

This program runs at 520 am Monday thru Friday

Various days cover topics of Environment, Texas Heritage & History, and Wildlife Conservation.

Texas Passport January 2017

Getting Healthier, Happier and Smarter in 2017

Monday, January 2nd, 2017

Adults and children can achieve a better quality of life by committing to spending time in the wide open spaces...or the forested spaces...or watery spaces...or...any outdoor space. Even their own backyards.

Outreach & Education Director, Nancy Herron, shares some thoughts on how individuals and families can make 2017 the healthiest...happiest...and smartest year yet by spending time outside.

When you spend time outdoors you can be healthier, happier and smarter. What do we mean by that? Well, actually there is a lot of research that's out there that shows that people of all ages actually do have benefits from being outside in nature, and that does include improvements to your health, your stress level, your sense of self esteem and confidence. Even being more cooperative. Can you believe that? Communities are more cooperative; families bond better in the out of doors. These are interesting things that we now know that we took for granted, and we just didn't realize. That there's a whole bevy of benefits from being outdoors.

Nancy Herron returns with resolutions to get you outdoors and help to make you and yours healthier...happier...and smarter.

Happiness is Spending Time in Nature

Tuesday, January 3rd, 2017

We hope 2017 will be the happiest year yet. Nancy Herron, Outreach & Education Director at Parks and Wildlife says resolving to be happier is as easy as spending more time outdoors.

Allowing yourself a little playtime outside does so many great things for you. If you put it on your calendar that once a week I'm going to do something fun for myself and it might be laying out in the grass and looking up and listening to birds, or maybe it's riding a bike again, or trying another kind of fishing or something like that. You just feel better about yourself; you actually do feel more confident when you've been able to be out.

Nancy is outdoors regularly as you might imagine; she told me about coming across a sprawling live oak tree while on a walk in the woods with her granddaughter.

It was the best climbing tree ever. And my little monkey granddaughter just ran right up...and yes...I couldn't resist, and I climbed up, too. It was so much fun. I felt pretty good about myself – I could actually do it at my age.

How spending time outdoors can make us healthier ...that's tomorrow.

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

[A Healthier New Year—and You](#)

Wednesday, January 4th, 2017

Healthier...happier...smarter: that's what you will be this new year when you commit to spending time outdoors.

There's a whole bevy of benefits from being outdoors.

Nancy Herron, Outreach & Education Director at Texas Parks and Wildlife, says to make spending time outdoors one of your resolutions.

One of the most fun resolutions is to get a little dose of "vitamin N" every day – and that's vitamin Nature. Being outdoors in nature, even 30 minutes a day, will make a big difference. If you get outside and take a nice walk, a stroll in the park. If you break it up even in three ten minute chunks, it just helps in a lot of ways physically. It reduces your stress. I have seen you taking a little stroll around the building before. I do try and take a little break. And you know we actually know that little walk around the block – wherever it is – there's nature everywhere. There's nearby nature in a city block. Just getting outdoors, just getting a little fresh air – even if you're checking out the sky and making some shapes out of the clouds: it's a good break for you and gets you physically moving. And that's the biggest problem we have is we're just not moving around. So, let's get outside and move. And it's as simple as thirty minutes a day, three ten minute breaks. Give yourself some recess and have fun.

Getting smarter with nature.

[Spending Time Outdoors is a Smart Move](#)

Thursday, January 5th, 2017

Did you know time spent outdoors can make you smarter? Outreach & Education Director Nancy Herron says when we say "smarter", we don't necessarily mean increasing one's IQ.

Being outdoors helps you with focus, and concentration – it clears your mind in a little different way. So when you come back inside, you're actually more ready to work. And they have neuroscientists who talk about the importance of before an important meeting ... a job interview ...something you anticipate is going to be stressful: take a walk around the block. Get outside. It clears your mind a little bit. I don't think you can find a more fertile ground for creativity than nature and outdoors. So, if you want to spark wonder – and that's the key to learning – that's getting outside in nature. Put these things on your calendar. Make a commitment to that in those resolutions sop, once a day you're getting outside to be a little healthier. Once a week you're going to do something that will help reduce that stress. And once a month get out there – put it on the calendar – you can do this. And they're fun. They're really fun resolutions to have.

