United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Helping People Help The Land

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The Reverchon Naturalist

Recognizing the work of French botanist Julien Reverchon, who began collecting throughout the North-Central Texas area in 1876, and all the botanists/naturalists who have followed ...

Draba

Excerpt from *A Sand County Almanac*

Aldo Leopold

Within a few weeks now Draba, the smallest flower that blows, will sprinkle every sandy place with small blooms.

He who hopes for spring with upturned eye never sees so small a thing as Draba. He who despairs of spring with downcast eye steps on it, unknowing. He who searches for spring with his knees in the mud finds it, in abundance.

Draba asks, and gets, but scant allowance of warmth and comfort; it subsists on the leavings of unwanted time and space. Botany books give it two or three lines, but never a plate or portrait. Sand too poor and sun too weak for bigger, better blooms are good enough for Draba. After all it is no spring flower, but only a postscript to a hope.

Draba plucks no heartstrings. Its perfume, if there is any, is lost in the gusty winds. Its color is plain white. Its leaves wear a sensible woolly coat. Nothing eats it; it is too small. No poets sing of it. Some botanist once gave it a Latin name, and then forgot it. Altogether it is of no importance—just a small creature that does a small job quickly and well.

Editor's Note: First published by Oxford University Press in 1949, one year after Aldo Leopold's death, A Sand County Almanac, has been translated and published in twelve languages, and has sold more than two million copies.

Figure 1 (*above right*). Draba (*Draba cuneifolia*), along a riparian area in Shackelford County, dots the landscape with its tiny blooms.

Figure 2 (*right*). Leaf "hairs" of Draba are stellate, or star-burst in shape, when zoomed in closely.

Photos credit: Ricky Linex, USDA-NRCS.

See You Down the Road

By Ricky Linex
NRCS Wildlife Biologist
Weatherford, Texas

Heralds of Spring

There is an old saying in Texas that you can't rule out a late spring freeze until the old mesquites break bud and leaf out. In many years, the young mesquites will leaf out a bit early, but the old ones are rarely fooled by a freeze. The surprising freeze the morning of April 15th caught both young and old mesquites with what will be their first set of 2014 leaves exposed and vulnerable. The tender foliage was no match for the freezing temperatures that stretched, at least in north central Texas, as far south as Burnet County. A west Texas newspaper editor, the late Frank Grimes with the Abilene Reporter News, even penned a poem back in 1939 entitled, "The Old Mesquites Ain't Out." Driving west along I-20 the morning of the 15th, you could see wilting mesquites, young and old, along with tender oaks with drooping leaves all the way to Abilene. The next day, I was walking in the dry Peters Creek in western Burnet County in preparation for a riparian workshop scheduled the following day. Wilting of leaves varied amongst the vegetation in and along the creek showing freeze damage. Plants that were affected included the tender terminal growth tips of milkweed vine, frostweed, greenbrier, bumelia, Mexican persimmon, and western soapberry. There were also instances of plants that revealed no wilting or stoppage of growth. Plants such as skullcap, Texas bindweed, water willow, spreading sida, knotweed leafflower, hog plum, and bush croton all appeared to be healthy on the next day during the workshop. Get out and walk among the plants wherever they are growing, if this dry weather continues, it will likely reduce the growth and occurrence of plants this year. Speaking of riparian workshops, check the calendar of events to see the locations of two upcoming workshops in north central Texas.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Riparian Workshops

May 16, Texas Game Warden Academy, Hamilton County, TX

8:30 am to 3:30 pm; Registration begins at 8:00 am

We will spend the morning in the classroom and the afternoon in the field on the Lampasas River. The Hamilton-Coryell SWCD is graciously sponsoring lunch for all participants! Pre-register by contacting Lisa Prcin at either 254.774.6008 or lprcin@brc.tamus.edu by May 14.

