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# TEXAS

PARKS & WILDLIFE

The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

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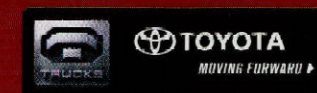
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Model shown with optional 20" wheels, running boards, and two-toned paint. Also available in Black and Salsa Red Pearl.



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COVER STORY  
Hunting on High

*By Russell A. Graves*

In addition to providing a better view,  
a well-placed treestand can make it harder  
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It's definitely time to see for yourself: Life is better outside!  
For the latest information on Texas' parks and wildlife, visit  
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Photo © Mike Searles

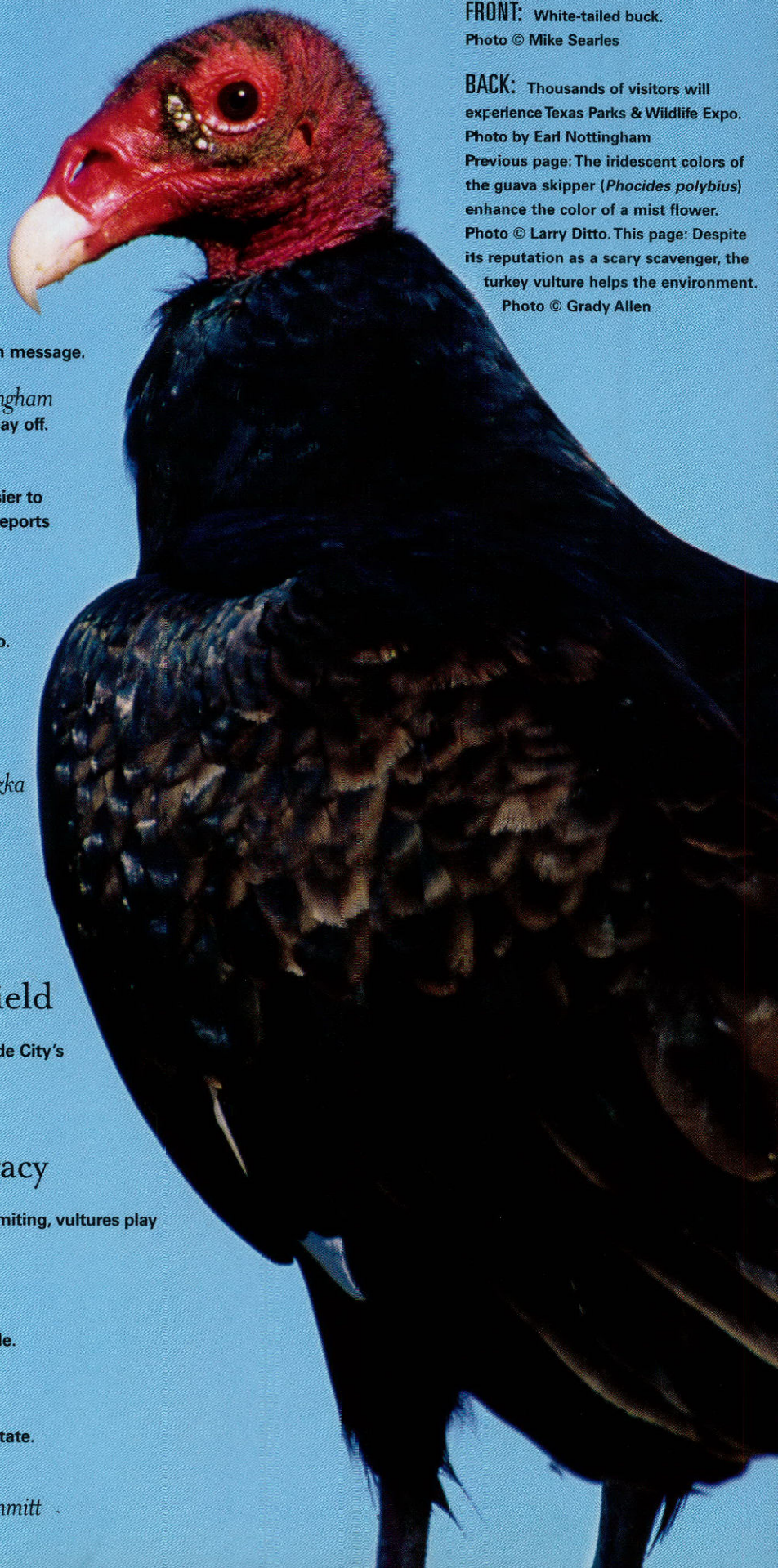
**BACK:** Thousands of visitors will experience Texas Parks & Wildlife Expo.

Photo by Earl Nottingham

Previous page: The iridescent colors of the guava skipper (*Phocides polybius*) enhance the color of a mist flower.

Photo © Larry Ditto. This page: Despite its reputation as a scary scavenger, the turkey vulture helps the environment.

Photo © Grady Allen



# TEXAS

The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE of TEXAS

OCTOBER 2005, VOL. 63, NO. 10

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# In the Field

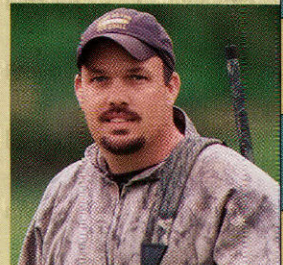
**KAREN HASTINGS** makes her home in the Rio Grande Valley where she moved with her family after many award-winning years with the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. Now working as a freelance journalist and writer, her byline has appeared in most of the major newspapers in Texas, as well as *The New York Times*, and a range of regional and national magazines. Since she moved to the Valley, she has become acquainted with her adopted home by writing about everything from *curanderas* and *quinceñeras* to wildlife, education and immigration issues. In this issue, Karen writes about the growing passion for butterfly-flying, aka butterfly watching, in the lower Rio Grande Valley, where you can find 300 of the country's 700 species — 75 of those butterflies can be seen only in southernmost Texas. Her article starts on page 36.



**CHESTER MOORE JR.** Chester Moore is a full-time outdoors journalist from the East Texas city of Orange. He is Outdoors Editor of the *Port Arthur News* and *Orange Leader* newspapers and contributes regularly to dozens of periodicals around the world. He hosts a weekly outdoors show on Newstalk AM 560 KLVI out of Beaumont and spends much of his time fishing on the coast. He has just released a new book, *Flounder Fever*, about the pursuit of his favorite fish. He and his wife Lisa share a home with a German shepherd, a chocolate Labrador retriever and an inquisitive ferret named Lita. On page 28, you'll find Moore's article on the deadly effect that major storms can have on the fish populations in the coastal waters of Texas.



**RUSSELL A. GRAVES** combined his enthusiasm for the outdoors with his photographic ability and writing experience to produce the article *Hunting on High*, which starts on page 22. Even though hunting white-tailed deer from treestands is the topic at hand, Graves expresses a sentiment shared by many of our readers when he writes, "the chance to be close to nature is what drives me afield." In the context of this article, he explains that there's something exhilarating about viewing the early-morning landscape from a platform strapped high in an ancient oak. When he's not making photographs or writing for outdoor magazines and other publications, Graves is an award-winning agriscience teacher in the north Texas town of Childress. To see more of Graves' photographs, visit his Web site at <www.russell-graves.com>.



# AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF ROBERT L. COOK

**In late August this past summer**, an old friend and I spent several days in the Trans-Pecos region of far West Texas. At 4,500 feet elevation, Alpine, Texas, sits in a bowl of peaks all of which approach one mile high, and is one of my favorite towns. We traveled north to Ft. Davis for an afternoon and evening at Indian Lodge and the Davis Mountains State Park, all perched a mile or more above sea level. The area has been blessed with the third year of good rainfall, and was, as they say, as green as Ireland. The air was cool and clear, the grass was thick and deep, and the wildflowers were blooming. We observed an abundant crop of mule deer and pronghorn antelope fawns, and were reminded of those who worry that we have too many — or not enough — predators. Not only are the game species making good recovery after almost a decade of drought, but we continue to get reports of an increasing black bear population in the rough, mountainous region of the area, and that the folks who manage land and who live in the area seem to be proud to have the native bear making a recovery.

Although the black bear is “omnivorous” (that means they’ll eat just about anything), the bulk of their diet is vegetation — green grass, forbs, berries, acorns, cactus fruit and such. The black bear of the Trans-Pecos joins another large mammalian predator that has also been doing extremely well in the area for several decades, the cougar or mountain lion. In fact, the mountain lion has become so numerous that individual lions sometimes have to be eliminated to protect domestic livestock and big game animals like deer and antelope. Lion populations must be reduced on release sites in the Trans-Pecos to successfully reestablish the desert bighorn sheep, which was totally extirpated from the area almost 60 years ago. Today the bighorn is back and doing well where habitat is conserved and managed, even though it remains a favorite in the diet of the mountain lion.

I was feeling pretty good and somewhat smug about our wildlife success stories in the Trans Pecos as we climbed out over the highway pass in the Davis Mountains past the McDonald Observatory. My old friend commented that none of this could have been accomplished without the partnership, cooperation, and hard work of the landowners in the area, and I nodded in agreement.

Suddenly, right there, not 25 steps off the highway, stood a new problem, the new challenge to an already difficult environment — a feral hog. This one was solid black, mostly head and front quarters, long straight tail with long black hair, and probably over 200 pounds on the hoof. He just stood there and looked at us. The feral hog is now quite common throughout the region and is beginning to cause serious problems for native wildlife of all varieties and ranching operations.

For those who worry one way or the other about bears, or mountain lions in Texas, I recommend the following; quit worrying, they are doing fine. They are not going extinct, they are becoming more common, and they are spreading across the state. If you want to worry, if you want to become involved, which I hope that you will, worry about feral hogs and their impact on native wildlife. Worry about other feral exotic species such as the aoudad sheep, which compete directly with our native species for a limited supply of preferred forage and habitat.

Get outdoors. Get informed. Get involved.

*We continue to get reports of an increasing black bear population in the rough, mountainous region of the area, and that the folks who live in the area seem to be proud to have the native bear making a recovery.*



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# MAIL CALL

PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

## FOREWORD

Last year was the first time I had the pleasure of working at the Texas Parks & Wildlife Expo. Publisher Randy Brudnicki was so determined to have me start this job before Expo that I began to wonder if the job itself was simply a ruse to fill remaining slots at Expo. There was a hint of desperation in the air a year ago, and that sense of barely contained chaos is upon us once again. Oh, don't worry, all the kinks will be worked out by show time on October 1.

It's difficult to describe the internal preparations leading up to Expo, but it's as if a well-oiled and efficient factory designed to build cars suddenly decided that, for two days a year, they would make cheese instead. As it turns out, making cheese is fairly complicated.

As you park at this year's Expo, take a look at the attendants. Those aren't contractors or paid parking professionals. They're all TPWD employees who normally do something else. They might be biologists, park managers, game wardens, administrators or even magazine editors. It's interesting to see the analytical mind of a scientist applied to the finer points of parking. Somewhere, I'm sure there's a highly detailed spreadsheet analyzing the advantages of angled parking over the straight-ahead variety.

One of my jobs last year was to help reload pellet cartridges for air rifles. I received brief instruction in how to use the "quick loader," which is supposed to make it quick and easy. Despite repeated attempts, the quick loader and I just never got along. I'd get everything all lined up and something would slip, and the pellets would tumble to the ground. I ended up loading most of the pellets one by one. (Of course, for the jobs that require some skill, Expo utilizes qualified experts from TPWD and beyond.)

During my other shifts, I did exit interviews. This is where you walk up to people who are heading to their cars and ask them about their experience at Expo. We made a point of walking along with them so they wouldn't lose any time, and most of the people were very nice and willing to help out. Again, we received brief training in how to randomly select people. Randomness is a very important concept in the world of exit interviewing. Before choosing an interviewee, we were supposed to stare at the ground for 10 seconds, turn half a turn, look up, and interview the first person who comes into view. Of course, during the training, I had to point out that this is remarkably similar to the behavior of a crazy person.

I did my best to follow the procedure, but after a few hours, I fear my randomness faded, and I may have subconsciously started selecting people who were smiling or otherwise looked nice. Fortunately, there were plenty of smiling people despite less-than-perfect weather.

And as I meandered through the crowds, I couldn't help but feel I was a part of something special. Everywhere you looked, there were fathers and sons, mothers and daughters and busloads of kids from around the state, all having a great time. It's the ultimate field trip, and you should check it out. For more information about this year's Expo, see Ernie Gammage's story on page 46.

*Robert Macias*

ROBERT MACIAS  
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

## LETTERS

### HELP DOCUMENT THE SPRINGS OF TEXAS

Thank you so much for the July issue which was dedicated to *The State of Springs*. I appreciated the authors' thoughtful and balanced articles on the past abundance, the present concern and

the potentially bleak future of one of Texas' most important and least understood natural resources. My special thanks go to Larry McKinney for his article and for his ongoing support of springs research.

I was particularly pleased to see Gunnar Brune's classic reference work *Springs of Texas, Volume I* highlighted in that issue of your magazine. Mr. Brune understood the importance and fragility of springs long before the rest of the state caught up. His catalog of Texas springs, compiled in the 1970s, still has no equal. Unfortunately,

Mr. Brune died in 1995 and was unable to complete the second volume of his encyclopedic work.

The Ecological Recovery Foundation has picked up where Mr. Brune left off and will complete *The Springs of Texas, Volume II*. As I work to complete Volume II, I am finding that it is indeed a daunting endeavor. Many individuals and groups have made significant contributions to the effort, but there is much more to do. If any of your readers own land where there is a spring or know of a spring in the 71 remaining counties to be included in Volume II or even if they just have a question about springs, please contact the foundation at (512) 327-6915 or send an e-mail to [springsoftexas@sbcglobal.net](mailto:springsoftexas@sbcglobal.net). I will



Mr. Brune understood the importance and fragility of springs long before the rest of the state caught up. His unfinished catalog of Texas springs compiled in the 1970s still has no equal.

Helen Besse  
Austin

# MAIL CALL

be happy to send them a map and a list of the counties that will be included in Volume II.

HELEN BESSE  
*Ecological Recovery Foundation*  
Austin

## WINDMILL MEMORIES

I thoroughly enjoy your magazine and read it from cover to cover every month. First thing I do when it arrives is see if there is an article by Barbara Rodriguez. She has such a delightful way of telling about her family outings and her *Of Ghosts and Gators* article about three days in and around Jefferson made me want to gas up the car and go.

E. Dan Klepper is another of my favorites, and his article on windmills brought back many memories of working long summers on my uncle's farm. I remember us all coming out of the bunkhouse as an enormous thunderbomber approached with clouds boiling overhead and dust blowing all over the place.

All of a sudden there was a lull and everything got real still. And then we heard a slow creak and groan and looked up and the tail vane on the windmill was pushing the whole head around without a blade moving or a speck of breeze in the air. Then it started rotating faster and faster and we decided it was time to head for cover. The storm hit like a freight train and I expected that old windmill to be gone. But it is still there today.

CLAIR SCHULTIS  
*McKinney*

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# SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

## CITIZEN SCIENCE AT CIBOLO

*With a new learning center and meeting facilities, Cibolo Nature Center hopes to reach more Central Texans with its conservation message.*

As I watched several spry retirees fanning out across a field to count milkweed plants, an odd thought occurred to me: Why do people walk in malls? Oh sure, it's a little cooler, but there's so much more going on outside — wind blowing, trees swaying, birds chirping — that I just can't imagine why anyone would do their walking inside. At Cibolo Nature Center, a leisurely walk can do much more than just get your heart pumping — the center's citizen science programs allow anyone to contribute to actual ongoing scientific research.

In fact, a volunteer working on a research project along Cibolo Creek recently discovered a population of big red sage (*Salvia penstemonoides*), a plant once thought to be extinct. While the showy plant is now easy to find at nurseries, and popular because of its hummingbird-attracting properties, it remains extremely rare in the wild. According to Dana Frice, a TPWD botanist, the big red sage at Cibolo is one of only three protected populations in the state.

Jan Wrede, education coordinator, tries to tailor the projects to the skills and temperaments of the volunteers. While the milkweed count was a slow-moving affair, the time-constrained reptile count was nonstop action. Guided by renowned herpetologist David Barker (co-author of *A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Texas*), boys and girls from age 8 to 17 sloshed through Cibolo Creek's cypress-shaded waters in an all-out race to spot — and catch — lizards and snakes. Most were measured, photographed and released, but a few were transported back to the nature center to be used in temporary displays.

With the recent addition of the \$2 million Lende Learning Center, Wrede says, the facility is now able to make its educational programs, research projects and land management workshops available to larger groups. The center includes an ecology lab, research library and computer room. While the previous building had a capacity of about 20, the new one can easily accommodate 50 in the main area, with additional rooms available for breakout sessions and smaller meetings.

