



# Oaks and Prairies Wildlifer

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

TEXAS  
PARKS &  
WILDLIFE

Winter 2017

## Page 2

Ranching and Wildlife Expo

## Page 3

Deer Season 2016-  
That's a Wrap

## Page 5

Species Spotlight:  
Ringtail

## Page 6

Let's Talk Turkey Cover

## Page 8

Landmark Wildlife  
Legislation Introduced  
into Congress

## Page 10

Plant Profile:  
Texas Wintergrass

## Page 11

Kissing Bug

## Page 13

Woodsmanship and  
Small Game Hunting

## Page 15

Upcoming Events

## Page 18

Our Wildlife Biologists

## District Field Notes

BY DAVID FORRESTER

As was predicted, great habitat conditions made deer hunting a bit challenging this season. We saw a decrease in overall harvest across the district due to a tremendous acorn crop and plenty of forbs and browse. When deer don't visit feeders, they tend to avoid harvest. Although this is frustrating to hunters and we don't harvest the number of mouths off the range that is needed, it also means that more bucks made it through the season and will be back next season another year older.

Biologists did a great job collecting Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) samples this year and are starting to shift priorities to other things as we start the New Year. We want to thank the local sheriff's departments, game wardens, TxDot, and animal control officers that notified us about road kills. Also, we want to thank the hunters that brought us deer. Although we are shifting focus a bit, we will still collect and submit samples if you have an animal you want tested. We still have not detected any CWD positives in the wild white-tailed deer herd. All positives continue to be confined to breeding operations.

Other areas to which we are shifting our focus are the district turkey project and conducting prescribed burns on private lands. Biologists have several properties that have prepared burn units and we are just waiting for the safe environmental conditions to conduct a prescribed burn. We should have some prescribed burn workshops listed in the upcoming events if this interests you. We also have several locations across the district that have turkey regularly sighted and coming to feeders. We hope to start trapping, tagging and collaring birds shortly. Hopefully, we can obtain good information on what types of habitat these birds are using to roost, nest and brood their young.

Due to retirement, the District said goodbye to one of our long time contributors starting December 1, 2016. Mary Ann Urban was the Administrative Assistant here in the La Grange office and she decided to leave the grind of state service and spend more time with her husband and family. Mary Ann was an integral part of the workings in District 7 and District 8.

*Continued on page 2*

*District Field Notes, continued*

She always made sure the biologists in the district were being supported and did an outstanding job managing the office here in La Grange. She will be sorely missed and not easily replaced. However, that's what we are in the processes of trying to do--hire a new Administrative Assistant. The process is nearing completion and we hope to have someone in place by February.

Although it can get cold, this is a great time of year, so please get out and enjoy the wildlife and habitat on your piece of Texas.



*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.*

## Ranch and Wildlife Expo

WRITTEN BY DAVID FORRESTER

The 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Ranching and Wildlife Expo is scheduled to take place March 7-11, 2017 at NRG Center in Houston, Texas. The event is organized by the Ranching and Wildlife Expo Committee, with help from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the All Breeds Committee, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Wildlife Association in conjunction with the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo (HLSR). It is designed to showcase the complementary and beneficial relationships that can exist between a successful ranching operation and a successful wildlife program.

This year's expo will consist of presentations taking place March 7-9. There are also commercial vendor booths and a wildlife auction on March 10. Finally, a youth wildlife poster competition and presentations by the winners will round out the Expo on Saturday, March 11. Past Ranching and Wildlife Expos have generated scholarship dollars for youth ranging from about \$235,000 in the early years to over \$500,000 recently.

Some of the presentations scheduled for this year's Expo include: Cattle and Market Report for 2017, Cows and Quail, Agricultural Conservation Easements: Lessening Ag Land Loss and Saving Family Legacies, Techniques for Predation Identification, Blue Ribbon Panel and a New Opportunity for Funding – HR 5650, Posting Observations, Documenting Plants and Exploring Data on iNaturalist, Snakes of Texas, Coastal Prairies, Texas Coastal Watershed: Green Infrastructure for Texas, Texas Coastal Conservation Legacy: The Power of Recreational Anglers, Wild Game Preparation: Sausage Making, Quail: Sustain the Abundance Forever, Migratory Game Bird Management in Texas, Development of an Oral Toxicant For Lethal Control of Feral Swine, Ecology of Deer Populations in Texas, Nature Photography Ranch Financing Update and 2016 Texas Rural Lands Market Report and Wild Game Preparation: Wild Pigs.

A complete schedule of topics and speakers is available on the HLSR website at: [www.rodeohouston.com/Portals/0/Content/VisitShow/Attractions/RanchingWildlifeExpo/Downloads/2017RanchingWildlifeSchedule.pdf?ver=2016-12-28-133516-233](http://www.rodeohouston.com/Portals/0/Content/VisitShow/Attractions/RanchingWildlifeExpo/Downloads/2017RanchingWildlifeSchedule.pdf?ver=2016-12-28-133516-233). Admission to the seminars is free. Pre-register today for a free gate and admission pass. For more information contact the TPWD District 7 office at 979-968-6591 or Clint Faas with the Texas Wildlife Association at 979-541-9803.