May 22, Clifton Administration Building, Clifton, TX

8:30 am to 3:30 pm; Registration begins at 8:00 am

We will spend the morning in the classroom and the afternoon in the field on the Bosque River. Bring your lunch. Pre-register by contacting Jenna Walker, Watershed Administrator, City of Waco Water Utility Services at either 254.750.6644 or jennaw@ci.waco.tx.us by May 20.

Quail Appreciation Days

Five Quail Appreciation Days (QUADs) will be held in May although two will occur prior to the posting of this newsletter. A QUAD is a 6-hour workshop on quail management; it includes quail physiology, management topics, and an afternoon tour featuring regional management and habitat assessment techniques. Pre-registration is $10 and is due one week before the field day; $20 thereafter and at the door. Three CEUs for Private Applicators are available (2 General; 1 IPM). Dates and locations include: ***May 14*** – Shackelford-Stephens counties, FMI contact Leslie Neve at 254.559.2313 or Rocky Vinson at 325-762-2233. This is the QUAD that will feature the Operation Transfusion release site; ***May 20*** – Victoria County, FMI contact Peter McGuill at 361.575.4581; ***May 23*** – Wheeler County, FMI contact Dale Dunlap at 806.826.5243.

Send your calendar items to Ricky Linex at ricky.linex@tx.usda.gov and Melissa Sturdivant, at melissa.sturdivant@tx.usda.gov.

Keys to Becoming a Successful Conservationist *and Advice from an Old Timer*

Steve Nelle

- Always remember the purpose and intent of the organization (providing service for the conservation of natural resources).
- Strive to learn something new every time you go out in the field; learn to be observant—the more you look, the more you will see.
- You will never learn to be a genuine conservationist if all you do is administer contracts.
- Conservation is not measured by the number of dollars of cost share payments.
- Take the time for self-improvement and make it a priority – even if it is on your own time.
- Even though you work within a bureaucracy, strive not to become a stereotypical bureaucrat.
- Be willing to embrace new concepts but don't be overly anxious or gullible to every new idea.
- Be willing to reject or modify traditional concepts when new information disproves or sheds new light on them. The right answers change over time.

Figure 1 (*above right*). Steve teaches resource conservationists about riparian plants and functions.

Figure 2 (*below*). Discovering and observing in the field, Steve "walks the walk" of a genuine and successful conservationist.

Photos credit: Ricky Linex, USDA-NRCS.

- Do not derive your satisfaction from awards and certificates that come from the agency.
- Your satisfaction must come from inside yourself, knowing that you have done a good job. If you excel, others will notice, and with time, you will gain recognition; but, be careful how you handle recognition.
- Strive to be the unsurpassed expert in your county in some important facet of conservation and land management (plant identification, plant ecology, grazing management, irrigation management, riparian management, wildlife management, soil health, conservation tillage, prescribed burning, etc.).
- Find one or more non-NRCS mentors to help you excel in your profession; cultivate that relationship. There are people in every county who are willing to help you improve and succeed.
- Always have a humble attitude.
- Serve with absolute personal and professional integrity and honesty—100% of the time, no matter what.
- Be passionate, but not arrogant or abrasive.
- Don't talk too much. You can learn a lot if you listen.
- The best job in the NRCS is the GS-9 planner; you will do more good and get more gratification from this position than any other. Don't be overly anxious to become a DC or climb the ladder. Those who climb the ladder too quickly miss a great deal of important experience.
- When you get to be a DC, your technical skills will begin to erode due to other responsibilities and priorities. It will require a great deal extra effort and commitment to remain technically competent.
- Always give back more than what you get in salary.
- A conservation plan is not a document. Conservation planning is an ongoing and dynamic process. It is built on the foundation of technical proficiency, trust, service, and effective two-way communication.
- Always remember that conservation planning is based on the landowner's goals, not your personal opinions, preferences, paradigms, or recommendations. Help him achieve HIS land goals, not your own.

Steve Nelle is a retired Wildlife Biologist with the USDA-NRCS and resides in San Angelo, Texas.

