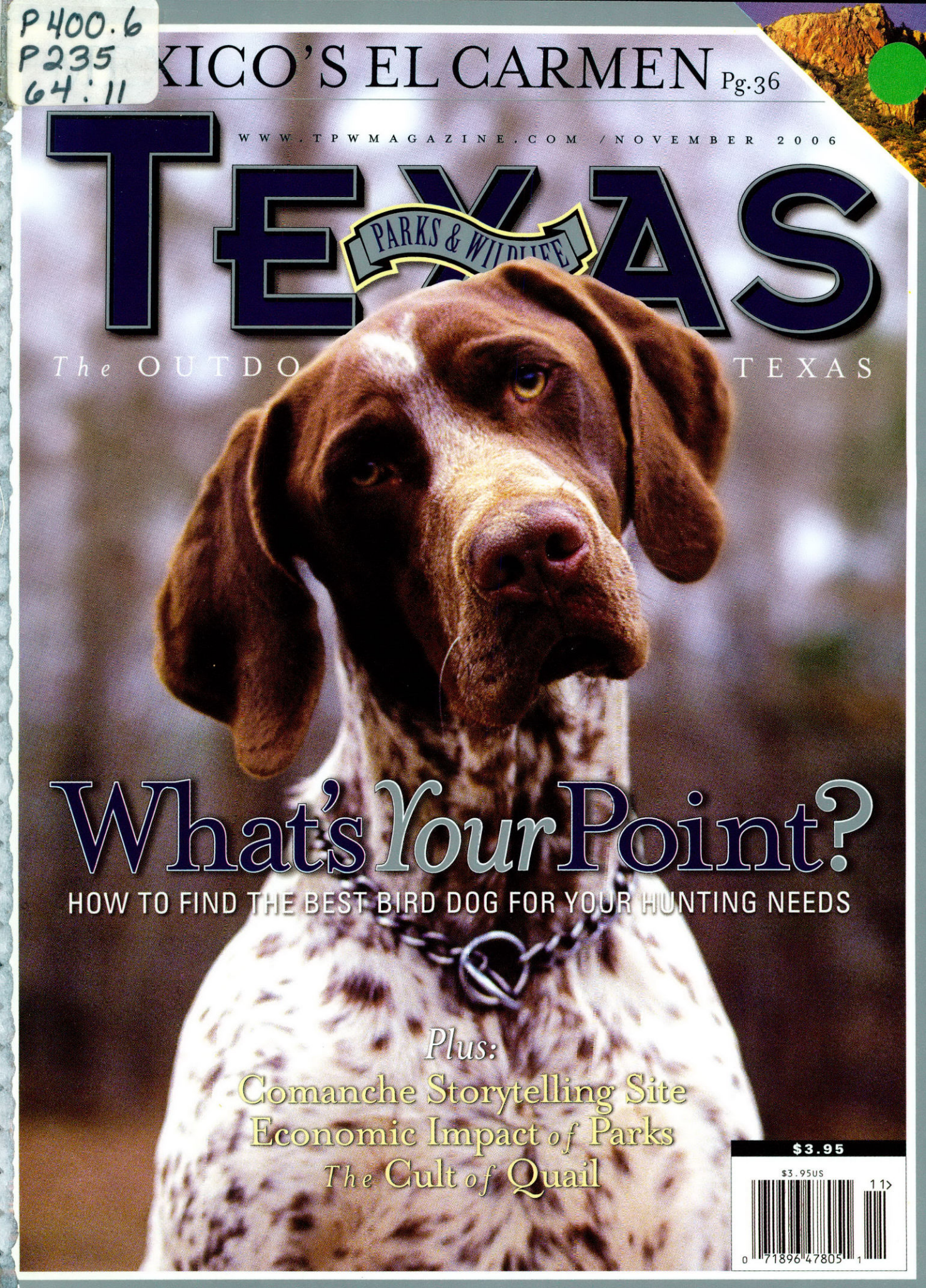
XICO'S EL CARMEN Pg.36

WWW.TPWMAGAZINE.COM / NOVEMBER 2006

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

The OUTDO TEXAS



What's *Your* Point?

HOW TO FIND THE BEST BIRD DOG FOR YOUR HUNTING NEEDS

Plus:
Comanche Storytelling Site
Economic Impact *of* Parks
The Cult *of* Quail

$3.95

$3.95US
11>
0 71896 47805 1

There's A Monster Lurking.

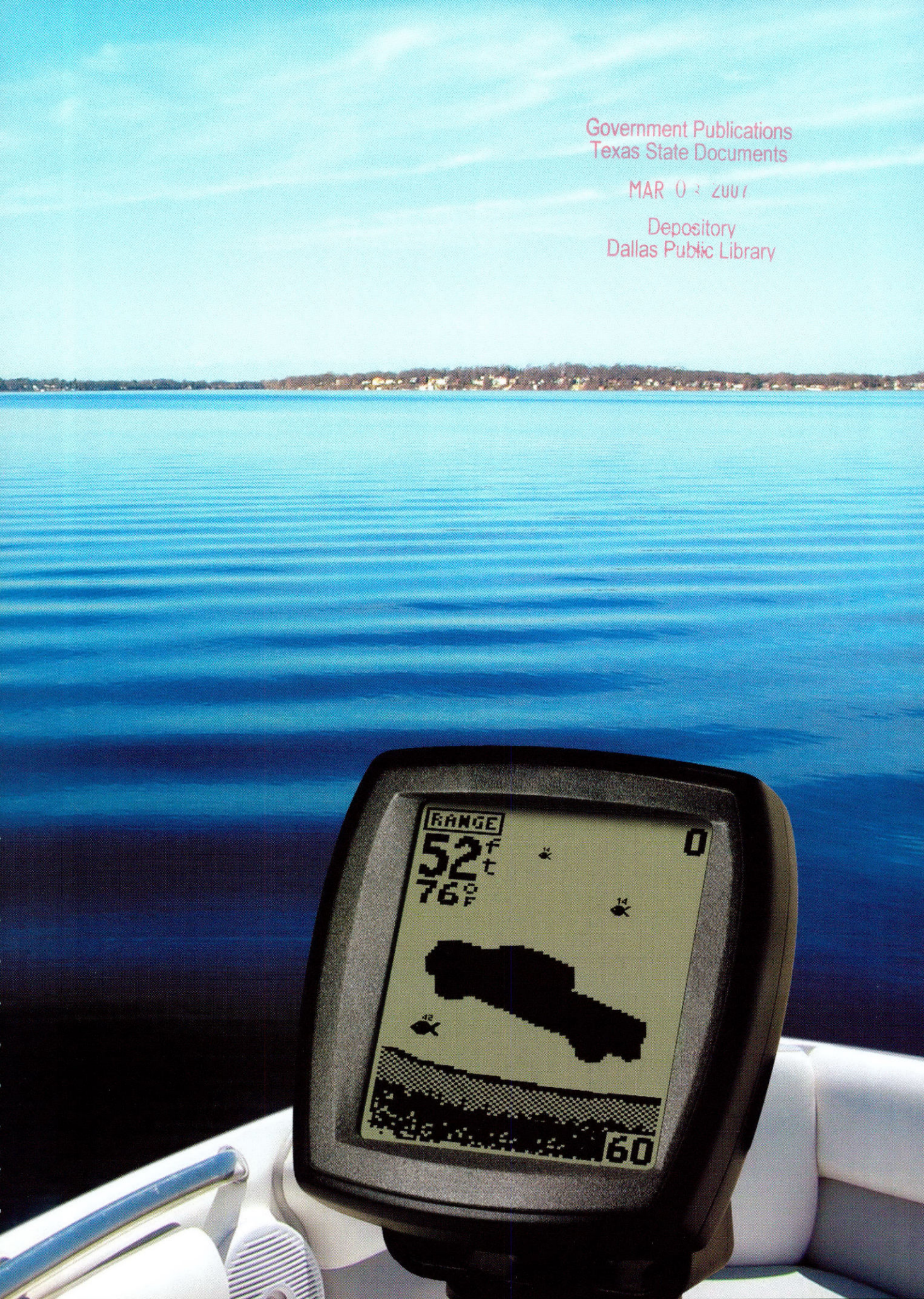
The all-new 2007 Toyota Tundra. It's coming. Watch for it early next year. If it's not on your radar, it should be. This lunker is over 19 feet long, bred in San Antonio at our brand new $850 million assembly plant. Toyota is a proud sponsor of the Toyota Texas Bass Classic, coming in April to Lake Fork...another site known for producing whoppers. **Toyota Tundra. Official truck of the 1st Annual Toyota Texas Bass Classic. Lake Fork, Texas. April 9-15, 2007.**

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE FOUNDATION Proud Sponsor and Official Vehicle of Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation

TOYOTA TEXAS BASS CLASSIC Official Sponsor

TOYOTA moving forward

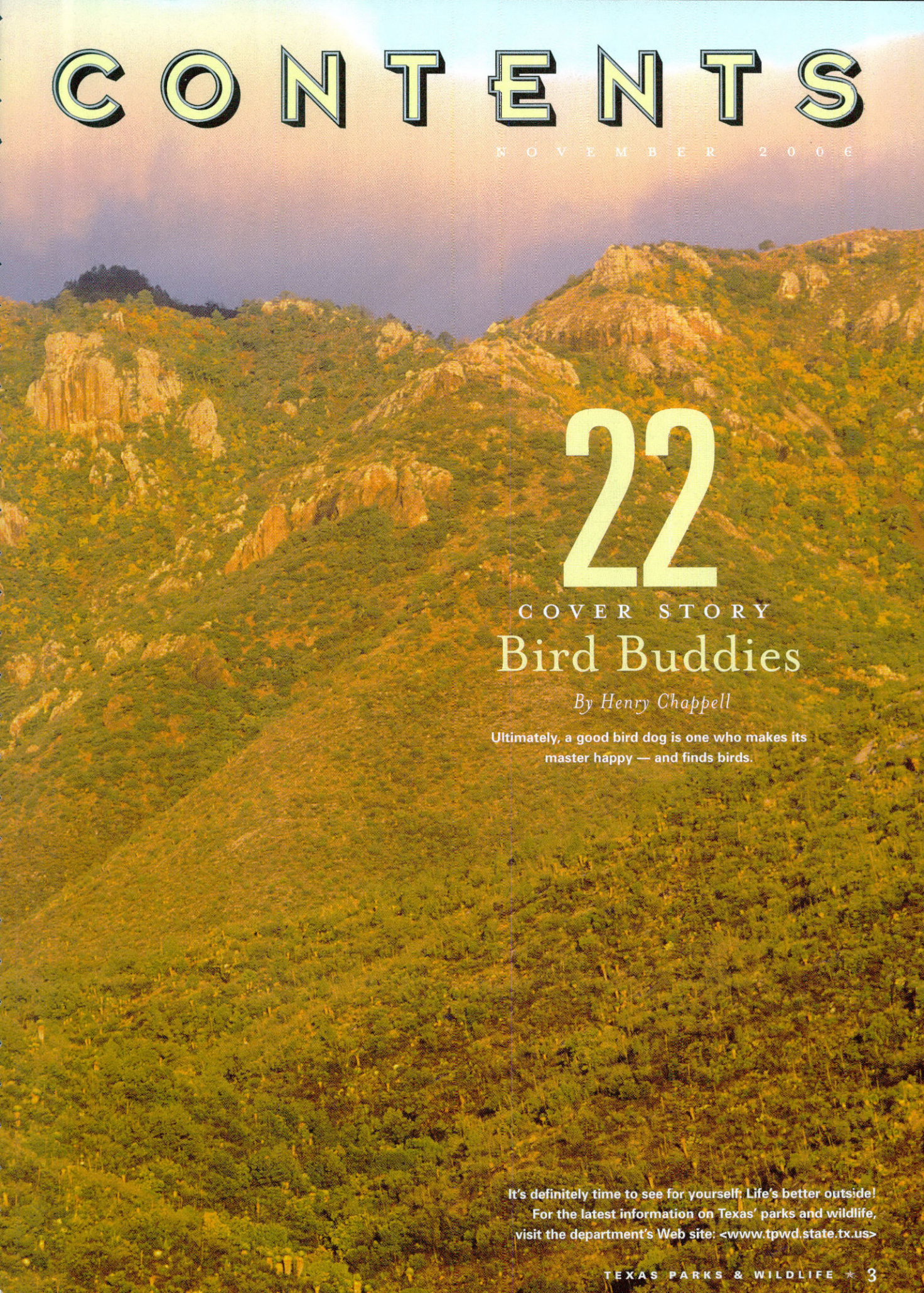
TRUCKS 2007 Tundra



Features

CONTENTS

NOVEMBER 2006



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

Departments

Covers

FRONT: Innate curiosity and intelligence make this German short-haired pointer the perfect hunting companion. Photo © Dale C. Spartas.

BACK: The hunt for the elusive quail easily slips into obsession. Photo © Larry Ditto.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: The majestic Maderas del Carmen. Photo © Wyman Meinzer.

THIS PAGE: An English setter, alert and ready for action. Photo © GaryKramer.net

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

THE OUTDOOR MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

NOVEMBER 2006, VOL. 64, NO. 11

EDITORIAL OFFICES:
3000 South IH 35, Suite 120, Austin, Texas 78704
Phone: (512) 912-7000 Fax: (512) 707-1913
E-mail: magazine@tpwd.state.tx.us

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES:
STONEWALLACE COMMUNICATIONS, INC.:
3000 S. IH 35, Suite 120, Austin, Texas 78704
Fax: (512) 707-1913
Jim Stone, Advertising Director (512) 912-7007
or (512) 799-1045.
E-mail: jim.stone@tpwd.state.tx.us

Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine (ISSN 0040-4586) is published monthly by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744. The inclusion of advertising is considered a service to subscribers and is not an endorsement of products nor concurrence with advertising claims.

SUBSCRIPTION RATE: $19.95/year; foreign subscription rate: $27.95/year. POSTMASTER: If undeliverable, please send notices by form 3579 to *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine, P. O. Box 5504, Harlan, IA 51593. Periodicals Postage Paid at Austin, Texas with additional mailing offices.

Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine is edited to inform readers, and to stimulate their enjoyment of the Texas outdoors. It reflects the many viewpoints of contributing readers, writers, photographers and illustrators. Only articles written by agency employees will always represent policies of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

SUBSCRIBER SERVICES
SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES ONLY, PLEASE.
PHONE: (800) 937-9393
7 a.m.–11 p.m. Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–6 p.m. weekends

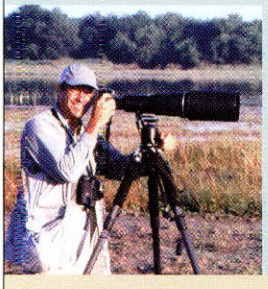
IRMA *Member International Regional Magazine Association*

ABC AUDITED

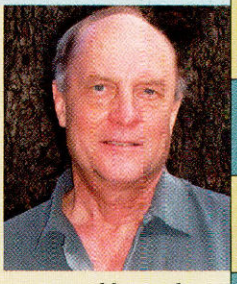
In the Field

BONNIE REYNOLDS MCKINNEY serves as wildlife coordinator for Proyecto El Carmen in northern Coahuila, Mexico. Bonnie worked for 20 years along the Texas-Mexico border conducting research projects and surveys for the USFWS and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Bonnie has published articles in scientific journals and magazines, as well as *Field Guide to Management of Black Bears* in 2004. At Proyecto El Carmen, featured in her article on page 36, Bonnie conducts wildlife surveys, captures and transports wildlife, does research and baseline inventory, and supervises project biologists. Karen and her husband, Billy Pat, also lived for 22 years at the Black Gap Wildlife Management Area in West Texas. It's a testament to her passion that she could only find photos of herself that included bears.

PATRICIO ROBLES GIL founded Agrupación Sierra Madre and Unidos para la Conservación in 1989 and 1992, respectively. He is currently the president of both organizations, working on three ecoregions: the Gulf of California, the Chihuahuan Desert and the Mayan jungles. He has been the editor of 18 books about nature, including *Megadiversity, Hotspots, The Gulf of California,* and *The Red Book: The Extinction Crisis Face-to-Face.* Patricio serves as an advisor for the Mexican section of the Mesoamerican Corridor, the Fund for Environmental Communication and Education, Mexico's Protected Areas and WWF-Mexico. This month, Patricio gives readers a view of wildlife protection in the Big Bend area from the Mexican side of the border (page 44), as well as some dramatic shots of the Maderas del Carmen.



RUSTY MIDDLETON has spent much of his career working for natural resource and conservation agencies, including several years at the Idaho Department of Fish and Game as a public information officer. But Rusty claims those are just his day jobs. He also loves to write about the outdoors and the environment and has published more than 100 freelance articles in a wide variety of publications. His piece in this issue involves a special passion – the Texas coast. Rusty says: "The creation of the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve was becoming imperative considering the pace of growth in Texas. This timely project took a monumental effort on the part of so many people." Rusty claims to live in Austin, but always seems to be someplace else, such as hiking Big Bend or eyeing the tip of a surf rod on Padre Island.

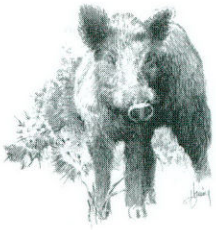


AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF ROBERT L. COOK

It's fall again, finally. I love autumn in Texas, if for no other reason than the crisp, cool mornings — they feel so fresh and smell so good, they are absolutely wonderful. I love to be up and outside early, before sunrise, when I can breathe in that sweet air deeply and slowly. A heavy, long-sleeved shirt feels comfortable and the sunrises are spectacular. If you could bottle that, you could definitely move to Silk Stocking Avenue.

I've already burned several pounds of gunpowder in what some would surely claim was my private war on doves. But, just so you don't fret about that renewable resource, the doves won, and we are at peace again. We started the season on Labor Day weekend with an absolute "swarm" of doves on our field of native sunflowers on Lost Creek. Believe me, they are still there. My sons, Joe and Andy, and I are such bad shots that I have written the ammo companies and told them that they could just hold off on the "shot" and the doves would never know the difference. The night before our first hunt, we figured out how to improvise a perfectly fine "plug" for Andrew's pump by borrowing about six inches off the handle of a wooden spoon in the cabin kitchen. Hopefully, we'll make another visit or two to the ranch before The Boss notices the missing spoon handle and I can legitimately shrug my shoulders and act like I know nothing.



I put up several trail cameras around the ranch earlier this fall and it's got me wondering about my supply of .257 Roberts ammo. I probably only have a hundred, maybe 200, reloads ready to go, and I don't reckon that is going to be enough. Sure we've got lots of deer, but I rarely shoot a deer anyway; I just "hunt" them. I'm talking about feral hogs — wild pigs, Russian boars, domestic-gone-wild — whatever you want to call them, they do not belong out there. Black ones, spotted ones, brown ones, striped ones — it's unbelievable. Susie (my "I hunt with Dad only" daughter) thinks that one of them is "Son of Cowpig," but that's another story. I don't know where they have come from. We have not seen a hog on the ranch for almost a year, and I was feeling pretty proud of achieving one of our many wildlife management goals: feral hog control. Wrong! Feral hogs are definitely active at night, or "nocturnal" as my biologists say. These porkers don't even get up until about 1:30 a.m. Then the trail cameras prove that it is Hog City until about 3:30 a.m., then nothing until the next night. Given that there is no closed season and no bag limit on feral hogs, you'd think us mighty hunters would've wiped them off the face of the earth by now. Alas, perhaps this requires another letter to the ammo companies.

Given that there is no closed season and no bag limit on feral hogs, you'd think us mighty hunters would've wiped them off the face of the earth by now.

Words and phrases like "natural resource conservation," "wildlife management," "water for environmental flows" and "increased plant and animal diversity" mean lots of different things to people. These are important words and phrases, but we have to work very hard to put these words and phrases on the ground, where they actually mean something to our ecosystems and to the fish and wildlife that live out there. Step one: feral hog control.

On second thought, you don't need to bottle it — just get outdoors and enjoy it. While you're out there — learn about it.

Robert L. Cook

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department mission statement:

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


Academy has the selection of hunting gear for your neck of the woods.
RIGHT STUFF. LOW PRICE.
Academy
SPORTS+OUTDOORS
academy.com

MAIL CALL

PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

FOREWORD

At the risk of being labeled a flagrant horn-tooter, I can't resist sharing the news about our latest awards. We won a total of 11 awards at this year's International Regional Magazine Association (IRMA) conference in Duluth.

We took home top honors (gold) for Public Issues ("Water Wars," July '05, Joe Nick Patoski), Nature Feature ("Save the Monkeyface," April '05, Wendee Holtcamp), Essay ("The Second Hunt," January '05, Rick Bass), Overall Art Direction (May, July, August '05 issues, Mark Mahorsky) and Cover (Jetty Warriors, March '05, Mark Mahorsky)

Our silver awards included Single Photograph ("Warden Chronicles," February '05, Earl Nottingham), Photographic Series ("The Park that Time Forgot," April '05, Earl Nottingham) and Special Focus issue ("State of Springs," July '05).

The bronze winners were Travel Feature ("The Park that Time Forgot," April '05, Joe Nick Patoski) and Art Direction of a Single Story ("Among the Clouds," May '05, Mark Mahorsky). E. Dan Klepper also won an Award of Merit in the Historical Feature category for "Springs and the River," July '05.

The annual conference is attended by regional magazines from all over the U.S. and Canada. Some cover large areas like Arizona, and others cover areas that, from the Texas perspective anyway, seem like extended neighborhoods. The visually stunning *Lake Country Journal* covers a part of north central Minnesota that encompasses only about 60 square miles. I had the pleasure of meeting husband-and-wife *Lake Country Journal* founders Chip and Jean Borkenhagen. They'd recently celebrated 10 years in the magazine business, and their passion and affection for their region was an inspiration to me.

The conference also reminded me that the business we're in is truly special. The best regional magazines, large and small, don't just cover a certain area — they help define it. No other medium can compete with magazines for their ability to capture the visual beauty, the rich culture and the indomitable spirit of a region.

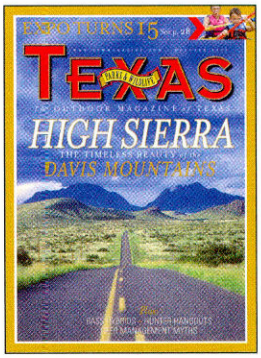
And speaking of indomitable spirits, I'm happy to welcome Louie Bond as our new Managing Editor. A native Texan, she previously worked at *Texas Co-Op Power* and, before that, had a long career in newspapers. On the home front in Wimberley, she's rearing four kids and oversees a menagerie that includes six dogs, three cats, one rabbit, one husband and "too many chickens to count." If she can handle all that, I figure she should be able to help maintain some degree of order here at our own little *Texas Parks & Wildlife* zoo. Former Managing Editor Charles Lohrmann is now Associate Publisher. In his new role, he is in charge of our circulation, marketing and advertising efforts.

As our team evolves, I'm confident that we're building momentum for another winning year.

Robert Macias

ROBERT MACIAS
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

LETTERS



Surely you could have picked a more probable bird than the rosy finch? ... I was ready to throw my birding gear in the car and head west!

Chris Harrison
San Antonio

NO ROSY FINCHES HERE

When the October issue arrived at my house yesterday, I quickly perused it. There was a nice article on the Davis Mountains and a photo of two birds with the caption, "The Montezuma quail can be seen in the Davis Mountains region, as can the gray-crowned rosy finch."

I thought: "What? Why have I never heard of this secret location for this bird?" Reading the text, I find out that the photo caption is based on a single sighting of the species by Barry Scobeee in 1928.

Surely you could have picked a slightly more probable bird than the rosy finch? Maybe the elegant trogon or the yellow-billed loon. I was ready to throw my birding gear in the car and head west!

CHRIS HARRISON
San Antonio

TP&W EDITORS RESPOND: According to TPWD Ornithologist Cliff Shackelford, the reported 1928 sighting of the gray-crowned rosy finch is unverifiable. Three species of rosy finches exist in North America, but none has been recorded in Texas.

NEW DOG VACCINES

Thanks for the article regarding "dog friendly" state parks (August 2006). Melissa Gaskill did a great job of including the important medical considerations that need to be addressed before a dog is taken along.