# Deer Season 2016 - That's a Wrap

WRITTEN BY BOBBY EICHLER

**By the time this newsletter is in your hands, the 2016 general deer season will be history. Hopes are that you had some success and, whether successful or not, had some good times with friends and family enjoying the outdoors.**

Before the season started, most biologists felt that this season would have its share of challenges. Going into the season, habitat conditions were probably better than they have been for October and November in a long time. While



*Photo © TPWD*

September did turn out dry, ample rain during August and again in October supplied an abundance of lush green summer forbs (weeds) and browse for the start of the season, as well as, one of the heaviest acorn crops that we have experienced in a while. Many properties still had 'good' acorns on the ground at the close of the season. Additionally, with the already abundant ground moisture and more fall rains, the winter forbs and grasses germinated and were present by mid-December. Needless to say, there was not a gap or a void in deer forage availability throughout the entire season.

So how was hunting and how was the harvest? I believe it is safe to say that the harvest was at best average and likely a little below average in regards to the number of deer harvested. When speaking of antler quality, there were some really nice bucks harvested with many reports of quality 140+ B & C bucks harvested throughout the district. Ample forage for the past two years has its benefits when growing antlers.

As mentioned above, forage availability was high which limits deer movements. Corn and protein feeders were not utilized as heavily as in times of drought. If hunters only sat observing feeders, deer sightings were likely lower than in years past. Many hunters reported having to reduce the amount of corn being fed since it was building up on the ground. Other than bringing in and attracting deer to feed, feeders can have a secondary advantage by attracting doe and holding doe in an area. This can be a benefit during the rut by bringing in bucks.

*Continued on page 4*

### *Deer Season 2016 - That's a Wrap, continued*

Rut? What rut? That might also be what you may have thought of this year's deer season. This year's mild and almost hot weather during October and November also impacted deer movements during the rut. For this part of Texas, much of the rut occurs from mid-October through the second or third week of November. This year was no exception. The rut is going to occur regardless, whether it is perceived or not. When day lengths start to shorten, glands and hormones for both buck and doe go into overdrive, the deer have no say in the matter. The problem is, during hot conditions, much of the running, chasing, and breeding is occurring after dark when temperatures drop. This obviously does not bode well for the hunter when deer are resting during the day.



Photo © TPWD

Some comments that biologists heard this December after hard hunting were; 1) I believe my neighbor has really impacted the deer population this year, and 2) I think too many permits are being issued for doe. Let me assure you, chances are your neighbor was having just as hard a time finding deer as anybody. If they were overly effective this year, maybe we all need to learn their hunting skills. Second, doe permits are issued on current year population surveys (conducted in August and September) and previous trends and patterns; such as fawn crop success. I can assure you that if and when winter sets in, you will be seeing the large groups of doe again in late January and February.

Now for some good news. Last year's hunting and this year's hunting seasons have been average at best when speaking of number of deer harvested, particularly bucks. Both years have ended with some hunters possibly not harvesting a buck. So what can possibly be the good news? Well, after Jan. 1 and the close of the general season, many bucks will live to see another season. Chances are, in the future there will be an increase in the number of 5 ½+ year old bucks that are out there for harvest. As a hunter, it will be up to you to try and outsmart one of these old bucks. So, next year if we are blessed with a third year of great forage availability, it would be a wise move to create a game plan that does not involve a feeder during the early season.



Photo © 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.*

# Species Spotlight: Ringtail

WRITTEN BY DOUG JOBES

**The ringtail (*Bassariscus astutus*) is distributed statewide but more common in wooded areas and regions that are comprised of rocky outcrops. They are uncommon in lower Rio Grande and Coastal Plains of southern Texas.**

This cat-sized mammal is said to have the appearance of a fox, cat and a raccoon. Its tail is flattened and about as long as both its head and body combined and is banded with 14 to 16 alternating black and white rings that are only on the upper surface. Its habitat includes rocky areas such as rock piles, canyon walls and talus slopes; however, in the Oaks and Prairies district they are found in woodland areas where they live in hollow trees and logs. This species is also known to inhabit buildings and homes including attics and crawl spaces. In fact, it is considered a nuisance wildlife

species in some areas. Its sharp, curved, non-retractile claws make it an expert climber, and the ringtail can often be seen in areas that other mammals of similar size would not. Unlike the raccoon, this species is entirely nocturnal and only can be seen during daytime if its resting spot has been disturbed. They spend most of the day sleeping in their dens and live a solitary life except during the breeding season. In central Texas, breeding begins around the beginning of April, and the female gives birth to blind and helpless young. The average litter size is two to four, and the eyes and ears of the young open approximately one month after birth. Their pelts are indistinguishable from the adult by four months of age.

Ringtails are omnivorous, and it has been documented that they consume a wide variety of animal species including passerine birds such as cardinals and robins, rats, mice, squirrels, cottontail rabbits, snakes and lizards. Ringtails are known in other parts of the U.S. as Miner's cats as they were often used to keep mine shafts free of rodents. Other food items utilized are juniper berries, persimmon fruit, spiders and scorpions.



