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TEXAS

A man wearing a dark cap and a patterned jacket is holding a golden retriever puppy. They are in an outdoor setting, possibly a field or a wooded area, with a warm, golden light. The man is looking towards the camera, and the puppy is looking slightly to the side.

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Legend of the Century Plant

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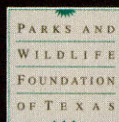
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This page: Taking a closer look at a white-tipped dove. Photo © Bill Draker/KAC Productions

TEXAS

The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE of TEXAS

AUGUST 2004, VOL. 62, NO. 8

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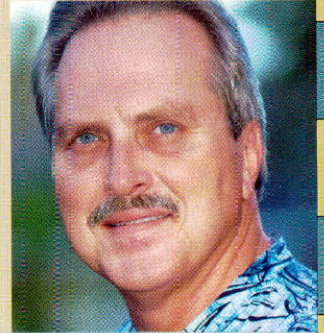
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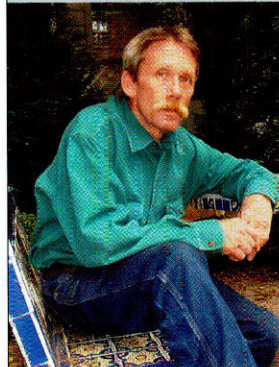
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In the Field

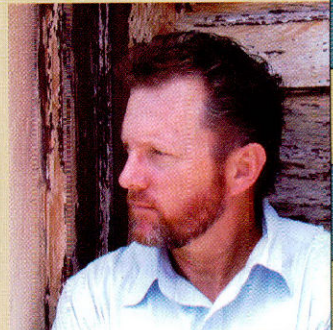
LARRY BOZKA, the magazine's contributing writer on saltwater fishing, shares some advice about how to buy a bay boat in this issue. Bozka has enjoyed a successful career as a writer, photographer, broadcaster and Web site consultant for more than 27 years, winning more than 100 awards. As the first full-time editor of the Coastal Conservation Association's *TIDE* magazine, he was heavily involved in the legislative effort to protect Texas redfish and speckled trout in the 1970s. He continues to specialize in covering the Texas coast through his magazine work and through his Web site, CoastalAnglers.com.



DICK J. REAVIS patrolled the border waters of Falcon Lake with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department game wardens during Operation Pescador in April and writes the story of the special night surveillance operation for this issue. Reavis was a Nieman Fellow in journalism and has worked as senior editor at *Texas Monthly* and *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazines. He's been a reporter for the *Dallas Observer*, a business correspondent for the *San Antonio Light* and a senior reporter for the *San Antonio Express-News*. He has written for numerous other publications, and is the author of several books, including *Conversations with Moctezuma*, *The Ashes of Waco* and *Fodor's Texas*. He is a member of the Texas Institute of Letters and now teaches journalism at North Carolina State University.



E. DAN KLEPPER writes about the mystery of the century plant in this month's Legend, Lore & Legacy department. Klepper often writes about adventure sports and the outdoors, and his article for *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine on mountain biking the Solitario took the International Regional Magazine Association's top award for travel writing in 2003. He is the author, under the pen name Edwin Daniels, of books on art, culture and natural history, including *Ghostdancing—Sacred Medicine* and *the Art of JD Challenger* and the beautifully illustrated *Wolf Walking*. His next book, *Spirit Walker*, is scheduled for release in spring 2005 by Tidemark Press. Klepper lives and works in the Big Bend country of West Texas.



AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF ROBERT L. COOK

Our new hunting and fishing licenses go on sale in early August. The SuperCombo hunting and fishing license with all the bells and whistles — including the new \$5 freshwater fisheries stamp — costs \$64. By adding the \$15 federal duck stamp, you can hunt and fish in Texas for every legal species during the next 12 months. In addition, our new Annual State Parks Pass, which gets you into every state park and historic site in Texas for one year, sells for \$60; for another \$15, you can add a second pass for your better half. There are no better recreational deals anywhere.

Occasionally, people call me to say they do not want their tax dollars wasted on anything to do with hunting, fishing or boating. Now and then someone else will encourage me to spend a larger percentage of tax dollars on our state parks or historic sites and less on our fish hatcheries and wildlife management areas. When I hear from these folks, I explain how the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is funded.

The vast majority of TPWD funding comes from revenue paid by our “users.” Our users fall into two main groups. One group consists of the people who picnic, camp and enjoy the outdoors in our state parks, along with those who visit our historic and cultural sites. The revenue from park entrance fees, cabin fees and park concessions goes into an account that we call Fund 64, the State Park Fund. A second group consists of people who hunt, fish and boat in Texas. The revenue from the sale of all hunting and fishing licenses and stamps, as well as the money from boat registration fees, goes into an account that we call Fund 9, the Game and Fish Fund.

These are “dedicated” accounts; by statute, Fund 9 and Fund 64 are kept separate from each other. Revenue from state parks cannot be used for hunting, or for fish hatcheries, or for game wardens or for any purpose other than state parks and historic sites. The only exception is a new statutory requirement directing that 15 percent of boat registration fees go into Fund 64 for state-park-related activities.

That exception aside, revenue from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and boat registration cannot be used for our state parks or historic sites. Fund 9 can only be used in our inland and coastal fisheries research, surveys and hatcheries and in our wildlife surveys, research and hunting programs and in enforcement of game, fish and boater-safety laws.

The only general revenue that is appropriated by the Texas Legislature for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to use is primarily directed towards our state parks and historic sites, with some funds allocated for the repair and maintenance of our buildings and facilities across the state, and some allocated for our local and community park grant program.

We try to be efficient and cost-effective in everything we do. We work hard to not waste any funds made available to us. Your use, enjoyment and appreciation of the sites and natural resources for which we are responsible are important to us, and we appreciate your support. Get outdoors. Get involved. Enjoy.

*Your use,
enjoyment and
appreciation of the
sites and natural
resources for which
we are responsible are
important to us, and
we appreciate your
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department mission statement:

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



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PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES

FOREWORD

One of my responsibilities as editorial director of *Texas Parks and Wildlife* magazine is to occasionally step back and look at what we're doing. Are we on target? Are we both serving the readers and fulfilling the mission of the agency? Recently I reviewed several October issues of the magazine, beginning in 1950 and moving ahead for every decade, to see how this magazine has evolved.

What I found was that in the October 1950 issue — then called *Texas Game and Fish* — almost every element of the magazine was in place. What we now call the "Parting Shot" was in the front of the magazine, in black and white, and called "Picture of the Month." That issue had a fall hunting prediction and a feature on game wardens getting the latest two-way radios. For the wing shooters there were stories on hunting rails, stocking pheasants in the Panhandle and improving quail habitat. For the anglers there was a story on research on spotted sea trout, and short features on buffalo fish and tiger sharks.

The 1960 issue had a "how to" article of the kind that we now run in our department called "Skill Builder" and a new product review that would run in the department we now call "Field Test." In 1970 there was a West Texas parks feature and a story by J. Frank Dobie on the roadrunner. I think of Rick Bass, who writes for us from time to time, as our contemporary parallel to Dobie, another writer from Texas with a national reputation. The 1980 issue bears a beautiful cover shot of a nighthawk by Wyman Meinzer, whose brilliant photographs continue to appear in these pages. By 1990 the articles were longer, and the photography was running larger and in better color.

Details change, writers change, photographers change but the mission of the magazine seems never to have changed. We're about hunting and fishing and all kinds of wildlife, about parks and people and land management and water, and most of all we're writing about conservation, about saving the treasures of the Texas outdoors for this generation and generations to come.

When the magazine was created in 1942, the nation was embroiled in a world war. In the first issue, W.J. Tucker, executive secretary for the agency, wrote that when that war was ended, Texas men and women would need "the invigorating influence of the out-of-doors to cleanse their spirits and temper their character."

This belief in the healing and spiritual power of the outdoors continues to influence everything we do in this magazine. I hope it shines through for you.

Michael Benfield
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

LETTERS

TRINITY RIVER AUTHORITY

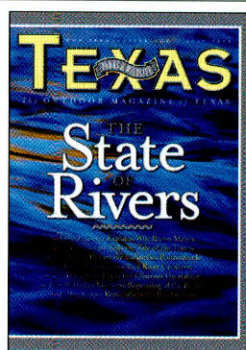
The author of the article in the July issue, "Contemplating the Trinity," has confused "twisted logic" with the simple truth. In the first

paragraph, Gary Cartwright notes that the river was described in the 1960s as "septic" by the U.S. Public Health Service for 100 miles below Dallas. There were no fish in the river at this time because they could not survive in a septic environment. The fact that there were fish present in the stream to be killed by a black rise in 1985 clearly demonstrated that the river was no longer septic. This was a direct result of improvements made to all major wastewater treatment systems in the DFW area during the 1970s. Today, there are game fish throughout the upper Trinity River basin, which is the result of

continuing improvements in wastewater treatment facilities.

The citizens of the metropolitan area are not "ignoring" the Trinity River. There are massive development plans going forward in both Dallas and Fort Worth. There are river-oriented parks developed and others being developed throughout the metroplex. More people are focusing on the upper Trinity for recreation every year. All of this is a direct result of improved water quality.

The "Black Rise" described in the article contained primarily decaying organic matter, mainly algae, and silt



I have seen the mouth of the (Rio Grande) where it flows into the Gulf of Mexico and was saddened to read that, in recent years, there have been times when it stopped flowing before reaching the gulf.

Lou Georgieff
San Antonio

MAIL CALL

from blackland prairie agricultural lands. When stirred from the bottom, the decaying organic matter caused a disastrous drop in dissolved oxygen, which in turn was the cause of the fish kill. The fish were not poisoned by pollutants. It should be noted that there has not been another major fish kill on the main stem of the river since 1985.

The Wallisville Saltwater Barrier was not stopped by environmentalists. It was delayed for decades but completed and dedicated in 1999. It is a structural solution to saltwater intrusion and it also features a navigation lock to facilitate barge traffic to the Port of Liberty. It has not damaged Galveston Bay and never will.

Gary Cartwright is a good writer, but he didn't let the facts get in the way of telling a good story.

JOHN JADROSICH
Trinity River Authority of Texas

PERSPECTIVE ON RIVERS

I just read the July issue and want to compliment you on the articles about rivers. Although I enjoy visiting rivers wherever I am, I especially

enjoyed the articles on the Guadalupe and the Rio Grande. I was born and raised in New Mexico and have seen the Rio Grande there in its full power. I have also seen the mouth of the river at Boca Chica, where it flows into the Gulf of Mexico, and I was saddened to read that, in recent years, there have been times when it stopped flowing before reaching the gulf. Your articles put the proper perspective on why rivers are so important in every part of Texas they flow through.

LOU GEORGIEFF
San Antonio

ODE TO THE COLORADO RIVER

The July issue of *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine was of great interest to me as I love rivers. I was born and grew up near the North San Gabriel River, northeast of Liberty Hill, Texas. There were many fish in the river when I was growing up.

I have always loved the Colorado because my parents made trips to the river, in the area of Smithwick, since my early childhood.

My uncle, Hugh Whitted, moved to

Hoover's Valley on the Colorado River in the early 1930s and lived near the Old Fort Mason crossing, about 2 miles below where Roy Inks dam was built to create Inks Lake. My Uncle Hugh was quite a fisherman and even caught large catfish with his hands. Of course that's not something we do any more. On overnight fishing trips we would sleep on the bank: On one of those trips, he taught me to swim when I was five or six years old.

I remember one time on a particularly dark night Uncle Hugh told us all the river would be rising. It had not rained where we were for a long time, so we didn't know how it could be possible. But big rains out west would take days to get where we were, and sure enough, the river came up that night.

After one storm in 1936, the river started rising and kept climbing up the long slope to Uncle Hugh's house. We were all standing out watching the water climb the banks, never thinking the river would make it as far as the house. Just then, a small airplane came down the river, the pilot saw us and circled the plane back and threw us a note that dropped



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nearby. I retrieved the note and it said, "Move out, the river will keep coming up." It did and washed the house away.

In 1938, after Buchanan Dam was finished, another flood filled the lake and the flood gates were not enough to keep the water from rushing over the dam. Even though it could be mean, I have so many wonderful memories of the Colorado River.

WILLIAM H. WHITTED
Kempner

CONCERN FOR THE BIG THICKET

The June article on the Big Thicket is nicely written and accompanied by beautiful photographs. There is one thing that readers should note. With the sale of more than 2 million acres of industrial forestland in East Texas over the last 2 years, the Big Thicket is in peril. These timber sales have removed a once familiar buffer to the preserve and opened it to multiple management practices,

fragmentation, and other non-compatible uses. This is a magnificent resource for Texas and a huge economic generator for East Texas. I would urge everyone to visit the Big Thicket and I would urge them to voice their support for the preservation of the Big Thicket to their elected officials, before it is too late.

ANDY JONES
Austin

CALLING ALL DRAGONFLIES

I enjoyed the information and photos of dragonflies in the articles by Cecilia Nasti and Robert Behrstock. A trick I have found to be very helpful for close observation is to purchase several of the 1/4 or 3/8" bamboo sticks found at most plant nurseries — four foot length is adequate. By placing these 5 to 6 feet apart in sunny, open areas in gardens, flower beds, along sidewalks or on pond edges, you will be amazed at the number of dragonflies that suddenly appear. They seem to use them just for "roosting" but frequently they will dart out for a second or two and snatch a gnat or other passing insect. For some reason they seem preoccupied while roosting and you can often observe them from the dorsal aspect for several minutes at just a foot or two distance. It is not unusual to see 3 or 4 species at one time just a few feet apart.

CURTIS REEMSNYDER
Fulton

BITTEN BY ALLIGATOR WEED

I was shocked by your May article "How to Build a Dragonfly Pond" by Cecelia Nasti. The article and the author recommend planting alligator weed to offer a resting place for dragonflies. You should know that alligator weed, *Alternanthera philoxeroides*, is on the federal government's and the state of Texas' list of noxious weed species. It is recognized as an invasive aquatic plant in other countries as well, including Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Indonesia, China and India. Not only should this plant never be planted in Texas, it should never leave its native home of Argentina where there are natural biological controls for it.

I am troubled that *Texas Parks & Wildlife*

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magazine would include this noxious weed in one of its articles.

JOHN SNYDER
Victoria

CECILIA NASTI REPLIES: *I certainly understand and appreciate your concern; in retrospect, I should have selected a different species to highlight for the article, such as the water snowflake (Nymphoides indica).*

I chose to mention alligator weed (Alternanthera philoxeroides) thinking that, when cultivated in a backyard pond environment, the plant could be easily controlled while providing the intended benefit to dragonflies and their nymphs.

Of course, with time to reflect, I realize that even the best laid plans can, and often do, go awry. Seeds and plant fragments could be carried to other locations by wildlife or by gusts of wind. Once there, they could take root, and ... well ... you know the rest.

Anyone who does have alligator weed in their ponds should be very careful about disposing of it. do not release it in local waters or flush it down the commode. Contact your local county extension service about the best way to divest yourself of the plant.

OLDER CAN BE BETTER

It was very interesting to read about the oldest man in camp (Mail Call, June 2004) In 1930, when I was 17 years old, one of my uncles and I travelled by passenger train to go on my first deer hunt in Kinney County. We were met at the depot in Spoford, Texas, by my three bachelor uncles.

The next morning, they gave me instructions on how to hang a deer and field dress it. This was very important because there was no refrigeration in those days.

Of course, we didn't sit in a deer blind by a deer feeder, we had to walk to hunt deer.

On the third day of the hunt, I bagged my first buck. I walked back to camp and then we had to hook up a pair of mules to a wagon to pick up the deer.

The next day, we boarded a train for home, and we shipped the deer by express.

In 74 years of hunting on the same ranch, I have only missed 2 years. We always enjoyed going to deer camp and visiting with our aunts and uncles who are now no longer with us.

Now our hunting party consists of our children and grandchildren. The ladies — including my wife, daughter and granddaughter — have also taken up hunting. We have a great time in camp.

Shortly after my 90th birthday, the day before Thanksgiving last season, I bagged a 10-point buck. I started out as the youngest in camp, and am now the oldest.

ROBERT MEISCHEN
Yorktown

BIRDING CONTEST ANSWERS

In your April 2004, there was a "Bird Identification Contest".

I have been unable to locate the answers to that contest. Bird number 11 has appeared in my back yard, and since it is one of the most beautiful birds I have ever seen, I sure would like to know its name.

Your help would be appreciated.

MILES RICKARD

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Your #11 bird is the painted bunting. We waited until this issue to announce the answers to the contest we presented in the April birding issue because the contest entries kept coming in the mail. Now, we've sent out all 300 of the Hummingbird Wheel prizes. And here are the correct answers:*

1. Scissor-tailed flycatcher
2. Great blue heron
3. Blue-winged teal
4. Anhinga
5. Red-winged blackbird
6. Great egret
7. American white pelican
8. Least bittern
9. Vermilion flycatcher
10. Ringed kingfisher
11. Painted bunting
12. Black-bellied whistling duck
13. Greater roadrunner

Sound off for "Mail Call!"

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SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

Buying Your Fishing License

Why Buy a Saltwater License When You Only Fish for Largemouth Bass?



New options for fishing licenses mean avid anglers can choose the license that is tailored for their special interests: freshwater, saltwater or both. Of course, the SuperCombo includes everything you need.

Fishing has become a specialized sport, and most avid anglers have become accustomed to targeting different fish with different tackle. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department thinks fishing licenses should be tailored as well. You wouldn't buy a bass spinnerbait to catch a red drum, for example, so why would you purchase a saltwater fishing license if you only fish for largemouth bass?

Beginning this fall, Texas anglers will have the option of picking the fishing license that matches their fishing preference: freshwater, saltwater or both.

When you go to buy a license, just keep in mind where and

when you plan on fishing. Hunting licenses haven't changed, but if you buy a combination hunting and fishing license, you'll have to specify your fishing preference.

The popular Super Combo, "one-stop shop" license package will still include everything you need to hunt and fish anywhere in Texas.

The reason for splitting up the fishing license is simple accounting. Coastal anglers shouldn't have to pay for a freshwater resource they don't use and vice versa for anglers who don't fish in salt water.

The TPWD Inland Fisheries Division needs a new fish hatchery. Since the 1970s, the agency has shut down a dozen aging and inefficient state fish hatcheries and now has only five, while the number of public reservoirs has skyrocketed during that time period.

To pay for a new fish hatchery in East Texas and to help buy fish for stocking, anglers who fish in fresh water will be required to buy a \$5 freshwater fishing stamp. A similar \$10 stamp required to fish in salt water has been in place for several years, and the money from that endorsement pays for coastal fisheries management.

The freshwater fishing stamp is not permanent. TPWD expects to raise enough money to pay for the new hatchery during the next 10 years, at which time the stamp fee will expire. Because the freshwater stamp will also help buy fish, the agency has dropped the trout stamp.

