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# TEXAS

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**PREVIOUS SPREAD:** The historic bison herd at Caprock Canyons State Park serves as an important link to the past. Photo by Earl Nottingham / TPWD

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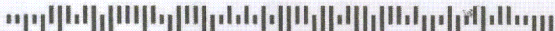


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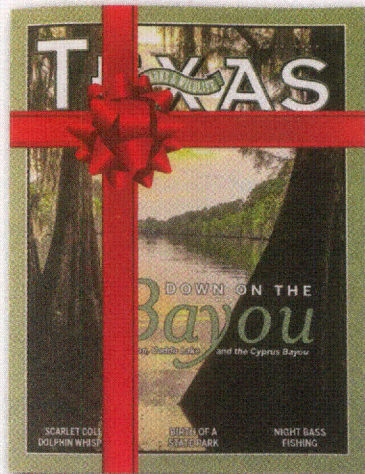
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THE OUTDOOR MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

OCTOBER 2015, VOL. 73, NO. 8

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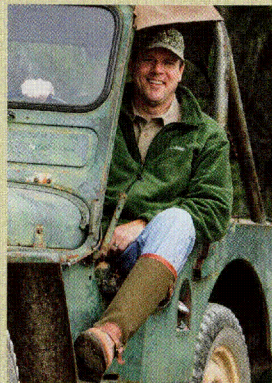
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# In the Field

**CARTER SMITH**, executive director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, developed his passion for wildlife and the outdoors at a young age while roaming around his family's farm and ranch interests in Central and South Texas. Few things excited him more than the opening day of dove season and the chance to get out of school to spend the afternoon immersed in a sunflower

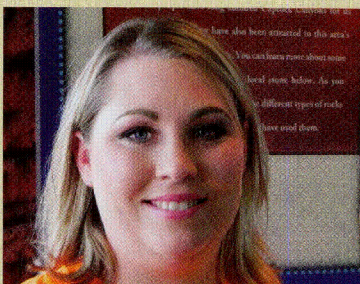


field or around a stock tank waiting for the birds to fly over. This month he shares with us a story of a time-honored Texas tradition — an opening day dove hunt with friends in South Texas. Carter holds degrees from Texas Tech and Yale University in wildlife management and conservation biology. He and his wife, Stacy, their son, Ryland, and their border collie, Bandito, get out in the field every chance they can.

**JOHN GOODSPEED**, a lifelong follower of the U.S. space program, vividly remembers watching Apollo II deliver the first people to the moon in 1969. The spacecraft, dangerously low on fuel, finally touched down after a long journey through space. The capsule communicator in Houston said, "You've got a bunch of guys about to turn blue! We're breathing again!" That was the voice of Charlie Duke, who later was the lunar module pilot of Apollo 16 and set foot on the moon in 1972. John never thought he would ever meet a moonwalker, much less share a blind with one. He joined Duke on a South Texas deer hunt with Duke's son and grandson and discovered that the astronaut is a passionate outdoorsman who cherishes passing on the tradition.



**LE'ANN PIGG** grew up in West Texas and frequently visited family in the Texas Panhandle area of Quitaque. Her childhood memories and adventures included fishing and hiking in Caprock Canyons State Park as well as rock-hounding and participating in an archeological dig with the Texas Archeological Society. Much of her interest in the park was spurred by her enthusiasm for Paleo-Indian archeology and the Folsom Bison Kill Site there. She studied anthropology at Eastern New Mexico University, and as a summer intern at Caprock Can-



yons, she developed a passion for educating visitors about the history, flora and fauna of the area. She now shares her enthusiasm as a park interpreter at Caprock Canyons, where she says history comes to life every day.



# AT ISSUE

BY EDITOR LOUIE BOND

**Hunting, hunting, hunting!** Where are my hummingbirds? This could be the wail of some readers when they open this October issue. It's fall in Texas, though, and the first whiff of cool air gets many of our colleagues jumping for joy at the prospect of a day in the field on the hunt. It's as elemental to them during this season as a pot of bubbling chili, a campfire under the stars or a Sunday afternoon football marathon.

We know that some of our readers don't hunt. We see their blissful smiles when our stories lean more toward watching warblers or hiking park trails or planting native grasses. Of course, during those months, I get complaints from the camouflage camp. Patience, dear readers, your day will come as surely as the seasons will change from autumn leaves to spring blossoms.

You may have noticed that we put our own spin on hunting stories, a spin we think sets us apart a bit from traditional hook-and-bullet publications. We like to weave our hunting narratives with science, philosophy, tradition, pop culture and humor. After all, hunters will tell you that they don't participate solely to pull the trigger. They enjoy the quiet of the woods, the camaraderie of sitting in a blind with friends, watching wildlife slip by, sharing the memories of their first hunt with Grandpa. Hmm, maybe they're not so different than our hikers and nature watchers after all!

This month, TPWD Executive Director Carter Smith shares his love of dove hunting, a passion he's pursued since he was a small fry. John Jefferson recounts the great hunting epic of Alan McGraw, the Round Rock mayor who took down a bighorn with bow and arrow. Even the moon isn't too far to go for a good hunting story. Astronaut Charlie Duke has traveled faster than a speeding bullet in space and now enjoys a different thrill with his family.

Don't despair! Look a little deeper and you'll see stories about topaz hunting in Mason County and a man with a passion for propagating seed to restore our prairies to their former glory. You can learn all about kangaroo rats (not a kangaroo or a rat!), cardinal flowers and the beautiful bison at Caprock Canyons State Park.

You see, there's something for everyone in each issue. We love to hear from you, so take a moment to tell us what you like to see when you open a new issue. And don't forget to check out the issue on our app — we always throw in a little extra fun.

Happy hunting! Happy hiking! Just get outdoors — it's lovely to live in Texas.

*It's fall in Texas ... and the first whiff of cool air gets many of our colleagues jumping for joy at the prospect of a day in the field on the hunt.*

*Louie Bond*  
EDITOR

*TPWD Executive Director Carter Smith will return to At Issue next month. See his feature story, "Fields of Dove," on Page 36.*

*Texas Parks and Wildlife Department mission statement:*

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





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# MAIL CALL

PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

## LETTERS

### SAVING THE TARANTULA

The article "Tarantula Hunter" in the July 2015 issue brought back a fond family memory. In 1987, our daughters (8 and 10 years of age) found a tarantula hawk dragging a paralyzed tarantula across our front lawn in College Station. The explanation as to the "fate" of the tarantula brought initial disbelief followed by pleas to intervene.

We scared off the tarantula hawk and placed the tarantula on dry sand in an empty aquarium. Its care consisted of water misting and leg extensions (physical therapy). The tarantula slowly recovered, and to the dismay of our daughters it was soon crunching crickets for meals.

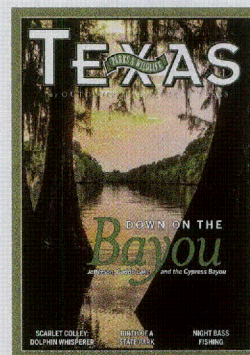
BRUCE & LAUREN ABBITT  
*College Station*

### TPWD DRONE POLICY

I was pleased to see your good article on drones in the July issue ("Eye in the Sky"). It seems that much of the media wants to make all of us drone fliers out to be voyeurs or terrorists rather than just photographers working from a different vantage point, so your article was nice to see.

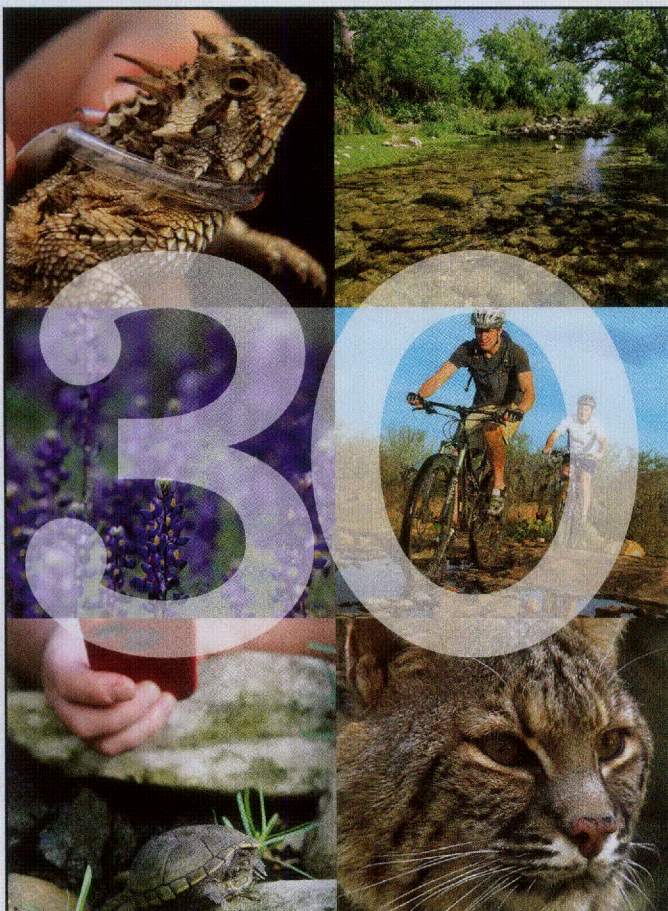
However, I am disappointed to read that operating a drone in a state park requires special permission. I'm not certain what the process is to get permission, but I'm bothered that such permission is even required.

What is the rationale for this policy? Are drones a threat to the peaceful enjoyment of the park and to wildlife? Not as much as loud people and motor vehicles. Are drones a threat



"The media wants to make all of us drone fliers out to be voyeurs or terrorists rather than just photographers working from a different vantage point."

JIM WIEHOFF  
*Friendswood*



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to privacy? Not nearly as much as ubiquitous cellphone cameras and telephoto lenses on conventional cameras. Are drones a threat to safety? Hunting, boating, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, camping and swimming all have higher injury and fatality rates.

The TPWD policy seems very unnecessary to me. This activity's regulatory burden is excessive compared to other activities that can be done in our parks without special permission. It's unfortunate that to simply take photographs I will need special permission that no other type of amateur photography requires.

JIM WIEHOFF  
Friendswood

*TPWD RESPONDS: Although state park management recognizes that most drone enthusiasts are responsible users, it is also true that the potential exists for wildlife disturbance, visitor conflicts and privacy concerns of visitors. The use of unmanned aircraft (mostly remote-controlled model aircraft) for recreational purposes*

*has been allowed and managed within state parks for many years, and the current generation of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) is subject to these rules. Use of established designated launch sites and flight areas within parks by unmanned aerial vehicles ensures resource and wildlife protection as well as visitor safety. At this time, a limited number of flight areas are designated in some parks, but new areas may be established after a review of potential conflicts. Drone users should check in with a park superintendent or other designated staff regarding restrictions for that particular park. In receiving permission, drone users must agree that they will stay in the designated flight area, will follow applicable FAA regulations, will not operate in a reckless manner and will not harass wildlife or visitors.*

#### BIRTH WAS BAD COMPARISON

Rob McCorkle did not really write, "It's not a big stretch to say that creating a state park out of a raw piece of property is akin to a woman giving birth, but instead of taking nine months, 'delivering' a state park can sometimes take nine years," did he? ("Birth of a

Park," July 2015.) And you, the editor, did not really print this absurdity, did you? Surely this was a typo or perhaps a terrible midnight judgment call after several rounds of tequila? Not only is it poor writing in general, but it is also strongly offensive and just plain ... ridiculous, stupid, poor taste, bad use of analogy. There are so many adjectives I could insert here, but I'll leave it at that.

BRENDA KLEIN  
Marfa

#### Sound off for Mail Call

##### Let us hear from you!

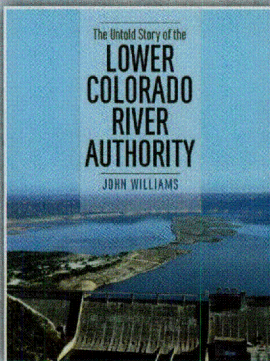
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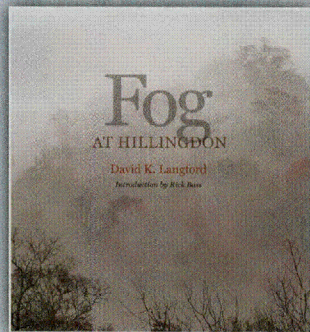
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John Williams

Foreword by Andrew Sansom

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#### Fog at Hillingdon

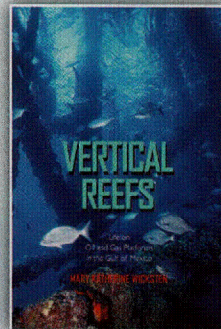
David K. Langford

Introduction by Rick Bass

Foreword by Andrew Sansom

Langford captures stirring images of the comings and goings of fog on Hillingdon Ranch in Central Texas, family land that has benefited from the stewardship of six generations.

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# SCOUT

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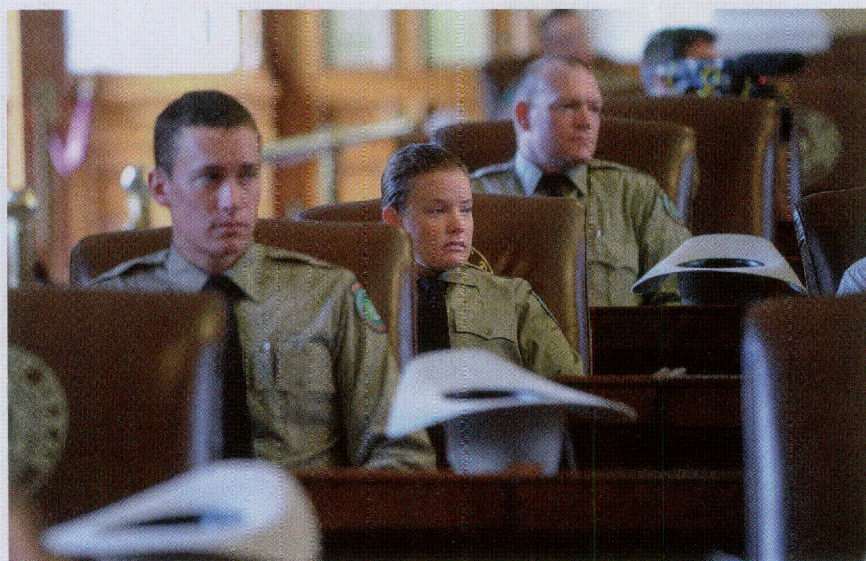
## SALUTE!

*Game wardens graduate, this time with state park police cadets.*

After seven months of training, the 59th Texas game warden cadet class graduated in July, with a new twist. This year marks the first time game wardens and state park police officers trained and graduated together in the same cadet class.

Following their preparation at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Game Warden Training Center in Hamilton County, the 23 newly commissioned peace officers were recognized during a special ceremony at the state Capitol.

