

# SOUTH TEXAS WILDLIFE



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Remember the Good Years?

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## THE DROUGHT OF 2011–2013, WHEN WILL IT END?

by *J. Alfonso Ortega-Santos and Leonard A. Brennan*

Many a wise Texan has said, “The day after the last rainfall may be the first day of the next drought.” In South Texas, we can hardly remember that unique smell in the air

Editor’s Note: Dr. J. Alfonso Ortega-Santos is a Research Scientist at CKWRI; Dr. Leonard Brennan is the C.C. “Charlie” Winn Endowed Chair for Quail Research and Research Scientist at CKWRI. Both are also professors within the Department of Animal, Rangeland, and Wildlife Sciences at Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

right before it rains. The 2011–2013 drought began in October 2010, but the telltale signs of drought were not evident until the spring of 2011. Since then, 28 months have passed and we are still hoping for rain. Cattle have been removed from many ranches; without rain, restocking is simply not possible.

An analysis of rainfall data from Kingsville, Texas showed that between 1950 and 1997, 18 (38%) years were characterized by drought. Three of the past 5 years (2009, 2011, and 2012) have been exceptionally dry (and exceptionally hot). Not only have we been experi-

encing a drought, climate scientists characterize our current conditions as an extreme drought.

Cattle producers and wildlife managers are facing huge challenges from these exceptionally hot and dry conditions. This is why drought management plans for ranches and hunting operations are needed. To have been effective, management decisions to mitigate the effects of drought on cattle should have been made back in the spring of 2011. In the case of the extreme drought conditions we are currently facing, completely destocking all pastures of cattle may be the only option for a rancher. Wildlife operations, especially those that specialize in quail, severely curtailed or even stopped hunting of most upland game species during these periods.

From June through August 2012, less than an inch of rain fell around Kingsville. Even pastures that had healthy stands of grass are now showing clear signs of stress, or even plant die-offs. For example, it is

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## By The Numbers

6.6–11 typical weight range in pounds of the common gray fox (The Mammals of Texas, W.B. Davis and D.J. Schmidly, TPWD)

50 percentage of pen-raised bobwhites that die within 8 days after release in South Texas (Bobwhites of the Wild Horse Desert: Status of Our Knowledge, Hellickson and Radomski, CKWRI Management Bulletin No. 4)



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The photo of a pasture on the left was taken in October 2009 and the photo on the right was taken in January 2012, demonstrating the effects of the wide range of rainfall conditions that wildlife and land managers must deal with in South Texas.

easy to find dead hackberry and oak trees on a short drive in any direction around Kingsville.

Because of the severity of the 2011–2013 drought, quail populations are suffering. Not only is nesting cover and green vegetation in short supply, quail simply go into a holding pattern and do not even try to nest until it rains. We have seen this pattern of behavior in 2009, 2011, and 2012 where most quail populations around South Texas had little or no production. At the time we are writing this article (early April 2013), bobwhites are still grouped in coveys when they should typically be paired off and nesting, if it had rained.

For white-tailed deer, the lack of screening cover for fawns will most likely lead to increased losses to predation. The lack of surface water is also likely to be affecting adult deer survival.

For wild turkeys in the 2009 nesting season only 11 out of 69 radio-marked hens (16%) nested

because of the drought; all the hens that nested did so in pastures where cattle grazing did not occur in 2008 because nesting cover was available.

Presently, most pastures likely have about 300 pounds/acre of standing forage or less, and maybe a few pastures with about 500 pounds/acre of standing forage. The critical management concept under these conditions is to understand that the remaining vegetation is needed to (1) initiate recovery of the root systems and (2) provide the seeds needed to replace dead plants. Thus, ranchers are faced with a difficult decision. Do they use the remaining vegetation as forage for feeding livestock? Or, do they use it to provide the pastures the opportunity to recover when it rains? It is simply not possible to achieve both objectives under the extreme drought conditions we are currently experiencing. In our opinion, the second option (destock-

ing and providing the best possible situation for pasture recovery after the rains return) is the preferred one. Taking this option will be expensive in the short term, but in the long term the faster recovery of the productivity of the pastures will pay off.

