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The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE of TEXAS

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RETURNING
to EAST TEXAS

BACK *in* BLACK

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BLACK DRUM BEATS
WARDENS of the WAVES

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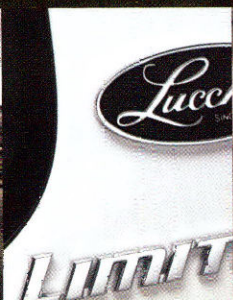


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Model shown with optional 20" wheels, running boards, and two-toned paint. Also available in Black and Salsa Red Pearl.

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By Larry Bozka

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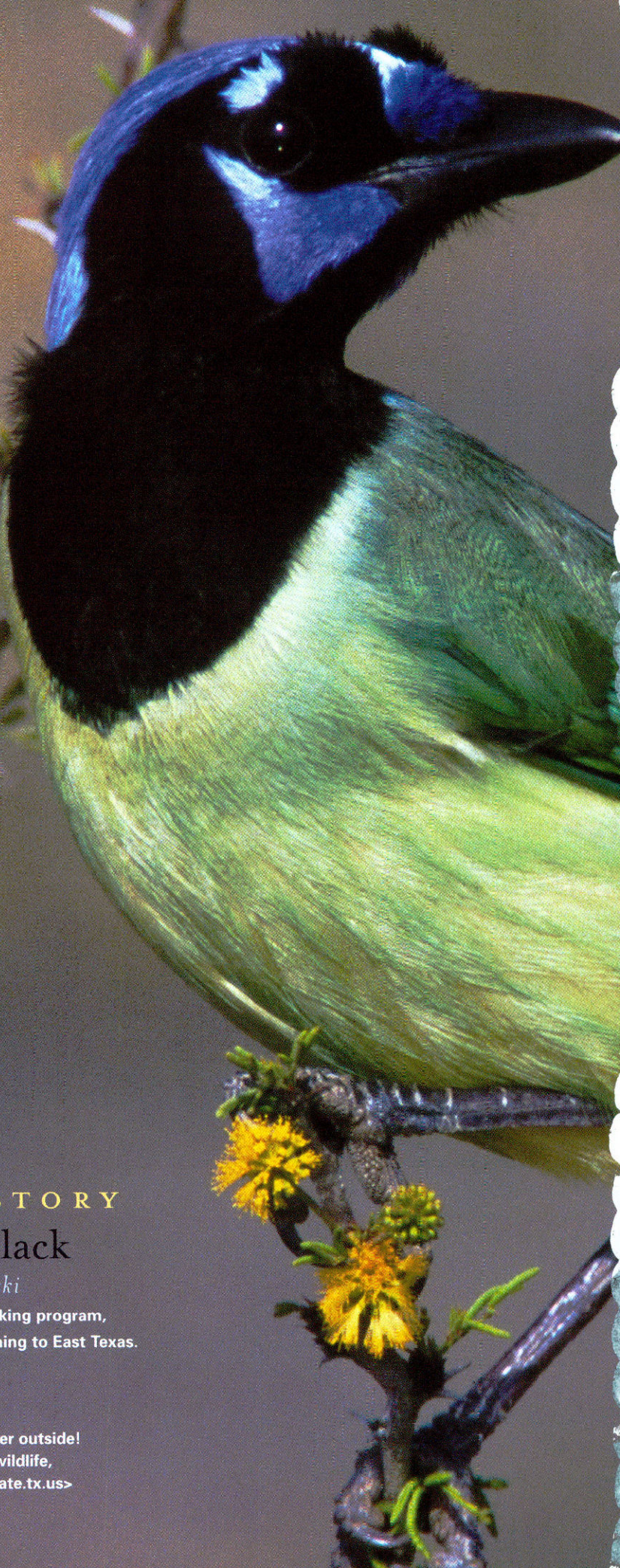
COVER STORY

Back in Black

By Joe Nick Patoski

With or without a stocking program, the black bear is returning to East Texas.

It's definitely time to see for yourself: Life's better outside!
For the latest information on Texas' parks and wildlife,
visit the department's Web site: <www.tpwd.state.tx.us>



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BACK: Angler Paul Brown poses with a black drum caught on a fly rod near Rockport. See the article on page 44. Photo © DavidJSams.com.

Previous spread: The green jay is a popular resident of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of extreme South Texas. Photo © Rolf Nussbaumer.

This page: The misunderstood skunk sometimes sacrifices everything in the quest for a mate. See the article in Scout on page 10. Photo © Rolf Nussbaumer.



PHOTO © SCOTT SOMMERLATTIE

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The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE of TEXAS

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In the Field

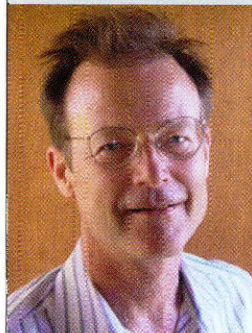
NOREEN DAMUDE

opens a window onto the often-raucous world of jays with her witty and informative style in this month's Legend, Lore & Legacy column. Those of you who know only the blue jay will be surprised to know that Texas is home to seven different jays. Not all are as outspoken and colorful as the blue jay. The brown jay is, as Damude says, "the only really drab neotropical jay." Damude is a committed and knowledgeable birder who has contributed regularly to *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine, among other publications. She has served as a nongame biologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and as director of bird conservation for the Texas Audubon Society. In addition to her work as an environmental consultant, she writes on natural history topics. ("Those Rapsallion Jays" begins on page 50).



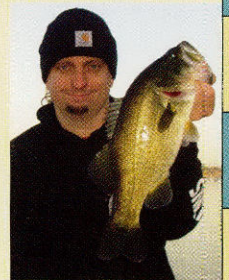
JOE NICK PATOSKI

first made a name for himself as a music and travel writer and built a national reputation focusing on those subjects. Even though he continues to write and publish extensively about music, he concentrates an increasing amount of his energy on outdoors and environmental subjects, often in the pages of this magazine. Collaborating with photographer Laurence Parent, another *TP&W* magazine regular contributor, Patoski has published *Texas Mountains* and *Texas Coast*, both for the University of Texas Press. Patoski wrote the introduction for *Conjunto Pictures*, a collection of photographs documenting the stars of conjunto music in the Texas/Mexico borderlands (published this year by UT Press). For this issue, Patoski writes about the return of black bears to East Texas. (The article starts on page 20.)



CHESTER MOORE, JR.

writes extensively about hunting and fishing in East Texas and along the Texas coast, as well as all sorts of other outdoors topics. Moore serves as outdoors editor for both the *Port Arthur News* and *Orange Leader* newspapers in East Texas, and contributes to several other regional, national and international publications. He has written four books on coastal fishing, the latest of which is *Flounder Fever*. In this issue of *Texas Parks & Wildlife*, Moore writes about the TPWD game wardens who patrol the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The inspiration to write the article was an anecdote described in the story. It was an encounter Moore and his father had with wardens several years ago. At that time, Moore was impressed with how hard the wardens were working to save fish trapped in an illegal gill net. His article "Wardens of the Waves" begins on page 30.



AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF ROBERT L. COOK

We recently completed the painful process of laying off 39 good, hard-working state park employees, closing several camping loops and reducing the number of days and hours that our state parks and historic sites are open because we do not have enough money to operate and maintain our state's wonderful state parks — nor to provide for the safety and needs of our park visitors. It wasn't fun. In addition, we eliminated another 40 state park positions that we have been holding vacant. Your state parks need all of those employees and much more.

Don't bother trying to find someone to blame; I know exactly who is to blame. Some folks will blame the Texas Legislature; not me. I have participated in the legislative process for 15 years, and our legislators have far more demands and requests for funding than they have funds to allocate. Legislators know how important the state park or historic site in their district is to the economy of the local communities.

Some folks will say we just cut out the fluff; that we were wasting money anyway. They are wrong. They do not visit our state parks and historic sites and see how hard our folks work and what a great job they do with so little. The truth is we are all to blame. That's right — me, you and every Texan must wake up and realize that we need to adequately fund our incredible state park system.

Currently the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department operates 124 state park units and historic sites in Texas. For the last five years, our operating budget, the money that pays the utility bills, patches the roof and pays park employee salaries, has been "flat" or slightly declining at around \$51 million per year. Sounds like a lot, right? Do the math — that's less than a half million dollars per site per year. Considering that our parks take in about \$32 million per year in gate fees and facilities use fees (cabins, RV hookups, etc.), "your taxpayer cost" drops to about \$170,000 per park, per year; or one penny per Texan per year! The great State of Texas ranks 48th or 49th in state park funding per citizen! I'm sorry, but it just isn't good enough to be next to last.

Surveys indicate that two-thirds of Texas taxpayers are willing to pay more taxes to have more, better and bigger state parks. In fact, most of us do not consider adequately funding our parks as a "cost" or a "liability." Independent studies have documented that investments in parks for our citizens to use and enjoy actually reduce the overall tax spending on delinquency and crime.

OK ... Bottom line, how much money do we need above and beyond the \$51 million that we have now to operate our current system with no expansion or additional parks? First, we need an additional \$12 million per year to effectively staff and maintain our current system of state parks and historic sites. Second, in addition to the \$7 million per year that we are currently spending to fund major repair projects in our state parks, we need an additional \$10 million per year to get these sites in good shape and keep them that way. Have you ever operated a 26-mile long steam train, or tried to keep a 100-year-old dreadnought class battleship afloat, or replaced a water/wastewater system like the one at Garner State Park that services 200,000 visitors annually? Finally, we need an additional \$5 million per year for replacement mowers, tractors, garbage trucks, pickup trucks and putt-putt-type vehicles. That totals an additional \$27 million per year!

You could think of it like this; that's less than \$2 per Texan, per year. Let's solve this issue! Sign me up. Get outdoors.

Surveys indicate that two-thirds of Texas taxpayers are willing to pay more taxes to have more, better and bigger state parks.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department mission statement:

To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

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PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

FOREWORD

When Joe Nick Patoski started working on this month's cover story, he asked me to send him copies of all of the bear stories the magazine has published. While looking through the articles, one caught my eye, "A Texas Grizzly Hunt," by J.G. Burr, which was published in the August 1948 issue.

In the article, Burr includes passages from an account written by C.O. Finley, who along with John Means, claimed to have killed a grizzly bear in the Davis Mountains in 1890. Finley's tale was written around 1940, 50 years after the event. If true, the story is a sad example of the extermination of a species at the hand of man. Yet it is also a fascinating slice of cultural history. Bear hunts were large multi-family affairs, and the gathering detailed in the article had been an annual event for many years. A few excerpts follow.

"Our party ran from 40 to 75 people; We also invited one or two ministers every year to our camp which was as clean and free of bad language as was possible ..." At the end of a long day of hunting, they would have a big meal, some hot coffee, and "We would then clear off a spot of ground and dance the old square dances."

As the 1890 hunt began near Limpia Canyon, there were about 50 dogs in the hunting party.

"We heard a dog yelp and then another and pretty soon the whole pack was running and yelping and the dogs and men rode up on a four year old fat cow that had been killed up on the side of the mountain and then dragged down the hill about 100 yards."

Demonstrating that political correctness was not a concern at the time, Finley continues, "... we rode like drunk Indians to keep up in hearing of the dogs."

After seeing the sheer size of the 800-pound bear, all but four of the dogs gave up the chase. Finley and Means tracked the bear for several miles, and they finally got close enough to take a shot.

"When we reached the bear, we discovered the gray tips of his hair. John yelled like a Comanche and threw his hat as high in the air as he could and said, 'Otie, we have got a grizzly!'"

Finley writes, "... that winter, a young man from the Biological Department at Washington came to the Davis Mountains to collect specimens ... he saw the bear's head hanging out over the door. When he went back to Washington, he related the story ... and they wrote and asked me to send it to them, which I did."

Years later, someone approached Finley about borrowing the skull for the Dallas Fair. Finley sent the request to Washington and received a polite rejection, "... this particular specimen was used by Dr. C. Hart Merriam, former Chief of the Biological Survey, as a basis for description of a new race of grizzly bear, namely *Ursus horriaeus texensis*, and ... this skull is the only known specimen of its kind in the world ... the greatest value of the specimen will be conserved by leaving it undisturbed in its present location in the National Museum."

I'd love to know if that skull still exists at the Smithsonian or in some other collection. I'll do some sniffing around and let you know what I find out in a future issue.

Robert Macias

ROBERT MACIAS
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

LETTERS

FISHING FOR FAMILY VALUES

Your article on competitive bass fishing in the December 2005 issue would have been more complete if you had identified the negative aspects of these tournaments. In the past, family fishing outings were oriented to the basic

family value of cooperation. It will be difficult for parents to teach these values as prize-winning fishing tournaments and competitive winner/loser values capture the imagination of both children and adults.

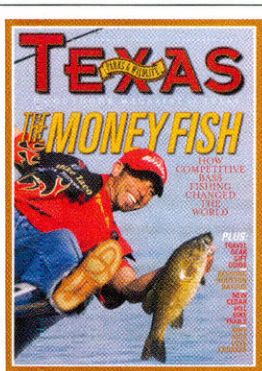
More importantly, sport fishing in the past provided a rare opportunity in our competitive and materialistic society for people to experience intrinsic satisfaction and reward in the activity itself rather than in the reward of money, trophies or status.

Turning work into a hobby is one thing and represents an advance in human growth. Turning a hobby into work is a totally different thing and represents a step backwards.

CHARLES MALESKY
San Antonio

NO MORE LOUDMOUTH ANGLERS

I truly enjoy your magazine and read it cover to cover. But I have an issue with the "Bassing for Bucks" article, or rather with the front cover, in the December issue. If you want to talk about Texas bass fishing and tournaments, then put a Texan on the cover. To put a loudmouth Yankee like Mike Iaconelli on the cover holding what I think is a smallmouth bass is not in keeping with your roots. By the way, last time I checked, there are no smallmouth bass in Lake Lewisville. If I'm wrong I'll apologize, but only about



Your article on competitive bass fishing would have been more complete if you had identified the negative aspects of these tournaments.

Charles Malesky
San Antonio

MAIL CALL

the fish. And the last time I watched a fishing show with loud mouth Ike in it was the first and last time!

I guess you didn't check the picture closely, so all of us ole time Texans will forgive you this once.

GENE D. GORDON

TP&W EDITORS REPLY: Professional bass fishing attracts unique characters, like Iaconelli. And you are correct that smallmouth bass are not found in Lake Lewisville.

PLEASE DON'T MOVE THE TURTLES

After an article in the magazine about the threats to Texas box turtles [in the June 2005 issue], someone with the best of intentions wrote to say that he picks up box turtles on the road and releases them on his land. His intentions are admirable, but the effects may not be so good. Box turtles establish a home range, a familiar area in which they stay and to which they try to return if displaced. Those who work with box turtles find that turtles don't do well if relocated to a new area. They often wander off, spending time traveling that should be spent feeding and resting. Many reptiles have this tendency to stick close to home, and research shows lower survival rates among those that are moved. For the sake of the box turtles, I hope this rancher will consider leaving the turtles by the side of the road rather than taking them with him.

MICHAEL SMITH
Box Turtle Partnership of Texas

Sound off for "Mail Call!"

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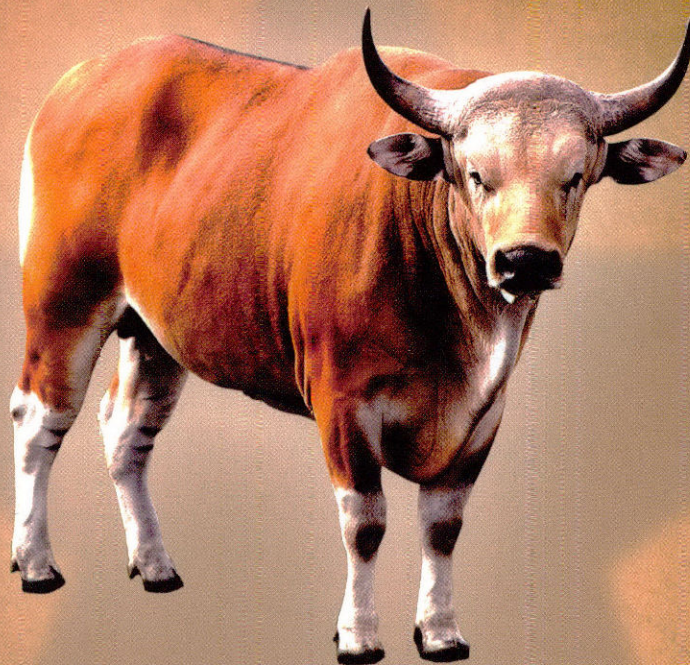
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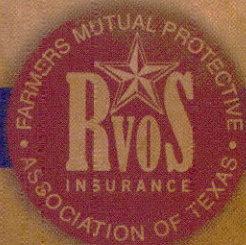
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SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

LOVE STINKS

Texas skunks risk life and limb during mating season.



A three-year study of skunks — striped, western spotted and hog-nosed — in and around San Angelo State Park will tell researchers more about the secretive lives of these creatures.

Alas, pity the poor skunk. Like snakes, spiders and vultures, this much-maligned creature receives little positive publicity and has next to no admirers. To top off its dismal — and foul-smelling — reputation, a skunk's love life is rife with risks.

Come February — the start of breeding season — these shy, cat-sized creatures hit the road. Literally. In their after-dark quests to find mates, males often venture onto highways and rarely make it across alive.

"We see more numbers of roadkill skunks in February and March than other times of the year," says Robert Dowler, a biologist with Angelo State University. "Preliminary data suggests that roadkill rates of skunks may double in parts of Texas during mating season."

Last February, Dowler counted more than 50 dead skunks along the road on a 300-mile trip to Oklahoma. "That's

roughly one dead skunk every six miles," he estimates.

Closer to home these days, Dowler and a team of graduate students are wrapping up a three-year study on skunks — striped, western spotted and hog-nosed — living in and around San Angelo State Park. (The two other North American species — eastern spotted and hooded — also live in Texas.)

Once completed, the study will reveal more about the secretive lives of skunks: what they eat (typically grubs, insects and sometimes, mice and eggs), how they interact, where they den, how far they roam, and what parasites afflict them.

In the field, university researchers successfully monitored striped and western spotted skunks using radio collars, remote cameras and analysis of tracks. "We found spotted skunks in thick brush and mesquite," Dowler reports. "Striped skunks were there, too, and also in open fields."

The hog-nosed species, however, stayed clear of traps. "They're almost impossible to capture," Dowler says. "We found them commonly as roadkill, but they wouldn't go in our live traps. We tried for more than two years without success, using baits that included cat food, eggs, fruit and even a lure called Liquid Grub. Nothing worked."

The males who do successfully cross the road likely mate, then move on to find more available females. Litters of four to seven blind kits are born in May or June. The young skunks remain in the burrow for about six weeks, and then venture out (usually single file) with their mother on nighttime hunts. By summer's end, they're on their own.

Unlike their relatives, western spotted males romance the ladies in September and October. After breeding, females keep fertilized embryos dormant — a process called delayed implantation — for several months until the embryos are implanted in the uterine wall, and development continues.

Data collected from the university will be used by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, which is funding the project. "We want to develop management actions that will help maintain skunk populations," says John Young, a TPWD mammalogist. "Not much is known about them because people don't want to handle them, for obvious reasons."

— Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

GRAB LIFE BY THE HORNS



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PICTURE THIS

Our chief photographer shares his insights.

My Name is Earl

Digiholic (n)

A person who uses digital cameras
and processes habitually and to excess
or who suffers from digiholism.

Hello, my name is Earl, and I am a digiholic. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would ever say it, or that it could ever happen to me. It's not as if I just woke up one morning and said, "Hey, ya know, I think I'll give up film photography today and go over to the digital side." No, like most addictions it began gradually, calling me ever so innocently to that rocky shore where, like legendary ships, I now sit dashed and dazed, trying to understand the forces that drove me to abandon my first true love for this digital mistress that now consumes me, and along with it the feelings of guilt ... and guilty pleasures.

My demise began innocently one day when a "friend" asked me if I would like to hold his new digital SLR camera. "What could it hurt?" I thought as my hands wrapped around its curvaceous body. By reflex, I lifted the camera to my eye and took a picture. It was at that point that I was doomed. For upon gazing into this Jezebel's eye of lavish colors, I was hit immediately with the opiate of digital photography — instant gratification. It didn't take hours in a darkroom, or several trips to and from a photo lab. It was here and now. It was fast and cheap.

