Texas Wildlife Association presents....

CRITTER CONNECTIONS

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Kid's Quarterly Mini-Mag!

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Postcards from Nancy....  By Cara Bierschwale

Howdy, Friends!

Traveling allows me much time to think about my many wonderful adventures. As this year draws to an end, I reflect on the remarkable places I visited, exciting species I encountered, and any major events that occurred in our state. Currently, I am camping at Bastrop State Park, a beautiful recreational area located in central Texas just east of Austin. Believed to have once been part of a widespread Loblolly pine and Post oak forest, this area is known as the “Lost Pines of Texas.” As you may remember, a massive wildfire claimed 96 percent of the park and its forests last year in September. Now that much of the park is reopened, I am amazed at nature’s recovering ways of restoring a once-burned forest into a nursery of new growth.

I am writing this postcard on my last night visiting the park. As I peer to the west, I can see the sun making its way down behind the golden-brown treetops, a clue that the wildfire didn’t spare this area. However, emerald shoots of new trees, forbs and grasses grow all around in an attempt to transform this gray canvas back into a healthy forest full of life and sounds. Two nights ago when I first arrived, I was settling to sleep among the symphony of chirping crickets when I heard some high-pitched yelps and howls coming from somewhere off in the distance. That must be one ugly poodle somebody brought camping, I thought.

As the next evening’s sky turned from pink to indigo, I heard the sounds again. This time, I could hear several sets of yips and yelps coming from different directions. Immediately I imagined packs of jackals or hyenas, with snarling lips and sharp teeth dripping with slobber, slowly closing in on me and ready to attack. I scrambled out of my sleeping bag and swiftly grabbed my Bastrop State Park field guide out of my backpack. The glow of my flashlight followed my search as I quickly thumbed through the guide’s pages. I couldn’t find a description of jackals or hyenas (because they live in Africa), but did discover that the howls were coming from coyotes, our native members of wild dog. I also learned that as the country’s populations of wolves have declined, coyotes have slowly taken over as the primary canine predator and are very common throughout Texas.

The next morning, I hiked a park trail towards an area from which I heard the coyotes calling. Using my field guide, I looked for signs of their presence and marveled at the recuperating forest’s sights and sounds. Insects and animals have gradually moved in to take advantage of the nutrient-rich soil, grasses, shrubs, and tree saplings. This was evident from some rub marks in tree bark and the berry-speckled scat piles I nearly stepped in. I also discovered tracks with a disturbance in the trail’s soil and thought, “Maybe the coyotes were here last night.” According to the guide, my suspicion was confirmed when I matched the tracks to two coyotes and found the fuzzy remains of a cottontail, their delicious dinner. I wonder what other fascinating facts I’ll be able to dig up as I study more about these wild dogs.

They say time heals all wounds. This trip to Bastrop State Park has made me a believer that nature with time is the best healer. Trees will grow, landscapes will change, and I will continue my quest to travel our fine state and learn about our wonderful wildlife.

Have a ‘howling good’ New Year!

Nancy Nine-band

Attention Teachers:

Free class sets available while they last!

Send your name, school name, grade taught, and mailing address to

hholdsworth@texas-wildlife.org

Conservation LEGACY

A Texas Wildlife Association Stewardship Venture

San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo®
Last year, we provided programming for over 62,000 youth across the state through Distance Learning, Discovery Trunks, Enrichment Modules, Wildlife by Design, Learning Across New Dimensions in Science (L.A.N.D.S.), and Texas Brigades. Contact us to find out how we may help you incorporate wildlife and natural resources into your classroom!

Most programs are free for teachers.

For information on our educational programs, please contact us at 800-TEX-WILD (800-839-9453).

Joining TWA is optional. Each membership helps support TWA programs but it is not required to participate in our programs.

Membership Levels:

- Life Member $2,400
- President’s Council $1,000
- Corporate $635
- Patron $375
- Family $230
- Active $145
- Associate $40
- Student $20
- Youth $12
  (ages 17-22)
  (ages 16 & under)

All members receive a one year subscription to our monthly magazine, Texas Wildlife.

Coyote Craft
Adapted from http://kids.sandiegozoo.org/activities

Create this howling coyote to help keep your photos, school papers, letters, and other important things organized.

What You Need:
- 1 empty cereal box
- Scissors
- Pencil
- 1 or 2 large brown paper grocery bags
- White glue
- Black marker
- Poster paint (optional)

What To Do:
1. With an adult’s help, cut the cereal box in half diagonally by cutting from one bottom corner to the opposite corner at the top.
2. The bottom triangular piece of the box will be the coyote’s body (the other piece can be a second coyote). Optional - you can paint the inside of the piece with poster paint.
3. Cut a brown grocery bag into one flat piece and lay it on your work surface, plain side up. Set the box piece on top of the bag.
4. Trace the rectangular bottom and side edges of the box piece on the paper to make two strips. Cut out the pieces, leaving about ½ inch extra on each side.
5. Glue the two brown strips (plain side facing you) to the bottom and side edges of the box and fold the extra paper along the edges onto the sides of the box.
6. On the same flat brown paper, trace around the two flat triangle sides of the box. Cut out those triangles.
7. Glue the two brown triangles to the sides of the box. The box should now be covered on all sides with brown paper.
8. Using what’s left of the brown paper bags, draw the shape of a coyote tail, with notches along the sides to make it look thick and fringed, and the shapes of two pointed ears. Cut out the tail and ears.
9. Glue the tail to the underside of the box at the open side, so it points backward from the opening. Glue the ears to the sides of the box towards the top (head).
10. Use the black marker to draw legs and feet on either side of the box, as if the coyote is sitting. Draw an eye on either side and give the tail a black tip.
Wild Word Jumble

Directions: Unscramble each of the clue words. Copy the letters in the numbered cells to other cells with the same number to reveal a fun fact.

