult white-tailed hawks (so much easier to identify than the sub-adults),

make up the lunch crowd.

We're leaning against the cars, eating our late lunches and scanning the fields and skies with binoculars when a deputy sheriff pulls up to our little group. "Are you Minutemen?" he asks. Less than two miles from the Rio Grande, it's easy to forget the river is a border for humans if not birds.

On the road again, I share the back-seat of Bill's car with field guides, maps, a spotting scope and dozens of squeaky mice and gerbils in cages and specialized raptor traps. Bill coddles his mice, limiting their working hours on hot days. The rodents bring down the birds, but the birds can't touch the mice. Bill swerves off to the side of the road when he spots a hawk over a cabbage field gone to seed. It's a banded rare bird, a gray hawk, that Bill has spotted here before, and he speculates that it is breeding in a nearby wooded tract.

On a cool gray Sunday morning, we caravan to Anzalduas County Park on the Rio Grande and set up three spotting scopes overlooking the spillway. Bill ranks the previous day as an "8." "It was a good migration, but not too heavy, so we were able to look at individual

birds." Bill has us observe hawks turning into the wind to gain altitude, then turning with the wind to gain speed, then into the wind again to rise. "Days without thermals, they still go up, tack-irg like sailboats from side to side."

We're on the lookout for the zone-tailed hawk, a mime with all dark plumages that blends in with vultures but is only half their size. Bill is convinced that another Valley prize, the re-introduced aplomado falcons, were wiped out years ago by a Brownsville collector who sent falcon specimens to natural history museums worldwide. In collections from Uganda to the Czech Republic, Bill has encountered drawers filled with aplomados, each with a Cameron County toe tag.

Heading east on a caliche road, past fields of onions, melons and sorghum, Bill spots a Swainson's hawk on top of irrigation pipe and stops to look. Down the road he spots a female Cooper's hawk perched on a power line on a back road. He slows down to drop a mouse-baited trap cut the window and drives to the next phone pole to watch. She's not interested, so we retrieve the trap after 10 minutes. We repeat the proced-



*Red-shouldered
hawk*

dures several times as Bill stops to look at every raptor except kestrels as we head to the Gulf to find aplomado falcons. "The plans will change if we run across something interesting," he warns us.

On Highway 100 to Port Isabel, Bill points out a Chihuahuan raven nest on the crossbar of the high-tension lines, mentioning it may be used by aplomados. On a back road, a dead cow surrounded by 25 or so black vultures rates a stop. Further north, Bill traps a kestrel and demonstrates how he bands and takes measurements on the bird while pointing out the notches in the kestrel's upper and lower beaks. With the bird in hand, he shows us how its head stays fixed when he tilts its body.

Even at the end of a hectic weekend, Bill Clark is not ready to stop looking at raptors. "It's still a challenge, still fun for me, especially when a class is along," he explains. Our class, while not yet up to tackling the tough sharpshinned versus Cooper's hawks puzzle, is now primed with enough knowledge to join Bill in the challenge and fun of watching raptors. ★

Details

Valley Nature Center: 956-969-2475

<www.valleynaturecenter.org/>

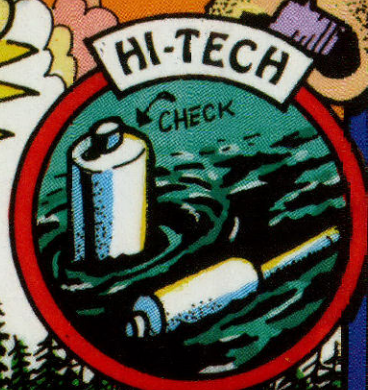
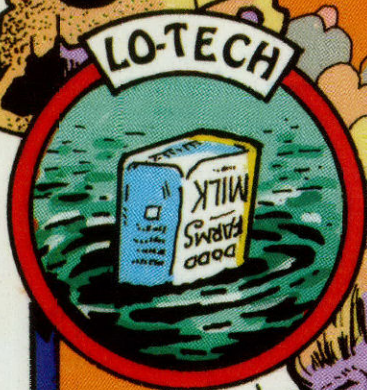
<info@valleynaturecenter.org>

Aplomado falcon



TOP PHOTO © MICHAEL JONES/AKM IMAGES; FALCONS © GREG LASLEY/KAC PRODUCTIONS

JUGGIN' *for* CATS



SECRET OF THE SELF-FLAGGING JUG.
PLASTIC JUG REBAR PVC PIPE
EYE SCREW
WHEN BAIT IS TAKEN OR FISH ACTION, PVC PIPE ENDS GOES DOWN. WEIGHT SLIDES TO THE BOTTOM END, TO FLAG CATCH!

Jug-fishing and limblining let you fish many places at the same time — and they work.

By Larry D. Hodge
Illustration by George Toomer

The Old School recreation area on Lake Aquilla near Hillsboro is hard to find, but for those wanting to pursue catfish with jug lines, it's worth searching out. Its boat ramp gives access to areas where jug lines and limblines can put plenty of blue and channel catfish in your cooler.

John Tibbs, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Inland Fisheries district supervisor for the Waco area, shares my enthusiasm for jug-fishing. Even better, John's father, Nick, is an accomplished jug-fisher on the Mississippi River, and he joins us for a day of jug-fishing and limblining on Lake Aquilla.

I came to jug-fishing late in life. As a kid growing up in Central Texas, I was a frequent farm-pond fisher using a cane pole. Fishing trips started with digging earthworms in the yard or chasing down grasshoppers, swatting them with a willow switch and popping them into a Prince Albert tobacco tin to await their turn on the hook. The catfish we caught tasted pretty much like the muddy water where they lived, but catching them was fun.

Not until I was grown did I discover jug-fishing. While on a float trip down the Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande, we found a number of abandoned jug lines fashioned from plastic quart motor-oil jugs. The cap screwed on over a knot on one end of a two-foot length of heavy twine that held the line in place. We hadn't anticipated fishing, so the only bait we had was pimento loaf sandwich meat. It didn't stay on the hook well, but the catfish didn't care. We'd toss a baited jug into the water and watch it pull ahead of the rubber raft as the current took it. Suddenly the jug would disappear, surface a short distance away, and head for the bank.

About the third time that happened, I was as hooked as the fish.

