

Wildlife Society

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NEWSLETTER

Spring 2014

Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Water

By Larry Joe Doherty, Chair,
Lone Star Water Forum

We take life and water for granted, prize them the greatly, and literally give them away without charge when we think the cause is worthy. We are engaged in an epic struggle to resist giving life up to a drought that has visited Texas since before Gideon Lincecum got here. The difference this time is that there are more Texans. The suffering is more obvious. Our will to resist is magnified, stronger. Resources are stretched thinner. Water scarcity is getting personal, like life.

Our available freshwater supplies ALL come from the same source: rainwater. Condensate and/or conversion of salt water doesn't amount to a drop in the "Need" bucket. So, what ARE you going to do BEFORE the well runs dry? Catch the rain and keep it? How effective do you really think you can be at hoarding water? It won't stay in a lake or pond. Nature evaporates it. The drought has left a lot of ponds and tanks more dry than full. Perhaps the world's largest cistern could provide a partial answer. Then you've got to use it and/or make it potable, and hope the day never comes that the well does run dry. Heed the Boy Scout Motto "Be Prepared".

Einstein believed that "Those who have the privilege to know have the duty to act." None of us have a crystal ball regardless of how foreseeable the need. We all have the same need for a clean drink of water, too. Those who went to the 5 prior Lone Star Water Forums are better prepared to deal with solving the short-term problem than their neighbor who did not. In 2011 we explored new techniques available for fulfilling our role in water catchment that has been played out for centuries. Cisterns are a salvage plan that almost got lost in community water supply systems, urbanization and civilization. A conscious end to waste and pollution of potable water supplies might eliminate the risk of one day having to ration. That day is a closer prospect for Texans than ever before. What are our alternatives?

This year The Lone Star Water Forum will focus on "Solutions." So,

Save The Date: October 4, 2014. Exhibitors and speakers will be at the Fair Grounds in Washington County to explain what they think needs to be done. They will also take your questions. And, if you don't have a solution you might think of one. Net proceeds go to further BISD's Outdoor Classroom Program, plus this year BISD art students will vie for a \$500.00 scholarship given to the winner of the "Poster Art Contest." Sponsors and Exhibitors will also be recognized for being part of the SOLUTION.

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A Message from our President:

Welcome to Spring here in Washington County!

The landscape of blues, orange, pinks, purples and white are just so amazing. I know our out of town guests really like them as you drive down Hwy 290 and see all the cameras out capturing the beauty that is here. There is a lot to say about Washington County. A place of beauty but a place to call home and the people here in this community where they support each other.. What else can a person ask for?

The Washington County Wildlife Society has been very busy. The LANDS program for the 8th grade classes from Brenham ISD was one too been seen. My congrats go to Stephanie, Dr. Bill Eickenhorst, Blake Eickenhorst, Dr. Pete Wunderlich and the many many more volunteers that came out to help dissect the deer and then study the grasses, the bone structure, and the tracking of deer. Thanks to Doodle Johnston and his crew for the wonderful meal that was served to all the volunteers. And to the very well behaved youth that came out – I am very proud of you all.

If any of you get the Texas Trophy Hunter Magazine – Jan/Feb 2014– by chance did you see the article written by one of our own Brenham Brigade – Wyatt Hohlt. If not you can go to: Washingtoncotexasbrigades.blogspot.com. Great job!

Welcome to Dr. Bill Eickenhorst as my Vice President. It is a pleasure to work with him. The future of the Washington County Wildlife Society is looking brighter and brighter. Also congrats to him as he received the Washington County Friend of Conservation Award.

There are many events that you can be involved in so keep a watch out and come and join us!

Cindy Lyles



REMINDER:

**If you haven't done so already,
RENEW your Wildlife Society
Membership for 2014!**

Fawn Production and Abandoned Fawns

It is approaching that time of year when you should start seeing whitetails fawns popping up. An adult doe in excellent habitat will normally have 2 fawns in late spring. These fawns are typically kept some distance apart and are hidden in tall grass if available. Fawns have little scent and will remain hidden if supplied with sufficient milk. When they become 4 or 5 weeks old they will begin to follow the doe. Fawns are usually weaned between 4 and 6 months old.



Most doe fawns will reach 6 months of age while the rut is in progress. With adequate nutrition as many as two-thirds of the doe fawns have been known to breed. If bred, doe fawns usually have only one fawn. Under less than optimal conditions or where deer are competing heavily with livestock or other deer, less than 10% of doe fawns will breed and adult does often will have only one fawn.

The number of deer, quality of habitat, degree of livestock competition and weather are common factors in determining the health of a fawn. If these factors are not favorable the fawn will not be born healthy and the doe will not supply enough milk. The fawn then may succumb to exposure and disease, or wander from its hiding place and be killed by predators.

Because of poor habitat management that results in improper nutrition and lack of tall grass cover, fawn production in our area typically averages less than 40 %. In other words only 1 fawn is raised per 3 does. This low production is unnecessary. With proper habitat management, addressing the food and tall grass cover requirements, the fawn production can be increased to near 100%.

