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SPORTS & WILDLIFE

The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE of TEXAS

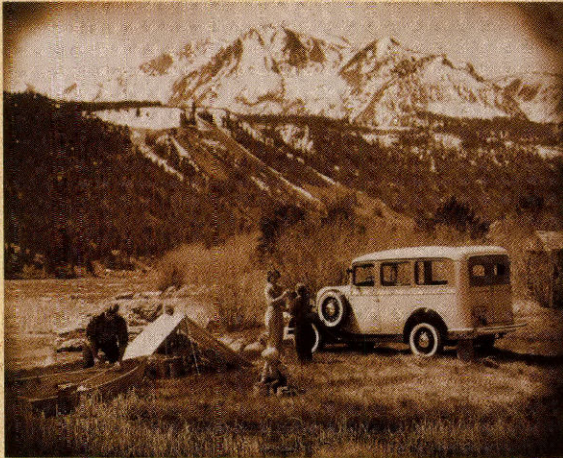


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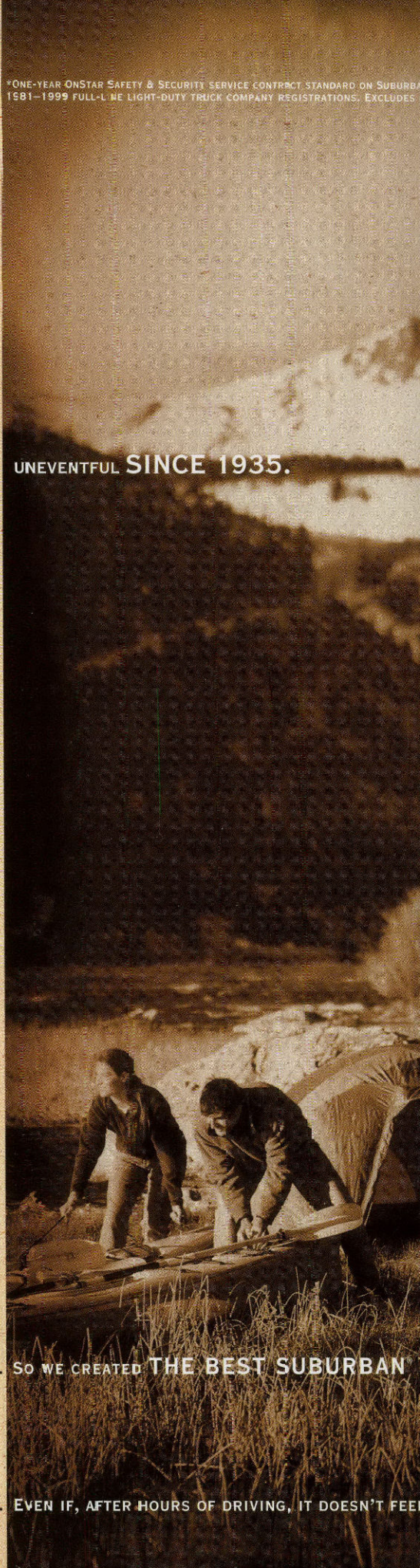
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APRIL 2001

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Front: This "high breeding" adult great egret's bare facial area flushes green for the brief period of courtship and into the nesting period. Photo © John R. Ford.

Back: Black skimmers are a familiar sight along Texas beaches. Photo © John R. Ford.

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AT ISSUE

From the Pen of Andrew Sansom

In my mind, it all started with the Freeport Bird Count.

MANY YEARS AGO, Victor Emanuel, now the world's premier purveyor of nature-related tourism, organized the first Audubon Christmas Bird Count down at the mouth of the Brazos River near Freeport. In the years since, the Freeport bird count has consistently scored among the top two or three in the nation and has placed first in number of species more times than any other count in the nation.



It is time for those organized interests who enjoy viewing wildlife to step up to the line and be counted.

At the same time, and with Victor's help, the man often called the John James Audubon of the 20th century, Roger Tory Peterson, grew so fond of birding on the Texas coast that he created a guide to the state's avifauna. Thus, Texas is the only state to have its own field guide in the great Peterson series.

Today, thanks to the energy, talent and dedication of birding enthusiasts led by Ted Eubanks and Texas Parks and Wildlife's own Madge Lindsay, Texas is quite possibly the largest single destination for birdwatchers in the world. State-of-the-art innovations, including the Great Coastal Birding Trail and the Great Texas Birding Classic, now help generate nearly \$1 billion a year for our state in economic impact.

Against this backdrop, the World Birding Center has been conceived in the Lower Rio Grande Valley as the most advanced venue for conservation and interpretation of resident and migrant birds in the Americas. The challenge of the World Birding Center is to create a globally significant conservation and education project whose operation and maintenance are sustainable.



Thus far, although the interest in birding among economic entities, communities and of course, birders themselves is high in Texas, a level of funding support similar to that traditionally provided by hunters and anglers for their interests has not been forthcoming. We must begin to invest in these resources in Texas, because they are a critical component of the state's incredibly rich biological diversity. It is time for those organized interests who enjoy viewing wildlife to step up to the line and be counted.

Andrew Sansom

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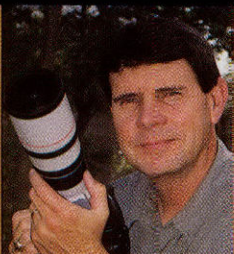
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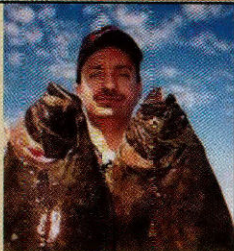
John Arvin has lived in South Texas all his life and has been studying the birds of that region since childhood. He recently retired after a 20-year career of leading birdwatching tours to all parts of the hemisphere, especially Central and South America, to concentrate on studying and writing about birds. His special interests include the study of bird voices through tape recording and the nocturnal migration of small land birds. He has participated in migration studies on offshore petroleum platforms in the Gulf of Mexico, a project that uses computers to record and analyze the flight calls given by migrating birds at night. He is currently writing a book on the status and distribution of South Texas birds and producing a set of audio CDs of the voices of Peruvian birds and mammals. In this issue he writes about the northward migration of subtropical bird species.



Larry Ditto, a regular contributor to *Texas Parks & Wildlife*, is a nature photographer and consultant on wildlife habitat restoration and management in South Texas. He recently retired from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, where he served since 1989 as refuge manager for the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuges. His photos have appeared in books, calendars and magazines for more than 25 years. Ditto and Greg Lasley of Austin were the winners of the Valley Land Fund's prestigious 2000 Wildlife Photography Contest. They are the first Texans to win the six-month-long competition, which included many of the country's top nature photographers. An avid hunter, fisherman and birder, he spends most of his time photographing the great biodiversity of the Texas/Mexico borderlands. Larry and his wife, Glenda, live in McAllen.



Chester Moore, who writes about sharks in this issue, grew up near Sabine Lake in Orange County, where he developed a passion for the outdoors at a young age. Since 1992, he has won nearly two dozen writing, photography and conservation awards from the Texas Outdoor Writers Association, Texas Parks and Wildlife and the Sportsmen Conservationists of Texas. He is outdoors editor for the *Port Arthur News and Orange Leader* and serves as saltwater editor of *Texas Fish & Game* magazine. He hosts "Chester Moore Outdoors" on AM 560 KLV in Beaumont. He and his wife, Lisa, live in Orange with their German shepherd, Chyna, and chocolate Labrador, Sable. They work to promote the outdoors to young people in their area.



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MAIL CALL

Picks, Pans and Probes from Previous Issues



FORWARD

LETTERS

Come celebrate our Texas state parks! Springtime in Texas is always greatly anticipated, and this year it should be even more glorious than usual. The latest drought is well behind us and the cold, wet winter we've slogged through has made for terrific wildflower germination, promising to deliver a bloom burst this spring that should be the finest in a decade.

Our staff at Texas state parks are busily preparing to welcome you. In addition to 121 Texas state parks — flung like jewels across the state — there are trails you can drive, hike, bike or horseback ride. Here are some favorites:

The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail: From deep in the Pineywoods to the heart of the South Texas Brush Country, this driving trail (see *Texas Parks & Wildlife*, April 2000) encompasses 500 linear miles with hundreds more miles in a series of loops. With 308 viewing sites, the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail offers countless opportunities to witness the spectacle of spring migration, add to your lifetime birding list and view other wildlife. This trail is accessible to all ages and activity levels.

The Texas Independence Trail: This is the second addition to the Texas Travel Trails Program, spearheaded by the Texas Historical Commission, after the Texas Forts Trail (see *Texas Parks & Wildlife*, July 1999). This living history lesson weaves through 30 counties and includes Fulton Mansion State Historical Park, Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historical Park, Kreische Brewery State Historical Park, Brazos Bend State Park and Goliad State Historical Park (see *Texas Parks & Wildlife*, May 1999).

The Great Texas Wildlife Trails: In progress, and modeled after the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, this driving route will encompass more than 100 counties from the Panhandle down to Laredo. For an update, visit <tpwd.state.tx.us/birdingtrails>.

In addition to these, the trailways at Lake Mineral Wells State Park, Lake Somerville State Park and Caprock Canyons State Park welcome hikers, bikers and equestrians. For a complete guide to all Texas state parks, visit any park in the system this spring and you'll receive our brand-new, free, 92-page annual guide, *Texas State Parks*. But hurry! We could only afford to print 300,000 of these in the first year, and with annual state park visitation topping 21 million, they should be a hot ticket!

Me? I'll be hitting the trails myself this April, enjoying a three-day springtime trail ride at Big Bend Ranch State Park.

Also — don't miss the May issue, when frequent contributor John H. Ostdick takes you behind the scenes of Ron Howard's newest movie, *Pearl Harbor*, starring our own "floating state park," the Battleship *Texas*.

Cat Fight

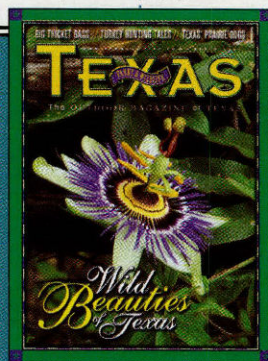
We enjoyed the article by Russell Graves on bobcats in your February issue. He makes reference to other Texas cats, including "the extremely rare jaguarundi, which lives exclusively in

the dense brush of deep South Texas."

All but one of them, apparently. We live in the midst of Texas Parks and Wildlife's Candy Abshier Wildlife Management Area at Smith Point, 15 miles or so across East Bay from Galveston. One afternoon in the summer of '99 my wife hollered for me to get out in the yard and save our cat, a Maine coon named Fluffy Underfoot. I dashed out on our back deck, and there, a few feet away, was our cat, nose to nose with a much

bigger cat with a long tail. The intruder quickly retreated into the woods. We looked in the wildlife book, and there was its picture, no doubt about it. After the encounter with the jaguarundi, our pet became an inside cat for a couple of days. Although once in a while we see a bobcat, we've never seen the jaguarundi again. Maybe he made the 400-mile journey back to South Texas.

Jerome R. Blackstone
Anahuac



I enjoyed your article on turkey hunting (March). Texas is blessed with an abundance of game, but our real blessings come from the stories told by those who love this great sport.

Doug Carter
Nederland



MAIL CALL

Scoping Out the Birds

Thanks for a great publication. My horizons have been broadened greatly by the varied content of your magazine. I used to read articles only about hunting, but now I read the entire issue cover to cover. I take my family camping at various state parks thanks to the park of the month coverage. The articles on conservation issues and features about birds and birding have become my favorites.

Mickey Petty
Garland

Crabbing Blues

I enjoyed the article by Marsha Wilson and the photos by Earl Nottingham on the plight of the crabbing industry (February). When I was young, we would go to Seabrook to buy crabs, and when the baskets were pulled from the water, they would be filled with large males. There are more females in Nottingham's photos than I ever remember being in those baskets. It would be nice to take a boat ride down any bayou, creek or open body of water without dodging crab traps.

Mike Armstrong
Houston

Fate of the Longleaf Pine

Thank you for Thad Sitton's excellent article, "The Forest That Fire Made" (February). Mr. Sitton ranks as one of Texas' finest historical writers. His book *Backwoodsmen: Stockmen and Hunters Along a Big Thicket River Valley* is a superb living account of the spirit and times of life in early East Texas.

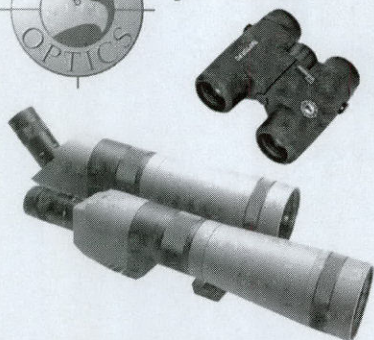
The forest surrounding the Boykin Springs Recreation Area that Mr. Sitton so beautifully describes is part of a larger area known as Longleaf Ridge. The towering pines, rolling hills, unusual plant communities and clear, running streams make Longleaf Ridge truly unique in all of Texas. Unfortunately, the future for the



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Eagle Optics salutes the Great Texas Birding Classic organizers, sponsors and local businesses for their role in promoting birdwatching and for increasing public awareness of the need for habitat conservation and restoration!

Good luck to all the participating teams - Especially the Eagle Eyes team in the Roughwing competition!



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towering giants that caused the wind to resonate with a “thrumming sound” is bleak. The U.S. Forest Service plan calls for these beautiful trees to be logged at some future date. Probable method of harvesting will be small-acreage clearcuts. Hopefully there will be a journalist like Max Bentley around to be “appalled at how quickly the pines fell.”

Several concerned groups are urging that this special area be set aside and protected for future generations of Americans as a National Recreation and Wildlife Area. Sadly, the U.S. Forest Service has turned a deaf ear to conservationists’ pleas. Hopefully, they will relent and preserve this remnant of the longleaf’s lost empire. If not, maybe Congress will act to put this treasure out of reach of the deadly chainsaws.

*Richard M. Donovan
Chair, Forest Task Force
Texas Committee on Natural
Resources
East Texas Forest and Wildlife
Coalition*

The article on the history of fire in the longleaf pine stands of East Texas was interesting. But statements regarding the open forest condition should have included facts about the lack of browse and suitable mast species for deer and turkey in the shaded open grown stands of longleaf. The turn-of-the-century period discussed was a time in which white-tailed deer and turkey were absent.

Following years of forest management research and practice in the Pineywoods of East Texas, habitat conditions have improved for wildlife. Hopefully, you will acknowledge the cooperative efforts of forest managers, foresters and wildlife biologists in reintroduction of white-tailed deer and eastern wild turkey in the forests of East Texas. It should also be noted that the presence of cleared areas in

the forests (clearcuts) have created valuable edge areas for wildlife, increasing populations of birds of prey, small rodents, bobcats and neotropical birds.

*Gary L. Price
Consulting Forester in Northeast Texas*

THE AUTHOR REPLIES: Research monographs, U.S. Forest Service wildlife biologist Ron Mize and eminent forest ecologist Daniel W. Lay have all confirmed the mature longleaf ecosystem as a cornucopia of wildlife foods for deer and turkeys. Deer and turkeys reached a low ebb around the turn of the century due to overhunting and overgrazing.

EDITOR’S NOTE: See page 53 in this issue for a story on the restoration of the eastern wild turkey.

Subscribing to Serendipity

A friend recently loaned me your February issue to review an article you had concerning flounder fishing. As I started thumbing through the pages, I came across an article you also had on Pedernales. My family and another family who are close friends of ours camped at this park eight years ago, so the article caught my attention. As I was reading and looking at the pictures, one particular photo caught my eye. It was a picture of some people on a platform looking across a pool of water and a little waterfall. The lady in the middle looked just like our friend that went on the camping trip. But that couldn’t be her — that was eight years ago. Then, to my great surprise, I saw my wife to the right of our friend. I couldn’t believe it! What are the odds that a friend would coincidentally give me the magazine and that this picture would be in this issue? I found this all quite amazing.

Your magazine is great. I now plan on ordering a subscription to it.

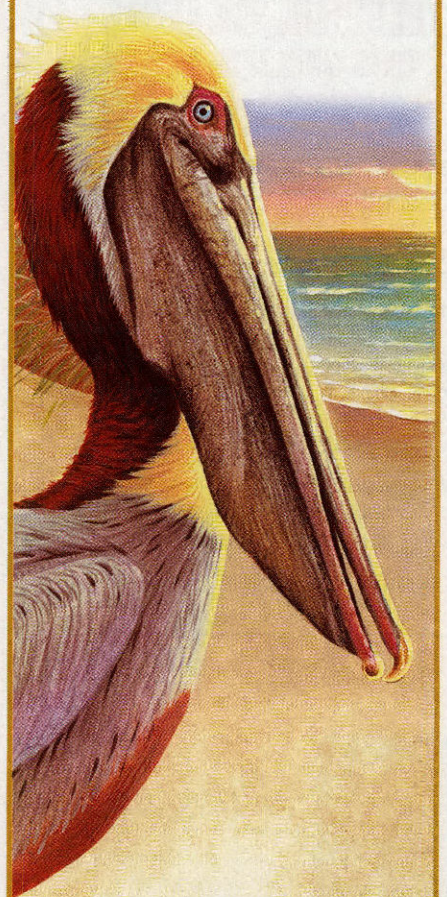
*Robert Lemmon
Houston*



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A Thirst for Knowledge

Thanks for running that great Scout piece on the water boondoggle (January). I learned a lot from it. This would have been the most environmentally destructive plan I have ever heard of, and to think that it barely failed makes me sad. I wonder what types of similarly foolish plans will be foisted on us in the future by those who see only the need for water. I also really enjoyed Erica House's article about the light pollution.

⚡ Matt White

ERRATA: We mistakenly identified the March cover photograph. Although both flowers are from the genus Passiflora, the flower on the March cover is actually the Passiflora caerulea, originally from South America, rather than our native Passiflora incarnata. While closely related and quite similar in appearance, the Passiflora incarnata is distinguished by three-lobed leaves and crimped corona filaments, while Passiflora caerulea has five-lobed leaves and straighter corona filaments. Texas boasts a plethora of passionflowers, with seven native and two introduced species which have escaped into the wild. Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine regrets the error.

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SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

Two New Birds in Town

Texas gets more feathers in its cap with the addition of two new species.

SURE, EVERYTHING'S BIGGER AND BETTER IN TEXAS — especially when it comes to birding. The state boasts the greatest number of bird species of any U.S. state. But we have two new feathers in our cap now that two new species have been added to the list of birds found in Texas, bringing the total to 620.

The first is the buff-breasted flycatcher, a four- to five-inch cinnamon buff and brown bird found traditionally in the Mexican highlands. For the last two years, a pair has successfully nested in the Davis Mountains near Fort Davis. The bird was previously known in the United States from a breeding population in Arizona.

The second is the blue mockingbird, a 9½-inch slate-blue bird with a black mask that is a distant relative of the Texas state bird. Birdwatching enthusiasts visiting Hidalgo County over the past year have been treated to sightings of this Mexican endemic at a site in Weslaco. Previous United States sightings include two accepted Arizona records and one accepted New Mexico sighting.

The Texas Birds Records Committee makes final decisions on adding newly reported species to the official list of Texas birds. The committee evaluates data and documentation on reported bird species within the state.

The buff-breasted flycatcher and blue mockingbird, along with all other current and historic birds from Texas, can be found in the fifth edition of *A Checklist of Texas Birds* from Texas Parks and Wildlife. To order the checklist, send a \$2 donation to Wildlife Diversity Branch, Texas Parks and Wildlife, 4200 Smith School Rd., Austin, TX 78744



Addition of the blue mockingbird, top, and the buff-breasted flycatcher bring the total of birds found in Texas to 620.



TEXAS BIRDING WEB SITES

BIRDING IS ONE OF THE FASTEST-GROWING recreational pursuits in the United States, so it is not surprising that there are now hundreds of birding Web sites that cater to every imaginable aspect of the hobby. Commercial sites worldwide offer online field guides, birding CD-ROMs and gear. In Texas you'll find sites that have checklists of area birds, information on where and when to go birding and information on field trips. Here are some of the best Texas sites:



Texas Ornithological Society
<texasbirds.org>

This Web site represents a bold new direction for the Texas Ornithological Society, which recently began publishing *Texas Birds*, the only magazine dedicated to birds and birding in Texas. It has seasonal summaries of recent bird sightings, as well as information about this non-profit organization's coastal bird sanctuaries.

Texas Bird Records Committee
<members.tripod.com/~tbrc>

Texas has 620 species of birds recorded — more than any other state. This site features many of the rarest. With photographs of dozens of rare and unusual Texas birds, the Texas Bird Record Committee's Web site is the kind of site you will want to visit again and again.

Upper Texas Coast
<texasbirding.net>

For a listing of birding Web sites as big as Texas itself, go to David Sarkczi's megasite, which contains links to Texas species and sites as well as birding sites that reach as far afield as the Yukon and the Middle East. Photographs and songs of dozens of species are guaranteed to whet the appetite of visiting birders.

Texas Parks and Wildlife
<tpwd.state.tx.us/nature/birding>

The Texas Parks and Wildlife's birding site is eye candy for birders. This site features a smorgasbord of information and checklists as well as birding activities, habitat projects and other bird-related programs.

Rio Grande Valley Birds
<geocities.com/RainForest/2240>

Birders without time to actually travel to the Valley may want to go there virtually instead — just don't let the boss catch you. To date 485

species of birds have been recorded in the Rio Grande Valley — many of them tropical species occurring nowhere else in North America. It's no wonder the Valley is a premier destination for birders from all over the world. This is the most comprehensive site for the region, with numerous links, checklists, pictures and more.

Deep in the Heart of Texas
<bafrenz.com/birds>

Bert Frenz's ambitious personal site is an amateur Web page worth visiting. He includes a wealth of birding resources and links to sites across the entire state.

Jim Peterson's Trans-Pecos
<esdallas.org/esd/pecos>

Judge Roy Bean may have been the authority west of the Pecos, but Jim Peterson is the authority on birds of that area. His Web site provides updates on Peterson's book *Birds of the Trans-Pecos*

(co-written with El Paso resident Barry Zimmer) and provides links to other local sites.

Northeast Texas Field Ornithologists
<members.tripod.com/NETFO_TX>

Considering how good their Web site looks, you might be surprised to learn that the Northeast Texas Field Ornithologists only have several dozen members. They're working to put this corner of Texas on the birding map. The site helps the cause with photos and information on local field trips.

Panhandle Bird Club
<geocities.com/Yosemite/2965>

Looking at the Panhandle Bird Club's Web site, it is easy to see why so many Texas birders visit the Panhandle each year. This site is a celebration of the many unique and unusual birds that regularly visit the Texas High Plains each year.

— Matt White

ILLUSTRATION BY FIAN ARROYO



History Lessons

Don't know much about history?
Visit the new Texas State History Museum.



THROUGH THE CENTURIES, the connection between Texans and the land has been strong. From the Native Americans who lived off the land to the pioneers who pressed westward as the 19th century came to a close, the history of Texas' land and its people are inseparable. On April 21, the stories of people interacting with the land will come to life with the opening of the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin. The new museum, just north of the Capitol at Congress and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, also tells the story of Texas ranching, the oil industry, space exploration, music and sports — and brings a new IMAX theater to Austin.

"Encounters on the Land," on the museum's first floor, uses life-size murals, artifacts, simulated landscapes and special lighting to give visitors a sense of place and a feel for the land. A fiber-optic map shows the routes of early explorers. French explorer La Salle's ship *La Belle* sank in Matagorda Bay in 1686, and special lighting techniques make objects excavated from the *La Belle* appear to be underwater.

Contact between European explorers

and Native Americans is highlighted in several exhibits. A Karankawa family pulls a dugout canoe ashore with a mounted conquistador nearby. A Caddo dwelling represents the tribe that lived in the Neches River valley around A.D. 300. A program in a theater inside the dwelling explains the Caddos' reactions to the De Soto expedition and their relationships with the Spanish and French.

A timeline for the period of Spanish colonization features a hands-on model of Mission Espíritu Santo, now part of Goliad State Historical Park. The model explains the functions of different parts of a mission complex.

