Region IV Wildlifer

A newsletter for landowners that fall within the 33 counties of Region IV, covering portions of Central and Coastal Texas

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

October 2024

District 8 Field Notes

BY DERRICK WOLTER

It's hard to believe it's already time for another quarterly newsletter, and more importantly, that the fall hunting seasons are upon us once again! Although we received good rainfall from winter through mid-summer in most of the district, things have dried out as of late. In fact, the entire region now ranges from abnormally dry to moderate drought conditions. This is Texas, so the next drought is always just around the corner, unfortunately.

Native wildlife are well adapted to dealing with changing habitat conditions, as long as quality habitat exists. So, a word of caution as things dry up. Although the plants that comprise good wildlife habitat still suffer during drought conditions, they bounce back much faster (than the plants that comprise poor habitat) when favorable conditions return. This is why it's best to manage rangelands for worst-case scenarios, never overusing the plants found on a property. Wildlife and livestock need them. Good quality plants must be present on the landscape in some quantity for a rebound to occur.

District biologists observed the favorable response by wildlife populations to positive changes in habitat through the survey data that they collected and reviewed this year. Mourning and White-winged dove populations were both estimated to be at all-time highs, so hopefully you were able to get out and dove hunt. An increase in Bobwhite Quail was recorded in areas where habitat was found. White-tailed deer populations were generally stable or crept upward, as well. Staff did see some disparity in fawn recruitment, but this often varies by property depending on local precipitation and land use practices.

In other district news, we have a new biologist for DeWitt County, Skyler Hickman! Skyler started on October 1 and is stationed at the Victoria Wildlife office. Skyler comes to the district from the Central Coast Wetland Ecosystems Project within Region 4, where she worked as a seasonal technician at the Justin Hurst WMA. Skyler is from Weimer and graduated with a B.S. in Wildlife & Fisheries Sciences from Texas A&M University. Skyler can be reached at skyler.hickman@tpwd.texas.gov or at 361-433-7896.

Derrick Wolter began his career with TPWD in 2000 working as a wildlife biologist within the Upper Coast Wetlands Ecosystem Project, where he worked with wetlands, waterfowl, and on several Wildlife Management Areas. In 2004, Derrick moved to Central Texas to serve as a district biologist for Bell, Coryell, Lampasas, and Williamson Counties. In 2020, he became the Senior Wildlife Biologist for the Hill Country District. In November 2023, Derrick became the Wildlife District 8 Leader. He received a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Science and a Master of Science in Wildlife Ecology from Texas A&M University.

District Field Notes, continued

District 9 Field Notes

BY BOBBY EICHLER

District 9 is currently fully staffed. At the time of the July newsletter, we were in the process of filling the Fayette County position. With the help of the Managed Lands Deer Permit (MLDP) fees established a few seasons ago, we have been able to hire additional biologists to help in areas that have historically had high constituent numbers. Because of this, we were able to split out duties for Lee and Fayette Counties so that each may have their own biologist. Laura Sherrod will now be covering only Lee County and Fayette County will now be covered by Drake Rangel.

Drake started in Fayette County on August 19, and he will be officing in the District 9 office which is in Fayette Savings, La Grange. Drake comes to us with both a Bachelor's and Master of Science in Range and Wildlife Management from Texas A&M Kingsville. While working on his Master's, Drake worked with many private landowners on what could have been stressful situations working with a species that was possibly going to be listed as either threatened or endangered. Drake was able to gain landowner trust and access to acreage for his study. Drake will be a great asset to our district.

As always, after July 15 our staff focus shifts to white-tailed deer. Staff helped numerous Wildlife Management Associations (WMA) with their deer surveys as well as the annual regulatory spotlight surveys across the district. Some of the WMA data is presented in this newsletter. I believe the one certainty across the board was that fawn rates were up quite a bit this year. Fawn survival rates are directly correlated with the amount of vegetation present while they are growing, particularly in their first 3-4 weeks. As you all remember, we had good rain through July. The weather has now turned off dry with much of the vegetation drying out. Vegetative cover is still critical for fawns, I recommend leaving vegetation in place through the fall. If you do not have a real need to mow/shred, leave the vegetation in place.

Staff have also been very busy with issuing MLD permits over the month of September. For the most part that has subsided and most folks have been taken care of. If for some reason you have stopped receiving permits over the past few years but would like to 'get back on the wagon' please contact your local biologist by mid-May so that we can assist you and figure out which route is best for you. We realize that many changes have occurred over the past few years, and you may need help getting back on the permit wagon.

Going forward, staff will be busy collecting Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) samples from both hunter harvest and roadkill deer. As always, we could use your help with this. We would be glad to sample deer you harvest; we simply need the location and the hunter information when collecting. We basically pull lymph nodes near the throat so if you leave just a small amount of neck on the head, we should be good to sample. We could also use your help finding roadkill deer. If you drive the same route daily to get to work, etc., and you come across a roadkill deer just give your local biologist a call with good directions.

On another deer topic, hunters need to realize that a new regulation is now in place concerning carcass disposal. This will be covered in this newsletter, and we hope all hunters do their part in reducing the spread of CWD. With this regulation, hunters can now debone deer at the site of harvest, but meat should still remain in whole muscle groups.

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District Field Notes, continued

Lastly, while I have covered a lot about deer, staff have been busy with the normal site visits that cover various tasks. Staff also showed up in force for a Youth Firearms Shooting Event that was held at the Neasloney WMA near Luling. Over two days, approximately 112 students representing 8 schools were able to shoot various firearms and learn about safety. I would estimate that 30% of these kids had not shot a firearm prior to this event. In late October, we will have another event for Lee and Washington County youth at Nails Creek State Park. Staff have also assisted in several scoring schools to train folks on antler scoring, attended and presented at numerous WMA meetings as well as various workshops.