"Since 1895, game wardens have played an integral part in public safety and conservation law enforcement in Texas," said Col. Craig Hunter, law enforcement director for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. "We are excited that this graduation marks the first academy where Texas game wardens trained with state park police officers, and congratulate these officers as they embark in the most rewarding



PHOTOS BY CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD

careers in law enforcement."

The graduates will begin their new careers stationed in counties and state parks throughout the state.

Game warden duties include the enforcement of all state laws, primarily

hunting, fishing and water safety regulations. As fully commissioned peace officers, they respond to emergencies, assist other law enforcement agencies and work to educate the public about conservation issues.





One of the new graduates, Jordan Favreau, said he has always loved the outdoors and always wanted to be in law enforcement. "I thought that being a game warden might be the perfect fit," he said.

He got a close-up look at game warden duties when he worked as a TPWD law enforcement intern in 2013. The drowning of a boy at Cedar Hill State Park was a turning point for him. He accompanied the game wardens to the park and watched as they assisted in pulling the boy out of the water. "Game wardens are out there protecting the public," Favreau said, mentioning game warden efforts in water safety. "I know you can't save the world, but if you can save even one life, you can make a difference. That's when it clicked for me."

State park police, also commissioned peace officers, provide law enforcement services to the visitors and users of state parks, and help enforce laws within their local jurisdictions.

"It is a distinct honor and a historic milestone for this first group of Texas State Park Police cadets to graduate from the Texas Game Warden Academy," said Brent Leisure, director of state parks.

All graduates met the state-mandated requirements for peace officer certification, including criminal and constitutional law, firearms, self-defense, use of force, defensive driving, arrest, search and seizure, ethics and first aid.

The cadet class had 878 applicants.

The new wardens and park police are joining the 532 game wardens and 180 park police officers currently in the field.

—Stephanie Salinas



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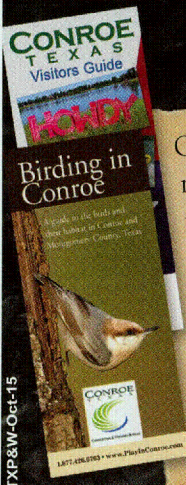
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# Bison on the Caprock

Caprock Canyons State Park offers a home on the range for the state herd.



**Crossing the threshold** into the park, you rattle across a cattle guard, the first hint that you are entering a different kind of place, with a glimpse into the past. Here lies the prairie land of Caprock Canyons State Park, home of the official bison herd of Texas.

These bison are the direct descendants of the herd started by pioneer ranchers Charles and Mary Ann Goodnight in 1878 to help save the species. The herd is one of five foundation herds, from which all bison in North America stem. The Great Plains were once home to an estimated 30 million to 60 million bison, but after the great slaughter of the late 1800s, fewer than 1,000 of these magnificent animals remained.

The present state of the species is much better, and the herd at Caprock is thriving. With several thousand acres to roam, this last-known vestige of native Texas bison has grown in numbers, and its future looks bright.

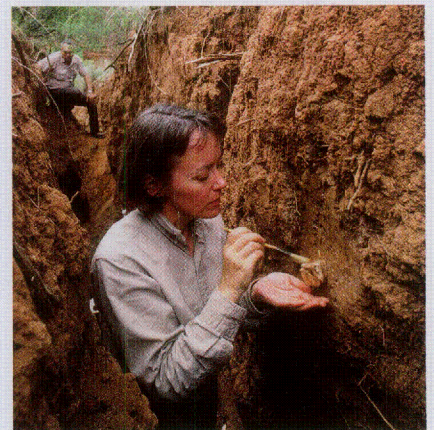
Currently, Caprock Canyons State Park is working toward restoring the prairie homeland of the bison to what it once was historically. While it will take many years to re-establish the prairie, various prairie grasses, plants and wildlife have made a comeback and have once again taken on their unique roles in the ecosystem. Perhaps future generations of Texas children will be able to know these prairies the same way that children did in the past.

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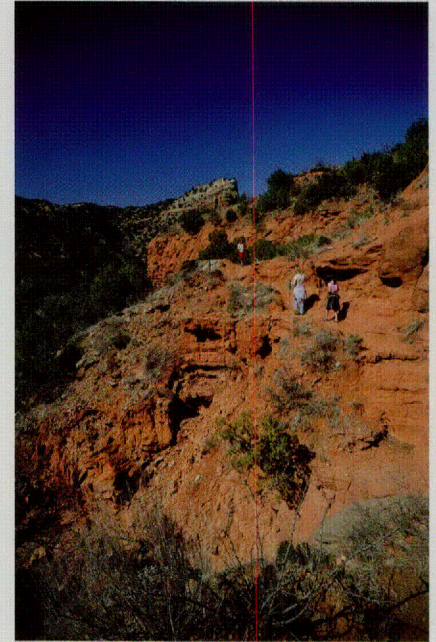


AERIAL PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD; OTHER BY TPWD





**Opposite page:** Caprock's red rock escarpment separates the High Plains from the lower Rolling Plains; archeological finds have produced clues about Paleo-Indian culture. **This page:** Members of the state bison herd roam the prairie just as their ancestors did hundreds of years ago; hikers can explore several miles of trails, some with rugged terrain.



The bison's unique relationship with humans goes back thousands of years at Caprock Canyons. With the discovery of Folsom projectile points and tools found in association with ancient bison bones, the Lake Theo Folsom Bison Kill Site at the park became one of the most important archeological sites in the study of human-bison interactions. This 10,000-year-old archeological site yielded valuable information about Paleo-Indian culture and the methods used to hunt a now-extinct form of bison known as *Bison antiquus*. Bison leg and jaw bones were found in a manmade circular pattern at the site, illustrating the sacred, long-standing relationship between man and beast. The bones are on display at the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum in Canyon.

Following along the 5-mile paved road through the park, you find yourself in a geologist's paradise, with 250 million years of geological formations greeting you amid a 1,000-foot drop in elevation as you make your way down into the canyons. The rock layers tell the story of an ancient sea and later an ecosystem reminiscent of the Amazon of today. The layers are "capped" or topped off with a white layer, and the icing on this scenic, geological cake gives the area its name — Caprock.

Perhaps the greatest allure of the park is its ability to take visitors back in time. Although history is a remembrance of past events, the unique elements that make up Caprock Canyons State Park make you feel that history is still alive.

And, in its own way, it still is alive here in the Texas Panhandle.

For more information, visit [www.texasstateparks.org](http://www.texasstateparks.org) or call (806) 455-1492. For upcoming events, visit the state park's calendar page at [tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/caprock-canyons/park\\_events](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/caprock-canyons/park_events). Caprock Canyons State Park is located 3 miles north of Quitaque on Ranch Road 1065.

—Le'Ann Pigg

## SIGHTS & SOUNDS

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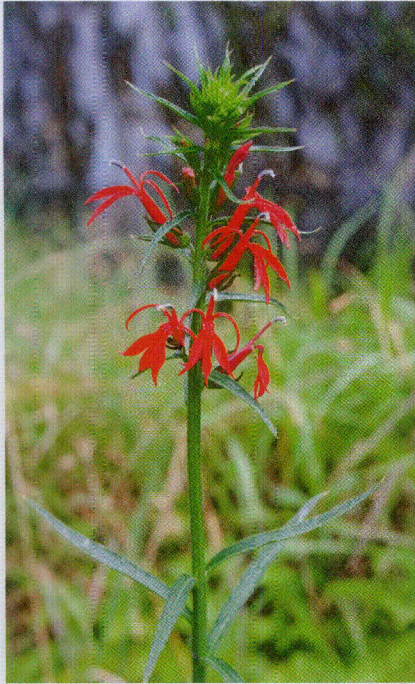
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# Crimson Beauty

*Brightly colored cardinal flowers attract hummingbirds.*



**A cardinal flower** in bloom is a sight to see. It stands up to 4 feet tall, topped by a column of vivid red flowers. Buds at the bottom open first. The flower stalk lengthens as the bloom progresses upward, eventually adding as much as 18 inches to the height of the plant.

Viewed at close range, an individual flower is 1 to 2 inches long. Five petals form a two-lipped tube: where it divides, three petals fold down like a ruffled petticoat while the other two point off in opposite directions. The flower has five stamens, also fused into a tube that extends beyond the petals. The stems or filaments of the stamens are also bright red, with gray pollen-bearing anthers at the tip.

Hummingbirds are the primary pollinators of cardinal flowers (*Lobelia*

*cardinalis*). It takes a long, thin snout to extract nectar from these flowers.

Cardinal flower is a wetland plant, found in marshes and low-lying meadows. It also lives in riparian zones, growing in a streambed or just at the water's edge. The plant's native range covers most of the United States and parts of southeastern Canada. Given a damp spot with good sunlight, it will grow in most regions of Texas. Still, it's nowhere near as common as bluebonnets in spring.

In his travels as a conservation biologist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Tom Heger recalls just a few sightings of cardinal flower. He found one at the edge of a floodplain wetland in East Texas, another on a gravel bed in the upper Guadalupe River. Other staff members who survey rivers and watersheds have spotted one or two along the Llano River.

Wetlands are fragile environments, and cardinal flower is listed as a threatened species in at least one state. However, it isn't considered rare or threatened in Texas. If people don't see it often, that could be because it isn't conspicuous until it blooms.

For most of the year, *L. cardinalis* is a tall, thin stem with long, narrow, pointed leaves. The stem is usually unbranched. A typical leaf is 3 to 5 inches long with fine teeth along the edges. The plant produces viable seed, but can also reproduce by sending offshoots at ground level. It may form colonies along stream beds, but until the flowers appear, it looks like "just another plant," says Heger.

Wildflower watchers should look for those bright red displays between July and October, or get seeds from a reputable supplier and plant some cardinal flowers in a garden. They'll grow in full sun or partial shade, as long as they can keep their feet wet.

—Dyanne Fry Cortez

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# Which Is It?

*The Texas kangaroo rat has a rather deceptive name.*

**The Texas kangaroo rat** isn't a kangaroo or a rat, but it is uniquely Texan, found in only a handful of counties near the Red River and the Panhandle. The Texas kangaroo rat isn't the state's only kangaroo rat, but of the five species found here, it is by far the rarest.

While kangaroo rats are small

rodents, they lack nearly all of the features people tend to associate with rats. Kangaroo rats have long, furry tails, and, as their name implies, they hop on their hind feet like a kangaroo. They are usually associated with arid regions and spend hot days resting in their burrows. If you've ever camped in desert regions of West Texas, you may have seen them making an appearance at dusk.

The Texas kangaroo rat was never widespread; historically it was known to inhabit only 11 counties in



**Researchers are trying to determine the range of the rare Texas kangaroo rat, a species unique to the state.**

Texas and two in Oklahoma. Unlike the other four species of kangaroo rats in Texas, the Texas kangaroo rat prefers clay (rather than sandy) soils. It also seems to have an affinity for short grasses and is often found in grazed pastures, leading researchers to postulate that they may have benefited in the past from the impact of large bison herds.

The need for a very specific habitat once allowed it to survive in a unique environment. However, habitats have changed since the time bison roamed, and it now appears that this species is declining. Research is currently underway to find out why.

From 1996–2000, TPWD hired Robert Martin of McMurry University in Abilene to search for Texas kangaroo rats. Martin found them in only five counties in Texas.

About 10 years later, TPWD hired another researcher, Allan Nelson of Tarleton State University, to resurvey Martin's sites. He was unable to find a single Texas kangaroo rat. While this may be cause for concern, it is worth noting that 2011 was a year of significant drought, and rodent populations can fluctuate dramatically. It's difficult to know if this is a major downward trend, or simply a short-term dip as a result of the drought. More research is certainly warranted.

A project at Texas Tech University is currently underway to search for Texas kangaroo rats across their historical distribution. Another project at Texas State University is just starting and will survey additional locations.

As researchers learn more about the status of this species and the reasons it may be declining, we also hope to learn how it can be recovered. The Texas kangaroo rat is found only in Texas, and now it's up to Texans to make sure it stays here.

—Jonah Evans

PHOTO BY TPWD

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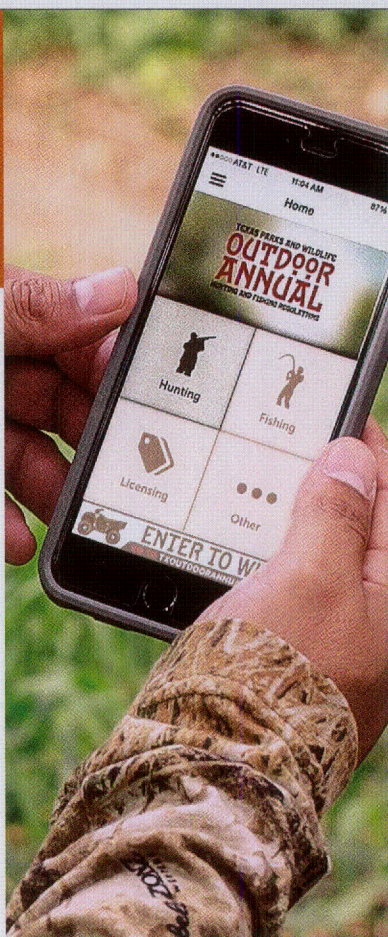
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# The Burden of Excess Gear

*Acquiring more camera equipment doesn't lead to better photography. Or does it?*

**I was in denial**, thinking that it was no big deal and, more importantly, that no one would notice. Trying to contain it became futile, and its presence became increasingly noticeable to my colleagues, friends and family. Only after some soul-searching did it become evident that it was time to clear the air and admit to myself that I had ... GAS!

Gear Acquisition Syndrome (commonly known as GAS) is a term used to describe a photographer's urge to acquire and accumulate lots of camera gear — typically more than is needed or could ever realistically be used. Typical early signs preceding a major episode of GAS include the amassing of photographic equipment catalogs and magazines with highlighted and

dog-eared pages, creating online “wish lists” and making frequent visits to local camera shops under the pretense of “just looking.”

Typically, inexpensive purchases such as filters, cables or other small accessories are the gateway to a more advanced occurrence of GAS. A bloated sense of equipment inadequacy fuels the rationalization that the newest camera, lens, tripod or any other number of accessories is what is truly needed to get the perfect photograph.

Left unchecked, GAS can permeate a home or office, lingering in cabinets and dusty closets bulging with gear that may never see the light of day but resides there nonetheless — just in case.

Sadly, my own home is ripe with the presence of GAS (as my wife constantly

reminds me), evidenced by a 40-year accumulation of gear and gadgets biding their time in mountains of boxes, bins and bags that migrate throughout the house like shifting desert dunes.

Thankfully, there is a cure for GAS. By gradually releasing, one step at a time, the notion that more gear equals better photography, the photographer can gradually “relearn” that, instead of carrying a ton of gear, a simple camera setup such as one body and one or two lenses may be all that is needed to best record the scene and tell the story at hand.

All too often, the excess gear we drag around actually hampers our decisions in choosing the best tool for that particular photo. As a result, a moment



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This partnership enables ship supporters to own a piece of history and help fund The Battleship Texas Battleship Foundation's efforts. For more information please contact The Battleship Texas Foundation at [info@battleshiptexas.org](mailto:info@battleshiptexas.org), visit our website at [www.battleshiptexas.org](http://www.battleshiptexas.org), or contact us by phone at **713-827-9620**.

