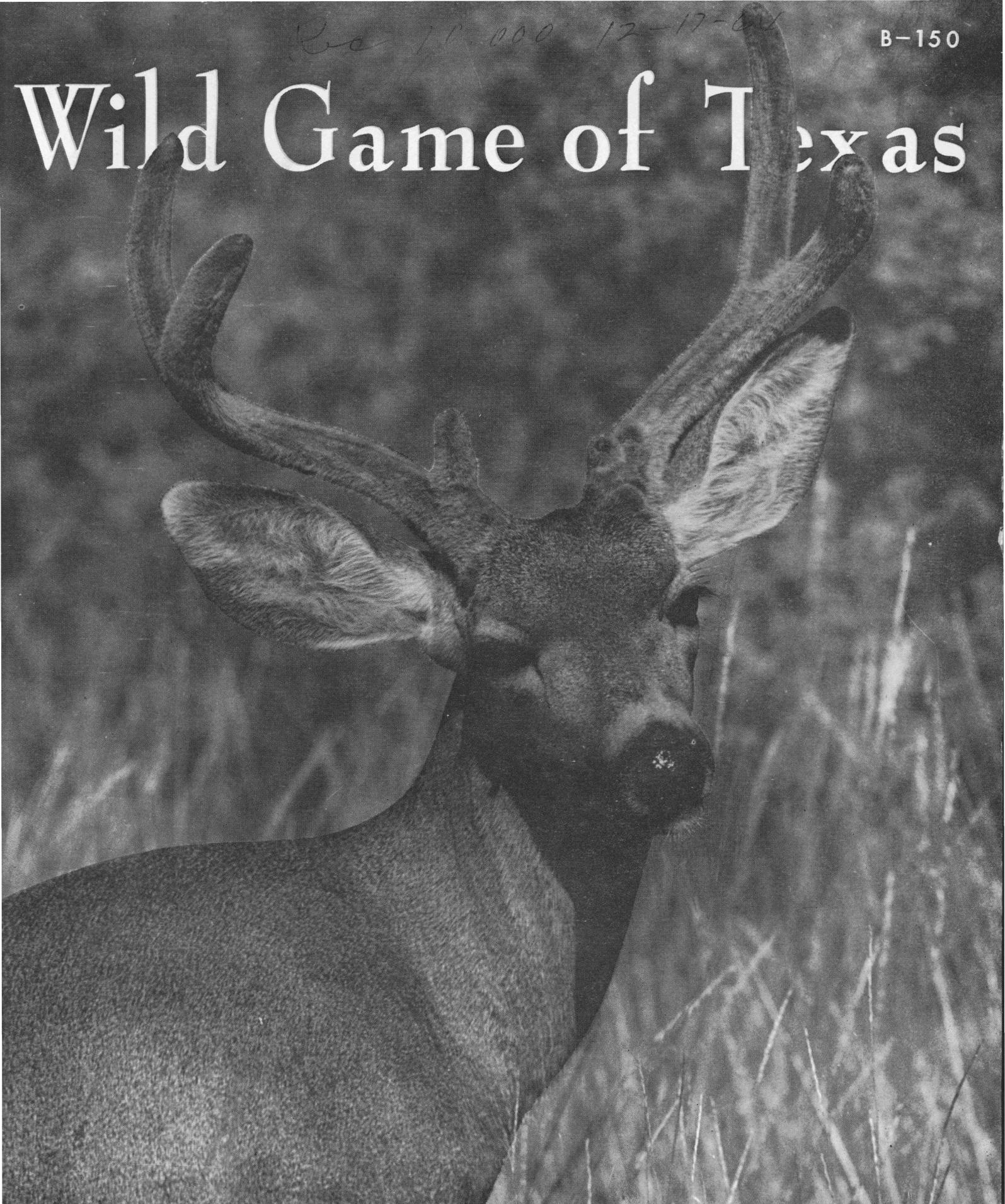


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Wild Game of Texas

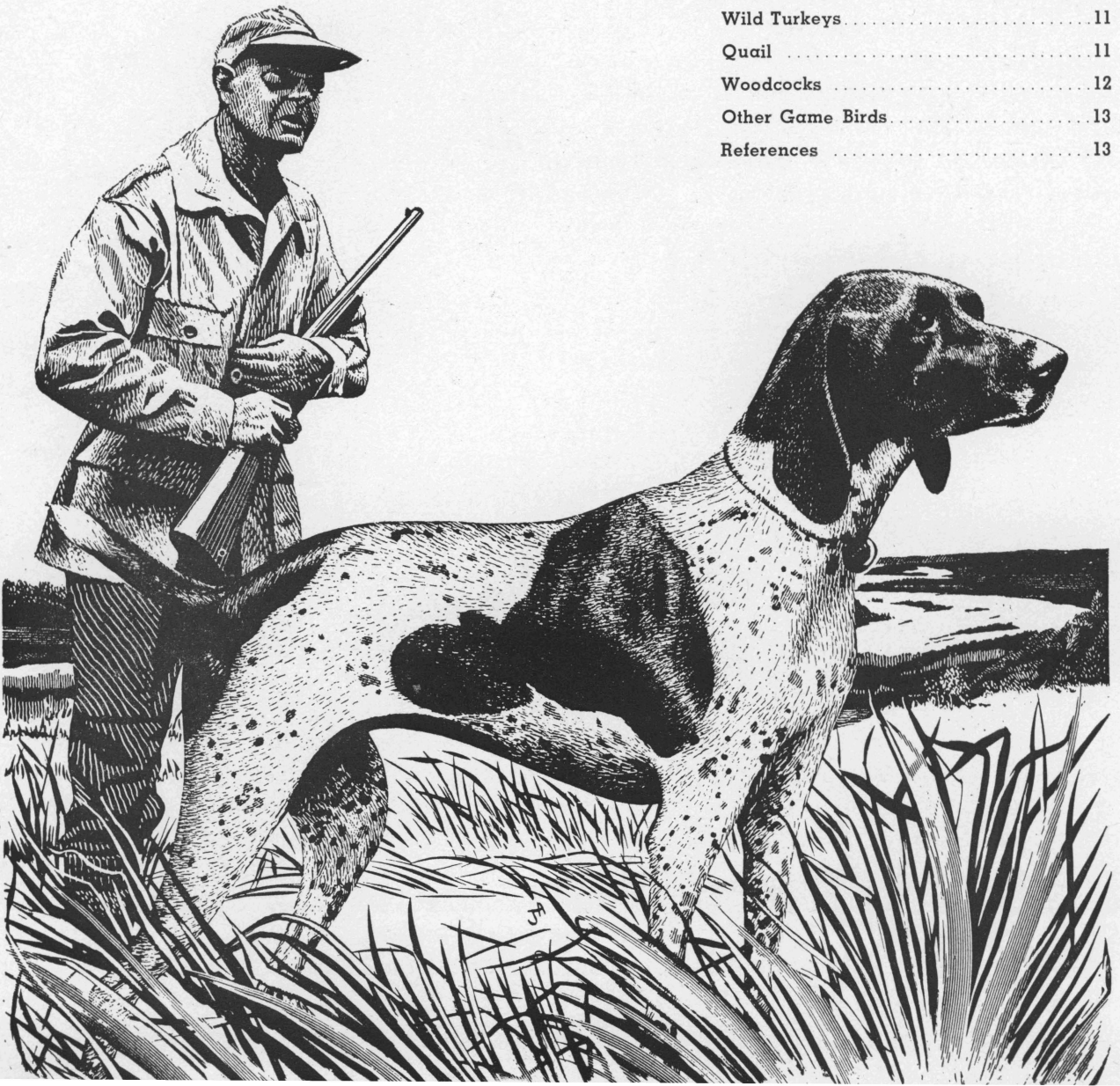


TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
TEXAS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
J. E. HUTCHISON, DIRECTOR, COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS

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WILD GAME OF TEXAS

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TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

ALMOST THREE-FOURTHS of Texas' 170 million acres of land are forests and grasslands. The soil, vegetation and climatic conditions vary in different regions of Texas, providing suitable habitat for a variety of native wildlife species. When drouth, intensive cultivation or overgrazing of ranges denudes an area of natural