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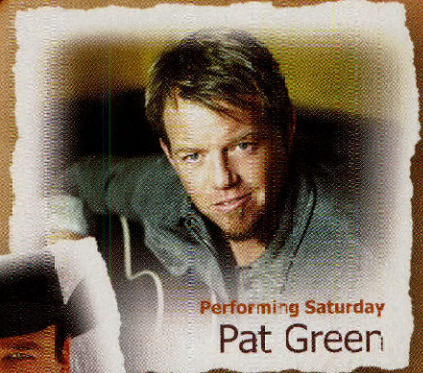
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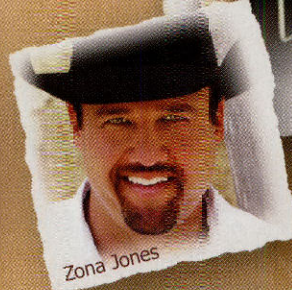
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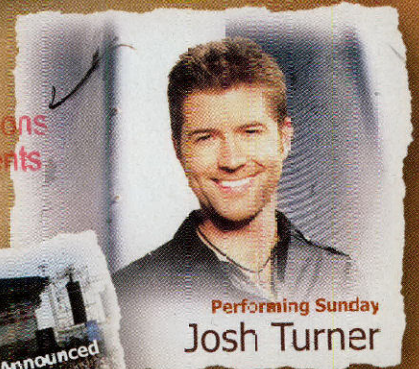
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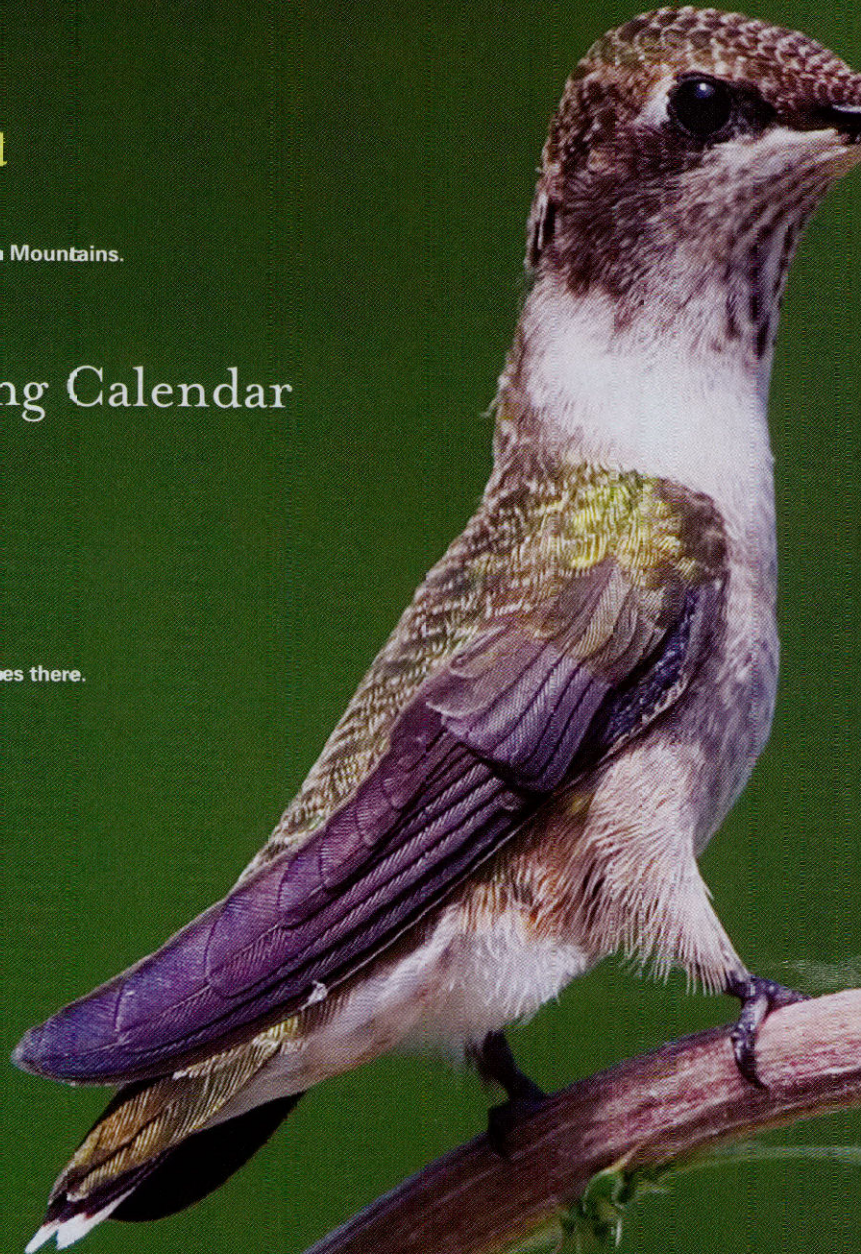
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S-s-s-snakes Alive!

Without them in the world, we'd be in big trouble.



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For the latest information on Texas' parks and wildlife,
visit the department's Web site: www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

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PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER

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Photo © Carolyn Whiteside.

TEXAS

THE OUTDOOR MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

AUGUST 2009, VOL. 67, NO. 8

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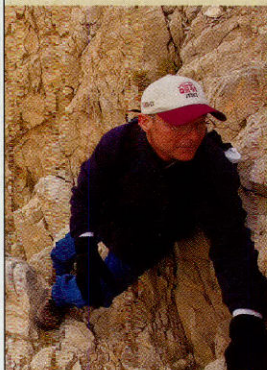
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In the Field

JOE NICK PATOSKI took TP&W readers along on a Big Bend hike with photographer Laurence Parent a few years ago, and now the duo let us vicariously experience their latest adventure, a grueling hike across the ridge of the Franklin Mountains. He first saw the range from his dorm window as a freshman in college. "These mountains challenge hikers like no other range,"



Joe Nick says. "The mountains are what makes El Paso El Paso and distinguish the city from the rest of Texas." Joe Nick's latest biography, *Willie Nelson: An Epic Life* (Little, Brown), won the TCU Texas Book Award for the best book written about Texas in 2007-08 and was released in paperback last spring. Up next is a cultural history of the Dallas Cowboys.

LAURENCE PARENT was trained as an engineer before becoming a full-time nature photographer and writer. He has worked for many magazines and has written and/or photographed 37 books, including three with Joe Nick Patoski — *Texas Mountains*, *Texas Coast* and *Big Bend National Park*. *Big River: Rio Grande* and a revised *Hiking Texas* will be coming out this fall. He and Joe Nick did their first adventure, backpacking all the way across Big Bend, when Joe Nick not only didn't try to talk him out of the idea, but wanted to go. Hiking the spine of the Franklin Mountains can be blamed on Joe Nick, but Laurence was foolish enough to go along. No doubt another adventure will be coming soon. Laurence's photos can be viewed at www.laurenceparent.com.



FIAN ARROYO has been creating award-winning illustrations for 20 years now. What first began as something to do until he grew up has blossomed into a full-time career from getting a "real job." His work has been sought after by many companies such as Taco Bell, Pace, Disney,



U.S. News & World Report and many others. But his all-time favorite gig is for this magazine's children's feature, "Keep Texas Wild," where he gets to draw what he loves drawing most ... animals. When not drawing, Fian can usually be found fishing on the beach, "catching air" at a skateboard park or playing his electric guitars really loud. As Fian says: "Life is short ... have fun!"

AT ISSUE

FROM THE PEN OF CARTER P. SMITH

He always spoke for the trees — the sweetgums, the longleaf pines, the bur oaks, the shagbark hickories, the white oaks and the water oaks. He spoke for them all, all of the time. It is an appropriate epitaph for the late Ned Fritz, one of Texas' most prominent citizen conservationists and forest advocates, who passed away at the ripe old age of 92 late last year.

For those unfamiliar with Mr. Fritz, one has to look no further than the lands and waters of the Big Thicket National Preserve, the laws promulgated by the Texas Wilderness Act and the National Forest Management Act, and conservation organizations now known as the Texas Conservation Alliance and the Texas Lands Conservancy. He was a driving force behind the creation of all of them. Mr. Fritz, an attorney by profession and an avowed environmentalist by avocation, was an indomitable force in Texas conservation circles for the last three decades or so. And his passion, unbridled to be sure, was the preservation of nature.

As you will read in the accompanying article by Wendee Holtcamp, Mr. Fritz accomplished much and inspired many. Not that he cared much, however, but to be fair, he also angered more than a few along the way. His willingness to litigate and his outspoken views for wilderness preservation and against clear cutting, prescribed fire and other commonly employed forest management tools made him an unwelcome guest in more than a few East Texas timber camps, sawmills and Forest Service offices. I myself recall at least two occasions in which he took me to task for my advocacy of management techniques that he felt were inconsistent with letting nature take its course.

But that was just Ned. He was living proof of the old aphorism, "If you aren't occasionally making someone mad, you probably aren't doing anything." So, whether one agreed or disagreed with Mr. Fritz's positions or actions, one could never accuse him of lying behind the log.

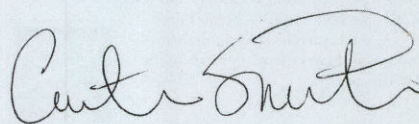
Fortunately, Texas is full of impassioned conservationists who aren't content to lie behind the log. You can find them heralding the importance of private lands stewardship, the future of our bobwhite quail, the need to get children in nature, the protection of recharge zones atop the Edwards Aquifer, the conservation of our seagrass meadows, the health of our rivers and the virtues of our parks, open spaces and greenbelts.

Some are carrying rod and reel, and others a shotgun, a day pack, a camera, a set of field guides or a pair of binoculars. Some are atop a kayak or mountain bike and still others are behind the wheel of a pickup.

Ours is a big state with a lot to care for. We need them all.

Thanks for being one of them. Texas wild places and wild things need you more than ever.

But that was just Ned. He was living proof of the old aphorism, "If you aren't occasionally making someone mad, you probably aren't doing anything."



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OUTDOOR NOTES

FROM TEXAS GOVERNOR RICK PERRY

There is no better place to start a business or raise a family than Texas. People and businesses across that nation are taking notice as more than 1,000 people move here each day and we have become home to more Fortune 500 companies than any other state. This is a testament to sound policies that have opened the doors of opportunity for our citizens.

With this growth, our cities are ever expanding, but the future of our urban culture is closely tied to rural Texas. Urban areas depend on farms and ranches for food, rivers and aquifers for clean water, and natural gas, coal and wind for energy. Rural Texas also provides diverse and abundant wildlife, a profitable nature tourism industry and outdoor recreation opportunities essential to maintaining the high quality of life that Texans enjoy.

Unfortunately, our state's famed wide-open spaces are increasingly threatened by expanding suburban development. While this is unavoidable given our state's growth, we must take the steps necessary to preserve our proud rural heritage. I am confident we can continue to move our state forward in the global economy without compromising the beauty and benefits provided by our natural landscapes.

More than 90 percent of Texas land is privately owned. Thankfully many of our state's rural landowners work hard to maintain healthy ecosystems and abundant wildlife on their property.

Each spring, these individuals, known as private land stewards, are honored through the Lone Star Land Steward Awards, created by TPWD in 1996 and supported since 2005 by the Sand County Foundation.

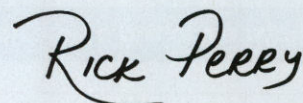
This year's top honor, the Leopold Conservation Award for Texas, went to Bamberger Ranch Preserve, west of Austin. Through solid, smart land stewardship and four decades of patience, this 5,500-acre ranch was transformed from rocky and eroded pastures to lush, green meadows where dry creeks and springs began to flow again. Utilizing methods like invasive cedar removal, native grass replanting, prescribed fire and light, rotational cattle grazing, owner David Bamberger and his staff are a testament to how overgrazed and damaged land can be successfully restored.

Ranches like Bamberger's are also agents of broader positive change, places where interested persons come to learn. They also provide restorative settings where urban dwellers, particularly families and children, can reconnect with nature.

To compliment efforts that preserve our private land, this session I signed House Joint Resolution 14, allowing Texans to vote on a constitutional amendment to strengthen landowner rights this November. If passed, this amendment will achieve unprecedented protection of private property by placing protections against government abuse of eminent domain directly into the Texas Constitution.

The passage of a constitutional amendment protecting landowners, combined with the hard work and dedicated stewardship of Texas' private landowners, will be a powerful force in ensuring our prized and diverse landscapes are protected for the benefit and enjoyment of all Texans.

I am confident we can continue to move our state forward in the global economy without compromising the beauty and benefits provided by our natural landscapes.



RICK PERRY
TEXAS GOVERNOR

Texas Governor Rick Perry writes about outdoor issues four times a year for Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine.

MAIL CALL

PICKS, PANS AND PROBES FROM OUR READERS

LETTERS

DON'T TRAMPLE FRAGILE BEAUTIES

I thoroughly enjoy your magazine and look forward to receiving it each month. I always have a list of new places to visit once I'm done reading it.

Having read "Fragile Beauties" in the July 2009 issue, I need to respond. I wish that Colorado Bend State Park Ranger Kevin Ferguson was correct when he said that so far park visitors have been respectful of the boundaries around Gorman Falls.

My husband and I have camped at Colorado Bend several times, the last time in early May after the falls were opened to all. We were extremely disappointed to see several park visitors climbing all over the fragile falls.

One couple had obviously planned on climbing in the falls. They changed from hiking shoes into water shoes to traipse all over the fragile area with their two huge dogs, who dislodged much vegetation.

In another group, a father led his two children and wife up the falls. Later he took just the kids back up while the wife smoked a cigarette and stepped over the warning signs to take family pictures with her cell phone.

My husband and I were stunned to see such blatant disregard for the falls. I can understand why the park wanted to open the falls to all, and we certainly enjoyed being able to hike there together. But if Gorman Falls is to exist in the future, I think the park officials might want to rethink allowing total access. I'm certain that the groups I saw are not the only ones who have violated the rules.

SUZANNE HURLEY

Austin

TPWD RESPONDS: Dan Sholly, TPWD deputy director of state parks, says: "We are sorry to hear that you observed blatant disregard for the rules at Gorman Falls. I hope you reported your observations to the park staff. We will review our signing and information about use of the area. Our general expe-

rience in places such as Gorman Falls, which are closed to the public with very limited access, is that violators tend to be the only ones to see the resource and they have little fear of being found out or noticed. Generally speaking, the public are some of our best guardians of such wonderful resources, by their mere presence. Unfortunately, there is a small percentage of people who have little regard for public treasures."

