

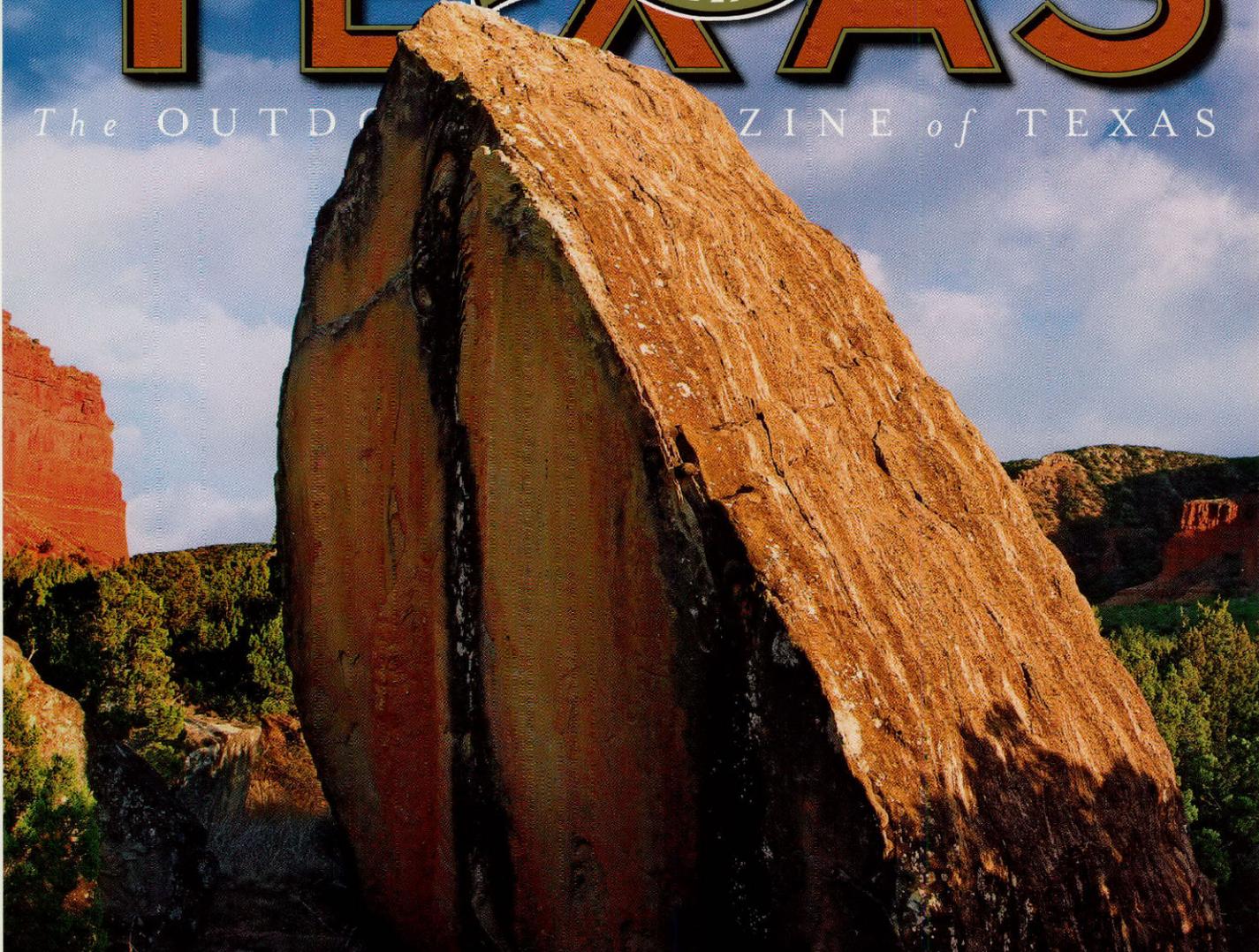
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The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE of TEXAS



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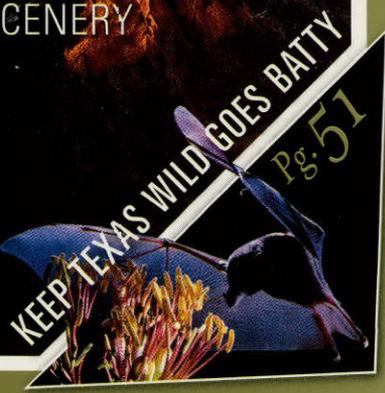
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THIS PAGE: Texas horned lizard.
Photo © Russell A. Graves.

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OCTOBER 2008, VOL. 66, NO. 10

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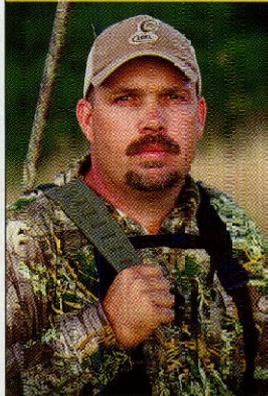
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In the Field

RUSSELL A. GRAVES and his dad planted two small wheat plots in 1938 among the post oaks of Northeast Texas.

After some timely rains and a bit of time, the wheat sprouted and the field was soon covered with deer tracks. Only two weeks after the season commenced, a nice eight-point buck stepped into the



field and Russell harvested his first deer ever. Since that time, Russell has combined his degree in agriculture with his love of wildlife to plant numerous food plots for all kinds of wildlife like deer and turkey for both hunting and photography. A resident of Childress, Russell enjoys spending time afield with his wife, Kristy, and their two young children, Bailee and Ryan, and tries to involve his kids in planting crops for wildlife whenever he can.

BARBARA RODRIGUEZ, former Texas Monthly

Press field guide editor and longtime outdoor life and garden writer, has been into birds since her mother let her hatch quail eggs in the family pantry. Less captive (but equally captivating) sightings of painted buntings and the unsought attentions of a very old

and very amorous wild turkey tom further fueled her interest in all things feathered. Barbara says she expected to open her eyes to more bird-brained pursuits when she visited the Trinity River Audubon Center in Dallas (opening this month). She was wowed to learn that the Audubon Society's mission would take a much broader flight path by expanding into educating North Texas about our feathered friends and more.



TERESA S. NEWTON wanted to know more about

Old Rip, Eastland County's legendary horned lizard, when she came across his name while researching her first book.

The idea of a horned lizard hibernating for 51 years invites skepticism. Teresa comes from a family of tall-tale tellers, but

she knows from her years as a newspaper reporter and editor that fact is far stranger than fiction.

"Besides, in Texas, anything is possible," she says. The East Texas native doesn't remember seeing

horned lizards where she grew up, but is a fan of *One Froggy Evening*, a cartoon featuring an Old Rip-esque frog. Teresa plans to include Old Rip in an as-yet-unpublished collection of Texas' famous, infamous, unusual and absurd.



AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF CARTER P. SMITH

Texans have always been proud of what is inside our borders. Our unique and diverse cultures, cuisines, dialects, ethnicities, music, art and literature are all points of considerable pride for those of us who cherish all things Texan. The same is true for another important element of our state's heritage ... the natural kind.

Not unlike our state's rich and varied cultural fabric, our natural heritage has always been strongly influenced by factors that transcend our borders. The hordes of waterfowl that winter along the coast spend most of the spring and summer in the prairie potholes of the Dakotas or the wetlands in the Boreal forests of northern Saskatchewan. Many of the colorful songbirds that come to breed in the spring have just returned from a winter in the pine-oak woodlands of southern Mexico and Central America. The black bears that may be found in the Big Bend country move back and forth between West Texas and the Serranias Del Burros and the Maderas Del Carmen mountain ranges of northern Mexico.

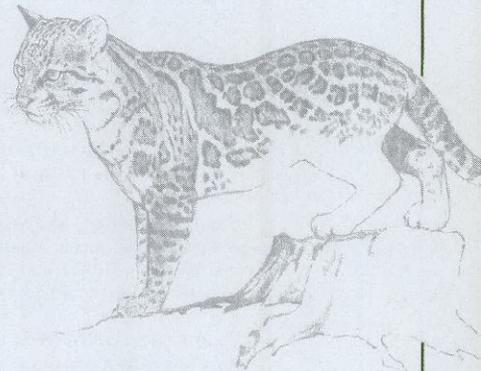
Suffice to say, for wide-ranging and migrating wildlife, geopolitical boundaries are not much of a consideration. That dynamic is changing, however, in the deepest reaches of the Rio Grande Valley, as the Department of Homeland Security proceeds with the construction of a new border wall along portions of the Rio Grande. The wall, a 16- to 18-foot-high barrier, is being constructed to aid federal agencies in their battle against illegal immigration, drug trafficking and prospective terrorism.

A rather unfortunate consequence of this project will be its likely impact on a range of border wildlife species such as ocelots and indigo snakes that can neither fly over, nor tunnel under, the wall. The wall's long-term impacts on a landscape that is already heavily fragmented by many decades of intensive agriculture and urbanization remains to be seen. At the department, we are concerned not only about the wall's impacts on wildlife, but also on our ability to manage certain portions of our wildlife management areas that will soon be situated between the border wall and the river.

For many in deep South Texas, the wall stands in stark and diametrical contrast to a three decade, bi-national partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife, private landowners, local communities and many conservation organizations on both sides of the border to conserve the ecological treasures of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo. Well over 130,000 acres of conservation lands have been preserved for the benefit of birders, hunters, nature enthusiasts, scientists, and of course, nature itself. Local communities have prospered with the influx of nature tourists from around the world, who come to see plants and animals that can be found nowhere else but this region. Whether the public may still safely access conservation areas located behind the wall is an open question.

Nobody said conservation would be easy.

Thanks for caring about Texas' wild things and wild places. We need them more than ever.

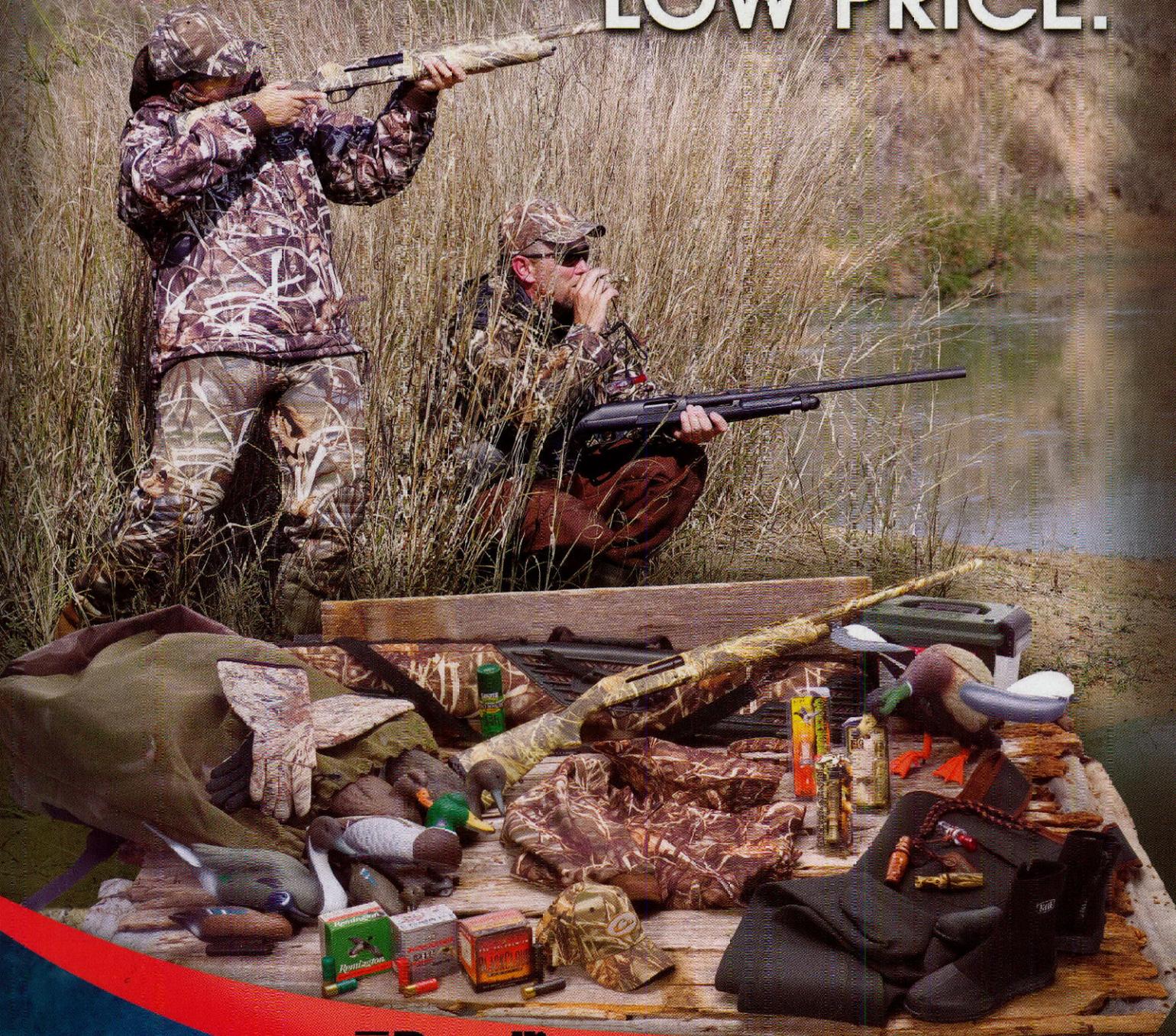


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MAIL CALL

PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

FOREWORD

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Expo is upon us again. These two days of fun in the sun (or rain or blistering heat) gives kids and youngsters-at-heart the opportunity to try out all sorts of outdoor activities, from shooting to mountain biking to kayaking to fishing to birdwatching. I'll be spending at least part of the time in the magazine booth, demonstrating by way of awkward conversations why I'm really at my best as a behind-the-scenes, hold-down-the-fort kinda guy.

Even though I'm normally involved in only the more low-key Expo activities, I always seem to walk away with some kind of injury. Last year, it was bruised thighs. One of my responsibilities was steadying the kayak while the kiddos got in or out of the boats at the Wet Zone. To accomplish this, you stand in the water and shove your body against the kayak to secure it against the dock. One of the supervisors kept walking up behind me and yelling, "Push! Harder!" So I pushed, maybe too hard, and created a thick blue line across my thighs by the end of the day.

I hope to return to the Wet Zone again this year. I feel like I even have a smidge of expertise to offer since I've done a lot of kayaking this year. The highlight of the year was a trip to British Columbia to kayak with killer whales — an amazing trip I highly recommend. The trip demonstrated to me again that kayaks are wonderfully suited for all sorts of wildlife viewing. We saw bald eagles overhead and observed purple starfish, sea slugs and harbor seals as we paddled along the shore. Now that I've kayaked in (slightly) rough water in Canada's Johnstone Strait, yeah, I think I can handle the Wet Zone.

Of course, the Wet Zone shifts are in high demand since you get to stand in nice, cool water for at least part of the shift. My backup choice would be the mountain biking area, where I worked two years ago. It's a high-volume, fast-moving gig, and the little people always keep it interesting. My role was to fit the kids with a helmet and then shovel them off to the bike selection area. It's never dull, that's for sure. And I get to remain incognito. For all those kids know, I'm a full-time bike helmet technician.

I hope you and your family will come and join the festivities on October 4 and 5 at TPWD headquarters in Austin. The magazine booth will be in one of those large tents, usually somewhere right in the middle. Look for the posters of our magazine covers. We always enjoy meeting our readers face to face and hearing what you like (and don't like) about our little magazine. Actually, we like the compliments a lot more than the criticism, but we'll come prepared for both.

Robert Macias

ROBERT MACIAS
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

LETTERS

LIFESAVING NIACIN IN HOMINY

I read with interest the note in "Parting Shot" of the August issue. During the early 20th century, it is my understanding that lots of families died in the southern parts of North America from pellagra. The lack of niacin in their diet (mostly corn)

primarily caused the disease. Is it possible that the Moreno family's tragic deaths were caused by that disease? What is tragic is that the vitamin deficiency was known centuries earlier by the Incas and Mayas. They learned that if they made hominy out of corn and ate it along with their regular diet, they didn't get dysentery. The process of making hominy changes the corn so the body can absorb the niacin.

KENNETH R. PARKER
Burleson

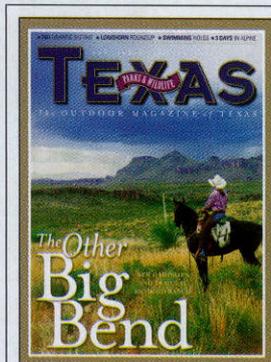
SPRING-FED OR TREATED?

In your August 2008 story "Top 10 State Park Swimming Holes," you say that Balmorhea is a spring-fed pool and since catfish and turtles are in it, I assume that it is not

treated. Abilene State Park also has a pool, and the park manager says that modern regulations require that the water be treated rather than spring fed. Is the Abilene pool not a spring-fed pool? Does Balmorhea use treated water?

BARBARA CLAEYS
Richmond

TPWD RESPONDS: Abilene State Park Superintendent Okie Okerstrom says the pool has never been spring fed. It used to be filled from a well in the '30s and '40s and was drained and refilled every few days. That is why it was so cold all the time. The pool is now maintained with treated water and treated with pool chem-



What is tragic is that the vitamin deficiency was known centuries earlier by the Incas and Mayas. They learned that if they made hominy out of corn and ate it along with their regular diet, they didn't get dysentery.

Kenneth R. Parker
Burleson

MAIL CALL

icals. Balmorhea State Park Superintendent Tom Johnson says San Solomon Springs is not chlorinated because it is a natural artesian spring flowing at about 20 million gallons of water a day. The pool displaces itself every six hours. There is an endangered fish in the springs, along with turtles, crayfish and lots of other species of fish. The water stays a constant 74 degrees.

EXHIBIT VOLUNTEERS PLEASED

The August issue is a keeper! Our friend Matt Woodall pictured in the May class of Texas game wardens, and the West Texas articles were of specific interest to us. We were especially proud that Eileen Mattei mentioned the Happy Jack Mine in her article, "High Desert Escape." This mine exhibit at the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute has been a special project for many volunteers since its inception in 2000. To read that others see it as "an accurate replica of a small 1880s Chihuahuan Desert silver mine" is quite a compliment and shows that the Chihuahuan Desert Mining Heritage Exhibit is fulfilling its mission. We would be honored to give Eileen a personal tour through the mine exhibit during her next visit. Thank you again for a quality publication.