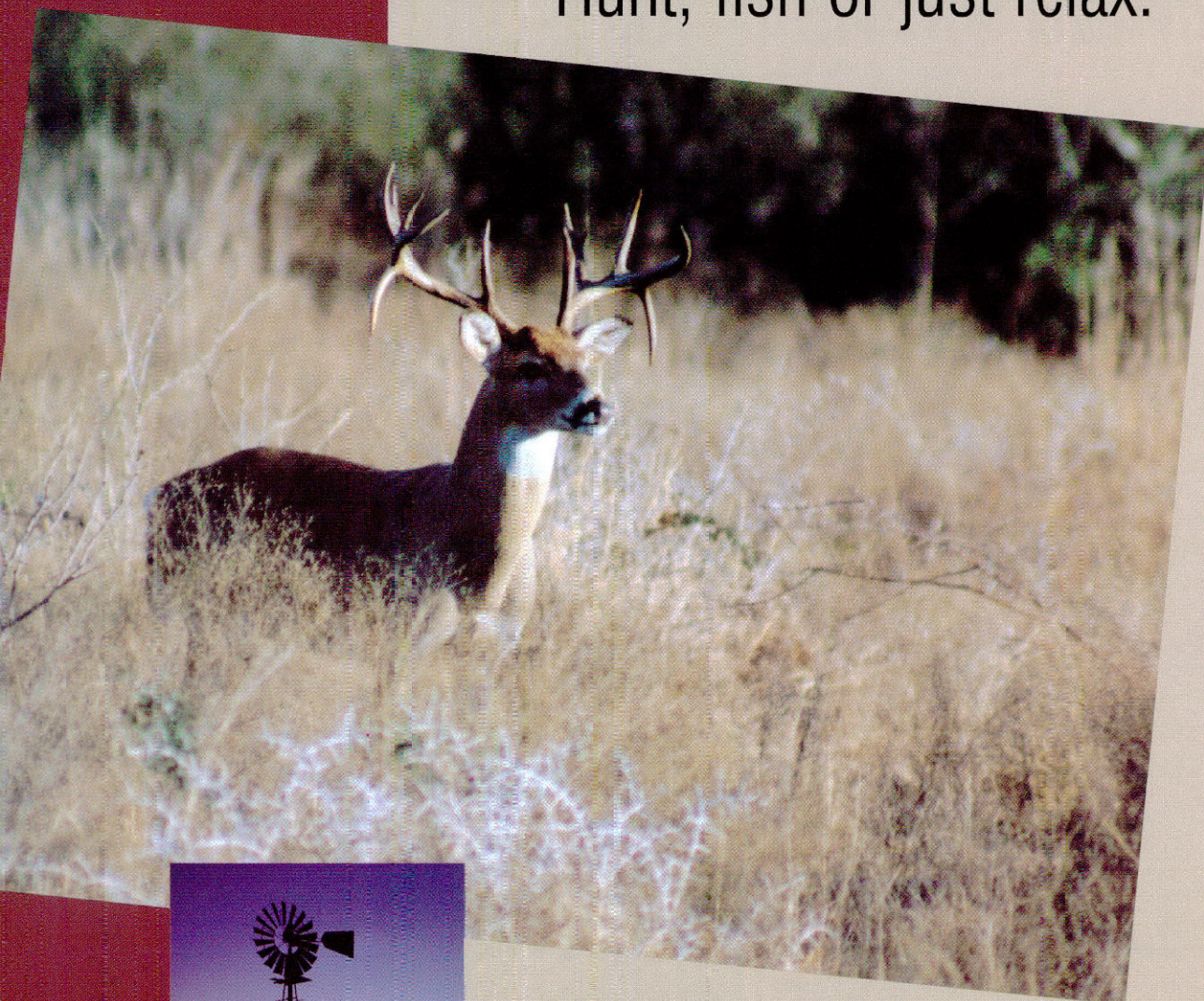
There are also other new license options.

Along with the freshwater stamp, TPWD created a new July/August summer license, a new single-day license and, for the first time in many years, a convenient "year from date of purchase" license that is good for 365 days from the date of purchase. Currently, all licenses expire each year on Aug. 31.

If you're only going fishing once this year, there's now a Day Plus license with an option to buy additional daily privileges at the time of purchase.

— Steve Lightfoot

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Kids Ride the Rails for a Song

Enjoy the Texas State Railroad's historic steam train excursion through East Texas.



Spend the day enjoying the scenery along the 50-mile round-trip journey between vintage depots at Rusk and Palestine.

Parents looking to offset higher gasoline prices and rising entertainment costs should consider taking their youngsters to ride the Texas State Railroad through the Pineywoods. The historic East Texas steam railroad has launched a "Kids Ride Free" summer promotion that runs through Labor Day weekend. Until Sept. 5, paying adults can treat children 12 years old and younger (as many as five per adult) to a free ride on the 123-year-old railroad, which is operated as a state park by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Passengers board steam trains at vintage train depots in Rusk and Palestine state parks for the 50-mile round-trip journey over 24 bridges through the hardwood creek bottoms. The trip takes 90 minutes to reach the opposite station, where visitors disembark to eat, browse the depot train stores and relax amid nature's splendor. Riders then re-board for the return trip.

Gift shops in the Rusk and Palestine train stations prove popular with train enthusiasts, who can choose from nostalgic items such as pocket watches and engineer caps or more modern collectibles such as locomotive mugs and custom magnets. Adults can keep the kids' hunger at bay during the stopover with sandwiches, drinks and baked goods from Palestine's Eilenberger's German bakery. Soft drinks, snacks and ice cream are available on the train as well.

Park Manager Robert Crossman says the Texas State Railroad's new promotion should prove especially popular with young fans of the Thomas the Tank Engine storybook character. "We offer a kid-friendly attraction that offers, weather permitting, a tour of the locomotive cab, where they can talk with the engineer, fireman and other members of the crew," Crossman says. "Most are in awe of the railroad experience, whether they are eight or 80."

For the second summer in a row, the railroad will be operating a climate-controlled passenger coach on both the eastbound and westbound trains, says Mark Price, the railroad's assistant superintendent.

Trains run Saturdays and Sundays until June when they will begin operating Thursdays through Sundays, and remain on a four-day schedule through the end of July. Regular train excursions revert to a weekend-only schedule in August and continue until the end of the season, Nov. 21. Trains depart both depots at 11 a.m., arriving back at their originating stations at 3:30 p.m.

Regular seating ticket prices for adults (persons 13 and older) are \$11 one-way and \$16 round-trip. Tickets for climate-controlled cars are \$15 one-way and \$22 round-trip for adults. Ticket offices open at 9 a.m. Reservations are recommended and can be made by calling (800) 442-8951 (Texas only) or (903) 683-2561.

Steam Engine Restoration Shop tours, murder mysteries, starlight excursions and other special events are held periodically throughout the year at the Texas State Railroad. Texas lawmakers last year designated the TSSR as the Official Railroad of Texas. It is the only steam railroad in the nation that runs two trains simultaneously each day of operation. One train, however, is being pulled by a 1947 diesel engine because of steam locomotive refurbishment projects currently under way.

—Rob McCorkle

Texas Plant Conservation Conference

Gain a global perspective on indigenous plants.

Want to know what the rarest plant in Texas is? Or which region of the state harbors the most and best plant diversity? Want to help prepare a plan to ensure that the native plants and their habitats that we see and enjoy today will be around for our grandchildren's grandchildren to enjoy? Then come to the Texas Plant Conservation Conference.

This annual meeting, in its fourth year, will be held September 15-17, 2004, in Austin at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. A global plant conservation perspective will be presented by Michael Way of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, England. Kathryn Kennedy of the Center for Plant Conservation at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis will give a U.S. perspective on native plants. State and local perspectives and the current state of plant conservation will also be covered. Additional talks on rare plant research and a panel discussion of botanical issues from East, South, North, Central and West Texas, will pro-



Learn about native plants, such as *Anthericum chand-lerii*, from international experts in September at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin.

vide background for a day-and-a-half-long session devoted to developing a Texas Plant Conservation Plan.

Organizers of the conference include the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Texas Department of Transportation and the Native Plant Society of Texas. Sponsors include Mercer Arboretum and Botanical Gardens in Phoenix. The cost of the conference, including registration and all materials, is \$35 for professionals, \$25 for students and volunteers and \$55 for the general public. The proceedings will be published and mailed to the attendees. For more information, or to register, contact Flo Oxley at 512/292-4200 ext. 160 or oxley@wildflower.org.

—Jackie Poole

TEXAS READER

Comanche Conflict

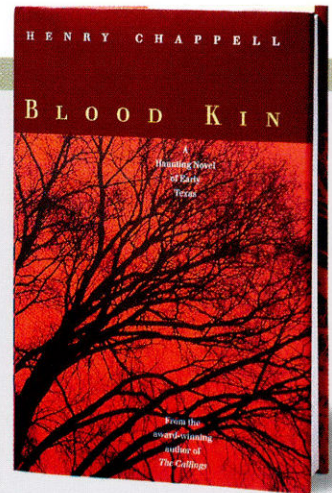
HENRY CHAPPELL IS WELL KNOWN TO READERS of this magazine as our hunting writer. But they might not know that Chappell is also a fine novelist. His first novel, *The Callings*, published in 2002, is a haunting and unsentimental treatment of the last encounters between the Comanches and a band of buffalo hunters in West Texas. Now he has gone further back in history to the time of the Texas Revolution to write *Blood Kin*, (Texas Tech University Press, 320 pages, \$27.95, cloth), about the origins of the destructive feud between the Comanches and the early Texas settlers of European descent.

The setting is Bastrop, and the young farmer at the center of the story, Isaac Webb, is summoned to war in the revolution and then to fight Comanches. He wants nothing more than to settle down with the woman he loves and to farm and hunt, but he discovers that he is good at war. That is not altogether a blessing.

Under Sam Houston's aegis, he is sent to live and treat with the Comanches, and discovers not only how different they are from him but also how much he has in common with them. While the story of Isaac Webb is fictional, the climactic episode of the novel is based on the 1840 "Council House Fight" in San Antonio. About 65 Penateka Comanche leaders and their followers came to negotiate a peace treaty and give up some captives. Enraged at the brutal treatment of some female captives, Texas soldiers killed about half of the contingent and held the rest hostage. The incident forever soured the Comanches on making peace with Texans.

It would be easy to sentimentalize either side of this conflict, but Chappell is well beyond sentiment. For his preface he cites the historian T.R. Fehrenbach in his book *Comanches: The Destruction of a People*: "History is brutal; only future peril lies in omitting or obscuring man's continuing brutalities." This is not to say that this is a bloodthirsty or a brutal book. It does what art demands: It makes us both think and feel.

—Michael Berryhill



ABOVE PHOTO: © J. M. POOLE; BOOK PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM

How to Use a Compass

By orienting a map with a compass, you can find your way out of the woods.

Getting lost may be the basis of some of the funniest campfire tales ever told, but anybody who has ever gotten turned around in the dark woods knows that there are not a lot of yuks to be had when you can't find your way home. In Texas, where treacherous terrain, poisonous snakes and quick-changing weather patterns are commonplace, an unplanned bivouac can have serious — even dire — consequences. Fortunately, the art of orienteering offers a better way to go.

Personal trainer Randall Watts and his partner, ex-Marine Adam Davilla, teach kids and adults the basics of orienteering, including map reading and compass skills, in the Austin area, sometimes conducting training sessions at Bastrop State Park. It takes about six months to attain navigational expertise, according to Watts, but the investment is worth the effort. "We teach people the woods are not a scary place to be," he says. "You can go much deeper into the woods and feel more confident when you are there, especially if 'What do I do if I get lost?' is not part of the equation."

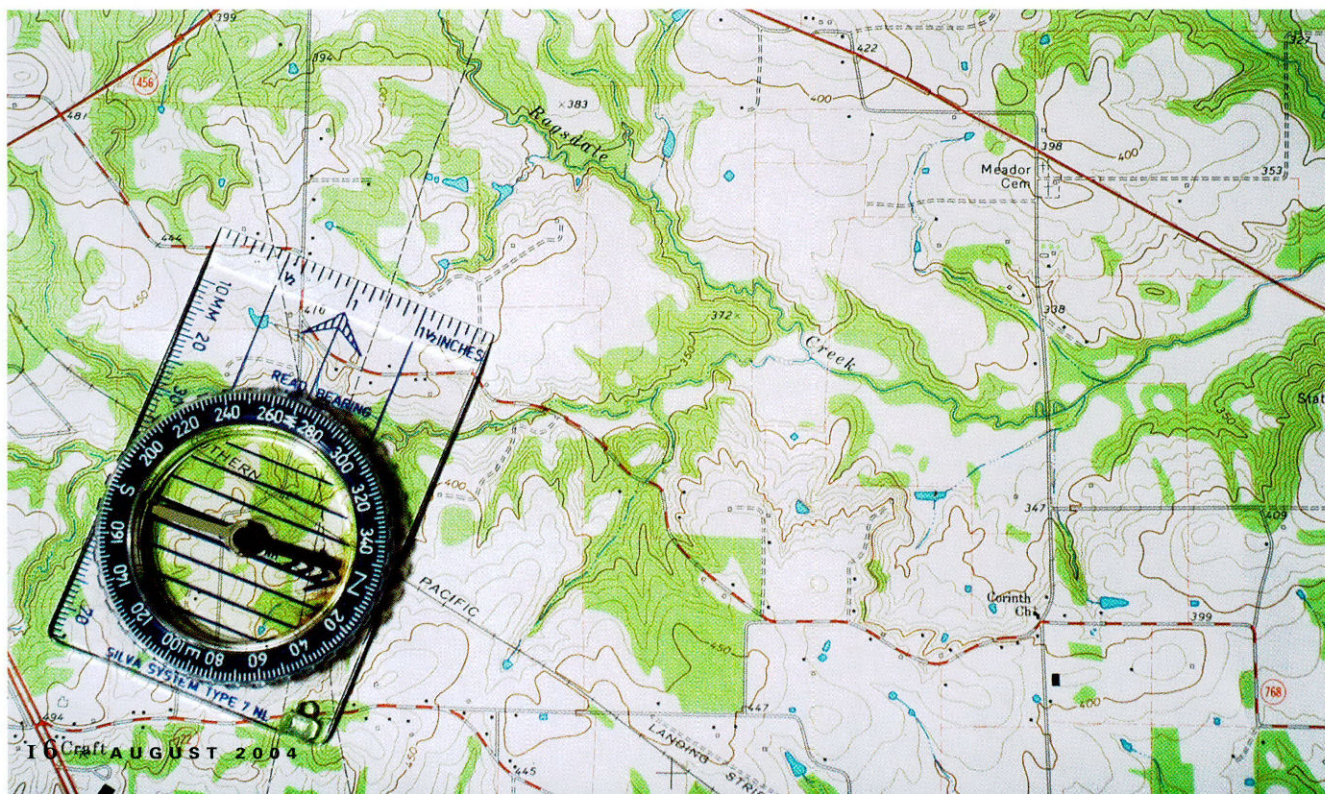
To start, you'll want a good compass. While most newfangled global positioning system (GPS) units have a built-in electronic compass, the problem with these devices can be summed up in two words: dead batteries. By contrast, an affordable orienteering compass will work no matter what the weather, terrain or power source. Look for one that incorporates a needle suspended in a non-freezing liquid, a static bearing or directional point marked on its base, a small ruler that allows you to scale map distances and a built-in protractor.

The other obvious tool for land navigation is an accurate map. If you're involved in adventure racing, hiking, mountain biking, treasure hunting or competitive, timed orienteering — navigating terrain according to specific waypoints — you'll want a topographic map that shows elevation contours over a given landscape. But it's worth noting that even an old highway map can do the trick if you're lost and need to determine which direction you should be walking, running, biking or boating.

Learning to use a compass and map together remains at the heart of land navigation. In short, orient the map to north by making sure the red arrow is pointing to the top of the map when the compass is set on the page. This will help determine which heading you want — toward camp, a main road, the next town — and then, using the sighting line (or direction-of-travel arrow) you should be able to chart a rough course. If no map is handy, you can "shoot the azimuth," or create a line of travel, by picking a direction on the compass and establishing an index with the dial, making sure that the red arrow remains within the outline of the orienteering arrow shown inside the compass rose. Once you establish a bearing, do not change the position of the dial and try to keep the red arrow in place.

When you learn the art of orienteering, you'll be ready to hike deeper into the woods and feel more confident about your ability to navigate the terrain when you're there.

Of course, the nuances of land navigation are many, so you'll want to practice plenty before your next big adventure. The other option is to be the laughingstock of the campfire — or maybe worse. ☆



Spincast Rods & Reels

There are some new advances to this first and favorite fishing gear.

The spincast rod and closed-face reel

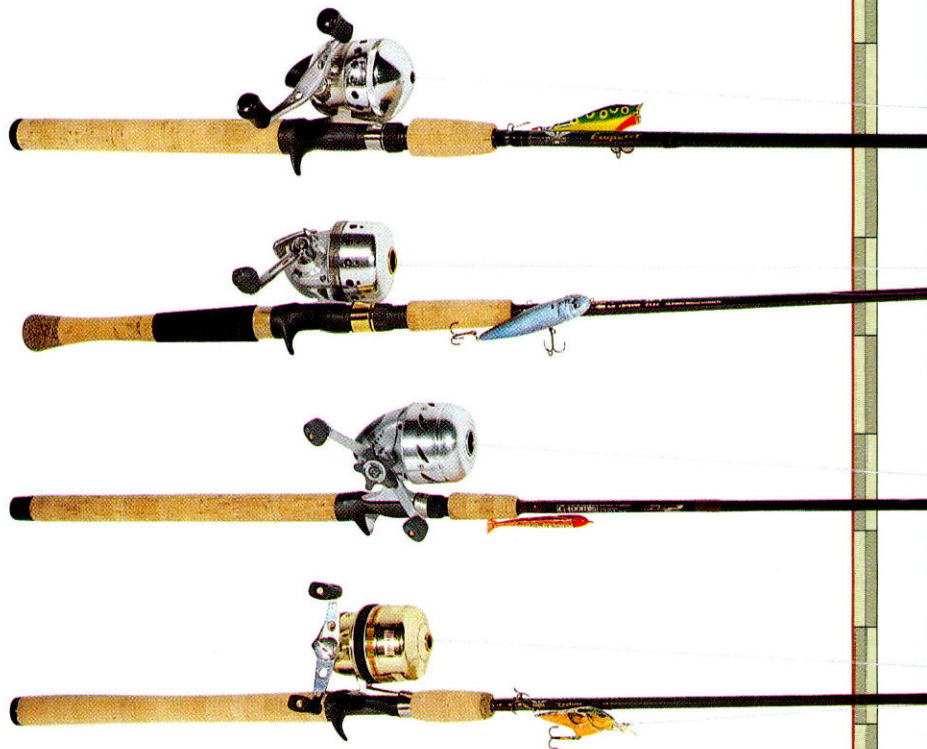
are almost everyone's first and favorite choice for foolproof casting. The perfect fishing cast is as easy as pushing a button when using these outfits.

The latest spincasting reels have anodized aluminum frames with stainless steel ball bearings, multiple pick-up line pins and smoother drags. Specialized trigger rods have more flexible tips, longer midsections and thicker butts to balance the casting action and fish-lifting capabilities. The trigger-finger grip design improves rod control and casting accuracy. The result is a combination of a simple-to-operate reel, a sensitive rod and hours of fishing without the hassle of backlashes, wind tangles and line twists.

A prime example is the new **Omega ZO3 Reel**, which is well constructed of thick, highly polished anodized aluminum. It has a smooth power transmission and silky retrieve. The three ceramic pick-up pins provide positive line capture and have carefully rolled edges to prevent abrasion. The compact size and small spool and orifice of this reel limit the line size to only 80 yards of 10-pound monofilament, but for most freshwater fishing, this is an excellent reel for a conventional 6 1/2-foot casting rod such as the **Fenwick Eagle GT**. (\$49.95, Omega ZO3 Reel, Zebco, (918) 836-5581, www.zebco.com. \$64.95, Fenwick Eagle GT Rod, #EGT66TM, Fenwick, (877) 336-7637, www.fenwickfishing.com)

The latest 7-foot **Airrus Co-Matrix 457 Rod** offers the most advanced design in filament-wound graphite materials with a cushioned, nonslip, foam grip in the cork handle. The rod butt is heavy-duty for lifting, with a medium mid-section and flexible, responsive tip. A match for this rod is the **Daiwa Silvercast 170 Reel**, which has a sturdy metal housing, smooth drag and enough line capacity for most freshwater and light saltwater fishing. (\$89.95, Airrus Rod, #AC701M, Airrus, (702) 395-2173, www.rodsbyairrus.com. \$22.95, Silvercast 170 Reel, Daiwa Corp., (562) 802-9589, www.daiwa.com)

Coastal fishing often requires a rod with extra length and backbone for longer casts and larger fish. The 9-foot, two-piece, fast-action **G. Loomis Trigger Rod**, combined with a star drag **Mitchell Spidercast Reel** and 30-pound test **Ghost Green Fusion Line**, will win the battle with most inshore species. Another excellent long rod-and-reel combination is



From top: Fenwick Eagle GT rod with Omega ZO3 Reel; Airrus Co-Matrix 457 rod with Daiwa Silvercast 170 Reel; G. Loomis Trigger Rod with Mitchell Spidercast SC400 Reel; Fenwick TechnaAV rod with Abu Garcia Abumatic 1076 reel.

the 8 1/2 foot **Fenwick TehnaAV Rod** paired with the **Abu Garcia Abumatic 1076 Reel**, spooled with the same Fusion line. This rig is smooth, light and responsive for lure or live-bait casting to redfish and trout in the bays and channels. (\$195, Trigger Rod, four color choices, Model: STR 1084C, G. Loomis, (800) 456-6647, www.gloomis.com. \$23.84, Spidercast Reel, Model: SC400W, Wal-Mart, (800) 925-6278, www.walmart.com. \$179.95, TechnaAV Rod, #AVC86MM-2, Fenwick. \$44.95, Abumatic Reel, Pure Fishing. \$8.99, 150 Yds. Ghost Green Fusion Line, Pure Fishing. (877) 777-3850. www.purefishing.com)

The secret to trouble-free spincasting is to always keep some resistance on the line during the retrieve so it will lie down level on the spool. When fighting a fish, do not constantly reel against the drag, because this causes loops from line-twist. With a strong fish, simply pump the rod to gain line on the down-swing. When reeling in loose line, hold the line between your fingers just forward of the reel to provide some resistance for smooth spooling and hours of fishing without a reel jam or backlash. ★

3 Days in the Field / By Michael Berryhill

DESTINATION: WIMBERLEY

TRAVEL TIME FROM :

AMARILLO – 10 hours / AUSTIN – 1 hour / BROWNSVILLE – 6 hours / DALLAS – 4.5 hours / EL PASO – 10 hours
HOUSTON – 3.5 hours / SAN ANTONIO – 1.5 hours

A Watery Way of Life

This Hill Country tourist village struggles to preserve its natural allure.

