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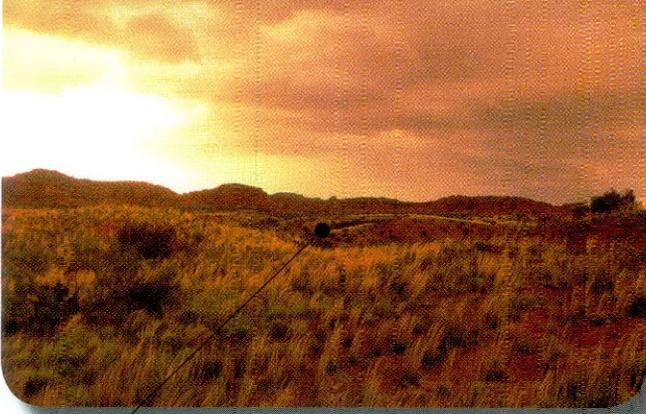
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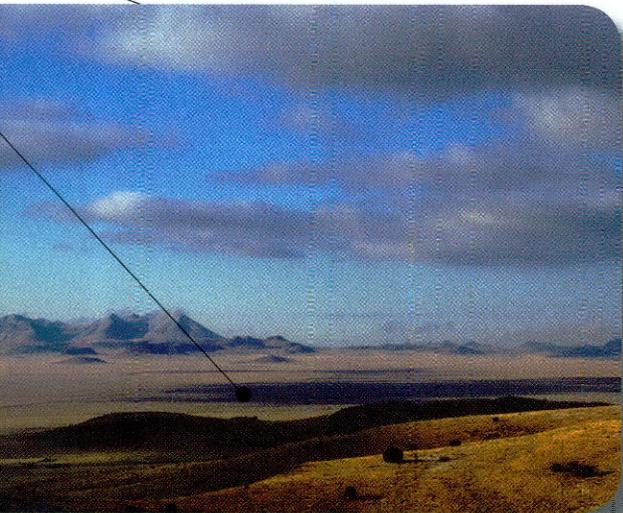
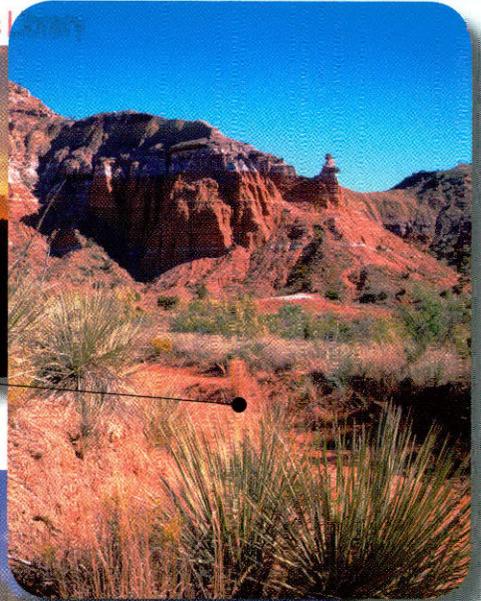
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Features

22 Public Hunting Primer By Steve Lightfoot

With a little advance planning and research, you can find plenty of inexpensive hunting opportunities close to home.

28 Snaring the Red Drum By Larry D. Hodge

A saltwater fish provides some of the best freshwater fishing.

42 Dog-Friendly Parks By Melissa Gaskill

When you can't resist those big eyes that say "Don't leave me at home," head for a park that welcomes pooches.

48 Marine Madness By Eileen Mattei

At Texas' largest saltwater fishing tournament, many participants bring the whole family along for the fun.

34

COVER STORY

Texas Skies

Photo Essay by Wyman Meinzer

Selected photos from Meinzer's new book,
Between Heaven and Texas.



C O N T E N T S

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It's definitely time to see for yourself: Life's better outside!
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Departments

6 At Issue *By Robert L. Cook*

8 Mail Call

Our readers share their ideas.

10 Scout

The latest conservation news and events.

10 DON'T DUMP THAT AQUARIUM!

By Larry D. Hodge

Cute aquarium fish become ugly monsters in springs and streams.

12 ARMY AID *By Erica H. Brasseux*

Divers from the U.S. Army Dive Company repair swimming platform in Tyler.

14 MOTTLED MYSTERY *By Wendee Holtcamp*

Gators were the prime suspect, but habitat destruction may be the real culprit behind the decline of mottled ducks.

15 PICTURE THIS *By Earl Nottingham*

Our chief photographer shares his insights.

17 BY THE NUMBERS: CAPROCK CANYONS STATE PARK *By Bryan Frazier*

Hard data and fun facts about your state parks.

18 SKILL BUILDER *By Gibbs Milliken*

Use your rod like a sling-shot when you're in a tight spot.

19 FIELD TEST *By Gibbs Milliken*

Sturdy, lightweight daypacks are an excellent choice for hiking.

20 Three Days in the Field

By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

A former gunslingers' haven, Sonora now draws tamer travelers in search of starry nights, cool caves and a rocking chair with a view.

54 Legend, Lore & Legacy

By Henry Chappell

Pioneering biologist A.S. Jackson left an enduring legacy based on no-nonsense, boots-on-the-ground research.

57 Sights & Sounds

Check out Texas Parks and Wildlife's television and radio schedule.

58 Park Picks

Recommended stops along the road less traveled.

64 Parting Shot *By Wyman Meinze*

Covers

FRONT: Night sky over Fort McKavett. Photo © Wyman Meinzer.

BACK: Davis Mountains State Park. Photo by Earl Nottingham.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: Complete camo. Photo © Russell A. Graves.

THIS PAGE: Lucy the pointer snaps up a yellow bass on the Pettigrew Ranch. Photo © DavidJSams.com

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In the Field

HENRY CHAPPELL

visited the Panhandle town of Canadian as he researched A.S. Jackson, profiled in "Legend, Lore & Legacy" (on page 54). He spent three days visiting the legendary biologist's friends and colleagues. "My affection for the Rolling Plains began with A.S. Jackson's writing," Chappell says. "Holding his camera, reading his early magazine work, and just standing by his old desk made me thankful for his legacy, and sad that I never met him." Chappell has written two novels, *Blood Kin* and *The Callings*; an essay collection, *At Home on the Range with a Texas Hunter*, and most recently *6666: Portrait of a Texas Ranch*, a collaboration with photographer Wyman Meinzer. His work has appeared in *Field & Stream*, *Sports Afield*, *Gray's Sporting Journal*, and numerous other publications. He lives with his family in Plano, and is at work on a novel set in Dallas just prior to the Civil War.



BRYAN FRAZIER

writes the "By the Numbers" spotlight each issue (see page 17). Bryan coordinates all aspects of promotions, special events and marketing for the state park system within TPWD. During his tenure with TPWD, he has been a regular contributor to ads, releases, features and publications. As a writer, he has won more than 20 regional and national awards in public relations, and he's been a newspaper and magazine writer, columnist and photographer for sports and outdoor publications for more than a decade. Prior to coming to TPWD, Bryan worked in college athletic administration and sports marketing / media relations in the Dallas - Fort Worth area. In his spare time, he enjoys fishing, coaching select youth baseball and spending time with his wife and infant son. Bryan attended Abilene Christian University, where he graduated with honors and was an All-American baseball player.



ERICA BRASSEUX

felt right at home writing this month's Scout piece on the U.S. Army Dive Team's recent work at Tyler State Park. "My husband and I love to dive too, so this article was interesting for me. I had no idea the Army even had a dive team. I also have a vested interest in Tyler State Park, as it's only about 10 miles from my house. It's one of my family's favorites," says Brasseux. Brasseux served as editorial intern and as associate editor for *TP&W* magazine from 2000 - 2002. She left journalism to teach middle school English for 4 years before taking time off to be a full-time mom. Recently, she began writing for the magazine again. She and her husband, Eric, now reside in Lindale with their 1-year-old son, Jackson and their golden retriever, River.



AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF ROBERT L. COOK

One of the things that I love about outdoor Texas and about our history is the old rock fences that occur out in the country. Many of these old fences were built before Mr. Glidden's barbed wire was invented in 1873. Many settlers couldn't afford barbed wire anyway, so they used what they had — native stone and plenty of muscle. There are several old rock fences on our home place on Lost Creek. Through the years I have walked the entire length of these old fences many times. Sometimes I sit on them and think; sometimes I just sit on them. The rock fences of Lost Creek Ranch are mostly fallen down now, in places almost indistinguishable from the adjacent rocky hillsides.

Our rock fence occurs in sections, 100 yards here, 50 yards there, starting and stopping without explanation. I've concluded that the fence was built where there were plenty of good fence-rocks. The fence-builder would not have carried these rocks very far. In some places the fence is connected to naturally occurring rock outcrops which, I suppose, served the same purpose of containing or excluding livestock. If there once were connecting rail fences filling in the gaps between the sections of rock fence, which I suspect was the case, they have long since decayed and disappeared, along with our fence-builders.

I have sat and pondered both the purpose of the fence and the people who built it. Hardly anywhere along its irregular route does it stand above waist-high, and I don't think it reaches a height of four feet high anywhere. It was not built to contain wild cows.

In his classic, *Adventures with a Texas Naturalist*, Roy Bedichek states that the rock fence near his Friday Mountain retreat "weighed not less than a ton per linear yard." I'd reckon that the rock fences along Lost Creek would weigh in at about half that amount. The family's milk cow didn't care how much the fence weighed; the fence-builder did.

How long did it take to build a mile of rock fence? I'd guess that my great-grandfather, even with his bad arm from the Civil War, and a couple of big strapping boys like my grandfather, could dig, tote, stack and chink maybe 30-40 feet of fence a day if they worked from daylight until dark. The only tools they had were a pick, a pry-bar and a heavy rock hammer. I would speculate that they only worked on this fence on days that it was too wet or too cold to do anything else, and then only after the morning chores were done, the firewood split and hauled in, and the livestock fed and cared for.

Years ago I found a large sandstone *metate*, a grindstone used by early Native Americans, within a couple of feet of our old rock fence. This metate is slightly larger than a large briefcase. I suspect that my fence-builders paused and rested beside it and wondered about its creators and their lives on Lost Creek. It would have fit perfectly into the rock fence, but interestingly, they did not put it in the fence. My fence-builders could not have known that the grindstone was thousands and thousands of years old, could they?

Texas is wonderful. Outdoor Texas is The Best. You don't have to hunt, camp or fish to enjoy the outdoors. And, if you ever want to build some rock fence, I know where there are plenty of good rocks.



Our rock fence occurs in sections, 100 yards here, 50 yards there, starting and stopping without explanation.

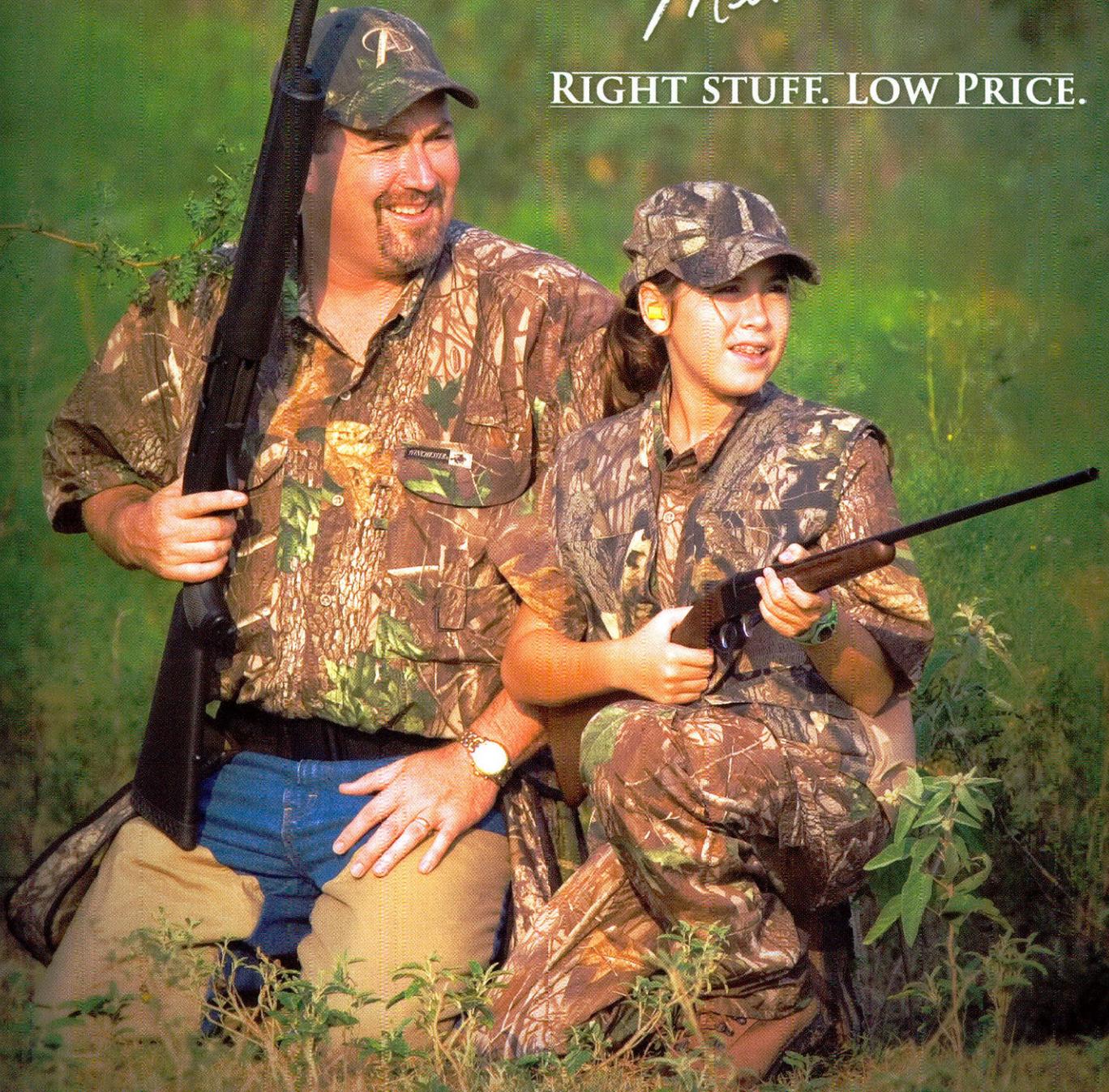
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PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

FOREWORD

One of the most enjoyable aspects of working for this magazine is when we are out of the office and greet our readers face-to-face. We go to events such as the Texas Parks and Wildlife EXPO, other outdoor hunting and fishing or boat shows several times during the year. That personal interaction always helps me learn a great deal about potential articles. Such was the case with this month's story about public land hunts (the article starts on page 22).

Not long ago, we had a display at the grand opening of a major retailer launching a new store in Texas; we met many of you there. One of the most-asked questions was about the public lands hunting opportunities available through TPWD.

No one can argue that hunting opportunities have changed. Old-timers have memories of simpler times when we merely decided to go hunting and went. (I can remember when I considered any hunter older than 40 an old-timer. Hence, my use of the collective "we" in the preceding sentence because now I am an old-timer.) No advanced reservations were necessary (at least not very often).

Some things have not changed. For example, if you expect to harvest that trophy buck, you still need to do a lot of advance scouting. On the other hand, now if you want to hunt for just about anything, you need to do more homework. We can't drive out of town, stop along a good-looking patch of ground and start hunting.

We need a plan: enter drawings, purchase annual public hunting permits and search out the best places to hunt doves, ducks or deer. TPWD makes it less expensive to hunt with the public lands hunting permit versus private leases. Be sure to read the "Public Hunting Primer" article for the details.

I haven't hunted much lately. Nevertheless, I easily recall almost every hunting trip. From my first deer hunt when I was 11, the six inches of new snow and the late November cold — 20 degrees below zero — on my uncle's land in northern Wisconsin, to my last hunt about three years ago on a frigid 30-below January morning, walking through two feet of snow, elk hunting at 10,000 feet in the Rockies. In between were hundreds of hunts. At one time, I made my living as a hunting guide. I hunted nearly every day, five months a year for five years. (It's funny that when you get older, short-term memory fades, yet we can recall experiences from a long time ago with the least bit of encouragement.)

I look forward to getting back into the field this fall. Now that I know more about the public hunting opportunities in Texas, I have the itch again — but if the temperature drops below freezing, you'll find me sitting in my recliner watching the Outdoor Channel.

Randy Brudnicki

RANDY BRUDNICKI
PUBLISHER

LETTERS

DANGERS OF PLASTIC BAGS

Having just read your article, "Bag those Bags" in the June issue, I would like to expound on the subject. Plastic bags are a real peeve of mine. I am in the livestock production busi-

ness and raise cattle in five counties of Central Texas. Many of the properties I operate are adjacent to public roads and two of them are adjacent to roadside parks. As we all know, roadside parks are also popular dumping sites for travelers' garbage as well as many people's household garbage. I recently lost an expensive registered Angus heifer to "gastrointestinal problems." Upon further inspection, we found a plastic Wal-Mart sack impacted in the animals rumen. This was an

expensive lesson for us. Cattle and wildlife die randomly for unknown reasons. Only because of the high value of this particular animal did I go to the expense of doing an autopsy. The cattle were grazing across the road from the roadside park which has open-topped trash containers that are subject to the passing breezes. We have to go through our pastures on a regular basis, cleaning up trash from the highway and the roadside parks. Well over half the trash is some form of non-biodegradable plastic. My veterinarian says this is a very common occurrence and that many cattle have this kind of garbage in their stomachs for



We have to go through our pastures on a regular basis, cleaning up trash ... well over half the trash is some form of non-biodegradable plastic.

*Bodey Langford
Caldwell County*

MAIL CALL

years. A paper sack would have digested in the rumen and passed freely from the animal. The plastic never digests or decomposes.

Another very similar subject is the use of helium balloons at celebrations and sporting events. I have heard TV announcers talk of how spectacular it is to see 10,000 balloons released into the sky as the climax of some big event. Where do these people think these balloons end up? Many people believe they continue into the atmosphere until they are burned up by the sun. No. They end up in my cow pasture and eventually in the stomach of my livestock or your wildlife. Plastic is a bad material but think about the mylar balloons. They may be here forever.

Livestock and wildlife are curious animals. They may not consume these foreign objects because they are hungry, but maybe because they are crunchy or noisy. Regardless, they are a major nuisance to our outdoors, our wildlife and to my livelihood as a stockman. Perhaps the big box stores and the big sporting and entertainment events could be given the heads-up on this issue. Maybe they would change their methods of operation if they had an idea of the impact they are having on the environment.

BODEY LANGFORD
Caldwell County

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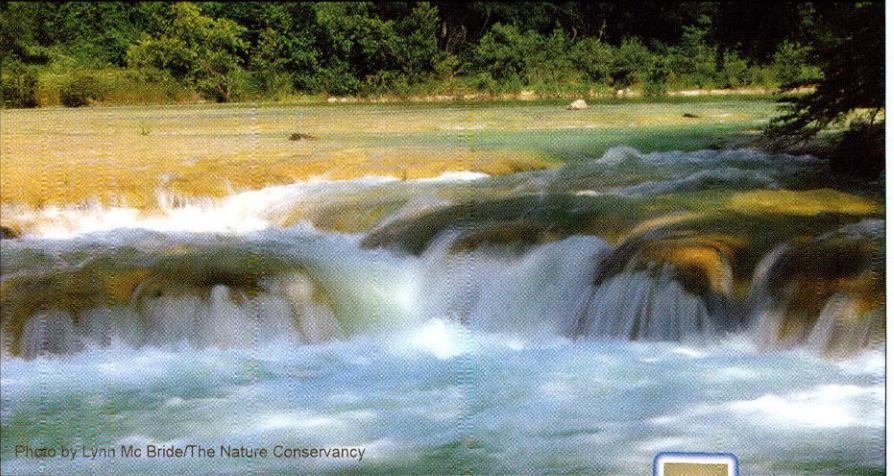


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SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

DON'T DUMP THAT AQUARIUM

Cute aquarium fish become ugly monsters in springs and streams.

It's an annual rite of spring in San Marcos: College students heading home for summer or off to a new job discard dorm-room detritus in a frenzy of packing and moving. Much unwanted stuff goes into dumpsters. Unfortunately, some aquarium contents go into the San Marcos River.

Other people have fish that have outgrown their aquarium and, in an act of misguided kindness, release them into the nearest stream or pond.

"People have fish in their aquariums they don't want to kill, so they dump them into a pond, river or spring," says Tim Bonner, assistant professor of biology at Texas State University. "They may save the life of one fish, but in doing so they could wipe out a whole population of native fishes."

Bonner and TPWD fisheries biologist Gary Garrett are particularly concerned with impacts on native fishes — some of which are threatened species — from a South American import commonly known as armored catfish or *armadillo del rio*. This creature (*Hypostomus plecostomus*) is undeniably cute — and useful — as it vacuums algae off aquarium gravel. But when you place that same fish into a spring-fed stream, it turns into an ecological disaster. Armored catfish can grow

to a foot long, and because they are covered with bony armor plate, almost nothing can eat them. They wipe out algae that other fish depend on for food. Worse yet, as they vacuum the bottom clean, they eat eggs of other fish and keep them from reproducing.