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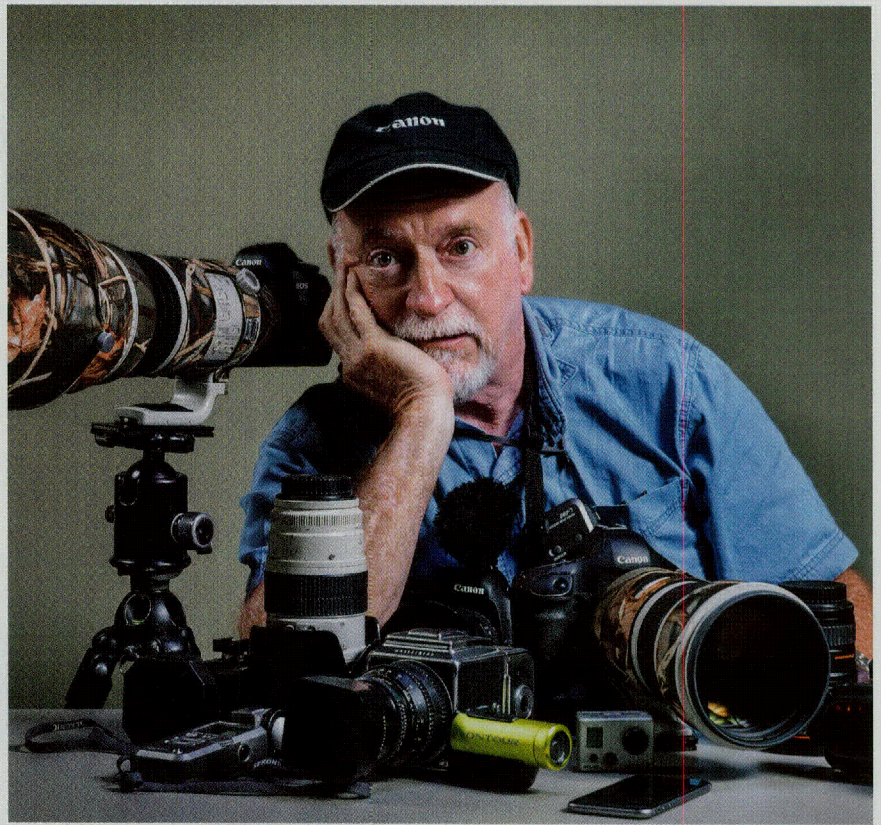
of spontaneity or good light is lost.

As a beginning step to dissipate GAS, try shooting with only one fixed prime lens such as a 28mm or the venerable 50mm (or the equivalent focal lengths on a zoom lens). It is a good way to rediscover the simplicity and effectiveness of a minimalist camera package.

You may even find it liberating to concentrate on the story and composition unfolding before the lens and not the nuts and bolts of the shooting process. Harken back to the beautiful and iconic images created by the simple cameras of yesteryear that consisted of only a black box and one simple built-in lens.

Recognizing the symptoms and admitting that you have GAS are the first steps in a lifelong journey of gradually weaning yourself from the burden of excess gear. During that journey, you may find that you are trying to rid yourself of the excess baggage. If you do, please let me know. I'm always looking for some new stuff.

—Earl Nottingham



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

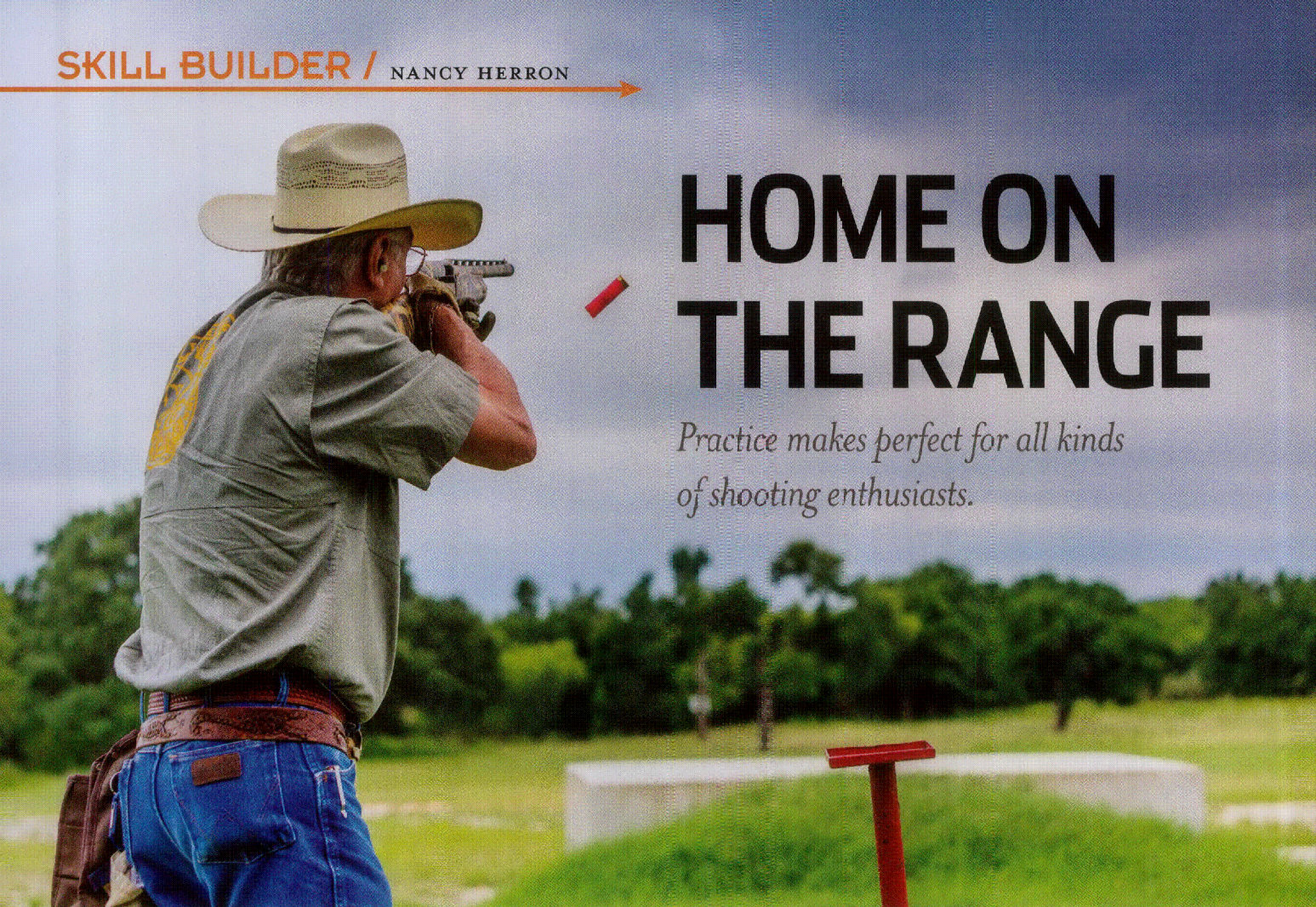
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# HOME ON THE RANGE

*Practice makes perfect for all kinds of shooting enthusiasts.*

**After you've purchased** a rifle, bow and arrow, handgun or shotgun, it's time to try it out. Where can you go to practice, or compete?

Whether you are looking for opportunities indoors or outdoors, in the city or out in the country, you can try your hand at all types of shooting at a shooting range. Shooting ranges offer a safe environment with range safety officers; many offer on-the-spot help and rent equipment.

One great place to find a shooting range is [www.wheretoshoot.org](http://www.wheretoshoot.org), hosted by the National Shooting Sports Foundation. The website offers a dandy search filter to help you find a range based on the kind of shooting you'd like to do, describing range features, programs and even special services like lodging and campsites. You can also conduct a general Web search or call your local chamber of commerce.

Let's take a look at just a few of the many kinds of shooting sports and ranges across Texas.

Families especially might enjoy

archery and air gun ranges. Communities are adding archery as courses in their parks and recreation departments. Youth in the Texas-NASP (National Archery in the Schools) program know the safety rules for archery, so range time is great as a

follow-up for the family or after-school activity. USA Archery clubs can prepare Olympic competitors. Some ranges offer 3-D targets and training for bow hunting. Air guns are an economical opportunity for marksmanship, and competitions are available from the



TOP PHOTO © LEFTY RAY CHAPA; BOTTOM PHOTO BY CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD



local level up to international contests.

Handgun and rifle ranges are popular both indoors and outdoors. You'll find fellow shooters in target practice, sighting in or trying out a new firearm. Watch some of the many excellent videos ([www.youtube.com/user/TheNSSF](http://www.youtube.com/user/TheNSSF)) on range safety and etiquette so you'll know what to expect and what's expected of you at a range. Be sure to check out the Project ChildSafe video (<https://youtu.be/M86QxNZF3AE>) to learn how to talk to children about gun safety and discover tips on adjusting your conversation to the age of the youth.

No shooting skills journey is complete without trying moving targets. Shotgunners enjoy trap shooting, where a mechanical thrower flings a clay pigeon (a saucer-shaped disk like the one under a flower pot) at different heights and angles. Skeet shooting ups the ante with two throwers at different heights and different shooting stations to vary the shot. Five-stand shooting and sporting clays offer courses with multiple shooting stations and throwers to provide a variety of challenges.

For tips on hitting moving targets, read "Patience, Practice, Persistence" in the August/September 2015 issue of *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine, and watch the video at <https://youtu.be/D9VXbUTUOcs>.

"Three gun" competitions — where you compete with a rifle, shotgun and pistol — are growing in popularity. Ranges offering these competitions are set up with obstacle courses and use different firearms for a high-action experience.

Enjoy living history? How about trying muzzleloaders or cowboy-action shooting? Cowboy-action shooters often sport period costumes and use firearms (or replicas) of the Old West. These friendly clubs welcome novices and new members. Competitions at the national level demand shooting and moving skill as competitors dash between shooting stations in a period setting.

With so many shooting sports choices and ranges available, you'll have years of enjoyment and a very impressive checklist of adventure! Get inspired at [www.wheretoshoot.org](http://www.wheretoshoot.org). ★



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# 3 Days in the Field

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS

# 3

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## Treasure Hunt

*Mason County lures visitors who dig topaz and Hill Country scenery.*

**Bluebonnet seedlings** and a few prickly pear cacti poke up from a granite sandbar that we're crossing on the Bar M Ranch in northwestern Mason County. Around us, northern cardinals, mourning doves and a mockingbird trill morning songs from the live oaks. In front, my husband totes a long shovel. I've got the metal sifter that's as big as a cookie sheet.

With high hopes and eyes peeled, James and I are on the hunt in early March for a Texas treasure like none other — rare Mason County topaz. Bar M owner Mark Hahn is one of three landowners who offer public hunts for a fee.

"We will find some," I tell James firmly as I lean down to examine some gravel. Surely, sheer determination will make my words come true.

Our quest for Texas blue topaz — designated as the state gem in 1969 and found only in Mason County — tops a three-day itinerary in Mason. But picturesque back roads and a vibrant downtown also beckon in this historic Hill Country town of nearly 2,200.

First, innkeepers Brent and Monica Hinckley usher us to our upstairs accommodations at the Red Door Bed and Breakfast, housed in an 1895 building on the square. In 1995, the couple renovated the second floor into four guestrooms and their private residence. To get to work, Brent simply walks to their downstairs business, Hinckley's Country Store, and down the block to City Hall, where he's served as mayor for a decade.

Our visit starts with Sunday lunch



Bats emerge for a nightly meal at the Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve.

at the Line Shack Cafe, where we dine on crispy fried shrimp and oysters. The locals give us warm smiles. One even recognizes me. Bob and I worked together years ago at an Austin newspaper.

For the afternoon, we head south to the Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve. We don't expect to see the cave or bats (Mexican free-tailed mothers raise pups there in the summer), but we've been told the drive is scenic.

Sure enough, gravel-topped James River Road meanders through rugged ranchland, past limestone-bluffed creeks and alongside scrubby hillsides dotted with yucca and juniper. A white-tailed doe pauses near a patch of red-berried tasajillo, then flees with her sisters into the tall grass.

At a river crossing, we decide the water over the road looks higher than our Camry can handle. So we double back, pull out our county map and choose a route that will put us on the south side of the James River. Off FM 783, we pull off to admire a ranch home and sandstone church built in 1902 at Hilda, a mere dot on the map. Back on unpaved county roads, we notice that the topsoils change in hue from red sandy loam to reddish brown, light brown and gray. At a creek crossing, a sheer bluff topped with bare-limbed trees reveals ancient rock layers and the empty mud nests of cliff swallows.

Finally, we reach our destination. Owned and managed by the Nature Conservancy, the high-fenced Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve is open



mid-May through October from around 6 to 9 p.m. when the bats emerge from the cave at dusk to forage. We'll come back another time to watch.

Back in Mason, we briefly tour the reconstructed officers' quarters — a dogtrot-style cabin perched atop Post Hill — at Fort Mason. Built in 1851, the frontier fort protected settlers from Indian raids. Several sparsely furnished rooms depict the era's rustic living conditions. After supper, we walk across the square to see a sci-fi flick at the Odeon Theater. Rescued by the Odeon Preservation Association in 1994, the 1928 theater also hosts live musical and theatrical performances.

The next morning, we dine on pancakes and French toast at the Willow Creek Cafe on the square. Then we stroll to Mason Country Collectibles, a short walk north on Fort McKavitt Street (U.S. Highway 87). Owners Warren and Susan Grote — the go-to gurus about the area's topaz — inherited the two-level compound from Warren's father, Oliver, who opened the offbeat antique business in 1978. The elder Grote, who passed in 2011, also sold jewelry set with Lone Star cut topaz from Mason County (which Warren sells, too). Oliver's most spectacular gem — a 587.15-carat faceted blue topaz — stays locked in a vintage bank vault.

"Daddy bought the potato-sized stone from a farmer who plowed it up in the 1940s and used it as a doorstop," says Warren, who allows me to cradle the sparkling topaz in my palm. "Our cutter studied the stone for nine months, then he took another nine months to cut it. He'd only cut 30 minutes a morning because he didn't want to make a mistake."

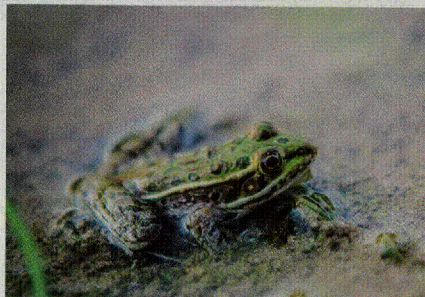
Oliver, who thereafter carried the topaz in his pocket, ultimately decided against selling it.

"People ask me all the time how much this piece is worth," Warren says with a chuckle. "Since it's not for sale, it's either priceless or worthless."

