

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Matador Wildlife Management Area Newsletter

Fall 2024

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

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

Matador WMA Staff:

- **Chip Ruthven** – Area Manager
- **Caroline Ellison** – Assistant Area Manager/Wildlife Biologist
- **Hunter Hopkins** – Assistant Area Manager/Wildlife Biologist
- **Misael Campa** – Wildlife Technician
- **Billy Bob Bumpus** – Wildlife Technician
- **Crystal Neskorik** – Administrative Assistant
- **Phone:** 806-492-3405



A look back at the past season and a look forward to the 2024-2025 season...

The 2023-24 quail season improved from the previous year with harvest rates increasing to 1.05 birds per hunter day, which is the best since 2016. We had a dry winter and early spring in 2023. Good rainfall in May-early June improved range conditions but the summer months (mid-June through August) were hot and dry.



Good rains in early September again improved range conditions. We did receive decent fall rains (October to December). The yearly total was 29.28 inches of precipitation, which was about 7 inches above normal. Dove hunter success was fair with about 5.7 birds harvested per hunter day. Antler quality was decent, but our deer harvest was down. Our buck hunters only harvested one white-tailed deer qualifying for the Texas Big Game Awards.

The moist fall of 2023 was followed by a wet winter in 2024, and we had a good spring green-up. We received over 9 inches of

rainfall in late-April through mid-June, which maintained good range conditions. We did appear to have good to excellent quail nesting and brood rearing success throughout spring and early summer. We then slumped back into dry conditions from mid-June to mid-September. This coupled with exceptionally hot temperatures in August (4 days of $110^{\circ}+ F$), did not bode well for late quail nesting and brood rearing success.

However, our late summer roadside counts started out averaging over 10 birds per mile in August, which is well above average. Unfortunately, the effects of the persistent drought and heat appear to be negatively impacting our bird numbers as September counts have dropped off to 4.57 birds per mile. These numbers are still the best we have had since 2016. As such, we anticipate a fair to good quail season. Dove numbers have been good with hunters on opening weekend averaging over 5 birds per day. The yearly rainfall total through September stands at 18.04 inches, which is below average. Turkey reproduction appears to be fair. Fawn survival appears fair (white-tailed deer) but may have been hampered, especially mule deer (peak fawning in mid-July compared to early June for white-tailed deer), by the exceptionally hot and dry August. Antler quality appears to be about average.

We continued our habitat enhancement activities in 2024 including the spraying of 932 acres of mesquite and 243 acres of shinoak. Grubbing of redberry juniper, mesquite, and salt cedar continues along the Middle Pease River floodplain. Much of these habitat management efforts have been supported by hunter's purchase of Upland Game Bird Stamp, as well as donations from conservation organizations such as the National Wild Turkey Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, and Quail Forever. Many state and private funds are leveraged in a 3:1 match with Pittman-Robertson funds to increase the magnitude of these habitat enhancement projects. These management activities are designed to reduce woody plant cover and enhance herbaceous vegetation. Managing the entire ecosystem is our goal at the Matador WMA and we will continue to use tools such as prescribed fire,

rotational livestock grazing, and chemical and mechanical treatments to enhance the plant and wildlife resources on the Matador WMA...

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

(Previous page) Last season Jason Prescott harvested a 4.5 year old white-tail buck with a typical gross score of 136 2/8. (Left) Kurt Mitchell harvested a 4.5 year old mule deer with a typical gross score of 144 1/8.



Matador WMA Rainfall Record (inches)

