

September 2017

TPW TV — In Search of the Blue Sucker

Friday, September 1st, 2017

The Colorado River is home to a blue ghost: a fish called the Blue Sucker. It's a rare and threatened species, and for Mathew Acre, it's worth the days, weeks and months spent searching for it.

Currently the Blue Sucker status is somewhat unknown in the lower Colorado River, so we are not a hundred percent sure how the Blue Sucker is doing.

Acre is a PhD Student from Texas Tech, and works with a team – that includes Texas Parks and Wildlife biologist Dakus Geeslin – to search for this elusive fish.

So we are about ten miles east of Austin on the Colorado River, we are looking for that faster water, and some type of structure, they are really adept at swimming in fast water, they are great swimmers.

Blue suckers used to be found throughout North America, but dams and poor river quality have led to their dramatic decline.

It's unique in that it has this really elongated body and it hangs out in these fast flowing waters, shoots, and riffles, that most fish tend to avoid because they just don't have the energy budget to stay within that riffle.

Join the search for the blue sucker when you tune into the Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series on PBS September 3-9.

Wow, finally! He was in that fast water just where we expected him to be! It just took us a couple of passes through there. You just have to be on your game. That is awesome dude!

Dove: Good Flavor Begins in the Field

Monday, September 4th, 2017

Jesse Morris is a hunter and professional chef; he traded his chef's jacket for a new career that allows him to spend more time with his family.

I felt that I needed to have a creative outlet to continue food. Two of my greatest passions were food and hunting, so I decided what better way to celebrate what I was doing than to put those together; and that's how Killer Chefs was born.

He shares these passions through the Killer Chefs website. Dove season is underway in the north and central zones. Jesse says: don't expect this bird to taste like chicken.

When people think about wild game, the thoughts in their head are: 'It tastes livery.' That's the word that they use. It has a flavor to it. But, what will give it that 'off taste' is not handling it properly.

Dove has a good flavor, but needs proper handling to ensure full enjoyment.

The very first thing in terms of food that you really want to think about, especially it being as hot as it is, is getting that animal cooled down. I always put the birds in a cooler right after they're shot. Getting that body temperature cooled down as quickly as possible – that's the most important thing.

That one act can mean the difference between delicious and disaster. Tomorrow: beyond bacon.

Beyond Bacon: Dove Carnitas a la Killer Chefs

Tuesday, September 5th, 2017

With dove season underway in the north and central zones, bacon wrapped dove breasts will soon show up on the tables of hunters everywhere.

People don't really like eating doves, they like eating bacon, if that's the only way that they cook it.

Jesse Morris is a hunter and chef with Killer Chefs in Richardson, Texas. He says there are more inventive ways to enjoy dove—including carnitas.

Everybody's go-to recipe—and there's nothing wrong with it – is bacon wrapped dove. It's nice to actually use all the bird. So, you can use the heart in the carnitas, and the legs, and the breast meat, and everything. Cooking that down low and slow; finishing it off, letting all the sugars come out in the product. It's something good.

If you're a new hunter and longtime foodie, you may be tempted to “go gourmet” when preparing dove or any game. Jesse recommends to start simply.

People get off on wanting to cover them in sauces or gravy, and things like that – when they're really not tasting the bird, or whatever game that it is that they're eating. When you're first starting out cooking wild game, cook it simply: grill it; salt and pepper. See what the flavors that the actual game is, and then work with that.

We have Jesse Morris' dove carnitas recipe at Passport to Texas dot com.

Developing an Ear for Backyard Birds

Wednesday, September 6th, 2017

It's not uncommon to find the white-throated sparrow and Carolina chickadee in backyards throughout Texas.

Most Texans have these – especially in the eastern two-thirds of the state

Cliff Shackelford, nongame ornithologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife, says these birds are whistlers.

They have very clear, clean whistles. Sometimes you might even think it's the neighbor whistling – but it's a little bird!