Heard enough? There's more. When these invaders spawn, they burrow into river banks, not only making the bank unstable but also releasing sediments that can adversely affect other fish species as well as plants such as wild rice.

The San Marcos River isn't the only body of water with an armored catfish problem. Bayous in the Houston area are infested, as is the San Antonio River. "Spring-fed streams are where we have the most problems, because the water stays the same temperature year-around and does not get cold enough to kill them," says Bonner.

What harm can there be in dumping one little fish into the river? Garrett's research in Del Rio provides the answer. "In San Felipe Creek in 1997, we found four of them. Now there are hundreds of thousands of them. These things explode," says Garrett.

While it is legal for dealers to sell the exotic species, it is against the law to release them into public waters. That puts responsibility for controlling the problem squarely on the shoulders of aquarium owners. "We have tried everything

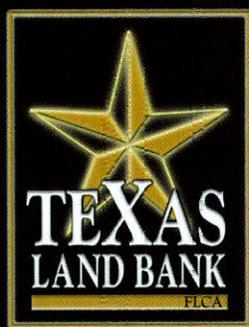
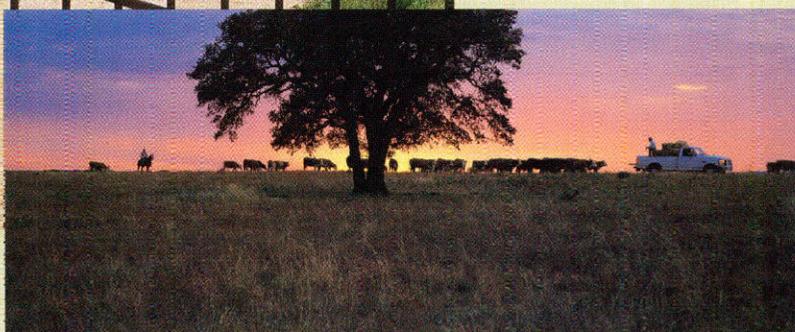
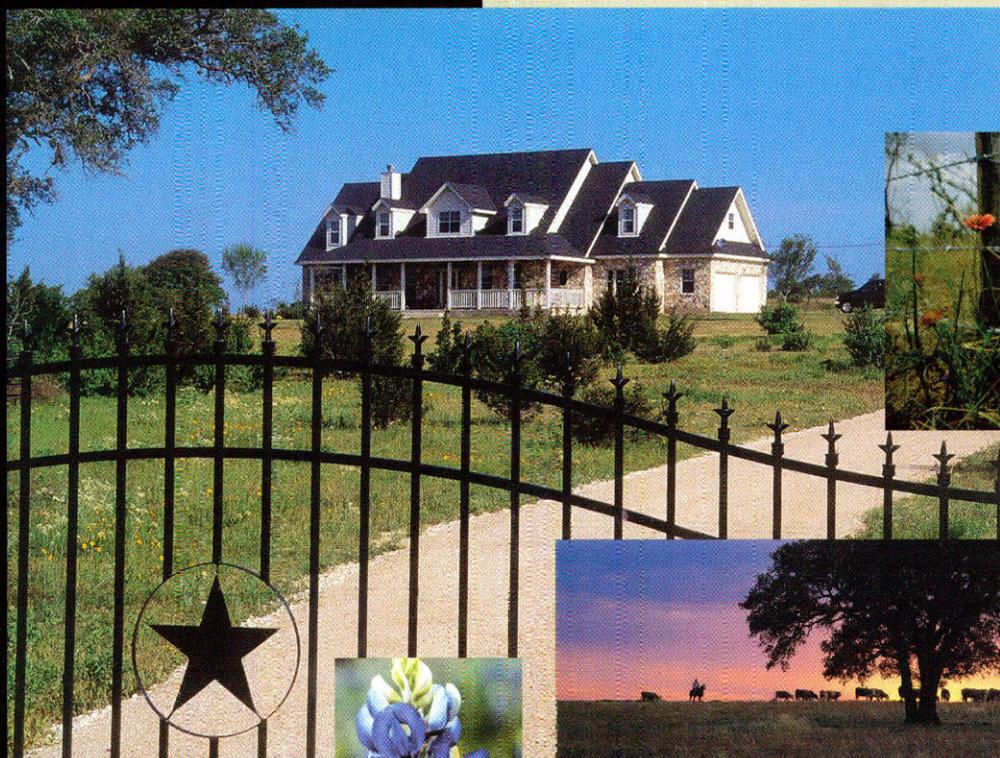
from electroshocking to baited traps, and we have not been able to impact them," says Garrett. "We will begin a research project this summer to see how we might be able to control these things. What scares us is there are many other important, pristine rivers and springs in the state that are susceptible to this."

Bonner and Garrett make this plea to aquarium owners: Don't throw anything — plants, bugs or fish — from an aquarium into any body of water. "Our efforts to control these fish will do no good if people turn around and put more fish in," Bonner points out. ★

—Larry D. Hodge

Aquarium creatures, like armored catfish, can prosper — and create an ecological imbalance — in Texas lakes and rivers.





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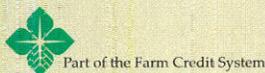
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Army Aid

Divers from the U.S. Army Dive Company repair swimming platform in Tyler.



Once an attractive respite for sunbathers and swimmers at Tyler State Park, a 44-by-10-foot aggregate concrete swimming platform eventually eroded into a safety hazard for park visitors.

Built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the late 1930s, the platform, located in about 13 feet of water about 60 feet offshore in the park swimming area, fell into disrepair over the decades, causing minor injuries to swimmers who scraped against it as they approached or climbed on it.

Officials from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department contacted the U.S. Army Dive Company, asking them to survey the damage and later, to demolish the top deck of the platform. Destruction of the original platform began May 1, and a new wooden platform was completed in time for swimmers to enjoy during the Memorial Day weekend.

"It was important to us to preserve the integrity of the original underneath structure, so the top was covered with a wooden casing, which serves as the new swimming platform for now," explains M.L. Hill, construction manager for the Tyler Region. "Eventually, budget permitting, we'd like to restore the platform to its original condition."

Debris from the demolition was collected in metal trashcans, taken by boat to deep water, and deposited in the lake to be used as fish habitat.

Not only did the Tyler State Park project put a once-hazardous facility back in play, it also served as a valuable training opportunity for members of the U.S. Army's 86th Engineer Dive Team. Based in Ft. Eustis, Virginia, where 80 percent of the Army's 120 divers are located, the five-man team used this mission to help prepare for

future underwater missions.

"It gives the new guys hands-on experience with the hydraulic tools and equipment we use for underwater construction and demolition," says 1st Lieutenant Timothy Mitroka, who was in charge of the three-day expedition. "Even though the majority of this project does not take place under water, it provides a chance for us to sharpen our skills, and it gives us a break from our normal training routine. This is also much clearer water than we're used to diving in. That, too, has been a treat."

This is the first time the Army has joined forces with Texas Parks and Wildlife in a service project such as this one, making it a unique venture. It seems it may not be the last, however.

Upon completion of the Tyler State Park project, the dive team traveled to Lake Ray Roberts to inspect and collect data on the potential reconstruction of a breakwater system. According to Hill, the original design failed and anchor cables snapped. The group also surveyed damage to a swimming platform at Lake Buchanan. Future plans for demolition of that platform and construction of its replacement are still in development.

—Erica H. Brasseux

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Mottled Mystery

Gators were the prime suspect, but habitat destruction may be the real culprit behind the decline of mottled ducks.

The Texas mottled duck population

has taken a beating over the past 40 years, but no one is quite sure why. Is the population reduction due to habitat loss? Predation? Hunting? Alligators? A recent report by The Gulf Coast Joint Venture — a partnership between state and local wildlife agencies and nonprofit organizations — showed a dramatic and consistent downward trend in the mottled duck population between 1966 and 2002. Only in Texas has the population taken a swan dive; in Louisiana there exists no downward trend. “We don’t consider it a crisis yet,” says TPWD waterfowl biologist Mike Rezsutek. “But we’re concerned.”

In a night-time adventure repeated throughout the spring and summer, biologists — including Rezsutek — take an airboat through the back sloughs of J.D. Murphree WMA on the upper coast in search of answers. K.J. Lodrigue is a Texas A&M University graduate student studying whether the coast’s alligators may be a factor. From the airboat, he and the crew perform alligator rodeo — a spotlight illuminates shining reptilian eyes on the water’s surface, and as the boat inches closer, Lodrigue quickly lassoes a big one, wrangling it onto the boat. After the crew has captured several, they head back to the lab where they pump the alligators’ stomachs. Although scientific analysis awaits completion, says Rezsutek, “from what the alligator folks were able to see, mottled ducks don’t appear too often in alligator tummies, and probably are not a major source of mortality — in opposition to what many of the old timers claim.”

In drought conditions, alligators may start to impact mottled duck populations as they concentrate in scarce freshwater. Mottled duck numbers dropped by 50 percent from 2004 to 2005 — and 2005 was a dry year. Such fluctuations are within the observed range for the past few years, but the real concern is that the mid-winter counts of mottled ducks have declined from highs of 50,000 – 80,000 in the early 1970s to numbers in the



↑ **The combined loss of wetlands and rice fields has been tough on mottled ducks.**

17,000 – 25,000 range over the past several years. Midwinter counts don’t represent an exact count of the population, but do provide a scientific index of how well the population is faring overall.

Although more studies are needed, the GCJV report suggests that the primary cause of mottled duck decline is lowered nesting success and brood survival rather than adult survival — a number that would be affected by hunting or predation.

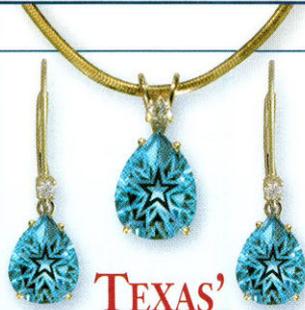
Both gators and mottled ducks prefer freshwater marsh, a habitat that has declined due to development and saltwater intrusion. In addition to loss of natural coastal freshwater marsh, fallow rice fields — once common throughout East Texas — provide ideal nesting habitat. But local rice farmers can no longer compete effectively with cheap foreign imports, and former rice fields are being taken over by tallow trees. Rice farming in Jefferson County — where J.D. Murphree WMA lies — declined 35 percent over the last year.

Rezsutek and colleagues will work to improve habitat — whether that means predator removal or ensuring salinity stays below 8ppt (above which is fatal to ducklings). The new USDA Grassland Reserve Program — modeled on the Wetlands Reserve Program — may provide an option to create breeding and nesting grounds. In the end, without more habitat, as Rezsutek says, “It may be that they’ve reached their carrying capacity with what we have left.”

To get a copy of the GCJV report, or if you’re interested in improving your land for mottled ducks, contact Rezsutek at Michael.Rezsutek@tpwd.state.tx.us or (409) 736-2551 x 30. ★

— Wendee Holtcamp

PHOTO © GARYKAMMER.NET



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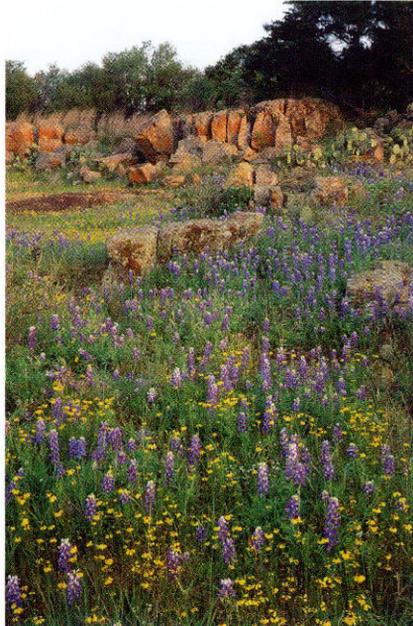
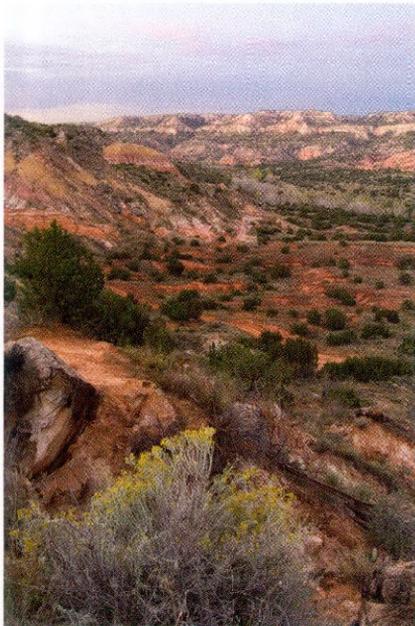
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Palo Duro Canyon State Park (above left) in the Panhandle and Inks Lake State Park in the Hill Country each offer landscapes that are unique to a particular region.

I'm often asked if I have a favorite state park. That's akin to asking if I have a favorite child. I find that parks, like children, have their own unique personalities and qualities; and in a state as wide as Texas there's something to love about each one. Even so, I'll admit that I do have several favorites based on their photographic qualities.

GRAND LANDSCAPE — Big Bend Ranch State Park

For mountain vistas, rugged canyons and breathtaking sunsets, Big Bend Ranch is the place to be. With almost 300,000 acres of Chihuahuan desert wilderness amid volcanic mountains, the park is a diverse mix of geology, ecosystems and human history.

AUTUMN COLOR — Daingerfield State Park

Autumn color in East Texas depends on

rainfall and temperature. But at its peak, Daingerfield State Park is a palette of dazzling reds, oranges, yellows and golds against a background of pine. Towering sweetgum, oak and maple trees are accented by smaller plants including sumac and beautyberry.

NOSTALGIA — Sauer Beckmann Farmstead at LBJ State Park and Historic Site

This working farm depicts daily life in 1918. Costumed interpreters carry out the day-to-day activities of rural life, gladly allowing photographers a chance for portraits as well as photos of farm animals and nostalgic trappings of the era. If you're into windmills and weathered wood, this is your place.

WILDFLOWERS — Inks Lake State Park

For the serious wildflower photographer, all roads lead to the Texas Hill Country. With its pink granite outcroppings and clear streams, Inks Lake is an artistic setting for many of the state's wildflowers, including bluebonnet, paintbrush, coreopsis, wine cup, indian blanket and black-eyed susan.

WILDLIFE — South Llano SP

South Llano State Park is unique in that it is one of the more "photographer friendly" parks in terms of close-up access to wildlife. Numerous mammals and birds

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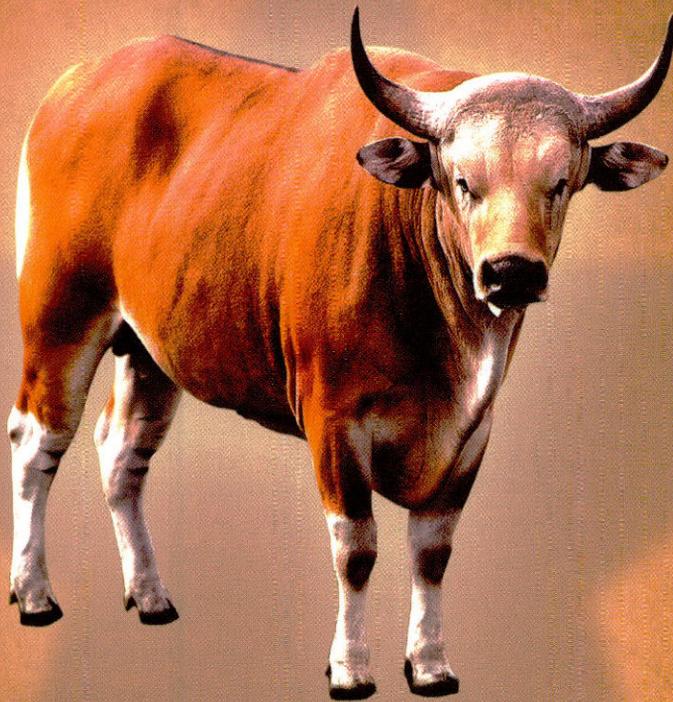
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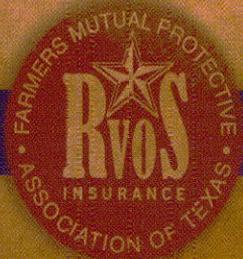
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can be viewed from several observation and box blinds strategically placed around the park.

HISTORY —

Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site/ Barrington Farm

Texas began here with the signing of the Texas Declaration of Independence in 1836. Now, the Republic of Texas era is reproduced in the park at Barrington Living History Farm, the home of the Texas Republic's last president, Anson Jones.

COASTAL —

Galveston Island State Park

Pristine sand dunes against picture-perfect seashore are a slam dunk at Galveston Island State Park. However, a value-added feature is the inland section which offers boardwalks and observation areas located around coves and bayous. You'll get close-up views of waterfowl and mammals.

TEXANA —

Palo Duro Canyon State Park

Take one look at the park's multihued canyons, and you'll feel immersed in the Old West. Even today, the aromas of leather and horsehide are a reminder of days gone by. The park is a wealth of landscape, wildlife and historic images throughout the year.

WINTER —

Caprock Canyons State Park & Trailway

You'll have to be quick because a winter snow doesn't usually last long in the Texas Panhandle. If you're lucky enough to get to Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway on the morning following a snow, you'll be rewarded with vistas of red rock canyons layered with white beneath a clearing winter sky.

RIVER —

Frio at Garner State Park

Among the many rivers that cut a swath through Texas state parks, the Frio River at Garner State Park is arguably the most photogenic. Framed by ancient cypress trees and towering limestone bluffs, the jade-green river runs clear, cool and constant.

— Earl Nottingham

BY THE NUMBERS / BY BRYAN FRAZIER

CAPROCK CANYONS STATE PARK

HARD DATA AND FUN FACTS ABOUT YOUR STATE PARKS

15,313 —

The number of acres at Caprock Canyons State Park.

1876 —

The year that legendary Texas rancher Charles Goodnight first brought cattle to the area around Caprock Canyons State Park and nearby Palo Duro Canyon.

90 —

Total trail mileage, including 64.25 miles featured in the Trailway section of the park, which is a converted old railroad and part of the Rails to Trails program.

175

The number of bird species, including the rarely seen golden eagle, that can be found in the park.

56 —

The number of bison that make up the official Texas State Bison herd. Caprock Canyons' bison herd is one of the last remnants of the population that once numbered in the millions across the southern plains.

PHOTO BY TPWD

Special birds find the perfect spot.

Field Guide



Your birdwatching experience takes flight in Laredo! Be among the lucky to witness the recently sighted Blue Bunting, quite rare for this area and Laredo's "million dollar" bird, the rare White Collared Seedeater. Year-round warm weather makes Laredo an ideal destination, for birds and birdwatchers alike. Follow the birds, come to Laredo!

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Bow-casting

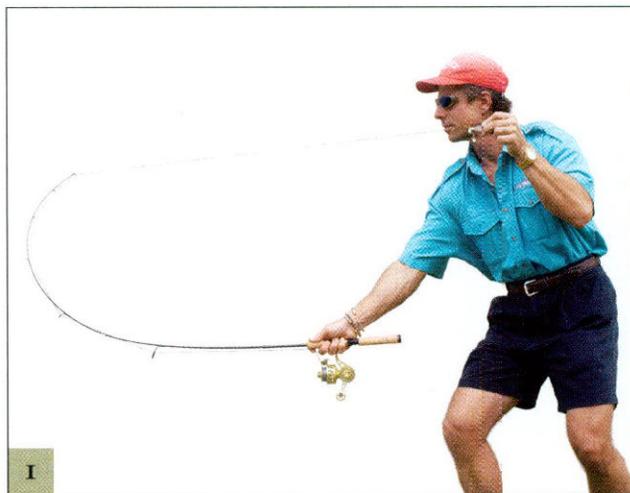
Use your rod like a sling-shot when you're in a tight spot.

At some point you may be fishing along a riverbank with little or no room to back-swing your rod. Tree limbs are overhead; thick brush is behind and on both sides. This is the perfect spot to make a toss to that lunker fish you see waiting in the shadows about 30 feet away. One practical casting solution is to use a bow-cast.

Bow-casting works best with spinning gear. Simply open the bail, lower the lure to your free hand while holding the line taut with pressure against the rod handle under your index finger. The lure is gripped with the opposite hand pinching the bend of the rear hook with two fingers well clear of the point or points. Keep your arms apart to form a wide arc while drawing the lure back to put a bow in the rod. Release the lure and instantly release your line-finger and — zip! — the flexed rod sends the lure flying forward exactly like a catapult or slingshot without moving your rod arm. For safety, always make sure that the bail is open and the line free of any wraps around the blank or guides before each cast.

When casting, lure and line weight are major factors and you will get more distance out of a slightly heavier lure on light mono or the stronger, yet thin diameter braided lines. In practice, I have found that 1/4 to 5/8-ounce lures work like a charm. For extra distance, just add a slight flip-of-the-wrist on the release and you can gain five or 10 extra yards to your bow-cast.

