Oaks and Prairies Wildlifer

A newsletter for landowners in the Post Oak Savannah and Coastal Prairies Regions of Texas

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

Fall 2015

In This Issue:

District Field Notes

BY DAVID FORRESTER

The new biologists we introduced last newsletter, Trent Teinert and Robert Trudeau, are doing well and working into their new positions nicely. Unfortunately, we lost another biologist in the district as of October 15. Josh Turner and his wife, Amy Turner, have moved to Tennessee. Josh has been a contributing member of District 7 for almost seven years. He's done a great job in DeWitt and Goliad counties and will be sorely missed. However, we wish Josh and Amy good luck and hope the best for them and their family. We hope to have a new biologist in place for DeWitt and Goliad counties starting November 1. Just a reminder, you can find contact information for all District 7 biologists on the district map at the end of this newsletter.

The biologists have been gearing up for the opening of deer season. The last couple of months have been filled with conducting our state deer surveys and helping our landowners and wildlife management associations conduct their deer surveys. Once the population densities are calculated and herd composition data is analyzed, we then develop harvest recommendations and issue permits. Hopefully, most everyone has been taken care of in this regard. We try to have the majority of permits issued by the first of October and the opening of archery season. However, we continue some issuance up to the start of gun season.

This upcoming deer season your local biologists will be making a concerted effort to ramp up their Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) sampling. You can read more about what CWD is in this newsletter, but the biologists need the hunter's help in increasing the number of CWD samples we are able to get. If you have a deer that you are interested in having tested, give your local biologist a call and we can hopefully work out how to get the sample. Deer heads can be put on ice and held for up to 48 hours, so this may be the most efficient manner to get your deer sampled. We do not want anything to be frozen, as freezing damages the sample tissue.

As mentioned in the summer newsletter, the district will be participating in a turkey research project coming up in the latter part of 2015 and running for a couple of years. The counties of focus are Lavaca, DeWitt, Gonzales, Caldwell, and Fayette. The idea is to trap some birds, put transmitters on

Continued on page 2

CONTINUED

them, and find out what sort of habitat they are selecting for primarily during the nesting and brooding seasons. We hope to develop a Habitat Suitability Index (HIS) model for wild turkeys in the Post Oak habitats. We also hope to develop some population data on the birds so we can possibly make some determinations on turkey seasons in some of these special one gobbler counties versus adjacent counties that may have larger bag limits and differing seasons.

Hopefully, El Nino will kick in shortly and we can enjoy another wet fall and winter. Until then, enjoy the wildlife and habitat on your piece of Texas.

David Forrester is the District 7 Leader in La Grange. He has been with TPWD since 2001 when he started his career as the TPWD wildlife biologist for Fort Bend and Wharton counties. David has a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Economics and a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences both from Texas A&M University. He has a Master of Science in Range and Wildlife Management from Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

We Want Your Deer! (or at least parts of it)

WRITTEN BY BOBBY EICHLER

Around July 1st of this year, a captive white-tailed deer in Medina County tested positive for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Since that time, a total of four deer from that facility and an additional deer at a trace-out herd in Lavaca County has also tested positive for CWD. To learn more about CWD in Texas, please see the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) CWD update page at http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/diseases/cwd/. Additionally, within this newsletter you will find information on cleaning and processing white-tailed deer.

Since 2002, TPWD wildlife biologists have been sampling hunter-harvested white-tailed deer across the state to detect CWD occurrence in the wild herd. Since that time nearly 29,000 samples have been taken from the wild population in Texas. Statistically speaking, TPWD is trying to test at a rate that gives 95% confidence that CWD will be detected if it has a 1% occurrence in the wild herd. As of today, CWD has not been detected in the wild populations of white-tailed deer in Texas.

This hunting season wildlife staff will be increasing sampling efforts on white-tailed deer. When sampling deer, biologists remove a portion of the brain stem (obex) as well as lymph nodes for testing. These tissues are found at the base of the skull and the throat region. Efforts will not only be on hunter-harvested deer, but also on road-killed deer that can be located in a timely manner.

If you harvest a deer and would like to have the deer tested, please contact your local biologist (contact information can be found near end of the newsletter). If your deer is tested this season, the biologist will give you a numbered receipt. From this receipt you will be able to check online the results for that individual deer. Testing and results will likely take a minimum of four weeks. Samples will be sent to the Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Lab (TVMDL) and the lab will be testing a large number of samples.

Continued on page 3

CONTINUED

Additionally, there will be a manned check station in Hallettsville during the first two weekends of gun season (November 7-8 and November 14-15). This check station will be at Hoffers Drive-in Grocery located at 115 Fairwinds, Hallettsville, TX 77964. The hours manned will be from 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Also, in Hallettsville there will be a voluntary drop-off location at Morton's just north of Hallettsville at 1603 N Texana, Hallettsville, TX 77964. The operational hours here will be 5:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. seven days a week through the hunting season. The District 7 office at 111 E. Travis, Suite 200, La Grange, TX 78945 will be open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday thru Friday, and the Victoria office at 2805 N. Navarro, Suite 600 B, Victoria, TX 77901 will be open on Monday mornings 8 a.m. to noon. The La Grange office phone number is 979-968-6591 and the Victoria location is 361-576-0022.

