

Rob and Bessie Welder Wildlife Foundation

Research, Education and Conservation



2015

From the Directors

This has been a banner year for wildlife! With the abundant rains, the refuge is lush. Big Lake, having water for the first time in many years, has been restored to its full splendor with an amazing abundance of wetland birds and wildlife!

As we move forward into 2016, we would like to make you aware of our concentrated effort in increasing the Research endowment for our Graduate Student Fellowships. Over the past 61 years we have funded approximately 350 graduate students who have completed their degrees under our Fellowships. These Fellows, who are now spread throughout the United States and around the world, are making huge contributions to wildlife research, conservation, and management. Throughout the years we have funded from 5 to 15 graduate students per year. Inflation has forced us to reduce the number of Fellowships awarded annually in order to increase the Fellowship amounts to meet the cost of living. Our goal is to build our Research endowment so that we may once again increase the number of Fellowships that we award to outstanding young biologists. You can learn more about how to contribute to this effort on page 8 of this report.

A few changes have occurred in Foundation staff over the past year. Long-time employee Baldemar Martinez retired this year. Baldemar began working at the Foundation in 1984. He was always willing to drop everything to assist a student who needed help with a project, repair of a vehicle, or whatever was needed. We will greatly miss Baldemar's humor and presence on the Refuge. Meg Streich, who has been with the Foundation since 2013, has taken a new position with the Padre Island National Seashore. Meg's leadership of our Education and Volunteer Program was outstanding. She too will be greatly missed, and we wish her well in her new position.

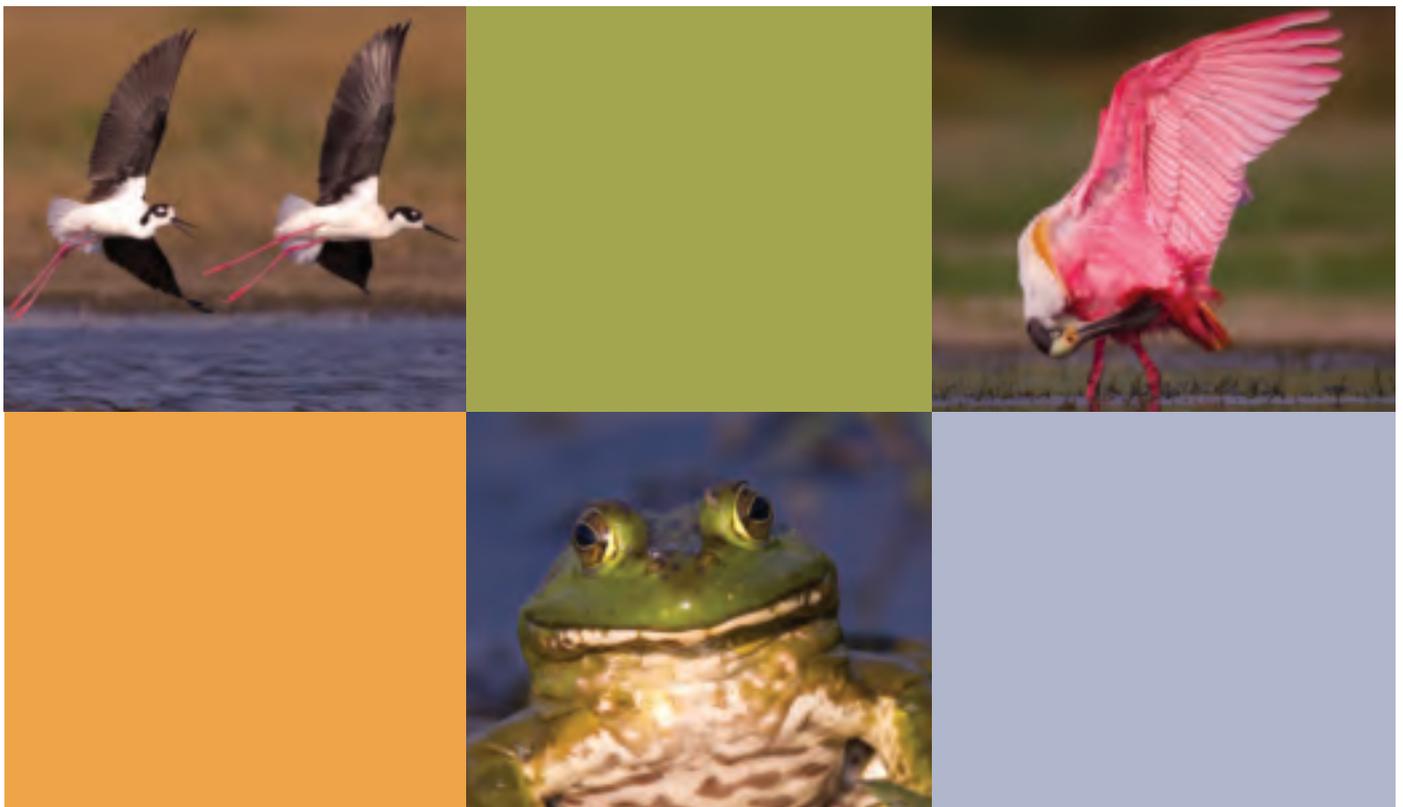
Michelle Batey and Nick Cano have recently come on board as part of our team. Michelle, who now serves as our Education and Volunteer Program Coordinator, is from this region of Texas and is acutely aware of all the conservation challenges affecting landowners and wildlife in this area. We are happy to have Michelle on board. Nick is in charge of Refuge Operations and Maintenance. He is from Sinton and has extensive experience in diesel engine repair.

