

Passport to Texas December 2017

[A Month of Holiday Fun Ahead at State Parks](#)

Friday, December 1st, 2017

Texas State Parks have what you're looking for this holiday season.

On December 2 join the festivities at Lake Casa Blanca International State Park in Laredo, for the [Fourth Annual Christmas Boat Parade](#)! There's Music and games. Activities begin at 5:30 pm and the Boat Parade will begin at 7:30 pm.

Also on December 2, from 6 – 8 p.m. at Goliad SP & HS, Dr. James Lee directs the Beeville Community Chorus as they present [a selection of sacred and secular Christmas music inside the old mission chapel](#).

On December 9th, celebrate an 1850's [Christmas at Washington-on-the-Brazos SHS](#). Explore the farm. Fall in with rowdy revelers. Meet up with St. Nick. There's an evening service with a traveling minister and a barn dance, too. Reservations are encouraged.

December 15 from 6-8 p.m. enjoy a sparkly evening at [Monument Hill & Kreische Brewery State Historic Site](#) when you walk their 1/4-mile trail of lights that overlooks the city of La Grange. Experience the 1850s era home of German immigrant H.L. Kreische bedecked in German-Texas Christmas splendor of the period.

In the Galveston area? [On Christmas day join Ranger Lisa for 1.5 mile afternoon stroll](#) along the beach. Look for birds, dolphins, sea shells, or the occasional \$20 bill. It happens.

Find more events at texasstateparks.org/holidays.

[State Parks Offer Unique Holiday Fun](#)

Monday, December 4th, 2017

Get to a state park or historic site this holiday season.

When we get to go outside and integrate holiday nostalgia and mix that with the outdoors and Christmas lights and food—it creates a really unique experience.

Thomas Wilhelm, with state parks, says forty-three sites have planned more than 60 holiday-themed events.

Our historic sites are doing a lot of period appropriate recreations of Christmas. We'll have a lot of fun outdoors with decorated campsite events, Santa hikes, that sort of thing. We also have a lot of food themed events this year.

Such as a taffy pull and cookie walk. Experience other sweet events like A Very Marshy Christmas at Sea Rim State Park near Beaumont.

Santa and Mrs. Claus arrive by airboat, and hang out with the kids and take pictures. Lake Mineral Wells State Park, near Fort Worth, they are having their Cross-Timbers Cowboy Christmas. And they'll have Christmas Cowboy Style. They're having a cowboy poet come in, a cowboy singer. And they'll gather 'round the campfire. Palo Duro Canyon is having their Balloon Glow event in the canyon, which is a really unique experience. And they are collecting donations for the High Plains Food Bank, which is a great opportunity to participate in "the season of giving."

Find all holiday events at texasstateparks.org/holidays.

Fishing for Flounder

Tuesday, December 5th, 2017

Flounder's flat shape and ability to blend with its surroundings, makes it nearly invisible and difficult to catch—unless you're Brian Treadway...

I think I've got a hit. Fish on! Fish on! I give you the southern Flounder. They live to be about six years of age. The state record's 13 pounds. So, a 20-inch flounder's considered a trophy fish.

Treadway fishes for flounder in Chocolate bayou, which he says is ideal flounder habitat.

The edge of the shoreline is a prime example of what you want to fish. It's not flat. It's simply curvy, and lots of points. Lots of edges. Drains are coming out of the marsh. It's just a prime example of great, great terrain for the flounder.

December 1st -14th, the daily bag limit is two flounder, taken by any legal means. The current minimum size for a keeper is 14 inches with no maximum.

Oh, shoot. I stepped on him.

When Coe Parker's not stepping on flounder in Christmas Bay, he's gigging them.

The tools you need for gigging are a good gig—two prong preferably. I have mine marked off with the legal size limit. You have an underwater gig light, as well as a 12-volt deer feeder battery. That's pretty much all you need.

Gigging with the best of them. Tomorrow.