If you wish to have a deer tested please preserve the head in a good condition. Time and temperature are critical factors to consider so that samples may be collected before tissue starts to decay. Head shots will destroy the needed tissue and will not be sampled. After harvest, it would be best to keep the head on ice (do not freeze) and get it to the biologist within 24-48 hours. Please remember: your local biologist likely covers two or more counties and his or her availability may be limited. We would like to get samples from many hunters across the county and region, but we cannot guaranty we will be able to satisfy every phone call. If you are planning to harvest several deer over a weekend hunt, it may help to touch base with the biologist prior to the hunt to set up a time to obtain samples.

Having your deer tested for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)

- After harvest, place the head on ice.
- Contact your local biologist to set up a time and place to have deer sampled.
- Samples should be taken within 24-48 hours.
- Once your deer is sampled, the biologist will give you a numbered receipt; this enables you to check the results of the test online.
- Biologist will need to know the location of the kill. Without a location, samples will not be taken.
- Head shot deer will not be useable.
- Please realize that while TPWD and your local biologist want to obtain samples, there may be times where it is not logistically possible for your biologist to meet with you.
- Samples will be collected on a county basis and a Resource Management Unit (RMU) basis, once the desired amount of samples is achieved, collection may no longer be needed.
- Testing for CWD will be free to the hunter and/or landowner.
- If you are planning to harvest several deer over a weekend and store the heads, make sure that each deer can be traced back to the individual hunter.
- The location of the kill and hunter identification are critical for each sample taken!

Bobby Eichler is the Technical Guidance Biologist for the Oak Prairie District. He has Bachelor and Master of Science degrees in Forestry both with emphasis in Game Management, from Stephen F. Austin State University. A native of Giddings, Bobby started his TPWD career in East Texas before moving to La Grange in 2007.

Predator-Prey Relationships: Nature's Balancing Act

WRITTEN BY MARK LANGE

The discussion of predator control is a common topic in the wildlife field. Whether it is to protect fawns or quail chicks, predator control seems to be a practice that many landowners believe must prelude any other practices including habitat improvements. As a wildlife biologist, we are asked to make recommendations on how to maximize wildlife populations in an area. What we must all keep in mind is that all of the species have survived together historically and have done fine. So simply shooting every predator you see while turning a blind eye to your habitat conditions will likely not produce the results you are looking for.

When we discuss specifically deer, in an area with very abundant deer populations you will see lower body weights, typically lower reproductive rates, and increased mortality compared to areas with lower deer density. Predators will benefit from areas with abundant prey, from an ecosystem perspective this is healthy. Predator-Prey relationships are looked at in two different ways: top down (predator driven) and bottom up (prey driven). Implementing predator control would be a top down (predator driven) approach. Implementing habitat improvement practices would be a bottom up (prey driven) approach. Scientific data can be found to support each approach, with that said I think a landowner should consider what is best for the property and the game species they are interested in when making this decision.

Direct predator control may give a landowner the feeling they are "protecting" their wildlife. As I mentioned earlier, there is scientific data to support controlling predators results in larger fawn crops in deer, increased survival in quail, and increased survival in turkey poults. In those studies, very extensive effort was put into predator control using any available method to control all predator species. Without consistent extensive efforts to control predators, predator populations will not be reduced for long enough periods of time to produce population increases in the desired species. As a landowner or manager you may consider the bottom up approach. Implementing habitat improvement practices will benefit both game and non-game species. Having quality habitat in place will provide the desired games species the cover to more effectively evade predation, but also provide habitat for non-game species that are also prey. Having quality habitat will produce prey abundance and diversity, therefore offering predators more availability of prey likely leading to decreased predation on the desired game species. Simply, would a bobcat rather attempt to predate on one fawn or predate on more rabbits, squirrels, and mice? While bobcats do eat fawns, the risk of injury to them when capturing larger prey is much higher so therefore it is in their best interest to consume more abundant prey that comes with less risk.

Bobcats may occasionally prey on white-tailed deer but are much more dependent on small mammals and birds for survival
Photo © TPWD

Continued on page 5

CONTINUED

Here are some aspects of predator control to keep in mind:

Are predators limiting the prey items you are looking to protect?

If you are looking to protect your deer herd, is the population of deer in the area low? If it is low, is that due to predators or is there something else you could do to better benefit the existing deer herd? In most cases, there are better explanations than excessive predation as to why populations of a particular species are low. In areas where deer abundance is high, predation is an important tool in population control. In the absence of all predation, most hunters would be incapable of harvesting enough animals to manage the population on a landscape level.

Is it possible to reduce predator populations enough to make an impact or is it just a perceived impact especially on small acreage?

A study conducted in 1974 on the King Ranch compared two areas, one with extensive predator control (steel traps, various poisons, and shooting) and one without any predator control. Both areas consisted of roughly 5400 acres. The area in which predators were extensively controlled for two years showed an increase of fawn survival by an average of 68% and also a noticeable increase in overall deer abundance. After the study concluded and predator control was not continued, predator populations in the area where they had been controlled returned to the pre-study levels within 6 months (Beasom, 1974). With this study in mind, most landowners would not be able to conduct such extensive predator control methods and also not have the ability to access acreage of that size in this area. Predator control on small acreage may lead to you seeing less predators on that track, while in reality no significant reduction in predator numbers has been made at the scale needed to significantly increase the survival of fawns, chicks, or poults.

What predators do you have on your property and what is their density?

