



PINEYWOODS POST

*A publication of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
for landowners and outdoor enthusiasts of the Pineywoods.*

Spring 2011

Winter has been something else in the Pineywoods this year!

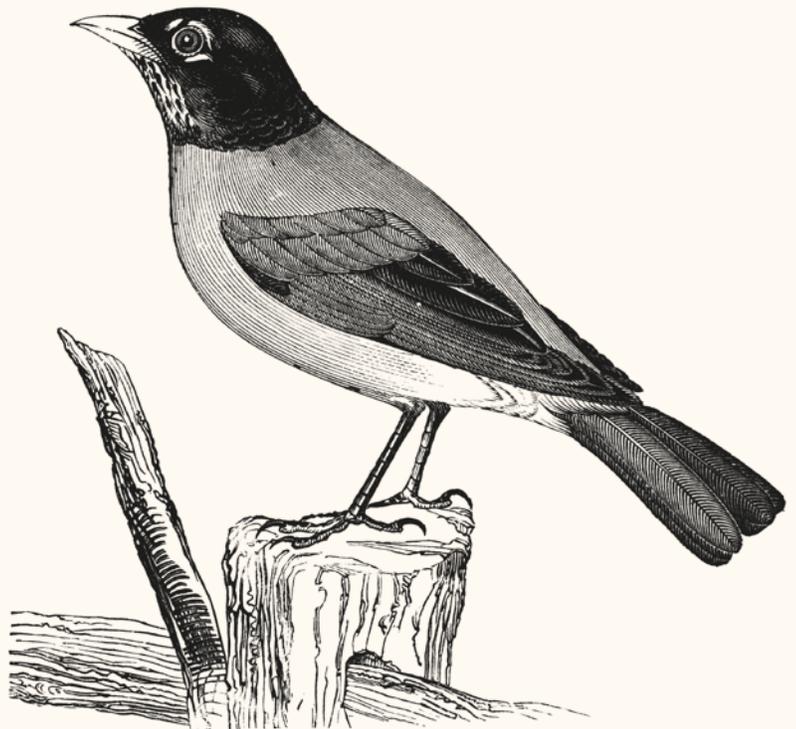
For three years in a row, the northern part of the area has been blanketed with snow and ice for a few days during the new year. Chilly temperatures and a bitter wind have us ready to see the first robins of spring and buds of new growth.

In this edition of the *Pineywoods Post*, you will see the second half of the articles featuring bears and mountain lions. As well we bring timely information on planning a prescribed burn; a question and answer session with Pineywoods district leader, Gary Calkins; and how to get money for planting longleaf pines.

Keep sending in your wildlife or habitat photos for the *Stewardship Snapshot* to Penny.Wilkerson@tpwd.state.tx.us. If someone forwarded you a copy of this edition of the *Pineywoods Post* make sure you don't miss future editions by getting on our distribution list. Forward your contact information to Rusty.Wood@tpwd.state.tx.us.

Thanks!

The editors



American robin

Courtesy Florida Center for Instructional Technology

CRITTER Corner

Mountain Lion: East Texas' Most Elusive Cat (Part 2)

By Gary Calkins, Pineywoods District Leader

One of the new and fancy inventions to aid in wildlife research and hunting is the digital trail camera. These are extra eyes in the forest that can sure find a lot more critters than a bunch of folks tromping around in the woods are likely to. It is probably a safe bet that there are very few hunting stands or feeders in the Pineywoods that aren't being watched 24 hours a day by some form or fashion of trail camera. And sometimes, just sometimes, these come up with a truly unique sight. Take for instance the picture taken September 21, in Panola County, of a mountain lion checking out a deer feeder. After a close inspection of the site by Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD), it sure looks like a legitimate cat sighting to us. After literally hundreds of calls a year with nothing to show for it, it is pretty unique to get this good of a picture of one of these animals. A word of caution though, there are all kinds of wild rumors on the Internet (as always) about TPWD saying it is a world record cat, 350 pounds and a lot of other tall tales. All we have said is that – yep – it's a picture of a mountain lion and every bit of evidence we have says it's real and was in Panola County, on the 21st of September.



