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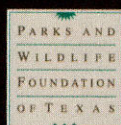
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Photo © Wyman Meinzer

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TEXAS

The OUTDOOR MAGAZINE of TEXAS

SEPTEMBER 2004, VOL. 62, NO. 9

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In the Field

CHESTER MOORE JR. grew up near Sabine Lake in Orange County, where he developed a passion for the outdoors at an early age. Since 1992, he has won nearly 2 dozen writing, photography and conservation awards from the Texas Outdoor Writers Association, Texas Parks and Wildlife and the Sportsmen Conservationists of Texas. He serves as saltwater editor of *Texas Fish & Game* magazine and hosts "Chester Moore Outdoors" on KLVI 560-AM in Beaumont. He and his wife, Lisa, live in Orange with their German shepherd, Chyna, and chocolate Labrador, Sable, where they work to promote the outdoors to young people.



JULIE COOMBES fell in love with nature as a child while hiking and paddling through the forests of New England and Texas. She honed her outdoor skills in the Pacific Northwest while pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Anthropology. Since 1990, she has written for numerous exhibits, publications and the Web, including the International Steinbeck Center in Salinas, California and *Exhibit Builder* magazine. As senior interpretive planner for TPWD, she has created exhibits for several state parks, including LBJ, Caddo Lake and Sheldon Lake. She also edits the interpreters' newsletter, *Hands-On Texas*. She and her husband, Scott, recently bought their first home in Austin and have become infatuated with organic gardening and wildscaping with native plants.



JOHN JEFFERSON often writes about hunting in this magazine, but in this issue he extends his subject to include the best-possible forecast for the upcoming hunting seasons in Texas — doves, pronghorn antelope, prairie chickens, pheasants, quail, javelina, small game, deer, turkeys and waterfowl. JJ is former executive director of the Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society, past president of the Texas Outdoor Writers Association and served as director of information and education for TPWD. He freelances writing and photography from his home west of Austin. Jefferson authored *Hunters' Guide To Texas* and recently served as editor of the *Texas Parks and Wildlife Outdoor Annual* for 2004 and 2005.



AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF ROBERT L. COOK

It had been a long time since I had killed a rattlesnake. I'm not sure why, maybe I just don't wander around in those kinds of places as frequently as I used to. I was born and raised in some of the best snake country in Texas, and I've been around rattlers all my life. I don't particularly dislike rattlers, but I do respect them and their role in the outdoors. I've learned to live with them, and I guess they have learned to tolerate me.

My most recent encounter with a rattlesnake included a new ingredient in our lifelong relationship: three of my little granddaughters. It was mid-June and time for our Sometimes Annual Campout with the Grandkids on Lost Creek Ranch. All seven grandchildren, age 10 months to 10 years, and an entire troop of fretting parents, were committed to an over-night campout. The tents were up and we had enjoyed a beautiful Texas sunset. The campfire and wiener roast were highly successful, and the s'mores were in various stages of stickiness on little faces and hands.

I had settled back in a camp chair studying the stars, listening for the owls and bullfrogs, pondering what big yarn I would spin for the kids before bedtime when spine-chilling screams cut into everyone's heart and mind. I knew it had to be a snake. Emilee, Morgan and Rachel, ages 6, 9 and 10, raced screaming and breathless back to the campfire. A quick check assured us they were not hurt, and the fact that they said "Rattlesnake!" about 20 times left little doubt about the problem. I quickly fetched my flashlight and pistol, walked about 15 yards in the direction indicated and was greeted by a huge diamondback rattlesnake, in full coil and strike position, its rattles buzzing. With no hesitation, I dispatched it.

Now, after some thought, I wonder if I did the right thing. At 61 inches tip to tip, and 13 rattles, this was an unusually large and beautifully marked specimen. I wonder how old she was. No way to know for sure, but most likely, 15-25 years. How many mice and turkey eggs had she eaten in her lifetime? How many red-tailed hawks did she avoid? Was she headed down to the Rock Tank that night to see if a frog might be on the menu? Will the cottontails sleep more comfortably and become lazy in her absence?

As strange as it might sound to some of my old reprobate friends, I find myself hoping that our old rattler left many generations of healthy offspring on Lost Creek. Like the mountain without the wolf, Lost Creek wouldn't be the same without the rattlesnake. The balance of nature is strong and lasting in many ways, but fragile and fleeting in others. We humans struggle to find our place in nature. Sometimes we succeed, sometimes we fail, and sometimes we wonder if we did the right thing.

By the way, I must report that the campout ended immediately. We adjourned to the safe and comparatively boring ranch cabin for the weekend. Get outdoors and watch your step.

I don't particularly dislike rattlers, but I do respect them and their role in the outdoors. I've learned to live with them, and I guess they have learned to tolerate me.



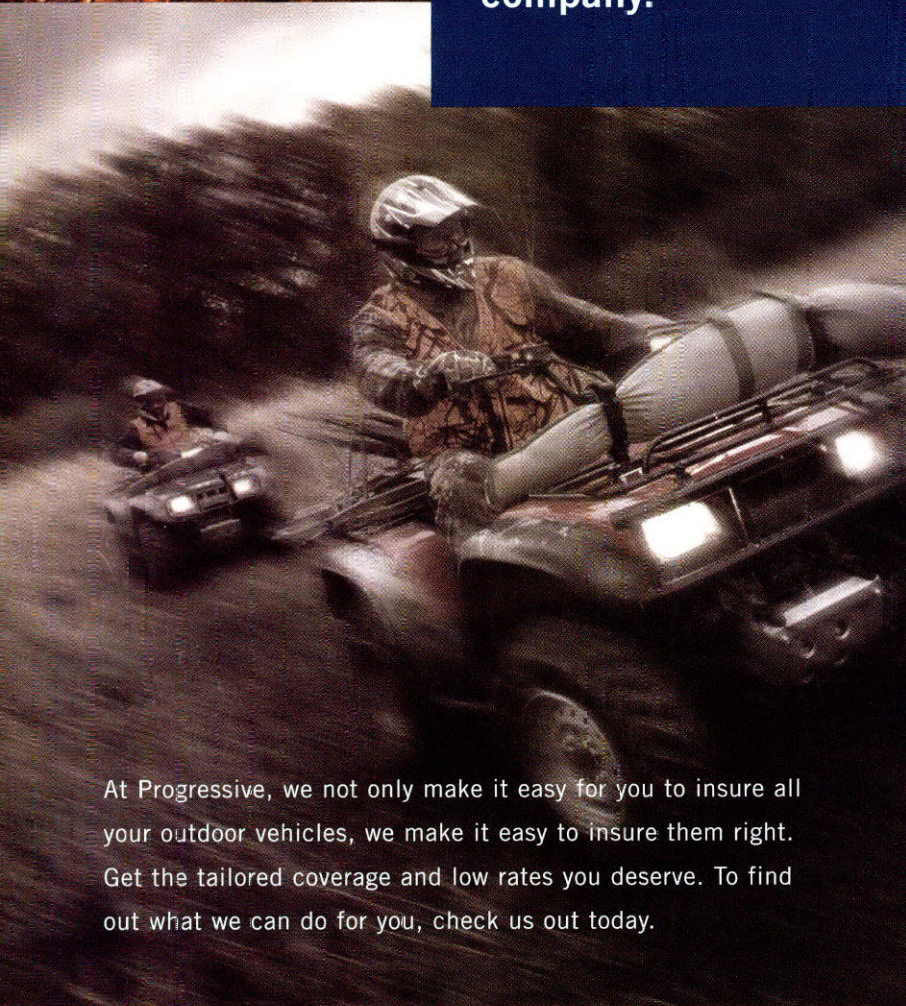
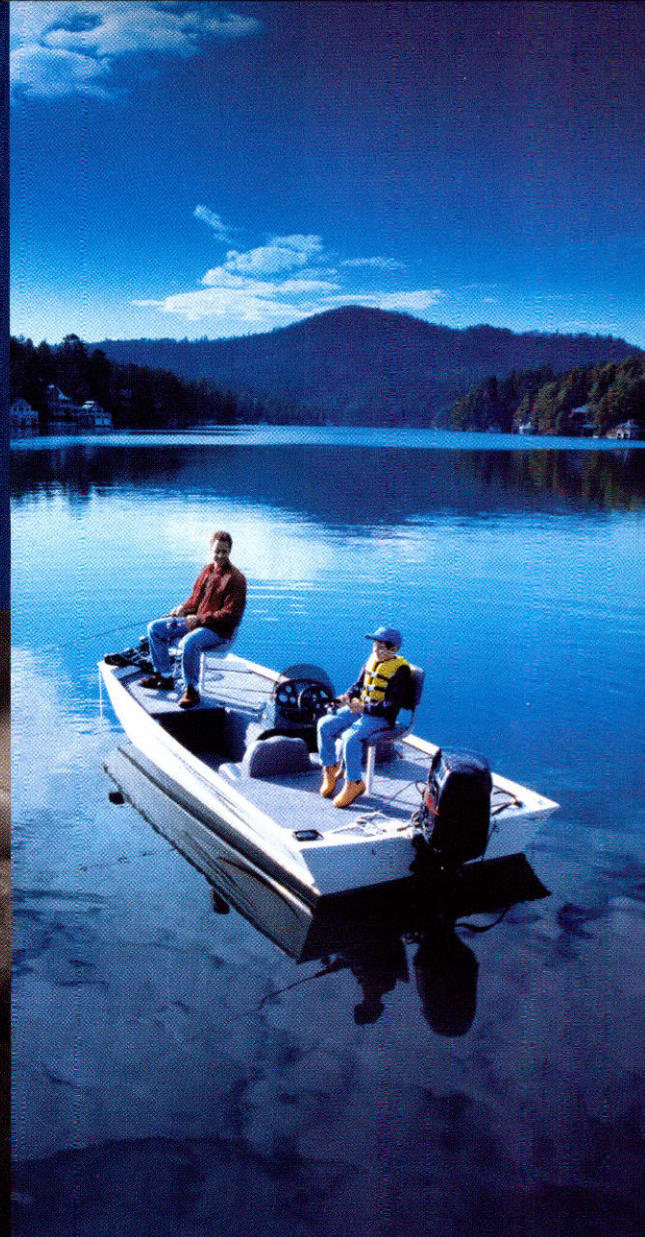
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To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.



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PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM PREVIOUS ISSUES

FOREWORD

The greatest time to be outdoors in Texas is coming up: the fall. During the most brutally hot parts of the summer, the only logical response is to stay in the shade. But the moderating effects of autumn seem to whet the appetite for the outdoors. Shotguns are checked and prepared for teal and dove seasons. A trip to the skeet range helps to get ready. The early summer rains have pushed Texas Parks and Wildlife biologists to new levels of optimism about the fall hunting season. Veteran outdoors writer John J. Jefferson, who has been doing this kind of thing for 30 years, talked to them to write our fall hunting forecast and he's a believer too. This is a year to get into the woods and fields.

One of the pleasures of editing this magazine is to see what E. Dan Klepper will write next. Give him a story on the century plant and he comes back with a treatise on both the physical and spiritual uses of it (August 2004); ask him to write about the Rio Grande and back comes an essay on time and the river (July 2004), and ask him to write about a 100-year-old expedition of naturalists to the Trans-Pecos region where he lives, and back comes a letter to his late father, a well-known Texas outdoors writer from San Antonio.

We're fortunate to have both Kleppers — Dan and his son E. Dan — in this month's issue. Dan Klepper, the long-time outdoors writer for the *San Antonio Express-News*, is the subject of Legend, Lore and Legacy (page 52). His irascible personality and powerful writing are a worthy part of the state's lore as well as legacy.

In a way, Dan Klepper is also the subject of E. Dan's article on the Trans-Pecos: "On Higher Ground," (page 46). The father lives on in the expressed values and responses of the son.

E. Dan picked up a wonderful theme in the letters that those naturalists wrote to their families while trekking across the Trans-Pecos, collecting specimens, counting species and taking notes and photographs all the way. There seemed to be an urgent kind of witnessing in what they wrote home, a desire not only to pass something on to someone on another side of the country, but also to pass it down through time.

You could say that has been the theme of this magazine since its creation. It's not only about how to go outdoors and where to go, it's about witnessing something for future generations. How will they know what they missed if we don't tell them, and how will they know what to save if we don't encourage them?

Michael Benzfield

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

LETTERS

THE STATE OF RIVERS

I've finally come up for air after reading the articles in July 2004's "The State of Rivers." What an incredible issue! I've grown up on

many of the rivers you profiled, and ache to think of the struggles each will undergo as our state's population continues to grow. In fact, I'm entering graduate school in the fall: Public Affairs at the Lyndon Baines Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. This issue inspired me to focus on studying how to preserve wild Texas (and its waters) in the next 50 years. So, thanks.

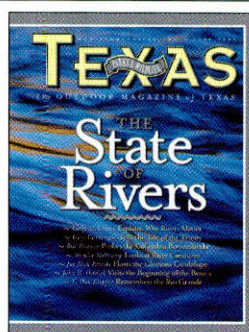
I was particularly shocked and saddened by a factoid in Gary Cartwright's article, "Contemplating the Trinity," that read "Texas is vanishing, at least its natural parts. Our state led the nation

during the last decade in loss of undeveloped land: every 2 minutes, another acre of Texas farmland or open space becomes a subdivision or mall or road." I've been quoting that line to quite a few folks.

KRISTEN MCCONNELL
Austin

WHICH RIVER IS LONGER?

I usually read your fine magazine from cover to cover. The July issue holds special interest for me as I work for the Lower Colorado River Authority. In Gary Cartwright's article, he states that the Trinity River is "the longest



I've grown up on many of the rivers you profiled, and ache to think of the struggles each will undergo as our state's population continues to grow ... This issue inspired me to focus on studying how to preserve wild Texas.

Kristen McConnell
Austin

MAIL CALL

river totally within the state's borders, 550 river miles ..." Unless the Colorado has an out-of-state origin, I believe that the Texas Colorado is the longest river totally within any state's border, 894 river miles

As an aside, I will add that often, during out-of-state visits, folks have asked about my association with the Colorado River, thinking it is the same Colorado River that runs through the Grand Canyon. My answer is that there was a hidden fork in the "Colorado" Colorado River that diverted water underground to Texas, forming the great Texas Colorado River. Another LBJ "win!"

FRANK B. FALKSTEIN
LCRA/Austin

TPW EDITORS RESPOND: To answer this question, we contacted Kevin Mayes, aquatic biologist for the River Studies Program in the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, who wrote another article, "Studying Our Rivers," for the July issue. He researched an answer and came up with an interesting response, or responses, to the concern about the Trinity's standing as the longest river completely within the state's boundaries. He explains, "I like all rivers, and the statement Cartwright makes are words to fight over. Semantically, one must define what is meant by terms like river, watershed, river basin, wholly in Texas, totally within the state's borders — all that jazz. At what point do you call the Colorado River the Colorado River?" Here are some sources that offer additional information:

In support of Cartwright:

The TPWD website suggests the Colorado starts in New Mexico. Visit http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/texasthewater/water_environment/habitat/river.html

The Texas Water Development Board's Water for Texas (the state water plan) states the Colorado River starts in New Mexico. You can check it out online at this url:

<http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/mapping> and look at the set of river basin maps.

The University of Texas Bureau of Economic Geology's River Basin Map of Texas, states, "Five Texas river basins originate outside of Texas . . . Three rivers commence in New Mexico: the Red River as Blanca Creek at 4,640 feet, the Brazos River in Running Water Draw at about the same elevation, and the Colorado River in Sulfur Draw at about 4,000 feet."

The Gazetteer of Texas Streams says that the Colorado rises in Dawson County (Texas) but it has "... possibly some contributory

drainage area in southeastern New Mexico to Concho River."

In support of Falkstein:

From The Handbook of Texas: "The Colorado River, measured in length and drainage area, is the largest river wholly in Texas."

The LCRA web site states, "The Colorado River is the largest river entirely within the state of Texas."

Mayes' conclusion? "The waters are indeed muddy ... but I think I would have to side with Cartwright because if it rains hard enough in

Sulphur Draw, New Mexico, water will come across the border and feed the mainstem Colorado River of Texas."

So, technically, Cartwright is correct. The Colorado River watershed begins in New Mexico, and the Trinity River watershed does indeed begin, and end, in Texas.

THE BEAR FACTS

I have a question about wildlife in the greater D/FW area.

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MAIL CALL

ago, there was a report of a black bear that appeared in a man's yard in the northern reaches of the greater D/FW area. Apparently, the bear was nervously hiding up in a tree on the property. My question is this: How many black bears (if any) are estimated to be living in and around the north-central part of Texas?

I would like to add that I believe *Texas Parks & Wildlife* is the best magazine out there. This state never ceases to amaze me with its diverse beauty, and *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine covers it superbly. By the way, I am planning to study wildlife photography at Sul Ross and hope to one day have my work published in *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine.

ETHAN KLENK
Arlington

TPW EDITORS RESPOND: Thanks for your letter. We checked with TPWD Mammalogist John Young who tracks information about bear sightings, and he didn't have any record of a confirmed sighting in or near the D/FW metroplex. The closest confirmed black bear sighting was in Franklin County near Mount Vernon. Typically, Young explains, there are one or two confirmed sightings of black bears in East Texas each year. However, that region of the state does not support a breeding population of black bears. The individual bears that are seen in East Texas have probably wandered into the state from adjoining Oklahoma or Arkansas, since both states support black bear populations. The only region of Texas that supports a breeding population of black bears is the Trans-Pecos. Currently, we cannot provide an accurate count of the Trans-Pecos black bear population. However, John Young adds that TPWD has a study underway in partnership with the University of Texas, and that study may provide more specific information about black bear habitat. A couple of additional notes: A black bear sighting is "confirmed" when there are two or more reliable witnesses, a photograph of the animal or if a TPWD biologist visits the site and confirms other evidence, such as tracks. A breeding population is a population in which there is documented evidence that young animals are being produced. We know that female bears are living in West Texas and producing cubs but that is not confirmed for East Texas. And by the way, keep us posted on your photography.

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CALL THE SNAKE DOCTOR

I'm writing in response to the letter from L.D. Clarke in Smithville asking about the name "snake doctors" for dragonflies. I grew up in Aransas Pass, less than a block away from the old seawall. We always called dragonflies "snake doctors," and as best I can recall, that is the only name we knew them by when I was growing up. In fact, I can't remember anyone ever calling them by the name "dragonflies."

RALPH MCCULLOUGH
Kingsland

ANOTHER ONE FOR MR. CLARK

L.D. Clark wondered if anyone else had called dragonflies by the name snake doctor. I grew up on a farm in Eastland County known as "The Ellison Springs Place." We always called damselflies snake doctors, but not the dragonflies.

I used to enjoy catching flies and placing them in a pint jar. Then I could feed them to a dragonfly I would coax into lighting with that offering.

Since I no longer live in Texas, your magazine is my link to the beauty and history of the state. Keep up the good work. It is a great balance of nature, history and hunting.

C.E. MCFATTGER
Semmes, Alabama

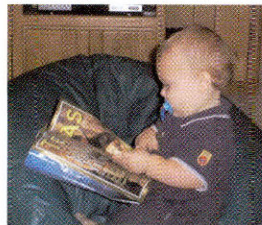
WIMBERLEY FISHING GUIDE

Wimberley-area fishing guide Kelly Watson was mentioned in August's "3 Days in the Field" article on Wimberley, "Watery Way of Life" by Michael Berryhill. We did not include contact information for Watson in the

sidebar that accompanied the August story. We can correct that oversight: Kelly Watson can be reached online through his web site, www.TexasRiver-Bass.com or at (512) 396-2108.

GET 'EM WHEN THEY'RE YOUNG

Thought you might like to see your latest subscriber. Ever since the issue with the three labs on the cover (We had three labs), he loves to look at the magazine when it comes in. At 13 months, the articles don't mean that much to him, but the pictures always fascinate him.



I picked up my first issue many years ago while staying at Davis Mountains State Park and have looked forward to every issue since then. Keep up the good work.

JIM FINLEY

Sound off for "Mail Call!"

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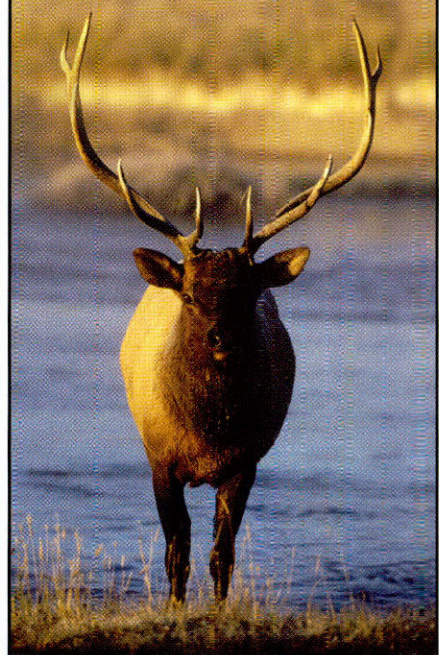
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NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

WINGED MIGRATION

Is that a bat? Huge moths from Mexico have made an impression on Texans.



The gigantic black witch moth (*Ascalapha odorata*) is enjoying a breakout year in 2004. High rains, a mild winter and prevailing southerly winds seem to have driven the moths north through Texas from Mexico, with multiple sightings along the coast.