MAIL CALL

Two relatively new vaccines are for Lyme disease and rattlesnake bites. Lyme disease is becoming more common in Texas; rattlesnake bites occur frequently as well. The vaccine does not preclude treatment but definitely decreases morbidity due to delayed treatment in remote areas. This vaccine also aids in copperhead bites. Both vaccines are safe, effective and affordable.

DOUGLAS MABRY, DVM
Gatesville

GENTLEMAN JACKSON

I felt you did a tremendous job of capturing the essence of my grandfather, A.S. Jackson, and his life's work ("The Quail Whisperer," August 2006). I was thrilled to see that there are young people still benefiting from his love for and dedication to his science. He never lost his love of learning and reading right up to the very end of his life.

One thing that an article cannot convey is what a beautiful soul he was. He was the type of Southern gentleman who never stopped holding doors open for ladies and who always wore a Stetson when he drove. Though he could look as rugged and outdoorsy as the Marlboro man, he was a loving man with a tender spirit who loved his family.

MARY WILT
Decatur, Illinois

Sound off for "Mail Call!"

Let us hear from you!
Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine welcomes letters from our readers. Please include your name, address and daytime telephone number.
Write to us at
Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine,
3000 South I-35, Suite 120,
Austin, TX 78704.
Or, fax us at 512-707-1913.
E-mail us at
<magazine@tpwd.state.tx.us>.
Subscribe at <tpwmagazine.com>.

We reserve the right to edit letters for length and clarity.

BEACH BUILDING

Inexpensive fences help restore sand dunes.

PHOTO BY TPWD

Sand fencing provides an easy and economical solution to the problem of dune erosion.

Biologists on the upper Texas coast have found a simple, and economical, solution to a rapidly eroding shoreline: plant a fence, and it will come. Sand, that is.

"Texas Point National Wildlife Refuge has some of the most extreme erosion — possibly in the U.S. — where 50 feet of shoreline is being lost each year," explains Marty Bray, until recently the refuge manager at McFaddin NWR, which is also losing 8-12 feet per year. So much beach had eroded that the clay underneath became exposed, turning what once were natural beaches into cliff-like banks. McFaddin is a few miles down from Texas Point; both lie within the Chenier Plain geological formation — coastal swales formed from sediment coming down the Mississippi River and spread out by currents along the coast.

"Most people are in agreement that the area is sediment-starved due to dams preventing sediment from flowing down rivers that historically replenished shoreline," explains Bray. Because of miles of jetties, sediment that does make it downriver ends up further offshore in the continental shelf rather than at the river's mouth, where currents would otherwise distribute it along coastal beaches.

"In a natural system the dunes will get eroded during storms but build back during the spring and early summer," explains Dean Bossert, the current refuge manager. "In the system we have now, they don't build back because there is a lack of sand in the system."

While the Army Corps of Engineers was spending thousands of dollars studying whether massive textile "geotubes" could prevent erosion, Bray, Bossert and refuge biologist Patrick Walther had a simpler idea. Walther's sister had installed sand fences along the Louisiana coast to rebuild dunes, so they brought the idea to Texas. Using relatively inexpensive supplies, they installed a few miles of fence, planting Atlantic panicum grass to help hold sand and rebuild the dune. Within a few months, several feet had accumulated.

Dunes not only create a more aesthetically pleasing beach and provide habitat for beach critters, they also buffer the impacts of storm damage, protecting human life and property. At Louisiana's Holly Beach, just a few miles from where the eye of Hurricane Rita hit, several miles of beach and recreated dunes had been replenished using sand fencing, which prevented further damage. "That beach has a highway — Louisiana Highway 82 — sitting just 200 feet from the Gulf of Mexico and the road was barely damaged," says Walther.

Although Rita destroyed the fences at McFaddin NWR, the new dunes survived. "Much of the foredune was washed away, but the back dunes were protected," explains Bossert. Unfortunately in much of their 18-mile coastline, the erosion rate occurs too fast for the sand fences to be effective. More sand is needed to re-establish dunes, but funding is currently hard to come by. Other places along the coast could benefit from this inexpensive method of dune restoration, says Walther. "Places like Bolivar Island and Galveston have a lot of potential to benefit from sand fencing." ★

— Wendee Holtcamp

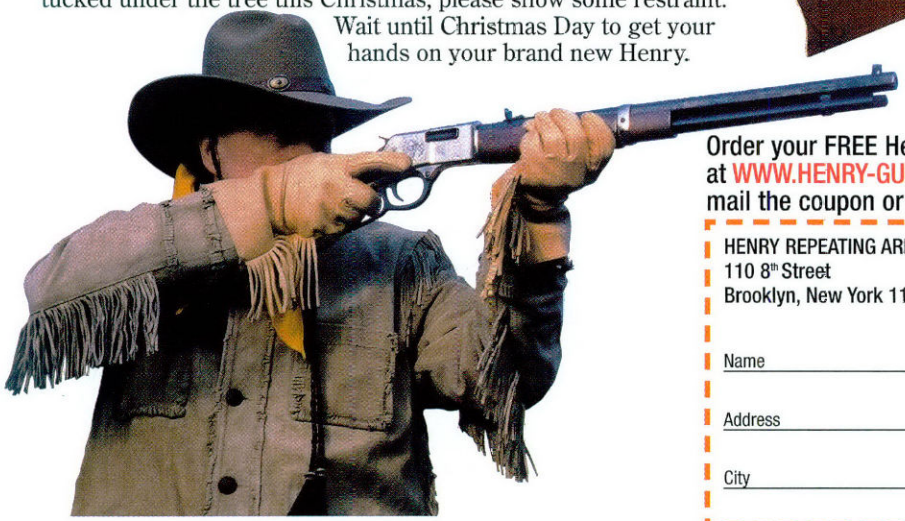
WHEN "DO NOT OPEN BEFORE CHRISTMAS" IS OFTEN IGNORED.

Henry Golden Boy Lever Action
Available in .22 LR, .22 Magnum, & .17 HMR
Guns & Ammo Rifle of the Year (2001)

People are giving and receiving Henry rifles for the holidays because they are magnificently styled, have the smoothest actions, perform with flawless reliability, bear the great historical name of Henry and are affordably priced.

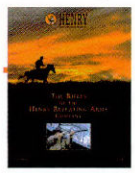
Every part in a Henry is made in America. Every rifle is engineered with features many competitors charge twice the price for. We are a family owned business and our customer service is second to none. Everything will be done to ensure your complete satisfaction.

Order our free color catalog featuring the entire line of Henry lever, bolt-action and semi-auto rifles by calling, writing or visiting our website. If you happen to notice a long, rectangular gift package tucked under the tree this Christmas, please show some restraint. Wait until Christmas Day to get your hands on your brand new Henry.



HENRY
Made in America and Priced Right

Order your FREE Henry catalog
at WWW.HENRY-GUNS.COM
mail the coupon or call (718) 499-5600



HENRY REPEATING ARMS CO.
110 8th Street
Brooklyn, New York 11215

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

TPW & Wild

Henry Repeating Arms Company 110 8th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215 Tel: (718) 499-5600 Fax: (718) 768-8056

Mission Mineola

A small East Texas town hopes to become a birders' paradise.

The great blue heron is one of nearly 200 bird species at the new 3,000-acre Mineola Nature Preserve.

"If we preserve it, they will come." This excerpt from the brochure for the Mineola Nature Preserve accurately describes the vision behind the city's seven-year planning efforts for the preserve. Home to about 5,600 people, this small East Texas town now has big bragging rights. The 3,000-acre preserve, which opened in April 2006, is one of the 25 largest city-owned parks in the nation.

City officials are hopeful that the new preserve will assist Mineola in becoming a destination city for people outside the region and outside the state. Designated the "Birding Capital of East Texas," it's destined to become a hotspot for people who enjoy birdwatching, wildlife and nature photography, hiking and walking.

"The preserve gives visitors a chance to experience a type of East Texas habitat that's disappearing," says City Business Administrator Dion Miller. "The city had an offer to sell some of the property for development purposes but declined that offer and opted to turn it into a nature preserve."

With more than four miles of improved and unimproved nature trails (many of which are accessible to people with disabilities), wildlife viewing stations, a canoe rest station and future plans for camp sites and an equestrian/mountain bike trail, there's something to satisfy a variety of interests and needs. And there's no shortage of wildlife either. Boasting a list of 189 bird species observed on the preserve, along with deer, wild hogs, beavers, waterfowl, coyotes and more, all that's needed for a full day of entertainment are some comfortable walking shoes and a pair of binoculars.

"Looking south from the pavilion, you can gaze out over approximately 150 acres with five beautiful wildlife viewing lanes that have been cut and cleared through the wooded area," explains site manager Butch Wood. "These lanes are food plots that entice deer, wild hogs and other animals to feed. I just love it when people out of Dallas come to visit and see

a wild hog for the first time and squeal. You see things here you just don't see in the city."

A guided bird walk, scheduled for one Saturday each month, is only a glimpse of what the preserve may one day offer visitors. "Our goal is to eventually provide events, tours, classes and workshops that cater to all skills, abilities and interests," explains Sandy Tibbs, member of the newly formed organization Friends of the Preserve and co-owner of Lost Creek wild bird and nature store in downtown Mineola. "We want to continue to grow the birding opportunities, but we're also looking into everything from orienteering classes to basic compass reading. The possibilities are endless."

An old railroad bed provides the main trail through the property, shrouded by trees all the way. Native hibiscus, trumpet vines and various other wildflowers pop with color amid a lush green backdrop.

"In the spring the wildflowers are gorgeous," says Wood. "Because of the thick canopy of trees covering the trail, it's not too hot, even in the summer. Not too hot by a native Texan's standards, anyway."

But if you do need a place to cool off, there's a station where people can launch their canoe or kayak on the Sabine River just a few hundred yards upstream from the preserve on U.S. 69 just south of the city.

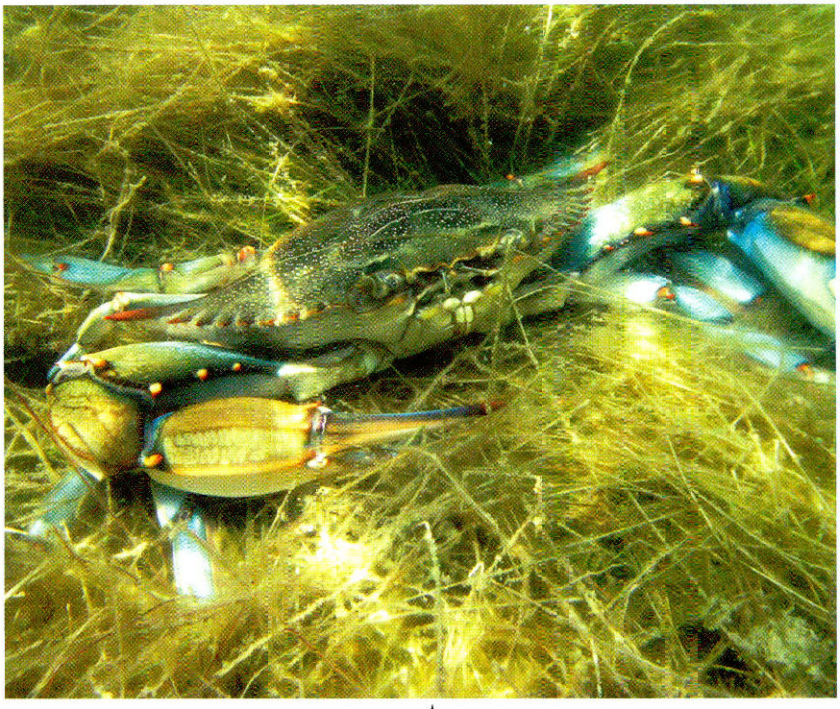
Bridge Bob pond, which will be stocked each year with fish from the Inland Fisheries Division of Texas Parks and Wildlife, is also a great place to unwind for anglers 14 and under and 65 and older. Even if you don't plan to fish, you may get lucky and see a great blue heron doing a little fishing of his own. The pond was named for a real person, Bridge Bob, who worked on the site when trains crossed the property in the early part of the 20th century.

The preserve is open seven days a week; park hours vary depending on the time of year. Admission is free. For more information about the Mineola Nature Preserve and upcoming events, visit <www.mineola.com> or <www.mnpfriends.org>. ★

— Erica H. Brasseux

Living Lab

Huge new reserve established on the Coastal Bend.



Salinity monitoring will ensure that endangered whooping cranes find enough blue crab, their primary food.

In May, the Mission-Aransas Estuarine Research Reserve on the Texas Coastal Bend became the third-largest estuarine research reserve in the nation. University of Texas marine science professor Paul Montagna led the seven-year process to establish the 185,000-acre living laboratory.

"This is a place where we're going to create a lot of long-term coastal research," says Montagna. "That research will be important because it will help coastal decision-makers better understand what changes in the estuaries are related to natural conditions or human activities."

Major areas of estuary-related research will be water quality, fresh water inflow and climate change. Information from these studies will help local communities and government agencies solve thorny problems such as non-point pollution, development controversies and habitat restoration.

Teachers and students will benefit also because a key function of the reserve will be education and outreach. New educational programs and facilities will be created, including the Wetland Education Center in Port Aransas (on the UT Marine Science Institute campus), nature trails, an environmental education center, teacher training and graduate research.

The reserve will establish a monitoring system that will thoroughly and systematically record conditions like currents, nutrient levels, bacteria, tides, temperatures and salinity. Such basic measurements are critical to understanding and protecting the coastal environment and the local economy. For example, blue crab, the primary food of endangered whooping cranes, cannot live in water that is too salty. And oysters, part of the economic lifeblood of the Texas coast, will get a disease known as dermo in highly saline water. Accurate monitoring of conditions will help the public and policy makers manage and protect the coast both now and in the future as population grows and pressure on the environment increases.

For more information, visit <www.utmsi.utexas.edu/nerr/>. ★

— Rusty Middleton

PHOTO © SCOTT SOMMERLATTE

BY THE NUMBERS / BY BRYAN FRAZIER

LOST MAPLES STATE NATURAL AREA

HARD DATA AND FUN FACTS ABOUT YOUR STATE PARKS

200,000-plus

the number of people who typically visit Lost Maples State Natural Area — near Vanderpool and Leakey — each year during October and November to see the spectacular seasonal foliage.

2,200

the number of acres that make up Lost Maples SNA. The park provides 30 water and electric hookup campsites and 50 walk-in primitive camping sites. Fall camping is typically a popular event, so reservations are strongly encouraged.

214

the number of bird species found in the park, including the green kingfisher, the endangered golden-cheeked warbler and the black-capped vireo.

25

the number of visible live springs inside Lost Maples State Natural Area. Many more springs hide in Can Creek and the Sabinal River, both of which flow through the park.

7 feet, 4 inches

the circumference of the champion bigtooth maple tree, located at the head of Maple Trail. An interpretive display has a cross-section of the tree, which once stood 68 feet tall. These bigtooth maples — responsible for much of the vibrant fall color — are survivors of the last ice age.

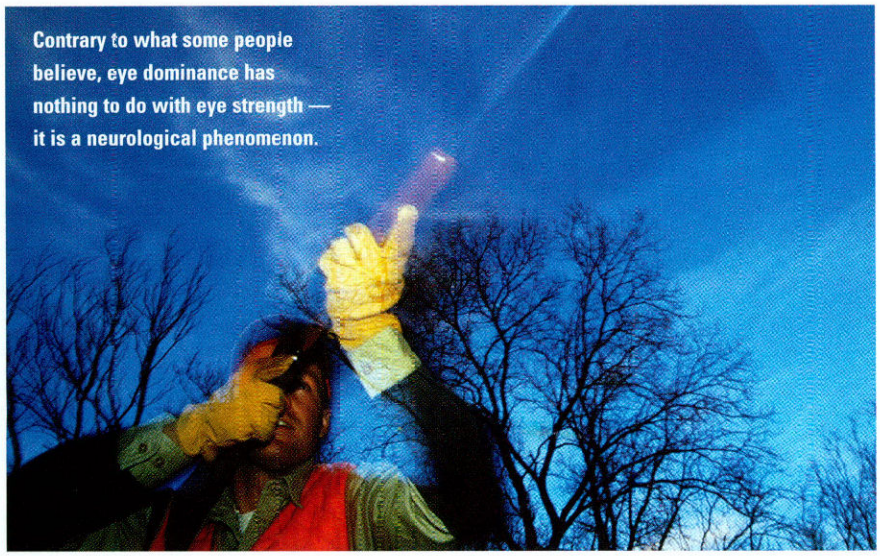
275 feet

the height that the East Hiking Trail rises above the Can Creek ponds. ★

PHOTO © LANCE VARNELL

Understanding Eye Dominance

You'll hit the target more often if you know which eye rules.



Contrary to what some people believe, eye dominance has nothing to do with eye strength — it is a neurological phenomenon.

You've probably heard the phrase "we aim a rifle but we point a shotgun." Very true. Our success with a rifle depends on a rock-steady hold, as the eye aligns the front and rear sights with a stationary target. Shotguns, on the other hand, are weapons of movement; they are dynamic. Shotguns don't have a rear sight and in order to use one successfully, the shooter's master or dominant eye must, in effect, become the rear sight. So what exactly is eye dominance? Contrary to what some people believe, eye dominance has nothing to do with eye strength — it is a neurological phenomenon. Our central nervous system, which we use to coordinate, regulate and control our bodily functions in response to various stimuli, is complete by late childhood, around 10 years of age. Eye dominance is fixed at the time of this neurological maturity. The number of optic nerve-brain hookups to each eye at this time will determine if the shooter is right eye dominant or left eye dominant. So how does this affect our proficiency with a shotgun? When shooting with both eyes open, if a right-shouldered shooter has a dominant left eye instead of a dominant right eye, his left eye will be controlling where his gun points. He will shoot behind a left-to-right crossing shot and in front of a right-to-left.

To check your eye dominance, try this. With both eyes open, point a finger at an object in the distance. Close first one eye then the other. The one that stays in line with the finger is your dominant eye.

Most people who are right-handed also have a dominant right eye, but not always. Some people are cross-dominant, meaning they are left-handed with a dominant right eye or vice-versa. If you have cross dominance and it can be diagnosed early enough, the best solution is to learn to shoot from the same shoulder as the master eye. With a youngster or someone who has never shot before, this is as easy to achieve as perfecting a new motor skill, but it is impossible to change one's master eye. Unfortunately, anyone who has shot for a few years will usually object to this suggestion because he will have already developed some "muscle memory" and it will now feel strange to mount the gun on the opposite shoulder. Another fix would be to block the cross-dominating eye with tape or a smear of grease on the lens of the shooting glasses. However, this will give a partial loss of binocular and peripheral vision. In a hunting situation, that fast-flying dove that appears from behind the mesquite trees may be seen too late to get a shot off!

A third way (and this is the one I prefer) would be to close the cross-dominant eye before the shot is taken. By doing this, the shooter has retained his full binocular, peripheral and stereoscopic vision by keeping both his eyes open as he evaluates the shot, until the last split-second. He now has a crystal-clear picture of his target/barrel relationship with no chance of cross-dominance kicking in.

Of course the shotgun, with its wide pattern, is a forgiving weapon and we will all hit some of the targets some of the time without diagnosing eye dominance. However, there is no substitute for making sure that the eye that is above the rib is the one that we rely on to give the brain the correct ocular information. Only then can we take some of the mystery out of our shotgunning, hit more of the targets most of the time and convert those frustrating whiffs into confident hits. ★

PHOTO © RUSSELL A. GRAVES

Rugged Luggage

Adventure travelers need tough bags to transport and protect their gear in the field.

While all sports luggage is tough enough to handle the rigors of most outdoor adventures, it's a good idea to consider exactly how you plan to use the bag before making a purchase.

In traditional design, perhaps the most distinctive look and feel and highest-quality construction can be found in bags and accessories made by C.C. Filson in Seattle since 1897. Each piece is made of water-repellent, heavy-duty canvas twill with strong bridle leather straps, industrial-strength snaps and brass zippers. This luggage ranges from an **Extra-Large Wheeled Duffle Bag** to a small personal effects **Travel Kit** and **Fly Reel Case.** In between are mid-size pieces like the **Medium Travel Bag** and a **Fly Rod Travel Case** that can also serve as a camera or spotting scope tripod carrier. The entire Filson line is designed to take years of travel abuse and still age gracefully without any functional failures. As the tan-colored canvas mellows, it takes on a look that shows the pieces have often been afield and are richer for the times spent and marks accrued during these adventures. ($425, XL Wheeled Duffle Bag,#284-TN. $245, Travel Bag, Medium #246-TN. $220, Fly Rod Travel Case, #216P-TN. $79.50, Travel Kit, #218-TN, $95. Reel Case, #2017-TN. C.C. Filson, 866-860-8906, www.filson.com)

The contemporary-styled **Pelican Case** is molded of durable hard-sided polycarbonate materials. It is a watertight, dustproof and crushproof unit intended to house optics and other delicate items during transport and storage. This case has a soft-padded interior, comes in several sizes, and is ideal for boaters needing to keep cameras, lenses, camcorders and other instruments dry and free of sand and salt spray. The light desert tan color reflects sunlight, helping to reduce heating inside the case. There is little doubt that this is just about the toughest luggage available, as evidenced by the U.S. military's using them for a number of strategic applications. ($151.95, Pelican Case, PC-1500DT, with $79.95, Padded Divider Set, #1505. Pelican Products, 800-473-5422, www.pelican.com)

Another example of traditional design at its best is found in the Bass Pro Shops' Bob Timberlake series of soft luggage. Each piece meets the very highest standards of quality in materials and construction. The large 42-inch **Wheeled Drop Bottom Duffel** carries enough gear for an extended expedition to your Texas hunting camp or the more distant plains of Africa. It has separate compartments to isolate your clean clothing from items like soiled hiking boots and waders. The matching **Wheeled Garment Bag** keeps outfits and personal items both organized and looking fresh in its many mesh compartments. Completing the set is a 52-inch **Gun Case** that is fleece lined and offers good protection to your rifle or shotgun. This luggage is reinforced with heavy oil-finished leather at all the corners, wear surfaces and stress points. The Timberlake line is made to stand the test of time and look even better after gaining the patina that comes with age and use. ($359.99, Wheeled Drop Bottom Duffel, #38-611-020-01. $249.99, Garment Bag, #38-654-879-00. $229.99, Gun Case, #38-622-574-00. Bass Pro Shops, 800-976-6344, www.basspro.com)

Clockwise from top: Filson Medium Travel Bag; Filson Fly Rod Case; Bass Pro Shops' Bob Timberlake Wheeled Drop Bottom Duffel; Pelican Case; Bass Pro Shops' Bob Timberlake Gun Case.

Note: Most black luggage is undesirable for outdoor use in warm climates because it absorbs and retains excessive heat in direct sunlight, which can permanently damage sensitive contents.

Also, if traveling by air, remember that luggage size and weight restrictions often vary. It is best to check in advance with the airline for that information. Nothing is worse than finding out that on the last leg of your journey, the small bush plane will not accept your luggage. ✶

3 Days in the Field / By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

DESTINATION: MATAGORDA

TRAVEL TIME FROM:
AUSTIN – 4 hours / BROWNSVILLE – 6 hours / DALLAS – 6.25 hours / EL PASO – 12 hours
HOUSTON – 2.5 hours / SAN ANTONIO – 4.25 hours / LUBBOCK – 11 hours

Mastering Matagorda

Kayak through pristine wetlands, stalk redfish or soak up some history along Texas' central coast.

Though the water's less than 2 feet deep, we're dutifully wearing life jackets — not to mention hats, sunscreen and plenty of insect repellent — as we paddle our kayaks through pristine protected wetlands at Matagorda Bay Nature Park, located at the mouth of the Colorado River channel.

Ahead of us, a crowd of laughing gulls hovers above a wide spot in murky water that's boiling with fins and scales.

"A pod of redfish is feeding there," observes Marcus O'Connor, recreation program coordinator at the 1,600-acre park, opened earlier this year by the Lower Colorado River Authority. "So the birds come and feed off the organisms that the fish stir up."

As we glide past, the commotion dies and the gulls dart away. Meanwhile, along a marsh edge, I spot a great blue heron, standing perfectly still in the partially submerged cord grass. Overhead, two roseate spoonbills soar by while a pair of royal terns twitter at one another.