Instant Ranchers, *A Second Look*

Jake Landers

A few years ago, I wrote a poem (Ranch Magazine, Dec. 1990) about new owners of rangeland who had little, if any, experience ranching. I made fun of some of their decisions on managing their new acquisition.

"Let's clean it up and grow some grass
And build an entrance gate with class
And cattle guards instead of gates
A registered herd that nationally rates."

Wealth obtained through another enterprise was used to buy the land, and I admitted that I was a bit envious of their gain.

"How plainly does my envy show
As instant ranchers' ranches grow."

I suggested that they could use some of my extended knowledge about plants and grazing animals.

"A lot of progress I could show
If they had half of what I know."

Actually, I was not serious about becoming a paid consultant on such matters because I perceived that new owners believed that ranching wisdom came with ownership of the land. They could learn the art and science of range management *"on the job,"* so to speak. They didn't need to share with a range expert.

"And I had half their money flow..."

Probably you can guess that my view on novice managers of rangeland has mellowed or I wouldn't be writing this. I have seen places transformed by new owners, especially where the previous owner tried to graze out every blade of grass to make a living. Increased productivity and diversity have come about through their cautious decisions, if nothing more than benign neglect, mostly by letting the cycles of nature take charge without the pressure of too many grazing animals.

Recovery from drought and past misuse takes time and reasonable amounts of moisture, not a lot of technical education.

I had an interesting and enjoyable day this spring with a new owner examining land recently released from extreme grazing.

We stopped the pickup dozens of times as he gleefully got out to examine close-up—a Sideoats, Canada wildrye, and an Engelmann daisy plant he hadn't noticed before.

Most of us have seen examples of the serious consequences that occur with extreme grazing which destroys the cover of herbaceous vegetation to allow loss of soil through wind and water erosion. One generation of poor management can cause enough deterioration that it takes three generations to recover. Simply removing livestock may be inadequate to restore the land if seeds and roots of desirable plants have been eliminated.

(Continued on next page.)

photo spot

In late winter, an American Goldfinch, *Spinus tristis,* (far left) forages for seeds from the stalk of Maximillian sunflower (*Helianthus maximiliani*).

Photo credit: Ricky Linex, USDA-NRCS.

Early-season bloomers like Mexican Buckeye (*Ungnadia speciosa*) are a welcomed source of nectar for bees (left) and other pollinators in early spring.

Photo credit: Melissa Sturdivant, USDA-NRCS.

(Continued from previous page— Instant Ranchers, A Second Look)

Most sites, however, have remnants that can fill back in when given the chance. The resiliency of our rangeland in recovering from severe drought is well known. Recovery from misuse by the previous owner by *"doing nothing to it"* is probably a good start.

Benign neglect is sure to have its consequences, also. Under most circumstances, the rangeland will gradually fill up with Pricklypear, Mesquite, Juniper, and other woody plants as it has done in the past 100 years. As the thickening process continues, the surprise event, when it occurs, will be a catastrophic wildfire on the windiest, hottest, driest, most inconvenient day of the year. Accumulation of forage following a wetter than average year is part of the recovery process, but it sets the stage for the fuel of a wildfire.

The recognition of fire as a vital part of many natural plant communities is finally being acknowledged by most scientists and many governmental agencies. The use of prescribed fire is long overdue on many of our public lands, and procedures to burn effectively and safely are now undergoing critical examination (Figure 1).

What's a new landowner to do?

"All there is to ranch success
Is to hire a man, I guess,
Who keeps the books and does the chores
And keeps the saddles off the floors…"

My advice is to learn fast!

The Edwards Plateau Prescribed Burning Association is a sensible and significant way of approaching wise rangeland management. Comprised mainly of traditional ranchers centered on Sutton County, the association plans and coordinates prescribed burns on member ranches, with old or new owners. The main requirement is that an owner must attain some proficiency through experience on other burns before the association will plan a burn on his or her land. Thus, there are no naïve landowners who burn, and likewise, there are none who know everything. Instant ranchers as well as those of long experience need to love the land together.