Eons ago, when the earth cooled, the difference of two fluorine atoms determined whether a quartz or topaz crystal formed. That said, amateur rock hounds often mistake plentiful



**Clockwise from top: Visitors can explore the reconstructed officers' quarters at Fort Mason, a frontier fort established in 1851. If you need a full meal or just a slice of pie, the Willow Creek Cafe has you covered. A Rio Grande leopard frog cools off in the shallows of the James River.**



quartz for Mason topaz, generally frosty and transparent in its raw state. Topaz also occurs in brown, yellow and light-blue colors. Glass dishes on Warren's counter contain small raw topaz stones for visitors to examine.

"They're hard to find," he warns. "I'll take a look at what you get, if you want."

For lunch, James relishes a hefty burger at the Square Plate on the square. My Chinese chicken salad comes packed with sunflower seeds, ramen noodles and slivered almonds. Our shared chunk of carrot cake kissed with cream cheese icing tastes divine.

Later, Dennis Evans meets us at the Mason Square Museum, where exhibits trace Mason's geology, early German settlers, Fort Mason days and cattle rustling feuds. But what most folks want to see is Mason

County's nearly 3-pound, uncut topaz displayed under glass. Found by Albert McGehee in 1904, the stone was sold to the Smithsonian Institution for \$75.

"We've had it on temporary loan since 1995," Dennis says. "We're hoping to make it permanent."

A quick stop by the Mason County M. Beven Eckert Memorial Library wraps up the day. James wants to see displays on the late Fred Gipson, a Mason native who authored the classic children's book *Old Yeller*.

For breakfast the next day, luscious blueberry muffins and hot coffee at Topaz Confections on the square hit the spot. We squirrel away a box of iced cupcakes and assorted cookies for later. Then we head northwest to the Bar M Ranch, where owner Mark Hahn and





his dog, Zeke, meet us at the gate.

"This place has been in my family since 1923," he says. "I grow cattle and run a deer hunting operation. This is my fourth year to offer public topaz hunts. Personally, I've never found any topaz. But a month ago, a family in a van got stuck in mud on a road and found a gem-quality topaz while digging out their vehicle."

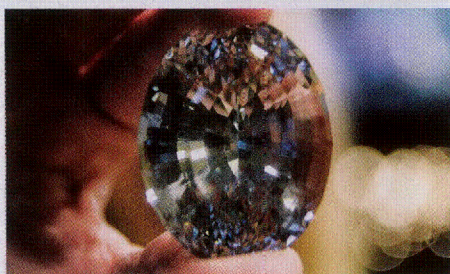
Mark goes over gem-hunting guidelines with us (such as don't do any off-road driving, close the gates and leave hunted areas in pristine condition), then hands us a ranch map, shovel and sifter. We must also sign a liability release. (FYI: Bar M offers topaz hunting from Feb. 1 to Oct. 2. Rates run \$15 per person per day. Metal sifters and shovels may be rented for \$6 each per day. The Seaquist Ranch and Lindsay Ranch also offer public gem hunts.)

"Anything you find is yours to keep," Mark continues. "You're more apt to find Indian artifacts in the pastures. Someone found a 4-inch spear point last year. For topaz, Honey Creek is the best place to look. I'd recommend that you walk up and down the creekbed. Or dig a hole and sift through what you find. Just please refill the hole."

"Topaz is difficult to find," he concludes. "It's like searching for a needle in a haystack. Good luck!"

Optimistic, we drive south on a bumpy ranch road and park at a picnic site. We tromp through tall grass to reach Honey Creek, which is barely

**Clockwise from top: Shops, offices and eateries line the square in downtown Mason. A gem hunter searches for topaz at the Bar M Ranch near Mason. This Texas treasure, a 587-carat blue topaz owned by the proprietors of an antique shop, spends most of its time locked in a vault.**



flowing. As we hike, I scan the granite gravel and pick up an occasional crystal. Maybe topaz, I think hopefully. Soon we venture up a grassy slope, sparsely covered with juniper, prickly pear and shrubby vegetation.

I pause to admire a cacti garden, growing within limestone bedrock, that features a small nipple cactus, clumps of claret cup cacti, a twist-leaf yucca, two Buckley's yuccas and young agaritas. A photo barely captures the natural beauty.

On the ground, I find what James later identifies as a small Native American scraper and a broken spear point. After an hour of searching, we decide to drive to a different pasture on the Bar M's southeast side. I pocket a few more crystals.

This time, we tote the shovel and

sifter to a dry creekbed. James digs into a sandbar, and we sift through the debris a few times. But, honestly, tearing up habitat isn't our thing. So James fills the hole back up, and I replant a displaced bladderpod. We agree to surface hunt for another hour or so.

By morning's end, we've collected several large rocks to accent our native gardens and a pile of unusual stones along with a few artifacts. In Mason, we track down Warren Grote, who's repairing a roof on Post Hill Street. I show him my handful of small treasures.

"Yep, young lady," he draws, "you've got some mighty nice quartz crystals there!"

I'm not surprised. Or disappointed. Because we did have a mighty fine time topaz hunting in Mason County, and that's what counts. ★



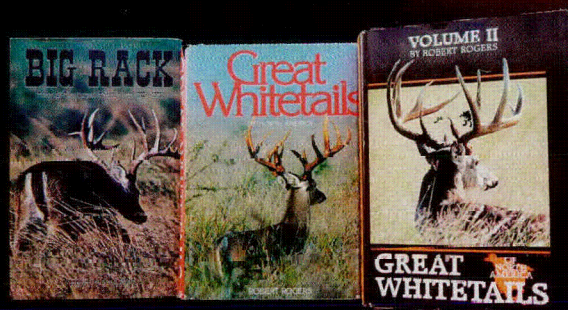


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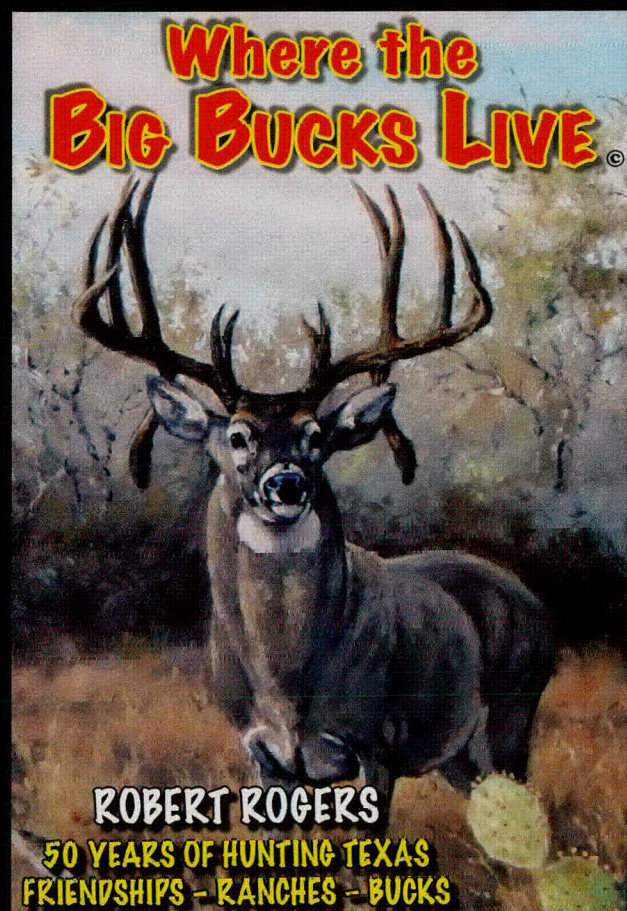
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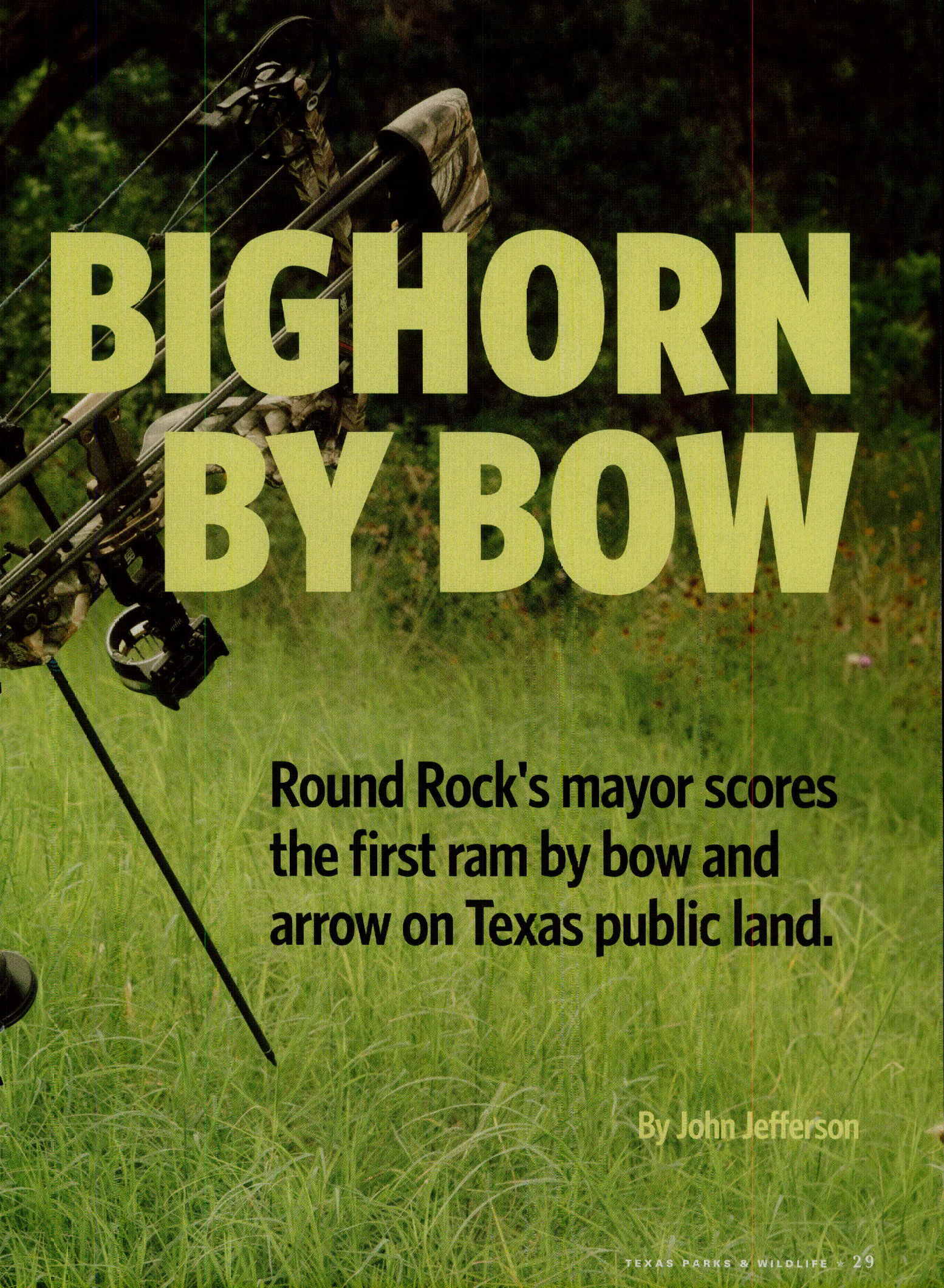




*Alan McGraw practices with bow and arrow to prepare for his next hunting trip.*

PHOTO © JOHN & VICKY JEFFERSON





# BIGHORN BY BOW

**Round Rock's mayor scores  
the first ram by bow and  
arrow on Texas public land.**

**By John Jefferson**



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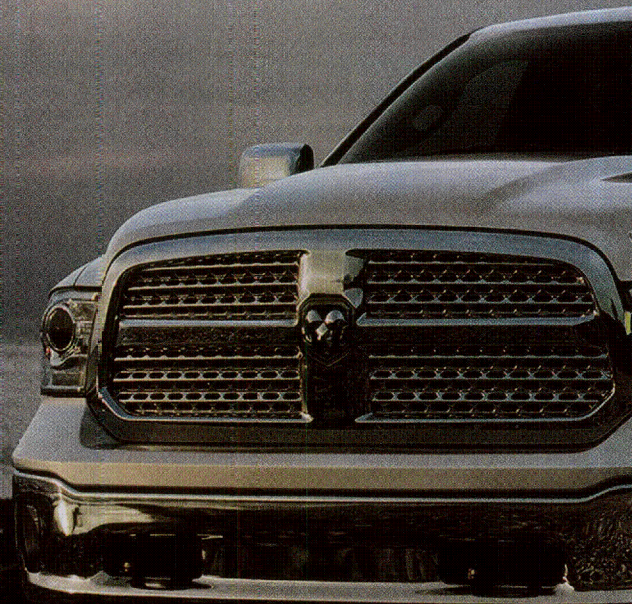


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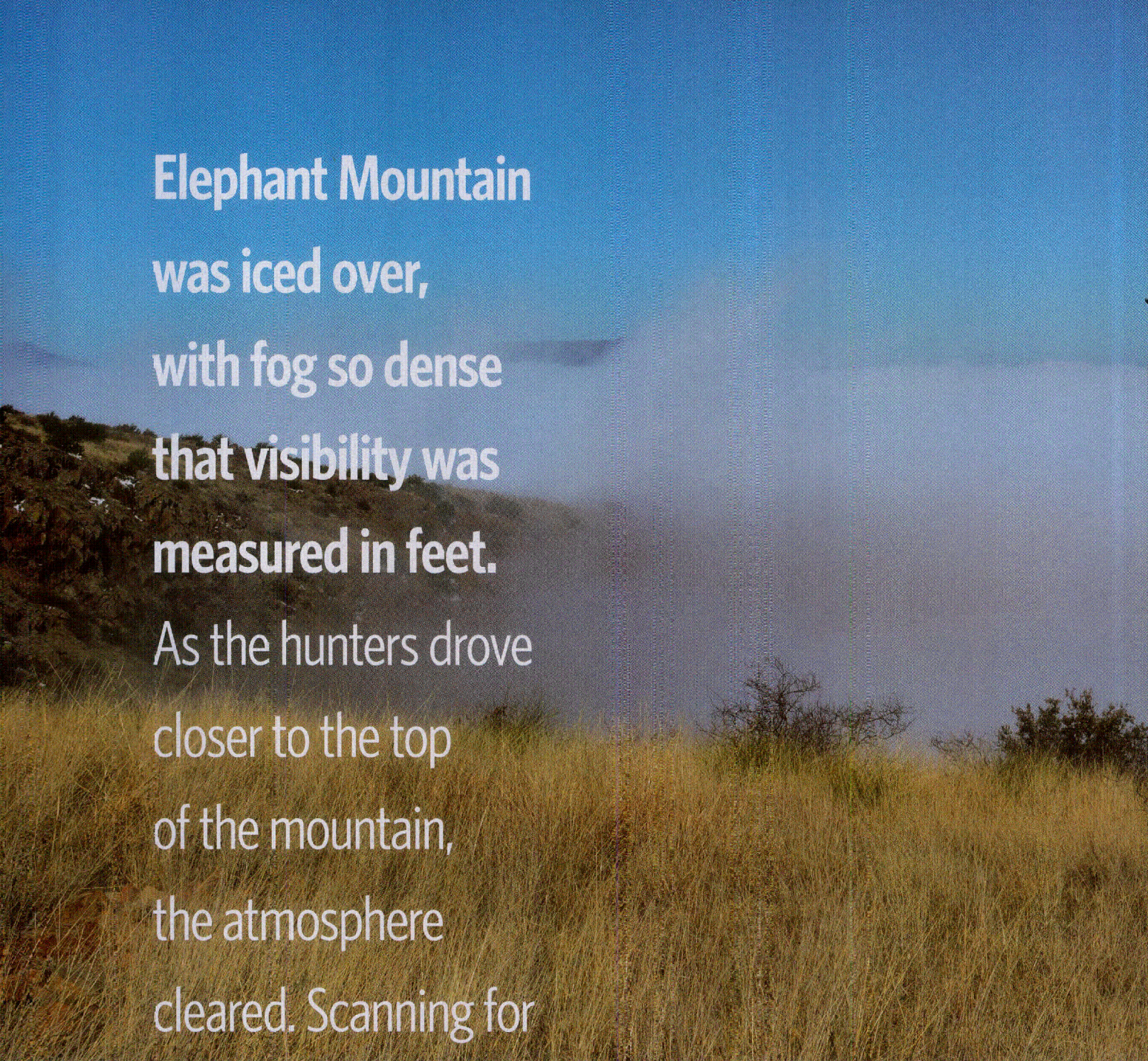
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Elephant Mountain  
was iced over,  
with fog so dense  
that visibility was  
measured in feet.