Like many independent nature centers around the country, the Cibolo, launched by Carolyn Chipman Evans in 1988, serves a number of functions in the Boerne community. By day, the scenic 100-acre spread is an outdoor recreation center, day camp, meeting place, classroom and hands-on research lab. By night, it plays host to swanky parties, dances and concerts.

It's a never-ending balancing act, with the need to pay the bills sometimes coming into direct conflict with the center's core mission of serving as a model of responsible land stewardship. For example, the construction of the Lende Learning Center had an adverse effect on this year's milkweed crop. In the course of the project, trucks, equipment and building supplies occupied the swatch of land that is also home to the milkweed plants. Despite excellent rainfall that would have otherwise increased their numbers, there were 161 plants this year as opposed to last year's 172. Since the plants are the monarch butterfly larva's sole source of food, even a small change makes a difference.

Yet these minor hiccups don't seem to slow down Cibolo's committed cadre of staff members and volunteers. As I stood on the banks of Cibolo Creek watching a group of men, women and children work a large seine through the gin-clear water, I couldn't help but get caught up in their enthusiasm.

When one of the volunteers pulled a healthy, wriggling sunfish from the net, Wrede pretty much summed up her passion for the work as she blurted excitedly, "I love fish!"

To participate in the Cibolo Nature Center's fall bird count or to learn about other upcoming events at the center, visit [www.cibolo.org](http://www.cibolo.org)

— Robert Macias

**Below left: Cibolo Nature Center volunteers seine for specimens in Cibolo Creek. Below right: Herpetologist David Barker examines a snakeskin as young volunteers look on.**



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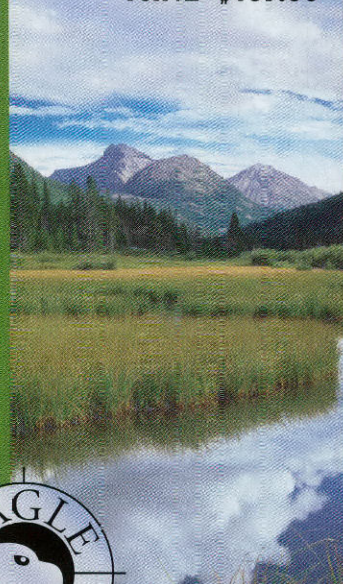
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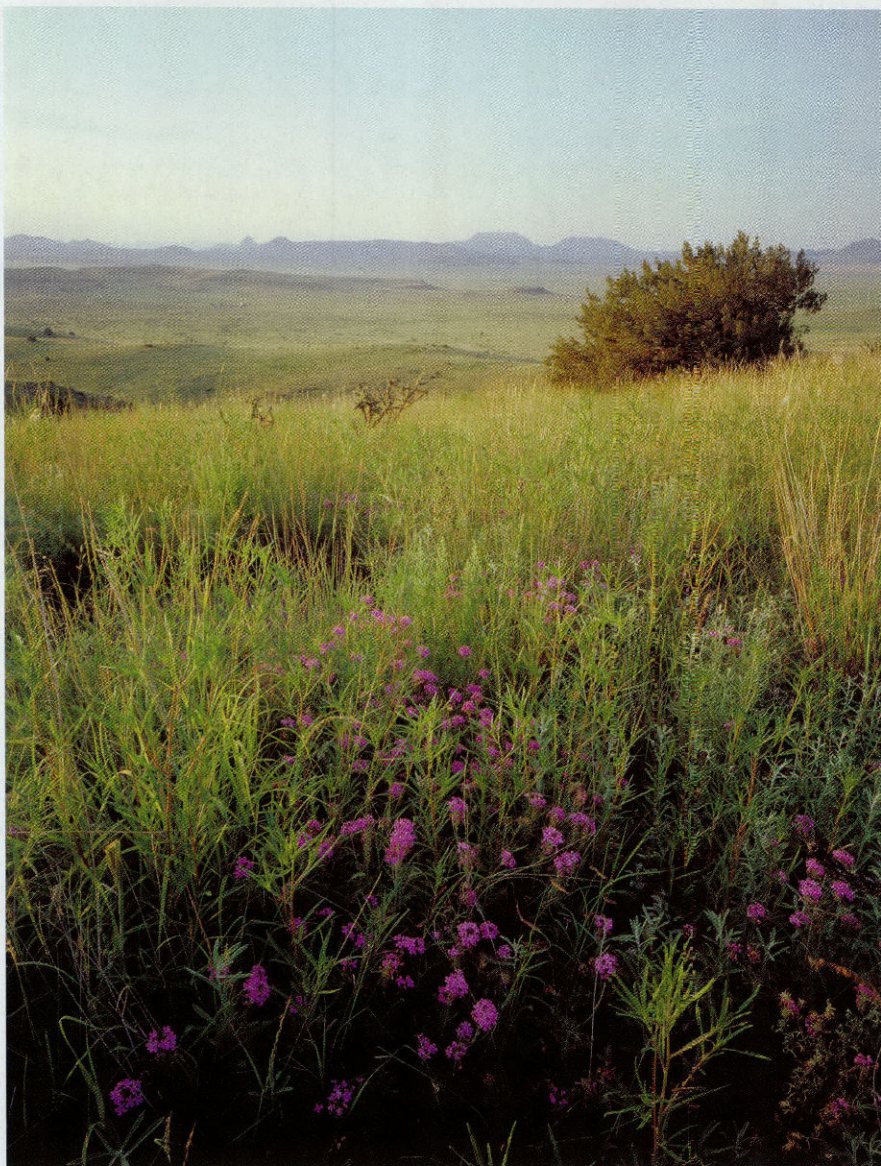
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## PICTURE THIS

Our chief photographer shares his insights.

A little forethought into your  
foreground will pay off.

PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM

It's unfortunate that in a three-dimensional universe, the photographer has always been limited to a two-dimensional world of horizontal and vertical when trying to replicate or interpret a scene — a limitation dictated by the flat nature of canvas, films, papers and pixels. At best, a painting or photograph can create only a shallow approximation of the reality, and beauty, of the natural world.

Lacking that vital third dimension of depth in their media, artists over the centuries learned how to imply depth in their compositions through the use of perspective by giving the viewer visual clues that create suggestions of dimension,

scale and space; all of which help give an illusion of reality.

For the photographer, one of the easiest ways to add apparent depth in an image is to include a distinct foreground object in the photograph. This creates a separate visual plane that distinguishes the background from the foreground and allows the viewer's eye to travel back and forth within the image; imparting a sense of space. Common foreground items include flowers, trees, outcroppings, hillsides or people; in other words, anything that stands between you and the overall background. I'm a sucker for the ancient tree stump clinging precariously to the hillside with a beautiful vista behind it. The key is to find naturally occurring objects that will complement the scene, adding to the overall "story" of the photo without creating a distraction. It also applies to subjects of all sizes. For instance, if photographing a toad, a toadstool could be placed in the foreground, framing the subject. A butterfly could be viewed with a leaf or twig in the foreground. Sometimes it's just a matter of moving the camera position an inch or two to find a suitable object. At other times, you might need to do a little footwork.

When shooting landscapes, one way to help "force" the foreground is to compose the image vertically. This allows you to include more near-ground space at the bottom of the composition in which to place closer or smaller objects, sometimes to within several inches of the lens. Be careful, however, to ensure enough depth-of-field in the scene by using a small lens aperture, generally around  $f/16$  to  $f/22$ . Otherwise, your foreground will be blurry while the background is sharp — or vice versa. While a wide-angle lens will increase the apparent depth of field, it can make your background look too far away. A zoom wide-angle will help you find the happy medium.

Once you start visualizing a scene in terms of foreground, background and even middleground layers, your images will take on a whole new look. Be prepared to hear comments like, "I felt as if I were there" or "I can almost reach out and touch it." At that point, you'll know that you've mastered the art of creating depth. ★

—Earl Nottingham

## FIELD NOTE

### Find it Faster on the New TPWD Web Site

SINCE THE AGENCY RECENTLY LAUNCHED ITS STREAMLINED WEB SITE, it is now easier to navigate through all the department's extensive storehouse of data. This means the thousands of visitors who rely on the site for information every week will save time searching. Also, the site is compatible with assistive technology to accommodate Web users with disabilities. Fishing reports, hunting bag limits and state park directions can even be accessed by cell phones and PDAs through the newly updated site.

If you're a regular visitor to the TPWD site, double-check your bookmarked Web pages because some of those links have been re-directed. Visit the updated site at <[www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)>.

To share your feedback, click the "Contact Us" link at the bottom of any active TPWD Web page.

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# Weighty Matters

*It's not a record fish until a certified scale says so.*



**The bend in your rod makes it clear you've hooked a big fish.** Once you've landed it, your handheld scale confirms what you suspect: It's a potential new state record. After the obligatory high-fives and photos you release the fish to be caught another day.

As the fish disappears into the depths you get a sinking feel-

ing. Only you and your fishing partner know what the scale read — and it's never been certified as accurate. Did you just blow your chance at getting your name in the record book?

Until recently, the answer would have been "Yes." But not anymore. New TPWD rules give anglers 30 days to have their handheld scale tested and certified. (An application for a state record — available at [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fish/infish/forms/arpapp.pdf](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fish/infish/forms/arpapp.pdf) — must be filed within 60 days of the catch date.)

And therein lies the rub: Where do you go to have your scale certified?

Previously, the Texas Department of Agriculture provided this service. However, this is no longer the case. Anglers now have two choices: the International Game Fish Association (IGFA) or a commercial scale-calibration company.

IGFA members may send their scale (up to 100-pound capacity) to IGFA and have it tested and certified annually for a \$20 fee. The process takes about two weeks, including shipping time. For details, go to: [www.igfa.org/ScaleCertificationInfo.pdf](http://www.igfa.org/ScaleCertificationInfo.pdf).

Non-IGFA members must have their scale certified by a commercial scale-calibration company. There are about 400 such companies in Texas. To find one near you, look up "scale repair" in the phone book or search an online business directory such as [www.switchboard.com](http://www.switchboard.com). ★

—Larry D. Hodge

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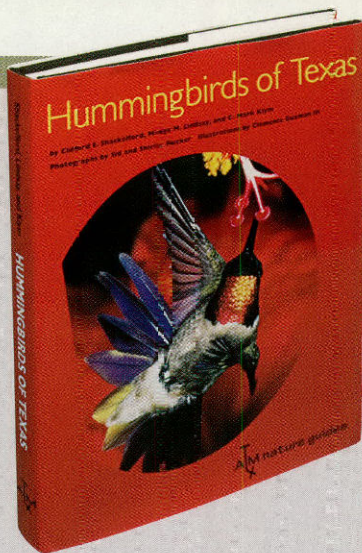
## Hummingbirds of Texas

**THE STATE OF TEXAS** can lay claim to many records that start with "Most" or "Largest," and that includes its share of hummingbirds: 18 species of the diminutive but colorful birds are regular residents (at the book's press time, New Mexico and Arizona tied for second with 17 species, but Arizona added one since then). And in the case of hummingbirds, "colorful" applies not only to their typically brilliant plumage but also their outsized behavior: Almost in inverse proportion to their size, these tiny birds are feisty, often aggressive and fly incredibly fast (up to 55 mph).

*Hummingbirds of Texas* (Texas A&M University Press Nature Guide Series, 110 pages; \$24.95, cloth) is a project born and raised with significant support from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Two of the three authors, Nongame Ornithologist Clifford E. Shackelford and Information Specialist C. Mark Klym, as well as the primary illustrator, Clemente Guzman, are TPWD employees. The third author, Madge M. Lindsay, is a former agency employee who helped develop the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, the World Birding Center and the Great Texas Birding Classic and now is director of Audubon Mississippi.

The book this group (with the help of photographers Sid and Shirley Rucker) has assembled for Texas A&M University Press is comprehensive, useful and entertaining. Chapter 1 opens with a discussion of the Texas Hummingbird Roundup (coordinated by Klym), which began under the direction of Lindsay in 1994 as a citizen-science project of TPWD designed to gather comprehensive information about hummingbird sightings and behavior across the state. More than 4,000 volunteers have contributed to the program (some of their letters found their way into the book), and TPWD now manages an extensive database of hummingbird information.

More than a conventional field guide, *Hummingbirds of Texas* offers suggestions about designing a hummingbird garden to attract these birds and details about which hummingbird feeders work best to attract and sustain the enchanting creatures. While Guzman's illustrations offer beautiful images of these remarkable birds, the photographs offer rarely seen views of the birds in mid-



flight and capture unique moments such as a stop-action glimpse of a hummingbird flying backwards. You'll even see a surprising photograph of a praying mantis stalking a hummingbird. (Yes, we learn in the book, a praying mantis is capable of killing and consuming a hummingbird.) Note that all royalties from the sale of this book will go to the TPWD Texas Hummingbird Roundup. Visit <[www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)> for more information. ☆

—Charles J. Lohrmann



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# Rifle-Sighting Made Simple

*A few easy steps will help ensure accuracy when it counts most.*



**When you consistently get the pattern you want on the paper target, you've reached the goal of sighting-in your rifle. Then stick with the same load and bullet weight — maybe even the same lot number — for the ammunition you rely on in the field.**

At the moment of truth, with a trophy white-tailed buck square in the sights, a successful hunter's entire season culminates with a split second of accuracy. Every rifle-and-scope combination, even the trusty 30.06 that was "dead-on" last year, should be carefully sighted-in before the season opens.

Fresh out of the box, a scoped rifle must first be "bore-sighted" at close range. With the stock squarely sandbagged, or preferably, secured inside the rubberized yokes of an adjustable bench rest or tripod, the shooter must either "eyeball" the bull's-eye through the barrel or use a "bore collimator" to squarely align the bore with the target.

Shooting range personnel will usually bore-sight rifles for a small fee. Some gun shops can do it before the rifle leaves the store. For the occasional shooter, either option is advisable. An inexperienced and unequipped shooter can waste a lot of expensive ammunition trying to simply get bullets "on the paper."

For most, it's worth it to pay a pro.

After bore-sighting, getting the rifle "zeroed" entails simple but essential procedures.

Select the load and bullet weight that match your caliber and hunting needs. Then, stick with the same brand and specifications. As insurance, some shooters buy multiple boxes of the same ammunition lot number (listed on the box).

Start at close range, no more than 50 yards. Use a calibrated target specifically designed for sighting-in a rifle. Check the scope screws for tightness. With a variable-power scope, use the same magnification you use when hunting.

Then, shoot a three-shot "group."

The center of the group will determine how much adjustment must be made to windage (left and right) and elevation (up and down).

Sighting-in is a slow and meticulous process. For both safety and accuracy, load only one shot at a time. Leave the chamber open for a minute before making another shot. The cooler the barrel, the better the accuracy.

Accomplished rifle shooters are like Zen masters. Above all, they relax. Breath control is critical. Exhale, take half a breath, then hold it. Never "pull" the trigger. Instead, make a slow but steady squeeze.

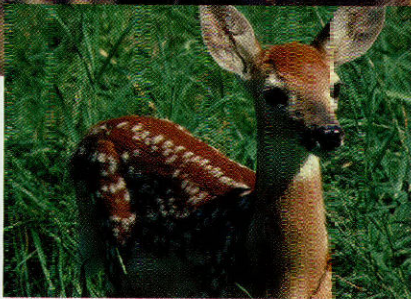
Use a spotting scope to view the group, and determine the pattern center. Follow the scope manufacturer's directions for adjustment of the reticle (crosshairs) at your chosen distance, and do not over-adjust.

After adjustments, lightly tap the windage and elevation screws with a soft object, like your wallet. It's rare, but scope adjustments can sometimes "stick." A light tap will correct it.

Each rifle has its own performance characteristics. In two different same-caliber rifles, even identical models, one ammunition brand, load and bullet may outperform another. With time and experimentation, every shooter discovers the ultimate ammo for his or her firearm.