vegetation, wildlife populations usually diminish. However, wise land and water management helps to preserve a bountiful wildlife population.

Wildlife biologists continually study the complex relationships between wild animals and their environment, including the effects of land management practices by man. If man would preserve and encourage the growth of natural food and cover plants essential to the various wildlife species, animals could defend themselves against the weather, disease and predators as they did before the arrival of man.

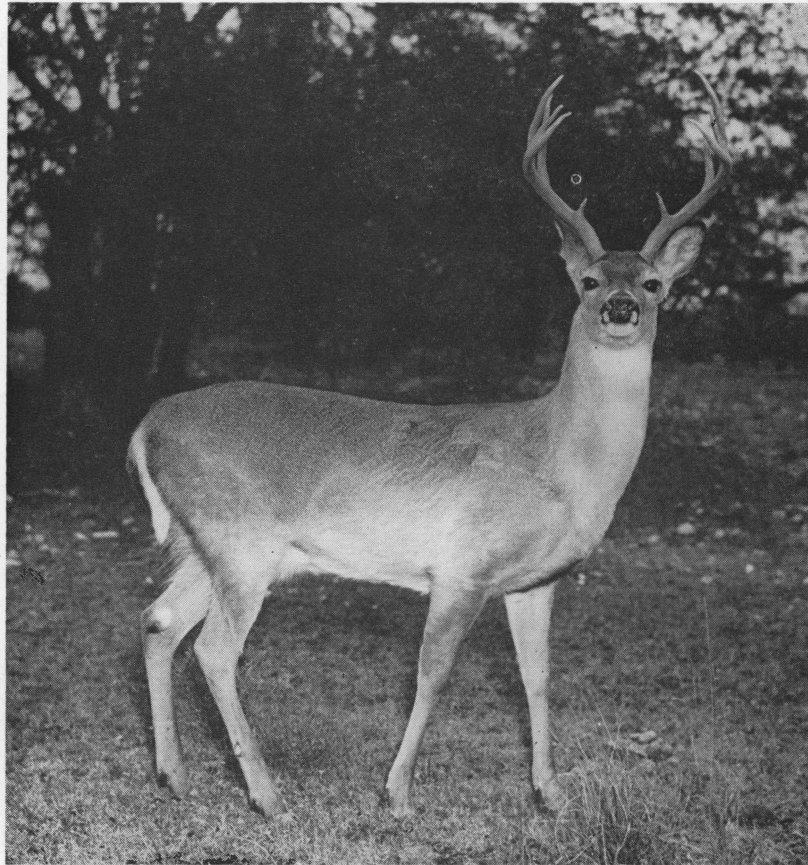
TEXAS GAME ANIMALS

Deer, pronghorn antelope, elk, bighorn sheep, bear, peccary or javelina and tree squirrels are considered game animals in Texas. White-tailed deer and tree squirrels, more plentiful than any other game, are distributed more widely and are the most important game animals.