We thank you for your continued support of the Welder Wildlife Foundation and our mission to conduct wildlife research and education. We look forward to fulfilling our mission for many more years!

Best wishes to you for a wonderful New Year!

Dr. Terry Blankenship, Director

Dr. Selma Glasscock, Assistant Director



Graduate Student Research

The Rob and Bessie Welder Wildlife Foundation is a private, non-profit, tax-exempt, operating foundation funded by an endowment and oil royalties. The mission of the Foundation is to conduct research and education in the field of wildlife management and conservation. The Foundation was established in 1954 and has gained national and international recognition through its graduate research and education programs.

Angelica F. Arredondo

Texas A&M University–Kingsville, M.S.

April A. Torres Conkey, Ph.D., Major Advisor

Angie is a master's student at Texas A&M University-Kingsville majoring in Range and Wildlife Management. She is evaluating the effectiveness of the Rangelands curriculum, a curriculum designed to teach the fundamental elements of Texas rangelands to elementary school students. The curriculum has now been implemented throughout all 20 Texas Education Service Center Regions and has been taught to approximately 1,000 Texas teachers. The evaluation will be accomplished through teacher surveys and student pre- and post-tests distributed to teachers who have implemented 5 or more curriculum lessons. Data acquired from the surveys and pre- and post-tests will help determine the magnitude of the curriculum's impact on students' academic achievements, together with its effect on the students' behaviors, attitudes and future goals. Evaluation of the curriculum is critical to ensuring it meets the goals of enhancing the conservation of rangelands and instilling a new appreciation for rangelands in future generations.



Cassandra M. Walker

Oklahoma State University, Ph.D.

Monica Papeş, Ph.D., Major Advisor

Global anthropogenic pressures have forced conservation practices to utilize management techniques emphasizing landscape-scale conservation efforts. Understanding organisms' interactions with the landscape requires knowledge of the scales at which ecological processes shape species distributions. Because habitat selection is often a hierarchical process, constraining environmental variables operating at multiple scales influence species' distributions. To investigate the variables operating at various scales, this project uses a combination of modeling, remote sensing, and field techniques to describe the distribution of Bell's Vireo (*Vireo bellii*). At broad scales, remote sensing techniques are used to identify spatial scales at which climatic, vegetation, and topographic variables contribute most to the distribution of Bell's Vireos, whereas at fine scales vegetation structure is measured using LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging). Preliminary data analysis indicates that constraining environmental variables change with spatial scale, shedding light on the ecological processes that shape the distribution of Bell's Vireos.



Cord B. Eversole

Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Ph.D.

Scott E. Henke, Ph.D., Major Advisor

Translocating wildlife to solve conservation and management problems is becoming progressively common. As many species are faced with increasing human-wildlife conflict, determining the most effective strategies for managing such issues is important. The recent growth of American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) populations has caused an influx of human-alligator conflict. Translocation of nuisance alligators in Texas has become a common management strategy; however, the effectiveness of this method has yet to be delineated. In this study, we propose to determine if alligators can be successfully translocated and whether or not this is an appropriate and cost-effective strategy to manage nuisance alligators in Texas. We have translocated 5 American alligators outfitted with ARGOS GPS transmitters to determine the effect of translocation on their movement patterns. Although we are in the preliminary stages of this study, no trends have emerged and individuals seem to remain at translocation sites when moved distances greater than 200 km.