Here's to your best New Year ever!

We record our series at the Block House studio in Austin, and our healthy, happy and smart engineer is Joel Block.

[Barrington Living History Farm Goes Whole Hog](#)

Friday, January 6th, 2017

They're going whole hog at [Barrington Living History Farm](#) January 14 & 15. That's when they'll present a hog butchering and curing program to the public.

Butchering is just one part of many things that we do seasonally throughout the year.

Barb King is a park interpreter at the farm, located at Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site. The program takes place outdoors in January just as would have happened in 1850s rural Texas.

So, all the meat that will be produced, and the sausage and the fat that we will save for soap or cooking all needs to be at a constant temperature, which is cold—like your fridge. So that we can start the curing process without worrying about it spoiling.

Staff will dispatch a heritage breed hog before visitors arrive. Barb says the rest of the process is for public view, which is mostly a demonstration...

People are able to do a tiny bit if they choose—like helping us scrape the hogs. But cutting up the carcass into specific portions of meat is only done by staff. A lot of people come right at 10, and we normally have a big group waiting. And then on Sunday, we focus on more of the preservation aspect.

Visitors who return Sunday will observe how staff cures the meat for storage. The butchering and curing program at Barrington Living History Farm is January 14 & 15, from 10am – 4pm both days. Admission fees apply. Find complete details at texasstateparks.org.

Celebrating 75 Years of Stories of the Outdoors

Monday, January 9th, 2017

When it went to press 75 years ago, Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine had a different name.

It started out as Texas Game and Fish, and then when the agency changed, the name of the magazine changed as well to reflect the addition of more state park content.

For the past 10 years, Louie Bond has been the editor of this outdoor magazine of Texas.

We're so lucky to be at the helm of this magazine. Here we just walk in, and we're just the current custodians. But it feels great to be part of such a longstanding, excellent tradition.

Originally, Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine was more of a hook and bullet publication.

We were more traditionally hunting and fishing at the beginning, and now have added in through the years: hiking and biking and visiting state parks...bird watching and photography, and all those wonderful pursuits that our readers have.

Louie says the magazine experienced “pop culture” shifts over the years as well, such as not publishing recipes for certain critters.

Um, perhaps large rats, and things like that. Back in the day, people cooked whatever game was in their yard. You can think of those folks as locavores as we have locavores today.

[The magazine celebrates its 75th anniversary](#) all year long, and we tell you how they plan to do that tomorrow.

[Celebrating 75 Years of TPW Magazine](#)

Tuesday, January 10th, 2017

All year long [Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine](#) plans to make room in its issues to celebrate its 75th anniversary.

The biggest celebrations will be in January and December [2017]. The issue we're just putting to bed for January/February will contain a history of the magazine and a feature on Orville Rice. And both of those are written by longtime staffers who have now retired.

I spoke with Magazine Editor Louie Bond in November of last year about this year's issues.

Throughout the year, we're going to do some scrapbooks of different decades and some of the funny things. We've picked out our special favorites, and we're going to be sharing those with readers every month.

But you'll have to keep tabs on the magazine to find out just what those funny things might be.

And then December is kind of a secret. We're going to do something we've never done in 75 years. And, we're going to really save it as a surprise. But we'll be doing the entire issue in a different way that we've never done before. So, I'm just going to hang that out there, and you y'all need to hang around 'til December to see what kind of special fun we have for the actual month of the anniversary.

With as fast as these years are going, December will be here before you know it. The January/February issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine is on newsstands now.

[Toyota Sharelunker Program](#)

Wednesday, January 11th, 2017

The [Toyota Sharelunker program](#) is in full swing.

It's an angler recognition program and it's a selective breeding program.

Kyle Brookshear coordinates the program for Texas Parks and Wildlife. For the past 30 years, anglers who reeled in 13-pound or bigger largemouth bass, caught legally in Texas waters, could donate their fish to the program.

We bring that fish back to the Texas freshwater Fisheries center in Athens and then attempt to spawn that fish. Once the fish is successfully spawned, we return the fish to the angler. The angler releases the fish back to the reservoir [where it was caught]. We will raise those fry up, and then stock them back into the public waters of Texas.

By breeding the big bass Texas Parks and Wildlife creates a better bass fishery in Texas with more potential for trophy fish. New this season, only largemouth bass caught between January and March may be entered into the breeding program.

