North Texas Wildlife Management News

August 2008 • Volume 1 • Issue 2

Inside this issue:

A Step Back

I have to admit that I under-estimated the power of email and the internet. What I did not anticipate was the forward button in your email software. The newsletter reached far beyond the list of 80 or so landowners and land managers that I provide wildlife management technical assistance to here in north Texas. As a result, I wanted to step back and give those who don't know me some background on me and the technical guidance program here at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD).

The goal of the Technical Guidance Program is to help landowners assess the wildlife potential of their land and recommend ways to improve the habitat to support a diversity of wildlife. TPWD biologists help landowners achieve their wildlife management goals. Through on-site assistance, biologists provide recommendations to landowners on how to manage the various wildlife populations and habitat on their land. Assistance is free and you can find contact information for your local TPWD biologist at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/technical_guidance/biologists.

I am from San Antonio and growing up I spent my free time on family ranches in central Texas. I received a B.S. in Wildlife Management at Texas Tech in 1994 and a M.S. in Range and Wildlife Management from Texas A.&M. at Kingsville in 1997. I worked as a wildlife biologist for private ranches in the panhandle and south Texas before starting with TPWD in 2000. I was a Private Lands Biologist in south Texas for seven years and have been a Technical Guidance Biologist in north Texas for the past year and a half. My wife (Melanie) and I have been married four years and we had our first child, Lane, this past March. Some of my interests include bow hunting, fishing and golf.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter. If you have any ideas for future topics, comments or would like to subscribe, please email me at tbartoskewitz@gmail.com.

