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TEXAS

PARKS & WILDLIFE

The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE of TEXAS



DIVE TEXAS!

LARRY BOZKA RATES LIVE BAIT
GOLIAD'S CINCO DE MAYO WITH CECILIA BALLÍ

PLUS: BORDER BIRDING, SHOOTING SCHOOLS AND CANOEING CADDO

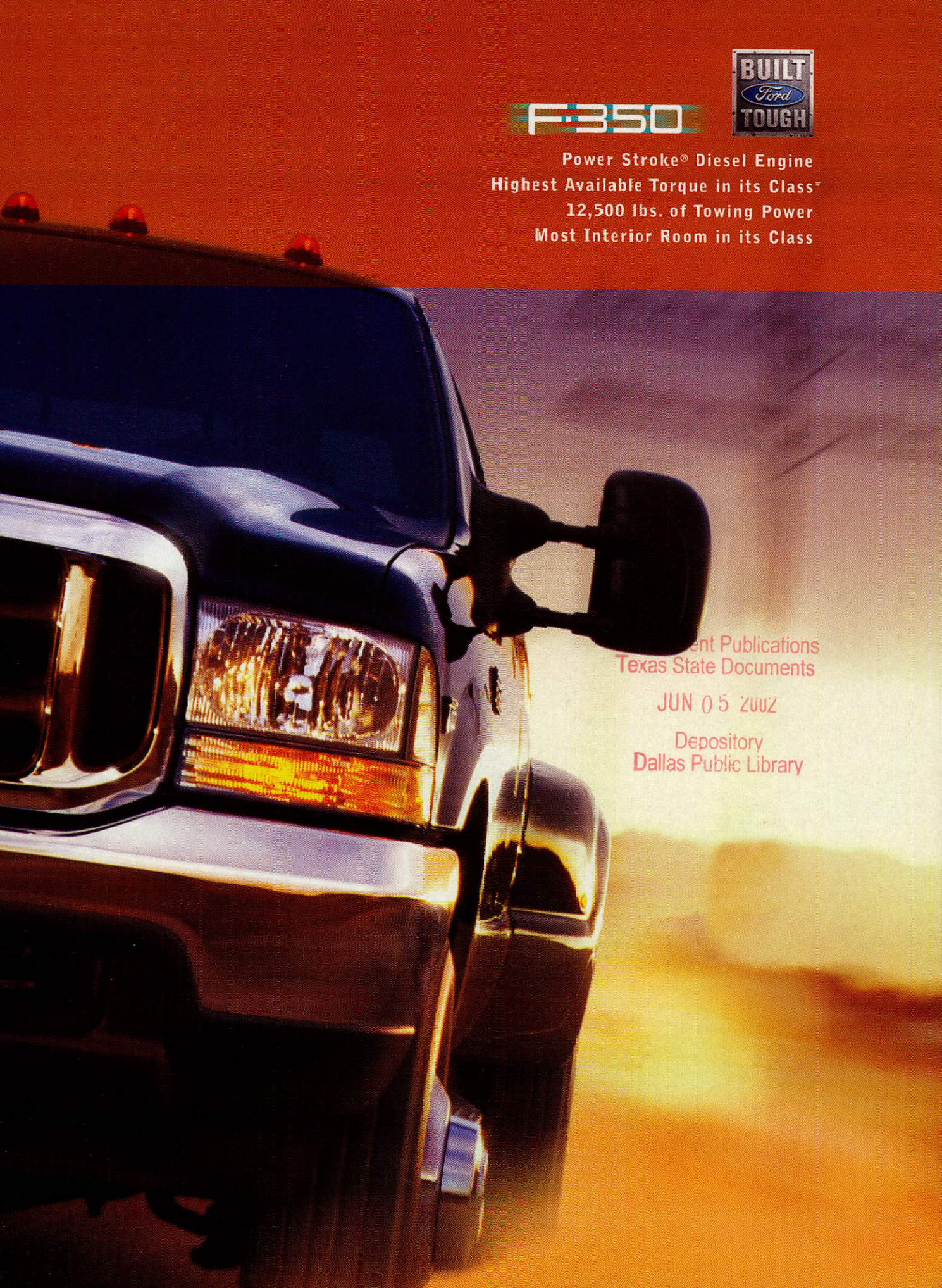
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no boundaries

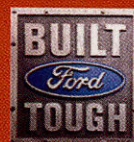


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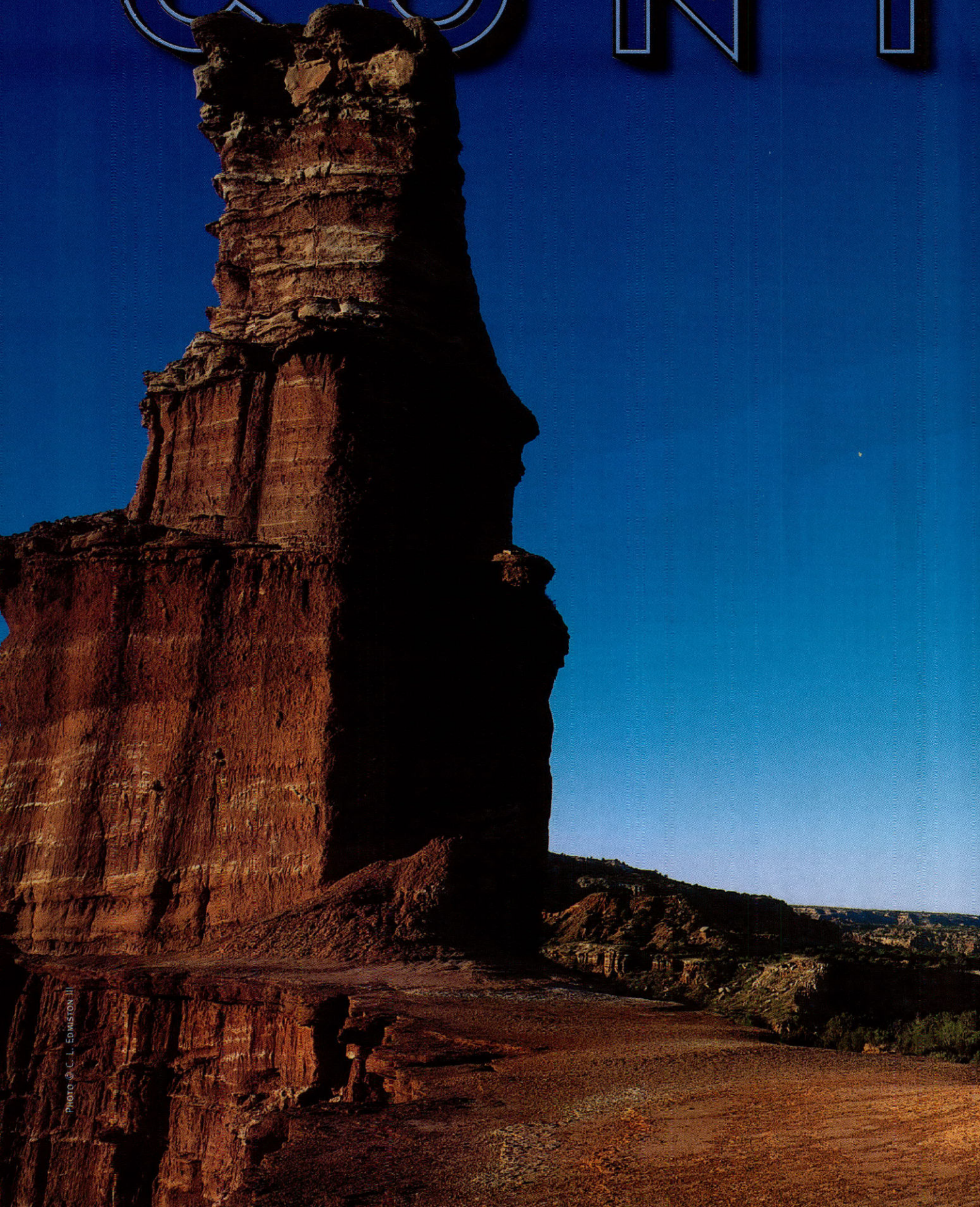


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MAY 2002

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Front: Offshore oil rigs are great places to explore the vertical reef communities of the Gulf of Mexico. See story on page 24. Photo © Jesse Cancelmo.

Back: For a Cinco de Mayo celebration like none other, go to the place the story started — Goliad. See story on page 36. Photo by Bill Reaves/TxDOT.

For the latest and greatest parks and wildlife information, check out our Web site <www.tpwd.state.tx.us>.

AT ISSUE

From the Pen of Robert L. Cook

In this issue of *Texas Parks & Wildlife*, you'll learn that Texas and Parks and Wildlife is a diverse agency, and that Texas is a very diverse state.

For example, at the recent 166th anniversary celebration of Texas Independence Day at Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site, I learned that of the 59 men who signed the Texas Declaration of Independence, only two were native-born Texans and, in fact, one was born in Mexico. Just over a week after these Texans signed our claim of independence, the defenders of the Alamo, including nine Hispanics, died for our freedom from Mexican rule.

On that day in 1836, another native-born Texan, Ignacio Seguín Zaragoza, was getting ready to celebrate his 7th birthday. Twenty-six years later, on May 5, 1862, while the cannon smoke was still clearing and the blood still visible on the ground in Shiloh, Tenn., where many Texans died defending their freedom again, native Texan Ignacio Zaragoza led a small army of "the first sons of Mexico" into the Battle of Puebla, Mexico, and defeated Napoleon III's much larger invading French Army, driving them back.



**Our children's children
will forever celebrate
Cinco de Mayo, May 5,
a national holiday in
Mexico, across the great
State of Texas,
and especially so at
Zaragoza's birthplace in
Goliad, Texas.**

All Texans are forever linked to the great nation of Mexico and our Hispanic blood-brothers and kin. We fought each other for what we believed, and we have fought, bled and lived side-by-side, as partners and lifelong friends. Our children's children will forever celebrate Cinco de Mayo, May 5, a national holiday in Mexico, across the great State of Texas, and especially so at Zaragoza's birthplace in Goliad. Join us, and first-time contributor Cecilia Ballí, in this wonderful celebration.



The incredible diversity of TPW is again emphasized by the fact that more than 600 species of birds call Texas home, and that more than 1 million Texans and 250,000 non-residents hit the roads of Texas annually to go wildlife watching. Almost half of Texas' birds stay in Texas year-round, or at least long enough to raise a family each year. Texas is known to be the favorite state for thousands of birdwatchers, which represents a significant inflow of tourism dollars for our communities. These wildlife watchers spend an average of about \$400 per traveler, or an estimated \$500 million each year, enjoying, watching and learning about wildlife in the great outdoors of Texas. To help facilitate the sport of wildlife-watching, TPW recently has completed The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, which links more than 300 premier bird watching sites and 100 communities along the Gulf Coast. Following the success and popularity of this trail, we are currently developing three new wildlife viewing trails across Texas: The Heart of Texas Trail, The High Plains Trail and The Prairies and Pineywoods Trail. Saturday May 11 is International Bird Day. Go bird!

What do you say? Join me in celebrating the heritage, history, and the great outdoors of Texas!

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CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS:

Grady Allen, Wyman Meinzer, Earl Nottingham and David J. Sams

EDITORIAL OFFICES:

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

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES:

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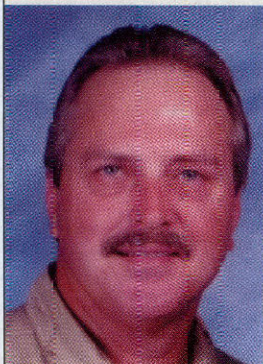
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ABC AUDITED

Larry Bozka, who writes in this issue about fishing with live bait, was the first editor of the Coastal Conservation Association's *TIDE* magazine and the former editor of *Texas Fish & Game*. Currently he is co-host of the weekly "Outdoors with Junebug & the Boz" program on Texas Radio and author of



Larry Bozka's Saltwater Strategies: How, When & Where to Fish the Western Gulf Coast. With Mary, his wife and partner of 20 years, he owns Bozka Outdoor Media and CoastalAnglers.com. The couple is currently producing "Coastal Angling Strategies & Techniques," an instructional video series.

Cecilia Ballí is a writer-at-large for *Texas Monthly* and a second-year doctoral student in cultural anthropology at Rice University. A native of Brownsville, she attended Stanford, where she studied American Studies and Spanish. For two years after graduation she served as an education writer for the *San Antonio Express-News*. This summer she will be published in *Colorize This!: Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism* (Seal Press), a collection of essays on feminism by minority women nationwide. She currently resides in Houston and is a fervent fan of Tejano music. In this issue she writes about Cinco de Mayo celebrations in Guadalupe.



Penelope Warren, who writes about birding in Laredo in this issue, is an English instructor at Laredo Community College. She has written about birds for *LareDos, A Journal of the Borderlands* and is co-author of a scientific paper, soon to be published by Texas Tech University, on the birds of the Bravo Bend area. She is a founding member of the Laredo International Birding Association, and is on the advisory board for the Rio Grande segment of PBS' American Rivers series.

IN THE FIELD

MAIL CALL

Picks, Pans and Probes from Previous Issues

It's shaping up to be quite a year for anniversaries here at Texas Parks and Wildlife. Operation Game Thief, Texas' wildlife crime-stoppers program, is celebrating its 20th anniversary next month with a gala event starring Jerry Jeff Walker, as you'll see on page 15 of this issue. This event's auctions and raffles will help fund OGT, a privately funded program which relies on donations.

"The millions of people who enjoy wildlife and the thousands of landowners who rely on game wardens to help safeguard their properties should be thankful for Operation Game Thief," says Col. Jim Stinebaugh, TPW law enforcement director. "OGT is an invaluable tool to help citizens help us stop wildlife crimes." Indeed. Over the past two decades, OGT has paid out more than \$150,000 in rewards, received more than 24,000 phone calls and helped make cases to levy more than \$1 million in fines. OGT offers rewards of up to \$1,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of individuals who flagrantly violate Texas game and fish laws. Callers may remain anonymous. Citizens with knowledge of a flagrant game or fish violation are encouraged to call OGT at (800) 792-GAME. This toll-free hotline is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Texas state parks have a bumper crop of anniversaries this year: Mother Neff State Park and Bastrop State Park — both venerable, enchanting Civilian Conservation Corps-constructed parks — are each 65 years old. Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Site is 50. Both Dinosaur Valley State Park and Lake Colorado City State Park are celebrating 30 years of service. What better places could you find to celebrate Mother's Day? And what better time to enjoy our state parks than May, before summer's sizzle sets in?

Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine will be celebrating this year as well, as December 2002 will mark the 60th anniversary issue of this magazine. Launched amidst the harshness and sacrifice of World War II in December 1942, the fledgling publication promised to deliver readers "a pleasanter place in which to live, with the invigorating influence of the out-of-doors doing its full share to cleanse their spirits and temper their character."

Every month, for nearly 60 years now, we have endeavored to do the same.

Susan Shelton

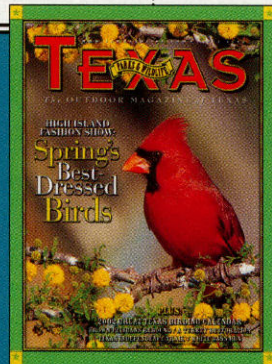
The Forgotten Story

As the parents of Delia and Regina Shelton, we would like to express our sincere thanks for the article "The Forgotten Story" (February 2002).

Reginald Owens provided a spectacular treatment of the subject by conveying the message of the research conducted by UT professor Norkunas' graduate students, Antony Cherian and Mark Westmoreland. The TPW grant that supports the project has brought a sense of urgency to the Old Washington community regarding the preservation of the oral history and a renaissance effort

of honoring the accomplishments of their forefathers.

The youth have gained an understanding of the commitment necessary to plan and complete the process of historical documentation and the techniques of interviewing subjects. Furthermore, they have benefited from the exposure to non-traditional careers and a firsthand opportunity to talk with university students regarding their experiences.



My attention was caught by "Bluebird Nest Boxes," (April 2002). What a helpful article! We are currently working with a Venture Scout on an eastern bluebird project. Thanks for all the great information you provide to Texas naturalists!

Dana Wilson,
Texas Master Naturalist Program

FORWARD

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MAIL CALL

While it has been arduous at times, we are proud of the girls for standing by their commitment to see the project through. The editorial phase is well underway and I believe that the final product will add a much-needed dimension to the coverage of history for all Texans in the state park archives. I sincerely hope that this is the first of many projects of this nature.

— Marcia and Nathaniel Shelton, Jr.

Remembering the Bird Man

Your short piece on Edgar Kincaid (April 2002) brought back special memories. About 1960, the MidNats (Midland Naturalists) made a weekend field trip to the Davis Mountains. Edgar accompanied us. Saturday evening found us at the Madera Canyon picnic area.

In the gathering darkness we heard what sounded like a puppy's bark. The sound moved back and forth along the side of the canyon above us. Edgar directed us to wait, and disappeared toward the sound. From time to time we saw the flicker of a flashlight as the barks continued. Edgar reappeared and, refusing to satisfy our curiosity, told us to follow him.

Stumbling over rocks in the dim light, we moved up the side of the canyon. Stopping, Edgar admonished us to be quiet. The barks came closer. Suddenly he switched on his flashlight and there, only a few feet away, perched an elf owl – a "lifer" for most of us.

The MidNats had me hooked on birding already. That night, Edgar Kincaid reeled me in.

Jim Henderson
Midland

Hunting Legacy

While hunting at Old Sabine Bottom Wildlife Management Area last winter, I was inspired to write about my family's years of hunting.

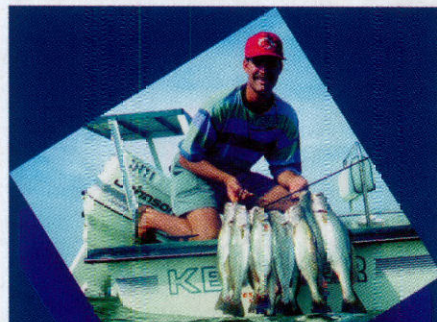


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MAIL CALL

My husband, Stephen, began hunting with his father in the early 1960s. Stephen harvested his first buck, a 10-pointer, at Alabama Creek WMA. Stephen and I married and had two sons, and soon the four of us were hunting as a family. In 1987 we were drawn for hunts on Honey Creek State Natural Area and Kerr WMA. This began 17 incredible years of hunting on Texas Parks and Wildlife lands.

Our son, Brian, harvested his first deer at Honey Creek. I harvested my first deer at Kerr WMA, thanks to the late Donnie Harmel. Our grandson, Blake, harvested his first deer at Chaparral WMA. Our son, Shawn, and our nephew, Joshua, also have harvested deer at wildlife management areas.

Our wedding anniversary is in October, and every year the two of us go to one of these WMAs. We have yet to harvest an animal, since it falls during bow season, but we love being together and enjoying the outdoors.

Our many hunting experiences have created a bond with our sons approaching only the bond created by our spiritual life. We have many sweet memories and plan to have more. We are grateful to Texas Parks and Wildlife.

*Marie Elaine O'Neal
Crosby*

Sound off for "Mail Call!"

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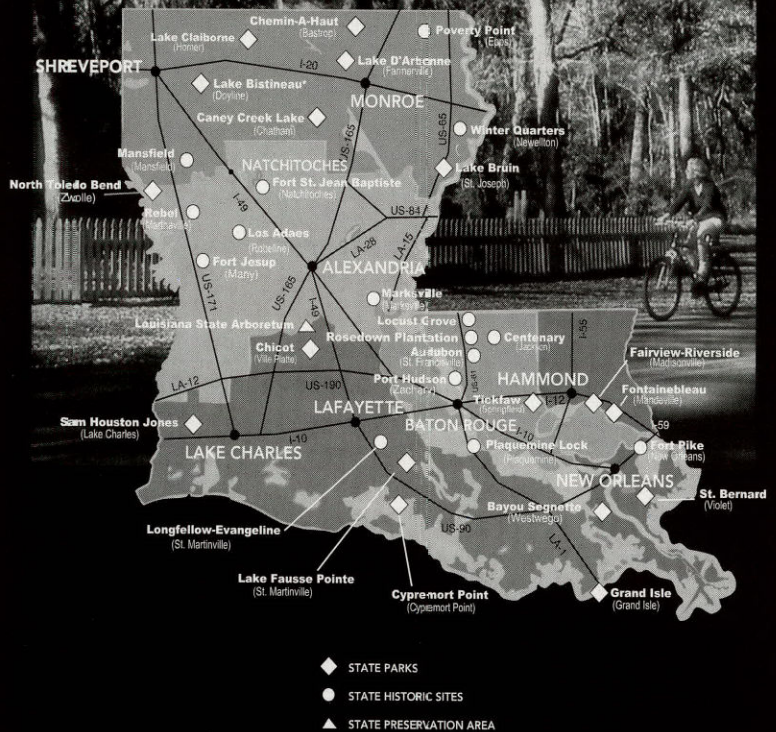
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SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

CONSERVATION

CRAB TRAP
*Cleanup**Volunteers clean up the coast
— under the water.*

MORE THAN 500 VOLUNTEERS flocked to Texas coastal bays earlier this year to gather and dispose of abandoned or lost crab traps, in a successful first annual Crab Trap Cleanup. Tens of thousands of unused wire crab traps clutter the Texas shoreline, in marshes, seagrass beds and shallow coastal areas. Many also lie abandoned on the bottoms of coastal bays.

"Seeing these old pieces of metal debris washing ashore is not very aesthetically pleasing," says Lance Robinson, regional director for coastal fisheries. Abandoned cages also create problems for boaters, shrimpers and marine resources.

Until this year, ridding the bays of old crab traps was impossible. Texas law considers the traps private property, and only game wardens or trap owners could collect even obviously abandoned traps. Game wardens had to try to locate the owner, then seek a destruction order through the court to destroy the trap, a time-consuming process.

A new Texas law allows TPW to close the crab fishery for a 10- to 30-day period each year during February and March. For the first seven days, private-property laws still apply. But on the eighth day, traps are reclassified as litter, which allows TPW to use volunteers to assist in removing abandoned traps. This year, volunteers gathered at 27 collection sites coastwide, collecting an astounding 8,063 traps.

"It's more than an aesthetic issue," says Robinson. "These traps continue to fish after they're abandoned. It becomes this perpetual ghost trap." Fish or crabs that are caught in a lost or abandoned trap can't escape, and after they die, they become bait for yet more organisms — known as ghost fishing. At the

cleanup, TPW staff counted species stuck in abandoned traps, and besides blue and stone crabs they found sheepshead, toadfish, gulf sandtrout, speckled trout, black drum, redfish, flounder and the increasingly rare diamond-back terrapin.

