

Keep Texas Wild

CONSERVING CRITTERS

Saving Texas' animals makes for a brighter future.



» WITHOUT A TRACE

Animals that go extinct disappear forever. Animals have always gone extinct; that's natural. However, some animals face unnatural troubles because of things humans do, and we need to help save them. Conservation means trying to fix the harm that's been done while also taking better care of the environment. It also means helping wildlife keep their natural homes (called "habitats"). Conservation matters not only to animals facing troubles, but also to our future. What if the animals you see today no longer exist when you grow up? That doesn't have to happen. Thanks to the hard work of conservationists, many Texas animals have been saved.

Kemp's ridley sea turtle hatchlings

»» TEXAS CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORIES

We came mighty close to losing these animals forever. Whew! Thanks to the hard work of Texans and others who cared, we call these “conservation success stories.” But the work’s not over yet ... some of these Texas creatures still need our help!

WHITE-TAILED DEER:

In the early 1900s, overhunting nearly wiped out white-tailed deer, but Texas now has more of these mammals than any other state in the U.S. — about 4 million! Conservationists got so serious about saving this Texas species in the 1930s that you’ll now spot these bounding beauties statewide.

» Male deer (called “bucks”) shed their antlers every year between February and April, then grow a new set for fall.



BALD EAGLE:

Could you imagine the United States of America without our national bird? That almost happened! In the 1970s, Texas had only four nesting pairs because of the pesticide DDT, which made egg shells so thin that mama birds accidentally cracked them when they sat on their nests. Thankfully, DDT became against the law in 1972. Today we have about 200 pairs nesting in Texas.



» Bald eagles use the same nest every year, returning to it with the same mate again and again.

BROWN PELICAN:

In the 1970s, Texas had fewer than 100 of these birds, also because of the pesticide DDT. Conservationists created special nesting places so these winged wonders would have safe places to have families. Now they no longer appear on the endangered species list.



» Brown pelicans dive head first, webbed feet last, into the water for fish. No other pelican species dives like these guys!

AMERICAN ALLIGATOR:

Once upon a time, alligator skin made a popular material for boots and other items. That, and its tasty meat, put the largest reptile in North America in danger of extinction. In 1967, American alligators officially became an endangered species. But thanks to the dedication of many people, their status changed in 1987 to “threatened” instead.



» As their teeth wear down, alligators grow new ones. They can grow 3,000 teeth in a lifetime!

» Female toads can lay up to 3,000 eggs at one time, but most won't live to adulthood.



PHOTO BY CHASE A. FOUNTAIN/TPWD

» Female turtles return to the same beach two to three times a year to lay their eggs (sometimes 100 of them at one time!).



PHOTO BY CHASE A. FOUNTAIN/TPWD

» When baby whooping cranes turn 5 months old, they join their parents on 2,700-mile flight to Texas for the winter.



PHOTO © TODD STEELE

» We call a grownup male turkey a "tom" and a teenage male a "jake."



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER/ROLFNUSS.COM

HOUSTON TOAD:

In spite of its name, the Houston toad hasn't been spotted in Houston since the 1960s. Instead, these amphibians live mostly in the Lost Pines near Bastrop. Scientists are raising these hoppers in the lab and letting them loose to help the population grow.

KEMP'S RIDLEY SEA TURTLE:

These sea turtles use Mexico as their main nesting site, but they have the second most nests at North Padre Island, on the Texas coast. That's why conservationists started a special program for them at North Padre in 1986. For the past five years, the turtles have created more than 100 nests there per year!

WHOOPING CRANE:

In 1941, only 16 whooping cranes remained in the wild. Now, they number almost 300. That's much better, but that's still only about how many kids there are in a few grades of an elementary school. One flock flies all the way from Canada to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Texas coast every year.

WILD TURKEY:

Folks at the National Wild Turkey Federation and other conservationists have helped increase the places in East Texas where these big birds roam. While we still don't have many of them in our state, things are looking up for these plump birds.

» Falcon babies stay so hungry that parents must hunt 25-30 times a day in search of food for their little ones.



PHOTO BY TPWD

» Ka-bam! Two male bighorns might do head-to-head combat for hours to decide which one gets the attention of a female.



PHOTO © ANDY LONG

» These amazing birds can fly 60 miles per hour and dive downward at 200 mph!



PHOTO BY TPWD

APLOMADO FALCON:

In 1995, something wonderful happened: the first Aplomado falcon pair in 43 years successfully raised a chick in Texas! This success made many folks happy, since there had not been a wild breeding pair here since the 1950s. Of course, the Aplomado falcon is still rare in Texas, but thanks to conservation, some still fly wild out there.

DESERT BIGHORN SHEEP:

Work began in the 1950s to conserve desert bighorn sheep in Texas. Since then, a lot of people have worked really hard, and finally these majestic animals are doing OK. Recently, 46 of them were moved to a new home at Big Bend Ranch State Park as part of an effort to restore them to their former range.

PEREGRINE FALCON:

These raptors became an endangered species in Texas in 1974. We almost lost these awesome Texas flyers because of DDT, the same pesticide that caused problems for bald eagles. Today, their status has improved to "threatened."



Spike's Activity Page



>> KEEPING IT WILD

Wouldn't it be awesome to be a conservationist when you grow up? Hey, why wait? That's something you can do right now! Here are five ways to get started:



- 1) Tempted to step on a bug? Don't!
- 2) Teach others what you know about nature. That helps them care about it!
- 3) Pick up plastic before it gets into the water (plastic kills lots of fish!).
- 4) Recycle paper so fewer habitats get messed up making more paper.
- 5) Keep Kitty inside as much as possible so she doesn't eat wild birds.

You don't have to go to a special school to be a conservationist. You just have to want to take care of the world around you. Start with your own backyard!

>> WILD MATH

1) A brown pelican's pouch has a capacity of about 3 gallons. How many quarts does that equal? How many pints?

2) A desert bighorn sheep's horns can weigh up to 30 pounds. How many ounces does that equal?

3) If a Kemp's ridley sea turtle is 24 inches long, about how many centimeters is that?

4) When baby Kemp's ridley sea turtles first hatch, they weigh 0.5 ounces! Write this decimal as a fraction.

$$\begin{array}{r} 1 \times 35 \\ + 2 \div 4 \end{array}$$



>> WILD WORDS

Draw a line from the word to its correct definition:

Conservation

Threatened

Habitat

Endangered

Extinct

Species of Concern

- Species in danger of becoming extinct
- The special place an animal or plant must live
- When a species has died out
- Wise use of resources
- Species we're still worried about
- Species about to become endangered

NEXT MONTH:
Star party

TEACHER RESOURCE

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