

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
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New Additions to Wildlife District 2

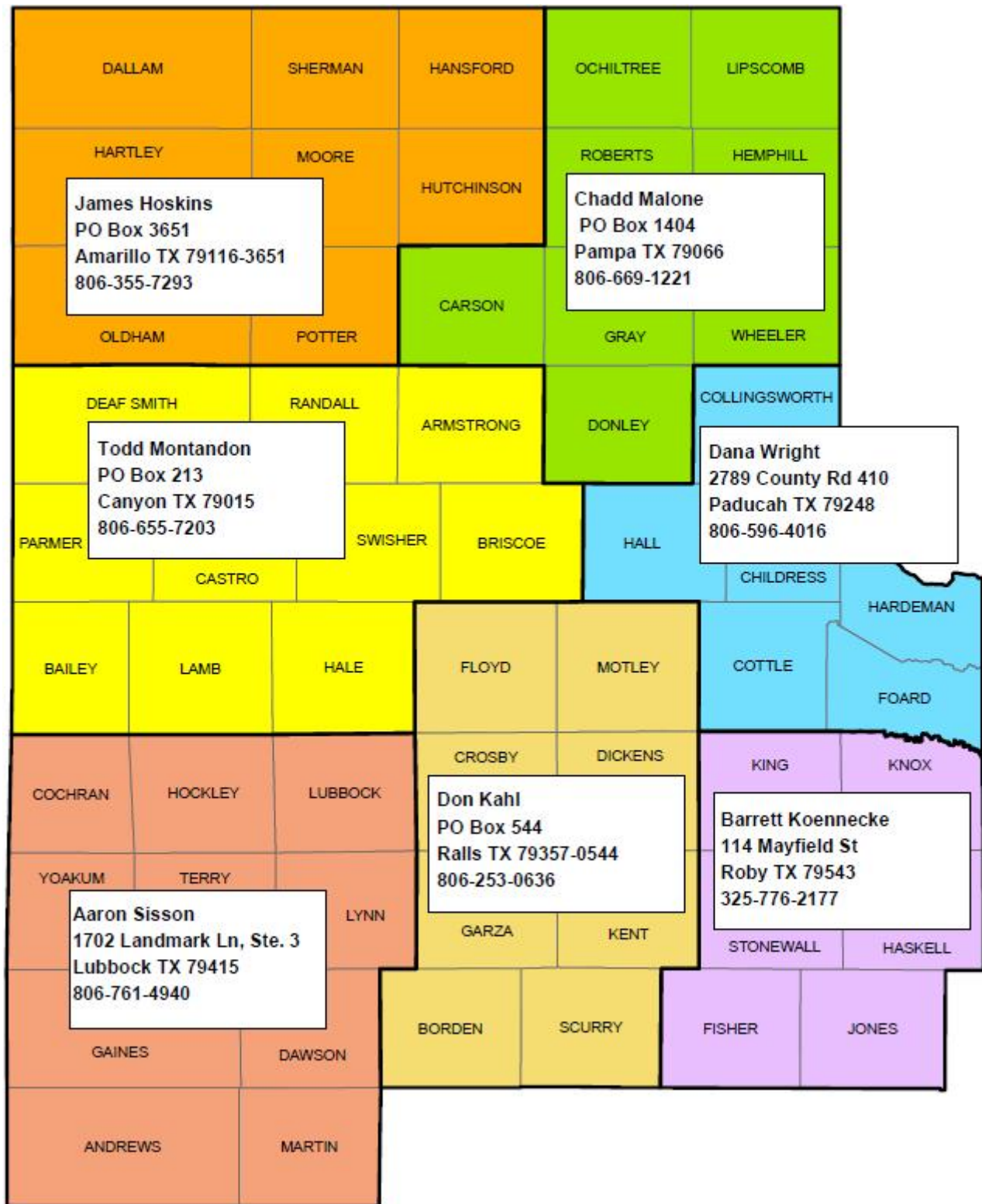
This past year, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department was able to justify hiring an additional wildlife biologist in the Panhandle Wildlife District. We have experienced an increase in requests for technical assistance, an increase in wildlife monitoring activities, and have been assisting with implementation of the Lesser Prairie Chicken Rangewide Plan which accompanied the federal listing of the chicken. As a result, it had become extremely challenging to meet the demands on our time. With the addition of the new position, there have been some changes in biologists' counties of responsibility (see map on Page 2).

