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**ICY** of the CCC ~ INTRODUCTION to **KAYAKING**  
**BRAZOS RIVER BASS** ~ **BALMORHEA: The GREAT OASIS**



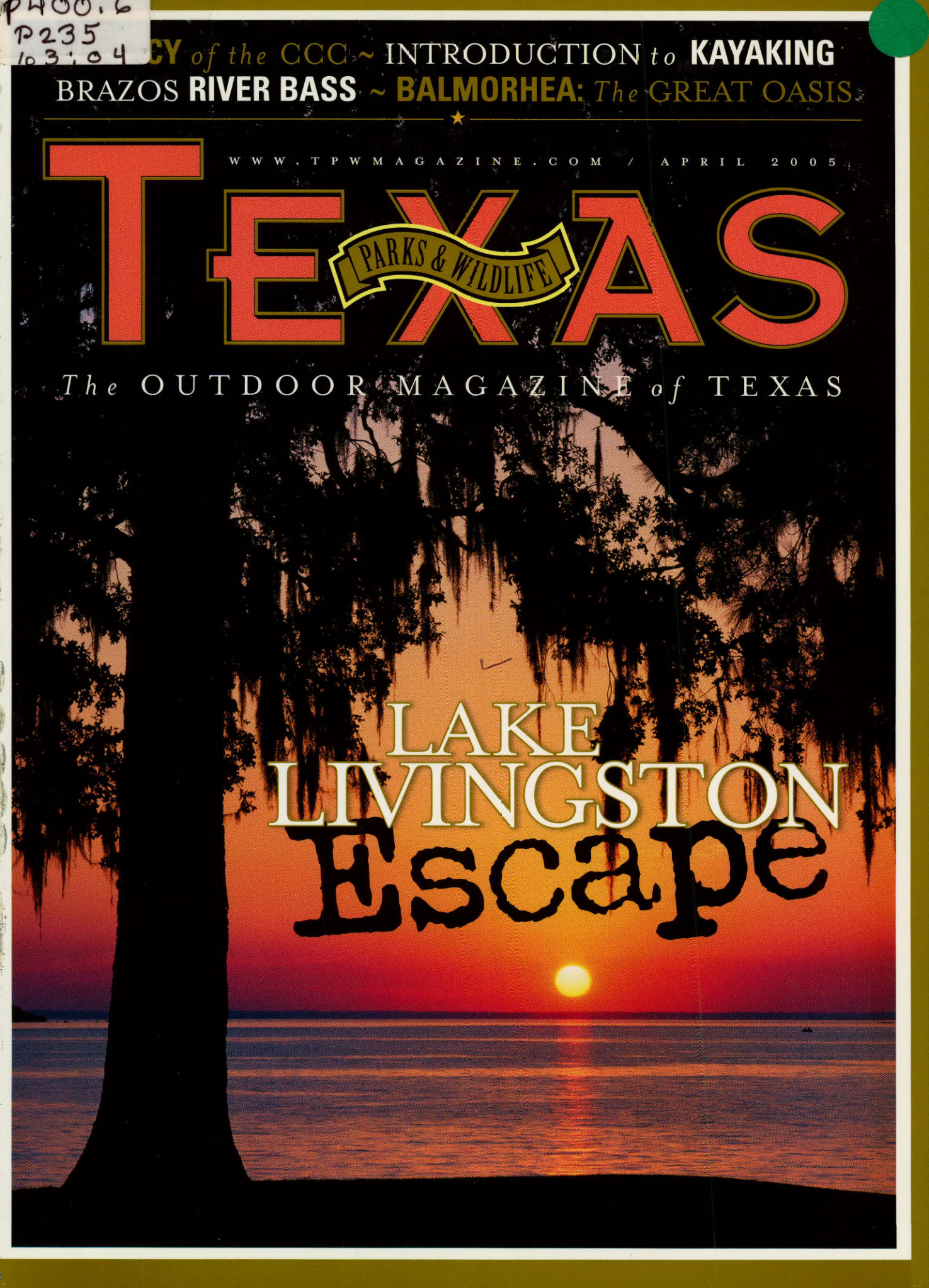
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# TEXAS

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The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE of TEXAS

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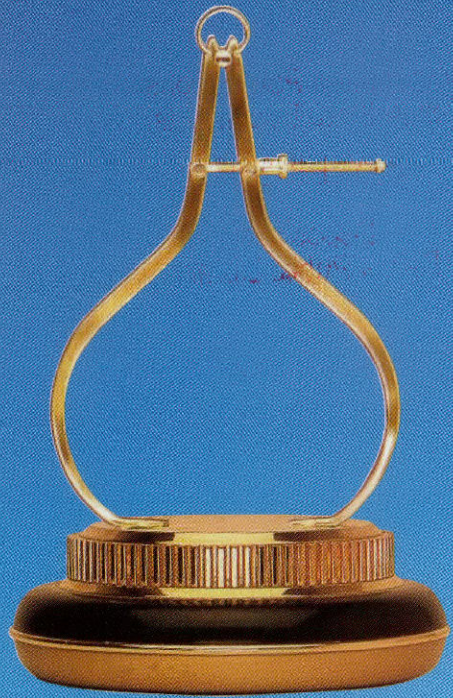
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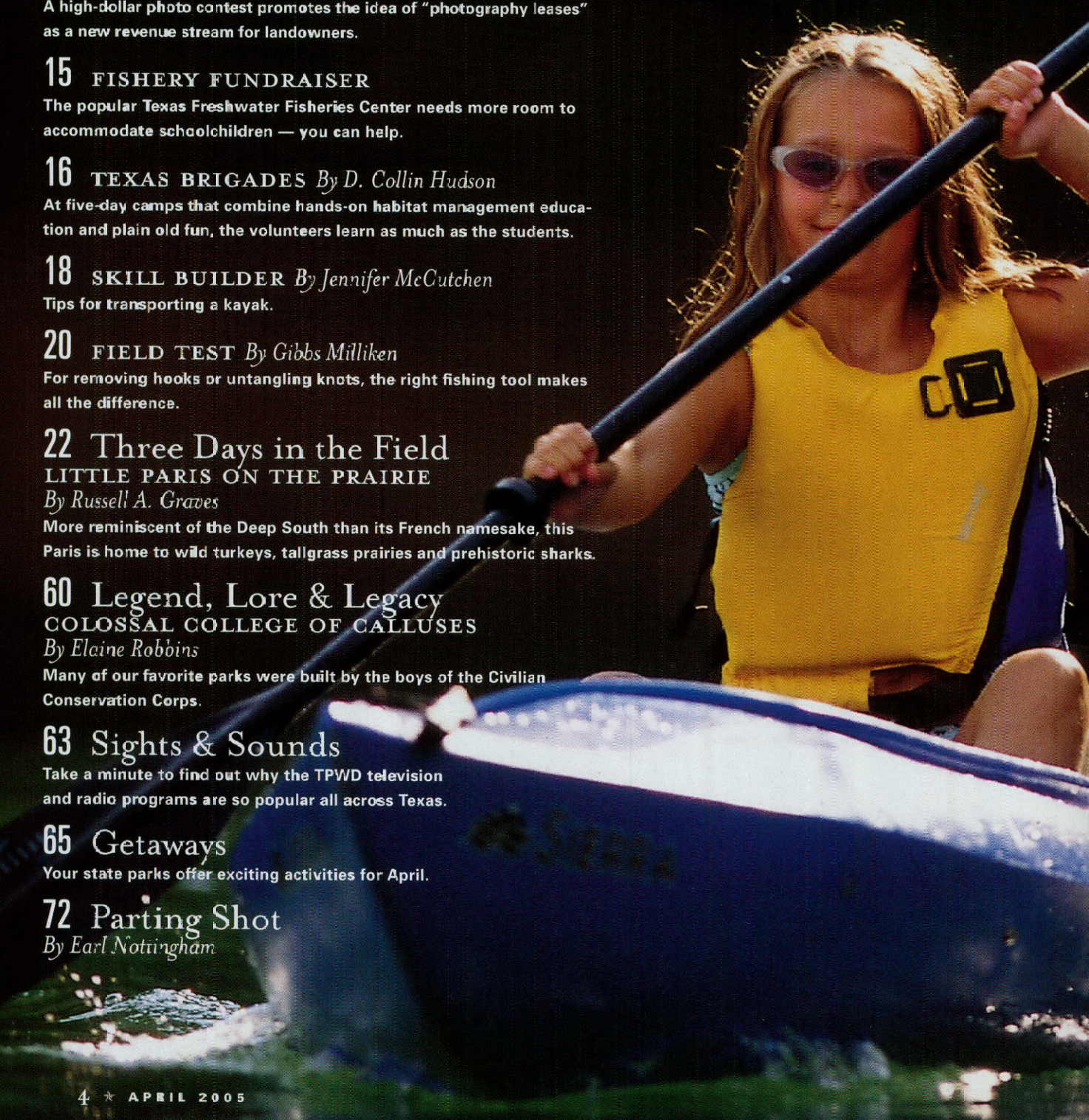
*By Earl Nottingham*

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**FRONT:** Lake Livingston State Park is the perfect setting for a family getaway — or the coronation of The Fisher King. The saga begins on page 48. Photo © Lance Varnell.

**BACK:** Any time is the perfect time to take the plunge at Balmorhea State Park. Jump in on page 26. Photo by Earl Nottingham.

This page: Kayaks are great for kids. Or kids of any age. See the article on page 42. Photo © DavidJSams.com





# TEXAS

The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE of TEXAS

APRIL 2005, VOL. 63, NO. 4

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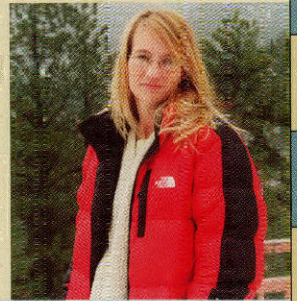
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# In the Field

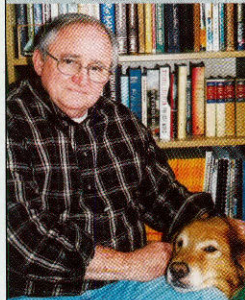
## WENDEE HOLT CAMP

writes about science, nature and the outdoors from her Houston home. She is a regular contributor to *Texas Parks & Wildlife*, and she has traveled all over the world, from Australia to Alaska and many points in between, writing about topics ranging from sea turtle declines and rainforest adventures to the wartime construction of the Alaska highway, among other topics. Holtcamp earned an M.S. in wildlife ecology in 1995, and is now back in school working on her Ph.D. in ecology and evolutionary biology at Rice University on a prestigious NSF Graduate Research Fellowship. For this issue, she explored Texas rivers, and spoke with members of Texas Mussel Watch to learn more about freshwater mussels, which are important indicators of a river's health. Her story — "Save the Monkeyface" — begins on page 54.



## TOM BEHRENS

has been an avid outdoorsman since he was a teenager growing up in Cincinnati, Ohio. In the years since, Behrens has published his outdoor stories in several newspapers as well as regional outdoor magazines along with game & fish magazines in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, California and Washington. Behrens also has written for *Wheelin' Sportsmen*, and *Xtreme Jakes* as well as the National Wild Turkey Federation publications. He is a former radio talk show host and has even had his poetry published in a University of Houston literary publication. In his article for this issue, Behrens explains that fly fishing for bass in the Brazos River below Lake Whitney can offer anglers a new fishing challenge that might be unexpected in Texas waters. See page 34.



## CINDY ROSS

gives us some basic ideas for getting started with the popular sport of kayaking in the article that starts on page 42. Over the past three decades, Ross has found peace, happiness and a sublime sense of contentment while walking and cycling the endless trails that are sewn into the fabric of the North American continent. She has crossed the 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail, penning and illustrating her first book, *A Woman's Journey on the Appalachian Trail*, which has been in print for 25 years and has become a hiking classic. Then she tackled the 2,600-mile Pacific Crest Trail through the Sierra and Cascade Mountains with her husband, Todd Gladfelter, and wrote and illustrated *Journey on the Crest*. (The Mountaineers Books). In addition to her six books, Ross has published numerous articles about her adventures in *Backpacker*, *Canoe & Kayak* and *Outdoor Life*.





# AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF ROBERT L. COOK

**If you hang around Parks and Wildlife** very much you'll hear a lot about "exotics," and most frequently, we'll be worrying about exotic plants and animals and their potential negative impact on the native plant and animal species of Texas. Most of the time, you'd walk away with the impression that our wildlife and fisheries staff and many of our constituents who hunt and fish flat out do not like exotics.

On the other hand, let's be honest, some "exotics" have proven to be "OK" if you just manage them. For example, we do not want walking catfish, green tree snakes or zebra mussels in Texas, but we love our Florida bass, blackbuck antelope (India) and ring-necked pheasant (Asia).

Some big game hunters and game biologists worry about the spread of axis deer, fallow deer, sika deer and the dozens of species of big game animals introduced into Texas decades ago from Europe, Asia and Africa. However, I learned long ago that these free-ranging populations of wild animals can be properly managed on our rangelands and they can be economically profitable. They are another species that grazes on the natural forage, and, therefore, you must control and manage their numbers just like our domestic cows, sheep and goats, which, by the way, you might recall are also "exotics" that most of us use and benefit from.

Sometimes the good, the bad and the ugly distinction between "exotics" and "natives" becomes quite blurred. You may recall that the nutria, an exotic from South America, was introduced in the southeastern states by folks with good intentions, but most of us would agree today that this animal has become a nuisance. Just about everybody would support sending the feral hog, English sparrow, Africanized bee and fire ant back to where they came from, but talk about ridding the state of rainbow trout, red fox or wall-eye, and you'll have a fight on your hands.

Some of the most serious concerns arise over the impact of introduced plants. Fishermen and fisheries biologists in Texas are truly concerned about the recent spread of giant salvinia, a water plant that can double in size and area every two weeks. Lake residents, river authorities and municipal water providers are struggling in several areas of the state to control an introduced water plant called hydrilla, which can literally take over the surface of a lake, clog the boat docks and the swimming areas and slow the flow of water to the point of causing water to back up into homes and areas never before flooded. Our land and water managers are conducting similar battles to control and manage the spread of the water hyacinth and the Chinese tallow tree.

Some exotics "introduce" themselves into Texas. Such as the armadillo, which arrived in Texas about 150 years ago, the cattle egret, which probably blew in from Africa in the 1920s, and, over the last couple of decades, the white-winged dove, which has spread into Central and North Texas from Mexico and Central America. Some folks think it is the climate change, or maybe the ozone layer. Personally, I think, like the most problematic exotic, they probably just like outdoor Texas and they got here as fast as they could.

*We do not want walking catfish, green tree snakes or zebra mussels in Texas, but we love our Florida bass, blackbuck antelope (India) and ring-necked pheasant (Asia).*



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# MAIL CALL

PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

## FOREWORD

**State parks are an integral part of the DNA of Texas.** I hadn't realized what an important role state parks played in my childhood until I started this job. While reading Rob McCorkle's article about Longhorn Cavern ("A Cave with a Past," December 2004), I remembered the trip I took with Aunt Katy's family when I was around 12. I'll never forget the cool blast of air that wafted over us as we descended into the cave or my sense of awe when I first saw Crystal City, the room where shimmering calcite crystals blanket the walls. And I also remember being very excited about the snack bar — I've always loved a good snack.

I think it was on the same trip that we visited Pedernales Falls. Even then I was a stickler for words, and I was bothered by the fact that everyone pronounced it *Perdenales*. Yet I was more of a swimmer than an editor at that point, and my wordy cares were washed away by the cool clean water.

In later years, I was attacked by a squirrel at Inks Lake State Park. It was my fault, really. I tried to feed a pecan to a seemingly friendly squirrel sitting on a branch just over my head. Apparently starving, the squirrel just couldn't wait for my slow approach, and it leaped onto my hand. I panicked and tried to shake it off, but the squirrel held on long enough to bite my arm (I still have a scar). Kids, this is a lesson in what *not* to do while visiting state parks (it's now illegal), or any park for that matter.

Speaking of mishaps, that reminds me of the time I was fishing with one of my cousins, and I happened to walk behind him at exactly the wrong moment. For some reason, he yanked his line out of the water in a side-armed motion. The fishing line looped itself around my neck three or four times, and I was slapped in the face by a sunfish. Sure, it seems funny now, but it was downright humiliating at the time — I was fish-slapped! Again, kids, safety first.

And then there are the memories waiting to be made. Joe Nick Patoski's article on Balmorhea State Park (page 26) has me dying to take a dip in the humongous spring-fed pool. Elaine Robbins also mentions Balmorhea in her story (page 60) about the Civilian Conservation Corps' role in building many of our state parks. When I do get a chance to see Balmorhea's white adobe cottages, I'll make a point of pausing to examine and appreciate the craftsmanship of the Depression-era CCC workers.

Elaine also includes some wonderful excerpts from TPWD's CCC oral history project. The words of these former CCC workers, now in their 80s and 90s, reflect the common sense, good humor and dogged determination that built not only our state parks, but all of Texas.

*Robert Macias*

ROBERT MACIAS  
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

## LETTERS

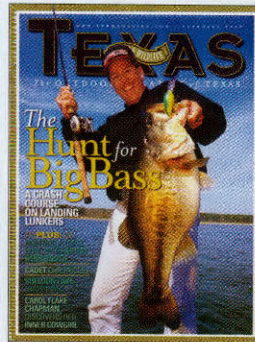
### WORKING WITH SHELDON

Your fascinating article titled "On Sheldon's Ponds" (February 2005) lists a variety of collaborative efforts from within the community that support the collective efforts at Sheldon Lake State Park, with one notable exception, which I'd like to describe.

For a number of years, the Lychner State Jail in nearby Humble, Texas, has followed a strategic alliance with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department whereby one state agency assists another state agency. In this case, that assistance is by way of the deployment of an offender workforce with staff from the Lychner State Jail to Sheldon Lake State Park on a weekly basis. This productive relationship continues as I write this letter. Without question, many thousand hours of offender labor, plus staff hours, have been contributed to this very worthwhile effort. It is an effort that allows the offenders to give back to the community in a very worth-

while cause while serving their sentence of record and saving the State of Texas a considerable amount of money.

LEE ANN BICKHAM  
El Paso County



For a number of years, the Lychner State Jail in Humble, Texas, has followed a strategic alliance with TPWD whereby one state agency assists another. In this case, that assistance is by way of deployment of an offender workforce.

Lee Ann Bickham  
El Paso County

### MEMORIES OF SHELDON

I was a student at Rice University in the 1960s. No boat. Limited time. Minimum gear. I used to drive to Sheldon, park my car, hike over the dam, swim the deep-water channel and then wade in a pair of jeans and canvas tennis shoes to the heavily weeded shallow areas. There I'd fish the small open areas of deep water



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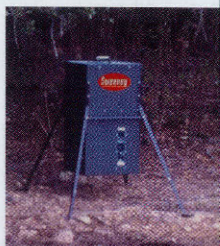
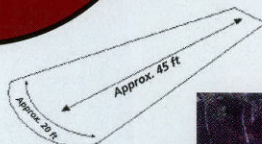


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with plastic worms and spinner baits. I caught many good strings of fish over several years. Your article about Sheldon Lake State Park in the February issue brought back fond memories.

ROY UNDERWOOD  
Dallas

### ALBINO SQUIRRELS ?

I am curious to know about albino squirrels in our state. I live in Sealy, and we have had an albino squirrel in and around our area for several weeks. It is a fox squirrel and just about the same size as a regular fox squirrel. I would think that it had to have albino parents, but no others have been seen. Would you comment on this squirrel? Thanks.

LEONARD ADAMS  
Sealy

### TPWD BIOLOGIST JOHN YOUNG

RESPONDS: We've been receiving a few calls about "albino" squirrels. Basically, this is a color phase of the regular fox squirrel known as the palomino phase. A true albino animal lacks pigmentation and therefore has red eyes. The squirrels we have been hearing about lack the red eyes, making them the palomino phase. Albinism is rare in the environment and the same is true about the palomino-phase fox squirrel.

### PROUD FATHER

Thanks for the informative article and photos on the game warden academy. My son is a cadet in the class of 2005, and it's comforting to know he is trained by the best. I'm a proud father.

R. G. MURDEN  
Weslaco

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# SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS



## PHOTOGRAPHY'S NEW PRO TOUR

*A high-dollar photo contest hopes to promote the idea of "photography leases" as a new revenue stream for landowners.*

**Landowners with at least 500 acres** of wildlife habitat in any of 19 counties in the Texas Hill Country are eligible to participate in the inaugural Pro Tour of Nature Photography. The event, scheduled for April 2005, will pair 20 renowned nature photographers with 20 private landowners in the Texas Hill Country to compete for a share of up to \$200,000 in cash. The application deadline is April 1, 2005, and landowner participants will be announced May 1.

"This is the first all-professional tournament of nature photography in the world," says John F. Martin, who founded Images for Conservation Fund to produce the event. "We

created ICF and the Pro Tour for Nature Photography to foster nature-photography tourism as a long-term income producer for private landowners, rural economies and nature photographers to help protect the wildlife of North America. Conservation and enhancement of wildlife habitat is the ultimate objective of the Pro Tour."

Martin, who lives near Edinburg, Texas, is a longtime conservationist and co-founder of the Valley Land Fund, a Rio Grande Valley land trust that has produced a biennial wildlife photo contest since 1994.

The contest is limited to landowners in the following counties: Bandera, Bexar, Blanco, Burnet, Comal, Edwards,



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*Tommy & Gena Offill from Bells, Texas*

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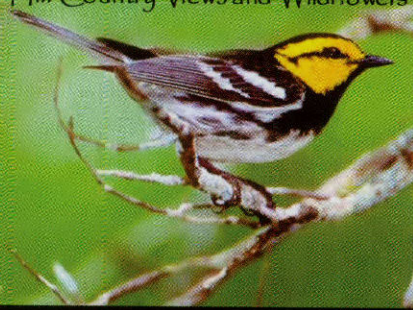
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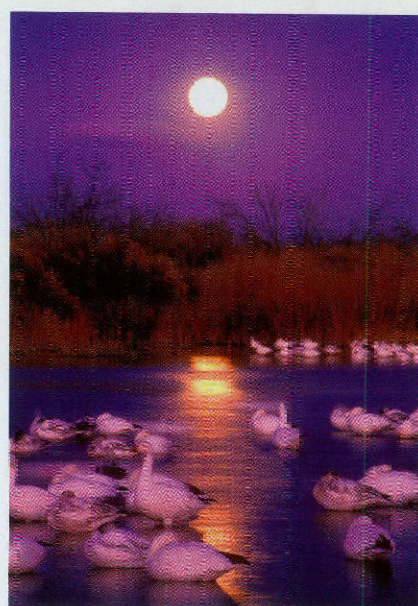
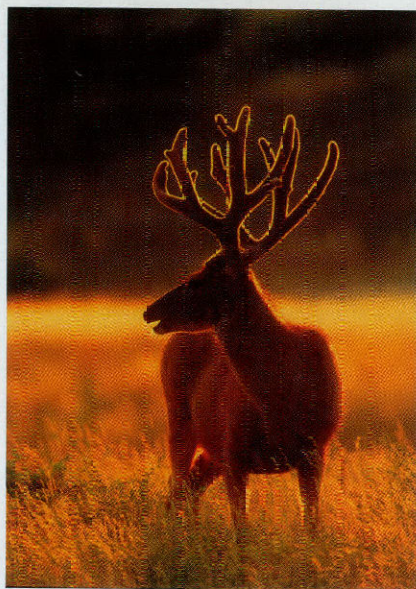
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According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Photo Marketing Association International, there are approximately 26 million Americans who photograph wildlife every year. "Through the Pro Tour of Photography, Images for Conservation Fund intends to help create a booming industry where private landowners lease top-quality wildlife photo settings on their land for a significant new stream of income," Martin says. "Lack of ways to create income from land ownership is one of the major reasons family lands are being subdivided and sold, which in turn is the primary reason for habitat destruction."