Two years have passed since I slid into digiholism. I still struggle with unresolved guilt, primarily due to the effect this addiction has had on those closest to me. My trusty film cameras sit unused in a dark closet, gathering dust and wondering why they don't go out on any more great adventures. But mostly, it's my family who pays the price, because now, instead of hours in a darkroom, I spend hours in front of a computer monitor.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY EARL NOTTINGHAM

Thankfully, I have made tiny steps toward recovery and have come to understand that my guilt was for naught. So, to my brethren who harbor the same digital demons, I offer these thoughts:

First, the idea that digital photography is not “real” photography. Although not chemically based, the electronic image is just another step in the evolution of photographic tools and processes. Its basic function of “writing with light” is no different than preceding generations of light-sensitive materials. The value of photography is in the final image we see (the message) and not the tools used to create it (the messenger). The lasting impressions created by the likes of Mathew Brady and Ansel Adams would still be seared into our mind’s-eye regardless of the technology used to create the images.

Second, the presumption that digital photography is manipulated. In one form or fashion, photographers have always been able to manipulate images — if they have wanted to. Traditional manipulation took on many forms, from the physical cutting and pasting of a print to subtle manipulations created by the choice of camera focal length or type of film used. Obviously, the term “manipulation” can be very subjective. When my journalistic colleagues express concerns over “digital manipulation,” I ask them if it’s easier to manipulate the written word by using a computer instead of a manual typewriter. The overriding issue is ethics — not putting in something visual (or written) that is untrue or misleading. Technology changes — ethics remain.

Last, that the digital image isn’t as good as traditional film. Now that camera manufacturers are producing SLR cameras in the 8, 11 and even up to 16 megapixels range, the resolution of the electronic image meets — and can exceed — that of film, and the color depth provided by modern sensors is superior. Many of the misperceptions about the quality of the digital image fade after a short learning curve and working with a few files. As the digital photo industry becomes increasingly standardized, working with digital files should become even easier.

Who knows, perhaps one day I will come out of this addiction and go back to my old ways. Until then, I will drown myself in the pleasure that the digital image affords me ... one day at a time. ☆

— Earl Nottingham

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Photo by Larry Ditto

The Value of Houston's Trees

A new report reveals that the Bayou City has lost a lot of forest to concrete, but the remaining trees provide measurable benefits.



Houston's urban forests — and their inhabitants, like this frog — are most threatened by land development. A new report quantifies the dollar value of the urban forests.

A long-anticipated report by the USDA Forest Service and the Texas Forest Service tells a tale of forest loss and urban expansion, but also puts green to green, quantifying the environmental benefits that Houston's trees provide in dollar values. The report is just one of many milestones changing the way Houstonians think about their trees.

Houston started getting concerned when national attention focused on its illegal air pollution and unsightly traffic and sprawl. Many realized the city's image was hurting the economy — companies were choosing not to establish a presence in the city. And with ozone levels dangerously outside of federal Clean Air Act limits, the city has to clean up its air, and trees can help.

A critical milestone was the production of the landmark study released in September 2005, which quantifies not only the

canopy loss but also the economic value of trees.

The study examined eight counties around Houston. TFS forester Mickey Merritt and colleagues sampled more than 300 field plots, identifying species, quantifying leaf biomass and measuring tree size. These measures were plugged into the Urban Forest Effects, or UFORE, computer model, which quantifies the structure, function and economic values associated with the existing forest canopy.

Forests encompass about 28 percent of the region's land matrix and are surprisingly diverse, with nearly 70 species — pines, oaks, elms, ashes and hickories, to name just a few. But the single most common tree in Houston is the invasive Chinese tallow, at 23 percent. Loblolly pine was the most common native tree at 19 percent.

Houston's trees provide an astonishing \$206 billion in structural value to citizens, and an additional \$450 million yearly in terms of a quantified value of removing Houston's toxic air pollutants, sequestering carbon and energy savings to buildings. The present tree canopy removes over 60,000 tons of air pollutants annually, including ozone and particulate matter.

"If we can do a good job of letting the public and policymakers understand the benefits of urban trees, we may be able to influence policy," stresses Merritt. "We don't want to stop growth, but to grow smarter."

For the most part, the urban forests and trees have little protection. From 1992 to 2000, 17 percent of the region's forest cover got converted to urban and residential areas — 486 square miles — and land development was declared Houston forests' greatest threat. Developers typically bulldoze every tree because it is the least expensive modus operandi. The study also revealed that small trees provide only a fraction of the benefits that large trees do. To get a copy of the report, visit www.houstonregionalforest.org. ☆

—Wendee Holtcamp

FIELD NOTE / BY ROBERT MACIAS

Nature's Ice Sculptures

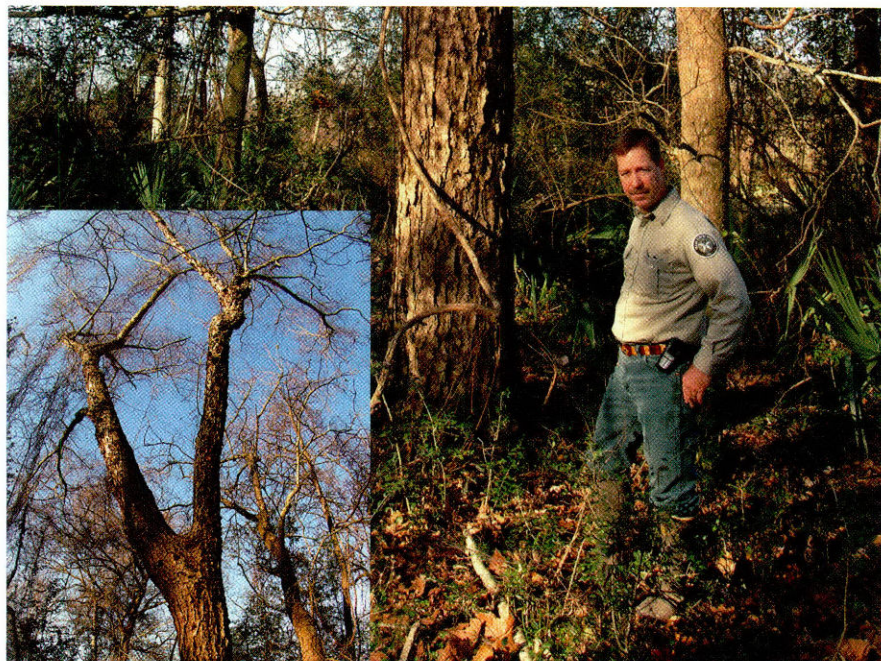
Normally a fairly ordinary-looking plant, frostweed (*Verbesina virginica*) sometimes puts on quite a show — usually when the first hard freeze of the year sends temperatures into the low 20s. "Sap in the stems freezes and expands, pushing out of cracks in the stem to form these ice ribbons," says Dana Price, TPWD botanist. Frostweed can be found in most parts of the state, usually in semishaded locations in open woodlands or along stream banks. Most people never have a chance to see these delicate ice formations, though, since they usually melt soon after sunrise. ☆



Look for the green frostweed in the summer and fall, left, and make note of the location, so you'll know where to look early on the morning after a hard freeze to see the delicate ribbons of ice that burst and curl from the plant's stem.

Big Birch at Banana Bend

East of Houston, a mammoth tree serves as the centerpiece for a new nature preserve.



In the small town of Highlands, just 20 minutes east of downtown Houston, a massive river birch tree — thought to be largest of its kind in Texas — was recently named a regional champion by the Harris County Tree Registry. It is 67 feet high, 73 inches in circumference, and has an average crown spread of about 68 feet.

This regional champion river birch, located in a curve of the San Jacinto River called Banana Bend, will be protected by a new conservation easement that is designed to protect the surrounding land.

Highlands sits quietly on the banks of the San Jacinto River in a boomerang curve aptly named Banana Bend. The land is owned by the Port of Houston Authority (PHA). In December 2004, fulfilling part of PHA's commitment under its Bayport Container and Cruise Terminal project permit, PHA and the Legacy Land Trust signed the Banana Bend Conservation Easement. This means PHA has agreed to help maintain the conservation values of this land and permanently forego intensive development.

The land, now known as the Banana Bend Nature Preserve, serves as a stop-over and wintering area for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds and songbirds, and includes forested riparian areas. Along with the champion river birch, Banana Bend hosts 39 species of trees, including southern red oak, blackgum and sassafras. The land is also home to 71 species of forbs (broad-leaved flowering plants), 15 species of vines, 18 species of grasses, five species of shrubs and eight-species of fungi. The site is a prime habitat for 60 species of birds as well as several rare species.

Since signing the easement, PHA has been working with Harris County Commissioner's Precinct 2 to ensure that the long-term use for the land includes a county park, so that area residents can enjoy the Banana Bend preserve for generations. In the near future, the rest of Highlands could well be swallowed by Houston's ever expanding borders. But, in the midst of all this growth, the champion river birch — and all of the other plants and animals thriving in the natural habitat surrounding it — will remain safely protected. ★

—Aston Hinds

PHOTO © ASTON HINDS

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Scat Facts

Though wild animals are elusive, their calling cards leave behind valuable information.

Wild animals stay alive because they're good at being cautious and remaining well hidden. Often, only subtle signs are left behind to indicate their presence. Environmental conditions can make obvious marks, such as tracks, difficult to distinguish. Another available clue, though, has its own set of unique identifiers.

Animal feces, or scat, offers a wealth of information about our elusive animal neighbors.

Who's been around, how long ago and what they've been eating are three of the many questions scat can answer. With a little practice, significant information can be gleaned that will help anyone in pursuit of a stealthy animal.

Mike Pittman, a Texas Parks and Wildlife biologist, uses a variety of animal signs to help him study and manage the desert bighorn sheep population at Elephant Mountain Wildlife Management Area in Brewster County. "We find it [scat] particularly useful for dietary studies," says Pittman — that is, the diet of the sheep as well as that of their predators. He adds that scat is a big help in detecting animal presence where dry, rocky ground renders tracks unreadable or altogether absent. When you are putting together and analyzing clues, you'll need to utilize what you already know about the habits and basic physical characteristics of animals. If a specimen looks like that of a cat, but you're not sure, consider the color and size. Is it 8 inches long? Then it's likely from a larger cat or dog-like animal — probably not a bobcat but more likely a cougar or maybe a coyote. You must be careful to keep an open mind, though, because most wild animals have a varied diet and the scat specimen may contain seeds, fur, bones or all three.

Color and visible contents will reveal clues about diet. The scat of a carnivore will contain fur. Most diets will contain some sort of plant matter and therefore droppings will contain seeds. A meal such as prickly pear may have a bright color as well. A meal of primarily meat is usually black and tarry in appearance. In the case of a coyote, inconsistency may be your best clue. If you are seeing different samples that are the same size (think of a bird dog for comparison) but with different contents, such as prickly pear seeds one time



then dark with fur another time, this could easily be explained by the coyote's opportunistic diet.

Once you get a feel for what type of animal it is, consider how long ago it was at the site. Moisture content is key evidence. Using a stick or gloved hand, compress the specimen. A fresh scat will behave more like clay or mud and mold into a different shape. An older dropping will crumble and fall apart or turn chalky. This may also be helpful for viewing any seeds or bones present if they aren't visible on the outside.

Experience will polish your skills after these fundamental rules are followed. A checklist will flow readily from your mind. Pellets? Round? = Rabbit. Slightly elongated? = Sheep. Tubular, like Fido's? Same size? Likely coyote. Larger but dark and tarry? Could be cougar.

If you are stumped but still want to know if that's a calling card from some wild hogs, put some in a plastic bag and take it to your nearest TPWD wildlife biologist for help with identification.

The topic may not be for the dinner table, but for a landowner who's been trying to coax deer onto his land, a deposit of deer "berries" can be a welcome site. Likewise, someone who has been dreading the encroachment of crop-damaging hogs may finally have conclusive evidence.

Lastly, when you're done with your detective work, don't forget to wash your hands with soap and water. Animal scat is just like that of humans — chock full of bacteria that can make you sick and spoil freshly harvested game. ☆

FROM TOP: The search for scat; desiccated coyote scat after some time in the field; The dark color and shiny patina of this deer scat tell us it is fresh; racoon scat with bits of shell that indicate the racoon recently enjoyed a crayfish feast; rabbit scat that has dried and changed color after some time.

Baitcasting for Bass

The top baitcasting rods and reels for just about any situation.

Bass rods and reels have evolved rapidly in recent years through research and development of new materials and intensive field testing by pros. These outfits come in a wide range of sizes, actions and prices. The following are some excellent trigger rod and casting reel matches.

For traditional baitcasting, the new 6-foot **Berkley Series I rod** is a high-quality multi-bias IM7 graphite bass rod. With super-smooth hard chromium guides, reinforced butt-section and tapered cork-over foregrip, this medium action rod is light and responsive. A great match is the Swedish **Abu Garcia Mörrum reel**, which is considered by many anglers to be the best made and most durable of the Ambassadeur series. Supplies of this model are limited, and those fortunate enough to own one have a classic casting and trolling reel with a loud on/off clicker setting for use in both fresh and saltwater. (\$109.95, Series I Rod, #SIC60IM, Berkley, (877) 777-3850, <www.berkley-fishing.com>) (\$199.95, Abu Garcia Mörrum Reel, M5600C, #5IS-113874, Cabela's, (800) 237-4444, <www.cabela.com>)

If you need a sensitive combination, consider the new lightweight **Team Daiwa-X**, a one-piece finesse rod of fine contemporary design and construction. It is a very comfortable match with their multi-bearing, low-profile **Team Daiwa-Z Magnesium reel** for extremely smooth presentations and sensitivity using drop shot techniques with light lures. This is a professional outfit designed for the most advanced bass anglers. (\$169, Daiwa-X Rod, #TDX66MLFB-C, \$349.95, Daiwa-Z Reel, #TD-Z103H, Daiwa USA, (562) 802-9589, <www.daiwa.com>)

Another great light casting combination is the **BassPro Johnny Morris Signature rod** and **Shimano Chronarch MG50 reel**. This rod has an 85-million-modulus graphite core and a 1K-carbon filament wrap along the entire length enhancing the overall hoop strength plus extra reinforcement in the lower section. The Shimano magnesium reel is lightweight, long casting, and hard-coated to resist wear and corrosion. This combo will let you instantly feel even the lightest bite and cast all day without fatigue. (\$149.99, Johnny Morris Rod, JX60MT, #33-151-612-00, \$249.99, Shimano MG50 Reel, #33-330-824-00, Bass Pro Shops, (800) 227-7776, <www.basspro.com>)

For big bass casting and striper trolling, you'll find the longer, stiffer rods work well for different type presentations to larger bass like the hybrid stripers stocked in many Texas lakes and rivers. These crossover rods also serve as excellent redfish and trout rods along the Texas coast. For example, the 7-foot **Quantum Cabo rod** has an excellent action and is beautifully made of top-quality components detailed with hand-laid six-color diamond butt wraps and silver-thread guide accents. The matching **Cabo PT Baitcast reel** has a medium low profile one-piece aluminum frame with a large line capacity spool (300-plus yards of 30-pound Super Braid). Other features include continuous antireverse, hard brass alloy machined gears, centrifugal cast control, line-out alarm and a magnum ceramic star drag. The finish is protected with six layers of Saltgard for corrosion resistance. (\$169.99, Cabo PT Rod, #CBIC70ML, \$159.99,



FROM TOP: BassPro Johnny Morris Signature rod and Shimano Chronarch MG50 reel; Berkley Series 1 rod with Abu Garcia Mörrum reel; Team Daiwa-X rod with Team Daiwa-Z Magnesium reel; G. Loomis Escape casting rod with Shimano Calcutta TE 250DC reel; Quantum Cabo rod with Cabo PT Baitcast reel.

Cabo PT Reel, #CBC30PTS, Quantum, (800) 588-9030, <www.quantumfishing.com>)

If you need a traveling rig, consider a compact, multi-section rod like the **G. Loomis Escape casting rod** series. These rods come in many actions and sizes and the graphite ferule connections are designed not to affect performance. One of the best combinations for bass is the 7-foot, 3-piece, fast-action model fitted with a **Shimano Calcutta TE 250DC reel**. This is the most advanced casting reel available and the first to have an electronic breaking system and computer sensor to control line over-run by applying just the right amount of resistance on the spool as the line speed varies. Depending on the lure weight, extremely long, flawless casts can be made with this reel. The electric current is self-generated by the force of the cast and internal computer parts are a completely sealed system that can be used in either fresh or saltwater. (\$260, Escape Rod, #ETR84-3MC-14, G. Loomis, (800) 456-6647, <www.gloomis.com>) (\$499.99, Calcutta Reel, #CTE250DC, Shimano, (800) 833-5540, <www.shimano.com>)

Most outdoor sporting goods stores and local tackle shops have experienced personnel who are often willing to take you out in the parking lot or to their casting pond to throw practice plugs with these latest outfits until you find the combination that feels just right. ★

3 Days in the Field / By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

DESTINATION: EDEN

TRAVEL TIME FROM :

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HOUSTON – 6.5 hours / SAN ANTONIO – 3.5 hours / LUBBOCK – 6.5 hours

Where is the Heart of Texas?

In the Lone Star's Garden of Eden, paradise means rock art, horny toads and deer sausage.

One traffic light blinks red-amber-green in the rural community of Eden. At the busy intersection, two popular stopovers beckon to travelers. Those longing for creamy sustenance turn into the Dairy Queen. Other drivers in-the-know, or those who are perhaps just plain curious, pull up to the business with the unusual name: Venison World.

As for me, I choose the latter because I'm on a mission to explore the region generally known as the "Heart of Texas."

I use the word "generally" because determining the state's precise center depends on whom you ask. For instance, the Texas Society of

Professional Surveyors — measuring by satellite the exact distance between the state's four borders — places the "geodetic" center of Texas 18.5 miles west-southwest of Eden.

On the other hand, the *Texas Almanac* says that the state's "geographic" center lies about 15 miles northeast of Brady (on private property) in northern McCulloch County. Hence, Brady bills itself as the official "Heart of Texas." Folks there even put up a "heart" monument on the courthouse grounds (there's an arrow-pierced heart atop the courthouse, too).

To the west, in Concho County, Eden

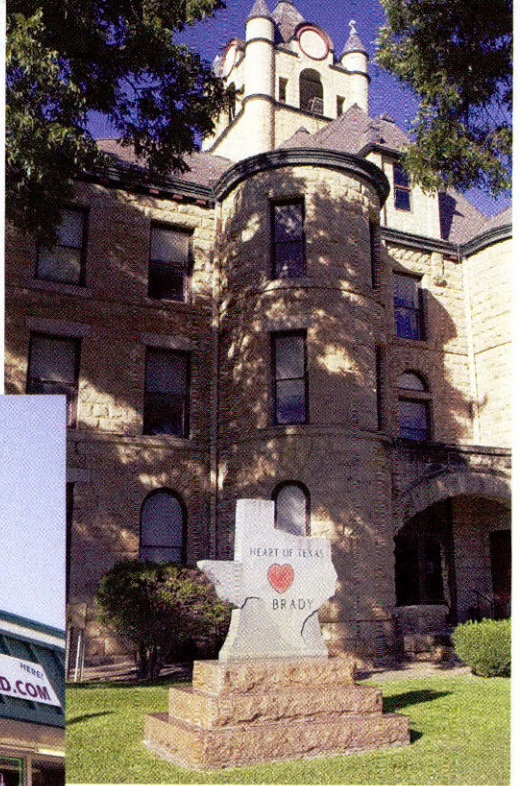
markets itself as the "Garden of Texas." You might assume the town was named after the Biblical garden of paradise, but not so. Actually, Frederick Ede donated land for a township in 1882 but didn't want the place named for him. Someone suggested adding an "n," and Ede apparently approved this variation on his name.

At any rate, I park in front of Venison World, where a life-size replica of an axis buck stands guard on the building's roof. Inside the glass doors, a spicy aroma leads me to a small round table laden with samples of venison summer sausage, buffalo jalapeño/cheese summer sausage and

When you visit Eden, plan to take an excursion to Paint Rock, where you'll see this collection of pictographs.



PHOTOS © SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS



ABOVE: The Heart of Texas Country Music Museum. ABOVE RIGHT: The Heart of Texas Monument in front of the McCulloch County Courthouse in Brady. RIGHT: Venison World, a popular destination that offers sausage and jerky made from the meat of axis deer.



other meats, as well as sugared pecans, sasals and dessert toppings.

