

THE CEDAR POST

MARCH 2012

News and Information for the Texas Hill Country

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VIEW FROM THE FIELD

Howdy! What a relief that 2011 is over, and what a relief that meteorologists are now predicting a change in the weather pattern for 2012! According to Jonathan Jennings with the West Texas Weather Modification Association, all indications are that La Nina is dissipating fast enough to be gone by June and relatively normal rainfall amounts can be expected this year. These indications stem partly from the fact that January 2012 was recorded as the third-wettest month since historical data has been documented around the San Angelo area, and the saying goes, "if January is wet, then you'll have a wet year." This is certainly welcome news and can make a believer of you that the current reprieve we're experiencing due to recent rains could actually last through this summer. Habitat recovery should begin a year earlier than anticipated and maybe all those browse plants, oak species especially, that took such a beating last year, can still be revived. So, while you're out hunting shed antlers, brushing up on songbird calls, or just getting back to the basics - let's all hope that we can bid 'Adios' to La Nina.

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Click on web links found throughout the newsletter to go directly to the associated site

LLANO COUNTY BALD EAGLE NEST *by Dale Schmidt*

If you have ever driven eight miles east of Llano, Texas on State Highway 29, you might have noticed cars parked on the side of the road, pedestrians with binoculars and cameras, and everyone looking up. That just happens to be the best spot in Texas to see, up close, a pair of nesting bald eagles on the Llano River. The Llano provides good sources of water, food and suitable trees for nesting. Historically, a bald eagle pair has had four active nest sites along this one-half-mile stretch of the river in eastern Llano County since the late 1980's. Two of the nest sites have been destroyed by natural causes and the third was abandoned for unknown reasons. The current nest site, which was established in 2010, is located on private property just 97 yards from State Highway 29, and has been a major tourist attraction for Llano County.



© Dale Schmidt TPWD

The bald eagle pair arrives in Llano County as early as October and usually leaves the nest site by mid March depending on the hatch date. The same bald eagle pair uses the nest year after year, and adds more sticks to make the nest larger each year. A nest may become so large that the weight of the nest might break the limb of the tree and destroy the nest, causing the nesting pair to relocate to a new nest site. Mating occurs in November and December with the female laying one to three eggs, most commonly 2. Both the male and female will incubate the eggs with incubation lasting 34 to 36 days. One to two eaglets usually hatch and they grow rapidly and fledge from the nest in 11 to 12 weeks. At the time of fledging, the eaglet will have a wing span of 6 to 7 feet and weigh 10 pounds or more and be just as large as the adults. An eaglet can be identified by its brown feathers with white feathers intermixed on the body and wings. The mature female bald eagle will be somewhat larger than the male. A bald eagle will obtain the white head and tail feathers at 4 to 5 years of age. Bald eagles will mate at 5 to 6 years of age and will mate for life. If one of the mates dies, then the remaining eagle will find a new mate and possibly use the same nest. Bald eagles can live up to 25 to 30 years in the wild.

Visitation to the Llano River site by the public increases when the eaglets are large enough to be seen in the nest, which is usually by mid January. The eaglets will fledge from the nest by mid March and leave the area. If you're planning a trip to the nest site, the best time to see the bald eagle pair and eaglets is in the morning during feed-

ing activity. Remember to bring your binoculars and camera as the morning light is best for photos. The nest is located 8 miles east of Llano Texas on State Highway 29. Hope to see you there.

Writers field notes: The bald eagle pair did return to the nest site first part of October 2011 and started repairing and improving the nest that they used last year. Starting mid-November and into December it appeared that the pair was sitting on an unknown number of eggs. On or about December 18, activity increased with the adults bringing food to the nest. This indicated that at least one or more eggs had hatched.

The hatch date of December 18 suggests the eaglet or eaglets will fledge from the nest around the 1st of March. On January 3, 2012 two eaglets were observed in the nest being fed and cared for by both adults.

UPDATE: It was reported that the eaglets had fledged by March 4, 2012. The young and adults may still be seen around the general area for a short time, but the nest is no longer active.

Dale Schmidt is a TPWD biologist stationed in Llano, TX

NEIGHBORS CAN PARTNER IN LAND STEWARDSHIP

by Rufus Stephens

A major challenge for landowners in the Hill Country is the proper management of deer populations. Proper management includes the challenges of: harvesting enough does to have the desired impact on the population density and the habitat, and allowing bucks to mature enough to be of good quality. Landowners, or their hunters, will often say, "if I don't shoot the first decent buck I see, that buck will just jump across the fence and my neighbor will shoot him" - even though it may be a young buck far from his prime. Reducing deer numbers to appropriate levels will improve overall health of the animals and improve the quality of the habitat for deer and other wildlife. A balanced harvest of bucks and does can also improve the age structure of bucks resulting in better quality mature bucks.