For more information, visit <www.imagesforconservation.org>. ★

ANHINGA PHOTO © SEAN FITZGERALD; BUCK PHOTO © LARRY ILLG; GEESE PHOTO © JOHN HENDRICKSON; MAWFLY PHOTO © JOSEF SEINTPETERI



# Fishery Fundraiser

*The popular Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center needs more room to accommodate schoolchildren — here's how you can help.*



Artist's conception of a proposed TFFC educational facility.

On a recent drizzly morning, dozens of people, young and old, filed through the gate at the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center in Athens, some with fishing rods in hand, ready to ply their skills at the casting pond, while others came to watch the interactive dive show, where feeding the fish is one of the main attractions.

The TFFC occupies 107 acres adjacent to Lake Athens, approximately 4 miles east of the city. In addition to hatchery services, it provides hands-on educational programming, including angling, aquatic education, nature study and hunter education for more than 60,000 visitors annually. Those who want to fish but don't have their own equipment may use the Zebco rods and reels free of charge. Sometimes the center can be too popular, filling up fast, for example, when large school groups show up.

While most of the facilities necessary to carry out the TFFC mission already exist, a new education building will enable the Center to improve the quality of its educational programming. The new 10,000-square-foot building would provide flexible space for classrooms, offices and a game warden museum.

The 50-member fundraising committee, "Schooling for Bass," is chaired by Richard Hart. An avid angler who achieved two world-record fly rod catches, Hart hopes to give the next generation of anglers a boost by using his enthusiasm, fishing knowledge and business skills to lead the TFFC's efforts to fund the new educational building.

Hart has served on the boards of numerous corporate, educational and civic organizations. His leadership experience and expertise has encouraged many other volunteers to work hard in this fundraising effort. Johnny Morris of Bass Pro Shops has pledged matching funds, dollar for dollar, up to \$650,000.

The "Schooling for Bass" banquet will be April 16 at the Embassy Suites Hotel, adjacent to the Bass Pro Shop, in Grapevine. A few tables (10 seats per table, \$1000) and individual tickets (\$100) are still available. The silent auction begins at 5:30 p.m., and dinner is at 7:30 p.m. For tickets, call Schelly Storm (214) 360-3912. If you would like to contribute to this project, please make checks payable to The Friends of the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center, and mail them to the TFFC at 5550 FM 2495, Athens, TX 75752. ★

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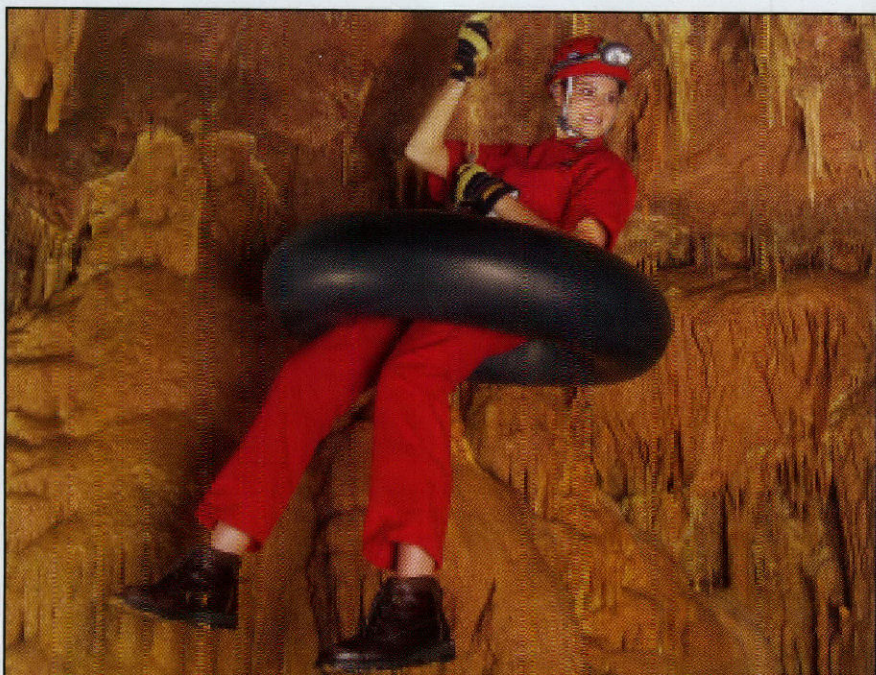
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# Texas Brigades

*At five-day camps that combine hands-on habitat management education and plain old fun, the volunteers learn as much as the students.*



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Jump in.

I grew up in a North Texas home where quail hunting was a big part of family life. My childhood winters were spent trailing fine bird dogs every weekend with my brother, father and grandfather. Bobwhite numbers began a noticeable decline at my family's ranch a few years ago in spite of the fact that it is located far away from urban sprawl. My concern over this disturbing trend is what prompted me to become interested in quail habitat management. While attending a Quail Appreciation Day seminar, I met esteemed upland game bird expert, Dr. Dale Rollins. He told me there was no more intensive crash course in quail management than the Bobwhite Brigades. Now in my 30s with no children of my



own, I also wanted to find a way to become involved with the passing of the torch to the next generation. This is exactly what Texas Brigades Wildlife Leadership camps are all about. I volunteered one week last July as a "covey leader" at the 7th Battalion of the Bobwhite Brigade at the 74 Ranch in South Texas, and it was one of the best experiences of my life.

Rollins founded the Texas Brigades Youth Wildlife Leadership camps 13 years ago, in partnership with Quail Unlimited, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. In addition to the Bobwhite Brigade, students can opt for the Buckskin Brigade (deer), Feathered Forces (turkey), and Bass Brigade, which held its first camp

march and shout military-style cadences that teach land management principles. Educational games and team-building exercises related to land management ethics and politics make up a large part of the daily schedule. They learn about the biology of the selected species, plant identification and other critical aspects of habitat management through hands-on experiences. In addition, cadets can compete for college scholarships.

The motto of Texas Brigades is, "Tell me, I forget. Show me, I remember. Involve me, I understand." The hands-on involvement is what leaves such a lasting impression on the youngsters, as well as

the adults that participate in the camps. Not only was I able to vastly enhance my own knowledge of quail habitat management practices at the Brigades, but also I took away a very good feeling that I was getting positively involved in the lives of the teens.

Cost for the five-day camps is \$300 for each 13- to 17-year-old cadet. Deadline for application for both cadets and adult volunteers is April 1. To participate, contact Texas Brigades Executive Director Helen Holdsworth at <www.texasbrigades.org> or by phone at (800) TEX-WILD.

—D. Collin Hudson



in 2004 in Bastrop.

"Parents should send their kids to the Brigades to fast-forward their youth's leadership abilities, like communication and teamwork skills, and build confidence. Cadets (boys and girls) are introduced to a network of wildlife professionals and allowed to experience what a career in wildlife management entails. The Brigades instill into youths an appreciation for the outdoors and the user's role and responsibilities in the future of conservation. The camps also motivate youths that have potential but have yet to be challenged to develop that potential," says Rollins.

The cadets' days are long, but there's also ample time for simple enjoyment of the outdoors. In the predawn hours, cadets

5:45 a.m. Hittin' the hole.

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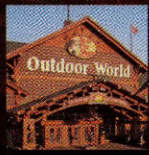
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# How to Transport a Kayak

*To enjoy a perfect day on the water, first you have to get there with an undamaged boat.*



**With some of today's lightweight kayaks,** it may be tempting to try to transport them without any special equipment — don't do it. To avoid serious damage to the boat, yourself and fellow drivers, invest in a durable rack system and appropriate tie-downs.

There are two types of rack systems that are designed to safely transport your kayak: foam saddles and roof-mounted rack systems. Foam saddle systems are easy to install, easy to remove, and can be found for under \$50. These curved foam blocks sit between the kayak and the car's roof. The entire system is secured in place by two or three sturdy straps that either attach to the car's rain gutters or loop through the car's open windows and attach inside.

The drawback to a foam rack is that it provides less security than a roof-mounted rack system. Your kayak could move around on top of your vehicle when you encounter wind or slam on your brakes. Even worse, your foam blocks might blow off from under your boat, causing the straps to loosen.

"Because of the kayak's shape, it's hard to find a foam rack that works well," says Bob Spain, director of coastal habitat resources for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. "You have to tie the kayak in the front and the back because there is nothing else to keep it secure." If your vehicle came equipped with a factory rack, foam saddles that have pre-cut grooves to slide over the load rack will provide more protection than those that are merely secured by straps. But foam saddle systems do offer an inexpensive alternative to a roof-mounted rack. These systems are ideal for those who transport their kayak only a few miles.

For more serious kayakers who travel greater distances to get to prime spots, a roof-mounted rack system is a much safer and more stable way to transport a kayak. With a roof rack specifically

**When used with a durable roof-mounted rack system, sturdy straps with spring-loaded buckles secure your kayak atop the vehicle much more effectively than rope can.**

designed to transport kayaks, you can overcome the hazards that accompany a foam saddle system. "A real roof-mounted rack is more substantial, secure and simpler because it is actually bolted to your car," says John Van Ness, owner of Austin Outdoor Gear & Guidance. Fortunately, roof-mounted rack systems can now adapt to almost any car, truck or SUV. Towers — small, sturdy, vertical supports that hold the rack on the car and keep the kayak from directly touching the roof — are either held in place by clamps or permanently fastened to the roof itself. The kayak is then supported on horizontal poles that lie between the towers. There are many different types, but most boats are secured to the bars by curved, cradle-like attachments. These padded braces gently clutch onto the sides of the kayak to keep it steady.

Most kayaks weigh between 35 and 90 pounds, so it is ideal for two people to help load and unload your kayak. "Having a friend grab one end of the kayak while you grab another is the easiest and most effective way to do it," recommends Spain. Luckily, some manufacturers such as Yakama and Thule produce roof rack systems that come with accessories like rollers that help to

simplify the process. With these, it's possible for one person to place the front of the kayak on the rollers, pick up the back and roll it straight up onto the rack.

Once the kayak is loaded onto your vehicle, sturdy straps with spring-loaded buckles will do a much better job of keeping the kayak in place than simple rope. "They provide positive closure over a wider hull area and tend to reduce the damage on your kayak," explains Spain. As a general rule, place some sort of cushioning between the buckle and the kayak. Doing so will lessen hull damage during transport. Tie off the extra strap directly above the buckle once it has been fastened tight, just in case the buckle releases while you're driving. Additionally, Van Ness suggests tying "keeper" lines in the shape of an inverted V from both ends of the kayak to the car's hood hinge for extra security. "If you open the hood and trunk and loop two pieces of rope, each 2 feet long, to the hinges and tie the bow lines to that, your kayak will be much more stable and will not slide forward if your car suddenly comes to a halt."

Driving with a kayak atop a vehicle is not difficult, but it can be dangerous if the kayak is not properly loaded. No matter what sort of rack system and strategy you use to fasten a kayak to your car, Spain explains that it is essential that the craft not slide in any direction when the car is in motion; otherwise, you could lose your kayak. Buckles can unbuckle, knots can loosen and rope can stretch, so to be on the safe side, stop periodically to make sure that your kayak has not shifted during the trip. ★



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# Fishing Tools

*From removing hooks to untangling knots, the right tool can make all the difference.*

A few well-designed gadgets will help make sure that your fishing hours remain focused on the fun. Of the hundreds of tools available to anglers, some are truly essential for safety, while others are just extremely handy. One of the most ingenious is the **Folstaf**, which can help avert dangerous falls. The unit is carried folded in a small belt-sheath. When removed by its cork grip, the pole sections instantly bungee-jump together into a full-length (41 to 59 inches) rigid aluminum staff that can be used as a probe and as a support for crossing rough terrain or wade-fishing in swift and unpredictable waters. (\$125, Folstaf, (607) 397-9133, <www.folstaf.com>).

Another safety device, the **Petzl Duo Headlamp**, offers hands-free lighting to anyone night fishing or navigating dark trails and watercourses. It is a waterproof unit with two lighting modes. General illumination is provided by 14 LED bulbs, or for long distance lighting, just flip a switch for the stronger quartz halogen adjustable beam spotlight. (\$114, Petzl Duo LED 14/ Halogen with battery belt pack, Petzl America, (801) 926-1500, <www.petzl.com>).

Among the handiest of fishing tools are the **Bassmasters Line Clippers** that include a knot pick, serrated lure tuner, hook file and flat head screwdriver. With an oversize thumb bar, it is easier to use than conventional clippers. For accessibility and to prevent loss, they are best carried on a neck lanyard or clipped to a pocket or vest. (\$3.99, Line Clippers, #21-421-800-00, Bass Pro Shops, (800) 227-7776 <www.basspro.com>).

Handling fish with sharp teeth and spines can be painful. The **Baker Stainless Hookout** has a trigger-style grip that activates rounded pincer jaws at the end of a long shank, allowing quick and easy extractions without injury to you or the fish. The tool comes in two sizes, standard 9 1/2 inches or short 6 1/2 inches. (\$14.89, Standard Stainless Hookout, \$11.99, Shorty Stainless Hookout, Academy Sports & Outdoors, (877) 999-9856, <www.academy.com>).

Top-rated among saltwater anglers and professional guides wanting the ultimate in durability are the 6-inch

**Van Staal Titanium Long Nose Pliers** that can stand years of service in the marine environment. The spring-loaded, channel-cut jaws have maximum holding and cutting power. Designed for rigging terminal tackle, they come with replaceable tungsten cutters; a textured nonslip metal finish, coiled lanyard and leather belt case. (\$279,

Combination Pliers Set, Van Staal, (800) 718-7335, <www.vanstaal.com>).

A must-have tool for positive hook-sets is a **Diamond Hook Sharpener** with a groove to put a fine point on dull hooks. The self-contained unit is small, light-

weight and clips in any pocket like a writing pen. The diamond-coated rod will also sharpen both cutlery and tools. (\$5.95, Diamond Sharpener Model S, Eze-Lap Diamond Products, (800) 843-4815, <www.eze-lap.com>).

Long-handled dip-nets can make it much easier to land larger fish, but those nets are a nuisance to carry and often tangle with other gear. To avoid these problems, try the **Spro Stowaway Net** that opens with the flip of the wrist. This net features a light and sturdy carbon graphite extension handle with locking sections for either a short or long reach. Fully extended it is 5 1/2 feet in length with a 2-foot soft mesh net. After use, the unit quickly collapses and is secured by a Velcro strap for easy stowage and transport. (\$79, Stowaway Net, Spro Corp., (770) 919-1722, <www.spro.com>).

Most of these tools are designed for marine conditions, but even stainless steel requires oiling to prevent rust. Anglers find they enjoy the sport more if they keep their gear to a minimum. This is fine so long as you have a few essential items that help to keep your baits or lures in the water. Nothing is more frustrating than to spend half an hour untangling a backlash with only your fingernails to pick out the knots. ★

THE GEAR GUY'S STAR RATING:	
Folstaf	★★★★★
Petzl Duo Headlamp	★★★★★
Bassmasters Line Clippers	★★★★
Baker Stainless Hookout	★★★★★
Van Staal Titanium Long-Nose Pliers	★★★★★
Diamond Hook Sharpener	★★★★★
Spro Stowaway Net	★★★★
	★POOR ★★OK ★★★GOOD ★★★★GREAT ★★★★★SUPER



Top left: Folstaf; top right: Baker Stainless Hookout; next top right: Diamond Hook Sharpener; middle left: Van Staal Titanium Long-Nose Pliers; middle right: Petzl Duo Headlamp; above: Bassmasters Line Clippers; right: Spro Stowaway Net.





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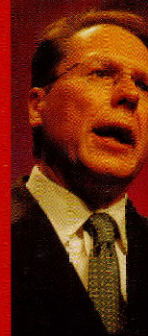
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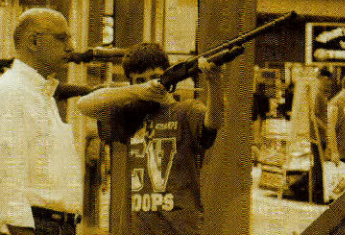
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# 3 Days in the Field / By Russell A. Graves

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## Little Paris on the Prairie

More reminiscent of the Deep South than its French namesake, this Paris is home to wild turkeys, tallgrass prairies and prehistoric sharks.

**The day is a bit misty**, but I can clearly see the eastern wild turkeys picking through the leaves searching for food. Their sturdy black bodies stand in contrast to the green winter grass at road's edge, and I ease to a stop along Farm-to-Market Road 1499 in northwestern Lamar County and watch them through my binoculars. Only 100 yards away, the birds seem unconcerned with my presence as I whisper to my lifelong friend Garry Mills about the significance of seeing the birds.

Eastern wild turkeys are a new import to the Paris area. Long extirpated, reintroduction efforts began in the 1930s to restock the birds, and today, the Pat Mayse Wildlife Management Area, located 11 miles northwest of Paris, is home to a thriving population of eastern wild turkeys. Soon, the flock melts into the underbrush and disappears from view. Credentialed with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Limited Use Permits, my friend and I decide to slip into the woods and try to photograph them.

A couple hundred yards into the woods, we hear the turkeys in the understory just to the east. We hastily throw up some brush for a blind and call but ultimately have no luck — the turkeys slowly skirt away. Nevertheless, I am excited to see the birds. In my life, I've seen thousands of Rio Grande turkeys but perhaps less than four dozen eastern wild turkeys. I chalk up our adventure as a success.

Driving east from the WMA, we explore the Corps of Engineers land around Pat Mayse Lake. On our drive, I notice

that increasingly, pine trees start to intersperse throughout the hardwood forests. Over the next three days, I will learn that Lamar County is on the northwestern edge of the East Texas pine curtain and has a Southern charm in which I've never fully immersed myself until this weekend. Although I grew up close to here, I know relatively little about the area and am anxious to find the kinds of adventure that the region offers.

On day two, I intend to go solo on the morning half of my trip, so I wake and head for the western edge of Lamar County to an area where the East Texas forests subside and the Blackland Prairie ecoregion begins. Before sunrise, I drive by two prairies — the 97-acre Tridens Prairie, which lies on the south side of U.S. Highway 82, and the immense, 2,100-acre Smiley-Woodfin Prairie, which is on the north side of the highway. In the predawn light, I walk among the mixed grasses of Tridens Prairie and quietly reflect on the plant diversity at my feet.

When the sun breaks, I dash across to the north side of the highway to take a look at the Smiley-Woodfin Prairie. A historical marker proclaims that this immense tract of private land is the largest piece of virgin tallgrass prairie left in Texas. Unlike the rest of the Texas tallgrass prairie, a plow has never furrowed the deep black soil just over the fence from where I stand.

Although I cannot walk onto the private prairie, there is a considerable amount of highway and farm-to-market road frontage on the south and east sides of the land, so I drive the margins slowly. Toward the northern edge of the prairie, I see a phenomenon that continues on to other parcels of land. The unusual terrain features are grass-covered mounds. Perhaps 10 feet across, these mounds rise about 18 inches and are randomly interspersed across the surrounding prairies and number in the hundreds. I ask around as to their origins, but no one seems to know.

As the sun climbs higher in the sky, I make my way to the Gambill's Goose Preserve. A modest-sized lake is the focal point of the preserve, and migratory geese and ducks line the fringes of

The Blackland Prairie meets the Pineywoods near Paris. below: part of the 2,100-acre Smiley-Woodfin Prairie — the largest piece of virgin tallgrass prairie in Texas.



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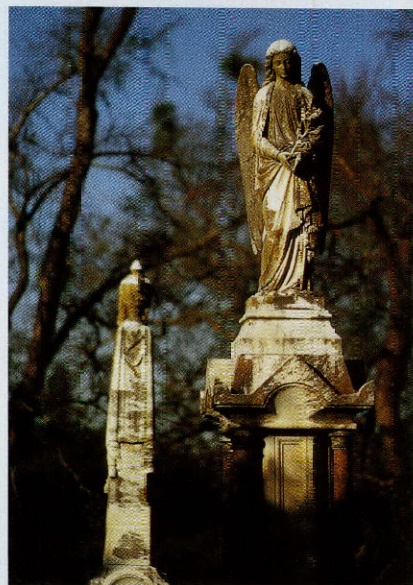
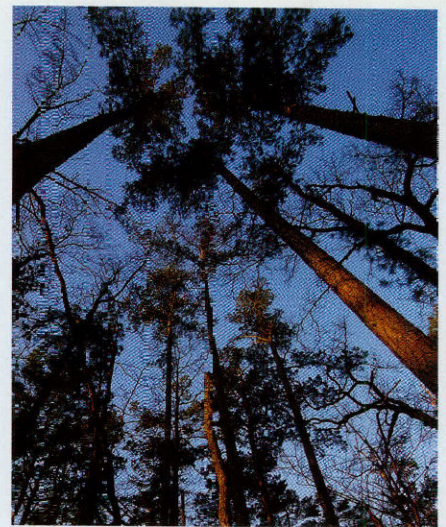


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with locals, they give directions according to which part of the loop in which you should drive.

Around the loop, it seems that the Paris economy is doing well. Once inside the loop, I begin to see palatial Victorian homes and realize that this city has a distinctly Southern culture. As I wander parts of old Paris looking for the Evergreen Cemetery, I stumble past a replica of the Eiffel Tower. Located by the city's civic center — just south of Paris Junior College — the replica tower was built by local craftsmen and sports a red cowboy hat on top.

Driving just west of the tower, I finally locate the Evergreen Cemetery and it's huge. According to the records, some 18,000 people are interred here. As I drive the cemetery grounds, I notice a distinctive divide between the uniformity of size and shape of modern headstones and the glorious splendor of old headstones. In the old part of the cemetery, late 1800s to early 1920s headstones rise tall amongst the pine and oak trees of the cemetery. I circle to the old part of the cemetery until I find what I came looking for — an old headstone with a cowboy-boot-wearing Jesus on top. I'd heard about it through the grapevine, and I just had to see it for myself. On my way out of the cemetery I see the grave of Civil War general Sam Bell Maxey and decide to visit his home just a few blocks north of here.

The home of General Maxey is typically Southern Victorian with its large front porch and spacious interior. The home is remarkably preserved and is managed as a State Historic Site by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Site administrator Judy Brummett and her staff expertly guide me through the house and explain intimate details of the furnishings and a late-19th-century way

Clockwise from top: Pat Mayse Lake; old-growth pines in Lennox Woods; angels stand guard in Evergreen Cemetery; Paris' replica of the Eiffel Tower. Below: the home of General Sam Bell Maxey, a TPWD state historic site.



the lake. Owned by the City of Paris, the Gambill's Goose Preserve is named for John Gambill, a local farmer who began feeding a pair of Canada Geese back in the 1920s. Over the years, he continued his practice of feeding and providing a winter stopover for migratory birds. In time, ownership of the refuge passed from the Gambill family to the state of Texas and eventually on to the city of Paris. Throughout the winter, the city of Paris and the trustees of the preserve maintain a twice daily feeding program

via automatic feeders and plant crops around the lake to provide supplemental feed. Although I missed the 7:30 a.m. feeding, ducks and geese still hang around the feeding area, and I watch them until I head for my next stop.

Pulling in to the city of Paris, I see that the town has all of the staples of modern life, such as big-box superstores, chain eateries and convenience stores on seemingly every corner. Paris is defined by the black ribbon of Loop 271 that circles the city. When you visit



of life that is unfamiliar, but at the same time, fascinating to me.

By now the sun is high overhead and I decide its time for lunch, so I drive west and meet my brother William in the small town of Windom. We grab a sandwich at a local mom-and-pop grocery store and head back east to the town of Honey Grove. This afternoon we will make our way southwest of Paris and explore many of the small towns with unusual place names that dot the map.

According to legend, Honey Grove got its name from Davy Crockett as he headed from Tennessee through the area to fight with the volunteers at the Alamo. William and I don't explore Honey Grove long. Our only stop is at Smith's Feed-Seed and Hardware. Johnnie Smith, owner of the old-school hardware store, has been in business for 54 years, and the store was in business even longer, as Smith shows me pictures of the store in operation with wagons and Ford Model T's lined up outside the limestone structure.