Through our analysis, we've determined that not only do we get more candidates during that time, but those candidates actually do spawn successfully.

Brookshear says fish caught outside this window may still be certified as a sharelunker, and then released back into the reservoir. Anglers who have lunkers accepted into the Toyota Sharelunker program receive a fiberglass replica of their fish.

The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series and helps fund the operation of the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center in Athens.

[Some Changes in the Toyota Sharelunker Program](#)

Thursday, January 12th, 2017

Largemouth bass weighing 13 or more pounds are eligible for the Toyota Sharelunker program, which runs October 1 through April 30.

It has to be legally caught in Texas waters.

And weighed on a certified scale. Kyle Brookshear coordinates the program, and taught me something new about ShareLunkers.

The males typically don't get that large. So, they're normally all female.

Something new this year is only the 13+ pound largemouth caught during the "spawning window of January 1st through March 31st are eligible to participate in the selective breeding program.

So, if an angler catches a fish outside of that window. We'll come to them with a certified weight, and enter them into the program, and then release that fish back into the lake.

Brookshear says they anticipate improved efficiencies and outcomes as a result of the change.

Through our analysis of our spawning results over the past 30 seasons, and 30 years of the program, we've determined January through March provides us with the greatest opportunity to attain good candidates for spawning...meaning that most of those fish that come in are healthy and capable and ready to spawn.

Find information about the Toyota Sharelunker program on the TPW website. The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series and helps fund the operation of the TFFC in Athens.

[TPW TV – Moving Bees](#)

Friday, January 13th, 2017

Urban wildlife biologist, Kelly Simon, says if your yard is the neighborhood hangout for bees, that's a good thing.

If you find bees in your backyard you should count yourself lucky, because all of our plants in Texas require pollination. Some are pollinated through wind but many are pollinated by our native bees, honey bees, wasps, butterflies and other pollinators.

Yet, if they establish hives in inappropriate places they can become mildly inconvenient to potentially dangerous. As they were at Whitney Nolan's home in Austin.

A few years back I installed two owl houses. One in the front yard and one in the backyard. And I had screech owls that inhabited both boxes for about two years. Then after that bees started taking over the box in the back. One year the hive was so big they broke off and they swarmed and they inhabited the front owl house.

Whitney wants her neighborhood and the bees to be safe. To ensure everyone's well-being, she called in Payden Price.

I am a bee specialist with the American Honey Bee Protection Agency. We are at a client's house. She has a hive in an owl box in her front yard in a tree. We are removing it today. We are going to take it out to one of our apiaries and give it a new home.

And you can [see the process from start to finish the week of January 8 – 14](#) on the Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series on PBS. [Check your local listings.](#)

The Wildlife restoration program supports our series.

Improvements at Palo Duro Canyon State Park

Monday, January 16th, 2017

[Palo Duro Canyon State Park](#), one of the crown jewels in the Texas State Park system, just got a little polish.

If you haven't been to Palo Duro in a while, consider getting out there to see what's new. Because—like all Texas state parks—it's getting better all the time.

Last fall, Texas Parks and Wildlife unveiled comfort and safety improvements at the park, made possible through a joint effort with the Texas Department of Transportation.

The more than 27-thousand acre park got a new camping loop with some sweet amenities, as well as a series of bridges constructed to provide safe passage across flash-flooding hazards on some of the park's roadways.

The new Juniper camp loop features 20 rebuilt campsites, a group camp area, an indoor group hall and comfort stations with bathrooms and showers.

In addition, six bridges were constructed over water crossings on Palo Duro Canyon's main roadway to enhance park visitor safety by providing access to higher ground areas of the park during flash flooding events.

Palo Duro Canyon State park offers camping, hiking, biking, wildlife viewing, and equestrian trails. And for lovers of musical theater, there's the summer production of the musical Texas!

Mentored Deer Hunt for Adult Novices

Tuesday, January 17th, 2017

The week before Christmas, five men and two women—myself included—met at Inks Lake State Park in Burnet for the first of its kind mentored hunt for adult novices. Texas Parks and Wildlife's Justin Dreibelbis was an organizer.

