

## Texas Plant Conservation: Issues and Challenges

By Flo Oxley

Which animals come to mind when you read the words “rare” ... “threatened” ... “endangered” ... “extinct” ...? Many people say the dodo or the dinosaurs. Others say panda bear or Siberian tiger. Still others say the grey wolf, American eagle or Texas horned lizard.

Now, which plants come to mind when you read the words “rare” ... “threatened” ... “endangered” ... “extinct” ...? If you’re like most people, a complete blank comes to mind. The vast majority of people can name rare animals, but most people are unable to think of a single plant. That’s one of the challenges facing plant conservationists in Texas.

Globally, botanists have identified between 250,000 and 300,000 plant species. Many botanists believe that there are at least 300,000 plant species waiting to be discovered and identified. That’s a lot of plants! It is estimated that anywhere from 10 to 29 percent of these plant species are at risk of extinction as you are reading this. That works out to be 30,000–87,000 plant species facing extinction at any given moment. That’s a lot of plants. Add to these numbers the estimate that one species (both plant and animal) goes extinct every hour and you can see why the Earth’s biodiversity is in trouble.

Looking at this issue from the local level, Texas is home to 5,000–6,000 species of native plants. As a state, we’re responsible for the conservation of approximately one quarter (25 percent) of the North American native flora. Of that number, the USFWS has listed 23 plant species as endangered, 5 as threatened, and more than 200 plant species as “Species of Concern (SOC).” These SOCs are plants that we simply do not have enough information about to make a good decision about their conservation. This lack of information is another of the challenges for plant conservationists in Texas.

Although it may not seem as if large numbers of plants are federally listed, Texas is considered one of the most threatened reservoirs of plant and animal life on Earth. It has been identified by the Center for Plant Conservation (CPC) as a “biodiversity/conservation hotspot.”

So, what, exactly, are the threats to Texas native plant species? Habitat destruction and fragmentation is, perhaps, the largest threat to our native species. The population in Texas is on the rise. It is estimated that by 2040, more than 26 million people will live in the Lone Star State. These people will need places to live. As a result, urbanization will continue to rise as we build homes and shopping centers to meet the needs of an increasing population. We’ll also have to feed those folks. This will mean an increase in farming and ranching to provide a steady food supply. These activities result in loss of habitat.

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#### [Texas Plant Conservation, continued from page 1]

Recreation and overcollection in the wild are two additional threats to our native plant species. People who recreate in the outdoors often destroy habitat unintentionally. They can inadvertently mow down the very plants that we are trying to protect. Overcollection in the wild is quickly becoming a major concern for plant conservationists. Cacti, which are very popular with plant enthusiasts and collectors, are being dug up and sold in nurseries and on the Internet. Entire populations of a particular species can be wiped out in a single day as a result of these activities.

"Plant blindness," a recently discovered phenomenon, also threatens our native plant species. Plant blindness is simply the inability of people to see or notice the plants around them. Plants form a kind of "green noise" that we all tend to overlook. There is an attitude that plants are always there; they've always been there; and, they will always be there. So, why worry?

These are just some of the challenges we face in the conservation of our native plant species. Another challenge is funding for plant conservation. Of all the species listed by the USFWS, both plants and animals, 61 percent are plant species. Only 5 percent of the funding allocated by the federal government is earmarked for plant conservation.

There are success stories to celebrate in Texas. For example, *Frankenia johnstonii*, a federally listed endangered species, has been proposed for delisting. Hard work by Texas Parks and Wildlife botanists revealed that there are many more populations of this species than previously thought. As a result, it is no longer considered endangered.

Texas is a partner in the global conservation initiative called the Millennium Seed Bank Project (MSBP). The MSBP began partnering with plant conservationists around the world in 2000 to collect 10 percent of the world's temperate flora by 2010. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center became a partner in 2002 and is now collecting seeds of Texas species throughout the state with the help of private landowners, federal agencies and nonprofits such as the Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Gardens in Humble, Texas.

