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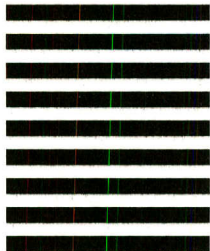
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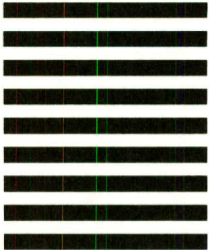
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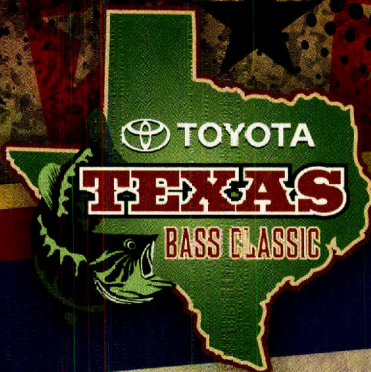
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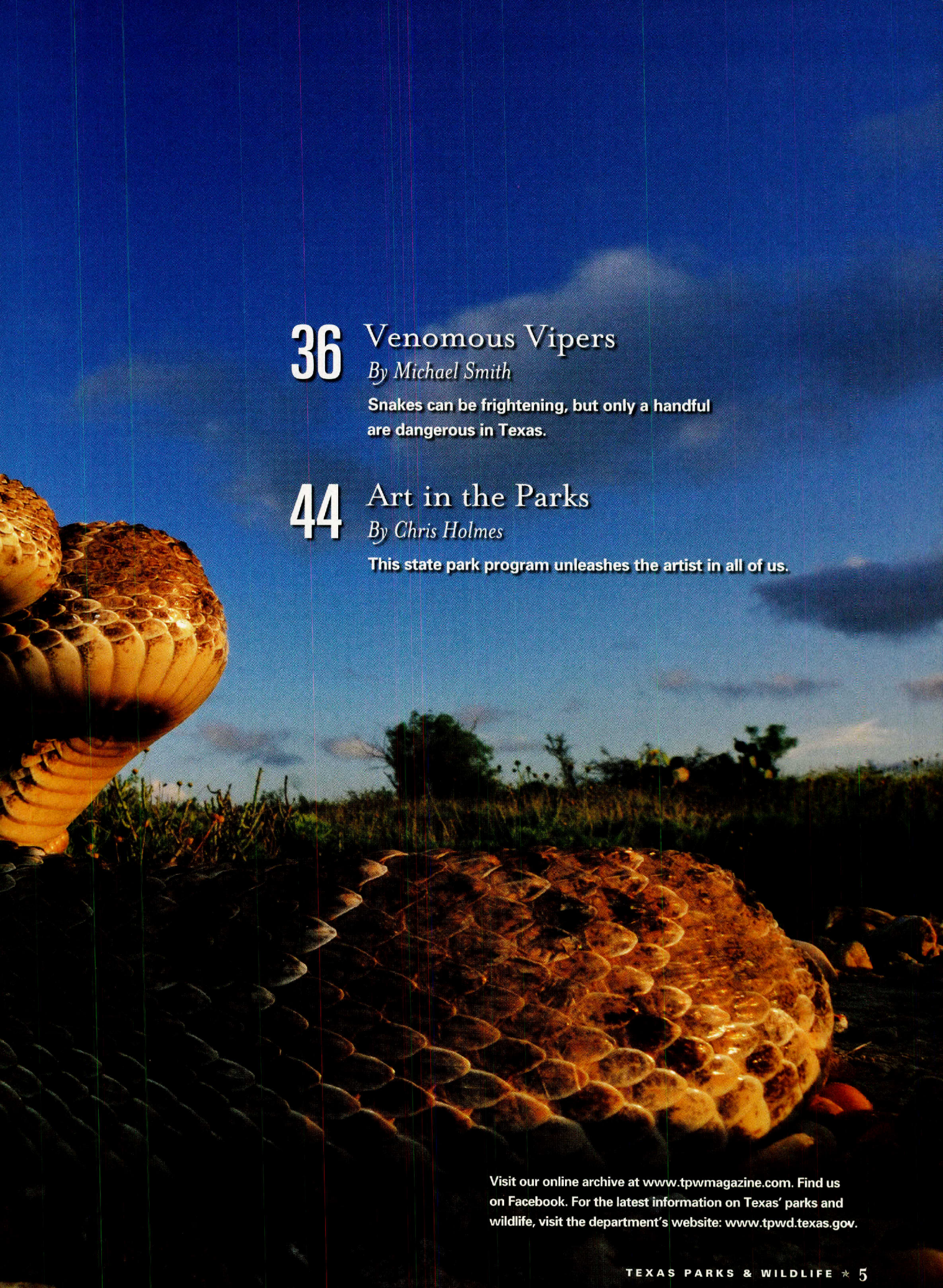
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FRONT: A rufous hummingbird hovers over a flower. Rufous hummingbirds migrate through West Texas on their journeys between Mexico and the northwestern U.S. Photo © Tim Fitzharris

BACK: A Texas tortoise takes a break in a field of wildflowers in South Texas. This threatened species, found in South Texas and northern Mexico, is the smallest tortoise species in North America and the only one found in Texas. Photo © Jeff Parker

PREVIOUS SPREAD: With tongue extended, a western diamondback rattlesnake, one of the most feared snake species in Texas, raises its head into a striking pose in South Texas. Photo © Rolf Nussbaumer

THIS PAGE: A photographer, flanked by ocotillo plants, catches the first rays of light at Big Bend Ranch State Park. The park hosts popular photography workshops as part of TPWD's Arts in the Parks program. Photo by Earl Nottingham / TPWD

TEXAS

PARKS & WILDLIFE

THE OUTDOOR MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

MAY 2015, VOL. 73, NO. 4

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In the Field

CHRIS HOLMES worked in national parks in England, Australia and New Zealand before arriving in Texas. He ran an environmental education center and summer camp for three years before joining the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Chris worked for seven years as a regional interpretive specialist



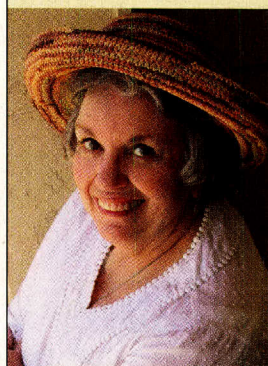
and three years as the outdoor education coordinator for Texas state parks creating a series of successful statewide programs aimed at connecting children and families to the outdoors, such as the Texas Outdoor Family program and the Geocache Challenge. In 2012 he became the director of interpretation for Texas state parks. Chris is happiest out in the field, side by side with other rangers, working on the fire line, building trails, riding bikes or providing programs to families.

MICHAEL SMITH developed a lifelong love of snakes at the age of 10 when a girl across the street asked if he wanted to go snake hunting. He volunteered with museums as a teenager, learned about scientific collections and spent lots of time in the field. He eventually went into a different line of work but has remained a lifelong naturalist. He co-founded the DFW Herpetological Society with Steve Campbell in 1999, and is currently involved with Crosstimbers Connection, a nonprofit that provides nature education. He feels a particular connection to the massasauga rattlesnake, the first venomous species he found. The little rattler was once frequently seen on the prairie west of Fort Worth, but its numbers have declined.



JANET KILGORE was past 40 when she went camping for the first time. Slowly, she learned to simplify the process, even leaving the cooler at home. Since then she and her husband have tent-camped at more than a dozen Texas state parks, all over the state, in all types of weather. Janet has become an accomplished camper who delights in identifying

something else she can do without. She was a columnist at the *Williamson County Sun* for eight years. One of the columns she wrote was "The Happy Camper," which gave helpful hints for camping and described various Texas state parks with love and humor. She is currently working on a book, *The Happier Camper*, which expands on her minimalist camping ideas. She lives in Austin with her husband and four dogs.



AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF BRENT LEISURE

We all have our favorite seasons of year. Despite my love for fall, it's mighty hard to contest the energy, vitality and striking beauty that accompany the arrival of spring. Whether you get out to chase that gobbler you've been dreaming about all winter, chunk a chartreuse lizard in hopes of enticing a smallmouth or largemouth bass or spend a night under the stars in your favorite campsite, opportunities abound for those who love the outdoors. The days are longer, the colors are more vibrant, and habitats are quickly repopulating with songbirds, mammals, amphibians and more. Who hasn't cast a longing gaze out the office window on a spring day?

This issue of *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine explores some of the beautiful Texas birds you may encounter this season, along with information and inspiration about the opportunities that springtime in Texas brings. Arts in the Parks, for example, is a concept gaining tremendous momentum in your state parks today. In all fairness, creating artistic renderings inspired by nature is not entirely new to our generation. Ancient pictographs adorn hidden rock walls in many parklands out West and were undoubtedly inspired thousands of years ago by the magnificent landscapes and the abundant resources of our beloved land. My mind often wanders back to those ancient people when I'm in these most special places, and I ponder the common experiences and feelings we've shared despite the thousands of years that separate us.

Your state parks today continue to be places of inspiration as young and old are encouraged to use all their senses to embrace the sights and sounds of nature and then go express that beauty themselves in any number of creative ways. Nature provides the backdrop: jaw-dropping splendor like the graceful ballet of a hummingbird or the riotous splashes of color in our native springtime meadows. Our mind's eye records these experiences, and the resulting art — painting, drawing, sculpting, photography, music, dance or words — provides us opportunities to share our unique interpretation.

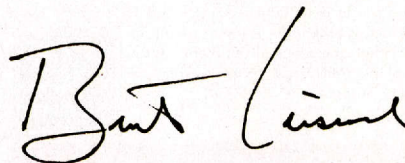
How you experience the outdoors is up to you. Some folks like to stroll along gentle paths, dip their fishing lines in the water and sit back to watch the clouds roll by. Others crave more excitement in their nature experience, dropping down into high-walled canyons or chasing an elusive gobbler with bow and arrow. That's one of the wonders of nature: there's something for every taste and ability.

As for me, spring invites me to hit a rugged trail on my mountain bike, explore some sparkling river by kayak, chase the white bass when the water is right, and spend time with family and friends as we listen to the night chorus under a jeweled sky.

Spring provides a smorgasbord of options, whatever your niche in the outdoors, so make the time to enjoy it. Every year during the dog days of summer, we look back and regret that we didn't take time to embrace the beauty and splendor that spring offered.

When you do manage to slip away and indulge your springtime yearning for the outdoors, bring young friends along. Help them discover a lifetime of joy as a steward of Texas' rich natural and cultural heritage. Once they experience it, they're hooked. They'll go back time and again, and pass it down to others.

As Executive Director Carter Smith says: "Thanks for caring about our wild things and wild places. They need you now more than ever."



DIRECTOR OF STATE PARKS

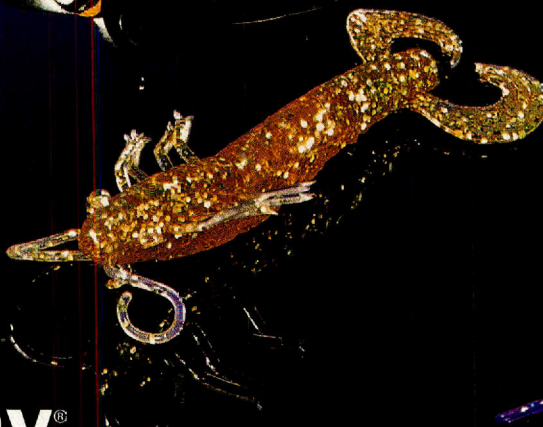
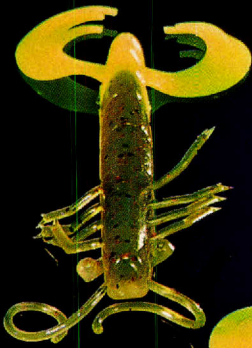
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PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

FOREWORD

Executive Director Carter Smith often says that we get paid in “beautiful sunsets and sunrises” here at TPWD. It’s a joke, but not a joke. You can’t measure the satisfaction of working on our mission here day after day in dollars and cents. At *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine, you could say our bonuses are the heartfelt letters that sometimes brighten a busy workday. Letters like this one from Rebecca Brown help us pause for a moment and savor the sweet rewards of our labor of love.

“Yesterday, my daughter Emilee took the Junior Angler class at Garner State Park. It was a fantastic experience for her! She’s recently been identified as dyslexic and struggles so hard in school. Her self-esteem is suffering, and she has a hard time being accepted by her peers. Emilee was the only girl in this class. It didn’t faze her at all! The lady who taught the class was amazing, keeping the kids captured and engaged. Before long Emilee was raising her hand, amongst older boys, and answering questions!

“Afterwards we went further down and she caught not only her first fish, but two! I can’t tell you how happy Emilee was and how much she learned. Our annual park pass is expiring and I’ve promised her we will try to find the funds to renew it. I’ve been in tears for gratefulness since we left the park. She’s so proud of herself! She told me, ‘My friends in my class can read and spell good, but I’m a certified Junior Angler!’ Thank you for this program and please thank that sweet lady who boosted my daughter’s self-esteem.”

Just reminds us that it’s all about putting aside our own distractions now and then. Take that struggling child or lonely friend or urban grandkid out for a day in a state park. Bring a fishing pole and rediscover the good feeling you get from just hanging out in nature’s beauty.

On inviting spring days, when our cubicles seem particularly dreary and confining, all we have to do to feel sunshiny warm inside and out is to read a letter like Rebecca’s, or the one by Gigi Edwards Bryant to the right.

I met Gigi at the Camp Fire Promise to Children Award Luncheon in February where she was the 2015 award recipient. Last year’s recipient, Carter Smith, presented the award and mentioned that Gigi was a fan of our magazine. I can’t pass by a chance to talk about *Texas Parks & Wildlife*, so I introduced myself. After hearing her touching story, I asked her to share it with our readers.

Emilee, the young angler, tells us that it’s “awesome” that we’re sharing her letter here. She turns 8 on May 15, so we wish her a happy birthday.

“The day she took the Junior Angler class and caught her first fish is a memory that will not only last her lifetime; this is a tale she will pass on to her kids and grandkids,” Rebecca says. “She’s the kid that asked Santa for a real fishing pole for Christmas while her friends wanted iPods, iPads and XBoxes.”

Louie Bond

LOUIE BOND, EDITOR

LETTERS

MAGAZINE IS A TREASURE

Recently, I was at a Camp Fire luncheon with Carter Smith, executive director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. While hearing him speak, I was reminded of my love of *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine. I remembered my days as a single parent, sharing the magazine with my

small son, who loved scenery, animals and especially fish! To amuse him and decorate our home, I cut out pictures from the magazine, framed them and put them all over his room. He loved the pictures, and we could read the stories together along with his sister.

