



Oaks and Prairies Wildlifer

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

TEXAS
PARKS &
WILDLIFE

Spring 2017

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District Field Notes

BY DAVID FORRESTER

Habitat conditions across the district couldn't be much better. Rainfall has continued to be ample and timely. Everything is green, soil moisture is good, and stock tanks are full. I think it's amazing how wet we've been and for how long. I think spring was actually a bit early this year. I don't really know what else to say about things except to thank the good Lord above and enjoy the good times.

We have finally filled our administrative assistant position. Kelly Mayfield started in her new position February 15, 2017. She's treading water efficiently and is doing a great job supporting the troops in both District 7 and District 8.

The ongoing turkey project in the district is...well, ongoing. We have two graduate students on board doing an outstanding job. Biologist Doug Jobes has a turkey update in this newsletter. This is our last year trapping and tracking birds, so we hope to have some reportable data to share shortly. We will definitely share results with you through this newsletter and also at co-op meetings, etc.

We had a pretty good prescribed burning season this year, burning about 2,000 acres on private lands across the district. This is a great management tool and the burns provide a great educational opportunity for the landowners and managers we work with.

Biologists are gearing up to band doves, set up our public hunting areas, and deal with the new MLDP (Managed Lands Deer Permit) changes. Mourning dove banding begins in June and white-wing dove banding in July. Dove leases need to be signed, sealed, and delivered by the end of May with set up in August. The new MLDP system that is being created has been delayed slightly. Now, we plan on doing testing the first week in June with a roll out July 1. Hopefully, we can work out all the bugs so landowners find a user-friendly system.

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District Field Notes, continued

We start getting warmer this time of year and some days can get awfully “summery” so to speak. Those that suffer from allergies may not appreciate some days as much as others. However, things are new and colors are vivid. 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.

Feral Hog Toxicant Update

http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/nuisance/feral_hogs/

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) has received numerous inquiries regarding the recent announcement from the Texas Department of Agriculture that the Warfarin-based toxicant, Kaput, has been approved for feral hog control in Texas. TPWD has recognized for many years that feral hogs pose substantial risks due to the damage they cause to wildlife, lands, habitat and crops. While TPWD has supported and encouraged responsible feral hog control management practices, it has not yet evaluated the risks and impacts this toxicant may have on non-target species when used as a means to control feral hog populations. TPWD is in the process of requesting the research information utilized by the EPA in recently approving the use of Kaput as a feral hog toxicant. Once an assessment of the research on Kaput is completed, TPWD hopes to express its position on the risks the use of this toxicant may have on Texas wildlife.



Photo@Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Chronic Wasting Disease Update

<http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/diseases/cwd/>

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a neurological disease in deer, elk, moose and other members of the deer family, known as "cervids."

The disease was first recognized in 1967 in captive mule deer in Colorado, and has since been documented in captive and free-ranging deer in 24 states and two Canadian Provinces. The first case of CWD in Texas was discovered in 2012 in free-ranging mule deer in an isolated area of far West Texas.

This disease presents numerous challenges for state wildlife agencies across North America. Of concern is the potential for decline within deer, elk, or other susceptible cervid populations. In addition, CWD could have indirect impacts on hunting, hunter participation, and economic benefits derived from big game hunting. In Texas, hunting is a \$2.2 billion economic engine, supporting many rural towns across the state.

Because eradication is thought to be impossible once CWD becomes established in a population, it is imperative that a sound CWD management program is established to reduce the severity of implications resulting from the disease. Of course, disease

prevention is the best approach to protect cervid populations and prevent social and economic repercussions. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) have developed a cooperative CWD management plan to guide both agencies in addressing risks, developing management strategies, and protecting big game resources from Chronic Wasting Disease in captive or free-ranging cervid populations.

Chart: Chronic Wasting Disease cases found in Texas as of March 20, 2017

CWD Positive Confirmation Date	Free Range / Captive	County	Source	Species	Sex	Age
2/18/2017	Breeder Deer-Released	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	M	3.5
2/17/2017	Free Range	Hudspeth		MD	M	7.5
2/17/2017	Free Range	Hudspeth		MD	M	5.5
2/9/2017	Free Range	Hudspeth		MD	M	3.5
2/9/2017	Free Range	Hudspeth		MD	M	7.5
1/24/2017	Free Range	Medina		WTD	M	1.5
1/18/2017	Free Range	Hartley		MD	M	4.5
1/18/2017	Breeder Deer-Released	Uvalde	Facility #3	WTD	M	5.5
1/18/2017	Breeder Deer-Released	Uvalde	Facility #3	WTD	M	3.5
1/6/2017	Free Range	Dallam		MD	M	2.5
1/6/2017	Free Range	El Paso		MD	M	4.5
12/6/2016	Free Range	Dallam		Elk	M	8.5
10/28/2016	Breeder Deer	Uvalde	Facility #3	WTD	M	5.5
10/28/2016	Breeder Deer	Uvalde	Facility #3	WTD	F	4.5
9/21/2016	Breeder Deer-Released	Medina	Facility #3	WTD	M	3.5
6/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	F	1
6/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	M	1
6/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	F	1
6/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	M	1

White-tailed Deer-WTD, Mule Deer-MD

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Chronic Wasting Disease Update, continued

