

TEXAS CO-OP POWER



STARK BEAUTY

Art, history and nature converge
through an East Texas family's legacy

BLUEBONNET NEWS
SEE PAGE 18



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Detail of a Kiowa drawing of a military officer and two Native Americans in U.S. military dress.

FEATURES

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By Brenda Kissko

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By Lonni Taylor



NEXT MONTH

We Brake for Queso A belt-busting, cheese-topped tour of the best Tex-Mex dishes in San Antonio—ground zero for the beloved cuisine.



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LEDGER ART: BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART. TEX-MEX: JODY HORTON



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ON THE COVER A great egret at the Stark Foundation's Shangri La Botanical Gardens in Orange. Photo by Julia Robinson

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iViva Conjunto!

Of all the things I miss about Texas, dancing to a live conjunto band is at the top of the list [*Soul Music of South Texas*, March 2020].

BRUCE LAMB | VIA FACEBOOK

Get to the Point

I kept looking for a reference to the “correct” pronunciation, according to my Texas-born and -raised husband, of the words barbed wire—“bob wire” [*Sharpening My Knowledge*, March 2020].

ANITA CARSWELL | GEORGETOWN PEDERNALES EC

Editor’s Note: Check out Chet Garner’s video with the story on our website. He notes the “proper” pronunciation, though it’s a variation on this one.

Masterful Illustration

I enjoyed the article but even much more so the clever illustration of crape murder [*Crape Murder*, February 2020]. Michael Koelsch is pure genius with his depiction of the terrorized housewife with the painting of her beloved crape myrtle tree, while outside, her menacing husband viciously commits the heinous act of crape murder. This illustration could easily be the cover of a midcentury Nancy Drew Mystery Stories I collected as a girl.

ELIZABETH WALTERS | BURNET PEDERNALES EC

Cut off crape myrtles as close to the ground as your saw can get. Then prune off subsequent suckers. Replace with native trees that support butterflies, hummingbirds and other native wildlife.

Squeezebox Cues

The articles about the accordion just took me back to my childhood [*Soul Music of South Texas* and *Texas’ Main Squeeze*, March 2020]. I grew up listening to my dad play the accordion and sing Czech songs. Talk about going down memory lane.

BARB SCHROEDER | SCHULENBURG | FAYETTE EC

Like the tallow tree people seem to love for its hardiness, the cumulative effect of crape myrtles is that of a destructive invasive species.

JOE FLARITY | OAKHURST SAM HOUSTON EC

Around the Clock

I really enjoyed the picture of the Wise County Courthouse in the March Letters. My wife’s grandfather, Daniel Jensen, a jeweler and watchmaker, was hired back in the early years of the 20th century to keep the clock on top of that courthouse running properly. I wonder if anyone sees to the clock’s functioning these days.

DAN TEED | MCKINNEY COSERV

A Mother’s Love

Only a mother’s love could have recognized that the picture of the raising of our American flag

over Iwo Jima included her son [*A Texan at Iwo Jima*, February 2020]. Belle Block recognized her son in that splendid image. Also, most amazing, she recognized him from his back in a crouching position. She must have had a million images stored of him in her memory and heart as he grew up.

FRED SMITH JR. | BUNA JASPER-NEWTON EC

I wonder how many Americans know that the picture taken by Joe Rosenthal was in fact the second flag raised on Mount Suribachi. The first flag raised was a smaller flag.



I write this to bring a little-known fact to the public’s attention and to honor Cpl. Charles W. Lindberg, who passed in 2007 as the last living flag raiser on Mount Suribachi. He was in the squad of Marines responsible for the first flag raised, and I have a picture, autographed by him, of the squad during the first raising.

DONALD GRUBBS | VICTORIA VICTORIA EC

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Please include your town and electric co-op. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

   **Texas Co-op Power**

TEXAS CO-OP POWER VOLUME 76, NUMBER 11 (USPS 540-560). *Texas Co-op Power* is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives (TEC). Periodical postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 75 electric cooperatives. *Texas Co-op Power*’s website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com. **SUBSCRIPTION PRICE** is \$4.20 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives and is paid from equity accruing to the member. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of \$7.50. Individual copies and back issues are available for \$3 each. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to *Texas Co-op Power* (USPS 540-560), 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. Please enclose label from this copy of *Texas Co-op Power* showing old address and key numbers. **ADVERTISING:** Advertisers interested in buying display ad space in *Texas Co-op Power* and/or in our 30 sister publications in other states, contact Elaine Sproull at (512) 486-6251. Advertisements in *Texas Co-op Power* are paid solicitations. The publisher neither endorses nor guarantees in any manner any product or company included in this publication. Product satisfaction and delivery responsibility lie solely with the advertiser.

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RURAL LIVING

The Future Looks Bright

THE NATIONAL FFA ORGANIZATION reached a milestone late last year: 700,000 members. The student organization that supports and promotes agricultural education has chapters in all 50 states. Of course, the Texas chapter is the largest, with more than 137,000 members who “believe in the future of agriculture, with a faith born not of words but of deeds.”



NATURE



THE FIRST CULTIVATED CARROTS WERE PURPLE OR YELLOW.

TECH KNOWLEDGE

Current Favorite

One year into committing his family to an electric vehicle, John Kent, in a column for *The Dallas Morning News*, called his Tesla “the best thing I’ve ever paid money for.”

Kent said the vehicle has easily handled trips to Oklahoma City, Austin, Houston and Santa Rosa Beach, Florida, with a range that tops out at about 264 miles.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Counting on You

The 2020 U.S. census is well underway. The 2010 census showed that nearly half of all U.S. Latinos lived in two states: 28% in California, 19% in Texas.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

The best part about being a mom is . . .



► **Tell us how** you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or post them on our Facebook page. Please include your city and co-op.

Below are some of the responses to our March prompt: **Why do dogs always ...**

Quickly find a way into your heart?

AL AND JUDY WILSON | NORTHLAKE COSERV

Want to go outside as soon as I sit down to do something?

KAY STRICKLIN | SEGUIN
GUADALUPE VALLEY EC

Bark at doorbells on TV even if they've never heard a doorbell in real life?

EMILEE ENSMINGER | FORT WORTH TRI-COUNTY EC

Go to sleep so fast?

ELIZABETH AND GEORGE MORGAN
SAN ANGELO | CONCHO VALLEY EC

Love us when we think there's nobody else who does?

MIKE CATES | BELLS | GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

Hate to have a bath but love to go for a swim in a muddy, algae-covered pond?

DARLA REGNER | BARTLETT | BARTLETT EC

To see more responses, read *Currents* on our website.

LIFESTYLE

SPLASH ACROSS TEXAS

In search of a Texas-sized photo op this summer? Here are some pools that are Texas-shaped, too.

HOUSTON The Marriott Marquis' 550-foot-long rooftop lazy river opened in 2016.

KERRVILLE The pool at the Holiday Inn Express has a lone star at the bottom that puts the city on the map.

PLANO The Texas Pool, a 168,000-gallon saltwater pool that opened in 1959, boasts a Panhandle diving board and South Texas wading area.



Know of a Texas-shaped pool near you?
Let us know: letters@TexasCoopPower.com.

CO-OP PEOPLE

Badgers Got Your Back



When Taylor Electric Cooperative asked students to submit designs for a billboard contest, one entry stood out from all the others to win the grand prize.

Bailey Casady at Merkel Elementary School drew fellow fifth grader Logan Malone, who is fighting cancer, alongside the school's mascot and "Badgers got your back."

"**This sweet student** showed us that her love of her community comes in their support of the Malone family and Logan as they go through a tough cancer battle," said Elizabeth McVey, Taylor EC public relations and communications manager. "It surprised the contest committee that a student so young would respond in such a way."

SPORTS SECTION

SPORT OF KING

Two Texas-bred horses have won the Kentucky Derby: Assault in 1946 and Middleground in 1950. Both were from the King Ranch.



FIRMLY ROOTED

The Stark family lumber empire
of Orange forged cultural destinations
that offer art, history and nature

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY JULIA ROBINSON



THE STORY OF

the Stark and Lutcher families in Orange mirrors the rise of the East Texas economy after the Civil War. During the last quarter of the 19th century, grain milling, ranching and cotton were the region's top producers. The timberlands remained relatively untouched, and because forests were considered an impediment to arable farmland, timber acreage could be bought cheap.

Henry J. Lutcher, a lumberman from Pennsylvania, visited East Texas with his business partner in 1876 and moved to Orange, on the Sabine River, the following year. He purchased 500,000 acres of timberland across the Sabine in southwest Louisiana and built a state-of-the-art sawmill.

The expansion of railroads in Texas helped fill demand for lumber products ranging from barrel staves to wood siding, and Texas lumbering experienced a boom that continued until the Great Depression. Through this 50-year industry expansion, the Lutcher and Moore Lumber Company became a leader in the quantity and quality of finished lumber products in the state.

William Henry Stark, a native Texan working in the mill, married Lutcher's daughter, Miriam, and moved into management of the family business. That union of families would transform the Orange community over the next several decades.

In 21st-century Orange, the legacy of W.H. and Miriam Lutcher Stark, along with that of their son, H.J. Lutcher Stark, who went by Lutcher throughout his life, continues through



Clockwise from opposite page: The W.H. Stark House is a 14,000-square-foot home built of cypress and longleaf pine in 1894. Henry J. Lutcher; Miriam, his daughter; and William Henry Stark, who married Miriam. The library of the Stark House.

venues managed by the Stark Foundation: the W.H. Stark House, the Stark Museum of Art and the Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center.

"The Lutcher-Stark Family would have been some of the wealthiest in the state before the oil boom and still among the richest even after it," explains Joshua Cole, W.H. Stark House interpretation and programming manager.



The Stark House's dining room is set for a formal evening with one of the many sets of dinnerware the Stark family used.

STARK MUSEUM OF ART

One block away from the Stark House waits the modern architectural contrast of the two-story Stark Museum of Art. Opened in 1978, the white marble building, with its 60,000 square feet of exhibition, storage and museum facility space, was designed to withstand hurricane winds of 200 mph.