What can you do to help? Begin by educating yourself. There are many ways to accomplish this. Check out the following Web sites:

- <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/species/?c=endangered>
- <http://plants.usda.gov/threat.html>
- [http://www.centerforplantconservation.org/NC\\_Choice.html](http://www.centerforplantconservation.org/NC_Choice.html)
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- <http://www.nps.gov/plants/>

Take a class, attend a lecture or sign up for a conference/symposium on plant conservation. The Texas Plant Conservation Conference is an annual meeting that focuses on Texas' rare plants. This year it is scheduled for September 16–20 and will be held in Corpus Christi.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Plant conservation botanists are among the most generous people in the world. We love to talk about our "babies" and the work we are doing.

If you see an endangered plant being sold in a nursery, ask the manager where they got it. Did they collect it from the wild? Grow it from seed? If they are unwilling to answer your questions, leave and don't go back.

Get involved. Participate in meetings where endangered issues are discussed. Join an organization that works with endangered species issues. There are great ones, including:

- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, [www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org)
- Native Plant Society of Texas, <http://www.npsot.org/>
- Center for Plant Conservation, <http://www.centerforplantconservation.org/>
- Plant Conservation Alliance, <http://www.nps.gov/plants/>

Look at the Federal Register, located at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>, and make comments on proposals relating to endangered species.

**If we all work together and do a little bit each time, we can make a huge difference for the conservation of our irreplaceable natural heritage.**

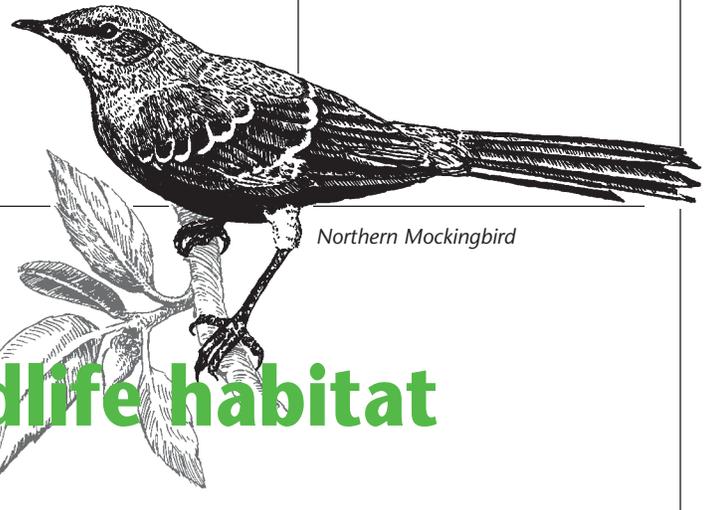
**Flo is Director of Plant Conservation and Education at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin.**



# Habitips

Habitips will become a regular insert in the *Eye on Nature* newsletter. It features simple things you can do on your land to enhance wildlife value.

April	May	June	July
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Monitor grazing program to provide nesting cover and plant diversity.</li> <li>■ Continue controlling feral hogs through hunting or trapping.</li> <li>■ Clean and store prescribed burning equipment.</li> <li>■ Develop a checklist of birds you see in various habitats.</li> <li>■ Clean your hummingbird feeders every three to four days.</li> <li>■ Continue to trap brown-headed cowbirds.</li> <li>■ Protection of roost sites is essential in areas with limited numbers of large roost trees. Turkeys like a lot of open space adjacent to roost sites for.</li> <li>■ March, April and May are prime wildflower blooming months.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Leave some unharvested winter crops next to edges of field.</li> <li>■ Monitor grazing program to provide nesting cover and plant diversity.</li> <li>■ Prepare ground and plant summer food plots.</li> <li>■ Clean your hummingbird feeders every three to four days.</li> <li>■ Monitor wildlife food plots. High-protein foods in May and June are critical to good antler growth.</li> <li>■ Continue controlling feral hogs through hunting or trapping.</li> <li>■ Cowbird trapping season ends May 31. Report all trapping data to TPWD.</li> <li>■ After dispersal of wintering flocks, juniper and mid-story hardwoods should be thinned adjacent to roost sites when they become too dense to provide for open space from the ground to tree branches where turkeys roost.</li> <li>■ Begin fire ant control as daytime temperatures reach 85 degrees.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Monitor grazing program to provide nesting cover and plant diversity.</li> <li>■ Continue to control feral hogs through hunting or trapping.</li> <li>■ Leave some unharvested winter crops next to edges of field.</li> <li>■ Before mowing, walk through hay meadows in order to reduce wildlife mortality, and consider leaving unmowed strips.</li> <li>■ Do not mow wildflowers until the seedpods have matured. Mowing at the proper time will ensure reseeding for a good crop for following years.</li> <li>■ Make sure summer wildlife water sources are operable.</li> <li>■ Clean your hummingbird feeders every three to four days.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Monitor/fluctuate water levels in wetland areas.</li> <li>■ Monitor grazing program to provide nesting cover and plant diversity.</li> <li>■ Continue to control feral hogs through hunting or trapping.</li> <li>■ Provide supplemental water for wildlife as necessary.</li> <li>■ Complete wetland dike repairs as needed.</li> <li>■ Defer grazing in some pastures to ensure adequate nesting cover for ground-nesting birds next spring.</li> <li>■ Start planning for fall youth hunts to assist in reaching wildlife management population goals.</li> <li>■ Clean your hummingbird feeders every three to four days.</li> </ul>