CWD Positive Confirmation Date	Free Range / Captive	County	Source	Species	Sex	Age
6/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	F	4
6/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	F	4
6/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	F	4
6/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	F	4
6/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	F	4
6/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	F	4
6/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	F	4
6/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	F	4
6/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	F	4
4/13/2016	Breeder Deer	Lavaca	Facility #2	WTD	M	3
4/13/2016	Breeder Deer	Lavaca	Facility #2	WTD	M	3
4/13/2016	Breeder Deer	Lavaca	Facility #2	WTD	M	3
4/13/2016	Breeder Deer	Lavaca	Facility #2	WTD	M	3
4/1/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #4	WTD	F	4.5
3/29/2016	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #3	WTD	M	3
3/25/2016	Free Range	Hartley		MD	M	3.5
3/18/2016	Free Range	Hudspeth		MD	M	5.5
2/4/2016	Breeder Deer-Released	Medina	Facility #3	WTD	M	3
9/14/2015	Breeder Deer	Lavaca	Facility #2	WTD	M	3
8/12/2015	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #1	WTD	M	2.5
8/6/2015	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #1	WTD	M	2.5
8/6/2015	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #1	WTD	M	2.5
6/30/2015	Breeder Deer	Medina	Facility #1	WTD	M	2.5
12/4/2014	Free Range	Hudspeth		MD	M	4.5
12/28/2012	Free Range	Hudspeth		MD	M	3.5
12/10/2012	Free Range	Hudspeth		MD	M	4.5
12/2/2012	Free Range	Hudspeth		MD	M	5.5
12/1/2012	Free Range	Hudspeth		MD	M	4.5
7/12/2012	Free Range	Hudspeth		MD	F	6.5
7/12/2012	Free Range	Hudspeth		MD	F	4.5

Summary of CWD in Texas

- As of March 20, 2017 a total of 49 CWD cases have been verified in Texas
- CWD in white-tailed deer has been found in the following counties: Medina, Lavaca, and Uvalde.
- CWD in mule deer has been found in the following counties: Hudspeth, Hartley, El Paso, and Dallam.
- 16 CWD cases have been verified in free ranging mule deer mostly along the Texas / New Mexico border.
- In December of 2016 the first free range elk with CWD was discovered in Dallam County, Texas.
- A total of 32 white-tailed deer cases have been confirmed.
 - 26 of the 32 cases have been in four breeding facilities.
 - 5 of the 32 cases have been breeder deer, released into high-fenced pastures.
 - On January 24, 2017 the first case of CWD in a free ranging white-tailed deer was discovered within Surveillance Zone 3 in Medina County.

For more information on CWD, please see our website at: <http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/diseases/cwd/>

The War on Gophers, are we Creating Friendly Fire?

WRITTEN BY TRENT TEINERT

“How do I control those pesky gophers?” is a question I hear often as I visit ranchers in the Post Oak Savannah of Texas. I usually return the question with an inquiry regarding what problems people have encountered with gophers.

Usually without fail, the conversation quickly devolves into repeated stories of extravagant failed attempts to eradicate a pesky gopher. As I listen to these stories, my mind pictures actor Bill Murray playing grounds keeper Carl Spackler in the 1980 movie *Caddyshack*. He relentlessly pursued a pesky gopher by all means necessary including shooting, drowning, and at last resort explosives! Comically, but unfortunately this is similar to many of the stories I hear. This brings me to the question, “What damage is the gopher causing?” Most of the time, the only answer I receive is that gophers create a few unsightly dirt mounds in a pasture.



Plains pocket gopher. Photo@Trey Barron

I would like to shed light on this little critter and maybe help it gain a little appreciation in the process. There are about 10 species of pocket gophers throughout Texas with the Attwater’s Pocket Gopher (*Geomys attwateri Merriam*) being the most common in the Post Oak Savannah. This pocket gopher is about eight inches in length and is strictly fossorial, meaning it spends most of its time under the ground. Pocket gophers get their name

from pouches, or pockets in their cheeks which they use to carry food. They create burrows underground with their strong feet and long claws. Their eyes are small because they seldom emerge from their burrows and do not need highly developed sight to navigate in their dark underworld. As one would expect, they are thought to be active at all times of day or night because they live in 24-hour darkness. They typically breed through most of the year, except during the hottest summer months, producing two to three young per litter about twice a year. They eat primarily a diversity of native plants and plant roots.

Pocket gophers’ unique underground lifestyle can make them hard to observe and consequently hard to appreciate. These mammals are very well equipped for their lifestyle and because they are such efficient diggers they are able to create their own habitat underground. As part of a larger ecosystem, the gophers’ maze of underground tunnels benefit more than just themselves. Burrowing owls, snakes, rabbits, other rodents, rely on these tunnels for refuge. I have even observed a bobwhite quail use a gopher hole to escape a predator. Not only do these gophers provide habitat for other animals, they also help maintain soil health.

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The War on Gophers, are we Creating Friendly Fire?, continued

Their frequent digging excavates soil which is pushed to new areas or deposited in little mounds at the surface of their tunnels. This process exposes new seeds as the gopher acts like a little tractor disc turning over the soil and aiding nutrient cycling. As gopher colonies expand, contract, or relocate their tunnels help aerate the soil and fight compaction which aids in soil water absorption, reduces rain runoff, and allows plant roots to easily penetrate the soil.