Gigging After Dark for Flounder

Wednesday, December 6th, 2017

If you think fishing is a warm weather endeavor for the daytime hours, think again. Kelly Parker and his son Coe take to *Christmas Bay in the dark of night in fall and winter months to flounder—as in fishing for flounder.*

It's nice and cool. You're not worried about a sunburn. So, it's relaxing. You aren't working up a sweat. And it's just very enjoyable. Very peaceful.

The Parker's wade into the bay armed with a gig and shining a light on the water. A gig is pole fitted with a multi-pronged spear for impaling the fish. Gigging is a legal means of harvesting flounder between December 1st and 14th. The bag limit is two fish per day.

[Kelly] Hurry. Hurry. Hurry before it goes. That cloud's going to get over it. Go! [splash] Yeah. There you go. [Coe] That actually looks like a Gulf flounder. [Kelly] I knew there was one hiding out here somewhere. [Coe] Yeah, they're very hard to find. And a lot of people first time gigging ask what they're looking for. And literally you're looking for what we call the imprint. It's the outline of the flounder. So, it looks like a football with a tail. That's how I kind of describe it to new people that are coming out to the sport.

This flatfish is skilled at laying low, and blending with its surroundings. Sometimes they're closer than you think.

[Coe] Oh shoot. [Kelly] Stepped on him? [Coe] I stepped on him. I missed him. Let me see if I can find another one real quick. I saw a few over here.

Watch your step, and [find fishing information on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.](#)

Stocking Southern Flounder

Thursday, December 7th, 2017

Spotted sea trout, redfish and southern flounder are the top three popular sportfish. Sea trout and redfish populations are stable, but not so for Southern Flounder.

We've had a slow, but stead, decrease in flounder populations throughout the coast of Texas. It's been worse in some bays than it has in others. But it's just been a slow decline.

David Abrego oversees the hatchery program at Sea Center Texas. Data suggests fewer females, over fishing, and loss due to shrimp bycatch are some of the main issues affecting flounder. Coastal hatcheries are tasked with helping boost the Southern Flounder populations.

The whole point of the stocking enhancement program is to supplement the natural population with fish.

Former stocking team member, Shane Bonnot, says there's a learning curve with flounder.

Flounder is totally different than redfish and trout; it's a whole new ballgame. So, we're at the beginning stages of learning how to culture this fish.

The process begins with capturing male brooders to fertilize the eggs. And it's not easy to do.

You have so many factors that can go against you. Whether it's the wind, or a strong tide. And of course, visibility is not optimal.

They breed healthy males with females at the hatchery, and after three months, they release thousands of flounder fingerlings into the bays to supplement the wild population...for your angling pleasure.

TPW TV–Lone Star Hiking Trail

Friday, December 8th, 2017

Texas Parks and Wildlife TV producers go the distance to tell compelling stories. In, Jeffrey Buras' case, that distance was 100 miles for a segment called: The Hundred Mile Hike.

It is a challenge, because not only are you doing a 100-mile hike, but you're also trying to shoot a video of that hike. For Emily, she got to just enjoy it and experience it, but I was worried about angles and lighting and batteries.

The segment follows 20-year-old Emily Lozano, a former State Park Ambassador as she backpacks the Lone Star Hiking trail in Sam Houston National Forrest.

I've always loved the outdoors. So, this spring break I decided to try something a little bit new, and go on a backpacking trip. I'm going to do the Lone Star hiking Trail; it's extremely long. We'll see how it goes.

Emily is alone for most of her trek, and Jeffrey did his best to remove himself from her experience. But at the end of the day when recording voice over recaps...

It was funny because while we were doing those little recaps, she would say 'Oh, and then Jeffrey did this. Oh, I can't talk about Jeffrey.' Then she would say "Well, my imaginary friend did this...'. She kept referring to me as her imaginary friend.

Emily's experience is anything but imaginary. Join her on the trail next week on the Texas Parks and WildlifeTV series on PBS.

It was such a great spring break. Great in ways I wouldn't have expected it to be. I'm so glad I went.

And you'll be so glad you watched. Check your local listings.

Still Time to Get State Park Ornaments

Monday, December 11th, 2017

State park users look forward to this time of year because new Texas State park ornaments are available.