Another major challenge for some landowners is getting the benefit of livestock grazing without owning the animals. I have heard landowners say, "I just don't want to mess with livestock anymore." While periods of rest can be very beneficial, the long-term removal of grazing from the land can be detrimental. Periodic grazing can maintain and improve native grass stands and at the same time can increase forbs (wildflowers) that are part of any healthy Hill Country property.

Both of these land management challenges can be addressed by working with your neighbors as partners in good land stewardship.

With assistance from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department over the past several decades, Wildlife Management Associations (WMAs) or Wildlife Co-ops have been formed around the state by groups of landowners interested in properly managing wildlife populations and habitats. Many WMAs were formed around the goal of improving the quality of white-tailed deer. Landowners in these WMAs know that their neighbor shares the same goals and objectives for the deer population and that together they can have the desired impacts on the population and habitat. Even if you don't hunt you can work with your neighbors to have the proper number of deer harvested in your area so you have healthier deer and healthier habitat for all wildlife.

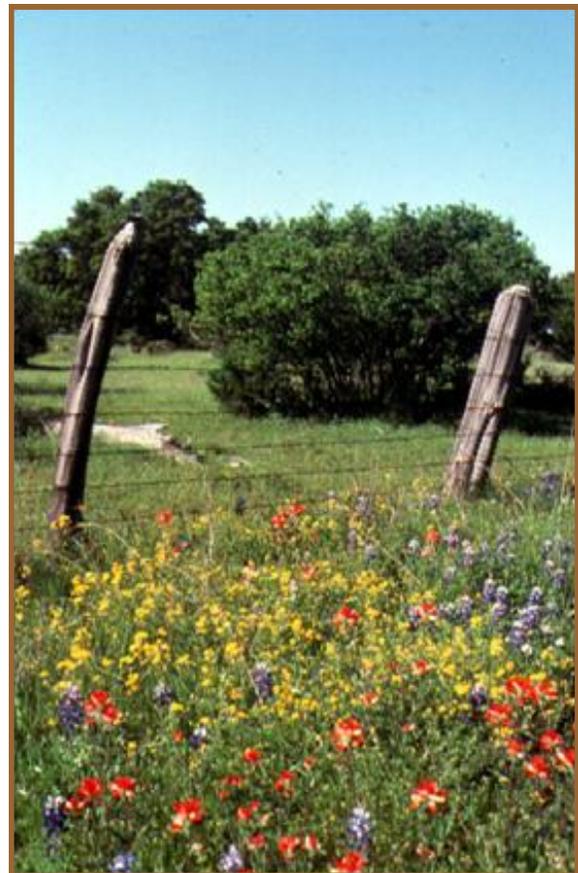
Grazing Co-ops have also been organized in parts of the state, but are usually associated with grazing public lands. Some landowners in our area will work with their neighbors who have livestock and allow their land to be grazed. This way the landowner without the livestock gets the benefit of grazing without the day to day work of owning the animals. The key to using livestock as a tool in land management is

periodic rest. Even landowners with small acreage can benefit from working with their neighbors. The landowner just needs to think of their property as a pasture that the livestock are rotated through for a short period of grazing.

Whether you want to improve the quality of the deer and other wildlife on your property, or use livestock as a tool for habitat improvements, it may be as simple as looking across the fence for a partner in good land stewardship.

Go to the following website to find a Management Association near you:

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/associations/>



Rufus Stephens is a TPWD biologist stationed in Boerne, TX

FROM THE PASTURE

Ringtail (*Bassariscus astutus*)

by Evan McCoy

This animal does not seem to be as commonly seen as it once was. It has the body of a fox and the tail more like that of a raccoon. It is actually in the raccoon family. This small predator is about the size of a housecat and probably has a similar diet as well. It eats most anything it can catch which includes birds, rodents, insects and reptiles, but it will also eat fruits and other mast when they are available.

Ringtails are excellent climbers and are commonly found in rocky areas such as canyon walls and rock piles where they will build their den, but they may occasionally inhabit woodland sites and make use of a hollowed out tree. They tend to stay in their den during daylight hours and venture out at night in search of a meal.