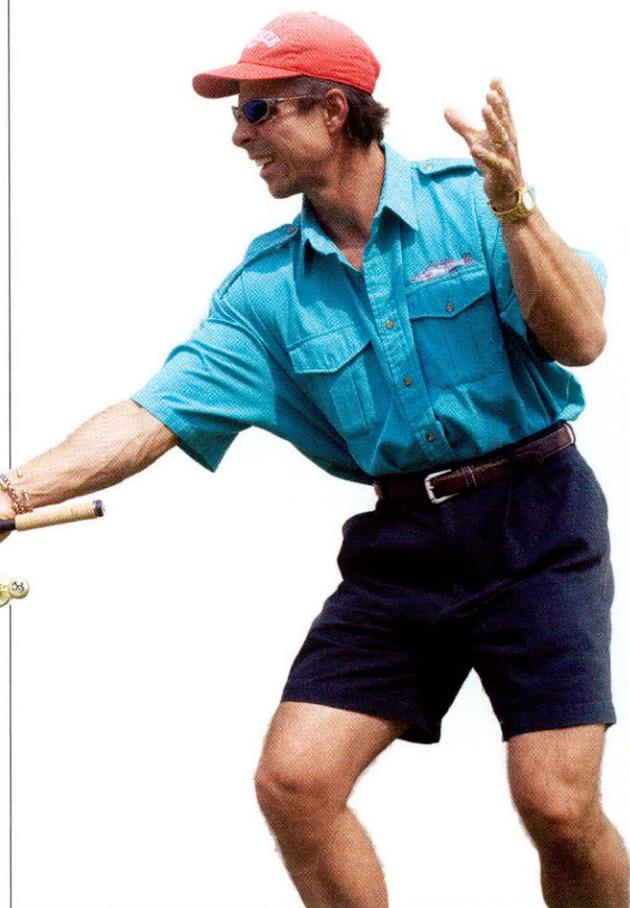
It is similar to flip casting, but is easier to learn and offers a wider range of distances with less effort and body movement. With practice, this special cast can become a really accurate presentation for reaching some difficult spots along the banks of small streams and ponds having thick undergrowth. This method also allows you to avoid using the same old fishing spots and to find fish that have not seen every lure in the box. ☆



1

Using an open face spinning reel and rod, the angler relies on the weight of the lure and the energy stored in the bowed rod to make a difficult cast in limited space.

2



Daypacks

Sturdy, lightweight packs are an excellent choice for hiking in the heat.

Compact, lightweight packs are usually of two types and are designed to carry the items necessary for a single day in the field. One style is centered on the back and held by two padded straps; the other is a sling-type over one shoulder and rides at your side.

Perhaps the toughest of all daypacks is the **Maxpedition Falcon II** built for years of hard use. This unit has four large, zippered pockets, two hidden compartments and features modular attachment webbing for Malice accessory clips on almost every surface. An insulated external sleeve against the back can hold an optional 100-ounce hydration bladder. The quality of construction and hardware is excellent with comfortable contoured shoulder straps and fully adjustable waist and sternum belts. A smaller **Maxpedition Fatboy Versipack** is a military-style shoulder sling pack of Teflon coated industrial strength fabric. It has an extra wide padded strap and is a perfect size for birders, fishers and almost any outdoor activity where a light essentials-only bag is needed. (\$114.99, Falcon II, #0513K, Maxpedition, 877-629-5556, www.maxpedition.com) (\$64.99, Fatboy S-Type Khaki, #0408K, Maxpedition)

Looking for a minimalist low-profile rugged hydration pack? The **CamelBak Chaos** comes with a 70-ounce (2-liters) **Omega HydroTanium** wide-mouth reservoir for adding ice and easy cleaning. It has two other cargo compartments and the main pocket is 17 inches deep with a smaller pouch for easy access at the lower back. This multipurpose design is ideal for most outdoor activities in hot weather. The back panel features air-mesh pads and harness for enhanced ventilation as you hike or bike. (\$75, Outback Chaos, #60385, Color: Coyote Brown, CamelBak, 800-767-8725, www.camelbak.com)

If a larger pack is needed for a load of light, yet bulky gear, the **Oakley Icon 2.0** made with durable ballistic cloth, riveted reinforcements and fittings of large size and strength is a good choice.

It is roomy, high-tech and functional with wide soft-padded shoulder straps and lots of drain ports, but it is not waterproof. Simply add a dry-bag enclosure or thick zip-lock plastics for things that need to remain dry. The large central chamber allows the items to be centered on the back. Adjustable three-way compression straps keep the pack and the contents from shifting. (\$135, Icon 2.0 Pack, Color: New Khaki #92027-323, Oakley, 800-431-1439, www.oakley.com)

The nylon **Canon Camera Backpack** is lightweight and water resistant with separate padded compartments for delicate photo gear. The unit opens fully using twin-zippers for easy access to your pre-selected camera and lens combination. It has just enough room for up to two camera bodies, four medium size lenses and accessories. Straps provided at the bottom of the pack can carry a compact tripod. *NOTE: Keep the twin-zippers of the main compartment together and low on one side, not at the top-center of the pack where, under pressure, they can accidentally spread apart and dump your gear.* (\$69.95, Canon 200EG Deluxe Pack, Canon U.S.A., 866-802-8500, www.precision-camera.com)

The flat profile **Wilson's Convertible Backpack**, made of leather and nylon, can be easily transformed into a classic messenger style shoulder bag in two easy steps. Simply unclip the backpack straps and tuck them away in a special rear pocket; then attach the adjustable shoulder strap, and you're ready to head for the outback with sketchbook and pencils or into the urban jungle armed with a laptop. (\$100, Convertible Pack, #07763, Color: Café, Wilson's Leather, 800-236-9976, www.wilsonleather.com)

Today's packs have evolved into highly specialized designs for just about any outdoor activity. These versatile daypacks remain the most practical means for individual, hands-free transport of essential gear in the outdoors. ☆



From top: CamelBak Chaos with Omega HydroTanium; Oakley Icon, second row, left; Maxpedition Fatboy Versipack, second row, right; Maxpedition Falcon II, Canon Camera Backpack; Wilson's Convertible Backpack.

3 Days in the Field / By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

DESTINATION: SONORA

TRAVEL TIME FROM :

AUSTIN – 3.25 hours / BROWNSVILLE – 7.5 hours / DALLAS – 5 hours / EL PASO – 6.25 hours
HOUSTON – 6 hours / SAN ANTONIO – 3 hours / LUBBOCK – 4.25 hours

Old West Reborn

Formerly a gunslingers' haven, Sonora now draws tamer travelers in search of starry nights, cool caves and a rocking chair with a view.

Prickly pear cacti, native grasses and gnarled live oaks rim the limestone edge of an abandoned quarry within Eaton Hill Wildlife Sanctuary in Sonora. Two young boys, out for an afternoon hike along the trails, take turns throwing long spears fashioned out of dry sotol at a rusted tin can set on a rock.

"They're playing 'Texas darts,'" explains Jimmy Cahill, a West Texas businessman who helped found the 37-acre sanctuary five years ago. While the pair continues their game, Cahill picks up a coiled rope that is next to a jagged tree stump, twirls one looped end over his head, and then tosses it around the stump. "They can also practice their roping skills," he grins.

Or pretend they've snuck up on a trio of armed outlaws bedded down beneath the oaks. Cahill, who's well versed in Sonora's early gunslinging days, set up several replica campsites in the sanctuary that depict how bad guys Will Carver, Ben Kilpatrick and their cronies might have cooked and slept while hiding out from the law.

If I'm to believe the countless tales I hear during my brief visit in Sonora, then "wild and woolly" would certainly describe life here at the turn of the century. In fact, one infamous murder case involves the town's first water well.

Sonora was founded by rancher Charles G. Adams, who settled on four sections of grassy but dry land in 1885

and named the site after a family servant from Sonora, Mexico. Two years later, he drilled a water well and offered free lots. His abundantly flowing well, located on a proposed courthouse square, attracted a large enough population for Sonora to become the county seat of Sutton County in 1890. (A historical marker marks the original well's site.)

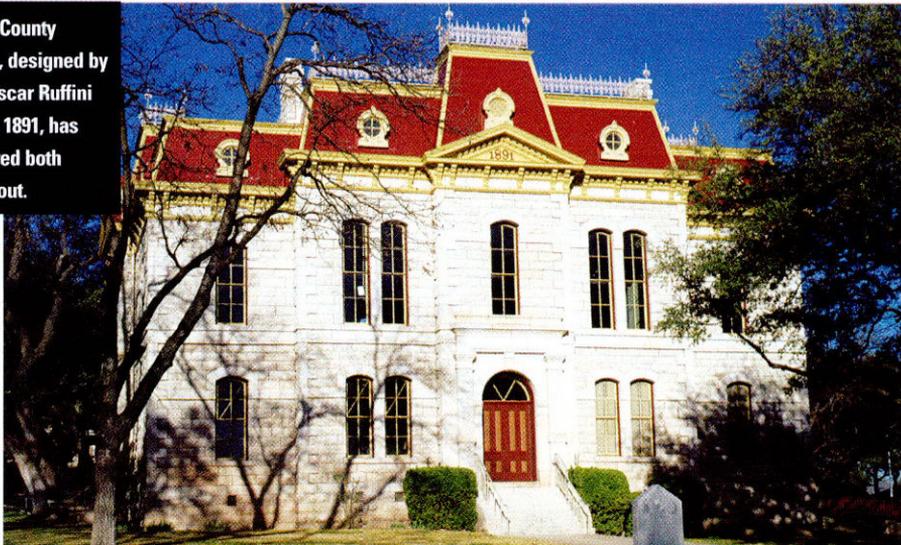
Tragedy connected to the public well befell Sonora in 1891. It seems Isaac Miers, who lived with his family in a board-and-batten house on the square (now the Miers Home Museum), feuded with neighbor John Q. Adams over watering livestock at the well's trough. Though eyewitnesses gave different reports, the most-told version puts Miers wielding a knife and then Adams shooting him in the abdomen. Miers died, and Adams was found guilty of murder. The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals later reversed the judgment.

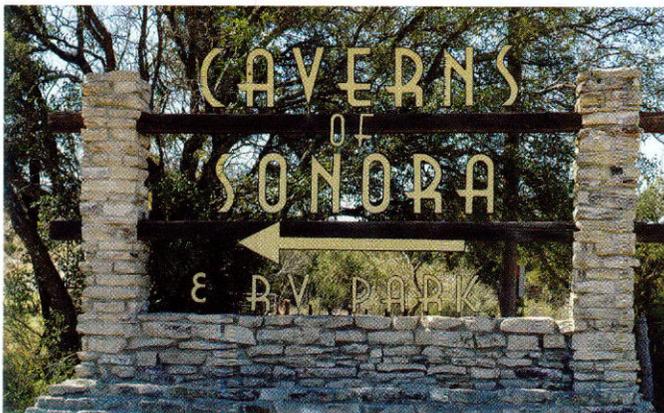
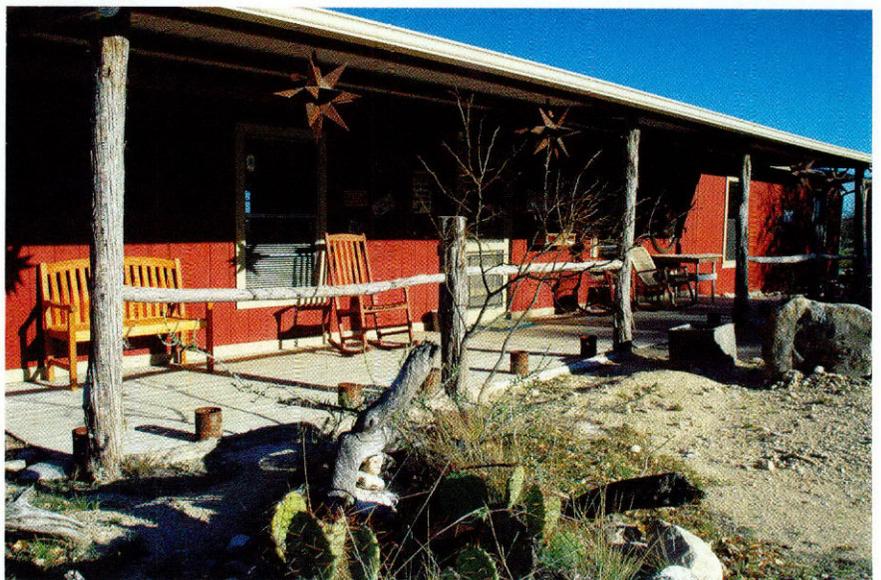
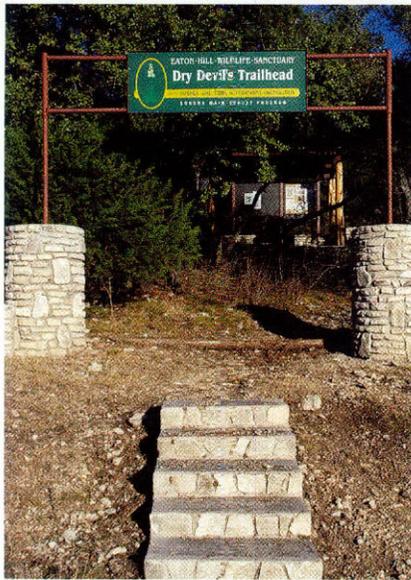
Legend has it that Adams mysteriously vanished soon thereafter. However, to this day, many residents believe he hid in his home and ventured out occasionally at night, dressed as a woman.

Over a hefty-sized Caesar salad, I listen to one yarn after another at the Sutton County Steakhouse, a popular eatery frequented by both locals and harried travelers pulling off Interstate 10. After we finish lunch, my hosts escort me to a front dining room, where dozens of vintage photos from Sonora's early days cover an entire wall. Even pages from the town's first telephone book, dated April 1920, are displayed.

An afternoon tour of Sonora starts at the newly renovated Sutton County courthouse, designed by architect Oscar Ruffini and built in 1891. During restoration, contractors uncovered a gold-stenciled border believed to have once lined the courthouse's rooms and

The Sutton County courthouse, designed by architect Oscar Ruffini and built in 1891, has been restored both inside and out.





Clockwise from above left: The Eaton Hill Wildlife Sanctuary; the Live Oak Lodge beckons visitors to the X Bar Ranch Nature Retreat; Entry for the Caverns of Sonora.

Main Street, today houses offices and the Ranch Women/Veterans From All Wars Museum, a three-room exhibit filled with local memorabilia.

After hiking at Eaton Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, some of us meet in the evening at La Mexicana Restaurant, where we unwind over appetizers. On one plate, chicken fajitas, refried beans, and guacamole, along with sautéed mushrooms and onions, top an order of Tejas nachos, a twist on the standard Tex-Mex melding of beef, beans and cheese. I'm also surprised to discover that the chicken flautas come blanketed with shredded cabbage, tomatoes and jalapeños. Delicious!

I've set aside the next morning for an excursion to the Caverns of Sonora, a spectacular showcase of underground formations located some 15 miles west of town. Gerry Ingham and daughter Louise Ingham-Moore, third- and fourth-generation co-owners of the National Natural Landmark, welcome me back. Even though I've visited here once before, the cave's gravity-defying helictites, delicate "soda straws" and

(continued on page 63)

halls. Based on that discovery and old photos, conservators meticulously hand-stenciled and -painted Victorian-style motifs in gold and copper. The borders beautifully accent the courthouse's sage green walls, not to mention the original pine floors, wooden railings and furnishings in the upstairs courtroom.

On the square also stands the two-story Sutton County jail, constructed in 1891 of native stone. Although the jail's four upstairs cells offered the latest in plumbing fixtures, Sonora's water pressure wasn't strong enough to get water up to them until 1895, when the waterworks were moved from the square to a nearby hilltop. The now-empty jail housed prisoners until 1980.

Next, we drive south along Water Avenue for a look at the Old Rock School. On the way, I experience a local rite of passage known as "the dip" thanks to our driver, who guns the accelerator just enough to give me a thrill as we speed down and across a low bridge, then back up to street level. "My mama's car would have sparks flying out when I'd bottom it out," confesses Cahill from the back seat.

Up ahead we see a pair of red-roofed,

limestone buildings that served as a school from 1904 until 1950. In 2003, Sonora's citizens passed a \$1.55 million bond to restore and update the school. Today, prekindergarten and third-grade students, in addition to computer labs, fill two levels of classrooms, which feature original hardwood floors and woodwork.

Downtown Sonora has enjoyed a similar resurgence over the years. As a member of the state's Main Street Program, the community has restored 39 buildings, costing more than \$3 million in private and public funds. The Mercantile building, constructed after a fire in 1902 destroyed the east side of

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A January norther that blew in hours earlier turned the 20-minute run across Espiritu Santo Bay from Port O'Connor to Matagorda Island Wildlife Management Area into a treacherous crawl. Pitch dark and in confused water, boats of various shapes and sizes negotiated myriad obstacles.

"There's one boat stuck on a sandbar to the left of the cut and another off to the right. We missed the turn and almost nailed a platform," offered a drenched, camouflage-clad duck hunter in his early 20s as he ambled toward the check-in station, a bag of two dozen plastic duck decoys slung over one shoulder. Despite a 30-knot "breeze" at their backs, the two beached boats would pull free and make the island in time to join a host of other waterfowlers for the morning hunt.

Public hunting in Texas is no walk in the park, but for those willing to put forth some extra effort, the 1,000,000-plus acres of public hunting lands offer affordable access to first-rate outdoor experiences.

During the second-to-last weekend of the 2005-2006 duck hunting season, 42 hunters on Matagorda Island WMA shared nearly two dozen freshwater ponds scattered across 7,300 acres and averaged better than four ducks apiece, with an impressive 13 different duck species counted among the harvest. Several young hunters strapped their first pintail drakes, and there were others, seasoned duck hunters, who cooed over a rare goldeneye drake, envied a brilliant cinnamon teal and inspected an unusual mottled duck/mallard hybrid.

Todd Merendino, a wildlife biologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department who oversees a series of WMAs along the coast, including Matagorda Island, appreciates the extra effort public hunters put into the experience and tries to be accommodating. "Public hunting is just a different style or type of hunting, primarily because unlike a guided operation or your own private lease, there is an element of the unknown," says Merendino. "My number-one priority is to do whatever I can to make sure these folks have a good time."

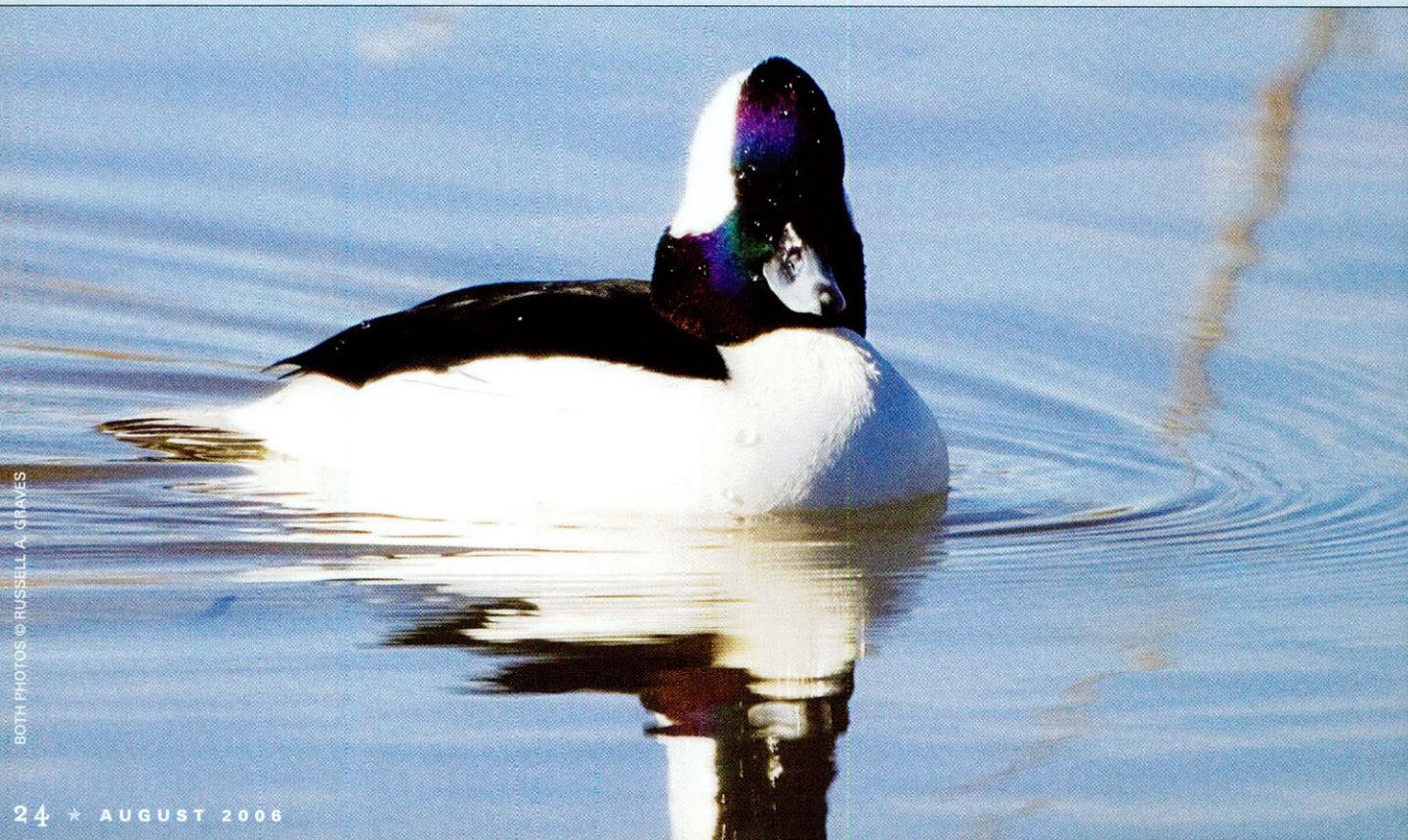
The adage about the early bird getting the worm rings true for public hunting in Texas. In many cases it is first come, first served, and it's that element of chance that can be daunting for some.

