

Making Tracts for TEXAS WILDLIFE



Spring/Summer 2005 • Wildlife Division

TPWD Passes Changes to Hunting Regulations

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission at its April 7, 2005 meeting has adopted a series of changes to state hunting and fishing regulations that offer greater harvest flexibility on lands managed for mule deer and prairie chickens, while simplifying and expanding hunting opportunity in other areas.

Based on the department's popular Managed Lands Deer Permit program that provides incentives to individuals that conduct habitat improvement projects on their property for the benefit white-tailed deer, the commission approved similar opportunities for mule deer and prairie chickens.

The new voluntary habitat-based permit programs offer landowners with an approved wildlife management plan greater flexibility in managing mule deer harvest. Permit holders could hunt from the first Saturday in November through the first Sunday in January.

A similar measure addressing long-term habitat loss impacting lesser prairie chicken populations allows a limited harvest option for properties with a wildlife management plan geared toward this species. Under the new regulation, hunting during the two-day season will occur only on managed properties in the program. There will be a two-bird daily bag limit and properties in the program will have a harvest recommendation.

Another proposal offering incentives for quail management was withdrawn from consideration pending further discussion with constituent groups, landowners, hunters and other interested parties.

Among the prominent changes in hunting regulations adopted by the commission is a continuation and expansion of special buck-deer harvest regulations in 21 counties. For the 2005-2006 hunting season, the department is adding a second buck to the bag limit in counties with the special antler restrictions. Those hunters will be allowed to take two bucks, but at least one must possess an unbranched antler.

In another move, the commission has simplified antlerless white-tailed deer hunting by consolidating the seven different options currently in place across the state into just three standard doe day categories. Hunters are urged to check the county specific hunting rules for these changes in the upcoming 2005-2006 Outdoor Annual, available in August.

The commission also eliminated the aggregate buck-bag restriction in one-buck and two-buck counties. The new regulation allows hunters to take a buck in any three



different one-buck-only counties or they could hunt in multiple two-buck counties, provided they do not exceed the county bag limit or take more than three bucks in all the two-buck counties combined.

In addition to deer, the commission adopted regulation changes simplifying turkey hunting. The fall Rio Grande season has been consolidated and standardized to run concurrent with the general deer season. The spring season for Rio Grande turkeys will open the Saturday closest to April 1, 2006 for 44 consecutive days and the eastern turkey season will run April 1-30, 2006. The commission also opened fall and spring seasons for Rio Grande turkey in Cameron and Zapata counties, and a fall season in Tarrant County.

The commission also adopted rules prohibiting hunting by remote control. This issue centers on the use of internet technology as it relates to the taking of game animals and game birds. The new provision requires any person hunting a game animal or game bird to be physically present and personally operate the means of take.

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Purple Paint: Making Your Mark Without a Fence

One of the advantages of wildlife management as an agricultural practice for ad valorem tax purposes is landowners no longer need to worry about maintaining livestock-proof fences. The downside to this is that fences often help deter trespassing. They can also provide places to post “NO TRESPASSING” signs. Keeping up with these signs can often be a challenge, and many a landowner has been frustrated by a trespasser declaring they were unaware they were on private property because they didn’t see any signs. Thanks to the 1997 Legislature however, signs are not necessary in order to legally mark a property’s boundary. Instead, landowners may utilize what has become known as “the purple paint law.”

The 1997 session added (D) to §30.05 of the Texas Penal Code in defining what constituted criminal trespass. In order for a person to be guilty of criminal trespass, they must have received – and ignored – notice that entry was forbidden. This notice can be achieved in several ways, including marking trees or posts with purple paint.

“What color purple?” is the question most often asked by landowners. Any shade of purple is acceptable as long as the marks meet the requirements of height and spacing.

When this bill was introduced to the Texas Legislature many people – including legislators – were confused as to why such a bill was deemed necessary. Using paint to mark boundaries is a common practice in several other southern states with extensive timber industries. If one thinks about

PENAL CODE

§30.05. CRIMINAL TRESPASS.