Keep your eyes open for one as you travel along a rural road at night or maybe while conducting a spotlight survey.

Source: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/species/rtail/>

Evan McCoy is a TPWD biologist stationed at the Kerr WMA



Cutleaf Daisy (*Engelmannia pinnatifida*)

by Mary Humphrey

A tough native, cool-season perennial plant found from South Dakota south into the Texas Hill Country is the Cutleaf Daisy also known as Engelmann Daisy. It has a deep tap root, is drought tolerant, grows in a variety of soils, and stays green throughout the winter.

Interestingly enough, this bright yellow daisy seems to flourish in caliche soils along Texas highways and blooms from March through July. It grows 6-24" in height and has one or several erect stems. Leaves coming off the base are 6-12" long and deeply, pinnately incised. Stems and leaves are coated with stiffish hairs. The flower cluster has several flower heads that are 1-1 1/2" wide. It is rated as a moderately preferred food for deer and has a 25% crude protein content in early spring. It is highly palatable to cattle, sheep and goats, provides cover to small mammals, and attracts painted buntings, finches, and various sparrows.



© Mary Humphrey TPWD

Mary Humphrey is a TPWD biologist stationed in Sonora, TX

WILDLIFE TAX VALUATION *by Mike Krueger and Mary Humphrey*

The Texas legislature allows landowners with a current 1-d-1 open-space Agricultural Valuation on their property to change from performing traditional agricultural practices to wildlife management practices which allows them to maintain their current tax valuation. This change is commonly called an Ag Appraisal for Wildlife Management or Wildlife Tax Valuation. Rather than being appraised for its market value, property qualifying for ag valuation is appraised on its productivity value for agricultural purposes. Under Texas law, wildlife management is considered an agricultural use that qualifies for agricultural appraisal. A property must currently be appraised for open-space (traditional ag) use before it can change over to wildlife management use.

There are minimum acreage requirements that vary according to the appraisal region within which a county is located – the county Central Appraisal District (CAD) selects the minimum acreage requirement from an allowable range based on the appropriate appraisal region. These minimum acreages apply only if there has been a reduction in the size of the ag appraised property in the year immediately preceding the application or has subsequently had a reduction in acreage. Refer to your CAD office for the minimum acreage size adopted. Refer also to your local CAD for their requirements on applications and reports landowners are expected to submit by April 30 of a year.

All landowners are required to develop a wildlife management plan by filling out a check-off style form (PWD 885-W7000) that can be found within the ecoregion-specific Wildlife Management Planning Guidelines and Forms found at: http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/private/agricultural_land/

This wildlife management plan must be submitted to your county Central Appraisal District along with a 1-d-1 Open-Space Agricultural Use Appraisal application (Property Tax Form 50-129).

After reading through the Guidelines, landowners may develop their own wildlife management plan or they can utilize the expertise of a wildlife biologist associated with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, Texas Forest Service, or other qualified wildlife biologist. Within the Guidelines are 7 different activity categories that can be performed on properties to benefit various wildlife species targeted by the landowner. Decisions must be made to address separate practices in at least 3 of the 7 wildlife management categories. The categories include activities related to habitat control, erosion control, predator control, providing supplemental water, providing supplemental food, providing supplemental shelter, and conducting census counts on indigenous wildlife species. Landowners' efforts to perform the activities identified in the wildlife management plan are completely voluntary and may change from year to year, but completion of the practices is necessary to maintain the ag appraisal for wildlife management use.

Mike Krueger is the TPWD District Leader stationed in Kerrville, TX

IN A NUTSHELL

Give Your Songbird Population a Boost by Trey Carpenter

Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) trapping is a valuable management tool available to private landowners in Texas who enjoy bountiful songbird populations and wish to contribute positively to songbird diversity. Cowbird nest parasitism has been documented on over 250 species of songbirds and is especially hard on the endangered black-capped vireo and golden-cheeked warbler populations. Private landowners from approximately 50 counties participate in the cowbird trapping program each year. Cowbird populations are concentrated in certain habitats that are more typical of some regions than others. Trappers follow strict protocols to protect other bird species and ensure that harvested cowbirds are humanely dispatched. Since the initiation of cowbird trapping programs in Texas, studies have documented reductions in parasitism rates on Black-capped Vireo nests from over 90 percent in the 1980's to less than 10 percent by 1999. Cowbird trapping is one of the few practices that can be carried out on a small property that can positively impact a songbird population that typically would cover a much larger area. For more information on Cowbird Trapping, trap designs, and on-line trapper certification (brand new!) see: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/nuisance/cowbirds/training.phtml>