Sighting-in and shooting can and should be enjoyable. Like hunting, it's not a sport for the impatient. But for the rifle shooter who invests the time and effort, the rewards are significant. ★

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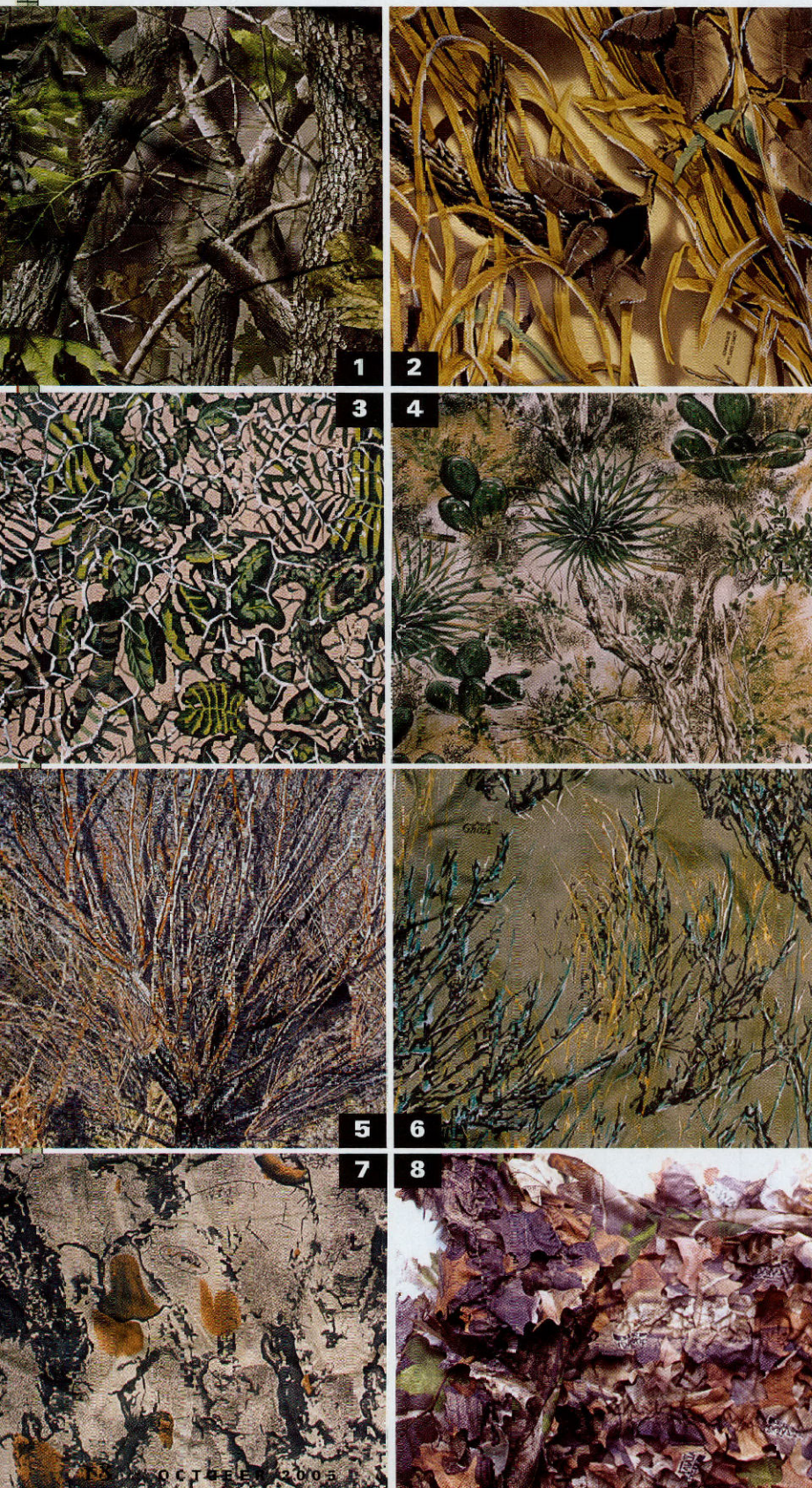
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# Hiding in Plain Sight

*Camouflage is all about contrast — the less contrast, the more stealth.*



Texas has such a wide variety of ecoregions that one camouflage pattern will not work for all habitats. Within each region, the appearance of terrain and vegetation varies greatly with the season and topography. The following are some designs that blend effectively with different environments across the state.

### East Texas Woodlands

In this region, the **Realtree Hardwoods HD** camouflage is a great choice for hunting the deep and often dark forests. This high-definition design includes rich-colored oak leaves and branches with sharp illusionary shadows, a convincing depiction of a common background in the East Texas bottomlands. (RealTree Camouflage, (706) 569-9101, <[www.realtree.com](http://www.realtree.com)>)

### Texas Gulf Coastal Wetlands

During fall and winter, the marsh grasses and croplands are best imitated with **Advantage Wetlands**. This camo design offers the 3D illusion of tan, dried reeds typical of waterfowl habitats along the Gulf Coastal Plain and tidal flats. (Advantage Camouflage, (706) 569-9101, <[www.advantagecamo.com](http://www.advantagecamo.com)>)

### South Texas Brush Country

Several designers are making patterns specific to the mesquite and chaparral country. **Brush Country**, a company in Bryan, Texas, makes a design that synthesizes the dappled appearance of green mesquite and white thorn branches. Another mimic of South Texas brush is available from **GameGuard**. Their tan and muted green motif features individually rendered clumps of yucca, cacti and bushes. At a distance, these patches of vegetation are seen as a random light and dark arrangement. (Brush Country Camouflage, (877) 599-7225, <[www.brushcountrycamo.com](http://www.brushcountrycamo.com)>) (GameGuard Camo, (866) 355-2668, <[www.game-guardcamo.com](http://www.game-guardcamo.com)>)

1. Realtree Hardwoods HD; 2. Advantage Wetlands; 3. Brush Country; 4. South Texas brush country pattern from GameGuard; 5. Mossy Oak Brush; 6. The Prairie Ghost Ultimate; 7. Natural Gear's Hill Country pattern; 8. Robinson 3D RealLeaf

### West Texas Rangelands

The latest open country pattern is **Mossy Oak Brush** which uses an abstract background of dirt and dead grasses with foregrounds inspired by dried brush. The combination matches the soft shadows and dusty landscape of sparsely vegetated rangelands. (Mossy Oak, (888) 667-7962, <www.mossyoak.com>)

### High Plains Prairies

The top of Texas offers a creative challenge to camo artists since there is little cover on these wide-open lands. The **Prairie Ghost Ultimate** pattern is intended for sagebrush country, but also gives an overall light gray impression that will fit the general tones and colors of the upland Texas landscape. (Montana Camo, Inc. (877) 226-6462, <www.prairieghost.com>)

### Central Texas Hill Country

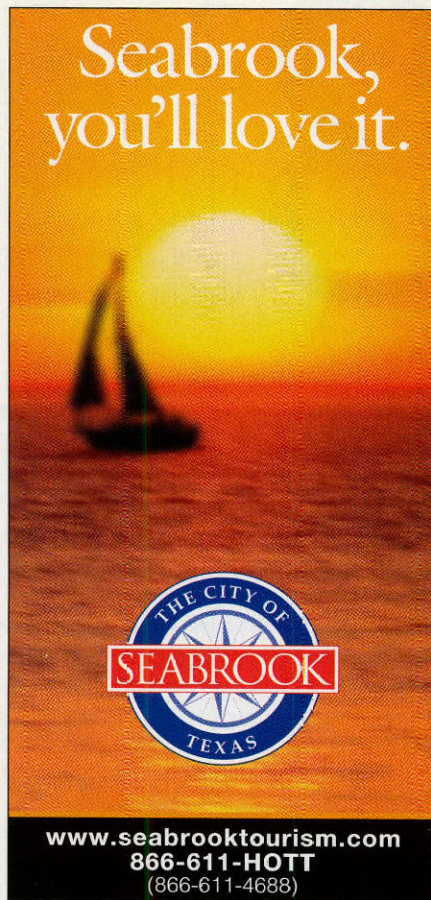
The cedar, live oak and limestone backdrop of the Texas heartland needs a muted gray-green cast to blend with the general surroundings. One excellent concept is by **Natural Gear**. It is an abstract design that has the character of bark textures and aged rock surfaces.

(Natural Gear, (800) 628-4327, <www.naturalgear.com>)

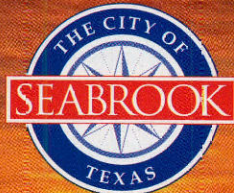
No doubt, the most convincing type of camouflage for the hills and similar landscapes is a full-body-and-head-covering "**Ghillie suit**," originally designed for military snipers. On the move, you look like a shaggy walking bush, but when still, you're transformed into a natural landscape feature. It is a bit bulky, but lightweight versions are available in several popular camo patterns. (Cabela's Lightweight Ghillie Suit, (800) 237-4444, <www.cabelas.com>)

A less bulky alternative is made of cutout cloth leaves attached to a breathable mesh fabric like the **Robinson 3D RealLeaf**. It does a good job of breaking up the human outline and contours. In addition, you can apply their Scent Blocker spray to the outfit and you have a good chance of being almost undetectable. (Robinson Outdoors, (800) 397-1927, <www.robinsonoutdoors.com>)

The secret of remaining camouflaged among wildlife is looking normal, smelling neutral and, when necessary, moving ever so slowly and quietly. ★



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# 3 Days in the Field / By Eileen Mattei

DESTINATION: RIO GRANDE CITY

TRAVEL TIME FROM :

AUSTIN – 5.5 hours / BROWNSVILLE – 1.5 hours / DALLAS – 8.75 hours / EL PASO – 12.75 hours

HOUSTON – 6.75 hours / SAN ANTONIO – 4.25 hours / LUBBOCK – 11 hours

## Border Bounty

*A change in the river's course altered the city's future, but at places like LaBorde House and Rancho Lomitas, history lives.*

Although Rio Grande City was founded in 1848 as the Mexican-American War rumbled across Texas, ranching clans had lived in the area since the 1750s, closely tied to the Mexican city of Camargo directly across the river. Until the early 1900s, river boats steamed to Rio Grande City's dock, but in 1952, the river shifted 1 mile south, leaving the city high and dry.

A relic of Rio Grande City's heyday, the carefully restored 1899 LaBorde House, once an elegant home, did time as a boarding house and hotel, and, rumors say, as a smugglers' den, before it evolved into an inn listed on the National Register of Historic Places. My husband Guy and I settle into one of the high-ceilinged rooms, which are graced with canopied beds, marble-topped dressers and mini-fridges, before ambling down narrow streets past weathered tan-brick buildings, many with French-style ironwork around second floor verandas.

El Patio Restaurant draws us in for a look at photos of old Rio Grande City showing a treeless horizon. On the patio, a rooster spur tree with massive thorns is an example of the semi-tropical plants that thrive in the arid environment.

In the morning, we head north about 14 miles to Benito and Toni Trevino's Rancho Lomitas. Benito Trevino, a one-time oilfield chemist who grew up nearby, has gone back to his roots — the roots, leaves and seeds of native plants that his ancestors used for folk remedies, food and fiber.

Looking slim in black jeans, Benito walks us through his native-plant nursery, aflutter with butterflies, to the ranch's mesquite-shaded patio where Toni is serving pan dulce and coffee to a group of master-gardeners-in-training.

"Benito is one of 13 children named in alphabetical order," Toni says, as she spreads mesquite beans in a dry cast iron skillet. When she heats them, the beans start popping like popcorn. Benito's grandmother saved the roasted mesquite shells and ground them to make a coffee substitute.

For our next lesson in native life, we hop on a trailer hooked to Jim Seeden's truck. Jim, who lives in the ranch's small RV park, eases the rig down trails winding through 177 acres while Benito balances on the back of the trailer to talk to us.

"To survive here, people had to know how to avoid the poisonous plants and to identify the medicinal and edible ones," Benito says. Older relatives passed lore to him by words and example. His grandmother would crush new mesquite leaves, cover them with water overnight and use the liquid to soothe irritated eyes.

"Vaqueros with heartburn knew to grab a handful of mesquite leaves, chew them and swallow the juice for a natural antacid."

Benito describes himself as an ethnobotanist, studying how plants are used for food, fiber and medicines, but he doesn't suggest that Mother Nature is benign. "If you eat the purple berries of the coyotillo, you're paralyzed for life," he tells us.

When the trailer stops, Benito hops off and snips a slender 3-foot-long yucca leaf. He softens the leaf over a gas burner and then pulls 1/8-inch-wide strands from the leaf. Knotting two strands together, he invites us to connect additional strands. From one leaf, we make a 20-foot-long strip, which Benito rolls on his thigh, squeezing out liquid, before halving the strand and letting it twist on itself. Pulled tight, the quickly made rope is strong and will be stronger once it dries.

Snipping a twig off a bush, Benito identifies it as all-thorn goat bush, or armagosa. The bitter tea made from its branches was used to treat dysentery along the border. Persuaded to bite into the tiny leaf, we grimace at the strong bitter taste.

"When I was a kid, my mother sent us to the river for willow bark, mesquite and cactus root. She always asked for the three together," Benito says. Not until he moved back home years later did he ask why. In tea, the willow bark eases a headache, the mesquite flavors it, and the prickly pear buffers the concoction.

We scramble off the trailer when Benito challenges us to find trapdoor spider holes, which we do. Benito slices into the root of a nearby bush, and it oozes red drops. Peeling the bark, he pops a two-inch segment of the sangre de cristo bush into his mouth. He recalls doing this years ago in Vietnam, thanks to his mother, who sent the root to heal his irritated gums.

The *tasajillo*, or desert Christmas cactus, decorated with orange and red berries in winter, holds a seasonal remedy. Hit



Tour Rio Grande City and you'll glimpse tropical verandas, century-old river warehouses and historic homes.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Benito Trevino makes rope from the leaves of the lechuguilla; his wife Toni creates a feast using native plants and fruit; and paddling the Rio Grande.

the plant, he suggests, to knock off the berries, chew on them, and swallow the watermelon-flavored juice to ease a cough.

Brownsville biology teacher Tira Wilmoth is taking notes as we go. "It's giving me a lot of good ideas on how organisms interrelate," she says. "And kids could interview family members about using mesquite and ebony."

Benito holds up a spiky leaf of the lechuguilla, an agave. After removing the spines, he peels off thin threads of the leaf, leaving a barb at one end. Wow! ... seven inches of thread with an attached needle for repairs.

Soon we are back on the patio where Toni has laid out a feast of mesquite sugar cookies, mesquite jelly and a sweet, dark nutbread made with Texas persimmon and mesquite flour. Her cactus float, combining juice from red cactus flowers, lemonade and lime sherbet, is refreshing and colorful.

Later, we join Mauro Villarreal, Main Street manager, who hosts an open-air, 90-minute trolley tour. "I love the history of the town. It's my heritage, too. Understanding where you came from gives you a sense of belonging," he tells us as his tour weaves through Fort Ringgold, circa 1848, intact with thick brick walls and gracefully arched verandas on the hospital and barracks. Besides identifying some of the town's 627 his-

toric structures — river warehouses and homes — Mauro points out the greenery, because "people are curious about the plants and the ecological diversity."

In the evening, Guy and I relax on LaBorde's upper veranda watching Brazilian free-tailed bats slip from the eaves of the building across the street.

Before first light the next morning, we're traveling west, past Roma to Chapeño, with Steve Monk and Debi and Mark Warner, to canoe a stretch of the Rio Grande. Fair-haired and sunburned, Steve is a part-time college biology instructor and our guide from the Friends of the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge. Paddling upstream to Falcon Dam, we discover that the Rio Grande, wide and dotted with islands, is a busy flyway. Green kingfishers, ringed kingfishers and green herons dart in front of us. Chachalacas and kiskadees cross north from Mexico to Texas, while red-winged blackbirds and white-winged doves work both banks. Above the Mexican bank, an altamira oriole flies from a hanging nest, which is the longest nest found in North America.

"These trips are a way to get to know the river and enjoy the natural habitat that still remains," Steve says as we paddle downstream past Mexican button bush, retama and green jays. "It surprises people, especially locals." Another surprise: He plunges his paddle down into the water at midriver and touches bottom.

Debi, a medical librarian, is on a quest to see a Muscovy duck. We spot some, along with black-bellied whistling ducks, red-billed pigeons and a

groove-billed ani. A narrow channel carries us past cliffs with dozens of kingfisher holes to what passes for whitewater on the lower Rio Grande, where we paddle over a shallow, rocky patch.

Steve steers us behind tall reeds into an arroyo, a setting that recalls *African Queen*. Guy spots two-foot-wide, round depressions underwater: nests of the Rio Grande cichlid or *mojarra*.

Ashore for lunch, we see javelina and raccoon tracks. Steve suggests we hike to the bluffs and petrified oyster reefs. Bushwhacking through a sea of oxeye daisy and cenizo, we reach the ancient reefs that look like layers of fine puff pastry. As we scramble up a ridge to get a breeze and a vista, Steve points out a Chihuahuan raven above us and, at our feet, a roadrunner anvil: a small rock surrounded by broken white snail shells.

Back on the river, past more shoals, Steve steers us from the bright sun into the cool, dark shade of "the nicest grove of Montezuma bald cypress anywhere on the river." The dense braid of roots reaches for several yards along the bank.