Part of the appeal of jug-fishing is purely visual. It's like fishing with a bobber, but instead of having just one line to watch, you can have a dozen or more. Set out a spread of jugs, anchor nearby, put some rod and reel lines in the water, and wait for a cruising catfish to find one of your baits. Small fish may just move the jug around a little when they take the bait, but a big fish will take it completely under. It's as exciting as watching a bass smash a topwater lure.

Jugs can be either free-floating, like those we found on the Rio Grande, or anchored to the bottom with a weight. Anchored jugs are like a vertical trotline, and you can adjust the length of the main line for whatever depth you're fishing. Put them in a good location, and they stay put — though if you pick the wrong place, you won't catch much.

Jugs must be white and bear the angler's name and address and the date set out. (Commercial jug-fishers must use orange jugs.) You can use plastic milk jugs, but they are not very durable. Ready-made versions are available, some of which tip up or "flag" to signal a bite. These have a short piece of rebar inside a length of PVC pipe and a collar of closed-cell foam on one end. The jugs are deployed with the rebar in the foam-covered end of the pipe; when a fish pulls on the line attached to the opposite end, it pulls the pipe down, the rebar slides to that end, and the rig stands upright in the water.

John Tibbs makes his own anchored, non-flagging jugs out of two-foot lengths of white plastic pipe capped at both ends. He uses a main line about 25 feet long weighted with a brick or a cement-filled tin can with an eyebolt embedded in it. Two drop lines about two feet long are attached to the main line; these hold

the hooks. "For the main line I prefer at least 300-pound test so if a fish pulls it into brush, you can retrieve the weight," Tibbs says. "I prefer 150-pound test for the drop lines." Hooks are 2/0 or bigger circle hooks.

"Circle hooks let the fish hook itself," Nick Tibbs points out. "Also, fish won't swallow the hook. They will take the bait and start to swim off with it, and the hook will turn and catch them, usually in

the corner of the mouth."

Legally up to five hooks can be used on a jug-line, but it's best to use no more than two. When handling the jugs, especially if there is a big fish on, it's easy to get tangled up and even hook yourself if there are a bunch of hooks flying around. Tibbs uses hooks attached to the main line three and six feet above the weight.

Line management is a major part of jug-fishing. Twenty jugs with two hooks each provide lots of opportunities for accidental snagging. Tibbs wraps the line around his nonflagging jugs and secures each hook with a rubber band for storage; hooks can be imbedded in the foam of the flagging jugs for storage. In either case, a five-gallon bucket or a plastic milk crate makes a handy holder. When the jugs are deployed, Tibbs drops the weight to the bottom, then uses a rubber band to hold the main line to the jug with about two feet of slack. When a fish takes the bait, it pulls the line free of the rubber band, and more can play out. "I like to use plenty of line so the float will always remain on top even if a big fish carries it off into deep water," Tibbs says. When the fish moves far enough, resistance from the float and the weight on the end of the line sets the hook.

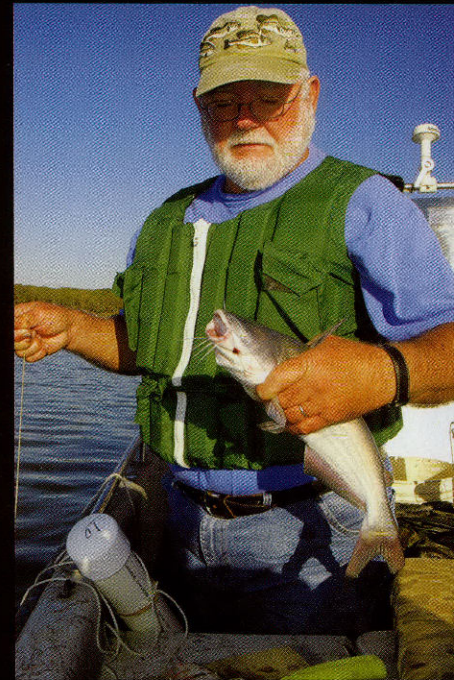
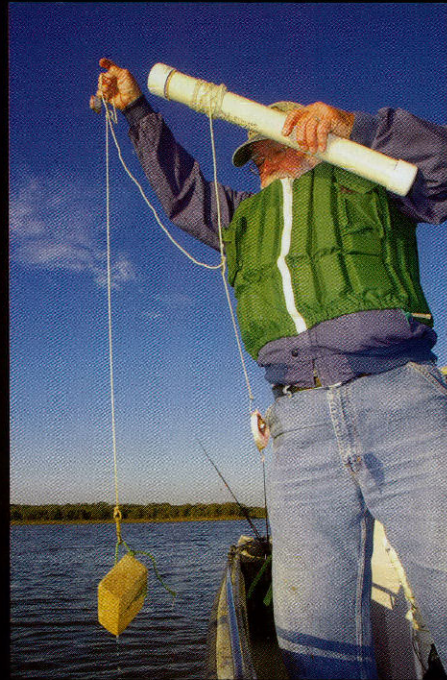
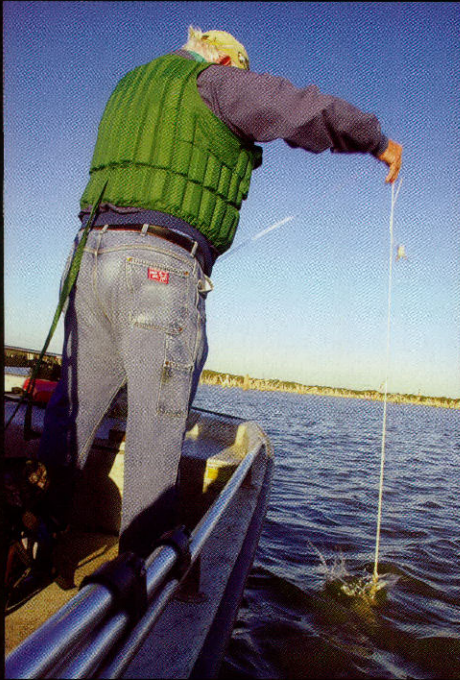
It's a fine October morning when we set out on Lake Aquilla,

Part of the appeal of jug-fishing is purely visual.

and John Tibbs has a couple of destinations in mind. The first is a flat adjacent to the Aquilla Creek channel. "One of the nice things about jugs is they can be set out on flats where there is no way to set a trotline or limblime, and you can catch cats cruising the flats looking for shad," he observes. "I've trotlined and limblimed and fished from the bank, but this is more fun. You see you have a fish and go pick up the jug. It's a more personal way of fishing than a trotline."

cormorant roost. After setting out a half-dozen jugs at the point where a line of flooded trees marking an old fenceline meets a thick stand of timber, we thread our way through the forest of dead trees to one that cormorants favor.