Photo courtesy of The Wildlife Conservancy of Texas

Trey Carpenter is a TPWD wildlife biologist stationed in Burnet, TX

Hog Bait by Mary Humphrey

If you don't already have feral hogs on your property, it's generally not a matter of "if" you'll end up with them, but rather "when". Some folks see them as a huntable resource, while others consider them nothing more than a complete nuisance. There are various methods of hunting and trapping that can be used to reduce the population of hogs. Box traps are an ideal way to trap multiple animals as long as the trap is placed between two or more areas of high use such as rooting or bedding sites, along fencelines, or near known hog trails. Hogs will eat most anything, but soured corn seems to work well for attracting hogs while limiting non-target animals. Pre-baiting is essential so that hogs are going into the trap freely before actually setting the trap.

Soured corn recipe:

- ½ sack of corn
 - ½ sack of cow cubes
 - 6-pack of cheap beer
 - 4-6 pkgs. of strawberry/cherry/raspberry jello
 - Dry yeast – enough of 1 pkg. to start mixture fizzing
 - ½ gal. Evolved Habitats® Pig Out® liquid – adds sweet taste
- (Ferment mixture in tub for 1 to 1-1/2 weeks) Can stagger production if feeding out of tubs.



© Dan Klepper

Unusual Acorns by Evan McCoy



© Evan McCoy TPWD

If you have spent some time exploring outdoors then you have probably noticed small, round shaped objects hanging off of the branches on a few of our local trees. They are frequently found on many of our oak species. Some people will assume that it has something to do with mast/seed production. These strange growths are actually called galls. They form when certain insects deposit eggs on a plant which causes the plant to form the unusual tissue around it. The larva, which receives nourishment from the gall, will mature inside until it is ready to emerge. Different insects will have different gall formations. They can also be found a little less conspicuously on the underside of leaves. Galls can be useful for other wildlife as well. Squirrels and birds will occasionally break into the gall to consume the larva. Some galls secrete a sugary substance called honeydew that is used by ants and bees. Other insects will re-use empty galls to lay their own eggs. These formations may be unsightly at times, but generally do not cause harm to the host plant.



FIELD NOTES



News and Information from our Wildlife Management Areas

Drought of 2011 and Beyond

As was the case all over Texas, 2011 was the second driest year ever recorded on the Kerr Wildlife Management Area (WMA) since 1952. Total rainfall for the year was 10.92" which is 15.2 inches less than our average rainfall of 26.13". Approximately one-third of that fell in the month of December. Though it did not beat our record low of 8.25" in 1956, it was just as devastating.

Most of the rainfall came in several small events which resulted in little more than keeping the dust down. The typical emergence of new grass and forb growth was non-existent. Some woody plants managed to leaf out and put on growth, but it was not long before they also shut down. Due to the lack of spring growth, deer were forced to begin eating available browse early which depletes their winter food source. This became apparent around mid-summer as brush showed signs of heavy use and deer began showing poor body conditions. Looking across the landscape one could see large areas of defoliated oaks and rusty colored cedar trees.

Landowners were justifiably concerned about the welfare of wildlife on their ranches. Despite high feed prices, many of them chose to continue supplemental feeding on into the fall and winter. This drought has taken a toll on all wildlife. It not only affects health and reproduction, but it also changes the movement and activity of animals as food and water sources become dangerously limited. This was evident to many as they were seeing half the expected number of deer along survey routes, but yet there was no indication of an unusually high mortality. It was unclear how to move forward in this extreme situation. There was even some debate among biologists about whether to greatly reduce deer populations to hopefully avoid a die off, or to maintain the current population so that if a die off occurred the herd would have enough individuals to recover. Fortunately, we were blessed with some fall moisture that resulted in considerable forb growth which improved the outlook...at least for the winter.

This past deer season the Kerr WMA estimated its lowest historical fawn crop (<18%), antler quality was down and body weights were well below average. This of course came as little surprise given the rough spring and summer. Our main goal is habitat health so we chose to make our normal harvest even though it could result in a considerably lower deer density for next season. We have always followed a simple rule, "If you can grow plants then you can grow animals, if you cannot grow plants then you cannot grow animals". With fewer animals on the range we hope that the plants will make a faster recovery, and eventually we will grow more animals once things return to "normal".