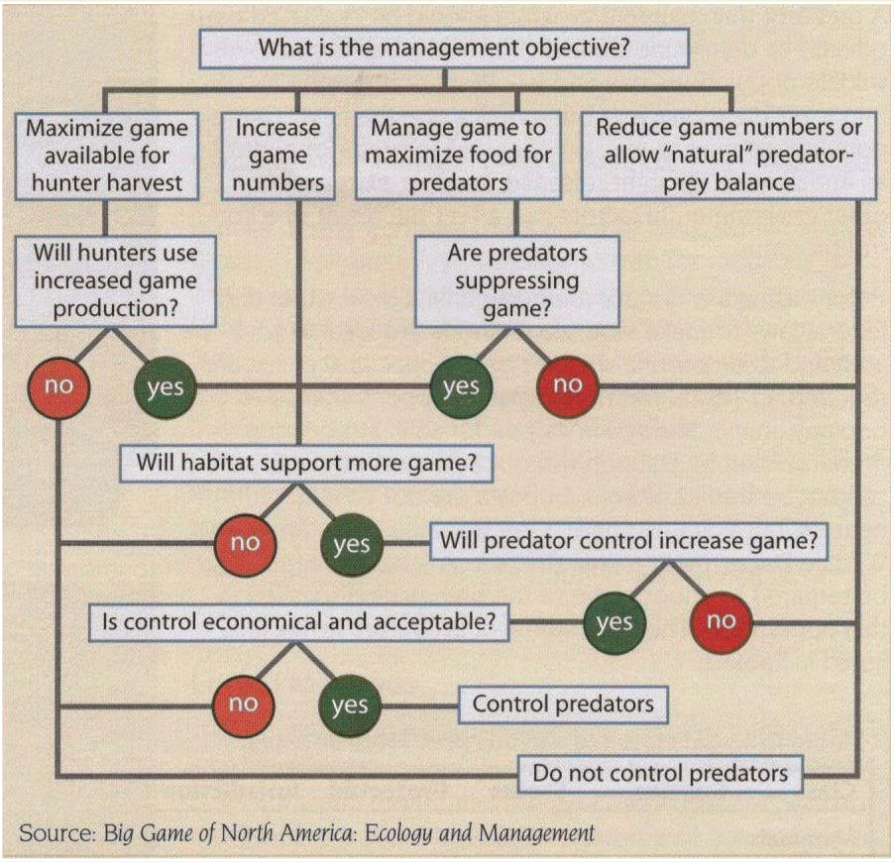
Seeing a coyote or bobcat trot across your property should not be a cause of panic or a trip to the store for ammunition. Nor should it be the undoubted reason why you are seeing less game species on your property. There are methods to determine what predators you have around and how prevalent they are. One of those methods is called a scent station. All you need is a bag of flour, a hula hoop of all things, and a lure (predator urine or fatty acid tablet). Place the hula hoop on the ground and fill it in with flour ¼ inch deep. Place the lure that the predators will not eat in the middle, then the next morning identify the tracks in the flour. You can also walk areas where there is soft substrate to identify tracks if you a skilled tracker. Other methods to assess predator populations are: cameras, calls, investigating kill sites, and searching for scat. Most of these methods require training and experience in order to be proficient at drawing the correct conclusions. Having some experience in tracking I will tell you coyote tracks are much less common when you don't take your dog with you.

Continued on page 6

CONTINUED

In conclusion, controlling predators should be a practice that a landowner puts some thought into. Is it worth the effort and expense involved? Will you be able to do it consistently and at a large enough scale to significantly reduce predator numbers? If so, are you capable of filling in the void with harvest of more of the desired game species specifically deer? Predator hunting and trapping is an enjoyable sport for many and by no means am I saying do not go out and hunt predators. With that said, I would just suggest evaluating your habitat and land practices to see if there is anything that could be improved upon that would decrease the impact of predators on the desired games species and better benefit the land and those same species. Below is a flow chart that may assist you in determining the importance of predator control on your property. Remember the three most important aspects of wildlife management are habitat, habitat, and habitat; not predator control, predator control, predator control.

King Ranch Study-Beasom, S. L. 1974a. Relationships between predator removal and white-tailed deer net productivity. Journal of Wildlife Management 38:854-859.



Mark Lange is the wildlife biologist for Colorado and Austin Counties where he started in June 2012. He grew up in the Texas panhandle in the small town of Nazareth. He attended West Texas A&M University where he completed his Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology/Wildlife Science in 2006 and his Masters of Science Degree in Biology in 2011. Mark offices out of the Columbus field office. Mark has diverse interests and enjoys working with landowners towards their management goals.

Plant Profile: *Croton*, The Underappreciated "Weed"

WRITTEN BY TRENT TEINERT

This time of year many pastures are full of an abundant plant negatively referred to as "goatweed" or "doveweed"

Croton results from a lack of soil cover, often caused by overgrazing or soil disturbance such as plowing or disking
Photo © Trent Teinert, TPWD

Biologists recognize this plant's exceptional value to wildlife and try to remove this negative connotation by referring to this plant by its genus *Croton*. Due to this plant's abundance and easy growing nature it has been dubbed an undesirable "weed" by many. To control this plant landowners have spent countless dollars and time trying to eradicate this plant with herbicides and shredding to no avail. *Croton* appears year after year in pastures across this state and has gained the scorn of many. This resiliency and abundance is exactly why so many wildlife species rely on it for a large part of their diet.