That's all I have for now. Hopefully as you read this newsletter the days have turned off cooler with the opening day of the rifle season just around the corner. Until next time, enjoy the outdoors and the wildlife with your family and be safe.

2024 Neasloney Youth Shoot. Photos©TPWD

Bobby Eichler is the District 9 leader for the Oak Savannah and Prairies 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.

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

STATEWIDE CARCASS DISPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

FOR WHITE-TAILED DEER & MULE DEER

Importance of Proper Carcass Disposal

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a fatal neurological disease that can be unintentionally transmitted from CWD-positive carcasses that are transported from the property of harvest and are not disposed of properly. Proper disposal of carcass parts from white-tailed deer and mule deer is an important management action for reducing the risk of disease transmission from CWD-positive areas to areas where the disease is not yet known to exist.

PREFERRED DISPOSAL METHOD »

Leave unused carcass parts at the property of harvest.

This greatly reduces the chance of spreading CWD to other parts of the state.
Hunters are allowed to debone a carcass at the property of harvest, provided that:

- Meat is processed no further than whole muscles and may not be ground, chopped, or sliced.
- Meat from multiple deer must remain in separate bags or containers while transported.
- Proof of sex and tagging requirements remain with the meat until reaching a final destination.

IF THE CARCASS IS TRANSPORTED away from the property of harvest, unused parts must be:

Disposed of in a commercial trash service

OR

Returned to the property where the animal was harvested

OR

Buried at least 3 feet below the ground and covered with at least 3 feet of earthen material

Harvested deer or deer heads can be taken to a commercial processor or taxidermist and the commercial processor or taxidermist must properly dispose of unused parts.

STATEWIDE CARCASS DISPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

» What species does this regulation apply to?

Carcass disposal requirements only apply to Texas' native deer: white-tailed deer and mule deer. Exotic deer species such as elk, red deer, and sika are susceptible to CWD, and, although not required, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department recommends practicing these same carcass disposal measures for exotic deer species as well.

» What are considered "unused carcass parts?"

These are the parts of the deer not retained for cooking or taxidermy purposes.

» How should I transport deboned meat from multiple carcasses?

Deboned meat from multiple deer must remain in separate bags or containers until reaching its final destination. Meat from multiple carcasses can be transported in the same cooler, provided that it is kept within bags or containers separate from other deer.

» Can I still quarter deer?

Absolutely. Quarters (two front quarters, two hind quarters, backstraps, and trimmings) can still be transported away from the property of harvest, but any unused parts should remain at the property of harvest or must be disposed of properly.

» If I harvest a deer in a CWD zone, can I take the whole carcass or any part of the carcass out of the CWD zone?

As long as the carcass disposal requirements listed here are followed, a deer carcass may be transported outside of a CWD zone.

» I am taking the deer to a processor or taxidermist. Does this apply to me?

Harvested deer or deer heads may continue to be taken to a commercial processor or taxidermist and the processor or taxidermist must properly dispose of unused carcass parts.

For more information on CWD, scan the code or visit

tpwd.texas.gov/cwd

2024 White-tailed Deer Population Survey Results

WRITTEN BY MARK LANGE

Every summer Wildlife Management Association (WMA) members and Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) staff work together on collecting deer survey data. This effort starts late in July and continues through August. Results of this effort provide the data needed to issue the Managed Land for Deer (MLD) permits every year for all WMA members. If you are one of those members that volunteer their time to assist on spotlight surveys, we want to say thank you very much and we also appreciate all member contributions to the incidental observation daylight counts! A complete summary of the 2024 results is included in the following pages with a few key points listed below.

- During the summer of 2024 collection period, a minimum of 55 spotlight routes were sampled, some ran 2-3 times each.
- This resulted in 1,835 miles or spotlight surveys with just over 136,000 acres being sampled.
- Incidental observations collected by WMA members resulted in just over 258,000 deer seen which helps determined the buck:doe ratio and fawn survival each year.
- Spotlight surveys are most important when analyzed across the long-term and as trend data. While the survey gives us an idea of deer densities, it is obviously not 100% accurate (we can't even count human populations accurately). Individual line data for a one-year period should always be viewed looking at the 'big picture' and in conjunction with several years.
- This past summer was an above average year for rainfall, so vegetation was taller than in years past. Most lines do not collect 'visibility' readings annually.
- Deer densities vary by habitat suitability. It is meaningless to compare your part of the county with other areas in hopes of obtaining higher densities. Different areas across the landscape have different carrying capacities, and we manage to keep populations within that capacity.
- Due to additional cover from the above average rainfall, fawn survival was higher this year during the survey period at 40% compared to 34% in 2023 and 30% in 2022.

Fawn laying in the grass. Photo©TPWD

Your participation in helping your WMA collect this data is again greatly appreciated. Working together as a team is the only way to effectively manage the deer herd on a landscape level in small acreage counties. Having a good understanding of densities and ratios of the herd is obviously the first step in properly managing it and thanks to members that have contributed for some now many years we have a solid data set to help make those important management decisions.

