2009 Cowbird Trapping Report

Begun in 2000, the cowbird trapping program marked its tenth year in 2009. This season continued the trend of more consistent capture rates that began with the 2005 trapping season. Many traps that had consistently captured high numbers of cowbirds prior to 2005 began seeing significant decreases in the number of birds being trapped. Since that time however, the number of cowbirds trapped has also remained relatively stable. The anecdotal evidence provided by landowners indicates that there has also been an increase in both the numbers of songbirds seen, and species of songbirds.

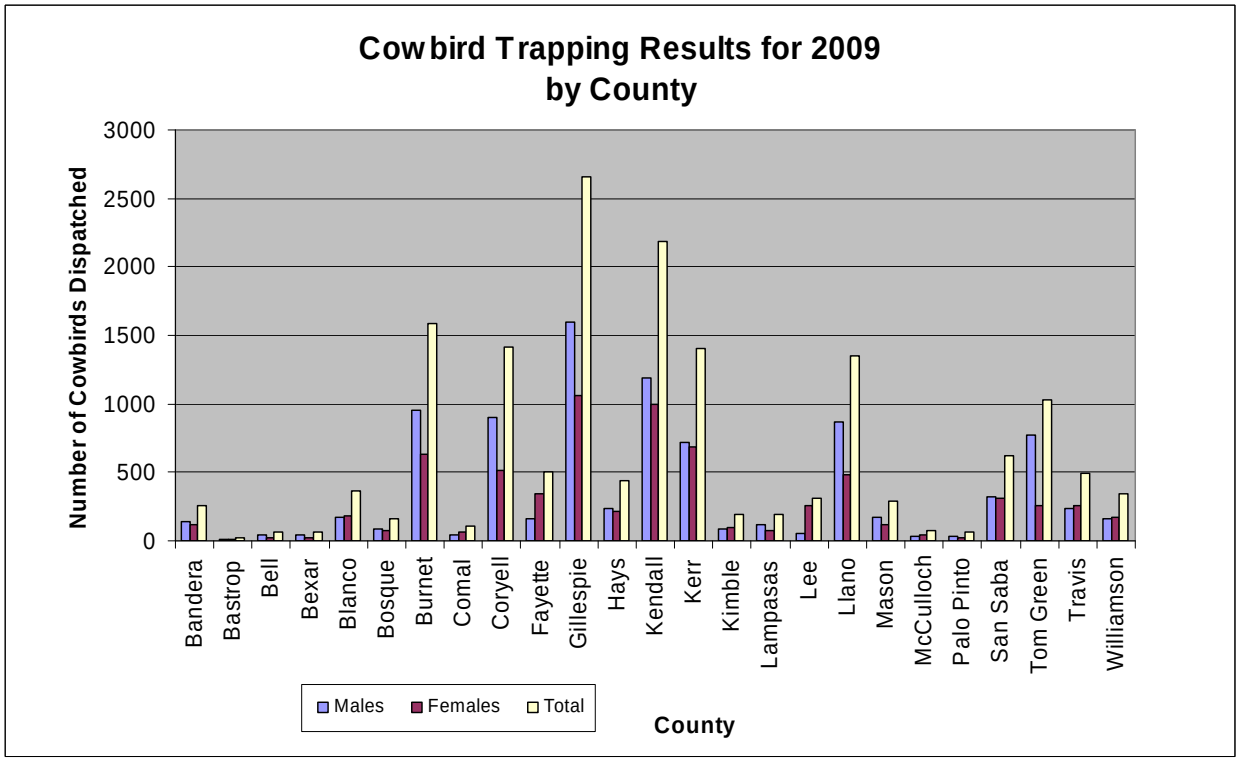
This year traps were operating in the following counties:

Bandera	**Bosque**	**Gillespie**	**Lampasas**	**Palo Pinto**
Bastrop	**Burnet**	**Hays**	**Lee**	**San Saba**
Bell	**Comal**	**Kendall**	**Llano**	**Tom Green**
Bexar	**Coryell**	**Kerr**	**Mason**	**Travis**
Blanco	**Fayette**	**Kimble**	**McCulloch**	**Williamson**

New for 2009 was the development and introduction of the online Cowbird Trapping Application whereby trappers could enter their data via the internet. As is generally the case with all new applications, this one had a few issues to be overcome, so not all trappers were able to enter their data online. However, it was still extremely useful, and with continued improvements it is hoped that many more trappers will be able to enter their data online in the 2010 trapping season.

