

WASHINGTON COUNTY
Wildlife
Society

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www.wcwildlife.org



NEWSLETTER

Winter 2011

WCWS Annual Meeting

January 21, 2011

Washington County Fairgrounds—Events Center

Election of Officers

Followed by **Conservation Education** Presentation

Featured speakers are **Helen Holdsworth**, Executive Director Texas Brigades, Vice President of Conservation Legacy for TWA (Texas Wildlife Association), and **Allison Bentke**, Brenham ISD 8th grade science teacher involved in a unique and challenging detailed study of the Texas white-tailed deer utilizing the L.A.N.D.S. (Learning Across New Dimensions in Science) model.

Social will begin at 6:00 pm with a stew dinner served at 7:00 pm.
There will be no charge for the meal.

A dessert table will be available if you would like to share your favorite dessert.

If you have not done so already, this would be a great opportunity to **RENEW your Wildlife Society membership for 2011! Renew online at www.wcwildlife.org**

Classroom Conservation

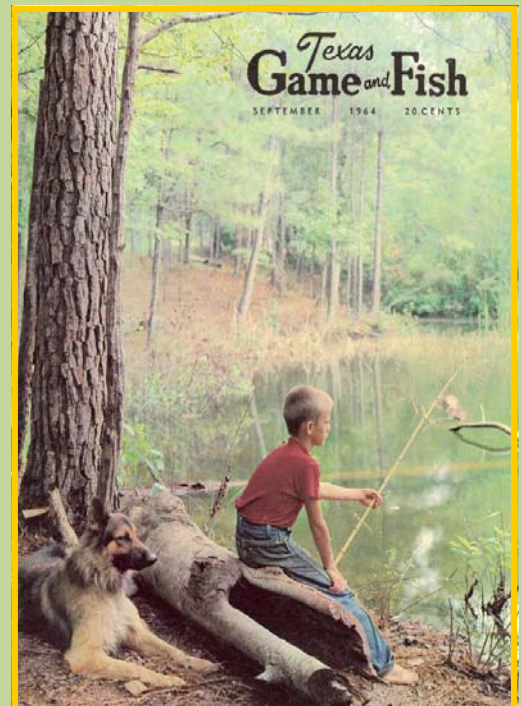
Reprinted from Texas Game and Fish Magazine, September 1964

YOUNGSTERS should be the concern of all adults at this time of the year. It's the beginning of another school term—a chance for them to gain in wisdom and knowledge for the years ahead. Learning should be the objective of all youngsters as they return to the classrooms. Students need the inspiration and encouragement of adults, but they should not wait for it or use the lack of it as an excuse for not trying.

Those to whom the natural resources belong should never shy from an opportunity to learn something that will help them be better stewards of these treasures. All the people can claim ownership, so the outdoors with all its varied creatures is everyone's house to keep.

More and more, conservation education is being worked into the classrooms. Certainly, it cannot consume all the hours and minutes that are set aside for learning. But it should receive a fair allotment of this time.

The Texas Education Agency soon will make available to our public schools, "A Guide to the Teaching of Conservation in Science and Social Studies for the Elementary and Secondary Schools of Texas." It will describe the nature and importance of our State's natural resources and



(Continued on page 2)

WASHINGTON COUNTY Wildlife Society

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This newsletter printed entirely on recycled paper

President's Remarks

Several months ago, Ann and I were going through some of our parent's belongings when we came across a September 1964 issue of "Texas Game and Fish." I couldn't resist flipping through the pages to reminisce about times gone by. Reading the Editor's column really hit home some 46 years later, "Classroom Conservation". We decided to include it in this newsletter's Winter edition.

Conservation Education in the classroom is as important an issue now as it was in 1964 and we need to continue to support the programs that are focused on perpetuating that dream.. Nurturing a child's sense of wonder with nature is the key to promoting better understanding, greater respect and responsible care for our resources. Today's dedicated teachers are doing this on their own. Wildlife organizations, like WCWS along with Texas Parks and Wildlife and ArgiLife Extension Service, are promoting conservation education through their volunteer programs. So with all of that in mind we thought it a natural fit to have our annual meeting speakers. Helen Holdsworth and Allison Bentke explain how such "conservation consciousness" is happening right here, right now in Washington County.