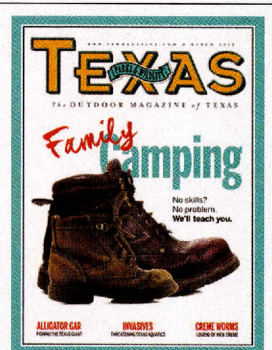
I enjoyed the detail in each frame and the portraits of Texas’ parks. Each month, we would pick pictures from the magazine to fit his love of animals and the outdoors and would also pick a park to visit the following Saturday. The magazine has been around a long time, for hunters, fisherman and novices of nature

alike, but the real jewel is the fact that I was able to travel through my son’s dreams using a real treasure in Texas’ landscape, *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine.

I took a moment to look in the magazine after the luncheon. It was refreshing to see the same care to detail that was a part of my family’s memories. In our family, memories are important, because they tell us that God’s amazing stories require us to acknowledge and remember the small steps that lead to big strides.

Thank you, *Texas Parks & Wildlife*, for your love of Texas’ unique treasures, and thank you, Carter, for the memories.

GIGI EDWARDS BRYANT
Austin



“To amuse him and decorate our home, I cut out pictures from the magazine, framed them and put them all over his room.”

GIGI EDWARDS BRYANT
Austin

MAIL CALL

GOOD WORK ON MAGAZINE APP

I love the new *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine app and thought that I would write to let you all know. It has been a while since I last subscribed to the physical magazine, but have been reading what is available online for the last few years. I have been a supporter of electronic books for nearly as long as they have been available to the public.

I was also glad when some of my favorite magazines decided to join the digital age and became available for e-reader devices and other such options. I just thought that I would say good work on the magazine app and thank you for providing this option for those of us who have wanted it for a long time.

MATTHEW FISHER
Katy

INDIGO SNAKE EXCITEMENT

Several years ago, three of us were birding at Choke Canyon State Park. We were leisurely walking on one of the paved paths when we came upon two of the largest snakes we had ever seen. They were "arguing" with each other. They kept rolling around, heads weaving about, seemingly trying to kill each other.

Bryan, our photographer, snapped pictures as fast as he could. We assumed they were mating, even if it seemed rather rough! I can't tell you how long this lasted. We just kept watching and Brian kept taking pictures. Finally, one snake slithered off the path. The event was over.

It was so exciting. I called my son to share my excitement. He told us they were indigo snakes and were highly desired by landowners because they eat rattlesnakes.

We felt as if we had been privileged to see one of nature's rare performances.

HARRIET SHEARER
Waco

SPECIAL PLACES, SPECIAL PLANTS

Thanks for the article by Ben Horstmann on our new state park, Resaca de la Palma ("Timeless Refuge," March 2015). It is a special place to visit indeed. I also enjoyed the article

by Dyanne Fry Cortez on noseburn in your March edition ("Mystery Sting-ers"). Another reason to appreciate this native plant is because it is the host plant for the red admiral, a spunky butterfly found in most places in Texas and one of my personal favorites.

I look forward to more articles on the unique native plants of Texas.

DREW BENNIE
San Benito

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SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

BIRDIE WATCHER

*Bastrop State
Park's historic
Lost Pines
golf course
is seeking a new
operator.*

As far as “help wanted” ads go, this offer’s quite unique. How’d you like to run a historic golf course, one that’s due to celebrate its 80th birthday in a few years? If the answer is affirmative, look no further than Bastrop.

As you travel Texas Highway 71 between Austin and Houston, you’ll pass through a town that calls itself the “most historic small town in Texas.” Bastrop offers more than 130 historic buildings, plus shopping and resorts, restaurants and recreation, but it’s the area’s natural beauty that makes it so memorable.

East of town stands a stretch of loblolly pines, known as the “Lost Pines of Texas,” so named for the fact that their closest genetic relatives are the majestic pines of East Texas, more than 100 miles away.

Nestled inside this unique natural feature lies Bastrop State Park, a 6,600-acre recreational haven for locals and tourists alike. Opened to the public in 1937, the park was originally developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration throughout the 1930s as part of President Roosevelt’s New Deal. Development included cabins, a refectory, a swimming pool and a nine-hole golf course. Because of the lasting legacy of the CCC work, the park was named a National Historic Landmark.

The golf course expanded in 1997 from its original nine holes to a full 18-hole course, now covering 135 acres.

“It’s just a piece of the fabric of this community,” says Jamie Hackett, Bastrop State Park superintendent.

In September 2011, the worst wildfire in Texas history tore through much of Bastrop County, burning a significant portion of the park. Thanks to the heroic efforts of the park staff, firefighters and others, the historic structures and the golf course were spared from damage. In fact, the golf course is frequently cited as one reason the fire did not reach the heart of the city of Bastrop.

The Lost Pines Golf Club, a nonprofit entity, recently ceased management of the Bastrop course after several decades, opening the door for a new operator.

The department is currently accepting proposals to find the next golf course operator. Interested parties can request a

prospectus by calling (512) 389-8086 or by emailing LeasedConcessions@tpwd.texas.gov.

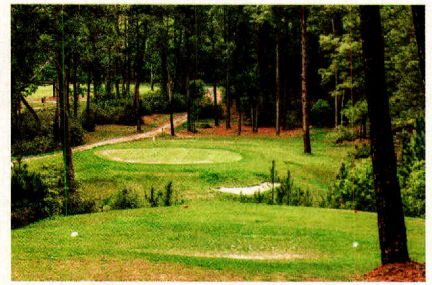
Considering the magnitude of operating a golf course, the state has leased this operation to a private entity for its entire history. These partnerships with the state are referred to as leased concession operations.

“These arrangements are vital to creating recreational opportunities for visitors, while facilitating profit and growth for both the concessionaire and the state park system,” says Austin Vieh, leased concession manager for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

To assist with the revitalization efforts, TPWD plans to help finance improvements to maximize the course’s customer appeal.

A golf course isn’t the typical state park offering, and TPWD has only a couple of courses in its inventory. Besides the Bastrop course, TPWD operates a nine-hole course at Lockhart State Park. Inks Lake State Park halted operation of its nine-hole Highland Lakes Golf Club in 2010, citing declining visitation.

—Thomas Wilhelm



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Photo by Dawn Huff



Beyond Shells and Surf

Unique programs enrich visitors' experiences at Galveston Island State Park.

As the park ranger sets the scene, a young visitor rolls a die.

"During our imaginary apocalypse, you found something to eat before the zombie found you!" announces ranger Lisa Reznicek with a grin. "It looks like

you didn't become more of a zombie this time."

At the end of the game, she counts up the number of good and bad rolls for each person and hands out candy. Those who were lucky enough to mostly avoid the zombies and thereby preserve their humanity receive more candy than those less fortunate.

It sounds like a crazy activity for a state park program, but Reznicek uses the game to help young people

learn about nature. She helps them figure out if they have the skills needed to survive in nature if the zombies attack.

Reznicek shows visitors how much they depend on the natural world in many of the programs she presents at Galveston Island State Park. When she succeeds, she also inspires them to help protect it.

On another day, Reznicek begins a beach hike by producing a plastic motor oil bottle with an odd shape cut into it.

"What made this hole?" she asks her audience. Nobody knows the answer. "A sea turtle bit into it, mistaking the bottle for food."

Reznicek points out a plastic bag left on the beach.

"It looks so much like the jellyfish that turtles eat," Reznicek says, "that they'll surely take a bite when it washes into the Gulf."

Moved to action, her audience helps her pick up trash on the beach.

This mix of exercise, learning and fun continues later in the day when Reznicek leads a kayak expedition on



PHOTOS BY CHASE A. FOUNTAIN / TPWD

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- Hike two miles of nature trails and stroll through colorful gardens at the East Texas Arboretum.
- Explore downtown Athens' historical museum, boutiques and galleries.
- Enjoy Cowboy Heritage at one of the local Rodeos.
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the bay side of the park. A certified kayak instructor, she teaches the skills needed for a safe and enjoyable trip, stopping periodically along the way to reveal how plants and animals live together. She also teaches geocaching and even night sky programs as healthy, enjoyable ways to connect with the natural world.

Building on a foundation for recovery from Hurricane Ike laid by the Friends of Galveston Island State Park, the park has come a long way in what it offers visitors today. Along with many programs like Reznicek's, the park offers both beach-side and bay-side campsites, birding, hiking and a nature center with hands-on exhibits to enrich the beachcombing, fishing and sunbathing for which it has long been known.

Check with park headquarters or the park website for more information about events and activities. Galveston Island State Park is located along FM 3005 (Seawall Boulevard) next to Jamaica Beach. For information, call (409) 737-1222 or visit <http://wd.texas.gov/galveston>.

—Walt Bailey

At Galveston Island State Park, visitors can learn about sea turtles on the beach side, left, and view tidal flats on the bay side, below. Rangers incorporate learning, exercise and fun into their programs to connect visitors to the natural world.




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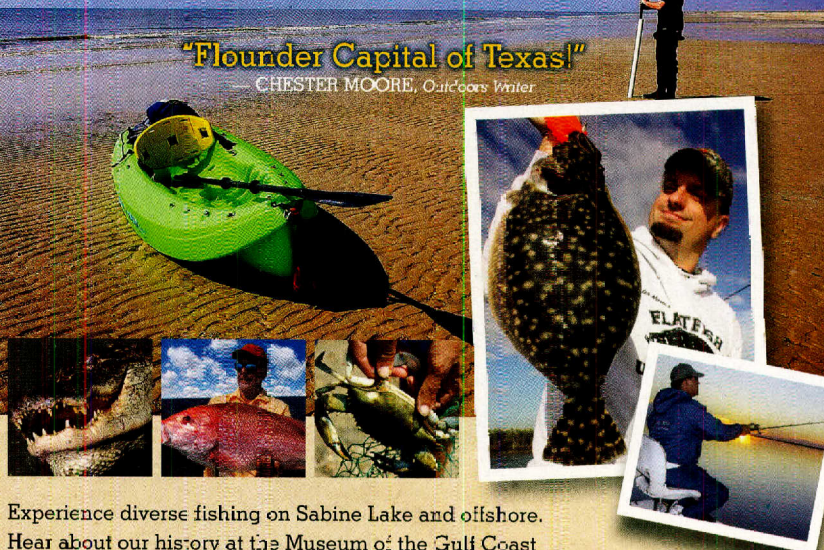
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Look, Don't Touch

If you run into prickly poppy, you'll understand the name.

Some wildflowers are aptly named. The white prickly poppy (*Argemone albiflora*) looks just like it sounds.

The flower is typical of the poppy family: symmetrical and cup-shaped, with four to six crinkly, fluttery petals. A crowd of bright yellow stamens surrounds a central pistil topped by a purple style. Fully open, the flower can be up to four inches across. It looks a lot like the red poppies of Belgium and France, except that its petals are pure white.

Underneath that pretty bloom is a very prickly plant. Leaves are deeply lobed with sharp tips on every point. Stems are studded with short, fierce spines. A typical specimen stands about three feet, sometimes taller, anchored by a taproot and branching near the

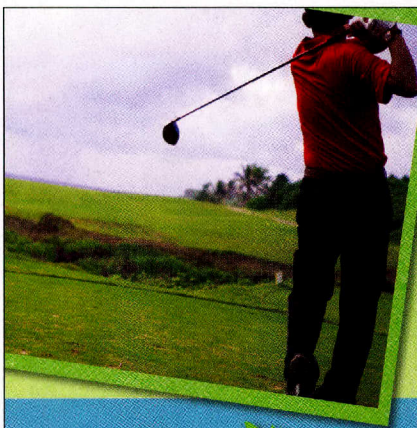
top. Seed pods are one to two inches long, rounded at one end with three horn-like projections at the other. The pods, too, are armed with spines.

White prickly poppy is common across the southeastern United States, forming large colonies in pastures and disturbed areas with sandy or gravelly soils. Flowers may appear as early as March, and can be seen as late as May or June. Some botanists recognize a subspecies, *A. albiflora* ssp. *texana*, found mostly in Texas and adjacent states. We also have the rose prickly poppy (*A. sanguinea*), whose deep pink flowers are seen along the Rio Grande, and two yellow-flowered

species, *A. mexicana* and *A. aenea*. The lavender Chisos Mountains prickly poppy (*A. chisosensis*) is found in far West Texas and northern Mexico. Other white-flowered species appear in different parts of the state. If it looks like a poppy on top and a thistle down below, it's probably one of the prickly poppies.

Are they useful plants or noxious weeds? Well, that depends on your point of view.

Cows and other grazing animals won't eat them. That's a good thing, because prickly poppies are dangerous on the inside, too. Their thick yellow sap contains alkaloid compounds that



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are toxic to mammals. Even the small, dark seeds are to be avoided: Cases of livestock poisoning have occurred when poppy seeds were accidentally mixed with feed grains.

On the other hand, these plants produce an abundance of pollen, enjoyed by native and domestic bees. Birds don't seem to be affected by toxins in the seeds, which provide food for dove, quail and turkey. The seeds are rich in oil, so they're a good source of concentrated energy for creatures that can eat them. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that oil from *A. albiflora* seeds was used as a fine lubricant during World War II.



Many toxic plants have medicinal uses, and the poppy family is certainly no exception. Its most famous member, *Papaver somniferum*, is the source of opium and its derivative drugs. Prickly poppies don't contain opium, but Native Americans found many uses for the alkaloids in that yellow sap. Preparations made from different prickly poppy species have been used to treat skin disorders, eye problems, headaches, toothaches, digestive trouble, coughs, colds and insomnia.


Unless there's a skilled herbalist in the family, it is not recommended to try these remedies at home. For most of us, the best thing to do with prickly poppies is keep a safe distance and admire the blooms.

—Dyanne Fry Cortez

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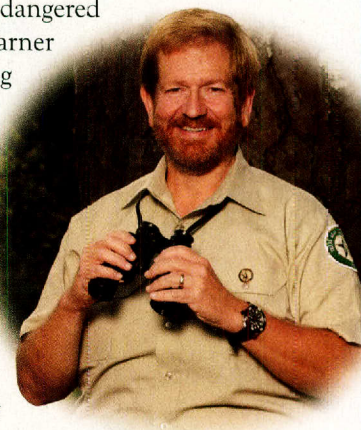
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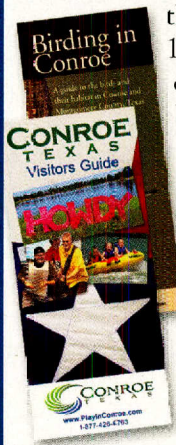
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John Warner, Urban Forester with Texas A&M Forest Service at the W. Goodrich Jones State Forest.



