

# Nueces Agriculture

## "IMPROVING FOOD & FIBER PRODUCTION"

VOLUME 16, ISSUE 5

DECEMBER 2023

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### Facts About U.S. Agriculture

farmflavor.com

Did you know mature turkeys have more than 3,500 feathers? How about that cows have four stomachs and can detect smells up to six miles away? Agriculture is one of the United States' most important industries, employing more than 24 million workers or 17 percent of the country's total work force.

Here are some fun facts straight from America's farms for you to absorb and share:

- Like snowflakes, no two cows have exactly the same pattern of spots.
- There are 47 different breeds of sheep in the U.S.
- Pork is the most widely eaten meat in the world.
- Elevators in the Statue of Liberty use a soybean-based hydraulic fluid.
- The longest recorded flight of a chicken is 13 seconds.
- The average dairy cow produces seven gallons of milk a day, 2,100 pounds of milk a month, and 46,000 glasses of milk a year.
- Raising beef cattle is the single largest segment of American agriculture.
- One pound of wool can make 10 miles of yarn. There are 150 yards of wool yarn in a base ball.
- Soybeans are an important ingredient for the production of crayons. In fact, one acre of soy beans can produce 82,368 crayons.
- The heaviest turkey ever raised weighed 86 pounds, about the size of an average third grader.
- Cows are herbivores, so they only have teeth on the bottom jaw.
- Cows must give birth to a calf in order to produce milk.

TEXAS A&M  
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Find us on Facebook at  
NuecesCountyAgriculture

### PRIVATE APPLICATOR TRAINING

When .... December 5, 2023

Time .... 8:30 AM

Where. .... A&M AgriLife Ext. Office,

Call to Pre-Register .... (361) 767-5220

710 East Main, Ste. 1, Robstown, TX

Fee: \$50.00 (Includes study manuals)

A Private Applicator is defined by law as a person who uses or supervises the use of a restricted-use or state-limited use pesticide for the purpose of producing an agricultural commodity.

### 2023 Soil Testing Campaign

(See flyer on page 2 for more info)

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office

710 East Main, Ste 1

Robstown, TX 78380

Campaign runs from October 30-November 17, 2023

For more information contact Jaime Lopez or JR Cantu at 361-767-5220

# 2023 Soil Testing Campaign

October 30-November 17, 2023



Just in time for next year's planting season, the Coastal Bend Soil Testing Campaign will begin October 30 and will run through November 17, 2023. Soil testing is the best way to determine the soil nutrient status of fields and pastures for area producers. Please follow the instructions below to participate in this year's soil testing campaign:

- Obtain sample bags and instructions from the Nueces County Extension Office.
- Collect composite samples.
- Complete the information sheet selecting the proper test.
- Return the sample to the Nueces County Extension Office at 710 E. Main, Ste 1, Robstown, TX, 78380

Not only does soil testing allow growers to make the most out of the value of their land, but it is also an important tool when it comes to protecting our area water sources by ensuring that nutrient levels are optimal for crop production while minimizing the potential for excess nutrient runoff.

**TEXAS A&M**  
**AGRI LIFE**  
**EXTENSION**

**710 E. Main Ave., Ste. 1,  
Robstown, TX 78380  
Ph: 361.767.5220**

**For additional information, please contact  
Jaime Lopez or JR Cantu at 361.767.5220**

*The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.*



# Coastal Bend Classic

## YOUTH AND LIVESTOCK CLINIC AND SHOWS

**December 2, 2023**

**San Patricio County Fairgrounds, 219 W. 5th, Sinton, TX 78387**

### Schedule of Events:

#### Friday, December 1

3:00 – 8:00 PM

Early Arrival (optional)

**NEW FOR 2023 SWINE CLINIC AND  
SHOW HAS BEEN ADDED**

#### Saturday, December 2

7:30 – 8:45 AM

Arrival and Stalling of Animals

8:45 AM

Weight Cards Due

9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Species Clinics (beef, goat, sheep, swine)

1:00 PM

Species Showmanship followed by Species Shows (steer/heifer, goat, sheep, swine)

**FIRST 100 YOUTH PARTICIPANTS PRE-  
REGISTERED WILL RECEIVE A FREE  
CBC GIVEAWAY ITEM. BUCKLES WILL  
BE AWARDED TO GRAND CHAMPION  
AND RESERVE GRAND CHAMPION FOR  
EACH SPECIES.**

**FOOD TRUCKS WILL BE AVAILABLE**

	<u>REGISTRATION</u> Sept 18 (noon) – Nov 27 (8pm)	<u>LATE REGISTRATION</u> Nov 27 (8:01pm) - DAY OF SHOW
CLINIC & SHOW	\$35*	\$60*

**Register online on Eventbrite or by scanning the QR code below:**

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2023-coastal-bend-classic-tickets-715279629627?aff=oddtcreator>



IF YOU NEED ANY TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROGRAM OR HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PHYSICAL ACCESS REQUIRED, PLEASE CONTACT JT MCCLELLLEN, EXTENSION PROGRAM SPECIALIST - D11 4-H AT 361.698-7436 BY NOVEMBER 10, 2023. TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION PROVIDES EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN ITS PROGRAMS AND EMPLOYMENT TO ALL PERSONS, REGARDLESS OF RACE, COLOR, SEX, RELIGION, NATIONAL ORIGIN, DISABILITY, AGE, GENETIC INFORMATION, VETERAN STATUS, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, OR GENDER IDENTITY.

