Oaks and Prairies Wildlifer

A newsletter for landowners in the Post Oak Savannah and Coastal Prairies Regions of Texas

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

Summer 2017

District Field Notes

BY DAVID FORRESTER

Once again, habitat conditions across the district remain pretty good. We have actually experienced some extended periods without rain in some areas and a few hot days. I've actually seen some areas where the pastures look like they need some rainfall! Don't think that has happened in a while. Recent spotty showers have eased things in most places and we're really in pretty good shape going into July. I'm going to keep counting our blessings. The last 3 years or so have been really nice and every time I start fretting about lack of rain or how hot it is getting, I think back to 2010-2011.

Photo © TPWD

One of the more experienced biologists in the district, David Lobpries, will retire at the end of June 2017. David began his career with the department in 1973. That's over 43 years of service! He became an expert waterfowl specialist for the department and spent most of his career along the gulf coast in that capacity. David has served as a district biologist in District 6 and, most recently, as a district biologist in District 7 serving Wharton and Fort Bend Counties for the last 11 years. Both the landowners he has worked with and TPWD staff that have worked with him will miss his expertise and knowledge. His last physical day on the job will be June 30th. The district is losing a lot of practical knowledge and a great mentor to young biologists. We wish David all the best in his retirement—lots of hunting, fishing, and time with grandkids.

Photo © TPWD

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District Field Notes, continued

I guess the big thing on the horizon for staff and a lot of our cooperators is the roll out of the new MLD system or the Land Management Assistance (LMA) system. The new system will go live on July 1, 2017. I've told the biologists to enjoy their July 4th holidays and plan on coming back to work July 5th prepared to help our cooperators navigate the new system. We should have workshops and trainings scheduled to help landowners and agents. Biologists will also attempt to be as available as possible to individual inquiries, etc. The troops are going to be challenged, but the District 7 staff are prepared to get the job done. We're approaching this as an "all hands on deck" situation, so we hope to make this as easy on everyone as possible.

Biologists have been busy banding doves, and will continue this activity into August. We will need to set up our dove leases in the area in August. District biologists will also be conducting our state Deer Management Unit surveys beginning in August, as well as, collecting CWD samples from road killed deer. There is no rest for the weary.

Summer is upon us and dry hot days are ahead. This is the norm and what should be expected, but we've been rather spoiled the last few years. Regardless of the heat and humidity, there's still a lot of beauty and enjoyment you can experience outdoors. Fawns are following their mothers pretty good by now. Bucks are running in bachelor groups in velvet. Turkeys and quail are brooding chicks. Fishing is good. Summer in Texas is still a great time of year, so please get out and enjoy the wildlife and habitat on your piece of Texas.

Mourning dove being aged and banded. Photo © TPWD

David Forrester is the District 7 Leader in La Grange. He has been with TPWD since 2001 when he started his career as the TPWD wildlife biologist for Fort Bend and Wharton counties. David has a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Economics and a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, both from Texas A&M University, and a Master of Science in Range and Wildlife Management from Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

Cautious Optimism

WRITTEN BY DR. MIKE FORSTNER

Bastrop State Park (BSP) represents an absolute key to Houston toad existence and persistence in the wild. Houston toads were once remarkably abundant in the park, with over a hundred pairs found laying eggs on a single night at a single pond in the 1990s.

Houston Toad
Photo © TPWD

As remarkable as that is, the next night they did so again at a different pond with only a few dozen fewer pairs found. Even with sustained efforts using good fires to reduce fuel loads in the park, the 2011 fire was catastrophic or severe for much of the habitat for toads.

The good news is that toads are resilient and had been documented to do well after prescribed fires in the Park and on the Griffith League Ranch (owned by the BSA Capitol Area Council). What we didn't know is that they can do well in native grasslands and woodlands interspersed with forest so long as some canopy structure is retained. Moreover, even the standing dead trees killed in the 2011 fire provide some level of shade (up to 15% coverage).

The very fuel loads that led to the severity of the 2011 fires now provided some relief from Texas heat and the downed trees provided shelter for the toads where once there were pine needles. The Houston toad reproduced in BSP the year after the fire and in a severely burned area (one of the largest successful reproduction events detected anywhere that year), but reproduction was not detected in 2013. Toads were found in 2013 but no egg strands or tadpoles were detected, they could have been there and we simply didn't find them. Then in 2014 the toad reproduced again in BSP with a successful egg strand found again and in the fire zone once more. Then things became quieter.

In 2015 and 2016 the toads were not heard or seen in the park, we knew they were still there and we hoped the supplemental egg strands we were able to place in the wild from captive toads obtained from BSP egg strands before the 2011 fire, would also help. In 2017 with two good years of toad growth and rains, things are much louder again. Houston toads have been detected in BSP in chorus and early too! The warmth had toads chorusing on the night of January 16th, but many nights since then and at three ponds across BSP. Tadpoles have been found in one pond and we believe it very likely we will find them in at least one more of the three chorusing sites for this year.

