

WASHINGTON COUNTY  
**Wildlife**  
**Society**

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**NEWSLETTER**

**Spring 2008**

## **Managing Native Vegetation for Deer Forage**

**By Robert Lehmann, Wildlife Biologist**

One of the most common questions biologist hear is, what do I need to plant for deer? Most hunters are familiar with all the commercial types of forage available for food plots as well as the old standbys such as oats and wheat for winter and cowpeas for the summer. While food plots can be a beneficial management tool for supplementing deer forage, they do have disadvantages. The largest disadvantage being that during droughty years when the deer need the forage the most, the food plots are likely dead. On the flip side, during wet years, the food plots are growing great but there is so much native vegetation, the plots are not utilized much. The solution, manage what is all ready their, the native vegetation. How often have you seen it so dry the greenbriers died?

Before managing your native vegetation for deer forage, a basic understanding of deer diet is required. Deer are very much like goats and sheep. Deer prefer forbs (weeds) and tender browse (twigs and stems) during the growing season and turn more to mast (acorns) and browse during fall and winter. Common browse species that rank high in deer diets include honeysuckle, greenbrier, rattan vine, hackberry, blackberry, poison ivy, Virginia creeper, and American beautyberry. Deer eat very little, if any, grass. If you have seen deer foraging in bermuda grass pastures, they were likely foraging on small weeds.

There are several methods to manage native vegetation for increased production, these include setting aside buffers, discing, and fertilization. Buffers should be established around pasture edges, woodlands, and roadsides by halting mowing and herbicide spraying. Simply designate areas adjacent to woodlands and pasture edges at least 30 feet wide. These areas should be mowed on a 3 year schedule by mowing 1/3 of the buffer annually. Do not mow the entire

buffer every third year! By mowing 1/3 annually, there will be 3 different stages of vegetative growth for the deer. All three stages will supply ideal forage. These areas are also excellent for fawning cover for deer and nesting cover for many species of wildlife. A 30 foot buffer would be a good start, but the wider, the better. A buffer 600 feet long and 30 feet wide would cover 0.4 acres.

Discing is another very simple way to create forbs which are utilized as deer forage. Early winter (December and January) discing creates forbs the following spring and summer. Ideal areas would be along fencerows that you do not want to grow up in brush. This method would allow access for upkeep of fence lines as well as deer forage. If discing fence-lines, disc one side in the winter, the other in the spring. Other suitable areas would include random strips throughout pastures and woodlands. Ideally, you would not disc the same piece of ground every year.

Lastly, fertilization of native forage can be beneficial and cost effective. The areas that you left as buffers, could be fertilized during spring and summer to increase protein, palatability, and utilization. Target areas with greenbriers, honeysuckle, and small saplings. Different methods can be implemented, the first method would be to apply a time release fertilizer in early spring and then again towards mid summer. The second method would be to apply a balanced fertilizer every 45-60 days from early spring through summer. Finally, do not forget the trees. Target large oaks with large canopies throughout the property and apply fertilizers formulated for trees. This should increase the mast production on these target trees. By following these simple steps, you should have an adequate supply of forage year-round.

If you would like to contact your local biologist, see our website at; <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/wildlifebiologist>.



Photos by Robert Lehmann

WASHINGTON COUNTY

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## President's Remarks

I hope you have had a good Spring and are enjoying the beautiful wildflowers. It is time to start thinking about those summer food plots for quail and deer and gear up for warmer weather.



Let me gently remind you to renew your WCWS membership for 2008 if you haven't already done so. WCWS needs your funding to continue supporting the youth brigades in our county as well as other worthy projects that will benefit us all in one way or another. This year we were proud to help financially with the burn trailer that will be made available to all WCWS members. Be sure to take advantage of the burn workshop scheduled for May 2 so you can learn how to safely burn on your property and then use this awesome trailer equipped with everything you need to conduct a prescribed burn.

I would like to encourage you to attend your individual Co-op meetings. Your directors and vice-directors have worked hard to bring you interesting and informative programs to help you manage the wildlife on your property. Our next semi-annual meeting will be held on August 22, 2008 at the Washington County Event Center. Our featured speaker is Robert Lehmann who will be retiring at the end of August after 30 years as our TPW Biologist. He will speak on the changes he has seen in wildlife and wildlife habitat over the past 30 years in Washington County.

I hope to see you there.