Northern Mockingbird

## Native Plants, the key to great wildlife habitat

By Steve Nelle

Texas have many reasons to brag. One of the things Texas can boast about is our tremendous bounty of native plants. These trees, shrubs, vines, wildflowers, forbs, grasses, sedges and cacti provide habitat for an amazing array of wildlife species. This rich abundance of wildlife is absolutely dependent on native plants for their survival and well being.

Think about any particular species of wildlife, and begin to consider how many different native plants play a role in their life cycle. Take, for example,

mockingbirds. First, they need a place to build their nest and conceal it from predators. Trees, shrubs or thickets are used for nest concealment and protection from the elements. The nest itself may be composed of twigs from various bushes as well as the leaf and stem of grasses, catkin tree flowers, fine roots and other plant fiber.

After the young babies are hatched, the parents must find a continuous source of insects to feed the young. These may include grasshoppers, caterpillars, crickets, ants, bees, termites and

beetles, to name a few. Each of these insects in turn needs a whole host of different plants for its own life requisites.

Mockingbirds also eat berries from a host of native plants. These may include hackberry, bumelia, algerita, pokeberry, Virginia creeper, Carolina snailseed, dewberry, mulberry, hawthorn, possumhaw, elbowbush, elderberry or greenbriar. The mockingbird then helps disseminate the seed of these plants by expelling the seed after the soft part of the berry has been digested.

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# How to write a Rare Plant Book in seven easy years

By Jackie Poole

In 2000 when Pat Morton, then head of education and outreach for the Wildlife Diversity Program, approached me about publishing a book on the rare plants of Texas, I was excited. Years before, David Riskind and I had written a rare plant identification guide for about 45 species, so how hard could it be to add another 200? Using Poole and Riskind's 1987 *Endangered, Threatened, or Protected Native Plants of Texas* and Bill Carr's abstracts for most of the rare plants in Texas as a starting point, I enlisted Bill and my two botanical co-workers, Jason Singhurst and Dana Price. After a few meetings we had a target list of species and a division of duties. All of us would work on various introductory chapters and species updates, Dana would gather photos and illustrations, Jason would produce maps, Bill would add descriptions and updates to his original work, and I would crack the whip along with helping with everything else, thus violating one of the first rules of project management (never work on the project that you are managing). We also determined that there were quite a few species with no photographs or illustrations. With grant money from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we hired Linny Heagy to produce the exacting and exquisite illustrations that we required. When Linny asked where she could find live rare plants, we just laughed, as most had not been seen in decades. She quickly adapted to using the few dried, flattened, brittle specimens that were available, making them come to life.

We were moving along, taking photographs, reviewing Linny's illustrations, and updating the species abstracts, when we hit our first speed bump. The press that we had hoped would be our publisher was not interested. The project went into a stall. Then one day, Shannon Davies of Texas A&M Press came by our office to discuss possibilities for their Nature Guide series, and she liked our book. We were back in business, and with an editor and publisher.

We went into high gear to get a rough draft finished for preliminary review. In retrospect, the draft made burlap seem like silk, but the reviewers liked it enough to recommend that the press publish it. By now it was spring 2004, and I hoped that we could get a final draft to the press by the end of the year. I suppose that I was getting a little aggravated with the project, with continually updating information and adding more species. Somewhere it had to stop.

