Oaks and Prairies Wildlifer

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

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE

October 2020

District Field Notes

BY DAVID FORRESTER

Although Covid-19 is still an issue, it appears we've decreased in the number of cases, hospitalizations, etc. Hopefully, we don't see another spike in cases or a spike in flu as we progress through the fall and into the winter months.

We finally got out of the dog days of summer and have entered some nice fall weather. We were very dry and hot in July and through August. We received some much-needed rain and cooler temperatures in September. Now we're good on temperatures, but dry again in October. Hopefully, we'll break this dry spell and get some moisture to finish out the month. However, I have noticed some hay being cut, so it looks like ranchers may have gotten lucky and are getting one last cut before the grass goes dormant.

Range conditions are good overall. The September rains helped the native vegetation, so there are plenty of forbs and new growth. It does not look like a great acorn crop this year, so that bodes well for deer coming to feeders this coming hunting season. Deer body condition is good and antler development looks good. Our spring and early summer range conditions were very good and antler development benefitted from the good groceries at that time. Fawn survival this year was very good, and we've seen a lot of fawns.

District biologists have completed their state-run survey lines and the many wildlife management association lines. The majority of properties enrolled in the Managed Lands Deer Program (MLD) have been issued their permits. Biologists are dealing with the last of permit issuance and have started gearing up for hunting season. That means they are gearing up for collecting CWD (Chronic Wasting Disease) samples off hunter harvested deer, as well as, road killed deer. If you or your hunters are interested in getting your deer sampled for CWD, contact your local biologist. The district also has a seasonal position focused on the collection of CWD samples. We should be able to collect samples in a timely manner.

Still focusing on the upcoming hunting season, but getting away from CWD, the district implemented a 4-day antlerless season last year at Thanksgiving. That 4-day season this year will be November 26-29.

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District Field Notes, continued

This season allows those hunting on properties not getting MLD permits to harvest antlerless deer using the tags off their hunting license. The bag limit is two antlerless deer. This bag limit is all seasons combined, so that includes archery season, the youth seasons, and the muzzleloader season. If a property receives MLD permits, then this 4-day antlerless season does not apply. Hunters on that property would have to utilize an MLD permit for each antlerless deer harvested. If all of the MLD permits have been used, then that property is finished harvesting antlerless deer.

Along with the 4-day antlerless season, hunters across the district that harvest antlerless deer using their hunting license tags must report their harvest within 24 hours. This mandatory reporting again includes archery season, the youth seasons, and muzzleloader season. You can report either via the My Texas Hunt Harvest App on your phone, or at the below web address: https://apps.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntharvest/hunting/hunting.faces.

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, and a Master of Science in Range and Wildlife Management from Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

Hunting Season Safety

WRITTEN BY BRENT PIERCE

Finally, it's hunting season! A time where you can feel normal about wearing hunting masks, gloves and sitting isolated in the woods for hours! As exciting as gearing up for hunting season is, it is also a time to reflect and go over some safety practices that can help you have a safe and accident-free hunting season.

Improper handling of firearms is the number one cause of accidents involving firearms while hunting. Bird and hog hunting lead in the number of shooting related accidents. This is due to the number of people in close proximity wielding guns and moving around, which can increase your chance of injuring others or yourself. If you are planning a dove hunt, make sure everyone is careful and aware of their shooting zones and, most importantly, where not to shoot. Also, make sure all firearms are unloaded and properly secured so they cannot fall from the vehicle while heading to or from the field. Please remember and follow the five basic principles of gun safety.

The 5 Basic Principles of Gun Safety:

- Treat every **gun** as if it were loaded.
- Always point your **gun** in a **safe** direction.
- Never point your **gun** at anything you don't intend to shoot.
- Keep your finger off the trigger until you're ready to shoot.
- Be sure of your target and what's beyond.

Since 1988 hunting accidents have declined, thanks to over 1.2 million students that have been certified through the required Texas Hunter education classes. However, we still need to be diligent in accepting the fact that accidents can happen, and safety training is a necessary part of life. If you were born on or after September 2, 1971 and have never taken the Texas Hunter Education safety course and received your certification, then you need to do so. There are many classes available, and you must currently be 9 years old to attend either a classroom or online course+ field day to be certified. If you are 17 years old or older you can attend either the six-hour class or take the online only course to get certified. Classes being offered near you can be found at the following website:

https://tpwd.elementlms.com/education/hunter-ed/.

For more information on online-hunter safety classes visit: https://www.hunter-ed.com/texas/.

You can also check to see if you have been certified or to replace a lost certification card at: https://tpwd.elementlms.com/am-i-certified/.

Hunter safety doesn't stop with firearms. Many major injuries that occur during hunting season are due to cuts while field-dressing game, trips and falls that cause broken bones, and in a few cases, accidents that lead to death. Nationally more hunting accidents involve some form of falling out of an elevated blind; so, you may just want to hunt from a ground blind this year! If you must hunt in a tree, always check the integrity of the stand and use a harness properly. If you're fortunate enough to bag some game, use some disposable gloves to help grip the knife so you do not slip and cut yourself or someone else.

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Hunting Season Safety, continued

Gloves can also help prevent transmission of certain zoonotic diseases, especially from certain species like feral hogs. If you're inexperienced cleaning a certain kind of game, ask for advice from someone with more experience. Finally, watch where you're going, use a light when it's dark, and be cautious on rough terrain. Sometimes clumsiness can show up when we least expect it, so try to be prepared and have your hands free to catch yourself.

We find ourselves in all kinds of situations when we go out into the field chasing game. Whether it is duck, dove, or deer, you will not only experience physical challenges but also mental ones. Planning is the key for a safe hunting trip. Letting someone know where you will be and when you plan to return is very important. Also, knowing the weather forecast before, during, and after the hunt will help you plan your hunting trip safely and help you pack the appropriate type of hunting apparel to keep from getting serious conditions like hypothermia or heat exhaustion. Finally, driving is dangerous enough by itself, so do not get in a hurry, and give yourself plenty of rest before you set out on your trip and especially before you head back home.

Being safe may not resonate with every hunter's attitude of adventure and excitement, but it is a discipline that needs to be practiced and respected. Safety needs to be on the mind of every hunter that enters the field to help ensure that everyone comes out alive and injury free. Take time to learn from accidents that have happened to other hunters, and most of all, be safe this hunting season!

