

THE CEDAR POST

APRIL 2014

News and Information for the Texas Hill Country

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 1

Rio Grande Turkey in the Llano Uplift

by Kory Perlichek

TPWD biologists initiated a field investigation on Rio Grande wild turkeys in the Llano Uplift region of Northern Edwards Plateau in January 2014. The primary focus of the work is to identify specific habitat characteristics of nesting, brood-rearing, loafing, and roosting sites. We will also look at dispersal rates and distance traveled between winter and summer ranges. Research conducted in the Edwards Plateau, where turkey populations have locally fluctuated, has not focused on populations in the Llano Uplift region. While these populations appear stable, changes in land use practices in this area and the effect on habitat use and productivity are unknown. Results of this habitat assessment will help biologists and landowners better understand the needs of wild turkeys and how to better manipulate and manage Llano Uplift habitat for their survival and reproductive success.



The field work consists of 3 trap sites in eastern Mason and western Llano Counties. Trapping began on February 11, 2014. A total of 50 turkeys, which include hens, gobblers, jakes and bearded hens, were caught using funnel traps and drop nets. Twelve hens were fitted with GPS-VHF backpack-style radio transmitters. All birds with radio transmitters will be monitored once a week prior to nesting. Radio-tagged hens will be more closely watched during the nesting season. Nesting season for the Edwards Plateau is typically from April to July each year depending upon habitat conditions and the timing of spring green-up.

Various data was collected on all birds and leg bands were placed on each prior to release. A silver band was placed on the right leg and a colored band on the left leg of each bird. Texas Parks and Wildlife phone numbers are on each leg band and radio transmitter. If anyone recovers a wild turkey with a leg band or radio transmitter please contact the phone number listed on the item or contact Kory Perlichek at 325-347-5691.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>CWD</i>	2
<i>CWD (cont.)</i>	3
<i>Flora & Fauna</i>	4
<i>Photo Point</i>	4
<i>In a Nutshell</i>	5
<i>Field Notes</i>	6
<i>Field Notes (cont.)</i>	7
<i>Events Calendar</i>	8

Kory Perlichek is a TPWD biologist stationed in Mason, TX

Editors:

Mary Humphrey

Kory Perlichek

Evan McCoy



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

Chronic Wasting Disease: What, When, and Where In Texas

By Ryan Schoeneberg

Reprinted from Pineywoods Post

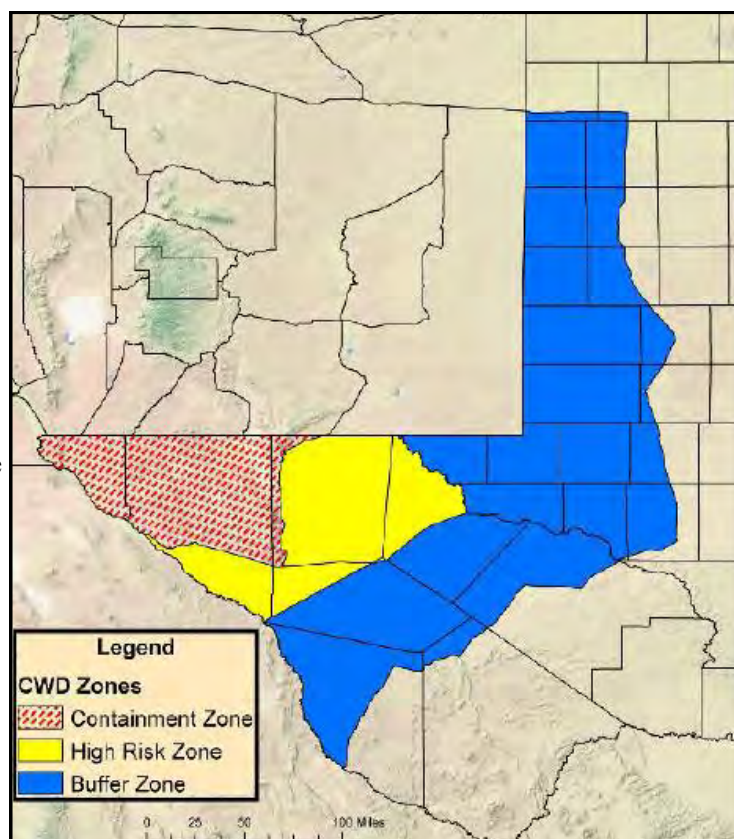
In 1967, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was first recognized as a clinical disease in captive mule deer by the Colorado Division of Wildlife at Foothills Wildlife Research Facility in Fort Collins, Colorado. Since then, CWD has been documented in captive and/or free-ranging deer across 22 states and 2 Canadian provinces, including neighboring New Mexico. On July 10, 2012, CWD was found in Texas for the first time in El Paso and Hudspeth counties near the city of El Paso. The management unit in New Mexico that shares its border with Texas has been known to have CWD positive cervids for some time, so to have it walk across the border into Texas is not surprising.