(a) A person commits an offense if he enters or remains on or in property, including an aircraft or other vehicle, of another without effective consent or he enters or remains in a building of another without effective consent and he:

- (1) had notice that the entry was forbidden; or
- (2) received notice to depart but failed to do so.

(b) For purposes of this section:

- (1) “Entry” means the intrusion of the entire body.
- (2) “Notice” means:

(A) oral or written communication by the owner or someone with apparent authority to act for the owner;

(B) fencing or other enclosure obviously designed to exclude intruders or to contain livestock;

(C) a sign or signs posted on the property or at the entrance to the building, reasonably likely to come to the attention of intruders, indicating that entry is forbidden;

(D) the placement of identifying purple paint marks on trees or posts on the property, provided that the marks are:

(i) vertical lines of not less than eight inches in length and not less than one inch in width;

(ii) placed so that the bottom of the mark is not less than three feet from the ground or more than five feet from the ground; and

(iii) placed at locations that are readily visible to any person approaching the property and no more than:

(a) 100 feet apart on forest land; or

(b) 1,000 feet apart on land other than forest land; or

(E) the visible presence on the property of a crop grown for human consumption that is under cultivation, in the process of being harvested, or marketable if harvested at the time of entry.

it, it makes little sense to build fences in order to mark a boundary by cutting down the very product you are trying to grow for market! A distinctive color of paint made considerably more sense. With increasing

numbers of landowners opting for wildlife management as their agricultural practice for ad valorem tax purposes, this law provides an attractive alternative to traditional fencing.

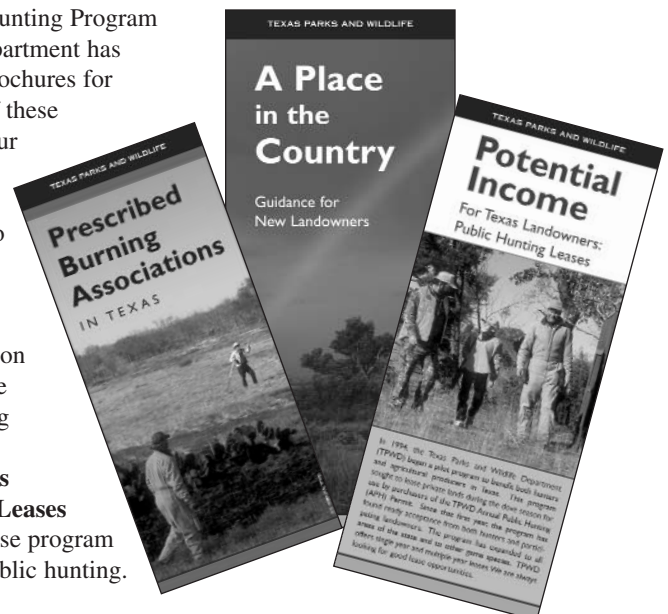
New Publications Available from TPWD

The Private Lands and Public Hunting Program of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has recently released several new brochures for landowners. To obtain a copy of these brochures, contact TPWD or your local biologist.

A Place in the Country is for new landowners who wish to manage their land for wildlife.

Prescribed Burning Associations in Texas provides landowners with basic information about prescribed burning and the advantages of prescribed burning associations.

Potential Income for Texas Landowners: Public Hunting Leases explains TPWD’s short-term lease program of private land to be used for public hunting.



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Lone Star Land Steward Awards Program – Ten Years of Recognizing Outstanding Stewardship on Private Lands

Day in and day out, generation after generation, many rural Texas landowners are faced with the challenge of making a sustainable living from their land. For these stewards of the land, conserving and enhancing the state's natural resources are a way of life.

As the shift to urbanization in Texas grows, the significance of the efforts of private landowners to manage the natural landscape can be lost to those who seldom venture off the asphalt.

On May 25th, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department recognized nine owners and managers of ranches and other properties for their innovative and ecologically sound management of wild habitats at the 10th Annual Lone Star Land Steward Awards reception.

The Lone Star Land Steward Awards recognizes private landowners' ability to integrate traditional land uses that produce meat, agricultural crops and outdoor recreation opportunities with habitat management and wildlife conservation, natural resource education of youth and outreach to other groups, and partnerships with natural resource agencies.

