

Passport to Texas February 2018

Recognizing Texas' Buffalo Soldiers

Thursday, February 1st, 2018

[singing] *I was once a captured slave. Now I'm just a black man who came to be...*

In the 19th Century, Black men who served in the 9th and 10th Regiments of Cavalry and 24th and 25th Regiments of Infantry of the United States Army were ...

I am a Buffalo Soldier!

It's said the Indians whom they fought during the Indian Wars gave troops the name because of their hair texture and their courage and ferocity in battle.

He feared and respected the buffalo. And he learned to fear and respect the black soldier as well.

That's Buffalo Soldier reenactor, John Olivera, who says Buffalo soldiers played a major role in settling Texas.

Seventy-five percent of the soldiers that settled this area were Buffalo Soldiers. The only white men that were with them were the commanding officers. Almost all of the forts were manned and built by Buffalo Soldiers.

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department offers [Texas Buffalo Soldier Outdoor Educational Programs](#).

[Find their schedule](#) on the Parks and Wildlife website.

The Buffalo Soldiers fought not only the Indians, and outlaws, but racism and prejudice. We had a job to do, and we done it.

TPW TV—Remembering Jacob Krebs

Friday, February 2nd, 2018

A [tragic accident in 2013 took the life 18 year old Harper High School Senior, Jacob Krebs](#). Texas Parks and Wildlife, biologist, Joyce Moore.

Will and Mary Krebs raised him to be active in all facets of the community. He was an Eagle Scout. He was a re-enactor at the Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg. Then he was a phenomenal athlete. He would run eight miles without any problem. He was training constantly. When Jacob died, Will Krebs came to me and he said, Joyce, I would like to memorialize my son. Could you help me? And so I said we should ask the Harper Wildlife Association if they would help us do this.

And they did, by creating a Youth Hunt for Wounded Warriors in Memory of Jacob Krebs. All participants had a connection with the military. Jacob's mother, Mary.

Jacob loved hunting and he also loved wounded warriors. He was so proud to acknowledge any veteran that he saw. He'd walk up to him and tell him thank you. And in memory of Jacob as well as the kids of veterans, we decided to honor them and have a youth hunt.

Mary Krebs says, Jacob's impact didn't end there. He was also an organ donor.

Jacob saved the lives of four people on April the 2, 2013 and he has greatly enhanced the lives of at least 80 more around the United States through tissue, bone and cornea donations.

Learn about Jacob Krebs's lasting legacy next week on the [Texas Parks and Wildlife TV](#) series on PBS.

2018 Crab Trap Removal

Monday, February 5th, 2018

Commercial crab fishermen use baited wire traps to lure their prey. Sometimes traps end up missing due to storms, or they are simply discarded.

These traps continue "ghost fishing" for months or years—capturing fish and other marine creatures, including endangered species, thus taking an environmental and economic toll on gulf fisheries.

In February of 2002, Texas Parks and Wildlife conducted the first [abandoned crab trap removal program](#). During a 10-day period in February volunteers like you, join Texas Parks and Wildlife staff and partners, in removing derelict traps.

More than 32,000 crab traps have been removed from the gulf since 2002, saving tens of thousands of marine organisms.

This year's cleanup is February 16th through the 25th. The big cleanup "push" is Saturday, February 17 from 10 to noon. The cleanup is the only time citizens may remove these traps from gulf waters.

Texas Parks and Wildlife facilitates roughly 20 coastal sites, and provides disposal facilities, tarps, gloves, crab trap hooks and other items to help volunteers remove troublesome traps.

To volunteer for this year's program visit the Abandoned Crab Trap Removal page on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

The Sport Fish Restoration Program supports our series.

Still Time to Plant Trees Before Summer Heat

Tuesday, February 6th, 2018

Theoretically, you can plant trees all year long. However, for the best outcome, do so while temperatures are cool.

It's just much easier on them.

Scott Harris is a certified arborist in Austin. Although fall the best time to plant trees, the best tree planting window in Texas runs from October through March.

Getting the trees in the ground in the fall [and winter], they have the entire cool season, dormant season, to spread roots out before the big demands on roots and water start in the spring.

There's still time to get your trees in the ground to take advantage of cool winter temperatures and spring rains. On another note: just because a tree will grow in Texas, doesn't mean it should grow here. Harris advises we stick with natives.

The biggest thing to avoid is non-natives. Our natives have all of the features you would want, but they've spent thousands and thousands of years getting used to being here, and with all of the wildlife used to having them, too. It's all a web, and you can't tell which string you can pull out without upsetting things.