| Year | Jan | Feb | Mar | April | May | June | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec | Total |
|------------|------|------|------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 2015 | 1.75 | 0.18 | 0.54 | 4.90 | 8.61 | 2.43 | 2.49 | 2.08 | 0.25 | 2.81 | 3.04 | 1.91 | 30.99 |
| 2016 | 0.60 | 1.09 | 0.93 | 2.57 | 7.01 | 2.94 | 3.81 | 3.52 | 2.03 | 1.12 | 1.26 | 1.26 | 28.14 |
| 2017 | 1.21 | 1.92 | 1.49 | 4.24 | 0.26 | 1.43 | 1.17 | 5.27 | 5.77 | 0.77 | 0.17 | 0.04 | 23.74 |
| 2018 | 0.05 | 0.28 | 0.84 | 0.09 | 3.17 | 1.83 | 1.16 | 2.40 | 2.23 | 8.94 | 0.29 | 2.10 | 23.38 |
| 2019 | 0.12 | 0.01 | 1.09 | 7.23 | 5.80 | 1.22 | 0.75 | 1.88 | 3.83 | 0.44 | 1.19 | 0.34 | 23.90 |
| 2020 | 1.26 | 0.69 | 2.21 | 0.09 | 2.92 | 2.58 | 3.50 | 3.72 | 0.62 | 1.76 | 0.52 | 1.00 | 20.87 |
| 2021 | 0.90 | 0.28 | 2.93 | 0.72 | 4.51 | 3.37 | 2.34 | 1.82 | 2.24 | 0.81 | 0.16 | 0.00 | 20.08 |
| 2022 | 0.25 | 0.49 | 0.00 | 0.12 | 4.17 | 3.53 | 0.12 | 5.80 | 0.0 | 2.75 | 1.41 | 0.36 | 19.00 |
| 2023 | 0.55 | 0.58 | 0.00 | 1.50 | 8.44 | 1.87 | 1.57 | 1.06 | 3.52 | 5.63 | 0.13 | 4.43 | 29.28 |
| 2024 | 1.26 | 1.38 | 1.51 | 1.54 | 3.24 | 5.29 | 1.81 | 0.26 | 1.75 | | | | |
| Avg | 0.70 | 0.87 | 1.17 | 2.01 | 3.55 | 3.07 | 1.88 | 2.35 | 2.48 | 2.32 | 1.00 | 0.95 | 22.34 |

*Monthly Averages (1914 to September 2024) ** Average Accumulations (1914 to September 2024)

2024 Rainfall year-to-date (Jan-September) =18.04 inches

2023-2024 Matador WMA Public Hunts

| Hunt Type | Permit Type | Hunt Dates |
|---------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Dove | APH | 9/1-9/30, 10/11-10/13, 10/26-11/7, 12/20-1/7 |
| Bobwhite Quail | APH | 10/26-11/7, 11/16-12/1, 12/14-1/31 |
| Waterfowl | APH | Each day of hunting season except during special permit hunts |
| Youth Dove and Quail | APH | 10/19-10/20 |
| ADE – Archery Deer | Special | 10/14-10/18 |
| AMD – Archery Mule Deer | Special | 10/21-10/25 |
| GMD – Gun Mule Deer | Special | 12/9-12/13 |
| GDE – Gun Deer Either Sex | Special | 11/11-11/15, 12/2-12/6 |
| Archery Feral Hog | APH | 3/15-3/23 |
| GFH – Gun Feral Hog | Special | 3/10-3/14 |
| YFH – Youth Feral Hog | Special | 3/8-3/9 |
| GTS – Spring Turkey | Special | 4/23-4/25, 4/28-4/30 |
| YTS – Youth Spring Turkey | Special | 4/26-4/27 |
| Coyote | E-Postcard (Drawing) | 2/7-2/9 |
| Fishing | APH or LPU | Year-round, except during special permit hunts |

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

2023-2024 Taylor Lakes WMA Public Hunts

| HUNT TYPE | PERMIT TYPE | HUNT DATES |
|----------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Dove | APH | 09/01/24-11/10/24 |
| Waterfowl (Early Teal) | APH | 09/14/24-09/29/24 |
| Youth Only Deer Either Sex | Special | 11/29/24-12/01/24 |
| Waterfowl | E-Postcard (Drawing) | 01/18/25-01/19-25, 01/25/25-01/26/25 |
| Youth Adult/ Waterfowl | E-Postcard (Drawing) | 12/07/24-12/08/24, 12/21/24-12/22/24, 01/04/25-01/05/25 |
| Youth Only Spring Turkey | Special | 04/05/25-04/06/25 |
| Archery Feral Hog | APH | 02/01/25-04/04/25, 04/07/25-08/31/25 |



Waterfowl use Taylor Lakes WMA as a stopover during migration.