Although there are twenty species of *Croton* in Texas, there are a few species that are wide-spread and common in most of Texas. Texas *Croton* (*Croton texensis*) and woolly *Croton* (*Croton capitatus*) are two species native to Texas; both are annuals which reproduce and grow from seed each year. Being annuals *Croton* must rely on seeds to propagate so plants produce large quantities of seeds to insure their offspring will cover the savannahs of Texas. Seeds may lay dormant for years waiting for the right conditions to germinate.

The mass production of seeds is one of *Croton's* exceptional values. *Croton* provides food for game animals such as bobwhite quail (*Colinus virginianis*) and mourning doves (*Zenaida macroura*) who readily consume the seeds. Small mammals such as the kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys compactus*) who stuff their cheeks with croton seed, rely on *Croton* as a staple of their diet. Some butterflies such as the goatweed leafwing (*Anaea andria*) use *Croton* to complete their life cycle as well.

Croton varies in height from one to five feet tall; starting with a single stem growing up and branching out to a crown, similar to a miniature tree shading the ground below. In this structure lies *Croton's* second greatest value. This single stem structure with a bushy crown acts as screening cover and provides a safe understory for doves, turkey poults, and quail to forage while masking them from both avian and mammalian predators. Screening cover is the first line of defense for quail and other birds that spend a lot of time on the ground. It allows them to travel and forage undetected by predators. Combining food and a safe place to forage, *Croton* has created an ideal habitat that benefits many species.

Continued on page 8

CONTINUED

Croton is an indicator of early succession and predominates on areas of high disturbance. In times of drought or on heavily grazed pastures it can become a dominate plant. Although this circumstance helped it earn a bad reputation, it provides the land manager a great indicator of range condition. When expansive monocultures of *Croton* are observed this is an indication that the land is being over utilized. After land is disturbed, *Croton* is the first colonizer that will spread in attempt to build and stabilize soil, paving the way for later successional species.

Traits such as large geographic distribution, high seed production, long seed viability, and resiliency make *Croton* an easy species to propagate. If you want to manage for *Croton*, possibly to create a food plot for doves, it is very easy. Chances are, wherever you are in Texas, there is a huge "seed bank" of *Croton* seeds waiting just inches under the soil for a disturbance to release them for germination. A food plot mix is not necessary. All you have to do is disturb the soil with a disk or hoof action from cattle, and the seeds will be released and start germinating. You can disk strips around the perimeter of your property or in select locations to create natural food plots; this is best accomplished during late winter. Because *Croton* is a resilient native plant, these natural food plots are resistant to drought and often produce well even in drought years.

This year when you head out to the back pasture and are greeted with a solid field of *Croton*, stop for a moment before muttering curses towards "goat weed". Stop and think what its presence is telling you about the health of your land and the availability of food and cover for wildlife. Realize that its presence is a direct response to land management practices which can be manipulated by man to achieve desired outcomes. By gaining an appreciation for *Croton*, you will ensure the health of your land and the wildlife that use it.

Croton provides food for game animals such as bobwhite quail and mourning doves who readily consume the seeds
Photo © Mary Ann Urban, TPWD

Trent Teinert has a B.S. and M.S. in Range and Wildlife Management both from Texas A&M-Kingsville. Trent started his career in 2011 with TPWD covering Victoria, Calhoun, and Refugio counties. In late 2013, Trent transferred over into the South Texas District and took on responsibilities in Karnes and Wilson Counties. District 7 was fortunate to be able to lure Trent back in 2015 and he began covering Gonzales and Guadalupe counties and caring for the Neasloney Wildlife Management Area. Trent resides in Seguin, Texas and is married to a wildlife biologist.

Species Spotlight: On the Trail of the Coyote

WRITTEN BY ROBERT TRUDEAU

From Alaska and Canada, all the way south into the depths of Central America, the all-to-familiar cries penetrate the night and instill fear amongst some and comfort to others.

These piercing cries that have created so many different reactions across the countryside only come from the infamous, four-legged, furry carnivore known as the coyote *(Canis latrans*). Having been bestowed the title of North America's most vocal wild mammal, the scientific name *Canis latrans* is nothing but highly fitting and is translated to mean "barking dog"…. Go figure, right?

The coyote is a highly versatile divergent of the grey wolf and historically was predominantly found in the Great Plains and the arid regions of the western United States. With the expansion of the human environment across the continent and the extirpation of grey wolves, red wolves, and cougars throughout their historical range, today's coyotes can be found just about everywhere in North America. Today, there are nineteen recognized sub-species of *Canis latrans* roaming the North American continent; of these nineteen sub-species, four are found here in the great state of Texas. The first and most prominent sub-species in Texas are the Southeastern (*Canis latrans frustor*) and Texas Plains (*Canis latrans texensis*) coyotes, which cover the majority of the state. The other two sub-species are vaguely present and are the Plains coyote (*Canis latrans latrans*), around the northern boundary of the Texas Panhandle, and the Lower Rio Grande coyote (*Canis latrans microdon*), found in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Weighing in at between 15 to 44 pounds and measuring 3 to 4 feet in length, the coyote displays multiple characteristics depending on the sub-species and the environment in which it is found. A coyote's fur coat is predominately light gray and/or reddish, with hues of black and white interspersed within the coat. The fur itself, as with a dog, is composed of a highly soft underfur and coarse, long guard hairs. Contrary to popular belief, albinism is highly rare within coyotes. Unlike a majority of domesticated dogs, the footprints of a coyote are usually easily distinguishable. Coyote tracks are elongated, or less-rounded, than domesticated dogs and have

