

THE CEDAR POST

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News and Information for the Texas Hill Country

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HILL COUNTRY VETERINARIAN JOINS WILDLIFE DIVISION RANKS

Blood samples, stomach contents, internal abnormalities, organ tissue collections, viruses, bacteria, field necropsies, clinical symptoms – specimens and trade-words in the fast-paced, dynamic world of wildlife veterinary medicine. In an effort of preparedness to diagnose, recognize and analyze the complexities of health and disease issues that bombard our Texas wildlife species on a daily basis, TPWD is pleased to announce that on July 1, 2014 Dr. Robert Dittmar was selected as our first-ever, Wildlife Division Veterinarian. While Dr. Dittmar will primarily deal with big game animals, he will also be involved with health and disease issues of small and non-game species, statewide.

A fifth generation Texan raised on a working livestock ranch in Gillespie County, Dr. Dittmar still actively ranches with his family partnership. He is a 1979 graduate of TAMU College of Veterinary Medicine and has worked in mixed animal practices in Weslaco, Hondo and Kerrville. He is active in the Texas Farm Bureau, Texas Wildlife Association, Texas Brigades, Texas and Southwest Cattle Raiser's Assn., and has served in various officer positions and directed both the Doss and Harper Wildlife Management Associations.

"Dr. Dittmar joins TPWD with over 30 years of professional experience and is no stranger to TPWD," acknowledges Clayton Wolf, Wildlife Division Director. "Bob has served on the Kerr WMA Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, Wildlife Health Working Group, White-Tailed Deer Advisory Committee, TPWD/TAHC CWD Task Force, and has assisted with multiple bighorn sheep and pronghorn antelope translocation projects. Bob has a keen awareness of the work we do to ensure the long term sustainability of healthy wildlife populations in Texas and the critical role of healthy habitats. His knowledge of our constituents, the state's wildlife health issues, the professionals who comprise the Wildlife Division, and his strong technical knowledge, skills and abilities make him best suited for this challenging position."

As Dr. Dittmar sees it, "The job will have many duties, one of which is assessing disease in free-ranging wildlife species. I will be conducting training sessions throughout the state to allow our biologists to become more comfortable doing field necropsies. One of my primary goals is to enable our biologists to answer landowner and hunter questions about sick animals or abnormalities seen in harvested animals." Biologists receive lots of questions and sometimes pictures of parasites or carcass parts, but often the carcass or part in question has been disposed of before being reported; and it can be difficult to make a diagnosis with limited information. "I would like to encourage landowners and hunters to help us with this by not only taking pictures of abnormalities but by saving pieces of that tissue or whole worm or insect specimen if possible, so that it can be examined and possibly submitted to a lab for testing. The part in question could be placed in a plastic bag and refrigerated, not frozen, until a biologist could be contacted. This will help us to better assess potential disease threats to our wildlife."



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If you have a wildlife health issue, you may contact Dr. Robert Dittmar at his office in Kerrville at 830-896-9045 or through your local TPWD wildlife biologist. Dr. Dittmar affirms, "I'm looking forward to not only working with the great folks in TPWD but the dedicated landowners of the State that are the stewards of our wildlife resources."



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

Conservation Hunting

By Rufus Stephens

Today more and more hunters are harvesting deer with a variety of new objectives which include: improving herd health through population control, as an ecosystem function, improving habitat condition, providing their family with a healthy and sustainable food source, and even donating the meat to feed the hungry. This could be the beginning of a new chapter in the history of hunting in Texas... the rise of the Conservation Hunter.

Hunting has progressed through a number of chapters over the years. When settlers first arrived in Texas, hunting was the primary means to provide food for their families. This subsistence hunting continued into the mid to late 1800's when a new, much more exploitive form of hunting arose. This was the age of market hunting, where the seemingly endless supply of wildlife resources could be harvested in massive quantities to meet the growing demand in eastern markets. An example of this was seen between 1844 and 1853 when there were 75,000 deer hides shipped from a single trading post near Waco back to the east to be used for fine leather products. This age of exploiting natural resources led to dramatic reductions in all kinds of wildlife species which resulted in Texas' first game laws being passed in 1861, and the hiring of the first game warden in 1909. Market hunting declined as wildlife resources declined and additional game laws were enacted and enforced. By this time, wildlife populations, including white-tailed deer, had decreased to historically low levels.



