

# SOUTH TEXAS WILDLIFE



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TAMUK President Dr. Steven Tallant with Drs. Fidel Hernández and Fred Bryant of the CKWRI

## FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR: DR. FIDEL HERNÁNDEZ

by Colleen Schreiber

The Fulbright Scholar program is one if not the most prestigious in the country. Fulbright scholars have gone on to become university presidents, heads of state, ambassadors, and cabinet ministers. Also, Fulbright alumni account for 43 Nobel Prizes and 78 Pulitzer Prizes, more than any other award program in the world.

Editor's Note: Colleen Schreiber is a staff writer for Livestock Weekly.

Now, one of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institutes' (CKWRI) own, Dr. Fidel Hernández, has been bestowed with the esteemed title of Fulbright Scholar. Fidel holds the *Alfred Glassell Jr. Endowed Professorship* at the CKWRI and is a professor in the Department of Animal, Rangeland, and Wildlife Sciences at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. Though his accomplishments are many, being one of this year's 800 Fulbright scholars chosen from thousands of applicants from around the world, is undoubtedly his major achievement—at least thus far in his career.

The Fulbright program, a merit-based program that awards scholarships to students, scholars, and professionals to study, research, or teach abroad, was created in 1946 by J. William Fulbright, a congressman from Arkansas. Fulbright believed that one of the most effective foreign policies for developing a mutual understanding between the United States and other nations was the exchange of scholars.

Fidel credits his family, particularly his parents, for instilling in him the drive and determination to reach for the things that at first glance might seem unreachable. Native to Zacatecas, Mexico, Fidel's parents, Santiago and Francisca, immigrated to the United States in 1954. Santiago was the foreman on the 65,000-acre Silver Lake Ranch near Brackettville, Texas, where they raised a family of 6 children.

It was from this agrarian lifestyle that Santiago and Francisca taught their children the value of

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## By The Numbers

13 weight in pounds of a largemouth bass that set a new record at Lady Bird Lake in Austin, Texas, which was caught by our very own CKWRI Board Member Ken Leonard

4 to 18 clutch size of the Texas diamondback terrapin (Texas Diamondback Terrapin; Texas Parks and Wildlife Coastal Wetlands leaflet)

hard work and the importance of an education. Fidel, the youngest, and his siblings, collectively, have 10 college degrees.

Fidel acknowledges and fully understands what his parents gave up, specifically leaving their families behind in Mexico, and this has always motivated him to excel. “I think if I can’t pursue every opportunity that comes my way or really develop my potential, it is as if all their sacrifices were in vain,” says Fidel. “It is my way of thanking my parents for everything they’ve done for us.”

Fidel began traveling to South America about 5 years ago. He had traveled to Mongolia, China, and Australia, but the culture, history, and ecology of South America spoke to him in a way no other place did. It was his desire to get involved with research in this geographic region that drove him to pursue the Fulbright Scholar program.

For his Fulbright Scholarship, Fidel will be teaching and conducting research on rangeland and wildlife sustainability on the grazed Patagonian steppe of Chile in partnership with the University of Magallanes.

Fidel opened his Fulbright Scholar application with this quote: “The world is an open book, and those who do not travel read only a page.” — *St. Augustine*. He closed his application with this quote: “The world is an open book. This is my quest to read it.”

CKWRI Director Dr. Fred Bryant, referring to Caesar Kleberg, the Institute’s patriarch, wrote in a recent column announcing Fidel’s nomination, “I find amazing all the fruits that have been borne from

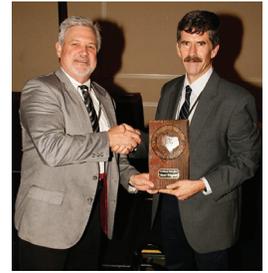
one man’s passion for South Texas wildlife, the generation of applied knowledge for the sound management of wildlife resources, the education of numerous students from across the United States on wildlife conservation on private lands, the influence of policy for the conservation of wild animals and places, and now, the contribution to conservation in a region more than 6,000 miles away. The legacy of Caesar Kleberg is inspiring and heart warming. Our goal is to continue it into the future.” ~

## CKWRI NEWS

### TCTWS Meeting a Success!

CKWRI faculty, staff, and students rose to the occasion to represent CKWRI at the Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society’s (TCTWS) annual meeting held during February 20–22 in Austin, Texas. Twenty-seven of the 85 (32%) scientific oral presentations and 30 of the 63 (48%) poster presentations had 1 or more coauthors from the CKWRI. These presentations signify the extensive research activities conducted by CKWRI personnel that advance our knowledge in wildlife science, conservation, and management.