White-tailed Deer

Some wildlife biologists place the total deer population of Texas around 2 million animals. While this estimate may be large, the kill of deer exceeds 200,000. Without question, Texas ranks among the five top deer states in the nation.

The principal kinds of deer in Texas are the white-tailed and the black-tailed, or mule deer. The white-tailed, with its varieties including the flag-tail, is distributed most widely and is the greatest in number.



The white-tailed deer is the leading big game animal of Texas.

White-tailed deer, the most important of Texas' game animals, weigh 65 to 125 pounds or more and have small ears and large tails. The upper parts of their bodies are reddish to dark brown and they are white underneath.

The males are antlered, with horn prongs ranging from two main beams. The first antlers appear in the second spring after birth and range from two spikes to as many as 10 points with the first set. Antlers are shed normally between December and March. A new set is grown annually. The age of deer cannot be determined definitely by the number of prongs on the antlers as male deer sometimes become "spikes" again in old age; however, the antler beams usually grow larger and rougher with age.

White-tailed deer are well distributed in brushy or wooded areas, especially in the Edwards Plateau. Mason, Llano, Kerr, Gillespie, Blanco, Kimble, Bander and Real counties have the heaviest deer populations.

The Parks and Wildlife Department in the past few years has had the responsibility of regulating the harvest of white-tailed deer in many counties. Biologists make deer census surveys in these counties and calculate the number which can be harvested safely the following season. Many areas are overstocked with deer due to severe drouth and ranges overgrazed by livestock. To prevent waste of deer through starvation, hunters have been allowed to harvest a certain number of antlerless deer in overstocked areas. Harvest of the surplus deer in these localities also lessens damage to agricultural crops.

Deer feed on weeds and grasses but prefer live oak, Spanish oak and shin oak browse. Tender hearts of sotol, acorns, Mexican persimmons and a wide variety of plants and shrubs also furnish food for deer.

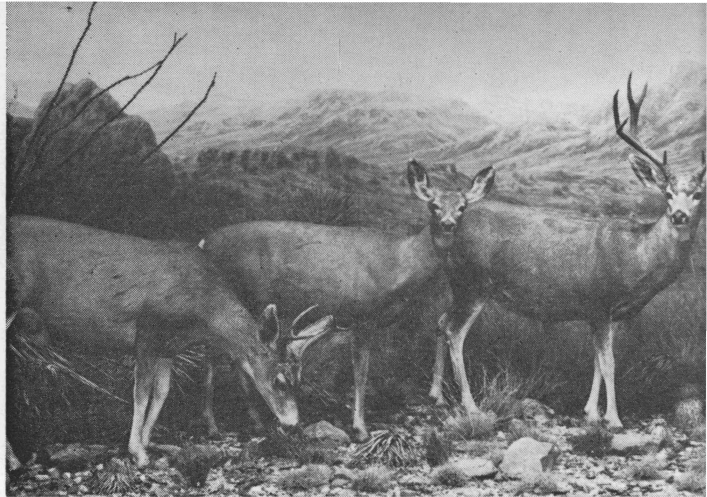
Deer mate from September to January and give birth to one or two fawns 7 months later.

The flag-tailed or fan-tailed deer is so called because of its conspicuous tail. This small deer is found in limited numbers in the highlands of the Big Bend area mountain ranges.

Mule or Black-tailed Deer

Mule deer or black-tailed deer are similar to but larger than white-tailed deer. They are a dark grayish brown with a white rump patch. The antlers fork equally and their prongs do not rise from main beams. Mule deer have large ears, narrow black-tipped tails and weigh 150-200 pounds or more.

Mule deer are unusual because they often run a short distance when alarmed and then stop to see what caused the disturbance. This habit often costs the animal its life when being hunted.



The mule deer is found west of the Pecos River and in the upper Panhandle.

Mule deer are found west of the Pecos River, in Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, Presidio and Brewster counties, in the southern part of Reeves, Pecos and Terrell counties and in the Panhandle.

Pronghorn Antelope

One of the most picturesque and swiftest of big game is the pronghorn antelope. It is a deer-like animal, suggesting a cross between a deer and a goat.