The 9,000-piece museum collection emphasizes art of the American West, much of it collected by Lutcher Stark. Iconic sculptures by Frederic Remington and Hermon Atkins MacNeil dominate the entry atrium. Remington's work is of a bucking bronco, and MacNeil's bronze depicts a Native American child learning from an elder. Porcelain sculptures of American birds by Dorothy Doughty line the atrium's walls, and weavings by Navajo women working in the post-reservation period hang from the balcony.

"The theme is exploring America's frontiers through the early 19th-century artists who traveled into the West primarily to

W.H. STARK HOUSE

The W.H. Stark House, a 14,000-square-foot, 15-room Queen Anne revival mansion, is a Texas Historic Landmark and appears on the National Register of Historic Places. Completed in 1894 and inhabited by the family until 1936, the house was an architectural and cultural anchor for the nascent community of Orange and remains one of the few area mansions fully restored and open to the public.

"When this house was built, [there were] dirt streets and cowboys shooting guns in the air," says Cole. "This house, paving the streets, bringing electricity, the churches—all this is about domesticating what was a frontier border lumber boomtown."

The Stark home was not the largest in Orange or even the largest on Green Avenue when it was built. What set the house apart was its exquisite wood finishes. As the only surviving house of its size, it now dominates the neighborhood, with pitched gables and dormers, detailed woodwork, and wraparound porches.

The exterior walls combine two layers of diagonal cypress, Cole points out. "Whichever way the wind blows, this house gets tighter in a storm," he says. In the foyer, cypress and longleaf pine exude a warm glow, and pine panels, intricate moldings and detailed lathe work line most surfaces of the house.

"This home was not only gorgeous; it was completely modern with all the latest modern conveniences," Cole says. "It was fully electrified, with indoor plumbing, making it one of the very first homes in the world to have those core technologies."

At its peak in the early 20th century, the house was staffed by 15 full-time employees, including a cook, butler, maid, nurse, chauffeur, laundress and gardener, some of whom lived on the grounds in the carriage house and servants' quarters.

Visitors can tour three levels of beautifully preserved rooms lined with yellow silk wallpaper, original family furniture and rugs, original ceiling murals painted on canvas, formal porcelain dining sets and Brilliant Period cut glass.



A John James Audubon painting of mockingbirds from his personal copy of *Birds of America*, a signature piece at the Stark Museum of Art.

AUDUBON: COURTESY STARK MUSEUM OF ART



Above: The Stark Museum houses 9,000 pieces from the 19th- and 20th-century American West. Right: The museum holds the only complete collection of the United States in crystal by Steuben glass, which includes engraved bowls depicting a scene or theme for each state.

record and document what was then unknown,” says museum curator Sarah Boehme.

One of the museum’s signature pieces is John James Audubon’s personal copy of *Birds of America* in enormous double elephant folio, one of only 100 remaining in the world. “Audubon set out to record and document every species of American bird, to show them life-size and in their natural habitat,” Boehme explains. “To disseminate this information, he had to make 435 prints and produce them as a book.” The volume, set under glass, is 39.5 inches tall and 28.5 inches wide, and the book is opened to a bird that complements concurrent exhibitions.

Ron Tyler, retired director of Fort Worth’s Amon Carter Museum of American Art, explains that the Stark’s Audubon collection is important not only because it includes Audubon’s own portfolio but also because of the naturalist’s letters, documents, sketches and paintings.

Tyler also cites the Stark’s John Mix Stanley painting of the treaty scene between the Republic of Texas and Native Americans at Tehuacana Creek near Waco in 1843.

In a nearby, specially lit hall, crystal bowls by the Steuben



glass company glitter as if illuminated from within. They comprise the world’s only complete collection of the United States in crystal, which includes a specific motif for each of the 50 states and one more for the United States.

In another gallery, the work of Native American artists shifts the perspective on the

West from outsider to insider. Clothing, baskets, pottery, carvings and weavings by Navajo, Pueblo and Hopi artists interpret daily life and traditions.

Katrina Nelson Thomas, director of the four Stark Art and History Venues in Orange, explains the Stark Museum’s educational mission. “When students come, they see the work in the galleries, and then they make art inspired by something they see, so they always leave with a piece they made,” she says. “We’re trying to make that connection between the collection and the art that’s made.”



SHANGRI LA BOTANICAL GARDENS AND NATURE CENTER

Less than 2 miles from the museum, visitors can walk through Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, named for the fictional Tibetan paradise described in the 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*. Shangri La is where Lutch Stark cultivated azaleas and camellias in abundance and created a lake where he launched a houseboat for weekend escapes in the 1950s.

A cold winter devastated Shangri La's plants in 1958, and the gardens closed to the public. The land reverted to a wild state, but in 2008, the Stark Foundation reopened the restored gardens to the public. Shangri La now occupies 252 acres of gardens and wetlands, with an eco-boat tour and an egret rookery that includes a viewing blind where 50,000 visitors a year watch great egrets nest and raise their young.

"What Mr. Stark did was paint a picture with plants," says Jen-

nifer Buckner, Shangri La's director of horticulture. "We honor that and our connection to the museum with garden 'rooms.' " Each section combines plantings that demonstrate an artistic character of line, shape, texture, contrast and color. In the shape garden, rows of dwarf yaupon form perfectly rounded bushes. The contrasts garden showcases flowers and leaves exhibiting colors from opposite sides of the color wheel.

The gardens revived Lutch Stark's original obsession with camellias and azaleas. Each spring, the flowers bloom along the shore of Pond of the Blue Moon. Miriam Lutch Stark's original epiphyte house overflows with orchids,

WEB EXTRAS

► Read online for a link to 600-plus artworks in Stark collections. Call or go online to confirm hours of operation.



Clockwise from opposite page: The boardwalk above the cypress-tupelo swamp at Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center; bottle tree sculpture; dwarf palmetto; and Bowring's cattleya orchids.

bromeliads, ferns and lichens. Other areas include an edibles garden, a daylily collection and hanging gardens.

The majority of Shangri La's property lies along Adams Bayou and is most accessible via the boat tour. Elevated wooden walkways take visitors past the Nature Discovery Center toward the dock, which is surrounded by cattails, Texas saw hibiscus, rushes and lily pads as well as bald and pond cypress. "We even have some wild orchids that grow here," says Buckner, who always keeps an eye out for unique flora.

The property along the bayou preserves an untouched section of cypress-tupelo swamp, used as an outdoor classroom for local students. Kathleen Nelligan, an environmental educator, narrates a tour as the boat swings out onto the bayou. As guests motor quietly upriver, they catch sight of turtles sunning on logs or egrets and kingfishers taking flight above the water.

In one classroom, children learn about the swamp ecosystem firsthand. The classroom's A-frame structure rises out of the marsh

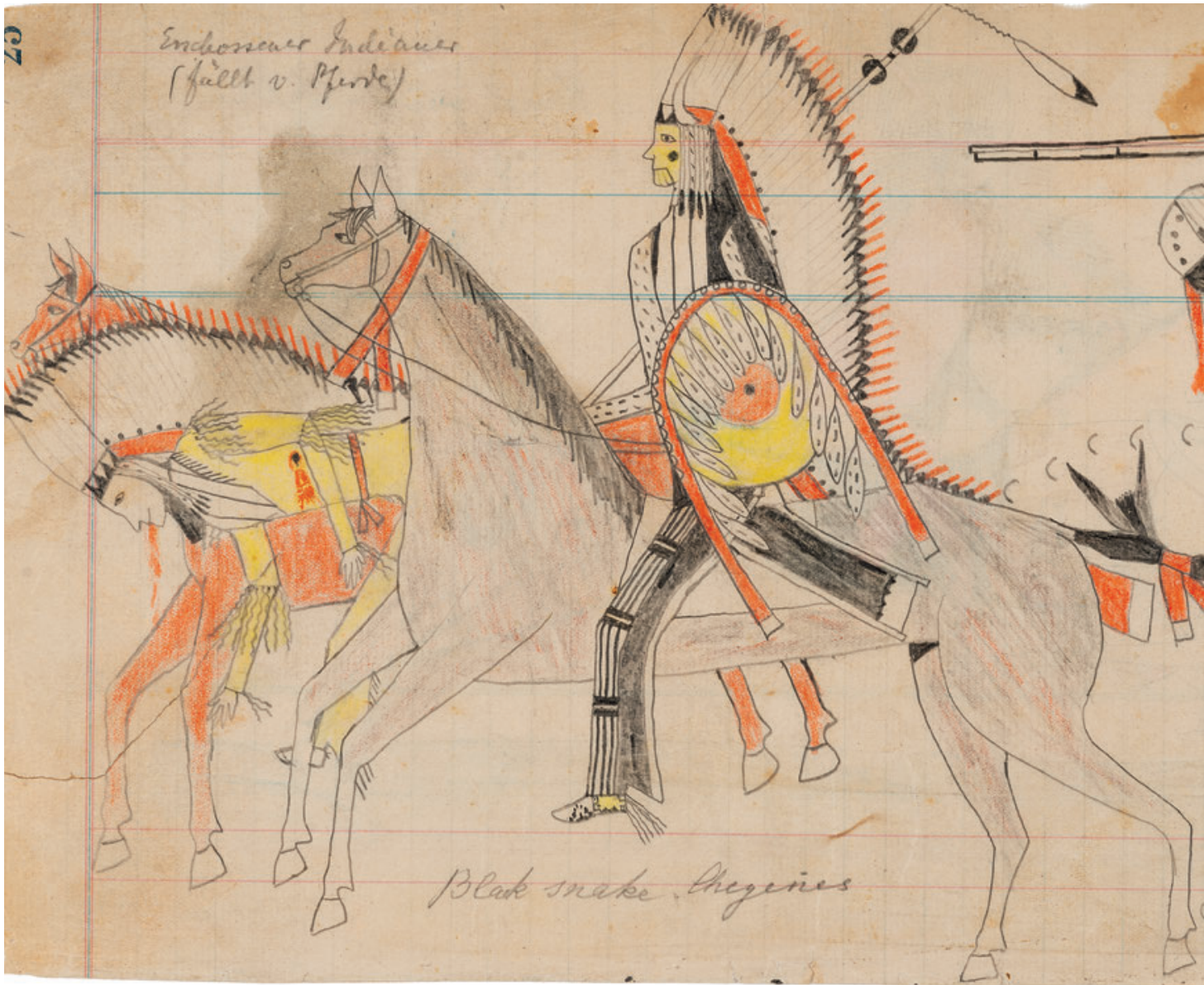
like a church, and rows of benches complete the look of a sanctuary.