Our own **Dr. David Hewitt** is president of TCTWS for the 2014–2015 term and **Dr. Randy DeYoung** is the vice president. Holding committee chairs for this term are **Dr. J. Alfonso Ortega-Santos** (Cottam Award Committee), **Dr. William Kuvlesky, Jr.** (Local Arrangements Committee), **Dr. Mike Tewes** (Program Committee), and **Kim Echols** (Scholarship Committee). These individuals are donating their time and effort to help the TCTWS and represent CKWRI in this professional service.



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The outgoing TCTWS President **Dr. Matt Wagner (L)** received a plaque in recognition of his service from incoming President **Dr. David Hewitt (R)**.

In addition, several of our researchers received awards in recognition of their accomplishments. **Drs. Fidel Hernández and Fred Guthery** (who was at the CKWRI from 1983–1997) won the Best Book Award for the revised edition of “Beef, Brush, and Bobwhites; Quail Management in Cattle Country,” published by Texas A&M Press.



© TCTWS

**Dr. Fidel Hernández** received the Best Book Award from the 2013–2014 TCTWS President **Dr. Matt Wagner**.

In Grateful Appreciation to the Texas Members of the Boone and Crockett Club who Contributed to our B&C Fellowship for Ungulate Research, Completed March 1, 2014, Total Gifts: \$445,851

C. R. “Bob” Palmer, Houston\*  
Ben Wallace, Corpus Christi  
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Dan Pedrotti, Sr., Corpus Christi  
Kyle Krause, Richmond  
Steve Lewis, San Antonio  
Jim Arnold, Austin  
Ned Holmes, Houston  
James H. “Red” Duke, Houston

\*Bob and Rebecca Palmer made a \$125,000 Challenge Gift to secure this Fellowship.



© TCTWS

Justin Plata (R) received the 1st place award for his poster presentation from outgoing TCTWS President Dr. Matt Wagner.

Justin Plata, undergraduate student in the Department of Animal, Rangeland, and Wildlife Sciences, won first place in the poster competition for his research entitled “Use of Human Hair as a Wildlife Deterrent: Fact or Fiction?” The poster was coauthored by CKWRI research scientist **Dr. Scott Henke** and another undergraduate student **Jesse Alegria**.

### Grad Student Wins Award

CKWRI graduate student **Joshua Grace**, whose advisor is **Dr. David Wester**, was awarded 1st place in the student presentation competition at the 2014 Texas Invasive Plant and Pest Conference, held February 26–28 in Port Aransas, Texas. His presentation was entitled “Effects of tanglehead (*Heteropogon contortus*) invasion on ecosystem processes in the Texas Coastal Sandsheet” and was coauthored by **Drs. David Wester, Sandra Rideout-Hanzak, J. Alfonso Ortega-S., and V. Acosta-Martinez**. The presentation was based on his dissertation work here in South Texas. ~



Courtesy of Texas Invasive Plant and Pest Council

Joshua Grace received the 1st place award for his oral presentation given at the Texas Invasive Plant and Pest Conference from Texas Invasive Plant and Pest Council Vice President **Dr. Autumn Smith-Herron**.

## CATTLE: THE PROBLEM OR PART OF THE SOLUTION?

by *J. Alfonso Ortega-Santos and Fred C. Bryant*

The complexity of grazing in rangeland landscapes varies from the microbes in the soil to the herbivores coexisting in different plant communities. The habitats are driven by the interactions and a multitude of factors that occur at all levels; especially influential is rainfall in this desert environment we call South Texas.