CWD is a member of the group of diseases called transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs). Other diseases in this group include scrapie in sheep, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE or mad cow disease) in cattle, and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans. CWD among cervids is a progressive, fatal disease that commonly results in altered behavior as a result of microscopic changes in the brain of the affected animals. An animal may carry the disease for years without outward indication, but in the latter stages, signs may include listlessness, lowering of the head, weight loss, repetitive walking in set patterns, and a lack of responsiveness. However, these symptoms are not unique to CWD, as most neurological problems manifest with similar symptoms.

The agent that causes CWD is referred to as a prion, which is an abnormal form of cellular protein that is most commonly found in the central nervous system and in lymphoid tissue. The prion "infects" the host animal by promoting conversion of normal cellular protein to an abnormal form. Prions are smaller than most viral particles and do not evoke any detectable immune response or inflammatory reaction in the host animal. The CWD infectious agent is assumed to be resistant to enzymes and chemicals that would normally break down proteins, as well as resistant to heat and normal disinfecting procedures. A protein does not need to be in the host to survive; therefore, it can reside in the environment. This particular protein is even more resistant than most proteins, which indicates that it is harder to denature or neutralize. Because of this resilience, once CWD is in the environment, it is nearly impossible to eradicate.

Currently, there is no evidence that CWD poses a risk for humans; however, public health officials recommend that human exposure to the CWD infectious agent be avoided as they continue to evaluate any potential health risk. The World Health Organization and the Center for Disease Control have both conducted extensive studies to look at the potential for the disease to jump the species barrier into humans. So far, all information indicates that it cannot. However, it is still recommended to take precautions such as: always use gloves when processing an animal, never eat an animal that doesn't look healthy, and never eat anything that is associated with the lymphatic or neurologic system of the animal.

Containment of CWD is the primary objective in Texas. In conjunction with Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC), Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) has enacted processes for preventing the spread of CWD within the state and defining the disease's geographic distribution and preva-



Chronic Wasting Disease cont. ...

lence. Since 2002, over 26,000 samples have been collected and tested for CWD in Texas. Based on a decade's worth of surveillance, there is no evidence supporting the existence of CWD in Texas beyond El Paso and Hudspeth counties. Texas borders are closed to the importation of live deer, which helps keep diseases, such as CWD, from coming in from other states. In West Texas, hunter check stations provide CWD testing for hunter-harvested deer, targeting the area where the disease is known to exist. Another strategy established is the use of geographic zones to designate the level of restriction that needs to be employed. The area immediately surrounding where CWD has been found in Texas is the "Containment Zone". The area surrounding the Containment Zone is the "High Risk Zone", and the area surrounding that is the "Buffer Zone". Each zone has a level of restriction that helps to provide confidence that human facilitated transmission of CWD is mitigated. When hunting within a CWD Containment Zone or High Risk Zone, it is recommended that harvested deer be quartered, the head detached in the field, and all other carcass parts be left at the site of harvest if it is not possible to dispose of inedible carcass parts in a landfill or to bury them. These recommendations help keep the risk of accidental spread to a minimum. There is no vaccine or known cure for CWD, so precautions must be taken to minimize the risk of the disease spreading from beyond the area where it currently exists.

