

Welcome to the Matador Wildlife Management Area. We hope you enjoy your stay and that you find some items of interest in this newsletter. Our newsletter will come out in the fall of each year prior to the hunting season. Look for various wildlife management issues and research updates in future newsletters. You can also follow us on Facebook at; <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Matador-Wildlife-Management-Area-Texas-Parks-and-Wildlife>

Have a great fall and winter and thank you for visiting the Matador WMA!

## Matador WMA Staff:

- **Chip Ruthven** – *Area Manager*
- **Caroline Ellison** – *Assistant Area Manager/Wildlife Biologist*
- **Hunter Hopkins** – *Assistant Area Manager/Wildlife Biologist*
- **Fred Stice** – *Wildlife Technician*
- **Kris Fields** – *Wildlife Technician*
- **Crystal Neskorik** – *Administrative Assistant*
- **Phone:** 806-492-3405



## A look back at the past season and a look forward to the 2023-2024 season...

The 2022-23 quail season declined from the previous year with harvest rates dropping to 0.16 birds per hunter day, which was one of the lowest on record. We had a dry winter and early spring in 2022. Good rainfall in May-early June improved ranges conditions but the summer months (mid-June to Mid-August) were hot and exceptionally dry. Good rains in late August again improved range conditions but September turned off dry. We did receive decent fall rains (October to December). The yearly total was 19.00 inches of precipitation, which was a about 3 inches below normal. Dove hunter success was fair with about 5.5 birds harvested per hunter day. Antler quality was



good overall, but our deer harvest was down. Our buck hunters harvested three white-tailed deer qualifying for the Texas Big Game Awards.

The moist fall of 2022 was followed by a dry winter and early spring into 2023 with little precipitation falling through late-April. Spring green-up was marginal. However, we received over 11 inches of rainfall in late-April through early-June, which dramatically improved range conditions. We then slumped back into dry conditions from early-June to mid-September. This coupled with exceptionally hot temperatures (5 days of 110°+ F) did not bode well for quail nesting and brood rearing success in mid-summer. However, our late summer roadside counts are averaging 2 birds per mile, which is near average. These numbers are not ideal but the best we have had since 2017. As such, we anticipate a fair quail season. Dove numbers have been good with hunters on opening weekend averaging over 8 birds per day. The yearly rainfall total through September stands at 19.09 inches, which is a little above average. Turkey reproduction looks to be decent with numerous broods seen over the summer. Fawn survival appears fair. Antler production appears to be about average.

We continued our habitat enhancement activities in 2023 including the spraying of 3,095 acres of mesquite and 284 acres of shinoak. Grubbing of redberry juniper, mesquite, and salt cedar continues along the Middle Pease River floodplain. Much of these habitat management efforts have been supported by hunter's purchase of Upland and Migratory Game Bird Stamps and funds derived from TPWD's Big Time Texas Hunts program, as well as donations from conservation organizations such as the National Wild Turkey Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, and Quail Forever. Many state and private funds are leveraged in a 3:1 match with Pittman-Roberston funds to increase the magnitude of these habitat enhancement projects. These management activities are designed to reduce woody plant cover

and enhance herbaceous vegetation.

Managing the entire ecosystem is our goal at the Matador WMA and we will continue to use tools such as prescribed fire, rotational livestock grazing, and chemical and mechanical treatments to enhance the plant and wildlife resources on the Matador WMA.

We hope you have a positive outdoor experience on the Matador WMA, and please remember to Hunt Safe and Hunt Responsibly.