# Texas hunting laws every hunter should know

By: Liberty Safe

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Thinking about venturing out into the Texas wilderness to catch some game? With the abundance and variety of wildlife in Texas, it's a much sought-after place to go hunting. But because wildlife varies so much, there are several rules and regulations that you'll want to become familiar with before you go out on the hunt. In this article, we'll walk through the basic hunting laws in Texas, including what kind of animals you can look forward to hunting and the specific rules that apply to them.

Let's start with the basics. This isn't a complete and comprehensive list of Texas hunting laws, but it will definitely get you started.

## HUNTER EDUCATION IN TEXAS

Most states require some form of hunter education, and Texas is no exception. In Texas, every hunter born after September 2, 1971, must complete a Hunter Education Course—this includes out-of-state hunters. Certification is not required to purchase a hunting license, but you must have proof of certification or a deferral for your certification on your person while you are hunting. The minimum age for hunter certification in Texas is 9 years old.

## PURCHASE A HUNTING LICENSE

A hunting license is required for any person (of any age) to hunt any animal in Texas, except under the following circumstances:

- Coyotes if they are attacking, are about to attack, or have recently attacked livestock or domestic animals
- Feral hogs on private property (must have landowner authorization)
- Fur-bearing animals if the hunter has a commercial trapper's license

Additional endorsements beyond your hunting license may be required depending on your activity. Here are a few of the endorsements you may need to obtain:

- Archery Endorsement
- Migratory Game Bird Endorsement
- Upland Game Bird Endorsement
- Reptile and Amphibian Endorsement
- Federal Duck Stamp

## PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION REQUIRED

Along with your education certificate, any person 17 years of age or older must carry a valid driver's license or personal identification certificate issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety. If your residence is outside of Texas, you must carry a valid ID from your state or country.

## WASTE OF GAME

If you fail to make a reasonable effort to retrieve a game bird or animal that you have injured while hunting, that is a Class C misdemeanor. It is also an offense if you intentionally take a game bird, animal, or fish and don't keep the edible portions in edible condition.

## RETRIEVAL OF GAME AND HUNTING DOGS

Regardless of circumstance, trespassing is still trespassing. You must have landowner consent to enter any private property to pursue wounded game or retrieve your dog.

## **SALE OF INEDIBLE ANIMAL PARTS**

Inedible wildlife animal parts may be sold or purchased if they were lawfully possessed. Some of these parts include:

- Hide, hair, antlers, bones, skulls, horns, hooves, or sinew from the following animals: mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn, desert bighorn sheep, fox squirrels, gray squirrels, and javelina
- Feathers, feet, or bones of game birds

Migratory birds and their parts are not allowed to be sold or purchased for ornamental or decorative purposes.

## **LEGAL GAME REGULATIONS IN TEXAS**

In Texas, like most states, there are only certain types of animals you are allowed to hunt. Make sure you are familiar with the current laws and what the legal game is for that year. If a species is not listed in the legal game legend for Texas, it is not allowed to be hunted. Here are the current legal game at the time of this article:

- White-tailed Deer
- Feral Hogs
- Turkey
- Dove
- Waterfowl
- Sandhill Crane
- Rail, Snipe, Gallinule, and Woodcock
- Quail
- Pheasant
- Chachalaca
- Furbearers
- Squirrel
- Predators (bobcats and coyotes only)
- Rabbits and Hares
- Frogs/Bullfrogs
- Fish
- Crayfish

## **UNLAWFUL ACTIVITIES WHILE HUNTING IN TEXAS**

It is just as important to know what is legal as it is to know what is not legal while you are hunting in Texas.

Here are some of the unlawful activities that you should be aware of:

- Taking or possessing wildlife resources other than as indicated by the Texas hunting law
- Hunting on public roads, with the exception of specific reptiles and amphibians
- Storing, transporting, or abandoning an unsecured firearm where children can access it
- Driving a motorized vehicle through the bed of a navigable freshwater stream, unless otherwise allowed by a local river access plan
- Fishing on privately-owner waters or hunting on private land without the landowner's consent
- Fishing in public water from private land without a fishing license
- Discharging a firearm on or across a public road
- Possessing a deer or any part of it that has been hit by a motor vehicle

## HUNTING LAWS FOR DIFFERENT ANIMALS IN TEXAS

In Texas, the wildlife varies a lot, and as such, there are laws that pertain to specific types of animals as you engage in hunting and trapping activities. Here are some species-specific laws to take note of.

### FERAL HOGS

Feral hogs have become a nuisance over the years. They are a non-native species that cause damage to property, and as such, there are specific laws in Texas for hogs that you should know.

- It is prohibited to snare or trap feral hogs unless under contract with the department or cooperating landowner.
- It is prohibited to use a dog to hunt feral hogs unless specifically allowed in the Legal Game Legend on a unit map.
- Shooting hours for feral hogs are restricted to daylight hours only unless otherwise specified for a certain unit.
- As of September 1, 2019, it became legal to hunt feral hogs without a hunting license on private property. You must have landowner consent to do so.

### FROGS AND BULLFROGS

There is a limit for hunting frogs and bullfrogs: you may only catch 25 per 24-hour period (midnight to midnight).