If whistling like this comes from ground level, it's likely the white-throated sparrow.

If it's a little higher up– maybe up in the trees – it's probably the Carolina chickadee. We get a lot of phone calls from people saying: what is this bird with that has this crystal clear whistle in my backyard? And it's probably going to be one or the other – either the chickadee or the sparrow.

The chickadee is finch-sized with a gray body, white underside and black and white head. The sparrow is plump with a black and white head, white throat, gray underside and little yellow eyebrows.

You can hear the chickadee whistling year-round, but the white throated sparrow leaves for southern Canada where it's nice and cool in the summer while we're here melting in the summer months.

Learn more about Birds in Texas on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

The Wildlife restoration program supports our series and funds wildlife surveys throughout Texas.

Hunters and Anglers Help Feed Hungry Texans

Thursday, September 7th, 2017

Hunger is widespread in the US and in Texas.

Our food banks collectively provide food and other services to about 3.5 million Texans every year. They do that through a network of approximately 3,000 private charities. They manage to get food and other services out to hungry Texans in all 254 counties.

Celia Cole is CEO of [Feeding Texas](#).

Feeding Texas is the state association that represents all of the food banks in Texas – there are 21. And we're all part of a network called Feeding America.

Hunters for the Hungry is a program of Feeding Texas.

We work with hunters and meat processors to involve them in the program. Hunters donate excess venison they hunt, to the processor who then grinds it up and packages it and makes it available to our network for distribution to the hungry people we serve.

Last year, hunters donated about 55-thousand pounds of venison to the program.

We are really hopeful that we can greatly increase that amount. It's a matter of getting the word out to hunters that this program is available, and then also recruiting enough processors that there are enough outlets for hunters to take their deer to.

Learn how to help hungry Texans when you buy your next hunting or fishing license. That's tomorrow.

The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series.

[Buy Your License, Feed Hungry Texans](#)

Friday, September 8th, 2017

Hunters for the Hungry, a program of Feeding Texas, welcomes legally harvested and tagged deer from hunters to help feed hungry Texans.

This is a wonderful program that helps us fight hunger.

Celia Cole, CEO of [Feeding Texas](#) says a bill passed during the 2015 Texas Legislative session, allows hunters and anglers to make voluntary cash donations to the program when buying a license.

The option on the license is you can (voluntarily) donate one, five, ten or twenty dollars. In addition to the donations we've received through the hunting license option, individuals have supported the program through a donation option on our website.

Last year hunters and anglers, donated 110-thousand dollars to Hunters for the Hungry.

So, for the first time this year, we had funds to help reimburse processors for their costs of participating in the program. And that funding stream is what's going to allow us to greatly increase the pounds of venison that go through the program next year.

Even with limited promotion, hunters donated more than 55-thousand pounds of venison to the program.

Collectively, we serve 3.5 million Texans every year. About a million of those are kids. We're looking to grow [Hunters for the hungry] in those areas where there are lots of opportunities.

Find details at feedingtexas.org; click on the “get involved” tab, and then Hunters for the Hungry.

Take a Hike at a Texas State Park

Monday, September 11th, 2017

After spending the summer indoors in self-imposed air-conditioned exile, the promise of cooler fall temperatures is sure to call you outside again.

Hiking in a state park is a simple and enjoyable way to reengage the great outdoors, and experience our state’s abundant natural resources.

Many parks have more than one trail, offering varying levels of difficulty.

A hike is not a race. So, slow down and take time to appreciate your surroundings. Trails are as varied as the parks they’re in. Some follow streams or take you into the woods, or onto rocky ledges; they can be shaded or sun-drenched. And wildlife viewing opportunities while hiking are abundant.

When hiking, dress for the weather. Always wear comfortable close toed shoes. Use a hat and sunscreen to save your skin. Insect repellent is always a good call when hiking in heavily wooded and wet areas. And don’t forget to bring water. Experts recommend you carry eight ounces of water with you for every hour you plan to be on the trail.