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In the Texas Panhandle we conduct annually: helicopter surveys for mule deer, winter waterfowl surveys, lesser prairie chicken lek surveys, mourning dove spring call counts, urban white-winged dove surveys, fixed-wing aerial pronghorn antelope surveys, roadside quail counts, spotlight white-tailed deer surveys, and roadside pheasant surveys. We also issue pronghorn antelope permits and various types of mule and white-tailed deer permits, write wildlife management plans, give educational programs to the public, trap & band white-winged and mourning doves throughout the summer, conduct prescribed burns, conduct vegetation browse surveys, attend various types of trainings, write reports and present programs at various outreach events. We have also been busy with different research projects including a pronghorn sightability study, capturing pronghorn for a restoration project out in West Texas, working mandatory deer check stations out in West Texas to monitor Chronic Wasting Disease in deer, mandatory pronghorn check stations in the Panhandle determining harvest in some experimental hunting units, and in the Fall of 2015, we will begin a 4-year, mule deer movement study in the Panhandle.

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department Biologist's provide free technical assistance to landowners throughout the State, field biologists typically have a home-based office and spend many hours out in the field conducting various types of surveys and research, so please be patient when contacting them. You can find the biologist for any county in the State by going to the following website and clicking on the county you are interested in: www.tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/technical_guidance/biologists/