AMOS INSPIRED YOUNG NATURALIST

I was very amazed to open up your magazine here in Wyoming and find an old friend, Tony Amos ("Old Man and the Sea"), in your April issue. What a wonderful story. I had the great privilege of working with Tony on an oceanographic cruise to Antarctica early in my career in 1973.

I am a Wyoming state nongame biol-

ogist. Eventually the love of birds that Tony inspired in so many of us resulted in a career change for me. I really enjoy your magazine.

SUSAN PATLA

Wyoming

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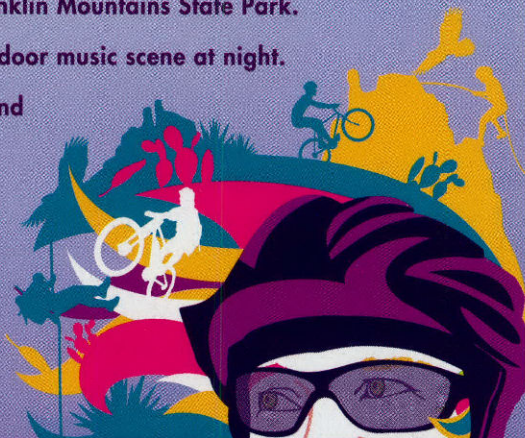
During the day, rock climb at Hueco Tanks or hike rugged terrain at Franklin Mountains State Park.

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SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

LADYBUG LOOKOUT

Help researchers figure out why numbers of this beloved insect are down.



Argus tortoise beetle

On a bookshelf in her bedroom, Miranda Mendoza keeps live ladybugs in baby food jars. But only for a few days. “I feed them aphids, take notes and photograph them,” says the Mount Pleasant teen. “Then I let them go in our garden, where I found them.”

So what’s up with a 14-year-old hunting insects? Mendoza is part of a citizen science project that’s surveying ladybug species across Texas and the rest of North America. Started five

years ago in a few New York public schools, the Lost Ladybug Project — led by entomologists at Cornell University — went coast to coast last year, funded by a \$2 million grant from the National Science Foundation.

Using digital images submitted by Mendoza and other volunteers, researchers hope to figure out why native species — particularly nine-spotted (*Coccinella novemnotata*), two-spotted (*Adalia bipunctata*), and traverse ladybugs (*Coc-*

cinella transversoguttata) — are declining. Conversely, numbers of introduced species, namely the multicolored Asian ladybug (*Harmonia axyridis*), have risen.

“Ladybugs are important — in both managed and natural ecological systems — in suppressing populations of aphids, mealybugs and other insects that eat plants,” explains John Losey, Cornell’s lead investigator. “But each species of ladybugs has a different job in terms of what they eat and where

PHOTOS © CLIVE VARLACK



Clockwise from top left: ladybug beetle egg cluster with visible larvae; ladybug beetle larva foraging; nine-spotted ladybug beetle perched at the tip of a pine needle; ladybug hatchlings.

they lay their eggs. So the more diversity we have of native species, the better job they do."

Of the 450-plus North American species, approximately 136 occur in Texas. Most species are small and drab. Only 70 species (22 in Texas) have the familiar bright wings (ranging from red to yellow) that are often marked with black spots or other patterns.

Want to help? Grab your camera and shoot any ladybugs you can find (this makes a great classroom project). Then upload the images to www.lostladybug.org. An attached data form will ask for the date, time and place where you found your specimen. Check out the Web site for more info on ladybugs (they're beetles, not bugs) plus tips on how to catch and photograph them (the more images you send, the better). Later, your name and photos will be added to an online listing of contributors. The numbers grow daily!

If you're lucky, you might even make ladybug history. In 2006, two children collected a nine-spotted ladybug in their Arlington, Virginia, yard — the first sighting of one in more than 14 years!

Overall though, citizen scientists so far aren't finding many native lady-

bugs. Of 2,100 specimens submitted (60 from Texas), 53 percent are introduced species. Despite the bleak numbers, researchers remain upbeat.

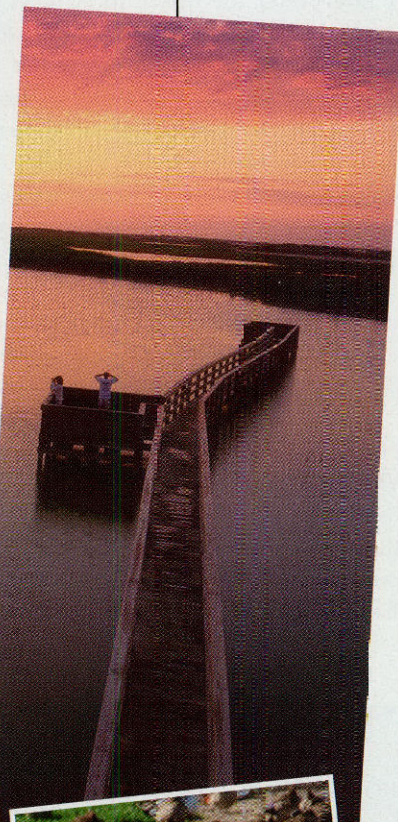
"Whatever data we collect from the Lost Ladybug Project is extremely valuable and will aid in the conservation of rare native species," Losey says.

LADYBUGS 101

- A ladybug can eat as many as 5,000 aphids in its lifetime.
- Females lay their eggs near pests so larvae — which resemble tiny alligators covered with bristles — can chow down right away.
- Adult ladybugs — also called lady beetles and ladybird beetles — can live up to one year.
- The name "ladybug" originated in the Middle Ages when farmers prayed to the Virgin Mary for help after swarms of insects attacked their crops. When ladybugs arrived, they christened them "Our Lady's beetles."
- A ladybug's red color warns predators to buzz off.
- Exotic species, not natives, invade homes during winter months. ★

— Sheryl Smith-Podgers

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Snakes, Knots and Survival

Education and entertainment abound at Tyler State Park.

Facial expressions vary from curiosity to fear whenever interpreter Joe Roach introduces children to Roscoe, a prairie kingsnake that co-stars in a weekly program at Tyler State Park. Then Roach offers the slithery reptile a live mouse, which quickly gets gulped. *Ewww!*

"I explain that snakes have to eat, too, and if we didn't have them in our environment, we'd be overrun with rodents," Roach says. "We use live snakes to teach kids that not all snakes are venomous, which ones to avoid, and what to do if you are bitten."

Looking for some kid-friendly things to do before school starts? This popular East Texas park caters to families with a variety of weekend programs — don't miss *Snake Feeding* Saturdays from 2 to 3 p.m. — that both teach and entertain.

During *Knotty-time for Kids*, Roach shows youngsters how to tie a bowline knot, square knot and other basic camp knots. While working his rope, he also sneaks in some cultural history. "Knots were originally created to solve problems," Roach says. "Different cultures had different problems so they developed and shared different knots. Cultures often clashed, but knots ultimately tied them together."

Kids' Wilderness Survival, another fun program, teaches chil-



Fishing pier at Tyler State Park's spring-fed lake.

dren how to make a cool survival guide with hidden messages. "While they're making the pocket guide, we talk about what to do if they get lost in the woods," Roach says. "I also tell them how to use a CD as a reflector and what to put in a survival backpack."

When the program's done, round up the kids and explore the

985.5-acre haven, nestled among the pines and oaks. Tip: Pack swim-suits and fishing gear. The park's spring-fed lake is a great place to splash around and hook crappie, perch, catfish and bass. Seasonal rentals of kayaks, canoes, paddle boats and jon boats are also available.

More than 14 miles of hiking, biking and nature trails wind around the lake and through scenic pineywood and hardwood forests. Camping areas offer sites with water only, RV sites with water and electricity or full hookups, and screened shelters. Other facilities include three fishing piers, a dining hall, a covered group picnic area and two open-air group picnic areas.

Knotty-time for Kids, Aug. 8 and 22, 10-11 a.m. *Kids' Wilderness Survival*, Aug. 8 and 22, 3-4 p.m. Check the park's online calendar for more activities. Interpretive programs free; regular park entrance fees apply. Tyler State Park is located 2 miles north of Interstate 20 on FM 14, just north of Tyler on Park Road 16. For more information, call 903-597-5336 or visit <www.tpwd.state.tx.us/tyler>. ★

— Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

PHOTO BY TPWD

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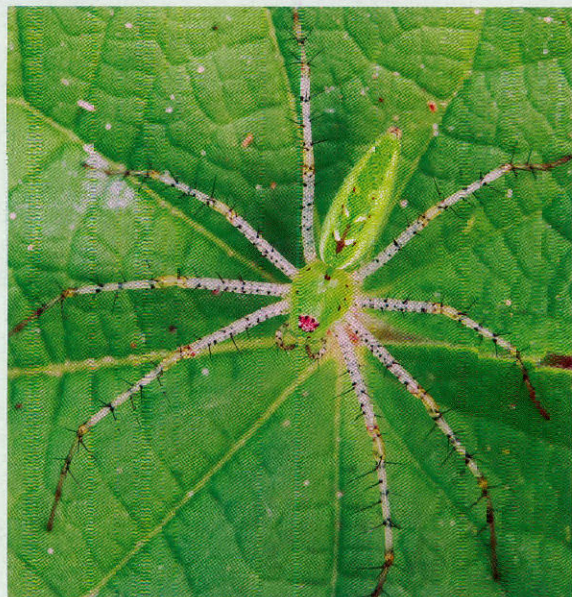
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A TEXAS NATURAL

Green Lynx

These striking spiders are stealthy hunters and protective moms.



The green lynx spider mother guards her spiderlings (above). Adults rely on skills, not a web, to catch prey.

Among our Texas spiders, the green lynx (*Peucetia viridans*) ranks as one of the most beautiful. Even spider-phobes might admit that this neon-lime arachnid — despite its spindly, black-bristled legs — merits a second glance.

That is, if they can spot them. Fast runners and expert jumpers, green lynxes — no bigger than a quarter — lurk in foliage, where they blend in and stalk bees, moths, caterpillars and other insects. Like jumping spiders (and cats, hence their name), lynx spiders rely on keen eyesight and stealthy hunting skills — not a web — to catch prey. They also

throw out a dragline from their abdomen's spinnerets (silk-producing organ) in case they need to make a quick getaway.

Common across the state, green lynx spiders mature by July. After mating in early fall, the female constructs a messy, straw-colored sac within a plant's topmost leaves or stems. She secures it with a hodgepodge of silken threads and deposits hundreds of eggs within the cottony mass. Then her vigil begins.

Upside-down, the lynx mother hugs the egg sac with her long legs. A fierce protector, she'll even spit venom from her fangs if threatened. After the orange spiderlings emerge, she remains near the sac, guarding her brood.

Four or so weeks later, the tiny lynxes — who are now bright green like their mother — disperse and find a place to overwinter. She soon dies. But come summer, her surviving offspring will repeat the cycle in gardens and landscapes across the state. ★

—Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

SIGHTS & SOUNDS

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE TV AND RADIO



TELEVISION

LOOK FOR THESE STORIES IN THE COMING WEEKS:

July 26 – Aug. 2: Pier fishing; Huntsville State Park; Big Bend's museum; West Verde Creek waters; Ranch recovers from fire.

City State Park; Baker Ranch habitat improvements.

Aug. 2 – 9: Blanco State Park; remembering the Buffalo Soldiers; wood kayak building; wildlife management on a tree farm; Smith Oaks rookery.

Aug. 16 – 23: Catfish catch on; Cedar Hill State Park; bald eagle surgery; seeing stars in the Davis Mountains; puffy clouds.

Aug. 9 – 16: Reclaiming a Galveston Bay island; chasing South Texas gobblers; Lake Colorado

Aug. 23 – 30: Shorebirds survival; Liberty Ships live on; horsing around at the Hill Country State Natural Area; hunting and outreach on a Texas ranch; Chase Fountain photographs.



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Shin Dagger

The dangerous yet useful lechuguilla.

Ever been jabbed by a lechuguilla (*Agave lechuguilla*)? If so, then you know exactly why this long-leaved succulent — an indicator species of the Chihuahuan Desert — has another common name: shin dagger.

Indeed, a knife-sharp point tips the ends of lechuguilla's narrow green leaves, armed with downward-pointing spines along their straight sides. Other tactics ensure survival for this drought-tolerant kin of yuccas, agaves and century plants. During rainfall, a lechuguilla — which grows no higher than one or two feet — quickly generates more roots and stores moisture within its rosette base and fleshy leaves.

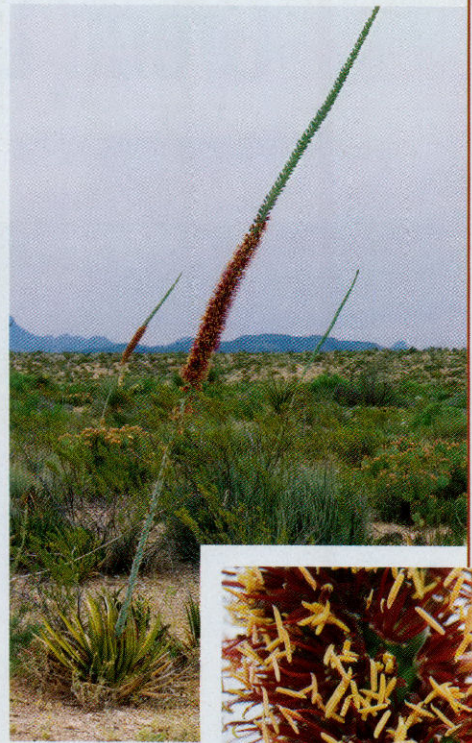
Extremely slow growing, a lechuguilla reaches maturity within 10 to 20 years. After storing up enough nutrients, the plant shoots up a single flower stalk (grow rates average 8 inches a day!) that stands 3 to 13 feet high. Blooms last about 96

hours, then the plant dies. No need to wait for seeds to germinate, though. Lechuguillas multiply primarily by suckers, which enables them to spread into thorny colonies.

You'd think so many barbs would keep wildlife — and people — at a distance, but not so. Many small mammals and reptiles of the Chihuahuan Desert hide beneath lechuguillas. Mockingbirds, cactus wrens and other bird species nest within its leaves. As for humans, Mexican farmers harvest the tough fibers — called *ixtle* — from lechuguilla leaves and work them into durable ropes, brushes and baskets. Flower stalks provide building material for roofs, walls and fences.

Lechuguilla roots — as well as leaves — contain saponin, a foaming compound used to make shampoos and detergents. Now you know how lechuguilla came by its other common name: soapbush. ★


— Sheryl Smith-Rodgers



↑ The lechuguilla has to work for many years to produce a giant stalk of flowers, then it dies.

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Stopping Water Hyacinth

Don't judge a plant by its petals.

There's a reason the beguiling purple blossoms of the water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) seem exotic. They are. The plant is originally from South America, and if it has its way, it's not leaving Texas anytime soon.