A theater designed to look like a Comanche tipi on a prairie introduces visitors to the Westward Expansion section. In a multimedia program, Comanche elders talk about the loss of the buffalo and the leadership of Quanah Parker. A frontier fort features the stories of people who played a role in the expanding frontier, including Texas Rangers and Buffalo Soldiers.

For more information about the museum, call 512-936-8746 or visit the Web site <www.TheStoryofTexas.com>.

— Mary-Loue Bigony

THE SOUND AND THE FURY

CHARLEY ECKHARDT DEDICATES his new book, *Texas Smoke*:

Muzzle-Loaders on the Texas Frontier (Texas Tech University Press, \$15.95) to young people interested in primitive firearms. Indeed, throughout this clear and concise work, he seems far more interested in actually teaching than in impressing readers with his expertise.

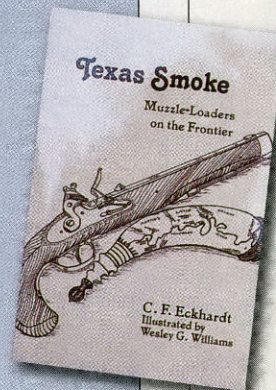
Eckhardt begins by asking "Why Guns?" Through a comparison of the crossbow, the English long bow and the unwieldy Spanish matchlock arquebus, he argues convincingly that early firearms were more frightening than deadly. Spanish soldieries fired these early guns from their chests so that their armor would protect them from the murderous recoil. Were it not

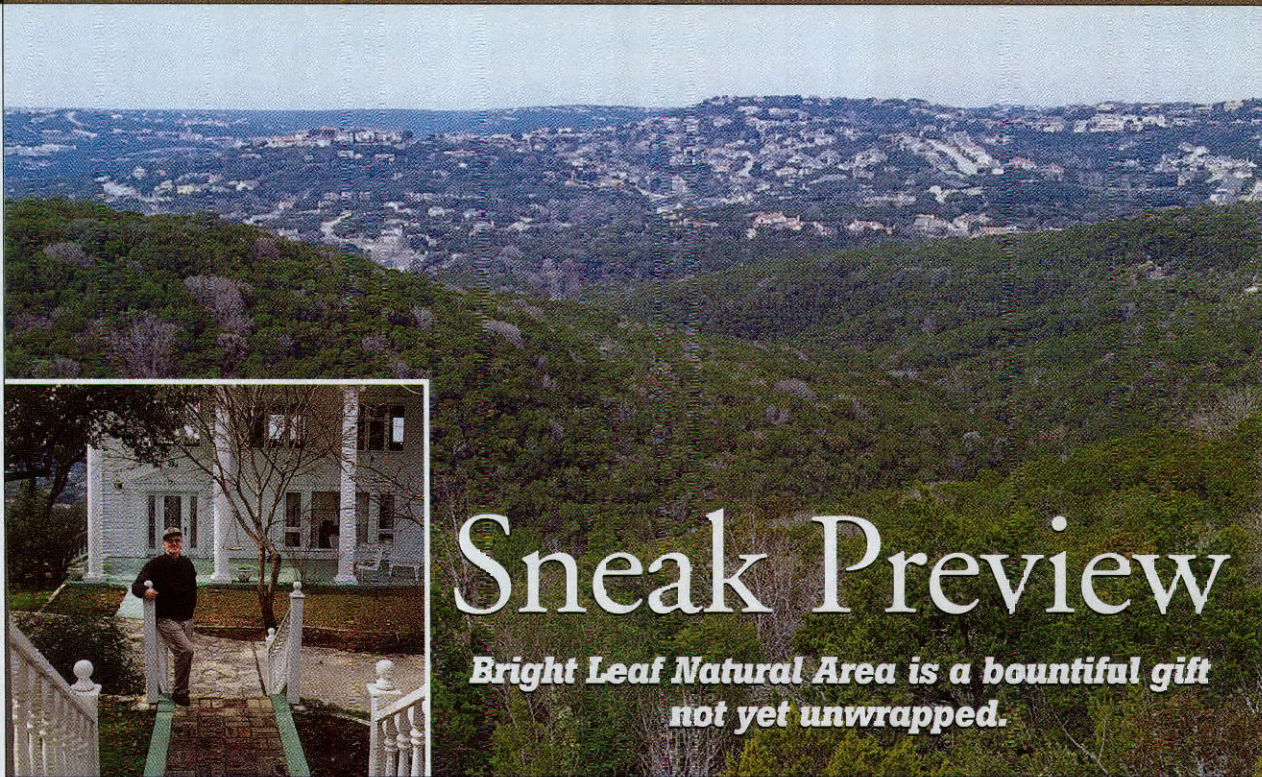
for the psychological impact of the gun's deafening report and cloud of acrid smoke, Native Americans would have made short work of European settlers.

Like all good teachers, Eckhardt understands the importance of humor. With a light sprinkling of Old English (fowlesmellynge smoak) and brief asides ("Do you know how brimstone got its name?"), he keeps what might otherwise be a mundane discussion funny and interesting.

Wesley G. Williams' clear, simple illustrations augment Eckhardt's descriptions. Anyone interested in Texas history or muzzle-loading firearms will find *Texas Smoke* a fine read.

— Henry Chappell





Sneak Preview

Bright Leaf Natural Area is a bountiful gift not yet unwrapped.

ON A SHADED, tree-canopied trail deep inside Austin's new Bright Leaf Natural Area, you have to strain to hear traffic sounds from nearby Mt. Bonnell Road or busy RR 2222. An oasis in the heart of the city, Bright Leaf is a bountiful gift not yet quite unwrapped: Its 2.6 acres of lush oak-juniper woodland are still being groomed, awaiting exploration by those wanting to learn from its plants and wildlife, and by others needing only a cool and leafy respite from the city surrounding it.

Spring is the best time to see scores of bird species, including the endangered golden-cheeked warbler. "In spring, neotropical songbirds and other migrants double — even triple — the local population," observes site manager Jeff Hershey.

On the ground, gray foxes share territory with deer, possum, raccoons and rabbits. The woodland is dominated by oaks and juniper trees. At one time, the area supported a harvesting of juniper trees, their logs sought by railroad builders for their strength and resistance to rot. (Buckles from the bridles of the horses of those builders have been found, as have bottles, pottery,

drill bits from a mined-out quarry at the site, and abundant marine fossils — all suggesting the possibility of further archaeological and geological treasures.) Today the junipers share space with red oaks, live oaks, yaupons, evergreen sumac, the uncommon sycamore-leaf snowbell, and Lindheimer's silk tassel, a small, attractive tree found throughout the park. Among the hundreds of plants are many wildflowers and a cool-season orchid uncommon to this area, the Glass Mountain coral root.

The legacy of Austin benefactor Georgia Lucas, Bright Leaf was bequeathed to Texas Parks and Wildlife in 1995. Lucas, who died in 1994, had systematically purchased 34 contiguous tracts of pristine escarpment terrain and very firmly stipulated its use: as a site for learning about nature and for hiking or walking. Don't expect to see recreational equipment or even picnic tables; no dog-walking or mountain biking will be permitted. What will be encouraged — beyond casual exploration of some 4½ miles of looping trails — is nature education (stemming from a yet-to-be-built interpretive center) and nature tours (now offered only by advance reservation) As a laboratory

for learning, Bright Leaf will be accessible and will contribute an ecosystem that varies from that of area parks.

The opening of Bright Leaf is contingent upon funds enabling construction of an interpretive center, in keeping with the vision imparted by Georgia Lucas. A parking lot has already been built at the protected entrance (off RR 2222, via Creek Mountain Drive) and two new bridges across Dry Creek facilitate use of the park by mobility-impaired visitors. Volunteers — mostly neighbors, Sierra Club members and Central Texas Trail Tamers — have been grooming existing trails, adding new ones, and ridding the area of such exotic invasive plants as chinaberry, ligustrum and Chinese photinia. The house used by Georgia Lucas as a country retreat is already serving as a conference center for non-profit and government groups.

To join a scheduled tour of Bright Leaf, contact site manager Jeff Hershey or park ranger John Mahan, 512-459-7269. Or volunteer to help maintain trails. Either will let you peek at Bright Leaf before this remarkable gift is ready and opened for everyone to see.

— Marilyn Swclinksy



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BINOCULARS: A Zoom with a View

BY GIBBS MILLIKEN

TODAY'S MODERN BINOCULARS put Granddad's old field glasses to shame. The new models boast such features as wide-field viewing and high-grade, color-corrected optical glass. Many feature greater light-gathering ability and waterproof, non-slip, shock-resistant housings. Birding, fishing, hunting — and the latest craze, butterflying — will never be the same.

After cost, the next consideration is whether you want a standard-size or compact unit. The standard units offer crisper images, greater brightness, wider field of view, and steadier handling — all of which are important to the naturalist user. On the other hand, the lighter, pocket-size compacts are more likely to be carried afield by fishers, hunters and backpackers.

Power, or magnification, is the next big consideration. Most individuals can hold a power of 7X or 8X steady, but with magnifications of 10X and greater, image-shake becomes a problem. The **Canon 10X30IS** (\$499.95, Canon U.S.A., 800-652-2666) features a design innovation that electronically reduces image movement, making it ideal for birding and sports viewing. It stabilizes details that would be obscured by slight vibrations in conventional 10X designs.

Weight and feel are major factors in selecting binoculars. Try out various styles to see if they are light enough, feel

balanced and comfortable, and give the proper eye-relief and diopter correction if you wear glasses. Compare them to see which have the most appropriate physical size, field of view, ease of focus, clarity and brightness.

For many naturalists, including the growing numbers of butterfly and dragonfly watchers, close focusing is a must. In dense woodlands or tropical rainforests, binoculars should focus at less than 10 feet, preferably five or six, for identification of very small bird or insect species with similar markings. Some of the best binoculars for this specialized viewing are the **EO Ranger PC 8X42** (\$398, Eagle Optics, 800-289-1132) and the **EO Raptor PC 8X32** (\$388, Eagle Optics). Both are waterproof, rugged units with outstanding image quality and close focusing.

Perhaps the top premium standard-size model for naturalists is the magnesium-frame **Swarovski EL Series, 8.5X42** (\$1,532 or \$1,610 for 10X42, Swarovski, 800-426-3089). These binoculars can be used with a special **2X Doubler** (\$288, Swarovski) attachment for one eye, converting them into a convenient-size spotting scope.

Other excellent brands in the \$600-\$2,000 price range are Leupold, Leica, Zeiss, Nikon and Bausch and Lomb. All of them feature barium glass BaK-4 prisms, quick-focus controls and multi-coated lenses for higher light transmission, durability and sharpness.

Most of the standard-size economy models under \$100 from Nikon, Simmons and Bushnell are fair in quality, performance and construction. A notable exception is the wide-angle **Bushnell Power View 10X50** (\$71, Bushnell, 800-423-3537) with an insta-focus control bar that is excellent for following moving subjects and is available in either black or camouflage finish.

Compact binoculars are designed specifically with the active sportsperson and traveler in mind. They are generally less expensive and feature light, nonreflective, armor-coated, shock-resistant housings. Some are extreme in their variable zoom powers, like the **Nikon Eagleview Zoom II 8-24X25** (\$240.95, Nikon, 800-645-6687). Although versatile performers, they are limited in field of view and lack waterproofing.

If you want to get smaller than a compact, try one of the thin, pocket-size, folding microcompacts like the roof-prism **Pentax DCF MC 10X25** (\$330, Pentax, 800-761-4422) or the tiny porro-prism **Nikon Special Anniversary Edition 6X15 chrome** (\$396.95, Nikon). This classic, retro-style Nikon has been reintroduced with center-focus controls, superior optics and close focus.

The latest improvements create a magical experience of the outdoors: the chance to sit undetected and observe intimate moments of animal behavior not discernible with the naked eye. ☆

Canon 10X30IS



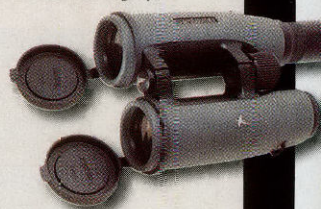
Nikon Eagleview II



Eagle Optics Ranger PC



Swarovski EL 8.5X42



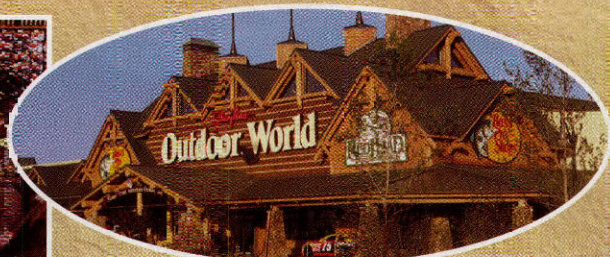
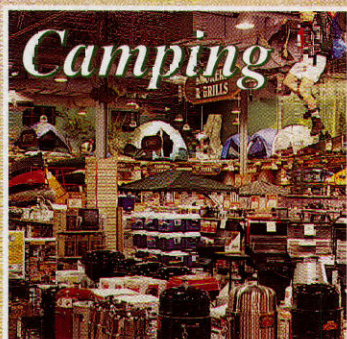
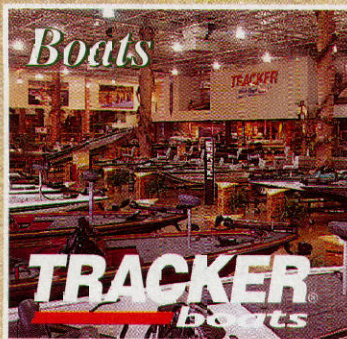
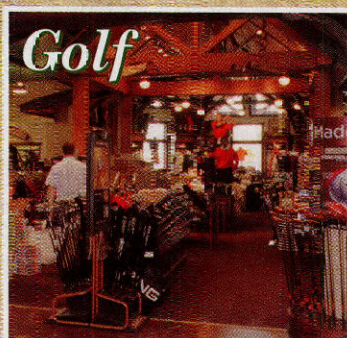
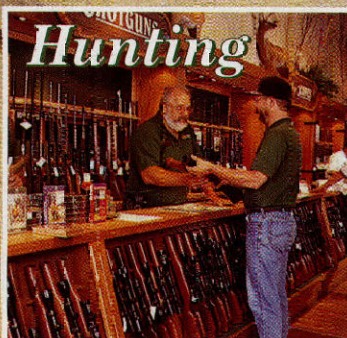
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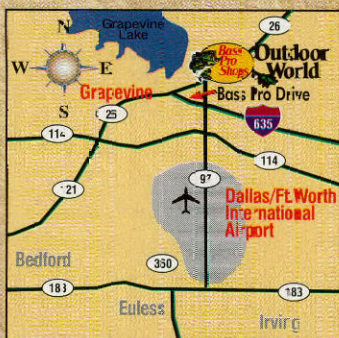


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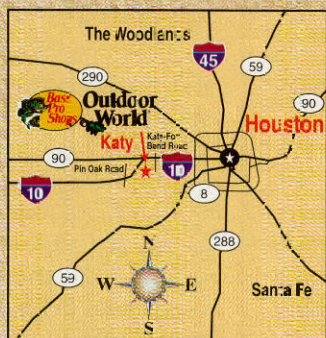
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COME HELL AND HIGH WATER

How should you drive in a flood? Rule number one: Don't. / BY MARTY KUFUS



TELEVISION COMMERCIALS IMPLY IT, and some motorists might believe it: that pickup truck or sport-utility vehicle — muscularly equipped with a big engine, four-wheel drive, and a high ground clearance — can go anywhere. But this notion is sometimes wrong, and a motorist who attempts to cross flood water risks being dead wrong.

The trouble starts when the ford gets unexpectedly deep, the current strong. Then the engine dies. After that, it's all hydraulics.

Water weighs about 62 pounds per cubic foot and flows downhill at six to 12 miles per hour (sometimes more in floods). Factoring in a vehicle's temporary buoyancy, which includes the air in its tires, a stalled vehicle "loses" 1,500 pounds of weight for every foot of water pushing against it. At some point, the vehicle might begin to float down-

stream — and maybe roll over. "Even six inches of fast-moving flood water can knock you off your feet, and a depth of two feet will float your car," the National Weather Service warns.

Flash floods, real killers in Texas, occur within six hours of a major rain event. Nationally, an estimated 140 to 200 people die in flash floods every year — many while driving.

"The most common causes of drowning in swift water are cars crossing flooded roadways and being swept away, and children playing near flooded creeks. Many others are would-be citizen rescuers," says Slim Ray, a consultant to Rescue 3 International <www.rescue3.com>, which trains emergency personnel across the nation and at several Texas locations.

Specially trained and equipped personnel can do only so much in a vast state whose rivers, coast, arroyos, and concrete-filled urban

areas are all susceptible to floods.

While every flood is different, here are some general guidelines:

- Heed emergency warnings broadcast on local radio and television stations.
- Never drive around an official traffic-control barricade. That's foolish, and it's a misdemeanor offense under state law.
- Never drive into water unless you are absolutely certain it is shallow — no more than a few inches deep — and slow. Also be sure the roadway is undamaged and clear of debris, and that you know where the edge of the road ends. (Night is the most dangerous time.) Otherwise, ignore impatient drivers behind you and turn around — or wait.

If your vehicle is stranded in water:

- Don't freeze. Remove your seat belt. Even if you have a cellular phone, don't get locked into the hope rescuers will get to you.

(Emergency personnel ruefully call this the "911 attitude.") The weather service urges, "If the vehicle stalls, leave it immediately and seek higher ground. Rapidly rising water may engulf the vehicle and its occupants and sweep them away."

• If you are swept downstream, get out of and away from your vehicle, which eventually will sink or roll over onto its side or roof. (Exception: If the water has crested at a few feet, the current is not strong and your vehicle is no longer moving, it might make sense to stay on the roof.) Walk, crawl or swim to shore or, failing that, to a solid tree. Avoid debris piles, which are unstable and dangerous.

The best advice of all:

Don't go into the flood, even if you're inconvenienced by the situation. Before you get in that four-wheel drive, forget the commercials and think: Is this trip worth the risk? ★

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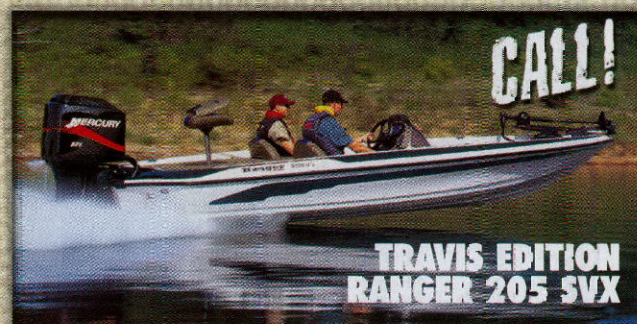


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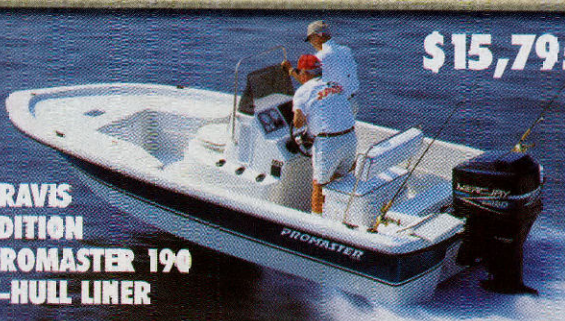


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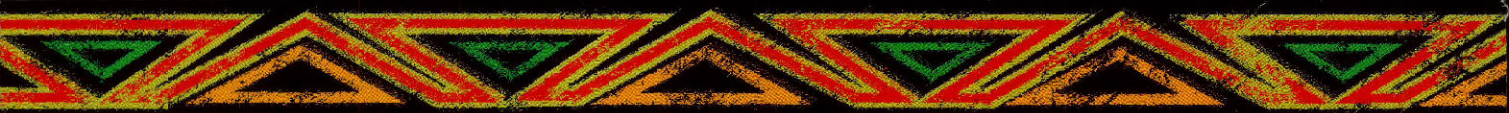
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ATLANTA ORIOLE © LARRY DITTO





TEXAS BIRDING IS BOOMING THANKS TO A
NORTHWARD MIGRATION OF TROPICAL SPECIES.

NORTH
of the
BORDER

By John C. Arvin

WE, THE HUMAN INHABITANTS OF TEXAS, have a very narrow view of the history of where other species with which we share our state have lived. After all, records of such things in any detail go back only about 150 years, an eye blink on the timetable of the changes that have shaped, and continue to shape, the Texas environment. Of course, even a casual summer tourist to the Hill Country might encounter impressions of marine shells and corals in the exposed limestone of a road cut or the impressions of dinosaur footprints

PHOTOS © LARRY DITTO

in the rock of a streambed that was once soft mud. He or she could hardly fail to appreciate that the ranges of creatures that have inhabited the region and the environment that supports them have undergone great changes in the eons before there were humans to record such events.

During the brief period when we have taken note of such things, we know that some animals have expanded or contracted their ranges across the state in dramatic fashion. Jaguars once ranged northward to the Big Thicket and beyond. Within the last 150 years, the armadillo crossed the Rio Grande and spread north and east across much of Texas and through the Gulf states all the way to Florida. The reduction of the jaguar's range is a direct result of the persecution by man of this top-level predator, but the great expansion of the armadillo is due to changes in the environment or in the genetics of the species that we can only guess at. These range fluctuations are conspicuous because they occurred over a relatively short period of time and involve highly distinctive species. But while we may not notice it, the ranges of all species are actually in a constant state of expansion or contraction.

Like the nine-banded armadillo, many Texas birds of tropical and subtropical origin have made a push northward during the 20th century. The first detailed study of the state's birds, *The Bird Life of Texas*, consisted of an enormous mass of data gathered by Harry C. Oberholser over half a century. This valuable

LIKE THE ARMADILLO, MANY TEXAS BIRDS O



but inaccessible body of information was edited into publishable form and updated by Edgar B. Kincaid and was published in 1974. The *BLOT*, as it is affectionately known, summarized knowledge up to that time of the ranges of birds in Texas, including changes that had been observed since records first were kept in the mid-1800s. Unfortunately, it is out of print and hard to find (and expensive) on the used book market.

Today, a quarter-century later, we can use the information provided by Oberholser and Kincaid to show a recent and rapid spread northward by several dozen species of essentially tropical birds. The process probably began early in the century with expansion of such species as the Inca dove and great-tailed grackle northward from deep South Texas to presently include most of the state and beyond into other states. Thanks to the recent exponential increase in the numbers of people from all walks of life who observe and study the natural world, especially birds, even minute changes in the places that species occur are chronicled in great detail these days.

The Rio Grande Valley makes a convenient benchmark by which to measure these changes. When the ranges of Texas' birds were being worked out in the latter part of the 19th and early 20th century, a number of familiar and for the most part widespread tropical species were found to occur in the United States only in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, consisting of Cameron, Hidalgo, Willacy and Starr counties. Soon, when

"the Valley" was mentioned among birders across the country, no one had to ask "which valley?" Its tropical denizens, found in no other part of the country, were generally termed "Valley specialties." The bold and noisy great kiskadee, brilliant green jay, secretive white-tipped dove, sparkling buff-bellied hummingbird and striking black-bellied whistling-duck were some of these tropical specialties restricted to the Valley in the early part of the century.

The green jay is now found regularly and in some numbers as far north as Three Rivers and Cotulla and in smaller numbers to Del Rio and Brackettville and is even knocking on San Antonio's back door. The great kiskadee presently has a similar distribution, additionally extending northeastward to the middle coast at Seadrift and Port O'Connor. The white-tipped dove has recently reached Del Rio in the west and Indianola on the coast. The buff-bellied hummingbird has taken a northeast trajectory, basically following the Gulf "coastal bend" around to about the vicinity of Victoria, where it is presently a fairly common summer resident and presumably is nesting there. Perhaps the champion colonizer has been the black-bellied whistling-duck, which now breeds northward as far as Dallas and eastward almost to the Louisiana border. None of these "Valley specialties" shows any sign of having reached a limit to their northward spread.