The next chapter that emerged in hunting was sport hunting. To re-build deer populations, does were protected and harvest was centered on bucks, particularly bucks with large antlers or trophies. Trophy hunting grew along with deer populations during the last half of the 20th century to the point where the primary goal of most deer hunters was to harvest a trophy. Deer populations reached historically high levels.

While trophy hunting still dominates in Texas, there seems to be a movement toward the use of hunting as a tool to improve ecosystem health and function and as a sustainable food source. This is ushering in a new chapter to Texas deer hunting that I refer to as "Conservation Hunting". With deer populations at such high levels, these hunters play an important role in managing deer numbers.

Conservation hunting can take many forms and it is not simply about managing deer numbers. For example, these hunters may be interested in a sustainable food source for their family similar to the subsistence hunting of earlier settlers. With growing concerns over antibiotics and hormones in commercially raised meat, lean venison from free-ranging deer that are feeding on native food sources is viewed as a healthier alternative. This is part of the "local food movement" that is sweeping the nation and focuses on locally produced food. Conservation hunters are typically focused on improvement of habitat, ecosystem function, and deer herd health. This is accomplished by intense population control which often targets the reduction of does. This usually requires a considerable harvest that can produce more venison than a single hunter can use in a year. When this occurs, conservation hunters help out their local communities by donating the excess meat to those that are in need. This is usually accomplished through organizations like Hunters for the Hungry, local food banks, or churches that can distribute the donation.

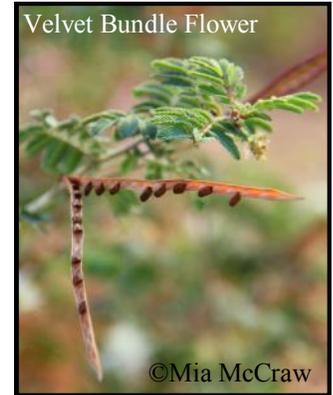
Through proper harvest, the deer populations are balanced with the habitat which reduces pressure on native plant communities resulting in better habitat quality and therefore ecosystem function. Better habitat also results in healthier deer which means higher weights, healthier fawns, and better antler quality. These conservation hunters can be an asset to landowners who are interested in increasing the quality of the habitat and the quality of the deer. Upon closer examination, you may find that some of your lease hunters or family members count themselves in the ranks of this new type of hunter... the Conservation Hunter.

Texas Native Seeds

By Mia McCraw

Reseeding native plant species is one of the most common wildlife habitat improvement methods used by landowners and recommended by natural resource agencies. However, variable success rates and low species diversity of commercially available materials prevent utilization of this proven method in many areas of Central and West Texas. In response, a collaborative project called Texas Native Seeds (TNS) was established in 2011.

The TNS project is focused on collecting, increasing, and commercializing ecotypic native seed sources that are needed to increase habitat restoration success rates. Funding is provided by a combination of sources, including primarily by a large research grant from the Texas Department of Transportation, augmented with support provided by private foundation grants, and by donations from landowners and contributions by the oil and gas industry. TNS is a collaborative project of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute's South Texas Natives Project, Tarleton State University, Texas AgriLife Research's North Texas Ecotype Project, and Borderlands Research Institute's Trans-Pecos Plant Materials Initiative. In addition, the USDA NRCS Plant Materials Centers in Knox City and Kingsville provides invaluable facilities support and critical in-kind cooperation in all aspects of the project.