Figure 1. (*left*). A "prescribed" burn helps to mitigate volatile rangeland conditions by removing residues safely using a managed approach.

Photo credit: Melissa Sturdivant, USDA-NRCS.

Editor's Note: To get more information about a Prescribed Burn Association near you, visit the Prescribed Fire Portal webpage at www.pbatexas.org

Jake Landers is a retired Range Specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife and lives in Menard, Texas.

We abuse land because
we regard it as a commodity belonging to us.
When we see land as a community
to which we belong, we may begin
to use it with love and respect.

- Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

Blue Funnel Lily

Androstephium coeruleum

Ricky Linex

Blue funnel lily, also known as funnel flower, is a native, perennial, cool season forb in the Lily Family. This forb has a grass-like appearance in the leaves and grows from a bulb, both being characteristics of monocots such as lilies.

Blue funnel lily features leaves with parallel veins running the length of the smooth, slender, 12 to 18-inch long basal leaves that often bend as the plant matures.

With the long tapering leaves, blue funnel lily can easily be mistaken for an early spring grass seedling prior to the emergence of its usually single but sometimes double flower stalks (Figure 1). These flower stalks can reach up to 10 inches in length but are often seen only 5 to 7 inches in length. The flower heads feature 1 to 6 flowers in an umbel-shaped cluster (Figures 2 and 3). One or two flowers will be seen at any given time with others blooming later. Six lavender, light blue or white petals, measuring up to ½-inch long, surround the corolla tube, which is also about ½-inch in length.

Figure 1 (*top*). Blue funnel lily greens up and flowers while nestled among dormant warm-season grasses.

Figure 2 (*left inset*). Close-up of blue funnel lily blooms.

Figure 3 (*right inset*). Image of whole plant with bulb.

Photos credit: Ricky Linex, USDA-NRCS.

This year in north central Texas, blue funnel lily was beginning to bloom the first week of March with the peak of flowering about the first of April. If deer do not consume the flower stalks, seeds will mature by May and the plant retreats into dormancy until the following winter. This plant is exceptionally hard to find in the field after the flowers have matured. In June one year, I searched a location where funnel lily was growing in March and could not find a trace of the plant. I knew the patch of prickly pear the lily was growing adjacent to and still could not locate the plant. This year, I tied a foot of orange flagging ribbon around several plants right at ground level. Perhaps this year, I will be able to find the seeds which appear around the end of May in clusters of three.

Forage value for deer and antelope is excellent, though the flattened, yucca-like seeds have poor value for birds. It is not uncommon for these plants to be eaten down to the ground within a month after flowering.

Survival of this plant is highest when growing adjacent to protective plants such as prickly pear, lotebush, and yucca.

Ricky Linex is a Wildlife Biologist with the USDA-NRCS in Weatherford, Texas, and serves as the Co-Editor for The Reverchon Naturalist.

Liquid History

***Dan Caudle*, © 2012**

Texas rivers are our liquid history -
Chronicles of the past,
Barometers of the present,
Prophets of the future.

Thousands of insignificant tributaries
Contribute their relatively minor aqueous deposits
Into rills, which become rivulets, then creeks
That finally feed into larger watercourses to become rivers –
Major arteries conveying the essential element of life across the land
As they wind their way toward the Gulf.

From the dawn of time rivers have been the focal point for settlement –
The location of cities and towns, the preferred sites for factories and commerce.
They have long been the basis for land ownership, boundary disputes, wars, and lawsuits
Between people, states, and nations, each seeking control of the water
To use for their own purposes and to gain advantage over others.

Our waters have been governed by the laws of six different nations.
They have seen once dominant civilizations and governments disappear entirely
They have witnessed the overnight establishment of bustling communities
Only to see them vanish almost as suddenly as they appeared.
They were the lifeblood of remote frontier outposts
Which have now become densely populated metropolitan cities.

For eons they weaved their way through the countryside
Unencumbered as they charted their own course.
They conformed only to the topography of the land
And yielded only to the laws of nature.