April 23, 2010



May 4, 2011



Photos taken of same location on Kerr WMA

ANTLER DEVELOPMENT



May 12



May 24



June 1



June 30



July 6



July 12



July 29



September 1

This is an individual deer (6.5 yr old) from the Kerr WMA research pens.

Antlers are one of the fastest growing tissues in nature which is evident in these photos.

Photos taken by Gene Fuchs (TPWD Retired)

ON THE HORIZON

Don't forget your MLDP harvest data is to be submitted by April 1, 2012

You can find on-line harvest logs at:

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/business/permits/land/wildlife_management/mldp/

Predator Awareness Workshop and M44 Certification (3 CEUs)

Kerr, Edwards and Real County Partnership

When: March 27, 2012, 9am to 5pm

Cost: \$25 (includes lunch and refreshments)

Where: Kerr Wildlife Management Area

Pre-register by March 23 at the following Extension Offices:

Kerr Co (830) 257-6568; Edwards Co (830) 683-4310; Real Co (830) 232-6673

Thrill-A-Minute: The Native Plants of the Canyon with Bill Carr

Learn the local plants and more

When: April 15, 2012, 9am to 12pm

Cost: Free, Space Limited

Where: Government Canyon State Natural Area

Registration Required: (210) 688-9055; EXT 289 or email at reservations@friendsofgc.org

Landowner Appreciation Day

Short introduction and tour of the Station, BBQ plate lunch, and interacting with fellow landowners

When: April 21, 2012 from 10:30 AM to 2:00 PM

Cost: Free

Where: Texas A&M System Texas AgriLifeResearch – Sonora/Rocksprings Station in Edwards County.

Please RSVP to Dr. John Walker at 325-653-4576 or email at jwalker@ag.tamu.edu

Kerr County Soil and Water Conservation District's Annual Field Day

Topic: FSA Programs, Drought, Brush Management, Grazing and other management tools (3 CEU's)

When: April 27, 2012, 9:30am to 4:30pm

Cost: \$15/person or \$25/couple if paid in advance, \$20/person if paid at the door

Where: Kerr Wildlife Management Area

RSVP Deadline: April 13, 2012 (830) 896-4911 EXT 3 or email Deanna@kerrcountyswcd.com

Small Acreage Landowner Series

6 Week Educational Series

When: July 10—August 14, 2012

Cost: \$15 per class or \$75 for entire series

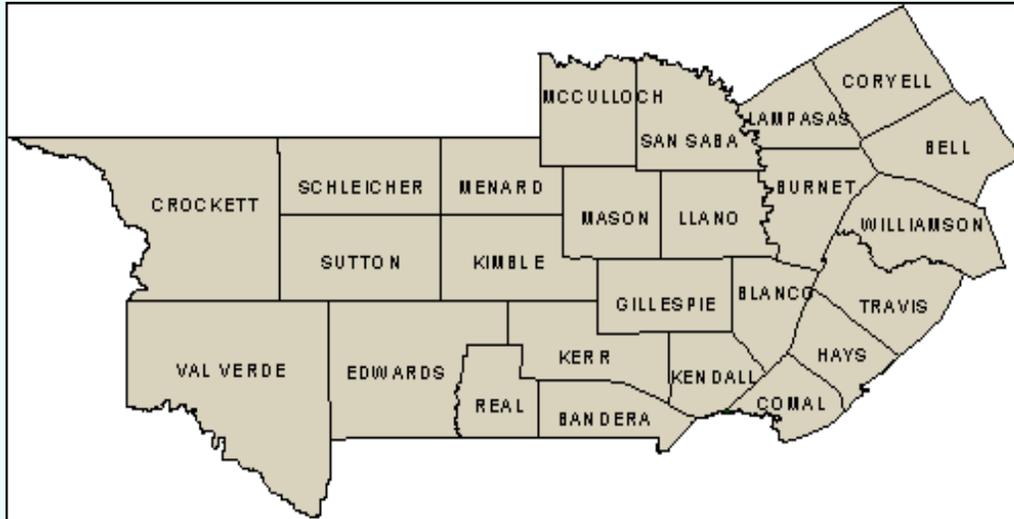
Where: Bandera County Extension Office

Register by June 15 at (830) 796-7755 or email Bandera-tx@tamu.edu

Contact your local State Park or Wildlife Management Area to learn of the many educational programs and outdoor seminars available near you or go to the TPWD calendar:

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/calendar/>.

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"To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations."

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