Taylor Lakes Update – Hunter Hopkins, TPWD

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

Centrally located within the panhandle region, the Taylor Lakes WMA serves as a small but highly diverse area, with great access for one to experience the wonders of the outdoors. One of the key features of this WMA is the assemblage of small playa lakes contained within the property. These lakes are a part of a larger congregation of playas which exist within the county and are separated from the large playas of the high plains region by the western extent of knolls and draws more typical of the rolling plains. These playas support large stands of cottonwood trees, also known as galleries. These galleries, along with the playas, prairies, and productive pastureland surrounding them, create what one could compare to a magnetic pull for migrating wildlife species. Waterfowl, birds of

both western grasslands and eastern deciduous forests, several bat species, and a wide host of pollinators assume residence at Taylor Lakes WMA along their annual journeys.

As stated in the 2023 address, rainfall is the key variable that influences overall yield related to wildlife management. Recent drought periods and the use of subsurface water for agricultural production have caused the Taylor Lakes WMA playas to be artificially filled by the use of irrigation. This practice occurs during the fall and winter seasons in order for migrating waterfowl to be able to capitalize upon the existence of surface water. Currently, the Taylor Lakes WMA has received 14.06 inches of rain which is on track with last year's trend. Hopefully, the WMA will catch the same autumn rains as captured in 2023; however, the current prediction models do not hold much optimism. If there is any list of rulings to predicting the panhandle weather, a caveat should preclude stating "Anything can happen".

As far as wildlife production goes, white-tailed deer fawns have been observed in decent abundance. Wild turkey populations are holding, and bobwhite quail abundance has surged due to the repeated decency of rainfall and forb production throughout the past two growing seasons. During the last hunting season, several waterfowl hunters had great success in bagging limits. During the later hunt periods, cold fronts arrived in timely fashion bringing forth great numbers of mallard, pintail, and widgeon ducks.

The largest management need for not only the Taylor Lakes WMA but the entire panhandle region is the need to reduce invading brush species. On the Taylor Lakes Unit, honey mesquite, redberry juniper, and Siberian elm are managed by IPT (Individual Plant Treatment) techniques. These species outcompete desirable plant species and must be kept in check in order to maintain grassland ecosystems. These species are managed by both mechanical and chemical means. Collaboration between our agency and other natural resource agencies has allowed for the removal of undesirable species while fulfilling certification needs for employees maintaining sawyer certifications. Rotational grazing, prescribed burning, and cottonwood pole harvesting are all management activities that are being performed upon this unit and plan to be implemented for the foreseeable future.

Public use opportunities consist of birdwatching and hiking for non-consumptive users. Public hunting opportunities exist in the form of Annual Public Hunting Permit (APH walk-in) for dove, early teal, and archery feral hog hunting. Individuals interested in youth deer, youth turkey, waterfowl, and youth/adult waterfowl hunting opportunities at Taylor Lakes WMA can apply for drawn hunts at https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/hunt/public/public_hunt_drawing/.



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

(above) Rotational cattle grazing is used as a habitat management tool at Taylor Lakes WMA.

Improving Habitat for Bobwhite and Other Grassland Birds— Anne Bartuszevige, Conservation Science Director, Playa Lakes Joint Venture

When visiting Matador Wildlife Management Area (WMA), you may notice the vegetation looks distinctly different from the surrounding area. That's because WMA managers have spent more than two decades removing mesquite and managing the WMA with prescribed fire to keep the mesquite from returning, which contributes to a healthy prairie ecosystem.

What does this intense management mean for the grassland birds that make the WMA their home?

For the last three springs (2022-2024), Texas Parks and Wildlife biologists at Matador WMA and Playa Lakes Joint Venture staff have been collaborating to evaluate the effectiveness of the conservation work. We collected data to determine which grassland bird species live on the refuge and estimate how many. Each spring, two field technicians visit 30 randomly selected sample grids (.6 x .6 mile or 1 km x 1 km in size) on the Matador WMA. Within each grid, bird data are collected at 16 point locations. At each point, a biologist trained to identify birds by sight and sound record all the birds they see and hear during a six-minute timeframe.

At the same time, we collected data at 30 control areas, in grids off the WMA on private land, using the same sampling methods. For these areas, we assume mesquite management is not happening at the same intensity, if at all, as on the WMA.

Based on the data collected, we estimate there are 3,000 more bobwhite quail on the Matador WMA than a property of the same size in the surrounding area. In addition, other grassland bird species like Cassin's Sparrows and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers are also found in higher abundance on the Matador WMA because of the work done to control mesquite invasion.