In addition to individual ranchers and farmers, the awards recognize cooperative conservation efforts by wildlife management associations across the state, neighbors partnering with neighbors to create consistent land management across vast tracts of land. These co-ops help reverse the negative effects of land fragmentation, improve habitats for all species and help co-op members produce income from wildlife recreation. Also recognized are the conservation efforts of corporate and industry landowners and managers who use sustainable resource practices.

Recipients of this year's Lone Star Land Steward Awards for outstanding land practices in their region included:

Blackland Prairies – Rey Rosa Ranch, Rusty Rose, owner and Rick Bruce, operator, Ellis County.

Cross Timbers – Richards Ranch, E. C. Richards Land Co. Ltd., owner, and John Hackley and Brent Hackley, operators, Jack County.

Edwards Plateau – Treadwell Brady Ranch, John A. Treadwell, owner, and Brian Treadwell, operator, Menard and McCulloch counties.

Gulf Coast Prairies and Marshes – WW Ranch, Jim Willis, owner and operator, Colorado County.

Pineywoods – George H. Henderson Family Partners L.P., Trey Henderson, owner and operator, Angelina County.

Post Oak Savannah – Shepherd's Mountain Ranch, John and Nellie Colson, owners, and Gary Chalmers, operator, Washington County.

Rolling Plains – Snipes Ranch L.P., Rick, Lana and Bailey Snipes, owners and operators, Stonewall County.

South Texas – Las Vivoritas Ranch, Edward H. Austin, Jr., owner and operator, Jim Hogg County.

Trans-Pecos – Cibolo Creek Ranch, John B. Poindexter, owner and operator, Presidio County.

Two additional properties were recognized in special categories for their achievements:

Corporate – White Rock Lake Park, City of Dallas, owner, Dallas Parks and Recreation Dept., managers, Dallas County.

Wildlife Management Association – Cave Creek Wildlife Management Association, Sam Segner, President, Gillespie County.

The Sand County Foundation, LCRA, Texas Wildlife Association, Texas Farm Bureau, H. Yturria Land and Cattle Company and the following banks help support the Lone Star Land Steward Awards through financial sponsorships: Farm Credit Bank of Texas, Capital Farm Credit, Heritage Land Bank, Southwest Texas Land Bank, AgriLand Farm FCS, AgTexas FCS, Great Plains Ag Credit, and Ag Credit of South Texas.

For more detailed information on each of these winning landowners, please refer to the TPWD news release "Lone Star Land Stewards Protect Wild Texas" of May 2, 2005 available online at: www.tpwd.state.tx.us



Lone Star Land Steward Awards 2005
A decade of celebrating private land conservation



The Riparian Sponge – Bigger is Better

by Steve Nelle, NRCS, San Angelo

There is no greater social or political or economic or biological issue in Texas than water. Many folks have put their water hopes in such grandiose plans as reservoirs, inter-basin transfers, pipeline projects, brush control, desalinization and other such “solutions.” Yet, there is another large and mostly unrecognized source of water that can be developed in nearly any part of the state.

One of the attributes of a properly functioning riparian area is the sponge effect and water storage capacity within the riparian area. This does not refer to water storage in the creek channel itself, but water detention in the land. This large absorbent sponge of riparian land will soak up, store and then slowly release water over a prolonged period. This riparian sponge can be managed in a way to greatly increase and improve this storage or it can be managed in a way to decrease and degrade water storage.

The best example to illustrate the riparian sponge effect is from Bear Creek in central Oregon (12 inches annual precipitation; 3,500 feet in elevation).

Veteran riparian specialist Wayne Elmore has observed, measured, photographed and followed the changes in this creek for the past 28 years. Prior to 1976, the area received no specialized grazing management. As a result, the riparian vegetation was sparse and inadequate. Creek banks were actively eroding and the channel was cutting down. Flow was intermittent and no fish life could exist. During runoff events, the volume of sediment was high. The size of the riparian sponge was only 3.8 acres per mile of stream and this sponge was storing less than 500,000 gallons of water per mile – far below its potential.