"These kayaking trips help people have a better understanding of the Colorado River and the importance of our bays and estuaries," explains Betsy Terrel, the park's programs coordinator who's paddling alongside me. "If you experience a place firsthand, then you have more of a bond with nature, and you want to take better care of it."

Visitors may access these wetlands only via a guided kayak or birding tour. Currently, the park offers hiking trails, three fishing piers, restrooms and showers, picnic shelters, beach access and an RV park with full hookups. Future amenities will include a natural science center and exhibit hall, a group pavilion and a half-mile, pedestrian-only beach.

As a native Texan who grew up in Corpus Christi, I'm embarrassed to admit that this is my first visit to Matagorda Bay and Matagorda County, a region — as I'm to discover during my three days of exploring — that's rich in history, wildlife, fishing and great food.

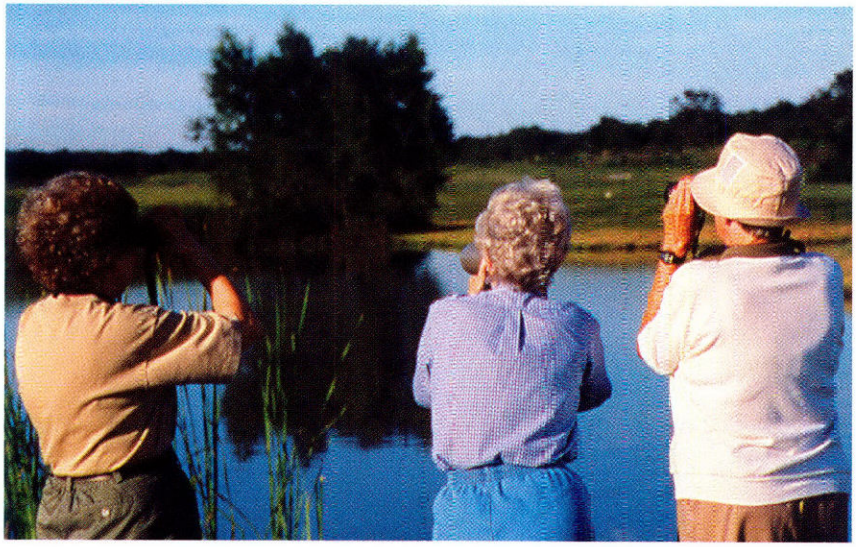
Speaking of history, a French explorer by the name of Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, mistakenly landed in Matagorda Bay in January 1685. Five months before, he and a fleet of four small ships had set out from France with colonists. La Salle's goal was to reach the mouth of the Mississippi River, where a new settlement would ensure King Louis XIV's claim to North America's western territories. Alas, Spanish pirates captured one ship along the way. Then, thanks to bad maps and poor navigation, the remaining ships reached landfall in Matagorda Bay.

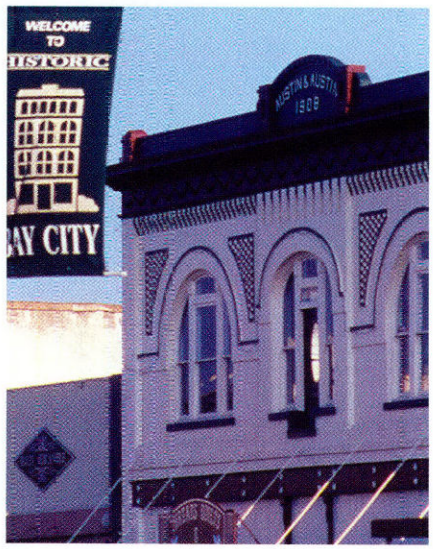
Within the shallow Gulf waters, a second ship was lost when it ran aground. A third ship returned to France, leaving one lone ship, La Belle. The surviving colonists stayed behind in a small fort while La Salle left to find the Mississippi. Within a year, more tragedy followed: La Belle sank during a storm, La Salle's men murdered him, and Karankawa Indians massacred all but a few children at Fort St. Louis.

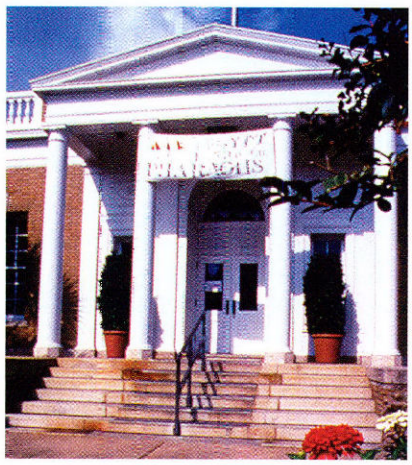
The area remained largely inhabited by nomadic Karankawas until 1827, when Stephen F. Austin convinced the Mexican government that a fort was needed near the mouth of the Colorado River to protect incoming settlers. Later that year, one of Austin's surveyors, Elias R. Wightman, platted a city there, then journeyed to New York to gather 50 or so colonists to inhabit the new town. Two years later, Matagorda — Spanish for

The Matagorda County Birding Nature Center offers superb birdwatching among six distinctive gardens and three complete ecosystems.

ALL PHOTOS © SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS







Clockwise from above left: birdwatching in Matagorda County; historic downtown Bay City; La Belle cannons from 1996 excavation on display; Matagorda Museum of History.

"thick brush" — was founded.

Following the Texas Revolution, Matagorda County was established in 1836, one of the first 23 counties organized by the Republic of Texas. The town of Matagorda served as county seat until 1894, when founders of Bay City successfully lobbied voters to move the county seat to their yet-to-be-built town.

Back in my car, I head north to Matagorda. But first I have to sit in line and wait for the old Highway 60 swing bridge to reopen. A tugboat is pushing a long barge along the Intracoastal Waterway. Once the two reach the bridge's other side, the tug blasts its horn four times. The bridge's middle section moves back into place, barricades rise, and a green light gives drivers the okay to cross. More than a half-century old, the swing bridge is one of two left in Texas.

Tonight, I'm staying in Matagorda at the Stanley-Fisher House B&B. Built in 1832 by Samuel R. Fisher, the two-story, white frame house still retains its original pinewood floors, staircase and hand-carved scroll trims. In the home, Fisher — who served as the first secretary of the Republic of Texas Navy — likely hosted his cronies, Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston. Fisher also signed the Texas Declaration of Independence.

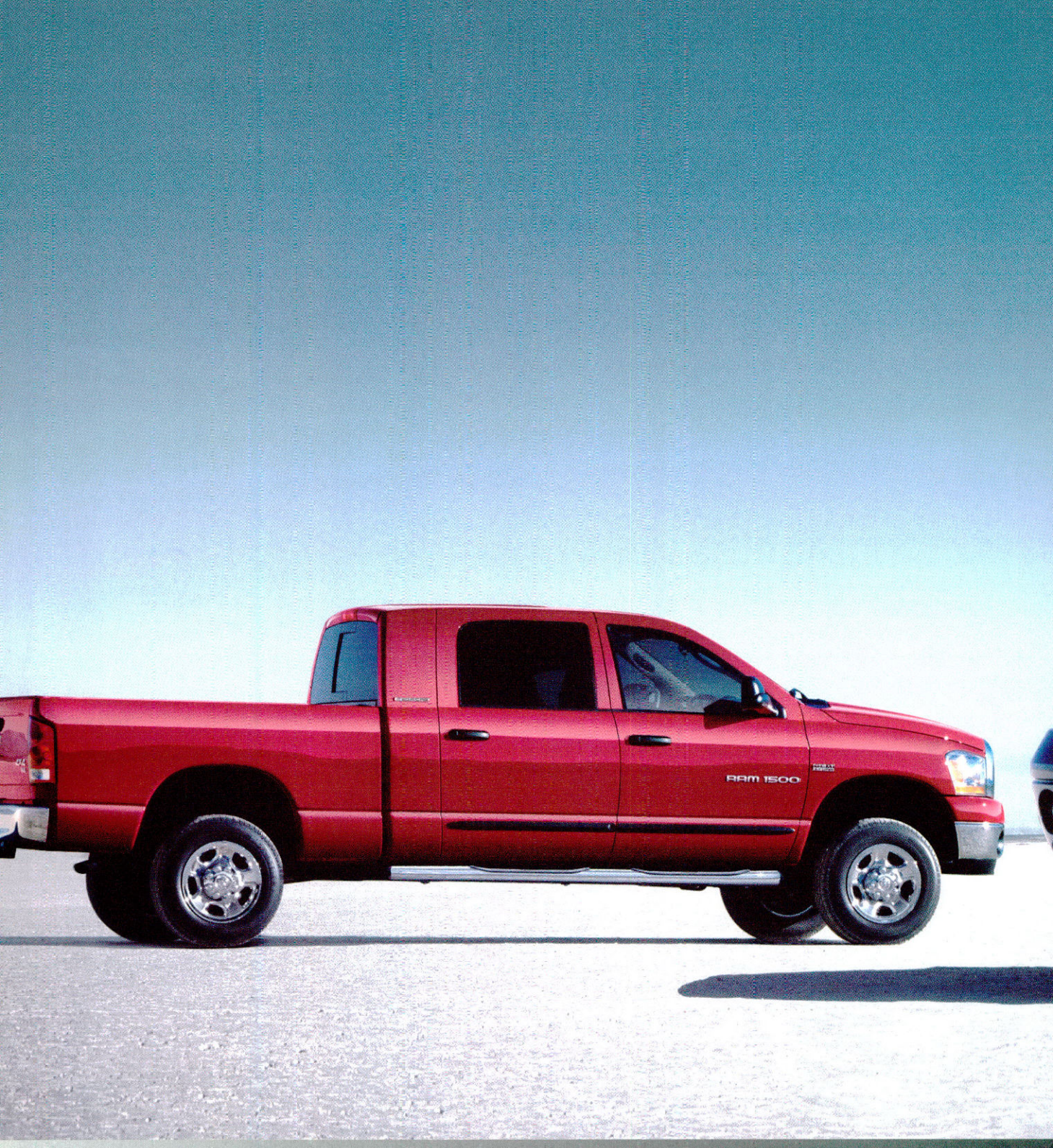
For supper, I order a soft-shell crab sandwich served with fries at the Waterfront Restaurant overlooking Matagorda Harbor. From my table, I watch the gulls and boats as I enjoy my meal.

Back at the harbor the next morning, I meet James Arnold with Day on the Bay Services. We're going to fish aboard his small scooter boat in East Matagorda Bay. Along the way, we stop at an oyster reef, where Arnold steps into the saltwater, scoops up a specimen and pries it open with a knife. Tiny stone crabs drop off the oyster and into the water.

"One oyster can produce a million eggs," says Arnold, who previously owned an oyster and shrimp company. "They have to be at least 3 inches long to harvest. The season runs November through April."

Four hours later, we haven't had any luck snagging a redfish with shrimp as bait. But we did reel in numerous hardheads, a croaker and one tough-looking stingray. Besides guided fishing trips, Arnold — who's extremely knowledgeable about the bay's ecosystem, wildlife, natural resources and history — books customized outdoor adventures for visitors wanting to oyster, crab, kayak, birdwatch or photograph wildlife, to name just a few activities.

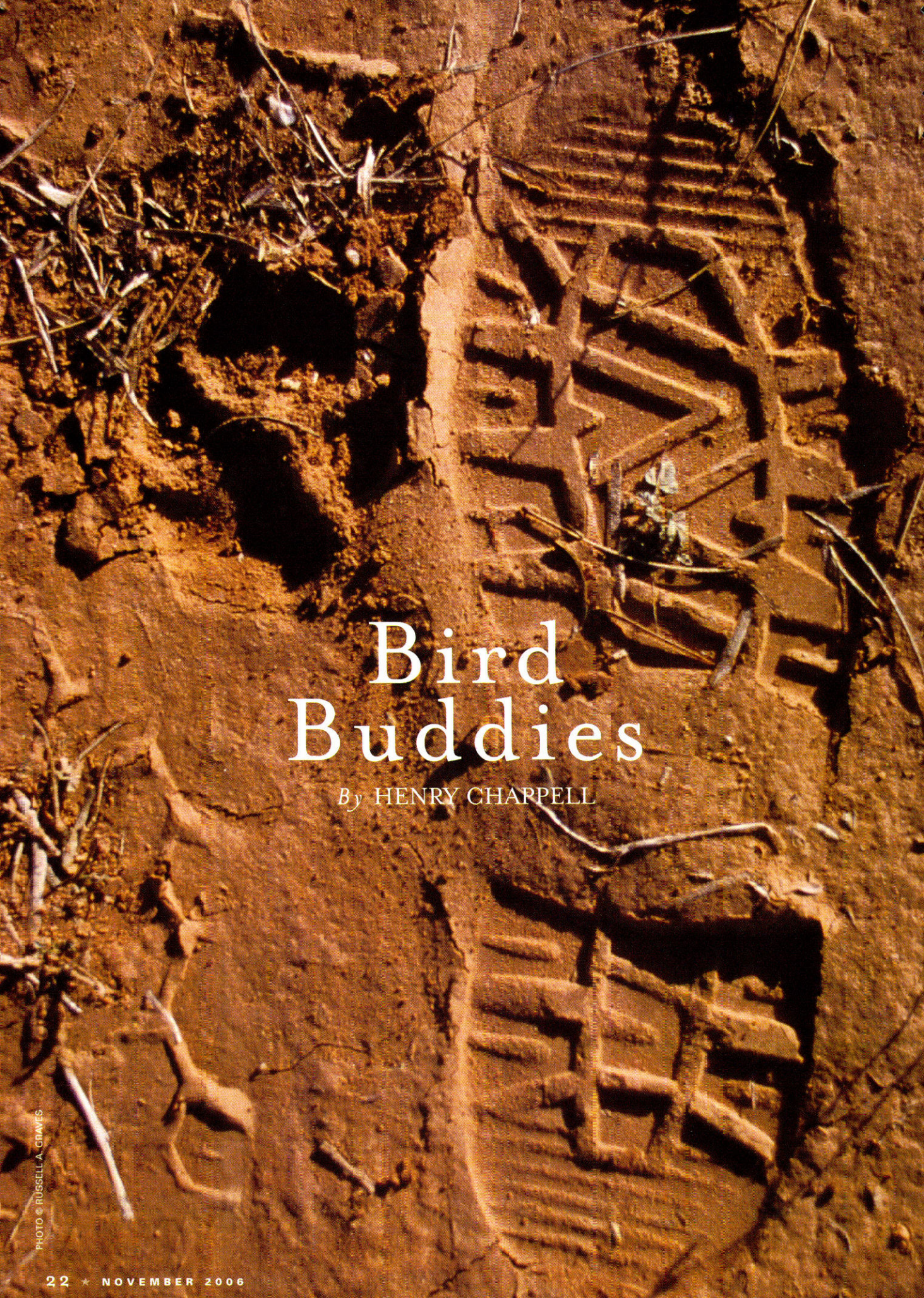
From Matagorda, I head north to Bay City to visit the Matagorda County Museum, housed downtown in the former 1918 federal post office. Here, I learn about the "La Salle Odyssey," a joint venture of **(continued on page 63)**



FIELD, STREAM. BOTH.

RAM 1500 MEGA CAB® WITH HEMI® ENGINE AND RAM 2500 MEGA CAB WITH Cummins® TURBO DIESEL ENGINE.
Either way we've got you covered. With the world's biggest cab, largest load floor area and best-in-class comfort, you only need to choose between the Ram 1500 Mega Cab 5.7-Liter HEMI V8 with 375 lb-ft of torque or the Ram 2500 Mega Cab Cummins Turbo Diesel with 325 horsepower. Or make it easy and get both. For more information, see your Texas Dodge dealer, visit DODGE.COM or call 800-4ADODGE.

BUCKLE UP



Bird Buddies

By HENRY CHAPPELL

PHOTO © RUSSELL A. GRAVES

Ultimately, a good bird dog is one who makes its master happy — and finds birds.

PHOTO © DALE C. SPARTAS

With rare exceptions, I'll hunt using dogs or not hunt at all. This is not a moral or ethical position. You should do as you please.

Tell me that blue quail are so thick that I don't need a dog, that I'm better off without one because the birds run like deer in the sparse grass, and I'll either take my chances with my German shorthair or shrug and let you chase blues through the pasture without me.

Show me a High Plains grainfield where pheasants are hunted most efficiently with a dozen drivers and blockers, and I'd just as soon sit in the truck and drink coffee unless there'll be a retriever or two quartering just ahead of the drivers or heeling in anticipation of fetching duty.

I cannot remember life without hunting dogs. Mixed with my earliest memories of my parents' faces and voices are images of whipping tails, liver and lemon ticking, and lolling tongues. My first sharp, permanent image is of a pair of lemon and white pointer puppies in a cardboard box, nosing a ball of hamburger. I remember the cold basement floor and the sweet puppy scent. According to the *Field Dog Stud Book* enrollment certificate, those two pups were whelped August 5, 1962. (Dad named the pups' mother, Sarah, after one of his beloved sisters.) I was barely two and a half years old. I never got over it.

I've never owned an exceptional bird dog. Mine have all turned out solid, nothing more. Most of the superb dogs I've seen were owned and handled by professional guides. A couple of years ago, on a guided bobwhite hunt in Mexico, I watched a fine string of pointers, working two at a time, find and point 42 coveys in a short day. I had never seen such a performance before and I'm unlikely to see anything like it again because given the choice between "the wing-shooting experience of a lifetime" and moving two coveys over my own dogs, I'll choose the latter.

I'm no expert, just a lifelong lover and observer of hunting dogs. I live with my dogs. I've often shared my bed with them.

PHOTO © GARYKRAMER.NET


I live with my dogs. I've often shared my bed with them ... I don't board them, sell them or trade them. My dogs are not tools; they're family.

If the pointer has a close rival in terms of style, stamina and bird-finding ability, it's the English setter, which, in my opinion, has no competition where beauty, grace and sweet temperament are concerned.

PHOTO © DALE C. SPARTAS

I've wept before, during and after those long, one-way trips to the vet. I don't board them, sell them or trade them. My dogs are not tools; they're family. Big-time hunters with quail rigs, walking horses, kennels full of dogs, and tens of thousands of acres to hunt won't need my advice. But if you're a weekend and holiday hunter and have room in your home and heart for a dog or two, maybe I can help.

To most Texas hunters, "bird dog" means English pointer, or just "pointer." I have no hard numbers, but my own observations suggest that in serious quail country, pointers far outnumber dogs of all other pointing breeds combined.

Little wonder. Tough, stoic and intelligent, with a superb nose, the pointer has no peer when it comes to speed, style and intensity. While there are a few pointer lines famous among grouse and woodcock hunters in the Northeast and upper Midwest, the breed is most associated with the great plantations of the Deep South and the wide-open rangelands of the southern Great Plains and South Texas. For the past century, pointers have completely dominated open, all-age field trials.

My friend James Collier, a veteran pro trainer and guide based in Decatur, runs pointers almost exclusively, though he trains and admires most of the popular pointing breeds. "A pointer is just more likely to turn out well," he says. "They almost never wash out and they respond to straightforward, no-nonsense training."

If I made my living hunting and guiding, I'd run pointers.

However, I don't make my living hunting. My dogs spend more time lazing in the backyard, lying in my easy chair and smearing nose prints on my truck windows than snorting quail scent. Also, I like my birds retrieved to hand with as little swearing (mine) as possible. Generally, pointers retrieve only because they have to. Most would rather blast off in search of another covey.

There are other excellent breeds.

If the pointer has a close rival in terms of style, stamina and bird-finding ability, it's the English setter. In my opinion, they have no competition where beauty, grace and sweet temperament are concerned. Setters are more likely than pointers to retrieve naturally and give up nothing in terms of nose and drive. You might think the long coat would be a problem on warm days, but I've seen several setters hold up well hunting desert quail in southern Arizona and New Mexico, where December days often reach the low 80s.

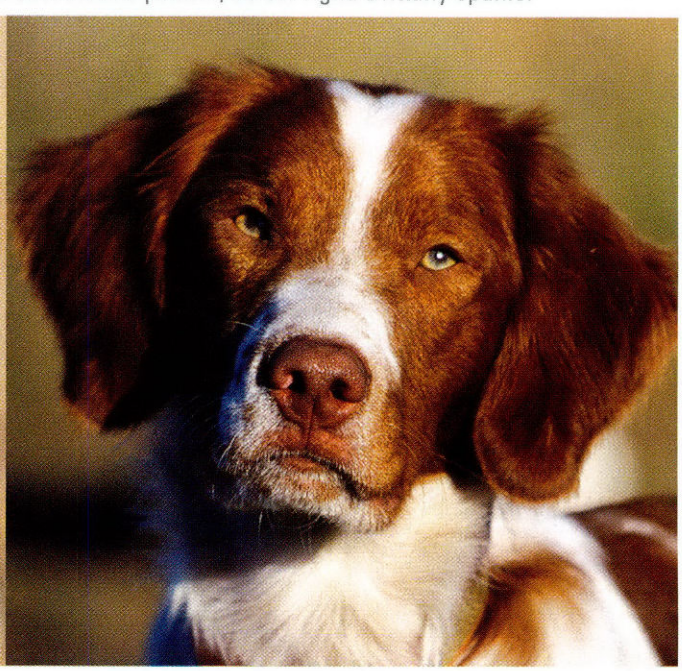
Setters usually develop later than pointers, but they're famous for retaining their lessons and for hunting into old age. Many have soft temperaments and may not thrive under the firm, intense training that works so well with pointers. Setter lovers tend to use patience and gentleness. They're often rewarded with outstanding dogs. I've heard a number of pros say something like, "Well, I'm a pointer man to the core, but I have to admit that the best all-around gun dog I ever saw was a setter."

At the risk of being bludgeoned with training dummies and check cords, I'll suggest that the average weekend hunter might be happiest with one of the dock-tailed European breeds, especially the Brittany or German shorthaired pointer. The other European breeds, such as the German wirehaired pointer, Weimaraner and Vizsla, have their enthusiasts, but Texans will have a far easier time finding a talented Brittany or shorthair.

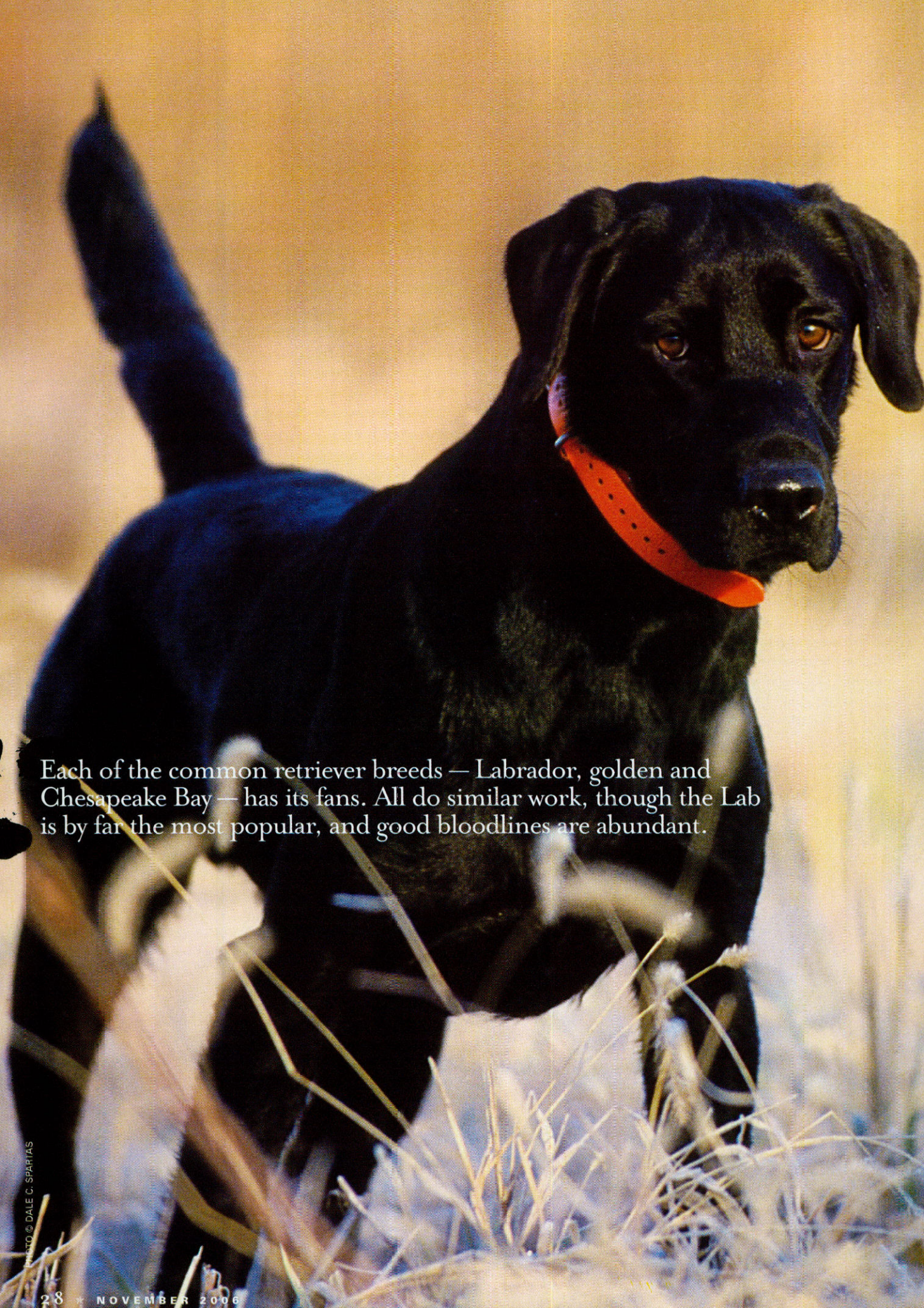
Although field trial breeding can produce big runners, Brittanies and shorthairs typically hunt at modest ranges. Most rarely get out beyond 200 yards, even in wide-open country. Many hunt much closer. In contrast, I've often seen pointers make casts of a quarter-mile or more. All well and good, so long as you're on horseback or riding in a quail rig.