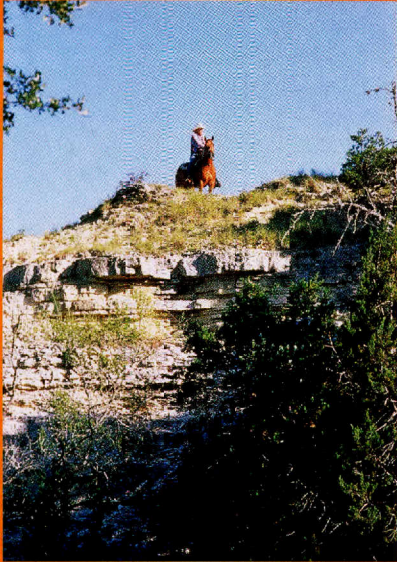
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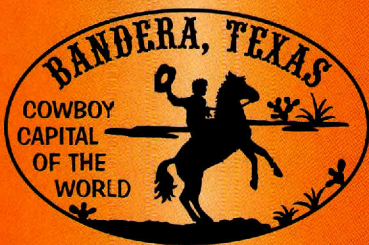
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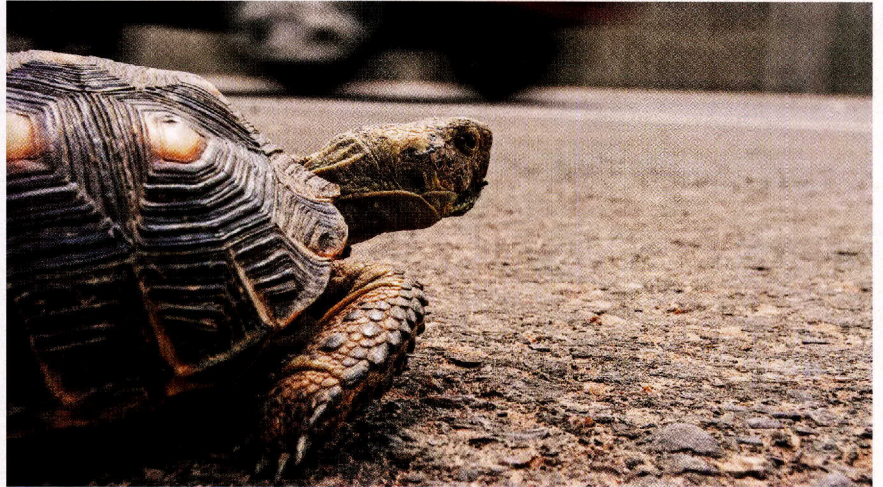
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Tortoise Crossing

Already threatened, Texas tortoises face danger from roadways.



Driving on U.S. Highway 281 in South Texas, I slammed on my brakes and jumped out to see if it was still alive. Just as I feared, yet another Texas tortoise was dead on the side of the road. My colleagues had sighted several tortoises moving in the area the day before, but as my luck (or perhaps the tortoise's bad luck) would have it, all the tortoises I found that day were roadkills. Within the next few days we found seven — some dead, some alive.

With their high-domed shells, scaly legs and curious gait, Texas tortoises are unique and beautiful creatures. North America has four of the world's 45 or so tortoise species, but here in Texas we have only the Texas tortoise, or *Gopherus berlandieri*. The Texas tortoise, once heavily collected for the pet trade, is on the state's list of threatened species, which prohibits its capture or sale. *Gopherus berlandieri* is the only tortoise species in the country not federally listed under the Endangered Species Act.

During our field season between March and October of 2014, my group of researchers at Texas State University surveyed the eastern and northern portion of the tortoise's range. This research, funded by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, sought to evaluate the presence of Texas tortoises in those regions,

where recent sightings have not been reported. This represents an area just south of San Antonio. The tortoise's full range stretches over South Texas and northern Mexico.

We drove more than 20,000 miles (almost the circumference of the Earth!) during this period and found only those seven tortoises along the roads. We used this data and added reported public tortoise sightings to create a map showing suitable habitat for the Texas tortoise. We found that parts of the area surveyed could potentially be suitable despite not finding many tortoises.

The 32,000 miles of roads that run through prime tortoise habitat represent a major threat to this species. About 6 million vehicles are driven on these roads every day, and there are more than 4 million acres with deer-proof fencing south of San Antonio. These obstacles act as barriers to tortoise movement.

If you do find a tortoise on the side of the road, help it cross the road safely but do not take it home. It is illegal to possess a tortoise without a valid permit. Please post any sightings of a Texas tortoise to www.inaturalist.org/projects/texas-tortoise-survey to help improve our study.

—Anjana Parandhaman

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Better Wildlife Photography

Avoiding these three errors will get you closer to pulling off that winning animal shot.



As you turn the pages in your favorite outdoor magazine, you may notice that the beautiful wildlife images taken by professional photographers seem to jump off the page with visual impact and possess a certain “presence.” This leads many aspiring photographers to wonder, “Why can’t I get good pictures like that?”

There are three basic reasons why most wildlife photos DON’T attain that “wow” factor that we all look for.

NOT GETTING CLOSE ENOUGH

All too often, that animal we photographed from our vehicle or front porch ends up looking like a small speck in the distance, despite having a good zoom/telephoto lens on the camera. Many photographers

mistakenly believe that a longer lens will magically bring an animal up close, allowing them to shoot from hundreds of feet or more. The dirty little secret is that, even with a powerful lens such as a 300mm, up to a 600mm, you still have to be physically close, especially for a close-up portrait shot. This is where patience, planning and luck pay off.

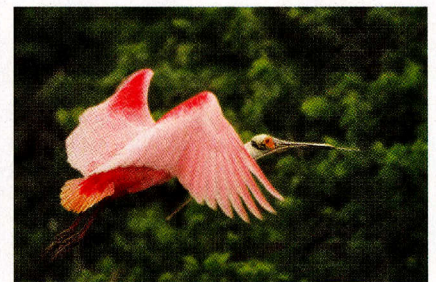
Getting close may involve setting up a blind, stalking an animal or photographing in areas where animals are not spooked by human presence. These could include backyard feeders, parks, zoos, wildlife refuges or game ranches. The best image will be the one that fills the frame with the animal, leaving just enough room around it to show its environment. Don’t forget the rules of composition, though, and avoid centering any subject in the dead-center of the frame.

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NOT USING CREATIVE LIGHTING

As you look over the images taken by professional wildlife photographers, you will likely notice that, almost without exception, they were taken under artistically pleasing lighting conditions. Usually, this involves the “magic light” times of morning or evening, when the warm-colored light creates a much more pleasing color palette than the harsh and contrasty noon to midday sun.

Alternately, shooting under atmospheric conditions as fog, or even rain, can add an artistic feel. Rarely will you see any great photograph taken under a noon sun on a clear day without some type of lighting modifier such as a reflector or diffuser.



Unfortunately, most photographers get started too late in the morning and miss the best lighting. As the old saw goes, "You snooze — you lose."

NOT SHOWING ANIMAL BEHAVIOR OR BODY LANGUAGE

Even with a good close-up taken under nice lighting, if the animal is just standing there you've lost a big portion of the recipe for an outstanding wildlife photograph. By showing some unique aspect of an animal's behavior, body language or motion, you can add that extra dimension that puts your photo over the top. Capturing a sharp image of any animal in motion can be challenging, but it's much better than a static pose. This is where practicing with your equipment (especially auto-focus features) pays off in the spontaneity required.

If the animal is not in motion, be patient and wait for those moments when it exhibits some type of behavior, such as when a deer snorts or makes a rub or scrape. Some great bird behavior includes preening, bathing or getting ready to take off.

The stealthy and elusive quality of most animals means that luck is always a factor for any wildlife photographer — amateur or professional. However, with some prior planning of the location and time of day to shoot, as well as the patience to wait for that split-second of unique behavior, you can increase the odds of getting that trophy wildlife photograph.

— Earl Nottingham

Please send questions and comments to Earl at earl.nottingham@tpwd.texas.gov. For more tips on outdoor photography, visit the magazine's photography page at www.tpwmagazine.com/photography.

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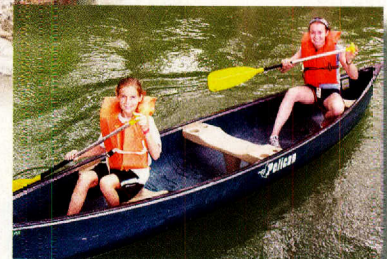
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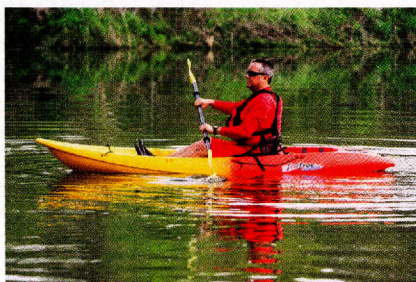
A primer on how to get your kayak to go where you want.

At kayak class, after donning life jackets and launching, kayakers typically learn four basic strokes that every paddler should know. In my classes, we always start with the backward stroke, or “stop.” This way, once you learn how to go forward, you’ll be able to stop, rather than float away.

Practice these four basic strokes, and before you know it, you will be having a great time on the water!

BEFORE YOU

BEGIN: Start by sitting up straight in the kayak, with your nose over your belly button, your knees slightly bent and your feet against the foot rests. Hold the paddle with a soft grip at shoulder width, elbows at a right angle. Twist your torso for your strokes to preserve your stamina.

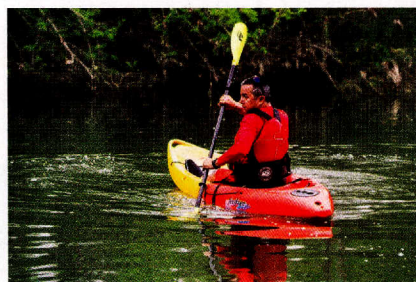


STOP: To stop your kayak, simply plant your paddle blade into the water in an upright position right at or just behind your hip. To stop more quickly, push forward in short strokes and repeat. Plant to either the left or right side of your boat, and if your momentum begins to turn the boat in that direction, simply switch your “brake” to the opposite side. Repeat this pattern until your boat has come to a complete stop.



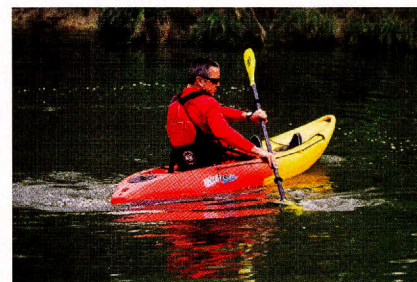
REVERSE:

To paddle in reverse, use the back side of the paddle blade. Look over either shoulder, reach back and plant the paddle directly alongside the kayak. Next, press down and forward as you follow through with your entire body. Switch to the opposite side and repeat. When paddling in reverse, it’s important to look over your shoulder and keep the paddle blade close and perpendicular to the kayak in order to avoid inadvertently turning the boat or rocking from side to side. Practice makes perfect until you can execute a smooth and straight reverse paddle maneuver.



TURN: Once you know how to stop and go backward, you can practice turning. The most common stroke to turn a kayak is the sweep.

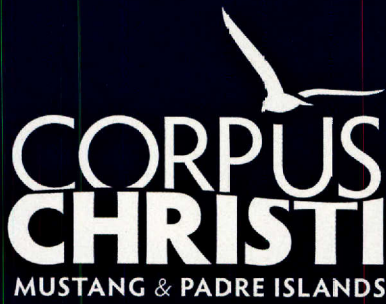
To execute the sweep, rotate the torso, lean forward and place the blade near the side of the kayak at the bow. Push the concave side (power face) of the blade out and in a wide arcing motion away from the kayak and then all the way back to the stern. Rotate your torso through the entire stroke. When the blade reaches the stern, lift and return it to the bow and repeat as necessary to complete the turn. Avoid leaning into your stroke, but rather turn your head and torso.



FORWARD:

To execute the forward stroke, begin by sitting up with good posture, holding your arms resting comfortably at your side with a right angle at the elbows and a soft grip on the shaft. Press your feet against the foot rests to provide additional leverage while you execute the stroke. Then, fully submerge the blade, power side back, in the water adjacent to your feet about 18 to 24 inches outside of the kayak. Experiment with which placement works for you, as too close results in lost power and too far out causes the kayak to turn. You will get a feel for what works for you. Your goal is to propel the bow forward in a smooth, straight line. Practice keeping a relaxed grip on the shaft and then using your entire body, smoothly rotating with the motion, as you push the paddle blade backward. At the end of the stroke, just behind your hip, lift the blade out of the water, then repeat with the other blade on the opposite side. Easy does it — try for smooth, efficient strokes to maximize power, and don’t forget to press on the foot pegs for added leverage in your stroke. ★





