IN 1782, OUR NATION’S leaders chose the bald eagle as our national emblem. Why? They wanted a symbol to represent freedom. As Texans, we have chosen many different symbols to represent our state’s rich history, different cultures and abundant wildlife and plants. But imagine trying to pick one bird to represent more than 600 different species! Or one insect from 29,000 species! Sounds hard, right? With help from students like you along with citizens and special groups, our state legislators since 1901 have selected a state bird, state tree, state flower and many other special symbols. Let’s find out what plants and animals represent our great state!
**Texas Symbols**

**TREE**
PECAN
Adopted 1910

SQUIRRELS, opossums, raccoons, birds and many other animals (including us!) eat the healthy nuts produced by pecan trees. Orchards in Texas produce an average of 60 million pounds of pecans annually.

**FLOWER**
BLUEBONNET
Adopted 1901

LOOK CLOSELY at the blue flowers that grow on upright stems. Some have white centers while others have purple centers. Why? White attracts pollinators like bees; purple means a bloom’s already been pollinated!

**BIRD**
MUTINGIRD
Adopted 1957

WATCH OUT for this medium-sized bird with light gray feathers and a long tail. Mockingbirds may swoop down on you if you get close to their nest!

**MAMMAL**

**Flying**
MEXICAN FREE-TAILED BAT
Adopted 1993

BRACKEEN CAVE in Central Texas houses the world’s largest group of Mexican free-tailed bats—some 20 million! Every night during the summer, they can eat as much as 250 tons of insects.

**Insect**
MONARCH
Adopted 1995

MONARCHS flutter through Texas twice a year. In the fall, they fly as many as 3,000 miles to reach warmer temperatures in Central Mexico. In the spring, they return north, laying eggs along the way.

**Reptile**

**Texas Horned Lizard**
Adopted 1993

SPINY AND FLAT-BODIED, Texas horned lizards eat mainly red harvester ants but also grasshoppers, beetles and spiders. When threatened, they can hiss, inflate their bodies and squirt blood from their eyes.

**Fish**
GUADALUPE BASS
Adopted 1989

GUADALUPE BASS live nowhere else but in a few Texas rivers. They measure up to 12 inches and may live up to seven years.

**Plant**
PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS
Adopted 1995

LONG AGO, Native Americans ate the flat stems of this cactus after scraping away the spines. They also ate the pear-shaped fruits called “tunas.”

**Shrub**

**Native**
TEXAS PURPLE SAGE
Adopted 2001

PURPLE BLOOMS often cover this silver-leaved shrub right before or after a rain. It provides cover for wildlife and nest sites for birds.
Texas Symbols

FLOWER
BLUEBONNET
Adopted 1901

Look closely at the blue flowers that grow in upright stems. Some have white centers while others have purple centers. Why? White attracts pollinators like bees; purple means a bloom’s already been pollinated!

BIRD
MOKINGBIRD
Adopted 1957

Watch out for this medium-sized bird with light gray feathers and a long tail. Mockingbirds may swoop down on you if you get close to their nest!

MAMMAL (Flying)
MEXICAN FREE-TAILED BAT
Adopted 1995

Bracken Cave in Central Texas houses the world’s largest group of Mexican free-tailed bats—some 20 million! Every night during the summer, they can eat as much as 250 tons of insects.

MAMMAL (Large)
LONGHORN
Adopted 1968

These extra-tough cattle with extra-long horns trace their beginnings to a mix of Spanish and English cattle brought to Texas by early settlers.

MAMMAL (Small)
ARMADILLO
Adopted 1995

Meet the world’s only mammal that wears a hard shell! Armadillos mainly eat worms, beetles and other insects at night, but you may spot one out during the day.

INSECT
MONARCH
Adopted 1995

Monarch butterflies flutter through Texas twice a year. In the fall, they fly as many as 3,000 miles to reach warmer temperatures in Central Mexico. In the spring, they return north, laying eggs along the way.

PLANT
PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS
Adopted 1995

Long ago, Native Americans ate the flat stems of this cactus after scraping away the thorns. They also ate the pear-shaped fruits called “tunas.”

BUSH (Native)
TEXAS PURPLE SAGE
Adopted 1989

Purple blossoms often cover this silver-leaved shrub right before or after a rain. It provides cover for wildlife and nest sites for birds.

REPTILE
TEXAS HORNS LIZARD
Adopted 1993

Spiny and flat-bodied, Texas horned lizards eat mainly red harvester ants but also grasshoppers, beetles, and spiders. When threatened, they can hiss, inflate their bodies and squirt blood from their eyes.

FISH
GUADALUPE BASS
Adopted 1989

Guadalupe Bass live nowhere else but in a few Texas rivers. They measure up to 12 inches and may live up to seven years.

TREE
PECAN
Adopted 1919

Squirrels, opossums, raccoons, birds and many other animals (including us!) eat the healthy nuts produced by pecan trees. Orchards in Texas produce an average of 60 million pounds of pecans annually.

GRASS
SIDEWAYS GRAMA
Adopted 1972

Cattle and other wild mammals eat the bluish-green leaves of this native grass. In the fall, leaves turn reddish-orange. Guess what the seeds look like? Yes, oats!

SHRUB (Native)
GUADALUPE BASS
Adopted 1989

Purple blossoms often cover this silver-leaved shrub right before or after a rain. It provides cover for wildlife and nest sites for birds.

Plant
PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS
Adopted 1995

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**HOMETOWN HEROES**

**DID YOU KNOW THAT STUDENTS (LIKE YOU) at Danbury Elementary School worked to get the Texas toad named as our state amphibian?**

“The students worked with a Texas Parks and Wildlife biologist, who recommended five amphibians they might consider,” says librarian Ace Filipp. “Then the class researched the animals and campaigned for their favorite by making posters and commercials.” After a campus-wide election, the Texas toad won, beating the barred tiger salamander, Strecker’s chorus frog, the cliff chipping frog and the Houston toad. From there, the students worked with their local state lawmakers. In 2009, the state Legislature approved the Texas toad as our state amphibian. Gov. Rick Perry agreed, too. You’re never too young to make a difference!

**KEEPING IT WILD**

**WILD SCIENCE**

SURE, the horned lizard is the state reptile, but what exactly is a reptile? All animals are grouped by characteristics. Identify these drawings of state symbols and see if you can match them with the descriptions that best match them.

**AMPHIBIANS**

Change from water-breathing to air-breathing

**INSECTS**

Have antennae and six legs; bodies have three sections

**BIRDS**

Covered with feathers, lay eggs, have beaks and wings

**REPTILES**

Cold-blooded, air-breathing, leathery skin

**FISH**

Cold-blooded, covered with scales, found in water

**MAMMALS**

Air-breathing, hairy, feed milk to young

**NEXT MONTH:**

Nature’s Cleanup Crews

**TEACHER RESOURCE**

Visit www.tpwmagazine.com to download a printable PDF, access lesson plans, find additional resources or order copies.

**Big news for bass anglers.**

Bass anglers love catching big bass. That’s why Texas Parks and Wildlife’s ShareLunker program has spent years working on the genetics and selective breeding of largemouth bass, or “lunkers,” with the goal of improving the quality and size of fish stocked in Texas lakes. Sponsor dollars have always been relied on to help pay for this important fisheries program. Thanks to Toyota, our new title sponsor, for providing funding to help make Texas a better place to fish and enjoy the outdoors through their support of Toyota ShareLunker and many other outreach and conservation programs in Texas.