Lastly as my volunteer WCWS presidency comes to an end I would like to thank the current board of directors plus the WMA directors for their help and guidance over these past two years. I know the upcoming elected board will continue toward our mission to enhance and preserve wildlife as well as quality of life in Washington County.

Richard Thames, President 2009-2010

Classroom Conservation *(Continued from page 1)*

point up the need for their conservation, as stated in the foreword. The introduction of this long-needed guide states, "Schools must lay the groundwork for proper feelings, appreciations, and attitudes toward our State and Nation's resources. This can be done through conservation education by (1) teaching the scientific nature of each of our resources, (2) showing how each individual depends upon his natural environment, and (3) developing the know-how to actively practice conservation."

Many of us realize and admit the seriousness of this conservation business. But, too many take too lightly the very small world we have reserved for dependent outdoor creatures. It's time Texans meet the facts head on, and look beneath the surface where the real truth lies. And, the time is ripe for us to stress again to the youth of this state the importance of conservation by letting them, too, have facts that will cause them to be serious when they discuss the future of our renewable and non-renewable resources.

Young children need to be told in a language they understand and, yet, the idea of responsibility, their responsibility, even as youngsters to all wild and natural things must not be omitted. We need to encourage every child to become "conservation conscious."

Much can be done outside the schools by parents and groups whose objectives directly or indirectly involve the outdoors.

THE EDITOR
(Curtis Carpenter)

Washington County Co-op 2010 Deer Report

By Stephanie Damron, Texas Parks & Wildlife

A big thanks goes out to all of the individuals who spent time recording their incidental sightings for deer in Washington County. The 2010 data set shows that co-op members identified and recorded a total of 4,235 deer resulting in 929 bucks, 2,096 does, and 1,210 fawns. This calculates to an amazing 1 buck per 2.2 does and a county average of 58% fawn survival rate. The 58% fawn survival rate is up 26% from last year's low of 32% fawn survival rate. As seen in CHART 1 the fawn survival rate continues to stay on an upward trend. Rocky Creek WMA reported the highest rate within the county with 69% of their fawns surviving this year. SEE CHART 2

The results of this survey demonstrate that the efforts of co-op members and others are having a positive impact on the deer herd. There is a direct correlation between high fawn survival

rates and the deer population increasing within the county. Without replacement fawns a deer population will not increase. It is very important to provide adequate fawning cover and proper nutrition during the fawning period to keep the fawn survival rates up.

I want to say a special thanks to the members who sent in daytime sightings, this valuable data can reflect the overall health of the herd and assist in making recommendations to benefit the deer population within the county.

Keep up the good work and feel free to call if you have any questions:

Stephanie Damron
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
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Chart 1