*(Previous page) Last season Robb Thetford harvested a 5.5 year old white-tail buck with a typical gross score of 156 4/5. (Left) Michael Loper harvested a 7.5 year old white-tailed deer with a typical gross score of 149 3/8.*



**Matador WMA Rainfall Record (inches)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>April</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>June</b>	<b>July</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sept</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2015</b>	1.75	0.18	0.54	4.90	8.61	2.43	2.49	2.08	0.25	2.81	3.04	1.91	30.99
<b>2016</b>	0.60	1.09	0.93	2.57	7.01	2.94	3.81	3.52	2.03	1.12	1.26	1.26	28.14
<b>2017</b>	1.21	1.92	1.49	4.24	0.26	1.43	1.17	5.27	5.77	0.77	0.17	0.04	23.74
<b>2018</b>	0.05	0.28	0.84	0.09	3.17	1.83	1.16	2.40	2.23	8.94	0.29	2.10	23.38
<b>2019</b>	0.12	0.01	1.09	7.23	5.80	1.22	0.75	1.88	3.83	0.44	1.19	0.34	23.90
<b>2020</b>	1.26	0.69	2.21	0.09	2.92	2.58	3.50	3.72	0.62	1.76	0.52	1.00	20.87
<b>2021</b>	0.90	0.28	2.93	0.72	4.51	3.37	2.34	1.82	2.24	0.81	0.16	0.00	20.08
<b>2022</b>	0.25	0.49	0.00	0.12	4.17	3.53	0.12	5.80	0.0	2.75	1.41	0.36	19.00
<b>2023</b>	0.55	0.58	0.00	1.50	8.44	1.87	1.57	1.06	3.52				
<b>Avg</b>	0.70	0.87	1.18	2.02	3.51	3.06	1.89	2.39	2.47	2.29	1.00	0.92	22.29

\*Monthly Averages (1914 to August 2022) \*\* Average Accumulations (1914 to August 2022)  
 2023 Rainfall year-to-date (Jan-September 30th) =19.09 inches

**2023-2024 Matador WMA Public Hunts**

<b>Hunt Type</b>	<b>Permit Type</b>	<b>Hunt Dates</b>
Dove	APH	9/1-9/24, 9/28-10/1, 10/5-10/15, 10/28-11/9, 12/16-12/31
Bobwhite Quail	APH	10/28-11/9, 11/18-12/3, 12/16-1/31
Waterfowl	APH	Each day of hunting season except when area is closed to hunting.
Youth Dove and Quail	APH	10/21-10/22
ADE – Archery Deer	Special	10/16-10/20
AMD – Archery Mule Deer	Special	10/23-10/27
GMD – Gun Mule Deer	Special	12/11-12/15
GDE – Gun Deer Either Sex	Special	11/13-11/17, 12/4-12/8
Archery Feral Hog	APH	3/16-3/24
GFH – Gun Feral Hog	Special	3/11-3/15
YFH – Youth Feral Hog	Special	3/9-3/10
GTS – Spring Turkey	Special	4/17-4/19, 4/22-4/24
YTS – Youth Spring Turkey	Special	4/20-4/21
Coyote	E-Postcard (Drawing)	2/16-2/18
Fishing	APH or LPU	Year-round, except during special permit hunts

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) offers a variety of hunting opportunities through two public hunting systems. The \$48 Annual Public Hunting Permit (APH) provides nearly year-round hunting on approximately 1.2 million acres of land. The Public Hunting Drawing System Permit (Special) provides opportunities to apply for a wide variety of supervised, drawn hunts including special drawings for both adults and youth hunters. In addition, TPWD offers special hunt package drawings for exotic wildlife and quality native animals on TPWD managed lands as well as specially leased private properties.



*Mallard, American Widgeon, and Pintail ducks at Taylor Lakes Wildlife Management Area*

### **Taylor Lakes Update – Hunter Hopkins, TPWD**

The Taylor Lakes Wildlife Management Area is a 525-acre unit managed by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department near Lelia Lake, in Donley Co, Texas.

Taylor Lakes WMA is situated upon the western edge of the Rolling Plains just below the vast expanses of the High Plains. The playa lakes that exist within the boundaries of the Taylor Lakes WMA are a part of a larger congregation of perched water table lakes which exist in this area of the county. These playas support a full assemblage of local wildlife species while also serving as an important destination for migrating waterfowl and songbird species. The wetland soils of this unit also promote unique species of vegetation which are uncommon throughout this arid region. Due to recent droughts and changing agricultural practices, these playa lakes are maintained through the use of seasonal irrigation.