Even after total destocking of livestock and considerable rain, 2 years or more may be required for pastures to be restored to the condition they were in back in 2010. As an interesting corollary, it will probably take at least 2 years of above average rainfall, especially in the months from April through August, for quail populations to recover to huntable levels.

Do we have any other options or anything else we could do to solve the drought problem at this point? Yes, pray for rain! Or, maybe, just maybe, the rains have returned during the time that lapsed between when we wrote this article and when you read it! ~

## CKWRI NEWS

### CKWRI Receives Endowment

We are pleased to announce that **Mr. Forrest Smith** has been named the *Dan L Duncan Endowed Director of South Texas Natives and Texas Native Seeds*. The \$2 million endowment was given by the **Duncan Family**. Forrest's exper-



TAMUK

Mr. Forrest Smith (2nd from right) is the recipient of the new *Dan L Duncan Endowed Director of South Texas Natives and Texas Native Seeds* position; pictured (L-R) are Charlie Williams, Randa Duncan Williams, CKWRI Director Dr. Fred Bryant, Forrest Smith, and TAMUK President Dr. Steven Tallant.

Consider giving a tax-deductible donation to CKWRI

tise centers on the restoration and management of native Texas plants. Forrest has led CKWRI's *South Texas Natives* (STN) since October 2008, and worked for STN since 2001.

Current projects that Forrest is directing under *South Texas Natives and Texas Native Seeds* include experiments to develop restoration methodologies for the various habitats found in Texas and develop additional native seed releases to provide high quality, diverse native seed mixes for consumers in Texas.

### Researcher Recognized

**Dr. Fidel Hernández** was recently honored with the *LULAC Council #1 Outstanding Community Leader Award*. The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) presents this distinguished award to individuals and/or companies who demonstrate a willingness and dedication to serve and contribute to their community, thereby impacting education, employment, and economic growth.



TAMUK

**Dr. Fidel Hernández** (center) received the *LULAC Council #1 Outstanding Community Leader Award*. Representing LULAC was Mr. Roland Gaona (left) and Dr. Nick Adame (right).



TAMUK

**Karen and Tim Hixon** (L-R) received special recognition for providing 3 fellowships to the CKWRI by CKWRI Director Dr. Fred Bryant and TAMUK President Dr. Steven Tallant.

Dr. Hernández holds the *Alfred C. Glassell, Jr., Endowed Professorship for Quail Research* with the CKWRI and is a Professor in the Department of Animal, Rangeland, and Wildlife Sciences.

### CKWRI Receives Endowment

*The Hixon Fellowships in Deer, Quail and Range Restoration Research* is a new \$1.2 million endowment that will be used to support CKWRI graduate students at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. The funds were provided by **Karen and Tim Hixon** and will aid qualified students studying deer and quail ecology and management, and rangeland restoration.

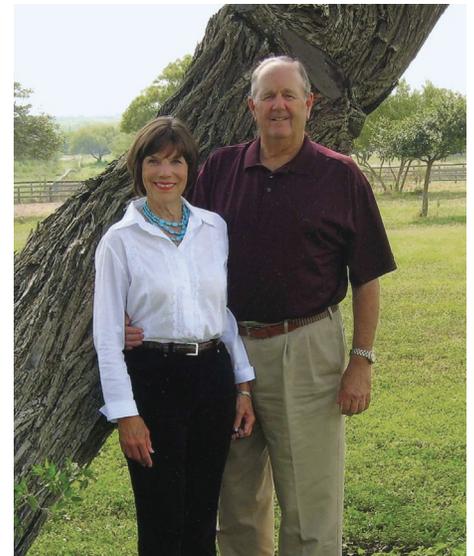
Graduate students from all over the United States will be recruited to fill each of these prestigious positions.

### Ellen and Buddy Temple Honored\*

We are pleased to announce that Ellen and Buddy Temple have jointly received the *Harvey Weil Sportsman Conservationist of the Year Award* sponsored by the Rotary Club of Corpus Christi at the event held on April 6th at the Welder Wildlife Foundation. Individuals considered for this annual award have made significant contributions to conservation, are not conservationists by profession, are sportsmen, have worked worldwide on conservation related projects, and exemplify the qualities of Harvey Weil.

