

THE SOUTH TEXAS QUARTERLY

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NEW QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

-DUSTIN WINDSOR

Hello Cooperators, Conservation Agencies, and other conservation-minded organizations. This is the inaugural issue of a quarterly newsletter designed to reach out to landowners, hunters, wildlife management associations, and many others in South Texas.

The primary goal of this newsletter is improve Texas Parks and Wildlife's communication with those intimately involved in land stewardship. With planned publication dates of March 1st, June 1st, September 1st, and December 1st, we hope to provide you with relevant information for habitat management practices, hunting and fishing reports, upcoming deadlines (for MLDP), and other outdoor news and information.

Within the District, we recognize that many landowners face similar problems, encounter comparable management questions, and seek guidance involving the same concerns. Hopefully, this newsletter will arrive in your email

inbox in time to answer those questions or spark your interest in learning about land management options.

Your District 8 wildlife biologists (all 10 of us) will be contributing authors. Each of us has a unique perspective based on our areas of responsibilities, experience, and education. With this extensive knowledge, you can be assured that every article provides sound information that has been peer-reviewed and approved for distribution.

We will provide other articles detailing some of our job requirements that you may not be aware of, a little information about who we are, and give you an idea of what District 8 is all about (yes, there's more to it than the biggest deer in Texas).

As this newsletter is designed for you, feel free to contact your biologist with article requests and feedback. Thanks and happy reading!

GETTING TO KNOW D8 STAFF



Alan Cain - District Leader for South Texas.

I'm a transplant to South Texas; I grew up in North Texas around the Weatherford area. I received a B.S. in Wildlife Management from Texas Tech University (1994) and a M.S. in Range and Wildlife Science

from Texas A&M - Kingsville (1999). I've been lucky enough to be involved in a variety of projects since graduating from Texas Tech. I started my TPWD career as a private lands biologist near Houston, but moved back to South Texas as a regulatory biologist covering Atascosa, Bexar, Karnes, Wilson, and Medina Counties. Currently, I serve as the district leader for the South Texas Wildlife District based out of the district office in Pleasanton. When not stuck in the office, I'm particularly interested in deer management, native plants and habitat management. Not to mention working with a number of exceptional TPWD cooperators where I learn as much from them as they may learn from me. On a personal note, my wife Tracy and I have been married for fourteen years and have a 6 year old son Montgomery. Some of my interests include fishing, hunting elk and other big game in the western states and taking Tracy and Montgomery turkey hunting.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

- ASHTON HUTCHINS

Shredding or mowing is a long standing and heavily used management practice across South Texas. Shredding can be used as a tool to manage wildlife habitat, and also to manipulate heavy stands of improved grasses for hay and cattle production. Shredding is also a fairly inexpensive management practice.

Shredding is a good way to maintain roads, fence lines, and fire breaks. When used under the premise of general ranch maintenance in South Texas, landowners mow roads, fence lines, and fire breaks to keep forb and grass cover low reducing the risk of wildfire.

Shredding is often used by cattle/grass managers to enhance spring grass production, especially with exotic grasses such as buffelgrass and coastal bermuda. This management activity deposits dead material at the soil surface serving

as fertilizer, and allows for these grasses to reach maximum production potential for cattle and hay production.

Under the premise of wildlife management, shredding may be used a little differently. A wildlife manager can use shredding at the beginning of the fall to knock down dead grasses and forbs to disperse seed and open up areas for fall weed production. This style of manipulation uses shredding much like a high-intensity, low-frequency grazing operation. It allows for spring production of wildlife across the range, followed by biomass removal after the growing season. When used like this, it should not be applied to the whole range, only a portion. This may be as high as 25 percent of open country per year. Also it is important to note, no shredding may be necessary if production is low, such as during drought years.



Typical shredding rig.
Picture taken from Google Images.

COMMON QUESTIONS AND MYTHS

- DUSTIN WINDSOR

When is the South Texas Fawning Season?