"The sightings this summer have been extraordinary," said Mike Quinn, entomologist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. "They are truly off the charts."

Quinn began receiving almost daily sighting reports — with as many as five sightings occurring in a single day — in late May. Black witch moths were reported widely in Texas as well in Arizona, New Mexico, Louisiana, California and Nevada. By midsummer, two sightings were reported as far north as Kansas.

Black witch moths are a migratory species found abundantly throughout the New World tropics. They migrate north from Mexico through Texas primarily in June and sometimes reach destinations as far north as southern Canada and Alaska.



Top left: the male black witch moth; top right: the more glamorous female black witch moth; above: look at those eyes!

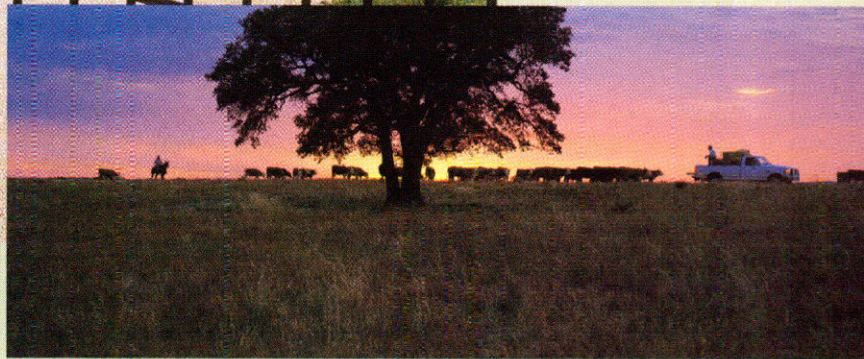
Black witch moths are some of the largest moths in the insect world and the largest in the United States. They belong to the family Noctuidae, the largest family within the order Lepidoptera, with more than 2,900 species in the United States and Canada.

"This dark-brown moth with a six-inch wingspan often startles people when first encountered, as it somewhat resembles a bat," Quinn said. The female is distinguished from the male by a pale median band or stripe running across her wings.

Most of the people reporting these sightings commented that it was the first time they had seen such an insect after living in the same location for many years. These moths like to perch in open garages or under the eaves of houses during the day. They

are also readily attracted to house lights and streetlights, as well as to tree sap and rotting fruit.

— Tom Harvey

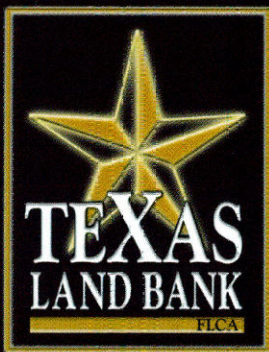


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Matagorda Lighthouse Shines Again

This historic beacon resumes its watch over Pass Cavallo.



The Matagorda Island Lighthouse, which once guided ships along midcoast of Texas before the Civil War, is again shining. On June 11, state and federal officials dedicated the state's oldest operational lighthouse after the completion of a year-long, \$1.23 million overhaul.

After more than a century of being subjected to the harsh Gulf Coast weather, the 92-foot tall, cast-iron structure had become compromised. The repairs included rebuilding and shoring up the base, repainting the entire lighthouse and replacing the light room at the top. In addition, sidewalks and a restroom were added. The lighthouse is situated within Matagorda Island State Park on the eastern tip of the barrier island overlooking Pass Cavallo, which leads from the Gulf into Matagorda Bay.

The charcoal-colored lighthouse is actually the second such structure to be built there. The original lighthouse, known as the Matagorda Light Station, was erected in 1852, but suffered extensive damage in the early 1860s when Confederate troops removed its Fresnel lens and tried to destroy the tower when they abandoned Fort Esperanza. What remained of the old structure was dismantled and a new lighthouse erected in 1873 using the same iron plates 2 miles inland, away from the eroding shoreline.

"The renovation of the lighthouse wouldn't have been possible without a federal grant secured through the Texas Department of Transportation and private donations raised by the Matagorda Island Foundation," said John Stuart, manager of Matagorda Island State Park. "The United States Fish and Wildlife Service and Calhoun County also helped make this unique public-private partnership work."

Park visitors will not be able to climb the stairs inside the lighthouse for liability reasons, Stuart said, but they will be

After a \$1.23-million restoration, this historic lighthouse once again presides over Matagorda Island State Park.

allowed to peer inside through a ground-floor door. A private ferry operating under contract to the state shuttles park visitors between the mainland and Matagorda Island.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department will work with the county and the foundation to educate visitors about the rich history of the island, as well as its unique natural resources. Calhoun County will handle lighthouse maintenance.

In 1999, TPWD installed a new rotating, flashing light, a solar-powered marine lantern, that can be seen up to 10 miles away. The lighthouse, which the U.S. Coast Guard had deactivated in 1995, was relit at the stroke of midnight of the new millennium, but had been out of commission during the last 2 months of the renovation.

Matagorda Island State Park and Wildlife Management Area occupies 43,893 acres on the northern two-thirds of the 38-mile-long island. USFWS manages 11,500 acres on the southwestern tip of the island. There is no bridge connecting the island to the mainland: The only way to get to the state park is by boat. Overnight facilities on the island are minimal but accommodating, consisting of a primitive beach campground for tent campers and two sets of converted former military barracks for group camping.

The state park headquarters is located in Port O'Connor at the intersection of 16th Street and Intracoastal Canal. For more information about Matagorda Island State Park, call (361) 983-2215.

—Rob McCorkle

Seeds of a Solution

Help prevent the spread of dangerous avian flu by taking a little care with bird feeders.



Aflatoxin — sometimes found in a mold that appears in bird seed — can cause cancer, birth defects and immune system damage in birds like this American goldfinch.

While there is no cure for aflatoxin, a disease that attacks the immune systems of birds, restocking bird feeders on a more frequent basis may help slow down this deadly problem. Commonly referred to as the bird flu, aflatoxin is caused by a mold that is found primarily in corn and peanuts, ingredients common in most bird feed. The disease can cause cancer, birth defects and immune-system damage in birds.

Scott Henke and other researchers at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University-Kingsville have been studying how aflatoxin is produced. They are also finding ways to prevent the disease from spreading.

"There are so many things that can affect the aflatoxin production," says Henke. "There are only about three or four big seed companies in the U.S., and they're basically buying all their grain from the same areas. There's no real way to tell how old the grain is when they purchase it or bag it."

Grain with high moisture content can produce the mold that causes aflatoxin. Henke has also found that aflatoxin can develop in storage just as easily as it can in the fields.

State regulations require a limit of 50 parts per billion of aflatoxin in wildlife feed, but the biologists at Texas A & M-Kingsville believe the number should be closer to 20 parts per billion, the limit currently acceptable for human consumption. Henke and his team of researchers came to this conclusion in 1999, when they embarked on a trip across Texas, purchasing bird seed off the shelf at feed stores and supermarkets.

"We had nearly 20 percent of the bags release 100 parts per billion or greater," says Henke. Henke studied the effects of contaminated feed on bobwhite quail and cardinals in the lab. "We gave doses to the quail of 100, 500, 1,000 and 2,000 parts per billion," Henke says, "and they didn't necessarily die from the aflatoxin outright, but their immune systems were compromised. For the cardinals, 500 parts per billion killed them outright within about a day or two."

To prevent the spread of the disease, Henke advises people to clean out their bird feeders frequently, dry them out completely and fill their feeders with only three days worth of food at most. Another solution may be to freeze seed until it's ready to use, taking care to avoid condensation, which could breed mold.

— Stephen Saito

TEXAS READER

Where the Birds Are

An updated handbook offers the latest photos and information on seldom-seen birds in Texas.

ONCE YOU START LOOKING AT BIRDS, you quickly discover that field guides cannot provide all the information you want, especially if you're curious about rare and vagrant species that visit Texas. The answer to this curiosity is the fourth edition of the *Texas Ornithological Society's Handbook of Texas Birds* (Texas A&M University Press, 260 pages, \$50, cloth, \$24.95, paper, (800) 826-8911, or www.tamu.edu/upress/).

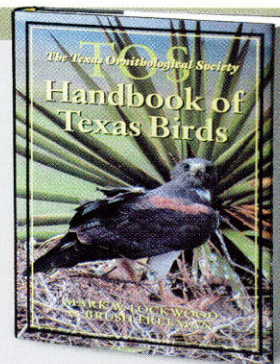
Written by Mark W. Lockwood and Brush Freeman, this book documents 623 species of birds (102 more species than were cited in a 1956 checklist) with a descriptive paragraph about where and when they have been found. The three sections of color plates document both rare and uncommon birds. The result is a compilation of tantalizing photographs of birds, some so rare you would never expect to see them.

The sightings and photographs are the work of the Texas Birds Records Committee of the Texas Ornithological Society, which collects field reports and photographs and attempts to verify sightings of rare and unusual birds.

Among the waterfowl we see are the mottled duck and the black-bellied whistling duck, birds common enough that many birders have seen them, but scarce enough that we don't want to take them for granted. Then there are what might be called the celebrity birds that occasionally drop into Texas. Such birds include the sole King eider to have been recorded in the state; the white-throated robin that has shown up in the Valley three times; the Aztec thrush; the rufous-capped warbler; the Colima warbler; the gray-crowned yellowthroat.

It's wonderful to find such species well-photographed and accompanied with information about where and when they were spotted. This handbook whets the appetite for learning about birds. Its thoroughly useful introduction to the basic ecological regions of Texas will help any birder get a firmer grip on species habitat in Texas. It tells you where the birds are.

— Michael Berryhill



ABOVE PHOTO © KATHY ADAMS CLARK/KAC PRODUCTIONS; BOOK PHOTO BY EARL NOTTINGHAM

Low-impact Camping

A few simple rules to help you — and your fellow campers — enjoy the outdoors even more.



ones. Do not cut trees for firewood, and extinguish fires completely, until cold to the touch.

Preparing a campsite

You wouldn't grab an ax and chop yourself a new bed from grandma's old dresser, but some people who were taught outdated camping methods still think they need to clear elaborate campsites and build furniture. Low-impact campers reuse existing campsites, or camp on bare ground, not on top of delicate plant life. Do not clear or cut brush and don't dig a trench around your tent.

Keep your feet off the furniture

Hike on existing trails. In true backcountry where there are no trails, spread out if you are with a group, to avoid creating new trails. Heavy boots can damage plants, so keep to hard surfaces such as rock, sand, snow or gravel.

Imagine enjoying a peaceful hike along the river with the wind whispering in the sycamores. There is beauty all around, and then you discover a fire half-out, trash scattered along the bank and, nearby, a chopped tree. How depressing — and completely avoidable.

We are guests in nature, and good guests know that whether we're outdoors or visiting grandma's house, minding our manners is a courtesy worth paying to both the resource and the people who will come after us. There are many simple things we can do to make camping better, safer and more fun, things that won't leave other people wishing we'd never come to call. So here are few tips on outdoor manners.

Good guests help out in the kitchen

Food always seems to taste better outdoors. Tired of carrying bulky, heavy packages? Put food into zippered bags and press out the air. There will be less weight to carry and more space in your pack. Keep food light and simple so it can all be cooked in one pot. Try no-cook or just-add-water meals. These are easy and tasty and they require less clean-up for the cook.

To make sure you actually get to eat your next meal, protect all food from animals and remember: It's illegal to feed wildlife in Texas state parks.

Don't burn down the house

There's nothing like the smell of a campfire, but low-impact camping means using fire responsibly. The cleanest way to cook in the backcountry is with a small camp stove. If you must have a campfire, use existing fire rings instead of making new

Good guests clean up after themselves

Pack out all trash — don't bury it — and keep a bag handy to carry out trash you find along the way. When washing dishes, or yourself, stay at least 200 feet away from streams and other bodies of water. Use very small amounts of biodegradable soap.

Where there's no toilet in the backcountry, do what cats do: Dig a small "cat-hole" with the heel of your shoe or a small trowel, about 6 to 8 inches deep. Make sure the hole is at least 200 feet from water. Deposit human waste in the hole and cover it up with leaf litter. Carry a bag to pack out toilet paper so animals won't dig it up and send it flying across the landscape.

Don't steal the silverware or keep grandpa up all night

It's a cliché, but "Take only memories, leave only footprints" is a good rule for campers who wish to minimize their impact on the landscape. Besides, in state parks, it's the law — all historic artifacts, plants, animals, rocks and everything else are protected.

Noise pollution is a type of trash, too. You've probably experienced this: Just as you're drifting off to sleep after a blissful day in the outdoors, loud music comes blaring out of the neighbor's tent. So leave the music at home and enjoy nature's sounds. You'll have a more relaxing trip, and by being quiet you may be lucky enough to spot some wildlife.

To learn more about low-impact outdoor skills, contact the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics at www.LNT.org or call (800) 332-4100. ★

Snake Proof Your Legs

You'll be more at ease when you're hunting in snake country.

Paranoia strikes deep in the minds of hunters and hikers in rough terrain with unprotected feet and legs. Accidents caused by unseen snakes, cacti and other thorny plants obscured by deep grasses, rocks and chaparral, can happen at any moment. Texans learned long ago that it is practical to wear tall armored boots or leggings.

Snake boots offer maximum protection for most puncture hazards. New designs and materials give the wearer coverage from the knees down without excessive weight, stiffness and bulk. Researchers have spent years developing fabrics such as ViperCloth, a synthetic weave that will resist most venomous snakes and thorny or noxious plants. Boots like the non-insulated pull-on **Justin Dune Traction Snake Boot** are made of this material plus Cordura, Kevlar and natural leather that flexes with every step, pumps air into the interior and makes you feel certain your feet and legs are secure. (\$179, 16" Dune Snake Boot, #2113, Justin Boots, (800) 358-7846, www.justinboots.com)

Ideal under wet or dry conditions, the **Rocky Outback Snake Boot** is made from thick Cordura nylon layered with a soft, insulated interior and breathable, water-proof Gore-Tex in the foot. The boot front uses a fully adjustable lace-lock system that allows for separate tensions above and below the ankle to insure a nonslip fit. It features a well-cushioned footbed for good support and ProHunter sole that collects little debris despite having aggressive rubber cleats for maximum traction. (\$179.95, Outback Snake Boot, #7545, Mossy Oak Break-Up Camo, Rocky Boots, (740) 753-1951, www.rockyboots.com)

The classic **Irish Setter Wingshooter Snake Boot** in moccasin-foot styling is built to the highest standards of handcrafted quality. Constructed of flexible waterproof Gore-Tex nylon with oiled kangaroo-leather feet, these have a SnakeGuard lining, cork EVA footbeds and large carbon rubber outsole cleats. They are heavy-duty footwear intended for years of dependable service if maintained properly with silicone leather conditioner and sealer. (\$259, Wingshooter 17" Boot, # 834, Irish Setter,



Protect yourself against snakebite and thorny plants when you're in the field. Above: Snake Guardz lightweight leg shields; top left: Justin Dune Traction Snake Boot; middle left: Irish Setter Wingshooter Snake Boot; lower left: Rocky Outback Snake Boot.

(888)738-8370, www.irishsetterboots.com)

A simple and effective alternative to snake boots is to wear conventional hiking shoes of sturdy leather combined with special lightweight leg shields like **Snake Guardz**. These are 16 1/2-inch, snap-buckle leggings. When worn loosely, the hinged synthetic panels allow air to flow up from the ankles, making them comfortable even in hot climates. This compact design packs easily, is considerably less expensive than high-top boots and can be quickly attached or removed as needed. (\$64.95, Snake Guardz, available in various sizes, solid khaki or camo patterns. Crackshot Corporation, (800) 667-1753, www.crackshotcorp.com)

In the field, peace of mind is important. With these specialized boots and leggings on, you can walk with confidence through most terrain and not worry about the inadvertent encounter with plant needles or a serious snake. ★

PHOTOS © GIBBS MILLIKEN

3 Days in the Field / By Michael Berryhill

DESTINATION: CIBOLO CREEK RANCH

TRAVEL TIME FROM:

AMARILLO – 9 hours / AUSTIN – 8 hours / BROWNSVILLE – 12 hours / DALLAS – 9.5 hours / EL PASO – 3.5 hours
HOUSTON – 10 hours / SAN ANTONIO – 7 hours

A Place for Vision

Near the Chinati Mountains, a luxury resort beckons with a sense of history and beauty.

Those of us who live in cities don't want to miss a moment in the outdoors when we get the chance to go there. There is always so much I want to do that I tend to schedule myself more tightly than when running errands and tending a career. But not this time. I had taken a day to drive from Austin and some decompression time in the towns of Marathon and Marfa. Finally I am stretched out in a hammock in Big Bend country at a private lodge called La Morita. From the hammock I watch golden-fronted woodpeckers tending the nesting cavities they have chiseled into the big arms of the cottonwood trees.

I was intent on some April birdwatching, but I wanted to be as passive as possible. Many birders search the countryside for as many different habitats and species as possible. No need to do that here. La Morita is a veritable oasis of mulberry trees and cottonwoods surrounding a small pond fed by a spring that has been running for thousands of years.

The place is a bird magnet. All I have to do is sit quietly near a

tiny irrigation ditch and watch the spectacle of spring migration, Big Bend-style: doves, warblers, flycatchers, orioles. Or even better, lie in the hammock and clock the time it takes a golden-fronted woodpecker to fly out of its nest cavity, catch something to eat and bring it back to the hungry chicks inside: about two and a half minutes. These birds are far busier than I want to be.

In the 19th century, life was risky in this isolated spot, where the local patron, Milton Faver, ran sheep and goats. In 1857, Faver, a man with a shadowy past, bought three vital springs in the desert plateau region at the foot of the Chinati Mountains and named them El Cibolo (Spanish for *buffalo*), La Ciénega (a marshy place) and La Morita (the little mul-

The spring-fed pond near La Morita lodge supports an oasis of mulberry and cottonwoods that attract seasonal migrating birds.

berry tree). La Ciénega is 16 miles away from El Cibolo, and La Morita is another 4 miles from La Ciénega. The ranches are halfway along the



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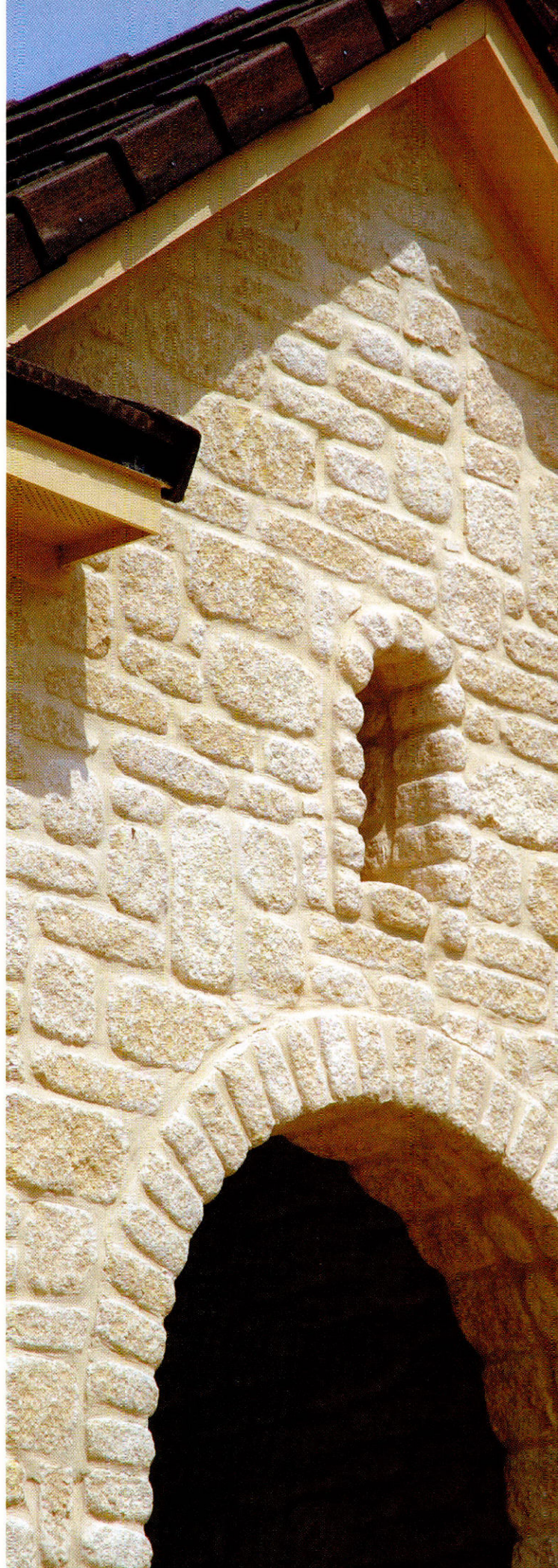
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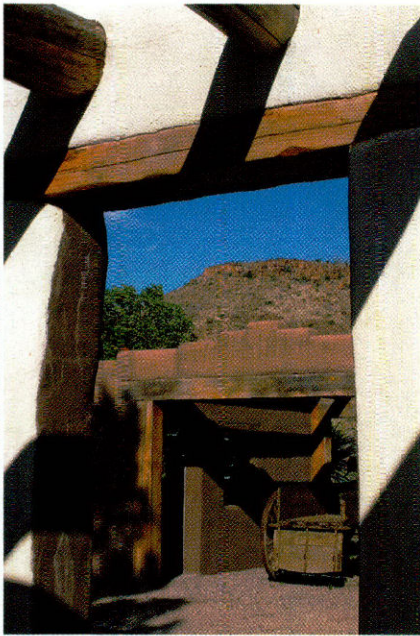
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road between Presidio, on the Rio Grande, and Fort Davis, once an important military outpost.