On the Blanco River just outside of the Village of Wimberley, I am sitting in the bow of a canoe while my fishing guide, Kelly Watson, is doing something that, in summer camp, they taught us never to do. He is standing up in the stern of the 14-foot canoe, occasionally pushing us ahead with a kayak paddle and looking for fish.

I am casting with one of his limber, short, ultra-light spinning rods loaded with braided, 2-pound test line. We are stalking bass, the native Guadalupe bass and the smallmouth bass, which have been stocked in Hill Country rivers since the early '70s, and hybrids of the two. Although the sky is overcast, we're wearing polarized sunglasses, essential for sight casting in the clear green water of the Blanco. It is January, and the water is cold, and the fish are typically lethargic this time of year and not inclined to strike. The odds are against us for catching anything, and if we do, we're going to release the fish anyway.

We are matching the hatch this afternoon, with a pale plas-

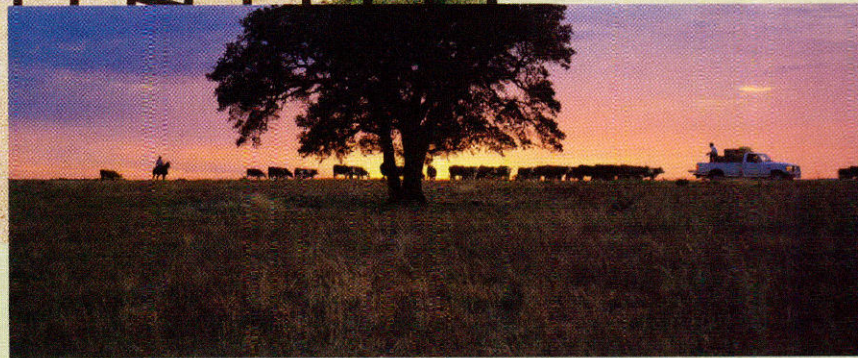
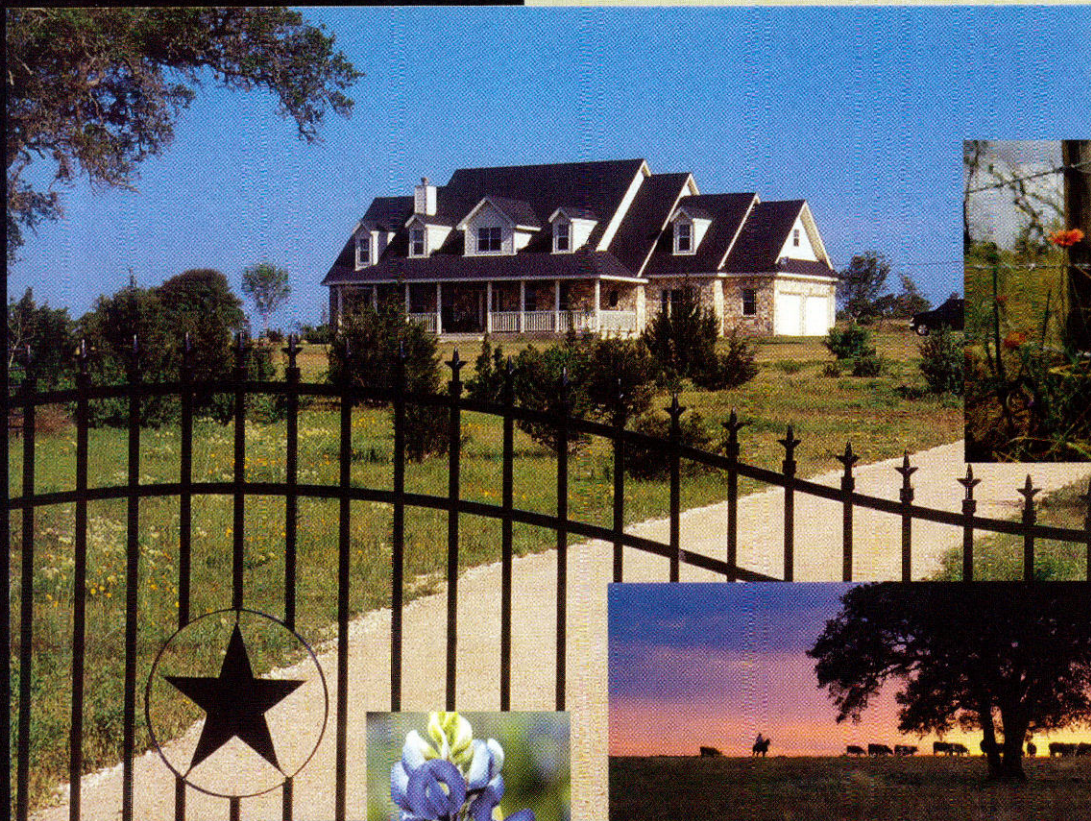
tic juvenile crawfish weighted with a split shot to add distance to the cast and help the lure sink quickly. Although we can see the fish, they can see us, too, so we keep our distance. Soon I'm learning to tell the difference between the bass and the other fish — smallmouth buffalo, a type of sucker — that swim by.

Watson points out a fish at 11 o'clock and for a change, I lay the plastic crawfish perfectly before it. Because he is standing up, Watson sees the strike coming before I feel it: The fish gapes and flares white. "Stick him!" he shouts, and I do. Then comes that peculiar moment in fishing when time seems to slow down. Because it has struck so hard, I'm sure I have this fish. How could I miss? And then Watson is urging, "Stick him again!" and I think, "Why?" I'm sure this fish is on, but I jerk

Fishing guide Kelly Watson sight casting for bass on the Blanco River near Wimberley.

the rod up again. There is a splash of water, and then the fish is gone, the fastest catch-and-release I've ever done.



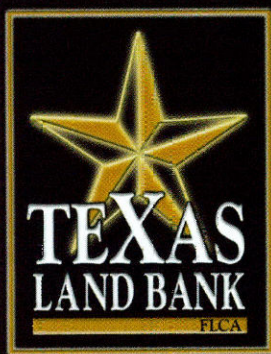


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PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BERRYHILL

The Lodge at Creekside offers quiet relaxation on Cypress Creek, top. Wimberley visitors refresh their spirits in the waters of Jacob's Well, above left, and the Blue Hole, above right.

The problem is that the crawfish is "Texas-rigged," with the point of the hook barely poking through the soft body of the lure. And then there is the limber rod, to which I am not accustomed. I might think I'm exerting 8

pounds of pressure when I'm only putting out two, Watson explains. Setting the hook has to be done emphatically.

We float the river a while, and then stalk the shallow rapids and rocks near a dam at the edge of the village. Fish will hide in the pools. Here you are sight-casting to habitat rather than fish, with the advantage that the fish can't hear you or see you. Watson is disappointed that

we don't take a fish, but I am delighted to have made the acquaintance of several. A line of Thoreau's ripples through my mind: "Many men go fishing all their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after." I'm just happy to be out on the river, learning something new. What could be better than this?

That night I stay in one of Wimberley's many bed and breakfasts, the Lodge at Creekside, run by Merry and Ashley Gibson and their daughter Sally. The word lodge is a little deceptive. Actually, the Gibsons have a series of small houses along Mill Race Lane on Cypress Creek. I particularly like one done in the frontier style of two log cabins with a breezeway between them, and a rustic willow bench on which to relax and admire the flowers blooming even in winter.

Mill Race Lane is not a fanciful name invented by a real estate developer. Remnants of a 19th-century mill race run along the side of the road. Hill

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Country river towns almost always got their economic starts from water. And water is still the economic engine that drives Wimberley. Situated in fast-growing Hays County between Austin and San Antonio, Wimberley faces a difficult problem: how to deal with a rapidly growing population and yet retain the water and slow pace of life that makes the area attractive.

On Saturday morning I meet with Malcolm Harris, a lawyer and civic leader who grew up at his parents' summer camp on the banks of Cypress Creek. Harris is chairman of the Wimberley Parks and Recreation Board, part of the Village of Wimberley, which was incorporated only 4 years ago. We take a walk along the recently created Cypress Creek Nature Trail, situated on 7.24 acres of floodplain along Cypress Creek, beginning at the bridge near Highway 12 and a couple of blocks from the visitors center. Local birders have been feeding, and I spot a male cardinal, a tufted titmouse and a kinglet. The only structure is a small rainwater catchment system using a corrugated metal roof and small tank. Such catchment systems may become common sights in the Hill Country. Brush barriers have also been built to slow the sheet flow of water from a supermarket parking lot and allow the rain to soak into the ground.

We walk upstream on the floodplain to one of the most famous swimming holes in Texas, the Blue Hole. It is one of those idyllic spots in the Hill Country, walled by a rocky bluff with overhanging trees, tall cypresses and deep pools in the creek for swimming. It's the kind of place where you want to picnic and swim and sit in the shade and do nothing all day.

But it was in danger of getting lost within a large residential subdivision of 380 homes and a hotel or condominium on the bluff. Thanks to the efforts of Wimberley civic leaders, the Blue Hole and 126 acres around it have been bought by a private landowner who is holding the land until the city can raise about \$2.75 million to buy it back in the next 2 years.

As we walk around the proposed park site, Harris talks about the village's vision of the future. Playing fields on the highest part of the park will be watered by efficient underground drip systems using sewage effluent from a badly needed new treatment facility. Through brush management, perhaps a dry creek bed running through the

park will have water again. As we walk around the grounds, I spot a roadrunner hunting by the edge of a clearing. Five deer watch us carefully and then bolt into the woods.

The next day I drive 5 miles upstream from the Blue Hole to Jacob's Well, a deep rock cave fed by a spring. No one knows exactly how the underground rivers of the Wimberley Valley feed Jacob's Well, but we do know that the well stopped running in 2000, and local conservationists fear that could happen again if the growing population of western Hays County continues to drill 200 to 400 wells a year. The self-appointed caretaker of Jacob's Well is David Baker, an artist turned conservationist who has gathered investors to preserve 170 acres around Jacob's Well. He also operates a small bed and breakfast near the spring called Dancing Waters Inn, a favored site for watching migratory neotropical birds, nesting golden-cheeked warblers and big hawk migrations.

The problem is that no one definitively understands how underground rivers in the area work, Baker says. He hopes to raise money to conduct dye studies of the water flows. The spring that emanates from Jacob's Well feeds Cypress Creek, which in turn feeds into the Blanco River, and from there affects Barton Creek in Austin. So what happens to Jacob's Well can affect people far from the source.

When I leave Wimberley that Sunday for the short drive to Austin, I take away memories of a charging fish in green water, tall cypresses on the banks of the streams and a sense of a Hill Country town that is being led by conservationists. I have a bottle of olive oil and another of good white wine from the Bella Vista Ranch outside of town, billed as "a little taste of Tuscany." But what lingers the longest is the thought of all that precious water that keeps the fish and the charming tourist village alive. Can people love it, live in it and preserve it, all at the same time? I hope so. ☆

FOR MORE INFORMATION

visit www.vil.wimberley.tx.us, or call the Village of Wimberley City Hall at (512) 847-0025.

For information about Wimberley-area bed & breakfast lodging, visit www.wimberleyonline.com/listing.mv?type=Lodging&catg=cabin or www.bbonline.com/tx/wimberley.html.

For information about the Blue Hole, contact Wimberley Mayor Steve Klepfer at (512) 847-0025



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A PECULIAR VIRTUE IN WILDLIFE ETHICS IS THAT THE HUNTER ORDINARILY HAS NO GALLERY TO APPLAUD OR DISAPPROVE OF HIS CONDUCT. WHATEVER HIS ACTS, THEY ARE DICTATED BY HIS OWN CONSCIENCE, RATHER THAN BY A MOB OF ONLOOKERS. IT IS DIFFICULT TO EXAGGERATE THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS FACT.

— ALDO LEOPOLD



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Annual Public Hunting Permits

Beginning in 1987, the Annual Public Hunting Permit system for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has provided hunters access to almost 1.2 million acres of land for hunting, fishing, camping and other outdoor related activities on TPWD-owned or leased lands. Many areas are open year-round for authorized activities. These lands also include the popular dove and small game leases. Youth under 17 may access and use these lands free when accompanied by a permitted adult.

The \$48 Annual Public Hunting Permits are available wherever hunting and fishing licenses are sold. Permit holders receive a *Public Hunting Lands Map Booklet* and supplementary booklet entitled *Public Dove Hunting Areas and Other Small Game Leases*, which lists available areas, facilities, rules and activity schedules.

ANTICIPATING THE HUNT | >



THE TRUE TROPHY HUNTER IS A SELF-DISCIPLINED PERFECTIONIST SEEKING A SINGLE ANIMAL, THE ANCIENT PATRIARCH WELL PAST HIS PRIME THAT IS OFTEN AN OUTCAST FROM HIS OWN KIND ... IF SUCCESSFUL, HE WILL ENSHRINE THE TROPHY IN A PLACE OF HONOR. THIS IS A MORE NOBLE AND FITTING END THAN DYING ON SOME LOST AND LONELY LEDGE WHERE THE SCAVENGERS WILL PICK HIS BONES, AND HIS MAGNIFICENT HORNS WILL WEATHER AWAY AND BE LOST FOREVER.

— ELGIN GATES



TOP & OPPOSITE PHOTOS © GRADY ALLEN; LOWER LEFT PHOTO © DAVID USAMS.COM

Hunt Drawing

Since 1954, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has conducted annual drawings to award special permits for high-quality, supervised hunts. Each year drawings are held for hunts on wildlife management areas, state parks and private lands leased by TPWD. These hunts include white-tailed and mule deer, pronghorn, turkey, exotics, feral hogs and alligator. Application fees are \$3 per adult for most drawn hunts, but a few guided and private lands hunts have a \$10 application fee. Selected applicants are awarded a 1- to 4-day hunt and assessed a \$75 to \$125 special permit fee for each adult.

Approximately 600 of these permits are issued for youth-only hunts. Youth applicants must be 8 to 16 years of age and can apply and hunt free. Deadlines for application in the drawn hunts are staggered from early August (alligator) to September (deer) to December (spring turkey). A free copy of the Application for Drawings on Public Hunting Lands may be picked up at TPWD offices, by calling (800) 792-1112 (menu 5), or sending an e-mail to hunt@tpwd.state.tx.us. Application information is also available on the TPWD Hunting Page at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/public_hunt.

Big Time Texas Hunts

If you've ever watched one of those hunting shows on television and imagined yourself experiencing a guided hunt, then the Big Time Texas Hunts is your ticket. Premium hunt packages, top-notch professional guide service, food, lodging and on-site transportation are standard amenities for a Big Time Texas Hunt winner. Entries for these drawings are \$10 each. TPWD offers seven hunt packages:





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Texas Grand Slam: One winner experiences a series of four separate hunts for desert bighorn sheep, white-tailed deer, mule deer, and pronghorn antelope.

Texas Exotic Safari: Two winners get to hunt their choice of an African plains antelope species.

Texas Whitetail Bonanza: Ten winners receive a high-quality 3-to 5-day white-tailed deer hunt.

Texas Premium Buck Hunt: One winner gets the chance to hunt trophy white-tailed deer.

Texas Waterfowl Adventure: One winner receives a series of Panhandle and Coastal Prairie goose hunts and East Texas and Coastal duck hunts.

Texas Big Time Bird Hunt: Quality quail, pheasant, dove and turkey hunts in some of the best places Texas has to offer.

Texas Gator Hunt: A rare chance for a 3-day alligator hunt on a state wildlife management area.

Entries are \$10 each, and you may purchase as many entries as you wish. Contest rules, regulations and entry forms are available on the TPWD Hunting page at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/btth. You can purchase your Big Time Texas Hunt entries whenever you pick up your new fishing or hunting license. Deadline to enter is midnight, Saturday, Nov. 6, 2004.

For information on all the public hunting opportunities offered through the TPWD Public Hunting Program, visit our web site or call (800) 792-1112, menu 5, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m to 5:00 p.m.

—Kelly Edmiston

THE SPORTSMAN LIVES HIS LIFE VICARIOUSLY. FOR HE SECRETLY YEARNS TO HAVE LIVED BEFORE, IN A SIMPLER TIME, A TIME WHEN HIS LOVE FOR THE LAND, WATER, FISH AND WILDLIFE WOULD BE MORE THAN JUST PART OF HIS LIFE, IT WOULD BE HIS STATE OF MIND.

—JIM SLINSKY





Otherwise, they must take and pass the course if they wish to hunt alone.

The deferral now grants that same privilege to adult hunters for an extended period of time, primarily to accommodate those who: **1) are taking up the activity at a late age, 2) have been out of hunting for a while, 3) are home on leave, such as military personnel, 4) are home during the holidays, such as college students, or 5) are from out-of-state and do not have similar requirements in their jurisdiction or country.** In every case, an adult hunter licensed in Texas who has completed hunter education or was born before Sept. 2, 1971, must accompany a hunter with a deferral and must be within normal voice control.

“Although we offer the course throughout the year, there are times during the holidays when only a select number of courses may be available and that’s typically the time of year when most people have an opportunity to go hunting,” says Steve Hall, TPWD hunter education coordinator. “This temporary deferral will give folks time to enroll at a later date and still take advantage of an opportunity to go hunting.”

The first mandatory hunter education requirement was passed in New York in 1949. Today, every state has such a requirement and accepts Texas certification reciprocally. Created as a safety effort, hunter education has reduced hunting accidents by more than 50 percent in most states, including Texas. In recent years, additional courses focus on hunter ethics and responsibility, the reduction of wounding losses and outdoor survival and preparedness. These hunter education programs are

WE APPRECIATE THE RAIN, WE APPRECIATE THE SUN, WE APPRECIATE THE DEER WE TOOK. SORRY IF WE MESS UP ANYTHING. YOU’VE GONE TO A LOT OF TROUBLE, AND WE’LL TRY TO BE GOOD GUESTS.

— BARBARA KINGSOLVER

Learning in the Field

Taking a practical and innovative step to make hunting more accessible, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission recently approved a plan that allows the deferral of hunter education certification requirements for up to 1 year.

The new Hunter Education Deferral, which takes effect Sept. 1, allows a person 17 years of age or older who has not completed a hunter education program to defer completion until Aug. 31 of the year the deferral is purchased. The deferral costs \$10 and may only be obtained only one time by the licensee. A person who has been convicted or has received deferred adjudication for violation of the mandatory hunter education requirement is prohibited from purchasing the deferral. Hunters who complete the course before the deferral’s expiration receive a \$5 discount off the course fee of \$10.

The hunter education effort began as a voluntary program in Texas in 1972 and as a mandatory program in 1988, requiring hunters born on or after Sept. 2, 1971, to pass the course. Under Texas legislation, those under 17 years of age can hunt if accompanied by a person who is 17 or over, is licensed to hunt in Texas, and who has passed the hunter education course or is exempt (born before Sept. 2, 1971), and is within normal voice control.

among the success stories of state fish and wildlife agencies and of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service’s Federal Assistance in Wildlife Restoration program, a “user pay—user benefits” system. Hunters pay for hunter education through state fees and federal excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition.

