April 2026
No. 228

Texas Chapter Tails

of Wildlife and Stewardship

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From Around The Corner
Photo by J. Argamany.

President's Note

Greetings all! I want to begin by congratulating Past President Jessica Glasscock and her teams and committees for a very successful annual conference in Galveston. Personally, I worry that meetings around the very edges of the great state of Texas may lead to diminished attendance, but your strong showing dispelled my assumption. Again, over 700 of us reconvened to network, educate, learn and socialize over the one thing that unifies this great body, and that is, conservation.

Speaking about the edges of Texas, I again want to commend the plenary speakers, Dr. Louis Harveson, Dr. Warren Conway, Kirk Feuerbacher, Sam Kieschnick, and Dr. Fidel Hernandez, for their great insight that “Margins Matter”. Too, their session reminded me that tremendous experience, wisdom, and expertise reside among our membership. If not directly stated during my conference remarks, I strongly implied that we should not take connections for granted for they are beneficial to our professional continuity and bench depth.

Personally, evaluating the success of the last few meetings, I’m challenged to more intentionally invest in others, be it students, coworkers, constituents, etc...Though few of us got in this field to relate to people, we know it is one of the most significant components of conservation success! Another important component

supporting successful conservation efforts are finances, and an example of successful conservation efforts includes a functioning and healthy professional society. Again, congratulations to Jessica and her team for setting a fundraising record last year, and for planning and conducting a conference meeting with an ending balance in the black. This supports a strong start to the new Chapter-year, and your current leadership will endeavor to achieve that standard heading into 2027.

Speaking of leadership, I want to do a better job in writing (than I did at the conference) introducing the newest members of our Executive Board, including Matt Reidy as Vice President, Ben Olsen as Secretary, and Bobby Allcorn as Board Member-At-Large. Along with Jessica, Masi Serna (Vice President), Jon Purvis (Treasurer), Maureen Frank (Archivist), and Matt Wagner (Executive Director), I assure you that you have a very active, responsive, and engaged team pursuing the best interest of The Chapter. I encourage you to please call on us anytime you have a thought or concern about which we should be aware.

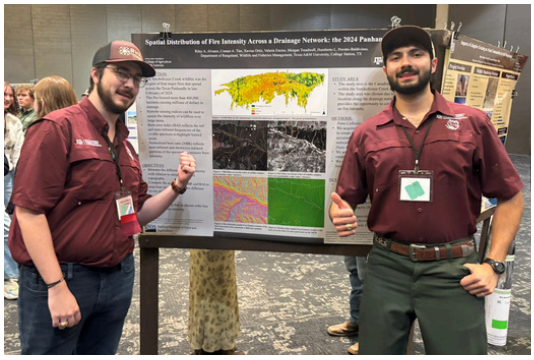
In closing, just a reminder that we are blessed to work in a wonderfully unique and ecologically diverse administrative unit known as Texas. From Rita Blanca National Grasslands to Las Palomas Wildlife Management Area, from El Paso to Texarkana, and everything in between, we have a lot to say grace over…268,596 square miles, in fact, and a close-knit Chapter full of professionals and exceptional students is needed to support all the conservation work to be done. What a privilege we have to conserve Texas habitats and native wildlife populations! We should never forget that or take it for granted, and we should not let personal preferences get in the way of staying connected, working together, and communicating the ecologic and economic value our work creates for all Texans. Above all, our daily perspective should be that we are in unity to achieve meaningful and lasting conservation for generations of Texans to come.

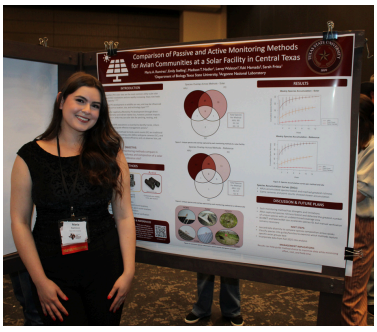
I hope y'all will take a few minutes to discover what's shared in this publication. You can again celebrate the awardees from our last conference, get updates from our Conservation Affairs Committee, learn about the upcoming Wildlife Conservation Camp, and discover more broadly what's happening from the Southwest Section of TWS, among other things!

Until next time compadres….Farewell!