"Folks that are in front of you at the check-in station may pick the spot you wanted to go to, or you may just be unfamiliar with the place and not know a good site to hunt," Merendino explains. "Just like this morning, these guys will be set up an hour before shooting time. On a private lease, or a guided operation, you'll probably be getting set up right at shooting time. If I can give somebody insight and offer advice, hopefully they'll have a productive hunt and will want to come back."

TPWD offers a variety of hunting opportunities through two public hunting systems. The \$48 Annual Public Hunting Permit provides nearly year-round hunting on approximately 1.2 million acres of land. The increasingly popular dove hunting areas are offered through this system. The Public Hunt Drawing System provides opportunities to apply for a wide variety of supervised, drawn hunts, including special drawings for both adults and youth hunters. In addition, TPWD offers special hunt package drawings for exotic wildlife and quality native animals on TPWD-managed lands as well as specially leased private properties.

Both public hunting avenues can provide quality hunting experiences. But, like any outdoor recreational activity, depending upon your level of expertise and expectations, you get out of it what you put into it. Scouting for the right public hunting experience might mean spending a fair amount of time researching map booklets, checking the odds of success based on past years' hunts and making calls to local wildlife biologists to find out about the prospects for a successful hunt.

"If you are a seasoned, experienced hunter proficient with a centerfire rifle, shotgun or bow, you could fill all your tags with an APH on public land," says Kelly Edmiston, who coordinates TPWD's Wildlife Division information phone bank and handles calls regularly from potential public hunters looking for advice. "If you're just getting into hunting or are looking for something between a fully guided hunt and one where you are turned loose



BOTH PHOTOS © RUSSELL A. GRAVES

on your own, then our drawn hunts are the way to go.”

With the special drawn hunts, participants are assigned to specific areas by compartment or section and are allowed to set up blinds or move around as they choose, except in some areas — such as state parks — where hunters might be stationed in blinds for safety reasons.

“The overall selection rate is about one for every nine applicants, but that’s skewed somewhat because some areas are extremely popular and get a lot of applicants,” says Vickie Fite, TPWD public hunting coordinator. “But, some areas don’t have enough applicants to fill the available slots.”

As demand for public lands hunting continues to grow, TPWD has expanded its drawn hunt system to maximize opportunity on state parks and wildlife management areas and by leasing private land for public hunting.

“Our private small game lease program is a priority,” says Fite. “It started out just for dove hunting, but now we have private leased land for duck, quail, pheasant, rabbit, squirrel and even feral hogs. We’ve also invested in making some areas wheelchair accessible and our field staff tries to accommodate physically challenged hunters whenever possible.

“The cool thing about the lease program is that it’s geared toward the urban hunter,” she adds, “and we’ve made a conscious effort to cluster lands along the I-10 and I-35 corridors to try and put public hunting within driving distance of major cities.”

Here’s what you need to know to take advantage of the public hunting opportunities available in Texas.

- Annual Public Hunting (APH) Permit — \$48
- Issued to an individual and valid for a 12-month period from September 1 through August 31 (the following year).
- Provides access to more than 1,000,000 acres of land for hunting, fishing, camping and other uses.
- Offers more than 200 different areas, including about 130 special dove hunting units.
- Many areas are open year-round for authorized activities by permit holders.

- Access to about 140 dove and small game leases covering nearly 60,000 acres in 48 counties. Majority of locations are within an hour’s drive of major metropolitan areas.
- Allows hunting for deer, feral hogs, squirrel, turkey, dove, waterfowl, quail and other legal game.
- The APH Permit waives any applicable daily hunting permit fees on the listed areas.
- Youth under age 17 may hunt free with a permitted adult.
- The APH Permit provides entry to TPWD Wildlife Management Areas at times when they are open for general visitation.
- Only permit holders receive a map booklet listing available areas, facilities, rules and schedules. Booklets are online and can be downloaded for review.

APH Permits are available at TPWD offices and all license vendors (a place that sells hunting and fishing licenses), or by calling 1-800-TX-LIC-4U (menu choice 1 for license sales) and paying by Visa, Discover or MasterCard. If the permit is purchased at a TPWD office, the map booklet and supplement will be provided immediately at the time of purchase; otherwise, the publications will be mailed to the permit holder within two weeks of purchase.

INSIDER TIPS: Check out the TPWD Annual Public Hunting map booklet online to locate hunting areas near home. Take advance scouting trips to become familiar with the land. Plan to hunt midweek or after the opening week of the season to avoid crowds. Remember, these are “your” hunting leases, so treat them with respect.



Computer Drawings for Supervised Hunts

Drawings are held to select a limited number of participants in high-quality supervised hunts for white-tailed and mule deer, pronghorn antelope, exotics, feral hogs, javelina, turkey, alligators and guided hunt packages. Most hunts take place on department-managed lands, including state parks and WMAs.

- Requires submission of a completed application and fees prior to an established deadline.
- Hunt applications and schedules are posted online during the summer.
- Application fees (required for adults only) are \$3 per person for most drawn hunts and \$10 per person on certain packaged hunts.
- Among the packaged hunts are top-shelf Big Time Texas Hunts, including the Grand Slam package of four separate hunts for desert bighorn sheep, whitetailed deer, mule deer and pronghorn antelope.
- Selected applicants will be awarded a 1- to 4-day hunt with \$75-\$125 hunt permit fee assessed for adults. No permit fee for youth hunters.
- Some drawn hunts have restrictions (archery, muzzleloader, handgun or shotgun only).
- Some drawn hunts are reserved exclusively for hunting by supervised youth (no application or hunt permit fees are charged).

Application deadlines for the categories of Computer Drawn Hunts are as follows:

- Alligator, Archery Alligator, Youth-only Alligator — early August
- Pronghorn Antelope, Archery Deer, Archery Exotic — mid-August
- Gun Deer (Either-Sex, Antlerless/Spike, Management Buck, Youth-only Either Sex, Youth-only Antlerless/Spike, Private Lands Management Either Sex, Private Lands Antlerless/Spike) — early September
- Javelina, Youth-only Javelina and Guided Deer Hunt Packages — early October
- Feral Hog, Youth Feral Hog — early November
- Exotic Only — mid-November
- Youth Spring Turkey, Spring Turkey, Guided Scimitar-Horned Oryx Hunt Package, Guided Gemsbok and Guided Waterbuck Hunt Packages — early December

INSIDER TIPS: Research the listing of drawn hunts online in midsummer; check the odds for success and selection. Call the site to see what the prospects are before applying. Look into standby hunting opportunities at sites near home (unfilled slots are awarded to those who show up the day of the hunt on an as-needed basis). Standby hunting offers the best odds of getting selected.



Regular Permit Hunts

A \$15 Daily Hunting Permit purchased at the hunting area is available for some of the small game hunts (youth under 17 free with permitted adult), including waterfowl. This information is found in the Applications for Drawings on Public Hunting Lands booklet.

- Dove, quail, waterfowl, squirrel and rabbit may be hunted at designated times on designated Wildlife Management Areas.
- Some hunts are youth-only hunts where only supervised youth are allowed to hunt.

INSIDER TIPS: This is an economical way for a group of friends to check out dove or waterfowl hunting, particularly those who have been out of hunting for awhile.

Federal Public Hunting Lands in Texas

There is free access and/or by permit for hunting on several National Wildlife Refuges in Texas, as well as on USDA Forest Service lands.

- Reserved space hunting areas available on some NWRs for \$10 a day or \$40 a year.
- Some NWRs have self-issued permits available at the check-in site.
- Some areas, such as the Trinity River NWR, have application drawings for big game hunts.
- Accessible hunt blinds are available in some locations, which can be reserved for hunters with a disability.

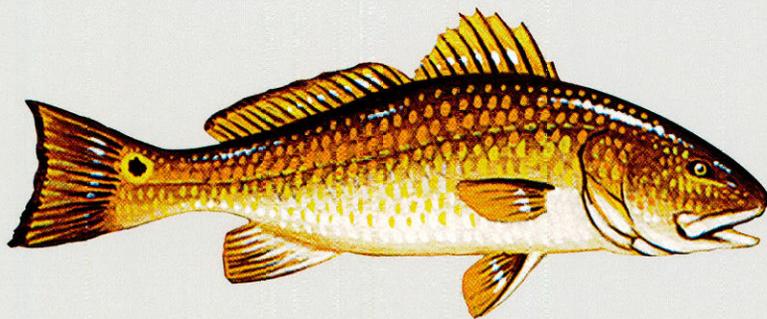
Additional information, including detailed maps and the refuge-required permits are available at refuge offices and visitor information stations. The required permit and maps may be downloaded from www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/txrefuges.html

INSIDER TIPS: Some of the best waterfowl hunting opportunities in Southeast Texas are available seasonally on Anahuac NWR, where 40 percent of the refuge is open to hunting. For bowhunters, the Hagerman NWR in Northeast Texas holds some of the biggest white-tailed deer found anywhere. ★



PHOTO © RUSSELL J. HANES

SNARING *the* RED DRUM



(*Sciaenops ocellatus*)

A saltwater fish provides some of the best freshwater fishing.

Text and photography by Larry D. Hodge



When it comes to water temperature and quality, *Sciaenops ocellatus* swims to the sound of a different drum. Unlike other saltwater species such as flounder and spotted seatrout, the red drum is able to survive and grow quite well in fresh water — as long as the water is warm and the right minerals are present.

Fortunately for Texas anglers, several reservoirs in the state meet the red drum's requirements. All are cooling lakes associated with electric generating plants that provide the conditions the transplanted marine dwellers must have to survive. All have "hard" water — significant levels of dissolved minerals such as calcium, sodium, potassium and magnesium. And all are artificially heated during the winter, which is crucial to red drum survival.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department annually allocates between 1.5 million and 2 million red drum fingerlings for stocking into these lakes, primarily Calaveras and Victor Braunig near San Antonio, Tradinghouse Creek near Waco and Fairfield near the town of the same name. Red drum have been stocked into other lakes — Colorado City, Nasworthy and Coletto Creek, to name a few, but the first four named above are the prime freshwater red drum fisheries.

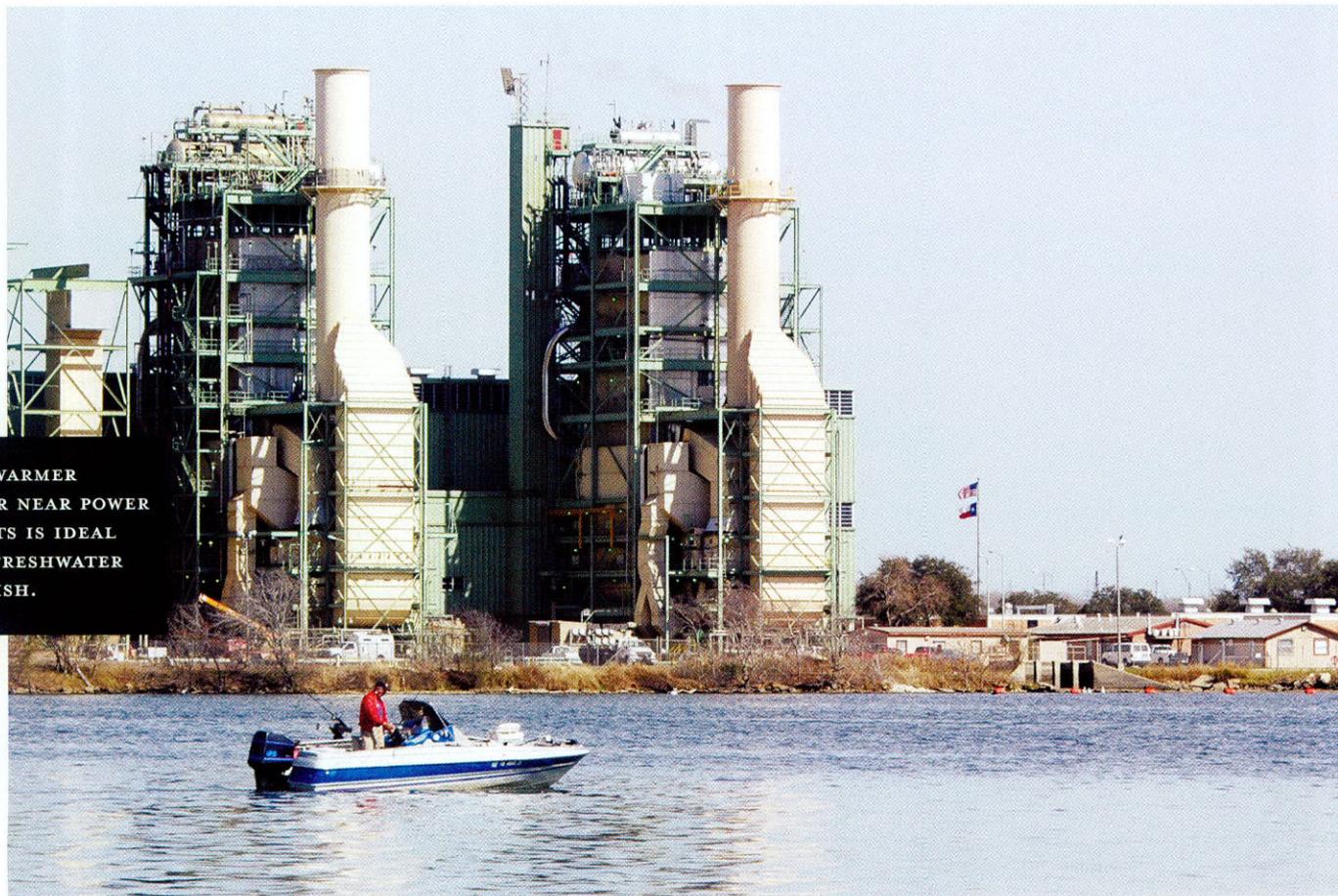
It's ironic, but if you want to catch a trophy red drum, or redfish, the best place to do so during most of the year is in fresh water. Red drum live in bays along the coast during the first three years of their lives, then head offshore, where they are inaccessible to anglers most of the time. Only during the fall spawning run do mature redfish congregate in the surf around passes where anglers can catch them. Most red drum caught in Texas bays are two or three years old, and only fish that fall inside the 20- to 28-inch slot may be kept. (Up to two oversized fish may be kept using special tags; see the fishing regulations in the *TPWD Outdoor Annual* for details.)

In contrast, red drum in fresh water can be fished for year-round and can grow quite large, and there is no maximum size limit on freshwater red drum caught in inland reservoirs. Since the fish can live for years, they can achieve hook-straightening, rod-snapping size.

Where conditions are right, hard-fighting red drum provide freshwater anglers with an experience few freshwater species can match. The freshwater state record red drum, caught by Billy Tyus from Fairfield Lake in 2001, was 44 inches long and weighed 36.83 pounds — more than twice as much as the state record largemouth bass. Among game fishes, only blue and flathead catfish and striped bass have weight records greater than 36.83 pounds.

Some people fish for reds from the bank using cut bait on the bottom. When the water warms to 76 to 78 degrees, Dead Tree Point on the south side of Lake Braunig sprouts surf rods with heavy-duty reels spooled with 40-pound-test line, says guide Harry Lamb. Lamb's clients experience a different kind of fishing. "It's more of a hunt than a fishing trip," he says. "I run four downriggers baited with spoons or grubs and troll around until I find them. Braunig is a small lake, and you can

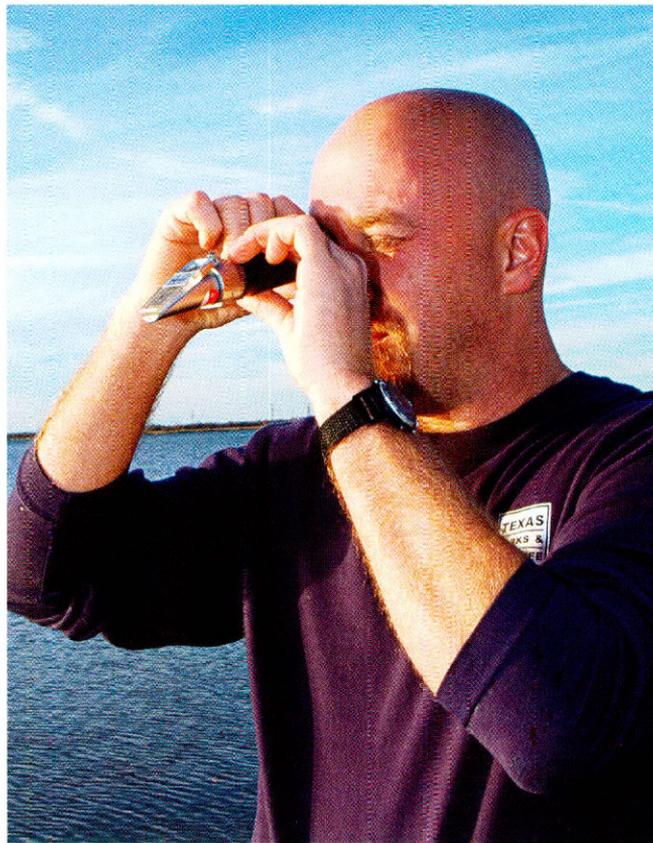
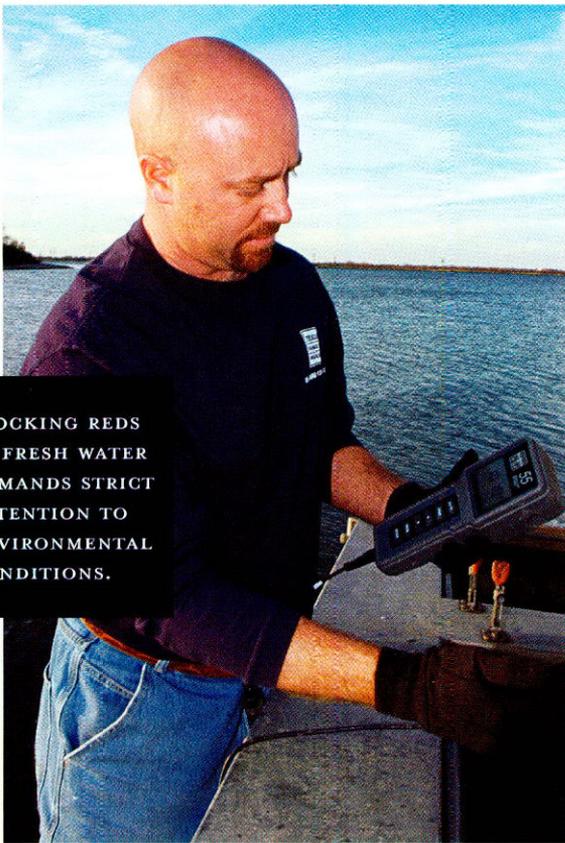
THE WARMER
WATER NEAR POWER
PLANTS IS IDEAL
FOR FRESHWATER
REDFISH.





TPWD FISHERY
BIOLOGIST
MICHAEL BAIRD
MANAGES STOCKING
OF REDFISH IN
FRESH WATER

STOCKING REDS
IN FRESH WATER
DEMANDS STRICT
ATTENTION TO
ENVIRONMENTAL
CONDITIONS.



cover it all in four hours.”

Lamb scans the lake looking for slicks and bird activity on the surface, both signs of subsurface feeding activity. He also relies on his fish finder to locate packs of roving reds. By mounting the transducer on the front of his 28-foot pontoon boat, he's able to see fish on the screen in time to adjust his downriggers to their depth and put the baits right in front of them. “Oddly enough, if you don't see any baitfish on the screen, that's an indication the big fish

you're seeing are reds,” he says. “When reds move into an area, the baitfish leave.”

Red drum are at the top of the food chain wherever they are found in fresh water. “The average size fish we catch on Braunig is 10 to 15 pounds,” Lamb says. “Bay anglers who catch a 15-pound redfish are stunned.”

Whereas Lamb hunts for reds all over Calaveras and Braunig, Billy Tyus targets specific areas on Fairfield Lake. “I spent weeks finding these places,” he says. “What

you look for is a place with a sandbar that drops off into deep water. Reds follow shad up onto the sandbars early and late in the day to feed, but they have to have an escape route. Once you find the right place, they will always be there.” Lamb and Tyus agree that the best time for freshwater red drum is from spring into mid-summer.

