

WASHINGTON COUNTY
**Wildlife
Society**

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www.wcwildlife.org



NEWSLETTER

Fall 2009

**WCWS Participates in 5th Annual
Youth Firearm Safety and Shooting Event**

The Washington County Wildlife Society, the Washington County Peace Officers Association along with Texas Parks and Wildlife hosted their annual youth firearms safety and shooting event. 63 students from local high schools and middle schools involved in wildlife and agriculture classes in Brenham, Burton and Carmine/Round Top were invited to come out for a fun, safe, hands-on educational opportunity.



The event took place at Nail's Creek State Park and was produced by surrounding State Biologists, Game Warden, Washington County Peace Officers, Nail's Creek Park staff and Washington County Wildlife Society volunteers. The objective of the event was to educate students about hunter ethics and safety and give them the opportunity to shoot different types of firearms and bows. The students were placed in small groups and rotated through eight stations where they received one-on-one instruction from trained persons.



Some of the stations included: hunter ethics and safety trail, archery, shotgun, .22 pistol, .22 rifle, black powder rifle, and center-fire rifle. The students enjoyed a picnic lunch provided by the Washington County Wildlife Society. The weather was perfect and the event was a lot of fun, it is a great venue for the Washington County Peace Officers and others to spend time with our young adults; it has become established as an annual event so anyone interested in helping next year please volunteer.



Additional thanks are credited to Lee County Wildlife Association. Special thanks to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation for providing a grant to purchase equipment which allow our local youth to gain knowledge that will help them enjoy the outdoors safely and ethically in years to come.

**Washington County Wildlife Society
Annual Meeting
January 16, 2010
at Camp for All**

Save the Date!

More details will be mailed to you so look for our brown postcard sometime in December.

(To update your address, please call Gael at 979-836-5258 or email her at gullywiatt@gmail.com)



WASHINGTON COUNTY Wildlife Society

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 This Newsletter printed entirely on recycled paper.

President's Remarks

The cooler breezes of fall have arrived... none too soon! It is a wonderful time to go outside and be part of the wild-life universe, to be in tuned with nature so to speak.

Our semi-annual dinner was held last August 22nd. 220 members, family and friends joined in for an informative evening on wildlife tracking given by TPWD biologist Greg Pleasant. A special thanks to everyone who helped with planning, setting up and clean up afterwards and most importantly the caterer Ricky Mantey and the members who provided the delicious dessert enjoyed by all.

WCWS was glad to be part of several local groups that joined to sponsor the 1st Annual - South Central Texas Water Conservation Conference titled "What Are We Gonna Do When the Well Runs Dry? - Planning for the Future". WCWS is looking forward to participating in the conference sequel next year.

I would like to welcome 24 new members to our Society so far this year. A special recognition to **Dr. Henry Boehm, Jr. and his wife Teddy** of Mount Vernon WMA who became our newest **Lifetime** Members!

The Society would like to express our thanks this year for the always increasing knowledge, guidance and support that we receive from our advisors: Larry Pierce, Washington County Extension Agent, and Stephanie Damron, Texas Parks & Wildlife Biologist for Washington and Waller counties.

Richard Thames,

WCWS President 2009



WCWS Now Has Office Hours!

Change is in the air and we're working to grow our support for landowner education in Washington County. We have a new Office Secretary, Gael Burke, who will take over the membership database, as well as keep in communication via emails, mailings and phone contact with the membership. Gael and her husband Brian have been members in the Greenvine Co-op since 2008.

Gael will set up shop in the kitchen at the Washington County Extension Office every **Tuesday afternoon from 1p.m. to 4p.m.** Members can reach her by calling 979-277-6212 or emailing her at gullywiatt@gmail.com.

Drop by and meet Gael and let her know if you've had a recent address change, wish to pay your dues, or just chat about the Wildlife Society.

Brush Piles for Wildlife

By Stephanie Damron, TPWD Biologist

Many wildlife species, including birds and small mammals, require adequate resting and escape cover for survival. If living brush or natural cover is not readily available, artificial brush piles can be created to serve this purpose. Artificially created brush piles can be especially beneficial in areas where natural cover is limited such as in agricultural areas, prairies, and open rangelands. The benefits of brush piles for wildlife include concealment from predators, protection from the elements, and as a place where seeds may germinate and lead to plant growth and establishment.