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Cautious Optimism, continued

It's also good news across the County with more than ten chorusing locations detected so far and one of those is about as far west as they have ever been heard in the County. Breeding outside of BSP has also been confirmed and if Mother Nature, our continued stewardship, and careful attention to not impacting the now increasing numbers is continued, it may be time to be more optimistic for the species in Bastrop once again.

Confirmed breeding site for the Houston Toad (2017). Photo © Andrew MacLaren, Texas State University, Doctoral student and Houston Toad researcher with TPWD

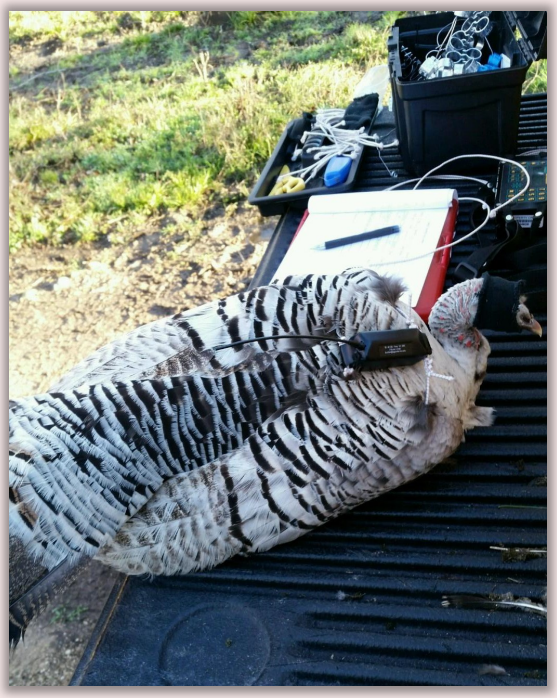
Houston Toad egg strand. Photo © Madeleine Marsh, MSc. Texas State University and lead for our head-starting fieldwork with the Houston Zoo, Inc, TPWD, BBEC, BSA-CAC and USFWS.

Mike Forstner is a Regent's Professor in the Department of Biology at Texas State University. He obtained a BSc. from Southwest Texas State University in 1989, a MSc. from Sul Ross State University in 1991, and a PhD from Texas A&M University in 1995. After his work as a post-doc at Columbia University and a brief time at Florida Atlantic University in Davie, Florida he returned to SWTSU in 1999 and has been a faculty member in Biology, and through the University name changes since then. His students, collaborators, and colleagues share the goal of effective rare species stewardship from informative, applied research.

Turkey Project Update

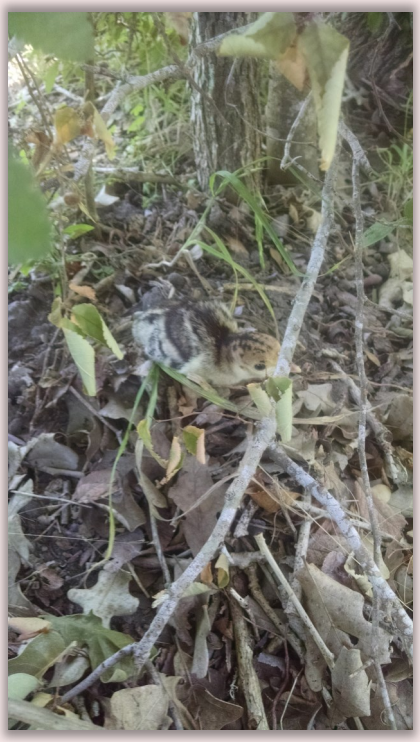
WRITTEN BY JACOB WHITE AND DAVID MOSCICKI

The second year of the District 7 Turkey project is nearing a close. We are currently monitoring nesting and brooding activity in all six counties of the research area, and will continue through the month of July. Trapping season this year went very well.



'Smoke phase' Rio Grande turkey. Photo © TPWD

From January to March, we captured a total of 61 turkeys using baited drop nets and walk-in traps. We even managed to capture one white "smoke-phase" turkey in Caldwell County. Although 61 turkeys were captured we deployed a total of 53 transmitters. The rest were either banded and released or just released for landowner preference. Of the 50 original females, 46 survived into the nesting season. To date, there have been 32 documented nesting attempts and 4 renesting attempts. Of the 36 total nests, 4 have made it to ~28 days and hatched.



Rio Grande turkey poult. Photo © TPWD

Once the hatch has occurred, we begin monitoring the hen to document brooding. As poults are flightless for approximately the first 15 days after hatching, this is a critical time for these young turkeys. Since they are not able to fly up to roost at night, they and the hen roost on the ground, making them very vulnerable to predation. Once able to fly, their chances of survival to adulthood grow significantly. To determine if a brood survives to this crucial 15-day mark, we conduct frequent poult counts to determine if a hen is still actively brooding. During these counts, we track down a hen and visually confirm the presence of poults.

