



CAESAR KLEBERG WILDLIFE  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE

SPRING 2026



## The CKWRI Wildlife Research Park Fred Bryant

Our idea to build a research park began over a couple of raccoons. Back around 2001, we were studying a parasite that can be transmitted to humans but is carried by raccoons. In those days, we really didn't have the facilities on our Kingsville campus to conduct such a study, which required a Bio Safety Level I laboratory. When I came to the office on that fateful day back in '01, after following the odor of thawed raccoons up to the lab on the second floor of our office building, I realized we desperately needed a Necropsy Lab. Our mantra became "build today what you can't do tomorrow."

With the shared vision and leadership of the Trustees of the Caesar Kleberg Foundation for Wildlife Conservation, Stephen J. "Tio" Kleberg, Dr. Duane Leach, and Leroy Denman Jr., we came up with a plan to build a Research Park, not just a Necropsy Lab.

The first question was, "where?" Because the land for the University was originally given by Mrs. Henrietta King and King Ranch, we suggested that such a Park would be ideal on 70 acres of unused University land on King Ranch's east fenceline. This area on the northwest corner of the university property would also make it more secluded and far away from normal campus activities.

Once the land was approved for our Park by the University and the Board of Regents, we met with our wildlife science team and asked, "what do we need to build today that we can't do tomorrow?" A total of 7 structures and facilities were identified: 1. a necropsy lab, 2. a research meetings, workshops, seminars, lectures and special events, 3. a captive facility for white-tailed deer, 4. an ocelot captive facility for breeding and release back into the wild, 5. a location for Texas Native Seeds to build greenhouses, barns for equipment storage, and research plots

for testing native seed varieties hand-harvested from wild populations across South Texas, and 7. a secure parking area for our fleet of 25+ trucks and other vehicles.

So off we went, raising funds for a grand research park. Because there was great urgency to build a necropsy lab, given that we needed a place to thaw out frozen raccoons and other critters, the Advisory Board of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute was 110% behind us. Arthur "Buddy" Temple was Chair of our Board and led us through the painful stages of raising necessary funding for the necropsy lab. The design was to build a 2-room lab that included both a Biosafety Level I and Biosafety Level II Labs. The cost was about \$700,000 back in 2002 and the Buddy Temple Pathology Lab was completed in 2003. Buddy privately remarked that the pathology name sounded a lot better than the Buddy Temple Dead Animal Lab.

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Fawns in the Alkek Captive Facility for White-tailed Deer.

Next up was the research aviary funded primarily by the Caesar Kleberg Foundation. The aviary cost right at \$1 million to build, and the adjoining flight cage was about \$150,000. Appropriately, we named it after one of the pioneer Trustees, Duane M. Leach. The Duane M. Leach Research Aviary was opened for business in 2004.

While we were building the first two structures, we were planning the conference and meeting center, the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Center, with a very capable architecture and engineering firm out of San Antonio. With her eye for detail, practicality, and design, Tio and I solicited the help of Janell Kleberg. It was one of the best decisions we ever made. Because the Texas A&M Board of Regents had a policy of a \$2 million cap on locally designed and managed building projects at regional system universities, we stayed under that cap.

The Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Center was opened in 2005 with a board room, welcoming foyer, service kitchen, auditorium, and outdoor patio. Within a few years, we had added a patio cover, a native plant garden with a windmill, cattle watering trough, and a “live” creek with running water. We then added a second foyer and a smaller room for seminars. A list of named rooms and other features is provided on page 4 to recognize those who provided significant resources and vision to see our conference center completed. About the only feature we couldn’t get named was the sewer line, although we came up with a few critics of CKWRI for whom that naming opportunity might be appropriate.

Dr. Fred Bryant is Director of Development at CKWRI.

### What Do They Eat?

Greater roadrunners (*Geococcyx californianus*) are opportunistic omnivores. They will eat insects, lizards, snakes (including small rattlesnakes), small mammals, fruits, seeds, and even prickly pear cactus. (Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, [tpwd.texas.gov](http://tpwd.texas.gov). Introducing birds to young naturalists: Roadrunners).