It is best to construct brush piles during the winter, or outside of the growing season. Creating brush piles goes hand in hand with clearing or thinning brush. Good brush piles need sturdy bases in order to hold up over time. Stones, old fence posts, oak wood, and other rot-resistant trees make durable bases. Tree limbs, small trees and shrubs of almost any species can be used as filler material. This is a great way to recycle your old Christmas trees, although be sure to remove tinsel and other decorations first. Caution is advised in selecting your filler tree species. Do not use noxious or invasive trees such as Chinese tallow or chinaberry which can drop seeds at the site and exacerbate the spread of such undesirable species. Yaupon, mesquite, and eastern red cedar are often targeted for brush control and are great materials for constructing brush piles in this area.

Brush pile designs vary. The teepee shape is a common design, with the largest materials forming the base, topped with layers of smaller limbs and branches. The base materials should include limbs that are approximately 6-inches or greater in diameter to create entrance holes at ground level for quick escape, while providing adequate support to prevent the stack from settling and rotting too quickly. Another common design involves constructing A-frames from scrap lumber or other sturdy materials to serve as a support for stacking brush materials. Lumber can be wired and nailed together (6 to 8-ft wide by 8-20-ft high) to create the A-frame, and then cross braces can be added at various heights along the frame. Brush is then piled against the frame on both sides and in layers within the frame, providing nesting and roosting sites at both ground level and at various heights above ground. This layering effect adds to the diversity of use of the pile, allowing it to serve a greater variety of species. Brush piles can also be created along fencerows, which can serve as the base for stacking brush. Brush piles should not be created by bulldozer since soil often makes up the majority of the base, eliminating essential escape entrances at ground level.



The ideal locations for creating brush piles are in areas that are lacking suitable close-to-the-ground cover, such as open fields, fence corners, clearings, or forest with limited shrubs or bunch grasses. Brush piles can help encourage use of food plots planted for birds or small mammals by providing quick access to escape cover while feeding. The optimum distance between brush piles is 200-300 feet, but can vary according to target species and surrounding habitat.

Brush piles should last 3-5 years, but some can last for more than 10 years. Brush piles do require periodic inspection and will need to be refurbished over time with new limbs and branches. Annual inspection is recommended, and spring and summer are ideal times to add new material to pre-existing piles. Once a brush pile has lost its functional value, it should be removed by burning and should be replaced with a new brush pile.



First Texas Geocache Challenge Debuts Nov. 1

A new program at 12 Texas state parks aims to use technology to draw visitors into the outdoors. The Texas Geocache Challenge will run from Nov. 1 through Jan. 31, 2010, challenging state park visitors to use Global Positioning System technology to find a cache of hidden rewards in each park.

Participating central and southeast central parks are Bastrop, Buescher, Government Canyon, Guadalupe River, Huntsville, Lake Somerville-Birch Creek, Lake Somerville-Nails Creek, Lockhart, McKinney Falls, Monument Hill-Kreische Brewery, Palmetto and Washington-on-the-Brazos.

Participants can download a Texas Geocache Passport, as well as the coordinates of each of the caches, from the TPWD website: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/geocaching/>. In each of the 12 parks a hidden box will contain small prizes, information about the park, a logbook for cachers to record their visit, and a paper punch unique to the park. Geocachers can use their GPS units to find the containers and then use the punch to mark their passports to verify their visit.

Managing for Songbirds and Small Mammals

By Stephanie Damron, TPWD Biologist

Managing habitat for nongame wildlife species is an important land management activity for many landowners in Washington County. As the quality and quantity of habitat for wildlife continues to diminish in many areas of Texas, proper management of smaller land holdings becomes increasingly important. Resident and migratory wildlife species are dependent on quality habitat for survival and reproduction. Without the conscious effort on the part of landowners to manage their land and wildlife habitat, wildlife populations may be displaced or their numbers diminished. This article discusses a variety of management practices and concepts that can be used to improve and enhance habitat for songbirds, small mammals and other wildlife species commonly found in this part of Texas.

Plant diversity is an important component of good wildlife habitat. Habitats with a variety of plants (annual and perennial, herbaceous and woody) that produce different cover types and foods throughout the year have greater habitability than those that do not. Habitats dominated by relatively few plant species are less likely to support high populations of wildlife. Native plants that produce fruits, nuts, seeds, berries, buds, foliage and nectar during different seasons of the year are important to wildlife. The greater the variety – the better the habitat.