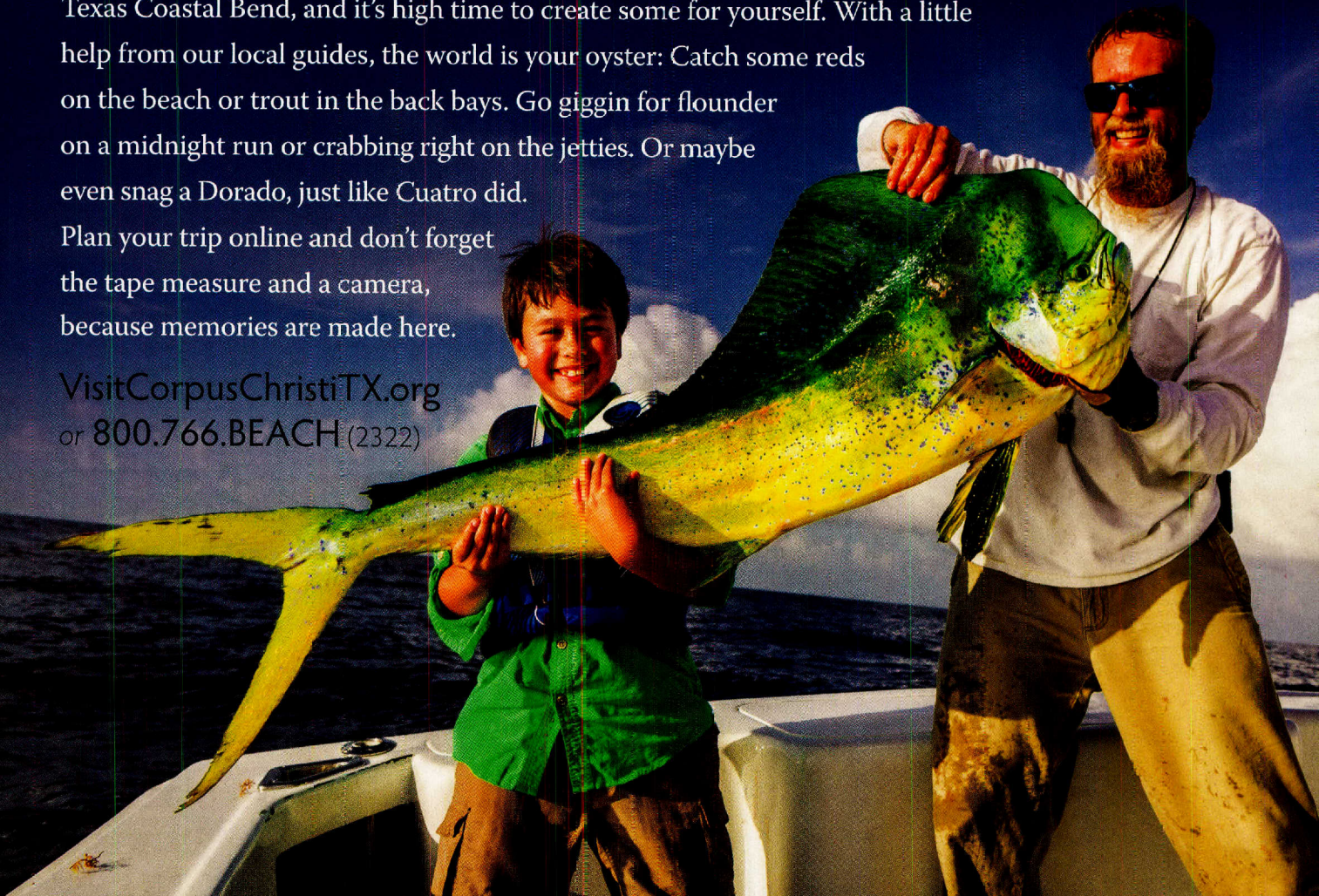
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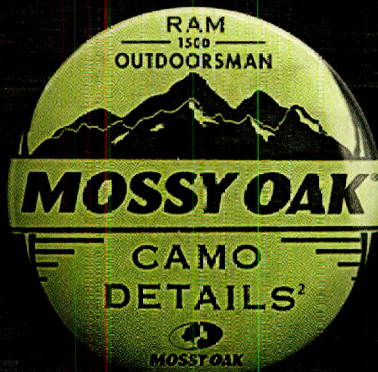
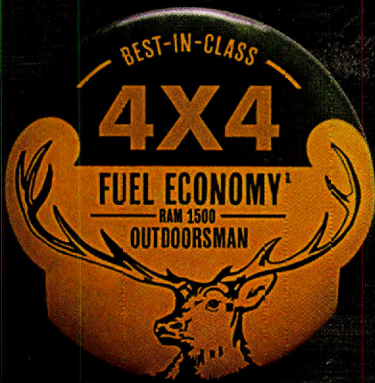
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3 Days in the Field / By Janet Kilgore

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More Fun, Less Fuss

Less time spent cooking means more time to enjoy South Llano River State Park.

Before our visit, we already knew that South Llano River State Park sits deep in the Hill Country just outside Junction, an ideal destination for all kinds of outdoor enthusiasts. My husband, Bryan, and I were surprised, however, when we learned that it's a hundred-mile round-trip to the nearest big-box store.

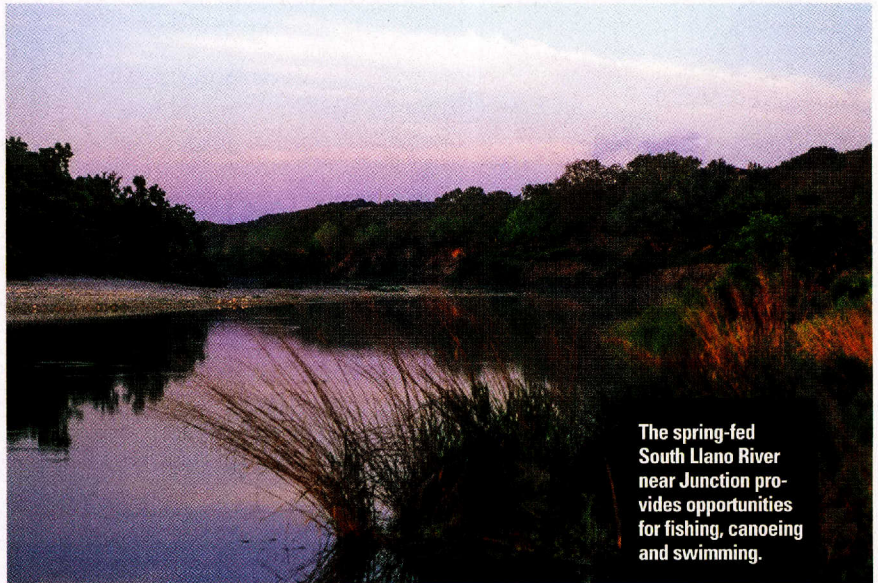
What might be a deal-breaker for some folks is just the kind of challenge we like. It gives us a chance to do the type of camping we prefer: minimalist camping.

For our visit, we checked in at the park in early November, shortly after the opening of deer season, which swells Junction's population of 2,600 each fall. (The park closes a few days each season to accommodate permitted hunts for those chosen by drawing.)

No matter the time of year you visit, South Llano River is a family-friendly retreat, just a few hours' drive from several Texas cities. The park is small, with 58 water and electric sites spaced far enough apart for a sense of privacy.

"The South Llano River is spring-fed from an area called 700 Springs, so it's rarely affected by drought," Superintendent Matthew Shelley tells us at the camp headquarters. "We also have one of the largest winter Rio Grande turkey roosts in Texas. You can hike into the preserve and see them."

Texas state parks provide camping for everyone from backpackers to RVers. Bryan and I have been minimalist campers for more than 25 years, and it's worked well for us in parks all over the state. This kind of camping falls between backpacking



The spring-fed South Llano River near Junction provides opportunities for fishing, canoeing and swimming.

and staying in a pop-up camper and is fun for kids and adults.

Look for a state park near any vacation destination as an excellent way to stretch your travel or vacation dollars. Why stay in an expensive, cramped hotel room when you can stay in a state park for a fraction of the cost? Your children will wear themselves out running around after a day in the car and will sleep like little logs. Quiet campgrounds provide a welcome counterpoint to amusement parks and city traffic, and many parks offer swimming pools or cool wading streams. All you need are a few tips to transition to this kind of camping.

I was 40+ the first time I went camping, and before then I'd had every intention of avoiding it the rest of my life. Eight years of Bryan's gentle prodding, and his promise to do all the

work, convinced me to give it a try. As I packed for every possible contingency, the car sagged lower and lower, and we finally got away three hours late. Four miles from the house I panicked and demanded we go back for my mascara. Bryan drove on.

"There's no mascara in camping!" he insisted.

That first camping experience ended on a rainy day. We couldn't cook in the rain, so I sat in the car's backseat and made bologna sandwiches. Holding a jar with a soggy label, slathering mayonnaise on soggy bread, I knew there had to be a better way.

The first time I enjoyed camping was the first time we left the cooler at home. Bryan and I took up minimalist camping and never went back. For us, that means not taking anything we could do without, especially the cooler.

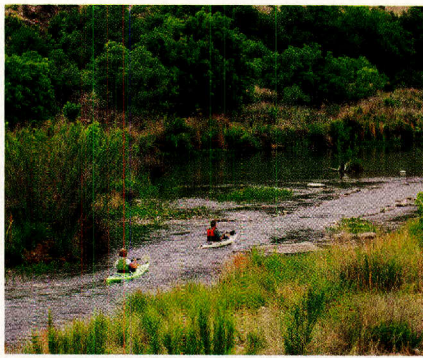
It requires learning to make good meals with nonperishable foods. Sodas become a treat, not a staple.

We have made accommodations for our aging joints over the years — now we sleep on padded cots — but our camp meals remain easy and our cooler remains at home. The average meal takes only 15 to 20 minutes to prepare, and cleanup is a breeze, usually consisting of just one pot. You won't spend most of your time cooking and washing up, and you'll have more time for fun and enjoying the outdoors.

On our South Llano River State Park campout, Bryan was dealing with a badly broken finger and still had a couple of weeks to go before getting the cast off. I had to plan on three hands instead of four to pitch the tent, unload the car and set up the cots. We just didn't know how much he would be able to do. We packed everything light enough for me to carry, just in case. As it turned out, we managed fine with Bryan's one hand and my two.

Day One of our trip starts with loading the car and driving to the park. We arrive in plenty of time to set up the tent and settle into our campsite. Checking the bulletin board at the restroom, I discover a program about wild hogs and javelinas scheduled for early evening. Time for a nap and quick supper before making the short walk to the amphitheater area.

Park interpreter Bertha Schmalfeldt explains the difference between wild (feral) hogs and native javelinas — which are not hogs at all — and the pros and



South Llano River State Park is a Hill Country destination for nature lovers who want to go camping, hiking, paddling, wildflower viewing or wildlife watching. Ranger programs offer insight into the area's wildlife.



cons of each animal. The wild hogs are loaded with cons; they can be aggressive and they overpopulate. They tear up the ground as they root for food, destroying parklands and crops alike in the process. Schmalfeldt says javelinas may look fierce but are relatively harmless unless they feel cornered. I make a mental note not to corner any I come across.

On Day Two, Schmalfeldt hosts Bryan and three teenagers on a guided hike. A veteran hiker, Bryan finds the pace of the teenagers on the hilly trail a satisfying challenge. Tonight's talk in the amphitheater is on porcupines, which are native to the park area. Viewed from a discreet distance, porcupines are fascinating animals with quirky personalities. Who knew?

One of my favorite aspects of camping is visiting with other campers and with locals in nearby towns. As soon as Bryan disappears over the hill

on his hike, I head to town.

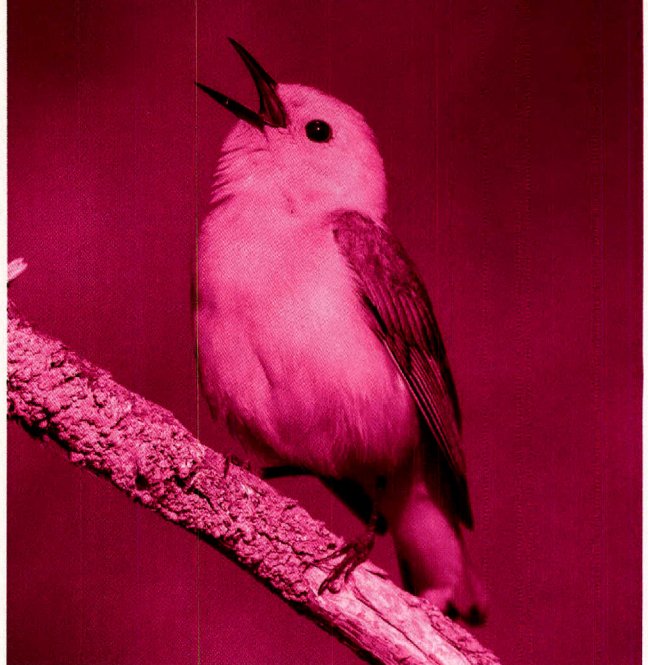
I follow the highway through Junction and stop at Plumley's Country Store, a modern establishment made to look like an old-time general store. Inside, half the space holds refrigerated cases filled with local pecans, shelled and unshelled, and exotic city fare like yogurt. Shelves display spices, barbecue rubs, honey, syrup, books and other Texana. If you can't find a souvenir in there, you're not trying. The other half of the store has a lunch counter and a few booths, where customers can order hamburgers and old-fashioned milkshakes. It's perfect for eating ice cream and people-watching.

I make it back to camp just in time to meet up with Bryan and fix dinner. His hiking group saw some wildlife signs (scat and tracks) on the hike, but he was most impressed by the teenagers. They enthusiastically asked questions, curious about everything around them. Bryan was inordinately proud of himself for being able to answer more of Schmalfeldt's "Who knows...?" questions than the teenagers.

Dinner is Indian mushroom masala with potatoes, chicken, sliced ripe olives and artichoke hearts, served over rice. Sounds impressive for camping, but it's easy, and remember, no cooler! The masala, rice and chicken come in ready-to-eat pouches I heat in pans of hot water on the propane stove. When our children camp with us, I usually cook some variation of mac and cheese and combine it with canned meats and

Continued on Page 52





TEXAS

BY CLIFF SHACKELFORD

Whoever came up with the phrase “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” was quite a diplomat, but I had to throw diplomacy out the window when selecting our state’s 12 most beautiful birds. Just think, Texas has nearly 640 species, and only 12 of them, or less than 2 percent, could make the cut!

Some readers will wonder why I omitted some extra-popular beauties like the cedar waxwing, wood duck, blue jay, northern cardinal and painted bunting. Sorry, but sometimes a bunch of bling — I’m looking at you, Mr. Painted Bunting — is just too much. About a century and a half ago, John James Audubon declared that the painted bunting was spectacularly colored but simply too gaudy. Who am I to disagree with one of our country’s all-time masters of bird art?

As an ornithologist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, I love all birds. If diplomacy was my only consideration, I’d give the honor to all Texas birds and call it a 639-way tie.