An additional part of our project this year involves nest and prenest vegetation sampling. We have been taking vegetation measurements at each nest site, as well as in the area the hen passed through several hours before she laid her first egg. Using this data, we hope to be able to determine if a hen is selecting nesting locations based on specific vegetation makeup or if it's a random choice based on the timing of her laying. This could play an important role in determining habitat management for biologists and landowners wishing to improve turkey habitat on their properties.

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Turkey Project Update, continued

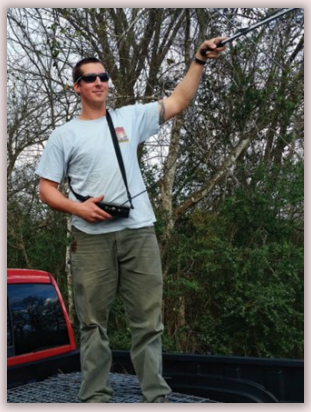
At the time of this report, 37 individuals are still active. As this season comes to a close, we look forward to the start of our final field season which will begin in January. As turkey ranges often shift, we are always looking for new potential trapsites. If you often see turkeys on your property during the winter months and are interested in assisting with this project, or just interested in learning more, contact your local biologist?

We would like to sincerely thank the many landowners who have assisted us in this project so far, especially the local MLD Cooperators. As this project occurs exclusively on private lands, your assistance and cooperation is vital to its success. Your curiosity, turkey tales, and kindness never fail to brighten our day. Thank you!!!

Jacob and David are Graduate Research Assistants with the School Of Renewable Natural Resources at Louisiana State University. Jacob began last year with the District 7 turkey project and this is the final summer of his field work. David started this January and will be here through the end of next summer.

Nest site vegetation sampling will give us an idea of what types of vegetation turkeys often nest in. Photo © TPWD

Graduate research assistant and a technician gathering Pre-nest vegetation data Photo © TPWD



Jacob White (top) and David Moscicki (bottom) Photo © Louisiana State University School of Renewable Natural Resources

Plant Profile: Goldenrod

WRITTEN BY ZNOBIA WOOTAN, NATIVE AMERICAN SEED

The imperiled migration of the monarchs has brought attention to available fall wildflower nectar sources. Many people are now looking around trying to see what the monarchs are actually using for nectar sources on their return flight to Mexico and other southern destinations.

Photo © Native American Seed

One of the few wildflowers blooming in the fall, which is an obvious favorite of monarchs and other pollinators is Goldenrod. It ranges in height from 2 - 4 ft. depending on the species and is topped by rich golden yellow flowers. The species fall bloom time is not only important for the monarchs but for our honey bees and native bees as well. You can observe many different species of bees visiting the blooms as they are madly trying to store up enough nectar and pollen for the winter months. Goldenrods habit of growing in moist locations almost always insures that there will be some nectar in the fall even in dry years. One species of goldenrod, Solidago altissima, is especially important in riparian restoration. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being anchored rock Goldenrod is given a stability rating of 6. It can also spread underground which is even better in riparian areas. Goldenrod could be the perfect trifecta of wildflowers because not only is it heavily depended on by pollinators and an excellent choice for riparian restoration but it also has historic medicinal uses as well.

Photo © Native American Seed

Goldenrod is also known as woundwort and has been used medicinally by man for many years. Its genus name Solidago is derived from the Latin solidare which means to make whole. The phrase ‘to make whole’ refers to Goldenrod’s reputation as being able to stop bleeding and heal wounds. This characteristic is well documented throughout early folklore history. Goldenrod is also currently used in modern day as a known diuretic without leaching essential nutrients from the body. In the Appalachian Mountains Goldenrod is used in making Blue Mountain Tea to cure fatigue. Native Americans used goldenrod for wounds, sore throats, kidney and urinary ailments. Consider planting live roots of Goldenrod in your outdoor environment. These plants are especially useful in erosion control, wetlands, raingardens and wildlife habitat restoration.

Photo © Native American Seed

Diamond-backed Terrapin

WRITTEN BY TODD PILCIK

The diamond-backed terrapin (Malaclemys terrapin) is a species found from the Atlantic seaboard from Massachusetts through Florida along the gulf coast into Texas. There are several different subspecies ranging from the northern latitudes to the southern.

Photo © Ryan Hagerty, 2009, USFWS

Photo © Earl Nottingham, 2009, TPWD

In Texas, terrapins may be found from Sabine Pass (Louisiana Border) to as far south as Kingsville. They inhabit the area immediately adjacent to the coast and are restricted to the brackish waters, tidal creeks and estuaries although they may be found in open bay systems when conditions are favorable.