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2024 White-tailed Deer Population Survey Results, continued

Wildlife Management Association or TPWD Deer Management Unit Survey	County	Spotlight Surveys				Incidental Observations		
		Miles of Survey	Acres of Visibility	# Deer Seen	Acres Per Deer	# Deer Identified	Doe per Buck	Fawn Survival
Austin County WMA /Bellville	Austin	16.0	1,224	38	32	4,985	2.0	35%
Austin County WMA (Welcome)	Austin	23.0	1,102	137	8			
Austin County WMA (Cat Spring)	Austin	10.4	402	60	7			
Pin Oak Creek WMA	Bastrop	45.0	2,250	84	27	1,811	1.4	27%
Red Rock WMA	Bastrop	61.2	1,983	461	4	2,629	1.6	38%
Clear Fork Creek WMA	Caldwell	33.0	2,373	293	8	5,020	1.5	31%
Tri-Community WMA	Caldwell	45.0	4,155	522	8	6,174	2.2	37%
Harvey Creek WMA	Colorado	24.6	1,960	230	9	5,783	1.8	52%
Sandy Creek WMA	Colorado	28.4	1,550	110	14	8,543	2.0	45%
Central WMA	Colorado	29.0	1,762	169	10	2,837	1.7	42%
Colorado River WMA	Colorado	13.6	1,174	147	8	4,578	1.8	32%
North East WMA	Colorado	24.2	1,128	146	8	9,031	2.4	41%
Central DeWitt WMA-Central	DeWitt	28.0	1,824	138	13	2,205	2.2	44%
Central DeWitt-WMA Friar	DeWitt	36.0	2,688	284	9	6,858	2.4	35%
Central DeWitt- WMA Sandies Clear Creek	DeWitt	51.0	2,076	429	5	2,798	3.1	40%
Central DeWitt WMA Edgar Stratton	DeWitt	**	**	**	**	6,096	2.9	40%
Meyersville WMA	DeWitt	31.8	2,946	253	12	5,585	2.4	31%
Western DeWitt WMA-Howard Kulawik	DeWitt	**	**	**	**	2,492	1.9	54%
Western DeWitt WMA - Nordheim	DeWitt	**	**	**	**	3,685	3.0	30%
Western DeWitt WMA - Cotton Patch	DeWitt	**	**	**	**	1,770	1.4	30%
Western DeWitt-Kubala	DeWitt	**	**	**	**	320	2.3	34%
Western DeWitt WMA - Garfield	DeWitt	**	**	**	**	888	1.7	48%
Buckners Creek	Fayette	89.1	3,792	259	15	4,462	2.1	44%
Colorado River	Fayette	7.5	719	35	21	3,661	2.6	48%
Cummins Creek	Fayette	28.0	2,770	130	21	1,304	5.3	33%
East Navidad	Fayette	48.0	4,452	256	17	2,917	3.3	34%
North Central Fayette County	Fayette	35.4	3,046	218	14	1,824	2.7	53%
Rabbs Creek	Fayette	66.9	5,472	830	7	4,825	3.1	53%
West Navidad	Fayette	33.3	3,123	152	21	1,026	2.4	27%

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2024 White-tailed Deer Population Survey Results, continued

Wildlife Management Association or TPWD Deer Management Unit Survey	County	Spotlight Surveys				Incidental Observations		
		Miles of Survey	Acres of Visibility	# Deer Seen	Acres Per Deer	# Deer Identified	Doe per Buck	Fawn Survival
Thompsons Bottom WMA	Fort Bend	40.5	4,233	664	6	221	1.2	49%
Guadalupe County WMA Sandhills West	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	356	2.0	58%
Guadalupe County WMA Sandhills Nockenut	Guadalupe	15.0	582	94	6	3,652	3.9	30%
Guadalupe County WMA Darst Field	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	3,633	2.5	45%
Guadalupe County WMA Blacklands	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	1,051	2.8	56%
Guadalupe County WMA Marion	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	408	3.4	26%
Guadalupe County WMA River Bottom	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	3,915	2.8	36%
Guadalupe County WMA Sandhills East	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	1,254	3.0	31%
Guadalupe County WMA Sandhills Sawlog Youth	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	1,372	3.2	31%
Goliad WMA-Ander	Goliad	23.1	1,947	126	15	6,769	2.5	43%
Goliad WMA-Bego	Goliad	35.1	2,652	225	12	9,181	2.7	32%
Goliad WMA-Berclair/Riverdale	Goliad	31.5	1,398	104	13	2,240	1.9	31%
Goliad WMA-Cabeza	Goliad	15.3	1,674	155	11	3,618	2.5	28%
Goliad WMA-NorthCentral	Goliad	36.3	2,652	226	12	12,371	2.3	34%
Goliad WMA-San Antonio River	Goliad	42.0	3,807	309	12	3,103	2.1	29%
Hamon River Bottom	Gonzales	5.9	464	53	9	1,144	3.2	25%
Belmont	Gonzales	*	*	*	*	902	2.8	40%
Salt Flat	Gonzales	*	*	*	*	2,934	2.8	35%
Northeast Gonzales	Gonzales	**	**	**	**	2,586	1.6	35%
San Marcos	Gonzales	*	*	*	*	468	3.5	20%
Sandies Creek	Gonzales	*	*	*	*	633	2.2	31%
JCWMA Sandy Creek	Jackson	35.0	2,627	139	19	5,129	2.6	39%
JCWMA Lavaca River	Jackson	25.0	3,110	202	15	4,943	2.2	46%
LCWMA West Lavaca	Lavaca	71.0	6,024	356	17	5,529	3.1	47%

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2024 White-tailed Deer Population Survey Results, continued