Tomorrow tree planting tips to help your newly planted tree thrive.

Tree Planting Tips from Arborist Scott

Wednesday, February 7th, 2018

Trees provide habitat for wildlife, as well as shade and beauty for us. If you're adding new trees to your landscape this year: know the rules.

People frequently ask how close they can put a tree to the house, because shade on the house obviously is a huge energy savings. The general rule of thumb is you go no closer to the house than the eaves are high. So, if you measure up to the eaves of your house, and they're ten feet high, then you need to get ten feet back from the house.

Scott Harris, a certified arborist in Austin, recommends planting native trees. For your tree to get the best start in life, he recommends the following:

You always want to plant your trees at the exact level they were in the pot. Don't dig a big deep hole, dig a big wide hole. Always use the same soil you took out to backfill. But, you can put your compost underneath the mulch, and then all of that organic goodness will dribble down in the way that nature intended.

Water your new trees infrequently and deeply; this helps them to develop extensive root systems.

If you just have a little bit of water in one area, that's where the roots are going to go. But if you water very deeply, it'll spread into the surrounding soil, and the roots will follow that moisture out.

A robust root system helps trees remain vigorous and able to better withstand Texas droughts.

What Monarchs Need

Thursday, February 8th, 2018

Larval monarchs have very specific nutritional needs.

Larval monarchs depend on milkweed species. Essentially, that's the only plant monarch caterpillars consume.

Ben Hutchins, state invertebrate biologist, says availability of milkweed in Texas is vital to their survival.

As monarchs migrate north from their overwintering grounds in Mexico, Texas is one of their first stops. And this is where they begin to reproduce. And so all of the monarchs that then migrate farther north through the US and Canada, those future generations depend on successful reproduction in the spring here in Texas.

Yet, Texas is just one stop along their migration route.

Monarchs also reproduce and depend on milkweed in the Midwestern states in the United States. And, we know that in many of those states—for example, in the corn belt region—that the availability of milkweed plants has declined substantially over the last several decades. And so, there is some pretty good science that suggests that decline in milkweed availability in the Midwest, directly relates to the monarch population declines that we have seen.

We can all play a part in the monarch's survival when we plant milkweed and other nectar producing plants.

The Wildlife Restoration Program supports our series.

TPW TV – El Camino Real de Los Tejas

Friday, February 9th, 2018

El Camino Real de Los Tejas, is a historic trail from Spanish Colonial times that shaped Texas history. Learn more on a segment of the [Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series on PBS](#).

I'm Steven Gonzales. I'm executive director of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association. El Camino Real de los Tejas is the old royal road that came up from Mexico City to establish Texas in Spanish colonial times. It's the road that led to the founding of Texas.

There are many caminos reales that make up the Camino Real. In times past these roads have different names because of the places that they were going to. The Old San Antonio Road and the Nacogdoches Road, La Bahia Road and the Laredo Road. Every Texan of note that we can think of, all the way from Spaniards such as Alonzo de Leon to Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie, Sam Houston, they all travelled along portions of the Camino Real at one time or another, and it's really elemental to the state's history. We think about things like the battle of the Alamo and Goliad, and we forget that those troops were actually travelling along roadways, pathways, and those were largely the Camino Real and segments of it. So one of our goals is to make the public more aware of it.

El Camino Real de los Tejas: Tracing a Timeless Trail next week on the Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series on PBS. [Check your local listings.](#)

Learn to Camp—No Experience Required

Monday, February 12th, 2018

This is Passport to Texas

Have your kids been begging you to take them on an overnight camping trip at a Texas State Park? Have they talked excitedly about sleeping in a tent and making s'mores over a campfire, or maybe even catching a fish? If you've been putting them off because you're out of practice, or never learned the skills in the first place—we can help.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department offers the [Texas Outdoor Family](#) program to help you to hone or to develop outdoor skills. During one or two-night workshops, state park staff lead families through the basics of setting up camp and getting the most out of their time in nature.

All camping gear and equipment required for an overnight stay at the park is included with each reservation! Just bring your family—that's up to six people—sheets, blankets and food and you are ready for a camping adventure.

But you need to register in advance, and workshops fill fast. [Workshops are scheduled in March](#) at Lake Tawakoni State Park, Galveston Island State Park, Buescher State Park, Lake Ray Roberts State Park, and Huntsville State Park. There are more workshops in April, May and June at other state parks.