Of course we didn't make the 2004 deadline but I was determined that we would finish in 2005. Early in 2005 I hired Emily Lott, a rare combination of botanist and librarian, to compile the glossary of almost 1,000 entries and the references with approximately 1,500 sources, so large that the computer refused to spell-check it. We hit our second speed bump in summer 2005 when we were told that many of our digital images were not high-resolution enough. We scrambled to find additional photographs that we could use. Throughout 2005 we all worked overtime to complete the book. Jason produced the maps for almost every species (a few do not have precise locations), and Dana spent long hours acquiring permissions from hundreds of photographers, artists and other publishers. Bill wrote an incredibly detailed chapter on the natural regions of Texas with an emphasis on the rare species in each. And I continued to crack the whip.

On the evening of December 21, the writing was finished, and I spent the next day making electronic and paper copies of the almost 1,000-page volume. Just before noon on the 23rd, I handed it all to Shannon. And after that, I felt empty.

The New Year brought a myriad of questions from new editors at the press. The copy edits were delivered in the spring, the peak of any botanist's field season. But we managed to find hours and days between, and sometimes during, field trips to address the numerous

## Rare Plants OF TEXAS



BY JACKIE M. POOLE, WILLIAM R. CARR,  
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questions and changes. Then came the calm before the storm, and in the spring field season of 2006, the galley proofs arrived. While they looked beautiful, photographs and illustrations had been cut to provide room for text. We spent another better part of a spring field season deleting words, lines and entire paragraphs to be able to add in the all-important photographs and line drawings. After the galley proofs were returned, we waited anxiously.

Shortly before Christmas 2007, we received advance copies. The book was beautiful, if a tad heavy. The black cover with Joe Liggio's photograph of a brilliant orange orchid was striking. The 25 advance copies that we had for our first book signing at the Wildflower Center were gone within an hour. In mid-January the rest of the copies were loaded off the boat and made it through customs. Books are being shipped to customers and book stores. And all that's left for us is the signing and to start keeping track of errors and updates for the next version of the book, when I hope that someone else will be cracking the whip.

Jackie is a botanist with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Wildlife Diversity Program in Austin.

# We're under attack – Aliens in the Landscape

By Clyde McKinney

Everyone is familiar with big-name alien invasives we fear or detest: fire ants, house sparrows, feral hogs, West Nile Virus, piranhas and Africanized honey bees, to name a few. However, some species of invasive plants may not be as high-profile but are equally menacing.

To understand what an invasive is, it is helpful first to understand just what its antithesis, a native plant, is. Many definitions exist. A simple one is that a native is a plant that was here when the Europeans first arrived. That definition falls a little short, however, because the Native Americans brought in seeds from other areas. Native plants are important because they are properly prepared for and adapted to the conditions in their home. They have learned to withstand the extremes of climate and rainfall specific to that area, thus assuring their continued existence. A native plant lives in harmony with its environment and knows how to survive without causing harm to that environment. Native wildlife is dependent on native plants for food, habitat and its very existence.

What native plants are not prepared for is invasives. So, what exactly is an invasive? An invasive must meet three criteria. First, it must be an introduced plant, an alien, *something that's not from around here*. An invasive can come not only from a foreign country, but also from another state or even another region of our own state. An introduced plant is one that is not native and has been relocated in some way, usually by man. A large percentage of introduced plants are well behaved, fit nicely in our landscapes, and bring great joy to many people, but some are invasive. Second, an invasive must be aggressive, a bully. It out-competes the natives; it *tends to take over*. Third, to be an invasive it must *cause harm*—to people, to wildlife (including native plants), or to our pocketbooks (economic damage).

Many birds, butterflies and other wildlife depend on insects that feed only on certain native plants. In a sense, natives act as sacrificial plants to sustain the food chain.

Many invasives are not sacrificial and offer very little to the food chain or act as a block to it. Usually what sets them apart is that they aggressively take over areas. Remember, to be an "invasive" it must cause harm. Economic harm is one type, and harm to native species is another type. Invasives out-compete our native plants. They tend to form monocultures that decrease plant diversity. What happens to our native plants when they are overrun by kudzu or Japanese honeysuckle or English ivy? They disappear. What happens to the wildlife that depend on the food produced by the native plants? The result is a reduction in native plants and a reduction in the native wildlife population.