If you're interested in improving habitat and increasing quail density, reducing or removing the mesquite canopy will help achieve that goal. For advice on how to do this contact the Matador WMA office at 806-492-3405 or your local TWPD District Biologist at <https://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/habitats/county/>.



Photos taken in Lone Canyon pasture illustrating the results of management using fire, grubbing, and herbicide. The left photo is from July 2012. The right photo was taken in the same location in July 2024.

Pastures for Upland Birds- Hailey Hawkins, TPWD

In District 2, we offer several cost/share programs. Our district biologist are in charge of planning and writing proposals for these programs. One of our programs is Pastures for Upland Birds (PUB). PUB is focused on planting native grass and forbs back into areas that are currently in cultivation or areas that were planted to non-native species such as Bermuda, Bahia Grass, Johnson Grass, or various Old-World Bluestems.

Establishing native grasses can be a difficult process. It can take 2-3 years depending on rainfall and summer temperatures. Despite the difficulty, TPWD biologists enjoy working with landowners on re-seeding projects. The program incentivizes controlling non-native species and establishing native plants for the benefit of resident and migratory grassland bird species, Monarch butterflies, and other pollinator species. This program has a minimum project size of 25 acres, with few exceptions. Seed mixes are custom but do require about 15 different species and at least 9 flowering species.

If you want to know further details concerning PUB, contact your local district biologist. If you are not sure who your district biologist is, go to <https://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/habitats/county/> and click on your respective county.



(Left) A freshly planted Pastures for Upland Birds (PUB) project in January

(Right) The same PUB project in May after 5 months of growth.

All Things Dove- Hailey Hawkins, TPWD

Mourning doves are the most numerous and widespread game bird in the US. White-winged doves, once confined to the southwestern US and Mexico border, have now expanded across most of Texas. Every year biologists across the state conduct rural and urban dove surveys. The US population of mourning doves is approximately 160 million. There are approximately 800,000 hunters, which harvest an average of 13 million mourning doves.

The Rolling Plains supports 10% of the state's mourning dove population, and 6% of the white-winged dove population. Every June through August, biologists are also trapping and banding mourning and white-winged doves. Doves are banded, sexed, aged, and then released.

If you harvest a banded bird, please report it at www.reportband.gov.

There are many ways that you can manage for doves on your property. Doves like to land in areas with water and bare ground. If your stock tanks have lots of forbs and grass around them, consider shredding. They also like trees such as old or dead mesquite trees that provide nesting and roosting cover. Doves are granivorous, meaning they eat seeds. They prefer seeds like sunflower, wheat, milo, and western ragweed. If you are interested in what seeds they are eating, open their crop and take a look. If you are unsure about some of the seeds, send a photo to your local biologist with a reference for scale. Visit <https://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/habitats/county/> to find a TPWD biologist near you.



(left) A juvenile white winged dove shows off its new leg band.

Summer Internship on the Matador WMA – Sam Wagner, South Plains College

My name is Sam Wagner, and I am going into my sophomore year as a biology student at South Plains College in Levelland. This summer, I had the amazing opportunity to work as an intern on the Matador WMA. I am incredibly grateful to have had such a competitive and unique opportunity early on in my career. The skills I have honed here will stick with me as I move forward in the field.

I discovered a passion for wildlife management over the past year when I came to the WMA to learn about a prescribed burn. Since then, I have been eager to “get my feet wet” in the field, and my time this summer here at the WMA has done just that. When I started in May, I was very green in the field. With the mentorship of WMA wildlife biologist Caroline Ellison, I have had so much fun learning and loved every bit of it. I have worked on projects including MAPS bird banding, bobwhite quail habitat monitoring, prescribed burns, wildlife surveys, vegetation sampling, and more. Every day brought something new to learn. I also had the opportunity to work with our district biologists on aerial pronghorn surveys and prairie dog captures, allowing me the opportunity to experience what their positions are like. I enjoyed working with and meeting new people in the Panhandle all summer.



Caroline, Hunter, and Chip- the three biologists managing the WMA- have taught me more than I can express. I feel much more comfortable and confident in fieldwork after this summer. I could not have had better teachers. Perhaps the most important lesson I learned at the WMA was that I am certain this field is the one I will continue to work in. I loved getting to know all the critters, birds, herps, and plant life in the Rolling Plains region. The TPWD internship program offers a wonderful experience for those of us who are looking into wildlife fieldwork, and I am very proud of my work at the WMA and excited to have experienced it this past summer. I will be returning with the agency in the fall as a CWD Technician, and I hope to come back again to the WMA later down the road.