As the hunters drove  
closer to the top  
of the mountain,  
the atmosphere  
cleared. Scanning for

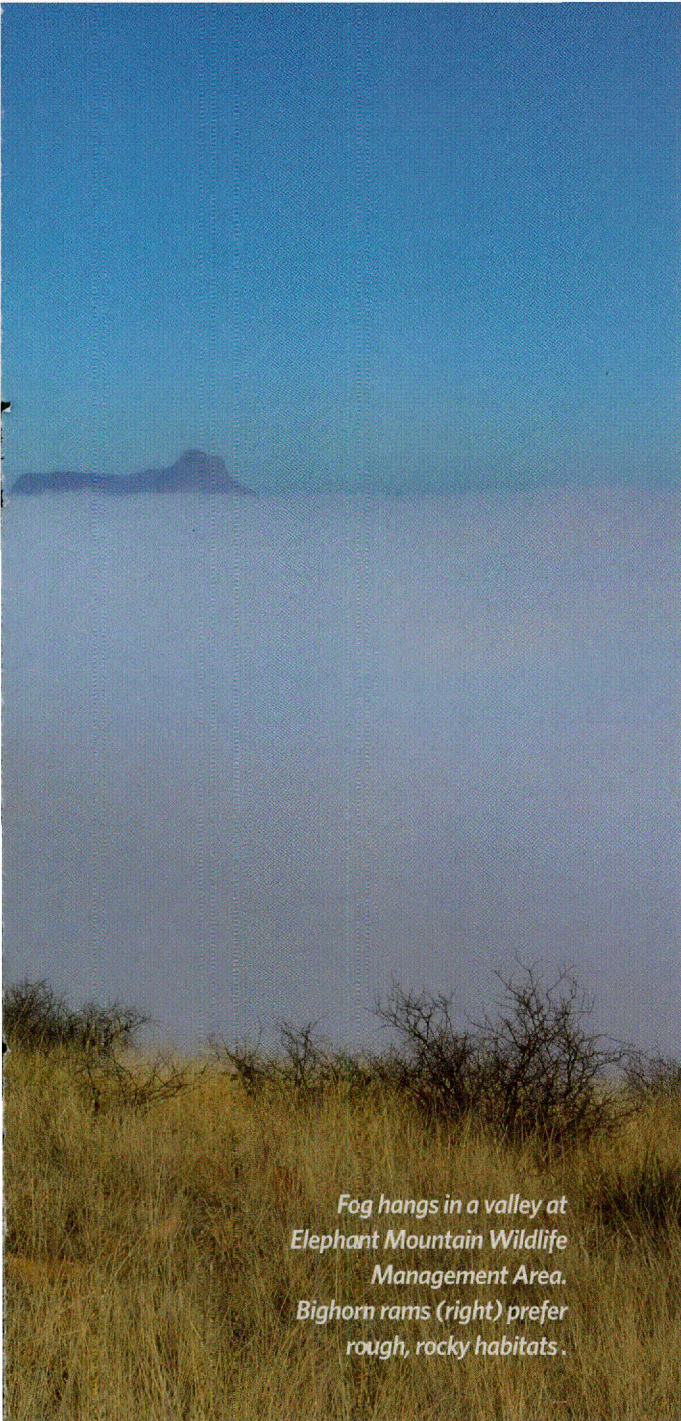
bighorn sheep (*Ovis  
canadensis*) was  
still challenging  
but improving  
with elevation.

The four hunters reached the summit when the spotter reported that he had seen 12 sheep at lower elevation. Two were “shooters” — big enough to harvest.

While going down sounds easier than climbing up, sometimes that’s not the case. The way down involved trekking through a nearly impassible gorge littered with boulders and thorny plants. Despite the daunting landscape, the hunters decided to make a stalk from the top.

Round Rock Mayor Alan McGraw, an experienced hunter and outdoorsman, was making his first bighorn ram hunt, accompanied by his wife, Kathy, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department wildlife





*Fog hangs in a valley at Elephant Mountain Wildlife Management Area. Bighorn rams (right) prefer rough, rocky habitats.*

biologist Dewey Stockbridge as guide. Cody McEntire, a wildlife technician on TPWD's Elephant Mountain Wildlife Management Area, came along, and Froylan Hernandez, TPWD's bighorn sheep program leader, served as a spotter from the top of Elephant Mountain. The peak is south of Alpine in West Texas.

That unforgiving terrain tested their endurance and their apparel. The soles of Kathy's boots started separating from the abuse and had to be duct-taped together. She kept going. No country for old boots or new ones not adequately broken-in.

The group struggled inch by inch to within 60 yards of the rams. Success seemed in sight. The first day of the 10-day hunt looked as if it was about to

be the last. The reward was a "gimme putt" away.

But one nervous young ram seemed aware of them. There were two shooters in the herd, as Hernandez had said. One had flared horns — ones that spread out to the sides. The other had boxy horns, meaning its horns stayed closer to the head in a tight curl. Both were trophy rams.

McGraw had told the WMA personnel that he didn't care about taking the biggest ram on the mountain. The thrill of the hunt mattered far more than the size of the prize.

The flared-horn ram got up and moved out farther. It was getting on into evening; McGraw was concerned about having to try to trail a wounded ram in fading light, especially over rocky hills and draws. He passed on that shot.

He and Stockbridge worked their way closer, but the rams were lying down, making it hard to see them. The two that qualified as shooters headed downhill, too far for a shot, and finally busted, distancing themselves from the hunting party. You see, McGraw was not carrying a high-powered, flat-shooting rifle with a strong, light-gathering telescopic sight — he was hunting with a bow and arrow.

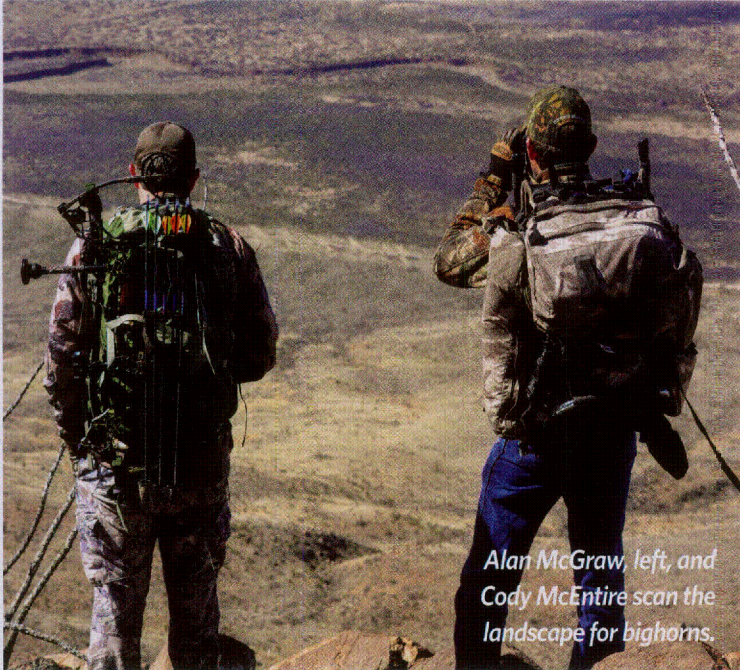
His judgment had avoided risking a wounding shot. While the first stalk ended disappointingly there in the twilight calm, getting back to camp would be a final bit of adventure for the day.

Their choices: Climb back up Elephant Mountain in the ensuing darkness to the truck, head straight down the mountain or strike out cross-country to the lodge. They decided going



LEFT PHOTO © KATHY MCGRAW, BOTTOM PHOTO © JOHN & VICKY JEFFERSON





back up the mountain was not an option — way too difficult. Going down the mountain would be precarious and still leave the party a long way from home. Going across the mountain won by consensus.

The four walked out, leaving the truck for later. The walk was long — more than two miles — and treacherous. It was after dark when they reached the lodge.

“Thank goodness we had moonlight,” McGraw said later. “And thank goodness we didn’t break an ankle. In the end, we were exhausted.”

They might have wondered if the going up was worth the coming down. The risk of tripping, slipping or stumbling and falling increases exponentially going downhill in the dark. At least in February the hunting party was not as concerned about rattlesnakes as they might have been in June. Warm weather adds different stresses.

After that long march in the mountainous high desert, they probably slept well that night, with visions of torn boots and bighorns dancing in their heads. After all, this was only Day One.

Many people don’t know there are bighorns in Texas, nor that they can be hunted. Permits are required, and hen’s teeth are easier to obtain. About 15 permits are awarded each year, depending on that year’s census. One permit goes to the winner of TPWD’s Grand Slam drawing, and another goes to the public hunt program’s bighorn sheep hunt drawing winner. One other permit is usually given on a rotating basis to a worthy conservation organization each year to be auctioned. McGraw’s

permit was a Texas Wildlife Association auction permit.

Proceeds from auctions are divided between the organization and TPWD. For more information on the two TPWD drawings, visit [www.tpwd.texas.gov/drawn Hunts](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/drawn Hunts).

Bighorns in Texas reside in the mountains of the Trans-Pecos region, ranging through several private ranches that partner with TPWD in stewarding the sheep, and three TPWD wildlife management areas: Elephant Mountain, Black Gap and Sierra Diablo. Big Bend Ranch State Park and Big Bend National Park also have some. Altogether, roughly 1,500 bighorns exist in Texas.

State management is greatly aided by the Texas Bighorn Society (TBS), a private nonprofit group dedicated to restoring bighorn sheep. TBS provides voluntary manpower, materials and money to create habitat-improving elements, benefiting not only sheep but all forms of wildlife.

Once abundant, bighorns historically suffered from disease, poaching and fences that restricted movement to food and water. Bighorns had virtually disappeared from Texas by 1958.

Restocking efforts through the years created a yo-yo effect. As the population increased after importing sheep from Arizona, Baja, Utah and Nevada, disease and mountain lion predation brought them down again. The 1983 construction of a brood facility at Sierra Diablo (by TBS) and the private donation of Elephant Mountain to TPWD were the turning points. The sheep population stabilized and continued to expand. More money came into the program through those auctions as well as excise tax proceeds, hunting license fees and the sale of Texas Grand Slam tickets. Today we see what may be the high-water mark for bighorn conservation, though the water looks to still be rising.

Alan McGraw’s hunt was a 10-day hunt package. He could take it in two five-day segments, if needed. The second day of his hunt was a reprise of the first day’s weather — cold and foggy, with most of the rams hanging out in the next ZIP code, apparently. The hunters did a lot of driving and stalking. Once, young rams came between them and two rams they were working. Their last stalk of the day began at a measured 637 yards — that’s six football fields plus nearly four more first downs. Peeping and hiding behind rocks and ridges, the group thought they had slipped close enough for a shot.

The hunters topped a ridge, but the rams were still 250 yards away, and there was no way to get closer. They backed out and headed for the lodge. Maybe tomorrow.

Sadly, the third day of the hunt turned out no better.



More fog. More driving, trying to peer through the soup. They came up on four young rams that they had seen several times. Stockbridge said one was mature and would measure about 160 inches of horn. He wanted to keep it in mind as a backup if nothing better materialized.

McGraw, who started the hunt saying he wasn't very particular about size, was becoming even less so.

It practically takes Comanche stalking skills to get within bow range — 40 to 50 yards for average archers. McGraw consistently practiced at 90 yards.

"That makes 40 yards seem easy," he explains. But bighorns are hard to hunt.

TPWD had carefully considered McGraw's request to bow-hunt a ram.

"Ultimately," Executive Director Carter Smith said, "we were persuaded by the fact that Alan has hunted big game on multiple continents in a wide variety of habitats and circumstances."

They stalked a nice ram, but again couldn't get close enough. Hernandez directed them to another good ram, and they went after it, only to see it spooked just as they got within range. Another day, another disappointment. They headed to the lodge.

"After three days, I was getting real concerned whether we could do it with a bow," McGraw admitted. Back at the lodge, they began talking about possible dates for the second five days.

Day Four dawned clear. No fog. But windy. This time, McGraw spotted a nice ram. They had to drive to the top and stalk down over the ridge. The four people moved stealthily, taking advantage of rocks and brush. Stockbridge stopped abruptly; the rams were feeding right in front of them, 54 yards away!

McGraw couldn't get a shot, so he belly-crawled closer. When he raised up, the ram was below him and behind a rock. No clear shot, so he back-crawled ever so carefully. The ram looked toward them, then away. Then the ram looked back toward them. McGraw waited.

Both rams looked toward the bottom of the mountain. McGraw rose to his knees, thankful to be wearing knee pads, and drew his bow. He could see the torso of the ram but not the legs. He had to get just high enough to shoot over the rock and avoid brush. His bow caught in the grass and he moved slightly to break it free.

His movement blended with the grass blowing in the wind, raising no alarm. He put the 50-yard sighting pin on the mark, took a breath ... and released.

The ram bolted and ran, showing no sign of being hit. Stockbridge said the arrow started well enough, but the wind took it to the right. They jumped up to follow it. McGraw pulled out another arrow, hoping

the ram would stop. They topped the ridge but saw to their dismay that the rams were nowhere in sight.

"My biggest fear," McGraw said, "was not a missed shot, but a bad shot. It was gut-wrenching."

McEntire contacted the spotters below.