A rare game camera picture of an elusive mountain lion (*Puma concolor*) in East Texas; after investigation from a local TPWD official, this sighting has been confirmed as credible. (Photo taken in Panola County, TX 9/21/10)

Now to step off into even thinner ice, there has never been a documented black colored mountain lion in their entire range – anywhere. Many species of animals have either albino (all white) or melanistic (all black) color phases. This is just due to changes in the amount of color pigment in the cells. For some reason, black color phases just do not happen in the mountain lion. The black phase does occur in other species of large cats including the jaguar which occurs in Mexico and South America, but it is extremely rare. A black phase also can occur in leopards which are found in Africa and Asia, but again is relatively rare.

It is possible (very slim chance) that some of the reported sightings are of a wandering jaguar from Mexico or of a jaguar or leopard that has escaped from captivity, but this also has not been documented. Often, when a sighting is investigated, we find tracks of bobcats, dogs or river otters. In fact, many of the sightings occur along creek banks and in areas typically frequented by otters and this is often the critter observed in these brief encounters.

Could a black mountain lion occur? Yes, genetic mutations could occur that would result in a black color phase, but considering how long these creatures have wandered the Americas without it happening, the chances are slim. Wildlife biologists have learned to never say never, but can't help being skeptical.

Regardless of color, are these animals a threat to humans? The typical behavior of the mountain lion is a very secretive, reclusive animal. They won't normally hunt nor stay around areas of high human activity. The recent upswing of encounters in other states is suspected to be a result of increased human activities in those

areas, reduction in the natural prey of the cat and other aggravating factors. In fact, in all of North America, the average number of injuries resulting from mountain lions is roughly two per year (Conover, 2002). Compare that to the roughly 27,000 per year resulting from rodents and a big cat attack isn't something to worry about.

For several years, TPWD has tried to get a better idea of the distribution and possible numbers of this animal across the state. If you happen to see a large cat in the Pineywoods, grab a camera and get a picture – or check that trail camera – you may have something to brag about. If you find tracks where your sighting occurred, cover the track with a bucket or some other device to protect it, and either way call a local TPWD office and let us know what you saw. Again, enjoy one of our natural wonders.

Courtesy TPWD



\$\$\$ FREE MONEY \$\$\$

Cash, moola, bread, coin, greenbacks, dinero, jack, dough, cheese, scratch, coin..... sorry I got a little distracted. If by now you have visions of some used car salesman with giant sunglasses and a bull horn or that song from the O'Jays stuck in your head like I do (money, money, money...money!) then you have the right idea. For residents in 18 counties** in the southern half of the Pineywoods with forestlands or pastures that they want to convert, this may be of interest to you. The federal government along with several state agencies, and private entities, has put an emphasis on restoring native ecosystems. For us in the south, that means the restoration of longleaf pines and its fire driven ecosystem. We have discussed in the past the benefits of longleaf pine to forest landowners and wildlife managers such as high quality (value) timber products, creation of wildlife habitat for both game and nongame species, aesthetic, carbon sequestration, resistance to insects and diseases, and reduced risk from wildfire in properly managed stands.

The federal government has "put its money where its mouth is" in the form of very generous cost shares of up to 75% for those willing to plant longleaf pine. The cost share is made available through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) is the agency in charge of distributing those funds. The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) is the specific program in charge of implementing 12 million dollars across nine southern states. Of those 12 million dollars, \$576,000 is designated for on-the-ground longleaf restoration in Texas. For more information on longleaf pine, what is going on locally, and how to get in on this opportunity, go to <http://www.txlalongleaf.org/> and click on contact us.

