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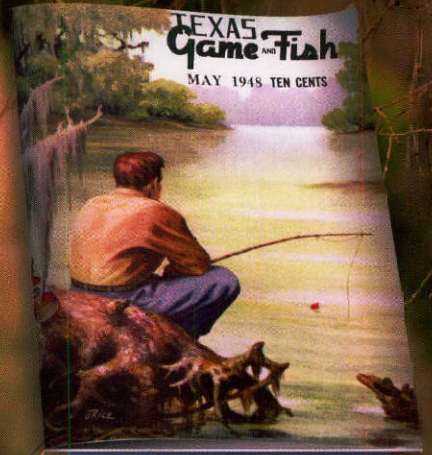
THE MAGIC OF MARBLE FALLS

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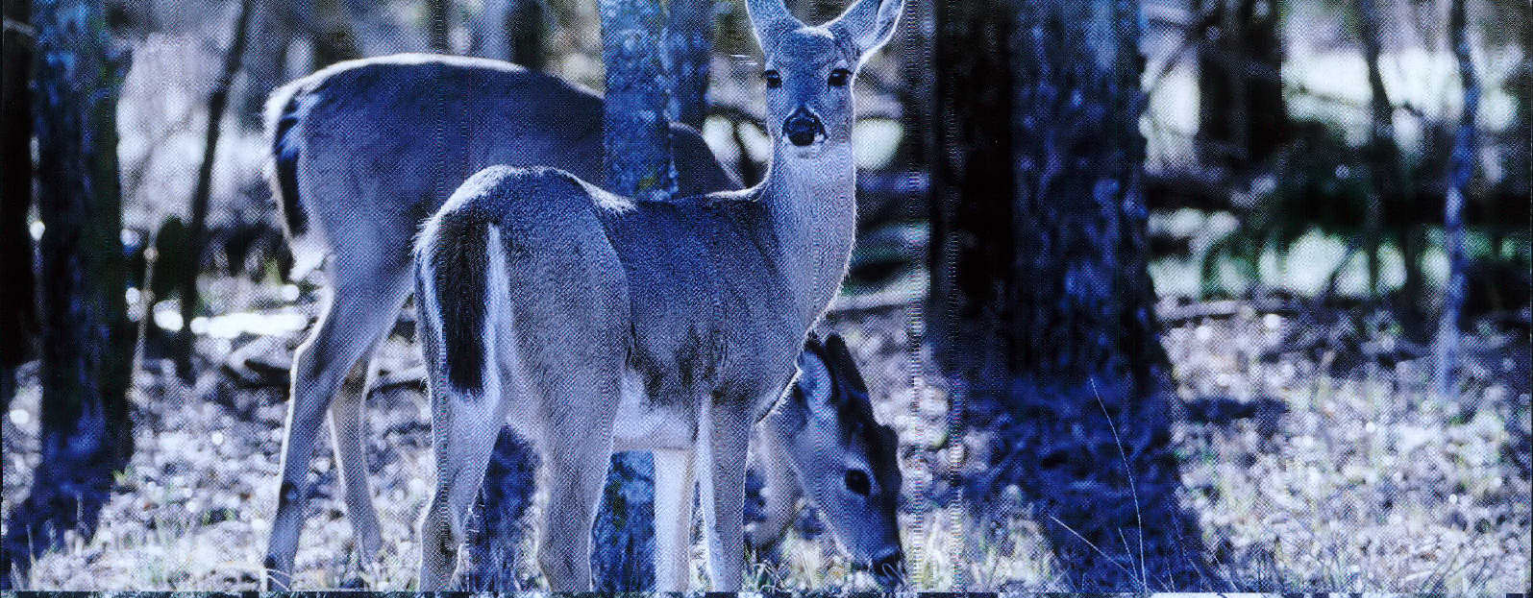


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Gently Down the Stream

Find the middle of nowhere in the middle of everywhere on an urban paddling trail.

by Camille Wheeler

ON THE COVER:

Adam Nottingham finds a place to cast a line in a modern take on one of our 1948 magazine covers.

Photo by Earl Nottingham / TPWD

BACK COVER:

Bald eagles, the national emblem of the U.S., have a year-round population in Texas, with more birds arriving in winter.

Photo © John Rivera

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Hold your nose and offer up praise for the much-maligned but most worthy vultures.

by Dale Weisman

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Two major Texas bass tournaments offer rare access for spectators.

by Randy Brudnicki

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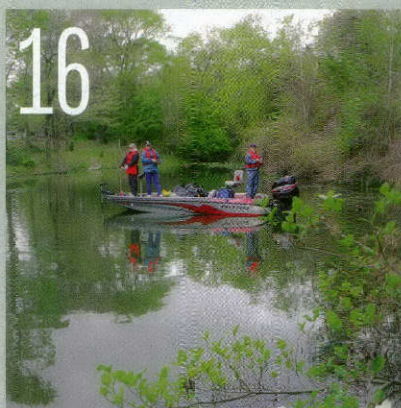
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↑ "VULTURES ARE SO MISUNDERSTOOD. THEY HAVE SUCH SWEET PERSONALITIES. IF PEOPLE ONLY KNEW HOW MUCH CHARACTER THEY HAVE AND HOW SMART THEY ARE, THEY'D RESPECT THEM MORE."

— CAROL, THE "VULTURE LADY"



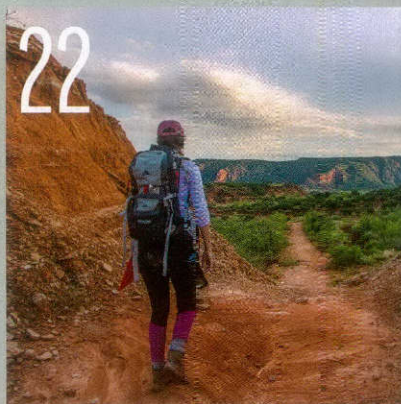
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PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD



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FROM THE EDITOR

WE'RE RIDING THE WAVE of our 75th anniversary all year long, and as part of the commemoration, we're giving a nod to each decade in our history. This month, it's the 1940s.

The 1940s were our first decade of publication. Somebody at what was then the Texas Game, Fish and Oyster Commission decided that 1942 would be a good time to start a magazine, and, well, it's worked out all right. We're now the longest-running magazine in Texas.

Let's start with the cover. This month's cover shot is an homage to our May 1948 cover of a man fishing by a stream, a cover painted by longtime magazine cover artist Orville Rice. Photographer Earl Nottingham found a spot on the Colorado River to capture the look and feel of the previous cover. We're hoping to re-create a cover from each decade as we go through the year.

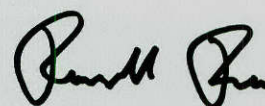
"We stand on the shoulders of artistic giants," says art director Nathan Adams. "Their work was so inspiring, and we wanted to pay tribute to them through a modern lens."

Our Park Pick is another nod to the 1940s. Monument Hill State Historic Site, where 1840s Texas fighters are entombed on a high hill overlooking La Grange, was acquired by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 1949. (Last month's Park Pick featured Blanco State Park, built in the 1930s, and next month will feature a 1950s park.)

Finally, our Legacy section near the back of the magazine collects highlights, lowlights, quotes, questionable recipes and more from the 1940s editions of our magazine. Take a look.

We've always tried to inspire Texans to get out and enjoy the outdoors and explore new parts of Texas. One person who looked to the magazine for such inspiration is longtime contributor and former TPWD communications director John Jefferson. As a young man growing up in Southeast Texas, he avidly read *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine to learn about Texas destinations he might someday get to visit. By its name alone, one place caught his attention as especially exotic and alluring — Marble Falls. Well, you're in luck, JJ, because we're featuring Marble Falls as our Travel destination in this issue. Maybe we'll inspire another young Texan to dream about traveling there.

Elsewhere this month, we're featuring urban paddling and those high-flying scavengers, the turkey and black vultures. And how's this for a Texas hall of fame wildlife lineup — largemouth bass, bald eagles and ocelots. You can read about them all.



Russell Roe, Managing Editor

MAKING TEXAS FISHING WORK

THE KID AND FISH PICTURES ARE ALWAYS MY FAVORITES.

You know the ones I am talking about. They are tacked up on picture boards at tackle shops, bait stands and convenience stores around any body of water that has a fish to be caught. Scattered amidst the photos of beaming anglers with their trophy bass and redfish, stringers of crappie and trout, and big sharks and flathead catfish are the kids with their sprawling grins holding fish that oftentimes aren't much bigger than their smiles.

Those pictures tell you all you need to know about the value of getting kids into the out-of-doors, particularly when they are holding a rod and a reel with a fish on the end of it.

Thanks to an abundance of public ponds, lakes, rivers, streams and bays, fishing is one of Texas' best family-friendly activities. With a relatively nominal investment in tackle, licenses and related supplies, coupled with as short or long a drive as one wants to make, any family in our state can find themselves on a bank, pier or boat casting for their quarry of choice with relative ease.

But, it doesn't happen purely by accident. What one may not know is that behind the scenes, a whole lot more goes into creating these opportunities for my family and for yours.

Fish stocks in lakes, rivers, bays and the Gulf are continuously monitored to assess species composition and population vitality. Hatcheries annually produce more than 40 million fingerlings of the most popular game fish to augment populations and angling opportunities in inland and coastal water bodies across Texas. Invasive plants are controlled to keep them from overtaking area lakes and negatively impacting both the fishery itself and a fisherman's access to the lakes. Other aquatic habitats are regularly being created and enhanced, such as converted oil platforms, sunken ships, oyster reefs and specially formulated reef blocks in our bays and Gulf waters, and native plants and artificial structures that are strategically placed in our rivers and lakes.

This behind-the-scenes, "under and on the water" work is the domain of the talented fisheries biologists and technicians at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Spread across every part of the state, these professionals work every day to make Texas fisheries and fishing the best they can be. Thanks to their efforts, popular initiatives such as winter rainbow trout stockings, Neighborhood Fishin', leased river access, Free Fishing in State Parks, Toyota ShareLunker, Rigs-to-Reefs and others create ample opportunities for



PHOTO BY TWP/D

the outdoor-inclined angler, new and experienced, young and old alike, to hit the water anytime of year.

As we head into the spring and put the winter doldrums behind us, nothing helps make the transition like a planned fishing trip to a favorite river, lake, bay or barrier island. If you need any help choosing a body of water, check out the various articles in the ensuing pages. From my colleague Randy Brudnicki's list of the state's top bass lakes and his excellent piece on Texas' biggest bass tournaments (the Toyota Bassmaster Texas Fest and the GEICO Bassmaster Classic) to Camille Wheeler's reflections on her experience with Texas' many urban paddling trails, I can assure you there will be plenty to whet your angling appetite and ultimately to wet your hook.

Thanks for caring about our wild things and wild places. They need you now more than ever.

Carter Smith

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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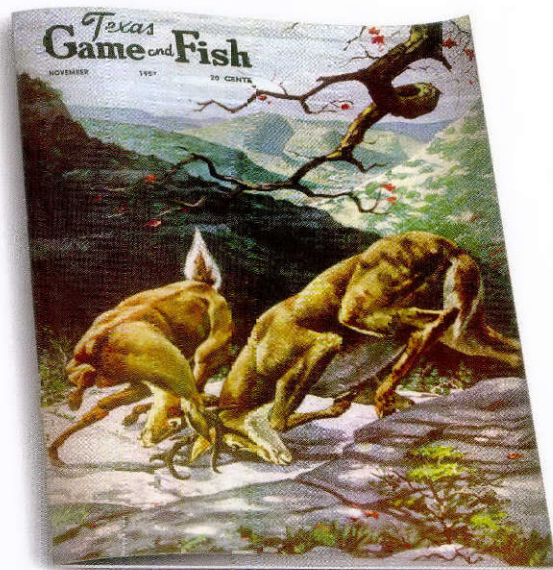
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CLIFFHANGER OF A COVER

Your 75th anniversary issue (January/February 2017) was excellent as usual, and especially to me, as I painted 28 covers for *Texas Game and Fish* in the late 1950s.

The article on Orville Rice's great watercolor covers described his eye for detail and accuracy. He left a legacy for correctness to the artists who came later.

One cover of mine was to show two bucks fighting. I thought it would be most dramatic to show them fighting on the edge of a cliff. When I turned the painting in, the editor called in the biologists to check the accuracy of everything, as was always done.

"They don't usually fight on the edge of a cliff, but in a clearing," they both agreed. The editor and I both liked the painting, so I said, "Could you say it never happened?"

"No" they admitted.

"Print it," declared the editor. I smiled and rested my case.

Thanks for a beautiful magazine.

CLAY MCGAUGHY
San Antonio

HOORAY FOR HICKORIES

What a great article on hickories ("Tough Nut to Crack") in the December 2016 issue of *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine. Probably no other native species of trees in Texas can compare in the economic benefit for humans and food for wildlife.

We are especially proud of our hickories along the Sulphur River in Red River County. All eight species of hickories recorded in Texas are found here. They are pecan (*Carya illinoensis*), shagbark hickory (*C. ovata*), mockernut hickory (*C. tomentosa*), black hickory (*C. texana*), water hickory (*C. aquatica*), bitternut hickory (*C. cordiformis*), pignut hickory (*C. glabra*) and nutmeg hickory (*C. myristiciformis*).

Of these hickories, the shagbark and mockernut are state champions. The least known of all hickories, the nutmeg, is national champion.

GARY CHEATWOOD
Bogata

STRENUOUS TREK ON THE NOSE

As one who lives in El Paso and regularly hikes in the Franklin Mountains, I thoroughly enjoyed Russell Roe's article "On the Nose" (December 2016). Everything he said about the hike was right, including the note about the group of hikers who had to spend the night on the mountain. I was one of the nine people who had to camp out. We considered it a great adventure.

WRITE TO US

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I have been on Anthony's Nose several times, and it is a strenuous and challenging hike, but gratifying when you make it to the top of the Nose and back down to your car. The pictures are excellent in showing the type of terrain that has to be hiked.

CAROL BROWN
El Paso

TURNING 75

I don't understand how you can say *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine is 75 years old when you published the first magazine in December 1942.

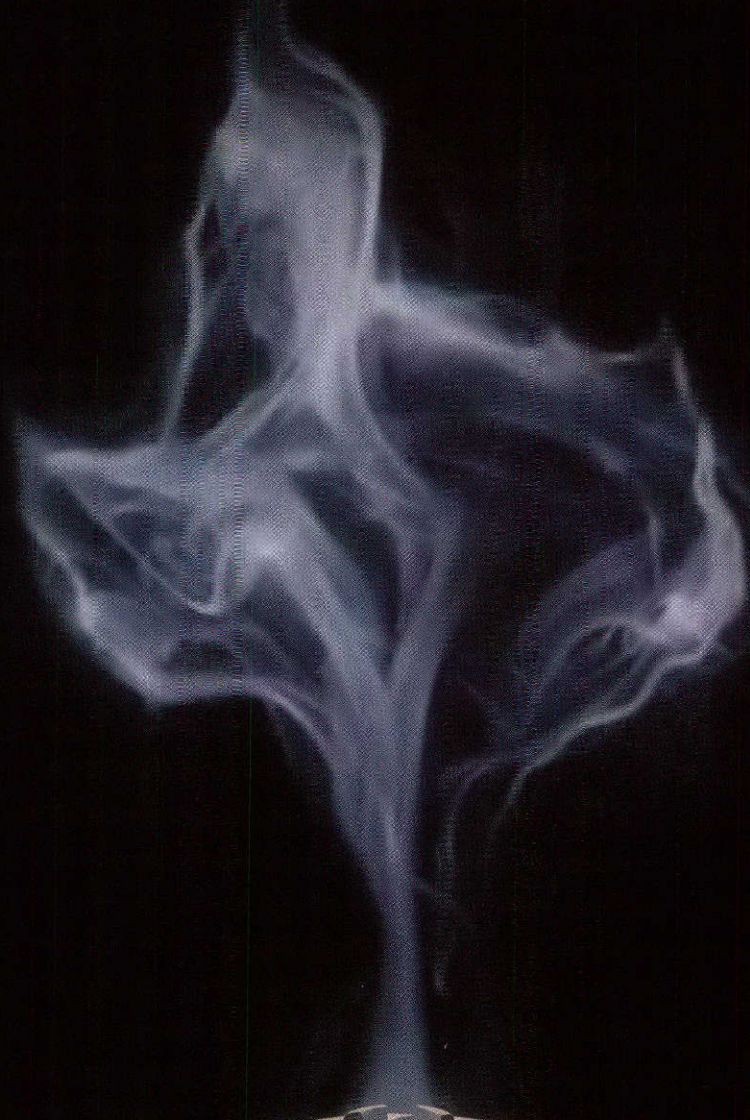
I was born Dec. 6, 1942, so that makes me 74 years old. I won't be 75 till December 2017. *Texas Parks and Wildlife* sent its first magazine in December 1942, so it just turned 74 years old, not 75 years old, and won't be 75 till December 2017.

Explain this to me if I'm wrong.

MARY LYN VENGLAR
Yoakum

Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine responds: We are honored to share a birthday with you and agree that we haven't hit 75 quite yet. We kicked off 2017 celebrating our 75th year of publication, and the yearlong commemoration will culminate in December, when we (and you) officially turn 75.

TEXAS JUST GOT QUIETER.



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Texas Ocelots on the Rebound

AFTER DIRE NEWS of increasing ocelot road deaths, remote cameras documented kittens at two different locations last year, as well as an ocelot den.

Researchers tracking the seven known adult female ocelots at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge in Rio Hondo followed one to discover the den, the first confirmed den sighting in nearly 20 years. Inside the den was a male kitten, about 3 weeks old. Three other females were seen with kittens as well.

