

# Introduction and Acknowledgments

THE OBJECTIVE of this guide is to provide residents of and visitors to South Central Texas with a concise overview of the natural features and biological diversity of the area. It is intended that the information be up-to-date and technically accurate yet presented in a manner accessible to any interested reader. The text includes the scientific and English (common) names of all birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, land snails, and butterflies known or suspected to inhabit South Central Texas at present and /or in the historic past. Brief comments are provided regarding the current status, preferred habitat, and abundance of each species, along with other information where appropriate. Terms used to describe species characteristics are defined in the Appendix. Published sources of information concerning these species are cited in the Selected References. In the listing of birds, specific locations where certain species have been observed previously are included. In Chapter 2, selected public lands and campgrounds are listed with facilities offered, and special attention is given to bird-finding opportunities.

For purposes of this guide, South Central Texas has been somewhat arbitrarily defined to include the following counties: Bastrop, Bell, Bexar, Blanco, Burleson, Burnet, Caldwell, Comal, Fayette, Gillespie, Gonzales, Guadalupe, Hays, Kendall, Lee, Llano, Milam, Travis, and Williamson. These counties lie wholly or partly within a radius of 70 miles from Austin, Travis County, the state capital. This guide focuses on the natural history of these nineteen counties; however, the fauna, flora, geology, and habitats discussed are represented in counties outside this area as well.

In the pages that follow, South Central Texas will often be referred to as "the area." Included within these nineteen counties are fifteen sites administered by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department: Bastrop State Park, Blanco State Park, Buescher State Park, Enchanted Rock State

Natural Area, Guadalupe River State Park, Inks Lake State Park, Lake Somerville State Park, Lockhart State Park, Longhorn Cavern State Park, Lyndon B. Johnson State Historical Park, McKinney Falls State Park, Monument Hill/Kreische Brewery State Historical Parks, Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area, Palmetto State Park, and Pedernales Falls State Park. Also, the parks of many of the cities, towns, and counties, as well as those of the Lower Colorado River Authority, provide at least limited opportunities for observing nature. Many of these parks are significant natural areas.

The diversity of flora and fauna at any given site is, of course, determined by the available habitats. Within its *range*, or the geographic area that a species normally occupies, individuals will likely be found only in their preferred habitats. For example, a typically marsh-dwelling bird probably will be found in a marsh, but not elsewhere in its range. Each habitat, in turn, is defined by its geology, physiography, soils, climate, vegetation, wildlife, and land use.

The ecological diversity of South Central Texas will easily arouse the curiosity of the most avid naturalist. These nineteen counties encompass a wide variety of habitats. The Balcones Fault System, a network of fractures in the Earth's crust, runs generally northeast to southwest across the middle of the area. There are relict pine forests in Bastrop County; sphagnum peat bogs in Bastrop and Lee counties; hot springs near Gonzales; and tall-grass prairie remnants near Elgin. Some of the oldest rock formations in the state are found in the Llano Uplift region in Burnet, Llano, and Gillespie counties. Major cold-water springs emerge along faults in Austin, San Marcos, New Braunfels, and San Antonio, and there are numerous caves and other karst features in counties within and west of the Balcones Fault System. In addition, there are several long-extinct volcanoes in southern Travis County, Pilot Knob being the most widely known.

The Colorado River, with its origin in the Staked Plains region some 400 miles to the northwest, traverses the area northwest to southeast. Other rivers of the area include the Pedernales, Blanco, Guadalupe, San Marcos, Lampasas, Little, and San Gabriel, all draining southward and eastward off the Edwards Plateau. In addition, the entire chain of Highland Lakes on the Colorado River is included, as are seven other major reservoirs. These recreational waterways and the many oil fields, rock quarries, feedlots, wastewater treatment facilities, farmlands, pastures, small towns, and sprawling metropolitan centers have created additional habitats shunned by many species but frequented by others.

One of the intrinsic effects of land use is the development of a transportation network. Many plants have capitalized on the creation of road-

way corridors with broad rights-of-way free from grazing. This is nearly the final refuge for some prairie species, whereas opportunistic "weedy" plants also take advantage of these open strips.