"People who travel this highway stop regularly to restock their freezers with our jerky and sausage," owner Max Stabel says.

Venison World Inc. opened in 1992 after a group of game ranchers near Eden decided it'd be an ideal way to market their axis deer products. Over time, other exotic game meats such as buffalo, elk, nilgai antelope and fallow deer were added. The retail store also sells a variety of seasonings, jellies, candy, cookbooks, kitchenware and even furniture.

After some tasting and browsing, I head over to the Don Freeman Memorial Museum, located next to City Hall on the town's oddly shaped square.

Several years ago, Concho County judge Allen Amos told me the grassy, tree-shaded plaza, which encircles a white gazebo, was designed to accommodate a courthouse. Though Eden for years coveted the county seat, the little town of Paint Rock further north held on to that designation. To this day, county residents still do business at the 1886 courthouse — designed by Frederick Ruffini — on the Paint Rock square. (Its architectural twin is the 1885 courthouse in Blanco, now used as a community center.)

At the museum, exhibits trace the county's history, starting with the Lost Iron Shoe Sole. This rusty metal sole may have belonged to a soldier from Coronado's army, but Museum

Director Carolyn Moody explains, "we don't know for sure." Other exhibits tell about military highways that crisscrossed the area as early as 1849, the

arrival of cattle and later sheep and the advent of farming. A collection of military displays honors the late General Ira Eaker, an Eden native and pioneer aviator who helped devise an aircraft level instrument later known as the "artificial horizon."

(continued on page 63)

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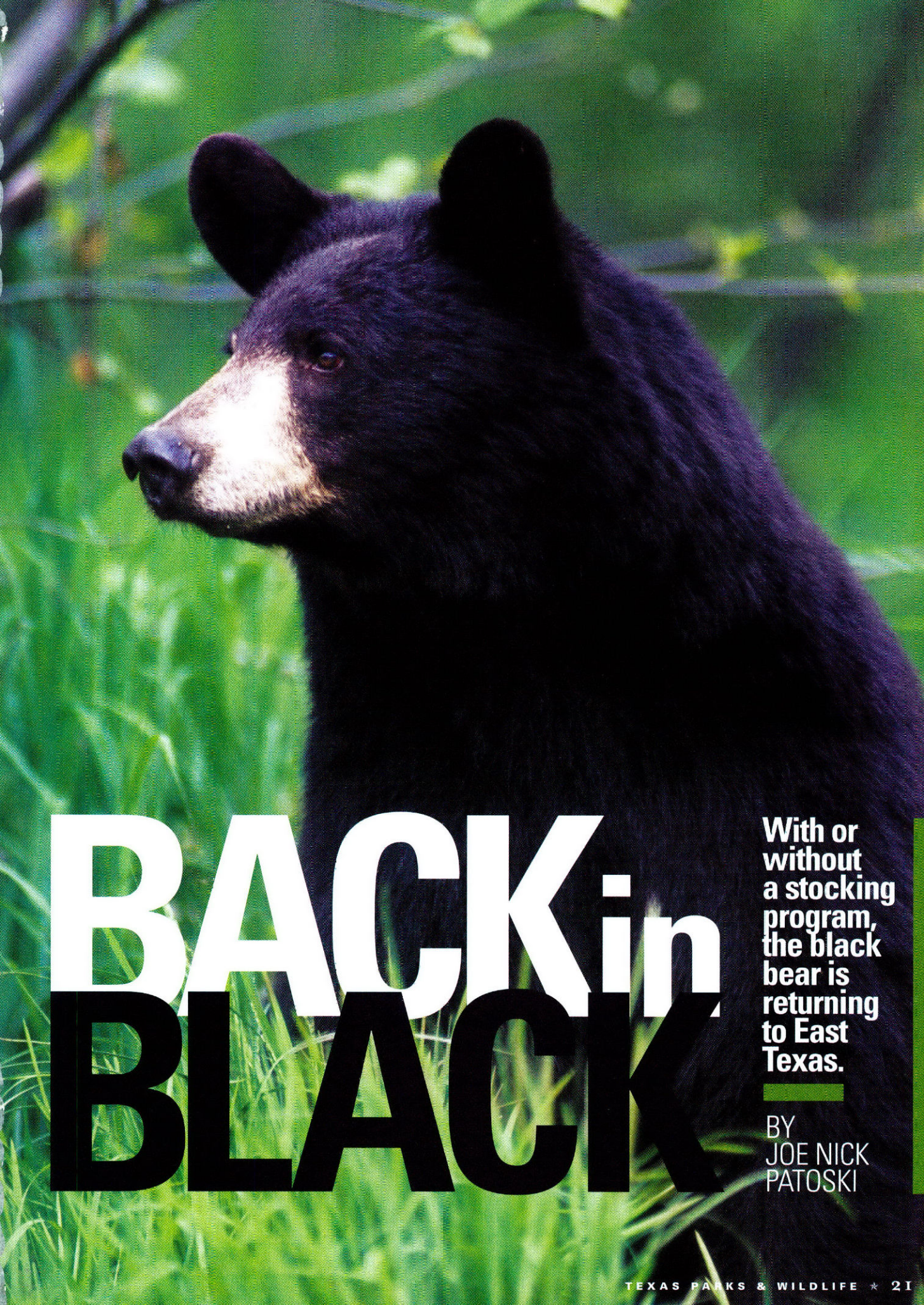
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PHOTOS ON THIS SPREAD © BILL TEA



BACK in BLACK

With or without a stocking program, the black bear is returning to East Texas.

BY
JOE NICK
PATOSKI

It's

usually little more than a footprint in moist soil or a dark blur darting across a dense green forest, leaves rustling and branches cracking in its wake. Some sightings are more specific: a mammal as big as a person, only heavier, that can stand up like a human and run like a deer. A few reports in recent years are quite detailed, like the one in February 2005, on Interstate 10, one-fourth of a mile west of the official Texas welcome center in Orange, when traffic screeched to a halt as a bear rambled around the highway median. Or the regular sightings at an RV park on the Louisiana side of Toledo Bend Reservoir. None should be too surprising — since the subject at hand pays less attention to state lines than people do.

All of them bear witness, as it were, to the obvious:

Black bear are coming back to East Texas.

"What we're seeing here is a regional bear expansion," Nathan Garner declares matter-of-factly. An affable bear of a fellow (more black bear than grizzly, actually), Garner is the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's regional wildlife director for East Texas, overseeing a staff of 60 covering 57 counties. He also knows a few things about bears. His interest began as a child growing up in the Houston area and continued as a college student pursuing a biology degree at the University of Houston, then at the University of Montana, where he worked on a border grizzly project under Charles (Mr. Bear) Jonkel. His graduate studies at Virginia Tech included tracking 47 black bears around the Appalachian Mountains.

He can tell you that black bear can actually be brown, red or even blond, stand 5 to 6 feet tall and weigh up to 400 pounds, that they'll eat anything and that they are not aggressive towards humans. "Grizzlies will charge when trapped," Garner says. "The black bear is afraid." Unless you get between a mother and her cubs, that is. Black bear coexist with deer. "By nature, they're less aggressive because they didn't have to be aggressive to survive as a species. They survived by retreating or climbing."

Garner will also tell you that Bud Bracken of Honey Island had 305 bear hides when he stopped hunting and that, while the last native *Ursus americanus* in the state may have been shot in Polk County almost 50 years ago, 47 verified sightings throughout the Pineywoods, the Big Thicket and along the Sabine River since 1977, as well as hundreds more anecdotal sightings, have been recorded since.

To prove how ripe East Texas is for the American black bear (*Ursus americanus americanus*) and its subspecies cousin, *Ursus americanus luteolus*, the Louisiana black bear that historically roamed East Texas, Garner takes me on a tour of a couple hundred miles' worth of bear habitat in the central and southern Pineywoods.



Even as black bear were being hunted out of Texas, Garner explains, recovery programs in adjacent states were underway. Beginning in 1958, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission moved 254 bears into the Ouachita and Ozark mountains from Minnesota and the Canadian province of Manitoba, the most successful restoration of a large carnivore population in the U.S. One hundred sixty-one black bear from Minnesota were moved into Louisiana between 1964 and 1967 to bolster the few hundred Louisiana black bear remaining. The ban on hunting bear in Texas in 1987, and regionally in 1992, when the Louisiana black bear was listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service under the

Endangered Species Act, further bolstered bear numbers to the point of expanding their range as close as a few miles north of the Red River in McCurtain County in southeast Oklahoma and along the Sulphur and Sabine rivers. A permanent black bear population is just a matter of time.

The bigger question is, Will Texans greet the bears with open arms or loaded ones?

Garner is responsible for coming up with the answer. He's invested four years heading the committee that recently completed the East Texas Black Bear Conservation and Management Plan, 2005–2015. Now he's spearheading the ETBB task force and still keeping options open for the most controversial element of the plan — relocating 30 females with cubs to sites in East Texas under TPWD oversight.

As a biologist, Garner sees the obvious benefits in bringing back wildlife to its former native habitat. But as an administrator, he understands too well the wariness some humans have warming up to the idea. "How dare you put my child at risk?" one mother challenged him at a public meeting. For that reason, Garner makes clear that the relocation idea will move forward "only if there is strong support." If public sentiment stands against TPWD helping to establish colonies, the project won't happen.

But in one sense it doesn't matter, because black bear are coming anyway.

Surprisingly, public reaction has been largely positive. Pollsters from Michigan State University surveyed 3,000 Texas households and 485 people who showed up



SEE A BEAR?

Call TPWD. One of the bear plan's goals is to resolve human-bear conflicts. If you see a bear, or have a bear problem, call your TPWD game warden or wildlife biologist or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (800) 792-1112 or at regional offices in Tyler (903) 566-1626, San Antonio (830) 569-8700, Kerrville (830) 896-2500 and Alpine (432) 837-2051

Don't feed the bears. Period.

What if a bear approaches?

Don't panic, don't shoot and don't approach. Don't run, either, says the TPWD *Black Bears in Texas* brochure. Back away slowly, with arms overhead to increase the size of your appearance, talk firmly and in a low pitched voice. If a bear stands on its hind legs, it is not preparing to attack. It's trying to see, hear and smell you. If a bear is in a tree, leave it alone. It's afraid. And NEVER approach a bear cub.



"The black bear is afraid. By nature, they're less aggressive because they didn't have to be aggressive to survive as a species. They survived by retreating or climbing."

WESTSIDE BEARS: an Unlikely Success Story

IN THE LATE 1980S, black bears from the northern state of Coahuila, Mexico, began migrating across the Rio Grande into the Trans-Pecos region, returning to a home range that had been unoccupied for nearly 50 years. The recolonization movement was a natural process, surprising many wildlife experts.

"If you look at all of Texas, the eastern two-thirds of the state had the best habitat, precipitation, vegetation and ecological system for bears," says David Holdermann, a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department endangered resources specialist who lives in Alpine. "The Trans-Pecos, ironically, has one of the lesser natural carry capacities to support bears."

But the black bears (*Ursus americanus*) continued to migrate — driven perhaps by scarcity of food, drought or some natural instinct that told them there were richer resources, remote mountains and sparse human population to the north.

Holdermann says his best guess is that there are now around 80 black bear in the Trans-Pecos, primarily in the southern sections of Brewster, Terrell and Val Verde counties — some of the state's most

remote, inaccessible terrain.

Of that figure, the breeding population probably numbers around 30 to 40 bears, says Holdermann. Extensive state and federally funded research in the past decade has focused on determining the extent of recolonization, including monitoring bears' movements through radio collaring, habitat analysis and field studies of bear sightings and bear depredations.

A biological key driving the bear recolonization process is the philopatric factor, which means a female black bear will allow her female offspring to remain on her home range. However, male offspring are forced to disperse outside the mother's home range.

"Because of this pattern," says Holdermann, "males will range farther outward, searching for a new home range with mates. Consequently, what we see is a slow, incremental expansion by females into new areas. Males are generally finding everything they need to expand except suitable females." Male black bears may range over a 100-square-mile area.

The resident breeding black bear population is believed to occupy an area covering the Chisos Mountains in the center of Big Bend National Park, the Dead Horse Mountains and the Black Gap Wildlife Management Area (near the eastern edge of the park), the Del Norte Mountains

(south of Alpine), the Davis Mountains (near Fort Davis) and the Guadalupe Mountains (south of the New Mexico border). Bear sightings, usually involving males, have also occurred in other areas of West Texas, but far less frequently.

The primary black bear breeding habitat in the Trans-Pecos is the Chisos Mountains.

Raymond Skiles Jr., the chief wildlife biologist in Big Bend National Park, estimates the current number of female black bears in the park to be around 15. The figure is down from a peak female population of around 30 bears in 2000, although Skiles believes the number is now increasing again.

"We had a precipitous decline starting around 2000 – 2001, following a failure in the food supply because of drought conditions," says Skiles.

Even though black bears appear to be in a new recolonizing phase, he warns, "The population isn't safe and secure here. We don't know how many bears are breeding females. It's a very tenuous existence. We need a couple of good years to get that breeding population back up."

Since 1987, Skiles has devoted a large portion of his time to studying black bears and devising programs and methods to lessen the chance of conflict between bears and park visitors.

"We've had to go through an immense change to adapt to the bears," he says.



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER

Changes include an extensive public education program, the creation of bear-proof trash containers and food-storage lockers for campers, bear-proof landfill operations for waste disposal and the development of a bear management and research team. The work has paid off: no major incidents involving bear-human encounters have occurred in the park.

TPWD wildlife specialist Holdermann recalls an example of male bear migration that occurred in Alpine in June 2003, when a young, mature black bear was found wandering in the downtown area. Holderman received an emergency call at his home about 1 a.m. He loaded a dart rifle with Telazol, an immobilizing chemical that interrupts an animal's nerve transmission system.

"We darted it in one shot and it took five minutes to be immobilized and drop from the tree," he recalled. Nicknamed the "Courthouse Bear," it was fitted with a radio collar and transported and released in the Black Gap Wildlife Management Area — all within five hours. In a few months, the bear had migrated 75 miles north to the Del Norte Mountains, about 15 miles south of Alpine, where it remained until radio contact was lost earlier this year.

Public opinion on bear recolonization is narrowly divided, according to a recent TPWD-sponsored survey. A questionnaire mailed to 1,100 landowners in nine Trans-Pecos counties who own at least one sec-

tion of land received a 42 percent return response. Black bear recolonization was not favored by 46 percent, favored by 40 percent and not answered by 14 percent.

Holderman notes that the TPWD approach to the recolonization process is not proactive. The recolonization has occurred naturally. The state's primary role has been to monitor the process, gather research data, attempt to minimize threats of bear-human contact and educate the public.

The migration of black bears into a former habitat is viewed as a positive indicator for the ecosystem by black bear advocates, who see long-term benefits in increased eco-tourism and the return of a sense of "wildness" to the region.

Private landowners are an important part of any natural recolonization process, Holdermann notes, since 96 percent of the bears' range is on private property.

"Once we've fully characterized how landowners feel about the black bear population, at that point we need to step back and ask what it means to the future of the bear population," he says.

"The negative attitude toward black bears reflects a strong pattern that has grown from the frontier experience — it generally extends to all large predators. It's a legitimate point for people to be concerned about property. The development of a successful bear strategy will have to include those private property interests, as well as the creation of a viable black bear habitat."

— Roy Hamric


at 10 town meetings that TPWD conducted around East Texas. The results were illuminating. The majority of those attending the public meetings supported the return of black bear to East Texas, and 70 percent of the written comments by mail were positive. The largest turnout was the 108 people who showed up in Kountze, in the heart of the Big Thicket. Meetings in Texarkana and Beaumont attracted the fewest. The greatest opposition was voiced by residents living near the Big Thicket preserves. Garner is not satisfied. "I want 75 percent," he says.

A significant element of the East Texas bear plan is the mix of public and private stakeholders. Representatives from the Big Thicket Association, a landowners group from Newton County, the Texas Department of Transportation, Temple-Inland Corporation, the East Texas Beekeepers Association and the Alabama-Coushatta nation all had a seat at the table alongside various state, federal and NGO entities. The value of the partnership becomes evident when Garner veers south, then west of Lufkin to South Boggy Slough, where Don Dietz lives. Dietz is a biologist for Temple-Inland Corporation, the timber products giant that controls more than 1.2 million acres of East Texas woodlands, including South Boggy Slough.

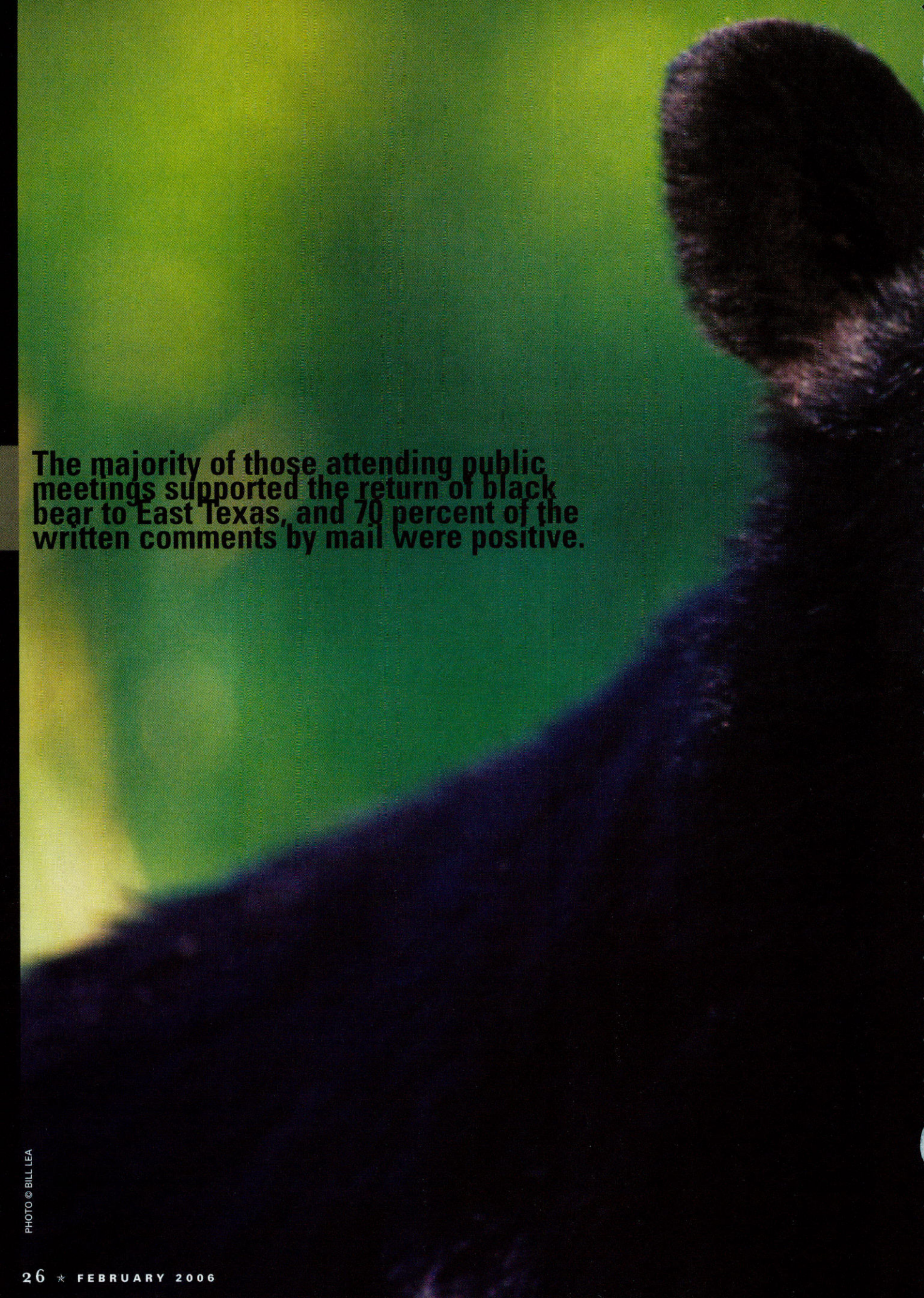
Healthy black bear habitat translates into healthy forests, as far as Temple-Inland is concerned, Dietz explains, as we drive past clear-cut pine plantations, conservation forests of hardwoods that will never be touched and SMZs, the streamside management zones that provide critical riparian habitat for wildlife on the move, including black bear.

