

## [TPW Magazine – Gently Down the Stream](#)

Wednesday, March 1st, 2017

Photo-journalist, Camille Wheeler, grew up in a farming and ranching family in West Texas, and remains a country girl at heart, despite living in the Capital City since the mid-1990s.

*I didn't grow up around very much water. So, while I was a country girl, I've always had a fascination with rivers and streams.*

Given her fascination for flowing water, she wondered why she'd never explored Austin's Lady Bird Lake.

*So, about a year ago [in January], I went out—really for the first time by myself—on a kayak, on Lady Bird Lake. And the lake was just filled with all these wintering birds. And the double crested cormorant is one of my favorite birds in the world. There were so many of them, and I could paddle up close to them and take pictures. And I was like: Why have I not been doing this?*

She discovered Lady Bird Lake is in Texas Parks and Wildlife's Paddling Trails Program, which gave her an idea for an article. She shared the idea with TPW magazine's editor, and the agency's nature tourism manager.

*We came up with this idea of me traveling around the state as a beginner [paddler] who has medium knowledge of birds, and putting the two things together for readers.*

Read about it in the March issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine. On tomorrow's show: how Camille Wheeler found the middle of nowhere in the middle of everywhere on an urban paddling trail.

That's our show for today...

## [Middle of Nowhere and Everywhere](#)

Thursday, March 2nd, 2017

Photo-journalist Camille Wheeler discovered five urban jungles teeming with wildlife when she [kayaked along their paddling trails](#).

*I had this romantic notion that I was going to do all five of these trails by myself. I actually did do two of them by myself. [But] I actually wound up having the best time on the three trails that I did with groups.*

She kayaked and in Fort Worth, Grand Prairie, Houston, San Antonio and Pasadena...and wrote about it for the March issue of [Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine](#).

*I felt like an explorer even in the middle of a group. I went out with the assurance that these paddling trails had been mapped and surveyed by a Texas Parks and Wildlife team. But, there was this sense of adventure traveling these waterways that were new to me.*

Camille saw birds, fish, insects, and even alligators—all in the middle of densely populated urban areas. She says urban paddling trails offer close-in outdoor opportunities.

*People like me can get our feet wet here in these urban areas, on these trails that are very safe and easy. And now that I have had a little bit of experience, and some very good guidance—my heart is beating fast at the thought of going back to these same trails that I’ve already traveled, and then going out a little bit farther and a little bit more into the country. And rekindling this love affair with water that is new for a middle-aged woman.*

You’re never too old to experience something new. Read Camille Wheeler’s article, Gently Down the Stream, in the March issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine.

## **TPW TV – Guzzlers for Wildlife**

Friday, March 3rd, 2017

A guzzler is a rain catchment device. Collected rainwater gets funneled into a tank that feeds a water trough for wildlife.

*As we all know, animals need water. Our annual rainfall is only around 11 inches a year. So we’re trying to supplement that water during dry periods.*

Travis Smith is a biologist at the Black Gap Wildlife management area in Brewster County. So is Will Rhodes.

*We’re in southern Brewster County which is in the Trans-Pecos region of Texas.*

They build and maintain guzzlers on the Gap—45 so far—and see to the needs of wildlife on the management area.

*We’re in the Chihuahuan Desert Ecosystem. The area is 103,000 acres or a little over. Black Gap is kind of in the middle of nowhere.*

Next week the men explain and demonstrate guzzlers on a segment of the [Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series on PBS](#).

*So this catchment consist of R-Panel in 12 foot lengths, which is connected to these 6 inch C-Purlins by...*

Let’s stop there. Will’s going to tell us about purlins and pitch threads and storage tanks; it’s not sexy stuff. But it’s necessary when building guzzlers at Black Gap. And, so are wildlife cameras.

*On these game cameras it’s triggered by motion. Usually that’s going to be wildlife coming in to get water from the guzzlers here.*

Which means their efforts are successful. See the segment on Guzzlers next week on the Texas Parks and Wildlife TV Series on PBS.

