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In the Field

E. DAN KLEPPER

writes about the black bear legend of the Davis Mountains and the limestone gorge created by Canyon Lake floodwaters in this issue. "Canyon Lake was a frequent outdoor destination for my family when I was growing up," Klepper, a native San Antonian, explains. "It was exciting to explore a new



canyon created in my hometown's backyard." Klepper is currently working on a book of essays and photographs for Texas A&M Press. *Klepper + Klepper—50 Years in the Texas Outdoors* combines his work with that of his late father, a consummate Texas outdoorsman and journalist. Klepper's most recent work, *100 Classic Hikes in Texas*, will be published next spring by Seattle-based Mountain Press Books.

MARY O. PARKER,

who writes this month about the Texas horned lizard program at the Fort Worth Zoo, has an affinity for the gentle reptiles. "There's just something about seeing a 'horny toad' that brings back a piece of childhood simplicity," she says. Mary, a freelance writer, lives in Smithville, where she hasn't seen a Texas horned lizard since 2004. When she found out about the zoo's program, she felt a stirring of hope. "I knew I missed seeing these guys around my house, but until I started researching the piece, I didn't realize the full extent of nostalgia other Texans have for them. It's important to many people that Texas horned lizards make a comeback. Sadly, sometimes we've got to face losing something dear to us before we take better care to help it survive."



MIKE COX

is an Austin-based freelance writer who has written 13 books, including the recently released *The Texas Rangers: Wearing the Cinco Peso, 1821-1900*. His grandfather, the late L.A. Wilke, was editor of *Texas Game & Fish* magazine in the late 1950s and early 1960s (the name was later changed to *Texas Parks & Wildlife*). A camper since the



fifth grade, Mike spent most of his childhood summers camping and playing near Little Walnut Creek in Austin, where he grew up. He never attended a traditional summer camp for kids (well, there was that time at the YMCA Day Camp in Austin), but his teenage daughter goes to several every summer. Seeing her off to camp is what inspired his story on summer camps for grownups.

SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

LIZARD LEARNING

Captive-breeding program offers hope for the Texas horned lizard.

John Ward, an assistant curator at the Fort Worth Zoo, is facing his annual challenge: coercing the Texas horned lizards under his care to hibernate. The yearly task is just one of the difficulties he encounters as director of the zoo's Texas horned lizard captive-breeding program.

"I enjoy a challenge and Texas horned lizard husbandry is quite challenging from their need to hibernate, and for us to do this artificially, to finding natural food items for hatchlings, juveniles, all the way up to adults," he says.

After years of effort, the program, part of the zoo's ectotherm department, had its first captive-breeding success of Texas' state reptile in 2005.

In large part, the program's accomplishments have been a collaborative effort. "Other institutions' lack of success has been helpful to us in that we know what hasn't worked and can concentrate on new ideas," says Ward. He adds that one aspect he enjoys most about overseeing the project is how it helps others develop similar programs.

Since 1977 Texas horned lizards have been classified as a threatened species by the state, meaning that they cannot be captured, possessed, transported or sold within Texas without a special permit. However, even with such status, their numbers have continued to decrease. While recent surveys show that they can still be found in about 60 percent of Texas' 254 counties, 90 percent of those interviewed by Texas Horned Lizard Watch volunteers say they no longer see the reptile in abundance as they once did.

Biologists are not exactly sure of the rea-



PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER

The Texas horned lizard lacks the sleek, tubular body shape of most lizards.



son for the decline. Ward notes, "It is suspected that habitat alteration, fragmentation and lack of food source are the culprits." Their traditional food source, harvester ants, may have declined due to habitat changes, the abundant use of pesticides intended for the invasive fire ant, and the effects of fire ants themselves.

Lee Ann Linam, president of the Horned Lizard Conservation Society and the TPWD biologist who oversees the Texas Horned Lizard Watch Program, is encouraged by the zoo's success, noting that the challenges in maintaining a captive population have made it so that "we've learned much through the Fort Worth Zoo experience."

"Ultimately," she says, "there is interest in seeing whether captive-reared horned lizards could be reintroduced into the wild and survive." She cautions that this step is still several years away.

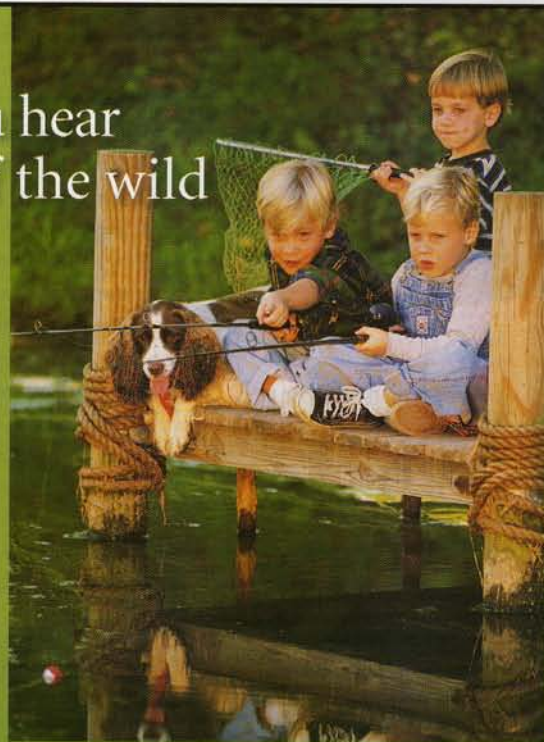
Ward is also cautiously optimistic. "The timeline only extends so far as to having some students from TCU taking part in site surveys at the Fort Worth Nature Center to attempt to determine whether or not there is suitable habitat and food sources at the nature center," he says.

Texans are nostalgic for their beloved "horny toads," and Linam reports that she is contacted often by those eager to have horned lizards released on their property. While such enthusiasm is appreciated, she notes that the difficulties in transplantation are much trickier than might be imagined. She does, however, encourage participation in the Texas Horned Lizard Watch Program (www.tpwd.state.tx.us/hornedlizards/), which relies on volunteers to help look for and monitor the general well being of the popular reptile. ★

—Mary O. Parker

Horned lizards control their body temperature by either basking in the sun or cooling off in shade or by burrowing. They can inflate their bodies to look larger and more fierce.

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