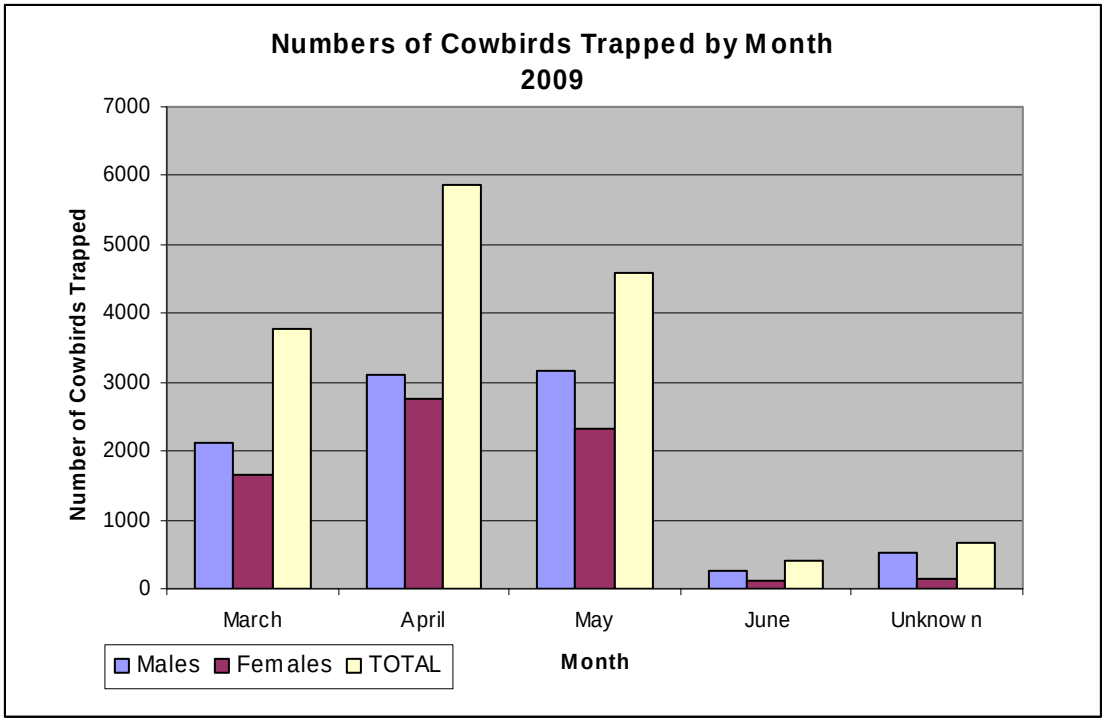
Trapping Graphs and Charts

The following graphs and charts show the data from the 2009 cowbird trapping season as well as provide a comparison of the cumulative data.



2009 Data Table

County	Males	Females	Total
Bandera	143	118	261
Bastrop	14	9	23
Bell	48	20	68
Bexar	44	22	66
Blanco	175	187	362
Bosque	87	73	160
Burnet	953	634	1587
Comal	44	61	105
Coryell	901	515	1416
Fayette	160	345	505
Gillespie	1595	1062	2657
Hays	232	209	441
Kendall	1191	992	2183
Kerr	719	684	1403
Kimble	88	101	189
Lampasas	116	80	196
Lee	58	256	314
Llano	870	479	1349
Mason	175	118	293
McCulloch	30	41	71
Palo Pinto	37	24	61
San Saba	318	307	625
Tom Green	775	256	1031
Travis	233	256	489
Williamson	162	176	338
TOTALS	**9168**	**7025**	**16193**



Non-Target Species

The following chart includes the count of non-target bird species trapped during the 2008 cowbird trapping season. Some trappers did not report the species names, only the count. These are reported as unknown. In addition, it is important to note that these numbers only represent the non-targets trapped; they do not reflect non-target mortality; nor do they take into account that many of the non-targets numbers (particularly cardinals and mockingbirds) represent the same birds being trapped and released multiple times.