Following a change in grazing management, including several years of rest, the riparian area began to respond. In 1985, a specialized grazing plan was implemented to continue the recovery of the area – both the uplands and the riparian area.

By 1996, riparian vegetation was full and thick. The riparian sponge had increased to 12 acres per mile and this sponge was now storing 4,000,000 gallons of water per mile. The improved riparian vegetation was now filtering

and capturing sediment and the streambed was raised by 2.5 feet. An eight-fold increase in water storage! Side benefits were a return of perennial flow and the return of fish. The rancher has benefited too, with a tremendous increase in riparian vegetation and greatly increased grazing capacity. Now the vegetation is properly grazed in a sustainable manner and riparian functions are maintained.

Just think, 12-acre-feet of water (4,000,000 gallons) being stored in the banks and the riparian floodplain on each mile of the creek. This water is absorbed during periods of runoff, stored in the riparian sponge and then slowly released for continuous flow in between runoff events. The shallow aquifer is being continually recharged. This natural phenomenon can be duplicated on thousands and thousands of miles of creeks all across Texas. While each creek is different, the principles of riparian management and restoration work in Texas just as they do in Oregon and other places.

The key to building a bigger and better riparian sponge starts with the right kinds and amounts of vegetation. If grazing is continuous or if livestock are concentrating their grazing in the riparian area, a change in grazing management is recommended. Fencing to create a separate riparian pasture can alleviate these problems and allow appropriate management. In some cases, a complete rest from grazing for a few years is recommended to jump-start the recovery process. In other cases, a change in the timing and duration of grazing is all that is needed to allow restoration to begin. Rest during most of the growing season and light to moderate grazing during the dormant season will allow recovery in many cases.

Slowing the flow of water as it moves downhill and keeping water on the land longer is the key to good land and water management. Good stewardship by private landowners can be a critical link in helping solve the water problems of Texas.



Good habitat management is responsible for keeping this spring-fed riparian habitat in Dimmit County, in deep South Texas, healthy and productive.

Wildlife and Habitat Management on Small Acreages in the Cross-Timbers and Prairies Region of Texas

by Nathan Rains, TPWD Private Lands Biologist, Cleburne

The face of Rural Texas is changing. The size of private farms and ranches has decreased dramatically over the past few decades. Today, 80% of Texas' private land holdings are less than 500 acres. Many of these properties are now owned by absentee landowners or are being subdivided for mobile home parks, high dollar "ranchettes," rural housing and industrial developments. Congestion in the cities and metroplexes has increased "urban sprawl." With a strong economy and increased resources, many people are leaving the urban environment to commute to the country for a taste of country life. Land use on these properties is also changing.

Today, many landowners are shifting away from traditional agriculture operations and land uses such as ranching or farming, either for economic reasons or changes in land-use interests. Managing land and habitat for wildlife is gaining in popularity, whether for trophy white-tailed deer, songbirds or everything in between.

Recent changes in the property tax laws of Texas have also helped increase interest in wildlife and habitat management. Now, wildlife management as a primary land use can be used to maintain agricultural tax valuation on properties with an existing agricultural tax valuation. Proposition 11 was passed in 1995 to amend Article VIII, Section 1-d-1 of the Texas Constitution permitting agricultural appraisal for land used to manage wildlife. Landowners and wildlife have both benefited from this change.

However, wildlife and habitat management on these smaller properties can be challenging. Can you really manage habitat for white-tailed deer on 20 acres? No, but there are things landowners can do to benefit wildlife on almost any size property, especially with a little creative thinking.

What is wildlife and habitat management?

Wildlife have four basic needs; food, water, cover and space. The arrangement of these elements is often equally important. Each species of wildlife has its own

specific habitat needs for reproduction and survival. If one of these components is missing, that is the **limiting factor** for that species. It is the availability, arrangement and ratio of these habitat elements on the landscape and influence of proper management that will determine the amount of wildlife (number of species and population of each species) on the property. This is referred to as the **carrying capacity**. Since many wildlife species often share habitat types, most common habitat management practices will benefit a number of wildlife species.

What wildlife species should I specifically manage for?