Common Causes of Hunting Accidents:

HUNTER JUDGMENT

- Victim out of sight /moved into shooter's line of fire
- Victim covered by shooter swinging on game
- Victim mistaken for game
- Horseplay with loaded firearm
- Use of alcohol or drugs

CARELESS HANDLING

- Improper Loading/Unloading gun
- Dropped firearm
- Discharge of firearm in or around vehicle
- Improper crossing of an obstacle
- Walking with loaded firearm

References:

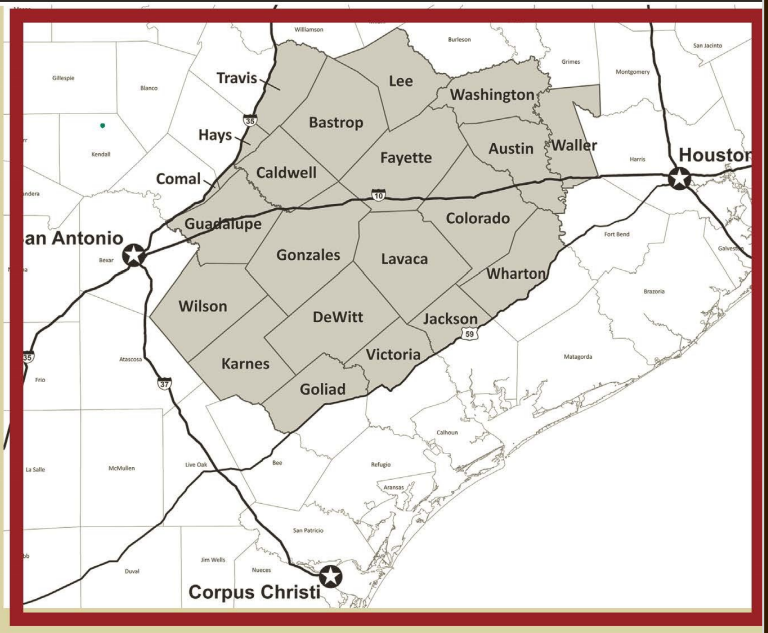
https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/hunter-education/online-course/hunting-safety
https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/hunter-education/2019-hunting-accident-report-2.pdf

Brent Pierce is the wildlife biologist for Lavaca and Jackson 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.

ATTENTION HUNTERS

MANDATORY HARVEST REPORTING FOR ANTLERLESS WHITE-TAILED DEER IN THESE COUNTIES

Antlerless deer harvested during the archery, youth-only, muzzleloader, or the four doe days during general season are required to be reported within 24 hours of harvest when using a hunting license tag.



Austin, Bastrop, Caldwell, Colorado, Comal (east of I-35), DeWitt, Fayette, Goliad (north of US 59), Gonzales, Guadalupe, Hays (east of I-35), Jackson (north of US 59), Karnes, Lavaca, Lee, Travis (east of I-35), Victoria (north of US 59), Waller, Washington, Wharton (north of US 59), and Wilson

Report using the My Texas Hunt Harvest mobile app or on the TPWD website at **tpwd.texas.gov/myhunt**

SCAN TO DOWNLOAD APP

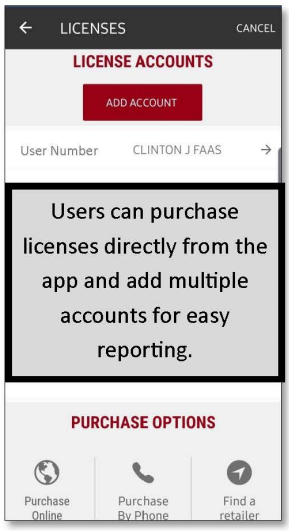
MLDP antlerless harvest is currently required to be reported annually using the Land Management Assistance (LMA) system. Antlerless deer harvested by MLD permit are not required to report through the My Texas Hunt Harvest app.

My Texas Hunt Harvest App

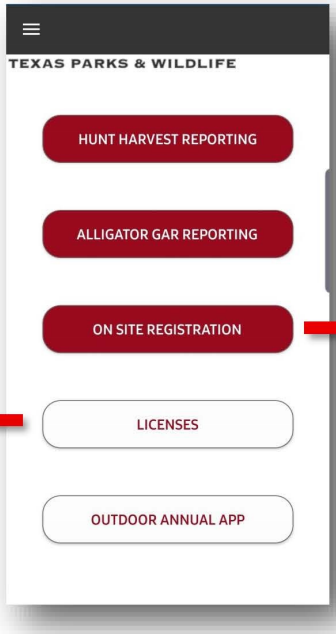
More Than Just Harvest Reporting

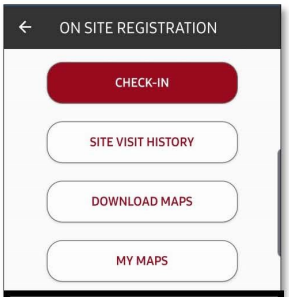
With new regulation changes, the My Texas Hunt Harvest App will soon become a part of many people's hunt. But there is much, much more than just using the app to report harvest! Take a look below at just some of the things that can be found.

The main page offers buttons to report harvest, register for public hunting, view your license and access the Outdoor Annual.



Users can purchase licenses directly from the app and add multiple accounts for easy reporting.





With On Site Registration you can check in to Public Hunting Areas, access previous hunts, and view maps of hunt areas with your location.

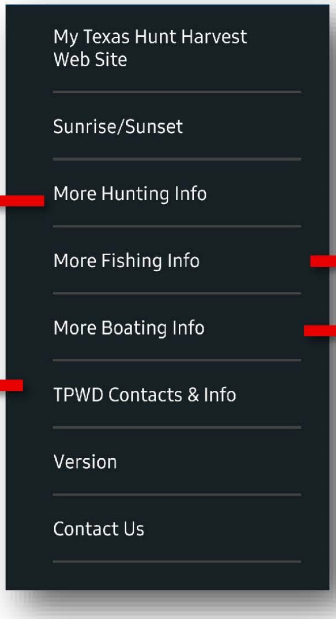
The pancake menu (3 lines) offers users several pages of additional information that can be used for both hunting and fishing.