Tyus ties a balloon to his line to carry live shad away from the boat and keep it suspended about a foot off the bottom. He uses reels with clickers and lets the line free-

A FISH OUT OF (SALT) WATER

Red drum could well be the “poster fish” for the importance of maintaining freshwater inflows to Texas bays. Freshwater inflows keep estuarine ecosystems alive. The brackish water found in bays is vital to the life cycle not only of red drum, but also of the prey species young reds feed on.

Although red drum spawn in the Gulf of Mexico, tides and currents carry the larvae into bays, where the growing young live for the first two or three years of their lives. There they feed on crabs, shrimp, worms and small fish that live among grasses and oyster reefs. When mature, redfish move into Gulf waters.

“The red drum's ability to survive in a wide range of water-quality conditions is based on its estuarine existence during the early part of its life cycle,” says Robert Vega, head of TPWD's marine hatcheries program. “Bony fishes such as red drum must have balanced proportions of water and concentrations of dissolved substances such as sodium and calcium in order to meet the requirements of their living cells. The process of regulating body water and dissolved substances is called *osmoregulation*. Red drum are very good osmoregulators.”

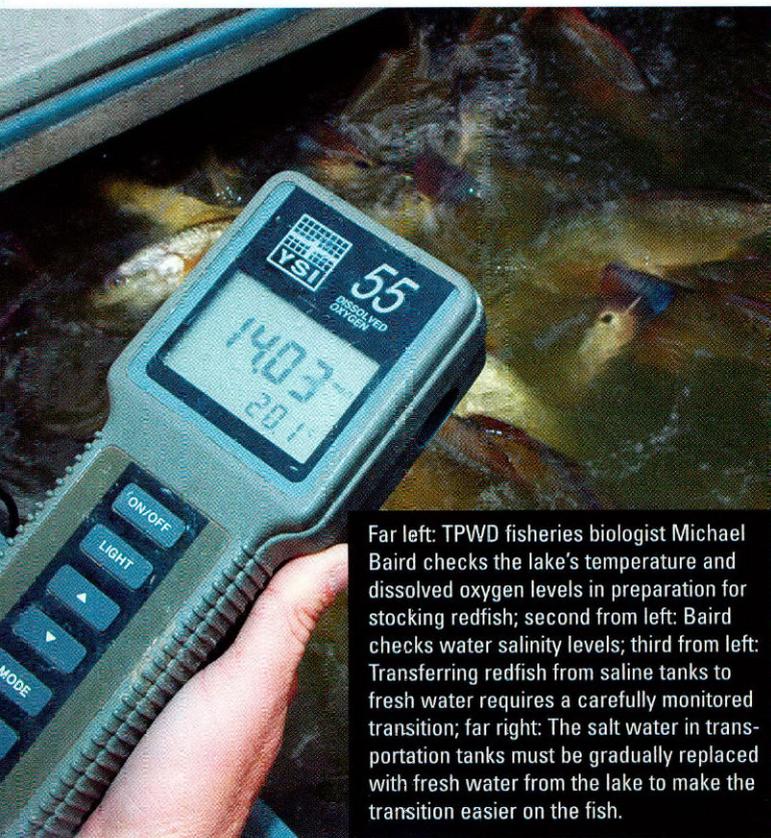
The ability of red drum to live and grow in fresh water depends

largely on the amount of calcium in the water. If calcium levels are too low, the fish's body chemistry is disrupted, and it becomes unable to regulate the flow of molecules through its cell membranes. The fish loses sodium, potassium and calcium ions (positively charged particles) to the surrounding water and at the same time takes in water. The increased water in the cells leads to even lower concentrations of ions. The low levels of ions eventually cause cardiac spasms and death. In effect, the fish drowns in its own body fluids.

A HARD DRUM TO BEAT
TPWD biologists stock red

drum only into reservoirs with high enough water temperatures and a sufficient level of dissolved minerals — “hard” water — for the fish to survive. But it's not just a matter of dumping fish into a lake and watching them swim off. Research by TPWD fisheries biologist Michael Baird showed that more fingerlings survive when stocked during cool weather and when specific procedures are followed.

The move from salt water to fresh water stresses the fingerlings, and the effect is lessened by a process called *tempering*. Fingerlings for stocking are hauled in trailers filled with the seawater they were reared in.



Far left: TPWD fisheries biologist Michael Baird checks the lake's temperature and dissolved oxygen levels in preparation for stocking redbfish; second from left: Baird checks water salinity levels; third from left: Transferring redbfish from saline tanks to fresh water requires a carefully monitored transition; far right: The salt water in transportation tanks must be gradually replaced with fresh water from the lake to make the transition easier on the fish.



spool until a fish takes the bait. "Redfish are very nervous and spooky," he says. "I work the balloons 40 to 50 yards behind the boat and move only with the trolling motor, or I anchor and let the wind carry the balloons away from the boat. When a redbfish takes the bait, the balloon will squat in the water, then come back or maybe travel a bit, and the next thing you know, it's gone. Wait for the rod to double, then pick it up, turn the handle and start reeling — don't jerk it, let the rod set the hook."

Remember you are fishing for big fish — the state record freshwater red Tyus caught on Fairfield Lake was 36 pounds plus. "Set the drag light and don't tighten it down when you think you have the fish worn down," he advises. "When he sees the boat, he'll be gone again. Keep pressure on and let him do whatever he wants to do, or he'll break you off. I fought my state record fish for 48 minutes, and I had to chase him up and down the lake. And get the big motor out of the water. Every big red knows how

to cut your line on the prop and has used that trick several times already."

Tyus offers one more tip. "If you want to catch big redbfish, the best days are Tuesday through Thursday. There's not as much boat traffic, and they are not as spooky."

Fishing for red drum in fresh water is a sure-fire way to redline your fun meter. "When the water is in the 70-degree range and you hook a big red, you'll have an experience fighting that fish," Tyus says. "Freshwater reds are really tough." ★

Tempering slowly replaces salt water with fresh water. When the trailer reaches the lake where fingerlings are to be stocked, its tanks are drained halfway and refilled with fresh water pumped from the lake. The process is repeated four more times at hourly intervals. "At that point salinity has been reduced from perhaps 35 parts per thousand to 1 part per thousand," Baird says.

In addition, fingerlings are then swimming in water that is the same temperature as the lake. "The more time fingerlings have to get used to the fresh water, the better their survival," says Baird.

TPWD records show that a few red drum were stocked into some

West Texas lakes such as Kemp and Red Bluff as early as the 1950s and 1960s, but stockings were minimal and sporadic until 1981. Since that time Lake Victor Braunig has received more than 4 million fish, Calaveras more than 6 million, Fairfield 4 million plus and Tradinghouse Creek more than 5 million. West Texas lakes such as Colorado City and Nasworthy were also stocked heavily in the 1980s and 1990s but have lost the majority of their red drum fisheries to golden alga kills or low water temperatures.

Braunig, Calaveras, Fairfield and Tradinghouse Creek are likely to be the main red drum fisheries for the foreseeable future. These

lakes benefited in 2004 and 2006 from the donation of about 30,000 year-old redbfish by Lonestar Aquafarms of Palacios. "These advanced fingerlings really jump-started the fishing, because there appear to be more legal-sized fish now than in the past," Baird notes.

Freshwater red drum fishing is based on a put-grow-take philosophy. Since the fish can grow but not reproduce in fresh water, there's no need to protect fish until they reach mature breeding size. The 20-inch minimum length requirement insures anglers will have the opportunity to catch good fish, the three-fish daily limit spreads the harvest over more

people, and the unlimited maximum size makes it possible for anglers to harvest a true trophy.

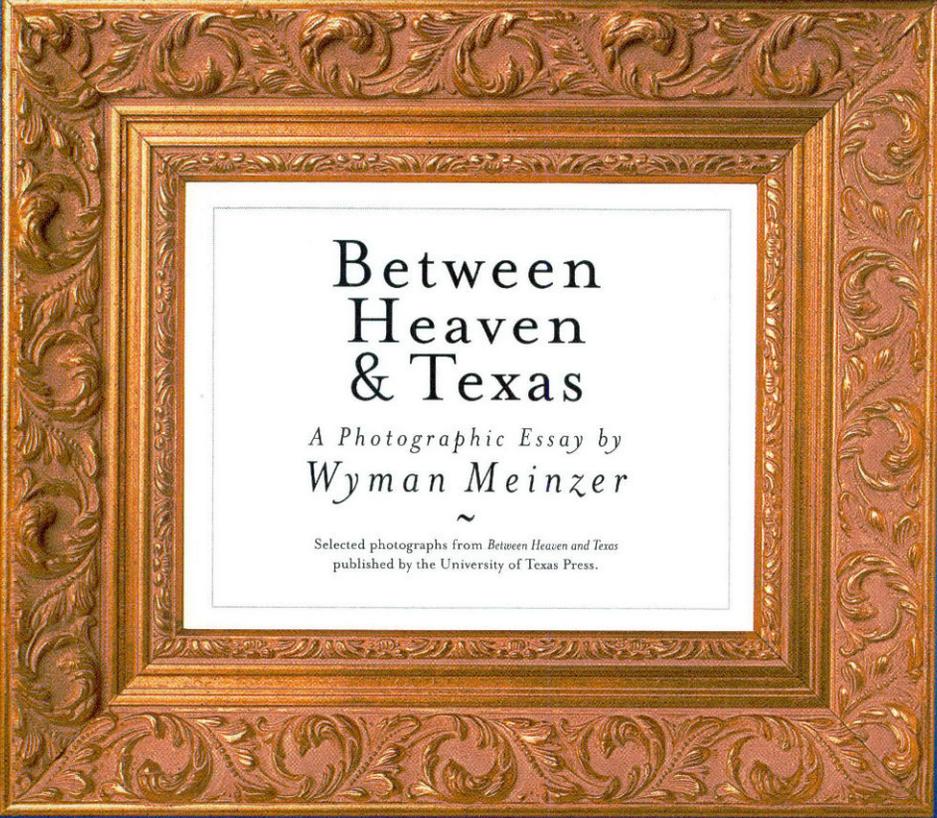
That's three good reasons freshwater reds are a hard drum to beat.

DETAILS

For current fishing reports, go to www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fishboat/fish/recreational/fishreport.phtml

Billy Tyus, (254) 445-2147, occasionally guides for red drum on Fairfield Lake during the summer months.

Harry Lamb, (210) 633-2801, guides for a variety of species on Lakes Calaveras and Braunig.



Between
Heaven
& Texas

*A Photographic Essay by
Wyman Meinzer*

~
Selected photographs from *Between Heaven and Texas*
published by the University of Texas Press.



This early spring sky
creates a dramatic and
ominous presence that
haunts the landscape
along Highway 83 near
Canadian in the
northern Panhandle.





Left: This mammatus cloud, photographed over the badlands north of Benjamin, seems to sprout out of one spot on the horizon.

Inset: This is a photo of the same storm in the larger image, taken about 30 minutes later at the Brine Lake near Truscott.



Right: A multiple roll cloud shot south of Benjamin near the town of Knox City. This was a cloud that followed a tremendous hail storm that hit the area on the previous day.

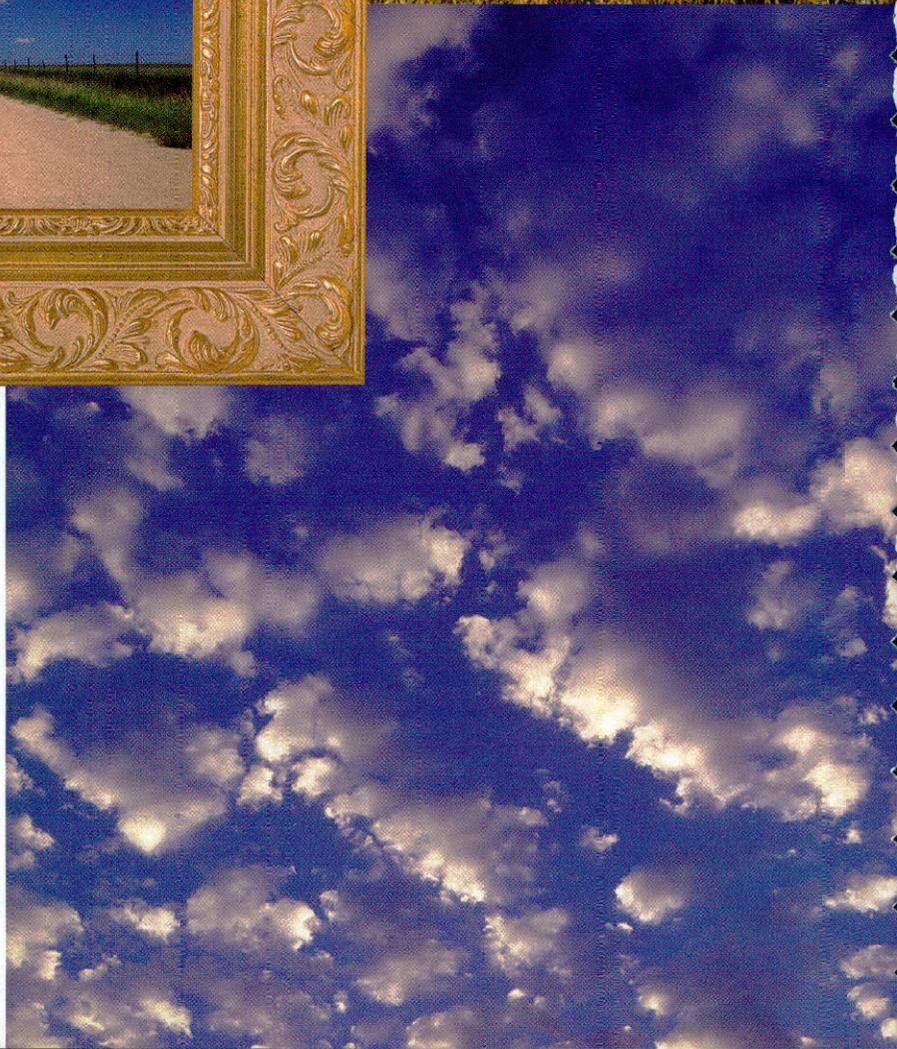
Opposite page, top: Shot in Fresno Canyon on the Big Bend Ranch. "We were hiking up the canyon when I noticed this nice cloud structure and broke out the Hasselblad for the shot," says Meinzer.



Opposite page, bottom: Another angle on the roll cloud, with a more complex cloudscape breaking up the sunlight in dazzling patterns.

Right: The staccato of these small clouds seems to punctuate the deep blue sky.

Inset: A shot that typifies the summer sky over the Llano Estacado. This group of puffy clouds appeared somewhere off of Interstate 27 near Amarillo one summer day. The big open sky harbors one little rain shaft at the end of the long caliche road.

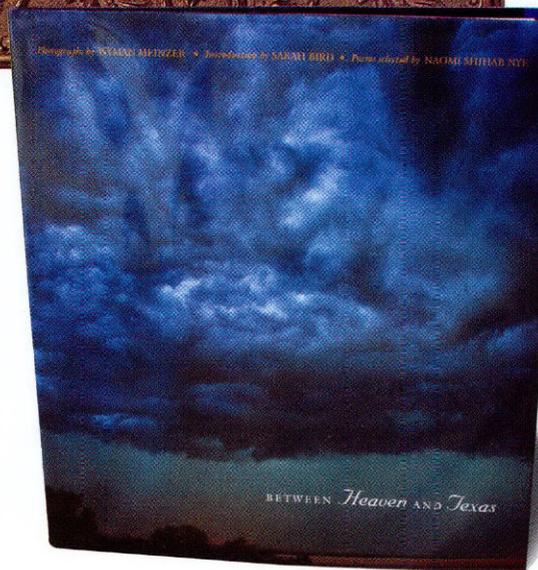
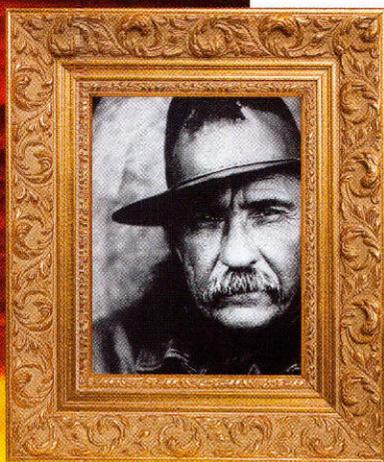






Left: A heat storm passes through North Texas and adds a brilliant range of yellows and oranges to the sunset.

Inset: Lightning shot north of Benjamin on a hot summer day after the passing of a heat storm at sunset.



Wyman Meinzer's photographs of the Texas sky appear in a new book, *Between Heaven and Texas*, with an introduction by Sarah Bird and poems selected by Naomi Shihab Nye. The book is published by the University of Texas Press.

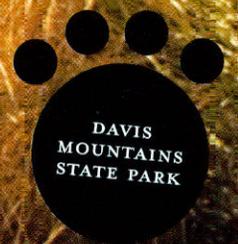


PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM

DOG- FRIENDLY PARKS

WHEN YOU CAN'T RESIST
THOSE BIG EYES THAT SAY
"DON'T LEAVE ME AT HOME,"
HEAD FOR A PARK THAT
WELCOMES POOCHES.

By Melissa Gaskill



Any outdoor experience is made better when it's shared with the right company, and as many of us have discovered, dogs are great travel companions. According to the Travel Industry Association, some 29 million Americans now travel with their pets, primarily dogs. While no doubt some of those millions are simply carrying a pampered pooch in and out of fancy hotels, I'm sure that many are, like me, taking their dogs swimming at the lake, exploring at the beach, hiking in the woods or on some other outdoor adventure.

If you're already one of these people, you know it isn't always easy to include your four-legged friend. Dogs simply aren't allowed some places, for good reasons, like protecting fragile ecosystems or endangered wildlife, or because it would be dangerous for the dog. Some places allow dogs but don't actively welcome them, for the same or related reasons. That said, there are great spots for enjoying the outdoors with your dog.

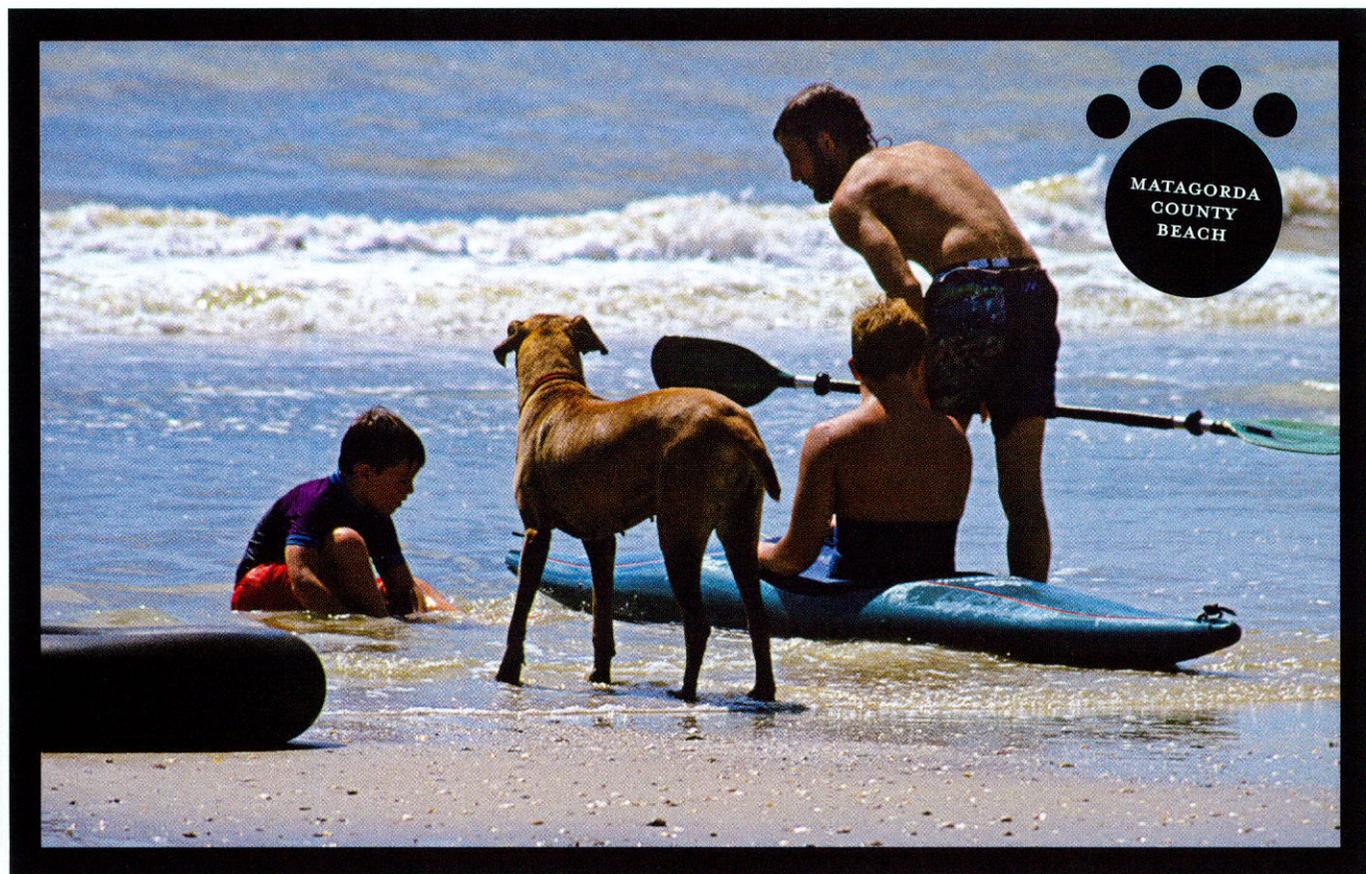
First, a few words about responsible doghood. Dogs in public places are like kids: Not everyone wants them around, and even those who like them may be somewhat annoyed by the disruptions they can cause. People quietly wildlife-watching won't be too happy if your barking dog scares the critters away, and someone floating Zen-like on the river probably doesn't want to be joined by your wet, hairy friend. Do yourself, your dog and everyone else a favor and make that first trip to an obedience class. Train your pooch to come when called and stay when asked; you'll be much more popular out there, and your dog will be safer, too (think snakes, alligators, cliffs and the like). Take your dog for a vet check-up (and updated shots) before inviting him along on a strenuous outdoor activity. Be aware that dogs can get sunburned and suffer heat stroke just as easily as people. Mosquito repellent may be a good idea, and all Texas dogs need heartworm preventive.

