

WASHINGTON COUNTY

Wildlife Society

1305 E. Blue Bell Rd., Brenham, Texas 77833

Telephone 979-277-6212 Fax 979-277-6223 www.wcwildlife.org**SKILL BUILDER: FOOD PLOT PRIMER**

Learn about your soil and select plants carefully to attract deer and other wildlife.

By Russell A. Graves

For hunters and wildlife managers, food plots are all the rage. With an increased interest in wildlife management, private-land food plots are popping up everywhere. Popular with deer hunters, food plots provide a source of nutrition that deer corn from feeders cannot. Food plots aren't just for deer and deer hunters, though. When planted both in the spring and fall, food plots provide a year-round nutritional source for deer, turkeys and other wildlife.

Pick a Spot

"If you are hunting over a food plot, plant an area relatively smaller than forage plots and near bedding areas and travel corridors," says Rans Thomas, head wildlife biologist for Tecomate Wildlife Systems, a land management consulting company. "Plots planted just for forage should be three or more acres and located in the heart of your land tract."

When picking a location, find a spot that's relatively flat to curb erosion but one that isn't so flat that drainage is a problem. Besides topography, it helps to do a little scouting and find out where the animals you want to attract will likely be during the course of a normal day and plan your location accordingly.

Plant Smart

Plants are not created equal. In fact, plant varieties are developed and

marketed according to growing season and planting zone. Since different plants grow best in different climates, it's best



to research and determine which plant varieties work best in your part of Texas.

According to Thomas, planting food plots in a compatible soil type is an important consideration. "For perennial plots I look for moist, rich bottomland soils surrounded by large trees to shade the plots during the hot, dry summer months," Thomas advises. He says to plant food plots in soil types conducive to productive agricultural crops. Therefore, he looks for sites lean on sandy soils, preferring instead to plant in areas with loam and clay soils.

Tend the Soil

One of the most elemental practices to ensure a successful food plot is a soil test. Soil testing helps identify any nutritional deficiencies present and provides guidance on how to fertilize.

Since dumping just any fertilizer blend on a crop is inefficient as well as potentially harmful, start with a soil test.

A basic soil test tells you the amount of the three key nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium) present in the soil as well as the soil's pH and gives recommendations on fertilizer blends and how to remediate any deficiencies. More advanced soil tests give you a breakdown of the macronutrients present in the soil and the soil's organic matter.

You can buy do-it-yourself soil test kits, but an easier and more accurate way to test is to contact your local Texas AgriLife Extension agent for instructions on how to collect samples and where to send them. In a few days, you'll get a copy of your test results with instructions on how to fertilize and correct the pH in your food plot.

Thomas advises the would-be food plot farmer to do plenty of research. "All of the information you need for successful food plots is available either online or from local crop and forage specialists. Don't be fooled by a picture of a big buck on the front of the bag or a snazzy product name. The United States Department of Agriculture requires every bag of seed to have a contents list on the bag. So read the list to find out what's in the bag to see if it suits your needs."

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This Newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

It's a beautiful Spring day, and I want to go outdoors and watch wildlife!

Our WCWS mission is to "enhance and conserve wildlife in the county through landowner education and support of local Wildlife Management Associations (WMAs) to improve the quality of life in Washington County." In pursuit of this goal your Society officers and directors try to organize interesting and useful experiences. Activities we plan for 2011 include:

- More outdoor WMA meetings and demonstrations.
- Periodically cleaning two miles of FM 1948 and FM 1155 (please see the Adopt-A-Highway article in this Newsletter).
- Various activities to encourage and support community youth (please see that article, too).
- Communicate with each other on Facebook, which is a project just starting.

We want to know what's on your mind, activities you want, how we can help you, how you want to help the Society, and everything else.

Dues for 2011 are \$15 which can be paid at our website <http://wcwildlife.org> or by mail or delivery to Texas AgriLife Extension office (see **RESOURCE CONTACTS** at left). Many members pay dues without the printed payment envelopes, so to save money they were not sent to everyone this time. We're being careful with our 2011 budget, which will be explained more fully during the WCWS Summer meeting.

"Welcome!" to new WCWS members and our continuing thanks to former Society leaders. Gael and I hope you have a wonderful Spring. Please contact me anytime for any reason.

Brian Burke,
 President 2011



SAVE THE DATE!
 3rd Annual
 South Central Texas Water Conference
 Saturday, September 24, 2011
 Washington County Fairgrounds and Pavilion
 More information coming soon!