The diamond-backed terrapin derives its name from the unique scutes (scales of the shell). The ridges on the scutes form a distinct hexagonal or diamond shaped pattern. There are no other aquatic turtles in Texas with this unique pattern. The top of the head is whitish with grey to black spots with a distinct dark colored bar that runs from the front to the back of the head. The legs are grey with black spotting. Adult males range in size from 4 to 5.5 inches and females 6 to 9 inches. In most specimens, the mouth may appear light or whitish in color.

Unlike other species like the pond slider (red eared slider), terrapins are not overly common. In the past, market hunting for turtle meat, for both domestic and foreign markets, impacted their population. Over time, this demand has declined, and today, coastal development and commercial crabbing are the greatest threats to their population. Coastal development destroys estuaries and nesting habitat and alters the natural flow of waters. It also changes the hydrology through channelization increasing salt water inflow destroying estuaries and limiting available habitat. Terrapins sometimes become trapped in commercial and recreational crab traps and drown.

Terrapins eat a variety of different foods but the main diet consists of mollusks and crustaceans. They breed in April and May and the female will lay 8-18 eggs in a nest built above the high tide line. Eggs incubate for 9 to 15 weeks and nest temperatures determine the sex of the clutch. Females may have up to 3 clutches per year and have a strong tendency to go back to previous nesting areas. Hatchling terrapins average 1 to 1.3 inches in length and inhabit similar habitat to the adults. Females become sexually mature around 6-7 years and males around 3-4 years. If you happen to be fishing the back bays and estuaries, keep a watchful eye. You may just encounter a unique species of turtle few know exist.

Todd Pilcik is the Private Lands Biologist for Matagorda and Brazoria counties. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in 1994 and pursued his Masters degree at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos. Todd was hired in August of 1994. He worked with the migratory program until 1999 when he accepted a biologist position in the Texas hill country covering Lampasas, Coryell and Bell counties. In 2002, he transferred to the Texas coast and is currently stationed in Bay City.

Spotlight Season Safety

WRITTEN BY BOBBY EICHLER

Over the next few months District 7 biologists and individuals belonging to local Wildlife Management Associations (WMAs) will be conducting deer population spotlight surveys throughout the Post Oak district. These surveys occur primarily at night and are conducted in various ways. Sometimes, when working with an individual landowner on large acreage, the survey will take place totally within that landowner's property boundary. Other surveys will take place on county roads when associated with WMAs or Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) deer management unit (DMU) lines.

Please be aware that these population estimates will be conducted between July 15 and September 30. During this time you may notice a vehicle spotlighting in your area at night. If TPWD is conducting the counts from public roads, we can be distinguished from possible poachers by the following:

- A TPWD marked truck
- A yellow and/or blue dash-mounted caution light and a tailgate mounted caution light
- At least two staff members with spotlights in the back of a truck
- A slow rate of speed between 5-10 mph
- Spotlights which are constantly on and sweeping both sides of road
- Surveys normally start one hour after sundown and take 3-4 hours

Prior to every survey, TPWD biologists notify the local Sheriff's Department so they are aware that a survey is being conducted on public roads. If you see spotlights from public roads during this time and are unsure of who it is:

- DO call the Sheriff's Department and inform them of the location
- DO NOT approach the spotlighting vehicle

Each year our biologists have encounters with citizens who believe they are encountering a poacher. In some instances we have had shots fired over trucks. This not only puts our staff in a potential unsafe situation, but also potentially puts citizens in harm's way.

Population surveys are also conducted by volunteers who are members of local WMAs. WMA volunteers are not necessarily utilizing TPWD trucks. Please be aware of their possible presence also and treat them in a safe manner. Volunteers conducting population surveys notify their local Sheriff's department and Game Wardens as well.

Biologists and volunteers conduct a deer population spotlight survey. Photo © Jeff Bonner, TPWD

Bobby Eichler is the Technical Guidance Biologist for the Oak Prairie District. He has Bachelor and Master of Science degrees in Forestry both with emphasis in Game Management, from Stephen F. Austin State University. A native of Giddings, Bobby started his TPWD career in East Texas before moving to La Grange in 2007.

Snipe Hunting in Texas

WRITTEN BY TREY BARRON

I am sure many of you have been on a snipe hunt at least once in your life. Like many of you, my first snipe hunt was an exciting adventure armed with only a burlap sack and a flashlight.

Common Snipe or Wilsons Snipe. Photo © David Ward, 2008, USFWS

The flashlight was obviously needed to see the glow in their eyes and lure them into the burlap sack. While I was being led into the darkest part of a property to sit and wait for the shy and secretive bird, I could barely contain my excitement to bag my first snipe. It was a long wait and I came away empty handed, as has every other young snipe hunter gullible enough to be led into the darkness. I later found out that this was just a good way to entertain the kids around camp so the adults could eat all of the s'mores while we were gone. As I grew older, and I like to think less gullible, I learned that snipe hunting can be quite the enjoyable experience. And to top it off, you could actually come home with some birds for the grill.