Chris and I are both really excited to have a program that allows them to get that knowledge and come out here—and feel comfortable asking questions, so they can learn how to do it. Now they can go take their kids, and hunt with their friends and family and enjoy the outdoors.

Chris Hall is lead ranger and hunt coordinator at Inks lake state park.

We set out to allow an opportunity and an experience for individuals later in life who have not had the opportunity to hunt or to enjoy the experience of the outdoors in that capacity. And, to give a total turn-key experience—start to finish—of ethics, proper care and maintenance. As well as the hunting experience, itself.

Hunter Ed Coordinator, Steve Hall took us to a shooting range at a nearby ranch where we learned safe firearm use. We shot balloons and paper targets until we got it right.

Now, with the deer tomorrow, though, the first shot is the one that you want to count. You try to do any sighting in or practice right before the hunt, because then you get out all the ‘ooga boogas’ out that you can on the range. So that when tomorrow morning shows up—the shot counts.

Tomorrow—hunters put their newfound skills to the test.

Ralston Dorn Revives a Family Tradition

Wednesday, January 18th, 2017

I met Ralston Dorn the week before Christmas at Inks Lake State Park, during the first of its kind mentored deer hunt for adult novices.

I come from a family of hunters—on my mom’s side. They all hunt. And my dad hunted when I was younger. But, I myself, have never been deer hunting, so I wanted to learn how to do it.

Ralston, whose middle name is “Hunter” is a paramedic from Dallas.

The first day of the program taught us a lot of what we needed to know in preparation for the hunt. What kinds of shots to take. What kinds of shots not to take. Ways to load and unload the rifle and carry it. How to be safe....

Ethics and proper care in the field were also covered. Ralston brought a family heirloom to use on his hunt.

My father’s Weatherby 2506 that he used to deer hunt with when I was a little kid. When I was about 10 years old, he quit deer hunting, and hasn’t hunt in probably 21 years. And so that gun probably hasn’t been fired in 20 years [chuckles]. So, it was nice to keep the tradition going on in my family with that firearm.

Tomorrow, find out if Ralston’s father’s vintage rifle, combined with the knowledge and skills he learned during the mentored hunt workshop brought him luck in the field.

The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series...as well as hunting and the shooting sports in Texas.

A Novice Hunter has Success in the Field

Thursday, January 19th, 2017

Armed with his father’s vintage Weatherby 2506 hunting rifle, Dallas paramedic, Ralston Dorn, climbed into the idling pickup that would take him and his mentor to a blind at Inks Lake State Park, where they would wait and watch, and hope for a chance to harvest a deer.

We got there at 6 a.m. when it was dark. It was quiet. You got to watch the sun rise. The birds come in. The feeder went off at seven, and then five or ten minutes later, my guide ironically said: 'Alright deer, come on out' just as a joke. And sure enough, about five minutes later two doe popped out.

Under the direction of his mentor, Justin Dreibelbis, Ralston brought the rifle to his shoulder, and put the deer in his scope.

You know, my adrenaline's flowing. And then he's looking through his binoculars and I'm looking through the scope. And he's telling me—alright—doe on the right is good to shoot. Alright, doe on the left is not good to shoot. Then it got to a point where the one on the left became the good one to shoot. My heart was racing. I did have to try and control my breathing. And so I took the shot. I just kind of let the trigger surprise me. And it went off and it was exactly where I was aiming. So it was a good shot. She ended up expiring about 20 yards from the blind. We waited for about 15 minutes in the blind, and then went to the point of impact.

Ralston Dorn shot his first deer during a new mentored deer hunt program for adult novices. Additional mentored hunts are in development.

TPW TV – Dundee Fish Hatchery Reopens

Friday, January 20th, 2017

The Dundee Fish Hatchery, Texas' largest, suspended operations in 2011.

Yep. We had a big hiccup in production due to water supply. It was a very big drought in 2011, so we discontinued production here just because we didn't have availability to water.

The hatchery produces striped bass, hybrid striped bass and catfish. Inland Fisheries Hatchery Program Manager, Carl Kittel, says the shutdown continued through 2015.

All of our hatcheries operate off water right that can be cut off. So we were without water and didn't operate. Last spring there was plenty of rain—the water levels in the lakes came up—so we began operations.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Television Series on PBS features the challenges of bringing the Dundee Hatchery back online after a four year hiatus.