Unlike fire ants, invasive plants are not an obvious problem because they don't attack or sting people, so we often ignore its other deleterious effects. Consider kudzu: an introduction that spreads incredibly fast, causes economic damage, and crowds out natives in areas where it grows. It is creeping into the warmer, wetter regions of Texas. Beyond that species, what else is there? In Southwest Texas, salt cedar was introduced to control erosion. It soon spread to areas along rivers such as the Pecos, and because of its incredible ability to suck up water, actually dried up the river itself. Years of expensive eradication measures have been successful in restoring some of the flow to the Pecos, but the river sustained a great deal of permanent damage.

Hundreds of other plants were imported to feed cattle, control erosion, and to fulfill dozens of other worthy needs. Most of them proved harmless, but a few turned into

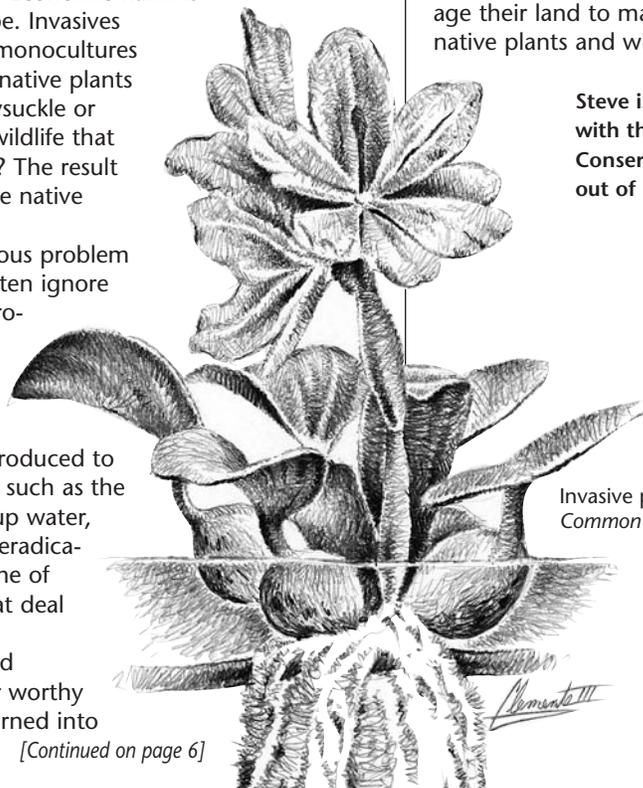
Of course, everyone knows the mockingbird ego; they find the most prominent place possible to perch and sing. Dead trees (called snags), or tall trees with dead limbs provide their favorite perching locations. It would be easy to enumerate over 100 different native plant species that play a role in the life of a single mockingbird.

If this exercise is repeated for each of the bird, mammal, reptile and amphibian species in Texas, it is clear that our diversity of native plant life is essential in maintaining healthy wildlife populations.

The Texas naturalist need not be overwhelmed by this complexity of native plants. Any given tract of land normally has 200 or fewer plant species. Of that number, only about 50 will usually be the more common and important plants. Internet resources, books and local plant experts are all good ways to begin to learn the plants of your area.

And since 95 percent of Texas lands are privately owned, it is clear that stewardship and conservation by landowners is the key to maintaining this rich heritage of plants and animals. Most Texas farmers and ranchers understand their role as caretakers of Texas plant life and wildlife, and take that role seriously. In addition to growing our food supply, and conserving soil and water, Texas landowners manage their land to maintain or restore native plants and wildlife habitat.

Steve is a wildlife biologist with the Natural Resource Conservation Service out of San Angelo.