** Anderson, Angelina, Cherokee, Hardin, Houston, Jasper, Liberty, Montgomery, Nacogdoches, Newton, Polk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Trinity, Tyler and Walker counties

BIOLOGIST BIO - District 6 Leader, Gary Calkins



Pineywoods district leader, Gary Calkins, releasing an eastern wild turkey. Courtesy of Ryan Bass

We have a real treat for you folks this time in the *Pineywoods Post*. We caught up with our favorite boss, Pineywoods district leader, Gary Calkins as revealed in our discussion, you will see Gary's great sense of humor and real passion for wildlife stewardship forged by varied experience in places, just as varied, enjoy.

PW Post: What does a district leader do?

GC: Stay confused most of the time, but the real answer is that our job is to coordinate field activities within the regulatory districts on everything from budget to personnel to research to biology.

PW Post: How many years did you spend in college and what are your degrees in?

GC: I spent way more than my share of time in college finally getting a degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences from Texas A&M and am currently trying to complete a Master of Forestry with a wildlife emphasis from Stephen F. Austin State University.

PW Post: Can you tell our readers a little bit about your background and how you became interested in being a wildlife biologist?

GC: I was born and raised in western Colorado and started hunting with my Dad when I was so little, he had to carry me piggy-back when the snow got too deep for me to walk. We went to "the hills" every weekend to shoot at logs, try to find "apache tears", look for elk, and hunt prairie dogs. The list goes on. That is where the interest in the outdoors came from. The interest in being a biologist sort of happened by accident. I was not happy in the major I was pursuing at A&M and went and just talked to a professor in

the wildlife building just to see what they did in there and became hooked.

PW Post: How long have you been a biologist? When and how did you start with TPWD?

GC: I really got into the field in 1989 with my first real job in Iowa. After that I had research or management jobs in Maryland, Delaware, South Carolina, three different spots in California and finally back to Texas. I hired on with TPWD as a Bighorn Sheep Biologist in the Trans-Pecos in 1992.

PW Post: What is your philosophy as a wildlife biologist?

GC: This may sound somewhat callous, but I really focus more of my efforts on making sure my grandchildren and other future kids get to have the same or better hunting and outdoor experiences than we have. If we focus just on today, we may not make the right decisions.

PW Post: What do you enjoy the most about your job?

GC: I get to work with lots of great people both in TPWD and outside of the Department and get to do some really neat stuff. Things most folks just don't get the chance to do. And the best part is that no two days are alike.

PW Post: What do you find the most challenging?

GC: I think the most challenging part is competing with the number of folks who are "weekend biologists". Those that read a little in the magazines, and then think we don't know what we are doing because we didn't read the same article.

PW Post: What is the most amazing (or scary) experience you've had while working with wildlife?

GC: The most amazing thing is getting to handle everything from bobwhite quail to alligators with things like spotted owls, Channel Island fox, desert bighorn sheep and pronghorn antelope all thrown in the middle. There is no way to pick "the best one".

PW Post: Do you have any advice for students who want to be professional wildlife biologists?

GC: The only real advice I can give is to go about this with your eyes wide open. The glamour on television isn't reality, but the reality can be just as interesting. Also, it is a challenging field to get in to; don't get frustrated if it doesn't work out at first. Keep trying and don't be afraid to ask those in the field for advice.

PW Post: What are your personal interests?

GC: I love to spend time with my kids and wife rebuilding vehicles, hunting, fixing the house; anything that lets me be around them and not sitting around doing nothing.

STEWARDSHIP Snapshots



Congrats to Abby Wilkerson, who shot this beast of a pig with her trusty .223, while hunting with her dad in Panola County. Courtesy of Randy Wilkerson



This barred owl was photographed spending his time perched in a tree at Alazan Bayou WMA in Nacogdoches County. Courtesy of Ron Randle



Apparently we, as hunters, are not the only ones who like to feast on fresh venison as evidenced by this red-tailed hawk that was photographed by a trail camera set up on a deer carcass in Smith County. Courtesy of Brian Lowry



This River Otter was captured using a trail camera set up on a creek crossing in Nacogdoches County. Courtesy of Micah Poteet

Submit your own interesting nature or trail cam photos by submitting them to the editors. Just tell us who, what, when, and where!