Wildlife Management Association or TPWD Deer Management Unit Survey	County	Spotlight Surveys				Incidental Observations		
		Miles of Survey	Acres of Visibility	# Deer Seen	Acres Per Deer	# Deer Identified	Doe per Buck	Fawn Survival
LCWMA Honey Creek	Lavaca	35.4	2,703	153	18	4,390	2.4	42%
LCWMA West Sandy Creek	Lavaca	26.7	1,221	128	10	3,399	2.3	55%
LCWMA Vienna	Lavaca	28.0	1,340	202	7	8,441	1.7	55%
LCWMA South Central	Lavaca	45.0	3,912	204	19	5,408	2.0	44%
Blue Branch WMA	Lee	21.2	1,604	87	18	244	3.7	26%
East Yegua WMA	Lee	47.7	3,819	355	11	1,814	2.5	38%
South Lee WMA	Lee	25.0	2,274	93	24	1,860	1.8	82%
Two Creeks WMA	Lee	35.1	2,043	75	27	2,958	2.4	45%
West Yegua WMA	Lee	32.4	3,132	179	18	4,782	3.2	50%
Guadalupe River North WMA	Victoria	54.0	3,465	424	8	16,944	2.2	41%
Southwest Victoria WMA	Victoria	22.4	2,094	137	15	2,738	1.8	44%
Victoria Prairie WMA	Victoria	28.2	3,484	109	32	3,948	2.2	47%
Post Oak WMA	Washington	15.7	1,194	54	22	1,004	3.8	34%
Mount Vernon WMA	Washington	14.9	1,191	53	23	268	8.4	48%
Greenvine DMU	Washington	16.8	859	88	10	858	4.6	48%
Rocky DMU	Washington	14.8	805	112	7	4,317	2.1	36%
Sun Oil WMA	Washington	12.2	493	112	4	2,447	3.9	39%
Sandtown WMA	Washington	13.3	736	46	16	376	7.3	25%
New Years Creek WMA	Washington	13.7	1,194	72	17	2,377	5.5	27%
Lost Prong WMA	Wharton	123.0	12,949	520	25	2,373	1.9	30%
Egypt WMA	Wharton	**	**	**	**	550	1.8	42%
TOTAL		1,834.8	136,785			258,570		40%

*Guadalupe and Gonzales Counties - Due to urbanization some of the WMA lines are no longer conducive due to housing developments and heavy traffic. Alternative methods by members are used to estimate population densities.

**Spotlight survey data not available at time of newsletter publication.

Mark Lange was the wildlife biologist for Colorado/Austin Counties where he started in June 2012 and is now the District 9 Senior Biologist. 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: Guinea Grass

WRITTEN BY RACHEL HAMILTON

Guinea grass (*Megathyrsus maximus*) is a perennial bunch-type grass originating from Africa that was introduced in Texas in the 1950s for cattle grazing. It is currently well-established in the southern and coastal regions of Texas and has been reported in other parts of Texas. Growing over six feet tall and typically seen in thick stands or clumps on open pastures or under nitrogen-fixing trees, it commonly follows areas of disturbance. It is identified by its open panicle seedhead with small ovular green seeds, densely hairy nodes, and some hairs along the stems.

Left: Dense stand of Guinea grass. Photo©Steve Conklin, Rio Grande Valley Invaders; Center: Branch of Guinea grass -seedhead. Photo©Brent Sellers, IFAS Extension; Right: Guinea grass seedhead. Photo© Gerald Carr, OSU

Guinea grass can tolerate herbivory, responds well to fire, produces allelopathic compounds, and has a dense and tall growth structure. These attributes contribute to its ability to choke out native species, leading to a reduction of native grasses, a loss of plant diversity, and therefore a reduction in usable wildlife habitat. Guinea grass typically begins its establishment through seed dispersal, often emerging in areas of brush encroachment, commonly mesquite mottes, especially in pastures used for cattle management. After the establishment of a source population, the spread becomes more rapid in areas with high levels of disturbance, like recent brush clearings or pastures with heavy livestock use.

How can we manage Guinea grass?

Control is often difficult once an invasive species is present. Prevention of colonization is the most effective management tool. Historically, fire was common on the landscape and necessary for maintaining a healthy grassland and controlling woody encroachment. Currently, mechanical removal of brush is a common practice for controlling the encroachment of brush. Both practices can encourage invasion where Guinea grass is present due to the strong post-fire response and rapid establishment in disturbed soils.

Recommended management once Guinea grass has been established is spot treatments of glyphosate or grubbing/hand pulling before and after mechanical brush removal.

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Plant Profile: Guinea Grass, continued

The manager should be cautious when using glyphosate, as it is nonselective and can potentially kill non-target species. Minimize soil disturbance and focus treatments where Guinea grass is abundant. It is also important to clean equipment when moving between areas where the grass is not present to prevent the spread of seeds. Guinea grass is one of many invasive and exotic grasses that are an ever-present factor affecting wildlife habitat and have the potential to limit our management toolbox. Awareness and identification are key to knowing the proper tools for managing the various grasses that threaten our native flora.

References:

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Rachel Hamilton is the biologist for Wilson and Karnes counties. She has a bachelor's degree in Natural Resource Management from Sul Ross State University and a Master's in Natural Resource Sciences from Tarleton State University. Originally from San Antonio, she began her career with TPWD as an intern at the Muse Wildlife Management Area in 2022. She returned as a seasonal technician at the Muse before starting her current role in February 2024.

The Importance of Youth Hunting in Texas

WRITTEN BY BRENT PIERCE

There has been a noticeable decline in hunter participation in Texas, mirroring a broader national trend. As our population rapidly increases our percentage of hunters decreases. Several factors contribute to this decline. One factor is an aging population. Many hunters are aging, and fewer young people are taking up the sport. Another major factor is urbanization. More people are moving and living in urban areas and these youngsters often have different interests, like video games and sporting activities that take up most of their time. This urban sprawl also leads to land fragmentation and more development which causes less hunting opportunities. Finally, the cost of hunting in general can be a limiting factor.

