

June 2017

National Trails Day 2017

Thursday, June 1st, 2017

National Trails Day is this Saturday, June 3rd. Observe the day by hiking a trail at one of your Texas State Parks.

Our trails really give people an opportunity to experience everything about state parks.

State Parks', Thomas Wilhelm, says hikers and walkers of all abilities can spend meaningful time on trails. All they need are sturdy shoes, sunscreen, water, perhaps a hiking partner and a sense of adventure.

We have hikes from beginner level paved hikes all the way to very difficult hikes. So, regardless of your skills or your interests – there's a trail that's perfect for you [in a state park].

This includes equestrian trails and ADA Accessible trails. The trails in Texas State Parks offer hikers opportunities to experience native plants and wildlife, as well as solitude, peace and calm. And, for those who like to exercise their brain along with their bodies...

There's also opportunities with interpretive hikes that have panels along the way that explain what's happening. So, you're either learning something about nature or about history — or whatever it may be. So it's both a relaxing experience and an enlightening experience.

Find state park and natural area, hiking opportunities and trail information at texasstateparks.org.

TPW TV — CWD Response Team

Friday, June 2nd, 2017

The first case of **Chronic Wasting Disease**, or CWD, was discovered in 2012 in free-ranging mule deer in an isolated area of far West Texas. Three years later...

2015 the sky fell out. They found a positive in a deer breeding facility.

CWD is a fatal, highly communicable neurological disease in deer. Ryan Shoeneberg is a wildlife program specialist, and part of Texas Parks and Wildlife's CWD response team. The Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series on PBS features the team on this week's show. Paul Crossley is a license and permit specialist on the team.

There is not treatment or cure. The only real management technique we have is containment.

This meant shutting down TWIMS—the [Texas Wildlife Information Management Service](#)—the central database used to manage deer breeding in Texas. It essentially halted the transfer of deer from breeding facilities, which affected people's livelihoods.

Our job is to nip it at the bud. Find it like a cancer. Wall it off, and not let it spread out.

The team had the job of helping breeders get deer moving again.

We were essentially given a deadline that said, look, we've got to get deer breeders moving again. We've got to get commerce going again—by deer hunting season. I think it was 57 days.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife CWD Response TWIMS Reprogramming Team took action. Find out what they did this week on the Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series on PBS. Check your local listings. The Wildlife restoration program support our series.

[The Lives and Loves of Frogs](#)

Monday, June 5th, 2017

Amphibians are a remarkably unique life form.

Texas State University Biologist Dr. Mike Forstner says in case you ever wondered how amphibians, romance one another, he can help.

Amphibian or amphibios is a two-stage life. Those dual lives reflect water and land. When we think about the mating process or the management of the toad we have to take both in account the water and the land. All frogs and toads call. They make a unique advertisement call.

You have probably heard male leopard frogs and bullfrogs advertising their interest in meeting members of the opposite sex without even realizing it. And if you were to find yourself in Central Texas, traveling through Bastrop...

... further into the forest in Bastrop, we begin to hear a high-pitched trills that lasts a long time, up to 15 seconds for the Houston toad.

Those calls allow the females to recognize the correct male for their species, and since the fire, we are beginning to hear a few more of these calls.

And the females will hop toward the male call that they think is the most attractive. So there is female choice- not very different from what happened in the human world.

Find more information about amphibians on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

[VISTA Volunteers at Parks and Wildlife](#)

Tuesday, June 6th, 2017

Volunteers in Service to America's, or VISTA, began as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty in 1964.

We must create a national service corps to help the economic handicapped of our own country, as the Peace Corps now helps those abroad.

Nearly 30 years later, VISTA integrated with AmeriCorps. Individuals volunteer to spend a year in communities working on wide-ranging projects, including environmental stewardship.

This [change] really could tie in greatly in getting VISTAs to come in and help us build some new programs and new projects that we haven't been able to do in the past.

Kris Shipman, a former AmeriCorps VISTA, is volunteer manager at Texas Parks and Wildlife. She developed the agency's first VISTA program, which began this past April.