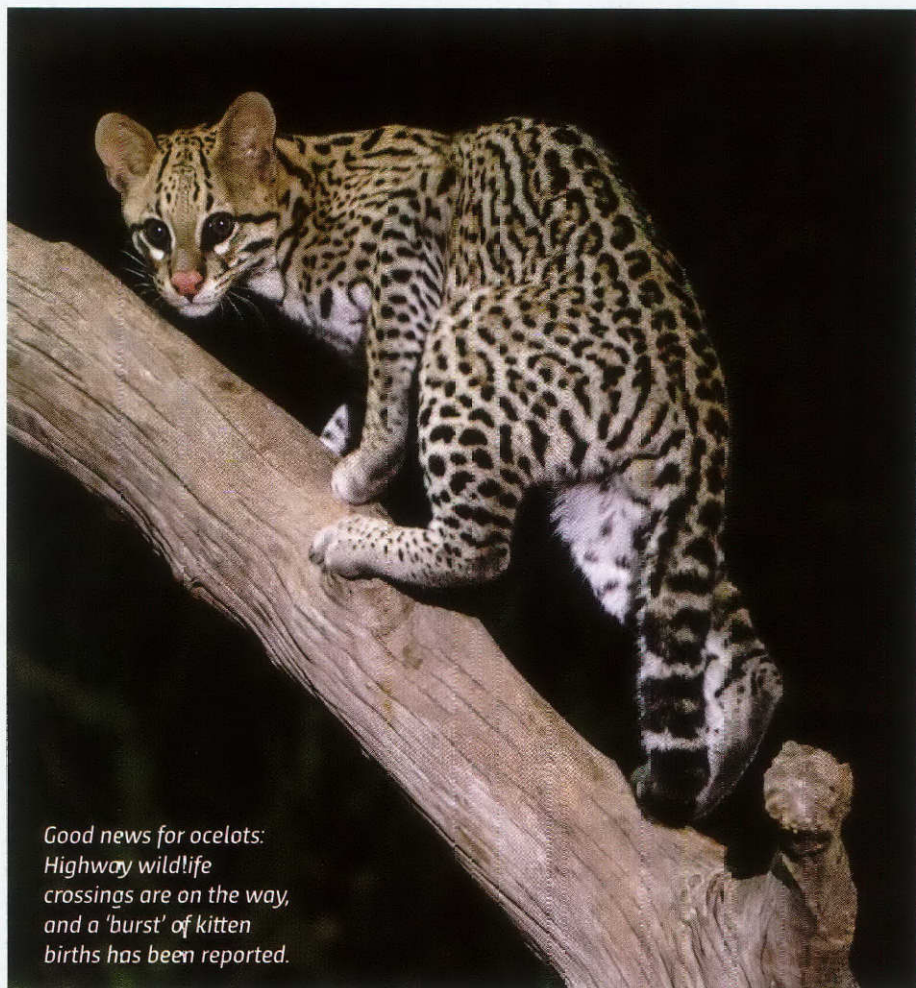
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service called it a "burst" of kittens for South Texas last year, as even more were born on private land. At least three adult females at Yturria Conservation Easement in Willacy County also had ocelot kittens last year. Although there's usually only one per litter, one mother had twins.

The births are significant because of low ocelot population numbers; previous statewide estimates fell between 80 and 100 total ocelots.

"The past couple of years of abundant rainfall have made excellent breeding conditions for these endangered wild cats," says Hilary Swarts, wildlife biologist at Laguna Atascosa.

Precipitation leads to plant growth, which in turn provides food for the wildlife that ocelots like to eat, such as rodents, rabbits and birds. "With plenty of food and water, and minimal disturbance from humans, female ocelots have all the resources they need to reproduce successfully," Swarts says.

Keeping these beautiful cats alive near



Good news for ocelots: Highway wildlife crossings are on the way, and a 'burst' of kitten births has been reported.

PHOTO © JEFF PARKER

busy highways has been a problem, but a possible solution is nearly ready. The state's first highway wildlife crossings are being built under General Brant Road (FM 106) and Texas Highway 100 in the vicinity of the two conservation areas. These will be the first such crossings developed for ocelots in the country. ★

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FEB. 26–MARCH 4:

Bobcats in the city; Harkins Ranch refocuses; behind-the-scenes support; coastal birds.

MARCH 5–11:

Blue sucker study; wildlife cameras; camping tips; wood ducks; magazine nature photos.

MARCH 12–18:

Attwater's prairie chickens; lionfish threaten the Gulf; gar fishing; Enchanted Rock

MARCH 19–25:

Cattle rotation conservation; dollars for youth and nature; fishing local; Kickapoo Cavern.

MARCH 26–APRIL 1:

Helping horned lizards teaching young hunters; explore Puritas Creek; leave no trace.



Tamaulipas and Texas Partnering to Improve Fishing



PHOTO COURTESY OF SOMOS TAMAUlipas

THANKS TO A RECENTLY SIGNED AGREEMENT, Tamaulipas fishermen may donate largemouth bass to help Texas augment genetic diversity and student interns from Universidad Tecnológica del Mar de Tamaulipas Bicentenario (La Pesca, Mexico) will volunteer at TPWD sites to gain practical experience.

"This is an unprecedented opportunity to work with our

Mexican neighbors on both saltwater and freshwater fisheries," says Ross Melinchuk, director of natural resources at TPWD.

Pedro Sors, president of the Tamaulipas Fishing Association, spearheaded the cooperative agreement, which includes joint research projects and information exchange on best practices for fish hatchery operations and tournament fish handling. TPWD staff was invited to visit tournaments at Guerrero, Las Blancas and Marte R. Gomez reservoirs hosted by the Tamaulipas Fishing Association.

"The Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center and the A.E. Wood Fish

Hatchery offer ideal locations for student interns to experience the full breadth of fisheries experiences such as production fish hatcheries, aquaria and outdoor educational programs for the public, and fisheries management," says Craig Bonds of TPWD's inland fisheries. Lance Robinson of TPWD's coastal fisheries will coordinate the internship program at field stations and Sea Center Texas.

University Chancellor Antonio Garza de Yta said that another major feature of the Tamaulipas-Texas agreement is binational research projects over the next couple of years. Texas universities will be invited to join this partnership. ★

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THE ANGEL

Statue by storied French artist stands watch over Monument Hill.

BY JENNIFER CARPENTER

FULL DISCLOSURE: I'M NOT A NATIVE TEXAN.

Joining the TPWD state parks team made me eager to learn more about my newly adopted state. After the obligatory Alamo tour, I visited Monument Hill and Kreische Brewery State Historic Sites in La Grange, where I unexpectedly encountered the work of an international award-winning artist.

Standing before me was a 10-foot-tall statue of an armed female angel. Her commanding presence conveys the importance of her task: guarding 52 Texan men who died while fighting the Mexican army in the 1840s, including the victims of the Black Bean Episode.

I'm not the only one taken with the sculpture, Superintendent Dennis Smith tells me. Many visitors ask what the angel represents.

Hoping to impress my new colleagues, I volunteered my research services. Monument Hill's tomb was dedicated in 1848. Archival materials reveal that the centennial of Texas independence in 1936 renewed interest in the site, and Austin architects Page and Southerland designed a new 48-foot-tall shellstone memorial, accompanied by a bronze sculpture by French artist Raoul Jossot.

The creative opportunity of the Texas Centennial compelled Jossot to relocate to Dallas. He completed several pieces for the Centennial Exposition at Fair Park and others at Texas historic sites: Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site's George Childress statue and the Fannin Memorial Monument in Goliad.

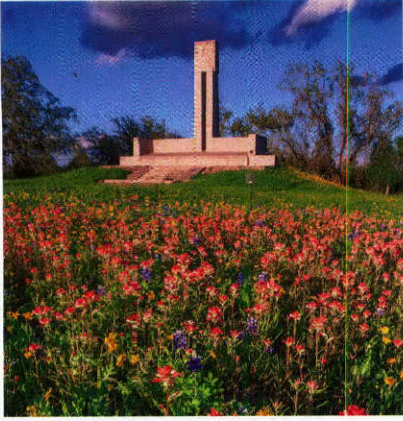


PHOTO © JASON MERLINO

Opposite and right: An armed angel created by Raouf Josset guards the tomb at Monument Hill. **Above:** Josset also designed the Fannin Memorial Monument in Goliat.

Josset's descriptions of his Texas commissions shed light on his creative vision. In a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, he wrote, "Most of my memorials in Texas are dedicated to the memory of brave Texans who were slaughtered, many while captives, until the victory of San Jacinto liberated this great state."

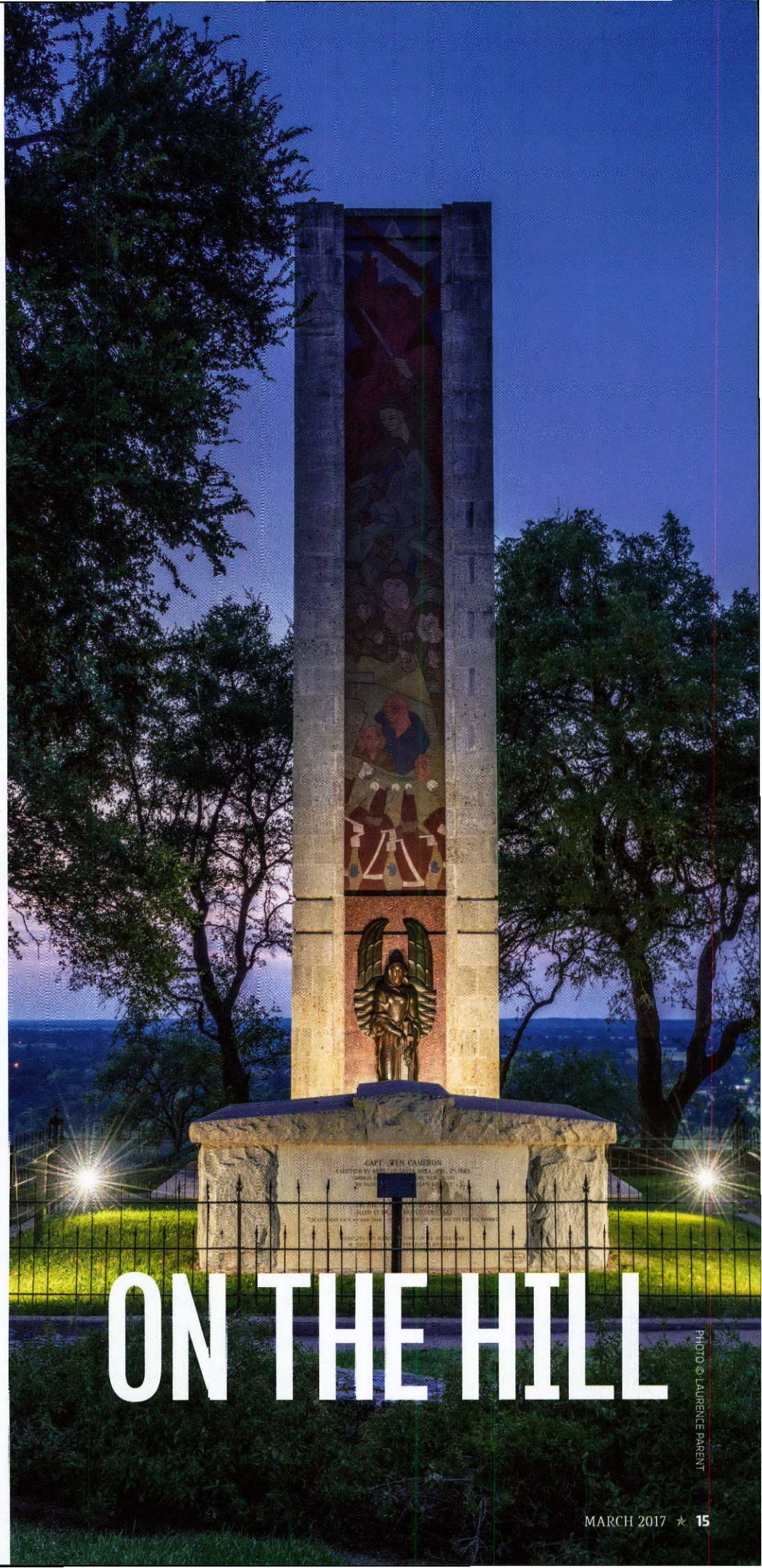
Themes of pride, beauty and possibility infused his sculptures.

"I have tried to portray, in the form of a graceful and beautiful woman, all the characteristics which have gone to make the Centennial possible — the bravery and courage of the people, the artistic effort put forth, the endurance and stamina necessary to see the job through," was how he described one of his pieces at Fair Park.

Through my research, I came to identify with Josset in a small way. We each moved to Texas for a new opportunity and came to discover the spirit and camaraderie of its people. Josset's handiwork at Monument Hill continues to captivate 80 years later, reminding us of Texas' past and encouraging us to look a little closer at the graceful artwork completed in its name.

Monument Hill and Kreishe Brewery State Historic Sites are located in La Grange, between San Antonio, Austin and Houston. For more information, call (979) 968-5558 or visit tpwd.texas.gov/monumenthill. ★

In keeping with this month's 1940s theme, our Park Pick features a park acquired in the '40s. Monument Hill, in 1949.



ON THE HILL

PHOTO © LAURENCE PARENT

FIVE LAKES WITH BIG BASS

BY RANDY BRUDNICKI



PHOTO BY LARRY HODGE / TPWD

↑ TOLEDO BEND RESERVOIR

(182,000 acres, Sabine River, Louisiana border, opened 1966) Texas shares this big lake with Louisiana. More than 100 10-pound bass catches have been documented annually here each of the last few years. The Bassmaster Elite Series returns to this popular lake in April.

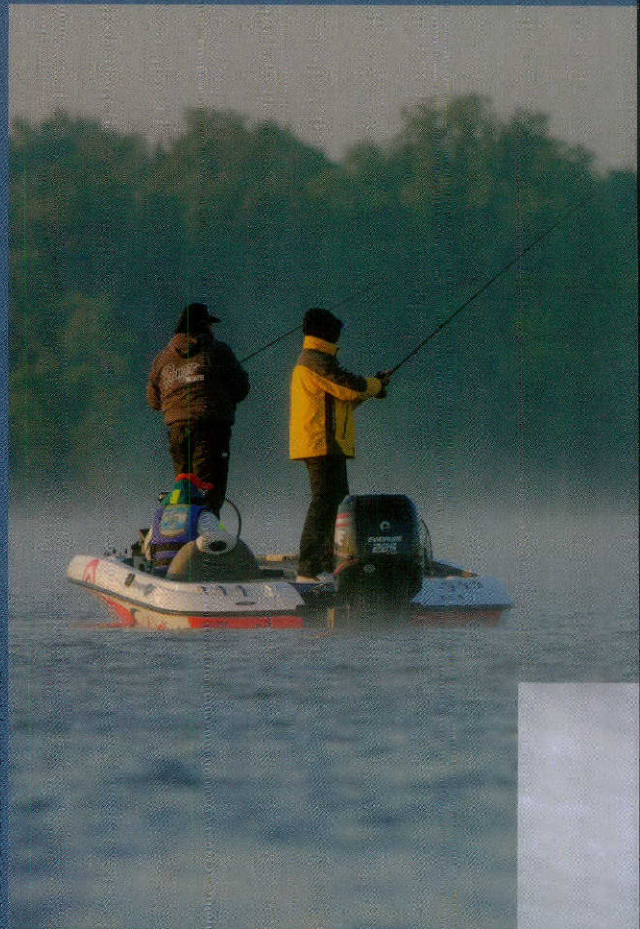


PHOTO © GRADY ALLEN

← FALCON INTERNATIONAL RESERVOIR

(84,000 acres, Rio Grande, Mexico border, opened 1954) The water level fluctuates, as do fish numbers, but Falcon's my favorite bass lake because I know the next cast could produce a 10-pounder. A while back we caught 40 hard-fighting bass on one spot. The glory days are returning.

PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM / TPWD



AMISTAD RESERVOIR →

(64,000 acres, Rio Grande, Mexico border, opened 1969) This deep, clear lake is truly unique. Steep canyon walls vary with brush and grass. On my best trip, we caught about 200 bass in three days; many were 3 to 6 pounds. The lake crashed for a while, but happily, it's rebounding now.

SAM RAYBURN RESERVOIR

(115,000 acres, Angelina River, Southeast Texas, opened 1965)
With 400 events annually, this may be the state's most popular bass tournament destination. Even after many trips, I've barely scratched the surface of spots to try my luck. Sam Rayburn may be the most consistent bass lake in Texas.

PHOTO BY TPWD

← LAKE FORK

(27,000 acres, Sabine River, Northeast Texas, opened 1980)
The first time you get on the lake, you'll wonder where to start — it all looks so "bass-y." There's a slot (size restriction on fish kept), but when you start landing 4- to 6-pound bass (with an occasional 8- or 9-pounder), you'll think you're the world's greatest angler.

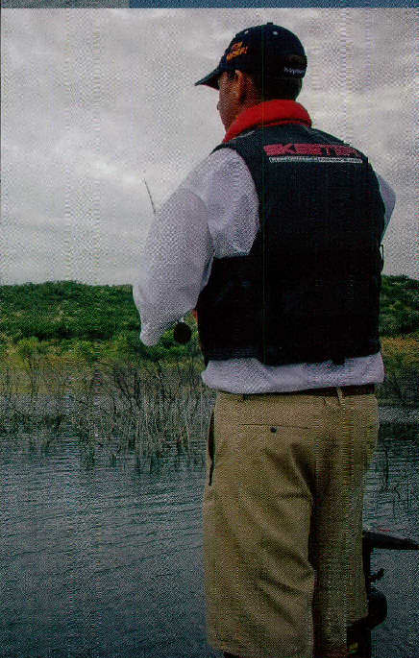


PHOTO BY LARRY HODGE / TPWD

The world's best fishermen go "lure to lure" March 24, 25, 26 on Lake Conroe. Yes that is a Lake Conroe bass

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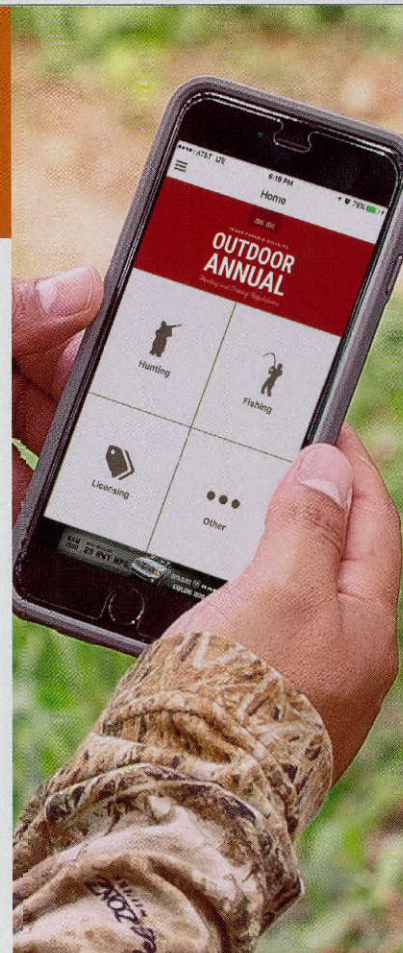
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EMBLEM OF FREEDOM

The nation's most beloved bird soars with majesty and strength.