Well-bred Brittanies and shorthairs — the only kind worth considering — usually retrieve naturally and develop early. Although she was still a bungling pup, as likely to point butterflies and field mice as game birds, my shorthair Maggie pointed wild bobwhites when she was nine months old. (Okay, once.) Productive hunters less than two years old are not uncommon. Both breeds possess plenty of drive, though usually not the near-maniacal focus of the English pointer. Hence, most amateur trainers find them easier to handle.

Opposite page: English setter; below left: German shorthaired pointer; below right: Brittany spaniel



PHOTOS THIS PAGE © RUSSELL A. GRAVES



Each of the common retriever breeds — Labrador, golden and Chesapeake Bay — has its fans. All do similar work, though the Lab is by far the most popular, and good bloodlines are abundant.

PHOTO © DALE C. SPARTAS

Opposite page: black Labrador retriever; above: German wirehaired pointer; above right: Vizsla

General traits aside, what is a good bird dog? Ultimately, one that pleases his partner. More objectively, one that consistently finds, points and retrieves game while under reasonable control. Successful methods vary depending on the dog, species of game bird and conditions.

Hunting bobwhite quail in open country, the best pointers and setters will out-perform the best shorthairs and Brittanies in terms of birds found and pointed. Day in and day out, my money is on the pointer with the setter close behind. But there are other considerations. In hilly or brushy terrain, it's much easier to keep track of closer-working dogs. What good is your stylishly pointing dog if you can't find her? Also, under difficult scenting conditions, deliberate dogs will sometimes outshine the thoroughbreds. Still, except in the case of an elderly or physically challenged hunter who might prefer a very leisurely pace, I can think of no circumstance in which a pointer would be a poor choice for a serious bobwhite hunter.

Some purists hate blue or scaled quail because the birds would rather run than hold for pointing dogs. I love them. James Collier sums up blues this way: "If a dog can handle blues, bobwhites will be a pushover."

The typical blue quail encounter goes something like this: The dogs get birdy, trail, then point. You move up, and the dogs break, trail and point, then repeat the sequence. Occasionally the birds eventually hold in cover. More likely, they keep running, with birds peeling off left and right. Pushed hard enough the covey will flush. Good dogs will move and point until one or two birds hold. Classic points and covey rises are rare.

Because the blue quail range overlaps the western margin of the bobwhite range, hunters often work them with pointers. Certainly, a lot of big-going bobwhite dogs learn to do a fine job on blues. But if I expect to encounter more blues than bobs, I would opt for a German shorthair or Brittany. The dock-tails are more likely to drop their heads and follow foot scent. They seem more patient and persistent than the long-tails when it comes to sorting out single, running birds.

If you hunt along the Rio Grande drainage in far southwest Texas or plan to head for New Mexico or Arizona, your blue quail dog will have no trouble with Gambel's quail.

Woodcock call for close workers, whatever the breed. In New England, close-working setters from lovingly developed bloodlines are the classic woodcock dogs. Good, tight-working pointers are out there, but in Texas you're more likely to find a unicorn. Use your bobwhite dog in a pinch, but if you're serious about woodcock and want to buy your dog in Texas, look for a Brittany or shorthair.

Pheasants are big, gaudy, irresistible and just about impossible to hunt with a pointing dog. They'll just run and flush out of shotgun range. As much as it pains this German shorthair snob, I'll have to recommend that serious pheasant hunters go with a retriever trained to quarter within shotgun range. Each of the common retriever breeds — Labrador, golden and Chesapeake Bay — has its fans. All do similar work, though the Lab is by far the most popular, and good bloodlines are abundant.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, prairie chickens can be hunted successfully with dogs. (If not, why bother?) My old shorthair Molly pointed greater prairie chickens in Kansas and lesser prairie chickens in the Texas Panhandle. Mostly, though, the birds flushed way out of range. Again, I'll admit that I would've pulled out less hair if I'd hunted with a retriever.

I'll draw the line at chachalacas.

Perhaps I should reconsider my comment about never owning a great bird dog. I asked Brad Carter, my old friend and longtime hunting partner, what he likes in a dog. Brad is a Brittany and setter man, and a fine amateur trainer. He said, "First, I want a dog that I enjoy living with, a dog that's fun and interesting to be around, a dog with personality, one that's intelligent and entertaining."

From that perspective, all of mine have been superb. They've found a few birds along the way, too. ★

PHOTO © LARRY DITTO

THE LURE OF QUAIL

HOW CAN A BIRD THAT'S SIX INCHES TALL AND WEIGHS BARELY A THIRD OF A POUND INSPIRE SUCH DEVOTED PASSION?

BY RUSSELL A. GRAVES

IT STARTS WITH A KEEN NOSE, A STEELY POINT, A FRENZIED FLUSH AND A BEVY OF ACTION. IT HAPPENS SO FAST, THE EVENT BORDERS ON SENSORY OVERLOAD. TO HEAR SOMEONE DESCRIBE A COVEY RISE IS AS CLOSE AS YOU'LL GET TO HEARING A BONA FIDE, SHOTGUN TOTIN' TEXAN SPOUT A HAIKU.

How can it be, though? How can a bird that's six inches tall and weighs barely a third of a pound incite such devoted passion by its followers? It's easy to understand if you've ever experienced the heart-pounding exhilaration of a covey rise on a crisp bobwhite quail-country morning or spent time following good dogs.

As a kid, I roamed the blackland hills of North Texas with my buddy Garry in search of the few coveys around my home. The dogs would zigzag in and out of the wild rose thickets until they settled on a point. Even when I knew it was coming, my heart would still skip a beat with the flurry of buff and brown colors scrambling in front of me. I'd try to gain my composure and make a clean shot, but mostly I missed — drinking in the glorious moment of the most exciting two seconds in the Texas outdoors.

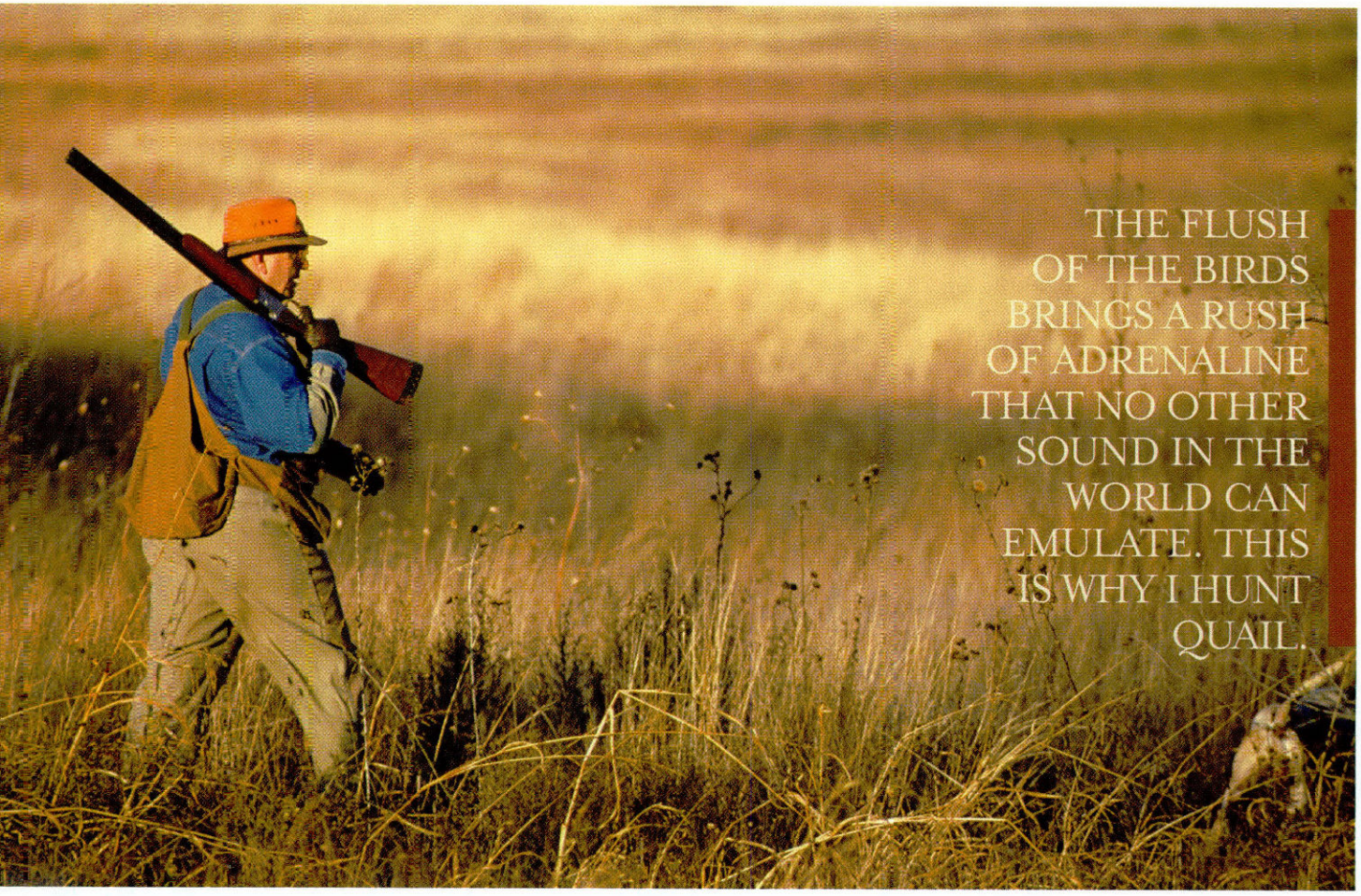
Early on, I became a member of the cult of quail. Although there weren't a lot of birds where I lived, Garry and I would still slip afield and chase them two or three times a season. Growing up, we were the only two quail hunters I knew. In 1993, that changed when I moved to wild quail country in the Texas Rolling Plains.

In Childress, I met hunters from all over the nation, and soon I realized that the cult of quail is a substantial one. I use the word "cult" not in a religious sense, although some may claim that devotion to the bird nears religious zealotry. Instead, I find the alternative dictionary definition to be most appropriate: "an exclusive group of persons sharing an esoteric, usually artistic or intellectual interest."

Every season finds people descending on my town, as well as other area burgs, to chase the winged rocket. Way out in northwestern Texas, you won't find theme parks, grand museums or monuments to Texas liberty. What you will find, in varying abundance according to the prior year's rainfall and local land management practices, is bobwhite quail. Arguably, the bobwhite quail is one of the hottest tourist attractions in the great swath of the Texas Midwest that spreads in a triangle roughly from the Wichita Falls area to Big Spring, then north along the Caprock to Clarendon and back.

Opening weekend of quail season finds hotels at capacity and local restaurants full of blaze orange and oilcloth-clad hunters. What brings the hunters in

PHOTOS BOTH PAGES © RUSSELL A. GRAVES



droves is simple. Save for the south Texas brush country, on a nationwide basis, bobwhites cannot be found anywhere else in as significant numbers as they are in the red dirt mesquite and prickly pear flats of the Texas Rolling Plains.

Being a cult of quail member isn't necessarily cheap. In 1999, Quail Unlimited reported that, on average, their Texas members spent $10,354 annually in pursuit of bobwhites, and 65 percent of that money was spent in the small towns near where they hunted quail. Simply put, bobwhite quail are an important tourist attraction for a bevy of small communities whose economies are often marginal at best.

Each year, I run across hunters from states with traditionally strong quail hunting heritages, but for a variety of reasons, wild quail numbers aren't what they once were. Thus the great migration from southeastern and midwestern states to hunt in Texas. Some even live the entire quail season in our midst.

Speaking with four cult members, I was delighted to hear their varied answers as to why they love to hunt quail. For the group, one reason can't sum up their passion for the sport. Instead, a tapestry of rationales justifies their devotion to the cause. But one thing was constant with each one of them: Once you join the cult, you don't ever want out.

FOR LOVE OF COMPANIONSHIP

"I'm a product of my environment, I reckon," says Dale Rollins of San Angelo. Rollins is a wildlife specialist for Texas Cooperative Extension. Rollins is intelligent, motivating and positively infectious as he discusses Texas quail with a mix of humor, scientific intuition and plain old common sense. Rollins' legacy of Texas conservation is storied — he is especially proud of his brainchild, the Bobwhite Brigade. Started 13 years ago, the Bobwhite Brigade trains high school students in leadership, critical thinking and public speaking skills by using bobwhite quail as a vehicle.

"When I was a youngster, if you went hunting, it was implied that you were going quail hunting," explains Rollins, who grew up in the southwestern Oklahoma town of Hollis. "We were fortunate — there were no deer and hardly any turkeys, so no competing interests during my formative years."

Rollins loves quail hunting, in large part, for the social aspects involved. He says that unlike other types of hunting, such as deer or turkey, quail hunting is big-group friendly. The chance to hunt with friends in a laid-back atmosphere, Rollins explains, is one of the key reasons he has held onto his quail hunting heritage for so many years.

"Over the last 15 years, I've been blessed to hunt with 'good dogs,' both hominid and canine."

FOR LOVE OF DOGS AND GEAR

My friend Silas Ragsdale of Childress is an international traveler. Although he has hunted three continents, he makes time to hunt quail more than any other species of game. "For me, quail hunting isn't about the birds, dogs, shotguns or landscape. ... It's about all those things combined."

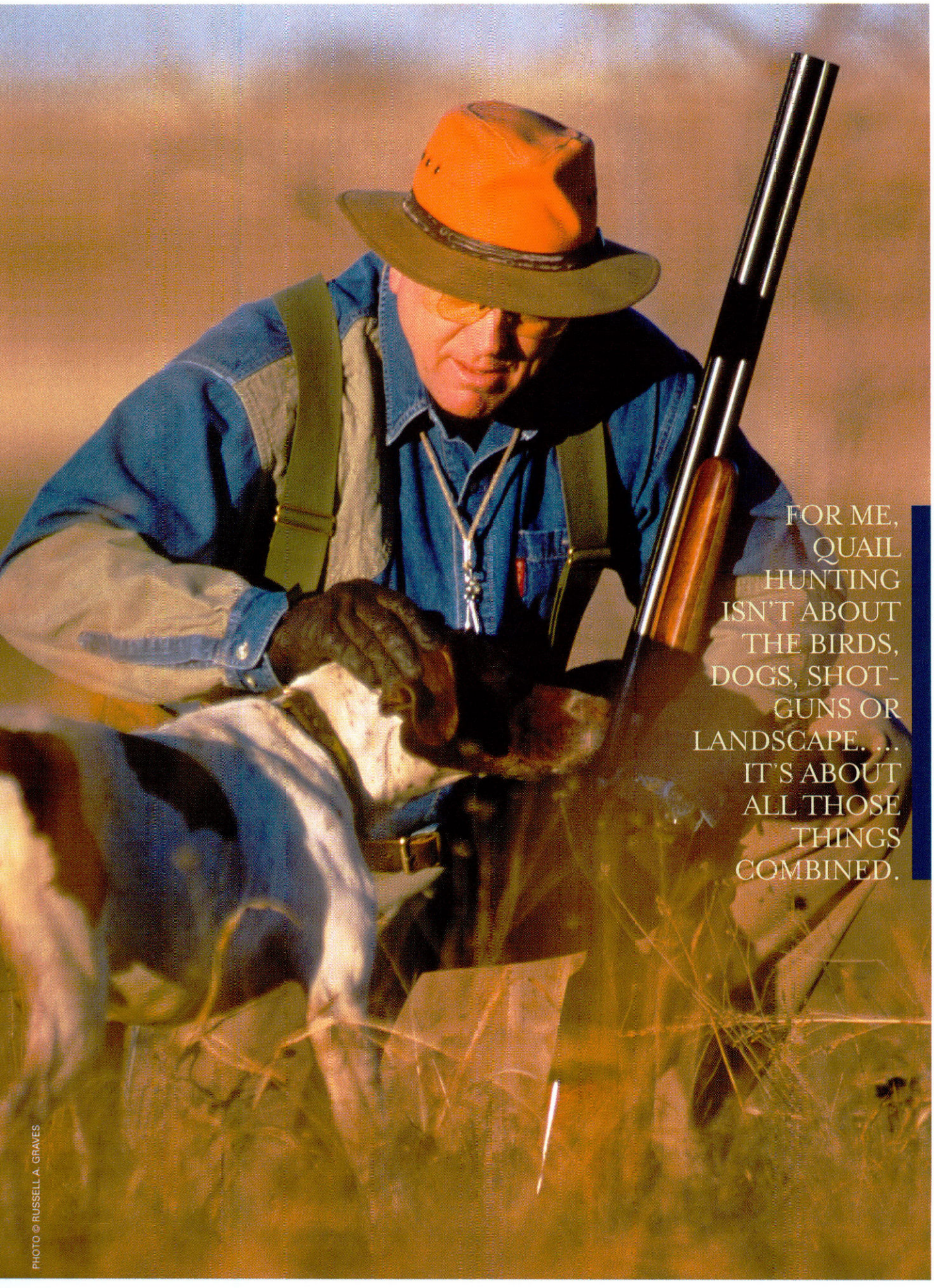


PHOTO © RUSSELL A. GRAVES

"I love the dogs and their innate ability to find that little 5- or 6-ounce bird in the proverbial haystack," waxes Ragsdale. He loves his pointer's laidback attitude when in the kennel, and how he is happy just to be alive and awaiting his turn to go afield. Once his turn comes, Ragsdale says, his dog is always ready.

Ragsdale also appreciates a dog's redemptive qualities. "It amazes me that an animal can completely frustrate you one day and be a hero the next. The same dog that couldn't find anything the day before because he was uncontrollable or I spent most of the day pulling porcupine quills out of his face turns out to really be able to hunt." Ragsdale says that even after taking it easy during the off-season with little training, when quail season begins, his pointer Pete adopts a "Put me in, Coach!" attitude.

Ragsdale says that great guns complement good dogs. "To me a fine shotgun is like art. With a great gun, though, you become part of the art itself. There are some days I'm not worthy to be part of the art. On those days when everything comes together perfectly, I truly feel like I'm a function of the gun."

FOR LOVE OF COUNTRY(SIDE)

Author, transplanted Texan and confessed quail junkie Henry Chappell is a firm member of the cult of quail. Although he lives in the Dallas suburb of Plano, his thoughts often drift westward. "I can't think of West Texas without thinking of quail."

In his book, *At Home on the Range with a Texas Hunter,* Chappell conveys his love of place. "Brad [Chappell's hunting partner Brad Carter] and I have since hunted together all over creation, but given a choice we'll hunt bobwhite quail in a certain piece of river breaks country in the southeastern corner of the Texas Panhandle. Somewhere along the line it became our country. ... I may vacation in the Rockies, but I'll do my most serious hunting at home in the country I know best and love the most: rough, dry, windy, brushy, rocky, thorny country with lots of quail ..."

I've hunted with Henry and Brad, and their love of the land is evident. On an afternoon hunt we worked ridgelines and draws in search of quail only to find a few stragglers. Neophytes would have been disheartened by this apparent lack of success. Henry, however, put the day in perspective when he noted how beautiful the country was on that foggy day. He was correct. Quail country is beautiful. Rugged landscapes that feature hills with scuffed, red edges grow the perfect blend of brush for cover, bunch grasses for nesting, and seed-producing plants for feeding bobwhites.

"In Texas," Chappell concludes, "you find the best quail hunting in rough, wide-open range country where big-going dogs have room to run. And if I had to choose a last meal, I'd pick fried quail, gravy and biscuits."

FOR LOVE — PERIOD

I first had a chance to hunt with Chuck Ribelin of Dallas a couple of years ago. We had e-mailed a couple of times and chatted on the phone but met in person when I traveled to Paducah to have supper with him at a restaurant full of blaze orange-clad patrons. Chuck is the epitome of a gentleman quail hunter. He's gracious, affable, generous, and if the cult of quail needs a patriarch, I nominate him. As we ate, Chuck opined about the condition of Texas bobwhites and how all of the involved parties — state governmental agencies, conservation organizations and private individuals — must fight to keep quail numbers from slipping below the point of no return. His words were inspiring.

On the hunt, Chuck didn't shoot much. In fact, I'm not sure he shot at all. He was happy watching the dogs work and spent an exorbitant amount of time petting one of his female pointers. Chuck's from the old school; I could tell that bag limits mean nothing to him. It's all about the love.

"For me quail hunting is about the peace and quiet of the country; the friendship of the dogs; watching nature at work; the beauty of sunrises and sunsets in the big country of West Texas; the smell of clean air; coyotes yelping just before sunset; a zillion stars in the sky; a proud dog retrieving a downed bird; watching a brace of dogs find a covey of bobs. This is my West Texas symphony. Finally, the flush of the birds brings a rush of adrenalin that no other sound in the world can emulate. This is why I hunt quail." ✯

QUAIL IN CRISIS

HOW IMPORTANT ARE QUAIL? Consider: The president recently created policy specifically for them. The Texas Legislature created an upland game bird stamp to help conserve them. They've received support from people across the spectrum because everyone agrees quail are in trouble.

About two-thirds of the bobwhite quail populations nationwide have vanished in less than 20 years; from 59 million birds in 1980 to about 20 million in 1999. They have disappeared from the landscape in southeastern states, where quail have been an integral part of the regional culture. Changes to the landscape during the last two decades — primarily urban growth, conversion of native grasslands to exotic grasses like coastal Bermuda and monoculture pine plantations — have robbed quail and other species of usable space, according to wildlife biologists.

"Quail are considered by wildlife officials to be a keystone indicator species of the health of grassland ecosystems," says Steve DeMaso, upland game bird program leader with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. "When their numbers fall, other species that inhabit those ecosystems follow in a domino effect."

DeMaso and TPWD quail program leader Robert Perez have helped guide state quail conservation efforts, including the creation of a diverse cooperative of landowners and state, federal and private entities working under the umbrella of the Texas Quail Conservation Initiative.

"By bringing all stakeholders to the table, the initiative can focus on landscape-level conservation that minimizes duplicative effort and maximizes resources," says Perez.

Many stakeholders serve on the Texas Quail Council, an official advisory group to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, and have interacted with national conservation policy makers on behalf of quail and grassland birds. This unifies quail recovery efforts by resource managers in Texas.