And always remember that if you pack in—pack it out. Leave no trace.

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

TPW Magazine — Texas Brigades

Tuesday, September 12th, 2017

Texas Brigades is a wildlife and natural resource focused leadership development program for youth, 13 to 17.

Texas Brigades has been around for 25 years. It started out as Bobwhite Brigade back in 1993, and then it just kind of morphed.

It’s morphed into is eight summer camps, each with a different conservation focus. Aubry Buzek [Byu-zik] wrote about the Brigades for the October issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine.

What was really interesting is that these camps are not necessarily about learning about one particular species. At Bobwhite Brigade, they were learning a lot about quail—and they had biologists there teaching them about quail. But that wasn’t the overall goal of the program. It

was about being comfortable with public speaking, comfortable talking with their peers. Debating.

These five-day intensive camps incorporate military marching and cadence, and introduce students to experts and activities that challenge and

I talked to a lot of parents after graduation and they were like, 'Who is this kid?' I saw it too. That confidence. A lot of parents said they didn't expect their kid to know just so much. But, in addition to that knowledge, these kids are loud, and they're marching, and they make a lot of friends. It really is a transformative camp.

Read Aubry Buzek's story about the Texas Brigades in the October issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine.

[Texas Brigades Inspire Careers](#)

Wednesday, September 13th, 2017

To categorize the [Texas Brigades](#) as "summer camp" is like calling a mountain lion "a kitty cat".

This is not a normal summer camp. This is meant to be a lot more than that.

Writer, Aubry Buzek wrote a story about the Brigades for the October issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine.

The editor of the magazine said, I want you to go to this summer camp and write about it. And I was thinking: Okay. There's going to be fun stuff happening; I get there and it's in the middle of a session on how conservation groups work in Texas....and conservation and hunters ethics. And I was like, Whoa!

The 5-day, cell-phone free, camps for youth build confidence and camaraderie with projects, public speaking and debates on conservation issues.

There are some really amazing instructors who come to this camp. There are instructors there who are wildlife biologists from Texas Parks and Wildlife, other private hunting ranches, water control authorities...just the gambit of [conservation] organizations in Texas. The kids get to meet people not easily accessible. Every instructor that I talked to said that they want these kids to pick up the phone and keep in touch with them. They want to help them grow now and into the future.

Aubry Buzek's story on the Texas Brigades appears in the October issue of [Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine](#).

[Landscaping for the Birds](#)

Thursday, September 14th, 2017

Putting out feeders is one way to attract wildlife to your yard. A better way is to create a wildscape.

What a wildscape is, is landscaping for wildlife.

Ornithologist, Cliff Shackelford, says this includes native plants that provide food and shelter; most urban yards, however, traded native habitat for lawns.

So, any little help you can [give] by putting in a wildscape really helps. And even if you don't have a yard, you can do a wildscape on your patio with pots. I have seen hummingbirds go up to the 6th floor balcony of condos where someone has showy plants that say, "hummingbird come up here."

A variety of berry and nectar producing plants will draw wildlife to your yard—or balcony.

You want to always stick to natives because they're acclimated to the soil and the weather and the rainfall that you're going to give them. And then, you want to make sure that they have some value to wildlife: that they're going to give you the nectar to attract butterflies; they're going to have berries at the right time when the cedar waxwings come, and so forth.

Fall is the best time to plant native trees, woody shrubs and perennial flowering plants. [Find a list of native species that do well in your area](#) on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

TPW TV — Parks Ranch, a Lone Star Land Steward

Friday, September 15th, 2017

Before we domesticated livestock, the land and water belonged to wildlife. Cattle took a toll on this habitat; but thanks to the efforts of landowners like David Crow, cattle and conservation coexist.

The ranch is our factory. The cattle are a part of the factory. The wildlife's part of the factory. And everything has to click together.