We had to go through a Federal grant process. And, once we were accepted, we received 13 VISTA members. This project will be a three year project; we have a VISTA leader that will be here in Austin. The other 12 are all over the agency.

Including, but not limited to state parks and Children in Nature. Erin Freiboth is Texas Parks and Wildlife's VISTA leader.

We are here to create and develop foundations for projects and for programs that support and carry on the mission of Texas Parks and Wildlife.

More about the VISTA program 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

Volunteers Help Texans Connect to Nature

Wednesday, June 7th, 2017

Texas Parks and Wildlife's [Americorps Vista program](#) got underway this year.

Yeah. It's actually a brand new project that we started in April; we've never had AmeriCorps Vista members at Parks and Wildlife.

People volunteer in communities to work on a wide array of projects. Kris Shipman, developed the TPWD program.

I looked at a lot of the initiatives that we were trying to do in our efforts to get children outdoors; trying to increase the public use of green spaces—and all our conservation efforts. [I thought] that this really could tie in with getting VISTAs to come in.

VISTAs like Erin Freiboth, who is the team lead, and coordinates 12 program volunteers statewide.

So, I get to share with my VISTAs, and with the program, about developing project, networking with communities, and maintaining a diverse portfolio, while working on several different projects.

Erin says one of the main goals of the program includes expanding user groups.

We want Texas Parks and Wildlife to be able to represent all of Texas, and all of Texans' diversity. So, we want everybody from every economic sphere. Every diverse sphere. And every sphere possible to be represented in the use of these resources.

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

Why, I Otter...

Thursday, June 8th, 2017

Eight years ago when wildlife biologist Gary Calkins was conducting statewide otter surveys, we talked about it on our radio show; he invited listeners to send in their sightings.

Really, when we started this thing, I sort of assumed that otters were pretty well just East Texas-centric, maybe in the Neches...Sabine River...Red River. That type of thing. But, man, the population that's in the Colorado River is way more than I had expected and a lot farther up the Colorado River than I ever expected, and then a lot farther up the Red [River] than I ever expected. [There are] just a lot more in general than I really thought there were out there just based on the number of people reporting stuff.

Because of you, we know there's greater distribution of otters throughout Texas than previously thought. These mammals are surprisingly common in urban areas, such as Austin in Travis County and Houston in Harris County.

Obviously, I think there are just more people out there are seeing them and reporting them. But those two counties—you've got Ladybird Lake, and all the different structures in the Colorado River. And then the thing with all the bayous that run through Houston, and so there're a lot of otters using that because it has been a created, perfect habitat.

Gary Calkins welcomes all public otter sightings in Texas, ideally with photos. Find out how to get in touch at passporttotexas.org.

The Wildlife restoration program supports our series.

Next Time You See an Otter...

Friday, June 9th, 2017

Wildlife biologist Gary Calkins could not have predicted eight years ago—when he invited radio listeners to send in their otter sightings—that it would change how we understand otter distribution in Texas, or that the sightings would continue coming in. He created a map using the data listeners supplied, and is confident it's accurate.

Every sighting I get, I ask them [the public] I ask them to describe how the animal swam. Ask them if it made any vocalizations. Ask some questions about behavior—and better yet—can I get pictures or something. The only time I will count an animal to put it on this map, is if I am beyond a shadow doubt that it is an otter—based on vocalizations and the way it swam. I feel pretty comfortable that that map is representing otters and not mistaken identity. If it's something that I can't wrap my head around, that 'yeah, it's an otter,' then I won't put it on the map. I'll tell the people to keep looking and thank you. One of the things that I've done is that out of all the emails that I've receive, I've made myself respond to every single one of them. So that people aren't sending something to a black hole; and I think that's why it's kept momentum on sightings.

Gary Calkins welcomes your otter sightings. Find out how submit them at passporttotexas.org.

[Get Dad Outdoors for Father's Day](#)

Monday, June 12th, 2017

A lot of men don't want friends and family making a big fuss over them on special days – but we're going to do it for Father's Day anyway, Daddio, so deal with it.

Show your Dad what he means to you by giving him the gift of the great Texas outdoors on Father's Day, June 18th.