### TURKEYS

Texas turkey hunting laws include the following:

- It is unlawful to hunt roosting turkeys at any time
- It is unlawful to release turkeys without department authorization
- All turkeys must be tagged with a tag from the hunter's license immediately upon harvest
- You are required to have the **Upland Game Bird Endorsement** to hunt turkey
- Harvest reporting is mandatory for wild turkeys in all counties (this can be done on the app or online)

### BLACK BEARS

Black bears are a protected species and may not be harmed or killed. If you see a black bear during your hunt, Texas authorities ask that you report any sightings to the appropriate wildlife district office.

### STORING YOUR HUNTING GEAR

As we've pointed out, it is unlawful in Texas to leave your firearms unsecured where a child can gain access to them, so it's important to have a plan in place to store and secure your firearms while you are not using them.



# TPWD proposes statewide deer carcass disposal rule

By: Jessica Domel; Texas Farm Bureau    October 12, 2023

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The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) is accepting comments on a proposed rule that would require hunters to dispose of unused deer carcass parts using one of three methods.

“The proposal was meant to help mitigate the spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD) through improper disposal or movement of carcass parts,” Alan Cain, TPWD big game program leader, said. “Prions, the infectious agent for CWD, is found in the brain and spinal column, nervous tissue and things like that. If we can minimize the risk of potentially spreading that disease through carcass parts from places where CWD exists to other places where it’s not known to exist, that’s the goal.”

CWD is a fatal, neurological disease that impacts members of the deer family, including white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, red deer and sika deer.

It is a slow, progressive disease. Infected animals may not show outward signs of illness for years.

According to the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC), infected animals shed prions through their saliva, urine or feces, blood or soft antler material. Deer carcasses can also spread the disease.

“Rather than restrict carcass movements, like saying you have to quarter the deer or something like that, what we’re proposing is carcass disposal rules,” Cain said in an interview with the Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network. “What that would require is, if you’re a hunter in the state, and you take deer off a site of harvest, (you) can take a whole carcass out. You can take that to a processor.”

Hunters who do not take the whole deer carcass to a processor would be required to dispose of all deer parts not retained for cooking, storage or taxidermy purposes in a method outlined in the rule.

“You can throw it in a dumpster that goes to a trash service that goes to a permitted landfill. Most all trash services I know of that have dumpsters go into some sort of permitted landfill,” Cain said. “That’s one option.”

The landfill would have to be permitted by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to receive such wastes.

“If you don’t have that option, you could bury those unused carcass parts in your backyard or back pasture,” Cain said. “You could bury them as long as they’re three feet deep and covered by soil so you’re not letting scavengers grab those carcass parts and draft them across the landscape.”

Burying the unused deer carcass parts won’t be an option in all parts of Texas due to rocks and other issues. Cain said that’s why the rule includes three options for hunters.

The third option is returning the unused parts to the property where the deer was harvested.

“It doesn’t really change things a lot for a hunter other than where you can dispose of it,” Cain said. “If you’re not the type of person who processes your own deer, you can still take it to a locker plant, and then they would be responsible for disposing of those parts in a landfill, trash service or bury it.”

The rule would provide some flexibility for those who hunt in CWD containment or surveillance zones.

“If you’re in a CWD zone and you harvest a deer, under the proposal, you’ll be able to take a whole carcass out. Currently, you can’t do that,” Cain said. “Before you leave the zone through, you’d have to stop by the check station and let us test the deer, which is required by rule. Then, we could provide instructions.”

Hunters would still be able to quarter deer on the property where they’re hunting and take it home to finish processing it.

“Under the proposal, you’d still need to throw those bones away in the dumpster or bury it, but you could still quarter it at the ranch and do that before you take off,” Cain said.

Those who do not plan to remove the deer they’ve harvested from the site of harvest will see no change if the rule is implemented.

“It’s just when you’re moving a carcass off the ranch (or hunting location) to another location, that’s where these proposed rules would come into effect,” Cain said.

The rule, if implemented, would impact deer hunters statewide, not just those in CWD containment or surveillance zones.

“If you have a CWD positive animal somewhere, and you haul it from wherever you harvest that deer to somewhere else that’s not known to have CWD, you run the risk of potentially introducing infectious carcass parts if you just haphazardly throw those out in the back pasture,” Cain said. “Now, you’ve potentially exposed other deer in your area, around your house or wherever you live, to those infectious carcass parts, which is a potential way for that disease to spread. By managing carcass disposal, we mitigate that risk or at least attempt to mitigate the risk as much as possible.”

Cain said the department wants to keep Texas’ deer populations healthy.

“Part of the issue with chronic wasting disease is there is no cure. It’s not like a virus or bacteria. It’s just this little misfolded prion protein that causes other prion proteins to misfold in the brain and essentially creates holes in the brain, which leads to all kinds of neurological issues and problems with the health of the deer. Ultimately, it’s fatal,” Cain said. “If we can minimize the impacts or try to stop the spread of disease in part through carcass disposal rules, then that’s a win.”

# The best days to deer hunt in 2023

By: Mike Hanback; Realtree July 14, 2023

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Our annual look at rut data, moon phases, and the tactics you need to know before picking your deer hunting vacation days this season.