"We would not be for the bear if we thought it would negatively impact how we manage our timber," Dietz states frankly. "Temple-Inland wants to make money off timber. As it is, biodiversity is in our best interest. We have seven bald eagle nests on T-I property in Texas."

Dietz points out how selectively clear-cut land encourages growth of sedges, grasses and berries for bear to feed on in early spring. Pine plantations provide trees for denning and loafing. Mixed forests provide berries through summer. Hardwood bottoms in the SMZs provide downed woody debris full of grubs and other insects for bears to eat and drop the nuts to satisfy black bears' dietary needs in the fall. If TPWD's relocation program gets the green light, Temple-Inland has committed to hosting release sites in several locations, according to Dietz. Bear in the woods are good for the land and good for business. "They're coming," Dietz says. "I had dinner with a guy two weeks ago in San Augustine



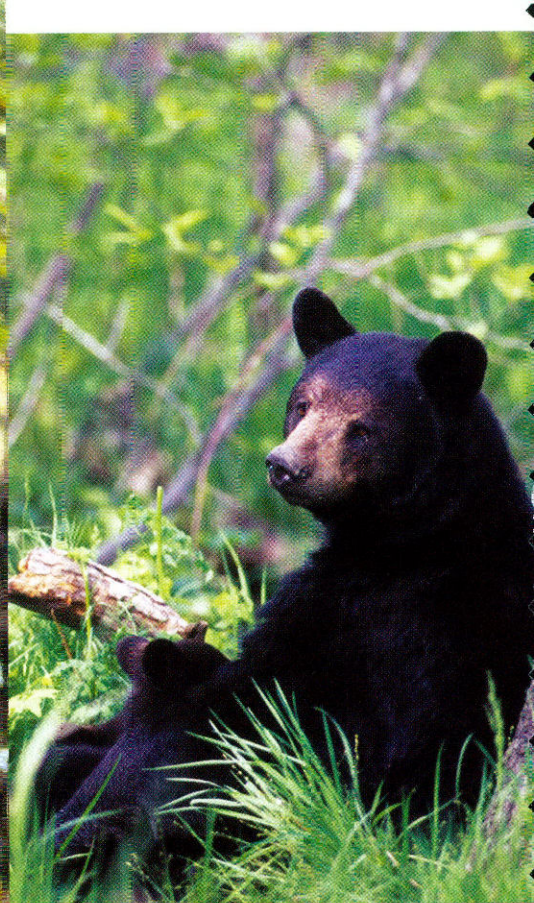
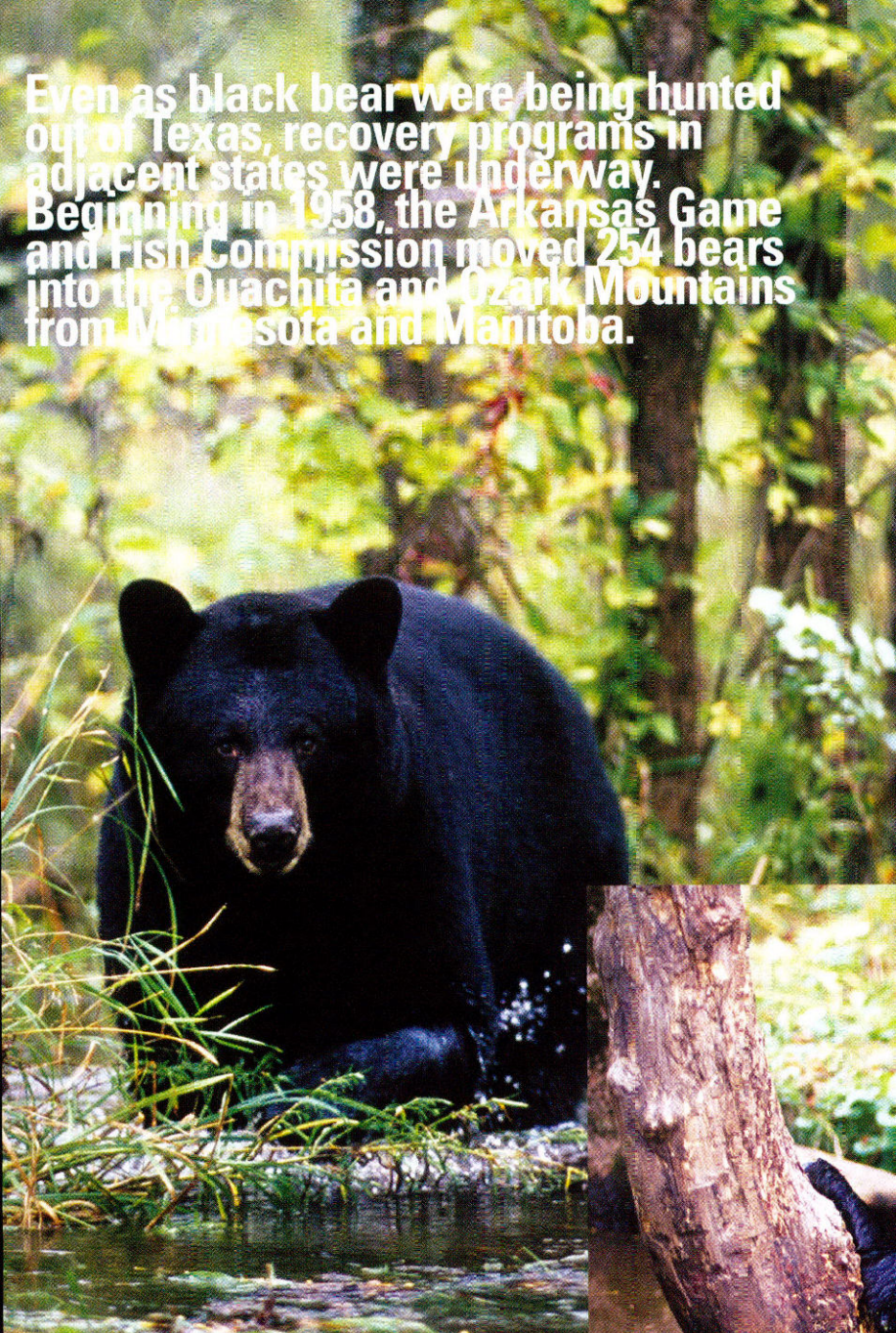
The migration of black bears into a former habitat is viewed as a positive indicator for the ecosystem by black bear advocates, who see long-term benefits in increased eco-tourism.



The majority of those attending public meetings supported the return of black bear to East Texas, and 70 percent of the written comments by mail were positive.



Even as black bear were being hunted out of Texas, recovery programs in adjacent states were underway. Beginning in 1958, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission moved 254 bears into the Ouachita and Ozark Mountains from Minnesota and Manitoba.



County who's seen a bear twice in the past few weeks."

"That's 20,000 acres of the best black bear habitat in East Texas," Garner says as he drives away. "That habitat offers bears everything they need. The Neches River corridor is the keystone. When I drive through the country, I think bear will do better on managed lands because they're managed for diversity."

Somewhere around the Angelina National Forest, he turns from the main highway and promptly gets lost on a net-

THIS PAGE PHOTOS © BILL LEA

work of unmarked back roads surrounded by forests and woodlands. “There’s groceries and cover in there,” Garner says, squinting into an impenetrable thicket. “It’s the roads that present the problem,” he says, changing direction again, “because roads bring people.”

Many roads also lead to hunting club cabins tucked in the backwoods, which is one asset Garner hopes to tap into. Hunters get back in the deepest woods, so they’re likelier to ID bears. Their cabins are also destined to be bear magnets if the clubs don’t take measures to properly store and dispose of garbage. Communicating with hunting clubs now will save a lot of hassles in the future, Garner believes.

The nuisance factor looms large. Black bear may be shy and prone to run, but they adapt quickly to humans. Garbage cans, raiding of deer feeders, bee hives and stock pens are all potential problems. As omnivores, black bear have been known to occasionally dine on small animals, be they wildlife, livestock or house pets. If measures aren’t taken to keep garbage lids secure, pet food out of reach, wildlife feeders monitored and so forth, bad stuff can happen.

What seems relegated to the past is human hostility towards bears. Some folks are still inclined to regard them as pests and vermin that should be eradicated, such as realtor Fuzzy Harmon, who told the *Lone Star Eagle* weekly of Marshall, “It makes about as much sense to spend money on bears as it does to stock Lake O’The Pines with piranha.” (For the record, piranhas are not native to East Texas; black bear are.) But Harmon’s sentiment is clearly in the minority.

“We’re never going to change those folks,” Garner admits. “There are people against this who are antigovernment and still mad about the Big Thicket,” portions of which were declared a national wildlife refuge, he acknowledges. “But I didn’t walk away from any town meeting discouraged.”

Garner’s patience with such concerns and fears, warranted or not, reflects one blueprint he’s followed while articulating Texas policy, the Black Bear Conservation Committee plan initiated in 1990 to promote the recovery of the Louisiana black

bear. The Baton Rouge-based BBCC, whose members include Garner, Dietz, TPWD’s Ricky Maxey and several other East Texans, oversees the successful bear recovery programs in Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas and Oklahoma, while raising public awareness and putting in place a plan for dealing with bears that cause damage, in concert with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Louisiana Fish & Game Commission.

In Jasper, at the TPWD offices, Garner hands me off to district wildlife biologist Gary Calkins. Calkins knows the southern hot zone of potential bear habitat along the Sabine and Neches river corridors well enough to fret about the area’s future.

“Bottomland hardwood forest is the most diverse ecosystem in East Texas,” he says. “It’s home to 500 vertebrates and 1,150 plant species, but 75 percent of these forests have been lost since settlement.” More loss, he fears, is just around the corner. While Temple-Inland remains a dominant presence, Calkins has observed other large timber companies such as International Paper and Louisiana Pacific selling off tracts to forest investment companies (among them, Harvard University) more interested in short-term profit than long-term conservation plans. “Some are pretty good stewards,” Calkins allows. “But others have no interest in biodiversity. They want to cut and get out. The northern part of East Texas has already gone through these growing pains. Here in the southern end, we had it made for awhile.” But with the short-term profit mentality moving in, he says, “all of it

is at risk.”

Perception issues are less worrisome. He’s heard the comment, “My kids are going to be at the bus stop and the bears are going to eat them,” a dozen times.

“I try to explain that I’m more concerned about the neighbor’s dog running loose than that’s going to hurt their kids.”

While cruising through a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers campground on the western shores of Lake B.A. Steinhagen between Jasper and Woodville, Garner surveys trashcans and camp sites that may have to be retrofitted. He breaks into a “Hey, Yogi” voice, assuming the cartoon character Boo Boo Bear spying a “pic-a-nic basket.” Garner is trying to emphasize the need for humans to dissuade bear.

I’m sold.

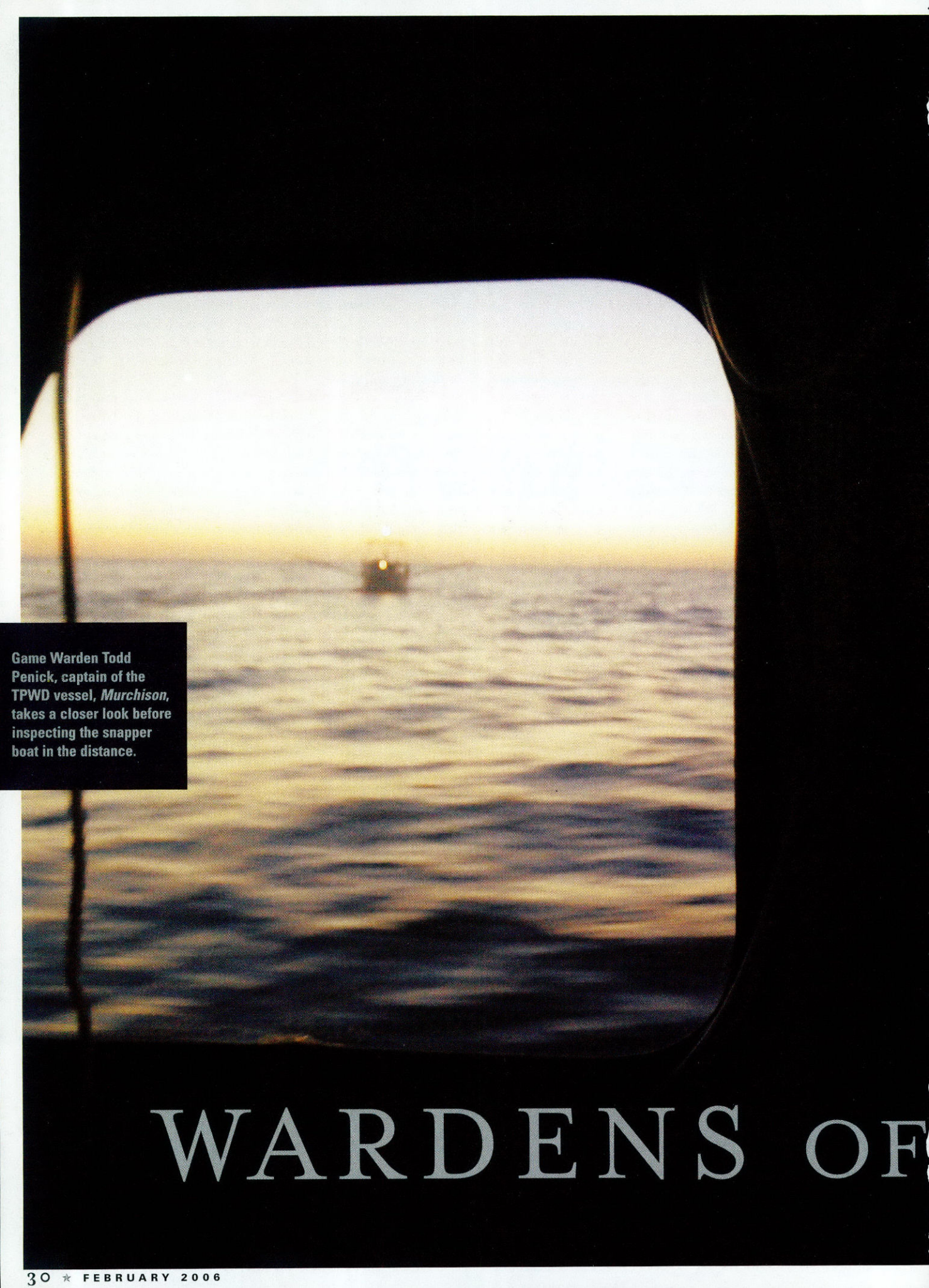
Having had close-up encounters with black bear in Minnesota, in the Mexican state of Coahuila and at many zoos, I have been persuaded by Garner’s tour that East Texas is primo bear habitat, as long as the people of East Texas let it be. But I am also impatient enough to hope public support will materialize for a restocking program that will bring them back sooner rather than later. ★

Black bears are adapting to life in a world dominated by humans.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: black bear raids a bird feeder; black bears are common enough in some areas of the country to require highway signage; well-managed forests can create excellent black bear habitat; campgrounds need to always be secure against the possibility of a visit by a curious bear.

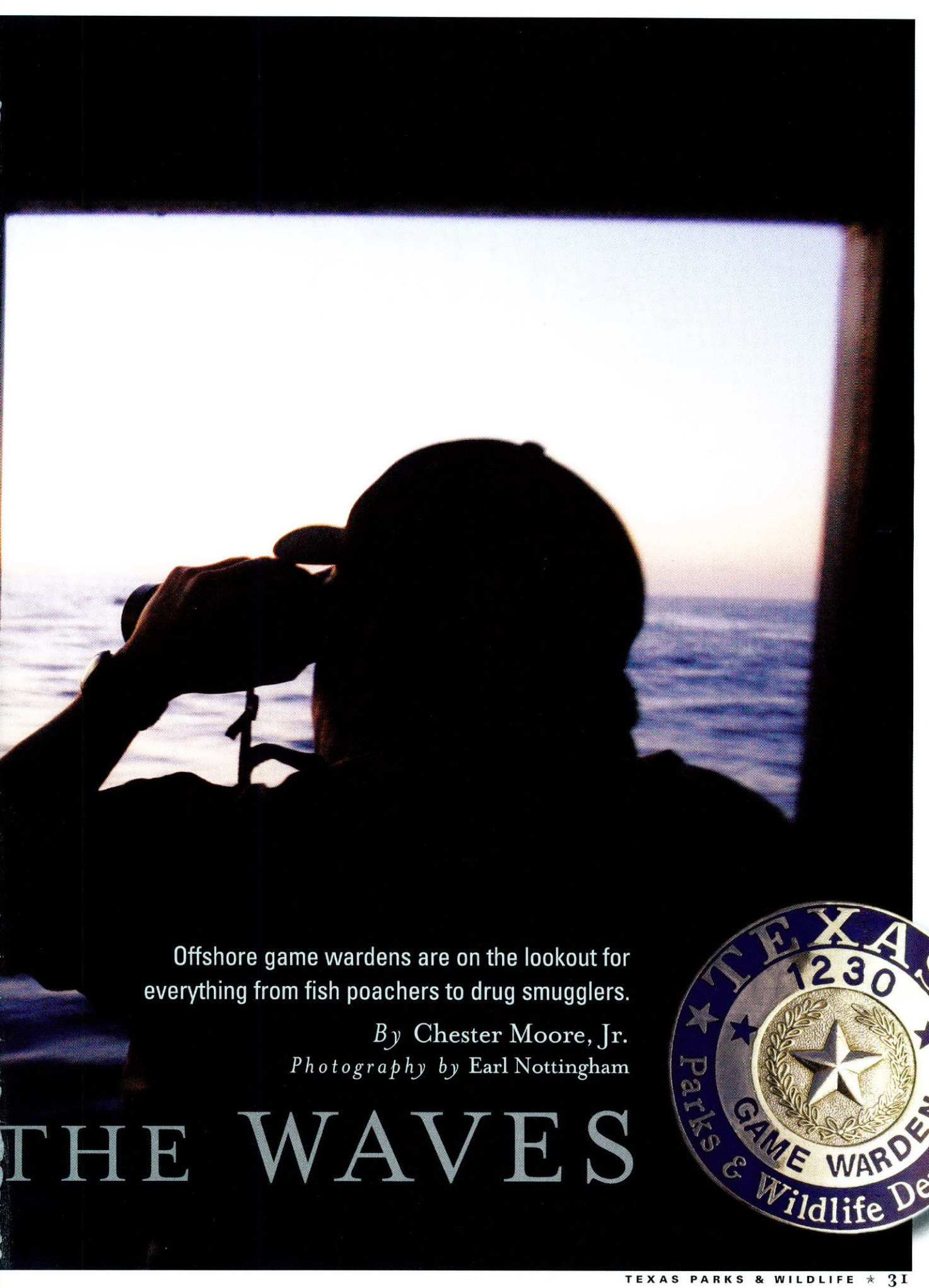


THIS PAGE: PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE BLACK BEAR CONSERVATION COMMITTEE



Game Warden Todd Penick, captain of the TPWD vessel, *Murchison*, takes a closer look before inspecting the snapper boat in the distance.

WARDENS OF



Offshore game wardens are on the lookout for everything from fish poachers to drug smugglers.

By Chester Moore, Jr.
Photography by Earl Nottingham

THE WAVES



SHARKS, DANGEROUS WAVES, THUNDERSTORMS, DRUG RUNNERS AND POACHERS.

That might seem like the formula for a blockbuster action-adventure movie, but for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department game wardens who patrol the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico, it is all just part of the job.

The image most of the public has of coastal wardens may be of dockside ice chest inspections, license checks on fishing piers and gill net patrols in the bays.

That is, after all, what most anglers see.

As taxing as those duties may be, however, many of these same wardens spend time enforcing laws in the vast Gulf waters off the Texas coast.

And that is an area where anything can happen.

"Much of the general public is not aware of the extent of work that our wardens do patrolling Gulf waters. Texas has a huge coastline, and the work these wardens do is essential in protecting the magnificent resources Gulf waters hold," says Alfonso Campos, chief of TPWD marine enforcement.

Consider that the Texas coast is 624 miles long with thousands of oil rigs, wrecks and reefs that attract anglers and divers. There are also hundreds of Texas shrimpers and commercial fishermen along with out-of-state and foreign vessels to consider.

The upper coast has around 65 wardens while the lower coast has just over 50. They have to cover the entire coast, both inland and offshore, and about 60 of them rotate duty from bays, marshes and intracoastal areas to Gulf waters.

