



PINEYWOODS POST

*A publication of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
for landowners and outdoor enthusiasts of the Pineywoods.*

Spring 2010

Welcome to the spring edition of the Pineywoods Post.

We hope that this edition finds you well and that you had a successful hunting season. At the time of writing this newsletter, turkey season is in full swing and the crappie bite is on. Our hope is that you will get outdoors during this beautiful time of year to enjoy nature.

The purpose of the *Pineywoods Post* is to inform, educate and entertain you on subjects that you want to hear about in the Pineywoods. With that in mind, we welcome all comments, feedback or suggestions for future topics.

The editors,
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*“When we try to pick out anything by
itself, we find it hitched to everything
else in the universe”*

– John Muir, naturalist and founder of the Sierra Club

BIOLOGIST BIO – Charlie Muller



Photo courtesy of Charlie Muller

“Working with people to help them improve their habitat and wildlife so that they can have a fulfilling and enjoyable outdoor experience, gives me personal satisfaction that I have done my job while doing something that I love.”

Charlie Muller was born and raised in East Texas. He spent his early years stomping around in the woods south of Tyler, where he developed a love for the outdoors. Hunting and fishing was a family tradition that provided the opportunities for Charlie to experience the outdoors through his eyes and also through the eyes of his father and other family members. Some of Charlie’s favorite memories were the stories they told of past fishing and hunting experiences in their lives, while sitting around a campfire. Charlie graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University in 1987 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry with an emphasis in wildlife management.

After graduation, Charlie accepted a position as a wildlife biologist with the Texas Animal Damage Control agency in the Houston area. This job provided him with an opportunity to work with many different species of wildlife that provided great learning experiences for a young wildlife biologist. In July of 1989, Charlie was hired by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) as a wildlife technician in Lufkin. From working on wildlife management areas, to trapping deer in South Texas, to releasing wild eastern turkeys back into the woods of East Texas, Charlie had found his dream job. After three and a half years in Lufkin, Charlie

accepted a new position with TPWD as a regulatory wildlife biologist in Longview with responsibilities for ten counties in Northeast Texas. From 1994 until 2002, Charlie was also the area manager of the Caddo Lake Wildlife Management Area in Karnack, where he was in charge of development and management of the property. In July of 2007, he accepted his current position as the private lands biologist for the Pineywoods District of TPWD. With this position his primary job responsibilities are to work with private landowners and hunting clubs in managing their habitat and wildlife. Charlie says this is what he enjoys most about his job. “Working with people to help them improve their habitat and wildlife so that they can have a fulfilling and enjoyable outdoor experience, gives me personal satisfaction that I have done my job while doing something that I love.”

Charlie has been married for 24 ½ years to his wife Deanna. They have two sons, Ryan 21 and Nathan 17.

Contact Charlie at (903) 757-9572, e-mail at charlie.muller@tpwd.state.tx.us or by mail at 419 Meadowview Circle, Longview, Texas 75604.

To find your local biologist, look us up on the Web at http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/technical_guidance/biologists/



Photo courtesy of Rusty Wood

Beware of Bambi!

By Andrea Webb, Pineywoods Regulatory Biologist

Colorful road-side ditches and afternoon thunderstorms are sure signs that spring is in full swing. With the dog days of summer fast approaching, it is also the time of year when many of our East Texas resident wildlife species, notably the white-tailed deer, begin to give birth to their young. A concurrent rise in people's outdoor activities can result in a proportional increase in the volume of reports of newly born white-tailed deer fawns. As a Texas Parks and Wildlife biologist, I regularly receive phone calls from concerned citizens throughout the county who had "the best of intentions" when they come across an "abandoned" fawn and picked it up thinking it was sure to perish without human intervention. Usually, the calls come too late after the fawn has not had the proper feedings and is close to dying, or is unable to be put back where it was originally found.

White-tailed deer breed in October and November, and then approximately 200 days later, the offspring will be born. The fawns are born with cryptic-pattern white spots and are virtually odorless. These two features enable the fawn to survive the first few weeks of its life. Its natural defense is being able to lie completely motionless for hours. The doe, whose odor and size would naturally attract predators, purposefully leaves her fawn(s) unattended for hours at a time while she finds food for herself, and in an attempt to keep from attracting predators to her otherwise defenseless offspring. It is during this "away-time" that most people,

innocently enough, happen across a fawn in a field or in the woods. It is when well-meaning folks mistakenly assume the deer has been abandoned and pick it up, that the natural method of parental care for the fawn is irreparably interrupted. If left alone, the fawn would surely have been reunited with its mother. Unfortunately, the damage can rarely, if ever, be undone.