JOE AND JOYCE MUSSEY
Fort Davis

BLACK GAP WAS FIRST HOME

Thank you so much for the story on Black Gap ("No Country for Wimps," September 2008). When my husband and I married 49 years ago, he went to work for TPWD, and that burned-out ranch house (the Rooney House) was our first home. We agree that Black Gap is one of the state's best-kept secrets. We go back as often as we can and still enjoy the beauty of the cac-

CORRECTION

In the September 2008 article, "Paddling the Forks," swallow-tailed kites were mistakenly referenced as scissor-tailed kites. Also, an owl sighted by the guide was a barred owl, not a barn owl. Barn owls are not found in bottomland hardwood forests in the Pinewoods of East Texas. In "Leggy Lantana," the species *lantana camara* was referred to as native when it is, in fact, invasive.

tus, ocotillo, greasewood and sage, the quiet stillness and the majestic mountains all around. Hiking there is like no other place in Texas. I have climbed up several of the mountains there and the view from each is just marvelous. We have lived in several other places around the state, but Black Gap remains our favorite and always will hold a special place for us.

ALEN WAGNER
Ingram

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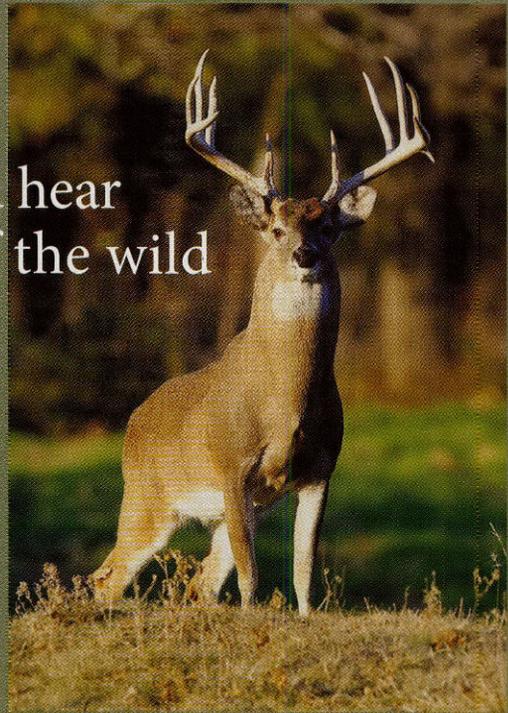
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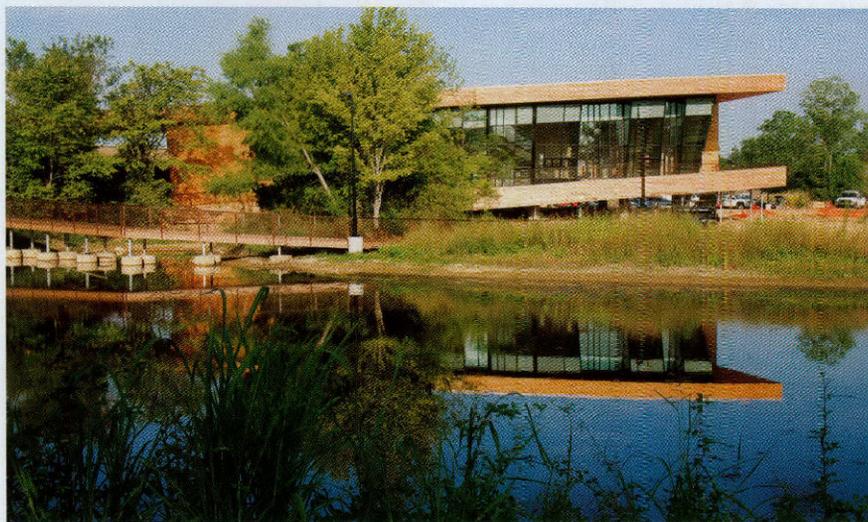
New Audubon center in Dallas helps young and old connect with nature.

The new Trinity River Audubon Center is for the birds. Less predictably, it's also for the turtles, snakes, lizards, opossums and — most of all — their human neighbors. And if the Audubon name evokes images of sensible shoes, life lists and binoculars, the new center is proof that the Audubon family — and mission — is spectacularly more broad than clichéd perceptions of bird-watchers past.

The \$10.8 million partnership between Dallas and the environmental organization has borne fruit in a facility poised to captivate entire families with a multi-generational appeal that's rare in wildlife and conservation centers.

A mere eight minutes from downtown, the 120-acre facility opens this month as an educational gateway to the 6,000-acre Great Trinity Forest, the largest urban hardwood forest within an American city's limits. Visitors to this impressive urban backyard will find the center's 21,000-square-foot interpretive center to be southeast Dallas' most welcoming back porch.

Broad decks and suspended walkways seem to float around the soaring LEED-certified (sustainable) building designed by award-winning architect Antoine Predock. The cypress siding and vegetative roof of native grasses seem an extension of the natural environment, as do expanses of stamped moss-green concrete walls and floors. The design is drawn from a gliding bird — the exhibition and office spaces its gracefully arched wings, the overhang of the main entrance the split tail, the entire building pitched to skim the ponds and wetlands that surround it.



▲ The center boasts a birdlike design, and was built over a reclaimed dump.

The center was constructed upon a reclaimed dump — a nasty, ugly, illegal dump many years in the making — so the architect may have drawn inspiration from the phoenix; what has risen from the ash of neglect is a radiant facility thoughtfully designed for a long, service-filled life. The exhibition hall features easily digestible lessons in conservation and science through interactive exhibits (including a hands-on, floodable model of the Trinity River), view tubes and cubby holes where little ones can curl up on a window shelf to ponder the great outdoors.

Wherever you go the walls of windows and breezes draw you in, exhibitions and programs open your eyes and views entice you outside again for more informed first-person encounters with nature along four miles of trails through restored prairie, wetland and bottomland forest habitats.

The center's educational programs are

dedicated to serving all corners, but especially those attending the Title I schools of southeast Dallas. Audubon has committed to raise \$5 million in scholarship funds to provide its neighbors with free outdoor learning programs designed to create a new generation of conservationists.

As Linda Perryman Evans said when announcing a \$1 million gift from the Meadows Foundation to complete construction funding for the project, "The center will be a flagship for Audubon and the community — a place where people will come to connect with nature and begin a journey to lifelong stewardship of our planet." Sensible shoes are optional.

For more information on the grand opening, memberships, volunteer opportunities and upcoming programs, visit www.trinityriveraudubon.org or call (214) 370-9735. ★

— Earbara Rodriguez



Snakeweed

As toxic as it sounds, this shrub can kill livestock.

From a distance, the mounds of golden yellow flowers cloaking roadsides and fenced pastures this month provide fall color for travelers on Texas highways. But don't be fooled by their pretty disposition.

Long despised by ranchers, broom snakeweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*) ranks among the state's 106 most toxic plants. Cattle, sheep and goats can get sick and even die after grazing the perennial shrub. Cattle may also abort, or give birth to stillborn or weak calves, according to *Toxic Plants of Texas*. Loss of livestock attributed to snakeweed poisoning costs ranchers millions of dollars annually.

On the flip side, desert mule deer occasionally browse the plant. Many small birds and mammals eat its seeds and use the foliage as protective cover.

Drought tolerant, broom snakeweed prefers the sandy, chalky and clay soils

of dry ranges and deserts. Its tiny yellow flowers — produced in clusters called corymbs — bloom profusely from August through November. In the winter, snakeweed dies back, leaving brittle stems that make great kindling; hence, its other common names of “matchweed” and “matchbrush.” In bygone times, dry snakeweed tied to sticks also

served well as brooms.

Native American Ethnobotany lists a multitude of medicinal uses for snakeweed, including as a treatment for indigestion, bee stings, headaches, diarrhea, painful menstruations, colds, fevers and nosebleeds, not to mention snakebites, too. ★

—Sheryl Smith-Rodgers



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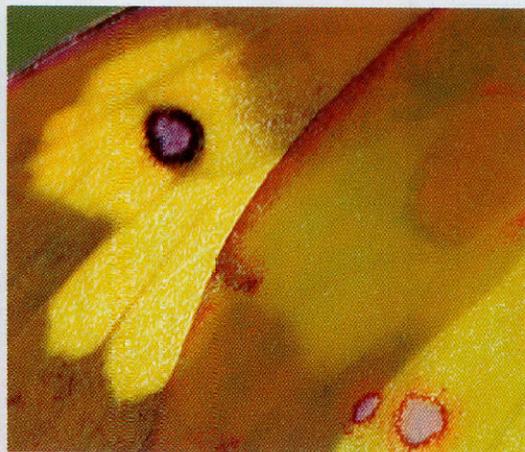
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Snakeweed, now a bane to ranchers, was used medicinally by Native Americans.

Dog on the Wing

The southern dogface butterfly appears to have tiny poodles on its wings.



The southern dogface flits quickly from flowers, but lingers at "puddle parties."

Next time you're outdoors, watch for a brilliant yellow-and-black butterfly flitting among fall flowers. Good luck with getting an up-close look, though. Southern dogfaces fly fast.

Photographs or specimens provide the

best views of *Zerene cesonia*, especially for understanding how the species got its name. On the insect's open forewings, two black dots mark the "eyes" of two yellow-headed poodles, profiled against black (the images resemble an ink splotch on a fold-

ed card). With wings closed, a dog's face may still be glimpsed when lit from behind. In the fall, their markings turn pink. Females are more subtle in color.

Southern dogfaces — which occur year-round throughout most of Texas — belong to the sulphurs, a group of yellow, orange and white butterflies. The California dogface — California's state insect — closely resembles the southern dogface, but is more orange in color. Adults prefer the nectar of coreopsis, bluet and verbena. Caterpillar food plants include indigo bush, Texas kidneywood, dalea, clovers and other legumes.

Sometimes young male sulphurs congregate at muddy or sandy puddles and sip water, a behavior called "mud puddling." It's thought that dissolved minerals and particularly salts from the soil provide essential nutrients, which males later pass to their mates during copulation.

Thanks to artist Steve Buchanan, the southern dogface now graces a postage stamp. In June 2007 the U.S. Postal Service released his beautiful "Pollination" images in a 20-stamp booklet that stresses the critical relationship between pollinators and plants. On the stamp, alongside bumble bees, a calliope hummingbird and a lesser long-nosed bat, a southern dogface hovers above a cluster of purple ironweed. ★

— Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

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IN THE HEART OF TEXAS BETWEEN SAN ANTONIO AND AUSTIN

RELAXING DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO SLOW DOWN

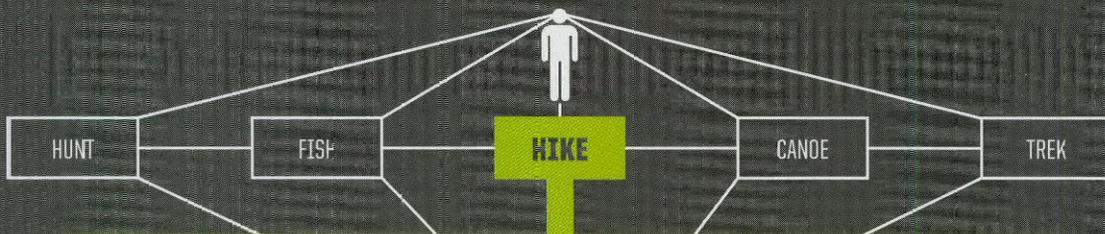
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I'll call for help on my cell phone. Uh oh. My cell phone is useless because I can't get a signal (and I don't know where I am even if I could get a signal).

406 MHz PERSONAL LOCATOR BEACON



MY WITS

Am I hallucinating from pain? No matter. Using damp leaves and a pocket knife, I can probably fashion some sort of shuttle craft to fly myself back to safety.

GPS

I will look at my GPS to tell me where I am. Great! Now I know where I am. If only I could telepathically communicate that information to someone who could save my life!

Like a ray of righteousness, my distress signal will blast through the tree canopy and reach the COSPAS-SARSAT satellite network within moments, triggering a search and rescue operation that will lead rescuers to my precise location.

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Speedy Wienies

Come to San Angelo for the dachshund races, stay for the scenery.



For 364 days a year, San Angelo State Park offers a peaceful camping experience. Dachshunds will invade on October 25 for Dog's Day at the Park.

On your mark — get set — go! And off they gallop, those speedy wienies down the grassy track. Some dash like the wind. Others stop. One goes sideways. At the finish line, owners wave and holler at their canines to hurry. Everyone cheers when a short-legged winner finally scrambles across the white chalk line and claims his reward — a doggie biscuit.

So go the wiener dog races at San Angelo State Park. Some contestants win, others lose. Casey, a black dachshund with three racing trophies to her name, has done both.

"At one of the races in 2005, she got so busy looking around that she forgot to run," chuckles owner Jeanne Jones of San Angelo. "Some people think you train dachshunds to race. But if there's a way, I haven't figured it out yet!"

This month, Casey will be among more than 50 dachshunds and other small-breed dogs that compete in the park's fourth annual wiener dog races, part of Dog's Day at the Park. The day-long festival will also feature costume contests, stupid pet tricks, and a "haunted" obstacle course, not to mention vendors and concessions. The fall event raises funds for Friends of San Angelo State Park.

Dogs on leash only, please, when exploring this 7,677-acre facility, which bounds C.C. Fisher Lake. Sixty miles of multi-use trails wind through the park's diverse habitat of grasslands, woodlands, pecan bottomlands and lake shoreline. The trail system features steep hills and rocky

creekbeds that especially challenge mountain bikers. (This month, the park will host the Chaparral Challenge Mountain Bike Race, Sunday, October 19.)

Weekend tours take visitors to see the park's ancient Permian animal tracks, Indian petroglyphs, bison and longhorn herds, and the gravesite of an early pioneer killed by Indians. Overnight options include heated mini-cabins as well as tent and trailer sites.

As for dogs, San Angelo State Park has some of those, too. Well, sort of. Two barren, rocky areas in the park support healthy numbers of ... prairie dogs.

Dog's Day at the Park runs 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday, October 25, at the park's Chaparral Pavilion. Enter through the South Shore gate. (Park entry fees waived for this event.) Proof of rabies vaccination required for all dogs. Some events require entry fees; winners will receive prizes. For more race information, call coordinator Gail Metcalfe at (325) 942-8096.

San Angelo State Park is located one mile north of San Angelo on FM 2288. From San Angelo, take U.S. 67 south to FM 2288 to the south shore entrance or U.S. 87 north to FM 2288 south to the north shore entrance. For more information, call (325) 949-4757 or visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/sanangelo>. ★

— Sheryl Smith-Recgers

PHOTO © LANCE VARNELL

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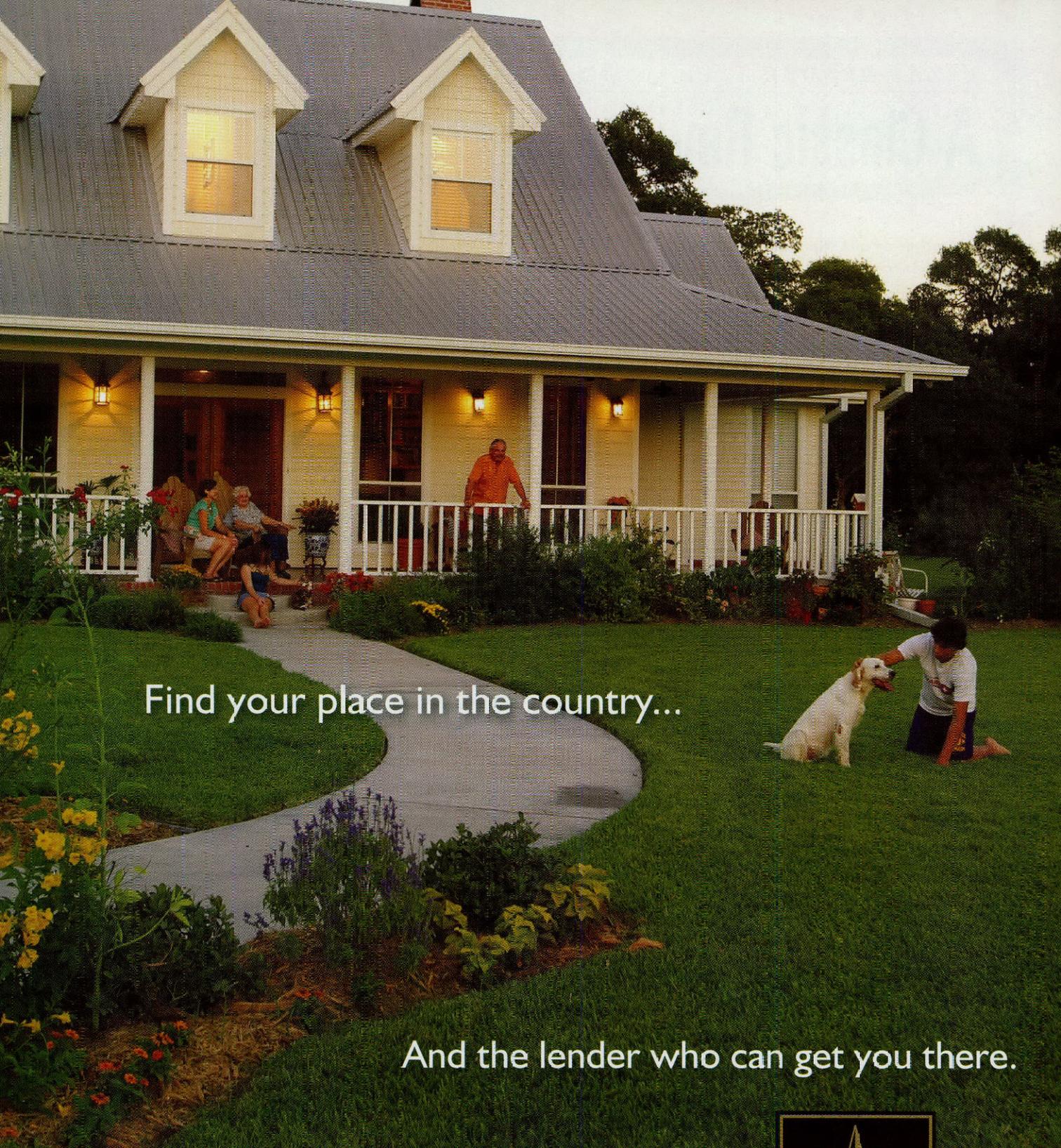
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A Classic Revisited

Bedichek book still inspires readers today with its mix of common sense and good humor.

"Whether or not this book is any good," Roy Bedichek wrote as he began the task of composing *Adventures With a Texas Naturalist*, "I am already compensated by having regained a sense of the flow of time." This would not be the only compensation for taking the time to write his personal observations of the state's natural world. Since its publication in 1947, *Adventures With a Texas Naturalist* has become one of Texas' literary treasures.