So, what can be done about it? Youth hunting in Texas is more than a recreational activity; it's a tradition that fosters a deep bond with nature, teaches valuable life skills, and ensures the future of wildlife conservation. Texas is a state with a long-standing tradition of hunting. Texas offers numerous opportunities for young hunters to engage in this time-honored practice. Getting involved with our Texas Youth Hunting Program (TYHP) can help offset some factors contributing to the decline in hunter participation.

Texas Youth Hunting Program

TYHP was established in 1996 by the Texas Wildlife Association and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to provide opportunities for youth to participate in hunts that are safe, legal, and ethical. TYHP sponsors beginner-level hunts for deer, turkey, hogs, javelina, exotics, dove, small game, waterfowl, varmints, and other species. TYHP teaches young people a variety of important life skills. Patience, discipline, and perseverance are essential traits for a successful hunt. Participating in a hunt with TYHP will help you learn firearm safety, hunting, and game processing skills. Youth hunters will learn how to appreciate nature, spend time with family, and make new friends. Applying for hunts with the TYHP is easy!

TYHP hunt. Photo©TPWD

TYHP Application Process

For youth hunters to participate in TYHP, they must be 9 to 17 years old and have a parent or guardian accompany them. They need to create a Youth Hunter Account at www.tyhp.org. Once you have an account, then you can check out the hunt schedule and click "apply" for any hunts you are interested in. If selected for a hunt you will need to complete the application process and provide a copy of a valid Texas hunting license along with proof of the Hunter Education certification for Texas or another state. For information on course schedules and registration, visit the TPWD Hunter Education page.

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The Importance of Youth Hunting in Texas, continued

TYHP hunt. Photo©TPWD

The hunt fee is usually around $200 and covers meals and sometimes lodging on the property for the youth hunter and one adult. Financial aid is available to help with the hunt fee and loaner gear is available for items like firearms, bows, and some camping equipment which should help keep hunting costs down to a minimum. TYHP is a great inexpensive way to get our youth interested in hunting, but spots and hunts are limited so get registered now.

Landowner Participation

To help increase hunting opportunities in Texas where approximately 95% of the land is privately owned, landowners can help TYHP by providing their properties for youth hunting events. This generosity allows more opportunities to connect young hunters with nature as they learn valuable hunting skills. Without these gracious landowners offering their private lands, TYHP would not be able to impact as many youth hunters as it has been able to. Landowners also benefit from wildlife conservation by providing hunting opportunities that help manage wildlife populations. Thanks to all the landowners who have been involved and those who will consider it. For more information, please click this link to read the Landowner Letter - Texas Youth Hunting Program (tyhp.org).

Volunteers Make It Happen

Another way to assist TYHP is by becoming a volunteer or a Huntmaster. It requires a lot of manpower to provide safe and successful hunts that are affordable for young hunters. Whether you want to assist with hunts, help cook or tell stories around the campfire there is something to do for everyone. Hunting is often a family activity that strengthens bonds and creates lasting memories. As a volunteer, parents, or grandparents, we can all pass down traditions and knowledge, creating a sense of continuity and shared heritage. These experiences can be invaluable in maintaining family connections and fostering a sense of community. In an age where technology often dominates the lives of young people, hunting provides a unique opportunity to disconnect from screens and reconnect with the natural world. Getting our youth to spend time outdoors is extremely important and helps them develop an appreciation for wildlife and the environment.

Participating in TYHP is a great way to foster a connection with nature, teach valuable life skills, ensure the future of conservation, promote family bonds, and provide safe hunting opportunities. TYHP can help offset factors that are creating a decline in hunter participation throughout our state. These experiences can build confidence and self-reliance in young hunters. By encouraging and supporting young hunters, we can preserve the rich hunting heritage of Texas for generations to come.

For additional information on TYHP, visit www.tyhp.org or contact your local TPWD wildlife biologist.

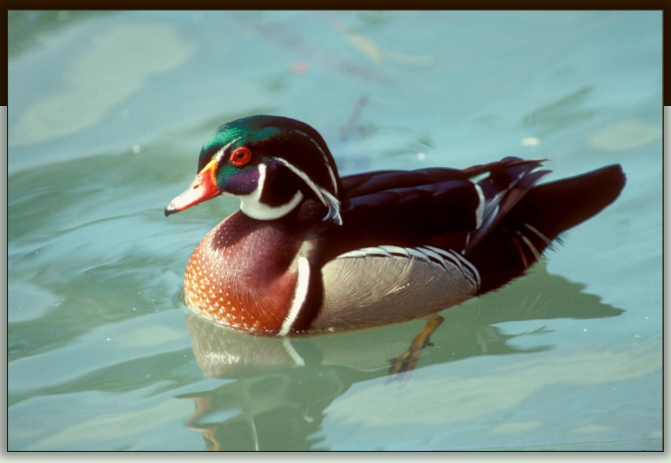
References:

tpwd.texas.gov
www.tyhp.org
US Hunting Statistics, Facts, And Trends: Here Are The Numbers (deerhuntingguide.net)
https://discover.texasrealfood.com/hunting-in-texas/texas-youth-hunt

Brent Pierce is the wildlife biologist for Lavaca County where he started in March 2016. He grew up in Galveston County in a town called Santa Fe, TX. He graduated from Texas A&M University with a Bachelor of Science in Rangeland Ecology and Management with a wildlife emphasis. Brent comes to us from the private sector where he has worked on private ranches managing habitat for deer and other wildlife species, as well as, guiding hunters and managing populations.