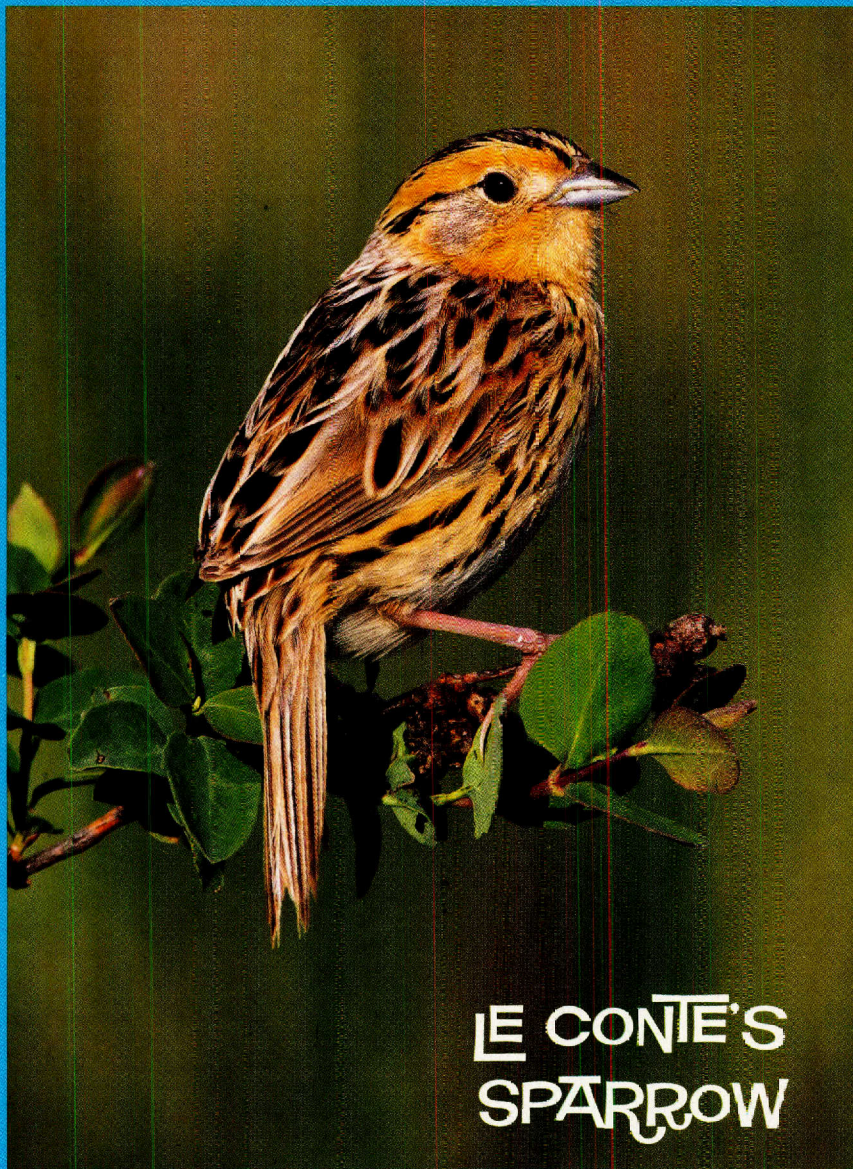
Of course, there are lots of lovely avian contenders for the most beautiful list. The “beauty” of it is that every time I go afield, I see things differently and have new favorites. After all, Mother Nature has provided us with many stunning treats just waiting to be observed and enjoyed.

With no more apologies, here — in my opinion — are the 12 most beautiful birds in Texas.

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER



PHOTO © GLENN BARTLEY / MINDEN PICTURES

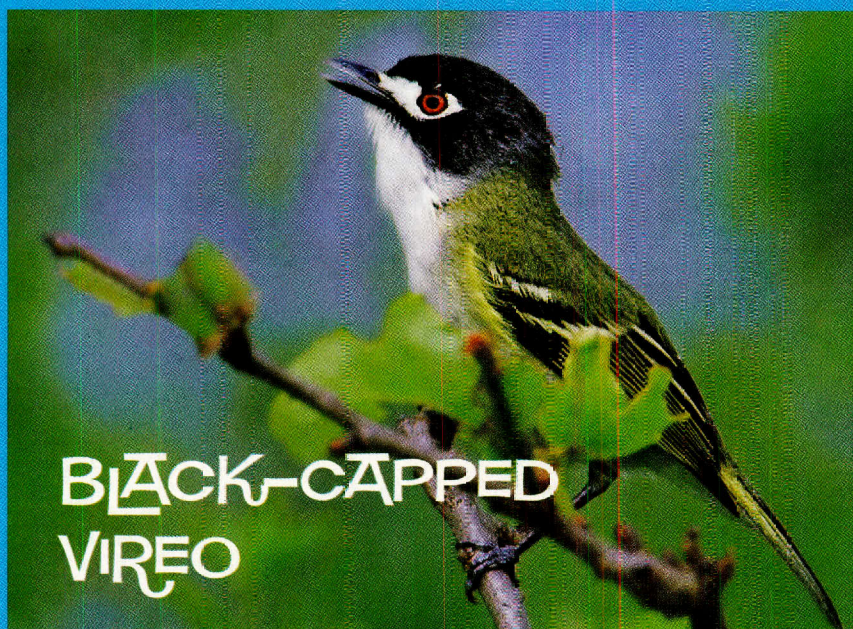


LE CONTE'S SPARROW

PHOTO © ROBERT ROYSE / MINDEN PICTURES

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER: Consider the crisp, solid hues of black, white and red. Maybe a laundry detergent should use this bird as its spokes-model because its colors “never fade, never run.” With more than 15 species of woodpeckers in Texas, this one steals the show with color and *chutzpah*. If you’re lucky enough to have a red-headed woodpecker visit your seed feeder, you’ll see that all the other birds make way, perhaps intimidated by the black and white tux, brilliant red hood and powerful beak.

LE CONTE’S SPARROW: Named in honor of a physician and naturalist from Georgia, these winter residents of native warm-season grasses are tough to spot until they finally flush. If a shrub is nearby, they’ll often sit up for a moment, showing that they’re not merely an “LBJ” (the colloquial birders’ term “little brown job” for sparrows, suggesting they all look drab and alike). Actually, there are other members in this genus (*Ammodramus*) that are just as gorgeous, but there’s something about the Le Conte’s broad, buff eyebrow and intricate ring around the collar that keeps me staring when I’m fortunate enough to kick one up.



BLACK-CAPPED VIREO

PHOTO © DAVE WELLS

BLACK-CAPPED VIREO: It’s not easy to see an entire black-capped vireo in a single view. These shy beauties don’t like to sit out in the open for long; they’d rather hop around in the shrubs in search of hidden insects. I once saw this endangered songbird years ago at a well-known hot spot for the species — the parking lot of Hippie Hollow on Lake Travis near Austin. Yes, this popular clothing-optional swimming area was a frequent hangout for enthusiastic birders equipped with binoculars. The vireo hasn’t been seen at this site in quite some time; its return is doubtful due to urban encroachment.

VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW:

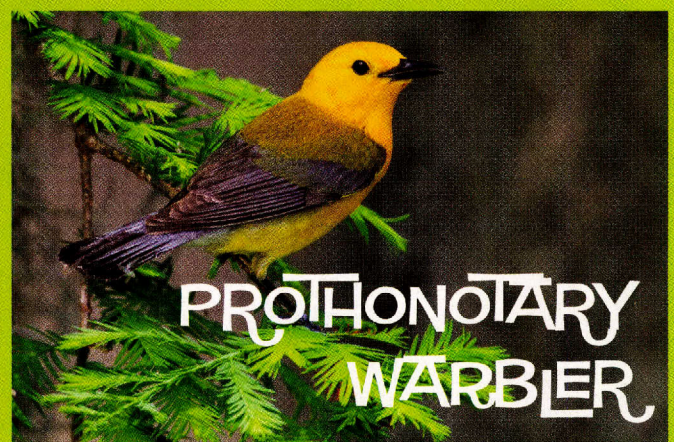
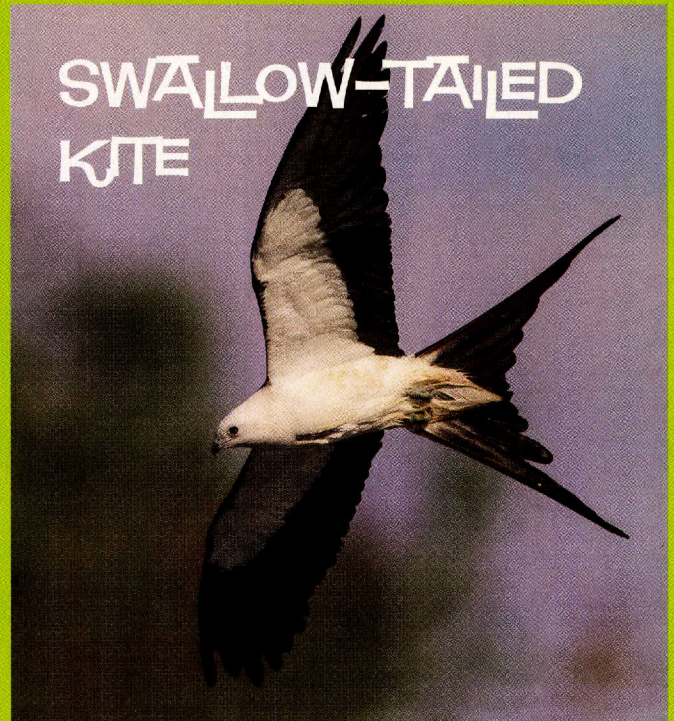
Iridescence adds beauty and variety to the feather coloration of many dark Texas birds. In good light, nothing beats the violet-green swallow as its green-purple topside feathers contrast with a snow-white underbelly. Iridescence — caused by light bending and twisting when refracted by structural features in the feathers — offers the observer an avian rainbow of colors in a West Texas stream or canyon.

SWALLOW-TAILED KITE:

Beauty can be found in the way this Southeast Texas nester flies. Picture a simple black and white bird soaring gracefully and effortlessly against a bright blue sky. They sure make flight look easy. To find one, look to the sky in spring or summer where the southern fringes of the Pineywoods meet the coastal prairies. That's where most of them reside. Swallowtails use their effortless flight to overwinter in Brazil.

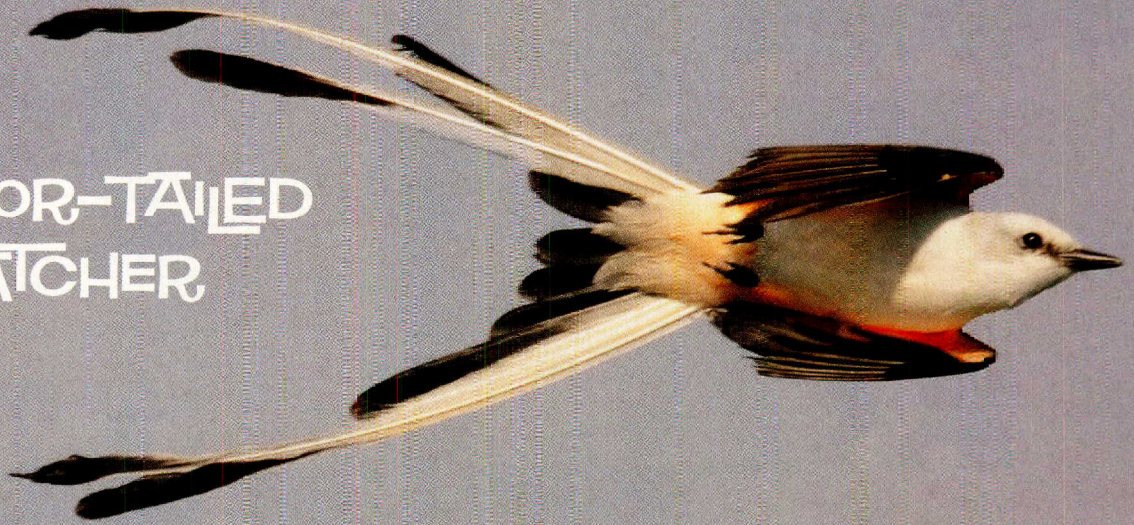
PROTHONOTARY WARBLER:

"Golden swamp fire" is just one old-fashioned name for this tiny songbird of East Texas' hardwood forests, swamps and sloughs. Not only do they spritz up the dark river bottoms with a vibrant yellow when they arrive in spring, but their distinctive song also rings loudly, proclaiming their breeding territory. Prothonotary warbler and Lucy's warbler (of the dry southwest) are the nation's two cavity-nesting warblers. I've seen some cleverly placed nests of the golden swamp fire in boathouses and sheds when the door was left open. The birds sometimes come in and nest in an old boot in the closet or a coffee can on a shelf.



PHOTOS CLOCKWISE @ ROB CURTIS / EARLY BIRDER, RON BIELEFELD / MINDEN PICTURES, LARRY DITTO

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER



SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER: The scissor-tailed flycatcher is the official state bird of Oklahoma. When several states (including Texas) selected the northern mockingbird for state honors, South Carolina smartly switched to the Carolina wren. It's never too late, Texas (hint, hint)! This flycatcher's peachy sides and flowing tail can spice up any barbed-wire fence or power line. During fall migration, massive roosts of scissor-tails can form — sometimes in cities — with hundreds and hundreds of birds. With a background of the setting sun, it's definitely a beautiful sight (and noisy sound) to behold.

MONTÉZUMA QUAIL: Often called "fool's quail," the male Montezuma quail is a spectacular vision — no fooling. Historically found throughout most of the Hill Country, far east of its current range, this bird digs in shallow soil in search of tasty roots and tubers. What we dig with shovels, these birds unearth with strong feet and thick nails. Native grasses (often missing where livestock continuously graze) on rocky slopes out West are a favored spot for this handsome bird. The best place to see this "lifer" in Texas is the water-drip and bird-feeding station at Davis Mountains State Park.

MONTÉZUMA QUAIL

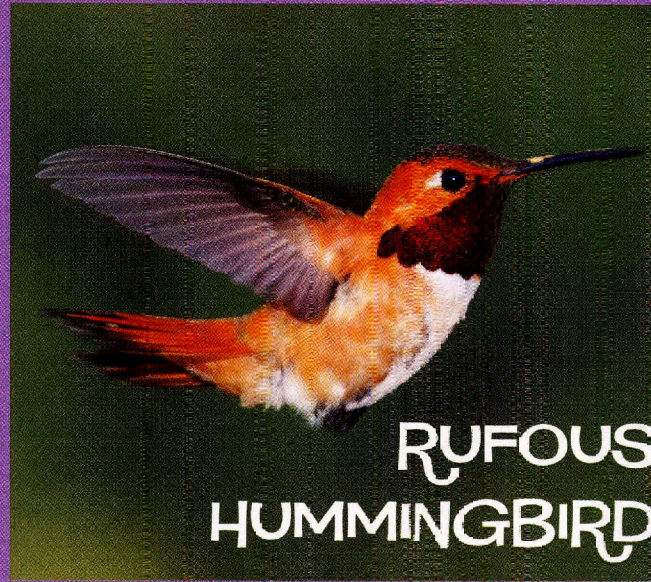


PHOTOS TOP TO BOTTOM © ROBERT BUNCH, LARRY DITTO

HOODED MERGANSER



PHOTO © GARY KRAMER



RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD

PHOTO © LARRY DITTO

TRICOLORED HERON

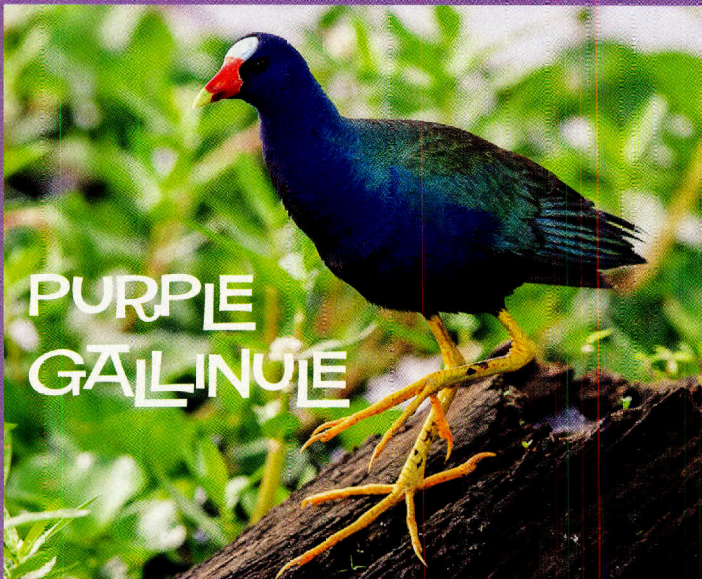
TRICOLORED HERON: This selection was prompted by a sighting of an adult tricolored heron in prime breeding plumage foraging in perfect light along a small pond on Galveston Island last year, giving me one of those “wow” moments. Perfect light was the key, as the nature photographers all know, because it was not too bright, not too dark, just right. I observed varying shades of purple and blue, including baby blue on the bill, but it was the straw-colored showy plumes on its back that hit me like a brick. I couldn’t stop staring.



