



Program Profile: Discovery Trunks

Article by ELANOR DEAN and KASSI SCHEFFER



Students at Meadow Wood Elementary gather around the *Butterflies Flutter By* Discovery Trunk as they open it for the first time. (Photo courtesy of Meadow Wood Elementary)

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

The selection and quantity of Discovery Trunks has increased greatly since their inception in 2008. Originally, there were only two trunk topics available—*Animal Adaptations* (now *Wildlife Investigations*) and *Let's Talk Turkey*. In 2009, two more topics were introduced: *Texas Critters* (now *Exploring Adaptations*) and *More Than a Drop*.

Trunk use slowly grew from an average of 3,300 students in 2008 and 2009 to 6,400 students in 2010. Then in 2011, when the Outreach Program of Conservation Legacy received funding to put educators on the ground, a set of Discovery Trunks was

created and earmarked for Harris County and the surrounding region. This increased the total number of trunks to 20 and student outreach to over 18,000 (plus teachers).

The next year brought new educators and Discovery Trunks to the Dallas/Fort Worth area, a set of trunks to the Rio Grande Valley and eight trunks to the Education Service Center's Living Science Center in San Antonio, increasing the total number of trunks to 60 and educating over 35,000 students about wildlife, water and conservation on private land.

In 2013, with the help from partner organizations Bat Conservation International, Houston Audubon Society

and the Texas Master Naturalists, Conservation Legacy introduced three new trunk topics, for a total of seven topics statewide: *Bats-A-Billion*, *Bird is the Word*, *Butterflies Flutter By*, *Exploring Adaptations*, *Let's Talk Turkey*, *More Than a Drop* and *Wildlife Investigations*. This again increased the total number of Discovery Trunks available statewide to 81, which educated over 77,000 students in 2013.

An ever-growing demand for Discovery Trunks in 2014 incited increased support from the Texas Wildlife Association Foundation, and over the course of 2015, 69 new Discovery Trunks were built, bringing the current total to 154 trunks available





statewide. Last year, Discovery Trunks impacted 128,257 students and their teachers across Texas, and in 2016, Discovery Trunks are anticipated to educate over 160,000 students.

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM

Today, there is a definite disconnect between youths and the natural world. More time is spent indoors using computers, video games and the television than outside exploring the backyard or local park. While many children may tell you about the African lion, very few can identify and tell you about a native animal species. Conservation Legacy developed Discovery Trunks as the bridge between the classroom and the outdoors.

While there are a handful of natural resource units that teachers are required to incorporate into their science classroom (per the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills [TEKS] standards), the words *Texas*, *native*, *private land* and *aquifer* do not appear. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that many teachers are not familiar with the topics of Texas wildlife conservation and/or natural resources. While the lessons and hands-on materials inside Discovery Trunks are designed with the student in mind, each trunk also contains resources for the educators, as they first need to educate themselves before teaching the next generation.

The impact of Discovery Trunks is best conveyed from the perspective of the educators, parents and students.

The students love this material. They get so excited when they see me coming to their classrooms. They know that we are going to have a great science lesson. Students stop me in the halls and ask when we will have science next. My goal is for the students to be excited about science, and these trunks definitely accomplish that goal. I love hearing from parents whose children come home and can't stop

talking about what they learned in science that day.

There is such a wealth of hands-on materials to bring the subjects to life. The trunks enable the students to see and hold the materials that are being discussed...to actively participate in hands-on learning with things they might not have experienced before. Science is more meaningful to them if they can approach/handle what they are studying.

The lesson plans provided are straightforward and easy to work into the science curriculum. The vocabulary that students are developing and the concepts they are exposed to will most definitely benefit them when the time comes for them to test. Our 5th grade teacher reports that Discovery Trunks can cover concepts not easily explained to kids with just text learning.

~Melissa Endicott, Parent Volunteer at Meadow Wood Elementary

The Discovery Trunks gives students practice with critical thinking skills. The trunk gives me a new way to teach adaptations that the students can see and apply to real life. They get to take these concepts and apply them to real life situations thanks to the trunk materials.

It's a real benefit given the limited amount of resources allocated to our schools. It is so nice to have access to such good resources in such good condition for free. These are city and suburban students. This provides them exposure to things that they wouldn't otherwise have access.

~Kathy Saludis, Science Lab Teacher at Rita Drabek Elementary

Animals need to be camouflaged. In my food chain, the owl is camouflaged. That lets him be a better hunter," described Saïor L., 1st Grader at Rita Drabek upon completion of the Owl Eat You Up activity.



Each Discovery Trunk features hands-on, natural resource materials consistent with the trunk's theme and a binder full of TEKS-aligned science lessons, designed for grades K-8, available at no cost. (Photo courtesy of Conservation Legacy)



Students at Rita Drabek Elementary play the game *Bird Eat Bird* while learning about predator/prey interactions. (Photo courtesy of Rita Drabek Elementary)





I'm able to incorporate the Discovery Trunks during my library time. This way all 700 students on our campus can enjoy the materials. They always look forward to the next trunk arrival and all the cool stuff they will get to see. They get really excited about getting to touch all the materials.

I had all the pictures of the animals on the board. As a class, we looked at each skull and became skull detectives. We discussed eye placement and teeth in order to guess which skull belonged to which animal. The students loved it!

~Molly Sparkman, Librarian at Janet Brockett Elementary

Discovery Trunks are available statewide, at no cost, to any Texas educational institution or organization with the desire to educate the youth of Texas. Visit www.trunks.texas-wildlife.org to learn more and reserve one for your local school. 📍



Stribling Elementary students investigate the materials of the *Butterflies Flutter By* Discovery Trunk. (Photo courtesy of Stribling Elementary)

CONNECT WITH TWA



Online

texas-wildlife.org

Visit the TWA website for the latest news, statewide and local leadership contacts, calendar of events, Texas Wildlife magazine, membership – join, renew or upgrade – Conservation Legacy, Texas Youth Hunting Program, Texas Big Game Awards and much more.



Twitter

[@texaswildlife](https://twitter.com/texaswildlife)

Become a follower of TWA on Twitter. Join the over 2,000 followers and receive free periodic "tweets" from TWA about headlines, news of interest, calendar reminders, and more.



Facebook®

[search Texas Wildlife Association](https://www.facebook.com/texaswildlifeassoc)

Enjoy TWA information and postings, discussion boards, photos, videos and other items of interest using the world's most popular social network. Communicate with TWA members, supporters and other who share similar interests.



YouTube

youtube.com/user/texaswildlifeassoc

View interesting and informative video clips regarding wildlife and wildlife management practices, including effective strategies for quail, as well as profiles of TWA Conservation Legacy programs and activities.