These seductive beauties have infiltrated a growing number of our urban and rural waters, costing state and local governments thousands of dollars annually. According to T.J. Marks, division manager of the City of Houston's Horticulture

Department, in the last couple of years the invasive aquatic has been showing up in more places in the city than ever before. "And once established," he says, "it's a fight to eliminate it. It's a daunting job."

Marks cites the pond at Houston's Hermann Park as a prime example. There, he says, it was purposefully planted by a Houston resident "probably not to be malicious. Instead, I think he didn't fully realize the ramifications of what he was doing." Water hyacinth has also been introduced, Marks adds, by folks emptying aquariums into city waterways.

Yes, the plant is so prolific that even that tiny amount can get it started on its aggressive path. Says Charles Hubbard, Interpretive Specialist at Caddo Lake State Park, where water hyacinth has been a problem for more than a decade, "The plants can overtake a natural ecosystem quite rapidly."

"The real problem," Marks explains, "is they wreak havoc with the native

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Don't be lured by its beauty — there are stiff fines for importing, selling or possessing water hyacinth, an invasive, prohibited exotic species.

TOP © KENDAL LARSON; BOTTOM © LARRY DITTO

species because natives can't out-compete the invasives. Any introduced plant, once you take it out of its own ecosystem, well there's no control to keep it in balance. The population explodes because there's nothing to keep it in check, it has no natural predators."

"Water hyacinth is quite happy here," says Hubbard, "because, for the most part, Texas is in a subtropical zone and climate conditions are almost identical to where it comes from. And here there are no natural consumers like there are in South America."

It's probably also happy here because it's made friends, human friends who've been sweet-talked by the plant's comeliness into helping it proliferate. But now that you know that water hyacinth's beauty is only petal-deep, besides not planting it on purpose, what can you do to act as foe rather than friend?

For starters, Hubbard suggests that, after a day in the water, you check your boat, trailer and gear thoroughly for plant remnants. Before towing your boat and trailer home, look carefully around the prop, trolling motor, water intake and shaft. Also peruse paddles, nets, lures and "anything that's been in the water. You don't want to bring it to another lake or body of water on accident." At many lakes, he says, you'll find special containers specifically for discarding any pieces you find.

In urban areas, says Marks, "It's bad news to have it in a garden pond or aquarium." No matter how isolated your backyard might seem it's not worth taking the chance that the plant will spread to a nearby creek, runoff or storm drain.

When removing it from ponds and aquariums, Marks sug-

gests, "Take it out and let it desiccate and die. Be really careful about where you put it while it's drying. Be sure to keep it terrestrial." Burning it isn't necessary; just make sure it's been out of water at least 48 hours before throwing it into a container that might accidentally collect water (like a trashcan).

Says Hubbard, "I think if people step back and look at the whole picture, realize how detrimental water hyacinth is to our lakes and rivers, they'll do all they can to help keep it from spreading." ★




After a day on the water, check your boat, trailer and gear thoroughly for plant remnants. Dispose of them properly.

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Battle Tested

Travel back in time as you visit Goliad's Spanish forts, missions and churches.

Heading south on Highway 183

toward Goliad feels like traveling into the pages of a Texas history book. The blackland prairie gives way to mile after mile of coastal plain, and soon the highway signs ring out with the familiar names of battles: Goliad, Coletto Creek, Refugio. "We have more history here than the Alamo," says Paul Jaure, a ranger at Goliad State Park and Historic Site, "only John Wayne didn't make a movie about it."

My companion and I set off on a road trip to explore this sleepy, out-of-the-way place that was once the strategic center of Spanish Texas. We discover that in Goliad, it doesn't take long for that history to spring to life. We are driving along, lulled by the endless emptiness of ranchland, when an apparition suddenly appears off the highway: the soaring, whitewashed walls of a beautiful Spanish colonial church. We are still rubbing our eyes at the unexpected sight when, less

than a mile later, another vision appears on a rise: the blackened stone walls of a Spanish fort silhouetted against the darkening sky.

No billboards, no highway gift shops, no fanfare prepares us for the appearance of the beautifully reconstructed 1749 Mission Espiritu Santo and Presidio La Bahía. Only later are we surprised to learn that together they comprise one of the few remaining Spanish mission/fort complexes in the western hemisphere.

Goliad also happens to be the only place in the United States where you can spend the night in a Spanish fort, which is how we find ourselves inside Presidio La Bahía long after the gates have closed and the last tourists and staff have gone home. Just us.

It is a dark, moonless night as we open the back door of our guest quarters — a warren of lamplit stone-walled rooms — and emerge into the hushed silence of the presidio's courtyard. A chill moves through my body as we walk around inside the stone-walled perimeter. We climb up into the corner bastions, and I contemplate how the Spanish soldiers must have felt living in this strange, sparsely inhabited land.

As we gaze at the fort's beautiful stone chapel, I think about James W. Fannin's men being held within its thick stone walls before 342 of them were executed. Fannin had occupied the fort, renaming

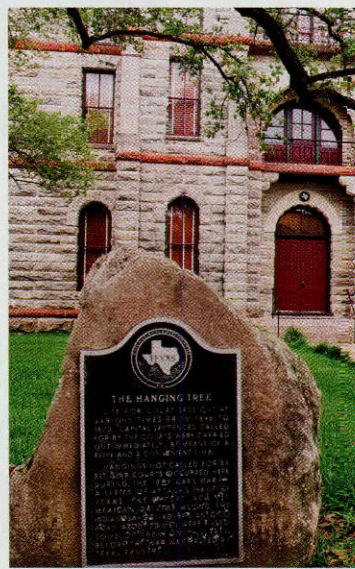
it Fort Defiance, but abandoned it after hearing news of Mexican advances. Mexican forces caught up with them near Coletto Creek, and after a fierce fight surrendered the next day on agreement that their lives

Reenactors lend an air of authenticity during the Living History Program at Goliad State Park and Historic Site.





Clockwise from far left: The reconstructed Franciscan church at Mission Espíritu Santo; Presidio La Bahía; girls don traditional Mexican garb; death sentences were carried out quickly at the Hanging Tree on the Goliad County Courthouse lawn.



would be spared. A week later, on March 27, 1836, on orders of Mexican dictator General Santa Anna, they were marched out from the fort in three groups and mowed down — an infamous event that became known as the Goliad Massacre.

Some 5,000 people descend on the presidio each year for a reenactment of the Goliad Massacre, held around the third weekend in March. Visitors who've experienced the weekend, particularly the candlelight tour, say that as they file past the wounded Texian soldiers in the chapel hospital and hear their agonized groans, they feel like they're actually experiencing that time. Although no ghosts spoke to us that night, surely visitors more steeped in Texas military history would feel their spirits here.

The next morning presidio director Newton Warzecha shows us around the fort and chapel and fills in some of the missing pieces.

"The Spanish built the fort to guard the Texas coast. If anyone wanted to take over, the first thing they did was capture the fort," he explains. "Most of the Spanish soldiers lived outside the fort in houses with their families. That origi-

nal Goliad community was named La Bahía. In 1829 the name was changed to Goliad, an anagram of Hidalgo, after the man who started the Mexican revolution of 1810."

He takes us inside the fort's original stone chapel. "This is one of the oldest Catholic churches in the U.S.," he tells us. "It's been in continuous use since the 1700s."

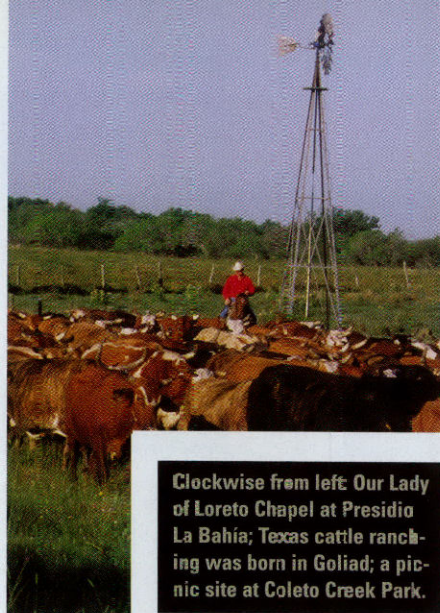
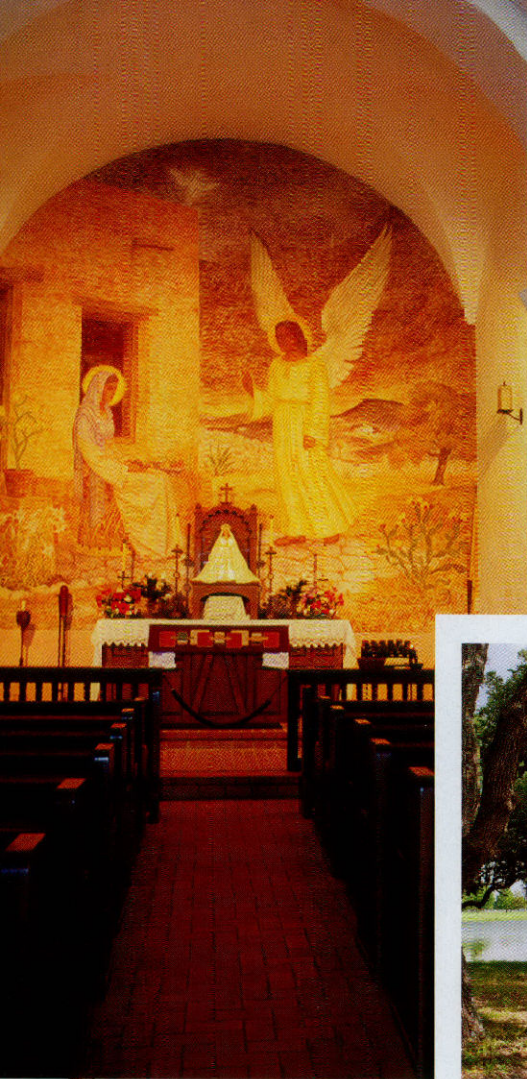
From the presidio, it's just a five-minute drive to Goliad's pretty courthouse square. We have breakfast on the square at the Empresario Restaurant, which serves up country cooking and homebaked pies under a pressed-tin ceiling in a 1903 building. On weekday mornings, Goliad's politicians meet at the Empresario for a power breakfast, while the town's power walkers do laps around the square. A few blocks away at Dairy Queen, the old-time ranchers meet for a 7 a.m. coffee klatch and discuss how the town should resist change. They needn't worry.

"In 1804 the population of La Bahía was 1,600," said Warzecha. "Today the population of Goliad is 1,900. We're very particular about who we let live here."

We poke into the few antiques shops and gift stores housed in the 1800s-era commercial buildings that surround the square. We gaze at the recently restored courthouse, a massive, magnificent brick-and-stone edifice topped with turrets and a clock tower. It's the kind of building you'd expect to find in a major European capital, not a sleepy town of less than 2,000 souls.

But in Goliad, such beauty often blends with a cruel history. An ancient live oak that spreads its lovely shaded canopy next to the courthouse is named the Hanging Tree. The name recalls a dark chapter in the town's history when extrajudicial hangings took place during 'the Cart Wars' — a period when Anglo settlers tried to take over the successful oxcart transport business of long-established Tejanos.

After wandering around town, we drive to the Barnhart Q5 Ranch and Retreat. The 700-acre family ranch is a Lone Star Land Steward winner, which means they've received an award from TPWD for managing their land in a sustainable, wildlife-friendly way. For guests, 18 miles of hike-and-bike trails provide a good



Clockwise from left: Our Lady of Loreto Chapel at Presidio La Bahía; Texas cattle ranching was born in Goliad; a picnic site at Coletto Creek Park.



way to see that wildlife. We wind past a stock pond, then arrive at the cheery 1877 Greek Revival house where we'll spend the night. Our vast room has a fireplace, 12-foot-high ceilings and a Jacuzzi tub.

As we relax in the shared living room with tall picture windows, we watch hummingbirds dart at the feeder. From the wide front porch we watch a family of bobwhite parade single file across the yard. A neotropical green jay flies to a birdfeeder, dazzling us with its blue head and parrot-green body. Later, we walk to a pasture behind the house to pet the ranch's adorable miniature donkeys, who rub their heads against our legs.

That evening we dine on succulent rack of lamb and luscious lemon crème brûlée at Terrell Hall, a small restaurant hidden behind the Berclair Mansion off Highway 59. This fine dining spot serves the best food in the Goliad area, but be prepared to bust your budget (and bring your own bottle). That night we sleep soundly, waking once to the sound of coyotes yelping in the night.

The next day we head to Coletto Creek

Park and Reservoir, a popular local destination for RV camping, boating and fishing.

"Goliad sits right on a transition zone between both north/south and east/west, between cold and hot and wet and dry," explains chief ranger Wilfred Korth. "In our park we get palmettos, which need moisture, but at the Barnhart Ranch they have a lot of cactus." That makes Goliad County a great place for birding. We drive along the long, narrow lake, which sits in the shadow of a power plant. Egrets and a great blue heron fish from the shore.

Back downtown, we walk a couple of blocks from the square and find the trailhead for the Angel of Goliad Trail. This two-mile hike-and-bike path is a great way to see Goliad State Park and Presidio La Bahía — and to walk off the town's ubiquitous lemon meringue pie. (You can also take the Goliad Paddling Trail, a three-hour trip from an upstream put-in point to Goliad State Park. No boat rentals are available, so bring your own canoe or kayak and make your own shuttle arrangements.) We fol-

low the hiking path as it meanders alongside the slow-moving San Antonio River, bends past someone's backyard workshop, then cuts a swath through a thornbrush thicket alive with birdsong.

Half an hour later, we reach Goliad State Park. The park offers camping areas along the river and hike-and-bike trails. But the highlight for most visitors is the white church of Mission Espíritu Santo. The church was reconstructed by the Work Projects Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. We walk around the grounds and through the museum.

I am surprised to learn that it was here — not in West Texas or Fort Worth — that Texas cattle ranching was born. The Franciscans and their Indian charges grazed 40,000 head of cattle on their land, which stretched from Goliad 60 miles north. I find my companion gazing into a display case at a beautifully engraved Spanish brass cannon so compact it could be handheld.

"You can imagine Bruce Willis holding it and firing at some English-accented bad guy," my companion remarks.

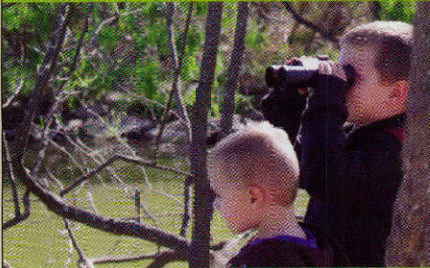
In Goliad it's easy to imagine heroes — and not just the Hollywood kind. "My ancestors came here in 1754," ranger Jaure tells us, when we stop to chat with him before leaving for home. "My grandfather worked as a laborer to help restore the presidio in the '60s. Today at age 90, he's lead cowboy at the nearby O'Connor Ranch, where he still rides at least three hours a day."