They ran wild and free – sometimes as raging torrents
That might cut a new channel
Leaving an oxbow vestige of the old watercourse.
Other times they just meandered
Lazily and aimlessly across the landscape.

Today the rivers have been subdued and tamed.
No longer are they unconfined and natural.
Now they are controlled and manipulated
To fit the needs and wishes of modern civilization.

Some rarely flow and consist mostly of occasional pools of water.
They run only when torrential downpours occur.
Then they become a thick, soupy, reddish brown mix of water, debris, and soil,
As they churn and stir and overflow their banks,
Destroying lives and structures that encroached into the floodplain.

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Background photo: The Frio River (north of the Nueces River). Source: www.texasbeyondhistory.net

Big-Root Cymopterus

Cymopterus macrorhizus

Ricky Linex

There are several native plants whose names clearly reflect a part of that plant—the Texas bluebonnet, American basketflower, Old man's beard, and Indian blanket are all very clear examples of names following function.

With a name like Big-root cymopterus, you have to wonder, don't you? This member of the carrot or parsley family belongs to the Apiaceae family. This family has plants that serve as both food (cilantro) as well as a couple of deadly plants (water-hemlock and poison-hemlock). Fortunately, for the American Indians who ate the tuber of this plant, the tuber is not poisonous (Figure 1).

Big-root cymopterus (*Cymopterus macrorhizus*) is also known as "wave-wing" due to the often undulating wings of the leaf margins. This plant will grow between 4 and 10 inches in height (Figure 2). Big-root is native to Texas and Oklahoma.

This past December 13th, I noticed a new shoot emerging from a pot which I had transplanted a large root the previous year. The plant produced a rosette of smooth, pale grey-green, pinnate leaves which are deeply cut to the midrib. From its emergence in mid-December through late March, the plant would wilt just a bit with each hard freeze, and then shake it off and perk right up. Freeze after freeze, this pattern was repeated.

As the flowers began to grow in February, the process of surviving the freezes continued. The flower is a typical umbel shape of the family which may show white to pale purple in color (Figure 3). The seeds eventually are winged as seen under magnification. The prime time of year to see this plant is during peak flowering in late February to March. Once the seeds mature, the plant seems to just melt away and goes dormant for another year. It is a small plant and easily overlooked. Much as Aldo Leopold said about Draba (*The Sand County Almanac*) from page 1, the same applies for Big-root cymopterus.

Forage value for livestock and deer must be poor as no loss of leaves nor flower stalks have been noticed. By the way, the root when freshly cut, has some crunch with a slight bitter taste, perhaps it would be better roasted in the ashes of a mesquite fire.

Figure 1 (*top*). Tuber root of a Big-root cymopterus seedling.

Figure 2 (*middle*). Big-root cymopterus blooms early in spring.

Figure 3 (*left*). Umbel–shaped bloom of Big-root.

Photos credit: Ricky Linex, USDA-NRCS.

Ricky Linex is a Wildlife Biologist with the USDA-NRCS in Weatherford, Texas, and serves as the Co-Editor for The Reverchon Naturalist.

(Continued from page 7— Liquid History)

Many of the rivers have been altered - straightened, narrowed, deepened -
By engineers, bulldozers, draglines, government planners - all with good intentions.
They have been restricted by artificial barriers,
Civilized by dams, weirs, locks, berms, and levees,
To control their flow and their route.

Rivers and streams are harnessed and contained in earthen reservoirs
To supply the voracious demands of urban landscapes - lush lawns and golf courses,
Water parks and swimming pools, industries, and thirsty city dwellers.
They say there is a desperate need to construct more dams and reservoirs for the future!
More dams to further diminish the rivers and creeks?

Our legacy will not only be recorded in journals,
It is there in the water for all to see.
The handwriting is not on the wall
Or in the pages of a book.
It is in the river.

Texas rivers are our liquid history -
Chronicles of the past,
Barometers of the present,
Prophets of the future.