**Washington County Percent Fawns
All WMA's Combined 1996-2010**

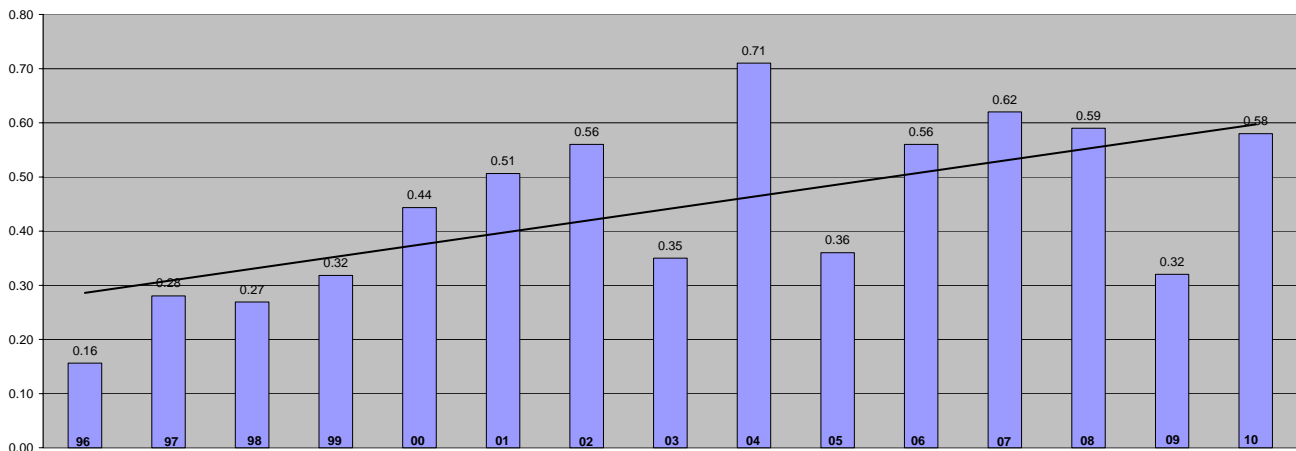
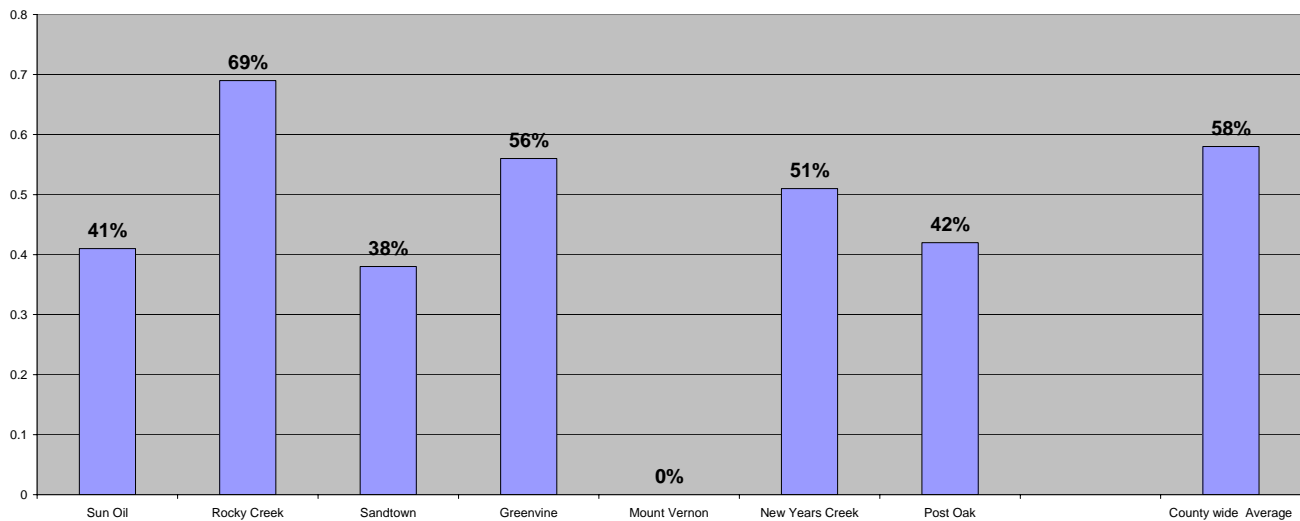


Chart 2

WMA's 2010 PERCENT FAWN SURVIVAL RATE



August Evening Safari

by Judy Deaton, Post Oak WMA Director



We passed a sweltering day having the abandoned barn swallow nests, mud dauber cubbies and orb weaver cobwebs pressure washed from the house in readiness for the coming autumn activities - this yearly chore accomplished without knowing that in the evening we were in for a treat that would live up to all the expat experiences we had crammed in during our time abroad.

We went on a Washington County Safari.

"Spotlighting tonight"... "What time?"... "8pm."... "We'd better go. Give the pup some peanut butter in a Kong."

A straight shot down Highway 105 had us arriving just as our valiant leader, Stephanie Damron, TPWD biologist and mentor for the County's wildlife-challenged, was wrestling a large plank into the back of her pick up. Bolted on to the plank, two excellent marine folding seats perched precariously atop looking for the world like a recycling mistake from a cinema renovation. A kind donation from Waldo Nienstedt.

There followed a discussion on how best to orient and clamp them across the truck bed the result of which was something that looked like an outtake from a decades old African adventure film. Large orange electric lines running from the 12 volt car battery powered the apparent stage lights with which we were to sweep the countryside in our mission to account for the Post Oak deer and other living things. Papers were produced for us to sign and the formalities were done.

Our expedition was joined by a new graduate of TAMU, Kelly, who was to spot ground dwellers, record data, ride shotgun or all of the above. We dutifully climbed into the bed of the truck naively sporting a flashlight and binoculars, keen to go. And go was the operative word. It has been 45 years since we caught bugs in our teeth squealing to the beach in an open vehicle. I stared at my iphone and feigned busy when people wondered why we were thusly arranged.