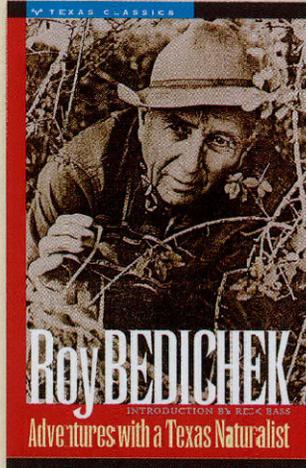
Bedichek was born in 1878 in Illinois but earned his Texas gravitas by growing up in Texas. In 1946, Bedichek was encouraged to take a year off by his friends J. Frank Dobie and Walter Prescott Webb in order to write. He moved to Friday Mountain Ranch, Webb's retreat in the southwestern Hill Country, where he penned *Adventures With a Texas Naturalist*. Bedichek captured the character of the state's natural world mid-century, ruminating on fences, fields, nature's rhythms, hunting, cedar cutters and roadrunners in a poet's voice but from a well-grounded perspective.

"A game warden on the Aransas Game Refuge near Austwell, Texas, killed a *pasano* [roadrunner] in my presence in order to

protect, he said, nesting quail," Bedichek recalled. "I insisted on an autopsy, and we discovered that the bird's crop was packed with the remains of grasshoppers, and with nothing else. There was just then a pest of these insects destroying grass and weeds, which normally produce food for quail. It was clear, therefore — in this instance, at least — that a friend of quail, not an enemy, had been shot down."

Bedichek's observations are as universal as they are personal, recorded over a brief period when the unfortunate decline in the health and well-being of Texas' natural world began to weigh on the conscience of all but the most recalcitrant. With it came a rising call for conservation that many Texans have since heard and heeded over time.

But, as Bedichek wrote: "Nature herself is deliberate. Ninety-nine percent of her performance is gradual. To take a single instance out of those hundreds ready at hand; what a large percentage of urbanized populations miss beginning the day under the spell of the silent, pervasive, leisurely preparations of the heavens to receive the sun!" ☆



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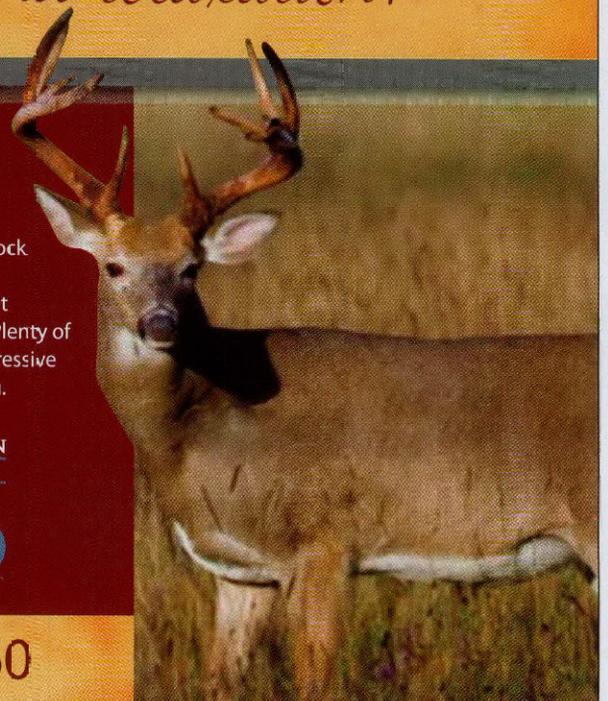


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Food Plot Primer

Learn about your soil and select plants carefully to attract deer and other wildlife.



For hunters and wildlife managers, food plots are all the rage. With an increased interest in wildlife management, private-land food plots are popping up everywhere. Popular with deer hunters, food plots provide a source of nutrition that deer can't get from feeders. Food plots aren't just for deer and deer hunters, though. When planted both in the spring and fall, food plots provide a year-round nutritional source for deer, turkeys and other wildlife.

Pick a Spot

"If you are hunting over a food plot, plant an area relatively smaller than forage plots and near bedding areas and travel corridors," says Rans Thomas, head wildlife biologist for Tecomate Wildlife Systems, a land management consulting company. "Plots planted just for forage should be three or more acres and located in the heart of your land tract."

When picking a location, find a spot that's relatively flat to curb erosion but one that isn't so flat that drainage is a problem. Besides topography, it helps to do a little scouting and find out where the animals you want to attract will likely be during the course of a normal day and plan your location accordingly.

Plant Smart

Plants are not created equal. In fact, plant varieties are developed and marketed according to growing season and planting zone. Since different plants grow best in different climates, it's best to research and determine which plant varieties work best in your part of Texas.

According to Thomas, planting food

plots in a compatible soil type is an important consideration. "For perennial plots I look for moist, rich bottomland soils surrounded by large trees to shade the plots during the hot, dry summer months," Thomas advises. He says to plant food plots in soil types conducive to productive agricultural crops. Therefore, he looks for sites lean on sandy soils preferring instead to plant in areas with loam and clay soils.

Tend the Soil

One of the most elemental practices to ensure a successful food plot is a soil test. Soil testing helps identify any nutritional deficiencies present and provides guidance on how to fertilize. Since dumping just any fertilizer blend on a crop is inefficient as well as potentially harmful, start with a soil test.

A basic soil test tells you the amount of the three key nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium) present in the soil as well as the soil's pH and gives recommendations on fertilizer blends and how to remediate any deficiencies. More advanced soil tests give you a breakdown of the macronutrients present in the soil and the soil's organic matter.

You can buy do-it-yourself soil test kits, but an easier and more accurate way to test is to contact your local Texas AgriLife Extension agent for instructions on how to collect samples and where to send them. In a few days, you'll get a copy of your test results with instructions on how to fertilize and correct the pH in your food plot.

Thomas advises the would-be food plot farmer to do plenty of research. "All of the information you need for

Cultivating a food plot specifically for wildlife will attract turkeys and other animals, as well as deer.

successful food plots is available either online or from local crop and forage specialists. Don't be fooled by a picture of a big buck on the front of the bag or a snazzy product name. The United States Department of Agriculture requires every bag of seed to have a contents list on the bag. So read the list to find out what's in the bag to see if it suits your needs." ★

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Lovin' Llano

This Hill Country gem is home to bounteous birds, butterflies, barbecue and llanite.

The sound of clinking marbles rattles in the cool morning air as we trek across a jumble of granite boulders, some skirted with rivulets of murky water. "Hear that? It's a cricket frog," I tell my husband, who's leading our short hike along Pecan Creek at the Llano County ranch where we're staying. Plop! Instantly I jerk my head around, but I'm too late. Only rings of ripples remain where probably another frog, startled by our intrusion, dove into the water. We linger, hoping to spot at least a bug-eyed head. No luck.

We follow what appears to be a trail. "Wait! Look at this!" I exclaim, squatting close to the ground where James has just stepped. I pull back some foliage to expose a black butterfly, teetering on a stem. Its folded wings reveal a row of bright orange spots against an iridescent blue background. "See?" I say, pointing to a yellow-orange sac attached to the same stem, "it just emerged from its chrysalis!" Wow, we've just met a brand new pipevine swallowtail.

Such memorable experiences make us love Llano in the Hill Country even more. We've visited a few times in the past, but never stayed overnight. This time, we will. Still, we already know what makes this town so special: a plethora of historic buildings, granite outcroppings along the spring-fed Llano River, great places to eat and browse, and wildlife adventures to boot.

Historically, little is known about a Tonkawa tribe of Sanas that once inhabited this region. Spanish explorers who later befriended the Indians called the river Rio de los Sanas. Through time, the name morphed into Llano, pronounced "lan-o" by the locals. (For the record, *llano* — Spanish for "plain" — is pronounced "ya-no.")

In 1856, Llano County residents chose a

site on both sides of the river as their county seat. In the 1890s, Llano boomed after iron deposits and other minerals were discovered in the area. In 1892, rail service from Austin arrived on the city's north side. On the south side, the county constructed a grand new courthouse to replace one that had burned the year before.

Iron ore mining waned before 1900, ending Llano's opulent era. Fires — probably set to collect insurance — later destroyed many buildings north of the river. Most of Llano's more than 7,000 residents left. After the boom, farming, ranching and the granite industry largely kept the town alive. Another blow came in 1935 when a flood swept Llano's bridge away. In its place stands the steel Roy Inks Bridge, a four-span architectural wonder built in 1936.

Day one

First, we want to bone up more on Llano, so we cruise across the bridge to the historic rail yard district. Here we visit the

Light plays on the pink granite outcroppings near Enchanted Rock.

new Llano Depot, Visitors Center and Railroad Museum, a replica of

the original depot that burned in 1961. Railroad exhibits, tourism brochures and friendly staff provide us with plenty of information.

Across the river, the old Llano County jail has always piqued our curiosity. Mike Reagor with the Llano Main Street Project meets us at the four-level structure, built in 1895 of pink granite and used as a jail until 1982. During Llano's boom days, ol' Red Top — so called for the red paint that once colored its roof — hosted a steady clientele of drunks and other lawbreakers. Most had to be physically coerced to head up the same iron staircase we're climbing. On the second floor, we stop in front of an iron-grated cell.

"This is why they call it the 'slammer,'" Reagor says, pulling a mechanism — patented in 1874 by the Pauley Jail Building Co. — that loudly bangs as it jams the heavy door shut. Two more levels up, Reagor guides us up the traditional 13 steps to the gallows, better known as the Drop Dead Room. "Until 1923, county jails had charge of their executions," Reagor explains. "We've tried, but we can't confirm any hangings here."

For a late lunch, we duck into Cooper's

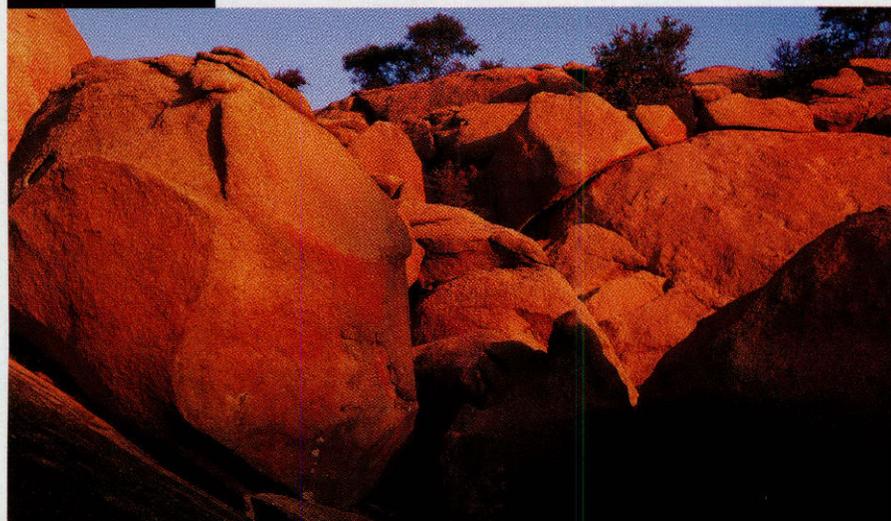
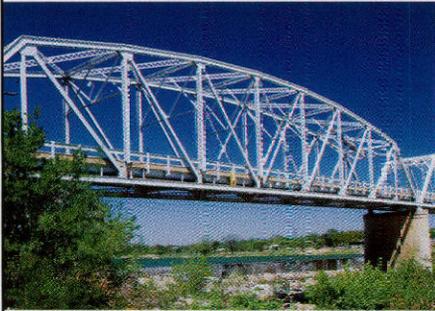


PHOTO © LANCE VARNELL



Clockwise from top left: the Roy Inks Bridge spans the Llano River; evening in historic downtown Llano; the 1927 LanTex Theater; bald eagles nesting near the river.

Old Time Pit Bar-B-Que, world renowned for their smoke-kissed delicacies served on butcher paper. At the outside pit, James points to his choices, then “pit guy” Paul Herrera slices some sausage, beef ribs and pork chops. Inside, we nab some potato salad in the service line, pay for our meal, then find seats at one of the long picnic tables.

Next, we head over to the 1907 Dabbs Railroad Hotel, one of the Victorian-style hotels built in the area to accommodate travelers. “It’s the last one still standing,” says owner Phyllis Alexander, who bought and restored the two-story Dabbs in 2006. Gangster Clyde Barrow reportedly favored the Dabbs as a hideaway in the 1930s.

James can’t pass up antiques, so we run into Llano Railyard Antiques, where we peruse vintage glassware, oak dining chairs, funky lamps, retro clothing and crocheted doilies. At Mudd’s Antiques, James spots a Kodak Brownie camera. I ponder old-time baking in a porcelain E-Z-Est oven with attached gas canisters.

We’re spending the rest of the afternoon with Gene and Bill Miller, who own Pecan Creek Ranch, a 1,900-acre spread northwest of Llano. First, we unload our stuff at their guest cottage, where we’re staying. Right away, we note the small dish of M&Ms on the coffee table, homemade sand tarts in the kitchen, and breakfast fixin’s in the fridge. Not to mention bedroom windows with tranquil views and a porch bench for morning coffee. We already feel at home.

In the Millers’ SUV, we bump down granite gravel roads that pass live oak mottes, cattle grazing in pastures, and several large ponds (stocked with catfish, bass

and bluegill). Along a slow-moving creek, we admire huge granite boulders that remind us of nearby Enchanted Rock.

“Our calling card is privacy and seclusion,” says Gene, who started her guest business, called Century Ranch Lodging, in 1992. “When people are here, they’re not jammed up against one another.”

From Pecan Creek, we head south on Texas 16, then west on County Road 113. Some 22 miles from Llano, we reach the gate to their other cattle operation: 1,240-acre Dutch Mountain Ranch, which adjoins Enchanted Rock State Natural Area. Like at Pecan Creek Ranch, the couple runs a guest lodge and cottage here, too.

“This all started with a league and a labor — about 4,700 acres — given to Matthew Moss, my great-great-grandfather, after he fought in the Battle of San Jacinto,” says Gene, the fifth generation in her family to own this land. Such longevity earned the ranch designation in the Texas Family Land Heritage Program, which honors farms and ranches kept in continuous ag production by the same family for a century or more.

Views from the lodge’s porch look across a small pond and beyond to Watch Mountain, a pink granite outcropping less than a mile away. “The time to be here is in the evening when those rocks just come alive,” Gene says. “Artists love it here.”

For more than an hour, the Millers drive us around the ranch. We spot a painted bunting winging from a tree, a roadrunner dashing across the road, and some Mexican buckeye trees in a valley. Bill also points out “the first ‘high fence’ in Llano

County,” built in the 1940s with barbed wire and cedar posts. From a vantage point called the High Spot, we gaze across treetops to nearby pink outcroppings — Dutch Mountain, Watch Mountain, Bullhead Mountain and Enchanted Rock. Talk about phenomenal scenery.

After farewells, we head back to Llano and straight to the Badu House, a former bank built of brick and native granite in 1891. Fortunately, a bank director by the name of N. J. “Professor” Badu bought the building in 1898 after the bank failed. For several generations, he and his family lived there. In later years, the Badu — a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark — housed a B&B and restaurant. In 2005, Ted and Sharon Lusher of Austin bought the Badu and turned it into one of our favorite places to dine.

What’s more, the Badu’s saloon boasts something special: one of the world’s largest assemblies of polished llanite covers the bar’s lengthy counter. The black granite-like stone — flecked with bluish quartz crystals — is found only in Llano County.

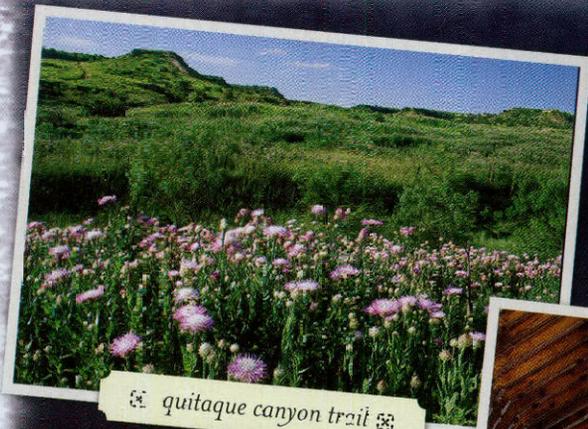
This evening, James orders the half-pound cheeseburger, grilled and served open face with crispy fries. I select Sharon’s spinach salad, a fresh medley of baby spinach, tomatoes, cucumbers and red onions, all tossed with feta, candied pecans and strawberry balsamic vinaigrette. No leftovers tonight!

Back at the Pecan Creek Cottage, we nibble sand tarts on the porch and watch purple martins flit by. Later, while James readies for bed, I grab a flashlight and sneak back outside for some spider hunting. Holding the flashlight at eye level, I pan the ground in search of “sparkling diamonds.” Ah, there’s a pair! Keeping the diamonds in sight, I walk toward them, crouch down, and — *voilà!* — find a dime-sized wolf spider, lurking in the grass. Subsequent searches turn up more wolf spiders, nocturnal hunters by nature.

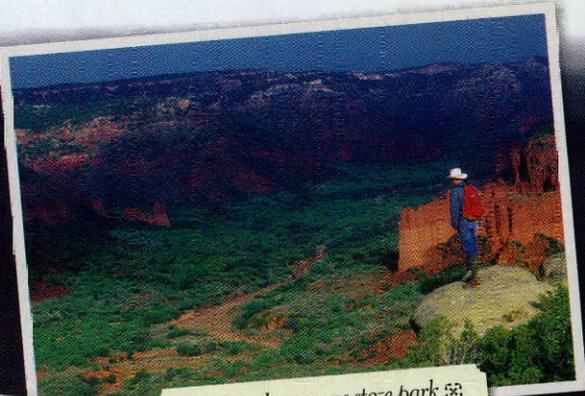
Day two

The happy call of phoebes wakes us the next morning. From the cottage windows, we spot painted buntings, cardinals, eastern fox squirrels and wild turkeys. As we head out for our short hike, we admire wine cups, dayflowers, Indian paintbrushes and other wildflowers still in bloom. Our trek along Pecan Creek will turn up the pipevine swallowtail.