Wilson's Snipe, also called jacksnipe or common snipe, are a medium sized shorebird measuring about 10.5 inches long with short legs and a stout body weighing about 4.5 ounces. They are highly cryptic, or camouflaged in coloration with dark brown mottled stripes on the back, a streaked chest, and stripes on the head. The belly of the bird is light in coloration, but not often seen until you are right next to them as they prefer to remain hidden amongst the vegetation. The bill is long in order to probe for earthworms and other invertebrates in the moist soil. They breed in the Northern United States and Canada and migrate to the southern part of the U.S. to spend their winters and prepare for the breeding season up north.

Snipe in Texas, talking actual snipe here, are one of the underappreciated game birds we have in our great state. They are considered a migratory game bird and to snipe hunt requires a Texas Migratory Game Bird Stamp Endorsement and Harvest Information Program (HIP) certification as well as your hunting license. The daily bag limit is 8 birds and a possession limit of 24 birds. During the 2014 and 2015 hunting seasons, there were between 200 and 3000 snipe hunters harvesting around between 900 and 6500 snipe. Snipe hunting participation seems to increase when the conditions are right and the birds are present, which is the same for many other game species such as quail.

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Snipe Hunting in Texas, continued

Snipe hunting has many similarities to quail hunting, other than the habitat is much wetter. Walking the shallow wetlands and vegetated pond margins to flush birds is the norm. Wetlands that hold some brush cover are often excellent places to look for snipe. Dogs can be used to cover more ground and flush birds that are more difficult for hunters to get to, although stomping through the mud to have a snipe bust at your feet is half the fun. It can be tough on dogs to slop through the mud and brush, so care must be taken not to push them too hard. When the birds do flush, they come out fast while making a high-pitched call and do not slow down. Their flight will be erratic and low to the ground and make for a challenging target. For those that like a challenging and exciting hunt, snipe are worth a look at.

Many ask how do they taste, and while I am not going to say like chicken, they deserve a spot right next to the dove and quail. They can be prepared the same as many of the other small game birds. Snipe poppers are always a go to with a jalapeno, cream cheese, and snipe breast fillets wrapped in bacon and cooked on the grill. They are also good sautéed with butter, your favorite seasonings, onions, peppers, and served over rice.

For anyone that has not had the pleasure of going on a snipe hunt, we experienced snipe hunters owe them their time in the dark with a flashlight and burlap sack. After you razz them a bit, you should go take them out to the shallow wetlands and see if you can flush a real snipe (wait until daylight of course). They can be very challenging, but are a very exciting target to chase here along the coast of Texas.

For information on seasons and regulations go to http://tpwd.texas.gov/regulations/outdoor-annual/regs/animals/wilsons-snipe-common-snipe-or-jacksnipe

Raftovich, R.V., S. C. Chandler, and K. A. Wilkins. 2016. Migratory bird hunting activity and harvest during the 2014-15 and 2015-16 hunting seasons. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Laurel, Maryland, USA.

Trey Barron began his career with TPWD in 2011 as a biologist in the Texas panhandle before moving to Victoria in May of 2014. He is currently the wildlife biologist for Victoria, Refugio, and Calhoun counties and enjoys working with landowners to improve habitat and manage all types of wildlife species. He received his Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Biology and Master of Science in Biology from West Texas A&M University.

Bulldozers for Mechanical Brush Control

WRITTEN BY TODD PILCIK

Brush control is often a recommended practice for wildlife management purposes. Several techniques may be employed to improve and enhance range for wildlife but several factors should be considered before, during, and after the application of brush control techniques. Factors often include equipment availability, target species for control, timing of applications, patterns of manipulation, soil types, budget, and potential for negative effects. Types of mechanical treatment range from bulldozers for complete removal or sculpting, roller choppers, root plowing, disking, targeting specific brush species via skid steer with either a mulching head or shears, and hand application through the use of chainsaws, axes, and hand loppers. Often, a pre- or post- application with herbicides may be necessary. These are by no means the only processes that may be employed to control brush species but are some of the most common.

Dozers are effective at removing undesirable vegetation. This operator is selectively removing cedar only while retaining beneficial species. Photo © Clayton Wolf, TPWD

When working in woodlands, realize that there are many desirable species in the understory. Photo © Todd Pilcik, TPWD

Bulldozers can be used for a variety of different applications. The blade alone can clear brush and remove undesirable trees and can sculpt the landscape to reduce erosion or rebuild eroded areas. Using a blade to remove brush and trees will disrupt the natural soil profile though the extraction of root systems, scraping of the blade and the action of the tracks on the soil surface may increase the chance for erosion. At the same time, this process acts as a soil disturbance technique stimulating the production of forbs and other vegetation that may be beneficial to wildlife but will also open a pathway for invasive species. A qualified, skilled operator with the understanding of the final objectives of the treatment will be the best candidate for a job and can create habitat for both wildlife and range production with minimal impact to the existing habitat. Enquire about and inspect previous clearing operations and consult neighbors to determine if the operator you are choosing is most likely to accomplish the objectives for the wildlife management plan that best meets your goals.