Smith's store houses everything from plumbing fixtures and nails to horse tack and livestock feed. It's Saturday afternoon and the store bustles. I'd like to stay and explore, but I am here on a mission — striped overalls for my 4-year-old daughter and 7-month-old son.

Heading south of Honey Grove, William and I soon cross the North Sulphur River. The river is a favorite among amateur paleontologists as its shallow water cuts through 102 feet of blackland soil to reveal prehistoric bones, teeth and shells from ammonites, urchins, sharks and mosasaurs.

The rest of the afternoon, we wander from place to place, taking in the quaintness of the small communities and wondering what each town was like during its heyday. We roam around communities like Ben Franklin, Mud Dig, Ladonia and Pecan Gap but end up in the mythical Bug Tussle. Today, not much exists at Bug Tussle, which lies at the intersection of Texas Highway 34 and FM 1550, but the community serves as a focal point for an annual antique car rally that convenes every April.

On the last morning of my adventure, William and I head northeast of Paris to explore the Texas Nature Conservancy Preserve, the Lennox Woods. Lennox Woods is a 375-acre patch of hardwood and old-growth pine forest with trees as old as 300 years still standing strong. Acquired by the Lennox family in 1863, the woods have

remained intact even as commercial logging operations buzzed all around.

We spend the morning exploring the woods and see animals such as barred owls, redheaded woodpeckers and various songbirds. Frost is heavy on the ground and coats the dead leaves with crunchy crystals. Therefore, we are surprised when a nice 10-point white-tailed buck sneaks silently past us only 20 yards away. We spend three hours roaming the woods marveling at the size of the trees and studying the growth rings of downed hardwood trees.

Driving away from the Lennox Woods, we make our way down a long, sandy

road with a tall canopy of trees overhead. Soon we are back on the blacktop and wind our way through northern Lamar County until we arrive back at the spot where my journey began — at the Pat Mayse Wildlife Management Area.

In the short time I've spent in and around Paris, I find that I've been missing out on all the natural and historic treasures that the area offers. Before I drive away for a quick visit with my parents a half an hour west of here, I take one last look for more turkeys. Not seeing any, I pull away knowing I'll come back to this spot.

I have to get photos of those turkeys. ★

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Help make a difference

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

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*The* PARK *that*  
TIME FORGOT

Boasting the world's largest spring-fed pool and a retro-cool motel, Balmorhea State Park is the great oasis of the Chihuahuan Desert.

By Joe Nick Patoski  
*Photography* by Earl Nottingham







# TO MOST PEOPLE LOOKING ON A MAP,

BALMORHEA IS JUST A STATE PARK. BUT INTREPID TRAVELERS WHO WILLINGLY MAKE PILGRIMAGES ACROSS SEVERAL HUNDRED MILES OF LONESOME HIGHWAY TO THIS 49-ACRE SPREAD IN FAR WEST TEXAS KNOW BALMORHEA IS MUCH MORE THAN THAT.

To them — to us, I should say, since I'm one of the longtime true believers — Balmorhea is the great oasis of the Chihuahuan Desert, the most scenic gateway into the Big Bend, and a delightful, low-key, and relatively undiscovered retreat off the beaten path in the middle of nowhere, yet still within eyeshot of Interstate 10.

In my particular case, Balmorhea is underwater nirvana, the finest natural swimming experience on earth. The World's Largest Spring-fed Swimming Pool, as the park's 3.5-million-gallon centerpiece is billed, is so big — a 200-foot circle around the springs and a large rectangular tangent — it takes a good 15 minutes of a steady crawl stroke to circumnavigate its perimeter.

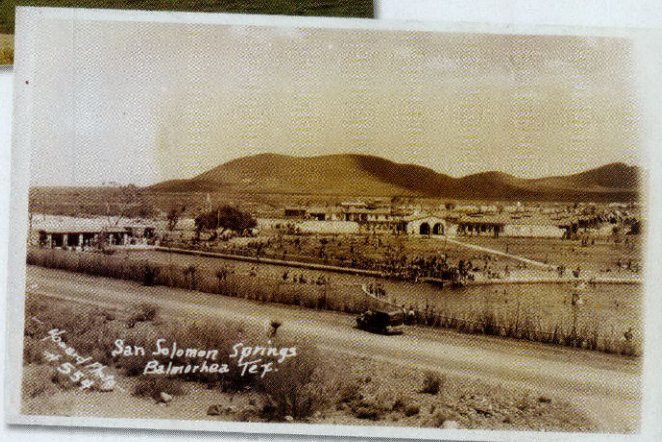
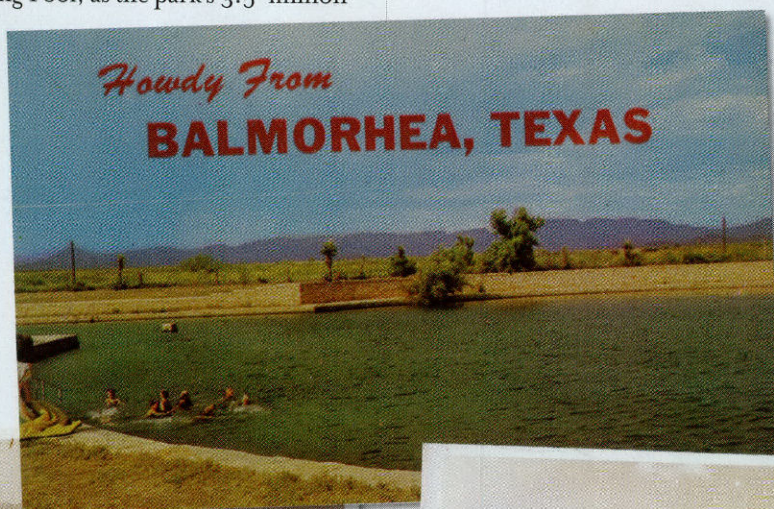
The cottonwood-shaded grounds, crisscrossed with footbridges over the small canals, and the distinctive Spanish colonial white

stant 76 degrees year round, refreshingly cool in the summer heat and surprisingly warm in the middle of winter, and so clear, the terms "gin-clear" and "crystal-clear" don't do it justice. Visibility is 80 feet, farther than one can see underwater in most of the Caribbean Sea.

The clear water and intense, sharp sunlight conspire to zap the waterscape with rays of Technicolor, fairyland light that illuminate thousands of minnow-sized Pecos gambusia and

Comanche Springs pupfish — both listed as endangered species — and tetra, dozens of black catfish hovering near the bottom, and several families of Texas spiny soft-shell and red-eared slider turtles working every corner of the pool. In the winter, coots and bufflehead ducks live on the surface.

Over the past three



adobe, red-tile-roof bathhouse, lovingly constructed in the 1930s by Company 1856 of the storied Civilian Conservation Corps, are soothing to the eye. So is the backdrop of the Davis Mountains rising majestically from the Madera Valley, the land mass dwarfed by the spacious wide-open western sky that sprawls overhead.

That setting is merely a prelude to the scenery underwater. Pure, pristine, ancient artesian water flows from at least nine springs 25 feet below the surface in the middle of the pool at a rate of more than 20 million gallons a day. The water is a con-

decades, I've managed to go swimming at Balmorhea every month of the calendar year. Many times I've had the pool all to myself, like I did two days after Labor Day last year. The solitude, I must admit, was quite a delicious feeling. I felt very privileged to be there at that moment.

Timing is everything. Between Memorial Day and Labor Day, the pool can be packed on weekend days with as many as 1,500 day trippers from nearby towns such as Fort Davis, Alpine, Marfa, Pecos, Presidio, and as far away as Midland, El Paso and Juarez. Most weekends during the rest of the year, the circular

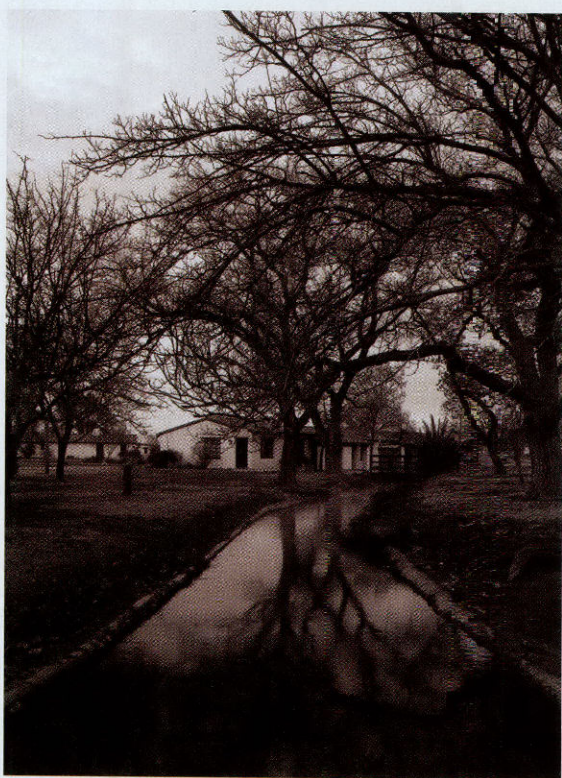




IN MY PARTICULAR CASE, BALMORHEA IS UNDERWATER NIRVANA, THE FINEST NATURAL SWIMMING EXPERIENCE ON EARTH.



THE LONGER ONE PAUSES, THE  
GREATER THE APPRECIATION  
FOR THE SIMPLER PLEASURES  
OF BALMORHEA.







middle of the pool above the springs, and the 18-room white adobe San Solomon Courts cottages and adjacent campgrounds fill up with scuba divers from all across Texas and as far away as New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas and Colorado. The pool is large enough to qualify as open water for scuba certification.

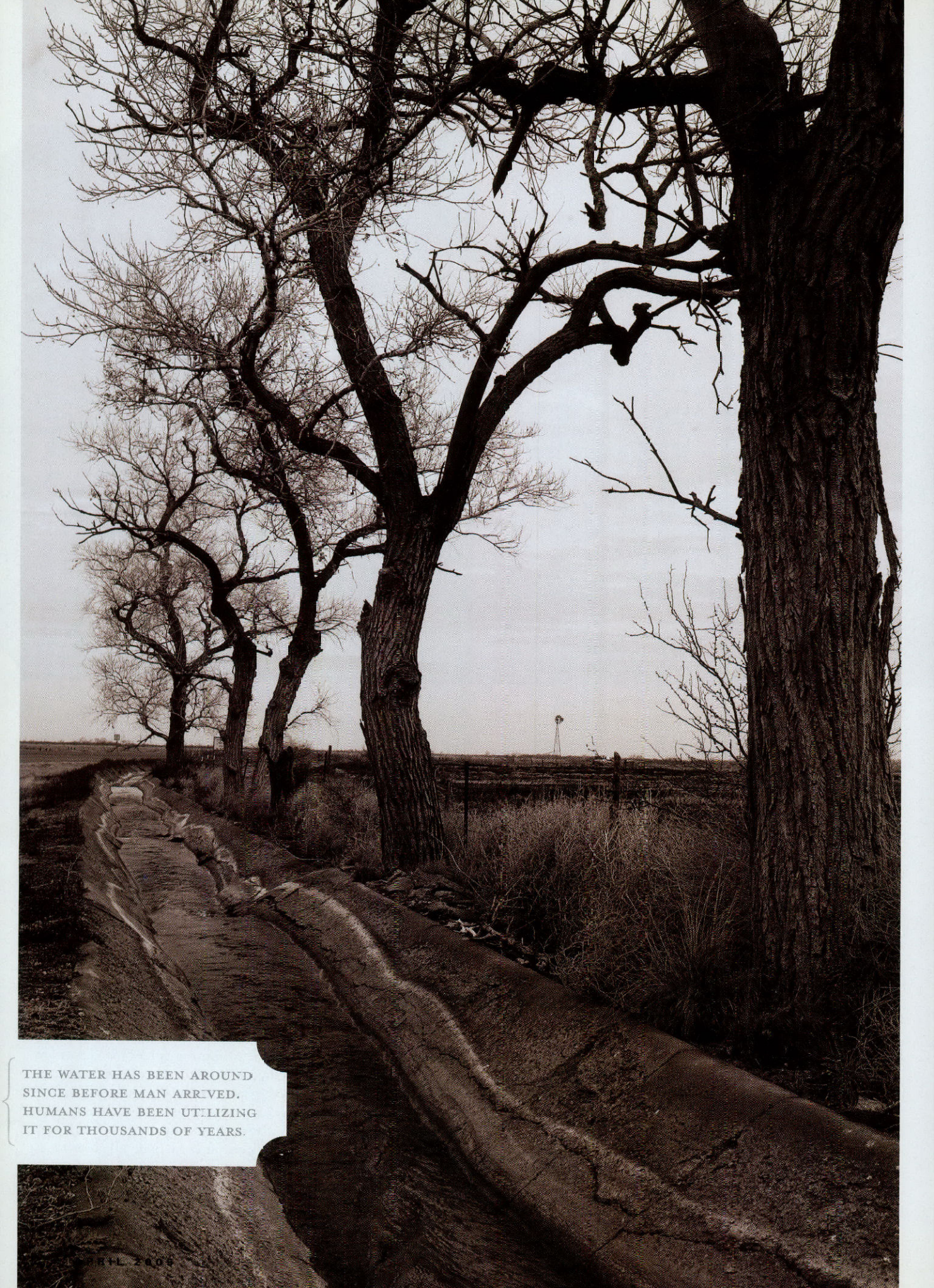
Weedays, more often than not, it's all yours.

Regardless of when I come, I'm struck by the wonder that a pool of this magnificence and aquatic abundance can exist in a dry, harsh terrain that annually averages 3-4 inches of rainfall. Dora Ceballos, a 20-something woman from El Paso whom I met on my last visit, affirmed the special nature of the place. "We're Jehovah's Witnesses," she explained while watching several friends splash in the shallow area by the main steps. "How can you not believe in the miracles of the Creator, seeing this? I had no idea this was here. Next time, we're bringing the kids."

She's right. Water like this belongs in the Texas Hill Country, where most of the other great swimming springs in Texas are located. And sunsets like this are straight out of the American West, Mesilla Valley at the very least, especially when you're finishing a plate of New Mexico-style stacked green chile enchiladas on the patio of the Cueva de Cso restaurant back in town.

Town, 4 miles from the park entrance on State Highway 17, is the real Balmorhea, population 500, so named for Balcomb, Moore, and Rhea, the three Scottish developers who began irrigated farming operations in the valley in the late 19th century.





THE WATER HAS BEEN AROUND  
SINCE BEFORE MAN ARRIVED.  
HUMANS HAVE BEEN UTILIZING  
IT FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.



The water has been around since before man arrived. Humans have been utilizing it for thousands of years. Indians were farming near the springs when the first Spanish explorers crossed this territory in the 16th century. Today San Solomon Springs sustains 12,000 acres of cultivated cotton, sudan grass and alfalfa.

San Solomon Springs is a *ciénega*, the Spanish word for desert marsh, a very unique and rare environment. Much of the *ciénega* was destroyed when the pool was constructed. The pool and the park were initially under the stewardship of the Reeves County Water District No. 1 and were annexed into the Texas Parks and Wildlife system in 1960. In 1996 the unintended marshland damage was mitigated when TPWD established a three-acre *ciénega* below the motel and adjacent to the campgrounds. Planted cottonwood, cattails and bulrushes have flourished. The pied-billed grebe (not seen since 1937) and the green heron have returned.

The above details came from Tom Johnson, the park manager of Balmorhea. Like the Jehovah's Witness, he too confirmed Balmorhea is hardly the typical Texas state park.

"People that come out here all the time don't want anybody else out here. They want it as their own private oasis," he says.

But the numbers don't lie. The annual visitation count is up to more than 200,000 and rising, ranking Balmorhea one of the top ten most-visited state parks. "For a little park out in the middle of nowhere, those numbers are way up there. We have a busy season, and a busier season."

Dove hunters book up motel rooms in early September. Birders from the eastern United States flock to the park to witness western flyway migrations in the spring and fall.

Cyclists regularly stop to ride the local roads. West Texas and New Mexico motorcycle groups hold rallies in town. Rock hunters drop by while seeking out Balmorhea blue agate. Word of mouth has prompted an increasing number of long distance travelers on Interstate 10 to pull off and spend a night in the comfort and quiet of motel rooms with 18-inch adobe walls before resuming their cross-country trek. Then there's the growing number of urban refugees "trying to get out of the city and wanting to find an unspoiled place," Johnson says. "They're coming here. They don't like the TVs in the room, they don't want phones, and they don't want us to make it too nice. They're happy that the nearest Wal-Mart is 53 miles away."

And why not? With simple retro-cool CCC motel kitchenettes for \$60 a night, a dive shop next door that sells air and rents masks and snorkels, nearby restaurants, a café/soda fountain, an RV park, and the new Laird Ranch bed & breakfast with private dining facilities, Balmorhea Lake three and a half miles downstream from San Solomon Springs, and endless vistas of wide open spaces no matter where you look, why bother going anywhere?

Johnson fetched a trove of old postcards and photographs of the springs and the park out of his desk to show me the cult of Balmorhea is no new thing. Two photos are of Tom Johnson's father on a high diving board in the 1940s. His father and mother, residents of Van Horn, 67 miles west, were pool regulars when they were growing up. Many cards identify the pool as the "world's largest." Comments written on the back politely acknowledge the dusty surroundings and occasionally violent weather: "... the country here is so much different from our part of the state."

"We came here but a tornado broke loose over us. What a night!"

On Johnson's wall are a couple of publicity photographs. One is the Paladins, a modern greased-up rockabilly band

from Los Angeles who stop in whenever they're going to or from Austin. The handwritten message accompanying the band's autograph declares: "This is the greatest place in the world."

Another publicity photo on Johnson's wall is signed by Divin' Sam Hernandez, the first and only American to win the Acapulco Cliff Diving Championships. "He's a truck driver now," Johnson said. "His route is from Los Angeles to Dallas, and he says this is the only place between those two cities worth stopping for a swim."

The longer one pauses, the greater the appreciation for the simpler pleasures of Balmorhea. The playground next to the pool has all the swings and slides a kid could ever need. Picnic shelters with small cooking pits may be no big deal in Dallas or San Antonio, but on this part of the desert, the tables and benches, the shade awning, and the grass around them are luxuries. The small network of canals emanating from the springs into the restored *ciénega* provides a subtle, sweetly melodic soundtrack while observing the abundant aquatic life thriving in the see-through water. It's an elementary, sometimes deeply spiritual exercise comparable to contemplating a tidal pool. (Shorter attention spans will benefit from the window wall viewing area of the San Solomon *ciénega* as well as the adjacent observation deck.) The mere act of sitting on the porch outside a motel room takes on its own appeal. Hang around long enough and you'll finally make sense out of the older couple who spent at least half of one day reclining in their folding beach chairs by the pool without ever moving.


One February day a couple of years ago, I emerged from the water to encounter a weathered old man gazing onto the scene. He was from California, he told me, and he hadn't been to Balmorhea since the days shortly after it was constructed. Back then, he said, there were dances staged on the pavilion and a Mexican café that operated on the premises. He was passing through and just wanted to see if the old place was still there. He seemed reassured it was. His experience synched with the first impressions two clean-cut gentlemen wearing leather chaps had when they stumbled onto the park last September while riding their motorcycles from Big Bend National Park back home to Kansas. "This is the park that time forgot," one whispered to the other as the ranger checked them into their room for the night.

All kinds of people from all over are Balmorhea fans, I've come to find out. From unsuspecting bikers from Kansas to the husband and wife walking in tandem in matching shirts, shorts and knee socks to the peregrine falcon biologist in search of relief from the heat to the displaced bathing beauties in bikinis making like lizards and lying on the concrete wall by the pool to work on their tans.

It's convinced me that no matter where I go or where I may end up on this earth, sooner or later I, too, will come back to Balmorhea, just to see if it's still there, just to get that feeling again of being in a park that time forgot — in a place that feels like it should be somewhere else. It will be worth the trip, I'm sure. ★

**THE SAN SOLOMON SPRINGS POOL** is officially designated as a natural spring, meaning swimming is at your own risk. No lifeguards are on duty. Pool hours are 8 a.m. until sunset, daily. Admission to the park, including pool access, is \$3 per person for adults and children 13 and over. Motel rooms are \$50 a night for two and \$60 for rooms with kitchenettes. Campsites are \$9 - \$14 a day. Call (432) 375-2370 for information.






# BASS *on the* FLY

The serene sport of fly fishing gets a lot more exciting when Brazos River bass are involved.

*By* Tom Behrens







## A POPPING BUG GENTLY DROPS

down on the water in a small eddy close to the bank, a perfect cast by a fly angler who methodically works his way down the gently flowing green river. A couple of short strips of line and suddenly the serenity of the quiet stream is broken by an explosion of water as a fish annihilates the bug. While it may sound like a scene from one of the famous trout streams of Montana, we are talking about catching bass on a fly rod in Central Texas — on the Brazos River.

This section of the Brazos begins in the tailrace of the Lake Whitney Dam and winds its way among granite cliffs and outcroppings. At some places, pure spring water cascades down the hillsides. Oak, sycamore, pecan and other hardwoods line this 38-mile stretch of the river near Waco.

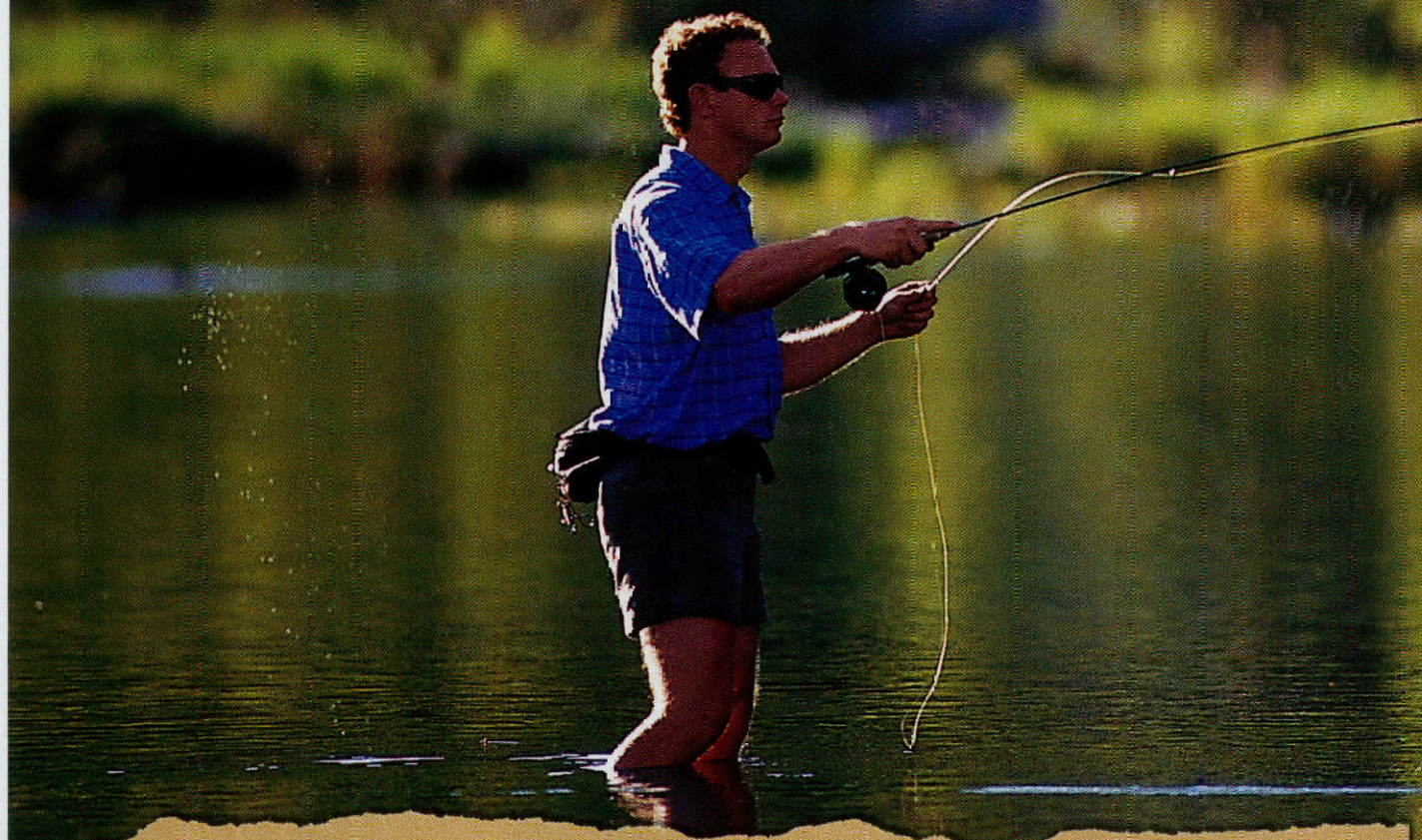
"In 2000, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department fishery personnel went below the Lake Whitney dam and electro-fished as far as they could go," says John Tibbs, District 2B Supervisor for Inland Fisheries. "They found populations of largemouth, spotted and smallmouth bass, in addition to some catfish, and some very large sunfish. Largemouth bass was the predominant sport fish that was electro-fished, but good populations existed in all the fish families."