If you ever doubt that this area was once Spanish territory and then part of Mexico, go to Sunday services at the presidio church. As you worship with the descendants of Spanish soldiers, you realize that in Goliad, the past is never far away. ★

DETAILS

- **Goliad State Park** (www.tpwd.state.tx.us/goliad, 361-645-3405)
- **Presidio La Bahía** (www.presidiolabahia.org, 361-645-3752)
- **Goliad County Chamber of Commerce** (www.goliadcc.org or 361-645-3563). Pick up a self-guided historic tour map at the chamber of commerce on the square.
- **Barnhart Q5 Ranch & Retreat** (www.barnhartranchretreat.com, 361-375-2824)
- **Coletto Creek Park & Reservoir** (www.colettocreekpark.com, 361-575-6366)

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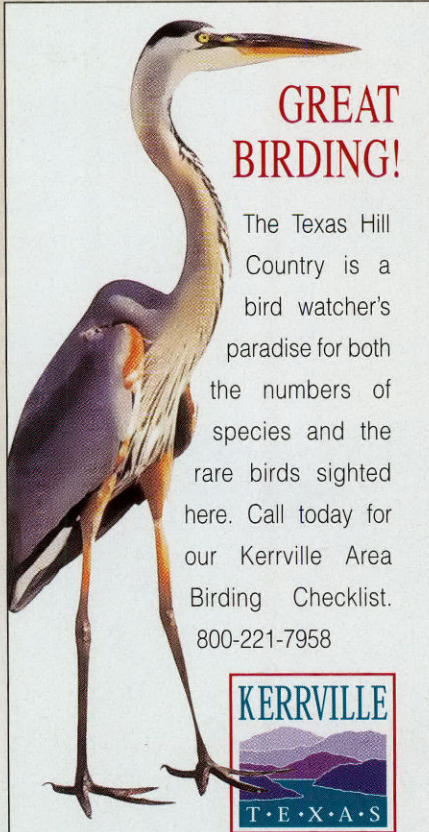


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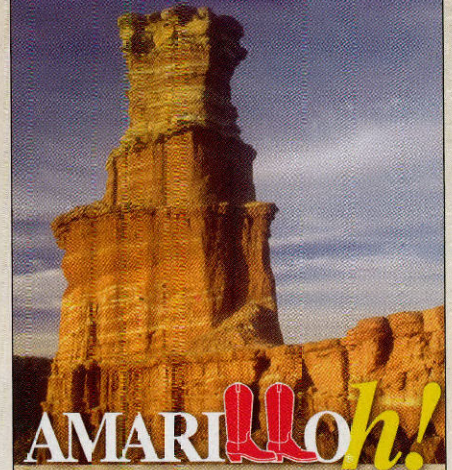
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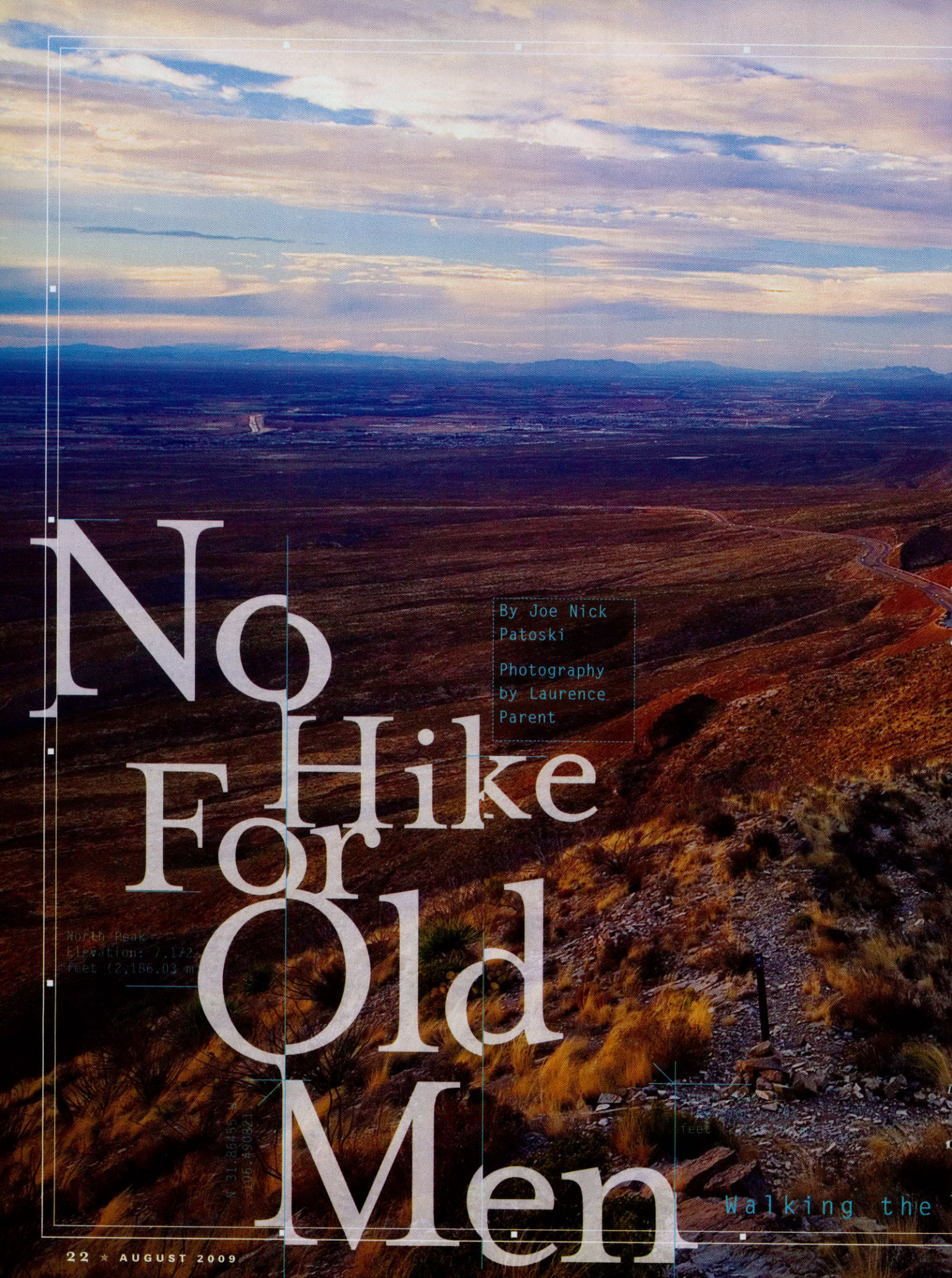
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By Joe Nick
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Photography
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Parent

North Peak
Elevation: 7,172
Feet (2,186.03 m)

N 31.86455
W 106.49021

Elevation
Feet

Walking the



spine of the Franklin Mountains.

I DIDN'T HAVE the most difficult one-day trek in Texas in mind when I first set eyes on the Franklin Mountains 40 years ago.

I was an 18-year-old freshman at the University of Texas at El Paso and came from East Texas, which is how El Pasoans refer to the rest of the state. I didn't even know a Texas city had mountains, much less a rugged, rocky range that effectively sliced the city in two before abruptly descending into the vast basin that cradles the original Paseo del Norte part of El Paso and most of its sprawling sister city Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico — the literal tail end of the Rockies.

The mountains define El Paso and El Pasoans. What side of the mountain you come from says a lot about a person. I have never been bored looking at the Franklins. At first I would wonder about who built the roads and the tram to maintain the radio and television towers on the ridge top? Who painted the giant white letters that adorned higher points on the ridge, corresponding with the first letter of a high school below? (I was usually staring at the C of Cathedral High.)

I spent hours on the Scenic Drive overlook, day and night, taking in the most spectacular vista of a city in Texas. I drove the new Trans-Mountain Road (Loop 375) that crossed the Franklins further north via Smuggler's Pass, and often paused at the western overlook on Transmountain for sunset. I marveled at the illuminated Christmas Star that glowed on the slope of the mountain every December. I was hooked on the jagged range that rose over 3,000 feet above the basin. What was it like up there?

I eventually rode the Wyler Aerial Tramway, the only publicly accessible aerial tramway in the state, from the eastern slope to Ranger Peak for a look-see. Then, eight years ago, I hiked to Ranger Peak from the west side with El Paso hiker Susan Larsen. On both occasions, the views were spectacular. But that narrow ridge snaking towards New Mexico tempted. How about hiking that? Several short hikes from the parking lot at Smuggler's Pass up the nearby switchback towards the Mammoth's Trunk further whetted my appetite.

The idea of going the distance came

after surviving a three-canyon crossing in Copper Canyon in the Mexican state of Chihuahua 10 years ago. Only three of the six gringos who signed up for the 50-mile trek up and down 10,000 feet of intimidating terrain completed it. Five years ago, I hiked more than 70 miles across the Big Bend over lightly charted territory with six people including Laurence Parent, my collaborator on the books *Texas Mountains*, *Texas Coast* and *Big Bend National Park*, and the best hiker I know ("The Ultimate Big Bend Hike," August 2005).

The Franklins in a day would be a cakewalk compared to those adventures. Laurence was game, so we bought airline tickets and hoped the weather would cooperate. The initial idea was to go north to south from the Transmountain Road trailhead to Scenic Drive — literally walking into the city — until I talked with John Moses, the general superintendent of the 24,000-acre Franklin Mountains State Park, which encompasses the entire mountain range and is the largest urban park in the nation.

Moses pointed out that we'd be trespassing on private property owned by media companies with broadcasting towers if we tried to start from Scenic Drive. He suggest-

ed we start at the newly acquired state park access point at the end of North Stanton Street and take Thousand Steps Trail up to Ranger Peak.

State park personnel referred me to Mike Olbrisch, a retired U.S. Army Sergeant and state park volunteer who maps and patrols trails in Franklin Mountains State Park and contributes to LocalHikes.com. Mike didn't like the route I'd sketched out, responding bluntly to an e-mail by saying: "If you are going north to south — I will not be going along. Nothing to discuss. If I can help in any other way, let me know."

Evidently he knew something we didn't.

I had yet to fully appreciate Mike's expertise. He prepped for our hike by hiking through the difficult Window north-to-south (it was doable, but barely, he reported) and improvising a route between the KFOX tower and the McKelligon Canyon saddle, where no trail existed.


The weather forecast for the December day we'd targeted was calling for winds gusting out of the southwest up to 30 mph, along with a predicted high in the mid-60s, so we took Mike's advice. Better to have the wind at our backs going north rather than the winter sun in our face.

By the time his wife, Monika, picked us up at our motel right at 7 a.m. and drove us to the end of North Stanton Street in the newer, semi-swanky hills above Executive Center on

Top right: Radio and television towers between Ranger Peak and Ron Coleman Trail above El Paso. Bottom, left to right: Olbrisch and Patoski climb toward Ranger Peak on Thousand Steps Trail; view down east side of mountain crest between Ranger Peak and Ron Coleman Trail; gondola from Wyler Aerial Tramway.







With a precipitous drop-off on either side, shifting scree under their feet and 30 mph winds, Olbrecht and Patoski follow the spine of the Franklin Mountains. El Paso spreads out across the background.

The views were exhilarating, but the winds that whipped up from the southwest made me nervous. I didn't want to get blown off the mountain.



the west side, just beyond a gated apartment complex adjacent to a city water supply tank, I was paying close attention to the retired Sarge. Mike, dressed in camo fatigues, presented Laurence and I with copies of a topo map roughly outlining the route, checked his radio to make sure it was operating, and checked his GPS for coordinates and a starting point.

The sky was clear and the winds calm when we hit the trail. Mike noted our coordinates on his GPS: N 31.80768, W 106.49986, elevation: 4,308 feet above sea level, right by the El Paso Water Utilities water tank.

Weather conditions are critical for any recreational activity in the Chihuahuan Desert, including a ridge walk. We waited until December because doing it any time from late April through mid-September added increased risk.

"Exposure is our biggest problem," John Moses explained. "People don't have a clue. They don't have water and there's no shade. It's that 18- to 24-year-old demographic, which we've got plenty of at Fort Bliss."

Franklin Mountains State Park is officially a multi-use park, but outside of McKelligon Canyon and the Tom Mays section, there is little infrastructure, which explains an annual visitor count under 50,000 and its rep as a hikers' and mountain bikers' park.

Most active recreationists head to the day-use-only Tom Mays section on the western side of Transmountain Road, an isolated piece of high desert foothills with paved and unpaved roads and easy trails leading to

Pangs of vertigo rose on the knife-edged ridge, which I tried to dismiss by focusing on the ground directly in front of where I was stepping.

North Franklin Mountain, the highest peak in the range at 7,192 feet.

The landscape is *puro* desert. The vegetation is dominated by tall, spiked balls of yucca, spindly ocotillo and rigid straight sotol stalks, rising skyward from the brown and yellow rubble. Curved-claw lechuguilla grow low to the ground beneath spiky bushes of catclaw and ubiquitous pads of prickly pear. The landscape, though, is mostly rock — sharp, jagged, banded, layered, hard and crumbly rocks.

The first few hundred yards of the route to the top followed an old dirt road once maintained by the El Paso Electric Company, up the crease between Flag Hill and Crazy Cat Mountain, toward a small rock building halfway up the western slope that was once an electric company guardhouse. The view was already bigger and more expansive than from Scenic Drive or Transmountain Road.

And I was already huffing and puffing. The rock house marked the beginning of 1,000 Steps Trail, with steps etched into the steep slope. The well-maintained trail was relatively easy to negotiate, with one small stretch requiring a scramble on all fours. Tendons in the back of the calves stretched as I leaned into the mountain, remembering the wisdom of a Tarahumara Indian guide in Copper Canyon, who advised taking *pasitos* — little steps — and

focusing on the ground directly ahead where you were about to plant your foot.

We had gained 1,000 feet when we arrived at a junction. A small sign pointing south identified Ridgeline Trail #1, leading to the Wyler Tramway and Ranger Peak. Mike asked if Laurence and I would rather hike down to Wyler and take the tram. We looked at him like he was crazy. We headed north.

Our new path on the tilted limestone ridge constantly played tricks on the eye, as if the mountain range had thrust up from the surrounding basin eons ago, then slumped on its side. The darker rocks on the lower eastern slope are Precambrian, dating more than 1 billion years, the oldest in Texas.

