

THE CEDAR POST

APRIL 2013

News and Information for the Texas Hill Country

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1

50 YEARS OF MAKING LIFE BETTER OUTSIDE



What does “life’s better outside” mean to you? Does it mean hunting with your best buds; taking the kids fishing; camping with your church group; gardening in your backyard; adding new birds to your life list; or star gazing at a State Park? Fifty years ago the Texas Game and Fish Commission and the State Parks Board was merged to create the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Our mission has always been 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 to make “life better outside”.

To those of us who work at TPWD - in fisheries, State Parks, law enforcement, wildlife conservation, and administratively - there’s no more important work to be done than what we do for the natural resources and citizens of the state of Texas. As the video states at <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/features/50years/>: “We are gathered here to celebrate life, in good times and bad; to protect, provide comfort and joy, to help you express yourself, to understand and honor our past and nurture our future; to have the chance to really feel alive. Imagine the next 50 years, and join the celebration by doing something active in the outdoors today!”

Below is a message from the TPWD Foundation:

If you are interested in supporting your state agency, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation is pleased to announce that H-E-B, in recognition of Earth Day, has selected EarthShare of Texas to be the April beneficiary for its in-store coupon promotion. This means that customers can tear off and add check-out coupons worth \$1, \$3, or \$5 to their total bill to support environmental work throughout the State of Texas for the entire month of April.

H-E-B supports many EarthShare of Texas organizations with corporate grants or in-kind contributions. The April tear-pad promotion is a bit different as it enables H-E-B customers to bolster the diverse environmental program work of more than three dozen EarthShare of Texas’ organizations, including Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation. The customers’ dollars go directly to these organizations, benefiting both the Texas environment and economy.

Throughout the month of April and into the first week of May, look for the EarthShare of Texas display and tear-off coupons at the check-out stands in any Texas H-E-B and Central Market stores. Support EarthShare of Texas and the Texas environment - thanks!

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

QUAIL VOCALIZATIONS AND SPRING CALL COUNTS

by Blake Hendon

The northern bobwhite quail is a highly social organism that uses vocalization as its primary means of communication within the various social units. These social units include pairs, broods and coveys. Though many bird species use vocalizations for establishing and defending territories, bobwhites are not considered territorial and instead focus their communication on attracting mates, coordinating group movements, and avoidance of predators. Instead of the hundreds of variations of an individual songbird's song, for example the brown thrasher with its virtual musical library of about 3,000 documented song types, the bobwhite has about 13 or so recognized calls.

Examples of these recognized calls include the assembly or group-movement call, alarm call, food call, and reproduction call. The assembly call is the call that is listened for in the fall during a fall covey count and is described as hoy, hoy-poo, hoy-ee, or koi-lee. The assembly call is typically heard after a covey has been flushed or just prior to sunrise after the covey leaves its roosting site. This helps the flushed covey reassemble and perhaps helps the individual make a mental note about the location of the others as they spread out. The reproduction call, or cock call, is made in the spring and early summer following the seasonal covey break-up as individual males attempt to attract a female. This is the 2 or 3 syllable call that we all know as the bob-white, ah bob-white, or poor bob-white. The reproduction call can begin as early as March, especially in the south, but the peak calling tends to be May and June.



© TPWD

The reproduction call is the target of the breeding season or spring call count. Procedures for establishing and conducting a spring call count can be found in *The Upland Game Bird Management Handbook for Texas Landowners*. The following provides a brief summary of the procedures.

- Several sites are located within the area that you are interested in surveying. The sites (points) should be at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile apart to minimize the recording of overlapping calls. Each site should be permanently marked and noted on a map for annual surveying. If you cannot locate the sites at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile apart on your property, then coordinate with your neighbors to include their properties.
- Print out and bring the standardized data sheets to record the approximate location and distance for individual male bobwhites that you detect. The data sheet represents an aerial map where you will attempt to plot the location of each calling male. Under good conditions and with good hearing, calls can be heard from 500+ yards.
- Arrive at the first site approximately 15 minutes prior to sunrise to start the first 10 minute detection period. Do not conduct the survey if the winds are greater than 6.5 mph, cloud cover is greater than 75%, it is raining, or if the weather is drastically changing. All of these conditions will affect the calling behavior and your ability to hear the calls.
- Record the detections during the 10 minute period at each site. Complete the survey of all sites within two hours after sunrise.
- An estimate of the number of bobwhites per acre can be calculated using a set of assumptions. The estimates and trends over time can be used to monitor the fluctuations from year to year or perhaps the responses to your habitat management practices. At a very minimum, conducting the survey will get you outside at sunrise when the day is at its best.

