WASHINGTON COUNTY
Wildlife Society

1305 E. Blue Bell Rd., Brenham, Texas 77833
Telephone 979-277-6212 Fax 979-277-6223 www.wcwildlife.org

SOUTH CENTRAL TEXAS PRESCRIBED BURN ASSOCIATION IS FORMED

By Dave Redden, Coordinator

SCTPBA
South Central Texas Prescribed Burn Association

If you have been to any workshop that addresses ways to improve your land for wildlife, there was likely at least one speaker who mentioned the Aldo Leopold's five tools for game management: axe, plow, cow, fire and gun. Most of us are comfortable with these tools in their modern day form, with the exception of fire. Since the mid-1800s, humans in Texas have suppressed the intentional and accidental use of fire as a tool for manipulating the land. As a result we have modified the habitat for wildlife that evolved with fire as part of the system. Many wildlife biologists and conservationists are trying to reverse the trend and get fire back into a more balanced use. This practice of using fire for improving wildlife habitat also improves public safety by reducing the buildup of excess fuels that occur when fire is suppressed completely. However, fire is a tool that many landowners are still not confident in using.

So, how does a landowner use fire safely as a tool for wildlife management? First he or she must recognize that fire as a tool is now called "prescribed fire" and it involves a very well planned and orchestrated use of the tool. It will not solve all problems, so the landowner first must decide what objective he or she has in manipulating the environment, then see if fire could be the right tool to address that. Sometimes the objective is easy to see and recognize that fire is the way to go. An example would be a pasture with standing native grasses and forbs that is dormant and needs to be cleared for new spring growth and invading brushy plants controlled. Even with a clear objective and obvious need for fire, there still are several hurdles that make using the tool of fire a problem. Here are the usual ones:

- Expertise – Before using fire, you need to understand some of the science behind fire behavior. A one-day course put on by a qualified instructor or agency is enough to get you thinking about the key factors, such as wind speed, humidity, fuel moisture, fuel density, temperature, width and quality of firebreaks, downwind fuels, and probable smoke behavior. The technical details of the conditions under which you will burn and the sequence of events from ignition to completion are written in a "burn plan" that will be reviewed with all the burn crew on the day of the burn. This is the "script for the play."

  It takes repeated training and practice in using the skills obtained to be prepared sufficiently to prepare a burn plan and then to execute it safely.

- Experience – That brings up the next hurdle, experience. How do you get to practice these skills and develop experience if you need it to burn in the first place? The short answer is to help someone burn on their place first.

- Equipment – There is specialized equipment that makes burning safely much easier. You may not have these items for normal farm or ranch operations. Some of the specialized items are drip torches, two-way radios, pressure sprayers mounted on ATVs or utility vehicles, fire swatters, weather monitoring devices, and safety gear.

- Manpower – Having enough people (men or women) to conduct a prescribed fire safely may be difficult for you, especially if you expect all to be familiar with the process. Trained and experience manpower is what you want.

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WCWS Contact Info:

OFFICERS for 2011:

Brian Burke, Society President, (979), 836-5258
Robert Lehmann, Society Vice Pres., (979) 251-4340
Richard Thames, Society Treasurer, (979) 278-3053
Gael Burke, Society Secretary, (936) 836-5258

WMA DIRECTORS for 2011:

Greenvine WMA
Robert Lehmann, Director, (979) 251-4340, rlehmanndeer@yahoo.com
Gene Bishop, Vice-Director, (512) 771-3322, gbishop@austin.rr.com

Sun Oil Field WMA
Colby Finke, Director, (979) 836-1041, colbyfinke@yahoo.com
Clint Duch, Vice-Director, (979) 277-5109, c_dconstruction81@yahoo.com

Rocky Creek WMA
John Anderson, Director, (979) 289-0041, sjanders@airmail.net

Post Oak WMA
Ralph Lilly, MD, Director, (936) 878-9944, rblillymd@me.com
Devin Holum, Vice-Director, (281) 807-0679, bismark98@yahoo.com

Sandtown WMA
Richard Thames, Director, (979) 278-3053, rbthames@industryinet.com
Doodle Johnston, Vice-Director, (979) 278-3855

Mt. Vernon WMA
Rob Johnston, Director, (832) 368-8076, robj709@gmail.com
Lisa Fletcher, Vice-Director, (512) 627-8720, texanbuffalogal@yahoo.com

New Years Creek WMA
Jack Taylor, Director, (936) 878-9942, jackandsandytaylor@gmail.com

RESOURCE CONTACTS:

Larry Pierce, Texas AgriLife Extension Agent-Agriculture/Natural Resources, (979) 277-6212, lw-pierce@tamu.edu

Stephanie M. Damron, Natural Resource Specialist II, Washington & Waller Counties, (979) 277-6297, stephanie.damron@tpwd.state.tx.us

Ben Garcia, NRCS District Conservationist, (979) 830-7123 ext. 3, ben.garcia@tx.usda.gov

Debbie Wellman, Washington Co. Appraisal District, (979) 277-3740, debbiew@brenhamisd.net

Gael Burke, WCWS Office Secretary (979) 836-5258, gullywiatt@gmail.com

Ann Thames, WCWS Newsletter, (979) 203-3455, newsletter@wcwildlife.org

Jon Wellmann, Youth Liaison, (936) 419-3910, jonwellmann@live.com

Eddie Hines, WC Game Warden, (979) 412-3140, eddie.hines@tpwd.state.tx.us

Operation Game Thief, (800) 792-4263

PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

I hope it's raining when you read this.