We all stepped nimbly along the ridge for another half-mile to an overlook where shards of metal on the steep western slope below glistened in the sunlight. They were remnants of an engine from the giant B-36 bomber that crashed into the slope during a snowstorm in 1953, killing all nine crewmen. We were 5,457 feet above sea level, N 31.80648, W 106.48598

A half-mile later, the trail disappeared and a panoramic 360-degree view enveloped us. Beyond a sheer drop-off to the east was the airport and Fort Bliss. The Wyler Tram and Ranger Peak were perched on the ridge a mile south; in the background was downtown El Paso and the wobbly streets of Juarez,



Opposite: Joe Nick Patoski scrambles up a cliff above the Window on Ron Coleman Trail (left). Patoski and Mike Olbrisch pause for a breather at the government radio site (right).

This page: Olbrisch traverses a rugged, cross-country route on a mountain crest between Ranger Peak and Ron Coleman Trail.



which appeared calm and peaceful despite the recent rash of violence that had gripped the city and the brown lid of air pollution hovering over it.

The west side of El Paso wound around the base of the Franklins, then sprawled into the Upper Valley and the empty New Mexican desert beyond. The view took in three states, two nations, and one once-verdant river valley bursting at the seams. The newly built portion of border wall extending west from behind Mount Cristo Rey and Anapra towards Santa Teresa, and the road that parallels the international border westward towards Columbus, New Mexico, were easy to spot. Reflecting sunlight offered glimpses of the Rio Grande, channeled as it came in from New Mexico, a straight ditch as it flowed downstream east towards the Lower Valley.

The huge Jobe Concrete quarry by the Beaumont Army Medical Center, out of sight at ground level on El Paso's east side, was plainly visible from our eagle's perch, where we could hear the beep-beep-beeps warning of a truck backing up, and the bang and

thunk of heavy machinery gouging, digging and pulverizing limestone. No matter how far away the city felt, the buzz of airplanes and jets flying overhead and the hum of automobile traffic below were constant.

We were headed beyond the next two clusters of broadcasting towers to the saddle above McKelligon Canyon, where we would pick up the Ron Coleman Trail to Smuggler's Pass on the other side of South Franklin Mountain. That distant pinnacle appeared so far away, reaching it in a day seemed impossible, much less in a few hours.

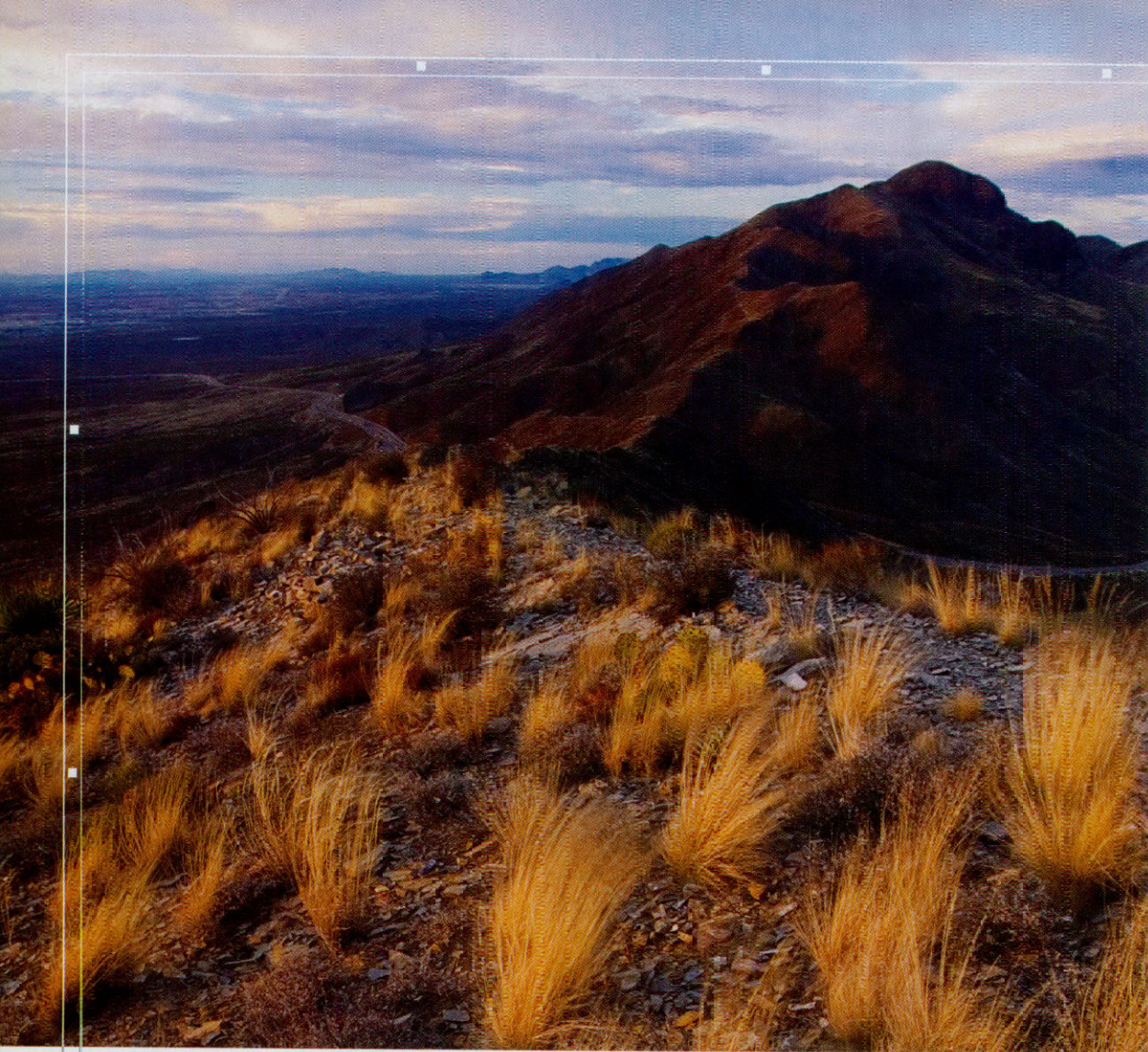
The going was about to get tough, Mike warned us. He wasn't kidding. When we walked on the west side of the ridge, jackets remained zipped to fend off the cool gusts. When we walked on the east side of the ridge, we were protected from the wind but exposed to full sun, moving us to peel off layers of outerwear to keep from overheating. The KFOX transmitter tower, 2.94 miles from the trailhead, required a scramble down and along the chain link fence around the facilities on the west slope, as dicey as walking

along the rim rock.

We got a free pass inside the radio room where Mike checked repeaters the station allowed ham radio operators to place at the site. After leaving KFOX, we followed Mike's lead on an informal trail as we descended, then ascended towards the next communications tower shared by several federal agencies. Laurence and Mike were leaving me lagging 25 to 50 yards back until we took a break.

The views were exhilarating, but the winds that whipped up from the southwest made me nervous. I didn't want to get blown off the mountain. During one pause, Mike lifted a couple of rocks and pulled out three bottles of sports drink from a cache he'd created earlier.

As we neared the government repeater towers, we spotted a Border Patrol helicopter scooting along just above the ridge, pausing near the tower, landing, then ascending, a procedure made more difficult by sporadic gusts. Evidently, the pilot was practicing. When we reached the tower, we saw the landing pad, a flattened area maybe



This page: Golden grasses in last light on Ron Coleman Trail. Looking toward North Mount Franklin.

Opposite: View from a cave on Ron Coleman Trail of North Mount Franklin; view of El Paso from Ron Coleman Trail at dusk.

20 square feet, that had been scratched out of the rim rock.

It was a little after high noon. We'd been on the trail almost five hours and had hiked 4.5 miles. We were 6,200 feet above sea level, the highest point on the first half of the hike. It felt like it, especially looking back to see where we had been, having gained 2,802 feet. Looking forward, beyond northeast El Paso, we could see the rise in the land mass marking Cloudcroft and the snow-capped Sierra Blanca.

The stretch from KEOX tower to the federal government repeater site had been the toughest so far, despite the refreshing pause for sports drinks. One scurry along the eastern ridge was tighter than a goat path, requiring a patient vertical scramble, Mike reminded me that it would have been even tougher doing it the other way, scrambling down. Hard as it was, we weren't the only ones to walk the ridge: I found a dollar bill nestled in a lechuguilla cactus.

We descended down to the McKelligon Canyon saddle connecting to the ridge lead-

ing to South Mount Franklin, the tallest peak on our trek, requiring a few scurries on all fours. Even the milder inclines were testing nerves if there were patches of scree — smaller rocks that felt like ice if you hit them wrong. A few thorns insinuated themselves into hands and ankles as I not-so-nimbly stepped over and around rocks while dodging cactus. Between the slippery rubble and plain old missteps, I twice planted my left foot so haphazardly that my ankle gave way, luckily without twisting or breaking anything. Blisters were forming on both feet as my little toes rubbed against the leather with each jarring step. Calves ached. The quads in my upper thighs pulsed.

While dropping to the low point of the saddle, the amphitheater in McKelligon Canyon came into view, as did a couple park rangers who were observing us from the edge of the pavement, 1,000 feet below. Mike took more readings on his GPS. We were six miles from the trailhead. 6 hours, 12 minutes on the trail. 3 hours, 55 minutes spent hiking; 2 hours, 17 minutes at rest. We'd ascend-

ed 3,000 feet, descended 2,100 feet.

"Do you want to abort the mission here?" Mike asked. We could call it a day, satisfied we had done what we could physically do. Otherwise, we needed to keep a quick pace on the Ron Coleman Trail, which we were picking up. It was 1 p.m. and the winter sun would be gone by 5:30 p.m. The wind was blowing and high clouds were scudding past.

I hurt — not a sharp-pain or throbbing-headache hurt, just a fatigued, worn-out, too-old-for-this hurt. Thankfully, Mike admitted he was running out of gas. I was running out of gas. But quit? No way. Laurence wasn't complaining at all, due to occasional windows of great lighting for taking photographs, and the fact he'd hiked to the top of the 9,000-foot Santa Catalinas above Tucson the week before, and summited Longs Peak in Colorado, a 14,000-foot, a few months earlier.

We gained elevation again plodding up a series of switchbacks. At certain junctures, Mike stopped to note GPS readings, calling

Even the milder inclines were testing nerves if there were patches of scree — smaller rocks that felt like ice if you hit them wrong.

them on the radio to Monika or fellow ham operators Doug Rose or Reiner Junge, who were listening on their radios at home. The second-smallest toe of my left foot began to cramp. The term “bandy-legged” kept popping into my head, as in rubber band. Pangs of vertigo rose on the knife-edged ridge, which I tried to dismiss by focusing on the ground directly in front of where I was stepping.

Along the way, Mike had talked about his son in the Army, a Cavalry Scout in Iraq, and his own experiences in Iraq during the first Gulf War. He would've reenlisted after 9/11 if he didn't think he was too old to be a soldier. At 52, he was in good shape, but not at fighting level, he told us.

We climbed into a narrow sliver of grasses that led to the base of what Laurence described as a “friggin' cliff,” the 40-foot wall leading to the Window. We could go back, Mike offered, meaning two hours minimum to McKelligon Canyon. Nothing had snapped or broken, so I respectfully declined.

The trick to the scramble was to grab a hand hold on a rock, make sure it was secure, then pull yourself up, feeling for footholds wherever you could find them, hoping they wouldn't crumble. I couldn't look down, instead fixing my eyes on which rock to grab next, occasionally glancing up to see where Mike and Laurence had gone. I reached the Window, halfway up the wall,

in a cold sweat, too exhausted and woozy to appreciate the porthole-sized opening in the wall that you could peer through, if you liked looking at precipitous drops.

We finally reached a high plateau that dropped off to the west, becoming Coronado Canyon on El Paso's far west side, known for the distinctive vein of red rhyolite in the limestone slope in the shape of a thunderbird. As we moved north, the streaks of red on the mountain grew more numerous, indicating volcanic rock, and the grasses grew thicker and more lush.

The high point on the trail, 6,600 feet, just below the FAA Towers at the pinnacle of South Franklin Mountain, was reached 8 hours and 37 minutes and 7.86 miles after we left North Stanton Street. We had ascended 5,336 feet — more than a mile — and descended 3,104 feet. Our coordinates were N 31.86424, W 106.49278. We could see Trans-Mountain Road and glimpses of the Smuggler's Pass trailhead. The Mammoth's Trunk, a bluff in the shape of an elephant's head, was staring straight at us, trunk raised, with curved swirls of subdivision streets below as a backdrop.

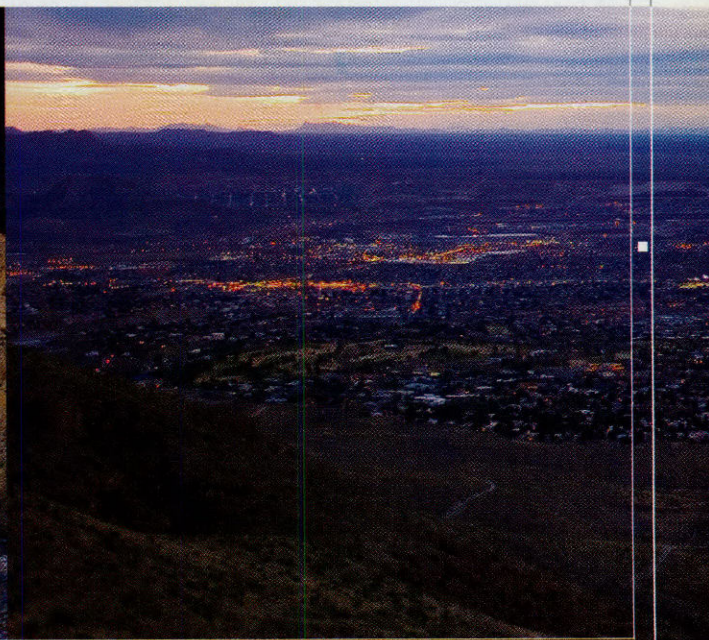
The late afternoon light was throwing off sharp shadows, rendering the harsh desert rubble soft, gentle, and wholly magnificent. The mountains in the distance were lighting up — the Organ Mountains above Las Cruces, Sierra Blanca beyond Cloudcroft, and the Black Mountains by Silver

City, New Mexico, marking the Gila Wilderness. We paused to appreciate, but just for a little bit. The light would be gone before we hit the last switchbacks down into Fusselman Canyon. Monika was waiting in the parking lot, she radioed. To the east and west, city lights twinkled as we descended, guided by flashlights.