The extra water discharges from Lake Whitney, a by-product of the dam's hydroelectric power generation, have helped produce the fishery in the Brazos. "I would say across the spectrum it probably has benefited from the higher flows, which obviously benefits the fishery," says Tibbs. "What we found was quite an intriguing fishery."

Chris Shafer is a veteran fishing guide on the Brazos whose specialty is fly-fishing for bass. Shafer was formerly a professional tournament angler in the '80s. He guided on Lake Whitney exclusively for largemouth, smallmouth and striped bass. "My knowledge of bass fishing came from the conventional venue; I have transferred it







to fly fishing," says Shafer. "Fly fishing on the river was one of those developmental type of things. I had to learn what it took for a fly fishing presentation to be effective consistently. That's a learning curve that we have gone through the last 10 years."

The combination of good populations of bass and shallow water makes the Brazos a fly angler's dream. "A bass is the perfect fish for

immediately turn back right. He can jump straight up 3 feet in the air and shake like it's nobody's business and give it back to you. He can run at you so fast you can't catch up with him. But with a fly rod, if you know what to do by keeping that fly rod loaded and the angle of attack like it's supposed to be, it's a gas. We are on the cutting edge on fly fishing for bass," Shafer says.

bluegills, shad, crawfish — all things of a larger size. Where most people make the mistake, when they go to pick a fly for fishing for bass, they choose too small of a fly.

"Then they say, 'Well I like to bass-fish but I just can't catch any big fish on a fly. It's because you are not fishing with the right bait. Predominantly the average size bass in most Texas rivers is 2 to 3 pounds. Down

here on the Brazos, I have a unique situation where our fish range from 3 to 5 pounds. Our bass, for a river, are pretty large."

Shafer doesn't have any secret flies. Whitlock Hair Bugs and Porxy's Pets are two of his favorites. "This is all a hair-bug deal," says Shafer.

"We are using Number 1s, 2s." The Whitlock Hair Bug comes in several different colors. Fruit-cocktail color produces smalles in clear water.

"We have no problems getting bites. But the difference between getting them to bite and getting them into the boat separates the true angler from the novice," says Shafer. "Most of my fly anglers, if they get a 50-

THE COMBINATION OF GOOD POPULATIONS OF BASS AND SHALLOW WATER MAKES THE BRAZOS A FLY ANGLER'S DREAM. "A BASS IS THE PERFECT FISH FOR A FLY ROD PRESENTATION," SAYS SHAFER.

a fly rod presentation," says Shafer. "He is a superior fish, meaning that his lower jaw extends further than his upper jaw. When a fish has that, it means the fish feeds upward. Fly presentations are generally designed to be fished on or at the surface.

"When you get him in riverine situations, especially where the water is shallow, he feeds at the surface continually. He can go left and

"Most guys who fly fish relegate their efforts mostly to trout or salmon. It is a different type of presentation, because those fish eat different types of food sources. Primarily for trout it is a small offering: bugs, nymphs and things of that nature. A bass is a garbage can. He eats fins, feathers or fur. He is looking for a larger offering, because that's what he normally eats. He eats





slack. If he runs left or right of me, I have the ability to lay my rod over either to the left or to the right so that I can keep constant tension on that fish," he says.

"Because of a fly reel, you cannot catch that line up as fast as that fish can swim. It is impossible. You have to learn to use that rod to change the angle of attack from your rod to that fish to be sure that line is tight. If that line is not tight, that fish will use the weight of the line to cam the hook out of his mouth and throw your bait back to you," Shafer adds.

The worst thing you could do is pull up on the fish to set the hook, he says. "When you pull him upward there is no better way for a bass to generate slack in line than to clear the line out of the water. By keeping the fish's head down and keeping as much line in the water at all times, if he makes a radical change in direction on you, just the weight of the line dragging through the water will help keep tension on the line where he can't generate slack. When the bass starts to surface, bury your rod tip in the water," Shafer says.

"We use straight 20-pound monofilament, about 5 feet worth. That way the fish

won't break off when you are around logjams, boulders and things like that. That heavier straight line helps turn that big bug over. They are looking at the reaction of that bug. When they hit that puppy, they will crater it."

Shafer claims that on an average day, two people in his boat can expect to catch about 20 fish apiece. The bass run between 2 and 6 pounds. "We designed this so that you are fishing out of a boat, similar to what the experience would be if you were drift fishing out in the West," he says.

A shallow draft boat such as an aluminum john boat, canoe or kayak is the best means of transportation down the river. Wade fishing is severely restricted because of limited river access. A popular access point is at the Lake Whitney dam, with another located on County Road 3650. The third public access point is the Brazos River RV Park at Gholson. Cameron Park at Waco is the last pickup and drop-off point. Privately owned watercraft can be put in or removed for a fee at The Outpost/Dicks Canoes. Canoe rentals and shuttle service are also available. The Outpost is located 12 miles west of West, Texas, on FM 2114, and 8 miles by water from the Lake Whitney Dam. ★

percent catch rate versus the number of bites, they are doing good."

"You have to know what to do once that fish takes the presentation. You have made your cast and your bug is sitting on the water where you want it to be. At that time you want to keep your rod tip as low to the water as possible when you are making your strip. That way when that fish hits you, you have sufficient amount of movement to be able to set the hook. If you're fishing with your rod at a 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock position and he hits you on a fly rod, you won't even get the hook set before you run out of room. You won't be able to generate any leverage because you have come to the edge of your arm," says Shafer.

"You keep your rod pointed directly in line with your fly. I keep my rod tip right at the water. When he fires me up, I have plenty of room to make that adjustment with that 9-foot rod. Once he hits me, which way I go with that rod depends on the fish. By having that rod tip out in front of me and pointed downward, if he comes straight to me I have the ability to pull the rod straight up and catch up my







# Cat Tricks

Innovative — and downright odd — ways of catching Texas catfish

*By* Chester Moore, Jr.



## TEXANS LIKE TO BRAG THAT EVERYTHING GROWS BIGGER HERE.

WHILE SOME OF THESE BOASTS MIGHT BE STRETCHING THE TRUTH just a little, there are things Texans can rightfully claim as grandiose, and one of them is catfish.

Living proof of this dwells in the aquarium at the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center in Athens. That is where Splash, the 121.5-pound, world-record blue cat caught by angler Cody Mullennix last January, entertains visitors on a daily basis.

Anglers dreaming of catching a Splash-size catfish, or at least one big enough to brag about, have many options in the Lone Star State, where excellent catfish action abounds in every region.

Let's take a look at some of the unusual methods anglers in Texas use to catch these trophy cats. Be warned: Some of these tactics may seem downright weird, but with catfish, that tends to come with the territory.

### Catfish for Bait

Over the years, I have cleaned cats that had ingested everything from bream to blue crabs. It should come as no surprise, then, that catfish can be cannibalistic, especially the highly predatory flathead.

In fact, when anglers in Southeast Texas want to score on trophy-sized flatheads, they exploit these cannibalistic tendencies.

No, I am not talking about putting flatheads or even blue or channel cats on a hook. That would be illegal since those species are game fish. I am talking about using bullheads or "mud cats," as anglers call them in many areas.

The law does not protect yellow, brown and black bullheads, meaning anglers can legally use them as bait and, according to Lewis Hogan of Orange, there is nothing better for big flatheads.

"Ask anyone around here who runs trotlines what their favorite bait for big flatheads is, and they will all tell you: mud cats," Hogan says.

Hogan catches bullheads in perch traps or on rod and reel in the backwaters in the spring and, when setting his trotlines, hooks them through the lips and hopes a big flathead does not break them off.

"I have had numerous break-offs from what I suspect are really big cats. I rarely catch any less than 20 pounds using mudcats for bait and have caught them up to 60 pounds," he adds.

Hogan uses other bait when he cannot catch his beloved mud cats but says, "It's just not the same."

### Catching cats in the brush

Another method that may seem strange but that works quite well is "flipping" for catfish. Many anglers know largemouth bass and crappie hold tight to brush that runs along shorelines of rivers and reservoirs, and so do catfish.

This method is one I discovered by accident a few years ago. I was field-testing an underwater camera system called the Aqua-Vu, which allows anglers to look underwater from the boat, when I came across a bunch of big channel cats in an extremely clear section of the Guadalupe River near Kerrville.

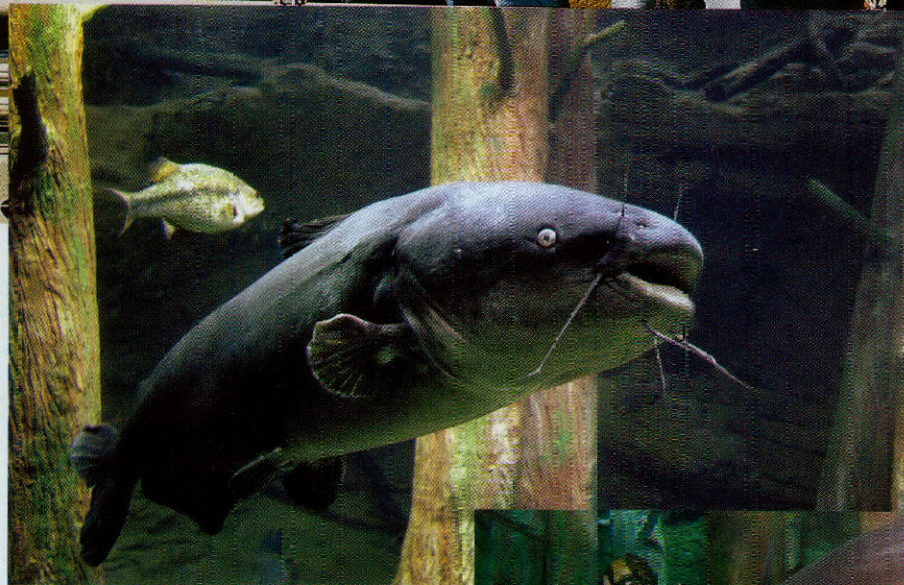
I did not have any catfish bait, so I rigged a heavy jighead with a pork rind and flipped it on the edge of the brush toward the fish. I ended up catching only two of these fish that day, but there were far more down there.

The best spot to look is near brush that rests on a ledge at the end of a point near a creek channel. This is especially true at night when catfish often move from the deep to the shallows to feed. Shad stack up in these areas, which in turn draws in the catfish. By flipping a piece of cut shad or a live crawfish rigged on a 1/2-ounce jighead, it is pos-





Previous page: Masters of the deep: Texas is home to giant catfish, including Splash (at left), now at home in the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center, Athens. This page: top: patience and technique pay off with big cat catches; Insets: Splash entertains visitors in the TFFC tank, waiting for the diver to deliver its next chicken dinner. Opposite: Catfish lurk in all sorts of underwater structure.



sible to catch good numbers of cats.

A few years ago, *Texas Angler* television host Keith Warren told me of a similar method he has used that involves fishing a dead shrimp or other bait on a Texas rig without the worm around brush and other structure.

He says channel cats will take to moving baits. The natural tendency is to think of catfish going for something that is still, but something with a little movement can get their attention.

Lake Sam Rayburn guide Roger Bacon turned me onto some outstanding brush fishing for cats by accident back in the summer of 2000.

While fishing with him for crappie over manmade brush piles, I caught a couple of channel cats along with some large-mouth bass and figured out quickly that cats hang around brush just as much as



any other game fish.

Anglers know manmade brush is good for crappie because it provides structure and draw in baitfish. Catfish like structure, too, and they, of course, prey on baitfish. This makes brush piles a magnet for cats.

Bacon says anglers not familiar with brush pile locations should search the open lake and large coves, looking for submerged marker buoys covered with green slime.

"These are the ones some of the hardcore crappie anglers put out and they usually hold plenty of fish," he says.

Some of these brush piles can be quite large, and there is much structure to cover. Anglers should stick with the main brush and not worry about the smaller piles on the outside. Most of the cats tend to stick around the main brush, and if anglers are baiting the brush for crappie or cats, they usually do so on the main pile because it is easier to position a boat over.

## Seeking Night Stalkers

Out of Texas' three most popular catfish species, the flathead is by far the most predatory. Anglers seeking these big aggressive catfish use everything from live perch to other catfish for bait as we detailed earlier.

Perhaps the best time to catch flatheads on rod and reel is during the summer at night when they move into shallow waters to feed on the baitfish that congregate there.

Veteran anglers claim that the biggest fish usually do not venture far from the deep. Target the large creeks and sloughs that feed into deep areas of a reservoir or river and fish the first 1/4 mile of it. Also, consider fishing any shallow, flat area along a major creek bend that empties into deep, moving water. During summer, the big flatheads tend to



stay in the deeper water during daylight hours and move shallow after the sun sets.

Most anglers fish with live perch, extra large shiners or goldfish under a lighted cork so they can easily see it disappear when a fish strikes.

Something to consider for use at night is a green fishing light. They are popular among coastal anglers and are becoming increasingly common among crappie anglers. Lights draw in baitfish, and the green lights tend to penetrate deeper into the water than standard white lights.

Anglers seeking nighttime flatheads could benefit from congregating baitfish in one area, and there is a good chance the bright green light can pique the curiosity of the flatheads themselves.

## Catching Coastal Blues

The brackish waters along the Texas coast are overlooked trophy blue-cat areas, especially during cold snaps.

Blues have a high tolerance for saltwater and congregate in these locations because of the abundance of easy prey that gathers there after cold fronts blow through.

Look for big blues around the points where the bay and river meet on strong moving tides, especially when it is coming back in after a cold front. Many of these spots have washouts created by current, and they are magnets for blues after the first few fronts. Anglers on the Upper Coast believe the draw is the shad that perish from the sudden change in water temperature and the crabs that come to feed on them. Something else to look for in these areas is mussel beds. Mussels are common in river mouths, and blue cats feed on them throughout their range.

Robert Vail, a Sabine Lake fishing guide who held the state saltwater blue catfish

record for a while, says other areas to target are various points in the ship channel emptying into the bay.

In February 2000, I spent a very cold night fishing with Vail in a canal in the Neches River north of Sabine Lake. Since the canal was originally built to help tugboats turn around, it is deep, but it also has shallow banks that drop off rather sharply. On the fish finder, we found huge schools of shad suspended in the water and had a fairly successful night of fishing.

We used small chunks of mullet fished on the bottom both in the deep and along the shorelines right at the drop-off. Most of the fish came from the deeper water, but occasionally one would strike the bait set in the shallows.

An interesting phenomenon is that many of these catfish jumped when caught. I have fished for catfish all over the state and have never seen them jump as these did. In fact, I thought the first fish we had on was a gar because of its aquatic acrobatics in the frigid night.

When seeking trophy catfish in such extreme conditions, it becomes obvious that patience is important.

When mosquitoes are mauling you on a night-fishing venture, or when you are freezing to death in search of big blue cats in the dead of winter on the coast, you have to be willing to wait on the big fish no matter how high the level of discomfort.

Trophy catfish can frustrate even the most seasoned angler. There are times when you know the fish are there, yet they refuse to bite.

This may become frustrating but will be well worth it when your rod doubles over and the catfish of a lifetime is battling furiously on the other end.

That is when adrenaline kicks in and frustration fades to fun. ★

## Success from the bank

**MANY TEXAS ANGLERS** fish from the bank. They may not be able to afford a boat or simply choose not to fish from one. This does not, however, mean they cannot catch good numbers of catfish or even trophy-sized ones for that matter.

In fact, Cody Mullennix caught his record blue cat from the bank last year on Texoma.

With that said, however, bank fishing is limiting and can be frustrating for anglers who wish to go where the fish are.

Well, for those seeking catfish, there is a way around this. It involves making the fish come to you.

European catfish and carp anglers who typically fish exclusively from the bank use a system called "ground baiting," which involves putting chum out with the bait. They attach a small cylindrical device above their swivel, which holds chum and dispenses it as the water rushes by. The problem is these rigs are not readily available in our marketplace.

However, with a little American ingenuity, a similar device can be made by taking a 35-millimeter film canister, punching a hole in the bottom and on the lid and then punching more holes along the side. This acts as a perfect chumming device and is very inexpensive.

Rig this above your swivel and weight, then fill it with your favorite chum. Now you will not only be chumming the area you fish in but also bringing fish directly to your bait.

Any kind of chum will work, but a mixture I have had some success with was menhaden oil (available through many mail-order offshore supply catalogs) mixed with soured milo. The oil creates a huge chum slick and when it mixes with the milo, the smell is almost unbearable, which means catfish love it. The best part is that a little bit goes a long way.

Something else to consider is using jack mackerel as bait. This oily fish is available in larger supermarkets in a can for less than \$1, and I can attest it will bring in fish. While fishing in the Gulf of Mexico and tagging sharks for the Mote Marine Laboratory, my partners and I were able to chum in and catch nearly 40 sharks while using less than two cans of the stuff. It is oily and stinks to high heaven, so catfish should love it.

For anglers interested in using film canisters to chum their bait, something else to consider is the use of a popping cork. Even if your bait is on the bottom, you can rig a popping cork above it and attach a baited film canister below. This will allow you to do some extra chumming and use the cork to "pop" the chum out whenever you want to release more.

Last summer I tried using one of these in the surf near Port Arthur and had a shark come up and attack the canister attached to the cork and cut the line. Catfish will probably not be that voracious, but you never know what will happen on Texas waterways.

That is the fun part. ★









# GETTING STARTED IN



# KAYAKING

Something magical happens when you put a person into a kayak for the first time and launch them onto the water. The water is so close you can reach out and touch it. You feel as though you're a cupped leaf floating on the surface, cruising with the current. My young son says,

**"You feel like a duck!"**

THIS PAGE PHOTO © CINDY ROSS, OPPOSITE PHOTO © DAVIDSAMS.COM



# Kayaking is one of the fastest growing sports today.

Everywhere you drive, you see vehicles “wearing” the boats on roof racks like ornaments. People everywhere are discovering the joys of this very accessible water sport, and Texans are not being left behind. In addition to the state’s fine navigable rivers, the Gulf Coast affords some of the finest sea kayaking in the entire country.

There is no smoother, easier way to move through water, and the newer, sleeker kayaks require no more than average body strength to paddle (or to hoist up onto a roof rack). So nearly anyone — single women, seniors or adolescents — can enjoy this extremely popular sport.

If you’ve paddled a canoe and enjoyed it, you will love kayaking. You will already know basic paddling techniques, so you will be able to jump right in with a just a few pointers. For those that have never done it before, even a 15-minute lesson is enough to get you out onto calm water. After taking a quick lesson, you may find the desire to purchase your own craft.

Paddle as many different brands and models as you can before buying. Many lakeside and bayside tourist areas offer kayaks to rent. You can take them out for an hour or so, play around, and get the feel of it. If you have friends that own kayaks, ask to try them out. (At the very least, sit in them.) Retailers and manufacturers sometimes sponsor demo days, or outdoor expos provide opportunities to get into multiple boats. You actually “wear” a kayak, so it needs to feel as comfortable as a favorite piece of clothing or an old pair of shoes. If you can’t get to a class, get a good book on

kayaking, study it at home, and then get out and practice.

Shoot for a plastic boat (a 12-footer can be had for \$600) as a beginner. Plastic boats are virtually indestructible and you can yank them up onto any shoreline and scrape the bottom of streams to your heart’s content. When you’ve developed your skills and you’ve decided to concentrate on a particular kind of paddling, consider a fiberglass boat (\$1,000–\$1,500), or one of the extremely lightweight Kevlar and carbon fiber kayaks (\$2,000–\$3,000).

The first step in choosing a kayak is deciding which type of water you wish to explore. In this age of customized everything, kayaks span a range from river play boats to seaworthy craft, so you can get as specific as you like with your needs.

The terms “sea kayak” and “touring kayak” are often used interchangeably. Touring kayaks are longer and narrower than recreational kayaks, and usually hold cargo in closed bulkheads. Sea kayaks can be taken on larger, open waters, such as lakes, bays and the open ocean, and require a larger investment. On open expanses or in rolling surf, longer boats are better. They often have rudders that you control with foot pedals and cables. Rudders don’t steer a boat but keep it straight in a wind, which can be a tremendous help.

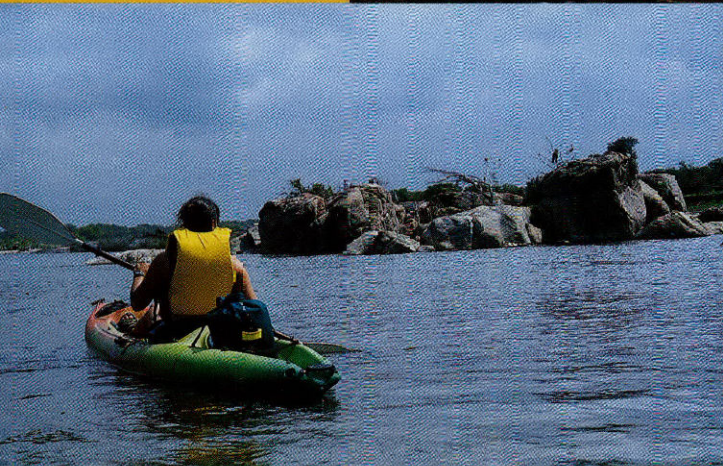
Shorter recreational kayaks are easier to steer, making them better suited to exploring tight tidal streams in estuaries and salt marshes. They have less storage space but certainly enough for day tripping. Tandems are available in many boat styles, and are just the thing for paddling with children or a dog. In warm weather or







From the coastal bays to the Rio Grande, kayaks are everywhere in Texas. And these days, there's a kayak for every interest and skill level, so a kayak is the ideal craft for group adventure tours. When access to the water is this easy, there's no excuse not to go fishing, exploring or just floating.



in shallow coastal bays, sit-on-top kayaks allow you to fish, snorkel, dive or just paddle around. If you fall out, you can climb right back in easily.

You're probably thinking, "I want to do it all!" which means you'll need more than one kind of boat down the line. You'll love this sport so much, however, you won't mind making multiple purchases over the years. (And resale value is high.) The important thing is to get out on the water now, so aim for a good used boat as a first purchase, preferably a more versatile recreational kayak (under 17 feet).

What you're looking for first when you test a kayak is how your body feels in the cockpit — too roomy, too tight or just right? Is the seat comfortable? Is there enough adjustment in the foot braces for your body length? You don't do a lot of shifting positions in a kayak compared to a canoe, so you can't have your legs or feet falling asleep because of a poor fit.

On the water, pay attention to how well it tracks and turns, how tippy and stable it feels. Are you a big person who needs a lot of boat or a small person who doesn't want to carry a lot of boat?

Of course you'll need life jackets and paddles, along with the

## WHERE TO GO:

Texas offers a wealth of kayaking opportunities. Here are a few contacts to get you started.