Maybe the kiddos could spring for a [Texas State Parks Pass](#) (which is really like a gift for the whole family); it allows unlimited access to all state parks for a year, discounts on camping, as well as discounts at state parks stores.

Or, you could [take Dad fishing](#) at a state park—because everyone fishes for free at Texas State Parks that have fishing opportunities. Some parks even have [tackle loaner programs](#). Just bring your own bait. Plus, you could catch something tasty for your Dad Day Dinner. How cool is that?

If your Dad prefers alone time with nature, and doesn't already have a [limited use permit from Parks and Wildlife](#), giving one to him provides access to a million acres of public land in Texas where he can hike, mountain bike, do some wildlife viewing, fish—and in some cases—primitive camping.

Texas is a big state that offers an exciting world of outdoor opportunities. Doesn't your Dad deserve the best of Texas?

Noodling: Hands on Fishing

Tuesday, June 13th, 2017

Hand fishing, commonly called noodling, became legal in Texas in 2011.

What they do is they find holes that are typically on the bank, or in structure timber, what have you. And, fishermen will search around in the water blindly, feeling in holes until they find these fish, and then they'll pull them out with their hands.

Fisheries biologist Kris Bodine says far from being a fringe activity, this technique is quite old.

Before we had fishing poles, it was a way folks fished. They were just grabbing fish for food.

Hand fishers are more efficient at catching trophy-sized fish using this technique.

Big fish of any species—I don't care whether it's catfish, or bass or what have you—they're hard to find. And, so, this particular technique has offered folks a chance to catch more big fish than they would at any other time, because they're really concentrated in these areas.

What impact does removing so many big fish have on the overall catfish population?

There's a perception among anglers and among fisheries biologists that high harvest of trophy fish is majorly detrimental to the catfish population.

Researchers conducted a study of hand fishers, with eye-opening results. Details tomorrow.

Is Hand Fishing Bad for Fisheries?

Wednesday, June 14th, 2017

Hand fishers locate catfish nesting sites along river banks, reach in until a fish latches onto their arm, and then remove both arm and fish from the water.

This is historically a controversial fishing method. First off, we're taking fish off of active nests, and some people don't like that. And, historically it's been illegal.

Legal in Texas since 2011, hand fishers only make up about one percent of all anglers. Fisheries biologist, Kris Bodine says hand fishers regularly harvest trophy fish. The belief has been that their harvest of trophy fish is detrimental to the population.

And if we want to have trophy fish, we have to protect the trophy fish [by catch and release], and since hand fishers are catching [harvesting] trophy fish, everybody viewed them as a problem.

Thus prompting a study at [Lake Palestine](#). After analyzing results from the study, it turns out harvest was low; very low.

For flatheads, which hand fishers tend to target, we were looking at around 3-4% [harvest rate]. And we were finding that the populations [in Lake Palestine] could withstand two or three maybe four times that, before any kind of problem started existing.

This was a revelation. So if trophy cats don't need our protection, which ones do? That's tomorrow.

A New Way to Think About Trophy Fish

Thursday, June 15th, 2017

The prevailing wisdom regarding trophy fish has been:

If we want to have trophy fish [in the future] we have to protect the trophy fish [in the present].

Fisheries biologist Kris Bodine says, as a rule, trophies aren't easy to find, let alone catch.

And that's the thing. They're hard to come by. They're hard to find, because they're just rare in the population.

Someone tell that to hand fishers. They can consistently find (or catch) trophy-sized catfish. Concerned about the effect removing trophy fish might have on the population, researchers conducted a study of flathead cats on Lake Palestine, which revealed something unexpected.

It's not the trophy animals that need protecting. It's the animals that are going to produce the trophies. So, the young adults.

Bodine says we should protect these younger fish because not only are they more abundant than their big sisters and brothers, they also have more life left in them.

These big trophy fish—they're old. More of them are dying of old age than are being caught by anglers. And I don't care what fishing method we're talking about. I mean, throwing them [trophies] back probably isn't going to create more big fish. But throwing back the young adults would help your cause.

Find the rules of hand fishing on the [Texas Parks and Wildlife website](#).

TPW TV – Steve Nelle: Biologist or Psychologist?