The Wood Duck Pond

WRITTEN BY RYAN MURPHY



Wood Duck. Photo©TPWD

That certain aroma of morning was in the breeze. It was that refreshing, crisp smell that never failed to start a great day. My dad started the engine in our '78 Ford Bronco as I took the last gulp from my morning coffee. My eyes were still closed as I climbed into the torn up passenger seat and wiped the sleep from my eyes. Except for the red vinyl seats, the mean looking vehicle was painted camouflage inside and out. It sat on four swamper tires and was shielded by a massive brush guard. This combination of rubber and heavy metal traveled all terrain and halted for no obstacles. Through the morning darkness, we headed for the wood duck pond. As the Bronco crept along, I gazed out my window, hoping to see a jackrabbit or deer spook from the roar of the truck. I've traveled this dirt road many times in the past. By now, I knew every bump was coming before it had the chance to knock me out of my seat.

We came to the gate at the entrance to the wood duck pond pasture. Like always, I had gate patrol. The iron gate, frozen with morning dew, shone in the headlights. I nearly froze my fingers off dragging the darn thing open. I never hated doing gate patrol. One day I would be able to pass that chore on to my son. Dad idled through the opening, and we drove on. When we pulled to the wood duck pond, we caught an armadillo digging above the grave of my dog Bud. The faded carvings in the wooden marker read:

BUD

SERVED 9 YEARS-FOUGHT THE WOOD DUCK CHEERFUL IN ALL WEATHERS-NEVER SHIRKED A TASK
SPLENDID BEHAVIOR

Weeds and vines have grown on and around it. The rotted wood has split from the punishing rain. He died four years ago, and it seems like just yesterday we buried him here. Not a day has gone by that I do not think of him. In his last few weeks, sometimes I slept with him in his doghouse. I did not know how much longer he would live, and I wanted him to know how much I loved him. Now I sat next to the grave so his spirit could hunt at my side forever. That was my way of never having to let go of him. Following every retrieve, he always managed to have a feather hanging from his mouth. Since his burial, for every duck I shot, I left a feather on his grave. I did this in honor of my fine companion.

There was nowhere on the earth I'd rather be to witness the sunrise. The sun broke the skyline with a fiery mix of red, orange, and pink. The "Mighty" Brazos River was the farthest thing I could see to the east. It was as if the sun rose right behind it. The rest of the great fireball looked hidden beneath the muddy brown waters.

Deep in the woods beyond the pond, I heard the first wood duck hen. She let out her echoing cry. It was the perfect way for nature to welcome the morning as I saw it. Shortly thereafter, the drakes chimed in with an excited melody. Contrary to popular belief, they were not quacks, but rather more of a cross between a whistle and a squeal.

Continued on page 15

The Wood Duck Pond, continued

Duck hunting. Photo©TPWD

I was busy looking for the squirrel chirping in a big oak that towered above me when a pair of "woodies" decided to make their entrance. They flew through the trees and right over us. For an instant, the mighty sunshine hit them perfectly to show off their true assortment of colors. The female's feathers consisted of all the shades of brown that exist. On the other hand, the male ducks wore an outfit of all different colors. It was such a beautiful sight that my dad and I made it a tradition to just sit and admire the first ones fly by. It was one of nature's finest shows, and we held high respect for such a thing.

Now that the sun was fully above the horizon, the woods came alive with creatures that inhabit them. Mockingbirds were singing; crows, cawing; and even the gar in the pond were splashing. The wood ducks were not really active in their flight, but I did not care. I was perfectly content with putting sticks in fire ant piles and watching the race to the top. Ants simply boggled my mind. All of a sudden I was distracted by the sound of wing beats cutting through the air. It was ripping silk, and I knew that sound anywhere. I have even had dreams with that sound blaring in my head. The wood ducks would fly around me by the millions. Then I would wake up. I looked up anxiously, spotting two ducks in the distance. They were flying directly toward my dad and me. They peeled off just out of range, as if in airplane formation. They made their customary circle before coming through the opening and down the pipe. Spurred by instinct, we shot simultaneously, dropping both ducks from the air. I walked over to pick up our ducks and smiled at my dad. This was a special thing for us. In all the years we had hunted together, we had never taken a pair like that.

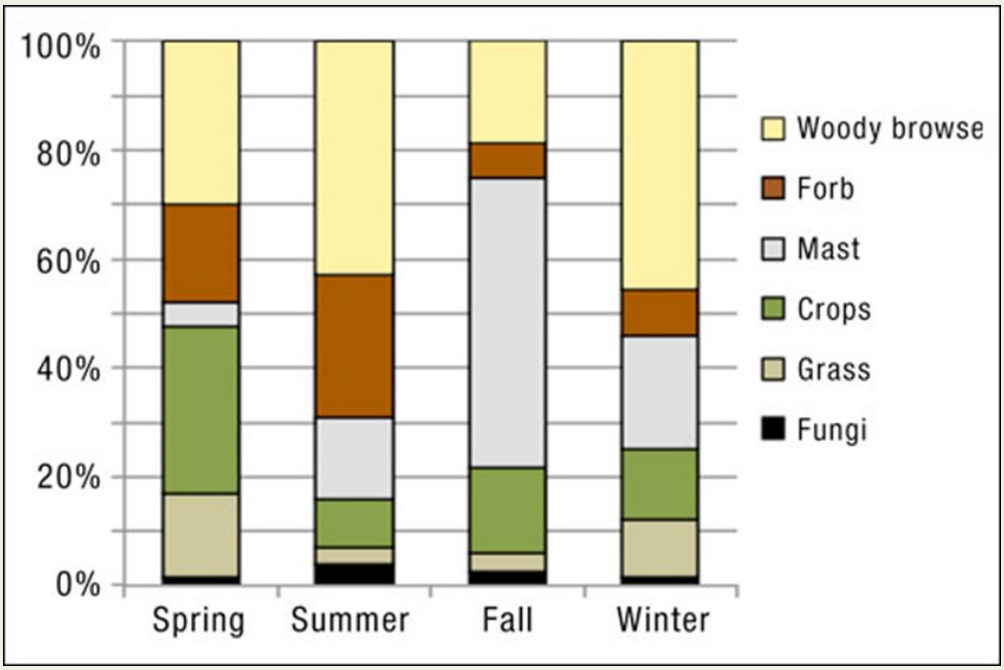
The hunt was never over until we had a moment of silence, paying our respects to Bud's resting place. I set two feathers on the grave with trembling hands and looked to my dad. As we removed our hats, he just nodded. No words needed to be spoken; the statement was in his eyes. My dad and I, hunting buddies and best pals, hadn't near enough ducks to fill a gumbo pot, but we did have plenty of fine mornings at the wood duck pond to fill our hearts with memories.