"That's a lot of responsibility and makes their job quite challenging, but they do an outstanding job," says Lance Robinson, TPWD coastal fisheries regional director for the upper coast.

STATE WARDENS, FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY

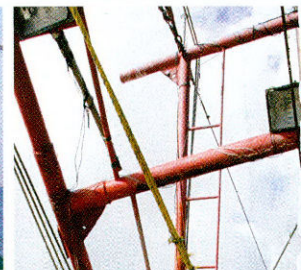
Texas claims nine nautical miles of Gulf waters as state territory, so our wardens naturally have jurisdiction over that. However, beginning in 2001, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) commissioned them to enforce federal laws as well.

That opens their jurisdiction out to 200 miles off the Texas Gulf Coast.

"That's a lot of water to cover, but our wardens are certainly up for the challenge. We enforce the fisheries regulations as well as those statutes of the water safety act. However, we do not enforce Coast Guard law," says Major Larry Young, chief warden out of the Corpus Christi office.

"NMFS has very few wardens in Texas, so our agreement states that they provide us with funding for equipment and enforcement and we act as their eyes, ears and, to a great extent, the Texas arm of the law out in federal waters," Young says.

Much of the enforcement aims at enforcing shrimping laws, which change frequently and are very gear-specific.



Clockwise from top: game wardens gauging the size of oysters; Warden Fred Ruiz, with JimBob Vandyke and Ray Canales in the second boat, on patrol; JimBob Vandyke checking the mesh size on a bay shrimper's trawl; wardens inspect a trawler; patrolling wardens prepare to board a fishing vessel.





"There have been quite a few changes over the years in relation to gear required for shrimping vessels, and now much of our emphasis is on enforcing Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) and Bycatch Reduction Devices (BRDs). Most shrimpers are compliant, but there are those who try to get by without using them," Young says.

Some shrimpers try to use a language barrier to confuse wardens boarding their vessels.

"That does not work with us. Many of our wardens are bilingual," Young says.

In fact, more and more of the wardens know Spanish and some speak Vietnamese as well, allowing wardens to get around any tricks that unscrupulous shrimpers might try to lay on them.

While some of the rules such as the requirement of TEDs and BRDs may seem like technicalities, Young says the wardens know the conservation relevance of the rules they enforce.

"We know, for example, the Kemp's ridley sea turtle is a federally endangered species and that the use of TEDs has helped their numbers," Young says. "And they know the BRDs are something that could help with numerous fisheries, so as they do their work, they keep this in mind. In fact, it is what drives many of them to work. These wardens are outdoors lovers and conservationists as well as law enforcement officers."

In recent years, red snapper violations have been the top citation given to recreational anglers in Gulf waters. Red snapper are a prohibited species in federal waters (past nine nautical miles)

from Oct. 31 until April 21 annually. The goal is to take pressure off snapper stocks; however, some anglers have tried to skirt the rules by fishing rigs just outside state waters, and then sneaking back and perhaps visiting a rig within state jurisdiction before heading home with their illegal catch during the closed season.

"We had some trouble with that at first, but most anglers are ethical and want to be legal. The others we certainly don't mind giving a ticket," Young says.

CORRUPTION ON THE SEAS

One of the more pressing problems facing Texas wardens, in particular those working in South Texas, is illegal long lining.

"There are quite a few boats from Mexico that come into our state waters and run long lines. They are targeting pretty much anything but end up catching mainly sharks, but other species as well, and that is something we really have to keep our eyes on," Young says.

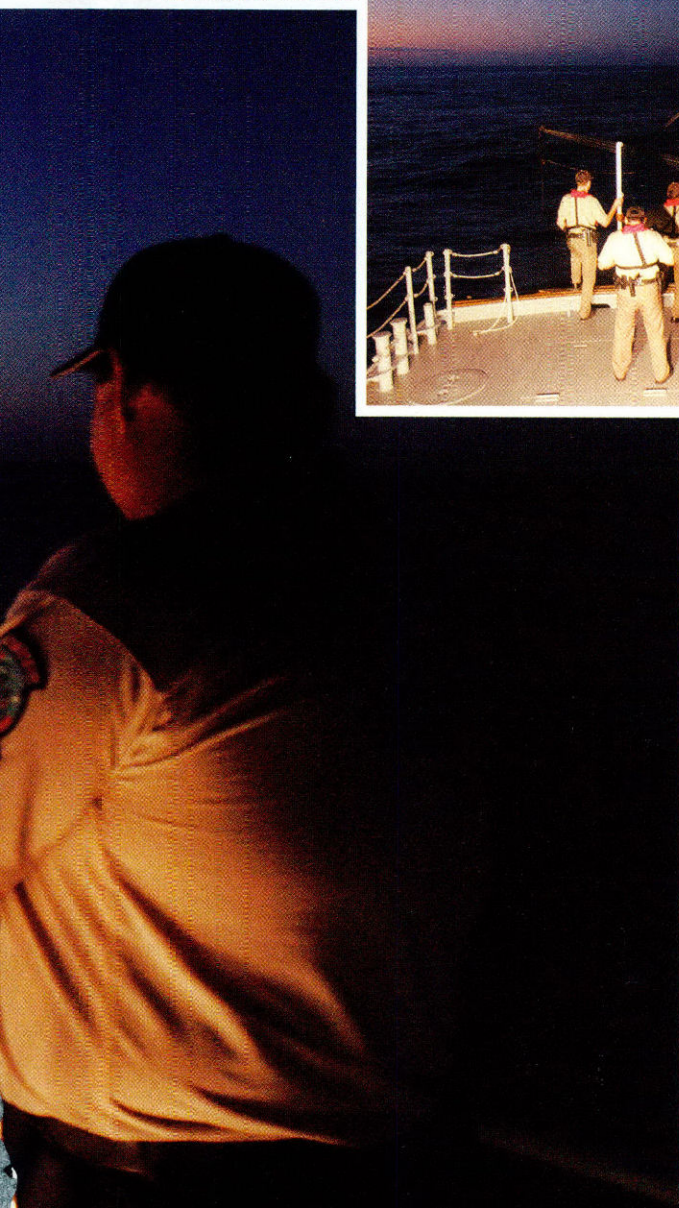
Long lining involves putting out what are essentially long trot-lines in the ocean that can go for miles and indiscriminately catch everything from commercial species like king mackerel to sea turtles and valuable sport fish like blue marlin.

"I think any time you have a border situation like that with another country, you are going to have some problems with enforcement, particularly if their laws are quite a bit different than ours," Young says.





ABOVE: Game Warden Ray Canales, left, and Todd Penick, captain of the 65-foot TPWD vessel *Murchison*, in the boat's wheel house; LEFT: preparing to board and inspect a snapper boat; FAR LEFT: Todd Penick watches as the wardens proceed with their inspection once they're aboard.



Another problem coastwide, but particularly widespread in South Texas, is drug trafficking. This mainly happens along the Intracoastal Waterway, but also makes its way offshore as smugglers pose as recreational anglers, bringing in drugs from Mexico and South America.

"It can make the warden's job a bit hairy," Young says.

Wardens out of the Galveston office faced such a "hairy" situation just before the July 15 opening of the 2005 offshore shrimping season.

"Two of our wardens, Ray Canales and Antoine Jackson, encountered three vessels shrimping in the High Island area after hours just off the coastline. Most of the time when we encounter out-of-season shrimpers, they pull their nets and let us board and realize the party is over. These suspects, however, all fled and in different directions," says Capt. Eddie Tanuz of the Galveston office.

"The wardens decided to go after the largest of the vessels and coordinate the pursuit with the Coast Guard. The shrimper's behavior raised suspicion that they were possibly trafficking drugs or involved in a threat to homeland security," Tanuz says.

The chase lasted for hours in the dark and dangerous Gulf, and



by the time they were able to stop the vessel, they were 23 miles offshore and five miles across the Louisiana boundary. Not knowing if those on the shrimping vessel were well-armed drug traffickers or terrorists, the two Texas wardens waited for a Coast Guard vessel from Port Arthur to arrive to assist in boarding it.

"It turns out they were simply illegally shrimping and turned a misdemeanor into a felony," Tanuz says. "In the end, they harmed themselves and put our wardens as well as the Coast Guard in danger. Our wardens in today's environment have to be diligent and assume that anyone who acts that way could have more sinister motives than escaping a fine."

These wardens get help in their dangerous jobs from fast-moving, 24- and 26-foot cutters that allow such chases on the high seas, and they have access to the latest in technology.

Recently, in conjunction with homeland security, wardens have received training with geographic information systems (GIS), for search and rescue after disaster and terrorism incidents.

TPWD uses GIS in conjunction with GPS (global positioning systems) for geographic analysis of various layers of information on a map. A layer is a single category of information. Although maps have many types of information, separation of just the navigable canals from that map, for example, would result in a single layer — ditto for bays, marshes and other types of habitat.

This helps wardens decipher the quickest and most effective routes for response to a disaster and would allow them a strategic advantage in the case of a terrorist attack. Also, it quickly locates assets and liabilities in the case of a disaster. Assets might be hos-

FISH IDENTITY CRISIS

Wardens who patrol offshore have to be able to identify many more fish species than their inshore counterparts. And several of the offshore species resemble each other.

For example, there are similarities between a juvenile Goliath grouper (formerly called a *jewfish*) and a Warsaw grouper, a species not commonly caught on the Texas coast.

Anglers are allowed to keep Warsaws, but Goliaths are catch-and-release only.

"That part of enforcement can get tricky, but our wardens are trained to spot the differences in species," says Alfonso Campos, chief of marine enforcement.

A juvenile king mackerel looks a lot like a large Spanish mackerel. And in

federal waters, rules affecting many similar looking reef fish, in particular those in the jack and snapper family, can get confusing to anglers.

Anglers need to be extremely careful when fishing offshore. A good rule is to never keep anything unless you know exactly what it is and what the size and bag limits are for it.

And always know where you are, particularly whether you're in state or federal waters. Anglers cannot retain red drum (redfish) in federal waters. They are fair game in state waters, but not out past nine nautical miles.

Some anglers are simply not aware of this, particularly those not experienced with offshore fishing, but wardens certainly are.

"Ignorance is certainly not an excuse," Campos says.

LEFT: shrimp, and bycatch from shrimp trawling, spread out on the trawler's deck; THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: the hidden compartment in a snapper boat, where illegal catches are stored; game wardens examine an illegal catch hidden in the boat's secret compartment; on patrol in the Gulf; Game Wardens Rip Fluitt, left, and Ray Canales display the larger illegal red snapper in this haul; wardens unloading illegally caught red snapper from the boat.



pitals, parks, schools and freeways within a few miles of the incident. Liabilities might be a difficult-to-navigate waterway or a bridge that would block the passage of a large rescue vessel.

All wardens have had to receive some training in homeland security measures since 9/11, and this new technology should aid in search-and-seizure operations offshore and help if, say, terrorists attacked an offshore rig.

"Our Texas game wardens are critical to the emergency management response in this state," says Col. Pete Flores, TPWD law enforcement director, in a press release debuting the technology.

Hardware involved with the program includes portable PCs equipped with GIS technology that enables communication with a fully equipped GIS lab at TPWD headquarters.

"This technology and training will serve us in our daily duties and will enhance our ability to serve Texans in the manner they expect and deserve."

Coastal wardens have also benefited from military technology donated by the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA).

Last year, CCA officials donated \$16,100 of state-of-the-art image-stabilizing binoculars and military lenses critical for enforcement-related surveillance in both bay and near-shore waters.

Now wardens working offshore can better watch the massive area of the coast they must patrol.

UNSEEN HEROICS

To a certain extent, the Gulf of Mexico is still a no-man's land, a frontier of sorts where civilization is scarce and there are those who seek to plunder the treasures hidden below.

There are no peg-legged pirates with parrots on their shoulder robbing gold from passing ships. But as we have discussed, there are those who steal from law-abiding sportsmen, and it is the offshore wardens who keep them at bay and often go to great lengths, albeit mostly unseen, to keep our waters and their resources safe.

Back when I was in high school, my father and I were fishing offshore out of High Island, cruising the short rigs looking for big speckled trout.

Coming in we saw a boat, which appeared stranded, so we cruised toward it to see if we could offer any help.

It was not a stranded boat, but a couple of TPWD wardens pulling up an illegal gill net. In the net were at least a dozen bull redfish along with some spinner sharks ensnared in the deadly device.

It would have been easy for the wardens to simply pull up the net and not worry about the fish in it. After all, there were some sizeable sharks entangled. Instead, they worked hard to get them out of the net and as we pulled up, they even worked to revive one of them.

Dad and I offered our help but they declined, saying they had the situation under control. I remember telling them it was nice to see them working so hard to save some fish and take that net out of the water.

"It's all in a day's work," the warden said.

All in a day's work, indeed. ☆

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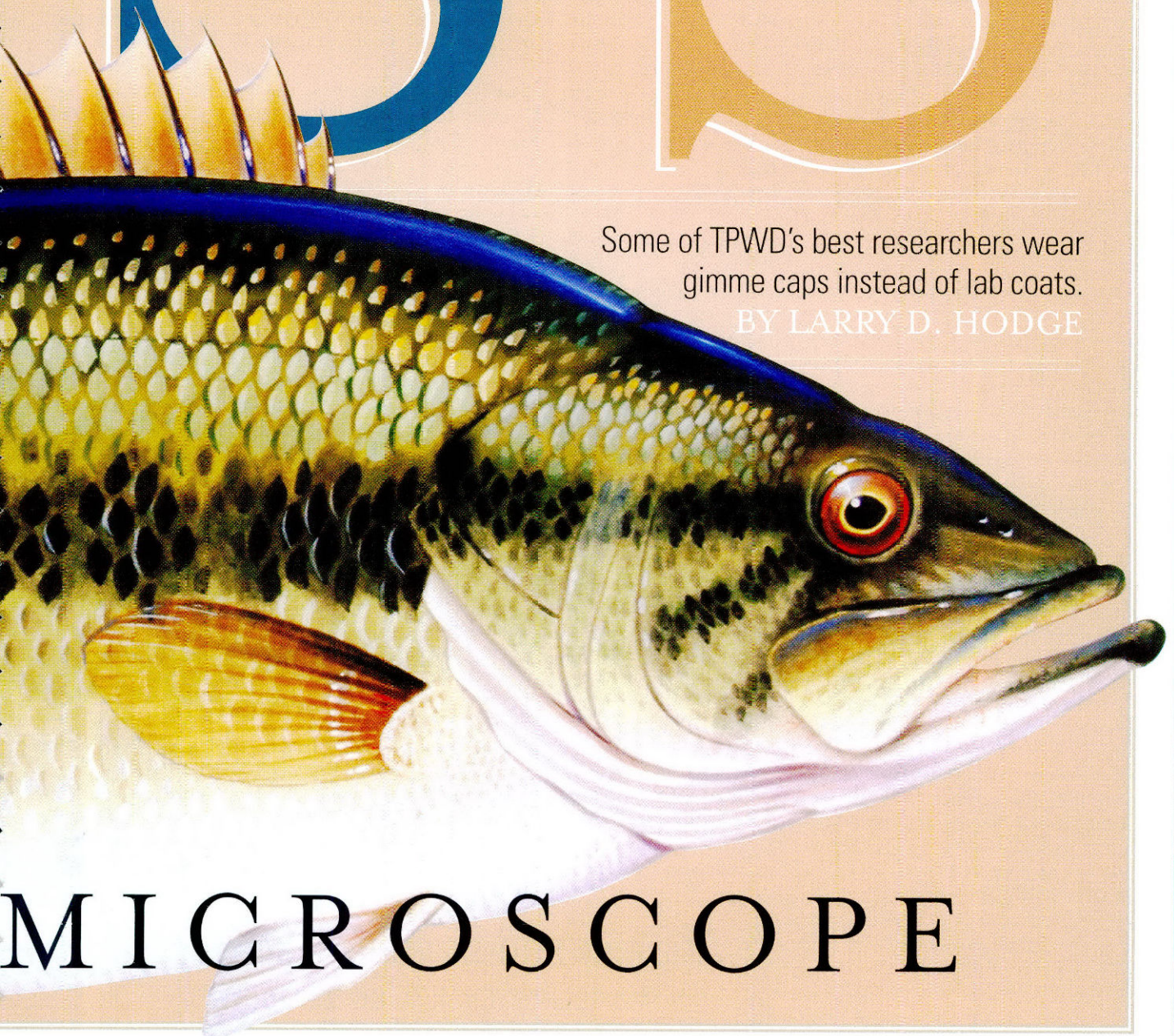
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UNDER THE

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S



Some of TPWD's best researchers wear
gimme caps instead of lab coats.

BY LARRY D. HODGE

M I C R O S C O P E



Because of their recreational and economic importance,

largemouth bass are probably the most-studied fish in Texas. While Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologists and researchers lead research efforts, some of the most valuable studies would not have been possible without the help of anglers.

By far the most visible and long-lived research program involving anglers is the Budweiser ShareLunker program, which has been ongoing since 1986. In an effort to improve the quality of fishing in Texas — and perhaps produce the next world-record largemouth bass — TPWD uses 13-pound-plus females for spawning and stocks the offspring into public waters.

Any angler can tell you 13-pound bass aren't found in every bush in a lake. In fact, during the past 19 years, less than 400 fish have been entered into the program — and every one of those fish was donated or loaned to TPWD by the angler who caught it. (All were females except for one male, a 6-pounder that was the largest male largemouth ShareLunker Program Director David Campbell had ever seen.)

Besides being scarce, big fish tend to live in deep water, where the main method biologists normally use for collecting fish for research, electrofishing, does not work. "Electrofishing using shocking boats is good for collecting small fish, but it only works in water less than about 8 feet deep," says Dave Terre, TPWD's Inland Fisheries regional director in Tyler. That's where anglers come in. "Using fish collected by anglers saves time and money, gives much better coverage of a lake and provides us with the larger fish that are hard to collect by shocking. Without anglers, we would never be able to collect enough large fish to conduct some of the studies we've done," Terre points out.

Campbell calls the anglers who donate fish to the ShareLunker program "the best conservationists in Texas" and says he is humbled by their attitude. "One of the biggest things I've learned from this program is that people who fish want to help TPWD," he says. "Anglers have made this program. They want to donate and help sportfishing. I've never met one of those

people who was mad at TPWD — I may meet someone at midnight at a boat ramp to pick up a fish, and he has his friends there with him, and they are all smiling. Getting to deal with those folks makes my job the best job in TPWD."

Other biologists might feel their job is best. One is Todd Driscoll, a fisheries biologist whose territory includes Sam Rayburn Reservoir, the largest reservoir totally within the state and a prime destination for both recreational and tournament anglers, hosting about 300 tournaments a year. "I got into this field because of my love of fishing, particularly bass fishing," Driscoll says. "I started participating in tournaments several years ago. I fish three tournament trails and belong to two different bass clubs. Being a serious angler helps me do my job better, because I see the angler's point of view. I think angler opinions should drive fisheries management activities, as long as they make good biological sense. Anglers are our constituents, and we should manage for the kinds of activities they desire."

Fittingly, Driscoll turned to anglers for help on two groundbreaking studies conducted on Sam Rayburn. "The first study used results from bass tournaments to supplement our existing database on largemouth bass populations in Sam Rayburn and Toledo Bend reservoirs," Driscoll says. "The information we gather using electrofishing and creel surveys is biased, because neither provides us with much information on large bass abundance." Driscoll regularly harvests data posted by bass clubs and tournaments. "That infor-

mation is incorporated into the management plans we write," he says. "This allows us to make more informed, better management decisions that ultimately provide anglers with better fishing."

A case in point was an exploitation study Driscoll and colleague Jay Smith conducted on Sam Rayburn in 2004. "Exploitation means removal of fish by anglers," Driscoll explains. "We asked anglers what they thought of our current 14-inch length limit on bass. Half wanted a more restrictive limit. In order to determine how that regulation would work and how much benefit it would provide, we had to know what percent of the overall fish population in the lake is removed by anglers each year."