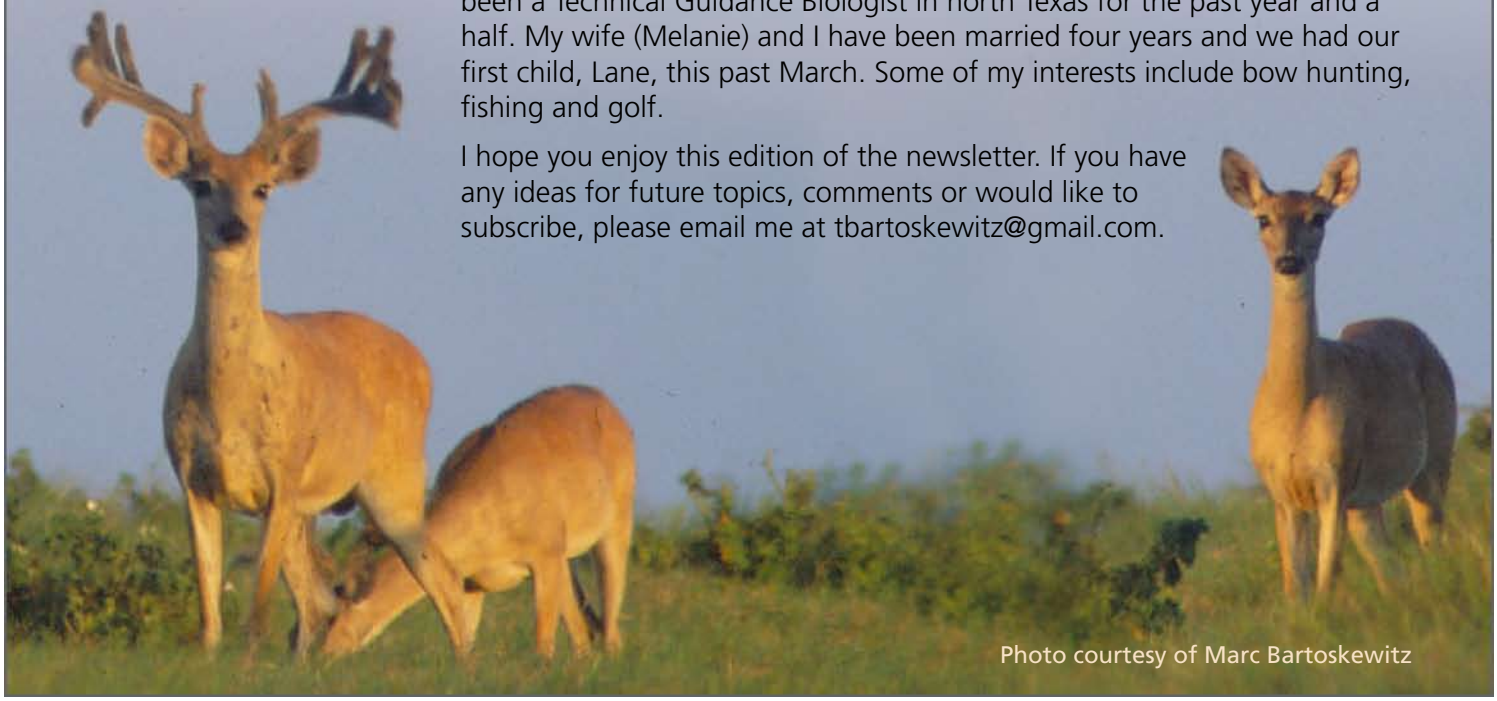


Photo courtesy of Marc Bartoskewitz

Texas Wildlife Information Management System **(TWIMS)**

The Wildlife Division has instituted the Texas Wildlife Information Management Services (TWIMS) program with the goal of integrating all data collected by the Wildlife Division. The purpose of this program is to create a secure centralized system for entering information, storing and analyzing data, generating reports, and printing permits.

WHY THE CHANGE?

This system provides important tools for TPWD biologists and landowners which will significantly increase the efficiency of managing information and data needed to make better decisions concerning the management of wildlife resources in Texas. For example, TWIMS will assist field biologists and landowners with data collection, storage and backup, while eliminating redundant data collection and maintenance.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO ME?

TWIMS will also generate reports such as deer population and harvest trends. You will be able to compare your deer population with averages from surrounding counties (e.g., average field-dressed weight of 5 1/2-year-old bucks, age structure of doe harvest) as a way to evaluate the effectiveness of individual management actions.

IS MY RANCH INFORMATION STILL PRIVATE?

Be assured that your ranch information will remain private; you and your biologist are the only people who can access your data. Data used for comparison reports is generalized by county.Our policy on privacy has not changed. No specific ranch information is ever shared without the landowner's permission.

HOW CAN I PARTICIPATE?

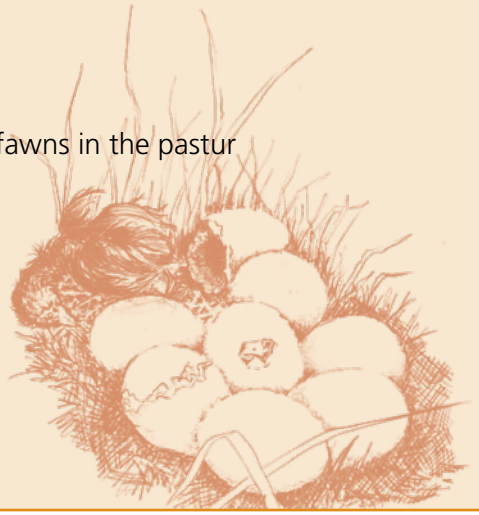
TWIMS is an online service, so you must have Internet access to retrieve information about your property. You can also receive information about your harvest recommendations and permits through e-mail. Participation is not mandatory. If you wish to receive information from TWIMS regarding your property, you need to submit an e-mail address to your local biologist.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Contact your local biologist, and he or she will be able to assist you with any concerns you have about TWIMS.