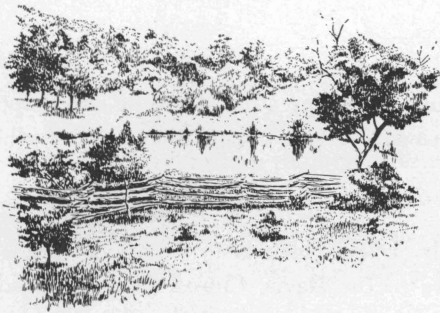
Adult bucks have back-flaring, pronged horns extending well above the ears. There are black spots under each ear. Does have shorter horns extending slightly beyond the tips of their ears, with no spots below the ears.

Pronghorn antelope have hollow horns with bony centers similar to cattle. The external horn sheath is slipped annually and a new set is grown. Further descriptive markings are two toes on each hoof, a white patch on the rump, reddish brown to tan on the upper regions, white on either side of its head and the base of the ears. The lower regions are white. They have long, coarse, brittle hair and weigh 75 to 125 pounds.

Mating takes place in the fall and the young are born about 7 months later. Pronghorn antelope usually give birth to twins.

Food of the pronghorn consists principally of weeds, grass, sage, cactus, yucca and greasewood. Pronghorn can survive with little surface moisture and when necessary, merely on moisture from plants.



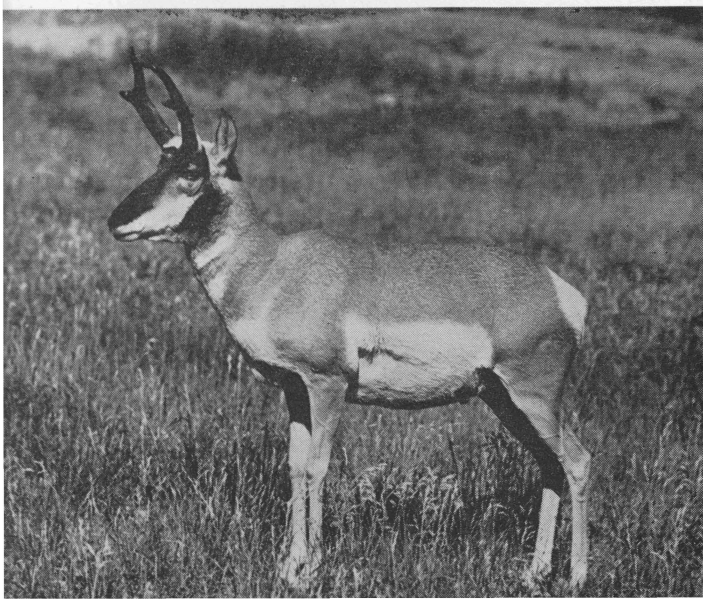


Under the present program of protection by regulating harvests and restocking new areas, pronghorn are now second to deer as a big game animal of Texas. Overgrazing of the range with competition by domestic livestock, especially sheep, is the chief limiting factor in the increase of antelope.

Until 1944, pronghorn antelope had been protected under a closed season since 1903. The first legal hunting season in more than 40 years was held in 1944 with approximately 400 permits issued. Antelope numbers have increased by successful restocking in suitable areas by the Parks and Wildlife Department and proper game management practices of landowners.

The present range of pronghorn antelope is confined mainly to Culberson, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Presidio, Pecos and Brewster counties west of the Pecos River. Also included are Hartley, Oldham, Moore, Roberts, Bailey and Lamb counties in the Panhandle, and Garza, Borden, Stonewall, Mitchell, Coke, Reagan and Irion counties of central West Texas. There is one small herd in Jim Hogg county. Pronghorn antelope prefer open rolling plains country. In recent years they have been trapped in thickly populated areas and stocked in other suitable locations.

The pronghorn antelope is the swiftest of game animals.



A few elk are still found in the mountainous region west of the Pecos River.

Elk

The few elk in Texas are found in the Guadalupe Mountains of Culberson county. The native elk vanished before 1900. In 1928, 44 elk were imported from the Northern Rocky Mountain region and they have increased under protection to a population of 300 to 500.

Elk feed upon brush, dwarf oak, buckthorn, mountain mahogany, mescal and sotol. Overbrowsing may develop since elk compete with mule deer for food. The type of range required for elk makes it unlikely that they will ever rank high as a game animal of Texas, regardless of protection given them.

Bighorn Sheep

Bighorn sheep have been in Texas since prehistoric Indian times, but now are extinct. The last remnant herd of the once-abundant desert bighorn herds was seen in the Sierra Diablo Mountains in the Trans-Pecos. In a desperate effort to save them, bighorn sheep refuges have been established in the Sierra Diablos in Culberson county, but the sheep have not been seen for 5 years despite diligent searches in former haunts. The Parks and Wildlife Department has trapped desert bighorns in Arizona and placed them in a large pasture on the Black Gap



Bighorn sheep once inhabited the secluded, mountainous terrain west of the Pecos River.

Wildlife Management Area in Brewster County in an effort to obtain brood stock for transplanting purposes. The captive herd has increased and some of the sheep will soon be moved to former ranges.

Bighorns are large brown sheep with light rump patches. Males have large, massive, backward-curved horns. Females have smaller horns. These sheep have four toes on each foot and, unlike domestic sheep, their coat is hairy rather than woolly. Males weigh 200 to 300 pounds; females weigh 125 to 175 pounds.