Friday, June 16th, 2017

Author and Hill Country Land Trust member Jill Nokes holds Steve Nelle in high regard.

He has this knack for connecting with people wherever they are.

Nelle, a natural resource specialist is part biologist and part psychologist.

Even though we're trained in the technical skills of plants and animals and soil and conservation, when we go onto farms and ranches, we're really more in the people business.

This is especially true when evaluating damage following natural disasters. The Texas Parks and Wildlife TV Series on PBS [features a segment where Steve Nelle visits landowners](#), like Bill Johnson, affected by the Blanco Floods.

[Bill Johnson] There was just devastation. The riparian area was stripped of all vegetation. With two big floods in one year, you get pretty down and you sort of feel hopeless almost. But he reminds you that nature is very resilient and it will recover.

[Steve Nelle] I'll walk with the landowner across an area that's been devastated and find a few good things. And you can show them how nature's trying to recover and heal this area back up.

Catch the segment about Steve Nelle next week on the Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series on PBS. Check your local listings.

[How to Behave Around Alligators](#)

Monday, June 19th, 2017

With more alligators spotted by the public in residential areas, you might think you'd be better off selling your home. The fact is... there's no need to panic if and when you see a gator in your neighborhood.

We're just trying to help people put it in perspective. People will begin to see more and more alligators in the future and not every alligator is going to be a problem.

Greg Creacy is a wildlife biologist based in Bastrop. He says horror movies and attacks by the more dangerous, and non-native crocodiles have caused people to be afraid of Texas alligators.

The number of attacks by alligators in the US each year is less than injuries and fatalities from dogs, scorpions, snakes and sharks...all of those are much more dangerous to people than alligators.

So what do you do if you see an alligator? Keep a safe distance from them and keep pets away from them. Don't swim in an area where there are alligators...and don't feed them.

Because people have fed that alligator they've broken down their natural fear that alligator has for people.

Find more [information on living with alligators](#) on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Website.

[Texas Vultures](#)

Tuesday, June 20th, 2017

Some people call them buzzards, but Cliff Shackelford says the correct ornithological name for the large black birds that dine on road kill is: vulture.

We have the turkey vulture and the black vulture.

Shackelford is a non-game ornithologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife.

And the best way to tell them apart when they're perched and sitting on that dead deer carcass on the roadside, is: look at the color of the head on the adults. The black vulture has a gray head and the turkey vulture, a red head.

Vultures circle high above the land in search of a meal.

The turkey vulture uses the sense of smell, and they'll smell their prey. The black vulture, though, uses sight, they'll look for prey, but they'll also cheat. They'll also look for where the turkey vultures are circling—[and decide] I'm going to bump in line. And with their numbers, usually the black vulture can overcome the turkey vulture and get the first little bites.

More fun facts: vultures poop on their legs to cool off, and when threatened, they vomit.

This is a defensive mechanism. They don't have fangs like a rattlesnake; they don't have claws like a bobcat. So, their best defense is to throw up what's in their stomach that was lying on the road for the last three days. And guess what? You're going to turn away; it's a great defense.

Find out about all kinds of birds and birding on the Texas parks and Wildlife website.

Vulture Fun Facts

Wednesday, June 21st, 2017

Vultures get a bad rap: maybe it's because they aren't "pretty birds", or because they eat road kill. Non-game Ornithologist, Cliff Shackelford, says they deserve our respect as they are a helpful, interesting species.

Vultures have a role to play, what we call 'ecosystem services'. These are benefits to us; it's unfortunate that our cars hit animals—but think about what's left behind. The vultures are cleaning up all the mess and we have to commend them for that.

How do vultures eat decaying carcasses and not get sick?

Vultures don't get sick because they have certain bacteria and other flora in their guts that help them break down these carcasses.

Although a migratory species, vultures live year-round in Texas. When road kill freezes up north, those vultures travel south.

Because of our location, we not only host a lot more vultures in the winter season, we see a lot more passing through in the spring and fall migration.

Vultures are social birds and roost together, preferring the tall structures that allow an easy entrance and exit.

They like cell phone towers, rocky outcrops and ridges, an old tree that's standing up really high. They like the tallest roof in the area.