For the last several years, we've featured three unique parks each year. This year we're featuring Lake Arrowhead SP, Garner SP and Village Creek SP. Three very different parks from three very different regions.

Thomas Wilhelm, with state parks, says the American made laser engraved wooden ornaments include an iconic image associated with each featured site.

Each year we try to feature a historic site that has a Civilian Conservation Corps component...we [may also] feature either an animal or geography [on an ornament]. This year we're featuring Lake Arrowhead because of the prairie dog town there. So, the image is a prairie dog. And we try to do an activity as well. So, this year Village Creek, we're featuring paddling sports that happen there at Village Creek.

The CCC built dance terrace adorns the Garner SP ornament. Purchase ornaments individually or as a group. A limited number of ornaments from past years are also available.

Call our customer service center (512.389.8900) any time during the month of December, and they will walk you through the process, and make sure you get the ones that you're looking for. It's usually about a 10 day turnaround from order to receipt.

Find prices and additional information about all [Texas State Parks ornaments on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website](#).

TPW Magazine – Featuring Epic Texas Challenges

Tuesday, December 12th, 2017

Expect months of action-packed stories in [Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine](#).

We have chosen as our theme for 2018: the year of epic Texas challenges.

Editor, Louie Bond. And just what are epic Texas challenges?

The biggest. The best. The most. The fastest. Whatever hyperbole you can come up with... You know, Texans love to brag [good natured] and challenge each other. So. We're going to play on that Texas spirit all year long.

Louie said the challenges align with the Texas Parks and Wildlife mission.

We thought about all of the things that we love to write about in the magazine, and we started looking at all the events that happen in Texas. We figured there was no way to make it all match up month-for-month with our publication. But you know the magic that happens. We found all the different categories and were able to place one in each month of the magazine. So, it just worked out perfectly.

In 2018, readers will paddle to the coast during the Texas Water Safari, bag big deer at the Muy Grande deer contest, push personal limits during the Howl at the Moon Relay, and hang on for dear life at the Hueco Tanks Rock Rodeo and more.

One thing readers might like to know is that if one particular month doesn't please them—each month is totally different. So, I hope that they hang on for an issue that piques their curiosity.

The latest issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine is on newsstands now.

TPW Magazine – Hueco Rock Rodeo

Wednesday, December 13th, 2017

The January 2018 issue of [Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine](#), features a story about the Hueco Rock Rodeo by Russell Roe.

The Hueco Tanks Rock Rodeo is a bouldering competition they hold every year at [Hueco Tanks State Park](#) outside El Paso. And it is the top bouldering competition in the nation, if not the world.

During four days in February, competitors cling to and climb boulders and small cliffs using nothing but their hands and feet.

Bouldering may lack the drama of scaling a high peak. The climbers are drawn to it because of the purity of the climbing and the powerful, graceful moves required, and the mental challenge of finding the best way to the top.

Climbers spot... and cheer on one another. Some climbs find competitors seemingly defying gravity.

At Hueco Tanks, they're really kind of finding the steepest thing they can climb. Which is often the roof of a cave. They're moving horizontally across the ground—holding on by their feet and their hands. And, it goes seem like it defies gravity.

Look for Russell Roe's Hueco Rock Rodeo story in the January issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine.

The history of Hueco Tanks, concerning bouldering, is so rich. And this competition celebrates bouldering and celebrates Hueco Tanks' history, and the development of that sport.

Clean Windows May be Dangerous to Birds

Thursday, December 14th, 2017

When ornithologist, Cliff Shackelford, visited the studio recently, he brought with him a small, lifeless bird.

And it turns out to be a yellow-bellied sapsucker.

The little woodpecker had flown into a window at Texas Parks and Wildlife headquarters. Cliff determined its sex and age by the smattering of red feathers on its head and white ones on its throat.

This is a female, yellow-bellied sapsucker, first year bird. I have a permit that allows me to salvage these and take them to a museum where it can be put up as a museum specimen for scientific use.