Whether you're a landowner, sportsman, birder or just curious about quail, additional information about efforts to conserve this important bird is available on the TPWD Web site and in the Texas Quail Council's publication, *Where Have all the Quail Gone?* A companion publication, *Scaled Quail in Texas,* details the biology and management strategies for this western cousin of the bobwhite. Both are accessible online at <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/huntwild/wild/species/upland_game/>. — *Steve Lightfoot*

ROOM T

The El Carmen initiative aims to preserve a one-of-a-kind ecosystem in Mexico and enhance

PHOTOS © WYMAN MEINZER

o ROAM

ildlife corridors on both sides of the border. ~ *By* BONNIE REYNOLDS MCKINNEY

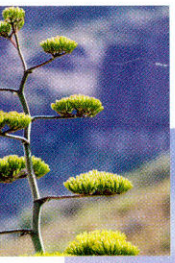
Across the Rio Grande from the Big Bend of western Texas in Coahuila, Mexico, lies a towering giant of a mountain called the Maderas del Carmen.

This huge sky island is surrounded by desert lowlands on both the eastern and western side, and stretches from the south in Mexico north to the Rio Grande, entering Texas on the western boundary of Black Gap Wildlife Management Area and the eastern boundary of Big Bend National Park. The Maderas del Carmen has long been regarded as one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the Chihuahan Desert. For decades, scientists have visited the area, discovered new species, marveled at the flora and fauna, and dreamed of ways to protect this ecosystem. Plans were made for an international park when Big Bend National Park was established in 1944. Scientists from the newly formed national park journeyed to the Carmens and reported on the richness of flora and fauna, richer even than the Big Bend.

Like many ecosystems in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico, the Maderas del Carmen was exploited for its natural riches for many years. Mining, timber operations, overgrazing by domestic livestock, subsistence hunting to the point of extirpation for several species, and harvesting of native plants contributed to the degradation of habitats and a decline in native wildlife populations.

In 1994, the Mexican government formally declared the Maderas del Carmen a "Protected Area." However, management was severely hampered within the 514,000-acre area because it included privately owned ranches or *ejidos* (communal properties). Traditional land use continued on many of the lands designated as protected areas.

In 2000, Cemex, a global cement company, recognized the importance of the conservation of this area and began purchasing lands within the protected area and along the adjacent boundary. This was the beginning of Proyecto El Carmen and a long-term commitment



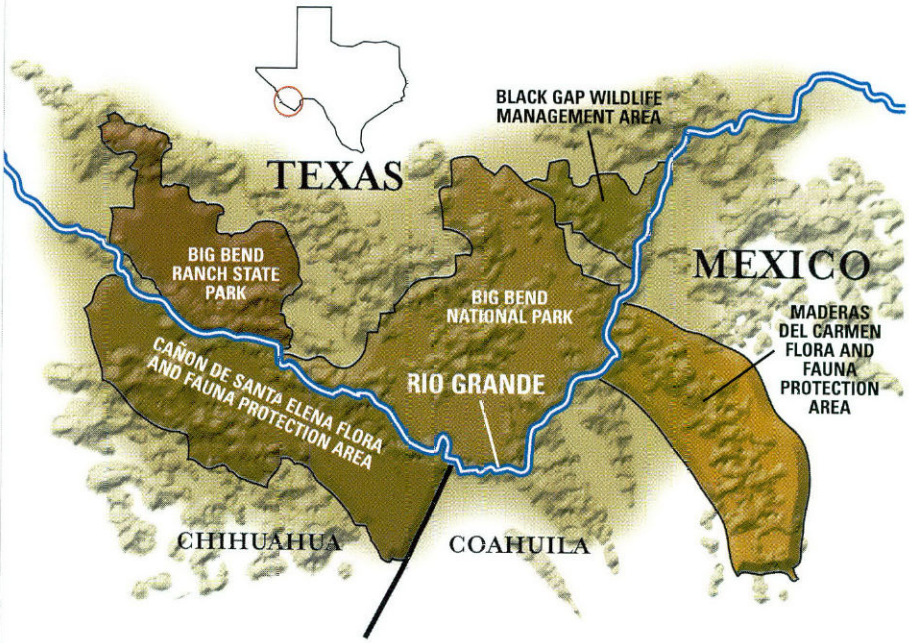
Left: Havard's agave; middle: pronghorn; right: lechuguilla.

PHOTOS BOTH PAGES © WYMAN MEINZER

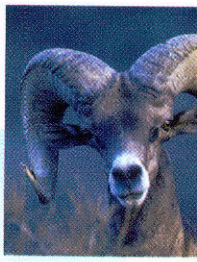
of resources from a private corporation with the ultimate goal of restoration of habitat and native wildlife to the Maderas del Carmen.

The El Carmen Project had a challenging mission: the conservation of a large tract of contiguous land that crossed the international boundary into the United States. The area had large corridors on both the east and west side of the mountain that were ecologically important for wildlife movement to adjacent mountain ranges in Mexico as well as corridors for wildlife and birds moving from Mexico to Texas and vice versa.

The area can basically be divided into two distinct parts — the northern portion, composed of limestone, and the southern portion, which is igneous. The



Left: bobcat; middle: coyote; right: desert bighorn.



Left: desert cottontail; middle: Mexican lobo (wolf); right: gray fox.

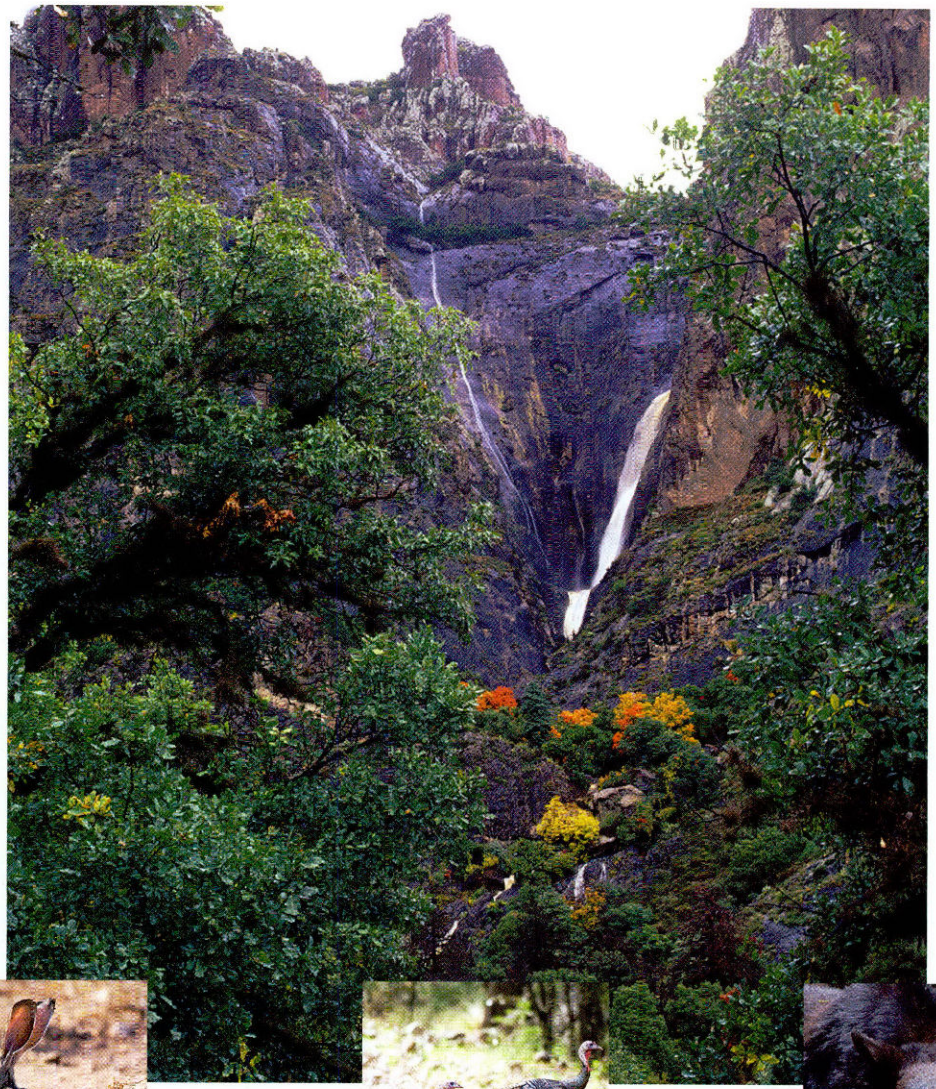
highest peak rises more than 9,600 feet. High mountain meadows, towering peaks, fir forests, humid canyons, park-like oak woodlands, sotol-yucca grasslands and desert lowlands all contribute to the rich diversity. American basswood and dogwood trees grow alongside prickly pear cactus and yucca in the deciduous woodlands. Agaves cling precariously to sheer rock inclines, and small succulents and ferns line the natural rock gardens along mountain streams.

Rare, endemic, threatened and endangered species find their particular niches here in this mountain. From a management and restoration perspective, this level of biodiversity meant that it was important to conduct a baseline inventory of flora and fauna. All species are important, so one species or group of species is not the main focus. Management decisions must be carefully considered to ensure that one action to help or enhance a habitat or a species is not detrimental to another species.

FOR DECADES, SCIENTISTS HAVE VISITED THE AREA, DISCOVERED NEW SPECIES, MARVELED AT THE THE FLORA AND FAUNA, AND DREAMED OF WAYS TO PROTECT THIS ECOSYSTEM.

The first step was to compile historical records, providing a foundation for the baseline work. During the past four years, the biological staff at El Carmen has documented a total of 79 species of mammals, 80 species of reptiles and amphibians, more than 400 species of plants, and more than 250 species of birds.

Several species of mammals are limited in their range, rare or endemic. These include the Coahuila mole, which was recently documented for only the second time since Rollin Baker collected the first specimen in 1951 at El Club. The Miller's shrew, another little-known species, is found in the higher elevations of pine, oak and fir. The cliff chipmunk has a limited distribution in Coahuila. Eastern fox squirrels were not documented in earlier scientific surveys, but



Left: black-tailed jackrabbit; middle: wild turkey; right: black bear.

this species is currently abundant in the pine-oak woodland, which indicates range expansion from the southeast. Large mammals are well represented — mountain lion, coyote, black bear, bobcat and a host of smaller mammals, as well as 20 species of bats.

More than 16 species of oaks have been described for the area, and several species of cactus reach the northern limit of their range here. One species of agave, *Agave portrerana,* is found only in the Maderas del Carmen; the next closest population is located in the state of Chihuahua.

Birdlife is diversified; notable birds for the area include the solitary eagle, northern goshawk, colima warbler, brown-throated wren, Audubon's oriole and eight species of owls. Butterflies are also well represented, with over 130 species documented.

Habitat restoration is a priority at El Carmen. One of the first steps was to remove domestic livestock to allow the regeneration of native vegetation. Interior fences were removed to allow freedom of movement for wildlife. Earthen tanks were cleaned and native plant growth encouraged in these areas. Water sources were developed and existing troughs were modified so that wildlife and birds could utilize water sources safely.

Native wildlife restoration is a work in progress. After many years of overhunting, many populations seriously declined and three species were extirpated from the area: the desert bighorn sheep, Mexican lobo and pronghorn. Both mule deer and Carmen Mountain white-tailed deer populations suffered drastic declines. Supplementing these herds will help to build viable populations as well as provide genetic diversity within this sky island complex.

In 2000 and 2001, Cemex, in collaboration with Agrupacion Sierra Madre, Unidos Para La Conservación, various other Mexican agencies and Texas Parks and Wildlife, began restoration efforts for the desert bighorn. The initial stage started with the construction of a 12,300-acre brood facility located at Los Pilares in the lower desert elevation. This brood facility is located in typical bighorn habitat with high ridges, caves, rockpiles and ample desert vegetation; all encircled by an eight-foot-high predator-proof

fence. A total of 48 desert bighorns were captured in Sonora, Mexico, and released in the facility at El Carmen during 2000 and 2001.

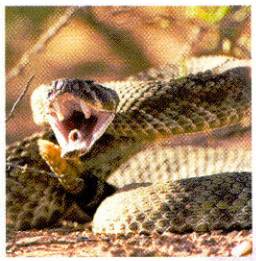
Currently over 125 desert bighorns inhabit the brood facility, which means the population has more than doubled, and more than half the sheep were born in Coahuila. The bighorns are monitored by radio telemetry and direct observation. The brood facility will furnish desert bighorns for wild releases into historic habitat in the Maderas del Carmen and in the future to other areas of adjacent historic habitat.

On July 14, 2004, a historic moment occurred in Coahuila when 11 desert bighorns captured at the Yaqui Reserve in Sonora, Mexico, were released into the wild in the Maderas del Carmen. For the first time in 50 years, desert bighorns once again roamed the high desert peaks of northern Coahuila. Two releases in 2004 and 2005 brought the number of wild bighorns to around 34 animals. Future releases from the reserve at Pilares will supplement these numbers to build a viable population.

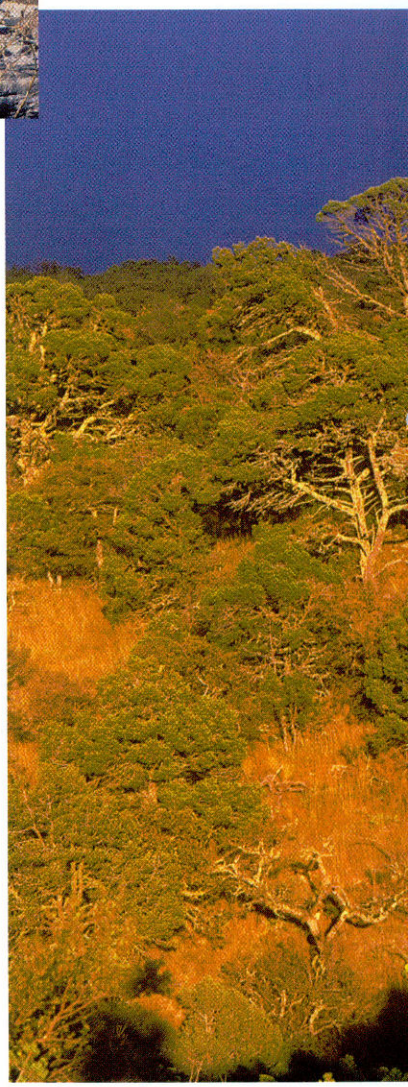
In years to come, the desert bighorns in Maderas del Carmen and West Texas bighorns from Black Gap Wildlife Management Area will mix through movement in the corridors that link the two countries. This will foster genetic diversity in both herds of bighorns, and cooperative work between Texas and Mexico will continue to ensure that the desert bighorn remains an integral part of the region's flora and fauna.

Another high-profile species, the black bear, was extirpated in western Texas by the 1950s. Occasionally a bear was sighted along the border with Coahuila, but for the most part, the bear was no longer present in the Texas landscape.

Bear numbers also drastically declined in Mexico, but remnant populations remained in a few isolated mountain ranges in northern Coahuila, particularly the Maderas del Carmen and Serranías del Burro. From these populations in Coahuila, the black bear began a slow recovery process. Through dispersal, again in the important corridors from Coahuila to West Texas, the black bear reappeared on the West Texas landscape in the late 1980s, mainly in Big Bend



Left: mule deer; middle: Western diamondback rattlesnake; right: scaled quail.



PHOTOS BOTH PAGES © WYMAN MEINZER EXCEPT SQUIRREL © LARRY DITTO AND MOUNTAIN LION © GARYKRAMER.NET

National Park and Black Gap Wildlife Management Area.

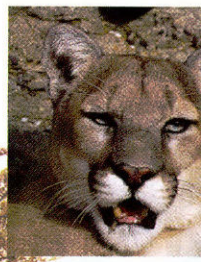
Seldom does a wildlife species recolonize historic habitat without the intervention of man in the form of reintroductions, but the black bear began recolonizing historic habitat in West Texas on its own. In 1998, West Texas saw black bear research begin in the Black Gap Wildlife Management Area and Big Bend National Park. Utilizing radio collars, researchers tracked black bears moving from Texas to Coahuila. DNA analysis revealed that the West Texas bears were definitely from Coahuila.

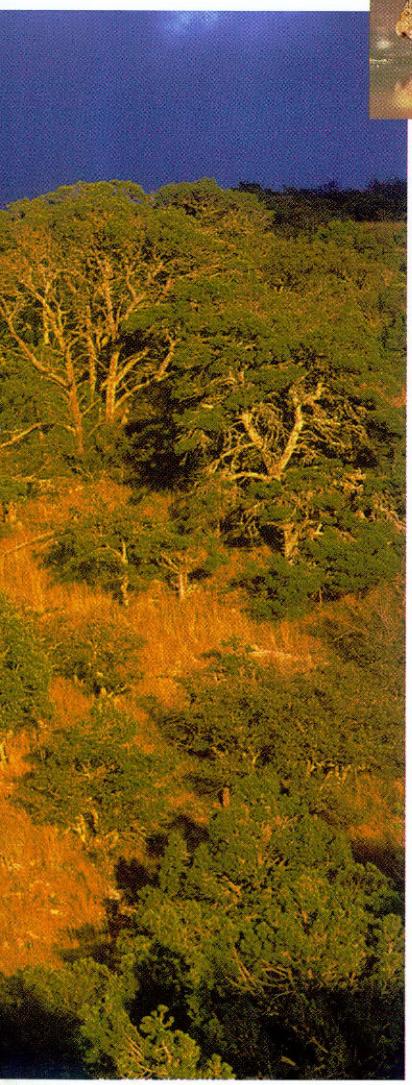
In 2003, a long-term study of black bears began at El Carmen. This project focuses on the dispersal corridors bears are using and the development of management strategies for the protection of these areas to allow safe travel into adjacent Mexican mountains and across the Rio Grande into Texas. Radio-collared black bears are tracked with telemetry and their movements mapped. Other parameters of black bear ecology such as reproduction, diet, home range, density, survival and mortality are also studied. Educational materials for coexisting with black bears have been developed, and Cemex published the first field guide for managing black bears in Mexico. Biologists work closely with Texas Parks and Wildlife and Big Bend National Park to coordinate bear movement on an international scale.

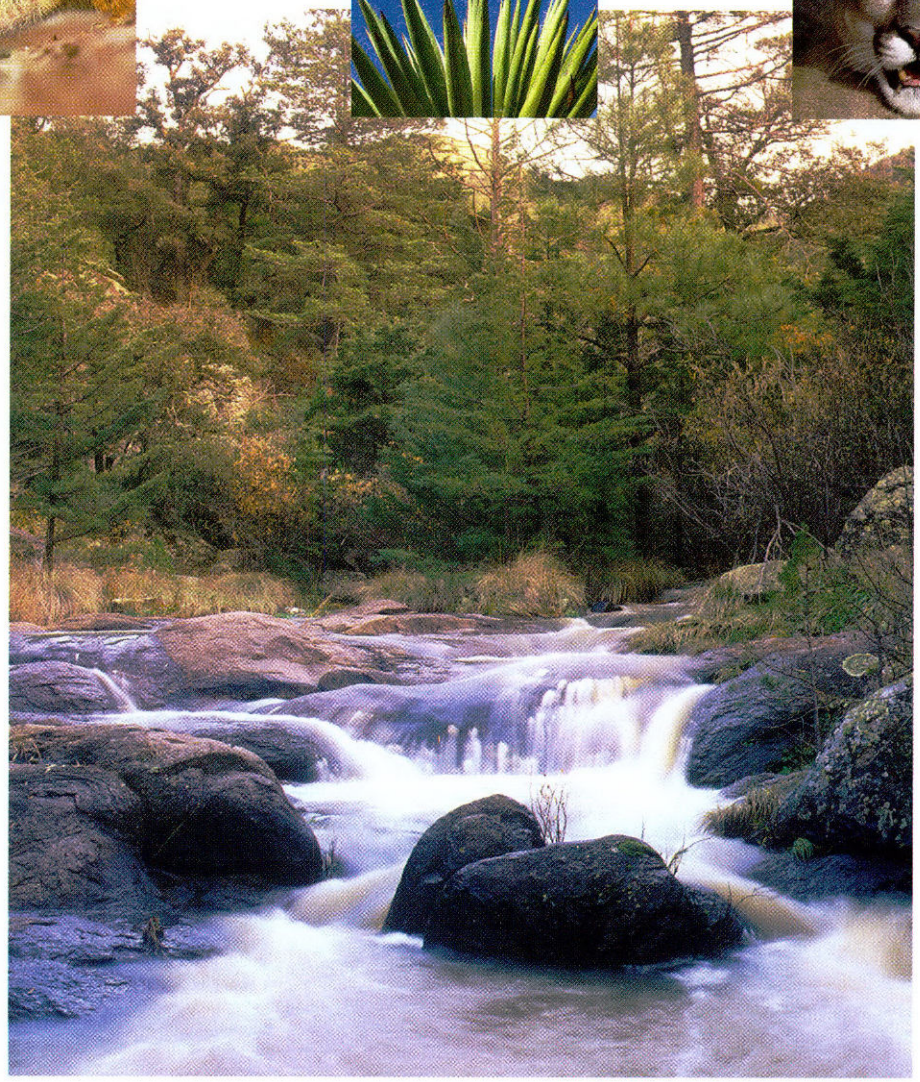
Proyecto El Carmen sponsors several students each year, as well as university groups from both Mexico and the United States. El Carmen also works cooperatively with a host of conservation groups in both countries and helps landowners develop conservation agreements. ★

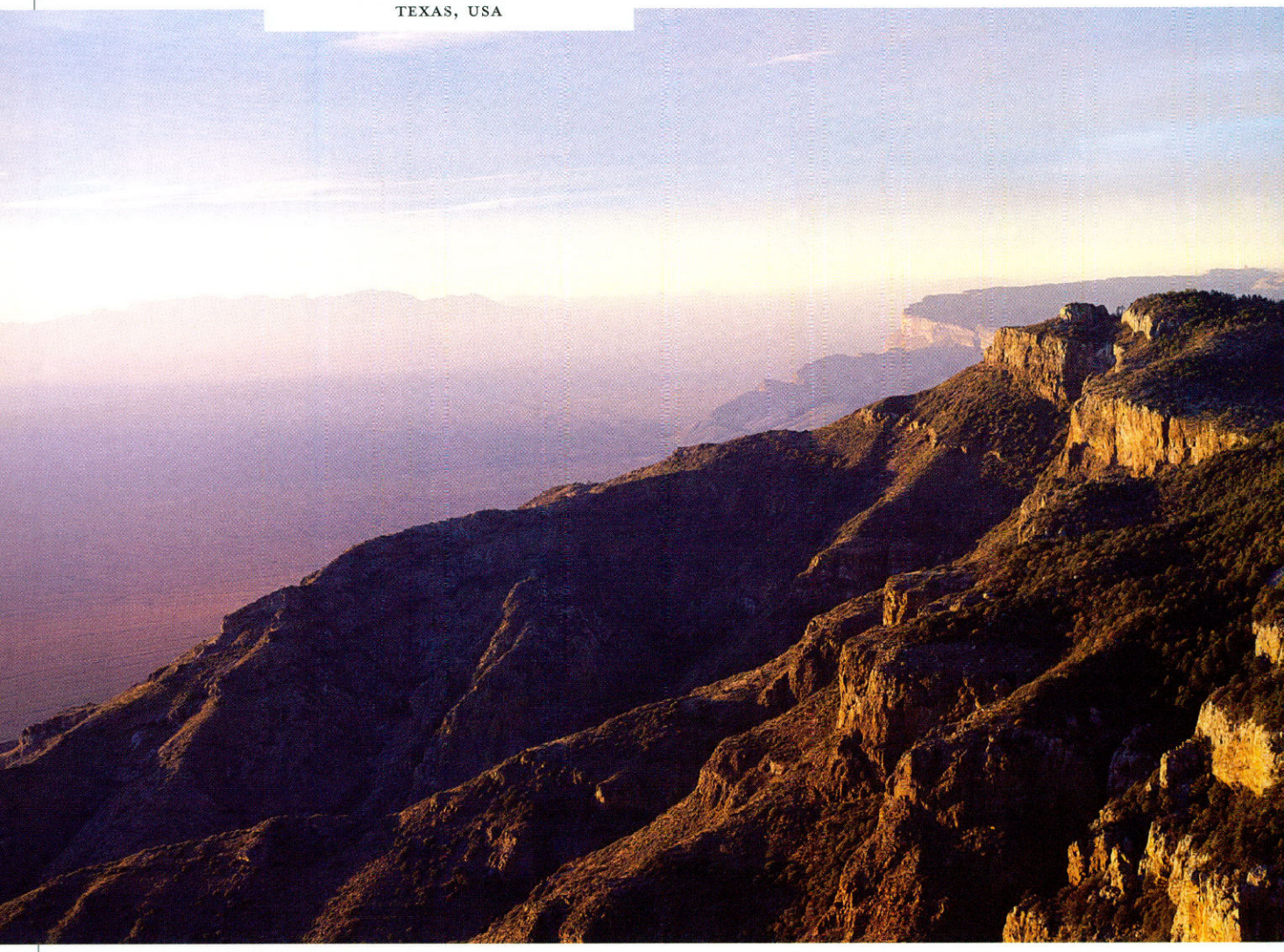
SELDOM DOES A WILDLIFE SPECIES RECOLONIZE HISTORIC HABITAT WITHOUT THE INTERVENTION OF MAN IN THE FORM OF REINTRODUCTIONS, BUT THE BLACK BEAR BEGAN RECOLONIZING HISTORIC HABITAT IN WEST TEXAS ON ITS OWN.