Graduate Student Research

Over the past 61 years, the Foundation has funded 350 graduate students who have completed degrees in wildlife and natural resource-related disciplines.

Olivia A. Kost

Texas Tech University, M.S.

Clint W. Boal, Ph.D., Major Advisor



Anthropogenic actions are key drivers in declines in North American grassland-obligate birds. Fire suppression and improper grazing management have facilitated woody plant encroachment in the Texas Gulf Coasts and Prairies ecoregion, significantly altering grassland-obligate species' habitats. To assess avian community response to prairie restoration efforts on the Welder Wildlife Refuge, we established 58 variable circle survey points in a 355-acre treatment plot and 533-acre control plot. We conducted breeding season point count surveys and vegetation surveys prior to herbicide application in October 2014 and will conduct breeding and wintering surveys in 2015 and 2016. High avian diversity dominated by Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*), White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*), Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*), and Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) occurred during pretreatment surveys. Novel species, Dickcissels (*Spiza americana*) and Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) occurred during the 2015 breeding season. Further data collection and analysis will provide baselines of avian community diversity and vegetation composition in the study area.

Julie M. Golla

Utah State University, M.S.

Julie K. Young, Ph.D., Major Advisor



Rates of human-wildlife conflict increase with shared use of space and resources in urban areas. Urban carnivores, such as bobcats (*Lynx rufus*), are of special concern due to their potential effects on the welfare of humans and domestic animals. Using Global Positioning Satellite tracking collars, we evaluated bobcat habitat usage in a highly urbanized region of the Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas metroplex (DFW) for one year. Average home range size was 4.60 km² ($n = 9$, SE = 0.99) for resident bobcats, 3.48 km² ($n = 5$, SE = 1.13) for females, and 6.00 km² ($n = 4$, SE = 1.61) for resident males. A camera trap survey documented 42 individual bobcats within a 58 km² study area. Bobcats in DFW have significantly smaller home ranges and occur at higher densities than rural bobcats. Mature bobcats ($n = 8$) preferred habitat with less than 20% urban development, but younger individuals ($n = 2$) used areas with up to 80% development. These results provide information to facilitate management of human-bobcat conflict in urban ecosystems.

Jessica L. Glasscock

Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Ph.D.

David G. Hewitt, Ph.D., Major Advisor



Rising feed costs have necessitated the need for alternative feed resources. Past research has shown the successful utilization of woody plant species such as quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) as a roughage ingredient. My research objectives focus on determining the effects of utilizing ground juniper (*Juniperus* spp.) as a roughage ingredient in livestock and wildlife feeds. To meet the research objectives, I will assess growth performance of Spanish X Boar kid goat crosses and Rambouillet lambs on diets containing ground juniper. I will also assess white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) utilization of a supplemental feed containing ground juniper and measure the feed's effectiveness as a deterrent to limit non-target species consumption. Findings from this research will assist in determining whether utilization of ground juniper as a feed roughage can contribute to a decrease in feeding costs for domestic livestock and a decrease in economic loss when feeding such supplements to white-tailed deer.

Graduate Student Research

This year, through the Welder Wildlife Foundation Fellowship Program and Conservation Education and Outreach Program, we educated over 5,000 people about wildlife and the natural world.

Kelsey R. Griffin

Tarleton State University, M.S.

T. Wayne Schwertner, Ph.D., Major Advisor

Our study focused on determining the impact of the Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society's Wildlife Conservation Camp (WCC) on high school students. A web-based survey questionnaire was used to measure participant attitudes and behaviors towards wildlife conservation and natural resources and to evaluate their participation in wildlife-related activities. Analyses explored associations among demographic data, sources of influence, and career path. Sixty-six percent of respondents were in a conservation-related career path, and 86% of those reported the WCC influenced their career decision. The majority of respondents reported moderate to large increases in knowledge (89%) and interest (80%) in wildlife conservation and observation following the WCC. A greater percentage of WCC participants (70%) took trips away from home to view wildlife compared to Texas residents (23%). These, among other findings, indicate the WCC can impact recruitment into conservation-related fields and help to create stewards of wildlife and natural resources.



