



Annual 2021

RANCHING | SCIENCE | EDUCATION

Conserving
Rangelands

Herd Improvement

Science for the
Real World

Spotlighting
Current Research

Developing
Next Generation
Leaders

Telling Our Story



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eastfoundation.net



About Us

East Foundation promotes the advancement of land stewardship through ranching, science, and education.

We manage more than 217,000 acres of native South Texas rangeland, operated as six separate ranches in Jim Hogg, Kenedy, Starr, and Willacy counties. Our land is a working laboratory where scientists and managers work together to address issues important to wildlife management, rangeland health, and ranch productivity. We ensure that ranching and wildlife management work together to conserve healthy rangelands.

East Foundation was created through the generous gift of the East family in 2007. To honor their legacy, we uphold their vision and values that were established more than a century ago. In pursuit of our mission, we use our unique resources to build future leaders through programs that introduce students to private land stewardship. We invest in future professionals through internships, graduate fellowships, and close engagements with university programs.

We care for our land and are always exploring more efficient ways to get things done and are continuously guided by our values to conserve the land and resources.

We do what's right for the land and the life that depends on it.



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Entering
East
FOUNDATION

From the CEO

Neal Wilkins, Ph.D.

Doing right by the land and the life that depends on it.

At East Foundation, our challenge is to ensure that cattle ranching is as relevant to our future as it has been to our past.

At East Foundation, we wake every morning to the job of being land stewards. For some, this means working cattle. For others it may mean repairing fence, clearing a fire line, plumbing a water well, or servicing machinery. We have wildlife biologists and rangeland ecologists working to understand how fire impacts rangeland health and how to sustain important wildlife resources through drought. Others solve questions of how cattle grazing can be best used to manage wildlife habitats. Our education team works to make sure kids get connected to our land and its animals. We approach our mission with the knowledge that land is the most enduring resource with which we can be entrusted.


Ranching began in Texas in the early 18th century and the tradition of ranching has set the course for what is now the most powerful image of our state. With the largest cattle herd in the nation, Texas has 140,000 square miles of ranchland covering about 60 percent of the state's land area. However, with over 85 percent of our population concentrated in metropolitan areas, relatively few people are directly connected to ranching and the conservation values of rangelands. For that reason, we find it important to publicly highlight the value of rangelands and land stewardship. At East Foundation, our challenge is to ensure that cattle ranching is as relevant to our future as it has been to our past – so, we advance land stewardship and all things related, including wildlife conservation, rangeland health, and ranch productivity.

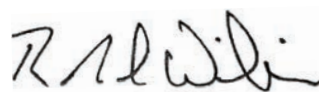
Science should be directed at solving problems – some we know about and others we do not. To address the most essential problems, we know that it is first important to know more about our land than anyone else – this includes soils, vegetation, and wildlife. We closely monitor our land's response to droughts, fire, and grazing as these are the factors that mostly influence the long-term productivity of rangelands. We also direct our research to questions regarding the ecology and management of predators, the role of hunting in sustaining wildlife populations, and the prospects of population recovery for endangered ocelots across ranchland in South Texas.

Our attention to good science is also directed at creating future leaders. Along with our university partners, we work to encourage our new scientists to not only address relevant management problems using good science, but to translate their work to decision-makers who are mostly non-scientists. This creates management-minded scientists that are more likely to succeed in a work environment that combines science, management, and policy.

Our education programs give us an opportunity to impact a portion of the next generation. East Foundation connects thousands of young Texans to the land in a way that motivates them and creates a better learning environment. This not only improves “natural resource literacy” but does so in a way that reinforces a connection to the land that inspires interest in career goals. We are also doing some work to verify whether our education programs contribute to academic success and college attendance.

The East Foundation's education program as well as our other programs, are supported by an investment portfolio held by The Diamond Bar Fund. The Fund's investment and withdrawal strategy is designed to be perpetually sustainable, meaning we expect protection and growth of principal with modest withdrawals to support East Foundation's mission. East Foundation's operations are further funded by the returns from cattle ranching and other income associated with land management. We receive generous financial support for enhancing our science and education programs, and these contributions are highlighted within this report. Overall, our financial position remains strong, and we are able to fully sustain our existing programs with current sources of revenue.

In this report you will find more information on all of what I introduce here. The guest writers and photographers are some of our friends and partners – and they help us a great deal. On behalf of East Foundation's Board of Directors, we submit for your enjoyment the following report. 





We promote the advancement of land stewardship through ranching, science, and education.



Ranchito
5,218 Acres

Gachupin
639 Acres

San Antonio
Viejo
150,121 Acres

Buena Vista
15,106 Acres

Santa Rosa
18,643 Acres

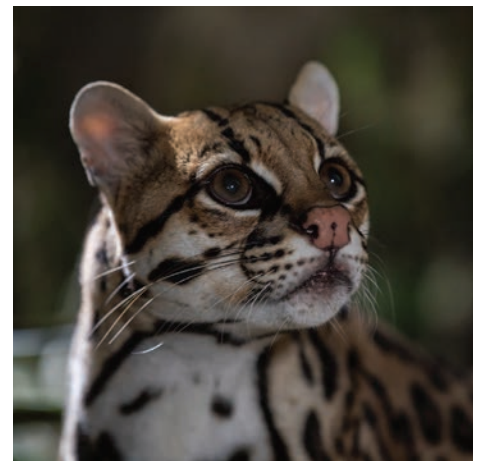
El Sauz
27,143 Acres

GULF
of
MEXICO

About East Foundation

Our Mission

East Foundation promotes the advancement of land stewardship through ranching, science, and education. In pursuit of our mission, we use our working ranchlands and unique resources to build future leaders through programs that introduce students to private land stewardship. We invest in future professionals through internships, graduate fellowships, and close engagements with university programs.




Our Land & Operations

Like the East family before us, we ranch in the Wild Horse Desert, a region also known as the South Texas Sand Sheet and the Coastal Sand Plains, an area prone to both drought and extreme heat. We manage over 217,000 acres of native South Texas rangeland, operated as six separate ranches in Jim Hogg, Kenedy, Starr, and Willacy counties.