Common Name	Number Reported Trapped
American Goldfinch	3
Black-crested Titmouse	28
Blue Grosbeak	2
Blue Jay	1
Bobwhite Quail	1
Brewer's Sparrow	1
Bronzed Cowbird	2
Cassin's Sparrow	1
Chipping Sparrow	19
Common Grackle	26
Common Ground-Dove	2
Eastern Meadowlark	9
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	122
European Starling	6
House Finch	49
House Sparrow	86
House Wren	1
Indigo Bunting	5
Lark Sparrow	1
Lazuli Bunting	1
Lesser Goldfinch	1
Northern Cardinal	359
Northern Mockingbird	17
Painted Bunting	35
Pallas's Bunting	3
Purple Finch	3
Red-winged Blackbird	44
Rufous-crowned Sparrow	1
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	1
Unknown species	58
White-crowned Sparrow	24
Yellow-headed Blackbird	40
TOTAL NONTARGETS TRAPPED	**952**

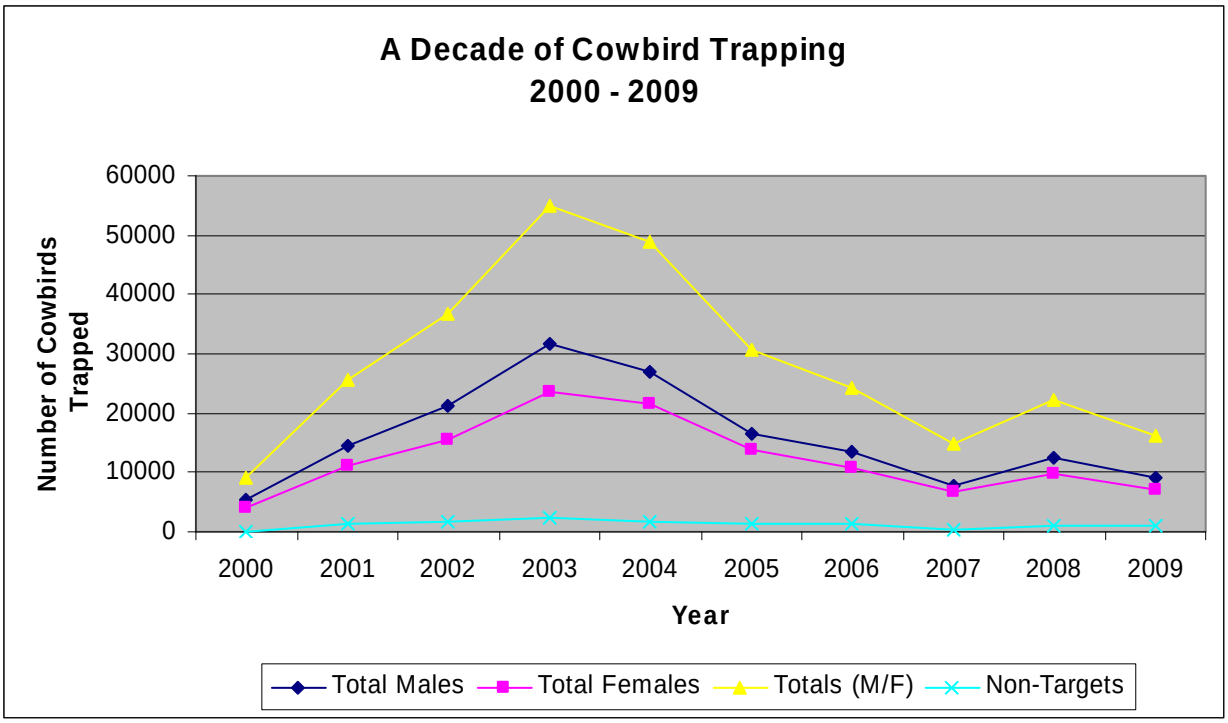
2000 – 2009 Cumulative Cowbird Trapping Results