It is very important that during the time period when fawns are on the ground to keep an eye out for them on the road and when shredding or mowing hay. If it is possible, hold off shredding fields until mid-July to provide cover for does to hide their fawn's. If you find a fawn that is not injured and is not in imminent danger from something harming it, please leave them alone. Needlessly hundreds of fawns are taken to licensed rehabilitator each year that are not injured, but most likely "**kidnapped**" from their mothers. People presume their efforts are well meaning, but normally are misguided attempts to "save" a seemingly abandoned fawn. The truth is that for the first two weeks of a fawn's life the doe leaves her fawns hidden, returning every 2 to 12 hours to nurse them (when she feels it is safe to return).

If you find a fawn that is not injured or seems ill or dehydrated, just leave it alone the mother will return and feed it. Please share this information with other people in your community. Remember, a young animal's best chance for survival is with its natural parents who, better than anyone else, can ensure that it retains all of its natural faculties and behaviors for survival in the wild. If you have any questions or would like more information contact your local Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Biologist at <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/wildlifebiologist>



Brown-headed Cowbird: Pest or Unique Species?

Have you ever seen a cardinal feeding a small brown bird? If you have, you likely saw it feeding a brown-headed cowbird. The young cowbird was not willingly adopted by the cardinal, its eggs were laid in the cardinal nest and then the young cardinal eggs were removed by the mother cowbird. The cardinal unknowingly incubated the eggs and raised the cowbird young. This happens to tens of millions of unsuspecting songbirds each year.



Throughout North America songbird numbers are declining. While there is no one single reason for these declines, one major contributing factor is the spread of the brown-headed cowbird. These brown birds which are about 8 inches long were once limited to grasslands in the United States where they followed the herds of buffalo, feeding on the insects stirred up by the movement of herds as they moved from place to place. Buffalo herds were constantly on the move and they did not allow the cowbirds which were dependent on them to kick up food to develop a normal nesting territory as other birds. As a result, they developed the unique ability to lay their eggs in other birds nests (parasitize) while they kept up with the roving buffalo herds. Today, there are no roving buffalo herds, but there are stationary livestock herds everywhere and this highly adaptive bird has found a “gold mine” and has spread throughout North America. This is a problem because of the reproductive strategies the species employs. The cowbird is what is referred to as a brood parasite. This means the female lays her eggs in the nests of other birds, abandoning them to the care of foster parents. The foster birds unknowingly raise the cowbird chick to the detriment of their own young. Because the female cowbird can lay as many as 70 eggs per season, susceptible species such as cardinals and other songbirds can be severely impacted in areas with high cowbird numbers. Some species of birds are able to resist parasitism by cowbirds, but many are not. Those that are resistant tend to be the birds that evolved with cowbirds in the Great Plains. Cowbirds have been known to successfully parasitize more than 225 species of birds in the United States.

Those birds that have not evolved with cowbirds tend to be birds that are found in tree-covered, forested areas. The most common to be parasitized are small woodland songbirds. What is important to understand is that these parasitized nests are not *unsuccessful* nests just because no baby songbirds have been raised. They *are* successful nests. The problem is they are producing the wrong “product”. They are producing baby *cowbirds*, not baby *songbirds*.

Therefore, trapping of cowbirds to reduce their numbers becomes an important option to consider if we are to prevent some declines in songbird populations. Trapping of cowbirds locally is done by the Texas Organization of Wildlife Management Association in cooperation with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. The traps are checked daily to make sure any non-target species of bird (any bird that is not a cowbird) can be quickly released. Female cowbirds are removed and humanely killed by cervical dislocation. Some of the males are banded and released to help learn more about cowbird movements.

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



Practical Application in Nature at Brenham ISD

By: Natalie James
Outdoor Specialist, Brenham ISD

While participating in the FFA and studying Agricultural Education at Texas A&M University, AgriScience experienced a shift in priorities. The main focus was no longer cows, sows, and plows. Our goal was to remain relevant by integrating academic subjects into our practical curriculum. Every lesson. Every time. As a result, it should come as no surprise that I wholeheartedly believe every academic subject can be enhanced by a practical application in nature.

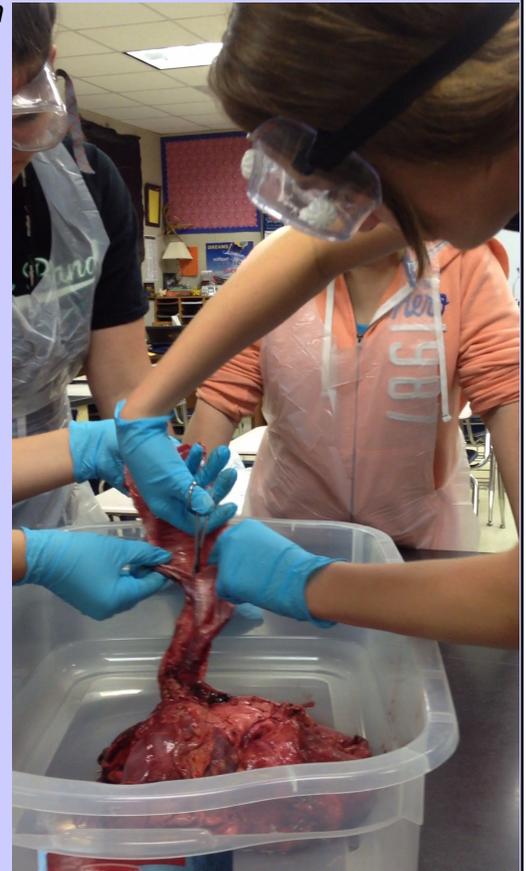
Just as core academics like math and science were integrated into AgriScience courses, here in Brenham ISD we are integrating environmental literacy, nature, and stewardship into all disciplines across the curriculum. It is the same concept, except on a *much larger scale*.