More Hunting Info

- CWD Check Result
- CWD Check Stations
- Hunter Education
- Youth Hunting
- Tagging a Deer
- Tagging a Turkey
- Public Hunting
- Check TPWD Draw Hunts
- Wildlife Management Areas
- Hunt Texas Online Connections
- Private Lands Resources

TPWD Contacts & Info

- Find a Game Warden
- Find a Biologist
- Operation Game Thief
- More TPWD Phone Apps
- TPWD Website



More Fishing Info

- Share Lunker
- Fishing Reports
- Where to Fish
- Report Red Snapper
- Freshwater Species
- Saltwater Species
- Stocking Information
- TPWD Fishing Home Page

More Boating Information

- Renew Boat Registration
- Where to Boat
- Boat Ownership Information
- Boater Education
- Boater Safety
- Boater Laws
- TPWD Boating Home Page

2020 White-tailed Deer Population Survey Results

WRITTEN BY BOBBY EICHLER

As many of you are aware, summertime is a busy time for both Wildlife Management Association (WMA) members and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) staff. It is during the short period of late July through August that population data is collected for white-tailed deer. This population data is then used to set harvest recommendations by permit issuance in mid-September. Both WMA members and staff across the Oaks and Prairies region of Texas should be proud of the hard work that is put into this collection period. Population data is critical to properly manage the deer herd, and staff take this task seriously. As you browse through these results, there are a few points to make as well as some summarization that indicates the annual effort for these surveys.

White-tailed deer does. Photo©Chase A. Fountain, TPWD.

- During the summer 2020 collection period, a minimum of 66 spotlight lines were sampled.
    - This resulted in over 1811 miles of spotlight lines being ran, with just over 168,000 acres sampled across 16 counties.
- Incidental observations collected by WMA members, as well as TPWD staff, resulted in over 355,000 deer identified to help determine buck:doe ratios and overall fawn survival.
- 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.
- 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.

Lastly, as always, we urge you to stay involved with your local WMA and volunteer during these counts. Help is always needed and appreciated, and there is nothing more educational than getting on back of a truck several times during the summer and seeing what is out there.

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.

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2020 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 / DMU	Austin	16.0	1224	29	42.2	5159	1.9	34%
Austin County WMA (Welcome)	Austin	9.7	522	49	10.7			
Austin County WMA (Cat Spring)	Austin	17.8	868	71	12.2			
Pin Oak Creek WMA	Bastrop	36.0	3360	90	37.3	2432	4.9	44%
Paint Creek WMA	Bastrop	35.0	3000	150	20.0			
Red Rock WMA	Bastrop	38.0	8250	449	18.4	4520	4.5	33%
Clear Fork Creek WMA	Caldwell	45.0	2373	336	7.1	10819	4.2	37%
Tri-Community WMA	Caldwell	50.0	4074	651	6.4	9110	3.3	36%
Harvey Creek WMA	Colorado	24.6	1960	189	10.4	6585	2.0	50%
Sandy Creek WMA	Colorado	28.4	1550	190	8.2	15522	2.1	39%
Central WMA	Colorado	29.0	1762	300	5.9	3549	2.1	45%
Colorado River WMA	Colorado	13.6	1174	196	6.0	4060	2.3	39%
North East WMA	Colorado	24.2	1128	218	5.2	11132	2.3	43%
Oakridge WMA	Colorado	44.1	1981	433	4.6	1928	2.0	38%
Central DeWitt WMA-Central	DeWitt	14.0	2736	296	9.2	4505	2.7	38%
Central DeWitt-WMA Friar	DeWitt	13.5	2481	678	3.7	10188	3.7	40%
Central DeWitt- WMA Sandies Clear Creek	DeWitt	8.1	1467	363	4.0	3027	2.9	40%
Central DeWitt WMA Edgar Stratton	DeWitt	16.8	2787	733	3.8	9558	3.8	46%
Meyersville WMA	DeWitt	13.7	1580	268	5.9	5461	2.8	34%
Western DeWitt-Howard Kulawik	DeWitt	9.4	2187	302	7.2	3404	2.7	45%
Western DeWitt WMA - Nordheim	DeWitt	26.0	2310	332	7.0	4514	4.0	31%
Western DeWitt WMA - Cotton Patch	DeWitt	13.3	4593	516	8.9	2324	2.5	33%
Western DeWitt-Garfiled	DeWitt	15.7	4017	303	13.3	1204	1.5	44%
Buckners Creek	Fayette	63.3	2964	292	10.2	8285	2.2	36%
Colorado River	Fayette	23.4	2154	301	7.2	4698	2.9	41%
Cummins Creek	Fayette	28.0	2770	219	12.7	1942	2.3	40%
East Navidad	Fayette	48.0	4452	383	11.6	6518	2.8	37%
North Central Fayette County	Fayette	35.0	3032	349	8.7	3866	2.5	31%

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2020 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
Rabbs Creek	Fayette	64.5	5472	807	6.8	533	4.1	38%
West Navidad	Fayette	53.3	5009	304	16.5	3209	3.2	36%
Thompsons Bottom WMA	Fort Bend	71.5	4494	538	8.4	2758	1.7	57%
Guadalupe County WMA Sandhills West	Guadalupe	45.0	1722	299	5.8	609	4.4	32%
Guadalupe County WMA Sandhills Nockenut	Guadalupe	11.6	460	142	3.3	5043	2.8	28%
Guadalupe County WMA Darst Field	Guadalupe	45.0	2329	390	6.0	5174	2.8	30%
Guadalupe County WMA Blacklands	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	914	3.3	33%
Guadalupe County WMA Marion	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	536	4.0	31%
Guadalupe County WMA River Bottom	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	6524	2.3	27%
Guadalupe County WMA Sandhills East	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	1887	2.7	37%
Guadalupe County WMA Sandhills Sawlog Youth Haven	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	2353	3.0	36%
Goliad WMA-Ander	Goliad	7.7	1782	162	11.0	7015	2.7	34%
Goliad WMA-Bego	Goliad	13.7	3270	485	6.7	9444	2.9	27%
Goliad WMA-Berclair/Riverdale	Goliad	10.5	1101	48	22.9	2386	2.5	29%
Goliad WMA-NorthCentral	Goliad	12.1	2652	288	9.2	11126	2.7	32%
Goliad WMA-San Antonio River	Goliad	11.1	2925	95	30.8	3900	2.8	25%
Hamon River Bottom WMA	Gonzales	20.1	2239	142	15.8	2008	2.7	25%
Belmont, San Marcos River, and Northeast Gonzales	Gonzales	15.0	1480	65	22.8			
Belmont WMA	Gonzales	*	*	*	*	2527	2.2	29%
Salt Flat WMA	Gonzales	*	*	*	*	3145	1.7	34%
Northeast Gonzales WMA	Gonzales	*	*	*	*	5133	2.0	31%
San Marcos WMA	Gonzales	*	*	*	*	1850	2.5	36%