Abandoned traps also ensnare boat propellers and shrimping nets. Many recreational angling groups were among the volunteers cleaning up the traps, and shrimpers were seen giving thumbs up to crab trap cleanup crews.

Part of the reason so many traps are abandoned is that the crab fishery has been a transient industry. "People were staying a year or so and moving on, and traps were being left in the water and discarded," explains Robinson. TPW estimated that 20,000 to 30,000 traps were being lost each year. It wasn't until this year's Crab Trap Cleanup that citizens could begin cleaning up the abandoned traps.

Everyone involved hailed the first cleanup as a big success. Likewise, everyone involved understands that more work is yet to come: thousands of traps remain in Texas bays, waiting to be cleaned up in coming years.

— *Wendee Holtcamp*



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CONSERVATION

Greening the Cities

Texas Parks and Wildlife's urban biologists are a small force with a huge impact on keeping cities livable.

FOR PARENTS who think managing a household is a challenge, try being responsible for an entire urban ecosystem. That's the challenge faced daily by Texas Parks and Wildlife's nine urban biologists.

While most of the Texas landmass is rural, 80 percent of Texans live in and around cities. And because much of the state's growth is around cities, urban biologists — stationed in Houston, Austin, San Antonio, Dallas, El Paso and the Rio Grande Valley — can have an impact on keeping cities green.

"Urban sprawl is a big problem in Houston and other Texas cities," says Houston-based urban biologist Diana Foss. "A city like Houston is basically open for development, and it is one of my jobs to work with developers who are making property decisions and come up with ways to leave green space."

San Antonio-based urban biologist Rufus Stephens is making a difference with developers. Through his work and presentations to land brokers and realtors, city leaders grew to respect his expertise in urban wildlife management. In 2000, San Antonio passed a \$60 million bond to acquire land and minimize development near the Edwards Aquifer. Stephens was appointed to the technical group that selected the properties and was instrumental in formulating a model to conserve open spaces. "We're trying to change the way city planners and land managers feel about development," says Stephens. "Usually, it's trying something different from the harmful development practices that they used historically."

John Davis, one of two urban biologists in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, has worked extensively with golf course developers. He works closely with municipal courses in Arlington and other cities in the metroplex, advising course managers on how to landscape with native plants and restore natural ecosystems, including prairies and wetlands.

Despite their hard work, there is no way urban biologists can address all the needs of cities with millions of residents. So TPW has implemented mentoring initiatives like the Texas Master Naturalist volunteer program. (For information, contact state coordinator Michelle Haggerty at (979) 458-2034.) Since 1998, urban biologists have helped train more than 1,000 volunteers, who returned some 40,000 hours of work.

"The idea is to train people how to use natural resources and educate them on what habitat and species are right for their ecosystem," Foss says. "They can then volunteer time to improve the resources of an area and educate others as well."

One concept that urban biologists promote for homeowners is wildscaping, which is landscaping to benefit native



wildlife. "Wildscaping promotes the use of native plants, which reduce water usage and can provide opportunities to bring colorful butterflies and birds to your yard," Foss says.

Changing an entire city's ecological and environmental attitude does not happen overnight. But progress is being made, particularly in encouraging city parks and recreation departments to use native plantings. "When people want to listen, we can accomplish things," says Dallas urban biologist Lou Vernon. "If cities and parks have good design, homeowners will follow their lead. And if people can be taught to appreciate the habitat features of their backyard, they'll better understand the habitat needs of wildlife everywhere."

— *Gariand Levit*

FIELD NOTES

BIKE TEXAS!

If you're into steep grades, water crossings, blind drop-offs or just a scenic off-road spin, many Texas state parks offer rides through awesome scenery and across challenging terrain. Plus, planning your next biking adventure just got easier with *Bike Texas: A Complete Guide to the Best Trails of Texas State Parks*. This 16-page booklet retails for 99 cents and is available at the 48 Texas state parks with bike trails and at sporting goods stores and bike shops.



A NEW PLACE TO PARK

*Looking for a place to keep cool in northeast Texas?
Try Lake Tawakoni, the newest state park.*

A NEW STATE PARK opened in March that offers great camping on a rolling wooded property alongside Lake Tawakoni, about 50 miles east of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. Visitors have access to 78 multi-use campsites, about five miles of hiking trails (one follows a peninsula that offers great views of the lake) and 40 picnic sites. A swimming beach



and a boat ramp offer abundant opportunities for water recreation. Birding is good year-round; in the spring, bluebirds, cardinals and sharp-shinned hawks are just three of the 112 species that have been identified.

Except for the hiking trails, the park is almost entirely

ADA-accessible, according to park manager Ken Watson.

The park not only provides a place to enjoy the outdoors, but preserves 40 acres of tallgrass prairie, an endangered ecosystem. The prairie ecosystem will be enhanced and managed by Texas Parks and Wildlife.

To get to Lake Tawakoni State Park, take I-20 to State Highway 47 north to FM 2475. Go through the town of Wills Point, and after 10 miles, the road dead-ends at the park. For more information, call the park at (903) 560-7123. To reserve campsites call (512) 389-8900 or go to www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/admin/res/.

— Tom Harvey

TEXAS READER

TEXAS SPRINGS REISSUE

“THE SAN ANTONIO SPRING may be classed as of the first water among the gems of the natural world,” Frederick Law Olmsted wrote about the Bexar County springs in 1857. “The whole river up in one sparkling burst from the earth. It has all the beautiful accompaniments of a smaller spring, moss, pebbles, seclusion, sparkling sunbeams, and dense overhanging luxuriant foliage. The effect is overpowering.”

But as geologist Gunnar Brune writes in *Springs of Texas*, the natural paradise that Olmsted admired has since slowed to a trickle. First published in 1981, the book sounded the death knell for the countless Texas springs that ceased flowing in the 20th century due to overpumping and the demands of a growing population.

Formerly out of print, this valuable reference is now available in a new edition with an introduction by Helen C. Besse (Texas A&M University Press, \$75 hardcover). It celebrates the state's natural bounty and provides the only comprehensive description of the archaeology, ecology and flow of more than 2,300 springs in 183 out of 254 Texas counties. (Brune died before he could complete Volume II.)

One point he makes throughout the book is that, just as humans throughout history have settled near springs, many endemic species of wildlife evolved in these unique ecosystems. “Springs are vital ecological components for conserving the biodiversity of Texas,” writes Besse in the new introduction. With the reissue of this classic work of natural history, perhaps more Texans will care about their fate.

— Elaine Robbins



TOP PHOTO BY TPW/SANDRA G. REYES; BOTTOM PHOTO © EARL NOTTINGHAM

Snorkel Set

High-quality masks, fins and snorkels can make your dives more enjoyable.

BY GIBBS MILLIKEN

ON YOUR NEXT VACATION or weekend trip to the lake, river or ocean, don't forget to pack a mask, fins and snorkel for some amazing discoveries down under. Priced from youth sets to high-end professional separates, they are made to fit all ages, shapes and sizes.

The **Pro Pack** (\$85, U.S. Divers, (877) 873-3483, <www.aqualung.com>) is a good introductory set with a high-quality mask, adjustable fins and dry-top purge snorkel, plus a ventilated compartment shoulder bag for easy transport. For snorkeling, I recommend adding a flotation vest for safety.

MASKS

The most important thing to look for when you select a mask is a comfortable fit. The better designs have soft, hypoallergenic, silicone face seals, large viewing plates of tempered glass and low-volume interiors. To make sure the mask fits properly, hold it to your face and lightly inhale through the nose. The mask should remain in place without holding, indicating a good air seal. (Any mask will seem to fit if the suction applied is strong, so be sure to sniff lightly.)

One of the better masks is the **Shadow** for men (\$79.95) or the **Mini-Shadow** for women (\$74.95, Oceanic, (510) 562-0500, <www.oceanicworldwide.com>). Made of soft matte-black silicone, it offers unobstructed vision. For an even wider view, try the panoramic **Tri-View Edgeless** (\$59.95,

Oak Hill Scuba (512) 892-4900, <www.oakhillscuba.com>) with beveled-glass peripheral-vision side windows.

Very popular are the clear silicone-skirted masks. These masks look cool, are comfortable — and don't deteriorate like rubber. The unique **Lite Vision 1** (\$124.95, Oceanic) has an LED waterproof headlamp and flashing signal light that runs on watch batteries. Effective in low-light conditions, it adds a safety element to an already fine design. Many other excellent masks are available to fit every size and shape of face.

FINS

Dive fins should fit properly; adjustable heel straps allow you to wear them with aqua socks, neoprene booties or light canvas boating shoes. This will prevent rubbing, plus let you take your fins off and navigate difficult locations without hurting your feet on sharp rocks, barnacles or sea-urchin spines.

A good choice for beginners is the **Fab Force SK** (\$125, Force Fin, (800) 346-7946, <www.forcefin.com>). Intended primarily for snorkelers and youths, they

have comfortable, fully opening, padded foot pockets and widely adjustable Velcro closures.

Among the top dive fins are the unusual, curled-blade **Tan Delta Force Fins** (\$279, Force Fin). Built to U.S. military standards of a special polyurethane, they feature reduced fin size, light weight and distinctive shape for easy maneuvering. A toes-free foot pocket reduces cramping and leverages power, producing an efficient kick.

Advanced swimmers who want great power and speed should try the **Vortex V12 Fins** (\$189.95, Oceanic). These long professional fins feature the new, high-efficiency split-blade design in a heavy-duty duroprene material. Lighter weight, yet very high in performance, are the **Tusa X-pert Zoom SF-8 Fins** (\$189, Tabata USA, (562) 498-3708, <www.tusa.com>). These split blades have all the advanced features plus a radical downward angle for greater propulsion. A third high-tech design is the excellent pivoting-blade **Mares Volo Fins** (\$199.95, Mares, (203) 855-9400, <www.mares.com>). These sleek, multi-ribbed and vented blades perform a flexing action that forces the fins to work continuously at the optimal angle, thus minimizing fatigue and producing a fluid movement through the water. Most dive fins can be matched as a set with the same-brand mask and snorkel.

SNORKELS

Most traditional snorkels have been improved by the addition of soft silicone mouthpieces for comfort and splash guards to reduce wave wash. One of the newest innovations is the **Dry Snorkel** (\$55, Ocean Master, (626) 582-8000, <www.oceanmaster.com>), with a valve that automatically closes off the breathing tube when the unit is submerged. A purge valve below the mouthpiece allows clearing of any excess moisture.

What's the point of spending more on dive and snorkel gear? With good equipment, you can put all your attention on the amazing underwater world that surrounds you. ★

Mares Volo fins, Mariner mask and snorkel.





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SKILLBUILDER

How to Clean and Store a Shotgun

To keep your shotgun in good condition, there's work to be done after hunting season's over.

BY LARRY D. HODGE

OPENING WEEKEND of dove season finds many hunters taking their shotguns out of storage for the first time since the end of duck, goose or turkey season. What they see when they look at their guns is not always a pretty sight. Rust or green goo may adorn a shotgun that was improperly cared for before being stored.

The time to prepare your shotgun is before you put it away at the end of the season. Avoid problems by carefully cleaning the gun before putting it away and by keeping the gun in the right kind of environment between uses.

One of the sad facts of life is that even stainless steel will rust eventually if not cared for. Guns with traditional blued metal parts can literally rust overnight if stored damp, especially after being exposed to saltwater or air. The first step in gun care is to get rid of all moisture. This requires disassembling the gun

before cleaning it. Wiping the wood and metal parts of a fully assembled gun with a silicone-treated cloth is quick and easy, but it doesn't get the job done down deep. Even if you don't get rained on in the duck blind, moisture can be trapped between wood and metal parts.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for disassembling your gun. (If you do not have an owner's manual, manufacturers are required by law to furnish one on request. Visit their Web site or get their telephone number from a licensed dealer.) Take off the forearm of a break-open gun, separate the barrels from the action and remove the trigger group from the stock. For pumps and autoloaders, remove the forearm and separate the barrel and magazine tube from the receiver. (Failure to do so can result in a barrel and receiver welded together by rust.) Remove the end cap from the magazine tube — careful! there's a strong

spring in there — and remove the spring and magazine plug. Remove the trigger group. Carefully wipe all moisture from the parts inside and out with a soft cloth.

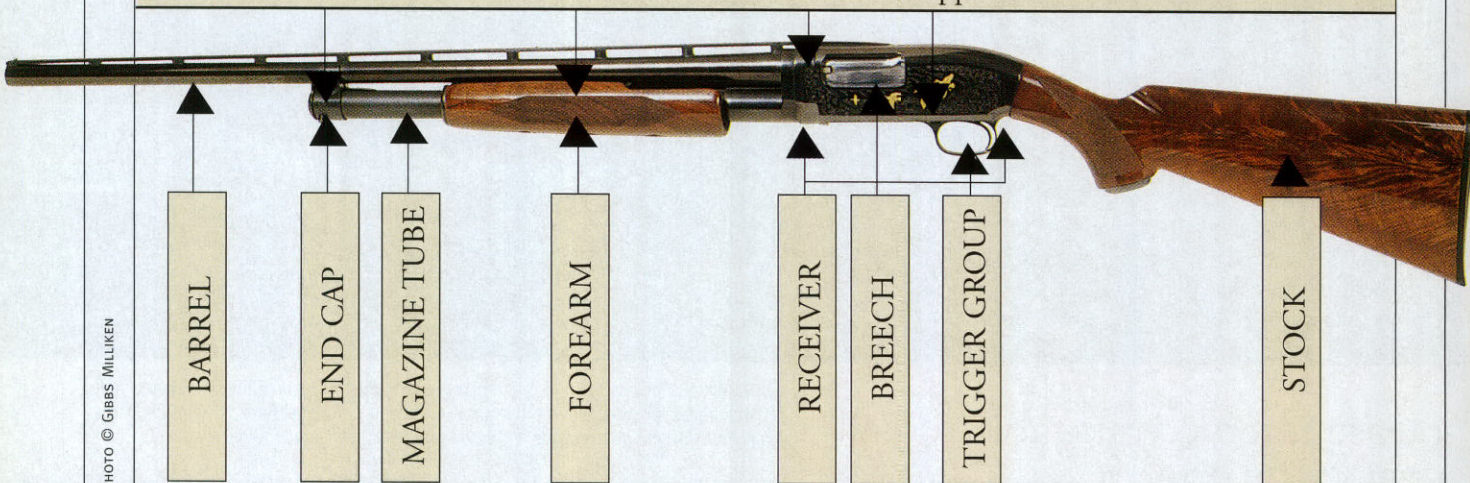
Then use the cleaners recommended by the manufacturer to clean the barrels and all other metal parts inside and out. For guns with interchangeable chokes, don't forget to take the choke out of the barrel and clean the threads on choke and barrel. And while you have the choke out, soak it in a cleaner designed to remove plastic wad residue. Your shotgun will pattern better. Apply some lithium grease to the choke threads before reinstalling.

Before reassembling the gun, apply gun oil in the manner and of the type specified by the manufacturer. Use a cleaning cloth to remove all traces of fingerprints from metal parts; the acid in body oils can etch metal.

The next step is to store the gun in a childproof, humidity-controlled environment. Never store a gun in a carrying case. Such cases can trap moisture and lead to rust and mildew — the green goo. Instead, store the gun in a cabinet where air can circulate around it. A heated, air-conditioned, locked space is best.

Finally, remember that nothing lasts forever. Every 30 to 45 days, take the gun out and wipe the metal parts with a cloth impregnated with gun oil or rust preventative. Come dove season, you'll be pleased to take out a shotgun that's clean and as ready to shoot as you are. ★

Places where moisture can be trapped



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The Ghosts of Caddo

The 21st century hasn't found Caddo Lake. Time seems suspended in the lake's shadowy cypress thickets and serpentine sloughs.

IT'S QUIET — EXTRAORDINARILY SO — and there's a mysterious, even spooky, feeling as you glance over your shoulder, expecting to see a steamboat carrying passengers to Jefferson from New Orleans.

I start my visit with a stop in Uncertain, an ambiguously named town of 150 friendly folks on the lake's southern shore. Uncertain is small-town Texas at its best. Grocery stores sell bait and hardware along with the bread and pickles, and one local business advertises "grocery, café, beauty shop." You won't find a multiplex theater or a strip mall anywhere in town. The people are proud of the lake and always eager to share their stories about it.

CADDO LAKE STATE PARK

Next I head for Caddo Lake State Park, which is not actually on the lake but on Big Cypress Bayou, which feeds into the lake. The sun is making its way down the western sky as I pull into the parking lot. I spend some time visiting with manager Todd Dickinson, who tells me about recent improvements to the 68-year-old park. The nine cabins — built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps from native iron ore stone — have been refurbished and are more popular than ever.

Eager to get out into the park during the last few hours of daylight, I head for the hiking trail. I pass by the cabins and see smoke curling from the chimneys on this November afternoon.

“LEARN ABOUT...” Series from TPW Press

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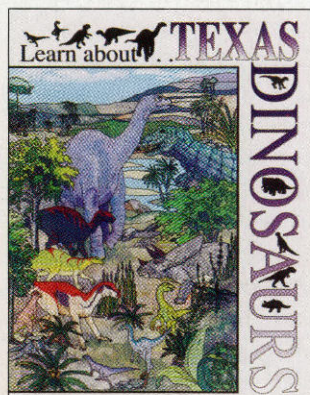
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By Georg Zappler • Illustrated by Elena T. Ivy
Just published in Fall 2001!

Learn About...Texas Freshwater Fishes combines detailed drawings suitable for coloring with information on color, size, habitat and range for 102 species of fish, including popular game fish such as bass and catfish. The book also presents information on characteristics of fish, taxonomy, internal and external structures, and how fish sense their environment, swim and reproduce.

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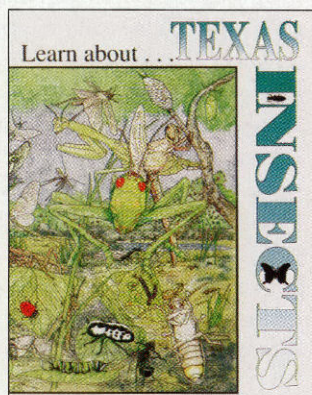
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Illustrated by Elena T. Ivy
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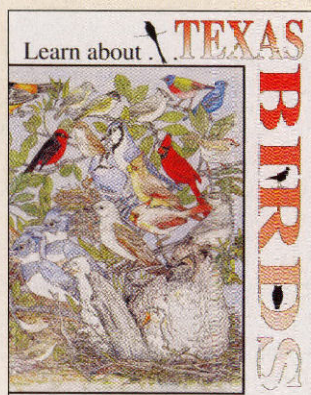
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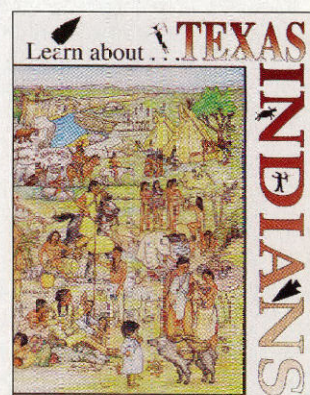
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Suggested for ages 10 to 14.

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By Georg Zappler
Illustrated by Elena T. Ivy
Eye-catching line drawings invite children to color scenes from the diverse lives of Texas' Native Americans. Entertaining games and a 16" x 21" coloring poster add to youngsters' knowledge of Lone Star Indians.
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Order online anytime at www.utexas.edu/utpress or call toll-free (800) 252-3206 (M-F 8 to 4:30)



The Graceful Ghost is a replica of the paddlewheel steamboats that used to carry passengers between Jefferson and New Orleans.

Lush vegetation envelops me on the trail. Pines and hardwoods form a canopy overhead, and stands of ferns, buckeyes and sumacs show off their autumn reds. American beautyberry shrubs sport clusters of purple berries. I hear a woodpecker tapping nearby and hear, then see, a flock of cedar waxwings. All too soon, I remember that night falls quickly in these thick woods, so I head for the car. My last stop of the day is Big Pines Lodge, where I watch the sun set over the lake while enjoying a traditional Caddo Lake dinner — catfish and hush puppies.

LOCAL LORE

At breakfast the next morning I meet Pud and Bobby Harper, who will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary this year. Pud Harper's father, Beer Smith, operated the Fly 'n Fish on Caddo Lake in the early 1950s. "He looked like a long-necked beer bottle when he played football in high school," Pud tells me, "so they called him 'Beerbottle' and later just 'Beer.'" As I finish my omelet, the Harpers entertain me with stories of Caddo Lake in the 1940s and '50s.

The Fly 'n Fish was "a 20-room motel that had a large dining area downstairs," Pud tells me. "Upstairs it had a ballroom with a stage that could be lowered or raised. On the other end of that was a bar. People would fly their private planes in, and we had a hanger where they could leave them. Across the street, he built a huge pier that's still there." Beer Smith was responsible for the town being incorporated in 1961.

The Harpers invite me to visit their doll museum, the M&M Doll House, named for Pud (Mimi) and granddaughter Marissa. Pud and Bobby have spent years collecting hundreds of dolls from all over the world. They display 200 or so at a time. A Thanksgiving scene graced the museum when I visited. A Christmas theme was to come in December and a Mardi Gras theme after that. Admission is free, but call before you go — (903) 789-3210 — to make sure someone is there.

STEAMBOAT CRUISE

More than one person has warned me that it's easy to get lost in the twisting sloughs and backwater cypress ponds. "Once you get out there, it all looks the same," says Bobby Harper. Maps are available, but for a first-time visit, it's best to go out with a fishing guide or a lake tour guide. Guides are local people with a passion for the area's history and nature. I choose the Caddo Lake Steamboat Company, which has a replica of a 19th-century steamboat called *The Graceful Ghost*.

With a blast of the steam whistle, we're off. Captains Jim and Lexie McMillen take turns telling passengers about the history and ecology of the lake and tending the wood-fired boiler. The cypress thickets are unbelievably dense in places, and the trees are decked out in hues of orange and red. Lexie points out a beaver lodge and a red-shouldered hawk circling above. She tells us that the thick Spanish moss draped over the tree limbs does more than add to Caddo's unique atmosphere; it exists only in clean air, making it an air-quality indicator. Caddo is primarily a fishing lake, and we wave to anglers we see casting from their bass boats.