BY EVELYN MORENO

ON JUNE 20, 1782, the Third Continental Congress adopted the bald eagle as the emblem of the United States. However, founding father Benjamin Franklin wasn't too keen on the decision. He believed the eagle was "a bird of bad moral character" because of its tendency to snatch meals away from other birds and mammals, including humans.

Despite their feeding habits, bald eagles are graceful and fascinating creatures. At 5 years old, these birds seek a lifelong partner by performing courtship calls and aerial displays, including a cartwheel maneuver known as the death spiral. The spectacle begins at a high altitude as the eagles lock their talons while tumbling down, breaking apart just before hitting the ground. The dangerous display exhibits the fitness levels of the eagles, a factor in choosing a partner.

Once coupled, the eagles build their nests, called aeries, atop large, sturdy trees to ensure the safety of their eggs. Both males and females gather materials such as sticks, grass and cornstalks to build the nest, but the female does most of the arranging. Together they build some of the largest

and heaviest bird nests — usually 6 feet in diameter and 4 feet tall — typically taking nearly three months to finalize. They live near rivers and lakes where they can find fish, a primary food source.

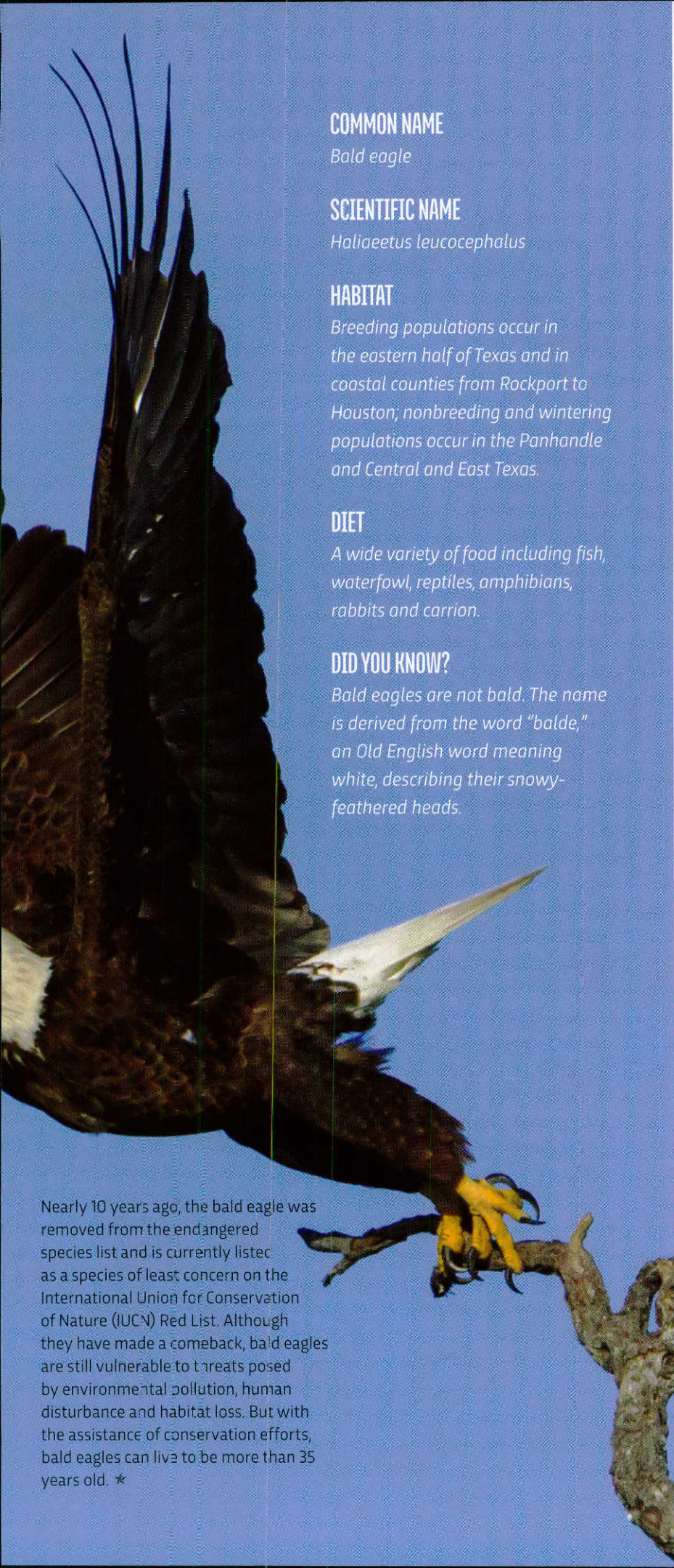
The female lays one to three eggs in that big nest. Eaglets hatch about 35 days later; they're nearly full grown at 9 weeks. Their longer, darker feathers and lack of white markings distinguish them from adults. At 4 or 5 years old, they develop the characteristic bald eagle features.

Bald eagles have a wingspan of 6 to 8 feet, allowing them to dive at speeds of 75 to 100 mph and soar more than 10,000 feet high. Immature eagles will spend their first few years roaming, traveling hundreds of miles each day. They can spot prey up to a mile away and will capture it in a quick swooping

motion, clasp it with their talons. Bald eagles can float and use their wings to "row" through deeper water, an advantage when catching fish.

The bald eagle was one of the first species to be declared endangered. Once thriving, the bird declined in numbers in the middle of the 20th century because of illegal shootings, habitat loss and pesticide poisoning. In 1963, only 417 nesting pairs were located throughout the lower 48 states, a significant drop compared to the estimated 100,000 pairs in the late 1700s. In an effort to save the bird, conservation laws were passed, and eagles were placed in captive breeding programs. In 1972, the Environmental Protection Agency banned the use of the chemical DDT throughout the country.

Their recovery is now a success story.



COMMON NAME

Bald eagle

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

HABITAT

Breeding populations occur in the eastern half of Texas and in coastal counties from Rockport to Houston; nonbreeding and wintering populations occur in the Panhandle and Central and East Texas.

DIET

A wide variety of food including fish, waterfowl, reptiles, amphibians, rabbits and carrion.

DID YOU KNOW?

Bald eagles are not bald. The name is derived from the word "balde," an Old English word meaning white, describing their snowy-feathered heads.

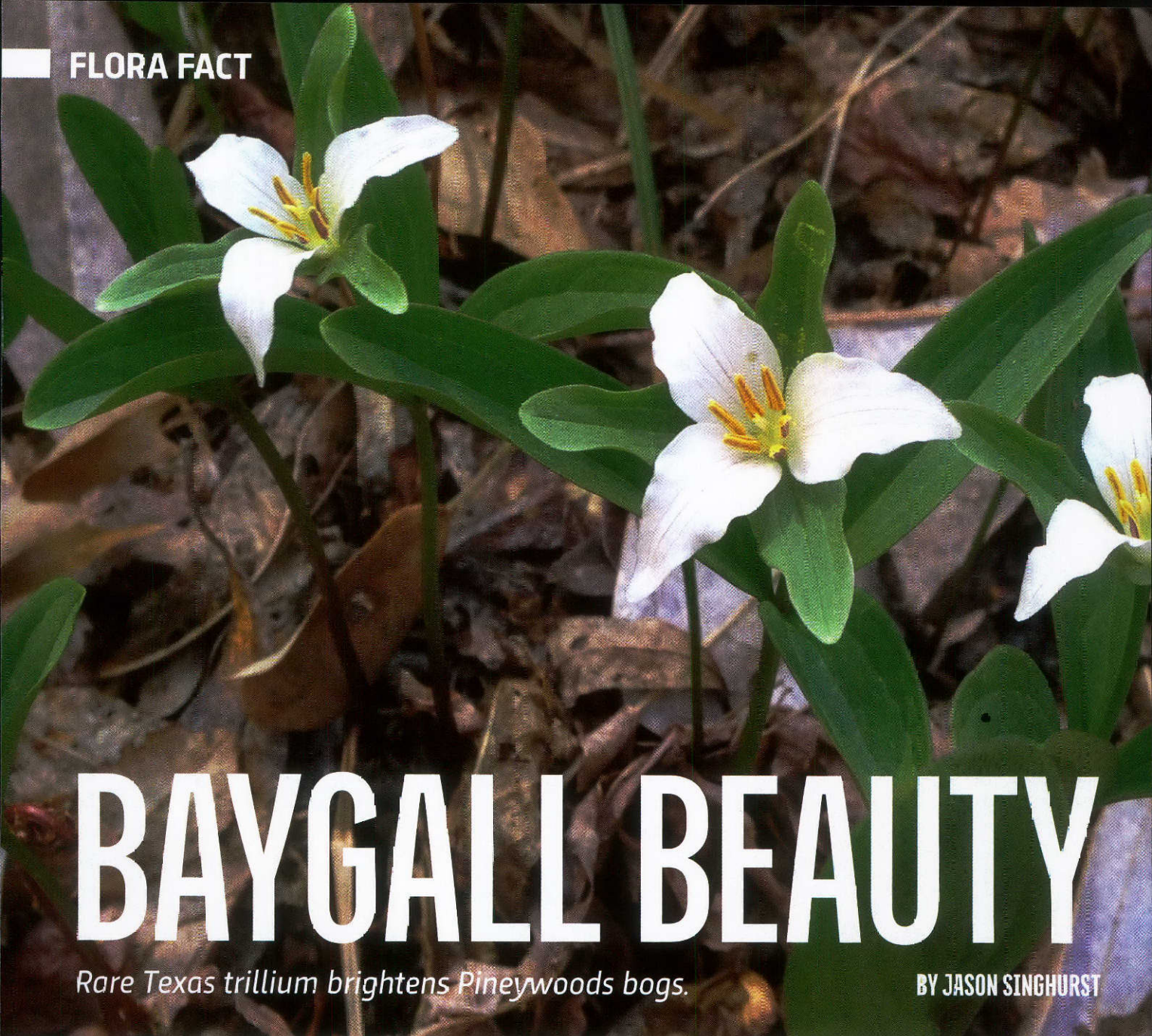
Nearly 10 years ago, the bald eagle was removed from the endangered species list and is currently listed as a species of least concern on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. Although they have made a comeback, bald eagles are still vulnerable to threats posed by environmental pollution, human disturbance and habitat loss. But with the assistance of conservation efforts, bald eagles can live to be more than 35 years old. ★

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BAYGALL BEAUTY

Rare Texas trillium brightens Pineywoods bogs.

BY JASON SINGHURST

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED TEXAS TRILLIUM on a field trip with the late botany professor Elray Nixon to Naconiche Creek in Nacogdoches County, one of the finest spring-fed streams in East Texas. This type of forested bog can be very mucky, he advised, so always hike with a companion. He noted my white baseball cap, which would float if I sank into an abyss, allowing rescuers to find me. Great comfort!

Five species of trillium (in the lily family) occur in Texas. Members of this genus are commonly known as trillium, wakerobin, toadshade, squawroot or carrion flower. Lately, these species have gained attention as garden plants.

Texas trillium, also known as Texas wakerobin, can be found in

southwestern Arkansas, northwestern Louisiana and East Texas. It differs from the rest of the trilliums in Texas by having pedicellate flowers (a stem that attaches a single flower) with white petals. All other trilliums in Texas have maroon (or rarely yellow) flowers. Small green wood orchids and yellow fringed

orchids occur at many of the Texas trillium sites. Both have basal leaves that could be mistaken for the juvenile leaves of Texas trillium.

Texas trillium flowers from March to May. In early flowering, Texas trillium petals are bright white, but in late flowering they turn pink.

Texas trillium habitat occurs along the margins of forested bogs, locally known as baygalls. One of the easiest places to observe this globally rare plant is the baygalls of Angelina National Forest. All of the other populations are on private land, but the Tyler Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas typically offers spring field trips to populations around Smith County. ★



PHOTOS BY JASON SINGHURST / TPWD

COMMON NAME

Texas trillium

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Trillium texanum

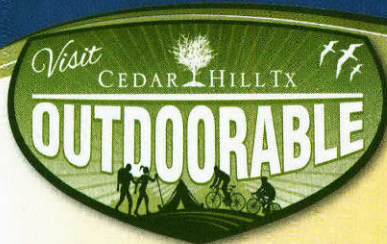
SIZE

Up to 12 inches tall

DID YOU KNOW?

All trillium species belong to the lily family.

DALLAS / FORT WORTH



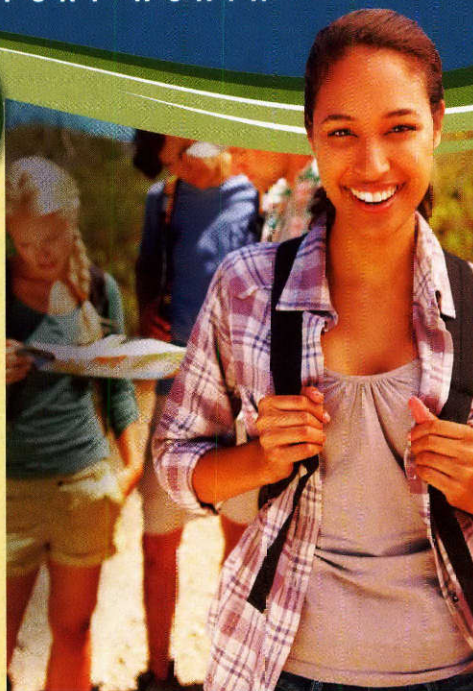
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Opposite page and this page: Selected monthly award winners in the Focus on the Wild contest. For more, visit tpwf.org/focusonthewild.

RIVERS & STREAMS © EGIDIO LEITAO

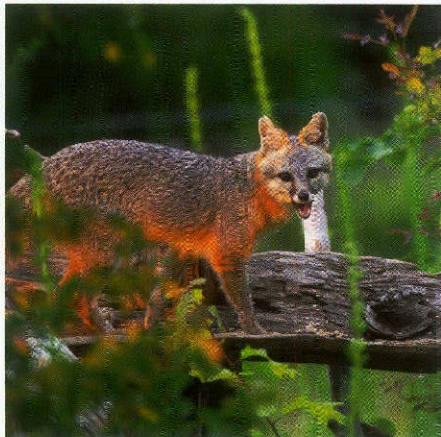
FOCUS ON THE WILD

Foundation's photo contest celebrates the Texas outdoors.

BY EARL NOTTINGHAM

TO HELP CELEBRATE its 25th anniversary of working to promote the outdoors, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation invited supporters to enter a yearlong photo contest coined Focus on the Wild. Each month, a different subject allowed entrants to showcase their individual talents, with the winner receiving special prizes in addition to exposure on the foundation's website.

SMILE FOR THE CAMERA © SUSAN GIBBONS



I was enlisted to be the contest judge, which proved to be no easy task since it quickly became apparent that Texas has some really, really good photographers out there.

When judging a photo contest consisting of hundreds of images in multiple categories such as wildlife, sunsets, rivers and people, it's important to see and appreciate the individual vision and creativity that each photographer brings to the table and not to pre-judge based on personal likes or dislikes. Luckily, among these hundreds of images, there

will be those that quickly jump out from the pack and scream "winner."

Usually their common denominators are the tried-and-true photographic elements of artistic lighting, strong composition, creative use of color and, in the case of human or animal subjects, interesting behavior. As you will see, the winning entries excelled at all of those components. By embracing these creative elements, the photographers have produced engaging images that celebrate the natural jewels that Texas has to offer in its wild places. ★



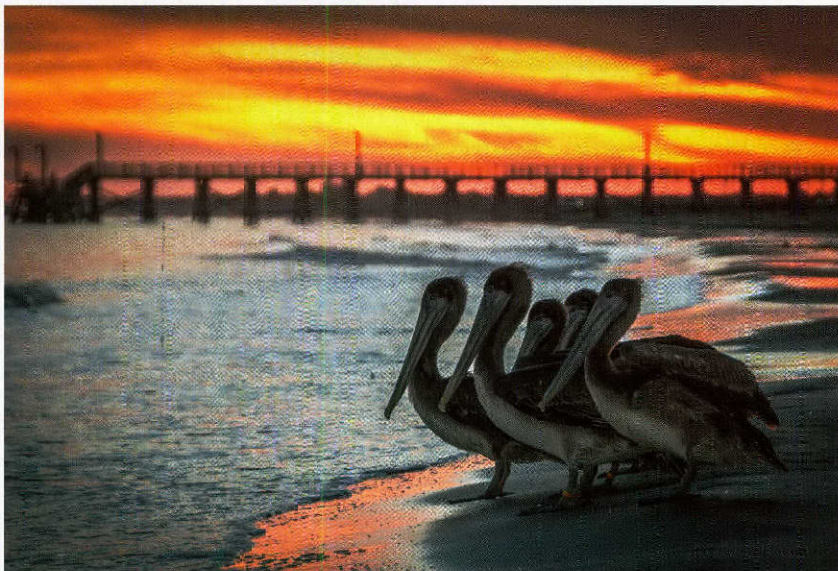
WINDOW ON DAVIS MOUNTAINS © EGIDIO LETTAO



TEXAS WILDFLOWERS © JEFF WEST



ETERNAL WHEEL OF TIME © JAMES LIVINGSTON



PELICAN SUNSET © PATTY BRINKMEYER

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

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PLAYTIME!