Our land is a working laboratory where scientists and managers work together to address issues important to wildlife management, rangeland health, and ranch productivity. We ensure that ranching and wildlife management work together to conserve healthy rangelands.



Our History

The East Foundation ranchlands were acquired over a period of about one hundred years. Tom T. East, Sr. (1889-1943) first registered the trademark Diamond Bar brand in 1912. In 1915, Tom married Alice Gertrudis Kleberg (1893-1997), the granddaughter of Captain Richard and Henrietta King, founders of King Ranch. On the San Antonio Viejo, Alice and Tom raised their children, Tom T. East, Jr. (1917-1984), Robert Claude East (1919-2007), and Alice “Lica” Hattie East (1920-1993), who were raised to believe in the importance of sound land stewardship and wildlife conservation. 

Looking Back and Moving Forward

By Lorie A. Woodward
Photos by Emily McCartney





Sprawling across six ranches comprising more than 217,000 acres of sometimes harsh, sometimes lush sand plains and thornscrub, the East Foundation's story began in 1914 with the combination of three simple elements vital for ranching in South Texas – hardy cattle, resilient land, and persistent people.

"Cattle were fundamental to the East family's long chapter of private land stewardship, so it is important that cattle ranching is a central element of our mission," said Dr. Neal Wilkins, the East Foundation's President and CEO. "Everything we stand for in science and education is directed toward land stewardship and conducted in the 'laboratory' of a large, working cattle ranch."

The idea of balance is inherent in the East Foundation team's definition of short-term and long-term success. And their notion of balance is broader than most.

"Many people consider livestock and wildlife as if they are positioned at opposite ends of a spectrum, but we view cattle grazing as a valuable tool for managing wildlife and sustaining biodiversity," Wilkins added. "Our native rangelands evolved with grazing alongside fire and drought, so the operative question becomes: how can we use beef cattle to better manage our land and our wildlife resources?"

THE HERD

When the East Foundation team took over management of the six ranches in 2007, they found a wild, rank, mostly red-hided cattle herd that reflected the longstanding practices that sprang from ranching on vast tracts of inhospitable South Texas rangeland.

Relying on the time-tested skills and knowledge of the Spanish-speaking South Texas vaqueros who had worked East family lands for upwards of four decades, the team began the daunting task of gathering cattle across expansive pastures with few cross fences.

"Because so many animals escaped into the brush in prior working seasons, the herd was almost equal parts bulls and cows," said Zane Herrin, Director of Cattle Operations. "The sex structure resembled a deer herd instead of a cow herd."

At the same time helicopters pushed cattle from the brush, cowboys swung loops from saddles and jeeps, and trailers rumbled off to markets, the East Foundation team was planning and installing modern infrastructure. Today, "bull-stout" working pens, cross fences, and more reliable water sources strategically dot the landscape. To effectively manage grazing, the team had to be able to move cattle around the ranches more easily.

“Well-managed cattle are our primary tool for improving the health and productivity of our land, the diversity of our vegetation and our wildlife,” Herrin said. “We look to the land first because if we take care of the land, it will take care of the cows—and the people.”

As the clean-up and modernization phase wound down, the team turned its attention to improving the productivity and therefore the reputation of the East Foundation’s herd specifically, as well as South Texas-bred cattle generally.

“Genetically speaking, we’re threading the needle,” Wilkins said. “We’re trying to maintain the survivability bred into these cattle over many years, while improving their maternal characteristics and reproductive efficiency along with the performance and carcass quality of their offspring.”

Like many in South Texas, Robert East built his cattle herd with Santa Gertrudis bloodlines. “Gerts,” known for their distinctive red color, are an American breed with Brahman influence developed on the King Ranch and preferred over time for their heat tolerance and toughness.

“Over time, the herd lost some of its heterosis, or hybrid vigor,” said Herrin, noting hybrid vigor is the increased performance obtained from crossbreeding European *Bos taurus* breeds such as Angus with tropical *Bos indicus* breeds. “We’re now introducing Red Angus bulls and some bred Red Angus heifers to give the herd a performance boost.”

On the hoof, Angus cattle are known for being top-notch mothers and on the rail, the breed is known for producing high-quality, high-yielding carcasses. Red cattle tolerate heat better than black cattle, so Red Angus are the ideal choice as a *Bos taurus* counterpart to the foundation of Santa Gertrudis and other Brahman-based genetics. Ultimately, the team wants to produce a $\frac{3}{4}$ *Bos taurus* crossed with a $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{8}$ *Bos indicus* animal, which will maintain the hardiness required for ranching in South Texas, improve the productivity of the East Foundation cattle herd, and position them to sell for top dollar.

“Our long-term goal is a consistent breeding cow,” Herrin noted. “We’re striving to improve productivity and efficiency while accumulating more data that can provide information to our neighbors across millions of acres in Texas—and the nation.”

THE SCIENCE

Research, like everything else undertaken at the East Foundation, is done through the lens of land stewardship.

With East Foundation ranches spanning a broad range of South Texas’ ecosystems, the opportunity for research is unmatched in the region. Livestock, range, and wildlife research are most commonly performed on small acreage test plots and then finding are extrapolated to larger landscapes. Not so at the East Foundation.

“Our research is conducted at scale within the natural laboratory of a large, working ranch that is charged with being profitable,” said Dr. Jason Sawyer, an Associate Professor and Research Scientist at the King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management in partnership with East Foundation, while also noting the team faces the same challenges that other ranches do – unpredictable weather, market fluctuations, and unexpected events like wildfires.

Staff scientists and graduate student researchers, operating within the context of a working ranch, put various management strategies and techniques to the test by asking: Are there better ways to do this? The ultimate goal of that research is applied science that can positively impact ranching enterprises in Texas and beyond.

While the ongoing research ranges from interactions between white-tailed deer, nilgai, and cattle to a long-term study on seasonal burning on the El Sauz Ranch and ground-breaking work on carbon sequestration, it is the Coloraditas Grazing Research and Demonstration Area that perhaps best highlights the East Foundation’s unique capabilities. In 2014, Foundation leadership dedicated approximately 18,000 acres on the San Antonio Viejo ranch to a long-term, large-scale study dedicated to determining the best grazing management practices for harsh South Texas environments.