Steamboat travel in the area began around 1845. Starting in New Orleans, these comfortable and elegantly appointed passenger ships would cruise up the Mississippi to the Red River, through Caddo Lake, and up Cypress Bayou to Jefferson. There was usually a band aboard, which would play at landings, during meals and during nighttime balls. We skirt the heavily wooded shoreline of Caddo Lake State Park and Wildlife Management Area. At more than 7,000 acres, the WMA is a permanent buffer to development on this part of the lake. The WMA offers public hunts, primitive camping, hiking, fishing and spectacular wildlife viewing.

CANOEING CADDO

After a morning trip to Jefferson — just 17 miles up FM 134 and filled with 19th-century charm — I head back to the lake

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Caddo Lake State Park: (903) 679-3351; www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/caddo/. To reserve cabins or campsites, call (512) 389-8900 or go to www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/admin/res.

Caddo Canoe Rentals and Lake Tours (in the state park): (903) 679-3743.

The Caddo Lake Area Chamber of Commerce & Tourism can provide lists of fishing guides and lake tour guides: (903) 679-3500; www.caddolake.org.

Caddo Lake Steamboat Company: (888) 325-5459 or (903) 789-3978.

A variety of lodgings is available in and around Uncertain. Call (888) 723-9800, (903) 789-2067 or go to www.caddolakeodging.com.

For information about Jefferson, call (888) 467-3529 or go to www.jefferson-texas.com.

Other useful Web sites: www.cityofuncertain.com; www.uncertain-tx.com.

and decide it's time to make a solo excursion. I buy a map, rent a canoe, and I'm off. Numbers on the map correspond to signs posted in the numerous boat roads that snake through the lake, so I figure that as long as I pay attention I should be OK.

I don't see any of the wood storks that inhabit the lake during the summer, but a lanky great blue heron rises just ahead of me with slow, deliberate wing beats. A belted kingfisher perches on

a snag, scanning the water for fish, and a row of turtles suns on a log. A single water lily floats on the surface; come spring, aquatic vegetation will burst into bloom, so thick in places it looks as though you could walk on it. I could stay out here for hours, but heeding the warnings I head back rather than risk getting turned around.

Before leaving town, I stop in at Caddo Grocery for a visit with Betty Holder, mayor of Uncertain and owner and operator of the grocery, which also sells barbecue and gives lake tours. It's two weeks before Thanksgiving, and Betty flips through a notebook of street decorations as we talk. Will Uncertain's lampposts sport bells, Santas or Christmas trees for the holiday season? She tells me about the upcoming Christmas parade, which is held on the water, and the Fourth of July fireworks, also on the lake.

Barbecue sales are brisk, and Betty tells me about some people who came in recently, ordered barbecue sandwiches and got drinks from the cooler. She rang them up, and they handed her a credit card.

"I'm sorry," she told them, "we don't take plastic."

The group looked nonplussed for a moment, then one of them said: "Well, we've already opened the drinks, and we don't have any cash."

Betty handed them a card with her address. "Just send me a check when you get home," she told them.

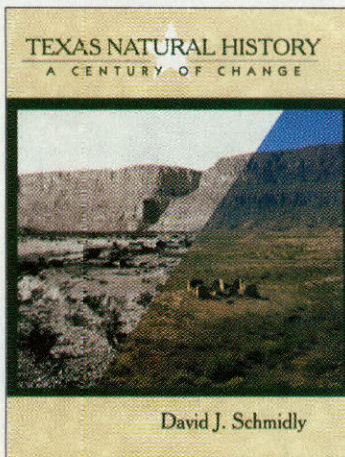
Did they do it, I wondered?

"Sure did," she says, "and they sent an extra \$25 for the next person who shows up without cash."

Small-town Texas at its best. ★

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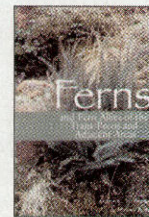
Texas Natural History A Century of Change David J. Schmidly

One hundred years ago, Texas was very different. A rural population was spread thinly across the eastern and central parts of the state, and vast lands in the western regions were still undisturbed. Wolves, both gray and red; black bears; black-footed ferrets; cougars; and many other species of wildlife that are now reduced or extinct were common then. *Texas Natural History* will give Texans a close and authoritative view of how their land once looked. More importantly, it will tell them what has happened to their wildlife heritage and what they might do to protect it in the future.

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Forewords by Andrew Sansom
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DEEPDOW

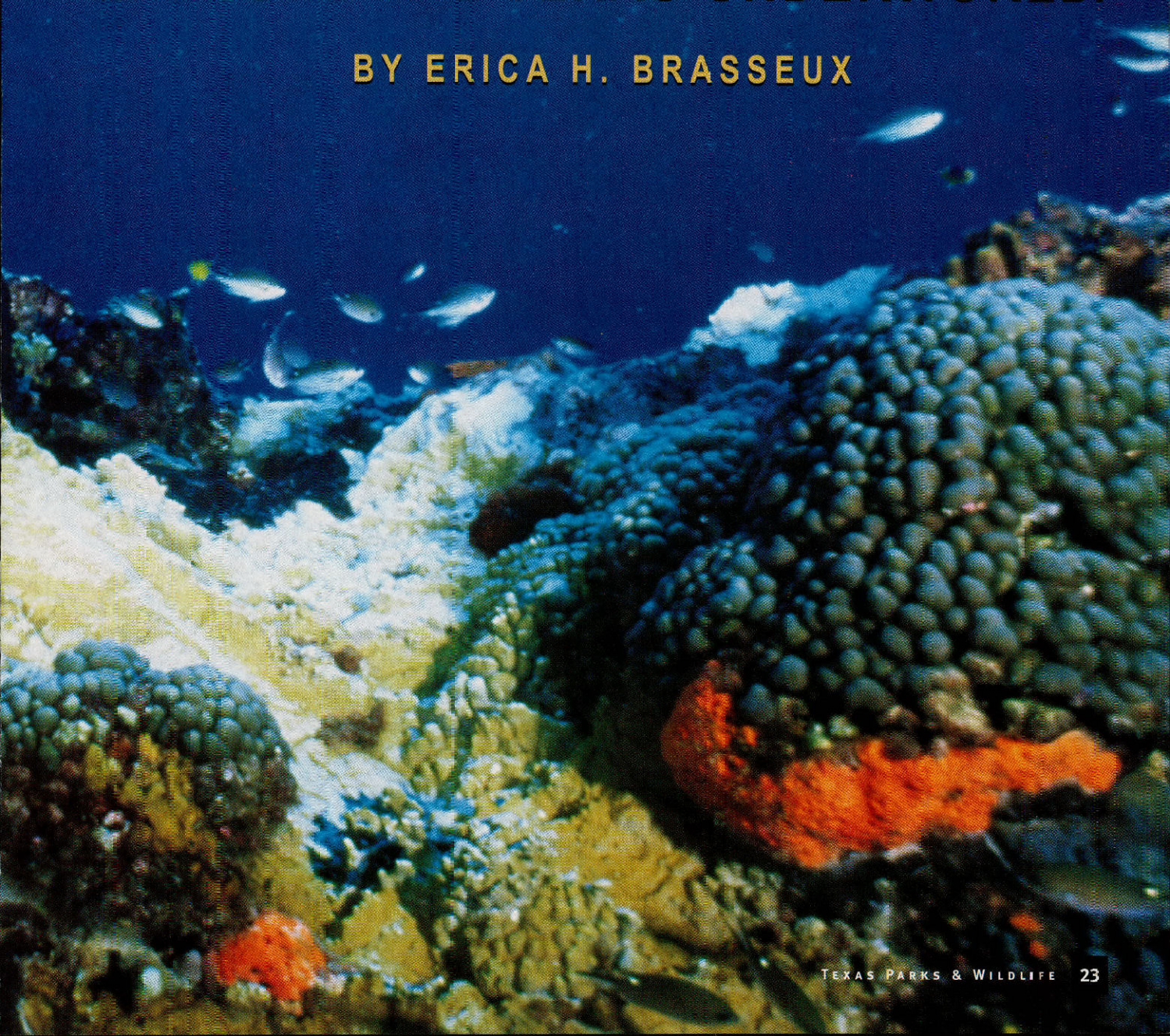


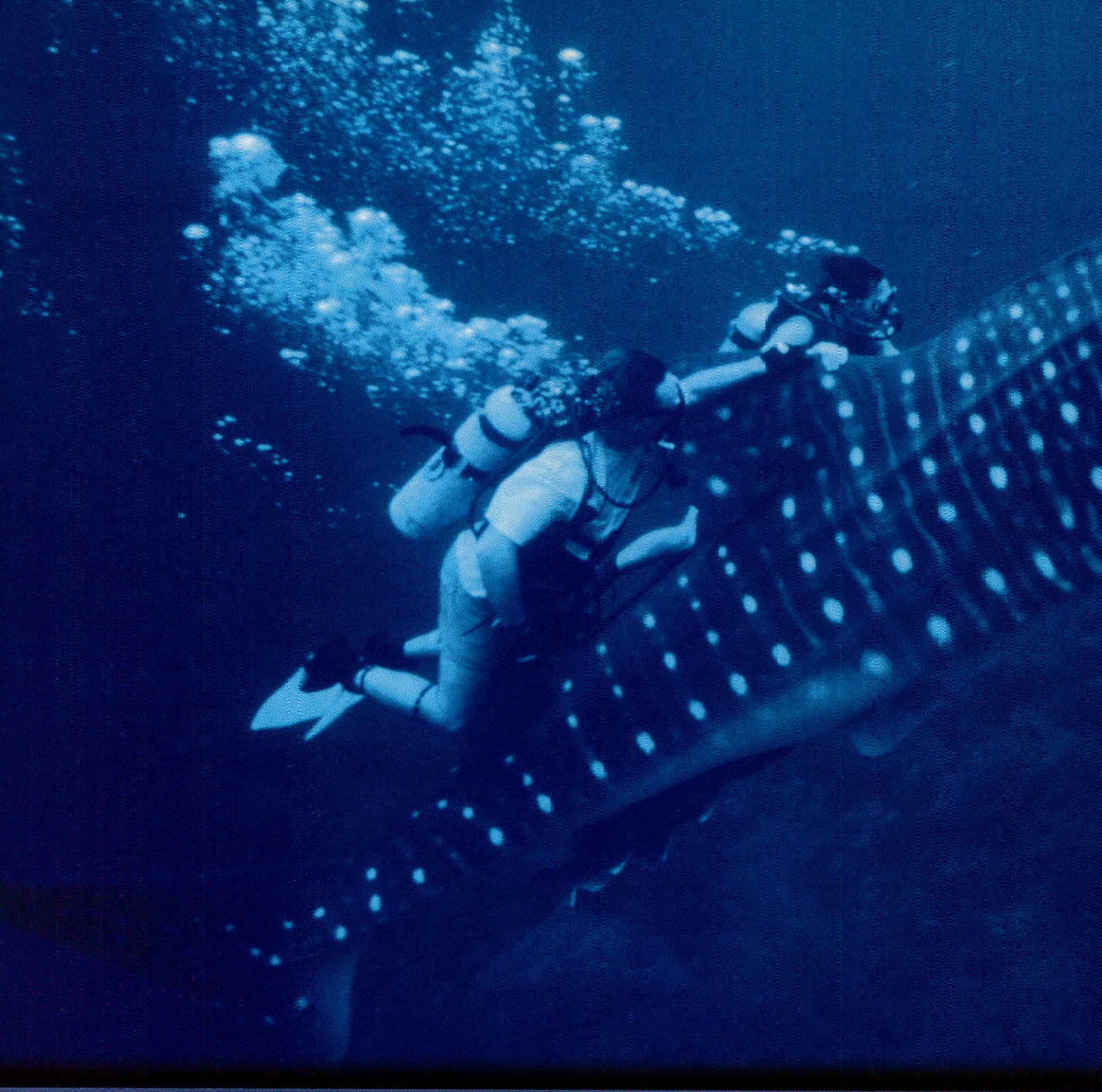
PHOTO © JESSE CANCELMO

WINTER TEXAS

NAVIGATE THE COMMAND STATIONS OF A NUCLEAR MISSILE SILO,
GAZE AT ARM-SIZED CATFISH IN A HILL COUNTRY LAKE OR SWIM WITH THE SHARKS IN
THE GULF OF MEXICO. THE OPPORTUNITIES ARE ENDLESS, SO GRAB YOUR GEAR AND
EXPLORE THE TEXAS UNDERWORLD.

BY ERICA H. BRASSEUX





Divers at the Flower Garden Banks share the seas with whale sharks and blennies.

1. Flower Garden Banks

A marine garden of spectacular coral and brilliantly colored sponges, the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary beckons divers on a two-day, eight-dive journey through Texas' backyard Caribbean reefs.

The Flower Garden Banks allow divers to explore more than 400 acres of coral reefs perched atop mountainous salt domes. The reefs host more than 250 species of fish, 375 invertebrates and 125 marine algae. Frequently sighted in this unspoiled wilderness are manta and spotted eagle rays, octopuses, loggerhead sea turtles, hammerhead and silky sharks and, if you are really lucky, a whale shark. For the venture-

some, transparent waters mean incredible night dives, allowing divers to see tiny crustaceans and other critters that emerge from the dark to feed under the safety of darkness.

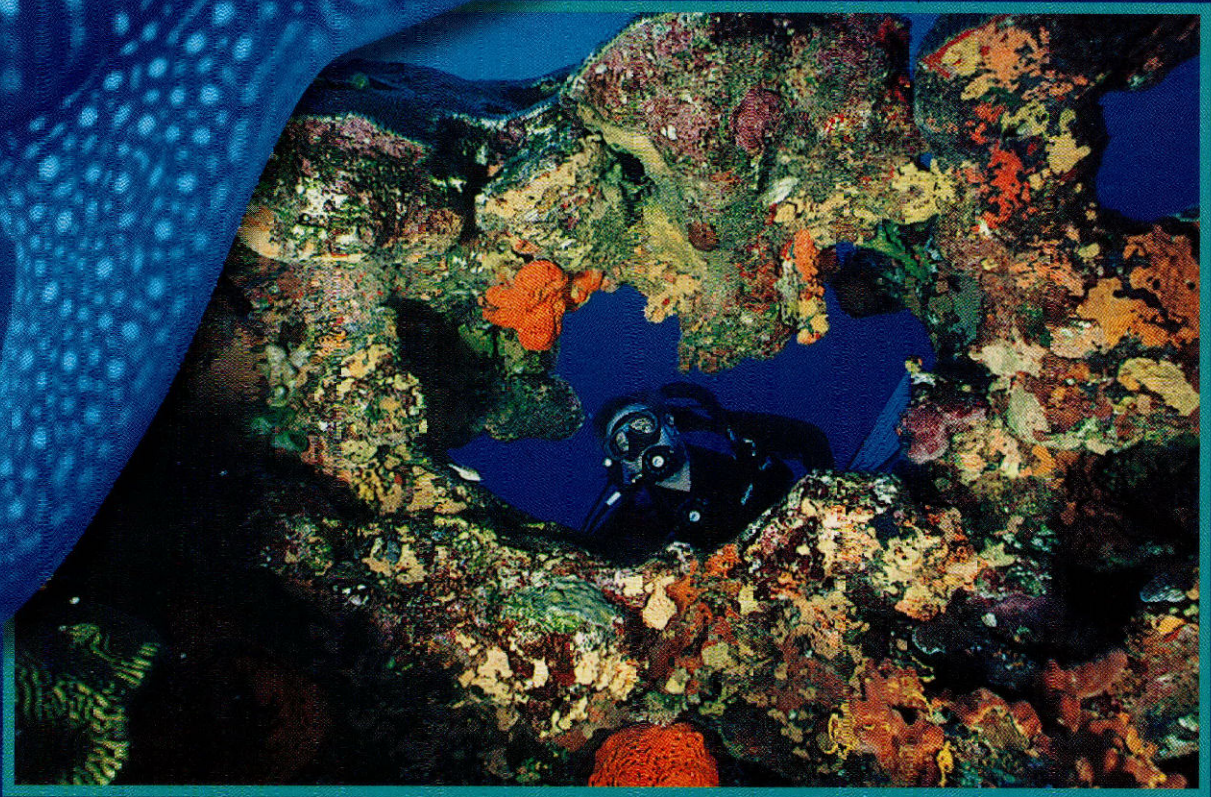
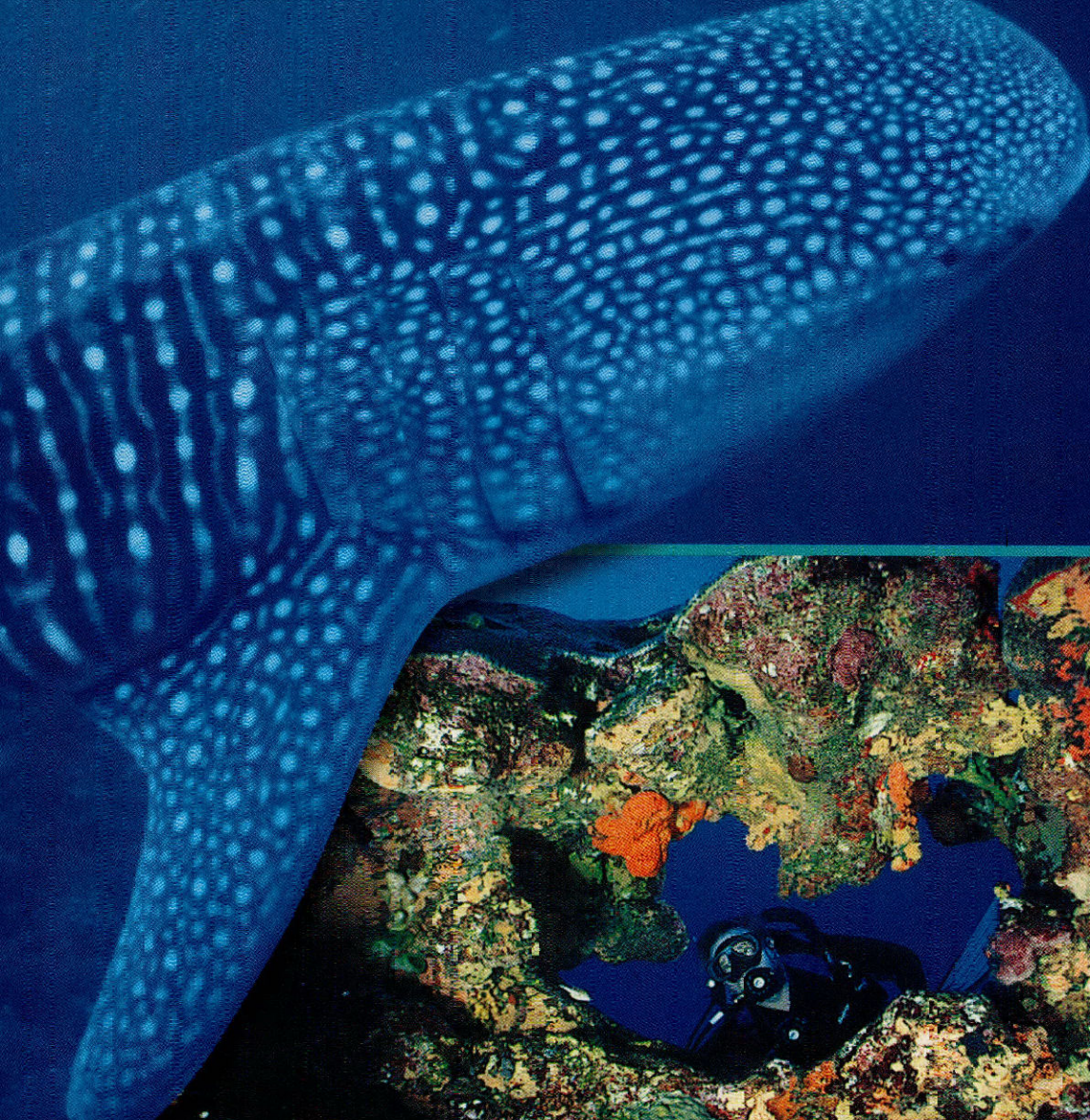
Lodging, meals and air refills are provided on most charters, but divers must bring their own gear. The saline level of the water is high, so additional weights are recommended. The Flower Garden Banks are recommended for advanced divers only.

Location: 110 miles off Freeport

Depth: 60 – 100 feet

Visibility: 50 – 100+ feet

Temperature: 65 – 85 degrees



Fees/Admission: Free to enter the sanctuary; trip fees vary depending on number of days, no user fee charged to boat owners.

Outfitter: Trips must be arranged through dive shops. Contact your local dive shop or Advanced Diving at (800) 396-3483, dive4kixx@aol.com or Rinn Boats, Inc. (979) 233-4445, <www.rinnboats.com> for information about scheduled dives.

Helpful Hint: The Gulf seas can be rough, so unless you're confident your sailor's legs are up to the test, anti-nausea medications or devices are recommended.



2. Dive Valhalla

Dive Valhalla, a 180-foot-deep abandoned nuclear missile silo near Abilene, offers divers a unique logbook entry and, as owner Mark and Linda Hannifin say, a definite conversation starter... "You dove *where?*" Flooded with groundwater that filtered through the concrete walls over time, the silo, 60 feet in diameter, once housed intercontinental ballistic missiles aimed at the USSR. Though you won't encounter any fish or vegetation in the silo, exploring this Cold War icon is an immersion into a fascinating chapter in America's history. Don't be surprised if you spot some bones scattered here and there along the floor. Before the abandoned site was transformed into a dive attraction, a few animals fell into the water and drowned. Since light penetrates only the first 40 feet of the crystal-clear water, diving with a flashlight (and back-up flashlight) is mandatory. Dive Valhalla, the only safely diveable missile silo in existence, is recommended for advanced divers.

Location: 20 – 30 miles south of Abilene

Depth: 130 feet

Visibility: Up to 100 feet with flashlight

Temperature: 60 degrees

Fees/Admission: Varies with dive shop

Outfitter: Dive Valhalla is not open to the general public. Trips must be reserved through dive shops. For a list of scheduled dives, visit <www.familyscuba.com> or call (915) 686-7333.

Helpful Hint: The water temperature at Dive Valhalla is always 60 degrees, regardless of outside weather conditions. Full-coverage gear, including boots, gloves and a hood, is highly recommended.

