

## Passport To Texas February 2017

Tuesday, February 28th, 2017

[Washington-on-the-Brazos](#) is the birthplace of Texas. We observe the state's anniversary on March 2, but we celebrate its 181 years on March 4th and 5th with family friendly activities at the State Park and Historic Site.

The Texas Independence Day festival observes the March 2, 1836 adoption of the Texas Declaration of Independence, and brings thousands of folks to Washington-on-the-Brazos to celebrate Texas' birth.

The festivities this year include live performances, food, music, tours, traditional crafts, demonstrations, living history presentations, historical encampments, commemorative programs, and historic firearms and cannon demonstrations.

There will something for everyone. Visit the [Star of the Republic Museum](#), featuring collections honoring the history of early Texans; there's [Independence Hall](#), where representatives wrote the Texas Declaration of Independence; and [Barrington Living History Farm](#), where interpreters dress, work and farm as did the original residents of this homestead.

Admission is free Saturday and Sunday, March fourth and fifth, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. both days.

[Visit the calendar section of the Texas Parks and Wildlife website for more details.](#)

[First Time Adult Hunters](#), Monday, February 27th, 2017

A white-tailed buck.

It's a bit of a phenomenon. Adults without previous exposure to hunting are expressing interest in learning the skills necessary to harvest big game. Texas Parks and Wildlife responded by developing a mentored deer hunt for adult novices, and offered its first workshop in December. Coordinator, Chris Hall.

*The interest was overwhelming. We had it set up to ensure that we gave a quality program and had ample one-on-one time with hunters to address each individual's needs. And I believe we were successful in what they were trying to get and achieve and where they were with their level of hunting and shooting.*

Brad Sheffield, an engineer from Grapevine, took part in the three day program. Day one involved classroom and shooting range work; days 2 & 3 were devoted to putting new knowledge and skills to work.

*We went out this morning to go hunting, and I passed on a button buck. And so I decided to see if there was more coming out—and there wasn't. That was my only chance to shoot him.*

Brad had success that afternoon. After waiting two and half hours in the blind, a group of deer came into view.

*I was waiting for the doe to get in the right position because she turned around to go the other way, was behind the feeder, and then she finally got in a good spot. And I took my shot and dropped her—just like that. [Cecilia] And do you think you'll be doing more deer hunting. Absolutely. I'll be taking my kids deer hunting as well.*

More adult novice mentored hunts are being developed.

[Suggestions for Preparing Your Spring Turkey](#)

Friday, February 24th, 2017

If you harvest a wild turkey, you can find techniques for preparing it from online experts who are hunters and chefs. A wild turkey has a rich flavor—some say gamey—and is quite lean, which makes it a little tricky to prepare.

Steve Rinella, the outdoorsman known as The Meat Eater, recommends brining wild harvested turkeys to keep them juicy.

Fill a large pot—one big enough to hold the turkey and brine—with a gallon of water. Next add 1 cup of Kosher Salt, 1/2 cup of sugar, the juice of three lemons, and a sliced onion. Heat the mixture to dissolve the salt and sugar. Let cool, and then submerge the bird in the brine and allow it to soak for 24 to 48 hours in the fridge.

Remove it from the brine, blot the moisture from the bird with paper towels, and then place it in a shallow baking dish on top of a rack, or on a bed of root vegetables. Rub the turkey with oil, and sprinkle it inside and out with your favorite seasonings.

Place it into an oven, preheated to 375 degrees. Roast the bird until an instant read thermometer registers an internal temperature of 160 degrees. Let the turkey rest at least 10 minutes before carving.

Steve Rinella says a hunting license should say “all hunters must brine their turkeys before cooking them—no matter the cooking method.” I say that’s a good idea.

### [Spring Turkey Bag Limits](#)

Thursday, February 23rd, 2017

Eastern wild turkeys thrived from the coastal prairies to the Red River until the early 1900s when commercial hunting and development drove the birds to near extinction. Hunting these birds was off limits until years of restocking efforts created a huntable population.

*We’ve spent a lot of time stocking birds into East Texas. We’ve had some really good success in some areas, and not as much success in others. So, we don’t have the densities that we have of Rio Grande...and we’re trying to keep a real good record of what’s happening with that population.*

Jason Hardin, Turkey program leader for Parks and Wildlife, says Rio Grande turkeys, found in most of the state are plentiful; this spring, hunters have a four bird bag limit.