The Upland Game Bird Management Handbook for Texas Landowners, in addition to many other excellent resources on quail management, can be found on the Texas Parks & Wildlife website. http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/game_management/quail/

Recorded calls can be heard at http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/northern_bobwhite/sounds

Blake Hendon is a TPWD biologist for Blanco, Travis and Hays Counties stationed in Austin, TX.

ANTLER RESTRICTIONS: ARE THEY WORKING?

by Trey Carpenter

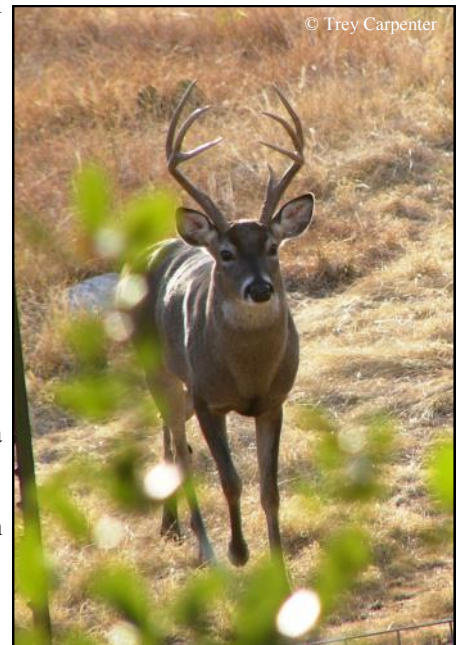
I work only one county for TPWD that has Antler Restrictions (AR's), so it's admittedly a small sample size, but most of the people from Lampasas County I encounter are really pleased with the results. If you are not familiar with AR's let me just summarize them by saying that a buck deer must have at least a 13 inch inside antler spread OR have at least one un-branched antler to be available for harvest. The regulation was designed to protect young bucks and increase the overall buck population in heavily hunted areas. The regulation has been expanded over the years to include most of East Texas and some east-central Texas counties totaling 113 in all.

The two biggest complaints I hear about AR's concerns deer that "will never make 13 inches" and the limitations it places on young hunters that will not always be able to shoot the first deer they see. I have some sympathy for both groups here. There will be a few deer out there that will never make the spread minimum, but they are definitely the exception rather than the rule. From a regulation standpoint, the only way around the restriction is to get involved in the Managed Lands Deer Permit program (MLDP). Landowners that meet the minimum program requirements can be issued permits which allow more flexibility in their deer harvest. As far as the limitations on kids, I have been involved in youth hunting for 30 years and have had numerous occasions where I had to tell a child that they could not harvest a particular animal for one reason or another. They are disappointed sometimes, but they generally understand. In my opinion, that would be a good time to teach them why the regulations are in place and also explain to a youth hunter that we don't always get everything we want, but I guess there are a lot of adults that never really understand that lesson either so I can see their conflict.

The rationale for the un-branched antler (spike) part of the regulation is based upon 30+ years of research on the Kerr Wildlife Management Area. The research demonstrated spike-antlered yearlings (1.5 years old) produced fewer inches of antler at maturity (4.5 years), when compared to their fork-antlered cohorts. Even though the majority of spikes are yearling bucks, TPWD wanted to make them available for harvest. Not only does this allow for more harvest opportunities, but there is also a better chance that some of those spikes will end up being the few mature bucks that don't make the 13 inch minimum spread.

When you look at the big picture this regulation has worked really well. Traditionally, in many of the AR counties, bucks that were 2 1/2 or younger constituted about 75% of the buck harvest every year. That number, with the implementation of AR's, has shifted dramatically. Now, according to TPWD locker plant data, about 75% of the bucks harvested are 3 1/2 or older. The main objective of the regulation is being achieved, but there is never a "cure all" law. The overall harvest has remained constant through the years since implementation of AR's so the criticism that all these deer are just going to die of old age and make up a huge percentage of the population is not justified. I'm sure there are localized examples out there, but the regulation has made a dramatic difference overall. Hopefully MLDP's will be a possible solution if there is a serious problem somewhere.