At each spring, Faver and his men built an adobe fort to protect his workers from the attacks of Indians and bandits, and more importantly, to control the water for their livestock. "Don Meliton," as Milton Faver was known in the region, never accumulated more than 3,000

acres, but because he controlled the water, he could sustain herds of 10,000 to 20,000 cattle, not to mention numerous sheep and goats. In a field before his twin-towered adobe fortress, Faver irrigated 200 acres for crops, including a peach orchard. He set up a still and made peach brandy that was legendary in these parts.

During the last ten years, a Houston businessman named John B. Poindexter bought the three Faver properties from various owners. Then he set about restoring the old buildings and forts, converting them into a resort called Cibolo Creek Ranch. The daily room prices are expensive — roughly \$500 a night. The suites are luxurious, with Mexican tiles and high beds and hundreds of books about the region, which seem to have come from Poindexter's library. There are not many places where you can find a book about the latest research on mountain lions in New Mexico.

In the 90-page book Poindexter wrote on the history of the site, he estimates that restoring such a place costs 200 percent more than building at the local luxury rate. It's pretty clear that he has spent that much money and more. The place is meticulous. It is a labor of love.

After watching woodpeckers, I poke

around the ruined fort, whose roofless walls have been restored and thoughtfully dressed like a movie set, with an old wagon and farm implements and rough tables at every turn. In the late afternoon sun, the exposed roof beams — the *vigas* — throw dramatic shadows across the white-washed walls. Outside the walls the wiry ocotillos are blazing with orange blossoms.

The isolation of this spot, which now makes it prized, once made it vulnerable. In 1875, three people were murdered at La Morita by Indians or by Mexican bandits disguised as Indians. A handful of ranch hands from nearby La Ciénega trailed the raiders, but when they came upon a large encampment of renegades and saw how badly outnumbered they were, they crept back to the safety of headquarters.

La Morita is known as the honeymoon cottage at Cibolo Creek Ranch. Its two rooms and spacious bath are illuminated by kerosene lamps. Water for the big tub is heated by propane. There are fluffy towels. An afternoon and a morning here soothe away the city's gritty mind games. It makes me just sit and look.

Looking is what this part of the world is about. I can't stop looking and looking



verde

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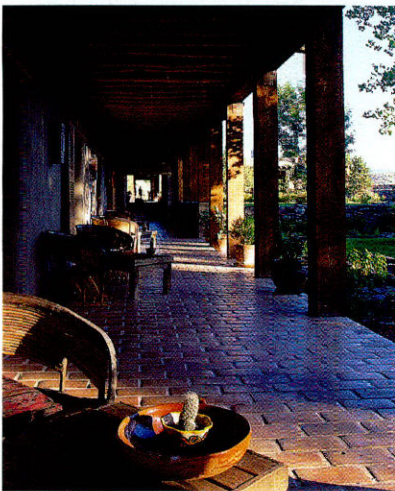
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The old fort at La Morita, opposite; a view from La Morita, above; the spacious portal of Cibolo Creek Ranch headquarters, left.

and looking at natural shapes, from the birds to the mountains, nature's living sculptures or geologic formations, whichever you call them.

Sunday afternoon I shoot trap with the ranch's general manager, George Van Etten; when I remember to keep my cheek pressed against the stock and really look down the barrel, I break mine. Across the way are the fields where Don Meliton grew his peaches. The restored peach orchard is in its early stage, but Van Etten allows that if there's a possibility to bring back the valley's peach brandy, Poindexter is likely to do so.

That afternoon I prowl along miles of ranch trails on a four-wheeler, periodically flushing pairs of scaled quail and watching ghostly quick lizards the color of the rocky trails dart ahead of the tires. At one of the highest summits graze a handful of longhorns that are being raised as tribute to the ranch's heritage. Somewhere, though I never see them, roams a herd of buffalo, the source of Cibolo Creek's name.

Guests may hunt native mule deer and Sierra del Carmen white-tails,

scaled quail and javelina. Exotic animals are also stocked, including scimitar-horned oryx, black bucks and red elk. Pen-raised bobwhite quail are also hunted, with dogs and guns provided.

Monday morning it's time for a slower form of transportation. We ride horses up to the source of Cibolo spring. I had walked here yesterday evening and checked out the vermilion flycatchers, which streak through the trees near the spring like red flames. It took me a while to figure out that what I thought was some sort of plain warbler was really the female vermilion flycatcher. If I had come a week later I might have picked up a few tips from birding guide Victor Emanuel, who usually leads a spring trip here.

When we ride through a small canyon, we flush a zone-tailed hawk that circles around us for a mile or so. We ride to the back edge of the property line; someone on the other side is building a German-style castle. The grandeur of the Chinati Mountains must inspire people to think big. Seeing big things and vast spaces calms the chattering mind. It's hard to think petty thoughts when I look at mountains all day, and then at Cibolo spring, dazzling with birds, and watch water pour from the earth at 600 gallons a minute. ☆

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit www.cibolocreekranch.com, or call (432) 229-3737. Reservations can also be e-mailed to reservations@cibolocreekranch.com. For an in-depth look at the history of the area, check out Poindexter's book, *The Cibolo Creek Ranch*, published by Southwestern Holdings, Inc.

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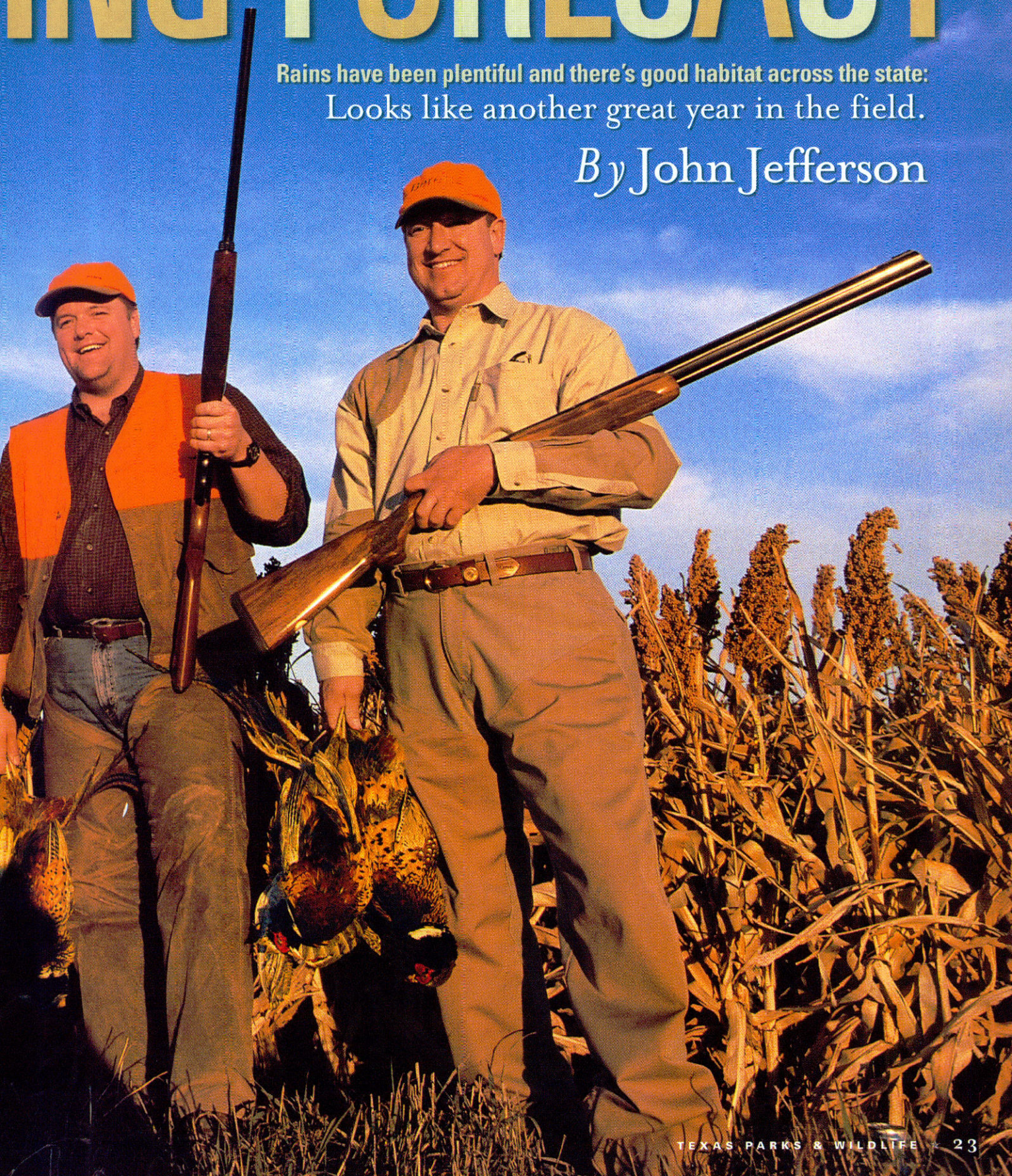


PHOTO © DAVIDUSAMS.COM

ING FORECAST

Rains have been plentiful and there's good habitat across the state:
Looks like another great year in the field.

By John Jefferson



Quail researcher Fidel Hernandez says the recipe for producing abundant quail is to give them plenty of room and "just add water."

For quail to do really well, to have a boom year, he says, they need a lot of space with sustained rainfall over an extended period. And has it rained! When there is as much life-sustaining rainfall as Texas has been blessed with for the past couple of years, every creature on the land tends to prosper.

Quail are said to be an indicator species. When rains are plentiful and the habitat is healthy, the quail crop will be good. When times are bad or the habitat is in poor shape from overgrazing or other abuse, the number of quail on the range will be significantly reduced. And if the quail numbers are good, other species will have benefited, too. A number of usually conservative wildlife biologists at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department are saying conditions are in place for the best quail crop in years — maybe the best since 1987.

Biologists describe the stands of forbs (showy wildflowers) that are critical to above-average antler development as "abundant, robust and vigorous" and emphasize that those forbs were present for 90 to 120 days — much longer than usual. When these cautious wildlife professionals say the season should be "super," you have

to believe something is up.

Of course, those same wildlife researchers would insist on the following disclaimer: An infamously hot, dry Texas summer could mess up June predictions made for September publication, especially predictions for quail. But as we go to press, the food's on the plate and there's more in the kitchen.

While that is good news for the wildlife, it could spell harder hunting for the hunters. With more groceries easily available, deer and other game birds and animals may not venture out of cover and come to feeders like they do in dry years. This year we may have to learn how to hunt all over again.

With privilege also comes responsibility. Several of my panel of TPWD consultants cautioned that they expect a better-than-normal fawn crop, and that the Eden-like conditions providing cover and concealment as the fawns arrive should ensure higher survival numbers. That, coupled with the fact that thick vegetation could make hunting more challenging, resulting in fewer adult animal casualties, could mean a record net increase in the deer herd.

The latest figures show the total Texas

herd numbers slightly more than 4 million — the largest in history, according to Mitch Lockwood, white-tailed deer program leader at TPWD. The number has increased steadily from just over 3 million in 1991. Lockwood's figures also show that adult does exceed bucks by about five to two across the state (2.65 does per buck statewide). With adult does having one to two fawns a year, there will be a large number of new mouths to feed come weaning time in the fall. Statistics also show that Texas' half-a-million deer hunters only harvest .82 deer per hunter (the total whitetail harvest statewide for 2003-2004 was 436,942).

That could spell trouble down the road when it quits raining for a year or two, which it inevitably will. The antidote is a committed resolve on the part of hunters and land managers to adequately reduce the number of antlerless deer before the already expanding deer herd gets any further out of control.

Many hunters say they don't need as much venison as needs to be removed. Fine. Eating what you kill is a commendable ethic. But there are too many deer and a lot of hungry people in Texas who would appreciate donated venison. If you don't want the venison, go online and visit www.tacaa.org, then follow the links to the Hunters for the Hungry web site where you can see how to make your donation.

DOVES

DOVE SEASON IS THE FIRST TO OPEN, and hunter enthusiasm would run high even if the flights were predicted to be down by half. But they're not, and hunters should expect at least a normal opening day. Dove hunting in the early season depends upon the resident Texas dove population. Later in the season, northern doves will ride the cool fronts down.

Jay Roberson, TPWD migratory game bird program leader, points to the above-average rainfall and the seed production it will nurture. That means plenty of food to hold the doves, but David Synatzske, manager of the Chaparral WMA and Macy Ledbetter, manager of the James E. Daughtrey WMA, agree

DOVE SEASON:

(Please report leg bands to 1-800-327-BAND)

NORTH ZONE: Sept. 1 — Oct. 30.

CENTRAL ZONE: Sept. 1 — Oct. 30, Dec. 26 — Jan. 4.

SOUTH ZONE: Sept. 20 — Nov. 5, Dec. 20 — Jan. 11.

SPECIAL SOUTH TEXAS ZONE: Sept. 4, 5, 11 and 12, Sept. 24 — Nov. 9 and Dec. 18 — Jan. 5.

that in South Texas the availability of food and water may disperse the birds over a wide area. Technical guidance biologist

Gary Homerstad in Victoria says the same for his area. Mike Hobson in Alpine reports that his staff has seen a larger than average number of nesting pairs, and expects good hunting. Chip Ruthven, manager of state WMAs in the Panhandle, echoes that, explaining that spring quail call counts are above average and range conditions are good in response to above-average rainfall. David Sierra, district biologist in the Post Oak region, says the best chance of coping with the abundance of food is to hunt a flyway between food, water and cover.



PRONGHORN ANTELOPE

MIKE HOBSON REPORTS a 31 percent increase in Trans-Pecos pronghorns since 2002 and a 51 percent fawn crop in 2003, which means a substantial increase in adults for this season. Consequently, more permits will be issued. Another good fawn crop is expected due to improved habitat conditions. Through time and hunter selectivity, the numbers should continue to increase.

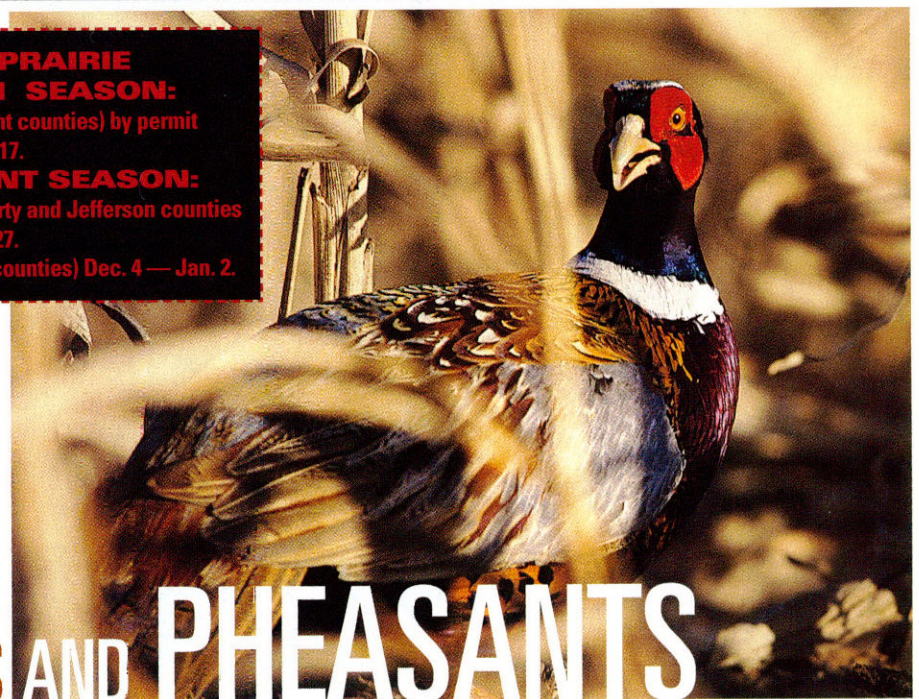
PRONGHORN ANTELOPE SEASON:
by permit only, Oct. 4 — 12.

Danny Swepston, Panhandle wildlife district leader, says the herds in that area came out of the mild winter in good shape, aided by above-average late-winter moisture. Overall numbers are estimated at about the same level as last year, but early antler development in the bucks seen so far appears good.



SWEPSTON, joined by technical guidance biologist Gene Miller, also reports that a mild winter followed by early spring moisture set up good range conditions for ground-nesting birds, particularly on managed lands that employ thoughtful grazing systems for wildlife. The early spring green-up will help all ground-nesting birds, including pheasants and prairie chickens. There was a good carry-over of pheasants, and new plantings of corn and maize have helped raise their population slightly, causing the TPW Commission to lengthen the season to 30 days.

LESSER PRAIRIE CHICKEN SEASON:
Panhandle (eight counties) by permit only, Oct. 16 — 17.
PHEASANT SEASON:
Chambers, Liberty and Jefferson counties Oct. 30 — Feb. 27.
Panhandle (37 counties) Dec. 4 — Jan. 2.



PRAIRIE CHICKENS AND PHEASANTS

ABOVE PHOTO © GRADY ALLEN; LOWER PHOTO © DAVIDSAMS.COM

QUAIL

QUAIL SEASON:

STATEWIDE (all counties) Oct. 30 — Feb. 27.

BIOLOGISTS IN EVERY SECTION

of the state say that a couple of years of rain and two years of carryover birds, coupled with continuing rain this year, have set the stage for the best year in recent memory. Only the biologists of the Pineywoods, which isn't known as a quail mecca, anyway, are reserved in their appraisal. Even there, where habitat is suitable, quail hunting should be good.

Bob Carroll, district biologist in La Grange, reports that the southeastern part of the state generally has a low quail population, but last year saw an increase, and the large carryover of birds means hunters can expect even better hunting this season.

Max Traweek, Edwards Plateau wildlife district leader, in another area not famous for its bobwhites, said production had been aided by the green ranges. Jim Dillard says 2 years of increasing bobwhite numbers in North Central Texas have them hopeful the third year is truly a charm.

The only question marks were inserted by Gary Homerstad and Jimmy Rutledge. Homerstad works the area along the Guadalupe River from Gonzales to the coast. His take is that quail have been improving for the past 3 or 4 years and this will be the best year yet, "unless quail just drown, or something." The flood-prone Guadalupe giveth, and it taketh away. Rutledge, technical guidance biologist stationed in Carrizo Springs, compiled a report with help from a number of South Texas biologists, and says conditions could be too lush in places. Thick stands of buffelgrass can become too dense for ground-nesting birds.

Mike Krueger, technical guidance biologist based in Lampasas, agrees with others that the rains would aid insect production, vital to a young quail's diet, but adds that a profusion of grasshoppers could also provide alternate prey for egg-eating mammals such as skunks and others, thus helping quail survival. In West Texas, Mike Pittman, manager of Black Gap, Sierra Diablo and Elephant Mountain WMAs, says scaled quail broods were seen earlier this year than usual. In Alpine, Mike Hobson pointed out that all four quail species (bobwhites, scaled, Montezuma and Gambel's) are found in the Trans-Pecos, and all four are doing well.

ABOVE PHOTO © DAVIDJSAMS.COM; LOWER PHOTO © GRADY ALLEN

JAVELINA SEASON:

(Approximately 43 counties)

Oct. 1 — Feb. 27

(Approximately 50 counties)

Sept. 1 — Aug. 31

JAVELINA populations remain stable in South Texas and West Texas. Mike Hobson says javelinas remain an underutilized resource in West Texas, although populations do not rival those in South Texas.

JAVELINA

DAVID SIERRA EXPLAINS that the Post Oak Savannah, that wooded farmland running diagonally from the northeast corner of Texas to the start of the Brush Country just south of San Antonio, will have good squirrel hunting this fall. Last fall's acorn crop is the reason. "Years of good mast production are typically followed by years of good squirrel reproduction," Sierra says, "so sportsmen desiring some early fall hunting opportunities should be rewarded."

Jeff Gunnels, assistant project leader at Richland Creek WMA, says there will be good squirrel hunting opportunities on the Gus Engeling and Big Lake Bottom WMAs for people holding

the TPWD Annual Public Hunting Permit. However, the Pineywoods, just east of the Post Oak, did not have as good an acorn crop, says Gary Calkins, district leader for the Pineywoods. "If summer conditions remain good, populations may rebound somewhat," he said. Most areas throughout Texas that have hardwoods could have decent squirrel hunting this

SQUIRREL SEASON:

SPECIAL YOUTH SEASON: EAST TEXAS (51 counties) Sept. 25 — 26.

EAST TEXAS (51 counties) Oct. 1 — Feb. 6, May 1 — 31

OTHER OPEN COUNTIES (see County Listings) Sept. 1 — Aug. 31

RABBIT AND HARE SEASON: No closed season.