This month **AT THE RANCH**

- Clean hummingbird feeders every three to four days
- Be mindful of ground-nesting birds when shredding or mowing ar
- Monitor and ensure supplemental water sources are available
- Monitor supplemental food sources
- Be on the lookout for quail chicks, turkey poults and white-tailed deer fawns in the pastur
- Prepare seedbeds for fall food plots
- Monitor blue bird nest boxes
- Conduct deer spotlight census and record incidental observations
- Fallow disking will promote germination of seed producing forbs
- Prepare ground and plant cool season food plots
- Conduct soil tests at food plot sites
- Shred or disk sunflowers, croton or millet for dove feed
- Begin flooding moist soil units for ducks in September



SPOTLIGHT on Plants

Bumelia, Chittam, Woolly Bucket Bumelia, Gum elastic *(Bumelia lanuginosa)*

Bumelia is a deciduous shrub or tree to 45 feet or more and is found throughout most of north Texas and the rolling plains. It can also be found in the Edwards Plateau and on sandy range sites in south Texas. Bumelia can grow as an individual tree or in dense thickets or mottes. Thorns are present along stem tips and the zig zag shaped branches. Leaves are alternate or clustered on short lateral spurs and are one to three inches long. They are elliptical and oblong shaped with smooth margins and are shiny dark green above with densely covered gray or rust colored hairs beneath. Fruits are a elliptical purple to black berry (~1/2 inch) that mature in autumn and have one seed. Bumelia is common in valleys and rocky slopes of uplands. The fruit is eaten by a variety of wildlife including turkey and deer. Bumelia is a moderately preferred browse species and provides good cover for wildlife.

Maximilian Sunflower *(Helianthus maximiliani)*

Maximilian sunflowers are tall perennials with one or more stalks and long, narrow, pale green leaves. They produce large bright yellow flowers up to three inches across in a spiral around the stem. Common on roadsides and low areas, this sunflower grows from one to 10 feet high with an average around four to six feet tall.

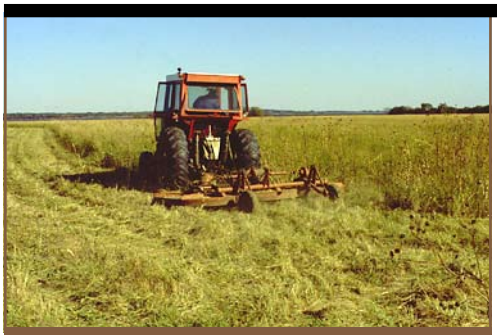
Maximilian sunflowers are yellow flowered perennials that provide food and shelter for a wide variety of wildlife. Butterflies enjoy the nectar from the masses of late summer blooms, deer enjoy the leaves and buds, and dove, quail, and other birds enjoy the seeds produced in the fall. Most sunflowers are annuals but Maximilian sunflowers are perennials and come back for many years from their roots. A single plant will slowly form a growing circular colony over a number of years. Sunflowers are heliotropes (sun-lovers) and the flower heads turn to follow the sun as it moves across the sky. Look at the next field of sunflowers that you see. On a sunny day all of the flowers will be facing the same direction. Maximilian sunflowers are found in seasonally moist ditches or depressions on prairies.

Plant photos courtesy of Jim Dillard and Ty Bartoskewitz

DOVE FIELD Management

Annual native sunflowers provide a major source of food for resident and migratory mourning doves throughout the Cross Timbers and Prairies and Rolling Plains Regions. Large fields may attract concentrations of doves for short periods of time during the late summer and fall and provide excellent sport hunting opportunities. Annual sunflower *(Helianthus annuus)* is a native, warm season, tap-rooted annual forb. Native annual sunflowers reproduce by seeds only and grow to variable heights from one to 14 feet, depending on soil moisture. Seeds may remain viable in the soil for many years until conditions are optimum for germination. Native annual sunflowers are very drought tolerant.

