

THE CONSERVATION QUARTERLY

Spring 2016 edition

Nature notes & news from the Lavaca County Wildlife Management Association

Texas Parks and Wildlife hires new biologist for Lavaca County

Dear Association Members,

My name is Brent Pierce and I will be serving as the TPWD Wildlife Biologist for Jackson and Lavaca County. My family and I are excited about moving into this area and becoming part of the community.

I was born and raised in Santa Fe, Texas located in Galveston County. I grew up hunting, fishing and camping with friends and family all over this beautiful State, and I know how precious these resources are. I graduated in 1999 from Texas A&M University with a BS in Rangeland Ecology and Management with a wildlife emphasis. I have 15 years' experience working for several private ranches across south Texas from Webb County to Calhoun County. During that time, I gained valuable experience, insight, and respect for the landowners and their families who invested their time and money into learning and promoting proper wildlife management practices. This has encouraged me to merge my private ranch experience into a career as a public consultant.

My goal as a TPWD Wildlife Biologist is to protect, manage, and conserve wildlife and their habitat, in order to maintain healthy wildlife populations for our enjoyment and for the enjoyment of future generations. To accomplish this goal it is important to have strong working relationships with everyone who has an interest in conserving and enhancing habitat resources for wildlife. That is why you should join your local wildlife management cooperative and become an active member. It plays a vital role in minimizing the effect of habitat fragmentation on our Texas landscape, which is a major threat to our wildlife. We should also continue to promote proper data collection, because good data is one of many fundamental components that guide us in making sound decisions that will positively impact native wildlife populations.

I am excited about my new position and looking forward to meeting and assisting you in efforts to help manage your property and the wildlife of Lavaca and Jackson County. This position requires that I be out in the field often, however I will plan on being in my office every Tuesday and Thursday morning from 8-12, so if you would like to stop by that will likely be the best time. Otherwise, please feel free to give me a call or send me an e-mail and I will respond back to you as quickly as possible. Thanks and I'm looking forward to meeting you at the fall meeting.

Brent Pierce

Don't delay. Send in your membership dues today.

If you haven't already done so, please mail in your 2016 membership dues as soon as possible. LCWMA dues are still \$20 and may be sent to the LCWMA at the following address:

LCWMA
P.O. Box 524
Hallettsville, TX 77964

Remember, any LCWMA member who wishes to be eligible to receive doe permits, for the 2016-2017 hunting season, must pay their 2016 dues by August 15, 2016. However, we prefer that everyone pay their dues now, to allow enough time to process the payments and mail receipts. Mailing early also helps avoid the glut of phone calls and emails from frantic members, who aren't sure if we will receive their payment by the deadline.

You should receive a receipt once your payment has been processed. Please be patient, though, as we have only one Treasurer, and he like all LCWMA officers are volunteers, meaning they handle LCWMA business in their spare time. If you don't receive a receipt within one month of mailing your membership dues, please contact LCWMA Treasurer, Sam Bordovsky by phone at 361-798-1813 or by email at sbordovsky@gmail.com. To avoid confusion, and to expedite payment processing, please mail your dues directly to the LCWMA. Please do not mail payments to, or drop them off at, the Texas Parks and Wildlife office in Hallettsville.

Save the date.

This year's annual meeting of the LCWMA will be on Sunday, September 18, 2016 at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Hallettsville. Please make plans to attend this meeting. Last year's meeting was well attended, and we would love to see even greater membership attendance at this year's meeting. More details of the meeting will be released in the summer edition of *The Conservation Quarterly*.

Help spread the word. Tell your neighbors to sign up now.

If you know someone interested in joining the LCWMA please get them signed up as soon as possible. Remember, new members must be enrolled in the LCWMA before August 15, 2016, to be eligible to receive doe permits for the 2016-2017 hunting season. Those with internet access can download an enrollment form off the LCWMA website (www.lcwma.org) under the JOIN tab. If you do not have internet access, please contact LCWMA chairman, Joel Wagner, at 361-798-6506 or by email at lavacacountywma@gmail.com

Chagas Project update

The LCWMA and researchers at Baylor College of Medicine's (BCM) National School of Tropical Medicine are collaborating on a project to study the extent of the parasite that causes Chagas disease in wildlife populations, particularly white-tailed deer. The following update was provided by Sarah Gunter, a BCM researcher actively working on the project:

The parasite that causes Chagas disease, *Trypanosoma cruzi*, is known to infect over 100 different mammalian species worldwide. Unfortunately, not much is known about which wildlife species in Texas are infected, and the magnitude of the population infected. To gain a better understanding of how this deadly parasite affects white-tailed deer in Texas, our team at Baylor College of Medicine embarked on a project to test harvested animals from across the state. With the help of LCWMA members, we collected 36 hearts from deer harvested in Lavaca County, during the 2015-2016 hunting season. Since the end of hunting season we have been working hard to process over 250 deer hearts received from across the state.