Texas certifies more than 33,000 hunters annually through more than 4,000 hunter education courses offered across the state, with at least one offered in each of the state’s 254 counties. The course consists of a minimum of 10 hours of classroom instruction and hands-on activities during a minimum period of 2 days. The classroom objectives can alternatively be taken through home study or online, followed by a one-day, hands-on outdoors session. Most courses are taught by volunteer instructors, trained and certified by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department hunter education staff. To date, more than 650,000 people have been certified in Texas.

The hunter education course offers a tool for the parent or mentor to use to assist a person in his or her development and maturity as a hunter. It also provides the means to introduce responsible use of the outdoors, shooting sports, firearm safety, promote landowner relations, compliance with game laws and help reduce violations.

— Terry Erwin



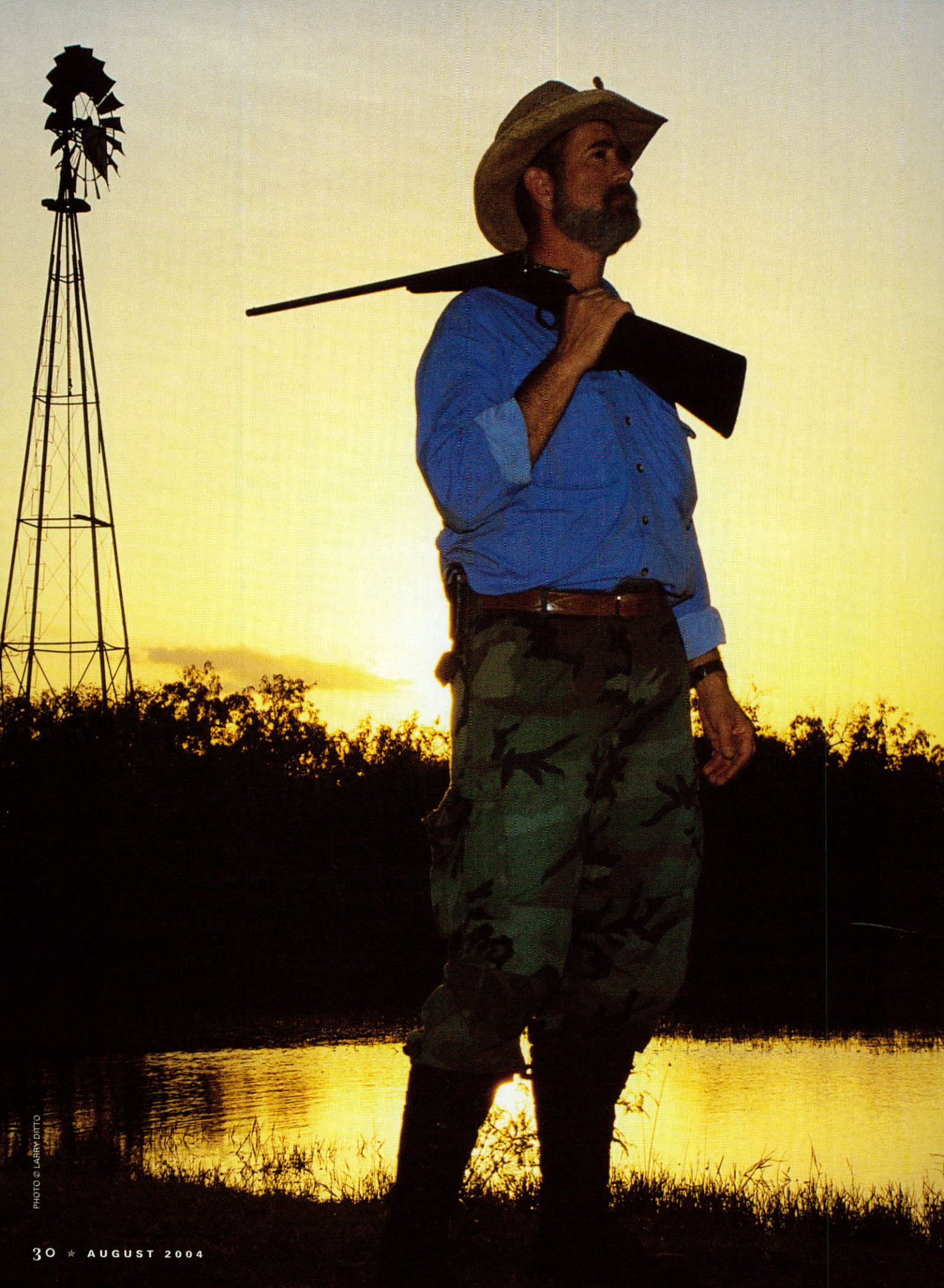


PHOTO © LARRY DITTO



I found Maggie's confidence

in me touching, but her reasoning was badly flawed. My 8-month-old German shorthaired pointer had deduced that since the boss's first two shots of the day had each produced a dove to be snatched up and paraded about, then every shot dropped a bird. Now she was out of sight in a patch of dried sunflower stalks 40 yards away, searching for a dove that was well on its way to Mexico after evading two loads of No. 8 shot. I could hear her furious snuffling above the rustling stalks. I gave up trying to call her with the whistle and resorted to threats. She broke out of the brittle cover, tongue lolling, her dark liver face covered with grass seeds and tiny, pale violet petals of awlleaf aster, and looked at me as if to say, "What are you hollering about?"

I pulled a leash from my game bag and went after her. Striding through the rank, knee-high cover, I considered our location (far South Texas), the time of day (mid-morning), the temperature (low 80s), and the likelihood of stepping on a rattlesnake (too high for comfort). I dragged Maggie to the shade of a mesquite tree, where she took her water lying on her heaving side.

This was my first South Texas hunting trip. The day before, I had driven 9 hours from the Dallas area to Hidalgo County in the Rio Grande Valley. Rolling through the Brush Country south of San Antonio, I understood why biologists were predicting a great 2003-2004 quail and deer season. The early November pastures still held a vernal lushness after ample spring and summer rain. I rolled down the windows when I entered the Valley at sundown. The warmth and sub-

TEMPERATURE'S RISING

A HUNTING WRITER AND HIS DOG MAKE
THEIR FIRST SOUTH TEXAS DOVE HUNT.

BY HENRY CHAPPELL

tropical scent of fruit groves, mesquite, crop fields and luxuriant grass gave me the sensation of having driven back into late summer.

I arrived with no preparation other than a quick phone call to Las Palomas WMA manager Steve Benn, who suggested that I concentrate on areas with plenty of brush, where I might find mourning doves loafing during the warmer hours of the day. A lone hunter would have sparse shooting in large, open pastures and grain fields with no other hunters to keep the birds flying. Naturally, Benn reported that hunting had been excellent a few weeks ago, but most of the birds seemed to have moved out of the area. I comforted myself by noting the possibility of late-season reinforcements from the north, and that if all else failed, quail season was open.

Next morning, I pulled into a big, brush-lined pasture, part of the 600-acre Taormina Unit of Las Palomas WMA, just south of the little town of Donna. The

power lines were empty of birds, except for one distant avian figure that I eyed hopefully for several seconds before it fluttered in the unmistakable manner of a kestrel.

I studied my prospective hunting ground. TPWD had disked dozens of strips through the tall weeds and brush, creating alternating rows of relatively open ground and thick, weedy strips. From the truck, I could see sunflower, croton and ragweed in the disked rows. Feeling better, I filled a couple of water bottles and let Maggie out of her box. She flew out of the truck before I could lower the tailgate. As an afterthought, I put together my 20-gauge over-under, and we went for a walk.

There's nothing like a long road trip into new country for teaching a young hunting dog lessons that can only be learned through experience. For instance, one gets only 5 minutes at roadside rest stops — not enough time to sniff every blade of grass before performing essential tasks. In motel rooms, we don't drink from the ice bucket, and the boss prefers not to share his pillow. Also, it's poor form to rear up beneath the curtains to woof at people in the parking lot.

Of slightly more importance is the positive association of gunfire with birds. Fortunately, at the Taormina Unit, the

cash register.

Mourning doves breed in all 10 Texas ecological regions, and every region receives migrating doves. Yet South Texas — the Brush Country and the Rio Grande Valley — has long held nearly mythical status among hunters. While South Texas is nearly as famous for high-dollar leases as for great hunting, doves remain affordable and available to even the most cost-conscious hunter. Moderately-priced day and season leases are available throughout the region; prices of \$75 to \$100 per day are common. A polite call to the chamber of commerce in most small towns will yield day lease contacts. However, a lease isn't a necessity. In addition to the various units that make up the 5,600-acre Las Palomas WMA, TPWD offers some 15,000 acres of public dove hunting areas in South Texas. These are mostly small agricultural areas made available through the TPWD public hunting program. In the Brush Country, the 15,200-acre Chaparral WMA, in LaSalle and Dimmit counties, offers superb hunting depending on the rainfall and weather. Of course, most South Texas deer and quail leases offer good dove hunting as well.

Although mourning doves make up the bulk of the region's annual harvest, South Texas may be best known for its white-

winged dove hunting. In the days when white-winged doves were at their population peaks, before the early 1980s, as many as 40,000 hunters — many of them from out of state — would greet the opening of the season. But severe freezes in 1983 and 1989, and a horrific drought in between, reduced both the white-winged population and hunter interest. According to TPWD migratory game bird program leader Jay Roberson, only about 20,000 hunters have shown up for white-winged hunts in recent years.

Historically, white-winged doves were confined to far southern Texas, south of the Nueces River. But during the past two decades, white-winged doves have spread northward. The birds are now fairly common as far north as Kansas and seem to be continuing their northward expansion. Biologists suspect the birds are responding to habitat changes, both in their historic home range and in territory to the north. The rub for hunters is that in Texas, especially outside of the Rio Grande Valley, white-winged doves have become primarily urban birds. San Antonio and Austin boast tremendous populations. "The overall health of the white-winged population in Texas and the United States is better than it ever has been," says Roberson. "But in terms of their historic range,

they've never really recovered."

Nevertheless, white-winged dove hunting in the Valley remains good because of habitat conservation and restoration.



brush along the ditches and field edges held doves. A few flushed within shotgun range. By the time I pulled her away from her search for the missed dove, Maggie was bird- and gun-crazy. Pointing-dog purists might cringe at the thought of a young dog chasing flushed doves, but like most suburban pups, Maggie needed a break from her daily regimen of digging up sprinkler heads and uprooting backyard landscaping. Besides, we had several hundred acres to ourselves, and I enjoyed her company.

We picked up a few more birds before noon, and on the way back to the truck, the largest bobcat I had ever seen ambled across the pasture only 60 yards away. Maggie lifted her nose, but fortunately her instincts (and my hoarse warnings) told her this wasn't the neighbor's housecat.

An hour later, waiting on a cheeseburger in a diner in Weslaco, I finally studied a map of the area and tried to ignore the 6-foot diamondback rattlesnake hide on the wall above the

MOURNING DOVES BREED IN ALL 10 TEXAS ECOLOGICAL REGIONS, AND EVERY REGION RECEIVES MIGRATING DOVES. YET SOUTH TEXAS — THE BRUSH COUNTRY AND THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY — HAS LONG HELD NEARLY MYTHICAL STATUS AMONG HUNTERS.



PHOTO © GREGORY AULIN

“Overall, I can say that white-wing numbers seem to be relatively steady in recent years,” Steve Benn says. “A focus at Las Palomas has been to restore native habitat. On one hand, we’re providing breeding and roosting habitat, and on the other, we’re trying to maintain some of the old farm fields we’ve purchased as feeding areas for the birds.”

White-winged doves migrate early. Although the general South Texas dove season typically opens the third Saturday in September, several early-September hunt dates in the Rio Grande Valley — which is designated a Special White-winged Dove Area — allow hunters into the field before the birds head south.

When it comes to mourning doves in South Texas, only one thing is certain: In any given season, the hunting will be good somewhere, sometime. “In the 2002 season, hunters took about 8,000 doves on the Chaparral WMA,” says David Synatzske, manager of the area. “In 2003, hunters harvested only a few hundred birds. But there was good hunting just south of San Antonio.” The difference? Rainfall. Unlike bobwhite quail hunting, dove hunting in the Brush Country usually is best during drought years. In 2002, South Texas suffered a severe drought through early summer. To the north,

Maggie and I finished our first day in the Valley three doves shy of a limit. We earned every bird. Late that afternoon, she pointed in a thick stand of ragweed along one of the disked strips. I waded in and flushed a covey of bobwhites. As my young bird dog bolted away to retrieve her first quail, I decided my timing was pretty good after all.

Next morning, we worked our way northeast into Cameron County, slowly building a limit of mourning doves and picking up a few bobwhites as we tried the various small Las Palomas units. It was sweaty, buggy, satisfying hunting.

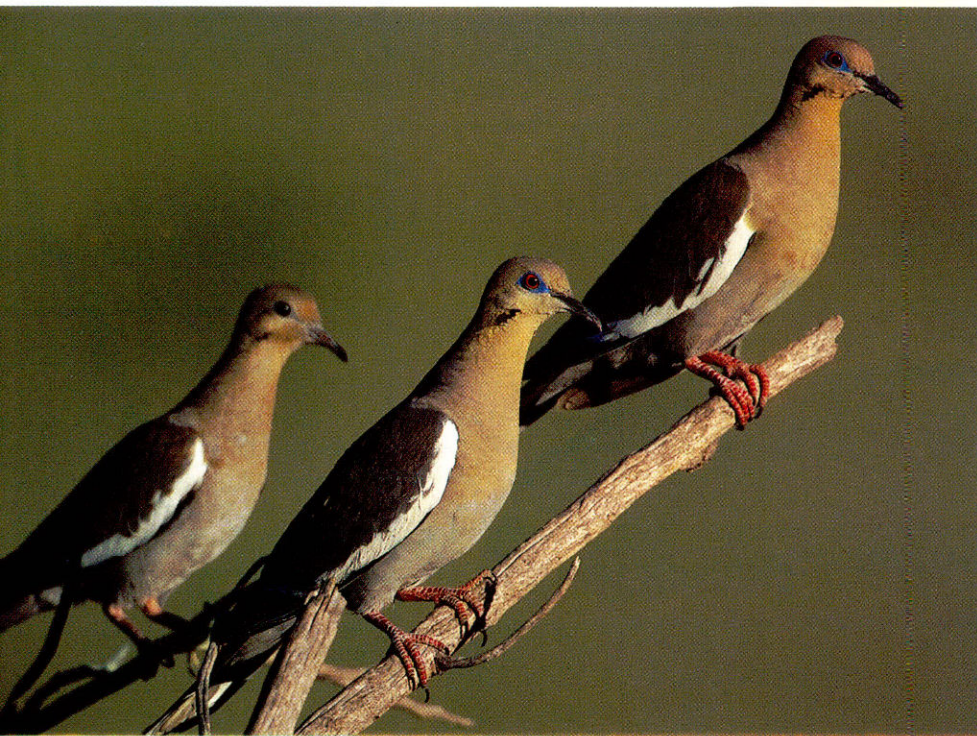
WHITE-WINGED
DOVE HUNTING
IN THE VALLEY
REMAINS GOOD
BECAUSE OF
HABITAT CON-
SERVATION AND
RESTORATION.

In a tiny diner in Rio Hondo, the proprietress served me a late lunch of chicken fajitas, then popped *The Jungle Book* into the VCR. While Shere Khan terrorized an elephant caravan, I tried in vain to remember what sort of urgent business had kept me out of the South Texas dove fields back in September.

Mid-afternoon, at the Arroyo Colorado Unit in far northern Cameron County, I sat on the dog box in the bed of my pickup and watched the occasional mourning dove fly into a huge maize field. Maggie reared up on the tailgate and whined at a pair of scissor-tailed flycatchers fluttering about a power line. A sharp wind brought welcome relief from the gnats and mosquitoes. I had plenty of doves in the cooler. My shotgun was stowed in its case behind the seat. I could feel the season winding down.

Two camo-clad hunters sat on stools out in the maize. After a while they walked over to pet Maggie and say hello. Both men were locals taking advantage of their retirement. They apologized for the lack of birds in their country, assuring me they’d been melting their barrels until a few days ago, and urged me to come back next year.

We wished each other luck. I drove away, and they carried their stools and shotguns back into the field. As I pulled onto the highway, I returned their final wave and hoped I’d see them next September. ☆



grain crops either failed or weren’t planted. Then the drought broke. Between July and December, much of South Texas received between 20 and 40 inches of rain. The rough pastureland responded by producing a bumper crop of seed-producing forbs such as sunflower, croton and ragweed.

“The Chap just turned to croton, and the doves poured in,” Synatzske says. “Nearly everyone took home a limit.”

But in 2003, residual moisture in the soil and timely summer rains brought on healthy grain crops to the north, and migrating doves took advantage by stopping over for most of the season, leaving the Chaparral and the rest of the Brush Country with only resident birds and a few migrants.

To consistently get into birds, thoroughly scout promising areas, hunt early in the season, and keep tabs on the birds by frequent scouting or by checking with local sources.

Or you can show up for the last two days of the season with high hopes, plenty of shells and a half-trained pup.

The Ins and Outs of Doves

Each of Texas’ three species of native doves has specific hunting regulations. All white-winged dove hunters must purchase and carry a white-winged dove stamp.

In addition to mourning doves and white-winged doves, hunters may take the white-tipped or white-fronted dove. The Eurasian collared dove — an exotic whose numbers are growing in Texas [see April 2004 issue, “New Dove in Texas”] — may also be taken. However, the Inca dove and ground dove, both smaller than game doves, are protected. Both are common in South Texas.

For tips on dove identification, go to:

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/edu/hunted/doves.phtml

For complete details on regulations and public hunting opportunities, contact the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (800) 792-1112 or www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

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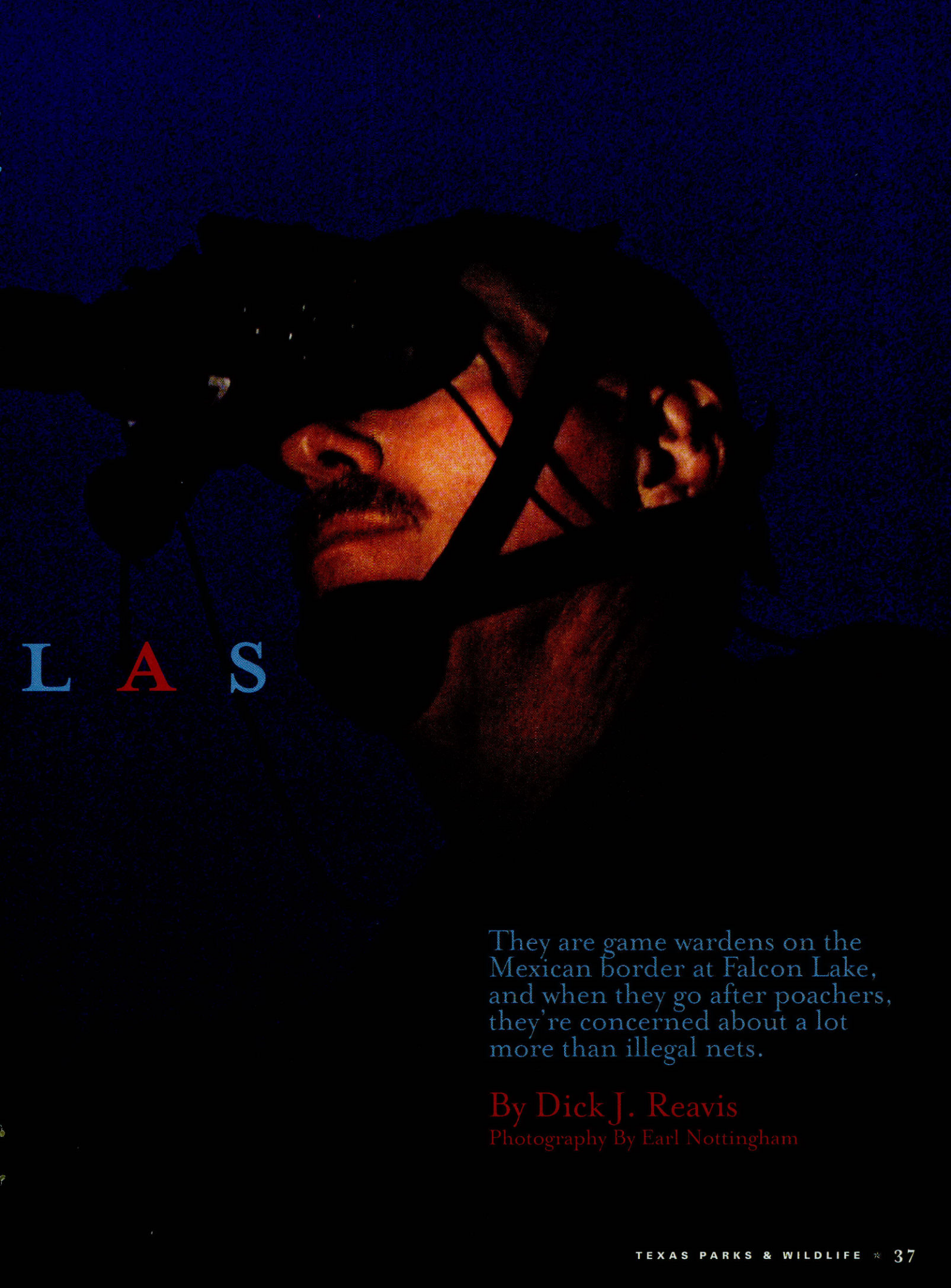
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LOS PADIL

PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM



L A S

They are game wardens on the Mexican border at Falcon Lake, and when they go after poachers, they're concerned about a lot more than illegal nets.