Pablo C. Teveni

Texas Tech University, Ph.D.

Robert D. Cox, Ph.D., Major Advisor

This study is designed to describe the dynamics of total nonstructural carbohydrate (TNC) movement within the root crown of huisache (*Acacia farnesiana*) in order to determine the best time of year and best environmental conditions under which to achieve optimum chemical control of this species. Average phenological stage was determined monthly for the study pasture. Five huisache shrubs per month, corresponding to that month's average phenological stage, were excavated and root crowns collected. On-site weather station data was gathered, and 10 shrubs were treated with 2 herbicide formulations every month at the 4 study sites during April 2012 to November 2014. Root crown samples were frozen, dried, ground, and analyzed for TNC. Root crown TNC was determined for all samples, and preliminary results show a pattern of increased root crown TNC during months March and April, April and May, and particularly July and August. Statistical analysis of all data, including herbicide-induced mortality data, will involve correlation and ANOVA with appropriate post-hoc tests. A more effective treatment recommendation may then be developed for herbicide management of this invasive rangeland species.



Nabil A. Nasseri

The University of Vermont, Ph.D.

Alison K Brody, Ph.D., Major Advisor

Approximately half the ant genera in the world (41%) form a classic food-for-protection mutualism with hemipterans. Hemipterans secrete a substance rich in carbohydrates and amino acids as a waste product from feeding on the "honeydew" (phloem) of plants. Ants harvest the honeydew and in turn remove hemipteran predators, parasitoids, and competing herbivores. Ant-hemipteran mutualisms (AHM) have been studied extensively. However, most AHM studies have focused on the costs and benefits to each member, but data on the effect this interaction has on the potential costs/benefits to their host plant is lacking. My research at Welder has shown that mesquite with AHM present produced significantly more flowers and fruits than did mesquite in which AHM were removed ($F_{1,94} = 4.19, P = 0.0434$). In addition, mesquite that hosted AHM had a 65.3% increase in flowers and fruits produced compared to only a 23.2% in AHM removed trees from one year to the next.



Meet Our Educators

Meg Streich

Conservation Education and Volunteer Program Coordinator



Meg Streich served as Conservation Education and Volunteer Program Coordinator at Welder from 2013 to 2015. She received her B.S. and M.S. degrees in Wildlife Biology from the University of Georgia. Meg's unique background included participation in a field course in South Africa and waterfowl research in Alaska. Meg did an excellent job of blending her passion for people and wildlife while educating them about the important role humans play in wildlife conservation. Meg is now a Biological Science Technician with the National Park Service's Division of Sea Turtle Science and Recovery at the Padre Island National Seashore. We thank Meg for her dedication to creating an outstanding education program for many visitors to the Foundation.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The Welder Wildlife Foundation's conservation education program remains dedicated to our mission of educating the public about wildlife conservation. Our educational staff and volunteers reach large numbers of youth and adults through our on- and off-site programs. In 2015 we reached almost 3,750 people through our education and outreach programs and nearly half of those people participated in programs on the Refuge.

Our program's focus is wildlife conservation and South Texas ecology, all of which are conducted within a safe and fun learning environment. We reached nearly 800 K-12 students this year in education programs on the Refuge. These groups participated in activities including nature trail interpretation, animal adaptations using our natural history collection specimens, wildlife sampling and monitoring techniques, aquatic organism and water quality sampling, kayaking, birding, and so much more!



Michelle Batey

Conservation Education and Vounteer Program Coordinator



Michelle Batey joined us in October of 2015 as our new Conservation Education and Volunteer Program Coordinator. Michelle obtained her B.S. in Agricultural Services and Development and her M.S. in Agricultural Education from Tarleton State University. Michelle was employed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service as a Soil Conservationist and District Conservationist from 2004 to 2013 working in La Grange, Hereford, and Vega, TX. She is the proud mother of a 3-year-old daughter named Starlie who loves animals and playing outside. Michelle is passionate about agriculture and our natural resources and educating our younger generations on the importance of conserving our water, soil, vegetation and wildlife.