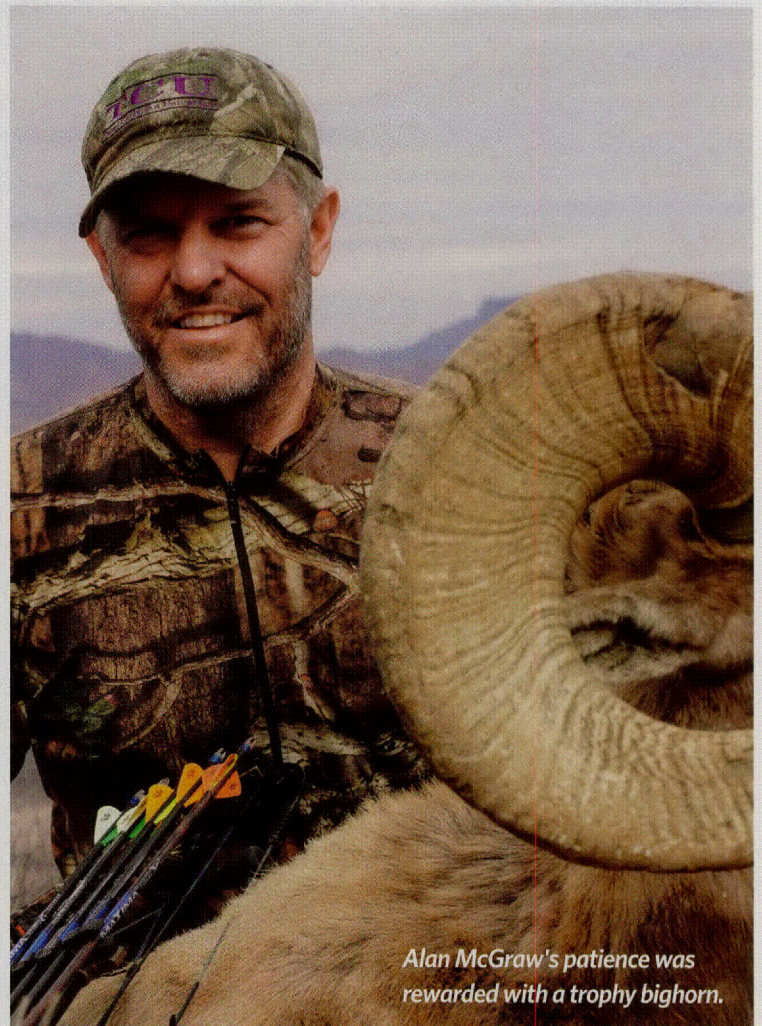
"Its legs are no longer kicking," came the word from the spotters.

"What!" McGraw exclaimed. "You mean I hit it?"

McGraw looked down, perhaps to wipe his eyes, and noticed they were standing in a trail of blood. The bighorn hadn't gone 60 yards.

The ram scored 172-7/8, enough to make the Boone and Crockett and the Pope and Young record books. It is also the first bighorn taken on public land in Texas with a bow and the first Pope and Young ram from Texas, quite a historic accomplishment.

McGraw credits his success to Stockbridge's knowledge of the sheep and the mountain. He recovered his arrow, and will use it on his next sheep hunt, in Canada. ★



*Alan McGraw's patience was rewarded with a trophy bighorn.*

PHOTO © KATHY MCGRAW





*Hunters take their spots for opening weekend of dove season in South Texas.*

PHOTO BY CHASE FOUNTAIN / TPWD



Opening  
weekend revives  
Texas hunters'  
passion for  
doves.

# FIELDS OF DOVE

By *Carter P. Smith*  
TPWD Executive Director





**THE RACE WAS ON.** We had left the Karnes County Fairgrounds under a searing hot midafternoon sun and a cloud-free sky. In spite of the heat, the weather appeared to be just fine for our purpose.

Thirty minutes later, as our procession of trucks pulled through the front gate of the Hedtke place over near the Karnes County line, thunderheads started to billow up overhead. Little pocket showers could be seen blanketing the surrounding Brush Country. Sporadic raindrops found their way onto our dust-covered trucks. And, judging by the flapping of the grass and the flailing of the mesquite leaves in the pasture, a pretty fair breeze had blown in from the southeast.

One of the more pessimistic members of our party wondered aloud whether we might get rained out. A second said with unwavering confidence that the weather forecast called for only a 30 percent chance of scattered storms, so any rains likely wouldn't last long. And, still another wit, clearly the most altruistic one of the bunch, posited that if we did get rained out, then so be it. The country needed it worse than we needed an afternoon in the field.

Outdoorsmen spend a lot of time speculating about the weather. And, like most such conversations I have been party to over the years, none of us really had a clue.

Notwithstanding all that rain banter, our little merry band, including Charlie, the excitable young white Lab, was not about to be deterred by any of that. Not rain, not wind, not worry, not nothing. We had simply waited too long and too longingly for what was in store that afternoon. So we pressed ahead down the winding caliche road with the unfettered haste and unbridled enthusiasm of kids rushing to the tree on Christmas morning.

As we went by the ranch headquarters, someone rolled down a window, and off in the distance, the siren call of a steady *pop, pop, pop* of shotguns could be heard. We all pointed and nodded our heads in affirmation at the line of mourning doves stretched out on the power lines. Out over a big stock tank, flights of doves in pairs

and trios were beginning to sail over like rockets in the wind.

When a pair of white-wings landed lazily on the eave of the barn where we had pulled up to park, it was simply too much for our party to bear.

Doors were flung open. Tailgates on the trucks came clomping down in unison. Shotguns were unsheathed and shells quickly stuffed in bird vests. Snake boots were hurriedly put on. Stools were slung over shoulders, and a cooler of cold drinks was thrown in the back of a Polaris. Someone remembered to grab a can of insect repellent.







*Mourning doves on a fence.*

PHOTO © TODD STEELE

Meanwhile, the doves kept flying by. With the tools of the trade appropriately assembled, we were off like a shot for one of the great rites of fall. Like the gaggle of other sporting enthusiasts out in the field that day, we had waited with great anticipation for the better part of a year for this time to come around again.

And here it was, just like clockwork, the opening weekend of dove season.

For as long as I have been old enough to shoulder a shotgun, there's hardly a place I'd rather be than around a stock tank, sunflower patch or freshly

harvested grain field. Dove hunting is one of the most social of our shooting sports. Good friends and good retrievers are always welcome. And, when the birds are flying, it is as good as it gets. Even when they aren't, it still beats most of the alternatives.

On this day, our hosts were the Hedtke family at their Coy City Ranch. With its mix of brush mottes, tree lines, sprawling live oaks, gnarled mesquites, caliche outcrops, open fields and a big tank with plenty of open shoreline, the ranch will have doves if there are any to be had.

The Hedtkes, longtime cattle people from the Karnes City area, are gracious hosts. Strangers are greeted like old friends, and old friends are welcomed like family. Son Wade, a rancher who also works at the local Farm Bureau Insurance office, likes nothing better than to put his friends onto the abundant game that call his country home. His canine sidekick, Charlie, more than earns her keep when it is time to locate an errant dove dropped in the tank or hidden by the tall grass.

Dad Larry and his wife, Beverly, live on the family place. He recently retired



from the Farm Bureau office where Wade works. He was also one of the original founders of the local Lonesome Dove Fest, a weekend-long festival organized by the area Rotary Club. Their mission is a noble one — to raise money for college scholarships for kids from Kenedy, Karnes City, Falls City and Runge high schools.

The Dove Fest, now in its 23rd year, was the brainchild of a few area ranchers, business owners and hunters who wanted to capitalize on the region's outstanding dove hunting and couple it with a family-friendly event that heralded the state's proud outdoor traditions.

After all, they pondered, who could resist raising money for kids while promoting dove hunting? It proved to be a pretty potent mix and grew with time.

From its humble beginnings in a freshly mowed coastal Bermuda field to its current home at the County Fairgrounds, the Lonesome Dove Fest now attracts upwards of 10,000 people to try their hand at archery and sporting clays or to watch the leaping Labs in the pool, see their kids catch a fish, watch a falconry exhibit, attend a bird-dog exhibition or listen to great live music at night.

One of the founders and local ringleaders of the Lonesome Dove Fest is native son and businessman Benny Lyssy. His sentiments make it clear why there is such strong community support for this annual festival.

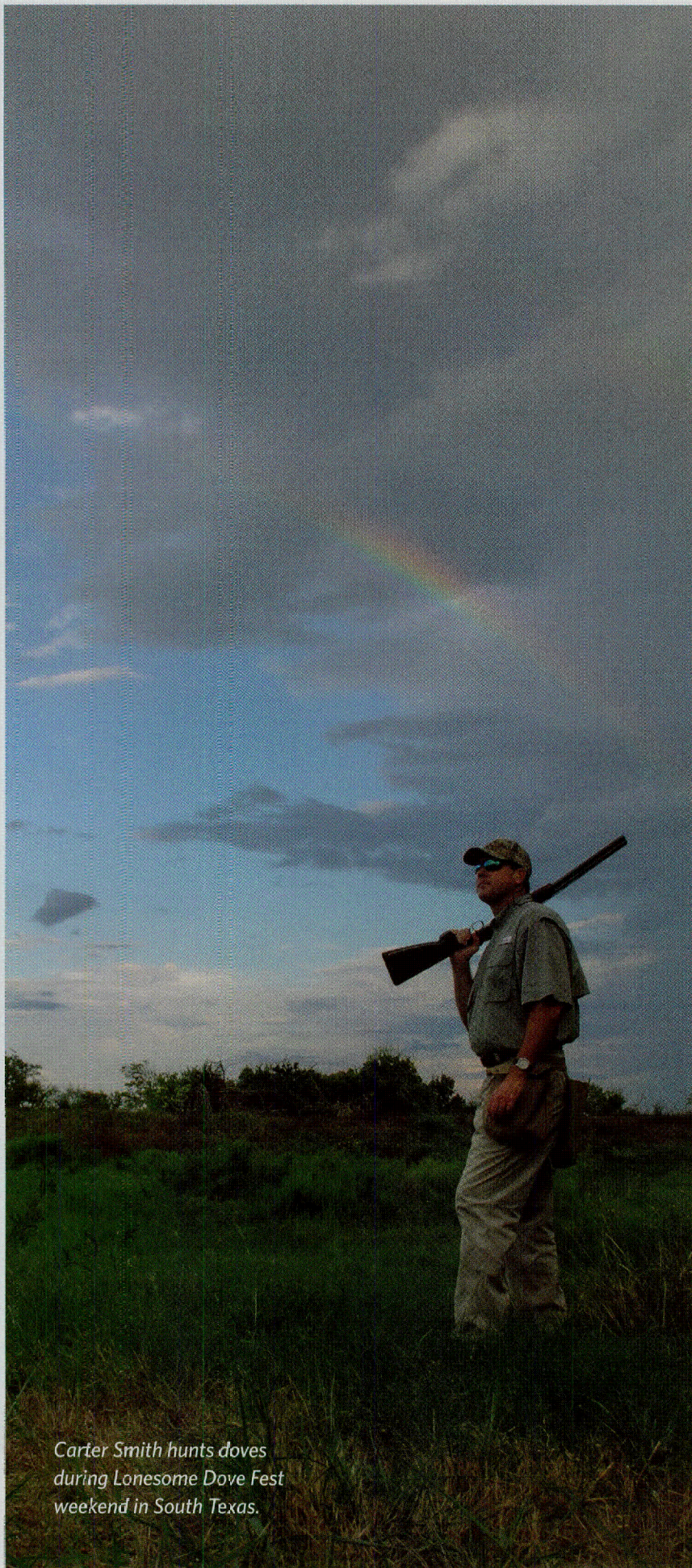
“What makes this event so special is what we do with the money we raise and how we involve the youth in the outdoors,” he says. “We are rapidly losing them to other pursuits, and this is our way of pulling them back in.”

Come September, communities all over the state welcome Texas' quarter of a million dove hunters into their folds with open arms. Their arrival is the harbinger of a diverse and robust hunter-



PHOTOS BY EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD





Carter Smith hunts doves during Lonesome Dove Fest weekend in South Texas.

PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD

driven economy that extends through the fall bird season and the winter deer, quail and waterfowl seasons, and mostly wraps up with turkeys in the spring.

Dove hunters alone pump more than \$300 million annually directly into small towns across Texas. More than 3,000 jobs are generated from these pursuits, and everyone from landowners to convenience store and motel owners to restaurateurs and sporting goods stores benefit from these hunter expenditures.

For other reasons, dove season means a lot to Benny, who is also the owner and proprietor of Big B's convenience store in Kenedy. The business has been in his family for more than 51 years, a justifiable source of pride.

Like many such businesses, Big B's caters to the sportsmen who come down to this neck of the woods. Benny's dad gave the store its oft-repeated slogan: "Come to Big B's, the Sportsman's Headquarters for Supplies and Lies!"

In his store, you can get shells, ice, gas, hunting and fishing licenses, camo shirts and caps, and all the other supplies you need for a weekend or week in the field. And if you want a little local flavor, stop in at 6 a.m. to join the local coffee klatch for lots of good advice and wisdom.

Thankfully, Texas has long been blessed with some of the best — if not *the* best — dove hunting in the country. Our unique position along the Central Flyway, coupled with our diversity of well-managed rangeland and farmland habitats, suitable climate and abundant places to hunt in and around both urban and rural areas, ensures bountiful opportunities for Texas bird hunters.

And, as the numbers suggest, Texas rarely disappoints. Fully 25 percent of all the mourning doves in the country are harvested right here in Texas, as are 80 percent of the white-wings. All in all, somewhere between 5 million and 6 million birds are harvested here annually.



That is not to suggest that dove hunting is anything but sporty. Throw in a little wind, birds that know when to fly high and when to fly low, as well as those that can — and will — zig and zag in flight with impressive acrobatic prowess and breakneck speeds, and even the best of shooters will eat a little humble pie now and again.

It gets even sportier when you pursue our native mourning and white-winged doves at the same time as the non-native Eurasian collared-doves. All three species have rather distinct patterns of activity, different habitat preferences, variable feeding times and unique tendencies in flight.

White-wings often fly high during their morning and afternoon feeding flights, while mourning doves may come at you low, high, fast or slow.

Mourning doves almost always are the first feeders in the morning, while white-wings have a penchant for “sleeping in.”

Collared-doves, which have recently expanded in our state and for which no bag limit exists, can be hunted all through the day. They also tend to be found around habitable structures and farm and ranch infrastructure like grain bins and cattle pens.

It was just our good fortune that all three were to be had that September afternoon at the Hedtke place.

After Wade dropped the six of us off at our spots around the big tank, it didn't take long for the action to begin. In fact, it didn't take a minute. To my left about 70 or 80 yards away sat Earl under a grove of little mesquites near

the tank's edge. When a mourning dove came barreling by in the wind, Earl dropped it with effortless precision, the first shot and the first dove of the day. As I watched him trot out into the broomweed to retrieve his bird, another dove came by, which he again dropped with one shot.

“Save some for me,” I heard someone yell jokingly.