The 2009 cowbird trapping season continued the general downward trend in capture rates that began in 2003. During the period 2003-2009, traps that had consistently captured high numbers of cowbirds began seeing significant decreases in the number of birds being trapped. During this same period, anecdotal evidence provided by landowners indicated an increase in both the diversity and numbers of songbirds observed.

One possible reason for the downward trend in numbers of birds being trapped is that trapping efforts have reduced the overall cowbird numbers in areas where trapping occurs. With ten years of trapping history in Texas, it is likely that trapping has reduced cowbird parasitism in localized areas, thus partially mitigating the effects of parasitism on songbird productivity. However, it is clear that cowbird trapping must continue as a land management practice in these areas in order to sustain a reduction in cowbird parasitism.

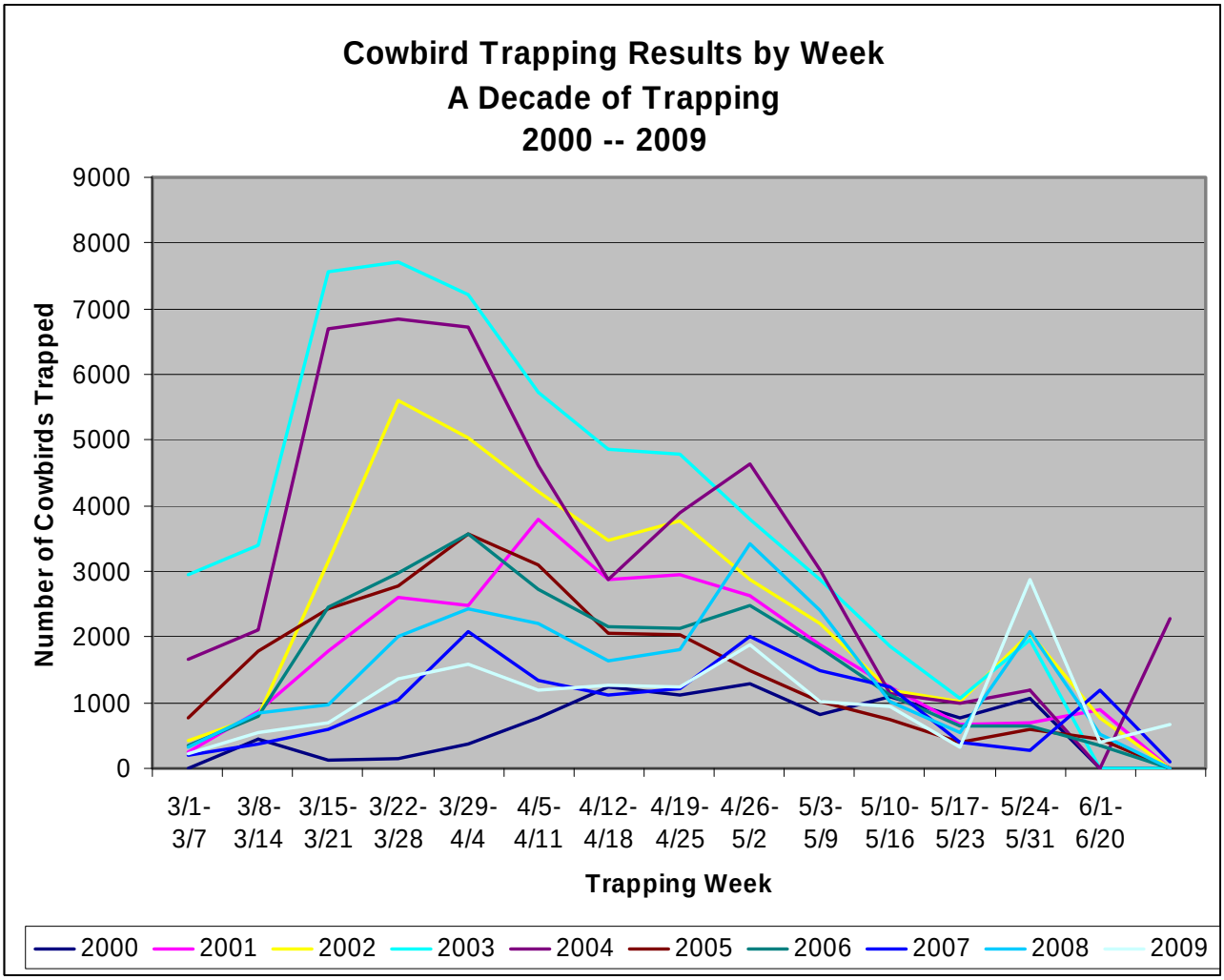
Annual Cowbird Trapping Summary Data Table
2000 – 2009: A Decade of Trapping