Dan Caudle is a retired State Rangeland Management Specialist with USDA-NRCS and currently resides in Weatherford, Texas.

Not Beloved:
Invasive Species of Texas

Melissa Sturdivant

While visiting a dry Peters Creek in Burnet County in April, a group of us found the riparian area awash with lush growth and new blooms—Spring had arrived in the Hill Country. Then, this caught my eye (Figure 1). Petite blooms, so dainty, fragrant—inviting.

It was deceiving. Yes, they got my attention. I was surprised at the number of mature Chinaberry trees and seedlings that were growing along the stream area—choking and consuming the landscape!

Chinaberry tree (*Melia azedarach*) has escaped! It is not native. Historically used as an ornamental in urban landscapes, the fruit, when consumed, is transported elsewhere by birds and mammals. It is hardy; no doubt of that. The problem is that it is prolific and will out-compete our native vegetation over time if not eradicated. Where it thrived along Peters Creek was years in the making and the problem most likely originated upstream or in the surrounding urban communities. A bird or other animal ate the fruit of the tree, and discarded the seeds in its excrement as the animal moved along the stream corridor. The seeds, sheltered by the lush canopy, survived, and when conditions were perfect, the seeds germinated and seedlings sprouted!

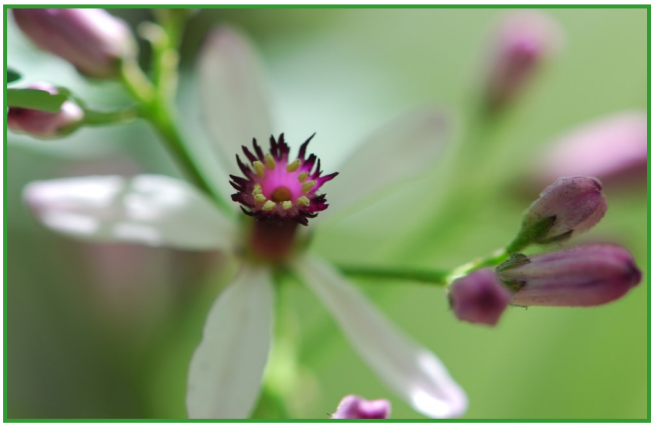

Figure 1. Tiny, fragrant bloom of the Chinaberry tree (*Melia azedarach*) isn't very pretty when you witness its effects upon the native landscape when left unabated.

Photo credit: Melissa Sturdivant, USDA-NRCS.

This cyclic process has continued to do this for many years now—not just here but along many stream banks and woodland areas across the state and elsewhere. What can you do? Take hold of those invasive species—now!

(continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page— Not Beloved: Invasive Species of Texas)

Chinaberry tree is not the only invasive species which Texas landowners must contend.

Landowners—all conservationists, should stay informed. Attend workshops, learn about plants, and study the landscape As Steve Nelle shared in his article on page 3, we should be out there observing—"The more you look, the more you'll see." If you see invasive species on your landscape, don't wait until they take over and choke out everything else. Eradicate them while they are still manageable. Once you get yours under control, then you can help your neighbor. We all need to work diligently to manage the rangeland—to leave it in better condition for the next generation. A network of volunteers is also out there trying to help the land by ridding it of invasive species.

Editor's Note: To find out about volunteering to eradicate invasive species such as the Chinaberry tree, visit www.texasinvasives.org for more information.

Melissa Sturdivant is a Soil Conservationist for the USDA-NRCS in Goldthwaite, Texas, and serves as the Co-Editor for the Reverchon Naturalist.

Have you seen these critters crawling around lately? The Eastern tent caterpillar *Malacosoma americanum*) forms dense silken webs at the crotch of limbs (Figure 1), preferring woodies such as native plums (*Prunus* sp.) and related Hawthorn species such as the Mayhaw. Damage is limited to defoliation as there is only one generation of tent caterpillars hatched each year, and their activity is usually finished by June.