Photo © TPWD

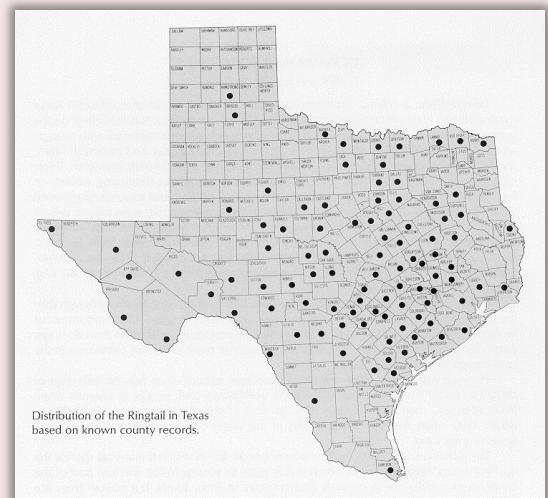


Photo © *The Mammals of Texas - Online Edition, 1997, Texas Tech University*



*Doug Jobes is the Wildlife Biologist for Jackson and Lavaca counties. After a three-year enlistment with the US Army as an Airborne Ranger with the 75th Ranger Regiment he graduated from the Daniel B. Warnell School of Forest Resources, University of Georgia. He then received his Masters of Science in Wildlife Ecology and Management from Oklahoma State University. His professional interests include working with small acreage landowners and wildlife management associations.*

# Let's Talk Turkey Cover

WRITTEN BY BRENT PIERCE

**As the holiday season comes to an end, and while our bellies are still full of turkey leftovers, the last thing you probably want to read about is turkey cover. I'm not talking about covering your turkey with giblet gravy or cranberry sauce. I'm talking about habitat cover, one of the required components of habitat for any organism to survive.**

In Texas, the Rio Grande wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo intermedia*) primarily resides in the central region of the state, from the upper panhandle to the southern gulf coast region.

Whether you have large or small acreage, habitat cover is a key component of nesting, brood rearing, and roosting for the Rio Grande wild turkey. Breeding takes place in early spring and the nesting period begins once the hen selects a nesting site. The hen lays one egg per day for an average of 10 days. The incubation period starts after the last egg has been laid and will last 28 days. It takes two weeks after hatching before the poults are capable of flying. Nesting and roosting on the ground for a two month period exposes the hen and her clutch to a considerable amount of predators and harsh weather conditions. Therefore, creating good nesting and brooding habitat is vital for their chance at survival.

Rio's prefer nesting cover that reaches at least 18 inches in height or greater. This includes native bunch grass such as little bluestem, yellow Indian grass and eastern gamagrass. In addition to grasses, brush, shrubs and forbs provide adequate shade, shelter and food for productive nesting to occur. Allowing areas of shrubs and brush to grow along fences and around fallen tree limbs will provide safe nesting sites as well. In areas with reduced ground cover, grazing deferment should be considered to regain vegetative density. Excluding areas from hay production and creating buffers around croplands can also aide in providing additional nesting habitat.

Brooding cover becomes important as the hatchlings leave the nest approximately 24 hours after hatching. Brooding and nesting cover need to be close in proximity and it is essential that the broods have adequate screening cover to

provide protection for the poults while allowing them to forage on insects. Good screening cover is a mixture of low shrubs, brush and forbs standing two to 4 feet high that provides shade and shelter from weather and safety from predators.



*A group of Rio Grande wild turkey hen's forage under a mesquite tree in Fayette County. Photo © Bobby Eichler, TPWD*

*Continued on page 7*

### *Let's Talk Turkey Cover, continued*

Prescribed burning and shallow disking are two management practices that can stimulate forb production. Forbs produce flowers and flowers attract insects creating an abundant food source for young poult. Burning removes and recycles rank vegetation and can set back invasive brush species. Burning and disking can be beneficial in creating the vegetative structure necessary to provide adequate food resources and protection from predators.

If you're fortunate enough to have existing roost sites on your property, it is important to consider them a valuable resource. Turkeys prefer an open understory so they can easily fly onto the roost, as well as spot out any approaching ground predators. Reducing thick understory, like yaupon, will help limit predatory ambushes at the roost site. This can be done by hand with a chainsaw, mechanically with a skid steer-mulcher, with herbicide or with a prescribed burn. Any improvements such as brush removal, in roosting areas should be done during dormant roosting periods. Continual disturbances in roosting areas can cause turkeys to leave permanently.

Given the fact that the Rio Grande turkey utilizes a home range between 300 and 1500 acres, a small land tract does not need to provide every habitat component. One needs to evaluate the surrounding area to determine the potential limiting factors in the habitat. Obviously, trying to create roosting cover in an open hayfield would not benefit the turkeys for many years. However, alternating hay production in certain fields or decreasing grazing pressure in and around riparian areas could be enough to increase nesting activity by attracting hens looking for nesting sites.

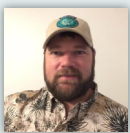
Since turkeys spend their days foraging for food and their nights roosting in trees, keeping the habitat interspersed with a diverse array of vegetative cover is imperative. Whatever the specific habitat need may be, adequate nesting/brooding and roosting cover is critical for the continued success of the Rio Grande wild turkey in Texas. Nothing is more enjoyable to see, than the majestic strutting toms gobbling in the woodlands and the prairies of Texas. Hopefully, the next time you're sitting on your porch, driving through your property, or sitting in a ground blind you can witness the gobbler in full strut.