(Continued on page 63)

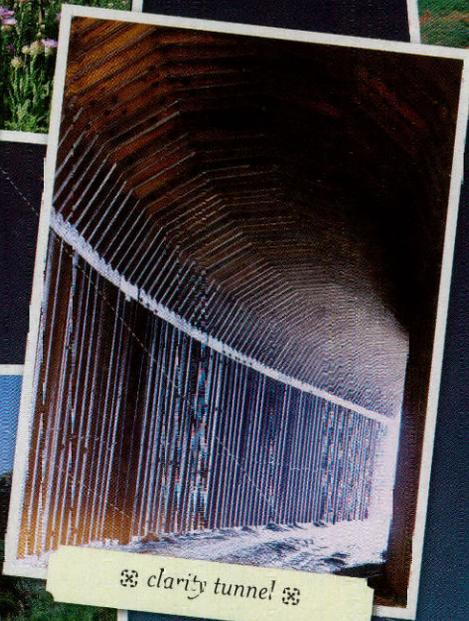


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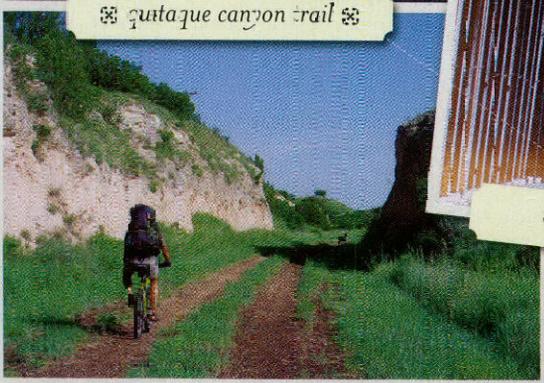


☞ *caprock canyons state park* ☞

CAPROCK
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☞ *clarity tunnel* ☞

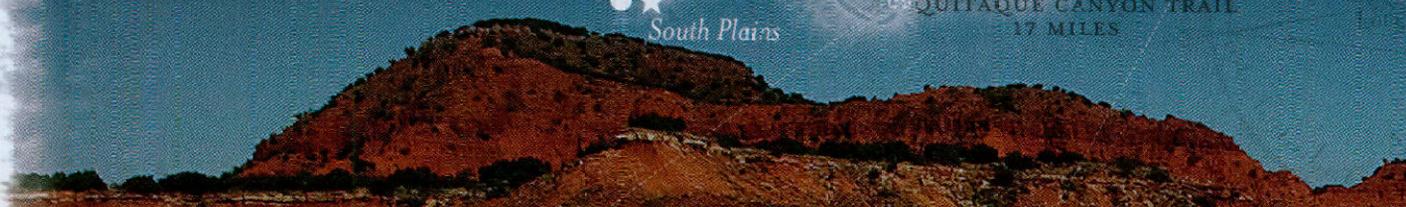


☞ *quitaque canyon trail* ☞

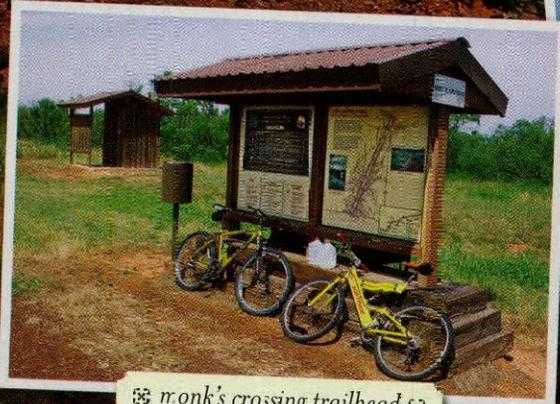
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LOS LINGOS TRAIL
1.5 MILES
Monk's Crossing

South
Plains
Terminal
South Plains

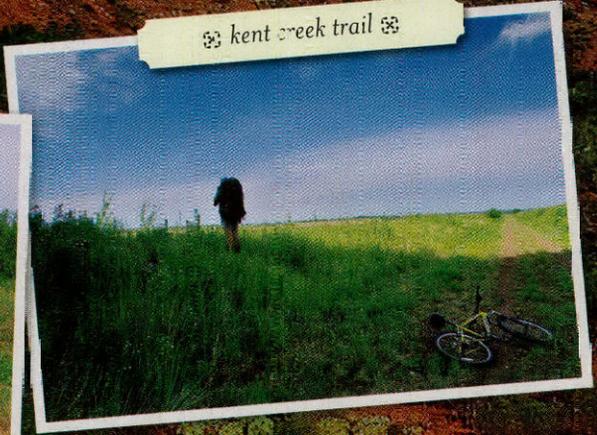
CLARITY
TUNNEL
QUITAQUE CANYON TRAIL
17 MILES



☞ *kent creek trail* ☞



☞ *monk's crossing trailhead* ☞



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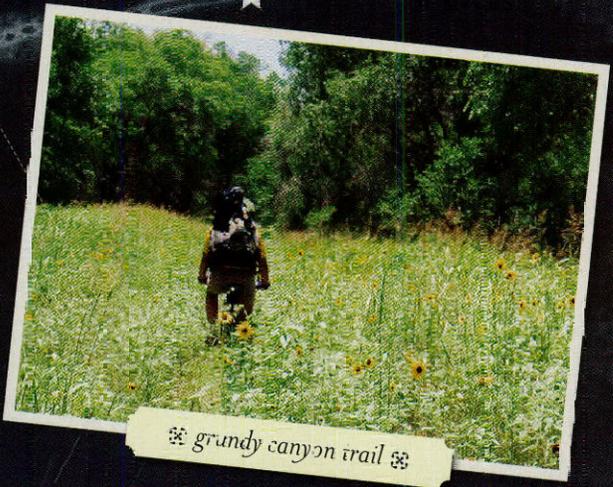


Estelline Terminal
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Parnell Station
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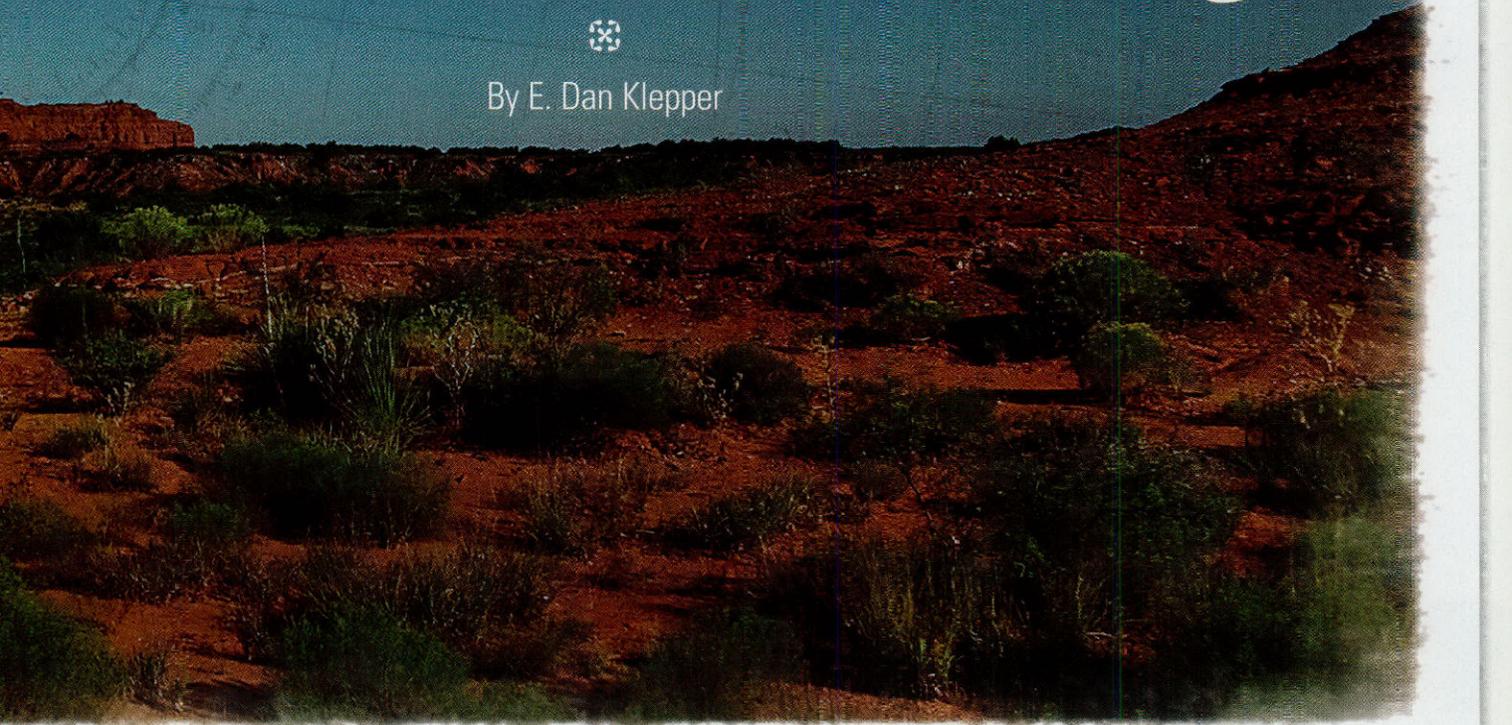
☼ grandy canyon trail ☼

DOODLEBUG Way

The Caprock Canyons Trailway follows an old rail line as it transports you to another time.



By E. Dan Klepper





Along the abandoned Fort Worth and Denver South Plains Railway Line, beyond the town of Estelline and a few miles shy of Parnell Station, the remnant trackway enters a stand of windrow trees.

The overhanging tree branches form a tunnel of sorts, shading the hot Panhandle landscape with a melancholy twilight. The gloaming lulls the senses and fodder the imagination, making it easy to roll back the years when the railway line operated the local Doodlebug Passenger Service. The lazy click-clack of the Doodlebugs, small train cars that ran between Estelline and big city Lubbock during the 1930s, echoes here beneath the droopy boughs. Cottonseeds twinkle in the

breeze. Puffs of whirligigs glitter against the slant sunlight. Bees buzz and big dumb dogs bark nonsense at the ginney nearby. A local farmboy, barefoot and carefree, lolls next to the trackway then flags a Doodlebug down. He hops on board, rides the "Doodle" 10 miles or so then hops off, fishes in the creek, lolls a bit more, flags again, hops on, then rides back home.

Inspiration for this heady kind of nostalgia still permeates the countryside along the

Fort Worth and Denver South Plains Railway Line, although the line's wooden ties, rails, steam engines and Doodlebugs are long gone. But the railroad berm it was built upon still survives, and its ghost tracks have since been resurrected as a 54-mile multi-use hiking, biking and equestrian trail called the Caprock Canyons Trailway. The trailway traverses the Panhandle's red dirt cotton fields across 55 trestle bridges, through one tunnel and into the canyons, then climbs up and over the caprock escarpment to the plains above on a 7 percent grade.

The Fort Worth and Denver South Plains Railway Line was once the purview of the larger Burlington Northern Railroad, and its circuit through the Panhandle's southern





☞ *quitaque canyon trail* ☞

plains enabled local producers to send their products all the way to Colorado and beyond. The line was completed in 1928 and served the Texas High Plains for more than 60 years. Its construction required more than 20,000 workers, mule teams, dynamite, and a track-laying machine that could lay a mile of track (including 2,880 ties and 320 sections of rail) in 2 hours and 30 minutes. Steam was the locomotion of choice, so nine 50,000-gallon steel water tanks were installed along the route. Burlington closed the line in 1989 and three years later it was purchased, modified and spruced up by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Once the makeover was completed, the railway was turned over to the state park system with Caprock Canyons State Park in charge and today it accommodates trekkers on foot, mountain bike and horseback.

The trailway is divided into six individual trails varying in lengths from 5 to 17 miles each. Its eight trailheads can be accessed via farm-to-market roads and state highways, allowing trekkers to complete the trailway piecemeal or traverse it all in one trip by caching water and supplies at strategic trailhead locations.

On either end of the 64-mile trailway, trekkers will find the tiny towns of EstelLine and South Plains. Between them, the trailway passes through the rural towns of Turkey and Quitaque (pronounced kit-a-kway). The section from EstelLine to Turkey, totaling 32 miles, is only minimally maintained, thus providing trekkers with a more challenging experience. Bushwhackers who don't mind sunflowers that often tower above the head will enjoy it.

Funding for additional maintenance on this section is in the works, however, says Walt Dabney State Parks Division Director. "Currently, we are trying to use trail grant funding and match it with some park maintenance funding," he says.

The remaining section from Turkey to South Plains, another 32 miles, sees more visitations and a higher degree of maintenance; therefore it may hold greater appeal to day trekkers. The fact that the entire trail system is built on the old railroad berm makes the trailway's 64 miles flat and wide, its grades moderate, and most of its segments easy to negotiate. Primitive camping is allowed along the trail

Above: The Quitaque Canyon Trail is the final east-to-west segment of the trailway and has the most rugged scenery. Here, the trail travels toward a rainbow after a brief summer shower. Opposite page, from left: basketflowers; horned lizard; riding the trail or horseback; an iron piece left over from the original rails.

The railway traverses the Panhandle's red dirt cotton fields across 55 trestle bridges, through one tunnel and into the canyons, then climbs up and over the caprock escarpment to the plains above on a 7 percent grade.



THIS PAGE © LAURENCE PARENT; OPPOSITE FROM LEFT © WYMAN MEINZER, E. DAN KLEPPER, LARRY DITTO, RUSSELL A. GRAVES

❁ los l'rgos creek bridge ❁



although permanent outhouses are located near most of the trailheads. Trekkers must carry all of their water.

Estelline Terminal is the easternmost trailhead for the trailway and also the start of the 10-mile Plains Junction Trail. The trail is a relatively straightforward route through cotton and peanut country, and the remnants of this once-lucrative agricultural economy are in evidence. Abandoned farmhouses sit along the horizon beneath mottles of shade trees, testaments to more productive times. Many of the farms continue to produce crops, giving trekkers a “behind-the-scenes” view of farming operations. Most farmers are friendly, but some occasionally use the trailway as a farm truck route into and out of their fields.

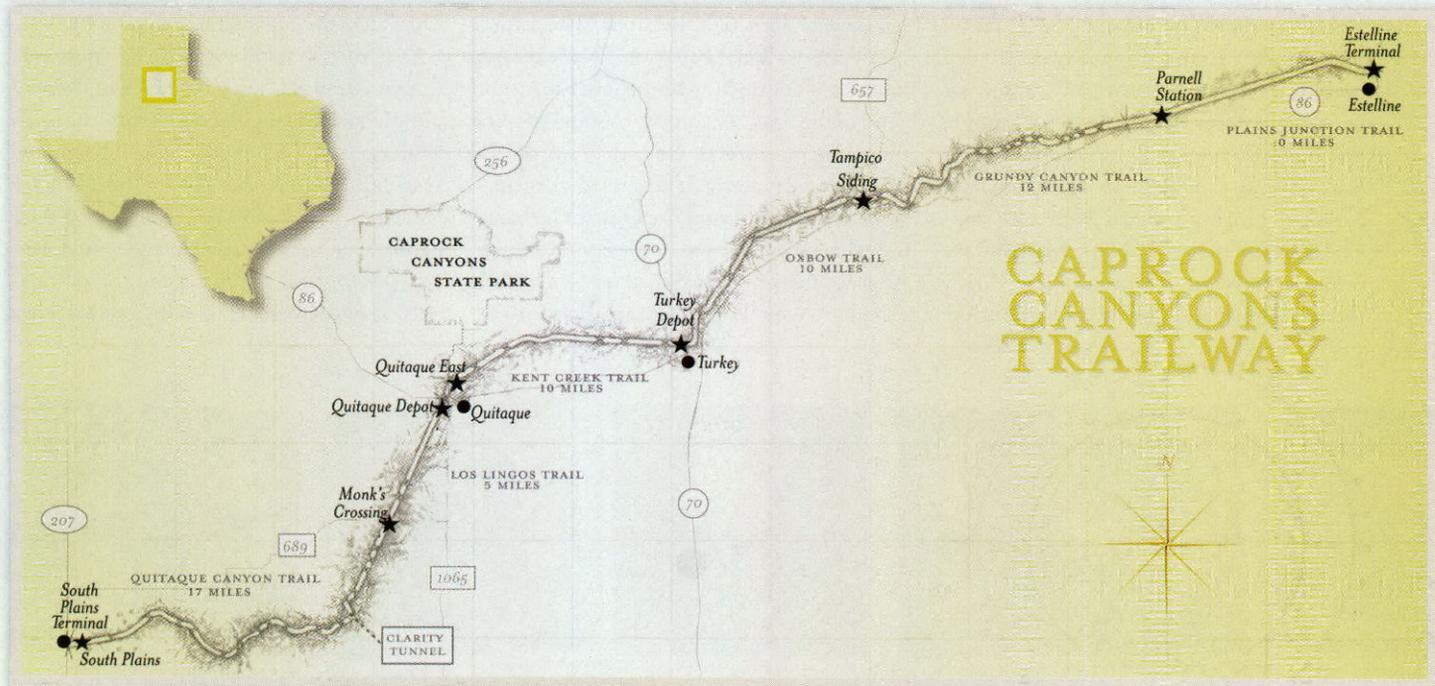
The Plains Junction Trail ends at Parnell Station trailhead, where the trailway continues on the 12-mile Grundy Canyon Trail. The small bridges along the route provide a bird’s eye view of the area’s 250 million-year-old Permian geology. The region served as the edge of an ancient inland sea once occupied by *Dimetrodon* and *Cotylorhynchus*, two dinosaur types that would have made lousy trekking partners. The view of the red sandstone layering is courtesy of thousands of years of erosion, as water etched gullies into the land-

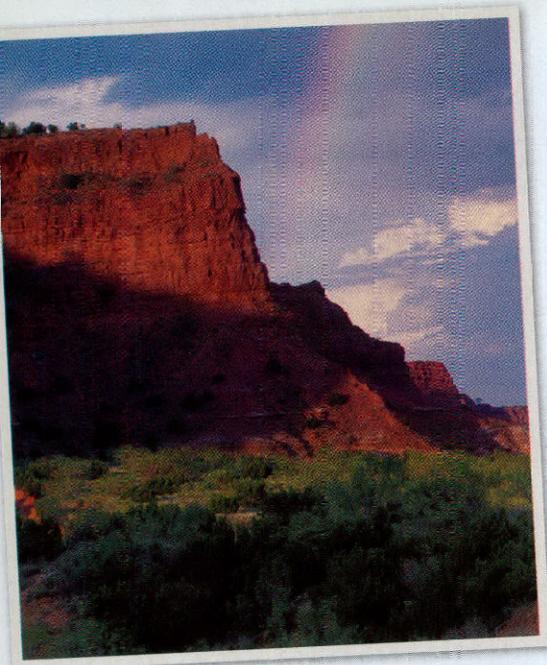
scape on its way towards the Red River. The color, a rich brick red, is a bright complement to the viridian plant life that takes root beyond the farmer’s plow.

Grass burs, in preponderance on sections of this trail, are a real nuisance with their clusters of painful star-shaped seeds. The attractive grass is a profligate opportunist, and at one time, the plant overwhelmed plowed fields. To combat the infestation, farmers constructed brick kilns and loaded them with bales of the offending grass then set everything afire. The kilns, called “bur burners,” are built like fat urns and rise almost two-stories high. While not visible along the trailway, trekkers may look for the bur burners on the outskirts of a few of the local towns.