Of nineteen recognized sub-species of coyote, four are found in Texas
Photo © Bill Reaves, TPWD

Continued on page 10

CONTINUED

a faint nail impression comparatively. When matched and compared to a grey wolf, the coyote displays a smaller stature with longer ears and a wider braincase than that of the grey wolf. When compared from a frontal view, coyotes also have a narrower posture, muzzle, and face than that of a wolf. Though wolves have been extirpated from Texas, there are other locations where wolves and coyotes coexist within the same ecosystem. Being able to distinguish between the two can be as simple as a quick glance at the tail posture. When walking or running, wolves carry their tail in a horizontal position; whereas coyotes carry their tail in a downwards position.

As with other wildlife species, the coyote's habits are adjusted to the environment in which it resides. However, there are many characteristics that are the same amongst the multiple sub-species. All sub-species of *Canis latrans* are highly gregarious, meaning they prefer to live in packs (family groups) rather than alone; though, it is still a common sight to see them running alone. The reason for this is that coyotes are not a "highly-specialized" species when it comes to taking on larger prey. When hunting, coyotes rely upon their keen senses for finding food. It is thought that the olfactory senses (smell) are the most useful, but in reality, it is actually their sense of vision that they rely on the most for finding prey. With their dinner in sight, coyotes usually attack from the front, targeting their prey's head and throat; though, it is all dependent on their targeted prey and what works. Prey may be as small as a field mouse or as large as a deer.

The territorial requirements of coyotes are highly fluid. Factors that contribute to their territorial requirements include food availability, other predators with overlying territories, availability of denning sites, and the size of the pack/family. With all these inputs, a coyote family's territory can range between .10 and 24 square miles.

Food availability has been identified in most studies as the primary limiting factor of coyote populations. Coyotes are opportunistic feeders and take advantage of whichever food sources are readily available. Coyotes not only hunt live prey, but they are also excellent scavengers. Coyote diets can consist of animal matter and plant matter. Coyotes will eat native fruits and insects as available, which is mainly during the warm season. Small mammals (rats, mice, and rabbits) are an important food source year round. Coyotes can be very effective predators of white-tailed deer fawns during the fawning season; proper fawning cover and tight buck:doe ratios can drastically offset the impact of coyotes on fawns.

Food availability has been identified in most studies as the primary limiting factor of coyote populations
Photo © TPWD

Besides food availability, the most crucial determination of a family's home territory will be the availability of denning sites. Since coyote families are centered on a single reproductive female, the alpha female, they rely heavily on the

Continued on page 11

CONTINUED

availability of denning sites. Coyotes are a strictly monogamous species, meaning they only have one mate at any given time; though, the mate can change each breeding season. Once a female coyote has found a mate for the reproductive process, they will establish their territory and select an adequate denning site. Denning sites can be established just about anywhere… rock outcroppings, banks, abandoned buildings, canyons, bluffs, logs, washouts, animal burrows, etc. Within the denning site, the female continuously maintains it in a comfortable condition; this is because she will be spending a significant amount of her time in it. With a gestation period of approximately two months and the pups not walking until two to three weeks after birth (full size at nine months), the female will spend a significant period of time in her den. Should something happen to the den, or should it become infested with fleas, the female will abandon her den and move her pups to a new one. Once the pups are large enough to join the other adults in the daily activities, the den is then abandoned. The established territory, normally, will not be defended outside of the denning season.

Coyotes are considered the most vocal wild mammal in the United States. Adult coyotes have eleven different and documented vocalizations; which, can be broken down into three distinguishable categories for classification. As with many other predatory animals, coyotes have different vocalizations for aggression/threats, contacts, and greetings. Each vocalization pattern has its own unique sound. Depending on the situation, coyotes and their pups use a variety of vocalizations that range from howls, whimpers, huffs, whines, barks, and yaps. Each has its own meaning and is also varied by the intensity and pitch. For instance, although barks and yaps are highly similar, the main difference is the pitch, volume and duration. Yaps are high-pitched and comparatively quiet with a short duration; whereas, barks are low-pitched and loud with a longer duration. Figuring out what a coyote is doing is as simple as listening to the sounds. Deep tones are usually a sign of irritation and aggression, whereas high-pitched tones are more of a sign of excitement and playfulness. The familiar, stereotypical howl of a coyote in the pale moon light is actually a contact call produced by lone coyotes and responded to by other families. Contact calls are basically the same as a human ringing a door bell at another person's house. Another common sound that is heard often, is the high-pitched yammering of multiple coyotes. To humans, it mimics a political debate session in a foreign language. This seemingly unorganized confusion is usually what is vocalized when a pack/family of coyotes gets on the trail of some much needed dinner or on the tail of an invader(s).

Though *Canis latrans* and all of its unique sub-species have been studied for many years, they still provide us with new information every day. No matter what stance you take on the presence of coyotes, they are a unique asset to our environment. However, it is only with understanding that we will be able to fully recognize this amazing animal's value in our lives. So, I leave you with this: Next time you hear the mournful sounds penetrating the quiet of the night, take some time to listen. Listen to them and contemplate what they may mean. Realize they are evidence of a healthy ecosystem.