Eggs of the Eastern tent caterpillar over-winter as a hard mass encircling woody twigs. In early spring, they hatch and begin feeding on new growth, and form their characteristic tent. They leave the webbing during the day to forage on nearby foliage and then return to the safety of the webbing at night. As the larvae develop, the tent expands, and is almost impenetrable.

Figure 1 (*above*). Tent formed of silken webbing protects the developing larvae.

Photo credit: Melissa Sturdivant, USDA-NRCS.

Woolly Croton

Croton capitatus

Bubba VanZandt

Woolly croton (*Croton capitatus*) is a warm season, native annual forb in the Spurge or Euphorbiaceae family. Croton leaves have an aromatic smell when crushed. The leaves are grayish and have star-shaped hairs on the surface. Croton has white flowers that are arranged in spikes at the end of the stems (Figure 1). The fruits are in a capsule that have three segments supporting the three individual seeds. The plant is densely covered with light brown wooly hairs that give its leaves and stems a gray or whitish appearance.

There are 20 species of Croton that occur in Texas. The seeds of croton are great for wildlife, and highly valued by dove, quail, turkey, and other seed-eating wildlife. The plant is of low value for livestock and considered by many ranchers as a weed.

Woolly croton can grow one to three-feet tall. It grows in dry, open areas and prefers sandy, rocky soils, and usually indicates soil disturbance and over-grazing.

Figure 1. Photo of Woolly croton in bloom.

Photo source: www.sbs.utexas.edu

Bubba VanZandt is a Resource Conservationist with the USDA-NRCS in Burnet, Texas.

Turkey Huntin'—NRCS Style!

What's *Struttin'* in Your Region?

Melissa Sturdivant

Guess what I did on opening day of spring turkey season? For most folks, this was probably not a typical day. Up by 5 am, out the door, and sitting in a ground blind an hour before sunrise. I got some perfect shots—shots from a different perspective, of course. Yes, I was armed—shotgun in hand, along with my Nikon D-90!

My favorite moment? There were a few, but catching shots like these were amazing (Figure 1). I actually had to go through hundreds of similar photos to find this one to share. For several hours, I watched this flock of turkeys! One of my favorite moments—"listening" to the turkeys come off the roost. By far, this is my favorite time in the early morning—listening to the turkeys chatter with their gobbles and yelps at first daylight, waking all the woodland animals to begin a new day.

On this particular opening day, my second favorite moment was watching four young "jakes" (adolescent male turkeys) prance in with their tiny "nubs" of beards on display vying for the attention of all the ladies (e.g., turkey hens). I watched the young "teenagers" march abreast of one another for over an hour trying with all their might to garner some attention, while trying not to get in a fight with those more mature fellas that "ruled the roost."

"Shooting" was not an option for me. As an avid hunter, I know my limits and know when you should or should not take the shot. Always strive to conserve the resource—all resources. From the picture, you can see how close the turkeys are to one another. Taking a shot was out, but not with my camera! So, for several hours, I watched them and their behavior, and was amazed at how they articulated and moved their fans (tail feathers)—enamoring the ladies and intimidating the young with their expansive fans, fluffed feathers, and protruding beards! They are so cool to watch! If you've not ventured out and been enamored by these amazing native birds, then you're missing out!

See anything happening on your Texas rangeland? Articles and photos related to the flora and fauna of our native landscape are welcome. We'd really like to hear from you; please share what's happening in your part of the state.

Send your 300 to 500-word essay to Ricky Linex at ricky.linex@tx.usda.gov and Melissa Sturdivant at melissa.sturdivant@tx.usda.gov.

Melissa Sturdivant

Melissa Sturdivant is a Soil Conservationist with the USDA-NRCS in Goldthwaite, Texas, and serves as the Co-Editor for the Reverchon Naturalist.

Figure 1. Three mature Rio Grande turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo intermedia*) strut around showing off their plumage at the peak of the spring mating season.

Photo credit: Melissa Sturdivant, USDA-NRCS .

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