Bill Adams
President, Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society

62nd Annual TCTWS Meeting Snapshots





Photos by Emmalee Balch, Chandler Christian, Cristian Lopez, Dayna Ovalle, and Emily Blumenrtritt

Annual Meeting Awards: Excellence in Wildlife Conservation, Honorary Life Member, and Student Chapter of the Year

Early Career Professional Award: Dr. Cord Eversole

Mid-Career Professional Award: Romey Swanson

Educator of the Year: Dr. Maureen Frank

Honorary Life Membership Award: Donald Charles “Chip” Ruthven III

Land Stewardship Award: Matador WMA

Student Chapter of the Year: Texas A&M University

Not pictured: Outstanding Achievement, Dr. Scott Henke.
Honorary Life Membership Award, Linda Campbell

Annual Meeting Awards: Clarence Cottam Award and Outstanding Wildlife Students

Clarence Cottam Award
1st place: Joseph McGovern
Caesar Kleberg Wildlife
Research Institute

Clarence Cottam Award
2nd place: Derek Malone
Texas Tech University

Clarence Cottam Award
3rd place: Tyler Bostwick
Caesar Klebuerg Wildlife
Research Institute

Outstanding Student
Abilene Christian
University: Sarah Smith

Outstanding Student Angelo
State University: Max Rowe

Outstanding Student East
Texas A&M University:
Victor Perez, Jr.

Outstanding Student Sam
Houston State University:
Karley Stanley

Outstanding Student
Stephen F. Austin State
University: Ashlyn Cox

Outstanding Student
Southwest Texas Junior
College: Charles Causey

Annual Meeting Awards: Outstanding Wildlife Students (cont.)

Outstanding Student Sul Ross State University: Anna Guerrero

Outstanding Student Tarleton State University: Hannah Atkinson

Outstanding Student Texas A&M University: Jackson LaFier

Outstanding Student Texas A&M University Kingsville: Abdiel De Hoyos

Outstanding Student Texas State University: Alexandra Fleming-Patrick

Outstanding Student Texas Tech University: Madison McGinnis

Outstanding Student University of North Texas: Shyann Sanchez

Not pictured: Outstanding Student Texas A&M University San Antonio, Aurelia “Lali” Rodriguez

Annual Meeting Awards: Outstanding Student Posters, Top Camper, and Quiz Bowl

1st Place Undergraduate
Poster: Xavius Ortiz
Texas A&M University

2nd Place Undergraduate
Poster: Nora Regan
Stephen F. Austin
State University

1st Place Graduate
Poster: Kevin Perozeni
Texas A&M University

2nd Place Graduate
Poster: Laken Mize
Texas Tech University

3rd Place Graduate Poster:
Hunter Oliver
Stephen F. Austin State University

1st Place Quiz Bowl Team:
Texas A&M University

Not pictured: 3rd Place Undergraduate Poster, Truman Gilliam Texas A&M University.
Wildlife Conservation Camp Top Camper, Mac Alaniz

Annual Meeting Awards: Scholarships

Rob & Bessie Welder Wildlife Foundation Scholarship: Gracie Triplett
Tarleton State University

Charly McTee Memorial Scholarship: Ashley A. Cano-Johnson
Texas A&M University Kingsville

Carl D. Shoemaker Memorial Scholarship: Emmalee Balch
Texas Tech University

Conservation Equity Partners & Wildlife Systems, Inc. Scholarship: Kevin LeGrow,
Sul Ross State University

Dan Boone Memorial Scholarship: Ricky Garibay
Tarleton State University

TWS Southwest Section's Southwestern Wildlife Graduate Student Scholarship: Laken Mize
Texas Tech University

South Texas Quail Coalition Scholarship: Abigail Dwelle
Texas A&M University

Sam Beasom Memorial Scholarship: Dylan Stewart
Texas A&M University

Not pictured: Collin Caruthers Memorial Scholarship, Camylle Fung, Texas Tech University

Annual Meeting Awards: Plant ID and Naturalist Contest

Plant ID 1st Place
Individual: Jake Chapman
Texas A&M University

Plant ID 1st Place Team:
Texas A&M University Team 1

Plant ID 2nd Place
Individual: Garrett Purcell
Texas A&M University

Plant ID 2nd Place Team:
Texas A&M University Team 2

Plant ID 3rd Place
Individual: Hanna Hardt
Texas A&M University

Plant ID 3rd Place Team:
Southwest Texas Junior College

Not pictured: Naturalist Contest Novice, Jake Chapman
Naturalist Contest Professional, Eric Grahman

Annual Meeting Awards: Publications

Outstanding Electronic Media: “The TAMU Natural Resources Job Board”
Brian Brittain, Alison Lund, Aundra Ellis and Roel Lopez

Outstanding Popular Article: “Masters of the Sky” (Jan/Feb 2025 issue of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Magazine)
Joseph Richards

Outstanding Scientific Publication:
“An efficient acoustic classifier for high-priority avian species in the southern Great Plains using convolutional neural networks"
Brandon Wolfe, Mike D. Proctor, Victoria Nolan, Stephen L. Webb

Outstanding Book:
“Applied Wildlife Habitat Management”
Roel Lopez, Jared Beaver, Israel D Parker, Michael L. Morrison