The last three or four years have sure been dry. I've mostly complained about it, but intend to:

1. Capture rainwater from all building roofs and store it in tanks to use as needed, and
2. Feed wildlife at our place more generously.

When we bought our land in 2008 there were no buildings. We built a shed and house with gutters, downspouts and rainwater storage. We are trying to complete a barn and carport, so we can store much more rainwater from those roofs. To benefit ourselves and the wildlife we're trying to nurture, storing rainwater is now a very high priority for us.

We are also feeding wildlife more than ever before. I thank Willy Dilworth for speaking on this subject at our Summer Meeting. As he pointed out, tough weather periods are when we need to "step up" and help the wildlife we care about. With brush piles and other habitat we built, there has been a big wildlife population increase on our little place since 2008. The critters are counting on us now, and I don't want to let them down, even during a drought.

Gael and I hope that you, your family and your wildlife are doing well. Let us know if we can help you.

Sincerely,

Brian Burke

ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY NEWS

Let's all say "Nice Work and Thank You" to Society volunteers who cleaned up our adopted road segments during September: Carol Montgomery, Jan and Dave Redden, Ann and Richard Thames, Gael and Brian Burke, Devin Holum, Judy and Bill Deaton.

Cleaning along the roads is real work. It is also quite a bit more. We have had fun and rewarding experiences with our fellow Society members on these days. Join us sometime to find out if the fun outweighs the work; it certainly has for me.

Next highway clean-up is scheduled for Nov. 5, 9am at FM 1948 and Nov. 19, 9am at FM 1155.

ADDRESS CHANGES: For address changes, or to be added or removed from our mailing list, please contact Gael Burke, (979) 836-5258, gullywiatt@gmail.com.

MITIGATING FOR THE DROUGHT

By Stephanie Damron, TPWD Biologist

Unless you have been out of state for the last 12 months, you should be very aware that we are currently in a very dry period. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, all counties in Texas are in some level of drought. The Drought Monitor categorizes drought on a level from D0 (dry) to D4 (Exceptional). All of the Oak Prairie District is in a D4 (Exceptional) category with little relief in sight.

Since most of the members of the local wildlife management associations have interest in white-tailed deer, I will try and discuss possible effects of the drought and ways to mitigate the drought. A very basic understanding of deer diet and the annual cycle is an important starting point. During a 'normal' year, deer prefer to forage on forbs (weeds) from early spring through mid-summer. Generally, these weeds will start to play out during dry summer conditions and deer will turn more to browse (woody twigs and leaves from small bushes, trees, and vines). As the fall and winter approaches, acorns will play an important part of the diet and if there is some precipitation then winter weeds will germinate and be a large part of the diet. Normally, by late winter browse is a vital part of the diet again as acorns play out. The main point you need to recognize in this preferred cycle is that browse is a very important category that helps get deer through the hardest of times (late summer and winter). Browse is the 'potato' of the deer diet.

As you drive down the highway, start paying attention to the absence of leaves on trees and along fence lines from about 5 foot and under. This absence of leaves is called a browse line. Generally speaking, a browse line is not a good thing and is normally only visible during late winter just prior to spring. Optimally, with excellent stocking rates and deer densities, you don't ever see a browse line. If you have paid attention this past 6 months, the browse line never recovered through the spring and is getting worse as the drought lingers. In this part of the world, browse lines are primarily created by two animals, deer and cattle. Simply stated, the forage that the deer will be depending on late this winter is already gone with little chance of re-growth between now and then.

So what effects might this drought have on the deer population? For starters, white-tailed fawns rely on good forage production to provide optimal cover to avoid predators. Normally, when drought conditions are present during fawning season, adequate cover is lacking and fawn survival decreases. Additionally, white-tailed does depend heavily on weed production during the spring and summer to supply vital nutrients for milk production.

Weeds are very dependent on rainfall and have been absent this year. As a result of both conditions mentioned above, fawn recruitment will likely be much lower this year than normal. Although the low fawn recruitment will not have major effects on the long term population, it will have short term impacts by reducing the number of animals in this year's age class. This will likely result in a noticeable decrease in the number of mature bucks 3-4 years down the road due to poor recruitment this year. This isn't necessarily a bad thing—deer populations across the majority of the Oak Prairie District have been increasing for the past decade plus and some areas have way too many deer.

From a hunters' stand point, this year's harvest will likely increase. Deer tend to be more easily encountered at feeders during drought years, particularly if the acorn crop is lacking. However, antler quality will suffer. Because this dry period began last fall, that good vegetation (forbes/weeds) that the bucks needed in the late winter/spring (and throughout the antler growing season) to maximize antler production has been lacking or non-existent.

Drought is a natural part of the weather systems in Texas and deer have managed to get through droughts ever since they have been around. As wildlife managers though, there are methods we can use to mitigate the impacts of the drought. Here are a few:

If you graze cattle and a portion of your property is wooded, try to keep the cattle out of the woods. Typically ranchers allow the cattle to 'clean out' the woods for aesthetic reasons. As implied earlier, cattle turn to browsing when conditions are unfavorable. By removing this added competition, deer will have a better chance of maintaining some of there body condition through the drought.