PHOTO © ROBERT BUNCH

...AND THREE "OTHER" ONES

There are only a few Texas species that aren't exactly beauties.



PURPLE
GALLINULE

PHOTO © LEE HOY PHOTOGRAPHY

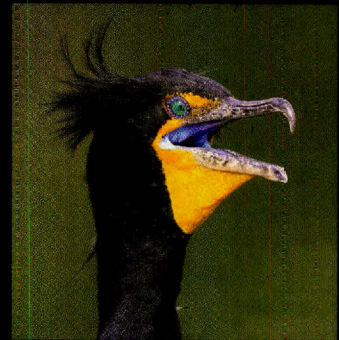
HOODED MERGANSER: The hooded merganser doesn't sport any pretty greens or blues like other beautiful ducks. It's a simple black and white bird with cinnamon sides, but the all-white rounded crest atop the male's head steals the show. When a male gets excited or agitated, he can flare that crest to wow any audience. Unlike Texas' other waterfowl, the hooded merganser and its two merganser cousins have an appetite for fish. A serrated bill helps mergansers catch and hold their slippery meals before swallowing.

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD: The lucky backyard nature enthusiast who properly maintains a hummingbird feeder may be rewarded with a fast-flying rufous hummingbird. When one speeds by, the flash of color from this hardy hummer is reminiscent of a newly minted copper penny. Most Texas sightings occur during the colder months, when we're not expecting hummingbirds to be around. To maintain that feeder throughout the year here in mild Texas, use a ratio of four parts water to one part sugar; red dye is not necessary. Sign up with TPWD's Hummingbird Roundup to report your backyard sightings (tpwd.texas.gov/hummingbirds).

PURPLE GALLINULE: The purple gallinule is not only beautiful, it can practically walk on water. Strong, thick feet with long toes enable this wetland inhabitant to stride across lily pads and other floating aquatic vegetation, appearing to walk on water. While doing so, the purple gallinule is searching for a variety of vegetable and animal matter found in, atop or under this floating vegetation. The birds often cock and flick their short tail, revealing a bright patch of white underneath.



The rumped **SEASIDE SPARROW** has disheveled feathers and an "I-just-tumbled-out-of-bed" look.



Take your gaze away from her crystal-blue eyes and there's nothing sexy about a **DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT**.



When the ducks all stood in line to get their uniforms, the **GADWALLS** must have been last and were left with drab. No wonder waterfowl hunters refer to them simply as "gray duck."

PHOTOS TOP TO BOTTOM © ALAN MURPHY / MINDEN PICTURES, MARTIN B. WITHERS / MINDEN PICTURES, GUY EDWARDS / MINDEN PICTURES



VENOMOUS

PHOTO © JIM OLIVE

Copperhead

SOMEWHERE IN THE WOODS,

a small coil of reddish-tan scales shifts, snuggling up closer to a fallen oak branch that stretches through the leaf litter. A pale red tongue flicks out, testing the air. The copperhead waits patiently for a mouse or a frog to wander close enough to become its next meal. Completely silent and able to remain essentially motionless, the little reptile blends perfectly into the mosaic of leaves on the woodland floor.

VIPERS

Snakes can be frightening, but only a handful are dangerous in Texas.

BY MICHAEL SMITH

Nearby, another copperhead hides under a tarp in a pile of junk. This little snake might have overwintered there, in the lee of a shed, or perhaps it had recently wandered in to eat a mouse. In any case, this particular copperhead is about to change Johnny Kratky's life. It is Kratky's tarp, and today is the day he has decided to clear out the junk. After pulling the tarp off, he reaches down for the first piece of debris and his finger is hit with a sting "like a red wasp." Kratky sees the copperhead, and his wife drives him to the hospital, 45 minutes away in Fort Worth.



Copperhead

PHOTO © TODD PUSSEY / MINDEN PICTURES. SCALES © SETH PATTERSON

Thankfully, he's almost certain to survive the bite. Copperhead venom is less potent than that of other species, and these small snakes have short fangs that can inject only a relatively small dose. Less than 1 percent of those bitten will die from a copperhead bite. In fact, death from any venomous snakebite is quite rare; the state reported from zero to two deaths per year from snakebite between 1997 and 2005. Fewer people died from snakebite during this time than from lightning strikes.

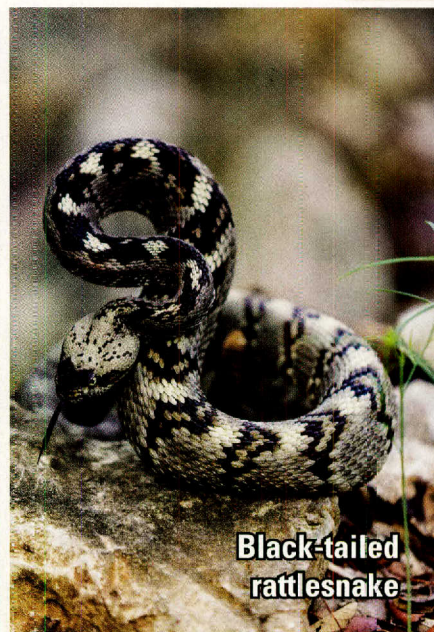
Snake venom was not designed as a defense against humans but

rather as a service to help acquire a meal. The copperhead lying in wait in the woods uses its venom to disable and kill prey that might otherwise get away. The mouse bitten by a copperhead may scramble a short distance before dying, but the snake can easily track it down and eat it. Snake venom is made up of proteins, some of which begin the process of digestion by breaking down the animal's tissues even before the prey is swallowed. The combination of venom glands and hollow fangs for injecting venom make up an elaborate hunting arsenal for the snake.

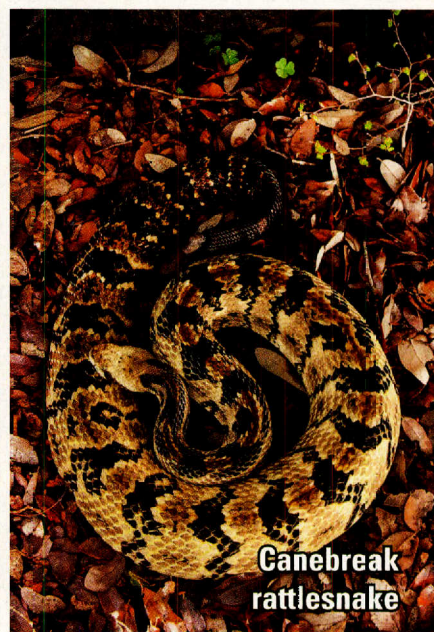
Aiding this hunting arsenal is the "pit organ" located between the eye and nostril of copperheads, cottonmouths and rattlesnakes. These membrane-covered depressions in the snake's face are sensitive to infrared energy and enable the snake to "see" warm objects in complete darkness—the snake's version of an infrared scope. A rattlesnake waiting to ambush prey on a moonless night can detect a wood rat making its way along a trail and accurately aim a strike based on information from its pit organs. Snakes that have these remarkable organs are called pit vipers.



Western diamondback rattlesnake



Black-tailed rattlesnake



Canebrake rattlesnake

COPPERHEADS

As you've learned from the unlucky Johnny Kratky, copperheads are small pit vipers with a venom that's less potent than that of other species. They reach a length of 20 to 36 inches. Copperheads are patterned with red or brown crossbands on a tan background and use their camouflage coloring to elude predators. Like other pit vipers, these snakes don't lay eggs — females hold the eggs inside until birth. Active during spring and fall days and summer evenings, these slow movers feed on small

animals and insects. They use their tail to lure prey to within striking distance. They are found throughout much of the state, more frequently in the eastern half.

RATTLESNAKES

In the United States, probably the most feared pit vipers are rattlesnakes. There are eight species of rattlesnakes in Texas, ranging from the western pygmy rattlesnake, no more than about 18 inches long, to the western diamondback rattlesnake, which can grow to 5 or 6 feet in length (the record is slightly more than 7

feet). What they share in common is a tail tipped with a string of hollow rattles, which produce a buzzing or high-pitched rattling sound when vibrated by specialized muscles. A baby rattlesnake is born with a tail that has nothing more than a button composed of keratin, the same stuff that makes fingernails. As the snake grows, it periodically sheds its skin; with each shed it adds a new segment to the rattle, of which the button becomes the last part. The rattle segments are hollow and interlocking, so they rattle against each other when shaken.

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE © LARRY DITTO, JEROD FOSTER, JIM OLIVE



PHOTO © SETH PATTERSON

The rattled warning is one strategy the snakes use to avoid getting hurt. Their primary defense, though, is to avoid being seen. Once when I was hiking with friends, a footstep prompted the *chick-chick-chick* of a rattlesnake tail beginning to twitch but not fully rattling. We were walking through thin grass on rocky ground, and the snake was very difficult to see as it sat motionless. I froze. We looked around, located the snake (a western diamondback) and stepped away without incident. If we had not come quite so close, the snake would have remained silent and we never would have known it was there.

A related species, the mottled rock rattlesnake, can sport different camouflage patterns to match the local rock and gravel habitat. At the edge of the Hill Country and

near the Pecos River, where chalky gray limestone predominates, these little rattlesnakes are often light gray in color, with few markings. Farther west, where the rocks and mountains are darker and more volcanic, the snakes have more color, sometimes a reddish or an olive or buff color. This is a small species, with most rock rattlesnakes measuring less than 2 feet. Being hard to see is a definite advantage for them.

Among Texas rattlesnakes, the most feared is surely the western diamondback rattlesnake, perhaps because it also claims first place as “most dangerous.” The danger comes from its large size and correspondingly large venom glands and long fangs, as well as its temperament, which is often irritable. Although many of these snakes freeze or attempt to retreat

when first confronted, if one feels truly threatened it can put up a furious defense. The forward part of the body rises off the ground and pulls back, ready to strike, as the rattle buzzes loudly and continuously. The snake tests the air with its black tongue, often extending and slowly waving it up and down before retracting it and sensing whatever smells are in the air. If its attacker comes close enough, the snake strikes forward, opening the mouth and rotating the fangs outward. The diamondback can strike and inject venom in a momentary blur and return to striking position almost too fast for the human eye to see.

Texas has one rattlesnake that is listed as threatened. The timber rattlesnake (also known as the canebrake rattlesnake) is second only to the western diamondback in size, and lives in bottomland forests and upland woods near rivers and streams. The snake occurs only in certain localities across the eastern third of the state, in parts of the Cross Timbers of North Texas and in some of the mixed pine and hardwood forests in the southeastern region of the state.

The timber rattlesnake spends much of its time quietly coiled alongside fallen logs or tree stumps, waiting for a squirrel or rat to come within striking range. Its yellowish or gray-brown body is broken up by a series of dark chevrons or irregular bands, with a vague reddish stripe running down most of its length.

Once Bitten

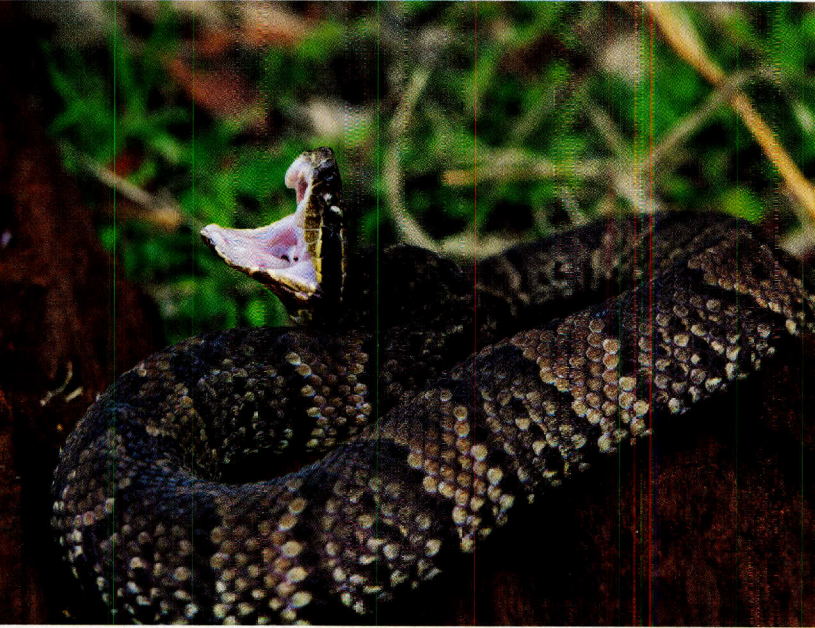
After Johnny Kratky (see accompanying article) was rushed to help, he was given antivenin and spent several days in the hospital. When his ordeal was over, he had a \$300,000 hospital bill.

Peyton Hood was not so lucky. On Aug. 10, 2010, a western diamondback rattlesnake bit the almost-2-year-old on the ankle. She died five hours later after an emergency flight to a children's hospital in Fort Worth. Peyton's aunt, Tammy Ræce, started **Peyton's Project** to raise rattlesnake awareness about not only the danger but also medical advancements based on venom. The website contains rattlesnake information and ways to volunteer and donate. Visit www.peytonproject.org for more information.

PEYTON'S PROJECT
Raising Rattlesnake Awareness



Cottonmouth



The tail is a deep, velvety black. Hikers or hunters have been known to step within inches of one of these snakes without triggering the slightest rattle, as the big reptile sizes up the threat and hopes to avoid being spotted. At some point, if the threat comes too close or the danger seems too great, timber rattlesnakes sound the rattle and can deliver a very serious bite. Since the snake is uncommon and often lives far from humans, bites from this species are rare.