Research can evaluate different components and is valuable to our understanding of these processes. However, for the information gained to be used in management, there needs to be a systems approach that considers all the interactions and variables.

Cattle grazing has been blamed for habitat destruction through overgrazing. It is a well-documented fact that overgrazing is not beneficial to the habitat, cattle, or wildlife.

In the last decade, many ranchers have completely removed cattle grazing from their ranch management plans with the idea of providing

the best habitat for wildlife and/or to avoid cattle management because of the lack of experience or to simplify management plans.

An unintended consequence of removing cattle from South Texas rangelands has been the explosion of exotic grasses such as buffelgrass, Old World bluestems, Guineagrass, and tanglehead. Thousands of acres of prime habitat for northern bobwhites in the sand sheet near Hebronville are now monocultures of tanglehead. In addition, this accumulation of fine fuels increases the risk of wild fires that are difficult



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**Flexible cattle grazing plans that allow adjustments in stocking rates to respond to variations in forage availability for cattle and wildlife and include drought management plans, are the backbone of successful ranching operations, which achieve conservation of plant communities, optimum cattle and wildlife productivity, and profitability.**

to control. The changes in rainfall patterns and other environmental factors may be affecting the spread of invasive species too; however, the lack of cattle grazing has exacerbated the problem.

Cattle grazing and proper management of wildlife habitat are compatible when grazing plans are flexible enough to respond to

Editor’s Note: Dr. J. Alfonso Ortega-Santos is a research scientist at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute and professor in the Department of Animal, Rangeland, and Wildlife Sciences at Texas A&M University-Kingsville and Dr. Fred Bryant is the Leroy G. Denman, Jr. Endowed Director of Wildlife Research at CKWRI.

### Did You Know?

Yearling white-tailed deer disperse further in fragmented habitats than in continuous habitats.

In addition to female northern bobwhites, males also participate in incubation duties.

Texas’ smallest toad is the eastern green toad. (A Field Guide to Texas Reptiles and Amphibians, R.D. Bartlett and P.P. Bartlett, Gulf Publishing Co.)

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stochastic events such as drought. Monitoring is the basic tool that can provide the needed information to make timely decisions to avoid habitat deterioration.

Approximately 42% of the forage production in South Texas occurs in the spring and 27% in the fall. If by the end of spring, we have only a limited amount of rainfall, we know that we already lost close to half of the forage production potential, no matter if we get 15 inches of rain in September.

After inadequate spring rains occur, cattle grazing decisions need to be made. The stocking rate of cattle is the main factor affecting important wildlife habitat features such as fawning or nesting cover. Managing the correct stocking rate of cattle to maintain adequate nesting cover for northern bobwhites could be one of the main objectives of the grazing management plan in a cattle-wildlife operation.

Cattle grazing and wildlife interactions are dynamic and may change

**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.

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from ranch to ranch in the same geographic region, from pasture to



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**Cattle and exotic wildlife coexist in habitats; interactions may be positive, negative, or neutral. These interactions need to be understood to generate information that can be used in wildlife management plans.**

pasture within the same ranch, as well as from season to season in the same year and from year to year. However, by monitoring standing forage, ranchers can provide the information needed to make timely decisions using a flexible grazing program, which will maintain the integrity of the habitat and provide optimum outputs from both cattle and wildlife.

At the CKWRI, we are very fortunate that the Ken and Tanya Leonard Family has provided us with the *Kenneth E. Leonard Fellowship for Livestock-Wildlife Research*. This fellowship will allow us to develop a long term livestock-wildlife research program that will provide management information within the context of a systems approach. ~

### What Do They Eat?

The sheep frog's specialized diet consists mainly of ants and termites. (AmphibiaWeb, 2014, Berkeley, California; <http://amphibiaweb.org/>)

The white-faced ibis mainly consumes insects, but also eats crustaceans, leeches, snails, amphibians, and small fish. (Handbook of Birds of the World, Vol. 1, del Hoyo et al., Lynx Edicions)

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