Feeding protein throughout the summer (and winter if drought persists) will also benefit the deer herd. Protein should be looked at as a supplement to help get deer through the drought and should never replace good habitat practices. Feeding protein during these extreme conditions can become costly and may not be a practice for everyone.

The 'overall' health of the herd will also benefit by harvesting deer early in the season. Many people feel that they should reduce harvesting during drought cycles to mitigate for lower fawn recruitment. This is not a good practice unless you are drastically below carrying capacity. Great effort should be placed on removing excess deer early (October and November) so that the surviving herd has plenty of resources throughout the winter.

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What about other wildlife? Water, Food, and Cover are the essentials. Without water wildlife can only live so long. For your small mammals that do not travel the distances that deer do you will likely need to provide a water source, unless you are one of the lucky few who still have water in your tank. Keep it simple. If you have a trough, fill it with buckets of water. Utilize your bird baths. Supplemental food in the form of protein pellets will provide nutrition to a variety of species. Providing a good seed source for your birds is going to be important. Pollinators are suffering as well and without pollinators there will be a decrease in seed production. Essentially every part of the ecosystem is being stressed during this drought. Proper habitat and/or range management is crucial.

If you have any questions or concerns about what you can do on your property please call Stephanie Damron. 979-277-6297

HOW TO BUILD A SIMPLE AND FUNCTIONAL DEER FEEDER

By Brian Burke, WCWS President, member Greenvine WMA

Deer in our area need help during this drought.

Dave Redden recently shared his deer feeder plan, and I like it a lot. It is made of Schedule 40 polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipe and fittings.

Gael and I made and installed two of these recently. I like the simplicity; there are no moving parts and feed moves by gravity. Also, it is easy to fill, clean or relocate.

Many pipe diameters work for this concept. I used 4 inch diameter Schedule 40 PVC, DWV grade. (DWV – drain, waste & vent – grade is adequate for the feeder, and often cheaper than pressure-rated pipe.) All fittings are the same 4 inch PVC.

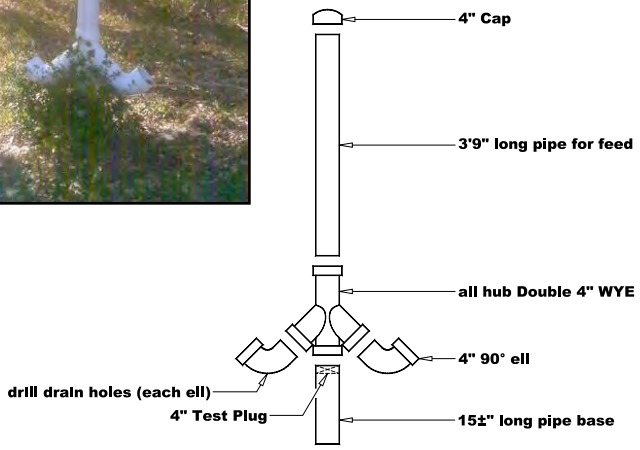
I made the base 15 inches long and the feed storage pipe 3 feet 9 inches long. (If the base and storage pipe lengths total 5 feet, then a 20 foot pipe piece makes four feeders.) I cut the straight pipe pieces, inserted a Test Plug as shown, and put it together. I did not solvent-weld (glue) the joints because I think feeder strength is adequate without that, and it's nice to clean and move it in pieces. Joints are simply pushed together or pulled apart.

We also drilled three holes (1/4 inch diameter) at the bends to help drain rainwater.

We placed the feeders against trees and used two cable-ties to anchor each feeder. We hope our game camera will show deer eating from it frequently.

This cannot make up completely for challenges deer face from the drought, but we think it will help.

I thank Dave Redden for his valuable guidance on this project.



Note: All pipe and fittings are 4 inch diameter Sch 40 DWV.

PVC Pipe Deer Feeder

WILDLIFE AND DROUGHT

By Rebecca McKeever, Director, Lone Star Wildlife Rescue

In my past life, I was a marine biologist working out in the deep Atlantic Ocean. I would never have thought, in a million years, that I would be writing an article about one of the worst droughts in Texas history.

Not only do the crops, grass and trees die but the impact of a drought on wildlife is far reaching. In the here and now, there is very little (if any) water left in tanks and competition for food is high. All wildlife is impacted – from the squirrels to the deer and from little hummingbirds to the birds of prey.

Many of the wildlife coming to our facility are in very poor condition. Most are emaciated, all are dehydrated. One of our major challenges has been fawn this year. Our usual intake is from 10 to 20. This year we have received 74 fawn. Fourteen have died, but that still leaves us with an extraordinary number in care. Many times, fawn are kidnapped by well meaning people. Normally the doe leaves her fawn for 8 to 10 hours and then comes back to feed them – they are not abandoned. Unfortunately, with that schedule and the intense heat, the fawn are barely making it. We've had many fawn brought to us unable to sit upright or even lift their head up. These are very intensive to take care of and not all make it. The deer population is going to have a hard time this winter. With very few acorns on the ground and little browse, the deer are going to struggle without the extra food provided by land owners this winter.