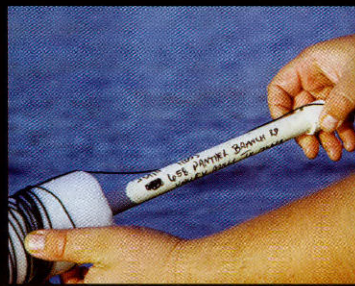
A limblime can be nothing more than a length of stout line tied to a limb with a hook on the end, but the Tibbses have a refinement: rubber hold-down straps with the hooks removed. The rubber strap acts as a shock absorber, so that if a big fish takes the



Nick Tibbs shows how to deploy a non-flagging jug. Tibbs makes his own out of capped two-foot lengths of plastic pipe, with a 25-foot main line weighted with a brick or a cement-filled tin can with an eyebolt embedded. The result of doing it right is a nice, eating-size Lake Aquilla channel cat.



Water bottle floats. Homemade jugs using bottles are legal, but they must be white and marked with the date and the owner's name and address.



Flagging floats use a weight inside the hollow tube to make them stand up when a fish pulls on the line.



Attaching staging to main line. Limit the number of hooks on each staging line to no more than two to make handling the lines safer.

Tibbs selects a flat between an island and the creek channel to set out a dozen jugs. The location offers several advantages. Catfish can use the creek channel as an underwater highway. Shad will move to the shallow water next to the island as the water warms, and the catfish can trap them between the bank and the deeper water. Plus we can beach the boat after setting out jug-lines and fish the flat using rods and reels while we wait for the jugs to get hit. It's a lazy, relaxing way to fish, but there's always the undercurrent of tension as we watch and wait for one of the jugs to tip up.

But for now we have more jugs to set out in another spot, and John has another trick he wants to try: using limblines under a

bait, it's less likely to break the line or snap the limb off. It also provides enough give to help keep a big fish from straightening the hook and getting away.

For bait we're using pieces of gizzard shad John catches with a cast net. "Chicken livers or worms work, too, and I've heard of people using stinkbaits on jugs or live perch for flatheads," John says. "Anise-scented soap is also a popular catfish bait, but I prefer to use what the fish would normally eat."

Once the limblines are set out, it's time to go back to our first spread of jugs and check for bites. We've set out a combination of flagging and non-flagging jugs, and one of the former is standing upright. One of the advantages of flagging jugs is being

able to see from a distance if you've had a bite. Non-flagging jugs aren't as visible, but one with a fish on may have moved from its original location or may be moving differently from the rest. Part of the fun is guessing whether a jug's motion is due to wave action or a fish. We're optimists. If a jug is nervous, we expect a fish.

A flagging or moving jug doesn't guarantee a fish has been caught, however, and we have some false alarms during the day. But a few channel and blue catfish do find their way onto ice. To

about catfishing from time to time, but he's willing to share his peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, so we don't throw him out of the boat. By the end of the day, jug-fishing for catfish has widened the circle of friends for all three of us.

That alone is reason enough to go jugging for cats. But fresh catfish fillets dredged in cornmeal and fried to a crispy golden brown, served up with hush puppies and coleslaw and french fries and savory pinto beans — now there's the real payoff. ★

REAPING THE REWARDS

John Tibbs advocates releasing all catfish weighing 10 pounds or more, since those are the broodfish for future generations. For the smaller fish, he offers this recipe.

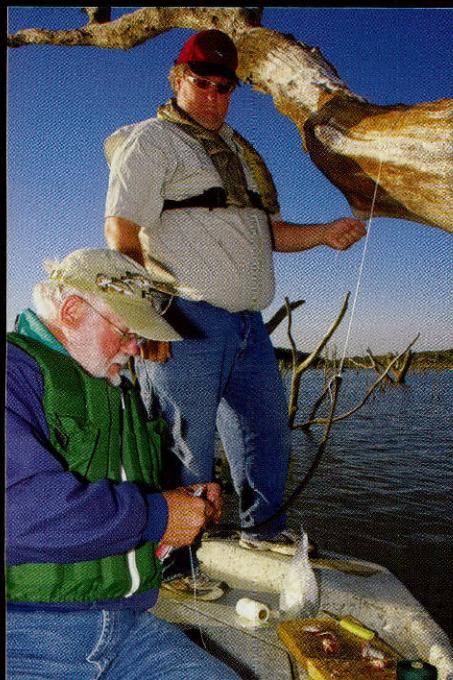
TIBBS' CATFISH TIDBITS

Preheat > cooking oil to 375 degrees.

Cut > catfish fillets into pieces about 2 inches square and no more than 1/2 inch thick. Put pieces in bowl with whole milk to cover. Add powdered milk until the liquid is visibly thickened and adheres to the fish. In another bowl, mix ample cornmeal with salt and spices to taste.

Coat > each piece of fish individually with cornmeal mixture, pressing it on so the cornmeal sticks well. Do not shake off excess cornmeal. (Do not coat the pieces by shaking them in a bag with the cornmeal. This results in an insufficient coating of cornmeal and soggy fish.)

Fry > until golden brown, approximately four to six minutes. Drain well. Let the oil temperature recover between batches to ensure crispy fish.



Setting limb lines under cormorant roosts will produce catfish for the cooler. A rubber strap shock absorber between the limb and the line keeps big fish from getting away.



Number jugs to keep track of them. Big fish can tow jugs some distance. Numbering them and putting them out in numerical order makes it easy to tell if one is missing.



Flagged jug. Floats that stand erect in the water when a fish takes the bait make it easy to tell when you've had a bite.

our surprise, the limblines under the cormorant roost produce not only more fish but also the biggest fish of the day.

Perhaps the best part of jug-fishing is that it requires teamwork to set out and run the lines, and it's that cooperation, rather than competition over who catches the biggest fish, that strengthens ties of family and friendship. John handles the boat while Nick checks lines for fish and re-baits hooks. It's a chance for the two to have some fun with each other, trading friendly barbs about John's boat-driving skills or Nick's ability to get tangled up in the lines. As the disinterested observer, it's my pleasure to watch the faces of both and see eyes rolled and heads shaken when things don't go just right. Nick bursts forth with impromptu doggerel verse

DETAILS

Regulations for jug-fishing as well as a list of water bodies where it is not allowed can be found at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/annual/fish/legal_devices/.