## **Birding Classic Still Flying High after 21 Years**

Monday, March 6th, 2017

Twenty seventeen marks the 21st anniversary of the Great Texas Birding Classic.

*I’ve been involved for 20 of those 21 years.*

Shelly Plante is Nature Tourism Manager for Texas Parks and Wildlife. In the beginning, Plante says the majority of participants were “hard core” birders. Since becoming a statewide event, she says it’s evolved into a tournament for everyone.

*We have a lot of different categories. There are categories for beginners; categories for kids who are just getting started; categories families can take part in—or bird clubs can take part in. And so, I’ve seen this really huge growth in the generalist, which I think is fantastic. That’s who we would love to connect with nature. They may not have a connection. So, we’re hopefully making that connection for them with an event.*

The Great Texas Birding Classic is April 15 through May 15; registration deadline is April 1st. Money raised through fees and sponsorship goes toward conservation grants.

*The more money we raise through registration fees and sponsorship, the more money we are able to award to conservation grant projects throughout the state. So last year, we gave out \$36-thousand dollars worth of grants. And, some of the winning teams got to pick which projects received that funding. So, it’s really a fun way to take part in conservation, and maybe even get to choose who gets those conservation dollars.*

Put together a team and register before April 1, at [birdingclassic.org](http://birdingclassic.org).

### **Birding Classic Attracts Birders Old & New**

Tuesday, March 7th, 2017

The Great Texas Birding Classic continues to attract seasoned and beginning birders to its flock.

*It’s really crazy. We keep seeing amazing growth. I keep wondering when we might plateau, and it hasn’t happened yet.*

Shelly Plante is Nature Tourism Manager for Texas Parks and Wildlife. The tournament had a growth spurt beginning in 2013 after it became statewide.

*We had the largest participation in over ten years in that first year that we were statewide. And that was 58 teams. Since then, we’ve grown every single year; last year in 2016, for our 20th anniversary, we had 113 teams.*

The money raised funds conservation grants. Birders have fun doing it, when they participate in various tournaments. One of the most popular is the Big Sit.

*And it is what it sounds like. You are sitting in a 17-foot diameter circle for 24 hours (or parts of 24-hours), to see how many birds come through that area. In 2016 of the 113 teams that were registered for the Birding Classic, 40 of those teams were Big Sit teams. And they took place in every region of the state.*

Register a team before April 1, at [birdingclassic.org](http://birdingclassic.org).

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation supports our series and helps keep Texas wild with support of proud members across the state. Find out more at [tpwf.org](http://tpwf.org)

### **No Bird Shaming, Just Bird Watching**

Wednesday, March 8th, 2017

During [The Great Texas Birding Classic](#), birding teams raise money for conservation while they compete for bragging rights against other teams...if there are other teams.

*If you wanted to know where I really feel like people need a challenge, I think the Panhandle. They want some competition up there.*

Shelly Plante is Nature Tourism Manager for Texas Parks and Wildlife. While the coast hosts a multitude of birding teams during the classic, regions like the Panhandle barely have any, and they aren't alone.

*Far west Texas—they want some competition. The DFW area only has a couple of teams participating. They could use some great competition. It would be wonderful to see those areas grow by leaps and bounds this year, and to see a real shift in people seeing birdwatching as an activity that they can do with their friends and family in spring as the Birding Classic.*

There are tournaments suitable for nearly every experience level. So, c'mon Panhandle, [Far West Texas](#) and DFW Metroplex, step up to the challenge and put together a team. You other regions, too. I'm not trying to bird-shame anyone, but you can all do so much better.

When you register, the fee you pay supports conservation, and you'll have fun outdoors with friends and family. Doesn't that sound better than watching The Real Housewives of wherever?

The Birding Classic is April 15 through May 15, and the registration deadline is April 1. Do it for the birds.

## [Threats to Texas Bumblebees](#)

Thursday, March 9th, 2017

We all know about colony collapse disorder whereby colonies of European honeybees seem to vanish.

*Less well known are the threats facing a lot of our native bumblebees.*

Michael Warriner is an invertebrate biologist with a soft spot for native bumblebees. Like other native wildlife species in Texas, habitat loss is taking its toll on native bumblebees.