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Bulldozers for Mechanical Brush Control, continued

Often times the most implemented brush control leaves areas looking like a park. This is also very detrimental to wildlife habitat and many wildlife species. Photo © Todd Pilcik, TPWD

Patterns of brush control are important for wildlife. Although a pasture or savannah appearance with big trees and green grass is aesthetically pleasing and the most common clearing technique, too much clearing negatively impacts wildlife habitat. In most bulldozer manipulations, all trees and brush are removed leaving only the most desirable trees, namely oaks. Species such as hackberry, cedar elm, yaupon, green ash, hawthorn, beauty berry and cedar to name a few are removed. These species are important to wildlife and are a critical component of the habitat, through both the structure they provide within the habitat and the patterns in which they are arranged. Vertical structures, as well as edge are important and leaving these components intact will allow for the most diverse habitat that will support a variety of wildlife species. Always note that edge is important for wildlife and using a dozer to create openings or irregular paths throughout the area will be much more beneficial to wildlife than large cleared acreage. Think small. Target areas with invasive species such as tallow, McCartney rose, trifoliate orange or where the brush density exceeds beneficial effects. As always, if there are questions on type or extent of habitat manipulation, consult your local biologist. Remember, what took hundreds of years for nature to create can be destroyed in a few hours or days and once it's gone, it's hard to get back.

Todd Pilcik is the Private Lands Biologist for Matagorda and Brazoria counties. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in 1994 and pursued his Masters degree at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos. Todd was hired in August of 1994. He worked with the migratory program until 1999 when he accepted a biologist position in the Texas hill country covering Lampasas, Coryell and Bell counties. In 2002, he transferred to the Texas coast and is currently stationed in Bay City.

The Life and Times of a Young Buck

WRITTEN BY BOBBY EICHLER

White-tailed deer are an interesting species to study and observe. Depending on the time of year you observe, deer may be grouped into bachelor groups of bucks, family groups of doe, or at times solitary bucks and does. Factors such as breeding season, fawning season and deer ecology influences their many patterns and behaviors.

Photo © Clinton J. Faas

The intent of this article is to focus on the early life of bucks, primarily less than two years old. By understanding their behavior it may help you as a landowner or hunter to better manage your property or lease.

It seems that young bucks may have the hardest life of any in a deer population. Somewhere around the first birthday of a buck it seems all the females he grew up with really start putting him in his place, whether it's his twin sister, older sister, grandmother, or even his own mother. Around the same time, all the bucks in this general area are likely being aggressive towards this young buck. Every way this young buck turns, another deer is wanting to kick him, chase him, or gore him. What a life for a 12 – 18 month old.

Much of this behavior is a result of the ecology and breeding system of white-tailed deer. White-tailed deer exhibit a polygynous mating system, meaning that one male will breed several females in a single breeding season. Usually in a polygynous breeding system it is the juvenile males which are most likely to move out of an area (emigrate) and be forced to find a new territory. This is certainly true in white-tailed deer. Additionally, the females live in matriarchal groups composed of several generations. The home-range structure of the doe population has been described as being similar to a rose, with the pedals being overlapping home-ranges for individual doe with the genetic relationship being less as the pedals radiate outwards (Porter 1991).

After understanding the breeding system and the matriarchal social system in white-tailed deer, the picture becomes clearer as to why the related females start being aggressive once the young buck starts becoming sexually mature; by chasing the buck away it reduces the chances of inbreeding. This same behavior also helps insure genetic diversity across a landscape as bucks venture to new areas. Dispersal caused by the mother is often initiated around spring / summer of the buck's first birthday.

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The Life and Times of a Young Buck, continued

As young bucks disperse into new territory, they also find much aggression from other bucks already in that territory. Established bucks are not very partial to a new buck coming into an area and increasing the competition for breeding a doe. Bucks have their own social system and a young buck has to find his way into being accepted into a bachelor group. The road to being accepted is likely not easy. Young bucks may be in a state of 'wandering' until finding a new range. Dispersal of young bucks caused by social pressures from other bucks is often initiated during the fall after the bucks first birthday.

So how prevalent is buck dispersal and how far do they travel? Most research indicates that 50-80% of the young buck herd will disperse from their natal range. A South Texas study, with two study sites, showed that young bucks dispersed on average 2.7 and 5.0 miles from their birth range (McCoy et al. 2005).