“They’re a really good indicator of quality habitat,” Texas Parks and Wildlife Department herpetologist Andy Gluesenkamp says, “and it might be habitat where you [also] could find bears or red-cockaded woodpeckers.”

COTTONMOUTHS

Another Texas pit viper that is greatly feared and reviled by some anglers and boaters is the western cottonmouth. Also commonly called “water moccasin,” this dark and fairly chunky snake is a close relative of the copperhead. Countless stories have been passed around about cottonmouths chasing people down boat docks or dropping into boats from overhanging trees. These snakes do make their home around water, and may climb into low branches at the edges of rivers or lakes. When disturbed, they quickly drop into the water and swim away.

Adult western cottonmouth snakes average 2 to 3 feet in length, with some reaching greater lengths. They are born with a sandy reddish or brown pattern of wavy crossbands alternating between lighter and darker colors, suggesting the color and pattern of the copperhead. As the snakes grow, the pattern darkens and may become all but invisible. Cottonmouths share a slight resemblance to our harmless water snakes, which are rather heavy-bodied and come in patterns

Cottonmouth



of dark brown or green. Many a “cottonmouth” killed along a lake or pond turns out to be a nonvenomous water snake.

Cottonmouths have an extremely varied diet. They eat frogs, salamanders, fish, other snakes and small mammals, and they may ambush birds that come to the water’s edge to drink. Most of the fish taken are small, injured or trapped in drying pools, so the cottonmouth is not a real threat to game fish.

Researchers tested cottonmouths’ alleged aggressiveness by stepping (with a protective boot) on or near cottonmouths, or grasping them with a set of tongs outfitted with a shirt sleeve and glove resembling a human arm and hand. They found that, for the most part, cottonmouths sit still or attempt to get away. They also may open their mouth in a threat display, showing the pale whitish tissues that give them the name “cottonmouth.” Only a minority of the snakes tried to bite, even when picked up by the simulated hand.

Still, be cautious: Cottonmouth venom is worse than that of the copperhead and can cause considerable tissue destruction.

CORAL SNAKES

All but one of Texas’ venomous snakes is a rattlesnake, copperhead or cottonmouth. The one exception is a small and secretive reptile that is distantly related to the cobra — the coral snake. Most are no more than 2.5 feet long, with smooth, polished scales brightly ringed with black, yellow and red. The snake’s head is barely wider than its neck; this slender little serpent spends most of its time in leaf litter or burrowing through soil in search of lizards and snakes to eat.

Coral snakes have short fangs that are fixed in place as opposed to the pit viper’s longer fangs (which fold against the roof of

Coral snake



Coral snake



**Milk snake
(nonvenomous)**



the mouth when not in use). Coral snakes are shy and nervous. They react to being found by attempting to escape, thrashing around and pushing against the attacker if grabbed. A coral snake may even coil its tail above its body and wave it around, while hiding its head. But make no mistake, this snake is capable of biting and delivering venom if touched or handled. Coral snake venom is primarily neurotoxic, meaning it can impair the transmission of nerve impulses that are essential for moving about and for bodily functions.

Another snake, this one harmless, has a similar color pattern of red, yellow and black rings. Milk snakes have fairly broad red rings or saddles with fairly narrow black and yellow (or cream-colored) rings. Additionally, in the milk snake, the red and yellow rings are separated by black, while the coral snake's red rings are bordered by yellow ones.

Of course, this old rhyme is a useful way to distinguish venomous from harmless: "Red on yellow, kill a fellow; red on black, venom lack." ★

What to do if you get bitten

Many home remedies and treatments such as applying tourniquets or sucking out venom have proven ineffective. The recommended treatment for a snakebite is:



Remain calm and still.



Seek medical attention as soon as possible.



Try to remember the shape and color of the snake to aid in identification and treatment.



If you cannot get treatment right away, perform simple first aid such as washing the bite and applying a clean dressing. Keep the bite lower than your heart.

PHOTOS LEFT TO RIGHT © ROLF NUSSBAUMER, MICHAEL & PATRICIA FOGDEN / MINDEN PICTURES

ICONS TOP TO BOTTOM © DMITRY EZEPCV, VLADIMIR YUDIN, JULYNX / ALL DREAMSTIME.COM

A framed painting of a field of flowers. The painting is set within a gold, ornate frame. The scene depicts a field of green grass and various flowers, including purple and yellow daisies. The background shows a red, rocky cliff face. The text "ART IN THE PARKS" is written in large, white, brushstroke-style letters across the center of the painting. The signature "A. DOBE" is visible in the bottom right corner of the painting.

ART
IN THE
PARKS

A. DOBE



This state park program unleashes the artist in all of us.

BY CHRIS HOLMES

“**T**here is an artist in everyone, Daddy,” my 8-year-old son Charlie informs me one day as I struggle to comprehend how he could produce such a masterpiece in his art class.

“Art is everywhere, but it’s best in nature,” he explains patiently and profoundly. “That’s why I love going to the parks.”

I take a long, hard look at this 4-foot-tall, previously unwise, smelly (but cute) animal. And, not for the first time, the innocent perceptions of the young spawn a wonderful notion. As director for interpretation, education and outreach for Texas state parks, what do I know about art? Unfazed, I decide at that moment to start an “art in the parks” initiative for Texas.

PHOTO © JULIE A. TUASON

A HISTORY OF ART (IN THE PARKS)

Art in the parks is not a new concept. Artists have created art in national parks since the late 19th century, when famed Hudson River School painters like Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt captured majestic views of our nation's Western parks. Ansel Adams' black and white photographic landscapes continue to inspire dreary office cubicles.

Some of the first parks in Texas used art to memorialize famous Texian battles through monuments, sculptures and obelisks. The San Jacinto Monument, dedicated to those who contributed to Texas' independence, stands 570 feet tall, the tallest stone column memorial in the world. It was completed in 1939.

Also in the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) began implementing one part of President Roosevelt's New Deal by hiring young men to build a variety of structures in state parks. Artistic dreamers such as the visionary architect Arthur Fehr used design principles to promote harmony with the surrounding landscape. Constructed from native materials, these structures — the pavilion at Garner State Park, the archways leading down to Longhorn Cavern and the Palmetto refectory, to name a few — appear to grow naturally from the ground. The workers became artists and craftsmen; evening art classes in the CCC camps were a highlight, and the camps' weekly newspapers often showcased the resulting fine art.

Long before Charlie inspired me, pioneering Texas state parks taught and celebrated art. Many parks have led informal art and photo contests, and arts and crafts are embedded in our school and outreach programs. Government Canyon State Natural Area staff leads Haiku Hikes; Big Bend Ranch State Park holds digital photography workshops that fill up the day they are announced.

Palo Duro Canyon State Park has hosted its *Texas* musical performance for 50 years. A cast of 60 actors/singers/dancers portrays 1800s Panhandle settler life on an outdoor stage in the second-largest canyon in the country. A horseman carrying a Texas flag atop a 600-foot cliff kicks off the show, and fireworks end the performance each night.

NATURE DEFICIT DISORDER

Art in the parks is not just about creative expression. Author Richard Louv coined the phrase "nature deficit disorder" in his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods*, jumpstarting a national movement to connect all children, their families and communities to nature. According to Louv's Children and Nature Network, Charlie was right — parks are great locations for inspiring art.

"This seems clear enough: When truly present in nature, we do use all our senses at the same time, which is the optimum state of learning," Louv says.

So I was inspired, but how to accomplish this? Coincidentally, my wife and I attended a local art class for families. We chose to portray a scene that looked just



PHOTO BY CHASE A. FOUNTAIN / TPWD

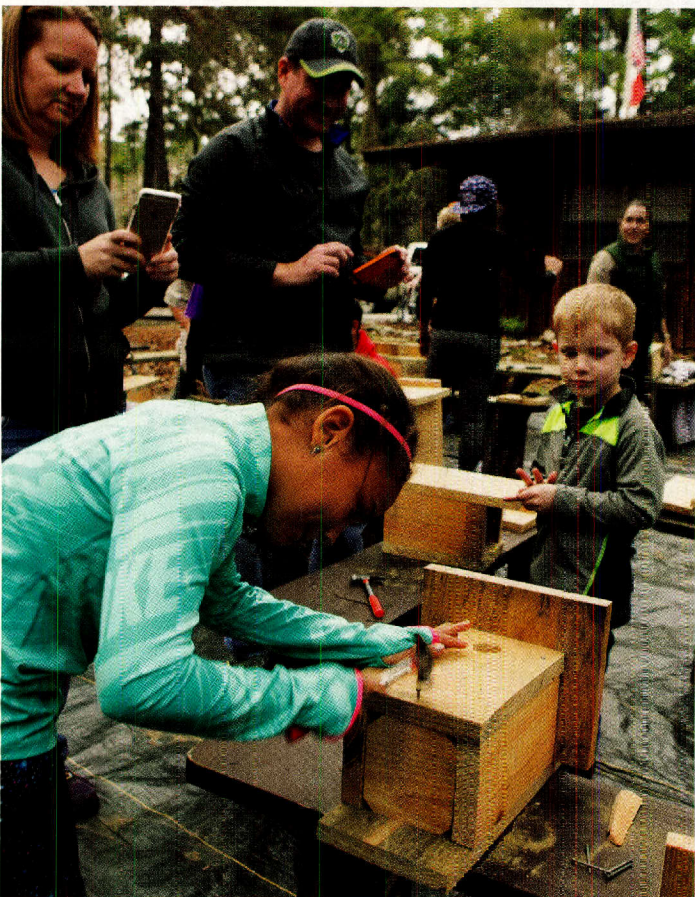
Children put paint to paper at Galveston Island State Park, above. A drummer keeps the beat during a musical performance at McKinney Falls, below.



PHOTO BY CHASE A. FOUNTAIN / TPWD



Photographers look for the perfect shot at a Big Bend Ranch photo workshop, above. Kids try their hands at making bluebird boxes at Martin Dies Jr., below.



like Lost Maples State Natural Area, the park we had enjoyed the week before. Our team effort, a masterpiece of fingerpainting, now perches proudly above our mantelpiece. Turns out Charlie was right: There is an artist in everyone!

After checking with our pioneer parks already offering art workshops, taking a few online seminars and sending out persuasive emails, we started offering arts programs across the Texas state parks system. Park staffs are always looking for something new to attract visitors, so word spread about the ease and attractiveness of the activities.

STARTING OUT

In that first year (2013), we offered more than 50 park workshops for families and adults alike, and since then, the program has continued to grow. Most parks now provide art-based programs. Some, like Brazos Bend State Park, dedicated their entire summer day camp season to arts.

“By taking the time to really observe your world, art in nature allows your mind to relax and become reflective on the moment,” says ranger Lisa Reznicek of Galveston Island State Park. The park has embraced the program with events like the Bayside Paint Party, where watercolors and other materials are provided, along with sunset views. “Let the beauty found in Galveston Island State Park inspire you to pick up a brush and lay down some color. Create a one-of-a-kind souvenir, and make some memories with Ranger Lisa,” reads the event description.

Other parks utilized existing programs like digital photography workshops and local artists teaching “plein air” painting in the parks. Digital photography scavenger hunts, activities that match nature’s colors with paint sample cards found at hardware stores, poetry slams, online videography, dances and flash mobs have all followed.

How do we measure our success? From the numbers of participants in these programs and the enthusiasm of their response. Families visit our parks and tell us that this is exactly the kind of program their children need. We’ve now repurposed much of the Junior Ranger Journal to include more arts experiences. (tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_bk_p4000_2027.pdf)

GET TO KNOW

One person I turned to for assistance in creating our program was Mary Krupa-Clark of Get to Know, a national group that has been inspiring connections between children and nature in the outdoors for more than a decade. Renowned naturalist and painter Robert Bateman and Krupa-Clark founded the organization in 1999. Get to Know had developed an art in the park activity guide for use in any park or green space. It was a perfectly designed, easy-to-follow guide to inspire art throughout a park.

Get to Know also hosts a national art contest for youth 19 and under with five categories: art, writing, photography, video and music. Texas state parks are hosting our own

Shooting the Parks

The 2013 State Parks Photo Contest captured magic moments at state parks across Texas. The 1,600 entries from more than 600 photographers were judged on composition, creativity and overall impression. Our parks never looked so good. State parks represent ideal locations for photographing the state's most remarkable scenery, plants, wildlife and landmarks.



▲ "Golden Moment"

by J Labrador

1ST PLACE WINNER FOR
THE TEXAS STATE PARKS
PHOTO CONTEST 2013

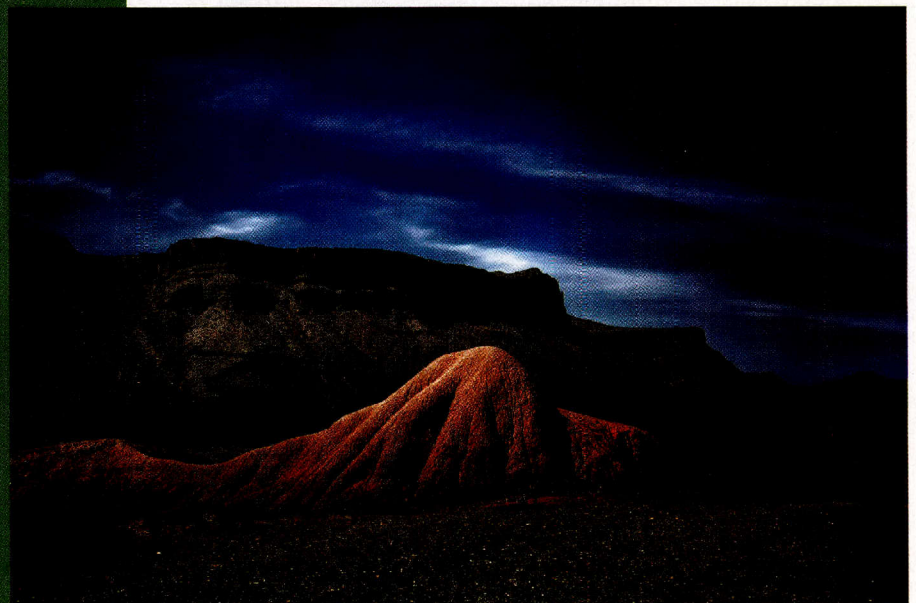


"Big Bend Ranch State Park"

by Augen ▼

▲ "Martin Dies Jr. State Park"

by Richard Baltazar



contest in conjunction with the national contest. To enter, kids post their artwork on the Get to Know website and name the park that inspired the piece. There's an online Texas state parks gallery to view all the creations.

Back in 2013, the first Texas state parks entry was submitted to the contest — by my son, Charlie H, age 8, Bastrop State Park. Charlie's twin brother and younger sister joined in, and the gallery began to grow. Texas joined the online contest halfway through the year, and by the end of the contest in November, young artists had posted more than 100 entries. The 2014 contest ended with a compilation of winning art, photography and poetry displayed in a beautiful 2015 Texas State Parks Calendar.