Six hours after we put in at Chapeño, we reach Salineño, happy campers. "We really did see all the biggies today," Debi says. "Birders go absolutely bonkers about getting these birds in one day." ★



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#### DETAILS

LaBorde House, 601 E. Main, Rio Grande City, (956) 487-5101

El Patio Restaurant, 402 E. Main, (956) 487-6593.

Reservations are required for the following tours:

Rancho Lomitas, (956) 486-2576 or <www.rancholomitas.com>

Mauro Villarreal, Main Street Trolley Tours, (956) 488-0047.

Friends of Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge, (956) 784-7500.

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# HUNTING ON HIGH



The date scrawled across the back of an aging photograph that hangs on my shop wall is still legible: 11/19/89. In the photo, I am 19 and in my grandfather's barn as I proudly pose with my first white-tailed buck. A couple of hours before my dad snapped the photo, I sat perched in a treestand in the cool November mist, 15 feet above a well-worn trail.

The stand, which still exists, rests on a huge forked tree branch that radiates from a stately post oak. Planks of Wolmanized two-by-fours bridge the gap between the forks and provide a platform on which to sit. Stretching all the way to the ground is a homemade ladder fashioned out of the same material as the platform and wired to the tree to keep it from falling away from the behemoth should the well-placed nails slip.

completely new perspective and affords a view of the landscape that you cannot get from the ground.

I love hunting in treestands and shy away from ground blinds and box blinds as much as I can. Sure, I sacrifice some comfort, because sometimes I sit in cold and damp weather, but for me, being intimate with nature as a nice, fat whitetail sneaks below is a hard experience to beat.

1990s, an aggressive market for portable stands emerged. Responding to the burgeoning demand, manufacturers quickly developed schemes to utilize metals like aluminum and fabricate the material into lightweight stands whose portability rivals any other hunting accessory. With portability, hunters can react quickly to variables such as changes in wind direction and shifting feeding areas. As the treestand market



Earlier in the day, I carefully slinked up the ladder and settled in. At the time, I'd already hunted from treestands dozens of times. Occasionally I would hunt from the ground, but I always felt more immersed in nature when I was among the trees. Often, fox squirrels sidled up beside me and chirped angrily when they recognized me as an intruder. Blue jays, crows and other birds constantly lit in limbs around me, seemingly unconcerned with a human juxtaposed halfway up a tree. Being among the trees offers a

### Selecting the proper stand

When I started hunting back in the mid-1980s, portable treestands were just coming into vogue among deer hunters. A few manufacturers cranked out mass-produced models, but many of the stands were heavy and hard to carry around. As recently as the late 1980s, most hunters in the northeast Texas woods where I hunted still climbed into permanently affixed wooden stands.

As interest in bowhunting gained momentum in the late '80s and into the

developed, three types of portable treestands emerged: ladder stands, hang-on stands, and climbing stands.

Of the three types of stands, ladder stands are usually the heaviest and most bulky to carry. However, they can be among the most versatile. Ladder stands work on a larger variety of trees than either climbing stands and hang-on stands. In order to secure the stand to a tree, most ladder stands employ a chain or ratchet-type strap that secures the stand to the tree's trunk.

Although bulky and less portable than



other tree stands, ladder stands are superior for a number of reasons. For example, getting in a ladder stand is relatively safe because most have wide ladders that make climbing easy. Ladder stands typically employ wider platforms that are more comfortable if you plan on sitting for long periods. Additionally, the stands often come standard with a padded bar that doubles as a safety restraint and gun rest. In terms of price, ladder stands with a platform run from \$100 to \$200 and will get you anywhere from 12 to 20 feet off the ground.

Hang-on stands are perhaps the most portable, and arguably the most versatile of all the types of treestands. They fit in vir-

ed. Therefore, hunters there must use strap-on tree steps or strap-on ladders to access their hang-on treestands.

For the record, hang-on stands run from \$50 to \$200 at most major retailers.

The last type of portable treestand, climbing stands, employs tree-gripping lugs that allow users to climb trees as high as they'd like and position the stand where it's most advantageous. Incredibly comfortable, climbing stands have many of the same advantages as hang-on stands without the use of steps.

One of the shortfalls of climbing stands is that their use is limited to straight growing trees with no low limbs. However,

surroundings so I can move slowly without being spotted."

Floyd ought to know. He has hunted big game all over the southwestern United States and has arrowed record-book-class elk and white-tailed deer using treestands. He explains that he likes to look for areas that serve as natural speed bumps for wildlife. Often, he'll hang his stands close to an interior fence line or creek where animals pause before crossing. The tactic, he says, buys him extra time to get a shot away.

One of the biggest factors that dictates Floyd's stand placement is wind direction. White-tailed bucks have a super-sensitive nose and Floyd considers that fact every



tually any tree that grows straight up and hang at heights from mere inches off the ground to as high as a tree will allow. Furthermore, many hang-on stand models weigh less than 10 pounds and support weights up to 275 pounds.

With hang-on stands, you must buy separate climbing equipment. Steps that screw into trees are popular on private land where no restrictions on their use exist. On public land such as the Pat Mayse Wildlife Management Area in Lamar County, the use of spikes or screw-in steps is prohibit-

climbing stands shine in pine forests or ash bottomlands. On price, \$140 to \$300 will get you climbing.

### Location, location, location

"The three things I look for when placing a stand are concealment, good ambush zones and wind direction," confides Tyge Floyd, a Dallas-based professional videographer and owner of an Internet-based hunting marketing firm. "When I choose a stand location, I want thick vegetation behind me to help me blend in with the

time he climbs in a stand.

"If you don't have the wind in your favor, the chances of taking game from any stand are slim. I always pick a stand where the wind will blow my scent away from the direction I think the deer will be coming. If the prevailing wind is from the south-southwest, as it is so often in October, I like to hang my stands north-northeast of my targeted ambush zone. If the wind is wrong for a particular stand, I move somewhere else."

Brandon Ray has a slightly different take

## SAFETY IN THE STAND

IN 2000, THE INTERNATIONAL HUNTER EDUCATION ASSOCIATION reported that non-firearm-related treestand accidents led to 20 deaths nationwide. Although that number sounds alarming, hunting from treestands is indeed a safe tactic. Like many outdoor activities, though, you should always be well prepared ahead of your trip. Before heading afield, follow these simple rules to make sure your next treestand hunting trip is a safe one.

### Precheck your equipment at home

Before you even load your stand in the truck, take some time to look everything over. Check the welds and make sure that none of them appears cracked or broken. Then, check to make sure that the bolts that hold parts of the stand together are still tight and haven't lost any nuts. Finally, check the cables and straps and make sure they aren't frayed or rusted so they won't break when weight is applied.

### Dress rehearsal

After you're satisfied the stand is in good shape, hang the stand a couple of feet off the ground and climb up in it to make sure everything is as solid as it should be. With the stand hung low in a tree, stand on the platform, sit on the seat, then bounce up and down on it, trying to see if the straps, welds, or bolts may be in danger of failing. Testing the stand in this manner, listen for metal slapping against metal or any other rattles that may spell trouble. When the hanging test is over, go over the stand again and check the construction again.

### Always have three points of contact

Once your stand hangs in the tree from which you intend to hunt, you should take special precaution when climbing the tree. Stand manufacturers like Gorilla Treestands make a climbing harness that straps around the tree and affords a measure of safety from falling when climbing. The bottom line is that any time you are climbing, always maintain three points of contact with the tree. By keeping two hands and a foot or two feet and a hand on the tree at all times, you'll significantly reduce your chances of falling.

### Use a safety harness

Once you've settled into your stand, always wear a safety harness. Even the shortest falls can result in injury, so it's best not to take chances. In the past, safety belts were common but full-torso safety harnesses are the best bet today. Safety harnesses will cradle your whole body if you fall and won't slip off as a belt can.

### Maintain a short tether

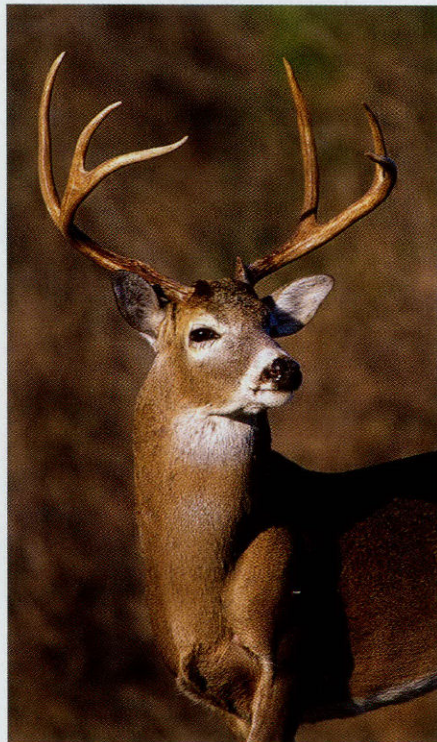
When you wear a safety harness, make sure you're attached to the tree by a short tether. As a rule, you should only have enough tether to allow you to sit down in the stand while the line attached from your harness to the tree remains taut. The idea behind a short tether is that if you fall, you don't want to plummet several feet before you stop. Ideally, should you slip and fall from your stand, you won't fall far and will be able to get back on the platform easily.

on stand placement. Ray, an outdoor writer and photographer from Claude, Texas, has taken 20 Pope and Young class big game animals because of his bowhunting acumen.

"When I'm deciding where to hang stands, I scout and try to determine where deer funnel through a specific area," says Ray. "Often I try to watch an area — a panhandle river bottom, for example — with binoculars so I don't spend any more time than necessary in the ambush area."

Ray reminds me that spending too much time in an area alerts deer to your presence and may push them away. He also says that in areas where glassing is impractical, look for well-worn trails or gather intelligence from landowners on where they've been seeing deer.

"I try to home in on spots where the terrain funnels deer to a specific area like a creek crossing or a low spot in a fence lead-



ing to an agricultural field," he says.

Ray says that for bow stands, he'll place his stand within 30 yards of a funnel but moves back as far as 100 yards when hunting with a gun.

## Concerning elevation

When determining how high to hang a stand, Ray uses the vegetation as his guide.

"For stand height, I go as high as I can to be out of sight while still trying to stay as low as possible," explains Ray. "In other words, if the tree has sufficient leaf cover or a dense canopy, I'm comfortable hunting from a 10- to 12-foot ladder stand or hang-on stand."

Ray concedes that the higher you go the less chance of a buck scenting you. However,

he believes a combination of quality cover scent, full camouflage and timing your movements when a tree or leaves obstructs a deer's vision makes hunting at lower levels very effective.

Floyd's take on treestand elevation is the opposite of Ray's.

"My stands are typically as high as I can get them — up to 20 feet off the ground," Floyd explains. "The number-one reason I hunt high is scent disbursement. The higher I am, the less likely a buck will bust me, since my scent is disbursed over a wider area. Being high up in a tree also affords me some invisibility because I don't think deer look for danger coming from 20 feet above them."

Ray and Floyd both agree that they like the portability that treestands offer. Because of treestands' relative affordability, both employ multiple stands on a piece of property and don't hesitate to move their stands if needed. Each hunter agrees that being flexible and thoroughly scouting a property is essential for success.

"When you're hunting mature bucks you'll typically only get one chance at him — particularly inside bow range. If he smells you or sees you, the odds of getting another opportunity at him from the same stand are slim to none," emphasizes Ray. Therefore, he never takes the wind direction for granted and is constantly cognizant of his scent.

"I never take chances with the wind, and I always reduce my scent as much as possible by using cover scents and wearing clothing that mitigates odor. Additionally, I carefully plan my entry and exit routes from my stands to avoid spooking deer."

Ray is also a big proponent of preparedness in the stand by packing snacks and water for a long day of waiting. He reports that one of the first things he does when climbing into a stand for the first time is employ the use of a laser rangefinder to predetermine distances. He will laser the distance from his stand to rocks and trees in the area so that when a deer does step out, he won't have to calculate distances at a critical moment.

Hunting in the trees is rewarding. The successes of Brandon Ray, Tyge Floyd and countless other hunters ought to serve as testament. Treestands are an affordable and extremely versatile way to pursue Texas big game and work especially well for getting you close to game.

Although I have never downed a record-book buck, I keep climbing trees and trying. Whether I hunt with a gun or a bow, the chance to be close to nature is what drives me afield. For me, nature doesn't come much closer than when I'm standing on a platform that's strapped to an ancient oak. ★

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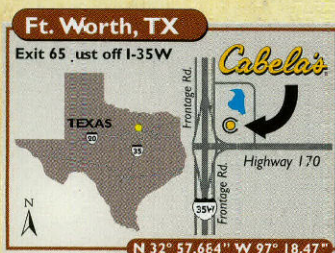
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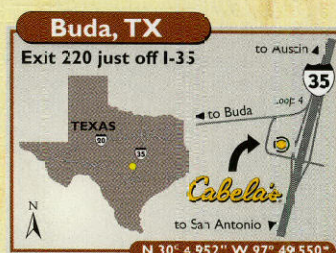


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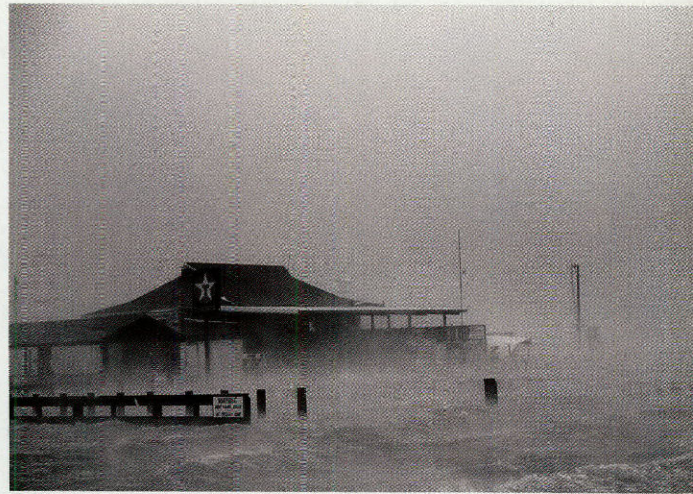
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**NO  
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When the Texas coast gets slammed by tropical storms, fish often pay the ultimate price.

By Chester Moore



# KILLER STORMS

On a low tide, the banks of Sabine Lake's East Pass are usually dark brown, revealing the influence of the convergence of two murky, silt-laden rivers. Specks of white shell highlight the shore, appearing as sparsely spaced snowflakes.

On a sweltering day in September 1998, however, the shoreline appeared unusually white.

Acting on a tip from a reader of my column in the *Port Arthur News*, Sabine Lake fishing guide Skip James and I went out to investigate reports of a fish kill along Sabine's eastern shoreline.

On our way out of East Pass into the main body, we noticed that something was amiss as we gazed to our east. Noticing the white, we first thought it was trash that Tropical Storm Frances had carried in from the flooded streets of nearby Port Arthur, but the pungent smell of rotting fish indicated something more sinister.

Approaching closer, our hearts sank as we realized the white along the shoreline was the undersides of dead flounder. Scattered 15 yards into the marsh and along more than

100 yards of shore were flounder of all sizes. This was the time of year flounder in the area school up in the surrounding marsh before the ensuing fall run. "However," James said, as we stood aghast at the haunting site, "there will be no run for us. Frances just gave our flounder fillets to the crabs."

Frances poured on Southeast Texas for a week, and when the water that had been standing still during that time moved into the bays, it choked out the dissolved oxygen level and began killing fish and other marine organisms, by the millions.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department officials said there was no way of getting an accurate tally of the damage, but it was significant. The same scene we saw at Sabine Lake also appeared in East Matagorda Bay, throughout the Galveston ecosystem and in parts of Louisiana.

According to TPWD field reports, species killed in Calveston and East Matagorda Bay included flounder, blue crabs, shrimp, redfish, croaker and speckled trout. There were also massive kills of white shrimp and juvenile game fish in key estuaries such as those near Bastrop Bayou in the Lake Jackson area; ditto for the fertile marshes that make up the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge.

Near Freeport, TPWD coastal fisheries biologists reported finding an estimated 5,000 dead flounder along 4.5 miles of the Intracoastal Waterway.

In Taylor and Hillebrandt Bayous near Port Arthur, TPWD reported thousands of dead blue and channel catfish, crappie, largemouth bass, mullet, crabs and crawfish.

That was seven years ago, but as a lifelong coastal angler it was something I will never



forget. For me, it was a great learning experience about the nature of fish kills.

"When fish kills occur, there is a natural public tendency to look for some human cause, such as a toxic spill," said Dave Euzan, TPWD coastal conservation branch chief, in a statement to the press at the time of the disaster.

"But the main cause can be natural. This shows how coastal ecosystems have to deal periodically with severe natural stresses that we can't control, which makes it even more important for us to conserve natural resources with those factors we can control."