"I really love teaching outside," says Nelligan. "The kids get out here and think, yay, we're out of school. But we are a school; we're just a school without walls."

Not far from the dock stands the Survivor Tree, a 1,200-year-old pond cypress that rises from the water near the edge of Shangri La. The species is not typically found in this area, but this tree was here long before Texas was a shape on the map.

"The story of the Lutchter-Starks is the story of the creation of the city of Orange," Cole explains. To convince his young wife to remain in Texas, W.H. Stark built an elaborate house to make her as comfortable as possible. "This area was always a borderland between empires, between countries, and was very lawless and underdeveloped."

Stark used the family wealth to pave streets, build churches and schools, and bring refinement to the burgeoning East Texas town. See more of **Julia Robinson's** work at juliarobinsonphoto.com.



Cultural Accounting

19TH-CENTURY DRAWINGS OFFER INSIGHT INTO PLAINS PERSPECTIVE

BY CHARLES LOHRMANN

The nomadic tribes of North America's southern Plains, including the Kiowa, did not traditionally maintain a written history, so a Native American version of events from the mid-19th century is not easy to find.

One rare example can be seen in a series of 58 pencil drawings in the collection of the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin.

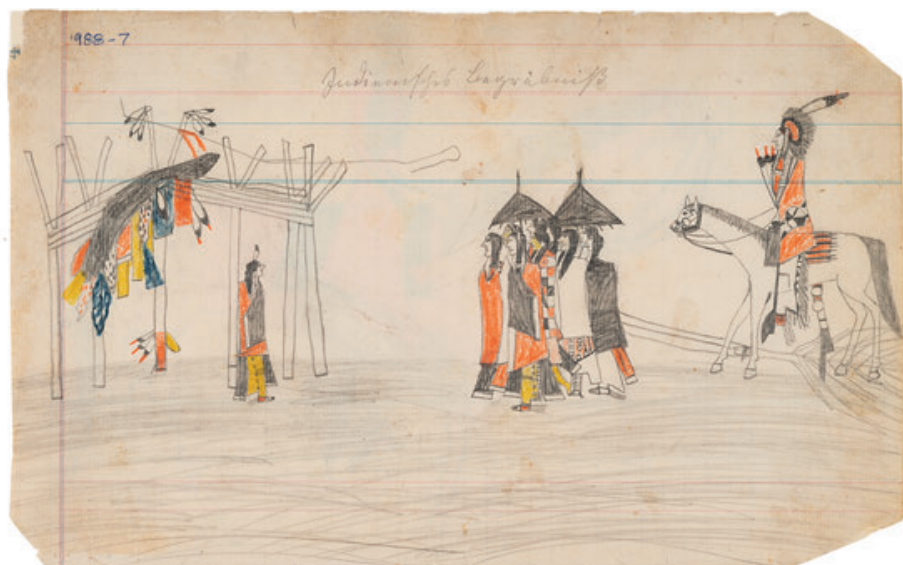
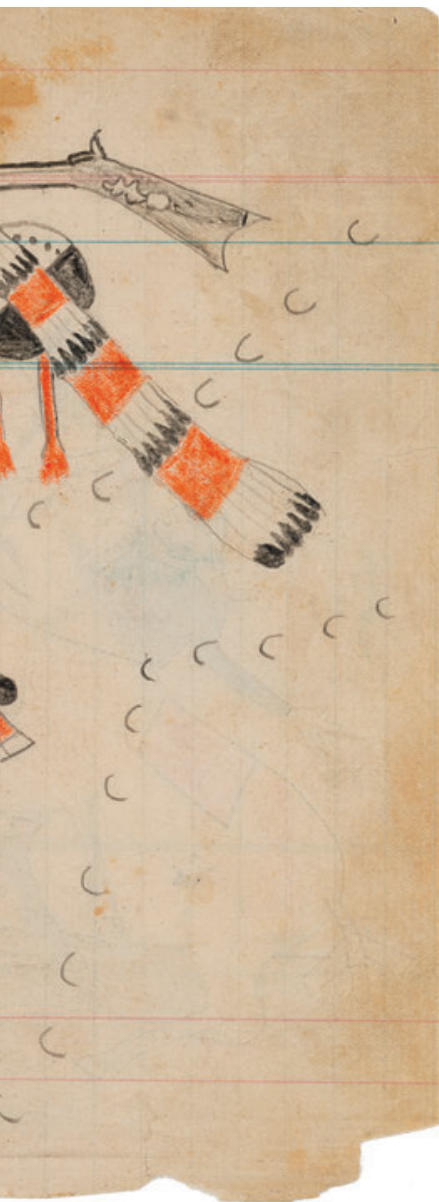
These drawings—many attributed to the Kiowa—were originally bound in an account ledger and dated 1840–1895. It is known as the Schild Ledger because it was purchased in 1895 by Dr. E.H. Tips in Fredericksburg from the estate of Herman Schild, believed to have been a member of the Board of Indian Commissioners.

“Because Kiowas had no written form of their language in

the 19th century, the ledgers are among the most important formats in which we can see things from their perspective,” explains Jennifer Graber, associate director of the Native American and indigenous studies program at UT Austin. “The ledgers, with their emphasis on landscapes, community, animals, family life, significant life events and ritual, point us toward what was important to Kiowas.”

Ledger art is widely known among students and collectors of 19th-century Native American art. As the name suggests, the drawings were made on paper in actual ledgers, and they are described as similar to paintings originally made on animal hides.

Graber points out that Kiowas changed artistic and historic media through the centuries the tribe lived on the Plains. Generations earlier, Graber says, the Plains people would have made carvings and paintings on rock. Later, these people painted on tepees and shields made from buffalo hides. “When paper



became available, they used that too," she says.

Even though an artist with a notebook full of paper can create more complex images than on other media, Graber says that "throughout their history of artistic production, Kiowas evidenced many consistencies, including their depiction of important historical events and their encounters with supernatural powers."

Ledger art history suggests that the drawings continued a Plains artistic tradition of two-dimensional figures populating scenes of battles, ceremonies and native life. The artists capture the essence of the scene in a highly stylized way, including little shading to imply depth. Unique details in the drawings, such as shield designs, are useful for identifying the subjects by tribal affiliation or even by name.

The Schild Ledger was a well-traveled volume. After Tips purchased the ledger in 1895, he traveled with it to Germany, and his son, Carlos, ultimately returned with it to the United States. The Texas Memorial Museum acquired the ledger from Carlos Tips'

WEB EXTRAS

► Read this story online for more about ledger art.

Clockwise from opposite page: Drawings from the Schild Ledger show a confrontation between two mounted warriors; two figures in elaborate dress; tribal members bringing boughs to a Sun Dance lodge.

widow in 1964.

When the museum deaccessioned its cultural artifacts to focus on natural history, the ledger moved to the Texas Archeological Research

Laboratory. In 2016, the ledger was transferred from TARL to the Blanton Museum of Art.

Jonathan Jarvis, associate director of TARL, describes the archaeological information these drawings communicate. In one example, a drawing depicts the 1874 Buffalo Wallow battle of the Red River War. "For us it is great art, and we recognize the history there, but we can relate it to actual, in-the-ground archaeology."

Jarvis helped facilitate the transfer of the Schild Ledger to the Blanton because the museum is better able to get the drawings out to the public. Now, the drawings are exhibited occasionally and preserved for further study by tribal members, artists, archaeologists, historians and anthropologists.

Charles Lohmann is the editor of *Texas Co-op Power*.

Clogged, Backed—up Septic System...Can anything Restore It?

DEAR DARRYL: My home is about 10 years old, and so is my septic system. I have always taken pride in keeping my home and property in top shape. In fact, my neighbors and I are always kidding each other about who keeps their home and yard nicest. Lately, however, I have had a horrible smell in my yard, and also in one of my bathrooms, coming from the shower drain. My grass is muddy and all the drains in my home are very slow.



My wife is on my back to make the bathroom stop smelling and as you can imagine, my neighbors are having a field day, kidding me about the mud pit and sewage stench in my yard. It's humiliating. I called a plumber buddy of mine, who recommended pumping (and maybe even replacing) my septic system. But at the potential cost of thousands of dollars, I hate to explore that option.

I tried the store bought, so called, Septic treatments out there, and they did Nothing to clear up my problem. Is there anything on the market I can pour or flush into my system that will restore it to normal, and keep it maintained?

Clogged and Smelly – Amarillo, TX

DEAR CLOGGED AND SMELLY: As a reader of my column, I am sure you are aware that I have a great deal of experience in this particular field. You will be glad to know that there IS a septic solution that will solve your back-up and effectively restore your entire system from interior piping throughout the septic system and even unclog the drain field as well. **SeptiCleanse® Shock and Maintenance Programs** deliver your system the fast active bacteria and enzymes needed to liquefy solid waste and free the clogs causing your back-up.

This fast-acting bacteria multiplies within minutes of application and is specifically designed to withstand many of today's anti-bacterial cleaners, soaps and detergents. It comes in dissolvable plastic packs, that you just flush down your toilets. It's so cool. Plus, they actually Guarantee that it restores ANY system, no matter how bad the problem is.

SeptiCleanse® Shock and Maintenance Programs are designed to work on any septic system regardless of design or age. From modern day systems to sand mounds, and systems installed generations ago, I have personally seen SeptiCleanse unclog and restore these systems in a matter of weeks. I highly recommend that you try it before spending any money on repairs. SeptiCleanse products are available online at www.septicleanse.com or you can order or learn more by calling toll free at 1-888-899-8345. If you use the promo code "TXS10", you can get a free shock treatment, added to your order, which normally costs \$169. So, make sure you use that code when you call or buy online.



