Texas Wildlife Association presents....

CRITTER CONNECTIONS

March 2007

Kid's Quarterly Mini-Mag!

TWA Mystery Mascot Contest!

Attention all KIDS! We need you!

Texas Wildlife Association is hoping to create an original, named mascot for this new youth magazine. You might be asking, “What, exactly, is a mascot?”

Well, the word “mascot” as defined by the Webster’s dictionary is: “a person, animal, or object adopted by a group as a symbolic figure, especially to bring them good luck.” Think about all of the mascots that you have seen before... From Ronald McDonald to Bevo the Texas Longhorn, mascots are everywhere!

We want something catchy, kid-friendly, and wildlife themed. To enter the mascot contest, please submit a drawing of your mascot on an 8 1/2 x11 piece of paper and write the name of your creation at the top of the page. On the back of the paper, please write your full name, address, and phone number so that we can contact you if you win!

Mail your submissions to:
Texas Wildlife Association
C/O MASCOT CONTEST
2800 NE Loop 410, Ste. 105
San Antonio, Texas 78218

Contest submissions must be postmarked by April 1, 2007!

The winner of this contest will have their original drawing published in an upcoming magazine and the new TWA youth mascot will be based on your design! You will also receive a TWA T-shirt and a $50 gift card to a store of your choice.

Get your creativity flowing, and send in your mascot design today!

Youth Sponsored
New Members
Contest!

Sign up new TWA members and win great prizes!

The contest runs from January 1, 2007 to June 30, 2007. For more contest details, see the Membership page in the March issue of Texas Wildlife or contact Claire Massey at 1-800-TEX-WILD or by email at cmassey@texas-wildlife.org.
Do turkeys purr? Believe it or not, they really do! Turkeys actually have a great vocabulary. They yelp, gobble, cluck, purr, and cut.

Turkeys are born in the summer. A hen will lay 10-12 eggs in a nest and incubate, or sit on them, for 28 days. When they are born, the baby turkeys are known as poults.

Turkeys, and their eggs, are a favorite prey (or food) for many different animals. Animals that eat other animals are known as predators. Turkey predators include skunks, coyotes, and raccoons. Turkeys use their senses to escape or hide from predators, but they cannot smell very well, so they rely heavily on their sight and hearing.

What do turkeys eat? They do not have teeth, so that tells you they do not eat meat (carnivore). Their beak allows them to primarily eat seeds, acorns, berries, and greens (like grass). Animals like this are called herbivores. Poults eat a lot of insects when they are little.

As turkeys grow and mature, certain physical characteristics will help you distinguish the younger from the older. You can tell the difference between a young male turkey, called a jake, and an older male turkey (a tom) by comparing the length of their beards, the length of their spurs, or by the shape of their tail feathers when fanned out. A tom’s tail feathers will be even all across the top. A jake’s feathers will have some shorter and some longer.

Have you heard of a turkey roost? Basically, a roost is where the turkeys sleep at night. Generally, they will sleep in a big group up in trees near a creek or river. This helps protect them from predators.

When the Europeans first came to what is now the United States, there were many, many turkeys. As more people came here, more turkeys were hunted for food and for their feathers. As farming expanded, there was less and less habitat for the turkeys. By the 1930s, turkeys were considered almost extinct, with an estimated population of 30,000.

But thanks to the efforts of private landowners, volunteers, and state and federal wildlife agencies, turkeys have made an incredible comeback! In areas where turkeys are plentiful, they are trapped and then transported to areas that have the proper habitat but no turkeys. It is a big job and takes money, time, and human resources. But dedication and commitment have given us a current estimated population of more than 7,000,000 turkeys! Today, there are wild turkeys in every state except Alaska.
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Turkey Trivia

Did you know that...

...Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of our country, wanted the turkey to be named our national bird? No one else agreed with him, so the eagle became our national bird.

...turkeys (and all birds) have hollow bones? This reduces their weight to make it easier to fly, although turkeys do not fly all that much.

...when poultis are born, they do not hang out in the nest for long? They have to get out and get moving or they might get eaten! This behavior, which is common to ground-nesting birds like turkey and quail, is referred to as precocial (pre – ko – shul).

Label the Tom Turkey

Read the definitions below, then label the turkey diagram.

BEARD - Male turkeys (and a few females) have a bundle of long, thin, dark feather on the chest, called a beard.

BILL - Turkeys have a hard, pointed bill (also called the beak), which they use to get food. They eat insects, worms, fruit, seeds, acorns, grains, slugs, snails, and many other foods

CARUNCLE - The reddish-pink fleshy growth on the head and upper neck of the turkey.

EYE - Turkeys have two eyes and excellent vision.

SNOOD - The flap of skin that grows from the base of the turkey’s bill and hangs over the bill.

SPUR ON LEG - Male turkeys have a spike above each foot.

TAIL FAN - The long, colorful tail feathers of the turkey.

WATTLE - Bright red skin that hangs from a turkey’s neck.
Turkey Word Find

BEARD
FORBS
INSECTS
PREDATOR
SLATE
BOXCALL
GOBBLE
JAKE

RIOGRANDE
SPUR
EASTERN
HABITAT
POULT
ROOST
TURKEY

Puzzles... mazes... oh my! go ahead......
give it a try!

Matt Smithhart is a TWA Youth Life Member and his love for the outdoors and animals began at an early age. He was the “Best of Show” winner for the 2006 Little Lonestars Poster Contest at last year’s TWA Convention. He attended his first TWA WildLife event with his family at age 4, and it is always one of the highlights of his year!

Photos courtesy of Matt Smithhart.

Matt Smithhart

Questionnaire

1. What is your full name? Matt Cameron Smithhart
2. What city/ town do you live in? Lufkin, Texas
3. How old are you? 10 years old
4. What grade are you in? 5th grade at Brandon Elementary
5. What is your favorite school subject? Why? Science, because I enjoy learning about animals, plants, and planets. I especially like to do experiments.
7. What are some of your hobbies? Hunting, fishing, football, soccer, basketball, rock collecting and looking for fossils, photography, swimming, and bird watching.
8. What is your favorite outdoor activity? Hunting because I always have fun with my Dad.
9. What do you want to be when you grow up? A surgeon, because I want to help others.
10. Who is your “hero”? My grandfathers. Wilburn “Heavy” Cosper from Killeen, Texas and Claude Smithhart from Lufkin, Texas.
11. If you were granted one wish—what would you wish for? More wishes!
12. Describe yourself in three words. Fun, Happy, and Honest.