By the time I get the phone call about what to do with a "rescued" fawn, it is generally too late to simply place the fawn back where it was found. This time period is limited to a couple of hours, at most. Thus begins the process of trying to find a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. This has proven to be increasingly difficult, as there has been a significant decline over the last several years in the number of licensed wildlife rehabilitators willing to spending their own money and time caring for injured and/or truly orphaned wildlife. Because it is illegal to pick up a fawn, much less keep one, a licensed wildlife rehabilitator must be contacted to take the now orphaned animal. Once a licensed wildlife rehabilitator is found, the fawn must be hand-raised and bottle fed until it is old enough to eat solid foods. Because the fawn will not be raised in the wild by its mother, the fawn will not learn critical survival behaviors, and its ability to survive is diminished.

In these situations, the "best of intentions" has actually resulted in an injustice to the doe AND the fawn, that started by someone simply picking up a fawn. The only time a fawn should ever be picked up, is if the doe is found dead in the immediate vicinity. If you come across a fawn under this specific circumstance, or any other injured animal, I encourage you to please contact the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department or any of your local game wardens.

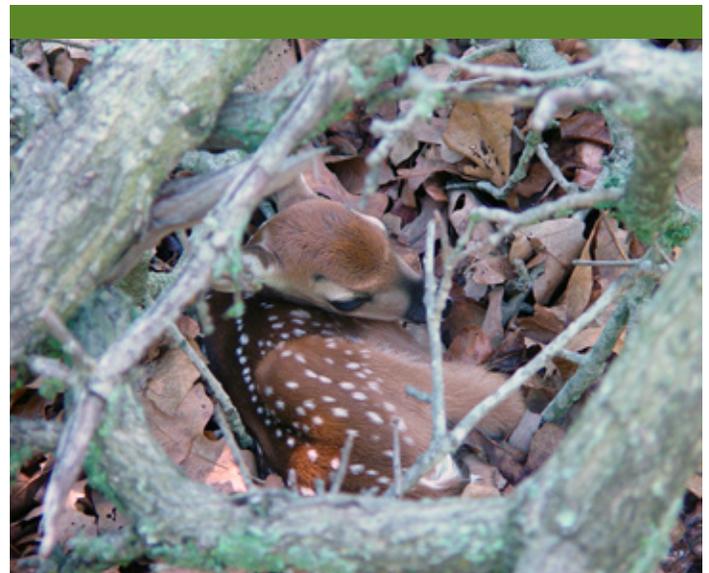


Photo courtesy of Rusty Wood

HABITAT Helper

Warm Season Food Plots

by Rusty Wood, Forest Stewardship Biologist



Iron and Clay Cowpea and Browntop millet mix planted by author.
Photo courtesy of Rusty Wood

As the winter doldrums pass and the first hints of spring approach, our attentions turn once again to outdoor pursuits and the anticipation of preparing for the upcoming hunting season. One project you can undertake to make your property more attractive to wildlife is a warm season food plot. Food plots are designed to provide nutritional forage during times with high nutritional demands such as antler development for bucks and fawn rearing and lactation in does, as well as stress times such as late summer when native browse toughens up and becomes less palatable. The reality is that supplemental feeding through food plots, when done properly, is a year long activity not just a place to kill deer during the hunting season. Let's look at three factors to consider to help make your food plots successful this year.

Where to plant.

If you are confined to hunting timber company land like many of us in the Pineywoods, then your options are limited. Utilize natural and existing openings such as old log sets, road sides, logging trails, pipe line and power line right of ways. If you hunt your own property or have a bit more freedom to work the land where

you hunt, then consider these factors when designing and selecting spots for your plots. Moisture can be a significant factor when considering where to plant a warm season food plot. You will want to select an area with your best soils that are not as prone to drying out. A good goal for your property to receive maximum benefit is to have three to five percent of your property in food plots. Plots should be no less than ½ acre and not bigger than 3 acres. Three 3-acre plots would be preferable to one 10-acre plot. Avoid large square plots. Plots with irregular boundaries increase the amount of edge habitat that benefits all wildlife and they are more interesting to look at and hunt over.