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Talk to Bluebonnet about your bill

The impact of the coronavirus on the economy has hit home. Many Central Texas families are hurting financially as jobs are lost or hours and incomes are drastically reduced. Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's members are increasingly asking for assistance to pay their electric bills.

Barbara Seilheimer, Bluebonnet's manager of member services, answered questions about what the cooperative is doing for members during this difficult time.

What is Bluebonnet doing for families who are struggling to pay their electric bills because they have lost jobs or their income has been reduced during the coronavirus outbreak?

We are always willing to work with our members who need help with their electric



Barbara Seilheimer

bills. We ask our members to contact us if they are unable to pay so we can work out a payment arrangement.

How can someone who needs assistance with their bill contact Bluebonnet, and what information do they need to provide?

They can contact us by email at memberservices@bluebonnet.coop, call 800-842-7708 (Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.), or visit one of our member service center drive-through lanes. Assistance information is also available at our website, bluebonnet.coop. Click on the Residential tab, then on Your Bill in the drop-down. Scroll to the bottom of the page for payment assistance information and links, including a list of Central Texas assistance providers. On the mobile app, click on the Payments icon at the bottom of the screen and select Payment Assistance.

If a family or business can't pay the entire amount due on their bill, why is it important to pay as much as they can right now?

Bluebonnet wants to make sure we do everything we can to support our members. Making a partial payment will enable more flexibility with payment arrangements, and avoid a higher bill once this health crisis ends.

What about businesses that need help with their electric bills?

We are helping businesses the same way we are helping families. We know a lot of businesses — large and small — are struggling right now.

During your 39 years with Bluebonnet, have you ever seen a time like this?

No. We have had summers with short spurts of high temperatures. Bills were high, and we made payment arrangements and payment plans. We didn't disconnect power because of the heat. But nothing like this. This time it's people losing jobs, cuts in pay and furloughs, and we don't know how long this will go on.



Angela Coy photo

Keeping Bluebonnet running

Keeping your electricity on is an essential service, and Bluebonnet employees are working during the coronavirus crisis. However, aspects of every job have changed. Many member service representatives are taking members' calls from home. Linemen are working but maintaining a social distance of at least 6 feet from members. Above, Angela Coy, second from left, a manager in the co-op's finance department, works from home as does husband, Josh, right. Their children, Joey, 8, left, and Lanie, 11, do schoolwork remotely. Everyone chips in on household chores. At right, Katie Weber, a member service representative, continues to work the Bastrop member service center drive-through window, wearing gloves and using spray, wipes and hand gel to keep things she touches sanitary.



Sarah Beal photo

Annual Meeting Notice

Dear Member:

Pursuant to the Bylaws of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, Inc., the Annual Membership Meeting will be held on May 12, 2020, at 9 a.m. at Bluebonnet's headquarters, 155 Electric Ave., Bastrop, Texas, and/or via teleconference or other electronic means. In adherence to federal, state and local guidelines issued to protect the health of our great nation from COVID-19, and to protect the health and well-being of Bluebonnet's members, employees and communities, the Board of Directors made the decision at its March regular meeting to hold the Annual Meeting without public attendance. Business coming before the meeting will be conducted by the Board remotely on behalf of the members by proxies registered with the Cooperative on or before May 5, 2020, directed to the Board and the Proxy Committee.

Four incumbent director seats were up for election, none of which were opposed. Those directors are Roderick Emanuel, District 3, Bastrop County; Russell Jurk, District 4, Lee, Milam and Williamson counties; Byron Balke, District 6, Austin, Colorado and Fayette counties; and Robert Mikeska, District 7, Washington County. The incumbent directors will be elected by general consent in accordance with Article II, Section 6 of the Bylaws. Other business that may come before the meeting will also be addressed.

Sincerely yours,



Robert Mikeska
Secretary/Treasurer
Bluebonnet Board of Directors

Annual Meeting to be held without public attendance

Members asked to return completed proxy forms by May 5

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Annual Meeting will be held Tuesday, May 12, without public attendance. The cooperative's Board of Directors made the decision to avoid endangering the health of its members, employees and communities from the spread of the coronavirus.

The decision adheres to federal, state and local public health guidelines issued in March to restrict large public gatherings in order to reduce the spread of coronavirus through community contact.

Bluebonnet's bylaws require the cooperative to have an Annual Meeting every year in May. State law governs when notification of the Annual Meeting is sent to members.

Although members cannot attend the Annual Meeting, they can still be represented by returning a completed proxy form, which was mailed to all members in March. The deadline to return the proxy

is coming up quickly. The form must be returned by mail and postmarked by May 5, 2020.

Completed proxies would be used if there were any business placed on the meeting's agenda. Those items would have to be added no later than 10 days before the Annual Meeting. As of early April, there was no new business on the agenda for the 2020 meeting, and none is anticipated. A second, very important reason to return the proxy forms is because they are counted in order to constitute a quorum of at least 1 percent of the cooperative's membership, which is required for the Annual Meeting.

All members who return their proxy forms will be entered into drawings for prizes, which the cooperative will mail or deliver to winners.

Immediately after the May 12 meeting, Bluebonnet will post information about it on our website, bluebonnet.coop, and on our social media: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Look for an article about the meeting in the July issue of this magazine.



The four incumbent directors on Bluebonnet's Board who are unopposed in this year's election are, from left, Roderick Emanuel, vice president/vice-chairman, who has been on the Board since 2011; Russell Jurk, who has been on the Board since 2011; Byron Balke, assistant secretary/treasurer, who has been on the Board since 2000; and Robert Mikeska, secretary/treasurer, who has been on the Board since 2008. Because the four were unopposed, they will be elected by general consent in accordance with Bluebonnet's bylaws.

Beware of phone scammers preying on coronavirus fears

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative members have reported an attempted phone scam by people claiming to represent Bluebonnet. Scammers are taking advantage of fears about the coronavirus and the economy. The fraudulent callers tell members their power will be disconnected unless they make an immediate payment over the phone. These calls are not made by or on behalf of Bluebonnet.

Bluebonnet makes at least two attempts to

remind members that a payment is overdue — once by mail and again by an automated courtesy phone call — within 10 days of their payment's due date.

If a Bluebonnet member has not received a reminder in the mail or a courtesy call about their account, and someone claiming to represent Bluebonnet calls demanding an immediate payment by phone, do not pay. Bluebonnet members who get a call from

someone asking for account information should not give the caller any information.

If you receive a call like that, get as much information about the caller as possible, including the phone number from which he or she is calling by caller ID. Please report the attempted scam by calling Bluebonnet at 800-842-7708 between 7:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Follow that with a call to local law enforcement.



Photos by Ralph Barrera

Above, a downy woodpecker feasts at the Colorado River Refuge in Bastrop, a popular spot for bird watching. At right, a great egret passes over people fishing at the Lake Fayette Park Prairie Park.

The beauty of birding



We live in a profoundly different world than the one we inhabited a few months ago. But if we step outside to decompress from the stress of it all, the birds still sing in the trees. The quiet adventure of birding can be done solo, or with a family member who requires no social distancing. Fortunately, the Bluebonnet service area is perfect for this gentle hobby.

BY CLAYTON STROMBERGER

For Louise Ridlon of Cedar Creek in Bastrop County, it was a male western tanager that did it – a burst of bright yellow with a flaming red head that appeared one sunny afternoon outside her college dorm window in Southern California.

“I’d never seen anything so beautiful,” Ridlon said. “A few years later I took a university extension course on the birds of southeast Arizona. We saw over 200 species in a week, and I was thoroughly hooked.”

For Mike Goebel, who lives in The Colony in Bastrop County, it was a male cerulean warbler, so startlingly blue, he

recalls, that when it alighted in front of him on a hike in West Virginia it was like “a little piece of sky just came from nowhere and landed on this bush, and I thought, ‘What is that?!’ ”

For Jason Leifester of Elgin, it was a dark-crested eater of desert mistletoe berries – the phainopepla, east of its usual range. It caught his eye near his grandparents’ San Angelo-area farm when he was 12. He’s never forgotten the thrill of identifying the mysterious visitor using his sixth-grade teacher’s classroom bird guide.

And if you ask distinguished Texas birder and author Brush Freeman, a longtime resident of Utley near Bastrop, how it all

Silently listening for a warble or sighting a new



started for him, he goes back to early childhood, a memory glowing like a Kodachrome slide: a male painted bunting, splashed with dazzling primary colors, sipping water from a cow's muddy hoofprint at his grandparents' Oklahoma farm.

Birders call it your "spark bird," the one that can ignite a life-long passion. Perhaps, like Freeman, you'll go on to set a record for the "Texas Big Year," an informal birding competition to find the most birds in Texas in a calendar year. He did that in 1995 with his friend Petra Hockey. They crisscrossed the state and saw more than 490 species. That record held up as No. 1 in Texas for five years.

Birding is a hot hobby. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported that more than 45 million Americans engaged in some form of wildlife-watching, including birding, in 2016, an increase of 20 percent from five years earlier.

In a time when quarantines, lethal viruses, business hardships and school disruptions have created fear and anxiety for many, birding may be just what the doctor ordered.

Birding can be different things to different people: a backyard pastime, a serious avocation, a meditative practice, an

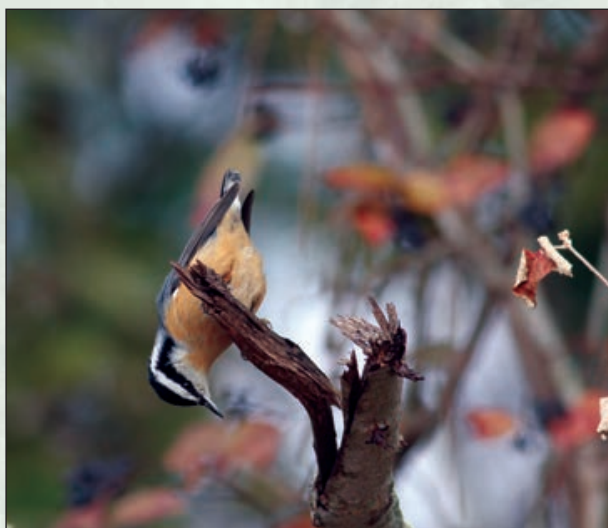


Photo by Jason Leifester

A red-breasted nuthatch, above, has a call that sounds like a tiny tin horn. See our list of top bird-watching spots in the area, Page 20B. Check for restrictions or closures due to coronavirus.