### MATAGORDA BAY

Building on the success of TPWD's six coastal kayaking trails (for information, go to <[www.kayak-texas.com](http://www.kayak-texas.com)>), the Lower Colorado River Authority is adding a series of kayaking trails in the East Matagorda Bay, near the mouth of the Colorado River.

Betsy Terrel, Education Coordinator

(512) 303-5073 or (800) 776-5272, Ext. 8026

Outfitter: Freebird Kayak & Canoe Adventures

(979) 863-7926  
freebird3733@aol.com

### CORPUS CHRISTI

Ken Johnson offers nine tours described on his Web site and is available to guide small groups.

Ken Johnson  
(361)-855-3926

<[home.earthlink.net/~johnsonkw/kayak-corporus/](http://home.earthlink.net/~johnsonkw/kayak-corporus/)>

### AUSTIN AREA

The chain of Highland Lakes are great for paddling. Austin Outdoor

Gear & Guidance rents from its fleet of 100 rental boats and 300 retail boats, including the high-end touring kayaks. Austin Outdoor Gear & Guidance also offers kayaking seminars, from three hours to three days.

Austin Outdoor Gear & Guidance  
512-473-2644

<[www.kayaktexas.com](http://www.kayaktexas.com)>

e-mail: john@kayaktexas.com

### ROCKPORT

Located on the gulf, 30 miles north of Corpus Christi. This outfitter specializes in kayaking and fishing.

Rockport Kayak Outfitters  
(866) 729-1505

(361) 729-1505

Lighthouse Lakes Trails — TPWD trail located in North Harbor Island, just west of Port Aransas. Order maps at <[www.aransaspass.org/boating\\_and\\_kayaking.htm](http://www.aransaspass.org/boating_and_kayaking.htm)>

Slowride Guide Service and Kayak Rentals

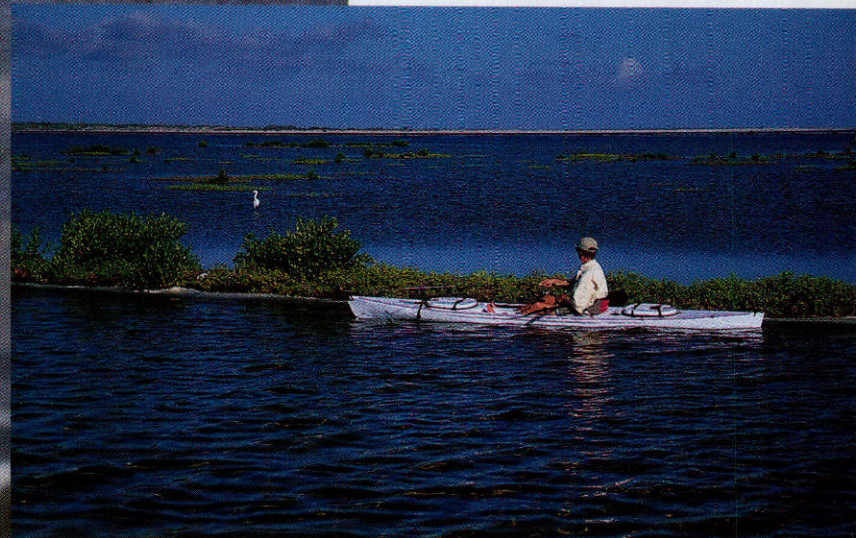
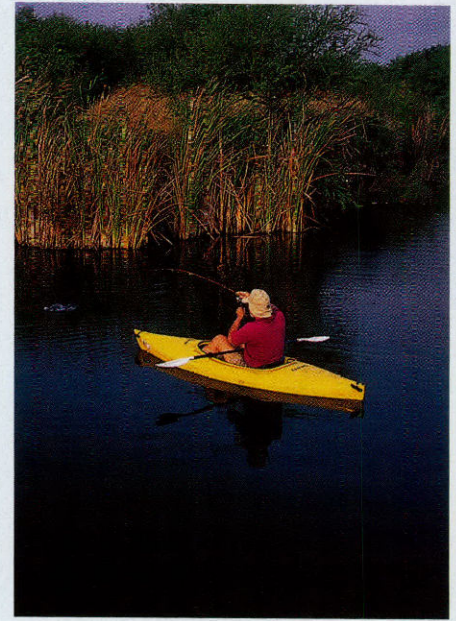
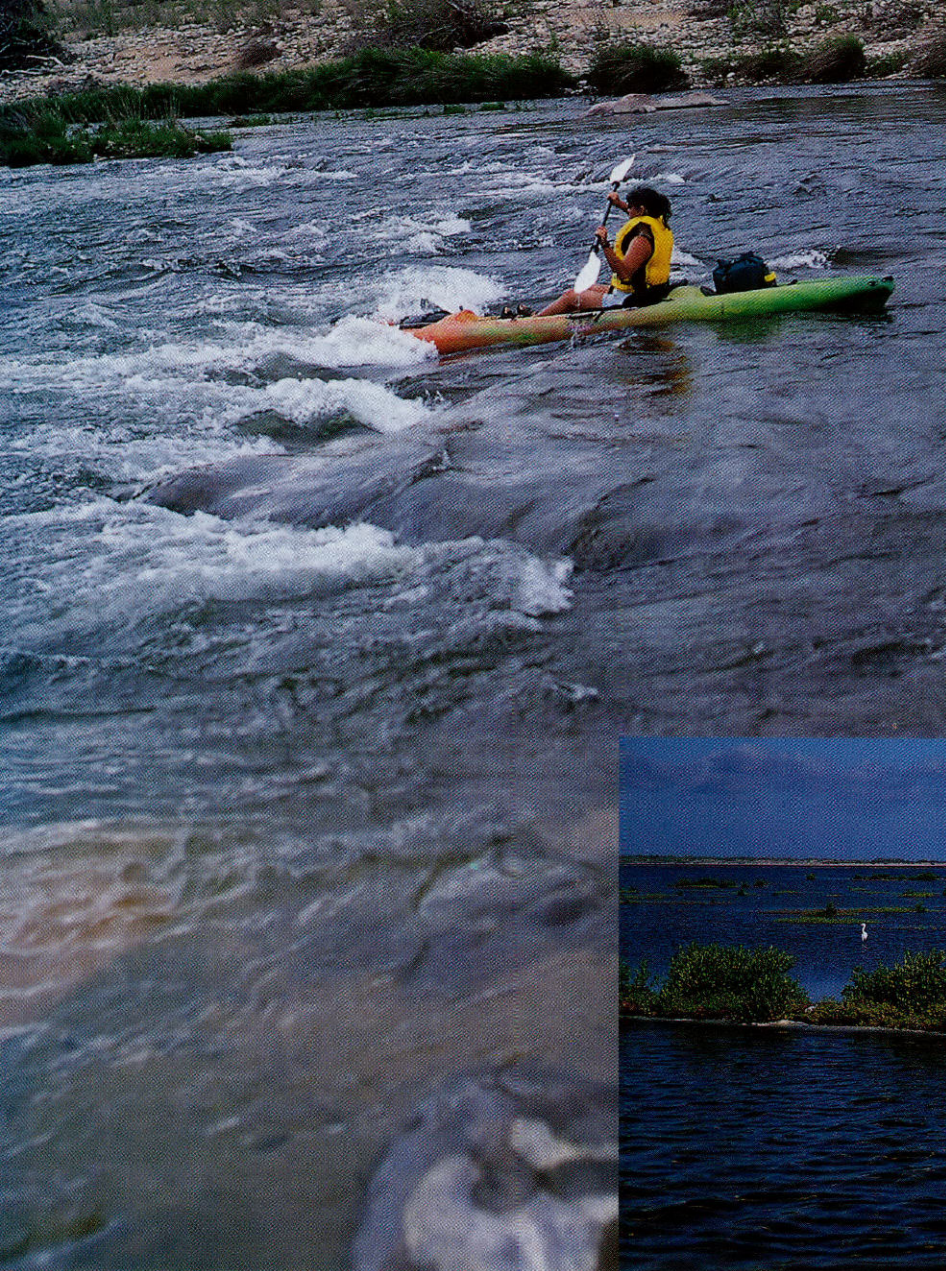
(361) 758-0463

<[www.slowrideguide.com](http://www.slowrideguide.com)>

TPWD Texas River Guide at

<[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/texaswater/rivers/links.phtml](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/texaswater/rivers/links.phtml)>





boat. A good outfitter can help you with material choice and sizing. Some experts say that the best boat performs poorly with a poor paddle. Some recommend spending 25 percent of the price of your boat on your paddle.

A shorter PFD (Personal Flotation Device) made just for kayaking is a nice idea, especially if you are using a paddling skirt to keep water out of your cockpit. (Longer models get pushed up and could make paddling uncomfortable.)

A spray skirt is necessary if you paddle in chilly weather or water or deal with waves. You'll need to buy one that fits your particular boat.

Also, each paddler should have a whistle and a water bottle. At least one member of the group should have a rescue tow rope, bailer and sponge.

Since paddling a kayak is easier than paddling a canoe (for one, you use a double-bladed paddle to control the kayak better), a person with minimal paddling experience will be able to get onto the water in short order. A course is not necessary. A few pointers may suffice. Even if you dream of playing in whitewater and running waterfalls, start out with a recreational boat first.

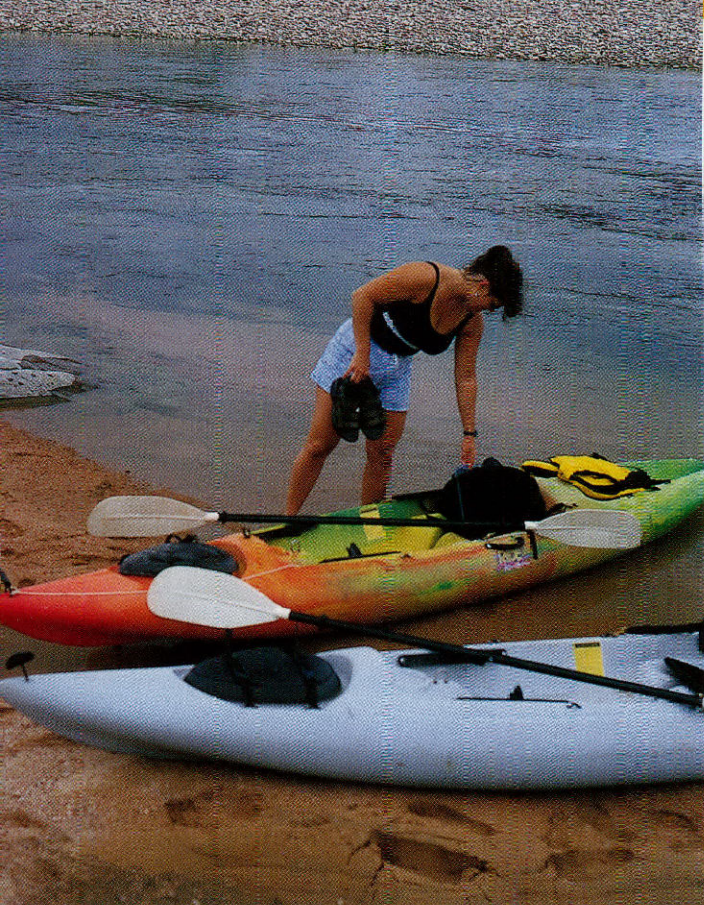
Boats and gear are a matter of personal preference, but

I'm going to share what kinds of boats we own, our experiences with them, and what we have found to work or not work. Remember that gear is nothing without skill, but if you want the freedom to paddle on your own, you'll need your own boat.

When my children were young, my husband Todd and I first decided on two tandems. We wanted to go on longer overnight paddles besides short runs down our local river. Since they are extremely stable, they take a huge amount of effort to tip. We felt very safe. In a tandem if the kids don't want to paddle, they don't have to. The boat is easily maneuvered from the rear, so children are free to watch the sights and sounds going by. On open water where you could encounter wind and tides, you can lower the optional rudder.

The Texas coast has many barrier islands and public beaches, offering a great variety of extended tours. If this type of tripping appeals to you down the line, go for a longer touring boat. John Van Ness of Austin Outdoor Gear & Guidance says that navigating some of Central Texas' large lakes can be similar to kayaking along the coast. If this is the type of paddling you see yourself doing, a





longer boat would also be a wiser choice.

A longer boat won't turn on a dime, but we have successfully taken our touring boats (tandems and solo) down streams at high water. With a little steering skill, they work fine. These boats provide plenty of hatch space for extended trips. At 20 feet long they are a dream, for they track well. The tandems are also nice for two adults who like to be together. When my husband and I are in one we can really make it move!

There are seven main drainages in Texas, and all these rivers have wild stretches averaging about 250 miles in length. Camping is limited to islands and large sandbars as public land is at a minimum. However, in east and west Texas, especially along the Rio Grande, there is tremendous camping along the shores. If this appeals to you, more points for a longer boat.

Since most Texas rivers' water levels are rain driven, whitewater is not as abundant as in other states. That's no big deal for beginners because whitewater shouldn't be attempted until after the paddler has accumulated considerable skill or taken an in-depth whitewater paddling course.

Our children have just arrived at the age where they prefer to be on their own (12 and 14 years old), so we got them two individual smaller kayaks from Wilderness Systems, called "Tsunami." They can accommodate any size and make for a great day boat or weekend cruiser.

I took my kids and these boats to my girlfriend's pond to teach them the strokes and basic handling techniques. In only a matter of minutes, they were maneuvering them as if the kayaks were an extension of their bodies. From there, we put in at our local river, which is wide enough to avoid strainers (fallen trees across the river), and the current is strong enough (but not too strong) to take them down on their own with minimal effort. They basically only had to steer and rudder and not power stroke the entire time, like you must on slow moving or still water which can be very fatiguing for children. My kids fell totally in love with solo kayak-

ing, and are dying to get good enough to try white water!

The thing that's nice about a boat the size of a "Tsunami" is that a woman can tote it around herself (even on the roof of an economy car). Although it will not track as well as a longer touring or recreational boat, it is great for a quick ride. One of the things I love about kayaking is how it gives you a great upper-body workout. I prefer the water, with blue herons, the warm sun, and a breeze, over pumping iron in a hot, smelly gym.

We also have a great solo touring kayak from Perception called the "Carolina." It is 14 feet long and is one of the most versatile boats made. It can handle open water and waves, as well as enable you to steer some pretty tight turns along a river. Another choice would be Current Design's "Slipstream" (16-foot sea kayak) and Wilderness Experience's "Tempest" (multiple sizes). Another versatile boat to consider is Current Design's "Kestrel," a recreational kayak, which comes in a 12- and a 14-foot model.

I ran the Llano River this past spring and used Wilderness System's "The Ride," which is a sit-on-top. You get a little wetter with a sit-on-top, but that can be downright refreshing in the mid-afternoon heat.

Scott Hickman, recreation program coordinator for the Lower Colorado River Authority and an avid kayak fisherman, suggests the "Cobra" by Wilderness Systems as a great sit-on-top fishing boat. You can get to your equipment easily, install a rod holder if one isn't built into the boat; it's roomy, and some boats are even stable enough to allow you to stand and cast.

"There are places like 'The Flats' in Matagorda Bay where the red drum fish are so abundant and large, and motorized boats can't get you into these shallow waters like a kayak can."

Before you buy, look at all the different boats, order company catalogs, and do some research. Use my personal boat examples as a guide to help you determine which one would be best for your needs and interests as well as your children's. My family has always loved canoeing, and it was just a matter of time before we took the plunge and invested in kayaks. It is an activity that brings our family close together, while we enjoy the great outdoors and get some marvelous exercise.

For you gear-heads, or those of you who are certain you want to get into this sport, check out these items:

Cascade Designs makes clear vinyl waterproof dry bags so you can see how much lunch is left, or where your fleece jacket is. The bags come in all sizes and are a must for things like a camera.

Water sandals (like Tevas) are great, especially the kind with buckle closures (as opposed to hook-and-loop closings). Mud and sand get into the latter, and they open at the most inopportune times, like when you are pulling your boat over cobblestones at a low-river point. Teva also makes an enclosed river shoe (like an all-terrain sneaker) with self-draining holes if you want more protection and want to use the same footwear for hiking as well as paddling. Scott says if you plan to paddle near oyster beds and have to do any amount of getting in and out and dragging, you'll need the greater protection of an enclosed water shoe.

Since I can't go anywhere without a camera, I found Cascade Design's waterproof Deck Bag to be my favorite piece of gear. It's attached to the outside of my boat, right by my hands, so I can quickly grab my camera (or snacks for a starving child) in short order. If the camera isn't easily accessible, the shots don't get taken, and the memories are gone forever.

I have a sciatic nerve problem, so Cascade Design's self-inflating "Touring Seat" makes me feel like I'm sitting on a cloud, instead of those hard rigid kayak seats.

These things aren't necessary, but they make kayaking easier and more enjoyable. The important thing is to get out on the water in a kayak as quickly as you can — you'll wish you hadn't waited so long. ★





TOOMER'S  
MINNOW  
FRESH

TOOMER'S  
MINNOW  
FRESH





# *The* FISHER KING

Despite raucous storms and melted gear,  
a fisherman is born at Lake Livingston State Park.



Halfway through fall break, I decide we need a family getaway. Lake Livingston State Park is a good 4 1/2-hour drive from Fort Worth, but I figure if we pack that night and leave the next morning we'll have two nights and one full day in the 635-acre park.

But before committing to the road trip, I take time to study the weather forecast. Hurricane Ivan is spinning back onto the scene in Louisiana, just close enough to hurl something nasty toward Southeast Texas. I decide a 30 percent chance of rain means the odds are in our favor. And really, how much spirit dampening can a has-been hurricane do? Given the short departure schedule I abandon checklists and embrace spontaneity. I even let my 7-year-old pack his own diversion bag (thankfully, I find and remove the hamster before things take an ugly turn).



By Barbara Rodriguez  
*Illustration by George Toomer*



## On the Road

We load up and head out the next morning. It's unseasonably warm and the long stretch toward the Big Thicket is overcast, not gloomy. We're anxious to arrive and select our hut-away-from-home.

Maybe too anxious.

About an hour out, Elliott starts asking if we're there yet — every 10 minutes. It is a self-parody that is not amusing for long. I hand him his backpack and encourage him to find something to occupy himself. He grows quiet. When I look back he is wrapped head to toe in a quilt. The binoculars protruding from the swaddling offer the only proof it's occupied. He begins sighting and counting birds, a somnolent sport that lapses into a nap until just past Huntsville, when we cross the 84,000-acre reservoir. Bursting from his cocoon Elliott gasps, "That's no lake, that's an ocean!"

Encouraged by his newfound enthusiasm, I begin regaling him with tales of record-setting catfish, black crappie, lunker bass. His only concern is that his dad will have to help him reel in these monsters.

## Sunday Afternoon

We arrive at the campgrounds just after noon Sunday. Happily enough, we have our choice of the 10 scattered tin-roof-and-timber shelters on stubby stilts. Although it is still early and very warm, the shaded half-court campground is deserted. So many available lakeside cabins make for a hard decision. Do we want the one mere steps from the parking lot, high on a swell with unobstructed views of water? Yes, I decide we do. Certain that a tidal wave of campers will arrive any moment, we rush back to the ranger's station, stake our claim and return to settle in. But by then our original choice doesn't look so good to me. It is gorgeously situated — really, all of the loblolly-and-oak-shaded shelters are inviting — but I decide that as the weather is uncertain, and as two walls of the shelter are floor-to-ceiling screens, our first choice might prove too chilly at night. True, there is a sleeping loft, but this has already been staked out by our son, who intends to pitch his tent on the platform. He is sure to be cozy in his sky-high Bedouin kingdom, but as the sliding barn-like doors on the sides of the shelters cover only half the screens, we groundlings won't be able to shut out the rain completely — should it come.

Hundreds of staples in the woodwork give witness to how cool-weather campers past have made do. I make a mental note to add plastic sheeting and a staple gun to my packing list. Then I make my husband reload and relocate our stuff to a cabin which seems less exposed to the elements. This shelter is set down off the road and has a grated fire ring almost on the lake. Best of all there are fishing opportunities mere steps away from our door. Jurgen humps our gear down the winding wooden ramp with little snarling (attractive wooden wheelchair ramps that zig and zag between cabins give the campsite a sort of treehouse feel). No doubt it is more of a haul to our new cabin, but father and son are of good cheer until I want to move the picnic table. That's when I hear Jurgen snort through his nose.

By the time we inform the rangers of our change of address, it occurs to me that if we are to saddle up this trip we'd best make a dash for the Lake Livingston Stables. The popular park concession rents horses daily in the summer, but after Labor Day the two-mile guided rides are available only on a limited weekend schedule. We arrive in time to see the rump of the last horse disappear into the forest. Hopes for an early morning trot to breakfast or an indulgent sunset-and-steak trail ride are dashed; the horses won't be back until the following weekend.

It is my turn to snort a few sparks, but Elliott is all smiles. Now

there are no horses standing between him and the fish. To sweeten the pot, I promise him his first encounter with live bait. We head to the camp store to buy nightcrawlers and minnows. Beyond the bait offerings, the mini-marina has an inventory a kid's (and this gal's) gotta love: neon jelly flip flops, Chocolate Soldiers, Jiffy Pop, Hershey bars and ice cream. And if the adjacent lighted pier and wooden observation tower don't offer adventure enough, you can rent paddle boats, bikes and canoes. We promise to avail ourselves of all these amusements the next day. For now, a melted butter sunset is in the offing, we have filet mignons in the ice chest and all is right with the world. Let the fishing begin!

Almost.

Apparently Elliott's rod has been stored away with his favorite "fish attractor" on the line and the bail open. I immediately disavow the nested heaps that web two of three rods, hand Elliott the one that's still functional and abandon my put-upon husband to rigging duty. The paved walking path that hems the lake along the eastern edge of the park makes for easy access to strolling and fishing. We head off, but not so far that we don't hear Jurgen's howl when the rig he has just cleared and baited falls into the campfire, instantly melting away the line and warping the rod. Having vented his angst, the poor man falls back to his Sisyphean task.

Teaching Elliott to bait a hook promises to be less trying. I hadn't skewered a minnow in years but the slippery fish and the cool updraft from the bucket evoke my childhood so vividly I expect to hear my brother calling me Squirrel Head as he ridicules my technique. Elliott, who can't resist a shot at scooping up the little fish with his hands, is unprepared for how difficult they are to catch. He's delighted when he comes up with one wriggling inside his grubby fist. As I show him how to place the hook he offers the fish an apology. Next, of course, he asks to keep one as a pet. Keeping them alive to fish another day is my goal, especially having seen the filthy hands that Elliott keeps plunging into their water. To give them a break I throw the minnow bucket into the lake. I swear I thought the rope lying at my feet was actually tied to the bucket at the time.

Jurgen is called from his rigging duties to fetch the minnow bucket. The man is a saint.

At least one of us is having a great time. But when we finally join Elliott we fish enthusiastically, albeit without success, until it starts to get dark. The black crappie Lake Livingston is famous for will have to wait. We call it a day, content to know we have all of tomorrow for fishing, hiking and boating.

On the way to the bathhouse Elliott sights a tiny leopard frog in the beam of his flashlight. When he captures it, a long naming session follows. At last he hits on the obvious. Sort of. "He'll be Froggy. Froggy Wolfgang Oldenburg, since he's my brother. Well, his name will be Frederick. We'll call him Froggy." I don't worry too much about losing my dishwashing basin to F.W.O. for long; Elliott has a good history of catch and release. That is before he suggests making Froggy's accommodation more permanent. "I know!" he says, suddenly inspired, "Let's keep him with the piranhas!" His father and I look at each other blankly. Malapropism is rampant in our family. I remember that Jurgen once excitedly pointed out an opossum while shouting, "Look, an octopus!" But then, his first language is German. "You know..." Elliott says, emphatically pointing at the minnow bucket, "We'll keep him with the salmon." That's when it occurs to me that his fishing education may be a little patchy.