3. San Solomon Springs

A popular adage says that things are always bigger and better in Texas, so it should come as no surprise that we have one of the world's largest spring-fed swimming pools, a 1.75-acre oasis nestled deep in the heart of West Texas. It's also probably the best freshwater dive in the state. Plunge into a wonderland of temperate, crystal-clear water teeming with diverse species of vegetation and fish, and springs that bubble forth some 20 million gallons of water every day. The pool, which also accommodates snorkelers and swimmers, offers a controlled environment, exceptional visibility and abundant aquatic life, making it a premier site for open-water certification, night dives and underwater photography. If you're lucky, you may see a myriad of color-

ful Mexican tetras, as well as catfish, perch, crayfish, softshell turtles and the endangered Comanche Springs pupfish and Pecos gambusia.

Location: Balmorhea State Park, four miles west of Balmorhea, on Texas Highway 17 in Toyahvale

Depth: 3 – 25 feet

Visibility: 40 – 80 feet

Temperature: 72 – 76 degrees (year-round)

Fees/Admission: \$3/per person; night diving for an additional fee

Outfitter: Contact Toyahvale Desert Oasis Scuba (next door) at oasis@overland.net or (915) 375-2572 for rental rates and current diving regulations.

Helpful Hint: Gear must be carried a fair distance from the parking area to the pool. A dolly, which can be rented at the dive shop, or other easy-tote device, is advised for equipment and tanks.

4. Lake Amistad

While a trip to Belize or the Cayman Islands might not suit your budget this year, an international dive might still be a possibility. Covering some 64,900 acres at normal level, Lake Amistad's international boundary between the United States and Mexico is marked with a line of buoys down the middle of the lake. One tank, two countries — that certainly renders bragging rights. It offers some of the clearest lake-diving in the state and, thanks to Southwest Texas' mild winters, the water is relatively warm nine months out of the year. Rocky pinnacles, which drop about 150 feet off the limestone shore at Diablo East, give divers an experience similar to wall-diving, while many underwater caves and rock formations and a variety of fish and vegetation found throughout the lake provide other sites to explore.

"I've been diving here for seven years and have just barely scratched the surface of seeing what all there is to see," says Mike McCarron, owner of Amistad Scuba Divers. "It's such a big lake, you can't say you've dived the lake, just certain spots." Most of the popular dive locations, including Castle Canyon, Indian Springs and Diablo East, are accessible by boat only.

Location: Del Rio

Depth: 20 – 150 feet

Visibility: 12 – 35 feet (best from March to June)

Temperature: 60 – 85 degrees

Fees/Admission: Free

Outfitter: Amistad Scuba Divers, (830) 775-0878, is currently the only dive shop that serves the lake. Full rentals are available, but quantities are limited. Reservations are advised.

Helpful Hint: Blooming algae impedes water clarity during the dry, hot months. Diving near one of the lake's many hydrilla patches can help improve visibility.

The limestone shore at Diablo East is one of the most convenient and popular access points at Lake Amistad.



5. Oil Rigs

Hundreds of offshore oil rigs that dot the Texas Coast serve as great venues for exploring the most abundant vertical reef communities in the Gulf of Mexico. Come face-to-face with a variety of fascinating marine life, including flounder, amberjack, angelfish, sponges and coral. Divers with more adventurous spirits will look forward to encounters with barracudas and sharks, especially from February to April, when hundreds of hammerheads migrate through the area.

Ever tried fishing underwater? The rigs are excellent sites for spearfishing, but shock lines and stainless-steel cable are recommended, since barnacles, which cover almost every inch of the offshore structure, can sever nylon. Varying in depth and visibility, depending on their distance from shore, the oil rigs host many attractive and unusual underwater species that can easily deter

your spatial awareness. Always maintain a reference point throughout your dive.

Location: Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Freeport, Galveston, Corpus Christi

Depth: 30 – 150 feet

Visibility: up to 100 feet

Temperature: 60 – 85 degrees

Fees/Admission: varies with outfitter

Outfitter: Ascuba Adventure, (361) 985-1111; Advanced Diving, (800) 396-3483, e-mail <dive4kixx@aol.com>

Helpful Hint: Coastal and offshore nongame spearfishing requires a fishing license and saltwater stamp. For more information, call Texas Parks and Wildlife at (800) 792-1112.



Encrusted legs and crossbars of offshore oil rigs provide habitat for a wealth of sea creatures.





Divers at The Blue Lagoon can explore sunken boats such as this 40-foot Chris Craft.

6. Athens Scuba Park

Like a movie set from “Planes, Trains and Automobiles,” Athens Scuba Park furnishes unique backdrops for photographers and an underwater playground that will captivate divers young and old. Whether you’re taking part in a regularly scheduled underwater treasure hunt or navigation race, investigating the engines and cockpit of a sunken airplane, or pulling yourself through the cabin of singer Ray Price’s first tour bus, the park offers a full menu of underwater eye candy. The 33 underwater attractions are all conveniently marked with buoys. Don’t expect to see any aquatic life in this bizarre manmade landscape, however: Fish can’t survive in the low pH of this spring-fed quarry. Complete with nine entry docks, a new outdoor heated spa, swimming pool and camping facilities, Athens Scuba Park is a popular site for skills training and checkout dives. The lake is open on weekends from mid-March to September. Visit www.athensscubapark.com for more information.

Location: Athens

Depth: 25 – 35 feet

Visibility: 20 – 60 feet

Temperature: 50 – 90 degrees

Fees/Admission: \$25/person, \$5 air fills

Outfitter: Full-service dive shop on site, (903) 675-5762

Helpful Hint: Watch those fins! Kicking up silt from the bottom will quickly hinder visibility.

7. Possum Kingdom Lake

Some folks will do just about anything to keep their lake clean. An underwater dump truck is one of many sunken objects to explore along the silty bottom of this 20,000-acre lake. Possum Kingdom is a Texas favorite for deep, freshwater diving, with water temperatures ranging 5 to 10 degrees cooler than Lake Travis. From Scuba Point, the lake’s only full-service

dive shop, divers may enter the underwater dive park located inside the large, buoyed-off area from one of three pier docks. Scuba Point can also arrange boat dives to sites including The Walls, where cliffs extend 80 to 100 feet into the water, and The Cove. A trip to Possum Kingdom is not complete until you have experienced Hell’s Gate, a deep-water bay surrounded by cliffs and an island.

Location: 30 miles west of Mineral Wells

Depth: 20 – 100 feet

Visibility: 5 – 25 feet

Temperature: 55 – 85 degrees

Fees/Admission: \$10 per day for divers; \$5 per day for non-divers

Outfitter: Scuba Point, (940) 779-2482; equipment available for rent or purchase

Helpful Hint: Possum Kingdom has a very distinct thermocline, and can be chilly. Full wet suits are recommended.

8. The Blue Lagoon

The spring-fed, sparkling blue waters of The Blue Lagoon provide a tropical experience in a not-so-tropical place. Located near Huntsville amid the towering pines of East Texas, The Blue Lagoon’s lack of vegetation and fish are perhaps the only factors missing from a true Caribbean experience — besides piña colodas and reggae bands, that is. The only species to observe is the dragonfly nymph, which looks and acts like shrimp. Divers can enjoy night navigation, practice underwater photography and explore sunken boats and an airplane in one of its two limestone quarries. Ten underwater platforms, which help reduce disturbance of the silty bottom, make The Blue Lagoon one of the most popular training facilities in Texas. The Blue Lagoon is open daily April through September, and on weekends during other months. Hours vary, so call ahead.



Shallow waters of the Comal River yield great snorkeling opportunities.

Location: Five miles north of Huntsville

Depth: 15 – 35 feet

Visibility: 5 – 60 feet

Temperature: 55 – 90 degrees

Fees/Admission: \$15/diver, \$5/non-diver. \$4 air fills, cash only

Outfitter: Full-service dive shop on site. (936) 291-6111

Helpful Hint: The Blue Lagoon is crowded on weekends, so go during the week for better diving and increased visibility.

9. Comal River

At less than two miles long, the spring-fed Comal holds the title of the world's shortest river. But with an abundance of fish species, three dive areas (upper, middle and lower), and money-making opportunities to boot, the Comal proves that good things do indeed come in small packages. The upper Comal, which lies along Hinman Island at Landa Park, is not diveable on weekends, as tubers frequent this area heavily, decreasing visibility. The middle Comal is accessible from the North Seguin Bridge. Exit at Coll Street Bridge, or continue into the lower Comal, the longest and the deepest part of the river. It provides the best diving, and may take more than an hour to complete.

In addition to encounters with catfish, bass, perch and carp, diving the Comal River can be a lucrative experience. The river bottom, consisting of white limestone slabs and silt, is often dotted with money, sunglasses and jewelry from tubers, especially near the shoals.

Location: New Braunfels

Depth: 15 feet

Visibility: 5 – 35 feet

Temperature: 72 degrees year-round

Fees/Admission: Free

Outfitter: Air and rentals, Deep Freddy's Dive Shop, San Marcos, (512) 393-3337

Helpful Hint: When diving the lower Comal, be sure to get out the end of Coll Street (the last public exit), or you'll free-fall over a small dam farther downstream.

10. Lake Travis

One of the most frequently dived lakes in the state, Lake Travis offers a variety of private and public parks, unique underwater landscapes and marine life including arm-length catfish, bluegill perch, buffalo carp and softshell turtles. Nestled in the rolling hills of Central Texas, many of its parks cater to scuba divers, including Windy Point, which boasts a number of boat and car wrecks in a buoyed-off dive area. The water drops off quickly, and at around 115 feet you'll encounter a huge pecan grove. When diving outside buoyed areas, be sure to keep an eye out for boat and jet-ski traffic. Other sites, including the cliffs around Marshall Ford Park, which offers some of the deepest, clearest water in the lake, and Starnes Island and Hippie Hollow, are best accessed by boat.

Location: Austin

Depth: 20 – 150+ feet

Visibility: 10 – 25 feet

Temperature: 60 – 85 degrees

Fees/Admission: Windy Point Park, (512) 266-DEEP, \$5/person/weekday, \$10/person/weekend, free for children 11 and under. Air only.

Outfitters: Pisces Scuba, (512) 258-6646, full rentals; Dive Texas South, (512) 219-8131, full rentals.

Helpful Hint: A full wet suit is recommended for depths below 60 feet, as water temperature can be as low as 60 degrees, even in the summer. ★

ERICA H. BRASSEUX is associate editor of Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine.

rating

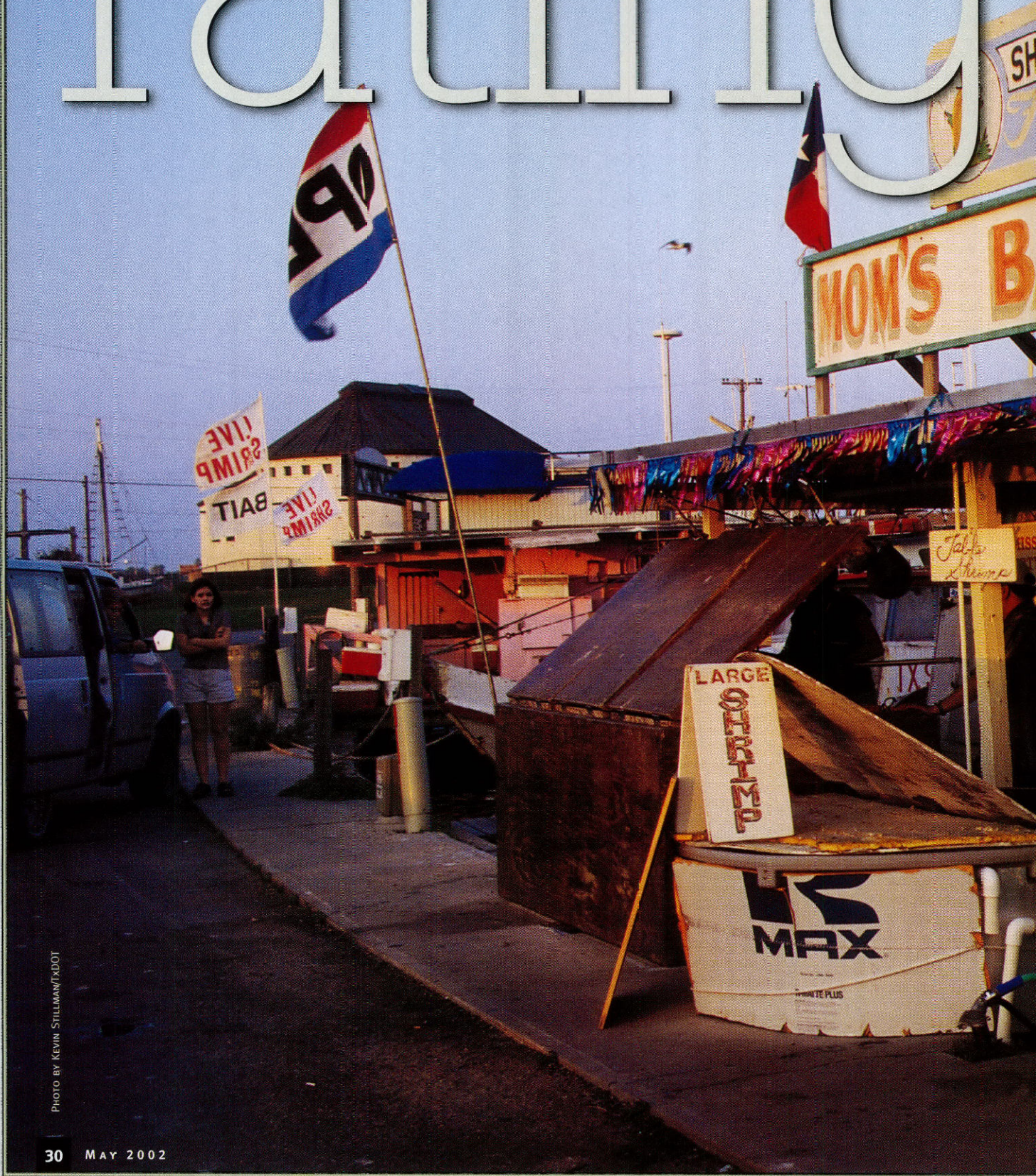


PHOTO BY KEVIN STILLMAN/TXDOT

Boat



Shrimp? Croaker?
Mullet? Menhaden?
Know what your target
fish is feasting upon
below, and you'll know
what to put on the menu.

By Larry Bozka

The lonely little island facing the Galveston Ship Channel is cluttered with driftwood. Laughing gulls hover in the light, salty breeze. Gentle waves quietly gnaw at a carpet of seashells, while fiddler crabs scurry in and out of tiny burrows.

Just six feet from the shore, gamefish follow the currents through a tide-carved ledge like hungry commuters on their way to work. This morning, however, my faded orange stringer float scratches the sand as it drags behind.

I'm carrying at least \$350 worth of fishing tackle. My bait-casting reel is loaded to the max with 12-pound-test monofilament linked to 20-pound-test fluorocarbon leader. The seven-foot rod is a fast-action, high-end graphite wand laced with rock-hard titanium line guides. Its extra-short handle is cloaked with Portuguese cork — the same elite grade that's used on \$100 bottles of vintage Bordeaux. Back-support wade fishing belt, stingray boots, polarized sunglasses, line cutters and a small tote box full of plugs, spoons and soft plastic lures complete the mobile angling arsenal.

My "secret spot," it appears, is about to get some company. I hear chatting, laughing and then a gentle but firm admonition. "Quiet down, kids."

The boat's driver is presumably not only the captain but also the husband and father of the visibly excited crew. He's unusually courteous, too. He cuts the grumbling outboard and the 19-foot center-console begins drifting in with the wind. With

experienced finesse, Captain Dad eases the anchor through the port side bow rail.

"Doing any good?" he asks.

"Not really," I reply. "Caught one undersized flounder on a red-and-white shadtail."

Captain Dad offers consolation while threading live shrimp on his family's already rigged spinning combos.

Two hours later, my new friends have boxed a limit of 25-inch-class redfish and at least 10 keeper speckled trout. Mom skipped the cork. With her egg sinker rolling across the hard sand bottom, she caught a trio of chunky flounder along with her broad-shouldered reds.

"Hope we didn't mess you up!" Captain Dad says.

"You didn't," I said, still casting with empty stringer in tow.

The beaming family idles off toward the channel, having successfully reaffirmed two critical points that diehard artificial lure fishermen often forget.

One: Just because fish aren't hitting artificials doesn't mean they aren't present.

Two: On a day-after-day basis, whether your tackle costs \$50 or \$500, nothing is more reliable than live natural bait.

LIVE SHRIMP

In the Old West, a fluttering white flag signaled surrender. At a Texas coastal bait camp, it's the thumbs-up beacon for live shrimp supplies.

Despite numerous other options, live "hoppers" continue to rank number-one in the salt. The reason, again, is consistent productivity.

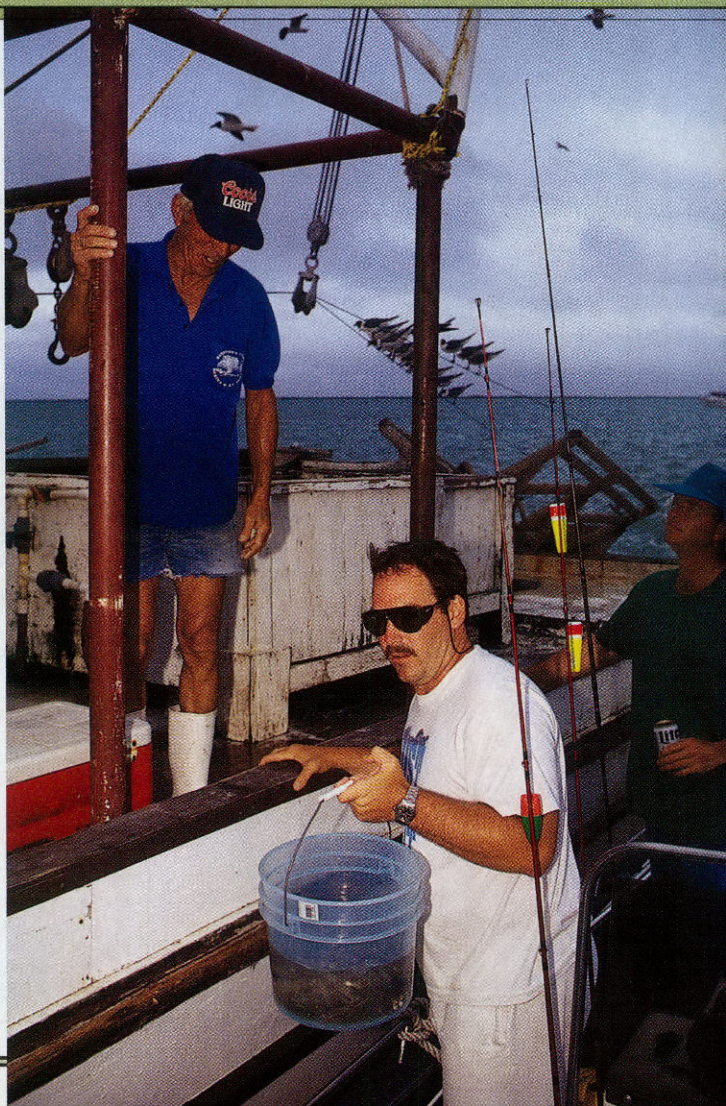
"Ain't nothin' like the real thing, baby," went the old Marvin Gaye R&B hit. The singer could just as easily have been crooning about bay fishing with live bait. There's not a gamefish alive in Texas bay waters that won't readily attack and eat a tail-snapping live shrimp, be it a small brown or a jumbo white. Except during mid-winter and depending on water temperatures and conditions, live shrimp are almost always available at coastal bait camps.

Most natural bait offerings are best fished on wide-gapped single hooks. Formerly known as "Kahle" hooks, they are now — for reasons soon to be explained — generically referred to as "croaker hooks." Compared to three-barbed treble hooks, single hooks tend to do far less damage to fish destined for release. And with proper hookset timing and technique, the ratio of strikes to hook-ups is every bit as good.

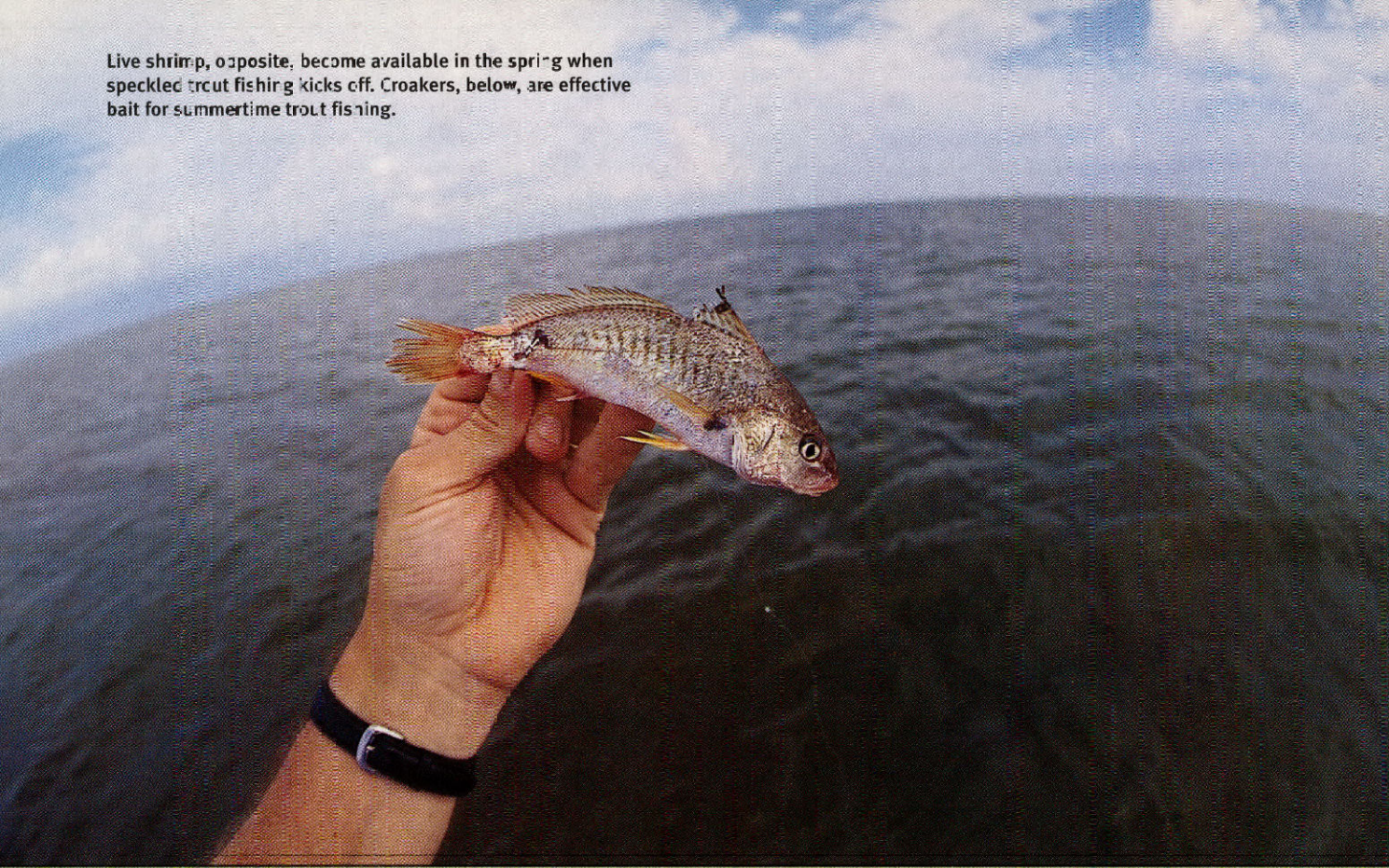
Most anglers hook live shrimp directly beneath the "horn" atop the crustacean's head. When rigging live shrimp, always take care to avoid the conspicuous black circle that is the creature's brain. Running the barb through the second or third to last section of the shrimp's tail is a productive but far less utilized option.