Continued on page 20C

species could be an antidote for troubled times

Best birding spots in the Bluebonnet region

Texas' marquee birding locations are still the Gulf coast, Rio Grande Valley and West Texas. But the post oak savannahs, prairies and pines between eastern Travis County and the Brazos River at the eastern edge of Washington County are among the richest, most diverse birding areas in the state.

Please check the status of these parks and facilities because they could be closed or have restricted hours due to coronavirus regulations.

1 Bastrop and Buescher state parks

These parks, connected by a winding 12-mile road, are a favorite combination for birders. Get a bird list at each park, and ask the rangers what they've seen or heard recently. Red-headed woodpeckers, once rare in the area, are easy to find. Quiet weekday mornings are best for birders. Bastrop State Park, 100 Park Road 1A, Bastrop; 512-321-2101; tpwd.texas.gov. Buescher State Park, 100 Park Road 1E, Smithville; 512-237-2241. Hours (both parks): 6 a.m.-10 p.m.; \$5 for 13 and older, free for 12 and younger.

2 McKinney Roughs Nature Park

With miles of hiking trails along a quiet stretch of the Colorado River, this 1,140-acre Lower Colorado River Authority park offers all sorts of habitat for year-round and migratory birds. Many of the best bird photos taken here are by park program coordinator and avid birder Nicholas Cowey, who leads the annual Lost Pines Christmas Bird Count. Spring and summer are nesting season for the pretty blue-gray and yellow northern parula. 1884 Texas 71, Cedar Creek, 512-303-5073; lcr.org. Open daily sunrise to sunset; \$5 for visitors 13 and older, \$2 for 65 and older, as well as those with disabilities, free for 12 and younger.



Photo by Ralph Barrera

Jan and Mike Goebel love that retirement allows them to spend more time birding. One of their favorite spots is at Prairie Park, an LCRA park on 2,000-acre Lake Fayette.

3 Somerville Lake

This lake, 10 miles northwest of Brenham, is so big it has shoreline in Lee, Burleson and Washington counties. It's a birding bonanza and a full day's expedition. A variety of parks ring the water, including Lake Somerville State Park and Trailway. Veteran area birder Bert Frenz lists 247 species seen here, from wood storks and pelicans to very rare visitors such as the brown booby and magnificent frigatebird. Lake Somerville State Park: Birch Creek Unit, 14222 Park Road 57, Somerville, 979-535-7763 and Nails Creek Unit, 6280 FM 180, Ledbetter, 979-289-2392; \$4 for 13 and older; free for 12 and younger.

4 Lake Fayette

This 2,000-acre power-plant reservoir offers a good chance to spot an osprey or the occasional wintering white pelican. Two LCRA parks, Oak Thicket and Park Prairie, are on the north side of the lake. The Rice-Osborne nature trail at Oak Thicket is free to visitors. Lake Fayette Oak Thicket Park, 4819 Texas 159, Fayetteville; 979-249-3504; Lake Fayette Park Prairie Park, 1250 Park Prairie Road, La Grange; 979-249-3504. Both parks open daily during daylight hours; \$5 for 13 and older, \$2 for 65 and older, as well as those with disabilities, free for 12 and younger; lcr.org.

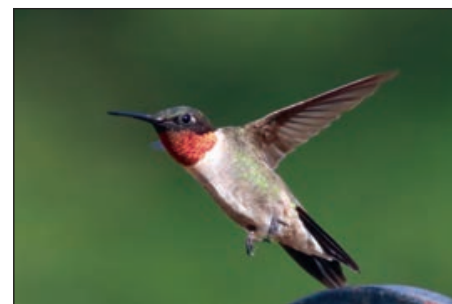


Photo by Ron Newhouse

The ruby-throated hummingbird migrates to Texas during the warm months.

5 Colorado River Refuge

A 10-minute drive from Texas 71 in Bastrop, this 65-acre natural area along the Colorado River is next door to Bastrop County Nature Park, an official take-out point on the Texas Paddling Trail. If you kayak, it's a great spot for river birding; if you don't, you'll enjoy walking the trails along the river. Look for pileated woodpeckers, a roadrunner or even a soaring bald eagle. In Tahitian Village subdivision, 280 Riverside Drive, Bastrop; 512-308-1911; open in daylight hours; free.

6 Lockhart State Park

This 263-acre park is just southwest of downtown Lockhart, along the Clear Fork of Plum Creek. The terrain is typical of the blackland prairie region. Look for the

beautiful scissor-tailed flycatcher, painted buntings and eastern bluebirds. 2012 State Park Road, Lockhart; 512-398-3479; open daily; \$3 for 13 and older, free for 12 and younger; tpwd.texas.gov.

7 Lake Bastrop

Two LCRA parks offer access to Lake Bastrop, and both rent canoes and kayaks to get closer to birds in the middle of the lake. South Shore Park has a special sheltered bird-viewing area. South Shore Park, 375 South Shore Road, Bastrop; 512-498-1922; North Shore Park, 603 FM 1441, Bastrop; 512-578-4816; open in daylight hours; \$5 for 13 and older, \$2 for 65 and older, as well as those with disabilities, free 12 and under; lcra.org

8 Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park

Already a great site for learning about Texas history – and seeing spring wildflowers – this Texas Historical Commission park with frontage on the Brazos River has rich birding opportunities. If you are up to the challenge, try identifying the 17 species of sparrows here. 23400 Park Road 12, Washington; 936-878-2214. Open daily 8 a.m. to sunset; \$8 for adults, \$5 for ages 6 through 17 or students, free for 5 and younger.

9 Hornsby Bend

In November 2019, Texas birders celebrated 60 years of sightings in this 1,200-acre area near a biosolids management plant southeast of Austin. The shorelines and ponds entice migrating birds. Some even spend the winter there. Explore trails along the bend in the Colorado River. Bird observatory, 2210 South FM 973, Austin. Free; open daily during daylight hours; hornsbybend.org

10 Birders' favorite back roads

Take a road less traveled early one morning to some quiet spots to pull over, look and listen. Jason Leifester of Elgin frequents Old Sayers Road between Elgin and Bastrop to find painted buntings in spring, and County Road 435 just east of Thrall in Williamson County to see sandhill cranes in winter. He uses Google Maps to find back roads he hasn't searched.

To check status of state parks, go to tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/parks-map



Photo by Nicholas Cowey/LCRA

A roadrunner's diet includes insects, small reptiles, fruits and seeds. The birds have been considered harbingers of both good and bad luck over the decades.

Continued from page 20A

excuse for an occasional outing with friends, a competitive sport, even an obsession.

"Birds are beautiful and fascinating," Leifester says. "They're found everywhere, from the middle of the ocean to the hottest desert. It's a hobby that can follow you or chase you anywhere you want to go. It gets you outside, and it gives you a reason to go to new places."

"It's therapeutic," Freeman says. "Some people go for a jog. I go birding."

Bastrop County is home to a dedicated community of birders who are frequently out early on weekend mornings, checking lakes, rivers, back roads and meadows that others zip by in cars. Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's service area – which straddles the "oaks and prairies" region of Texas, with the Lost Pines a special element in the mix – is rich with birding hotspots, stretching from the Hornsby Bend area on the Colorado River in eastern Travis County to the Brazos River on Bluebonnet's eastern border.

"We're in the central migratory flyway," Ridlon says, "and we're the crossroads between the eastern species and the western species, so we get a lot of overlap. That's what makes it such a prime birding area." The Colorado River is also a major habitat area for many species, including the bald eagle.

Bastrop County's unique birding environment was officially recognized in January of this year when Bastrop was certified as one of only four "Bird Cities" in the state by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and Audubon Texas. The other three are Dallas,



Photo by Jason Leifester

The golden-crowned kinglet can be found throughout Central Texas during the winter.

Houston and Port Aransas.

"This honor makes people aware of what a treasure we have in this area, and how important it is to conserve the natural environment," Ridlon says.

Many annual birding events are festive, family-friendly and open to beginners. The Great Texas Birding Classic is normally held each spring by Texas Parks & Wildlife, but this year the coronavirus threat has prompted organizers to push it into autumn. It is advertised as the "biggest, longest, wildest bird-

Continued on page 20D



Photo by Ralph Barrera

The Carolina wren, seen in Buescher State Park in Smithville, has a loud, varied song.

Continued from page 20C

watching tournament in the U.S.” and invites people to form teams for various events such as a “Big Sit.” Teams pick a 17-foot diameter circle in any location and wait there for 24 hours, counting as many bird species as they can see and identify.

“For our Big Sit (in 2019) I picked Fisherman’s Park (in Bastrop), and it turned out beautifully,” says Goebel, who teams with his wife, Jan, on bird-watching adventures. “We saw 34 species there right in the park. Right at dawn a pair of belted kingfishers came rattling along the river. A couple of hours later we were sitting in the count circle, eating pizza, and we said, ‘What’s that? It’s a bald eagle!’ It sailed right smack over our heads.”

Serious birders can function as “citizen scientists,” contributing valuable data about bird populations in their communities. Audubon’s annual Christmas Bird Count, begun in 1900 as an alternative to Christmas bird hunts, is

an all-day ritual, with birders fanning out to count as many species as they can in a 15-mile diameter area from dawn to dusk. The Bastrop area count is held on New Year’s Day. The Great Backyard Bird Count, held each February by the Audubon Society and Cornell University’s Lab of Ornithology, encourages everyone to count and report bird species around their homes.

At the heart of the birding experience is a moment of connection with the natural world. Even the shyest birder can share that encounter with others – searching with a friend, logging sightings on Cornell’s eBird digital smartphone app or snagging a great photo to post on the iNaturalist website. Birders speak of special moments like the “dawn chorus,” when a morning’s stillness is broken as every bird seems to wake up at once and start singing.