It is generally accepted that buck dispersal does not affect overall deer densities. Normally between immigration and emigration, the net change is ZERO. This may not always be the case if there is an area of high density near an area of low density (or possibly an area that is overharvested). In areas where bucks are overharvested, a property could be creating a 'sink' into which young bucks may move since the buck competition is severely decreased by overharvest.

How does buck dispersal factor into managing your property? Honestly this is hard to answer. Managing for genetics across a landscape is rather difficult and when you consider the average property is less than 125 acres through much of our district, managing for genetics and more importantly buck densities can be rather tough. Assuming some common research numbers that deer home range is generally 1 square mile+ (640 acres) and that bucks may disperse several miles, it is obvious that a buck spends its life across many landowner fences, and is vulnerable to many different hunters during its life. It is also safe to say that the mature bucks on your property were most likely born miles from your property. The single most important take-a-way from this article should be the need for you as a landowner and/or hunter to manage on a landscape frame of mind. This means working with neighbors, discussing what bucks you have been seeing and which ones you consider off limits for this current hunting season, and harvesting an appropriate amount of bucks on your acreage. This may also mean that on your property, harvesting 1 buck annually may be too much when looking at it from landscape management and proper harvest rates.

McCoy, J. E., D.G. Hewitt, and F.C. Bryant. 2005. Dispersal by yearling male white-tailed deer and implications for management. Journal of Wildlife Management 69:366-376

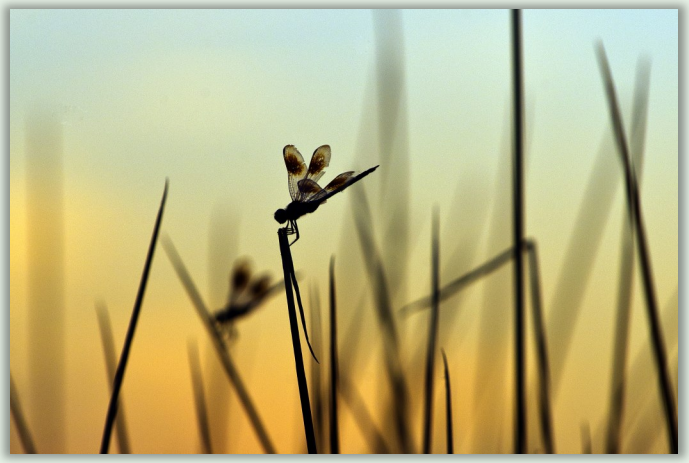
Porter, W. F., N. E. Mathews, H. B. Underwood, R. W. Sage, and D. F. Behrend. 1991. Social organization in deer – implications for localized management. Environmental Management 15:809-814.

Bobby Eichler is the Technical Guidance Biologist for the Oak Prairie District. He has Bachelor and Master of Science degrees in Forestry both with emphasis in Game Management, from Stephen F. Austin State University. A native of Giddings, Bobby started his TPWD career in East Texas before moving to La Grange in 2007.

Upcoming Events

JULY

13-16 TWA Convention
J.W. Marriott San Antonio Hill
Country Resort and Spa
23808 Resort Pkwy., San Antonio, TX 78261
Contact Texas Wildlife Association
at 210-826-2904 or 800-839-9453
Visit: https://www.texas-wildlife.org/contact



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August

12 Youth Hunter Training
Lackey Ranch
Yorktown, TX
Contact Spence Innocenti at 361-649-6162

16-18 Statewide Quail Symposium
MCM Elegante,
4250 Ridgemont Dr., Abilene, TX 79606
Contact TWA and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
Service at 210-826-2904 or 800-839-9453
Visit: https://www.texas-wildlife.org/contact

19 Western DeWitt Co-op Meeting
Garfield Hall
Begins at 11:00 a.m.
Contact Larry Vasbinder at 361-564-6442

19 Alum Creek WMA Summer Meeting
Bluebonnet Headquarters
155 Electric Ave., Bastrop, TX 78602
Begins at 3:00 p.m.
Contact Robert Trudeau at 512-332-7280

25 Washington County Wildlife Society Annual Meeting
Washington County Event Center
Begins at 5:30 p.m.
1305 E Blue Bell Rd. #110, Brenham, TX 77833
Contact WCWS at 979-277-6212

26 Goliad County Co-op Meeting
ICC Parish Hall
8:00 a.m.—1:30 p.m.
238 N Commercial St., Goliad, TX 77963
Contact Brian Yanta at 361-645-8204 or
Doug Jobes at 361-576-0022

Continued on page 17

Upcoming events, continued

SEPTEMBER

9 **Jackson County WMA Fall Meeting**
Jackson County Service Center
Begins at 10:00 a.m.
411 N. Wells St., Edna, 77957
Contact Wade Watkins 361-771-2401
or Jim Theiss 713-253-1135
https://facebook.com/jacksoncowildlife

17 **Lavaca County WMA Fall Meeting**
Knights of Columbus Hall
Begins at 10:00 a.m.
Contact Joel Wagner 361-798-6506 or
Email at lavacacountywma@gmail.com
Visit https://www.lcwma.org