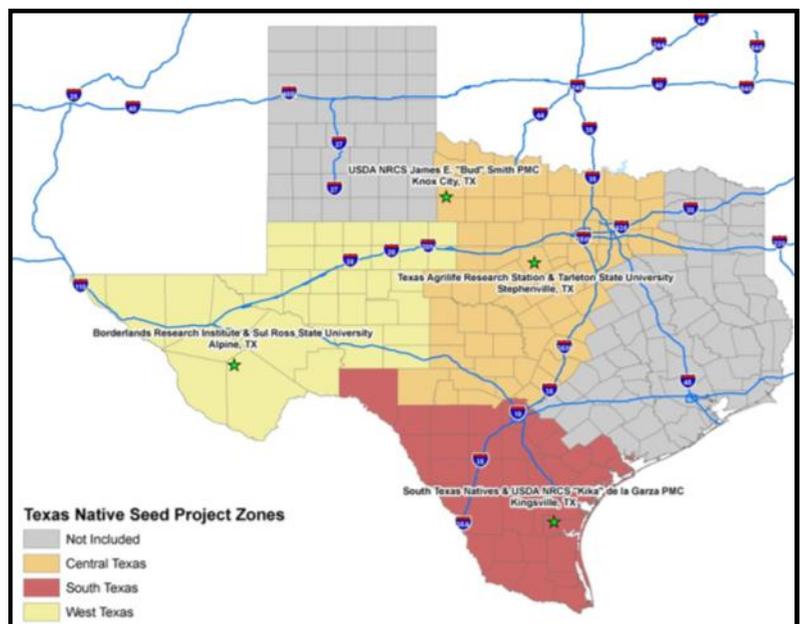
Project seed collectors are seeking the help of private landowners and natural resource managers to locate and gain access to native populations of the plants of interest for collection. Once granted access, workers will collect small amounts of seed by hand and record pertinent information such as the general location, county, and soil series. Our goal is to obtain 2 or more collections of each species, depending on distribution, from each county being served by the project. This collection process will insure that a broad population (geographically and genetically) will be available for evaluation and selection, and that the resulting seed releases will be suited for widespread use. The timeline for seed collection starts in late spring and can stretch through fall depending on climatic conditions. Providing commercial sources of ecotypic native seed that can be obtained and used by private landowners and agencies to restore native habitat is the end goal of TNS.

In addition to supporting project efforts through land access for collections, TNS is always on the hunt for educational and outreach opportunities. Over the past three years we have given more than 30 presentations about our efforts and the importance of native plants and restoration to groups from the Texas Wildlife Association, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, NRCS and the Native Plant Society of Texas. These opportunities allow us to connect with enthusiastic landowners and conservation professionals, which in turn greatly enhances our success in seed collection efforts. If we can help with a program you have coming up in 2015, please let us know!

Please contact us for more information:
www.ckwri.tamuk.edu/research-programs/texas-native-seeds

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Mia McCraw is a Research Associate for the Central Texas portion of the Texas Natives Seeds project.

FROM THE PASTURE

Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*)

The Bobcat is a medium-sized, reddish brown or grayish cat with a short tail, long legs, and large feet. Its ears usually have small tufts at the tips, and its fur is longer on the sides of its head than on the rest of its body. They are active largely at night, although they frequently leave cover and begin hunting long before sundown.



Their diet consists mainly of small mammals and birds. Although deer occasionally are killed and eaten, most of the deer meat consumed is from carrion. The breeding season begins in February, and after a gestation period of about 60 days, the two to seven young are born. Bobcats live in a variety of habitats, but they favor rocky canyons or outcrops. They choose thickets for protection and den sites. These cats are highly adaptable and are found throughout Texas.

Source: www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/species/bobcat/

Yellow Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)

by Rufus Stephens

Yellow Indiangrass is showing its fall colors this year. This tall grass species is fairly common in the tall grass prairies to the east, but in the mixed grass prairies of the Hill Country it makes up only a small percentage, even under excellent conditions. Though it is always present, it will bloom extraordinarily strong every few years, and this happens to be one of those years. Yellow Indiangrass is used by wildlife such as our wintering Le Conte's Sparrows (*Ammodramus leconteii*) that use it for escape cover and also use the seeds as a food source.