Crow operates the 5,600-acre Parks Ranch in Goliad County, and keeps the needs of wildlife top of mind.

I think one of the biggest detractors to wildlife is fragmentation of habitat. To be able to hold this ranch together is extremely important.

A 2016 Lone Star land Steward award-winner in the Gulf Prairies & Marshes region, Crow uses a variety of techniques to create greater density of native grasslands, which supports better diversity of native wildlife.

I'm pleased that my son has chosen his career in this business as well, because that means at least we're good for another generation.

Witness the success of Parks Ranch on the Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series next week on PBS. Check your local listings.

The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series.

A Brighter Future Starts Outdoors

Monday, September 18th, 2017

They say you can never go home again. Just don't tell that to Nicole Roque. After graduating college, she moved back to El Paso; in March, she took a job as an AmeriCorps volunteer with Texas Parks and Wildlife.

AmeriCorps is a national service program designed to alleviate poverty.

Headquartered at [Franklin Mountains State Park](#), Nicole says a question she usually gets is:

How are you alleviating poverty [via] parks?

Research supports the theory that people who engage the outdoors 30 minutes to one hour a day are happier, healthier and smarter.

Kids do better in school, they have higher self-esteem. They're just more confident in general. It's more than just going out and hiking.

A solid education, a high level of confidence and good self-esteem are all tools that help people to move beyond barriers and to lean into success.

We're definitely looking to help kids feel more welcome by environmental science careers and STEM careers in general – and strengthen them in that way.

Tomorrow Nicole tells us about a program where El Pasoans turn trash into art while learning about environmental stewardship.

Trash to Treasure

Tuesday, September 19th, 2017

A project in El Paso, has HS students and the local art community turning roadside trash to treasure.

It's called [It's Your World](#), and it's a really, really cool project.

Nicole Roque, an AmeriCorps volunteer with Texas Parks and Wildlife, based in El Paso, heard about El Dorado HS art teacher, Candace Printz who, with her students, created the project to improve their community.

She started It's Your World, and what they do is they go into the community and they do cleanups. They adopted a portion of highway and they went out a few months and cleaned it completely. And they kept statistic on what they found, and then they took all this trash back to their school, they cleaned it up, they separated it, and then used it as art supplies.

It's Your World compliments AmeriCorps' mission of improving the human condition. Nicole partnered with the project to develop art workshops.

And they've created some of the most amazing things I've ever seen. They recently had an art exhibition; I went to go see it, and it floors you to look at some of these really amazing things [made from trash]. And one of my favorite things that Candace told me is they opened their portable where they had all the supplies, and local artists were coming in to collect supplies for their art, and people were fighting over the trash.

One man's trash.... Learn more about [It's Your World](#)...we have a link to their website at passporttotexas.org.

Understanding the Roll of an Urban Biologist

Wednesday, September 20th, 2017

You may not think there's a much need for urban wildlife biologists in cities...

People hear "urban wildlife biologist" and they assume grackles and squirrels.

But Richard Heilbrun says they are much more than nuisance wildlife experts.

Urban wildlife biologists work in all of our major metropolitan areas throughout the state, and they work with municipal decision-makers on land management.

Heilbrun is team lead for the urban wildlife technical guidance program.

One day we might work with a parks department on which new property to acquire that's best for wildlife diversity. The next day, we might work with the City Council in alleviating some conflict between people and wildlife. And the third, day we might work with a home owners association to manage their greenbelt for maximum wildlife diversity.

The urban landscape is more diverse than you know.

So, in a city you might have golf courses, cemeteries, creeks, greenbelts, rivers, city parks, state parks, vacant lots. And then all those corridors that connect those neighborhoods together are usually really great wildlife habitat.

[Find an urban biologist in your area](#) on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

The Wildlife restoration program supports our series and helps fund Wildlife technical guidance and assistance to urbanites of Texas.