Bighorns are expert mountain climbers; sure-footed and accurate as they leap from one rocky ledge

A few black bear remain in mountainous regions of the Trans-Pecos.



to another. The spread of domestic sheep upon their range presents serious competition to these wild sheep.

Black Bear

Only a few black bear remain in Texas today. They are in the Davis, Chisos, Diablos, Dead Horse and Guadalupe Mountains of the Trans-Pecos. Black bear are so few in number that they are of little importance as game today. Both the Louisiana black bear of East and Southeast Texas and the grizzly, formerly west of the Pecos, are extinct.

Growth of the livestock industry and the depredations of bear upon livestock make their control necessary.

Javelinas or Collared Peccaries

Javelinas are the only native wild hogs in North America. Large numbers of javelinas are found in the southern and southwestern parts of the state.



The javelina is the only native wild hog in North America.

The females' normal litter is two pigs a year. Frequently only one pig is born, and occasionally four. The pigs are reddish tan but at maturity they turn grizzled gray with a whitish "collar" around their necks.

Pricklypear, grass, mesquite leaves and beans, ebony beans and carrion are major items in the diet of javelinas.

Javelinas have a keen sense of smell and sometimes quietly trail hunters in the woods. They are



regarded more beneficial than harmful by many ranchers. Their long tusks enable them to be vicious fighters when one of them is wounded, but they are not likely to attack unless unduly molested. A gland on the back just over the hips secretes a strong odorous musk when the hogs become excited.

The flesh of young females is excellent food, but the meat of old males has an objectionable odor. Hides and bristles, valuable commercially, cannot be sold under our present game laws.

Squirrels

Fox squirrels are distributed widely throughout the timbered sections of Texas. The gray or cat squirrel prefers the bottomland of the eastern sections along streams.

Trees favored by squirrels include oak, sweetgum, cottonwood and pecan. Squirrels are credited with aiding tree propagation since trees develop from the acorns and nuts that squirrels bury and forget.

Squirrels have two mating seasons a year. Most counties have closed seasons during the spring and



The fox (or red) squirrel is a game animal of interest to old and young alike.



A cat (or gray) squirrel enjoys a meal.

fall, while the squirrels are young, and when they are in their nests. The litter of young squirrels usually ranges from two to five.

Squirrels build nests of leaves, grass and twigs in holes of trees and among tree tops. They eat tender buds, mulberries, wild fruits, acorns, nuts, seed and corn.

TEXAS GAME BIRDS

Principal game birds of Texas include ducks, woodcock, brant, geese, snipe, plover, many species of shore birds, wild pigeons, chachalacas, prairie chickens, wild turkey, quail (bobwhite and blue quail) and doves (mourning doves and white-wing).

Waterfowl

Many of the 60 kinds of waterfowl in North America migrate southward in the fall to spend the winter in Texas, where they congregate along the Gulf Coast. The coast line from the mouth of the Mississippi River westward along the southern borders of Louisiana and Texas and into Mexico is perhaps their most important wintering region.

The species of ducks and geese that frequently winter in Texas are:

Canada goose	Baldpate
White-fronted goose	Shoveller
Snow goose	Wood duck
Blue goose	Redhead



Thousands of wild ducks winter in Texas.

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| Fulvous tree duck | Ring-necked duck |
| Mallard | Canvas-back |
| Black duck | Greater scaup |
| Mottled duck | Lesser scaup |
| Gadwall | Buffle-head |
| Pintail | Ruddy-duck |
| Green-winged teal | Hooded merganser |
| Blue-winged teal | Red-breasted merganser |

Breeding grounds in Alaska, Canada and northern parts of the United States furnish Texas with most of its waterfowl. However, a few species nest in Texas and the southern states. Among these are the wood duck, black-bellied tree duck, fulvous tree duck, hooded merganser, mottled duck, Florida duck and the shoveller.

Waterfowl concentrations on the Texas coast fluctuate yearly. In a year with subnormal rainfall, fresh water in the marshes becomes scarce and waterfowl must seek suitable habitat elsewhere. Unfavorable conditions in the northern nesting regions also decrease the fall migration to the Texas coast. Waterfowl numbers vary with the shooting pressure in given areas. The future welfare of waterfowl in Texas depends largely upon the preservation of marsh areas.

Snipe and Plover

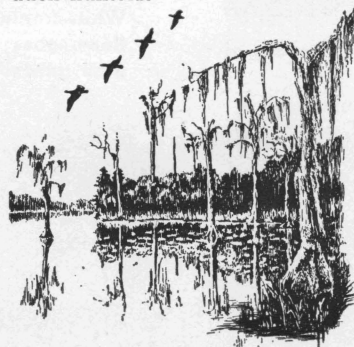
Relatively few snipe and plover are found permanently in the State. These birds during the southward migration concentrate on coastal regions in the fall.