Grundy Canyon Trail ends at Tampico Siding trailhead, where the Oxbow Trail begins. Oxbow Trail is a 10-mile pastoral stroll through cotton and peanut fields with an occasional crossing of a wooden gully bridge to disrupt the seemingly arrow-straight route. Small islands of wild vegetation float occasionally by in an endless red ocean of plowed fields, suggesting remnant bits of flotsam from the once vast prairie. A glance from horizon to horizon makes it easy to imagine the countryside covered in bison, as it was 150 years ago. Birds,

Opposite page: Sturdy trestles capable of bearing the weight of a train now provide more than adequate support for the trailway’s current modes of transportation. This page, from left: biking the trail; Texas sleepy-daisy; eastern collared lizard; some farms along the trail are still producing crops.





Above: The dramatic red bluffs of the Caprock Escarpment provide spectacular views. Below: pickly pear with tunas (fruit); Turkey residents take time to chat; scissor-tailed flycatcher; aerial view of the trail; sweet potato sign in Turkey. Opposite: great horned owl.

bees, lizards and toads populate the trail-side, but so do feral hogs, the scourge of both landowners and environmentalists. Farmers have drastically reduced their peanut crop simply because the feral hogs invade the fields and consume all the peanuts before harvest time.

The real charm of Oxbow Trail is that it leads trekkers to the tiny town of Turkey. Established in the early 1890s, Turkey was first called Turkey Roost due to the American turkeys that can be found roosting along nearby Turkey Creek. It was shortened later to plain ol' Turkey and had its first newspaper called the Turkey Gobbler by 1919. Like most prairie farming communities, Turkey suffered its ups and downs throughout the

first half of the 20th century, growing and shrinking accordingly until it settled into a comfortable rural community with a few good mom-and-pop restaurants, a very pleasant hotel, a volunteer fire department, a school, five churches and a few hundred residents. Trekkers tackling the entire 64-mile trailway over the course of several days have the opportunity to skip a night of primitive camping and book a room (and a hot shower) at the Hotel Turkey.

The 10-mile Kent Creek Trail takes up the trailway where the Oxbow Trail ends, leaving Turkey at the Turkey Depot trailhead before crossing historic ranching country. Cattleman Charles Goodnight, with the financial backing of British businessman John Adair, established the JA Ranch in 1877, a 1,325,000-acre cattle spread that once dominated the horizon view along Kent Creek Trail. The ranch, home to more than 100,000 head of cattle, succumbed to division in later years, but the stretch of horizon, unbroken by anything modern, remains.

Segments of Kent Creek Trail offer havens for both trekkers and wildlife in the form of shady rows of trees, called shelterbelts, which were planted years ago by farmers to reduce wind-driven erosion. Inadvertently, farmers provided ideal conditions for woodland-loving birds that typically prefer protected edges along an open field or prairie. Birders should keep an eye out for blue grosbeak, bobwhite quail and the beautiful scissor-tailed flycatcher.

Kent Creek Trail ends in the small town of Quitaque. New Mexican trader José Piedad Tafoya established a trading post here in 1865, trading goods and ammo to the Comanche for stolen livestock. The settlement was called Quitaque by cattleman Charles Goodnight, who believed it meant "end of the trail." According to some sources the actual meaning of the Indian word is "a pile of horse manure," and a third story suggests it was named after the Quitaca Indians, a designation that was understood by the Anglo settlers to mean "whatever one steals."

Kent Creek Trail becomes Los Lingos

Trail as it leaves Quitaque at the Quitaque Depot and the Quitaque East trailheads before traveling 5 miles to Monk's Crossing. The trail offers trekkers a chance to cross the longest railroad bridge on the Caprock Canyons Trailway, a concrete trestle that spans the width of Los Lingos Creek. The bridge, built with the help of a pile driver, is a favorite nesting spot for cliff swallows. During the spring and summer months hundreds of the birds can be seen diving in and out from the bridge's underbelly.

The Comanche passed through the region frequently in the 1800s along with New Mexican traders, called Comancheros, whose primary trade customers were the Comanche. Comancheros provided guns, whiskey, and stolen cattle and the Comanche provided captives for the slave trade. Hundreds of victims were forced to cross El Valle de Las Lágrimas, or the Valley of Tears, a wide, shallow valley that can be seen just north of the trail.

Los Lingos Trail ends at the Monks Crossing trailhead. Here, the Quitaque Canyon Trail begins, providing the final east-to-west link in the Caprock Canyons Trailway. Its 17 miles of easy trekking follows a slowly rising 7 percent grade and leads trekkers from the Red River Valley to the top of the Caprock Escarpment. The hike is a scenic tour through the Permian Age, and, thanks to the railroad's need for a steady grade to accommodate freight train physics, trekkers can examine the geology of layering in the many crosscuts made by the railroad building crews. The trail ends atop the caprock, literally a cap of rock that covers the red sandstones and siltstones of the Quartermaster formation.

One of the highlights of the Quitaque Canyon Trail is Clarity Tunnel, a fine example of railroad engineering from the early 20th century. Once railroad building crews reached the rock that forms the Caprock Escarpment they had a real challenge on their hands. The rock is unstable and soft in certain places, thus requiring reinforced tunnels. Open crosscuts wouldn't always work



"The flight started early, while the sun was still lingering in the sky, and the bats were fully visible. We were able to watch a pair of prairie falcons hunting the bats. Then, after the sun went down and the falcons retired, a great-horned owl began hunting bats!"

— Deanna Oberheu, park superintendent for Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway



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One of the highlights of the Quitaque Canyon Trail is Clarity Tunnel, a fine example of railroad engineering from the early 20th century.



THIS PAGE BY EARL NOTTINGHAM/TPWD; OPPOSITE PHOTOS FROM LEFT © RUSSELL A. GRAVES, WYMAN MEINZER; RUSSELL A. GRAVES, WYMAN MEINZER, OPPOSITE TOP © WYMAN MEINZER



☞ *quitaque canyon trail* ☞

Opposite page: inner view of Clarity Tunnel. Hikers and equestrians are encouraged to walk slowly through the tunnel because of the layers of bat guano that cover the surface of the tunnel and kick up easily as a fine dust. Right: Bats emerge from Clarity Tunnel. Below, from left: the trail crosses historic cattle country; walking bikes across a trestle bridge; common nighthawk; crab apples; one of 55 trestle bridges along the trailway.



here, as the walls of crosscuts tended to erode and cave too easily. Two tunnels were constructed in the more unstable sections — the Clarity Tunnel, originally 790 feet long, and a second, shorter tunnel called Gowdy Tunnel. In 1968 the Gowdy Tunnel collapsed due to a train derailment. Engineers were required to “daylight” it, meaning they blew it open with dynamite, and it was never replaced. The Clarity also collapsed five years later after a derailment, but, rather than daylight it, engineers simply moved enormous amounts of dirt in order to free the rail cars. The incident shortened the tunnel by 208 feet, leaving it at its present 582 feet.

Void of train traffic today, the tunnel interior makes a perfect roost for Mexican free-tailed bats. Once trekkers pass through the tunnel cautiously and quietly in order to avoid disturbing the bat colony, they may want to set up camp around the benches and outhouse that are used for bat flight interpretation programs at the western entrance.

“A few weeks ago I was at the tunnel to witness the bat flight, and it was the most spectacular flight I have ever seen,” says Deanna Oberheu, park superintendent for Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway. “The flight started early, while the sun was still lingering in the sky, and the bats were fully visible. We were able to watch a pair of prairie falcons hunting the bats. Then, after the sun went down and the falcons retired, a great-horned owl began hunting bats!” Oberheu and staff

conduct bat tours on Friday and Saturday nights from June through August, by reservation only. Visitors are transported to and from the tunnel via the trailway.

Beyond Clarity Tunnel, small wetlands populate the landscape below the trail berm and along the final leg of the Quitaque Canyon Trail. During wildflower season the big, beautiful Texas basketflower often lines the trailway. Trekkers pass through more crosscuts of the distinct caprock just before the trail delivers them on top, where a broad plain stutters endlessly with tidy plowed fields of cotton and peanut crops. The tiny town of South Plains wavers in the heat, the sun glancing off its shiny cotton gin and its black water tower squatting like a tin can of oil in the distance. The Panhandle Plains, remarkably unchanged for almost a century, unravels in a straight line all the way to the horizon. This vision is a bit of the magic that awaits trekkers along the Caprock Canyons Trailway, a route that tracks the landscapes and memories of the Panhandle past. As the trailway rises out of the canyonlands and crosses the unflinching flatness topside, the sentiments of a handwritten entry in a 1954 Turkey High School yearbook come to mind, summing up the wistful romance inherent in all meager, pancake prairie towns and the lofty aspirations of their big Panhandle dreams:

“When you live on a Hill,
Send me a Kiss,
Whipocrwill.”★

DETAILS

- The trailway is administered by Caprock Canyons State Park. Information and permits can be obtained at the state park’s Visitor Center and Headquarters, located on FM 1065, 3.5 miles north of the State Highway 86 intersection in Quitaque; (806-455-1492; www.tpwd.state.tx.us/caprockcanyons). Trekkers are required to check in at the state park headquarters before using the trailway.
- Plains Junction Trail is approximately 45 miles east of Quitaque, off Highway 287 just north of Estelline and the intersection of Highway 86 at the Estelline Terminal trailhead. It can also be accessed from the Parnell Station trailhead just off State Highway 36.
- Grundy Canyon Trail can be accessed either from Parnell Station or the Tampico Siding trailhead on FM 657.
- Oxbow Trail can be accessed either from Tampico Siding or the Turkey Depot trailhead in the town of Turkey.
- Kent Creek Trail can be accessed either from Turkey Depot in the town of Turkey or Quitaque Depot or Quitaque East trailheads in Quitaque.
- Los Lingos Trail can be accessed either from Quitaque Depot or Quitaque East in Quitaque or Monk’s Crossing trailhead off FM 689.
- Quitaque Canyon Trail can be accessed either from Monk’s Crossing or from South Plains Terminal trailhead on Highway 207.
- Reservations for Hotel Turkey Bed and Breakfast (806-423-1151).
- Shuttle service for vehicles can be arranged for a fee through the Caprock Home Center in Quitaque (806-455-1193, www.uitaque.org).





WETLANDS BRIMMING WITH WILDLIFE SERVE AS THE CENTERPIECE OF A NEW SOUTH TEXAS PARK.

RESACA REBIRTH

BY E. DAN KLEPPER



A PECULIAR SCENT OF SOOT AND FERMENTATION permeates the damp Tamaulipan thorn scrub along the Rio Grande Valley floodplain. The wet scrub, a tangle of mesquite and palmetto that gives way to ball-mossed ebony before tumbling into marsh, emits an odd, unsettling perfume. The scent seems to override all other senses with its distinct notes of smolder and decay. Once the body enters a moisture-laden thorn scrub the nose begins to work overtime in compensation for diminishing eyesight.

The thorn scrub, a snarl of hundreds of botanical species, weaves a thick, dark mat that leaves little room for daylight. Sun rays, blazing unimpeded across the Rio flatlands, are reluctant to penetrate the scrub. Once the beams collide with the scrub's green wall, their radiance is all but snuffed out. Only dim fragments of light remain, lingering like curling whiffs of smoke.

Resacas, with their marshy habitats composting in remnant floodwaters, are important components of the Rio Grande's Tamaulipan thorn scrub and are invariably the source of both its dampness and decay. These ancient river channels provide conduits for floodplains to negotiate periodic

PHOTO © E. DAN KLEPPER; BUTTERFLY © LARRY DITTO

and natural inundations. The resulting resacas form arterial, snake-like patterns across the landscape. Before the advent of dams along the Rio Grande, resacas performed nature's own flood control and assisted wildlife that depended on their peculiar environs to survive and thrive.

Nature, in fact, loves a resaca. It is the womb from which all manner of bugs and beasts are born. Its water harbors shore, song and sea birds; the nimble branchwork above it gives rise to nests, eggs and wings; and its mud coddles and then recycles frogs, turtles and insects. Quietly watching a resaca in scrub shadow grants witness to a semitropical world in full swing — green jays chatter and feed, dragonflies strafe the water's edge, bobcats drink, then scatter.

But once daylight lags, darkness comes quickly to a resaca's thorn scrub, and night is its inhabitants' milieu. Great horned owls haunt the canopy, ocelots stalk prey, Mexican treefrogs squeak like bed springs, indigo snakes thread the resaca cattails, and Rio Grande lesser sirens (a type of salamander) surface the mud with a *click-click-click* of odd, amphibian song. Fireflies ignite and beacon a crazy course through an impenetrable morass so remarkably dense that humans are no more hamstrung by it in darkness than they are by the light of day.

Perhaps therein reside the metaphysics behind the human assault on the Rio Grande Valley's Tamaulipan thorn scrub and its attendant resaca wetlands. For the past 100 years, these native Texas habitats, with a unique expanse of vegetation once covering vast swaths of the state's deep



ered one of the most threatened plant communities in the United States.

Efforts have been made in the last several decades to kickstart Tamaulipan preservation and restoration before the remaining fraction vanishes altogether. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has been working alongside other organizations, including the World



WHAT SURVIVES CONSISTS OF A PATCHWORK OF FRAGILE AND COMPROMISED HABITATS, HOME TO DOZENS OF SPECIES OF ENDANGERED PLANTS AND WILDLIFE.

south, have been systematically cleared, plowed, dammed and drained to accommodate agriculture, flood control and unimpeded urban sprawl. Today, less than 5 percent remains. What survives consists of a patchwork of fragile and compromised habitat, home to dozens of species of endangered plants and wildlife including ocelots and a bit of Texas ebony-anacua woodland that is consid-

Birding Center, to establish parks and preserves that protect this endangered ecosystem.

In fact, TPWD's latest and grandest effort in this push for preservation can be found within a few miles of Brownsville. Called Resaca de la Palma State Park for the sabal palms that dot the drier savannahs above its resaca, these 1,700 acres of rich, semitropical diversity represent the largest contigu-

ous tract of native resaca and thorn scrub habitat in the World Birding Center's lower Rio Grande Valley preserve.

Today visitors will find a small network of trails constructed across the park's scrubland that weaves quietly through the mesquite-palmetto savannahs, ebony-anacua woods, and resaca wetlands. All trails lead to comfortable wildlife-viewing benches or observation decks that hover



The unique ecosystem of Resaca de la Palma nurtures a variety of wildlife including (clockwise from lower left) summer tanagers, ocelots, Mexican tree frogs and blue metalmarks. Below right: This observation deck offers informative signage for species identification.



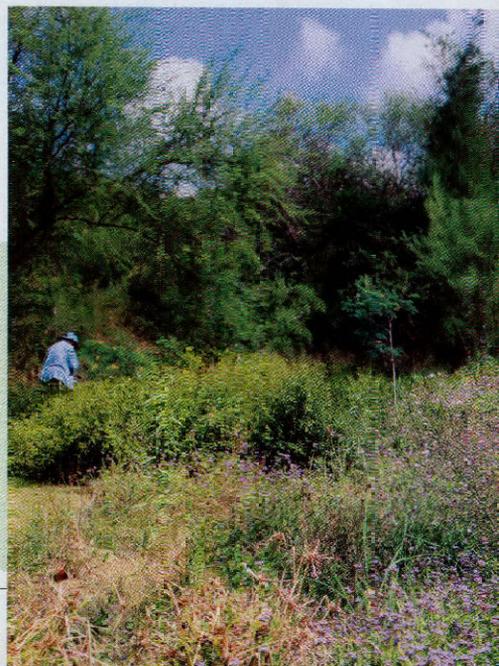
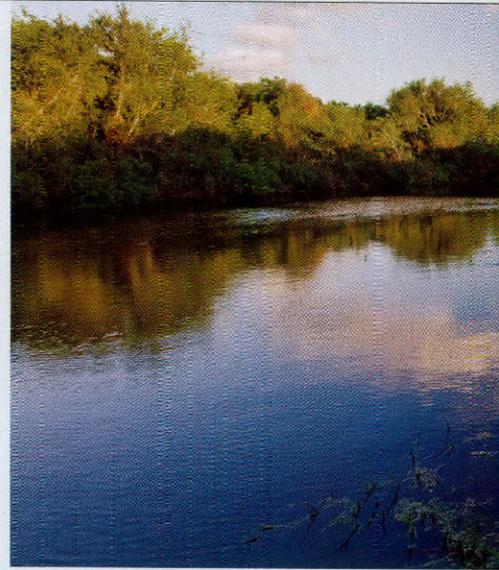
indiscreetly over the resaca banks. A wooden boardwalk levitates visitors above the resaca itself, allowing an opportunity for a more intimate examination of the resaca's dark and pungent waters.

The park's bird list numbers more than 250 species including the aforementioned Valley favorite — the green jay — as well as summer tanagers, great kiskadees, anhingas, white-tailed kites, cerulean warblers, peregrine falcons and buff-bellied hummingbirds. The birds and other wildlife are free to roam the park, unimpeded by the dangers of traffic because vehicles are not allowed beyond the visitor center. Instead, a 3-mile, single-lane tram road circumnavigates the park, and visitors are encouraged to bike, walk or ride the unobtrusive tram to view the park. Hikers can take the tram to one of the trailheads and, after their hike, catch the tram again for a ride back to the visitor center parking area. The outdoor recreational activities available at Resaca de la Palma include picnicking, wildlife viewing, and butterfly watching and all are consistent with its true mission: to preserve, restore and interpret this unique and disappearing habitat.

While it took foresight and vision to secure this threatened bit of the state's original natural world, it is the long-term plan for the restoration of the park's main attraction — its degraded resaca — that makes this project a truly remarkable and challenging environmental endeavor. The park's resaca, like most, once functioned under a prehistoric yet fragile system, one inclined to do so in perpetuity if uninterrupted. Restoring this system to its natural state has taken both compromise and ingenuity. TPWD's desire has been to mimic the resaca's natural cycles and revive it for future generations. But in order to do so they had to replicate its past.

Resaca de la Palma State Park is located along a primal delta, terra firma recovered from the nearby ocean by the handiwork of the Rio Grande. The river literally forged the land over centuries through flooding and silt deposition. The river would flood its banks each season in accordance with the snow melt far upriver and the gulf's tropical storms downstream. As the water receded it would leave behind layers of soil along with scoured arroyos or resacas that retained water for longer periods, thus transforming the habitat into wetlands as the moisture lingered, then slowly evaporated.

OCELOT & DECK © LARRY DITTO; TREE FROG & Tanager © ROLF NUSSBAUMER; BUTTERFLY © E. DAN KLEPPER



TPWD'S DESIRE HAS BEEN TO MIMIC THE RESACA'S NATURAL CYCLES AND REVIVE IT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS. BUT IN ORDER TO DO SO, THEY HAD TO REPLICATE ITS PAST.