With the help of biologists from across the state, about 6,000 largemouth bass were electrofished and tagged. Over the next year, anglers were asked to report each tagged fish they caught. "We found that only 6 percent of the bass were taken home to be eaten, and only about 5 percent were caught by tournament anglers and taken to a weigh-in," Driscoll says. "While the latter group of fish was released, we estimate about 30 percent of them later died. Still, this represents only 1.5 percent of the total population. We concluded that a more restrictive regulation — a longer length limit — would increase the abundance of 20-inch fish only 3 to 4 percent. Without the cooperation of anglers, we would not have been able to get this information — and this had never been documented before. We interviewed some anglers as many as 30 times during the year. It took a lot of patience on their part to be interviewed so many times, but most of them were all for the study and were excited when they caught a tagged fish."

Anglers can take comfort from one of the main findings of the study, that angler harvest is not limiting the number of big bass on Sam Rayburn. "This study told us

Anglers and biologists are both very passionate about what they do, and both love and care for the resource.



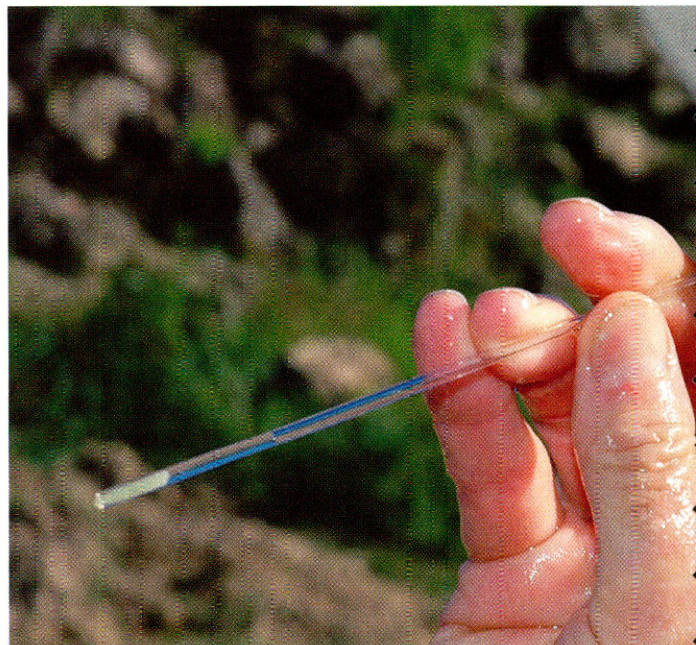
Bob Weinecke, a technician at the TPWD Heart of the Hills Fisheries Science Center near Ingram, handles a lunker bass accepted into the Budweiser ShareLunker program.



we can't use length limits to increase the quality of fish in Sam Rayburn," Driscoll says. "Habitat and genetics are more important. In a large reservoir like this, we're limited in what we can do to affect habitat, which makes more important our stocking of Florida largemouth bass to improve the genetics of the fish in the lake. Anglers helped us learn what we needed to know to make fishing better for them."

While individual anglers and TPWD biologists sometimes disagree on the best way to manage a fishery, they tend to pull together when there is a threat to fishing. When largemouth bass virus (LMBV) struck several Texas lakes in 2000, anglers

TOP: ShareLunker Program Director David Campbell travels far and wide with a specially designed tank to collect the lunkers. ABOVE LEFT: volunteers help with brooder collection at Lake Livingston. RIGHT: examining bass eggs in a glass pipette; INSET RIGHT: removing eggs from a bass with a pipette.



played a key role in providing fish for a study to determine how widespread the disease was. “We collected 2,876 adult largemouth bass from 49 reservoirs,” says Terre. “Sampling efforts included 71 electrofishing and 56 angler-assisted collections. Angler collection was far more efficient because tournaments gave us the fish, and all we had to do was show up at the boat ramp and collect them. One thing we learned was that it did not matter whether the fish were collected by electrofishing or by angling. They were equally likely to have LMBV. This showed biologists across the nation that collection by anglers was a valid method, and this had never been done before.”

LMBV seems to have run its course in Texas — the last outbreak was on Lake Bastrop in 2002 — but Terre knows what he will do if it shows up again. “The first calls I will make will be to the anglers of Texas, because they saved us a lot of time and money, and we greatly appreciated that. But the greatest benefit of the study was that it got our biologists comfortable with working closely with anglers and that work established a lot of good relationships with anglers, and there’s nothing better than that.”



Recognizing what a precious resource Lake Fork is (a 1996 study showed anglers spend \$27.5 million annually on fishing trips to the lake), the Lake Fork Area Chamber of Commerce and the Lake Fork Sportsman’s Association cooperate with TPWD on an ongoing trophy bass survey. Anglers catching a fish weighing 7 pounds or more report their catches using forms made available at marinas around the lake. “One objective of the study is to create publicity for the lake and its great fishery,” says TPWD Inland Fisheries District Biologist Kevin Storey. “On a deeper level, electrofishing and creel surveys don’t provide much information on the catch of large fish, and it’s difficult for us to judge the effectiveness of the slot limit without this information.”

Storey deliberately kept the information collected to a minimum: the date and time the fish was caught, the angler’s home ZIP code and the length and weight of the fish (estimated length and weight are accepted if the angler chooses). “We do not ask where or how they were fishing,” Storey says. “We felt if we kept it simple, we would have better participation. The data show that the slot limit does seem to be working. Almost one-third of the fish that are mea-

Restrictive regulations have played a big part in maintaining the fishery on Lake Fork.

sured are actually above the top end of the slot. About 80 percent of the fish that are weighed are more than 10 pounds. We estimate that 12 percent of the fish that are caught are actually reported. If that is true, more than 15,000 fish weighing 7 pounds or more are caught each year.”

It’s that reputation for big bass that keeps the cash registers jingling at marinas, motels and restaurants all around Lake Fork. “The trophy bass survey proves that we don’t need to change the slot limit on Lake Fork and risk killing the goose that lays the golden egg,” Storey says, “we just need to let her keep laying eggs. When you have a lake that is so special — Fork is 25 years old and is still churning out these big fish — it demands and deserves special treatment. It doesn’t need to be exploited, because when it’s gone, it’s gone. Restrictive regulations have played a big part in maintaining the fishery on Lake Fork, and the other big factor is the popularity of catch-and-release on the lake. There are guides on that lake who tell clients they will not keep any fish on this trip, and if they don’t like it, find some-

body else to fish with. Those two things have done an amazing amount to prolong this boom.”

Someone who catches a monster bass usually would like to have a memento of the occasion. At one time skin mounts were the only way to preserve a fish, but that required killing the fish. Today, with length and girth measurements and a photo, anyone can have a fiberglass replica on the wall while the fish continues to swim around the lake.

Bass Life Associates, an organization dedicated to maintaining and improving the quality of bass fishing in the lakes of Northeast Texas and adjacent parts of Louisiana, found an unusual and highly effective way to encourage anglers to let big bass live. “We started out stocking fish in the lake, then thought, why don’t we have a program to keep them there,” says Dudley Beene of Shreveport, a former board chairman. The resulting Trophy Replica Program provides a free or subsidized fiberglass replica of big bass caught from Caddo Lake. With the help of the program, anglers pay only \$75 for a replica of a bass weighing between 8 and 9 pounds and \$50 for bass weighing between 9 and 10 pounds. Replicas of bass weighing 10

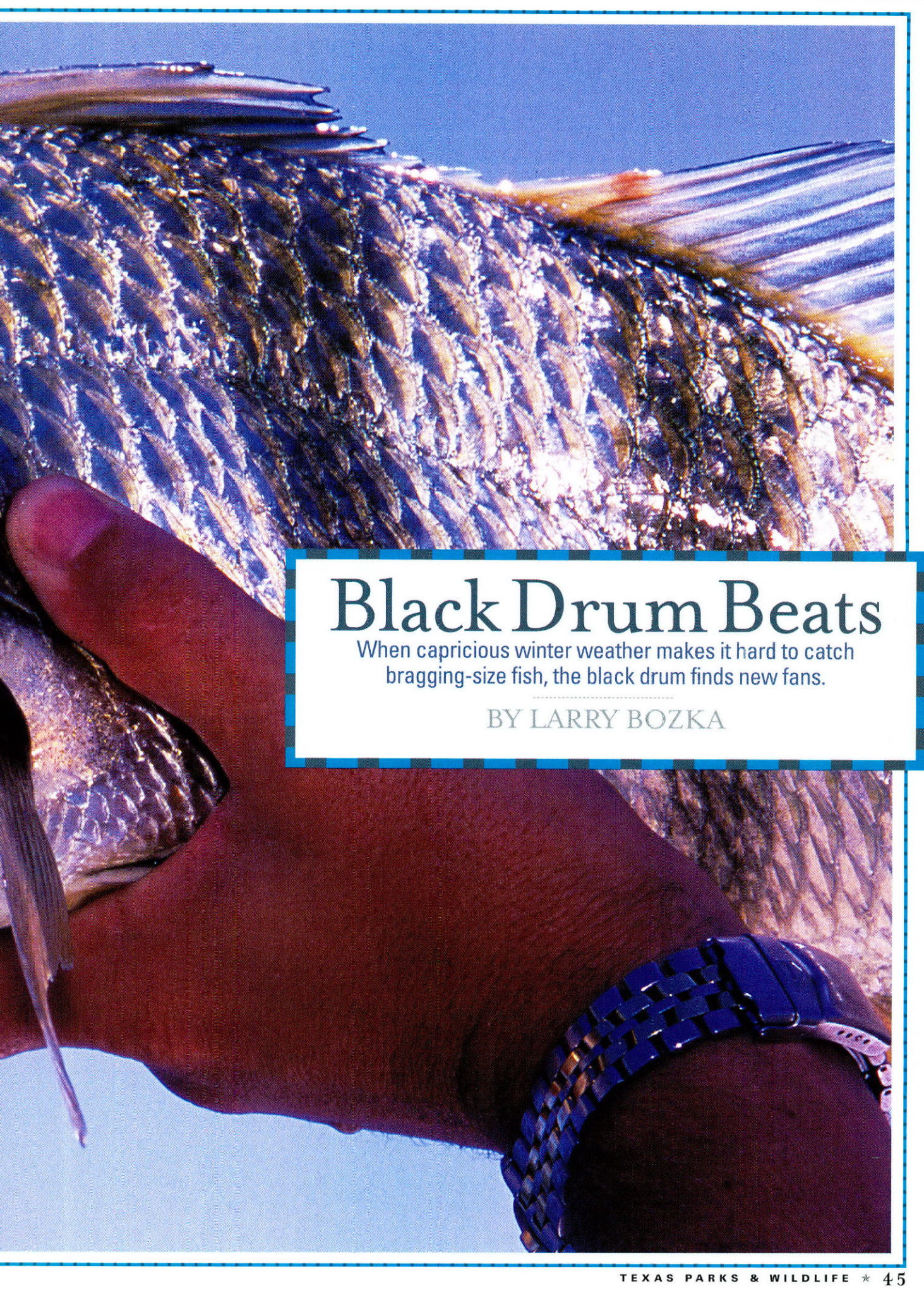
pounds or more are paid for by the organization. Since 1993, the Trophy Replica Program has encouraged anglers to return more than 700 trophy bass to Caddo Lake. Anglers need only take the fish to Caddo Grocery in Uncertain, Texas, or to the ranger station in Earl Williams Park near Oil City, Louisiana, for weighing. Once the fish’s weight was recorded, the angler could release it.

Texas is acknowledged to be a national leader in fisheries management. What is often overlooked is that this leadership status would not be possible without the cooperation and active assistance of the very people who benefit most from that management — the anglers themselves. “If I could say one thing to the anglers of Texas, it would be this,” says Dave Terre. “Thank you for your past help, and I look forward to a lot more. It’s so important that we work together on projects and move in the same direction.” ☆

For more information on the Budweiser ShareLunker program — and a new cash prize — visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us>.



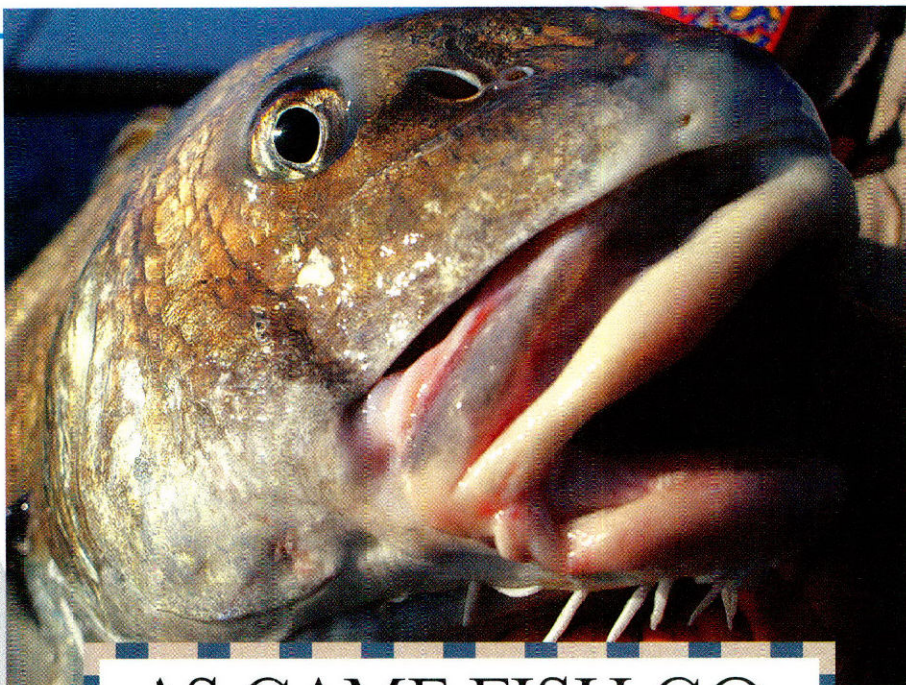
PHOTO © SCOTT SOMMERLATTE



Black Drum Beats

When capricious winter weather makes it hard to catch bragging-size fish, the black drum finds new fans.

BY LARRY BOZKA



AS GAME FISH GO, BLACK DRUM ARE ABOUT AS ROMANTIC AS DUMP TRUCKS.

A dump truck has rubber tires. So does a Maserati, but the comparison pretty much ends right there. It doesn't require a poll to determine which vehicle most people would rather ride around in.

That might change, of course, if the pretty red sports car hopelessly broke down a long way from home and the driver needed a ride. A rusty but reliable dump truck slowly chugging down the road suddenly starts looking very attractive.

That's the way it is with black drum. The charcoal-colored bruisers get next to no respect for much of the year. Come January through March, however, saltwater fishermen generally take what they can get. They know, if nothing else, they can get big black drum.

The key word here is "big."

Deep in the soul of every angler is the inherent desire to simply catch a big fish. Speckled trout and tarpon snobs may deny it, but a month or so of back-to-back cold fronts can significantly impact a fisherman's priorities. Just about the time that cabin fever starts feeling like a terminal disease, news of the drum run hits the hotline and weather-weary anglers with readjusted attitudes happily head for the coast.

There's nothing quite like a 50-pound drum to knock the cobwebs off a dusty boat rod.

Fish of that caliber are not uncommon. The state record for black drum stands at a whopping 81 pounds. By comparison, the record red drum ("redfish," to most anglers) weighs in at a comparatively meager 59.5 pounds.

It's undeniable that, pound-for-pound, the redfish is a much tougher opponent. Reds take the bait and run like punt return specialists. Black drum, even really big ones, shuffle along like overweight offensive linemen.

A black drum's surges are slow but deliberate. Bigger fish methodically shake their thick, humped heads with telltale zig-zags and capture line in short, uninspired spurts that belie their surprising size.

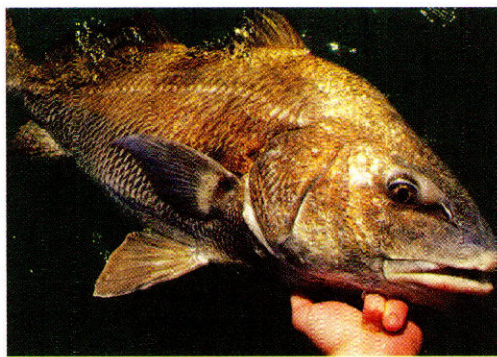
The annual migration kicks off in January. All along the Texas Coast, heavyweight drum course through deep-water channels in sizable schools. Fishermen are restricted to a "slot" limit that allows for the retention of five fish per day, none less than 14 inches long and none over 30 inches. Unlike red drum, there is no "trophy tag" on an angler's license that allows the fisherman to retain one oversized fish per year.

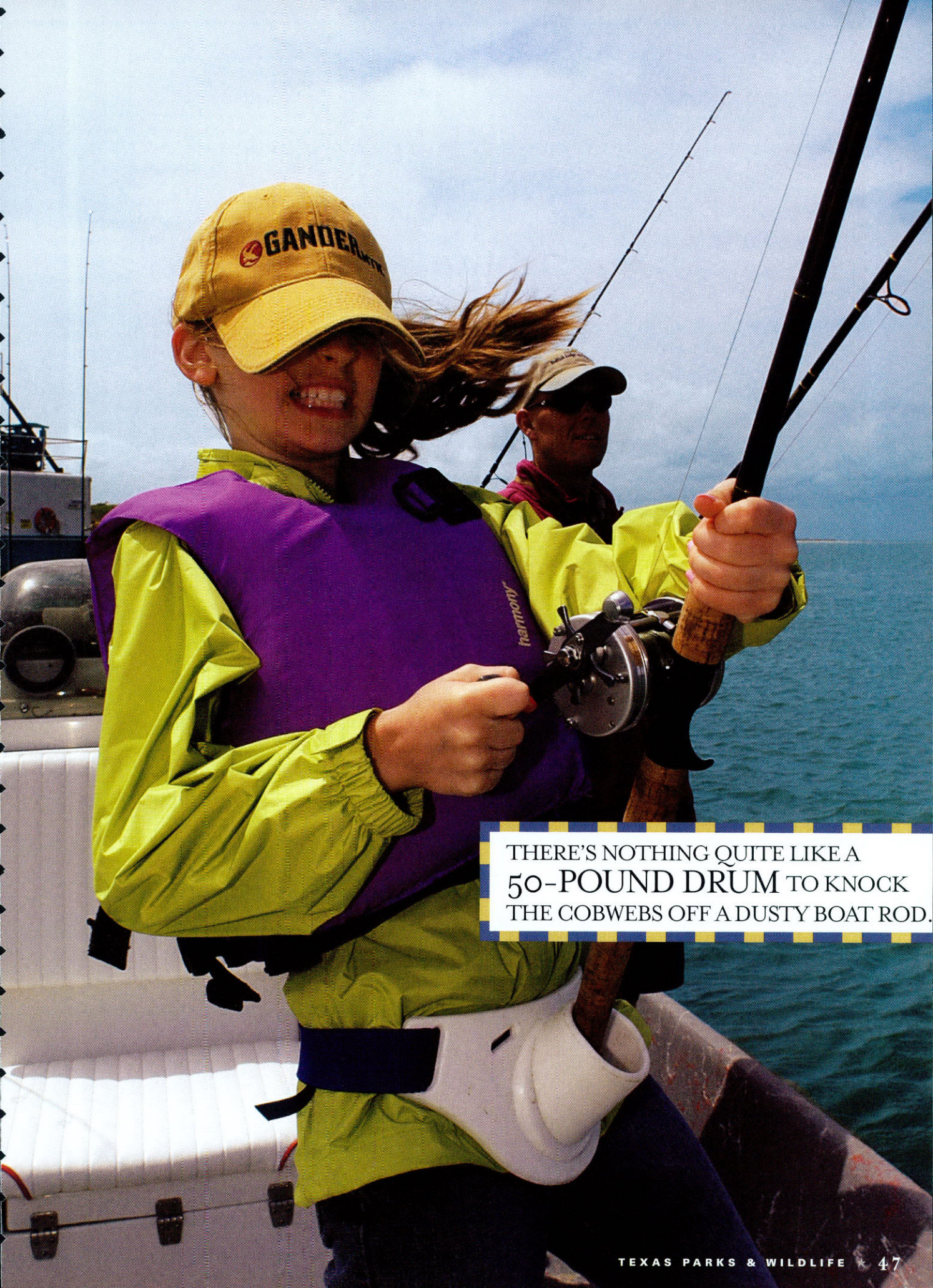
It's that restriction, however, enacted in 1988, that makes it possible for coastal fishermen to predictably catch — and release — so many goliath black drum year after year.

"That same year, in addition to the size and bag limits, a seine net ban was implemented," says biologist Karen Meador, Aransas Bay Ecosystem Leader at TPWD's Rockport Marine Lab. "Commercial black drum landings initially decreased, as fishermen made the transition to trotlines."