We finished in pitch dark. Mission complete, Mike radioed to Doug and Reiner. Our coordinates were N 31.87748, W 106.49386. Elevation: 5,184 feet. We hiked 9.74 miles in 10 hours, 30 minutes, climbing 5,594 feet and descending 4,772 feet. Along the way, I collected the dollar bill found in a lechuguilla on the ridge, a cigarette butt spotted near South Mount Franklin, a rusty bottle cap picked up between the McKelligon Canyon saddle and the Window, and a piece of light aluminum fetched along the ridgeline.

Mike's planning and knowledge of the lay of the land was invaluable. Teamwork, as always, proved essential, making any calculated risk less risky to take. Mike admitted it was his roughest hike in the 14 years since he left the service. It got Laurence to thinking he'd like to see how many of the tallest peaks in Texas you could ascend in a day.

Maybe I'll take Laurence up on his challenge. I may be getting too old for this. Whatever happens, for the rest of my life, whenever I lay eyes on El Paso, I'll be able to smile to myself, knowing full well what it's like up there on the backbone of the rugged range that defines the mountain city of Texas. ★



Fall / Winter

2009

By Shelly Plante

BIRDING CALENDAR

*As migration begins,
the birdwatching
just gets better.*

IN ADDITION TO THE EVENTS LISTED ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES, a regularly updated calendar of all events at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department facilities can be found online at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/calendar. Search this calendar by "Events and Activities" or by "Regions" of the state to find more outdoor adventures for you and your family year round. Bird walks, butterfly hikes, hawk watches, breakfast with the birds and owl prowls are only a few of the many activities available not only at the World Birding Center state parks but also at state parks throughout the state.



Year ROUND

Every Wednesday

GUIDED BIRD WALKS. Harlingen Arroyo Colorado Birding Center, Harlingen. Guided bird walks through this World Birding Center site. 7:30 a.m. Free. (361) 676-5416; www.worldbirdingcenter.org

Second Saturday of Each Month

BEGINNERS' BIRD WALKS. Judson Nature Trails, Alamo Heights. Binoculars are provided. All are welcome. Helps newcomers and beginners learn the birds of the area. 8 a.m. each month (except August, when groups meet at 7:30 a.m.) Free. (210) 342-2073; www.saudubon.org

Second Saturday of Each Month

SECOND SATURDAY NATURE PROGRAM. Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge, Sherman. Nature programs open to the public. Informal talk, photo presentation and/or field trip on refuge. Topics include birds, birding, natural history, more — geared to all ages. 10 a.m. Free. (903) 786-2826; www.friendsofhagerman.com

Third Saturday of Each Month

BIRD BANDING — GULF COAST BIRD OBSERVATORY, LAKE JACKSON. Public welcome to observe as staff work to collect baseline data on bird populations at the sanctuary. Nature store is open until noon each banding day. 8 a.m. — noon. Free. (979) 480-0999; www.gcbo.org



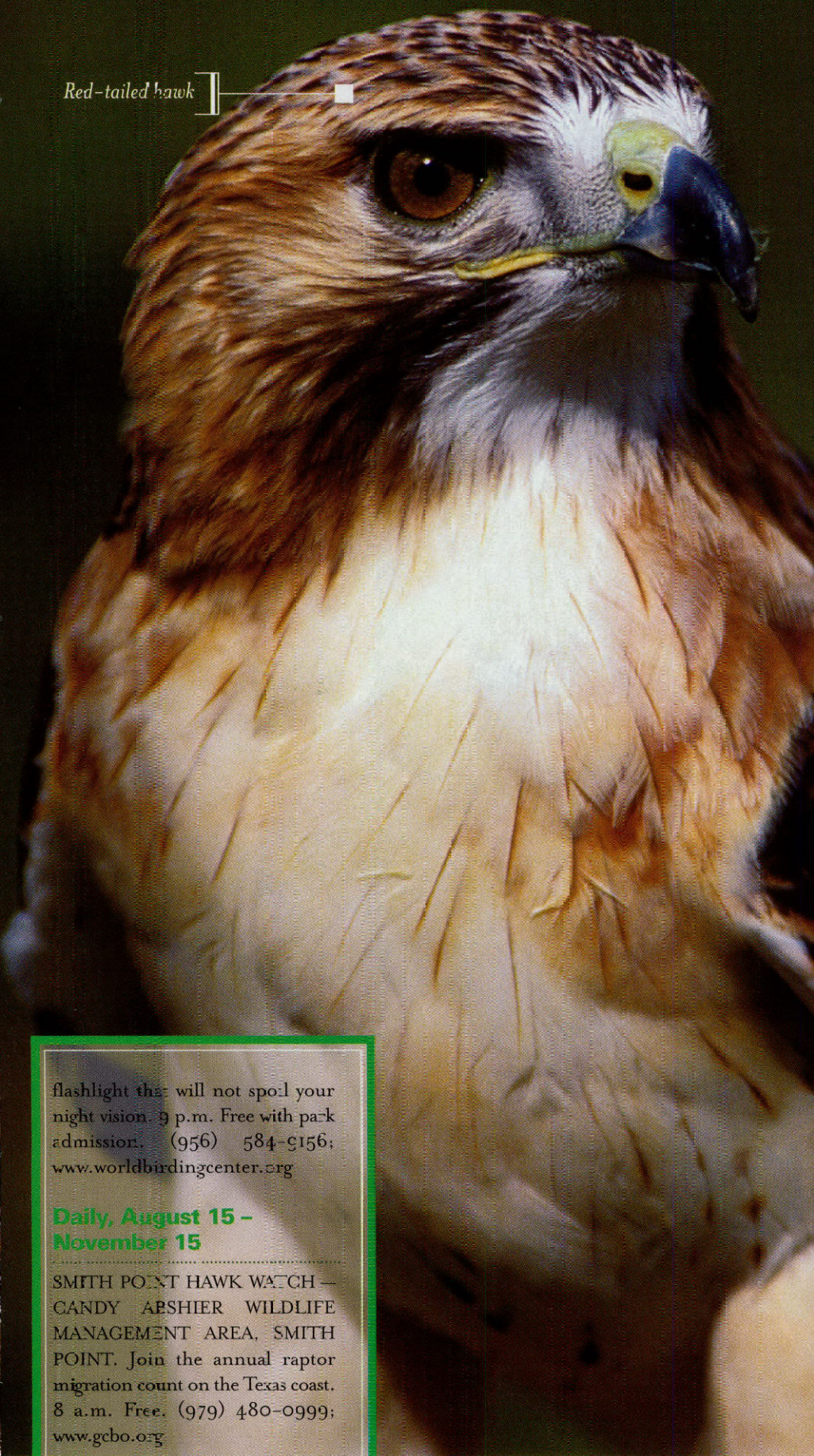
Western screech-owl

August AUG.

August 12

PERSEID PARTY — BENTSEN-RIO GRANDE VALLEY STATE PARK, MISSION. A variety of activities focused on both the skies and the park's wildlife, including viewing the peak of this year's Perseid meteor shower (weather permitting). Bring bug spray, food and drinks, blankets or folding chairs, plus a red-filtered

Red-tailed hawk



flashlight that will not spoil your night vision. 9 p.m. Free with park admission. (956) 584-9156; www.worldbirdingcenter.org

Daily, August 15 - November 15

SMITH POINT HAWK WATCH - CANDY AFSHIER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA, SMITH POINT. Join the annual raptor migration count on the Texas coast. 8 a.m. Free. (979) 480-0999; www.gcbo.org

September SEPT.

Every Sunday

16TH ANNUAL BLUEBIRD FESTIVAL - WILLS POINT.
XTREME HUMMINGBIRD XTRAVAGANZA - GULF COAST BIRD OBSERVATORY, LAKE JACKSON. Watch bird banding, adopt a hummingbird, browse the nature store, walk the nature trails, or buy a plant to attract hummingbirds and butterflies. Guest speakers. 8 a.m. - noon. \$2 per adult; kids are free. (979) 480-0999; www.gcbo.org

September 12

BIRD WALK - LEWISVILLE LAKE ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING AREA, LEWISVILLE. Birders of all skill levels are invited to join a master birder as the group searches the wetlands, prairies and woods for just a few of the 289 avian species documented there. Ages 10 and up, reservations are required. 7:30 a.m. \$7 per person. (972) 219-7980; www.ias.uni.edu/llela. Also October 10, November 14, February 13, March 13 and April 10.

September 17 - 20

HUMMER/BIRD CELEBRATION - ROCKPORT. Over 14 speakers and programs, outdoor exhibits, a banding site, nature-related vendor booths, Hummer Home visits, birding boat excursions, guided field trips and much more. Costs vary. (800) 242-0071; www.rockporthummingbird.com

September 26

KLEB WOODS HUMMINGBIRD FESTIVAL - KLEB WOODS NATURE CENTER, TOMBALL. Everything you want to know about hummingbirds including identification tips and gardening for hummingbirds. Games and activities for the whole family. No food or drink will be available at this event. Free. 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. (281) 357-5324; www.pct3.tctx.net/parks/klebwoods/naturepres.aspx



OCTOBER 10

BIRD WALK — LEWISVILLE LAKE ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING AREA, LEWISVILLE. (See September listing for details.)

OCTOBER 22 – 24

14TH ANNUAL TEXAS BUTTERFLY FESTIVAL — MISSION. Celebrate the Valley's 280-plus species of butterflies. Learn from internationally renowned speakers and explore the area's natural habitats on guided field trips. Costs vary. (800) 580-2700

OCTOBER 29 – 31

WILD IN WILLACY — RAYMONDVILLE. A four-day festival celebrating the natural bio-diversity of Willacy County. Birding field trips by airboat, boating safaris, children's programs and many other events throughout the weekend. Costs vary. (888) 603-6994; www.wildinwillacy.com



NOVEMBER 7

EN-RAPTOR-ED — KINKAID SCHOOL, HOUSTON. The stars of the event are the raptors from the Raptor Project. Jonathan Wood will take you on a wilderness expedition with his raptor entourage, which includes live birds of prey from every habitat on the planet: arctic, desert, rainforest, wetland, prairie, woodland and tundra. Lunch included. 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. \$100 per person. (979) 480-0999; www.gcbo.org

Red-tailed hawk



SEPTEMBER 26

FALL HAWK WATCH — FENNESSEY RANCH, BAY-SIDE. Witness thousands of hawks lift off from the Mission River on a private Texas coastal ranch. Up to 15 species of hawks possible as you watch kettle after kettle rise. Lunch included. 7:30 a.m. \$62 per person. (361) 529-6600; www.fennesseyranch.com

NOVEMBER 12 – 15

RIO GRANDE VALLEY BIRDING FESTIVAL – HARLINGEN. Join birders and nature lovers from around the world for the 16th year of Harlingen's premier event. World-famous birders will share their experiences with you, plus enjoy seminars, keynote lectures, workshops, field trips, children's programs and a first-class nature fair. Costs vary. (800) 531-7346; www.rgvbirdfest.com

NOVEMBER 14

BIRD WALK – LEWISVILLE LAKE ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING AREA. (See September listing for details.)

NOVEMBER 19 - 22

SOUTH TEXAS WILDLIFE AND BIRDING FESTIVAL – KINGSVILLE. This festival includes workshops and seminars, birding tours, vendors and exhibitors. Costs vary. (800) 333-5032; www.kingsvilletexas.com

DEC.

DECEMBER 5

ANNUAL OPEN HOUSE AND HOLIDAY SALE – GULF COAST BIRD OBSERVATORY, LAKE JACKSON. Come and see what great items they have on sale for the holidays, from bird books to hummingbird feeders. There is a 10 percent discount for all GCBO members and all items are sales tax free. 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Free: (979) 480-0999; www.gcbo.org

DECEMBER 5

HOLIDAY AT THE CABIN – SIMS BAYOU URBAN NATURE CENTER, HOUSTON. Go green for the holidays and learn about native birds! Fun "green" activities, arts and crafts to take home, refreshments and special guests. 5 p.m. – 8 p.m. Free. (713) 640-2407; www.houstonaudubon.org



Brown pelican

DECEMBER 19

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT — HAGERMAN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, SHERMAN. Annual Christmas Bird Count in Hagerman Circle, with a 15-mile diameter, includes the refuge and surrounding area, adjacent to Lake Texoma. Birders of all levels of experience are welcome and will be assigned to teams. 7 a.m. — 5 p.m. \$5 per person.

(903) 786-2826;

www.friendsofhagerman.com.



FEBRUARY 13

BIRD WALK — LEWISVILLE LAKE ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING AREA, LEWISVILLE. (See September listing for details.)



MARCH 13

BIRD WALK — LEWISVILLE LAKE ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING AREA, LEWISVILLE. (See September listing for details.)

EVERY WEEKEND (EXCEPT EASTER)

BLUCHER PARK BIRD WALKS — BLUCHER PARK, CORPUS CHRISTI. Participants will bird Blucher Park and the expansive lawns behind it. Guides will assist with bird identification as needed. Free. (361) 443-0744; www.ccbirding.com

■ — Anhinga



APR.

APRIL 10

BIRD WALK — LEWISVILLE LAKE ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING AREA, LEWISVILLE. (See September listing for details.)

APRIL 10 -11

ATTWATER'S PRAIRIE CHICKEN FESTIVAL — ATTWATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, EAGLE LAKE. Experience the beautiful courtship dance of the Attwater's Prairie Chicker and virgin coastal prairie habitat through many different guided tours by vehicle or walking. Free. (979) 234-3021; www.southwest.fws.gov/refuges

APRIL 17 & 24

FENNESSEY RANCH SPRING MIGRATION TRIP — FENNESSEY RANCH, BAY-SIDE. Full-day hayride-style tour with short hikes. Experienced bird guides may spot as many as 70 – 80 species of birds. Beginning to expert birders welcome. 7:30 a.m. \$62. (361) 529-6600; www.fennesseyranch.com

APRIL 25 – MAY 2

GREAT TEXAS BIRDING CLASSIC — TEXAS COAST. Head for the Texas coast for some fun birding in teams to raise money for coastal habitat conservation. There are tournaments for birders of all skill levels and any age. Costs vary. (979) 480-0999; www.birdingclassic.org

LAST TWO WEEKS OF APRIL

SPRING SONGBIRD SEMINAR — UPPER TEXAS COAST. Professionally guided van tours throughout the Upper Texas Coast to the best bird sanctuaries during the height of songbird and shorebird migration. \$400 per person per week. (409) 370-1515; www.galvestonbirders.org



MAY 1

FESTIVAL ON THE BAYOU 2010 — SIMS BAYOU URBAN NATURE CENTER, HOUSTON. Celebrate International Migratory Bird Day with Houston Audubon. Festival on the Bayou is full of educational bird games and activities, arts and crafts, live bird displays and lots of fun programs. 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. \$5 per person. (713) 640-2407; www.houstonaudubon.org ★

Greater prairie-chicken

I'M HERE TO GIVE NORTH TEXAS anglers a wake-up call. Just half an hour's drive north of Lake Fork is an 18-year-old reservoir with excellent largemouth bass, white bass, catfish and crappie fishing and what may be the best hybrid striped bass fishing in this part of the state.