No matter the species presented or pursued, all live bait

PHOTOS © DAVID J. SAMIS



Live shrimp, opposite, become available in the spring when speckled trout fishing kicks off. Croakers, below, are effective bait for summertime trout fishing.



fishing revolves around the seasons. Spring migrations bring shrimp into Texas bays, and the bait shrimp trawlers follow in turn.

“Brown shrimp begin their migration to the Gulf in the early spring,” says 54-year-old Johnny Valentin of Eagle Point Fishing Camp in San Leon. “I’ve always contended that even though there are trout that ‘winter over,’ there nonetheless is a migration of specks from the Gulf that follow these shrimp. When those white ‘live bait’ flags pop up in the first of April, the speckled trout fishing kicks off. It coincides with the emergence of post-larvae brown shrimp from the back bay systems.”

According to the veteran upper Galveston Bay bait camp operator, the white shrimp crop emerges in late July. “By August 15 the white shrimp harvest kicks off,” he explains. “After the summer season, when we’re catching trout here in our backyard, the mature whites begin to leave. Up in the rivers and bayous, small shrimp begin to emerge at the same time that the mid-bays are fairly empty.”

That situation bodes well for angling potential close to the mouths of rivers and inside the rivers themselves. Cold-weather trout action in the Colorado River at Matagorda is the stuff of Texas angling legend. Be it on the Sabine, Trinity, San Jacinto, Brazos, Colorado or elsewhere, those who follow the autumn river-to-bay migrations of shrimp can almost always count on finding trout, redfish and other predator species.

It’s a proven and age-old adage: Follow the bait and find the fish.

THE TEXAS CROAKER CRAZE

From Memorial Day until Labor Day, a large percentage of the state’s trout fishers focus their summertime efforts on “croaker fishing.” As specialized offerings for keeper-class speckled trout, live “bullet croakers” in the 4- to 4½-inch range are the undisputed kings of hot-weather naturals. The silvery, grunting little panfish can be — and usually are — extremely effective.

Though some hardcore “lure purists” might disagree, the reputed guaranteed deadliness of live croakers as trout baits is arguably a bit overblown. Many anglers who decry the technique have yet to try it.

Despite the croaker’s undeniable allure, a croaker-soaking trout fisherman still has to be in the right place at the right time in the right conditions to score. Proper tackle and technique are no less critical.

In response to croaker fishing’s immense popularity, specialized “croaker hooks” are now standard fare in most coastal sporting goods stores. Sold in 4/0 and 5/0 sizes, these wide-gapped live bait hooks perform well with not only bullet croaker but also most other baitfish, as well. Whatever the selected baitfish species, run the hook barb immediately behind and below the fish’s dorsal fin and — just as important — above its backbone.

Proper timing is essential. Set the hook as soon as a trout bites a croaker and you’ll snatch the bait away from the fish. Speckled trout and flounder capture baitfish with the sharp canine teeth in their upper jaws. The predators will eventually turn the bait around and move with it, pulling the lure

KEEPING LIVE BAIT ALIVE

"Live" being the operative word, live bait can be difficult to maintain. During hot-weather months, when dissolved oxygen levels plummet to precipitous lows, bait mortality can be a major and costly problem.

An inexpensive aerator can be had for as little as \$20. More sophisticated and powerful aerators that force oxygen into a baitwell sell for anywhere from \$50 to \$100 and up. Although they are extremely effective and do much to enhance live bait performance, regulator-and-tank pure oxygenation systems start out at around \$250. Let your budget — and the amount you invest in live bait throughout the year — dictate your choice.

The immediate condition of the bait you buy or capture is the key to its potential for survival. How it is handled is no less critical. Wire-handled baitwell nets cost only a couple of bucks, and they're far less damaging to your shrimp and baitfish inventory than human hands, which might introduce harmful chemicals or oils into your bait bucket or livewell.

PREDATORS, PREY AND THE SALTWATER SEESAW

Without a steady diet of gazelles, impalas, zebras and other four-legged forage, African apex predators like lions and leopards would suddenly cease to exist. Though virtually invisible compared to the vivid life-and-death drama of the sub-Saharan plains, the delicate relationship shared between prey and predator species of Texas coastal waters is no less essential.

Without the perennial bay buffet of shrimp, striped mullet, menhaden, blue crabs, sand eels, croakers and various other forage creatures, gamefish populations throughout the state's beachfront and bays would plummet. In essence the coastal ecosystem is a huge saltwater seesaw: If one end disproportionately falls or rises, the collective balance can topple.

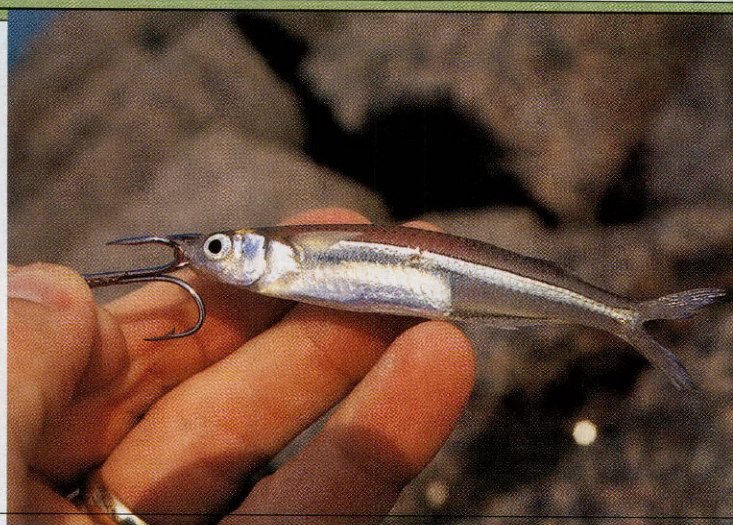
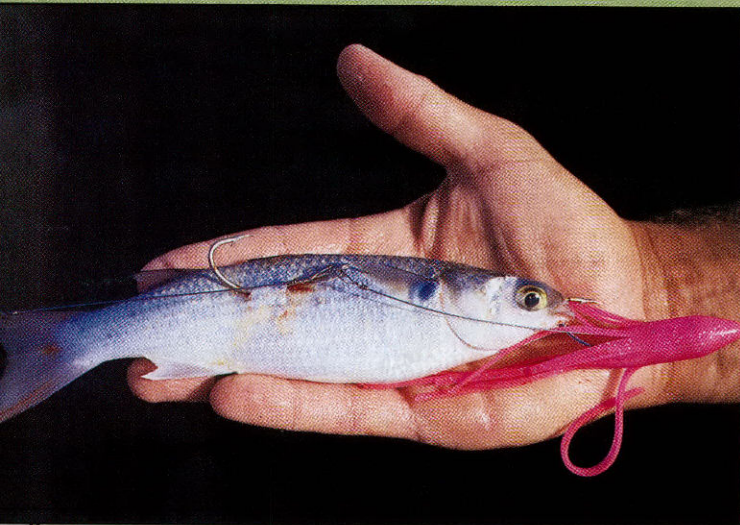
Redfish and, to a lesser degree, speckled trout, long have garnered the limelight of Texas Parks and Wildlife's coastal hatchery program. It's easy to understand why. The highly sophisticated and globally acknowledged hatchery

system has evolved immensely throughout the past two decades. Today, Texas coastal hatcheries regularly raise approximately 27 million redfish fingerlings and 3 million spotted seatrout fingerlings a year.

Despite the red drum's well-deserved notoriety as a premier angling prize, the technicians who operate and maintain our coastal hatcheries remain acutely aware of the value of far less celebrated but nonetheless invaluable baitfish species.

Mike Ray, director of field operations for TPW's Coastal Fisheries Division, points out that hatchery personnel have for the past five years been working on a contingency plan of sorts, one that will offset the potentially devastating impacts of a sustained, fish-killing winter freeze. Understandably, that plan is geared toward one of the most pressured forage species of all — the Atlantic croaker.

"Given their incredibly prolific nature, menhaden and mullet have traditionally held their own," says Ray. "But a few years ago we recognized that the coast's croaker population



taut. It's then, and no sooner, when in-the-know anglers set the hook.

Be sure that the bait you buy is in good shape. That means you need to arrive at your chosen bait camp the minute it opens, or even before, to gain a place in line. Competition for healthy bullet croakers remains fierce throughout the entire summer.

Live croakers have to be frisky to be effective. The liveliness of a croaker almost completely dictates its efficiency. Croakers in poor condition generally make very poor trout baits. At \$6 a dozen, compared to an average of \$10 to \$12 for a quart for live shrimp, croakers represent a substantial angling investment.

By late August, croakers in Texas bays simply become too

large to use as bait. As the panfish begin to migrate out of the bay systems, the feeding habits of speckled trout also rapidly change. Suddenly, fishers who use shrimp begin catching the majority of the trout. In recent years, however, more and more saltwater anglers have also discovered the productivity of live mullet and other small finfish.

MULLET, MUD MINNOWS AND MENHADEN

Mullet constitute an invaluable year-round forage base for predator species in Texas coastal waters. The same basically goes for mud minnows and menhaden as well as pinfish and piggy perch.

"Finger mullet" in the 3- to 5-inch range are excellent baits for redfish and speckled trout. Flounder fishermen

was in trouble. We didn't know exactly why, but we did realize that croaker are in the same family as red drum and as such are fair candidates for stocking efforts.

"We rounded up some brood stock — some of it obtained through Gulf Coast Roundup public events — and have since raised a small number of fish in hatchery ponds. In the process, we've learned enough to know that we could produce a significant number of croaker fingerlings if need be in the future.

"The big croaker runs have suffered over the years," Ray adds. "That's an indisputable fact. If stocking can play a role in altering that trend, we'd like to be ready for that scenario.

"It would be difficult," he concludes. "to effectively counter the lethal effects of a major freeze on a coastwide level. But it can be done in a localized area."

RIGGING FUNDAMENTALS

There are three basic options for rigging both shrimp and baitfish.

1. Free Lining: "Free line" the bait with nothing



more than a single hook on a leader tied to a small barrel swivel. Black barrel swivels are preferred, as chrome versions sometimes draw unwanted line-cutting strikes from toothy species like bluefish and cutlassfish.

2. The Fishfinder Rig: To create a "fishfinder rig" for bottom or mid-depth presentations, simply add a small egg sinker above the swivel. Let the amount of current dictate the amount of weight. In most bay fishing scenar-

ios, a ¼-ounce egg sinker is more than enough. For finesse in light currents, lighten up to ⅛-ounce.

3. Float Fishing: Attach a foam plastic popping cork or hard plastic rattling float above the swivel in accordance with the water depth. Try "popping" it with the rod tip to attract sound-conscious predators. Popping corks, with their concave tops, "chug" the surface when popped. Hard-bodied floats contain noisemaking beads that also create a fish-attracting element of sound, much like the rattle chamber of an artificial plug.

PROBE THE WATER COLUMN

Experiment with bait presentations at various water depths. If there are several people in your group, try all three rigging options at once.

Saltwater fishing is invariably best when there is some degree of tidal movement. Vary your rigging and baits and, when the pattern is established, make the appropriate switch. You'll be fishing — make that "catching" — like a pro in no time.



Mullet or glass minnow (opposite)? Many anglers say nothing is more reliable than live natural bait. Natural bait aficionados often carry their own cast net. The angler above used a croaker to catch this redfish.

who focus on large "saddleblanket" flatfish jealously hoard bait stocks of small finger mullet. Live mud minnows — properly known as "Gulf killifish" — run a close second as flounder baits. Small, live menhaden, colloquially called "pogies," are great all-around baits. For targeting speckled trout, purplish, iridescent-hued piggy perch and pinfish are prime choices.

Though bait camp inventories have broadened somewhat due to increased demand, anglers serious about using live mullet, mud minnows, pinfish or especially piggy perch are well-advised to carry along a monofilament cast net. Baitfish species can be netted readily from brackish-water sloughs, roadside marsh ditches, beachfront tidal pools and the shallow banks of grassy bayshore inlets. Considering the sub-

stantial cost of live bait, a small monofilament cast net can pay for itself in a single trip. The cast netter also can capture bait species that can't be bought.

Frozen menhaden is readily available at most bait camps, but if you prefer your pogies alive, you'll have to catch them yourself. Ditches and culverts that feed estuaries, especially those near hot-water discharge areas, are premier locales for netting menhaden. You'll likely capture a few of the aforementioned baitfish species as well, not to mention random marine creatures you might not be able to identify.

Piggies, or "pigfish," are best taken on tiny, long-shanked, thin wire perch hooks with very narrow gaps. Use small pieces of dead shrimp or, preferably, cut squid as bait. Unlike shrimp, cut squid is tough. As such, it's difficult for baitfish to steal.

Small croakers, piggy perch and pinfish are notorious for mauling and killing live shrimp intended for speckled trout, redfish and other highly coveted predator species. Frustrated fishers incessantly complain about "trash fish" killing their baits.

What they don't realize — and what more and more avid coastal anglers are learning every day — is that when it comes to super-effective specialized offerings for the trophy-caliber gamefish they so avidly pursue, those "trash fish" are, in fact, treasures in disguise. ☆

CINCO DE MAYO



EXTRAVAGANZA

PHOTO BY ERIC NOTHSTADT

GOLIAD PUTS ON ONE OF THE NATION'S BIGGEST CINCO DE MAYO EXTRAVAGANZAS. THE TOWN'S STRONG TIES TO THE LANDMARK MEXICAN BATTLE ALSO MAY MAKE IT THE MOST MEANINGFUL.

BY GEGILIA BALLÍ

IN GOLIAD, TEXAS, A STORY ABOUT IGNACIO ZARAGOZA might begin a bit melodramatically.

"He was a man of compassion..." longtime Goliad resident and justice of the peace Emilio T. Vargas will begin. Sitting there in his black cowboy boots and his crisp jean shirt — back upright and hands resting on either knee — Vargas will go on to describe how the brave, young military man defeated Napoleon III's troops in Mexico's most glorious military victory. His voice will turn even more impassioned as he tells you, too, how in the early 1940s a local historian made a trip to Mexico City and discovered that the heroic Mexican general had been born right here, in this unassuming little Texas settlement. And then you will understand why what could be the most meaningful Cinco de Mayo celebration on this side of the Rio Grande takes place in a town of just 2,000 residents.

Though not the most significant holiday in Mexico, Cinco de Mayo has quickly become the United States' preeminent celebration of Mexican culture, akin to St. Patrick's Day tributes to all things Irish. Yet in Goliad, while residents have maintained the day's celebratory spirit, the commemoration of Mexico's 1862 victory at the Battle of Puebla takes on a weightier purpose that includes educating the public about Texas' profound ties to Mexico.

"Goliad has been celebrating Cinco de Mayo since before it was popular to celebrate Cinco de Mayo here in Texas," says Emilio "Sonny" Vargas III, the elder Vargas' son. Sonny Vargas is a middle school history teacher and president of the Ignacio Zaragoza Society, which organizes the annual festivities in Goliad. "We didn't just jump on the bandwagon when being Latino became popular," he says. "We've been at it for decades, and I think it's very evident in what we do and how we do it."



Ignacio Seguín Zaragoza was born on March 24, 1829, the same year that Goliad's name was changed from La Bahía del Espíritu Santo to an anagram of Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, the priest who ignited Mexico's independence movement. The second son of Miguel G. Zaragoza, an infantryman from Veracruz, Ignacio was baptized in Goliad's Presidio La Bahía and lived in the surrounding early Spanish settlement until his family relocated to Matamoros following Mexico's defeat in the Texas Revolution. He later moved to Monterrey where he enrolled in the seminary, which he later gave up. For several years he was a businessman until, in 1853, the state of Nuevo Leon offered him what would become his career and passion: a place in the military.

The four decades that followed Mexico's 1821 independence from Spain were marked by economic instability and punctuated by internal political conflict. During a civil war that lasted from 1857 to 1860, Mexico's liberal faction, led by Benito Juárez, defeated conservative forces to establish a constitutional, democratic government. But the financial troubles remained, and in 1861 President Juárez declared a two-year moratorium on the nation's European debts. Five months later a fleet of Spanish ships arrived at Veracruz, with French and British forces soon making their own appearance. While the Spanish and the British eventually withdrew, the French, under Napoleon's orders, were determined to stay.

"Your enemies are the first soldiers of the world, but you are the first sons of Mexico," Zaragoza proclaimed to his small army of several hundred Mexicans before they were attacked by a significantly larger French force in Puebla on May 5, 1852. A captain in the Mexican army, Zaragoza had been appointed by Juárez to serve as minister of war and navy in 1851. When the struggle with the French began, however,

Zaragoza did what he loved best, leading the Mexican army on the ground.

After a long day of fighting that May 5, the French withdrew to Orzaba forever making Zaragoza one of Mexico's most revered military heroes. The city's name was changed from Puebla de los Angeles to Puebla de Zaragoza, and, with time, countless schools, plazas and streets throughout the country would also be named in his honor. Though Zaragoza died that same year of typhoid fever and though the French eventually defeated Mexico and ruled from 1864 to 1867, Zaragoza's legacy lives on in Mexico's spirit of independence, perseverance and self-determination.

Today, the foundation of the caliche floor where Zaragoza first crawled and eventually ran is preserved in Goliad, surrounded by whitewashed, plastered stone walls that represent what his family's modest three-room home would have looked like. The building serves as a museum honoring Zaragoza. The site, which is managed by Texas Parks and Wildlife, was built up from what remained as a pile of rubble and was completed in 1974, though it was later closed for renovation until last year's Cinco de Mayo celebration. The house sits in front of Presidio La Bahía and is a representation of military housing that would have been around the presidio in 1829.

Between the house and U.S. 183 stands another significant monument, one that the Zaragoza Society fancied for years: a 3,000-pound bronze statue of General Zaragoza, which arrived in 1980 as a gift to the state of Texas from the state of Puebla.



With all the importance of Zaragoza's birth in Goliad, there are other reasons Cinco de Mayo takes on an added significance for Texans of Mexican descent, argues Andrés Tirerina—a

WE HAVE LIVE MUSIC ALL DAY LONG. WE HAVE CONJUNTO MUSIC, WE HAVE MARIACHI MUSIC, WE HAVE BALLET FOLKLÓRICO DANCERS. WE'RE WORKING TO BRING IN OTHER ENTERTAINMENT.



fellow of the Texas State Historical Association and an award-winning professor of history at Austin Community College. Tijerina points out that Tejano contributions, from military leadership to tactics, may very well have won the Battle of Puebla for Mexico.

While Zaragoza was born in Texas when it was still the Mexican state of Coahuila y Texas, there was another important military leader in the Battle of Puebla that was fully Texas. Capt. Porfirio Zamora, the commander of a cavalry troop that fought under Zaragoza, hailed from a rural Texas community. “So Zamora was literally a Texas boy,” says Tijerina, “and he lived in a place called Palito Blanco, which today is nothing more than the site of a small, old Tejano ranch. But in the mid-19th century, it was the focal point of a strong Mexican rural community.”

That community, like many others in the South Texas region extending from the Rio Grande north to the Nueces River, still felt a deep allegiance to Mexico in the second half of the 19th century. Tijerina explains. Although Texas’ annexation by the United States in 1845 and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 had automatically changed their citizenship, the fact that the Rio Grande region experienced a power vacuum until about 1880 — neither Spain nor Mexico nor the Republic of Texas nor the United States were able to control it — made it so that Tejanos were technically U.S. citizens but “felt very Mexican in the 1860s.”

As a result, they were integrally connected to Juárez’ efforts to establish a liberal democratic government, sending him money raised by mutual aid societies and even physical manpower for his cause. Before the French intervened, it had not been uncommon for Tejanos to organize by the hundreds or travel alone into Mexico to participate in military events. Even

as late as 1888, a group of Texas-Mexicans ventured south as an armed, organized military troop to confront the regime of Mexican president and dictator Porfirio Díaz, who by then had toppled Juárez’s government.

“The significance to Tejanos is that Tejanos strongly opposed Díaz because they had fought to establish Juárez’s democracy,” says Tijerina. “So Tejanos felt very closely akin to Mexico and to Benito Juárez’s liberal democratic government. That’s what Cinco de Mayo was all about: Benito Juárez was struggling to establish a liberal, democratic government in Mexico when England, France and Spain invaded Mexico to try to colonize it.”

And so Porfirio Zamora served as a cavalry commander for Juárez, while Díaz, who was then barely emerging as an important historical figure, led another major flank of troops at the Battle of Puebla. After the battle, it was Zamora who received something like a medal of honor from Juárez, and later, after he had returned to his home in Palito Blanco and Díaz had launched his own political campaign, the would-be president made a trip to Texas to seek his compatriot’s support. “The Mexican presidential candidate came to get Zamora’s endorsement,” Tijerina says. “That’s how important a Tejano was to Mexican national politics.”

Tejanos may also have made a more crucial contribution at the Battle of Puebla: the concept of light cavalry, or *compañía volante*, as the military tactic was known in Spanish. Because of their lives as ranchers and their frequent confrontations with mobile, nomadic American Indian tribes, Tejanos had become skilled horsemen and developed a technique of fighting in small, offensive units. (“They were always taking the battle to other people,” says Tijerina, “they weren’t sitting in a fort defending themselves.”) Anywhere between three to 15 men

GOLIAD HAS BEEN CELEBRATING CINCO DE MAYO SINCE BEFORE IT WAS POPULAR TO CELEBRATE CINCO DE MAYO HERE IN TEXAS. WE DIDN'T JUST JUMP ON THE BANDWAGONS.



would organize as a mounted troop that traveled with spare horses.