A good day to hunt is any day you can get off work. But knowing that some days will be better than others, I flipped through the calendar, analyzed moon phases, guessed the weather as best I could, and predicted when the hunting will be best this season.



## OCTOBER 20-21

After weeks of lazing around and fattening on grain and acorns, mature bucks get antsy and start to move more, the deeper we get into October. If you study historical rut curves assembled by biologists for the northern two thirds of North America, you'll find that 5 to 7 percent of a herd's does are bred around an October 20 "mini-rut." That's not many does, but it's more than enough to make bucks active. For the bowhunter, good things can happen right now.

**Best conditions:** It will be a warm Indian summer weekend in many regions. Plus, on October 21 the moon is waxing to first-quarter, which studies have shown to be the worst phase for deer movement.

BUT, if you get lucky and the first significant cold snap of the year blows in from the northwest and drops the temperature 20 or 30 degrees in your area, watch out, you might tag out.

**Top stand:** A narrow oak ridge within 100 yards of a corn or bean field is one of my favorite spots in bow season. Deer cut around points, ditches, and gullies on a hogback; hang stands on these terrain features to funnel bucks close. Bucks stage, eat acorns and browse in ridge thickets not only in the evenings, but in the mornings as well.

**Go-to tactics:** Deer are super sensitive to human odor now, so spray your camouflage, pack, and any other fabric gear with a scent-eliminator. I believe it's too early to rattle, but keep your grunt call handy and use it if you see a buck cruising out of bow range. Hang two scent wicks with hot-doe scent near your stand to create the illusion of an early estrus doe in the area.

## OCTOBER 28-31

No trick but all treat for bowhunters this Halloween, so make the next weekend a long hunting weekend if you can.

**Best conditions:** Based on the full moon October 28, I predict good to great deer movement all weekend and through to Halloween, when the moon will still shine at 93% illumination. The bright moon should kick some bucks into scraping and prowling. If a cold front rolls into your area and drops temperatures into the 35- to 50 -degree range, watch out because the Halloween pre-rut could be epic.

**Top stand:** A killer spot is near the corner of a woodlot where an overgrown pasture and a crop field merge. Bucks will run those diverse edges and fence rows, rubbing and scraping as they make for the feed in the afternoon. Some does and bucks will cut across the weed pasture, especially in the mornings, so watch for tines and flashes of hide out in the brush.

**Go-to tactics:** On these full-moon days, I find that deer tend to move best at midday and a little earlier in the afternoons, so morning hunts could be iffy; concentrate time in the stand from 11 a.m. until dark. Grunt and light rattle to any bucks you see crossing the weed field out of range. Calling remains a good, if uncertain, tactic for the next three weeks. In the afternoons, try a doe decoy. Stake her where she's visible in the cut crops 25 yards from your bow stand.

#### **NOVEMBER 6-8**

Regardless of weather or moon phase, the majority of whitetail does in the northern two-thirds of America will be bred between November 5 and Thanksgiving. If you check the record books, November 6-8 have historically been top big-buck days within this window, especially in Midwestern states. That won't change this year.

Why is this week hot? Most bucks haven't bred a doe for a year. They wander around in a testosterone stupor, rubbing trees, pawing scrapes, acting ornery, and waiting on that first wave of does to pop into estrus any day now. Any given year you cannot go wrong taking off work and hunting this week, especially if you hunt from Missouri through the upper Midwest to Wisconsin.

**Best conditions:** Like on Halloween, hope for cold weather and frosty mornings. The cooler the days and the less humidity, the better. A light wind out of the north or west is perfect.

These three days will be illuminated by a last-quarter moon phase, which should make the hunting even better. I am a believer in a deer/moon study conducted at North Carolina State some years ago. It tracked the movements of GPS-collared whitetails through the four moon phases and found that overall deer activity is best during the last-quarter.

**Top Stand:** This time of year, I love morning hunts back in the timber. Set a stand or blind where two or more ridges, points, and draws converge and drop off into a thick river or creek bottom. Resident bucks, as well as some cruisers from a mile or 2 away, will swing through these corridors and funnels, either trolling for does or chasing them. Hunt a convergence like this for two or three days and I'll put down money you'll see a shooter.

**Go-to tactics:** While scrape hunting is always iffy, these are the days to try it, especially if you have trail cam pictures of bucks hitting a really hot scrape. Rattle from your convergence stand (7 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. on a frosty, still day is best). Grunt at any buck you see. Hanging hot-doe wicks can't hurt. Hang tough on stand for as long as you can hack it, and be sure to hunt the last two hours of daylight. The N.C. State moon study I told you about earlier found that deer move best the last hour of daylight under a last-quarter moon.

#### **NOVEMBER 14-17**

If you're off work this week, hunt as many hours as you can, especially if you live in the Mid-Atlantic up into the Northeast, where peak rut tends to run a week to 10 days later than in the Midwest. It's the rut, man, and you never know when and where you'll see a big deer.

Not to spoil the fun, but this is the start of major lockdown in some places in the Midwest. Older bucks hook up with does and seem to go underground to have their fun for three or four days. Shooter buck sightings can decrease noticeably. If you hit it wrong, the woods can be like a tomb.

If you take vacation this week, keep in mind the pressure. This is a big hunting week all across America. There will be many bowhunters in the woods in some areas, and an army of gun hunters out in other places. Try to hunt a spot where pressure is lightest.