Robert Trudeau is the Wildlife Biologist for Bastrop and Caldwell counties and offices out of Bastrop. He graduated from Tarleton State University in 2011 with a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Management and a minor in Biology. Robert was hired by TPWD in 2013, where he filled the position of Resource Specialist for the Lost Pines Complex until accepting his current biologist position in 2014. Prior to working for TPWD, Robert has also worked as a Biological Science Technician for the US Fish and Wildlife Service in South Dakota, Illinois, and Nebraska.

Non-game Notes: Bald Eagle in Coastal Texas

WRITTEN BY BRENT ORTEGO

The Bald Eagle is one of the most charismatic birds in Texas and is the National Emblem of the United States. It is a species that people will stop to watch; it gives people a sense of wilderness.

Photo © Brent Ortego, TPWD

It is also a species that was almost eliminated as a breeder in Texas.

The Bald Eagle is becoming more common throughout the coastal Texas because of quality stewardship from area landowners, regulations protecting it and restrictions on the use of harmful pesticides. A few of you might remember when seeing a Bald Eagle was a rare event.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) started studying nesting, food habits and movements of the Bald Eagle in 1970 when there were only four pairs known to nest in the State, with all being located near the Coast. Their nesting population was closely monitored each year through 2005 at which time 156 nesting territories were documented following a ten percent increase per year. Food habits were determined to be mostly fish, waterfowl, coots and turtles, and occasionally they were sighted scavenging on road kills. Eagles tended to use the same nest each year, and when the nest fell they would build another one nearby. Eagles generally did not stay near the nest all year. Many left the nesting area during the summer after the young fledged and migrated north; some, as far as Canada.

There are many man-made hazards for birds as demonstrated by the wing damage on this eagle that was shocked by a power line in Victoria County. Photo © Brent Ortego, TPWD

Today, TPWD does not know how many Bald Eagle nesting territories there are. TPWD still keeps up with information on historic eagle nesting sites and new sites reported by the public. This allows TPWD to provide input to new development to minimize impacts to the species.

The timing of nesting of Bald Eagles is directly related to how far south the species nest. Those nesting in southern Texas generally return to their nesting territories in October, lay eggs in late November with eggs hatching by New Years and young leaving the nest in spring. Eagles nesting to the north start nesting progressively later depending on latitude. Nest initiation is usually timed to optimize maximum availability of food to raise the young.

Continued on page 12

CONTINUED

Northern breeding eagles tend to migrate south during the winter following waterfowl and looking for ice free water. This makes eagle monitoring complicated. Is the eagle you see fishing at the river or breaking up a flock of geese a local nester, or is it a bird from northern states? The only way to really know is to find it associated with a nest.

Eagles tend to nest in large trees within one mile of rivers, creeks and lakes that are secluded from disturbance and provide the eagles' good views of surrounding land with easy access for them to fly to and from the nest. Large trees are needed for nesting because nests are typically huge being at least five feet in diameter and at least three feet deep.

The best time to search for nests is when the leaves fall from trees making viewing much easier. Photo © Brent Ortego, TPWD

Indications of increasing populations and possibly habitats becoming saturated with eagles are when birds don't always nest in those classic settings of big trees in isolated situations near rivers and lakes. Reports of nests near small seasonal creeks (30 feet wide in Calhoun County), catfish farms surrounded by agricultural lands (Matagorda and Wharton counties) and within residential areas of Houston are becoming more common.

A farmer recently found a nest on the ground in Matagorda County which was the first known to be on the ground in Texas. There were catfish farms nearby for food, but no large trees. The eagle appeared to be trying to take advantage of this food source. A ground predator found the nest before the eggs could hatch. "Nature tends to cull bad decisions".

Harris County, with millions of people and large residential and industrial complexes, supports more eagle nests than any coastal county in Texas. Harris County hosts twenty-three nesting territories. Many of these are associated with green belts near Lake Houston and bayous and rivers. A few are near other waterbodies like clusters of golf course ponds. Other sites are puzzling being in isolated wood lots at distances greater than one mile from any obvious large water bodies.

Brazoria County supports the second most reported Bald Eagle nests with sixteen and is followed closely by Wharton County with fifteen. Matagorda and Victoria counties each have thirteen; Fort Bend and Jackson have ten each; Goliad nine; Colorado seven; Bastrop and Fayette have five each; Calhoun four; Lee, Orange and Refugio three each; Gonzales, Jefferson and Lavaca two each; and Austin and Caldwell one each. and four counties with no nests reported.

If you want more information on Bald Eagles or assistance with management, contact your local wildlife biologist.

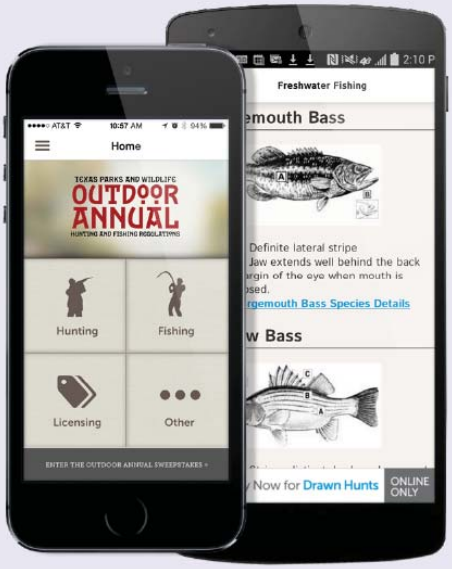
Dr. Brent Ortego is the Wildlife Diversity Biologist for TPWD Region 4, based out of Victoria. Brent has thirty-three years of experience with TPWD having worked in East Texas and along the coast on diverse topics such as red-cockaded woodpeckers, endangered species recovery teams, and migratory birds.