During the early and mid-20th century, several species of

TROPICAL AND SUBTROPICAL ORIGIN HAVE MADE A PUSH NORTHWARD DURING THE 20TH CENTURY.



Once found only south of the Rio Grande, the clay-colored robin, far right, and Altamira oriole, far left, were reported in Texas for the first time in 1939 and 1940. Initially considered vagrants, or out of their normal range, today they are fully accredited Texas breeding birds. Black-bellied whistling-ducks, left, now breed northward as far as Dallas. The white-tipped dove, below, has expanded its range from the Rio Grande Valley to Del Rio and the middle Texas Coast.



tropical birds that had not been found on the Texas side of the Rio Grande during the exploratory phase of ornithology in the region appeared north of the border for the first time. These included the Altamira oriole (1939), clay-colored robin (1940), ringed kingfisher (first recorded at Laredo in 1888 but not seen again in Texas until the 1950s), hook-billed kite (1964), Tamaulipas crow (1968), brown jay (1974) and blue bunting (1978). Most of these, and a number of other tropical species that have turned up on the Texas side of the Rio Grande in the last decade or so, began as “vagrants” (individuals out of their normal range). Gradually their “vagrancy” became more and more regular until now all but the blue bunting have become fully accredited breeding Texas birds. Can the bunting be far behind?

The Altamira oriole has become a regular resident species in deep South Texas, slinging its two-foot-long nest from conspicuous sites. The ringed kingfisher not only has become the most common of the three species of kingfishers found along the Rio Grande, but has pushed northward across South Texas to the very limits of the region at the southern edge of the Edwards Plateau. The hook-billed kite has not spread beyond the limits of the Lower Rio Grande Valley so far, but is widespread across that area where natural habitat remains. The Tamaulipas (formerly Mexican) crow invaded in spectacular fashion — with first hundreds and then thousands of birds in large flocks becoming evident soon after the initial beachhead

of three birds appeared. After nesting in small numbers for several years, it now seems to be in a state of retreat back across the border. Time will tell if this is but a temporary wobble in the widespread trend of pushing the tropics northward.

An interesting situation exists with two extremely similar species of kingbirds. The Couch’s kingbird was one of the original “Valley specialties” that has expanded northward since the mid-20th century to the edge of the Edwards Plateau and across the Guadalupe River to the middle Texas coast — an increase of about 300 miles from the northern edge of its range in Texas at the turn of the last century. About an equal distance south in Mexico, the Couch’s kingbird occurred side by side with its virtual twin, the tropical kingbird. They can be reliably distinguished only by their very different vocalizations. The northward march of the tropical kingbird along the Mexican coast escaped the notice of birders (few observers, either Mexican or North American, visit this area) until they began to be found on the Texas side of the border about 10 years ago. Since the first pair of tropical kingbirds was found nesting in Brownsville in 1991, the species has spread northward to Zapata and Kenedy counties. Its total northward advance has almost exactly equaled that of its twin, though the leading edges of the ranges of the two remain about the same distance apart, as they always have.

Scientists tell us that each of the recent decades has succeeded its predecessor as the warmest on a worldwide basis since cli-

GREAT KISKADEE © GRADY ALLEN; BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD © LARRY DITTO

DURING THE EARLY AND MID-20TH CENTURY, SEVERAL SPECIES OF TROPICAL BIRDS, INCLUDING THE CLAY-COLORED ROBIN



matic records have been kept. Global warming is an undeniable fact, though its causes remain in dispute. Will the next generation of Dallasites host green jays at their birdfeeders and watch ringed kingfishers plunge into the Trinity River for fish? Or will renewed surges of Arctic air wipe out these range extensions and again relegate these tropical species to the status of “Valley specialties?” No one can say with certainty, but the northward spread of tropical species seems to have been in progress throughout the 20th century and perhaps began even earlier. It is not merely a product of the recent series of mild winters.

While it is easy to demonstrate the northward expansion of tropical birds in the state, the reverse — that is, the tendency of northern birds that migrate south for the winter to move their wintering ranges farther north — is less clear. The paucity in recent decades of wintering purple finches and rusty blackbirds, which formerly were fairly common in the eastern half of the state, may be part of that trend, but many other species of northern breeders show no real pattern.

The Lower Rio Grande Valley has lost several of its breeding birds of temperate origin in the latter half of the 20th century — species such as the red-shouldered hawk, orchard oriole, summer tanager and yellow-breasted chat. But the reasons for this are unclear. Except for the hawk, all are heavily parasitized by cowbirds, which have increased explosively in the region with the clearing of nearly all the native vegetation and the conversion of much of the area to small grain farming and live-

stock production — a transformation that greatly favors cowbirds. Some observers feel that factors such as these — not long-term climatic change — are more likely to be causes of their regional demise.

Likewise, while most species of tropical origin are steadily extending northward, several show no signs of doing so. A few have even largely withdrawn from their Texas ranges. Again, the reasons for this are obscure and likely are different for different species. Two tropical species found more or less commonly by the early ornithologists, the aplomado falcon and gray-crowned yellowthroat, both disappeared from the southern tip of the state early in the 20th century for reasons unknown. The falcon has been brought back by a vigorous reintroduction campaign, and the yellowthroat has recently shown signs of reclaiming its former foothold in Texas. Several have reappeared in the Valley in the last decade after a half-century’s absence. Unfortunately, all seem to be single individuals so far, and breeding has not been detected.

Whether the northward march of tropical species is a positive trend is a matter of opinion. One thing is certain: Aside from trying to reduce the greenhouse gases that cause global warming, there seems to be little we can do about it. So we may as well enjoy these colorful and interesting species and keep close tabs on their future movements. Ultimately, their changes in latitudes could have implications far beyond their presence or absence in a given region. ☆

GREEN JAY © GRADY ALLEN; COUCH’S KINGBIRD © JOHN C. ARVIN

UTAMIRA ORIOLE, RINGED KINGFISHER, AND HOOK-BILLED KITE, APPEARED NORTH OF THE BORDER FOR THE FIRST TIME.



No longer just Valley specialties, the great kiskadee, far left, and green jay, immediate left, are expanding their ranges toward San Antonio. The Couch’s kingbird, right, is now 300 miles from the northern edge of its range in Texas a century ago. A similar kingbird, the tropical kingbird, has also advanced northward. The buff-bellied hummingbird, second from left, has followed the Coastal Bend toward Victoria. It is a fairly common summer resident of the area.



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KISKADEE
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DAVID BLANKINSHIP WILL NEVER FORGET HIS FIRST SIGHT OF THE GREAT KISKADEE. HE WAS STANDING BESIDE A DRAINAGE DITCH IN THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY 44 YEARS AGO, DOING A POPULATION STUDY OF WHITE-WINGED

By Kay Charter

PHOTO © LARRY DITTO



DOVES. HE SPOTTED A BIRD HE DIDN'T RECOGNIZE FORAGING FOR FISH. "I WAS ASTONISHED BY THIS BIRD," HE SAYS. "I WAS STRUCK BY ITS SIZE AND ITS BOLD BLACK-AND-WHITE HEAD."



ANXIOUS TO LEARN ITS IDENTITY, he made a sketch of it and took it to his supervisor, field biologist W.H. Kiel, Jr. Kiel immediately recognized the bird in

the drawing. Known as the derby flycatcher at the time, the bird was later named "kiskadee flycatcher." That name was ultimately changed to great kiskadee.

The pattern that so impressed Blankinship makes the great kiskadee one of the most distinctive flycatchers in North America. It is a showy, big-headed flycatcher with a lemon breast, olive-brown back, and bright reddish-brown wing and tail edgings. The black crown, with wide white lateral stripes converging at the back, is broken by a yellow patch in the center. This patch, though not always visible, is prominently displayed when the bird is excited.

The great kiskadee has a similar plumage pattern to that of two other tropical species, boat-billed and social flycatchers. But there are no records of Texas sightings of the boat-billed flycatcher, and sightings of the social flycatcher are very rare. Unless this close cousin becomes a regular visitor, it will remain virtually impossible to confuse the great kiskadee with any bird on this side of the Mexican border.

Kiskadees belong to the Western Hemisphere family of birds known as tyrant flycatchers, or Tyrannidae, a word derived from the Latin *Lanius tyrannus* — a name given by Swedish biologist Carolus Linnaeus in the 18th century to the eastern kingbird. Because they belong to a family not found in the Old World, Linnaeus mistakenly classified the kingbird with shrikes.

While Linnaeus was wrong about his classification, the term "tyrant" aptly fits those members of this exclusively New World family who aggressively defend not just their nests, but a given territory during the breeding season. Anyone who has watched a returning male eastern kingbird in the spring, pumped up with hormones and ready to breed, can attest to the bird's tyrannical nature. He unhesitatingly drives everything, whether hummingbirds or hawks, from his domain. Years ago, an adult great kiskadee apparently failed to live up to the reputation of its family name by allowing Harry C. Oberholser to pick up a fledgling without putting up a fuss. While this caused the renowned ornithologist to judge the bird's reputation for aggressiveness to be "overrated," kiskadees

are typically no less pugnacious as parents than kingbirds.

Timothy Brush's experience more nearly represents the norm. Brush, associate professor of biology at the University of Texas—Pan American and a longtime birder who has studied kiskadees, says these birds vigorously chase anything deemed to be a threat to eggs and nestlings. They attack not just humans who enter their nesting territory but snakes, squirrels and other perceived predators.

"Great kiskadees are at least as aggressive as eastern kingbirds, in my opinion, within about 50 feet of their nests," Brush says. "When I once tried to look into a fairly low kiskadee nest in my neighborhood, one of the parents flew at me from behind, uttering its loud *reeep!* call as it passed by. It was quite startling. At least one of those birds remembered me for several weeks that summer, and would attack again whenever it spotted me walking through its nesting territory." Other observers who have either deliberately or inadvertently approached kiskadee nests have reported similar attacks.

In South Texas the most frequently attacked adversary is the great-tailed grackle, no doubt because grackles are very common and they prey on eggs and nestlings of other birds. Kiskadees immediately chase or scold any grackle that enters their territory. They will, however, tolerate close proximity of nests built by those species such as smaller flycatchers, Altamira orioles and white-winged doves, which do not represent a threat to their own young. Birds that build their nests within kiskadee territory can benefit from the latter's aggressive behavior toward snakes, grackles and other nest-threatening creatures.

Kiskadees fashion great, globular nests of a foot or more in diameter from grasses, strips of bark, mosses and weed stems. A hole on the side permits entry, while the insides are softly lined with fine plant material. They sometimes steal material from nests of other birds, and there are a few reports of kiskadees incorporating entire nests of smaller species, such as the vermilion flycatcher, into their own.

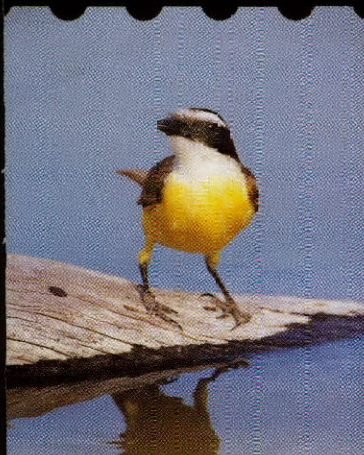
The nests, with roofs thick enough to shed rain, often are more elliptical than spherical. They are placed from as low as six feet to as high as 50 feet off the ground in the fork of a tree, in a vine tangle or resting on the tops of several small branches. While the birds ordinarily nest near water, sometimes they build in dry habitat. Kiskadees will also, on occasion, place their nests in the open; one nest was discovered on top of a purple martin nest box. Others have been seen near the tops of utility poles.

While some describe kiskadee calls as "raucous," the bird's voice is neither unpleasant nor strident. It is — at least for many fans of this remarkable bird — clear and cheerful. British naturalist W. H. Hudson may have said it best. Like many other nonmigratory species, kiskadees form long-lasting pair bonds. On more than one occasion, Hudson observed pairs that he judged were reuniting after a lengthy separation. He reported that, in each case, the birds perched closely side by side and, with yellow crests raised and wings beating the branch upon which they sat, they raised their voices together in a "jubilant noise." Although they do not sing complicated, melodic tunes like wrens and thrushes, the common *kis-ka-dee*

TOP PHOTO © LARRY DITTO; BOTTOM PHOTOS (LEFT TO RIGHT) © BILL DRAKE/KAC PRODUCTIONS, © GLENN HAYES/KAC PRODUCTIONS, © LARRY DITTO



GREAT KISKADEES, it turns out, actually do very well in disturbed habitat and, in fact, are typically absent in extended intact forests.



call for which the bird is named, conducted with its variations and shortened versions in emphatic, ringing tones, has its own special appeal.

Most tyrant flycatchers make their living, as the name implies, by catching a variety of insects such as flies, wasps and bees on the wing. They also glean non-flying insects, spiders and larvae from leaves and branches. Although all North American Tyrannidae are insectivores, many add occasional frugivorous fare, especially berries.

Kiskadee palates are far more cosmopolitan. Their appetites are reported by one researcher to be "boundless." Great kiskadees add drupes of palms as well as other fruits and many berries to their menu. Their taste for bananas on tropical plantations is strong enough that locals in those regions sometimes call the kiskadees "banana birds." They snag fish like kingfishers, pluck tadpoles and frogs from shallows. They scavenge dead fish like vultures and follow the plow, where they pick worms from freshly turned earth. They take lizards and small snakes. They steal scraps of meat from rural butchers' wagons in Latin America, snatch dog food from pet bowls on open porches, and have been known to hang around garbage dumps. Like magpies and jays, they sometimes raid the nests of smaller birds. They even eat chile peppers.

Sightings of these birds in the 1950s were relatively unusual events, Blankinship recalls, even for people who spent a lot of time in the field. That is no longer the case. Today the man who was so taken as a youth with the great kiskadee is a wildlife biologist for the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge and lives in the Valley. Still a kiskadee fan, he says that this bird is now ubiquitous in the area. Its numbers are so great that he has seen as many as five individuals visit his backyard birdbath at a time.

The population of this colorful, adaptable species not only has expanded throughout its historic range, but the evidence indicates that it is also moving slowly northward. While Kingsville was once considered to be the northern limit of kiskadee breeding range, several pairs now regularly nest in the riparian zone along the Nueces River. During the past decade, the number of sightings of kiskadees at the Rob and Bessie Welder Wildlife Refuge in Sinton has increased; individuals have been seen on most Christmas bird counts, and pairs are now regularly present during the time of year when the birds should be nesting. A single individual spent part of the winter of 1998-1999 in Goose Island State Park near Rockport, and another pair is known to have overwintered in Seadrift last year.

THE POPULATION of this colorful, adaptable species not only has expanded throughout its historic range, but the evidence indicates that it is also moving slowly northward.

The great kiskadee is a tropical bird whose range stretches from central Mexico down through Argentina. A narrow finger reaching up along the west coast of Mexico stops well short of Arizona. But a broader thumb-like section runs up the east coast of Mexico, spilling into our country in the southernmost part of Texas, particularly in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Some experts once feared that the bird would be eliminated from this area as a result of expanding agricultural activity that destroyed much of the native flora in the region. In his 1942 book on the life history of flycatchers, Arthur Cleveland Bent fretted that the replacement of native chaparral and forest habitat by orchards and farms "threatens to extirpate this and many other interesting Mexican species and drive them from their only foothold in the United States."

But Bent and others who mourned the potential loss of this species were unaware of just how opportunistic the birds are. Great kiskadees, it turns out, actually do very well in disturbed habitat and, in fact, are typically absent in extended intact forests.

While strays have been seen as far north as Black Kettle National Grassland in west-central Oklahoma, as far east as Louisiana and as far west as Arizona (those more than likely from Sonora, Mexico), this flashy and fascinating flycatcher is — and is likely to remain — one of Texas' many claims to avian fame. The great kiskadee is one of the Lower Rio Grande Valley species that make this area one of the top 10 birding hotspots in the nation. I recently met a group of birders visiting the Valley — a couple from Germany, a man from Switzerland and two people from New Zealand. They were in pursuit of tropical birds such as the plain chachalaca, green jay and Altamira oriole. But at the top of each wish list was the great kiskadee. ○

KAY CHARTER, *author of For the Love of Birds (Crofton Creek Press, Fall 2000), lives with her husband, Jim, in Michigan, where they have a 47-acre sanctuary for migrating and nesting neotropical passerines.*

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY RJ SHAY



I WAS 24 YEARS old when I started watching birds — an ancient age compared to most hard-core birders who take up the hobby about the same time they're learning to ride a bike. At least I was fortunate to start out in the company of birding prodigies, so I learned by example. But I still made some bumbling mistakes. If I could start all over now, here are 10 tips I would give myself.

1 Leave your ego at home. Many adults who blithely think birdwatching looks easy — as opposed to, say, rock climbing — are alarmed to discover that tracking a bird with a pair of binoculars is harder than it looks. Adults cannot bear the thought of appearing stupid or uncool among their peers. All too often, beginning birders give up before they master the necessary hand-eye coordination because their egos get the better of them. What a pity.

2 So practice hand-eye coordination. Birdwatching shares one thing with contact sports: You must possess or acquire the skill of hand-eye coordination. Your brain, hand and eye have to work in concert — all in a matter of milliseconds — to accurately place your optical equipment on the object you desire to see before it flies away, which, alas, it often does. Fortunately, lifting your binoculars to the exact spot where you saw the rustle of leaves in the top of an 80-foot tree is less life-threatening than standing in against a high and tight Randy Johnson fastball.

3 Buy a good pair of binoculars. Birdwatching is an inexpensive, low-tech hobby. You can bird your entire life with two pieces of equipment: a pair of binoculars and a field guide. Unfortunately,

many people form their first opinions of birds and birding through lousy optics — binoculars Uncle Bob used in the Merchant Marines or Aunt Beatrice's opera glasses — which are invariably out of alignment, meaning the prisms and other gizmos have slipped around and no longer produce one sharp image. Out-of-align binoculars have ruined the nascent careers of many budding birders. It is better to see a few birds well than a lot of birds badly. So on your first outings, assuming you are with seasoned birders, ask to look through their binoculars. If you are thrilled by the experience, then you

can safely invest your money in a good pair of binoculars. The American Birding Association (phone: 719-578-9703, <www.americanbirding.org>) has a world of information on binoculars. Generally speaking, \$350 will get you a very good pair of binoculars, and the ABA recommends satisfactory brands for beginners that cost \$50 to \$75.

4 Why do you think God gave you two hands? To watch birds with, of course. If you go to the expense of buying a good pair of binoculars, hold them with both



hands. Binoculars magnify movement as well as image, so the slightest twitch becomes an optical lurch. Holding binoculars in one hand is like watching birds from a dinghy on the high sea. With two hands firmly gripping the binoculars you are better able to create a steady platform for viewing. Furthermore, one-handed birding is a sure giveaway of your novicehood, so if image and style are important to you, grab those binoculars with both hands.

5 Hang out with experts. Watching birders watch birds is the quickest, surest route to proficiency.

cy. From them you will learn all the basic rules, pointers and procedures. Fortunately, as a rule, seasoned bird-watchers love to nurture newcomers.

6 Go birding alone. While you can learn a great deal from experienced birdwatchers, you also run the risk of their skills and knowledge becoming your crutch. If, for example, you always rely on someone else to pick out the western, least, Baird's and semipalmated sandpipers in a mixed flock of shorebirds, then you may never learn to I.D. these peeps (the collective name for this group of look-alike sandpipers) on your own. By birding alone, you not only hone your skills; you are also more likely to enter that zone of bliss, inexplicably most often described by runners, of being one with your world. Without the distraction of companions and idle chitchat, you can immerse yourself in birds. It is an exquisite place to be.

7 Listen. Birding by ear — identifying a species by its song or call note — is the mark of a veteran birder. The typical response of a neophyte to this practice is something like, "Well, gosh, it doesn't seem fair to count a bird if you don't see it." This rejoinder demonstrates that the newcomer has yet to realize that easily half the joy of birding is auditory. Instead, he or she is mortified at the thought of having to learn and memorize hundreds of different bird songs and calls. It is a daunting prospect unless you take the long view. If you consider birding as a lifelong pursuit, then what's the big rush? Over a lifetime, you will learn the songs and calls at a pace that fits your timetable and level of enthusiasm. Two caveats: 1) As people age, they tend to lose hearing in the higher-pitched registers (and men tend to lose this zone faster than women), so if you start birding in your 40s or 50s, the days are numbered for you to learn the vocalizations of birds with tiny, tinny, high-pitched songs. 2) If you are in your teens or 20s and taking a fancy to birds, stop going to rock concerts. Any music or other loud noise (jet engines, firearms) that quivers your sternum is going to be hard on your eardrums as well.

8 Birding is about three things: habitat, habitat, habitat. A veteran birder can look at a particular landscape at a given longitude and latitude in a specific season — a mudflat on the Texas coast in spring, for instance — and name the birds that he or she will see there. Neophyte birdwatchers (especially hardheaded ones) have problems accepting the reality that birds, thanks to the long, slow hand of evolution, display amazing fidelity to certain habitats, even niches within habitats, at predictable times of the year. As you learn birds, learn where and when you saw them, and this will help you identify them when you see them again. This will also keep you from making foolhardy identifications, and it will sadly demonstrate that the reason so many birds are declining is because we are not doing a very good job of protecting their habitats.

9 Learn the common birds; it will help you identify rarities later. My fellow birders are obsessed with chasing rare birds — a species that shows up where it does not belong, for reasons sometimes understood (e.g., a hurricane blew it off course, global warming) and sometimes not. There are local and national hotlines and e-mail servers that give reports on rare-bird sightings. Birders with deep pockets will drop what they are

**HERE ARE
10 TIPS
FROM 10
VETERAN
BIRDERS:**

Spend as much time as you can, even if it is just in your own backyard, watching birds. The major benefit of birdwatching is learning more about the world in which you live. Putting a name to a creature should be the beginning, not the end, of the process.

—John Arvin

Learn the habitat of each species as you learn to identify the bird.

—Rose Ann Rowlett

Invest in a good pair of binoculars as soon as you feel yourself getting serious. A good pair of binoculars will increase your enjoyment immensely.

—Michael Braun

With the first glimpse you get of a bird, start making a mental checklist of its characteristics — thin bill, no eye ring, two wing bars — before it flies away. In case you don't get another look at the bird, this will help you remember what you saw when you start looking in the field guide.

—Chris Helzer

Find a productive and pleasant birding spot near your home and check it at least once a week. Challenge yourself to learn all you can about the regular birds at your spot, including their vocalizations. You will be amazed at how you continue to discover birds new to you even close to home.

—David Wolf

Consider bird identification as a lifelong pursuit and learn to identify birds by song. Some people, like me, are more aurally than visually oriented. You may find birdsong to be more rewarding than studying the details of plumages.

—Steve Wilson

Get up early during the breeding season to experience the dawn chorus and its intense activity. Although it can be a bit frustrating identifying birds in dim light before you have learned songs, it is exciting to hear so much activity.

—Peter Scott

Learn to find and identify birds by ear. Don't stand around waiting for the expert in the group to find the birds for you. Stay on a bird — often it will just fly a meter or so and with patience and skill you can locate it again.

—Bob Behrstock

Birds are extraordinarily beautiful, feather by feather and in totality, so give yourself a chance to let them capture your interest: beg, borrow or buy the best optics you can — and then go birding in places where you can let the birds fill the field of view of those good lenses.

—Richard Webster

doing and fly to far parts of the country to see a rare bird. I've personally always found this kind of birding a little cuckoo and even sad. A bird in the wrong place is lost and may never find its kin again. In any case, this is a big part of birdwatching. The very

best way to be good at finding rare birds is to be intimately familiar with common birds. Then, when you see an unusual bird, I promise it will look very different to you.

10 Watch birds doing things.

Birds, like us, have complicated lives.