60 MPH later we arrived at our beginning destination for the Spotlighting Experience.

The sun was drifting off for the night and a glabrous moon competed with a single star. We dutifully scrambled

up into the seats wondering if our girths would dislodge anything. This was a mistake for we immediately turned into those squealing seaside adolescents playing with the equipment until a stern voice told us not to spot houses and such. Chastened we rose to the task and began in earnest.

Crawling the byways through hedgerows and past streams, we reported happily "eyes".

"Cattle"... "Eyes!"... "Donkeys"... "Stop, back up, back up!"... "Unidentifiable brown critter"... "What's that?"... "Deer!"

And the count began.

It was like a safari. Cruising on high along the hedgerows that parted as a barn owl lifted off, flew in front of our truck and up into a live oak. A bit of a ham, he remained on stage under the floodlights until his audience moved on. Jackrabbits perked up amongst the cows, raccoons peered in wonder at the voracious creature preying on the night, and a very dark skunk waddled indifferently in the gloaming.

"Stop!"... "Two does, a buck and one, no two, one... is that a yearling? OK, two does, a buck and two fawns."

"Aww isn't it sweet how they stay still when we put the beam on them?", "Is that a deer in the headlights joke?"

"Wait, backup backup. Behind that tree. A bit more, A bit more. There" OH WOW. One two three fawns, two buck, and um..... 15..18 in all. So that's a buck is it?"

Three counts later and three attempts to use the binoculars by crossing the beams.....

"Got it" and we're off again in a cloud of road dust.

Just when we were really beginning to get with the program, Stephanie quietly pulled over and the GPS ended all our fun. Spider webs in our matted hair and a large brown insect dealt with as we settled back down in the truck bed, we felt like kids again as highway 390 slipped by.

The kitchen was thankfully intact when we got home at nearly midnight to let the dogs out. End of September we're dusting off the peanut butter Kong again unless the second Safari is booked up.



There's a new Game Warden in Town...

Washington County Game Warden **Eddie Hines** began his career in May of 1991 when he was assigned to Conroe, Montgomery County. Warden Hines worked Montgomery County for eight years then transferred to Fannin County in north Texas where he worked for eleven years. Now he has the opportunity to get closer to home and transferred to Washington County. Warden Hines looks forward to working here, getting to know the people of Washington County and helping them any way he can. He can be reached at 979-412-3140.

Feral Hogs



Texas has the largest feral hog population in the country. Estimates range from 1 to 3 million. Nobody knows for sure, because there just is not an accurate way to count them. Feral hogs have been in Texas for over 200 years, but have recently increased dramatically. Feral hogs now occur in 24 states in the U.S. and have spread from 462 counties in 1988 to 1,042 counties in 2004, an increase of 125% in 16 years. Feral hogs cause a huge economic impact on agricultural and property damage. Some of the types of damage include crop depredation, spreading disease to livestock, rooting that causes loss of hay production and damage to farm equipment and loss of livestock and wildlife feed.

Feral hogs are difficult to control because they, 1) reproduce quickly, 2) can live just about anywhere, and 3) are highly mobile. Females can breed as young as 6 months and produce up to 5 litters in a two year period. The gestation period is 115 days and litters average 6 piglets, but can range from 4 to 12.

In Texas it is legal to shoot, trap, snare or catch pigs with dogs and it can all be done day or night. You need to have a valid hunting license and have permission from the landowner. However, if the pigs are doing damage to your property and you are the landowner or acting agent for the property you can harvest without a license.

For this part of the state, trapping is probably the single most effective method of removing hogs. There is no hope of eliminating them completely. Unfortunately, they are here to stay, but their numbers can be greatly reduced along with the damage they do. Trapping correctly is the key to success. Most hogs travel in large family groups, so the objective should be to catch all the pigs in the herd, called a sounder, at one time. Using small traps makes catching the whole sounder much less likely and risks educating the pigs that did not get captured. Small box traps are less expensive and are easy to haul and relocate, but are not the best tool for the job if reducing hog numbers on a large scale is the objective. If you only have a few hogs the will work fine.

A large corral type trap made with up to 10, 5 foot tall utility panels using 4 x 4 inch mesh with a solidly built trap door increases the odds of reducing hog numbers locally. No matter what type of trap you use, pre-baiting your trap is the key to having more success. When pre-baiting, take as much time as necessary to get the entire sounder comfortably entering the trap.