The advantage of light cavalries was that they could move easily and provide the fighters with long-range reconnaissance. They facilitated communication and allowed the troops to make shock attacks by either riding straight through an infantry or surrounding it on all sides. So successful was this strategy in helping small numbers win big struggles that it flourished on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

"If you stop and think about it," Tijerina says, "that's the Texas Ranger. The Anglo-American simply copied the model from the *compañía volante*. And the significance for Cinco de Mayo? Tejano light cavalry were instrumental in the Battle of Puebla."

These are the kinds of stories that the elders in Goliad, a town steeped in history, learned when they were children sitting on front porches on mild Texas nights.

They are the stories that made them believe that their tiny town is truly special — a gem in both Mexican and Texas history — and why they commemorate events like Cinco de Mayo with such personal zeal.

"I know we sound like we're up on soapboxes, and I guess we are," says Lupita Barrera, TPW manager at Mission Espíritu Santo State Historic Site in Goliad. "It just makes it so rich here that there are still descendants in this community that can tell you stories... you almost hear it from primary sources."

Goliad Mayor Bill Schaefer agrees. "There are still families

that have a lot of this history in their homes," he says.

Though Cinco de Mayo has been celebrated in Goliad as long as anyone can remember, the annual tradition has become increasingly larger and more festive in recent years. Goliad was declared the official Cinco de Mayo venue by the Texas Senate in 1999.

The festivities will begin two weeks prior to May 5 with the coronation of Miss Cinco de Mayo as well as Junior Miss Cinco de Mayo and Little Miss Cinco de Mayo. But they will officially kick off on Friday, May 3, with opening ceremonies outside Pres. cío La Bahía, between General Zaragoza's statue and home. Both Mexican and American dignitaries are expected to attend, and historians will speak about the historical significance of Cinco de Mayo. In the evening the celebration will move to Schroeder Hall for the presentation of the queen's court and a coronation dance.

Saturday's events will begin with an 11 a.m. parade around the historic Goliad town square, followed by a brief ceremony to be held at noon. Locals and visitors alike will mingle in a daylong fiesta with booths that will feature games, Mexican arts and crafts and various types of music and food.

Says the younger Vargas: "We have live music all day long. We have conjunto music, we have mariachi music, we have ballet folklórico dancers. We're working to bring in people with other types of entertainment. We have a lot of food booths, too, from hot dogs and hamburgers to gorditas and taquitos and nopales." The day ends with a street dance that will keep young and old moving until 1 a.m.

CINCO DE MAYO HAS BEEN CELEBRATED IN GOLIAD AS LONG AS ANYONE CAN REMEMBER. IN 1999 THE TEXAS SENATE DECLARED GOLIAD THE OFFICIAL CINCO DE MAYO VENUE.



with music from conjunto to country.

On Sunday, May 5, the weekend will culminate with a Catholic Mass at the Zaragoza Amphitheater, celebrated by Bishop David Fallhaus of the Victoria Diocese. Following the Mass, a barbecue luncheon will seal the busy weekend. Except for the barbecue, which requires tickets, all events are free and open to the public.

A significant part of Cinco de Mayo in Goliad is the educational programming. This year, volunteers from the Zaragoza Society and others will go into classrooms to talk about the significance of Cinco de Mayo. Goliad State Park staff is developing curriculum materials and will distribute the materials to schools in the area. Historical characters in period clothing will be on the square and will interact with the audience, and Mexican and French soldier encampments are being planned at the presidio.

"I think once people from outside Goliad realize what a treasure Goliad is, they will want to come back at times other than when we have our fiestas," says Vargas. Goliad is a popular place in March, when thousands of people come to witness the Crossroads of Texas Living History Association's reenactment of the killing of Colonel James Farrin and his men. And this year, the town was featured on Home & Garden Television's program "Small Town Christmas."

All in all, Goliad may already be on its way to becoming one of Texas' most meaningful tourist destinations. But its residents remain as ambitious as justice of the peace and storyteller Emilio Vargas II. His next goal, says the elder Vargas, is "to make Cinco de Mayo an official holiday in Goliad." ★

GETTING THERE

The city of Goliad is at the crossroads of U.S. Highways 59 and 183/77A. Goliad State Park is located $\frac{1}{4}$ mile south of Goliad on U.S. Hwy. 183/77A.

Opening Ceremonies

May 3, 10 a.m.

Presidio La Bahía

$\frac{1}{2}$ mile south of Goliad on U.S. Hwy. 183/77A.

The Queen's Court Dance

May 3, 8 a.m., Schroeder Hall

Take U.S. Highway 183/77A north out of Goliad. About 4 miles north of Goliad, take FM 622 east for about 15 miles to Schroeder Hall, the second oldest dance hall in Texas.

Cinco de Mayo Parade and Fiesta

May 4, 11 a.m.

Goliad's courthouse square in historic downtown Goliad. Downtown is two blocks south of the intersection of U.S. Highways 59 and 183/77A at East Erd Street.

A daylong fiesta with food and music from conjunto to country continues until 1 a.m. For more information, contact William Zermero at (361) 645-8526.

Sunday Mass

May 5, 10 a.m.

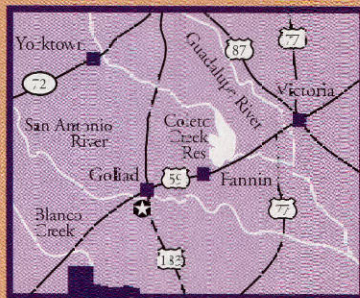
Zaragoza Amphitheater

In front of Presidio La Bahía (see above)

Barbecue luncheon follows the Mass at a location to be announced. Tickets are \$5 each.

For more information on Goliad's Cinco de Mayo festivities, contact Sonny Vargas at (361) 645-4079.

— Garland Levitt





PRACTICE MA

Golfers & ballplayers

know what good

shotgunners do:

A few lessons deliver

marked improvement.

Dallas Gun Club shooting instructor

Peter Blakeley watches two clay targets fly out of the 120-foot "duck tower" nearly 60 yards away. Were they real ducks, I wouldn't think of attempting a shot. "Most of my new students look at me like I'm crazy when I tell them to lead those birds by 12 feet," he says. "You should see the looks on their faces when they do it and break both of them."

A few stations farther along the sporting clays course, he punches the release button, and a clay target zips out of a clump of brush, rolling along the ground like a flushing rabbit. I watch it disappear into the woods, thankful I'm carrying a notebook and pen instead of a shotgun. Blakeley smiles. "I'm always amazed that hunters will spend thousands of dollars on leases, ATVs, duck blinds, dog training and all sorts of gadgets and then go out into the field and miss nearly everything they shoot

MAKES PERFECT

BY HENRY CHAPPELL
PHOTOS BY
DAVID J. SAMS



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at because they won't pay for a shooting lesson. Too many hunters use the poke and hope method of shotgunning. They have no idea why they hit or miss a bird."

Some hunters dismiss clay target shooting as a game with little in common with hunting. After all, wild birds fly erratically or in heavy cover and don't wait for the hunter to call "pull." Likewise, the reasoning goes, professional instruction at target shooting is of little benefit to the practical "field shot."

These hunters should try a round of sporting clays. A good course will present targets that simulate every imaginable field shot and a few shots tougher than any likely to be offered by wild game.

Predictable clay targets help instructors to diagnose technique problems efficiently. "We see the same mistakes over and over, mostly among hunters," says instructor Gil Ash. "A poorly fitted gun, sloppy gun mounting, and trying to aim the shotgun." Gil and his wife, Vicki, own and operate Optimum Shooting Performance (OSP) Shooting School in Houston.

"Shotgunning is similar to golf and baseball in that you need to learn the basics from a good coach," says Craig Hill, a sporting clays All-American and OSP student. "Just a couple of lessons should improve your shooting significantly."

Sheila Saffa agrees. "Good instruction keeps you from developing bad habits that might be difficult to cure later on," she says. "Coaching has made me more analytical about shooting, as far as understanding a target and how I'm moving with it." Carrolton resident Saffa, one of Peter Blakeley's star students, won the women's gold medal in helice — a competition that simulates European pigeon shooting — at the 2001 U.S. Championships.

FINDING HELP

Black's Wing & Clay 2002 lists 84 shotgun instructors and shooting schools. Most coaches are certified through the National Sporting Clays Association (NSCA) as Level I, Level II or Level III instructors, depending on training and experience. Good coaching is not cheap. Expect to pay from \$80 to \$150 an hour for competent instruction.

Blakeley minces no words. "Don't waste your money," he says. "If you go to any shooting coach, regardless of his or her qualifications, and you don't improve in the first hour, find another coach. It's that simple."

Blakeley and the OSP coaches stress the importance of the shooter and instructor working toward the same goal. "If the goal is to become a better wing shot, then a couple of lessons will probably do," Gil Ash says. "We'll get your gun properly fitted, work on basic technique, shoot some targets and schedule a second lesson. If you're a quail hunter, we'll set up the quail machine. If you're a dove hunter, we'll set up dove shots. If you're going to Scotland to hunt pheasants or grouse, we'll set up pheasant and grouse shots."

Good shooting coaches take into account the size and physical abilities of their students. "If you're trying to get a woman or child started in shooting, get that gun cut down to fit immediately," says Vicki Ash. "You can always add a spacer and sell it if things don't work out. Women and youngsters should start with a 28 gauge — not a .410 — because it has good pattern effi-

Continued on page 46



Practice pointing your finger at the target as you track it.

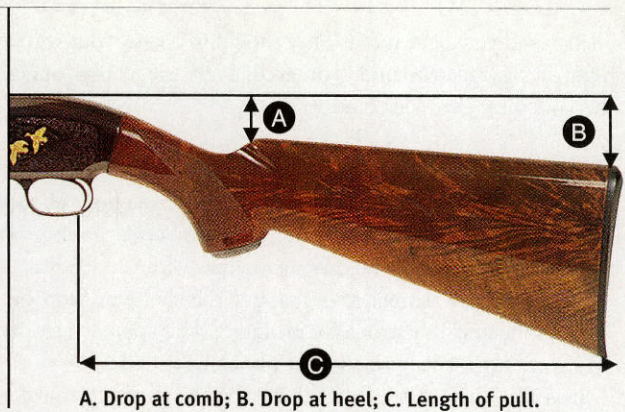
With your weight on your front foot, call for the bird.





Pick the spot where you want to break the target.

Success!



A. Drop at comb; B. Drop at heel; C. Length of pull.

GET FIT

WHEN MOUNTED, a properly fitted shotgun shoots where the gunner looks. You should not have to lower your face to the stock. However, factory shotguns are sized to fit an “average” shooter; therefore, most shotgunners move their heads to bring their eyes in line with their barrels, and their shooting suffers as a result.

Proper fit is primarily a function of stock length, drop at the heel, comb elevation and thickness, pitch and cast, as well as the shooter’s facial dimensions and build.

To make an initial check of your shotgun’s fit, stand before a mirror and quickly mount the unloaded gun, pointing at the reflection of your face. If the gun fits, you’ll be looking down the barrel at your aiming eye. If the barrel points elsewhere, the gun needs work.

However, many shotguns don’t shoot exactly where they point, due to momentary bending of the barrels during firing. For this reason, most shooting instructors have new students mount and fire several times at a target plate to determine the average center of the shotgun pattern. Gun fit recommendations can then be made.

The stock can be cut down or lengthened with a recoil pad or spacers. If the stock is too short, recoil will drive your thumb into your nose. If it’s too long, the gun won’t mount smoothly. Lengthening the stock moves your face farther back and lowers your eye. As a result, the gun will shoot lower. A longer stock also tends to reduce recoil.

The recoil pad on a stock cut for warm-weather skeet shooting may hang up on heavy clothes. You can slightly grind the edges of a recoil pad to make mounting easier or size the stock for normal conditions and use a slip-on stock boot for warm-weather shooting. In general, go with the longest stock that you can mount efficiently.

If a properly mounted shotgun shoots left or right, a good gunsmith can add cast-off (a slight bend away from a right-hand shooter) or cast on (a bend to the left) by heating and bending the stock. Not all gunsmiths are capable of this adjustment; ask your shooting coach or an experienced shotgunner for recommendations.

Moleskin applied to the comb area is useful for trying comb height and thickness adjustments prior to modification. Competitive shooters sometimes have their guns fitted with adjustable combs.

Remember: Slight changes to stock parameters can yield drastic results. One-eighth of an inch change in the comb can translate to an elevation change of more than a foot at 40 yards.

Shotgunning: The Art and the Science by Bob Brister (New Win Publishing, \$18.95) and *Shotguns for Wingshooting* by John Barsness (Krause Publications, \$49.95) offer sound advice on self-fitting to shooters of all experience levels.

ciency and very light recoil. They should never start out with a light 12 gauge over-under or even a 20 gauge over-under, because these guns kick hard.”

METHODS AGAINST MADNESS

A shotgun should be pointed, not aimed. The proper shooting sequence is swing-mount-fire. Beginners often reverse the first two steps and handicap themselves with an inefficient mount-swing-fire sequence — mount the shotgun, drop the head to the stock, then look for the target. This approach results in wasted time, a jerky swing and a bobbing muzzle.

Instead, focus on the target and begin the swing by moving the muzzle along the flight line with the leading hand. Keeping the hands parallel, head up, and eyes on the bird, bring the stock smoothly to cheek and shoulder, then fire. Blakeley stresses the importance of keeping the hands parallel during the mount. Butt and barrel should come up together. “Don’t bring the gun to your shoulder first,” he says. “That causes your muzzle to dip as flushing birds are rising.”

The fundamental rule of shotgunning says that to hit a moving target, shoot where it’s going. In other words, lead the bird. Necessary lead increases with the speed and angle of the target. A bird flying directly away from the shooter (a rarity) requires no lead. A bird flying at a 45-degree angle to the shooter requires more lead than one flying the same speed at a less severe angle. A crossing shot of 90 degrees requires the most lead.

Shooting coaches teach various methods or “systems” for establishing proper lead. Most are variations of four basic approaches: the Churchill swing-through method; the controlled swing-through method; the pull-away method; and the sustained lead method.

Using the Churchill method (named for English instructor Robert Churchill), the shooter doesn’t consciously lead the target, but relies on barrel momentum to achieve proper lead. Simply point at the target, swing with it and fire.

With the controlled swing-through method, the gunner starts the barrel behind the target and swings past it, looking for the proper lead. These two swing-through methods work well on quick, short-range targets such as quail and woodcock, which often flush in heavy cover and fly away at slight angles.

Using the pull-away method, the gunner points at, or just in front of, the target, then swings fast or “pulls away” to gain the desired lead.

A shooter using the sustained lead method inserts the barrel ahead of the target and maintains proper lead until after the shot. Blakeley recommends this approach for long-range pass shooting at waterfowl and doves because it allows quick adjustment to variations in the bird’s line of flight. The barrel momentum developed using the swing-through and pull-away methods makes flight line adjustment more difficult.

PRACTICING WHAT THEY PREACH

Even the best instructor can do only so much. Good shot-gunners burn a lot of powder. “You should practice until you’re going through the move and shoot unconsciously,” Gil Ash says. “The more mechanically you have to think, the more mechanically you move and the worse you shoot. And don’t just prac-

GET ON TARGET

SHOOTING COACHES:

Peter Blakeley
Dallas Gun Club
Lewisville, TX 75067
(972) 462-0043
<www.dallasgunclub.com>

Gil and Vicki Ash
Optimum Shotgun Performance (OSP)
15020 Cutten Road
Houston, TX 77070
(800) 838-7533
<www.ospschool.com>

INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS:

Read the Line, Feel the Lead with Peter Blakeley, \$59.95, www.sunrisevideo.com

Sporting Clays: How to Practice and Understanding the Move, \$49.95, Vicki or Gil Ash/OSP Shooting School, (800) 838-7533

SHOOTING ORGANIZATIONS:

National Sporting Clays Association, (800) 877-5338, www.nssa-nasca.com/nsca/

National Skeet Shooting Association, (210) 688-3371, www.nssa-nasca.com/nssa/index.htm

SHOOTING SCHOOLS:

For a list of shooting schools and gun clubs, consult *Black’s Wing & Clay 2002* (Black’s Sporting Directories, \$14.95) available at gun shops, bookstores and most online booksellers.

tice the shots you’re good at. Work on the shots that give you trouble. If you continue to have difficulty with certain targets, seek professional instruction — you’re doing something fundamentally wrong.”

The game of skeet was developed by bird hunters and remains the best type of practice for the average shotgunner. Blakeley starts all of his sporting clay students on the skeet field, where they learn to gauge the ranges and angles common to hunting and competition.

But not all practice must take place in the field or at the gun club. “Golfers and tennis players practice their swings constantly,” Blakeley says. “But hunters will put their guns away at the end of the hunting season and never touch them until the opening day of dove season. You must learn to mount the gun properly and consistently. You can practice your mount without firing a shot.” Indeed, practicing the swing and mount before a mirror with an unloaded gun, keeping your eyes on the reflection of the muzzle, is an effective way to develop a proper and consistent mount.

Vicki Ash recommends practicing with a small flashlight inserted in the barrel of an unloaded shotgun so that the muzzle movement can be tracked by watching the beam sweeping along the seam between the wall and ceiling. She demonstrates this method in the OSP video “Sporting Clays: How to Practice and Understanding the Move.”

Shotgunning proficiency, like competence in any sport, comes through study and practice. Fortunately, bird hunters often find practice almost as much fun as the real thing. ★

HENRY CHAPPELL’S latest book is *A: Home on the Range* with a Texas Hunter. *He lives in Plano.*

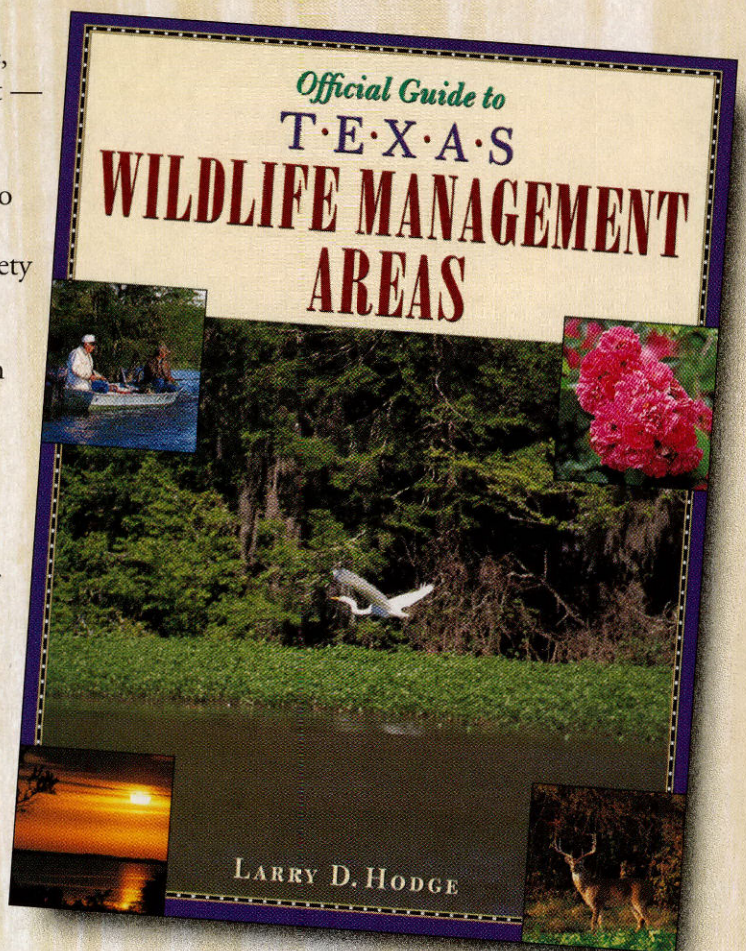
YOUR GUIDE TO WILD TEXAS

OFFICIAL GUIDE TO TEXAS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS



Here's an insider's look at Texas' undiscovered places to bird, hike, bike, camp, canoe, fish and hunt — the 51 Texas wildlife management areas. Larry D. Hodge shares tips from guides, biologists and recreational users on how to enjoy the many activities offered by these unspoiled areas. Learn where to see a variety of wildlife near major cities, camp in magnificent isolation in the Big Bend or canoe amid towering trees. The profile on each WMA includes information on history, geography, nearby state parks, recreational facilities, outdoor activities available and wheelchair accessibility. Handy locator maps and easy-to-follow driving directions are included. Full-color photographs enhance the descriptions. Each chapter includes pointers from pros on the best places for each kind of activity and a feature on some interesting aspect of the area.

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275 pp., color photographs throughout,
ISBN 1-885696-35-3, \$29.95, paperback



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Yellow warblers, just one of the many birding attractions of the Laredo area, can be found in low trees and woodland edges.

PHOTO © JANEY BURTON

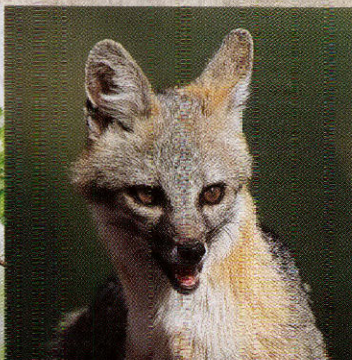
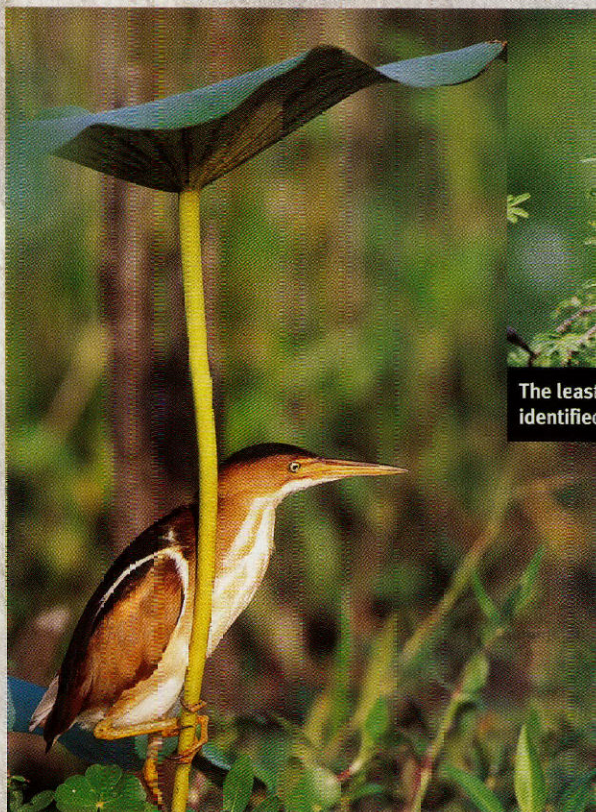


TALK TO ALMOST ANY BIRDER, AND THE WORDS "WHITE-COLLARED SEEDEATER" WILL BE UTTERED WITH THE REVERENCE OF SIR LANCELOT DESCRIBING THE HOLY GRAIL AS MORE PEOPLE ARE DISCOVERING, LAREDO IS THE PLACE TO PURSUE THIS PILGRIMAGE.