**Best conditions:** I sound like a broken record, but you want it cool-to-cold for the best hunting. But don't let a heat wave stop you. One November 16 in South Dakota, with the sun burning the prairie at 80 degrees, I stalked and sweated and finally shot a 5½-year-old 8-pointer that was drooling and tending a doe out in the tall grass at 2 p.m. When you hit it right, the power of the rut is amazing.

These days fall under the New Moon of November. Both the N.C. State study and my 40 years of field-journal entries indicate that during the dark phase, deer move best at first light each morning, and movement diminishes the remainder of the day.

**Top stand:** Set a stand or blind on a timbered ridge flanked by a crop field on one or two sides and CRP, a marsh, or other heavy cover on the other. The more deer trails on a ridge, the better. Heavy cover near your stand is crucial, because with the pressure of the last couple weeks, old bucks will stage and move in or near thick stuff before coming out to feed. Be on stand extra early each morning and hunt hard until at least 10 a.m.



**Go-to tactics:** I back off rattling now because bucks have heard clashing antlers (both real and fake) for weeks. But keep grunting because those calls won't spook deer, and to the contrary might pull in a buck at any time.

#### **DECEMBER 3-5**

For the last five years I have hunted in Oklahoma and/or Kansas (when I drew a tag) in early December. On all those hunts I witnessed good buck movement and some of the best rutting activity of the year. I've shot five mature bucks over that span, including a stunning 160-class giant in southeast Kansas last December 3. The early post-rut has become my most productive time, and I urge you not to miss these three days this season.

**Best conditions:** This December 3-5, two things will work in your favor. While Sunday could be tricky, there will be noticeably less hunting pressure in your woods on Monday and Tuesday. On December 4, the moon will be waxing to last-quarter, which as we discussed earlier is typically the best phase for deer activity, especially the last hour of daylight. If it's frosty and cold those three days, all the better.

**Top stand:** Mature bucks that have been hunted for weeks come to check does and eat the last morsels of food in a field or

plot, but they're hesitant to move through open woods in daylight. Bucks will cling to the last strips of standing weeds or brush in a draw, or walk in a cover-laced ditch, or hug cedars on a ridge. That's where you need to set up, tight to those cover strips and close to the feed, and try to whack a buck the last hour before sunset.

**Go-to-tactics:** A landmark Texas study found that the early post-rut is the best time to rattle in a 4- or 5-year-old buck, so crack the horns (crisp, still mornings are best). Go back and watch areas you hunted in the November rut; you might catch a buck prowling back through the rut zone for a last hot doe. I lay a doe-in-heat trail into all my December stands, and then I hang wicks to float more estrus lure in the woods. There are only a few hotties left to breed now, and that sweet scent might bring a buck running. If you see him, shoot straight. Good luck!

# White-winged dove hunting has become a “Texas thing”

By: Will Leschper; Texas Outdoor digest

August 29, 2023

White-winged dove hunting was a “Valley thing.”

Years ago, it was a specialized pursuit that had Texans in metro areas driving 300 or 400 miles one-way to make it down to prized whitewing havens not far from the Mexican border in the Rio Grande Valley to blast at the high-flying quarry.

Then, in the 1980s, the whitewing population slowly started expanding north — first into areas such as Kingsville and Corpus Christi — and later into the southern reaches of San Antonio.

Today, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department biologists are close to declaring whitewings in nearly every one of our 254 counties, with roughly 90% of the breeding population occurring in urban areas.

Simply put, whitewing hunting is now a “Texas thing.”

Sure, there are much higher concentrations of whitewings in South Texas, but it’s not uncommon for hunters in regions to the north to bag a few of these distinctive game birds to go along with the more common mourning doves that fill most bag limits in those locales. In fact, in some places west of Houston, it’s becoming commonplace to find more whitewings than mourning doves, something unheard of 30 or 40 years ago.

Dove hunting in Texas continues to maintain its strong appeal, both signaling the start of fall and winter seasons while providing an affordable opportunity to spend time outdoors. The numbers back it up. Not only does Texas have the highest dove populations in the country, it also boasts the largest number of hunters, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. In an average season, roughly a quarter-million people put time in the field hunting mourning doves, while 125,000 target whitewings. Those hunters typically harvest about 5 million mourning doves and almost 2 million whitewings.

That’s a lot of dove breasts that will be doctored up with bacon and jalapeno and charred over a mesquite grill.



Much like the whitewing population, Texas' public hunting program has grown exponentially during the past three decades, providing an outlet for dove hunters across the state to get their fix, and for cheap, too.

Kelly Edmiston, public hunting coordinator with TPWD, said there are now more than 100 public hunting "units" totaling tens of thousands of acres scattered across the state that can be accessed by those purchasing an Annual Public Hunting permit.

"Our public hunting program started in 1987, focusing mainly on walk-in hunting opportunities on wildlife management areas and even some state parks," Edmiston said. "We even leased land from timber companies for some public hunting and in 1988 TPWD formed a partnership with the Forest Service to lease more new areas for hunters."

Edmiston said that one particular game bird has helped provide a big draw each year: doves.