Deer Release

Birds of prey are still coming in but we are mostly seeing starved adults. This is disheartening because this time of year we usually see more fledglings. These are the ones that have left the nest but haven't mastered their hunting technique. We can only conclude that many juveniles haven't made it this year. My flight cages are full: Mississippi Kites, eagles, great horned owls and red shouldered hawks.

Screech Owls

We won't be releasing any of the raptors in our area. In fact, I'm headed down to south of Angleton to release the kites. They actually have had some rain down there! I've also managed to find a private reservoir/sanctuary down south that is willing to let me release the great horned owls in a month. Our food bill this year has been incredible and I hate to say it, but the freezers are almost empty.

Even the little squirrels and opossums are feeling the pinch. Babies that fall from the nest are usually robust but this year they are all very thin with the mothers unable to supply enough milk to sustain their young.

Wildlife are also coming closer to homes – opossums in garbage cans, armadillos in the garden, masses of hummingbirds coming to the feeder. Some, people like and some, they don't. I've ended up taking in baby opossums just because the mother was seen on the property and killed. They are animals that are trying to survive the best they can in a bad situation. It's an easy remedy: so if we do get rain, plant those food plots. Keep water troughs topped off, otherwise if you don't want wildlife near your house or garage put up any food that you might be feeding to outside dogs or cats before dark and don't leave garbage cans outside (put them in a barn, shed or garage). They won't be tempted. Armadillos are a bit harder. They eat grubs and the grubs right now have gone deep down because of the lack of moisture and heat. Our gardens are somewhat watered and therefore a buffet for the armadillos. If you don't want them in your garden, remove the food source. That is the best way to deter an armadillo that doesn't involve guns or trapping. Raccoons are also getting bolder and the same applies to them. Don't tempt them with pet food left on the back porch.

While I am not an advocate of putting out food for wildlife under normal circumstances, this winter might be the exception. Natural food is best. Keep hummingbird feeders full and change their nectar often. You don't need to purchase the red dyed food, just boil 4 cups of water to 1 cup of sugar and let cool and keep it refrigerated. Be aware that deer feeders will attract many different mammals, not just deer.

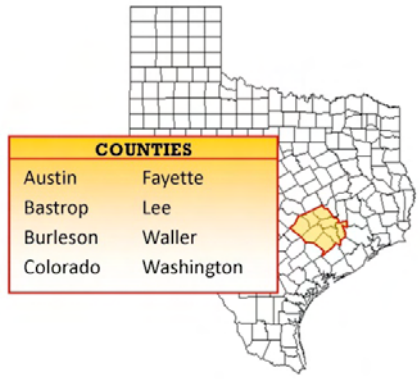
Pray for rain and all God's creatures.

If you have any questions on wildlife or need assistance with injured or orphaned wildlife, please call the LSWR hotline: (979) 865-0763. Visit www.lonestarwildlife.org for ways you can help.

SCTPBA cont.

- Legal Issues – Fire is not only scary for you as the landowner, but is scary for all your neighbors. For that reason there are numerous laws and practices that you must follow to use the tool. It is comparable to getting a driving license before you drive a car, except that the rules for getting a "license" to burn are less clear. In fact, there is no "license," but there are legal requirements. It should be obvious that using prescribed burning as a tool requires some help. You can hire professionals to do it for you, but the cost is usually prohibitive for most landowners with less than several hundred acres. To meet the need, many areas of the state have formed cooperative groups of landowners who agree to help each other burn. They work together to get the equipment and training they need. This also allows members to gain experience with burning practices by helping on others' properties before burning on his or her place.

The South Central Texas Prescribed Burn Association (SCTPBA) began a few years ago as such a group. Initially it was just a list of names with telephone numbers and email addresses for landowners in the area who were willing to help each other burn. This quickly grew to around 150 members in five counties around Washington County, but remained an informal group with no officers, dues, or state charter. In the summer of 2011, there was progress in the state to form an alliance of all the prescribed burn associations (PBAs) in the state to improve communications among the groups and to coordinate interactions with county and state government offices. In June, 2011, the informal SCTPB Co-op group met and 18 members agreed to a set of bylaws and policies for a proposed nonprofit corporation, SCTPBA. The SCTPBA also joined the state alliance of PBAs called the Texas Alliance of Prescribed Burn Association, or TAPBA. In July SCTPBA filed with the state to become a nonprofit corporation and in early September filed for 501(c)(3) tax exempt status with the IRS. The SCTPBA is open for membership, which is currently $25/year for a family. When SCTPBA obtains a liability insurance policy to cover officers, directors, and helpers, membership fees will likely increase. However, the cost will still be low compared to alternative options. If you think you might be interested, please check out the SCTPBA website at www.sctpba.org. Then contact Dave Redden, President (dredden00@gmail.com) or Larry Joe Doherty, Vice President (ljdlaw@texasbb.com). There will not likely be any prescribed burning taking place until weather conditions change considerably. However, now is the time to be working on getting your firebreaks in place and making a plan for your prescribed burn. Planning and preparation are key elements to a safe and effective burn.