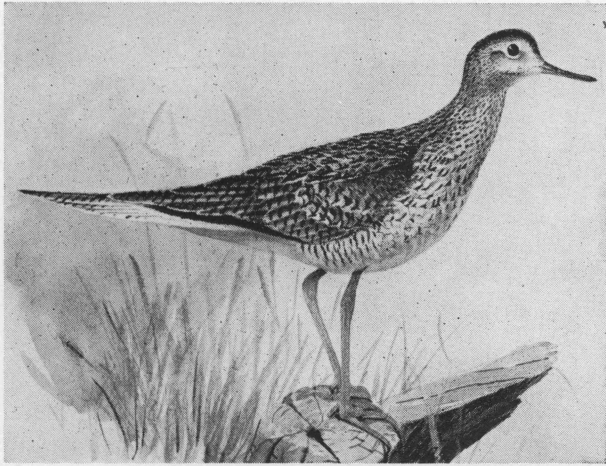


The mallard duck is a favorite with duck hunters.



A flock of Canadian geese.





Upland plover—a spring and fall migrant.

Upland plover, one of the most common, the golden, black-bellied and the Wilson, are found in Texas during this period. The killdeer, a member of the plover family, nests and raises young here. These birds are protected fully except for the woodcock and jacksnipe which may be hunted during the open season.

Wild Pigeons

Passenger pigeons were once abundant, but now are extinct. According to written accounts and tradition wild pigeons were once so numerous that the sky was darkened by their flights. Their numbers were so great that the tree limbs on which they roosted were broken by the weight of these birds. Unrestricted killing of passenger pigeons resulted in their complete destruction.

Band-tailed pigeons are found in the mountainous sections of Southwest Texas and in the Big Bend area where they are relatively few in number.

Red-billed pigeons are found in limited numbers along the Rio Grande and are protected by law.

Doves

Mourning doves are the most common and widely distributed of game birds. They are migratory and move freely from one locality to another seeking sufficient food and water supplies. Mourning doves nest in trees or on the ground and easily adapt themselves to all sections of the country. Doves belong to the

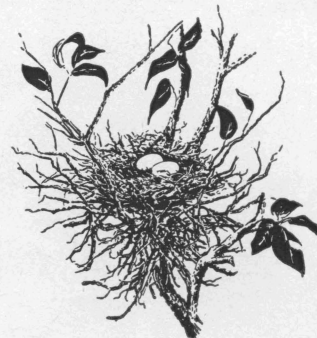


The mourning dove broods a pair of young.

pigeon family and their feeding and nesting habits are similar. They nest from early spring until frost, hatching two eggs at a time and hatch one pair of young after another during the entire season. Doves feed mainly on seeds of weeds and grasses and eat insects occasionally.

The white-winged dove, found along the Rio Grande Valley as far north as Uvalde and El Paso counties, resembles the mourning dove, but is larger with a splash of white feathers on each wing. The tail of the white-wing is square and the outer parts of the tail are white. A fine quality of meat and a rapid level flight make the white-wing a popular game bird among sportsmen.

Since 1920, approximately 95 percent of the white-wing dove's native habitat in Texas has been removed by brush clearing operations. The white-wings have been forced to use citrus groves for nesting cover and a severe freeze in 1951 destroyed about 85 percent of the citrus trees. Predation of white-wing



eggs by certain birds and rodents in addition to heavy hunting pressure contributes to the diminishing population. Thus, the fall flights of white-wings have been reduced from an estimated 3 to 4 million birds in the 1920's to a record low of approximately 8,000 in 1955. The future of the white-wing dove as a game bird in Texas is uncertain.

A few white-fronted doves are found in the Rio Grande Valley. They are about the size of a small pigeon and have square tails further distinguishing them from the mourning dove. White-fronted doves are limited in number and are restricted to one area.

Limited numbers of Inca doves are found in South Texas. The Inca dove resembles a small mourning dove with a long, pointed tail. It has a "scaled" appearance and a red or rusty color under the wings.

The little Mexican ground dove is well distributed over South, Southwest and Central Texas. It is the smallest of the doves and is not taken as game, mainly because of its size. The ground dove has a square tail and is rusty colored under the wings.

Chachalacas

Chachalacas give a touch of Central American bird life to the extreme southern part of Texas. The courtship and nesting period begins early in March and the males often are seen with two females. They

The chachalaca is a resident of the Rio Grande Valley.

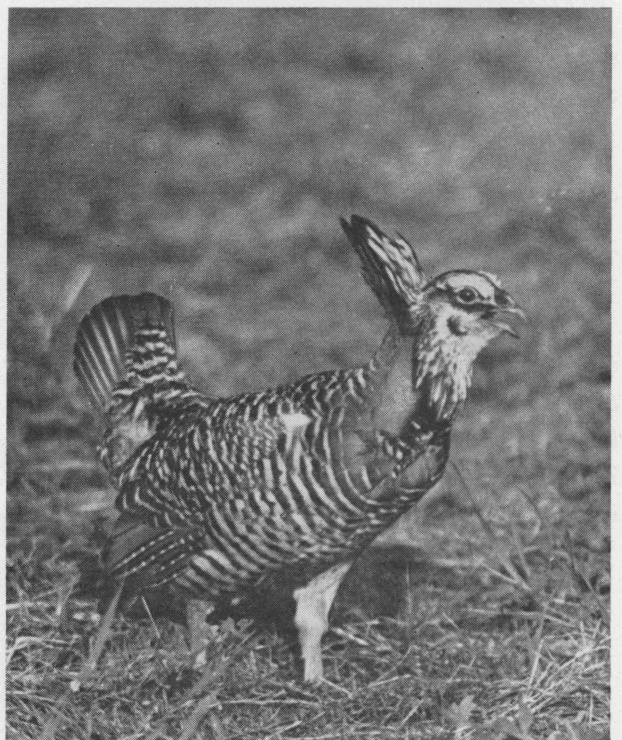


The male white-wing dove helps raise the family.

nest in trees, preferably ebony or mesquite, and the nests are built from 5 to 15 feet above ground. Chachalacas prefer to nest near water where there is a supply of berries and other suitable vegetation. They usually lay three pale, cream-colored eggs. These hatch within 22 days and the young leave the nest soon after hatching. When they are a week old, the young can flutter 8 or 10 feet. When about 2 weeks old, they fly about 100 feet at a time.