*Bumblebees need open, flower-rich habitat—like grasslands. And, a lot of that habitat's been converted to agriculture.*

Warriner says pesticide use is another concern, but the threats to these big black and yellow insects doesn't stop there.

*And also, there's been the importation of bumblebees from Europe into this country which has brought in parasites and diseases that may be impacting them. So, there's a lot of concern how they're faring in North America.*

One of the threats to Texas bumblebees might actually be honeybees, which have colonies in the tens of thousands compared to the hundreds of insects in a bumblebee colony.

*Honeybees have these tens of thousands of workers, and so they can go out and monopolize a flower resource—like nectar or pollen—and that reduces what's available for our native bees. And there's some research that suggests that the presence of honeybees in natural sites can reduce native bees.*

We'll have the potential impact from bumblebee decline tomorrow.

## **Plight of the Bumblebee**

Friday, March 10th, 2017

Texas has nine native bumblebee species. Loss of habitat to agriculture, use of pesticides, as well as European honeybees competing for food, threatens these important pollinators.

*And so if we have a reduction in bumblebees, that spells trouble for our ecosystems.*

Michael Warriner, an invertebrate biologist, says because Texas bumblebees have evolved with native flora as pollinators, fewer native bees would eventually translate to fewer native plants, which would impact other living things...

*The birds and the mammals and other insects that depend on plants for fruit, or seeds, or just the functioning ecosystem.*

While we give non-native European honeybees credit for pollinating our food crops, in some instances, bumblebees outperform them.

*14—Bumblebees, although they aren't talked about a lot as important pollinators, they're much better and more efficient than honeybees. They're the best pollinators for things like tomatoes, blueberries, cranberries, melons, and those sorts of crops.*

You can find more bumblebee on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

*11—And if you're interested in being a bumblebee watcher, [check out the website, and if you see any bumblebees in your garden](#), just send in photos. We're really trying to learn how bumblebees are doing.*

## **Oops! Baby Bird Out of the Nest**

Monday, March 13th, 2017

As spring approaches it's good to know what to do if you find a baby bird out of its nest. And the babies most likely to try and get a jump on spring are blue jays.

*I don't know what happens. They just jump the nest a couple days early, and the problem is they're in the backyard where the dogs and cats and kids are. So you really have to focus on not trying to pick up the bird.*

Cliff Shackelford, Parks and Wildlife's non-game ornithologist, says the baby is not abandoned; mom and dad are nearby.

*The better thing to do would be to pull the cats, dogs and kids in for that day or two and let the baby blue jay make it on its own with mom and dad. Because the fate is not the same if you pick it up and try to rehabilitate it. Mom and dad know how to raise baby birds a lot better than we do.*

Even so, it's good to be prepared if you do find a baby bird that is vulnerable and unattended.

*On your refrigerator, where you have the numbers of 9-1-1 and poison control, you should have [the number for] your local rehabilitator on your refrigerator ahead of time. Once you do get that baby bird — you don't have a lot of time.*

Find a list of wildlife rehabilitators by county on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

## **Baby Bird Rehab**

Tuesday, March 14th, 2017

Spring is in the air and so are some baby birds as they prematurely exit their nests. **If you find one grounded in your yard**, resist rescue. The parents may be nearby.

*Mom and dad know how to raise baby birds a lot better than we do.*

If the bird is a featherless nestling, return it to the nest, says ornithologist Cliff Shackelford. If it is a feathered, yet flightless fledgling, it may be under mom and dad's supervision. But if parents are absent, call a rehabilitator.

*You would work with that person on trying to get the bird to them. Keep in mind the rehabilitator's busy 24/7 tending to the wildlife they have — so don't expect them to come all the way to you. So you should probably make the point of, 'Okay. I'm committed to this; I'm going to see it through. So, I'm going to drive the bird even though it's an hour away to the rehabilitator.*

Rehabilitators are not evenly distributed, and the nearest one might be a two hour drive away, and Cliff says rescuers need to be prepared for that.