SMALL GAME

year, and the fall is such a fine time to find out.

In years after good rains, the rabbit population often expands, and cottontail and jackrabbit hunting could be at its best this year. Rabbits are vegetarians, so the past 2 years have been good to them. Reproduction is also stimulated by plentiful food plants, and each female eastern cottontail can have four or five litters a year, consisting of one to eight young.

LIKE WHITE TAILS, mule deer are also doing well.

This year's census showed an 11.8 percent increase from the 2002 census. Average age of bucks harvested last year was 5 1/2. Because of the increased cover, fawning losses should be lower. When TPWD Executive Director Bob Cook was wildlife division director in the late '90s, he told me that West Texas was in a prolonged drought and that antelope and mule deer were declining because there was so little cover that every time a fawn hit the ground there was a predator waiting there to eat it. Well, the drought may have broken, at least to an extent. Hobson was pleased with 2003 antler quality, but expects better antlers this season. Pittman expects antler quality to be "above average to excellent."

The Panhandle report is not quite as glowing, but Swepston and Ruthven expect antlers to be good to excellent.

MULE DEER SEASON:

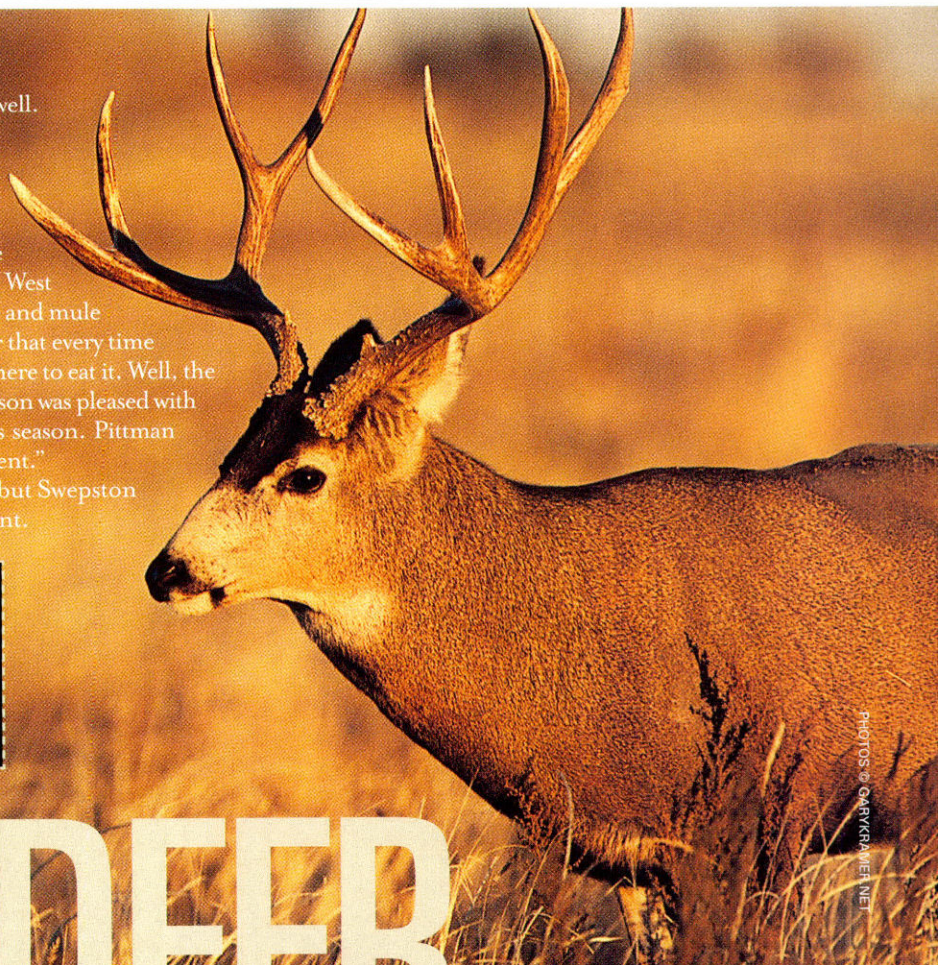
ARCHERY Oct. 2—31

GENERAL:

PANHANDLE (36 counties) Nov. 20 — Dec. 5

SW PANHANDLE (7 counties) Nov. 20 — 28

TRANS-PECOS (19 counties) Nov. 27 — Dec. 12



MULE DEER

PHOTOS © GARY RAMBLET NET

WHITE-TAILED DEER



BIOLOGISTS ARE SINGING the same song, and it ain't the blues: "Better than average rain for the past two years." Donnie Frels on the Kerr WMA reports the refuge is nine inches above average rainfall through April. Mike Krueger says he has heard this has been the most rainfall in at least ten years in the country he works from the Lampasas office Rutledge says, "Many areas are nearing their average annual rainfall totals as of the middle of May." Mitch Lockwood says some Hill Country ranchers have told him this has been the best spring in 20 years. Lockwood adds that ranches that have refrained from shooting young bucks will reap more benefit from the rains.

Bob Carroll says because of the experimental antler restriction in the six counties he covers from the LaGrange office, they are just not shooting the younger bucks and are consequently seeing more buck in the older age classes. This season, that may pay off. Homerstad says it well: "Rain continued

through the critical months of March and April, and hasn't stopped yet (May). It probably won't matter much, as far as antler growth is concerned, if it doesn't rain a whole lot during the summer."

In fact, a dry end of summer and early autumn could increase visibility and actually aid hunters. Synatzske pointed out that bucks from the abundant 1997 fawn crop that are still around are now 7 1/2 years old. Thick brush and tough hunting conditions the past 2 years have helped them live to maturity. He added that last season produced 29 bucks statewide that qualified for Boone & Crockett listings. "The last 2 years have provided excellent potential for antler growth and this year we will see the results," he predicted. In South Texas, Ledbetter says "Expect a good, pronounced and early rut this year." Hobson,

speaking of the whitetails in West Texas, says he expects to see "quality antlers on mud-fat deer."

WHITE-TAILED DEER SEASONS:

ARCHERY Oct. 2 — 31

SPECIAL YOUTH SEASON: Oct. 30 — 31, Jan. 15 — 16

NORTH TEXAS (200 counties) Nov. 6 — Jan. 2

PANHANDLE (6 counties) Nov. 20 — Dec. 5

SOUTH TEXAS (30 counties) Nov. 6 — Jan. 16

EDWARDS PLATEAU (25 counties)

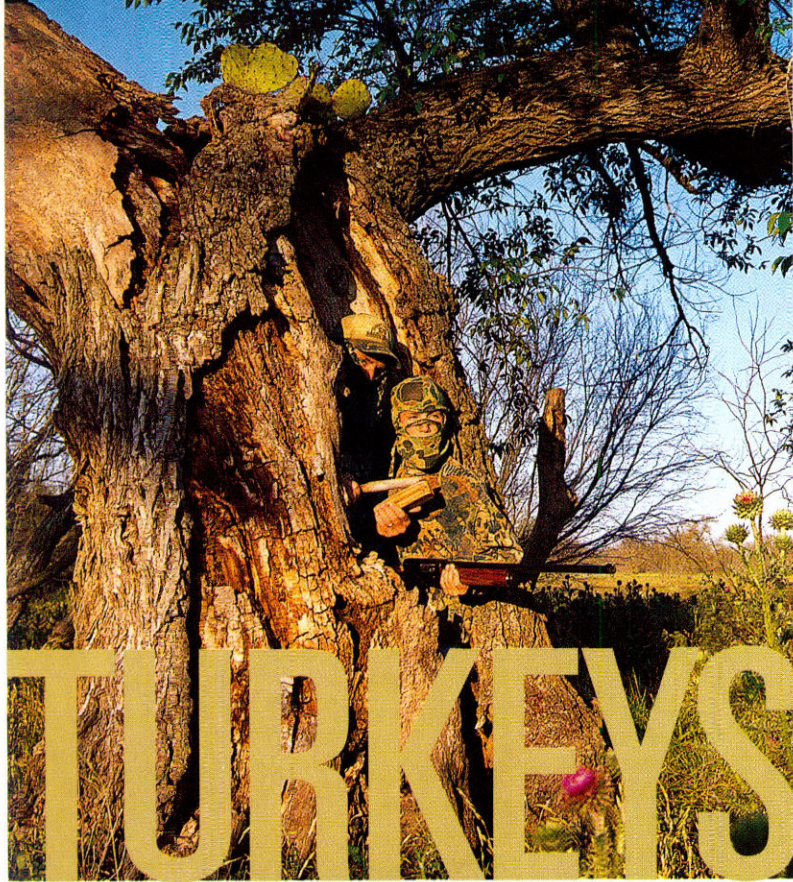
LATE ANTLERLESS AND SPIKE Jan. 3 — 16

SOUTH TEXAS (30 counties)

LATE ANTLERLESS AND SPIKE Jan. 17 — 30

MUZZLELOADER (23 counties)

LATE ANTLERLESS AND SPIKE Jan. 8 — 16



EVERYTHING SAID ABOUT THE PROSPECTS

for “ground nesting birds” and abundant insects — especially grasshoppers — and food availability, applies to turkeys. Steve DeMaso, turkey and quail program leader, says there has been a good carry-over of gobblers from last season. Only Rio Grande turkeys can be hunted in the fall, though, so that restricts autumn turkey hunting to the western two-thirds of the state. Eastern turkeys can only be hunted in the spring. TPWD’s eastern turkey restocking program has been highly successful, though, so look out in East Texas next spring!

DeMaso says 39,000 Rio Grandes were taken by hunters last fall, and another 27,000 fell in the spring. The tally for Eastern turkeys for last spring was between 300 and 350 gobblers. For those who want to put a bird on the table at Thanksgiving or a beard on the wall, there will be ample opportunity throughout the western part of Texas, where the Rio Grandes are legal and plentiful.

RIO GRANDE TURKEY SEASON:

ARCHERY: Oct. 2 — 31

FALL SEASON:

SPECIAL YOUTH SEASON Oct. 30 — 31, Jan. 15 — 16

NORTH TEXAS (119 counties) Nov. 6 — Jan. 2

SOUTH TEXAS (25 counties) Nov. 6 — Jan. 16

BROOKS, KENEDY AND KLEBERG COUNTIES Nov. 6 — Feb. 27

AFTER HEARING ABOUT all this rain, you might think Texas is now one big duck pond. Not quite so. David Sierra, in East Texas, says “having water at the right time with an abundance of acorns, invertebrates and aquatic plants” is what is needed in the bottomland forests and wetlands. Gunnels says floods on the Trinity filled potholes that will produce food as they dry up, but the ducks still have to come south for it to do any good.

Vernon Bevill, small game and habitat assessment program director, says a number of key breeding areas have been drying out, including the Dakotas, and prospects are still in question. Winter was longer than usual in the north, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service surveys were later than expected. Consequently, migratory waterfowl regulations were not set in time to be included here.

Bevill says, however, that ice and snow on the ground could have affected nesting. There was late snow cover in a number of the goose breeding areas of the Arctic, so goose production will likely be down. He also says undocumented reports indicate that “some key duck areas received excellent moisture in the early spring after having been dry.” Some late moisture in duck breeding country might be helpful. Waterfowl program leader Dave Morrison says Texas surveys have shown an increase the past few years in spite of hunters complaining that there were no ducks. The wet weather for the past 2 years has enabled



ducks to disperse more, and they just haven’t been in traditional areas.

Bevill expects at least a nine-day teal season. The dates will be the last two full weekends in September, or the last three weekends if the season runs to 16 days. Texas’ resident species, the mottled duck, seems to be poised for good production, according to Jim Sutherlin, area manager for J.D.

Murphree WMA. Waterfowl biologist Bill Johnson reports that the Panhandle is “as dry as it can be” where ducks and geese are concerned, which doesn’t bode well for the fall. He does have his fingers crossed, however.

Waterfowl season regulations will be covered in the 2004-2005 Texas Waterfowl Digest. ★

ABOVE PHOTO © GRADY ALLEN; LOWER PHOTO © GARY KRAMER/NET



As a swollen sun peeked over the horizon, a familiar whistle tickled my eardrums. Seconds later, a flock of blue-winged teal buzzed our boat at breakneck speed. It was a sight my hunting partner and I had seen hundreds of times, but this one caught us by surprise.

The shock came not from the birds' incredible swiftness or daredevil navigation, but from the fact we were on Lake Guri, in a remote corner of the Venezuelan rainforest. Six weeks earlier, we had hunted these birds on the upper Texas coast and now they were among parrots, howler monkeys and anacondas in South America.

Bluewings migrate in September, giving hunters an early crack at waterfowl hunting action. The season follows their southward movement, which can be intense. At the first hint of a cold front, bluewings quickly exit our borders and head toward the tropics. Fortunately, Texas hunters have plenty of opportunities to hunt them on public land while they are here. The key to success is learning what makes these pint-sized ducks tick and applying that knowledge to scouting their habitat.

WITH A LITTLE PATIENCE AND SCOUTING, YOU CAN HUNT THESE BLAZINGLY FAST DUCKS ON PUBLIC LANDS.

By Chester Moore Jr.

TEAL TIME



OPPOSITE PHOTO © GARYRAMER.NET; THIS PAGE PHOTO © DALE SPARTUS



OPPOSITE PHOTO AND THIS PAGE PHOTO © GRADY ALLEN

Scouting for water

THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR in having a successful teal hunt is finding an area with the right water supply. Dry marshes and fields send teal south quickly, while too much water spreads them out so much that hunters have a difficult time luring them into shotgun range.

Last season was a prime example. Jacob Virdine, who works at the J.D. Murphree Wildlife Management Area near Port Arthur, said 49 hunters showed up there for opening day. Those hunters shot only 48 teal. The next day 35 hunters took 2 dozen birds.

"The problem was our water level was too deep for teal," Virdine said. "It was just right a couple of days before the opener, but then it rained really hard." The same storm system dropped only a couple of inches of rain in the rice fields to the west and produced limits of teal for hunters during opening weekend.

Back in 1998, the Texas coast experienced a brutal summer-long drought. Two days before teal season opened, Tropical Storm Frances hit, dumping water everywhere on the coast. Instead of shooting in marshes, hunters were shooting teal out of flooded cattle pastures where the birds had easier feeding on floating seed.

Since hunters can't control the rain, how should they prepare for early teal season? The key is scouting, says Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Manager Kelly McDowell.

"Many of our hunters are first-timers from the Houston area," he says, "and lots of times hectic schedules and such do not allow them any time to scout. Sometimes there are so many birds it does not matter much, but other times they will discover too much water or not enough water. Scouting is the key to successful hunting, especially on public land."

McDowell is right. Because of scouting efforts I have been able to bag teal on public lands when others had a tough time.

Teal are dabbling ducks and tend to prefer shallow mud flats and grass beds in marshes where they eat milfoil, seeds of pond weeds and tiny mollusks. High water can cover areas that would normally be productive, but knowing the topography of the land and locating higher ground that might hold only a few inches of water can yield results.

In the Lower Neches Wildlife Management Area near Bridge City, I go to an island that has a shallow pond in the middle of it. Tropical storm-level tides make it about 6 inches deep, and a magnet for teal during periods of high and low water. It seems to be better during high tides because the birds can see the vegetation

more easily than in the foot-deep water around it.

With the advent of the Internet, scouting is no longer confined to physically exploring hunting areas. Web sites such as topozone.com provide detailed topographical maps of any location in the United States and can help you pick out spots that would hold water and be potential ambush spots for teal. I had passed by the island described above dozens of times, but after studying the area on the Internet, I found the little pond and a true teal-hunting hot spot.

Teal hunting tactics

TEAL ARE SMALL and offer a challenging target, but they are easy to hunt during the September season. They are creatures of habit, so you can generally count on them to feed both early and late.

The first thing to consider is setting up a blind. In the case of teal, this does not require a lot of effort. Teal are certainly not blind-shy during the early season, so hunting out of a boat draped in camouflage netting or covered by Roseau cane is more than adequate. Or you can simply wear plenty of camouflage and sit still.

For years, hunters brought dozens of decoys for the early season, but that is becoming outdated. A dozen decoys of any kind of duck set out in the marsh will give these sociable birds an inviting place to land and you a place to shoot.

I usually bring only half a dozen teal decoys, a few shoveler imitations and a "robo duck," and have no problem scoring limits of teal. Sometimes I use a "confidence" decoy such as a great blue heron, a common sight on the Texas coast in September.

Calling teal is rather simple, although many hunters on public lands tend to overdo it. Simple teal whistles sounded a few times at the sight of birds is enough to lure them in. Too much calling spooks them. I have been in areas where hunters a few ponds away called too much and pushed birds right to me.

Part of a successful hunt on public land is using the mistakes of other hunters to your advantage. It seems there is always someone who calls too much, shoots when the birds are too high or arrives in the field late and pushes birds to you. This may be frustrating, but if you keep your cool, you should get a shot at some of "their" birds.

When you do get a shot, make sure not to use a heavy load, which can destroy the meat in their tiny breasts. I use number six, but sevens will work as well.

TEAL ARE DABBLING DUCKS AND TEND TO PREFER SHALLOW MUD FLATS AND GRASS BEDS IN MARSHES.

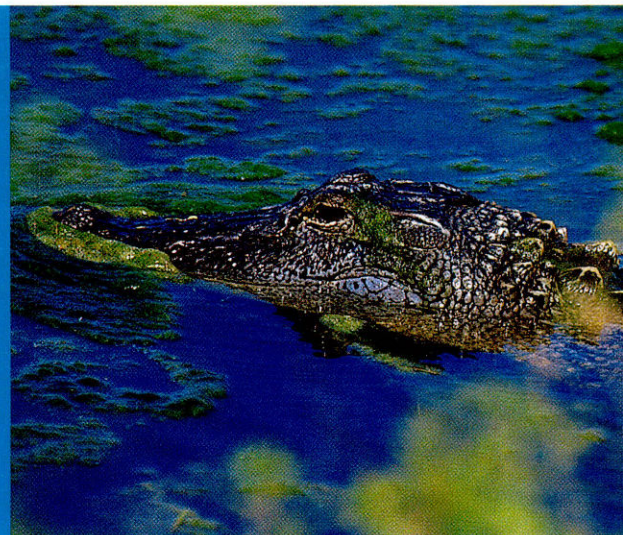
BEWARE OF ALLIGATORS

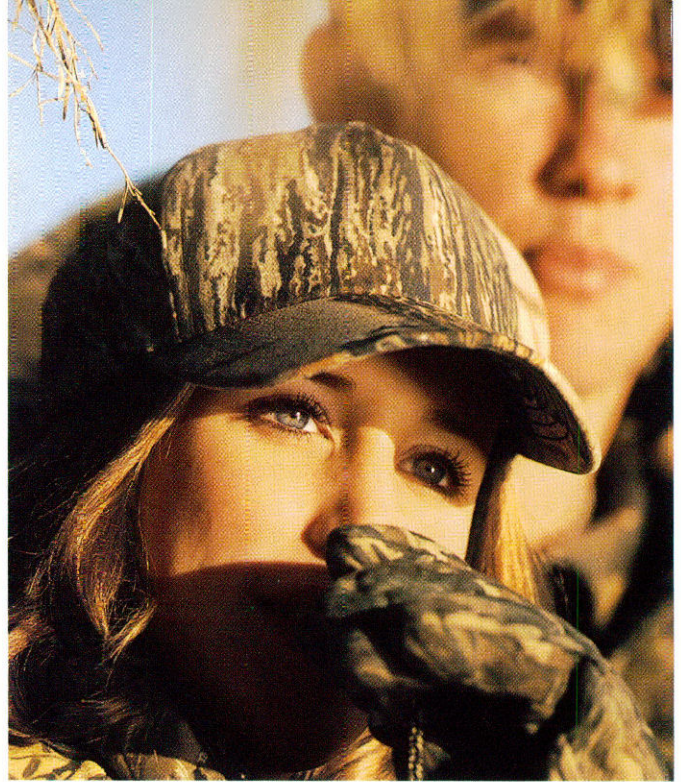
MARK HALL OF CENTRAL FLYWAY OUTFITTERS in Winnie recalls a narrow escape of his beloved retriever. "She ran out toward the reservoir behind the lodge and when she came back after a while I noticed she was walking funny so I went over to her. She was a bloody mess and I figured there might be no way she was going to live. It was obvious a gator had attacked her."

"When I tried to pick her up, it put her in terrible pain because her hips were in bad, bad shape. The car was 100 yards or so off and she followed me all the way with messed up hips and teeth marks all over. She then hopped up in the pet porter like she always did and rode to the vet without a complaint."

After expensive surgery the dog recovered and returned to the marsh to hunt again.

Because teal season occurs when temperatures are plenty warm enough for alligators and snakes to prowl, pay special attention to your dogs. There are thousands of gators in Texas marshes and they would love nothing more than to get hold of your hunting partner. After my dog narrowly escaped a big alligator, I now refuse to bring a dog into the marshes I hunt during September. You might not want to go that far, but you should be mindful of the danger.





LURING THE DUCKS: SOME HUNTERS TRY DECOYS, OTHERS RELY ON CALLING THE FAST-FLYING BIRDS.