Food of the chachalaca consists principally of tender buds, berries, wild fruits and a few insects. The habitat of the chachalaca is in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Mexico.

A male prairie chicken in courtship display.



Prairie Chickens

The Attwater prairie chicken is found along the Gulf Coastal region from Jefferson county on the east to Refugio county on the west. Its range also includes Harris, Waller, Colorado, Wharton, Matagorda, Chambers and Austin counties. The Attwater prairie chicken's future is doubtful due to the destruction of its favorite nesting grounds by rice farming and overgrazing of the range.

Small populations of lesser prairie chickens have managed to survive in the eastern and southwestern portions of the Texas Panhandle. When the lesser prairie chicken ranges receive little rainfall and heavy livestock grazing pressure, the number of birds is reduced drastically. Through cooperative management associations of landowners, efforts are being made to maintain and increase the supply of prairie chickens.

Wild Turkeys

Wild turkeys are the largest and most wary of Texas game birds. Some of the heaviest concentrations are in Kimble, Gillespie, Mason, Kerr and Sutton counties. Wild turkeys also are numerous on the Aransas Wildlife Refuge near Austwell and on the King Ranch, in Kleberg and Kenedy counties. Substantial numbers are in Brooks and Willacy counties.

In contrast to domesticated turkeys, wild turkeys are slender. They are brownish and less bronzy. Their blue heads bear less evidence of beading than domestic fowl. Tame turkeys mix readily with wild ones and quickly become wild themselves. Feeding and breeding habits are identical to those of tame birds, which have access to free range.

Brush clearing, the removal of larger trees used for roosting, overgrazing ranges with livestock, illegal hunting practices and a prolonged drouth have contributed to the decline of wild turkeys in Texas.

The eastern wild turkey at one time occupied the eastern half of Texas, but is no longer present in the state. Between 1940 and 1945, the Parks and Wildlife Department transplanted Rio Grande wild turkeys,



Wild turkey gobblers feed.

which live in the western half of the state, into areas which lacked turkeys. Transplants of the Rio Grande turkeys were successful only in the natural western range of the birds. In East Texas, which has a higher annual rainfall, higher population and different species of plant life, the transplants of the Rio Grande turkey proved unsuccessful.

Quail

The most popular Texas game birds are bobwhite quail, which are well distributed over all sections, except extreme West Texas. They prefer areas interspersed with cultivated fields along fence rows and field margins. The covey often makes its home in plum thickets, berry hedges, around wild grape tangles and along ravines.

The bobwhite quail covey breaks up in early spring as the birds pair off for the nesting season. Family instinct is strong and adult birds are loyal to each other. From 9 to 20 eggs usually are laid, with 14 to 16 eggs appearing to be average. Eggs hatch in about 21 to 22 days. The young leave the nest as soon as all are hatched. In early fall, birds from two or more families join and form a covey. There is considerable interchange of birds among coveys.

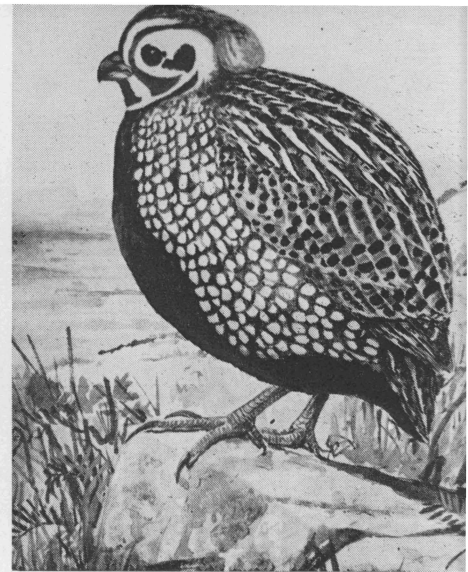
Quail are mainly seed eaters, but also feed on green vegetation, grasshoppers and other insects. The quail population of an area is dependent largely upon available food and cover. Overgrazing limits quail production.



The bobwhite quail is the most popular game bird in Texas.



Gambel quail are found in the El Paso region mainly along the Rio Grande.



Mearns quail prefer remote, inaccessible areas west of the Pecos River.

Blue quail are next in importance to bobwhites. They are found in the Panhandle and in the southern, southwestern and westernmost parts of the State. Ranges of the two species may overlap. As the bobwhite diminish westward, the blue quail inhabit the more arid sections.

A few Gambel quail are found in the El Paso region along the Rio Grande. These quail are easily distinguished by their black faces and feathered plumes.