How to plant.

How you plant your plots depends largely on the size of the plot, equipment available, and access to the areas you want to plant. I have seen successful plots planted with everything from a weed trimmer and garden rake to the finest tractor and seed drill available. Due to limited space here I will only say that I heartily recommend getting a soil test to establish adequate lime and fertilization rates. We

will address this issue further in a future article. When planting warm season plots weed competition can be a significant factor. A general weed killer like a glyphosate product (Roundup or one of the many other brands) is usually sufficient to control weed competition and give your food plots a head start. The first step is to make any soil amendments necessary as recommended by your soil test report. Spread your fertilizer and lime on the plot and then till the ground to incorporate and expose bare mineral soil. Spread your seeds and then **LIGHTLY** plow or drag to cover the seeds and insure good soil contact. Small seeded items such as clovers should be covered no more than ¼ inch while larger seeded plants such as peas or beans should be covered no more than 1 inch.

What to plant.

When planting a food plot in East Texas, I prefer the tried and true mixes that consistently produce reliable plots every year. The small bag mixes that you see at the local sporting goods store can be good for small plots but are generally cost prohibitive for larger plots. Some of the larger "feed store" 50-pound mixes that

you see are a good value if you are only planting one or two plots and contain most of the things that work well here anyway. If you are planting several plots, it may save a little money to buy bulk bags of seed and make your own mixes. Iron and clay cow peas or soybeans at a rate of 50-pounds-per-acre mixed with a different cover crop tend to make nice food plots in East Texas. Both species are fairly drought resistant but can succumb to overgrazing pressure when just developing or on small plots. Good companion cover crops

that grow well in East Texas include things such as alcy clover, browntop millet, and American jointvetch. Combinations are virtually endless and everyone has different opinions, but to find out more information contact your local biologist.

Hopefully these tips will help you establish successful food plots on your property this year and will help you be more successful with your wildlife management program. Let me know how it goes!

PINEYWOODS History

by Micah Poteet, Pineywoods District Technical Guidance Biologist

Continued from last edition

PRESENT

The Pineywoods landscape has changed drastically over the last 100 years. Many human-induced factors have influenced the dynamics of the East Texas forest. A recent survey (1992) of 43 East Texas counties estimated that there were 11.9 million acres of forest and 9.7 million acres of nonforest land. Most (62%) timberland was nonindustrial private forest land (7.3 million acres). Industrial timberlands comprised 32% of the area. The predominant forest type in East Texas was the loblolly-shortleaf pine type (35%). Bottomland hardwoods comprised 15% of the area. The least common forest type was the longleaf-slash pine type (2%).

In most areas, the virgin forest has been harvested several times over the last century. Thinning and clearcutting account for the most common harvest methods. Following harvest, some areas are allowed to regenerate naturally, while others are planted. The most common species planted is loblolly pine. In many cases, competing

hardwood vegetation is controlled by herbicides or mechanical means which favors the establishment of pines. This has resulted in thousands of acres of pine plantations, that have little, if any hardwood component. A recent survey indicated that 22% of all timberland was classified as pine plantation. Most (72%) plantation establishment was on forest industry lands. The 1992 survey indicated that approximately 71% of the plantations were less than 20 years old.

A very small amount of the historic longleaf range area is currently occupied by longleaf. Difficulties associated with regeneration of longleaf pine, conversion to loblolly and slash pine forests, and the absence of fire has reduced this forest type to less than 10% of its former range. Most of the longleaf forests that remain are not typical of the historic longleaf forests that were maintained by fire.

The southern yellow pine ecosystem evolved with periodic fires, either from lightning strikes, or the practice of Native Americans. Fires would spread across vast areas, driven by an abundance of highly flammable

ground fuels such as pine needles and grass, and the lack of man-made barriers such as highways and lakes. In the absence of periodic fires, the grass community disappears and is replaced by shade tolerant hardwoods. The loss of this pine Savannah type habitat has led to the decline of many species that were once associated with it. Examples include red-cockaded woodpecker, Louisiana pine snake, northern bobwhite, eastern wild turkey, and Bachman's sparrow.

Much of the area previously occupied by bottomland hardwood forests has been converted to other uses. Many thousands of acres of bottomland hardwood forest have been lost due to reservoir construction. The construction of dams along major river drainages has resulted in the upstream flooding and loss of bottomland hardwood forests.