They have to find food, attract mates, defend territories, raise offspring, stay out of the jaws of predators, travel long distances, find a warm place to sleep at night, survive inclement weather. Catching glimpses of how they go about doing all these things is one of the joys of birdwatching. From my office window, while going about my day, I will watch an American kestrel prowling the neighborhood for a meal or a row of Inca doves at dusk snuggle up on the utility lines or hear Albert's towhees scuffling in the leaves under my window or observe the intricate, often feisty exchanges among Anna's hummingbirds sharing the sugar-water feeder dangling from the eaves. This may not be a way to earn a living, but it is a way to enjoy life. ★

SUZANNE WINCKLER is a native Texan living in Arizona.



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YEAR-ROUND

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

JUNE

JULY

2001

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NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

YEAR-ROUND

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YEAR-ROUND

Katy Prairie Birding

Platform – Largest U.S. winter home for migratory waterfowl, as well as 250 other species. 281-391-7116, <kfarr@fal-pc.org>.

Houston Arboretum and Nature Center – Birdwatchers Club. Second Monday of every month. Explore the natural history of birds, share resources, view films, discuss birding sites and field guides. Each month covers a different class of birds. Free. 713-681-8433, <www.neoscft.com/~arboret>.

King Ranch Nature

Tours – King Ranch Visitor Center, Kingsville. Guided nature tours, including special programs for birdwatchers. Programs vary in length and cost. 361-592-8055, <www.king-ranch.com>.

San Antonio Audubon Society

– Beginners' Bird Walk and Monthly Mitchell Lake Field Trip. Beginners' bird walk meets the second Saturday of each month at 8 a.m. The Mitchell Lake field trip is the fourth Saturday of each month. SA Audubon meets the first Thursday of each month, except May, at 7:30 p.m. 210-308-6788, <www.electrotex.com/saas>.

MARCH

March 21-October 17

Bird banding – Hermann Park, Houston. Observe and learn from the Friends of Hermann Park education

staff as Harris County's Avian Surveillance Program conducts bird population studies. Free. Reservations required. 713-524-5876, <programs@hermannpark.org>.

March 24

Houston Audubon Society Field Trip to the Pineywoods – "Butterflies, Dragonflies and Migrants." Trip leader P. D. Hulce. 281-358-6745.

March 24

Travis Audubon Society – Open house of TAS's Golden-Cheeked Warbler Sanctuary. Guided tours to observe singing male golden-cheeked warblers. 9 a.m. – noon. Free. 512-443-2709, <www.travisaudubon.com>.

March 25

Houston Audubon Society – Spring Migration at High Island Sanctuaries. Volunteers will greet visitors daily until May 12. Diverse habitat of prairie, wetlands and wooded areas with wheelchair-accessible trail. Daily entry fee or annual patch. 713-932-1639.

March 31

Houston Audubon Society – Spring Beach Cleanup. Join the Houston Audubon Society at Bolivar Flats Sanctuary for their Spring Beach Cleanup of shorebird habitat. 9 a.m. – noon. 713-932-1639, <www.houstonaudubon.org>.

Yellow Rail Walks, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. Guides will lead participants through salty prairie habitat in search of yellow rails. Free. Space is limited. 409-267-3337, <http://southwest.fws.gov>.

APRIL

April 4-May 9

Texas Ornithological Society – RV Tour. Depart from Houston. Designed for birders and their partners, with a professional birding guide. Big Thicket, Gulf Coast, Hill Country, Southern Brushlands and Rio Grande Valley. \$895/RV with one or \$995/RV with two. <www.texasbirds.org>. Click on "Field Trips."

April 7-8

Houston Audubon Society – High Island Birding Book Sale. Wonderful selection of used books for collectors and birders. Topics include birds and natural history at the TAS Boy Scout Woods Sanctuary.

Attwater Prairie Chicken Festival – Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge. Eagle Lake honors this unique and indigenous bird now on the verge of extinction. Wildlife viewing tours are available. Local artists will display arts and crafts. Free. 979-234-2780, 979-234-3021.

April 7, 14, 21, 28

Saturday Bird Walks, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. Great opportunity for beginning birdwatchers. Meet at the visitor information center at 9:30 a.m. Bring binoculars and insect repellent. Destination determined by participant interest. Free. 409-267-3337, <http://southwest.fws.gov>.

April 7, 8, 14, 15, 21, 22, 28, 29

Bird Walks, Blucher Park, Corpus Christi – Audubon Outdoor Club of Corpus

Christi. Club members lead walks through Blucher Park and the Blucher homes across the street from the park. Blucher Park is the site of large migrant fallouts during spring migration. Free. 361-241-2617, <www.electrotex.com/aoc/aoc.htm>.

April 7 & 21

Fennessey Ranch Spring Migration Trips. Full-day birding tour that racks up more than 100 species. Guided by experienced birder and ranch guide. Lunch on the banks of the Mission River. \$44. 361-529-6600, <fenranch@2fords.net>.

April 8 & 14

Yellow Rail Walks, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge – *SEE MARCH 31*

April 11

Houston Audubon Society Membership Meeting – Houston Zoo. 7 p.m. John and Gloria Tveten, "Birds at Home, Their Nests and Eggs." Visitors welcome. 713-932-1639.

April 14

Fennessey Ranch Photography Workshop. Full-day workshop designed to improve your wildlife pictures. Tips on composition, technique and equipment. Opportunities to shoot from African-style brush blinds built on watering holes, freshwater marshes and game trails. Birds, deer, coyotes, wild hogs and wildflowers. \$159. 361-529-6600, <fenranch@2fords.net>.

Houston Arboretum and Nature Center – Natural History Field Trip: "Spring Migration." Houston birder Bill Goloby takes participants to some of the best spots on the coast. \$30.



Often seen perched on telephone poles along South Texas highways, the handsome Harris's hawk is a swift and powerful hunter.

The American white pelican has a wingspread of eight feet. Flocks fly in lines, often circling to great heights.



A migrant throughout much of Texas, the pied-billed grebe is the most common grebe in eastern North America.

The striking purple gallinule uses its long toes to walk on lily pads and cling to low branches in the eastern part of the state.





Similar to the cardinal in appearance and behavior, the pyrrhuloxia frequents the thorny scrub of South and West Texas.

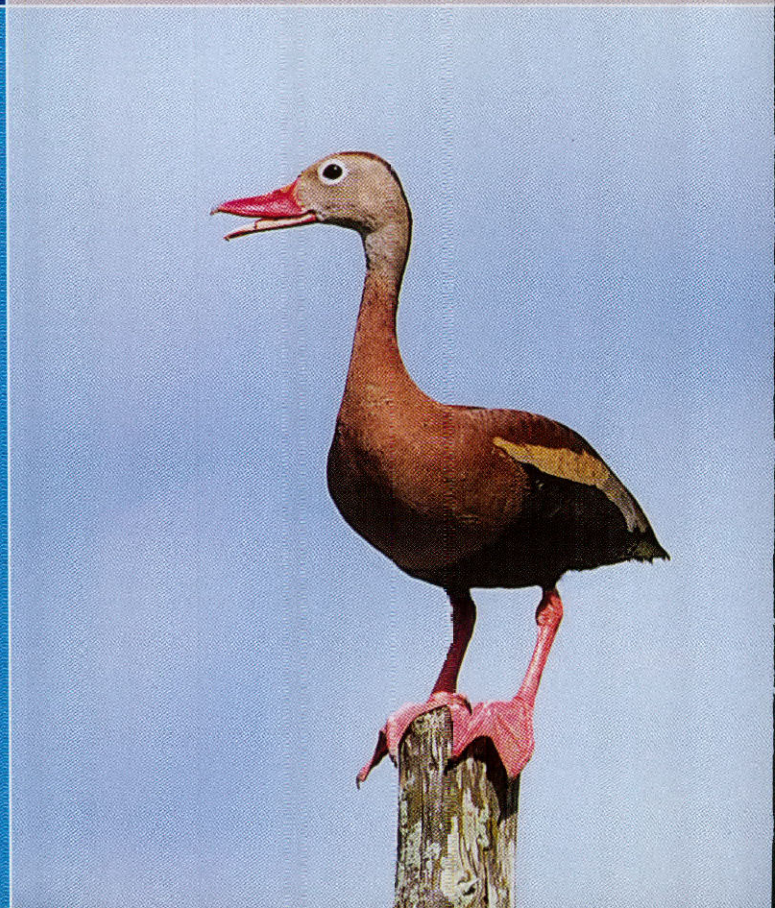


Thousands of ruby-throated hummingbirds migrate through Texas each fall en route to Mexico and Central America.

The husky warble of the blue grosbeak is heard around brushy areas in its breeding range, which covers the southern half of the United States.



Once called the black-bellied tree duck for its habit of nesting in trees, the black-bellied whistling-duck is known for its high-pitched call.



Preregistration is required. 713-681-8433, <www.neosoft.com/~arbor>. Gulf Coast Bird Observatory – Earth Day. Volunteers are needed for the Bayou Bail-out, Forest Trail Blazing, Handy Man Helpers, Trash Bashing and Mulching Madness. Bring a lawn chair, gloves, safety glasses, insect repellent, and tools, if you have them, labeled with your name. Something for everyone, even birding! Lunch provided. Free. 979-480-0999, <www.gcbo.org>.

April 15 & 20

Yellow Rail Walks, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge – *SEE MARCH 31*.

April 18–24

American Birding Association Convention – Beaumont. From the Pineywoods to the coastal marshes and tidal flats, the ABA convention will cover a wide range of birding habitats in and around Beaumont. Top field experts will present programs, workshops and evening presentations. Victor Emanuel Nature Tours will be coordinating the field trips. 800-850-2473, ext. 233, <www.americanbirding.org>.

April 20

Great Texas Birding Classic Opening Ceremony – Jasper. Join Birding Classic teams and Texas bird experts for this informal exchange of information. Learn where to find those tough birds all along the Texas coast. 5:30 p.m. Martin Dies, Jr. State Park. Free. 888-TXBIRDS, <www.tpww.state.tx.us/gtbc>

Dedication of Visitor Information Center, Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. Ribbon-cutting ceremony dedicating the newly completed visitor center. Refuge tour following dedication. 9 a.m. Free. 409-267-3337, <http://southwest.fws.gov>.

April 20-22, 25-29

The Children's Museum of Houston Birding Week celebrates International Migratory Bird Day, April 20-29. The museum conducts bird activities and workshops 2 p.m.–3 p.m. daily. Free with museum admission. 713-522-1138, ext. 280, <www.cmhouston.org>.

April 21

Earth Day/Migratory Bird Celebration – Houston Arboretum and Nature Center. Open house 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. featuring activities and displays on migratory birds. Bird walk at 7 a.m. precedes the family-oriented event. Learn about hazards of migration, habitat loss and the homeowner, and positive steps everyone can take. 713-681-8433,

<www.neosoft.com/~arbor>. Nature Discovery Center, Russ Pitman Park, Bellaire – Combination Earth Day/International Migratory Bird Day. Activities include a bird banding demonstration, bird walks and a warbler identification seminar. Free. 713-667-6550.

April 22

Earth Day/Bay Day – Blucher Park, Corpus Christi. Celebrate Earth Day, the outdoors and nature during the spring migratory fallout of birds. Also take a “walk through the wetland.”

Free. <www.sci.tamucc.edu/cbbf>.

April 24

Friends of Hermann Park and City of Houston's Parks & Recreation Department – lecture by Jim Patterson, designer of the bird habitats on two islands in Hermann Park's McGovern Lake. Learn what features and plants were included to attract birds, and how similar principles can be applied to your own yard. 7 p.m. Free. 713-524-5876, <programs@hermannpark.org>.

April 26-28

Texas Ornithological Society – Spring Semi-Annual Meeting, Corpus Christi. Birding field trips to local “hot spots” and little-known “cubbyholes.” Evening speakers on birds and birding topics. Saturday evening banquet with Joel Simon speaking on hawk migration in the Coastal Bend. \$28 plus an additional \$20 for non-members. <www.texasbirds.org>.

April 29

Great Texas Birding Classic Awards Brunch – Mission. Meet the winners of the Birding Classic. Prizes, guest speakers. \$10. 888-TXBIRDS, <www.tpww.state.tx.us/gtbc>.

MAY**May 3-6**

Migration Celebration – Gulf Coast Bird Observatory Headquarters, Lake Jackson. A four-day birding festival for youth and adults. Lectures, guided field trips, vendor display booths, barbecue and more. Prices per

activity vary from \$3 to \$25. 800-938-4853, <www.tourist-info.org>.

May 5

Fort Worth Audubon Society Annual Spring Bird Count. All birders, not just society members, are urged to participate. Free. 817-283-2658, <marimike@flash.net>

May 11

Houston Arboretum and Nature Center – “Owl Prowl” Field Trip. Trip leader Bill Goloby takes participants west of Houston to see all four Houston owl species. 7 p.m. – midnight. \$30. Space is limited, preregistration required. 713-681-8433, <www.neosoft.com/~arbo>.

May 12

International Migratory Bird Day – Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Lake Jackson. Birding tours and barbecue, with help from Texas Nature Conservancies Mad Island Marsh. Free. 979-480-0999, <www.gcbo.org>.

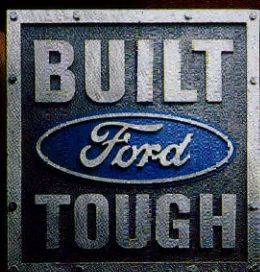
May 14-18

“Goldenwings” North Florida Birding Trip. A fully guided excursion around the pristine ecosystems of the Florida Panhandle: Wakulla Springs, St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, St. Joe Bay, Longleaf Pine Forest and many more beautiful areas. Ride from Texas City or fly to Tallahassee to meet the group. \$400. 281-337-2829, <rrichardm@prodigy.net>

May 20

Houston Audubon Society Field Trip to Brazos Bend State Park. Free. 713-528-0259.

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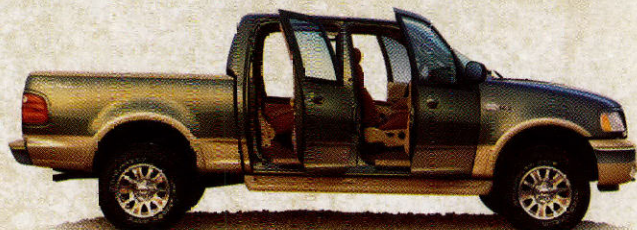


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JUNE

June 24

Houston Arboretum and Nature Center field trip. Bill Goloby will take participants to Jones State Forest for a look at woodland birds — with luck, possibly even a sighting of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. \$30. Space is limited, preregistration required. 713-681-8433, <www.neosoft.com/~arbor>.

June 25-29

Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary, Houston Audubon Society — In and Out of the Nest Camp. This camp, for children ages 7 to 11, features activities, crafts, games, visits from live birds and lots of opportunities to learn about the natural world. Registration forms will be mailed in March and April. Confirmation and camp information will be mailed in May. \$100. 8:30 a.m. — noon. Space is limited. 713-932-1639, ext. 15.

JULY

July 2-6 and July 16-20

Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary, Houston Audubon Society — In and Out of the Nest Camp — *SEE JUNE 25-29*.

July 7-15

“Goldenwings” camping trip to Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. Fantastic Rocky Mountain birds will be the highlight of the trip, and there will be opportunities to see interesting mammals, as well. \$500. 281-337-2829, <rrichardm@prodigy.net>.

AUGUST

August 11-23

“Goldenwings” birding trip to California. All the great spots will be birded: Point Reyes, Muir Woods, Sierra and Yosemite National Parks, Salton Sea. Drive with the group from Texas City or fly directly to California. \$1,500. 281-337-2829, <rrichardm@prodigy.net>.

August 15-November 15

Smith Point Hawk Watch — Candy Abshier Wildlife Management Area. Hawk Watch International and the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory conduct full-season raptor migration counts at Smith Point on Galveston Bay. Observers count birds from a 20-foot tower, which is situated at the southwestern tip of a sharply tapering peninsula. On days with north winds, observers may be treated to the spectacle of thousands of broad-winged hawks and hundreds of accipiters. Up to 22 species of raptors have been seen. Free. 971-480-0999 <www.hawkwatch.org>.

August 21

Houston Arboretum and Nature Center — “Birds of Texas” naturalist class. Bill Goloby, noted Houston birding expert, will cover the physical and behavioral adaptations of the major bird groups in Texas. Naturalist classes are open to all interested adults and include more than 18 natural history topics. 7 p.m. — 9 p.m. \$30. Preregistration is required. 713-681-8433, <www.neosoft.com/~arbor>.

SEPTEMBER

September 6-8

Texas Ornithological Society — Fall Semi-Annual Meeting — Prude Ranch, Fort Davis. Birding field trips in the Davis Mountains. Evening speakers on birds and birding. \$30, plus \$20 for non-members. <www.texasbirds.org>.

September 8

Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza — Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Lake Jackson. Lasting up to two weeks. Witness hundreds of migratory ruby-throated hummingbirds as they stock up on flower nectar or at feeders, as they prepare for their southbound journey to the tropics. 9 a.m. — 4 p.m. Free. 979-480-0999, <www.gcbo.org>.

September 8, 15, 16, 17, 29

Fennessey Ranch Hummingbird Hayrides. A rare opportunity to observe hundreds of ruby-throated, buff-bellied, broad-tailed and rufous hummingbirds feeding on the native Turk's cap of the Mission River. Seats are limited, reservations required. Some full-day trips into primitive areas are scheduled. 7:30 a.m. — 10:30 a.m. 361-529-6600, <fenranch@2fords.net>.

OCTOBER

October 5-7

Smith Point Hawk Watch and Nature School Weekend Workshop — Hawk watching, slides and video presentations on topics such as dragonflies, butterflies and

wildflowers, as well as nocturnal spider hikes and local history. Fee includes lectures and walks, meals and lodging. Lodging is rustic but clean, with separate, shared bathrooms for men and women. 888-258-4687, <sskrei@swbell.net> or <criley@gcbo.org>.

October 7-14

Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge — National Wildlife Refuge Week. Designed to make the public more aware of the National Wildlife Refuge System and opportunities for wildlife-oriented recreation. Free. 956-748-3607, <www.fws.gov>.

NOVEMBER

November 8-11

Wild in Willacy, A Nature Odyssey. A nature festival in the most biodiverse county of the Rio Grande Valley. Combination history and nature tours; field trips to private, usually inaccessible ranches; airboat rides in the sloughs of the Laguna Madre; children's programs, presentation of the Father Tom Pincelli and Richard Moore Nature Awards at Awards Banquet. 956-689-3171, <chamber@vsta.com>.

DECEMBER

December 1-2

Rio Bravo Nature Center, Eagle Pass — “Birding the Rio Grande/Maverick County.” <naturecenter@wconline.net>.

December 15

Ft. Worth Audubon Society Annual Christmas Bird Count — *SEE MAY 5*.



Once near extinction, whooping cranes are making a modest comeback. The endangered birds winter at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.

A bird of the southeastern United States, the Carolina wren is found throughout the eastern half of Texas.



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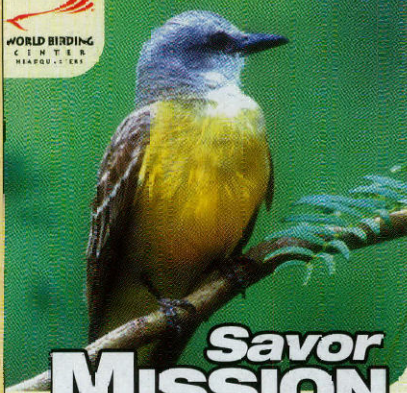
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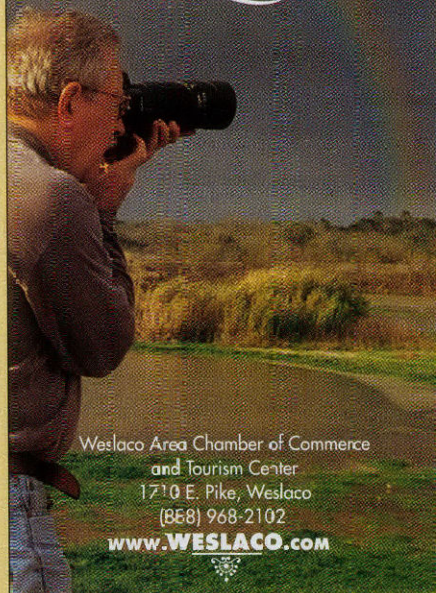
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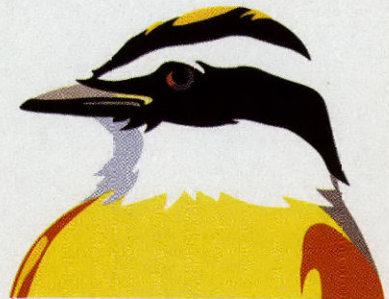
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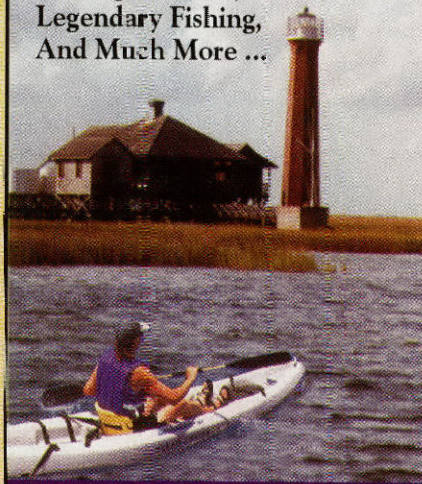
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BACK FROM THE BRINK



*The eastern wild turkey is being restored
to its former range. / By Henry Chappell*

PHOTO © NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION

APRIL IN THE EAST TEXAS PINEYWOODS. The first gobble of the morning rings out in the timber across the creek. A big tom, perched in the upper reaches of a greening sycamore, backlit by the orange glow above the eastern hills, answers immediately.

Yet another gobbler issues a challenge from the dark woods. The tom glides from his perch to the open forest floor. Head low, he moves soundlessly amid massive oaks. The sun edges above the eastern hills, setting his iridescent feathers ablaze. A hen clucks nearby. *Effff-twoom!* He snaps open his tail fan and shoves out his breast and dangling beard.

Every spring, similar scenes play out over much of Texas—but this drama had all but disappeared by the end of the 19th century. Unregulated hunting and habitat destruction nearly wiped out that venerable symbol of abundance, the wild turkey.

Early attempts at protection, such as an 1897 prohibition on trapping for five months out of the year and a 1903 bag limit of 25 turkeys per day throughout a five-month season, proved no match for the prevailing frontier attitude toward wildlife. For decades afterward, spring mornings in Texas dawned far too quiet.

Texas boasts three wild turkey subspecies: the Rio Grande, the Merriam's and the eastern. Rio Grande turkeys are abundant over most of south, central and north Texas. A small Merriam's turkey population inhabits the Davis Mountains. This western subspecies, common in Arizona, New Mexico and

other western states, probably never existed in large numbers in Texas.

Eastern turkeys are found in the United States east of the 35-inch isohyet of average annual rainfall—from the western edge of the Pineywoods northward through Iowa and the upper Midwest and eastward to the Atlantic Coast. In Texas, eastern turkey range is restricted to the more wooded areas of the Pineywoods in far eastern Texas and a few counties in the northeastern Post Oak Savannah region.

EAST MEETS WEST

Although similar in appearance to the more common Rio Grande turkey, the eastern is slightly larger and darker with brown-tipped tail coverts, as opposed to the Rio Grande turkey's tan-tipped tail coverts. Adult males or "gobblers" of both subspecies sport black-tipped, iridescent breast feathers, red, white and blue featherless heads; dark beards and bare, spurred legs. Hens are smaller, less iridescent and often lack beards. Rio Grande gobblers average 15 to 18

pounds, while eastern gobblers average 18 to 19 pounds. The birds' ranges simplify identification. Wild turkeys in deep East Texas are easterns. Elsewhere in Texas, outside of the mountains of the Trans-Pecos region, they're Rio Grandes.

Ideal eastern turkey habitat consists of a mosaic of 60 percent woodlands and 40 percent natural and agricultural open land. The birds use the habitat with good lateral and overhead cover from April through June for resting. They use the mix of habitats for rearing their broods through the summer months, but spend much of their time in the open habitat types that usually support more insects, from which young turkeys derive protein.