Gestation for a white-tailed deer is 187-212 days (approximately 7 months). Basically, a doe bred on January 1st, is expected to give birth around August 1st. As the rut is extended, fawning season begins to spread out. During the rut, a doe will come into heat for approximately 24 hours. If not bred, she can cycle again in 3-4 weeks. Does will cycle multiple times in order to maximize the chance of breeding. Another factor that could extend fawning season is if a doe fawn or yearling is bred. Doe fawns and yearlings usually come into estrus later than adult

does, thereby having fawns later in the season.

When do Fawns Lose Their Spots?

A fawn's spots are key to early life survival. These spots help camouflage the fawn until it is strong enough to follow its mother on a regular basis. Typically, spots begin to fade around 12 weeks of age, and will be imperceptible about a month later. With trail cameras and incidental observations, you can use this information to estimate when your fawns were born.

"As the rut is extended, fawning season begins to spread out."

NEWS AND POLICY UPDATES

- ALAN CAIN

The TPWD Commission recently adopted changes to the Deer Management Permit (DMP). The popular DMP program landowners to capture wild white-tailed deer and place them in a pen to improve breeding success of particular bucks. Up to 20 does and 1 buck may be placed in a DMP pen and must be released each year. During the recent TPWD commission meeting there were some changes adopted that affect facility (pen) standards and release date.

Changes to the facility standards state that all DMP pens must be between 5 and 100 acres in size *and* must have 50,000 sq. ft. of cover in the form of natural vegetation. Current DMP permit holders should note that this change does not take effect until September 2011. Anyone who has a DMP permit for this upcoming 2010 season will be exempt from the new facility standards as long as that permit is renewed each year. However, should the permit holder let the DMP permit lapse even one year that permit holder will be required to ad-

here to the newly adopted changes in facility standards.

A second change to the DMP permit concerns release dates of white-tailed deer from the pens. Before changes were adopted DMP permit holder were required to release deer in DMP pens no later than August 31 of the current permit year. TPWD states that all deer must be released from a DMP facility on a date intended to be 45 days prior to the capture deadline of the subsequent permit year. In other words, DMP permit holders in South Texas could hold deer until October 30 because the capture deadline is December 14th for South Texas. Current DMP permit holders should note this rule takes effect immediately. So deer currently held under the authority of a DMP can be released after August 31st of this year. Current DMP permit holders should receive amended permits in the next few weeks.

Should you have questions call your cooperating TPWD biologist or find your local TPWD biologist at http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/technical_guidance/biologists/

TPWD JOB SPOTLIGHT

- DUSTIN WINDSOR

From June 1st through August 15th, D8 becomes focused on doves. Early mornings are spent performing survey counts on mourning and white-winged doves. When not counting doves, we are putting leg bands on trapped dove.

The surveys help monitor population trends and estimate populations. Leg bands provide annual survival rates through hunting season, estimates on harvest mortality, and allow population modeling. All this information is used to monitor the state's adaptive harvest management strategy. Basically, the bag limit is influenced by the quality and quantity of data collected.

Speaking of quantity, your D8 biologists have a banding quota (on top of the surveys). We hope to band 350 mourning dove (15.5% of the state total) and 7,850 white-winged dove (62% of the state total). As for the quality of data, we do our part as best we can; however, leg bands that are not reported influence that quality. **If you do any dove hunting at all, check the bird's right leg for a silver band.** If you find one, follow the instructions in reporting it – if not, then that's not one of the nearly 15,000 banded birds (this year alone).

This part of the job can be a lot of work, but as a responsible state agency, we are burdened with the conservation of all wild-

life. Texas alone is responsible for 30% of all mourning dove harvests in the United States. If you narrow that spectrum, two-thirds of the central U.S. harvest happens right here at home. White-winged dove distribution is changing annually, and through surveys and bands, we can stay on top of their movement.

We'll end with a little trivia. The research has been ongoing for several years and has produced some amazing information. For example: the oldest mourning dove known was harvested at 5 years old; the farthest mourning dove harvest from band location was over 785 miles; the oldest white-winged was 6 years old at harvest; and finally, the white-winged harvested farthest from the banding location travelled over 1,285 miles.