Information on lakes and rivers, fishing reports, stocking reports and more can be found at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fish/.

Commercial fishing for blue and channel catfish is allowed only in certain Texas counties. Find a link to the Commercial Fishing Guide at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fishboat/fish/commercial/.

For Texas-specific catfishing information, including jug-fishing how-to and where-to, one good source is www.whiskerkitty.com.



A Pine Beyond Time

Since the Pleistocene era, Texas piñons have served as a food source and graced the landscape with understated beauty.

By Dale Weisman

Riding a motorcycle west on Ranch Road 337 between Leakey and Camp Wood, I slow down and scan the roadside for a Texas native. White-tailed deer? Yes, certainly. I'm also looking for something far more unusual in the Hill Country: the Texas piñon pine.

Flourishing in isolated stands on the western edge of the Edwards Plateau south of Rocksprings and east of Camp Wood, the Texas piñon pine (*Pinus remota*) grabs my attention like no other tree in these oak- and cedar-dominated environs. Even larger populations of Texas piñons thrive in the Glass and Del Norte mountains of the Trans-Pecos and across the highlands of northern Mexico in the states of Coahuila, Chihuahua and Nuevo Leon.

Young Texas piñons — also called papershell piñons for their exceptionally thin nutshells — look like perfect, conical Christmas trees. Often mistaken for junipers, mature Texas piñons develop bushy crowns and reach heights of 25 to 30 feet — hardly impressive compared to towering ponderosa pine, bald cypress and live oak. But don't underestimate the lofty stature of this shrubby evergreen in the ecology and history of Texas.

remota really is.”

Like Hosage, I'm drawn to this unsung pine-out-of-place. I admire a rugged survivor, and *P. remota* is certainly that: an enduring Ice Age relict taking a stand against the steadily encroaching Chihuahuan Desert and natural enemies like the porcupine and pine bark beetles.

cats and other now-extinct megafauna walked the land.

Ancient packrat middens — piles of organic debris gathered by wood rats — provide an unlikely window into the prehistoric range of the Texas piñon. By carbon-dating fossilized piñon needles and seeds in packrat middens,



Ice covers piñons in the Chisos Mountains.

STANDING IN A GROVE OF TEXAS PIÑONS, I IMAGINE CABEZA DE VACA SUBSISTING ON THIN-SHELLED PINE NUTS AND NATIVE AMERICANS GATHERING PINE CONES AND GRINDING THE SEEDS.

“The Texas piñon is one of the most photogenic plants in the Hill Country,” says Dan Hosage, owner of Madrone Nursery near San Marcos and a Texas native plant expert. “Looking at this beautiful bonsai-like form in a rugged limestone habitat — this gorgeous, bright blue-green tree against dusty hard rock with very little else growing around it — shows you what a tough player *Pinus*

“Between every two pines is a doorway to a new world,” wrote John Muir. Standing in a grove of Texas piñons, I imagine Cabeza de Vaca subsisting on thin-shelled pine nuts; Native Americans gathering pine cones and grinding the seeds; and vast piñon-studded woodlands carpeting West Texas during the late Pleistocene, when mammoths, giant bison, saber-toothed

researchers like Thomas Van Devender — a senior research scientist at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum — have proven that *Pinus remota* and other piñon species once carpeted the Trans-Pecos, from the Big Bend to El Paso.

Toward the end of the last Ice Age, West Texas' climate was cooler and wetter than it is today. As glaciers began to recede 10,000 to 15,000 years ago, the climate grew hotter and more arid, and *Pinus remota* gradually retreated to higher ground. Isolated populations of these pines survive today in mesic settings — in sheltered canyons and valleys



WESTERN SCRUB-JAYS HELP PIÑONS BY INADVERTENTLY PLANTING ITS SEEDS. PORCUPINES DAMAGE THE TREES BY CHEWING THE BARK AND DESTROYING THE SOFT TISSUE BENEATH.



and on north- and east-facing slopes of hills and mountains.

Piñons, like all pines, share an ancient lineage. According to Ronald Lanner, author of *The Piñon Pine: A Natural and Cultural History*, the first pines arose about 180 million years ago in the Triassic Period. Mexico in particular has been a crucible of conifer evolution. "Few areas in the world have been such a haven for pines as Mexico," wrote Lanner speculating that a "slow-growing, long-lived, short-trunked" piñon progenitor evolved some 60 million years ago in the highlands of Mexico as the climate grew hotter and dryer.

Botanists have identified about 100 pine species worldwide, classifying them as either hard or soft pines based on wood density and the number of pine needles per bundle. About a third of all pines are soft pines, including 11 known species of piñons, or pinyons as some call them. (The word pinyon is an Anglicized version of the Spanish *piñon*, which means nut pine.)

Pinus remota has two close relatives in Texas: *Pinus edulis* (the New Mexico or Colorado piñon) and *Pinus cembroides* (the Mexican piñon). The state tree of New Mexico, *Pinus edulis* abounds in the Southwest, providing a source of firewood and pine nuts — a Native American staple as well as a gourmet item sold coast to coast. In Texas *P. edulis* grows in Hud-

speth, Culberson and Deaf Smith counties, with the largest populations in the Guadalupe and Sierra Diablo mountains. *Pinus cembroides*, a wide-ranging piñon species found in the highlands of central and northern Mexico, typically grows at elevations of 4,000 to 7,000 feet in the volcanic mountains of the Trans-Pecos, including the Chisos and Davis ranges. While it has the hardest shell of all the piñons, the nut is tasty and widely available in countless Mexican village markets.

Until recently, botanists considered the Texas piñon to be a thin-shelled variety of the Mexican piñon. U.S. botanist Elbert L. Little first identified the Texas piñon in the wild in 1966, classifying it as *Pinus cembroides* var. *remota*. In 1979, botanists Dana K. Bailey and Frank Hawksworth contended the tree should be a separate species, *Pinus remota*. Bailey also suggested that its common name be "paper-shell pinyon" because of its paper-thin seed shells.

Most botanists, including A. Michael Powell, professor emeritus of biology at Sul Ross State University in Alpine, now classify *P. remota* as a distinct species. "*Pinus remota* is one of my favorite trees," says Powell, author of *Trees and Shrubs of the*

Trans-Pecos and Adjacent Areas. "I've camped and walked among Texas piñons for a long time. It's nice to find a little pine forest in remote areas on limestone slopes."