## UNDERLYING CAUSES

Tropical storms bring lots of wind, rising sea tides and intense rain down on coastal areas in a short amount of time. These natural forces combined are all part of the process of a fish kill, but each can do its own damage.

The key reason for post-storm fish kills is a low or virtually nonexistent level of dissolved oxygen in the water. This part is quite simple to understand because when the oxygen is low, fish can not acquire enough to metabolize and they get weak and may even-

tually die.

Many coastal anglers are familiar with small-scale fish kills during summer months when oxygen levels dip in certain areas. Storm kills operate on the same principle, but on a much larger scale, and are caused by different forces.

Wind is the culprit that most people would not suspect of decreasing the dissolved oxygen content, but it is a major factor. What happens in lakes and ponds within coastal marshes is that the wind pushes the surface water to one side. At this point, water from the bottom comes to the surface and fills the area the surface water occupied previously. And this is where the problem lies.

The bottom water brings with it various

organic matter that, when stirred up, can take away the oxygen in the water. Many bottom materials are high in hydrogen sulfide, which can be lethal to fish and is what is responsible for the raw sewage odors often reported with fish kills. While inspecting Frances wrath, I experienced this firsthand as some of the area smelled like a leaking septic tank.

The odor was bad enough that some anglers thought sewage from local industry might have leaked out in the rain and caused the kill. What happened, however, was the result of a completely natural phenomenon.

TPWD Coastal Fisheries Biologist Lance Robinson says this phenomenon is akin to what residents around Mobile Bay, Alabama,



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Photo by Emmel Kleberg  
Waiting for Daylight collection



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call a "jubilee."

"At some level these kills are a bit mysterious and can occur even without tropical systems," Robinson says.

"Take, for example, Mobile Bay's 'jubilees,' which are so named because fish, shrimp and crabs beach themselves on the shores. For years this was celebrated because people would go in and get fish by the ice chest full, but it's really part of a process that kills the fish and other marine organisms," he adds.

During these events in Mobile Bay, heavy winds blow toward the eastern shoreline, which is of quite a bit higher relief than the western. As this occurs, Robinson explains, "the bay turns over and the water that was on the bottom is pushed toward the top."

The bottom water brings with it more sediment, and this creates a wall of oxygen-depleted water that is toxic to marine life.

"This will literally push fish onto the beaches as they retreat from the water that is dangerous to them," Robinson says.

## FLOUNDER STOCKING IS ON THE WAY

The sport fish that tropical storms typically hit hardest is the southern flounder. Dwelling on the bottom where oxygen levels are lowest and not as easily mobile as speckled trout or redfish, they are more susceptible to oxygen depletion.

Already hit hard by shrimping-related bycatch, flounder numbers get sucker-punched by these storms, but TPWD coastal fisheries biologists are hoping to rejuvenate flounder populations.

"We are working on developing

a full-scale flounder stocking program that would greatly supplement natural spawning in the wild," says TPWD biologist Robert Vega.

Working with Joan Holt of the University of Texas Marine Science Institute, TPWD officials are still working through a number of obstacles, but remain positive.

Holt has spawned some flounder at a facility in Port Aransas, but there have been some problems rearing them in outside ponds.

"We have a number of hurdles to overcome, but the goal is worthwhile. A stocking program could

get some oxygen. I was literally able to scoop live but dying shrimp up with my hand and observe tiny flounder and croaker at the surface, gulping for air.

"Those were likely fish that got trapped and had to deal with the toxic conditions they found themselves in," Robinson says.

There is yet another source of fish kills that spawns from tropical storms or happens separately, and that involves a lack of sunlight penetrating the water.

Officials with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Institute who have had to deal with numerous kills caused by the relentless storms that have hit the state over the last few years explain this component of fish kills as quite complex.

"In aquatic ecosystems, the oxygen manufacturing system consists of microscopic organisms and aquatic plants that carry out photosynthesis: using energy from sunlight to create carbon-based nutrition for them

make a significant contribution to recovery," Vega says.

Currently, there is flounder brood stock at three TPWD coastal hatcheries, including Sea Center Texas in Lake Jackson, showing that the coastal fisheries crew is optimistic that this project will move forward.

"Flounder have a big following along the coast, and we hope to aid their long-term conservation by stocking them like we have red drum and spotted seatrout. Those programs have been successful, and we hope the same for southern flounder in the near future."

themselves with oxygen as a by-product," according to a paper they published entitled "How Do Hurricanes Kill Fish?"

It goes on to say that when there are long periods of cloudy days, these organisms produce less oxygen.

"At night, photosynthesis doesn't occur at all, and these same oxygen-producers are actually using up oxygen during respiration, just like fish and other animals. Under these conditions, it does not take long before there is little oxygen left for fish. Low-dissolved-oxygen fish kills often occur early in the morning, when oxygen levels are at their lowest."

## LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Robinson says despite the carnage that ensues after one of these kills, they are probably important for the long-term health of the ecosystem.

"They are probably more of a benefit overall because those kinds of events occur

throughout history," he says, "A good analogy would be the old range fires that occur throughout the grasslands. Fire is a natural component of maintaining healthy grasslands, and these kills are likely equally as important to an estuary although they certainly do not appear to be that way when you witness one for yourself."

These events tend to knock back a lot of the vegetation, including the undesirable plants, and in time, there is a major growth of new, healthy plant material and vegetation.

James says for him, the kill on Sabine Lake hurt the flounder fishing from which he derives a good portion of his income.

"When the big kill hit, it really did a number on my fishing in those certain areas because flounder were hit really hard," he says.

"I wondered if it might have serious, long-lasting effects on the area, but a few years later those bayous and shorelines were back to normal in terms of flounder activity. I will say that witnessing something like that firsthand is disheartening, but in the end it's all part of the big picture."

James says what worries him is the intrusion of seawater into coastal marshes, which could cause more long-term damage.

"Manmade waterways like the Intracoastal have allowed much more saltwater to get into the marshes and when you have a storm, they certainly make storm surges more devastating to our ecosystems, at least from what I have seen being a fishing guide for 20 years. They are certainly necessary for commerce, but seem to come with an environmental price," he says.

Robinson says the Intracoastal Waterway and other channelization projects have thrown a wild card into the mix with these storms and with saltwater intrusion in general, but that TPWD officials are closely studying ways to protect the marshes and learn more about naturally caused fish kills.

"We got hit hard in '98 and have had small, localized kills since then. We are learning more about these factors all the time and are working to find ways to counteract any negatives that might possibly ensue," he says.

Nevertheless, in the end, Mother Nature does what she wants despite our opinions on the matter.

Take it from someone who had the opportunity to witness one of these kills firsthand, when the carnage stretches as far as the eye can see, it is hard to comprehend how this could actually be good for the environment in the long run. ☆



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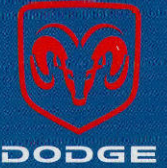
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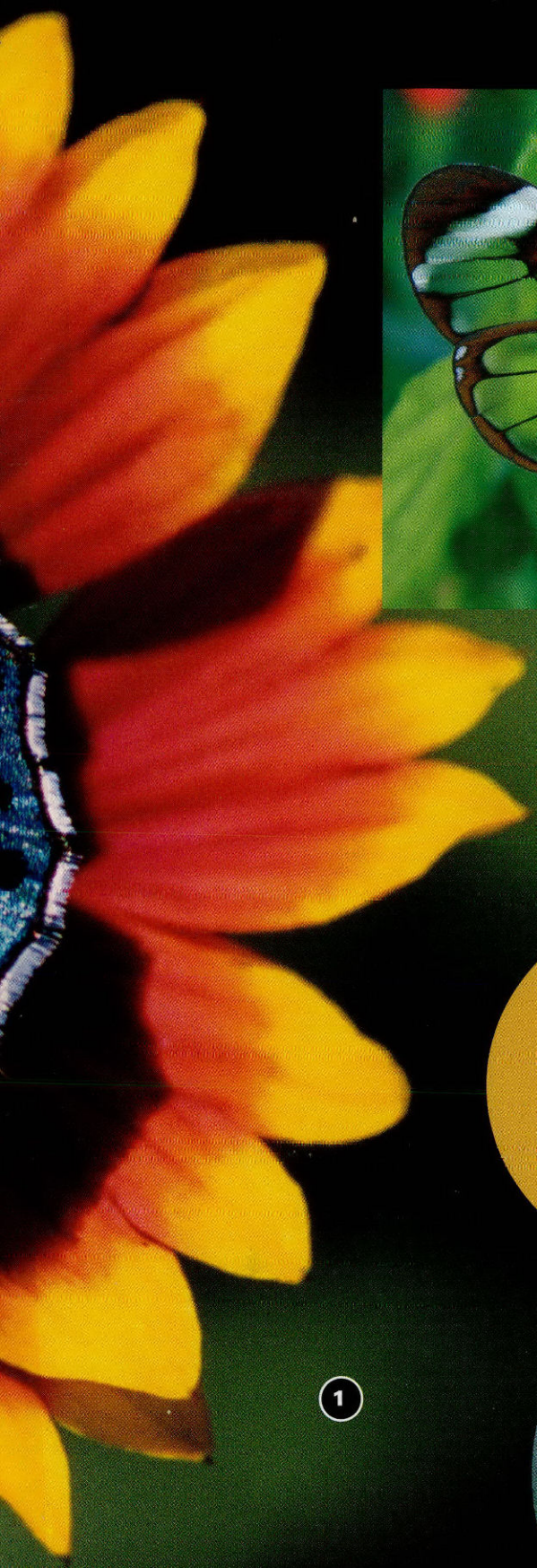
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The Lowvi Rio Grande Valley draws growing numbers of butterfly watchers to see stunning beauties such as these: **1.** blue metalmark (*Lasaia sula*) on a firewheel; **2.** thick-tipped greta (*Greta morgane*); **3.** zebra longwing (*Heliconius charithonius*); **4.** white peacock (*Anartia jatrophae*) sunning; **5.** red-bordered pixie (*Melanis pike*). PHOTO 1 AND PHOTO 4 © LARRY DITTO; PHOTO 2 © RANDY EMMITT; PHOTO 3 AND PHOTO 5 © KATHY ADAMS CLARK/KAC PRODUCTIONS.

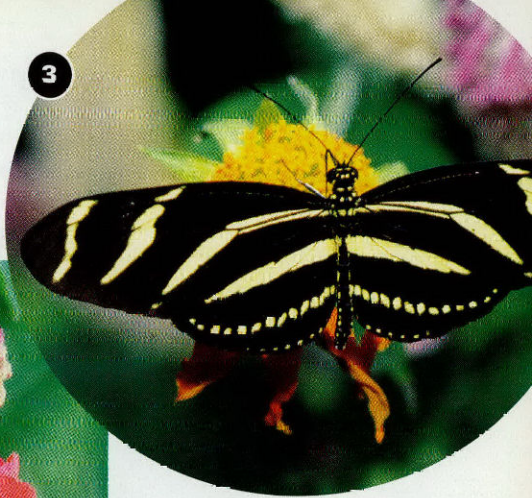




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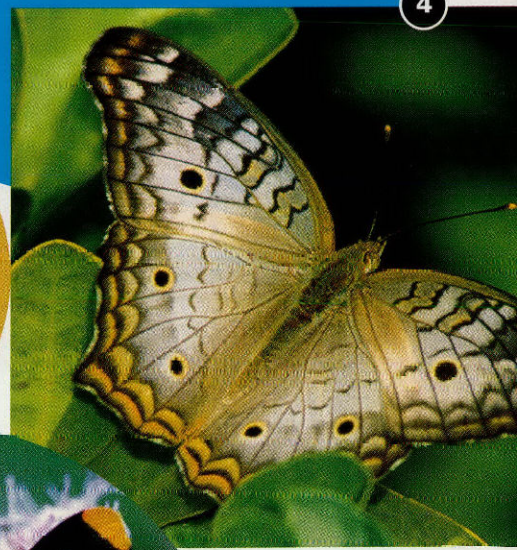


3

By Karen Hastings

# BUTTERFLY FEVER

With butterfly-friendly flora popping up all over South Texas, rare beauties are becoming easier to find.



4



5

When North Carolina photographer Randy Emmitt traveled to the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas last December to expand his rare butterfly portfolio, he never expected just how successful the trip would be.

Emmitt knew subtropical South Texas was the place to find uncommon butterfly species, but what he found was even better: a dainty beauty with transparent wings — a thick-tipped greta (*Greta morgane*) — that had never before been seen in the United States.

“The day I found it, I was hanging out with the local butterfly folks. Everybody had just left, and I was heading to the car and taking a last look at the flowers.”

The mystery clearwing was dancing along the golden eye daisies outside the World Birding Center headquarters at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. Emmitt quickly grabbed his cell phone and, within minutes, a crowd of 10 local butterflyers had returned to share his find.

“Somebody said it was 100 years since any (clearwing) had been found in the United States,” says Emmitt. “I didn’t expect something so big and so beautiful to show up, and yet be so unique. It just happened to be my luck.”

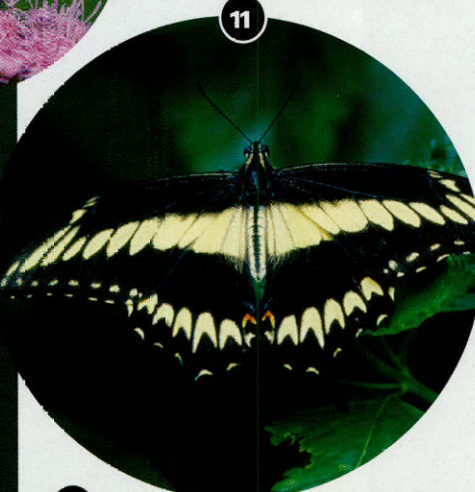
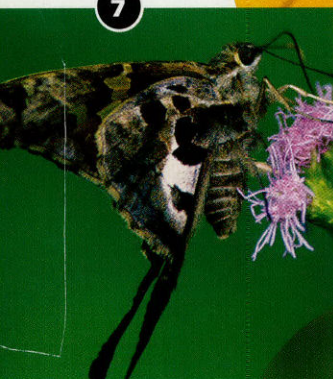
Luck indeed. Emmitt had wandered into a butterfly phenomenon that unfolded across the Lower Rio Grande Valley last fall: Six different U.S. record species were reported in 52 days in one county at the southern tip of Texas.

From a dusted spurwing (*Antigonus erosus*) spotted along a Hidalgo County roadside on October 17, to Randy Emmitt’s clearwing on December 8, it was a banner season for butterflies in South Texas. It was not, however, a surprise.

Already known nationally and beyond as prime birding territory, the Lower Rio Grande Valley is quickly gaining equal notoriety as the place to find rare butterflies. The Valley alone has 300 of the country’s 700-plus species. In terms of butterfly diversity, that places it in the same league as the top butterfly states, including Texas (with 455 species), Arizona (347) and New Mexico (321). Some 75-plus species — from the guava skipper and Guatemalan cracker to the jaunty red-bordered pixie — are found nowhere else in the United States but the southernmost counties of Texas’ Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Recent finds only add to the excitement. Since 2003, there have been a total of at least 10 new U.S. records from the area — 10 species never before documented in the United States.

Butterflies — with their close-focusing binoculars and digital cameras — are hop-



6. great purple hairstreak (*Atides halesus*); 7. zilpa longtail (*Choides zilpa*); 8. crimson patch (*Chlosyne janais*); 9. silver-banded hairstreak (*Chlorostyman simaethis*); 10. Gulf fritillary, freshly emerged from its pupal stage (*Agraulis vanillae*); 11. ornithion swallowtail (*Papilio ornithion*); 12. two-barred flasher (*Astratpes fulgerator*); 13. Eufala skipper (*Lerodea eufala*).

PHOTOS 6, 7, 8, 9 AND 12 © LARRY DITTO; PHOTOS 5 AND 11 © KATHY ADAMS CLARK / KAC PRODUCTIONS; PHOTO 10 © ROLF NUSSBAUMER.

14. common mestra (*Mestra amymone*) 15. ceraunus blue (*Hemiargus ceraunus*) 16. malachite (*Siproeta stelenes*); 17. Julia heliconian (*Dryas iulia*); 18. Mexican bluewing (*Myscelia ethusa*) 19. orange sulfurs (*Colias eurytheme*) 20. red rim (*Biblis hyperia*); 21. banded peacock (*Anartia fatima*) 22. silver emperor (*Doxocopa laure*);

PHOTOS 14, 16, 17, 18, 19 20, 21 AND 22 © LARRY DITTO; PHOTO 15 © ROLF NUSSBAUMER

ing the phenomenon will continue in the prime season beginning this fall, despite last year's rare Christmas freeze that did major damage to plants and to lepidoptera.