COOPED-UP FISH

*Cooper Lake is flooded with fish,
—but hardly anybody fishes there.*



By Larry D. Hodge



AND YET ON THE AVERAGE DAY 19,000-acre Cooper Lake is practically devoid of anglers.

The reason has to be simply lack of awareness. I don't know of many anglers who wouldn't enjoy catching five- to 10-pound hybrids cast after cast, or having two-pound white bass swarm topwater lures.

Cooper disappeared from anglers' radar in 2006, when the lake level fell so low it was impossible to access the lake. Record rains in 2007 refilled the lake and flooded terrestrial vegetation that had grown up in dry areas.

"That gave the lake a real boost as nutrients entered the water from the flooded vegetation, and more baitfish were produced," says Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Inland Fisheries biologist Aaron Jubar. "Our annual electrofishing in the fall of 2007 showed lots of baitfish. They are obviously taking advantage of that new habitat, and the hybrids and white bass feed on them when they move out into the lake."

Finding baitfish — primarily gizzard shad — is the key to finding hybrids, says Cooper Lake guide Tony Parker (903-348-1619).

"When the water temperature hits the 90s, the big gizzard shad move up on top of humps out in the lake, and the hybrids follow them," Parker says. "You won't see fish feeding on top. You might see one or two fish come up, but what you will usually see is seven or eight shad come screaming out of the water,

the fact the lake was closed to angling for a time.

"Because the lake was so low, nobody fished it, and the fish had not seen a bait for a year and half," Jubar says. "It was like a new lake — the fish had just not experienced much angling pressure. To our benefit, they have not wised up yet."

If there is a downside to the hybrid fishery on Cooper, it is that the hotter the weather, the better the bite. Zoe Ann Stinchcomb and I fished with Tony Parker in August 2008 during that string of 100-degree-plus days that wilted most people's desire to do anything outdoors.

"Meet me at the ramp at 3 p.m.," Parker instructed us. "The fish won't start biting until late afternoon."

Armed with bottled water, slathered with sunscreen and sweating profusely just from breathing, we set out on a 106-degree afternoon with no breeze. "The last two afternoons from three o'clock to seven we boated 30 fish from three to 10 pounds," Parker tells us. "We typically catch seven- to eight-pound hybrids. I expect the lake record of 11.22 pounds to be broken this year. The number of fish we are seeing is amazing."

The hybrid fishing is so good that Parker doesn't even bother with white bass. "We will see seven to eight schools of white bass on the surface this afternoon," he says, pointing to a spot near the boat ramp where feeding white bass are beating the water to a froth. "You can catch as many as you want right now."

As we head across the lake, we seem to have it all to ourselves.

"The lake was so low, nobody fished it, and the fish had not seen a bait for a year and a half."

— TPWD biologist Aaron Jubar

running for their lives. They're not doing that to get a suntan."

TPWD has stocked 1.5 million hybrid striped bass into the lake since 1996, so there are plenty of them to terrify the shad.

"The lake was impounded in 1991 and is very close to Lake Fork," Jubar says. "Many people thought it would be the next Lake Fork and become a superb largemouth bass fishery, but it became apparent in the mid-1990s that would not happen. It is in a different watershed from Lake Fork and is a fairly turbid lake with lots of gizzard shad, so we started stocking hybrids to try to take advantage of what the lake is giving us."

Cooper is subject to annual fluctuations in depth that average seven to eight feet. As a result, it lacks the shoreline vegetation that makes Lake Fork so good for largemouth bass (although Cooper does have lots of flooded timber in the upper end that is good largemouth habitat).

"Hybrids don't need a lot of vegetation and timber," Jubar explains. "They are at home in open water areas, because they are a cross between striped bass, a marine species, and white bass, a schooling freshwater fish. Whereas largemouths associate quite a bit with sunfish species, hybrids associate more with schools of shad. They are like lions with zebras — they will be nearby at all times."

Parker fishes for hybrids by finding them using his electronics, then offering them four-inch Sassy Shads in salty pepper or chartreuse or mullet-colored five-inch Storm Wild Eye swim baits. Both look like shad, and their effectiveness is enhanced by

I recall that writer Noel Coward said that only "mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun." Perhaps he should have included deranged hybrid striper anglers. Even the boat on plane does not generate enough breeze to keep us comfortable. It's going to be a miserable afternoon.

But misery is made more bearable by catching fish, and although they don't start biting for a couple of hours, we have a ball, albeit a sweaty one. Parker ties a chartreuse Sassy Shad on one rod and a Storm Wild Eye on the other and has us drop them to the bottom, then jig them up and down by raising and lowering the rod tip six inches or so. Hybrids gobble both, and several times we have a double on, and twice a triple.

I'm used to seeing deep-bodied hybrids, but these brutes are in a class by themselves. They take drag, jump, run under the boat and generally behave badly.

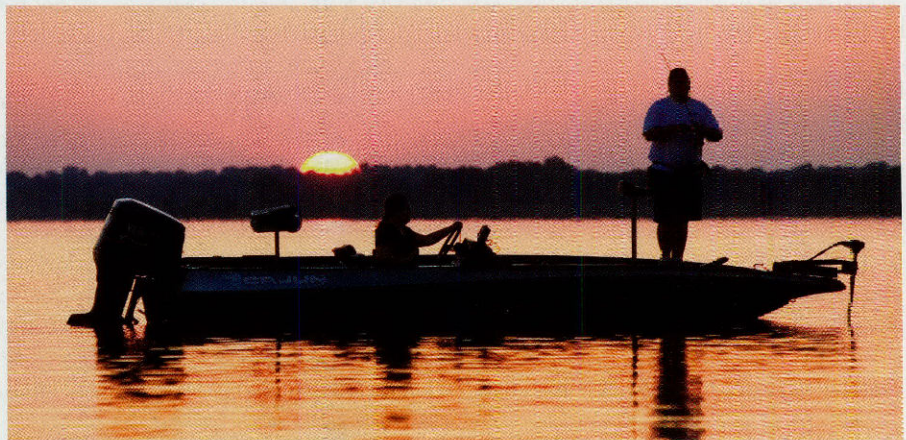
Late in the day we see another boat in the distance.

"People see me and wonder what I'm doing," Parker says. "I'm out in the middle of nowhere casting at nothing."

But the sight of seriously bowed rods is irresistible, and after a while the boat wanders over. One of the anglers hails us.

"We've never fished this lake before," he begins, and in short order Parker has clued him in and even tossed a package of Storm swim baits over. Another angler has become a Cooper convert.

"Over the years, we have seen that hybrid lakes get hot for a



All you need for hot summer hybrid striped bass fishing is a stout rod, an assortment of soft plastic shad-imitating lure, and plenty of sunscreen and cold water. (Right, middle) It's hard to tell the difference between a white bass (top) and a hybrid striped bass.

TOP RIGHT & LOWER LEFT BY LARRY HODGE/TPWD; LOWER LEFT © GRADY ALLEN; OTHERS BY EARL NOTTINGHAM/TPWD



When summer sun turns Cooper Lake to molten gold, hybrid striped fishing heats up. You'll find fish on top of humps in the middle of the lake.

couple of years, and Cooper is very hot right now," Jubar says — and he's not talking about the weather. "We talk a lot about hybrids, but white bass are plentiful, the largemouth bass fishery is good and the lake is loaded with catfish and crappie. It's the complete package."

Rounding out Cooper's attractions are the two state park units located on the north and south shores of the lake. Both the Doctors Creek Unit on the north shore and the South Sulphur Unit on the south shore offer campsites and screened shelters, but the South Sulphur Unit also has furnished lake-side cabins, deluxe screened shelters with air conditioning, equestrian sites and two lighted fishing piers.

The fishing piers make it possible for boatless anglers to sample the crappie fishing, which Parker says is fantastic in the winter. Live minnows or crappie jigs work well, especially along "the wall" at the Heron Harbor day-use area in the South Sulphur Unit. Anglers with boats target crappie in the flooded timber on the upper end of the reservoir.

While we are reeling in hybrids, Parker tosses out a teaser that assures I will be coming back to Cooper next summer.

"We have a very unusual fishery on this lake," he says. "In the summer when the big grasshoppers are flying, I have some fly-fishers who like to fish for catfish with dry flies."

Having a five- or six-pound catfish slurp a fly off the surface has to be as much fun as having a hybrid slam a bait on the bottom — maybe even more.

Cooper seems primed to remain an outstanding hybrid striped bass fishery for some time to come. TPWD stocked approximately 200,000 hybrids in both 2007 and 2008, and Jubar says he is planning another big stocking in 2009.

"We will have multiple year classes, with lots of two-to-four and four-to-six pounders, and a lot of even bigger fish that will give you a real workout," he says. "If the lake stays essentially full like it is now, that jumpstarts the food chain. If we have that habitat there supplying the predator fish with food, we are going to see the fishery continue to improve."

Jubar notes that Cooper fares well when compared to better-known East Texas lakes like Takawoni.

"In the past few years we have seen more white bass and hybrids in our sampling than we do on Takawoni," he says. "I can't say how it compares to other good hybrid fisheries, but the quality of fishing is stellar."

And it's not just hybrids, Jubar points out. He fished the lake a couple of weeks before Zoe Ann and I did, and he was enthralled.

"It was neat to see acres of white bass feeding on the surface," he says. "There were lots of baitfish fleeing — it was like something on the Discovery Channel. To see that happening and cast into the middle of it and have them take your bait is very exciting, and only with white bass and hybrids do you see that very often."

Ironically, Jubar says, the one thing Cooper needs to keep it an outstanding fishery is more anglers.

"Our hatchery system has limited capacity, and hybrids are at a premium," he says. "In order for Cooper to continue to get stockings of hybrids, we need to be able to show that anglers are utilizing these fish — we need to have data to show that people are using the lake."

Wake up! This is no dream!

Cooper needs you — now. ★

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» SLIM AND SLITHERY

Hey, wait a minute — don't hurt that snake! Sure, a few kinds are deadly, but most are harmless. In Texas, we have 76 species of snakes, the largest number found in any U.S. state. That's really good news. Why? Because snakes eat mice, rats and other critters that can spread diseases. Like turtles and lizards, snakes are cold-blooded reptiles, which means their body temperature changes depending on their surroundings. Scientists who study snakes are called herpetologists. If you learn about snakes, too, then you'll be less afraid of these beneficial animals.

Rough green snake

WWW.TPWMAGAZINE.COM

Anatomy of a Snake

Western diamondback rattlesnake

SCALES:
Snake's dry, protective covering

BRILLE:
Clear, protective scales that cover eyes (also called spectacles)

PII:
Special organs between eyes and nostrils on certain snakes that detect heat

FANGS:
Sharp, teeth-like points used by venomous snakes to inject venom into prey.

FORKED TONGUE:
Used to smell, not taste.

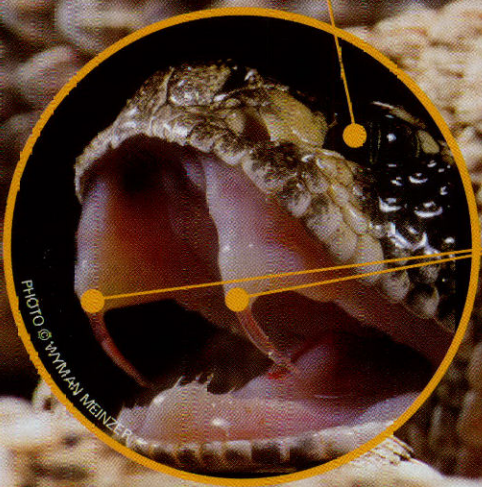


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» Did You Know?



• Have you ever found a snake skin? That's how snakes grow — by shedding their old skin.

• Because snakes burn up little energy, they don't need much food. Some eat once a week while others dine only a couple of times a year!

• When they do eat, snakes swallow their food (like a mouse or frog) whole.

• Snake Menu: slugs, worms, fish, birds, mice, eggs, other snakes.

• Small snakes can live up to 12 years. Large kinds can survive 40 or more years!



• Snakes brumate (like hibernation) in the winter and come out of their dens in the spring.

ILLUSTRATIONS © FIAN ARROYO

» FRIEND OR FIEND?

“Red and yellow, kill a fellow.
Red and black, friend to Jack.”

RATTLES:
A new “button”
is added every
time the snake
sheds its skin.

SCUTES:
Thick, large
scales on
snake’s
belly

CORAL SNAKE

VERSUS

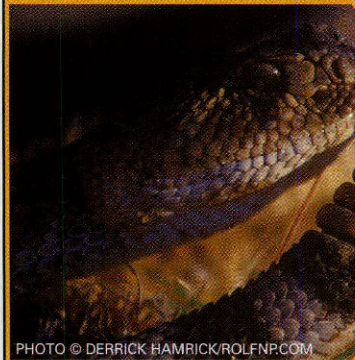
MILK SNAKE



RATTLESNAKE

VERSUS

RAT SNAKE



COPPERHEAD

VERSUS

HOGNOSE



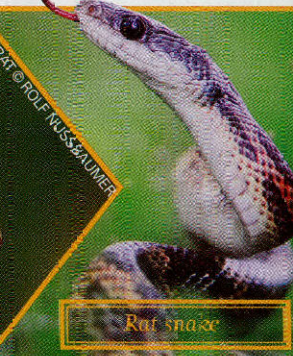
» Common Non-Venomous Snakes



Ribbon snake



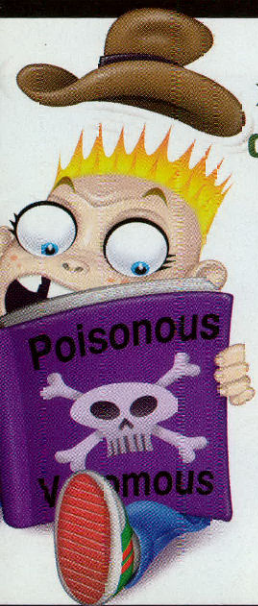
Corn snake



Rat snake

» Venomous or poisonous?

An animal that can bite or sting and inject a harmful toxin (venom) is “venomous.” An animal or plant that would make you sick if you ate it is “poisonous.” Example: Rattlesnakes are venomous. Some mushrooms are poisonous.