In closing, next time you declare war on your local gopher colony take a second to think about the reason you want to eradicate them and see if the benefits they are providing you outweigh the minimal “damage” they might be causing on your property. I think many times people will see that the cost of gopher eradication drastically outweighs any benefit that is observed by their removal. When you hear the words of Bill Murray’s character Carl Spackler “Who’s the gopher’s ally? His friends. The harmless squirrel and the friendly rabbit.” remember that the gopher is part of a larger ecosystem and its presence on the landscape is a sign of a healthy property.



Gopher mounds across a sandy pasture. Photo@Trent Teinert

Reference:

Schmidly, David J. 2004. *The Mammals of Texas*. Sixth Edition. University of Texas Press.



Trent Teinert has a B.S. and M.S. in Range and Wildlife Management both from Texas A&M-Kingsville. Trent started his career in 2011 with TPWD covering Victoria, Calhoun, and Refugio counties. In late 2013, Trent transferred over into the South Texas District and took on responsibilities in Karnes and Wilson Counties. District 7 was fortunate to be able to lure Trent back in 2015 and he began covering Gonzales and Guadalupe counties and caring for the Neasloney Wildlife Management Area. Trent resides in Seguin, Texas and is married to a wildlife biologist.

Plant Profile: Red Mulberry

WRITTEN BY TRENT TEINERT

Red Mulberry (*Morus rubra*) is a small to medium tree that can typically grow to about 30 feet tall. In Texas, it ranges across the eastern half of the state and is primarily found in shaded areas that have moist soil. In the eastern part of its range, it can be found in varying terrain due to higher rainfall. In the western portion of its range it is primarily found along rivers, creeks, and other riparian areas. The leaves are simple and typically heart shaped, with a slightly rough texture ranging in size from 3 to 7 inches. These trees produce a fruit that is similar in appearance to an elongated dewberry and when ripe, turn from green to a purplish color.



Photo@Carl Fabre, Wildflower Center Digital Library

Many times, people are disappointed because they find that a particular mulberry tree does not produce fruit. This is because red mulberries have male and female trees and only female trees produce fruit. It is even less common to find a fruiting tree, because only a small portion of female trees consistently produce fruit every year. Once you find a fruiting tree, feel free to sample nature's bounty, because these fruits are edible and quite tasty! However, they will leave your tongue stained purple with evidence of your plunder! The fruits can be eaten raw or made into preserves or other dishes. If you find a fruiting tree, take advantage of it while you can. These fruits are only ripe for a short period of time and are highly desired by wildlife as well. This species can be confused with the white mulberry (*Morus alba*), which is actually an exotic species native to China. White mulberry trees produce a similar fruit, however it is white, less juicy, and bland in flavor when ripe. White mulberries can hybridize with red mulberries, potentially decreasing the genetic integrity of the native red mulberry. These hybrid trees can be observed with half red and half white fruit. The wood of the red mulberry can be attractive, but it is seldom used for wood products. The wood is strong and Native Americans sometimes used it when building bows.

If you are looking for a tree that will provide habitat for wildlife, and also has properties that humans can enjoy, take a look at the red mulberry. Maybe, with a little searching, you can find one on your property! If not, visit one of Texas' many native plant nurseries and bring one home with you today!



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Spring Cleaning for Wildlife

WRITTEN BY ROBERT TRUDEAU

With scattered showers, warmer temperatures and a complete green-up of the landscape, we can see that the spring season is in full swing here in Texas. For many, the lushness of spring may be their favorite time of year. For others, it may just be the “honey-do” season.

I will not deny that annual spring cleaning is not one of my favorite hobbies. Cleaning the gutters out, fixing the lawnmower, organizing the garage, the list goes on... and usually involves busted knuckles! Though tedious, the need for a good spring cleaning is warranted. This brings me to an activity that is widely overlooked. Many people tend to ignore the spring cleaning for our fuzzy or feathery friends. Whether it is to comply with the 1-D-1 Wildlife Appraisal, or just a favorite pastime, we have the obligation to provide clean houses, feeders, and other wildlife facilities to the wildlife we enjoy.

By providing shelter, food, and water, we are supplementing some of the basic necessities many of our wildlife species require, not just for living, but for reproduction as well. In some instances, we may actually increase organism numbers past the actual carrying capacity on the landscape, which can lead to a localized overpopulation. This increase in wildlife densities within an area can elevate the likelihood for disease transmission. Though we can't guarantee 100 percent disease control, there are many little things we can do to lessen the likelihood that we will experience a problem.

For a wide variety of wildlife feeders and equipment, the most common approach is to use a 10 percent bleach solution to soak or spray the item. For some things, like plastic bird feeders, it is easier to soak them in a bathtub or a bucket; while, for larger deer feeders or nest boxes, it is easier to spray them down and rinse them off. Ultimately, the ideal method of cleaning just depends on what one is trying to clean and for what species. Another important thing to

remember when cleaning your items, is to make sure you clean the area around it. This past hunting season, a frequent comment biologists received was that hunters found uneaten corn under their feeders because there was so much food availability in the natural habitat. This corn will rot and ferment under the feeder. Old corn should be removed from the ground and disposed of to prevent problems. If it were eaten, potential problems such as aflatoxin in deer or aspergillosis in birds could arise. By cleaning the surrounding area, we can reduce the possibility of an animal getting into something that may be tainted.