"There's no telling what's out there," advises experienced Mission butterflyer David Dauphin. "Just get out there and look!"

The North American Butterfly Association — which boasts 5,000 members and 32 chapters around the country — says interest in butterfly tourism is increasing rapidly across the country. In far South Texas, the year-round good weather, the proximity to Mexico and an increase in butterfly habitat add up to an increasingly popular butterfly-watcher's destination.

Avid collectors and watchers discovered the region decades ago. Now Valley communities are "adopting" charismatic butterflies like the Gulf fritillary, blue metalmark and queen, and schools are starting butterfly clubs and planting caterpillar food plants such as guava, passion vine and guamuchil in butterfly gardens of their own.

Why is the Valley such a butterfly — and butterfly-watcher — magnet?

Butterfly experts suggest several factors for the Valley's diversity, popularity and recent spike in new record species.

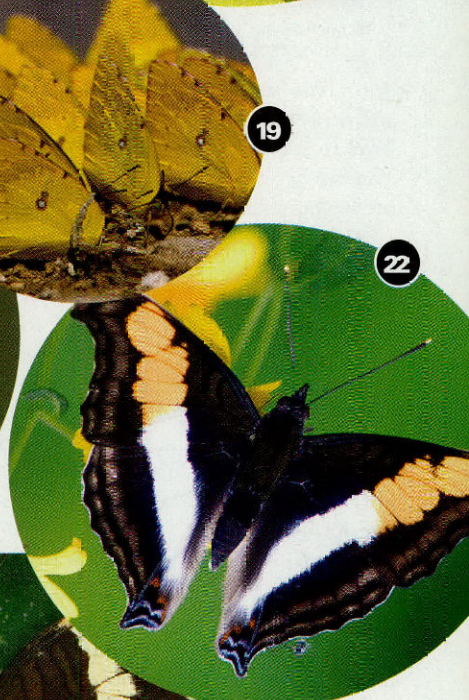
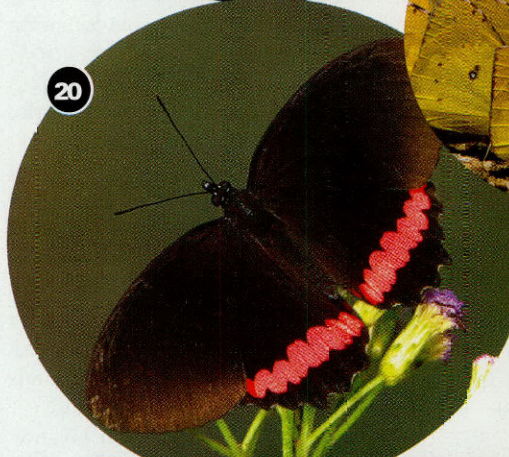
"A great portion of the diversity that the Valley enjoys is because of strays from Mexico," says Mike Quinn, an invertebrate biologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. "If you come in October, November and December, you're going to see all kinds of really great butterflies."

Another factor is a year-round mild climate that's easy on both butterflies and their human patrons. When other areas are locked in winter, butterfly travelers to the Valley can count on sunshine and comfortable temperatures.

"We definitely plan on coming down to South Texas again," says University of Indiana Professor James Hengeveld, who's been coming to the Valley since 2003. "When there are no butterflies in northern states, they can be found year-round in South Texas. And there is always something new to see."

Plus, as biologist Quinn points out, it's so easy.

"Just about every park, refuge and nature center now has butterfly gardens that are often right around the visitors' center and very easy to access," says the biologist. "You



## BUTTERFLY BEND

What the Serengeti is for elephant, zebra and lion, the North American Butterfly Association's new International Butterfly Park near Mission is for butterflies: A place to roam free.

Established on 100 acres of former sorghum and cotton fields, along a reed-fringed bend of the Rio Grande, the park is the only one in the world devoted to wild butterflies. And, according to its founder, no place but South Texas would do.

"The Rio Grande Valley of Texas is the only place where the butterflies are flying all year, and the numbers and kinds of butterflies dwarf anyplace else," says Jeffrey Glassberg, who founded the North American Butterfly Association in 1992 and has been watching butterflies in the Valley for 35 years.

"You can stand there looking at the river and imagine the butterflies flying in from Mexico," says Glassberg. "In fact, you can stand there with binoculars and watch them come in — you don't have to imagine."

NABA created the park on land donated by the same developers who gave acreage for the nearby World Birding Center headquarters at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. Today, you'll find a tiny gift shop and portable office buildings, and a half-acre of cowpen daisies, blue mistflower and wild olive, spilling over beds and gravel walkways. Here and there, log sections hang like tiny trapezes, smeared with rotten bananas, brown sugar and beer for a butterfly treat.

Not much to see yet? Then recheck those close-focusing binoculars and have your digital camera ready.

Even in its early stages, the park has been successful in attracting the rare butterflies known to inhabit, or sometimes wander through, South Texas. Since 2003, the park has recorded more than 150 species — including the ruby-spotted swallowtail, zebra longwing and red-bordered pixie.

The park also has been associated with four of the last 10 U.S. record sightings in the Valley: the stag hairstreak (*Rekoa stagira*) and turquoise longtail (*Urbanus evona*) in 2003, and the common melwhite (*Melete lycimnia isandra*) and cross-barred white (*Itaballia demophile*) in 2004.

Gazing south toward the river, restoration ecologist Shelley Beville looks down gently sloping terrain that one day will feature tranquil ponds and Montezuma bald cypress. A crop of gaily colored plastic flags marks 22 acres of recently restored ebony resaca and sabal palm habitat.

"Every flag you see is a seedling. We planted with a shovel and lots of elbow

don't have to get up at the crack of dawn and do a death march down the Jaguarundi Trail to see a bird high up in the canopy. You can drive up to the visitor's center and see the butterflies right there."

With more eyes in the field — and faster communication via digital cameras, email and cell phones — each rarity or new record only builds enthusiasm for the next. Knowledgeable butterflyers head for the Valley's remaining pockets of riparian woodland and thorn forest, where considerable effort has been made to attract these tiny jewels. Along with the NABA park and the Edinburg WBC (see sidebar), they include:

- The World Birding Center at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park has planted most of its 2-acre headquarters in Turk's cap, lantana and red tropical sage. The site has been rewarded with two of the recent U.S. records: a beautiful beamer, or belus skipper (*Phocides belus*), in April of 2003, and Emmitt's thick-tipped greta.

- Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, south of Alamo, was among the first to feature a butterfly garden, and it now boasts several. This 2,088-acre refuge has record-

ed more than 300 butterfly species in all, including favorites like the zebra longwing and Mexican bluewing. On Oct. 23, 2004, an east-Mexican white-skipper (*Heliopetes sublinea*) was found there, another in the string of recent U.S. records.

Other hotspots include most of the best birding sites in the region, such as Sabal Palm Audubon Center and Sanctuary and Los Ebanos Preserve in the lower Valley; Frontera Audubon and the Valley Nature Center in Weslaco; Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge on the Laguna Madre and the Convention Centre grounds and wooded lots of South Padre Island.

"The birding map of the Rio Grande Valley is now the birding and butterfly map," says Mike Quinn.

NABA's Jeffrey Glassberg notes that, 20 years ago, the word "butterfliar" did not exist, and there were no crowds with their binoculars focused down. Yet in a few short decades, he predicts there will be more butterfly enthusiasts than birders coming to stay, eat and spend in the Valley.

"We see more and more family units outside," agrees Dauphin. "It's a fun, easy and inexpensive family activity. And almost all

grease," says Beville. Between January and April 2005, she organized 820 volunteer hours and oversaw the planting of 3,800 seedlings of coral bean, plumbago, retama, brush holly and manzanita.

Starting this fall, another 30 acres will get similar treatment, with species found in the mesquite savannah, barretal and Tamaulipan thorn scrub habitats.

"We want this park to look like nature at its best," says park Executive Director Sue Sill, who launched a \$2.5 million capital campaign this year to raise money for a permanent visitor's center and intensive landscaping.

"We want people to come here because it's a beautiful place — and they might just discover the butterflies and get fascinated by them too."

## UPCOMING BUTTERFLY EVENTS MISSION

Mission's Texas Butterfly Festival celebrates its 10th anniversary Oct. 20 – 23. Organizers saw record crowds last year and are hoping to better a 2004 festival species count of 106. Seminars, workshops and children's activities are scheduled. Get your reservations in early, because Mission Chamber of Commerce Tourism Director Farwa Naqvi says field trips sell out fast.

"If you're into butterflies, you really need to be here in Mission in October," says Kim Garwood, president of the local NABA chapter. "It's a good festival for beginners, but it's also fun if you're an expert. You get a real collection of folks here who are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and passionate."

## EDINBURG

The Edinburg Scenic Wetlands wing of the World Birding Center is planning its first-ever Butterfly Festival on Oct. 29. The park features a 3.5-acre butterfly garden, as well as an active dragonfly pond. A festival theme will be Dia de los Muertos, in honor of Mexican legends that link the annual fall monarch migration with the returning souls of honored ancestors.

"We do have a spectacular habitat," says Marisa Oliva, park manager of the Edinburg Scenic Wetlands at the WBC. "When you come out to the gardens in October, everywhere you walk, hundreds of butterflies will just lift off the plants. Everything from the malachite — a gorgeous green and brown butterfly that's less than 6 inches wide — to the smallest, the western pygmy blue, which is only about a half-inch. Every mistflower bush is just covered."

kids like butterflies: They're gentle. They're colorful. They're slow, and they don't fly away as easily."

And in the "Magic Valley," it doesn't take a 2,000-acre refuge to host excellent butterfly habitat.

David and Jan Dauphin moved to Mission in 2003 strictly for the butterflies. They immediately set about transforming their tiny residential lot — covered in landscaping rock — into a miniature butterfly oasis, with native flowering plants and a babbling brook.

"In this little postage stamp yard, we put in probably 55 species of host and nectar plants," says Dauphin. "In the year and a half since, we've probably had 121 species of butterflies" — including the pale sicklewing and starred skipper — "and that's more than most state lists."

On Nov. 20, 2004, Jan saw an unfamiliar pale-orange-and-white butterfly swoop onto her backyard where it rested on a Texas lantana. It was a common melwhite (*Melete lycimnia isandra*), and another U.S. first for the Valley.

"It was thrilling!" says Jan. "It's so exciting when something new shows up." ★

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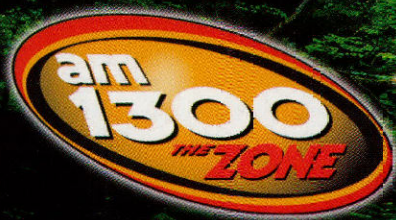
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# GOVERNMENT BIGD

Dotted with scenic vistas, caves and springs, the new state natural area is an 8,600-acre recharge zone for the spirit.



The park's buildings are designed to optimize water and power resources. Opposite: The park's Hill Country vistas are a welcome contrast to the urban development of nearby San Antonio. Below: Interpreter / Peace Officer John Koepke.



When you think of canyons, you might think of dramatic landscapes like the Grand Canyon or Palo Duro, where you can feel dwarfed by the deep gorges and precipitous cliffs carved out by water over the eons. By comparison, Government Canyon, which lies on the Balcones Escarpment northwest of San Antonio, is considerably gentler and more human-scaled, though it has its rocky retreats and panoramic vistas. The water that has flowed and seeped through the canyon over the centuries has transformed the hard Edwards limestone of the escarpment into a classic karst landscape of bluffs, sinkholes, crevices and caves. Water appears and disappears in a poetic rhythm of springs, ephemeral creeks and losing streams, eventually finding its way into the Edwards Aquifer below.

"Government Canyon kind of sneaks up on you," says Chris Beckcom of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, who has studied its terrain since it was first envisioned as a state natural area more than a

# REBUTT

By  
Carol  
Flake  
Chapman



decade ago by a consortium of citizens' conservation groups and government agencies. Its tranquil slopes and streambeds, shaded by stands of oak and cedar and the occasional mountain laurel, can come as a surprise, particularly if you've arrived there from busy downtown San Antonio, less than 20 miles away. "While you're down there below that green canopy, you'd never know you're so close to a big population center," says Bob Pine of the U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service, one of the partnering agencies concerned with the future of the canyon and its resources.

Most of Government Canyon, with its porous and fractured crust providing so many conduits for surface water, is considered part of the recharge zone for the Edwards Aquifer. But when visitors arrive at the newly opened natural area, they'll find a mosaic of habitats and features, each of which has played an important role in the

history of the natural and cultural resources of the area. After a stop at the visitors/interpretive center, designed for optimal water catchment, you can walk north from the partially restored grasslands at the entrance of the natural area, following the curving pathway through the canyon first used by Native Americans, who refreshed themselves at the year-round spring at the bottom of the canyon. Later known as the Old Joe Johnston Road, the trail became a sup-

PHOTOS BY TPWD



Above: Government Creek remains dry most of the year because its water seeps quickly into the Edwards Aquifer; Left: The natural beauty of the natural area was saved from development by the Government Canyon Coalition.

“While you’re down there below that green canopy, you’d never know you’re so close to a big population center.”

— Bob Pine, USF&WS

ply route from San Antonio to forts farther west, hence the name Government Canyon. And if you take one of the side trails to Chula Vista or to Black Hill, the highest point within the boundaries of the natural area, you can see the whirling rides of Sea World and, even farther in the distance, the Tower of the Americas marking downtown San Antonio.

“From there, you can see tomorrow coming,” says Beckcom, meaning the inevitable march of the city and its suburbs toward Government Canyon, around it and beyond.

In fact, it was not merely the beauty of Government Canyon that brought it to the attention of so many different individuals and agencies concerned with protecting the natural resources of this area. It was also its strategic location near the city and over the aquifer that made Government Canyon such a compelling piece of land. San Antonio, which is one of the fastest-growing areas in the state, depends almost entirely on the Edwards Aquifer for its drinking water. "It's unusual for a large city to rely on an aquifer for its drinking water," says Calvin Finch, conservation specialist with the San Antonio Water System. And because of its porous karst recharge zone, he says, "the Edwards Aquifer is especially sensitive in terms of potential for pollution."

In the 1980s, the canyon had been slated for development as part of a subdivision called San Antonio Ranch. The developers went bankrupt, however, in the wave of bankruptcies at the time, and in the early 1990s, when the core area of 4,700 acres wound up in the hands of the Resolution Trust Corporation, concerned citizens formed an alliance called the Government Canyon Coalition and joined forces with the Trust for Public Land, TPWD, the Edwards Aquifer Authority, and the San Antonio Water System. Eventually, the total number of groups and agencies involved in acquiring and conserving land and resources for the natural area would number more than three dozen. With the Trust for Public Land working out the details, the original tract of land was purchased for \$2 million, which now seems an astonishing bargain. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department took over the role of managing the land, and Government Canyon was designated a state natural area rather than a park. That meant a number of limitations were placed on the way the land could be used. Says Beckcom, "We came in with a very light environmental footprint on the site." As more land was added with additional purchases, along with additional deed restrictions, the natural area eventually grew to more than 8,600 acres.

Nearly as remarkable as the canyon's natural history is the way it evolved into a state natural area over the last decade, with an extended family of individuals, groups and agencies watching over it, each with their own concerns and visions of the way the land and its resources should be managed. "I think the social-administrative side of Government Canyon is as unique as its natural features," says George Veni, a hydrogeologist who was a member of the original Government Canyon Coalition, and who has continued as a volunteer with

the Government Canyon Natural History Association. "It should serve as model for other parts of the country as an example of how to make the most of the limited amount of money available for conserving land by sharing the load."

The Trust for Public Land, for example, became involved for a number of reasons in saving Government Canyon from the auction block, says TPL spokesman James Sharp. "Government Canyon is very special to us not just because of its beauty, its historic value and its proximity to a large population of people. One of our most important goals is to protect our sources of drinking water, and Government Canyon is crucial to the health of the aquifer." For TPL, says Sharp, it was important to keep going after the first major acquisition, "to keep the momentum going in acquiring more land and bringing in more agencies and volunteers. We wanted to make sure it didn't stop at 4,700 acres."

For the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, protection of Government Canyon's endangered species, from the blind invertebrates living in the caves below its surface to the golden-cheeked warbler nesting in its cedars, was paramount. Consequently, the most severe deed restrictions within Government Canyon are on the 1,100 acres that include a dedicated karst reserve and golden-cheeked warbler habitat. "The canyon is unusual because of its listed karst and bird species," says Pine. "It's rare to get a combination of so many high-quality habitats combined in one area." At least eight of the canyon's listed cave invertebrate species, he says, appear to be unique to Bexar County. The invertebrates, he says, also serve as canaries in the coal mine: "If the karst species can't survive, it can be a warning sign of the state of the aquifer."