Initial plantings of native annual sunflowers should be conducted during the fall or early winter in a well prepared seedbed for growth during the following spring and summer. Sunflowers should be planted at three to five pounds per acre for pure stands and at a depth of one inch or less using a seed drill. Native annual sunflower seeds may also be planted along with winter wheat, oats, rye or other small grains in a mix. Sunflowers will begin to germinate as these cool season small grains mature and die back during late spring and early summer. In subsequent years where a stand of sunflowers has been established, lightly plow or disk between October and January for the next year's growth. If winter small grains are to be planted during the fall or early winter where sunflowers are established, no additional sunflowers seed should be added and the cultivation associated with these plantings will also replant existing native annual sunflower seeds. Grazing small grain plantings by cattle will also help incorporate sunflower seeds into the soil. Native annual sunflowers planted during the spring will germinate at the rate of only about two percent to five percent but may germinate the following year if conditions are right. Cultivation of fields for wheat pasture containing sunflowers during late August and September makes sunflower seed unavailable to doves and other seed eating wildlife species and may contribute to move-



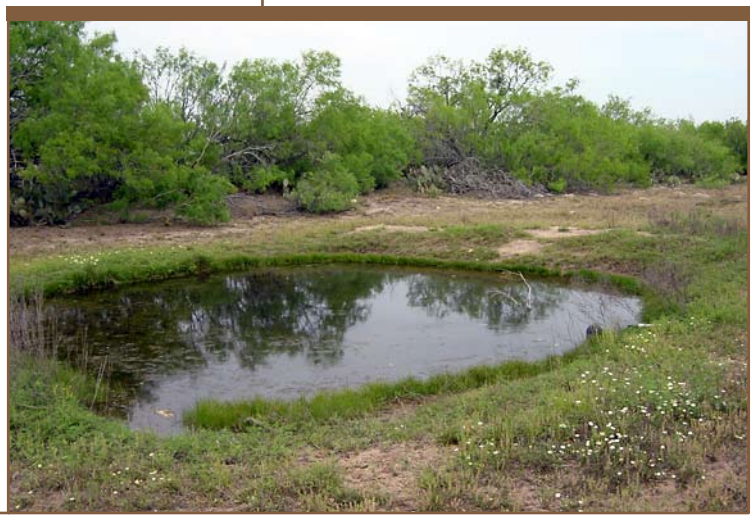
ment to other feeding areas. Delaying fall plowing until mid-October will greatly improve sunflower seed availability to doves.

There are many other crop options available for dove fields. Some of these include red or white milo, sesame seed, millet and sorghums. In some cases, it could be beneficial to stagger planting dates in the same field by seven to 10 days. This will allow for the crop to mature throughout dove season in the same field to attract birds for the entire season. This technique works especially well with milo and sesame under irrigated conditions. Check with your local seed provider to determine the number of days it takes for a particular small grain to mature. Use this number and advice from local farmers to help you determine when to plant small grains so they will mature about the start of dove season in your area.

To facilitate access and feeding by mourning doves, strips should be mowed through your fields during late summer to create openings and shatter mature seeds. Mowed strip widths may vary, depending on the size of the field, but generally should be twice the width of the unmowed strips (i.e. 200 feet mowed by 100 feet unmowed). Shredded strips should also be placed along the perimeter of the field to allow places for hunters to hunt and retrieve downed birds with ease. Mowing a large area in the center of the field will also give birds a place to land and congregate in the field. Hunters should pass shoot the doves as they come to and from the field from a perimeter shooting location. It is not recommended to place hunters at the center of the field. This will discourage birds from feeding in your field and also presents a safety liability.

Many old fields or croplands taken out of crop production contain a diverse seed bank in the soil including native sunflowers and croton. Disking or other soil disturbance operations in such areas during late fall and winter often results in vigorous growth of seed producing annuals the following spring and summer. Fallow winter disking is the most economical method for growing native annual sunflowers and many other native annual seed producing plants used by wildlife.

Adequate roost trees and available water sources nearby can also increase the potential for doves to be attracted to your fields. Tanks or ponds should have at least six feet of bank edge that is free of herbaceous cover to give the birds a landing area and access point. Overflows from windmills also provide a good water source for doves. Hopefully, these tips and a few days at the skeet range this summer will increase your success this September in the field.