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2020 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
Sandies Creek WMA	Gonzales	*	*	*	*	1380	3.1	24%
JCWMA Sandy Creek	Jackson	38.0	3280	384	8.5	6054	1.8	49%
JCWMA Texana	Jackson	40.0	3185	234	13.6	884	2.6	30%
JCWMA Lavaca River	Jackson	41.0	3912	462	8.5	4559	8.5	48%
LCWMA West Lavaca	Lavaca	54.0	4334	162	26.8	12371	2.0	46%
LCWMA Honey Creek	Lavaca	24.0	1802	144	12.5	8791	2.6	45%
LCWMA West Sandy Creek	Lavaca	73.0	2338	341	6.9	8185	1.9	39%
LCWMA Vienna	Lavaca	30.0	1340	154	8.7	13058	1.8	48%
LCWMA South Central	Lavaca	30.0	2606	134	19.5	10070	1.8	36%
Blue Branch WMA	Lee	10.6	802	34	23.6	198	2.0	36%
East Yegua WMA	Lee	47.7	3819	326	11.7	2691	2.1	29%
South Lee WMA	Lee	25.0	2274	212	10.7	2957	2.5	47%
Two Creeks WMA	Lee	35.1	2043	179	11.4	3446	2.0	33%
West Yegua WMA	Lee	32.4	3132	211	14.8	8023	3.9	44%
Guadalupe River North WMA	Victoria	18.0	3018	410	7.4	17817	2.5	35%
Southwest Victoria WMA	Victoria	11.5	2064	301	6.9	3612	3.9	27%
Victoria Prairie WMA	Victoria	26.3	8574	463	18.5	4687	2.7	48%
Post Oak WMA	Washington	15.7	1194	71	16.8	633	3.0	40%
Mount Vernon WMA	Washington	14.9	1191	36	33.1	678	2.0	13%
Greenvine DMU	Washington	16.8	859	58	14.8	2258	9.0	41%
Rocky DMU	Washington	14.8	805	75	10.7	6162	2.3	29%
Sun Oil WMA	Washington	12.2	493	143	3.5	2195	3.0	35%
Sandtown WMA	Washington	13.3	736	42	17.5	1821	2.1	14%
New Years Creek WMA	Washington	13.7	1194	16	70.4	5369	8.2	23%
Lost Prong WMA	Wharton	41.3	4930	295	16.7	4302	2.8	42%
Egypt WMA	Wharton	11.6	1265	65	19.5	969	2.4	35%
		1812	168,881			355,554		36%

**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.*

Species Spotlight: Southern Flying Squirrel

WRITTEN BY LAURA SHERROD

It's a Bird! It's a Plane! It's…..a Flying Squirrel?

Most people are not aware that flying squirrels may be in their own backyard. These nocturnal cousins to the bushy-tailed rodent at your bird feeder are rarely seen during the day. Their elusive nature contributes to their rare sightings, which can make their known presence and conservation particularly difficult.

Southern Flying Squirrel. Photo©Tony Campbell, Dreamstime.com

While there are various species of flying squirrels around the world, the species native to Texas is the southern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys volans*). According to the National Wildlife Federation, they can be "found throughout the eastern U.S., from Maine south to Florida and west from Minnesota south to Texas." They tend to be found in deciduous forests or mixed forests, with greater densities outside of urban and suburban areas. Southern flying squirrels are much smaller than the typical squirrels that people think of, and they only reach 21-26 cm of which 8-12 cm is their tail. They are covered in very soft grey/brown fur on top with a cream-colored fur underneath. One of their notable features is their very large, dark eyes for seeing in the dark.

Flying squirrels are also different from their cousins in their ability to make "flights," which are actually glides, or slow falls with style. They are able to do this because of a special furry membrane between their arms and legs called a patagium. The patagium acts as a parachute, slowing the squirrel's fall. Flying squirrels are able to perform impressive maneuvers mid-air, often making 90 degree turns around obstacles in the way. To accomplish this, the squirrel's tail is flat and used as a rudder. These "flights" can be up to 76 meters!

Due to their nocturnal and secretive nature, it is difficult to observe flying squirrels in the wild. Various studies have been conducted to find out information about their secretive lifestyle. They prefer larger nut or oak trees, both for feeding on the fruit and nuts from the trees, as well as to make their homes. They will build nests from leaves and twigs, and they often find a hollowed-out cavity to make their nests. Snags, or dead standing trees, are particularly good nesting sites, so you may want to think twice before cutting down dead trees on your property! Flying squirrels are also very social. They will forage with one another, and there have been large aggregates of flying squirrels found nesting together, especially as temperatures start to decline. These squirrels can produce up to two litters of 2-7 young per year. Young are already gliding and maneuvering by eight weeks old, and they are fully independent by four months of age. Southern flying squirrels have a life span of about three to five years in the wild, with up to 10 years in captivity.

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Species Spotlight: Southern Flying Squirrel, continued

One of the best times to try to observe these little squirrels are autumn nights. They will be busily gathering food in preparation for the colder winter weather. While they mostly gather fruit and nuts, particularly acorns, flying squirrels are actually omnivorous. In addition to fruits and nuts, they will also dine on flowers, mushrooms, insects, carrion, and even the occasional bird egg or nestling.

Southern Flying Squirrel in a nest box. Photo©John Sommer

Very little is known about the population abundance and conservation status of southern flying squirrels in Texas. If you are interested in protecting them on your property, you can try to encourage them by providing nesting sites. As mentioned earlier, be sure to leave those dead standing trees on your property that are not in danger of falling on you or your house. If snags and cavities are in low numbers on your property, you may consider building some, similar to putting out bird nest boxes. You might think about setting up game cameras near cavities and nest boxes to see if they are being used. Consider yourself lucky if you do happen to catch a glimpse of these elusive, interesting members of the squirrel family!