Improved cylinder or modified chokes work great for teal, especially in close quarters. These are incredibly fast birds that can fly at 60 miles an hour. Make sure to lead them by at least 5 feet when they are 20 yards away and double that when they are out past 30 yards.

Beware of sudden surprises

MAKING A PAPER-CUTTING SOUND as they move, teal seem to come out of nowhere. I do not know how many times I have thought nothing was going to happen and then a flock of

bluewings lands right in the decoys. Once a small flock buzzed right over me and landed less than 10 feet from my blind. The encounter excited me so much, I never thought to shoot until my partner's hyperactive dog alerted them and sent them packing.

Some hunters might consider that a failure, but I consider it the ultimate success. The day I quit being in awe of Mother Nature is the day I put away my decoys for good.

With their super-fast flight and rapid migration, blue-winged teal remind us that good things come and go quickly, but their memory stays with us forever. ✧

PUBLIC HOT SPOTS

A \$48 ANNUAL PUBLIC HUNTING PERMIT gives hunters access to hundreds of thousands of acres in public hunting lands on the teal migration route. In addition, hunters have access to more acreage of national wildlife refuges. Some of these areas are free to hunt, while others charge a nominal daily use fee, so call ahead.

"If I wanted an inexpensive hunt that was relatively easy to manage, my first choice would be Peach Point WMA," says the WMA's manager, biologist Todd Merendino of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. "Unlike during the big duck season, we're not really crowded, and the habitat is excellent. Mad Island WMA would be my second choice because it always has water in it."

Peach Point and Mad Island are great spots, but there are many more good hunting destinations located near most of the major cities on the Texas coast. Here are the most popular public teal hunting areas:

J.D. Murphree Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is one of the best-known public teal hunting destinations. Located near Port Arthur off Highway 73, it offers access to thousands of acres of freshwater marsh. Hunting is morning-only each day of the teal season, and access is by boat only.

Lower Neches WMA, an often-overlooked 7,998 acre stretch of tidal marsh located between Bridge City and Port Arthur, offers prime opportunities for teal. Hunting is legal both east and west of Highway 87. This area also includes the Nelda Stark Unit in Orange County, which is one of few spots open for evening hunts during teal season. Access to Lower Neches is walk-in only. For more information on the J.D. Murphree or Lower Neches WMAs call (409) 736-2551.

Sea Rim State Park offers a 600-acre portion of the park located off Highway 87 for public hunting each day of the teal season. Hunting is morning-only,

and access is walk-in only. For more information call (409) 971-2559.

Texas Point and McFaddin National Wildlife Refuges (NWR). Located near Sabine Pass, these twin refuges will be open to boat-in and walk-in, morning-only hunting in designated areas. All areas in the McFaddin refuge, except the Spaced Hunt Unit, will be open every day of the season. For more information call (409) 971-2909.

Anahuac NWR's Pace Tract will be open each day of the teal season for morning-only hunting. Parts of the refuge's Middleton Tract will be open to morning-only hunting on days to be determined. Access to open areas is by boat only. For more information, call at (409) 267-3337.

Portions of **Peach Point WMA** in Brazoria County will be open for teal hunting. Hunting is morning-only each Saturday, Sunday, Tuesday

Mad Island WMA Located in Matagorda County, this area offers some walk-in access. This spot always holds water and is popular with hardcore teal hunters.

Parts of the **Guadalupe Delta WMA** Mission Lake Unit, Guadalupe River and Hynes Bay units will be open to morning-only teal hunting each day of the teal-only season. Walk-in access is available.

For more information about hunting Peach Point, Mad Island and Guadalupe Delta WMAs, contact the TPWD office in Bay City, (409) 244-7636.

Designated areas in the **Brazoria NWR** will be open to all-day teal hunting each day of the teal-only season. No fee is required. Boat and walk-in access are available.

Designated areas in the **Big Boggy NWR** will be open each day of the teal season. Walk-in access is available, and no fee is required.

For more information on Brazoria or Big Boggy refuges, call (409) 849-6062.

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Bull Reds *in the Surf*

FOR A BIG-GAME FISH THAT DOESN'T REQUIRE AN
OFFSHORE BOAT, CHECK THE SEPTEMBER SURF.

By Larry Bozka



Christine Peugh is accustomed to using her muscles. She is, after all, a licensed chiropractor. Catch is, she's more used to prescribing the workouts than receiving them.

paddle. Like all big redfish, she is built for power more than speed.

Peugh's surf rod is deeply bowed and glistening beads of sweat are slowly rolling down her suntanned forehead. Although her arms ache, Peugh seems oblivious to the pain. She is smiling, a contented outdoorswoman in the midst of her favorite activity.

But when the clicker on Peugh's squidding reel suddenly begins buzzing like a miniature chainsaw, she bolts from her lawn chair and pulls her 10-foot surf rod from a waist-high piece of PVC pipe driven deep into the beach near Rollover Pass. She gives the star drag a light turn to increase the pressure, and a giant red drum responds with a commanding up-current surge. This is going to be a battle.

It's hard to imagine that a creature this large can be swimming in the surf only a hundred yards away. Peugh, 35, usually paddles a kayak to carry baits out beyond the third and even fourth sand bars. But she threw this line from the first bar just as the sun was sinking below the western horizon.

As any angler who has hooked one knows, red drum are strong. Hook a sizable redfish like the one on the end of Peugh's line and you will understand why the big females, with their dogged demeanor and powerful runs, are called bulls.

The fish Peugh is playing this Labor Day weekend is a big one, but not the 54-inch, 50-plus-pound leviathan Peugh took a few weeks ago from this same spot. Still, the fish will measure more than 40 inches. The profile of its head resembles a huge and continuous Roman nose with a blunt snub at the tip and a shining, rock-hard armor of copper-colored scales on the angular top and sides. Her soft white belly sags heavy with eggs. She's powered by a thick, blue-tinged tail that's as wide as the blade of a kayak

CHIRSTINE PEUGH LOVES this annual workout, so much so that the day I met her at her office we spent an extra 20 minutes perusing her photo album. She and her brother Bob, 41, have caught and released countless bull redfish from the Upper Texas beachfront, mostly between Rollover Pass and San Luis Pass. These two bay-to-gulf passes that jettison tide-driven saltwater with frightening force are among the top autumn surf locales in Texas. The mouth of the Colorado River at Matagorda is also held in high esteem. Depending on the severity of cold fronts, the bull redfish run can extend from September well into October.

A \$100 investment in tackle and a basic understanding of how to read the water and interpret the tides is all that's required for what the late Galveston outdoors writer, A.C. Becker Jr., used to call "the poor man's big-game fishing."

It's the open expanse of beach, the elemental, gloves-off thrill of battling an enraged brute of a fish with scales the size of quarters while your heels are planted deep in the sand, your arm muscles are in spasms and your knuckles are curled white around the spongy grip of a bucking surf rod that constitutes the incomparable thrill.

Peugh times her fishing to the high incoming tides of the fall equinox, when spawning red drum venture amazingly close to the tide line. Their annual journey to the passes is at the heart of the

species' survival.

Traveling through the surf in sizable schools of 50 to 100 with the smaller males, the mature female redfish deposit massive cargos of eggs that are immediately fertilized with thick white clouds of milt released by nearby males.

High autumn tides push the buoyant eggs through the coastal passes and deep inside the vegetated sanctuary of shallow bays and coves. Juvenile redfish spend their first 6 months to a year inside these nurseries. Then, depending upon the season, they move from bay to adjacent bay over the course of the next 3 to 4 years. Again spurred by the tides, they feed on shrimp, crabs, menhaden, mullet and other forage species that seek shelter in the emergent sea grass and coastal wetlands.

Finally, at the age of 4 or 5, a male will grow to a length of as little as 13 inches to as much as 29 inches. Females grow substantially larger, from 30 to 50 inches. During the summer months, schools of mature males and breeders roam the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico, but they generally remain close to shore during the other months of the year. In the fall, the spawning instinct kicks in and they swarm through the surf and repeat the timeless ritual of reproduction.

One of the triggers for this cycle seems to be light. Back in the late 1970s, pioneer researcher Connie Arnold of the University of Texas Marine Science Institute at Port Aransas helped unlock the key to tricking captive redfish into spawning. By manipulating the exposure of red drum to light, Arnold could artificially condense

It's the open
expanse of beach,
the elemental,
gloves-off thrill of
batting an enraged
brute of a fish with
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deep in the sand

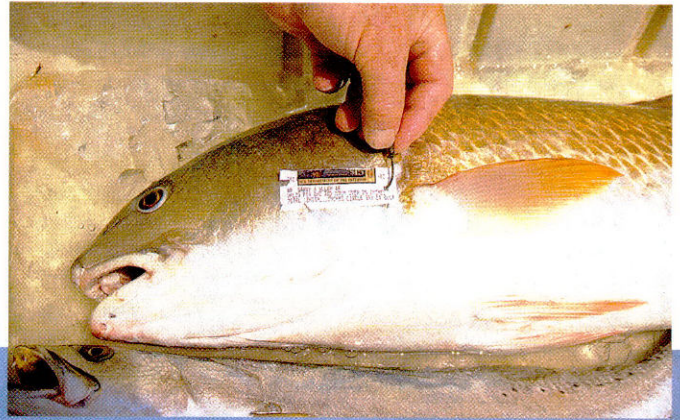
the seasons and spur redfish to spawn almost at will. The TPWD coastal hatchery complex uses this technique to produce more than 35 million redfish a year.

That we now have red drum to enjoy in impressive numbers is not coincidental. Not so long ago redfish were in serious trouble throughout the Texas coast. Because redfish don't spawn until they reach 4 or 5 years of age, the population is particularly vulnerable to decline if it is overfished.

Their tendency to congregate inside small and isolated bay cul-de-sacs made them particularly vulnerable to illegal monofilament nets. From 1975 to 1988, Texas coastal game wardens confiscated an average of 340,000 feet of illegal webbing a year. From August 1982 to September 1983 alone, more than 116 miles of outlaw nets were confiscated.

The passage of House Bill 1000 in 1981, which established the red drum as a game fish, came none too soon. An aggressive restocking program has also helped restore red fish to historic numbers.

But the red drum fishery is still susceptible to major depletion by an excessive harvest of heavyweight spawners. With age, the female's carrying capacity only increases, and redfish can live a long



ABOVE PHOTO © GRADY ALLEN; LOWER PHOTO © GRADY ALLEN



TACKLE BULL REDS WITH A SHOCK LEADER

Fishing for beachfront bull reds requires some specialized gear and rigging. Veteran surfcasters tend to use baitcasting or "squidding" reels that afford greater casting distance because they lack level-winds. Those who want to virtually eliminate the possibility of backlashes choose heavyweight spinning rods and large-capacity, open-faced reels.

For convenience in storage, both spinning and casting rods are usually made in two pieces. Newer graphite models are more expensive than fiberglass, but considerably more sensitive and easier to cast.

For the mainline, use 25- to 30-pound-test monofilament. Regardless of tackle style, however, most beachfront long-rodgers employ shock leaders. Some use leader material of 100-pound test or more. For years I have successfully used 50-pound-

test leader made of super-tough but nearly invisible fluorocarbon.

To rig a shock leader, tie a heavy-duty black barrel swivel on the end of the mainline. Add 3 to 4 feet of leader. Thread a plastic bead (for added color and knot protection) on the leader, add a snap swivel with the line through the swivel so that it slides freely, affix another bead, and then tie another barrel swivel to the end.

On the end of the swivel, tie another 3-foot length of leader. At the end of the leader, affix a circle hook of sufficient size to accommodate the bait. Size numbers vary significantly, as there is, unfortunately, no manufacturers' standard for hook sizing. Personally, I prefer Daiichi's 4/0 or 5/0 red "bleeding" hooks of the "wide circle" variety.

Many anglers use improved clinch knots or Trilene knots throughout the rig, hook connection included. I always tie my hook with a loop knot, which allows baits — especially live baits — to swing freely with the current and action of the bait.

The final step is to affix a wire-pronged "surf spider" weight to the snap swivel. The amount of lead necessary depends upon the strength of the current.

Cast the rig with a smooth and forceful swing, using the surf rod's extended handle for maximum leverage. Let it sink to the bottom. Pull it slowly but firmly to anchor the surf spike deep in the sand, where it will hold the bait in place.

When the fish picks up the bait, it runs a short distance and then abruptly encounters the "shock" resistance of the anchored surf spider. The circle hook will set itself; all you need to do is reel.

And reel, and reel and reel.

— Larry Bozka

either mullet caught in cast nets or pond-raised but saltwater-resistant baitfish sold at bait camps — are preferred by many. Others use cut bait, fresh dead mullet, menhaden ("pogeys"), squid or even blue-crab halves.

When spawning redfish are on the run and readily feeding, it sometimes makes little difference what bait is used. I've heard four rods ignite at once, often after as much as two to three hours of waiting. It happens with all the subtlety of a panicked herd of steers crashing through a rickety wooden fence.

Then again, there are fish like Christine Peugh's adversary, lone stragglers that snatch an offering from its surf spider-anchored mooring and continue a full-bore run down the nearest between-the-bars gut.

Chris Peugh's quarry has saved its best for last. After 10 minutes of constant pressure, the wallowing red summons a final authoritative surge. A softball-sized wad of seaweed just above the upper swivel is sucked underwater, the reel drag protests and for a brief moment it appears that woman and fish will fight forever.

Then, just as abruptly, the exhausted redfish rolls to the surface, her ivory-white belly shining softly through the layer of tiny bubbles at the fringe of the timeline.

Almost as exhausted herself, Peugh

kneels into the calf-deep water and cradles the mammoth head with her left hand. With her right hand she extracts the hook from its leathery white jaw in a single quick motion.

The red, we realize, was barely hooked.

Peugh looks at the wallowing redfish with admiration, even respect, then gently rocks

Because redfish don't spawn until they reach 4 or 5 years of age, the population is particularly vulnerable to decline if it is overfished.

it with a gentle to-and-fro movement that resuscitates the lumbering fish in less than 30 seconds. With a forceful kick of the tail and a defiant splash of brine, it's gone.

This is one of eight bull redfish she will release this fine starry evening with its faint hint of fall in air. She stands up, breathes deeply, stares out at the blackened Gulf and says to her brother, "Your turn, Bob."

As if in response, the reel clicker on the far left side of the four-rod setup erupts with its telltale alarm. Bob Peugh looks over his shoulder at his sister as he sprints toward the waiting rod holder.

"Thanks!" he yells.

Somehow I suspect he's speaking not only to her, but also to the grand and mysterious beachfront that every autumn so freely offers a chance to catch the fish of a lifetime. Could be another 40-inch red, we surmise. And when this night of battling bull reds is over, Bob Peugh is likely to be very thankful that his sister is a chiropractor. ☆

time. A big bull red is likely to be older than the 30-year old angler that catches her, and she's carrying 2.5 to 3.5 million eggs. Such fish are too important a resource to catch and keep.

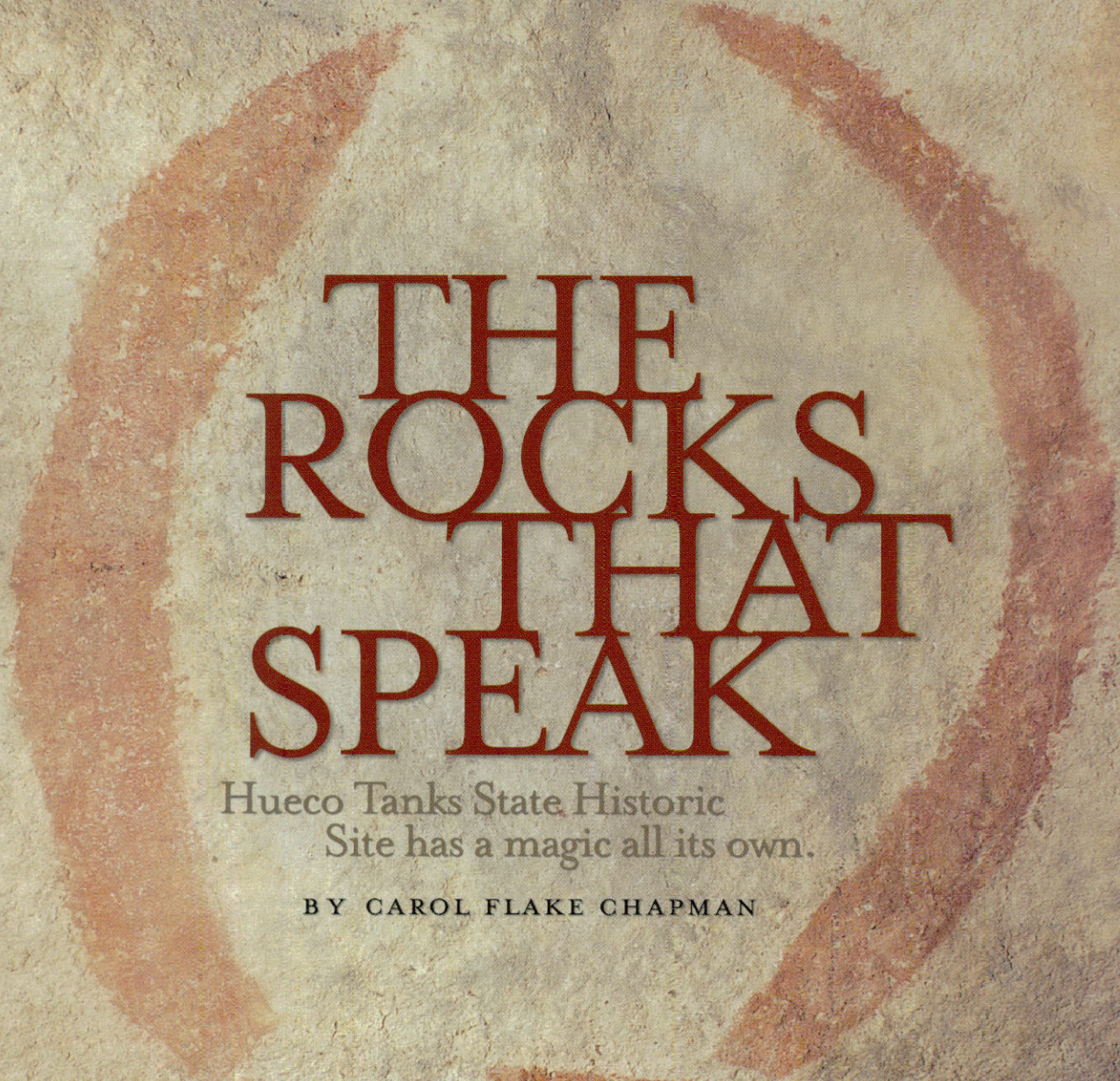
Anglers may only retain three redfish per day inside a 20- to 28-inch "slot." A fishing license contains a single "trophy tag" that allows the angler to keep one 28-inch-plus redfish per year. Anglers are encouraged to send the tags back to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department so the agency can monitor the fishing pressure on the big fish.

Relatively few anglers use their trophy tags. Redfish longer than 28 inches have coarse meat, and surprisingly little of it is left after head, bones and tail are removed. As for mounts, fiberglass and acrylic replicas can be easily created by taxidermists, all of whom will assure you that such a replica is considerably more durable and will long outlast a "skin-mounted" version of the real thing.

Sure, you can justify keeping a fish if you think it beats the state record of 59.5 pounds and 54 1/4 inches. And sometimes a fish can be too seriously injured in the fight to survive.