A minute later, I heard someone shout, “Over you, Ross, over you,” just in time for our friend Ross to pound out two shots at a pair of doves sailing fast and furiously over a tree line. Almost concurrently, I heard another shot, and looked over to see a bird falling out of the sky near the tank's edge.

The hunt was on!

As it turned out, it was one of those



PHOTO © RUSSELL GRAVES



blessed days in the field. The rain stayed at bay, and the cloud cover made the afternoon an unusually pleasant one. Both mourning doves and white-wings came in to the tank pretty steadily, and a couple of hunters around the barn got a bag full of the Eurasian collared-doves.

On my spot at the edge of the tank dam, I had more than my fair share of pass shooting. Birds leaving their afternoon roosts in the adjacent brush came by as they went to water. To add to it, I had some pretty fair bird watching to boot during the breaks in the action. A big battalion of white pelicans came over, and a nice flock of blue-winged teal buzzed over me. A pair of great blue herons kept me company for much of the afternoon, and a great kiskadee showed up

unexpectedly in a nearby mesquite.

Charlie, Wade's trusted young Lab, put on a great show. At the end of the day, I had four downed birds that I couldn't readily locate. Two were in the tall grass behind the tank dam, one was off in the brush, and one more was out in the tank. Charlie more than proved her mettle, locating the birds on land quickly, then diving into the water and diligently following Wade's hand signals to locate my last bird that had floated out into the tank.

After a quick pat on the head, Charlie was off to help one of the other hunters with a lost bird. Her job (and her fun) weren't done.

At the end of legal shooting hours, we all met back at the barn for what is one of the wonderful traditions and

culminations of a dove hunt. Gathered around the tailgates with cold drinks in hand and with all eyes fixed on the last rays of a setting sun, we reflected on the good shots and the bad ones and laughed heartily about who hit what and who didn't hit anything. Hunting stories from years gone by were told and retold. Charlie was universally praised for her disposition and her retrieval skills. The Hedtkes were toasted for their stewardship and their generous hospitality.

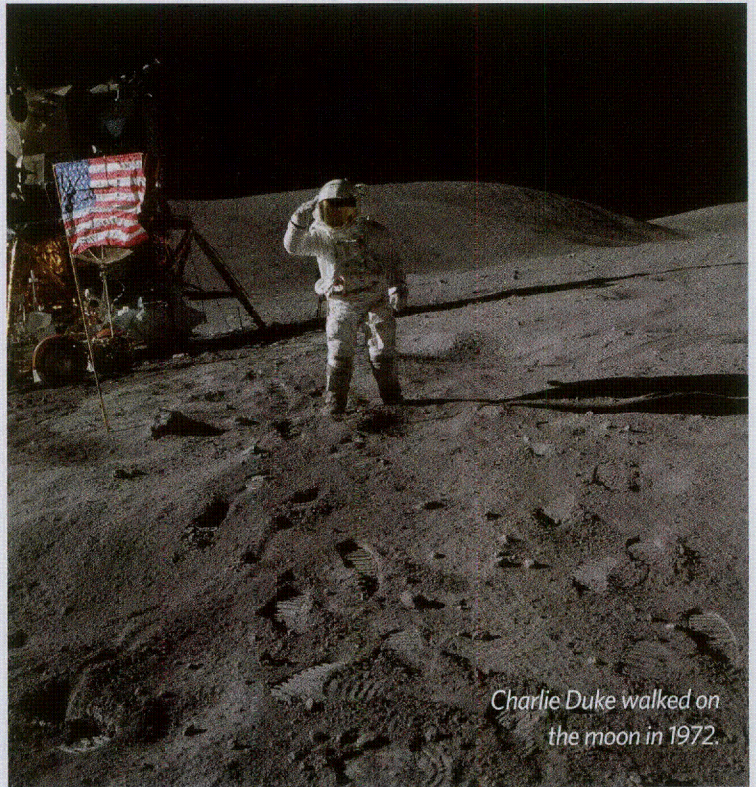
As the night took over the day, and the final birds were cleaned and the gear stowed away, we all made a promise to the dove fields. We would do it all over again soon. ★



*Three hunters carry their guns and gear for an afternoon dove hunt.*



Astronaut  
passes  
hunting  
heritage on  
to his family.



LEFT PHOTO COURTESY OF NASA; RIGHT PHOTO © DIOMEDES66/DREAMSTIME.COM

*Charlie Duke walked on the moon in 1972.*

# Lunar

**CHARLIE DUKE** puts the crosshairs on a young buck and anticipates the result — a 168-grain, .308 Winchester bullet blasting out of the muzzle at 2,700 feet per second.

As he squeezes the trigger, a thought flashes through his mind. He has traveled more than 14 times faster than that bullet — 38,800 feet per second, to be exact — when his Apollo 16 spacecraft accelerated into Earth's gravity just before re-entering the atmosphere.

One of only 12 men to walk on the moon, Charlie spent 71 hours on its surface after landing in a lunar module named for Orion, the constellation of a great hunter in Greek mythology.

The experience was a defining moment in his life, but not his crowning achievement. That continues to evolve, as on this day, when he shares his passion for the outdoors with his son and grandson.

It keeps him down to earth.





# Legacy

BY JOHN GOODSPEED





*Charlie Duke learned to hunt as a boy and has passed along that heritage to his kids and grandkids.*

His father, Charles Duke Sr., didn't hunt. But Charles Sr. taught Charlie and his twin brother, Bill, to target-shoot at age 10. Three years later, he gave them a 20-gauge, double-barreled shotgun, and told them, "Y'all take turns," Charlie recalls.

Growing up in the country near Lancaster, S.C., the youngsters hunted rabbits and bobwhite quail.

"We just fell in love with the outdoors," he says.

Later, Charlie also became enamored with flying, setting his sights on being a fighter jock. He scored a bull's-eye in that pursuit. He served as an Air Force fighter-interceptor pilot during the Cold War at Ramstein Air Base in West Germany and later became a test pilot at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

"One of the reasons I fell in love with airplanes was the opportunity to track and fight one-on-one — sort of a love for the chase," Charlie says. "Stalking an object in an airplane is very similar to the adrenaline rush when stalking an animal."

In 1965, he volunteered to be an astronaut and moved to Houston with his wife, Dotty, and their first son, Charles Duke III.

The moon was his next target.

The following years were filled with training, the birth of a second son, Tom, and intimate involvement with five Apollo flights, including serving as spacecraft

communicator for Neil Armstrong's landmark Apollo 11 lunar landing.

He was invited on hunting and fishing trips around the nation. Charlie and Dotty shot their first white-tailed deer near San Saba. The couple loved to camp, hike, hunt and fish.

"On the first survival training, there were four or five of us astronauts, and none of them had a clue about the outdoors," Charlie says. "They didn't know how to field-dress a rabbit or skin it. So I did all that and roasted it.

"It wasn't a chore; it was fun."

On April 16, 1972, Charlie, commander John Young and command module pilot Ken Mattingly lifted off from Kennedy Space Center on Apollo 16 for a 240,000-mile journey to the Descartes highlands of the moon.

Duke and Young conducted three moonwalks and drove the lunar rover nearly 17 miles. The outdoorsman did not forget to pack his humor.

One assignment was to collect soil from a shadow. He found the perfect sample in a hole underneath a rock, Charlie recalls in his autobiography *Moonwalker*, co-written with Dotty.

While Duke reached in with a shovel, Young described it as a gopher hole. Charlie replied, "Do this in West Texas and you get a rattlesnake."

In 1975, he left NASA, joined the Air Force reserves



and moved to New Braunfels to pursue business opportunities. He joined a deer lease near Canyon Lake, about 15 minutes from home. Son Charles was 11 when he shot his first buck. Son Tom got his at age 10.

Rearing their own families now, the men share their father's enthusiasm for the outdoors with their children.

Charles, 50, a business consultant/strategic planner with the CPA firm Elliott Davis Decosimo in Greenville, S.C., has six children. He bought some land, improved the duck ponds and planted food plots for deer and doves. Charles' oldest sons, Charles IV and Haywood, took their first deer at Charlie's deer lease. His stepdaughter hunts, too.

Tom, 48, a retired colonel with the Texas Air National Guard and a Delta Air Lines pilot, lives in Terrell Hills, a San Antonio suburb. His son Parker, 15, also shot his first buck at the deer lease. His other two sons have yet to pick up hunting, but they enjoy fishing and the outdoors with their father and grandparents.

"Hunting has been a real bond for our family, with our kids and older grandkids," says Charlie, who turns 80 this October and travels the world doing motivational speaking and Christian ministry.

*"Seeing the joy the kids and grandkids have — and the thrill of their first kill — is really special," he says. "You're basically living your first deer through them, and you're so excited for them."*

*Charlie Duke hunts with son Tom and grandson Parker at a ranch in Southwest Texas.*



"Hunting has been a real bond for our family," says Charlie Duke, preparing to climb up to a blind.



PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD

This year, Charlie and Dotty spent one cold, drizzly Friday afternoon in January in a tower blind so tall that he said he needed an oxygen mask. Tom and Parker arrived at the Black Ranch in Maverick County in Southwest Texas later that day, just in time for dinner.

It was far from a typical deer camp meal — or conversation.

The hosts were the Hasslocher family — patriarch G. "Jim" Hasslocher, 92, who is the founder of Jim's Restaurants and Magic Time Machine restaurants; Jim's wife, Lilia; his son, Bobby; Bobby's wife, Jill; and Bobby's son, Robert, 31.

Gary Johnson, a general manager with the restaurants, and his wife, Cori, prepared a feast of fried shrimp, oysters and trout, and grilled mahi-mahi. The conversation included discussion of the spectacular views of Earth from the moon, the difficulty of moving in a spacesuit, manned missions to Mars, ion drives and the future of spaceflight.

The next day, the Hasslochers planned the morning hunt.

"If you see something that you want to shoot, there are some 12- to 14-point bucks that come in there. Try to take one," Hasslocher says.

"I'm not going to shoot one of your big bucks," Charlie says. "I just want some deer meat."

Dotty says that Charlie processes his own deer.

"He'll skin it and hang it in a meat locker for a week," she says. "It makes the meat more tender."

As the hunters head out before daylight in a gentle rain, Bobby Hasslocher nods at the teenage Parker and says, "This is great. That's the generation we have to concentrate on to keep the interest going."

Charlie settles into his blind. When the feeders go off just after daylight, a swarm of deer emerge from the brush and mesquite — does, fawns, young bucks and some older bucks, including a massive eight-point.

After about an hour, Charlie hears a report. A text from Tom says he thinks Parker got a big 10-point but they'll wait before looking. Not long after, Charlie lines up his crosshairs on a four-point and drops him. Another text appears, this time with a photo of a 12-point buck.

"Man, that's a monster," Charlie says.

The hunt is over, but the sharing of stories begins as the hunters collect the harvest. Parker is still excited when he tells

his grandfather about the other bucks they had seen and how his father advised him to be patient.

"That's the best I ever shot," Parker says.

"That's the biggest thing I've ever seen," Tom adds.

Growing up near the deer lease allowed Tom and Charles plenty of chances to share time camping, fishing, hunting and learning with their parents.

Tom says his father showed him how to clean his first deer, hang it in the garage and butcher it.

"He taught me to respect the animals," he says. "Dad always said if you shoot something, you eat it."

"Going to the deer lease, sometimes just to camp out, gave me the opportunity to have a lot of quality time with Dad."

Tom passes what he learned on to his sons, whether it's simply tying a hook on a line or preparing gear for hunting, fishing or camping.

"Definitely the experiences I have had flow through me to my sons. Not one specific moment, but the collectiveness of all the things I learned over the years," Tom says.



“Being outdoors is a good way to spend time with your kids and your kids to spend time with their grandfather — and also to do something you enjoy,” he explains. “I like the quiet and sheer beauty of God’s creation. I love being out in it, whether at a park, campground or a ranch — tracking game or not.”

Tom says he thinks of his father every time he looks up at the moon.

Parker quickly cites the top three things he has learned from his father — respect for the animal (whether a deer or a bass), firearm safety and how to bait a hook.

It was his grandfather, however, who made him a sharpshooter.

“My shots were pretty awful,” Parker says. “He took me out to work on my marksmanship with a .22 whenever he could. It showed he cared about me, and I really liked that.”

He says he used to take it for granted that his grandfather walked on the moon. But as he grew older, a broader outlook developed.

“He’s given me something to shoot for. Maybe not exactly the moon, but whenever I think I’ve done something great, I realize that there are so many better things, and I’ll get there someday,” Parker says. “It’s pretty inspiring.”

He enjoys being outdoors and getting away from schoolwork and cellphone service.

“Doing something that people have been doing for such a long time feels natural; it feels great,” he says, adding a line from a poem by Adam Lindsay Gordon: “Life is mostly froth and bubble.”

“It reminds me of how lucky I am to spend time with my dad and grandfather,” Parker says. “It keeps my sights on what’s important, keeps things in perspective. Do other things really impact my life as much as the outdoors stuff?”

When he has children someday, he plans to continue the family tradition.

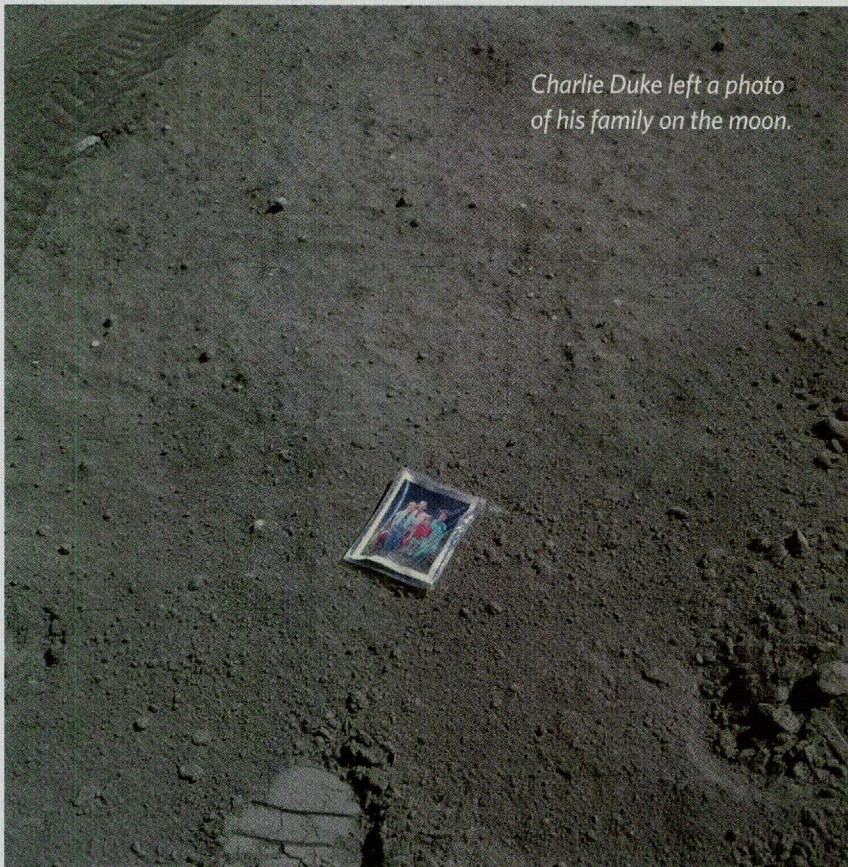
Charlie still feels a sense of wonderment when he sees the moon, whether he is sitting in a deer blind with Dotty or just enjoying the outdoors with his grandchildren.