Laura Sherrod is the Wildlife Biologist for Lee and Fayette counties. She grew up in Dripping Springs and graduated from Texas State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Wildlife Biology. Laura was hired by Texas Parks & Wildlife in 2008, where she worked with the Big Game Program until accepting her current biologist position in April 2014. Laura offices in Giddings, and she enjoys helping landowners and wildlife management associations achieve their habitat and wildlife management goals throughout Lee and Fayette counties.

Chronic Wasting Disease in Texas

WRITTEN BY LAURA SHERROD

Digging in a smelly deer on the side of the road may not be one of the most glamorous aspects of being a biologist, but it certainly provides valuable information! Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) biologists did this to over 13,000 deer this past year – both roadkill and hunter harvested animals – to look for a deadly disease most have probably heard of by now.

Chronic Wasting Disease, or CWD, is a disease in the group of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs). It attacks the brain and neural tissue of infected cervids including white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, moose, red deer, and sika deer. Other TSEs that you might be more familiar with include Scrapie in sheep, Mad Cow Disease in cattle, or Cruetzfelt-Jakob Disease in people. All of these diseases are caused by prions, a form of proteins that trigger normal proteins to fold abnormally and cause holes in the brain of infected animals. So why is this disease such a huge concern? The simple answer is that there is not a cure once a deer has CWD and it is very difficult to control after it is in a population; therefore, an ounce of prevention is worth an immeasurable amount of cure. Since these disease causing proteins are not “alive” like a bacteria or a viruses, they cannot be “killed.” Prions can sustain in the environment for decades, meaning that, with the science as we know it, is impossible to actually eradicate the disease from an area where it has been found.

Chronic Wasting Disease is aptly named. Symptoms of an infected animal include disorientation, staggering, excessive drooling, walking in circles, very poor body condition, and emaciation in its more progressed stages – basically, the animal looks like it is wasting away. Since there is no cure, this disease is 100% fatal, though it may take months or years to progress to that point. A deer that looks perfectly normal and healthy may have this disease and be capable of passing it to others through prions shed in bodily fluids before exhibiting the above symptoms.

Chronic Wasting Disease was first recognized in 1967 in a captive mule deer herd in Colorado. It has since spread and has now been documented in both captive and free-ranging deer in 24 states in the continental United States and 2 Canadian provinces. TPWD first documented CWD in Texas in 2012; this was in positive mule deer that were located in the Hueco Mountains in El Paso and Hudspeth counties. Since 2012, TPWD has increased testing throughout the state and has located the disease in several more areas of Texas. As of March 2020, 170 CWD positive animals have been confirmed.

The state’s response to positive CWD findings has been a joint effort between TPWD and Texas Animal Health Commission. Increased testing and movement restrictions help to give confidence that CWD is either not present or is at a very low prevalence. “CWD Zones” have been created around those areas where CWD positive animals have been found. These areas restrict movement of deer and deer carcasses in effort to help contain the disease.

As a landowner, you can help TPWD with the monitoring of CWD. If you see a freshly killed deer on the road or may be wanting/willing to have your hunter harvested deer tested, please contact your local TPWD wildlife biologist. If you are willing to submit your harvested deer for CWD testing, please save the intact head of the deer and keep it cool until your biologist can collect the sample. We appreciate the help in continuing to monitor for this disease!

For more information you can visit the TPWD website at: https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/diseases/cwd/

Small Acreage Success: A Landowner Perspective

WRITTEN BY KRIS SCHULZE—AUSTIN COUNTY LANDOWNER

The unforgettable call of the bobwhite quail is a common occurrence these days on our 130 acres of prairie in eastern Colorado County. This is still new and exciting to us and one of the many rewards for our wildlife management efforts.

We began our wildlife management journey in 2018 on land that for many decades had been overgrazed or cut for hay. As new landowners in 2001, we were content with the status quo for many years. As time passed, we began to have a yearning to restore the land to more of an original natural state. The local "old-timers" would tell me how this area used to be called the Bernardo Prairie where the bobwhite, jack rabbits, dove, loggerhead shrike, meadowlark, and no doubt our states beloved horned toad to name a few flourished.

So, with much help from the Colorado County appraiser we went from agriculture valuation to wildlife valuation. During one of my visits with the chief appraiser, he highly recommended I reach out to Mark Lange, wildlife biologist for Colorado and Austin counties. This was the best advice we had been given and so began our relationship with Mark and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD)!

Here we are now in 2020, our third year. After numerous conversations, emails, on-site visits with Mark, and much reassurance by him we are thrilled to have experienced our first official prescribed fire. With approved fire breaks around the 2 burn units we anxiously awaited the burn crew. On March 11, which was also the first week of COVID-19 in our area and the beginnings of strange talk about social distancing/no handshakes/elbow bumps, we saw our burn crew arrive. And what an entrance! TPWD trucks pulling trailers loaded with specialized all-terrain vehicles driven by a ready and eager crew of awesome individuals who LOVE what they do! Having a professional firefighter in the family is a huge benefit and the burn crew was delighted to educate him in starting fires! After a successful burn we saw green growth within one week. In early May, we sowed sunflower seeds into the fire breaks of the smaller burn unit which were a huge success and have provided food for many species.

Top: TPWD Biologist Trent Teinert giving ignition instructions to the landowner. Photo©Meagan Lesak, TPWD. Bottom: Final moments of an active fire. Photo©Trey Barron, TPWD.

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Small Acreage Success: A Landowner Perspective, continued

We knew there were a few bobwhite in our area and by late April we began hearing the call. Dove sightings have increased as well as meadowlarks and loggerhead shrikes. We also greatly enjoy our great horned owls! On one of our frequent land checks we had the thrill of our wildlife management life when we crossed paths with a male and female bobwhite and at least 8 tiny chicks. We realize full well that the removal of the overabundant cattle and elimination of hay cutting has not only allowed us to burn but also allowed the grasses and forbs to flourish! Wooly croton, little bluestem, and black-eyed Susan's abounded this year and the native prairie milkweed is coming back! So therefore bumblebees, butterflies, and grasshopper species are abundant as well!

We have much more to learn and to put into practice but as long as TPWD is here we are certain of success!