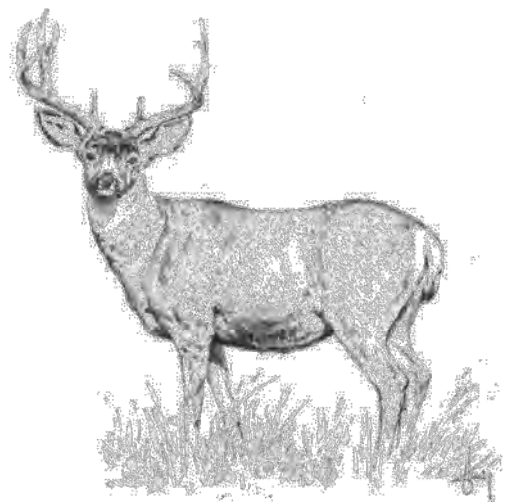
Chronic Wasting Disease is increasing in prevalence nationwide, as well as increasing significantly in the populations where it already exists. For example, the Wyoming-South Converse Unit has CWD prevalence rates exceeding 50%. In the same time period, that area has seen an approximate 50% decline in mule deer populations. Is this merely coincidence? Cases such as this are the reason that the number one goal for CWD management in Texas is to keep the disease out!

The management of CWD is hotly debated, largely because it is not the doomsday disease that it was originally touted to be when it was first recognized. However, the significant population level impacts the disease can cause over time gives reason to be proactive and prevent the disease from spreading throughout our state. In the case of CWD, an ounce of prevention is worth an infinite amount of cure!

For more information regarding CWD please visit the links below:

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/diseases/cwd/

www.cwd-info.org/index.php



Ryan Schoeneberg is TPWD Big Game Program Specialist.

FROM THE PASTURE

Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*)

This medium sized skunk has the familiar white stripes that run along either side of the back that extends from head to tail. They stay in dens during the day and venture out mainly at night. The majority of their diet consists of insects, but they also eat vegetation, reptiles, birds and eggs. Breeding takes place in February and March which is why you may notice a sudden increase in sightings or road kills during that time. Young are born about May with an average litter size of five. They live 2 years on average, though the skunk has few natural predators. This of course is due to their ability to spray a foul smelling musk from glands located at the base of their tails.



Striped Skunks (*Mephitis mephitis*). Note varying patterns. Photo by D. W. Law

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

Texas Redbud (*Cercis canadensis* var. *texensis*)

by Ryan Reitz

Member of the Legume family. Found in the rocky limestone slopes of the Edwards Plateau to the western Cross Timbers and Blackland prairie. Hybridization does occur with var. *canadensis*. Blooms and young pods are edible, reported to be appealing when sautéed with butter. Redbud is known to proliferate following fire events. Fire prescriptions can increase abundance of the plant. It is recognized to be a host of the Henry's Elfin butterfly, although many pollinators visit the plant. Kerr WMA food habit studies rank this plant a 2 (1=excellent and 4=poor) for preference in white-tailed deer. Browsing pressure in moderate to high deer densities is often very noticeable.



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

Photo Point



Photo points are a good way to monitor range conditions and habitat changes over time. Above is one of ten photo points located on the Kerr Wildlife Management Area which helps us to realize the impacts the recent lack of moisture is having.

2014 Rainfall (Jan-April 16)

Mason Mtn. WMA

0.33"

Kerr WMA

0.46"

IN A NUTSHELL

Free Birds

- The only birds not protected by any state or federal law are European starlings, English sparrows, feral rock doves (common pigeon, *Columba livia*) and Eurasian collared-doves; these species may be killed at any time, their nests or eggs destroyed, and their feathers may be possessed.
- Yellow-headed, red-winged, rusty, or Brewer's blackbirds and all grackles, cowbirds (does not include cattle egret), crows, or magpies may be controlled without a federal or state depredation permit when found committing or about to commit depredations on ornamental or shade trees, agricultural crops, livestock, or wildlife, or when concentrated in numbers and in a manner that constitutes a health hazard or other nuisance.