You've probably seen dead birds in your neighborhood.

Bird deaths are rampant in urban areas [from] windows and/or housecats. You can't take the killer out of a cat. And then windows: go outside—try to take the perspective of a bird. Look at the window. You'll see blue skies and white clouds, and the trees. It's all a reflection of what's behind you.

Birds, especially the young and inexperienced, fly into the reflection because it looks like clear passage.

The really sad part is, this bird doesn't breed in Texas or anywhere close to Texas. This is a winter bird. And actually, I haven't seen one yet this fall. It's sad that the first one [I see] is a dead one in my hand.

As a museum specimen, researchers will study the little bird to better understand her species.

Her death is not in vain, but tens of thousands of birds across the planet die every day by hitting windows.

As good a reason as any not to wash your windows. The Wildlife Restoration Program supports our series.

Quail and Turkey Outlook for 2017-2018

Friday, December 15th, 2017

Last quail season, bobwhite were at an all-time high thanks to a few years of great weather in a row.

We saw something we hadn't seen in over 10 years, and it was quite special. And what comes up, must come down.

Robert Perez is Upland Bird Game Program Leader.

This past winter and spring we had average winter rains. Average spring rains. And so, we did have some quail production over the summer—that wasn't phenomenal. But what we did have was so many birds that are still alive from last year that they carried over to this year. So, hunters can expect—in the bag—a lot of adult birds.

The season for Bobwhite, Scaled (blue) and Gambel's Quail runs through February 25, statewide.

Scaled quail were phenomenal as well. Way out west in the Trans Pecos. There will still be great hunting opportunities out west at our WMAs.

If turkey's more your bag, Perez says Rio Grande Turkey season is looking good.

Rio Grande turkey hunting in Texas is top notch. Populations in our state are at an all-time high. We'll have two year old, three year old birds. Maybe not so much production this past year—a little bit below average—but, overall, Texas populations of Rio Grande turkeys are just through the roof.

[Refer to the Outdoor Annual](#) for seasons and bag limits for all upland game birds.

The Christmas Tree in Texas

Monday, December 18th, 2017

The custom of decorating trees for Christmas took root in German villages during the sixteenth century.

A lot of Germans, as you know, settled Texas. And they brought a tradition with them of the tabletop Christmas tree.

Cynthia Brandimarte is program director for Texas historic sites.

When you look at interior photographs of Texas houses, you see many tabletop Christmas trees ornamented for the season, particularly in German households in the late nineteenth century Texas.

Ornaments were handmade then, and small gifts often dangled from branches. Eventually, the tabletop conifer gave way to larger trees that became “floor models,” and the decorations sometimes mirrored the day's events.

You saw more and more seven or eight feet trees that were placed on the floor. And because we had just ended the Spanish American war in victory, there was a fashion in the early part of the twentieth century to decorate trees with a few American flags here and there. We have photographic evidence for that.

If you celebrate Christmas, we wish you a joyous holiday season. And if you do not, then it's the perfect time to immerse yourself in nature, because Life's Better Outside.

Road Ecology and Protecting Rare Species

Tuesday, December 19th, 2017

Roads provide convenient travel to work, school and home for humans—but not for wildlife.

You have habitat loss. And then that physical road can act as a barrier to wildlife. It can impact habitat connectivity. Which, then, in turn can impact genetic transfer of information between populations, and weaken the genetic background for a species.

Laura Zebehazy, program leader for **Wildlife Habitat Assessment**, studies the impacts of roadways on wildlife, known as road ecology.

Basically, it is where biologists, engineers, landscape architects... try to evaluate the impacts that road infrastructure has on wildlife habitat connectivity, air pollution, noise pollution, and try to find solutions to alleviate those impacts from that type of development.

Endangered ocelots that live in Rio Grande Valley brush country have died on SH 100. Recently, TxDOT, in consultation with USFWS and Texas Parks and Wildlife..., completed four wildlife underpasses along this popular route to South Padre Island.

To allow ocelot and any other wildlife in the area to move under the road between the Bahia Grande to the south, and the Port of Brownsville area up north towards Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.