	Total Males	Total Females	Totals (M/F)	Non-Targets
2000	5349	3894	9241	161
2001	14500	11140	25640	1266
2002	21125	15461	36586	1737
2003	31549	23434	54983	2227
2004	27125	21561	48715	1694
2005	16618	13914	30532	1243
2006	13404	10889	24293	1304
2007	7832	6831	14663	426
2008	12448	9804	22252	865
2009	9168	7025	16193	952



When weekly trap data for the 2009 season is compared with data from previous years, similar trends can be seen. Weather is probably still the most important factor influencing the peak in numbers of cowbirds trapped. Overall trends show a peak in numbers trapped during weeks 4 to 6 and again in weeks 8 to 10 in most years. One way to explain these peaks is that these are the times when initial nesting and later on re-nesting would be occurring, thus providing the cowbirds with a second opportunity to parasitize nests.

The peak that occurs at the end of the season is an artifact of the data and is due to the end of the trapping season when all remaining cowbirds are dispatched and the traps are closed down for the season.



2000-2009 Cumulative Years of Data for M/F Cowbirds

	Week	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
3/1-3/7	1	0	242	428	2943	1668	772	343	206	328	211
3/8-3/14	2	455	870	795	3402	2112	1774	803	374	840	548
3/15-3/21	3	127	1792	3149	7568	6682	2442	2446	589	974	685
3/22-3/28	4	160	2609	5605	7711	6839	2786	2981	1033	2019	1376
3/29-4/4	5	367	2487	5044	7220	6723	3569	3573	2093	2434	1587
4/5-4/11	6	764	3799	4215	5721	4608	3110	2721	1344	2210	1179
4/12-4/18	7	1228	2869	3461	4865	2888	2048	2169	1112	1632	1275
4/19-4/25	8	1107	2946	3764	4780	3891	2045	2124	1214	1816	1239
4/26-5/2	9	1293	2621	2866	3790	4647	1483	2483	2013	3422	1873
5/3-5/9	10	818	1878	2204	2872	3018	1023	1839	1496	2405	1013
5/10-5/16	11	1103	1234	1193	1861	1143	733	1125	1243	1028	952
5/17-5/23	12	763	658	1015	1058	989	389	655	386	534	320
5/24-5/31	13	1056	698	2067	1954	1186	603	645	279	2078	2879
6/1-6/20	14	0	904	780	0	0	445	336	1190	532	393
	Unk	0	0	0	0	2288	0	0	91	0	663
	Total	9241	25607	36586	55745	48715	23222	24243	14663	22252	16193

Conclusion

Thanks to the efforts of landowners throughout Texas, cowbird trapping programs are making a difference in decreasing individual songbird nest parasitism rates. Although secondary to habitat management designed to enhance songbird populations, cowbird trapping has become an important practice to increase reproductive success of a diversity of songbird, especially when used in conjunction with other habitat improvement practices.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is committed to the cowbird trapping program and would like to thank all those landowners who are participating in the cowbird trapping program and providing their data to us.