*And we have on the Parks and Wildlife website, **a list of the licensed rehabilitators in the state**. That is something that has to be permitted. You have to have state and federal permits to be a rehabilitator. You don't just take it down the road to grandma and hope that she can do it, because the reason they're permitted is they have to go through training, and they have to have the right facilities to be successful.*

Find that list of wildlife re

## **Don't Fear Bats**

Wednesday, March 15th, 2017

Despite improved public relations, people remain—if not terrified—then at least apprehensive of bats.

*A lot of people fear bats because of a lot of myths and superstitions associated with them.*

Meg Goodman, former Parks and Wildlife's bat biologist, says bats will not purposely entangle themselves in your hair, nor will they attempt to suck your blood.

*We do a lot of work to get the message across that bats are actually very, very beneficial for us, and they're very gentle creatures and very interesting to learn about and learn from.*

With education, more people are beginning to appreciate bats than fear them. In fact, we've even started looking forward to seeing certain bats—such as Mexican free-tails—that winter in Mexico and summer in Texas.

*The Mexican free-tailed bat is probably one of our most common bats in the state, and people know it because it lives in such large numbers in places such as bridges and caves and makes nightly emergences that many people can come out and watch.*

Tomorrow: the benefits of bats.

*The Mexican free-tailed bat, in particular, is really valuable for agricultural purposes.*

## **Benefit of Bats to Agriculture**

Thursday, March 16th, 2017

Farmers know how costly it can be to spray crops with insecticides to prevent pest damage. What some may not know is...bats can be partners in pest eradication.

*The Mexican free tail bat, in particular, is really valuable for agricultural purposes.*

Meg Goodman is a former Parks and Wildlife's bat biologist.

*Current research has shows that these bats can save farmers up to two sprays of pesticides per year because of all the insect pests that they're eating, like the corn earworm moth and the cotton boll worm moth, among other crop pest species.*

In the early 20th century, San Antonio physician Charles A. Campbell designed and tested artificial roosts to attract bats to eat mosquitoes blamed for the spread of malaria. Eventually Campbell developed a bat tower, which he installed at Mitchell Lake, south of the city, which attracted hundreds of thousands of the flying mammals. The spectacle of the bats' nightly emergence drew spectators in the 1920s...as it does today, wherever bats roost.

*Their numbers and nightly emergences bring in a lot of tourist dollars to a lot of smaller communities—and big communities like Austin... It's one of our top tourist destinations. But they do provide a lot of tourist dollars through nature tourism through a lot of our smaller communities throughout the state.*

Learn [how to attract bats](http://passporttotexas.org) at [passporttotexas.org](http://passporttotexas.org). That's our show...we receive support from the Wildlife Restoration program.

## **TPW TV–Casting Call with Neighborhood Fishin'**

Friday, March 17th, 2017

Texas Parks Wildlife's [Neighborhood Fishin' program](#) creates convenient and close-to-home fishing opportunities for city-dwellers by stocking urban lakes.

*Our goal with the neighborhood fishin' program is to bring the focus back to the outdoors.*

Effie Dukes and her husband David took the bait. In a segment of the Texas Parks and Wildlife TV show next week, viewers wait along with them at East Metropolitan Park in Travis County for the stocking truck to arrive.

*I think they'll be coming momentarily, because they said between 9 and 9:30. Yeah, look. They're coming with the fish.*



Marcos de Jesus is a natural resource specialist with Texas Parks and Wildlife. He says the fish they stock are big, healthy, and fun to catch. As Effie and David discovered.

*What we try to do is to actually bring fishing close to home. Most people in Texas are moving into bigger and bigger towns. Having these opportunities in your backyard, basically, is what it's all about. [Effie] Yeah! Got a big one! [David] That's what I'm talking about.*

The Neighborhood Fishin' Program provides an outdoor experience with fishing at its core. Perhaps her successful experience means the program reeled in Effie Dukes as its newest recruit.

*It's a big catfish. And I caught it with a net. With the help of my husband. With a rod and reel that I don't know how to use. [laughs]*

Catch the segment, Casting Call, next week on the [Texas Parks and Wildlife TV](#) show on PBS. [Check your local listings](#). The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series.