Yet, they nest on the ground under fallen trees, and are excellent parents. Now that you're better acquainted, [we hope you'll give vultures a little respect](#).

Wildlife Tracking

Thursday, June 22nd, 2017

When it comes to wildlife, there's more of it out there than meets the eye.

Some of them are fairly secretive. A lot of times, we never even see the animal. Looking at the tracks and sign are the only way that we're able to determine that the animals are present.

Heidi Baily is a wildlife biologist in east Texas. She says [tracking is a skill](#) she uses when conducting wildlife surveys.

Wildlife tracking is getting out there and looking for not just the tracks or the imprints left by the feet of the animal, but it's also getting out there and looking for chew marks on a particular plant. Or, maybe scat—which is the highfalutin name for animal poop. Or a feeding sign, or anything that reveals that something has passed through.

When tracking wildlife, Heidi says, it helps to think like the animal you're tracking.

The best trackers are the ones who can put themselves in the mind of the animal, and be able to determine where it's been, what it's doing and where it's going. That's the fun part of the wildlife CSI of it: almost becoming the animal.

Tracking isn't for wildlife biologists only. Heidi Baily says anyone can track wildlife, starting in their own backyard. Find field guide and [tracking app information](#) at passporttotexas.org.

Tracking Wildlife Beyond Footprints

Friday, June 23rd, 2017

A lot of us, when tracking wildlife, search for footprints only.

You know, the tracks, themselves, are the easy part as far as determining something's been there.

East Texas wildlife biologist, Heidi Baily says the tracks alone tell only part of the story.

In my experience, one of the toughest things for a tracker to learn, is to just take a step back and look at the scene as a whole rather than zooming in on one or two tracks. Sometimes it really helps to step back and look at where the animal's been going, and what he's been doing. You get a whole lot bigger picture as opposed to just kind of a snapshot and being able to say, 'Okay. That's a raccoon.'

Heidi says when people start opening themselves to fully tracking wildlife—and not just the footprints—they begin to experience the outdoors in new ways.

A lot of times, you may not see wildlife, but tracking just puts it in your mind that you're surrounded by wildlife whether you see it or not. And, it really gets your brain to churning trying to put yourself in the mind of that animal. It's a real treat, and a good time to get outside and enjoy it to the fullest.

[Enrich your outdoor experience with wildlife tracking.](#) Find more information at passporttotexas.org.

Fourth of July Festivities

Monday, June 26th, 2017

This July Fourth Weekend give yourself and your family a treat, and spend it at one of your state parks.

Pack a picnic and dine al fresco. Depending upon where you go, you'll dine under the shade of ancient oaks or pines or maples. Bring your hiking shoes or mountain bikes and enjoy the extensive trail systems.

Fishing is free in parks with fishing opportunities. Cast a line and see if you can reel in something tasty to for dinner so you can skip the grocery store on the way home.

If you live in Central Texas, the LBJ State Park and Historic site's **[Sauer-Beckmann Living History Farm](#)** in Johnson City is the place to be on July Fourth. They plan to celebrate like early Texans. What does that mean? You have to go to find out.

For East Texas residents, one of the biggest fireworks display in your part of the state will light up the skies over the **[Texas Fresh Water Fisheries Center](#)** in Athens. Admission to the center is free after 4 p.m. And there's free fishing until 8:30 p.m.

Whether you go to a park to celebrate your own way, or attend one of these events: bring your family, bring your friends, bring some snacks, but leave the fireworks and sparklers at home. Don't worry, you'll still have a blast.

Mule Deer Restoration

Tuesday, June 27th, 2017

The mule deer population is struggling in parts of the Big Bend region of far West Texas.

We've been trying to boost our populations in the Black Gap area since about 2015.

Shawn Gray oversees mule deer restoration. Unlike other mule deer populations, those at Black Gap never fully recovered after the last drought.

We had been monitoring that population for years, and it just remained stagnant. And so, the next decision we made was, well, let's put some animals down there and try to boost it and see if we can't get the population trending upward.