LIFE AND WATER

By Larry Doherty, LSWF Chairman and member of Rocky Creek WMA

We take life and water for granted, prize them greatly, and literally give them away without charge when we think the cause worthy. We are engaged in an epic struggle to resist giving life up to a drought that has visited Texas before. The difference this time is that there are more Texans. Suffering is more obvious. Our will to resist is magnified, stronger. The rainwater resources are stretched thinner. Water scarcity is getting personal, like life.

Our useable water supplies ALL come from the same source: rainwater. Condensate and/or conversion of salt water don't amount to a drop in the "Need" bucket. So, what ARE you gonna do BEFORE the well runs dry? Catch it and keep it? How effective do you really think you can be at hoarding water? It won't stay in a lake or pond. Nature evaporates it back. The drought has rendered ponds and tanks dry. Perhaps the world's largest cistern could provide an answer. Then you've got to use it or make it potable, and hope the day never comes that the well does run dry. "Be Prepared" – Boy Scout Motto.

And, "Be Prepared to Share." None of us have a crystal ball regardless of how foreseeable this need. We all have the same need for a clean drink of water, too. Those who went to the 3rd Annual Lone Star Water Forum are better prepared to deal with solving the short term problem than their neighbor who did not. We got introduced to new techniques available for fulfilling our role in water catchment that has been played out for centuries. It is a salvage plan that almost got lost in community water supply systems, urbanization and civilization. A conscious end to waste and pollution of potable water supplies might eliminate the risk of one day having to ration. That day is a closer prospect for those without their own cisterns.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE DEER NOW?

By Ryan Schoeneberg, TPWD Big Game Program Specialist

This year has been a tough year for all wildlife around the state with the drought, but following the fire in Bastrop things got a little tougher for them. Fire is a natural part of the pine-forest and prairie ecosystem, but that doesn't make dealing with the wake of a large wildfire any easier. While all of the human residents start to sift through the ashes and rebuild, the wildlife residents do the same.

There have been numerous calls from residents to local biologists expressing concerns ranging from the absence of certain animals to observing too many animals. This is a natural progression following a fire of this scale. The animals that are able to easily relocate have done so, and some have stuck around. When talking about White-tailed Deer they appear to be more numerous now. The reason for this is that the under-story of brush is no longer there, allowing for all the animals to be more easily seen. Also the ani-mals have to feed longer to fulfill their nutritional requirements, making them that much more visible. Feeding longer is also a function of the drought. Even before the fire the deer were working harder to find enough food.

A whitetail deer makes its way Wednesday Sept. 7, 2011 through the charred remains of the Bastrop County Complex wildfire that burned more than 33,000 acres. Photo: SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS, WILLIAM LUTHER / 2011 SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS

So the question is what will happen to the deer now? Part of what makes us human is our capacity to empathize and our desire to help. This is our greatest attribute! However, we need to ensure that our actions are manifested in a way that has a positive effect on the deer, both short term and long term. The necessities for all living creatures are water, shelter and food. With that in mind we can start to figure out how we can help, while keeping in mind that we are ultimately trying to help their long term recovery. We all know water is dire necessity. With the drought, the free stand-ing available water is not always readily available. Something that can be done to help alleviate this stress is to place tubs of water on the range that are accessible to wildlife. By looking online you can find detailed descriptions of how to do this properly. Essentially you want to dig a hole to make the tub ground level, for accessibility, and then place some bricks or wire mesh inside to allow animals that fall in the water a way to climb out and not drown. Second requirement is shelter, which for deer this is any vertical vegetative structure that allows the deer to be concealed. This is what the fire consumed and one reason that residents can see deer more easily now than before. Shelter is a component that will take a while to recover. Food is the third component.

Shelter also overlaps with the Food category, as deer can browse the brush that they are using as their habitat. Supplying food is an area that a person can more easily visualize and therefore is a practice that our human nature wants us to partake in. Having said that, there are some things that you need to consider before running out and "feeding" the deer. First thing to consider is the short term effects, which vary depending on what you feed. Most people associate corn with being a deer food. While it is a common practice to feed deer corn this is not the best feed to help maintain a deer's health. Corn tastes good to a deer. It is a carbohydrate, which can help by giving the deer energy, but over weeks of utilizing it as a large portion of its diet it will have negative effects. Two of these negative effects are foundering and toxic acidosis. If you are truly trying to help the deer, specifically designed deer protein pellets are much more beneficial. Protein pellets are specifically designed to help to supplement a deer's diet and therefore contain the needed vitamins and minerals. To be done properly, the protein should be put in a gravity-style, free-choice feeder. This type of feeder allows the deer to come at any hour of the day or night and eat as much as they need. Feeding the deer protein pellets can provide short term benefits, however we need to look years down the road. As we mentioned earlier , some of the animals have already dispersed in search of water, shelter, and food. Most people's initial reaction to this is a gasp of horror that their wildlife are leaving. This dispersal is a good thing. Remember that we are looking at the long term good of the animals. If we are artificially sup-porting their population by feeding then we are holding them in the area instead of allowing them to disperse naturally. The long term effect of this is that the deer will be eating any natural vegetation as it starts to rebound. The more natural response is for the deer to leave the area, allowing the plants time to rebound, and then the deer will move back into the area and take advantage of the bounty.