Although wild turkeys eat a tremendous variety of buds, seeds, grasses, insects and forbs, they thrive in hardwood forests with heavy mast production. The relatively brush-free floor beneath the canopy of a mature forest allows the birds to forage freely and spot approaching predators. The abundant brush in the country west of the Pineywoods provides cover for predators. Attempts to establish the eastern turkey there have met with failure.

In the spring, after being seduced by a strutting, tail-fanning, wing-dragging, polygamous gobbler, the hen backs into a "guard object" such as a tree or bush, lays an egg and then covers it with soil or forest duff. One or two days later, she'll exhume the first egg, lay another alongside it, then cover them both. The process continues until the nest contains from nine to about 12 eggs.

The hen then sits on her eggs night and day until they hatch approximately 23 days later. During this time she must rely on fat reserves, as she feeds little or none at all and leaves the nest only to drink. Hens that come into breeding season without the requisite fat reserves may abandon their eggs. Typically, a hen in good condition will attempt a second

"We finally realized that we had to stock wild eastern turkeys — nothing else works," Burk says.

nest if her first nest is disturbed. The ideal nesting site is either adjacent to or amid brood-rearing habitat. The farther the hen and newly hatched poults must travel to reach broad cover, the greater the likelihood they'll be detected by a predator.

Poults reared in good habitat — knee-high native grasses and weeds with an abundance of insects — may fledge in seven to 10 days. Those hatched in less ideal conditions might take as long as two weeks to fly. After a poult fledges, its survival odds increase tremendously. "The quicker they fly, the fewer that die," says TPW Turkey Program Leader John Burk of Nacogdoches.

In lean times, an eastern turkey flock may need as many as 5,000 acres — currently the minimum size for potential stocking sites — to meet their annual needs for diet and cover. During a year with excellent mast production, a flock may require as few as 100 acres during the fall and early winter.

RESTORATION EFFORTS

Restoring the eastern turkey population involves more than just stocking. "We tried releasing pen-reared birds, Rio Grandes and hybrids," says Burk. "We even tried eastern wild poults with a surrogate wild Rio Grande hen." These efforts failed. In 1979, after years of frustration, TPW acquired several eastern turkeys from Mississippi and Louisiana and stocked them at two East Texas sites. Some of these birds survived and reproduced, and Texas' Eastern Turkey Restoration Program was off and running. "We finally realized that we had to stock wild eastern turkeys — nothing else works," Burk says.

A shortage of trapped wild turkeys hampered TPW's early stocking efforts. Traditionally, state wildlife agencies trade one species of wildlife for another. Texas, despite its abundant wildlife, had nothing that states with healthy eastern turkey populations needed. Consequently, TPW stocked only about 200 easterns over the following nine years.

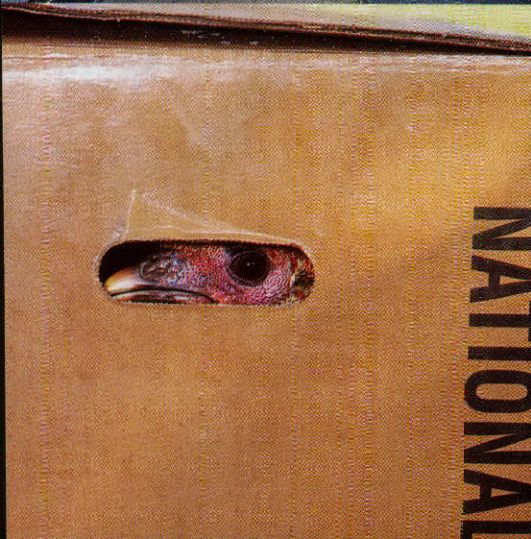
Then in 1987, the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) launched Target 2000, a program aimed at stocking all available range with eastern turkeys by the year 2000. East Texas was



Similar in appearance to Rio Grande turkeys, eastern turkeys are slightly larger and darker. Their Texas range includes the Pineywoods and the northeastern Post Oak Savannah.



TOP PHOTO © JOHN BURK; BOTTOM PHOTO © MASLOWSKI WILDLIFE PHOTO



For More Information

National Wild Turkey Federation
P.O. Box 530
Edgefield, SC 29824-0530
803-637-3106
<www.nwtf.org>

Texas Chapter
National Wild Turkey Federation
J.B. Wynn, Regional Director
3332 Walkers Mill Road
Hallsville, TX 75650
903-660-0138
<www.nwtf-tx.org>



Bobcat predation can be a problem, as can predation on eggs. Turkeys are flown in from other states in boxes designed and donated by the National Wild Turkey Federation.



the country's largest block of unstocked eastern turkey habitat. NWTF helped negotiate an agreement under which Texas could reimburse capturing states for the cost of trapping turkeys. Funds created by the sale of wild turkey stamps on hunting licenses, along with further help from NWTF and timber companies, raised Texas' stocking rate to 500 eastern turkeys per year.

Simply transporting and handling the captive birds pose problems for biologists. Captured birds, packed in specially designed, self-contained boxes donated by NWTF, are often flown in from other states. "These are wild animals," says Burk. "The longer they're in captivity and the more you handle them, the greater the impact on their survival. We strive to release them as soon as possible."

To keep track of population trends, Burk annually mails 4,000 brood survey cards to landowners, hunters, foresters and others likely to encounter turkeys during the summer. "We know the eastern turkey population is slowly increasing," he says. "When populations are first established in good habitat, the birds' numbers can increase exponentially for the first several years, while in other areas they decline. Overall, it comes out as a slow, steady increase."

STAYING ALIVE

In 1994, Texas Parks and Wildlife, NWTF, Temple-Inland Products and the College of Forestry at Stephen F. Austin State University funded a study to compare reproduction and survival of turkeys transported from Iowa and turkeys transported from Georgia. The captured birds were fitted with radio transmitters and released in what was thought to be suitable East Texas habitat. For that one year, researchers found that gobblers from Georgia survived far better than those from Iowa. "We attributed the difference to bobcats," says Dr. Monte Whiting, the principal investigator and a professor of wildlife management at SFASU. "We lost 60 to 70 percent of all adult birds to bobcats alone. In fact, all of the Iowa gobblers were dead within 16 months. One of the Georgia gobblers is still alive today."

Burk suspects that winter stress and

age difference contributed to the Iowa birds' susceptibility to bobcat predation. "1994 was the only year in a six-year study that showed that Georgia stock survived better than Iowa stock," he says. "All the Georgia males were jakes, and the Iowa males were adults. Furthermore, the winter of 1993-94 was severe in Iowa, adding to the physical stress of being captured, exposed to an 80-degree temperature change in a matter of hours, handled and released in a foreign environment."

Losses weren't limited to hens and gobblers. Raccoons, snakes, skunks, opossums and other small foragers held nesting success to only eight percent.

In the second phase of the study, the researchers hoped to determine whether or not birds released in 1997 would associate with surviving 1994 birds. Results varied. About half of the newly released turkeys joined flocks with 1994 birds. Gregarious gobblers showed slightly higher rates of survival, while hen survival seemed essentially unaffected.

The most significant result of the study was the identification of what constitutes suitable eastern turkey habitat in Texas. "Inadequate habitat more than any other factor explained poor survival rates and reproduction," says Burk. "This information assisted TPW in making future stocking decisions."

SUCCESS STORY

Persistence paid off. After 22 years and the stocking of nearly 7,200 birds, eastern turkeys once again occupy their historic range in Texas. TPW held its first countywide spring eastern turkey hunting season in 1995 in Red River County. In spring 1997, nine additional East Texas counties were opened to turkey hunting. This year, 32 East Texas counties will hold spring turkey seasons.

TPW has shifted its emphasis from actively searching for suitable release sites to managing existing habitat and responding to landowner stocking requests. Qualifying properties must meet stringent requirements. All habitat components must be present in a 5,000-acre contiguous block. Burk says that most requests are refused because the habitat doesn't measure up.



Public Hunting

HUNTERS WILLING to do some pre-season scouting can find excellent eastern turkey hunting on public land. TPW Turkey Program Leader John Burk recommends the Angelina and Sabine National Forests and the 25,500-acre White Oak Creek Wildlife Management Area in Bowie, Cass, Morris and Titus counties. Hunters accessing White Oak Creek WMA or wildlife management areas within the National Forests must possess a \$40 Annual Public Hunting Permit.

TPW also offers spring turkey hunting by special permit (acquired through a drawing) on the 16,150-acre Caddo National Grasslands WMA in Fannin County and the 8,925-acre Pat Mayse WMA in Lamar County.

The 2001 East Texas spring turkey season is scheduled for April 16-29. Bag limit: one (gobbler only).

For more information, consult the Texas Parks and Wildlife *Outdoor Annual* or contact Texas Parks and Wildlife, 800-792-1112, <www.tpwd.state.tx.us>.

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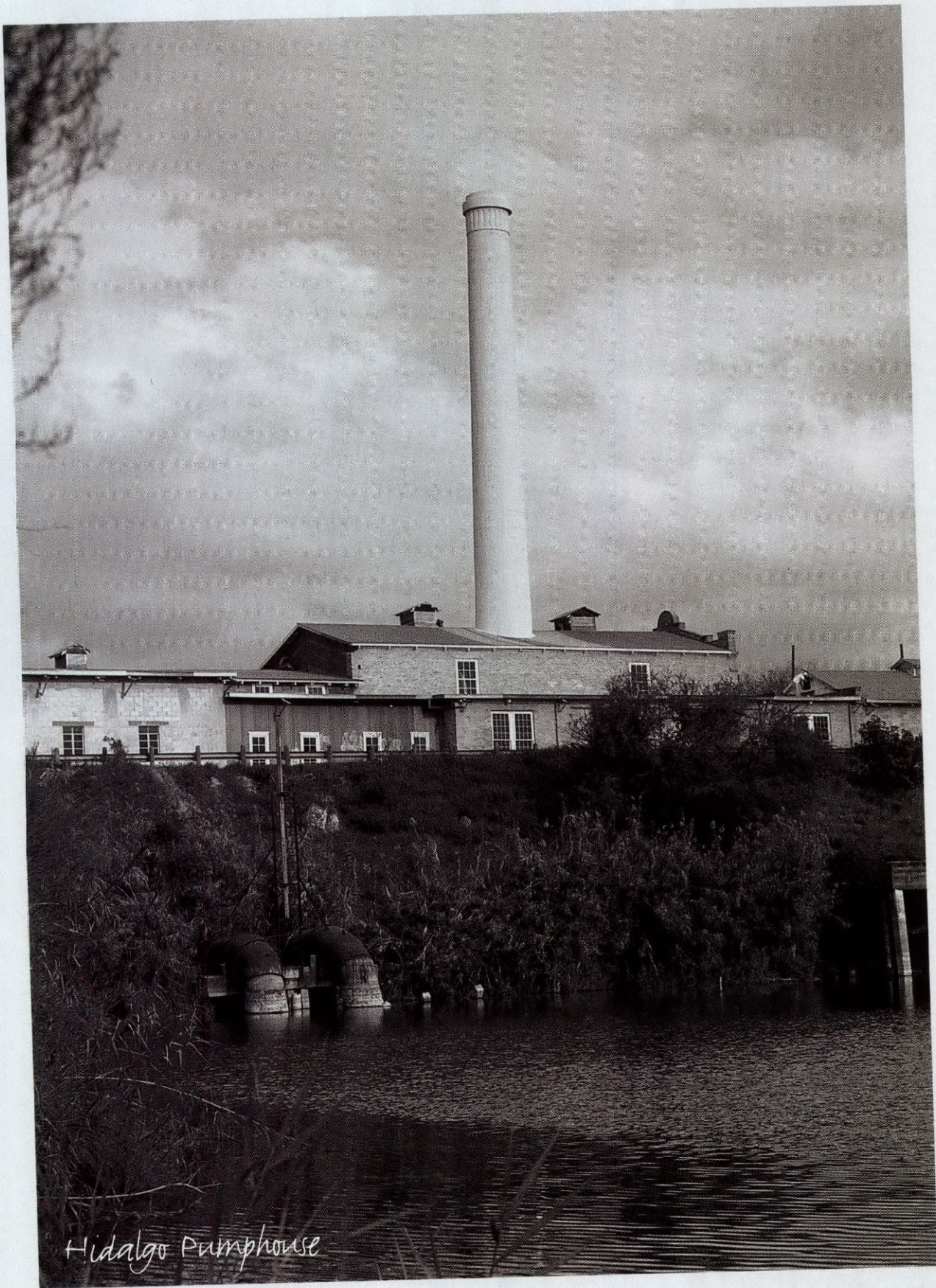
Despite all the success, the rapid loss of habitat concerns Burk. "The average age of the forest in East Texas is decreasing as more and more land is being cleared every year. Too many major hardwood bottomland tracts have been logged off, sprayed and converted to pine. Turkey populations in these areas have declined precipitously."

Whiting considers prescribed fire an indispensable wildlife management tool. Controlled burning cleans brush and debris from the forest floor to create the open woodlands eastern turkeys require. Prior to the arrival of settlers, fire,

whether caused by lightning or set by Native Americans, frequently cleansed the southern pine lands. In recent years, however, landowners and agencies have been increasingly reluctant to use prescribed fire because of liability concerns. "From a turkey and quail management standpoint, the loss of fire is one of the biggest problems we're facing in East Texas," Whiting says.

Challenges remain, but by all indications the eastern wild turkey has come back strong. To the camouflaged hunter coaxing those first tentative dawn yelps from a long-familiar call, the booming answer wafting back through the pines says that the future looks bright indeed. ★

HENRY CHAPPELL, an avid hunter and birder, lives in Plano.



Hidalgo Pump House

Past Perfect

Two of Hidalgo County's unique architectural gems are finding new lives as World Birding Center locations.

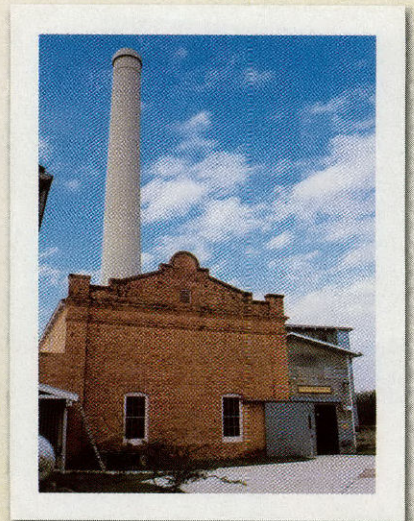
By Oliver Franklin

THE 1909 HIDALGO PUMPHOUSE, A BRICK-AND-IRON MOUNTAIN OF A BUILDING WITH TWO RARE, MAMMOTH STEAM-DRIVEN PUMPS INSIDE, LOOMS A STONE'S THROW FROM THE RIO GRANDE NORTH OF REYNOSA. ONCE ITS

great engines spun turbines that shoved thousands of cubic feet of water into a vast, freshly dug network of irrigation canals, fueling the creation of the Valley's citrus industry. The Rio Star and Ruby Red grapefruit, not to mention billions of oranges, tangerines and lemons, owe their birth to the Hidalgo Pumphouse.

As more modern equipment became available, the pumphouse's water operations went dormant. Its feeder and exit canals, once powerful rivers, were isolated from the new, more efficient, irrigation systems, and the canals became stagnant, narrow lakes. But these placid waters turned out to be perfect for attracting some of the Valley's more extraordinary feathered creatures. Soon schoolchildren and birders from around the world arrived to look for green jays, the great kiskadees and other exotic Valley species — a phenomenon that helped convince the city of Hidalgo to save the idle structure.

Today the Hidalgo Pumphouse once again is a major economic generator for the region, but now it's people, not water, that flow through the building. Currently a science museum, the pumphouse — with its attractive canals, emerging nature trails, informative exhibits and assembly space — is expected to be a keystone in the World Birding Center chain.



PHOTOS © LARRY DITTO



Quinta Mazatlan is a 1930s hacienda-style stucco estate — one of the largest adobe buildings of its kind in the United States. The estate sits on an island of untouched Valley floor that is one of the most pristine landscapes in Texas.



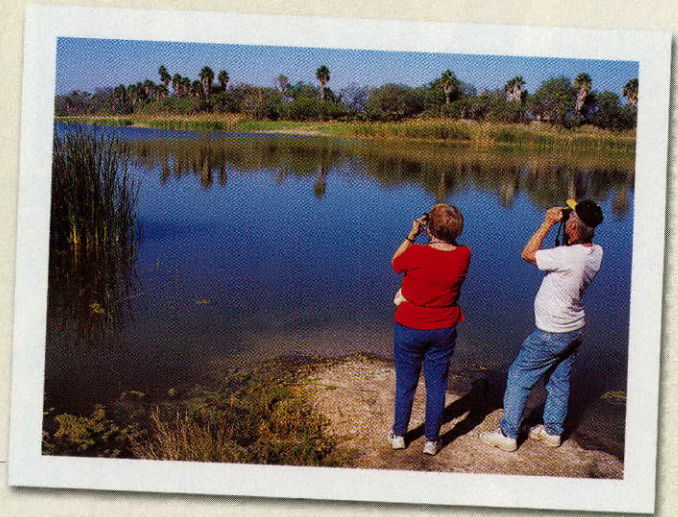
Just 12 miles north of the pumphouse, another architectural gem is undergoing transformation to become part of the World Birding Center network. Quinta Mazatlan is a 1930s hacienda-style stucco estate — one of the largest adobe buildings of its kind in the United States. The estate sits on an island of untouched Valley flora that is one of the most pristine landscapes in Texas.

An architectural anomaly, this large and exotic complex was once the home of Jason Chilton Matthews, a publisher and radical isolationist politician. A poet and proselyte, he roamed the world, undertaking wild adventures that included military service with Lawrence of Arabia. He eventually landed in McAllen, where he practically hand-forged his own Valhalla.

Besides being a firebrand, Matthews was a skilled craftsman. He molded the adobe bricks used in Quinta Mazatlan himself. Hounded by debt, however, Matthews died peniless. The neglected property, lovingly restored by the Frank Schultz family, ultimately wound up in the hands of the City of McAllen. When the World Birding Center concept was born, the city finally found a use for its prized albatross.

After extensive redevelopment, Quinta Mazatlan will soon open as another extraordinary site for birders and students alike. Trails will carefully traverse the delicate native landscape, home to such species as the curious chachalaca and the bobcat. A greenhouse, one of several out-buildings, is targeted to be one of the state's largest butterfly gardens. ★

OLIVER FRANKLIN is executive director of the Texas Historical Foundation.



World Birding Center Update

AS PROCESSIONS OF HAWKS, waterfowl, hummingbirds and songbirds migrate to South Texas next fall, birdwatchers from around the world will flock to the nation's premier birding hotspot to witness the spectacular aerial parades.

The Lower Rio Grande Valley, located at a confluence of tropic and temperate zones, is a vital stopover for a river of birds that flows between North, Central and South America. Home to more than 485 species throughout the year, the area is the ideal location for the World Birding Center, a partnership among nine local communities, Texas Parks and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The World Birding Center, due to open in fall 2002, will be a regional complex of sites stretching from the pristine beaches of South Padre Island to the historic riverside bluffs of Roma. It will offer a variety of trails, viewing areas, information centers and interpretive exhibits

for all levels of birders.

Momentum for this environmentally friendly business is already building for Valley residents, conservationists and business owners alike. Valley residents look forward to the economic benefits the additional tourism will generate.

"Ecotourism is going to do great things for the Valley," says Rosemary Breedlove, proprietress of The Inn at Chachalaca Bend, a bed-and-breakfast that lures birders with its 40 surrounding acres of prime habitat.

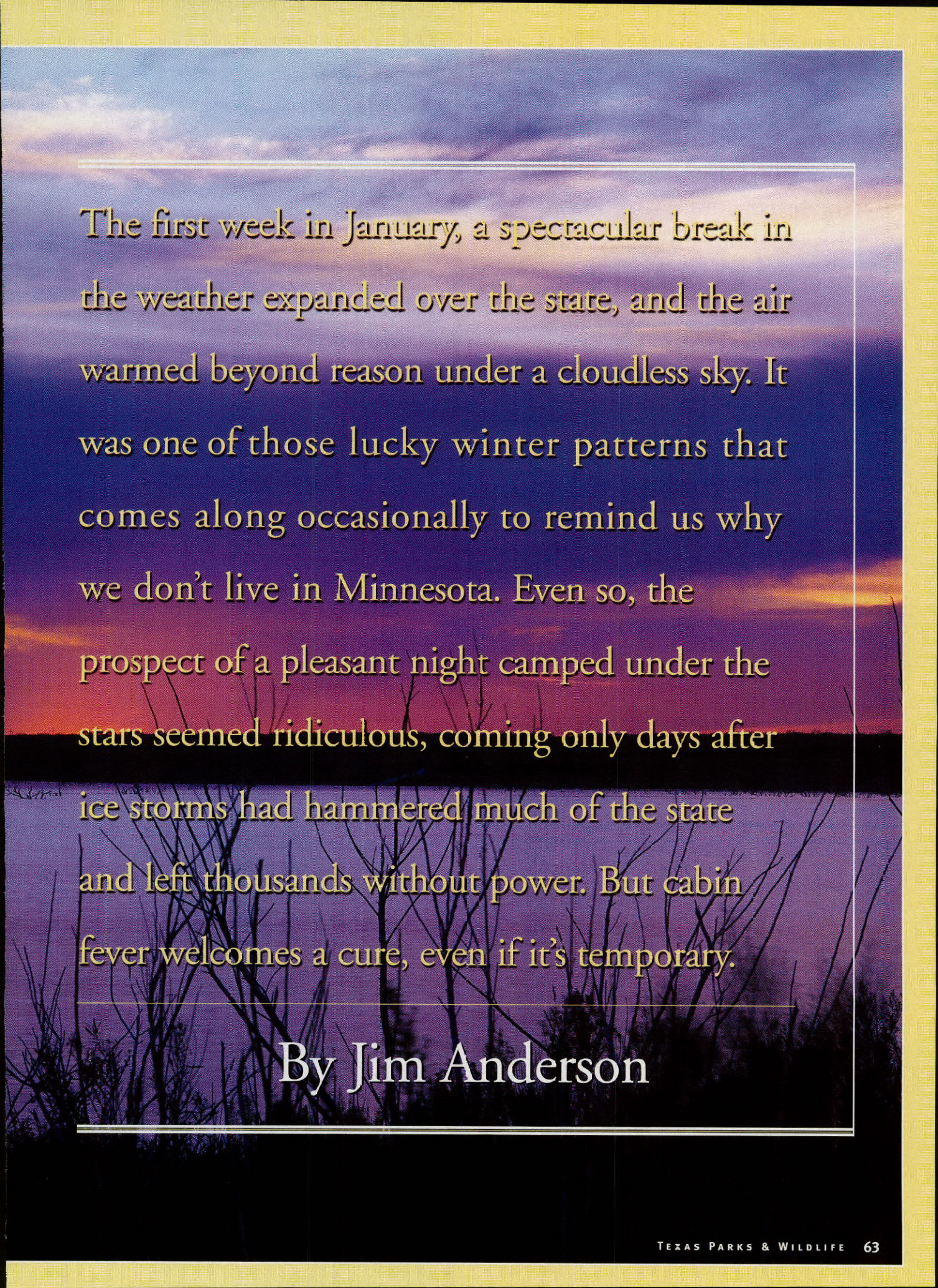
"I see it as another vehicle to raise awareness and help local people understand the benefits of protecting our natural resources," says Lisa Williams of the Nature Conservancy. "People may not be aware that this is a jewel of this hemisphere. The more that local people are aware of the rich natural resources that we have here in the Rio Grande Valley, the more they will want to protect them."

—Erica House



WHERE THE
WILD
THINGS
ARE

*Choke Canyon State Park is a wildlife oasis midway
between Corpus Christi and San Antonio.*

A photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sky is a mix of purple, blue, and orange. In the foreground, there are silhouettes of bare trees. The text is overlaid on the image.