Homeschoolers provide a playful look at Marble Falls.

BY EMILY MOSKAL

PHOTOS BY EARL NOTTINGHAM



It's not difficult to imagine Marble Falls — with its array of parks, lakes, camps and playgrounds — as a town-sized nature playscape. Everywhere you go, outdoor fun beckons, particularly for the young at heart.

AUSTIN

1 hour

DALLAS

3.5 hours

EL PASO

8 hours

SAN ANTONIO

1.5 hours

BROWNSVILLE

5.75 hours

LUBBOCK

5.5 hours

This Central Texas town of 6,500 is home to the founding members of the Texas Hill Country Homeschoolers, Jennifer Jones and Jennifer Newberry, with more than 1,000 students participating. Some of these bright, outdoor-oriented youngsters showed me all the fun in Marble Falls, through their eyes.

LONGHORN CAVERN STATE PARK

Our first stop was Longhorn Cavern State Park. The cavern has a long and colorful history: a shelter for Comanches, a den to manufacture gunpowder from bat guano during the Civil War, a speakeasy during 1920s Prohibition and later the “only air-conditioned meeting room in Texas.”

The day was chilly and drizzly. We entered the year-round 68-degree cave, where the lights gave a warm glow and cast shadows on the undulating walls of the cave, protected from the falling rain.

“Think about a pecan stuck on the wall,” says tour guide Al Gerow helping us spot hibernating females of one of the smallest bat species in Texas. The eastern pipistrelles looked like little winged pecans as they hung in depressions just larger than their bodies to stay warm.

Longhorn Cavern is a fast water cave. You won't see many fragile stalactites or stalagmites, but, like the popular slot canyons of Arizona and Utah formed by thundering creeks and rivers, you'll find

water-cut curves and sculptures.

The resulting shapes have been named, like passing cloud animals, by children since the park's opening. The youngest boys of our group, Max and Rafino, spayed on their backs with hands resting behind their heads, staring at the oval ceiling of the old gunpowder manufacturing room where swirling marble-like

deposited, accounting for some of the smoothest, strongest limestone sister rocks, called dolomite. The remarkable quality of the area's rocks was incorrectly identified as marble when first discovered, just like the "falls" the town is named for.

We passed through the Viking Prow, Eagle's Wings and Devil's Footstool to the Smokehouse room, named after

who says she learns best through touch. The Hall of Gems, where she could touch the calcite crystals, was her favorite. Rafino, 10, says his all-time favorite spot is Chicken Rock at the Devil's Waterhole in Inks Lake State Park. Marny, 13, enjoys exploring the lake's endless coves. In fact, lakeside parks are a central meeting location for many families.



FEATURED ATTRACTIONS (LEFT TO RIGHT):

- ★ Texas Hill Country Homeschoolers at Longhorn Cavern State Park
- ★ Schist formation at Reveille Peak Ranch
- ★ Giant cookies at Choccolatte's
- ★ Downtown art

layers reveal the motion of an ancient whirlpool.

We passed the four-legged Queen's Watchdog formation. In keeping with tradition, we touched the smooth Bear's Nose for good luck as we passed, as generations of kids have done before.

When the climate started to change and the sea that covered Central Texas millions of years ago started to retreat, magnesium from the sea water was

the sausage-shaped stalactites.

"Who's on the five-dollar bill?" Gerow asks, testing the kids to see if they can name the profile of a former president etched in stone. Young hands flew up, the kids eager to name Abraham Lincoln.

"Like a diamond in the sky," Jones sang to the youngest as we entered the glittering Hall of Gems, colored by floodlights. We neared the end of the hour-and-a-half tour as the children penguin-walked and limboed during the bent-over walk through Lumbago Alley.

After the tour, we drove toward Inks Lake State Park and the Perissos Vineyard and Winery, to eat at the Hoover Valley Country Store and Café. While munching on chicken tenders, loaded potatoes, chicken-fried steak and fries, we discussed everyone's favorite outdoor spots around Marble Falls.

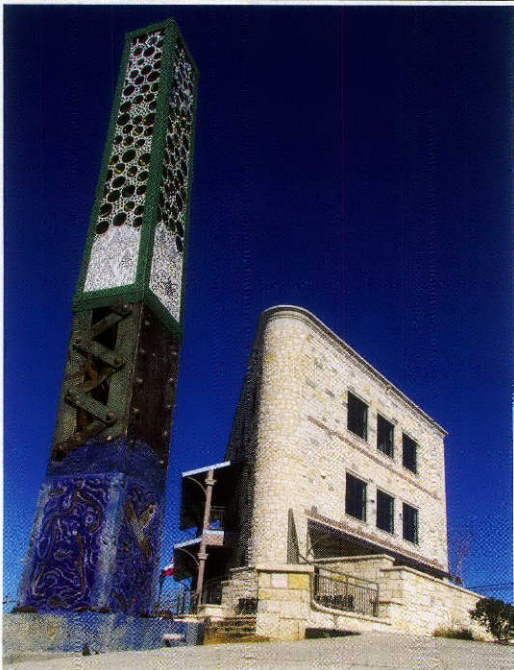
The oldest of the bunch, Avery, 16, is a newly fledged yoga instructor

UPPER HIGHLAND LAKES NATURE CENTER

The next stop was the Upper Highland Lakes Nature Center, just north of Inks Lake. The 5-acre outdoor learning center on the Reveille Peak Ranch property is entirely volunteer-run and accessible only by reservation. The nature center customizes day activities for families and school groups alike. Options include angler education, nature scavenger hunts, a beetle station, water conservation and garden demonstrations, as well as hands-on display tables, such as a touch station for the visually impaired.

Billy Hutson, founding director and president of the center, is our guide to the area's geology and archeology. Hutson lifts a handled door from the ground, like an entrance to a secret passageway, revealing an ancient hearth.

On this high spot overlooking the water, Native Americans lived, cooking



and eating around this campfire. Hutson asks if the kids know what the subtly arranged rocks are.

"If I was an archaeologist, I would know!" Marny responds.

The students left with an archeological understanding of the land, learning that the particular assemblage of food-related artifacts and the depth and sequence in which artifacts are found indicate their age.

We played a hypothetical game of survival. If we were here 4,500 years ago, when the Nolan projectile points found in this area were created (at the same time the pyramids were being built), would you use the Nolan point on an atlatl spear-thrower, or would you prefer to hunt with a bow and arrow? What would you hunt with each weapon? Who would last the longest? A game of sibling rivalry ensued, but would cooperation win the game? The girls role-played hunting bison, while the boys were content with squirrels and snails.

"Anything I catch will be the first thing I cook," says Max. "I can live off of small animals forever."

Next stop, we wove through mint-colored lichen and pink granite

Top: The Falls Creek Skatepark attracts skateboarders, bikers and in-line skaters.

Middle: A sculpture of the Marble Falls visitors center incorporates portions of the old U.S. Highway 281 bridge over the river.

Bottom: Old Oak Square offers shopping and dining opportunities downtown.

MORE INFO:

MARBLE FALLS

www.marblefalls.org

LONGHORN CAVERN STATE PARK

(512) 715-9000

www.tpwd.texas.gov/longhorncavern

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JOHNSON PARK

www.ci.marble-falls.tx.us/185/johnson-park

outcrops to a waterfall, lined by black rocks resembling a lava flow. Hutson says geologists travel from out of state to see the formation — some even shed a tear at the rare find. The garnet-studded Packsaddle schists are some of the oldest rocks in Texas and the world, created during a mountain-building event older than the Himalayas.

The rocks around Marble Falls are unique, supporting resilient ecosystems and providing an outdoor classroom to students. By touching the oldest rocks in Texas and standing around the same campfire as someone who lived more than 4,000 years ago, we learned a lesson in deep time, a difficult concept to grasp.

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN AND JOHNSON PARK

To reward and fuel the kids for our next destination, we treated the kids to a stop at Choccolatte's. The husband-and-wife team of Michele and Steve Parsons make a fresh, handmade batch of gelato every week. They offered us a sample of the gelato and their popular pecan English toffee. Located in historic Old Oak Square on Third Street, the storefront has an old-town look with cast-iron café tables and French-style awnings. Many boutique shops and wineries line the street.

With heads full of spirit and stomachs full of sugar, we headed to Johnson Park for some horseplay.

Located adjacent to historic

downtown or the shores of Lake Marble Falls, Johnson Park was platted by 1867, when the township was founded, and used for community events as early as 1888. Just last year it was designated as a Lone Star Legacy Park, the 29th park to receive the designation, and remains the center of town activities and many time-honored events. Johnson Park has hosted the annual Howdy-Roo Chili Cook-Off since 1973 and the LakeFest Drag Boat Race since 1992.

We arrived at Johnson Park and the kids burst out of the sides of the SUVs, beelined to the tire swing — Max and Rafino's favorite feature — and executed a perfect mount. They've obviously done this before.

For the parents, it's easy to entertain the kids when it seems as if there's an event almost every weekend from March to November, including a monthly skate contest for all ages at the adjacent Falls Creek Skatepark.

The Texas Hill Country Homeschoolers hold their science co-op and book club at Johnson Park, including a workshop on sound and magnets by Jones at the pavilion, kickball and soccer tournaments in the fields and yoga (taught by Avery) at the park's amphitheater.

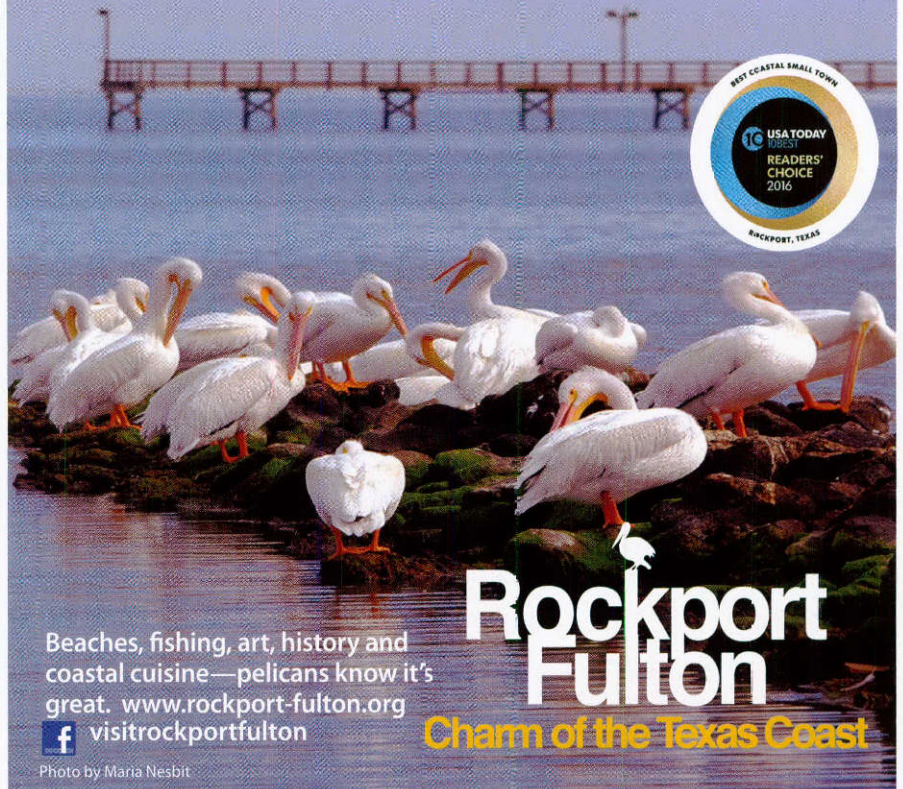
After a while, the kids came running up to the picnic tables where we sat. Flushed and panting, they reached for the leftover 6-inch Choccolatte's cookies that stretched to the corners of their wide grins.

"The number one draw to Marble Falls for kids of all ages is the number of swimming opportunities in a small town," Jones says. "You can paddle the whole lake and head to nearby spots like Inks Lake all in one place."

Kids come to Marble Falls from all over the state to go to popular summer camps like Camp Peniel, Camp of the Hills and Camp Champions, or to enjoy a day trip to Sweet Berry Farms to pick their own strawberries in spring or pumpkins in fall.

I came thinking we'd teach them a thing or two about the outdoors, but I think I got schooled. Spend a day in Marble Falls with children, and they'll be sure to show you the best places. ★

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Gently Down



the Stream...

*Find the middle
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of everywhere
on an urban
paddling trail.*

BY CAMILLE WHEELER

In the fall of 2016, I launched my urban Texas Paddling Trails investigation. As a beginning paddler, I kayaked and canoed 20-plus miles of river, lake, creek and bayou trails in Fort Worth, Grand Prairie, Houston, San Antonio and Pasadena, near NASA's Johnson Space Center.

Throughout my metropolitan exploration of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Texas Paddling Trails program, I never left the concrete jungle. Now in its 20th year, the program counts 72 officially designated public inland and coastal trails in rural and urban settings, with its most recent addition in February — the Mission Reach on a restored section of the San Antonio River near downtown San Antonio.

I paddled alone (always a bad idea) and with groups on guided tours. I made boat delivery and shuttle bus arrangements. I tried out equipment, renting or reserving four types of kayaks and one canoe.

I always donned a life jacket, but sometimes neglected to wear a hat or sunscreen. I rarely drank enough water.

I got stuck in shallow-water gravel, scraped my boat on rocks, muscled across a cove in moderate wind conditions, paddled around piles of post-flood woody debris, bumped into other people's kayaks on group tours and banged my vessel's nose into shorelines. Repeatedly.

In short, I had a blast.

I coordinated all trip arrangements by first visiting the Texas Paddling Trails website, www.tpwd.texas.gov/paddlingtrails, which offers a comprehensive array of safety and planning information. My goal, as originally discussed with TPWD nature tourism manager Shelly Plante, was to show Texans the urban paddling opportunities available to them in the hearts of big cities, near picturesque skylines and in outlying metropolitan areas.

As Plante notes, outdoor recreation conversations often focus on rural Texas, where people are more likely to have ready access to waterways, be familiar with access sites and own their own kayaks or canoes.

Outings typically involve urbanites exploring rural

areas, but not vice versa, says Plante, who helps process paddling trail applications, works with community partners and coordinates launch events for newly designated paddling trails.

"It's trying to get urbanites to realize what's in their own backyard," she says.

It's a matter of encouraging novice paddlers like me to build their comfort levels close to home. New paddlers (perhaps intimidated by the logistics of some rural paddling trails) can practice on shorter urban loop trails where they will remain in cellphone range, are closer to assistance if needed and won't require shuttle delivery to a separate take-out point.

Once paddlers gain experience, and start purchasing their own equipment, they'll have the resources to start exploring more trails.

"You have to start where beginners are to get to those next levels," Plante says. "You can't say, 'Here are these amazing experiences for a 25-mile paddle' and expect them to go out and do it — it's not reasonable."

The better message, she says, is, "Here are some beginner things, and once you get experienced, here are all these opportunities that exist all over the state and are one hour, two hours out."

NEVER PADDLE ALONE

My journey began on the Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge Paddling Trail, designated in November 2015 as TPWD's 70th trail. Romanticizing the idea of solitude, of which I found plenty just 10 miles from downtown Fort Worth, I made a rookie mistake: I paddled alone.

Plante emphasizes that on-site paddling trail kiosks feature these basic safety rules: Never paddle alone, and always file a float plan — telling someone where you are going and when you expect to return.

Ron Smith, the lead mapper for TPWD's paddling trails program, says novices might ask: "What could happen to you in a boat that only goes 2 mph?"

Smith, a program specialist within TPWD's Inland Fisheries Division, provides the answer.

"Well, there's a lot that can happen," he warns. "When you get out there by yourself, you're kind of stuck. Things get elevated."

Smith, a 20-year veteran paddler with TPWD, once made an emergency repair to his leaking kayak after paddling a short distance on the San Marcos River. He started out with a group, but no one noticed that Smith had fallen behind when his cracked kayak started to sink. Smith pulled his kayak to shore and patched it with duct tape carried in his waterproof bag.

I was nowhere near that prepared for my Fort Worth paddle. But I did exchange cellphone numbers with Tim Tenery and his wife, Lori-Ann, at their Fort Worth Kayak Rentals business where I signed rental paperwork. Then, I followed Tenery and his assistant Roy Ash to the nature center where they unloaded my kayak from a trailer and

helped me plan my estimated four-hour trip.

As I pushed off into the West Fork of the Trinity River, I immediately liked the maneuverability of my lightweight Old Town Vapor 10 kayak.

And I liked Tenery's suggested route: Head southeast, toward Greer Island, to explore part of the official TPWD paddling trail. Then turn around to explore the path that local paddlers treasure — a narrow stretch of the Trinity River that cuts through bottomland hardwoods and the eastern edge of the Cross Timbers forest ecosystem.

On the official TPWD trail, I paddled into a magical world of wetland marshes separated by long, thin islands. Great egrets, snowy egrets and great blue herons stalked prey, ghostlike, in an aquatic sea of smartweed, bur-reed and water willow.

I turned around, keeping my eyes peeled for the Trinity River's resident alligators. Deep into the river's narrow stretch, off the official paddling trail, I suddenly spotted a young alligator straddling a log. Shuddering with fear and wonder, I studied the reptile's webbed toes, bony scales and open, unblinking eyes.

PADDLING INTO THE WIND

Grand Prairie offers a different kayaking experience on the Joe Pool Lake and Walnut Creek Paddling Trail: a trip across open water into a shaded stream.