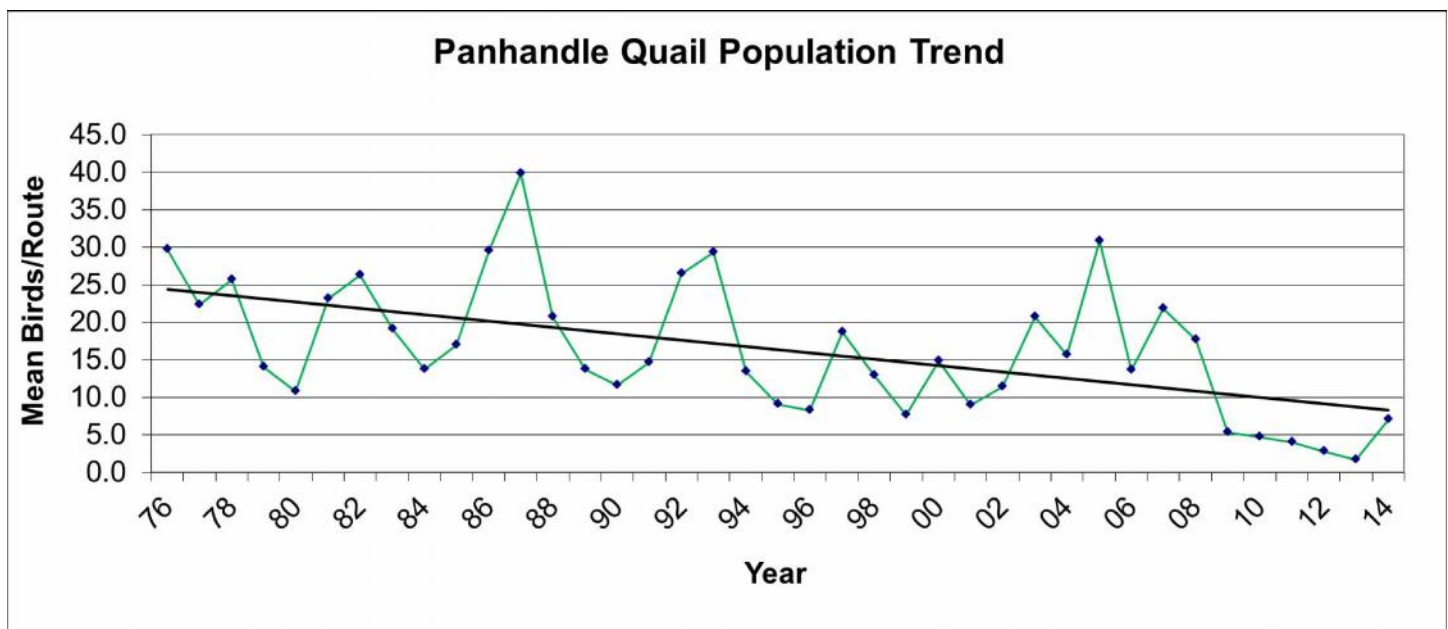


Quail Forecast

I probably don't have to tell you that the last several years have been dismal for quail mainly because of below average rainfall and above average summer temperatures. In 2011, the Matador Wildlife Management Area just north of Paducah, Texas, recorded 99 days of over 100 degree temperatures that summer and only received 9.98 inches of rain for the year. These conditions set us up for record low populations of quail across the Rolling Plains. Texas Parks & Wildlife Biologists conduct annual roadside quail surveys across Texas during the first two weeks of August. These surveys are used to monitor population trends. The surveys are conducted along randomly chosen, 20-mile routes using county roads and/or highways. The same routes are driven each year. The survey is conducted at sunrise or 1-hour before sunset. The observer drives 20 mph along these routes recording the number of quail observed and classifying the quail observed as singles, pairs, coveys as well as the size of the birds in the covey (1/4, 1/2, 3/4 or full grown birds). The data is then reported as birds seen per mile. In the Texas Panhandle (56 counties from Dalhart to Anson) in 2014 we surveyed 42 routes and saw an average of 7.0 birds per route; the long term average is 16.6 birds per route (some routes have been counted for 39 years). In 1976 when TPWD started quail roadside counts, we only surveyed 12 routes in the Panhandle and saw an average of 29.8 birds per route.

Quail numbers are showing signs of rebounding and with favorable weather conditions, timely rainfall and mild temperatures, we should continue with the upward trend in 2015.

You can visit the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's website to see results of quail surveys by ecological region: www.tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/hunt/planning/quail_forecast/forecast/



Dove Banding Project

Texas Parks & Wildlife Biologists and trained volunteers across Texas annually band thousands of mourning and white-winged doves. In 2014, almost 2,700 mourning doves and 6,300 white-wings were banded in Texas. TPWD started banding doves in 2003 and white-wings in 2006 in order to obtain estimates of annual survival rates, age ratios, harvest, movement and population trends of doves in Texas as it relates to harvest and habitat changes.

Doves are captured using walk-in funnel traps, with milo, sunflower seeds or corn used as bait. Trapping begins the first of June and lasts until the middle of August. All doves captured are sexed, aged and fitted with a small metal leg band and then released. The leg band has a unique number so that we can track individual doves. Bands can be reported by calling 1-800-327-BAND or at www.reportband.gov, in return for reporting the band number, you will receive information on when and where that bird was banded. Dove bands have been reported over 1,000 miles away from where the dove was originally captured. A biologist in the Rolling Plains recaptured a banded Mourning Dove in 2013, that was first captured and banded in 2007. At the time when the bird was first caught, it was an adult, making the bird at least 7 years old when it was trapped a second time. According to the North American Bird Banding Laboratory, based on bird banding data and recovery of bands, they have a record of a mourning dove living up to 30 years!



Putting Fire Back on the Land

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department is interested in getting more landowners/managers involved in using fire as a management tool to create, maintain and improve rangelands and habitat for wildlife. Fire is one of the many tools that can be used to help control brush and cactus. It can also be used to remove excessive ground litter and old growth to encourage new growth of grasses which would be beneficial to livestock and wildlife. The season and intensity of the fire can be used to improve the vegetation composition i.e. shift the type/species of plants (eg.. sand dropseed and hooded windmill grass can be shifted toward increasing abundance of big bluestem, little bluestem and sideoats grama). Fire will stimulate new growth, encourage plant diversity and return valuable nutrients back to the soil.