Carry plenty of water for everyone (not all sources of water are safe for your dog to drink) and snacks for your dog if you'll be

hiking or otherwise active. First-aid supplies are a good idea, and, in some thorny places, dog booties.

Follow the rules. When hiking, stay on trails. Most places — and all state parks — require dogs to be on a leash; use leashes where required, even if no one is looking. And only service dogs are allowed in public buildings. Most important rule: scoop the poop. Unlike the stuff that wild animals produce, dog-doo is not a natural part of the environment. It can contain harmful viruses and bacteria, which are carried by rain into streams and rivers. No one likes to step in it, and no one likes to look at it, either. Carry plastic bags — this is a great way to reuse the ones that envelop your newspaper or sub sandwich.

Okay, turn the page to read about the top 10 dog-friendly sites according to my personal opinion, without benefit of scientific analysis or public poll (well, the dogs had a vote). This list reflects a preference for beautiful views, refreshing water, nice facilities for humans and ample recreational possibilities for all. There are many more wonderful places that just wouldn't fit; almost every Texas state park is worthy of a visit with your dog, for example. You may quibble with certain selections, depending, say, on your level of tolerance for a sand-covered dog, or perhaps a burning (pun intended) desire for shade. That's okay. What's important is getting up and out, breathing in that fresh air (even if it is laden with eau de wet dog) and appreciating this great gem of a state. So, don't sit. Don't stay. Go!



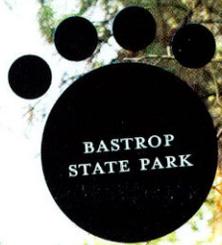


PHOTO: JEFFREY M. COOPER

1 MATAGORDA COUNTY BEACH

Dogs can run free on this wide, uncrowded beach that stretches 22 miles from the mouth of the Colorado River. The first half-mile is pedestrian beach, adjacent to the LCRA Matagorda Bay Nature Park, which has restrooms, showers for you and your dog and picnic shelters. Dogs are also allowed on the park's nature trails and three fishing piers. Stop at Stanley's, at the turnoff onto 2031 from Highway 60, and pick up a beach vehicle permit, \$6 for the calendar year. On the beach, keep your dog out of the dunes and from chasing the birds (there will be plenty; Matagorda County has been number one for number of species counted in the Audubon Christmas Bird Count for four years). There is an RV park and camping is allowed on the beach.

Matagorda County (979) 863-7120;
<www.lcra.org/community/matagorda.html>

HONORABLE MENTION: PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE.

More than 60 miles of undeveloped beach — just you and your dog with lots of sand and surf. Malaquite Beach, a five-mile, vehicle-free stretch, has a visitor center with a place to wash off your dog (who isn't allowed on the deck or in the buildings). Keep dogs on leash here and elsewhere around people, but let him swim loose in the Gulf. Campground at Malaquite Beach, primitive camping anywhere on the rest of the beaches.

(361) 949-8068; <www.nps.gov/pais>

2 LAKE GEORGETOWN

Jump into the blue water with your pup, then hit the Good Water Trail, a scenic 16.6-mile hiking route along the lake's shore, named after what local lore suggests the native Tonkawa called this area: "land of good water." Views, rugged terrain, wildlife spotting and solitude abound. Let your dog run loose on the trail as long as he isn't a nuisance and you clean up after him. Dogs aren't allowed in designated recreation areas like swimming beaches or in buildings and should be on leash in "public places." Dogs welcome in all the campgrounds — two developed and four primitive, three of those accessible only by boat or trail.

(512) 930-5253; <www.swf-wc.usace.army.mil/Georgetown>

HONORABLE MENTION: LAKE SOMERVILLE STATE PARK AND TRAILWAY.

A 13-mile trail connects Birch Creek Unit (with camping and day-use facilities) on the north shore of the lake to Nails Creek Unit on the south, crossing Yegua Creek and skirting Flag Pond. Shelters along the way for resting and picnicking and four primitive campgrounds. All state parks require that dogs remain on leash at all times, and only service dogs are allowed in public buildings.

(979) 535-7763; <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/find_adept/parks/lake_somerville>

3 BASTROP AND BUESCHER STATE PARKS

Dogs — and people — love the sandy, shady 8.5-mile Lost Pines Trail and 3.5 miles of other trails through this most westerly stand of loblolly pine in the United States. The park also has a small lake, picnic areas, campsites and, for humans only, cabins, lodges and a swimming pool with a CCC-built bathhouse. Roll the windows down and drive scenic Park Road 1C to Buescher State Park to enjoy another 7.5-mile trail plus multiuse and tent camping, picnic areas and fishing lake.

(512) 321-2101; <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/Bastrop>

4 CANYON OF THE EAGLES LODGE AND NATURE PARK

Hang out at Lake Buchanan with your pup or explore (on leash) 14 miles of hiking trails roaming 940 wooded acres, from level shoreline to rugged hills. Look for a variety of wildlife and birds, including American bald eagles, black-capped vireos and golden-cheeked warblers. Dark skies are conducive to star gazing, and the park's observatory is open most Sundays, Tuesdays and Fridays. The park has a dog-friendly lodge, campgrounds and RV sites.

(800) 977-0081; <www.canyonoftheeagles.com>

HONORABLE MENTION:
BLACK ROCK PARK, an LCRA park on the southwest shore of Lake Buchanan, with boat ramp, sandy beaches, tent and RV sites. Dogs can play unleashed in the water if it isn't crowded.

(512) 793-3138; <www.lcra.org/community/black_rock.html>

INKS LAKE STATE PARK, on Inks Lake just downstream from Buchanan, has camping, swimming, fishing and 7.5 miles of hiking trails, where dogs will find an endless supply of intriguing sights and smells.

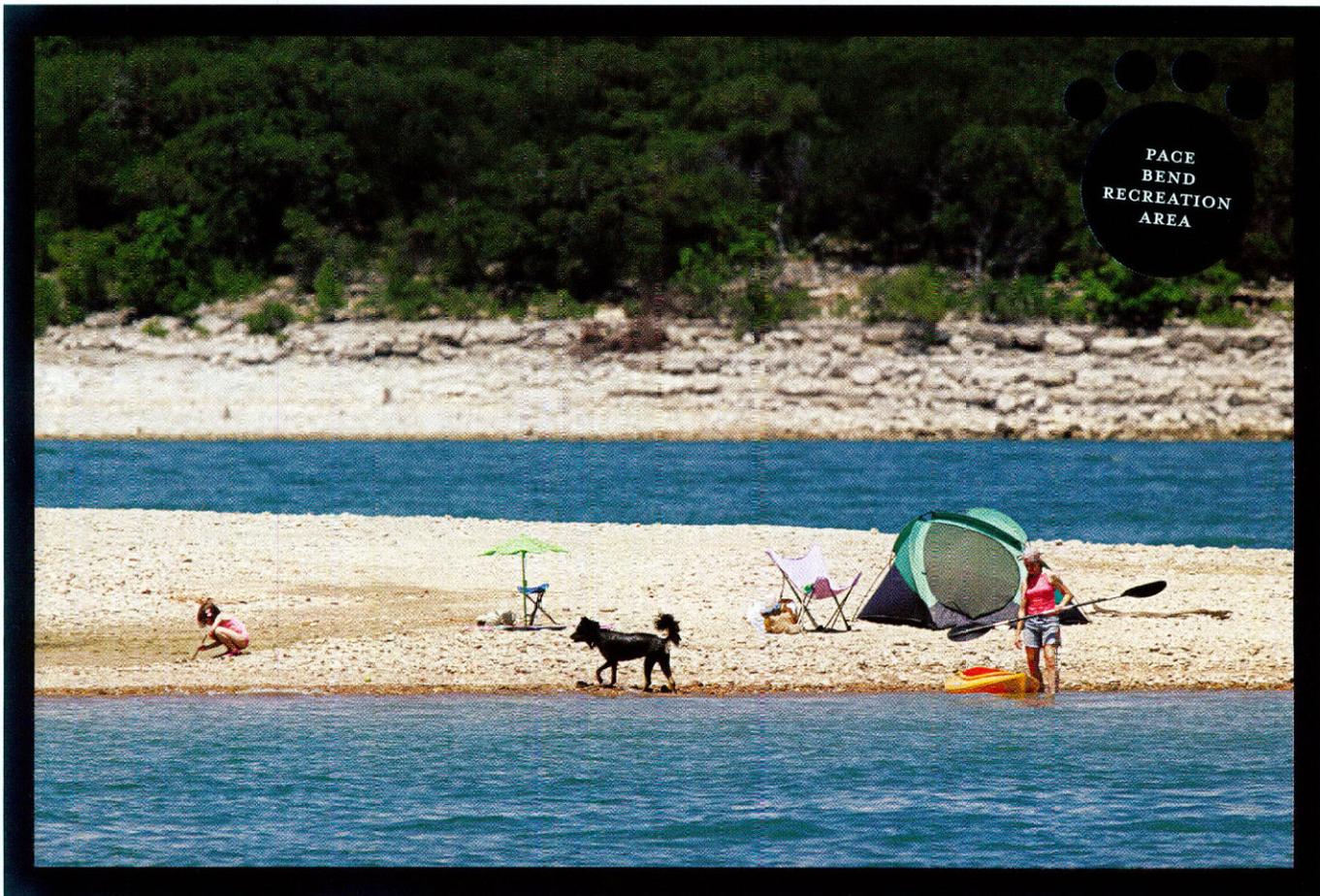
(512) 793-2223; <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/inks>

5 DAVIS MOUNTAINS STATE PARK

Trails meander through part of the most extensive mountain range in Texas, including a 4.5-mile route that leads to Fort Davis National Historic Site (dogs allowed on leash, but not in the buildings). The aptly named Skyline Drive is popular with star gazers; let your dog's inner coyote gaze at the moon, which seems larger here. Keep pups in the tent or RV at night.

(432) 426-3337; <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/davis>





6 CAPROCK CANYONS STATE PARK AND TRAILWAY

This is John Wayne country — rocky cliffs, deep canyons, dramatic skies, even bison — and almost 90 miles of trails beckon, including a 64-mile trailway along a former railroad bed, complete with a tunnel. Hike up to 3,100 feet, then down to wade in the sandy Red River. People and perhaps their dogs first settled 10,000 years ago. Be prepared to share some trails with horses and bicycles.

(806) 455-1492; <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/caprock>

7 SAM HOUSTON NATIONAL FOREST LONE STAR TRAIL

Wander through woods of pine and magnolia, across creeks and through swamps on the 128-mile Lone Star Hiking Trail through Sam Houston National Forest. A section with National Recreation Trail status goes from a trailhead on FM 945 just south of State Highway 150 27 miles to another on FM 1725 just north of Cleveland, with several access points in between that allow you to shorten that distance. Double Lake Recreation Area, accessible from this route or by car, is on a 24-acre lake and has campsites, picnic sites, a swim beach and, in summer, a concession stand with canoe rentals. Dogs must be on leash but are allowed in the lake (and

can ride in a canoe).

(936) 344-6205; <www.fs.fed.us/r8/texas/recreation/sam_houston/samhouston_gen_info.shtml>

8 PACE BEND PARK

The 1,368-acre park on a Lake Travis peninsula, with rugged limestone cliffs and typical Hill Country terrain, welcomes dogs and allows them off leash as long as they are under the owner's control. Hiking trails take you to the high ground, where you may see deer, fox and other wildlife, and swim beaches on the gentle north and east shores provide easy water access. Picnic areas, restrooms and campgrounds.

(512) 264-1482; <www.co.travis.tx.us/nr/parks/pace_bend.asp>

9 HILL COUNTRY STATE NATURAL AREA

Forty miles of multiuse trails crisscross more than 5,400 acres of grassy valleys, steep limestone hills and spring-fed streams on this former ranch, which the donors requested be kept natural and untouched. That means only basic facilities are provided, but it also means the park is wild and natural, just the way some of us like it. Primitive and improved campgrounds, as well as several equestrian campgrounds

(you'll often share trails with horses).

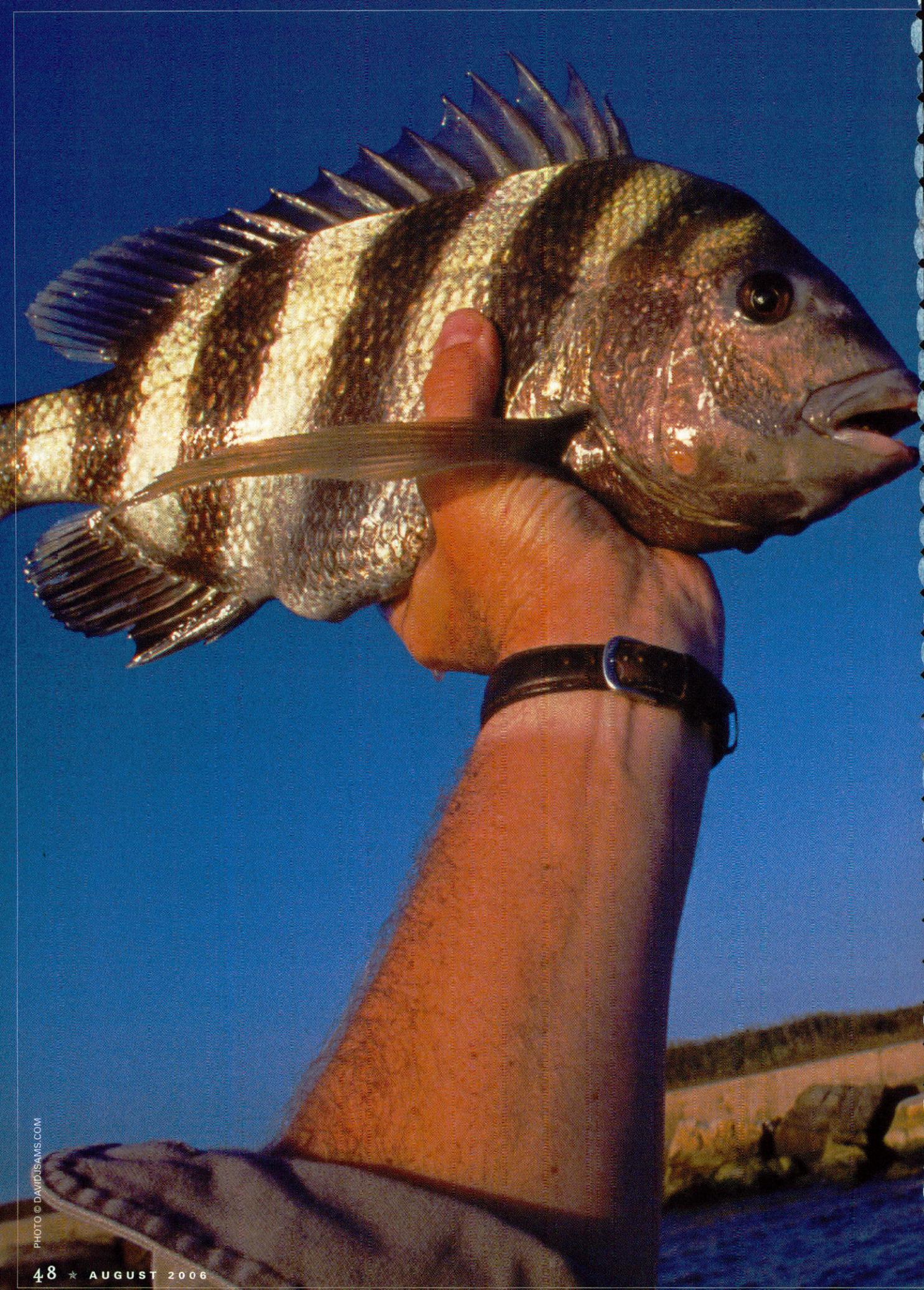
(830) 796-4413; <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/find_a_dest/parks/hill_ccountry>

10 GRAPEVINE LAKE

Several parks on the north shore of this Corps of Engineers lake smack-dab in the middle of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex offer varied recreational opportunities. Your best bet is Murrell Park in Flower Mound, open 24/7 and free, with boat ramps, picnic tables, camp sites, restrooms, fishing banks and a trailhead for the Northshore Trail, a challenging hike and bike route roughly nine miles long. Dogs must be on leash.

(817) 481-4541; <www.swf-wc.usace.army.mil/lewisville/grapevine_lake.htm>

When you don't have time to travel far, tide yourself over at dog-friendly urban parks like leash-free Red Bud Isle or Bull Creek District Park in Austin and dog parks like George Bush Park's Millie Bush Bark Park in Houston, Gateway Park's Fort Woof dog park in Fort Worth and the Dallas Dog Park at White Rock Lake. Check with your local parks department or find a listing at <www.ecoanimal.com/dogfun/texas.html>. Just promise your dog, and yourself, that you'll make time for a longer jaunt soon. ★



MARINE

MADNESS

At Texas' largest saltwater fishing

tournament, many participants bring

the whole family along for the fun.

By Eileen Mattei



By 5 a.m., the South Padre Whataburger is doing a booming business. Circle K's Krispy Kreme doughnuts are moving off the

rack like free topwater lures to the anglers signed up for the Texas

International Fishing Tournament. Texas' largest saltwater fishing event,

TIFT (August 2 – 6, 2006) draws 1,500 entrants, including entire

families, to compete in its bay, offshore and tarpon divisions.

"TIFT is the one tournament I fish with my kids every year," says Mike Jones, on board the 22-foot bay boat named *Spook-em*. Anchored in the Laguna Madre opposite Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, Mike is smearing BullFrog sunscreen on the neck and face of his 10-year-old son Clay while his teenage daughter Chelsea pulls on wade boots, and family friend Terry Key prepares his tackle.

At 6:30 a.m. Friday, the TIFT officially opens. The sun is not yet above the horizon when Chelsea wades north in knee-deep water with her rod and a topwater lure. The three males follow, trailing floating tackle boxes and stringers. Other than the soft plop of the lures hitting the surface and the occasional squawk of a great blue heron, the bay is tranquil. Reflected on the calm water, Chelsea's pink blouse mimics roseate spoonbills flying nearby.

Mike hooks into the first redfish, 23 inches. "We've got to do better than that," he says, motioning the kids in an arc to his right. When father and daughter hook redfish at the same time, Mike loses his as he watches Chelsea bring hers in.

"I feel sorry for any boy who goes fishing with Chelsea," observes Terry Key. "I think she can outfish any boy her age."

Back in the boat, heading to another hotspot, the four sip from water bottles wrapped in the TIFT logo, which Mike's company made and donated for the tournament. The next long wade brings in a few more redfish. Clay releases one nearly 30 inches long, too big for this tournament.

Wading is becoming more popular, although it still attracts only about 10 percent of the bay's anglers, Mike says. The rest stay with drift fishing or anchored boats. Cloud cover brings a south breeze, which swings the boat around 180 degrees. Islands appear to be floating above the horizon, an optical illusion. After two hours, no other boats have joined the *Spook-em* because the foot-deep water is a big deterrent. An osprey is the only other fisher in sight.

Skimming past islets rimmed with short, dense mangroves, the boat leaves the backwaters, disturbing redfish whose large vee wakes run at right angles from the boat. Out in the Gulf Intracoastal Canal, boats — one is named *Shallow-minded* — dot the water like scales on a trout.

While the kids take a break from fishing, Mike starts *Margaritaville* on the CD player before he and Terry ease into the deep water bordering the canal. Clay and Chelsea prop

their bare feet on the boat's wheel and nibble curly Cheetos. Everyone's killing time, waiting to get to the family's favorite spot, which is currently occupied.