BY PENELOPE WARREN

BORDER BEAUTIES

BORDERS ARE MYSTERIOUS PLACES. FREQUENTLY DISPUTED, OFTEN POORLY UNDERSTOOD, THEY ARE LINES ALONG WHICH CULTURE AND LANGUAGE AND BLOOD MINGLE AND GIVE RISE TO UNIQUE FORMS FOUND NOWHERE ELSE. IN SOUTH TEXAS, THE RIO GRANDE MARKS THE PATH OF AMBIGUITY BETWEEN CULTURES. BUT THE BORDER IS NOT ONLY A HUMAN ONE. THIS SAME VALLEY OF THE BIG RIVER — EL RÍO BRAVO — IS THE PLACE WHERE WINGED NATIONS PUSH AGAINST THEIR LIMITS. NORTHERN BIRDS COME HERE TO WINTER OUT OF THE KILLING COLD. FOR MANY TROPICAL SPECIES, THIS IS THE NORTHERN EDGE OF THEIR WORLD. EASTERN BIRDS AND WESTERN MEET HERE, TOO, FUNNELED DOWN THE LONG FLYWAY OF THE ROCKIES' EASTERN SLOPE AND THE TRACK CUT BY THE RIVER. THIS IS THE ZONE OF THE UNEXPECTED, AND LAREDO IS AT ITS HEART.



The least bittern, left, is more often heard than seen. Groove-billed anis are identified by their distinctive bill shape and posture. The gray fox climbs trees.

BRAVO BEND NATURE RESERVE

"I had no idea this was here. It's like another world!"

The speaker is Susan Foster, president of the Laredo International Birding Association, but it could be almost anyone seeing Bravo Bend for the first time. Set in the midst of the second-fastest growing urban area in the United States, along the curving arm of the Rio Grande, these 200 acres of Tamaulipan scrub and remnant forest are a refuge for human and non-human alike. It is a green ghost of another time, a living memory of the land before settlement became exploitation.

Mature hackberry and black willow line the riverbank, forming a canopy inhabited by fox squirrels and possums, raccoons and nimble gray foxes. That's right, foxes. The gray fox is the only canid capable of climbing trees, and the lucky visitor may see a pair loquax in the fork of a large tree or foraging for hackberries. Where the woods thin, stands of cane dominate the water's edge, rimming Bravo Bend's seven ponds. Formed when gravel miners in the 1930s dug down into the water table, the ponds rise and fall with the river's flow.

This narrow corridor, best reached from the campus of Laredo Community College and stretching to the Tex-Mex railroad bridge upriver, will officially become part of the El Portal Riverfront Project's bird and wildlife sanctuary within the next several years, one phase of a decade-long development of parks and greenbelts along the river.

Bravo Bend is one of the best-kept secrets of the birding world — a sizzling hotspot that almost no one knew about until recently. It is home or winter quarters to nearly 200 avian species, a number of them highly prized by birders worldwide.

Talk to almost any birder, and the words "white-collared seedeater" will be uttered with the reverence of Sir Lancelot describing the Holy Grail. Visually unremarkable in severe black-and-white plumage and, at less than 5 inches long, thoroughly unprepossessing, the male seedeater and his demurely buff-colored mate are the object of ornithological pilgrimage. For years, the species was known in the United States from a single stretch of riverbank in the historic village of San Ygnacio.

Then came the Audubon Society's 1999 and 2000 Christmas Bird Counts. Laredo was the only count circle in the nation to report the white-collared seedeater in either year, and reported it in record numbers — nine in 1999 and 19 in 2000. Marc Woodin, co-author of a breeding bird survey commissioned by the city of Laredo, concludes that Webb County is the stronghold of the U.S. seedeater population. Local birders since have established that the bird can be found reliably year-round at Bravo Bend. Look for the male Eigh in the cane, clinging to the shaggy seedheads, announcing its proprietorship and offering its defiance to intruders both winged and two-footed.

While the white-collared seedeater is the sexiest bird at Bravo Bend, it is by no means the only prize. Ron Laduque, a co-founder of the fledgling Laredo International Birding Association (LIBA), calls Bravo Bend the "crown jewel" of the area's habitats for its variety and for the number of rare species found there.

Red-billed pigeons roost in the mature woods they require for nesting, while the clay-colored robin reaches the northern limit of its range here. Black-bellied whistling-ducks congregate on sand spits that jut out into the water, sometimes 50 or 100 birds taking their ease together in the drowsy noon.

The largest of the Bravo Bend ponds has for several years provided a nursery for the endangered interior least tern. The speckled eggs and chicks are almost perfectly camouflaged

against the sand and gravel exposed when the river is at its mid-summer low. In fact, the best clue to their presence may be a parent bird's distraction display provoked by black-necked stilts, which defend their own lanky offspring with equal panache. Listen for the staccato rattle of the ringed kingfisher as it hurtles along above the water, its plumage a riot of blue and rust.

As you hike the Border Patrol road, a three-mile loop that connects the ponds of Bravo Bend, look for the loose-jointed, comical, groove-billed ani and its ground-going roadrunner cousin. You may not see the white-tipped dove — it is shy — but listen for its low-pitched cooing, like breath across a bottle's mouth. Be watchful, too, for anhingas and neotropical cormorants — large black birds with a prehistoric air about them that perch and spread their shaggy wings to dry.

As you leave the college campus, pause at the refurbished historic church at Victoria and Davis. A colony of several dozen green parakeets roosts there. They cluster about the old bell tower and cling upside down, wings and tails spread in displays of chartreuse against faded brick. They also frequent the Laredo Independent School District property behind the church on Houston Street. Heard before they can be seen, they wheel above the gables of the late Victorian neighborhood screeching and clattering like a thousand kindergartners let out all at once.

LAKE CASA BLANCA INTERNATIONAL PARK

Egret, I think, as I glance up out of the car window. Great egret. Awfully big egret. A second look. That's no egret — yikes, that's a pelican!

Lake Casa Blanca has hosted three generations of Laredo pic-

nickers, boaters and anglers, most of whom noticed the baby "mudhens" bobbing along behind their parents — "Oh, look, how cute!" — but didn't think much more about them. The development of local birding and the establishment of Lake Casa Blanca International Park have changed that. The 2,020-acre park is almost 80 percent water, and offers habitat for a rich variety of wintering ducks and wading birds. American white pelicans have been recorded here, bobbing along sedately behind their enormous bills, almost as if the birds were afterthoughts to their pouches. In the air, though, they are spectacularly graceful, 70 or so gliding high above the water in a V-formation, wheeling and dipping in unison. It is rather like watching C-17s performing aerobatics devised for fighter planes.

Wintering white pelicans share the lake and its fish with ospreys. These large fish hawks have both the habits and the appearance of a downsized bald eagle, the white face accented by a black mask and stripe. In summer, the hunters over the water include six species of swallows. Bank and barn, cliff and cave, and northern rough-winged swallows and purple martins all skim over the lake to drink on the fly or to scoop up the pellets of mud from which they will build their nests. Look, too, for migrating tree swallows, with their iridescent wings and backs.

Birds that favor woodland or thorn scrub nesting sites find excellent habitat in the willows east of the "El Ranchito" pavilion on the north side of the lake. Hooded orioles build their baggy nests here, and the hesitant, slurred whistle you hear is the call of the Audubon's oriole, bright yellow of breast and body, with black wings and a hangman's hood.

Loud and rude, the ringing call of the great kiskadee carries



Visitors to Lake Casa Blanca State Park might spot an Audubon's oriole, above right, or the raucous great kiskadee, right, as well as a bordered patch butterfly.



PARK PHOTO © LAURENCE PARENT; OTHER PHOTOS © LARRY DITTO

over the water: *Q'est-q'il dit? What does he say? Kiskadee! Kiskadee!* Watch, too, for scissor-tailed flycatchers, the Texas bird of paradise, as males display their long, elegant tail feathers to prospective mates in upward-swirling flights.

Butterfly-watchers will find this area especially rich in the fall. A morning's hike will yield subtropical specialties: pearly-blue white peacocks, common mestras, queens and soldiers.

LOBO CREEK RANCH

"Oh, look! What's that little gray parrot?"

We have been strolling rather nonchalantly along one of the brushy trails at Lobo Creek Ranch, headed back to the stock tanks for another look at the newly arrived summering wood storks and the comforts of lunch on Willy Cavazos' breezy patio. With almost military precision, every person in the group snaps to attention, raises binoculars and wheels to follow the first-time birder's pointing finger. You can almost hear the mental chorus: Gray? Parrot? Monk parakeet!

Then the binoculars come down, along with expectations. Perched on a prickly pear studded with ripe purple tunas is a gray bird with a disproportionately huge, hooked yellow bill. As we watch, he hops up onto one of the pears and begins to tear at its outer skin, going for the succulent flesh beneath. In silhouette, his identity is clear: red on face and breast and a high, pointed crest like a cardinal's. "It's a male pyrrhuloxia," someone says. The new birder, just as thrilled as if it had been a monk parakeet, writes down yet another lifer, and we set off again.

Pyrrhuloxias are a desert specialty, found in a curve sweeping along the Texas segment of the Rio Grande and across the southernmost areas of New Mexico and Arizona. Lobo Creek is not only host to these "desert cardinals" but is rich in other South Texas prizes. Eleven miles east of Laredo on Highway 359, it is one of two privately owned parcels of land currently being developed for birding.

Four miles of trails form a loop around the property and lead birders through a remarkably diverse habitat. Waders and waterfowl of all kinds make themselves at home on the three large stock tanks near the ranch house, but the real treasure of

Lobo Creek is in the woods. In fall and winter, they are temporary home to winged "snowbirds" such as pine warblers and yellow-rumpeds, affectionately christened "butterbutts." During migration, the woods teem with small birds headed for or returning from their wintering grounds in Mexico and South America. In one April day, birders on a LIBA field trip sighted chestnut-sided warblers, magnolia warblers, Wilson's warblers, black-and-white warblers, American redstarts, yellow-breasted chats, palm warblers and yellow warblers. Later visits produced blue-winged warblers, black-throated green warblers, Canada warblers, blue grosbeaks, indigo buntings and nesting orioles, it seemed, in every other tree. That's in addition to the resident varied buntings, so plentiful on that "Day of the Warblers" that it seemed we were tripping over them, and the crested caracaras that sailed ever-present overhead. Near-certain sightings at any season include olive sparrows, common pauraques, green jays and the ranch's trademark birds, vermilion flycatchers.

LA BOTA RANCH

I am standing on Ron Laduque's back porch, taking my turn at Lily Engels' spotting scope trained on a Couch's kingbird nest. "Here comes mama!" someone announces.

I watch as the female settles on the nest. She twitches, adjusts herself a little. A pause. Then she shifts again, and a third time. She looks as though she can't get comfortable, a traveler tossing on a lumpy \$25-a-night motel mattress. Finally she bounces up onto the side of the nest, and three tiny orange bills shoot straight up where her belly had been a moment before. Worse than a lumpy mattress; the springs were breaking through.

Ron lives on La Bota Ranch, a working agricultural operation that includes a gated residential community and a wider variety of birding habitat than any other site in Laredo. There is the river, bordered by cane and mesquite scrub, but also, for part of its length, by tall sandstone bluffs where a colony of cliff swallows builds their jar-shaped mud nests. They share their vertical real estate with barrel cactus and purple sage, rock wrens and black-crested titmice.

Owls, both barn and great horned, frequent the area, hoping



Lobo Creek Ranch boasts such species as the pyrrhuloxia, left, indigo bunting and blue-winged warbler.



Birders at La Bota Ranch might see the Couch's kingbird, left, long-billed thrasher or eastern screech-owl.

for an easy meal, but are regularly mobbed and deported — chased across the river into Mexico — by enraged parent birds. The mesquites at the foot of the cliff are good for verdins, tiny gray birds with heads the color of ball-park mustard. Thickets near Sombretillo Creek host the gray version of the eastern screech-owl, long-billed thrashers and white-tipped doves. Sparrows and gnatcatchers are abundant, including such area

specialties as Cassin's and black-throated sparrows.

Borders are mysterious places. Exploring them requires an openness to change and a taste for the thrill of discovery. Some of the most precious treasures of the Big River come in the splendid greens and reds and blues worn by native birds. They are there for the finding, for anyone who will take up binoculars and field guide and embrace the adventure. ★



GETTING THERE

Bravo Bend Nature Reserve

Bravo Bend is best reached from the Laredo Community College campus. Leave I-35 at the Washington Street exit and follow it over the railroad overpass. You can park free on campus at the Environmental Science Center, which maintains live displays of local fauna. Visit the resident mallards and the latest celebrity babies — I saw six, 1-year-old baby alligators and their seven recently hatched siblings — at the Environmental Science Center before setting out on the Paso del Indio Nature Trail. The lower part of the Paso links with the Border Patrol road and is policed by agents who are almost unfailingly enthusiastic about the birds and other creatures that inhabit their beat.

Contact the Lamar Bruni Vergara Environmental Science Center at (956) 764-5701 or LBVESC@laredo.tx.us. Center hours are Monday-Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

You can walk the Paso trail and the road through Bravo Bend any time, but expect questioning by the Border Patrol after dusk. The Paso is handicapped-accessible.

Lake Casa Blanca State Park

To reach Lake Casa Blanca State Park, leave I-35 at the Saunders/Houston-Hwy. 59 exit and follow it until it intersects Bob Bullock

Loop. Turn left (north) onto the Loop, and drive less than half a mile. Turn right on State Senator Judith Zaffirri Road. The entrance to the park will be on your right.

Contact Lake Casa Blanca State Park at (956) 725-3826. The office is open daily, and the park's hours are 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. There is an admission fee of \$3 per person.

Lobo Creek Ranch

Lobo Creek Ranch is owned by Willie and Chacha Cavazos. From the intersection of Highway 359 and Bob Bullock Loop, Drive 11.2 miles east. The ranch will be on your right, identified by a small green sign and a bright yellow gate. Arrangements to visit can be made by e-mail to lobocreek@surfus.net, or by calling Cavazos and Associates, Architects at (956) 724-8123. Tours are self-guided — Willie provides maps — and it's virtually impossible to get lost on an essentially circular road. Hours are by arrangement. A guesthouse for overnight visitors is under construction.

La Bota Ranch

To reach La Bota Ranch, leave I-35 at the Mines Road exit. Follow Mines Road for 2½ miles. (Disregard the La Bota water tower; you still have almost ½ mile to go.) Turn left onto Muller Drive, proceed through the guard station, and continue until you reach the office across the street from the duck pond.

Call ahead to make arrangements to visit.

Excellent birding locations are accessible by car, though you may want to walk where the thorny mesquite comes too close to your paint job. History buffs will also want to check out La Bota's comanchero ruins. La Bota's office is open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and can be reached at (956) 726-9891, or contact Cookie Muller at galleta@labotararanch.com.

Laredo International Birding Association

For information about the Laredo International Birding Association or tips on current "hot" sightings, contact Ron Laduque at ronlad@zekow.net.

HEART OF TEXAS WILDLIFE TRAIL

Bravo Bend Nature Reserve, Lake Casa Blanca International Park and La Bota Ranch are sites on the Laredo Loop of the new Heart of Texas Wildlife Trail. The trail, due to open in late 2002, stretches from Laredo at its southern end to Abilene in the north, where it adjoins the High Plains Wildlife Trail. The Heart of Texas Trail connects with the highly successful Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail and will become part of a system of wildlife-viewing driving trails that eventually will make the circuit of the entire state. Each trail has its own colorful map and a description of each site along its various loops.

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WILD HORSES

Can this
enchanted
creature
survive
in its
watery
realm?

By
Elaine
Robbins



THE MARINE BIOLOGIST from the University of Texas Marine Science Institute drags her net along the bottom of Redfish Bay and scoops up a net full of treasures — young red drum, pipefish, small crabs and juvenile spotted seatrout flashing in the sun. Barely noticeable at the edge of the net, an inch-long dwarf seahorse clings to a blade of grass. She stops to admire it, then plucks it out and gingerly releases it. It drifts down to its watery world, where it lives hidden from sight in the seagrass meadow.

With their tiny, horse-like heads and plates of armor, seahorses resemble fairy-tale creatures. In fact, many people are surprised to learn that seahorses are real, and not some mythical creature like unicorns. Named *Hippocampus* from the Greek word for horse (hippo) and sea monster (campus), seahorses have appeared on everything from Greek vases and Roman fountains to bathroom soaps and Disney movies.

Only recently have biologists begun to study the behavior of seahorses in the wild. “It’s strange because we don’t know their life history very well,” says Gloria Joan Holt, director of the fisheries and mariculture lab at the UT Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas. “We know they’re in the seagrass beds. And we occasionally get them trawled up in the UT research vessel in the channel. So we assume they’re moving somewhere, maybe to some area to spawn.”

Seahorses live largely unnoticed in seagrass meadows, coral reefs or mangroves in the coastal waters of six continents — everywhere except in polar waters. Anchoring with their prehensile tails to a blade of grass or other fixed object to avoid being swept away in the current, they suck up tiny crustaceans and fish larvae that float by. Three species inhabit the Gulf: the lined seahorse, which grows to six inches; the dwarf seahorse, at one inch one of the world’s smallest species; and the long-snout seahorse.

Seahorses have few natural predators, as they are masters of camouflage. Long, thin bodies conceal them among the grasses, and they change color to match their surroundings. (One researcher watched a seahorse turn a “lurid orange” to match the fluorescent tape of her survey grid.) Some species grow long tendrils on their heads and backs that make them look more plant than animal.

From Florida to the Philippines, an estimated 20 million seahorses are collected in the wild each year for use in aquariums, souvenir shops and medicine.

At spawning time, seahorses begin a charming courtship ritual that revolves around — that’s right, guys — dancing. In another trait that women find endearing, it is the male that becomes pregnant. The male stays in his home turf, while the female roams a larger territory in search of food. At dawn, the female visits him. The two brighten their coloration, and with their tails holding the same blade of grass, begin to circle. Finally, they intertwine tails and begin a slow promenade through the seagrass meadow. They repeat this courtship dance each morn-

ing to form a strong bond that keeps them monogamous through the five- to seven-month mating season or in some cases, for life.

In the final stage of mating, at the end of the dance “they pirouette together up in the water column as she transfers eggs to his pouch rather slowly and steadily,” says Amanda Vincent, a McGill University professor who has studied seahorse behavior and ecology in the wild. “Gradually the pair part, and he heads down into the seagrass to start weaving from side to side to settle the eggs.” The morning promenade continues throughout gestation. In a few weeks, the male releases between one and 1,000 tiny, quarter-inch seahorse replicas. (Only a few will survive to adulthood.) He usually becomes pregnant again a day or two later.

Despite their prolific breeding, though, seahorses are creatures at risk. From Florida to the Philippines, an estimated 20 million or more are collected in the wild each year for use in home aquariums, souvenir shops and medicine. More than a million people around the world depend on dried seahorse for a wide range of medicinal uses, from asthma to impotence. As a result, most seahorse species — including all three Gulf species — are on the World Conservation Union’s Red List of Threatened Species.

To counter these threats to their survival, Vincent and Heather Hall of the Zoological Society of London founded a conservation initiative called Project Seahorse. In villages in Vietnam and the Philippines, where fishers make a living from catching seahorses, Project Seahorse is promoting alternative livelihoods. It is also assisting the fishers to develop more sustainable methods of resource management with the use of marine protected areas and selected fishing.

At the Marine Science Institute — and at a few select marine labs around the world — biologists are experimenting with breeding the seahorse in captivity. In Holt’s lab, a male lined seahorse recently gave birth to 700 tiny replicas. Eventually, they hope aquaculture can reduce pressure on wild populations.

Here in the coastal waters of Texas, the fate of seahorses is tied to the survival of the seagrass beds where they live. Large areas of Texas’ coastal seagrasses have been damaged by boat propeller scarring, dredging and shrimp trawling, as well as the less visible effects of coastal development and the resulting decline in water quality. In 2000, Texas Parks and Wildlife’s Seagrass

Conservation Plan established voluntary no-motor zones in Redfish Bay near Aransas Pass and Nine-Mile Hole in the Upper Laguna Madre, and cooperation from boaters has been good. The expected return of the seagrasses may give this valuable ecosystem — and its most enchanting ambassador — a chance to recover and give up its treasures another day. ★

ELAINE ROBBINS is executive editor of Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine.

SIGHTS & SOUNDS

Continued from page 57

Corpus Christi: KEDT-FM 90.3 / 5:34 p.m., KFTX-FM 97.5 / 5:35 a.m., KBSO-FM 94.7 / 6:50 a.m.

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

Cuero: KVCQ-FM 97.7 / 6:50 a.m.

Del Rio: KWMC-AM 1490 / 5:50 p.m.

Denison/Sherman: KJIM-AM 1500 / 8:55 a.m.

Dimmitt: KDHN-AM 1470 / 12:31 p.m.

Dumas: KDDD-FM 95.3 / 10:30 a.m., KDDD-AM 800 / 10:30 a.m.

Eagle Pass: KINL-FM 92.7 / 7:15 a.m.

Eastland: KEAS-AM 1590 / 5:51 a.m. & 5:51 p.m., KATX-FM 97.7 / 5:51 a.m. & 5:51 p.m.

El Campo: KULP-AM 1390 / 2:00 p.m.

El Dorado, Ark.: KBSA-FM 90.9 / 5:33 a.m.

El Paso: KXCR-FM 89.5 / 12:20 p.m.

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

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

Fort Stockton: KFST-AM 860 / 7:56 a.m. & 12:50 p.m., KFTS-FM 94.3 / 7:56 a.m. & 12:50 p.m.

Fort Worth: KTCU-FM 88.7 / 8:50 a.m. & 5:50 p.m.