Starting up is a bit of a process. Personnel have to be reallocated and then hired and trained to do their job. Equipment has to be started and repaired and all those things take a little bit of gearing up to get going full speed.

Getting it back online benefits freshwater fishing in Texas.

The Dundee hatchery is a big part of the inland fish hatchery program. And we can produce more fish and better support fisheries when this hatchery is operating.

Catch the segment on the hatchery on the Texas Parks and Wildlife TV Series on PBS the week of January 22.

Mid January Resolution: Take More Nature Photos

Monday, January 23rd, 2017

Last time my colleague Aaron Friar and I got together to talk about holiday events in state parks for the radio show, I also asked him if he had any resolutions for the New Year that include the outdoors.

*Well, one thing that I would really like to work on is outdoor photography. I love taking pictures—I do it a lot now—but I want to do it more and hone my skills. Do a lot more dark sky photography. I think that’s really neat. I’ve seen that a lot lately, and that just really gets me excited. I have a camera; I really want to get involved in trying to get some of those really special shots. All it takes is getting out and doing it. **Where’s a park you’d like to do some of that?** Oh, that’s a great, great question. [**I’m actually in love with Caprock Canyons**](#)—and it’s so photogenic out there with the mountains and the colors and the wildlife. The sunsets out there are absolutely beautiful. So, that’s one site that I think is really, really good for that. But, then again, in the spring in the Hill Country...I mean, you can’t beat the wildflowers. I mean, it’s just so hard to say. That’s a really tough question. But I really am enjoying Caprock, and there’s a lot of great chance to get some good photography out there.*

What do you want to do new or better in the outdoors this year? Let us know at passporttotexas.org.

[**Habitat Improvements for Better Fishing**](#)

Tuesday, January 24th, 2017

Collaboration can bring about positive outcomes. Consider the teamwork between Texas Parks and Wildlife, the Brazos River Authority, and other supporters and volunteers. Together they made habitat enhancements at Lake Granbury, Possum Kingdom Lake, and Proctor Lake.

The work was designed to improve habitat for a variety of fish species, and to provide better fishing overall.

The enhancements include artificial structures made of recycled plastics, and natural structures made of recycled bamboo and Christmas trees. These items were vetted for safety, and deployed to create new habitat and improve areas with existing habitat for popular sport fish and prey species.

Environmental conditions such as golden algae, drought and the natural reservoir aging process can affect fish populations. The enhancement projects offer improved areas for spawning and feeding, in addition to providing cover from predators to help fish grow to maturity.

GPS coordinates and maps of the locations of the habitat improvement projects In Lake Granbury, Possum Kingdom Lake and Proctor Lake are available on the TPW web site.

[**New Hunters on the Horizon**](#)

Wednesday, January 25th, 2017

This is Passport to Texas

Hunting is attracting new groups of enthusiasts.

Women are the number one growing group in a lot of the outdoor activities—especially in the shooting world. More women today are shooting now and learning to shoot a firearm and to hunt than any other group.

Heidi Rao is a Hunter Education specialist for Southeast Texas. She says many among this new tide of hunters—both women and men—identify as locavores. People who seek locally sourced, sustainably raised food.

So, they've become more interested in hunting because they know the animal was naturally fed—in nature, of course—and so if they shoot it, they're directly part of that process. And then they learn how to cook it and prepare it, so it's a complete that circle of life.

Not all people with a budding interest in hunting are ready for big game like deer or feral hogs. For them, Rao suggests something smaller, but no less challenging.

Squirrel hunting is a very great way to introduce somebody to hunting whether they be a youth or an adult.

Heidi Rao returns tomorrow to tell us what it takes to have a successful squirrel hunt, and why small game like squirrel don't seem to get the attention they deserve.

The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series, and works to increase shooting and hunting in Texas.

Small Game, Big Challenge

Thursday, January 26th, 2017

If you're considering hunting for the first time, but feel intimidated when it comes to big game like deer ...

Squirrel hunting is a very great way to introduce somebody to hunting whether they be a youth or an adult.

Heidi Rao is a Hunter Education specialist for Southeast Texas. Squirrel hunting may actually offer a more challenging and exciting overall experience.