BINARY Bio

7–8 average number of shotgun shells to harvest one dove

24 days until north and central zone dove season

32 number of bat species in Texas

195 minimum entry score for non-typical white-tailed deer for "all-time" B/C record book

4,840 square yards per acre

26,000 number of square miles in the Cross Timbers and Prairies region of north Texas

Nathan's **NONGAME**

Horned Toads

by Nathan Rains

"Yeah, when I was younger we used to see horned toads all the time". Boy, if I had a nickel for every time I've heard that over the past few years. But the somber reality is, many of us did frequently see horned lizards across much of Texas in the past. The unique and fascinating horned lizard was, and is, a popular critter here in Texas…so much so that it's our state reptile.

The Texas Horned Lizard *(Phrynosoma cornutum)* once ranged over most of Texas (with east Texas being the exception) as well as Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Southeast Colorado and southeast Arizona. Their range also extends well into Northern Mexico. This species is found further east than any other species of horned lizard. However, over the past few decades, their range has been greatly reduced across much of central Texas, now rarely occurring east of I-35. Fortunately, they are still fairly common in the panhandle, west Texas and south Texas. Texas horned lizards prefer arid to semi-arid habitats with relatively sparse vegetation and an abundance of open, bare ground.

The Texas horned lizard is differentiated from other horned lizard species by a white stripe down the middle of its back, two rows of spiny fringe scales down its side, and its most recognizable feature… the two large spines on its head. They are actually two large occipital horns that are nearly conical in shape which are unique to this species. The size of Texas horned lizards is typically 2 ½ to 4 ½ inches, not counting its fairly short tail. They are cryptically camouflaged in coloration, allowing them to blend in amazingly well with their surroundings. This aids in defense as they are not as swift-a-foot as most other lizard species.

Texas horned lizards typically mate and lay eggs shortly after emerging from hibernation in the late spring through July and August. The female will dig a shallow hole and lay approximately 30 eggs which will hatch in five to nine weeks. The young receive no parental care and are on their own as soon as they emerge.

One unique aspect of all horned lizards is their appetite for ants and the Texas horned lizard is no exception. Approximately 70 percent of its diet is comprised of harvester (Red) ants. The rest is primarily made up of various other insects. Another unique behavior of horned lizards is their unique ability to squirt blood from their eyes. Yes, this is one instance that old legend is actually true. When alarmed, horned lizards can increase the blood pressure in their heads and then release a stream of blood from the ocular sinuses in their eyelids through the tear ducts. The stream can be "aimed" forwards or backwards to some extent and can travel a distance up to six feet. This defense is primarily used against canine predators as chemicals in the blood have been found through research to have an adverse taste reaction in canine species (dogs, coyotes and foxes). Texas horned lizards camouflaged coloration, "hard to swallow" body design and other defenses make it a less desirable prey item to many predators. Curious little boys are another matter entirely.

Loss of preferred habitats through conversion of native rangeland to improved pastures for livestock, urban expansion, widespread pesticide use on native harvester ant populations, and fire ants are all thought to be causes of decline in the abundance and range of the Texas horned lizard. Hopefully as we become more aware of these factors and become better land stewards and conservationists, we can someday soon say "boy, it's sure nice to see horned toads running around here again."

EDITOR'S NOTE

Nathan Rains is the Wildlife Diversity Biologist for north Texas and is based in Cleburne. He will be periodically writing articles for future issues.

CANDID Wildlife

Send your best and most unique trail cam photo. I will post a new picture(s) each month.