By bedtime, a stomach aching number of marshmallows have been roasted and consumed in a ritual that includes this conversation: "Dad, how do you like yours?" "Brown." "Is that after black?" At the time Elliott is trying to douse with spittle one that is now fully aflame. Brother Froggy has been released to a lengthy farewell-and-good-fortune speech after a misguided attempt to feed him a night crawler. Before turning in, Jurgen inspects the fishing gear. He tries to keep





THE WATER FACING OUR CAMPSITE IS STUDED WITH JAGGED TREE TRUNKS RISING AND FALLING IN A SILVERED MARCH ACROSS THE HORIZON LIKE SO MANY MISMATCHED PYLONS. EACH IS NOW TOPPED BY A BIRD, SEAGULLS MOSTLY, READY TO PLAY AN ELABORATE GAME OF SQUAWK AND SWITCH PRESIDED OVER BY A SOLEMNLY REGAL GREAT BLUE HERON.

PHOTO © LANCE VARNELL



his voice at an even pitch when he asks me how it is that all the rods are once again hopelessly snarled. I don't tell him about walking under a tree with my rod held high as I raced to stop Elliott from whirling his bobber around the end of his rod.

We settle in to sleep like the dead. In his sky kingdom Elliott has a screened view of the lake. I call up to him: "What was the best part of the day?" "I got a new pet," he answers. "The only bad part of the day was that I had to let him go." As we drift off the cricket song is punctuated by the occasional pling of an acorn on the tin roof. Jurgen murmurs, "Did you bring the French press?" I imagine he's thinking he'll need caffeine early and frequently if he's to spend another day of battling Gordian knots.

## Monday, Monday

Day two is filled with promise. Elliott gulps breakfast, anxious to tackle the technique of worm fishing — or play with the worms. Jurgen and I linger over our French press coffee. Across the water an island shimmies in the distance. We talk about how comforting it is to pad around the campground on the soft pineywood soil; sight what might be a swamp rabbit; take time to breathe deeply; and express gratitude that so far we have been assaulted by nary a mosquito. Elliott heads a little farther down the walking path after each cast, until he is out of sight. I know his destination to be a portion

as he masters the language of a bobber, no longer jerking the worm out of the eager mouths, but letting the bobber disappear and begin to swim before he gives the line a little tug and then, with his signature whiplash, sets the hook. He even remembers to crank the reel. He has been listening to me. I am amazed.

At lunch we take a break for a picnic and Elliott is unusually quiet until he archly says, "Say, anybody caught anything yet?" A beat, then, "Oh, yeah, I did." He cackles like a madman at his own joke. Who has time to catch fish when they are in baiting servitude to the Fish Master? Jurgen, reveling in a brief respite from rigging, has managed a few casts, but without luck. "I'm not stopping till I catch eight — or we run out of worms," Elliott announces. He catches eight, and we run out of nightcrawlers. We'd only bought a dozen. His fish-to-worm ratio is excellent. Elliott smeared with jelly, dirt and his own share of worm guts is as joyful as only a dirty boy can be. When a squirrel runs right across his feet he cocks his head and whoops that it's his lucky day. Mine, too. All morning I have been happily reminded of a childhood spent with worm dirt under my nails.

We've talked enthusiastically about frying up his mess of fish, but suddenly, his streak broken, he says, "Those fish I caught... I don't really want to eat them. I want to let them go." And he does, to a great cacophony of birdcalls. The water facing our campsite is studded with jagged tree trunks rising and falling in a silvered march across the



of the shore where the walkway has collapsed in a mudslide. His instinct that fish will like this runoff area gives me hope that he has his grandfather's fishing genes. But when I follow him I find him tugging at a line that is tautly horizontal, as he struggles to pull free of a snag of logs. I'm glad Jurgen isn't here to see this. Then I realize that in fact he is hauling in his very first fish, a nice-sized sunfish. He is so excited he has completely forgotten the reel and is attempting to drag the fish in.

He is ecstatic when he sees me. "Mom! Mom! I caught a fish. All by myself. I have to show Dad." He beams at me, a goofy gap where his front teeth should be. His eyes are glistening. "I am so proud of myself I could cry!" he says, and for a minute I think we both might. I hug him tight. In that moment I become his bait slave. As fast as he can catch the fish I skewer up the nightcrawlers. He quickly fills a stringer with pan fish. "Are you proud of me?" he asks, more than once. There are no words, I tell him. I watch him

horizon like so many mismatched pylons. Each is now topped by a bird, seagulls mostly, ready to play an elaborate game of squawk-and-switch presided over by a solemnly regal great blue heron. The gulls mob one another, then flit away cajoling and chortling, as if to say "Look over here, look over here." Any bird simpleminded enough to follow the shill immediately loses her perch. This continues for 40 minutes as the sky boils up into great lumps of blackened marshmallow clouds.

By 2 p.m. the wind is whitecapping the lake and the storm begins pelting us with hard, cold pellets of rain. The birds abruptly end their game and take flight. We bolt for shelter as the winds begin gusting. Remarkably, until the rain makes it impossible to continue, a very single-minded park worker doggedly attends his task of leaf blowing, seemingly oblivious to the fact that he is not the creator of the whirlwind surrounding him.

We have positioned the barn doors of our shelter at the head and



foot of our bedding, and I think how nice it would be to have a couple more plastic tablecloths to extend the coverage. I know Elliott's bed will stay dry in his tent in the loft, but ours will no doubt get misty from the blowing rain. Still, there's nothing to be done now. And as much as we'd all looked forward to hiking the Pineywoods Trail loop around the duck pond, there is a strange comfort in the lack of options now available. Boats are out, bikes and hikes impossible, but we cheerfully hunker down to read to one another from various books, play cards, snack on chips and hot sauce. It's like being comfortably sealed in the miniscule hut inside a snowglobe, the weather whirling all around us. Around dinner time the rain breaks. The birds return and the sky runs with blue-on-blue rivulets, a watercolor streaking off the edges of the sky. We trot to the edge of the campground to walk out to the boat docks above a small cove and watch a magnificent white heron as she fishes. We hear the little green kingfisher crackle before he swoops, deftly stealing the heron's dinner. We've brought our rods to do a bit of cast fishing, but neither we nor the heron score any trophies before the heavens upend again.

## The Storm

The storm continues throughout the afternoon. We make a run to the camp store for dry wood, but find it closed against our optimism that the storm will pass. After sunset the wind and rain take on

a howling intensity that assures no one is venturing out. Our camp wood is soaked, our chairs have been whipped into a rising river of runoff, and now, as we try to sleep it's apparent that our air mattress is slowly going flat. Squinting outside I feel a lame sort of pride to discover that the tablecloth I had affixed to the picnic table with pushpins is still in place—for all of another 30 minutes. Jurgen and I feel charged by the storm, but not anxious. We know we are one family out of a handful in the park, but are confident that if there is any real danger the rangers will come for us. It is a rush to be so exposed to such rollicking weather. Elliott is silently tucked away in his tent, but I can hear him rolling about. Concerned the storm has him too worried to sleep, I start to climb the ladder and check on him. I stop when he calls down. "Did you ever not want to sleep because you just want to keep doing what you've been doing?" Yes, I say, wondering what's coming. The storm couldn't have been farther from his thoughts. "I don't want to sleep. I just want to fish and fish and fish and fish..." It becomes a mantra as he chants himself to sleep.

Jurgen and I silently high-five one another. We'll leave early the next day without having ridden horses, rented a canoe, fished from the lighted pier or hiked the pine-shaded trail. We have lost fishing gear to fire, seen our camp chairs sail away in flash flood, and are fully prepared to spend a wakeful night taking the measure of the wind. Yet, for all its slings and arrows, the trip has been a roaring success. A fisherman has been born. ★



## The Details

Lake Livingston State Park is 1 mile southwest of Livingston and 75 miles north of Houston. Travel from Livingston south on U.S. Highway 59 to FM 1988. After 4 miles turn north on FM 3126 and travel 1/2 mile to the park entrance. The high season at Lake Livingston begins in March and runs through Labor Day. Campers have their choice of 170 campsites in four camping loops. Sites vary from secluded, water-only campsites to RV sites with water, electrical and sewer hookups. There are 21 "Premium" campsites lakeside in the Piney Shores campground adjacent to the 10 wheelchair accessible screened shelters.

The Pineywoods Nature Walk is a handicapped accessible 1-mile boardwalk loop through the forest and past a frog pond and hummingbird garden.

The swimming pool overlooking the lake (lake swimming is not encouraged) is open Thursday through Monday from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Trail rides from the Lake Livingston Stables can be reserved at (936) 967-5032. Breakfast and dinner rides are available. Rides are offered 5 to 6 times daily during high season and on a limited weekend schedule between Labor Day and Memorial Day.

Insect repellent is highly recommended.

Daily use fee is \$3 per person. Children 12 and under get in free. Camping fees vary. The park is open daily and the office is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. For more information about the park call (800) 792-1112 or visit <[www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)>. To make reservations call (512) 389-8900 or go to <[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park)> and click on Make Park Reservations. ★



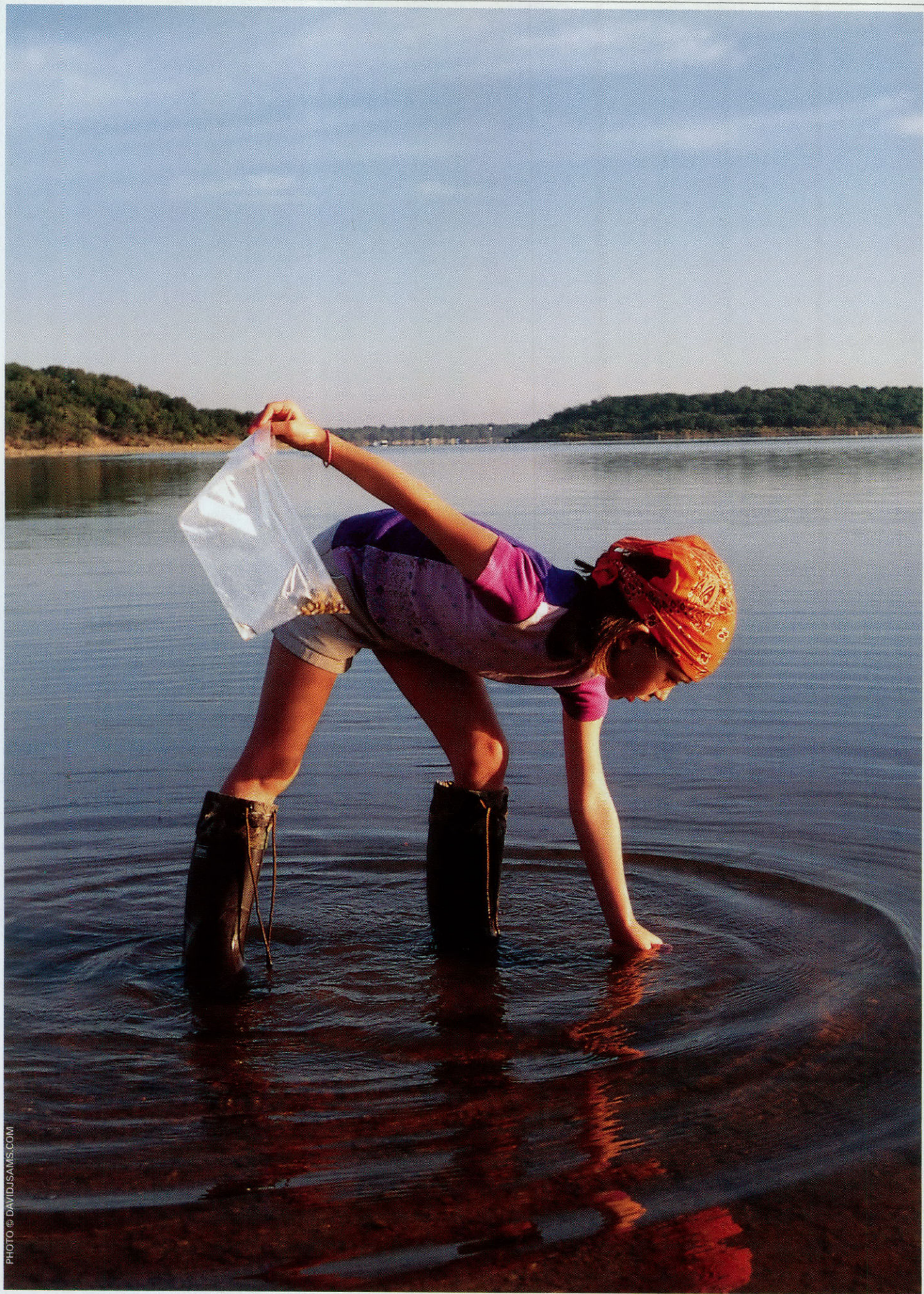
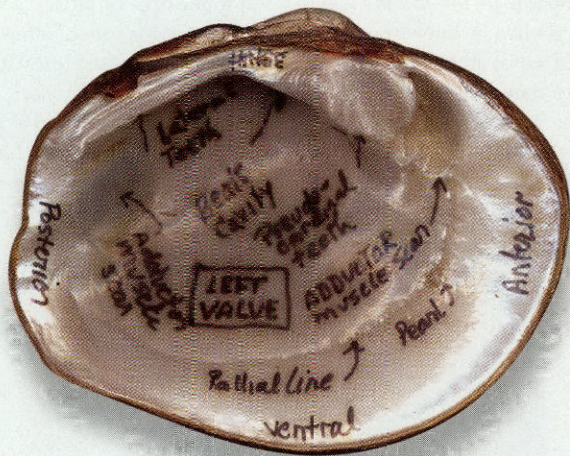


PHOTO © DAVIDSAMIS.COM





# Save the Monkeyface!



Despite their funny names, freshwater mussels are important indicators of a river's overall health.



By Wendee Holtcamp



**T**he southeast United States is a global hotspot for freshwater mussels; in fact, it's the most species-diverse region in the world. Nearly 300 mussel species live in our rivers, compared to a slim dozen in all of Europe. They may claim funny names like rock pocketbook, monkeyface, and fuzzy pigtoe, but our freshwater mussels are seriously imperiled. The American Fisheries Society survey

found that more than 70 percent of the nation's mussels are endangered, threatened or of special concern, compared to only 7 percent of the nation's mammals and birds. Thirty-five freshwater mussels have already gone extinct in the U.S., with 56 species listed as federally endangered or threatened, and as many additional candidate species awaiting review for listing. We stand at the brink of an unparalleled mollusk extinction, and the declines can be directly attributed to human-induced river modifications. If "Save the Whales" was yesterday's swan song, perhaps today it's time to proclaim, "Save the Monkeyface!"

I can't often resist the call of a river, so I'm thrilled when offered the chance to kayak the Navasota to look for mussels with a Navasota junior high teacher and five science camp students. Ronald Rushing, or Mr. Rushing, as he's known to his students, has led exploratory kayak trips for the last five summers and has included TPWD's Texas Mussel Watch on the trip for the past three. Nothing inspires a budding interest in science like getting kids muddy and grimy and sampling wild creatures the way biologists do.

"You have to get kids outside to experience nature if you want

them to appreciate the natural world," Rushing says of his annual kayak trips. "It's the best way for me to make ecology relevant to a handful of kids."

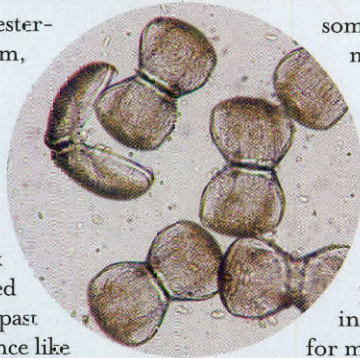
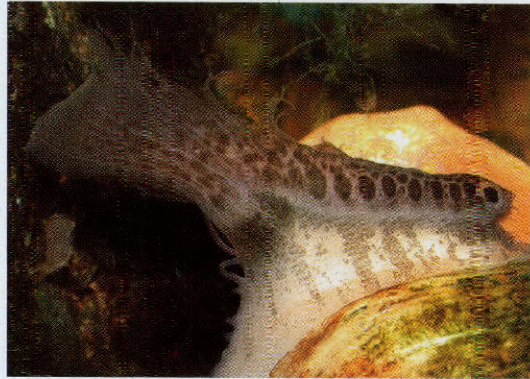
Rushing is one of a few dozen teachers and individuals trained to search for and monitor mussels along Texas riverbanks for TPWD's Texas Mussel Watch, one of several Texas Nature Tracker programs. TPWD staff train volunteers like Rushing in day-long workshops. They learn about mussel biology, about mussels' imperiled status and the reasons for their decline.

Then workshop participants try out their mussel identification skills in a field excursion. After training, volunteers monitor a local stream and report their findings back to headquarters.

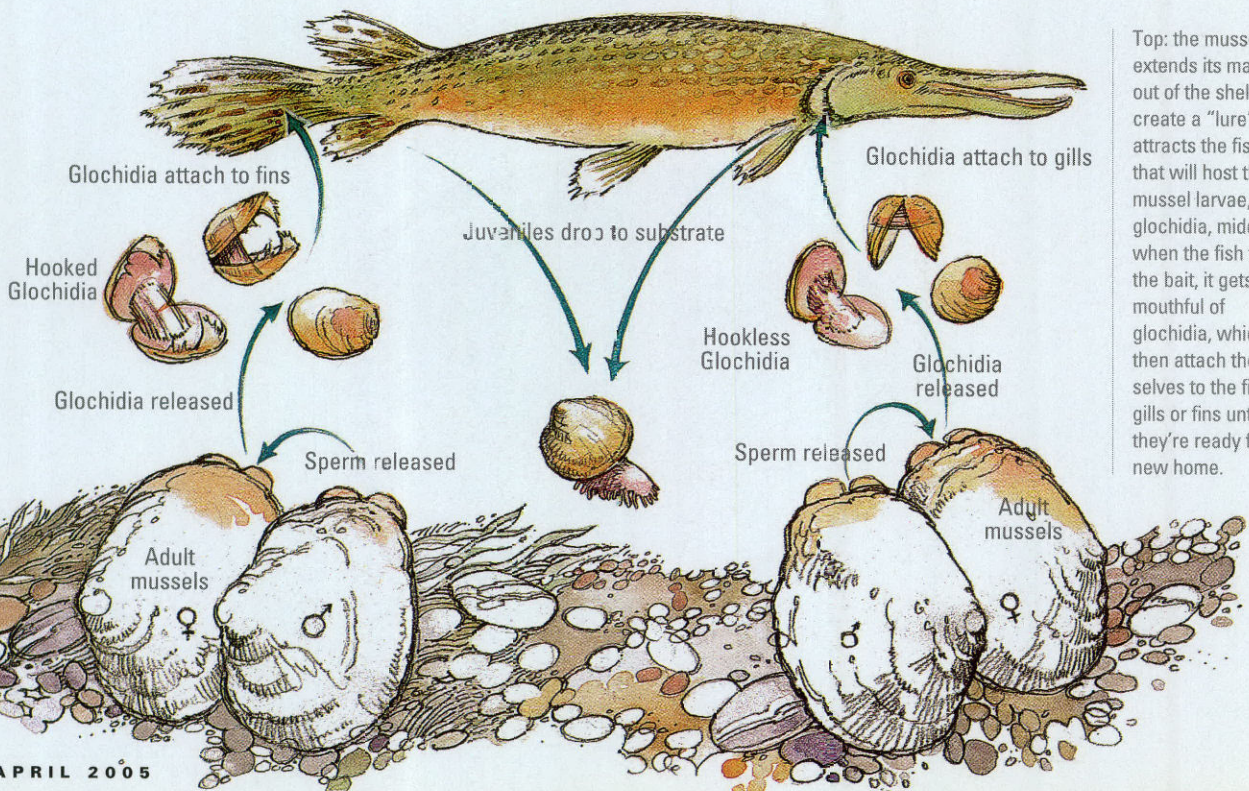
"Texas Mussel Watch has been a challenge," program director Marsha Reimer tells me. "It's not a warm and fuzzy watch like some of the other programs. They're not cute like horned lizards, they're not beautiful like butterflies, and they're difficult to get to.

It's not something that you can hand someone a monitoring packet and say, 'Here, go monitor mussels.'"

The real possibility of finding a rare species of mussel in a watershed overshadows the challenges. Biologists are concerned about over half of Texas' 52 mussel species, and several species are found nowhere else in the world, including the Texas fatmucket, golden orb, Texas pimpleback, Texas fawnsfoot and triangle pigtoe. Since biologists don't have complete information on distribution and population levels for many species, monitoring any Texas stream could reveal vital information. Determining what species reside where, monitoring their populations, and watching for mass die-offs are crucial first steps in conservation.



### FISH HOST



Top: the mussel extends its mantle out of the shell to create a "lure" that attracts the fish that will host the mussel larvae, or glochidia, middle; when the fish takes the bait, it gets a mouthful of glochidia, which then attach themselves to the fish's gills or fins until they're ready for a new home.

THIS PAGE: ILLUSTRATION BY NARDA LEBO



Texas Mussel Watch volunteers have already increased the scientific knowledge of mussel distribution throughout Texas. Junior high teacher Melba Sexton found a golden orb in the San Marcos River, a Texas-endemic species known only from a handful of populations around the state. Rushing's Navasota River expeditions have also met with success. Reimer went with Rushing last year on his annual trip, and knew they'd found a mussel haven. "There are so many mussels in that river it's absolutely amazing," Reimer says. "So many rivers where we've collected, the mussels are gone."

We paddle down the muddy brown Navasota for a few miles. There have been heavy rainfalls this year, which can churn up sediment, but I wonder whether the river was always this muddy, or whether human activities have significantly changed the watershed. When erosion, runoff or dam construction cause increased amounts of sediment to flow into or pile up in streams that used to run clear, the fauna within often can't adapt to the rapid changes.

"Habitat degradation is probably one of the biggest concerns when it comes to things like mussels because they can't get up and run away," says TPWD aquatic biologist Dick Luebke. "So many rivers have impoundments on them, and that changes it from flowing to standing water. Historically, we didn't have lakes. The entire state had flowing water. And that throws a curveball at species."

The Navasota has a single dam, upstream of where we're paddling. Dams create a multitude of problems for mussels. Upstream, dams cause decreased dissolved oxygen, reduced water flow, and lower algae populations, which mussels filter-feed on. In a reservoir, water flow ceases and sediment piles up. Many mussels can't live in mushy soft substrates. Besides losing habitat, mussels can suffocate in the increased sediment load. For organisms that adapted over millions of years for flowing water, changes to a river's flow regime can spell disaster.

"Many of the species that are 'of concern' need flowing water at some point in their life," says TPWD aquatic biologist John Prentice, who works with Luebke at Heart of the Hills Fisheries Research Science Center. As sensitive species disappear, a region becomes dominated by a few common species. Exotic species get a foothold, like the Asian clam, which has invaded all Texas' major river systems.

In this Garden of Eden for mussels, is it tolerable to accept having a few resilient species and let the rest go the way of the dodo bird? Preserving our natural heritage for its own sake might be reason enough, but simply having biodiversity serves an important function. "Species diversity tends to increase stability in the ecosystem," explains Prentice. "A stable ecosystem is better able to withstand various and varying stresses." Healthy ecosystems also provide benefits to people. "Although some of us think of ourselves as above the ecosystem, we are not," Prentice notes. "Our health and well being is connected to the health and well-being of the ecosystem."

Dams affect mussel habitats downstream as well, causing an unstable zone of underwater erosion (scour) caused by the rapid flow immediately below the dam. At the Elephant Butte Dam on the Rio Grande, scientists documented more than 4 meters of accumulated sediment downstream, which destroyed mussel habitat and reduced fish diversity and abundance. Changes to the fish fauna affect mussels because mussels require a fish host to disperse their young. Mussels have an extraordinary life cycle. It might look like a rocky lump, but inside that mussel shell lies a mighty surprise.

Mussels extend a part of their body outside their shell as a lure to attract fish. The lure, formed from a fleshy part of the mussel called the mantle, can be incredibly realistic. Some look like worms that waver in the flowing water, while others resemble small minnows. Since mussels can't move far, they've solved the evolutionary puzzle of how to disperse by having their larvae, called glochidia, piggyback on the gills of fish. When a fish takes the bait, it gets a mouthful of glochidia instead of a meal.