*Oak uplands that are relatively open with a well-developed herbaceous understory are ideal for nesting turkey hens. Photo © Bobby Eichler, TPWD*



*Turkey hens will nest under small bushes and downed tree limbs. Photo © Bobby Eichler, TPWD*



*Brent Pierce is the wildlife biologist for Lavaca and Jackson County where he started in March 2016. He graduated from Texas A&M University with a Bachelor of Science in Rangeland Ecology and Management with a wildlife emphasis. Brent comes to us from the private sector where he has worked on private ranches managing habitat for deer and other wildlife species, as well as, guiding hunts and managing populations.*

# Landmark Wildlife Legislation Introduced into Congress

WRITTEN BY RICHARD HEILBRUN, TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

**In July 2016, Congressman Don Young introduced HR 5650, entitled “Recovering America’s Wildlife Act of 2016.” The bill, which is the result of a three-year process by wildlife and industry representatives, says that diverse fish and wildlife populations are vital to our nation’s infrastructure and economy.**

It is in the interest of our country “to retain for present and future generation a wide variety of fish and wildlife, to recover species of fish and wildlife and to prevent fish and wildlife species from declining to the point of requiring Federal protection.”



*Photo © Steve Hillebrand, 2009, USFWS*

HR 5650 was introduced as a “marker bill” designed to start conversations, begin planning, assemble partners in the Congress and in the nation, and create a placeholder for similar legislation to be introduced in the next session of Congress. When Congress reconvenes in 2017, Mr. Young will reintroduce this legislation, and a member of the U.S. Senate will do the same. With this reintroduction, it’s off to the races. Congress will have about 20-22 months to consider and vote on the bill.

What does it say? There is a current fee that is paid by energy corporations that explore or produce energy (fossil fuels and renewables) on offshore and federally owned land. That fund generates about \$12 billion annually, which goes into the general treasury. If passed, the new bill would dedicate \$1.3 billion from that *existing* revenue source towards sustaining our most imperiled species. The money would be required to be spent on Species of Greatest Conservation Need and mandates that state fish and wildlife agencies are the appropriate stewards of those funds. These agencies would work with the conservation community in their states to implement their Wildlife Action Plan, helping to manage more than 12,000 species of concern nationwide. In Texas, that plan is called the Texas Conservation Action Plan (TCAP), and was developed with input from the public and statewide conservation partners. The Texas plan lists more than 1,300 species of concern. As of this writing, Rep. Gene Green is the only Texas legislator to have co-signed the bill.

*Continued on page 9*



### Landmark Wildlife Legislation Introduced into Congress, continued



Photo © TPWD

These funds can only be used to implement the Texas Conservation Action Plan, which provides a roadmap to recover more than 1,300 imperiled species in Texas. It includes both imperiled species and sensitive habitats, and lists the major threats to each of these. These funds, if passed, could be used for education, outreach, technical guidance to landowners, land management, land acquisition, conservation easements, research grants, and encouraging wildlife-based recreation, as long as these activities benefit Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

Simply put, this bill is a game changer. It's a game changer for wildlife, and it's a game changer for the thousands of businesses and organizations in Texas that care about our natural resources. It's a game changer for the Texas public that cares about clean air, clean water, and a healthy economy. It's a game changer for the birders that are concerned with ever declining bird populations. It's a game changer for the consumer, who's concerned about pollinators and the stability of our food supply, and it's a

game changer for land managers who put their heart and soul into stewarding our natural resources.

Over the next two years, the conservation community will participate in an all-out blitz to find solutions that that will enable us to address populations of greatest concern and to prevent the need to add additional species to that list. I hope you and your organization are part of those conversations.

Organizations that would like to bring this message to their members can request newsletter articles and in-person presentations from Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and the True to Texas Wildlife Coalition.

To arrange for a presentation or article, contact Karly Robinson at [K.Robinson@teamingtxwildlife.com](mailto:K.Robinson@teamingtxwildlife.com).

You can read more about this effort at <http://fishwildlife.org/?section=blueribbonpanel>.



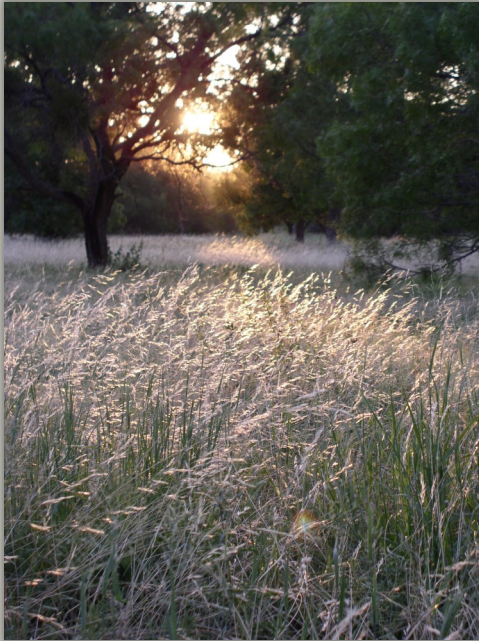
Photo © TPWD



*Richard is a Certified Wildlife Biologist® and manages the Conservation Outreach Program for Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. Richard holds a Bachelor's and a Master's degree from Texas A&M University in wildlife ecology. He is a conservationist, public speaker, and steward of Texas's natural resources. He has worked throughout the state on projects that conserve wildlife, manage wildlife habitat, and help people connect with natural resources on a deeply personal level. He has worked with bighorn sheep, ducks, Whooping Cranes, songbirds, raptors, quail, deer, dove, bobcats, and endangered cave invertebrates.*