"In 1994, we started a pilot program for public hunters, focusing specifically on doves but also other small game species," Edmiston said. "TPWD went out and looked for landowners willing to lease tracts within a short drive from metropolitan areas. We used proceeds from the sale of the Annual Public Hunting permit, which at the time was \$35, to lease more lands from private landowners that could be used for dove hunting. I think that first year we had about 10 areas but it was the start of something larger."

"All along, the public dove hunting we've offered has been geared toward urban hunters. Maybe it's that hunter who can get off work early and take their kids out dove hunting and help pass the tradition on. That first year was focused mostly on areas within that I-35 corridor in either the Austin or San Antonio areas. And while we wanted to find more areas to lease for hunting, we also were focused on showing landowners that leasing land for hunting was a good thing, something that's not intimidating."

Edmiston said that there are numerous benefits associated with the public hunting program, and not just for hunters.

"Today we have about 120 areas throughout the state that are leased for public hunting, still mostly on those major metro corridors," Edmiston said. "Every year, we send biologists into the field, looking for new areas and contacting landowners to inquire about leasing their land for small game hunting. That includes doves, but also quail, waterfowl and even pheasants up in the Rolling Plains and Panhandle."

"What landowners quickly learn is that leasing land for public hunting is a great way to supplement their incomes and efforts. We've got a lot of folks that may only offer dove hunting during the first split because they've got cattle to work or crops to plant during the rest of the year."



Because of the economic impact of dove hunting in Texas — estimated at roughly \$300 million annually — it's easy to be optimistic each fall about lies ahead.

“The public hunting program, espe-

cially for doves, also helps out the little communities in and around our public hunting areas,” Edmiston said. “Many of those little towns and stores see a bunch of business come in the door in September and October when all those dove hunters are out. That’s good for them.”

Edmiston noted there’s a wealth of information available for hunters looking to maximize their efforts on public lands, perhaps even finding a spot that might not get as much hunting pressure.

“When you purchase an Annual Hunting Permit, which becomes available Aug. 15 — the same date as hunting licenses — you will get a booklet (roughly 180 pages) that includes map of all the tract in the public hunting program, with listings for species that can be hunted and when, and the regulations that each tract is under,” Edmiston said. “There’s also a digital version online on our website, which includes aerial maps of the areas, which can help provide a little more detail.”

### **Wildlife Management Area Public Dove Hunts**

Here are five Wildlife Management Areas spread across the state that provide excellent dove hunting, including for an expanding whitewing population:

#### **South Texas: Chaparral Wildlife Management Area**

The “Chap” is a deer-hunting hot spot situated just southwest of Cotulla, but its 15,000 acres include great hunts for birds and other game, too. While deer, javelina and feral hog hunts are by drawing only, the WMA offers public hunt access for white-winged doves and mourning doves as well as quail.

#### **Rio Grande Valley: Las Palomas Wildlife Management Area**

Las Palomas, unlike some other WMAs in other parts of Texas, is a combination of different tracts that aren’t connected. The one that typically draws the most attention from hunters is the Arroyo Colorado Unit, a roughly 900-acre tract in Cameron County just northeast of Harlingen. This is the prime hot spot for public white-winged dove hunting in the Lone Star State, featuring excellent native habitat.

**Gulf Coast: Justin Hurst Wildlife Management Area**

Hurst WMA, located west of Freeport in Brazoria County, is named for a game warden who was killed in the line of duty in 2007 after a high-speed chase. The WMA is among the top public waterfowl hunting haunts in Texas, but it also offers good dove hunting opportunities. It should be noted that dove hunting must be done using non-toxic shot.

**Rolling Plains: Matador Wildlife Management Area**

This 28,000-acre area southwest of Childress near the Oklahoma border is well-known for its deer opportunities and annually produces multiple whitetail bucks exceeding 150 Boone & Crockett points and mule deer surpassing 160 B & C for public hunters. The area also offers excellent dove hunting, especially in years with average to good rainfall, and hunters annually find similarly good shoots for quail and early teal.

**North Texas: Tawakoni Wildlife Management Area**

With a waterfowl hunting area encompassing more than 36,000 acres, Tawakoni is a duck hunting haven, with more open dates than other WMAs. The lake east of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex also is a draw for doves and dove hunters. In addition, all-day hunting is allowed for the early teal season running in early September.

**2023-24 Texas Dove Seasons**

**North Zone:** Sept. 1 – Nov. 12, 2023 & Dec. 15 – 31, 2023

**Central Zone:** Sept. 1 – Oct. 29, 2023 & Dec. 15, 2023 – Jan. 14, 2024

**Special White-winged Dove Days** (entire South Zone): Sept. 1-3 and Sept. 8-10 (special regulations apply)

**South Zone, Regular Season:** Sept. 14 – Oct. 29, 2023; Dec. 15, 2023 – Jan. 21, 2024

The daily bag limit for doves statewide is 15 and the possession limit 45.

During the early two weekends for the Special White-Winged Dove Days in the South Zone, hunting is allowed only from noon to sunset and the daily bag limit is 15 birds, to include not more than two mourning doves and two white-tipped doves. During the general season in the South Zone, the aggregate bag limit is 15 with no more than two white-tipped doves.

# What deer hunting means in Texas

By: Will Leschper; Texas Outdoor Digest

October 11, 2023

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Deer hunting in Texas is more than just a barrage of camouflage.