Powell, who has grown *Pinus remota* from seed to maturity, notes that Texas piñons have a broad, rounded crown rather than a conical crown like the Mexican piñon. The most drought- and heat-tolerant piñon of all, *P. remota* grows at the lowest elevations of all New World piñons — down to 1,500 feet in the Edwards Plateau and from 2,500 feet to 5,000 feet in West Texas.

According to Mark Lockwood, a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department natural resources coordinator in Fort Davis, *Pinus remota* favors limestone substrates, while *P. cembroides* grows in igneous soils. "The Del Norte Mountains have patches of both soil types," says Lockwood, "and so *P. remota* and *P. cembroides* grow in close proximity in the Del Norte — the only place in the United States where the two species occur together."

Because the majority of *Pinus remota* habitat in Texas sits on private land, the easiest way to see the trees is by driving in the western Hill Country. Follow, for instance, FM 337 west of Leakey to Camp Wood — a spectacular route that climbs out of the Frio River canyon and roller-coasters across a lofty plateau where piñons, oaks and madrones frame see-forever views.

The region's thickest stands of piñon cloak the rugged landscape along FM 674 south of Rocksprings. North of the Edwards and Kinney County line, the twisty ranch road sweeps past the entrance to 6,400-acre Kickapoo Caverns State Park — the only Texas park with a plenitude of *Pinus remota*. Piñon thickets flourish in the park's valleys and on north-facing hillsides. The park is open for regularly scheduled tours and by special arrangement (830-563-2342, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/kickapoo cavern).

Devil's Sinkhole State Natural Area also harbors a scattering of *P. remota* along its southern boundary. Located off U.S. 377 northeast of Rocksprings, Devil's Sinkhole is open to visitors only by prearranged tours through the Devil's Sinkhole Society in Rocksprings (830-683-BATS).

If you want to see Mexican piñons up close, go hiking in Davis Mountains State Park or in the Chisos Mountains of Big Bend National Park. To commune with New Mexico piñons in Texas, trek the high country in Guadalupe Mountains National Park. But if you want to see lots of Texas piñons in the Trans-Pecos, you'd better plan on driving.

From Fort Stockton, take U.S. 385 south toward Marathon. After some 30 miles of driving, treeless Chihuahuan Desert gives way to the anomalous greenery of the limestone-laden Glass Mountains — a core woodland habitat for Texas piñons. A roadside picnic area on the west side of U.S. 385 affords scenic views of the piñon- and juniper-clad Glass Mountains. This may be the only spot of public land in West Texas where you can actually walk among *Pinus remota*.

Given their limited range and relict status, are Texas piñons in decline in their native habitats? The experts say no — that *P. remota* is holding its own in the wild.

"I've been terrifically impressed by the remarkable comeback *Pinus remota* is making," says Dan Hosage, who has observed Texas native plants since the early 1980s. "There are piñon seedlings and juveniles coming up everywhere in their ranges."

Like all piñons, *Pinus remota* is a long-lived tree. Based on field work and core samples at Kickapoo Caverns and in the Glass and Del Norte ranges, Rob Kinucan, dean of agricultural and natural resource sciences at Sul Ross State University, believes some Texas piñon stands are 250-300 years old and that *P. remota* potentially can live for up to a thousand years.

But not without a fight. Texas piñons face two natural adversaries: porcupines and pine bark beetles. Porcupines feed on the bark of piñons and other trees, damaging the nutrient-carrying phloem (soft tissue) beneath the bark. Porcupine scarring opens the door to pine bark beetle infestation. The beetles often attack drought-stressed pines by chewing through the outer bark and feeding on the phloem, which cuts off nutrient flow. The beetles also deposit eggs beneath the bark, and the larvae feed on the phloem. To compound this damage, the beetles infect pines with a "blue stain fungus" that clogs the tree's soft tissue.

Some animals that feed on the protein-rich piñon nuts actually do the pines a favor by inadvertently planting the seeds. Blue jays, western scrub jays and other birds, as well as some rodents, cache the pine nuts, some of which remain uneaten and germinate. Piñon nuts also provide forage for wild turkey, deer and black bear.

Drought-tolerant Texas piñons make excellent ornamentals for xeric and conventional landscapes, thriving in both alkaline and acid soils with no supplemental watering.

Hosage, who grows Texas piñons from seed in his greenhouse, enthusiastically advocates widespread planting of *Pinus remota*. "Not only should *P. remota* be grown as a native Texas Christmas tree, but piñons are also a highly desirable food source," says Hosage.

According to Lanner, piñon nuts average 15 percent protein, 20 percent or more fat, and at least 14 percent carbohydrate. They're also high in iron, vitamin

A, thiamine, riboflavin and niacin. Not only are piñon nuts nourishing (rivaling pecans, peanuts and walnuts), they're quite tasty, whether consumed raw or as an ingredient in salad dressing, pesto, spaghetti sauce, corn pudding, granola and many other recipes from Lanner's book, *The Piñon Pine*.

The next time you see a Texas piñon in the wild or in your neighbor's yard, consider this bit of wisdom from Ralph Waldo Emerson: "The wonder is that we can see these trees and not wonder more." ★

TRAIL OF SEEDS HOLDS CLUES TO CABEZA DE VACA'S ROUTE

For nearly a century, historians have debated the route of Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca's epic odyssey from the Galveston area to safety in Culiacan (a city in northern Mexico). Some scholars favor a trans-Texas route arcing into New Mexico before entering northern Mexico, either near present-day El Paso or Presidio. Others advocate a more southerly route through South Texas and across northern Mexico. The debate rages on, mostly in scholarly circles.

One of the more intriguing articles on the subject makes a compelling case for the southerly route, based on Cabeza de Vaca's descriptions of subsisting on thin-shelled pine nuts. (The article, "Piñon Pines and the Route of Cabeza de Vaca," by Donald W. Olson, Marilyn S. Olson, Russell L. Doescher, et al., first appeared in the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* in October 1997. To view the complete article, visit www.library.txstate.edu/swwc/cdv/further_study/pinon_pines.pdf.)

In one of his published works, Cabeza de Vaca describes eating piñon nuts provided to him and three shipwrecked companions by Indians: "They ate the fruit of the prickly pears and nuts from pine trees. In that land there are small pine trees, and the cones of these are like small eggs, but the pine nuts are better than those of Castile, because they have very thin shells." In fact, the shells were so thin they could be consumed with the nuts.