There are no silver bullets when dealing with an ecosystem. Time and rain will make the deer population stronger and healthier than ever. As hard as it is to let happen, nature will take its course and things will be stronger than ever when that happens.

If you have questions or concerns about wildlife in your area please do not hesitate to contact Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

A FIREWISE HOME HAS...

DEFENSIBLE SPACE

Do you have at least 30 ft of space surrounding your home that is Lean, Clean and Green? The objective of Defensible Space is to reduce the wildfire threat to your home by changing the characteristics of the surrounding vegetation.

Lean – Prune shrubs and cut back tree branches, especially within 15 feet of your chimney.

Clean – Remove all dead plant material from around your home; this includes dead leaves, dry grass and even stacked firewood

Green – Plant fire-resistant vegetation that is healthy and green throughout the year.

Defensible space allows firefighters room to put out fires.

FIRE-RESISTANT ATTACHMENTS

Attachments include any structure connected to your home, such as decks, porches or fences. If an attachment to a home is *not* fire-resistant, then the home as a whole is *not* firewise.

A DISASTER PLAN

The time to plan for a fire emergency is now. Take a few minutes to discuss with your family what actions you will need to take.

• Post your local firefighting agency's telephone number in a visible place.

• Decide where you will go and how you will get there. With fire, you may only have a moments notice. Two escape routes out of your home and out of your neighborhood are preferable.

• Have tools available: shovel, rake, axe, handsaw or chainsaw, and a 2 gallon bucket

• Maintain an adequate water source

• Have a plan for your pets

• Practice family fire drills

Evacuations for a wildfire can occur without notice; When wildfire conditions exist, BE ALERT.

LEAN, CLEAN AND GREEN LANDSCAPING

With firewise landscaping, you can create defensible space around your home that reduces your wildfire threat. Large, leafy, hardwood trees should be pruned so that the lowest branches are at least 6 to 10 ft high to prevent a fire on the ground from spreading up to the tree tops. Within the defensible space, remove flammable plants that contain resins, oils and waxes that burn readily: Ornamental junipers, yaupon holly, red cedar, and young pine.

Although mulch helps retain soil moisture, when dry, it can become flammable. Mulch as well as all landscaping should be kept well watered to prevent them from becoming fire fuel.

FIRE-RESISTANT ROOF CONSTRUCTION

Firewise construction materials include Class-A asphalt shingles, metal, cement and concrete products. Additionally, the inclusion of a fire resistant sub-roof adds protection.

Something as simple as making sure that your gutters, eaves and roof are clear of debris can reduce your fire threat.

FIRE-RESISTANT EXTERIOR CONSTRUCTION

Wall materials that resist heat and flames include brick, cement, plaster, stucco and concrete masonry. Double pane glass windows can make a home more resistant to wildfire heat and flames.

Although some vinyl will not burn, firefighters have found that some vinyl soffits can melt, allowing embers into the attic space.

EMERGENCY ACCESS

Identify your home and neighborhood with legible and clearly marked street names and numbers so emergency vehicles can rapidly find the location of the emergency. Include a driveway that is at least 12 feet wide with a vertical clearance of 15 feet – to provide access to emergency apparatus.

WWW.FIREWISE.ORG

Firefighters need your help. Use these tips to PREPARE your home and PROTECT your family and pets. BEWARE of accidentally starting a wildfire!

MONARCH BUTTERFLY'S AMAZING JOURNEY

Excerpts from articles by Ridlon Kiphart on March 11th, 2011 and Chip Taylor - Director, Monarch Watch

Fall migrating monarchs are passing through Texas.

Monarchs will overwinter Mexico and return to Texas in the spring looking for milkweed (Asclepius species). Milkweed is the only host plant that monarchs utilize for their life cycle. Abundance of milkweed in Texas is crucial for the development of the first generation of monarchs.

In 2010, the monarch butterfly was added to the World Wildlife Fund's Ten Most Threatened Species List, due to loss of habitat necessary for survival of the monarch migration.

According to WWF, "Every year millions of delicate monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) migrate from North America to their winter habitat in Mexico. A well conserved and protected high-altitude pine and fir forest in Mexico is essential for the survival of the over wintering of monarchs, which has been recognized as an endangered biological phenomenon. The protection of its reproductive habitats in the United States and Canada is also crucial to saving this species migration, one of the most remarkable natural phenomena on the planet."

In the fall the remarkable monarchs, which weigh about a half of a gram, migrate through Texas to their overwintering sites in the transvolcanic mountains in the state of Michoacan in central Mexico, about 100 miles west of Mexico City. Monarchs don't tolerate freezing weather so they must migrate to a warmer climate to survive. At an attitude of 10,000 to 12,000 feet, the monarchs cluster in oyamel fir trees for warmth. They have fat stores which they utilize during their 4 month dormancy.

Migratory butterflies travel approximately 74 miles per day, taking advantage of ascending warm-air currents, gliding in the thrust they get from it. With this flying technique, Monarchs only need to flap their wings when they run out of wind or when they need to change their path. This way, they achieve to save enough energy to complete their long trip.

The leading edge of the migration has now reached northern Texas. The migration is just beginning to navigate a 1000 miles of hell - a nearly flowerless, nectarless and waterless expanse of central Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico (see Drought Monitor at http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/).