The first week in January, a spectacular break in the weather expanded over the state, and the air warmed beyond reason under a cloudless sky. It was one of those lucky winter patterns that comes along occasionally to remind us why we don't live in Minnesota. Even so, the prospect of a pleasant night camped under the stars seemed ridiculous, coming only days after ice storms had hammered much of the state and left thousands without power. But cabin fever welcomes a cure, even if it's temporary.

By Jim Anderson

FROM CENTRAL TEXAS I follow the grade down the watershed of the Gulf toward the brush country of South Texas. About 70 miles south of San Antonio, I turn west on FM 72 out of the small refinery town of Three Rivers. As I cross a county line, I notice an official-looking roadside sign that says, "Welcome to the Free State of McMullen County." Gee, I hadn't thought to bring my passport.

Shortly I arrive at the headquarters of Choke Canyon State Park's Calliham Unit. Luckily, American currency is accepted in The Free State of McMullen County. After registering and buying a camping permit, I swing by the Calliham General Store for a bundle of firewood. With an armload of cured oak and mesquite piled in the Jeep, I ease into the park grounds, stopping along the way for wandering deer and javelina, and find my assigned campsite on a grassy spot overlooking the lake. The late sun is turning the water shimmering gold around the bobbing silhouettes of waterfowl.

Bluebird Weather, Blackbird Songs

While I unroll and pitch my tent, a mesquite tree full of redwing blackbirds sings the old sentimental favorite about fair weather and calm waters. As I finish the tent job they abruptly end the concert and, as if they've discharged their duty for the evening, fly away in a blink toward their own camps among the shoreline cattails. Overhead a wedge formation of white pelicans flaps lazily in the amber light on their way to roost. By dusk I have my accommodations in order and a good fire crackling in the fire pit.

The 26,000-acre Choke Canyon Reservoir was built in the 1970s by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to provide water for Corpus Christi 60 miles to the south. The dam spans what was originally a narrow gorge of the Frio River, a natural feature dam builders call a "choke canyon." Thus the engineers found their ideal spot, and the reservoir got its name. The surrounding landscape is typical South Texas brush country, prettiest in the spring when the vegetation greens and blossoms. Along with mesquite and live oak grow huisache, mountain laurel, catclaw, acacia, agarita,



Choke Canyon Reservoir, at 26,000 acres, provides recreational opportunities and attracts wildlife. Deer and javelina are abundant and approachable. Largemouth, striped and white bass, catfish and crappie are among the popular fish.





guajillo, giant prickly pear and more. Scanning the countryside, it's easy to imagine a small band of mounted Comanches picking their way through the brush to their riverside camp after a day's hunt.

At my own camp the southwestern horizon goes from crimson to purple to deep blue, and a gibbous moon, already high in the east, brightens in the night sky and casts its soft light over the landscape. Angled toward the horizon below the moon come Jupiter and Saturn, and over in the high west comes the evening star, Venus herself.

But hunger soon wins out over stargazing. I notice the coals are about right, so I unwrap a burger patty from the cooler and lay it on the grill. Still in my shirtsleeves, I have to remind myself it is January. I turn the meat until it is nicely browned, slap it on a bun with the works, open a jar of fresh salsa and a bag of tortilla chips and chow down. Camping is good for the soul, but it's also a great excuse to eat stuff I usually resist.

Twenty or so javelinas wander into camp on their skinny peg legs, snuffling the ground and hinting broadly for a handout.

The javelinas drop by just after supper. Twenty or so of the bristly little wild pigs, officially known as collared peccaries, wander into camp on their skinny peg legs, snuffling the ground and hinting broadly for a handout. Having made a pig of myself, I have no leftovers to tempt me to violate the "no feeding" policy. I explain the situation, but they pretend not to understand. They just lift their snouts, grunt peevishly and move on, looking like ancient pictographs come to life in the pale moonlight.

I add more wood to the fire and watch it blaze, then slowly diminish again to embers. Sometime later, as I drowse in my sleeping bag, two owls strike up a hooting flirtation somewhere in the distance. Actually, it probably is two males standing off over territory. Neither owl seems willing to concede, and the dialogue goes on for over an hour, sounding like *Who-who-who-are-you?* answered by, *Hey-who-who-wants-to-know?* Then the coyotes chime in. There are two packs, east and west, both on the prowl, yipping and howling, wild and restless in the night. Not me. I zip the bag and snooze.

Rumors, Theories and Observations

I awake determined to discover what else there is to know about Choke Canyon State Park. The sunrise brings another clear, unseasonably warm day, and I dispense with breakfast as quickly as possible. As I finish my coffee and debate between fishing and birding, along comes Bruce Duncan, a birder from Austin. He has noticed my binocu-

TOP TWO PHOTOS © MIKE SEARLES PHOTOGRAPHY; BOTTOM PHOTO © GRADY ALLEN

lars and field guide of birds on the picnic table.

"Have you seen the Lewis's woodpecker?" he asks.

For a second I think maybe he means the pet bird of a family named Lewis. Fortunately I don't say so. I confess I am a beginner, and he helps me find the bird in my book. It's a big, black, crow-sized sucker with a flashy red belly. Bruce says word is out that one has been seen in the vicinity. If the sighting were for real, the bird would have wandered considerably east of its specified range, which only goes to prove that woodpeckers don't take the guidebooks all that seriously. Bruce pushes on to search for the itinerant woodpecker, and I take the encounter as my cue to make birding the first order of the day.

Choke Canyon offers prime birding in the winter, and it's the reason many visitors make the trip. It makes perfect sense, of course. Being only 60 miles from the Gulf Coast, the area is ideal wintering grounds for all kinds of migratories, not to mention an extensive population of permanent residents. And they're downright convenient. I spot as many species in the trees around the campgrounds as I do prowling the outlying thickets.

I'm not an experienced birder, but in a two-hour ramble I see the following birds: long-billed marsh wren, killdeer, rufous-sided towhee, yellow-rumped warbler, a pair of roadrunners and a pair of ladder-backed woodpeckers, plus numerous little chit-and-twitter birds I can't quite identify. These are in addition to the expected cardinals, mockingbirds, thrushes, redwings and robins. Of raptors, I see red-tailed hawk, marsh hawk, osprey, crested caracara, and a fine little American kestrel with a freshly caught mouse in its beak. But alas, no Lewis's woodpecker.

Another popular winter sport at Choke Canyon is duck hunting. Down at the shoreline a camo-painted johnboat noses up on the sandy bank, and a camo-clad duck hunter named Mike steps ashore. We strike up a conversation, and I ask about his hunting success. He confesses he is having an off day. He lives in Germany but comes to South Texas every winter to visit his in-laws and do a bit of duck hunting. He assures me there are normally plenty of ducks — pintails, mallards, gadwalls, teal and others — but he theorizes that the low water and/or balmy weather might account for the slack hunting that particular day.

PHOTOS © LANCE VARNELL

Dense thickets of mesquite and blackbrush acacia provide habitat for the variety of wildlife species found in both park units. Canoeing is permitted on the Frio River below the dam.

**The owls'
dialogue goes
on for over an
hour, sounding
like *Who-who-
who-are-you?*
answered by,
*Hey-who-who-
wants-to-know?***





Among the park's many charms, fishing is a top draw year-round. Largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, white bass, striped bass, walleye, crappie, bream, sunfish, blue cat, channel cat, flathead cat, carp, drum and gar are known to inhabit the lake. The fish are jumping in spring, but Choke Canyon's winter angling can also be quite good, although a boat is necessary for reaching the deeper water where the fish hold in winter. Nevertheless, I take my spinning tackle to the lake and give it a shot. I locate a few stick-ups within bank-casting range and start working a spinner tight to the structure. After an hour of casting several kinds of lures to several likely-looking spots with the net result of zero, I accept defeat. I make a note to return in the spring equipped with a canoe, or at least a float tube.

Later in the day I leave the Calliham Unit and drive back toward Three Rivers to pay a visit to the South Shore Unit at the lower end of the lake, near the dam. The accommodations at both units are first-rate. There are ample sites for both tent camping and RVs, with hookups available at the RV sites. All campgrounds have large, modern bathroom and shower facilities with hot water, and all campsites feature covered picnic tables. For those seeking a bit more comfort, nearby Three Rivers has several motels.

As I drive the park road inside the South Shore Unit, I notice another curious roadside sign: "Caution — alligators exist in this park."

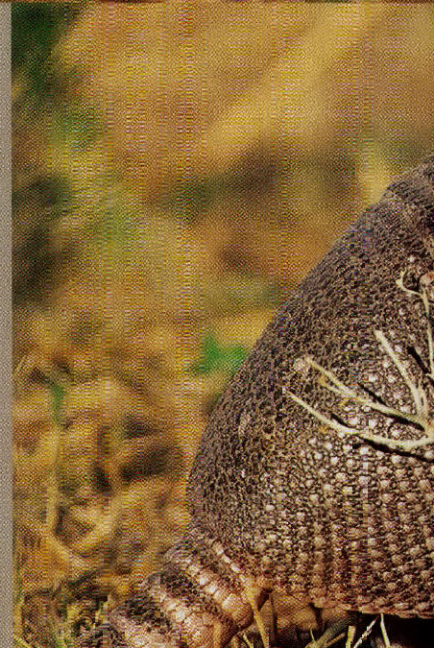
Alligators? Come on. But sure enough, Choke Canyon Lake is the westernmost habitat of the gnarly, knobby and sometimes aggressive reptiles. I run into game warden Steve Woodmansee, who assures me they are not only real but are rather plentiful — and definitely not to be messed with. It seems they've been known to gobble a small dog now and again. Suddenly I feel a certain fondness for the big sneaky rascals. I ask if they have any special preference for toy poodles, but Steve declines comment.

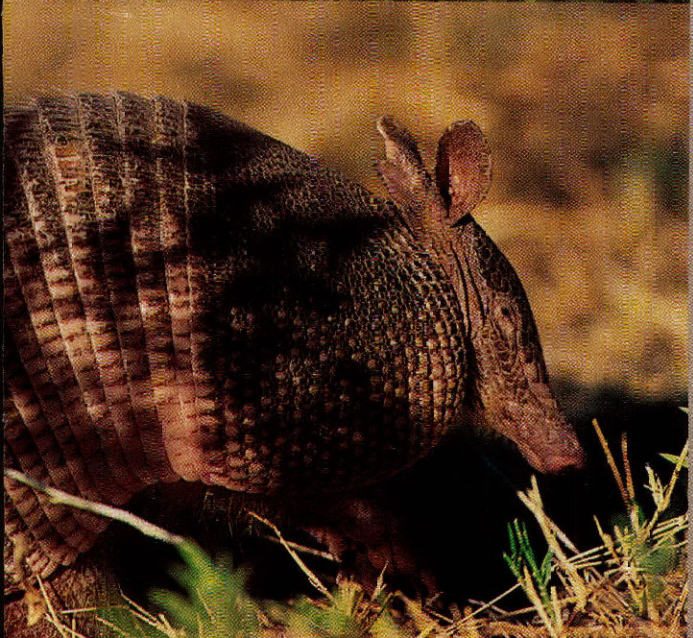
I inquire about the local population of wild cats. Steve says bobcats are quite common and evidence of mountain lions, previously rare, actually has increased in recent years. It's an interesting paradox. While the human population of Texas is growing at a phenomenal rate, sightings of mountain lions (cougar, puma, panther — call them what you will) have increased statewide in recent years. Few wild creatures need as much hunting territory as a solitary mountain lion, but evidently they're adapting, somehow.

Waggish theories aside, I move on to explore the South Shore Unit further. In addition to the campsites and boat launch above the dam, there are several campsites below the dam and a birding trail that meanders among the tall hardwoods of the river bottom. Through a chute on the backside of the dam, the cold water from deep in the reservoir flows back into the Frio River and resumes its trip to the Gulf. If the outlet discharge is within safe limits, canoes can be launched here for downriver float trips. A popular day trip is the easy six-



Observation blinds and birding trails help visitors enjoy wildlife at the South Shore and Calliham Units. Among the frequently sighted creatures are raccoons, ground squirrels, great egrets and armadillos.

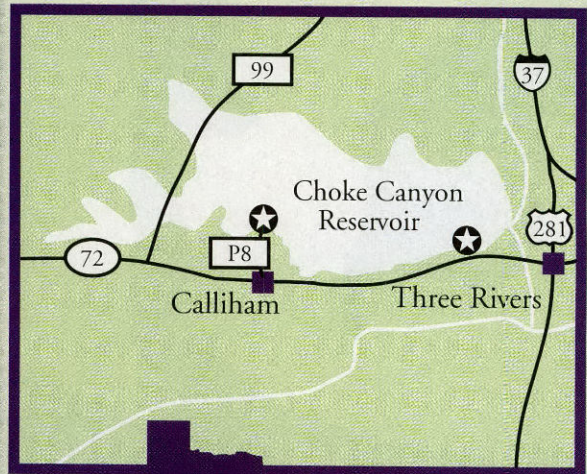




mile float down to Three Rivers.

With my case of cabin fever in remission for the time being, I leave Choke Canyon and head home under the spell of a new hobby. As if I needed yet another one. But the next time the fish aren't biting, I'll make sure I have binoculars and bird guide handy. Who knows — maybe I'll spot a Lewis's woodpecker one of these days. ★

JIM ANDERSON is an Austin-based freelancer who values work as a relief from the relentless pressures of camping and fly fishing.



Left: Calliham Unit
Right: South Shore Unit

Getting There

CHOKE CANYON STATE PARK is on the shores of Choke Canyon Lake, south of San Antonio and west of the town of Three Rivers. The park is divided into two unit — the South Shore Unit and the Calliham Unit. Both sites can be reached by driving west out of Three Rivers or east out of Tilden on FM 72.

The park features camping, bird and wildlife observation, and excellent fishing. The lake is stocked with several species of gamefish, including the popular largemouth bass, the spirited smallmouth bass and the tasty walleye. Migratory birds, both upland birds and waterfowl, favor the habitat in winter. And it's one of the few public places javelinas can be observed easily up close.

All campgrounds have modern comfort stations with showers and hot water. RV sites feature hookups for water and electricity, and all campsites feature covered picnic tables. Boat launches are available at both units, and a canoe launch into the Frio River is located in the South Shore Unit below the dam. For information, call South Shore Unit: 361-786-3538 or Calliham Unit: 361-786-3868. To reserve campsites call 512-389-8900 or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

— J.A.

Map © Texas Parks and Wildlife Press, *Official Guide to Texas State Parks*.

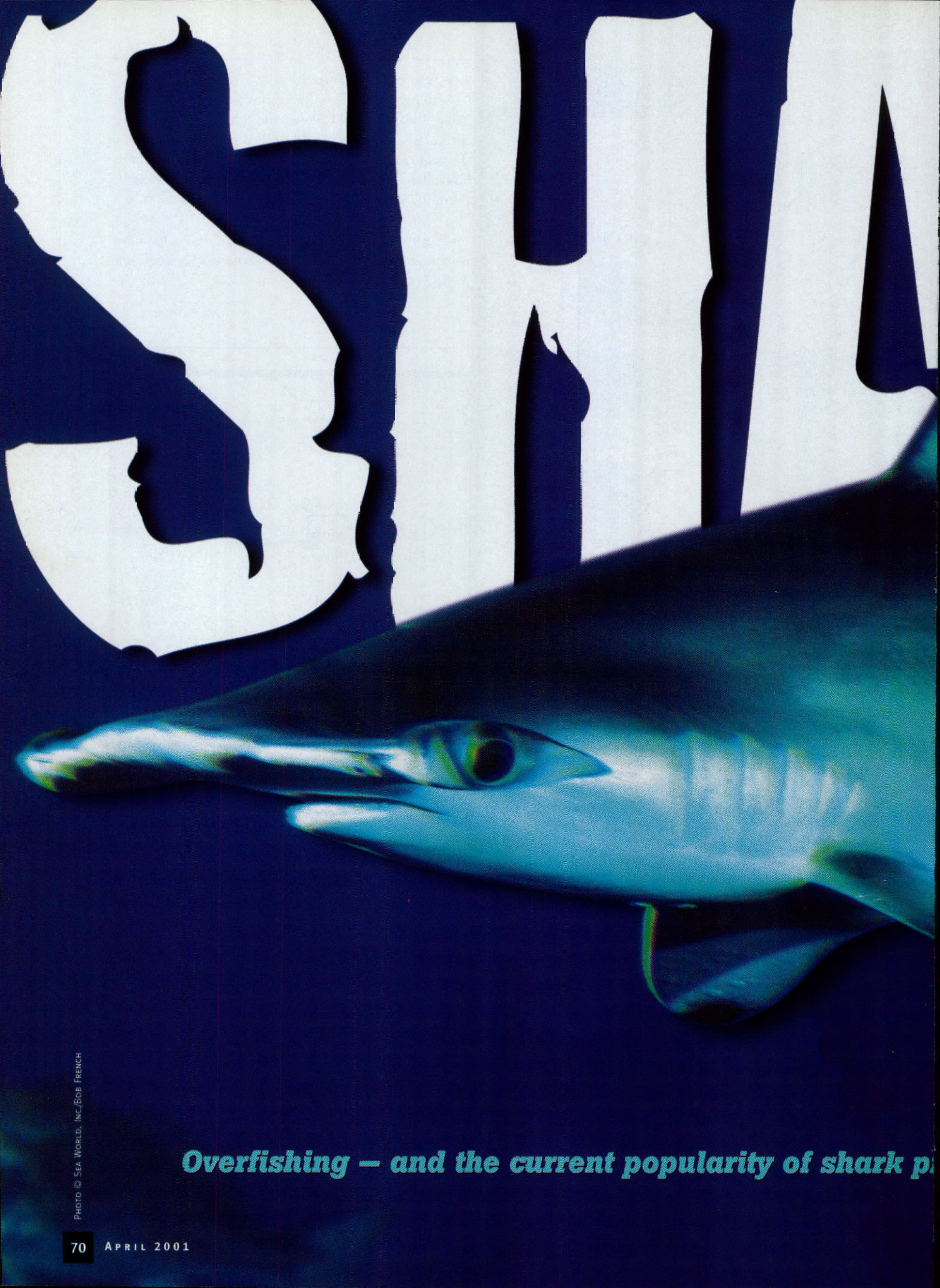


PHOTO © SEA WORLD, INC./BOB FRENCH

Overfishing — and the current popularity of shark p



By Chester Moore, Jr.

ucts — makes man's threat to sharks the true danger.

SHARK

The very word conjures up fear and visions of blood-soaked waters. Grisly tales of real-life shark attacks, coupled with highly dramatized images from films like *Jaws*, give rise to

paranoia and mischaracterization of these supreme predators of the sea.

Statistically speaking, however, sharks aren't much of a threat to mankind: You are more likely to be struck by lightning twice or win the lottery than to be attacked by a shark.

Humans, on the other hand, are a very real threat to sharks: We kill millions of sharks every year. According to biologists, this loss stands to upset the very balance of the sea.

"The elimination of sharks could spell disaster for the ocean's delicate food chain," says Enric Cortés, a scientist with the National Marine Fisheries Service in Panama City, Florida. "Everything in the ocean has its purpose, and the shark has a very important one. It sits at the top of the food chain and serves as a mechanism for keeping baitfish populations healthy by scavenging and taking out the sick and weak. If sharks are eliminated, we might open a can of worms we don't want to deal with."

According to Cortés, while some sharks will eat anything from boat license plates to seagulls, most species have a sweet tooth for sick and injured sea life. I personally didn't believe this until I spent some time diving with and observing sharks in an underwater observatory. For hours I would watch sand tiger, blacktip and reef sharks ignore the healthy blue runners, bonitas and sheepshead that swam only inches from their powerful jaws.

But when a single wounded bonita was thrown into the water, it didn't last for more than 10 seconds. The sharks went into a frenzy-like mode. Most biologists believe this characteristic of shark feeding behavior helps keep sick individuals from spreading diseases through the entire population.

THE SHARK OVERHARVEST

Sharks aren't immune to overharvest, though.

That's why Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPW) officials have reduced the daily bag limit in state-controlled waters from five sharks of any size to one shark measuring more than 24 inches. Coastal Fisheries Director Hal Osburn says this should help reduce the overall recreational harvest of sharks in Texas waters by 30 percent — and help protect the juveniles that are crucial to their future.

"We've recognized the role of sharks in Texas waters and have taken the lead in protecting them from overharvest," says Osburn. "Because of our regulations, we have a very limited commercial shark fishery in state-controlled waters. But sharks are migratory, and they leave our jurisdiction during certain times of year and in crucial times of their life cycle. It's at this

time that sharks face their greatest threat."

That's a change in attitude from the mid-1980s, when shark fishing was encouraged to take the pressure off other overfished species. At that time, with broadbill swordfish and bluefin tuna stocks running low, officials with the National Marine Fisheries Service promoted sharks as an alternative to those declining species.

They didn't expect so many commercial boats to switch over to shark fishing. Nor did they expect a market to develop in the United States for secondary products such as shark leather and shark cartilage, which has soared in popularity for its benefits as a treatment for everything from arthritis to cancer. (Recent studies have proven shark cartilage has no effect on cancer.) In the 1980s, commercial landings of shark increased from less than 550 tons to 8,250 tons nationwide in response to the new demand for shark products. That's an increase of about 1,500 percent.

BAN ON "FINNING"

An even greater problem is the increased number of foreign fishing vessels in international waters. These vessels, many pursuing tuna, will catch sharks for the fins, which are the main ingredient in shark fin soup. These boats are catching sharks, cutting their fins off, and throwing them back into the water to die slowly.

I talked with an Alabama commercial fisherman who encountered a live 300-pound "finned" hammerhead shark five years ago.

"It was one of those sights I will never forget," he says. "There was this shark, robbed of its fins and left to die. I've fished commercially all my life, but I believe in treating ocean creatures with

respect. I don't understand how someone could do something so wasteful."

A bill to ban finning in all U.S. waters was approved recently by both houses of Congress, but the practice continues in international waters at a frightening pace.

The problems don't all lie with foreign vessels, though. In nearshore waters, shrimping-related bycatch is another problem facing sharks, especially juveniles. And researchers at Louisiana State University have found that menhaden boats operating off the coast of Louisiana and Texas are contributing to shark mortality through a high level of bycatch. Many juvenile sharks spend the summer months in the same stretch of water in which these boats operate, and they feed heavily on menhaden, so it's easy to see how this practice might contribute to the death of many sharks.

"It was one of those sights I never will forget. There was this shark, robbed of its fins and left to die."



There was a time when shark fishing was encouraged, to take the pressure off other species. That no longer is the case.

Some marine biologists fear that all of these factors combined may already have put certain shark species at such a high level of danger that their numbers may never be sustained. Although some fish populations can rebound from such problems, the sharks' slow reproductive cycles inhibit rapid population rebounds. Most sharks can't breed until they're at least 10 years old and then give birth to only a few young at a time.

"What you're looking at is a species that can't sustain high rates of harvest. Period," Osburn says. "A speckled trout, for example, can mature at a couple of years of age and can produce millions of eggs at a time. That's why they and other sportfish can sustain high fishing pressure. Sharks have one of the lowest reproductive cycles of any fish, and that's why certain species are in real trouble."

NURSERIES TO PROTECT THE YOUNG

This is prompting fisheries managers to scramble in search of ways to lessen the mortality of sharks before certain species spiral toward extinction. And one of the key terms spawned by this concern is "shark nursery."

What is a shark nursery? "It's an area where sharks come to have their young," says Terrie Ling, a biologist with Texas A&M University's Seagrass Program. "And it's also a relatively safe place for those young to grow up. Besides humans, sharks are the number-one enemy of sharks. If a female blacktip had her young in the deeper waters off the coast where big blacktips normally dwell," Ling continues, "then another shark would likely eat that youngster. In the shallower areas, these small sharks have a chance to survive. So shark nurseries are very important to the life cycle of sharks."