It was bittersweet to leave the Matador WMA, but I am excited to continue my career in this field and use all the skills the folks at the Matador have taught me in the future.

(above) Sam Wagner holds a drip torch on a prescribed fire during her summer internship on the Matador WMA.

The Life of a Northern Cardinal – Caroline Ellison, TPWD

The northern cardinal is a charismatic species loved by birdwatchers across the eastern half of the US. In the winter the males are especially noticeable as their bright red plumage stands in stark contrast to the drab or snowy scenery. They keep their bright plumage year-round and are non-migratory, although you might have a harder time spotting them in the summer when the vegetation is thicker. If you listen in the morning, you can hear their bright “peep” calls, and during the summer their territorial calls sound to me like they are singing “Lazers! Lazers! Pew pew pew!”

We have the pleasure of catching many northern cardinals each summer during our bird banding efforts for the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) program. This continentwide effort collects demographic data from songbirds at hundreds of bird banding stations across the US and Canada. The Matador WMA staff have been contributing to the MAPS program since 1998.

We capture birds for MAPS using 8.5 x 40 ft mist nets. Capturing cardinals is always exciting because of their feisty nature and powerful bites. Cardinals have a large bill that is designed to crack open tough seeds, but they are also adept at chomping intern fingers! Once removed from the net, we collect demographic data from each bird and then give it a uniquely numbered leg band before releasing them back into the wild unharmed. This leg band allows us to keep track of individual birds if we recapture them.

Last July we captured a male cardinal that was sporting leg band number 2651-64184; I'll call him 184 for short. The band looked dirty and dull, so I knew that he must have worn it for at least a year. His bright red feathers and bill told me that 184 was a male and that he was at least a year old. I could tell by the shape of his cloaca that he probably had a mate that year. He only had a moderate amount of fat, likely because he was busy feeding his newly fledged chicks.

I checked my records, and learned that I had first banded 184 in August of 2020. He was the final bird captured out of the 221 I banded that summer. He didn't appear to have found a mate that summer based on the shape of his cloaca and the fact that he was 3 grams heavier than 2023 (which is a lot when you only weigh about 35 grams!). I also recaptured 184 in June of 2021, when I was 8 months pregnant with my son. It looks like 184 probably also welcomed a baby that year and was a bit light from taking care of his chicks. 184 was at least a year old in 2020, which means he was at least 4 years old when we captured him in 2023. The record for the oldest wild cardinal is 15 years old, so there is a chance that I will get to cross paths with 184 again.



If you are hunting in the northeast corner of O.X. pasture keep an eye out for a bright red bird. It just might be 184 checking in on you.

(left) A male northern cardinal perched on a branch

Local Business Directory

Lodging and R.V's

Republic Starr RV Park West
817-304-6266
US 83 and Gober St., Paducah

Hunter's Lodge 806-492-2167
902 11th St., Paducah (1 blk N of
Whitaker's) 806-492-2167

Restaurants

Whitaker's Family Restaurant
806-492-1515
1112 Easly, Paducah (US70 W)

Dixie Maid 806-492-3460
1618 Easly, Paducah (US70 W)

Crossroad's Café 806-472-4205
820 Backus St, Paducah (US 83)

Grocery Stores

Moore Thriftway 806-492-3616
1113 9th St., Paducah

United Supermarket 940-937-3631
2105 Avenue F NW, Childress

Convenience Stores

Allsup's 806-492-3947
1602 Easly St., Paducah (US 70 W)

The Store 806-492-2979
1001 9th St., Paducah (US 83 & US70)

Family Dollar 325-261-8498
1515 Easly St, Paducah (US 70 W)

Veterinary Services

Childress Veterinary Hospital
940-937-2558
109 Industrial Circle, Childress (US287 N)

Critter Care 940-937-6065
406 19th Street NW, Childress (US83 S)

Emergency Services – Dial 911

Sheriff, 806-492-3131
Ambulance, 806-492-2336
Fire Station, 806-492-3131
Mejia's Tire & Towing 806-422-1719