In this day and age, there is a wide array of feeders, nest boxes, and water troughs that are readily available for you to purchase and put out for different wildlife species. Many of these items are tailored to a wide array of animals, while some are more species specific. Just be aware that even though an item is designed for birds (for example), other animal species may utilize it. There are very common examples of this such as raccoons eating out of a deer feeder, deer drinking out of a hummingbird feeder or mice utilizing a nest box.

With the wide variety of feeders, nest boxes and waterers available today we should take the time to evaluate the cleaning needs of each and strive to implement a cleaning regime that fits each item. There is a lot of information and cleaning recommendations available through the Internet. Also, the companies that produce wildlife products may have information on cleaning and sanitizing. Finally, your local wildlife professional should have information or be able to direct you to a good source. By offering the cleanest facilities to our wildlife species, we can minimize the chances that a serious wildlife issue will arise. After all, not only do we like to see our wildlife on a daily basis, we like to see it vibrant and healthy.



Robert Trudeau is the Wildlife Biologist for Bastrop and Caldwell counties and offices out of Bastrop. He graduated from Tarleton State University in 2011 with a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Management and a minor in Biology. Robert was hired by TPWD in 2013, where he filled the position of Resource Specialist for the Lost Pines Complex until accepting his current biologist position in 2014. Prior to working for TPWD, Robert has also worked as a Biological Science Technician for the US Fish and Wildlife Service in South Dakota, Illinois, and Nebraska.

What is Wrong with this Deer?

WRITTEN BY MARK LANGE

During deer season, both trail cameras and hunters are scattered throughout the Texas landscape in high numbers. Hunters regularly check their cameras in hopes that the next picture is a buck the size that no man has seen before!

Well, maybe a more realistic assessment would be a buck bigger than they have ever seen or harvested. Sometimes a large set of antlers is not what stops a hunter from scrolling over the seemingly endless pictures of tree branches moving, it's an image of a deer that possesses some abnormal blemish that catches their attention. The next step is an email and/or phone call to their biologist with the question of "what is wrong with this deer?" While sometimes there is no clear answer, most of the time we can produce a very likely explanation as to why that deer is presenting the symptoms it is. My purpose of this article is to bring your attention to a few of the more common health issues that arise in deer so that maybe by next deer season, if you get one of those "odd" pictures, you will already have a good idea on what condition that deer has.

We get numerous calls about deer limping and upon closer observation, the deer has a swollen foot. Many are quick to assume that the bones in the lower leg must have been fractured in some way, or the deer had something puncture the skin and it got

infected. While both of those are possible, typically a deer that is limping and has a swollen foot has contracted *Fusobacterium necrophorum*; otherwise known as hoof rot. While you may think that wet years produce more cases of hoof rot, that is not necessarily the case. Being a bacteria, obviously it needs moist conditions to thrive but drier years may actually produce more cases of hoof rot as animals congregate more around limited water supplies. Many of the calls we get are about bucks having these symptoms. Could it be that hunters don't pause long enough at pictures of doe to notice? That's possible, but it could also be that bucks typically have a larger home range than doe and during rutting activities will frequent specific high traffic areas (scrapes and rubs) therefore increasing their chances of coming in contact with the bacteria. The bacteria enters the body via a lesion of some sort, healthy skin will prevent a deer from contracting it. Obviously, most deer at some point in their life will sustain some sort of an abrasion on their lower extremities. If the bacteria is present at sites they frequent at that time, then there is a good chance they will contract this bacteria. After contracting the bacteria, the hoof area will swell and in many cases the hoof and surrounding tissue will slough leaving exposed bone or soft tissue. This bacteria can also be ingested and cause infections in the mouth, throat, and internal organs.



*Deer with hoof rot in two hooves.
Photo@Ryan Schoeneberg, TPWD*

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What is Wrong with this Deer?, continued

What can we do to help a deer with hoof rot? While infected cattle with a treatable condition can be caught, obviously there is little we can do to help a deer with hoof rot except let nature take its course. Hoof rot seems to be noticed more in the fall and early winter months. Possible explanations for that are; 1) that is when more people are actively watching deer during deer season, or 2) that is when food sources become more limited and deer are more common at feeders. One thing that may help the rest of the deer herd in your area is to limit the reasons for deer to congregate in a small area, in other words stop supplemental feeding. This will limit the chances of more deer coming in contact with the contaminated soil around a feeder. Supplemental feeding could resume well after you don't see any deer present with the hoof rot symptoms in that area.



*Close-up of hoof rot after hoof has sloughed.
Photo@Mark Lange, TPWD*

Besides the question of what is wrong with this deer, the next question is always “will the deer survive?” There is no guarantee it will or it will not. Obviously, if the deer has it in more than one hoof, that will decrease its ability to travel, escape predation, and forage leading to an increased chance of mortality. Deer infected in just one hoof will be less prohibited in movement and have a greater chance of surviving.