Texas Outdoor Family Workshops are always fun; you'll leave the park with new confidence in your ability to enjoy overnight camping with your family and friends.

Find details in the calendar section of the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

Re-homed on the Range

Tuesday, February 13th, 2018

Wildlife biologist, Shawn Gray, stays busy most days in his role as Texas Parks and Wildlife pronghorn and mule deer program leader in the Trans Pecos.

I get to oversee the management and research for the two species for Texas Parks and Wildlife.

This includes orchestrating the restoration of these species to their native range. Last year, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department successfully relocated 109 pronghorn.

Our surplus populations are located in the Northwest and Northeast Panhandle. We take animals from healthy populations there to boost our local populations in the Trans Pecos that have in recent years seen historic decline.

Texas Parks and Wildlife worked with partners to redistribute the animals.

Translocation has been one of the management tools we've been able to do to help those populations rebound. There's a whole suite of things that we do to improve populations. And, of course, we always need help from Mother Nature to make all those things work for us.

Drought was a leading factor in the pronghorn's decline in the Trans Pecos, but Gray says the reasons are more complex than that alone. After trapping the animals, each received a health checkup; some were fitted with radio collars.

Through time and our management practices, the populations have been responding well.

The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series and funds pronghorn restoration in Texas.

Pronghorn Restoration and Rural Economy

Wednesday, February 14th, 2018

Wildlife biologist Shawn Gray finds pronghorns fascinating, and hopes you will, too.

The pronghorn is a unique mammal of North America; it's the only one found in its family. It's the fastest mammal in North America. It's a big game species.

Gray is the pronghorn program leader and oversees the Pronghorn Restoration Project. Because it's a game species, hunting them should pick up as their population grows, thus benefiting local communities.

In 2008, we issued probably like 800 buck only hunting permits. And, shoot, in 2009 or 10, we were issuing less than 100. And there's a lot to that. Not only is it the money that they get for trespass access for hunting, but the hunters come into the local communities and spend time and spend money. So, there's a lot of those economic impacts as well with a much reduced pronghorn population out here.

The Trans-Pecos pronghorn population dipped below 3K in 2012, and Gray says through translocation and natural reproduction, they hope to see the number rise to 10K.

Most of the local communities in the Trans-Pecos really miss the pronghorn. And they really want to see pronghorn back on the landscape at numbers that they are used to seeing.

With the continued success of the restoration project, they may get their wish.

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Changes to ShareLunker Program

Thursday, February 15th, 2018

The ShareLunker Program is a promotion and enhancement program for Lunker bass fishing in Texas. It selectively breeds trophy largemouth bass donated by anglers.

[Starting] this year we expanded that program to include eight pound bass, nine pound bass, ten pound bass, etc....all the way up and over thirteen pounds.

Kyle Brookshear oversees the Toyota Texas Sharelunker Program. Why the change?

We wanted to get involved with more anglers out there and begin to recognize them for their achievements. Because, really, a 13-pound bass is the fish of a lifetime, but so is an eight, nine, ten.... And so, we wanted to recognize anglers at other levels of achievement for their catches.

In addition, Brookshear says collecting data on bass 8lb+ helps Texas Parks and Wildlife better understand the influence of ShareLunker genetics in each public water body. He says they'll continue to collect and spawn 13-pound bass, caught January 1st through March 31st.

And then, we're not only stocking some of those fingerlings out into the lakes of Texas, but the new change is we are incorporating them into our brood stock development so that eventually, we'll greatly increase the number of fingerlings that are direct sharelunker descendants that are stocked out in Texas public lakes.

Find details at texassharelunker.com.

The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series.

Reel in a Lunker and Get Some "Loot"

Friday, February 16th, 2018

This year, the Toyota Sharelunker program expanded to include largemouth bass eight pounds or more. Anglers may submit data year-round into one of four classes: Lunker, Lunker Elite, Lunker Legend and Lunker Legacy.

And anglers can submit a fish into one of those four classes through our mobile app or our web based form.

Kyle Brookshear oversees the program.

Our mobile app allows an angler to enter the data field, such as the date and time that it was caught—the weight the length. And then document those with a photograph and submit those to us. And once they're reviewed and confirmed, they'll be entered into the program.

Lunker Legacy class permits anglers to submit their data and loan 13+ pound lunkers caught during the January 1st—March 31st spawning window.