## Plant Profile: Texas Wintergrass

WRITTEN BY ZNOBIA WOOTAN, NATIVE AMERICAN SEED



*Dry, wispy stems after the seeds have fallen. Underneath, it's actually evergreen.  
Photo @ Native American Seed*

Some of us can remember the spear grass fights of our youth. Whether it was with friends, neighborhood kids or cousins the first swimming trip of the summer usually began or ended with a Speargrass battle. The seed heads of Texas Wintergrass ripen at the beginning of summer providing an ample supply of spears, an oat like seed with a 2-4 inch twisted awn, to use as ammunition for a brief running skirmish. The resemblance to a spear is really uncanny. Most of the time when I reflect on a marvel of nature, I usually don't have an answer but the secret of the barbed seed and twisted awn has been revealed by careful observation. The twisted awn is an evolutionary tool responding to the humidity in the air. The awn twists and untwists with the changing humidity gently driving the seed into the ground. The barbed tip of the seed catches in the coats and artificial coats (socks and clothing) of any and all passing animals insuring a wider dispersal. This particular feature has earned Texas Wintergrass an ugly reputation with the sheep and goat raisers. The seed would lower the quality of the wool or Mohair and before the eradication of the screw worm any sore caused by the seed burrowing into the coat would become packed with screw worms.

On the other hand, Texas Wintergrass is the most wide spread prolific cool season grass available for grazing, providing valuable forage in lean months. The grass grows best in the deeper soils of pecan bottoms or mesquite flats. Even though it is found in dense stands in shady pecan bottoms, Texas Wintergrass has a medium tolerance for shade. It is a cool season grass, so during most of its active growing cycle the leaves of the pecan trees have not flushed out yet. By the time the pecans are fully leafed out our hot Texas summer is beginning in earnest and the Texas Wintergrass has finished with its seasonal growth. It will stay green all summer under the trees as long as it doesn't get too dry or too hot in which case it will turn brown and go dormant. Texas Wintergrass, *Nassella leucotricha*, is found growing from Northern Mexico up into Northern Oklahoma. Add some diversity to your environment for the wildlife and for you. Plant some Texas Wintergrass this fall and in the spring ambush some unsuspecting youngsters and squeals of laughter will fill the early summer air.



*Lush, green growth of Texas Wintergrass during cool season provides valuable forage in winter months.  
Photo @ Native American Seed*

# Kissing Bug

WRITTEN BY LAURA SHERROD

**Despite the name, the kissing bug (*Triatoma* sp.) is anything but romantic. Kissing bugs, also commonly known as cone-nose bugs or chinchas, belong to the Reduviidae family of insects.**

There are 11 different species of kissing bugs that live in the United States, and the highest density and variety of the bugs live in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Kissing bugs have been documented to be in the United States as far back as the 1800s, so they are by no means new to the area. While we have many different kinds of bugs around Texas, only the kissing bugs are known to cause Chagas disease.

Kissing bugs are typically dark brown or black with six orange or red spots around the edge of their flattened bodies. The adults can be  $\frac{3}{4}$  to  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches long. The mouth parts of the kissing bug are long and cone-shaped, thus the name “cone-nose bug,” and are used for sucking blood. Kissing bugs typically hide out during the day in animal burrows, cracks, and crevices, and they emerge at night to feed. Like many other insects, they are also attracted to lights at night.

Chagas disease is caused by a parasite, *Trypanosoma cruzi*, which can be found in the digestive system of certain species of kissing bugs. Kissing bugs developed their name due to the fact that they tend to bite and suck blood around the mouth and eyes of people. When the bug bites, it defecates near the bite site. A person who feels the bite may then scratch or rub the site, causing the feces, which carries the *T. cruzi* parasite, to enter the bite wound and bloodstream. A person may go years without knowing they have been infected. Some may have mild symptoms such as fever, fatigue, headaches, vomiting and diarrhea after being infected. About 30 percent of the people infected will develop chronic Chagas disease, which can lead to cardiac and/or intestinal complications including enlarged heart, colon, and/or esophagus, heart failure, cardiac arrest and digestion difficulties.

Chagas disease can also affect other mammals. Wild animals such as coyotes, raccoons, skunks, rodents and several other mammals have been known to carry the disease. Domestic dogs are also susceptible to contracting Chagas disease. About 10 percent of domestic dogs are known to carry the disease, and many others may never be diagnosed with the disease since symptoms can go unnoticed or may cause sudden death. Kissing bugs can infect dogs and other mammals by biting and defecating on them, just like in humans.



Three types of kissing bugs in Texas. Left to right: *Triatoma sanguisuga*, *Triatoma gerstaeckeri*, *Triatoma protracta*.

Photo © Gabriel L. Hamer, Texas A&M University

*Continued on page 12*

*Kissing Bug, continued*

Unfortunately, many dogs are curious and also have an affinity to eat bugs. If they ingest a kissing bug with the parasite, this can lead to the disease. Kennels with several dogs are particularly prone to kissing bugs. The bugs are attracted to heat and carbon dioxide, which occurs when you have several dogs confined to an area.