TPWD recently hired Wildland Fire Coordinators across the State to provide free technical assistance to landowners interested in using prescribed fire on their properties. Derrick Holdstock is our fire coordinator for the Panhandle, Rolling Plains and Trans-Pecos Areas of Texas. Derrick has over 13 years of prescribed burning experience and he can prepare prescribed burn plans for properties to help landowners reach their management goals. Most fires are conducted during the winter, so I suggest contacting your local biologist or Derrick well before the time to burn so he can evaluate the property to be burned, discuss objectives



and prepare a burn plan. TPWD can also provide some equipment and personnel to assist with prescribed burns. Derrick Holdstock may be contacted at: TPWD, P.O. Box 715, Paducah, TX 79248 (806)983-0897 or derrick.holdstock@tpwd.texas.gov

Wildlife Friendly Water

Not all water sources are created equally. Some watering facilities may limit wildlife access based on their design. During 2011 and 2012 when many ponds and creeks dried up, ground water was limited and many species of wildlife drowned in water troughs trying to reach water and then were unable to escape. Escape ladders can be installed in troughs to give animals a way out if they do fall in. Instructions for building escape ladders can be found at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs142p2_041023.pdf or www.extension.usu.edu/rangelands/files/uploads/Livestock/Prevent%20Wldlife%20Drowning.pdf



An alternative source of water may be installing a wildlife water guzzler that catches rainwater. These are great options for CRP fields that may not have a source of water. Wildlife including deer, turkeys, small mammals and birds will utilize these for water. When you install a guzzler, you initially have to fill it with water, then we should receive enough rain in most years to keep water in them. The dome top helps funnel water into the tank and slows evaporation. If you have livestock on your property, then it's recommended you fence the guzzler to keep livestock out.

Interesting Mourning Dove Facts

- Mourning doves harvested in Texas come from 21 different states. Most out-of-state banded birds come from Kansas, Iowa, Oklahoma and South Dakota.
- The oldest Mourning Dove ever recovered was banded in Georgia, and it was 31 years old.
- There are 7 species of doves in Texas, with only one considered an exotic, the Eurasian Collared-Dove. The collared-dove was first observed in Texas in 1995.
- Doves are “pickers” not “scratchers”. They prefer to eat seeds off bare ground.
- Doves typically lay 2 eggs and incubate them for 14 days. Young doves are referred to as “squabs” and are fed a liquid diet referred to as pigeon milk. Pigeon milk is a liquid secretion from the crop glands of the parents. Eventually, the squabs will gradually be fed a diet of regurgitated seeds.
- Mourning doves are able to have up to 6 clutches per year.
- Dove hunters account for 74% of the shotgun shells sold in the U.S.
- Doves can fly up to 55 MPH.
- The mourning dove is one of the 10 most populous birds in North America, it inhabits 48 contiguous US states, and the fall population is estimated at around 400 million.

Desert Termites



Ever noticed tubes made of dirt, about the diameter of pencil on the ground or even extending up into the air? These tubes are created by desert termites. Desert termites are found in West Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. The dirt tubes they create are made of carton. Carton consists of moist soil particles and feces glued together with saliva of the termite. They build the carton around a food source, which can be grasses, wood fence posts, dried cow manure and cactus. The tubes are destroyed by rainfall, but the termites quickly rebuild them. They generally prefer clay loam soils, as sand does not make good tube building material.

The abundance of desert termites is related to range conditions and spring rain. There are less termites in drought conditions but the termite tubes are more noticeable during drought conditions because of the lack of vegetation to conceal them due to over-grazing. A research project in the High Plains estimated termite populations averaged 8.6 million per acre.

The desert termite does not damage structures or buildings, but primarily feed on plant litter, plants and animal manure. Desert termites can be seen as beneficial. They help break down plant litter, regulate the flow of carbon and nitrogen, and enhance rainfall infiltration. Many animals including small mammals, birds and even reptiles have been known to feed on desert termites.

There are no insecticides labeled to control desert termites. You could use a light disc to break up termite cartons exposing the termites to predators and heat to control them. Generally, good livestock grazing practices will control termite damage to rangelands.



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