With wildlife cameras in place, TxDOT will collect data on these solutions and adjust as necessary **to save this (and other) rare species**.

The Wildlife restoration Program supports our series.

The Problem With Pelicans

Wednesday, December 20th, 2017

You're driving the posted 75 MPH speed limit on SH 48 in south Texas. It's winter. Dusk. You're crossing the bridge. Suddenly, you see a pelican on the road; you barely miss it.

What happened?

In winter, what's been happening at the Gamin Bridge—at SH 48 in Bahia Grande—is strong northerly winds come through at dusk, when pelicans are coming from the coast; they want to go roost on the Bahia Grande, [but] the way the bridge as well as the concrete barriers is engineered, it's creating these wind vortexes that—if they don't get high enough loft—makes the birds lose loft, and they crash into the roadway.

Laura Zebehazy, program leader for Wildlife Habitat Assessment, studies the impacts of roadways on wildlife, known as road ecology. Researchers believe the structure of the SH 48 Bridge, along with the fluctuating tide, may impact the wind, and the pelicans' fate.

It is contributing, but now there needs to be further research that looks at what can we do to the bridge and those concrete barriers that's the most effective to alleviate the number of pelicans that are being impacted.

We'll learn more about that tomorrow.

The Wildlife restoration Program supports our series.

Protecting Pelicans from Deadly Downdrafts

Thursday, December 21st, 2017

Winter evenings, when north winds blow, brown pelicans perish along SH 48 between Brownsville and South Padre. The highway bridge, concrete barriers, and changing tides, contribute to downdrafts that cause the birds to crash onto the roadway enroute to their roost at Bahia Grande.

It's heartbreaking to see what's going on there.

Over the last year more than a hundred the birds died on SH 48. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, TxDOT, USFWS, nonprofits and citizen groups, have joined to develop solutions, says Laura Zebehazy, program leader for Wildlife Habitat Assessment at Texas Parks and Wildlife.

They're putting up temporary signage to ask the traveling public to slow down. Be aware: there's pelicans on the road. DPS is getting involved. There's folks who volunteer to flag people down to get them to slow down if they know a bird is on the roadway.

Earlier, TxDOT installed poles on the bridge, which forces the birds to fly higher.

Now, they're actually putting these flashing lights [on the poles] so the birds can see. All of these things trying to encourage the birds to move up as much as possible so, they can maybe avoid that tornado of winds that makes them fall to the roadway.

If you find yourself driving that stretch of road at dusk this winter, slow down; save lives.

The Wildlife restoration Program supports our series.

TPW TV — Mules of the Plains

Friday, December 22nd, 2017

The panhandle of Texas is the epitome of rural. And [mule deer](#) can be found nearly everywhere. Just ask local, Rodney Geissler.

It's not unusual to nearly be able to walk plumb up on a mule deer. [Truck door closes] Or drive up on one. If they're out in the field next to the highway you can stop and take pictures of them [camera clicks].

In fall and winter it's common to see groups of up to 200 mule deer grazing in wheat fields. And that interests biologists like Thomas Janke.

One of the big questions of this project is dealing with agriculture land versus the rangeland like you see behind me.

Janke is studying how mule deer movements and survival are influenced by panhandle agriculture.

Is there a difference in the nutritional value of the plants? Or is it the deer are picking it just because it's out here and they have a buffet.

During the week of December 24, the [Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series on PBS](#) will feature a segment on the mule deer study, which shows how they use helicopters to track and trap the animals.

We have deer that are radio collared that we captured back in 2015. The radio collars all transmit a signal. Those radio collars are allowing the helicopter crew to use radio telemetry and locate them.

[Check your local listings.](#)

The Wildlife restoration program supports our series, and funds mule deer research in Texas.

Finding Your Resolve for 2018

Monday, December 25th, 2017

As we approach the New Year we consider ways to improve our lives in the 12 months ahead.

More time outdoors often ranks near the top of everyone's list. Thirty minutes a day outdoors for adults, and an hour for children, improves overall physical and mental wellbeing.