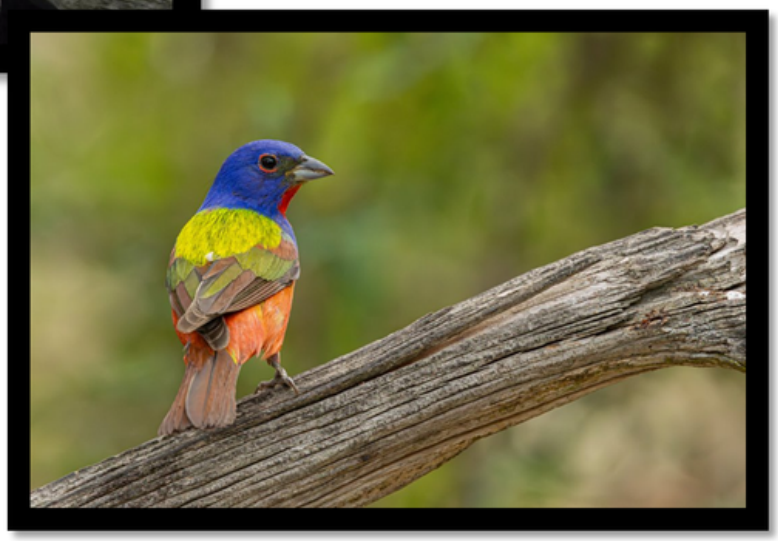
Not pictured: Outstanding Technical Publication, "Mottled Duck Conservation Plan Update"
Joseph Lancaster, T. Anderson, M.G. Brasher, W.C. Conway, S.J. DeMaso, J.A. Moon, K.M. Ringelman, and B.C. Wilson

Photo and Art Contest Highlights

The Photo and Art Committee is pleased to share highlights from the February 2026 Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society Conference, which showcased an impressive display of talent from our members. This year's contest featured over 175 photo entries submitted by more than 45 contestants, along with over a dozen art entries spanning a variety of conservation focused categories. The quality and diversity of submissions continue to reflect the passion and dedication our members bring to wildlife conservation and storytelling through visual media.

We extend our congratulations to Jack Rogers (TAMU Kingsville) for an outstanding performance, earning three first-place awards and one second-place award across eight total photo categories. We also congratulate Cameron Martin (TPWD) for receiving the Best of Show award along with a first-place finish in the art category. The committee sincerely thanks everyone who contributed entries to this year's contest. Your participation is what makes this event such a meaningful and inspiring part of our annual meeting!

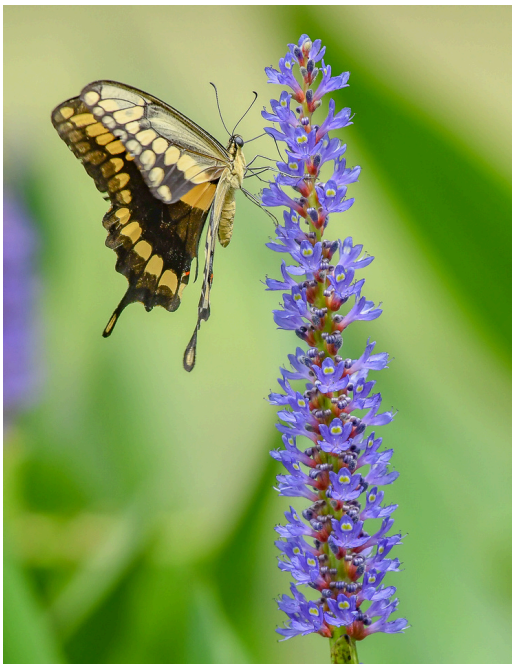
1st Place Art and Best in Show:
Cameron Martin