I often recommend that leases or family hunting operations use the 13 inch rule (or "outside the ears" rule) even in non-AR counties. It is a good way to enable the average hunter to judge a buck. Typically about 80% of the deer from TPWD surveys that have a 13 inch + inside spread are at least 3 1/2 years old. Antler Spread is not the best way to age a deer on the hoof, but is a good rule of thumb. Learning the characteristics of a mature buck, such as neck and body size, is the best way to ensure that a deer is optimum for harvest (but that's a whole other article). When AR's are not in place, I recommend that hunter's on a lease get together and decide on a particular deer's age that may not make the 13 inches. If all agree that it is indeed an older deer then someone can go ahead and harvest that animal since it is only a lease rule. Seems to work great, but communication is the key (as in most things of life).



FROM THE PASTURE

Nine-banded Armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*)

by Evan McCoy

The armadillo is the State mammal of Texas. It migrated from Mexico during the late 19th century and has been expanding northward since that time. It is found in all but the western Trans-Pecos portion of Texas and in a variety of habitats; brush, woods, scrub and grasslands. It gets its name from the 9 bands found on its hard shell. This armor helps protect the animal from predators, but they can usually make a fast run for cover to avoid being eaten. It is an excellent digger which it does to make its home in a deep burrow in the ground. Many other animals will make use of an abandoned burrow. It digs and roots in soil and leaf litter searching for mainly insects and other invertebrates, but will occasionally eat berries, eggs and small amphibians. Breeding occurs in July and four young are born in March. All four young are identical quadruplets, always the same sex, developed from the same egg. It has been found that armadillos are susceptible to leprosy so caution should be taken when handling them.

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

Evan McCoy is a TPWD biologist stationed at the Kerr WMA in Hunt, TX



Twist-Leaf Yucca (*Yucca rupicola*)

by Ryan Reitz

This plant is in the agave family which are herbaceous or woody xerophytes (of arid land) recognized by elongated, narrow leaves, often with a pointed tip, that are crowded near the base. This group of plants is renowned for use by Native Americans for food, soap, medicine and thread. The species name, *rupicola*, refers to affinity to rock or cliff edges which is fitting since rocky slopes are a typical site to find this plant though it can grow in other sites as well. This is a very common yucca in the Edwards Plateau and is identified by long, twisting leaves growing from a central base. Creamy white, bell-shaped flowers appear in April through June and grow from a stalk 2 to 5 feet tall. Pollination of flowers is generated by the yucca moth and is the only pollination source of the plant. White-tailed deer and exotic animals have been found to consume stalks and flowers of yuccas.

Ryan Reitz is a TPWD biologist stationed at Kerr WMA in Hunt, TX



TAX VALUATIONS by Mary Humphrey and Rufus Stephens

Rufus Stephens, new District Leader for the Edwards Plateau ecosystem, graduated Texas A&M with a B.S. in Wildlife Ecology in 1988 and then moved on to short stints with the Noble Foundation in Oklahoma; as a deer research assistant for the Missouri Dept. of Conservation; as a District Biologist in Kansas; as an Urban Biologist with TPWD; and as a District Biologist with TPWD over Comal and Kendall Counties. He has an extensive background in wildlife technical guidance as it is especially related to Wildlife Tax Valuation of properties. Rufus has been very instrumental in developing a series of workshops for landowners on how to write their own wildlife management plans for Wildlife Valuation. In collaboration with the Cibolo Nature Center these workshops were designed to help landowners understand the planning process and the necessary steps to complete a successful plan.

In his workshops, Rufus assisted small acreage landowners which was where he felt the greatest demand and need seemed to be. He focused on creating, enhancing, and maintaining habitat for species other than deer which often led to implementing management activities geared towards breeding birds in the Texas Hill Country. Rufus stressed to his landowners that they should assess their habitat and determine what it was lacking or what limiting factors were affecting their habitat to decide which of the management activities they should implement. Landowners should not pick a management activity just because it sounds good as it may not be appropriate for what is needed on the property or for the targeted species.

Breeding birds are popular species to target on smaller acreages as they can be used as a means to an end. As in all aspects of wildlife management, 'it just depends' what your habitat is lacking in order to decide which activities you should perform. Sometimes it may even be proper to consider deer as plant predators that must be controlled to improve habitat for birds (and deer). Diverse vegetation interspersed with suitable open spaces provides the best habitat for all species. But if high numbers of deer are reducing the diversity on your place, then consider reducing deer numbers.