*Sara Byman*

President, Washington County Wildlife Society

*Share your photos of Wildlife In Washington County*



*Email your favorite snapshot to us at  
info@wcvwildlife.org and we may publish  
them in upcoming newsletters. See featured  
picture on page 4 of this newsletter.*

## Prescribed Burning for Wildlife and Ranching

By Dave Redden, WCWS Vice Director—New Years Creek

**F**ire has always been a part of the Texas landscape. Before European settlers arrived in the 1800s, it was one of the main factors in determining the plant life on our prairies. Fires caused by lightning and native Americans, either accidentally or on purpose, kept the prairies abundant with tall grasses and few trees. Bison herds wandered the plains and thrived on the grasses, but moved on to the greener areas when they had depleted an area. The native Americans followed the bison and lived off them. The system worked well and was self-sustaining. When the European settlers arrived, they were not interested in following wandering bison herds. They wanted their own piece of land and want permanent homes. They wanted their cattle to stay on their place, so they needed fences. The house, fences, and cattle were not compatible with range fires, so fires were suppressed and the culture of fire as a tool to improve the land diminished.

For many years, the productivity of the land was measured by the number of cattle it could support. The key to increasing productivity was to find grasses that would respond to fertilizers and apply those fertilizers at the most economical rate. Grasses were introduced from Africa and the Caribbean and other parts of the world. The system worked and we fed the world with beef.

In today's economy, fertilizers are increasingly expensive. Water is expensive and may be less available due to climate changes. The overall profitability of ranching is questionable for many who see land as a source of recreation or development potential instead of farming and ranching. Water and air quality are as important issues in today's society as the quality of beef produced.

One tool that was around earlier and is re-gaining popularity is fire. The careful use of planned fire, or "prescribed fire," can improve forage for farm animals, increase production of native grasses that require less water and fertilizer than imported grasses, and can stimulate habitat and food for wildlife. Further, prescribed fires can reduce the risk of wildfires by removing fuel (tall grass and brush) in fields that may be set on fire accidentally with no one there to oversee the fire until emergency personnel arrive. Burning under supervision is safer than burning accidentally. If you think you may have an application for the use of fire in your ranching operation, a group of your neighbors has formed a support group of others who feel the same way and are willing to help you. The group is the South Central Texas Prescribed Burn Co-op. This is currently an informal group of landowners and interested partners who will help each other with tools and expertise in using this technique. The group is working with NRCS and other state organizations to prepare safe burn plans and train its members. You are welcome to join. All that is required is an e-mail address so that you can be informed of upcoming burns and training events.

A special training program will be conducted May 2 at the Bleiberville VFD. See agenda on the back page of this newsletter. You are welcome to attend this meeting even if you are not interested in being in the Co-op. Please contact Dave Redden at [dredde@mssblue.net](mailto:dredde@mssblue.net) (or tel.: 979-218-0493 in Washington) or Jim Hluchan at [james.hluchan@tx.usda.gov](mailto:james.hluchan@tx.usda.gov) (tel.: 979-865-3139 in Bellville) if you would like to attend.

## Members in the News

### TPWD's Private Lands Advisory Board Names New Chairmen

Dr. Bill Eikenhorst, a native of Brenham and a WCWS member since 2001, will help head the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Private Lands Advisory Board. This influential advisory board is charged with advising the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department on matters pertaining to wildlife programs, management, and research of private lands. Eikenhorst has served as an Executive Committee Member, Regional Chairman and Membership Chairman with the Texas Wildlife Association. In addition, he is a Texas Wildlife Association Foundation Trustee and has been a driving force in the Texas Brigades Program, an intensive conservation leadership program for high school students. Advisory Board duties include providing input to TPW Commission Chairman and staff on development and implementation of priorities in management, research, regulations, and habitat improvements. The Board also provides guidance and assistance in education and communications with various constituent groups and individuals interested in private land resources in Texas.

## Quail Surveys to Run in Greenvine Area

**F**or the second year a roadside Quail Call Count will be conducted in the Greenvine area. Volunteers from the local Texas Master Naturalist group will get out early along three selected routes to listen for Bob-white males calling. The volunteers will be making five minute stops at each mile interval of their 12 mile long route.

Last year volunteers heard a couple of quail at several stops along the way but for the most part not many quail were heard in the area. These surveys are an important part in evaluating the surviving population of quail and to document future efforts to re-establish quail in the Greenvine area. If you hear quail calling in your area please give TPWD Robert Lehmann a call and let him know. (979)277-6292.