“A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.”

– Greek proverb

CONSERVATION Closeup

BLACK BEARS IN EAST TEXAS (Part 2)

by Ricky W. Maxey, Wildlife Diversity Biologist

So, what does all of this mean to you as a landowner, hunter and citizen of East Texas? First of all, black bears are part of the natural heritage of the region and the natural movement of black bears into remaining areas of suitable habitat indicates presence of quality habitats. Secondly, black bear sightings can add value or quality to hunting and outdoor experiences, and if populations continue to increase to the point of recovery, there may be limited future hunting opportunities.

Here are a few pointers for people who hunt, fish, recreate or live within occupied black bear habitat. First of all, be cautious around bears, but do not become extremely threatened or fearful. Black bears are typically non-aggressive and shy, and will choose to avoid contact with humans when given a choice. You can be in close proximity of a black bear and never know they are there. However, caution is the rule because black bears, particularly females with cubs, are very unpredictable and can be dangerous if provoked. Maintain a safe distance from all black bears at all times, and if there is a female with cubs, do not get between the mother and its cubs. Many times just standing up and making loud noises will send a bear running. Pepper sprays can also be of use if one comes into close contact with a black bear, but it is best as a first measure to just move away and maintain a safe distance.

Because black bears are in constant search for food, it is important to minimize food availability in areas of human habitation like homes or hunting camps. All food supplies and garbage should be contained in locked containers or in areas inaccessible to bears. The majority of bear-human conflicts are related to human feeding of bears either intentionally or unintentionally. Areas around homes and hunting camps should be kept as clean



as possible. Specific areas should be designated for cleaning of fish and game, and these areas should be cleaned up after use. Refuse from cleaning should be buried, stored in a bear-proof container or removed from the site. No food or garbage should be left in or near yards of homes, or within campsite areas. Feed pets and livestock only amounts that they will readily consume at time of feeding. Pet bowls that are continually full can become food sources for bears, and can train them to associate food with homes or camps, and with humans. A good source of detailed information about black bears and their behavior can be found at www.BeBearAware.org.

Baiting and use of supplemental feeds, particularly use of corn or other grains, is the most likely location where a hunter may see a bear in East Texas. We have had numerous recorded instances of that happening already. Corn and grains to be used for baiting would best be stored off-site away from hunting camps, but if stored on-site should be in locked inaccessible areas. Excess grains should not be left spilled on the ground in home or camp areas. Feeders used in areas where black bears occur should be at least 8 feet above the ground with the top 4 feet from the attachment point. Feeder tops should be tightly secured. It is best to hang the feeders with small diameter cables to prevent bears from pulling the feeders within reach. Controlled feeding using timer mechanisms will limit large amounts of unused food on the ground available to attract bears, and will be more cost-effective to the hunter as well. Another consideration for hunters is to clearly know your target when hunting feral hogs; a bear and a feral hog can look very similar at a distance, or under poor lighting conditions.



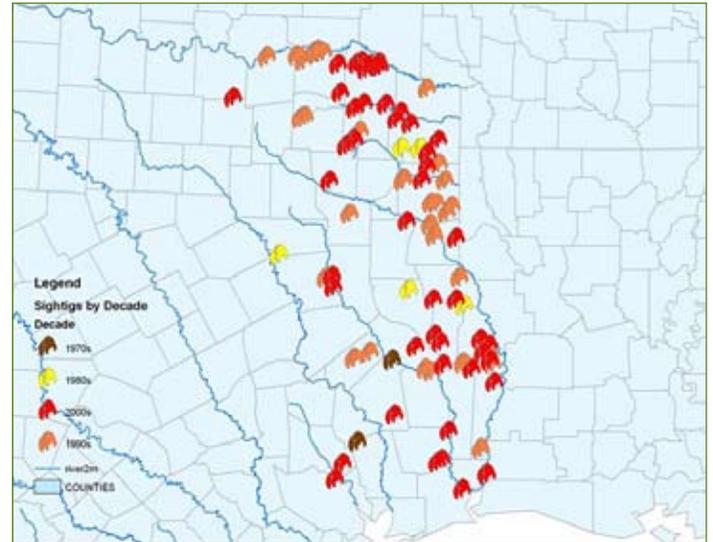
Remember black bears are protected by both federal and state law and shooting one could result in significant penalties. A brochure entitled, "Bear Safety in Mind: Hunter's Edition", can be downloaded from the Texas Parks and Wildlife (Department) Web site at www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