Invasive plant  
Common Water Hyacinth

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invasives when introduced into Texas. Giant reed (*arundo donax*) was brought in by the highway department to control erosion in ditches along highways. Today, large clumps exist along roads in the eastern half of Texas looking like 20-foot tall corn with a plume on top. In some areas, giant reed runs along the road for a mile or more. Aquarium or pond plants like hydrilla, giant salvinia and common water hyacinth were dumped in storm sewers and streams or carried by a boat coming from an infested lake, and, they now clog Texas lakes, inhibiting recreational use and fishing. Many introductions did not even prove useful for the intended purpose, yet Texas is stuck with them forever. Plants like bahiagrass, johnsongrass and King Ranch bluestem come to mind. Others, like costal Bermuda, while very useful for cattle, escaped and spread everywhere forming monocultures that displaced the bluestems, switch grass and other natives. Its turf grass cousin, Bermuda-grass, grew right out of your yard and displaced native plants along roadways.

Many invasives, in fact, are very attractive to look at and are highly prized in our landscapes by well-meaning, uninformed people or by people who are informed yet couldn't care less what damage they cause. Invasives may actually be easier to grow than some natives for the very reason they are invasive; they don't have any natural enemies in the area. That's why ornamental invasives are used—plants like Japanese honeysuckle, nandina, mimosa tree, Chinese privet, golden bamboo, Chinese tallow tree, chinaberry, Chinese wisteria

and English ivy. They began as easy-to-grow yard plants but soon escaped to the woods and became a serious problem, forming monocultures, displacing natives and reducing diversity.

Why should we care? Harm, that's why: the effect on native wildlife that depend on native plants for food; the economic damage to crops, lakes, rivers and streams; the ecological damage (salt cedar). It's funny how things work out. Take an early settler in Texas who comes from another country and acquires alien cattle to feed himself. Then he finds that native grasses soon disappear when heavily grazed by alien cattle (our native buffalo knew how to co-exist in harmony with native vegetation) so he imports grasses from all over the world to feed the alien cattle. From there, it spirals out of control.

### What can we do?

Don't plant invasives. Don't spread seeds of invasives. Inspect your clothes and shoes for seeds when leaving an area containing invasives. Power-wash your boat anytime you enter another lake. Check the state invasives list before you buy plants. Tell your nursery that they are selling invasives and should stop the practice. Eradicate invasives where possible, or closely watch them if you just can't part with them. Plant natives and support wildlife. Perhaps you can offset the harm caused by your neighbor who insists on planting invasives "because they do so well."

Become trained as a citizen scientist in the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center's "Invaders of Texas" program and report sightings of invasives along roadsides, in parks and on your own property.

Get educated about the impact of invasives and the benefits of using native plants. Read Matt White's *Prairie Time*, a *Blackland Portrait* if you live near the Blackland Prairie or Post Oak Savanna areas. Read Sally Wasowski's *Requiem for a Lawnmower*, especially if you live in the city or have a lawn. Read Jeffrey Greene's *Water from Stone* if you are interested in the Texas Hill Country. Though a little more technical, try a new book titled *Rare Plants of Texas: A Field Guide* by Poole, Carr, Price and Singhurst. Learn how to use Texas native plants in your landscape by reading books on the subject by Wasowski and others. Visit the "Invaders of Texas" Web site: [www.texasinvasives.org](http://www.texasinvasives.org) to find information on the citizen scientist program and for invasive plant lists and other good information on invasives. Join the Native Plant Society of Texas ([www.npsot.org](http://www.npsot.org)) to learn more about native plants. Become a Texas Master Naturalist (<http://masternaturalist.tamu.edu/>) to learn more about all things natural and how making any change to the environment causes something else to change. Read the Spring 2006 issue of *Eye on Nature* for a short list of plants that make good substitutes for invasive plants and more information on using invasive plants in the garden.

Clyde McKinney is retired from commercial real estate in the Metroplex and now resides at Lake Lydia near Quitman. He is a Texas Master Naturalist, a Texas Master Gardener, a member of the Tyler Chapter of The Native Plant Society of Texas and the Tyler Audubon Society, and a citizen scientist with the Invaders of Texas program.

### We Value Your Comments

As part of the change in format for *Eye on Nature* and *Make Tracts for Wildlife* newsletters, which have now merged, we would like your feedback on what type of articles, what topics and subjects you would like to see included in future editions. Please visit [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/eonsurvey](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/eonsurvey)

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[The Back Porch, continued from back page]

self-motivated employees focused on getting people interested in wildlife management. Each developed a unique style of working with landowners to “sell” quality habitat management by addressing the landowner’s primary interests, in most cases, game management.