Top Left: Post burn plant diversity.
Bottom Left: Sunflower stand from seeds planted in the firebreaks post burn.
Right: Quail enjoying the post burn plant diversity in the spring. Photos©Kris Schulze

Cagle's Map Turtle

WRITTEN BY TREY BARRON

When most people think of rare or threatened animals, they think of species like the giant panda, koala or even something like the Galapagos tortoises. Although it may seem like those animals don't have much in common, they are all endemic. Endemic species are geographically restricted to a particular range and not found in the wild anywhere outside that range. The giant panda is endemic to China, the koala to Australia, and the Galapagos tortoises to the Galapagos Islands of Ecuador. Texas has many of its own endemic species including many that are found in our own area. A couple that you may be familiar with are the federally endangered Attwater's prairie-chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido attwateri*) and the Houston toad (*Anaxyrus houstonensis*), but there are others that are less familiar including the state threatened Cagle's map turtle (*Graptemys caglei*).

Cagle's map turtle is only found in the Guadalupe River system of Texas and ranges from Kerr County in the north down to Victoria County close to the coast. The carapace, or upper shell, has dark tipped spines along the dorsal keel and can be faintly reticulated or a plain olive green. As with most turtles, the juveniles will exhibit more markings than adults. The plastron, or lower portion of the shell, is a cream color with dark specks. The head and limbs are contrasted with cream reticulations and stripes on a dark gray-olive to black background. The head pattern is variable, but there is usually a transverse chin bar, or chin strap, and a light V-shaped mark with arms on top of the head that create a crescent behind the eye. Females are larger than males and have proportionally larger heads. Adult males are around 3-5 inches and females are around 4-9 inches. This size difference is common among map turtles and allows for diet partitioning. While other turtles within its range may at first appear similar to Cagle's map turtle, they are easily differentiated from the others with a little effort. No other map turtles are found within the Guadalupe River system, and the other species that are close in appearance, the Texas cooter (*Psuedemys texana*) and the pond or red-eared slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*), lack the vertebral keel and have different facial markings. The Texas cooter has yellow head and neck stripes, and the red-eared slider has the red stripe behind the eye that people are familiar with.

Cagle's Map Turtle basking in the sun. Photo©Trey Barron, TPWD

This species has had very little research with many aspects of its biology unknown, but it is believed they generally occur near areas of rapidly moving water or riffles and use emergent logs, rocks and cypress knees as basking sites.

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Cagle's Map Turtle, continued

It does appear that they are not strictly tied to rapidly moving water as they can be found in several of the lakes along the Guadalupe River. Diet of the turtles is made of aquatic invertebrates, with a fondness for arthropods such as the larvae of caddisfly. The proportionally larger head of females allows them to feed on mollusks and prevents competition for food between the males and juveniles. Nesting is thought to occur during the late spring and summer, and they can lay 2-3 clutches each year adjacent to the riverbank.

This summer several Texas Parks and Wildlife biologist have been surveying the species along different parts of the Guadalupe and San Marcos Rivers. We have found the species in all stretches surveyed so far in varying densities, but they do seem to be more common in certain stretches more than others. TPWD also funded a 4-year study to survey the entire range of the species in order to get a better understanding of the distribution, status, and population ecology of the species that calls Texas and nowhere else home. I know many of you have paddled, floated, or fished the San Marcos, Guadalupe, or Blanco Rivers in Texas. Next time you are out on the water, pay extra attention to those turtles on top of the logs. They just may be something truly special that no other state has the pleasure to enjoy.

References:

Hibbitts, T. D., T.L. Hibbitts. 2016. Texas Turtles & Crocodilians: A Field Guide. University of Texas Press.

Dixon, J. R. 2013. Amphibians and Reptiles of Texas: With Keys, Taxonomic Synopses, Bibliography, and Distribution Maps. Texas A&M University Press.

Trey Barron began his career with TPWD in 2011 as a biologist in the Texas panhandle before moving to Victoria in May of 2014. He is currently the wildlife diversity biologist for Region 4 and enjoys working with landowners to improve habitat and manage all types of wildlife species. He received his Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Biology and Master of Science in Biology from West Texas A&M University.

Plant Profile: Post Oak (*Quercus stellata*)

WRITTEN BY MEAGAN LESAK

The state of Texas has more than 50 species of oak trees. Oaks are a very important plant for wildlife as they provide a food source and shelter, both when the tree is live or decaying. Native Americans also used this tree as a food source and for medicinal purposes. The specific oak to be featured in our Plant Profile is a namesake of an ecoregion in Texas. The post oak (*Quercus stellata*) tree is abundant around most of Texas due to its ability to tolerate periods of high heat, and they require little water. The tree fits perfectly in our famous Texas weather patterns. Post oaks are readily growing along rocky, sandy ridges. The tree has a shallow root system and does not respond well to disturbance or soil compaction which might occur after activities such as construction. If you have post oaks on your property and were in the path of Hurricane Harvey, you might have noticed several that succumbed to the high winds. These trees appeared to have just 'laid down' after the storm. Due to their shallow roots they couldn't keep themselves secured in Harvey's wind.

Post Oak tree in Texas. Photo©Meagan Lesak, TPWD

The tree has dark gray bark and rough, scaly ridges creating an interesting texture. The tree is sometimes referred to as "iron oak" because of its heavy, close grained wood that is very durable. It decays slowly which makes it an excellent source for fence posts, railroad ties, rough timbers and planking. Although it is not readily used as a finished wood product.

The leaf arrangement is simple and alternate on the stem. It gets the species name 'stellata' because of the hairs on the cross-shaped leaves. The leaves are generally 4-6 inches long, with 3-5 deep lobes. The flower of the post oak consists of many yellow-green hanging catkins (male flowers) that appear in March to April. The female flowers are on the same tree but are short reddish spikes near the leaf base. Leaves soon follow and the fruit matures in September to October.

Post Oak leaves. Photo©Meagan Lesak, TPWD

The fruit of this tree is known as the acorn, and white-tailed deer favor acorns and will consume them frequently when they start to drop from the oak trees. If you notice deer not visiting your corn feeders as often during this time, try setting yourself up on a trail near an oak tree to try your luck.

The post oak is a beautiful tree and can been seen in many of the state's ecoregions. Since it is the state's widest-ranging oak tree, remember it when you are traveling around the state and take note of everywhere you have spotted it.

Resources:
Trees of Texas http://texastreeid.tamu.edu/content/TreeDetails/?id=107

Meagan Lesak is the wildlife biologist for DeWitt and Goliad Counties. She received her Bachelor of Science in Range & Wildlife Management and Master of Science in Animal Science from Texas A&M University-Kingsville. A Victoria County native, Meagan began her career with TPWD in January 2019.