But with proper terminal rigging, anglers should rarely kill a big redfish. Using circle-style hooks, anglers can almost invariably assure that not only redfish, but also blacktip sharks, black drum, gafftopsail catfish, jack crevalle and other beachfront roamers are hooked in the outer fringes of the jaw. [see sidebar, above]

Luckily, "trout-green" waters are not a prerequisite to tangling with autumn's bronze brutes. Redfish rely heavily upon scent to locate their prey, and tidal movement outranks water clarity in terms of importance. Live baits that readily bleed after being hooked —

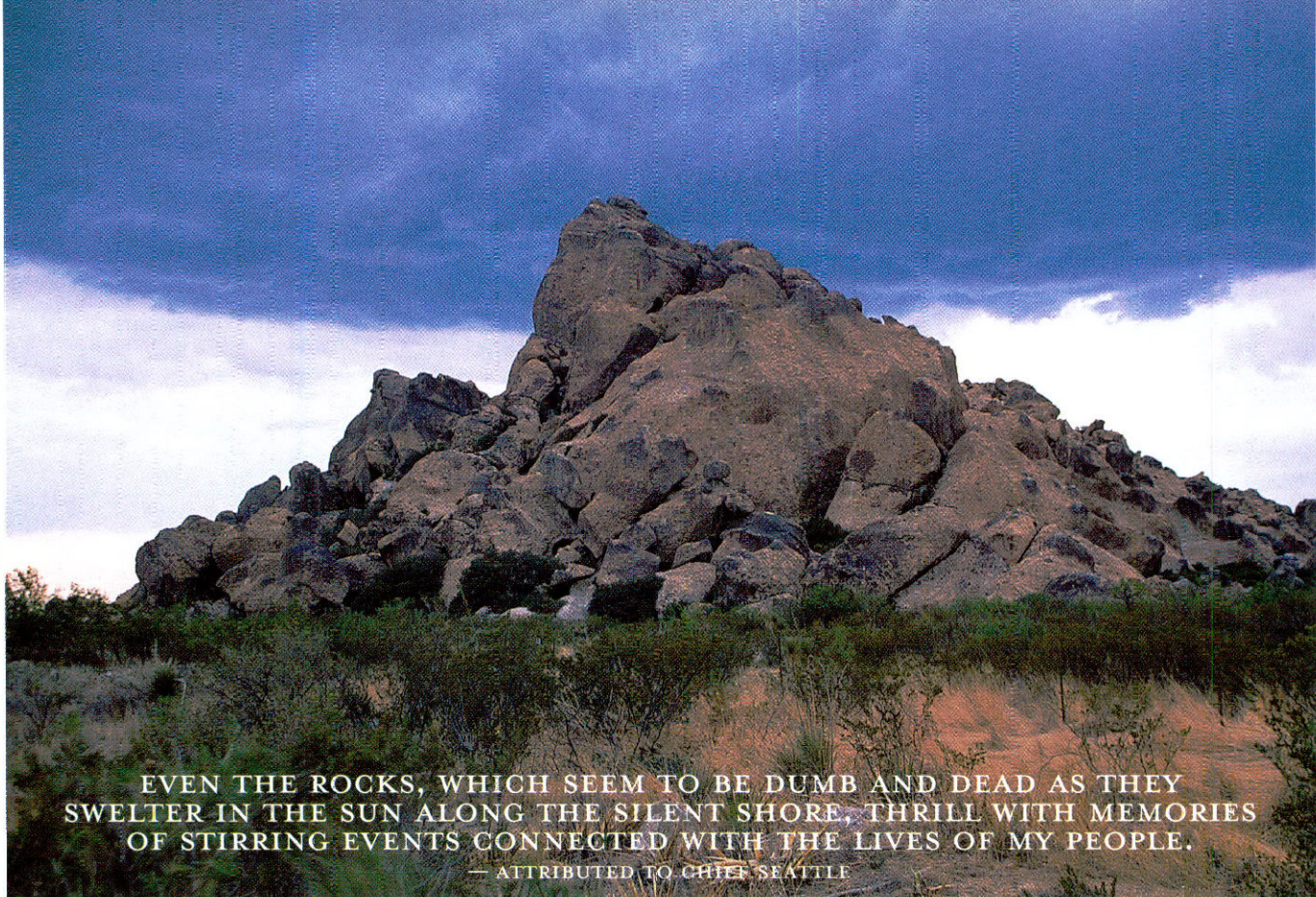


THE ROCKS THAT SPEAK

Hueco Tanks State Historic
Site has a magic all its own.

BY CAROL FLAKE CHAPMAN





EVEN THE ROCKS, WHICH SEEM TO BE DUMB AND DEAD AS THEY SWELTER IN THE SUN ALONG THE SILENT SHORE, THRILL WITH MEMORIES OF STIRRING EVENTS CONNECTED WITH THE LIVES OF MY PEOPLE.
— ATTRIBUTED TO CHIEF SEATTLE

It was so quiet inside Cave Kiva

that the sound of my errant ballpoint pen skittering down the tilted rock floor startled me. Five of us were wedged inside the narrow, cave-like crevice on North Mountain, one of the three prominent rock formations within Hueco Tanks State Historic Site. Like reptiles, we had slithered headfirst into the narrow space, inching our way along a slippery surface polished to a sheen by the wriggling of previous visitors, including the creators of the eerie relics that had drawn us there. We must have made an odd spectacle, lined up side by side on our backs in our jeans and khakis, gazing in awe at the overhead gallery of ancient pictographs.

There was just enough light inside the crevice on this late March morning to gradually locate the eight painted images that seemed to hover like anchored spirits on the rock ceiling above us. I found myself peering up at a fierce-looking, one-eyed, horned mask and a less intimidating bonneted companion, both a reddish-rust color that appeared to be stenciled on the rock by a steady hand. Linda Hedges, regional interpretive specialist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department based in Fort Davis, and Phil Hewitt, statewide director of interpretation and exhibits for TPWD, were positioned near a reddish mask with large vacant eyes, while John Moses, the site superintendent, was lying face-to-face with a mask that was topped by what appeared to be an ochre-colored rainbow. As I craned my neck to get a better look at the rainbow mask, I realized why Cave Kiva has been called the Sistine Chapel of rock art, though observers seldom get the chance to view an ancient masterpiece at such close range, lying in the probable same position as its original creator.

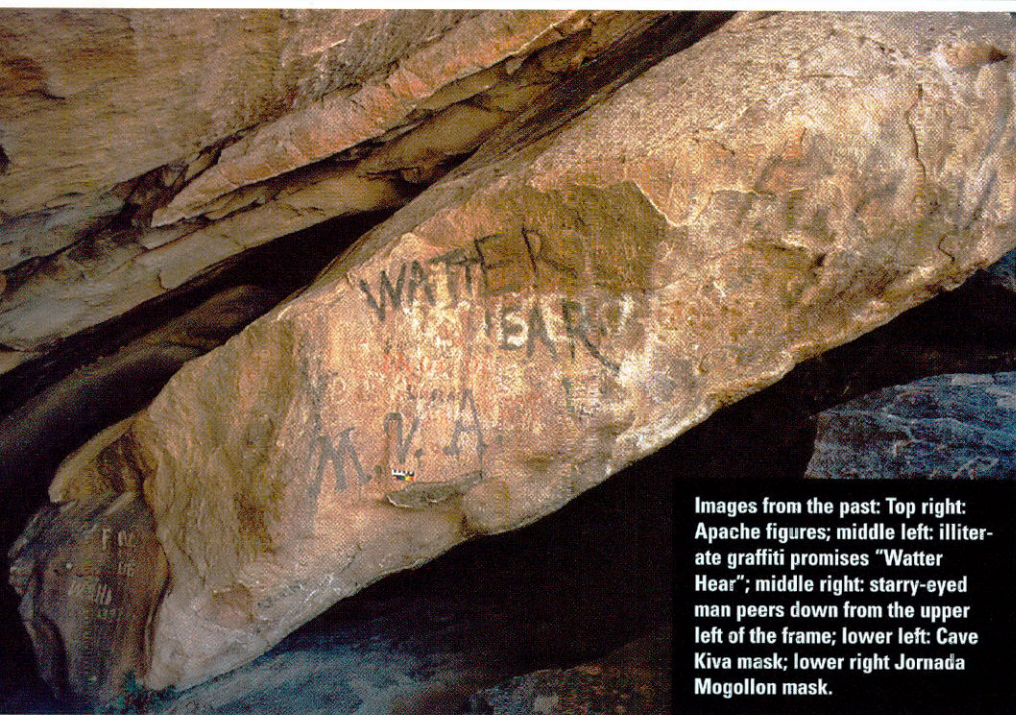
Hedges and Hewitt had arrived at the site to help iron out the final details on the master interpretive plan for Hueco Tanks that had been in the works for nearly a year, and Hewitt was relishing the chance to finally get a look at some of the site's most compelling art. From watching a video required of all newcomers to the park, I had

learned that not all visitors have felt such reverence for these rare and haunting images. In 1992, a vandal defaced the Kiva by spray-painting his name on the wall, obscuring the horned mask and its companion and requiring thousands of dollars for removal.

More than 200 of these enigmatic painted masks have been discovered around Hueco Tanks, hidden within enclosed spaces or under deep overhangs, making them the largest collection of such images in North America. They have been attributed to the pre-Pueblo people known as the Jornada Mogollon, who inhabited the area from about 450 to 1400 A.D. and then moved on. The images evoke motifs from early Meso-American cultures to the south as well as from later Pueblo cultures to north. For the late anthropologist Kay Sutherland, who made a life's work of studying them, the images seem to suggest the bringing together of opposite entities and forces into harmony and balance.

Earlier indigenous people from the archaic period also left images on the rocks — some etched and some painted — of animals or hunting scenes. Later peoples, from the Tiguas of nearby Ysleta del Sur, to traveling bands of Mescalero Apaches and Kiowa, contributed their own distinctive records to Hueco Tanks. One large, dramatic panel of figures known as the Kiowa Siege appears to record the nearly miraculous escape from a cave by a group of outnumbered Kiowa warriors. A smaller group of images at another location appears to depict the healing dance of the Mescalero Apache mountain gods. A series of computer-enhanced photographs, taken as part of a survey of the site by Rupestrian CyberServices, has revealed the presence of even more images, either overlaid by graffiti or eroded by nature, bringing the total number of known individual pictograph and petroglyph figures at Hueco Tanks to more than 3,000.

Standing out like an enormous reddish-pink cairn on the desert east of El Paso, the 35-million-year-old igneous rocks of Hueco Tanks have been beckoning travelers and offering sanctuary for at



Images from the past: Top right: Apache figures; middle left: illiterate graffiti promises "Watter Hear"; middle right: starry-eyed man peers down from the upper left of the frame; lower left: Cave Kiva mask; lower right Jornada Mogollon mask.



least 10,000 years. And the main source of their attraction to early farmers and thirsty travelers should have been as obvious to us as the features on the faces above us. I nodded in agreement when Linda Hedges remarked that the eyes on the mask above her reminded her of the huecos, meaning *hollows* in Spanish, for which the site is named. The site's highly porous syenite rocks, which appear from a distance to be pocked and pitted like the surface of the moon, collect rainwater like stony sponges, creating unique microhabitats for plant, animals and humans.

The natural cisterns and channels that lie within the rock formations were enhanced by the Jornada Mogollon to ensure the presence of water in Hueco Tanks for themselves and their crops of corn and beans, even when the surrounding desert remained dry. Later groups who sought refuge here included 49ers on their way to California and workers on the legendary Butterfield Overland Stage route. One 19th-century wayfarer with a spelling disability

examples of comal snakewood plants and a thriving population of a newly discovered species of rotifer (tiny aquatic plankton), which dwell in a seasonal seepage pond below an early 20th-century dam built to water cattle. It was one of the last strongholds of the old ranching era in El Paso. In the 1990s, the site was "discovered" by rock climbers and became one of the world's top destinations for "bouldering," the sport of free-climbing improbable rocks. And it even harbors a substantial population of horned lizards, which have been known to inspire tears of nostalgia in visitors from other parts of Texas where the endearing reptile has disappeared.

With such a variety of visitors and stakeholders and such an abundance of treasures to be protected, the site offered a daunting challenge for TPWD's interpretive team, which has embarked on the ambitious project of creating master plans for each state park and historic site. The goal set out by State Parks Director Walt Dabney is for every site to have a plan that defines the site's primary purpose, meaning and themes, sets interpretive goals and establishes practical timetables. Much of the planning process has moved to the field, according to Julie Martenson, who coordinates interpretive programs. "We're taking the process to the sites and consulting with community leaders and stakeholders," she says.

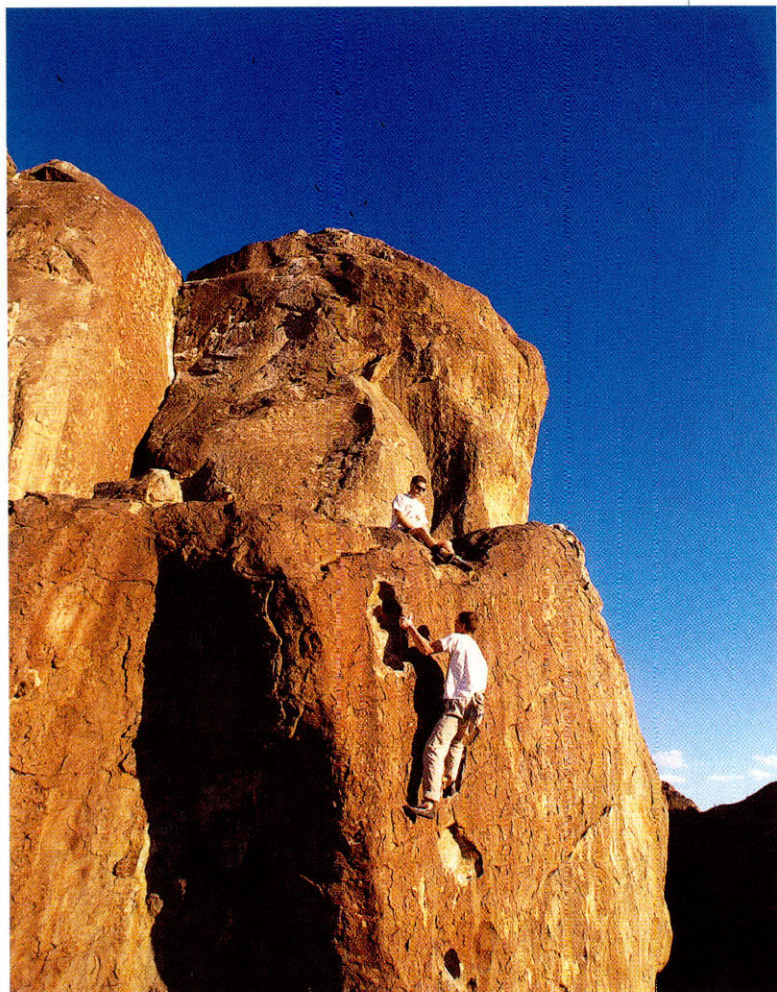
With a site as fragile and important as Hueco Tanks, which also happens to be much in demand by climbers and sightseers as well as those with deep cultural connections to the place, says Martenson, "You can't simply close off the place to the public. You try to get people so impressed and involved with a place that they want to take care of it. You walk the razor's edge in protecting it through knowledge."

For Hueco Tanks, the first crucial steps toward protecting its resources and educating the public came in 1998 and 2000 with the enactment of public-use plans that restrict the number of visitors to the site at any one time and require visitors to East and West Mountain sites to be accompanied by a trained guide. An educational video describes the site's place in Texas history and its importance for Native Americans, depicting the damage that has been done to the priceless relics in graphic detail. The awareness-building efforts are paying off: The defacement of the site by graffiti has been halted, and the fragile habitat that had been trampled by over-visitation is beginning to recover.

Among those who supported those protective measures was Dewey Tsonetokoy of the Kiowa tribe of Oklahoma. "Implementing the public use plan was a significant gesture," says Tsonetokoy. "I think they set a good precedent." Tsonetokoy is the great-great-grandson of legendary Kiowa chief Dohasan, who was among the Kiowa warriors who were trapped at Hueco Tanks and whose story is believed by

many to be depicted on the rock wall near Mescalero Canyon. Tsonetokoy had heard about the site from oral accounts of the siege that had been passed down through the generations. When he visited the site with the tribal chairman, he was astonished by details in the panel that appeared to corroborate the old stories. Tsonetokoy says that he eventually realized that one of the figures on the panel was an image of his great-great grandfather, wearing the red band around his waist that was the symbol of the warrior society to which his great-grandfather belonged.

Tsonetokoy felt so strongly about this deep connection to Hueco Tanks that he worked there as a ranger during the summer of 2000 and has continued to lead tours to the site and to train guides in its history. Tsonetokoy recalls visitors who would tell him that they had lived in El Paso all their lives and had visited Hueco Tanks before,



"HUECO TANKS IS THE MOUNT EVEREST OF BOULDERING," EXPLAINS ROCK CLIMBER ROBERT RICE. THE SPORT IS RECOGNIZED AS AN IMPORTANT RESOURCE TO THE SITE.

scrawled a message in Comanche Cave with happy news for parched travelers: Watter Hear.

Fittingly, the new master interpretive plan for Hueco Tanks describes the site as "an oasis of nature and culture." Wanda Olszewski, the site's interpretive technician, also likes to talk about it as a crossroads in time. As Olszewski notes, people come to the site for many different reasons, and it holds different meanings for different people. Within a compact area of less than 850 acres, the site encompasses an extraordinary range of geological oddities, cultural relics and rare plants and animals, including the last known

but that they had never understood what the place was all about. He learned from those experiences, he says, that education could actually work to protect a place. "I tell people that those pictographs are not like old graffiti," says Tsonetokoy. "They are there for a reason, and there was sacrifice and prayer involved in creating those images." Those prayers linger at Hueco Tanks, he says, making the site sacred ground. When you walk there, he says, "It's like you are walking on the prayers of the ancients."

Not everyone, however, was pleased, at first, by TPWD's protective measures, including rock climbers who had been accustomed to climbing wherever the ledges and crevices led them. But by June 25, 2003, the date of the interpretive master planning session held in El Paso for Hueco Tanks stakeholders, some of the site's most knowledgeable and passionate defenders and most frequent visitors were ready to talk about their hopes and their vision for the future of Hueco Tanks. Among the stakeholders present at the session was Robert Rice, a rock climber who had first come to Hueco Tanks in the spring of 1998 and never wanted to leave. "Hueco Tanks is the Mt. Everest of bouldering," says Rice flatly. He now offers guided climbing tours and operates a campground near the site that has become a kind of clearinghouse for site volunteers. "The rock-climbing community wanted to show that we're a concerned user group," says Rice, "and that we want to make sure the site can work for everyone."

Birders were represented at the meeting by Bob Johnson, a member of the Friends of Hueco Tanks who leads regular birding tours at the site, and who has been known to do a creditable imitation of the noisy cactus wren that resides in a tall torrey yucca next to park headquarters. Representing the Tigua people of nearby Ysleta del Sur Pueblo was Rick Quezada, the tribal war captain. The Tiguas have been visiting Hueco Tanks for centuries to acquire materials for medicine and ceremonies, and they claim as theirs a powerful image in Comanche Cave. In that figure, a solar nimbus surrounds a square, which the Tiguas say represents a pueblo, and an arrow piercing the image points north, referring, they say, to their original home to the north in New Mexico. The image has become an important tribal symbol, which the tribe used as the name for their former casino: Speaking Rock.

Another participant was Ellyn Bigrope, a Mescalero Apache, who says that she thinks the rock art in Hueco Tanks attributed to the Mescalero Apaches came from bands that were traveling through the area on the way to and from wintering places in Mexico and their homes further north. "They would stop and refresh themselves on their travels back and forth," she says. "The Apaches," she says wryly, "know how to find water." The dancing figures on the face of Comanche Cave, she says are "pretty close" to the dancers who still perform the dance of the mountain gods, or *gaje*. That dance, she says, is always performed for a reason, usually for someone who requires healing.

As the stakeholders spoke about their ties to the site, they found more in common than they had expected. "I think we educated each other even more than we educated the representatives for the state," says Robert Rice. "We learned why the place was important to each group and what each group valued, and that made it easier for us to come up with a well-rounded mission statement. I think our interests were very well considered at the meeting and in the plan. I was happy that climbing was included as a resource to the site."

Among the goals that the group agreed on wholeheartedly, and which became a key part of the master plan, was to strengthen the site's connections to the Native American communities repre-

sented at the site. To follow up on that goal, Wanda Olszewski and then-lead ranger Alex Mares traveled in September to the Mescalero Apache reservation to formally request to the leader of the tribe's mountain spirit dancers that they perform at the annual Hueco Tanks Interpretive Fair. Olszewski and Mares had to be in Mescalero, New Mexico at dawn to present a special offering, the details of which Olszewski says that she cannot reveal. "That was how it needed to be," she said. "You have to go through something in order for your request to be answered."

As so it was, that during the site's annual Interpretive Fair last October, the dance of the mountain gods was performed, perhaps for the first time at Hueco Tanks in well over a century, bringing the plan for the site full circle, and perhaps bringing history full circle as well. As the campfire burned hot, and the shadows of the dancers flickered on the rocks of North Mountain, they seemed to echo the pale silhouettes on the rock face of Comanche Cave. It was as though



CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCES AT THE HUECO TANKS INTERPRETIVE FAIR STRENGTHEN TIES WITH NATIVE AMERICANS WHOSE ANCESTORS VISITED FOR CENTURIES.

the rocks themselves had come to life and had begun to speak.

For Wanda Olszewski it was a magical moment. "It was beautiful to have a great blessing like that for this site," she says. "When people get to watch something like that, it gives them a feeling of stewardship, a feeling of connection with the land that we've lost. That's part of the reason this place is so important." And the dancers who brought their healing ritual to Hueco Tanks may also be conveying another message as well. They may be suggesting, as some say the masks of the Jornada Mogollon do, that opposites can be brought into harmony and balance — at Hueco Tanks, if not in the world at large. ✧



PHOTO © C.L. EDWARDS III

IN HIGHER COUNTRY

A LITTLE MORE THAN 100 YEARS AGO, A TEAM OF NATURALISTS

WROTE HOME ABOUT THEIR TOUR OF THE TRANS-PECOS REGION. NOW A FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR TO THE MAGAZINE, E. DAN KLEPPER, WRITES A LETTER TO HIS LATE FATHER, DAN KLEPPER, [SEE *LEGEND, LORE AND LEGACY*, PAGE 52] ABOUT WHAT HAS CHANGED AND WHAT, FOR THE TIME BEING, SEEMS TO HAVE REMAINED THE SAME.