“I’ve really been there, and I can see some of the general area of my landing site,” Charlie says.

In quiet moments, he sometimes thinks about different aspects of the adventure, such as the re-entry.

“Faster than a speeding bullet, just like Superman. I’ve done that,” he says.

He believes his longer-lasting achievement, though, is instilling a love of the outdoors in two generations of Dukes — and counting. ★



*Charlie Duke left a photo of his family on the moon.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF NASA



# Seeds of Hope

by Camille Wheeler

**NURSERYMAN BILL NEIMAN HARVESTS  
NATIVE SEED TO RESTORE TEXAS PRAIRIES.**



Bill Neiman examines annual winecup seeds (top photo) and eastern gamagrass.

TOP PHOTO © CAMILLE WHEELER; BOTTOM PHOTO © BILL MCCULLOUGH

**AS A CHILD** growing up on the rural outskirts of Dallas in the 1950s, Bill Neiman loved to plant himself beneath the native horse apple trees in his family's backyard. Water hose in hand, he created rivers and lakes for his imaginary little people in the make-believe cities he built in the dirt.

The young Neiman spent summers barefoot, walking through pastures to explore the tall grasses around Bachman Creek and Bachman Lake. He dug in the dirt with his grandmothers, nurturing vegetable gardens and flowerbeds. As a teenager, Neiman traveled yearly with his father to New Mexico's Gila Wilderness, where they slept on the ground, made hot tea from wild mint and seasoned freshly caught trout with watercress, nuts and berries.

By Neiman's 19th birthday, the seeds of destiny that someday would yield the operations of his Native American Seed farm and a partnership with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department had clearly been sown: He would work with land, plants and water.

In 1973, Neiman borrowed a rake, a shovel and a lawnmower to start a landscaping business in Argyle, northwest of Dallas. Five years later, in neighboring Flower Mound, he launched a bigger operation: Neiman Environments Nursery and Landscape Construction Company.

But by 1985, at the age of 30, Neiman was questioning everything about his business. Haunted by a brutally hot 1980, when his non-native landscapes succumbed to drought, Neiman realized he was growing the wrong



kinds of plants. The surrounding countryside was virtually covered with alien species. No one, it seemed, knew where to find native vegetation.

Disconnected from his childhood roots, Neiman was at a crossroads. The turning point he desperately sought came on March 30, 1985, during a native plant landscaping seminar held in Dallas at the Texas Agricultural Research and Extension Center, which was locally known as the Renner Station. Hosted by the Native Plant Society of Texas, formed four years earlier, the seminar featured keynote speaker Sally Wasowski, an author whose first native landscaping book was set for release that April.

Neiman sat alone near the top row of the auditorium confronting a painful truth: Everything about his role in the conventional American landscape paradigm, every non-native species that he planted in a customer's yard, every drop of water that went toward keeping insanelly thirsty exotics green for green's sake, was a mistake.

On the stage below, Wasowski challenged the audience: Where could native plants be found? Who could be trusted to grow them?

Shocking even himself, Neiman sprang to his feet.

"I can do it!" he shouted as every head in the crowd turned to stare up at the 135-pound landscape contractor whose booming, crow-like voice didn't match his grass-stalk-slender frame. "And I will do it! I have a nursery. I'm in Flower Mound, Texas, and I'm converting the whole thing to native plants."

Wasowski had never heard of Bill Neiman.

"We all looked at each other and thought 'Who is this guy, and will we ever see him again?'" she recalled in a phone interview.

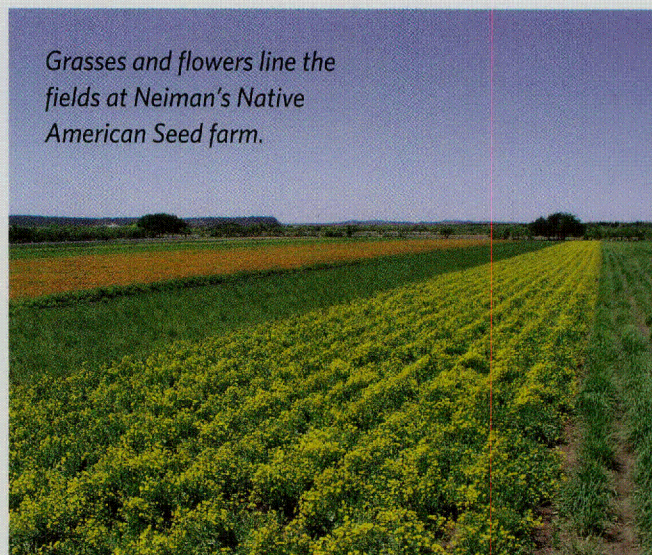
The answer was yes. Neiman kept his word, completing his nursery's conversion to native plants by the late 1980s. Wasowski, who went running to get Neiman's name after the seminar, became one of his first customers.

The transition wasn't easy. Neiman and his wife, Jan, dug up native plants and roots from Denton County sites being paved over by urban sprawl. They hand-collected native seeds to grow starter plants. And they bought an old church bus, removed its seats and traveled to Central Texas, bringing home native plants from visionary nurseries.

Their efforts were producing amazing results. In the morning, Neiman and his crew would deliver native plants to a customer's home for landscaping. That afternoon, before the men had finished cleaning up, bugs, birds and butterflies were already zooming into the yard, wildly attracted by the new vegetation.

There was no doubt in Neiman's mind: There was a crash in habitat. Wildlife was starving for native plants. Nearby, a few pockets of wild prairie remained where native seeds could be harvested. Neiman figured that in the back of a pickup truck, he could load enough native plants to landscape a yard in an afternoon. Or, in that same pickup bed, he could load enough bags of harvested seeds to plant 40 acres.

The future was at stake. Neiman resolved to start restoring Texas' native prairies. Otherwise, genetic information would be lost. The seeds were the only things holding it.



Grasses and flowers line the fields at Neiman's Native American Seed farm.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIVE AMERICAN SEED

In 1988, Neiman pulled an Allis Chalmers combine with a Farmall Super M tractor to harvest Flower Mound's 12-acre namesake, The Mound, sacred Native American ground cloaked with 350 native plant species. Neiman had a new offering: an ecosystem in a bag. That same fall, he introduced the business name Native American Seed, selling seeds in Mason jars.

In 1989, in a project funded by TPWD, the Nature Conservancy and Collin County, Neiman conducted his first native prairie restoration, planting seeds he harvested within a 15-mile radius on 60 acres of the Parkhill Prairie Preserve. He could rebuild an ecosystem from itself.

The next year, Neiman shut down his Flower Mound nursery, moving full-time into harvesting seeds on native prairie remnants. In 1995, Bill, Jan and their children, Emily and Weston, ages 12 and 6, moved to the Hill Country, eventually establishing a permanent home for Native American Seed on a farm northeast of Junction on the Llano River.

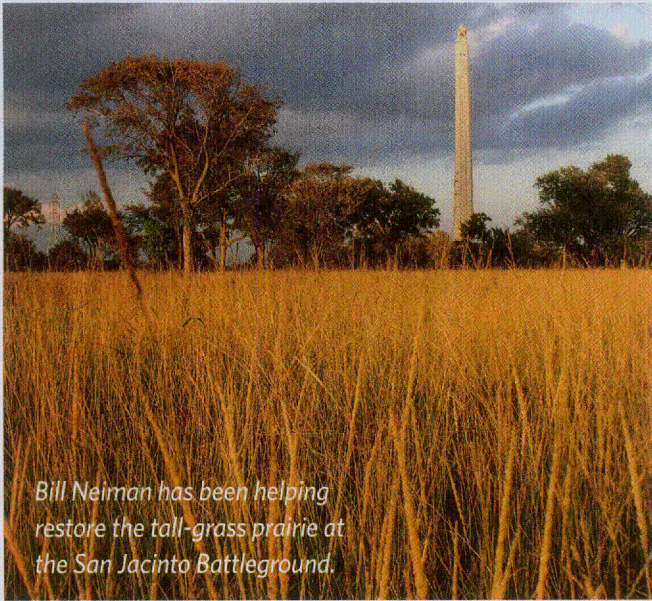
Seated at the intersection of a handful of Texas' 10 ecoregions, Native American Seed specializes in the harvest and sale of wildflower seeds and prairie grasses native to the Texas-Oklahoma-Louisiana bioregion. As a research laboratory for seeds harvested off-site, the farm provides vivid examples of how native habitat sustains wildlife.

During the extreme drought conditions of 2011, clouds of painted buntings descended on rows of Texas cupgrass (*Eriochloa sericea*), surviving on its nutritious seeds. Milkweed varieties grown on the farm support migrating monarch butterflies, whose numbers are plummeting these days.

The Native American Seed story is one of connections, with none more critical than Neiman's collaborations with TPWD. Through harvesting, prairie restoration and educational outreach, Native American Seed has provided help to dozens of state park facilities over the past 27 years.

Two such partnerships continue at the Houston-area Sheldon Lake State Park and Environmental Learning Center and at San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site, where TPWD biologist and natural resource specialist Andy Sipocz strategizes with Neiman's team.





*Bill Neiman has been helping restore the tall-grass prairie at the San Jacinto Battleground.*

Since Neiman's initial visits to Sheldon Lake State Park in 2004, Native American Seed's work, in part, has involved wetlands restoration via the planting of live roots into marshes. And in cooperation with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Texas Master Naturalist volunteers, wetlands covered up

by agricultural land use decades ago are being re-excavated with the "Sheldon-Sipocz" method that Sipocz pioneered.

Sheldon Lake State Park's intricately connected wetlands and prairie need many more years of recovery, Sipocz says. Yet the swift return of wildlife to the park is "like magic," says Sipocz, who again is seeing American bitterns and bobcats, among many other animals, thriving in tall native grasses.

In nearby La Porte, the San Jacinto Battleground Conservancy, the Shell Oil Company and Texas Master Naturalist volunteers are providing support for the restoration of the San Jacinto Battleground to its 1836 appearance, when Texas soldiers crawled through waist-high native grasses to take Mexican Gen. Santa Anna's encampment by surprise and seize the decisive victory of the Texas Revolution.

In 2013, Native American Seed meticulously planted a mixture of native grasses and wildflowers on 110 acres of the site with a tractor and seed drill. The size, scope and precision of Neiman's convoy-traveling operations set the team apart.

"It's not easy planting prairie soil. That's why we use folks like Bill," Sipocz says.

Neiman, now 61, encourages us all to read the land: to understand what grew there 150 years ago without human interference.

"People can rebuild this," he says. "All is not lost." ☆



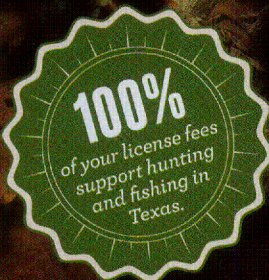
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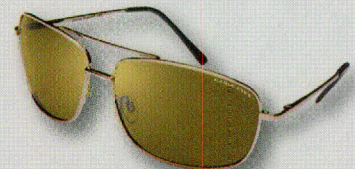


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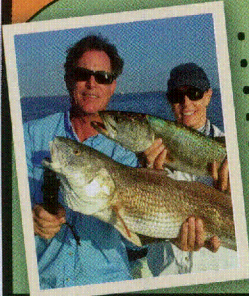
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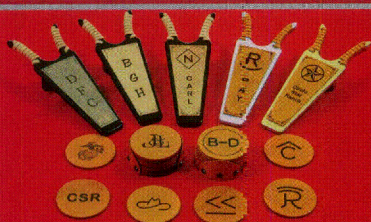
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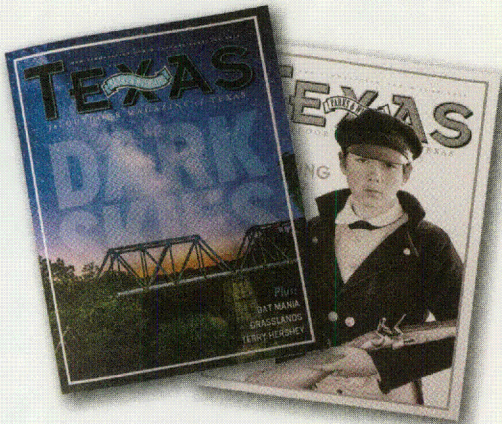
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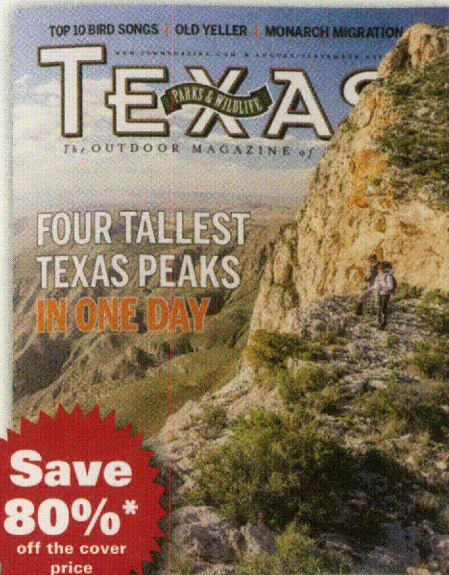
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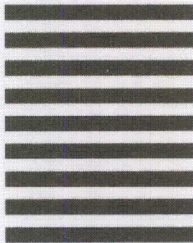


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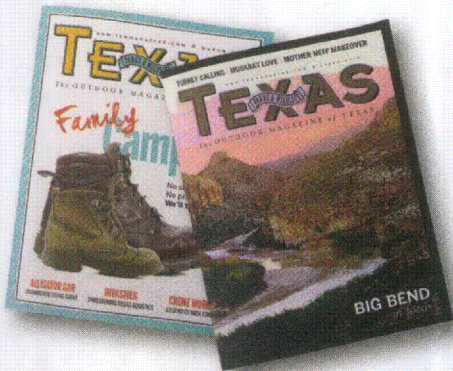
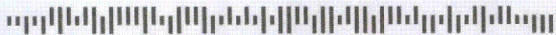


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# PARTINGSHOT



#### IMAGE SPECS:

Nikon D3S camera with 80-200mm f/2.8 lens. Shot at 200mm, f/2.8 at 1/60th of a second. ISO 500.

*Texas Parks & Wildlife* photographer Chase Fountain captured this image of a black-tailed jackrabbit while on his way to the Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve near Mason. "When I spotted 'Jack' eating a prickly pear cactus I had to pull off and try to capture this moment. Fortunately for me, the jackrabbit was more interested in dinner than me sneaking up on him." These large-eared animals — they're hares, not rabbits — can run up to 45 mph and are found in grasslands and desert scrub.





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