Juvenile dove freshly banded in 2007

KNOW YOUR DISTRICT

- DUSTIN WINDSOR

"Roughly the size of Indiana, District 8 is home to diverse habitats, threatened and endangered species, and, annually, some of the biggest deer harvested in Texas."

Texas Parks and Wildlife's District 8 is known as the South Texas District. D8 is responsible for helping manage the habitat and wildlife found in 30 south Texas counties.

With a field staff of 10 biologists (with a district leader, technical guidance biologist, and a wildlife diversity biologist also available), D8 covers over 35,300 square miles (22.6 million acres) of the state. Roughly the size of Indiana, District 8 is home to diverse habitats, threatened and endangered species, and, annually, some of the biggest deer harvested in Texas.

We are also home to abundant northern bob-

white quail, the endangered ocelot, the collared peccary (javelina), and numerous feral hogs. South Texas is also host to many song birds, dove, duck, predators, and prey.

Within our boundaries lay 3 wildlife management areas and at least 10 state parks. As field staff, our jobs range from deer management to mountain nuisance calls to urban interface issues.

District 8, from our leadership to our field staff, is constantly striving to better serve those interested in finding out that its true: Life's Better Outside®.

SOUTH TEXAS PLANTS

- DUSTIN WINDSOR

Granjeno, also known as spiny hackberry, is a key browse species for wildlife in South Texas. Utilized by white-tailed deer, a variety of birds, and the seasonal snout butterfly, this evergreen shrub can be found in a variety of soils and habitat types.

This species has paired thorns, zig-zagging branches, and produces small orange berries. The dark green leaves are quite unique in that they have toothed or serrated edges.

Trying to track a deer through granjeno

proves to be tough, as the plant provides dense and relentless thorns. This cover is great for staying out of sight, but a significant contribution is in the nutrient quality. Depending on the season, granjeno offers between 15% and 31% protein for deer.

This high nutrient content makes this plant a First Choice on the deer browse preference list. As biologists, when granjeno is present, it makes a good indicator of deer browse pressure.



Granjeno leaves, stems, and fruit. Image from Google Images

TEXAS PARKS &
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Questions, Comments, and
Suggestions are always welcome.

Email your biologist or call the Main
Office to submit your ideas.



TEXAS BRIGADES

Contributions by Robert Brumbaugh and Daniel Haverlah

With fewer and fewer young people becoming or staying involved in activities such as fishing and hunting, how will we keep the traditions alive? Who will be the ones to educate our next generations about wildlife management? Well, a non-profit organization known as the Texas Brigades has been fulfilling those needs for over a decade now!

What is it? The Texas Brigades is a wildlife leadership development program for high school students ages 13-17. There are four different residential camps: Bobwhite Brigade, Buckskin Brigade, Feathered Forces, and Bass Brigade. Each camp is 5 days of intense, interactive, fun learning from top wildlife and natural resource professionals from around the state. Subjects covered include everything from biology, ecology, and botany, to photography journalism, firearm safety, fishing, communication, critical-thinking, team building, and leadership.

What is the cost? \$300 includes a polo shirt, great food, a place to sleep, new friends, supplies, and a wealth of knowledge over the 5 days of camp. Top cadets even have the opportunity to earn scholarships.

The Texas Brigades is a 501(c)(3) organization whose partners include: Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas Cooperative Extension, USDA-NRCS, Texas Wildlife Association,

On the web at: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/>

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Mission Statement

To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations

TPWD Wildlife Division Mission Statement

To foster on-the-ground conservation of diverse native wildlife and their habitats through sound science and land stewardship for the benefit of the resource and our hunting and outdoor heritage

Wildlife Division Statement of Values

The Wildlife Division is passionate about wildlife and proud of our commitment to provide excellent service with integrity, teamwork, and determination

the Mellon Foundation and numerous private contributors.

The Texas Brigades' mission is to empower high school youth with the knowledge and skills to become ambassadors for conservation in order to ensure a sustained wildlife and fisheries legacy for future generations here in Texas and beyond.

For more information and to apply to a camp, visit www.TexasBrigades.com, or contact Helen Holdsworth at 1-800-Tex-Wild or H-Holdsworth@Texas-Wildlife.org.