[The Ecosystem Functions of Wildlife](#)

Thursday, September 21st, 2017

Golf courses, cemeteries, creeks, parks and greenbelts, all common in urban areas, provide habitat for wildlife.

In a typical greenbelt [for example], you'll find owls and hawks and songbirds and lizards and snakes and coyotes and bobcats. And all of those put together form a functional ecosystem that only exists in those urban areas.

Richard Heilbrun is team lead for the urban wildlife technical guidance program. These biologists work with communities to ensure humans and wildlife coexist comfortably.

Most people recognize that seeing wildlife is a great thing, and they feel fortunate to see that wildlife. Every once in a while we get folks who are nervous, but once they talk to our urban wildlife biologists, and are told this is a good thing, they change their perception fairly quickly. So, someone that might be nervous about seeing a coyote, when they call an urban wildlife biologist and are told that coyote populations perform an ecosystem function – they keep those rats at bay, or they make sure that the skunk populations don't go haywire. So, when they realize there's a benefit, their perception changes fairly quickly.

[Find your urban biologist when you log onto the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.](#)

The Wildlife restoration program supports our series and helps fund Wildlife technical guidance and assistance to urbanites of Texas.

[Texas Outdoor Story – The Squirrel and the Snake](#)

Friday, September 22nd, 2017

Ginger Turner enjoys paddling on Lady Bird Lake in Austin. Over the years, she says she's witnessed her share of unusual incidents on the water.

The one that was really funny and sticks out in my head. My friend and I were paddling and we saw something swimming and we couldn't figure out what it was. We get over there and it's a squirrel swimming over one of the widest parts of the lake. We're like, "let's get closer; get closer." So we follow him over and he ran up this tree that was leaning over in the water. As he was running up he ran smack dab into a snake that was curled up sunning on the tree. And it startled the squirrel, and it startled the snake and they both jumped about 10 ft. up in the air! And the snake plopped in the water and the squirrel we couldn't even find. Later we heard a

rustling and we saw the squirrel had made it over to the shore. But it was hilarious, it was funny. But I didn't know that squirrels swam, but I guess they do. [laughs]

Thanks, Ginger. You never know what you might see when you get outside.

Do you have a funny or memorable Texas outdoor story to share? Go to passporttotexas.org, and let us know. We love to hear what you do outside!

Texas Two Step Against Fire Ants

Monday, September 25th, 2017

The imported red fire ant can ruin a beautiful spring or fall day outdoors.

We typically see most activity in the spring and in the fall. It's nice, and that's generally when we like being outside, too, unfortunately.

Elizabeth "Wizzie" Brown, an entomologist with AgriLife Extension says researchers continue to work on ways to manage this non-native pest, which is a threat to wildlife.

We have had things that we're working on...things like fungus, and there's organisms that live in the fire ant body that reduce the reproductive capabilities of the fire ants. They have brought in parasitizing flies, that are called phorid flies that they use that attack the fire ants and pretty much eat them from the inside out. So we are working on it, but the fire ants are here—they're always going to be here; these are just tools in our tool belts to help up manage those populations.

Use the Texas two-step method to combat fire ants... now through mid-October: first, broadcast an insecticide bait across your entire yard, and then treat individual mounds with an approved insecticidal drench, bait, granule or dust.

Ethereal Caddo Lake WMA

Tuesday, September 26th, 2017

When mist cloaks Caddo Lake it's easy to understand how the lore and legend about this east Texas water body came to pass.

Native American legend says a giant flood created Caddo Lake. Others say an earthquake was responsible.

Meanwhile, scientists believe the lake formed when floodwaters, blocked by massive log jams on the Red River, backed up into the Cypress Bayou watershed, forming the lake.

One thing that is true: Caddo Lake's beauty. And visitors to Caddo Lake State Park/WMA not only experience nature at her most beguiling, they also have a plethora of recreational opportunities — from hiking to hunting – to choose from.