Nearly 2,000 of the more than 4,800 vascular plants of Texas have been documented in the nineteen counties of the South Central Texas area, and many species can be seen along the roadsides. Spring is a particularly delightful time to drive through the countryside. Two species of bluebonnets occur in the area, *Lupinus texensis*, which grows in clayey soils, and *L. subcarnosus*, a species found in sandy soils. In addition to bluebonnets, wildflowers such as Indian paintbrush, *Castilleja indivisa* and *C. purpurea*; Indian blanket or firewheel, *Gaillardia pulchella*; and greenthread, *Thelesperma filifolium*, are found in great abundance along roadways, particularly from mid-March to mid-April. Natural occurrences of these species are augmented along major highways with plantings by the Texas Department of Transportation. From mid-April through May, look for Mexican evening primrose, *Oenothera speciosa*; lazydaisies *Aphanostephus* spp.; goldenmane coreopsis, *Coreopsis basalis*; and phlox, *Phlox drummondii* and *P. roemeriana*. A few excellent roads for viewing wildflowers in spring are US 183 in Gonzales County, RR 1431 from Kingsland to SH 29 in Llano County, SH 29 from Burnet to Llano and beyond, and SH 71 between Austin and Bastrop. There are many other scenic routes, as well.

Throughout this book, the scientific and English (common) names of grasses conform to *The Grasses of Texas* (Gould 1975). Other plant names conform to the *Manual of the Vascular Plants of Texas* (Correll and Johnston 1970). There have been numerous revisions and corrections of plant names in the years since these references were published, and some of these changes affect species mentioned in this book. As an aid to the reader, we have compiled a list of those changes in scientific names of which we are aware, in the order in which these species are mentioned in the book (see following page). Note spelling differences.

In accordance with conventional usage, the English (common) names of birds are capitalized (for example, Mourning Dove and Blue Jay) throughout the text and in the bird checklist. A different convention has been adopted for other animals and all plants: English names for these species are not capitalized (for example, nine-banded armadillo and Texas bluebonnet) except in some taxonomic references. For this reason, English names of plants and all animals except birds are not capitalized in this handbook except in their respective checklists. Eventually, English names may become standardized for all organisms, allowing consistent treatment in publications of this kind.

Correll and Johnston (1970)	Gould (1975)	Hatch et al. (1990)	Johnston (1990)
<i>Carya illinoensis</i>	Not listed	<i>C. illinoensis</i>	<i>C. illinoensis</i>
<i>Quercus fusiformis</i>	Not listed	<i>Q. virginiana</i>	<i>Q. fusiformis</i>
<i>Q. sinuata</i> var. <i>breviloba</i>	Not listed	<i>Q. durandii</i> var. <i>breviloba</i>	<i>Q. sinuata</i> var. <i>breviloba</i>
<i>Q. texana</i>	Not listed	<i>Q. buckleyi</i>	<i>Q. buckleyi</i>
<i>Bothriochloa</i> <i>saccharoides</i> var. <i>longipaniculata</i>	<i>B.s.</i> var. <i>longipaniculata</i>	<i>B. longipaniculata</i>	<i>B. longipaniculata</i>
<i>Fraxinus pensylvanica</i> var. <i>integerrima</i>	Not listed	<i>F. pennsylvanica</i>	<i>F. pensylvanica</i> var. <i>subintegerrima</i>
<i>Commelinantia</i> <i>anomala</i>	Not listed	<i>Tinantia</i> <i>anomala</i>	<i>Comelinantia</i> <i>anomala</i>
<i>Berberis trifoliolata</i>	Not listed	<i>Mahonia trifoliolata</i>	<i>Berberis trifoliolata</i>

Throughout the text, particularly in Chapter 2, frequent reference is made to specific highways and roads. Conventional abbreviations for road types have been used. These road types and abbreviations include:

IH	Interstate or Interregional Highway
US	United States (Federal) Highway
SH	State (Texas) Highway
FM	Farm-to-Market Road
RR	Ranch Road
RM	Ranch-to-Market Road
CR	County Road
PR	Park Road

A publication of this kind results from the compilation of records and past experiences of a great many people (many unknown to the authors), and a debt of gratitude is due all of them. Everyone who has observed and reported a bird, mammal, reptile, amphibian, fish, land snail, or butterfly in the area has contributed directly or indirectly to this guide.

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Finally, thanks are due our wives, Amy and Kay, for their continued understanding and support.

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*Birds and Other Wildlife  
of South Central Texas*

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