Rufus Stephens is TPWD District Leader stationed in Kerrville, TX

Wildlife Trailer

By Dale Schmidt

TPWD Wildlife Biologists in the Edwards Plateau and Cross Timbers have a new tool to help educate landowners, students, hunters and the general public about wildlife conservation and management. The Wildlife Division recently acquired a 20' display trailer due to the generosity of the Texas Wildlife Association and Charlie McLemore, owner of Magnum Trailers. This trailer has been transformed into a TPWD wildlife education display.

Outreach and education have always been major priorities for TPWD. However, staff are often limited in the amount of information that can be covered and the manner in which that information is delivered to their audience. Limited space in vehicles and manpower required to set up displays usually forces staff to narrow topics and displays to a minimum. In addition, many remote sites do not have accessible power sources to run technology-based programs that often help to relay the intended message.



The new education trailer will provide the opportunity for TPWD staff to efficiently display and address a broader range of topics which cater to a diverse audience. The trailer contains four unique compartments featuring information on ecosystems, wildlife management, job duties of wildlife biologists, and wildlife management areas (WMA's). Display items are permanently mounted in the trailer and require very little set up. Each compartment opens up and allows the public to easily walk around both sides to view displays. The trailer is also equipped with two 42" outdoor TV's that allow staff to display slide presentations and videos so that they can elaborate on any subject. Conveniently, it also has its own power source that can run the lights and the A/V system so that programs can be given at any location and time of day. This outreach trailer can be seen at various events in the local area and can also be requested by contacting your local TPWD office or biologist.

Dale Schmidt is a wildlife technician stationed in Llano, TX

IN A NUTSHELL

Exotic Mammals and Fowl

Exotic mammals refers to grass-eating or plant-eating, single-hoofed or cloven-hoofed animals that are not indigenous or native to Texas and are known as ungulates, including animals from the deer and antelope families that landowners have introduced into this state. This includes, but is not limited to feral hog, aoudad sheep, axis deer, elk, sika deer, fallow deer, blackbuck antelope, nilgai antelope, and russian boar. Exotic fowl refers to any avian species that is not indigenous to this state, including ratites (emu, ostrich, rhea, cassowary, etc.).

There are no state bag or possession limits or closed seasons on exotic animals or fowl on private property. It is against the law to:

- Hunt an exotic without a valid hunting license.
- Hunt an exotic on a public road or right-of-way.
- Hunt an exotic without the landowner's permission.
- Possess an exotic or the carcass of an exotic without the owner's consent

For more information on hunting laws and regulations visit: www.tpwd.texas.gov/regulations/outdoor-annual/hunting/

Texas Freshwater Turtles

Dispelling Misconceptions

- Many people believe that turtles are a nuisance or that they eat game fish. As a result, turtles are often killed by fishermen or shot for sport.
- Dozens of scientific studies examining the diets of native freshwater turtles indicate that turtles eat primarily plant material and aquatic invertebrates. Fish make up a small part of the diet of any freshwater turtle found in Texas.
- Carrion is accepted by most species, which probably explains the myth that turtles eat game fish; they like the same bait as game fish or they eat dead fish off of trot lines.
- Recent studies suggest that the presence of freshwater turtles actually improves water quality and game fish habitat.

Recreational Harvest

- Recreational harvest is allowed for most species of freshwater turtles native to Texas as long as they are not on the [Texas or Federal Threatened and Endangered List](#) and license requirements are met.
- No collection of any freshwater turtle is allowed in public waters.
- No person is allowed to possess a [Texas diamondback terrapin](#) (*Malaclemys terrapin littoralis*) (image below) at any time. This species is restricted to Texas coastal waters.
- The recreational bag limit is six (6) for turtle species listed on the TPWD [Black List](#) and 25 turtles for other species.