For the San Antonio Water System and the Edwards Aquifer Authority, the canyon represented not only a chance to protect the aquifer, but to educate citizens about water conservation and the nature of aquifers. "We're really excited about the educational exhibits in the interpretive center," says Calvin Finch. Those exhibits include panels describing the Edwards Aquifer as well as ways that water can be carelessly wasted or thoughtfully conserved. For the city of San Antonio, says Finch, "protecting land over the recharge zone maximizes the recharge and assures the water will be in as pure a state as possible, with minimal pollution." It's important, he says, that visitors learn about how aquifers may become polluted and about how they can help to conserve water. "The more visitors learn about protecting natural areas, the better off our water resources will be."

For TPWD, Government Canyon represents an extraordinary opportunity to carry out the directives of its Land and Water Resources Conservation and Recreation Plan. The plan calls for acquisition of land close to urban areas, as well as increasing the opportunities for improving land stewardship for the benefit of water quality and wildlife. "I wish we could do this all around the state," says Cindy Loeffler, water resources manager for TPWD. "We're protecting habitat, watershed, parkland and endangered species, and demonstrating for landowners the benefits of good land stewardship."

With so many goals to consider and so many resources to protect, the business of planning and managing Government Canyon State Natural Area has proved a considerable challenge, as Natural Area Manager Deirdre Hisler can attest. Hisler compares the canyon to an onion, with an almost infinite series of layers and complexities. "Every time you learn something, you realize there's a lot more to learn," she says. Something as simple as bringing in fresh soil, for example, can disturb the balance of native species of grass in the canyon because seeds of invasive species might be hidden in the soil. A brush-sculpting project in an area of the canyon known as Laurel Canyon has required years of preliminary study there and in the Honey Creek State Natural Area, located to the northwest. As her crew was working nonstop to get the area ready for its grand opening, there were times, Hisler says, when she thought of having T-shirts made up proclaiming: "Government Canyon: Where Nothing Is Easy."

For Hisler and all the other managers, volunteers and guardians devoted to Government Canyon, "the resources come first," as she puts it. And that means that the way visitors experience the area has been determined by the need to protect those resources. All of the facilities have been built on the lower 700 acres, away from the recharge zone. And for the six months of the year that golden-cheeked warbler are in residence (typically March to September), their habitat will be closed to visitors.

And yet, the area's approximately 40 miles of trails offer urbanites a chance to get away from it all, just minutes from busy streets. For a visitor who climbs to Chula Vista on a clear day, to see "tomorrow coming," it's apparent that Government Canyon offers a kind of protective habitat for its human visitors as well as its resident species. As highways widen and new developments spring up like new-growth cedar in the Hill Country surrounding it, Government Canyon, with its bubbling springs and its precious tranquility, is a recharge zone for the spirit. ★



# LIFE'S BETTER OUTSIDE.



**FOURTEEN YEARS AGO**, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department presented its first Expo at department headquarters in Austin. No one had any idea how many people might come to learn about wildlife, wildlife management and hunting, but on that first weekend of October 1992, a surprising 7,000 people showed up. Since then, almost 400,000 Texans have trekked to Austin for this annual autumn gathering to learn about outdoor recreation and conservation. It's become the biggest event of its kind. And it's free.

Originally called the Texas Wildlife Expo, for the first few years the event focused solely on wildlife management and hunting as a way to bring recognition to hunters for their contributions to conservation. Today, hunting and wildlife management are still essential to Expo, but now, just about every facet of the Texas outdoors has been added to the event. This year's visitors to Expo will find angling, paddle sports, camping, outdoor skills, cultural history, mountain biking and even rock climbing.

What makes Expo so special is that these activities can be experienced, not just talked about. "Learn by doing is the basic Expo concept," says TPWD Executive Director Robert L. Cook. "There's an old and very true saying that the first fish you catch catches you. We feel that giving Texans an opportunity to try, hands-on, many types of outdoor recreation will interest them in exploring the outdoors."

Why is this important to TPWD? Because experience tells us that recreating in the outdoors

leads to caring about it. As Texas continues to urbanize, establishing this important connection to the natural world becomes even more important. Especially for today's young Texans, discovering the natural world through recreation — whether it's fishing, camping, hunting or birdwatching — can be the starting point for life-long involvement in the outdoors and its conservation. Almost half of Expo visitors are under 17 years old with an average

**FIND OUT WHY AT THE 14TH ANNUAL TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE EXPO**  
**OCTOBER 1 AND 2**  
*By Ernie Gammage*

age of 8. These are the visitors for whom Expo is not only fun, but important. It will be their actions that set the stage for the outdoors of tomorrow.

But there are other benefits as well. "We've seen improved grades, better discipline and the development of leadership skills as a direct result of their involvement in the outdoors," says Amelia Valdez, director of education and substance abuse prevention at the Boys and Girls Club of San Antonio. The club began attending Expo in 2000 with a van full of 10 kids and their chaperones. Last year, almost 300 youth attended, including those from other organizations and near-

by neighborhoods. "We use Expo as a reward for good behavior and performance throughout the year. The kids look forward to Expo all year long."

Boys and Girls Clubs typically focus on sports like baseball and boxing, and introducing outdoor recreation was initially a stretch for the organization. "We saw getting our kids into the outdoors as an expansion of our environmental programs," says Valdez. "When we first introduced archery, for example, it was very strange to them. These are inner-city kids and most had only seen a bow and arrow on TV or in the movies. They had no idea it was a sport! Now we offer fishing, camping and kayaking as well."

One youth, 16-year-old Patrick Rodriguez took to these skills immediately. "Patrick started with us when he was 6. He comes from a single-parent home and has had to overcome many obstacles and adversity. Through participation in the archery program, he became better disciplined and a better student. Archery really turned him around. Now he wants to be a competitor!" Patrick has also graduated to become a Junior Staff member, training and mentoring other kids.

Another Expo participant, Megan Perez, found a passion for the outdoors and has benefited from it in ways she never dreamed. Kayaking especially has grabbed her interest, and at a recent outing to Mustang Island State Park, she helped teach the sport. Now 16, she has become a lifeguard at the Boys and Girls Club recreation center and shows a keen interest in many other outdoor activities. "The girls have found out that the outdoors is fun, challenging, and opens doors to a whole new world. These are inner-city kids, and seeing them find themselves in these sports is a great experience for all of us," explains Valdez.



For the Boys and Girls Clubs, Expo has become "family day," a chance for parents and the kids to connect in ways that aren't available in the city. "Our families all look forward to it. We've seen real personal growth in these kids. They've been all over the state and as far away as New Mexico on camping trips and learned important life skills that they'll carry with them always. And it all started at Expo," Valdez says.

For LeVaughn Mosley, extension agent for 4-H at Prairie View A&M University, the annual visit to Expo is a dream come true. "To have all these activities in one place is just outstanding. To experience everything that outdoor recreation has to offer is just phenomenal. Expo lets them just be kids. Too often, life in the city robs them of their childhood. The outdoors gives it back."

A couple hundred youth from Harris County have come to Expo each year for the past three years, including 11-year-old Mark Jamison. "Mark is absolutely mad about fishing; he wants to fish all the time! To see him excited about something is amazing. He's passed this skill on to his younger siblings, and one of the things he talks to them about is personal responsibility. Almost immediately his parents saw a change in him, in his behavior and in his grades. His mother told me now he even offers to take out the trash!"

Mark is excited about a new program incorporating a shooting team into his 4-H club. "It all started at Expo. Kids tried out the five-stand sporting clays and really liked it. Some people express misgivings about inner-city kids taking up the shooting sports, but we see it as extremely positive. Proper training teaches safety and personal responsibility, both attributes that we encourage. We also see the shooting sports as offering an engaging activity for young men of 13 and 14, an age when they typically start to lose interest in

traditional 4-H. We're working on this right now and hope to have the program underway in the spring." Mark Jamison for one will be there.

Just as 4-H looks to freshen its programming, so does Expo. This year, water takes on a new focus as Texans come to better understand the issues surrounding this vital resource. TPWD's series titled *Texas: The State of Water* has pointed out the competition for water in Texas: competition that includes municipalities, agriculture and industry along with wildlife and aquatic life. A new presentation, *Texas Water Ways*, will combine many of the water-related activities and exhibits at Expo.

#### DETAILS

**TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE EXPO takes place at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department headquarters, 4200 Smith School Road, in Austin on October 1 and 2, from 9 to 5 daily. Admission and all activities are free. For information, call (800) 792-1112 or go to the Web site at <[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/expo](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/expo)>. For information about the Expo Conservation Banquet held Friday, September 30, call (800) 221-0931 or go to the Web site at <[www.tpwd.org](http://www.tpwd.org)>.**

In the state parks area of Expo, a new display will be devoted to the San Jacinto Monument. The monument and its visitors' center are beneficiaries of proceeds from the Friday night Expo Conservation Banquet. Over the past several years, many new archeological finds have been made as the site is returned to its original landscape. Never before seen by the public, these artifacts will be on display at Expo, along with reenactors and even pieces of the original limestone covering the famed monument. During refurbishing, damaged slabs were removed and pieces of the rock will be available for purchase at Expo.

The wildlife management and hunting tent will have a new focus. Basic tools of the trade — including axes, plows and guns — will be graphically presented in a way that will engage and entertain visitors. For some Expo visitors, those who already enjoy the outdoors and have a strong connection with it, these kinds of presentations are just what the doctor ordered.

The city of Orangefield is outside of Orange, in southeast Texas. A rural community, its high school of some 520 students offers a strong agricultural science program that includes a semester of wildlife management. What do these teenagers gain from Expo? "It's all the hands-on activities that Expo offers that appeal to our kids. Their eyes are opened to all the various aspects of wildlife management and outdoor recreation," says agricultural science instructor Chad Jenkins. "Fishing, fly-tying and even the Dutch oven cooking presentations get their attention."

Jenkins' group, about a dozen kids a year, comes up on Friday night so they can hit the grounds on Saturday morning. "We don't go home until Sunday and still can't see and do everything." Sponsored by Beaumont businessman Tony Houseman as part of a group of 50 kids and chaperones that have come from Orange County to visit Expo for each of the last several years, this group of 14- to 18-year-olds uses Expo as a way to expand their knowledge of and contact with the Texas outdoors. "It's great! The kids always want to go," says Jenkins.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Expo continues to provide a great opportunity to reach new — and current — users of the outdoors. It's an event where Texans can experience all that the outdoors has to offer while learning about how to ensure its future. Spend a day at the 2005 Expo and learn why "Life's Better Outside." ★

# TEXAS WILDLIFE



TEXAS WILDLIFE EXPO 2005

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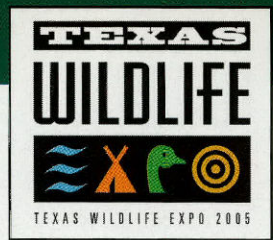
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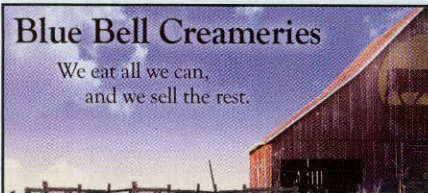
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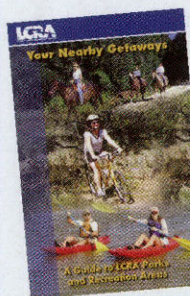
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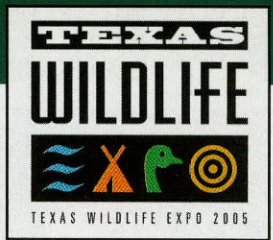


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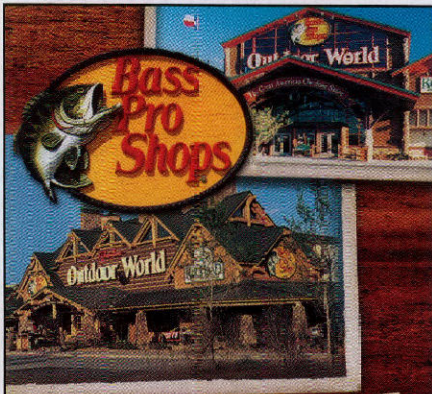
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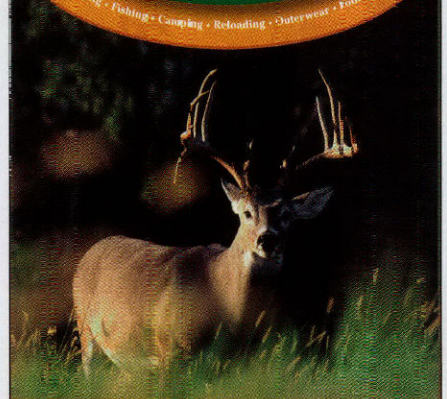
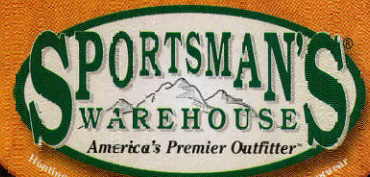


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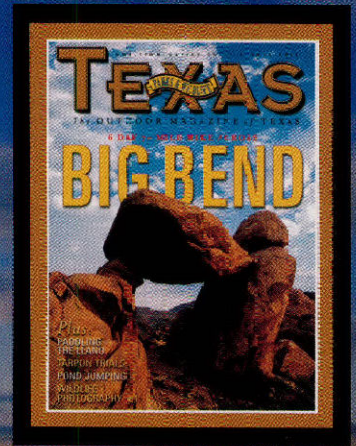
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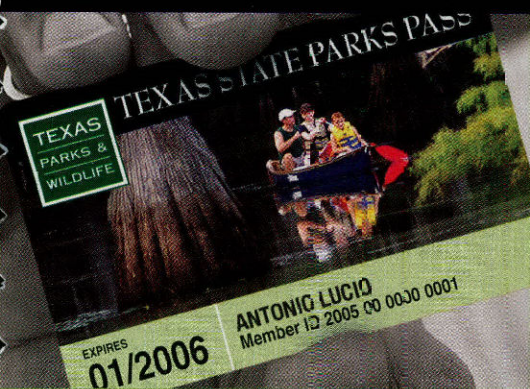
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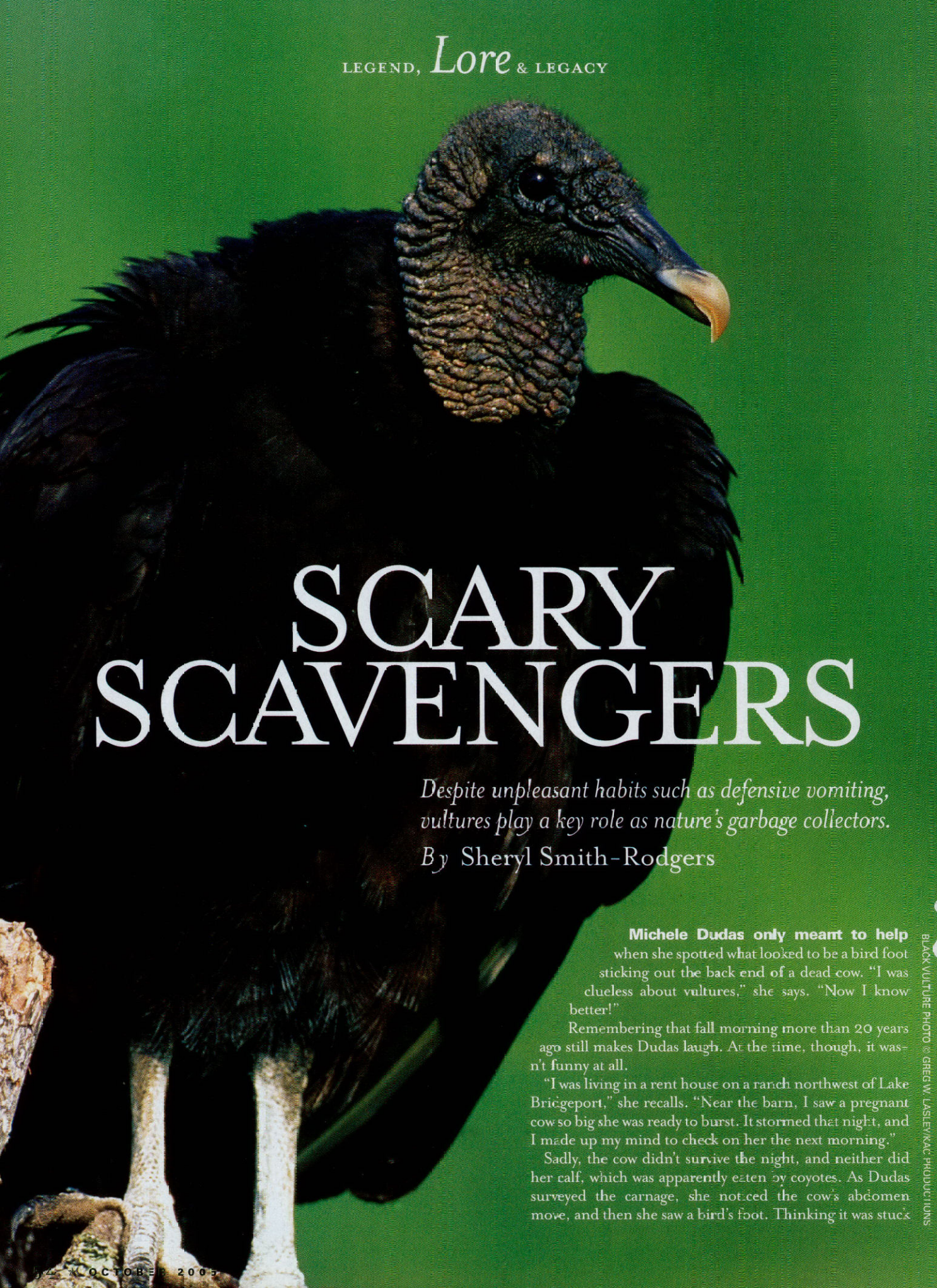
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# SCARY SCAVENGERS

*Despite unpleasant habits such as defensive vomiting, vultures play a key role as nature's garbage collectors.*

By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

**Michele Dudas only meant to help** when she spotted what looked to be a bird foot sticking out the back end of a dead cow. "I was clueless about vultures," she says. "Now I know better!"