GDO  IWDL  SARE  LOHW  PADROERT
KACP  LYPE  DNE  OPENUC  LAMMAM

Key: DOG, WILD, EARS, HOWL, PREDATOR, PACK, YELP, DEN, POUNCE, MAMMAL

The San Antonio Spurs mascot is “The Coyote.”

Cool Coordinates

Background: Coordinates are sets of numbers that show an exact position. On maps and graphs it is common to have a pair of numbers (x,y) to show where a point is. The first number (x) shows the distance along the horizontal axis (side-to-side) and the second number (y) shows the distance along the vertical axis (up and down). Example: the point (10,6) is 10 units along, and 6 units up.

Directions: Use the coordinate pairs to create a picture of a coyote. On the graph below, place your pencil on the first coordinate pair in each set and draw lines to each coordinate pair until you come to the word Stop. Then, lift your pencil and go to the next Start, and continue.

Start: (3,6), [7,8], [9,13], [12,10], [14,13], [17,7], [15,5], [11,4], [10,5], [4,5], [3,6], [7,6] Stop
Start: [11,8], [12,9], [14,9], [14,8], [11,8], [11,9], [9,9], [8,8], [11,8] Stop
Start: [5,7], [6,4] Stop
Start: [5,7], [8,4] Stop
Start: [5,7], [4,4] Stop

Key: DOG, WILD, EARS, HOOF, PREDATOR, PACK, YELP, DEN, POUNCE, MAMMAL
Coyotes are common residents throughout North and Central America and play an ecologically important role in pest and rodent control. Over centuries of changing environments and declining gray and red wolf populations, coyotes have gradually taken the place of “top dog” in Texas. They now are typically associated with the open plains in the West, scrubby prairies in the South, and bushy areas in the East. Remarkably, despite urbanization and predator control efforts, coyote populations continue to grow and thrive.

Physical Description

On average, coyotes weigh 25 to 45 pounds and are about the size of a medium-sized breed dog. The Border Collie. Males are generally slightly larger than females. They have slender bodies, long legs, and bushy black-tipped tails. In general, the coat over the back and shoulders is a grizzled color of buff and gray with a slight overlay of black. The muzzle, ears, and legs are buffy yellow and the chest and belly are gray or white. Their large, triangular, and unmistakable yellow eyes readily seek the sounds and movement of prey.

Hunting and Diet

Extreme intelligence and keen sense of hearing, sight, and smell make coyotes excellent hunters. They are primarily nocturnal and tend to be most active during dusk (around sunset) and dawn (early morning). Due to their social nature, on some occasions coyote pairs will “team up” with other individuals to form a hunting pack. In addition, they are rapid sprinters and strong swimmers and can outrun most prey.

Like similar species, coyotes use a characteristic “stalk and pounce” hunting technique to catch small prey like mice in the grass or snow. When prey is sensed, the coyote will slowly move forward, watching intently and listening for movement. Once located, it leaps almost vertically into the air, bringing its front feet down to pin the prey before the final bite.

Coyotes are classified as carnivores, but they are truly opportunistic eaters, like omnivores. This means that they will eat what is available to them, even if it is not meat. Though their diet consists mainly of rodents, rabbits, and insects, coyotes will also eat snakes, carrion (dead animals), fish, frogs, lizards, fruit, vegetable matter, and garbage. Because they have adapted to living and hunting closer to humans, they will also sometimes kill poultry, small livestock, and domestic pets.

Life and Reproduction

The basic coyote family unit consists of a mating pair and their offspring. Pairs tend to remain together for several years, though not necessarily for life. Non-family groups, including “single” males, non-reproductive females, and older offspring, may live alone or form a temporary unit of 2 to 6 members. An important survival adaptation of the coyote is its minimal shelter requirement and use of cover. It will use a den for the birth and care of its young and prefers to renovate an abandoned badger den or other natural cavity rather than dig one of its own. Nursery dens are frequently located in brushed-covered slopes, thickets, hollow logs, rock ledges, or shallow bluff caves.