During population surveys last fall, biologists identified an available surplus of animals at Elephant Mountain Wildlife Wildlife Management, and one private ranch in Pecos County. Using the helicopter and net gun method, they trapped the animals.

Once we caught them, we radio-collared and tagged them. We gave them a series of injections for health reason, and then loaded them in trailers and took them down to release them.

Shawn Gray says this spring they moved 98 female mule deer to the Black Gap Wildlife Wildlife Management Area and to the adjacent El Carmen Land & Conservation Company, which together comprise 135,000 contiguous acres dedicated to wildlife and habitat conservation.

Of those radio-collared animals, we monitor intensively, looking at survival and movement—habitat use. We use all those findings to help improve the habitat and help improve our survival.

The Wildlife Restoration Program supports our series.

Introducing Mule Deer to their New Home

Wednesday, June 28th, 2017

Shawn Gray oversees the mule deer restoration program for Texas Parks and Wildlife. Over the past two years, with the help of partners, the program identified available surplus animals on public and private land and moved them to [**Black Gap Wildlife Management Area**](#).

We have moved over two hundred female mule deer.

Gray says the program radio collars 30 to 40 percent of the animals before release.

Some captured deer had a “soft release” which involved keeping them in a fenced area for a couple of weeks allowing them to acclimate to their surroundings. Then, when freed...

They don't go as far; they tend to stay where you released them.

Other deer had a “hard release”. They were let out of the trailers and allowed to immediately run free.

We have seen one or two of our [radio collared] translocated animals go back to where they were captured. Those were the ones that were hard released. The animals that we have soft released, we have not observed them going back to their home. We’ve observed them doing a lot of exploratory type movements. Figuring out their new home. But for the most part, those animals are staying in and around Black Gap Wildlife management Area.

Which makes all the hard work, planning and coordination worth it.

The Wildlife Restoration Program supports our series.

Archery in Schools Levels the Playing Field

Thursday, June 29th, 2017

Most individual and team sports demand a high level of physical agility or strength to compete—**unless that sport is archery.**

All ages. All sizes. All genders. So, it doesn’t matter; it really is an inclusive activity. And that’s one of the things that makes it very unusual.

Burnie Kessner is the archery coordinator for Texas Parks and Wildlife. More students are being exposed to the activity through the National Archery in Schools program.

It’s a non-traditional activity. It’s a lot of fun. And so, it’s very motivating for a student to want to do it. You know, you’re now going to shoot a bow and arrow. And we do it inside the building. So, you’re going to tell a sixth grader, ‘Hey, we’re going to shoot bows and arrows in the gym. [heh]’

That’s fun, right? Plus, archery has something in common with today’s technology.

It’s great immediate feedback. And they do it themselves—individual skills. They pull the arrow back. Draw the bow back, and shoot the arrow and see immediate results. So it’s great for today’s generation. They click buttons and send texts and get on the internet and find information immediately. Even though it’s an ancient sport and skill, it’s immediate feedback just like sending a text, because you see results right away.

Want to bring the Archery in Schools program to your district? Log onto the Texas Parks and Wildlife website to find out how.

The Wildlife restoration program support our show, and promotes the shooting sports in Texas.

Archery is a Sport for all Abilities

Friday, June 30th, 2017

Participation in archery, helps kids develop various skills.

Because you learn decision-making, and judging distances, and focusing—and tht sort of thing. So, there's a lot of life skills.

Burnie Kessner is the archery coordinator for Texas Parks and Wildlife. The National Archery in Schools Program introduces students to the sport. What makes this sport and program special is that anyone of any ability can be successful.

Physical limitations are addressed by adaptive devices on the bow and arrow. We do archery at Special Olympics—that audience can do it. And, at the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind [and Visually Impaired] in Austin, they do archery. So, all kinds of challenges can be overcome and still participate in archery.

In fact, Kessner says visually impaired students have successfully competed in state and national school tournaments with everyone else.

They can't see the bow and arrow they're holding. They can't see the target. They just need someone else to assist them and be their eyes and give them verbal cues—and they can shoot just like everybody else.

Interested in bringing the Archery in Schools program to your district? [Log onto the Texas Parks and Wildlife website](#) and find out how.

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