## **Black Bear Boom or Bust**

Monday, March 20th, 2017

A few years back we spoke with Texas Parks and Wildlife mammologist, Jonah Evans, about increased [sightings of black bear](#) in West Texas.

*A few years ago during the drought, we had a major boom in bears. What was happening is, when food resources were very low, they started dispersing, looking for other places to make a living. And, a lot of those bears came across—from those big mountain ranges in Mexico—into Texas.*

Black bears have, in effect, been absent from West Texas for years. So this was good news...but it did not persist.

*In the years since that big drought and that big dispersal period— 2011 and 2012—we really haven't seen nearly as many bears. In fact, last year [2016] we only had one bear report in West Texas. Not counting Big Bend National park, where, of course, they have many reports every year.*

The big bear boom went bust. But Jonah Evans says that's typical of this natural system of checks and balances.

*It's a bit disappointing, but I think it's also a little dose of realism, I guess—that this is probably the way that recolonization is going to happen. I haven't given up on the bears.*

Learn more about black bears on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series and funds diverse conservation projects in Texas.

## **Why the Black Bear BOOM Went BUST**

Tuesday, March 21st, 2017

Wildlife lovers were optimistic with increased reports of black bears in West Texas in 2011 and 12. Mammologist, Jonah Evans, says the drought drew animals across the Mexican border; yet, once the rains fell, so did reports of bears.



*Yes, it was a blip as the result of the drought—but that's the way that dispersal happens. And that's the way that bears recolonize: in pulses. So, they'll pulse out into the landscape, try to find little places where they can survive.*

Evans says bears that relocate take a risk, and many do not make it. He adds that bears follow the food. So I asked about the feasibility of creating bear-attracting habitat in West Texas.

*They want big oak trees making lots of acorns, or pecan trees, or fruit trees, or things like that. And those are things that take many, many years or even decades to establish. With white-tailed deer, you can put in a food plot, and next the next year, you're feeding deer. It's not that simple with bears.*

Then I asked about relocating black bears to suitable habitat—as we've done with eastern wild turkeys.

*Given that Texas has so much private land and the bears travel so far, it's a very tricky issue to release bears somewhere in Texas where they won't have the possibility of becoming a nuisance on a neighbor's property.*

Jonah Evans says the agency works to support natural recolonization of black bears in Texas.

### **Stay Calm and Carry on — It's Only a Black Bear**

Wednesday, March 22nd, 2017

Black bear are threatened in Texas. And what might their biggest threat be?

*That really is people.*

Nobody intentionally threatens them, of course. But Texas Parks and Wildlife Mammologist Jonah Evans says because the black bear population is sparse across the state, we don't know how to behave...when our paths do cross.

*What we can be doing is working to make Texas a friendly place for bears to live, by educating people how to live with bears, so that bears do not become a nuisance. And to teach people that bears are not the big, scary animals that they think they are. They are relatively safe compared to domestic dogs, for example.*

One way bears become a nuisance is when they associate people with food, and get into “trouble.”

*We did have that happen in 2011 when all those bears were here. We had a number of bears get in trouble. They got used to getting into trash cans. Once a bear learns that people equal food, it's really hard to teach it otherwise. That particular bear, we relocated it, and it immediately got into trouble again, so we had to trap it. And it's living out the rest of its days in the Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville.*

Jonah Evans says Texas Parks and Wildlife's goal is to ensure all wildlife lives a wild life. If you see a bear, [contact your local Texas Parks and Wildlife office.](#)

### **Plants for Pollinators**

Thursday, March 23rd, 2017

It's springtime, and a perfect time for planting a garden for pollinators like bees, butterflies and birds.

Even [a few native flowering plants](#) will draw a multitude of winged wildlife to your yard. Monarchs and other butterflies, bees, and even hummingbirds swarmed the few flowering plants I installed in my side yard last year.

What a thrill it was to come up the driveway each evening after work to a battalion of butterflies flitting through my garden.