“You wait for the quiet,” says Jan Goebel, “and the birds start showing up, and you’re just there, communing with nature.” ■



Photo by Ralph Barrera

Mike Goebel uses a scope to get a closer look at ducks at Buescher State Park in Smithville.

How to become a birder

Spring migration is a great time to give birding a try, but you can spot avian residents feeding, nesting, flitting or soaring along rivers and meadows any time of year. Here’s how to spread your wings as a beginning birder.

At the time of publication, some events were canceled or postponed. Check event information for updates.

1 Take a birding tour

The more you learn, the more fun birding becomes. The best way to learn is from a passionate local birder who knows where to look and listen. Bastrop State Park offers a monthly, Saturday morning one-hour Birding for Beginners Hike. Get more information: Call the park at 512-321-2101 or visit the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department website (tpwd.texas.gov) and search “birding” on the events calendar. Bastrop County Audubon Society occasionally hosts a Birding for Adults class at the Bastrop Public Library and organizes annual bird counts. For information, check Bastrop Audubon’s Facebook page or visit its website (bastropcountyaudubon.org). The Rio Brazos Audubon Society offers Birding 101 each month at Lick Creek Park in College Station (riobrazosaudubon.org). Loaner binoculars are usually available for beginner tours. On the far western and eastern sides of the Bluebonnet service area, the Travis and Houston Audubon societies are large and thriving organizations with plenty of activities open to the public. Go to audubon.org for more information.

2 Download free birding apps

At least a dozen free smartphone apps can help you identify a species on the fly, by appearance or by call. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology revolutionized birding in 2002 with its eBird website (eBird.org), which gathers and tracks global data



Photo by Ralph Barrera

A trio of birders — Gwen Bunnell, Louise Ridlon and Anna Stalcup, from left — on the search for birds a few months ago. They were on the 3-mile trail along the river's edge at the Colorado River Refuge in the Tahitian Village subdivision in Bastrop.

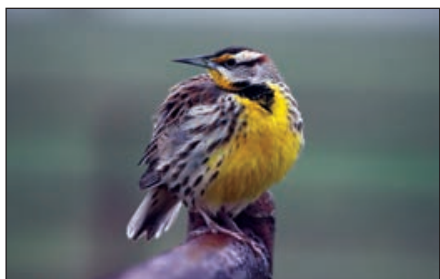


Photo by Jason Leifester

Eastern meadowlarks can be heard sweetly singing in grassy fields across Central Texas.

on bird observations by professional and “citizen scientists.” The eBird app allows you to log your treks and sightings and build your checklists. It also can send rare bird alerts for your area. The Lab’s Merlin Bird ID app offers a series of questions to help you identify what just flew by. The Audubon app has a field guide and bird ID feature that you can tap into and listen to a call or song to see if you’ve got a match. Of course, the old reliable birders’ guide Peterson has an app, too. Search your app store under “birding” to see what’s out

there. More of a print person? Get a good field guide for home, such as: “The TOS Handbook of Texas Birds,” co-written by Bastrop County resident Brush Freeman and Mark W. Lockwood. This Texas Ornithological Society book is updated every 10 years and is the most authoritative reference on the status and distribution of all Texas bird species.

3 Treat yourself to a good pair of binoculars

Veteran area birder Bert Frenz recommends using 8x42 magnification binoculars. They make birds appear eight times closer. Get the right fit for your vision needs (especially if you wear glasses). You can also search online for Audubon Society reviews. A harness strap (\$15 and up) is a smart addition for longer treks.

4 Build a bird habitat in your yard

Birds talk — so get some word-of-beak buzz going with a bird

feeder and an old-fashioned birdbath. The sound of dripping water is especially alluring, so consider a fountain. A quick Google search for “backyard bird habitat” yields plenty of simple ideas to make your yard a rest stop for local and migrating species.

5 Make a new birding friend

Many local birders first became friends through their area Audubon chapter or the Texas Master Naturalist program. Bastrop Audubon meets on the third Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the First National Bank in Bastrop. Birder Mike Goebel gives a talk on a special bird each month (go to bastropcounty-audubon.org for details). For more on Texas Master Naturalist chapters, go to txmn.org. If you’re ready to take your interest in birds to a new level, join the American Birding Association (aba.org) and the Texas Ornithological Society (texasbirds.org).

10 cool birds to watch for in our area

We asked four local birders — Louise Ridlon, Anna Stalcup, Mike Goebel and Jason Leifester — to select some of their favorite birds they've spotted in the Bluebonnet service area.

1 Yellow-billed cuckoo

This seasonal migrant is hard to spot, but not to hear, especially if it hears thunder. "It's secretive and not highly active, so seeing one is a matter of being in the right place, usually before noon. Your best bet in the spring is to enter the woods quietly, find a spot, stop and listen. The ka-ka-ka kow-kow-kow kwop-kwop-kwop-kwop call is one of the sounds of spring for me," Goebel says.



Photo by Ron Newhouse

2 Red-headed woodpecker

"Rarer here than the pileated but a very classy-looking bird," Stalcup says. Like the pileated, it is a full-time area resident often nesting in dead trees.



Photo by Jason Leifester

5 Painted bunting

"Dazzling birds. A group of painted buntings is called a 'palette,'" Goebel says. "Learning their song makes you realize just how many there are in a particular habitat. It's not unusual for me to hear 30 to 40 in a few hours during the spring," Leifester says.

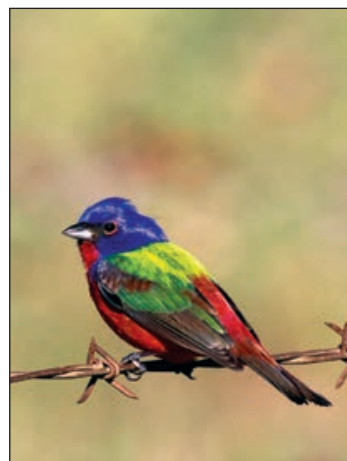


Photo by Jason Leifester

6 Osprey

"After catching a fish," Stalcup says, "the osprey lines it up head first in its talons while flying so it's more aerodynamic." These year-round residents dive in rivers or lakes like kingfishers or brown pelicans, going as much as 3 feet deep to snag their prey.



Photo by Ron Newhouse



Photo by Ron Newhouse

8 Northern parula

"Easy to hear but sometimes hard to see in the spring as they establish territories in tall trees near rivers and lakes," Leifester says. Parulas arrive in March and head south in July. Adult males have a bright yellow throat and breast, and white eye crescents.

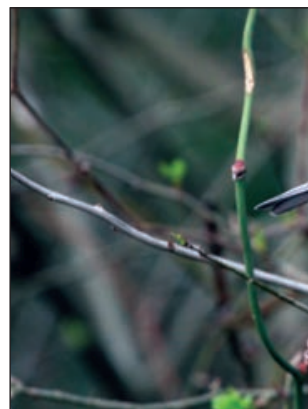




Photo by Ron Newhouse

3 Scissor-tailed flycatcher

"I usually see my first one in early to mid-March, and soon they seem to be on every power line and fence line in the area. They're beautiful and pugnacious. I've rarely seen an American crow or a red-tailed hawk in spring that isn't being chased and harassed by a scissor-tailed flycatcher," Leifester says. Their tail enables "astonishing acrobatic flight," Goebel says.

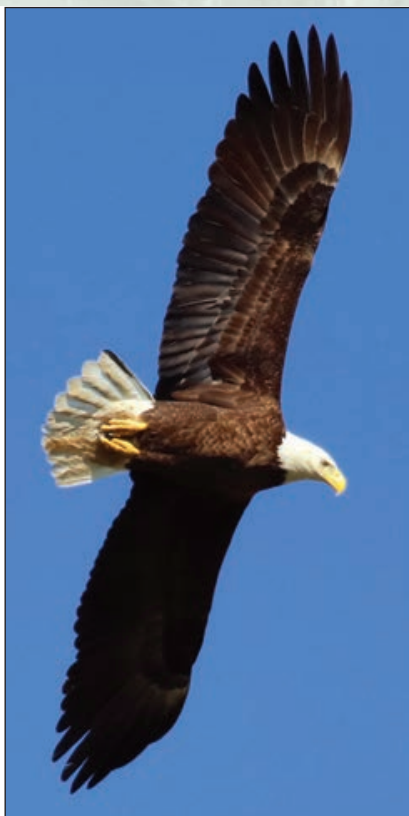


Photo by Ron Newhouse

4 Bald eagle

"This bird never fails to inspire awe," Ridlon says. "They've made an amazing recovery since DDT was banned." Says Goebel: "Look for them near water, as they prefer fish; most known nests in the Bastrop area are along the Colorado River."



Photo by Ron Newhouse

7 Loggerhead shrike

These 8-inch-long black, white and gray songbirds can be spotted in open fields, sitting on exposed branches or power lines. "It's known as the 'butcher bird' because it impales its food, like lizards and small rodents, on thorns, twigs or barbed wire to eat later," Stalcup says. "They attack vertebrates like a falcon, with a precise paralyzing bite to the neck," Goebel says.

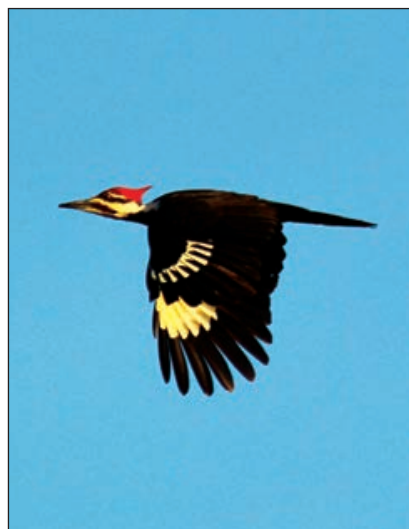


Photo by Jason Leifester

10 Pileated woodpecker

"Its call sounds like a South American jungle bird. Its size makes it fun to see. You can't believe you're seeing an 18-inch flame-topped woodpecker," Goebel says. Unfortunately, these big birds can cause damage to wood power poles.