Visit our website or contact our TPWD herpetologist if you would like more information
 Andrew G. Gluesenkamp, Ph.D
andy.gluesenkamp@tpwd.texas.gov





Food Habits of Coyotes

by John Kinsey

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) can be found across the North American continent from the Bronx to Los Angeles, Hudson Bay to the Everglades, and Northern Alaska to Costa Rica (Glass, 1997). Because coyotes are such versatile animals with diverse diets, high reproductive potential, and the ability to adapt to changing habitats - they continue to inhabit new areas. Since the range of the coyote is so great and transcends ecoregions, their diet reflects a variance from vegetarianism to dependence on big game species depending upon what is available (Hernandez et al. 2002, Glass, 1997, and Meinzer, 1995). Most determinations about the diet of coyotes are, and should be viewed as, site-specific rather than regional (Glass, 1997).



Coyotes are generally accepted as opportunistic feeders or generalists; however, some believe that coyotes are highly selective predators (Glass, 1997). Even though coyotes are archetypal generalists, some individuals may specialize on particular prey (Sacks and Neale, 2002). The theory of optimal foraging states that the predator selects certain prey because the amount of energy gained from that particular prey is greater than the amount of energy expended during its capture (Sacks and Neale, 2002, Hernandez et al. 2002, Glass, 1997). A pair of coyotes can be energetically sustained for two days on a single lamb, but it would take approximately 10 jackrabbits, or 20 ground squirrels to do the same. This means that from an energy conservation standpoint, it would be more advantageous for coyotes to specialize in the predation of lambs rather than small mammals (Sacks and Neale, 2002). Another reason for prey specialization may be that a coyote, during a stressful period, turns to a certain available prey species, subsequently develops a taste for that animal and continues to prey upon it. This is often the case when a coyote specializes in the predation of livestock (Sacks and Neale, 2002).

Coyotes have the ability to assess and select the most profitable food items within a wide variety of prey (Glass, 1997). Some foods are selected for more than others during certain seasons (Meinzer, 1995; Glass, 1997). This is more likely due to food availability of these particular items during these seasons. The frequency of predation upon big game animals during late winter months and into the spring can be directly connected to the breeding season of the coyote. Because coyotes are in larger groups at this time, it is easier for them to take down larger prey (Bright and Hervert, 2005). Ungulates such as white-tailed deer will hide their fawns while foraging, leaving them helpless against a coyote looking for a meal to take to her pups (Glass, 1997).

In July of 2014, The TPWD Kerr Wildlife Management Area (WMA), in conjunction with The University of Texas – San Antonio (UTSA), initiated a study on the dietary habits of coyotes in the Texas Hill Country. In this study, coyote scat found throughout the WMA will be collected and processed to identify all food items in each sample. At the same time, baseline food availability surveys will be conducted seasonally across the entire WMA. After all scat samples are processed and the amount of each food item found has been quantified, each food item will be compared to the results of the availability surveys. The results of the fecal analyses when compared to the baseline food availability surveys should allow the determination of whether coyotes are behaving as generalists, or opportunistic foragers specific to the Kerr WMA.

To become better wildlife managers, we must realize the importance of holistic ecosystem management and shy away from a single species approach. Coyotes are an important component to the ecosystem of Texas. As with the management of any species, the more knowledge we gain about coyotes, the better we understand their role, and the better we can manage for a healthy ecosystem.

References

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- Meinzer, W. 1995. Coyote. Texas Tech University Press, USA.
- Bright, J. L. and J. J. Hervert. 2005. Adult and Fawn Mortality of Sonoran Pronghorn. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 33:43-50.