Left: Mexican ground squirrel; middle: Spanish dagger; right: mountain lion.









CHISOS MOUNTAINS
TEXAS, USA

PHOTO © PATRICIO ROBLES GIL

THE VIEW FROM MEXICO

Thanks to cross-border cooperation, protected wildlife areas are slowly expanding in the Maderas del Carmen and Big Bend.

BY PATRICIO ROBLES GIL

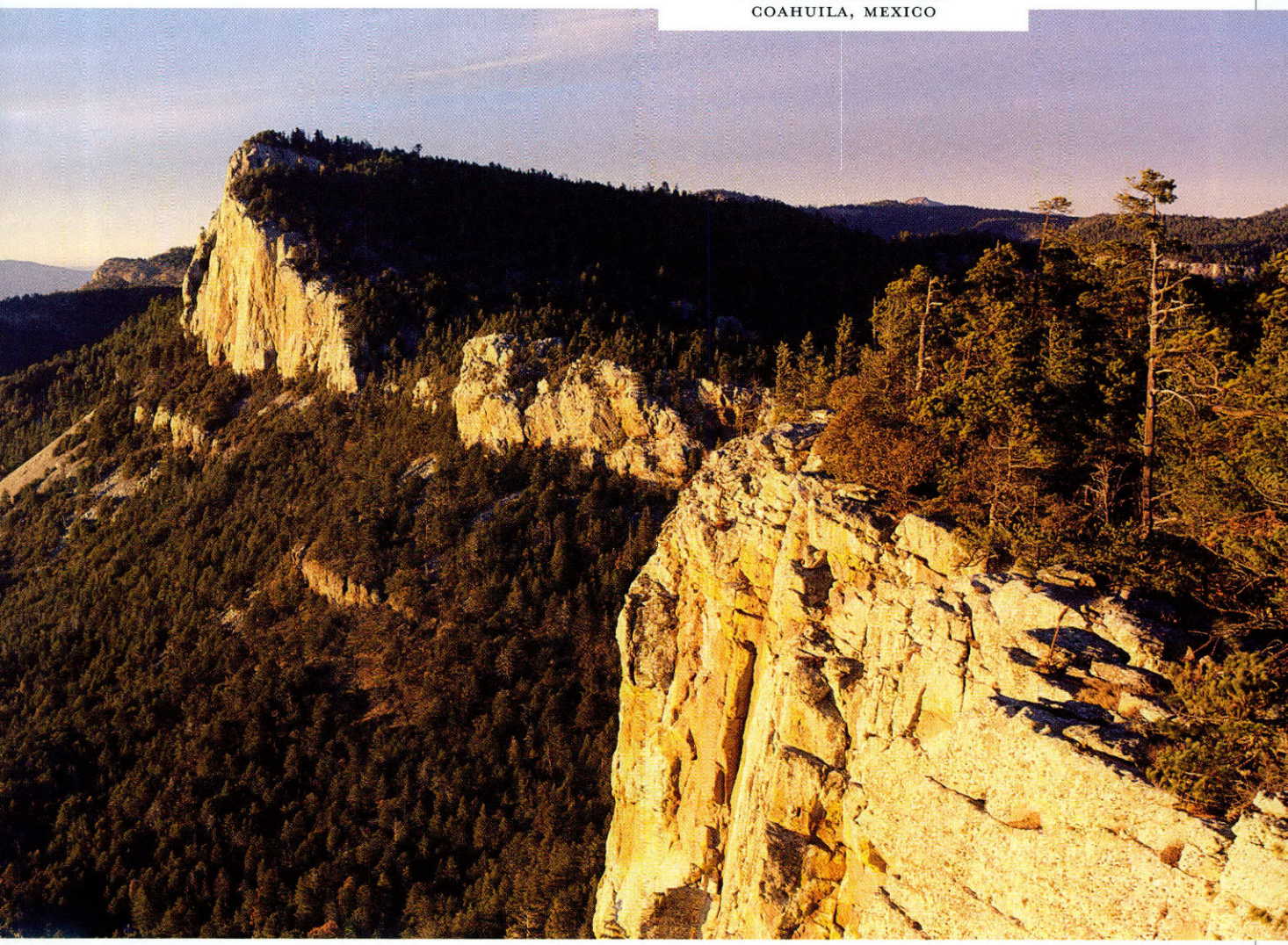
SELDOM HAS THE RELATIONSHIP between Mexico and the United States faced such a difficult and decisive moment in its history as today with the issues of immigration and national security along the border. I am aware of the complexity of these issues, but in my opinion, environmental issues have not been adequately considered in the debate. In particular, I am talking about the enormous costs to future generations if this political divide becomes a barrier to the natural world and an obstacle that prevents wildlife from freely roaming across the region.

Paradoxically, ranchers, conservation organizations and government agencies in the El Carmen-Big Bend corridor are collaborating more closely than ever to protect the natural resources of the area.

When Big Bend National Park was created 60 years ago, the idea of creating an international park that extended beyond the southern border was first discussed. At about the same time, the United States and Canada designated Waterton-Glacier Peace Park, the first transboundary park in the world, opening a new path for international cooperation. Probably inspired by this partnership with Canada, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt invited Mexican President Manuel Avila Camacho to create a park encompassing the Chisos Mountains in the Big Bend and their counterpart mountains in Mexico, known as El Carmen.

While the vision of a true international park remains unrealized, much of the region is now protected from development to some degree. In 1994, Mexico designated two large reserves — classified as Flora and Fauna Protected Areas — along the southern boundary of the Big Bend. Cañon de Santa Elena in Chihuahua comprises 693,000 acres and Maderas del Carmen in Coahuila covers over 514,000 acres.

Texas also extended its protected areas on each side of Big Bend National Park. To the east, Black Gap Wildlife Management Area contains 103,000 acres, and to the west, Big Bend Ranch



MADERAS DEL CARMEN
COAHUILA, MEXICO

State Park encompasses 300,000 acres.

The complexity of Mexico's land policies makes it enormously difficult to create and conserve protected areas. The majority of land in Mexico is private or communal property; only 20 percent of Mexico's protected areas are government-owned. In some ways, these privately held, protected areas are similar to Texas properties governed by conservation easements.

For 30 years, Mexican ranchers in the state of Coahuila restored and protected habitat to the point that the black bear population recovered and sub-adult bears began dispersing into Texas in the 1980s as they searched for territory of their own. The small black bear population that survived the hunting pressures of the 1920s and 1930s in Coahuila and Texas found refuge in the most remote mountainous areas on the Mexican side. The return of this species after a 40-year absence is, in the words of Big Bend National Park biologist Raymond Skiles, "the most important event in the history of the park, only surpassed by its declaration."

Recently, a new stakeholder has gone into action in the region, a corporate giant with a solid commitment to the environment. Cemex is not just a global cement company but a key player in the conservation initiative of the El Carmen-Big Bend region. With its strong economic interests in both Mexico and the United States, Cemex is a catalyst for conservation action in collaboration with nongovernmental agencies, government agencies, ranchers and local communities.

Cemex has acquired 40 percent of the land inside Maderas del Carmen reserve, in Coahuila, and the Adams Ranch in Texas — both for protection in perpetuity — to reverse land fragmentation. In October 2005, during the 8th World Wilderness Congress held in Anchorage, Alaska, Cemex announced its commitment to continue to expand protected areas in the northern end of Sierra del Carmen, a rugged and pristine terrain adjacent to Big Bend National Park.

Another recent milestone was the declaration of the Rio Bravo del Norte Natural Monument, which will set aside 625 miles of the southern shore of the Rio Grande.

Undoubtedly, we still face many challenges. But in this vast and remote wilderness, we can also find many opportunities to show that Texas and Mexico can be good neighbors and responsible stewards of the land and wildlife we all treasure.

PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM

PARK POWER

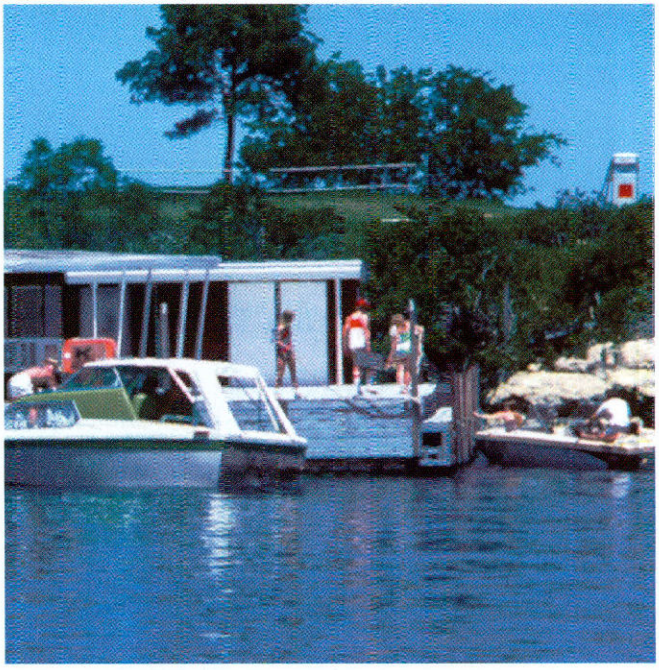
STATE PARKS PACK AN ECONOMIC PUNCH THAT BENEFITS AREA BUSINESSES.

By Tom Harvey

WHEN THE REDUS CLAN shows up for their annual summer reunion at Meridian State Park, cash registers start ringing in nearby motels, grocery and hardware stores.

The reunion focus is summer fun and family bonding, not economics. But the annual Redus confab, now in its 27th year, vividly demonstrates the economic impact of state parks on surrounding communities. "My kids were little when we started going, and now they're grown and have kids of their own, so now my grandkids are learning [about the park]," says Darla Kattner of Copperas Cove (a Redus on her mom's side), who helps organize the reunions. "My kids know every inch of those woods up there. My son James is now 30, so he was four when we started going. I have a picture of our very first family reunion at Meridian State Park in 1980."

About 60 to 80 family members usually come in the Redus bandwagon. Most of them stay in the state park, but some prefer the comforts of the Circle Motel in nearby Meridian, population 1,491. The family typically rents half a dozen rooms or so for the



big weekend, and sometimes they spill over into other motels in nearby towns like Clifton.

"We spend a lot of money at the local grocery store," Kattner says. "We buy ice, hamburger and hot dog buns, eggs and bacon."

Meridian Ace Hardware, just two miles from the state park, has a special section devoted to state park campers. Here the Reduses once had to buy tools and parts to repair a popup camper and one year bought plastic tarps to keep rain out of the park's screen shelters.

"There's no doubt in my mind that the traffic the state park generates is beneficial to our city and our business," says store owner Dennis Clark. "We have a sporting goods department,

"There's no doubt in my mind that the traffic the state park generates is beneficial to our city and our business."

— store owner Dennis Clark

and there we definitely cater to the park with rods and reels, camping equipment, stoves, fuel, lanterns and mantles. Because of the state park, we're going to put in a propane fuel station here."

These are some of the human faces behind the statistics compiled by Texas A&M University researchers in their 2005 report, "The Economic Contributions of Texas State Parks." The Texas Coalition for Conservation, a nonprofit umbrella group formed to support parks and natural resource conservation, raised $100,000 to fund the study. The A&M team interviewed 11,709 visitors.

Researchers reported the 80 state parks in the study generated an estimated total of $793 million in sales, a $456 million impact on residents' incomes and an estimated 11,928 jobs.

Significantly, only expenditures of park visitors from outside the host counties were measured. Spending by local residents and "casual" visitors attracted to the community for other reasons was excluded. The research thus measured only those economic benefits drawn to local areas by state parks.

For example, in the year it was studied, Mustang Island State Park cost $52,000 more to operate than was covered by revenue from entrance and camping fees — researchers called this the state's net investment. In return, the park generated 47 jobs and more than $1.4 million in income for Nueces County residents.

Meridian State Park drew an estimated total of 49,221 out-of-county visitors, who spent $454,253 in Bosque County. For small, rural towns, that's a chunk of change.

State parks near big urban populations understandably have bigger numbers. But even in large cities loaded with attractions, state parks still exercise a unique draw.

Researchers also studied the San Jacinto Battleground, east of Houston in La Porte, which includes the monument and the Battleship Texas. They found this historic site attracted an estimated 133,722 non-local, non-casual visitors who came to the area just to see this site. These folks were bigger spenders, dropping a whopping $5 million-plus in Harris County, mostly for lodging and auto transportation, but also for retail shopping, recreational equipment and food.

"Tourism is a major component of the Texas economy. Attractions drive tourism, and state parks operate more of these desired attractions than any other entity in the state," says John Crompton, a professor with A&M's Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences, who led the state park economic impact research.

To illustrate, Crompton points to another survey where tourists from outside Texas ranked the things that were most important to them. The top 10 (in descending order) were pretty scenery, historic sites, beautiful beaches, interesting wildlife, opportunities for adventure, museums, state parks, festivals or special events, lakes and boating activities, and good hiking trails.

Crompton says this list shows state parks have a lot of what people want. Further, he says, investing in maintaining and

PHOTOS BY EARL NOTTINGHAM

improving parks increases their economic value.

"State parks are analogous to retail stores," he says. "Economic success depends on what happens inside the facility. Investments in park services and amenities thus mean more visitors and higher per capita expenditures, which equals higher revenues to the state and more jobs and income for local residents."

The right mix of amenities is certainly part of what brings the Redus family back to Meridian every summer. Like many of Texas' best-loved state parks, it was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933-34, and many of the structures showcase the classic rustic charm wrought by CCC craftsmen. The park surrounds a 72-acre lake with good fishing. But it's the group camping facilities that facilitate the Redus reunions.

"We have a big group camping area," says Jody Lee, Meridian State Park superintendent. "It has a central dining hall surrounded by seven screen shelters and four water/electric campsites for trailers and motor homes. The dining hall has central air and heat, a deep freeze and commercial fridge. It stays pretty booked, especially on weekends. We have some groups who've been coming here for 30 years."

Despite the park's popularity, it has limited staffing and other resources to work with. The Redus family comes because they love the way the sun sets on the lake and the wind whispers in the trees (although Darla admits the air-conditioned dining hall can be nice on a summer day). But the facilities they use are not getting any younger.

"They have done some good things — putting in campsites for trailers, and new air-conditioning units and a ceiling for the dining hall," Kattner says. "But really we keep the reunion there because the kids and grandkids all know the park."

Meridian, like dozens of other state parks in recent years, has benefited from Proposition 8, a bond package approved by Texas voters in 2001 to fund critical repairs to state parks and other facilities. Early this decade, Meridian got a new wastewater system with new underground lines, and a couple of years later was able to replace the park's underground water supply line network — big-ticket repairs that would have been difficult to fund without Proposition 8 money. Still, the state park system strains to keep operating, mainly because it is a labor-intensive enterprise where salaries are the biggest ongoing expense.

"The biggest funding/operational issue at this site is lack of personnel," Lee says. "We continue to dramatically increase state park revenue and visitation, but remain static on personnel. The park operates a 42-site overnight facility, which includes one of the largest-capacity group camps in the state. It has to be operated 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and there are only four classified employees to do this."

They may be few in number, and they may not have a big budget to keep up the facilities, but the state park staff appears to do well with what they have.

"Attractions drive tourism, and state parks operate more of these desired attractions than any other entity in the state."

— researcher John Crompton

"We had an emergency situation once where my daughter reacted to some medication," Kattner says. "The park ranger was up there fast and got an ambulance, and he kept on coming back and checking on her. They were really good."

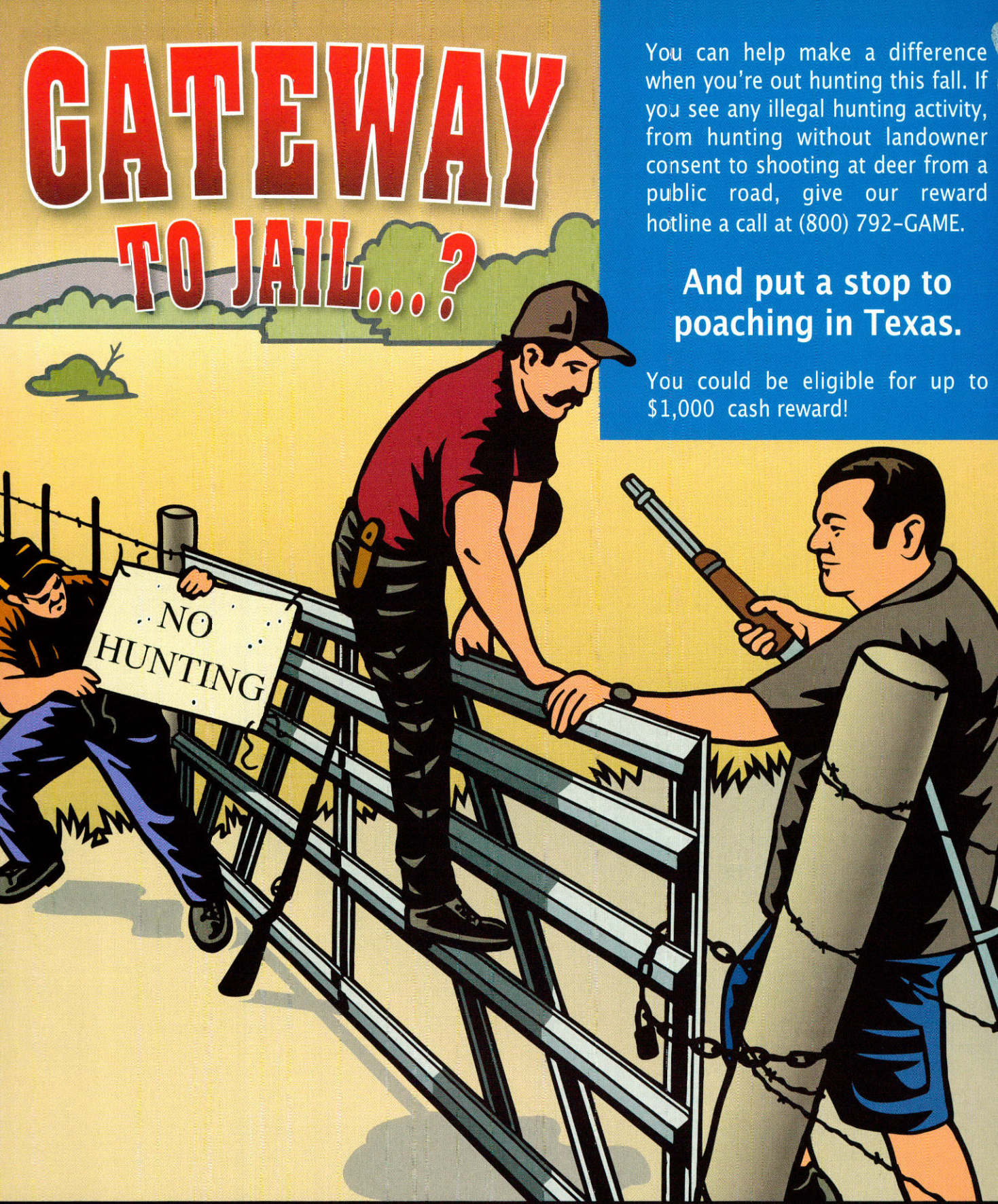
Looking at photos taken over the decades, Kattner can recall the number of new babies each year, along with the tally of scraped knees, errant fish hooks and preteen hijinks. You won't find numbers like these in an economic report, but the memories they represent are treasured by the Redus family. Whether enjoying a large family reunion or a weekend with close friends, loyal state park visitors know that time spent in the great outdoors — and away from the rat race — is priceless. ★

GATEWAY TO JAIL...?

You can help make a difference when you're out hunting this fall. If you see any illegal hunting activity, from hunting without landowner consent to shooting at deer from a public road, give our reward hotline a call at (800) 792-GAME.

And put a stop to poaching in Texas.

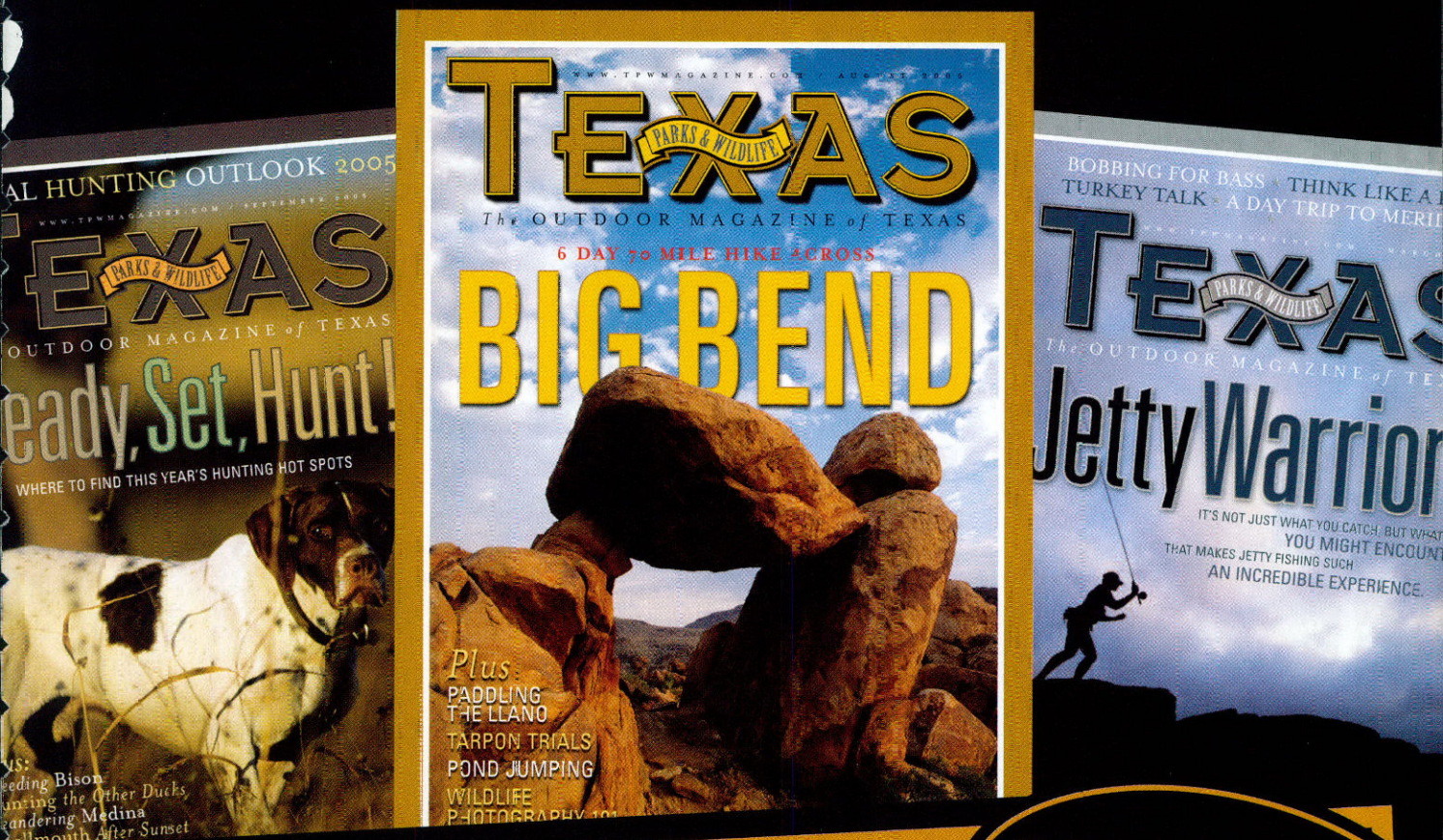
You could be eligible for up to $1,000 cash reward!



TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

Reward Hotline
800-792-GAME
Help make a difference

Operation Game Thief



EVERY ISSUE IS AN ADVENTURE

AND WE'LL TAKE YOU ALONG ...

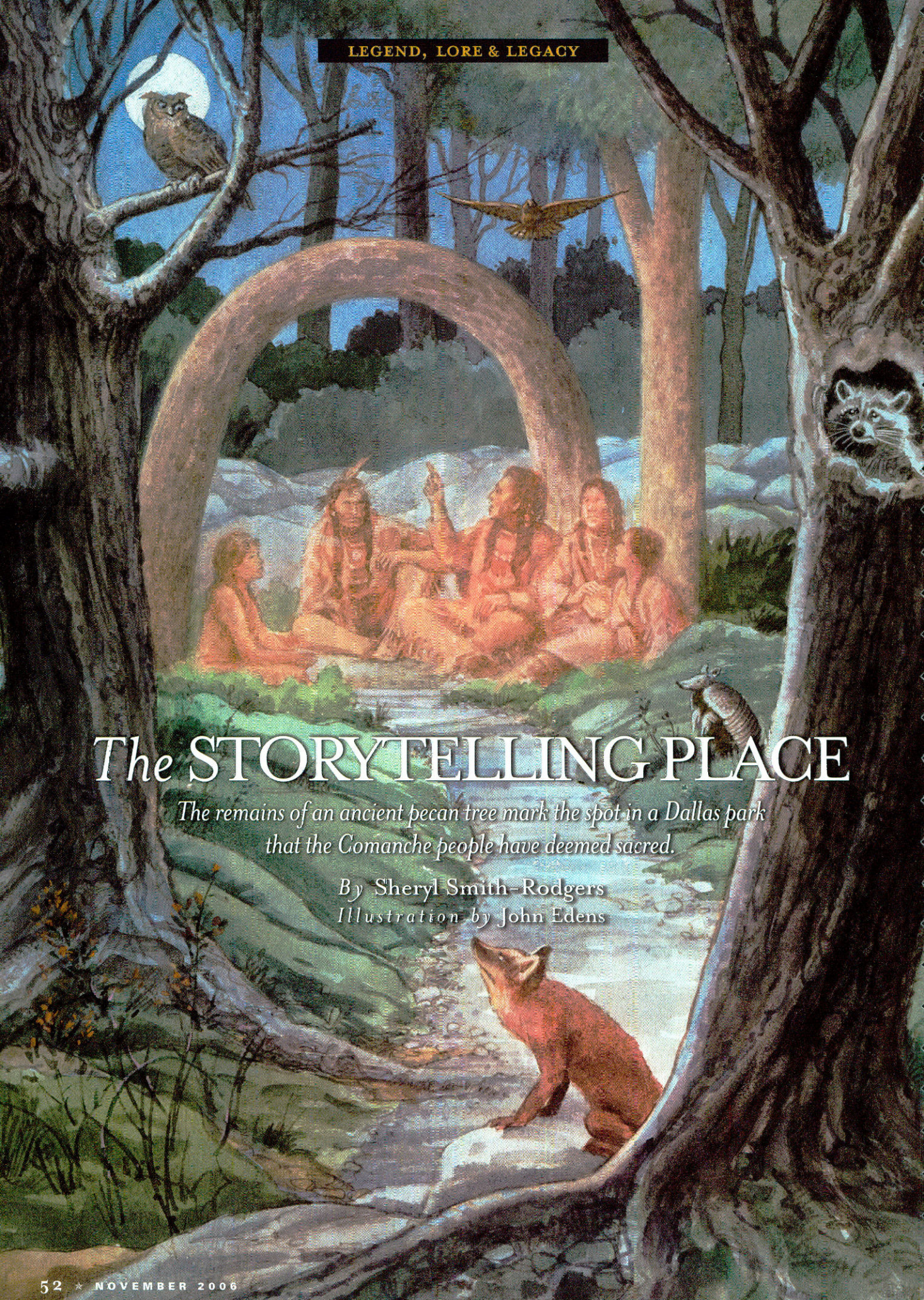
2 ONE YEAR GIFTS FOR $19.95

Hiking through the stunning vistas of Big Bend,
Fly fishing for redfish in the Gulf Coast's Copano Bay,
and Hunting for pheasant on the high plains of North Texas.
It's a big, beautiful state and we bring you the whole thing — Panhandle included.

www.tpwmagazine.com
1.800.937.9393

Call or email now and mention offer number AO6Y

Offer expires November 31, 2006



The STORYTELLING PLACE

The remains of an ancient pecan tree mark the spot in a Dallas park that the Comanche people have deemed sacred.

By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers
Illustration by John Edens

On a residential street in southeastern Dallas, an ambulance blares its siren and races to some unknown emergency. Several dogs howl in response while someone's stereo belts out music for a Saturday night party. The sounds of modern life surround our small band of three as we climb out of the car and make our way in the dark to Devon Anderson Park.

Beneath a full summer moon, we've come to see and experience a natural site deemed sacred by Comanche people. The Storytelling Place, as it's called, lies within the Great Trinity Forest, one of the largest urban hardwood forests in the nation. Here, roughly 6,000 acres of woods — a mixed palette of Texas buckeyes, pecans, walnuts, oaks, ash, persimmons, redbuds, cottonwoods and willows — thrive near the Trinity River and its tributary, the Lower White Rock Creek. Archeological sites found within the forest indicate human occupation dating back more than 10,000 years.

To reach tonight's destination, we must hike a short distance along a footpath that meanders through shadowy trees, vines and brush.

"This reminds me of the novel *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* where the children walk into a wardrobe and enter a magical land on the other side," says ethnologist Linda Pelon, our guide for the evening. "Here, you enter through a little neighborhood park, and on the other side you find this place."

As we continue our trek, the raucous calls of cicadas and tree frogs reverberate high in the trees. Along the way, we carefully cross two shallow ravines dotted with small stones. It's not long before we're standing atop a bowl-shaped indentation in white rock that seems to glow in the soft moonlight.

We've arrived at the Storytelling Place.

Pelon, who's lived near the Great Trinity Forest since the late 1970s, first became interested in Native Americans while researching for a master's thesis at the University of Texas in Arlington in 1993. "Each of us had to do a project on Indians," says Pelon, who now teaches anthropology and history at McLennan Community College in Waco. "I wanted to study the Caddo because I thought they were in this area, but someone had already picked them. So I chose Comanches, and I've researched them ever since."

Ironically, her graduate studies brought her back home to the Great Trinity Forest, a biologically rich region where nomadic Comanches camped and traded in the early to mid-1800s. One of the first remnants of Comanche life that Pelon recognized in the area was a marker tree — sometimes called a "turning tree" — in city-owned Gateway Park. The trunk of the large pecan tree (later estimated to be approximately 290 years old) was growing unnaturally in a half-moon shape from its roots, then upward.

From conversations with Comanche elders and other native people, Pelon knew that when Comanches wanted to mark a campsite or special place, they would stake the top of a young hardwood tree to the ground, causing it to arch, then grow vertically. Comanche visitors who later came to see the old pecan agreed with Pelon.

As a result, in 1997 the Comanche Nation proclaimed the Gateway Park Marker Tree as a "living monument to our historic presence" in Texas. A year later, the ancient pecan tree, already damaged and weakened with age, was destroyed by a Memorial Day storm. Almost magically, the tree produced a final crop of robust pecans before dying. Someday, Pelon hopes that a pecan sapling — propagated by the American Forests Historic Tree Program — will be planted and ceremonially "turned" near the remains of its ancestor, which is still protectively fenced in Gateway Park.

Earlier on this warm evening, Pelon escorted us to another part of the Trinity Forest long ago favored by Comanches. From the Scyene Overlook, we gazed across treetops that reach to the far southern horizon.

"High places like this are sacred, too, because they're closer to heaven," Pelon told us. "Comanches didn't use high places for ordinary things. Plus, medicinal plants grow close by, and there's a stream, too, all important for Comanche spiritual and medicine traditions. Warriors may have also used this overlook for smoke signaling."

Next, we hiked along an adjoining trail that took us through thick stands of Eastern red cedars, another necessary component of Comanche life. "Comanche visitors to our forest have told me that their Texas ancestors preferred using red cedars as lodge poles because they grow straight and tall," Pelon explained. "They also smell wonderful and naturally repel insects." With age, the beautiful reddish-brown bark of a red cedar separates into long, fibrous strips, which gives the tree a soft-looking appearance.

Though a jet roared high above us and we could hear the muffled sounds of traffic, the surrounding terrain still felt wild, primitive and untouched by time. Several times, the woods gave way to open meadows that teemed with native grasses, flowers and vines.

And then we came upon the pecan trees — massive, towering, magnificent wonders of nature whose diameters dwarf any we'd seen before. Some, Pelon said sadly, will likely be cleared to make way for Dallas Area Rapid Transit's new light rail that will follow the old Southern Pacific Railroad track, originally laid in the 1880s.

The pecans, as well as many venerable black walnut trees, were growing here back when pioneer James Beeman and his large clan — major players in the establishment of Dallas — settled east of White Rock Creek. John Neely Bryan, who founded the city around 1842, married Beeman's niece, Margaret.

Pelon also told us about nearby Joppa, an 1870s freedman's community where descendants still live. Along Joppa's 18 short streets are 19 churches and surviving shotgun homes (narrow, one-story dwellings without halls).

About a decade ago, the nonprofit White Rock Heritage District was formed to protect, preserve and promote the area's rich history and unique flora and fauna. Volunteers with the group are currently working with the Comanche Nation to place the district on the National Register of Historic Places as a Traditional Cultural Property.

White Rock's eligibility for inclusion will be strongly tied to this spot in the forest where we're now standing in the moonlight. By day, the Storytelling Place resembles little more than rocky slopes of limestone, edged with oaks, junipers and brush. Through the years, few people have paid much attention to the place or its historical importance.

When Comanche descendants visited in 2002, however, they quickly perceived the location's past ties to their cultural and oral traditions. The reasons for this were many: The site lies above and

(continued on page 63)

STORIES LIVE IN THE WORLD, AND SOMETIMES THEY CHOOSE TO INHABIT PEOPLE. IF YOU HONOR A STORY, THEN IT WILL BECOME YOUR TEACHER.

FOR FREE INFORMATION on these advertisers, simply fill out the Reader Response Card to the right of page 56. Drop the postage-paid card in the mail and we will do the rest!

FOR FASTER SERVICE

Visit our Web site at <www.tpwmagazine.com> to access instant information on any of our advertisers!

PETER EMERSON ~ SILVERSMITH ~
PESilversmith.com

TEXAS COMFORT

Large Flag Throw $49 - 48"x68"
Small Throw $30 - 35"x48"
Flag Pillow $15

LOCATED IN THE HOUSTON GALLERIA
800.989.8377
visit our web site @ www.
TEXAS AND THE TERRITORIES
TEXASTERRITORIES.COM

'Tis the season to be Texan!
Y'alls Texas Store has hundreds of unique gifts on our Catalog Web site, **yalls.com**

Texas Christmas Ornaments, Texas Food Boxes, Salsas, Jellies, Candies, Lone Star Pecan Pralines, T-shirts, Caps, Golf Balls, Cutting Boards, Texas Flag Jackets, Texas Flag Afghans, Clocks, Desk Sets, and much more!

www.yalls.com
or
call 281-955-0100

CRAWFORD & COMPANY

Hand Crafted, Personalized Boot Jacks and Coaster Sets.

P.O. Box 126, Uvalde, TX 78802
Visa/Mastercard. Call to order a Free Brochure
Toll Free (888) 301-1967
www.crawjacks.com

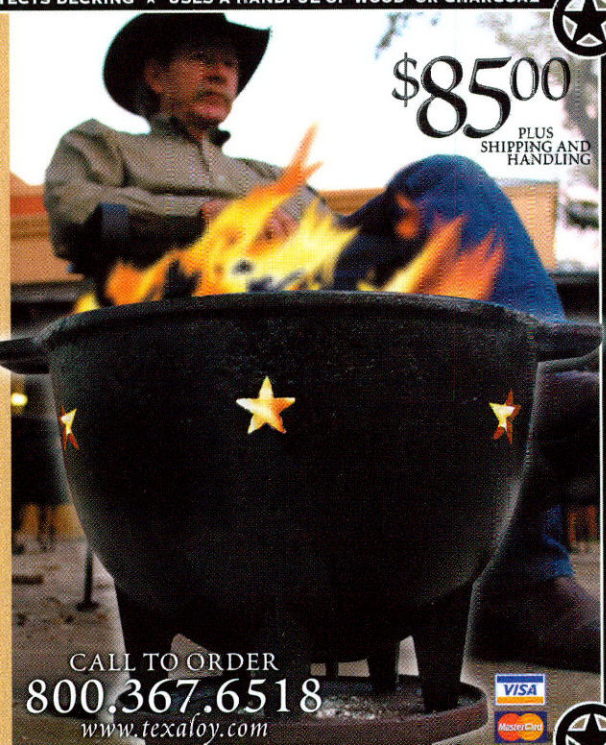
CAST IRON BASE PROTECTS DECKING ★ USES A HANDFUL OF WOOD OR CHARCOAL

PORTABLE ★ DOUBLES AS FIRE PIT ★ CAST IRON GRILL ★ APPROX. 50 LBS.

ADJUSTABLE DAMPER ★ RETAINS HEAT FOR EVEN COOKING

KICK BACK AND ENJOY THE STARS OF TEXAS.

THE LONE STAR GRILL FROM TEXALOY



$85.00 PLUS SHIPPING AND HANDLING

CALL TO ORDER
800.367.6518
www.texaloy.com

VISA MasterCard

APPROX. 11" TALL ★ 14 3/4" DIAMETER KETTLE ★ PERFECT FOR DEER LEASE AND BACK DECK

The "Original" Hoglight™

$189
Sale Price

- Observe all wildlife at night.
- Use for auxiliary lighting on entry gate, camp area, wherever light is needed.
- Lights automatically at night.
- Recharges daily without maintenance
- Heavy duty rust-free housing with powder-coat finish.
- 1 yr. warranty against manufacturer defects.

830-587-6140

SIGHTS & SOUNDS

(continued from page 57)

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

CROCKETT: KIVY-AM 1290 / 8:20 a.m., KIVY-FM 92.7 / 8:15 a.m.

DIMMITT: KDHN-AM 1470 / 10:30 a.m.

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

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

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

EL CAMPO: KULP-AM 1390 / 2:36 p.m.

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

FAIRFIELD: KNES-FM 99.1 / Sat. mornings

FLORESVILLE: KWCB-FM 89.7 / 1:30 p.m.

FORT STOCKTON: KFST-AM 860 / 7:10 a.m.; KFST-FM 94.3 / 7:10 a .m.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HUNTSVILLE: KSHU-FM 90.5 / throughout the day

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LAREDO: KHOY-FM 88.1 / throughout the day

LEVELLAND: KIVT-AM 1230 / 12:30 p.m.

LLANO: KITY-FM 102.9 /5:15 a.m.; 1:15 p.m.; 3:15 p.m.; 9:15 p.m.

LONGVIEW: KZQZ-FM 101.9 / 10:20 a.m.; 4:20 p.m.

LUBBOCK: KJTV-AM 950 / overnights

LUFKIN: KUEZ-FM 100.1 / 12:15 p.m.; KYBI-FM 101.9 / 12:15 p.m.

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

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

MASON: KOTY-FM 95.7 / throughout the day

MESQUITE: KEOM-FM 88.5 / 8:15 a.m., 2:30 p.m., 8:30 p.m. Mon.–Thu.; 8:15 a.m., 2:30 p.m. Fri.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WACO: KBBW-AM 1010 / throughout the day

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

WOODVILLE: KWUD-AM 1490 / throughout the day

THE TEXAS NEWS CENTER.COM
<www.texasnewscenter.com>

"Passport to Texas" is available at no cost to stations across the state. For information fax (512) 389-4450 or write to 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744, e-mail <info@passporttotexas.org>.
This series is made possible by:

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE FOUNDATION
A Natural Investment

ANHEUSER BUSCH

and a grant from:

SPORT FISH & WILDLIFE RESTORATION

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

THE FRONT LINE OF NEWS AND VIEWS

TELEVISION

LOOK FOR THESE STORIES IN THE COMING WEEKS:

Oct. 29 – Nov. 5:
Preservation of Government Canyon; honoring angler Richard Hart; Starr family history in Marshall; restoring coastal family land; paddling trails; soothing springs at Ft. Hood.

Nov. 5 – 12:
Sandhill cranes' marvelous migration; fishing hall of famer Buddy Bradley; sandhill crane hunting rules; record ridley release; escape to Pedernales Falls State Park; fly the Rio Grande.

Nov. 12 – 19:
Prehistoric artwork of the Lower Pecos; hiking at Tyler State Park; from grazing lands to wetlands in the Pineywoods; competitive shooting sports; old-fashioned ferry crossing.

Nov. 19 – 26:
Student adventure at Big Bend Ranch; dove hunting paradise in Midland; creating new marshlands in Galveston Bay; Palmetto State Park; wind-powered landscapes.

Nov. 26 – Dec. 3:
Rediscovering the San Jacinto Battleground; living with alligators; Mother Neff, the first state park; fishing with art; full moon rising.

Check out one of the oldest surviving bird species in the world, the sandhill crane. Watch the week of November 5 – 12.

"TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE"

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

<www.tpwd.state.tx.us/tv>

AMARILLO: KACV, Ch. 2 / Wed. 12:30 p.m. (Oct. – March)
AUSTIN: KLRU, Ch. 18 / Sun. 9 a.m. / Mon. 12:30 p.m. / Fri. 5:30 a.m; KLRU2, Cable Ch. 20 / Tues. 11 p.m.
BRYAN–COLLEGE STATION: KAMU, Ch. 15 / Thurs. 7 p.m. / Sun. 5 p.m.
CORPUS CHRISTI: KEDT, Ch. 16 / Sun. 12 p.m. / Fri. 2:00 p.m.
DALLAS–FORT WORTH: KERA, Ch. 13 / Sun. 12:30 p.m. (airs Oct. – March)
Also serving Abilene, Denton, Longview, Marshall, San Angelo, Texarkana, Tyler, Wichita Falls, Sherman
EL PASO: KCOS, Ch. 13 / Sat. 3 p.m. (rotates with other programs; check listings)
HARLINGEN: KMBH, Ch. 60 / Sun. 5 p.m.
Also serving McAllen, Mission, Brownsville
HOUSTON: KUHT, Ch. 8 / Sat. 3:30 p.m. / Fri. 1 p.m.
Also serving Beaumont/Port Arthur, Galveston, Texas City, Victoria
KILLEEN: KNCT, Ch. 46 / Sun. 5 p.m. Also serving Temple
LUBBOCK: KTXT, Ch. 5 / Sat. 10 a.m.
ODESSA–MIDLAND: KPBT-TV, Ch. 36 / Sat. 4:30 p.m.
PORTALES, NEW MEXICO: KENW, Channel 3 / Sunday 2:30 p.m. Also serving West Texas and the Panhandle region.
SAN ANTONIO & LAREDO: KLRN, Ch.9 / Sunday 1 p.m.
WACO: KWBU, Ch. 34 / Sat. 3 p.m

Check local listing. Times and dates are subject to change.

RADIO

"PASSPORT TO TEXAS"

Your Radio Guide to the Great Texas Outdoors

Join host Cecilia Nasti weekdays for a 90-second journey into the Texas Outdoors. Producer and host: Cecilia Nasti, (512) 389-4667. Check the following listing for a station near you. Listen Monday–Friday unless indicated otherwise. Or listen on the Web any time:

<www.passporttotexas.org>

ABILENE: KACU-FM 89.7 / 7 a.m., 1:43 p.m., 6 p.m.; KWKC-AM 1340 / 6:30 a.m.
ALPINE: KSRU-AM 1670 / 2 p.m MWF.; KVLF-AM 1240 / 6:30 a.m. ; KALP-FM 92.7 / 6:30 a.m.
AMARILLO: KACV-FM 89.9 / 9:20 a.m.
ATLANTA: KPYN-AM 900 / 7:30 a.m.
AUSTIN: KWNX-AM 1260 and KZNX-AM 1530 / Sun. 9:20 a.m
AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN'S INSIDE LINE: (512) 416-5700 category 6287 (NATR)
BEAUMONT: KLVI-AM 560 / 5:20 a.m.
BEDFORD: KMCE, K-Meadow, Meadow Creek Elementary / throughout the day
BIG SPRING: KBST-AM 1490 / 10:50 a.m.; KBST-FM 95.7 / 10:50 a.m.
BONHAM: KFYN-AM 1420 / 10:10 a.m. KFYZ-FM 98.3 / 10:10 a.m.
BRADY: KNEL-AM 1490 / 7:20 a.m.; KNEL-FM 95.3 / 7:20 a.m.
BRYAN: KZNE-AM 1150 / 5:40 p.m.
CANTON: KVCI-AM 1510 / 8:20 a.m.
CANYON: KWTS-FM 91.1 / throughout the day
CARTHAGE: KGAS-AM 1590 /throughout the day; KGAS-FM 104.3 / throughout the day
CENTER: KDET-AM 930 / 5:20 p.m.; KQSI-FM 92.5 / 5:20 p.m.
CISCO: KCER-FM 105.9 / 12:00 p.m.
COMMERCE: KETR-FM 88.9 / 10:15 a.m.
CORPUS CHRISTI: KEDT-FM 90.3 / 5:33 p.m.; KFTX-FM 97.5 / between 5

(continued on page 56)

PARK PICKS

RECOMMENDED STOPS ALONG THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

PHOTO © TPWD

Ray Roberts Lake State Park

Take your budding astronomer to a star party.

ANY NIGHT IS A GREAT NIGHT to look up at the big Texas sky and gaze at the stars. But if you want to understand what you're seeing or better yet, see it a little more clearly, Ray Roberts Lake State Park has just the event for you.

About once a month, the park's Isle du Bois unit hosts a stargazing party complete with state-of-the-art telescopes, amateur astronomers and, of course, the most twinkling views in Texas.

Because the park is easy driving distance from anywhere in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, the party can attract as many as 140 people. Aside from the celestial spectacle, Don Whited, the park's naturalist, says that most people enjoy the casual atmosphere of the event. With other park programs, "once you join in, you're kinda stuck," Whited says. "That's what's nice about the stargazing party. People come and go. Some stay only 10 or 15 minutes. Some stay for hours."

On the night I attended, the crowds were thinner (it was that time of year when you still sweat after sunset). This meant we got plenty of personal attention from the three — yes, three — volunteer astronomers. John Olson, a postal worker from Flower Mound, has been heading up the event for the last four years. He's a self-taught astronomer. "Heck, I never went to college," he says, yet he could hold your attention for hours with his knowledge of stars. Along with his star stories, Olson also brings along a couple of his super-fancy telescopes — one has a built-in GPS system.

When we looked through the scopes, we saw spectacular views like the Wild Duck Cluster, the Butterfly Cluster and even Jupiter. We even got to see some "newer" stars (which I learned means they were formed about two million years ago). Olson says that in November stargazers should be able to see Neptune, Uranus, the Orion Nebula and the Pleiades (or "Seven Sisters") Cluster.

Since my astronomy familiarity starts and ends with the Big Dipper, I asked Olson if other party guests were as un-star-savvy as me. He assured me that most were big on interest but low on knowledge. At least I wasn't alone.

One exception was a young boy who couldn't have been older than nine. He ran from telescope to telescope, peering at the stars and asking questions. He also had plenty of his own answers. When I asked him how he knew so much about stars, he proudly said, "I'm gonna be a scientist." His dad nodded in agreement and said that an event like this is unlike anything his child could ever learn in school.