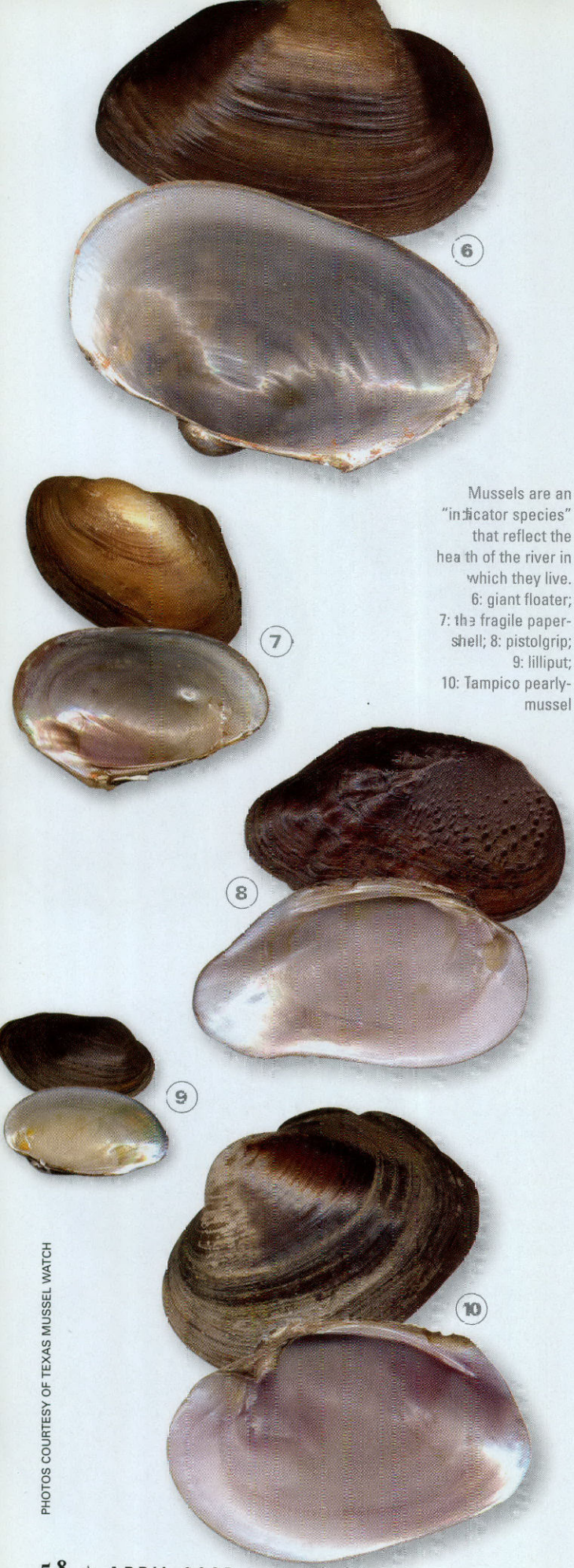
Scientists used to think the mussel larvae parasitized the fish host,



Freshwater mussels are sensitive creatures with unusual names.

- 1: bleufer;
- 2: southern mapleleaf;
- 3: threeridge;
- 4: yellow sandshell;
- 5: washboard.





Mussels are an "indicator species" that reflect the health of the river in which they live.  
 6: giant floater;  
 7: the fragile paper-shell;  
 8: pistolgrip;  
 9: lilliput;  
 10: Tampico pearly-mussel

causing them harm, but recent studies have found at least some fish species benefit from the glochidia, making it more of a symbiotic relationship. When the glochidia attach to a fishes' gills, it initiates an immune reaction, which apparently guards against other infections. Many mussels require a specific fish species for their larval stage, and if that fish disappears from a river drainage, mussel species that depend on it will eventually disappear too.

Rushing, the kids and I bank our kayaks at a gravelly sandbar to look for mussel shells. As the kids explore the sandbar, Rushing shows me the common shells scattered among the gravel, sand and clay. The abundant threeridge grows to nearly 9 inches across and like its name, has three distinct ridges across its dark shell. The slightly less common washboard looks similar but has more ridges, like an old-fashioned washboard. The fragile papershell breaks easily and has a smooth, sandy yellow shell. The mapleleaf has a pimply shell, while the smooth pimpleback has none. Non-native Asian clams are everywhere.

Who came up with these names? I think to myself. Pistolgrip. Deertoe. Pimpleback. Little Spectaclecase. Heelsplitter. I can just picture Billy Bob and George in overalls mucking through streams. "Hey George, look at this 'un. Looks like a rock pocket-book!" as he slips the mussel in his back pocket in jest.

"Most common names you'll see used come from the shellers that were collecting shells for the pearl button industry," explains Arthur Bogan, a research associate with the American Museum of Natural History. My mental image of mussel-naming may not be far off base.

Until the plastics industry replaced shell buttons in the mid-1900s, shellers harvested mussels by the thousands. The buttons were punched out of the mother-of-pearl from the inside of mussel shells, which varies from pure white, once favored for buttons, to pearly pink, purple, peach, or silver-gray, depending on species. This same material, also called *nacre*, creates pearls.

Freshwater mussels have a long history of importance to humans. Large middens, or shell mounds, can be found in archaeological sites in the southeast U.S. where Native Americans lived. Not only did Native Americans eat mussels, but they used pearls for ornamentation and for trade.

Pearls develop more frequently in certain mussels than others, such as the pearly mussel family (*Margaritiferidae*) but also species in the *Unionidae* family such as the washboard and Tampico pearlymussel. Natural pearls only form in a small percentage of individuals, and often they stay attached to the shell. The pearl industry overcame these difficulties by developing pearl culturing, in which a round object, or nucleus, is inserted into a living mussel. Today, commercial musselers harvest washboard, threeridge and mapleleaf shells to create bead nuclei for pearl culturing. An AMNH traveling pearls exhibit on marine and freshwater pearls recently visited the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

In Texas, an industry grew up around so-called Concho River pearls in San Angelo. First noticed by Native Americans and later by Spaniards, the pearls still provide an economic boon to the region. These unique pink and purple pearls form in the Tampico pearlymussel, a species found only in Texas and northern Mexico. Some believe that the Spanish crown jewels include Concho river pearls. Unlike many other species, Tampico pearlymussels are relatively common and not currently a species of concern.

At the sandbar I notice an exposed group of about a hundred large mussels, mostly dead, and I ask Rushing if it's unusual. "Mussels are indicator species. They're like the canary in the coal mine," Rushing explains to me as well as the students. Since mussels feed by siphoning algae out of water, they are vulnerable to pollutants such as agricultural runoff.

The students lay out orange squares in a line, each 10 steps





Above left: start a cultured pearl by inserting a round "nucleus" (made from a piece of shell that has been rounded) into an oyster's shell. middle left: the oyster adds layers of "nacre" onto the nucleus to create a cultured pearl; lower left: a collection of freshwater pearls from mussels; above: before plastics, buttons were cut from mussel shells.

apart, and count half-shells and whole shells and identify the species present. This standard sampling method provides a way to compare from site to site, or from year to year. As the kids count shells, Rushing mentions that the water dropped a full foot from yesterday, when he took a separate group of students on the river. Rapid changes to the water level can kill mussels because of their low mobility. Although mussels do have a foot, they can't move far, and when the water level drops they become easy prey for raccoons or other scavengers. Most likely the rapid water-level drop killed the mussels.

As we head back out onto the river, I think about the myriad challenges mussels face from so many directions, and I wonder, what it would take to reverse the trend?

"One is the need to improve riparian buffers, control erosion and improve land management practices in construction, farming, and silviculture," says Bogan. Riparian buffers are forested strips along riverbanks, and they protect streams from excessive runoff, cool the water and provide organic matter via falling limbs and debris, which helps drive the aquatic ecosystem. "Clean water is critical to the survival of freshwater mussels. Recovery of the waters will assist with the recovery of the freshwater mussels and fishes, as long as they have refuge populations they can expand outward from."

Besides destroying mussel habitat, dams prevent the migration of anadromous host fish, those that spawn in the ocean but live in rivers, and this affects any mussel species whose larvae depend on them. "If you put in a dam, that migration can no longer occur," Bogan continues, "It's only a matter of time before a mussel species depending on such fish disappear. Removal of dams would facilitate the movement of fishes and the recolonization of areas where the mussels have been extirpated."

Though lack of information should not be an excuse for not conserving, research provides an integral component of conservation. "There's a great need for further research on the basic biology of freshwater mussels, their physiology, ecology, and role in nutrient cycling, since they are very long-lived invertebrates.

There is the need to better understand and determine fish hosts for native species," urges Bogan.

TPWD just instituted a grant with two universities to help expand knowledge of mussel populations, but budgets are not infinite. Reestablishing species requires money and know-how. "The mussels we know least about are the rare or endangered species," says Prentice, "and they are the most difficult to study because of their limited numbers."

For species on the brink of extinction, scientists in other states are developing captive propagation methods, so they can reintroduce mussels where they once lived. In Texas, captive rearing could become a tool for working with mussels-in-decline in the future, says Prentice. "The habitat needs to be there to support any mussels we might someday want to reintroduce, so we work at land- and water-use practices that can enhance river/stream flow and natural setting stream bank stabilization, river rehabilitation, and water allocation."

Paddling slowly down the Navasota River in the still quiet of the morning, you can almost forget that a world exists beyond the banks. The river's world is a quiet one, punctuated with an occasional cicada song or the plunk of a snake dropping from an overhead tree. I think about the great loss we endure when species as interesting as mussels disappear — the colorful pearls, the unusual shells, the hilarious names, the history. Mussels have so many adversities to overcome — exotic species, pollution, sedimentation, dams and other river modifications — it seems understandable that species diversity has plummeted, and of the lineages that remain, many struggle to keep their place in the tree of life.

It's easy to understand why people don't know much about mussels. They live hidden lives buried under the riverbank. They look like bumpy rocks, and not many people care when they silently disappear, species by species, from a river. ★

For more information about the Texas Mussel Watch program, visit: [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/nature/education/tracker/mussels/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/nature/education/tracker/mussels/).







# Colossal College of Calluses

*They were only looking for “three hots a day,” but CCC workers earned their keep and much more as they built parks that Texans still enjoy.*

By Elaine Robbins

**The rustic sandstone cabins** in the pine forest of Bastrop State Park seem to emerge organically from the landscape like the buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright. Balmorhea pool, the largest spring-fed pool in the country, sits like a sparkling gem in the West Texas desert. The whitewashed, adobe-style Indian Lodge nestles like a pueblo against the towering backdrop of the Davis Mountains. I’ve long felt that there was something special about these state park places, but I’ve only recently discovered what it was: They were all built by the CCC.

Established in 1933 as part of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal recovery plan, the Civilian Conservation Corps provided jobs for 2.5 million young men ages 18–25 whose families were struggling to survive the Depression. Across the country, the CCC — or the Colossal College of Calluses, as workers called it — transformed the American landscape. Workers arranged in companies of 200 men planted 2 to 3 billion trees and built 13,100 miles of hiking trails. In Texas, they virtually built our state park system from the ground up. During the brief span between 1933 and 1942, the CCC built an astounding 56 state parks — including Bastrop, Palo Duro Canyon and Garner — 31 of which still stand. They offer a shining architectural and conservation legacy that still inspires park visitors today.

The CCC was a lifeline for people like Thomas Earl Jordan, who first heard about the program while standing in line at a Kilgore employment office. After Jordan’s father had quit sharecropping, which had barely sustained his family, they were pitched into instability. “Daddy did public work whenever he could find it. I think every time the rent come due, we moved.” Although he was

just 16, Jordan lied about his age to sign up. His \$30-a-month paycheck — \$25 of which was sent directly to his family — helped sustain them through hard times.

In a time of bread lines and soup kitchens, the CCC’s free meals and lodging were as attractive as the paycheck. “When you was out there working on a farm, you didn’t know where your next meal was coming from,” says Ezekiel Rhodes, who sold sweet potatoes to the African American Company 3807 at Fort Parker before he joined at age 18. “But when you was in the CCC camp, you knew where you was going to get your three hots a day.”

During their six-month stints, workers learned useful trades from the out-of-work architects, carpenters and stonemasons — LEMs, or local employed men — hired by the CCC. Texas architects were supervised by Herb Maier in the National Park Service’s Oklahoma office. Maier is considered the “father” of a distinctive park building style that came to be known as “National Park Service Rustic.” Under his exact-



**DISTINCTIVE CCC STYLE:** Above left: typical CCC rough stone construction at Palo Duro Canyon State Park; above right: the refectory at Palmetto State Park; right: the rugged stone cabins at Bastrop State Park; opposite: the pueblo-style buildings at Indian Lodge.



ing eye, local architects designed entire parks — from cabins and group shelters to picnic pavilions and handcrafted furniture. According to Jim Steely, author of *Parks for Texas: Enduring Landscapes of the New Deal*, the “NPS rustic” style

## CCC Favorites of Historian Jim Steely

**BEST NPS RUSTIC:** Palmetto refectory  
**BEST ARTS AND CRAFTS REVIVAL:** Bastrop refectory  
**BEST REGIONAL ADAPTATION:** Indian Lodge  
**BEST ODDBALL ASSIGNMENT:** reconstruction of Goliad's Mission Espiritu Santo  
**BEST LOST BUILDING:** CCC exhibit at 1936 Centennial Exposition  
**BEST DESIGN IN STONE FLOOR:** pentagram at Mother Neff refectory  
**BEST PLACE I'D LIKE TO SPEND SOME TIME:** (tie) Bastrop Cabin No. 1 and an original Indian Lodge room

borrowed ideas from many architectural movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries — the “Great Camp” Adirondack style, the organic architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright,

and the Arts and Crafts movement.

Promoting the philosophy that park structures should harmonize with nature, Maier taught CCC architects and landscape architects the elements of style that best achieved that effect. He encouraged the use of local wood and stone such as limestone, oak and cedar. (Perhaps the most impressive use of local materials was the Palmetto State Park refectory building, whose roof was originally thatched with 32,000 palmetto fronds from the surrounding stand of dwarf palmetto.) Materials were finished with simple tools using pioneer building techniques. Maier encouraged the use of low, horizontal lines and warned architects to avoid straight lines and right angles. Muted browns and grays were the preferred colors; green, although it seems a likely choice, was found to be too difficult to match to the natural scenery.

Even the park landscapes that we think of as “natural” were in fact created — or at least improved — by a cadre of talented Texas landscape architects. Unlike national parks, which were established in the country's most spectacular natural settings, Texas state parks were often carved out of marginal land that needed major restoration. CCC workers dammed rivers and built beaches, creating dozens of the recreational lakes we

enjoy today. They built hiking trails that offer a new discovery at every turn, and they planted native vegetation that appears to have been rooted there forever. Perhaps most impressive, they reseeded Bastrop State Park, transforming what was then an eroded and overcut timber harvest tract into today's bucolic forest of loblolly pine.

Like the best Arts-and-Crafts-style houses, the CCC work reveals the craftsmanship of the human hand that made them to everyone who takes the time to notice. “These rocks wasn't put up here in one day,” says Alvin Thieme, 89, gesturing to some rockwork at Bastrop he helped build as a young man. “Some of them have chisel marks on them. I think, ‘Does the young generation see it?’ You got to get around, see things, see how it's made.”

The handcrafted structures they left us would be impossible to replicate. “For us to build those cabins today would take millions of dollars,” says Janelle Taylor, CCC coordinator for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. “The heavy stone foundations and rough-hewn timbers that are classic CCC style used very labor-intensive construction techniques. They're very different from tilt wall and prefab — terms you hear in construction today.”

In the modern American landscape of Wal-Marts and Taco Bells, it's sometimes hard to find a sense of place or a connection to the past. At times like these, we can always head to the CCC parks for inspiration. ★

## CCC Oral History Project

The CCC workers quoted in this article were interviewed for the TPWD-CCC oral history project (CCC Boys of Texas: Tell Us Your Story). Since 1997, Texas Parks and Wildlife employees have videotaped interviews with former workers to collect their stories. “The average age of the men we interviewed is 86,” says Janelle Taylor of TPWD's Infrastructure Division, who leads the project. “Many of them are World War II veterans, and those veterans are dying every day.”

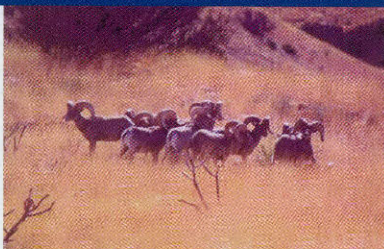
At CCC reunions held at state parks around Texas, former CCC workers gather to share reminiscences. “We're finally honoring these men,” says Taylor. “Many have died, but we're telling their wives and children, ‘You have a hero in the family.’” The next reunion is planned for September 2005 at Garner State Park. For more information on the oral history project or the CCC reunions, contact Janelle Taylor at (512) 389-4665, Janelle.Taylor@tpwd.state.tx.us.

## Trophy Desert Bighorn Sheep

Got yours?  
 Here's your next  
 best opportunity  
 for a Texas permit.

Texas Parks & Wildlife Operation Game Thief has been granted a Trophy Desert Bighorn Sheep permit to be auctioned in its annual fundraiser, the **Bandana Ball**, scheduled for June 11, 2005 and located at the DoubleTree Post Oak Hotel in Houston, Texas.

For information on tables, tickets, menu, attire and reservations, please contact Gina Nesloney, Event Coordinator at 512.332.9880 or email gnevents@austin.rr.com



Texas Parks & Wildlife Department's

Operation  
*Game Thief*  
**Bandana Ball**

Saturday, June 11, 2005  
 DoubleTree Post Oak Hotel  
 Houston, TX

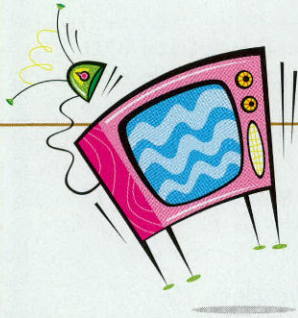


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# SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

THE FRONT LINE OF NEWS AND VIEWS



## TELEVISION

LOOK FOR THESE STORIES IN THE COMING WEEKS:

### March 27 – April 3:

Planning for conservation and recreation; rock climbing at Lake Mineral Wells State Park; tree stand safety; whooping cranes at Aransas NWR; alligator lizard.

### April 3 – 10:

Galveston Island State Park; prairie chickens in the Panhandle; stone skipping; raising beneficial insects; morning moonset; venomous snakes.

### April 10 – 17:

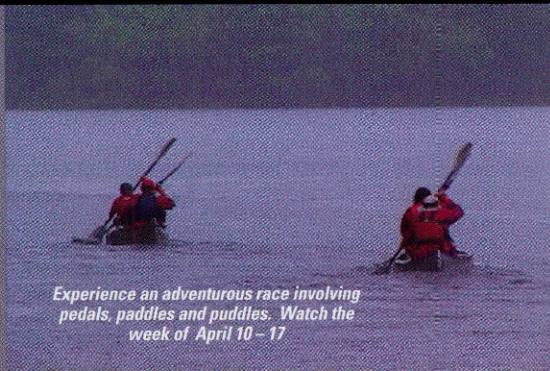
Rock art of Seminole Canyon; state parks host adventure races; running with the antelope; firearm safety; pain in the pines.

### April 17 – 24:

Longhorns and landmarks at Fort Griffin; dissecting tarpon trends; Lone Star Land Steward; Panhandle hills; the mysteries of bird migration.

### April 24 – May 1:

Sport fish restoration funding; game wardens as part of the community; Fanthorp Inn; finding public hunting opportunities; Honey Creek State Natural Area.



Experience an adventurous race involving pedals, paddles and puddles. Watch the week of April 10 – 17

## “TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE”

Winner of 12 Emmy Awards, our television series is broadcast throughout Texas on local PBS affiliates. In stereo with closed captions.

[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/tv](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/tv)

**AMARILLO:** KACV, Ch. 2 / Sun. noon

**AUSTIN:** KLRU, Ch. 18 / Sun. 9 a.m. / Mon. 12:30 p.m.; KLRU2, Cable Ch. 20 / Tues. 11 p.m.

**BRYAN-COLLEGE STATION:** KAMU, Ch. 15 / Thurs. 7 p.m. / Sun. 5 p.m., 10:30 p.m.

**CORPUS CHRISTI:** KEDT, Ch. 16 / Sun. 11 a.m. / Fri. 11:30 p.m.

**DALLAS-FORT WORTH:** KERA, Ch. 13 / Sat. 8 a.m.

Also serving Abilene, Denton, Longview, Marshall, San Angelo, Texarkana, Tyler, Wichita Falls, Sherman

**EL PASO:** KCOS, Ch. 13 / Sat. 3:00 p.m.

(rotates with other programs; check listings)

**HARLINGEN:** KMBH, Ch. 60 / Sun. 5 p.m.

Also serving McAllen, Mission, Brownsville

**HOUSTON:** KUHT, Ch. 8 / Sat. 3 p.m. / Fri. 1 p.m.

Also serving Beaumont/Port Arthur, Galveston, Texas City, Victoria

**KILLEEN:** KNCT, Ch. 46 / Sun. 5 p.m.

Also serving Temple

**LUBBOCK:** KTXT, Ch. 5 / Sun. 5:30 p.m.

**ODESSA-MIDLAND:** KOCV, Ch. 36 / Sat. 5 p.m.

**SAN ANTONIO & LAREDO:** KLNR, Ch. 9 / Friday noon, Sunday 1:30 p.m.

**WACO:** KWBU, Ch. 34 / Sat. 3 p.m.

Check local listings. Times and dates are subject to change, especially during PBS membership drives.



## RADIO

### “PASSPORT TO TEXAS”

Your Radio Guide to the Great Texas Outdoors

Join hosts Joel Block and Cecilia Nasti weekdays for a 90-second journey into the Texas Outdoors. Producers: Cecilia Nasti, (512) 389-4667 and Lisa Wheeler, (512) 389-8031. Check this listing for a station near you. Listen Monday-Friday unless indicated otherwise. Or tune in on the Web:

[www.passporttotexas.org](http://www.passporttotexas.org)

**ABILENE:** KACU-FM 89.7 / 7:04 a.m., 1:43 p.m., 6 p.m.; KWKC-AM 1540 / 6:30 a.m.

**ALPINE:** KSRU-AM 1670 / 9 p.m.

**AMARILLO:** KACV-FM 89.9 / 3:50 p.m.

**ATLANTA:** KPYN-AM 900 / 7:30 a.m.

**AUSTIN:** KVET-AM 1300 / between 5 a.m. and 7 a.m. Sat.; ESPN Radio KWNX-AM 1260 and KQQA-AM 1530 9:20 a.m. Sun.

**BEAUMONT:** KLVI-AM 560 / 5:20 a.m.

**BIG SPRING:** KBST-AM 1490 / 10:55 a.m.

**BONHAM:** KFYN-AM 1420 / 10:10 a.m. KFYZ-FM 98.3 / 10:10 a.m.

**BRADY:** KNEL-AM 1490 / 7:20 a.m.; KNEL-FM 95.3 / 7:20 a.m.

**BRIDGEPORT:** KBOC-FM 98.3 / 11:45 a.m.

**BRYAN:** KZNE-AM 1150 / 5:40 p.m.

**CANTON:** KVCI-AM 1510 / 8:20 a.m.

**CANYON:** KWTS-FM 91.1 / noon, 4 p.m., 7 p.m.

**CARTHAGE:** KGAS-AM 1590 / 6:40 a.m.; KGAS-FM 104.3 / 6:30 a.m.

**CENTER:** KDET-AM 930 / 5:20 p.m.; KQSI-FM 92.5 / 5:20 p.m.

**CISCO:** KCER-FM 105.9 / 12:05 p.m.

**COMMERCE:** KETR-FM 88.9 / 10:15 a.m.

**CORPUS CHRISTI:** KEDT-FM 90.3 / 5:33 p.m.; KFTX-FM 97.5 / 5:30 a.m.; KVRT-FM 90.7 / 5:33 p.m.; KLUX-FM 89.5 / throughout the day

**CROCKETT:** KIVY-AM 1290 / 8:15 a.m., KIVY-FM 92.7 / 8:15 a.m.



**DENTON:** KNTU-FM 88.1 / 10:58 a.m., 3:58 p.m., 11:59 p.m.

**DIMMITT:** KDHN-AM 1470 / 12:29 p.m.

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

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

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

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

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

**FAIRFIELD:** KNES-FM 99.1 / 6:47 a.m.

**FLORESVILLE:** KULB-FM 89.7 / 1:30 p.m.

**FORT STOCKTON:** KFST-AM 860 / 12:55 p.m., KFST-FM 94.3 / 12:55 p.m.

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

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

**GREENVILLE:** KGVL-AM 1400 / 8:10 a.m.

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

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

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

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

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

**HUNTSVILLE:** KSHU-FM 90.5 / 12:05 p.m., 5:05 p.m.

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

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

**KERRVILLE:** KRNH-FM 92.3 / 5:31 a.m., 12:57 p.m., 7:35 p.m.; KMBL-AM 1450 / 5:49 a.m., 12:49 p.m., 5:49 p.m.; KERV-AM 1230 / 5:49 a.m., 12:49 p.m., 5:49 p.m.; KRVL-FM 94.3 / 5:49 a.m., 12:49 p.m., 5:49 p.m.