Inside the Camp Store at Loyd Park, where I'd made a kayak reservation by phone, volunteer Peggy Shea gave me some bad news: Wind speeds were gusting between 11 and 15 mph; anything higher than 20 mph rules out open-water paddling. It was too dangerous to let me cross the lake.

OK, I said, disappointed but grateful for Shea's decision. I wanted to be safe. Then, Shea and another volunteer, Don Ullom, considered my question: What if I only paddled Walnut Creek?

They agreed to let me paddle to the creek from the beach of a semi-wind-protected cove. I followed Ullom to the beach where he pushed a fishing-style kayak, an Emotion Stealth Angler, into shallow water. Ullom helped me board, pointed me in the direction of Walnut Creek, and told me to call him when I was ready to return.

I paddled into a stout, manageable wind, searching for the buoy marking the Walnut Creek entrance. The creek and the cove, with its graveyard look of bare trees rising above the water's surface, bore the marks of flooding from 2015. Upon reaching the creek, I suddenly wished I wasn't paddling alone as I worked my way around floating masses of woody debris.

Once tucked inside the creek's banks, I could hear, and just barely feel, the wind whistling through the trees. Spooked great blue herons flew before me, disappearing from view around the bend.

I left Loyd Park feeling a healthy dose of respect for the elements. For the rest of my urban paddling trails investigation, I would stick to this resolution: No more would I paddle alone.

PHOTO © CAMILLE WHEELER

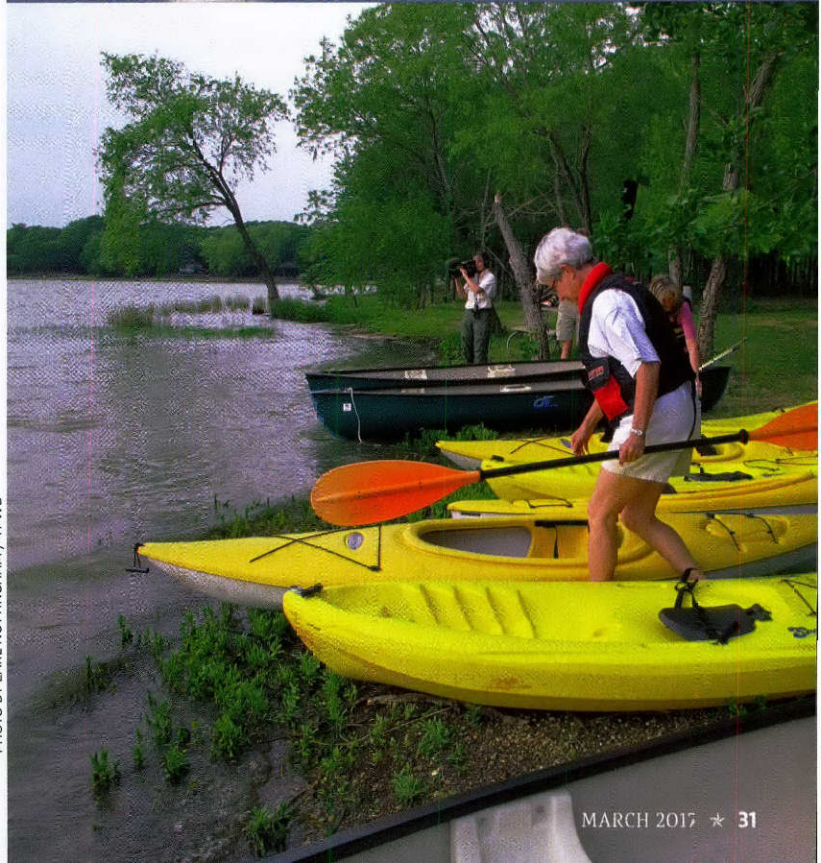
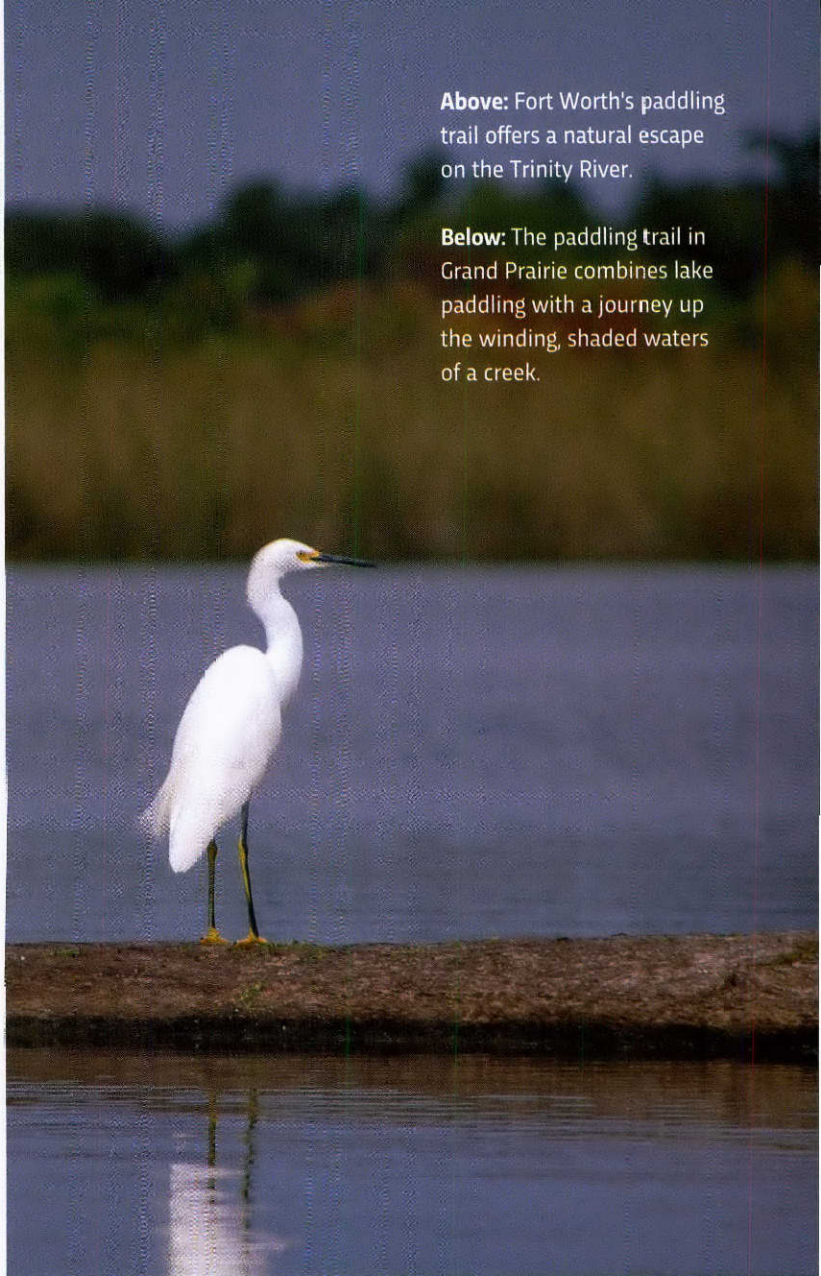


PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM / IPWU

Above: Fort Worth's paddling trail offers a natural escape on the Trinity River.

Below: The paddling trail in Grand Prairie combines lake paddling with a journey up the winding, shaded waters of a creek.



PHOTO © BEE LEEK PHOTOGRAPHY

The Buffalo Bayou Paddling Trail takes paddlers through the heart of Houston.

A SKYLINE JOURNEY

One week later, I stood in a downtown Houston parking lot, staring up at the concrete lanes of Interstate 45 almost directly above me.

As we boarded a Bayou City Adventures shuttle bus, the other paddlers and I, gathered here on a mid-October Sunday morning, excitedly discussed our trip: a guided kayak tour on a portion of the 26-mile Buffalo Bayou Paddling Trail that cuts a path through Houston's urban core. Officially designated as a TPWD paddling trail in 2009 — and the first such venue in Houston — the trail features 10 TPWD access points.

No one in our 18-member group had paddled any stretch of Buffalo Bayou before. So it was with a special sense of wonder that we set out, following lead guide Nick Ellis single file like baby ducks behind their mother as our tandem Ocean Kayak Zest Two EXP boats snaked around the first bend.

We settled into the pace dictated by the narrow, winding bayou as we paddled beneath the Loop 610 bridge and into the River Oaks neighborhood. Its mansions and manicured green lawns stood in stark contrast to upended tree roots, eroding banks and scraps of trash — evidence of recent flood damage.

Yet thanks to the conservation efforts of many people and groups, including the Bayou Preservation Association, which works in partnership with other organizations, this historic waterway once used as an urban drainage ditch is on the obvious road to recovery.

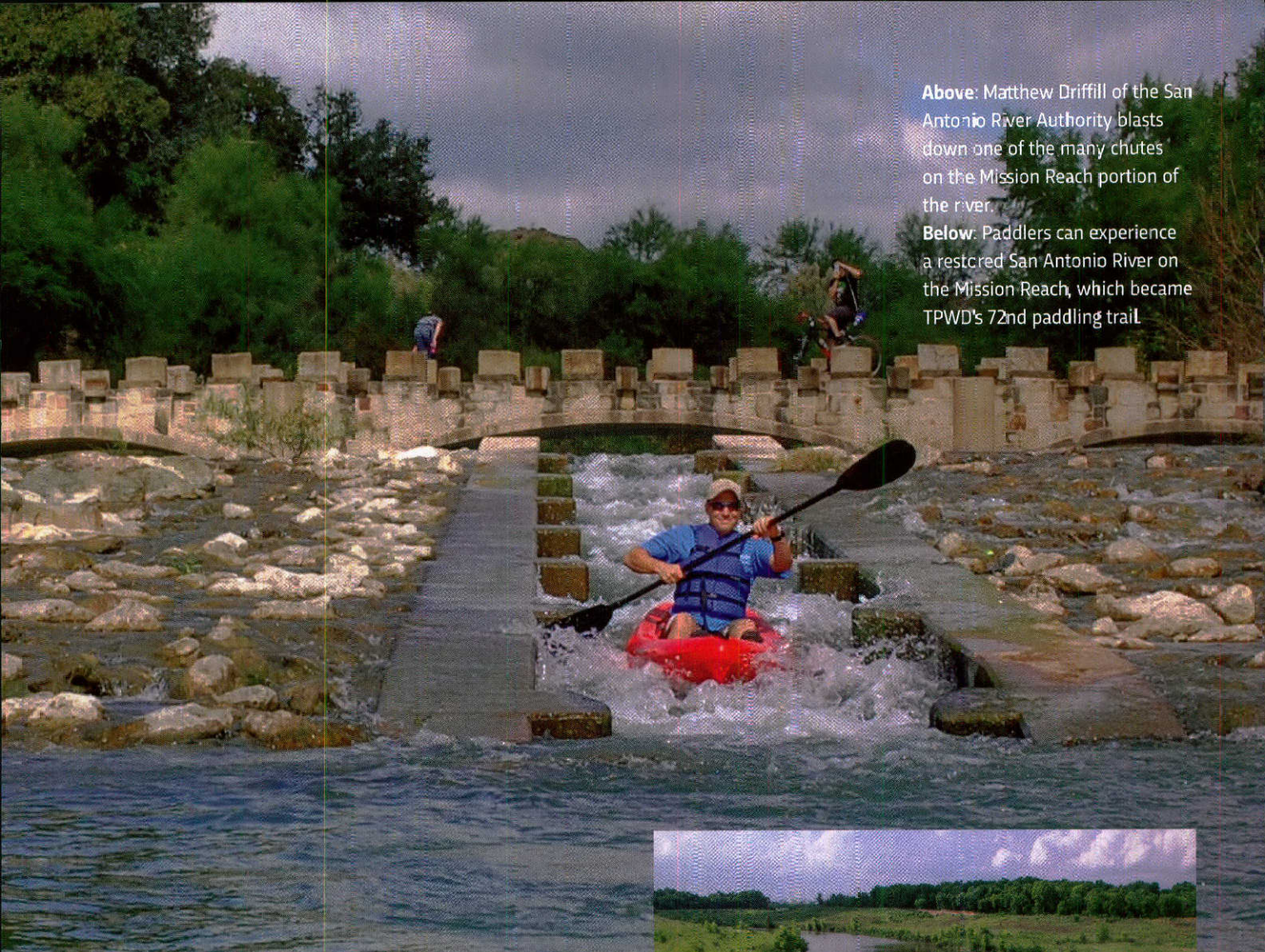
A great egret stood still as we passed, its white feathers shining bright in the sun. Cicadas sang from the forest-green loblolly pine, sycamore and black willow trees that marked our passage into the heart of the city.

At the journey's halfway point, we stopped for a break on a sandy beach so close to the River Oaks Country Club that we waved at golfers on the fourth green. As we stretched our legs, Ellis said some paddlers on this beautiful urban trail have told him, "I've never been out in the woods this long before."

Ellis laughed. With Houston's skyline soon to come into view, we were obviously a long way from the country.

As our group returned to the water, we encountered more paddlers. The closer we got to downtown, the busier the bayou became. I felt like a celebrity as pedestrians waved to us from footbridges and hike and bike trails.

No, we weren't in the woods. But we were surrounded by nature, in the middle of nowhere in the middle of everywhere.



Above: Matthew Drifill of the San Antonio River Authority blasts down one of the many chutes on the Mission Reach portion of the river.

Below: Paddlers can experience a restored San Antonio River on the Mission Reach, which became TPWD's 72nd paddling trail.

THE REBUILDING OF A RIVER

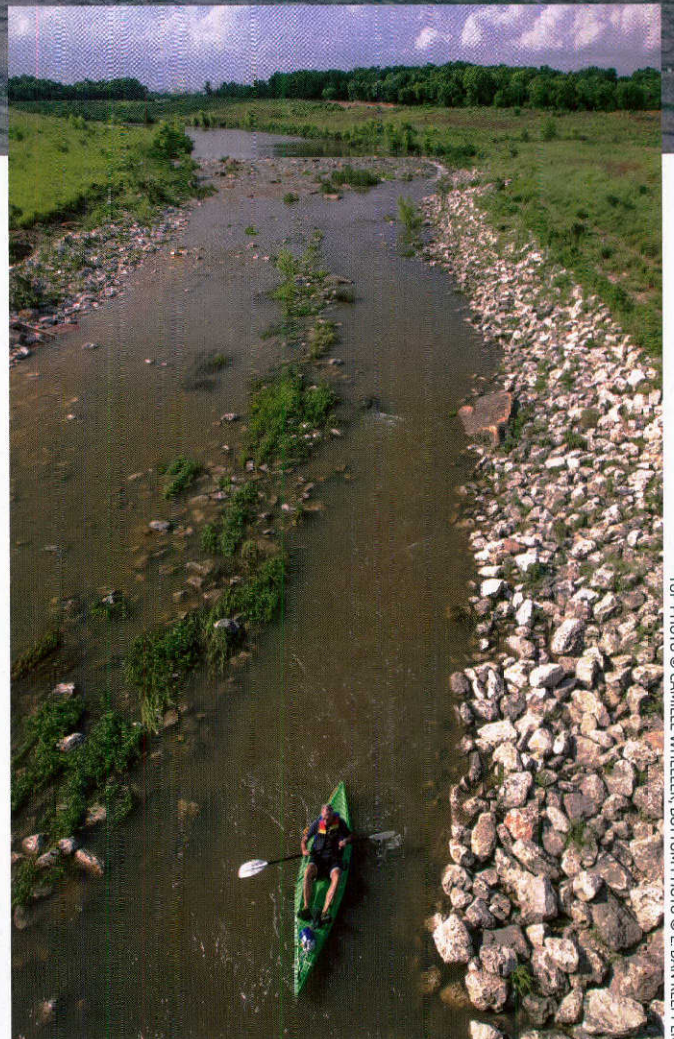
In late October, I paddled San Antonio's ultra-fun Mission Reach: an 8-mile section of the San Antonio River where a remarkable ecosystem restoration is reconnecting the city to its cultural and historical roots.

The Mission Reach became TPWD's 72nd, and newest, officially designated Texas Paddling Trail in February through a partnership agreement with the San Antonio River Authority. The \$271 million Mission Reach ecosystem restoration launched in 2008 has returned the river channel to a more natural state, reversing the damage caused by flood-control measures.

In 1954, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers authorized the San Antonio River for channelization. Floodwaters were successfully diverted away from the city, but the straightening of the river's natural meandering course crippled the riparian ecosystem, with floodwaters concentrating within the channel itself.

Now, as a result of the decade-long revitalization, the river is once again following its age-old natural, meandering course as it flows near the city's four historic Spanish missions in the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park.

The river authority will continue to manage the trail,



TOP PHOTO © CAMILLE WILLETTE; BOTTOM PHOTO © L. DAN ILLIEN

URBAN PADDLING TRAILS IN TEXAS

In addition to the Fort Worth, Grand Prairie, San Antonio, Houston and Pasadena paddling trails mentioned, here are a few other urban paddling excursions to consider:

LADY BIRD LAKE PADDLING TRAIL (AUSTIN)

Loops from 3 miles to 11 miles long near downtown Austin.

BEAVER POND PADDLING TRAIL (LEWISVILLE)

A 1-mile loop through shady willow thickets, water lilies and open water in an area known for wildlife north of Dallas.

DALLAS TRINITY PADDLING TRAIL

A 10-mile trip near downtown with contrasting segments — an altered, channelized river segment in the first half and a tree-lined natural river corridor in the second half.

LAKE ARLINGTON PADDLING TRAIL

An 11-mile paddle along the shores of a lake in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.

BOSQUE BLUFFS AND BRAZOS BRIDGES PADDLING TRAIL (WACO)

A 2-mile loop on the Bosque River or a 5-mile loop on the Brazos River through the middle of town.

MUSTANG ISLAND PADDLING TRAIL (CORPUS CHRISTI)

A series of routes along the coastal island's western shoreline with fishing and birding opportunities.



PHOTO BY EARL NGUN/SHUTTERSTOCK

which has been open to the public since 2013, and plans to incorporate the official TPWD Texas Paddling Trails logo into existing signage.