During the period 1988 through 1991, five additional technical guidance biologists were hired. In 1992, Wildlife Division managers made the decision to assign the responsibility of providing assistance to landowners to all field biologists as part of their jobs. The acreage managed under written wildlife management plans and recommendations more than doubled from 1992 to 1994 (2.5 to over 5 million).

The importance of working with private landowners to accomplish the agency’s mission of wildlife conservation was clearly recognized with the creation of the Private Lands Advisory Board (PLAB) in 1993. The PLAB was created to advise the department and Commission on matters of importance to private landowners. Consisting of private landowners appointed by the Chairman of the Commission, it serves as a sounding board for private lands issues of concern to TPWD. Members are asked to examine issues and prepare responses on specific charges given to them by the Commission Chairman.

The mid-1990s was a particularly challenging period for wildlife conservation in Texas, particularly with regard to endangered species issues. Many landowners expressed mistrust of the government in general and lack of support for rare species conservation in particular. A new approach to private lands conservation was needed. Discussion began to center around the concept of providing incentives for private landowners to manage habitat benefiting rare species, and removing disincentives inherent in the laws and policies of that time.

In 1997, TPWD piloted the first Landowner Incentive Program with financial support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The program was designed to reverse the top-down regulatory approach to rare species conservation and replace it with a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to landowners to help achieve their overall conservation goals for the land, including habitat-based work benefiting rare species. For many landowners, this voluntary, incentive-based approach was all that was needed to encourage participation in the conservation of rare species on their land. In 2002, LIP became a national program administered by the USFWS.

As a result of the endangered species controversies of the mid-1990s, Section 12.0251 was added to the Parks and Wildlife Code in 1995. This statute mandated that information and species data used to develop a wildlife management plan for private landowners was confidential and could not be released without the written permission of the landowner. It provided the assurance many landowners needed to feel comfortable requesting technical assistance and inviting TPWD biologists on their land.

Another key law (H.B. 1358), passed in 1995, implemented a constitutional change by amending the Texas Tax Code to allow wildlife management as an agricultural use that qualifies the land for agricultural appraisal. Commonly referred to as the Open Space Tax Valuation for Wildlife Management, this law allowed landowners to declare wildlife management as their primary agricultural use, providing added flexibility for land managers throughout the state. The result was an increase in landowners managing primarily for wildlife and an accompanying increase in landowner requests for assistance.

*The fall edition of the Back Porch will explore these changes to private land technical guidance and how they are leading into the future.*

**Linda is Program Director of Private Lands and Public Hunting for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department working in Austin.**

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# The Back Porch



## Historical and Current Assessment of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Private Lands Assistance Program

By Linda Campbell

Since the 1930s Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) biologists have provided habitat management assistance to landowners. In the early years, work consisted of collecting data for hunting/fishing regulations, trapping and transporting wildlife, population studies, wildlife research and vegetation surveys.

Between 1950 and 1973, the increasing economic value of hunting lead to increasing requests for landowner assistance. Requests for assistance began on large ranches in south Texas. As it became more difficult to make a living from livestock alone, landowners sought to diversify income by selling hunting opportunities.

More landowners began to ask for advice on improving wildlife resources

on their land. White-tailed deer and quality game management became the driving force in landowner requests for assistance. As requests for assistance increased in South and West Texas, field biologists saw their workload changing in response to requests for landowner assistance separate from their traditional regulatory duties. They began to document these requests and eventually shared these changes in workload with leaders in Austin.

In 1973, in response to this changing role, Robert Kemp, Director of Wildlife and Fisheries, proposed to implement a private landowner assistance program. Five technical guidance biologist positions were created, and a proposal to implement a technical guidance program designed to provide

landowner assistance was presented to the TPW Commission. The Commission approved the program in 1973. Under the leadership of the first five technical guidance biologists, private lands managed according to a wildlife management plan developed with TPWD assistance averaged about 1.5 million acres during the period 1973 through 1988.

The first technical guidance biologists were experienced field people with strong ties to their communities and solid relationships with the landowners they assisted. They were recognized as big supporters of the technical guidance program and showed a strong belief in one-on-one assistance to landowners. They became the model for

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