We work with each teacher to design a unique agenda based on the group's interests and size. We also incorporate activities that stress a variety of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) based on the teacher's classroom curriculum and students' grade levels. Our newest activity—Karankawa Indian Geocache on Moody Creek—highlights the historical connection the Foundation has with the native people of South Texas. Students begin this activity by hiking or kayaking along Moody Creek, a tributary of the Aransas River, until they reach Karankawan archaeological sites previously investigated and excavated by Welder Wildlife Foundation Fellow, Dr. Robert Ricklis. Students then explore these sites and their associated geocaches using hand-held GPS units and information given by our educators. This activity teaches students about Karankawan Indians and their history in the Coastal Bend along with valuable navigational skills using GPS units.

We continue to be involved with the Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society's annual Wildlife Conservation Camp for high school students. The 2015 camp was held in July at the Texas Tech University Center in Junction, Texas. Our educators served as professional mentors for the campers and led wildlife conservation activities along the South Llano River throughout the week.

About Our Programs

In 2015 we hosted a number of universities through on-site educational programs and workshops. Students from 5 different universities participated in outdoor wildlife programs on the Refuge covering topics such as wildlife management and sampling techniques, ornithology, botany, and geology. In January we hosted the Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow workshop for natural resource science undergraduate and graduate students from various Texas universities. The goal of this workshop is hunting awareness and conservation education, and the students have the chance to participate in a guided hunt at the end of the workshop. We also hosted approximately 160 students from 20 universities from the western United States for The Wildlife Society's Western Wildlife Conclave.



Contractual Educator

Dr. Sandra Johnson

Dr. Sandra Johnson is an outstanding educator who has taught at the University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, and in grades K–12. She served as the Science Consultant for Education Service Center Region XIII, providing 59 school districts with technical support and professional development for K–12th grades. As a contractual educator for the Welder Wildlife Foundation, Dr. Johnson wrote the elementary curriculum *Rangelands: A Conservation Education Guide* and developed its professional teacher training program and *Home on the Range* workshops. She has reached approximately 1,000 teachers through the hugely popular workshops that have been conducted in all 20 Texas Education Service Center regions.



Our 2015 adult and teacher education programs continue to reach people from various interest groups and backgrounds. These groups include our annual wildflower workshops, South Texas Master Naturalist and Mid-Coast Master Naturalist training days, and our state-wide *Rangelands* curriculum K–5th grade teacher workshops. The *Rangelands* curriculum educates Texas teachers and youth about the importance of rangelands and the ecosystem services they provide to everyone. The *Rangelands* curriculum workshops continue to be an important educational outreach tool for the Foundation. The 2016 workshops, led by Dr. Sandra Johnson, reached more than 200 K-5 teachers from 6 Education Service Centers regions. Based on each teacher reaching a minimum of 22 students per year, it is expected that approximately 4,650 students learned about the importance of rangeland conservation from the *Rangelands* curriculum in 2015.

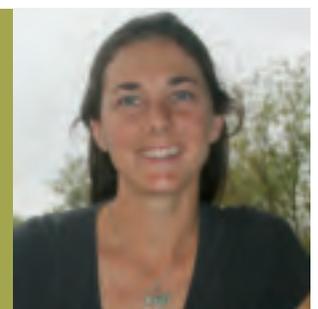
Our informational and educational outreach programs encompass all ages and have allowed us to reach over 2,000 people in 2015. These programs include events such as Earth Day Bay Day, HummerBird Celebration, and teacher resource events.

We host public tours of the Refuge every Thursday, excluding holidays, and private tours for 10 or more people can be scheduled throughout the year. We are proud of the continued progress of our conservation education program and we look forward to reaching more people with our programs over the upcoming year!

Contractual Educator

Mandy Corso Krause

We are excited to have Mandy Krause to once again be a part of the Welder Wildlife Foundation's education team. After receiving a B.S. from Texas A&M University in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, Mandy worked as the Welder Foundation's Education and Volunteer Program Coordinator for 2 years. Since then she and her husband created an agriculture business in D'Hanis, Texas where they produce and direct-market, pasture-raised poultry. Mandy will be leading the Foundation's *Rangelands* curriculum teacher workshops. This curriculum is full of hands-on activities designed to connect children to the outdoors, encourage stewardship, and foster a land ethic. Mandy says "to see a child light up when immersed in nature is the greatest joy."