Precipitation is the highest valued currency of all legal tender in the economic scheme of wildlife management, and in being so, the Taylor Lakes WMA is a little richer than it was in previous seasons. Currently 14.19 inches of rain has fallen in the area compared to 9.50 inches at this time one year ago. White-tailed deer produced a good fawn crop and wild turkeys can be observed in abundance. The resident population of bobwhite quail is growing as well. Interesting songbird species that claimed stake on the unit this year included eastern kingbirds, red-headed woodpeckers, and warbling vireos.

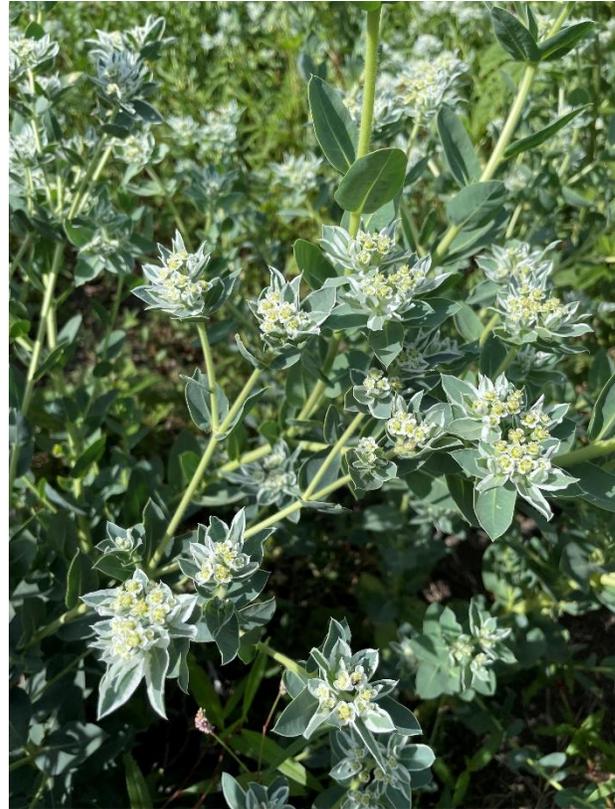
Last fall, several parties of youth and adult hunters were able to participate in excellent hunting opportunities at Taylor Lakes WMA. The youth waterfowl hunters were able to bag near-limits of mixed duck species during each day of their hunt. Mallard, widgeon, and pintail ducks exist in the highest numbers during the waterfowl season. During the youth deer hunt our lucky hunter was also able to bag a white-tailed buck and doe.

Another management activity that is conducted on the Taylor Lakes Unit is brush management. Siberian elm, honey mesquite, and redberry juniper are all invasive species that are abundant in the area and outcompete desirable woody plant species. This year, sixty-six acres of dense honey mesquite was treated using aerial applied herbicide.

Redberry juniper exists in abundance on the gravelly slopes of the unit and is treated using a soil applied herbicide and the individual plant treatment technique. Siberian elm is removed by sawing methods and the stumps are treated with herbicide to prevent resprouting. This management technique has allowed us to collaborate with other agencies to provide sawyer training classes for natural resource managers.

As we move forward, the management activities that will be continued include prescribed grazing, prescribed burning, invasive brush management, cottonwood pole harvesting, and seasonal irrigation for waterfowl management. Public hunting opportunities will also consist of dove, early teal, archery feral hog, youth deer, youth turkey, waterfowl, and youth/adult waterfowl hunts.

For more information on the Taylor Lakes Unit, please contact Hunter Hopkins at 806-492-3405



*Snow on the Mountain is one of the many plants found at Taylor Lakes.*

### 2023-2024 Taylor Lakes WMA Public Hunts

HUNT TYPE	PERMIT TYPE	HUNT DATES
Dove	Annual Public Hunting	09/01/23-11/12/23
Waterfowl (Early Teal)	Annual Public Hunting	09/09/23-09/24/23
Youth Only Deer Either Sex	Special (Drawing)	11/24/23-11/26/23
Waterfowl	E-Postcard (Drawing)	01/13/24-01/14-24, 01/27/24-01/28/24
Youth Adult/ Waterfowl	E-Postcard (Drawing)	12/02/23-12/03/23, 12/16/23-12/17/23, 12/30/23-12/31/23
Youth Only Spring Turkey	Special (Drawing)	04/06/24-04/07/24
Archery Feral Hog	Annual Public Hunting	02/01/24-04/05/24, 04/08/24-08/31/24
Youth Adult/ Waterfowl	E-Postcard (Drawing)	12/02/23-12/03/23, 12/16/23-12/17/23, 12/30/23-12/31/23