Dear ol' Dad,

After recently completing a hopscotch trek across the Trans-Pecos, from the Chisos Mountains in the southern Big Bend all the way north to the Guadalupe Mountains, I thought I would take the opportunity to write and catch you up. Many things have changed since we last spoke, at least for most of the world and perhaps a bit for Texas as well. You will probably not be surprised to learn that Texans continue to embrace their outdoor pursuits with a growing interest in non-consumptive sports – a good thing for all wildlife as well as the game animals. Oh, and the battle to preserve our remaining natural world rages on. It continues to follow the same issues it has since the fight began (loss of species, loss of habitat, loss of clean air, land and water) and maintains a similar imbalance of power but perhaps with a few more soldiers added to conservation's battalions. Some of the skirmishes have been lost along the way, the true victims being either the species gone extinct or us humans who are the poorer for their absences. I am never quite sure who suffers the greater tragedy. But some struggles have actually been championed in the intervening years, proving that the fight is worth our sacrifices. For instance, I don't believe that in all the seasons we spent hunting the Texas brush together for quail and deer that we ever saw a single golden eagle. And now, 10 years after your passing, I have seen a dozen cross the mountains and basins of the Texas west just this year, free and born wild.

By E. Dan Klepper

that had been visited over a century ago by an information-gathering expedition of scientists. It was part of the Biological Survey of Texas, which took place between 1889 and 1905 and encompassed all 10 ecological regions found in Texas. Reports were written, lists made, specimens collected, photographs taken, drawings and paintings created and then all of it was boiled down to provide future Texans with an understanding of just exactly what natural wonders lay at our doorstep.

The Trans-Pecos section of the survey was undertaken during 1901 by Vernon Bailey, chief field naturalist for the U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey, ornithologist Harry Church Oberholser and wildlife artist Louis Agassiz Fuertes. They spent 4 months traveling from the Pecos River to the Chisos Mountains and then north through the Davis Mountains and on to the Guadalupe range. It was a circuit that we, as a family, replicated many times with the same sort of minimal camping gear and maximum sense of adventure. You wrote about this country often and introduced its resources to me by placing a pair of binoculars or a gun or a camera in my hands — whichever seemed to fit the circumstance. It has remained compelling to me throughout the years, so much so that I have made it my home.

It should come as no surprise to you that Louis Agassiz Fuertes, the artist of the expedition, was someone with whom I soon shared affinities. And as I read through the letters that he wrote to his family during his time on the survey, I discovered my own voice in his words.

I am busting to get up to the Chisos, he wrote, as he prepared to leave his camp just south of Marathon, my hometown now, to get the fine high

timber fauna there, and that will come now in a few days. Having the mountains always in sight... makes the desire for them ever run high.

My intention in taking this voyage was to review what has stayed the same in the last 100 years since the expedition, and my plan was to draw heavily on David J. Schmidly's *Texas Natural History—A Century of Change*. This is an excellent publication that will tell you exactly what in the natural world has remained for Texans and, within its 534 pages, includes Vernon Bailey's *Biological Survey of Texas* in its entirety. You were no doubt familiar with Schmidly, having utilized his *Mammals of Texas* and other superb publications in your own research as a Texas outdoor writer.

But as I made my personal trek with the hope of seeing these places through the eyes of the expedition, I discovered that nature is resistant to stasis and disdainful of our desire for all things to remain the same. She is in love with the transitory, demands evolution and is powered by an overriding ability to awe. I succumbed, instead, to watching the past fall away — the expedition's, yours, mine — as she consistently succeeded in drawing me into her overwhelming present.

Yet as I sat in my Pine Canyon campsite among Big Bend National Park's Chisos Mountains complex, my first stop, I read my own sense of place described precisely as I was feeling it, only in handwriting of a hundred years ago:

Well, this is all different and even more wonderful than I had tho't it would be, Fuertes wrote from his own Pine Canyon camp less than a mile from mine. I wish I could describe so you could see it, this magnificent place. The deep lovely colors of the rocks, covered in places with a light green moss, but for the most part some tone of light gray, deep brown or rich cinnabar red, towering up out of the high banks of broken slide rock, the rich green of the forested parts, the lovely yellow stretch of grass grown

"bottom" reaching down between the enclosing ridges to the mouth of the valley, which is blocked by a blue mountain, and beyond the broad hazy valley 15 or 20 miles the filmy outline of the Mexican Boquillas (Carmen range) Mountains—the color of the palest blue morning glory.

Memory, however unreliable, is a persistence of vision. I accept that the view from Pine Canyon is far inferior now after 100 years of industrial particles and combustion travel have diffused what was no doubt unspoiled for Fuertes. Too often these days, his blue of the Sierra del Carmens is blanched white or tinged a sullen brown. But in my Pine Canyon mind's eye and the images it retains from each of my hikes through it, the essence at least, if not the view, always holds the same clarity that Fuertes described. And during those moments of clarity, the mountains' pale blue is truly of a glorious origin.

...and at night, Fuertes continues, for me, when the big southern moon comes coolly up from behind her great mountain and floods the cañon and valley with soft light, and the owls and whippoorwills and other night-lovers come out and give it all a new and unsolved life, it makes me long to have some power to get your senses, at least, down here to help me hold it.

Fuertes gathered 58 species of birds in Pine Canyon, approximately a sixth of the total bird specimens he would collect for the survey. He skinned and stuffed them all, using some as models for his paintings. In my lazy two-day meandering through the canyon I spotted perhaps a dozen species and, by adding them to my list from previous birding forays into Pine, I could total perhaps 24 or so. But that is not to say that all of Fuertes' 58 species don't still inhabit the canyon at times throughout the year. It is to our history's credit that less than 30 years after the survey ended, the U.S. government began the process of preserving Pine Canyon and its attendant wildlife for all mankind. Today, the combined area of Big Bend National Park, TPWD's Big Bend Ranch State Park and Black Gap Wildlife Management Area represents more than 1,000,000 acres of the southern Trans-Pecos that we have managed to preserve so far. This wilderness corridor provides a

haven for many of our remaining Trans-Pecos species, and, perhaps just as importantly, it hosts a platform of contemplation for our own place in the natural world.

I DON'T THINK, IN ALL THE SEASONS WE SPENT HUNTING, WE EVER SAW A SINGLE GOLDEN EAGLE.



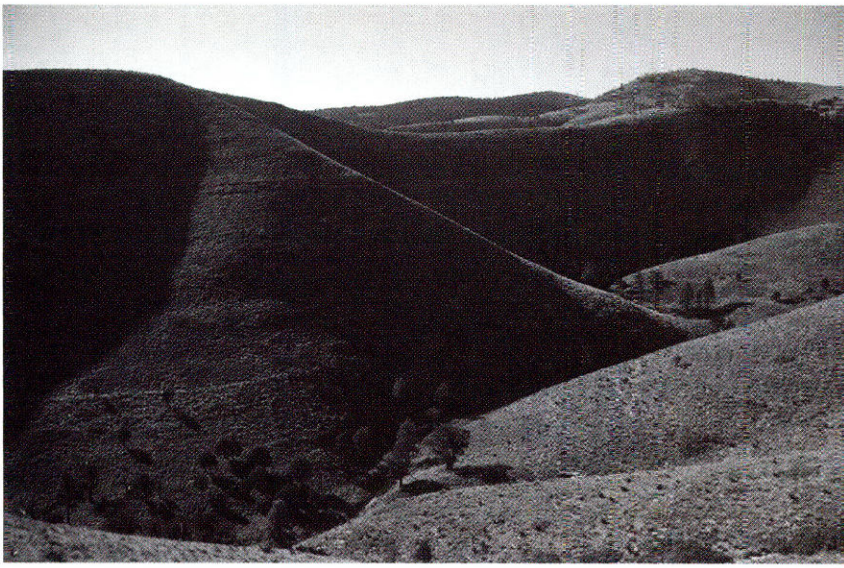
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALTON LANGFORD



MY INTENTION IN TAKING THIS VOYAGE WAS TO REVIEW WHAT HAS STAYED THE SAME IN THE LAST 100 YEARS.



PHOTOS © E. DAN KLEPPER



I DISCOVERED THAT NATURE IS RESISTANT TO STASIS ...

Following in Fuertes' tracks, I traveled north towards the Davis range. Halfway, I passed by Elephant Mountain, a chief icon in the desert profile of my external (and internal) geographies. After reading Fuertes' own encounter with it I am somewhat confident that, due to efforts by the state's Elephant Mountain Wildlife Management Area grass restoration plans, much of Fuertes' view has begun to return.

That day we passed thro' a lovely grassy country, Fuertes recounts, and up past the big Santiago Peak and Elephant Mesa, over immense old lakebeds, covered with dense grass, mostly dead and dried to a nearly blue-white which looked very like water, through half shut eyes.

I believe that Elephant is akin to its namesake more for memory than for shape. It doesn't look much like an elephant, but it is, without a doubt, unforgettable. Just as Fuertes states, and perhaps as you, Dad, remember it also, the mountain's visage casts a sense of calm over the viewer, appearing like an island above an ocean mirage and, at times, even becoming the sea itself.

Thanks to an aggressive partnership between TPWD and the Texas Bighorn Society, Elephant is also the home of a Texas bighorn sheep restoration program. The restoration is necessary today because, as expedition leader Vernon Bailey warned, our native sheep population declined steadily a scant few years after the survey ended.

It is with some hesitation that I make public these facts as to the abundance, distribution, and habits of mountain sheep in western Texas, Bailey recorded, and only in the hope that a full knowledge of the conditions and the importance of protective measures may result in the salvation instead of extermination of the species. It would not be difficult for a single persistent hunter to kill every mountain sheep in western Texas if unrestrained. Not only should the animals be protected by law, but the law should be made effective by an appreciation on the part of residents of the country of the importance of preserving for

all time these splendid animals.

Texas bighorn sheep were all but extirpated within a short 50 years after living among the mountains of the Trans-Pecos for thousands. The decline occurred just as Bailey feared, leaving the responsibility to Texas biologists to restore some semblance of what Texans once had.

But you and I both know that efforts to create a future from the past are foiled as much by the things that must change as by the things that refuse to do so. The experiences had by Bailey, Fuertes and the rest of the expedition team created an hourglass of memory for them even as they tried to capture and preserve each one accurately. Perhaps they believed that by writing them down and sharing them with their loved ones back home that they would create, beyond collected specimens and maintained lists, more than just a record of their astonishing adventures. They could demarcate, as all original trailbusters do, each watermark event that would later enable them to sit down and understand just exactly what pathways brought them to their place in life. But they also seem to know that nature's experiences are ultimately ephemeral, and that one can only do his or her best to capture them and then, in sharing them, keep them vivid somehow for just a bit longer. And also to lament, if only a little, that the opportunity to share life and its gifts never seems to come quite soon enough.

We have got so many things to tell and hear, all of us, Fuertes writes to his family, that had much better not wait any longer than necessary — in my own case, at least, my experiences drift so rapidly into their ranks as past events — and once there they are so reluctant to come out and show themselves in their true fullness, that I fear that unless I can see

you soon the best will be lost.

Fuertes and "the outfit" (as he liked to call the expedition) spent their time in the Davis Mountains collecting a catalogue of specimens including panther and bear skulls. While hiking below Mount Livermore, the second highest peak in Texas, I made my own discovery of a panther skull. The bone apparently had remained in place for dozens of years; at least the soft green lichens spreading across the crown indicated as much. Like you, Dad, I have been fortunate enough to see the big cat alive and wild, if only for a fleeting moment in that heart-stopping way nature presents itself, and with enough frequency to fear for their extinction less than for those species I never see.

Camping a stone's throw from what constitutes today's Davis Mountains State Park, Fuertes appropriated four new bird records for Texas and seven new ones to add to his personal list. The red-shafted flicker, a new tanager, a new bluebird, a new chic-a-dee, a new nuthatch and a new blue-jay were the most important ones, he reported. The Davis Mountains have remained that way — often proffering up a few new species to the diligent birder's life list with each foray into their pristine cañons.

Fuertes moved north from the Davis complex to the Guadalupe Mountains, the limestone cliffs that provide perhaps the most dramatic profile of all the Texas mountain ranges. He skirted our state's highest point, Guadalupe Peak, preferring,

IT IS WITH SOME HESITATION THAT I MAKE PUBLIC THESE FACTS ABOUT THE ABUNDANCE OF THE BIGHORN SHEEP.



as I do, to explore Dog Canyon at the northern end of the range.

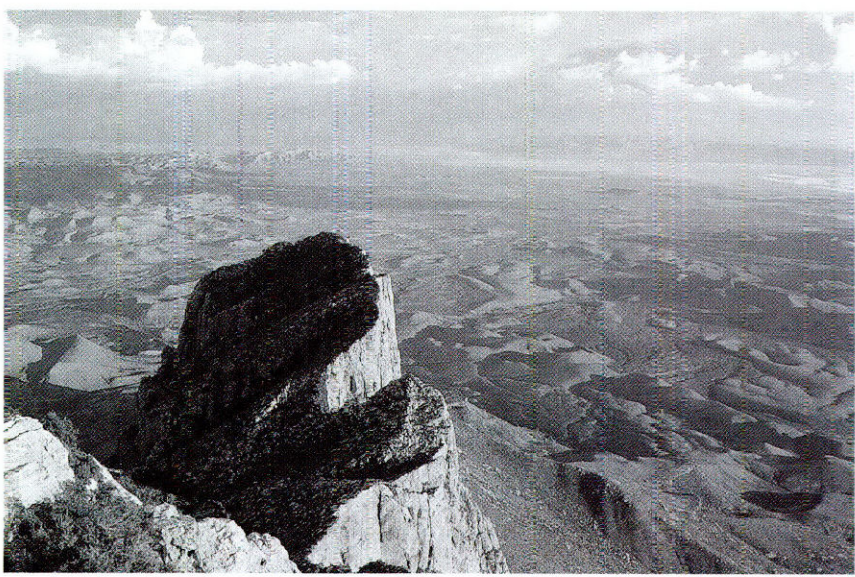
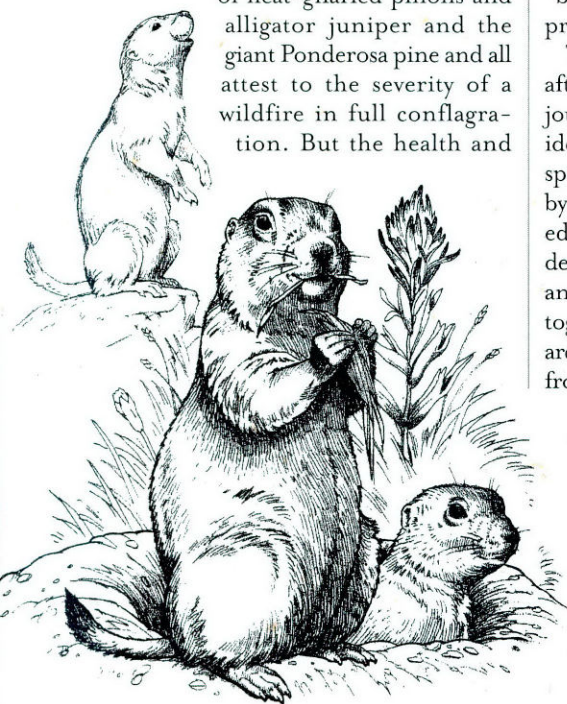
It is a long cañon — 20 miles or more — and we are now at the end of it, just across the Texas line, and in splendid country, Fuertes wrote. We are at 6,900 feet and can see down the cañon the whole length — towards the South the cañon forks into three and all head within a very few miles, and the tops of the ridge there, and the gulches at the head are heavily timbered with juniper, spruce, oak, and yellow pine. There are chipmunks there and robins, two jays, five woodpeckers, pigeons, and a lot of fine small birds including the rufous hummer that I got in Alaska. There are plenty of Mt. Sheep and black tale deer in the next cañon west, and we saw fresh antelope tracks crossing the road 10 miles north of here when we came in.

I doubt Fuertes would recognize the country leading up to Dog Canyon from the north with its plethora of gas wells and oil rigs and rarely a patch of grass remaining for the most arduous of livestock. Fuertes speculated that the canyon's name came from the big prairie-dog towns all along the first part of it. The dogs have yet to shake their reputation as vermin with many Texas landowners, a perception that also prevailed in Fuertes' time.

But once in the canyon proper, at the head of the canyon's trident split and well within the protection of the Guadalupe Mountains National Park, Fuertes might recall much of his old haunt.

We have a bully camp here, 1 mile from the 'head', in a high pasture—or orchard like level overlooking the valley grown over rather openly with fine junipers and an occasional big yellow pine, Fuertes wrote. The grass is splendid...

Some of the health of our high Texas country is due to the embrace of a management tool that has come back into play after almost 100 years of villainy — fire. Dog Canyon harbors the blackened bark of heat-gnarled piñons and alligator juniper and the giant Ponderosa pine and all attest to the severity of a wildfire in full conflagration. But the health and



... AND DISDAINFUL OF OUR DESIRE FOR ALL THINGS TO REMAIN THE SAME.

abundance of new vegetation, not to mention the wealth of birds — including the once elusive golden eagle, a hunting kestrel and a rambunctious flock of indigo buntings — are no doubt happy with the results. I certainly was, as my Dog Canyon foray became the most restorative of my ventures. I discovered a renewed confidence in our efforts to preserve the remnants of our Texas nature. You may rib me for my optimism, Dad, as you were always the pragmatist, but I can only believe that the commitment of those dedicated to the fundamental preservation of our natural world will ultimately displace the apathy that continues to work against their efforts. To believe otherwise these days would only lead to despair. My trek left me with a hope and an invigoration of the kind that only nature, in its entire "bully splendor," as Fuertes might say, can provide.

The survey continued on for 4 more years after Fuertes completed his Trans-Pecos journey. Field agents ultimately collected, identified and preserved more than 5,000 specimens of mammals, birds and reptiles by survey's end. Collateral material included travel journals, landowner correspondence, detailed observations of the biology and hundreds of black and white photographs of Texas landscapes. Today, this archive provides a clear and concise baseline from which all of Texas fauna can be mea-

sured. It is our past, and, drawing from its wealth of knowledge and its lessons, we can continue to direct our future.

Fuertes left Texas after completing his Trans-Pecos journey and returned happily to his family in Ithaca, New York. I returned home as well, to Marathon, and took up my usual routine of dawn jogs and dusk birding forays along the road to Iron Mountain, just a few miles behind the house. In a pleasant moment of serendipity, I discovered that I could have easily written the same words to you that Fuertes wrote to his own father from his Marathon camp 100 years ago. It seems, at least here, some things have not really changed much after all.

I am still well-supplied, and find the ground and the open air good incentives to a hard sleep and an early rise ... There are some very sweet singers that keep going from dusk in the a.m. till dusk at night, and poorwills and horned owls are "doing" at night, so the place is always able to keep up its impression of newness and wildness. ... There is a nice breeze nearly every day, which keeps it from being very hot, generally. I walked over to Iron Mountain the other day, though, (as I guess I told you) and it was terribly hot and dry coming home in the p.m., as it was heading up somewhere else for a thunderstorm, and we got the still, heavy bake of it.

Well, ol' Dad, a "bully" thunderstorm has "headed up" near the house rather than somewhere else this afternoon, bringing a cooler breeze and sweeping away the "still, heavy bake." The grasses will be all the richer for it and the birds along Iron Mountain Road should be "doing" their best by the time I take my dusk constitutional. Perhaps we can enjoy this walk together someday or at least in someplace like it where the birds are always plentiful, nature is unfettered by human folly and the memory of loved ones no longer wears so heavily on the heart.

Until then I remain your loving son,
E. Dan ★

THE CANYON'S NAME CAME FROM THE BIG PRAIRIE DOG TOWNS ALL ALONG THE FIRST PART OF IT.

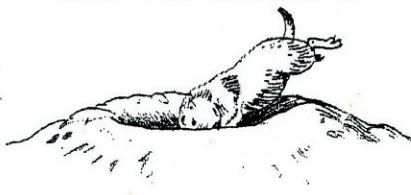


PHOTO © C. L. EDMISTON III



DAN KLEPPER

This legendary outdoors writer built a reputation on his straightforward style and strong opinions.

By Bob Hood

When I met Dan Klepper in 1968 at a Texas Outdoor Writers Association meeting at Eagle Lake, he already was famous for his opinions. For a dozen years he had been expressing them eloquently as the outdoor writer for the *San Antonio Express-News*. His matter-of-fact questioning of state and federal wildlife officials over outdoors issues had established Klepper as a no-nonsense investigative reporter, and his dramatic writings about his adventures, people and wildlife as he traveled throughout Texas and beyond had left countless readers spellbound. Former governor Ann Richards, who went hunting with Klepper in 1992, remembered him as “a great Texan.”

Those first outdoor writer meetings were more social affairs than journalistic meetings of the minds. The “professionalism” was individually dispersed among the likes of Klepper, Ed Holder of the *Port Arthur News*, Roy Swann of the *Corpus Christi Caller Times*, George Kellam of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and John Thompson, formerly of the *Beaumont Enterprise* with whom I had recently teamed on the outdoors at the *Star-Telegram*.

Klepper, Kellam and Swann founded TOWA, said Thompson and Holder, and those first meetings actually were hunting and fishing trips geared toward having fun rather than discussing issues.

It didn't take long, though, for Klepper to change the mood. Klepper demanded respect if for no other reason than the fact that he rarely got into an argument but often settled one simply by voicing his opinion. And it was under his guidance that the TOWA gatherings soon evolved into genuine professional meetings to address important outdoor issues.