### Check It Out:

A Wild Quail Habitat Management DVD is available through the Washington County Extension Office. This 30 minute course explains quail and their habitat requirements. It is setup like a teaching tool that has a short quiz at the end to see how much you have learned. Call Robert Lehmann or the extension office to check it out.

## The Texas Brigades Wildlife Leadership Camps

**T**he Texas Brigades Education and Youth Leadership Development Program has recently been recognized for outstanding accomplishment in youth development. Dr. Dale Rollins, Extension wildlife specialist at San Angelo, and the Brigades' originator, said the program teaches high school youth about wildlife, fisheries, habitat conservation, and land and water stewardship. Rollins said cadets also practice team-building, communication, and leadership skills to enable them to fulfill their mission of becoming ambassadors for conservation and to ensure a sustained wildlife and fisheries legacy for future generations.

There are six camps in the Brigades program; two Bobwhite Brigades, two Buckskin Brigades, one Bass Brigade and one Feathered Forces. They are held in six different locations across Texas during June and July.

The Brigades have educated more than 1,100 young people over the past 13 years. These youths have conducted educational programs and projects for more than 160,000 people and have earned two national and four state awards for excellence. They have also been featured in many newspaper, magazine and television stories. Six Brigade graduates have earned recognition as "Youth Conservationist of the Year" from the Sportsman Conservationists of Texas.

For more information about the Brigades or to donate, contact Helen Holdsworth, Executive Director, at (800) 839-9453 or (210) 826-2904 or log on to: [www.texasbrigades.org](http://www.texasbrigades.org).

**"Tell me, I forget"  
Show me, I remember  
Involve me, I understand."**

**~Anonymous**

# The Spectacle of Spring Migration in the Central Brazos Valley©

By Darrell Vollert, Chappell Hill, Texas

The Central Brazos Valley provides very important stopover and foraging habitat for migratory birds. Hundreds of thousands of neotropical migrants use the Brazos River corridor each spring and fall. Texas is situated in the path of two migratory flyways: the Central Flyway and the Mississippi Flyway. The Central Brazos Valley is situated in the path of the Central Flyway. The peak for spring migration in the Central Brazos Valley occurs during the last two weeks of April and the first week of May. A late season cold front associated with rain in the Central Brazos Valley could ground a large number of migrants.

Nearctic-Neotropical Migrants are bird species which breed in the temperate zone and winter in Latin America. There are 338 species listed as Nearctic-Neotropical migrants, of which 333 have been recorded in Texas. Nearctic-Neotropical species include raptors, shorebirds, cuckoos, swifts, hummingbirds, flycatchers, vireos, swallows, thrushes, wood warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks, buntings, and orioles. These birds are among the most colorful birds in North America.

Trans-Gulf migration is a 600-1,000 mile flight across the Gulf of Mexico starting from as far south as northern South America and the Yucatan Peninsula. Neotropical migrants time their northward migration to coincide with the emergence of insects from their winter slumber in the temperate zone. Our hackberry, pecan, elm, and oak trees have an abundance of caterpillars, which the migrants feed on. Preparation for Trans-Gulf migration begins two to three weeks before neotropical migrants take flight. Birds gorge on high

energy insects, fruits, and seeds almost 24/7 to increase fat reserves for the trip across the Gulf of Mexico. Many species develop larger flight muscles for the trip across the gulf.

Songbirds exhibit *zugunruhe*, or "migratory restlessness" shortly before migration. This includes a rapid fluttering of the wings and facing in the appropriate direction for migration.



Swainson's Warbler  
Photo by Kristi Graham

Migrating at night allows birds to fly in cooler, more stable winds. Trans-Gulf migrants begin their migration north shortly after sunset. Migrants take flight across the gulf singly or in small, loose flocks. Migrants navigate at night using the North Star as a compass. Migrants also use the Earth's magnetic field, waterways and other landmarks for navigation.

The optimal time to look for neotropical migrants is in the morning and evening. The birds are actively foraging and singing during this time. On a good day as many as 20 species of wood warblers can be observed in the Central Brazos Valley during the peak of spring migration.

Several species of neotropical migrants spend the summer months in the Central Brazos Valley to nest and perpetuate the existence of each individual species.

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Darrell will lead a trip to the Navasota Bottoms on May 3rd, East Texas Nesting Warblers tour on Memorial Day weekend, and a bird banding workshop on June 14th. Information about these events are on his website: [www.DarrellVollertNatureTours.com](http://www.DarrellVollertNatureTours.com).