## Is Removing Mesquite Good for Bobwhite?— Anne Bartuszevige, Playa Lakes Joint Venture Conservation Science Director

If we remove mesquite, are we destroying habitat for Northern Bobwhite? That's an important question for hunters, wildlife biologists, and anyone generally concerned with grassland bird conservation. Biologists at the Matador Wildlife Management Area (WMA) have been working hard to remove mesquite from the WMA for many years and while they think that's the right thing to do for birds, they wanted to make sure.

In 2019, Playa Lakes Joint Venture began a several years long collaboration with Texas Parks and Wildlife at Matador WMA to evaluate how quail and other grasslands birds respond to the removal of mesquite. We took advantage of a large-scale breeding bird monitoring program to compare results from data collected on Matador WMA, where active mesquite management is taking place, to data collected off the WMA, where mesquite management is not happening.

We divided Matador WMA evenly into 0.6 mile X 0.6 mile (1 km x 1 km) approximate grids. We removed any grids that had a high density of juniper, then randomly selected 30 grids to visit and count birds. During May in 2019, 2022, and 2023, field technicians trained to identify birds by sight and sound collected data in these areas, which we call our treatment grids.

At the same time, we collected data at control areas, grids off the Matador on private land where we assume mesquite management is not happening at the same intensity, if at all, as on the WMA.

So, is removing mesquite good or bad for bobwhite? Our results show that there are more bobwhite on Matador than off. In addition, the density of bobwhite is lower in areas with higher mesquite cover. This pattern is true for other grassland birds as well.

So, if you're interested in improving habitat and increasing the density for quail, reducing or removing the mesquite canopy will help you achieve that goal. For advice on how to do this contact the Matador WMA office at 806-492-3405 or your local TWPD District Biologist at [https://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/technical\\_guidance/biologists/](https://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/technical_guidance/biologists/).



*Photos taken in Sisk Pen pasture illustrating the results of mesquite management using fire and herbicide. The left photo is from March 2011. The right photo was taken in the same location in July 2023.*

## Your TPWD District Biologists- Hailey Hawkins, TPWD

The Texas Parks & Wildlife (TPWD) Panhandle Wildlife District is comprised of 54 counties. Each county has a district biologist that will assist landowners with any technical guidance questions they may have. In the Texas Panhandle, TPWD biologists annually conduct helicopter surveys for mule deer, winter waterfowl surveys, a one-day sandhill crane ground survey, 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. They also spend a considerable amount of time in November and December collecting Chronic Wasting Disease samples and age/antler data from harvested white-tailed deer and mule deer. Biologists also issue pronghorn antelope, antlerless mule deer and white-tailed deer permits, write wildlife management plans, give educational programs to the public, trap and band white-winged and mourning doves throughout the summer, conduct prescribed burns, and present programs at various outreach events.

Texas Parks & Wildlife now offers a few cost-share programs to bring important financial and technical assistance to landowners to restore our native grasslands. These programs can help plant native seed mixes into cropland or areas that are dominated by a non-native grass. They can also help with brush management and prescribed fire.

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department Biologists provide free technical guidance 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:

[https://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/technical\\_guidance/biologists/](https://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/technical_guidance/biologists/).



*(Above) District biologists Hailey Hawkins and Matt Poole fly aerial surveys to monitor pronghorn populations in the panhandle.*

*(Left) Our Panhandle district biologists are here to help you achieve your land and wildlife management goals.*

## Wild Turkey Research at the Matador WMA – Hunter Hopkins, TPWD

During the past few years, our staff have been conducting important research on the wild turkey population that exists at the Matador WMA. The turkeys that call the Pease River corridor home are members of the Rio Grande subspecies of wild turkey. This subspecies can be found throughout the western two-thirds of the state and exist as far north as Nebraska. These game birds were also introduced into California, Oregon, and Hawaii.