Finally, anchored at the prized site where the water is cooler and deeper, Mike is convinced that the outgoing tide is sure to bring some action. He begins coaching Chelsea as she reels in a gold spoon. "Go slow, slow. Reel really slow. You

want it to stay submerged about halfway to the bottom." When Mike loses a big trout, Clay asks his dad if he has a chance of winning the tournament. "That's not what this is about," Mike replies. "I'd have to start first thing in the morning and ignore you guys all day."

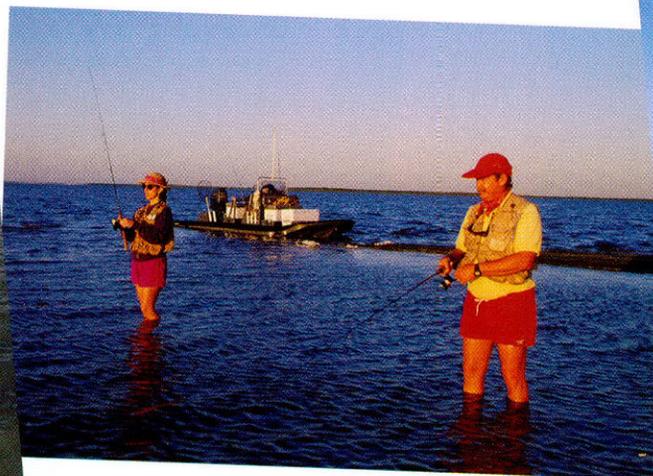
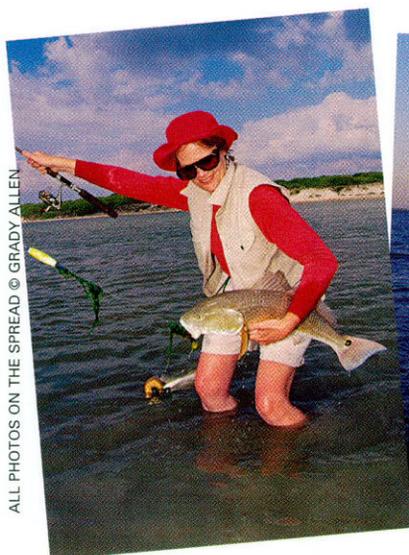
After a long day on the water, the Joneses and Terry Key vote to head in to Port Isabel and the TIFT weigh-in at Southpoint Marina. The *Spook-em's* catch ranks in the respectable class, 11 redfish and nine trout, but the satisfaction level from a day well spent is off the scale.

Offshore

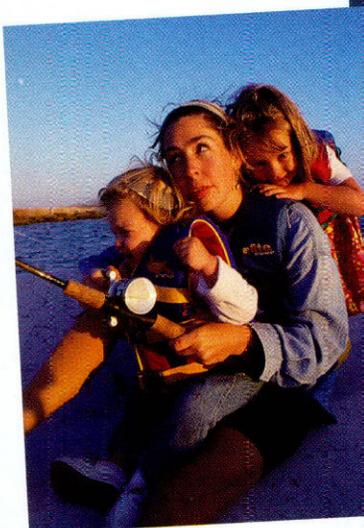
Saturday 3 a.m. — fresh doughnuts at Circle K. At 4 a.m., Terry Gray is standing on the bridge of the *Wet N Wild*, a 48-foot Hatteras, heading due east at 17 knots in the Gulf of Mexico with a boatful of family and friends. The glow of the radar, GPS and depth recorder dimly illuminate the cockpit, not competing with the stars on the clear quiet night.

Sixty miles out from Port Isabel, out past the continental shelf, in water 2,600 feet deep, Terry and his friends are primed to bring in billfish, wahoo, tuna and other treasures of the deep. Clouds hide the ris-

Wade-fishing is becoming more popular among anglers entering the tournament.







TIFT gives entire families the opportunity to hone their skills — and have fun together.

ing sun as the eager anglers set out seven lines, using outriggers and center riggers to spread them wide apart. Slowing down to seven knots, the boat dangles mullet, lures and two top-popping teasers. Flying fish skitter like dragonflies across the Prussian-blue water that is still enough to mirror towering cloud banks.

Leaning over a satellite map of the currents, Terry points out water temperature variations. “Fish will be hunting for food at the dividing lines,” he says. Since the demarcation is usually marked by floating sargassum, the *Wet N Wild* zigzags along the seaweed, waiting for action.

Terry, who is on the TIFT executive board, is officially tracking reports from the other boats in the area about the billfish and tuna being tagged or boated. The first 20 blue and white marlins reported are tagged and released because they measure, from lower jaw to fork of the tail, less than the TIFT requirements of 101 and 67 inches. Just to be on the safe side, TIFT pegs the minimum billfish keepers at two inches above the federal lengths.

The *Wet N Wild* sparks to life each time the wake of a large fish is spotted. With the first strike, Stephen Gray, 10, slips into the fighting chair and reels in a small dolphin-fish or mahimahi.

After that brief spurt of action, the boat keeps trolling as clouds drift in from the east, where waterspouts twirl and squalls darken the sky. Suggestions to head in that direction to wash the boat are rejected as the search for big fish continues, accompanied by reggae music from the satellite radio. When a guest is found to have brought a banana on board, she is soundly scolded,

because bananas reputedly bring bad luck for those going after sailfish. Within a minute of the peel going overboard, a billfish strikes. But the boat throttles down too much, too soon, and the fish gets away. Another large fish teases the anglers without striking, bringing the consensus that it had to have been a white marlin: they’re real finicky.

“This boat’s philosophy’s is not to spread around the reeling-in during a tournament,” Terry says. Patsy Robinson is the designated reeler because she landed a 142-pound yellowfin tuna as well as tagging and releasing a white marlin on TIFT’s first day. When something big hits the blue and white lure with a ballyhoo around noon, Patsy scoots into the fighting chair, and everyone else leaps to reel in the other lines, clear the deck and make sure the youngest kids are out of the way. Everyone on board encourages and advises Patsy as her big fish runs the line out. Up on the bridge, Terry shifts from reverse to neutral to one engine, keeping the line taut when Patsy takes a breather and easing off as she reels in. “Once it’s hooked for three to four minutes, you have it,” Terry says, except for the critical moments of bringing it into the boat. “The captain and the mate have to communicate and not just verbally. They have to ‘walk the dog,’ manage the fish.”

A breast cancer survivor, Patsy had lost some muscles on her right side during surgery, but nonetheless she’s cranking on a right-handed reel. As the fish nears the boat, it looks like blue neon lights are flashing underwater as sunlight bounces off the twisting wahoo. Finally aboard, thanks to an enthusiastic team effort, the wahoo is large

enough to possibly win the class. The crew is hungry for more strikes. When news comes in of a friend’s boat doing well just south of The Canyon, approximately 45 miles offshore, the *Wet N Wild* heads that way.

On the bridge, Terry pats his younger son’s leg as he describes his boys’ different talents. “Stephen likes to sit up on the bridge and fool around with all this — radar, GPS, depth recorders. Taylor likes fish. He’s going to be the slime guy.”

Family involvement matters to Terry, who is also chairman of TIFT’s endowment fund, which each year awards seven \$2,000 scholarships, based on grades, TIFT involvement and financial need.

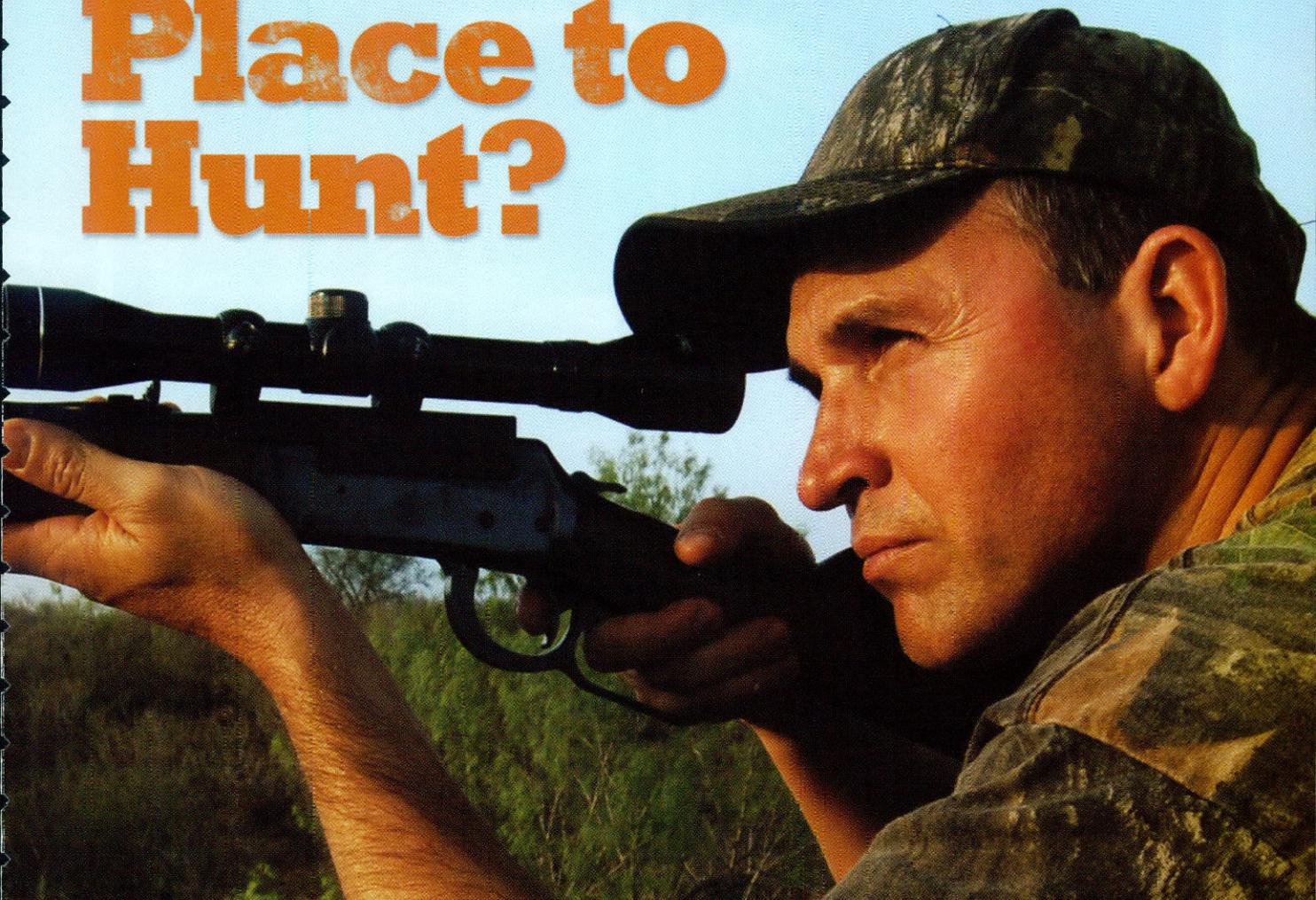
An immense school of bait fish shows up on the depth recorder at 60 fathoms, “That’s the most bait I’ve seen in my life,” Terry says, maneuvering the boat on top of the school. “We can hit more fish this way.” When Stephen, known for having sharp eyes, points out birds floating on the water or changes in water color, all pay attention, waiting for opportunities to rise to the bait.

In the last hour of the tournament, heavy rains move across the Gulf bringing lightning, rolls of thunder and hammering rain in a deafening surround-sound show by Mother Nature at sea. Nearby boats disappear from view as squalls overtake them.

The *Wet N Wild* heads in to the Port Isabel pier, where TIFT dock crews wrestle the big fish to the scales. Crews and spectators stop to admire the big ones that didn’t get away. Patsy’s wahoo places fourth, her released white marlin takes third and her yellowfin tuna wins its class. “The TIFT is totally fun, a family outing,” she says, “but we’d like to catch more next year.” ☆

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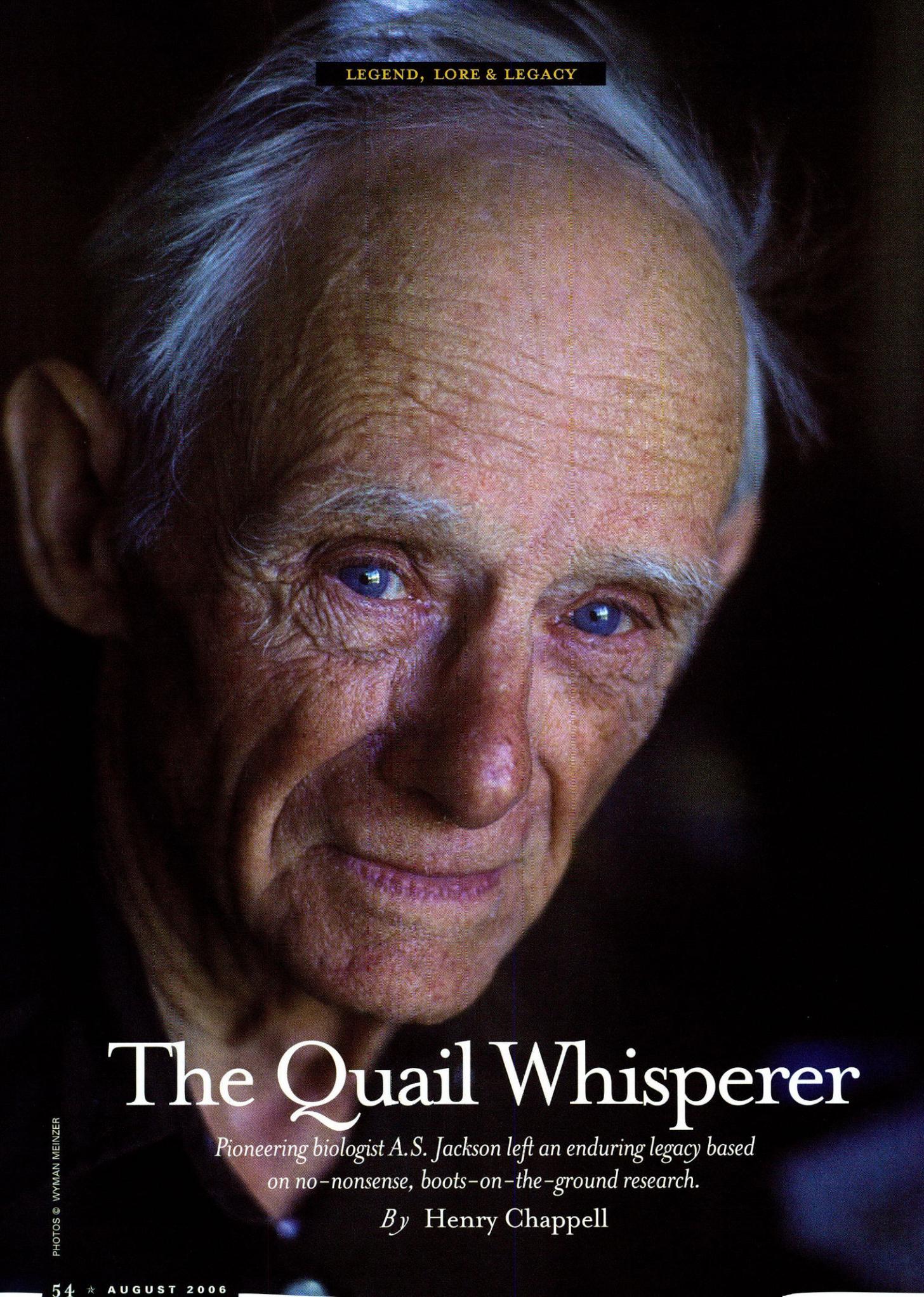
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LEGEND, LORE & LEGACY

The Quail Whisperer

Pioneering biologist A.S. Jackson left an enduring legacy based on no-nonsense, boots-on-the-ground research.

By Henry Chappell

I was 30 years old and considered myself a quail hunter. After all, I had grown up following pointing dogs. I pored over quail hunting articles, read popular books on the subject, ran a pretty good German shorthaired pointer and pocketed a few bobwhites. Then, in 1991, I read *A Handbook for Bobwhite Quail Management in the West Texas Rolling Plains* by A.S. Jackson. I learned more from those 77 pages than from the previous hundreds — or thousands — of pages I had read. The modest paperback book contained no discussion of guns, loads or hunting methods. Instead, its author explained in simple, elegant prose, the basics of bobwhite ecology on the Texas plains. I passed out copies to friends and quoted Jackson to long-suffering hunting partners. More importantly, I realized that the birds were more interesting than the hunting.

A few years later, writing assignments took me afield with biologists, and I began to hear A.S. Jackson stories: He would camp out with the birds for days at a time; he could out-walk anyone; as an octogenarian, he told a roomful of young biologists that they needed to get out of their pickups and walk. In Canyon, I held his neat, detailed maps of prairie chicken leks, hand-drawn on onion skin. I noted citations of his work in every scientific paper or TPWD bulletin on upland game bird ecology I read.

I regret that I never knew him. So I resolved to know more about him.

Alfred Sloan Jackson was born February 5, 1901, on a cotton farm in Dallas County, Texas. After living on several farms in several counties, the Jackson family settled at Wolf Ridge, near Gainesville, where they farmed the Blackland Prairie along the Red River. Young Jackson roamed thousands of acres of wooded bottomland and saw some of North Texas' last red wolves. After graduating from high school in Gainesville in 1920, he stayed on the farm another six years before enrolling at North Texas State Teachers College in Denton. He received a bachelor of science degree and married his college sweetheart, Mary Elizabeth, in 1930. After teaching for a year at the NTSTC demonstration school, he taught science and served as principal at Grandview High School and Throckmorton from 1931 to 1941. In his spare time, he worked toward his master's degree, performing research on mourning doves and white-necked ravens. Although he earned a master's degree from North Texas State University, that institution didn't offer courses in wildlife management, so Jackson supplemented his education with courses at Texas A&M University.

In June of 1941, at the age of 40, A.S. Jackson began a new career when he went to work for the Texas Game, Fish, and Oyster Commission. After a brief assignment in Lubbock, where he began to familiarize himself with the various wildlife projects, he moved his young family to Paducah, in the southeastern Panhandle. There he did his first serious quail and prairie chicken research.

In 1944, Jackson moved to Albany, where he established an office at the Lambshead Ranch and formed a friendship with rancher Watt Matthews that would last the rest of his life. His research focused on the Rio Grande turkey. He trapped surplus birds, which were used to restock depleted areas in the Panhandle. Many of the turkeys in the Canadian River bottom today are descendants of the Lambshead birds.

Jackson's theories on quail mortality caught the attention of

Aldo Leopold, the great naturalist, writer and conservationist widely regarded as the father of modern wildlife management. The two corresponded and met in San Antonio to discuss their ideas.

In 1950, the Jacksons moved to Canadian, where he was instrumental in the acquisition of the Gene Howe Wildlife Management Area. There, in the river breaks and sand hills of the northeastern Panhandle, he supervised and performed research on bobwhite quail and blue quail, prairie chickens, turkey and pronghorn. He laid down principles that still guide wildlife managers today.

"A.S. Jackson was a premier quail biologist in his time," says retired upland game bird program leader Don Wilson. "He wrote all the beginning stuff about quail — the things we take completely for granted today."

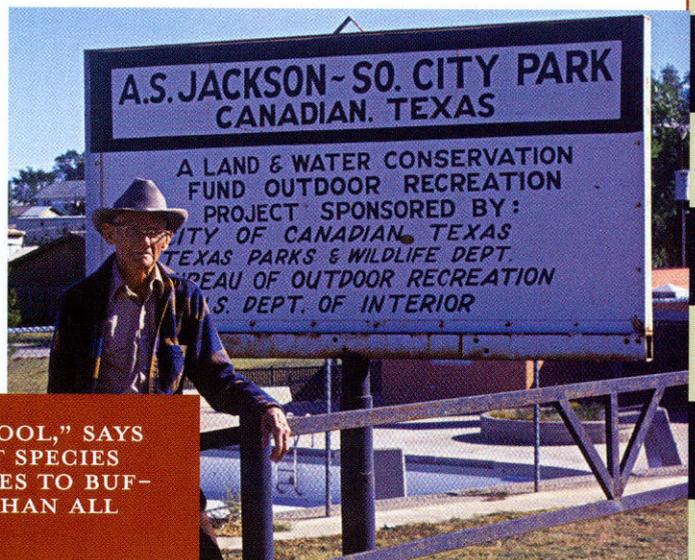
Jackson earned his formidable knowledge through thousands of days in the field, literally living with quail, locating and studying coveys, nesting pairs, and broods, rising before sunup to relocate birds by their morning calls. He was among the first to understand that quail populations suffer about 80 percent mortality independent of hunting. He consistently debunked popular misconceptions. In *A Handbook for Bobwhite Quail Management*, he considers the problem of misplaced faith in unscientific practices:

"A major problem lies in the holdover of faith in management techniques that have proven ineffectual in the past. The most widely advocated of these is the close-the-season-stop-all-hunting approach. Another is the stocking of non-habitable range with pen-reared bobwhites. Still another is predator control. None of these work in deficient habitat and none are needed where the habitat is right."

Jackson studied the feeding habits of bobwhites by examining the contents of thousands of quail crops. During hunting season, he and colleagues gathered data on age and mortality by sorting thousands of bobwhite wings provided by hunters.