The Mission Reach's 447 total acres of aquatic and riparian woodland habitat restoration provide natural flood control. The river also features riffles, runs, pools and embayments — all essentials of a diverse river channel.

And on a gorgeous late-October afternoon, I experienced the most dynamic component of the Mission Reach: rock and concrete canoe/kayak chutes that — I can say this now — are both fun and functional.

I anticipated a relaxing journey with my paddling companions, recreation superintendent Matthew Drifill and community relations coordinator Summer West of the San Antonio River Authority, who booked our shuttle trip with Mission Kayak.

But after we launched our kayaks at Roosevelt Park, two miles south of downtown San Antonio, Drifill told me about the Mission Reach's chutes: manmade slides, of sorts, designed to move paddlers downstream during even the lowest river flows.

Doubting my paddling skills, I nervously asked: All right, how do we do this? Drifill smiled and said the chutes do all the work for you. Just point your kayak's nose right in the middle of them. And with that, he paddled down the first one and disappeared from view.

After West went down, it was my turn. Envisioning a steep roller coaster, I feared I would turn over. But my lightweight Perception Tribe 9.5 kayak easily handled the chute's short, gentle slope. I let out a whoop as the current propelled me downward, and straight into West's kayak as I lost control at the bottom.

I apologized, and West laughed, making me feel better by recounting the time another inexperienced kayaker went down this same chute backward.

Several chutes later, as we completed a 5-mile paddle on a partial Mission Reach trip, I realized I had lost count of the chutes and the wildlife we observed: great egrets, snowy egrets, double-crested cormorants, great blue herons, little blue herons, belted kingfishers, a pied-billed grebe, sandpipers, turtles and a diamondback water snake.

The birds were so enjoying the pools and riffles that Drifill's instruction to me on one chute was to "stay right of the egret on the rocks."

"GATOR! HUGE GATOR!"

The final stop on my urban paddling trails tour was the Armand Bayou Paddling Trail in Pasadena, one of the original seven coastal trails designated by TPWD.

Located about 20 miles southeast of downtown Houston and near NASA's Johnson Space Center, the trail is surrounded by urban development competing with riparian coastal flatland forest and tallgrass prairie habitats.

But as I discovered during a guided canoe tour in early November, the interior trail itself is as country as it gets. I reserved the tour with the Armand Bayou

PHOTO © CAMILLE WHEELER



Nature Center, which provided the canoes and the volunteer guide, Rich Fair, an electrical systems engineer for NASA.

I was joined on the tour by married couple Tammy and Syd Sexton of nearby Deer Park and Vicki Nguyen and Haylea Vige, who attend the University of Houston-Clear Lake

Shortly after we put our three canoes in at Bay Area Park, the wildlife action heated up. Knowing that alligators thrive in the bayou — and fully expecting to see one — I jumped every time an alligator gar leapt out of the water.

We paddled deeper into the bayou, negotiating hairpin turns. Bird life was abundant, including egrets, cormorants and kingfishers spectacularly dive-bombing the water.

But at our turnaround point, we still hadn't seen any alligators. Fair prophetically asked: "You guys ready? Let's go back and find that alligator that's tired of just sitting around."

Sure enough, several minutes later, Nguyen and Vige both hysterically laughed and screamed as an alligator jumped from a bank into the bayou right beside their boat. I looked just in time to see the gator's tail end splashing into the water.

Well, shoot, I thought as we returned to the bayou's deeper channel. I'm not going to see a whole alligator today. But then I heard Fair yelling from the back of our canoe.

"Gator! Huge gator! Huge gator! Right in front of you!"

An immense alligator was leisurely swimming 20 yards straight ahead. We paddled faster, trying for a better view, but the beast slid beneath the water.

It seemed the perfect ending to my urban paddling trails investigation.

Now, of course, I want to buy a kayak. I want to explore as many Texas Paddling Trails as possible. I think it's safe to say: If I can paddle these trails, anyone can. ★

Above: Paddlers on the Armand Bayou Paddling Trail keep an eye out for alligators and the abundant bird life.

Camille Wheeler is an Austin freelance writer who is ready for her next paddling adventure.

Vultures use a third eyelid, called a nictitating membrane, to protect their eyes while eating a carcass

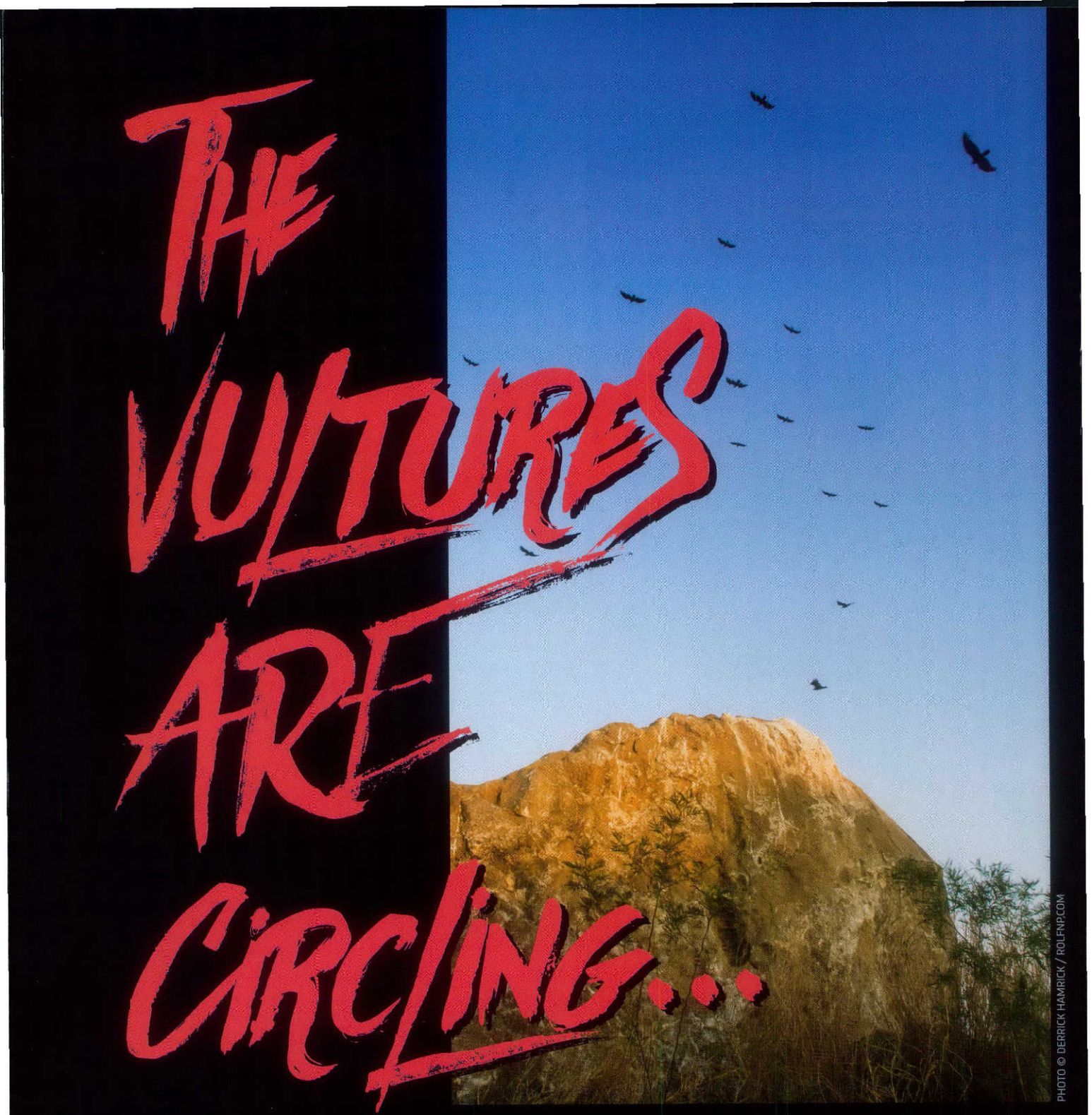
GRUFF SO

Hold your nose and offer up praise for the much-maligned but most worthy vulture.

GA

BY DALE WEISMAN

ME RIDERS



THE VULTURES ARE CIRCLING...

Bet you're picturing an old Western movie, where a thirst-crazed cowboy crawls across a blazing desert while vultures circle slowly overhead, waiting patiently for him to heave his last breath before swooping down for the feast.

Vultures suffer from seriously bad public relations that started long ago. Old Testament verse condemns vultures as "an abomination among birds." Seeing a "turkey buzzard" in 1835 on his voyage to the Americas, Charles Darwin called the poor creature "a disgusting bird, with its bald scarlet head formed to wallow in putridity."

Neither sweet like songbirds nor majestic like eagles, perhaps vultures seem too ugly to love. Many of us associate them with death, disease and decay, viewing them as sinister, grotesque carrion-eating scavengers, the bottom

feeders of the avian world, too lazy to hunt for fresh meat.

My friend Carol, the "vulture lady," vehemently disavows these ugly stereotypes. While many neighbors in her posh Northwest Austin neighborhood hang birdfeeders around their homes to attract colorful buntings and cardinals, Carol used to set defrosted chickens out on her hillside deck to feed black vultures and turkey vultures — the only two vulture species found in Texas.

"Vultures are so misunderstood," says Carol, while we admire the canyon view from her deck and reminisce about her vulture friends. "They have such sweet personalities. If people only knew how much character they have and how smart they are, they'd respect them more."

Carol's vulture clan drifted away a few years ago,



although a few visit on occasion.

"I really miss them," Carol sighs, showing me photos of her favorite black vultures. "It's amazing how these birds have evolved. Black and turkey vultures work together. They coexist and don't compete for food. The black vultures eat first, and then the turkey vultures come in and clean the carcass like nobody's business."

GETTING GRUESOME

Turkey vultures and black vultures, the most numerous of the seven species of New World vultures, abound in Texas. We see them everywhere: circling in thermals, roosting in trees and towers, and gathering at roadkills. Like all of the world's 23 species of vultures, turkey and black vultures are obligate scavengers, feeding mostly on carrion, the flesh of dead animals.

While New World vultures of the Americas and Old World vultures of Europe, Asia and Africa share similar scavenging behaviors and appearances (bald heads, hooked beaks and large wings), they are biologically unrelated. DNA testing indicates that New World vultures are closely related to storks, while Old World vultures are akin to raptors such as eagles and hawks.

The word "vulture" comes from the Latin word *vuellere*, meaning to pluck and tear, which is how they feed with their long, hooked beaks. While vultures prefer fresh meat, they will eat carrion in various stages of decomposition (except for extreme putrefaction).

Endowed with powerful digestive systems and corrosive stomach acids that destroy microorganisms and toxins, vultures are able to consume carrion without contracting diseases. Consummate recyclers — they're basically nature's hazmat team — vultures play a vital role in the food chain by ridding the landscape of decaying carcasses that could harbor pathogens.

FLY LIKE A VULTURE

Vultures shine at soaring as well as sanitation. On the ground, they seem graceless, hopping about with a clumsy gait. But when vultures take wing, they're in their element, masters of the air. Catching rising thermals and gliding on air currents, vultures soar as gracefully as hawks and eagles. They can stay aloft for hours and fly scores of miles, expending very little energy as they scan the landscape for their next meal.

Turkey vultures, the most widely distributed

Above: A vulture's bald head and neck help the bird stay clean when diving into a carcass. A vulture's strong stomach acids destroy harmful bacteria found in carrion.

Opposite: Vultures fly in groups called kettles, soaring high on thermals as they scan for their next meal.

New World vultures, fly in great migrations and range from southern Canada to the tip of South America. Their scientific name — *Cathartes aura* — means “cleansing breeze” or “purifying wind,” from the Greek words *cathartes* (catharsis or cleansing purification) and *aura* (breeze).

Cloaked in black-brown plumage, turkey vultures have ruddy, featherless, wrinkled heads, similar to

TURKEY VS. BLACK VULTURES

The most striking difference between turkey and black vultures is sensorial, affecting how they find their carrion meals. “Turkey vultures have an exquisite sense of smell and can detect a few molecules of rotting meat at great distances,” says Ian Tizard, a professor in the College of Veterinary Medicine at Texas A&M University.



WHEN VULTURES ... BEGIN DROPPING DEAD,

wild turkeys — hence their common name. Another frequently used name, “turkey buzzard,” is a misnomer. In the Old World, buzzards are raptors in the genus *Buteo*; in the U.S., we call them hawks. When Europeans settled in North America, they mistakenly thought turkey vultures were large hawks, calling them buzzards.

With light bodies (up to 5 pounds), long tails and wingspans of up to 6 feet, turkey vultures are aerodynamically built for flight. Aloft, they hold their wings in a shallow V or dihedral, slightly above the body plane. When flying close to the ground, turkey vultures tip their wings in a seemingly unsteady jinking motion, helping them maintain stability at lower altitudes.

Black vultures also excel at soaring despite having very short tails and heavier, stockier bodies and shorter wingspans (up to 5 feet) than their turkey cousins. Their ungainly takeoffs begin with a flurry of laborious, flapping wingbeats. Once airborne, they tend to circle higher in the thermals than lower-flying turkey vultures, and they hold their wings nearly flat like eagles and hawks. While turkey vultures are found across much of Texas year-round, many individuals are somewhat migratory. Black vultures reside year-round in the eastern, central and coastal areas of Texas (but are less common in West Texas).

The scientific name for black vultures, *Coragyps atratus*, aptly means “vulture dressed in black,” as if in mourning. With their sooty-black plumage and bare, gray-black heads, black vultures call to mind somber avian undertakers.

One of three New World species in the *Cathartes* genus with a highly developed olfactory ability, turkey vultures can detect the odor of rotting flesh in concentrations as minute as a few parts per billion. They flock to the pungent odor of ethyl mercaptan, a gas produced when flesh decomposes.

Black vultures have a poor sense of smell, relying instead on their sharp vision to spot dead or dying animals. When higher-flying black vultures spot turkey vultures descending to feed, they often swoop down and drive away the less assertive, more solitary turkey vultures.

“Black vultures are more aggressive as flocks of them bear down on a carcass,” Tizard says. “Turkey vultures back away when it comes to competition.”

DEFENSE MECHANISMS

Although turkey vultures and black vultures have few natural predators, they share a potent defense: their stomach contents.

“Vulture vomit is incredibly acidic and stings,” Tizard says. “If chased, they disgorge their stomachs to reduce weight as they take flight to gain altitude.”

Lacking a syrinx (vocal organ), turkey and black vultures hiss and grunt when disturbed.

Like other New World vultures, as well as their stork relatives, turkey and black vultures defecate on their legs and feet. In addition to sanitizing their legs by killing off bacteria with highly acidic excrement, this behavior — a

form of thermoregulation called urohydrolysis — helps vultures stay cool through evaporation during hot weather.

Instead of making nests, turkey and black vultures lay their eggs directly on the ground and inside brush piles, hollow logs, shallow caves and abandoned buildings. These family-oriented birds maintain long-term monogamous pair bonds. Abiding parents, mother

in the U.S. are stable, even increasing. More adaptable than turkey vultures, black vultures can tolerate human presence and pressures and have expanded their range over the past several decades, steadily advancing north and east from Gulf states into New England and as far north as Ontario.

Avian experts speculate that black vultures are following the expansion of highways and the resulting trail of roadkill. The

Humane Society estimates that vehicles kill a million animals a week in the U.S.

“There’s no shortage of roadkill,” Tizard says. “Nowadays roadkill and the growth of deer populations provide much of vultures’ food.”

From left: Texas vultures come in two varieties: black vultures and turkey vultures. Downy chicks emerge from eggs laid in makeshift nests in logs, caves or brush piles.

WITHOUT VULTURES

While turkey and black vultures are thriving in the Americas, nearly a fourth of the world’s vulture species are in deep trouble, some facing extinction. An estimated 97 percent of India’s vultures have died off in recent decades, poisoned by a veterinary painkiller (diclofenac) that tainted cattle carcasses.

Poisoning and poaching have decimated vulture populations in many African nations. In the Americas, the California condor teeters on the edge of extinction, and the Andean condor also faces dire threats.

The prominent environmentalist David Brower wisely observed, “When vultures watching your civilization begin dropping dead, it is time to pause and wonder.” To raise public awareness of the plight of vultures in many parts of the world, avian enthusiasts now celebrate International Vulture Awareness Day, held the first Saturday in September each year since 2009. Turkey vultures enjoy a growing fan base through the Turkey Vulture Society (turkeyvulturesociety.wordpress.com), dedicated to promoting the environmental benefits of these red-headed vultures.

Thom Van Dooren, author of *Vulture* and a leading figure in the field of extinction studies, suggests: “Perhaps one of the things that vultures might ultimately show us is that all creatures — even the ones that may seem a little frightening or gross — are doing their own part in holding together the all-too-fragile tangle of life on this planet.”

Ponder this parting thought the next time you see vultures soaring in the summer sky or huddled over roadkill along a highway. ★

Dale Weisman is an Austin writer who has an appreciation for “unloved” animals.

IT'S TIME TO PAUSE AND WONDER

vultures feed their young up to eight months after fledging. Both species are social and roost overnight in trees and on power lines and radio towers. When large roosts in residential areas pose a nuisance, some communities practice “vulture hazing” — discharging loud pyrotechnics to drive them away.

FRIEND OR FOE?

According to Tizard, rural communities once tolerated black and turkey vultures as largely beneficial scavengers.

“In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, country folk viewed vultures positively and as useful to have around to clean up offal from slaughter or dead livestock,” says Tizard. “Attitudes changed after 1900 due to the rise of microbiology and a mistaken view of vultures as dirty, disease-spreading vermin, and vultures were persecuted.”

Nowadays, many ranchers dislike black vultures, complaining that they prey on newborn or weak calves and sheep. Aggressive by nature, black vultures sometimes turn predatory and kill small mammals and other birds. Although black vultures, as well as turkey vultures, are protected under the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act, ranchers can obtain permits to trap, shoot and poison vultures believed to be killing livestock.