First, it is important to learn about the ecology of wildlife species found in the area. All wildlife have a minimum size of area they need to live and reproduce. This is their **home range**. Some animals such as small reptiles and amphibians have small home ranges of only a few hundred yards. Others, however, like white-tailed deer or wild turkeys, have home ranges of a square mile or more. Wildlife species to be considered for management are those in which a landowner's property supports and encompasses their habitat and home range or at least a significant part of it.

Second, what species of wildlife are already living on and around the property to be managed and which would benefit most from some type of management? Finally, what type of wildlife management practices would be most economically and environmentally feasible to meet the goals and objectives of the landowner?

Wildlife and habitat management practices for smaller acreages

Fallow Disking: Fallow disking refers to disking the soil in the winter months after the first freeze but prior to the first green up of spring. This promotes the germination and growth of grass, weed and wildflower seeds already present in the soil (called the soil seed bank). Some of these seeds may have been dormant for years, but with a little disking to expose them (and a little rainfall) they should grow vigorously. These natural weeds and wild-

flowers are very important to wildlife and are preferred over most introduced "wildlife plants."

Providing supplemental water:

The availability of water year round is extremely important to wildlife and is often a limiting factor on many properties. Most often we think of stock ponds (or "tanks" in Texas) when we think of water sources. However, there are also many other ways to provide water to wildlife that can be equally beneficial. Troughs, windmill overflow basins, wildlife guzzlers and plastic drums are just a few ways to provide supplemental water for wildlife without excessive costs. It is imperative that these structures be monitored and kept filled for them to be effective.

Census: Annual census of wildlife populations is a valuable tool for monitoring the stability, growth and health of populations of many wildlife species. Conducting surveys on white-tailed deer populations is an important technique for proper management and harvest in Texas. Other census techniques such as migratory songbird call counts, roadside quail surveys, time area counts for small mammals, and drift fences for reptiles and amphibians are just a few types of survey methods that may be used to estimate populations of other wildlife. Determine the best census technique for the target wildlife species found on the property and keep good records.

Providing supplemental food:

Wildlife feeders and food plots are the most common ways to provide supplemental food for wildlife. Feeders, while often providing a good place to observe or harvest animals, usually do not provide a substantial benefit to most wildlife species. They also may increase the threat of predation and spread of diseases. Food plots, planted in native plant species are generally a better option. Native grasses, forbs (weeds) and wildflowers usually provide a better nutritional benefit to most wildlife species. However, wildlife feeders and food plots should always be viewed as **secondary** to proper habitat management.

(Continued on page 6)

Pastures for Upland Birds: Restoring Native Plants in Bermudagrass Pastures

by Matt Wagner, TPWD, College Station; Fred Smeins, Department of Rangeland Ecology and Management, Texas A&M University, College Station; and Brian Hays, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station

The conversion of large areas of the Post Oak Savannah to improved forage grasses, such as bermudagrass (*Cynodon* spp.) and bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*), has been a major reason for the decline of wildlife species in the region. Bobwhite quail (*Colinus virginianus*) and eastern wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo silvestris*) are two important game species that have been impacted by this vegetation conversion. Pastures for Upland Birds (PUB) is a research, management and demonstration program designed to determine cost-effective strategies for establishing native grasses and forbs in bermudagrass pastures, while providing technical assistance and cost share incentives to private landowners.

Study sites were established in Falls, Grimes and Washington counties. At each

site, two rates of Glyphomax Plus herbicide (41% glyphosate) and a combination of different native seed mixes and planting methods were applied. Two years after herbicide application, the two rates averaged 86% bermudagrass control on sandy soil, 90% on sandy loam and 52% on clay soil. Foliar cover of native grasses averaged about 50%, 40% and 15% on sandy, sandy loam and clay soils respectively, while forbs averaged 10%, 50% and 40% respectively. Funding and support for this study was provided by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, Texas Cooperative Extension, Cross Timbers Chapter of Quail Unlimited, Dow AgroSciences, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the National Wild Turkey Federation.

Opportunity to Benefit Bobwhite Quail and Farm Economics in Texas

CP33: Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds

- Provide food and cover for bobwhite quail and other farmland wildlife.
- Program sign-up at local FSA offices began October, 2004 and runs on a continuous basis.
- Automatic enrollment of eligible acres.
- Offer incentive, cost share and maintenance payments for establishing and maintaining buffers.