Introducing the Official App of Texas Hunting and Fishing

Available on the App Store

ANDROID APP ON Google play

Available Free on iOS and Android



In the field or in a blind

- Find hunting season dates and bag limits for your county
- See seasons and bag limits for all game animals
- Review means and methods restrictions
- Find public hunting lands
- Apply for drawn hunts for mule deer, bighorn and other game
- Read the latest hunting news from TPWD*

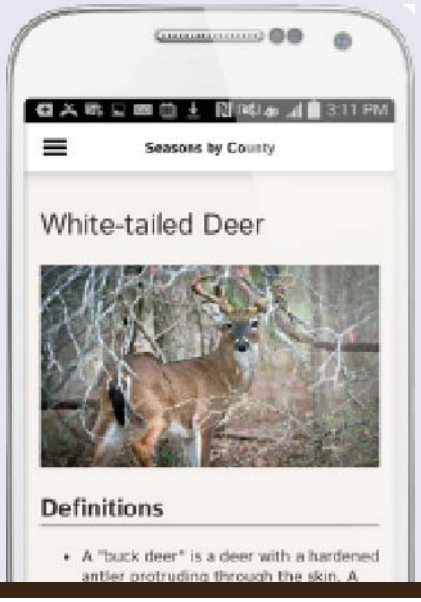
On the water or on the shores

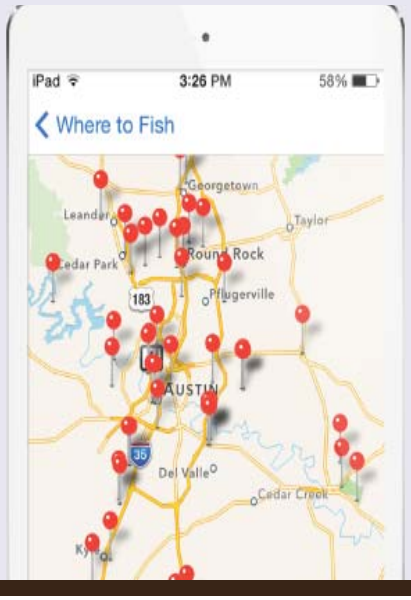
- See statewide bag and length limits
- Find exceptions to statewide limits by water body
- Find places to fish nearby
- See tips for identifying bass and catfish
- View weekly fishing reports*
- Read the latest fishing news from TPWD*

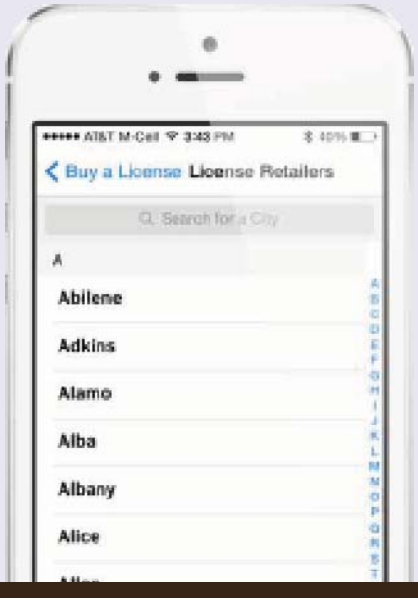
Licenses, stamps and permits

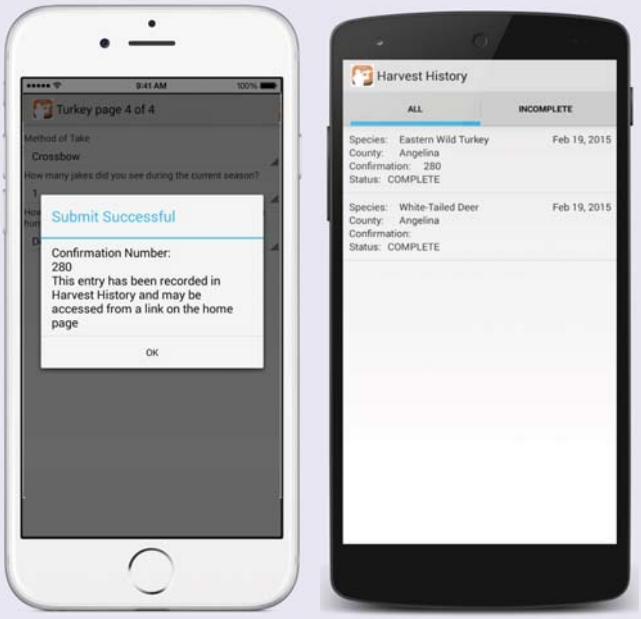
- See types of licenses, permits and stamps available
- Find license retailers near you
- Purchase licenses*

* Some features require internet access









Announcing *My Texas Hunt Harvest* App

Available on the App Store

ANDROID APP ON Google play

Available Free on iOS and Android

Built exclusively for Texas hunters, this official Texas Parks and Wildlife app allows hunters to report harvested game in real-time