The Department worked cooperatively with federal and state agencies, natural resource managers, private landowners, leaseholders and conservation organizations to develop the "East Texas Black Bear Conservation and Management Plan: 2005 -2015" (can be downloaded from the Department's Web site). The Department also hosted 10 public meetings throughout East Texas to acquire citizen input in the development of this plan. Those same cooperators who worked with the Department to develop this plan formed the East Texas Black Bear Task Force (ETBBTF) as a working group of the Black Bear Conservation Coalition (BBCC), and are actively engaged with the Department in implementation of the plan. These efforts are basically two-fold: to educate the public throughout the region about black bears; and to conserve, enhance and develop habitat for black bears throughout the region.

The task force has received money from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through the BBCC to facilitate its Hardwood Habitat Initiative (HHI). The HHI has worked cooperatively with a number of private landowners to either restore and/or enhance hardwood habitats throughout East Texas. Basically the HHI provides as much as a 75% cost-share for projects that qualify. More information about the task force and its efforts can be found at www.easttexasblackbear.org/etbbtf.

The Department has been investigating black bear sightings in East Texas since 1978. A total of 110 black bear sightings have been verified through investigation by Department biologists and technicians

(1978-1979=3, 1980-1989=5, 1990-1999=34, 2000-2009=54, and since 2010 there have been 15).



Black Bear Sightings by Decade FY 1978, through FY 2009 (TPWD).

A significant number of these sightings have been confirmed through game camera photographs like the one below.



Courtesy of Mr. Tommy Archer, Paris, Texas.

The Department is always interested in gathering information concerning black bear sightings anywhere within the state. To report black bear sightings in East Texas, you can contact the Wildlife Division Region III headquarters in Tyler, at (903) 566-1626, or the Wildlife Division District 6 headquarters in Jasper, at (409) 384-6894, or you can contact your local Department biologist. Please report sightings of black bears as soon as possible after they occur so that there is a greater chance to collect good evidence of black bear at the sight. Please feel free to contact the author, Ricky Maxey at (903) 679-9821, to ask questions or get further information about this article.

HABITAT Helper

Prescribed Burning: Planning is Key

by Robert Baker, Pineywoods Regulatory Wildlife Biologist

Planning is the key to making a prescribed fire.

The difference between a forest fire and a prescribed fire is the precise conditions that are met before the fire is ignited. These precise conditions need to be planned out in the burn plan. In this article, I will discuss what needs to be included in a burn plan and what to do with it after it has been created.

A goal for the burn should be the first thing created. This is important as it will dictate the factors to follow. For example, if a person was trying to reduce fuels in a young pine plantation, they would want to burn during the cool season with a low intensity fire to reduce tree mortality, but if they were trying to kill hardwoods, a growing season hot fire, might be what they want. Examples of good goals for wildlife are increase the amount of forb production, create snags, earlier "green up" and fighting invasive species. Fire can be used for different goals for different people such as cattle producers may want to increase weight gain in stocker cows, increase visibility or make rounding up easier. Users in the urban interface might use fire for goals such as removal of fuel build up to "fireproof" a home or to clean the area.