ON THE HORIZON

Submit MLDP harvest data by April 1, 2015

Fire Ecology: Elements of a Prescribed Fire

When: Saturday, January 24, 2015, 8am – 3pm
 Where: Herff Farm, 33 Herff Rd, Boerne
 Cost: \$20 for HCPBA Members, \$25 for CNC Members, \$30 for Non-Members
 Registration: Contact the Cibolo Nature Center at nature@cibolo.org or 830-249-4616

Wildlife Tax Valuation Workshop (3-part series)

Saturday, January 17, 2015, 9 am - 1 pm
 Saturday, January 24, 2015, 9 am - 2:30 pm
 Saturday, January 31, 2015, 9 am - 1 pm
 Where: Cibolo Nature Center, 140 City Park Road, Boerne
 Cost: CNC Members: \$90 per person or \$110 per couple. Non Members: \$110 per person or \$135 per couple.
 Registration Required: Contact the Cibolo Nature Center at nature@cibolo.org or 830-249-4616

**Harper W.M.A. Youth Hunt In Memory of Jacob Krebs
 Honors Jacob Krebs who died on April 1, 2013 while training for his US Navy S.E.A.L. contract**

25 Youth (ages 9-17) of fallen or wounded soldiers are given the opportunity to hunt on local ranches
 Volunteers are needed: fundraising, meals, check-in, shooting range, deer processing, guiding hunters
 When: January 16-18, 2015
 Contact: Will Krebs, (H) 830-699-2860, (C) 830-889-2860
 Donations to support this operation can be sent to W. Krebs at 13844 FM 2093, Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
 Checks payable to: Harper Wildlife Management Assn OR Texas Youth Hunting Program/memo: Harper WMA Youth Hunt
Thank you for your support

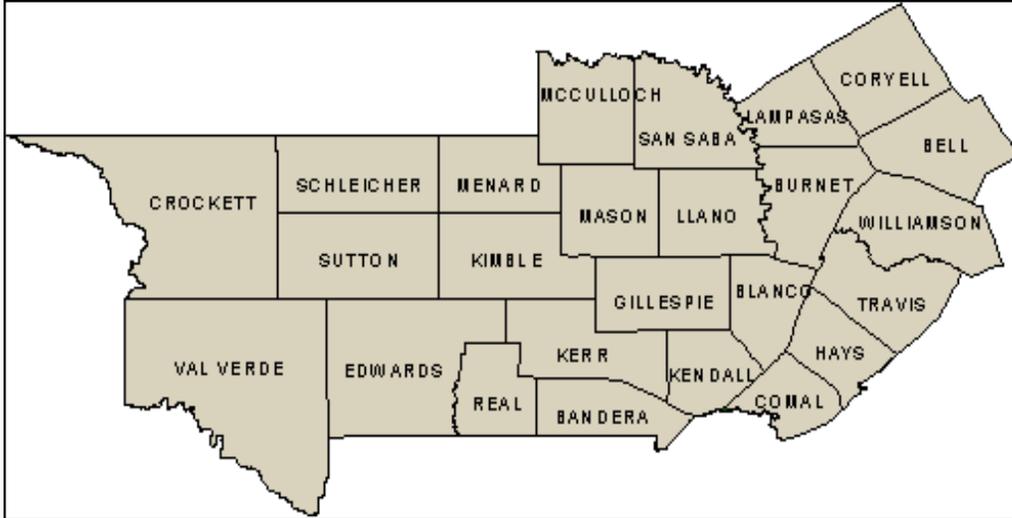
**Farming and Ranching Workshop for Veterans
 Agriculture Workshop for Active Duty and Veteran Military Service Members**

When: Saturday, January 24, 2015, 8am – 5pm
 Where: AgriLife Extension Office, 3151 SE Inner Loop, Georgetown
 Registration: RSVP at <http://txagrability.tamu.edu/workshops.php>

Wildlife Tax Valuation Workshop (3-part series)

Saturday, February 7, 2015, 9 am - 1 pm
 Saturday, February 21, 2015, 9 am - 2:30 pm
 Saturday, February 28, 2015, 9 am - 1 pm
 Where: Riverside Nature Center, 150 Francisco Lemos, Kerrville
 Cost: \$90 per person or \$110 per couple
 Registration Required: Riverside Nature Center at RNC.Kerrville@gmail.com or 830-257-4837

HILL COUNTRY WILDLIFE DISTRICT



Note: There have been some recent changes in contact information so please check the Hill Country Wildlife District map for updated contact information for your local biologist.

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