Ryan Murphy submitted this essay in 1999 as a senior in high school to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Essay Contest. The Wood Duck Pond was awarded 1st place and went on to be published in the 2005 NRA American Hunter Magazine.

Important Fall Foods for Deer

WRITTEN BY ROBERT CONRAD

It's officially autumn now, which means deer general season is just around the corner. Autumn or fall also means another forage opportunity for deer, that is the increase in mast consumption in deer diets. Mast is any kind of fruit produced by a tree, and in the fall, it makes up around 40% of a deer's diet. We'll go over some of the more common types of mast found in South-Central Texas: acorns, mesquite beans, and persimmons.



University of Missouri Extension, 2022

Oak (*Quercus sp.*)

If you live in the post oak savannah, you can expect to be surrounded by post oaks. However, some other common oaks can also be found in this region, like the blackjack oak and the water oak. While corn is a popular choice to use in deer feeders, acorns make up to 25% of a deer's diet this time of year while providing more carbohydrates and fat. Protein is always important, but a key element to nutrition during this time of year is building fat reserves before the winter. Crude protein in acorns can range from 4.4-6% while fat ranges from 5-25% depending on the type of oak tree. Many species of wildlife seek out and enjoy acorns, with deer and turkey chief among them.

Honey Mesquite (*Neltuma glandulosa*)

While mesquite trees are usually frowned upon by landowners due to resprout, this tree produces a lot of protein for your deer, with the beans averaging around 12-13% protein. While eating the beans, the deer may also take a few bites of the leaves that sit around 16% protein this time of year. During drought years, mesquite beans are abundant across the landscape. Due to the amount of rain many of us have received this year, it may not be as popular as other forage options.

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Important Fall Foods for Deer, continued

Persimmon

Persimmon fruits should be ripening around this time, and wildlife will be taking note. These fruits are high in sugar and are a medium-to-high quality option for forage for white-tail deer. Plenty of other animals can be found eating these fruits as well, including turkeys and small mammals. There are two species of native persimmons that occur in the region.

Texas persimmon. Photo©TPWD

Texas persimmon (*Diospyros texana*)

Texas persimmon is our most common species of persimmon in the region and can be found throughout Central Texas and extending off into the southern and western reaches of the state. This medium to large shrub produces numerous 1-inch black fruits

Common persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*)

Although a less common plant species in the region, common persimmon trees are a wildlife asset where they occur. Common persimmon is a species of the eastern forest of the U.S. that extends westward into Central Texas. This persimmon typically grows as small to medium sized trees that produce a larger 2-inch plus orange fruit.

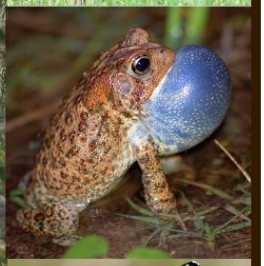
References:
https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g9487
https://news.okstate.edu/articles/agriculture/2020/gedon_deer_acorns.html
https://deerassociation.com/look-inside-acorns-to-find-deer-hunting-success/
Range Plants of North Central Texas by Ricky Linex
https://rangeplants.tamu.edu/plant/mesquite/

Robert Conrad is the Wildlife Biologist for Gonzales County and the M.O. Neasloney Wildlife Management Area. Following his time in the Army, he earned his bachelor's and is currently working on a master's from Texas A&M University. Robert started in April 2024, and offices at the M.O. Neasloney WMA.

Wildlife & Woodlands

Pine-Oak Savannah Landowner Workshop

Bastrop, Texas
Friday, December 6, 2024
9:00 am - 4:00 pm
Lost Pines Scout Reservation
785 FM 1441 Bastrop, TX 78602



Meet a Houston Toad!

Topics & Information:

- Learn about the Lost Pines ecosystem
- Planning Pine-Oak Savannah habitat restoration
- Pollinator biology and habitat management
- Habitat restoration and conservation cost-share opportunities for private landowners
- Tools for implementing prescribed fire
- Field tour of restoration project areas
- Talk with wildlife biologists & land managers
- Meet local organizations
- Get wildlife and habitat advice
- ...and more!