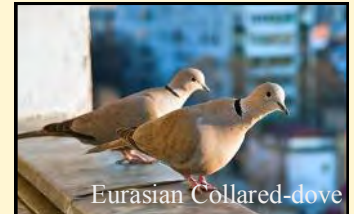
European Starling



English Sparrow



Rock Dove



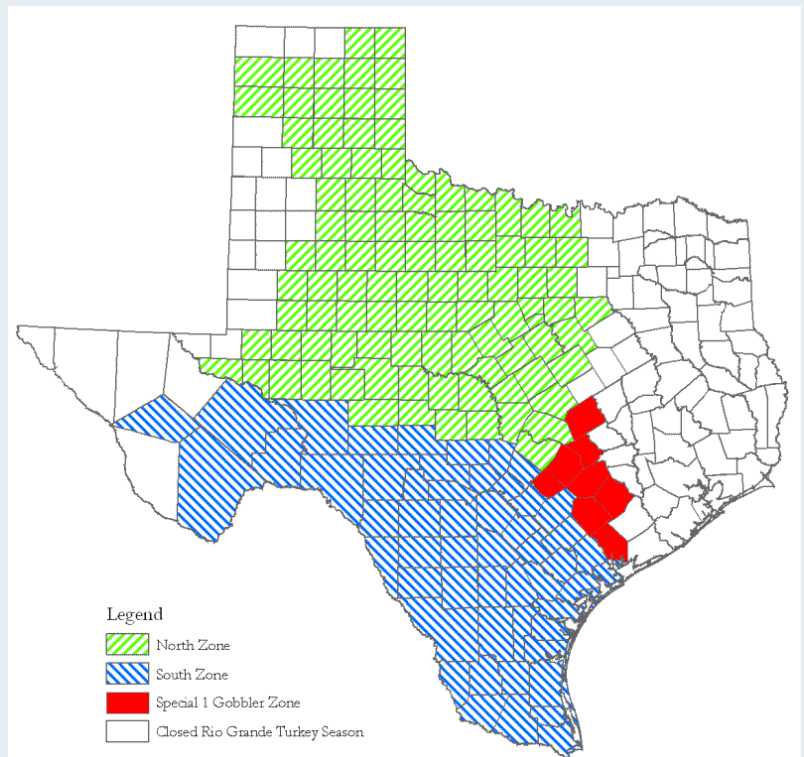
Eurasian Collared-dove

Spring Turkey Season

Spring Season Dates

1 Turkey Bag Limit	Apr. 1 - 30, 2014
North Zone	Mar. 29 - May 11, 2014
South Zone	Mar. 15 - Apr. 27, 2014
Eastern Turkey	Apr. 15 - May 14, 2014

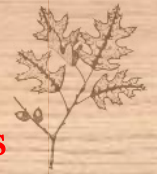
Check the TPWD Outdoor Annual for local county hunting regulations



Kerr WMA
is on Facebook
f

FIELD NOTES

and Information from our Wildlife Management Areas



Contentious Coalitions for a Conservation Conundrum

by Donnie Frels

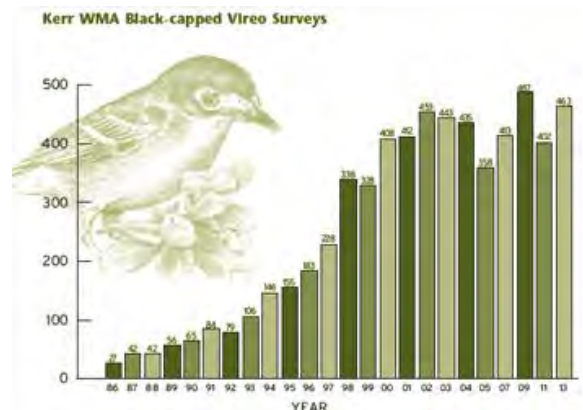
Some things just go together - biscuits and gravy, hot coffee on a cold morning, camp fires and old friends. It seems easy and comfortable to relate these associations, almost natural. Other things just don't mix – Aggies and Longhorns, ex-wives and girlfriends, Seinfeld and Newman. Most folks would put hunters and birders in the latter category although I might disagree. Having experienced both activities and associated with each group, I often hear of hunters enjoying the art of bird watching, albeit most are novices, while sitting in a deer blind enjoying the antics of a cautious road runner or a curious green jay. However, in my unscientific survey, it seems fewer birders participate in hunting or appreciate the positive ecological impacts regulated hunting activities may produce. In one particular instance, hunters will play a key role in the recovery efforts of an endangered Texas songbird.