However, a culmination of human flood control measures over the last century succeeded in altering the delta's pattern of inundation, deposition and evaporation, thus ending the ancient cycle. The resacas were then divided and dammed and utilized for storing irrigation water. Irrigation districts and farmers used the natural canal structure to moderate the flow of water to townships and crops in a display of agrarian adroitness. But as urban development encroached and water delivery networks went underground, the resacas were no longer needed. Once abandoned, they dried up permanently, and crucial south Texas wetlands were lost.

Today, TPWD habitat restoration specialists are modifying the pre-existing water delivery system already in place along the resaca to recreate natural conditions. Through a series of irrigation pipelines, levees, open canals and water-control structures, TPWD will ultimately succeed in restoring four separate sections of the resaca, controlling and staggering the water depth of each section to achieve the broadest variation of resaca habitats in order to draw the greatest number of wetland birds.

This system will also allow park staff to maintain these varied water levels all year long. Unlike much of the region's isolated, transitory wetlands, the park's resaca was once part of an open, persistent system that meandered across 30 miles of delta country. The evidence can still be seen in aerial photographs.

The presence of water year-round means habitat is made available to migrating as well as breeding and wintering birds such as waterfowl, cranes and hummingbirds. It also provides a safe haven for aquatic and semiaquatic organisms including the Rio Grande lesser siren and the black-spotted newt, both considered threatened species in Texas. The plants that thrive alongside the resaca will also benefit, including the regionally rare Bailey's ball moss and the largest concentration of Runyon's water-willow known. In essence, Resaca de la Palma provides a microcosm of the vast wetland diversity that once dominated the southern Rio Grande delta.

This is good news for Texans as well as for the World Birding Center, a partnership endeavor "dedicated to increasing



the appreciation, understanding, and conservation of birds and other wildlife and their habitat.” The center’s lower Rio Grande Valley partners include Resaca de la Palma, Bentsen–Rio Grande Valley State Park (the center’s headquarters), Estero Llano Grande State Park, nine tracts of national wildlife refuge property and six urban sites. Together their efforts represent approximately 9,735 acres of protected lower Rio Grande delta habitat.

It is a laudable start to an overwhelming conservation task. However, the state’s lower delta environment encompasses a far greater tract of unprotected habitat, land that extends 150 miles from Falcon Dam to the Gulf of Mexico. Agriculture and urban development have increasingly dominated the region over the last

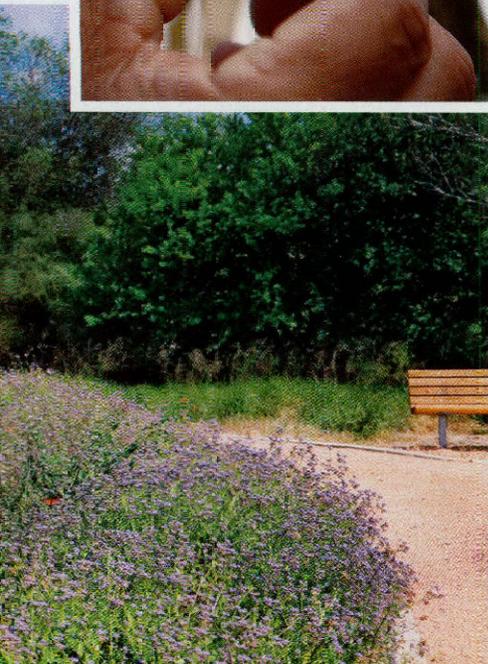
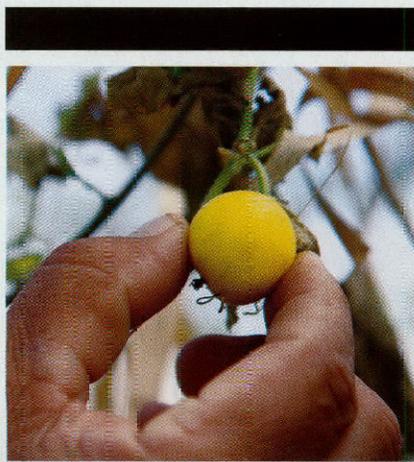
century, and continue to do so today. Thus, South Texans have left little room for native species to survive and follow them into the future. Hope lies in efforts by TPWD and other conservation-minded organizations to reverse this course.

Resaca de la Palma State Park represents more than just a stopgap in the collapse of our river delta wetlands. By employing the tools that were once meant to control and eliminate its namesake, the partners in Resaca de la Palma’s creation have succeeded in bringing a small piece of Texas natural history back to life. ★

DETAILS

For more information, visit www.worldbirdingcenter.org/.

Texas’ abandoned resacas eventually dried up, but efforts at Resaca de la Palma include refilling four sections at different depths to achieve a variety of habitats. TPWD added a tram, trails, a boardwalk and observation decks so visitors can enjoy the spectacle of returning wildlife. Below, a wild cucumber, or pepito.





EXPO 2008

SPECIAL TP&W GUIDE

SEVENTEEN YEARS AND COUNTING! That's how long the annual Texas Parks & Wildlife Expo has engaged, educated and entertained Texans, giving them a chance to get their "hands on" the Great Outdoors. Especially for those growing up in urban areas, Expo is THE place to "try it out." The spirit that led the first Expo organizers

is still alive and well at Expo today. "Let me show you how to do that!" "Did you know...?" "Have you ever tried to...?" Expo is about sharing the joys of the outdoors with those who have not experienced them, and to help those who do fish, hunt or camp to do so better.

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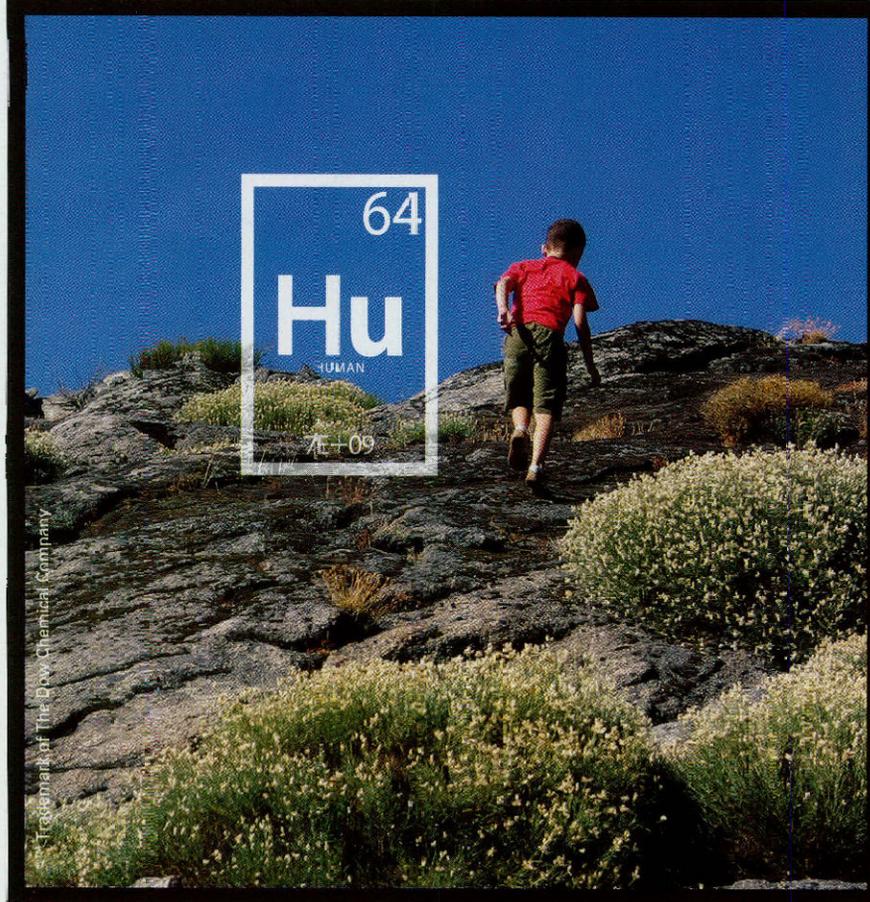
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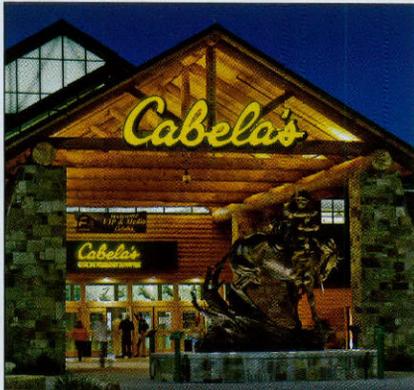
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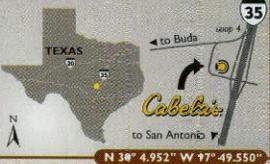
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SeaWorld's Chris Bellows, sponsored by Anheuser-Busch, returns to the Expo Main Stage with his Amazing Animals show, an Expo favorite. Chris does two shows daily, at 11 AM and 2 PM, on stage in the Main Tent. Master Falconer John Karger, founder and director of Last Chance Forever, the Birds of Prey Conservancy, is a perennial favorite at Expo. Since the first Expo in 1992, John has exhibited raptors and presents two flight demonstrations daily. John Karger's Birds of Prey Show is at noon and 3 PM daily in the Birds of Prey Arena.

New to Expo this year is Xtreme Sport Shooter Patrick Flanigan. Holder of six world records and billed as the "World's Fastest Shotgun," Patrick has wowed audiences all over the country with his exciting brand of exhibition shooting. One show daily at 1 p.m. in the Shooting Sports Arena. Also visiting for the first time are husband-and-wife pro anglers Hector and Diane DeLaGarza. These tough competitors will be on hand in the Fishing and Aquatic area to share angling tips and talk about their lives as professional anglers.

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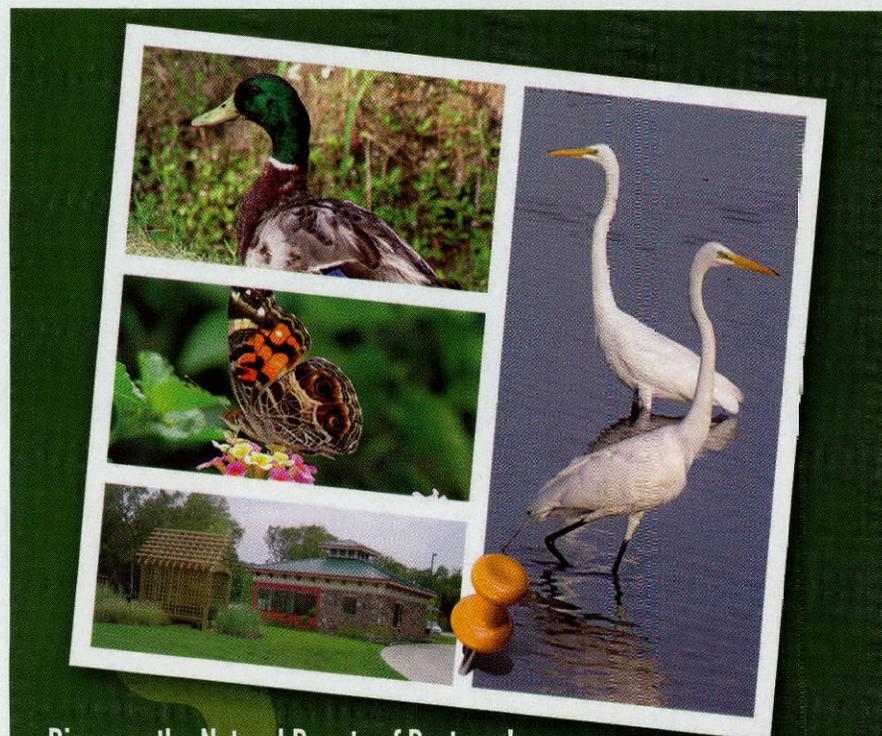
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The Baytown Nature Center is a 450-acre peninsula surrounded by Burnet Bay, Crystal Bay and Scott Bay. Operated by the City of Baytown, the nature center is a site on the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, and is home to more than 300 species of birds who depend on this area for migration, feeding or nesting. But this recreated wetland is not just for the birds. Numerous animals also call the nature center home. In addition, it's an important nursery area for a variety of aquatic species, including fish, shrimp and crabs.

This former residential subdivision now offers picnic shelters, fishing piers, two pavilions, an education stage, two wildlife overlooks and birding blinds. There's also a butterfly garden, walking and biking trails and a children's nature discovery area.

The Baytown Nature Center is open to the public daily year round, except for Christmas Day and during extreme inclement weather. Gates open 30 minutes before sunset and close 30 minutes after sunset. Daily and annual passes are available for individuals and families. For more information contact us at (281) 420-5360.

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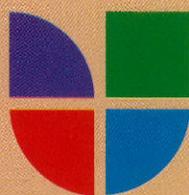
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Texas Game Wardens are officers who enforce the fish, game and water safety laws of the state and provide life- and property-saving assistance in times of natural disaster. Visitors to the Law Enforcement area can meet game wardens, learn about their roles in conservation, and even taste wild game, courtesy of the Texas Game Warden Association cooking teams. Ever considered becoming a game warden? Visit the Law Enforcement tent for information detailing requirements for becoming a member of this elite enforcement organization.

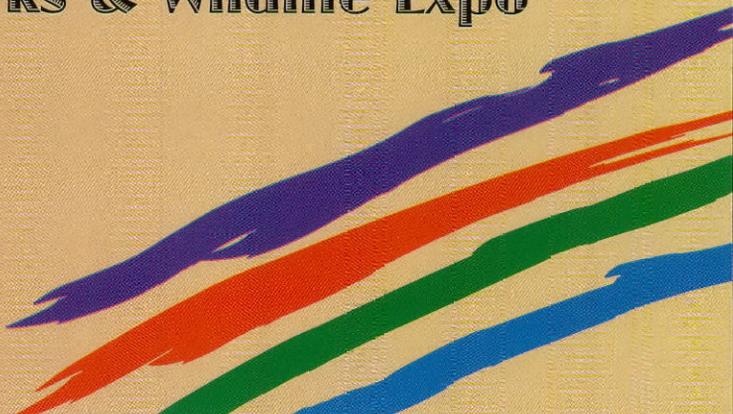


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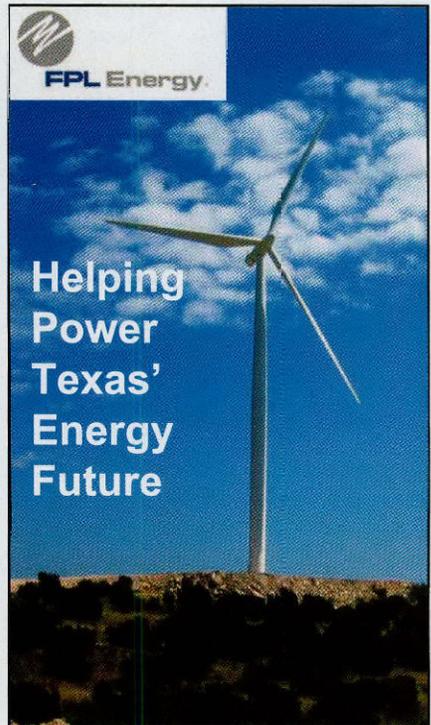
Texas Parks & Wildlife Expo





Learn about the wildlife of Texas, from where they live to how they live. Great exhibits and presentations include live animals, sporting dog demonstrations, birds of prey and much more! Hunters, birders, landowners and conservationists of every kind will be interested in the wildlife presentations at Expo. Learn about the contributions of hunters to conservation and Texas Parks and Wildlife's international partners in this important effort. What can you do? Visit the Design with Nature and Sustainable Design area for tips on practicing conservation in your own home and backyard.

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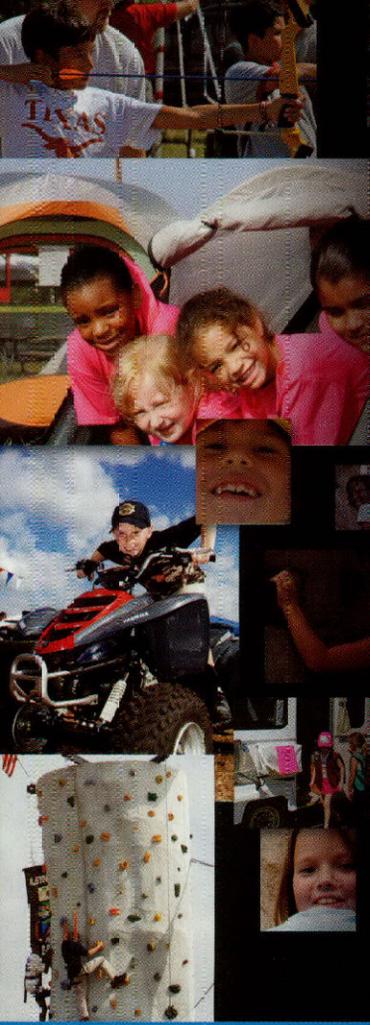
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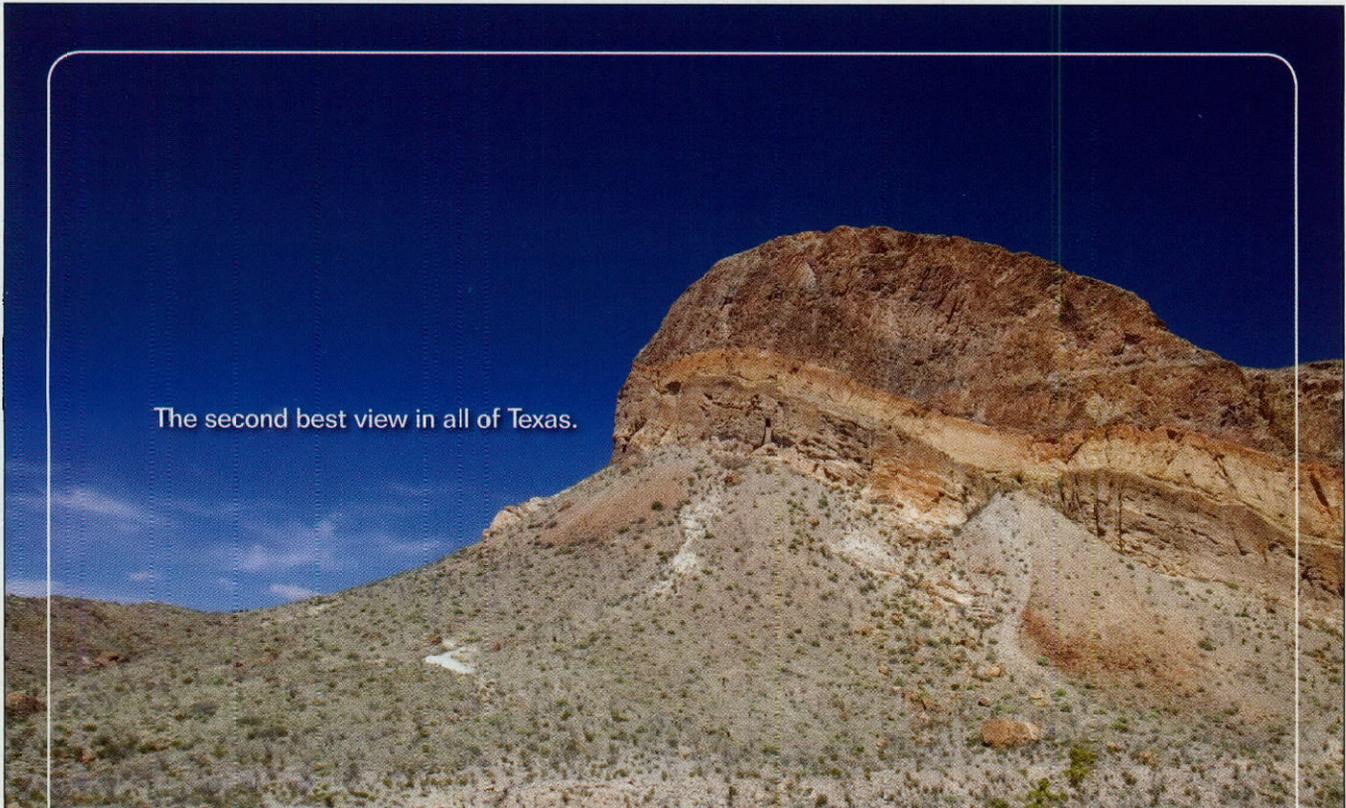
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Mexican long-tongued bat

NIGHT RIDERS!