Photo by Jason Leifester

9 Pine warbler

"These bright yellow beauties are common throughout the pines year round," Ridlon says. "They are super active, usually high in the pines. Getting a good look at one is mostly a matter of patience," Goebel says. Sometimes they show up on a backyard bird feeder.

A golden anniversary

Herbert Pampell has worked at Bluebonnet for more than 50 years, and he has no plans to stop

By Melissa Segrest

A lot happened in America in 1969. Astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first human to set foot on the moon. Richard Nixon became president. Hurricane Camille killed 143 people on the Gulf Coast. The Woodstock music festival in New York attracted about 400,000 people.

And, on Oct. 6, 1969, 24-year-old Herbert Pampell started working at the Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative in Giddings. Today, that cooperative is called Bluebonnet, and Pampell is still hard at work.

No other employee has worked as long at Bluebonnet — more than 50 years.

Pampell first earned \$2.05 an hour as a laborer or so-called “grunt,” he said. He worked behind the cooperative’s single digger truck, helping make holes for new power poles. “We worked hard,” he said. “We would (put in) 10 to 12 poles a day. By 5 p.m., the job was through. We didn’t mess around.”

He then was a lineman for more than 18 years. “We could go up and down a pole in 7 minutes and have it tied in,” Pampell said.

He’s been a district foreman, district supervisor, construction superintendent, control center operator and now is an inspector of contractors. He still works in Giddings.

Pampell’s most vivid memories are wicked weather and big power outages. In 1983, 18-degree temperatures iced and snapped miles



of power lines, causing thousands of electric outages, some lasting more than a week. “I worked a solid week,” he said. “Never made it home. We were living off Coke, potato chips and coffee. But nobody got hurt, nobody had a wreck. Everybody worked together.”

Pampell was born in Houston and raised in Lee County, where he and wife Katherine — they married in 1975 — live on 10 acres. They have three children, Nick, Scott and Heather, and Gina is his daughter from a previous marriage. He has a grandson and two great-grandchildren.

In his free time, Pampell works around the property or runs a few head of cattle nearby with his brother. He enjoys bass fishing and traveling with Katherine to Branson, Mo. He is most happy when spending time with his children and their families. He loves John Wayne Westerns and is proud of a pair of vintage guns.

He was recently recognized by members of the Bluebonnet Board of Directors, and at an all-employee event, General Manager Matt

Herbert Pampell has worked longer for Bluebonnet than any employee.

Sarah Beal photo

Bentke presented Pampell with a pair of Lucchese boots with the logo “50 Years of Service” etched into the leather, plus some of his favorite type of caps bearing that logo, his name and start date.

These days, working at the same job for more than a couple of years may seem strange to some. Not to Pampell. “I just enjoy the work. I like the people I work with. It’s a good company to work for,” Pampell said. “I keep working because it’s good for me. It keeps my mind sharp.”

His advice to new line workers: Ask stupid questions, because that’s the only way you’re going to learn. Pay attention to what’s going on around you and watch your brother. Protect one another.

If Pampell ever retires, he would like people to remember this: “We worked hard to keep the lights on. We still do.” ■

Government Youth Tour canceled

Concerns about the coronavirus prompted the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association to cancel the Government-in-Action Youth Tour, slated for June 2020. In February, Bluebonnet had selected Margaret Woodward, left, a junior at Lexington High School, and Mayra Robles, right, a junior at Bastrop High

School, to represent Bluebonnet during the tour of historical sites in Washington, D.C. Megan Wheeler, a junior at Lockhart High School, would have been the alternate to join the tour if Robles or Woodward were unable to attend. Robles and Woodward will still each receive a \$1,000 scholarship after graduating from high school.



Margaret Woodward



Mayra Robles

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Horses' Roundabout Trail

How today's noble steeds follow in the footsteps of their prehistoric ancestors

BY MARTHA DEERINGER

MUCH OF THE MODERN HISTORY OF TEXAS was built on the backs of horses, but where did these equine partners in the settlement of the state originate? The fossil record of the genus *Equus*, according to Live Science, can be traced back some 4 million years in North America.

The predecessors of modern horses spread from North America, probably over the Bering land bridge that once connected Alaska and Siberia, and colonized Asia, Europe and Africa. The last of those prehistoric horses in North America died out 11,000–13,000 years ago, the result of a cooling event that also wiped out woolly mammoths, American camels and other animals.

The Americas remained horseless until Christopher Columbus arrived on his second voyage, in 1493, and introduced domesticated horses to Hispaniola and Cuba. The return of horses to the Western Hemisphere was no small feat. Records from early voyages tell of numerous deaths among valuable horses, which crossed the stormy Atlantic suspended in slings in damp, dark holds to prevent the rolling of the ship from tossing them about.

If the storms didn't get them, the calm winds of the "horse latitudes" might. In this region, about 30 degrees north and 30 degrees south of the equator, ships sailing to the Western Hemisphere from Europe and Asia often became stalled,



sometimes for weeks. If a ship carried horses and the supply of fresh water crept below a critical point, sailors would sometimes be forced to throw horses overboard—earning this region its name.

In 1519, Hernando Cortés landed in what is now Veracruz, where horses left hoofprints on the North American mainland for the first time in more than 10,000 years. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who accompanied Cortés, explained, "The natives had never seen horses up to this time and thought the horse and rider were all one animal."

That same year, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado sailed to North America with 150 horses, followed in 1539 by Hernando de Soto with 237. Eventually, some of the wily beasts emancipated themselves and set up housekeeping on the Great Plains, helped in their expansion by the development of Spanish missions, which kept herds of horses. Some were traded with Native Americans, who learned to ride like the centaurs that had so astonished

them when the Spanish arrived.

The first horses brought to Texas arrived in 1542 with the Moscoso expedition, named for Luis de Moscoso Alvarado, who took charge of the 600-man expedition when de Soto died of fever near the Mississippi River. These original Spanish mustangs were the foundation for later American breeds, including the fabled quarter horse, whose endurance and talent for handling cattle made it the horse of choice for frontiersmen and ranchers in early Texas.

Today, there are an estimated 880,000 horses in Texas, according to Texas A&M University. Artist Frederic Remington paid tribute to the noble animal when he remarked, "Of all the monuments which the Spaniard has left to glorify his reign in America, there will be none more worthy than his horse."

Martha Deeringer, a Heart of Texas EC member, lives in McGregor. Read more of her work at marthadeeringer.com.

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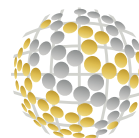
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Spring Celebrations

SPRING IS USUALLY A TIME FOR CELEBRATIONS, including graduations and bridal showers. Of course, gatherings have been on hold and social distancing is in place because of COVID-19. So save these recipes for when we're able to join together and celebrate joyous occasions.

Whenever I go to a party, or host one of my own, I try to bring something that everyone will enjoy. Often I share dishes that are on the healthier side to balance out a buffet spread. I know guests are grateful when only crumbs remain.

This take on a popular dip is portable. You can make the dip in advance and bake the cups just before party time, ensuring they're warm and crisp for serving.

MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Spinach Artichoke Wonton Cups

- 24 wonton wrappers
- 1 package (10 ounces) frozen spinach, thawed and drained
- 1 jar (7.5 ounces) marinated artichoke hearts, drained and finely chopped
- 1 cup sour cream
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 cloves garlic, minced or pressed
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Arrange the wonton wrappers in two 12-cup muffin pans, then coat lightly with nonstick spray. Bake the wonton cups for 5 minutes, then remove from oven and set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, stir together spinach, artichoke hearts, sour cream, cream cheese, Parmesan, garlic and pepper until thoroughly combined.
3. Divide mixture evenly among the wonton cups. Bake 10–12 minutes until warmed and wonton cups are golden. ▶ Makes 24.

COOK'S TIP This recipe uses a standard muffin tin, but you can also use a minimuffin tin to make the cups bite-size.

Follow along with **Megan Myers** and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com.

MEGAN MYERS



Recipes

Spring Celebrations



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

MILLIE KIRCHOFF | NUECES EC

Banana bars are a hit with kids of all ages. Topped with cream cheese icing, this recipe is baked in a sheet pan, ensuring plenty for eager hands.

Kirchoff suggests topping the bars with pecan halves or decorative sprinkles for an extra-festive touch.

Banana Bars

BARS

- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened
- 2 cups sugar
- 3 eggs, room temperature
- 2 cups mashed ripe banana (about 4 large bananas)
- ½ teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cloves
- Pinch of salt

FROSTING

- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened
- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened
- 4 cups powdered sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

- 1. BARS:** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease an 18-by-13-inch rimmed baking sheet with butter or nonstick spray and set aside.
- 2.** In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar. Beat in eggs one at a time until just incorporated, then stir in banana and vanilla.
- 3.** In another bowl, combine flour, baking soda, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, cloves and salt, then add to banana mixture and mix well.
- 4.** Pour onto prepared baking sheet and bake 20 minutes or until it springs back slightly when touched in the center. Cool completely.
- 5. FROSTING:** While bars cool, mix together butter, cream cheese, powdered sugar and vanilla until smooth. Spread over cooled banana bars. Cover and chill at least 1 hour.

► Makes 3 dozen bars.

Soy Brown Sugar-Glazed Salmon

CASSANDRA HUNTER | PEDERNALES EC

This easy yet flavorful salmon dish is excellent for a spring dinner party. "Every time I make this salmon for a special occasion, I have had numerous guests asking me for the recipe," Hunter says. For ease of serving, cut the salmon into individual portions before baking, keeping in mind that cook time may be reduced.

- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 pounds center-cut salmon

- 1.** Preheat oven to 450 degrees. In a mixing bowl, whisk together brown sugar, soy sauce, rice vinegar, ginger and garlic. Set aside.
- 2.** Place salmon skin-side down on a rimmed baking sheet lined with foil. With a small knife, cut ½-inch slits about 1 inch apart across the top of the salmon. Brush the salmon generously with the glaze, reserving the rest. Allow the mixture to seep into the slits.
- 3.** Bake salmon 10 minutes, then baste again with remaining glaze. Return to oven for 5 minutes more, until a baking thermometer inserted in the salmon's center reads 145 degrees. Let salmon rest 5 minutes and serve. ► Serves 8.