When the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 was initially passed by the 93rd Congress and signed by President Richard Nixon, it was met with some skepticism by suspicious landowners leery of federal government intrusion in matters involving private property rights. Perhaps nowhere in Texas was this more apparent than the biologically diverse and ecologically sensitive Edwards Plateau ecoregion in Central Texas. Depending on your point of view, perhaps landowners had reason for concern as the stated purpose of the ESA is to protect imperiled species and also "the ecosystems upon which they depend." Others felt the Act may even encourage preemptive habitat destruction by landowners who fear losing the use of their land because of the presence of an endangered species; known colloquially as "Shoot, Shovel and Shut-Up". One example of such perverse incentives is the case of a forest owner who, in response to the ESA listing of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*), increased harvesting and shortened the age at which he harvests his trees to ensure that they do not become old enough to become suitable habitat. Add two endangered songbirds to the fray in Central Texas and you get misinformation, contentious meetings, suspicious landowners, and locked gates. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel referred to themselves as "combat biologists" while TPWD wildlife biologists, who historically nurtured and enjoyed a trusting relationship on private lands, found themselves without a key.

If Black-capped Vireos (*Vireo atricapilla*) were the battle, Golden-cheeked Warblers (*Setophaga chrysoparia*) were the war. Although both occurred in the Edwards Plateau, they were not common neighbors as each searched for very specific habitat requirements within the central part of the state. Simply stated, the warbler preferred old growth while the vireo needed new growth. As fate would have it, Black-capped Vireos (BCVI) were of particular interest to a group of enterprising biologists and technicians working on the Kerr Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in western Kerr County. Owned by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, this 6,493 acre research and demonstration area led by Donnie Harmel and Bill Armstrong, was fast becoming known for innovative ideas and a holistic approach to land management focusing on the health of the ecosystem rather than the individual inhabitants.

At that time, cows were king and livestock grazing was the primary use of hill country rangeland. In order to be credible to landowners, most TPWD management plans had to consider livestock grazing and the Kerr WMA had discovered a way for cows and critters to coexist. For promoting attendance at their annual seminars, proper stocking rates and rotational grazing was part of the message while production of big antlered bucks was the carrot. Problem was, cows attracted Brown-headed Cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) and cowbirds have a disdain for proper parenting. Instead, they prefer foster parents who build cup-shaped nests just like the Black-capped Vireo, to incubate, feed, and raise their demanding offspring - often to the detriment of the rightful recipients. As a result, the Fish and Wildlife Service had cattle grazing on the Kerr in the crosshairs.

Ever diligent, our habitat heroes teamed with Joe Grzybowski of Central State University in Oklahoma to devise a research project investigating the real obstacles to BCVI population growth. Two overwhelming factors emerged: lack of proper nesting habitat and nest parasitism. To address the latter, cowbird trapping proved effective as captured cowbirds off the Kerr perched on the Pearly Gates by the hundreds. Providing proper nesting structure proved problematic.



FIELD NOTES

News and Information from our Wildlife Management Areas

Conservation Conundrum cont. ...

Although the requisite four foot high nesting structure is readily available for BCVI's in the Edwards Plateau, it seems white-tailed deer and other exotic mammals literally eat them out of house and home. What is one animal's home is another animal's hamburger. Unfortunately for the endangered songbird landowners like deer, and in Central Texas they're thicker than bugs on a bumper. With arguably the highest white-tailed deer density in the world and a monetary incentive for landowners to tolerate them, BCVI's literally got the short end of the stick.

Due to long term trends derived from annual vegetation lines and deer surveys, Kerr WMA staff were keenly aware of the predictable cyclic fluctuations - as the deer population increased, vegetative diversity and abundance declined. To address the situation, biologists recommended reducing deer density by half on several occasions. While public hunters enjoyed and appreciated the increased opportunity, success at maintaining the desired density proved temporary as deer from adjoining properties packed their bags and moved to the lush accommodations provided at club Kerr. Staff then reached into their management toolbox and pulled out an uncommon one for a state agency at the time...deer proof fencing. Soon our four-legged friends across the fence would peer through the net wire and opine that the grass is indeed greener on the other side of the fence.

A cadre of camo-clad hunters served as willing participants in the battle for black-capped bungalows. Without the constant browsing pressure of deer and exotic ungulates, low level structure returned to the motte producing species like shin oak and live oak which provide the majority of nesting substrate for these and many other passerines.