Over the last few years, there has been increased research in Texas regarding Chagas in wild populations. One study was conducted by Baylor College of Medicine to see what portion of the white-tailed deer population is affected by Chagas disease. With the help of Texas hunters and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, around 300 deer hearts from across the state of Texas were collected. The research is ongoing, but so far out of the 250 deer hearts screened for the *T. cruzi* parasite, only one has been positive. Preliminary results signify that deer do not serve as a significant reservoir for this parasite. Other studies around the state have shown a much higher

prevalence in other species of wildlife. In Lee County, there is the annual Lexington Lone Star Varmint Tournament, which attracts participants from all over the state. Each year there are hundreds of “varmint” brought in including coyotes, raccoons, bobcats, and fox. Typically it is hard to find a good sample size, especially all at once. Researchers from Texas A&M have taken advantage of this to study Chagas prevalence in the raccoons and coyotes in Texas. Various studies in Texas have shown that the raccoon serves as a significant reservoir for *T. cruzi*. It has been reported that up to 70 percent of raccoon samples in some areas have been positive for the parasite.



*Students sampling coyotes and raccoons for *T. cruzi* at the Lexington Lone Star Varmint Tournament. Photo © Greg Pleasant, TPWD*

If you find a kissing bug in your house or think you may have been bitten, it is a good idea to get a blood test for Chagas disease. If you have a

hard time getting tested by your doctor, there are several researchers in Texas that often offer free testing. A simple finger prick is all that is involved. If caught early enough, there are medications to treat Chagas disease. Currently, there is not a vaccine to prevent Chagas. Some safeguards for the home or kennels include spraying for insects periodically, making sure your windows have screens, and turning off outside lights at night. If you do find a kissing bug, make sure you do not squish it, as this can spread the parasite, and do not handle the bug with your bare hands. Use a plastic bag or container to scoop up the bug. You can submit the bug for testing for the Chagas-causing parasite to Texas A&M University by visiting <http://kissingbug.tamu.edu/found-a-bug/>.



*Laura Sherrod is the Wildlife Biologist for Lee and Fayette counties. She grew up in Dripping Springs and graduated from Texas State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Wildlife Biology. Laura was hired by Texas Parks & Wildlife in 2008, where she worked with the Big Game Program until accepting her current biologist position in April 2014. Laura offices in Giddings, and she enjoys helping landowners and wildlife management associations achieve their habitat and wildlife management goals throughout Lee and Fayette counties.*

# Woodsmanship and Small Game Hunting

WRITTEN BY DOUG JOBES

**Small game hunting for rabbit and squirrel has decreased in popularity over the past few decades. There are many theories on why this has occurred, but one thing is for sure, the trend shows this type of hunting will probably fade into history.**

The most popular types of hunting now draw a sharp contrast to the traditional hunting style associated with small game hunting. Our time in the field is now limited to only the amount of time it takes to harvest and drop off at the processing facility. Very little time is spent observing with the eye, analyzing sign and stalking our quarry. All of these skills are essential when hunting small game, and will likely be the difference in a successful outing and an empty bag. A keen eye for the woods and nature are a few of the things gained from this type of pursuit. In addition, things that normally go unseen or passed up begin to take on a meaning and have value. A small brush pile now becomes a good place for a rabbit den. The pecan tree with its busted out top now inhabits a squirrel nest, and the creek bottom that you drive over every day is now an evening destination with your .22 long. The types of observations that small game hunters make while out are enumerable and this continued practice usually develops an expert eye in the woods and sharpens the eye for detail.

There is another principal of small game hunting that has been lost in our modern day ways. The average hunter spends most of his or her time waiting in a blind for the game

to arrive, and to be fair this is the most common and accepted practice for deer hunting across the state. However, this was not always the case, and although it does require the noble trait of perseverance, it doesn't require very much outdoor skill. I often recommend to deer hunters especially in the late season when hunting pressure and the rut has taken its toll that they leave the blind, dawn their hunter orange and venture out to look for sign. This is usually a productive way to harvest deer that have become wary and secretive in their habits. This method, however, is the small game hunter's routine. If they are to be successful they must rely on the tried and true traditional hunting practices throughout the hunting season.



*Photo courtesy of Doug Jobes, TPWD*

***Continued on page 14***

### *Woodsmanship and Small Game Hunting, continued*

Things like looking for trails, nests, bedding areas, feeding sites, tracks, and scat are all important pieces of the puzzle, and regardless of whether you are chasing cottontails or bushy tails the same things apply. In order to analyze sign, you have to know what you're looking at and what it means. The delicately peeled, half eaten acorn.

What does that mean? Is it a water oak or a post oak? What about the loosely scattered pea-sized scat on the edge of the dewberry thicket? Is it fresh scat? Are the tracks weathered or do they appear crisp and recent? These types of questions are almost unending and the small game hunter who asks develops a great proficiency in the field.



Photo © TPWD

Although it is considered to be old school and scoffed at by some modern hunters, small game hunting is probably one of the best ways to improve and sharpen your woodsmanship. The fact is most hunters of old honed their shooting skills and learned about the outdoors while chasing small and elusive game animals. There may be no better way to improve your hunting and outdoor skills than to take to the field and pursue some of Texas' plentiful and delicious small game species.