Prior to the change, pressure on black drum had progressively increased to problematic proportions. "Black drum became a substitute for red drum after the red drum purse seine fishery was shut down in the Gulf of Mexico," Meador recalls. "The fish were in big demand because of the 'blackened fish' craze occurring at the time."

Meador and other biologists working with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission witnessed firsthand what purse seines could do to redfish in the open Gulf. "With the purse seine fishery in full swing, numerous year classes of breeding-sized redfish were disappearing," Meador says. "We weren't





THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE A
50-POUND DRUM TO KNOCK
THE COBWEBS OFF A DUSTY BOAT ROD.

going to wait for that to occur with black drum.”

Florida and Louisiana remain the only other Gulf states that also have enacted black drum bag and size limits. Yet, the three states' collective efforts showed almost immediate results.

“The regulations went into effect Sept. 1, 1988, and the 1990 class of black drum was very strong,” Meador says. “This ‘cohort’ was estimated to be five times that of the last strong class, in 1979. Peak catches by recreational anglers also occurred in 1994 and 2001.”



According to Meador, black drum spawn between January and June, with peak activity from January through March. “Both males and females run in large schools,” she says, “which is one reason we are not willing to relax the regulations to allow fishermen to retain over-30-inch fish. If we allowed those fish to be kept, the spawning population could be adversely impacted.”

Surprisingly, 80 percent of Texas commercial black drum land-

ings occur in Upper and Lower Laguna Madre and Corpus Christi Bay. Meador points out that black drum populations are sustained by peaks of good recruitment, cautioning that such peaks generally occur only once every decade.

Furthermore, despite a general increase in the number of fish, the numbers of 30-inch and bigger black drum in Texas waters have not increased since the regulations change. Some bays have even witnessed declines in oversized fish. As such, regulations aren't likely to be liberalized anytime soon.

The Texas Coast is a long and varied crescent. It's nonetheless a bit surprising that black drum life cycles are so remarkably dissimilar from Brownsville to Beaumont. “Females in South Texas, from Corpus Christi Bay on south, reach maturity at the end of their second year, or 11 1/2 inches,” Meador explains. “Black drum from Aransas Bay and north generally are not sexually mature until 4 or 5 years old. And,” she adds, “Northern Gulf studies have determined that few males or females in that area reach maturity before they are 5 years old and around 23 inches long.”

The annual drum run has become a ritual of sorts for me and my friend Ray Keeling. A licensed fishing guide, Keeling operates Shutterbug's Guide Service out of Houston, writes the occasional fishing story and (as you might have guessed from the name of his business) is an avid photographer. That skill comes in very handy during the run, when Keeling's clients have to release most of the fish they catch from the Galveston Ship Channel, where oversized drum are the norm.

Small “puppy” drum can be taken from bay shores, rock groins and reefs, often on live shrimp or fiddler crabs, and make for fine eating (see sidebar). Unlike big drum, they lack the harmless but distasteful “spaghetti worms” that, along with coarse flesh, make big drum less-than-desirable table fare. The small fish are also elusive targets for shallow-water fly-casters.

But for Keeling and me, it's all about catching and releasing

R E C I P E

THE SURPRISINGLY DELECTABLE “PUPPY” DRUM

Despite the poor eating qualities of big black drum, many an unsuspecting diner has been fooled into thinking that properly cooked “puppy drum” are actually redfish. For 14- to 20-inch drum, the quality is in the cooking.

Basic, batter-fried fillets are always a good option. But to procure the ultimate puppy drum recipe, I turned to long-time cooking pro and avid outdoorsman Don Netek of Pasadena.

Netek runs a catering service and specializes in cooking wild game. The personable chef is also author of *The Sportsman's Cookbook and Then Some*, and he agreed to share a special, non-published recipe with *Texas Parks & Wildlife* readers that will transform fresh puppy drum fillets into mouth-watering culinary delights.

He calls it “Black Drum Fillets on a Blanket of Stuffing.”

Black Drum Fillets on a Blanket of Stuffing

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 to 6 drum fillets
- 1/2 cup chopped onions
- Salt, to taste
- White pepper, to taste
- 1 stick butter or margarine
- 1/4 cup dry white wine (optional)
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- Lemon juice
- 1/2 pound cleaned, boiled shrimp (chopped)

- 1/2 cup chopped celery
- 1/2 clove minced garlic
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 1/2 cup Stove Top Stuffing Mix (Home-style Herb), moistened
- 1/2 pound crabmeat
- Parmesan cheese, grated, to taste

DIRECTIONS:

Using one stick of butter or margarine, sauté onions, celery and minced garlic on medium to high heat in frying pan. Add crabmeat and shrimp. Continue to stir. Add moistened Stove-Top Stuffing Mix, beaten eggs and (optional) white wine. Stir the mixture for 2 minutes, take it off the burner and set it aside.

To prepare black drum fillets, first brush each fillet with lemon juice and then brush with melted butter or margarine. Do this to each side of each drum fillet. Use white pepper and salt to season both sides of each fillet.

Take a covered baking pan (glass or metal) with 1-inch sides and spray bottom of baking pan with nonstick cooking spray.

Cover the bottom of the baking pan with moistened stuffing mix. Take each drum fillet and lay it on the blanket of stuffing.

Cover the baking pan. Bake in preheated oven at 350 degrees for 45 to 55 minutes or until fish flakes easily with a fork.

Remove from oven and sprinkle with a dash of parmesan cheese. Serves 3 to 4 adults.

For more information on Don Netek's colorful and tasteful collection of wild game recipes, check the Web at <www.sportcookbook.com>, e-mail him at donnetek@sportcookbook.com or call (800) 494-0098.

heavyweight fish from deep water in the midst of the low-odds stretch of the bayfishing season. Last year, it was the first week of March before Ray and I finally made our annual pilgrimage. His father, Ray Sr., joined us.

Our first two jetty fishing attempts were scrubbed due to unanticipated northers (nothing unusual there), so when the anchor finally touched down some 40 feet below, we were all more than ready for action.

It's always great at this point in a fish story to say, "We didn't have to wait long."

Problem is that would be lying.

Truth is, it was more than three hours before the first channel-cruising drum smelled and crushed one of our freshly rigged blue crab halves.

Shelled, broken in half and hooked through the body and a leg chamber so that the barb is fully exposed, there is no more effective big drum offering than fresh blue crab.

Live crabs can be difficult to find. Usually, select bait houses and seafood shops carry sufficient inventories for fishermen who are willing to do some searching.

Keeling and I use large, red-plated Daiichi "circle" hooks tied on with loop knots to enhance the free-swinging presentation. The metallic crimson plating of a "bleeding hook" isn't an imperative. To Keeling and me, it's another "confidence" element, just like some fishermen prefer chartreuse lures over silver or painted weights over bare lead sinkers.

Hook selection is another matter altogether. The distinctive circle-hook design and exaggerated size are both, in our estimation, absolutely essential.

task, the danger zone is usually avoided.

Big black drum are strong, but again, they aren't fast. They also don't possess a lot of endurance. With time, the fish succumb to steady pressure. At boatside, they often roll over on their backs like puppy dogs wanting a belly scratch.

Keeling corralled the tired-out 40-pounder inside the metal rim of his wide-mouthed landing net and lifted it from the water just long enough for me to shoot a few photos.

Its eyes were the size of quarters, liquid amber with jet-black pupils. The ivory white of its sagging, egg-stuffed belly blended into large, deep-brown scales on white-and-silver skin. The dorsal fin was opaque with heavy spines, the tail broad and sturdy. Its pectoral fins were long and white; their tips tapered thin like the wings of a bird. On the cusp of its rounded chin drooped a cluster of short,



pinkish-white whiskers.

We caught eight fish that day, all in the span of six hours. We will no doubt get a sense of déjà vu in repeating the process again this year. January, February and March can offer the occasional day of spectacular fishing for speckled trout and redfish. All the same, even if conditions are prime, I'm not really sure I'll bet on the chancy proposition of catching big trout when the odds of taking 30- to 50-pound black drum are always so much higher.

No, it isn't the Ferrari of saltwater sportfish.

But the fact remains: for fulfilling the fisherman's ever-present fantasy of catching a very large fish for a very impressive photo, and doing it at a very unlikely time of year, it's virtually impossible to beat the black drum. ☆

FOR FULFILLING THE FANTASY OF CATCHING A VERY LARGE FISH, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO BEAT THE BLACK DRUM.

Circle hooks (a.k.a. "tuna hooks") were initially developed for commercial fishermen who needed a hook that would virtually set itself, which is exactly what circle hooks do.

"Setting the hook" with one of these is a no-no. Hook-sets only take the bait away from the fish.

The circle hook's "gap" — the distance between its sharp, curled-in barb and thick, sturdy shank — must be wide enough to accommodate the wide, rubbery lip of a large black drum. (Circle hooks are also perfectly suited to catch-and-release redfishing.) If the fish is allowed to pick up the bait, chew on it briefly and then move a short distance, the tightened line will pull the barb into the fish's jaw for a firm — and almost invariably harmless — hook-set.

As a conservation tool for catching precious breeding-sized fish and releasing them uninjured, the circle hook is without equal.

So, when the first drum of the day finally picked up the bait on the rear port-side rod, we gave the fish time. The Keelings graciously allowed me the honors.

I pulled the boat rod, a long-handled, 6-foot offshore stick actually designed for king mackerel fishing, out of the rod holder. Thirty-pound-test monofilament stretched tight and sang in the wind as the big drum chugged up-current.

On the fringe of a deep-water jetty, the first few feet of a big drum fight are tentative at best. Inside that narrow zone, a really big drum can pull a hook and leader down inside a barnacle-encrusted rock crevice and sever even heavy fluorocarbon leader like dime store sewing thread. With a good dose of pressure and a rod to match the



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER / KAC PRODUCTIONS

Pair of green jays sparring in a huisache tree.

THOSE RAPSCALLION JAYS

Loud, raucous and playful, the jay birds of Texas demand to be noticed.

By Noreen Damude

Flamboyant members of the crow family *Corvidae*, Texas jays are an intelligent, sometimes raucous, in-your-face tribe, with heaps of attitude — at once revered and reviled. Most are permanent residents, fairly abundant in suitable habitat, and eminently easy to see. Imps of the perverse, they both beguile and infuriate. Indeed, their puckish antics may strike us as intriguing, puzzling or downright infuriating. At times arrant knaves and wily tricksters, at others, dotting parents and eminent foresters — their true colors forever elude us. Despite their Jekyll-and-Hyde personalities, their lively colors, lifestyles and shenanigans never fail to attract our attention. And, for those who hold the blue end of the spectrum dear, they cannot help but please.

Colorful jays join ranks in the New World with their more somberly clad

ing them from other songbirds. Some of the principal morphological features, besides the large size and 10 stiff primary wing feathers, include circular nostrils concealed by stiff feather tufts; a bill that is long, slightly down-curved and overlapping the tip; strong feet, toes and claws, and legs strongly scaled in the front, and smooth behind. Males and females are dressed alike, in blues, greens and grays, with a dash of black and white, predominating.

Most jays speak in harsh, strident tones with ear-piercing squawks and shrieks, especially when danger draws nigh. Jays display a remarkably varied repertoire, with a few, such as the blue and Steller's jays, reverting to soft, siren "whisper" songs to win over a reticent mate. Many are likewise excellent mimics, with hawk imitations a well-honed specialty, not to mention a dizzying array of sharp click-

and Mexican jays, are sociable creatures, trooping about in large flocks when not nesting. A few, like the Florida scrub-jay and Mexican jay (though not the subspecies from Texas), nest in colonies or tend group nests. Others, like the pinyon jay, maintain complex social organizations in year-round, multisized flocks. In fact, the range of the pinyon jay matches almost exactly the distribution of the bird's favored food plant, the pinyon pine. Occasionally a collapse in food supplies will send "invasions" of these high-elevation seed-specialists down out of the mountains into the lowlands, both east and west.

Compared to the diversity of breeding strategies, courtship behavior is surprisingly uniform in jays. Pair bonds are typically reinforced by bobbing displays, courtship feedings and bill-tapping rituals. Most species include swooping and diving maneuvers, mutual preening and special vocalizations in their romantic repertoire. After pairing, jays normally become quiet and secretive. The male invariably helps the female build the bulky cup nest, made mostly of twigs and lined with soft fibers. He also brings food to the female, as she alone incubates the eggs. Never a deadbeat dad, he tirelessly helps her feed and care for the nestlings. Most jays nest in isolated pairs, but a few form large colonies. Many travel around in variously sized, frequently noisy, postbreeding flocks. These

AT TIMES ARRANT KNAVES AND WILY TRICKSTERS, AT OTHERS, DOTING PARENTS AND EMINENT FORESTERS — THEIR TRUE COLORS FOREVER ELUDE US.

cousins, the ravens, crows, magpies and nutcrackers. Thought to be among the most intelligent of birds, jays and their kin cover every continent on the planet except Antarctica.

So what makes a jay a jay and not a cardinal, tanager or finch? Jays share several features in common with other corvids, defining them as such, and distinguish-

ing, rattling and bell-like notes.

With jays, social behaviors often speak louder than physical descriptions. Most jays, such as the blue, Steller's and western scrub-jay, are relatively sedentary. While migration is uncommon, jays inhabiting the northern limits of their ranges do move southward to escape the cold. Many jays, such as green, brown

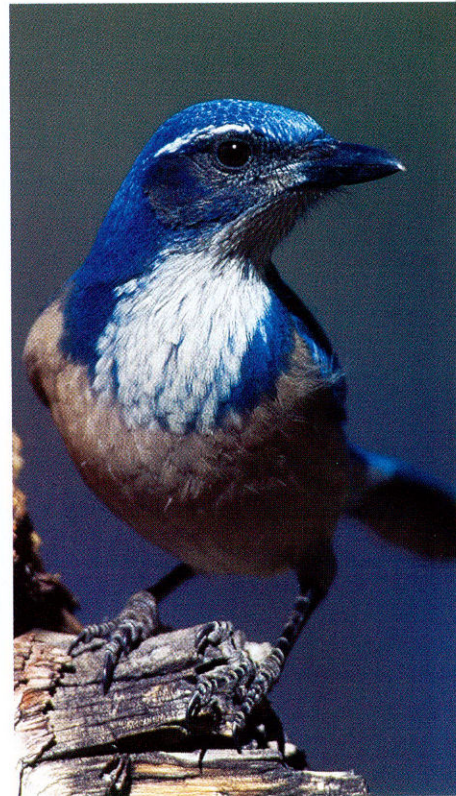
vagabond groups scour countryside, streets or forests for food as they recoup from the nesting season.

Though omnivorous, most North American jays rely heavily on acorns, nuts and pine seeds. Large, hard-shelled nuts never daunt them, as they secure the bulky item with their foot and stab or tear into it with their bill. Many jays are renowned for their efficient caching behavior. Come autumn, birds bury surplus nuts just under the ground surface in open areas, to be retrieved later when other food is scarce. Some species carry their booty in throat pouches, which they disgorge when they reach their hiding places. A larder overlooked has a better-than-average chance to sprout the next spring, thus replenishing the forest. Could oaks survive

cold, hard, tense, frozen music ... in harmony with the winter sky itself."

For all the ambivalence jays inspire, they clearly earn their keep by performing valuable ecological services. By collecting and caching vast numbers of nuts, they promote reforestation of cleared land — thus providing additional habitat for a host of other woodland birds. As human cities and suburbs continue to grow, jays adapt and prevail. Their healthy population numbers and widespread distribution are ample testimony to their success. As any savvy business person knows, when it comes to survival, flexibility is the key — and the jays have it. While many bird lovers still rue the sight

Denizens of woodlands, parks and backyard gardens, they are common and conspicuous residents in the eastern half of Texas. Often boisterous and achingly conspicuous, they can just as easily slip unnoticed through the treetops. Always alert to what is going on around them, they sit sentinel in a live oak — on the *qui vive* — the first to sound the alarm at approaching danger. The ear-splitting ruckus they create immediately draws in a bevy of neighborhood birds to size up the risk. A frenzied mobbing and scolding ensues until the interloper, be it a roosting owl or an intrusive hawk, flies off in harried desperation. Anyone who has ever been dive-bombed by a backyard blue streak knows well how fiercely jays will defend their nest. On a lighter note, blue jays are gleeful and



of a troop of shrieking jays, few can deny their beauty and versatility.

The state of Texas boasts seven of the possible eight North American jays; to wit, the blue jay, the western scrub-jay, the green jay, the brown jay, the Mexican jay, and the Steller's jay, as well as rare cameo appearances put in by the pinyon jay. In fact, only one, the gray jay (formerly known as the Canada jay) has avoided a documented trip to Texas. Described in more detail below are short cameos of seven jay species that call Texas home.

Brash and flashy, **blue jays** are readily identified by their combination of jaunty blue crest, white underparts, blue wings barred with black and white-tipped tail, conspicuous in flight.

FROM LEFT: a young male blue jay perches on a birdbath; Steller's jay; western scrub-jay; Mexican jay; juvenile brown jay.

vigorous bathers, splashing about with more gusto than most other passerines. Sunbathing and anting (rubbing ants over the body to spread formic acid over the feathers) likewise appear to be intoxicating pastimes, all done in the rigorous pursuit of feather maintenance.

Dressed in stygian blue, the **Steller's jay** replaces its closest relative, the blue jay, geographically, west to east. In Texas, birds haunt the dense coniferous and pine-oak forests of the Davis and

without the diligent cache-and-carry service jays provide to our disappearing forests? Some ecologists would say no.

Finally, jays have earned a solid place in American literature, language and legend. Such phrases as "naked as a jay-bird," "jaywalker," "flighty as a popinjay," culled from folk sayings and popular literature, illustrate stunningly to what extent jays strike us as notable "characters." Author Mark Twain, when commenting on the blue jay's intelligence and moxie, quipped: "It ain't no use to tell me a jaybird hasn't got a sense of humor, because I know better." For Thoreau, the scream of the blue jay "is like a flourish of wintry trumpets ...

Guadalupe mountains, where their dark colors blend in well with dark forest interiors. Like the blue jay, the Steller's is a talented mimic, specializing in several calls of both hawks and loons. A devotee of picnic grounds, scenic overlooks and feeding stations, it is often found lurking about in search of handouts where people are gathered. The Steller's jay found in Texas is the prettier inland form, graced with small spots of white on the forehead and near the eye. Birds forage mostly high in the canopy but will also feed on the ground. Well able to crack the hardest nuts, they are often seen pounding them relentlessly with their bills. Except when nesting, they live in flocks, birds often flying across a clearing one at a time, in single file, giving their low *shook-shook* calls as



they swoop up to perch in a tall pine.

The **western scrub-jay** — the other common Texas blue jay — but without a crest, is a denizen of scrub oaks or pinyon-juniper woodlands throughout the Texas Hill Country. Not as comfortable in urban settings as his cousin the blue jay, the western scrub-jay roams the pristine canyonlands, often in small family groups. Best recognized by their characteristic undulating flight pattern and shallow wing-beats, birds are blue above and grayish below. They are typically seen hopping along the ground or along the branches of trees or shrubs, carefully examining the twigs and leaves for edibles. Calls tend to be harsh and

varied, and include a discordant *shreeep* and a fast-paced *shek-shek-shek*. While occasionally noisy and conspicuous, western scrub-jays prefer to keep within brushy cover. Curiously, they display the crow-like proclivity for snatching and hoarding bright, shiny objects, from bits of glass to silver coins. Unlike their close relative the Florida scrub-jay, from which they were recently split, western scrub-jays are solitary breeders.

The **Mexican jay** is a locally common resident of oak-clad mountainsides from Arizona to the Big Bend region of Texas. Plain dull blue above and a uniform light gray below, these highly gregarious birds live in noisy flocks year-



round. They forage mainly in the oak forests on the mountain slopes, consuming a wide array of insects, fruits and seeds. They depend heavily on acorns, especially during the winter months, and are considered major agents of acorn dispersal. Mexican jays are stockier than the similar-looking western scrub-jay and lack the contrasting white throat with smudgy dark necklace. Their calls, though nasal, are softer than those of most other jays. The Texas population differs in a number of ways from the Arizona population, both behaviorally and morphologically. Arizona's Mexican jays exhibit a surprisingly complex breeding system, with various members of the flock involved more or less in several nesting attempts at once. Texas' Mexican jays, true conservatives, appear

to be solitary nesters.