Honey Bee: Honeybees live year round, their size ranging from ½" to ¾". They can be observed as a giant swarm migrating, or as 5 to 20 buzzing around an eave, chimney, or other structural openings. New honeybee swarms consist of 4,000 to 6,000 bees. An active hive generally has 10,000 to 50,000 bees and 20 to 80 lbs of honey. Respectively, there is no such thing as a small hive. Honeybees have barbed stingers, if a bee stings a person or an animal, the bee will lose its stinger and die. The average life span of a single honeybee is about 6 weeks in the summer and 4 months in the winter.



Bumble Bee: Found living in nests of 15 to 100 in cavities in the ground, under sheds, or other random places usually low to the ground. Bumblebees are seasonal, after summer only the queen survives, starting a new colony in the spring. They are known to defend their hive very aggressively and can sting multiple times. Like many types of bees, the bumble bee species is declining.



Carpenter Bee: Male carpenter bees are solid black, they also cannot sting. The females are tan in color and sting quite well. Carpenter bees are sometimes mistaken for bumblebees, however carpenter bees are shiny with less hair. Their flight is faster than a bumblebee's, and is also a more jerky flight, very similar to a hummingbird. Carpenter bees are solitary bees burrowing holes the size of a dime or penny into wood patio covers, eaves, and other places. Average size is one inch in length.

HOPE FOR POLLINATORS

By Stephanie Damron, TPWD

Pollinators are crucial for our survival, yet pollinator populations are plummeting in the United States, affecting the foods we eat and the lives we live. For example, the number of commercially managed honey bee colonies in the U. S. has declined from 5.9 million in the 1940's to 2.7 million in 1995 and less now. Commercial honey bees are needed to pollinate one-third of the approximately 130 agricultural crops grown in the U. S., a service valued at \$14.6 billion annually. Texas crops benefited from pollinators include tomatoes, berries, alfalfa, soybeans, cotton, rice, and many other vegetables and fruit. Worldwide, of the estimated 1,330 plants grown for food, beverages, fibers, spices, and medicines, seventy five percent (approximately 1,000) are pollinated by animals (bees, flies, bats, wasps, beetles, birds, butterflies, and moths). The National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) calculates that 1 out of every 3 mouthfuls of food we eat, and beverages we drink, are delivered to us by pollinators.

Worldwide, pollinators are in trouble. Destruction or alteration of habitat removes vital food and shelter sources. Management of habitats to discourage insect populations affects pollinators. Pesticide use has doubled in North America since 1960. Insecticides kill pollinators while herbicides remove potential food sources. Yet there is hope for pollinators – YOU!

As a landowner you can help pollinators living and working your land. There are over 500 native species of bees in Texas, not to mention all the native pollinating flies, beetles, butterflies, moths, and hummingbirds. Conserving pollinators might be as simple as rethinking your routine. Reconsider the idea that "weeds" have no place on your land. Many of those milkweeds, thistles, and other native

flowers and forbs provide nectar and nesting sites for pollinators all through the year. Treat those "weedy" plants as "pollinator plants" rather than weeds. Allow pollinator plants to grow at field boundaries, turning corners, along fence lines, in buffer strips, riparian zones, or in designated areas. Encourage wild-flowers to bloom and set seed before cutting pastures or fields for hay. Avoid the use of pesticides when crops are in bloom and being utilized by pollinating insects. Target specific problem areas, rather than using broad-based sprays. Set aside herbicide-free zones to allow foraging by pollinators.

You can actively plant for pollinators too. In small fields, plant different crops that provide nectar-rich blooms in every season. Or grow flower/herb gardens to promote pollinator abundance and diversity. Choose native plant species that have been unaltered. Avoid horticulturally improved plants, especially 'double' blooms, or flowers with very little nectar, such as roses, marigolds, mums, begonias, and others. Good pollinator plants include: asters, milkweeds, coreopsis, coneflowers, sunflowers, verbenas, liatris, phlox, bee balm, penstemons, herbs, native honeysuckles, hawthorns, plums, sumacs, lantanas, turk's cap, goldenrods, clovers, soybeans, peas, and more. Try not to spray water on flower blooms in the heat of the day to provide as much nectar for pollinators as possible.