It should be understood that a piece of property needs to be appraised for open-space (traditional ag) use before it can change over to wildlife management use. Landowners managing for wildlife should also know that they will have to perform certain operations on the property that would somewhat 'equal' what an ag producer would have to do to manage for livestock. In both worlds, for the most part, that entails maintaining or enhancing habitat which includes food, water, cover and open spaces in suitable quantities for all animal species.

IN A NUTSHELL

Life Expectancy

Below is a general life expectancy that is listed for some of our local creatures. This is for animals that are found in the wild where predation, disease and nutrition can greatly influence the chances of survival. In captivity these animals may live considerably longer. For instance, one of the oldest recorded deer was 20 years old.

	Years
Striped Skunk	2
Opossum	2
Turkey	2-3
Feral Hog	4-5
Deer	6-8
Mountain Lion	10-11
Coyote	10-12
Raccoon	10-15

Removing Wildlife to Increase Wildlife by Evan McCoy

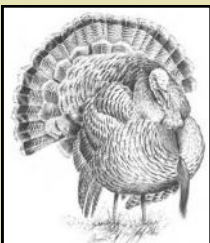
Not every landowner has the same passion for white-tailed deer that many others do. They still however desire to have wildlife on their property. Some have never hunted and may never have plans to hunt deer. In fact, the thought of removing any wildlife from their property may seem counterintuitive to their goals of attracting wildlife. It is important for any landowner to understand that in order to provide the habitat necessary to attract a variety of wildlife you will likely have to become involved in deer management. This does not mean you need to manage for trophy bucks, but you definitely should be concerned with population management.

One of the biggest culprits of poor habitat conditions is the white-tailed deer. Deer eat plants and there is a limited abundance of plants on a given piece of property. If deer populations are allowed to grow beyond the lands capacity to support those animals then you will begin to see a reduction in biomass, or plant material such as leaves and stems. Over just a short period of time this can greatly alter the habitat. The growth form of many plants will change and you will likely even see the gradual disappearance of certain plant species. This loss of plant structure and diversity can greatly limit wildlife use of your property. By simply inviting guests out to hunt or leasing hunting access to an individual you will be improving the quality of habitat on your land and therefore attracting more wildlife.



Good plant structure and diversity

Turkey Shift



Did you know that Rio Grande turkeys shift between a summer and winter range? During the spring and summer months, birds are more spread out as they disperse into breeding and nesting range. You may only see a few turkeys in the spring, but during the winter you may either see several dozen or maybe none at all. Turkeys will congregate or flock together in the winter. They are drawn to areas near large streams and drainages where you tend to find the best roost trees. Some birds come from miles away to the same winter roost sites that they used the year before. If you happen to be a winter range site then you are likely drawing in turkeys from all over. If not, then you at least know where your turkeys have gone and that they will return.

FIELD NOTES

News and Information from our Wildlife Management Areas

BIG DEER WITHOUT THE HABITAT

by Evan McCoy

On our WMA's we regularly give programs stressing the importance of maintaining a proper number of deer in order to maintain a healthy habitat. Not only does it make for a better home for deer, but good range conditions also helps attract a multitude of other wildlife species as well. In my experience though, it seems that most landowners deny that they are overpopulated. One argument they give to support this claim is that their deer are fat and healthy. In their minds, if the deer are doing well then that means everything must be optimal. Years ago, it was understood that you had to have good range in order to produce good deer. These days, deer health is not always a good indicator of habitat health. I have witnessed several examples where good deer were produced on poor range.

This phenomenon is due, in part, to the fact that almost everyone has some type of supplemental feeding program and many of them are quite intense. I have no big issue with supplemental feeding, as long as it is done properly. It can often be very beneficial to a deer management program by helping to improve body condition, fawn production and antler growth. The problem is that some ranches will continue to artificially support an overabundance of deer to the point where they are simply feeding deer rather than supplementing their diet. Just look at the extreme scenario of a pen raised deer herd. Those deer are fatter and heavier than most wild deer you will find, but native habitat and forage is usually non-existent inside those pens, and they are totally reliant on pelleted feed. Managers should know that deer will definitely make supplemental feed a part of their diet, but not to the exclusion of natural forage.

Deer like variety, and they have a desire for native plants. This is evident in high rainfall years when quality forage is more abundant and, as a result, we find that supplemental feed consumption goes down. Another example is the sudden early season disappearance of deer when acorns hit the ground. If desirable vegetation is present, deer will often prefer that over artificial feed. If the deer population exceeds the natural supply of plants then deer will increase their supplemental feed use to get the nutrition they need. As the population continues to grow, so will the feed bill, since forage becomes scarce and deer are forced to rely more on feeders. Therefore, as you can see, deer health can be maintained at the same time habitat health declines.