It is too late for rains to change the situation in Texas and northern Mexico. Monarchs will make it to the overwintering sites but their numbers will be significantly reduced by these conditions.

It will be interesting to see how monarchs cope with the lack of nectar and water as they move through Texas. Monarchs, like most insects, have hygroreceptors (sense organs that are sensitive to humidity gradients); therefore, when conditions are extremely dry, we might expect monarchs to seek out the darkest and most humid habitats. If this plays out, most monarchs will accumulate in drainages, along rivers, move in and out of forests, and concentrate around other water sources.

Low monarch numbers in Mexico this winter and in the future means that the integrity of the overwintering sites is now more important than ever and that planting milkweeds in gardens and incorporating these plants in restoration projects either as seeds or plugs should receive the highest priority.

So what can you do?

- Create a Monarch Waystation habitat: http://monarchwatch.org/waystations
- Do NOT use pesticides.
- Plant lots of nectar plants for adults. You want to have a continuous supply of different nectar plants from spring through fall.

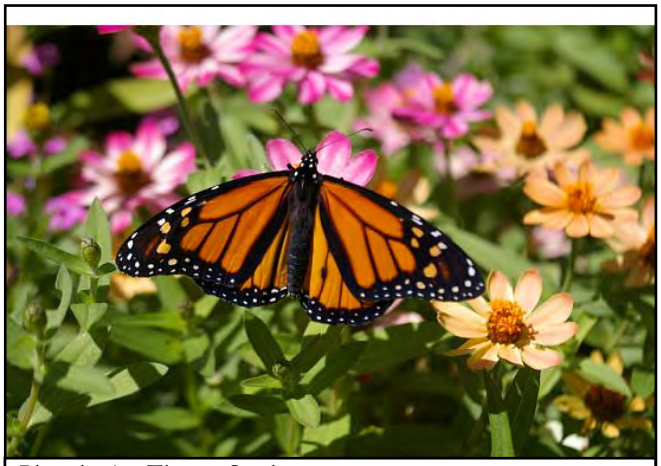


Photo by Ann Thames, Sandtown

You can provide a special treat for the intrepid travelers by placing slices of watermelon in prominent sunny places in the yard. Scratch the surface of the melon flesh, and while the Monarchs gorge themselves on the sweet juices, you may enjoy their beauty until with a flap of their wings, they bid us "adios" and continue south.

Monarch Watch (http://monarchwatch.org) is a nonprofit educational outreach program based at the University of Kansas that focuses on the monarch butterfly, its habitat, and its spectacular fall migration.

SOME HELP FORTHE BIRDS

By Darrell Vollert, Darrell Vollert Nature Tours

The drought is having very adverse affects on our avifauna.

More people are reporting Baltimore Orioles at sugar water feeders this fall than ever before. Birders are placing out orange halves for the orioles too. I have been impaling my orange halves on small tree branches. Last Friday morning I had five or six Baltimores waiting their turn at the orange halves. A friend in College Station has placed out grape jelly for the orioles. Normally orioles feed on insects, particularly caterpillars, during fall migration. With this exceptional drought there are fewer insects for birds to feed on. Orioles also feed on the nectar in tubular-shaped native flowers. Again, the drought has severely impacted our native plants and trees. Orioles and other bird species have been flocking to bird baths and sprinklers to drink and bath. Baltimore Orioles will be migrating through the Brazos Valley through mid-October.

The most important thing that landowners can do for birds and other wildlife during this drought is provide them with water. Keep your birdbaths filled. Place out plastic bowls with water. Anything that will hold water. If one can, put a sprinkler on near a tree limb or bush so birds can bathe.

The seed of choice for seed-eating birds is black-oil sunflower seed. Cardinals, chickadees, titmice, jays, buntings, and grosbeaks all like sunflower seed. Millet is another popular bird seed for seed eating birds. Millet can be cast on the ground or in hopper feeders. Doves, buntings, and native sparrows like millet seed. A number of migrating native sparrow species will be arriving in our area in the next two months.

Birds also like suet cakes. Suet can be found in most grocery stores in the pet food area. Suet can be placed in a suet cage and hung from a tree limb or placed on the side of a bird feeder. Woodpeckers, Carolina Wrens, and warblers (Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped, and Pine) will eat suet.

My next birding tour will be at Camp Allen in southern Grimes County followed by a tour on November 19th at Lake Somerville. We will see a combination of fall migrants, winter residents, and permanent residents during these tours. December 3rd I will conduct a woodpecker/nuthatch tour in the Huntsville area. We hope to see eight woodpecker species and 3 nuthatch species, plus a number of other winter birds. Folks can contact me for more information on these and future tours. (979) 251-4986, dvollert1967@yahoo.com.

WCWS WANTS YOUR PHOTOS!!!

WCWS would like everyone to share their awesome photos of wildlife. You can send or bring in hard copies to the extension office or email them to photo@wcwildlife.org. Thanks to Bev Schawe of New Years Creek WMA and Gael Burke from Greenvine WMA, an album is currently displayed in the foyer of the county extension office. We will make the album available it at the joint meetings for attendees to peruse or add to. It seems like a fun way to share your wildlife sightings other members. When submitting a photo please give a description of your picture and let us know which WMA/Co-op you live in.