What pops into your mind when you think of bats? Count Dracula and haunted houses? Long, pointed fangs and cold, beady eyes? While you would never want to pick up a bat and play with it, bats are helpful, gentle creatures and not as frightening as they look. There are 32 kinds of bats in Texas. The bats you are most likely to see eat lots of insects. Other bats pollinate flowers and help spread the seeds of plants. The Chinese view bats as symbols of good luck!

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roosting under a bridge

» WHERE DO BATS LIVE?

Mexican free-tailed: our state bat

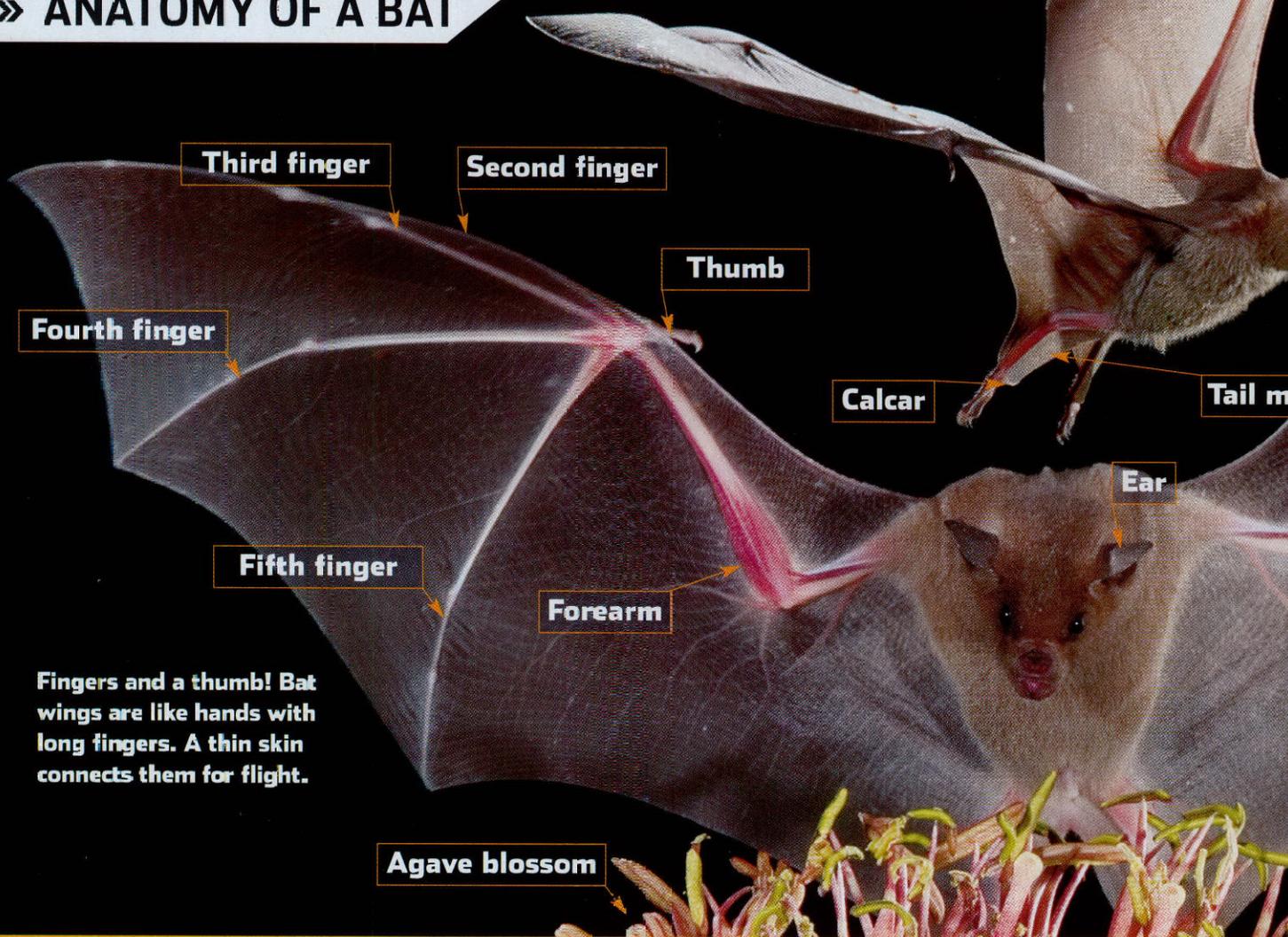
Bats spend their days sleeping in dark places like caves, holes in trees and rocks, the attics and ceilings of barns and buildings, under bridges and in manmade bat houses. They hang upside down because their feet are very strong for hanging, but not for standing. A bat has special toes that lock, so even when the bat is asleep upside-down, it will not fall.

pallid bats hanging together

emerging from a cave



» ANATOMY OF A BAT



Fingers and a thumb! Bat wings are like hands with long fingers. A thin skin connects them for flight.

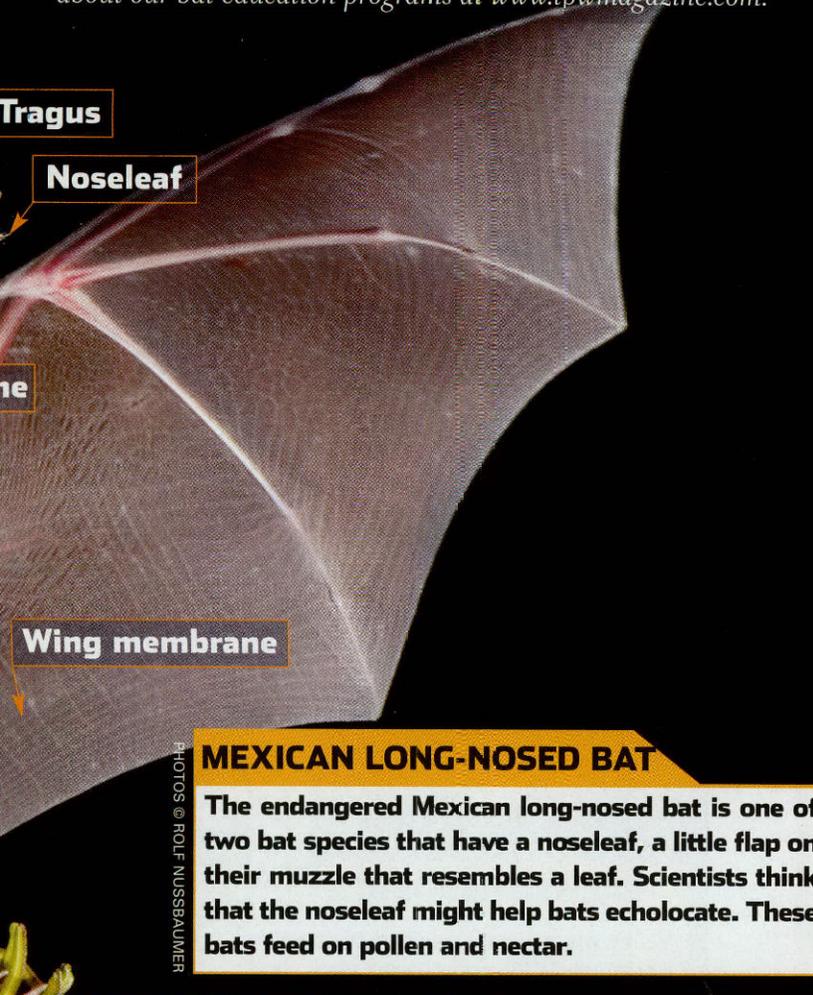


PHOTOS © ROLF NUSSBAUMER

evening bat

Bats can make sounds (a human can't hear the sound) that strike targets and bounce back. The way the sound bounces back tells them what the target is and where it is. The collection of echoes makes a mental picture. This echolocation works so well that bats can fly and find food in total darkness and not hit anything.

Would you like a bat to visit your school? Teachers, find out more about our bat education programs at www.tpwmagazine.com.



Tragus

Noseleaf

Wing membrane

PHOTOS © ROLF NUSSBAUMER

MEXICAN LONG-NOSED BAT

The endangered Mexican long-nosed bat is one of two bat species that have a noseleaf, a little flap on their muzzle that resembles a leaf. Scientists think that the noseleaf might help bats echolocate. These bats feed on pollen and nectar.

Bat Myths

1. ALL BATS HAVE RABIES.

Any mammal can have rabies, including bats. But there is only one human death each year in the United States from rabid bats (on average). More people die from dog bites than bat bites.



2. BATS ARE DIRTY.

Bats groom themselves regularly (like a cat) and are actually very clean.

3. BATS ARE MICE WITH WINGS. Although bats and mice are both mammals, bats are more like mice than like mice. For example, mice have many babies, but humans and bats usually have only one.



4. BATS ARE BLIND. A bat can see as well as you can.

5. BATS WILL SUCK YOUR BLOOD. Only three types of "vampire" bats exist, and they live in Central America. Only once has one been found in Texas, and that was 40 years ago.

ILLUSTRATIONS © FIAN ARROYO



6. BATS GET TANGLED IN YOUR HAIR. Ba:

echolocation is precise enough to catch a tiny bug in the air. A bat can easily avoid your head.

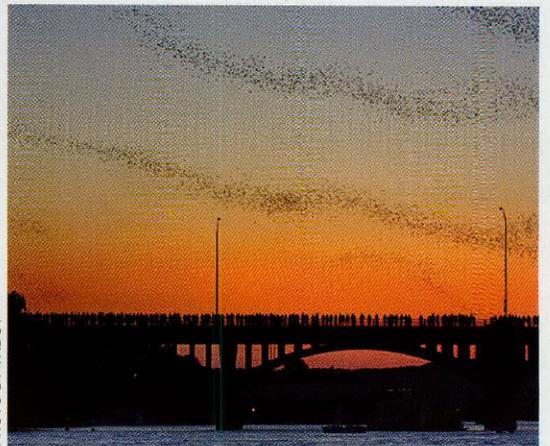


PHOTO BY TXDOT

Some bats live alone or in small groups; others live in large groups called colonies. The largest colony in any city lives under a bridge in Austin. People gather at sunset during the summer to watch the 1.5 million bats fly out. To find other places to see bats, go to www.tpwmagazine.com.



Spike's Activity Page



>> WILD MATH

$$\begin{array}{r} 60 \text{ sec} \\ 12 \div 10 \\ \times 60 \\ \hline 30 \end{array}$$



1. Bats can't glide so they must constantly flap their wings to fly. Mexican free-tailed bats can flap their wings 10 times per second. How many times per minute is that? How many times can you flap your arms in a minute?
2. Some bats eat half their weight in insects every night! If you were a bat, how many pounds of food would you eat in a day?
3. If a bat can pollinate flowers on 12 different agave plants in one night, how many agaves will he pollinate in 30 nights?

>> WILD WORDS

BAT WORD SEARCH:

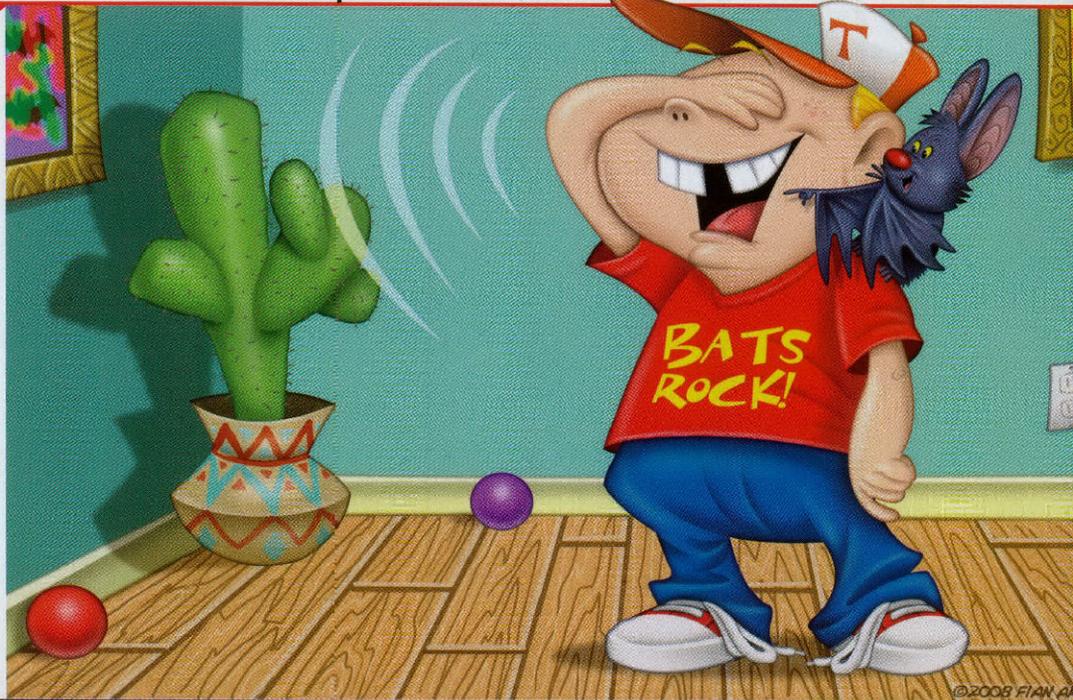
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cave
echolocate
freetail
hibernate
insect
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F	C	P	S	I	I	K	H	D	W
A	L	H	O	J	N	Q	I	K	F
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O	M	A	Q	A	V	I	A	W	N
N	B	R	I	D	G	E	T	T	Y
E	T	L	Q	R	X	S	E	S	E

>> WILD SCIENCE

Can You Echolocate?

Go into an empty room (like a gym) or hallway. Holding two jingle bells (or balls), close your eyes and spin in a circle a few times. Keeping your eyes closed, stop and roll your bell in front of you. Listen to how long it takes to hit the wall. Turn to the right and roll the other one. Which wall is closer? How do you know? You just used echolocation!



>> KEEPING IT WILD



Go outside and find three places where bats might roost. You could even make an origami bat (directions at www.tpwmagazine.com) and try to find good places for it to hide outside. What is good about those habitats? What is bad about them? Some bats have become endangered because humans have moved closer to their natural homes, like caves. What can we do to provide them with new places to live?

NEXT MONTH: Native Americans: Living Off the Land

PHOTO BY LORENE MOORE/TPWD

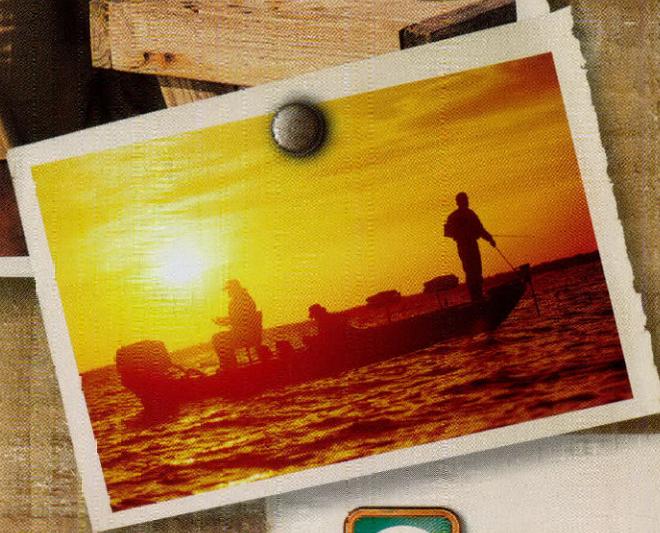
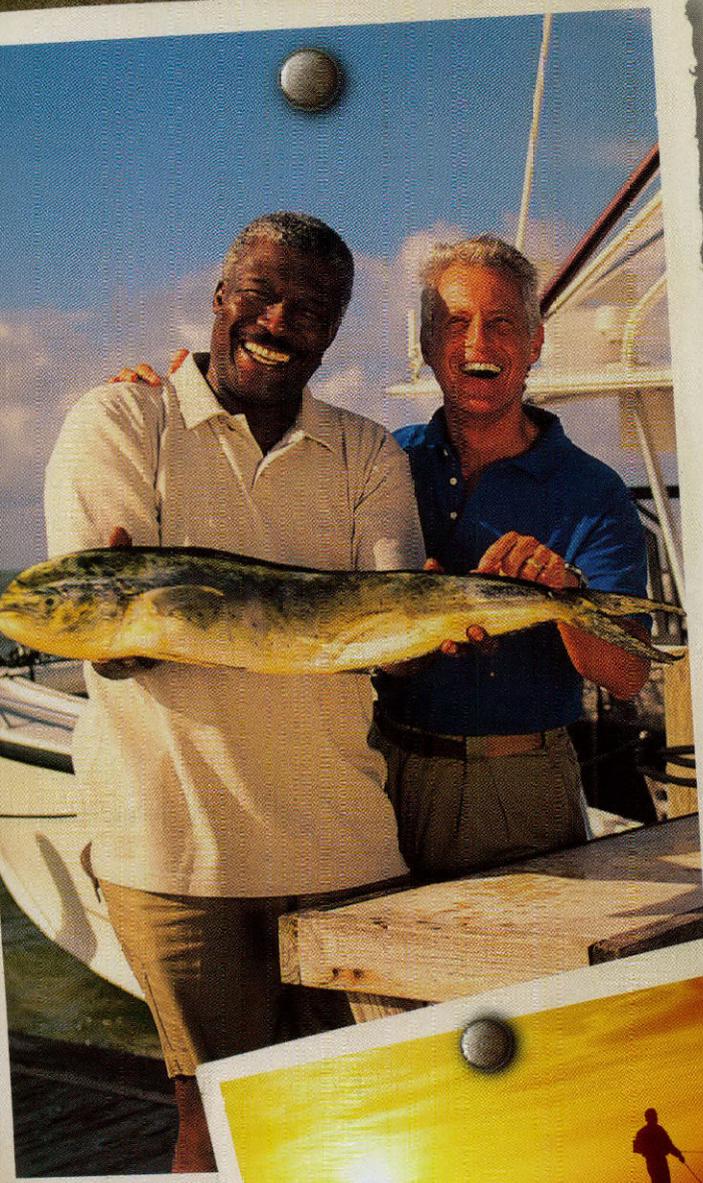
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TELEVISION

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Sept. 28–Oct. 5:

Bat caves of Texas; using bats for pest control; history of the Battleship Texas; clear, cool waters of the Davis Mountains.