For many folks — hundreds of thousands of us here in the Lone Star State alone — deer hunting is life, and from Amarillo to Brownsville north to south and Texarkana to El Paso east to west, it's easy to see why.

Deer hunting is big business.

Deer hunting is time-honored tradition.

Deer hunting is simply family time unlike any other.

It's also a three-month season that most of us average hunters — and again, there are hundreds of thousands of us — look forward to the instant we leave the lease for the last time in January, closing the book on more invaluable memories as we close that ranch gate.

Make no mistake, deer-hunting success is based on multiple criteria centering on your own personal preferences.

Perhaps you only count achievement in regards to the number of tags you fill or the weight of how much organic venison you put in the freezer.

Maybe you only hunt for the antlers or for taking only mature bucks.

No matter the inclination, there is no wrong answer in determining success in the deer woods.

And if you're like most hunters, deer hunting is mainly an excuse to spend time outdoors, joining others in the shared search of our state's big-game animal.

So what does deer hunting really mean to Texas?

Beyond the emotions and motivations associated with enjoying the hunt, which can vary and be hard to adequately assess based on subjectivity, you only have to look at the numbers to learn just how significant the impact is objectively. That's especially true at the local level. Places like Sonora, Junction and Mason are just a few of the dozens of small towns across the state that welcome nonresidents of their communities with open arms, throwing wild game dinners and hunter appreciation events complete with barbecue, all the trimmings and plenty of prize giveaways.

Local business owners revel in seeing GameGuard, Realtree and Mossy Oak from head to toe, lifted pickups towing gear-laden trailers and all those hunters who bring along their wallets beginning with lease preparations in September through February when everything must be secured and packed away.

It's a fact that those dollars flowing into those communities can make the entire year for small shops, especially those hit hard the past couple of years by the pandemic.

The most recent economic impact survey from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on outdoor recreation sheds light on just how much money we're talking about. That survey showed more than 1 million residents and nonresidents 16 and older bought hunting licenses in Texas — a figure that has continued to hold steady at seven figures for years.

Annual deer-hunter participation and harvest surveys conducted annually by Texas Parks & Wildlife show that in good seasons roughly 750,000 of those more than a million hunters are pursuing deer, harvesting more than a half-million bucks and does from a statewide herd that numbers in excess of 5 million.

That's a lot of folks digging into their bank accounts to collect bone and backstraps, a true economic driver of the first order.

While the federal survey includes a host of numbers, the overall impact of hunting in Texas is clear: hunting-related expenditures add up to more than \$1.8 billion, with a healthy chunk of those funds going directly toward deer-hunting trips, gear, food and lodging, among other purchases. According to studies from the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, that funding has a multiplier effect of double those expenditures, providing revenue across multiple business interests, while a study compiled for Texas Parks & Wildlife by an outside agency showed a total economic effect multiplier of nearly three.

Just think about how many pallets of bagged corn changes hands over the course of the year — and that's just one small aspect of the pastime — and you can somewhat envision the wide-ranging scope of deer hunting.

All that funding has a trickle-down effect, helping to pump hundreds of millions of dollars into our local state economy each fall and winter. While that dollar amount includes valuable funds headed to outfitters, mom-and-pop shops and those making a direct living off the hunting industry, the federal taxes generated by the overall industry end up going back into state coffers earmarked for needed resource protections and improvements.

In that aspect, hunting is conservation, with a direct correlation to improving habitat and in some cases access and opportunities.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service annually distributes revenue to each state's wildlife agency through the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration program, with funds coming from excise taxes on the sale of everything from sporting firearms and ammunition to archery equipment.

That figure in 2021 coming back to the Lone Star State was nearly \$27 million for wildlife restoration efforts — the highest figure in the country, equal to the share paid to the state of Alaska. Pittman-Robertson funds allow the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department's Wildlife Division to offer many services, including technical guidance to private landowners who control roughly 95% of wildlife habitat in Texas, TPWD surveys and research for development of hunting regulations, operation and management of Wildlife Management Areas and conducting research and developing techniques for managing wildlife populations and wildlife habitat.

Hunters also play a vital role in that deer management at the statewide level, which also means a lot, too. Those hundreds of thousands of hunters are the main mechanism by which TPWD influences overall deer numbers, buck-to-doe ratios and various herd genetics, while helping to increase or reduce populations based on selective harvest.

The clear example of this conservation role and management framework is the antler restriction move implemented in a half-dozen Post Oak region counties in the late 1990s. They were designed to improve the age structure of buck herds, increase the opportunity to harvest those bucks and encourage better habitat management. For the most part, that framework has been wildly successful and the restrictions are now in place in dozens more counties in the Post Oak, Pineywoods and northern coastal prairie regions.

While it's easy to quantify the economic and management impacts of what deer hunting means to Texas, it's just as simple to see numerous other ways hunters contribute. In many regards, deer hunting also is about giving back, whether it's hunting organizations and local clubs offering community fundraising events and field days that get families into the outdoors — something that's vital to our hunting heritage — or providing high-quality, lean meat for the state's Hunters for the Hungry program.

Texas Parks & Wildlife deer biologists will offer the suggestion that you manage your particular tract as if a lingering drought remained — even in times of good rain — and to keep populations in check through selective harvest, an ideal that transcends land size, fence height or geographic region. Should you find yourself with extra venison that won't fit in your already stacked freezer, by all means help out by donating your extra harvest to state-inspected meat processors that will grind it up for a nominal fee and give it to food pantries that desperately need the sustenance.