Another common call is about “worms” coming out of the nose or in the throat of a recently harvested deer. Those “worms” are nasal bots and are the larval stage of a specialized fly in the genus *Cephenemyia*. The fly lays its eggs on the tip of the deer's nose and the larvae travel into the nasal passage of the deer. Nasal bots live off the mucus of the deer and cause no harm to the animal until their numbers become too excessive. While somewhat disturbing to see, these organisms do not affect the quality of the meat in any way. They are extremely common in deer and if you have harvested many deer at all, you have likely seen them. As the larvae mature, they will leave the nasal cavity of the deer. There is no effective way to prevent deer from getting nasal bots. So next time you harvest a deer take a look, but only if you want to notice them.



*Nasal bot in a deer's nose.
Photo@Ryan Schoeneberg, TPWD*

We have all heard the stories or seen the results firsthand of battling bucks getting their antlers locked up. That rarely ends well, but that is not the only hazard bucks subject themselves to when battling for dominance. We see trail cam pictures of bucks with sometimes very large swollen areas around their neck or chest. Not by coincidence at all, many of these pictures turn up a few weeks after the major rutting activity. Typically, these swollen areas are abscesses that have developed from a buck being gored by another buck. After the antler breaks the skin, a pocket of infection (abscess) starts under the skin and will continue to grow until an area of the skin is compromised. At that time the abscess will rupture and drain. This is the best thing that can happen for the animal, as the infection can now drain out and that area will gradually heal from the inside out.

What is Wrong with this Deer?, continued

Most of the time, once the abscess has drained the animal will recover relatively quickly. In most cases it is unknown how widespread the infection may be in the body of the deer so it would not be recommended to eat the meat of a deer with an abscess.

There are many other conditions in nature that affect deer in this area and we could probably dedicate an entire newsletter to just the topic of potential health issues in deer. Many of these conditions have always been present in the deer herd to some extent and will always be. Like I mentioned before, there is nothing we can do to prevent most of them and nothing we can do to treat animals with them except let nature be nature. The conditions I covered in this article are a few that I have received calls about in the last year or two. If you have picture of a deer with some abnormality I did not cover in this article, I would encourage you to contact your local biologist.



Bushnell

12-14-2016 08:59:11

*Deer behind feeder has large abscess.
Photo@Anonymous landowner*



PRIMOS TRUTH CAM 35 087F 08-07-14 THUR 06:23:43 PM

*Deer with an extreme case of cutaneous fibromas.
Photo@Anonymous landowner*



Mark Lange is the wildlife biologist for Colorado and Austin Counties where he started in June 2012. He grew up in the Texas panhandle in the small town of Nazareth. He attended West Texas A&M University where he completed his Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology/Wildlife Science in 2006 and his Masters of Science Degree in Biology in 2011. Mark offices out of the Columbus field office. Mark has diverse interests and enjoys working with landowners towards their management goals.

We Set the Place on Fire: Our Prescribed Burn Was a Success

WRITTEN BY SELENA AND KEITH SCHINDLER

The following is a landowner testimonial. This February, District 7 staff assisted with a prescribed burn on the SnK Wildlife Reserve. The 408-acre property in Dewitt County is owned by Selena and Keith Schindler.

I had heard of prescribed burns and my wife, Selena, had been wanting to do one for years. Boy, was I scared to death of the idea. I didn't need to be, though. We pulled it off without a hitch.

So, why the burn?

Well, if you've read about The SnK you might have heard that we are involved in a Grassland Restoration project in the front 35 acres of our place. We're working on turning the old hay field back into a native prairie. King Ranch Blue Stem and Coastal Bermuda had been planted and those are not native grasses.

We want to bring back the right stuff.

Our plans are to kill off the KR Blue Stem and Bermuda, then plant native grasses and wildflowers. To do the kill we're going to have Round Up sprayed, but there was so much dead growth that it was advised to burn the acreage, then do the spraying.

We couldn't have pulled the burn off without the help of Texas Parks and Wildlife folks. Trey Barron, Mark Lange, Greg Pleasant, Bobby Eichler, and our Biologist, Doug Jobes were instrumental in our success. Doug has spent some time with us in getting ready for the burn, helping me get the burn breaks in place and planning our next phases in this adventure.

As I mentioned, the burn was pulled off without a hitch and I won't hesitate to do more. As Greg Pleasant put it, "We do all of our burns using this Cookie Cutter method. So far, every burn has been successful and we've done a bunch." I'm so glad that we didn't mess up their record.

Well, that's enough of the verbiage, so how about some photos?

Mark Lange sets off the test burn. This was done to see how well the grass was going to burn and how it was going to behave.



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We Set the Place on Fire: Our Prescribed Burn Was a Success, continued



Mark keeps tabs on the test burn. Greg Pleasant and Trey Barron can be seen in the background, prepping gear for when the actual burn was a go.

Mark supervises Selena as she “Puts Fire On The Ground.” She was pretty excited about getting to do this. I got my chance later, but no photos of me.



This is the Back Burn taking off. The idea behind it is to slowly burn into the wind a swath that’s 30 feet wide. This blackened area was to become a safety area in addition to the burn breaks that I put in place. This was done to help protect the neighbors’ fields, down wind.