1,000 Waterfowl Per Week Was All He Could Kill in 'Golden Age'

Old-Time Market Hunter Tells Dramatic Story of Where Our Game Went; Today He Favors Strict Protection

"I killed more than 1,000 waterfowl in 1 week and shipped the whole lot to New Orleans for $2.40 a dozen, or $2.40 a pair. That was the largest number of ducks I ever bagged in 1 week."

Cap'n Theodore Johnson leaned over the edge of the levee and spat into the muddy waters of the Mississippi River. Cap'n Johnson, youngest of the 5 or 6 old-time market hunters still alive in the Mississippi delta region, was talking to a representative of the Fish and Wildlife Service. His comments were reported today to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes as a document in American wildlife history.

"In the old days," said Johnson, "a good market hunter down here shot an average of 100 birds a day and thought nothin' of it. On an average good day he bagged between 140 and 150 birds. And it is no exaggeration to say that 25 to 30 birds was a poor day's shootin'."

The old-time market hunter from Louisiana knew what he was talking about. He killed and sold about 10,000 wild game birds each season between 1902 and 1911 and was considered one of the most successful market hunters in the bayous and swamps of the Mississippi delta.

"But mark my word for it," the Cap'n said. "It's a darn good thing the Federal Government started regulatin' the bag limits and seasons, or else there wouldn't be many ducks and geese left to look at today. We were shootin' 'em off so fast the birds didn't have a chance. But with the refuges and the laws, they're comin' back now."

Cap'n Johnson was referring to the fact that in 1900 there were at least 150 migratory waterfowl in North America and that the wildfowl began dwindling so rapidly that by 1934 there were less than 30 million wild ducks and geese on this continent. Waterfowl regulations recommended by the Fish and Wildlife Service, of the United States Department of the Interior, and the nation-wide system of national wildlife refuges are both playing an important part, he believes, in increasing the continental population of migratory waterfowl, which has more than doubled since 1935.

Just to keep the record straight, Cap'n Johnson also pointed out that not only the market hunters but the sportsmen were important factors in the serious reduction in the population of migratory waterfowl between the early 1900's and 1935.

"What is now the Delta National Wildlife Refuge," said Cap'n Johnson, "right here from Pilottown down the Mississippi River 20 miles to the Gulf and 10 miles east, was the huntin' grounds of the old Delta Duck Club. I saw the sportsmen who hunted there because I was a guide at the club for 6 years and then chief guide for 6 more years.

"Well, sir, I saw the sportsmen shoot their share of game. The daily bag limit was 25 birds back in 1922, but the average hunter killed more than 25 birds if he got his limit. That is, if you count his cripples." To prove his point, Cap'n Johnson said that in 1926, a record-breaking year, the season in bag at the Delta Club which accommodated a large number of hunters was 16,480 wild ducks.

"A poor marksman will fire 50 to 60 shots to get 10 ducks," the Cap'n said, "and he's liable to cripple as many as 15 or 20 birds before he gets his limit."

The captain stated that the take by market hunters was large until game laws and regulations placed restrictions on the market hunter's activities.

"Settin' up a daily bag limit is what did the trick in the first place," the old-timer explained.

Market hunting then became unprofitable. After including the cost of camping out during the hunting season, buying barrels and ice for shipping the birds, and paying freight charges, there was little profit for the commercial hunter with a curtailed take of birds. Like others, Cap'n Johnson tried "to make a go of it" after the bag limit was set, but he finally turned to other fields.

The sale of migrtory waterfowl is now illegal.

"I started trappin' muskrats and doin' jobs along the River," the Cap'n said. "There was no percentage in workin' for small bags. We didn't get much money for the birds in the first place."

In the New Orleans market, where Cap'n Johnson and other hunters along the Mississippi delta shipped all their wild fowl, prices seldom exceeded 80 cents a pair. "And that was the top price for the best birds," he said.

Green-winged teals were considered "choice" birds and commanded the best prices. Yet, during "one real good season" Cap'n Johnson sold his wild ducks for an average of only 22½ cents a pair. Most of the birds were pintails and mallards. These were called "good" ducks. Shovelers, gadwalls, scaups, and widgeons, which were classified as "common, or trash," ducks sold for 15 cents a pair. "And that was considered good money for them."

Though blue geese have always been plentiful in the region of the Mississippi delta, this species did not attract the market hunters' fire. Geese were too big for the commercial hunters' purposes. "They brought no more money than ducks," Cap'n Johnson recalled, "and fewer geese than ducks would fill a barrel." Obviously, ducks were preferred to geese, since the market hunter was interested in cutting down expenses of buying ice and barrels and shipping the birds to New Orleans.

A large barrel that would hold 30 pairs of geese would hold 50 pairs of mallards or 60 pairs of pintails.

There is no doubt in Cap'n Johnson's mind about the effect that market hunting (and, he insists, sport hunting) had on the waterfowl populations back in the early 1900's. "You could see the birds gettin' fewer and fewer each year," he said. "It was a good thing they started puttin' the restrictions on huntin' and made sellin' and buyin' ducks and geese illegal."

One of the things Cap'n Johnson says he can't explain is the rise in the number of blue and snow geese wintering on the Mississippi delta. In 1920, he estimates, there were about 300,000 blue and lesser snow geese on the area. In 1927 and 1928, the number of geese began increasing. Today more than 500,000 of these birds winter on the Delta National Wildlife Refuge. About 95 percent of these are blue geese and 5 percent lesser snow geese. The increase, he said, was gradual rather than by one sharp rise in population during any one season.

Establishment of the Delta Wildlife Refuge on the wintering grounds for a tremendous number of the blue geese of North America was a "good idea" in Cap'n Johnson's opinion. "The refuge has done all the good in the world to protect those birds," he said. "Before, even though they weren't hunted very much, they didn't have a good place to rest and feed. The sportsmen were shootin' all over the deta marshes and scarin' the geese out to the bars, where the food was scarce and space crowded."

The ex-market hunter is just as positive about the value of migratory waterfowl hunting regulations. "One of the best things ever done was to restrict automatic and pump guns to three shots," he said. "I shot two automatics to pieces while huntin' for market, and I missed few birds, although the average sportsman hunter isn't that good."