Once you've started conserving pollinators on your own land, encourage your neighbors and work with wildlife management associations to spread the word and share successful techniques. And take the time to get down at eye level with your pollinators. Observe your insects and other pollinators, identify them, and continue learning about the species that share your land. You might just be amazed at what you find!

WCWS ADOPTED TWO HIGHWAYS

The Adopt-A-Highway Program is a Texas original. It started here in 1985 and has spread to 48 other states and six foreign countries. Participants are permitted to work in state road right-of-way to clean litter as a way to enhance their communities.

WCWS signs mark each end of 2 mile segments we clean along FM 1155 and FM 1948. We cleaned them twice so far, and continue until Summer next year. We chose FM 1155 at Washington-on-the-Brazos to beautify the drive near this unique and historically important county site. We chose FM 1948 between Rocky Creek State Park and Yegua Creek State Park because of high traffic (plus litter) and significant wildlife presence there.

The cleanups involve work, but we've also



had fun. I'm now much better acquainted with the Society members who volunteered, and share friendships with them more completely. We found cash (\$5), a man's watch, a left glove (just in time, I lost my left one before starting that day), the apparent center of the beer can universe and enough lotto tickets to cover Kansas.

We've removed 65 large bags of unsightly and non-biodegradable material from community roadways. I know others join me in sincerely thanking the intrepid volunteers to date:

Bill and Judy Deaton, Richard Thames, John Anderson, Debbie and Jon Wellmann, Devin and Erica Holum, Gene Bishop, and Gael Burke.

Please contact Brian Burke (see RESOURCE CONTACTS on page 2) or send an email to info@wcwildlife.org if you want to be notified about a cleanup on each road this Summer.

<p>Bring Sunblock Bug repellent Gloves and a hat</p>	<h3>Highway Clean-up Calendar for 2011</h3>		<p>Provided Pick-up sticks Vests Bags</p>
	<p>FM 1155</p> <p>May 21 - 9:00 a.m.</p> <p>September 17 - 9:00 a.m.</p> <p>November 19 - 9:00 a.m.</p>	<p>FM 1948</p> <p>May 14 - 9:00 a.m.</p> <p>September 3 - 9:00 a.m.</p> <p>November 5 - 9:00 a.m.</p>	

YOUR WILDLIFE SOCIETY SUPPORTS YOUTH

Enhancing local wildlife and thereby improving overall quality of life in Washington County is the Society mission. This year we are particularly focusing on youth education, using wildlife as the foundation for many types of instruction and experience.

I hope you were able to attend the January 21st Society Winter Meeting. We heard interesting and encouraging presentations by two educators about successful public school programs in our county based on wildlife as the theme.

Allison Bentke, Brenham ISD 8th grade science teacher, explained about the Learning Across New Dimensions in Science (LANDS) program. It challenges 7th and 8th grade students to learn beyond textbook biology and math with lectures and hands-on experiences.

Helen Holdsworth, who is Executive Director for Texas Brigades and Vice President of Conservation Legacy for the

Texas Wildlife Association, explained about Texas Brigades. This program offers high school students intensive learning experiences using Texas wildlife as the theme.

Adult members of our county have been key advocates of both these excellent programs. In fact, much of the LANDS and Texas Brigades success is credited to some of our friends here. Your Washington County Wildlife Society 2011 officers and directors are intentionally becoming more involved with both programs. We are also trying to build closer ties with wildlife majors at the Blinn College Agriculture Department.

Jon Wellmann, a Sophomore at Brenham High School, has agreed to serve this year as the WCWS Youth Liaison. Jon is the first to serve in this new position, and we appreciate his involvement.

We will send emails to our members about opportunities to volunteer and help local youth.

TEXAS SNAKES

Texas snakes reside in every county of the state.

By Larry Pierce, Texas AgriLife Extension

There are many different kinds of snakes in Texas, but only rattlesnakes, copperheads, cottonmouths, and coral snakes are poisonous and should be avoided. Snakes are very specialized animals and have an important role in our environment. Most snakes are non-poisonous and help control rodent and insect populations. Like other reptiles, snakes are cold-blooded animals; their body temperature is regulated by climatic conditions. Snakes cannot tolerate extreme cold and will normally hibernate during the winter months, usually emerging from their dens in late February or early March. Snakes are most active at night and during early morning and late evening hours.