“Stocking rates are the best tools we have, but stocking rates vary with the conditions,” Sawyer said. “We’re trying to develop and test a very consistent approach to modifying stocking rates over time based on data, and not solely on gut instinct and past experience.”

“We are purposely creating a group of talented, effective, and experienced leaders who will be a legacy that extends far beyond our fence lines. We are preparing today’s graduate students to excel in a work environment that demands they understand science, management, and policy.”



**We intentionally
focus our research on
developing better tools for
ourselves and our fellow ranchers.**





“Any successful strategy will not only support livestock productivity in any given year but will improve range conditions which will benefit our wildlife.”

Working with multiple pastures, the team is using continuous grazing, a widely held practice, as the control method and comparing that with a rotational grazing strategy that combines elements of the four-pasture, three-herd Merrill System against the higher intensity, quick rotation patterns of short-duration systems. Sawyer notes that their hybrid system uses one group of cows in three pastures, which means that two-thirds of the land is resting at any given time.

“This system not only allows vegetation to recover, but it also provides a standing forage stockpile as insurance against drought. We have designed both our continuous and rotational grazing strategies to be ‘adaptive’, adjusting stocking rates according to data collected from cattle and the land.”

Currently, the science team is gathering data and testing its conclusions. Measures include livestock performance such as pregnancy rates, body condition scores, and weaning weights as well as range condition and productivity measured utilizing vegetation transects and wildlife surveys that note population trends and diversity.

“In our estimation, productivity is defined across many dimensions of the landscape—and we have to test them all to have confidence in our results,” Sawyer added. “Any successful strategy will not only support livestock productivity in any given year but will improve range conditions which will benefit our wildlife.”

While progress is constantly being made, the Coloraditas Grazing Project’s end is not in sight and may never be. As the team finds answers, they will ask new questions that furthers their understanding. For instance, as they become confident in the new grazing regime, they will begin to examine how to translate it into a risk-assessment system, so producers can choose grazing strategies based on their individual risk tolerance and goals.

Sawyer and the team have many questions to explore.

“For example, can we consider adaptive strategies that allow us to manage drought risk while also selectively enhancing habitat for a particular wildlife species in certain area, like bobwhite quail? We are aiming to give land stewards better tools to manage their risk and optimize the value of the land resource over the long term, not write a one-size fits all prescription. In a natural, land-based system, there will always be more questions than answers, especially if our goal is to discover how we can do things better.”

Ultimately, doing things better not only positively affects the Foundation’s land, cattle, and wildlife, but the availability and sustainability of clean air, clean water and a host of other ecological services that benefit the public.

“We intentionally focus our research on developing better tools for ourselves and our fellow ranchers. We ask the relevant questions and test the results, so we have confidence in the outcomes. Then, to magnify the impact of our discoveries, we share that knowledge because it doesn’t do South Texas and the greater industry any good if we keep our findings to ourselves.”

LEGACY AND MOMENTUM

While the East family’s legacy is forever rooted in the land, it is carried forward by people who respect the past but look to the future.

“The East Foundation exists because the East family had the grit and determination to survive on what this land had to offer,” says Wilkins. “We are charged with keeping a working ranch working—and to do that we, like they did, have to cope with challenges and spot unseen opportunities.”

Today, the Easteños who rode alongside Robert East work alongside livestock professionals who have earned advanced degrees. In a relationship founded on mutual respect, they readily exchange experience and information with the shared goal of moving the ranch forward.

“Our livestock leadership doesn’t force their will on the system, instead they consult with our cowboys to get a deep understanding of the cattle, the wildlife, the water, and the land that comes only from long contact and deep attachment,” Wilkins adds. “Data and spreadsheets don’t explain everything – some things are only learned through experience on the land.”


The ranches have been divided into management units where team members take responsibility for the cattle, the water, the wildlife, and the land in their care. Work is still done on horseback, but cattle are being trained to come to a feed truck to facilitate movement and reduce use of helicopters. Grazing is planned utilizing on-the-ground observations as well as computers and satellite technology.

“We’ll hold fast to our cherished traditions and way of life as far as walking forward will allow, but to survive we also have to be an efficient, productive operation,” Herrin said. “We won’t continue a practice just because ‘it’s always been done that way.’ Like our neighbors across South Texas, if it doesn’t make sense for long-term sustainability, we’ll adapt newer, better practices to our traditions.”

In addition to producing top-notch cattle, healthy wildlife and environmental benefits for the public, the East Foundation identifies and cultivates talent. To survive in the 21st century, the ranching and wildlife professions will require leaders that not only have vision but are rooted in the realities of what it takes to manage working ranches.

“Somebody somewhere—and it might as well be us—is working to train the next Secretary of Interior or Secretary of Agriculture, the next Chief of NRCS or Executive Director of Texas Parks & Wildlife, and the next managers of our large-scale ranches,” Wilkins said. “We are purposefully developing a group of talented, effective, and experienced leaders who will be a legacy that extends far beyond our fence lines. We are preparing today’s graduate students to excel in a work environment that demands they understand science, management, and policy.”

Regardless of the bountiful human resources, the East family’s legacy, inside or outside the fences, would not exist without the land. Of course, the land wouldn’t be intact today if the East family hadn’t changed with their times.

“Despite many peoples’ perceptions to the contrary, the past wasn’t static,” Wilkins said. “Part of the East family’s history is they adapted as things changed. Adapting to change was their story. For us, today, adaptation is our story.” 

About the Author

Hailing from Brenham and passionate about agriculture and conservation, Lorie Woodward is an experienced Texas-based writer and editor with expertise in all areas of print communication for a wide variety of publications and clients.



Katy Baldock

Cows, Deer, and Nilgai – Stemming the Fever Tick Tide in South Texas



Non-native wildlife can challenge management of native rangelands.