Buddy is a CKWRI Advisory Board member and previously served as chairman. As chairman of the T.L.L. Temple Foundation, he has supported hospital expansion and medical research, educational projects, libraries, and community development. Buddy is actively involved with conserving, managing, and protecting our natural resources.

Ellen currently serves on the *South Texas Natives* Advisory Board of the CKWRI. In addition



Ellen and Buddy Temple were the 2013 recipients of the *Harvey Weil Sportsman Conservationist of the Year Award*.

\*See complete narrative by the Rotary Club of Corpus Christi at <http://www.rotarycc.net/harvey-weil-honorees/current-honorees/>.

### Did You Know?

The green-winged teal is the smallest duck found in North America.

The Texas horned lizard, roundtail horned lizard, and the mountain short-horned lizard occur in Texas. (Management of Texas Horned Lizards, S.E. Henke and W.S. Fair, CKWRI Wildlife Management Bulletin No. 2)

to working on education, library development, and women's leadership issues, she has focused on a wide range of conservation and beautification efforts, which include serving on Lady Bird Johnson's Texas Highways Beautification Awards Committee, chairing the board of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, and helping to establish the Stephen F. Austin State University Pineywoods Native Plant Center in Nacogdoches, Texas.

Congratulations are extended to Ellen and Buddy Temple for being honored with the *Harvey Weil Sportsman Conservationist of the Year Award*.

### Dr. Fred Bryant Honored\*

We are proud to announce that **Dr. Fred Bryant**, Leroy G. Denman, Jr. Endowed Director at the CKWRI, is the recipient of the *Harvey Weil Sportsman Professional Conservationist of the Year Award*, sponsored by the Rotary Club of Corpus Christi. This prestigious award is presented to someone

**Advisory Board**

The Advisory Board of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute provides leadership in all aspects of our work. We are indebted to them for their commitment to CKWRI and its mission.

Gus T. Canales	A. C. Jones, IV	Barry Coates Roberts
T. Dan Friedkin	David Winfield Killam	Stuart W. Stedman
Henry R. Hamman	Tio Kleberg	Buddy Temple
(Chairman)	C. Berdon Lawrence	Ben F. Vaughan, III
George C. "Tim" Hixon	Kenneth E. Leonard	Bryan Wagner
Karen Hunke	James A. McAllen	Charles A. Williams



© Rotary Club of Corpus Christi

**Dr. Fred Bryant (left) was presented with the *Harvey Weil Sportsman Professional Conservationist of the Year Award* by Mo Morehead, co-chairman of the event.**

in the profession who has made major accomplishments in wildlife habitat and/or marine fisheries, is a conservationist, a sportsman, and

exemplifies the qualities that Harvey Weil possessed.

Fred is a 4th generation Texan. He received his B.S. in Wildlife Management from Texas Tech University, M.S. in Wildlife Biology from Utah State University, and Ph.D. in Range Science from Texas A&M University. He has coauthored several books and book chapters, numerous peer-reviewed journal articles, bulletins, and popular articles. He has received many awards throughout his distinguished career, served on the board of several conservation-oriented foundations, and held office in his professional society organizations.

Fred and his lovely wife Janis have 3 grown children and 9 grandchildren. Fred, congratulations for being recognized for your service. ~

\*See complete narrative by the Rotary Club of Corpus Christi at <http://www.rotarycc.net/harvey-weil-honorees/current-honorees/>.

Visit our web page at  
<http://www.ckwri.tamuk.edu>

### What Do They Eat?

The eastern pipistrelle is an insectivore, eating "small insects, such as leafhoppers, ground beetles, flies, small moths, and flying ants."

(<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/species/easpip/>)

The long-nose snake is known to feed mainly on various lizards and small rodents and, on occasion, other snakes.

(<http://www.herpssoftexas.org/content/long-nosed-snake>)



Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute  
700 University Boulevard  
MSC 218  
Kingsville, Texas 78363-8202

Editor: Alan Fedynich, Ph.D.

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