The bag limit is one for the Eastern Turkey, and it must be reported on [Texas Parks and Wildlife’s My Hunt Harvest app](#) for smart phones or online at Texas Parks and Wildlife’s Wild Turkey Page. Physical check stations for Eastern wild turkeys are no longer open in Texas.

The data helps Parks and Wildlife manage the species. Need a place to hunt the Eastern gobbler?

*Some of our WMAs provide good Eastern turkey hunting as well.*

### [Spring is Turkey Time in Texas](#)

Wednesday, February 22nd, 2017

Thanksgiving may be three months behind us—or nine months ahead of us depending upon how you view things—but that [won’t stop turkey hunters from bagging big birds this spring](#).

*There are going to be a lot of two-year-old gobblers for harvest this year.*

Jason Hardin is Turkey Program Leader for Parks and Wildlife. Adequate rainfall statewide and excellent habitat conditions overall, add up to a good season ahead.

*We had really good production across the Rio Grande range, which is the central portion of the state, so I would expect a really good season.*

In addition to hunting Rio Grande Turkeys in Texas brush country, hunters can also find Eastern Turkey in the woodlands of East Texas.

*The eastern is found in the eastern third of the state. It's a little bit of a larger, darker colored, bird compared to the Rio, which is quite numerous. We have more Rios in Texas than anywhere else in the country. The bird's a little bit smaller and has a little lighter coloration. But, other than that, they gobble fairly similarly and they're both pretty tough to hunt.*

There is a statewide bag limit of four turkeys in Texas with no more than one Eastern Turkey.

### **Assisted Living: Attwater's Prairie Chickens**

Tuesday, February 21st, 2017

We all need help sometimes. And in the case of the endangered Attwater's Prairie Chicken, they're getting it in the form of captive breeding programs, including one at the [Fossil Rim Wildlife Center in Glen Rose](#).

*Adding birds from the captive breeding program has allowed us to keep birds in the wild. Without the captive breeding program this species, undoubtedly, would have been extinct by now.*

Biologists estimate there are fewer than 100 Attwater's Prairie Chickens in existence today. Mike Morrow is a wildlife biologist at the Attwater's Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge in Eagle Lake. The juvenile prairie chickens at Fossil rim are color banded and radio collared in preparation for release onto the refuge.

*How many other species can we watch go extinct, before it starts making a difference the ability of the world to support us as a human species.*

Juvenile birds take a long ride to the refuge and are kept in an outdoor enclosure until they've acclimated to their new habitat. After two weeks in their pen, they're released onto the refuge.

Biologist Morrow says he knows not all the birds they release will survive, but [those that do, represent the future](#). He says Texas Parks and Wildlife and partners will continue to build the population with wild birds. And that's where he says we place the hope for the recovery of the species.

### **Most Endangered Bird in North America**

Monday, February 20th, 2017

The most endangered bird in North America is a chicken. No, it's not your ordinary farmyard fowl. It's the extraordinary [Attwater's Prairie Chicken](#)—a species unique to Texas coastal prairies. Yet, over the past two decades fewer than 100 individuals have been reported in the wild.

*For a species that only lives on average two years—that's a very bad place to be.*

Mike Morrow is a wildlife biologist at the Attwater's Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge in Eagle Lake. He works with biologist Rebecca Chisholm.

*You know, they're [prairie chickens] an endangered species all over the rest of the country and the world. But this one here, lives only in Texas.*

The birds are part of our natural heritage. At the refuge, Morrow and Chisholm work together to give the Prairie Chicken a chance at survival, which includes building predator deterrent fences around nest sites.

*The idea of this predator deterrent fence is to deflect predators away from the nest area so that hopefully they won't find the nest and destroy it.*

The fence doubles the chance of survival for the hens and chicks. And when there are fewer than 100 members in a population, you take those odds.

*Working with—arguably the most endangered bird in North America—has its ups and downs. I mean, sometimes, it's a little bit disappointing. Things don't go quite as well as you want, but it's also rewarding when things do. So I think everyone would agree that it's worth it.*

## **TPW TV – Student Camper**

Friday, February 17th, 2017

Lindsay Stroup started her college career intent on becoming a nurse. She spent two years completing her prerequisite classes.

*And then right before I applied to nursing school I was just like "Nah."*

Instead she decided to study wildlife biology at West Texas A&M University in Canyon. She'd need a place to live, and found the rents in Canyon a bit out of her reach.