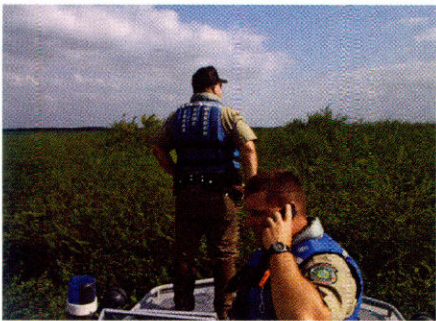
By Dick J. Reavis
Photography By Earl Nottingham



PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM



ABOUT 5 O’CLOCK ON A MONDAY AFTERNOON IN APRIL, A HALF-DOZEN VINTAGE, TRI-HULL MONARCHS WITH 200 HORSEPOWER MOTORS — STURDY WORK BOATS — BEGIN THEIR DESCENTS INTO THE WATERS OF FALCON LAKE, WHICH STRADDLES THE MEXICAN BORDER BETWEEN LAREDO AND MCALEN. THEIR OPERATORS, TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT GAME WARDENS, INTEND TO REACH THEIR “SETS,” OR SURVEILLANCE STATIONS, WITHOUT BEING SPOTTED BY LOOKOUTS ON THE MEXICAN BANK, SOME 2 MILES AWAY. AS THE BOATS MOVE OUT OF THEIR LAUNCH COVES, THEY KEEP TO THE AMERICAN SHORELINE, SEEKING CONCEALMENT BETWEEN THE TOPS OF TREES AND SHRUBS — HUISACHE, RETAMA AND MESQUITE — WHOSE TRUNKS ARE SUBMERGED BENEATH THE SURFACE. THE LAKE’S LEVEL HAS BEEN RISING WITH EACH PASSING STORM. SOME OF THE TREES ARE FRESHLY IN BLOOM.



SPECIAL OPS ON FALCON LAKE: GAME WARDENS TAKE ON MUCH MORE THAN GAME-LAW AFFAIRS. THEY HAVE BECOME DRUG LAW ENFORCERS — SOLDIER-SAILORS IN A WAR THAT HAS NO RULES OF ENGAGEMENT AND KNOWS NO END.

The game wardens

keep their motors at low speeds, careful not to create white water, which is visible from afar. Within 30 minutes, all of them have reached their destinations. Rather than dropping anchor, the crews tie on to still-leafy branches.

From posts atop bluffs on the north bank, two wardens, spotters, scan the water and shorelines. One of them has the assistance of a Border Patrol agent and his “Snoopy truck,” as the men call it, a vehicle loaded with high-tech surveillance devices. When the sun goes down, the lawmen’s radios begin to crackle with tantalizing coded messages.

“Hotel 9 on the Mike side, running white water,” one of the transmissions says, citing the location of a suspect boat.

The dozen men upon the water are mostly game wardens, some accompanied by men from the Border Patrol’s Special Response — or SWAT — Team, because the effort that’s underway, called Operation Pescador, or Fisherman, is not simply a game-law affair.

CARP AND COCAINE

During the past 6 years, wardens at Falcon Lake — officially known as International Falcon Reservoir — have confiscated more than 150 boats and their motors, arrested more than 250 suspects and destroyed a quarter-million feet of gill net.

But in doing so, they’ve had to confront a duty that most of them didn’t anticipate back when they were studying biology or wildlife management: They’ve become drug law enforcers, soldier-sailors in a war that has no rules of engagement and knows no end.

Eliseo Padilla of Zapata, 56, is the mentor of the group. Retired in 2002 after nearly 30 years on Falcon Lake, over time he became so legendary that Mexican commercial fishermen in the area refer to all game wardens by his name: “Los Padillas,” they call them.

Padilla still comes around to aid his successors, and to size up their challenge, which he describes with unblinking candor:

TPWD PHOTOS

"The commercial fishermen and the drug-runners are one and the same," he declares. "The purpose of the fishermen today is just to provide a legality, a legal covering."

Drug seizures on fishing boats back up his assessment. During the past 6 years, game wardens at Falcon Lake have confiscated more than 25 tons of marijuana and 200 kilos of cocaine.

The behavior of the fishermen that the game wardens have taken into custody on purely game-law charges seems to support the charge as well. Fishermen, even commercial fishermen, lead economically precarious lives in Mexico, yet the men don't complain about the punishments they face.

Netting is a Class C misdemeanor, penalized with fines of \$250 to \$500. Mexicans accused of netting usually plead guilty, then sit out their fines in the Zapata county jail, discharging their penalties at a rate of \$50 a day; most are free within a week.

Jail time is less a hazard than the loss of their rigs, worth \$2,000 to \$5,000, when the costs of boats, motors and nets are summed. But even a loss of that magnitude rarely inspires a cross word.

Photos of netters in custody show them joking and gesturing, carrying on as if at a backyard fiesta.

"You'll arrest two of them, and they'll tell you, 'Hey, you better go catch so-and-so and so-and-so.' And they'll tell you where they are, too. When you catch the others, those in the first group cheer. It's like they don't want to go to jail alone," says Marshall Davidson, 24, a Zapata-based warden.

The conclusion that game wardens draw is that most of the fishermen are front men, straw men, maybe even decoys: Somebody else, probably a smuggler, is covering their losses.

The apparent alliance between the fishermen and drug-run-

ners has, during the past 10 years, redefined the job that Falcon-area game wardens do. It has turned every attempt to halt and inspect a boat into a possible shooting scene, every chase into an armed pursuit. The wardens, already trained as lawmen, have had to master military techniques as well.

Despite the blazing skies of the border country, the Falcon Lake wardens now wear bulletproof vests: "Better hot than shot," they say. After sundown, they peer through night-vision goggles that they've borrowed from their better-equipped federal colleagues. While on duty at Falcon, every warden carries a .40-caliber Glock, and on every boat there's a game-warden-issue Mini-14, a rifle that's not necessarily a match for the modern weapons that drug lords love. And in this wireless age, it's anybody's guess which side, outlaw or law enforcement, calls on the greater arsenal of cell phones.

When the game wardens at Falcon surprise a Mexican netting crew, they don't know whether they'll find carp or cocaine, pocket knives or pistols.

Sometimes they find all of those things.

And sometimes, they find only boats and nets, or maybe those things and a blanket or two.

THEY WERE A BURR-HEADED AND ELECTRIC LOT, WITH WIRES AND MICROPHONES HANGING FROM THEIR EPAULETS.

BARBECUE AND BINOCULARS

Operation Pescador, staged in late April, began with a Monday meeting at a ranch near the lake. Just after noon, 13 game wardens in khaki uniforms, two plainclothes customs agents and three border patrol agents in camouflage fatigues, got together in a garage on the privately-owned spread. They were a burr-headed and electric lot, with wires and microphones hanging from their epaulets. With saddles, tires, chain saws and welding tanks as witnesses, they mapped, for one last time, a plan of action.

IN THE PAST 6 YEARS, GAME WARDENS AT FALCON LAKE HAVE CONFISCATED MORE THAN 150 BOATS, DESTROYED 250,000 FEET OF GILL NET, ARRESTED MORE THAN 250 SUSPECTS AND SEIZED 200 KILOS OF COCAINE AND 25 TONS OF MARIJUANA.



TPWD PHOTOS

They deliberated in metal folding chairs around a long table laden with barbecue. Some of them had come in the night before and taken bunks in an adjoining room whose sole virtue was air-conditioning. During the morning hours of a workday that would last past midnight, the early arrivals had prepared grub for them all. Bacon-wrapped jalapenos stuffed with cheese were the trademark delicacy of the operation, whose pre- and post-action meetings, during the course of four days, resembled campfires at a late-season deer camp more than meetings of any board.

As the men reviewed their written orders, nervous or distracted, they toyed with knives, flashlights, binoculars, the tools of their trade, and opened, closed and stirred the ice chests that would supply them with sandwiches and soft drinks during the long nights ahead.

Several men grumbled that on cloudy, moonless nights, like the one awaiting them, their borrowed night-vision goggles would be needed more than ever, but would be of very little use, because where there's no light, the goggles don't help much. On the water, when one can't see much, they said, one hears things that only long experience can make sense of: the rhythm of oil pumps, the rumble of unlighted vehicles, and the wafting snatches of laughter and conversation.

Most of the men at the barbecue table had met before the operation began, but only a few were neighbors. Three wardens are assigned to Zapata County, where most of Falcon Lake lies. Supervisory and line personnel alike had been drawn from further reaches. Captain Chris Huff, 58, a short, graying Laredo native who learned his military skills in Vietnam, commanded the mission. He came from Hebbbronville, 130 miles away in Jim Hogg County, which has no lakes for wardens to supervise. Others came from McMullen, Webb and Atascosa counties, pulled away from their usual warm-weather chores.

Most of the men had taken part in a four-day hunt for Falcon netters two weeks before, an operation whose success — six suspects, five boats and some 10,000 feet of net — gave them hope on that Monday. Some of them had also helped seize a couple of tons of marijuana in an operation the year before.

Their mood was optimistic, though it would turn doubtful before Operation Pescador was done.

The men said no departure prayers as they left the meeting, perhaps because they've grown accustomed to uncertainty and peril. But Huff's parting words to the group were chilling: "Don't be shooting at anybody unless they be shooting at us."

AN INTERNATIONAL BORDER

Policing Falcon Lake, for either gill nets or dope, is, for diplomatic and logistical reasons, not a simple affair. Not only is the Lake expansive — 120 square miles in size — and rising, but it also straddles an international boundary. Mexican laws and Mexican authorities govern the south side of the lake, Texas laws and American authorities, the opposite half.

The problem is that the two sides meet under water, and there can't be a white line running down the middle of a lakebed. Instead, the boundary is suggested by a series of small towers, planted about a mile apart along the center point of the Rio Grande's channel. Lawmen reckon the boundary by eyeball, lining up the boats they see with an imaginary line between the markers. When they can see the markers, that is.

"They used to be lighted by batteries, but commercial fishermen need batteries, too," quips Huff.

At night, the towers are sometimes dark profiles against a lighter sky, and sometimes it takes minutes to spot them.

Game wardens at Falcon are not authorized to pursue suspects across the line. If a chase starts on the north side of the boundary, they can't tail their subjects into Mexico, nor make an arrest

NIGHT VISION: ONCE ILLEGAL BOATS CROSS INTO AMERICAN WATERS, WARDENS PREVENT AN ESCAPE BY SHINING SPOTLIGHTS INTO THE SUSPECTS' EYES. EVEN SO, CHANCES OF APPREHENDING THE SUSPECTS ARE 50/50.





ILL-GOTTEN GAIN: GAME WARDENS CONCLUDE THAT MOST GILL NETTERS WORKING THE BORDER WATERS OF FALCON LAKE ARE FRONT MEN OR DECOYS FOR OTHERS, PROBABLY SMUGGLERS, WHO WILL COVER ALL LOSSES.

on the Mexican bank. This forces them to lie in wait until boats cross into American waters, and usually, until they halt in a Texas-side cove. When — and if — that happens, the flotilla gathers at the mouth of the cove, its boats ready to foil any exit by shining spotlights into the suspects' eyes.

But even when they have their suspects bottled up, the chances of apprehending them are 50/50 at best. Treetops, brush and miles of mesquite-studded ranchland aid getaways.

The wardens praise their sturdy Monarchs, but the boats that the commercial fishermen use, made by Argos, a Mexican manufacturer, are nearly as narrow as a canoe.

"They can slither into those treetops and in the darkness, it gets hard to find them," complains Martin Oviedo, 32, one of the Zapata-based wardens.

Texas law allows TPWD agents to confiscate boats used in illegal fishing operations, and seizures are common. But once suspects realize that they're surrounded, they usually beach, abandon their craft, and take off in a run.

"Once they hit that brush, they're gone," says Huff, who has worked the lake for 29 years.

AN AQUATIC STAKEOUT

On that April Monday, shortly before sundown, a call comes over the wardens' radio network. The spotters see a watercraft and a warden from his post on the lake notes that, "It sounds like a dude boat to me." A "dude boat," in the argot of the wardens, is a sport-fishing craft, and at Falcon, pleasure craft appear mainly on weekends. The lake is notorious for a dearth of game fish, which some anglers blame on the netters. Other messages say that four people are aboard, too many for an ordinary netting expedition.

The suspicion of the wardens is aroused by the dude boat.

During the past few years, smugglers have begun using speedy bass boats for what lawmen call "heat runs"— reconnaissance missions. When they spot what they take to be a heat run, the wardens usually keep to their stations, hoping that their presence won't be detected.

The dude boat that the flotilla puts under watch goes upriver and then beaches at a spot more than a half-mile from the nearest warden. Three of its occupants disappear into the brush onshore. Then its pilot turns and speeds back into Mexico. No one drops a net, nobody is seen unloading bundles, no vehicle is standing in wait. The flotilla's boats keep near the banks.

"Maybe he was just dropping off some guys who work on a ranch," somebody comments by radio.

Entering the United States across Falcon Lake is not legal, even for citizens, but on the border, informal crossings are an old and enduring custom. The men of Operation Pescador don't want to tip their hands for the sake of an offense that, in the region's courts, might not appear offensive in the least.

The sky turns black and the wind gains speed, creating waves almost like those of the Gulf. The wardens say that Mexican commercial fishermen do go netting in choppy water, even on moonless nights, but none are seen or heard.

The chief tools of "the commercials," as the wardens call them, are indiscriminate gill and hoop nets — both illegal in Texas. Their catch consists mostly of rough fish, carp and tilapia, whose retail market is limited on the northern bank. But those species are stewed and fried in Mexico, and even if they weren't, fishermen might still venture onto the lake because some are either lookouts or decoys for drug smugglers, or smugglers themselves.

Hours pass. Nobody is seen, nothing is heard. Midnight comes, and still the radio remains silent. About 1 a.m., Huff

calls the effort to a close. The wardens, still keeping their motors at low speeds, slip back into their coves and their pickups. Using only dim running lights, they lumber back to the bunkhouse in which most will pass the rest of the night.

Tuesday the team returns to the lake, for a similarly uneventful experience, concluded at 3 a.m. On Wednesday it's the same, and Huff, sensing disappointment in his ranks, ends the operation at 11 p.m. Before turning in, the men compare speculations. Most believe that Operation Pescador has been detected. The ranch that is their staging ground has civilian guards at its gates, and oil company trucks work the area every day until sundown. Somebody has a cell phone and a brother-in-law among the fishermen, somehow there has been a tip-off, they believe.

Even Captain Huff has lost his confidence.

"It's like a cat and mouse game," he muses. "Our surveillance gets better, and then their intelligence gets better. Right now, I think that their intelligence must be better than it was."

But he doesn't lose his determination. Skeptical, sleepy, a little unkempt and by now, tired of bunkhouse life and longing for home, on Thursday the men of Operation Pescador return to their coves to repeat their daylight-sneak routine. Then they wait, as they have waited for three nights.

On Monday and Tuesday, as they passed the hours, the wardens chatted quietly about mutual friends, family members and food. By Wednesday, some were talking shop, trading agency gossip, even discussing the apparent and looming futility of their mission. On Thursday, there wasn't much talk. Everybody was simply pooped.

And bored.

Bored, that is, between about 10 p.m. and midnight.

Early in the evening, the wardens on the south end of the night's operation, whose area spanned 6 miles of water, spied a boat with four occupants. It passed a marker and then suddenly turned in the opposite direction and came to a stop, apparently in response to another boat, near another marker, whose two crewmen were waving oars — a signal of some kind. The occupants of the two boats chatted for a few minutes, then drifted southward as night fell. A few minutes later, both of them, Huff believed, "boogied to the Mexican side," though he admits that in the darkness, one of the boats may have slipped unseen to the American shore.

Not long afterwards, game wardens Bubba Shelton, 47, and David Murray, 40, both of Tilden, found a net strung beneath

the waters. They tied up nearby, keeping their eyes peeled. Nobody came to tend it. The wardens didn't know whether its owners were hidden in the cove or on the Mexican side of the lake. They waited.

But nothing happened. For hours.

Then Zapata's Oviedo, on duty as a spotter atop the dam, which lies at the south or downriver end of the lake, saw a boat slide past.

"It was idling as quiet as could be, about midnight," he recalls.

He informed the others by radio, but the boat slipped between treetops near the shore and was lost from sight.

The flotilla began closing in. Shelton and Murray cruised along the shore of their cove, looking for the netters for nearly an hour. They didn't see any boat or anybody.

About 1 a.m., Captain Huff, who had been spotting, came to the cove on foot. He probed the shoreline for what seemed to be an eternity, and finally stumbled onto a boat — freshly abandoned.

Nothing had been heard or seen in the other cove some two hours later when Huff set off to find the boat that Oviedo had glimpsed before it vanished into the night. But before he reached it, warden Davidson came upon the craft in his Monarch. Its occupants had taken to the brush, too.

The interlopers had made their getaways, but they'd left behind a 16-foot and an 18-foot craft, along with nets, motors and gasoline rigs.

The crew of one of the boats had also run off without their sleeping gear — a couple of cotton blankets. Apparently, they too, had planned on waiting until near-sunup. What's not known is whether they were waiting on fish to fill their net, or for smugglers to make contact.

When the second boat was recovered, Huff called it a day, ending the search that had brought his flotilla to Falcon.

Operation Pescador had not been a striking success, but it hadn't failed: Stakeout jobs often end with such mixed results, any lawman knows. The wardens and their federal colleagues had prevented the netters from profiting for a night — and most likely, had nicked their dope-dealing backers for thousands of dollars in replacement costs.

They had done something else as well, and the blankets showed it. Though it wasn't important in the greater scheme of things, because of their own exhaustion, it loomed large in the game wardens' minds: By staying on the water until the wee hours, they had deprived their elusive prey of some badly needed sleep. ☆

THE WARDENS AND THEIR FEDERAL COLLEAGUES HAD PREVENTED THE NETTERS FROM PROFITING FOR A NIGHT.

FALCON LAKE GETS BIG DOSE OF FISH AND WATER

The locals recall the "good old days" at Falcon Lake and back it up with yellowed Polaroids of large stringers of fish on tackle-shop walls. For 2 years running during the mid '90s, this massive, 98,000-acre reservoir was ranked by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department as the best bass tournament lake in Texas, better than Lake Fork or Sam Rayburn or Toledo Bend.

By 1997, in the midst of what turned out to be a 10-year drought, Falcon's reputation and water level had dropped rapidly. In the summer of 2002, this once mighty impoundment was sitting 54 feet below normal pool level and covered only 13,000 acres. Even if you wanted to go fishing on Falcon, chances were slim you'd be able to access the water at all, since most of the boat ramps were high and dry.

In June 2003, Falcon was still down 45 feet. Then rains came, and by May 2004, Falcon had gained 40,000 surface acres of new water and close to 32 feet of depth. The recovery brings new hope for anglers and predictions by state fisheries biologists that Falcon will reclaim its glory days.