Nilgai antelope (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), a native antelope of India, Pakistan, and Nepal, are challenging to hunt and are prized for their meat. Where they occur, mostly in South Texas, they are generally free-ranging, and ranchers generate revenue from their hunting or commercial harvest. Unfortunately, nilgai can wreak havoc on fences and they compete for forage with both native wildlife and cattle. They can also be an agent of the spread and infestation of rangelands by cattle fever ticks. This puts cattle ranching operations at risk, and, to date, there are no effective treatment options for controlling cattle fever ticks on nilgai.

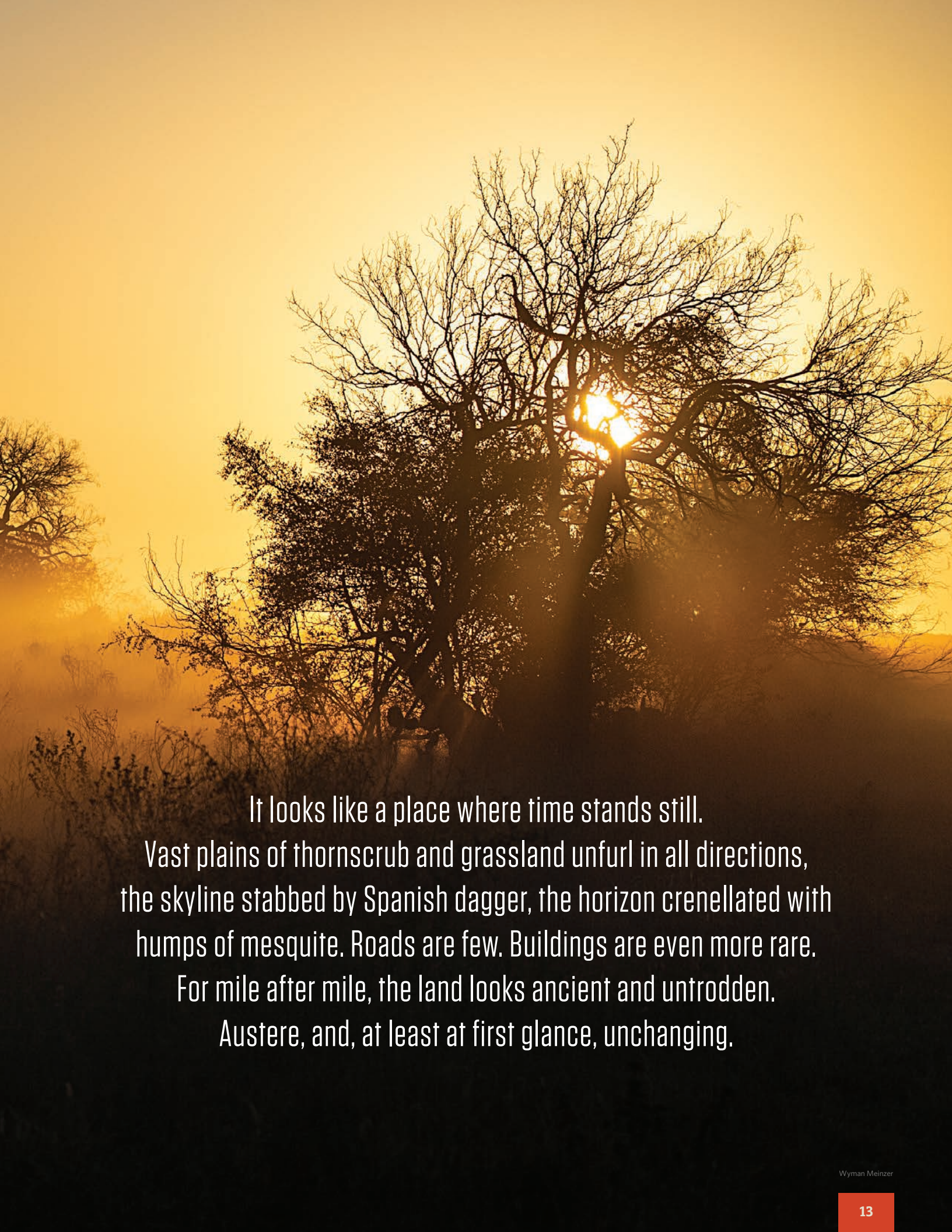
To better understand the impacts of nilgai, East Foundation and its partners conduct vegetation sampling across the San Antonio Viejo, El Sauz, Santa Rosa, and Buena Vista ranches. Plant biomass and diversity are determined, from which annual estimates of grazing intensity and forage standing crop (available plant material) are known. Analysis of animal tissues (blood, hair, and dung) allow for the reconstruction of animal diets to determine diet overlap and assess competition. Findings indicate nilgai do compete seasonally with both cattle and white-tailed deer. Efforts to better understand competition for forage continue.

To find out more about our research and educational efforts related to this fascinating but challenging animal, visit eastfoundation.net.



Research in Action – Real Science for the Real World

By T. Edward Nickens



It looks like a place where time stands still.
Vast plains of thornscrub and grassland unfurl in all directions,
the skyline stabbed by Spanish dagger, the horizon crenellated with
humps of mesquite. Roads are few. Buildings are even more rare.
For mile after mile, the land looks ancient and untrodden.
Austere, and, at least at first glance, unchanging.

But little is permanent in the rangelands of South Texas. Shaped by rain—or the lack of it—and molded by forces from human hands and non-native species to the encroaching mesquite that now dominates the brush country and the vast grasslands of the Wild Horse Desert, these harsh but bountiful rangelands are in a constant, if nuanced flux. What drives them, and how they affect the future of land and its inhabitants, is the reason behind the East Foundation's science program.

Across all six Foundation ranches, the advancement of knowledge and the application of scientific principles is a bedrock upon which all activity rests. “Our science program is focused on those things that support the productivity of native rangelands,” says Neal Wilkins, East Foundation President and CEO. “The productivity of native rangelands is a bedrock of our nation's agricultural economy as well as a primary source of the ecological wealth that contributes to our quality of life.” And even while operating under the challenging circumstances of the last year, the varied scientific endeavors pushed the boundaries of what we know about wildlife management, rangeland health, and ranch productivity.