With an annual public hunting permit, hunters may harvest deer, eastern wild turkey, and quail during appropriate seasons. Licensed anglers find largemouth bass, catfish and brim plentiful in the lake.

Find more on [Caddo Lake SP/WMA](http://passporttotexas.org) at passporttotexas.org.

That's our show, made possible by the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration program providing funding for the operations and management of more than 50 wildlife management areas.

Miles and Miles of Texas

Wednesday, September 27th, 2017

Texas' fifty wildlife management areas encompass more than three-quarters of a million acres of land. They serve as living laboratories for students and professionals to develop habitat management techniques...

And [then] demonstrate those to private landowners in the area, so that they can replicate those management techniques on their own land, and help accomplish conservation in Texas.

Dennis Gissell is the Wildlife Management Area facilities coordinator for Texas Parks and Wildlife. He says we have 10 ecological regions in the state that represent different vegetation, habitat and wildlife.

Our goal is to acquire at least one WMA in each of those ecological regions so that we can study, understand and demonstrate techniques for conservation and management in each of those ecological regions to the landowners that live in those areas. We have eight right now. We just acquired three new WMAs. And, those will help achieve our goal; and we're getting very close.

As most Texas land is privately owned, landowners are a vital piece of the conservation puzzle. Learn about The Landowner Incentive Program on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

The Wildlife restoration program supports our series and helps to fund the management of Texas' 50 Wildlife Management Areas.

Landowners Learn Conservation on WMAs

Thursday, September 28th, 2017

Texas landowners are vital to long-term statewide habitat and wildlife conservation strategies.

Something that folks really are not aware of is that the water that they drink, the air tht they breathe, the clothes they wear, and even the fuels that provide energy for their vehicles and power plants, come from private lands in Texas.

Dennis Gissell is [Wildlife Management Area](#) facilities coordinator.

Private landowners really are stewarding not only the natural habitat, but they're providing the resources that we as humans must have to survive.

Texas Parks and Wildlife uses [Wildlife Management Areas](#) to educate landowners about conserving wildlife and habitat, including water.

When you're dealing with either surface water or groundwater, people need to be aware that that surface water is coming through lands that are owned by private landowners, and the extent to which they manage the vegetation and the habitat there, allows that water to be filtered naturally before it arrives at a lake or a river.

Texas landowners take stewardship seriously. Gissell says he hopes this remains true as ownership changes.

The former farms and ranches that were owned by some of the original settlement families in Texas are being sold off and broken up to some degree; we call that habitat fragmentation. As landowners acquire those lands, we think it is very important that they understand the role of stewardship, and managing and conserving wildlife habitat.

The Wildlife restoration program supports our series and helps to fund the management of Texas' 50 Wildlife Management Areas.

Big or Small, WMAs Are Places to Learn

Friday, September 29th, 2017

Texas Landowners learn how to manage their acreage by emulating wildlife biologists who keep the state's Wildlife Management Areas in top form.

Wildlife biologists go out on the WMAs and they take a look at what we have; what the baseline is. And then they take a look at historically what has been there in terms of vegetation and wild animals. They'll determine what it takes to restore that habitat, or to enhance that habitat.

Dennis Gissell is [Wildlife Management Area facilities coordinator](#). Texas Wildlife Management Areas' encompass about three-quarters of a million acres.

[The] largest WMA is in east Texas – the Sam Houston National Forest, which is actually a US Forest Service Property that we lease/license from them to manage. It's over 160-thousand acres. The smallest is near Corpus Christi.

And that WMA is only 36 acres! The aim is to have WMAs for teaching and research in each of the state's 10 ecoregions. Every one provides opportunities for discovery and learning, even when they are small.

These smaller tracts of land have really unique features. In this case – this particular property – has a wetland and a pond that has historically, been very attractive to waterfowl.

[Find more information about WMAs](#) on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

The Wildlife restoration program supports our series and helps to fund the management of Texas' 50 Wildlife Management Areas.