Sometimes when you're deer hunting, you might be sitting in a blind [for hours] just being quiet and waiting, and not see anything. But squirrel hunting, because it's quick—meaning a lot of action in the field—if they take a shot, within a matter of often minutes, another one comes out. So, it's a pretty high paced activity. You can really have an enjoyable outing.

Whether hunting big game or small, the same rules apply.

You do need your hunting license. And, if you're required to take hunter education, you must have that as well. Anyone born after September 2nd 1971, to hunt in Texas, must have hunter education.

The specifics of squirrel hunting. That's tomorrow.

The different counties have different dates in which you can legally hunt squirrel.

Download the Texas Outdoor Annual App for hunting information and regulations. Find it at the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

Tips for Hunting Squirrels

Friday, January 27th, 2017

Mention hunting to a Texan and most think: deer.

That's just the way it's always been. But it doesn't mean that for everyone.

For some people, hunting includes small game like squirrel, says Hunter Education specialist Heidi Rao.

I think we need to get outside of the box and pursue these opportunities that we have here in Texas. There's such an abundance of wildlife.

We may legally hunt fox and gray squirrels in Texas.

A .22 is usually the best choice of rifle to use to hunt squirrel. They're found statewide, and you do need your hunting license. And if you're required to take hunter education, you must have that as well.

Heidi says it's best to have a strategy before going squirrel hunting, such as the one she employs when hunting with her kids.

So, our strategy was what you call still hunting. And what that meant is that we moved very slowly through an area. We remained in a straight line, and we kept a good distance from each other. And we slowly moved throughout area looking for squirrel. You're listening to the rustling of the leaves that the squirrels may be foraging in looking for acorns and food. You can hear them chattering between themselves, among themselves. And you can look into those different calls to see where they may be located.

After that, it takes patience, a keen eye and steady hand. Find season information and hunting regulations in the Texas Outdoor Annual.

Baits and Lures

Monday, January 30th, 2017

If you plan to go fishing, you'll need to bring along live bait, man-made lures—or both.

Let's talk baits first.

Steve Campbell worked in Outreach and Education at Texas Parks and Wildlife, specializing in angler education.

Nothing beats natural bait for catching fish. Some good, all around freshwater baits are: kernel corn, hot dogs and live critters, such as worms, minnows and crawfish.

If you're on the coast, can hardly go wrong with using live shrimp. Whether you're a freshwater or saltwater angler, you need to keep your bait alive.

You've got to keep bait alive for it to be effective. Make sure you keep your bait cool and moist and out of direct sunlight.

Most anglers keep live bait in their coolers. Just don't get it mixed up with the tuna sandwich you packed for lunch. And if your bait came from a bait shop or another body of water, do not release the unused bait into the waters you are fishing.

It can interfere with the plants and animals that live there naturally. Dump the bait in a trash can or on land, away from the water.

Tomorrow we learn about several lures and how to use them to your best advantage.

We record our show in Austin at the Block House. Joel Block engineers our program.

Using Baits and Lures to Your Advantage

Tuesday, January 31st, 2017

Nothing beats live bait for catching fish. Yet, manmade lures have been around a long time—because they work.

For example, take the spinner bait. The spinning blades are designed to catch a fish's attention as they move through the water. The flashing silver looks just like a tasty minnow.

Steve Campbell worked in Outreach and Education at Texas Parks and Wildlife, specializing in angler education.

Another popular lure is the top water lure. Because it floats on top of the water, it works best in calm waters where it is visible to fish below. To use a top water...cast...wait for the bait to settle, and then pop your rod tip; repeat until you get a strike.

The crankbait is a fun lure to work with. It has a kind lip that extends from the front of the lure.

This lip causes the bait to dive down through the water as you crank on the reel. As soon as you cast your crankbait, turn the reel quickly a couple of times so the lip will catch the water and pull down. Stop reeling, and the lure begins to float back up. Your goal is to imitate an injured fish darting through the water.

Lures come in all shapes and sizes, and your tackle dealer can help you select the right lures for your next fishing trip.

And remember: while natural bait is best, it's always a good idea to keep a couple of lures on hand when you get tired of feeding—I mean catching—the fish.

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.

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.

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

[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.

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.

Passport To Texas March 2017

[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.

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.

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

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. 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.

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.

[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.