At the end of the day, Alan Cain, the white-tailed deer program leader for the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, may have still provided the best answers on quantity and quality when it comes to both deer hunting and enjoying the outdoor pursuit in general.

“Regardless of where you hunt in Texas there's always a good chance you'll see a great quality buck each season,” he has noted. “Whether you take a deer or not, spending time outdoors with your family and friends is worth the effort, much better than spending a day at the office or a weekend on the couch.

“Hunters ought to feel lucky that we live in Texas with the largest deer herd in the nation. Our biggest problem is that we probably don't harvest enough deer, which is good that hunters have the opportunities that they do to harvest deer.”

Texas long has had the greatest whitetail hunting in the country, not just for folks who can afford to spend the big bucks in their attempts to harvest the big bucks, but also for the average hunter who still enjoys hunting as much as possible but may not necessarily get to head afield as much as they'd like.

It's always a perfect year to get back to the basics of deer hunting — mainly the opportunity to spend time outdoors during a splendid time of year while providing for your family should you enjoy success.

Make sure you're included in that group for this upcoming year's counts and also make sure to spend some of your hunting dollars in the local communities you frequent on your excursions.

We're all better because of your deer-hunting efforts!

# What is Venison? You might be surprised.

**Most think of venison only as deer meat, but for centuries it had a broader meaning**

By: Mathew Every; Field and Stream

September 22, 2023

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Whitetail deer meat? Yup, that's venison. Elk meat? That's venison, too. Moose meat? Still venison. What about squirrel meat? Well, actually, sort of. If you're a hunter, and especially a big-game hunter, it might be easier to ask what *isn't* rather than *what is venison*? For a long time, in fact, the word venison was used to describe any meat that came from a game animal. Today, it's used to describe meat from animals in the deer family—whether that's a whitetail deer or an elk, and whether it was shot in the woods or raised on a farm.

## **Where Did the Word “Venison” Come From?**

The word “venison” was first coined in the 14th century. Back then, people were less picky about what they called their food. The word is derived from the Latin *venari*, which means to hunt. According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, it's “the edible flesh of a game animal and especially a deer.” For most hunters today, it just means deer meat.

You might just think about whitetails when you think of venison, but there are a lot of deer out there.

Worldwide, 43 species make up the family *Cervidae*, from the biggest Alaska moose to the smallest South American pudu, and they're all loaded with venison.

## **Wild vs. Farm-Raised**

If you're a hunter—and you probably are if you're reading F&S—you know where your venison comes from. And it isn't the grocery store. Most venison consumed in the U.S. is from hunted game like whitetail deer, mule deer, caribou, moose, and elk. It's usually eaten by hunters and their family and friends. In fact, Americans eat the most wild venison in the world, consuming 315 million pounds a year.

America is one of the only places that allows hunting where it is *illegal* to sell meat from wild game. It wasn't always like this. Before the early 1900s, game meat was butchered and sold in markets around the country. There was an industry of market hunting similar to commercial fishing today—except it was way less regulated. Eventually, venison became scarce along with meat from ducks, turkeys, bears, and other game. Hunters and conservationists lobbied for regulations, and market hunting was stopped.

## **Why is Venison Thought of as “Gamey”?**

Any meat's flavor comes from what the animal is eating. It can also come from improper field care and cooking. The gamey taste associated with deer meat is usually more pronounced in animals that have a wild diet versus those that eat mainly alfalfa, corn, and soybeans. When it comes to field care, it's best to get any edible meat away from the guts and keep venison between 32 And 40 degrees F shortly after killing and dressing the animal. Some say that aging venison helps with flavor, too. But you need to monitor humidity and temperature to do this safely.

Gamey flavor also comes from silver skin and fat. Deer fat tends to be thick and waxy with a strong flavor that coats your mouth, so it's important to trim it away especially before grinding.

For good cuts of venison like backstrap and steaks, you'll get the best results by cooking it medium-rare and letting it rest a few minutes before cutting into it. Cook venison too much, and it will have a dry, chalky texture. Some cooks like to use marinades and sauces to help tenderize and flavor the meat. These can work well, but cooking the meat medium-rare and adding little salt and pepper goes a long way.

For ground venison, some like to add fat like beef tallow. ( It's best to avoid adding pork fat or bacon to ground venison unless you plan on making sausage or cooking the meat all the way through.) This will make an exceptional burger that has a lot more flavor than a beef burger. But you'll also negate some of the health benefits associated with venison.

## **Is Venison Good For You?**

Hell yes it is. Both store-bought and wild deer meat is lean compared to other red meat. Deer of all kinds live mostly on wild browse and grasses, making venison nutrient-rich with iron, zinc, vitamins K, and B-12. It's also high in protein with 9 grams per ounce. That's 2 grams more than beef with only one-fifth of the fat per serving. Because of this fat-to-nutrition ration, game meat is a healthier alternative to meat from more traditional farm animals. And this is still true for farm-raised venison.

Hunting for your own venison is good for you, too. According to Michigan State University, hunting is a natural antidepressant. It lowers your blood pressure, reduces stress, and exposes you to more Vitamin D via the sun. So stop reading this story and go get some venison.

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