Ling, who is involved with a shark-tagging program in the Sabine Pass area (see sidebar), admits that it may seem unusual for female sharks to break off from the rest of their kind, but there's plenty of hard data to prove it. "Numerous shark species segregate by sex during certain times of year, and since most sharks are live-bearing, it's important for the females to get away from the mature males that would eat the young. Our study indicates that Atlantic sharpnose sharks board to oil platforms, and out of the more than 100 sharks we've tagged,

only two have been females. That's segregation at its finest," Ling says.

TPW biologist Jerry Mambretti can validate the Sabine area's importance to sharks. "Last year we had a record catch of baby bull sharks in our gill net samples, and we also had a good number caught in 1999," he says. "One thing a lot of people don't realize is the importance of bay systems like the Sabine to sharks. These nutrient- and baitfish-rich areas are a key component to the survival of many shark species like the bull."

Large numbers of young bull sharks also have been caught by TPW crews in Galveston Bay, Mambretti says. And since wadefishing has become popular on the upper Texas Coast, more and more anglers are reporting encounters with sharks to TPW officials.

"People are beginning to find out that sharks, including some big ones, inhabit our waters. Some people probably think that's pretty neat. Yet others probably aren't too comfortable with the idea, especially since bulls are one of the more notorious species," Mambretti says.

My first exposure to the reality of shark nurseries came with catching a bull shark at the Sabine piers in the summer of 1999. While learning to tag sharks with biologist John Tyminski of the Mote Marine Laboratory's Center for Shark Research in Sarasota, Florida, and Julie Neer, Louisiana State University graduate research assistant, I caught a bull that measured around 26 inches. It looked young

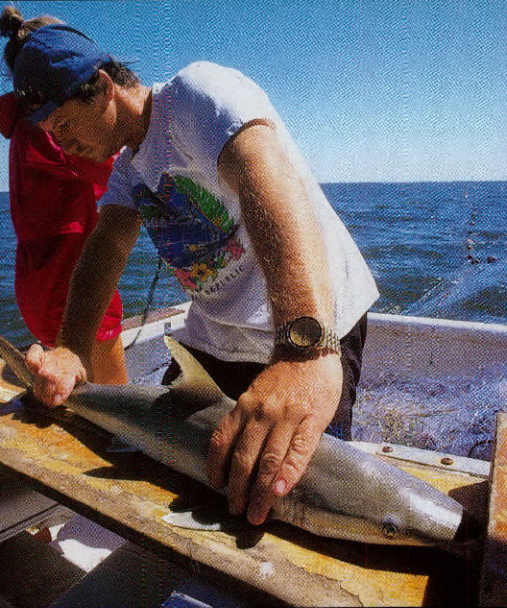
to me, but to my two partners it looked really, really young.

Tyminski kept throwing around the word "neonatal," and he seemed very happy about the catch. Neonatal means that the shark was two weeks old or younger. How can he tell? An open navel means the shark is two weeks old or less, whereas a closed navel means a slightly older shark. This little bull had an open navel.

"This little bull shark just entered the world within the last couple of weeks," Tyminski says, as he fits the shark with a tag. "This is definitely a bull shark nursery area. TPW's nets have caught large numbers of these species in Lake Sabine." The tags have a phone number and address on them and are written in both English and Spanish. "There is some evidence to suggest that blacktip and spinner sharks from Texas and

"In shallow areas, small sharks have a chance to survive. These nurseries are crucial to the sharks' life cycle."

LEFT PHOTO © J. TYMINSKI, MOTE MARINE LABORATORY; RIGHT PHOTO BY TPW



John Tyminski measures a blacknose shark, tags it and releases it as part of a study of shark nursery areas.

Louisiana are being caught commercially once they migrate to Mexico," Tyminski says. "There is a largely unregulated commercial fishery for sharks and other species there. By tagging sharks in the Sabine area and in other parts of Texas, we're hoping to determine the migration patterns of these sharks," Tyminski says. Mexican commercial fishermen have been cooperative in turning in tags from sharks that turn up in their nets because there's a \$10 reward for returned shark tags and associated information.

THE MEXICO-TEXAS CONNECTION

Mote Lab officials are interested in Texas waters because of their value as a nursery area for sharks. "Determining that an area is a true nursery area for certain species of sharks is one of the best ways to address their conservation," Tyminski says. "Nursery areas are one of the key issues in the scientific community regarding sharks. We're trying to learn as much as we can about exactly which species are using certain areas."

The program, which has tagged several hundred sharks from Sabine to South Padre, has had moderate success. "Tag return rates are low in general, but we've had several of our sharks tagged in the Corpus Christi area that turned up in Mexican nets," Tyminski continues. "It's disheartening to know some of them are being killed as soon as they leave Texas waters, but it's good to know we're on the right track in terms of understanding their migration patterns and getting an idea how far their nursery areas extend."

Tracking shark movements is one thing, but Tyminski says getting the public to rally behind sharks is an entirely different matter. "Since *Jaws* came out in 1975," he says, "Americans have been fascinated with sharks, and this has been a double-edged sword. On one hand people fear them, and then on the other hand, you have people fascinated with them. In certain situations sharks can be scary, but for the most part, we're a far greater threat to them than they are to us." ★

Well-Oiled Sharks

THE LITTLE ATLANTIC SHARPNOSE SHARK looked strangely familiar to me.

It was the exact size and shape of the ones I had been catching all day, but there was something unusual about this individual. And before releasing the feisty creature to fight another day, I figured out what it was.

The shark had exactly the same scar as one I had caught at the same oil rig two days earlier. The scar was at the same position on the dorsal fin, and the shark had a sore on its tongue as if it had been hooked. It had to be the same fish.

This got me to thinking about the importance of oil rigs to Atlantic sharpnose sharks. During summer months these small, prolific sharks seemingly swarm offshore platforms. Do they stay around the same rig throughout the course of a year? Do they return to the same rig when they migrate into nearshore Texas waters after their winter migration into the far reaches of the Gulf?

"The elimination of sharks could spell disaster for the ocean's delicate food chain," says Cortés.

After pondering these questions, I hooked up with Jefferson County Seagrass agent Terrie Ling, who helped get a grant to fund a tagging study of Atlantic sharpnose sharks caught around oil rigs in the Sabine Pass area. The idea is this: If we can estimate the number of sharks that use these rigs throughout the season when they migrate in from deeper Gulf waters, we will have a bet-

ter understanding of how important these platforms are to sharks.

Sharpnose and other species may develop territorial ties to these rigs, which could pose conservation concerns if platforms are removed. The study may provide scientists and policymakers with information they need to enhance shark habitat and boost shark numbers. The original goal of the program was to tag 200 sharks, but it may take more than that to get some returns on the tags. If we tag 300 sharks and we get two recaptured, that would be a great recatch rate. We're expecting pretty good rates simply because of the fishing pressure that's on the area we're studying.

As of this writing, no tags have been returned yet, but we're keeping our fingers crossed. It will be interesting to see whether these fish get caught at the same rig where they were caught originally. —C.M.

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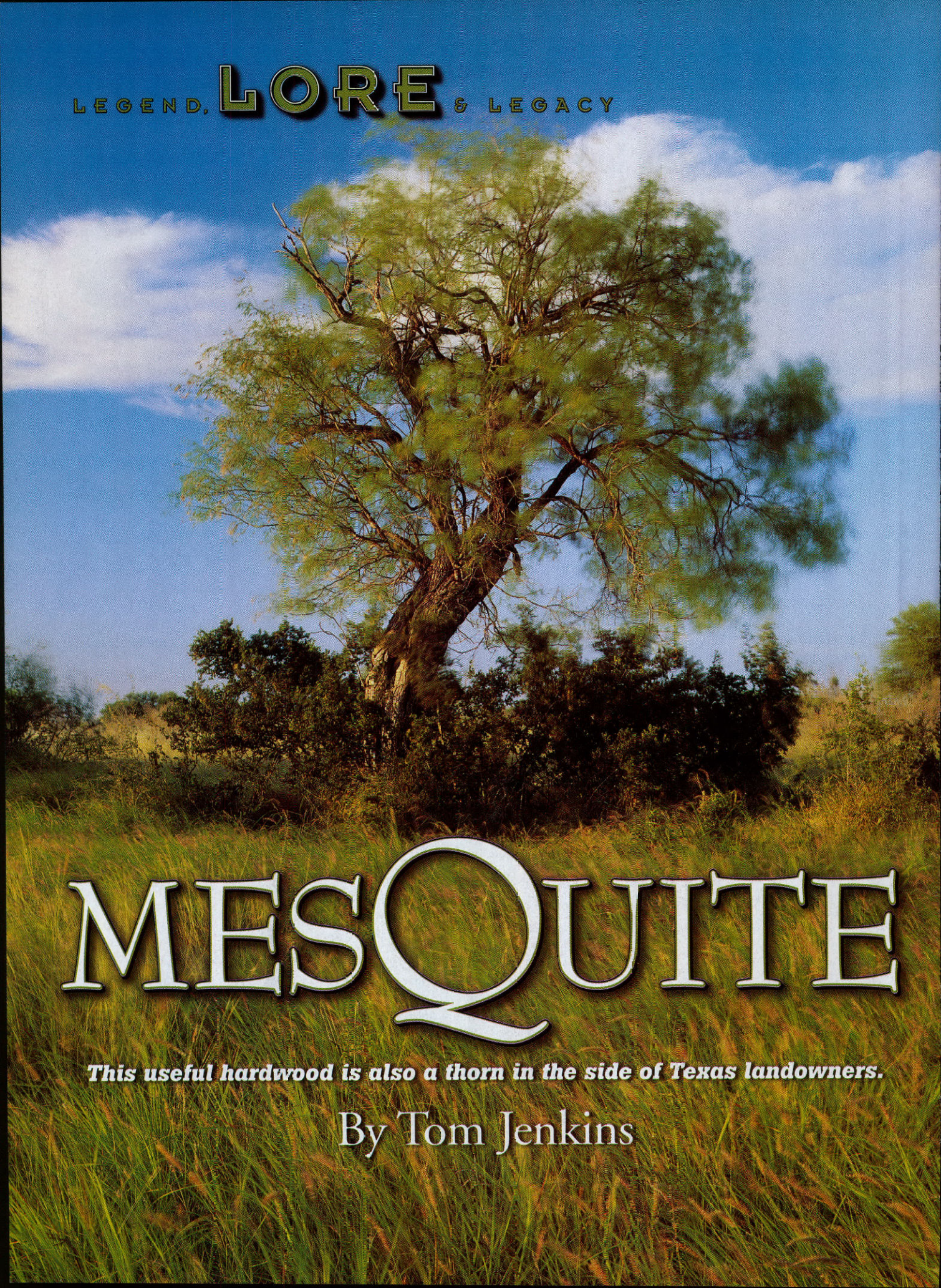
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LEGEND, **LORE** & LEGACY



MESQUITE

This useful hardwood is also a thorn in the side of Texas landowners.

By Tom Jenkins

IN THE BATTLE OVER THE WEST, the victor seems to be the tangled, thorny tree known as the mesquite. The mesquite absorbs more than its share of life-sustaining water and reduces livestock grazing acreage. Thousands of dollars are spent each year to control this ranchers' and landowners' nemesis, but the not-too-beautiful mesquite always wins in the end.

But despite the antagonistic relationship, mesquite has long provided food for wildlife and useful commercial products for humans. Aztecs — who gave the plant the name from which it is derived, *mizquitl* — used the roots, trunk, bark, leaves and beans, even combining pulverized leaves and water to make a soothing compress for sore eyes and wounds. Comanches chewed the leaves to relieve toothaches.

Mesquite beans and bean pods have also provided an important source of nutrition. The beans, which grow in long, slender pods up to nine inches long, are high in protein (even higher than soybeans), and have about 30 percent glucose. Texans and Mexicans ate the bean pods directly from the tree, as well as boiling or crushing them to make wine, jelly and bread. The Cahuillas ground the pods and baked the meal in sand heated by the sun, producing a nutritious sugar cake.

Mesquite's hard wood — which earned it the name ironwood — has become a familiar feature on the Texas landscape. The wood is durable and resistant to rot, making it ideal for fenceposts and landscaping, as well as for crafting furniture, picture frames, cutting boards and carved trinkets. Houston Street in early San Antonio and some streets in Brownsville were entirely paved with mesquite blocks.

Today restaurant chefs and backyard cooks use mesquite as a fuel for barbecue pits and grills. Mesquite wood, charcoal and briquettes produce a hot flame with relatively sparse but aromatic smoke, giving a savory flavor to foods.

Despite its commercial benefits, though, the tree is a major environmental dilemma for some governmental agencies, foresters, cattle ranchers and other landowners struggling to survive in an already stressful climate. In West Texas (which includes the Trans-Pecos and the Panhandle), and North Central Texas, where rainfall totals are low, the water shortage is crucial. An incorrigible water-guzzler, some experts estimate

other invader plants and warm-season grasses. The semi-desert grassland is dominated by mesquite stands, which are especially dense along streams and rivers, as well as scattered on the grasslands between drainages. In places, the persistent plant prevents (or detours) access by horseback and restricts wildlife pathways. It seems to thrive on drought and benefit from fewer wildfires, and it even gets some growth assistance when undigested mesquite seeds are spread by livestock dung.

Mesquite can even survive in areas where there is as little as six inches of rainfall a year. Under severe drought conditions, while grasses and some other forage plants continue to transpire at the same rate, the mesquite reduces its transpiration rate — and therefore its water use — with the plant or tree entering a kind of “resting” mode.

The result is a mesquite overabundance in certain areas, with a reduction of grass for cattle. A Texas A&M study by Raedeke Associates in Seattle claimed that “Prairie dogs, before being curtailed, removed pods and seeds, nipped and stripped the bark from young mesquite plants, significantly reducing the mesquite's spread by seedling mortality. They had prevented or reduced the mesquite established on their colonies. Therefore, broadscale eradication of prairie dogs in the area may have removed an important natural control of mesquite where the ranges of the prairie dogs and mesquite overlapped.”

In a larger sense, the beneficial and popular products of the mesquite come at a comparatively high price, considering the costs of brush control. Current control methods include aerial spraying of herbicides, mechanical extraction devices and controlled burns. Despite these procedures, the suppression of mesquite (both shrub and tree) has been short-term, with only a temporary increase in grass production usually followed by a rapid reestablishment of the mesquite's growth. Only in some instances has brush control increased grazing capacity. In a few areas, landowners who lease their land to hunters apply control strategies to only 30 percent of the mesquite thickets to create forage and accessible passages for wildlife.

Honey mesquite is also a problem on Texas highway rights-of-way in the western two-thirds of the state where brush eradication programs are applied. Mowing, which is the Texas Department of Transportation's standard maintenance practice,

Some experts estimate that mesquite trees in Texas draw as much as 63 million acre-feet of water from the ground each year.

that mesquite trees in Texas draw as much as 63 million acre-feet of water from the ground each year. When allowed to densely colonize pastures, mesquite can be an obstacle to rangeland managers (both private and public) by preventing the spread of grasses needed by livestock. Some stockmen claim the mesquite draws water when its canopy cover is more than 20 percent, restricting grass growth underneath the tree's canopy, in turn reducing the grazing potential for stock. The mesquite grows into a thick and thorny mass of restricting foliage, preventing easy access and movement.

Much of West Texas is an open savannah of honey mesquite,

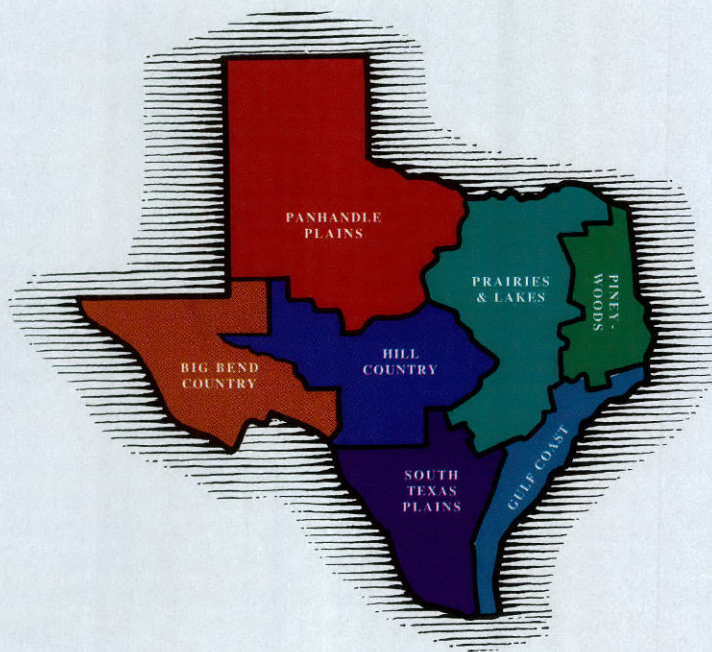
gives only temporary mesquite suppression. Darrell N. Ueckert, under sponsorship of TxDOT (Austin) in a 1995 study, reported that “Mesquite cannot be eradicated. A single treatment will not provide long-term control. It requires long-term management.”

Today ironwood seems an appropriate label to describe the mesquite's will to survive. Despite all the strategies applied to diminish it, the mesquite always seems to win in the end. ☆

TOM JENKINS writes about nature, the environment and mountaineering from his base in Englewood, Colorado.

GETAWAYS

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



BIG BEND COUNTRY

APRIL EVENTS

April: White Shaman Tour, every Saturday, Seminole Canyon SHP, Comstock, 888-525-9907.

April: Bouldering Tours, every Saturday and Sunday, also available Wednesday through Friday by advance request. Hueco Tanks SHP, El Paso, 915-849-6684.

April: Trail Ride, call for dates, Black Gap WMA, Brewster County, 915-376-2216.

April: Fishing on the Rio

Grande, call for dates, Black Gap WMA, Brewster County, 915-376-2216.

April: Fate Bell Cave Dwelling Tour, every Wednesday through Sunday, Seminole Canyon SHP, Comstock, 915-292-4464.

April: Pictograph Tours, every Saturday and Sunday, Hueco Tanks SHP, El Paso, 915-849-6684.

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

April: Desert Garden Tours, call for dates, Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center, Lajitas, 915-424-3327.

April 1: The Beautiful Solution to Affordable Housing, Fort Leaton SHP, Presidio, 915-229-3613.

April 6-8: Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Workshop,

Prude Ranch, Fort Davis, 512-389-8198.

April 6-8, 9-10, 13-15: Spring Trail Ride, Big Bend Ranch SP, Presidio, 281-486-8070.

April 7: Desert Landscaping I, Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center, Lajitas, 915-424-3327.

April 7, 8, 21, 22: Guided Tours, Franklin Mountains SP, El Paso, 915-566-6441.

April 14: Stories of Spirits, Magoffin Home SHP, El Paso, 915-533-5147.

April 15: Bird Identification Tours, Hueco Tanks SHP, El Paso, 915-849-6684.

April 20-22: Longhorn Cattle Drive, Big Bend Ranch SP, Presidio, 915-229-3416.

April 21: Presa Canyon Tour, Seminole Canyon SHP, Comstock, 915-292-4464.

April 21: Desert Landscaping II, Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center, Lajitas, 915-424-3327.

April 21: "Remembrances," a Forum for Gathering Oral History, Fort Leaton SHP, Presidio, 915-229-3613.

April 22: Upper Canyon Tour, Seminole Canyon SHP, Comstock, 915-292-4464.

April 27-29: Spring Photo Tour, Big Bend Ranch SP, Presidio, 915-229-3416.

April 28: Desert Landscaping III, Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center, Lajitas, 915-424-3327.

April 28: Texas Big Game Awards Regional Banquet, Midland, 800-839-9453, ext. 114.

MAY EVENTS

May: White Shaman Tour, every Saturday, Seminole Canyon SHP, Comstock, 915-292-4464.

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

May: Bouldering Tours, every Saturday and Sunday, also available Wednesday through Friday by advance request, Hueco Tanks SHP, El Paso, 915-849-6684.

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

May: Tour Phantom Cave Springs and San Solomon Cienega, by reservation only, Balmorhea SP, Toyahvale, 915-375-2370.

May: Desert Garden Tours, call for dates, Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center, Terlingua, 915-424-3327.

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COLORADO BEND



GOOSE ISLAND



BRAZOS BEND

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

May: Trail Ride, call for dates, Black Gap WMA, Alpine, 915-376-2216.

May: Fate Bell Cave Dwelling Tour, every Wednesday through Sunday, Seminole Canyon SHP, Comstock, 915-292-4464.

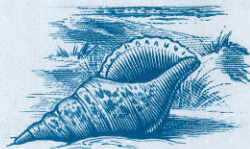
May 4-6: Desert Survival Workshop, Big Bend Ranch SP, Presidio, 915-229-3416.

May 5, 6, 19, 20: Guided Tours, Franklin Mountains SP, El Paso, 915-566-6441.

May 6: Spring Tea, Magoffin Home SHP, El Paso, 915-533-5147.

May 12: Stories of Spirits, Magoffin Home SHP, El Paso, 915-533-5147.

May 20: Bird Identification Tours, Hueco Tanks SHP, El Paso, 915-849-6684.



GULF COAST

APRIL EVENTS

April: Plantation house, barn and grounds tours, Wednesdays through Sundays, Varner-Hogg Plantation SHP, West Columbia, 979-345-4656.

April: Weekend Nature Programs, most weekends, Lake Texana SP, Edna, 361-782-5718.

April: Guided Bird Walks, Wednesday through Saturday, Goose Island SP, Rockport, 361-729-2858.

April 7: Volunteer Work Day, Matagorda Island SP & WMA, Port O'Connor, 361-983-2215.

April 7, 21: Spring Migration Birding Count, Fennessey Ranch, Refugio, 361-529-6600.

April 14: Photography Seminar, Fennessey Ranch, Refugio. 361-529-6600.

April 15: Easter Day Activities, Lake Texana SP, Edna, 361-782-5718.

April 21, 22: Migratory Bird Tour, Matagorda Island SP & WMA, Port O'Connor, 361-983-2215.

April 21: Birding Field Trip, Sea Rim SP, Sabine Pass, 409-971-2559.

April 21: San Jacinto Day Celebration, San Jacinto Monument SHP, La Porte, 281-479-2431.

April 21: Earth Day, Armand Bayou Nature Center, Houston, 281-474-2551.

April 22: Earth Day Activities, Lake Texana SP, Edna, 361-782-5718.

April 27: Coastal Expo, Sea Rim State Park, Sabine Pass, 512-912-7190.

April 28: Beach Cleanup, Matagorda Island SP & WMA, Port O'Connor, 361-983-2215.

April 28: Photography in the 19th Century, Fulton Mansion SHP, Fulton, 361-729-0386.

April 28: Coastal Expo, River Front park, Beaumont, 512-912-7190.

April 29: History Tours, Matagorda Island SP & WMA, Port O'Connor, 361-983-2215.

MAY EVENTS

May: Plantation house, barn and grounds tours, Wednesdays through Sundays, Varner-Hogg Plantation SHP, West Columbia, 979-345-4656.

May: Weekend Nature Programs, most weekends, Lake Texana SP, Edna, 361-782-5718.

May: Nature Programs, every weekend, Brazos Bend SP, Needville, 979-553-5101.

May 2-5: Guided Bird Walks, Goose Island SP, Rockport, 361-729-2858.

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

May 6: Beachcombing and Shelling Tour, Matagorda Island SP & WMA, Port O'Connor, 361-983-2215.

May 11-13: Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Workshop, Texas Baptist Encampment, Palacios, 512-389-8198.

May 12: Wild Boar Safari, Fennessey Ranch, Bayside,

361-529-6600.

May 12: History Tours, Matagorda Island SP & WMA, Port O'Connor, 361-983-2215.

May 19: Gordon's Birthday Party, Sea Center Texas, Lake Jackson, 979-292-0100.

May 25-26: Willacy County Young Farmer's Annual Fishing Tournament, Port Mansfield, 956-440-0725.



HILL COUNTRY

APRIL EVENTS

April: Wild Cave Tour, call for dates, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, 830-563-2342.

April: Gorman Falls Tour, every Saturday and Sunday, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, 915-628-3240.

April: Walking Cave Tour, every Saturday and Sunday, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, 915-628-3240.

April: Birding at Kickapoo, call for dates, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, 830-563-2342.