Each winter, biologists begin baiting turkey traps which are constructed from wire paneling. Once the turkeys become accustomed to going into the trap and feeding, biologists close the front panel, setting the trap. The turkeys enter through a small funnel in the panels and are captured, often in groups of five to fifteen. Next, a wrestling match ensues. Biologists enter the trap eye level to the birds and must wrap the turkey in their arms like a running back accepting an overly inflated football made of fragile materials (specialized hollow bones and feathers in this case) then find their way out of the barrage of bewildered birds and the short statured trap.



*(Left) Hunter Hopkins attempts to grab a turkey inside a walk-in trap.  
(Right) Hunter holds a gobbler with a freshly attached radio transmitting backpack.*

Staff members then equip each turkey with an aluminum leg band and radio transmitting backpack. The leg band serves as an identification marker since each has its own unique number. The band also displays a phone number so that members the public can report the band upon finding it. Band reporting provides researchers with important information about how far turkeys travel and the lifespan of turkeys on a landscape. The radio transmitting backpack is a small object about the size of a flip-phone, or for the technologically astute, half the size of a gaming system controller. The device emits short bursting signals through unique frequency channels which can be detected by using specialized antennae and a radio receiver. If a turkey ceases to move for a predetermined number of hours, the transmitters begin to emit a faster signal which informs researchers that the turkey has perished.

The biologists must venture out and intercept the signals of each bird on a regular basis to monitor the bird's movement and life status. Staff also use a receiver device that can download GPS data which is stored in the turkey backpacks. To download this data, the researcher must sneak up within 200 yards of the turkeys and keep the receiving antenna

pointed at the birds until the device is able to download the data. This process typically takes one to five minutes per turkey. This data is then processed through Geographic Information System (GIS) programs so that researchers can see where the turkeys have travelled. This information can be used to identify turkey roosting areas, travel corridors, feeding areas, and reproductive trends and sites. The research being conducted on the Matador WMA is mostly targeted on the latter of these aspects.

The information about timing, location, and success of turkey reproduction at the WMA is the bread and butter of this research project. Researchers observe when hens initiate nests by observing how the movement of each hen greatly decreases and centers near specific points. Nest survival can be recorded by observing whether the hen stayed at the nesting site for the required incubation period of 28 days. By analyzing this data researchers have observed that some turkey hens will attempt to lay several nests during a season if the first attempt was not successful. After the hen has left her nesting site, Matador WMA staff conduct vegetation surveys to record the composition and characteristics of the nesting habitat that turkeys choose. To determine composition of the nesting habitat, the presence and amount of grasses, herbaceous plants, woody plants, bare ground, and dead litter is measured at the nesting site and at four points equidistant from this site. Canopy cover of woody plants is recorded at each of these points as well. Lastly, visual obstruction and vegetation height is measured by observing the intrusion of plant material between observers and the nest site from fifteen meters in each cardinal direction. These measurements are also compared to a control site selected randomly within 200 meters of each nest site.

So far, the results show that turkey hens typically select a nesting site in midgrass and tallgrass communities that are sparsely populated with low growing brush species. The actual nest bowl is typically constructed underneath a low growing (less than 10 feet in height), multi-stemmed tree, such as honey mesquite, juniper, shinnery oak, and hackberry. The overall survival of tracked turkeys from the past two seasons was 54% in 2022 and 69% in 2023. During the 2022 season none of the tracked hens initiated nests, this can be contributed to the drought conditions of the season. This nesting season, sixteen of our hens were equipped with functioning transmitters and seven nests were initiated. Two of these nests can be attributed to the same hen, one of which was a failed nesting attempt.

Overall, this research study has highlighted important aspects of turkey management at the Matador WMA. Biologists can use this data to make more informed decisions about what turkeys require to survive and can implement practices that are conducive to these requirements.