1st Place Texas Wildlife:
Jack Rogers

Annual Meeting Awards: Photos and Art

1st Place Texas Scenery:
Silverio Avila



1st Place Texas Plants:
Jessica Johnston

1st Place Non-Texas:
Jack Rogers

Annual Meeting Awards: Photos and Art

1st Place Wildlife
Conservation: Caleb Carpenter

1st Place Humor:
James Helferich

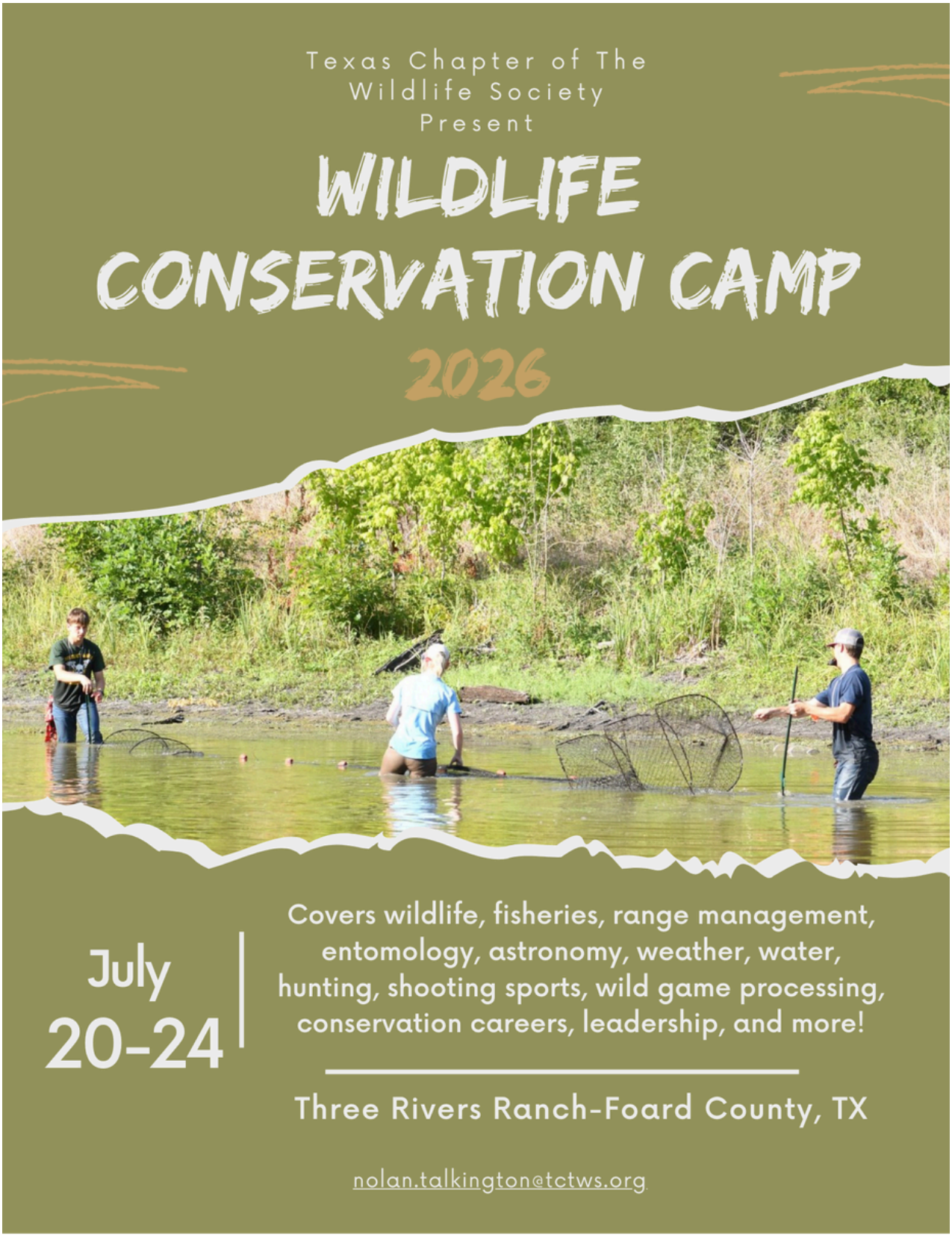
1st Place Work Related:
Jack Rogers

Annual Meeting Awards: Photos and Art

1st Place Remote Camera:
Raymond Turner

2nd Place Art:
Adina Hernandez

3rd Place Art:
Brooklyn Day


Texas Chapter of The
Wildlife Society
Present
WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION CAMP
2026
July
20-24
Covers wildlife, fisheries, range management, entomology, astronomy, weather, water, hunting, shooting sports, wild game processing, conservation careers, leadership, and more!
Three Rivers Ranch-Foard County, TX
nolan.talkington@tctws.org

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION CAMP

Members of the Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society,

I am pleased to announce that Wildlife Conservation Camp 2026 is headed to the Rolling Plains! Camp will take place July 20th through 24th at the Three Rivers Ranch in Foard County.

I am looking forward to hosting high school youth from around the state/country for a week full of natural resources management and conservation education, as well as team building and leadership development.

I am honored to volunteer alongside many great folks from various state, federal and local agencies, NGO's, research foundations and universities. Without these volunteers who sacrifice their time and talents to spend a week at camp, it would not happen.

If you are a professional, I would love to have you present at camp, provide educational materials/equipment or make a financial contribution if you are able. If you are a university student, I would love to have you volunteer and represent your university at camp. If you are a high school student or know a high school student, please encourage them to apply for camp.