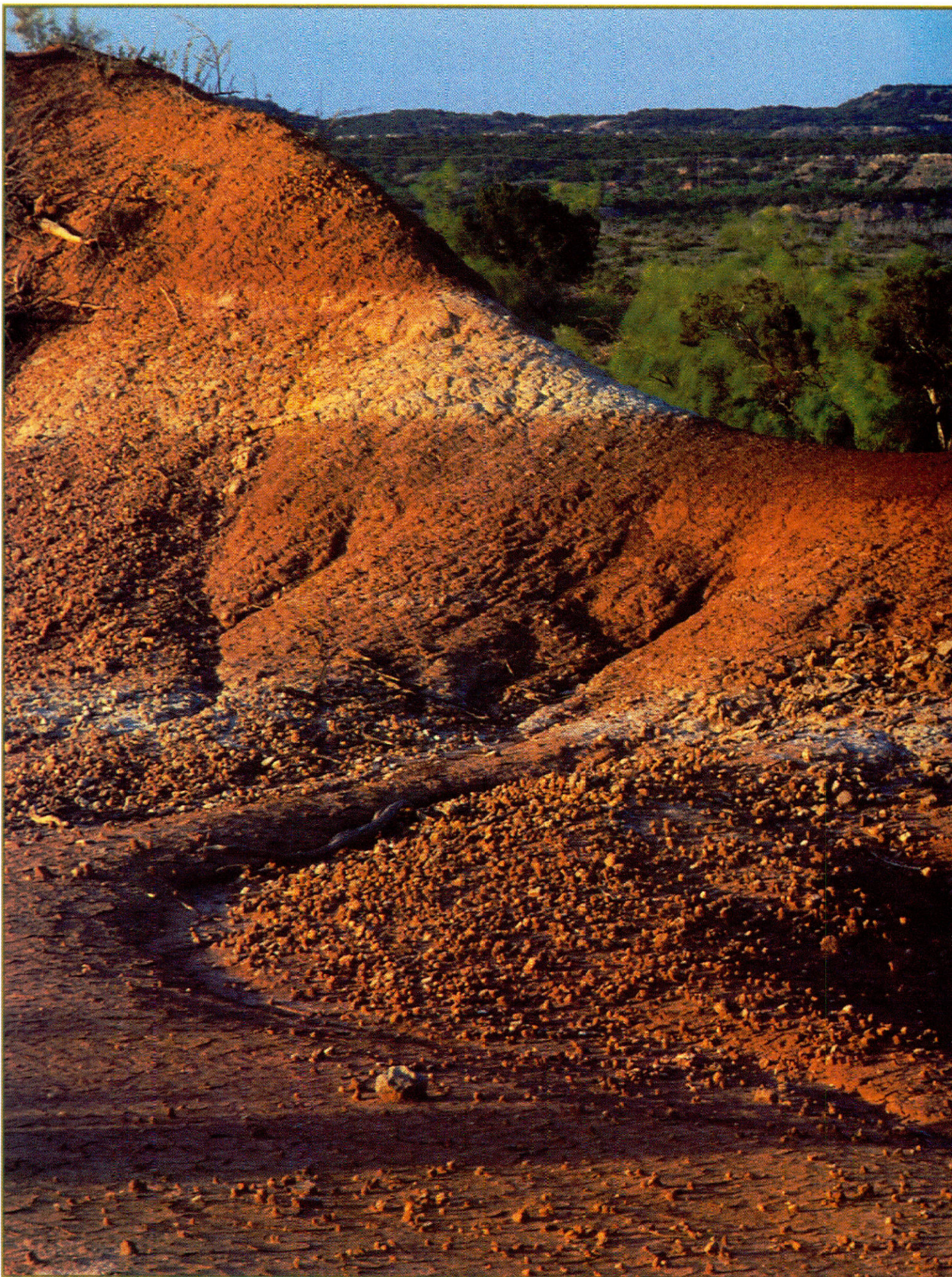
"While the lake was down we saw all kinds of plant regrowth along the shoreline, and when the water increased, that created new habitat," says Jimmy Dean, TPWD's fisheries biologist for Falcon Lake. "It's creating, in essence, a new lake."

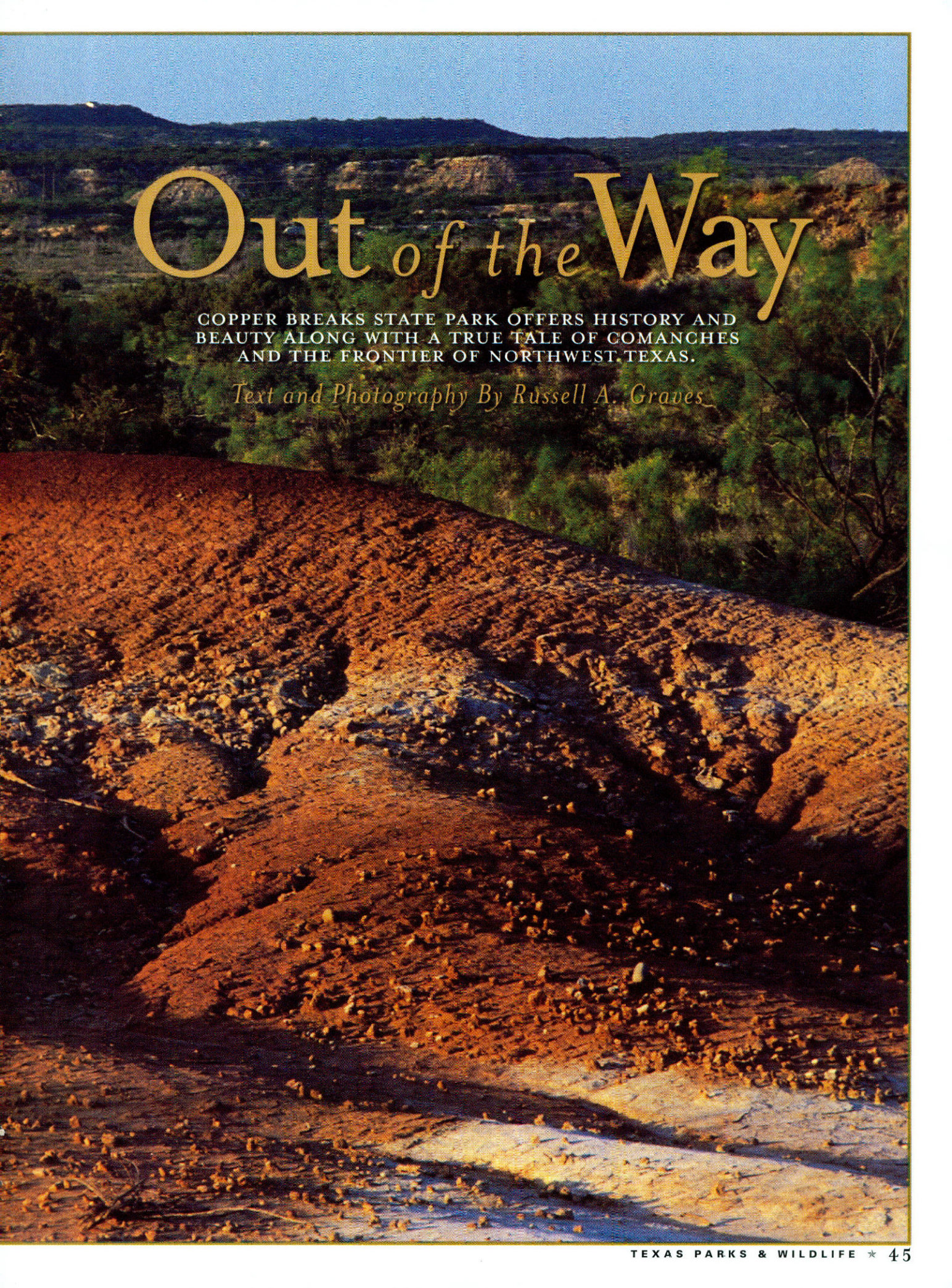
Dean noted the lake has always been a healthy and productive fishery and the rise has come at a time that would benefit natural spawning, but TPWD is also providing a jump start to fish populations with a major stocking effort this year.

Biologists have transplanted crappie, white bass, bluegill and blue catfish, but the primary focus has been on largemouth bass. Dean predicts anglers will see an immediate impact on the bass fishery from this year's stockings of more than 500,000 Florida-strain largemouth bass and 200,000 native largemouth bass.

"They should be catching a lot of smaller fish and in 3 years, will hopefully be back to catching big fish," he says. "We'll keep our fingers crossed that we continue to get some rain. The need for water can sure come on in a hurry."

—Steve Lightfoot





Out of the Way

COPPER BREAKS STATE PARK OFFERS HISTORY AND
BEAUTY ALONG WITH A TRUE TALE OF COMANCHES
AND THE FRONTIER OF NORTHWEST TEXAS.

Text and Photography By Russell A. Graves



From my vantage point high on a bluff overlooking the broken badlands of the Pease River, I can see the appeal of this land to centuries of intrepid travelers. This country has attracted Comanches, a future president, cowboys, ranchers, farmers and, most recently, tourists. The badlands are situated in the midst of some of the most beautiful country in Northwest Texas, in Copper Breaks State Park.

While I contemplate the rugged landscape, the morning-sun sky washes the broken red badlands with a soft light. Sitting on a slickrock ledge, I am glad that public access exists along this riparian corridor. Virtually unknown to people outside the region, this 1,899-acre park is the only bit of public land situated along the Pease, a non-navigable stream that is an insignificant source of water compared to other, more notable, Texas streams. Even though it may not be notable for its water, the Pease is notable for the history that has unfolded along its banks.

FAILED ATTEMPTS AT MINING

I am seated perhaps 200 feet above the river as it flows from right to left toward its merger with the Red River about 45 miles from here, northeast of Vernon. Behind me lies Hardeman County. Wedged between the Red River to the north and the Pease River to the south, Hardeman County is typical of the hardserabble country on the western end of the Red River. Red-rock breaks dominate the watercourses, which are surrounded by acres

of mesquite, agarita, yucca, prickly pear flats and shortgrasses that seem to flow uninterrupted, save for intermittent, neatly tended fields of cotton and wheat. Across the river to the south is Foard County, which looks to be a carbon copy of its neighbor to the north.

Located 12 miles south of Quanah — just off Texas Highway 6 — Copper Breaks State Park gets its name from the deposits of copper laced throughout the area's indigenous rock. The famed

Red River explorer Captain Randolph Marcy first discovered evidence of copper in the area during his expedition to the Texas frontier in 1854. More than 20 years later, after serving as an officer in the Civil War and as governor of New Jersey, General George McClellan traveled to Hardeman County to mine the copper. Financed with \$1 million from a Philadelphia investment group, McClellan led a wagon train and 200 horses from Fort Worth and began exploration. Five years later, confident that copper mining was a feasible enterprise, McClellan shipped heavy machinery to a primary mine



A ROCK BLUFF OVERLOOKING THE PEASE RIVER VALLEY, ABOVE, AND A VIEW OF THE PEASE, NOTABLE FOR THE HISTORY IT HAS WITNESSED, INSET. COPPER NUGGETS, OPPOSITE, STILL PUNCTUATE THE LANDSCAPE OF COPPER BREAKS.



site on the south side of the Pease River.

In 1884, with \$12 million in operating capital, the Grand Belt Copper Company began full-scale, open-pit mining of the ore. Up to 100 employees worked the steam-powered machinery and rock-crushing equipment, and a shantytown of saloons and other frontier businesses soon opened. George McClellan died in 1885 and the mine closed in 1888, after less than 4 years of mining, because of lackluster production. Other entrepreneurs attempted to open the mine three more times, but none succeeded.

LAND OF THE MEDICINE MOUNDS

Around 1725, the Comanche Indians split off from the Shoshone tribe of Colorado's Rocky Mountain region. Moving southeast across the plains, the Comanches eventually made the land surrounding the Pease River the center of a vast piece of Texas and Oklahoma real estate known as Comancheria.

"The People," as the Comanches called themselves, were the dominant tribe of the plains and offered considerable resistance to settlers of the West Texas frontier. During the 100 years or so that the Comanches freely roamed the Texas plains, they found the Pease River a favorable place to hunt bison, find shelter from northern winds and seek medicine from the spirit

world. Just 10 miles east of Copper Breaks State Park is one of the places where the Comanches believed spirits dwelled.

Rising as conspicuous domes above the relatively flat surrounding plain, the Medicine Mounds consist of four monolithic, conical hills that lie in a southeast-to-northwesterly line. The hills grow progressively larger, with the largest hill, some 350 feet tall, at the northwest end of the line. The top of the largest hill is covered with a layer of protective rock. The Comanches believed that the most benevolent and powerful spirits lived at the top of this hill. One medicine man found the spirits after his daughter became ill and a vision directed him to the top of the highest mound. Once on top of the hill, he mixed his medicines as the spirits instructed and prayed for his daughter's good health. After leaving the mound, he returned to his tepee to find his daughter awake and her fever broken.

Soon the word about the powers of the mound spread and other medicine men visited the area, seeking its powers. Warriors often visited the mounds to drink from their gypsum-laced springs, which was thought to cure ailments. The Comanches also believed that as long as they were in sight of the mounds, the hills would direct their arrows into the buffalo and protect them from their enemy's weapons.

IT WAS HERE THAT ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE COMANCHES' STRUGGLE WITH THE SETTLERS OCCURRED: THE RECAPTURE OF CYNTHIA ANN PARKER, A SETTLER'S CHILD WHO HAD BEEN RAISED TO WOMANHOOD AS A COMANCHE.



THE RECAPTURE OF CYNTHIA ANN PARKER

An ancient bison trail leads from the Medicine Mounds to the Pease River. It was here that one of the most significant events in the history of the Comanches' struggle with settlers occurred: the recapture of Cynthia Ann Parker, a settler's child who had been raised to womanhood as a Comanche.

In 1836, Parker was kidnapped from her family's fort east of Waco. For the next 24 years she was raised as a Comanche; she married a Comanche chief and had two children with him. Before her recapture along the Pease, white people spotted her three times. Captain Randolph Marcy saw her during his 1854 Red River expedition, and wrote: "There is at this time a white woman among the Middle Comanches, by the name of Parker, who, with her brother, was captured while they were young children from their father's house in the western part of Texas. This woman has adopted all the habits and peculiarities of the Comanches; has an Indian husband and children and cannot be persuaded to leave them ..."

Eight years later, she was captured back by whites. In 1860, just a few miles east of Copper Breaks State Park, where Mule Creek runs into the Pease River, a young scout for the Texas Rangers named Charles Goodnight rode into an abandoned camp and picked up a Bible that had belonged to a Parker County family killed in a Comanche raid a few weeks earlier.

Goodnight knew that Comanches often stole books in their raids and used them in makeshift bullet-resistant vests. He instructed a group of Rangers to ride into a grove of bumelia trees and look for signs that the Comanches were camped there. Upon finding signs, Goodnight noted that the trail headed west,

THE SITE OF CYNTHIA ANN PARKER'S RECAPTURE FROM THE COMANCHES, LEFT, AND THE INTERPRETIVE DISPLAYS IN THE PARK'S VISITOR CENTER, OPPOSITE.

and the band of frontier fighters followed. A few minutes later, the Comanches were spotted and a brief gun battle ensued.

A woman riding a gray

horse and carrying an infant was captured, and Goodnight noted her reaction: "The squaw was in terrible grief. Through sympathy for her, thinking her distress would be the same as that of our women under similar circumstances, I thought I would try to console her and make her understand that she would not be hurt. When I got near her I noticed that she had blue eyes and light hair, which had been cut short ..."

Shorn hair was a Comanche sign of mourning. The woman was Cynthia Ann Parker, and she was the wife of Chief Peta Nocona and mother of Quanah Parker, the last chief of the Comanches. The baby she carried when she was captured was Topasannah — little sister to Quanah Parker. According to *The Handbook of Texas*, Cynthia Ann returned to her family in Van Zandt County with her daughter, who died 10 years later. Though the exact date of Cynthia Ann Parker's death is disputed, the last record of her was the 1870 Anderson County census.

From that pivotal event, the Comanches warred with buffalo hunters, pioneers and the United States Army for the next 15 years. Shortly after his father died, around 1865, Quanah Parker took command of the Quahadi band of Comanches. He led raids on buffalo hunters across the Texas plains and fought the United States Army led by Colonel Ranald MacKenzie until the Comanches surrendered in 1875 and were exiled to a Kiowa-Comanche reservation at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

When the fighting was over, Parker became a dignitary for his people and often lobbied leaders in the U.S. government for Indian rights. In 1906, he hosted a wolf hunt for President Theodore Roosevelt just north of where I sit. Five years later, Quanah Parker died of heart failure. He left a legacy of peace that helped heal the divide between the Comanche people and the United States government.

THE PARK

A small museum at the park's headquarters displays artifacts that trace the area's frontier history. Purchased in 1970 from a private owner, the park opened in 1974. It offers campsites, recreational vehicle hook-ups and group picnic and camping areas.

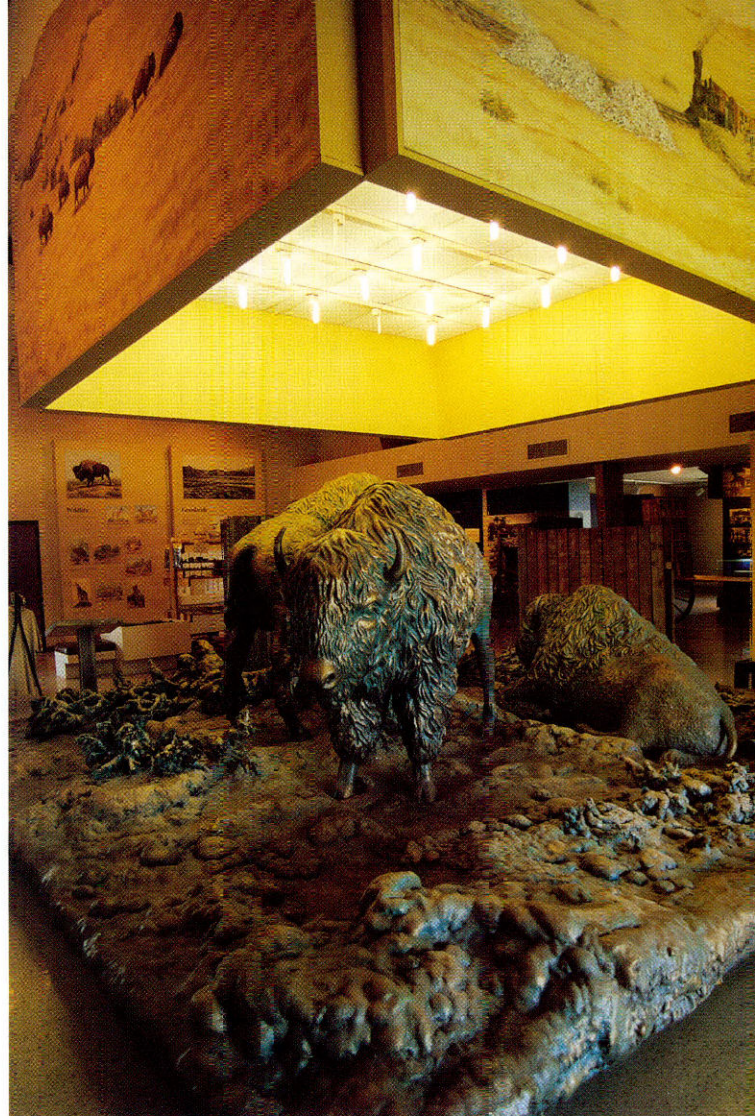
Along the 10 miles of hiking trails, an assortment of wildlife can be seen: Texas horned lizards, roadrunners and white-tailed and mule deer. The park's 60-acre lake is home to many shorebirds and species of waterfowl. From my perch, I watch turkey vultures catch thermals and soar as they search the broken terrain for carrion. In this short trip, I have seen a couple of rabbits and some wigeons on the lake. As a plant lover, I appreciate the variety of rugged plants that populate the park's rocky breaks. Grama grasses, little bluestem and sand dropseed and sculpt the park's softscape. Copper and gypsum-laced rocks, mesquite, and prickly pear create a pleasing hardscape. Rounding out the mix are colorful flowers such as Indian Blanket, horsemint and prairie verbena.