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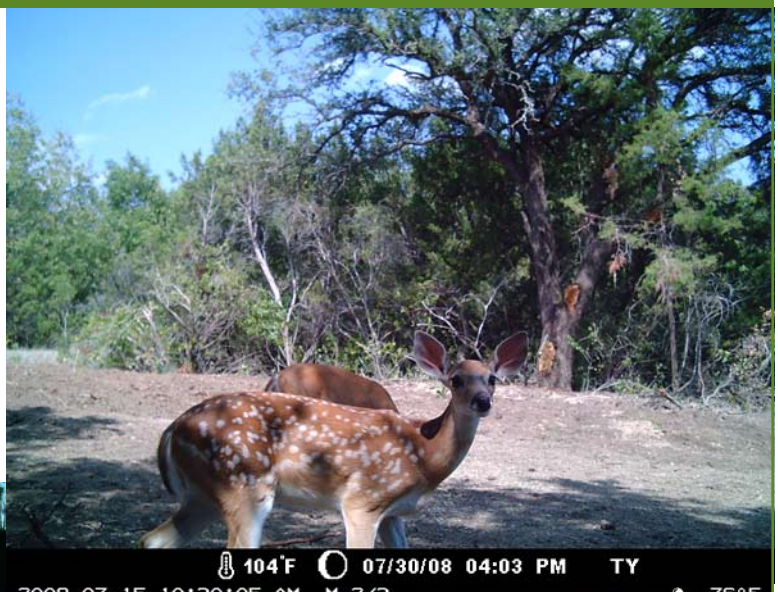
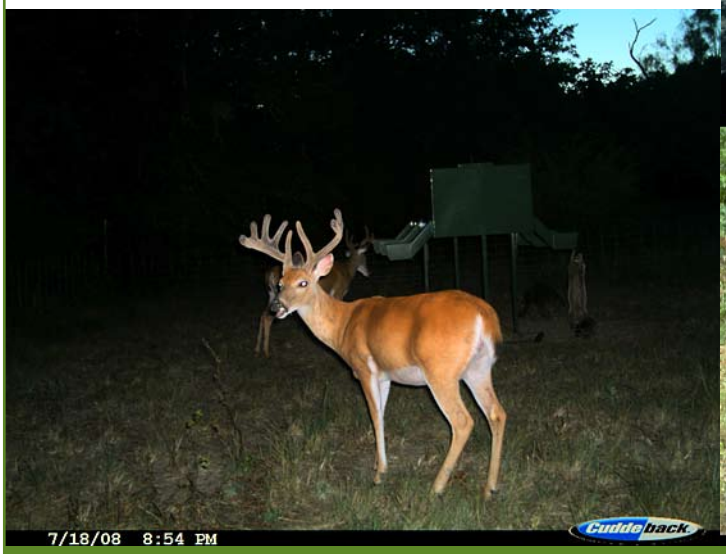
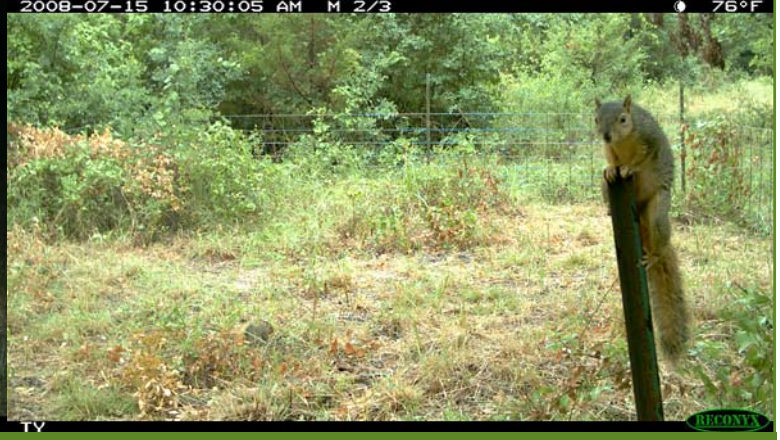






UPCOMING EVENTS in North Texas

August 15–17, 2008: **Texas Trophy Hunters Extravaganza,** Fort Worth, Texas, Will Rogers Center. For more information visit www.ttha.com

August 23, 2008: **Region 2 Texas Big Game Awards Banquet,** Childress, Texas, Fair Park Auditorium. For more information visit www.TexasBigGameAwards.com