In the meantime, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at nolan.talkington@tctws.org if you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,
Nolan Talkington
TCTWS-WCC Director 2026

Conservation Affairs

By Matt Wagner, Executive Director, and Mary Pearl Meuth, Past President

New World Screwworm

The CAC continues to monitor any new developments regarding NWS. The USDA continues to coordinate the dispersal of about 100 million sterile flies per week, including Texas counties bordering Mexico. For the latest developments on NWS, go to the USDA NWS website: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/stop-screwworm or the Screwworm Coalition of Texas website: https://screwwormtx.org/

March TPWD Commission Meeting

The March commission meeting included agenda items on the cultivation of dotted duckweed (an invasive aquatic plant), the 2026-2027 Statewide Hunting and Migratory Game Bird Proclamation, the acquisition of a new 2,850 acre wildlife management area in Stephens County, a briefing on the latest version of the Texas Wildlife Action Plan, and a proposal for the mandatory harvest reporting of mountain lions, to be decided on at the May commission meeting. Chapter members are present at all commission meetings to provide input as needed on these, and any other natural resource agenda items.

Texas Chapter's Resolution on the Border Wall

On February 14, the Department of Homeland security released an announcement in the Federal Register waiving certain environmental reviews for a border wall in the Big Bend Sector. Many local businesses and conservation organizations are opposing the construction of a border wall in this region. The Texas Chapter produced a resolution on this issue in 2017 which can be found on our website. We have worked with TWS, the Southwest Section and other TWS affiliates to produce a letter to congressional leaders in opposition to a border wall in the Big Bend Sector. **The letter is available to read below.**

Photo by L. Petracca

The Honorable Ted Cruz
167 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tony Gonzales
2239 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Cornyn
517 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cruz, Senator Cornyn, and Representative Gonzales,

On behalf of the members of the Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society, the Southwest Section of The Wildlife Society, and The Wildlife Society, we write in continued opposition to **border wall construction and associated development activities along the Texas-Mexico border.** Collectively, our organizations represent more than 10,000 wildlife professionals across Texas, Mexico, the southwestern United States, and beyond. We work to empower those members as they advance conservation through science, community, and professional excellence.

On February 17, 2026, the Secretary of Homeland Security waived federal resource protection laws in the Big Bend Sector to expedite the construction of border barrier structures. This region is biologically, economically and culturally significant, not just to Texans, but nationally and internationally. It includes, but is not limited to: Big Bend Ranch State Park, Big Bend National Park, Black Gap Wildlife Management Area, the designated Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River, Seminole Canyon State Park, Amistad National Recreation Area, Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuges, Las Palomas Wildlife Management Areas, the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge. It also includes several Mexican federal conservation areas.

The natural resources of this region provide critical support to local economies, generating hundreds of millions of dollars in outdoor recreation spending. These lands support populations of state-listed species like the coatimundi (*Nasua narica*), ocelot (*Leopardus pardalis*), black bear (*Ursus americanus*), Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium brasilianum*), as well as economically important wildlife like the bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) and mountain lion (*Puma concolor*). Research has documented that Big Bend's population of these charismatic mammals depends on having

open connectivity across the U.S.-Mexico border. Waiving protections from laws like the Endangered Species Act and National Environmental Policy Act for border security measures means there is no opportunity to assess impacts to these species and their habitats. It also eliminates the role of conservation professionals in designing mitigation measures that could avoid or reduce impacts while still achieving border security objectives.

Should projects of this nature be initiated in this ecologically sensitive region at any point in the future, we urge that **border infrastructure be subject to appropriate environmental review under laws such as the Endangered Species Act and National Environmental Policy Act**. These projects should also **incorporate science-based mitigation measures**—such as **maintaining wildlife connectivity**, **designing for permeability**, **avoiding high-value conservation areas**, and **implementing site-specific modifications**—through early coordination with qualified wildlife professionals. Our membership stands ready to assist in this work, offering technical expertise to support informed, science-based planning and implementation of these activities.

We thank you for your attention to this issue, and look forward to serving as a resource should you have any questions about this or other wildlife policy issues.
Sincerely,

Dr. Edward B. Arnett, CWB®
CEO, The Wildlife Society

Dr. Matt Wagner
Executive Director, Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society

Dr. Luis Antonio Tarango Arámbula
President, The Wildlife Society Mexico Chapter

Dr. Ryan Luna
President, Southwest Section of The Wildlife Society

Additional resources:
Texas Chapter 2017 Resolution
TWS Western and Southwestern Section 2018 Joint Letter on Ecological Impacts of Border Wall Proposal
"Wildlife and the Wall" short film

Conservation Affairs, cont.

Dotted Duckweed

At the March TPWD Commission meeting, a decision will be made to allow the cultivation of dotted duckweed or not. This duckweed is currently listed as an exotic, harmful or potentially harmful species, the commercial cultivation of which has been debated since November 2025. Texas A&M AgriLife has provided extensive input including required safeguards to prevent the escape of this aquatic plant into the environment. The Texas Chapter opposes the cultivation of dotted duckweed because of it's threat to private and public water-dependent species and habitats.