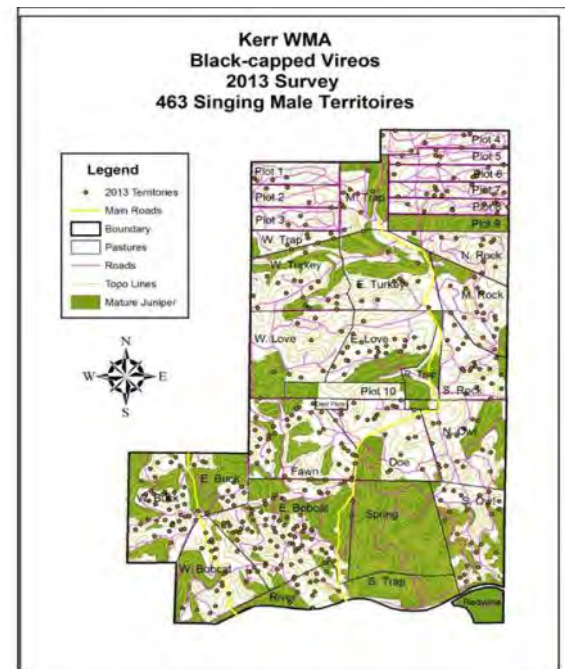
With Aldo Leopold's tools of wildlife management firmly in place, the Kerr WMA was now operating like a well-tuned ecological machine.

- Prescribed burning was reducing ashe juniper while rejuvenating grass and brush species
- Rotational grazing proved the importance of rest and recovery for grass species while utilizing the range properly
- Hunters and the high fence maintained deer density at appropriate levels so browse and forbs flourished
- Cowbird trapping was reducing nest parasitism not only for BCVI's but numerous species of other songbirds

While avoiding the temptation to concentrate management efforts on just birds, cows, or deer, Harmel and Armstrong built an ecosystem capable of producing a variety of desirable products appreciated by both birders and hunters. A quick glance at the graphs provided will attest to the success of the ecosystems approach to proactive BCVI management rather than strict preservation of existing limited habitat. As Armstrong was fond of saying, "Black-caps are the poster child for good deer management".

Today, public opinion of the Endangered Species Act varies depending on personal perspective. Generally speaking, I would surmise a definite shift in general landowner attitudes with regards to private property impacts. Where landowners once feared the yoke of federal regulation, many now embrace the Act as a vehicle for property protection when threatened by proposed road or utility projects, while others enjoy the monetary benefits now associated with recreational birding for rare and endangered species.

Often in nature, beneficial associations formulate over time out of necessity. Although hunters and birders both enjoy a quest for quarry and an appreciation for things wild, they often seem to possess opposing ecological ideologies. Understanding the niche each occupies in natural resources conservation and management may assist us all in effectively navigating the road to recovery for our endangered resources.



ON THE HORIZON

Urban Wildlife Management Workshop Open to anyone interested in urban wildlife

When: Thursday May 8th, 2014, 8am to 5pm
Where: Phil Hardberger Park Urban Ecology Center, San Antonio, TX
Cost: \$30 - includes lunch/snacks
Registration/Information: jessica.alderson@tpwd.texas.gov or 210-688-6444

Spring Field Day (3 CEU's) AgriLife Extension & Kerr County SWCD

When: Friday May 16th, 2014, 9am to 3:00 pm
Where: Flagler Ranch, 438 Flagler Ranch Rd, Mountain Home, TX
Cost: \$15 per person - includes lunch
Registration/Information: Deanna@kerrcountyswcd.com or 830-896-4911 x 3

Well Educated: A Course for Texas Water Well Owners

Learn well and septic system maintenance, water quality and conservation
Bring in a well water sample to be tested

Event 1: Sutton County Civic Center, Sonora, TX—July 23rd, 8:30am-3:30pm
Event 2: Fredericksburg, TX—July 24th, 8:30am-3:30pm
Cost: Free
For Information call 979-845-1461 or email dgholson@tamu.edu