The more pigs you have in your area the larger your trap should be. In a larger trap, more hogs will feel comfortable entering. Also, a group of hogs are less likely to panic and go crashing through the corral walls if they have room to move away from you. Your trigger needs to far enough away from the gate and set in a way that all the pigs have time to enter the trap before the first pig to the bait can trigger the gate to close.

Baiting: Corn is as good as anything for baiting hogs. There are dozens of recipes for soured corn with sugar, yeast, and raspberry or strawberry jello. Depending on the size of your trap, you can place a feeder inside your trap to further reduce the number of trips you have to make to the trap to pre-bait. A five gallon bucket feeder would work fine and is cheap. Placing corn in a piece of 4" diameter perforated PVC sewer pipe with a cap on each end will slow down raccoons and crows from eating your bait. Burying corn in post holes is another way to keep bait in the trap longer and keeps soured corn from drying out.

Justification for the expense: Pigs can die very quickly in the heat without shade or water, so once you set a trap you must check it every morning. Using a large corral trap and pre-baiting can greatly reduce the amount of time you spend checking on traps compared to the number of hogs captured. If you are selling the trapped hogs, you will also have more hogs per trip. This saves time and gas. This trap may cost you more money up front, but you should make up the difference quickly in time and miles driven.

Remember, if you are planning on selling pigs you catch, you need to be able to get a trailer to the trap in all weather. So consider that when setting up the trap.

Feral hogs are a growing problem, but if enough landowners in an area trap smart their numbers can be greatly reduced.

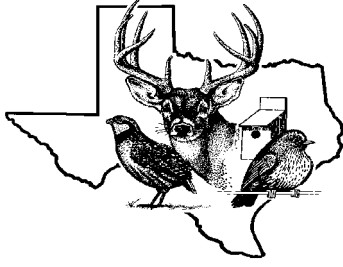
Outdoor Burning in Washington County

By Crim Croft, Carmine VFD

Outdoor Burning is prohibited when a "Burn Ban" is in effect. What does it mean when a burn Ban is in effect? No open fires, i.e. brush piles, pasture burns or campfires. When the burn ban is **NOT** in effect, Washington County Outdoor Burning Guidelines suggest the following rules should be considered:

- ◆ Burning may only be conducted when wind direction is such that smoke will not adversely affect any public road, landing strip, navigable water, or off-site structure used for human residence or business, the containment of livestock, or the housing of sensitive live vegetation.
- ◆ Burning must be attended to by a responsible party while the fire is progressing.
- ◆ Burning may only be conducted when wind speed is 23 mph or less.

Remember you are responsible for all damages done by a fire started on your property that goes off your property. Call or drive by your fire department to find out if a burn ban is in effect, which has flags out and highway signs. Remember to support your volunteer fire department; they are here to help you 24/7.



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Nine-Banded Armadillo (*Dasypos novemcinctus Linnaeus*)

About the size of a small dog, the armadillo may be found throughout Texas except for the Trans-Pecos region of far West Texas. It's body is covered with bony shell which acts like armor to protect the animal from predators. Armadillos have powerful claws for digging up their dinner, mostly insects and their larvae. They also dig burrows in which to den.

Because they have virtually no hair to help them regulate their body temperature, armadillos will forage for food in the cool of summer evenings and on warm winter afternoons. They make a great deal of noise while foraging for insects and are fairly easy to sneak up on. When surprised they will leap straight up in the air which acts to startle any attacker while the armadillo scurries off to a safe den. Female armadillos give birth in spring and they always produce 4 identical quadruplets which are born fully formed with their eyes open. The armadillo has a particularly interesting method for crossing water. Its heavy armor shell causes it to sink. When faced with a narrow stream or a water filled ditch, the armadillo will simply walk across the bottom, under water. However, when up against a wider body of water, the armadillo will swallow enough air to inflate its stomach to twice its normal size. This increased buoyancy then allows the armadillo to swim across. Afterwards, it takes the armadillo several hours to release all the excess air from its body. The armadillo is the only animal, aside from humans, known to carry leprosy. For this reason it is illegal to sell a live armadillo in the State of Texas. The armadillo was designated the official small state mammal by the 74th Legislature.



Photo © TPW/D