For more information on the Conservation Reserve (CRP) Northern Bobwhite Quail Habitat Initiative, contact your local FSA office or visit the FSA's web site at: www.fsa.usda.gov

Wildlife and Habitat Management on Small Acreages... (Continued from page 5)

Brush management: Brush Management or brush "sculpturing," as it is sometimes referred to, is an important way to improve wildlife habitat. For example, in Texas, Ashe juniper (cedar) and mesquite are invasive species that require management. Mature juniper, especially on land with a history of overgrazing and lack of natural wildfires, can literally take over the landscape. In and around these cedars it may become an "ecological desert." They shade out mid- and under-story vegetation, reducing the amount of sunlight reaching the ground and restrict the growth of other important plant species. A little work to remove some of this brush to create a "patchy" landscape will greatly benefit many species of wildlife. Remember, some cedar is beneficial because it is evergreen and provides year round cover for many wildlife species. However, it must be kept in balance with other plants and trees. Diversity is the key.

Providing supplemental shelter: Nest boxes and brush piles are two simple yet practical ways to provide shelter and nesting sites to wildlife. Instead of burning all piles of cleared juniper, leave a few piles to create habitat and escape cover for small birds and mammals. Nest boxes for bluebirds and wood ducks are also simple and easy ways to provide valuable nesting habitat. They are easy to build or can be purchased from various sources. They also are a great project for a high school environmental class or local agriculture group. The size of the entrance hole and proper placement of the nest boxes are the two most critical factors to their success. Literature is available on proper construction and management of nest boxes. A system of monitoring and recording their use and success (reproduction) should be established.

Wildlife Cooperatives: On smaller properties where many management practices are not feasible or on properties

where landowners do not have enough land to manage for the wildlife they are interested in (i.e., white-tailed deer), wildlife cooperatives are an excellent alternative. Landowners, joined together with common objectives and goals, can manage wildlife habitat on a much larger scale than they could independently. Communication is the key to developing and maintaining effective cooperatives.

There are many other ways to manage wildlife habitat and there is certainly room for some creative thinking on smaller acreages. Contact your local Texas Parks and Wildlife Department office for information on how to obtain assistance with wildlife habitat management on your property under the **Private Lands and Habitat Program**.

Wild About Wild Turkeys

by Jim Dillard, Technical Guidance Biologist, Mineral Wells

There are a lot of outdoor experiences and happenings we have as kids that stay with us all our life. It only takes an encounter or the mention of something in later years to spark our memory and take us back in time. I still remember the smell of bacon sizzling in an old black skillet on a smoky campfire down in the bottoms of the San Gabriel River in Central Texas when I was about 12. Sunrise squirrel hunts and the aroma of damp leaves and mud and gun smoke hanging in the air linger in my mind. And then there's that first turkey gobbler I heard years ago that continues to draw me back to the woods year after year to experience all over again its calling, its cunning and its culinary delights.

Domesticated turkeys were discovered by the Spanish conquistadors when they invaded Mexico in the early 1500s. Ancient Aztec cultures there had tamed wild turkeys and used them extensively for food and their feathers as ornamentations. By 1520, some of those birds were taken from southern Mexico back to Spain. Eventually, they were spread throughout Europe and the British Isles. Some of the early colonists in North America brought stocks of these turkeys with them as a food source. They were known to have been sent to Jamestown around 1607 and to Boston by the Massachusetts Bay Company in 1629 to help support the establishment of the towns. Descendants of those domestic turkey stocks are the ones we buy down at the grocery store today. They're the real couchpotatoes of the turkey world, having been bred for deeper bodies, shorter legs and heavier fleshing for consumers. To me, turkey tastes like turkey, no matter how you slice, dice or package it.