Such thin shells come from *Pinus remota*, rather than New Mexico's moderately hard-shelled *Pinus edulis*. *P. remota* grows in abundance in the mountains of the Mexican states of Nuevo Leon, Coahuila and Chihuahua. Follow the seeds, and you'll probably follow in the footsteps of Cabeza de Vaca across northern Mexico.

While Cabeza de Vaca's exact path remains a tough nut to crack, the papershell piñon pine seed evidence points convincingly to a southerly route.



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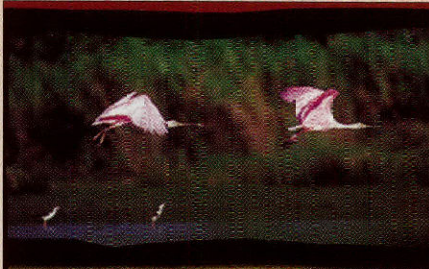


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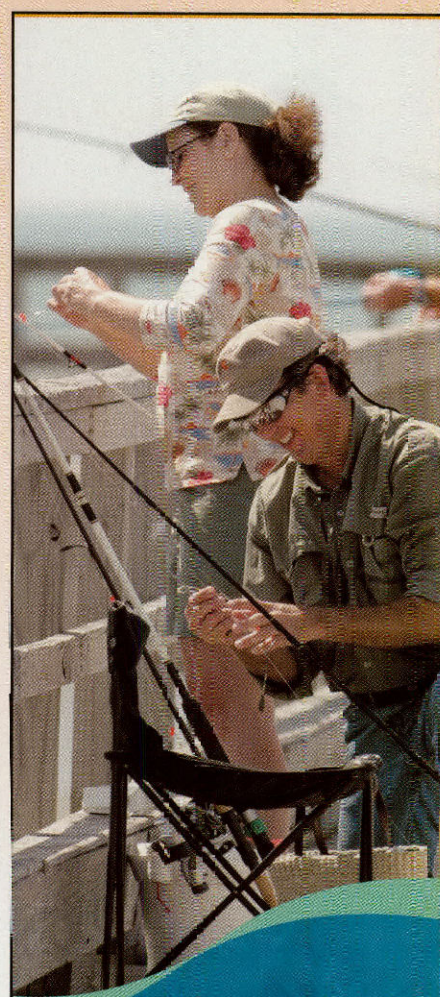
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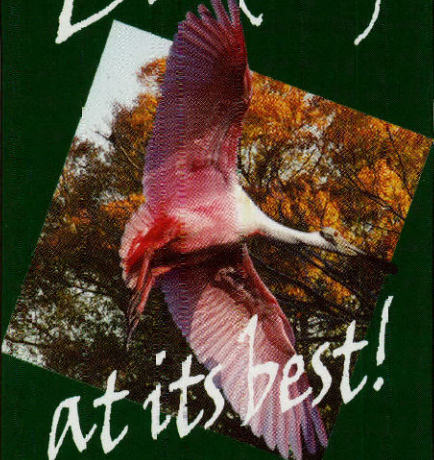
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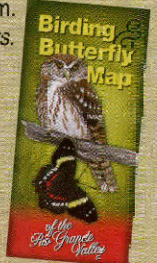
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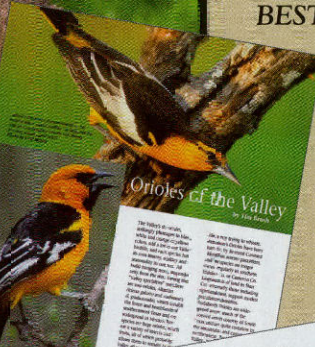
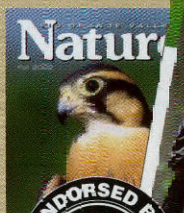
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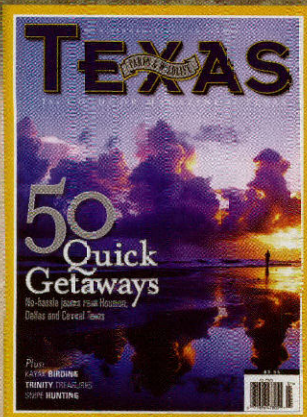
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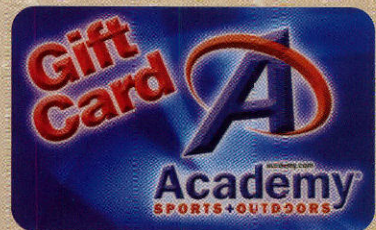
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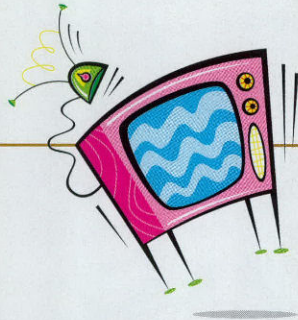
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May 6 – 13:

Winter migration of sandhill cranes; record ridleys release; sandhill crane hunting tips; flowing along at Pedernales Falls State Park; honoring angler Buddy Bradley; bird's-eye view of the Rio Grande.

May 13 – 20:

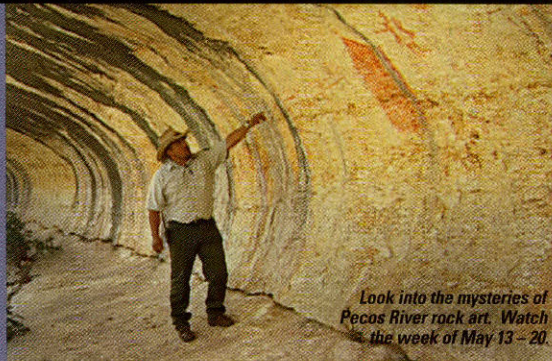
Prehistoric artwork of the Lower Pecos; restoring wetlands in the Pineywoods; shooting sports competition; Tyler State Park hiking trails; old-fashioned ferry crossing.

May 20 – 27:

Palmetto State Park; restoring Galveston Bay; student adventure at Big Bend Ranch; dove hunting paradise in Midland; wind powered landscapes.

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EAGLE PASS: KINL-FM 92.7 / 3:30 p.m.

EASTLAND: KEAS-AM 1590 / 5:50 a.m., 5:50 p.m.; KATX-FM 97.7 / 5:50 a.m., 5:50 p.m.