Spike's Activity Page



WILD ART

WHY DO SNAKES COIL UP? Curling up helps a snake stay warm or moist. Some snakes coil up before they strike at prey. Think of a spring. If you hold it down, then let go, what happens? BOING! A snake can strike with more force! Make your own coiled snake from a paper plate. First draw a spiral (like the picture) on a plate. Using markers or crayons, color your snake. Cut the plate along the spiral line. Glue on a forked tongue and googly eyes if you like. Then attach a piece of string or yarn to the head and hang it up!

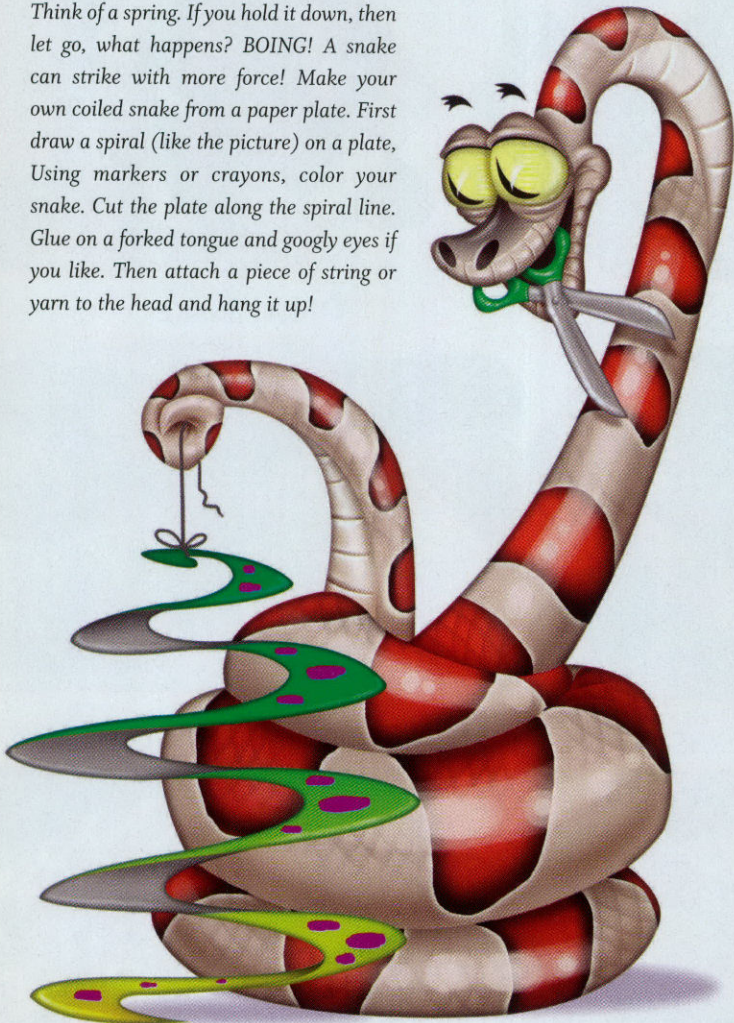


ILLUSTRATION © EIAN ABRONO

WILD SCIENCE

Poisonous or venomous?

Circle your answer.

Black widow



VENOMOUS
 POISONOUS

Oleander



VENOMOUS
 POISONOUS

Puss caterpillar



VENOMOUS
 POISONOUS

Bee



VENOMOUS
 POISONOUS

Wheel bug



VENOMOUS
 POISONOUS

Mistletoe



VENOMOUS
 POISONOUS

Jellyfish



VENOMOUS
 POISONOUS

Poinsettia



VENOMOUS
 POISONOUS

Answers below.

KEEPING IT WILD

SCIENTISTS FEAR THAT WE HUMANS could kill off snakes completely. Why? The more new homes and roads we build, the fewer habitats there are for them. Many people kill snakes out of fear and ignorance. What can you do to help snakes? Learn about one you might find in your yard and tell your friends (especially the ones who don't like snakes) why that snake's so cool. For instance, rough green snakes — which do not bite — mostly eat caterpillars, spiders, grasshoppers and crickets. Plus, they're really cute, don't you think?

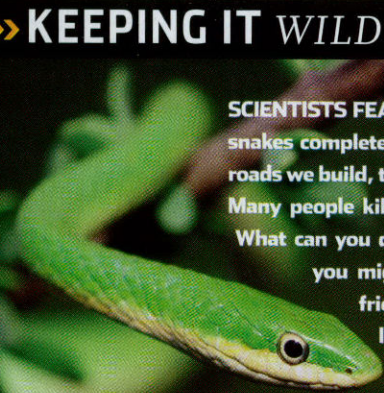


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NEXT MONTH: Back to School

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Black widow = venomous
 Oleander = poisonous
 Puss caterpillar = venomous
 Bee = venomous
 Wheel bug = venomous
 Mistletoe = poisonous
 Jellyfish = venomous
 Poinsettia = poisonous



Larger than Life

The inimitable Edward 'Ned' Fritz changed the face of Texas conservation.

BY WENDEE HOLTCAMP

In 1981, one curious 11-year-old boy found himself on a hike with the inimitable Edward "Ned" Fritz during one of the original Texas Wilderness Pow Wows. Fritz was already renowned as "the father of Texas conservation," a man who had spent years fighting to preserve wilderness, halt clearcutting in national forests, and inspire others to action. His red hair had started turning white with age, but his passion for conservation continued to grow. The memorable hike was a perfect example of how the man often known more for his passionate words and indomitable spirit also inspired people in gentle, life-changing ways.

"He made a big deal about me just because I was young and interested in the plants and forests and outdoors," says David Bezanson, who recalls the hike on which

Fritz shared lore about the forest wildflowers and plants with him. It even influenced his decision to pursue a career in conservation; he now works for The Nature Conservancy in Austin.

"It was pretty amazing for someone who was that prominent and that much of a leader to pay attention to someone who was 11 years old," Bezanson says. "Ned had an amazing ability to reach out to people of all ages and to see their value."

During Fritz's long and storied career, he earned a law degree from Southern Methodist University, married his sweet-

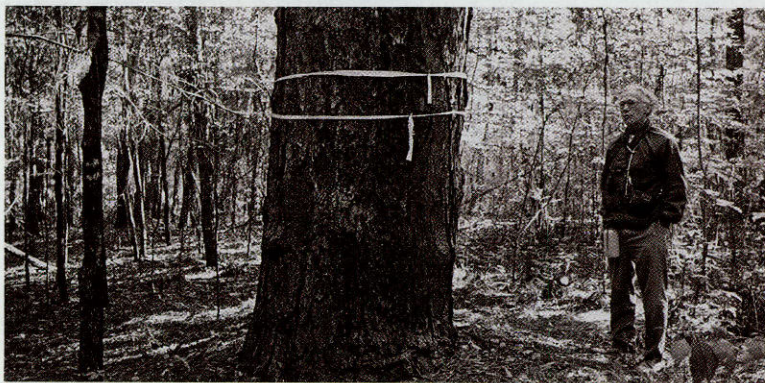
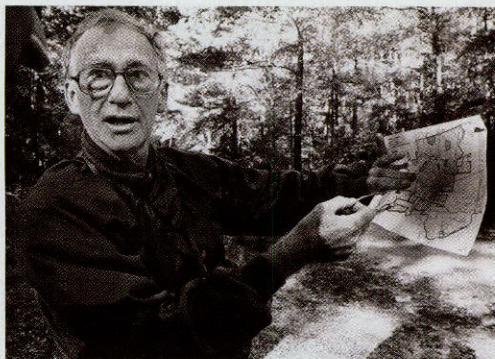
heart Genie and raised four daughters, served as a Navy flight instructor during World War II (he taught George H.W. Bush to fly), worked as an advisor on consumer affairs in President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration, and ran a successful law practice. On retiring in the 1970s, he went on to change Texas conservation with his trademark fiery grit.

Relentless. Fearless. Passionate. Persistent. His friends and colleagues use these words to describe him. He was a lover of natural ecosystems and a lover of truth and

(continued on page 55)

HE WAS A LOVER OF NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS AND A LOVER OF TRUTH AND WORKED TENACIOUSLY TO ENSURE BOTH PREVAILED. HIS PERSISTENCE IS THE STUFF OF LEGENDS.

Opposite: Ned Fritz searches for another state champion tree in the East Texas forest. Clockwise from right: Fritz points out a location on a wilderness map; Fritz at a 1995 Save America's Forests rally; Fritz surveys another notable tree.



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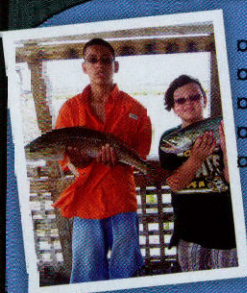
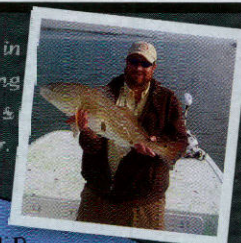
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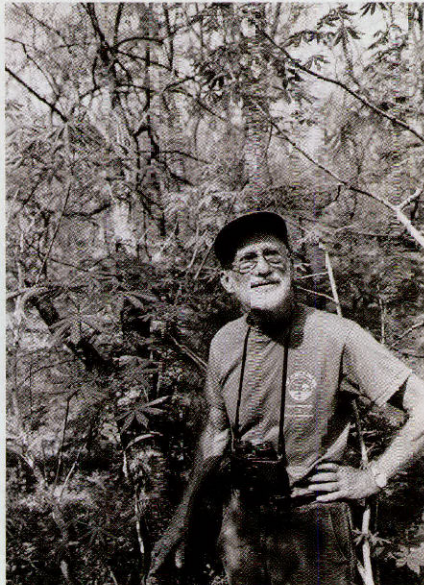
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Above: a 1934 photographic portrait of Fritz. Right: Fritz and the former national champion Texas buckeye tree (fallen) in Rochester Park, Dallas, 1987.



worked tenaciously to ensure both prevailed. He despised when monetary gain was placed before managing the natural world in a sustainable way — one that ensured its integrity would be maintained for future generations. His persistence is the stuff of legends.

His early and sustained advocacy for the Big Thicket of East Texas epitomizes his determination. The battle for this treasured forest goes as far back as 1927, but by the 1970s, many longtime advocates lost their comph. Fritz would drop by the house of fellow activist Geraldine Watson, a naturalist who wrote *Reflections on the Neches*, refusing to let her give up on the cause.

He also knocked on local residents' doors, alleviating fears associated with having federal land ownership in their backyard. Congress established the Big Thicket National Preserve in 1974.

"He was very instrumental in passage of the Big Thicket National Preserve (BTNP). I can't go over there and cancel down Village Creek without thinking about Ned Fritz," says former TFWA Executive Director Andy Sansom, now executive director of the River Systems Institute in San Marcos.

"He could get people to devote huge amounts of time and resources to environmental issues. He was very difficult to say 'no' to," says Sansom, who met Fritz in the 1970s, when Sansom worked in the Department of the Interior and Fritz had come to lobby Congress for the creation of the BTNP.

"I never met anyone quite like him. He had flaming red hair and he talked a mile a minute. He was a very colorful and eccen-

tric character," says Sansom of his first impressions. He recalls that when Fritz was excited about an issue he'd often begin a conversation by saying "Lookie" and then roll out a map or some document. "Like many, many other young people, he was a sort of an early mentor to me. I was thrilled and privileged to actually get to know him."

Fritz established several nature organizations and helped preserve more than a quarter million acres of land. He founded the Texas Committee on Natural Resources (TCNR, now Texas Conservation Alliance) and Natural Area Preservation Association (now Texas Land Conservancy), as well as several other regional and state chapters of organizations, including co-founding the Texas Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. He was instrumental in passing the Texas Wilderness Act, leading the charge to set aside five wilderness areas in the national forests of East Texas.

"There are examples of his legacy on the ground all over Texas," says Sansom.

Fritz's impact extended nationwide. He played a role in passing both the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act and the 1976 National Forest Management Act. He served as a litigating attorney with TCNR, petitioning the U.S. Forest Service to stop clearcutting in lawsuits spanning three decades. His occasionally indignant tone is evident in his 1989 book *Clearcutting: A Crime Against Nature*:

"A clearcut looks like a war zone. It is the radical surgery of the timber business. The soil washes off like blood."

Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine ran an article in 2000 about Fritz, which resulted in many opinionated letters to the editor.

"We got some criticism by people in the forest service and others because Ned was so controversial," Sansom says, "but quite frankly I was proud of the magazine for doing that. The fact that he was controversial was one of the reasons he was effective."

Sansom and Fritz worked together on and off throughout their lives.

"I did not agree with all of Ned's positions on various issues, but I always felt we were very blessed by having a person who was willing to go to the extremes that he did to bring change to institutions like federal agencies, because they don't change on their own," Sansom says.

"A lot of people were angry because he challenged their beliefs, but with Ned it was never personal," Bezanson says about his mentor. "It was simply about good stewardship of land and wildlife. Ned just wanted us to learn the truth."

Fritz also had a lifelong impact on David's mom, Janice Bezanson, who started volunteering with Fritz and TCONR doing filing and other simple duties. "The first thing I knew, I was debating a forest service supervisor on the local TV station!" she says. Fritz had a way of seeing the potential in people. She worked with Fritz closely for more than 25 years, and became a close friend. Today, she is Texas Conservation Alliance's executive director.

"I lost count of the things Ned accomplished that people said couldn't be done. He was the most persistent person on the face of the earth," she says. But she also recalls a gentler side that fewer people knew.

"He had a marvelous sense of humor, very deadpan. His motivation and personal relationships were very affectionate. His family and his daughters adored him. He was very musical and wrote songs, and he's written some wonderful poetry."

Fritz's softer side emerges clear and memorably in another book he authored, *Realms of Beauty: A Guide to the Wilderness Areas of East Texas*, a fitting tribute to a natural landscape that would not be preserved in its current form were it not for the man who penned these words:

"The freer a forest is from the manipulations of human beings, the more clearly the spirit of earth and sky is manifested in the marvelous processes that we sense. Let our eyes and minds now drink the beauty and sing the praises of seven areas where, by the grace of humankind, East Texas plant communities may survive and evolve as long as life endures in this verdant region." ★

PARTING SHOT



Photographer Clive Varlack watched this ladybug feast on aphids on a crepe myrtle leaf. When the ladybug took a break, Varlack moved in for a shot and found that two aphids had found a haven from the insect's voracious appetite.

IMAGE SPECS:

Canon 1D MK11 DSLR with a Canon MPE 65mm macro lens at 2-1 ratio, Twinlite MT-24EX, f/11, 1/125-second exposure, ISO 100.

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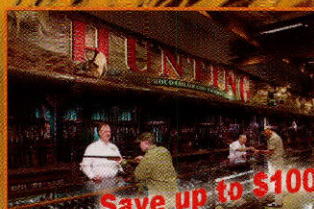
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