Registration required:

$20 Registration
Lunch, drinks, and snacks included

Questions? Contact:
Rachel.Patterson@tpwd.texas.gov
512-332-7280

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USDA United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service

fort worth zoo

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ARC Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy

PINES & PRAIRIES LAND TRUST

Upcoming Events

OCTOBER

19 **Fall Festival & Native Plant Sale**
Lockhart State Park
2012 State Park Rd., Lockhart, TX 78644
Begins at 1:00 p.m.
Contact Lauren Hartwick at 512-398-3479 or
lauren.hartwick@tpwd.texas.gov

25 **Wildlife Tax Valuation Workshop**
Bastrop County Community Center
15 American Legion Rd., Bastrop, TX 78602
Begins at 9:00 a.m.
Contact Dakota Kempken at 512-581-7186 or
dakota.kempken@ag.tamu.edu

26 **Buckners Creek WMA Fall Meeting**
Plum Church
127 Plum Church Rd., Plum, TX 78952
Begins at 2:00 p.m.
Contact Greg Smith at 512-694-3335 or
gregsmith@cvctx.com

26 **Hunter Safety Course**
Washington County Expo Sales Facility
1305 E. Blue Bell Rd., Brenham, TX 77833
Begins at 9:00 a.m.
Contact Stephanie Damron at 979-277-6297 or
stephanie.damron@tpwd.texas.gov or
Trevor Dickschat at 979-277-8353

NOVEMBER

9 **Native Prairies Association of Texas - Dowell Fest**
301 Farm to Market 1626, Manchaca, TX 78652
2:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Contact Aspen Huebner at
aspen_huebner@texasprairie.org

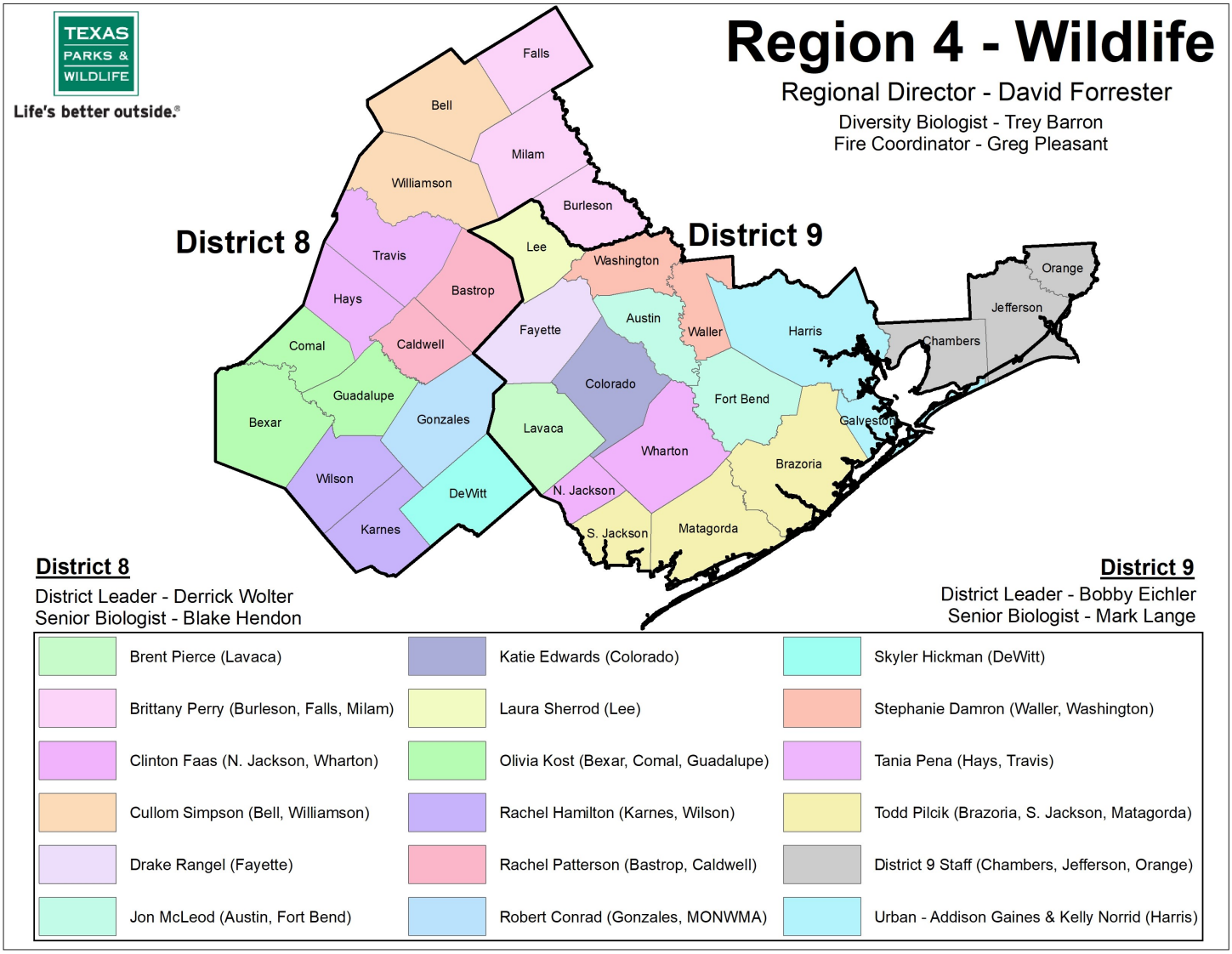
DECEMBER

6 **Wildlife & Woodlands: Pine-Oak Savannah Landowner Workshop**
Lost Pines Scout Reservation
785 FM 1441, Bastrop, TX 78602
9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Contact Rachel Patterson at 512-332-7280 or
rachel.patterson@tpwd.texas.gov

6 **Feathers, Furs, and Farming Workshop: Pollinators**
Immaculate Conception Catholic Church
15994 Hwy. 159 W., Industry, TX 78944
Begins at 1:00 p.m.
Contact Katie Edwards at 979-702-1935 or
catherine.edwards@tpwd.texas.gov

Our Wildlife Biologists

Click on the map for your biologists contact information



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www.tpwd.texas.gov

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