Deciduous plants provide cover, shelter, nesting sites and abundant food sources during the warm seasons but lose their leaves during winter months. Landscapes dominated by deciduous vegetation may become less habitable for many wildlife species after leaf drop in the fall and late winter when protection from the elements and predators diminishes. Evergreen or **non-deciduous** plants found in Washington County such as eastern red cedar, and liveoak provide year around cover, protection, and nesting sites. Habitat containing both deciduous and non-deciduous plants is a desirable characteristic of good wildlife habitat. Habitat should contain varying degrees of shape, heights, and density of vegetation to meet the needs of different wildlife species. Tall trees restrict sunlight from reaching the ground and can be thinned for openings created to stimulate growth of understory shrubs and other herbaceous vegetation. Areas of vegetation with irregular borders increase the amount of edge (transition zones between openings and brush that is referred to as “**edge effect**”) and are used by many wildlife species to access feeding areas where insects, seeds and other food sources are available near escape cover. Some species of Neotropical songbirds, however, prefer dense woodlands. Islands of trees, vines and brush with thick vegetation growing from the ground level upwards into the lower limbs of the trees provides excellent habitat for many bird species. “**Corridors**” of cover that provide lanes for wildlife to travel and reduce their exposure to predators should connect these areas. Dead trees often contain cavities or loose bark where insects hide or burrow into wood. These “**snags**” are important to many birds and small mammals for den and nest sites and food sources. Woodpeckers (downy, ladder-backed or red-bellied woodpeckers), flickers,

wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, bluebirds, titmice, flycatchers, screech owls, squirrels, lizards, and many other species use these snags. Several species of bats roost in interior cavities of snags or under loose bark. Another method of developing cover is the construction of **brush piles**. The benefits of brush piles for wildlife include concealment from predators, protection from the elements, and as a place where seeds may germinate and lead to plant growth and establishment.

Water is important to wildlife and good wildlife habitat should contain water sources that are available throughout the year. This source of water can be in the form of ponds, creeks, or other natural or man-made depressions developed on natural drainages of the land or made available by creative development. Animals are attracted to running or dripping water. Water should be piped to small ground level structures that provide easy access for birds and small mammals. Water depth is important to many wildlife species such as small mammals, birds, turtles, amphibians and insects (butterflies). Shallow water with sloping shorelines or edges with a portion of the area free of heavy vegetation will provide access for a variety of wildlife species.

The use of prescribed burning is a tool that can be used to help regenerate and restore meadows and prairies that are important habitats for many ground nesting birds and small mammals. Many species of wildlife prefer low to mid-stages of **plant succession**. Plant succession is the natural process of recolonization of disturbed soil sites by plants. Annual weeds and grasses are the first plants that normally reappear and over time are replaced by perennial weeds and grasses or woody species adapted to the area (climax plant communities). Land management practices that set back climax plant communities and replace some of the climax species with other annual and perennial species may result in enhanced habitat for wildlife. Use of management tools such as grazing, fire, herbicides and soil disturbance by mowing, plowing or disking can be used to achieve lower stages of plant succession without planting new species.

Disking is the one of the most cost-effective tools available to landowners for promoting foods for wildlife. Disking promotes germination and growth of native seeds existing in the natural seed bank in the soil. Winter disking should be conducted in strips adjacent to or near existing brush or cover such as brush lines, fencerows, or around thickets or other dense vegetation cover types. Avoid disking on slopes or terrain that may cause soil erosion.

So What Does a “Posted, No Trespassing” Sign Mean?

By Brian Burke, WCWS Member

It means that without your permission, no one (except law enforcement and emergency service personnel) can legally enter your land.

Poachers hunted on our land frequently last year during dove season. Since then we installed a WCWS/Greenvine sign at our entry gate. The poachers didn't use our gate, and I wondered if it could help this year to also install signs along boundary fences which do not front the public road. After looking into it, I learned:

- Property fences or agricultural crops should be enough to exclude trespassers, but unambiguous signs can be more effective.
- Trespassing with no firearm is usually a Class B or C misdemeanor. With a “deadly weapon” it's likely a Class A misdemeanor. (Class A & Class B involve fines and possible incarceration; Class C involves a fine).
- If a trespasser does not leave after you instruct him to, call the Sheriff's Office at (979) 277-6251, or 911 for emergencies.
- For general calls about poachers, call Operation Game Thief at (800) 792-4273.
- If poachers are actively hunting, call the Sheriff's Office at (979) 277-6251. We are fortunate here in Washington County because the Sheriff and Game Warden coordinate responses to urgent calls through the county dispatcher. The Deputy or Game Warden who is closest will respond, so if the situation is urgent it's best to call the Sheriff.
- Signs labeled “Private Property, No Trespassing” are very clear, but are not the only notification that is valid in Texas. Purple paint marks also provide legal warning. Purple paint marks intended as warnings must be (at least) eight inches in vertical height, one inch in width, clearly visible to intruders, and spaced no farther apart than every 100 feet in woods or 1,000 feet in open areas. Examples of paint mark surfaces include fence posts, trees and other natural features.