September 1, 2008: **Opening day of dove season in North Texas**

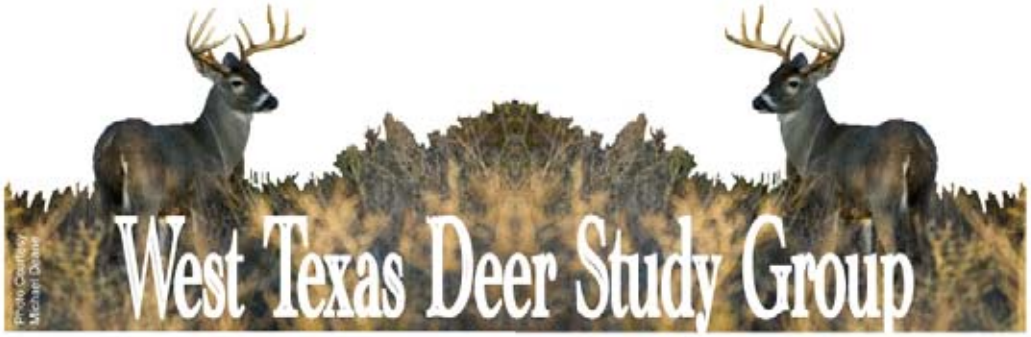
September 13, 2008: **Texas Big Game Awards Region 3 Banquet**, Abilene, Texas, Abilene Civic Center. For more information visit www.TexasBigGameAwards.com

September 23–24, 2008: **West Texas Deer Study Group**, Albany, Texas. For information, contact Kassi Scheffer at kscheffer@texas-wildlife.org or (800) 839-9453, or log on at www.texas-wildlife.org

September 27, 2008: **Opening day of archery season in Texas.** For more information visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us

October 2–3, 2008: **Texas Quail Study Group,** Odessa, Texas. For more information visit www.texas-wildlife.org/Workshops&Events

October 23–24, 2008: **Brush Sculpting: A Decade Later,** Snyder, Texas. For more information visit www.texas-wildlife.org/Workshops&Events



Back to the Basics of Deer Management

Date:
September 23-24, 2008

Location:
Aztec Theater, Albany
&
Ranch Tours, Shackelford County

Fees:
Before 8/22: $60
After 8/22: $90
"Please register at the door after September 16"
Registration includes 2 meals and all program materials.

Hotels:
Albany Motor Inn
Hwy 180 @ Hwy 283
325-762-2451

Whitten Inn, Abilene
Hwy 351 & I-20
800-588-5050

Rooms blocked—mention WTDSG

Contact:
Alan Heirman
325-762-3165 or 325-280-1313

Tuesday, September 23

7:30 Registration & Refreshments
The Evolution of White-Tailed Deer in Shackelford County (Bob Green)
Aldo Leopold Perspective on Land Stewardship (Dr. Dale Rollins)
Getting Back to the Basics of Habitat Management (Steve Nelle)
Deer Nutrition – What Do We Really Know (Dr. Tim Fulbright)
Prescribed Burning for Habitat Improvement (Ricky Linex)
Evaluation of Survey Methods, Wherein lies the Accuracy (Ty Bartoskewitz)
12:00 Lunch
Deer – Cattle Interactions (Dr. Susan Cooper)
Big Country Deer Manager's Discussion (Johnnie Hudman & Rob Hailey)
Managing for Post-rut White-tails (Dr. David Hewitt)
Managing Genetics of Free-Ranging Deer Populations (Dr. Randy DeYoung)
Managed Lands Deer Permits (Mitch Lockwood)
Future Research Needs for Deer in the Rolling Plains
Deer Management Calendar (Ty Bartoskewitz)
Research on Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) in Deer (Dr. Don Davis)
6:15 Dinner & Presentations
Stasney's Cook Ranch
Dr. David Hewitt, TAMUK
Dr. James Kroll, SFASU

Wednesday, September 24

8:00 Convene for Ranch Tour
Plant Identification & Habitat Evaluation
Examine 2008 prescribed burn & Discuss burn effects
10:15 Deer Dissection at Stasney's Cook HQ
Getting to Know Your Deer
What Deer Eat & Why (Kent Mills)
Rumen Contents (Steve Nelle & Ricky Linex)
Muscles & Skeleton (Johnnie Hudman)
Fawn Development (Ty Bartoskewitz)
Deer Anatomy (Dr. Bill Eikenhorst)
Internal Organs (Dr. Bob Dittmar)
12:00 Adjourn

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