CWD Task Force

Matt Wagner has been asked to serve on TPWD's CWD Task Force. The first meeting is being planned for April. Recently, the Texas Regulatory Efficiency Office (TREO), created by Senate Bill 14 of the 89th Legislature, has proposed eleven changes to existing CWD rules. Five of these changes would increase the risk of spreading the disease to accommodate reduced costs of testing and fencing requirements for deer breeders.

Preparations for the 90th Legislative Session

CAC members have been making plans to meet with key legislative committee members prior to the 90th legislative session beginning in January 2027. The focus will be on the chairs of the House Culture, Recreation and Tourism Committee and the Senate Ag, Water and Rural affairs committee and their staff. Brief visits have already occurred with Chairman Perry's office. A Legislative Ag Day is being planned by the Texas Agriculture Council in Luling for May. Matt Wagner will attend to network with legislative staff. Another Day at The Capitol for Texas Chapter members will be organized for Spring 2027.

Photo by K. Fleming-Patrick

Conservation Affairs, cont.

Upcoming Meetings:

May 27-28, Austin, TPWD Commission Meeting
July 9-11, San Antonio, Texas Wildlife Association Annual Convention
July 20-24, Three Rivers Ranch, TCTWS Wildlife Conservation Camp
July 24, Three Rivers Ranch, TCTWS Summer Board Meeting
August 19-20, Austin, TPWD Commission Meeting and Annual Public Hearing
November 1-5, Des Moines Iowa, TWS Annual Conference
February 10-12, Waco, TCTWS Annual Meeting

If you are interested in participating in TCTWS policy discussion activities or attending Commission Meeting(s), legislative hearings or more alongside TCTWS, please reach out to the Conservation Affairs Committee (conservation.affairs@tctws.org).
TCTWS members are always encouraged to participate in these activities.

Photo by S. Avila

Open Call for Committee Involvement

The Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society is strongest when our members show up and get involved. Committees are where ideas turn into action – whether its supporting students, planning meetings, strengthening partnerships, or advancing wildlife conservation across Texas. Getting involved is a great way to meet fellow professionals, share your perspective, and help shape the direction of our chapter. No matter your career stage, your voice matters and your experience adds value. Committees are also a place to grow as a leader and contribute to something bigger than any one of us.

If you are looking for a way to give back, consider joining a committee and being a part of the work that moves the chapter forward.

Check out all our Committee Opportunities:
https://tctws.org/about-us-2/committees/

Complete this form to get involved:
https://forms.office.com/r/k6A5fHaniD

Call for Workshops

The Activities committee is looking for workshops for the next Annual Meeting, to be held in Waco, TX in February 2027. If you have put on a workshop in the past and are interested in bringing it to Waco, or have an idea for a new workshop, please reach out to Adam Terry (adam.terry@tctws.org) or Nick Fisher (nick.fisher@tctws.org).

Previous workshops have covered a diverse array of topics, including field trips, photography, new tools and technology, R programming skills, career building and education, and information on specialized topics. A list of workshops held during the previous Annual Meeting and their descriptions can be found on the TCTWS website.

Photo by K. Yorke

Webinar

Join us this May to hear an informative presentation on savings and retirement planning for wildlife conservationists. This webinar will cover the three pillars of retirement income — Social Security, employer pensions, and personal savings — and how to make the most of each, whether you work in public service or for a non-governmental organization. Attendees will also have the opportunity to complete a brief financial questionnaire to help guide their own retirement planning.

Registration details and dates coming soon. Stay tuned!
Follow Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society on social media for updates: find us on Facebook and Instragram.

If you are interested in presenting an upcoming webinar, please email the webinar chair at webinar@tctws.org

Photo by A. Patrick

Angelo State University Student Chapter: Annual Meeting Experience

The ASU Student Chapter had the amazing opportunity to attend the TCTWS annual meeting this year. Making it to this meeting has been our goal ever since a few students got to go to Denton last year. The experience at that meeting inspired us to start a student chapter at Angelo State. Through establishing the chapter, we hoped to give other students the opportunity to be a part of the community that TWS creates.

The Angelo State University Student Chapter at the 2026 Annual Meeting

Creating a new chapter from the ground up has been challenging, but fun. The Texas Chapter has been a huge help to us, particularly Dr. Sarah Lucht, who was always there to answer our questions and help us stay on track. The inspiration from the Denton meeting and the encouragement from the state chapter helped us hit the ground running and do some great things in our first year as a chapter.

Over the last two semesters, our chapter has stayed actively involved in conservation, outreach, and professional development across Texas. Our efforts included volunteering with the Rolling Plains Quail Research Foundation, which we were able to do thanks to meeting Kyndal Underwood at this year's conference, and assisting at both the San Angelo and Hill Country Safari Club banquets. Our chapter also traveled to Ingram to participate in the Stars over the Guada-Loop event, where we connected with the public and helped raise money for local flood victims. Our students took part in a deer capture with the East Foundation, contributing to ongoing research efforts in South Texas.