Unmistakably tropical, the **green jay** ranges south all the way to Ecuador, but enters our state only in South Texas, where it is fairly common in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Here it lives in dense lowland thickets dominated by acacia, ebony and hackberry, but also frequents mesquite brush and oak woodland habitats a bit farther north. Around parks and refuges it can be very tame, coming to picnic tables for handouts. Elsewhere, it can be elusive and surprisingly difficult to see given its gaudy colors. Green jays tend to live in pairs or social groups at all seasons, communicating with each other via a bizarre array of staccato calls. It is another Texas specialty, found in the U.S. only in the Lone Star State. The green jay is popular with birders, and many birders make the long trek to extreme South Texas to get this gorgeous green, yellow, turquoise, tipped-in-violet-and-black bird on their life list.

The boisterous **brown jay** is our only really drab neotropical jay. This outsized, long-tailed tropical jay ranges as far south as Panama, but barely crosses the Rio Grande in the Falcon Dam area, where it haunts dense riverside woodlands. Typically somewhat wary and elusive, it troops about in small flocks. Dark sooty brown, paling to off-white on the belly, adults have black bills and legs. Juveniles, by contrast, sport contrasting yellow bills that reveal their youth. When alarmed or on the move, the brown jay's voice can be shrill and explosive. Sometimes birders traveling south of the border curse them silently; their piercing screams warn every shier bird within earshot that a stalking birder with a life list approaches.

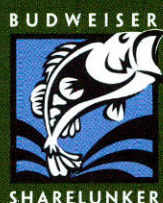
Pinyon jays might better have been dubbed "little blue crows," given their relatively small size combined with their jay-like blue color, yet crow-like build, and their habit of walking, not hopping, while foraging on the ground. Pinyon jays roam the western mountains in highly organized flocks that can number in the hundreds of birds, feasting on the seeds of pinyons and other pines. Pinyon jays are social during all seasons, traveling in flocks and nesting in colonies. Pinyon jays are a highly irruptive species, entering West Texas at unpredictable intervals during fall or winter. Appropriately named, they feed heavily on the seeds of pinyon pines, and their distribution roughly shadows the range of these trees, as they are largely responsible for planting pinyon pines in most of their range. ☆



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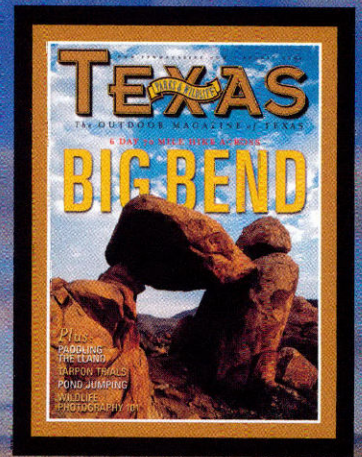
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Offer ends June 30, 2006

(continued from page 57)

6 a.m.; KVRT-FM 90.7 / 5:33 p.m.; KLUX-FM 89.5 / throughout the day

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

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

HUNTSVILLE: KSHU-FM 90.5 / throughout the day

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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MINEOLA: KM00-FM 99.9 / 5:15 p.m.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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T E L E V I S I O N

LOOK FOR THESE STORIES IN THE COMING WEEKS:

Jan. 29 - Feb. 5:

Wade fishing the Texas coast; history of El Paso at Magoffin Home; a wildlife biologist's way of life; wade fishing gear; scenery of the San Marcos.

Feb. 5 - 12:

Inland water projects impact Texas bays; from overgrazed range to healthy habitat; Pedernales Falls State Park; the McDonald Observatory; the Red River.

Feb. 12 - 19:

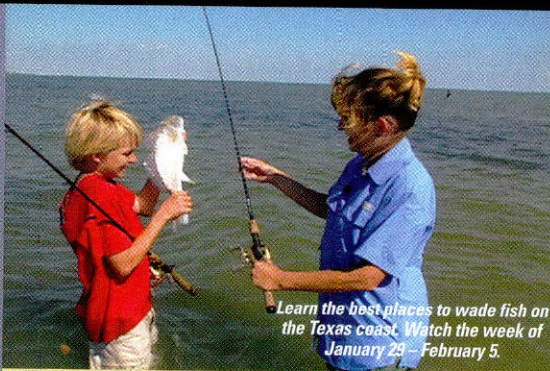
Houston parks bring nature to the city; fly fishing for beginners; alpine adventure in El Paso; real cowboys; float the backwaters of Martin Dies, Jr. State Park.

Feb. 19 - 26:

Spring fishing for white bass; backyard wildlife; Caddo Lake State Park; preserving land from urban development; Attwater's prairie chickens.

Feb. 26 - March 5:

Water quantity and quality; grass and quail on the Las Viveritas; Eisenhower Birthplace; endangered ocelots; West Texas clouds.



Learn the best places to wade fish on the Texas coast. Watch the week of January 29 - February 5.

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

CORPUS CHRISTI: KEDT, Ch. 16 / Sun. 12 p.m. / Fri. 2:00 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.

Also serving Temple

LUBBOCK: KTXT, Ch. 5 / Sat. 10 a.m.

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

SAN ANTONIO & LAREDO: KLRN, Ch.9 / Sunday 1 p.m.

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

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



R A D I O

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AMARILLO: KACV-FM 89.9 / 9:20 a.m.

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

AUSTIN: KWNX-AM 1260 and KZNX-AM 1530 / Sun. 9:20 a.m.

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BIG SPRING: KBST-AM 1490 / 10:50 a.m.; KBST-FM 95.7 / 10:50 a.m.

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

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

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.; KQSI-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



Buescher State Park

This quiet spot near Smithville specializes in peace, pine trees and woodpeckers.

Linked to Bastrop State Park by a roller-coaster road that twists and turns for 13 scenic miles through the Lost Pines and oak woodlands of central Texas, Buescher State Park near Smithville offers an entirely different visitor experience than its larger and more celebrated twin. Whereas Bastrop, with its 18-hole golf course, swimming pool and rustic cabins, appeals to today's more active adventurer, Buescher charms with its minimalist offerings and promise of a respite from life's frenetic pace.

Here is a classic Civilian Conservation Corps park developed in the 1930s on 1,017 acres donated by Emile Buescher, his heirs and the city of Smithville.

Compared to Bastrop, which is three times larger and draws three times more visitors, Buescher's clientele tends to be a bit older and primarily in search of seren-

ity. It's the kind of place to rent a screen shelter or pitch a tent on a bluff beneath oaks, red cedars, cedar elms and pines and put your feet up for a while.

Park visitors looking for recreational opportunities at Buescher State Park won't be disappointed. In recent years, the park has become quite popular with birders, who find the overlap of woodlands and water creates excellent habitat for more than 200 species of birds, including spring migrating warblers and vireos. The 30-acre lake in the center of the park serves as a magnet for such waterfowl species as the northern parula and green kingfisher. Buescher is home, too, to an enviable variety of woodpeckers, including the granddaddy of the "drillers," the pileated woodpecker.

The lake draws anglers, as well, who try their luck casting for bass or catfish, which are stocked in plentiful numbers by TPWD fisheries personnel.

The park supports a healthy population of squirrels, cottontail rabbits, armadillos, raccoons, deer and at least one bobcat family. The endangered Houston toad, though predominantly found at Bastrop State Park, which has been designated as critical habitat, also turns up occasionally at Buescher.

A multiloop hiking trail winds 7.8 miles through the pines and bottomland deciduous forests in the park. Stroll along Pine Gulch Trail (the trailhead lies just across the park road from the walk-in tent camping area) and find yourself transported into a setting more reminiscent of East Texas and South Louisiana than central Texas. Here the air is redolent with the sweet aroma of dripping pines and the dank smell of mushrooms and decaying wood. Rust-colored pine needles cover the meandering trail, Spanish moss cascades from overhead branches and jagged tree stumps cloak themselves in a sartorial splash of lime-green, orange and yellow moss and lichen. ★

— Rob McCorkle

The park is located two miles northwest of Smithville just north of State Highway 71 on FM 153. For more information, call (903) 785-5716 or visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/buescher/>.

Magoffin Home State Historic Site

A sprawling, 19-room hacienda offers insights into early El Paso's high society.

Twenty years before notorious gunslinger

John Wesley Hardin met his fate in the Acme Saloon in rough-and-tumble El Paso, a man who would become synonymous with the bustling border city erected an adobe home just north of the Rio Grande. The Magoffin Home, built across the river from the Mexican town of El Paso del Norte in 1875 by Mexico-born Joseph Magoffin, marks the birthplace of modern El Paso.

The historic hacienda, built not far from the site of the 1849 homestead settled by Joseph's father, offers a glimpse into late-1800s frontier grandeur enjoyed by one of the area's first multicultural families. The tiny settlement established by trader-merchant James Magoffin succumbed to Rio Grande floodwaters in 1867, but helped plant the seeds for what would become one of the nation's most vibrant border cities.

Strategically located on the Chihuahua Trail across the Rio Grande from present-day Juarez, the original Magoffin home hosted merchants and dignitaries from the United States and Mexico. One of those visitors was U. S. Boundary Commission artist Henry C. Pratt, who in the 1850s painted a portrait of Magoffin, U.S. consul to Saltillo and Chihuahua, Mexico.

The Magoffin portrait is among a host of splendidly preserved 19th-century artifacts found throughout the striking structure designed by James Magoffin's son, Joseph, in 1875. Located just six blocks east of looming downtown skyscrapers, the low-slung, 19-room residence stands as one of the few remaining examples of the territorial architectural style in Texas. The U-shaped residence, built around an interior patio, incorporates Greek Revival ele-



ments, such as pedimented doors and windows, into a Spanish hacienda-style of architecture.

Constructed of adobe, the Magoffin Home was given a more refined look by plastering over the exterior with chalk-colored plaster and scoring the covering to create the illusion of stone construction. Almost three-foot-thick adobe walls and 14-foot ceilings, along with eight fireplaces, helped keep the family comfortable during the desert's weather extremes. Form followed function, too, with every bedroom featuring an exterior door that could be opened to create a cross-breeze for better ventilation.

The original wing of the house, which sported dirt floors and ceilings supported by cottonwood vigas, was converted to a carriage house and later became a playroom for the Magoffin grandchildren. Today, the south wing serves as a gift shop. The Magoffins added two more wings to the original adobe structure, and in 1876 moved in to the more modern north wing that faces Magoffin Avenue. Restoration was begun after the property was purchased in 1976 by the City of El Paso and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department from granddaughter Octavia Magoffin Glasgow and two brothers. Octavia lived in the home until her death in 1986.

The Magoffin Home today serves as both an architectural landmark and a monument to one of El Paso's most important pioneering families. Before his death in 1923, Joseph Magoffin held several city and county offices, served four terms as El Paso mayor and helped incorporate the city in 1873. A visit to this tranquil one-and-a-half acre oasis in the heart of a bustling multicultural metropolis reaffirms the difference one family can make in shaping Texas history. ☆

— Rob McCorkle

For more information, call (915) 533-5147 or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/magoffin_home/

Mission Tejas State Park Soak up 300 years of turbulent history along the King's Highway.

The piney woods and fertile flood plain of San Pedro Creek, a few miles upstream from the Neches River and 30 minutes from Crockett, have drawn people — both natives and settlers — for centuries. Mission Tejas State Park encompasses 659 acres of this important property that lies just off one of Texas' most historic roads — the El Camino Real, or King's Highway.

This East Texas park's moniker derives from the first mission established in the province of Texas by the Spanish. The mis-



sion was built to head off incursions from the French around the turn of the 17th century. The missionaries who founded the mission took the name from the Caddo Indian word for friend, *tejas*, that they heard spoken by the neighboring Nabedache, a sub-tribe of the larger Caddo tribe that lived along San Pedro Creek.

Though the park exists primarily as a forest retreat for hikers and campers, its historical components — including a replica of the ancient Spanish mission and the Rice family home — play an important role in help-

ing interpret early Texas history. More important, perhaps, is the fact the state park includes a short segment of El Camino Real, also known as the Old San Antonio Road, which served during Spanish colonial times as a major artery for travel into Texas from Mexico and Louisiana.

Today, State Highway 21, which runs from Nacogdoches to San Marcos, roughly parallels El Camino Real. The U.S. Congress recognized the significance of the historic road, used from 1690 to 1820, by designating a system of trails, including the Texas segment of the Old San Antonio Road, as a National Historic Trail — El Camino Real de los Tejas.

In 1974, TPWD moved one of the oldest structures in Houston County, the Rice family log cabin, from a farm just outside Crockett to the park. Park crews restored the 1828 home that once served immigrants, adventurers and others traveling the Old San Antonio Road. Park visitors can get an up-close look at the home's log construction, a type of architecture that by 1820 had been imported to Texas by German immigrants who settled in Pennsylvania in the 18th century. The home features a dogtrot, or central open-air passageway, several rooms and a covered front and back porch.

Just down the winding park road, the replica of San Francisco de los Tejas stands

in a forest clearing. Nearby, a kiosk with interpretive panels provides insight into the area's history and the evolution of the first Spanish mission in Texas.

After absorbing a serious dose of Texas history, park visitors can enjoy a variety of recreational pursuits at Mission Tejas State Park.

Popular activities include hiking along more than three miles of marked woodland trails that wind around and through the

developed part of the park. There is plenty of room to roam among the towering pines and other hardwoods that dot the picturesque hillsides. ☆

— Rob McCorkle

The park is located in Weches in East Texas 21 miles northeast of Crockett on State Highway 21. For more information, call (936) 687-2394 or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/mission_tejas/.

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

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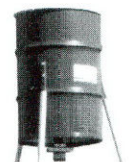
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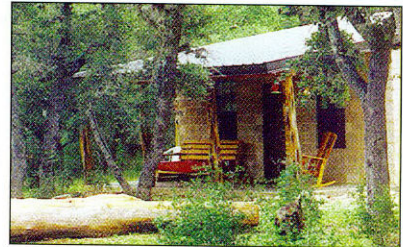
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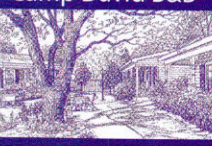
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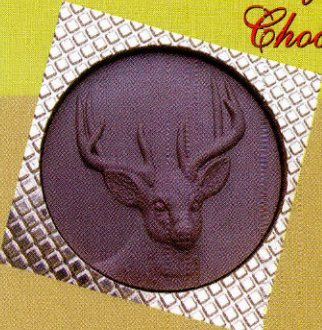
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(continued from page 19)

Throughout the region, farming and ranching — producing primarily cotton, sheep and beef cattle — rank among the leading industries. So a locally produced steak seems in order for an evening meal. I choose Jacoby Cafe in Melvin (located between Eden and Brady), a family-owned business that also includes an adjacent feed store and a nearby cattle ranch. My tasty, medium-rare ribeye comes with a salad and baked potato.

“Our beef is born here and never leaves the place,” says owner Jason Jacoby. “We don’t use any hormones, and all our meat is aged 14 days before it’s cut up.”

The next morning, I have an appointment with ranchers Kay and Fred Campbell, caretakers of the Indian pictographs for which Paint Rock is named. I’ve always wanted to visit this place, and, for some reason, I assumed there’d be a grueling hike involved. Wrong.

I meet the Campbells at a ranch-style house, where Kay tells the story of how her grandfather, D.E. Sims, discovered the crudely drawn pictures in the late 1870s. “He decided to stay so he could protect them,” she says, standing in a room furnished with family heirlooms, photographs and Native American artifacts. “He and his family guarded the pictographs all their lives, and they taught us how, too. So that’s our heritage.”

Using her forearm as an easel, Kay demonstrates how primitive artists blended pulverized iron ore with animal fat to create paint. Then Fred runs a short video that shows another archeological site’s “sun daggers” (pointed shafts of sunlight made by passing through rock formations) moving across specific pictographic images during the winter solstice.

We load up in vehicles and ride a short distance on the ranch to a grassy meadow that’s paralleled by a high slope topped with slabs of limestone. Kay hands me a trail guide that describes the drawings we’re going to see. We’ll see the paintings from a trail that runs beneath the rock face, because the Campbells forbid climbing up to the rocks.

The paintings — predominantly created in a red pigment and believed to be at least 200 to 500 years old — depict a multitude of characters, including animals, human hands and figures, stars and corn stalks.

“My uncle brought some of his

friends here for a party,” Kay says, sniffing with disdain when we pause midway along the trail. She’s referring to a scrawled “W. I. Sims 1907” on a low rock that’s nearly hidden by a clump of prickly pear cactus. “He’s the only person who’s ever disgraced our family name.”

After lunch, I head east to Brady to explore the downtown square. Right away, an intriguing sign that’s painted on the side of a two-story building grabs my attention: “See Horny Toads Inside.” Naturally curious, I step inside Evridge’s on Commerce Street and ask the first lady I meet: “Where are the horned toads?”

Elegantly dressed and genteel in manner, the woman smiles and leads me through a showroom of upscale furniture and accessories, past a display of fine china and shelves of Christmas decorations until we stop at the jewelry counter.

Jewelry?

“We have dangly earrings and lapel pins,” Susan Evridge drawls, peering at a glass case filled with tiny gold and silver critters. She glances at me and grins mischievously. “Well, the sign didn’t say ‘live,’ did it?” I laugh.

Since it opened in 1937, Evridge’s has sold everything from beds and grandfather clocks to tires and air conditioners. Upstairs via a lime-green-carpeted spiral staircase is an unusual work of art entitled “Family Tree.” The stained-glass dome, crafted by founder I.G. Evridge (Susan’s late father), bears the initials of 12 family members and a beloved rat terrier, Ramona.

The next day, I’m bound for the Heart of Texas Country Music Museum, an extensive collection of music memorabilia housed in a brick building on South Bridge Street. “We have a lot of entertainers who got their start in our area,” explains Tracy Pitcox, a Brady disc jockey. “About 10 years ago, we started collecting stage costumes, and we didn’t know what to do with everything. So we decided to raise money and build a museum.”

George Strait, Loretta Lynn, Johnny Cash and Charley Pride are among the many country music artists who donated clothing, hats, boots and other personal items to the museum. Stage dresses worn by Patsy Cline, Tammy Wynette and Minnie Pearl hang in glass showcases.

Parked outside stands “Big Blue,” a 1956 Flixible (yes, that’s how it’s spelled)

Tour Bus owned by the late country music star Jim Reeves and his band, the Blue Boys. “We bought that for \$3,000 from the Jim Reeves Museum after it closed in Nashville, then it cost us \$3,100 to haul it to Texas,” Pitcox says, chuckling.

To wrap up my jaunt through the heart of Texas, a tour of the Heart of Texas Historical Museum — housed in the old McCulloch County jail — seems fitting. The stately, red brick edifice stands at Main and High streets, a block off the town square.

The Southern Structural Steel Co. of San Antonio built the prefabricated, three-story jail in 1909. It remained in use until 1974, when the county built a new jail and sold the old one to the museum for five bucks.

According to museum president Bert Striegler, the sheriff in those bygone years kept an office on the first floor, where he and his also wife lived. Part of her job was to cook meals for the inmates in the jail’s kitchen. The kitchen is now a museum exhibit outfitted with assorted antique utensils and cookware from the period.

Other museum exhibits include historic photographs, family mementos, military memorabilia and rifles, along with historic papers, including an authentic land grant signed by Sam Houston in 1860.

For the grand finale, Striegler ushers me to an iron staircase, which leads to the second floor. I immediately meet the “hanging noose,” a coil of rope suspended over a trap door. Evidently, the noose successfully deterred inmates from causing any further trouble, because “no one was ever hanged there,” Striegler says.

As for me, I’m ready to break out and head home. From an eerie jail to spicy venison sausage and mysterious Indian drawings, the Heart of Texas — wherever it may precisely lie — has definitely left its mark on me. ★

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PARTING SHOT

While traveling through West Texas, photographers Laurence Parent and Earl Nottingham found a respite from the bitter cold at a mom-and-pop diner. They enjoyed a warm meal but soon discovered that the roads were too icy to continue their trip. Fortunately, the owner allowed them to camp out in the diner. After a restless night, they left before sunrise and made their way toward Guadalupe Mountains National Park, where they encountered a full moon setting behind gossamer clouds and framed by El Capitan. As the sun began to rise, the mountain took on a rosy hue, and Earl captured this shot just before the glow disappeared.

IMAGE SPECS:

4x5 Linhof Technica IV camera with 210mm Schneider lens, exposure of 1/4 second at f/16 on Velvia film.

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