For entering, an angler in any of those categories receives a catch kit. In addition to that, everyone who enters into one of those four categories, is included in a grand prize drawing of a \$5K shopping spree at the end of the year. Those anglers that enter the Legacy Class program are in an additional drawing for another \$5K shopping spree.

Find details about the program changes as well as the items found in each catch kit, and how to submit your catch data at texassharelunker.com.

The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series.

Feel the (Prescribed) Burn

Monday, February 19th, 2018

Man mimics nature when he uses fire as a land management tool. He does this with controlled burning, and with prescribed fire.

David Riskin, director of natural resources for state parks, says there is a difference between the two.

Controlled burning is a term that people use that you start at part A, and you burn until you get to part B. Professional land managers use the term prescribed fire because you have specific objectives, you have specific outcomes, you burn under very specific conditions. And so a prescription is a planning document... you lay everything out ahead of time and you then implement it with very specific objectives in mind.

Those objectives naturally have to do with land management, as well as a range of various objectives a landowner may hope to achieve.

There can be a whole series of objectives. From very simple things like fuel load reduction. You can have specific habitat objectives...to change the vegetation structure and composition to support waterfowl, or to support antelope, or lesser prairie chickens...or Houston toads for that matter.

Learn more about prescribed fire on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

The Wildlife Restoration Program supports our series.

Questions About Monarch Butterflies

Tuesday, February 20th, 2018

Here's what you need to know about scientific discovery: it starts with a question. And that leads to—not answers—not immediately, anyway. It leads to more questions.

They just keep coming.

Ben Hutchins, the state's invertebrate biologist, has been asking a lot of questions lately about monarch butterflies.

That's right. The more you know, the more you realize you don't know. And so, many of us that are involved in monarch conservation have been to a number of conferences, meetings, workshops, symposia. And a big emphasis is on all of the questions that we still have about monarch biology. I think the biggest question, particularly, for conservationists for natural resource managers is: what can we do to make the landscape good monarch habitat. How can we be good stewards of the land to make sure monarchs are getting what they need?

See what I mean?

We have lots of questions about how particular land management practices, like using controlled burns, or reseeding with native plants—how those practices can best be used to produce good monarch habitat. We have lots of questions about patch size, too.

And if your next question is: what does Ben Hutchins mean by patch size? You'll have to listen next time to find out.

The Wildlife Restoration Program supports our series.

Habitat for Monarchs and other Pollinators

Wednesday, February 21st, 2018

For as long as biologists have been studying the iconic monarch butterfly, they've come up with more questions than answers about its biology and basic needs. The biggest question: do land management practices, like controlled burns and reseeding with native plants improve monarch habitat?

We have lots of questions about patch size, too.

That's Ben Hutchins, the state's invertebrate biologist. So, what is patch size?

When I say ‘patch size’ what I mean is, how far will a monarch travel to get from one plot of nectar producing plants to another? How big of a prairie do we need to support healthy monarch populations? How many milkweed in it? What density do we need across the landscape to promote healthy breeding populations?

Expansive patches of prairie are best, but hard to come by due to urbanization. Having said that—all is not lost.

Even urban environments have lots of potential for habitat for monarchs moving through; so you have urban corridors. So, there’s no property that’s too big or too small to help out monarchs and other urban pollinators.

That means even planting native nectar producing plants and milkweed in empty lots, on building rooftops, or in containers on your downtown balcony—you are playing a role in supporting monarch and native pollinators.

The Wildlife Restoration Program supports our series.

City Nature Challenge

Thursday, February 22nd, 2018

Game for some friendly competition? Then [join teams from 60 cities, on six continents](#), to compete during the City Nature Challenge—April 27-30th. Teams will attempt to document more plant and animal species in their regions than competitors in other regions.

And we are using a format called iNaturalist, which is a real easy way of collecting data. All you have to do is take pictures of things. You don’t even have to know what it is.

Texas Parks and Wildlife biologist and Austin area challenge coordinator, Marsha May, says they need more experts to help verify data.

Professionals. People who know their plants. People who know their insects. Their invertebrates. Any of these organisms, to help us verify the data. You don’t have to live in any of the regions. Go to iNaturalist—especially those who use it regularly—because we need to get the data verified for it to count towards the contest.

Seven regions in Texas are hosting teams. Find them on the Nature Trackers page of the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

It would be a good idea in advance, if people would check out iNaturalist.org. And join iNaturalist and see what it’s all about—practice it. And then when the time comes, they would just join the project as they’re collecting their data.

How the City Nature Challenge works... tomorrow.