Mearns quail are found in the wooded sections of the mountainous regions west of the Pecos River. They are highly colored birds, large in size, but seldom hunted because of their preference for remote, inaccessible areas.

Quail prefer well-watered areas, but when necessary can live with little or no water. Moisture in vegetation and in insects consumed appears sufficient to sustain them. Bobwhite have been known to raise coveys 3 to 4 miles from the nearest watering places. Blue quail are adapted even better to dry country.

Woodcocks

American woodcocks are winter visitors to Southeast Texas. They prefer low, moist thickets such as those found in Liberty, Hardin, Polk and Orange counties. During the warmer months, woodcocks

range mainly in the northeastern portion of the United States.

Woodcocks are secretive birds, moving about mostly at night. They have long bills with flexible, sensitive tips with which they probe into soft soil for earthworms and insects.



A nesting woodcock is well concealed.

Woodcocks are plump birds, somewhat larger than quail, and have large heads, short necks and short, rounded wings. The general color of both sexes is brown.

The flight of woodcocks is very erratic, which makes shooting difficult. Their flesh is edible but not as highly relished as that of most other game birds.

The population of woodcocks now is considerably lower than it has been in years past.

Other Game Birds

Other game birds of minor importance include king rails, clapper rails, Virginia rails, soras, yellow rails, black rails, purple gallinules, Florida gallinules and American coots.

Sandhill cranes, longbilled curlews and upland plovers are considered game birds, but are protected

completely from hunting by closed seasons except for a short season on the sandhill crane in Northwest Texas.

Pheasants and several species of partridge are considered game birds but open seasons are limited to only a few counties, mainly where they have been introduced or on licensed shooting resorts.

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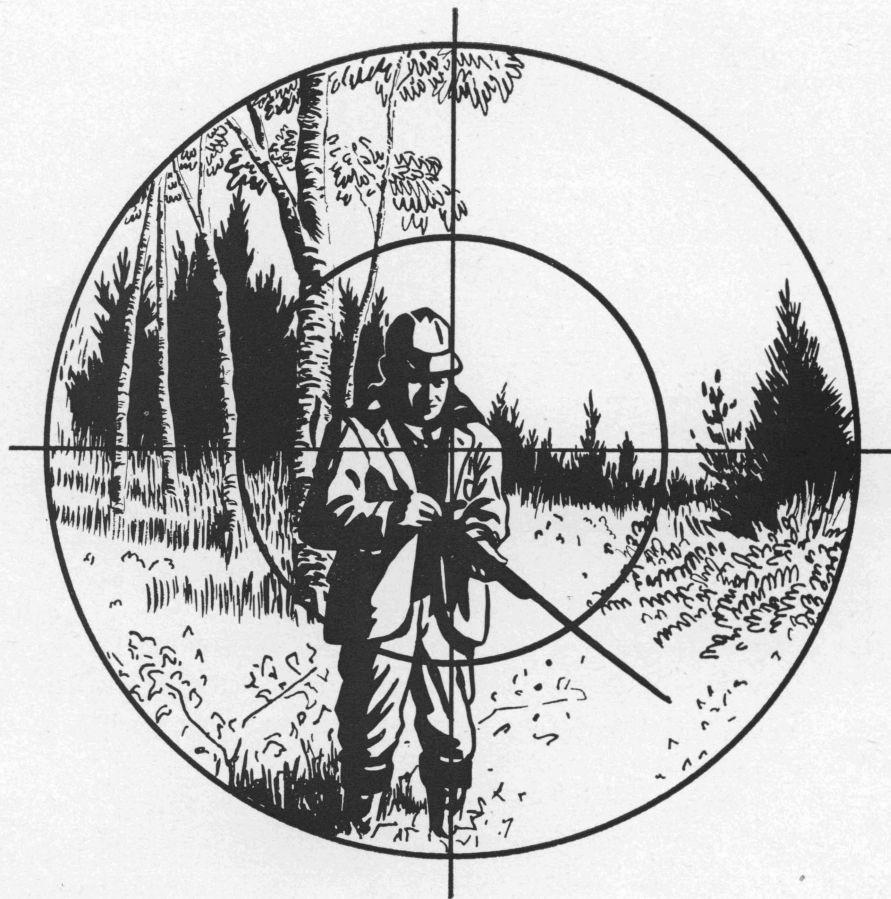
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The Ten Commandments of SAFETY



1. Treat every gun with the respect due a loaded gun. This is the cardinal rule of gun safety.
2. Guns carried into camp or home must always be unloaded, and taken down or have actions open; guns always should be encased until reaching shooting area.
3. Always be sure that the barrel and action are clear of obstructions.
4. Always carry your gun so that you can control the direction of the muzzle, even if you stumble. Keep the safety on until you are ready to shoot.
5. Be sure of your target before you pull the trigger.
6. Never point a gun at anything you do not want to shoot.
7. Unattended guns should be unloaded; guns and ammunition should be stored safely beyond reach of children and careless adults.
8. Never climb a tree or a fence with a loaded gun.
9. Never shoot at a flat, hard surface or the surface of water.
10. Do not mix gunpowder and alcohol.

(Courtesy of the Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute in the interest of keeping shooting a safe sport.)



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