It seems so permanent—more than 217,000 acres under private stewardship, shored up by long-term funding, dedicated staff, solid partnerships, and forward-thinking leadership. But not much is static here. Including our own understanding.

FOUNDATIONAL THINKING

East Foundation's science programs are based in two overarching goals, each firmly rooted in the abundant natural resources and ranching culture of South Texas. The first is purely scientific – provide a living, working laboratory for research into the interaction between rangelands and both native and non-native animal species, while managing the Foundation's properties in ways that support economically viable ranching with sustainable wildlife populations. The second is a philanthropic approach to communication and education – migrate the foundation's scientific findings off its holdings and out of academia and into the neighboring South Texas ranches and beyond, where they can be put to use on working ranchlands managed with an eye focused on innovation and sustainability.

Those studies involve a vast, often interconnected web of research, including the monitoring of some 625 wildlife species, from charismatic raptors to Texas horned lizards and some of the nation's best examples of native game such as bobwhite quail, wild turkeys, and white-tailed deer. The Foundation's current efforts are focused on five primary areas to move its research forward.



Conducting experiments such as these, over vast landscapes and long periods of time, is a hallmark of the East Foundation approach.

- A northern bobwhite study seeks to quantify how a 20-percent harvest rate across a 15,000-acre ranch impacts quail populations and hunter success.
- Studies of prescribed fire occur on about 12,000 acres of Foundation rangelands, comparing summer and winter burns across habitat types.
- On the San Antonio Viejo, an ongoing analysis of how varying approaches to cattle grazing affects wildlife populations and vegetative responses covers 10 separate units covering about 18,000 acres. Another research priority is teasing apart the ways in which white-tailed deer in South Texas interact with coyotes and cattle grazing. One particularly intriguing focus is competition for shade between deer and cattle.
- The charismatic—and exotic—nilgai antelope occupies another research priority. A demographics study kicked off in 2020 to get at basic questions that had never been assessed, such as an examination of aging techniques, while a longer-term study of the relationship between cattle fever ticks and nilgai continues.
- And generating great excitement is East Foundation's ongoing study of ocelots. These secretive felines are at the edge of extinction in the United States. But the groundwork for a comeback is being laid in South Texas. (See sidebar "Ocelots 2.0").

Conducting experiments such as these, over vast landscapes and long periods of time, is a hallmark of the East Foundation approach. "That's a real strength of ours," figures Chief Science Officer Tyler Campbell, Ph.D. "Many wildlife research projects align with a master's or Ph.D. student, with a study or project maybe two or three years long. But that's just a snapshot of what happens over time in the real world. We're not limited to that, and we can explore questions over the long term, and hopefully arrive at answers that make a real difference for ranch owners and managers."

NETWORK EFFECT

Such an array of research activity requires a lot of eyes—and boots—on the ground. East Foundation's staff science team is strong, and one of its core strengths is an ability to foster significant partnerships with other scientific and academic institutions. From public schools to local museums to state and federal agencies, the Foundation nurtures relationships with like-minded partners and researchers.



Wyman Meinzer

How Much Harvest: The Quail Conundrum



On East Foundation ranches, graduate students are exploring one of the most vexing questions regarding quail management in South Texas.

Is the region's long-accepted 20-percent harvest prescription for hunted quail populations sustainable? Research on the Buena Vista Ranch is beginning to drill down on the issue.

Abe Woodard, a Ph.D. candidate and Research Associate at the East Foundation, has recently completed the third year of the harvest study. Each year a 20-percent harvest quota and monthly population trends are determined by counting covey flushes from a helicopter. In addition to evaluating harvest rates, researchers are documenting hunting efforts by tracking bird dogs with GPS collars and recording detailed hunting logs, including the times and locations of coveys found, covey sizes, and the number of shots taken by hunters.

"The 20-percent harvest rate recommendation for South Texas is based on theoretical models and has not been tested in the field," explains Woodard. "This is a unique opportunity to implement and evaluate a sustainable harvest prescription on a large scale, on properties which have historically never been hunted. Our goal is to provide insight regarding sustainable harvest practices that will ensure the continued legacy of quail populations and quail hunting in South Texas."



“We are a living laboratory, with an emphasis on equipping the next generation of landowners, managers, and scientists with useful information.”



Randy W. DeYoung, Ph.D. is a perfect example. A Research Scientist and Professor at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute of Texas A&M University-Kingsville, DeYoung has worked on research projects on Foundation ranches for a decade. The studies range from a long-running deer capture-and-marking project, to analyses of how nilgai cross fences, to using eDNA to monitor the ephemeral appearance of sirens and black-spotted newts after heavy rains.

“The Foundation is built on pillars of teaching, outreach, and range stewardship,” DeYoung says, “and we share those missions. The Foundation also has collected so much data for so long, from mapping and GIS data to rainfall variation and wildlife population responses, and having access to those resources means we don’t have to spend our own time and money collecting. That’s an enormous benefit.”

Another core value of the East Foundation is to inspire and train the next generation of natural resource scientists. East Foundation ranches are heavily utilized by academic institutions, with a strong network in particular from the Texas A&M campuses in College Station and Kingsville. At any given time, as many as 20 graduate students are at work on the ranches. The Foundation funds many of those projects directly, but many more are financed by other interests. Another 20 to 30 projects might fit under that umbrella, for a total of 40 to 50 projects underway throughout a typical year.

Taking that knowledge beyond ranch borders is a critical component of the science program. “We train our students to communicate their research,” says Landon Schofield, Range and Wildlife Biologist for East Foundation. “It’s one thing to do great research, but it’s another thing to communicate it to people who are going to benefit from and work with the findings. There’s a real focus on applicable management studies and how to get the science to the people who are going to use it every day.” One of the most intriguing of the outreach emphases is the Foundation’s “Three-Minute Thesis” competition, with cash prizes for students who excel in explaining scientific processes and lessons learned to a non-academic audience.

It all underscores the fact that East Foundation’s bottom line is useful knowledge, says Campbell. “Our approach is that every cow on our land is in an experiment,” he says. “We don’t ignore economics, as economic models and information inform the scientific and technical bulletins we produce. But we are a living laboratory, with an emphasis on equipping the next generation of landowners, managers, and scientists with useful information.” 