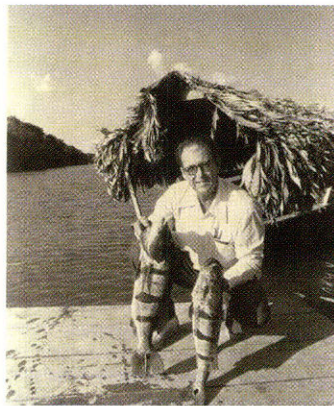
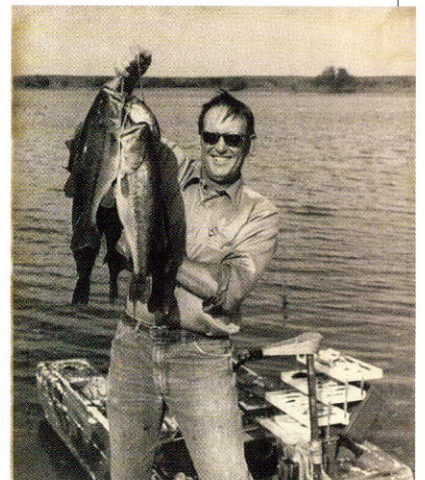
“One thing anyone who has been a Texas Parks and Wildlife commissioner or employee for the past 40 years can attest to is that Klepper could be their best friend or their worst enemy,” recalled Thompson. “Whatever it was, Dan had an opinion about it and he wasn't afraid to tell you what it was. His opinions and outlooks mirrored the common aspect of things. He didn't try to gloss anything up.”

Barry Robinson was sports editor of the *Express-News* when Klepper took over the outdoors beat in the mid-1950s, a job Robinson said Klepper got because no one else wanted the beat. “He became the legend of South Texas and he was no doubt the best writer we had at

the newspaper,” Robinson said.

Despite his straightforward approach to almost any outdoors issue, Klepper saw beyond the norm and was an advocate for changes when changes were overdue. One change involved the Texas state fish records.

Other than a 13 1/2-pound largemouth bass caught at Lake Medina in 1935 that was recognized at the time as a state record, there were no official listings. Klepper encouraged other TOWA writers to embark on a search-and-find mission to compile a list of all known catches that might be records.



A life outdoors: Clockwise from top left: The head shot for his column; a handful of fish from a South Texas tank; more than a match for this feral hog; fishing in South America, probably on the Orinoco. Opposite: Klepper with a South Texas rattler.



It worked, and soon TOWA established the first official list of state fish records. But Klepper didn't stop there. He later helped convince the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to accept full responsibility for recording and recognizing state record catches, using the TOWA list as a basis.

Underneath Klepper's shield of seriousness was a layer of uncanny humor no one could forget. And he loved nicknames.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF E. DAN KLEPPER

"He had a nickname for everyone," said Thompson, whom Klepper called "Admiral" and vice versa.

"We were together on a press trip at Lake LBJ for the opening of a resort and I decided to try my hand at operating a sail boat," Thompson recalled. "I flipped it over and they had to come rescue me. After that, Dan dubbed me 'Admiral.' Then a short while later we were in Florida and Dan was driving a boat when we hit a big wake and the boat turned over. After that, I started calling Klepper 'Admiral,' and from then on we both greeted each other with 'Hi, Admiral.' 'Hi Admiral.' "

Klepper was a devout family man and he loved Texas, particularly the Southwest Texas brush country, the Hill Country and far West Texas. His writings taught you that. Countless outdoors enthusiasts with only an inkling of such grand places found pleasure in taking a road trip with Klepper, riding on his words to places they longed to experience. The cost of the ticket was the price of a newspaper. The depth of the experience was the depth of the person's thoughts as Klepper carried each reader through the blackbrush, over the rugged juniper-covered hills and throughout the rock-thorn beauty of the Trans-Pecos.

It was in a rocky draw along the Dry Devil's River in West Texas in the early 1970s where I learned more about another side of Klepper. I learned about his deep passion and compassion for the wildlife he wrote about.

On that day, a hunter had wounded a javelina. The javelina escaped into a narrow cave at the bottom of a draw and everyone gathered around the entrance. Klepper's chin squared, as it often did when he was in thought and about to make a statement.

"We can't leave him in there wounded," Klepper said. In just seven words, Klepper had issued a challenge of responsibility no hunter should ever forget and one I certainly took to heart.

Looking first at Klepper, I asked, "Anyone got a flashlight and a .22?"

"I do," Klepper said. "But they are in my truck. Ed (Holder) and I will go get them."

Minutes later, Klepper and Holder arrived back at the mouth of the cave. Klepper not only had brought a flashlight and .22 revolver but also a handful of 5-ought hooks. But that was Klepper — always looking ahead.

"If you can't reach him after you've finished the job," Klepper said "we can tie these hooks to a stick and drag him out of the hole."

The .22, flashlight and hooks worked. I crawled into the hole, shot the javelina and pulled it out with the make-shift gaff Klepper had hastily rigged.

After the ordeal Klepper said little, which was not surprising. He just shook his head.

Later, I read about our hunt in Klepper's story in the *Express-News*. He had all the details, even to the part about how crazy any person would have to be to crawl into a cave with a wounded javelina. But that was Klepper. He shot it to you straight, the way he saw it.

If there were any one thing that irked Klepper, it was what he called "pseudo-environmentalists" who demanded the closing of a park, river or wilderness area for the sake of protecting a particular species of grasshopper, minnow or other such creature.

Klepper often blasted such people orally and in print. He once told a friend that when he passed away he wanted his body to be cremated and his ashes spread across Lost Maples State Park. When asked why, Klepper responded with something like: "I just want to make those environmentalists mad one last time."

Klepper's passing in 1993 came about calmly in his sleep. He knew he was fighting a losing battle with cancer and already had helped his editor choose his successor at the *Express-News*. Indeed, he was always thinking ahead, but that's just one part of the legacy of Dan Klepper that will long remain in the minds of those who knew him or read his words. ★

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CCC Reunion; shotgun cleaning; Texas State Railroad; grasslands; hidden rock art in Seminole Canyon.

Sept. 19 - Sept. 26:
Late-blooming volunteers; Huntsville State Park; the end of the Rio Grande; call of the chorus frog; trout stocking; sunset in Uvalde.

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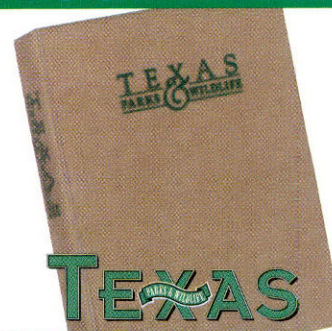
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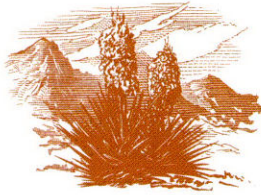
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BIG BEND COUNTRY

SEPTEMBER: Desert Garden Tours, Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center, Terlingua, call for dates, available for groups of six or more, reservations required, (432) 424-3327

SEPTEMBER: Boulderling Tours, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, every Wednesday through Sunday, reservations required, (915) 849-6684

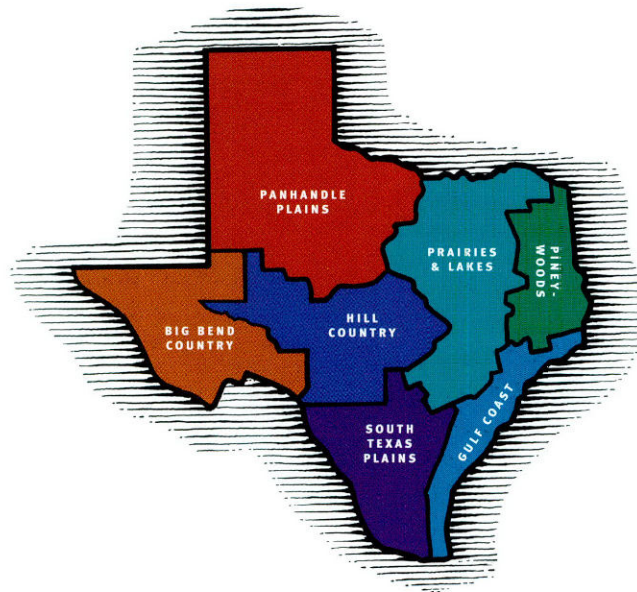
SEPTEMBER: Pictograph Tours, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, Wednesday through Sunday, reservations required, (915) 849-6684

SEPTEMBER: Fate Bell Cave Dwelling Tour, Seminole Canyon SP&HS, Comstock, every Wednesday through Sunday, (432) 292-4464

SEPTEMBER: White Shaman Tour, Seminole Canyon SP&HS, Comstock, every Saturday, (888) 525-9907

SEPTEMBER 1-30: Dove Hunts, Black Gap WMA, Alpine, current hunting license, Annual Hunting Permit and (if applicable) a current White-wing Dove Stamp required, call to confirm, (432) 376-2216 or (432) 837-3251

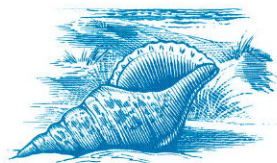
SEPTEMBER 1-30: Fishing on the Rio Grande, Black Gap WMA, Alpine, fishing license, an Annual Hunting or Limited Public Use Permit required, call to confirm, (432) 376-2216



For more detailed information on outdoor getaways across the state, visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us and click on "TPWD Events" in the center light blue area entitled "In the Parks."

SEPTEMBER 4-5, 18-19: Guided Tours, Franklin Mountains SP, El Paso, (915) 566-6441

SEPTEMBER 19: Birding Tours, Hueco Tanks SHS, El Paso, reservations required, (915) 849-6684



GULF COAST

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

SEPTEMBER: Exploring Sea Life, Galveston Island SP, Galveston, every Saturday, (409) 737-1222

SEPTEMBER: Aquarium and Hatchery Tours, Sea Center Texas, Lake Jackson, every Tuesday through Sunday, hatchery tours by reservation only, (979) 292-0100

SEPTEMBER: Marsh Airboat Tours, Sea Rim SP, Sabine Pass, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday, reservations required, (409) 971-2559

SEPTEMBER 4, 19: Beachcombing and Shelling Tour, Matagorda Island SP&WMA, Port O'Connor, reservations required, (361) 983-2215

SEPTEMBER 4, 25: Butterfly and Dragonfly Hike, Brazos Bend SP, Needville, (979) 553-5101

SEPTEMBER 4, 11, 17, 18, 25: Story Time, Sea Center Texas, Lake Jackson, (979) 292-0100

SEPTEMBER 5: History Tour, Matagorda Island SP&WMA, Port O'Connor, reservations required, (361) 983-2215

SEPTEMBER 11: Wild Boar Safari, Fennessey Ranch, Bayside, reservations required, (361) 529-6600

SEPTEMBER 11: Candle Making Demonstration, Varner-Hogg Plantation SHS, West Columbia, (979) 345-4656

SEPTEMBER 11-12: Texas Gatorfest 2004, Anahuac,

(409) 736-2540

SEPTEMBER 11-13: Archery Only Alligator Hunt, J.D. Murphree WMA, Port Arthur, specialized equipment is necessary, reservations required, (409) 736-2540

SEPTEMBER 17-19: Hummingbird Hayride Tours, Fennessey Ranch, Bayside, reservations required, (361) 529-6600

SEPTEMBER 18: Fall Adopt-A-Beach Cleanup, Sea Rim SP, Sabine Pass, (409) 971-2559

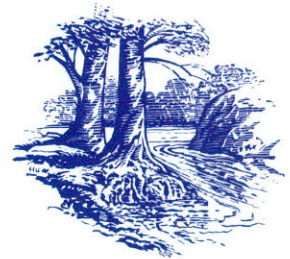
SEPTEMBER 19: Bird Watching Hikes, Brazos Bend SP, Needville, (979) 553-5101

SEPTEMBER 19, 26: Bird Walk, Galveston Island SP, Galveston, (409) 737-1222

SEPTEMBER 24: Friday Morning Bird Watching Hikes, Brazos Bend SP, Needville, (979) 553-5101

SEPTEMBER 24: World Birding Center, Seabirds of the Gulf of Mexico, South Padre Island, reservations required, (956) 584-9156.

SEPTEMBER 25: Fall Migration Hawk Watch, Fennessey Ranch, Bayside, reservations required, (361) 529-6600



HILL COUNTRY

SEPTEMBER: Walking Wild Cave Tour, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, every Saturday and Sunday, reservations recom-

mended, (325) 628-3240

SEPTEMBER: Summer Bat Flight Tours, Devil's Sinkhole SNA, Rock Springs, every Wednesday through Sunday evening, reservations required, (830) 683-BATS

SEPTEMBER: Interpretive Program, Guadalupe River SP, Spring Branch, every Saturday, (830) 438-2656

SEPTEMBER: Saturday Morning Interpretive Walk, Honey Creek SNA, Spring Branch, every Saturday, (830) 438-2656

SEPTEMBER: Wild Cave Tour, Longhorn Cavern SP, Burnet, every Saturday, reservations required, (877) 441-2283

SEPTEMBER 3: Range and Wildlife Seminar, Kerr WMA, Hunt, reservations required, (830) 238-4483

SEPTEMBER 3: Texas State Parks Slide Show, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223

SEPTEMBER 4: Crawling Wild Cave Tour, Colorado Bend SP, Bend, reservations recommended, (325) 628-3240

SEPTEMBER 4: Bat Flights at Stuart Bat Cave, Kickapoo Cavern SP, Brackettville, reservations required, (830) 563-2342

SEPTEMBER 4-5: Island Assault 1944 Living History Program, Admiral Nimitz SHS-National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, (830) 997-4379

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

SEPTEMBER 9: Devil's Waterhole Canoe Tour, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, reservations required, (512) 793-2223

SEPTEMBER 11, 12: Guided Hikes, Bright Leaf SNA, Austin, (512) 459-7269

SEPTEMBER 11, 25: Simple Sounds Concert in the Cave, Longhorn Cavern SP, Burnet, reservations required, (877) 441-2283

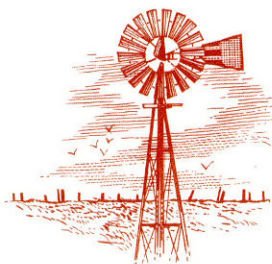
SEPTEMBER 18: Trail Project, Enchanted Rock SNA, Fredericksburg, reservations recommended for large groups, (325) 247-3903

SEPTEMBER 18: Bluegrass Music in the Park, Inks Lake SP, Burnet, (512) 793-2223

SEPTEMBER 18: Castroville Pioneer Day, Landmark Inn SHS, Castroville, (830) 931-2133

SEPTEMBER 18-19: Annual Symposium: The Battle of

Leyte Gulf-Greatest Naval Battle of the 20th Century, Admiral Nimitz SHS-National Museum of the Pacific War, Fredericksburg, (830) 997-8600



PANHANDLE PLAINS

SEPTEMBER: Campfire Tails, Abilene SP, Tuscola, (325) 572-3204

SEPTEMBER 3: Canyon Critters, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, (806) 488-2227

SEPTEMBER 4: Bison Seminar, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, (325) 949-4757

SEPTEMBER 11: Palo Duro Canyon Legacy 2004, Palo Duro Canyon SP, Canyon, reservations required, (806) 378-3096

SEPTEMBER 17-19: Living History Re-enactment, Fort Griffin SP&HS, Albany, (325) 762-3592

SEPTEMBER 18: Sun Fun and Star Walk, Copper Breaks SP, Quanah, (940) 839-4331

SEPTEMBER 25: Stargazing Party, San Angelo SP, San Angelo, (325) 949-4757

SEPTEMBER 26: Harvest Saturday, Big Spring SP, Big Spring, (432) 263-4931



PINEYWOODS

SEPTEMBER: Walk on the Wild Side, Martin Dies, Jr. SP, Jasper, every Sunday, (409) 384-5231

SEPTEMBER 3, 17: Nature Slide Program, Village Creek SP, Lumberton, reservations required, (409) 755-7322

SEPTEMBER 4: Fireside Storytelling, Mission Tejas SP,

Grapeland, (936) 687-2394

SEPTEMBER 4-5: Kids Ride Free, Texas State Railroad SP, Rusk, reservations recommended, (800) 442-8951

SEPTEMBER 4, 25: Snakes Alive, Tyler SP, Tyler, (903) 597-5338

SEPTEMBER 11: Owls, Tyler SP, Tyler, (903) 597-5338

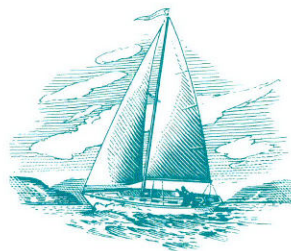
SEPTEMBER 11, 25: Guided Nature Trail Hike, Village Creek SP, Lumberton, reservations required, (409) 755-7322

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

SEPTEMBER 18: Pioneer Tools, Toys and Games, Mission Tejas SP, Grapeland, (936) 687-2394

SEPTEMBER 18: Raccoons, Tyler SP, Tyler, (903) 597-5338

SEPTEMBER 19: Archeology Tour, Grapeland, (936) 687-2394



PRAIRIES & LAKES

SEPTEMBER: Nature Programs, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, every Saturday, (972) 291-5940

SEPTEMBER: Yegua and Nails Creek Canoe Tours, Lake Somerville SP & Trailway/Nails Creek Unit, Ledbetter, every Thursday and Saturday, reservations required, (979) 535-7763

SEPTEMBER: Kriesche Brewery Tours, Monument Hill & Kriesche Brewery SHS, LaGrange, every Saturday and Sunday, weather permitting, (979) 968-5658

SEPTEMBER: Campfire Programs, Ray Roberts Lake SP/Isle du Bois Unit, Pilot Point, every Saturday, (940) 686-2148

SEPTEMBER 4: Guided Nature Hike, Cooper Lake SP/South Sulphur Unit, Sulphur Springs, (903) 395-3100

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

SEPTEMBER 11: Stargazing Party, Ray Roberts Lake SP/Isle du Bois Unit, Pilot Point, (940) 686-2148

SEPTEMBER 18: Guided Nature Hike, Cooper Lake SP/Doctors Creek Unit, Cooper, (903) 395-3100

SEPTEMBER 18: Sunset Safari and Dinner, Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, Glen Rose, reservations required, (817) 897-2960 Ext. 0

SEPTEMBER 25: 4th Annual Trail Ride, Cedar Hill SP, Cedar Hill, registration required, (972) 291-5940

SEPTEMBER 25-26: A Stitch in Time, Barrington Living History Farm-Washington-on-the-Brazos SHS, Washington, (936) 878-2213

SEPTEMBER 25: Big Fish Bluegill Tournament, Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center, Athens, (903) 676-BASS



SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

SEPTEMBER: Birding Walk, Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, Mission, every Wednesday, (956) 585-1107

SEPTEMBER: Owl Prowl, Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, Mission, every Saturday, (956) 585-1107

SEPTEMBER: World Birding Center Interpretive Tram Tours, Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, Mission, every Saturday and Sunday, (956) 585-1107

SEPTEMBER 25-26: Leave No Trace Course, Government Canyon SNA, San Antonio, reservations required, (210)

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SNA	State Natural Area
WMA	Wildlife Management Area
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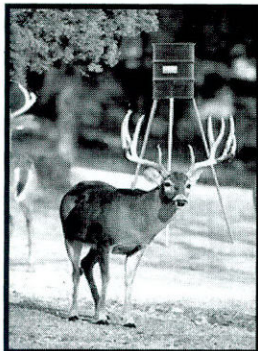
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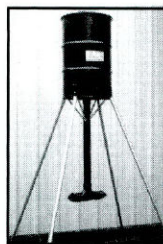
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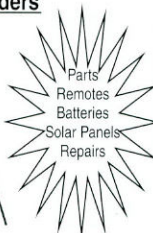
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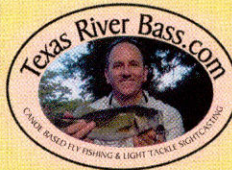
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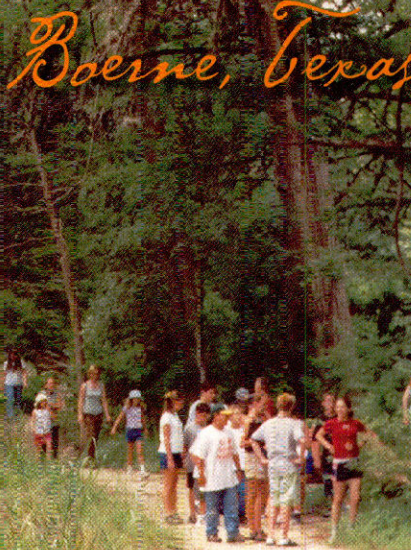
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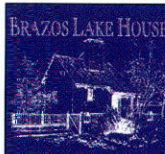
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PARTINGSHOT

Sea Dog: "Frida loves to go camping on the beach," explains photographer Erich Schlegel about his family's half German shepherd, half chow. "We got her the doggy backpack for Christmas so she can help carry the rods." Frida learned to swim in the Guadalupe River, but still takes the plunge into the surf. What's her favorite coastal activity? Turns out it might be chasing coyotes down the beach at Port Mansfield.



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