Despite its beauty, Copper Breaks State Park is not heavily used. Small crowds and year-round interpretive programs such as the star-gazing tours make this an attractive park.

For the past 2 hours, as the sun gains altitude in the immense cobalt sky, I have been watching the birds, the river and the trees swaying rhythmically in the wind. The land is a sensual delight. The smell of the sage and juniper, the feel of the constant wind, the calls of bobwhite quail, the rustling of cottonwood leaves and the sight of an unending and remote landscape beneath a huge sky satisfy the soul. The longer I sit, the more I understand what Comanches and cowboys saw in this country.

THE TRAIL OF CYNTHIA ANN PARKER

The story of Cynthia Ann Parker is one of the most enduring



stories of the Texas frontier. The classic John Ford western, *The Searchers*, was loosely based on Parker's story. For history enthusiasts, following the trail of Cynthia Ann and Quanah Parker is relatively easy.

East of Waco, along the Navasota River near Mexia, is Fort Parker State Park. A replica of the family fort is situated in a nearby city park operated by the town of Groesbeck. In the Comanche chief's namesake town of Quanah, the Hardeman County Historical Museum tells the area's frontier history from a local point of view. Just east of Quanah you can see the Medicine Mounds by turning south onto FM 1167 from US Highway 287. A word of warning, though: The Medicine Mounds lie on private property and trespassing is prohibited.

Near the community of Margaret, in northeastern Foard County, a granite marker 3 miles east of Copper Breaks State Park commemorates the Pease River Battle Site where Cynthia Ann Parker was recaptured. From Texas Highway 6, turn east on FM 3103 to the small community of Margaret, take FM 98 from Margaret, and then turn north on County Road 231. An alternative route is to get on FM 98 at Crowell and travel to CR 231.

Just northeast of Copper Breaks State Park, near the city of Lawton, Oklahoma, Quanah Parker, Topasannah, and Cynthia Ann Parker's graves lie commemorated in the Fort Sill Cemetery. A few hours northwest of Copper Breaks State Park in Canyon, Texas, the Panhandle Plains Museum chronicles the life of Quanah Parker, the Comanche Indians and the history of the plains more thoroughly than any other museum in Texas. ★

It's Friday evening at the 2004 Houston Boat, Sport and Travel Show. The after-work crowd has arrived in force. Ahead of me shuffles a tired-looking, 40-something fellow still dressed in his business suit. There's a lavishly appointed, 21-foot, center-console bay boat immediately to our right, and the sight of it stops him in mid-stride.

The man steps out of the aisle, lowers his briefcase to the floor and pulls a small spiral notepad from his jacket pocket. On a nearby easel rests a placard that profiles monthly payment plans. He scratches a few quick notes, stares pensively at the bright red rig and then turns to walk away.

Halfway down the aisle he stops again, looks back at the boat and sizes it up with a wistful gaze.

"So," I ask him, "is it what you're looking for?"

He hunches his shoulders and cracks a weak grin.

"At this point," he says, "I honestly don't have a clue."

His trepidation is understandable. This week, during the traditional boat-show month of January, Reliant Center is hosting the biggest show-and-tell in town. A sparkling fleet of more than 1,200 boats is on display, and the sticker prices on many of the boats are right up there with those on new cars.

Although the boating industry as a whole

is still suffering the economic downturn from 9/11, bay boat sales are booming. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department division of coastal fisheries reports that saltwater fishing licenses have been increasing at the rate of 2,000 a month, and many of those new anglers are buying boats. No other style of powerboat has witnessed such a remarkable degree of expansion and evolution in the past decade.

My new friend has come to the Houston Boat Show to buy a bay boat, but even within that seemingly narrow definition (it immediately excludes sailboats, motor yachts, pontoon boats, ski boats and bass boats), selecting a boat for bay and flats fishing remains an intimidating proposition.

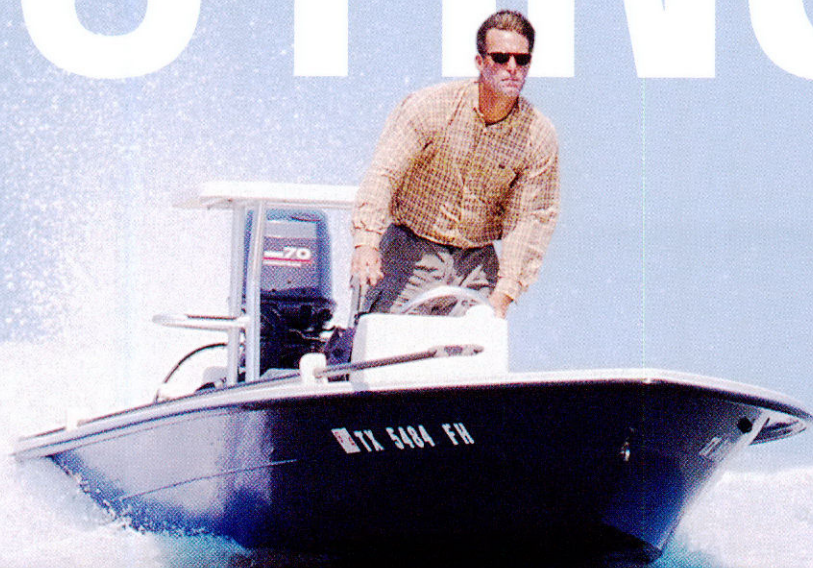
As the quality and popularity of Texas coastal fishing has grown, bay and flats fishing rigs have become increasingly specialized. Picking the right bay boat is a little bit like picking the right fishing tackle. You don't use a surf rod for sight casting to redfish in the flats. There is no ideal boat that fits every fishing situation, but for every fishing situation in Lone Star salt water, there is an ideal boat.

For the next half hour, we mull over the major options between Beaumont and Brownsville. We start south, on the super-shallow flats of the Lower Laguna Madre, and work our way up the coast.

WANT TO BUY A BAY BOAT?
MATCH THE BOAT TO
THE FISHING SCENARIOS.

By Larry Bozka
Photography by David J. Sams

BUYING A



CONQUER THE SHALLOWS WITH A SCOOTER

There is arguably no more specialized wade-fishing boat than the strange-looking but effective rig known as the "scooter." Scooters were first built with fiberglass-coated plywood bot-

oms as flat as the Coastal Prairie. From there, they evolved into sophisticated, tunnel-hulled shallow-water wonders.

An ideal scooter is a 15-footer, and, like most boats intended for shallow-water use, it's equipped with a hydraulic "jack plate" that raises

and lowers the outboard engine, allowing the propeller to run efficiently in different depths. It's fitted with a custom Tops-N-Towers poling platform, ideal for long-range viewing through polarized sunglasses when scouting the shores for tailing redfish and nervous bait.

Like all small scooters, it's light — only 750 pounds — and as such can be trailered with a lightweight towing vehicle. While this craft is wide and stable, its primary drawback is the same as any boat with a scooter-style hull: It's capable of handling rough water, but not comfortably.

PRICE RANGE:
\$12,000 to \$20,000

On a glassy flat, however, it can plane three adult anglers over 6-inch-deep water like a waterborne glider. Because its deck is set low to the water, it's ideal for the wading angler to step off and on.

POPULAR BRANDS: Shallow Sport, Dargel, Shoalwater, BoatRight, Shallow Craft



BAY BOAT

POLE A SKIFF TO NO-MAN'S LAND

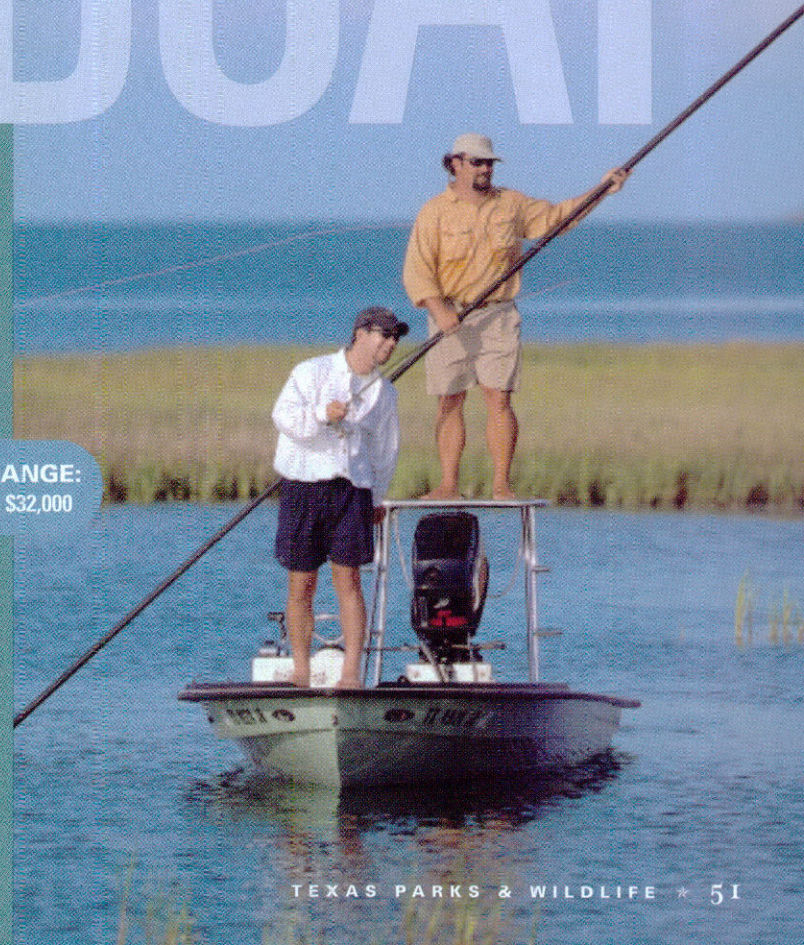
The back lakes of San Jose and Matagorda Islands, the remote lagoons out of Port O'Connor, Seadrift and Rockport, and even the tiny estuaries that spill out of major bays from Galveston to Sabine Pass comprise the "No Man's Land" that, with the exception of kayakers and the most rugged of mud-slogging wade fishermen, are reserved for the pole-pushing fraternity of saltwater skiff owners. Typically 15 to 18 feet long, the saltwater poling skiff is made of lightweight fiberglass or Kevlar or a carbon-fiber laminate. These boats can weigh as little as 425 pounds and, because of their light weight, draw only 5 inches of water. They can be set up to carry 18 gallons of gasoline and are powered by fuel-efficient motors of 60 horsepower or less, yet they can achieve respectable speed.

Trim tabs offset varying loads, and freeboard carpet quiets the thud of dropped tackle and gear that might spook fish. These boats can be equipped with a 10-gallon live well that holds both bait and catch. These skiffs are favorites of fly-fishing purists.

When the water gets thin and a stealthy approach is imperative, the driver tilts up the prop, retrieves the push pole from a flush-mounted holder and pushes the boat towards tailing redfish for sight-casting by the angler in the bow.

POPULAR BRANDS: Maverick, Hewes, Ranger, Action Craft, Carolina Skiff, Avocet

PRICE RANGE:
\$22,000 to \$32,000



TRY A HYBRID FOR WATERS GREEN TO BLUE

Between 18 and 25 feet long, the "hybrid" bay rig is a dual-purpose product of modern technology. By combining the features of V-hulls and flare hulls, boat manufacturers are making hybrid hulls that can perform in vastly different environments. Some hybrids sport broad-swept bows for better shallow-water entry; others emphasize the V-hull design for slicing through surface chop.

From my perspective, the best all-around hybrid — and most popular version — is a 21-foot, center-console V-hull with a dry-running Carolina flare configuration. But there are many other designs and makes that fit the bill.

PRICE RANGE:
\$15,000 to \$40,000

Most all can be ordered in tunnel-hulled versions for shallow-water running. While tunnel hulls do help boaters run in the shallow water, their downside is that they cost the boat speed, maneuverability and fuel-efficiency. For my purposes in running the sometimes long distances on Galveston Bay, a tunnel hull is not required.

Here's the way they're typically set up: The center console allows round-the-hull mobility and is fitted with six flush-mount rod holders on each side. It can withstand a person's weight,

so it serves as a guide console from which you can gain an elevated view.

A leaning post, rather than a standard seat, looms over a large padded ice chest, which is used as a dry box. A small, cushioned deck mat at the base of the console lessens the leg-pounding impact when running through chop at high speed. Twin recirculating live wells maintain both baitfish and game fish. Four rod holders are welded to the post, and three more parallel rod tubes rest beneath the gunnels on both sides.

The beam is 8-1/2 feet, wide and stable. A powerful 24-volt bow-mounted electric trolling motor is the norm, but for purposes of a clutter-free deck I prefer remote-controlled units mounted on Lenco hydraulic trim tabs. Adjusted for shifting loads and changing water conditions, trim tabs are a major plus.

Dry storage boxes are incorporated fore and beneath the bow. Storage locker lids are fitted with seal gaskets to prevent leakage. The stainless steel bow and gunnel cleats are recessed. All other hardware, including deck and console screws, is recessed, because anything that protrudes is a snagged fishing line waiting to happen.

The stern is low, perhaps with a recessed

gunnel on one side, for easy entry when wade fishing. Climbing into a boat with high gunnels is no simple feat: a fixed transom step-up or, at the least, a removable ladder, is an appreciated amenity.

A minimum of 60-gallon, and preferably 80- to 100-gallon, fuel capacity opens the possibilities for fishing trips from inshore coves to ship-channel etties and, on calm days, offshore weed lines and production platforms.

This boat is indeed a hybrid, one that, in the right conditions, can virtually do it all. As such it's the rig most saltwater anglers ultimately buy, as versatile and seaworthy as Texas saltwater is unpredictable and diverse.

A hybrid bay boat is also the toughest to choose. There are a dozen-plus favorite makes, and several times that many more alternatives.

POPULAR BRANDS: Kenner, Skeeter, Triton, Proline, El Pescador, Blue Wave, Gulf Coast, Pathfinder, Bay Stealth, Boston Whaler, Grady-White, Mako, Parker, Scout, Majek, Mowdy, TransPort, Champion, Ranger, Angler, Century, Sea Pro, Polar, Sea Hunt, Cobia, Robalo, Trophy, McKee, Hawk, BayMaster, Bay Hawk, Flatlander, Bayquest, Nitro





PRICE RANGE:
\$7,500 to \$20,000

CONSIDER THE ECONOMY OF ALUMINUM

If the goal is to hug the shore, access shallow water and, above all, to tow a rig on long hauls with a six-cylinder pickup or even a medium-sized car, aluminum shines.

Aluminum boats range in size from 15 to 21 feet, with 17 feet being a great compromise.

And again, make no mistake, every boat-buying decision requires compromise.

An inexpensive 12-volt trolling motor, preferably a corrosion-resistant model, can be fitted for chasing working birds or scouting surface slicks. Four PVC rod holders are fitted to the transom, with as many more on the small center console.

A 48-quart ice chest mounted with deck brackets near the bow serves as a dry box. Another chest immediately forward of the console holds either fish or, rigged with a 12-volt Burgess aerator, live bait.

A 40-horsepower engine is miserly with the fuel that's carried in twin 6-gallon tanks beneath the rear deck. If the budget is really tight, the console can go. Many a Texas bay angler goes from spot to spot while steering a tiller-operated outboard. It's not nearly as convenient as a console with a wheel, but it gets the job done, and that, in any case, remains the prime consideration of the saltwater boat angler.

POPULAR BRANDS: BoatRight, Allweld, Monark, Sea Ark, Tracker, Alumacraft, Xpress, G3, Fisher, Weldcraft

PERUSE BEFORE YOU CRUISE

A reputable dealer will answer questions thoroughly and honestly, and won't hesitate to allow the buyer as much time as it takes to understand the nuances of owning a new boat. He or she also won't hesitate to let you take a test drive. Consider the following checklist when talking with boat dealers.

Does the boat have adequate dry storage, and just how "dry" is it? Every inch of deck space and deck storage counts.

How much weight, and how many passengers, do you need to accommodate?

Will you fish at anchor, drift-fish or wade-fish? Low-profile hulls are far more efficient for slow drifting. Low sterns and hull sides also make it much easier for waders to get in and out.

How far will you travel to and from your fishing locale? Aside from fuel and range considerations, comfortable ride plays an important role here.

What is the towing capacity of your vehicle? If it's on the light side, consider a smaller hull or perhaps an aluminum rig.

Are rod holders built-in or an optional accessory? This seems minor, but for some styles of fishing, rod holder positioning and style are surprisingly important.

Will you drive the boat sitting down or while standing? Almost all boaters prefer the latter; thus the growing popularity of "leaning post" configurations.

Does the boat come with a Bimini-style canvas shade or an aluminum/fiberglass "T-Top"? Biminis are great for stopping the sun, but they tend to get in the way of anglers who fish from their boats. T-Tops allow for the mounting of VHF radios, depth finders and other electronic accessories, but can impede access beneath bridges and inside low-roofed storage areas.

Does the manufacturer offer a warranty? Can it be extended to a second owner should you choose to sell the rig?

Will you also use the boat for water-skiing? If the family is pressing for a ski boat, check out the various fish-and-ski hybrids.

What about console design? The vast percentage of today's bay boaters run center-console hulls, due to increased fishing space and round-the-hull rod maneuverability. Walk-through windshield designs are the norm on fish-and-ski rigs, and perform fine for at-anchor fishing, particularly jetty fishing.

How much horsepower is enough? Check the manufacturer's maximum rating. Larger engines, provided they are operated at reasonable speeds, are sometimes more fuel-efficient than less powerful outboards that must be run at higher rpms to achieve the same speed.

—Larry Bozka

IF YOU CHOOSE IT, USE IT

For the devout, but impatient, angler, a new boat can be a seductive, but obscenely expensive, siren. But no boat is the right boat unless the buyer uses it enough to justify the effort and expense. The initial purchase is only the first step. Factor in insurance, licensing, storage, electronics, fishing-related accessories, fuel and maintenance, and you're getting closer to the real cost. If you're only going fishing two or three times a year, you might be better off spending your money on one of the coast's many qualified fishing guides. On the other hand, if you're an angler who knows your needs and you are certain you can make the time to use your boat on a regular basis, the freedom afforded by ownership is virtually priceless. ★



Legend, LORE & LEGACY

THE CENTURY PLANT

This agave gives up its heart to us.

BY E. DAN KLEPPER

Dig a pit (a palenque) about 3 feet deep, line the sides and bottom with rocks, and build a fire in it. While the flames turn to coals, unearth a mature maguey, also called the century plant, just as it begins to bloom. Then start cutting away the long fibrous leaves. This will eventually reveal the heart, or la piña (the “pineapple”) of the plant. To harvest this delicate morsel, one must first negotiate the century plant’s skin-

shredding spines and dangerously sharp, dagger-like leaf tips. But just as in love’s mauling, painful obstacles that require delicate navigation often confound the path to nature’s heart as well. Once your leaf peeling is complete, you may, if you wish, bestow a traditional blessing upon la piña and those who will benefit from its bounty. Then place the heart in the pit, cover it with damp grama grass and fill in the pit with soil. Wait a few days, then open the pit, extract la piña and share its sweet flavor with your own heart’s passion. The century plant is no stranger to requiting desires. It has been serving hearts to the hungry and mending the humble rifts in life (such as unraveled shoes, torn clothing and other simple goods) with its strong, resilient fiber for 1,000 years or more. It is soap, rope and paper, roofing material, fodder, dye and drink. It is stomach medicine and hair tonic and relief from syphilis — the scourge of lovers past. It steadies the walk and mends fences and can be made musical or to cause death. It has been all of these things at one time or another and even to this day it is the sweet thickness of pulque, the straw-colored tequila and the bitterness of mescal.

In its humble servitude the plant shares the genus name *agave*, meaning “noble,” with a host of species, subspecies and varieties. Remarkably, all of them are members of an order of another of life’s love plants: the lily. Agaves are full of the fickle notions inherent in love-struck botanicals — changing their minds, hybridizing, morphing and causing general confusion among botanists. They answer to many names such as *Arizonica*, *Arkansana* and *Neomexicana*. There are the slim-footed, the thorn-crested and the beaked. Some are giant, smooth, blue, or just plain plains. The Rattlesnake Master, Basketgrass, and Devil’s Shoestring know exactly who they are. Not quite so true with the False.