Grandma Jewel's Italian Cream Cake

KAITLYN WILLINGHAM | CENTRAL TEXAS EC

This popular cake is often served at birthday parties and other celebrations. This version features nuts in the frosting, but Willingham also loves to incorporate pecans within the cake. For those who enjoy more coconut, press extra coconut flakes to the frosting while it is still tacky.

CAKE

- 2 cups sugar
- ½ cup shortening
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened
- 5 eggs, separated
- 2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup sweetened flaked coconut



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We know there's an abundance of **Cobblers, Crisps, Buckles and Betties** made around the state. What makes yours special? Enter our October contest by **May 10**. Readers whose recipes are featured will receive a special *Texas Co-op Power* apron.

ENTER ONLINE at TexasCoopPower.com/contests; MAIL to 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701; FAX to (512) 763-3401. Include your name, address and phone number, plus your co-op and the name of the contest you are entering.

FROSTING

- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened
- ¾ cups powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup chopped pecans

1. **CAKE:** Preheat oven to 350 degrees and grease 2 round 9-inch cake pans.
2. In a large bowl, cream sugar, shortening and butter. Add egg yolks one at a time.
3. In a small bowl, whisk together flour and baking soda. Add the flour mixture to the large bowl alternately with the butter-milk and vanilla.
4. In a separate bowl, beat egg whites until stiff. Fold into batter until no streaks remain, then stir in coconut.
5. Divide batter between cake pans and bake 25–30 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Let cool in pans 5 minutes, then remove to a wire rack to cool completely.
6. **FROSTING:** Combine cream cheese and butter. Using an electric mixer, beat in powdered sugar until smooth, taking care to increase speed slowly. Add vanilla and pecans. Place one cake layer on serving plate and top with ¼ of the frosting, spreading evenly to edges. Top with second layer of cake and spread remaining frosting on top and sides. ▶ Serves 12.

WEB EXTRAS ▶ Find more than 800 recipes in our online archive, including this winning punch from November 2015.

Almond Punch

DEBBIE SUGAREK | BLUEBONNET EC

- 2½ cups sugar
- 3 quarts water
- 1 can (46 ounces) pineapple juice
- Juice of 3 lemons (approximately ¾ cup)
- 3 teaspoons almond extract
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1. Combine sugar and water in a large pitcher and stir until sugar is completely dissolved.
2. Add pineapple juice, lemon juice, and almond and vanilla extracts. Stir to blend.
3. Refrigerate 24 hours. Serve cold.
▶ Serves 24.

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Fairs and Carnivals

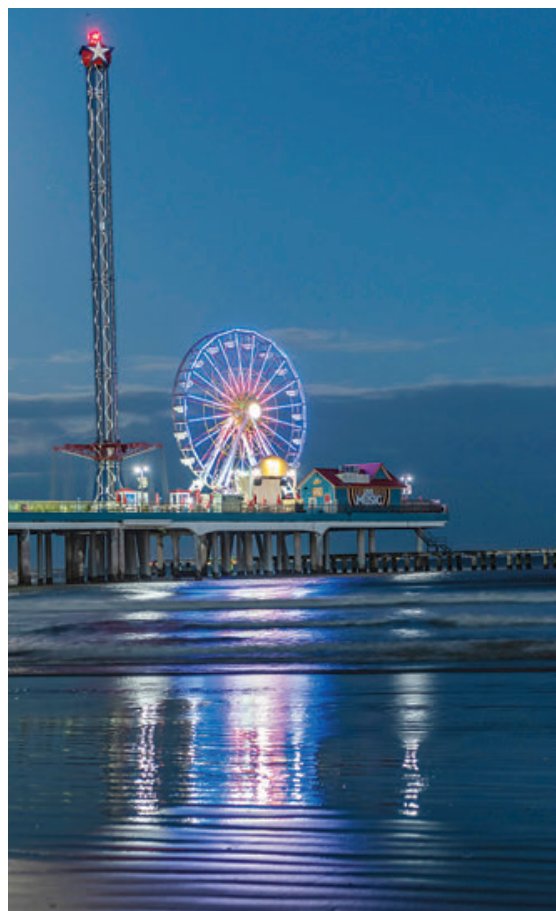
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WEB EXTRAS ▶ See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.



▲ **RACHELLE GLENN**, Guadalupe Valley EC: “Aurora and Will at the Come and Take It Carnival 2019 on one of their favorite rides.”

▼ **TSO DAVIS**, United Cooperative Services: “Close call.”



▲ **ANGIE BIRMINGHAM**, Nueces EC: “The Galveston Pleasure Pier is a year-round carnival.”

▼ **CHAD PRAHL**, CoServ: “It’s not a fair without some cotton candy.”





AROUND TEXAS ▶ TCP's monthly list of local events has been suspended due to COVID-19 cancellations. Always call or check an event's website for details.

◀ **THERESA MCKEE**, Fannin County EC: "The icon of the Texas State Fair, Big Tex, after the fatal fire. Now he has a slightly new look."



▲ **REBECCA WARREN**, Heart of Texas EC: "Riot of color offered blessed shade for one patio in the September heat of the State Fair of Texas."

▲ **PAUL LAUDER**, Farmers EC: "The pig and her handler catch up on badly needed sleep after the competition."

◀ **PATRICIA STEHLING**, Central Texas EC: Rainbow Ferris wheel.



UPCOMING CONTESTS

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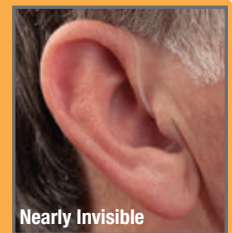
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Spirits of Seguin

Historic Magnolia Hotel features encounters with the supernatural

I'D HEARD THAT SEGUIN'S MAGNOLIA Hotel is one ghostly getaway where eerie encounters are a nightly occurrence, so I decided to see for myself. A block east of the Guadalupe County Courthouse, I found the boxy, two-story frame building and learned that its history dates to the mid-1800s.

Texas Ranger James Campbell built a log cabin on the site in 1840, and Ranger Jack Coffee Hays married the owner's daughter there in 1847. The hotel itself was built in 1853, and current owners Erin and Jim Ghedi saved it from abandonment after it was named to advocacy group Preservation Texas' 2012 Most Endangered Places list.

Erin Ghedi had taken my tour reservation and met me at the door. Knowing she voluntarily lives in a haunted hotel, I was surprised when she greeted me with a calming smile. My first brush with the unexpected occurred on the first floor, which felt anything but haunted: I encountered a warm and welcoming home with bright lighting and antiques in every corner.

The tour started in the front living room, which was decorated with frontier memorabilia and a large portrait of Campbell, the supposed lingering occupant. Ghedi described how guests catch the scent of Campbell's burning cigars or hear his boots walking across the wooden floor. Almost on cue, the rocking chair in the corner moved back and forth. "Oh, and he likes to do that too," Ghedi said.

As we moved from room to room, Ghedi told stories of the 13 ghosts that inhabit the building. In the kitchen, guests encounter the 1850s owner and her chil-



Jim and Erin Ghedi with Chet.

dren. Near the back fireplace, a person who had been enslaved blows out candles. To convince skeptics, Ghedi supports each story with photographs from guests and a binder full of historical research.

Upstairs, the Ghedis have transformed a portion of the second floor into an Airbnb rental, while the rest remains the same as when they bought it. Before we entered the dark rooms, Ghedi paused and said, "Remember, the ghosts cannot hurt you. While you may feel them touch you and you may feel scared, they cannot hurt you." I had never been touched by a ghost and was not sure I wanted to start now.

Ghedi handed me a flashlight and a device with blinking lights to signify when spirits were present. Then she led me into the darkness. My flashlight beam illuminated walls with crumbling wallboard and bathrooms full of broken tiles and fixtures. Even in daylight, this place would be super creepy. Suddenly, the overwhelming scent of rose perfume filled the air. Ghedi spoke:

"Oh, Rosebud is excited that a gentleman is visiting. She was a madam here for many years." I didn't believe my nose and even accused Ghedi of spraying the room with rose scent. She swore she had not.

Ghedi believes all the ghosts are voluntarily present and can leave at any time—all except one, known as the Murderer, who is trapped in an upstairs bedroom. I walked into the room and experienced an overwhelmingly heavy feeling. I decided to walk out before I learned more about this spirit.

I'm certainly a skeptic when it comes to haunted places, but I've got no explanation for the things that happened on my tour. I do know that if you're looking for a rendezvous with the strange, the spooky and the unexpected, you need to check into this historic hotel that's so fascinating some guests never check out.

Chet Garner shares his Texplorations as the host of *The Daytripper* on PBS.

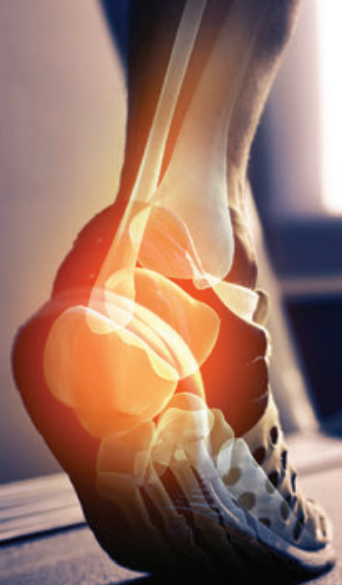
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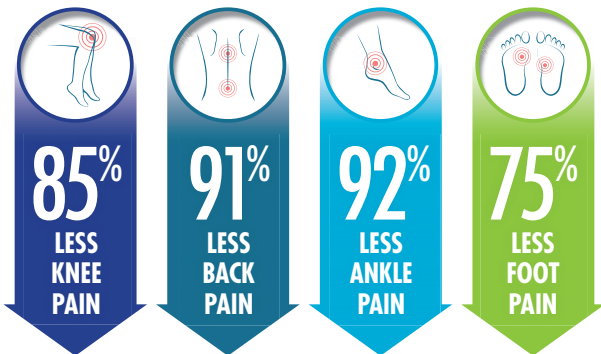
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