- Log your harvested game animals
- View your harvest history on your smartphone or tablet
- Eastern Turkey hunters can now check their harvested turkey with the app instead of visiting physical check stations
- Voluntarily report harvests for all other resident game species and help TPWD Wildlife biologists manage healthy game populations
- After a one-time login, you can easily access your TPWD customer number for future reference

No Apple or Android device? Report your game online

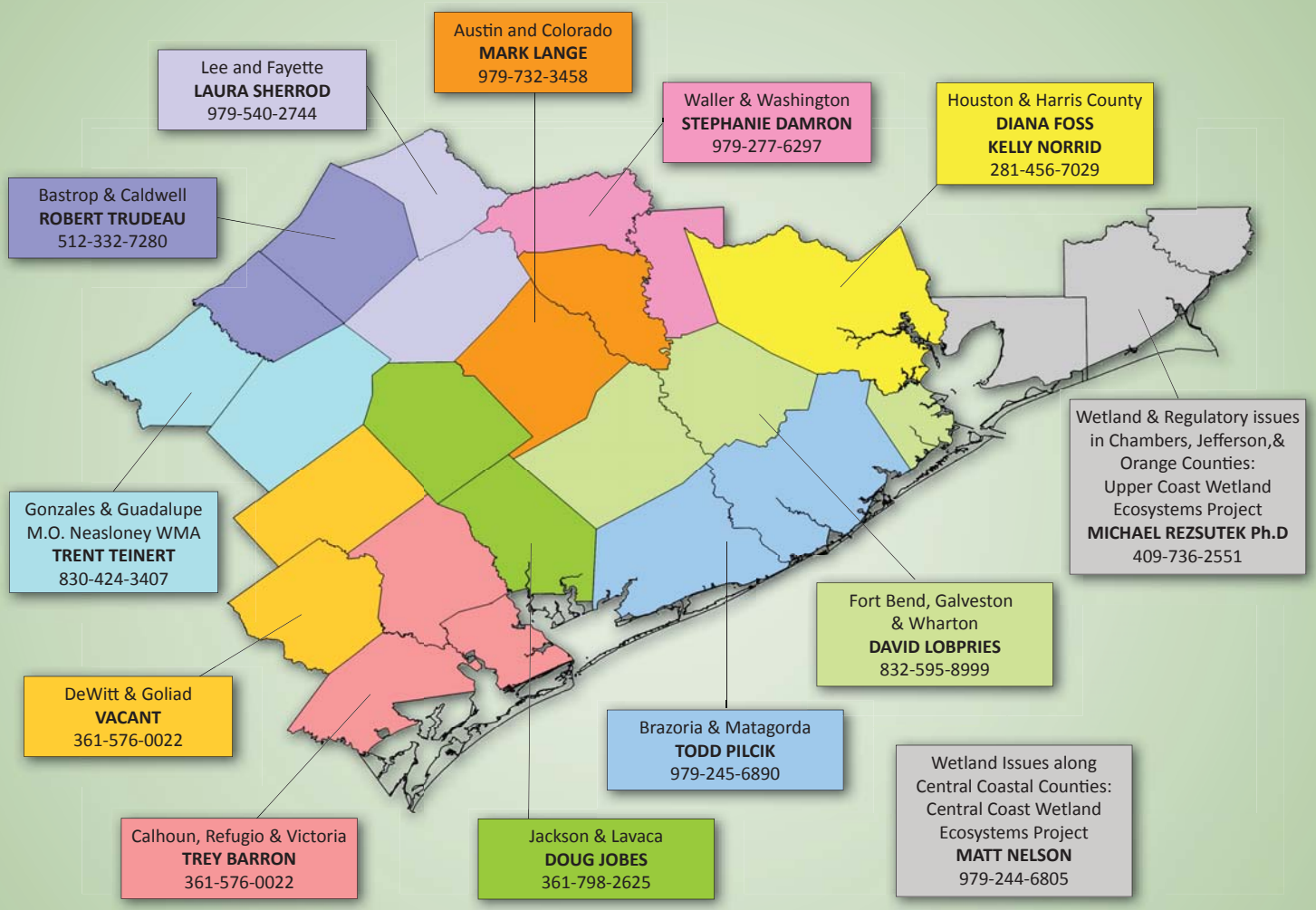
https://apps.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntharvest/#/

(Not compatible with Internet Explorer 8 or older)

Photo © Bill Reeves, TPWD

* This app does not fulfill tagging requirements for any game required to be tagged, or requirements for completion of the harvest log on the back of the license as it applies to white-tailed deer.

Our Wildlife Biologists



District 7 Leader	Technical Guidance Biologist	Wildlife Diversity Biologist
DAVID FORRESTER	**BOBBY EICHLER**	**BRENT ORTEGO Ph.D**
979-968-3501	979-968-9942	361-576-0022

Executive Director
Carter P. Smith

Editors
David Forrester
Bobby Eichler
Mary Ann Urban

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE
Life's better outside.®

COMMISSION
T. Dan Friedkin, Chairman Houston
Ralph H. Duggins, Vice-Chairman Fort Worth
Dan Allen Hughes, Jr. Beeville
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 website, as well as other newsletters created by the department. Please visit www.tpwd.texas.gov/newsletters/ for more information.

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 website for detailed information about TPWD programs:

www.tpwd.texas.gov

PWD LF W7000-2068 (10/15)