EDNA: KGUL-FM 96.1 / 7:10 a.m.

EL CAMPO: KULP-AM 1390 / 2:36 p.m.

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

FAIRFIELD: KNES-FM 99.1 / Sat. mornings

FLORESVILLE: KWCB-FM 89.7 / 1:30 p.m.

FORT STOCKTON: KFST-AM 860 / 7:10 a.m.; KFST-FM 94.3 / 7:10 a.m.

GAINESVILLE: KGAF-AM 1580 / 10 a.m.

GRANBURY: KPIR-AM 1420 / 4:20 p.m.

GREENVILLE: KGVN-AM 1400 / 8:10 a.m.

HARLINGEN: KMBH-FM 88.9 / 4:58 p.m.; KHID-FM 88.1 / 4:58 p.m.

HENDERSON: KZOX-FM 104.7 / 10:20 a.m., 4:20 p.m.

HEREFORD: KPAN-AM 860 / 2:50 p.m.; KPAN-FM 106.3 / 2:50 p.m.

HILLSBORO: KHBR-AM 1560 / 9:30 a.m.

HOUSTON: KILT-AM 610 / between 4 a.m. and 7 a.m. Thur.-Sun.

HUNTSVILLE: KSHU-FM 90.5 / throughout the day

JACKSONVILLE: KEBE-AM 1400 / 7:15 a.m.

JUNCTION: KMBL-AM 1450 / 6:40 a.m., 3:30 p.m., KOOK-FM 93.5 / 10:20 a.m., 3:30 p.m.

KERRVILLE: KRNH-FM 92.3 / 5:31 a.m., 12:57 p.m., 7:35 p.m.; KERV-AM 1230 / 7:54 a.m., 11:42 p.m., 6:42 p.m.; KRVL-FM 94.3 / 7:54 a.m., 11:42 p.m., 6:42 p.m.

KILGORE: KZOX-FM 105.3 / 10:20 a.m., 4:20 p.m.

LA GRANGE: KBUK-FM 104.9 / 12:30 p.m.; KVLG-AM 1300 / 12:30 p.m.

LAKE CHEROKEE: KZQX-FM 104.7 / 10:20 a.m., 4:20 p.m.

LAMPASAS: KACQ-FM 101.9 / 8:25 a.m.; KCYL-AM 1450 / 8:25 a.m.

LAREDO: KHOY-FM 88.1 / throughout the day

LEVELLAND: KIVT-AM 1230 / 12:30 p.m.

LLANO: KITY-FM 102.9 / 5:15 a.m.; 1:15 p.m.; 3:15 p.m.; 9:15 p.m.

LONGVIEW: KZQZ-FM 101.9 / 10:20 a.m.; 4:20 p.m.

LUBBOCK: KJTV-AM 950 / overnights

LUFKIN: KUEZ-FM 100.1 / 12:15 p.m.; KYBI-FM 101.9 / 12:15 p.m.

MADISONVILLE: KMVL-AM 1220 / 7:45 a.m.; KMVL-FM 100.5 / 7:45 a.m.

MARSHALL: KCUL-FM 92.3 / 6:12 a.m.; KMHT-FM 103.9 / 6:25 a.m.; KMHT-AM 1450 / 6:25 a.m.

MASON: KOTY-FM 95.7 / throughout the day

MESQUITE: KEOM-FM 88.5 / 8:15 a.m., 2:30 p.m., 8:30 p.m. Mon.-Thu.; 8:15 a.m., 2:30 p.m. Fri.

MEXIA: KRQX-AM 1590 / 3:15 p.m.; KYCX-FM 104.9 / 3:15 p.m.

MINEOLA: KMOO-FM 99.9 / 5:15 p.m.

MONAHANS: KLBO-AM 1330 / between 8-9 a.m. and 1-3 p.m.

NACOGDOCHES: KSAU-FM 90.1 / 2:45 p.m.

NEW BRAUNFELS: KGNB-AM 1420 / 5:55 a.m.

ODESSA: KCRS-AM 550 / 6:15 a.m., 5:50 p.m.; KOCV-FM 91.3 / 6:49 a.m.

PECOS: KIUN-AM 1400 / 10:30 a.m.

PLAINVIEW: KVOP-AM 1090 / 9:50 a.m.

ROCKDALE: KRXT-FM 98.5 / 5:04 a.m., 8:45 p.m.

SAN ANGELO: KGKL-AM 960 / 6:32 a.m., 6:58 p.m.

SAN ANTONIO: KSTX-FM 89.1 / 9:04 p.m.

SEGUIN: KWED-AM 1580 / 7:55 a.m.

SONORA: KHOS-FM 92.1 / 10:15 a.m.; KYXX-FM 94.3 / 10:15 a.m.

SULPHUR SPRINGS: KSST-AM 1230 / 2:50 a.m., 11:50 a.m.

SWEETWATER: KXOX-FM 96.7 / 8:30 a.m.; KXOX-AM 1240 / 8:30 a.m.

TEMPLE: KTEM-AM 1400 / 10:20 a.m.

TEXARKANA: KTXK-FM 91.5 / 2:04 p.m.

VICTORIA: KTXN-FM 98.7 / 6:50 a.m.; KZAM-FM 104.7 / 7:10 a.m.; KGUL-FM 96.1 / 7:10 a.m.

WACO: KBBW-AM 1010 / throughout the day

WICHITA FALLS: KWFS-AM 1290 / 6:15 a.m., 7:45 a.m.

WOODVILLE: KWUD-AM 1490 / throughout the day

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San Felipe State Historic Site

See where Texas as we know it began, at the site of Austin's first colony.

Located about a mile from Stephen F. Austin State Park near Sealy, San Felipe State Historic Site is a tribute to the town-ship of San Felipe, the place where Stephen F. Austin brought the first 297 families to colonize Texas. It was here that Texas saw its first Anglo newspaper, *The Gazette*, the beginnings of its first postal system and the creation of the Texas Rangers.

While this town, known as "The Cradle of Texas Liberty," may have been the hub of everything social, economic and political in the 19th century, the site now sits on a quiet road just off Interstate 10. The area has two buildings: a log cabin and a museum. The home is a replica of Austin's double log cabin, which he

built in 1828 for \$600. Even though the house is not an original, the tour guides' tales sure are. When Juanita Perry or other volunteer tour guides talk about "Stephen," you may forget that they didn't actually know him. They know everything about the man, his peers and his family, right down to each person's birth and death day.