**LA GRANGE:** KBUK-FM 104.9 / 12:30 p.m.; KVLG-AM 1570 / 12:30 p.m.

**LAMPASAS:** KCYL-FM 102 / 7:10 a.m.; KCYY-AM 1450 / 7:10 a.m.

**LAREDO:** KHOY-FM 88.1 / 2 p.m.

**LEVELLAND:** KLVT-AM 1230 / 12:05 p.m.

**LLANO:** KITY-FM 102.9 / throughout the day

**LUBBOCK:** KJTV-AM 950 / 6:45 a.m.

**LUFKIN:** KUEZ-FM 100.1 / 10:40 a.m.; KYBI-FM 101.9 / 10:30 a.m.

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

**MARSHALL:** KCUL-FM 92.3 / 6:12 a.m.; KMHT-FM 103.9 / 6:35 a.m.; KMHT-AM 1450 / 6:35 a.m.

**MESQUITE:** KEOM-FM 88.5 / 5:30 a.m., 2:30 p.m., 8:30 p.m. Mon.-Thu.; 5:30 a.m., 2:30 p.m. Fri.

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

**MINEOLA:** KMOO-FM 99.9 / 5:10 p.m.

**MONAHANS:** KLBO-AM 1330 / 6 a.m., noon, 3 p.m.

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

**NEW BRAUNFELS:** KGNB-AM 1420 / 6:52 a.m.

**ODESSA:** KCRS-AM 550 / 6:05 a.m., 5:50 p.m., KOCV-FM 91.3 / 7:37 a.m.

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

**PLAINVIEW:** KVOP-AM 1090 / 7:49 a.m.

**ROCKDALE:** KRXT-FM 98.5 / 5:05 a.m., 5:50 a.m., 8:50 p.m.

**SAN ANGELO:** KGKL-AM 960 / throughout the day

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

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

**SONORA:** KHOS-FM 92.1 / 10:13 a.m.; KYXX-FM 94.3 / 2:15 p.m.

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

**SWEETWATER:** KXOX-FM 96.7 / 7:20 a.m.; KXOX-AM 1240 / 7:20 a.m.

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

**TEXARKANA:** KTXK-FM 91.5 / 8 p.m.

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

**WACO:** KBBW-AM 1010 / 5-7 a.m., 1-3 p.m., 5-7 p.m.

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

**WOODVILLE:** KWUD-AM 1490 / throughout the day

**AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN'S INSIDE LINE:** (512) 416-5700 category 6287 (NATR)

**BEDFORD:** K-Meadow, Meadow Creek Elementary / noon

**VIRTUAL RADIO eTUNZ:** <www.etunz.net> / :20 every hour.

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# TEXAS

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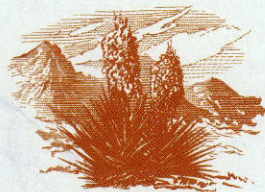
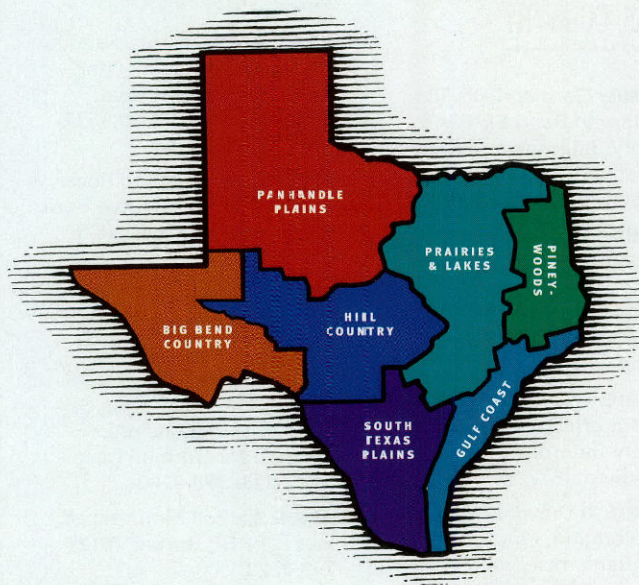
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# GETAWAYS

FROM BIG BEND TO THE BIG THICKET AND THE RED TO THE RIO GRANDE



## BIG BEND COUNTRY

**APRIL:** Desert Garden Tour, Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center, Terlingua, available by reservation only to groups of six or more, call for dates, (432) 424-3327

**APRIL:** Hiking Tours, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, every Wednesday through Sunday, by prior arrangement, reservations required, (915) 849-6684

**APRIL:** Pictograph Tours, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, every Wednesday through Sunday, by prior arrangement, reservations required, (915) 849-6684

**APRIL:** Full Moon in the Dunes, Monahans Sandhills SP, Monahans, call or email for dates info@texascamel-corps.com (866) 6CAMELS

**APRIL:** Texas Camel Treks, Monahans Sandhills SP, Monahans, call or email for

For more detailed information on outdoor events across the state, visit <[www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)> and click on "TPWD Events" in the blue area labeled "In the Parks."

dates, info@texascamel-corps.com (866) 6CAMELS

**APRIL:** Fate Bell Cave Dwelling, Seminole Canyon SP&HS, Comstock, every Wednesday through Sunday, tours are subject to cancellation, (432) 292-4464

**APRIL:** White Shamaa Tour, Seminole Canyon SP&HS, Comstock, every Saturday, tours are subject to cancellation, (888) 525-9907

**APRIL 1-30:** Equestrian Riding Trail, Black Gap WMA, Alpine, Annual Hunting Permit or Limited Public Use Permit required for visitors 17 and older, (432) 376-2216

**APRIL 1-30:** Fishing on the Rio Grande, Black Gap WMA, Alpine, Annual Hunting Permit or Limited Public Use Permit required for visitors 17 and older, (432) 376-2216

**APRIL 2:** Presa Canyon Tour, Seminole Canyon SP&HS, Comstock, reservations required, (432) 292-4464

**APRIL 9:** Stories of Spirits, Magoffin Home SHS, El Paso, reservations encouraged,

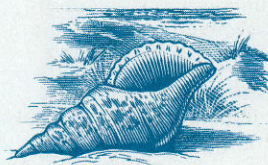
(915) 533-5147

**APRIL 14-16:** Longhorn Cattle Drive, Big Bend Ranch SP, Presidio, reservations required, (432) 229-3416

**APRIL 17:** Birding Tours, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, reservations required, (915) 849-6684

**APRIL 22-24:** Digital Photography Workshop, Big Bend Ranch SP, Presidio, reservations required, (432) 229-3416

**APRIL 30:** Birding Tour, Big Bend Ranch SP, Presidio, reservations required, (432) 229-3416



## GULF COAST

**APRIL:** Weekend Nature Programs, Brazos Bend SP,

Needville, every Saturday and Sunday, for details visit <[www.bbspvo.org](http://www.bbspvo.org)> or call (979) 553-5101

**APRIL:** Hatchery Tours, Coastal Conservation Association / American Electric Power Marine Development Center SFH, Corpus Christi, every Monday through Saturday except holidays, reservations required, (361) 939-7784

**APRIL:** Bay Walk, Galveston Island SP, Galveston, every Sunday, (409) 737-1222

**APRIL:** Bird Walk, Galveston Island SP, Galveston, every Sunday, (409) 737-1222

**APRIL:** Exploring Sea Life, Galveston Island SP, Galveston, every Saturday, (409) 737-1222

**APRIL:** Slide Show, Galveston Island SP, Galveston, every Saturday (409) 737-1222

**APRIL:** Aquarium and Hatchery Tours, Sea Center Texas, Lake Jackson, every Tuesday through Sunday, hatchery tours by reservation only, (979) 292-0100

**APRIL:** Marsh Airboat Tours, Sea Rim SP, Sabine Pass, every Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday, reservations required, (409) 971-2559

**APRIL 2:** Earth Day Celebration, Brazos Bend SP,



Needville, for more information visit <www.bbbspvo.org> or call (979) 553-5101

**APRIL 2:** Civil War Preservation Trust's Park Day, Sabine Pass Battleground SP&HS, Sabine Pass, (409) 971-2559

**APRIL 2:** 4th Annual Pecan Growers' Workshop and Grafters Seminar, Varner-Hogg Plantation SHS, West Columbia, (979) 345-4656

**APRIL 2, 16, 23:** Spring Migration Birding Tour, Fennessey Ranch, Bayside, reservations required, (361) 529-6600

**APRIL 2, 9, 15, 16, 23, 30:** Story Time, Sea Center Texas, Lake Jackson, (979) 292-0100

**APRIL 4-5:** Coastal Expo, Alamo, Texas, visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/coastalexpo> or call (512) 912-7037

**APRIL 9:** Huck Finn River Adventure, Fennessey Ranch, Bayside, reservations required, (361) 529-6600

**APRIL 9, 30:** Beachcombing and Shelling Tour, Matagorda Island SP&WMA, Port O'Connor, reservations required, (361) 983-2215

**APRIL 10:** History Tour, Matagorda Island SP&WMA, Port O'Connor, reservations required, (361) 983-2215

**APRIL 16:** Photography Workshop, Fennessey Ranch, Bayside, reservations required, (361) 529-6600

**APRIL 16:** Celebrate Texas History, Fulton Mansion SHS, Fulton, (361) 729-0386

**APRIL 16:** Spring Bird Walk, Sea Rim SP, Sabine Pass, (409) 971-2559

**APRIL 17, 23, 24:** Walking Bird Tour, Matagorda Island SP&WMA, Port O'Connor, reservations required, (361) 983-2215

**APRIL 23:** San Jacinto Day Festival, San Jacinto Battleground SHS, LaPorte, (281) 479-2431

**APRIL 23:** Spring Adopt-A-Beach Cleanup, Sea Rim SP, Sabine Pass, (409) 971-2559

**APRIL 30:** Wild Boar Hunt, Fennessey Ranch, Bayside, reservations required, (361) 529-6600



## HILL COUNTRY

**APRIL:** Gorman Falls Tour, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, every Saturday and Sunday weather permitting, (325) 628-3240

**APRIL:** Walking Wild Cave Tour, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, every Saturday and Sunday weather permitting, reservations recommended, (325) 628-3240

**APRIL:** Wild Cave Tour, Longhorn Cavern SP, Burnet, every Saturday, reservations required, (877) 441-2283

**APRIL 2:** Crawling Wild Cave Exploration, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, reservations required, (325) 628-3240

**APRIL 2-3:** Access restricted for scheduled hunts, Guadalupe River SP, Spring Branch, Partial restriction, call for details (830) 438-2656

**APRIL 2, 9, 16, 23, 30:** Go Fishing with a Ranger, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223

**APRIL 2, 16, 30:** Stumpy Hollow Nature Hike, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223

**APRIL 2, 16, 30:** Bat Flights at Stuart Bat Cave, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, reservations required, (830) 563-2342

**APRIL 2, 16, 30:** Morning Bird Walks, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, reservations required, (830) 563-2342

**APRIL 2, 16, 30:** Wild Cave Tour, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, reservations required, (830) 563-2342

**APRIL 3, 7, 17, 28:** Basic Canoe Skills Clinic, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, reservations required, (512) 793-2223

**APRIL 3, 7, 17, 28:** Devil's Waterhole Canoe Tour, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, reservations required, (512) 793-2223

**APRIL 8-9:** Texas Book

Festival on the Road in LBJ Country, Lyndon B. Johnson SP & HS, Stonewall, reservations required for dinner (830) 644-2252

**APRIL 9:** Bluegrass in the Park, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223

**APRIL 9, 23:** Hike the Hill Country, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223

**APRIL 9, 23:** Simple Sounds Concert in the Cave, Longhorn Cavern SP, Burnet, reservations required, (877) 441-2283

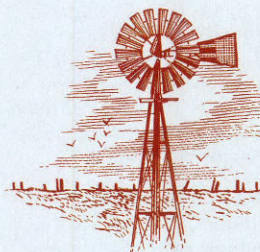
**APRIL 16:** Enchanted Rock Trail Project, Enchanted Rock SNA, Fredericksburg, (325) 247-3903

**APRIL 16:** Tour of Texas State Parks, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223

**APRIL 23:** Earth Day Celebration, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, reservations recommended for Gorman Cave tour, (325) 628-3240

**APRIL 23:** Full Moon Hikes, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223

**APRIL 24:** Breakfast with the Birds, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, reservations required, (512) 793-2223



## PANHANDLE PLAINS

**APRIL:** Interpretive Programs, Abilene SP, Tuscola, reservations required, call Paul Seals (325) 572-3204

**APRIL 2:** Great Texas Trash Off, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, (940) 839-4331

**APRIL 2:** Petroglyph Tour, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, (325) 949-4757

**APRIL 8-10, 15-17:** Access restricted for scheduled hunts, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, Partial restriction, (325) 949-4757

**APRIL 9:** Star Walk, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, (940)

839-4331

**APRIL 13:** Silver Bluebonnet Event, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, (325) 949-4757

**APRIL 16:** 8th Annual Master the Mountain Fun Walk/Run, Big Spring SP, Big Spring, reservations recommended, (432) 263-4931

**APRIL 16:** Volunteer Day, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, (806) 455-1492

**APRIL 23:** Earth Day Celebration, Fort Richardson SP&HS & Lost Creek Reservoir State Trailway, Jacksboro, (940) 567-3506

**APRIL 23:** Wildflower Tour, Fort Richardson SP&HS & Lost Creek Reservoir State Trailway, Jacksboro, (940) 567-3506

**APRIL 29-30:** Texas Amphibian Watch and Texas Mussel Watch Training Workshops, Abilene SP, Tuscola, e-mail Melissa.Clifton@aisd.org, call (325) 529-5595 or (325) 660-5610

**APRIL 29-30:** 8th Annual Spring Open House and Youth Outdoors Day, Lake Brownwood SP, Brownwood, (325) 784-5223



## PINEYWOODS

**APRIL:** Saturday Evening Programs, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, every Saturday, (409) 384-5231

**APRIL:** Walk on the Wild Side, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, every Sunday, (409) 384-5231

**APRIL:** Bluebird Hike, Tyler SP, Tyler, every Saturday, (903) 597-5338

**APRIL 1-3:** Dogwood Steam Train Excursion, Texas State Railroad SP, Rusk, reservations recommended, (800) 442-8951



**APRIL 9:** Pioneer Tools, Toys and Games, Mission Tejas SP, Grapeland, (936) 687-2394

**APRIL 10:** Archeology Tour, Mission Tejas SP, Grapeland, (936) 687-2394

**APRIL 14-15, 21-22, 28-29:** School Steam Train Excursions, Texas State Railroad SP, Palestine, reservations required, (800) 442-8951

**APRIL 16:** Floating the Forks, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, reservations required, (409) 384-5231

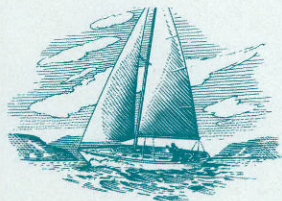
**APRIL 16:** Astronomy, Mission Tejas SP, Grapeland, subject to cancellation due to weather, (936) 687-2394

**APRIL 16:** Snakes Alive, Tyler SP, Tyler, (903) 597-5338

**APRIL 23:** Herbs from A to Z, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, (409) 384-5231

**APRIL 23:** Gambler Train, Texas State Railroad SP, Rusk, reservations required, (903) 729-6066

**APRIL 23:** Night Sounds, Tyler SP, Tyler, (903) 597-5338



## PRAIRIES & LAKES

**APRIL:** Discover the Lost Pines Nature Hike, Bastrop SP, Bastrop, every Saturday, (512) 321-2101

**APRIL:** Group History Tours, Monument Hill & Kreische Brewery SHS, LaGrange, available to groups of 10 or more by reservation only, (979) 968-5658

**APRIL:** Kreische Brewery Tours, Monument Hill & Kreische Brewery SHS, LaGrange, every Saturday and Sunday weather permitting, also available to groups of 10 or more by reservation, (979) 968-5658

**APRIL:** Campfire Program,

Ray Roberts Lake SP/Isle du Bois Unit, Pilot Point, every Saturday, (940) 686-2148

**APRIL:** Nature Hike, Ray Roberts Lake SP/Isle du Bois Unit, Pilot Point, every Saturday, (940) 686-2148

**APRIL:** Nature Hike, Ray Roberts Lake SP/Johnson Branch Unit, Valley View, every Saturday, (940) 637-2294

**APRIL:** Exhibit: Love's Messenger: Courtship in the Victorian Age, Sebastopol House SHS, Seguin, every Friday through Sunday, (830) 379-4833

**APRIL 2:** Reptiles - Our Scaly Skinned Friends, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, call to confirm program, (972) 291-5940

**APRIL 2:** Dutch Oven Cooking, Cooper Lake SP/South Sulphur Unit, Sulphur Springs, (903) 395-3100 or (903) 945-5256

**APRIL 2:** Gecko Adventure Race, Fort Parker SP, Mexia, for registration, visit <www.rattlesnakeracing.com> (254) 562-5751

**APRIL 2:** Kid's Wilderness Survival, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, reservations required, (940) 328-1171

**APRIL 2, 16:** "The Convention of 1836" Historical Play, Washington-on-the-Brazos SHS, Washington, (936) 878-2214

**APRIL 2, 9, 16, 23, 30:** Blooms of Spring Wildflower Walk, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, call to confirm program, (972) 291-5940

**APRIL 2-3, 10, 16-17, 23-24, 30:** 1800s Tours, Fanthorp Inn SHS, Anderson, (936) 873-2633

**APRIL 3, 10:** Kreische House Tour, Monument Hill & Kreische Brewery SHS, LaGrange, also available to groups of 10 or more by reservation on other dates, (979) 968-5658

**APRIL 8-9:** Texas Amphibian Watch and Texas Mussel Watch Training Workshops, Waco, Texas, preregistration required, To register or get more information contact e-mail [noras@ci.waco.tx.us](mailto:noras@ci.waco.tx.us) or call (254) 848-9654.

**APRIL 8-10:** Becoming an

Outdoors-Woman Workshop, Riverbend Retreat Center, Glen Rose, reservations required, for more information visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/edu/baow> or call (512) 389-8198

**APRIL 9:** 4th Annual Cedar Hill Expo, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, call to confirm program, (972) 291-3900

**APRIL 9:** Guided Nature Hike, Cooper Lake SP/Doctors Creek Unit, Cooper, (903) 395-3100

**APRIL 9:** Texas Colonial Heritage Festival, Stephen F. Austin SP, San Felipe, (979) 885-3613

**APRIL 12:** Stagecoach Days, Fanthorp Inn SHS, Anderson, (936) 873-2633

**APRIL 16:** Old Time Baseball, 1860s Style, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, call to confirm program, (972) 291-3900

**APRIL 16:** Guided Nature Hike, Cooper Lake SP/South Sulphur Unit, Sulphur Springs, (903) 395-3100

**APRIL 16:** The Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center/Bass Pro Shops Banquet and Auction, Grapevine, reservations required, (214) 360-3912

**APRIL 16:** Cowboy Campfire, Music and Poetry, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, (940) 328-1171

**APRIL 16:** Stargazing Party, Ray Roberts Lake SP/Isle du Bois Unit, Pilot Point, (940) 686-2148

**APRIL 23:** Neatness of the Night Hike, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, call to confirm program, (972) 291-3900

**APRIL 23:** Insects and Spiders, Cooper Lake SP/Doctors Creek Unit, Cooper, (903) 395-3100

**APRIL 23-24:** Doctor, Soldier, Farmer and Statesman, Barrington Living History Farm-Washington-on-the-Brazos SHS, Washington, (936) 878-2213

**APRIL 23-24:** Living History Days, Confederate Reunion Grounds SHS, Mexia, (254) 562-5751

**APRIL 30:** Penn Farm Tour, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, call to confirm program, (972) 291-5940

**APRIL 30:** Insects and Spiders, Cooper Lake

SP/South Sulphur Unit, Sulphur Springs, (903) 395-3100



## SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

**APRIL:** Bird Walk, World Birding Center - Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, Mission, every Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, reservations required, (956) 585-1107

**APRIL:** Birds of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, World Birding Center - Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, Mission, every Saturday, reservations required, (956) 585-1107

**APRIL:** Interpretive Tram Tour, World Birding Center - Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, Mission, every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, reservations required, (956) 585-1107

**APRIL:** Owl Prowl, World Birding Center - Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, Mission, every Wednesday and Friday, reservations required, (956) 585-1107

**APRIL:** Hawks by the Hundreds, World Birding Center - Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, Mission, daily reservations required, (956) 585-1107

**APRIL 10:** Victoria Civic Chorus Concert, Goliad SP, Goliad, (361) 645-3405

**APRIL 21:** Discover the Night Shift, World Birding Center - Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, Mission, reservations required, (956) 585-1107

**APRIL 23:** Spring Concert, Goliad SP, Goliad, (361) 645-3405

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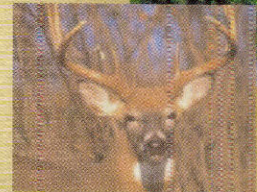
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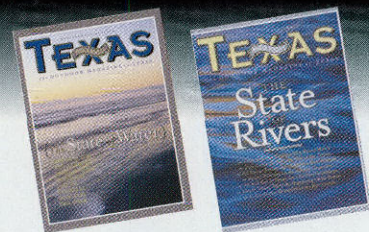
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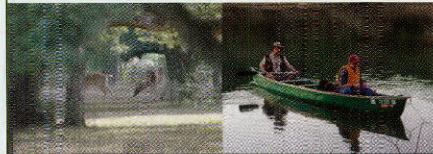
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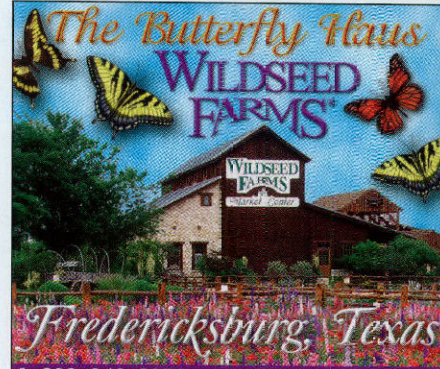
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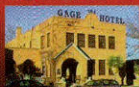


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# PARTINGSHOT

This snowy egret is practicing its unique style of fishing in the canals of San Solomon Springs in

Balmerhea State Park. The springs are home to the Pecos gambusia and the Comanche Springs pupfish — both listed as

endangered species. See the article about Balmerhea on page 26.

**IMAGE SPECS:**  
Canon EOS-1D Mark II  
with a 300 mm lens  
and a 1/640 second  
exposure at f/4.5.

PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM



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