With guidance and help from the Alkek Foundation in Houston, the Albert & Margaret Alkek Ungulate Research Facility was designed with labs and research pens to study diseases, nutrition, and heat stress in white-tailed deer. The Alkek Facility construction began in 2005, and it was opened in 2007. Deer, originally from wild stocks, were transported from our old facilities to the new Alkek Facility for detailed study and controlled experiments. We also built a secure entry to our research facilities and surrounded them with an 8-foot-tall fence.

Around 2003, the east half of the property was developed for South Texas Natives, later to become Texas Native Seeds. Greenhouses started to go up northeast of the Wildlife Center, thanks to the leadership of Paula Maywald (Director 2001-2005) and later, Forrest Smith (Director 2005-2021). We also built a barn for equipment storage and maintenance, and developed several research plots to test native seed for establishment and survival.

As the park was nearing completion with the exception of the ocelot facility (more on that later), we needed to name the park after those who were heavily involved in its development and construction. More importantly, we wanted to name it after someone who was passionate about wildlife research and conservation. In 2008, the park name was officially approved by the Texas A&M System Board of Regents as the Tio and Janell Kleberg Wildlife Research Park.

A long time coming, construction is officially under way for the Ocelot Captive Facility, thanks to many donors and supporters who have raised ALMOST enough money to build the \$20 million facility. We are still short about \$1.5 million, and we could use your support. Nonetheless, the Ocelot Captive Facility will be opened this fall because of the visionary leadership of David Hewitt and Caroline Cage at CKWRI and tremendous collaboration with Neal Wilkins and the East Foundation. After 30 years associated with the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute and South Texas, I finally have great hope that through this new facility, we will restore ocelots to their rightful place among the iconic wildlife species of the brush country. ~

The Duane M. Leach Research Aviary.



## CKWRI News

### Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society Outstanding Achievement



Dr. Scott Henke

Congratulations to Scott Henke, who was presented with the Outstanding Achievement award at the annual Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society meeting in February. The award recognizes those who have made outstanding contributions to the Texas Chapter, including noteworthy research, development of outstanding outreach programs, or application of conservation principals.



CKWRI students and other faculty also made an excellent showing at the annual meeting. They were co-authors on 43 oral presentations and 26 posters. This amounted to 39% of presentations and 20% of posters. There are now 16 universities with a student chapter of TWS across the Lone Star State.

Graduate students, Joseph McGovern and Tyler Bostwick placed 1st and 3rd, respectively, in the Clarence Cottom Awards, which is the most prestigious student award given by the Texas Chapter. Photography awards went to Jack Rogers, Jessica Johnson, Lisanne Petracca, Kyle Yorke, James Helferich, Raymond Turner, and Chloe Nouzille.

## By The Numbers

# 3

All octopus species have 3 hearts: two that pump blood to the gills, and a third that circulates it to the rest of the body (Octonation. [www.octonation.com](http://www.octonation.com) How many hearts does an octopus have?).

### CKWRI Advisory Board:

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### Did You Know?

Texas tortoises (*Gopherus berlandieri*), have temperature dependent sex determination in which nest temperature during incubation determines the sex of hatchlings. Cooler temperatures produce more males, and warmer temperatures produce more females. With climate change resulting in warmer temperatures, tortoise populations may become skewed toward females (In: Rostal, McCoy, and Mushinsky (Eds.). 2014. Biology and Conservation of North American Tortoises. JHU Press. Baltimore, MD).

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### Named features at the Tio & Janell Kleberg Wildlife Research Park:

- o Buddy Temple Wildlife Pathology & Diagnostic Laboratory
- o Duane M. Leach Research Aviary
- o Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Center
- o Albert & Margaret Alkek Ungulate Research Facility
- o Texas Native Seeds Research Farm
- o CKWRI Ocelot Conservation Facility
- o Curtis and HP Pinnell Family Memorial Auditorium
- o Petra Vela Kenedy Conference Room
- o Stuart W. Stedman Conference Room
- o Karen and Phil Hunke Reception Area and Foyer
- o Tim and Karen Hixon North Foyer
- o A.E. Leonard Family Native Plant Garden

Other special features at the Center are named in honor of the Dan Friedkin Family, Tommy Funk, Henry Hamman Family, Jones Family in memory of Dick Jones, Betty Kelso, Ed and Ellen Randall, and Frank Yturria Family.

The CKWRI Ocelot Conservation Facility in progress.