Once the back burn was completed, side burns were begun. Two teams simultaneously started fire down the sides of the burn unit. Once the side burns moved down the length of the unit, the burn was then worked across the upwind side of the unit. This was referred to as closing the loop. Once that was done the winds pushed the fire quickly into the unit. That’s when things got really exciting. Hot, too, if you were near the edge of the burn.



Here things are starting to take off. As you can see, there’s a fair amount of green for February. We almost missed the “Window” for doing a burn. Luckily, we had some good, dry fuel. The green that’s visible is not the type of grass that we are needing to kill off, but unfortunately, it will get sprayed too. Luckily we’re going back in with the natives.

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We Set the Place on Fire: Our Prescribed Burn Was a Success, continued

This was not long before the fire really took off. When things really started burning there was so much smoke you really couldn't see the flame.



Looking north, the fire has consumed most of the dry stuff.

Looking South, towards the house, you can see how much actually burned. There's a fair amount of green left, but the heavy dry stuff is gone.



This looking toward the front gate. I sure wish that I had shot before the burn photos, then you'd have a good idea of how much grass we burned.

Having read about and hearing presentations about Prescribed Burns I had a bit of an idea of what they are like. Thing is though, reading about and hearing about is not the same as doing. Sure was a neat adventure.

Selena and I have decided that we want to get some formal training, so we can do our own burns. Can't always have Texas Parks and Wildlife out.

In closing, our hats are off to Trey Barron, Mark Lange, Greg Pleasant, Bobby Eichler, and Doug Jobes. These guys were educating and entertaining. We sure appreciate their help in pulling this off.

Turkey Research Project: 2017 Spring Update

WRITTEN BY DOUG JOBES

District 7 staff as well as research assistants from Louisiana State University have continued the Rio Grande turkey project this spring. In addition to Lavaca, DeWitt and Jackson Counties, our efforts were expanded to three additional counties including Fayette, Gonzales, and Caldwell.

Although this required more traveling and monitoring, we were able to successfully capture and GPS tag hens in all six of the counties. The last trapping event occurred on March 1 which resulted in a total of fifty-eight turkeys trapped, out of those, fifty hens were fitted with GPS backpack transmitters. Also, just as last year all of the birds were fitted with uniquely numbered aluminum leg bands.

The GPS transmitters that were placed on the hens during the 2016 year were monitored throughout the early summer until early July. Monitoring revealed that of the birds captured only one successful brood rearing event took place. We speculate that nests were abandoned due to heavy rainfall events at least on one of the study sites, and likely predators caused the hens to flee from their nest on the others. However, of the birds that did initiate nesting we were able to gather information on those selected nest sites. We located nests in a range of different types of habitat including a thick yaupon understory, an open Kleingrass pasture, and mix stands of grass and live oak. While this does imply that turkey hens will initiate nests in various cover types we do not know at this point if any give better chances of successful brooding.

The daily movements of all of the tagged hens were monitored over the course of last year. This information shows differences in distance and area traveled depending on the study area and region. We believe this to be based on the availability of roost sites in a given area. For example, areas indicative of the Blackland Prairie region have long linear distributed habitat corridors associated with riparian areas. Whereas, birds in continuous stands of live oak and post oak showed relatively less distance moved and area used. One particular hen that was captured along a river corridor moved roughly 10 miles from the trap site and returned this winter.

A smoke phase hen captured on camera and one that was captured on a different site. While most folks believe it to be a hybrid of some type, this is a naturally occurring phenomenon. Other colors seen in the wild are reddish and completely black. A light color such as this should make her more susceptible to predation and less likely to successfully brood, so we'll be watching closely.

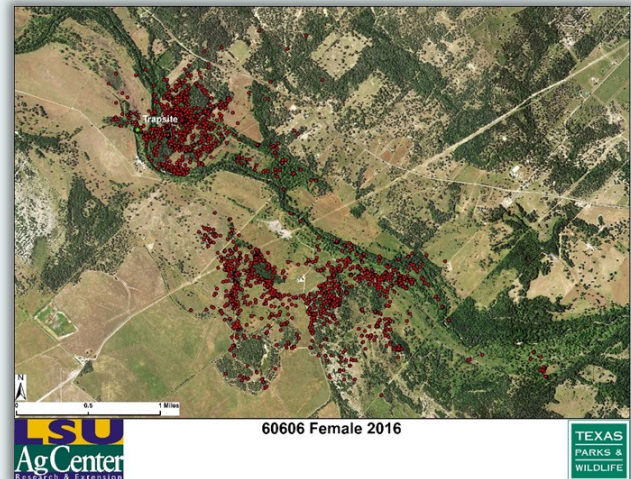
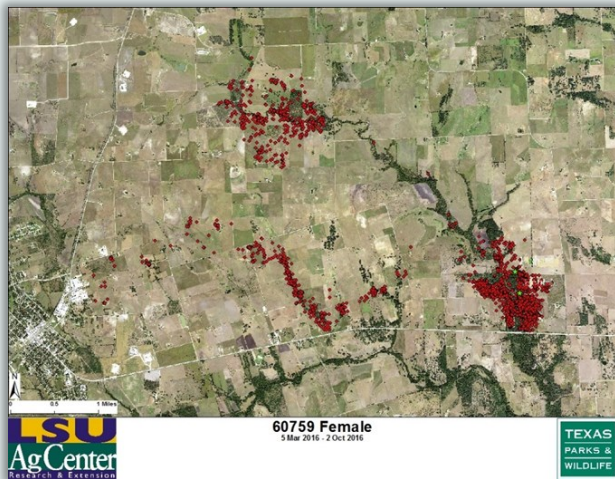


Photos@TPWD

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Turkey Research Project: 2017 Spring Update, continued

In 2017, things appear to be off to good start, and all of the readers know we are off to another early spring. If the rains that we are currently experiencing taper off just a bit we may have some nests to monitor soon. In fact, we noticed several males on a couple different sites strutting and displaying early in February. With a little luck, some of our tagged birds will be more successful this year, and as this project continues we will continue to give periodic updates to our readers.