Because of our members' dedication and commitment to our chapter throughout the year, we were able to bring over twenty students to Galveston! Our students showed up very eager to compete at the 2026 conference as a new chapter. We had students participate in the art, photography, naturalist, plant ID, and quiz bowl events. Our teams were competitive and our students are very proud of the effort they put in to prepare. For the art contest, our very own Adina Hernandez came in second with her art piece of a scissor-tailed flycatcher (see page 14!). Regarding the quiz bowl, anyone who was present saw how passionate our students were about the competition. Our efforts in preparing a basket for the silent auction were pleasantly received and rewarded by selling the most tickets out of any other student chapter! We look forward to continuing efforts to help raise money for the Texas chapter.

ASU Student Chapter: Annual Meeting Experience, cont.

We took full advantage of the opportunity to network with professionals in the industry at the annual meeting. Many of us were pleased to meet Greg Simons and Terry Anderson, who co-own wildlife consulting businesses alongside our faculty advisor, Ruben Cantu. Students who volunteered were privileged to work alongside Tamara Wood, also a face of Conservation Equity Partners, who was more than willing to assist our members. Research ideas for our graduate students were also discussed with none other than Dr. Andrew Kasner of the AgriLife Extension Center located in San Angelo! Some of our students were eager to be able to discuss research with Cottam Award recipient Joseph McGovern, since they have similar interests and hope to research northern pintail themselves. One of our members was able to meet SaraBeth Hill, an Assistant Professor of Veterinary Practice in Parasitology at Texas Tech's School of Veterinary Medicine. Discussing Texas Tech's veterinary program shaped the students' decision on which veterinary school to attend. These are just a few examples of the meaningful connections our students made at the chapter, which gave us inspiration and relationships to draw on.

The meeting was replete with excellent presentations which afforded our members the opportunity to examine meaningful work. Angelo State's own Master's candidate, Sarah Macha, presented her original research involving black-capped vireos. Witnessing one of our own was an inspiring moment for those in our club who envision a future in wildlife research. Kevin Lovasik's presentation on whitetail fawn survival was of particular interest to our club, as we participated in the deer capture operations at the East Foundations which allowed us to assist in data collection for this project.

While competitions, networking and research were the reason we were in Galveston, we couldn't resist having some fun at the coast, too. San Angelo isn't exactly known for its seafood scene, so we had some excellent meals while we were there, and we also had a brave band of students go for a swim at the beach, despite the February water. You can't keep wildlife students from enjoying nature!

The conference strengthens our chapter as a whole. The experience is both rewarding and inspiring. It builds confidence, encourages collaboration, and motivates members to push themselves academically and professionally. We look forward to seeing you all again in Waco!

The Angelo State University Quiz Bowl Team

Yucca elata (soaptree yucca)

By Eliana Goodwin

Yuccas are iconic plants of the American Southwest, with more than a dozen species found across Texas' diverse landscapes. One of the most recognizable is the soaptree yucca, a slow-growing species with a distinctive, palm-like form. Common throughout the Big Bend region, it thrives in arid grasslands, rocky hillsides, and desert scrub.

Photo by Cecelia Alexander

Photos by Anthony Mendoza

Its leaves are linear, tapered, and edged with yellowish-white margins. Mature plants can reach heights of 5 to 20 feet, topped in mid- to late spring by flower stalks that rise 3 to 7 feet above the leaf rosette. Clusters of creamy-white, waxy, bell-shaped blooms open at night, emitting a sweet aroma. These nocturnal flowers attract the soaptree yucca's exclusive pollinator, the yucca moth (*Tegeticula yuccasella*). The two species share an obligate mutualistic relationship – neither organism can complete its reproductive cycle independently, making this interaction a classic example of coevolution.

Soaptree yucca has a rich history of human use. Its name comes from the high concentration of saponins in its roots, which were once commonly used to make soap. Indigenous peoples utilized the strong fibers in its leaves to make sandals, baskets, and cordage. The flowers remain culturally significant and are still consumed in a traditional dish prepared from sautéed yucca blossoms called *flor de palma*.

Literature Cited:

1. Hess, W.J., and R.L. Robbins. "Yucca Elata - FNA." Flora of North America, floranorthamerica.org/Yucca_elata. Accessed 26 Mar. 2026.
2. Wauer, R.H. and C.M Fleming. 2002. Naturalist's Big Bend: An Introduction to the Trees and Shrubs, Wildflowers, Cacti, Mammals, Birds, Reptiles and Amphibians, Fish, and Insects. Texas A&M University Press.
3. Weber, L and J Weber. 2017. Nature Watch Big Bend: A seasonal Guide. Texas A&M Press.