Education Interns and Volunteer Program

Conservation Education Intern

Kelsey Griffin

Kelsey Griffin was a Master's Fellow and Conservation Educator at the Welder Wildlife Foundation. She recently completed her M.S. in Wildlife, Sustainability, and Ecosystems Sciences from Tarleton State University. She grew up in Jackson, Wyoming and spent a lot of time recreating in the outdoors and was influenced to pursue a career in natural resources. Her passion for conservation education started when she worked as a seasonal Interpretive Naturalist for the U.S. Forest Service during the summers of her undergraduate career at Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo. Her favorite part about leading education programs at the Welder Wildlife Refuge is seeing the enthusiasm and joy on the faces of students when they experience something new in nature.



Angie Arredondo

Conservation Education Intern

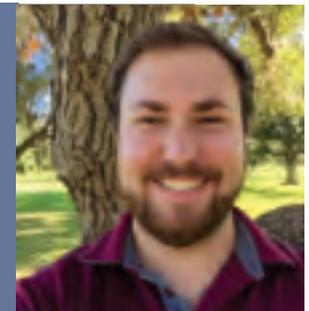


Angie Arredondo is a native south Texan from Kingsville. Her love for the outdoors began as a child with family fishing trips, and from there she pursued her passion for the outdoors with a bachelor's degree in Range and Wildlife Management at Texas A&M University-Kingsville (TAMUK). She also volunteered teaching conservation topics to elementary school students. Shortly after graduation, she was awarded a Conservation Educator internship at the Welder Wildlife Foundation. Angie said the best part of her internship was seeing the thrill and fascination that overcame students as they learned about conservation and the natural environment that surrounded them daily. She is now attaining her M.S. degree in Wildlife Management at TAMUK.

Conservation Education Intern

Taylor Abshier

Taylor Abshier began working as a Conservation Education Intern for the Foundation in 2015. He received his B.S. in Range and Wildlife Management and a minor in Business Administration from Texas A&M University-Kingsville. Taylor became interested in wildlife management from hunting and fishing in his youth and attending the South Texas Buckskin Brigades Camp. He enjoys taking groups to Big Lake and teaching them about the various species of wetland birds, like the Roseate Spoonbill, that occupy this unique habitat. He says, "this area has a vast diversity of aquatic and terrestrial vegetation creating a habitat where two communities meet, leading to mammals, shore birds, waterfowl, and reptiles all intertwined within one system."



VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Our volunteers are a crucial part of the Foundation and have helped tremendously with our education, research and maintenance programs throughout the year. Twenty-seven volunteers donated over 1300 hours of their valuable time to the Foundation in 2015. We are exceedingly grateful for our volunteers - their contributions have helped make 2015 a successful year!

Here are some of the projects with which our volunteers have assisted this year:

Support with reaching more than 5,000 people about the Foundation's programs and wildlife conservation and management • Assistance with the WWF Youth Hunt • Leading public and private tours • Computer and technology assistance • Scanning and archiving Foundation documents • Maintenance of the natural history collections • Assistance with the bird banding and research • Maintenance of our nature trails • Support with revision of the River Walk trail guide • Maintenance of the Grass Garden/Water Catchment System and the CONE site's Native Plant and Butterfly Garden • Weekly filling of the bird feeders at the CONE site • Assistance with delivery of monthly water samples for analyses • Photographing Foundation programs and events.

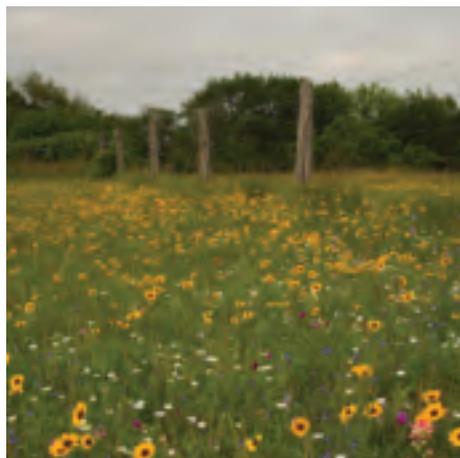
Interested in becoming a volunteer?

Welder volunteers assist with an array of activities on and off the Refuge. Official volunteers must complete an application process.

Visit www.welderwildlife.org or contact us at conservationeducator@welderwildlife.org or 361-364-2643 to discuss how you can become involved!