As mentioned previously, these bottomland areas contain highly productive soils. Therefore, thousands of acres of bottomland hardwood forests have been lost due to conversion to agricultural production.

CONSERVATION Closeup



Workshop in Karnack.
Photo courtesy of Laura Speight

Small Acreage Landowner- No Apologies Necessary

by Laura Speight,
Pineywoods Regulatory Wildlife Biologist, TPWD

little impact on wildlife species that require large home ranges, and fragmentation of habitat hurts all wildlife, but any habitat improvement is a step in the right direction regardless of size. Keep in mind, too, the possibilities, if enough small acreages in an area work towards habitat improvement!

I sometimes answer a call that starts with the phrase, "I don't have a lot of land, but ..." sensing the caller feels an apology is necessary for calling to talk about their land. Perhaps our society is so caught up in "more is better" or "everything in Texas is bigger" that having just a small amount of acreage gives one the perception that there is little of value they can do with a small parcel of land or that a biologist will not be interested in taking time to listen and offer advice. Let me assure you, small acreage landowner needs are important to us and stewardship of land of any size can play an important role for the good of wildlife.

A perfect example of how small acreage ownership provided valuable habitat, is found in the rise and fall of bobwhite quail. If you go back to the time when small farms were the norm, farmsteads were set apart by boundary fences and further divided into fields and pastures by cross fencing. These fencerows grew up in tall grasses, vines and woody plants, perfect nesting and roosting habitat for small birds such as the bobwhite quail. Trees planted to protect the home site and livestock provided further protection and cover for wildlife. Various crops were planted, ripening at different times, creating abundant food throughout the growing season. The home garden was also another great source of food. These were good times for quail and their numbers were high. Slowly, small farmsteads disappeared, swallowed up into larger tracts of land. Boundary and cross fences were torn out, trees cut down, and single crop farming became the new norm. Thus, the prime habitat created by the small farm disappeared and so did the quail.

It's a sad story, but a perfect example of how "small" is valuable to wildlife. Granted, small acreages may have

So, what are some things small-acreage landowners can do? The first step is to go out and assess what you have. Is your acreage mostly pasture, pine plantation or hardwoods? Do you have creeks, ponds or marshy areas? Do you have power or gas lines and do you graze livestock? Look closely at what is actually growing, and identify plants or trees that are not native. Assisting landowners in this evaluation phase, is part of what TPWD wildlife biologists do. We are here to help you with this step.

Spend a little time and contemplate your goals. Is your sole interest wildlife viewing or is hunting a part of your plan as well? How much time, effort, and money do you want to spend and are you interested in participating in available programs? Your local TPWD wildlife biologist can explain the various programs available and help you develop a plan to reach your goals.

This spring, May 15 to be exact, plan to attend a free workshop designed just for small-acreage landowners. We'll cover a wide range of topics including: forestry practices, control of feral hogs, using GPS, and threatened and endangered species of the Pineywoods to name just a few. This is a great opportunity to meet local biologists and other small acreage landowner with similar cares, concerns and interests. The workshop will be held at the Karnack Community Center located on Hwy 134. Starts at 9am and should end by 4 pm. A free lunch will be served by the "Friends of Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge." We hope you will plan to attend!

Please RSVP by contacting either:

Charlie Muller at charlie.muller@tpwd.state.tx.us or 903-757-9572

or Laura Speight at laura.speight@tpwd.state.tx.us or 903-679-9149

CRITTER Corner

Eastern Bluebird

by Keith Aguilar and Andrea Webb,
Pineywoods Regulatory Biologists



Photo courtesy of TPWD

You have more than likely seen the beautifully colored eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) sitting on a wooden fence post on the side of the road a time or two or even in your own backyard. The eastern bluebird is a native songbird found in the eastern half of Canada, the United States, and Mexico. In the 1800s, the bluebirds' numbers were very high; however, in the early 1900s, they drastically declined, mostly due to habitat loss, pesticide uses, competition from introduced species, and replacement of wooden fence posts to metal. Bluebirds are cavity nesters and rely on snags and dead standing timber, including wooden fence posts for nesting sites. Bluebirds do not, however, create the cavities they nest in. Instead they rely on cavities already created by other birds and animals.