April: Stumpy Hollow Mystery Hike, every Saturday, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, 512-793-2223.

April: Geology Program, every Thursday, Longhorn Cavern SP, Burnet, 877-441-2283 or 512-756-4680.

April: Birdwatching, daily, Pedernales Falls SP, Johnson City, 830-868-7304.

April: Guided Tour, every Saturday, Honey Creek SNA, Spring Branch, 830-438-2656.

April 7: Spring Rio Grande turkey season opens in 129 counties, 512-389-4505.

April 7: Birdwatching Walks, Kerrville-Schreiner SP, Kerrville, 830-257-5392.

April 7: Moonlighting, Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve, Austin, 512-327-7622.

April 7, 14: Crawling Cave Tour, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, 915-628-3240.

April 7-22: Wildseed Farms Wildflower Celebration, Fredericksburg, 830-990-1393.

April 12, 26: Devil's Waterhole Canoe Tour, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, 512-793-2223.

April 16: Austin Fly Fishers meeting, Austin, 512-916-4393.

April 18-22: Nature Quest, field trips and seminars covering birds, butterflies, bats and wildflowers, Uvalde, 800-210-0380.

April 19: Castro's Texas Land Grants, Landmark Inn SHP, Castroville, 830-931-2133.

April 21: Earth Day Celebration, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, 915-628-3240.

April 21: Water, Water Everywhere or Everyone Lives Downstream from Someone, Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve, Austin, 512-327-7622.

April 21: Enchanted Rock Trail Project Day, Enchanted Rock SNA, Fredericksburg, 512-445-3862.

April 25-27: Scheduled Hunts, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, 915-628-3240.

April 28: Paddlefest, Festival Beach, Town Lake, Austin, 512-473-8644.

April 29: Paddlefest Town Lake Cleanup, Festival Beach, Austin, 512-473-8644.

MAY EVENTS

May: Birding at Kickapoo, call for dates, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, 830-563-2342.

May: Guided Tour, every Saturday, Honey Creek SNA, Spring Branch, 830-438-2656.

May: Wild Cave Tour, call for dates, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, 830-563-2342.

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

May: Bat Flights at Stuart Bat Cave, call for dates, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, 830-563-2342.

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

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

May: Stumpy Hollow Mystery Hike, every Saturday, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, 512-793-2223.



May: Walking Cave Tour, every Saturday and Sunday, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, 915-628-3240.

May 2-4: Scheduled Hunts, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, 915-628-3240.

May 3-5: Back to Blanket Tour, X Bar Ranch, Eldorado, 888-853-2688.

May 5: Birdwatching Walks, Kerrville-Schreiner SP, Kerrville, 830-257-5392.

May 5, 12: Crawling Cave Tour, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, 915-628-3240.

May 10, 17, 24, 31: Devil's Waterhole Canoe Tour, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, 512-793-2223.

May 12: Spring Art & Music Plant Sale, Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve, Austin, 512-327-7622.

May 19: Songwriter Festival, Garner SP, Concan, 830-232-6132.

May 19: Riverfest 2001, Bandera, 800-364-3833.

May 19: Enchanted Rock Trail Project Day, Enchanted Rock SNA, Fredericksburg, 512-445-3862.

May 21: Austin Fly Fishers meeting, Austin, 512-916-4393.

May 25-28: Memorial Day Weekend, X Bar Ranch, Eldorado, 888-853-2688.

May 26: Close Encounters of a Natural Kind, Kerrville-Schreiner SP, Kerrville, 830-257-5392.

May 26: Let Us Gather At the River, riverside entertainment, Kerrville-Schreiner SP, Kerrville, 830-257-5392.

May 26-27: Island Assault 1944, National Museum of the Pacific War SHP (Admiral Nimitz), Fredericksburg, 830-997-4379.



PANHANDLE-PLAINS

APRIL EVENTS

April: Llama treks, by reservation only through Jordan Llamas, San Angelo State Park,

San Angelo, 915-651-7346.

April 7: Volunteer Day, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, 806-455-1492.

April 7: Owl Calling, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, 940-839-4331.

April 7: Evening Birding, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, 806-455-1492.

April 7: Great Texas Trash Off, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, 940-839-4331.

April 7: Family Nature Hike, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, 806-488-2227.

April 7: Spring Rio Grande turkey season opens in 129 counties, 512-389-4505.

April 7, 14: Petroglyph Tour, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, 915-949-4757.

April 14: Night Noises, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, 806-488-2227.

April 14, 28: Dinosaur Walk, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, 915-949-4757.

April 14-June 9: Gentling Birds/Carlander Birds Exhibition, Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, 806-651-2250.

April 15: Easter Sunrise Service, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, 940-839-4331.

April 15: Sunrise Service, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, 806-488-2227.

April 21: 4th Annual Master the Mountain, Big Spring SP, Big Spring, 915-263-4931.

April 21: River Walk, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, 806-488-2227.

April 21: Longhorn and Bison Seminar, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, 915-949-4757.

April 21: Evening Interpretive Presentation, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, 806-455-1492.

April 21: Wildflower Walk, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, 806-455-1492.

April 28: Wildflower Safari, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, 806-488-2227.

April 28: Night Sky Tour, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, 940-839-4331.

MAY EVENTS

May: Llama Treks, by reservation only through Jordan Llamas, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, 915-651-7346.

May 4-5: 4th Annual Open House, Lake Brownwood SP, Brownwood, 915-784-5223.

May 5: Birding 101, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, 806-455-1492.

May 5: Edible and Useful Native Plants, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, 806-455-1492.

May 5: Nature Challenge, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, 806-488-2227.

May 5: Petroglyph Tour, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, 915-949-4757.

May 12, 26: Dinosaur Walk, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, 915-949-4757.

May 12, 28: Canyon Critters, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, 806-488-2227.

May 19: Longhorn and Bison Seminar, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, 915-949-4757.

May 19: Family Nature Hike, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, 806-488-2227.

May 19: Flintknapping, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, 940-839-4331.

May 19: Upper Canyon Hike, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, 806-455-1492.

May 19: Star Gazing Party, Fort Griffin SHP, Albany, 915-762-3592.

May 19: Bat Tour, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, 806-455-1492.

May 25-26: Panhandle Trail Riders Benefit Ride, Caprock Canyons SP & Trailway, Quitaque, 806-455-1492.

May 26: Starwalk, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, 940-839-4331.

May 26: Trail Talk, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, 806-488-2227.

May 27: Sunset Hike, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, 806-488-2227.

May 28: Copper Breaks Day, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, 940-839-4331.



PINEYWOODS

APRIL EVENTS

April 1, 8, 15, 29: Walk on the Wild Side, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, 409-384-5231.

April 6: Slide Presentation, Village Creek SP, Lumberton, 409-755-7322.

April 6, 7, 8: Dogwood Steam Train Excursions, Texas State Railroad SHP, Rusk, 800-442-8951 or 903-683-2651 outside Texas.

April 7: Spring Rio Grande turkey season opens in 129 counties, 512-389-4505.

April 12, 19, 20, 26, 27: School Steam Train Excursions, Texas State Railroad SHP, Rusk, 800-442-8951 or 903-683-2651 outside Texas.

April 14: Campfire Programs, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, 409-384-5231.

April 14: Easter Egg Hunt, Tyler SP, Tyler, 903-597-5338.

April 14, 28: Guided Nature Trail Hike, Village Creek SP, Lumberton, 409-755-7322.

April 16: Spring eastern turkey season opens in 32 East Texas counties, 512-389-4505.

April 21: Floating the Forks, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, 409-384-5231.

April 28: Who's in the Woods? Tyler SP, Tyler, 903-597-5338.

MAY EVENTS

May 3, 4, 10, 11, 17, 18: School Steam Train Excursions, Texas State Railroad SHP, Rusk, 800-442-8951 or 903-683-2651 outside Texas.

May 4, 18: Slide Presentation, Village Creek SP, Lumberton, 409-755-7322.

May 4, 5, 6: Texas Trail Rides and SWFWDA Spring Quarterly Meeting, Gilmer, 817-444-4885.

May 5: Birding Boat Tour, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, 409-384-5231.



May 6, 13, 27: Walk on the Wild Side, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, 409-384-5231.

May 12: Anniversary Celebration, Texas State RR SHP, Rusk, 800-442-8951 or 903-683-2561 outside Texas.

May 12: Riding with Ranger Rick Mountain Bike Ride, Tyler SP, Tyler, 903-597-5338.

May 12, 26: Guided Nature Trail Hike, Village Creek SP, Lumberton, 409-755-7322.

May 19: Floating the Forks, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, 409-384-5231.

May 19: Guided Nature Hike, Tyler SP, Tyler, 903-597-5338.

May 26: Starlight Excursion, Texas State Railroad SHP, Rusk, 800-442-8951 or 903-683-2561 outside Texas.

May 26: Campfire Programs, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, 409-384-5231.

May 26: Who's in the Woods? Tyler SP, Tyler, 903-597-5338.



PRAIRIES AND LAKES

APRIL EVENTS

April: Historic and Scenic Tour, by reservation only to groups of 10 or more, Monument Hill & Kreishe Brewery SHP, La Grange, 979-968-5658.

April: Guided Tours, every Saturday and Sunday, Fanthorp Inn SHP, Anderson, 936-873-2633.

April: Kreishe Brewery Tours, every Saturday and Sunday, Monument Hill & Kreishe Brewery SHP, La Grange, 979-968-5658.

April: Easter Egg Hunt, call for more information, Monument Hill & Kreishe Brewery SHP, La Grange, 979-968-5658.

April 1-30: Ennis Bluebonnet Trails, Ennis, 972-878-4748.

April 1, 8: Kreishe House Tours, Monument Hill & Kreishe Brewery SHP, La Grange, 979-968-5658.

April 7: Guided Nature Hike, Cooper Lake SP/Doctors Creek Unit, Cooper, 903-395-3100.

April 7: Spring Rio Grande turkey season opens in 129 counties, 512-389-4505.

April 7, 14, 21: Birds of the Brazos Hike, Stephen F. Austin State Historical Park, San Felipe, 979-885-3613 x27.

April 7-8: Lessons from Lydia, Washington-on-the-Brazos SHP/Barrington Living History Farm, 936-878-2213.

April 14: Easter Egg Hunt, Cooper Lake SP/South Sulphur Unit, 903-945-5256.

April 14: Easter Egg Hunt, Cooper Lake SP/Doctors Creek Unit, Cooper, 903-395-3100.

April 14: Stagecoach Days, Fanthorp Inn SHP, Anderson, 936-873-2633.

April 14: Easterfest, Purtis Creek SP, Eustace, 903-425-2332.

April 15: Easter Egg Hunt, Eisenhower Birthplace SHP, Denison, 903-465-8908.

April 15: Easter Sunrise Services, Monument Hill & Kreishe Brewery SHP, La Grange, 979-968-5658.

April 15: Easter Sunrise Service, Fanthorp Inn SHP, Anderson, 936-873-2633.

April 21: Critters of the Cooper Lake Area, Cooper Lake SP/Doctors Creek Unit, 903-395-3100.

April 21: Star Party, Dinosaur Valley SP, Glen Rose, 254-897-4588.

April 21: Kids Wilderness Survival, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, 940-328-1171.

April 21: Children's Spring Flower-Planting Class, Eisenhower Birthplace SHP, Denison, 903-465-8908.

April 21: 12th Annual Native Plant Sale, Heard Natural Science Museum, McKinney, 972-562-5566.

April 28: Old-Time Music and Cowboy Poetry Gathering, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, 940-328-1171.

April 28: Guided Nature Hike, Cooper Lake SP/South Sulphur Unit, 903-945-5256.

MAY EVENTS

May: Kreishe Brewery Tours, every Saturday and Sunday, Monument Hill & Kreishe Brewery SHP, LaGrange, 979-968-5658.

May: Historic and Scenic Tour, available by reservation only to groups of 10 or more, Monument Hill & Kreishe Brewery SHP, LaGrange, 979-968-5658.

May: Guided Tours, every weekend, Fanthorp Inn SHP, Anderson, 936-873-2633.

May 5: Guided Nature Hike, Cooper Lake SP/South Sulphur Unit, Sulphur Springs, 903-945-5256.

May 5: May Day, Sebastopol SHP, Seguin, 830-379-4833.

May 5: Wildflower Walk, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, 940-328-1171.

May 6, 13: Kreishe House Tours, Monument Hill & Kreishe Brewery SHP, LaGrange, 979-968-5658.

May 12: Guided Nature Hike, Cooper Lake SP/Doctors Creek Unit, Cooper, 903-395-3100.

May 12: Stagecoach Days, Fanthorp Inn SHP, Anderson, 936-873-2633.

May 12, 19: Children's Fishing Derby, Washington-on-the-Brazos SHP, Washington, 936-878-2214.

May 19: Night Sounds, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, 940-328-1171.

May 19: Poisonous Plants and Venomous Animals, Cooper Lake SP/South Sulphur Unit, Sulphur Springs, 903-945-5256.

May 26: 16th Annual Texas Black Invitational Rodeo, State Fair Coliseum, Dallas, 214-565-9026, ext. 311

May 26: Wildflowers of the Blackland Prairie, Cooper Lake SP/Doctors Creek Unit, Cooper, 903-395-3100.

May 26: Kids Wilderness Survival, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, 940-328-1171.

May 27: Cowboy Campfire-Music and Poetry, Lake Mineral Wells SP & Trailway, Mineral Wells, 940-328-1171.

May 28: Memorial Day

Celebration, Eisenhower Birthplace SHP, Denison, 903-465-8908.



SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

APRIL EVENTS

April: Kiskadee Bus Tour, every Tuesday and Friday, Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, Mission, 956-519-6448.

April 5-7: Coastal Expo, Archer Park, McAllen, 512-912-7190.

April 21: Run, Walk, or Bicycle Across Dam, Choke Canyon SP/South Shore Unit, Three Rivers, 361-786-3538.

MAY EVENTS

May: Kiskadee Bus Tour, every Tuesday and Friday, Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, Mission, 956-519-6448.

State Parks Offer Public Hunts

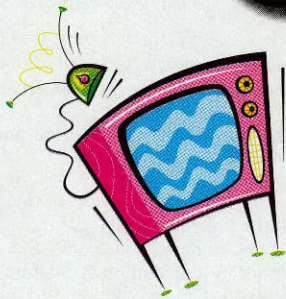
A number of state parks offer special permit hunting. The specially controlled public hunts are scheduled for Monday through Friday, a slow time at most parks.

The following schedule lists the times and dates when public access is restricted. Call the park directly to make sure it will be open on the day you want to visit. Or call Texas Parks and Wildlife's information line, 800-792-1112, between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday-Friday Press 3 for park information or 5 for public hunt information.

April 25-27, May 2-4
Colorado Bend SP
945-628-3240

SP	STATE PARK
SHP	STATE HISTORICAL PARK
SNA	STATE NATURAL AREA
WMA	WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS



The Front Line of News and Views

TELEVISION

Look for These Stories in the Coming Weeks:

April 1 – 8:

The geology and ecology of a barrier island; how barbed wire changed the Texas landscape; a family of shrimpers struggling to make a living.

April 8 – 15:

Rock art in Hueco Tanks; the Texas tortoise; wartime history of the Battleship *Texas*.

April 15 – 22:

A 98-year-old hunter; identifying poison ivy; "active duty" with reenactors aboard the Battleship *Texas*.

April 22 – 29:

The mythology surrounding snakes; creating habitat for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker; breeding striped bass.

April 29 – May 6:

The value of hardwood forests; detecting and preventing Lyme disease; attracting birds to your backyard.

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Amarillo: KACV, Ch. 2 / Sat. 5:30 p.m.

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

Bryan-College Station: KAMU, Ch. 15 / Thurs. 7 p.m. / Tues. 10 p.m. & 11:30 p.m.

Corpus Christi: KEDT, Ch. 16 / Sun. 11 a.m. / Thurs. 10 a.m.

El Paso: KCOS, Ch. 13 / Sat. 5:30 p.m. (check local listing)

Harlingen: KMBH, Ch. 60 / Thurs. 8:30 p.m. / Sun. 12:30 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. 4 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

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Center: KDET-AM 930 / 5:15 p.m.

Coleman: KSTA-AM 1000 / 5:15 p.m.

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SIGHTS & SOUNDS

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 / TBA

Denison/Sherman: KJIM-AM 1500 / 9:04 a.m.

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

Dumas: KMRE-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 Paso: KXCR-FM 89.5 / 1:20 p.m.

Fairfield: KNES-FM 99.1 / 6:49 a.m.

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

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

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

Freeport: KBRZ-AM 1460 / 10:15 a.m. & 7:45 p.m.

Gainesville: KGAF-AM 1580 / 7:00 a.m.

Galveston: KGBC-AM 1540 / 1:45 p.m.

Greenville: KGVF-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.

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: KLVF-AM 1230 / 12:06 p.m.

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

Malakoff: KLVQ-AM 1410 / 6:45 a.m.

Marshall: KCUL-AM 1410 / 7:10 a.m., KCUL-FM 92.3 / 7:10 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: KCRS-AM 550 / 6:43 a.m. & 6:43 p.m.

Mineola: KMOO-FM 99.9 / 5:10 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 / 12:09 p.m.

Palestine: KLIS-FM 96.7 / 6:20 a.m.

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Point Comfort/Port Lavaca: KAJI-FM 94.1 / TBA

Rockdale: KRXT-FM 98.5 / 5:04 a.m. & 5:50 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., 12:30 & 5:45 p.m.

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

Sonora: KHOS-FM 92.1 / 12:09 p.m.

Sulphur Springs: KSST-AM 1230 / 4:45 p.m.

Texarkana: KTXK-FM 91.5 / noon hour

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

Victoria: KVRT-FM 90.7 / 5:34 p.m., KTXN-FM 98.7 / 6:45 a.m.

Waco: KBCT-FM 94.5 / 6:10 a.m.

Wichita Falls: KWFS-AM 1290 / 6:15 & 7:45 a.m.

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

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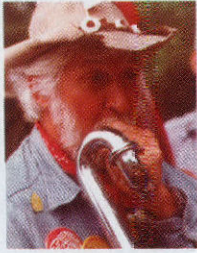
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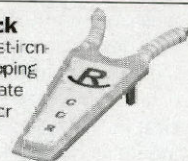
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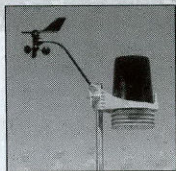
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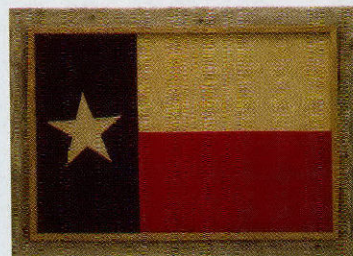
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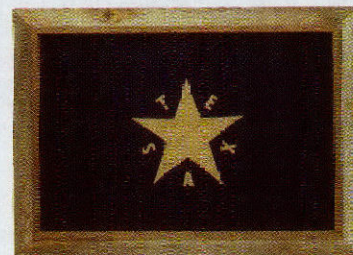
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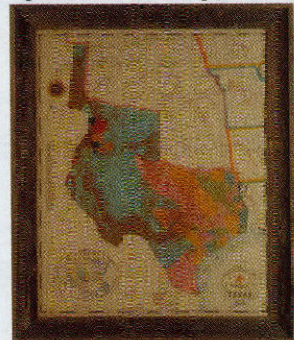
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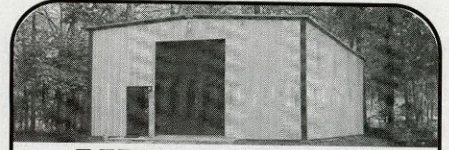
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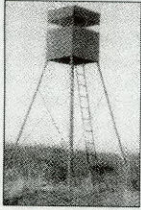
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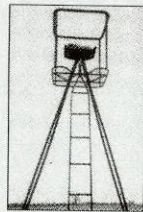


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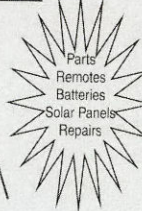
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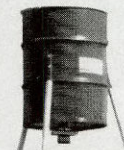


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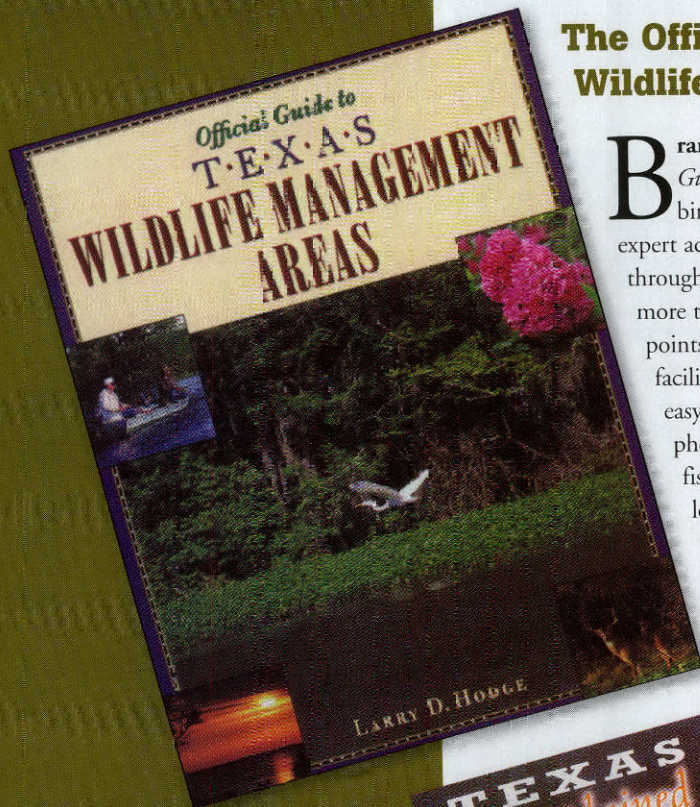
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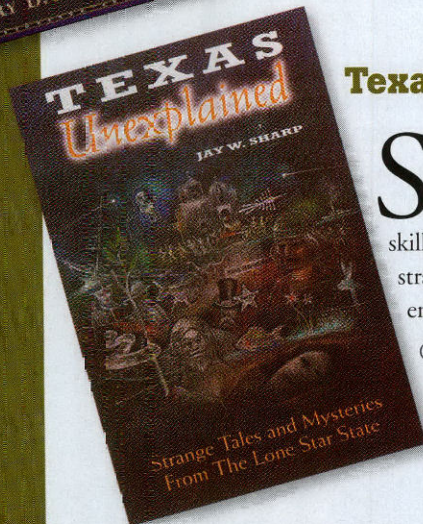
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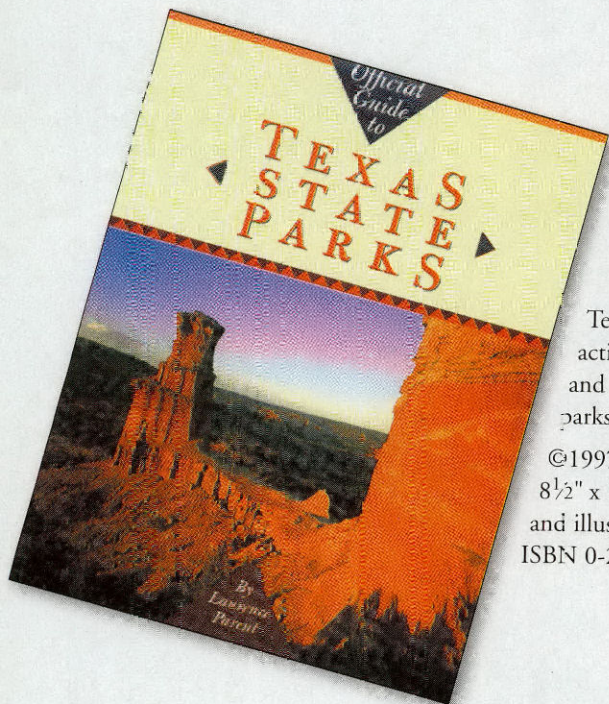


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