Galveston: KGBC-AM 1540 / 11:45 a.m.

Gatesville: KASZ-FM 98.3 / 7:24 a.m.

Greenville: KGV-L-AM 1400 / 8:15 a.m.

Hallettsville: KHLT-AM 1520 / 6:50 a.m., KTXM-FM 99.9 / 6:50 a.m.

Harlingen: KMBH-FM 88.9 / 4:58 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: KBME-AM 790 / 11:30 a.m.

Huntsville: KSHU-FM 90.5 / 11:55 a.m., 5:55 p.m.

Jacksonville: KEBE-AM 1400 / 7:25 a.m.

Junction: KMBL-AM 1450 / 6:46 a.m. & 3:46 p.m., KOOK-FM 93.5 / 6:46 a.m. & 3:46 p.m.

Kerrville: KRNH-FM 92.3 / 5:31 a.m. & 12:57, 7:35 p.m.

Lampasas: KCYL-AM 1450 / 7:10 a.m., KACQ-FM 101.9 / 7:10 a.m.

Levelland: KLVT-AM 1230 / 12:05 p.m.

Lubbock: KJTV-AM 950 / 6:50 a.m.

Lufkin: KLDN-FM 88.9 / 5:33 a.m.

Marshall: KCUL-AM 1410 / 6:39 a.m., KCUL-FM 92.3 / 6:39 a.m.

McAllen: KHID-FM 88.1 / 4:58 p.m.

Mesquite: KEOM-FM 88.5 / 5:30 a.m. & 2:30, 8:30 p.m. M-Th. (5:30 a.m. & 4:45 p.m. Fr.)

Midland/Odessa: KCRS-AM 550 / 6:15 a.m. & 5:50 p.m.

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

Nacogdoches: KSAU-FM 90.1 / 3:00 p.m.

New Braunfels: KGNB-AM 1420 / 6:52 a.m.

Ozona: KYXX-FM 94.3 / 6:22 p.m.

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

Rockdale: KRXT-FM 98.5 / 5:04 a.m. & 6:35 p.m.

San Angelo: KUTX-FM 90.1 / 1:58 p.m. (12:58 p.m. Fr.)

San Antonio: KSTX-FM 89.1 / 9:04 p.m. Th., KENS-AM 1160 / 7:40 a.m., 12:26 & 5:45 p.m.

San Augustine: KCOT-FM 92.5 / TBA

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

Shreveport: KDAQ-FM 89.9 / 5:33 a.m.

Sonora: KHOS-FM 92.1 / 6:22 p.m.

Sulphur Springs: KSST-AM 1230 / 2:50, 3:50 & 11:22 a.m.

Texarkana: KTXK-FM 91.5 / noon hour

Uvalde: KVOU-AM 1400 / 8:30 a.m., KVOU-FM 105 / 5:33 a.m.

Victoria: KVRT-FM 90.7 / 5:34 p.m., KTXN-FM 98.7 / 6:50 a.m.

Waco: KBCT-FM 94.5 / 6:05 a.m.

Wichita Falls: KWFS-AM 1290 / 6:15 a.m.

Yoakum: KYKM-FM 92.5 / 6:50 a.m.

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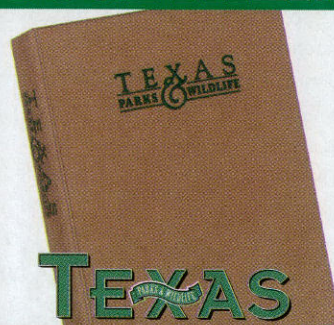
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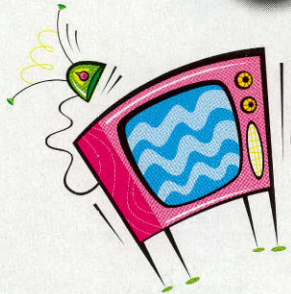
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SIGHTS AND SOUNDS



The Front Line of News and Views

TELEVISION

Look for These Stories in the Coming Weeks:

April 28 – May 5:

The endangered Attwater's prairie chicken; Spanish missions in Texas; the Sport Fish Restoration Act; coastal birds; Martha Daniels cooks Caribbean snow goose.

May 5 – 12:

Transforming a Hill Country ranch into a haven for wildlife; rebuilding Roma; sea turtles; floating the Frio; teriyaki venison.

May 12 – 19:

The business of bass; raccoons; a tramway in El Paso; whooping cranes; Martha Daniels' recipe for venison rolls.

May 19 – 26:

The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center; bears; green building; fishing reel repair; restoring CCC-made cabins at Caddo Lake State Park.

May 26 – June 2:

Preserving a Mexican cloud forest; grabbing 'gators for grades; Gulf Coast biologists; competitive turkey calling.

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See how Roma's historic buildings are being restored. Watch the week of May 5.

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Austin: KLRU, Ch. 18 / Sun. 10 a.m. / Mon. 12:30 p.m. KLRU-TOO, Cable Ch. 20 / Tues. 11 p.m.

Bryan-College Station: KAMU, Ch. 15 / Thurs. 7 p.m. / Sun. 5 p.m.

Corpus Christi: KEDT, Ch. 16 / Sun. 11 a.m. / Thurs. 1 p.m.

El Paso: KCOS, Ch. 13 / Sat. 5 p.m. (rotates with other programs; check listings)

Dallas-Fort Worth: KERA, Ch. 13 / Fri. 1:30 p.m. Also serving Abilene, Denton, Longview, Marshall, San Angelo, Texarkana, Tyler, Wichita Falls, Sherman

Harlingen: KMBH, Ch. 60 / Thurs. 8:30 p.m. Also serving McAllen, Mission, Brownsville

Houston: KUHT, Ch. 8 / Sun. 5 p.m. / Fri. 1 p.m.

Also serving Beaumont/Port Arthur, Galveston, Texas City, Victoria

Killeen: KNCT, Ch. 46 / Sun. 5 p.m. Also serving Temple

Lubbock: KTXT, Ch. 5 / Sat. 6:30 p.m.

Odessa-Midland: KOCV, Ch. 36 / Sat. 5 p.m.

Portales, N.M.: KENW, Ch. 3 / Sun. 2 p.m.

Also serving West Texas/Panhandle area

San Antonio & Laredo: KLRN, Ch. 9 / Thur. noon

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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Abilene: KACU-FM 89.7 / 7:06 a.m. & 1:44, 6:01 p.m., KWKC-AM 1340 / 6:00-6:30 a.m.

Alexandria, La.: KLSA-FM 90.7 / 5:33 a.m.

Alpine: KSRC-FM 92.7 / TBA

Amarillo: KACV-FM 89.9 / 11:20 a.m.

Austin: KUT-FM 90.5 / 1:58 p.m., 12:58 p.m. Fr.) • *Austin American-Statesman's* Inside Line 512-416-5700 category 6287 (NATR)

Beaumont: K.VI-AM 560 / 5:20 a.m.

Big Spring: KBST-AM 1490 / 10:55 a.m., cable ch. 23 / 10:55 a.m., KBST-FM 95.7 / 10:55 a.m.

Brady: KNEL-AM 1490 / 7:20 a.m. & 8:50 p.m. (7:50 a.m. Sat.), KNEL-FM 95.3 / 7:20 a.m. & 8:50 p.m. (7:50 a.m. Sat.)

Bridgeport: KBOC-FM 98.3 / 8:10 a.m. & 5:15 p.m.

Bryan: KZNE-AM 1150 / 5:45 p.m.

Canton: KVCI-AM 1510 / 6:40 a.m.

Canyon: KWTS-FM 91.1 / 6 a.m. – 9 a.m. hours

Carthage: KGAS-AM 1590 / 6:46 a.m., KGAS-FV 104.3 / 6:46 a.m.

Center: KDET-AM 930 / TBA

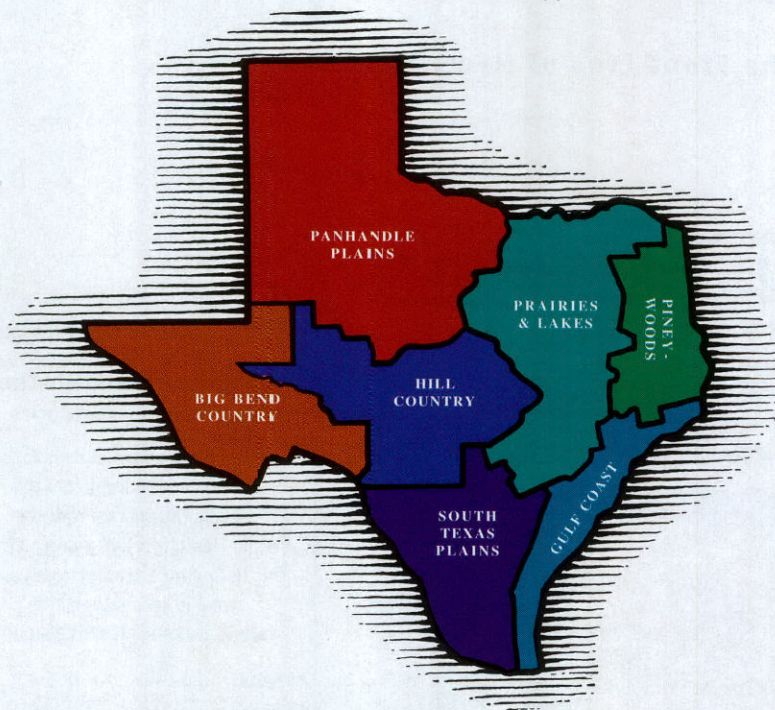
Comanche: KCOM-AM 1550 / 6:30 a.m.

Commerce: KETR-FM 88.9 / 10:15 a.m.

Continued on page 56

GETAWAYS

From Big Bend to the Big Thicket and the Red to the Rio Grande



BIG BEND COUNTRY

May: Horse Riding Trail, call for dates, Black Gap WMA, Alpine, (915) 376-2216.

May: Pictograph Tours, every Saturday and Sunday, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, (915) 849-6684.

May: Fishing on the Rio Grande, call for dates, Black Gap WMA, Alpine, (915) 376-2216.

May: White Shaman Tour, every Saturday, Seminole Canyon SP & HS, Comstock, (800) 525-9907.

May: Fate Bell Cave Dwelling Tour, Wednesday through Sunday, Seminole Canyon SP & HS, Comstock, (915) 292-4464.

May: Bird Banding, call for dates, Davis Mountains SP, Fort Davis, (915) 426-3337.

May: Desert Garden Tours, by reservation only, Barton Warnock

Environmental Education Center, Terlingua, (915) 424-3327.

May: Bouldering Tours, every Saturday and Sunday, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, (915) 849-6684.

May 3-5: Commercial Guide Training, Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center, Terlingua, (915) 424-3327.

May 4: Dutch Oven Cooking, Big Bend Ranch SP, Presidio, (915) 229-3416.

May 5: Spring Victorian Tea, Magoffin Home SHS, El Paso, (915) 533-5147.

May 11: Stories of Spirits, Magoffin Home SHS, El Paso, (915) 533-5147.

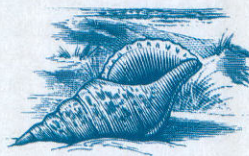
May 11: Upper Canyon Tour, Seminole Canyon SP & HS, Comstock, (915) 292-4464.

May 11, 25: Trip to Madrid Falls, Big Bend Ranch SP, Presidio, (915) 229-3416.

May 18: Birding Tour, Big Bend Ranch SP, Presidio, (915) 229-3416.

May 18-19: KBCY Big Bass Tournament, D.H. Ivie Reservoir, (915) 365-2353.

May 19: Bird Identification Tours, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, (915) 849-6684.



GULF COAST

May: Plantation House, Barn and Grounds tours, Wednesdays through Sundays, Varner-Hogg Plantation SHS, West Columbia, (409) 345-4656.

May: Hatchery Tours, every Monday through Saturday, Coastal Conservation Association/Central Power and Light Marine Development Center SFH, Corpus Christi, (361) 939-7784.

May: Weekend Programs, every Saturday, Lake Texana SP, Edna, (361) 782-5718.

May: Nature Programs, every Saturday and Sunday, Brazos Bend SP, Needville, (979) 553-5101.

May: Aquarium and Hatchery Tours, every Tuesday through Sunday, Sea Center Texas, Lake Jackson, (979) 292-0100.

May 3: Colonial Waterbird Rookery Tour, J.D. Murphree WMA,

Port Arthur, (409) 736-2551.

May 4: History Tour, Matagorda Island SP & WMA, Port O'Connor, (361) 983-2215.

May 4, 18: Beach Combing and Shelling Tour, Matagorda Island SP & WMA, Port O'Connor, (361) 983-2215.

May 4, 18: Wild Boar Safari, Fennessey Ranch, Bayside, (361) 529-6600.

May 5, 12: Migratory Bird Tour, Matagorda Island SP & WMA, Port O'Connor, (361) 983-2215.

May 10-12: Spring Photo Shoot, Fennessey Ranch, Bayside, (361) 529-6600.

May 11, 25: Nighttime Wildlife Tour, Matagorda Island SP & WMA, Port O'Connor, (361) 983-2215.

May 17: Texas Amphibian Watch Monitoring Workshop, Houston, (512) 912-7062.

May 18: Gordon's Birthday Party, Sea Center Texas, Lake Jackson, (979) 292-0100.

May 18: Texas Mussel Watch Monitoring Workshop, Houston, (512) 912-7062.

May 19: 12th Annual Monumental Bug Bash, San Jacinto Battleground SHS, LaPorte, (281) 479-2431.

May 24-25: Willacy County Young Farmers Annual Port Mansfield fishing tournament, (956) 440-0725.

May 24-26: Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Workshop, Texas Baptist Encampment, Palacios, (512) 389-8198.



HILL COUNTRY

May: Birdwatching, daily, Pedernales Falls SP, Johnson City, (830) 868-7304.

May: Gorman Falls Tour, every Saturday and Sunday, weather permitting, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, (915) 628-3240.

May: Wild Cave Tour, by reser-

vation only, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, (830) 563-2342.

May: Birding Tour, by reservation only, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, (830) 563-2342.

May: Bat Flights at Stuart Bat Cave, by reservation only, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, (830) 563-2342.

May: Sinkhole Bat Flight Tour, call for dates, Devil's Sinkhole SNA, Brackettville, (830) 563-2342.

May: Walking Wild Cave Tour, every Saturday and Sunday, weather permitting, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, (915) 628-3240.

May 2, 9, 16, 23, 30: Devil's Waterhole Canoe Tour, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223.

May 3: Range and Wildlife Seminar, Kerr WMA, Hunt, (830) 238-4483.

May 4: Crawling Wild Cave Tour, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, (915) 628-3240.

May 4, 11, 18, 25: Stumpy Hollow Nature Hike, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223.

May 18: Enchanted Rock Trail Project Day, Enchanted Rock SNA, Fredericksburg, (512) 445-3862.

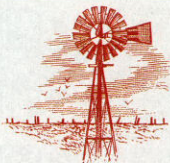
May 20: Austin Fly Fishers meeting, Austin, (512) 918-1832.

May 22: Texas Amphibian Watch Monitoring Workshop, Austin, (512) 912-7062.

May 22, 26: Blacklock's Breeding Birds of Coastal Waters Workshop, Corpus Christi, (361) 852-2100.

May 24-27: Summer Getaway, X Bar Ranch, Eldorado, (888) 853-2688.

May 25-26: Island Assault: 1944, Admiral Nimitz SHS-National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, (830) 997-4379.



PANHANDLE PLAINS

May: Trailway Challenge, call for information, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, (806) 455-1492.

May 4: Nature Challenge, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227 Ext. 49.

May 4: Star Walk, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, (940) 839-4331.

May 4: Dinosaur Walk, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, (915) 949-4757.

May 4: Photography Workshop, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, (940) 552-6291 Ext. 2292.

May 9, 10: Hummingbird Watch, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227 Ext. 49.

May 11: Trail Talk, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227 Ext. 49.

May 11: Campfire Tails, Abilene SP, Tuscola, (915) 572-3204.

May 11: Wildflower Walk, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, (806) 455-1492.

May 11, 24: Evening Program, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, (806) 455-1492.

May 18: River Walk, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227 Ext. 49.

May 18: Canyon Heritage, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227 Ext. 49.

May 24: Juniper Hike, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227 Ext. 49.

May 25: Trailway Adventure, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, (806) 455-1492.

May 25: Moon Walk, Abilene SP, Tuscola, (915) 572-3204.

May 25: Wildflower Safari, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227 Ext. 49.

May 25: Geology Hike, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, (806) 455-1492.

May 25-26: Panhandle Trail Riders Benefit Ride, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, (806) 622-2982 or (806) 655-2286.

May 26: Family Nature Hike, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227 Ext. 49.

May 27: Palo Duro Pioneers, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227 Ext. 49.



PINEYWOODS

May 2-3, 9-10, 16: School Excursions, Texas State Railroad SP, Rusk, (800) 442-8951 or (903) 683-2561 outside Texas.

May 4: Birding Boat Tours, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, (409) 384-5231.

May 5, 12, 26: Henhouse Ridge Nature Hike, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, (409) 384-5231.

May 11: Railroad Goes to War, Texas State Railroad SP, Rusk, (800) 442-8951 or (903) 683-

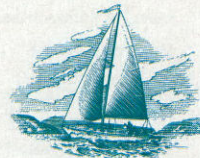
2561 outside Texas.

May 11, 25: Guided Nature Trail Hike, Village Creek SP, Lumberton, (409) 755-7322.

May 17: Nature Slide Program, Village Creek SP, Lumberton, (409) 755-7322.

May 18: Floating the Forks, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, (409) 384-5231.

May 25: Starlight Run, Texas State Railroad SP, Rusk, (800) 442-8951; (903) 683-2561 outside Texas.



PRAIRIES AND LAKES

May: Kreische Brewery Tours, every Saturday and Sunday, Monument Hill & Kreische Brewery SHS, La Grange, (979) 968-5658.

May: Evening Programs, every Saturday, Stephen F. Austin SP, San Felipe, (979) 885-3613.

May: Interpretive Programs, every Saturday, Purts Creek SP, Eustace, (903) 425-2332.

May: Historic and Scenic Tour, by reservation only to groups of 10 or more, Monument Hill & Kreische Brewery SHS, La Grange, (979) 968-5658.

May: Weekends at the Farm, Washington-on-the-Brazos SHS, Washington, (936) 878-2461 Ext. 245.

May 4: Wildflowers of the Blackland Prairie, Cooper Lake SP/Doctors Creek Unit, Cooper, (903) 395-3100.

May 4: Snakes Alive!, Purts Creek SP, Eustace, (903) 425-2332.

May 4: Wildflower Walk, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, (940) 328-1171.

May 4: Penn Farm Tours, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, (972) 291-5940.

May 4-5, 12, 18-19, 25-26: Tours, Fanthorp Inn SHS, Anderson, (936) 873-2633.

May 4, 18: Children's Fishing Derby, Washington-on-the-Brazos SHS, Washington, (936) 878-2214.

May 5, 12: Kreische House Tours, Monument Hill & Kreische Brewery SHS, La Grange, (979) 968-5658.

May 11: Guided Nature Hike, Cooper Lake SP/South Sulphur Unit, Sulphur Springs, (903) 395-3100.

May 11: Star Party, Lake Whitney SP, Whitney, (254) 694-3793.

May 11: Armadillo Odyssey, Purts Creek SP, Eustace, (903) 425-2332.

May 11: Stagecoach Days, Fanthorp Inn SHS, Anderson, (936) 873-2633.

May 11: Kids' Wilderness Survival, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, (940) 328-1171.

May 11, 25: Wildflower Walk, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, (972) 291-5940.

May 18: Night Sounds, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, (940) 328-1171.

May 25: Poisonous Plants, Cooper Lake SP/Doctors Creek Unit, Cooper, (903) 395-3100.

May 25: Storytelling Down in the Holler, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, (940) 328-1171.

May 25: Moonlight Meanderings, Purts Creek SP, Eustace, (903) 425-2332.

May 26: Cowboy Campfire-Music and Poetry, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, (940) 328-1171.



SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

May 2-3: Coastal Expo, Mission, (512) 912-7033.

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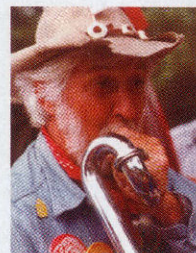
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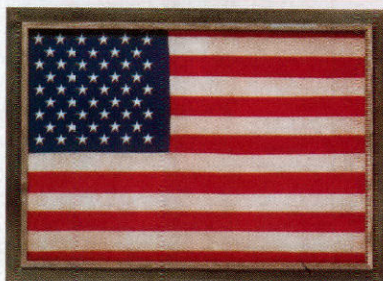
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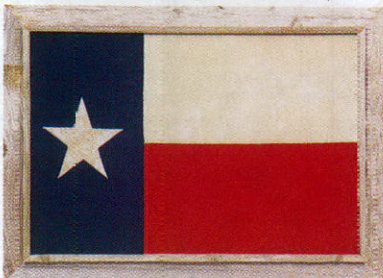
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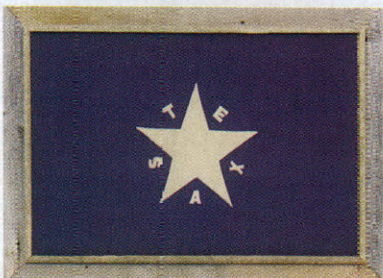
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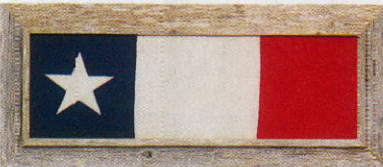
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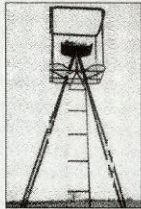
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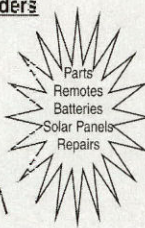
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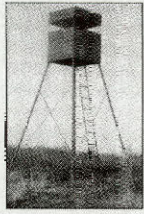
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PARTING SHOT

Once believed to be extinct, trumpeter swan populations have responded to restoration programs in the Midwest. Photographer Paul W. Bozzo of Kingwood photographed this wintering trumpeter on Feb. 3, 2002, at Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge on the upper Texas Coast. This was only the fourth modern sighting of a trumpeter swan in Texas. The other sightings were: 1989-1990 in Starr County; 1993 in Oldham County and 2000 in Hemphill County. The largest native waterfowl species in North America, trumpeter swans have a wingspan of more than 7 feet.



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