Until the 1970s, the egg-thinning effects of DDT contaminated turkey and black vultures, as it did with many raptors. Although still sensitive to habitat loss and lead shot in carcasses, black and turkey vulture populations



Angler Edwin Evers took home the top prize in the 2016 GEICO Bassmaster Classic in Oklahoma. The event comes to Texas this year.

*"Well, it's bass and boats
It's water and cold
It's the shout of the adoring crowd
It's the stretch of the lines
The hundred grand prize
He'll win in the final round
It's jigs and frogs, fish under logs
Thumb the reel and then let it go
It's the braid and the fluoro
The joy and the sorrow
And he's called a bass pro."*

FISH ON

TWO MAJOR TEXAS BASS TOURNAMENTS OFFER RARE ACCESS FOR SPECTATORS

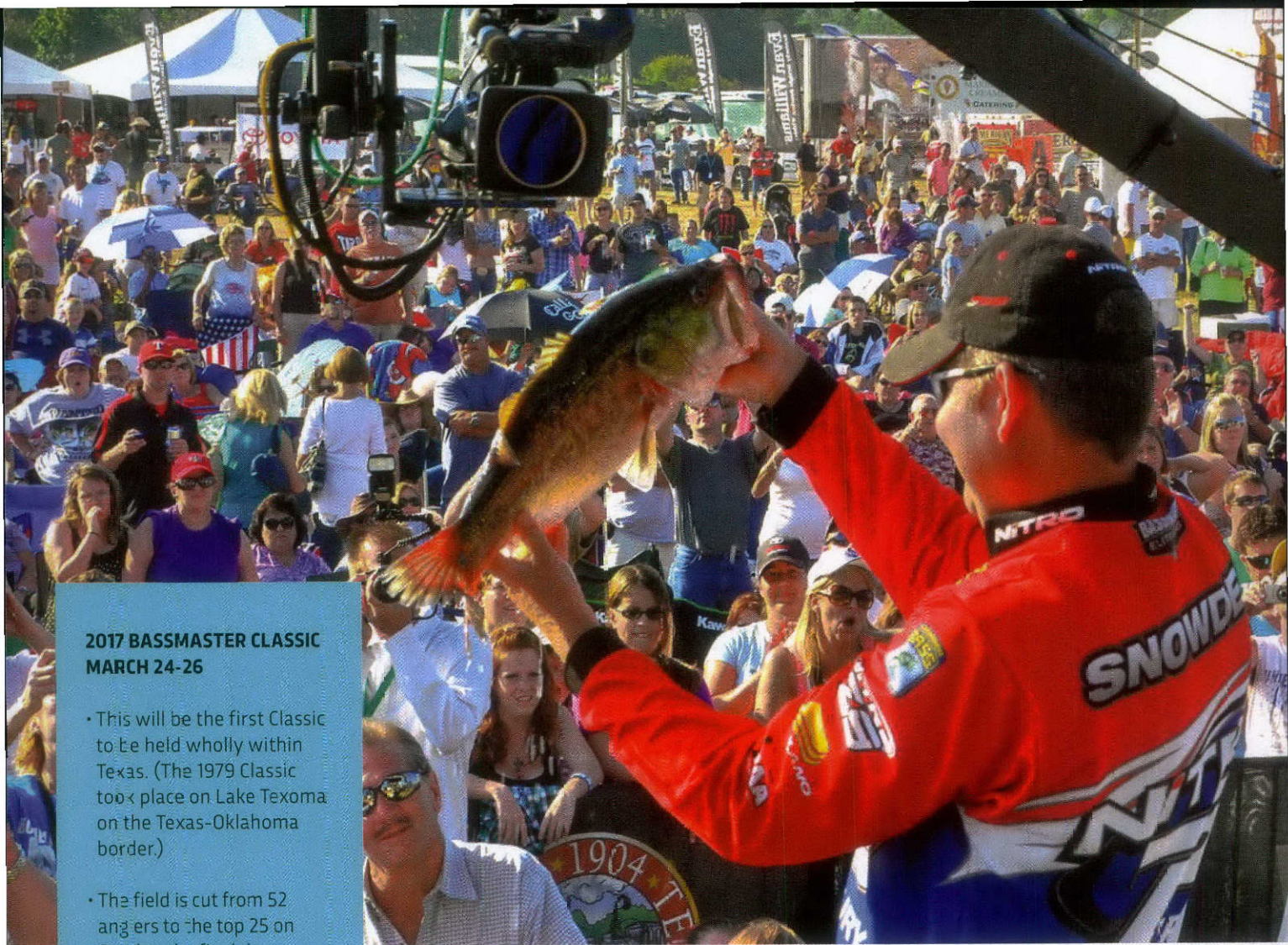
Apologies to Garth Brooks, but every time I hear *Rodeo*, I can't help but replace his lyrics about cowboys with my own words about bass tournament anglers. The sentiment is the same; the outcome is the same. Some make it. Most don't, but many keep trying.

The bass pro will give up his family and a normal life just to pursue the dream of making it as a pro fisherman. As the lyrics go: "He'll sell off everything he owns just to pay to play her game."

It's not an easy lifestyle, nor is it inexpensive. The travel is brutal, and dealing with the ever-changing elements wears you out. It can take five-digit amounts (if not nearly \$100,000) per year to "pay to play" the bass game at the highest level.

Despite all this, there's no shortage of people trying to make it in the world of bass.

BY RANDY BRUDNICKI



2017 BASSMASTER CLASSIC MARCH 24-26

- This will be the first Classic to be held wholly within Texas. (The 1979 Classic took place on Lake Texoma on the Texas-Oklahoma border.)
- The field is cut from 52 anglers to the top 25 on Sunday, the final day.
- The Classic is a no-entry-fee tournament open only to top-ranked anglers who qualified through one of several E.A.S.S. tournament circuits.
- First-place prize is \$300,000. The total prize payout is more than \$1 million.
- Takeoffs occur from Lake Conroe Park.
- Weigh-ins take place each afternoon in Minute Maid Park, home of the Astros, in downtown Houston (501 Crawford St.).
- The Bassmaster Classic Outdoors Expo will be held all three days in the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston (1001 Avenida De Las Americas).

Fans admire the toughness the top anglers show. Those who make it to the highest levels know that it takes drive and determination to get there, as well as skill.

Unlike rodeos, bass tournaments are not particularly spectator-friendly, but there are exceptions. Some pro events are made for fans — with more entertainment to offer than just watching the anglers take off in the morning or observing a live weigh-in.

THE BASSMASTER CLASSIC

Texans are blessed this year with two of the most fan-friendly events. Watch the best anglers up close at the GEICO Bassmaster Classic near Houston (fishing on Lake Conroe) and at the Toyota Bassmaster Texas Fest (benefiting the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department) on Lake Sam Rayburn. B.A.S.S. (Bass Anglers Sportsman Society) manages both of these events.

Up to 200,000 fans are predicted to attend this year's Classic on March 24-26, in part because Texas has so many B.A.S.S. members. Fans, however, come from all over the world.

"We are thrilled to be able to bring the GEICO Bassmaster Classic to Houston for the first time in the event's 47-year history," says Bruce Akin, B.A.S.S. CEO. "Texas is the largest state in terms of B.A.S.S. membership, and the Houston area is home to some of the most passionate anglers and conservationists among our more than 500,000 members."

Not only can you watch the anglers at the Classic, but there's also a world of tackle to explore. At last year's event in Oklahoma, 143 exhibitors showed their wares. This year, more than 200 exhibitors are expected to fill 315,000 square feet of exhibit space in the George R. Brown Convention Center, making it the largest outdoor expo in Classic history.

Many companies introduce new products at the Classic; sometimes, you'll be the first to buy them. It's like heaven for tackle enthusiasts.

Lake Conroe area businesses are preparing for the influx of visitors, who go to the lake to watch the takeoff each morning and follow the anglers on the water. Plus, there's a large support staff for the tourney. Local marinas are expecting a marked increase in boat launches on the days of competition.

The Bassmaster Classic will provide a big economic boost for Houston and Lake Conroe. Previous host cities have reported an average of \$24 million in economic impact, including more than 11,000 hotel room nights. B.A.S.S. alone books nearly 4,000 hotel room nights for anglers, sponsors, staff, media and invited guests.

“National and international reporters will be here to cover the action on the lake, too. Many of them will be staying in Conroe,” says Harold Hutcheson, Conroe Convention and Visitors Bureau manager.

One interesting facet of bass tournaments is watching the pros dissect our Texas bass lakes. No matter what the conditions, someone figures it out and catches the big fish.

Some on-the-water spectators will take advantage of the opportunity to move in after the pro angler leaves a spot to mark the GPS coordinates. It may be an easy way to get new waypoints, but some anglers question whether it's ethical. At the very least, be courteous and give the pros plenty of room to fish. Don't drive over their spots while they are fishing and don't move in to fish it after they leave. Sometimes the pros leave for a short time and return to fish the area again.

At 22,000 acres, Lake Conroe is the perfect size for an event of this magnitude — it's large enough to accommodate 50-plus competitors with plenty of room to spare for spectator boats.

THE TEXAS CONNECTION

Five Texans are competing in this year's Classic. The father-son duo of Alton Jones (former Classic champion) and Alton Jones Jr. (who qualified through the Bassmaster Open circuit) will compete, as well as Todd Faircloth of Jasper, former Classic winner Takahiro Omori of Emory and Keith Combs from Huntington.

If you play Fantasy Fishing, put Combs high on your list. He's won two Toyota Texas Bass Classics on Conroe, in 2011 and 2013. On top of that, he is fishing well right now, finishing second in the Elite series Angler of the Year standings last season.

Fishing in the Classic is not only for full-time pros. Amateurs can make their way into the Classic by competing in the College Series, Team Series and local B.A.S.S.-affiliated clubs to earn places in state and regional championships, and finishing at the top in the B.A.S.S. Nation Championship. The 2016 B.A.S.S. Nation Championship was also held on Lake Conroe in November, so the three qualifiers from that event will have considerable experience on Lake Conroe and could pull off a win.



Life B.A.S.S. and B.A.S.S. Nation members qualify for special perks at the Bassmaster Classic. They get early entrance into the Classic's Outdoors Expo, personalized credentials, a gift bag, access to a special lounge and priority entry to the weigh-ins every day.

THE BASSMASTER TEXAS FEST

The other popular tournament coming to Texas is the Toyota Bassmaster Texas Fest, May 17-21, at Cassels-Boykin Park in Zavalla. This event is a merger of the former Toyota Texas Fest and Toyota Texas Bass Classic with the B.A.S.S. BASSfest.

“Toyota Bassmaster Texas Fest will combine the best features of the Toyota Texas Bass Classic and our own BASSfest tournament, both of which have become immensely popular among anglers and fishing fans,” Akin says. “Texas Fest will host a special Fan Appreciation Day offering anglers and their families

Above: Edwin Evers boat-flips a bass at the 2016 GEICO Bassmaster Classic.

Opposite: Largemouth bass are the stars of the show at the Toyota Texas Bass Classic, which this year becomes the Toyota Bassmaster Texas Fest.

For schedule information, visit www.bassmaster.com.



From the top:

Fans crowd the banks to watch the pros take off in the morning at the Bassmaster Classic. Tournament exhibit halls give fans a chance to see the latest fishing gear. The fish weigh-in generates excitement at the Bassmaster Classic.

opportunities to meet, greet and learn from the world's best professional anglers."

This smaller and more intimate setting will let attendees meet and learn from the anglers. Here, too, fans can attend an expo with fishing-related exhibitors.

The Texas Fest event follows the format made popular by the Toyota Texas Bass Classic. Even though Sam Rayburn is not a slot lake (with size restrictions on fish kept),

the anglers' marshals will weigh and record the bass in the boat. Then the fish will be immediately released. Each pro angler will be permitted to bring one bass longer than 21 inches to the weigh-in.

"TPWD's role in the event will not change," explains Dave Terre of TPWD's inland fisheries. "The Toyota Bassmaster Texas Fest will still be a benefit event for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. We will still showcase a 'fish-friendly' catch/weigh/immediate-release format, but now with more than 100 anglers — two times more than TTBCs of the past."

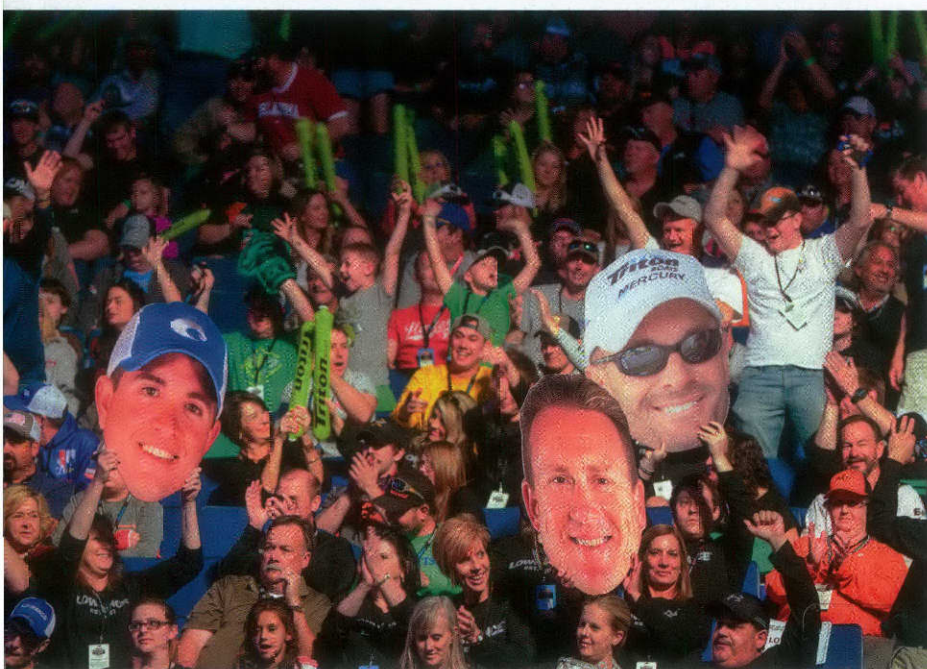
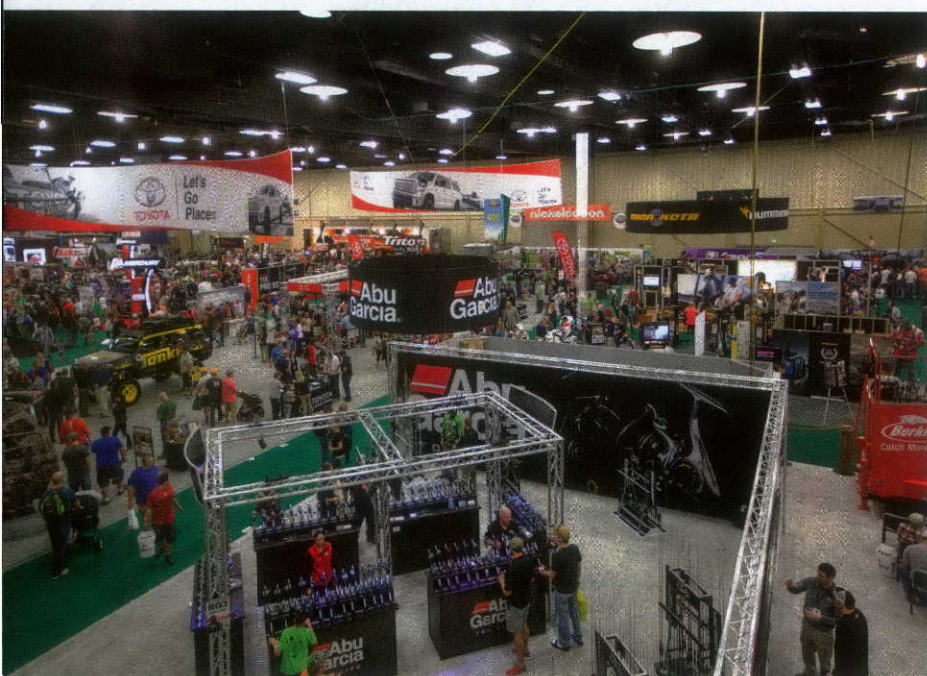
Families who want to engage and learn about the outdoors and fishing can explore the Outdoor Adventures Area. Donations from the tournament sponsors will continue to be invested in TPWD youth fishing outreach programs, like Neighborhood Fishin'.

Pro bass anglers are a friendly bunch. It's easy to talk to them; you might even get a selfie with your favorite angler.

"Bass fishing fans who attend the GEICO Bassmaster Classic or a Bassmaster Elite Series tournament are invariably impressed with how accessible the world's top professional anglers are," Akin says.

Two other national bass events are also on tap this year in Texas. The FLW pro anglers will be on Lake Travis in February, and the Bassmaster Elites return to Toledo Bend in April.

Make your plans now to attend these world-class fishing events. It's a rare treat to have them so close to home. Don't forget to take an extra bag to hold all that new gear! ★



Randy Brudnicki is publisher of Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine and an avid bass angler.



December 1942
Texas Game and Fish magazine
debuts. The price? Ten cents.



July 1944
Big Bend National Park
opens to visitors.

FROM WEIRD TO WILD TO “WHAT WERE WE *THINKING?!*”

WORST HEADLINE OF THE DECADE

FROM A DECEMBER 1949 ARTICLE ABOUT SKUNKS

Pistol Packin' Pussy



That's offensive!

MUSKRAT? THEM'S GOOD EATIN'

FROM APRIL 1945

“MARSH HARE” SAUERBRATEN

- 1 muskrat
- ½ teaspoon salt
- Dash of pepper
- Dash of nutmeg or ginger
- 6 tablespoons vinegar
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 3 cups water
- ¼ bay leaf
- 2 tablespoons fat
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- ¼ cup chopped green pepper or parsley
- 2 tablespoons chopped celery
- ½ cup raisins
- 1 tablespoon flour
- ¼ cup sour cream

1. Soak muskrat in slightly salted water overnight; wash thoroughly, removing all blood and visible fat. Disjoint and cut in pieces for serving; drain.