Our TPWD Exhibit Shop was inspired by our Arts in the Parks program, designing a program to allow park visitors to make their own greeting cards. Using a traditional printing press with hand-carved linoleum printing blocks, adults and children created beautiful mementos of their park stays at Meridian State Park and McKinney Falls State Park. This program has become so popular that we're exploring ways to bring it to other parks across the state. In another use of this technique, we created a special printing block for visitors to commemorate the Battleship Texas' 100-year anniversary.

"The great thing about this program," says Dana Younger, Exhibit Shop manager, "is that it's fun and informative for all age groups. Plus, everyone comes away with a great-looking piece of art!"

What else could we offer, I wondered. We reached out to VSA Texas, the state organization on arts and disabilities. A few meetings and calls led to a pilot program held in several parks last spring.

"The aim of the the project is to give people with disabilities access to the arts," says April Sullivan, program director for VSA Texas, "both to those who want to be artists professionally, including teaching artists, and to provide art programs for people with disabilities to attend."

LOOKING AHEAD

New partnerships continue to pop up. The Texas Commission on the Arts will host art programs at Texas state parks that qualify for the commission's rural outreach program, and will offer free performances by Texas artists in designated rural counties. This spring we will promote our own Texas state park digital photography contest, open to adults and children, and will host several digital photography workshops in parks.

This year, state parks will also coordinate with the National Park Service "Find Your Park" campaign, celebrating the centennial of that organization.

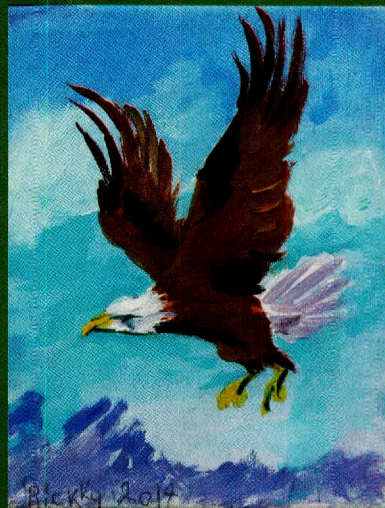
"Our campaign will encourage Americans to 'Find Your Park' — to discover a personal connection to a place or a story that provides inspiration or enjoyment," says National Park Service Director Jonathan B. Jarvis.

How can you find art programs in a state park near you, or one you plan to visit? There are plenty of state park calendar listings each month, and you can sort them to find the "art" events (check tpwd.texas.gov/calendar/arts-crafts).

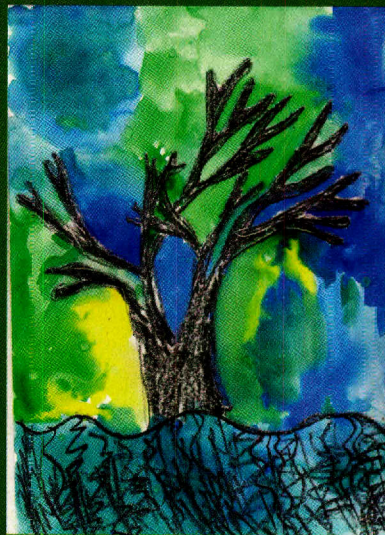
The Arts in the Parks programs are as varied as the state parks themselves, with something for everyone, whether you love to draw, take photos, write, sing, dance, sculpt, act, take videos, make prints or, yes, even fingerpaint like me. That Charlie, he was right! ★

Kid Art in the Parks

Texas state parks are hosting an art contest for youths 19 and under in conjunction with the Get to Know organization. The contest runs from May 1 to Nov. 1. Entries will appear in the Texas State Parks Gallery on the Get to Know website; last year's winning entries, including the ones below, were featured in a 2015 calendar.



Ricky Schmitz, age 9



Dalton Mason, age 11



Evan Rhinehart, age 6

Whooo do you Love?

by Camille Wheeler

PHOTO © CAMILLE WHEELER

THE WONDERS OF WATCHING A SCREECH-OWL FAMILY IN AN URBAN BACKYARD.

On May 23, 2014, the baby-blue sky deepened into night. From my stepladder perch, I quickly lost sight of the two eastern screech-owl nestlings peering wide-eyed into the darkness above me.

Since early March, from the privacy of my South Austin backyard, I'd been monitoring activity in what proved to be the perfect screech-owl home: the 30-foot-high hollow of a paper mulberry tree. I dreaded the coming moment of departure. The nestlings hatched and raised in the natural cavity were growing restless and bold. When the babies saw me climbing the ladder to take their picture, they no longer disappeared into the depths of the hole or hid beneath their mother's wings.

Now when the nestlings saw me, they practically posed, cocking their heads

and staring straight at the camera lens as though reading my mind: "*Please, please, look my way.*" I knew the nestlings would soon leave the safety of their tree-cavity nursery, if not this night, then the next. I had fallen in love with these two babies, whom I'd named Puck and George. I wasn't ready for them to go.

Suburban screech-owls thrive across much of Texas. According to Cliff Shackelford, statewide nongame ornithologist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, urban areas likely host more screech-owls than rural areas because of maturing shade

trees and an abundance of favorite foods, such as mice and wood roaches.

But it's a complex situation. Shackelford explains, compounded by what's called a "sink" population: Urban screech-owls might appear to be successfully reproducing, he says, but a high mortality rate sparked by domestic cat attacks, collisions with vehicles and other factors can keep the owls' population numbers level or on the decline.

Dependable screech-owl homes, such as wooden boxes that resemble natural cavities, can mitigate a sink population. So why don't more beautiful urban trees provide suitable screech-owl habitat? The answer lies in the question: In the interest of beauty and safety, urbanites often trim damaged limbs or decaying natural cavities.

Some people cut down entire trees to suit their aesthetic sensibilities,

says eastern screech-owl authority Fred Gehlbach, professor emeritus of biology at Baylor University, where he taught from 1963 to 1995 and remained on faculty as a graduate student adviser until 2014.

“People don’t realize they’re removing habitat for native species,” says Gehlbach, noting that other wild animals, such as squirrels, use natural cavities when they’re not occupied by screech owls.

All of which brings me to my paper mulberry tree, which technically isn’t “my” tree. It stands in a neighbor’s backyard, rooted right up against our separating chain-link fence. The red-tip photinia shrubs on my side of the fence are so tall and thick that they hide the bottom third of the tree from view. High above the fence, the tree is in no-man’s land. The natural cavity that developed up there would be considered ugly by urban aesthetic standards. It’s a rotted-out scar on an old, broken limb facing and leaning toward my yard.

But pretty is as pretty does. For the past several years at my home, a gray-phase eastern screech-owl — in my household, we like to believe that it’s always the same owl and his name is Oscar-Rufus — has arrived at winter’s end for a short stay in the hollow.

Time and again, in fading evening light, I have watched the owl perch on the cavity’s edge, waiting for the magical summons of dusk. It’s a wild, beautiful sight. And in 2014, things got even wilder. Early in the year, the owl was a no-show. And then, on a gray and gloomy March 2, I just happened to look up. There sat an eastern screech-owl. I told myself not to get too excited. The owls always leave, after all.

But by month’s end, this owl was still there. Slowly, it dawned on me: Maybe a female owl was incubating the eggs she had laid. And it seemed as if two adult screech-owls were using the cavity, with one staying put and the other coming and going at twilight. The owl occupying the cavity wore a medieval expression that made me shiver. In broad daylight, with talons gripping the cavity’s edge tight, the owl would

slowly turn its head, scanning the yard for threats.

I just knew there were baby screech-owls up there. Finally, on May 18, with binoculars trained on the hollow, I saw the fuzzy gray heads of two screech-owl nestlings, their yellow, saucer-plate eyes profoundly wide open as if taking in a scary movie.

On May 23, the nestlings swayed to and fro on the cavity’s edge in the gathering darkness. The babies were alone in the hollow, with their parents watching from adjacent trees in my backyard. One adult flew to the pecan tree in my front yard, as though asking the nestlings to follow. The other adult swooped into the cavity in a chaotic flapping of wings.

Clearly, some sort of baby screech-owl operation was in the works. Mom and Dad were trying to coax the nestlings out of the nursery. Tears filled my eyes. I feared that the babies’ wings weren’t strong enough, that their minds weren’t wrapped around the task at hand.

The next morning, the babies were still in the cavity. At dusk, the gray sky spat rain. Shortly before 9 p.m., I gasped: One of the babies, wings wildly flapping, was crawling out of the hole. And then the baby was out, clinging to the cavity’s edge for a terrifying split-second before clumsily hopping up onto a flimsy limb.

It was now too dark to see. I couldn’t tell if the other nestling followed its sibling out of the cavity. Were the babies safe? Would they make it through the night?

The next morning, the hollow was empty. I didn’t know if I’d ever see the babies again. But that evening, an angry mockingbird was harassing an adult screech-owl in the pecan tree. Surely the youngsters were nearby.

As darkness fell, I spotted a fledgling high in the canopy, crawling on a branch and bobbing its head for visual orientation. The baby looked scared, but a parent was a few feet away. For the next hour, I lay beneath the tree, listening to the soft whinnying calls of the parent as it hunted and brought the food to the quivering fledgling.

I tried not to think about the other baby screech-owl. Anything could



PHOTO BY CHASE A. FOUNTAIN / TPWD

Time and again, in fading evening light, I have watched the owl perch on the cavity’s edge, waiting for the magical summons of dusk.

have happened. But at dusk on May 28, I saw both siblings snuggled together on a limb in a next-door neighbor’s tree. I laughed as the fledglings walked upright on spindly little legs, wobbling to regain their balance as if on a tightrope.

I last saw the family of four in mid-June. Would I ever see the owls again?

This year, on Jan. 17, I just happened to look up. There, in the hollow, sat an eastern screech-owl.

It might just be one of my owls, said Gehlbach, whose research from 1967 to 2007 provided the first exhaustive case studies of the eastern screech-owl in the United States. As he explains, adult male screech-owls typically return to the same winter roosts. And the same screech-owl parents will return to a cavity where they successfully raised nestlings.

The theme of my story, Gehlbach says, is the integration of native wildlife and cultural city life. Screech-owls can raise youngsters in urban habitats — including my backyard.

On a Sunday afternoon in mid-January, I raked leaves in the backyard, glancing up at the cavity where the newly arrived screech-owl dozed in the sun. Would the owl stay? I didn’t know. But in this moment, everything felt right in my own private wilderness. ✧

Continued from Page 27

vegetables. However, the variety of pre-cooked foods now available makes it easy to turn out truly impressive meals with minimal effort. These are not MREs or expensive pouch-chow from trendy sporting goods stores. This food is delicious, inexpensive and easy to find. We enjoy our feast and call it a day.

On the morning of Day Three, Bryan decides to hike along the two miles of riverfront. I go as far as the trailhead and take a seat near some large patches

of grass that were upended by foraging wild hogs. Bryan later sheepishly admits that halfway down the trail, he saw a group of animals in the distance and was quite happy they turned out to be goats and donkeys, not wild hogs. He wants to come back in warm weather and kayak the river.

Bryan's hike gives me a chance to sit and enjoy the scenery. The bright-blue sky is cloudless this November morning. Turkey vultures whirl above me, traveling the thermals like

highways. Their aerial search for food fascinates this earthbound park visitor.

On our final day, we pack up and decide to eat lunch in Junction before heading for Austin. A ranger recommends locally owned Lum's Bar-B-Que in Junction — a lot of food for the money. It turns out to be a great tip.

Outside, Lum's looks like a store that sells live bait, but the interior is typical Hill Country café, decorated with new and vintage Texas sports posters. We choose our barbecue from the handwritten menu on a chalkboard. Bryan orders a barbecue sampler that would feed two people, while I opt for a brisket plate — some of the best brisket I've ever eaten. Even the sides are spectacular, especially the cucumber vinaigrette salad. While Bryan works his way through carnivore heaven, I finish up with a piece of truly magical homemade coconut cream pie. We'll definitely come back.

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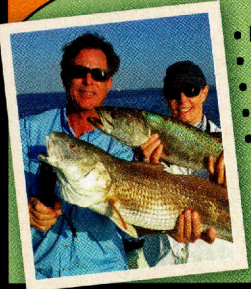
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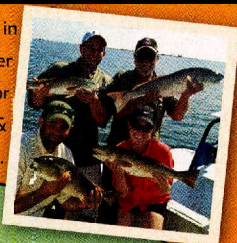
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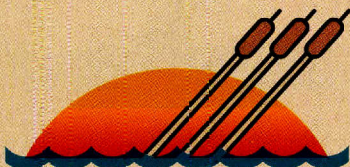
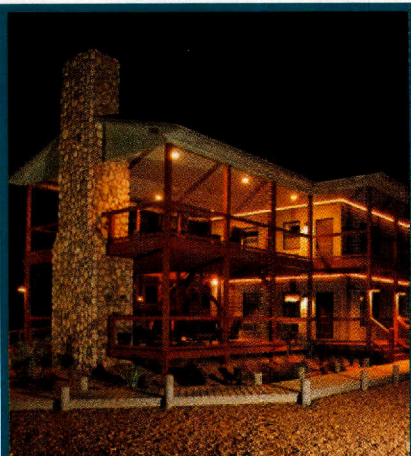
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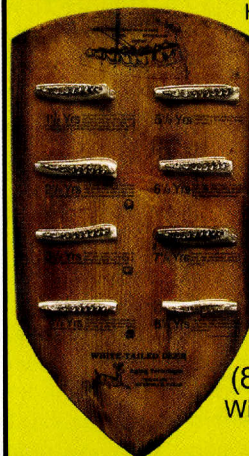
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second. ISO 400.

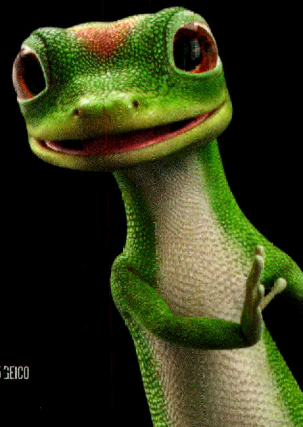
On Labor Day weekend in 2011, fires in Bastrop County destroyed 1,673 homes, killed two people and inflicted more than \$325 million in property damage. *Texas Parks & Wildlife* photographer Chase A. Fountain went to Bastrop State Park to document the fire damage there. "As soon as I arrived at the park, a large cluster of loblolly pine trees next to the golf course ignited, making a hissing sound, so I grabbed my camera, jumped out of my truck and took this image."



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