About the Author

For more than three decades, T. Edward Nickens has reported on wildlife conservation, the outdoors, and sporting culture for some of the world’s most respected publications. A celebrated and prolific periodical and book author, he divides his time with family between Raleigh and Moorehead City, North Carolina.



Ocelots 2.0: South Texas as the Cradle of Recovery



To say that the Foundation’s properties are critical to bolstering ocelot populations is an understatement.

Fewer than 80 ocelots are known to exist in the United States, and more than 30 of those individuals have been documented with trail cameras on a single South Texas ranch: the East Foundation’s El Sauz Ranch near Port Mansfield.

Bringing back the ocelot will require years of research and effort, but at the most fundamental level, it will require more ocelots. Working with Ashley Reeves, a wildlife veterinarian pursuing a Ph.D. through the University of Tennessee, East Foundation is supporting an assisted reproduction effort that began in 2020 and has shown impressive results. By capturing male ocelots (no small task) and inserting catheters (no mean feat, either), researchers have been able to collect semen from eight adult males, and freeze the semen onsite using liquid nitrogen.

This material could form the basis for a network of zoos to create a breeding population of ocelots, which could bolster an experimental wild ocelot population in South Texas. Meanwhile, outfitting captured ocelots with GPS collars is helping scientists understand and identify which habitats could be most suitable for translocating animals. “Filling in the knowledge gaps is what we do,” explains Schofield. “And to play a significant role in the recovery of ocelots would be a very exciting way to use science to make a difference.”

6

Ranches

217,000

Acres

20+

Projects

600+

Species

10+

Partner Organizations

16+

Research Project Leads

100+

Students Involved

30+

Program/Project Alumni

Current Research Highlights

The primary purpose of our research program is to understand and improve the productivity and sustainability of native rangelands for both wildlife conservation and livestock production.

Our practical goal and desired outcome? Generate science-based, practical solutions to help ranchers and other landowners better conserve wildlife populations and habitat while also improving and sustaining livestock production.

To achieve that goal, the East Foundation's lands are operated as a working ranch, supported by a science team comprised of experts in their fields of study. On any given day, virtually year-round, we host researchers on our ranches who utilize our land as a working outdoor lab.

Through our various research projects, we create dynamic and collaborative partnerships with universities, their faculty, and students. This partner-based research model allows us to work collaboratively and helps us engage with and develop young, emerging scientists into knowledgeable and experienced future leaders. Below are just a few highlights of current research taking place on Foundation land.

WHITE-TAILED DEER CAPTURE AND RELEASE

White-tailed deer hunting and related habitat management investments provide significant recreational opportunity for hunters and important revenue for landowners, businesses, and the economy. With one of the largest known populations of wild and un hunted white-tailed deer populations in North America, the Foundation's ranches serve as a unique resource for research due to the large scale of our ranches and the unmanaged status of our deer populations.

The deer capture project began in the fall of 2011 as part of a long-term study. Annually, researchers capture deer on four of the six East Foundation ranches. Captures utilize undergraduate student volunteers from wildlife programs including Texas A&M-Kingsville, Texas A&M-College Station, Texas Tech, Sul Ross, Tarleton State, Texas State, and Stephen F. Austin, among others. The capture data have formed the basis for a doctoral dissertation, two master's theses, and numerous presentations.

The long-term study has:

- Quantified the influence of soil type on body mass and antler size
- Explored the influence of drought and rainfall on fawn recruitment, lactation, and stress hormones
- Investigated genetic similarities within and among populations

Student volunteers learn about the results of the research and applications related to deer ecology in South Texas. Students also interact with and learn from East Foundation and Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute staff and faculty, who are experts in their field.



Agricultural Research Organizations



Partnering with like-minded land grant colleges and universities

The East Foundation was the first organization in the United States to be officially designated as an Agricultural Research Organization (or ARO), and as such, is directly engaged in the continuous active conduct of agricultural research. As part of this designation, we partner with like-minded land grant colleges and universities including the Texas A&M University system, as well as the King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management and the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University – Kingsville. The Foundation also works with other universities across Texas and the United States.

COYOTES AND CATTLE INTERACTIONS

Coyotes are a common predator on ranches across South Texas. However, little is known about what motivates them to move and utilize space across rangelands. Common ranching practices may unknowingly place calves and deer fawns at risk of predation. Sound coyote management on South Texas ranches and elsewhere depends on better understanding coyote behavior.

East Foundation's unmanaged coyote population on the San Antonio Viejo Ranch presents the opportunity to generate data on coyote behavior and predation risks. We initiated a research project with Texas A&M AgriLife utilizing GPS collars to track coyote movements and collect data on:


- Coyote social dynamics – territorial versus transient animals
- Territory turnover or change over time
- Long distance movements of transient (non-territorial) animals
- Movements relative to livestock management practices

The goal is to determine how common wildlife and livestock management practices impact coyote behavior on rangelands, and better understand the interactions and impacts of coyotes on white-tailed deer. Ultimately, researchers will develop science-based recommendations to reduce the risk of livestock and wildlife predation by coyotes.

SOIL CARBON SAMPLING

To better understand how much additional carbon can be stored in the soil resulting from good grazing management on native rangelands, the Foundation is working in partnership with the King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management to develop and provide a “proof of sampling” concept that accurately estimates carbon values in soils – an important decision-making tool for landowners and managers interested in developing carbon markets. Twenty-four sampling locations are located within permanent grazing exclosures representing the different ecological sites that dominate the Foundation's Coloraditas Grazing Research and Demonstration Area.

Collected samples are sent to the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Soil, Water and Forage testing Laboratory, where they are tested for total organic carbon, total carbon, and a textural and mineral analysis.

Initial objectives are to determine soil carbon values and natural variability in grazed and ungrazed pastures, with further objectives to develop a robust sampling procedure to answer future questions related to how and why soils store carbon, how much they can store, and how South Texas ranchers can benefit from the rapidly developing carbon sequestration market. 