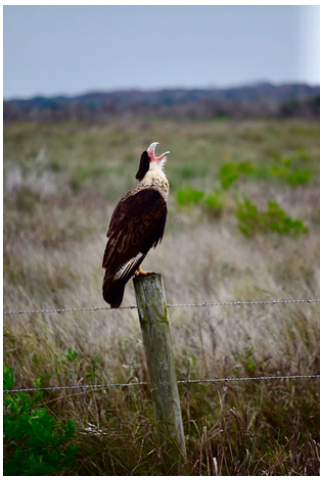
Southwest Section Tracks

By Kathy Granillo, Southwest Section Representative

I'm writing this on a glorious spring day here in central New Mexico. The hummingbirds have just arrived after their winter in Mexico, the House Finches (I think they should be renamed the Exuberant Finch) are singing and singing, and the garden is greening up and flowers are blooming. It all makes me feel like I can take on any task with a smile on my face and joy in my heart. I hope you feel the same.

Kathy Granillo
TWS Southwest Section
Representative

I recently returned from the spring Council meeting. This was an action-packed two-day event, held in conjunction with the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Columbus, Ohio. Having our meeting adjacent to the North American allows TWS staff and Council members to interact with many of our partners. During our meeting, we heard from the Executive Director of the American Fisheries Society, Jeff Kopaska; the CEO of the Society of American Foresters, Terry Baker; and the Chief Operating Officer of the Wild Sheep Foundation, Corey Mason. TWS plans to have another joint annual conference with AFS in 2030, and a joint meeting with SAF, year still to be determined.



Our agenda included hearing from Tony Wasley, the CEO of the Wildlife Management Institute. His presentation focused on a current assessment of wildlife fundamental elements. WMI is convening an effort to identify and then elaborate on the key foundational elements of conservation. The website says, "Once identified, elements will be discussed and further developed to offer well-thought and evidence-based guidance to the conservation community." I urge you to visit FoundationalElements.org for more information. There is a questionnaire available to gather input from a broad spectrum of wildlifers. They have about 500 responses so far. I encourage you to participate. I completed the questionnaire and found it to be based on a limited number of older documents from a handful of authors. I hope they plan to expand their search for more current day thoughts on foundational elements.

Photo by J. Burke (top) and J. Coyle (bottom)

TWS remains active in the policy arena. Council heard from staff about ongoing efforts to provide input to Congress. TWS policy priorities are:

- Robust Funding for Wildlife Conservation. When federal funding for wildlife conservation is threatened, we fight to provide conservation programs with necessary resources
- Conservation of Biological Diversity. Threats to biodiversity are significant and increasing. We advocate for proactive policies that promote resilient ecosystems where wildlife and people thrive.
- Science as the Foundation of Wildlife Policy. Conservation decisions must be based on research and data. We work to connect policymakers with the expertise of TWS members.

One of the policy topics we discussed was the Endangered Species Act. Specifically, about Section 7(e) The Endangered Species Committee (colloquially known as "The God Squad."). ESA Section 7 says:

"Each Federal agency shall, in consultation with and with the assistance of the Secretary, insure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out by such agency (hereinafter in this section referred to as an "agency action") is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered species or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of habitat of such species which is determined by the Secretary, after consultation as appropriate with affected States, to be critical, unless such agency has been granted an exemption for such action by the Committee pursuant to subsection (h) of this section."

The Act goes on to say "The Committee shall be composed of seven members as follows:
(A) The Secretary of Agriculture.
(B) The Secretary of the Army.
(C) The Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors.
(D) The Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.
(E) The Secretary of the Interior.
(F) The Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration."

This Endangered Species Committee has only been convened 3 times, the last in 1992. The current Administration convened the Committee recently and they voted unanimously to exempt oil and gas drilling in the Gulf of Mexico from environmental safeguards in place to protect the endangered wildlife living in its waters. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth requested the exemption. He said it was "a matter of urgent national security" and a response to "ongoing Endangered Species Act litigation that threatened to halt oil and gas production" in the gulf."

I find this deeply concerning. The administration seems to have bypassed the process of assessing the issues and developing non-jeopardy solutions that would still allow for oil and gas development and gone straight to “a threat to National Security.” This could be devastating to many endangered species who inhabit the Gulf of Mexico including the critically endangered Rice’s whale (51 estimated to be left in the wild), the sperm whale, two species of endangered sea turtles and the manatee. I hope that you take the time to familiarize yourselves with this aspect of the ESA and how it is currently being employed and inform your own thoughts on the issue. There are rumblings in the press that the Administration might convene the Committee again in the near future regarding timber sales and other environmental issues.

As always, I welcome your comments and questions. Email me at KGBirder55@gmail.com

Photo by R. Swanson

So long and happy "tails"!

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