Look for our upcoming Photo Contest along with rules in our upcoming newsletter in January. Details will be on the website as well at www.wcwildlife.org.

Larry Guidry, Sandtown

Cherry Craven, New Years Creek

Ann Thames, Sandtown

ELECTION OF WMA DIRECTORS AND DUTIES

It is time for the Fall WMA meetings. These gathering are informative, social and brief business meetings wrapped into one event. The business aspect is the election of a Vice Director for the upcoming 2012 calendar year. This year several WMAs might be electing both a new Director and Vice Director. The main duties are the following:

- The Director and Vice-Director of the Society will serve on the executive committee. This committee is installed at the first annual meeting of each new year. The executive committee will meet every even number month (6 total) of the calendar year.
- Help with membership within their WMA. Being part of the society's membership committee is the best way to enhance and retain membership within the society. Also allows the directors to see what other directors are doing within their WMAs and share their ideas.
- Organize two educational meetings of all WMA members each year, generally Spring and Fall. This is a great way to meet the members of your WMA, find out what they would like to see within the society. It also allows the directors to convey to the members what is going on within the general society and inform them of upcoming events and the society's progress.
- Encourage landowners in their WMA to become better educated about land management practices which enrich wildlife habitat and to encourage the implementation of those practices among landowners.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

(Check www.wcwildlife.org for up-to-date listings)

FOURTH ANNUAL YOUTH SHOOTING AND HUNTER SAFETY EVENT
October 19 - Nails Creek State Park, Lake Somerville. Local high school students involved in wildlife and agriculture classes are invited to come out for a fun, safe, hands-on opportunity to learn about hunter ethics and safety and give them the opportunity to shoot different types of firearms and bows. Students are placed in small groups and rotated through eight stations where they receive one-on-one instruction. Students will also enjoy a picnic lunch provided by Washington County Wildlife Society. It takes a lot of people to put on this event and any interested volunteers will be welcome. Contact us at info@wcwildlife.org or call (979) 277-6212.

MULTI-COUNTY NEW LANDOWNER PROGRAM RESUMES
The October program will take place on **Friday, October 21st**, and begins at 1:30 p.m. The tour will begin and end at Washington County Fairgrounds in Brenham. The October program will focus on Native Grasses and Prairie Restoration. Registration is $10.00 per person and includes refreshments and educational materials.

The final program in the 2011 series and will take place on **Friday, November 18th**, and will focus on Livestock Production for Small Acreage. The program will include a tour of a local cow calf and stocker cattle operation and a goat operation. The program will begin at the Columbus High School at 1:30 p.m. Registration is $10.00 per person and includes refreshments, your educational materials and a catered meal.

The Multi County New Landowner Educational Series is open to anyone that wants to attend, but it specifically targets new landowners in the Austin, Colorado, Fayette and Washington County areas. For additional information contact the Washington County office of Texas AgriLife Extension Service at (979) 277-6212.

ROCKY CREEK WMA FALL MEETING
Tuesday, November 1, 2011, Rocky Creek VFD on Longpoint Road
Social @ 6:30 PM - Hamburgers, chips and drinks @ 7:00PM
RSVP BY TUESDAY, OCT. 25, 2011 to John Anderson @ (979)289-0041 or sjanders@airmail.net

TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST TRAINING COURSE 2012
The Gideon Lincecum Chapter is starting a new training class from February to May of 2012. The fee for training is $150 per person or $250 for couples sharing materials. To learn more about Texas Master Naturalist™ visit http://txmn.org or you can visit our chapter web site at http://txmn.org/glc. For questions about the program or to join, please contact Outreach Coordinator, Judy Deaton at 936-878-9900 or email judith_deaton@yahoo.com.

Eastern Fence Lizard (*Sceloporus undulatus*)

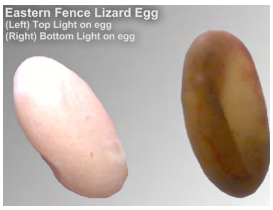
The eastern fence lizard is a medium-sized species of lizard found along forest edges, rock piles, and rotting logs or stumps from the Mid-Atlantic states to Texas. They are sometimes referred to as the prairie lizard, fence swift, or gray lizard.

Fence lizards are diurnal, and spend much of their time basking. Their diet consists of insects and spiders. When surprised, they often will dash for a nearby tree, climb up a short distance, and then hide on the opposite side of the trunk, moving around to stay on the opposite side if approached.

The eastern fence lizard ranges from New Jersey south to central Florida, and west into northern Mexico, Kansas, Utah, and Texas. There are isolated populations outside this range in Missouri, southeastern New York, and Pennsylvania.

The eastern fence lizard can grow from 4 to 7.25 inches long. It is typically colored in shades of gray or brown, and has keeled scales, with a dark line running along the rear of the thigh. A female is usually gray and has a series of dark, wavy lines across her back. They closely resemble the western fence lizard, but differ slightly in coloration and live in a different area and habitat.

Eastern fence lizards mate in spring, and lay three to 16 eggs in late spring or early summer. The young hatch in summer and fall.



Washington County Wildlife Society
1305 E. Blue Bell Rd., Brenham, Texas 77833
Telephone 979-277-6212 Fax 979-277-6223
www.wcwildlife.org