This month I'm going to install plants that will bloom from spring to fall, and thrive in the dry clay soil and sunny location I have in mind. These plants include: the Pasque flower, which is a perennial that gets about a foot tall, forms clumps, and blooms in April.

The Pale purple coneflower, which is a 2 to 3 foot tall perennial, and one of the earliest-blooming coneflower species.

Purple prairie clover is a care-free perennial I'm considering. A midsummer-bloomer, it attracts insects like mad. And it's one to 2 feet tall and just as wide.

A species of Liatris, Tall Blazing Star, is a late-summer to early-fall bloomer that grows 1 foot wide and 3 to 4 feet tall. And, finally, the aromatic aster, a small shrub that blooms in September and October, will provide fuel for a few late season pollinators just passing through.

Pollinator gardens are fun and rewarding. Plant one.

## **Wildflowers for Truth and Beauty**

Friday, March 24th, 2017

Texas roadsides will soon be awash in colorful wildflowers. Dr. Damon Waitt, director of the North Carolina Botanical Garden, formerly of the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center, says these and other native plants have a place in the natural and built landscapes.

*Natives provide really important ecosystem services for local wildlife, pollinators.*

*They filter storm water and rainwater, so they provide all these services to the ecosystem, and they can provide similar services in the built landscape, and reduce things like water use, pesticide use and fertilizer use.*

*In addition, they have the aesthetic qualities that we want people to learn to appreciate, so they're not looking for that next exotic ornamental—that they're more interested in finding that next native plant that looks great and functions perfectly in their environment.*

**There are a lot of people who might look at wildflowers and native plants and say, gosh, how do those fit into my idea of a formal landscape.**

*That's something we're really trying to fight—that concept that if you're a native plant enthusiast, then your yard must look wild and unkempt. At the wildflower center, we model different design styles using native plants, and you can use native plants in very high designs and very formal designs if that's the look you're going for.*

Find plants that are right for you at [wildflower.org](http://wildflower.org).

## **Lake Livingston State Park, A Great Getaway**

Monday, March 27th, 2017

City life has its charms, but it's good to escape the concrete jungle now and then. For Houstonians, [Lake Livingston State Park](#) is the perfect getaway.

*We're about an hour north of downtown Houston on US 59. We are here primarily as a water recreation park, although, we do have a lot of trails, and some very beautiful campsites—many of which have just been renovated.*

Joel Janssen is a ranger and interpreter there.

*Every Saturday, I do several programs for the public. They range from guided hikes, to art programs, primitive fire demonstrations, and even night sky programs—where I take our visitors on a tour of the night sky through mythology. And I wrap up by showing them planets and galaxies and nebula.*

Located in the East Texas Pineywoods, Lake Livingston offers visitors wildlife viewing opportunities.

*Including deer, raccoons, flying squirrels. We have American mink. And, I just saw a bald eagle here in the park this morning. We have a resident bald eagle population that lives year-round here in the park. So, we're very good for birders to come up to see the kinds of birds that live in the woods, but also see the shorebirds that are attracted to the lake and to the dam.*

Lake Livingston SP hosts a Birds of Prey Program April first. Find details on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website, and on tomorrow's show.

### **Birds of Prey at Lake Livingston State Park**

Tuesday, March 28th, 2017

Birds of prey are apex predators. See them in action at Lake Livingston State Park during a birds of Prey Demo on April first, by the non-profit environmental education organization, EarthQuest.

*So, we reached out to them, and said people are asking about birds of prey here at the park. We've got a lot of them, and we would love for you to come out, showcase some of the different birds of prey that can be found in this area—as well as some birds you may not find in Texas—so that we can educate our visitors about the importance of these birds of prey and our role in conserving habitat.*

Joel Janssen is a park ranger and interpreter.

*What makes birds of prey fascinating to not only birders but regular park visitors is that they are true masters of the sky. They have adaptations that make them ideally suited for catching prey, and [during the program] they show off those skills.*

The Birds of Prey Program is April 1, with two shows—at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Bring blankets and camp chairs for your comfort, and cameras to capture the action.