Breeding season is from January to March, and during that time the social bond between the mating pair is strong. Nearing the end of approximately 63 days of the gestation period, the male will start to hunt alone and bring food to the female. Coyotes typically have one litter per year of 5 to 7 puppies which are born blind and helpless. At around 9 days old, the eyes open and the puppies will leave the parent pair around 6 to 7 months to find their own home range. The average life span of a coyote in the wild is 6 to 8 years. Puppies are vulnerable to predation by hawks, eagles, owls, mountain lions, and even other coyotes. Adult losses may be caused by parasites, disease, and hunting. Coyotes are known to attack and kill livestock, such as sheep and goats, and fawns. Landowners may implement control methods like hunting and trapping to minimize losses. Coyotes are also trapped for their fur and are the second most popular furbearing animal in the state. Even with these control methods, coyote populations remain strong and growing. Because of their highly adaptable nature, many cities and towns in Texas and the United States report the presence of coyotes within their urban boundaries. Wildlife biologists and landowners continue to work together to maintain a natural balance within the populations of these top predators.

Sources

Did you know...

…that coyotes are strong swimmers?
…that coyotes hold their tails down while running, instead of horizontally like foxes, or up like wolves and dogs?
…that though they will travel in packs, coyotes hunt mainly in pairs?
…that coyotes are rapid sprinters (up to 40mph) and can outrun a jackrabbit?
…that Ancient West African, Japanese, Scandinavian, and Native American stories and myths similarly portray the coyote as a mischievous trickster who steals treasure from the gods?

Color Me

Coyote
Canis Latrans

Yellow ears and muzzle
Gray and buff-colored coat
Bushy tail with black tip
Yellow legs

Looking Alert by Russell Graves
Left: Alert Coyote by Rusty Ray
Far Right: Young Female by Grady Allen

Photo by Russell Graves
No, this is not the sea creature in which Disney’s character, Nemo, lived. This anemone grows on dry land. Two-flowered anemone is found in the buttercup family or the Ranunculaceae family (pronounced ra-nun-kew-LAY-see-ee). That’s a mouthful, isn’t it! The Latin word ranunculus translates to “little frog.” This implies they are found near water, which some are, but not all. This family includes approximately 1,700 species found all over the world, but in Texas there are only about 52. There are five known species of the genus Anemone in Texas: Anemone berlandieri, Anemone caroliniana, Anemone edwardsiana, Anemone patens var. multifida, and Anemone tuberosa.

**Edwards Plateau Thimbleweed**

Two-flowered Anemone, also known as Edwards Plateau Thimbleweed, is an upright perennial that grows from a tuberous root and reaches a height of six to twelve inches. It is one of the first wildflowers to be seen blooming in the spring in the Edwards Plateau, or Hill Country, region of Texas. It likes to grow in moist soils and in shaded areas below bluffs or on limestone ledges. A single flower is found on each stem-like structure called a scape. What makes this species different from others in its genus is it can have from two to ten scapes growing from each plant. The other species in this genus have only one scape per plant. Two-flowered Anemone appears to have petals, however, it actually has none. Instead, it has ten to twenty sepals which are petal-like and can be white, pink, purple or blue. Above the sepals are the stamens and pistils. The fruits, or achenes, are stacked in a cylindrical shape, resembling a sewing thimble. The leaves are divided into three leaflets which are purplish-tinged underneath and are found well below the flowers.

**Wind-Flower**

Anemone edwardsiana is the scientific name of Two-flowered anemone. The genus name, Anemone, comes from the Ancient Greek language meaning “daughter of the wind.” This may refer to how the achenes are dispersed. The achenes, which have a single seed inside, can be covered with small hairs or have no hairs at all. As the achenes mature, they let go of the flower head and blow away with the wind, hence the other common name for anemones, wind-flower.

**Adonis**

In Greek mythology, Adonis is the god of beauty and vegetation. He was raised by Persephone who lived in the underworld. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, fell in love with him and when he was killed she begged Zeus to bring him back to life. Zeus agreed, but Adonis would spend the summer with Aphrodite and spend the winter with Persephone in the underworld. When he was with Aphrodite, the flowers bloomed and when he went to the underworld the flowers died. Hence the god of vegetation. Now, how does this story of Adonis relate to Anemone? Folk etymology! Folk etymology is the study of how an unfamiliar word is altered through use to become a more familiar word. Like folklore, people would create their own history, or reason, for a word and change it just slightly. Anemone is said to come from the words “Na ‘man”, which is the Semitic name for Adonis. Also, when Adonis was killed, it is said that Aphrodite mixed his blood with nectar and spread it on the ground around his body. It is believed that a red-flowered Anemone, found in the Orient, grew from the mixture of blood and nectar. How’s that for folklore!

**WARNING**

There are species from the Ranunculaceae family that are known to be poisonous, and some of them are in the Anemone genus. It has been noted that Two-flowered Anemone may be one of those species. Please admire them without touching them or use protective clothing when handling them.
WILDLIFE IS IN OUR NATURE.

You may know the San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo hosts one of the most prestigious professional rodeos in the world. You may also know we have one of the world's largest junior livestock shows and that we support agriculture and education to develop the youth of Texas. But did you know that we encourage responsible management and use of our beautiful Texas wildlife and natural resources through the Texas Wildlife Expo? Through interactive educational exhibits and hands-on demonstrations that make learning fun for the entire family, you'll see that our commitment to Texas youth just comes natural.

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