Compete in the City Nature Challenge

Friday, February 23rd, 2018

Document local flora and fauna when you participate in the [Worldwide 2018 City Nature Challenge, April 27-30](#).

Each city will have a leader; that leader will bring in partners [like the city, county or environmental organization]. And they will ask participants to do bioblitzes within that city. A bioblitz is where you collect data on all the plants and the animals throughout the area.

Marsha May is a biologist and Austin area challenge coordinator. Teams from six continents will [upload their observations to iNaturalist.org](#) in an attempt to document more species than their competitors.

Then all that data is collected in iNaturalist, and it will be evaluated a week after the challenge is over, and a winner will be announced.

Experts from various fields will verify the data. No prizes will be given to winners, but they will get bragging rights, and a chance to help researchers.

We have many species in Texas that are species of greatest conservation need. And when we do these bioblitzes, oftentimes those species are identified within that project. And those species are very important for us to know where they're located, and how many there are out there. And this is just a way that citizens help quite a bit.

For more details on the 2018 City Nature Challenge, April 27—30th go to [citynaturechallenge.org](#).

Anglers Discover a New Favorite in an Old Fish

Monday, February 26th, 2018

An old timey freshwater fish is getting new attention. What is it?

A traditional fish that's been caught by anglers for many, many years.

That's more of a clue than an answer, Dave Terre. Dave is chief of inland fisheries research and management. Here's another clue: Parks and Wildlife produces and then stocks this fish in Texas water bodies.

Yes, we do produce many, many catfish in our state fish hatchery system in Texas.

Catfish! But you knew that, right?

As a matter of fact, we stock literally thousands of advanced size channel catfish in small ponds located throughout the state. One of those programs is our neighborhood Fishin' program, where we're stocking every two weeks adult channel catfish 12-inches or larger, into some 14 water bodies across the state to offer up great fishing opportunities for people who reside in urban areas of our state, which is definitely a group that we would like to reach out to.

To the original point: serious anglers are rediscovering catfish...but why?

Texas is changing. We're going to be experiencing more drought conditions in Texas; and what we know about catfish is they are able to deal with fluctuating water levels better than largemouth bass, which have been – and will continue to be – a popular sport fish in Texas.

With heavy stocking and a new eye toward management catfish is a traditional species for changing times.

The Sport Fish Restoration Program supports our series and funds fisheries research in Texas.

Are Catfish the Future of Freshwater Fishing?

Tuesday, February 27th, 2018

Largemouth bass is hands down the favorite sport fish among anglers in Texas

Today in Texas about 50% of our anglers say they prefer largemouth bass.

Dave Terre, chief of inland fisheries research and management, says one fish is gaining on largemouth.

About 20 percent of anglers prefer fishing catfish in Texas.

That's right – the humble catfish. Catfish are better able than largemouth bass to survive and thrive when water levels are low, such as during drought.

We're trying to study catfish more intensively to determine how we can make fishing for catfish even better.

Texas Parks and Wildlife developed a management to guide the future of this sport fish in Texas.

Most people in Texas – when they think of a fish, they think of a catfish. I think that's the honest truth. Bass get more notoriety, but catfish are very important and I think a perfect fish to start new anglers on fishing, and to get a new generation of Texas interested in fishing.

Texas is home to at least 10 species of catfish. Three provide important fishing opportunities to anglers: Channel, Blue, and Flathead Catfish. We have a link to the catfish management plan at passporttotexas.org.

The Sport Fish Restoration Program supports our series and funds fisheries research in Texas.

Celebrate the Birth of Texas, Where it Began

Wednesday, February 28th, 2018

March 2 is an important date in Texas history. It's when Texas declared its independence from Mexico. And each year we celebrate where it all began: **[Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park and Historic Site](#)**.

The **[Texas Independence Day Celebration](#)** is an annual two-day living history event; this year it's on Saturday and Sunday, March 3 and 4.

It's when we celebrate the day when 59 delegates met in 1836 to make a formal declaration of independence from Mexico in 1836.

This admission-free event features live music, food, demonstrations, living history presentations, kids' activities, and more.

Historical reenactors set up an accurate Texas Army camp where visitors may wander freely among the tents to learn how the soldiers and their families lived in 1836.

During that weekend, admission fees are waived for the site's attractions. Admission to the grounds, on-site shuttles and parking are also free.

Washington on the Brazos State Historic Site is halfway between Houston and Austin. Come out and celebrate with us on March 3rd and 4th. Find more details on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.