*Hunter places a Robel pole and Daubenmire frame on a turkey nest to collect vegetation data.*

## Dimmitt Playa WMA Restoration – Heather Johnson, TPWD

Texas Parks and Wildlife purchased the Dimmitt Unit of Playa Lakes WMA in 1990, which houses a 77 acre playa wetland and 345 acres of upland grassland habitat. Previous owners of the playa had constructed a large tailwater pit on the northeast side of the playa and a berm transecting the playa in two halves. Shortly after purchasing the playa TPWD added a shallow pit and berm on the southwest side of the playa to prevent sedimentation input from the south and to create areas for water concentration for waterfowl and hunters. There was a second pit dug on the northwest side of the playa for the same purpose. Around 2012 TPWD cut the southwest berm to allow water for flow through and a pipe was installed on the northeast berm to also allow water flow through the berm. Since those original modifications were made, research has broadened our understanding of how playa wetlands function. Research has shown that pits hinder the functionality of playa wetlands and reduce their ability to recharge the aquifer at full capacity. The 77 acre playa on the Dimmitt Unit has the potential to recharge an average of 6.2 million gallons of water annually to the Ogallala aquifer, but this was being hampered by the pits and berms. The playa is also critical habitat for local and migrating wildlife including but not limited to pheasants, deer, sandhill cranes, ducks, and geese.

In spring of 2022, TPWD sought financial support from Ducks Unlimited to restore the Dimmitt playa. TPWD submitted a plan to fill in all three pits, flatten the berms around the adjacent pits, build a small island in the playa for hunters, repair the water well, and extend the existing water pipe that fills the playa during the hunting season. The project cost just over \$40,000 and was completed in August of 2022. This restoration has improved the quality of the playa wetland habitat for resident and migratory birds that rely on playas in the region for wintering and migration habitat. It should also improve water recharge into the Ogallala aquifer.



If you have property with a playa wetland and are interested in learning how TPWD can help you restore it, contact Heather Johnson at (806) 475-1308.

*The Dimmitt Playa 3 months after the restoration project was completed. Photo courtesy of Todd Tyler.*

## Summer Internship on the Matador WMA – Joshlyn Perez, West Texas A&M University

The Matador WMA internship offered an experience that I could only dream of. I know I faced several competitors for this opportunity and am extremely proud that I was selected to work on this site.

I'm no stranger to the Matador as I had visited in the past with The West Texas A&M University Student Chapter of The Wildlife Society for a weekend of skill building. I knew what to expect and was glad to return for an extended stay. There were plenty of early mornings, scorching hot days, and long evenings, but it hardly ever felt like work. Several hours of my day were dedicated to upland gamebird management techniques involving both Northern Bobwhite Quail and Rio Grande Turkeys. Quail call counts, roadside counts, and various other Texas Quail Index projects helped me understand the conditions needed to maintain standard quail habitat.

Turkey research, however, was a little more tedious. These birds can roam several miles from where they were originally caught, banded, and fitted with GPS backpacks. It was my job to regularly drive around the property, and other areas adjacent to the WMA, in search of them. When found, I would download their data from a distance, and our biologists would use that data to find their nesting locations. When the nest would become vacant, we would survey the habitat selected by the hen. A couple of these could take several hours and required a lot of data collection.

Other than upland game birds, I was tasked with helping on other projects. Some of these involved migratory birds such as the breeding bird survey, dove banding, and the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship bird banding station. The latter of the three helped me further my skills of handling, identifying, and aging birds. Working and handling animals is every aspiring wildlife biologist dream, but there were several other skills I gained while working here. Data entry, plant identification, operating weed eaters, UTVs, 4x4 trucks, and aging deer jaws were only a fraction of new abilities learned.



I feel my most accomplished skill was gaining more plant identification skills. I used this knowledge to compete in the Texas Statewide Quail Symposium plant ID contest at the student level. I knew I would perform well, but I exceeded my expectations and placed first. I was able to showcase the mentorship taught to me by the staff here at the Matador WMA.

My last few days at the Matador were bittersweet. I didn't want to leave, but it was my time to go. I will be back from time to time to volunteer and keep up with the wonderful people who take care of this property. Until next time.

*Joshlyn Perez holds a glossy snake during her summer internship on the Matador WMA.*