© TPWD



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The question you should ask yourself is, "If you eliminated your supplemental feeding program then would your land still support your current deer herd?" You may suddenly see the relationship between habitat quality and deer quality. Would they be stuck eating juniper and persimmon or is there plenty of oak and hackberry within a deer's reach? By decreasing the deer population you will be increasing the amount of forage to go around and your deer will rely less on handouts. You want to be sure that feed is a supplement to their natural diet and not the other way around. To truly determine if your ranch is overpopulated, it may be best to take a closer look at the condition of your land, rather than the condition of your deer.

ON THE HORIZON

Don't forget your MLDP harvest data is to be submitted by April 1, 2013

Feral Hog Management Workshop

Feral hog status, trapping and removal, health risks, current research and Muse WMA tour. (2 CEU's)

When: April 5, 2013 at 10:00 am (registration 9:30am)

Where: Muse Wildlife Management Area

Cost: Free

For information contact Devin Erxleben (derxleben@aol.com) at 325-203-6926
or Scott Anderson (sa-anderson@tamu.edu) at 325-646-0386

Texas Deer Study Group

“Navigating the Deer Management Continuum”

When: April 18-19, 2013

Where: Somervell County Expo and Texas Amphitheatre

Cost: \$75 pre-registration (\$100 after April 10)

Register online www.texas-wildlife.org or contact Helen Holdsworth at hholdsworth@texas-wildlife.org

Range and Wildlife Management Field Day: Managing in Challenging Times

When: One day event held on May 29th (MWMA) and again on the 30th (KWMA)

Time: 8:15 am (registration 7:45-8:15)

Where: Muse WMA and Kerr WMA

Cost: Lunch Fee TBD

Contact Scott Anderson 325-646-0386 for MWMA or Roy Walston 830-257-6568 for KWMA

Texas Big Game Awards

Edwards Plateau & South Texas

When: July 27, 2013

Time: 3 pm - 8pm

Where: Y.O. Ranch Hotel and Conference Center, Kerrville, TX

For more information on the program visit www.TexasBigGameAwards.org or call (800) TEX-WILD

Kerr Wildlife Management Area 1st First Friday Tours

3 part series

When: Series 1 - August 2 “Habitat Needs”

Series 2 - September 6 “Critical Issues in Edwards Plateau”

Series 3 - October 4 “Ecosystems Management: Putting it all Together”

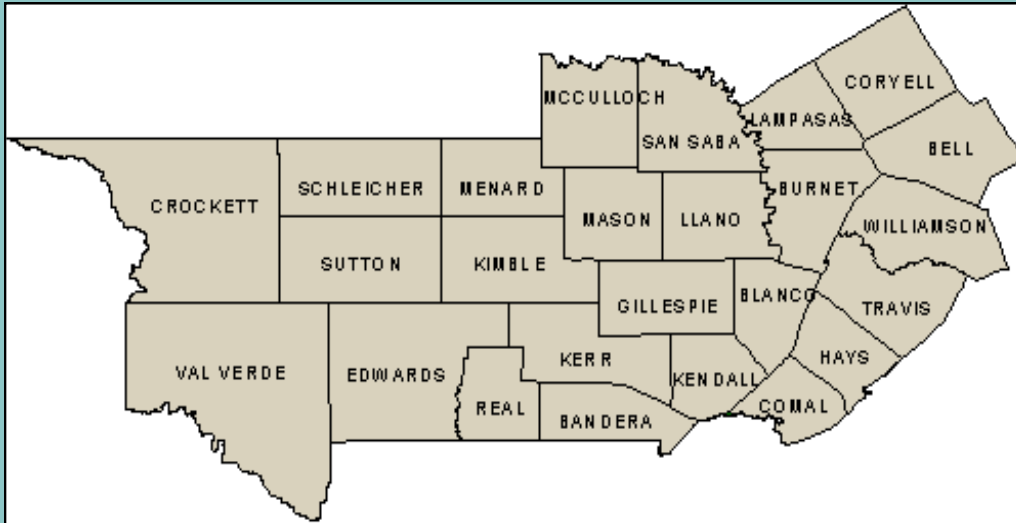
Time: 1-5 pm

Cost: Free

Where: Kerr Wildlife Management Area

For more information contact Kerr WMA at 830-238-4483

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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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