*Between the two programs, the falconer and his assistant are going to be available. They will hold the birds for the visitors and let them get up close and personal. So, you are more than welcome, and we encourage you to bring your camera out and take photos both during and after the program.*

Your \$5 park admission gets you into the April 1st Birds of Prey program at Lake Livingston State park. Find complete details at [texasstateparks.org](http://texasstateparks.org).

## [The Kraken Serves Texas as an Artificial Reef](#)

Wednesday, March 29th, 2017

On Jan. 20th, Texas Parks and Wildlife's Artificial Reef Program sank a 371-ft cargo vessel, named The Kraken, more than 60 miles off the coast of Galveston. Alison Baldwin is an Artificial Reef technician.

*Because Texas [gulf floor] doesn't have a lot of structure, it makes it hard to for fishermen to fish because fish really enjoy structure. So any time we put structure out here, it's really good for fishermen and divers.*

Program Leader, Dale Shively, says the Kraken, which began life in 1987 as a Japanese cargo ship, was cleaned of fuel, oil and hazardous materials before being deployed into gulf waters.

*We're at our reef site, about 65 miles out of Galveston. We're trying to maneuver into a deep water spot that's at least 140 feet deep.*

To facilitate a controlled flood to sink the ship, Baldwin says work crews cut four large holes into the its hull.

*Water will rush into the stern, and we're hoping that the stern touches the bottom first, and all that super structure will fill with water, and it will bring the bow down nice and slow.*

Everything progressed flawlessly, because of the planning and preparation that went into it beforehand.

*As soon as we sink the ship, there should be fish on it in minutes—which is really exciting.*

Since 1990, [the artificial reef program](#) has documented more than 200 marine fish species that make these complex, stable and durable habitats home.

## [Birding Hot Spots During Spring Migration](#)

Thursday, March 30th, 2017

Texans perk up as the monochromatic birds of winter give way to their colorful counterparts of spring.

*Like the orange and black of the Baltimore Oriole, or the red and black of a Scarlet Tanager. So, all of a sudden you see this splash of color that you haven't seen in months, and it's very exciting.*

Cliff Shackelford, Parks and Wildlife's non-game ornithologist, says to witness these colorful migrants, location is only part of the equation.

*Location is important, but if a storm hit – like a blue norther – in late April, that grounds those birds just like it would ground small aircraft. And so, they're seeking shelter, and that could be your backyard.*

Hot spots where you can view large concentrations of migratory birds are plentiful – the Texas coast is one of the best.

*Places like High Island, Sabine Woods near Sabine Pass, Bleacher Park near downtown Corpus Christi, the South padres island Convention center. Birdwatchers go to those spots, typically in April and May. They can be very productive. Those are just a few of the really important hot spots we call "migrant traps" that are great for the birds and the bird watchers.*

[Find birding information](#) on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

## [Your Own Backyard Offers Birding Opportunities](#)

Friday, March 31st, 2017

The Texas coast attracts a wide variety of species of birds during spring migration. But what if you live inland and don't have plans to visit the coast?

*Folks that are inland can probably scout and look for big groves of trees and watch the weather.*

Cliff Shackelford is Parks and Wildlife's non-game ornithologist.

*I'm here in Nacogdoches, and we have a place in town called Pecan Park – it's right next to Stephen F. Austin State University – and it is a migrant trap. So what I do is I look at the weather; if it rained the night before during a window of time when I know birds are passing through, that would be late April, early May, I would immediately get out there at eight in the morning and see what's there.*

Inclement weather grounds birds as it does some aircraft. Shackelford said a location with large trees and an open understory is ideal for birders to glimpse migrants high above in the canopy. Of course, if you want to encourage migrants to visit your backyard...

*Provide a wildscape; that's landscaping for wildlife. And in that you'll start to see that 'hey if I want berry-eating birds like tanagers and grosbeaks and buntings, I should put some of these berry-giving shrubs and trees out. If you're wanting to attract fly-catching birds, then just having a wildscape means you're going to have a lot of insect fauna – flies and bees and things like that – that a lot of birds feed on.*

Find [wildscaping and birding information on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website](#). The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series.