There were already other native wild turkey subspecies in North America prior to European settlement. Native Americans didn't attempt to domesticate turkeys but did hunt and trap them with nets, snares and pens. Turkey feathers were a favorite source for arrow fletchings and ceremonial headdresses. Leg bones were made into beads and other ornaments. Turkeys served as an important source of food for early pioneers and settlers during the expansion of our nation. However, due to unregulated hunting and loss of habitat, wild turkey populations began to disappear completely

from many of the eastern states by 1920. Today, due to restoration efforts and regulated hunting, turkey populations flourish throughout most of their range.

Five distinct subspecies of wild turkeys are recognized in North America and three are found in Texas. Although these subspecies may be similar in appearance, each has its own unique requirement for reproduction, survival and habitat. The Rio Grande turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo intermedia*) is found generally west of I-35 in the western two-thirds of the state and here in the Cross Timbers of Northcentral Texas. The eastern turkey (*M. g. silvestris*) has recently been reintroduced into the forests and woodlands of East Texas and the Merriam's turkey (*M. g. merriami*) into a few mountain ranges in far West Texas.

In the early Greco-Roman language, *Meleagris* meant "guinea fowl" and *gallopavo* was Latin for peafowl of Asia. Linnaeus proposed the scientific name *Meleagris gallopavo* for turkeys in 1758. One source indicated that the common name "turkey" was used to describe any foreign or exotic species imported from Tartary or Asia. Others believe "turkey" was derived from the bird's call of "turk,

turk" or perhaps from the Hebrew word *tukki* which also means "peacock" and was used by Jewish poultry merchants that helped spread them across Europe. Benjamin Franklin even supported an effort to make the wild turkey our national emblem, but the bald eagle was eventually chosen.

Male Rio Grande turkeys (gobblers) weigh 13-25 pounds and can be distinguished from females (hens) by their larger size and black tipped breast and back feathers that makes them look almost black. Hens average 6-10 pounds and have buff tipped feathers that give them a lighter coloration. Most gobblers have a distinctive beard (mesofiloplume) sticking out from the front of their breast as do some hens. This bristle-like appendage arises from a single follicle of skin and is considered a trophy to most dyed-in-the-wool turkey hunters. Some turkeys may have multiple beards. The beard on yearling males (jakes) is usually 3-5 inches and will grow to 10 or more inches at three years of age unless broken or worn down. Gobblers have spurs on the back side of their legs that are used in fighting. Spur length is another general indication of age: 1 year = 1/2 inch; 2 years = 1/2 to 7/8 inch; 3 years = 7/8 to 1 inch; 4 years + = 1 inch +. The amount of barring and ware on the outer most two primary wing feathers can also be used to determine whether a turkey is a juvenile or adult.

(Continued on back page)



This young gobbler, or jake, can be distinguished from the older mature gobblers by his visibly shorter beard. His tail fan is another distinctive, identifying feature. Starting from the center, the longer "adult" feathers begin to replace the shorter juvenile feathers.

Wild About Wild Turkeys... *(Continued from page 7)*

Since the eyes of turkeys are located on the side of their head, they have a wide field of vision and can detect the slightest movements around them. Sneaking up on a flock of turkeys is nearly impossible as any bobcat, gray fox or cammo clad turkey hunter can attest.

Turkeys communicate bird to bird using a variety of calls including yelps, perts, peeps, gobbles, purrs, clucks and hisses. They'll eat things like acorns, pecans, insects, snails, worms, seeds, fruits,

berries, green leafy material and grain crops. Food is "gobbled" into their crop (proventriculus) for later movement into the gizzard and stomach for digesting. Gravel or grit is ingested into their gizzard to help grind coarse materials and hard seeds.

Turkeys roost at night in tall trees for protection from predators. Nests are built on the ground in clumps of grass and weeds or in low brush. An average of 12 eggs is laid over a two week period

and hatch in 28 days once incubation begins.

Wild turkeys are good flyers and young are capable of flight two weeks after hatching. Predators include skunks, raccoons, snakes, fox, bobcats, coyotes, owls and me.

I can still smell the aroma of a big ol' turkey roasting in my mother's oven at Thanksgiving as if it was only yesterday. Thank goodness for wildlife, wild places and especially wild turkeys.

HELP STOP POACHING REPORT VIOLATIONS TO **OPERATION GAME THIEF** 1-800-792-GAME

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