23 **Meyersville Co-op Meeting**
Clem Waskow's Barn
Begins at 5:00 p.m
Contact Clay Haun at 361-243-6026

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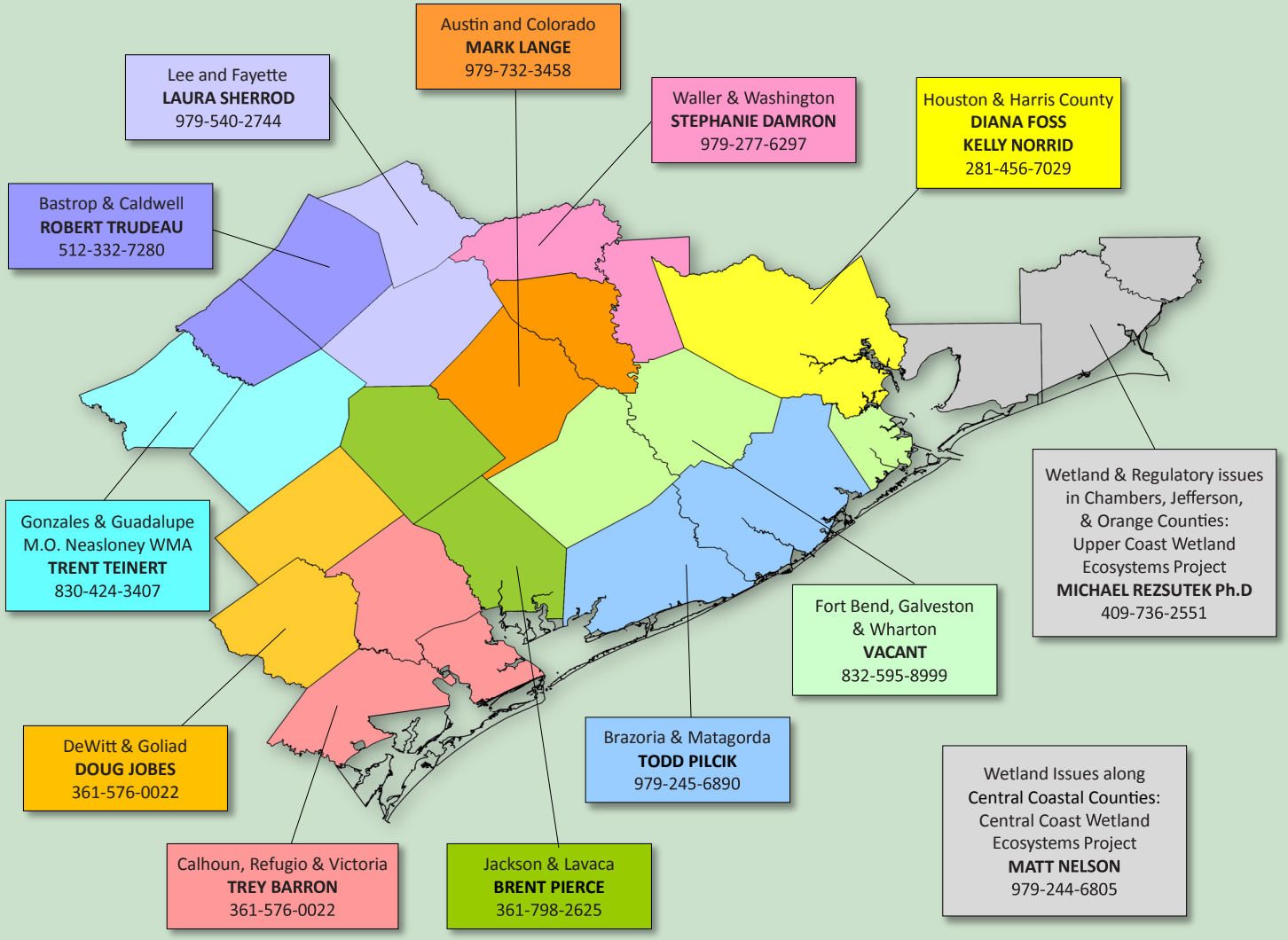
OCTOBER

11-12 **Guadalupe-Gonzales County Youth Shoot**
Neasloney WMA, 8:00 a.m.
Contact Trent Teinert at 830-424-3407

17-18 **Lee-Washington County Youth Shoot**
Nails Creek State Park, 8:30 a.m.
Contact Stephanie Damron at 979-277-6297 or
Laura Sherrod at 979-540-2744

Photo © TPWD

Our Wildlife Biologists



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FOR MORE INFORMATION

All inquiries: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Rd., Austin, TX 78744, telephone (800) 792-1112 toll free, or (512) 389-4800 or visit our website for detailed information about TPWD programs:

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