On the Refuge...

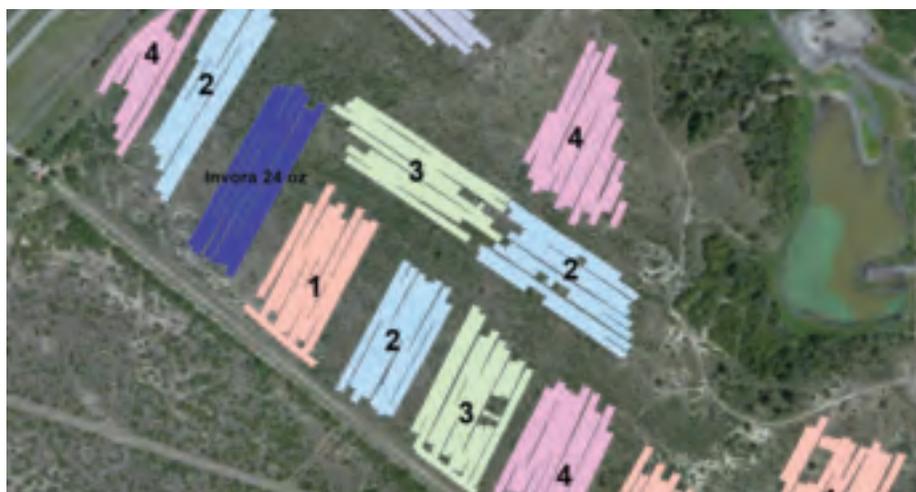
The drought is officially over and we are happy to report that we have had a very wet 2015. However, rainfall continues to be a big part of any conversation. The period from 2011 to 2014 was the lowest rainfall period since 1954 and included the driest year on record. Big Lake was completely dry by the end of the summer in 2011. It remained dry until spring of 2015 when we finally received enough rain to produce runoff into the lake. It is nice to once again be able sit on the overlook at Big Lake and enjoy seeing the multitude of birds and hear the sounds of all the wetland activities.



High and low rainfall years provide opportunities to study and monitor wildlife responses to changes in cover, food, and water. Deer densities have remained about 1 deer to 12 acres. Fawn survival has been below average over the last 4 years, but has been high enough to maintain deer densities. Turkey numbers and poult survival have increased, but, interestingly, poult survival was higher during some of the drier years as compared to the 2015 wet year. Quail increased in 2014–2015 and we are seeing more coveys and more birds per covey than we have in the past 7–8 years. Rodent numbers were down, but were starting to increase in 2014. Rabbit numbers were higher during 2012–2014, but have now declined. Christmas Bird Count numbers declined during the drought due to the lack of water in the wetlands and associated decline in water birds.

We reduced stocking rates during the drought and used a one herd rotation with 8 pastures. Past grazing research defined a moderate stocking rate of 1 animal unit(AU) per 14 acres for the Refuge. After reducing cattle numbers we maintained about 1AU/35 acres during the drought. This stocking rate and rotation system allowed us to maintain cattle through the drought and still provide cover and resources for wildlife.

Management of old-world bluestems and other invasive grasses remains a challenge. Unfortunately, the use of any ground-disturbing management practices, including fire, appear to promote their spread.



The diagram above illustrates the experimental design used in a partnership project conducted on the Welder Wildlife Refuge and adjacent properties to test a new chemical on huisache (*Acacia farnesiana*). Variables in the treatment included droplet size and volume of chemical. Application was made by helicopter in October 2014, and one year post treatment the results indicate very high mortality rates.

We continue to investigate new tools, costs, and alternatives to determine the appropriate management practices for invasive species in south Texas. In doing so, we seek and encourage proposals for research opportunities and partnerships that will provide landowners and biologists information on invasive species management.

2015 Donors and Supporters

We are deeply appreciative and moved by the generosity of all our donors and supporters!

Your contributions are critical in allowing the Welder Wildlife Foundation to fund more crucial wildlife research, reach more children and adults with our conservation education programs, and carry out essential wildlife and range management projects on the unique habitats of the Welder Wildlife Refuge. The Foundation's endowments continue to be strong, but there is much more that we would like to accomplish. With your help we can do so!