Developing the Next Generation of Leaders

Promoting the Advancement of
Land Stewardship through Education

By Katy Baldock



Clearly stated in its mission, one of the primary reasons for the East Foundation's existence is to educate future generations. Whether it's bringing local students to the San Antonio Viejo Ranch for hands-on learning or reaching people of all ages across the state through their newly developed virtual programs, the Foundation continues to find innovative ways to accomplish that mission.

From the beginning, the Foundation has focused on the value of outdoor learning experiences. Many of the Foundation's education programs target students in the Rio Grande Valley who have grown up in urban environments and otherwise may not have an opportunity to visit a working cattle ranch and learn about natural ecosystems through hands on experiences. By opening the gates to working East Foundation ranches that also serve as living laboratories, students develop an appreciation for the South Texas region and its abundant natural resources, learn about land stewardship practices, and develop conservation-minded leadership skills that will benefit the region and its communities in the future.

The primary education programs offered by the Foundation and its partners are:

- Behind the Gates
- Land Stewardship Ambassadors
- Land Stewardship Lab
- Wildlife by Design
- Stewarding Texas

A huge contributing factor to the success of the Foundation's education programs are the organizations and entities that it partners with. Carefully selecting partners that have similar missions and goals and that can contribute to the educational program curriculum drastically improves the impact of these programs. Education partners for in-person programs have included IDEA Public Schools, the Witte Museum, Texas Wildlife Association, and more.

"IDEA Camp RIO is honored to partner with the East Foundation in preparing the next generation of leaders from South Texas who are knowledgeable about natural resources to serve their communities, state, and the nation," said Al Lopez,

Acting Superintendent and Chief Executive Officer for IDEA Public Schools. "For the past six years, the East Foundation's support has been a vital part of IDEA's impact on over 17,000 students per year as they participate in Land Stewardship-based curriculum at Camp RIO."

In the 2019-2020 school year, East Foundation education programs reached more than 12,000 students in the classroom and welcomed over 2,800 students onto the land for Behind the Gates and 1,800-plus students for field lessons.

While hands-on learning experiences have been and continue to be a primary focus for the Foundation's education programs, 2020 posed undeniable challenges. The Foundation was forced to adapt in the same way countless other organizations and businesses across the country did — by transforming their field lessons into a virtual format.

By prerecording field lessons with subject-matter professionals and then coordinating the virtual events using a live host, the Foundation focused on five topics to develop into virtual lessons:

- A Look into Our Past: How South Texas Ranchlands Were Settled
- Who's Eating Who? Predator and Prey Relationships on the San Antonio Viejo Ranch
- Elusive Ocelots
- Land to Sea Stewardship
- Behind the Gates of a Working Cattle Ranch

As with the in-person programs, the Foundation partnered with organizations like The Museum of South Texas History, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, the Texas Zoo, and the UT-RGV Coastal Studies Lab to produce the virtual lessons.

"We took what we already had, we transformed it into a virtual format, and we highlighted the use of our partners," said Tina Buford, Director of Education for the East Foundation. "To be able to partner with like-minded organizations or entities to distribute that information further amplified the validity and impact of the content."

2019-2020 SCHOOL YEAR

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2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR

The Foundation's virtual programs reached almost 15,000 students across the state, resulting from 50 presentations given by educators.



The Foundation will always remain dedicated to providing in-the-field learning experiences, but it now recognizes the added benefits that can result from connecting with students virtually.

The Foundation will always remain an organization dedicated to providing in-the-field learning experiences, but it now recognizes the added benefits that can result from connecting with students virtually. Since the development of virtual programs, the Foundation has expanded its reach to students statewide and beyond rather than being limited only to South Texas communities. It has enabled the Land Stewardship Ambassador cohorts to connect with professionals from across the country, given teachers the opportunity to provide their students with TEKS-aligned lessons directly from experts, and allowed for the flexibility of hosting unique virtual events for the public, such as a Facebook Live event conducted in partnership with Florida's Archbold Biological Station. While virtual lessons will never replace the value of in-person, hands-on learning experiences, the East Foundation has welcomed the use of technology as a supplemental tool in its education programs.

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Another notable success of the past year is the expansion of the Land Stewardship Ambassador Program with the addition

of the Cameron County cohort, who joined students from San Antonio and Laredo.

"So now we have three different groups from three different communities that all have different viewpoints. When the Foundation brings these kids together, they're able to interact and share perspectives based on where they live and what they experience," said Buford. "It produces a very dynamic conversation when you bring the three groups together."

In the very near future, the East Foundation is looking forward to improving the experience for students participating in field lessons with the addition of a second education facility to supplement the existing one on the San Antonio Viejo Ranch. The new infrastructure on the El Sauz Ranch near Port Mansfield will include multiple large pavilions, designated walking trails, and supporting utilities constructed specifically for this learning experience. Rather than bringing portable structures onto the property and mowing pathways prior to hosting students, this facility's permanent structures will allow for safer, more efficient exploration of the surrounding area as well as provide shelter in the case of inclement weather.

In addition, a viewing platform will be built on the impressive dune overlooking the new facility, allowing students and visitors a 360-degree view of the coast, Port Mansfield, nearby ocelot habitat, native rangelands, and live sand dunes. “So, when we talk about the value of open space, they will be able to see for themselves that this open space is a working ranch that provides food for our citizens, but also provides critical habitat for a diversity of wildlife,” added Buford.

The El Sauz education facility is expected to be open to students by the end of the 2021 fall semester.

Looking forward, the East Foundation is eager to continue improving the quality of educational experiences on the ranches. By looking back on what has been done to date, evaluating the impacts of the programs – both short- and long-term, and determining future areas for improvement, the value of these unique educational experiences will only improve over time.