2. Rub pieces with mixture of salt, pepper and nutmeg or ginger; place in crock or deep pan. Pour 2 cups of boiling hot mixture of vinegar, sugar, water and bay leaf over meat and let stand 4 to 8 hours. Remove meat and drain; discard mixture in which meat was soaked.

3. Brown meat in hot fat in a heavy frying pan, turn over and brown on other side. Remove meat to platter and pour off fat. Add onion, green pepper, celery, raisins and sour cream to pan and cook 5 minutes. Pour over meat. Add vinegar-sugar mixture and bring to a boil.

THAT SEEMS FISHY

Ted Johnson of Harlingen submitted the photo below of a “fur-bearing trout, or beazel,” along with a whopper of a fish tale.

From September 1949

Well, We



THEN AND NOW: GOING BATTY

FROM AUGUST 1943 AND JAN/FEB 2015

Whatever the era, Texans are fascinated by these flying mammals.



Hundreds of thousands of these tiny baby bats literally cover the walls of many caves in Texas. They are fed during the day by their mothers who swoop over the Texas countryside at night to forage for millions of insects, many of which are harmful to growing crops.

Dwellers In Darkness

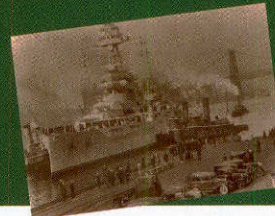
April 1946

Texas Game and Fish gets its first official editor.



1947

Texas watchmaker R. D. Hull invents the spincast reel.



April 1948

Battleship Texas is decommissioned.

ROGER M. BUSFIELD
Editor

HUNTING: SISTERS ARE DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES

FEBRUARY 1947 (SPREAD) AND SEPTEMBER 1947 (BELOW)

Texas women have been bolstering the ranks of hunters for generations. "Mamma" was the "life of the party" on her hunt; Bess McCarley bagged predators as a government trapper.

THAT'S RIGHT, WE SAID IT...

"Women think, for some inane reason, that fishing is a man's sport. This misconception has been planted in the female mind for generations. The principal reason for this malignant attitude on man's part is the fact he recognizes woman's ability and cannot stand to have his piscatorial glory taken away."

From June 1943



Mamma Went Deer Hunting—Too
By E. W. ODOU

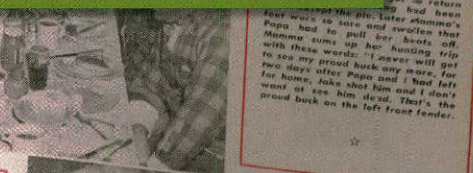
HORACE STEEDMAN's father, a Texas sportsman, was a little. He calls him "Mamma" and his hunting party call them "Mamma and Papa."
Well, Mamma went deer hunting this year too and was the life of the party. She was always the deer hunter of the party.
I have been an experienced and successful hunter, naturally, and I have been hunting deer for many years by calling, tracking, and using a compass, ranging, and other methods. I have a "wooded" book, and I am a member of the Texas Game and Fish Commission.
Other members of the party are Mamma, Papa, and I. Mamma is the best on E. W. ODOU.
The first day after Mamma got out with an automatic rifle and



In the upper photo Mamma is being wild to look for the Tom's head.



In the lower left photo Mamma came into the cage to unload her gun. She got her trigger finger tangled up with the trigger and blew a hole in the wall about two feet from where Papa was sitting on a log. In the bottom photo Mamma is a victim of buck fever. Well Mamma, I wanted to shoot that big fellow but I just couldn't. I tried to point my gun at him but it wobbled too badly and my knees shook and may was get off!



That was the pic. After Mamma's Papa had to pull her back off with these words: "I never will get two days after Papa and I had left for home. Jack shot him and I don't want to see him dead. That's the proud buck on the left front fender."



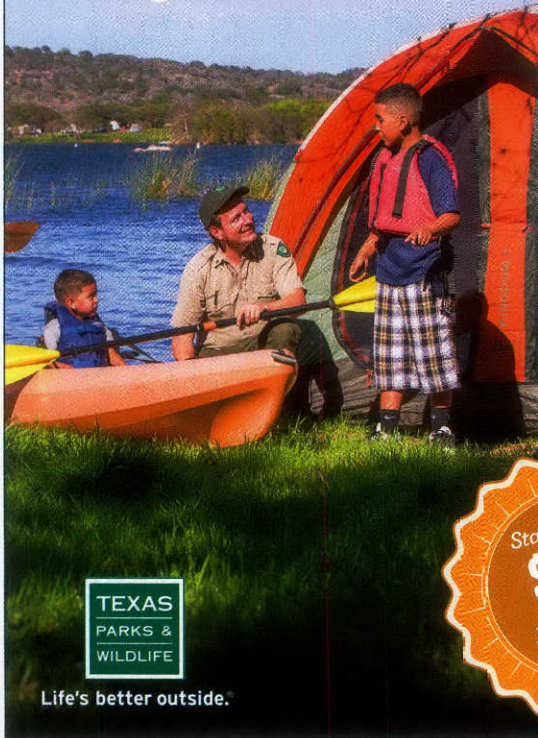
YOUR TAX DOLLARS AT WORK FOR CONSERVATION

FROM DECEMBER 1949

Uncle Sam has increased our allowance since the 1940s. TPWD received \$48.5 million in federal funds in fiscal year 2015.

\$495,670 to Texas For Wildlife Work

Texas will have \$495,670 in federal money to spend during the fiscal year for restoration and development of her wildlife resources. The money is allocated by the secretary of the interior, and it accrues from federal excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition. Texas, which gets more than any other state, must contribute 2% per cent of the cost of the projects within her borders.

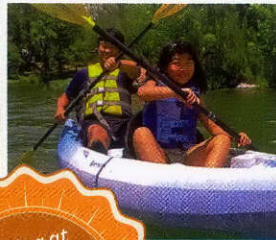


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Discover this spectacular 6½-carat green treasure from Mount St. Helens!

At 10,000 feet high, it was truly a sleeping giant. Until May 18, 1980, when the beast awoke with violent force and revealed its greatest secret. Mount St. Helens erupted, sending up a 80,000-foot column of ash and smoke. From that chaos, something beautiful emerged... our spectacular *Helenite Necklace*.

EXCLUSIVE FREE
Helenite Earrings
 -a \$129 value-
 with purchase of
 Helenite Necklace

Helenite is produced from the heated volcanic rock of Mount St. Helens and the brilliant green creation has captured the eye of jewelry designers worldwide. Today you can wear this massive 6½-carat stunner for **only \$149!**

Make your emeralds jealous. Our *Helenite Necklace* puts the green stone center stage, with a faceted pear-cut set in .925 sterling silver finished in luxurious gold. The explosive origins of the stone are echoed in the flashes of light that radiate as the piece swings gracefully from its 18" luxurious gold-finished sterling silver chain. Today the volcano sits quiet, but this unique piece of American natural history continues to erupt with gorgeous green fire.

Your satisfaction is guaranteed. Bring home the *Helenite Necklace* and see for yourself. If you are not completely blown away by the rare beauty of this exceptional stone, simply return the necklace within 30 days for a full refund of your purchase price.

Necklace enlarged to show luxurious color.



Limited to the first 2200 orders from this ad only

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Rating of **A+**



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The hunt for the perfect outdoorsman knife is over. There's only one tool you need: the Whitetail™ Hunting Knife—now **ONLY \$49!**

The consummate outdoorsman never goes on deep woods hunting trips without the essentials. Not just the basics for every hunting trip, but the items he's come to depend on over the years.

Our new **Whitetail™ Hunting Knife** will quickly become your go-to blade for every expedition. The Whitetail™ is a premium fixed-blade hunting knife that's perfect for skinning. With the Whitetail at hand, you'll be ready for field dressing in only seconds, and you'll never need a separate gut hook tool ever again. The Whitetail™ boasts a mighty 420 high carbon, full tang stainless steel blade, meaning the blade doesn't stop at the handle, it runs the full length of the knife. According to *Gear Patrol*, a full tang blade is key, saying "A full tang lends structural strength to the knife, allowing for better leverage ...think one long steel beam versus two."

The comfortable handle is made from pakkawood—moisture-resistant and more durable than hardwood. If hunting is your life, then the Whitetail™ Knife was designed to make your life easier.

With our limited edition **Whitetail™ Hunting Knife** you're getting the best in 21st-century construction with a classic look inspired by legendary American pioneers. What you won't get is the trumped up price tag. We know a thing or two about the hunt—like how to seek out and capture an outstanding, collector's-quality knife that won't cut into your bank account.

This knife can be yours to use out in the field or to display as the art piece it truly is. But don't wait. A knife of this caliber typically costs hundreds. Priced at an amazing **\$49**, we can't guarantee this knife will stick around for long. So call today!

Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed. Feel the knife in your hands, wear it on your hip, inspect the craftsmanship. If you don't feel like we cut you a fair deal, send it back within 60 days for a complete refund of the item sale price. But we believe that once you wrap your fingers around the **Whitetail's** handle, you'll be ready to carve your own niche into the wild frontier.

What customers are saying about Stauer knives...



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— B. of Maryland

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*Discount is only for customers who use the offer code versus the listed original Stauer.com price.



Not shown actual size.



Rating of A+

• 5 1/4" 420HC stainless steel blade • Full-tang design with gut hook • Pakkawood handle with brass pins • Bonus heavy duty nylon sheath

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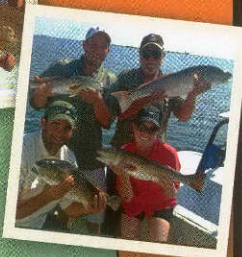
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When "cute" is a four-letter word. If you want to make a romantic impression, go big. Cute doesn't cut it. Your love deserves to be wowed. If you're a billionaire with money to burn, turn the page. Everyone else? What you read next just might change your love life. There's only one way to find out...

Experience the luxury of money in the bank. We "built" our own mined diamond version of this ring online at a popular jewelry site and the grand total was \$77,767! Today you can wear this 3 ¾ carat lab-created DiamondAura solitaire, accented with 32 gleaming DiamondAura rounds in fine .925 sterling silver for **only \$79!**

That's good, but you deserve better. Order now and we'll include the matching 1-total carat DiamondAura Avalon Earrings...absolutely **FREE**. That's right, 5 total carats of DiamondAura in sterling silver for under \$80. Talk about money in the bank!

Your satisfaction is guaranteed. If for any reason you don't absolutely adore your DiamondAura Avalon Ring, return it within 60 days for a full refund of your item sale price. But we promise that once you get a look at the Avalon up close, you'll see love in a whole new light.

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Rating of A+



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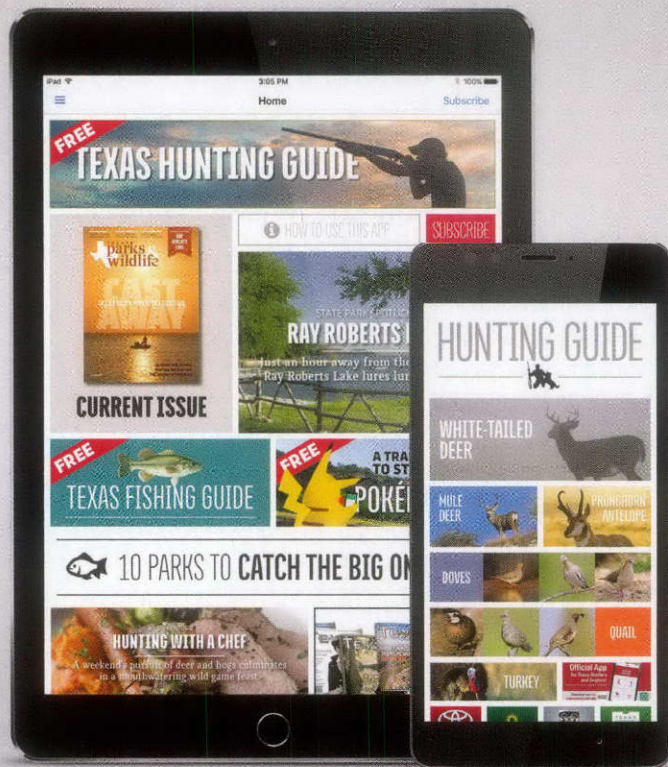
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Turkey Hunting

by Steve Hall

ILLUSTRATION © JESSICA BLANK

Tuk-tuk-tuk-tuk. Yobble-yobble-yobble. Prrrt!

Sounds like these, echoing from the turkey woods each spring, are magically alluring. The mating ritual of the old tom turkey gathering his harem signals a time for hunters to gather their gear and head to the pastures and valleys of Texas to pursue this uniquely American tradition. Hunting the wily gobbler is considered the ultimate challenge by many hunters — an experience that lures turkey hunters back each year, as evidenced by a growing number of “beards” hanging in their dens. These delicious birds make for fine table fare, too.

GEAR UP

SHOTGUN/AMMO OR BOW/ARROWS



Standard gear is a 12- or 20-gauge

camo shotgun with fixed open sights/scope or bead, along with a chamber that accepts 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch or 3-inch shells with No. 4, 5 and 6 field/turkey loads. For bow hunters, a minimum 7/8-inch, two-edged broadhead point is legal.

PORTABLE BLINDS



A pop-up portable camo blind and

folding chair are becoming favorites of turkey hunters to quickly move locations and conceal movements when positioning for a shot.

TURKEY CALLS AND VEST



A turkey hunter uses a variety of

calls (e.g. box, diaphragm, slate, wing bone and plunger) to mimic the sounds of hen turkeys or fighting gobblers. A camo vest (with detachable seat cushion for moving and posting at different positions) is a must for storing accessories.

HEN/GOBBLER DECOYS



Decoys are an effective way to fix

a gobbler's attention elsewhere so the bird does not detect your movement.

CAMOUFLAGE CLOTHING AND BOOTS



Turkeys easily see movement

and colors, so hunting in clothing that matches the environment or breaks up a solid pattern is best. Good field “snake” boots are sought by hunters who know that rattlesnakes are most active in the springtime.

ACCESSORIES



Coolers, knives, range finders, binoculars,

shooting sticks, survival kits, chigger/bug sprays and sunscreen are among the many accessories of a turkey hunter.

QUICK TIPS

- Be sure of your target and what is in front of and beyond the bird as it approaches.
- Properly and immediately tag your bird upon kill and retain proof of sex (e.g. leg/spur or patch of skin/beard) when and where required.
- Pattern your shotgun or practice with your bow well before the season begins. Center your shot at the bottom of the neck if shotgun hunting, or aim for the body at the confluence of the wing/breast feathers, just above the legs, if bow hunting.
- Calls such as barred owl, crow or peacock work great for locating birds on their roost.
- For safety, use hunter-orange flagging above your hunting post, an orange vest/hat while moving locations on public lands or an orange bag when taking your kill from the field.



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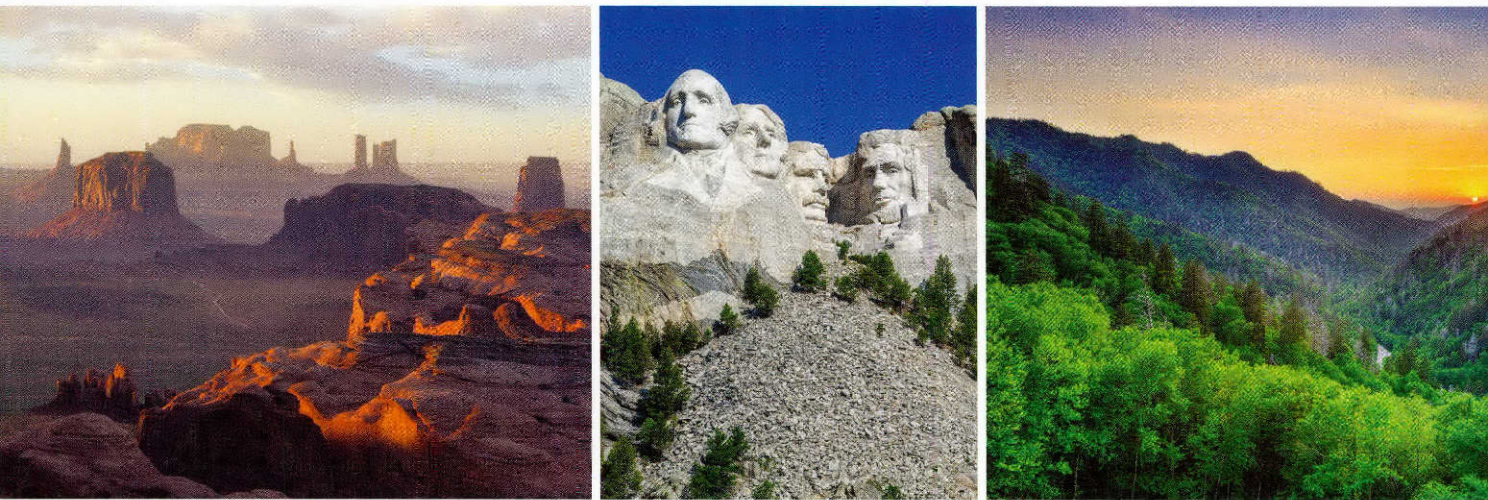
Texas Ornithological
Society

PARTING SHOT

Photographer Michael Chang captured a bit of outdoor fun at Balmorhea State Park and ended up as one of the winners of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation's Focus on the Wild photo contest (see story on Page 22). Contest judge Earl Nottingham says: "This photo is pure serendipity! You can never plan or orchestrate these fun and quirky photos, but when everything comes together at just the right second, you get a very engaging and memorable image."

TOOLS: Canon PowerShot D10 camera; auto exposure mode with f/2.8 at 1/250th of a second, ISO 160.





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