Differences in movement and areas traveled within Blackland Prairie regions (60759 Female) and Post-Oak Savannah (60606 Female). Photo@TPWD

Photo@TPWD



Gobblers in full strut in February. No fighting yet but they are gearing up for spring. This a photograph of one of the trapping techniques. It's just a simple box trap with a funnel that functions much like a fish trap. Photo@ TPWD



Doug Jobes is the Wildlife Biologist for Dewitt and Goliad 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.

Hunting Conditions: Past, Present, Future

WRITTEN BY MARK LANGE

The 2016-2017 hunting season is one that most people will never forget. That is not because it was filled with excitement; but instead disappointment. Conditions presented unique challenges to all hunters no matter what game they were pursuing. Waterfowl hunters reported, at best, low numbers of harvested birds. Many left what were their most productive areas empty-handed. If my personal waterfowl hunting experiences from this year meant anything, my average was one shot per hunt. Deer hunters experienced the same frustrations. In areas with typically high deer densities the activity was remarkably low. These observations had landowners calling their local biologist in fear that something catastrophic had happened to the deer herd. In reality, the same observations were consistent statewide.



Photo@Earl Nottingham, TPWD

So why did this happen? Does seeing such few animals during the hunting season mean the overall populations have declined? I can clearly remember the weather conditions during early teal season and the conversations I had with bow hunters in October. The topic that dominated those conversations was the unseasonably, not warm, but HOT conditions. Survey data collected before last season suggested that populations were still at or near their normal densities. The reduced activity should not be blamed on massive die offs or over harvest. Keep in mind, the two priorities in the life of a wild animal are to survive and breed. With the above average temperatures and rainfall leading up to last season, the availability of forage for deer lasted well into the hunting season. If an animal can reduce their home range and find everything they need to survive, it is in their best interest to reduce movement. The same goes for waterfowl as they migrate south. They will follow the conditions and if they can survive at their current location, there is no reason to expend more energy by migrating any further.

As we move past this last hunting season, it is not too early to start preparing for the next one. This would be a good time to evaluate your habitat and determine ways to improve it. It may be that some brush management is needed to increase prime choice browse plants for deer, or it may be that your wetland needs maintenance. It is a good time to evaluate the conditions of your property for fawns. Doe will be looking for areas with taller grasses to hide their fawns. Shredding pastures is not recommended during the spring especially. Doing so will eliminate your fawning cover and you run the risk of catching fawns in the shredder and/or destroying nesting habitat and the nests of grassland birds. It may also be a good time to evaluate stocking rates of your livestock. If you are grazing areas where your deer densities are typically highest, you may consider taking the pressure off of that area to allow for better cover conditions for this year's fawns. Also, most of you likely have some sort of problem with feral hogs. This is a great time of year to focus your efforts on feral hog control. This could include setting up new traps or more actively hunting them. Intense efforts now, may reduce the problems they cause you during next hunting season. While some of you will enjoy spring turkey season, the rest of you are in the "offseason". While your options for legal game to pursue are limited this time of year, there is always something you can do to improve your chances of next year being more rewarding than the previous. If you need guidance on what to do I highly encourage you to contact your local biologist.

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Hunting Conditions: Past, Present, Future, continued

Now we can look ahead to next year. Many landowners I have spoken to, have commented on the increased deer activity after the conclusion of hunting season. Go figure right? Many above average bucks were harvested this past season; though the overall numbers of harvested deer was down. That means the upcoming season, if conditions are favorable, should present good opportunities for hunters. The mature bucks that only showed up at night this last season, will likely still be roaming around next year. We can all cross our fingers and hope the conditions will be favorable next year; and that come October and November those deer that flew under the radar this year will slip up at least once. For waterfowl hunters, we can hope that next year brings more favorable temperatures to push more birds to this area.

The majority of this article focused on private lands, so now I want to draw your attention to hunting opportunities available on public lands. Many people do not realize the public hunting opportunities that are made available to them, courtesy of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). There are many options available when it comes to public hunts. TPWD offers public drawn hunts for numerous species including white-tailed deer, mule deer, exotics, pronghorn, and alligators. Many public hunts produce large trophy animals every year. I encourage you to apply for any of the hunts you have an interest in. You never know when you will get the opportunity to hunt somewhere you never thought you would or hunt for a new species. To learn more about all public hunts and the public draw system use the link below.