The bluebird is a brightly colored bird, with a mostly blue backside, rusty red throat, and white underbelly. The male has brighter, deeper colors than the female. Bluebirds are approximately 6-8 inches long with a wingspan of 10-13 inches. The male arrives first in his migration back north, and chooses a cavity that he will protect vigorously from

other males, and then he uses his bright colors to attract a female. Once a female has chosen a mate, the two will then nest two to three different times in a season. The female does all of the incubation while the male forages for insects and brings them back to feed the female. The young are born and will fledge approximately two to three weeks later. The young from previous broods will sometimes assist in the upbringing of later hatched broods. The greatest threat during this time is fierce competition from introduced species such as the European starlings and the house sparrow. Both will push eggs out of the nest and kill young in order to take over the nesting site.

Managing for bluebirds requires a few simple steps. Building nesting boxes has been very successful to the species recovery. Plans for building a nesting box can be found on the internet or through your local wildlife biologist. The important part of building a box is that the entrance hole be no more than 1½ inches in diameter and that there is a predator guard on the pole to prevent snakes and other varmints from climbing up the pole and eating the eggs. The smaller entrance hole prevents European starlings and other bigger songbirds from entering the box; however, it does not deter the house sparrow. There are many forms of trap doors to try and rid the house sparrow from utilizing the box, and if the sparrow does begin

to nest in the box, then the nesting materials and eggs should be discarded. House sparrows and European starlings are considered exotic species, so they are not protected, but if you see another species of songbird utilizing the box, let them finish nesting in the box without disturbance. The nesting boxes should be at least 100 yards apart due to the territorial behavior that both the male and female have when nesting. Another management tool is allowing snags and dead standing timber to remain, as these trees will provide natural cavities for the bluebird to nest.

In the spring, bluebirds feed mainly on ground-dwelling insects, ideal habitats are open short grassed, pesticide free areas with a few trees, fences, and high lines for perching. Supplemental feeding of bluebirds in early spring can be accomplished using mealworms offered in a container. Bluebirds will utilize fruits and berries in fall and winter when insects are scarce. American holly, Eastern red cedar, red mulberry, chokeberry, and wild grapes are among those fruits/berries chosen.



Photo courtesy of Rusty Wood

STEWARDSHIP Snapshots



Carolina chickadee chicks that were raised in a satellite antenna pole – home can be where you make it! Courtesy of Rusty Wood, taken in Nacogdoches.



Native grass burn in Panola county. Courtesy of Andrea Webb



Summer tanager at Alazan Bayou WMA. Courtesy of Rusty Wood.

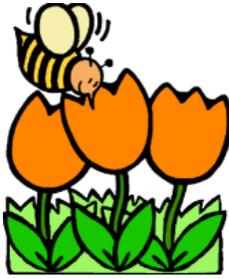


River otter taking a nap in a nest box at a private lake in Kirbyville. Courtesy of Gary Caulkins

SUBMIT YOUR SNAPSHOT!!! We'll accept photos from your game camera, cell phone or regular camera, as long as you took it!! Just email it to Penny.Wilkerson@tpwd.state.tx.us or Rusty.Wood@tpwd.state.tx.us and tell us who took it, what it is, when, where, how and why!"

“Conservation means the wise use of the earth and its resources for the lasting good of men.”

– Gifford Pinchot, Forester, 1st Chief of the U.S. Forest Service



Spring 2010



April		May		June	
TPWD Biologists @ Work	MLDP Cooperators & Landowners	TPWD Biologists @ Work	MLDP Cooperators & Landowners	TPWD Biologists @ Work	MLDP Cooperators & Landowners
Collect Biological/Observation Data from MLDP Cooperators	After Season Scouting/ Shed Hunting	Process Data from Cooperators	Plant Warm Season Food Plots	Process Data from Cooperators	Plant Warm Season Food Plots Brush Control with Mowers or Herbicide
Offer Outreach Programs to Schools and Groups	Eastern Turkey Spring Season April 1-30 Start of Non-Core County Alligator Season April 1	Offer Outreach Programs to Schools and Groups	Spring Squirrel Season May 1-31	Offer Outreach Programs to Schools and Groups	Watch Out for Fawns when Brush Hogging and Baling Hay!!!
Turkey Gobble Routes	Soil Tests Start Plowing Ground For Spring Food Plots	Landowner Site Visits	Small Acreage Workshop May 15th Karnack, TX	Landowner Site Visits	End Of Non-Core County Alligator Season June 30

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