*I researched the volunteer opportunities, and I came across being a park host. And in the description it said you can keep your camper up there; you get a camp spot while you're working. And I thought: Hmmm. That's interesting.*

The distance between the park and school was about 10 minutes, so Lindsey applied for and was accepted into the Park Host program at Palo Duro Canyon State Park.

*Everybody thought I was crazy. 'What do you mean you're going to live in a camper?' I was real fortunate that my grandparents let me use their camper. Since it's just me and my dog and my snake, it's really all the space we need. It's a great way to go through college.*

Park superintendent, Shannon Blalock, is glad to have Lindsay as a volunteer.

*Lindsay is not jaded by some of the boundaries of life that some people know because of their experiences. She knows no bounds at this point. So it's been wonderful for my staff.*

See Lindsay's path from Campus to Camper the week of February 19th on the Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series on PBS.

## **Cooking up Cottontail Carnitas**

Thursday, February 16th, 2017

I think the late chef and cookbook author, Julia Child coined the expression: Easter Bunny Syndrome. It's when we decide which animals not to eat based on their perceived cuteness. Rabbits fall into that category.

As Central Texas writer, cook and mom, Evin Cooper tells us, rabbits are as delicious as they are cute, and even better than pork in carnitas. She says her first attempt using cottontails was a success, and began with two rabbits in a slow cooker.

*And, I stewed them all day with some beer and some homemade salsa, and let them cook and cook and cook. And then, let them cool—and then I deboned the meat. Then, I let the meat sit in the fridge overnight, and the next day I seasoned it up a little bit more with chili powder and cumin and all those wonderful Mexican spices. And I fried them in some hot oil—just the shredded meat—almost like hash browns. It got really crispy on the bottom, and I flipped it over and got it crispy on the other side—almost to the point of burnt. Then, I put it in warm corn tortillas with avocado slices and lime juice. It was so good. I mean, I've given up pork for my carnitas. And I want to use almost entirely cottontail now. It's just delicious.*

Find Evin Cooper's Cottontail Carnitas recipe at [passporttotexas.org](http://passporttotexas.org).

## **Safe, Successful Rabbit Hunting**

Wednesday, February 15th, 2017

Deer hunters are used to sitting quietly in a blind for—sometimes—hours before a buck or doe saunters into view. If they ever do. Increase your odds of harvesting game by hunting rabbits.

*I mean, there is an abundance of rabbits across Texas.*

Rabbit hunting is year-round and statewide. Heidi Rao, a hunter education specialist says rabbits don't often stray into the wide open spaces, and suggests hunting the edges of their territory, such as fence lines or tree lines.

*A lot of people use .22 rifles, .22 pistols. Some people use 410 shotgun or 20-gauge.*

Rao recommends sticking with the .22s; shotguns are loud and can cause other rabbits to run erratically, reducing your odds of taking a safe shot.

*The do zigzag. We always recommend making sure you have a safe background and that you can identify your target. So, we always want to make sure that you have a good still shot. So, make sure that they stop. Because it's always difficult to hit a moving target if you don't have a spray of pellets like a shotgun.*

Besides, it was that shotgun blast that made the rabbits zigzag in the first place. Plus, a single shot from a .22 will go further to preserve the integrity of the meat.

Tomorrow—a recipe for making cottontail carnitas.

The Wildlife restoration program supports our series and works to promote shooting sports and hunting in Texas.

## **Hunting Rabbits and Hares in Texas**

Tuesday, February 14th, 2017

People who hunt rabbits say they find it more engaging than waiting hours in a blind for a deer to visit a feeder.

*Sometimes when you're deer hunting, you might be sitting in a blind just being quiet and waiting and not see anything.*

You don't have to "bait and wait" with rabbits; they're everywhere. Heidi Rao, a hunter education specialist, says rabbits and hares may be hunted year round, statewide.

*In West Texas, you do have the larger jackrabbits. We do have some larger rabbits and hares down in South Texas. There is an abundance of rabbits across Texas.*

A hunting license is still necessary. Rao says you can use a shotgun when rabbit hunting, but they tend to be loud.

*If you plan on doing a day of rabbit hunting, and you're using a shotgun, you could scare away some of the other rabbits in the area. They could hunker down and hide because of the noise. A .22 rifle or pistol is a lot quieter.*

Heidi Rao offers tips on hunting rabbits.

*The best way to hunt rabbits—they love cover. They hide near their food source. So that's a great way to hunt rabbit, along what we call edge. Which is the edge of their habitat versus the open area.*

[Find hunting information by species](#) on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

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## [\*\*Rabbits Versus Hares — Some Differences\*\*](#)

Monday, February 13th, 2017

A cottontail is a rabbit and a jackrabbit is a hare. And although they're in the same family, they're different species. Hares have longer ears and back legs than rabbits—and the differences don't stop there.