Most recently, in a collaboration between the Texas Wildlife Association (TWA), Washington County Wildlife Association (WCWS), and Brenham ISD, 8th grade students in Allison Bentke's advanced science classes performed a deer pluck necropsy. Students were given a rare opportunity to necropsy fresh tissue, being guided through process by local veterinarians Doc Bill Eikenhorst and Dr. Pete Wunderlich, as well as Koy Coffey, Education Specialist at TWA; Stephanie Damron, Natural Resource Specialist with Texas Parks and Wildlife; Lefty and LeAnn Yarnold, volunteers from the Texas Master Naturalists; and Mary Pearl Meuth, former Education Programs Contractor with TWA.

On the surface, the necropsy was a great opportunity to teach body systems. Go a little deeper and you realize that it was an opportunity for 130 twelve- and thirteen-year-old students to meaningfully interact with a species that they may not have encountered before. You could almost feel the "aha!" moment when students realized that healthy deer require healthy plant life and water quality.

What we are doing in Washington County, specifically in Brenham ISD, is truly unique. Our 8th graders are the only students in the State of Texas that have the opportunity to necropsy deer plucks. Brenham ISD and our partners, including the Washington County Wildlife Society and Texas Wildlife Association, are taking proactive steps to develop students' understanding of the land and our natural resources.

For more information on the expansion of Outdoor Education efforts in Brenham ISD or to inquire about opportunities to volunteer, please contact Natalie James, Outdoor Education Specialist at njames@brenhamk-12.net or visit <https://sites.google.com/a/brenhamk-12.net/outdooreducation/>.





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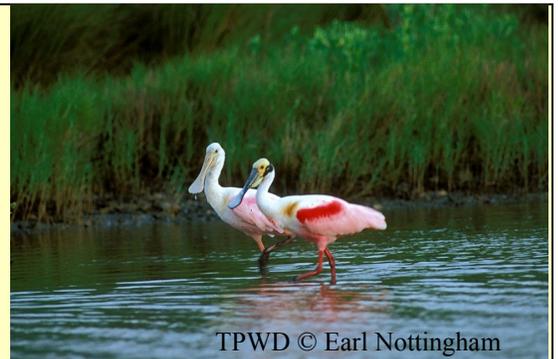
Roseate Spoonbills

Roseate spoonbills grow to a height of 32 inches (81 cm), with an average wingspan of 50 inches (127 cm). Their distinguishing characteristics include their pink body and legs, white neck and breast, pale green bald head, spoon-shaped bill, and bright red shoulder patch.

Roseate spoonbills eat primarily small fish and crustaceans. Raccoons and coyotes eat roseate spoonbill eggs and young. Spoonbills reach sexual maturity at approximately 16 weeks. In Texas, their mating season lasts from March through June. Nests are built in thick vegetation above water; are well-built, and deeply cupped. Females typically lay two to five brown-speckled white eggs, which hatch after about 24 days. In about eight weeks, the young roseate spoonbills are ready to fly. Their life span is as long as ten years. Unlike most birds, roseate spoonbills are silent and often solitary when they feed. They swish their spoon-shaped bills back and forth in the water to find small invertebrates, fish and crustaceans. During breeding season, the male uses gifts of nesting material to attract the female. Once mated, the pair remains monogamous. Both male and female take turns sitting on the eggs and feeding the young.

Spoonbills eat shrimp, shrimp eat algae, and the algae make their own red and yellow pigments, called carotenoids. Some scientists believe that the pink coloration that roseate spoonbills acquire as they mature is due to their diet of carotenoid-rich organisms like shrimp. The more they eat, the pinker they get. Flamingos are close relatives of the roseate spoonbill. They both have pink feathers, but the flamingos are much larger, with a longer neck.

From March through October, roseate spoonbills prefer the bays, marshes and estuaries along the Gulf Coast. Occasionally they will travel inland through the eastern third of Texas. In winter, most roseate spoonbills migrate to Central and South America. The roseate spoonbill is found throughout the entire Gulf of Mexico coastline, south to Central America, South America, and the West Indies. Like many other bird species with beautiful plumage, roseate spoonbills were nearly hunted to extinction during the 1800s. Their striking pink feathers were popular on women's hats, and hunters from all over the United States competed for spoonbill plumes. In the early 1900s, roseate spoonbills began to recolonize areas along the Gulf Coast and slowly increase in number. Today, threats to roseate spoonbill populations come as a result of habitat loss.



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