Most non-poisonous snakes cause little damage other than to frighten people. Occasionally, large snakes may feed on chicks, small ducks or eggs. In some cases, water snakes may damage fish farms by feeding on fish. The greatest danger to people is the possibility of being bitten by a poisonous snake. The best way to prevent snake bites is to learn how to recognize the poisonous ones and keep away from rocky or brushy areas where they are likely to be. One website that I have found useful for snake identification is the Herps of Texas site which can be found at <http://www.lifesci.utexas.edu/research/txherps>.

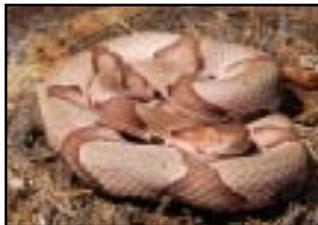
If the presence of snakes is undesirable, removing their shelter is one of the most effective ways of discouraging them. Eliminating rock piles, brush piles, tall grass, etc., will cause snakes to seek a more suitable habitat. Lumber, wood piles and other debris around the home should be stored at least 18 inches off the ground. Controlling insect and rodent populations in the area also will help to discourage snakes by eliminating their food supply.

The information provided in this article is taken from Extension publication L-1912, Snakes and Their Control, which can be found online at <https://agrilifebookstore.org> along with many other useful publications from Texas AgriLife Extension Service.

- Coral Snake



- Copperhead



- Cottonmouth



First Aid

First Aid for snake bites can prevent disability, disfigurement or death if it is applied effectively. The recommendations have changed drastically over the years, and remaining informed on effective first aid should be a priority of everyone working in snake habitat.

Assume envenomation has occurred even before symptoms appear.

Identify the species of venomous snake with care. This could help with the medical treatment but do not endanger yourself and become another victim.

- Keep the victim as calm as possible. Keep yourself calm as well.
- Know and treat for any symptoms of shock.
- Wash the bite area with a disinfectant soap.
- Remove restrictive clothing or jewelry in the area of the bite.
- Prevent movement of the bitten extremity.
- Get medical attention as soon as possible.
- Under no circumstances should you cut between the punctures, or suck the venom out or apply electric shock.



Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*)

Eastern Bluebirds are small birds, blue above with rusty throats and chests and white bellies. Males have much brighter, deeper colors than females.

Bluebird populations experienced an alarming decline starting in the 1930's. This was caused by loss of habitat, pesticides and competition for nesting sites by introduced house sparrows and starlings. Efforts by concerned citizens have resulted in an increase in the number of bluebirds through birdhouses and habitat improvements.

Male bluebirds usually arrive at their territories first and defend them vigorously against other male blue-birds. When courting, male bluebirds sing to, feed and preen females and show them

the nest sites that they have picked out. The females make the final decision on where they want to nest. They usually nest two or three times during a season. Young blue-birds are born naked, eyes closed, and helpless. They rely on their parents for warmth.

The bluebird's diet consists of insects and fruit. They catch insects on the ground or in low vegetation, usually swooping on them from a perch. Young bluebirds are able to fly two to three weeks after hatching. Young from the previous brood sometimes help raise the next batch of nestlings. Bluebirds often band together in groups of up to 100 during the winter. Bluebirds live an average of 2 years in the wild, but have been known to live up to 8 - 10 years.

They prefer open woodlands, roadsides, farmlands and orchards.

Bluebirds have long been thought to be a lucky sign by humans. This beautiful creature has long been considered the harbinger of spring and a symbol of happiness, love and hope.



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Please return sightings by July 1.

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Place
Stamp
Here

Stephanie Damron
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Feathers:

Males– Toms have iridescent red, green, copper, bronze and gold feathers.
Females– Hens have drab, usually brown or gray feathers.

Head:

Males– Toms have brightly colored, nearly featherless heads. During breeding season the color of their heads alternates between red, white and blue.

Females– A hens head is gray-blue and has some small feathers for camouflage.

Caruncles and Snoods– Both males and females have fleshy growths that hang over their heads known as caruncles. They also both have snoods, fleshy protuberances that hang over their bills and can be extended or contracted at will. The snood of an adult male is usually much larger than that of a female.

Beard:

Male– Males grow a cluster of long, hairlike feathers from the center of its chest. This cluster is known as the turkey's beard.

Females– Females can also have a beard, however it not very common.

Tail:

Male turkeys fan their tails when displaying to attract a mate. You can usually tell the difference between an adult male (a tom) and a juvenile male (a jake) turkey by looking at the tail. All tail feathers of adult males are the same length. The feathers forming the center of a jake's tail are usually longer than the rest