*One of the [differences between hares and rabbits](#) are the types of nests they build. And this is determined by the condition of their young at birth.*

Heidi Rao is a hunter education specialist. She says true rabbits are born hairless, blind, and dependent on their mother's care.

*A young jackrabbit is actually born with his eyes open, and his body fully furred, and with the ability to hop around only moments after birth. It doesn't need an elaborate nest to be reared.*

Hares are less social, and they give birth and raise their young in above ground nests. Rabbits live in groups, and give birth and raise their young in underground burrows or warrens. There is one exception. The cottontail.

*The eastern cottontail's nest is a saucer-like depression three or four inches deep and about eight inches across. And they line it with mouthfuls of soft, dead grass mixes, and hair from the mother's body.*

Hares are more skittish than rabbits and do not make good pets. But they both are good eating. Hunting rabbits and hares...that's tomorrow.

## **The Future of Print Editions of TPW Magazine**

Friday, February 10th, 2017

Technological advancements have changed the way we consume information. Many of us have put down newspapers, magazine and books in favor of digital devices.

Even the 75 year old Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine has an APP. So, I checked in with Editor, Louie Bond, to get her thoughts on whether she believes this outdoor magazine of Texas it will remain a print publication.

*I truly believe that we will always have a print copy.*

*I think that there's a great love for readers young and old to have that quiet time that you spend away from all screens—and to just hold that magazine in your hand and turn the page and see what surprise is next—rather than looking up a certain topic digitally and seeing it that way.*

*So for me, I'm an old school paper, print journalism person. So, I love the experience of picking up a magazine and not knowing what the next page is going to bring. And I don't think you get that same feeling in an app.*

*However, [a lot of young people get their information digitally](#). So, that enables us to reach both audiences. And it doesn't really take anything away from our print magazine to add digital viewers as well.*

The January/February issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine is on newsstands now. You can also download the app from [tpwmagazine.com](http://tpwmagazine.com).

## **Biggest Change for TPW Magazine in 75 Years**

Thursday, February 9th, 2017

Generations of Texans have enjoyed Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine. This year the publication observes its seventy-five year anniversary. I asked editor, Louie Bond, what she considers one of biggest changes to the magazine since the first issue debuted in 1942.

*I've now been the editor for 10 years. In Parks and Wildlife terms, that's short. But for me, it feels like a good, solid block of time. And I think definitely the biggest thing we've done—in the past decade—is the addition of the app.*

*It started out as just a page turner on our website—it seemed the easiest way to go from print to digital. But now, with the advent of so many technological changes, we can add so much more to the app than just a digital reading of the story. There's more movement. There's videos. There's additional material that doesn't fit into the print magazine. There will be whole slideshows of additional photos.*

*If there's historical documents in the article, we can show those in more detail. And so, it opens a lot of new doors for storytelling for us. And a way to reach younger readers.*

**[Download the app from the Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine website](#)** and enjoy the magazine of Texas in a new way.

## Lionfish Symposium to Host Public Forum

Wednesday, February 8th, 2017

The second Lone Star Lionfish Symposium convenes later this month in Galveston. In addition to a closed-door session where experts from a variety of disciplines will review a report generated from last year's gathering, there will also be an opportunity for public participation.

*We know the public is interested, and they're the only people that can help us. We can have all the ideas we want, but if the public's not with us—doesn't get our message—then we've lost.*

Leslie Hartman is Matagorda Bay Program Leader and one of the symposium's organizers. The public event will be at Moody Gardens Imax.

*We usually do about a 20 minute review of the lionfish program so that everybody has that same level of knowledge. And then, all the experts are there, so you get that baseline—which is me—but you get the real experts. And you can ask them any question you want.*

Topics reviewed last year included: Priority Areas, Outreach, Research, Policy, Control & Management, Funding, and Markets & Uses. Everyone is welcome to the public event.

*Just show up. The event starts at 6 p.m. We will have light hors d'oeuvres, so not only will you be able to feed your mind, you'll be able to feed your body. **Will you be serving lionfish?** We are actually discussing that possibility. We make no promises.*

The Lone Star Lionfish Symposium is February 15 & 16 in Galveston. [\*\*The public event is the 15th at Moody Gardens IMAX Theater.\*\*](#)

The Sport fish restoration program supports our series.