Research, Education, or Unrestricted Funds

These are the three categories from which you may choose to direct your support. Donations dedicated to the Research category will be specifically used to enhance the Graduate Student Fellowship endowment. Funding generated from that endowment supports graduate students and the research they conduct.

Donations dedicated to the Education category are used to support our education programs. Most recently, several generous organizations and individuals contributed to the renovation of an existing Refuge building into a new Education Center. Next we will be updating the educational displays in our Museum.

Contributions to the Unrestricted category will allow us to decide where we feel the need is greatest - Research, Education, or Foundation Operations.

Won't you consider making a special gift to the Welder Foundation this year?

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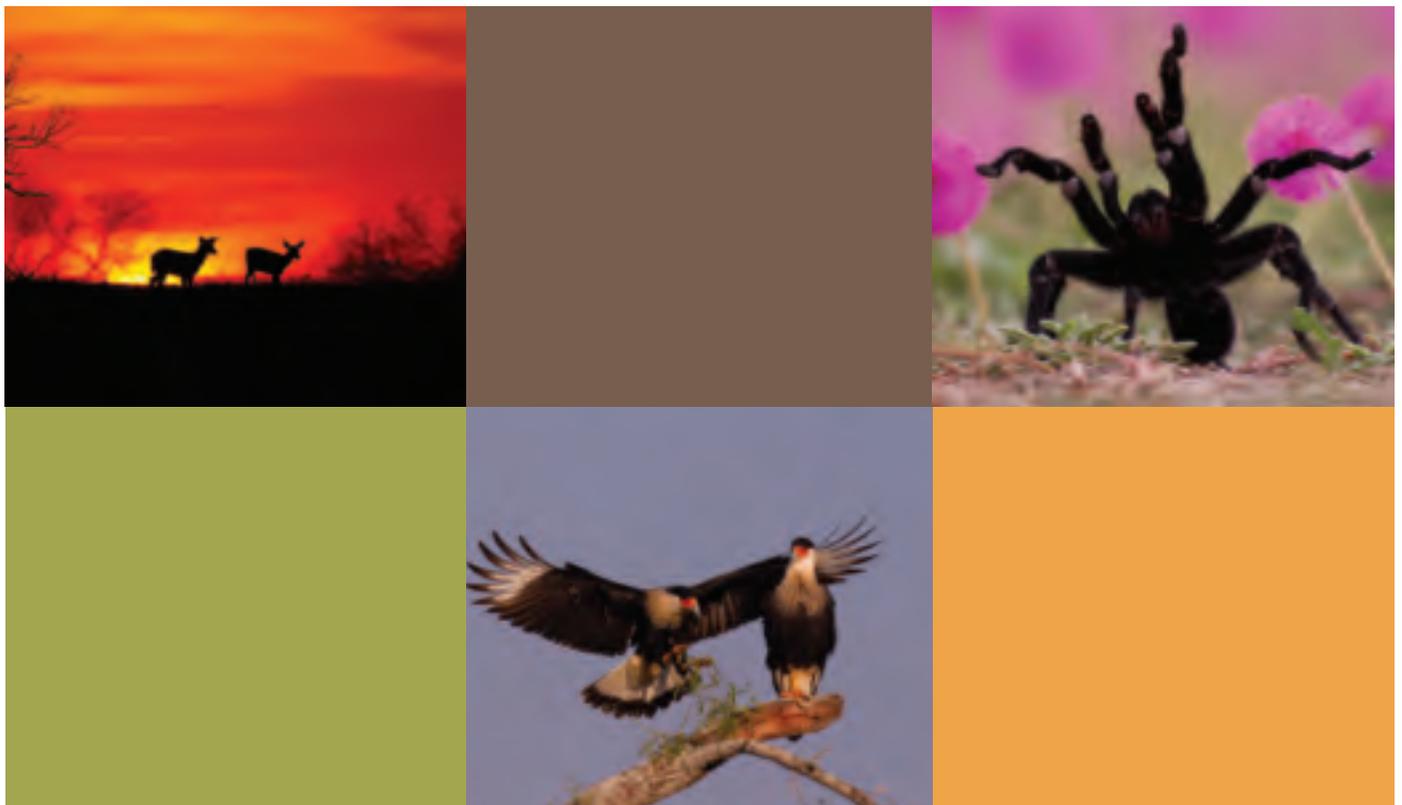
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