If the young boy and the other party-goers didn't feel that a glance through a telescope was enough, the volunteers also pulled up maps of the constellations on their laptops. Olson used his super-extended laser light to point at various stars.

Whited says that while about 70 percent of the stargazers are campers, many drive in just for the event. If you plan to sit under the stars for a spell, bring chairs, beverages and snacks if you like. Oh, and don't forget the kids. You never know; you might have a budding astronomer on your hands.

For information on dates and times for the stargazing party, call (940) 686-2148 or visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/rayrobertslake> and check the calendar of events. ✯

— Elsa K. Simcik

Lake Brownwood State Park

North-central Texas park is home to some of CCC's finest work.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT NEVER SLEPT in a cabin at Lake Brownwood State Park, but thanks to his Civilian Conservation Corps, you can. Part of FDR's New Deal recovery program for a Depression-wracked nation, CCC work camps established across the country in the 1930s offered work to unemployed young men and improvements to state lands. Workers arrived at the Brownwood camp, one of 15 in Texas, in 1935 to improve 500 lakeshore acres that had been purchased by the Izaak Walton League and then donated to the state. By 1941, using rock trucked from a quarry 16 miles away and shaped with hand picks, they had completed 17 cabins and nearly 100 other structures.

Those included a spacious bath house, which the National Park Service initially insisted be placed atop a hill for sanitary engineering reasons. The state parks department asserted that it would be deemed a "laughingstock" for building a facility 300 yards from the sandy beach and swimming area it was to serve, and eventually prevailed. Today, the beach is gone but the building remains as Beach Lodge, which sleeps 26 in two dormitory-style rooms, with two baths, a kitchen and dining area, and a large outdoor grill.

Fisherman's Barracks, built to serve anglers coming to the lake in growing numbers in the 1930s, is now the five-bedroom Fisherman's Lodge, and a cook's shack became the two-bedroom Oak Lodge. Firepits, curved benches, culverts and picnic tables, NPS-designed and CCC-built, are scattered throughout the park.

One of the CCC's finest pieces of work here was the Clubhouse, which included concessions, a hardwood dance floor and park headquarters. The food and dances attracted many visitors, and a park ranger provided rides from the dam in his personal boat for 50 cents each way. He dropped guests off at a long set of wide rock stairs leading from the water up to a lookout pavilion. The boat dock there was eventually destroyed by floods, so today people arrive at the Clubhouse by car for events like family reunions and weddings.

Brownwood's CCC camp closed in 1942, and during WWII, the park served as a rest-and-recreation site for soldiers stationed at Camp Bowie. After the war, Texans returned to the park in force to swim, boat, camp, hike and picnic — activities that visitors still enjoy today. In the early 1970s, numbered sites brought order to camping in the park, and new hiking trails were added to the ones created by the CCC in the 1930s. In 1978, cabin renovations upgraded the heating and cooling systems, appliances and windows. Sleeping porches were enclosed. Otherwise the structures remain much as they were in the 1930s, sturdy pieces of history scattered among oak, hawthorn and cedar elm trees along a ridge above the lake. Night brings the call of owls and the gentle lapping of waves against the rocks. In the morning, sunlight reflects off the lake to create mysterious but beautiful images on the ceiling. FDR would have been pleased.

For more information, contact Lake Brownwood State Park at (325) 784-5223 or visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lakebrownwood>. ★

— Melissa Gaskill

Fort Boggy State Park

Nature rules at this East Texas haven — but watch out for hungry hogs.

AT FORT BOGGY STATE PARK, thick oak and elm trees form a lush green canopy over a clear-water swimming lake that's often filled with laughing children. Meanwhile, on the banks, their parents and grandparents try their luck at fishing. It is a scene that may seem far away, in both time and space, when you're stuck in rush-hour traffic, but it's really just a matter of pointing the car toward a more peaceful destination.

Fort Boggy State Park is located in Centerville. The original inhabitants, the Keechi and the Kickapoo, were joined by the families of John Byrns and Christopher C. Staley in 1840. After C. C. Staley was killed by raiding Native Americans, the settlers built Fort Boggy for protection. The area was used as farmland until the 1930s. Since then, it has returned to a near-pristine natural state.

Fort Boggy abounds in wildlife. On a perfect May day, while I walked through the flowing savannah grasslands, a monarch butterfly landed on a branch, a majestic hawk circled overhead, and a large grasshopper stopped to rest on my foot. With the help of some fat earthworms, I pulled in a couple of feisty brim from the lake.

Melvin Dube, a cattleman from McDade who was enjoying the day at a family reunion, commented: "Wildlife is a very important part of our environment. It needs a place."

Park Superintendent Mike Kleinert is charged with keeping man and nature in harmony within the 1,847 acres of this largely undeveloped park. He admits that it can be a challenge. For example, the park's unpaved roads and trails are feeding grounds for feral fogs.

"They're still tearing up the roads," chuckled a good-natured Kleinert as he pointed to a mound of dirt where hogs stopped a new trail in its tracks.

"We also have snakes, like copperheads," said Kleinert. "But we have to remind our visitors; it's like a stranger coming into your house. You cannot harass or disturb the wildlife while you are in our parks."

Fort Boggy visitor Gary Dunklin, a retired businessman with disabilities, credits Texas parks with helping him and his wife combat the stress caused by his fixed income and medical problems.

"I'm a big fan of the Texas State Parks Pass," said Dunklin as he tossed a handful of multicolored corn into the lake. "We can travel though Texas and hit every state park on the route."

Fort Boggy currently has a beach, swimming area and two hiking/mountain bike/nature trails. There is also a covered pavilion with picnic tables and a barbecue pit.

For more information, call (903) 344-1116 or visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fortboggy>. ★

— Marsha Wilson Rappaport

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

PHOTOS TOP TPWD; BOTTOM © MARSHA WILSON RAPPAPORT

GOODS AND SERVICES FOR THE OUTDOOR ENTHUSIAST

OUTDOOR MARKETPLACE

CALL FOR MORE INFORMATION & MECHANICAL SPECIFICATIONS: (512) 912-7007

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

FISHING & BOATING

RECRUITMENT

TEXAS ARTS

ARCHEOLOGY

★ **The Great Stays of Texas (HAT)** includes the state's finest bed & breakfast inns, country inns, guesthouses and distinctive hotels. The HAT seal of approval means that the property is not only beautiful but unique, sparkling clean and also is full of Texas charm. For a full listing of HAT accommodations, visit us at www.hat.org or call 1800) HAT-0368.

THIS MONTH'S INNSIDER CHOICE
is Meyer Bed & Breakfast on Cypress Creek

Originally built as a stage stop, this 1850's Texas landmark complex is located in the heart of the Hill Country overlooking the Cypress Creek. Meyer B & B offers decorated rooms and romantic suites with private fireplaces, Jacuzzi tubs for 2, sitting areas and pillow top beds for your relaxation. Enjoy a complimentary hearty full breakfast while viewing the deer across the creek. For a scenic and relaxing getaway, we are only a phone call away!.

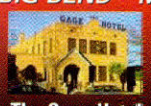
Meyer Bed & Breakfast on Cypress Creek
Comfort, TX
(888) 995-6100
www.meyerbedandbreakfast.com

MEYER BED & BREAKAST ON CYPRESS CREEK
COMFORT, TX.

THE INNSIDER

THE GREAT STAYS OF TEXAS (HAT)

BIG BEND – MEXICO GETAWAY



The Gage Hotel
Marathon, Texas
(800) 884-GAGE
www.gagehotel.com

Villa Del Rio
Del Rio, Texas
(800) 995-1887
www.villadelrio.com

BELLVILLE

★ **Texas Ranch Life.** Restored historic Texas homes on 1,400-acre ranch between Bellville & Chappell Hill. Weekend rental includes bass fishing, trail and chuckwagon rides, cutting, bird/coyote/raccoon hunting and cow works available.
www.texasranchlife.com (866) TEXASRL

BRENHAM

★ **Mariposa Ranch.** Cabins, fireplaces, Jacuzzis for two, dinners, carriage rides, "Enchanted Evening" packages. — *Southern Living*
www.mariposaranch.com (877) 647-4774

COMFORT

★ **Meyer B&B.** On Cypress Creek, Hill Country, mid-1800s stage stop, Texas landmark. Pool, hot tub, fireplaces, golf.
www.meyerbedandbreakfast.com (888) 995-6100

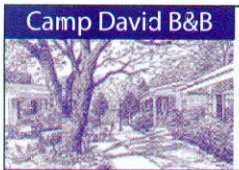
FREDERICKSBURG

★ **The Full Moon Inn.** Quiet, peaceful, fireplaces, whirlpool tubs, full breakfast, weddings & reunions.
www.fullmooninn.com (800) 997-1124
www.texas-wedding.com

★ **Palo Alto Creek Farm.** Landmark historic German-Texas farmstead on the creek. Ancient oaks, abundant wildlife, Hill Country tranquility. Beautifully renovated log cabin, barn, farmhouse all with private spa therapy rooms.
www.paloaltocreekfarm.com (800) 997-0089

★ **Settler's Crossing Bed and Breakfast.** Private historic log cabins and cottages spread over 35 park-like acres, just minutes from town.
www.settlerscrossing.com (800) 874-1020

Camp David B&B



Five romantic cottages and main house. King-sized beds, fireplaces, cable tv/DVD, internet access, kitchens and whirlpool tubs. Gourmet Breakfast served.
www.campdavidbb.com (830) 997-7797

GRUENE

★ **Gruene Mansion Inn.** Premier romantic B&B, next door to Gruene Hall and overlooking the Guadalupe River... a little Texas Magic.
www.GrueneMansionInn.com (830) 629-2641

HUNTSVILLE

★ **The Whistler B&B.** 1859 Victorian home, lovingly restored. Original antiques. Peaceful atmosphere on 3 wooded acres. Gourmet breakfast.
www.thewhistlerbnb.com (800) 404-2834

NEW BRAUNFELS

★ **Historic Kuebler-Waldrip Haus & Danville Schoolhouse.** 43-acre deer haven near Gruene, rivers. Getaways, reunions, weddings, corporate retreats. 10 luxurious rooms, Jacuzzis. Delicious breakfasts.
www.kueblerwaldrip.com (800) 299-8372

ROCKPORT

HOOPES' HOUSE
ROCKPORT, TEXAS
(800) 924-1008
WWW.HOOPESHOUSE.COM

NATIONALLY HISTORIC VICTORIAN HOME. EIGHT ROOMS EACH WITH PRIVATE BATH. FULL BREAKFAST INCLUDED. CALL FOR BROCHURE.

Visit www.tpwmagazine.com
FOR LINKS TO OUR ADVERTISER'S WEBSITES

ACCOMMODATIONS

Fredericksburg — Sunday House Inn & Suites.
www.SundayHouseInn.com (888) 900-0058

Kerrville — Best Western Sunday House Inn.
www.BestWesternKerrville.com (888) 900-8914

Kerrville — Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites.
www.kerrvillemotel.com (800) 404-4125

Lake Whitney-Rocky Creek Lodge. Clean cabins, 24-hr. fishing, largest covered fishing & boat docks.
www.rockycreeklodge.com (254) 622-3383

Frio River Cabins. Overlooking the FRIO RIVER with 175 acres of Texas Hill Country. Off-Season Discounts.
www.friorivercabins.com (830) 232-5996

RIO FRIO LODGING

- Experience Hill Country Living at Private Vacation Homes & Cabins.
- Near Lost Maples & Garner State Parks.
- Also Offering Campfire Storytelling, Champion Big Tree, Natural History & Birding Tours.

830-966-2320 WWW.FRIOLODGING.COM

KNOLLE FARM AND RANCH
Bed, Barn, and Breakfast
Upscale inn on historic ranch near Corpus Christi. Kayaking, Skeet Range, Equestrian, Fishing, Weddings, Retreats and Gourmet meals.
(361) 547-2546 • www.knolle.com

The Trailhead for Your Weekend Getaway. A Web site with Texas events and attractions information.
www.TheTexasTrails.com

TOURISM

West Texas Oasis. Texas' largest concentration of breeding Black-chinned hummingbirds. Viewing room and 3 cottages are available year round. Dan Brown, Box 555, Christoval, TX 76935
www.hummerhouse.com (877) 255-2254

Lake Livingston - Bethy Creek Resort. Riverside, TX

Beautiful scenic East Texas waterfront lodging with a view of nature. Daily and weekend specials on suites w/kitchens, RV sites, pontoon boats, fishing, canoe and pedal boats. Fishing guide. Swimming pavilion available for family reunions and gatherings. Family friendly. 80 miles from Houston.
www.bethycreek.com (800) 537-6251

USPS STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

Publication Title: Texas Parks & Wildlife
Publication Number: 0040-4586
Filing Date: 09-26-06
Issue Frequency: Monthly
Number of Issues Published Annually: 12
Annual Subscription Price: $19.95
Complete Mailing Address:
3000 South I.H. 35, Suite 120,
Austin, Texas, 78704
Contact Person: Randy Brudnicki
Telephone: (512) 912-7001
Randy Brudnicki, Publisher
Robert Macias, Editorial Director
Louie Bond, Managing Editor,
Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine,
3000 South I.H. 35, Ste., 120, Austin, Texas, 78704
Owner:
Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept., 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, TX 78744
Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities. — None
Tax Status: Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months
Publication Title: ***Texas Parks & Wildlife***
Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: September 2006

Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
Total Numbers of Copies (Net press run)	126,392	151,832
Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail-Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541	114,452	137,211
Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Non-USPS Paid Distribution	1,495	1,361
Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation	115,947	138,572
Free Distribution by Mail Outside-County	958	958
Free Distribution Outside the Mail	2,108	2082
Total Free Distribution	3,066	3,040
Total Distribution	119,013	141,612
Copies not Distributed	7,379	10,220
Total	126,392	151,832
Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation	97%	98%

Publication of Statement of Ownership: Required publication in the November 2006 issue of ***Texas Parks & Wildlife*** magazine.

(continued from page 53)

apart from camping areas; and the limestone itself has significant meaning (for instance, Comanches used limestone tools to clean hides). Moreover, moonlight at the naturally occurring amphitheater would have illuminated storytellers and their facial expressions.

Those stories, passed orally from generation to generation, perpetuate Comanche customs and history as well as aid in the training of children. They also translate how Native Americans believe that the universe is bound together through spirits that inhabit everything — plants, animals, humans, water and the Earth itself.

Pelon says that many of their stories feature a giant owl who lives in the moon and flies down, sometimes to eat the people. Raccoons, foxes and other creatures of the forest play tricks on the giant owl in an attempt to save the people. "The animals in those stories are still here — coyotes, armadillos, raccoons, hawks," Pelon says.

Within the coming year or so, an edge of the Storytelling Place also will be carved away to make room for the future commuter train. At this site, DART officials have agreed to construct a retaining wall of limestone that will blend with the natural setting. During construction, the agency also will try to preserve as much existing vegetation as possible. Trees of "exceptional quality or size" that are damaged or removed will be replaced.

Those assurances, however, mean little to Pelon, who has worked tirelessly to preserve the Storytelling Place.

"I once read a memorable quote that has stuck with me," she reflects in the moonlight. "It said that stories live in the world, and sometimes they choose to inhabit people. If you honor a story, then it will become your teacher."

For a few moments more, we stand atop the Storytelling Place, admire the stars and talk quietly. Then it's time to go back, say our goodbyes and merge once again with modern life.

Later, we will write the story that now lives within us and release it back into the world so others may know, too, about a surviving remnant of both natural and cultural history that's tucked away in Dallas' Great Trinity Forest.

It will be our way of honoring the Storytelling Place. ✯

(continued from page 19)

seven Gulf Coast museums to tell about the French explorer's ill-fated expedition and the recovery of his ship. This museum's exhibit highlights the 1996 excavation of La Belle in Matagorda Bay and features a bronze cannon recovered at the site, in addition to dozens of artifacts.

Local history displays include the compass used by Wightman when he platted Matagorda. Another exhibit tells about a 19th-century steamboat that sank during the Civil War in Caney Creek, once used as a major thoroughfare for sugar cane plantations along its banks.

In the basement, a series of themed rooms create "Our Town," a hands-on children's museum that depicts pioneer life. In the general store, for instance, kids can stand behind an old-fashioned soda fountain, shop for (plastic) fruits and vegetables, and buy a bolt of calico fabric. In the opera house, they can sit in antique seats or give a performance.

Next on the afternoon's agenda is a tour of the Matagorda County Birding Nature Center, located west of Bay City. Because time's limited, Rhonda Vallely and David Sitz wheel me around in a golf cart so I can see the 34-acre park's three ecosystems — wetlands, prairies and woodlands. I also get a quick look at the center's six gardens for butterfly, cacti, hummingbird, roses, herbs and palms.

This afternoon, Ethel, the 4-foot alligator who hangs out in the upper wetlands area, keeps out of sight, but I do spot a swamp rabbit and a red-shouldered hawk, one of more than 300 species of birds seen in the area throughout the year. In fact, since 1997, Matagorda County has topped the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count, an annual day-long bird census taken across the nation. In December 2005, volunteers counted 251 species in the county.

Tonight, I'm staying at the Main Inn B&B in Palacios. The innkeepers' home, built in 1915, and two bungalows once housed military personnel and their families from nearby Camp Hulen, decommissioned in 1946.

More seafood sounds good to me, so I head for Outrigger Restaurant, where I choose a half order of crunchy coconut shrimp, which comes with pineapple salsa. For a buck more, I substitute sweet potato fries. No leftovers tonight.

In the morning, I scope out six murals painted around Palacios by artist Dayton Wodrich of Independence. Each illustrates the city's history and heritage, such as the La Belle shipwreck, coastal birds, ranching and the seafood industry.

Next I visit the temporary quarters of the Palacios Area Historical Association Museum. A limited photo exhibit recounts the La Belle excavation. The museum plans to include a display of items recovered from the shipwreck.

My last stop in Matagorda County plunks me down at the century-old Hotel Blessing. Since 1977, owner Helen Feldhousen has cooked up a noon spread that attracts folks from as far away as Houston. Customers help themselves from steaming metal pots and pans set on two antique stoves. Today's menu: chicken-fried steak, meat loaf, hash, a slew of fresh vegetables and salads, rolls, cornbread and strawberry shortcake.

"We serve Christmas dinner (turkey and dressing) every Sunday," Feldhousen says. "Actually, Christmas is the only day we close all year."

My plate's empty; time to go home.I duck back into the dining room, where I ask Helen if I can snitch a cellophane-wrapped cinnamon roll.

"Sure!" she exclaims. "Then you'll have something to snack on driving home."

Oh, no, I protest, it's for my husband.

With a sly grin, Helen nods. "Then you'd better take another," she advises, "just in case!" ✯

DETAILS:

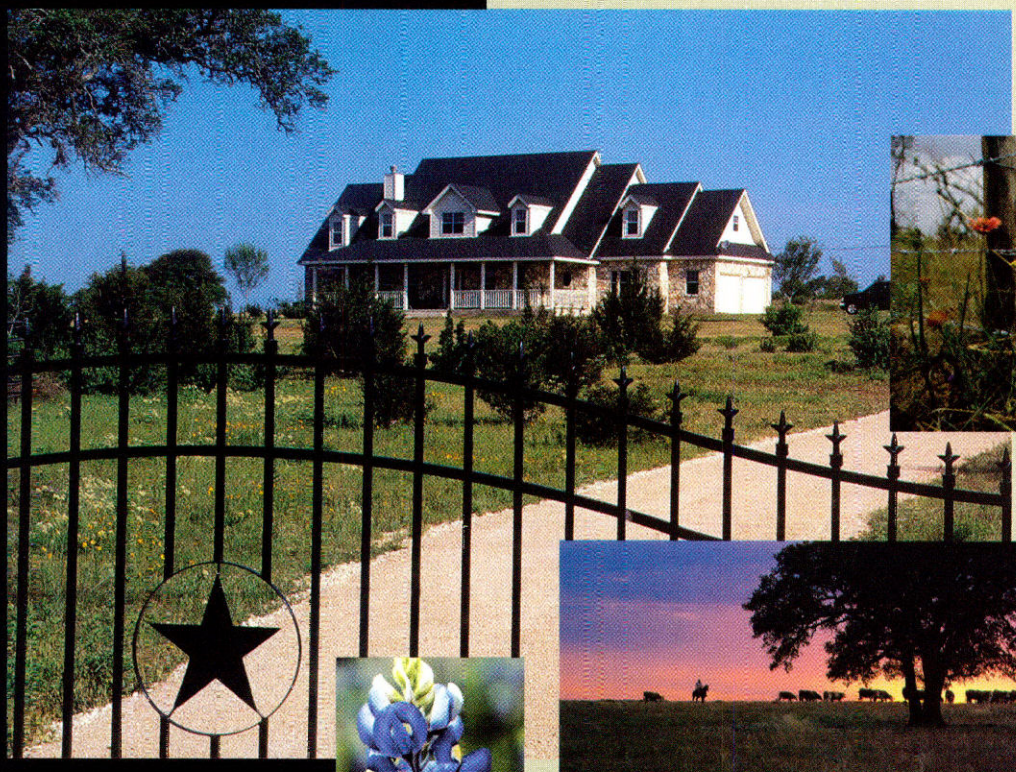
Matagorda Area Chamber of Commerce, <www.matagordachamber.com>
Bay City Convention and Visitors Bureau, (800) 803-8333, <www.visitbaycity.org>
Palacios Chamber of Commerce, (800) 611-4567, <www.palacioschamber.com>
Matagorda Bay Nature Park, (800) 776-5272, <www.lcra.org/community/matagorda.html>
Day on the Bay Services, (979) 244-6787, <www.dayonthebayservices.com>
Stanley-Fisher House B&B, (979) 863-2920, <www.stanley-fisher.com>
Matagorda County Museum, (979) 245-7502, <www.matagordacountymuseum.org>
Matagorda County Birding Nature Center, (979) 245-3336, <www.mcbnc.org>
Main Inn B&B, (361) 972-3408
Palacios Area Historical Association Museum, (361) 972-1148, <www.palaciosmuseum.org>
Hotel Blessing, (361) 588-6623

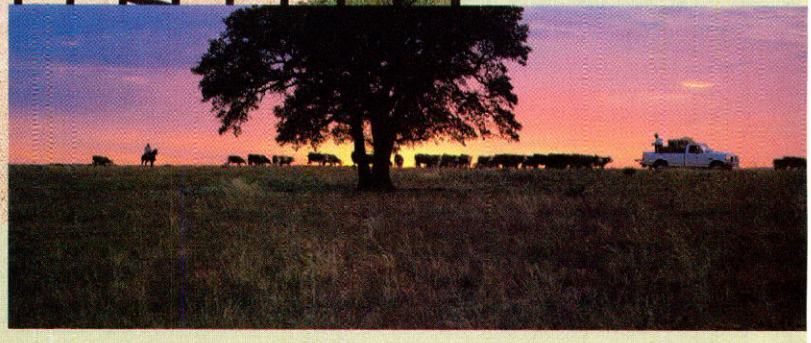
PARTINGSHOT

Photographer Patricio Robles Gil shot this image of snow-covered ocotillos on a crisp morning in late October. Such a large amount of snow is a rarity on the southern slope of the mountain known as El Carmen in Coahuila, Mexico. The branches began to bend under the weight of the snow. Heavy winds had hampered his earlier efforts to capture the snowy scene, but on this morning, the wind stopped and revealed a peaceful winter wonderland in the Chihuahuan Desert.

IMAGE SPECS:
Nikon F5 with AF Nikkor 80-200 mm 1:28 lens, aperture of 5.6, on Fuji Provia 100 F200 film.

PHOTO © PATRICIO ROBLES GIL





At Home in the Country

When you're ready to buy or improve your place in the country — for farming, ranching or recreation — then you need to talk to Texas Land Bank.

Texas Land Bank has been financing country land for more than 85 years. As the experts in financing rural properties, we can help you purchase, refinance or improve your country place.

That's what we do.

1-888-467-6411

www.TexasLandBank.com

Corsicana • Georgetown • Hillsboro • Lampasas
Temple • Waco

TEXAS LAND BANK FLCA

Farm & Ranch
Country Land & Home Loans

Part of the Farm Credit System

EQUAL HOUSING LENDER