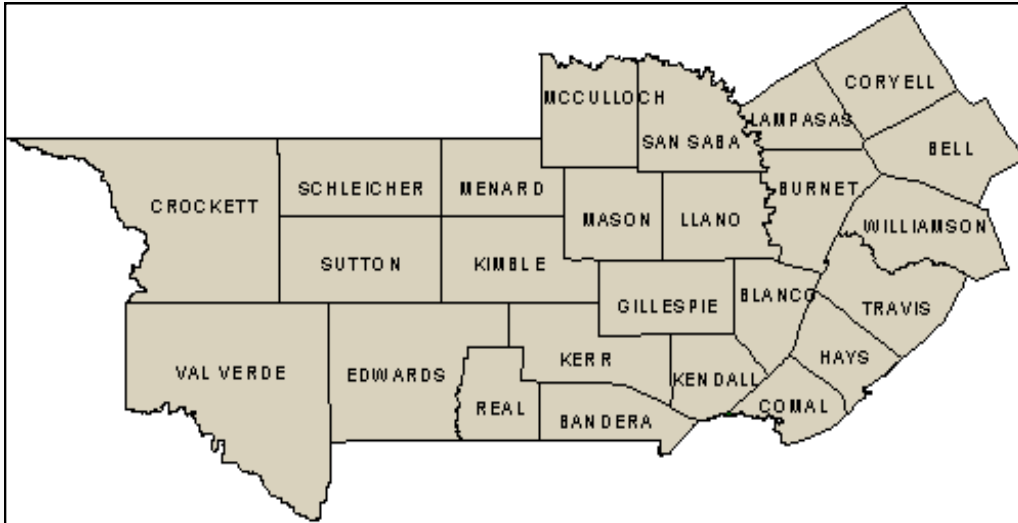
Kerr Wildlife Management Area First Friday Tours 3 part series

When: Series 1 - August 1 "Habitat Needs"
Series 2 - September 5 "Critical Issues in Edwards Plateau"
Series 3 - October 3 "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

Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Area Second Friday Tours 3 part series

When: Series 1 - August 8 "Habitat Needs"
Series 2 - September 12 "Critical Issues in Edwards Plateau"
Series 3 - October 10 "Ecosystems Management: Putting it all Together"
Time: 1-5 pm
Cost: Free
Where: Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Area
For more information contact Mason Mountain WMA at 325-347-5037

HILL COUNTRY WILDLIFE DISTRICT



Kerrville District Office
 District Leader: Rufus Stephens
 309 Sidney Baker South
 Kerrville, Texas 78028
 phone (830) 896-2500
 Email: rufus.stephens@tpwd.texas.gov

Executive Director
 Carter P. Smith

Editors, The Cedar Post
 Mary Humphrey
 Evan McCoy
 Kory Perlichek



COMMISSION

- Dan Allen Hughes Jr., Chairman
Beeville
- Ralph H. Duggins, Vice-Chairman
Fort Worth
- T. Dan Friedkin, Chairman-Emeritus
Houston
- Roberto De Hoyos, *Houston*
- Bill Jones, *Austin*
- James H. Lee, *Houston*
- Margaret Martin, *Boerne*
- S. Reed Morian, *Houston*
- Dick Scott, *Wimberley*
- Lee M. Bass, Chairman-Emeritus
Fort Worth

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT MISSION STATEMENT

"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."

You may view this publication through the TPWD Web site. Please notify us by completing a request form at www.tpwd.texas.gov/enews/. Once verified, we will notify you by e-mail when a new version of your selected newsletter is posted at www.tpwd.texas.gov/ newsletters/. Your name and address will be removed from the printed version mail distribution list.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

All inquiries: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Rd., Austin, TX 78744, telephone (800) 792-1112 toll free, or (512) 389-4800 or visit our web site for detailed information about TPWD programs: www.tpwd.texas.gov

©2014 Texas Parks and Wildlife Department PWD LF W7000-1683

In accordance with Texas State Depository Law, this publication is available at the Texas State Publications Clearinghouse and/or Texas Depository Libraries.



TPWD receives federal assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other federal agencies. TPWD is therefore subject to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, in addition to state anti-discrimination laws. TPWD will comply with state and federal laws prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, national origin, age, sex or disability. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any TPWD program, activity or event, you may contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Federal Assistance, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Mail Stop: MBSP-4020, Arlington, VA 22203, Attention: Civil Rights Coordinator for Public Access.