Oct. 5–12:

The life of a fishing guide; bats, bikes and buffalo at Caprock Canyons; fishing the Texas coast; serene sands at Monahans Sandhills State Park.

Oct. 12–19:

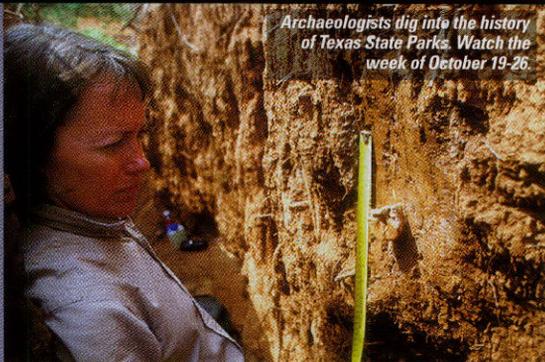
From puppy to hunting companion; how animals use coloration for camouflage; finding a place to hunt in Texas; Goliad State Park; blooming poppies in the Franklin Mountains.

Oct. 19–26:

Ancient paintings of West Texas; wilderness experience at Colorado Bend State Park; archaeology of Texas state park; frogs and toads on display.

Oct. 26–Nov. 2:

A 12-year-old history buff discovers the story of the CCC; wing shooting tips; frontier days at Ft. Leaton; state parks recover from Hurricane Rita; kite surfing at South Padre.



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FREDERICKSBURG: KITY-FM 101.3 / 5:15 a.m., 1:15 p.m., 3:15 p.m., 9:15 p.m.

GAINESVILLE: KGAF-AM 1580 / 8:45 a.m.

GRANBURY: KPIR-AM 1420 / 3:30 p.m.

GREENVILLE: KGV-L-AM 1400 / 8:50 a.m.

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Old Rip

Did a horned lizard really survive for 31 years inside a cornerstone?

BY TERESA S. NEWTON

The legend of Old Rip, Eastland County's famous horned lizard, spurs a lot of questions. Can a horny toad really hibernate for 31 years? Was the lizard presented to crowds when the courthouse cornerstone was opened in 1928 the same one that had been deposited there in 1897? Did Old Rip, by his own fame, cause the downfall of his own kind?

The story is hard to prove, yet difficult to disprove. People either believe or not. Still, 80 years after his coming-out party, Old Rip draws tourists to view him in a velvet-lined coffin, lying in state at the Eastland County courthouse.

The Texas horned lizard's adventures started July 29, 1897, when 4-year-old Will Wood caught the reptile and named him Blinky. Will's dad, Eastland County

Clerk Ernest E. Wood, was heading courtown when he decided to use the horny toad to test a theory. The elder Wood had read about the ancient belief that horned lizards could live up to 100 years in hibernation.

Wood offered Blinky and a note to be placed in the cornerstone of the new courthouse. Officials said they placed the horned frog, the note, a Bible and several newspapers and coins in the small vault.

Years passed, and Eastland County's oil boom brought more people and paperwork. By 1928, the courthouse wasn't big enough, and voters approved building a new one.

'Mr. Wood stopped me and said they were building a new courthouse and

there was a horned frog in [the old courthouse],' says 94-year-old Eldress Gattis of Eastland, one of a handful of surviving eyewitnesses to the cornerstone opening. "He was always kidding, but I don't think he would go that far with a practical joke."

Boyce House, editor of the *Eastland Argus-Tribune*, passed the story along to news agencies. By noon on February 18, a crowd reportedly between 1,000 and 3,000 surrounded the courthouse rubble.

Ed S. Pritchard, the county judge, officiated over the cornerstone opening. To ensure no sleight of hand, the Rev. Frank E. Singleton, a Methodist pastor, would observe the procedure. Workers cleared the cornerstone and removed the metal sheet covering the

small cavity. Singleton looked in.

"There's the frog!" he called out.

Eugene Day, a local oilman and brother-in-law to Ernest E. Wood, reached in, bringing forth a flat, dusty horned lizard. He passed the toad to Singleton, who gave it to Pritchard. The judge raised the reptile high.

"He's alive!" Pritchard yelled. The crowd roared, pushing children aside in order to see the small celebrity. Some tried to grab the creature.

"I got there late and got on top of a pile of rubble to see what was going on," says Gattis, 14 at the time. "When they uncovered it, I couldn't see him. Then (Pritchard) held him by the tail, and he was wiggling."

"I am positive there was no hoax perpetrated," preacher Singleton later declared to the Associated Press.

The lizard was renamed Old Rip, for Rip Van Winkle, and placed on display in a local store window. Newspaper reporters quoted zoological experts on the plausibility of surviving a three-decade sleep. Articles from throughout the nation reported eyewitness accounts of similar incidents with horned lizards, frogs and similar creatures.

Texas Christian University sent a biology team to examine Old Rip. An X-ray revealed a broken leg. His horns and spikes were worn down, possibly from trying to escape his prison. His mouth and eyes appeared sealed shut, but it was still hibernation season. Otherwise, he was healthy.

Rip rested peacefully, but not those around him. When cynics claimed Day, Singleton or Pritchard brought a live horny toad in case the original was dead, local businessman Hiram McCandliss offered \$1,000 to anyone who could find a horned toad in February — a near-impossible feat since the lizards were hibernating underground. Will Wood attributed the horned lizard's survival to the Bible enclosed with him.

The curious swarmed to Eastland to view the natural oddity. Merchants and the chamber of commerce were ecstatic. Postcards with Old Rip's official portrait sold at a brisk pace.

Demand for horned toads exploded. Zoos wanted them. A local gas station offered a horned lizard with each fill-up. The Dallas Advertising League quickly sold 600 lizards at the

International Advertising Association of the World convention in Detroit. Sid Sackett of Coleman, the only known horned lizard breeder at the time, saw prices jump from five cents a head to 25 cents.

College professors in Brownwood prepared to seal a horned lizard in an airtight container to test the hibernation theory. Eastland County planned to place a horny toad in the new courthouse cornerstone that May. In both instances, the Fort Worth Humane Society intervened, and the creatures were released.

That spring, Old Rip slowly became more animated, finally eating and drinking after four or five weeks. He was displayed at events across the nation. President Calvin Coolidge delayed 300 visitors to meet with Eastland's celebrity. Rip became an item in "Ripley's Believe It Or Not."

Back home in Eastland, Old Rip's abode was a fish bowl filled with sand in a store window. He entertained visitors by eating harvester ants, every horny toad's favorite food. Eventually he settled in with Will Wood's family in Eastland.

Life with the Wood children provided adventure. Edith Wood Grissom, Will's older daughter, recalled Old Rip for an oral history project in the 1970s.

"Old Rip was my pet. He dashed from an ant bed in front of a truck with me in pursuit, and later to a vacant lot where I had released 250 horned frogs," she recounted. "He was easy to find as he was gray with worn horns and a limp from a broken leg. He hibernated in a goldfish bowl, and I put him on the back porch. He froze."

The legendary lizard died of pneumonia Jan. 19, 1929, 11 months after his courthouse release.

Will Wood had Old Rip preserved, courtesy of the Barrow Undertaking Company. The National Casket Company provided a tiny casket.

Grieving friends said goodbye during an extended visitation at the funeral home and later at the courthouse.

But even death wasn't the end of the Old Rip story. County officials allowed him to travel to fairs and exhibitions. After World War II, the Wood family returned Old Rip to a courthouse enclosure.

Old Rip became a part of the Eastland economy for decades with the Old Rip Café, Old Rip Cap Co. and an Old Rip soda, produced by a local bottling company.

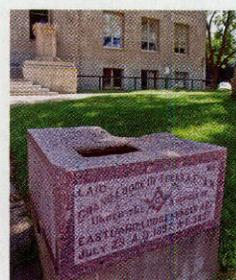
Legendary cartoon director Chuck Jones borrowed from the cornerstone story for his film classic *One Froggy Evening*. The character, Michigan J. Frog, is the symbol for the WB, the Warner Brothers television network.

Residents celebrate Old Rip with a ceremony each Feb. 18 at the courthouse. Local dignitaries and school children gather to repeat the Old Rip Oath, which provides they keep his legend alive. Ripfest is held on the first Saturday of October.

Old Rip's kin are hardly seen in Eastland County anymore. Pesticide overuse in the 1960s and 1970s and the invasion of fire ants harmed the harvester ant, horned lizards' main food. The lizards have disappeared from East and Central Texas, with only a few reported in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and Milam County, says Lee Ann Linam, president of the Horned Lizard Conservation Society.

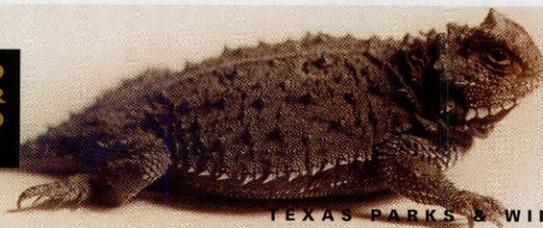
In 1967 the state of Texas made the sale of a horned lizard illegal. In 1977 the reptiles were added to the state's threatened species list. In the 1980s ownership of a horned toad became off limits. The Horned Lizard Conservation Society was formed in 1990 to save the beloved critter.

Linam says the average Texas horned lizard lives only five to 10 years, but adds, "Old Rip was a very unusual horned lizard." ★



From left: Tricky Ward and Blair Cherry, former TCU football stars show Old Rip at his "awakening." The original cornerstone where Old Rip reposed.

"HE'S ALIVE!" PRITCHARD YELLED. THE CROWD ROARED, PUSHING CHILDREN ASIDE IN ORDER TO SEE THE SMALL CELEBRITY. SOME TRIED TO GRAB THE CREATURE.



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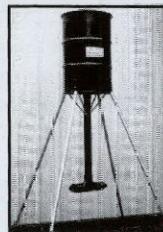


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(Continued from page 21)

It's time to go, so we pack up and head for Llano, where we tour the Llano County Historical Museum. Docent Karylon Russell points us toward the Cecil Smith exhibit, which honors Llano's polo hero. Smith — who at 20 learned the game by hitting tin cars in a pasture — achieved stardom in the 1930s playing the highbrow sport. We also find out that James Fields Smathers — inventor of the electric typewriter — was born in Llano County in 1888.

For lunch, we mosey over to the square and stroll into the Acme Cafe, formerly the town's dry goods store. We share two chili dogs, then we're fortified for more touring. Frank Rowell, who owns Enchanted Rocks and Jewelry, takes us inside the LanTex Theater, first opened in 1927. Today, first-run movies and the Llano Country Opry draw visitors. Next, county judge Wayne Brascom escorts us through the renovated courthouse, a Romanesque Revival-style beauty. I love the softly lit courtroom, warmly appointed with oak furnishings, wainscoting and banisters.

On East Mair, we check out some of the cool shops. In Create, funky bottle cap pendants, handmade mosaic crosses and other mosaic art intrigue me. In Sagebrush,

acclaimed Western artist Jack Moss shares his studio with Diane Willmann and Jean Rostrom, who tout leather sofas, greeting cards, candle holders, jewelry and lamps.

Tonight, we're staying in the Pinkerton House, one of three lovely homes that comprise the Railyard Bed and Breakfast Houses complex in the rail-yard district. After exploring the house, we walk to the nearby Llanaux Seafood House, which occupies a 1903 Victorian-style home. For supper, we share a delectable fried seafood platter — shrimp, oysters, frog legs, crawfish tails, catfish — that's served with sautéed zucchini and fries.

Day three

At the Hungry Hunter, James orders a fried egg with bacon and pan fries. I snag one of his biscuits. Then we're off to see the eagle nest 8 miles east of Llano on Texas 29. Since 2004, a pair of American bald eagles has reared their young in a pecan tree not far from the Llano River. Early on, so many folks pulled over to look that the highway department paved a marked viewing area.

Dale Schmidt, a TPWD wildlife technician, later tells me that "the best time to see and photograph them is in the early morn-

ing, from sunrise on." Llano's nesting Texas eagles arrive in late September, start rebuilding the nest, and lay one or two eggs in December. Eaglets typically fledge by April; everyone migrates north thereafter.

As for us, it's time to migrate back toward home. But like the eagles, we'll be back soon. There's a lot to love about Llano. ★

DETAILS

Badu House (325-247-1207, www.baduhouse.com)

Cooper's Old Time Pit Bar-B-Que (325-247-5713, www.coopersbbq.com)

LanTex Theater (325-247-5656, www.lan-textheater.com)

Llanaux Seafood House (325-247-3663, www.llanauxseafoodhouse.com)

Llano Chamber of Commerce (325-247-5354, www.llanochamber.org)

Llano County Museum (325-247-3026, www.llanotx.com/tourism/LlanoCountyMuseum.htm)

Llano Depot, Visitors Center and Railroad Museum (325-247-4265, www.hillcountryrailroad.com)

Llano River/Railyard Bed-and-Breakfast Houses (888-254-9535, www.texhillcntry.com/bedandbreakfast)

Pecan Creek Cottage (325-247-4074, www.centruryranchlodging.com)

PARTINGSHOT

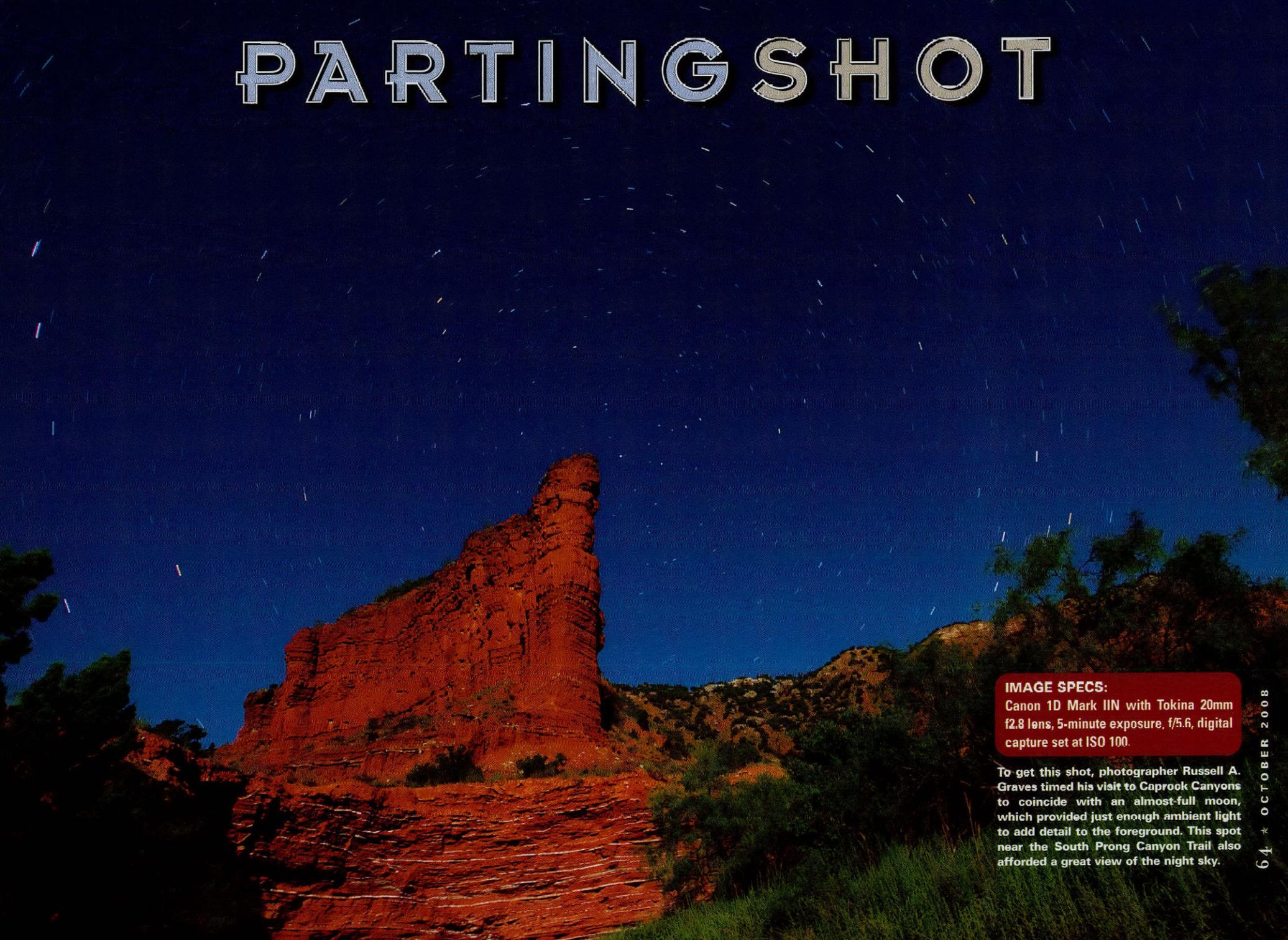


IMAGE SPECS:

Canon 1D Mark IIN with Tokina 20mm f2.8 lens, 5-minute exposure, f/5.6, digital capture set at ISO 100.

To get this shot, photographer Russell A. Graves timed his visit to Caprock Canyons to coincide with an almost-full moon, which provided just enough ambient light to add detail to the foreground. This spot near the South Prong Canyon Trail also afforded a great view of the night sky.

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