Weather is one of the largest and most important factors that need to be included in a burn plan. One problem with weather is that it is constantly changing and if the fire is large enough, it can even influence the weather. Weather should be monitored throughout the entire burn and during mop up (clean up) operations afterwards. In the plan conditions for humidity, wind speed, temperature, fuel moisture, and other factors should strictly be specified as they all directly impact fire behavior. A person, whose job is to monitor weather during the burn, should also be written into the plan. Fire weather can be found on the internet at places such as www.srh.weather.gov-data-SHV-FWFHSHV and www.tamu.edu/ticc/predictive_services/psfire_weather.html. Weather can be monitored on site by using handheld weather equipment as well. This can be done with a small weather unit that measures humidity, wind speed and temperature. It can be purchased through most

forestry related stores.

Topography plays an integral part in the planning process. It will dictate the type of equipment needed to put in firelines, ignite the fire, transport personnel and plan escape routes. The lay of the land will affect the behavior of the fire as well as other factors, including funneling winds through a draw, fire running faster up hill, or creating natural firebreaks to name a few. Firebreaks will need to be constructed in such a way as to not only stop the fire but also follow the terrain to reduce erosion, follow natural materials, and allow entry with equipment.

Equipment should be included in the plan. This aspect includes equipment such as pumpers, rakes, shovels, drip torches, etc and includes personnel as well. Different fires will require different amounts and types ranging from burning a pile with a water hose, shovel, and box of matches to a 10,000 acre burn using bulldozers and helicopters. Specify in the plan what needs to be there, and what will happen if it is not.

Smoke management is the next category of concern. Identification of areas of concern and how to eliminate the problem need to be addressed in this area. These can take different forms such as people with health concerns, the big highway just to the south, time of the day, or the major pipeline on top of the ridge. Most of these concerns can be taken care of with some planning ahead of time. For instance, people with health concerns can be informed so that actions can be taken to protect their health, signs (and flaggers if needed) can be put on the highway, fires can be started with enough time to complete, and the pipeline company can be contacted for any concerns. Wind direction, speed, and mixing height can, and should be used to control the effect of smoke.

Once the plan is completed, the plan needs to be given to important agencies in the area that have oversight pertaining to prescribed fire. These include Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (www.tceq.state.tx.us), Texas Forest Service (www.txforestservicetamu.edu), local sheriff's office and local fire departments (including volunteer fire

departments). Other agencies that can help and it would be good to contact include your local Texas Parks and Wildlife Department office (www.tpwd.state.tx.us), National Forest Service (www.fs.fed.us/r8/texas/) and Natural Resource Conservation Service (www.nrcs.usda.gov).

The final step is to adhere to the burn plan that has been written. A well written burn plan will go a long way towards ensuring that your burn is successful. A burn plan should contain a goal, precise weather conditions, topography, equipment and smoke management. If help is needed in writing a burn plan, please contact your local natural resource professional.



Workshop for Wildlife

Hosted by Texas Parks and Wildlife

Tuesday, March 8th, 6-9 pm

Karnack Community Center, Karnack, TX

Topics: Wildlife Tax Valuation, Feral Hog Control, Native Grass Restoration

Free snacks provided by Friends of Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge

RSVP Charlie Muller (903) 757-9572 or Laura Speight (903) 679-9149



Courtesy of Laura Speight



Spring 2011



February		March		April	
TPWD biologists @ work	MLDP cooperators & landowners	TPWD biologists @ work	MLDP cooperators & landowners	TPWD biologists @ work	MLDP cooperators & landowners
Conduct habitat browse surveys on MLDP cooperator lands	After season scouting and shed hunting	Begin preparation for eastern wild turkey season by setting up turkey check stations	Send in MLDP harvest records and jawbones	Collect and process harvest data from MLDP cooperators	Eastern wild turkey spring hunting season starts April 1
Offer site visits to landowners to improve wildlife habitat	Conduct prescribed burns	Assist state parks and wildlife management areas in conducting cool season prescribed burns	Disc wetland areas after draw down to encourage moist soil plants	Offer outreach program to schools and local organizations	Start of alligator season in non-core counties April 1
Work with other agencies (NRCS and ETBBTF) to replant longleaf pine and hardwoods	Plant trees and shrubs to serve as cover for wildlife	Landowner Workshop @ Caddo Lake NWR			Soil tests and plowing for spring food plots

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