Finally, and likely the most honed skill of a small game hunter is the ability to stalk in the woods. When pursuing squirrel it's all about being sneaky and stealthy. Too much movement on the ground, too many noisy footsteps, or even the involuntary sneeze, and the squirrels will disappear from sight. Ultimately, it's the bird's eye view that the hunter must overcome.

Photo © Chase A. Fountain, 2013, TPWD



*Doug Jobes is the Wildlife Biologist for Jackson and Lavaca counties. After a three-year enlistment with the US Army as an Airborne Ranger with the 75th Ranger Regiment he graduated from the Daniel B. Warnell School of Forest Resources, University of Georgia. He then received his Masters of Science in Wildlife Ecology and Management from Oklahoma State University. His professional interests include working with small acreage landowners and wildlife management associations.*

## Upcoming Events

### JANUARY

---

- 20 Washington County Wildlife Society Annual Meeting**  
Washington County Fairgrounds Event Center in Brenham, Social begins at 6:00 p.m., stew dinner begins at 6:45 p.m.  
Contact Washington County Wildlife Society c/o Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 979-277-6212.
- 24 Texas Well Owner Educational Training**  
Calhoun County Extension Office, 186 Henery Barber Way, Port Lavaca from 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.  
Contact Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 979-845-1461.  
<http://twon.tamu.edu/training/>.
- 25 Texas Watershed Steward**  
Jackson County Service Building 411 North Wells St., Edna from 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 979-845-1461.  
<http://tws.tamu.edu>.
- 28 Alum Creek Wildlife Management Association Meeting**  
Bluebonnet HQ in Bastrop (Electric Drive and SH21E), 3 p.m. - 5 p.m.  
Contact Robert Trudeau at 512-332-7280 or [Robert.trudeau@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:Robert.trudeau@tpwd.texas.gov).
- 28 Egypt Wildlife Management Association Meeting**  
Tim Krenek's barn in Egypt, 9:00 a.m.  
Contact Brian Gordon at 281-797-4647.
- 28-29 Lexington Varmint Tournament**  
Lexington Memorial Park. Registration begins at 10:00 a.m. on January 28.  
Contact Bill Woodward at 512-217-0984 or Tommy Ramsey at 512-636-9488.

*Continued on page 16*

## Upcoming Events

### FEBRUARY

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>3</b>     <b>Lee County Wildlife Management Association Annual Meeting</b><br/>Sons of Herman Hall in Giddings. Doors open at 5:00 p.m., dinner at 6:30 p.m. Contact Susan Schatte at Texas A&amp;M AgriLife Extension Service, 979-542-2753.</p> <p><b>5</b>     <b>Private Applicators License Training</b><br/>Jackson County Service Building at 411 North Wells St., Edna<br/>Begins at 8:00 a.m.<br/>Contact Mike Hiller at 361-782-3312 or <a href="mailto:mrhiller@ag.tamu.edu">mrhiller@ag.tamu.edu</a>.</p> | <p><b>10</b>    <b>Prescribed Burn Field Day</b><br/>M.O. Neasloney Wildlife Management Area, 20700 St. Hwy. 80 North, 78629<br/>Begins at 8:30 a.m. to approximately 4:00 p.m.<br/>Contact Trent Teinert at 830-424-3407 or <a href="mailto:Trent.teinert@tpwd.texas.gov">Trent.teinert@tpwd.texas.gov</a>.</p> <p><b>11</b>    <b>Dime Box Sportsman's Club Annual Banquet</b><br/>SPJST Hall in Dime Box, 6:30 p.m.<br/>Contact Jeff Shows at 979-224-5483.</p> <p><b>11</b>    <b>Central DeWitt County Wildlife Management Association Awards Ceremony</b><br/>Cuero VFW Hall, 5:00 p.m.<br/>Contact Mary Keating at 361-275-9000.</p> |
|---|---|



Photo © Trey Barron, TPWD

***TIME TO CLEAN OUT THOSE NEST BOXES!***  
***Make sure nest boxes are cleaned out and ready to go by the start of nesting season.***

*Continued on page 17*



*Upcoming events continued*

**MARCH**

- 7-11 Ranching and Wildlife Expo**  
Houston Livestock Show, NRG Center  
[www.rodeohouston.com/Visit-the-Show/Attractions-Activities/Ranching-Wildlife-Expo](http://www.rodeohouston.com/Visit-the-Show/Attractions-Activities/Ranching-Wildlife-Expo).
- 18 Colorado County Wildlife Association Spring Banquet**  
Columbus KC Hall, 4:00 p.m.  
Contact Mark Lange at 979-732-3458 or [mark.lange@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:mark.lange@tpwd.texas.gov)  
Visit [www.ccwma.org](http://www.ccwma.org) for more information.