Remembering that fall morning more than 20 years ago still makes Dudas laugh. At the time, though, it wasn't funny at all.

"I was living in a rent house on a ranch northwest of Lake Bridgeport," she recalls. "Near the barn, I saw a pregnant cow so big she was ready to burst. It stormed that night, and I made up my mind to check on her the next morning."

Sadly, the cow didn't survive the night, and neither did her calf, which was apparently eaten by coyotes. As Dudas surveyed the carnage, she noticed the cow's abdomen move, and then she saw a bird's foot. Thinking it was stuck

inside the carcass, Dudas began to tug on the bird, which turned out to be a black vulture.

"He was quite messy," Dudas says. "I got him out, and he ran a few feet away from me. Then he turned around, raised his wings, and spewed this awful, purple, nasty, smelly goo all over me! I thought, 'Why, you ungrateful thing!' I had to walk home with the stuff all over me. I was a mess."

Dudas, who works as a naturalist at the Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary in McKinney, has since learned more about black vultures, namely that they can vomit with a vengeance when threatened.

Vile. Hideous. Disgusting. Ugly. Spooky. Such are the adjectives commonly used to describe the low bird on the animal totem pole. Much like spiders and snakes, vultures have few admirers. What's to love about a scrawny-headed creature that relishes road kill on a regular basis? Confirming that age-old view, the Old Testament classifies vultures as an "abomination." Edgar Allan Poe gave his murder victim the "eye of a vulture" that ultimately drove the killer insane. Walt Disney portrayed vultures in his animated productions as goofy and witless.

They may look goofy to most, but to others, vultures have been an important source of inspiration and guidance. Orville and Wilbur Wright designed their first powered aircraft based on a turkey vulture's curved wingtips. Folklorist J. Frank Dobie, who often watched them glide and soar, wrote that "nothing in the sky is more serenely graceful."

Until recently, ornithologists classified vultures as raptors, along with eagles, hawks and falcons. Studies of DNA, however, concluded that New World vultures are more closely related to storks, gulls, pelicans and loons; thus, the birds were reassigned to the order *Ciconiiformes*. Though commonly referred to as buzzards, technically, vultures are not buzzards. The misnomer comes from the French word *busard*, which means hawk. In the Old World, *busard* refers to the genus of soaring hawks called *Buteo*.

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Two vulture species, both predominantly black in color, occur in Texas — the turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*) and the black vulture (*Coragyps atratus*). Like their namesake, turkey vultures have a bright red, bald head. Their wing spans can reach up to 6 feet. When flying, turkey vultures hold their wings in a shallow V formation called a dihedral, tilting and rocking as they soar.

Black vultures aren't as graceful in the air. Slightly heavier with both a shorter tail and wingspan (5 feet), they alternate between quick wing flaps and short glides. Black vultures have a white patch on their wings' undersides and featherless gray heads.

Males and females of both species are indistinguishable. Pairs usually mate for life. Females typically deposit two eggs on the ground in a clearing, on cliffs and in tree cavities; no nests are constructed. Both parents incubate the eggs for approximately 40 days. They also jointly feed the nestlings regurgitated stomach contents; weak talons preclude them from carrying food.

Vultures lack a syrinx (voice box) so they're generally silent, but they will occasionally hiss or grunt.

As Mother Nature's garbage collectors, vultures have several built-in mechanisms for staying healthy. Their bald heads

shield them against bacteria that would otherwise cling to head feathers when scavenging inside carcasses. Infected meat deadly enough to kill a coyote doesn't phase a hungry vulture; its digestive tract somehow destroys virulent pathogens, which curtails the spread of diseases in nature.

Even a vulture's impolite method of defecating protects him. The bird urinates a white mixture of uric acid and feces directly on its legs and feet, which cools the bird as the urine evaporates. The highly acidic mixture also kills any bacteria and parasites clinging to the vulture's feet from a previous meal.

Surprisingly, vultures are very clean birds. They enjoy bathing in water and will spend two to three hours preening their feathers every day.

Though similar in appearance, the two species differ in temperament. Black vultures, the more aggressive of the two, occasionally kill small birds, mammals and young livestock. At carcasses, they shove turkey vultures aside. If threatened or trapped, black vultures will struggle violently and vomit vile goo at their attacker, whereas turkey vultures have been known to roll over and play dead. Even so, they vomit, too.

Vultures — sometimes numbering in the hundreds — congregate in the evening at communal roosts in trees and on power line structures. The two species often roost side by side. In the morning, turkey vultures take off to eat first, then search for carrion. Their keen sense of smell and sight enable them to locate food miles away. Returning to the communal roost toward day's end, they somehow communicate to other vultures about their finds, and the next morning everyone reports to the scene to dine. Black vultures often tag along after the turkey vultures and barge in at the lunch table.

In February 2003, turkey vultures inadvertently assisted in the recovery of astronauts' remains in Texas following the Columbia disaster. Bill Kohlmoos, former president of the Turkey Vulture Society, advised FBI officials regarding the vultures' reconnaissance habits. They learned to watch for birds flying in a circle. If they began spiraling downward in a tighter circle, that meant the vultures had spotted something. Federal authorities plotted locations by GPS and then sent recovery teams to designated sites. "They did have success using the turkey vultures," says Kohlmoos, who later received a letter of commendation from the FBI.

What vultures lack in looks, they make up for with brains and an affectionate, fun-loving nature. Ramona VanRiper, Turkey Vulture Society president, can vouch for vultures being sweet and personable because she's known several, including one named Clem. "Vultures raised by humans learn quickly to love and trust us," she says, "and will often respond to human attention long after they have successfully reassimilated into their natural communities."

Vultures enjoy games, both in the air and on the ground. Several years ago, Brush Freeman of Utley observed two juvenile black vultures playing with a stone in eastern Travis County. "One would pick up the rock and drop it, the other would do the same, back and forth," he recalls. "This went on for several minutes, like clockwork every 15 seconds. It was a very strange thing to see in birds."

Playful. Smart. Graceful. Clean. Such are just a few of the adjectives that vultures everywhere certainly deserve. It's about time they got some good press. ★

For more information and vulture anecdotes, visit the Turkey Vulture Society's Web site at <[vulturesociety.homestead.com](http://vulturesociety.homestead.com)>.

(continued from page 57)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**WACO:** KBBW-AM 1010 / throughout the day

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

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

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**Oct. 2 - 9:**

Habitat help for the bob-white quail; Dinosaur Valley State Park; Lone Star Land Steward, going batty in the capital city; flying the Nueces River.

**Oct. 9 - 16:**

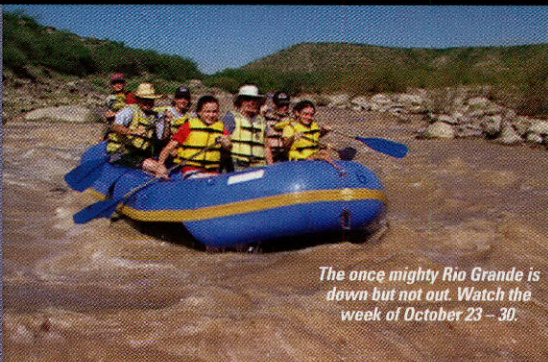
Volunteers on vacation; wildlife feeding issues; longhorns and legends at Fort Griffin; growing from pup to retriever; shovelers on the water.

**Oct. 16 - 23:**

Balancing water needs for people and wildlife; eye and ear protection for shooters; Lake Somerville State Park; rescue training and competition; rabbits.

**Oct. 23 - 30:**

Helping hands for the Rio Grande; wildlife diversity on the Rey Rosa Ranch; families finding a place to hunt; African animals at Fossil Rim; San Angelo State Park.



The once mighty Rio Grande is down but not out. Watch the week of October 23 - 30.

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  - CORPUS CHRISTI:** KEDT, Ch. 16 / Sun. 11 a.m. / Fri. 11:30 p.m.
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- EL PASO:** KCOS, Ch. 13 / Sat. 3 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.
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  - ODESSA-MIDLAND:** KOCV, Ch. 36 / Sat. 5 p.m.
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- BRADY:** KNEL-AM 1490 / 7:20 a.m.; KNEL-FM 95.3 / 7:20 a.m.
- BRYAN:** KZNE-AM 1150 / 5:40 p.m.
- CANTON:** KVCI-AM 1510 / 8:20 a.m.
- CANYON:** KWTS-FM 91.1 / throughout the day
- CARTHAGE:** KGAS-AM 1590 / throughout the day; KGAS-FM 104.3 / throughout the day
- CENTER:** KDET-AM 930 / 5:20 p.m.; KOSI-FM 92.5 / 5:20 p.m.
- CISCO:** KCER-FM 105.9 / 12:00 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 / between 5 -

(continued on page 56)



## RECOMMENDED STOPS ALONG THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED


**CASA NAVARRO  
STATE HISTORIC SITE  
REMEMBERING  
A TEJANO TITAN**

Three white limestone-and-adobe structures tucked amid parking lots and modern office buildings command little attention in bustling San Antonio, a city known for the Alamo, River Walk, Spanish missions and popular theme parks. Nearby, a life-sized bronze statue of Casa Navarro State Historic Site's namesake keeps watch on the 19th century landmark, leaning on a cane, with the left hand outstretched palm-up, gesturing toward the former residence of one of Texas' more remarkable, but unsung, heroes. What scant recognition Navarro has achieved in the passage of 130 years stems from his being one of two native Tejanos (Texans of Mexican descent) who signed the Texas Declaration of Independence.

Navarro lived from 1795 to 1871, a peri-

od that saw a number of governments come and go in what would become Texas. During that time, Navarro served in the state legislature under Mexico, the Republic of Texas and the U.S., and held local government positions. He was appointed by fellow Tejanos to serve on committees that wrote the first two Texas Constitutions, in 1836 and 1845.

But Navarro gained his greatest accolade while working on the 1845 Constitution. The usually mild-mannered statesman took issue with a proposed amendment that would require citizens to be white to vote. A decade later, Navarro's legend grew when he became the first Mexican-American to write about the history of Texas from a Mexican perspective. Enraged by local newspaper articles attacking his people, Navarro wrote eloquently about the sacrifices of Tejanos who fought to win Mexico's independence from Spain.

Navarro was also a prominent civic leader of San Antonio's Laredito — the area west of San Pedro Creek on the road to Laredo, heavily populated by Mexicans that in the mid-1800s played a major role in preserving and reinforcing Tejano heritage. It was in Navarro's times that the roots of Mexican culture in San Antonio — Spanish language, ethnic foods, music, theater and religious festivals — took hold and grew.

To show Casa Navarro's key role in furthering the Mexican culture, the site's staff holds folkways demonstrations for school groups and others beneath a canopy of live oaks in the courtyard of the Navarro home site. Visitors learn how long-ago Texans used a *metate* to grind corn for the masa used to make tamales and tortillas, and how to make adobe bricks using dirt and straw.

Visitors receive an orientation about Navarro and his role in Texas history, and are given guided tours of two of three original structures built for Navarro in the 1840s and 1850s. Tour fees are: \$2 for adults, 12 and under are free.

Be sure to pass through the two-room, 1856 Navarro home to see the photos of the patriarch, his wife Margarita and their seven children, including Angel, who went on to attend Harvard law school. Here, too, is a map of Navarro's extensive land holdings totaling 50,000 acres of ranch land acquired from profits from his thriving mercantile business.

— Rob McCorkle

For more information about Casa Navarro, call (210) 226-4801, or visit [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/casa\\_navarro/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/casa_navarro/).

**COPPER BREAKS STATE PARK  
FEWER PEOPLE  
MEANS MORE CRITTERS**

Add Copper Breaks to the list of off-the-beaten-path, relatively unknown but invaluable natural treasures that spice up Texas' state parks menu. The former cattle ranch on the Pease River only 22 miles from the Oklahoma border opened as a state park in 1974.

Copper Breaks State Park takes its name from the gray-green streaks of raw copper that permeate the rust-colored hills and mini-canyons, or "breaks," that cut jagged slashes into the red-dirt, rolling plains of the Texas Panhandle. What it may lack in picture-book beauty, Copper Breaks makes up for in its plentiful and diverse wildlife that populates the park's mesquite and juniper-dominated landscape.

Unlike many state parks whose wildlife has disappeared or been driven by heavy visitor traffic into remote areas where it is rarely seen, this Hardeman County sanctuary teems with a variety of animal and bird life. Here, campers often find themselves sharing their campsite with endangered Texas horned lizards, inquisitive roadrunners and insect-gobbling bats. Copper Breaks is home, too, to several varieties of raptors, such as barn owls, red-tailed hawks and peregrine falcons; half a dozen different kinds of lizards; the rare black prairie snake; several varieties of tur-



bles; bobcats and coyotes, endangered kangaroo rats and a host of more common critters.

Park Manager David Turner who left his park superintendent's job in the verdant, wooded homeland of the Caddo Indians in East Texas to come to this semi-arid land of the Comanche, still marvels at the park's abundant wildlife.

"In the years I've worked at TPWD this is one of the healthiest, most pristine environments — in terms of wildlife diversity — that I've seen in a state park," Turner says.



"If you want a true nature experience and want to stand an excellent chance of seeing wildlife, Copper Breaks is a really good place to do it."

Turner attributes that in part to the park's remote location 100 miles west of Wichita Falls, which keeps visitor traffic to less than 65,000 annually. Copper Breaks which boasts a 60-acre lake and the 13-acre Big Pond, covers only 1,933 acres. Visitors can spend a day swimming, hiking, biking, birdwatching, horseback riding or picnicking, or stay overnight in one of 46 design-

nated campsites.

Waist-high native grasses once covered this part of the south plains, where massive buffalo herds hunted by the Kiowa and Comanche roamed. The nearby town of Quanah derives its moniker from the last free Comanche chief, Quanah Parker, the son of Anglo captive Cynthia Ann Parker who in 1836 was taken by the Comanches during a raid on Fort Parker in central Texas.

The park has expanded its interpretive programs in recent years to satisfy visitors' desires to become better educated about the park's Native American history, Western folkways, starry skies and wildlife. Special Saturday evening programs conducted throughout the year cover such topics as astronomy, bats, owls, snakes, flint-knapping, outdoor photography and hunter safety.

— Rob McCorkle

For more information, call (940) 839-4331 or visit [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/find-adest/parks/copper\\_breaks/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/find-adest/parks/copper_breaks/).

For information about upcoming events in all your state parks, visit [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/newsmedia/calendar/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/newsmedia/calendar/).

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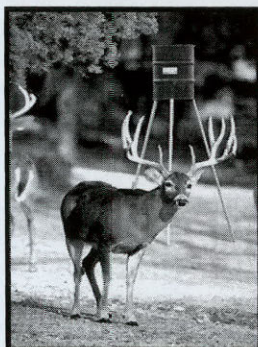
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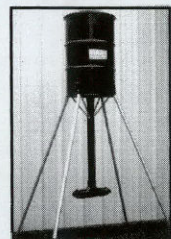
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**IMAGE SPECS:**  
Nikon Coolpix 8700 digital,  
ISO 100, 22 mm lens, expo-  
sure of 1/65 second at f4.4





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