<http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/hunt/public/>



Mark Lange is the wildlife biologist for Colorado and Austin Counties where he started in June 2012. He grew up in the Texas panhandle in the small town of Nazareth. He attended West Texas A&M University where he completed his Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology/Wildlife Science in 2006 and his Masters of Science Degree in Biology in 2011. Mark offices out of the Columbus field office. Mark has diverse interests and enjoys working with landowners towards their management goals.

Upcoming Events

MAY

- 5 Bobwhite Quail Workshop**
Lavaca Rio Ranch
2050 County Road 127, Edna 77957
Begins at 8:45 a.m.
Contact Mike Hiller at 361-782-3312.



Photo@TPWD

JUNE

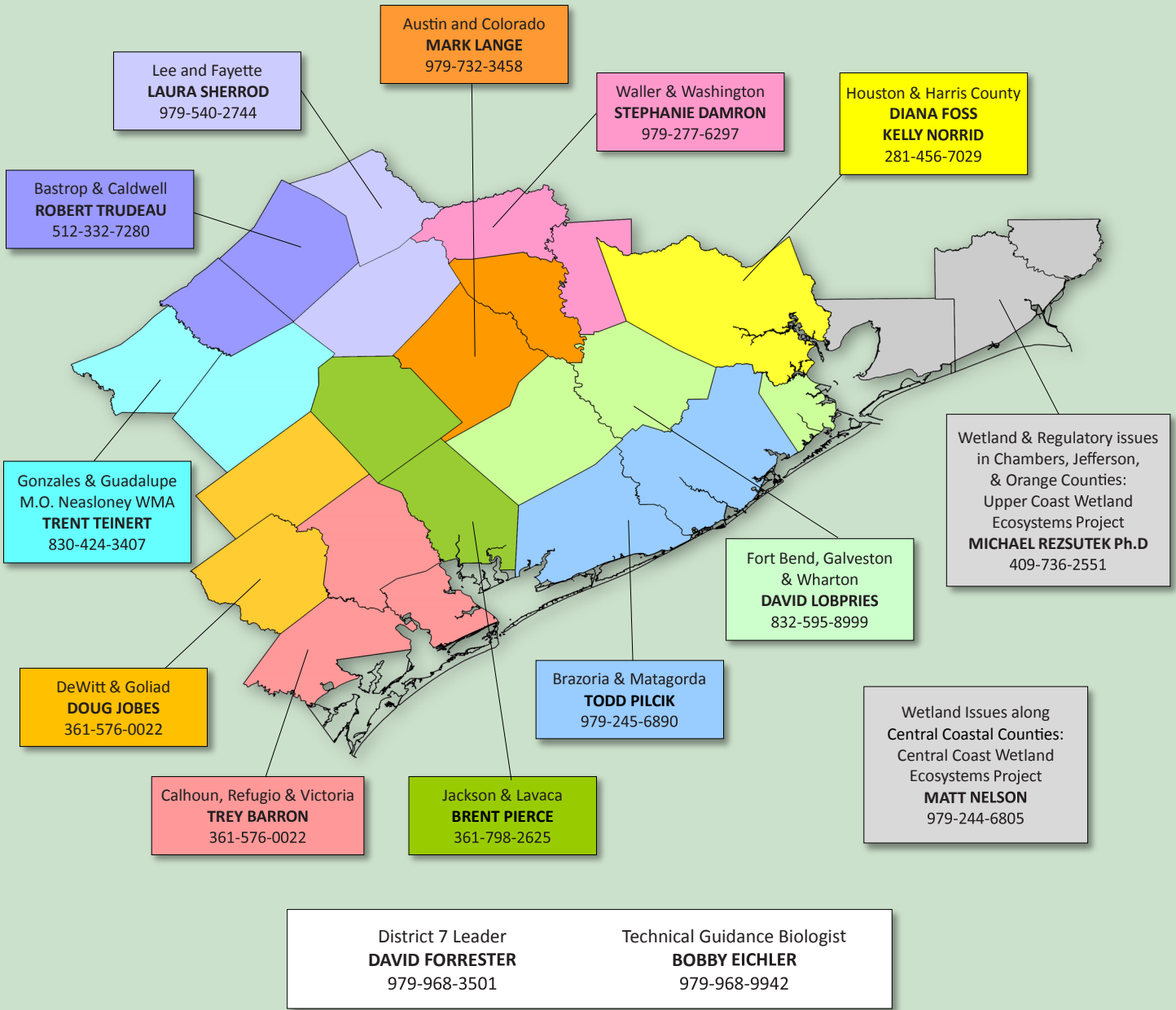
- 24 Texas Big Game Awards-Regions 5, 6, 7 Sportsman's Celebration**
Pitser Garrison Convention Center
601 North 2nd Street, Lufkin 75901
Dinner begins at 5:30 p.m.
Banquet begins at 6:30 p.m.
Contact David Brimager at 210-236-9761.

JULY

- 8 Goliad WMA TWIMS Enrollment Workshop**
Wimberly Building
814 JW Memorial Dr., Goliad
Begins at 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Contact Brian Yanta at 361-645-8204
Or Doug Jobes at 979-255-8475.

- 17 Western DeWitt WMA TWIMS Enrollment Workshop**
Yorktown High School Computer Lab
416 W 4th St, Yorktown
Begins at 5:00 p.m.
Contact Stephen Gowens at 361-564-2977
Or Doug Jobes at 979-255-8475.

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