The use of automatic and pump guns by careless, inexpert gunners was to blame for a great deal of crippling and loss of birds, he emphasized. "By restricting the automatic and the pump to three shots, fewer birds are crippled and killed but not counted in the bag."

Cap'n Johnson explained further. "The average man is a poor judge of range and he often shoots at birds that are too far off to kill but within range for cripplin'. In the old days, when the birds came into the blind, the hunter picked up his gun and fired a volley of shots into the flock. He hardly took time to aim. Bein' restricted to three shots, today, the hunter is more careful, takes less wild chances, and cripples fewer birds."

"Yes, they're comin' back. But you got to give 'em time, and you got to help 'em. The regulations will give 'em the time, and the national wildlife refuges will help 'em," the veteran hunter said.

"I'll say one thing," Cap'n Johnson declared, "it's a good thing they stopped both us market hunters and the sport hunters before we went too far or there wouldn't be any huntin' left now."

And with that Cap'n Johnson picked up his double-barreled shotgun, stepped into his pirogue, and headed for the public hunting marshes. It was the last day of the 1940 migratory waterfowl hunting season.

Captures Albino Buzzard

A snow-white buzzard has been added to the Hermann Park Zoo in Houston. It was captured by C. W. Farrell of Augusto, Houston County. It is the first white buzzard reported to the Texas Game Department.

Upcoming Events

JANUARY

23 **Western DeWitt County Wildlife Management Association Big Buck Scoring Day**
Lackey Ranch
9357 State HWY 119 North
Yorktown TX 78164
Begins 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.
Contact Stephen Gowens at 361-564-2977 or Larry Franke at 210-215-7124

FEBRUARY

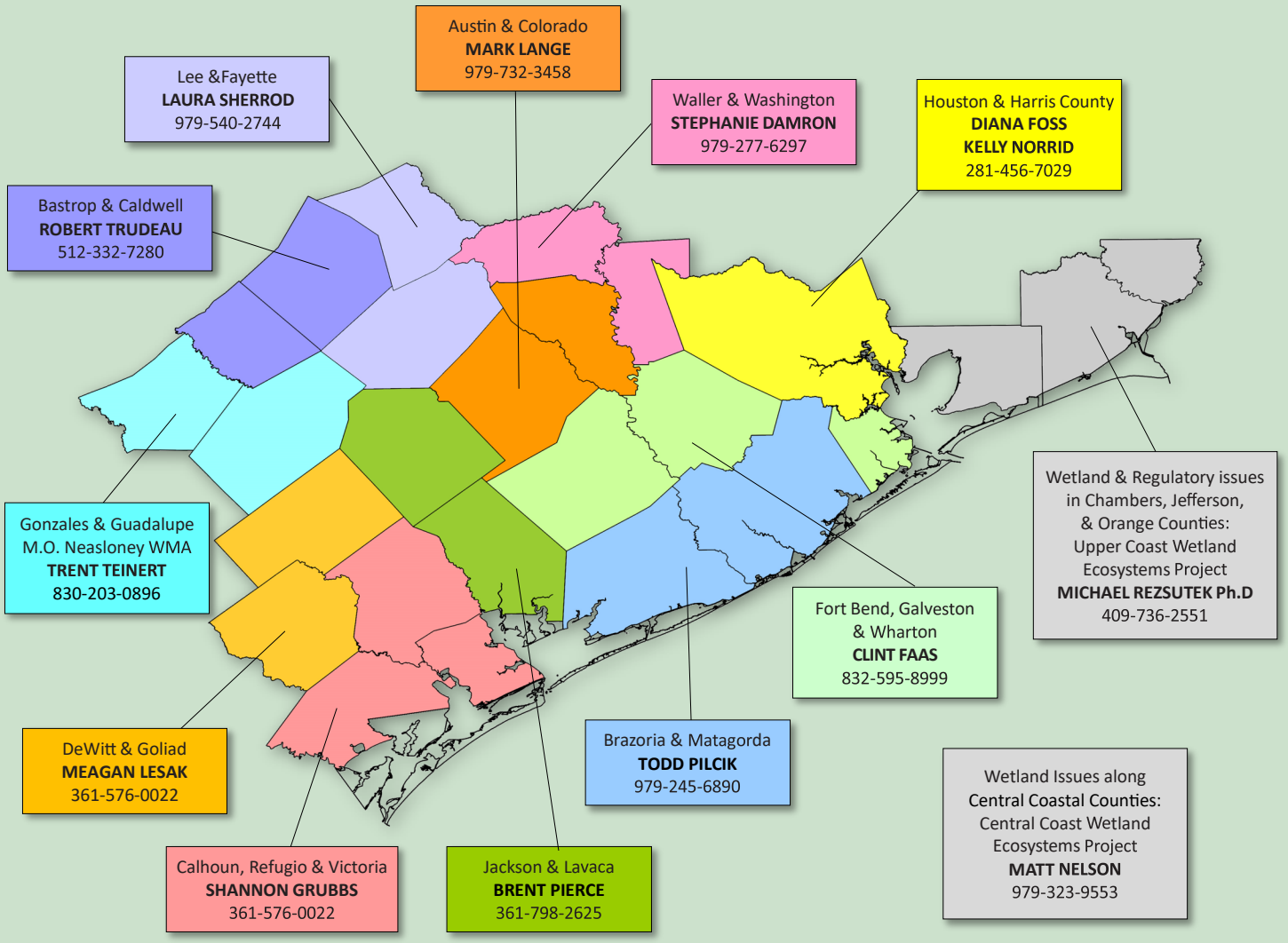
5 **Lee County Wildlife Association Annual Meeting**
The Silos on 77
Doors open at 5:00 p.m., dinner at 6:30 p.m.
Contact Dusty Boullion at 979-716-0540 or https://leecountywildlife.org/

6 **Western DeWitt County Wildlife Management Association Awards Banquet**
5D Steakhouse
632 West Main
Yorktown TX 78164
Begins at 5:00 p.m.
Contact Stephen Gowens at 361-564-2977 or Larry Franke at 210-215-7124

MARCH

2-6 **Ranching and Wildlife Expo with the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo**
Educational seminars offered March 2-4 with virtual option available
Contact Clinton Faas at Clinton.faas@tpwd.texas.gov or 832-595-8999 for more information.

Our Wildlife Biologists



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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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