Consider a daily walk ‘round your neighborhood, or explore your own backyard. Discover what critters make their homes there. Create a game of counting the species you see. Do this every day to see if something new has arrived. Keep a list and compare the seasons.

Perhaps this New Year you’ll become a citizen scientist. Texas Nature Tracker Programs can help. Sign up for Nature Trackers, choose from the rare species they’re tracking, and share your observations on [iNaturalist](#). Biologists use your data to broaden their knowledge, and improve the support they provide these species.

Perhaps this is the year you volunteer with one of the friends groups at a nearby Texas state park, or become a master naturalist, or even a certified Texas Wasters Specialist.

The New Year holds so much promise for you, your family, friends and community. Enrich your life when you spend time in nature solo or with others, because Life’s Better Outside.

2018 First Day Hikes in State Parks

Tuesday, December 26th, 2017

When it comes to making New Year resolutions, success comes when you walk your talk. For the past few years, that’s meant busting a move on state park trails during [First Day Hike events](#).

First Day Hikes is a nationwide initiative that Texas State Parks has been participating in for the last several years.

Thomas Wilhelm, with state parks, says most sites throughout Texas will host First Day Hikes.

Essentially, it’s the concept of getting outside on January first, and doing something to kick the year off right. So, almost all of our parks have some sort of first day hike. A few of our parks take it a unique way. For example, Balmorhea state park—the swimming pool in West Texas—they have a first day dive. So, everybody jumps into Balmorhea, which is a polar dive sort of thing, but that’s a unique experience. But many of our parks do have those first day hikes. And they’re, of course, guided hikes with a park ranger. And it’s just a way to start the year off right on the good foot. Literally.

Find all First Day Hike events at texasstateparks.org.

2018 Resolutions for Anglers

Wednesday, December 27th, 2017

When I asked Karen Marks and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Aquatic Education team if they had any New Year resolutions for anglers that they’d like to share with me, they did, and boiled them down to three little words:

Learn. Fish. Teach.

Learn to be safe on or near the water. Understand weather and water currents, and how to safely use your gear. Learn how to hold and release fish safely for you and the fish. Most of all, [**learn about aquatic invasive species**](#) and how as an angler you can prevent their spread.

Fish. Get outside and go fish. Buy a license and follow all regulations. [**It's free to fish at state parks**](#) with fishing opportunities. Use established trails to access shoreline, and pick up litter along the way. Leave every area better than you found it. And invite family and friends to join you; don't be surprised when they jump at the chance.

That brings us to teach. Volunteer at a local fishing event, help a scout group, volunteer with Parks and Wildlife or with a local veteran fishing organization like Heroes on the Water and Project Healing Waters.

Moreover, [**consider becoming a certified TPWD Angler Education instructor**](#). Share your knowledge, skills and proper attitudes towards our fishing heritage, and help create a brighter future for freshwater and saltwater fishing in Texas.

The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series.

2018 Resolutions for Hunters

Thursday, December 28th, 2017

Today: resolutions for hunters. Hunter Education Director, Steve Hall, provided a list of resolutions that, when followed, will make it even more rewarding to be a hunter in Texas this New Year.

[**Attend a hunter education course**](#) and recommend the training to anyone who wants to learn more about firearm, hunting and outdoor safety as well as game laws, ethics and responsibilities.

Be safe and obey the laws such as [**always practicing proper muzzle control**](#), staying within a safe zone of fire and brushing up on game laws and regulations each year through the Outdoor Annual.

Practicing your shooting skills before you leave for your hunting trips; learn proper shot angles, shot placement, distance estimation and vital zones of the game you hunt.

Take care of your game from "field to table"; [**learn how to properly field dress**](#), transport, butcher, freeze and prepare your favorite wild game meals.

Take along someone new to hunting on your next trip; expose them to the joys of the outdoors and to taking their own healthy, organic meat for the table.

Become a hunter education instructor and give back you knowledge, skills and proper attitudes towards the hunting heritage and a brighter future for hunting and shooting sports.

The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series.