To perform the testing we extract small tissue samples from three locations in the heart that we propose may contain the parasite. Once the tissue is prepared for all of the hearts received we will extract DNA to test for the presence of the parasite. We are currently working to prepare the last of the hearts for testing, and we anticipate completing this project in the next 2 months. We are eager to get the results of our study, as I am sure many of you are as well. We plan to share our findings in the local newspaper as well as at the LCWMA meeting in September.

Thank you to everyone who participated in our Chagas research study. It is only through the dedication and generosity of people like you that we are able to learn more about this important emerging infectious disease. If you have any questions or concerns, about the study or Chagas disease itself, please contact Sarah Gunter at 713-298-7314 or by email at sarah.murphy@bcm.edu.

Keep it current.

Please keep us informed of changes to your email or mailing address. For those who use the TWIMS system for permit issuance it is also a good idea to contact Brent Pierce, Texas Parks and Wildlife biologist for Lavaca County, to ensure that your information is changed in TWIMS before the permit issuance season begins.

The next newsletter should arrive in mid-late July. That newsletter will contain the herd composition survey that must be completed, to be eligible to receive doe permits for the 2016-2017 hunting season.

Points on plants by Joel Wagner, wildlife ecologist and LCWMA chairman



An eastern gamagrass spike. Red flowers on top are male. Fuzzy strands on bottom are female.



A small stand of eastern gamagrass with spikes and seeds in different stages of flowering.

Eastern gamagrass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*) is a native, perennial bunchgrass frequently found in areas that stay moist for an extended period of time. An ancestor to corn, a deep root system (≤ 7 feet), and specialized root structures, known as aerenchyma, allow it to extract soil water, even in times of drought. The airspaces created by the aerenchyma also allow the plant to transport air from above ground to the roots, enabling it to survive prolonged periods in saturated soils. On the contrary, its ability to pull water from deep in the soil means eastern gamagrass can be found on drier uplands, but rarely achieves the growth seen on bottomland sites. Its expansive root system also makes eastern gamagrass a fantastic streambank stabilizer, as well as a remarkable plant for filter strips. It can also collect and store tremendous amounts of carbon from the air and slowly release it back into the soil, making it perfect for mitigating air pollution.

Probably one of the rarest native grasses in cattle country, it has largely been grazed out of existence in Lavaca County because it does not tolerate prolonged, heavy grazing. Gamagrass should never be grazed more than 6-8 inches from the ground, and should be rested 30-45 days between grazing episodes. Isolated patches of eastern gamagrass still exist in Lavaca County, the majority of which are in roadside ditches away from the reach of grazing livestock.

Rivaling alfalfa in protein content (some studies confirm as high as 20%) and digestibility (upwards of 65% total digestible nutrients at certain times of the year), cattle will decimate an eastern gamagrass stand if given the chance. Rates of gain on cattle grazing eastern gamagrass rival those of Tifton 85, and it does not deteriorate in digestibility nearly as quickly as Tifton 85 does.

A prolific seed-producer, the seeds are about the size of a kernel of corn and can easily be gathered for planting. However, it produces a low amount of viable seed. This means that while on the outside the seed may look perfect on the inside the seed is sterile and will never grow. Low seed viability is common in many native grasses. Some studies estimate that 1 in 1,000,000 seeds is actually viable in many native grasses.

The seeds of eastern gamagrass must be cold-stratified before they will germinate. Cold stratification is a natural process in which the moisture and cooler temperatures, intrinsic with wintertime, break down the coating on the outside, and allow moisture to penetrate the seed. It can then germinate and grow when the warmer temperatures of spring arrive. Eastern gamagrass starts growing much earlier in the spring than most native or nonnative grasses, including bermudagrass. As a result, gamagrass can achieve grazing height by mid-late March in Lavaca County.

From the wildlife perspective, the bunchgrass growth-form of eastern gamagrass provides a perfect substrate for turkeys to nest in, and the seeds are readily consumed by white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, and songbirds alike. It is also a preferred larval food source for ≥ 3 butterfly species.

**LCWMA
P.O. Box 524
Hallettsville, TX 77964**

LCWMA Board of Directors

Chairman: Joel Wagner (Western Lavaca County)

Vice-chairman: Jason Johnson (West Sandy Creek)

Secretary: Tom Grahmann (At-large)

Treasurer: Sam Bordovsky (South Central Lavaca County)

Member: William "Rusty" Wallace (Honey Creek)

Member: Mike Hoelscher (At-large)

Member: David Pohl (At-large)

Membership questions?

Call the Chairman at

361-798-6506 or

Email

lavacacountywma@gmail.com