Like love life, the lives of the agaves are filled with mystery and abandonment. Many agave specimens, gathered a few centuries ago by early explorers of the Americas, now reside in European botanical collections. Some of them have never been found in their natural settings again since they were first collected, and their original locations are thus lost to the world. Occasionally some confound scientists further by going extinct.

Our own agave, the reliable century plant, abounds and is widely cultivated throughout Texas and the world. The giant *Americana* flourishes across the Edwards Plateau and South Texas Plains and the state’s own special species, the *Chisos Agave*, occurs along the higher elevations of the Trans-Pecos. Yet, just as the phrase “for-

ever yours” suggests doubt even in its conviction, the name “century plant” conceals loss within its deception. In reality, this agave rarely grows beyond a decade or two, then blooms only once and dies away.

But its final blush, a magnificent inflorescence as thick as Cupid’s thigh, delivers all that la piña promises. Calling on its entire reserve, the plant proffers a giant, asparagus-like stalk, elongating it up to an inch an hour and 16 inches a day. Reaching up to 20 feet in height, the tumescence then explodes in thick, nectar-loaded flats of blooms. The flowers’ saturated yellow hue acts as a beacon to all creatures that love the savory taste of the desert’s elixir. Songbirds and hummingbirds and all manner of butterflies, beetles and bees make a meal of the bloom’s syrup. In the evening, scarlet-ribbed Sphinx moths and the unique Mexican long-nosed bat come to feed upon the piña nectar. The blossoming signals a torrid display of nature’s magnitude, leaving tiny, sprouting pups scattered about the ground and the dead and drying stalk, favored by birds and beasts that nest and roost in its remains.

A fabric made from agave leaves is said to “... have been more soft and beautiful than parchment,” comprised the cloak of Juan Diego, a poor but loyal devotee of the Catholic Church. Diego and his fellow indigenous people of 16th-century Mexico used the fibers of the century plant to make their cloak-like coverings, called *tilmas*, that they wore on cool mornings.

One day in 1531, while taking his daily walk to church, Diego had a vision of the Virgin Mary, who spoke to him and told him to gather flowers from a nearby hilltop. Diego complied, filling his agave *tilma* with blooming roses that “... were very fragrant and covered with dewdrops of the night which resembled precious pearls.” As instructed, Diego carried the rose-filled *tilma* to his bishop. Upon unfolding the cloak and scattering the flowers across the ground, an exquisite painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared across the *tilma* where the roses had been resting against the fibers. The appearance of the image was declared a miracle by the church. Five centuries later, in July 2002, Diego was canonized, and the century-plant *tilma*, with its remarkable image, fresh and brilliant as if it had just appeared, resides today in a shrine in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Villa de Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexico City.

“I am a nobody,” Diego said to the Virgin Mary in the language of pure love’s devotion. “I am a small rope, a tiny ladder, the tail end, a leaf.” It is a voice that can be shared by two humble servants: one of heaven and the other, a simple agave, here on earth. ✪



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Continued from page 57

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LEVELLAND: KLVF-AM 1230 / 12:05 p.m.

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

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

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

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

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

5:30 a.m., 2:30 p.m. Fri.)

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

MINEOLA: KMoo-FM 99.9 / 5:10 p.m.

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

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

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

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

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

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

PLEASANTON: KBUC-FM 95.7 / noon Sat.

ROCKDALE: KRXT-FM 98.5 / 5:05 a.m., 5:50 a.m., 8:50 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 / 10:13 a.m.; KYXX-FM 94.3 / 2:15 p.m.

STEPHENVILLE: KSTV-FM 93.1 / between 5 a.m. and 7 a.m.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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BEDFORD: K-Meadow, Meadow Creek Elementary / noon

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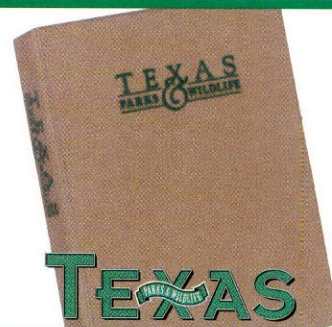
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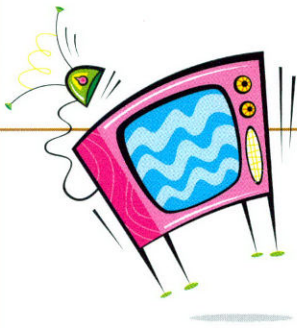
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THE FRONT LINE OF NEWS AND VIEWS



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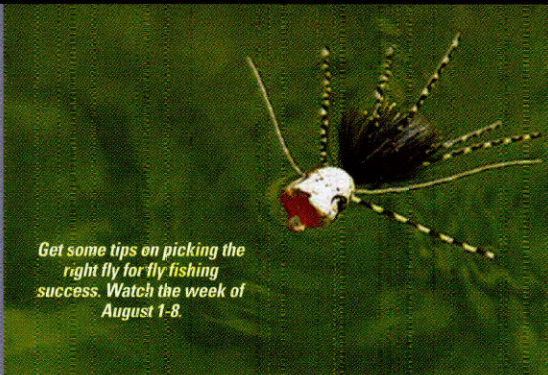
Aug. 1 - Aug. 8:
Monahans Sandhills; choosing the right fly; game wardens in the Valley; the art of fishing rods; heatwaves;

Aug. 8 - Aug. 15:
Guadalupe River State Park; landscaping with native plants; a day in the life of a West Texas biologist; above the clouds; rummaging racoons.

Aug. 15 - Aug. 22:
Seminole Canyon; the importance of urban parks; Guadalupe morning mist; saving sea turtles; finding fishing regulations.

Aug. 22 - Aug. 29:
Art and history in a state park; booming prairie chickens; Brazos Bend; family hunts; contrasts of the Colorado and the Trinity rivers.

Aug. 29 - Sept. 5:
Personal water craft safety; the history of fishing lures; crazy about birds; Longhorn Cavern; green architecture; Cooper Lake.



Get some tips on picking the right fly for fly fishing success. Watch the week of August 1-8.

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CORPUS CHRISTI: KEDT, Ch. 16 / Sun. 11 a.m. / Fri. 11:30 p.m.
DALLAS-FORT WORTH: KERA, Ch. 13 / Sat. 8:30 a.m.
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EL PASO: KCOS, Ch. 13 / Sat. 2:30 p.m.
 (rotates with other programs; check listings)
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HOUSTON: KUHT, Ch. 8 / Sat. 2:30 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 / Sun. 5:30 p.m.
ODESSA-MIDLAND: KOCV, Ch. 36 / Sat. 5 p.m.
SAN ANTONIO & LAREDO: KLRN, Ch. 9 / Friday noon, Sunday 1:30 p.m.
WACO: KWBU, Ch. 34 / Sat. 3 p.m.

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

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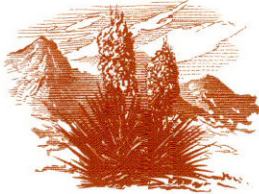
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AUSTIN: KVET-AM 1300 / between 5 a.m. and 7 a.m. Sat.; ESPN Radio KWNX-AM 1260 and KQQA-AM 1530 9:20 a.m. Sun.
BEAUMONT: KLVI-AM 560 / 5:20 a.m.
BIG SPRING: KBST-AM 1490 / 10:55 a.m.
BONHAM: KFYN-AM 1420 / 10:10 a.m. KFYZ-FM 98.3 / 10:10 a.m.
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BRIDGEPORT: KBOC-FM 98.3 / 11:45 a.m.
BRYAN: KZNE-AM 1150 / 5:40 p.m.
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CANYON: KWTS-FM 91.1 / noon, 4 p.m., 7 p.m.
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CENTER: KDET-AM 930 / 5:20 p.m.; KQSI-FM 92.5 / 5:20 p.m.
CISCO: KCER-FM 105.9 / 12:05 p.m.
COLUMBUS: KULM-FM 98.3 / 5:20 a.m.
COMANCHE: KCOM-AM 1550 / 6:30 a.m.
COMMERCE: KETR-FM 88.9 / 10:15 a.m.
CORPUS CHRISTI: KEDT-FM 90.3 /

Continued on page 56

GETAWAYS

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



BIG BEND COUNTRY

AUGUST: Desert Garden Tours, Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center, Terlingua, call for dates, available for groups of six or more, reservations required, (432) 424-3327

AUGUST: Boulderling Tours, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, every Wednesday through Sunday, reservations required, (915) 849-6684

AUGUST: Hiking Tours, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, every Wednesday through Sunday, reservations required, (915) 849-6684

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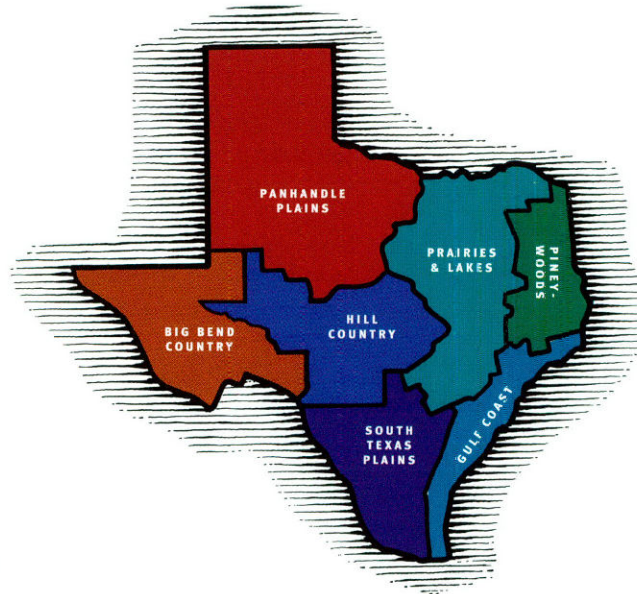
AUGUST: Texas Camel Treks, Monahans Sandhills SP, Monahans, call for dates, (866) 6CAMELS

AUGUST: Fate Bell Cave Dwelling Tour, Seminole Canyon SP&HS, Comstock, every Wednesday through Sunday, (432) 292-4464

AUGUST: White Shaman Tour, Seminole Canyon SP&HS, Comstock, every Saturday, (888) 525-9907

AUGUST 4-8, 11-15: Summer Amphitheater Program, Davis Mountains SP, Fort Davis, (432) 426-3337

AUGUST 7: Guale Mesa Tour, Big Bend Ranch SP, Presidio, reservations required, (432) 229-3416



For more detailed information on outdoor getaways across the state, visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us and click on "TPWD Events" in the center light blue area entitled "In the Parks."

AUGUST 7-8, 21-22: Guided Tours, Franklin Mountains SP, El Paso, (915) 566-6441

AUGUST 14: Stories of Spirits, Magoffin Home SHS, El Paso, reservations encouraged, (915) 533-5147

AUGUST 15: Bird Identification Tours, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, reservations required, (915) 849-6684

AUGUST 21: Fresno Canyon Tour, Big Bend Ranch SP, Presidio, reservations required, (432) 229-3416

AUGUST 30: Full Moon in the Dunes, Monahans Sandhills SP, Monahans, (866) 6CAMELS

and Sunday, (979) 553-5101

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

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

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

AUGUST: Marsh Airboat Tours, Sea Rim SP, Sabine Pass, every Wednesday through Sunday, (409) 971-2559

AUGUST 1-2004: Homemade Ice Cream and Lemonade Demonstrations, Varner-Hogg Plantation SHS, West Columbia, (979) 345-4656

AUGUST 7, 14, 20, 21, 28: Story Time, Sea Center Texas, Lake Jackson, (979) 292-0100

AUGUST 9: Music at the

Mansion, Fulton Mansion SHS, Fulton, (361) 729-0386
AUGUST 14, 28: Beachcombing and Shelling Tour, Matagorda Island SP&WMA, Port O'Connor, reservations required, (361) 983-2215
AUGUST 15: History Tour, Matagorda Island SP&WMA, Port O'Connor, reservations required, (361) 983-2215
AUGUST 27: Nighttime Wildlife Tour, Matagorda Island SP&WMA, Port O'Connor, reservations required, (361) 983-2215



HILL COUNTRY

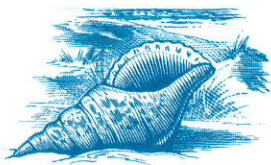
AUGUST: Gorman Falls Tour, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, every Saturday and Sunday, weather permitting, (325) 628-3240

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

AUGUST: Summer Bat Flight Tours, Devil's Sinkhole SNA, Rock Springs, every Wednesday through Sunday evening, reservations required, (830) 683-BATS

AUGUST: Saturday Evening Interpretive Programs, Guadalupe River SP, Spring Branch, Saturdays, (830) 438-2656

AUGUST: Saturday Morning Interpretive Walk, Honey Creek



GULF COAST

AUGUST: Weekend Nature Programs, Brazos Bend SP, Needville, every Saturday

SNA, Spring Branch, every Saturday, (830) 438-2656

AUGUST: Stumpy Hollow Nature Hike, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, every Saturday, (512) 793-2223

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

AUGUST 5: Devil's Waterhole Canoe Tour, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, reservations required, (512) 793-2223

AUGUST 6: Texas State Parks Slide Show, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223

AUGUST 6: Range and Wildlife Seminar, Kerr WMA, Hunt, reservations required, (830) 238-4483

AUGUST 7: Crawling Wild Cave Tour, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, reservations recommended, (325) 628-3240

AUGUST 7, 21: Wild Cave Tour, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, reservations required (830) 563-2342

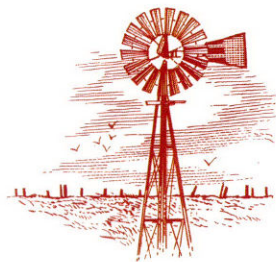
AUGUST 8-14: Guided Hikes, Bright Leaf SNA, Austin, (512) 459-7269

AUGUST 14, 28: Simple Sounds Concert in the Cave, Longhorn Cavern SP, Burnet, reservations required, (877) 441-2283

AUGUST 21: Bluegrass in the Park, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223

AUGUST 21: Bat Flights at Stuart Bat Cave, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, reservations required, (830) 563-2342

AUGUST 27: LBJ's Birthday, Lyndon B. Johnson SP&HS, Stonewall, (830) 644-2252



PANHANDLE PLAINS

AUGUST 1-28: Summer Art Exhibition, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, (940) 839-4331

AUGUST 7: Surviving Your Hike, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, (806) 455-1492

AUGUST 7: Prehistoric Permian Track Tour, San Angelo SP,

San Angelo, (325) 949-4757

AUGUST 7, 28: Canyon Critters, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227

AUGUST 9, 23: Fire in the Canyon, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227

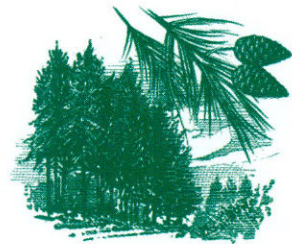
AUGUST 14-15: Hunter Safety Course, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, reservations required (940) 839-4331

AUGUST 14, 28: Campfire Tails, Abilene SP, Tuscola, (325) 572-3204

AUGUST 21: Sun Fun and Star Walk, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, (940) 839-4331

AUGUST 21: Hoof 'n Hair Barbecue Cook-off and Qualifying Competition, Fort Richardson SP&HS & Lost Creek Reservoir State Trailway, Jacksboro, (940) 567-3506

AUGUST 21: Snakes of Palo Duro Canyon, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227



PINEYWOODS

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

AUGUST 6, 20: Nature Slide Program, Village Creek SP, Lumberton, reservations required (409) 755-7322

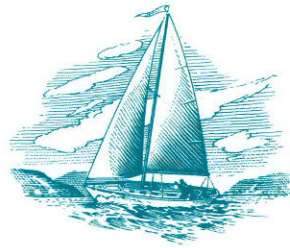
AUGUST 14: Steam Engine Shop Tours, Texas State Railroad SP, Rusk. Rusk station, (800) 442-8951 or (903) 683-2561 outside Texas

AUGUST 14: Snakes Alive, Tyler SP, Tyler, (903) 597-5338

AUGUST 14, 28: Guided Nature Trail Hike, Village Creek SP, Lumberton, reservations required, (409) 755-7322

AUGUST 21: Floating the Forks, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, reservations required, (409) 384-5231

AUGUST 28: Owls, Tyler SP, Tyler, (903) 597-5338



PRAIRIES & LAKES

AUGUST: Yegua and Nails Creek Canoe Tours, Lake Somerville SP & Trailway/Birch Creek Unit, Somerville, every Thursday and Saturday, reservations required, (979) 535-7763

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

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

AUGUST 1, 8: Kreische House Tours, Monument Hill & Kreische Brewery SHS, LaGrange, also available to groups of 10 or more by reservation, (979) 968-5658

AUGUST 1, 7-8, 15, 21-22, 28-29: Tours, Fanthorp Inn SHS, Anderson, (936) 873-2633

AUGUST 7: Guided Nature Hike, Cooper Lake SP/Doctors Creek Unit, Cooper, (903) 395-3100

AUGUST 7: Cowboy Campfire, Music and Poetry, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, (940) 328-1171

AUGUST 7-8: School Daze-Education in Early Texas, Barrington Living History Farm-Washington-on-the-Brazos SHS, Washington, (936) 878-2213

AUGUST 10-12; 31-SEPTEMBER 2: Hunter Education Course, Bastrop SP, Bastrop, reservations required, (512) 237-2241

AUGUST 14: Neatness of the Night Hike, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, reservations required, (972) 291-5940

AUGUST 14: Reptiles-Our Scaly Skinned Friends, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, (972) 291-5940

AUGUST 14: Guided Nature Hike, Cooper Lake SP/South Sulphur Unit, Sulphur Springs, (903) 395-3100

AUGUST 14: Stagecoach Days, Fanthorp Inn SHS, Anderson, (936) 873-2633

AUGUST 14: Kid's Wilderness Survival, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, reservations required, (940) 328-1171

AUGUST 14: Stargazing Party, Ray Roberts Lake SP/Isle du Bois Unit, Pilot Point, (940) 686-2148

AUGUST 20-21: IBEP Bowhunter Education Course, Buescher SP, Smithville, reservations required, (512) 237-2241

AUGUST 21: Steel Sports Super Cooper Adventure Challenge, Cooper Lake SP/South Sulphur Unit, Sulphur Springs, (903) 871-8466

AUGUST 21: Night Sounds, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, (940) 328-1171

AUGUST 28: Penn Farm Tour, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, (972) 291-5940

AUGUST 28: Tunes and Tales, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, (972) 291-5940

AUGUST 28: Storytelling Down in the Holler, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, (940) 328-1171



SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

AUGUST 7: Mountain Bike 101, Government Canyon SNA, San Antonio, reservations required, (210) 688-2208

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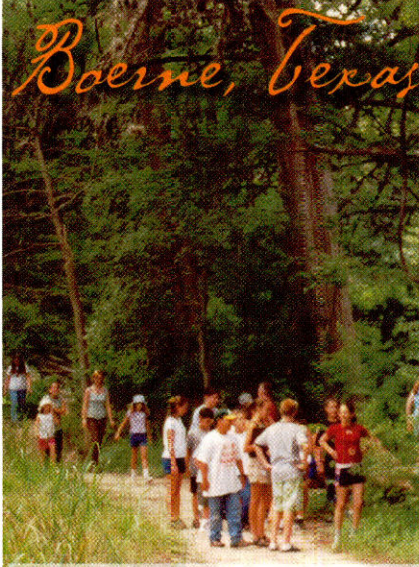


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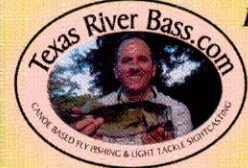
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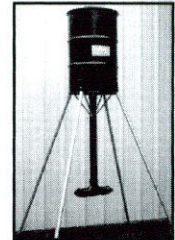
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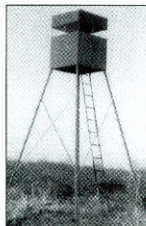
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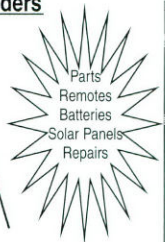
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PARTINGSHOT

This black-headed nightingale-thrush drew flocks of birders to Allen Williams' backyard in Pharr in June. Although the species is common in the cloud forests of the Sierra Madre Oriental 250 miles south of the Rio Grande, the Pharr bird is the first to be documented in the United States, says John Arvin, bird program specialist at the World Birding Center in Mission.



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