Right next to the cabin is a monument to possibly one of the most important structures in Texas history — the original town hall. The conventions of 1832 and 1833 and the Consultation of 1835 were held here, all of which eventually led to the Texas Declaration of Independence. So why can't you see the original building? It was burned down (along with most of the town) to prevent it from falling to the Mexican Army.

Visitors will likely spend most of their time in the site's museum, which was actually San Felipe's mercantile. You can spend hours wandering around looking at things like Austin's desk, photos, documents and letters. There are even dinosaur artifacts. And

true to its mercantile roots, the museum has replicas of the groceries that Texans purchased back then. If you want to know more about how those Texans lived, the knowledgeable tour guides will show you maps and models of the town, pointing out each person's home.

If you plan to come with a group, call ahead. If you're passing through on FM 1458 or happen to be camping at Stephen F. Austin State Park for the weekend, just head on in; someone is usually there. They'll show you around, or you can do a self-guided tour, if you prefer.

So what's the cost to see all these treasures and learn about Texas' first community? One dollar. As Perry says, "It's the same dollar they've been paying since 1960."

For more information about San Felipe State Historic Site, call (979) 885-3613 or visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/stephenf-austin>. ★

—Elsa K. Simcik



Sam Bell Maxey House

Take a trip back to post Civil War Texas, when a toilet was a status symbol.

Standing in the parlor of Samuel Bell Maxey's home and looking around at the original furniture, floors and fireplace, I try to imagine what it must have felt like when the room was packed with well-heeled guests attending one of the family's swanky parties in the late 19th century.

General Maxey and his wife, Marilda, built the Victorian-style house in 1868 with the help of the local community. It sits just off Paris' quaint town square in the historical district where it has seen almost 140 years of Texas history. And it serves as a tribute not only to our past but also to great architecture. The home was one of the few structures that withstood the great Paris fire of 1916, which destroyed almost the entire town.

Four generations of the Maxey family lived in the home until 1966. General Maxey himself is an important figure in Texas and U.S. history, having served in both the Mexican War and Civil War and later as a U.S. senator. A graduate of West Point, he was roommates with fellow Confederate General Stonewall Jackson (see their photos in the library).

Now visitors can take tours of the home on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays and learn as much as they want about the Maxey family and life in post-Civil-War Texas. In about 30 to 45 minutes, they'll see the parlor, sun room, butler's

pantry, dining room, General Maxey's library and two upstairs bedrooms.

Staff members at the house or knowledgeable volunteers tell about the features of the home ('Here's the first running toilet in Paris, Texas'), the foundation ('They built the house on criss-crossed bois d'arc trees') and family legends ('They were scared of light bulbs so they never used them.'). Some other interesting nuggets include General Maxey's 800-plus book collection (which include works by Poe, Plath and Hawthorne), his dress sword and shoes belonging to members of the family. (Who knew that folks in the 19th century didn't have right and left shoes?)

After the tour, visitors can venture over to the gift shop or simply stroll around the historic district and the antique shops on the square.

No matter how much you already know about the Civil War, life in the 19th century or Victorian-style homes, you're sure to leave the Maxey house with some new tidbits of knowledge. And besides that, you'll have seen the first running toilet in Paris, Texas.

For more information, call (903) 785-5716 or visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/sambellmaxeyhouse>. ★

—Elsa K. Simcik

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

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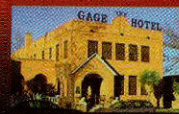
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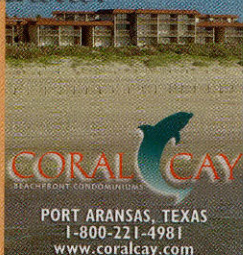
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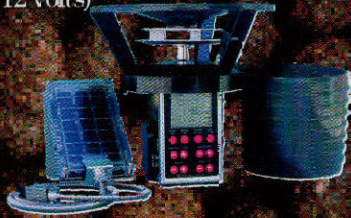
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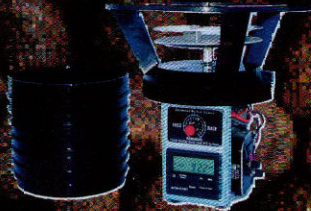
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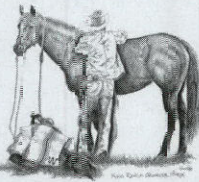
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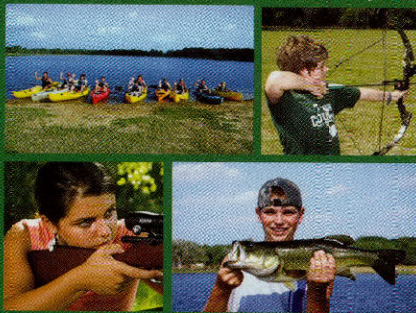
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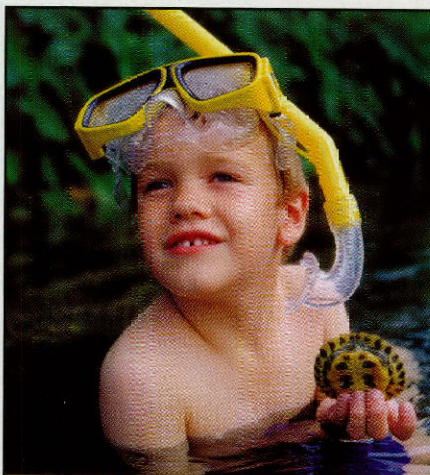
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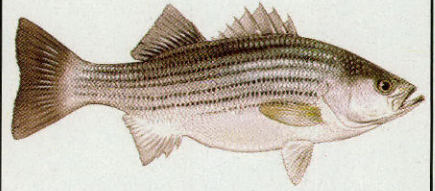
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PARTINGSHOT

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An eastern bluebird brings a tasty morsel for youngsters waiting in the nest cavity. The shot was taken at El Tecolote Ranch near Raymondville in May 2006. To get the image, photographer Rolf Nussbaumer used the Phototrapp, an infrared camera trigger which allows the camera to be activated at the right moment by an infrared beam.

IMAGE SPECS:

Nikon D2X (digital) with
Nikon 200-400mm/4.0 lens,
exposure of 1/4000 second
at f/4.


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