Retired TPWD wildlife technician Tommy Hinkle recalls his first year working for Jackson at Gene Howe WMA: "We were doing crop analysis, and we separated out every seed. Maybe out of 500 crops, we'd have half a dozen seeds we couldn't identify."

In those days before radio telemetry, Jackson sometimes resorted to colorful methods — literally. To investigate covey dynamics, he trapped and dyed birds red, green, purple or orange — one color for each covey — then released them. The result? Within a few weeks, the coveys were multicolored. The birds moved between coveys far more than many biologists had previously



"HE WAS A WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST OF THE OLD SCHOOL," SAYS VERNON MORSE. "HE COULD TELL YOU ALL ABOUT SPECIES FROM OBSCURE LITTLE FISH WHO LIVE IN PUDDLES TO BUFFALO AND BEAR. HE SPENT MORE TIME IN CAMP THAN ALL THE REST OF US BIOLOGISTS COMBINED."

(continued from page 57)

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5:50 p.m.; KATX-FM 97.7 / 5:50 a.m.,
5:50 p.m.

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- Sonora, Texas Chamber of
Commerce, pg. 21**
www.sonoratax-chamber.com
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TELEVISION

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July 30 – Aug. 6:

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

Aug. 6 – 13:

Reclaiming rangeland habitat; inland water projects impact bays; following the Red River; the McDonald Observatory; Pedernales Falls State Park.

Aug. 13 – 20:

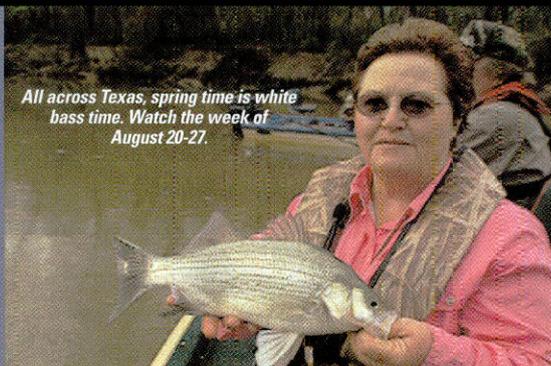
Alpine adventure in El Paso; Houston's parks bring nature to the city; beginning fly fishing; Cowboys on a Texas ranch; whooping cranes.

Aug. 20 – 27:

Spring fishing for white bass; preserving land from development; backyard haven for wildlife; Attwater's Prairie Chickens; Caddo Lake State Park.

Aug. 27 – Sept. 3:

Endangered ocelots; human impact on water supplies; prairie grass and quail; West Texas clouds; Eisenhower Birthplace State Historic Site.



All across Texas, spring time is white bass time. Watch the week of August 20-27.

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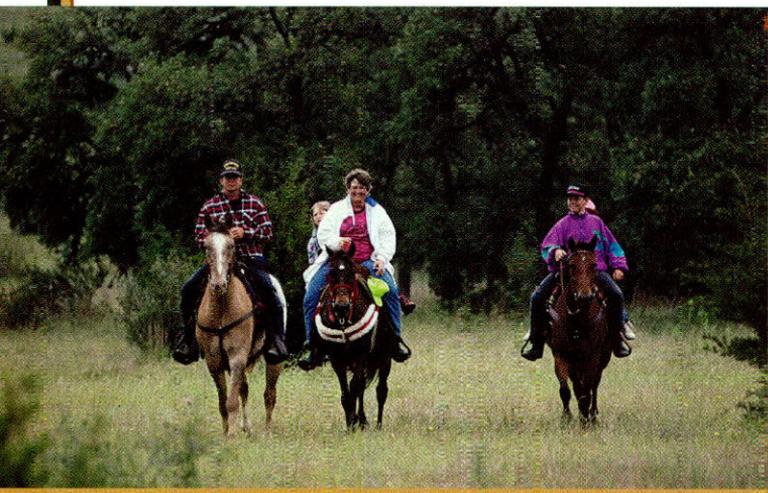
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(continued on page 56)

PARK PICKS

RECOMMENDED STOPS ALONG THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED



Hill Country State Natural Area

Step back in time and enjoy a little “horsepitality.”

RANCH ROAD 1077 IS MY KIND OF ROAD. Trailing southwest of Bandera, it winds through hardscrabble Hill Country past welcoming dude ranches. The lonesome byway narrows into a single paved lane, then peters out to gravel road. Kicking up caliche dust for a couple miles, I cross West Verde Creek and leave the frenetic 21st century behind. I’ve entered Hill Country State Natural Area, a 5,370-acre sanctuary dedicated to preserving native plants and wildlife, as well as Texas’ ranching heritage.

I’ve come to HCSNA for the day to hike, horseback ride and let my inner wrangler roam free. Park ranger Randy Evans, a third-generation Bandera native, shows me around.

“I like to tell our visitors: where the pavement ends, the west begins,” says Evans as we head out by pickup to explore the park’s 40 miles of ranch roads and multi-use trails. Jouncing along a rutted road, we angle north past rich bottomland pastures where native grasses are staging a comeback. To the west, limestone hills — cloaked in live oak, juniper, mountain laurel and cacti — rise up like stacks of green sombreros, rolling to a 2,000-foot apex near Cougar Canyon.

HCSNA is steeped in ranching history dating to the 1870s. Last operated as the Merrick Bar-O-Ranch until the early 1970s, the land was donated to the state by Louise Lindsey Merrick. She stipulated that the acreage be “kept far removed and untouched by modern civilization, where everything is preserved intact, yet put to a useful purpose.” The state opened the natural area in 1984, then added 617 adjoining acres in 1987.

“This was once an awesome working ranch,” says Evans, showing me the stately, two-story 1892 ranch house near the park entrance. Old barns, stables, cattle pens, dipping baths and rusting farm equipment recall a time when the Bar-O was one of the finest ranches in Bandera County.

In keeping with its ranching heritage, the site is a premier equestrian destination. Barns, covered stalls, corrals and water troughs at several group camping areas reflect the park’s genuine “horsepitality.” Remote camp sites are also available for riders and backpackers. All campers should come prepared for a primitive experience, without showers and flush toilets. “If you need it, you better bring it because the only thing we have out here is nature,” advises Evans.

The park hosts equestrian events year-round, from family-oriented trail rides to endurance riding competitions. The Hill Country State Natural Area Partners (HC-SNAP) friends group organizes benefit rides, as well as the Ranch Heritage Weekend, a fun-filled Western fandango held in October. Neighboring dude ranches bring their guests here for trail rides.

Hard-core endurance runners gather here each January for the Bandera 100K race along 100, 50 and 25-kilometer routes. Mountain biking clubs use the rugged trails for bone-jarring rides. The area’s dark skies, free from light pollution, draw star-gazing clubs.

“There are all kinds of experiences here,” explains park superintendent Paul Fuentes.

Indeed, there’s room enough here for everyone, and this is something I plainly see when Evans takes me trail riding around Twin Peaks. My sure-footed buckskin, Cisco, carries me up a rocky, stair-stepping path. We pause at a windy overlook and admire the rumpled panorama unfolding to the next county. Now this is Hill Country! ✨

— Dale Weisman

To reach the natural area, head south of Bandera on Texas 173, cross the Medina River and turn right on Ranch Road 1077. Continue 10 miles until the pavement ends and follow the caliche road to the park headquarters. For more information, call (830) 796-4413 or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/hill_country/.

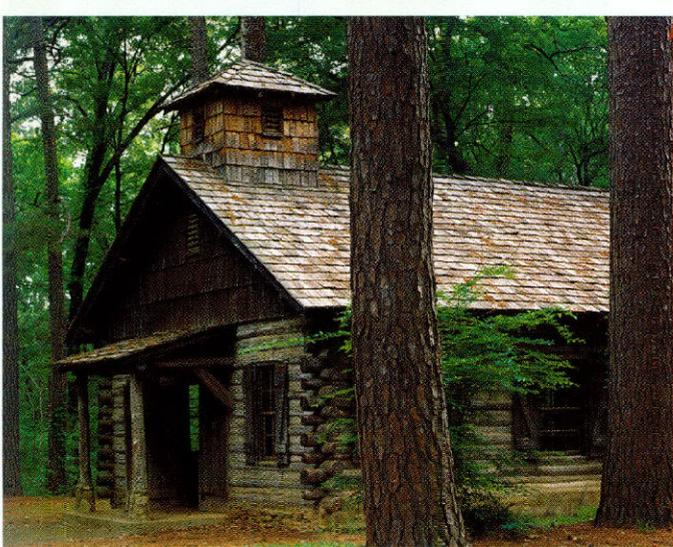
Mission Tejas State Park

Walk in the footsteps of Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie along the Route 66 of pioneer Texas.

DAPPLIED BY THE FILTERED SUNLIGHT OF THE PINE FOREST, Mission Tejas State Park offers campers and day visitors a quiet spot to enjoy the natural beauty of East Texas.

Among buildings constructed in 1934 by the Civilian Conservation Corps, sits a commemorative representation of Mission San Francisco de los Tejas, the first Spanish mission in Texas. The historic building is available by reservation and enjoys a reputation as a site for romantic weddings in a rustic setting.

Explore the Rice Family log home, which was constructed between 1828-1838. The building was restored and moved to the park in 1974. The house served as a stopover for travelers on the old San Antonio road, and, as the Rice family — and the number of visitors — grew, the family added rooms to the original structure.



Campers and RVers will find shady campsites and group facilities, including a group picnic area and pavilion, as well as a group camping area and an amphitheater. Take advantage of the opportunities to fish, explore the pond's aquatic life, hike the nature trail or enjoy demonstrations of activities such as blacksmithing and astronomy. The El Camino Real Archeology Tour combines a brief history of the area with a half-mile hike that follows the route Sam Houston, Cynthia Ann Parker, Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie rode along the El Camino Real de los Tejas, the Route 66 of pioneer Texas. The walking tour includes a visit to the site of the Nabadache Indian village.

Pick up the Forest Trail booklet that ties information about the natural world to the numbered stakes along the three-quarter-mile path. The booklet also lists birds that frequent the park. Nearly 4 miles of additional hiking trails within the park offer a more vigorous hike. The park's flowering dogwood trees usually reach their peak in March, and the hardwoods bring bright colors to the woods in the fall.

Plan to visit Caddoan Mounds State Historic Site, only 6 miles from Mission Tejas. The historic site offers exhibits and interpretive trails through its Caddo dwellings and ceremonial areas, including two temple mounds, a burial mound, and a village area. The site is all archaeological in nature and the mounds are historic structures. If you need a cooling dip, drive 12 miles to the swimming beach at Ratcliff Lake Recreation Area (operated by the USDA Forest Service). The park's one-acre fishing pond contains perch and bream; no license is needed to fish within the park before August 31.

Geocachers, take note: Mission Tejas State Park harbors five caches, the Pineywoods KM1 and KM2, the Hobbit, Kidz Cache, and the Lotto Ticket cache. Find more information on these caches at <www.geocaching.com>. ☆

—Marian Edwards

Sea Rim State Park

With Rita repairs mostly complete, the beach is again ready to be combed.

ALONG THE EASTERN EDGE OF THE STATE, the Texas coast begins on a point jutting into the Gulf of Mexico called Sea Rim State Park. Unlike some of the state's beaches, this one lacks high-rise hotels, condos, bars, hamburger joints and T-shirt shops. In fact, it lacks just about everything, except what lures true beach bums — a wide expanse of sand, shallow waves and low dunes, perfect for activities like sand-castle building, sunbathing and feeding the gulls. The very remoteness of the park is a large part of its appeal; six miles of open beach beckon those who eschew

crowds and noise, enjoy non-competitive beach combing, and think fishing is an ideal way to commune with nature. The beach is part of the D. Roy Harrington Beach Unit, which includes campsites, parking and an interpretive center with restrooms and showers just over the dunes. Open-beach primitive camping is allowed on two-mile-long East Beach. Beachcombers who venture from the developed area are likely to be rewarded with delights such as sharks' eyes, whelks, turtle backbones, and dolphin skulls, along with all manner of odd human detritus — buckets, rope, light bulbs, bottles — perhaps not beautiful but certainly fascinating. Two wildlife refuges border the park, offering additional beach to comb. In short, you won't have any trouble finding interesting stuff.

The Harrington unit's Gambusia Nature Trail is all boardwalk, leading from near the tent campsites through marsh between the road and East Beach. The grassy marsh abounds with snowy egrets, white ibises, ducks and other birds, and perhaps an alligator or two when it's warm.

Explore the park's Marshlands Unit, part of a total 4,141 soggy acres, on a one-hour air boat tour, available by reservation, weather permitting. These marshlands were formed by silt from the Sabine River delta, and are valuable habitat for many wetland species. For visitors, the marshes mean a good chance to see birds, alligators, muskrat, raccoon, and even otter and mink. In the spring, nesting birds here include species seen nowhere



else, and in fall, mass migrations of ducks pass through. Canoes are available, and rental includes paddles, life jackets and a briefing (reservations recommended). When you are visiting the park, please do not approach, annoy or feed alligators. When Hurricane Rita hit Texas in September 2005, Sea Rim was scoured twice — once by a surge from the Gulf into the marsh and again, as the storm rotated through, by another surge from the marsh back into the Gulf. Although not all damaged facilities will be replaced, the park's water and wastewater facilities, its fee booth and the damage to the visitor center will be repaired. Ron Bonin, a Sea Rim ranger, noted that the surges also did a pretty good job of cleaning off the beach; good news for picnickers but perhaps not for beach combers. Although they can rest assured that, over time, nature will take care of that. Who knows, the very fact that the beach was washed clean may make it easier to spot special treasures in the sand. ☆

—Melissa Gaskill

Sea Rim is 20 miles south of Port Arthur on State Highway 87; (409) 971-2559, <www.tpwd.state.tx/spdest/findadest/parks/sea_rim>.

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

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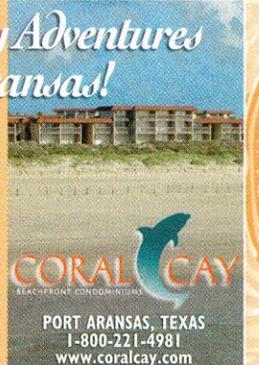
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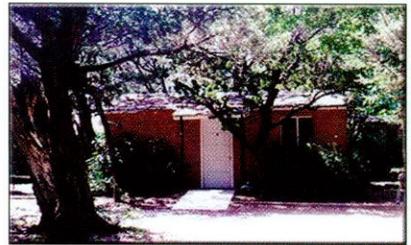


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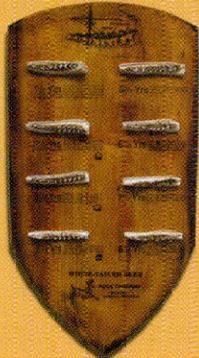
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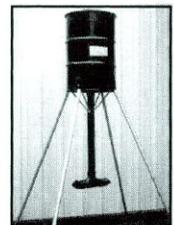
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(continued from page 55)

believed. Better yet, the Gene Howe WMA staff didn't tell the hunters about the dyed birds. "You should've heard some of the comments," Hinkle says.

Jackson's interest ran far beyond game birds. "He was more than a biologist," Hinkle says. "He was a naturalist." Jackson loved the Mississippi kite, a small, agile hawk common on the southern Great Plains. He built blinds in trees to monitor kite nests and took countless photographs and field notes. His article "Mississippi Kite" appeared with his accompanying photos in the August 1945 issue of *Texas Game and Fish*, the predecessor to this magazine.

"He was a wildlife biologist of the old school," says Vernon Morse, who managed Gene Howe WMA late in Jackson's tenure. "He could tell you all about species I didn't even know about — from obscure little fish who live in puddles to buffalo and bear. He spent more time in camp than all the rest of us biologists combined."

During the late 1950s, Jackson led negotiations with the Matador Ranch for the acquisition of the 28,000-acre Matador Wildlife Management Area. He bargained shrewdly; it's no accident that the state came away with miles of Pease River bottom.

In 1997, retired TPWD biologist Dick DeArment, one of Jackson's closest friends, told me, "Jack was remarkable in

that he was not only an exceptional field man, but a fine writer as well." What writer wouldn't love to claim these passages from "Sandhill Citizen," Jackson's March 1957 article in *Texas Game and Fish* magazine?

"Over-sized, bugged out black eyes, swollen cheek pouches, and two-legged locomotion give the kangaroo rat an impudent, winning personality not possessed by other members of the rat family."

And a bit further on:

"The flesh of the Ord Kangaroo rat is tender and without offensive odor. Doubtless, were it not for our prejudices, it would be as delectable as quail on the breakfast table."

By the time he retired in 1966, Jackson's influence and reputation had spread well beyond the Panhandle. His awards include the 1963 American Motors Conservation Award and the Outstanding Service Award from the Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society, given in 1967. More telling, perhaps, are A.S. Jackson Park in Canadian and A.S. Jackson Nature Trail at Lake Marvin, designated by his community.

Likewise, he made some of his most important contributions close to home. Retired TPWD biologist Billy Hudgins went to work for Jackson in 1958, "A.S. was a great natural teacher," he says. "We young hands up in the Panhandle thought of him as our Aldo Leopold."

(continued from page 21)

gleaming cave coral still amaze me. The cave's most famous formation — called "the Butterfly" — consists of a pair of symmetrical fishtail helictites that form a butterfly shape.

Family roots also run deep at X Bar Ranch Nature Retreat, a 7,100-acre spread in adjacent Schleicher County where I'm scheduled to stay next. Live oaks, mesquite and juniper dot the rugged, rolling hills where Stan Meador and his family have ranched for generations. In 1997, they diversified into nature tourism by offering such activities as hiking, biking, birding and stargazing.

Six comfortable cabins accommodate overnight guests, who also enjoy unlimited access to a furnished kitchen at the lodge (plus there's a family area with satellite TV and a conference room).

I settle into one cabin, then meander over to the back deck at the adjacent Live Oak Lodge to visit with Meador. "We check people in, and then they're on their own," he says. "A lot of people come just to enjoy the quiet here." Meador pauses, then nods toward a pair

of inviting rocking chairs behind us. "A lot of folks sit in those and talk about what they're gonna do next, but then that's as far as they get!"

As for me, I later slip on my walking shoes and head for the hike-and-bike trails. Four well-marked, interconnected loops totaling 16 miles crisscross X Bar. For the rest of the afternoon, I explore the 3-mile trail, an easy hike that meanders over rocky slopes, across grassy pastures and through oak mottes. Colored ribbons, keyed to each designated loop and knotted on tree branches, keep me on the right track.

That night, a dark, clear sky twinkles with millions of bright stars. I easily spot the Big Dipper, which hovers right over my cabin. The Meadors keep outdoor lighting to a bare minimum to enhance an already pristine stargazing location. (Each October, amateur astronomers gather at X Bar for the annual four-night Eldorado Star Party.)

After sunrise the next morning, I'm back on the trails for an hour-long hike. Then it's time to load up and meet Meador in nearby Eldorado, where he

Andrea Green, Jackson's daughter, recalls riding with her father on mourning dove and prairie chicken surveys. "Those are some of my fondest childhood memories," she says. "His ideals certainly influence my life. I nearly always knew what kind of snake I was looking at, or flower, or bird. If I didn't know I'd look it up. I still do today."

In 1991, while working on an assignment for this magazine, photographer Wyman Meinzer asked Dick DeArment who he should talk to about the natural history of the Panhandle. Following DeArment's suggestion, Meinzer drove to Canadian and knocked on A.S. Jackson's front door. The two became instant friends. "The man had incredible recall for facts and poetry," Meinzer says. "We spent a lot of time driving around up on the Canadian River, talking about Indians, buffalo and history."

About a month before his death in 1994, weak and burdened with an oxygen bottle, Jackson had to decline when Meinzer suggested an outing. "But he told me to be sure and stop by on my way home," Meinzer says. "He wanted to talk about what I'd seen."

Andrea Green's summation of her father's life is as simple and beautiful as many of his field notes: "He did everything he could to conserve what we have. He lived a fine life." ☆

takes me on a quick tour around town. There's not a lot to see, unless you count the Hysterical District, a roadside park decked out with dozens of quirky signs, all hand-painted by resident eccentric Jim Runge. As we drive by slowly, I read a few and groan: "2,000 pounds of Chinese soup equals won ton," "Coffee ... the person who is coughed upon," and "Bad spellers of the world ... UNTIE!"

All in all, I've learned a lot during my visit to Sonora and Eldorado. As I head east toward home, I ponder playing a round of Texas darts with an oak branch from our backyard. And who'd have guessed that "lymph" means — according to Mr. Runge — "to walk with a lisp"? ☆

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Eldorado Star Party, Oct. 19 (public night),

www.texasstarparty.org/eldorado.html

PARTING SHOT

When Wyman Meinzer stepped out his back door in Benjamin at about 11 a.m., he noticed a storm building southwest of town. By 2 p.m., the storm was spitting hail and looking devilish. At about 2:30, he took this photograph — a chilling reminder of the violent weather that is a reality of life on the plains of North Texas.

IMAGE SPECS:
Canon F1N camera with
a 28-85 mm F4 lens, an
exposure of 1/60 second
at f/4 on Velvia 50 film.



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