This year, I'm going to post more signs around our land, be more visible during hunting season, and hope for the best.



Fall Migration in the Brazos Valley

By Darrell Vollert

The Brazos Valley is in the midst of a transition period with bird migration. By late October most of our nesting neotropical migrants have headed south to their wintering grounds. Native bird species which nest as far north as Alaska and in the Canadian provinces and the northern tier of states are arriving in the area to overwinter. Bird species will continue to migrate into the area until early December.

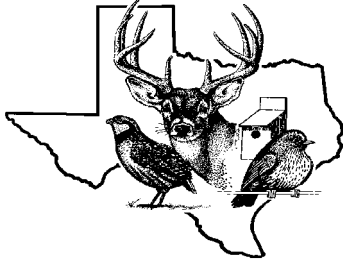
Washington County provides critical winter habitat for a number of bird species. At the end of September Savannah Sparrows begin arriving in the area. This species prefers open habitat such as native grasslands and hay meadows. They often perch on fences. Eastern Phoebes and American Kestrels arrive in September and October and perch on fences and powerlines. They replace Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, which are mostly gone by late October. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Flicker, House Wren, and Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglet arrive in the Brazos Valley in October.

November brings skeins of Snow, Canada, and Cackling Geese. The bugling calls of Sandhill Cranes can be heard in the November skies over the Brazos Valley. Late November brings American Goldfinch and Cedar Waxwing to our yards. Some winter seasons we are fortunate to have an invasion of finches. Pine Siskin and Purple Finch arrive in the area in December during these invasion winters. They will visit feeding stations with goldfinches. During the winter season of 2008-09 we had an invasion of Pine Siskins. I had upwards to two dozen siskins visiting my sunflower seed feeders (they also like thistle seed). Pine Siskins were observed all the way down to the Lower Rio Grande Valley last winter. Five years ago Texas experienced a major invasion of Purple Finches. Four Purple Finches arrived in my yard in December and stayed into March. It was a real treat to see these colorful birds, as they do not visit Texas as often as they once did. Purple Finch is a species in decline due to loss of habitat and competition by their cousin, the House Finch.

Bird species are always moving about throughout the year in Texas. It is what makes birding fun in this great state of ours.

Darrell Vollert has nature tours scheduled for Saturday, November 21st at Lake Somerville and the Sam Houston National Forest on Saturday, December 5th. Contact Darrell by e-mail at dvollert1967@yahoo.com or phone at 979-251-4986 for details on these tours. Visit his website at:

www.DarrellVollertNatureTours.com. The Gibbons Creek Christmas Bird Count in Grimes County will be held on Tuesday, December 29th. Darrell is the compiler for this bird count and volunteers of all skill levels are needed to assist with the count. Novice birders will be placed in territories with experi-



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BEFORE DAWN

Poem by Laura Quinn Guidry
(Member Sandtown Co-op)

The voices of the coyotes come,
not from the deep woods now,
but from the fence line.
Unless the wind deceives, carrying
their sharp barks and giddy trills closer.
The hour is morning, although still dark.

In another hour, light will rise
over the open range.
Cold air will contain the whistles
of titmice and churrs of house wrens,
the distant cawing of crows
and lowing of cattle.

Wind will have scattered
the night's wails.

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Texas Poetry Calendar 2007

Coyote (*Canis latrans*)

The Coyote is very similar in size to a small German Shepherd and weighs an average of 25 to 40 pounds. It has long, slender legs, a bushy tail with a black tip, and large ears that are held erect. The Coyote's coat can vary, but it is usually gray or buff-colored. The Coyote is a strong swimmer. It characteristically runs with its tail down instead of horizontally like foxes, or up like wolves and dogs.

The Coyote is an extremely intelligent animal with keen senses of hearing, sight and smell. It primarily is nocturnal and very opportunistic. They feed primarily on rabbits, rodents and insects, but they also eat carrion, lizards, snakes, fruit, vegetable matter and even fish.



TPWD © Bill Reaves

Coyotes are considered monogamous, with pairs remaining together for several years, although not necessarily for life. They breed from mid-January to early March. Coyotes normally live from 10 to 12 years.

The adaptability of the Coyote and its acute sense of survival make it difficult to identify preferred habitat, although they most typically are associated with open plains in the West and brushy areas in the East.