**Rio Grande Turkey Spring Season**  
(see TPWD Outdoor Annual for County Listings)  
**North Zone**  
Special Youth Season: March 25-26, May 20-21  
**South Zone** - March 18 - April 30  
Special Youth Season: March 11-12, May 6-7



*Photo © Chase A. Fountain, 2012, TPWD*

**APRIL**

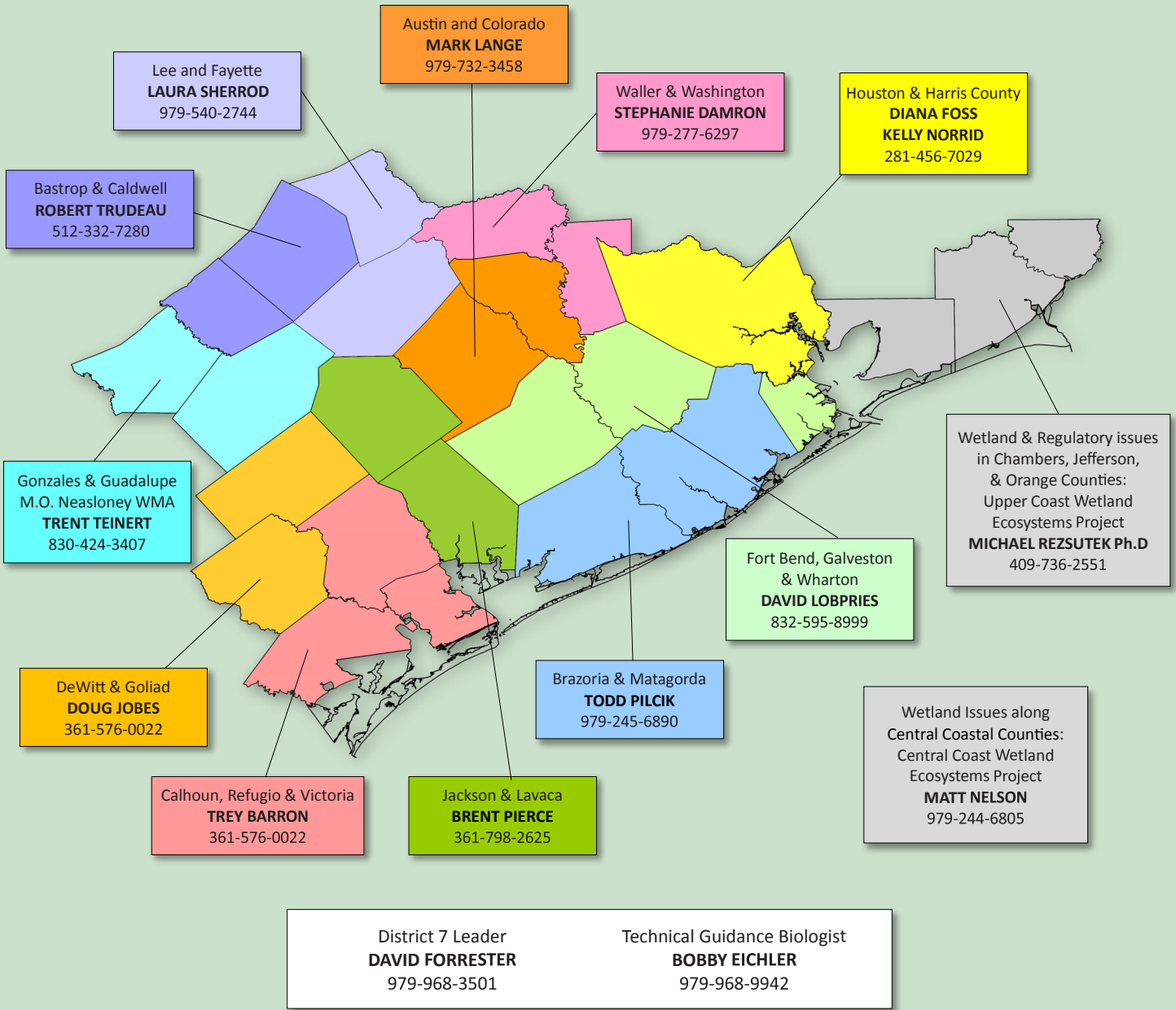
- 6 21st Annual Wildlife Activities and Practices Workshop**  
S.P.J.S.T Education and Nature Center at Cooper Farm (Fayette County), 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.  
The workshop fee is \$12 with refreshments and a catered lunch. Reservations are required before April 4.  
Contact the Fayette County Appraisal District at 979-968-8383.

**Rio Grande Turkey Spring Season**  
(see TPWD Outdoor Annual for County Listings)  
**North Zone** - April 1-May 14  
**South Zone** - April-May 30  
1-Turkey Bag Limit



*Photo © TPWD*

# Our Wildlife Biologists



**Executive Director**

**Carter P. Smith**

**Editors**

**David Forrester**  
**Bobby Eichler**  
**Stephanie Damron**



Life's better outside.®

**COMMISSION**

**T. Dan Friedkin, Chairman**  
Houston  
**Ralph H. Duggins, Vice-Chairman**  
Fort Worth  
**Anna B. Galo** Laredo  
**Bill Jones** Austin  
**Jeanne W. Latimer** San Antonio  
**James H. Lee** Houston  
**S. Reed Morian** Houston  
**Dick Scott** Wimberley  
**Kelcy L. Warren** Dallas  
**Lee M. Bass, Chairman-Emeritus**  
Fort Worth

**TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT MISSION STATEMENT**

*"To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations."*

You may view this publication, as well as other newsletters created by the department, through the TPWD website. Please visit [www.tpwd.texas.gov/newsletters/](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/newsletters/) for more information.

**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:

[www.tpwd.texas.gov](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov)

©2017 Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
PWD LF W7000-2068 (01/17)