The East Foundation’s goal of fostering the next generation of South Texas leaders by educating them on the land is inspiring a greater appreciation for the natural world that will stick with these young students throughout their lives. By providing STEM-based (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), conservation-focused learning – in the field, in the classroom, and online, the East Foundation will continue to make strides in educating and inspiring future leaders for South Texas and beyond. [◇](#)

Our Education Sponsors

Financial Sponsors

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In-Kind Sponsors

Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute	Selah Bamberger Ranch Preserve
IDEA Public Schools Camp Rio Staff	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Game Wardens
Lamar Bruni Vergara Environmental Science Center	Texas Wildlife Association
Museum of South Texas History	Texas Zoo
U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service	The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Coastal Studies Lab
	The Witte Museum

About the Author

Katy Baldock is a photographer, designer, and writer with a passion for conservation, the outdoors, and visual storytelling. A proud Texas native residing in Austin, Katy works in film as well and has served as Associate Producer of *Deep in the Heart*, *The River and the Wall* and the 2019 Wild Texas Film Tour.

PRAISE FROM TEACHERS FOR BEHIND THE GATES

“This was an amazing opportunity for students and teachers to learn about our area in South Texas. It is a great experience for students of this age.”

“Presenters with personality and projection grab the students’ attention during the lessons.”

“Students had a better comprehension on certain TEKS by allowing them to have hands-on experience.”

COMMENTS FROM STUDENTS

“This was the best field trip we’ve ever had.”

“I want to learn more about endangered species in Texas.”

“Now I know where I want to go to college and what I want to do.”

“I can see myself doing something like this in my life.”



Telling Our Story

Promoting the advancement of land stewardship requires thoughtful collaboration with partners and effective communication of the values derived from our innovative ranching, science, and educational programs.

Opening our ranch gates to a broader world allows us to tell the story that ranching and the conservation of wildlife and natural resources are, at their best, intertwined, and ensures our efforts will inform land stewards and managers across South Texas and beyond – today, and for generations yet to come.

Our task? To use our living, working laboratory to educate and inform. Our tools? We share our unique story through mediums that matter – print, web, social media, film, and more.

NEWSLETTERS

Our quarterly newsletters for staff, partners, and friends of the Foundation provide regular updates on our operations, projects, staff and ranch happenings, partners, and programs. Subscribe to get the newsletter on our website at eastfoundation.net.

MANAGEMENT BULLETINS

Based on our research, East Foundation Management Bulletins are geared toward landowners and managers that have practical knowledge and experience with ranching and wildlife management and are looking for applicable, science-based information they can put to use on their own land. Topics include bobwhite quail management, white-tailed deer survey methods, cattle fever tick management and nilgai antelope, optimal cattle grazing strategies and drought, coyote management, and prescribed burning as a rangeland management tool.

EASTFOUNDATION.NET

The East Foundation website is the go-to resource for all things related to the Foundation and our work. Partners, supporters, educators, media, and the public can learn about our history and mission, our ranches, our team, and our programs and publications. In 2020, the website had more than 55,000 page views, and over 24,000 website visitors – 84 percent of whom were new visitors to the site last year. For 2021, eastfoundation.net has re-launched as an all-new site featuring a new look, fresh new content, expanded photography and video resources, mobile optimization, and an improved user experience.



SOCIAL MEDIA

The East Foundation's suite of social media platforms provides timely and engaging information about our operations, programs, events, science outcomes, and current issues.

Through our primary platforms Facebook and Instagram, the Foundation promotes awareness of range and wildlife conservation issues, explains the practical benefits of our research program, promotes private land stewardship through education and outreach, and advocates for sustainable, efficient, and profitable livestock production.

Find and follow us directly on Facebook and Instagram or follow our social media links on eastfoundation.net.

FILM

Few mediums fully capture the complexity and nuance of a story as well as film. The Foundation's unique assets and mission provide ample opportunity for filmmakers to weave tales capturing the essence of South Texas rangelands, wildlife,

and culture. The Foundation's mission, programs, and natural resources were captured on film several times over the past year, exposing the East Foundation brand and mission to thousands of people across Texas and the U.S.



American Ocelot

Providing an intimate glimpse into the life of one of most mysterious and endangered wild cat species, *American Ocelot* made its fall 2020 premiere in Austin, Texas, with plans for expanded production and distribution as a full-length documentary on PBS Nature in 2022. Through stunningly beautiful images and video never-before captured, the film tells the story of the few remaining ocelots in South Texas, including those found on our El Sauz Ranch near Port Mansfield, Texas. The film highlights private land stewardship and habitat conservation as well as issues related to the Endangered Species Act, and calls viewers to action in aiding ocelot recovery in South Texas.

West of Texas

Going much farther and deeper than a typical story of the hunt, *West of Texas* focuses on the lifestyle, adventures, and conservation principles that make up the complex fabric of our modern sporting community. In 2020, the East Foundation hosted and partnered with Stephen West to bring viewers outdoor adventure while demonstrating how hunting, rangeland management, and wildlife conservation can work together. One episode filmed on our El Sauz Ranch covered the complex dynamics of controlling cattle fever ticks and managing nilgai antelope populations.

Ocotillo Films

Ocotillo Films, sponsored by Desert Door Distillery, filmed during spring 2021 on the San Antonio Viejo Ranch to capture forever the hard work, skill, and dedication of cowboys Timo and Miguel Rodriguez – brothers who have been cowboying together on East Foundation ranches for close to 40 years. Debuting in August of 2021, the film premieres in Texas cities including Austin, San Antonio, Dallas, and Houston. Follow East Foundation social media for event information. [!\[\]\(3342c215b2a8b663596a81468d5dc314_img.jpg\)](#)

Our People

Just as every ranch survives and thrives based on the passion and perseverance of those stewards who work the land and tend the cattle, every successful organization is only as good as its people.

2020 was a challenging year for the Foundation and our partners. However, a team of exceptional employees came together and took that challenge head-on. Perseverance in the face of adversity will meet our land stewardship mission today, tomorrow, and for years to come. Below are highlights on the foundation's recent hires and promotions, as well as news regarding much-deserved staff recognition and retirements.

NEW EMPLOYEES



Zane Herrin

June 2020

As Director of Cattle Operations Zane Herrin leads our team of ranching

professionals and directs and executes the Foundation's cattle and rangeland management strategies. Zane comes from a ranching background. He was raised in Big Spring, Texas where his family owns and operates a cow/calf operation throughout west Texas. He has a B.S. in Wildlife Management from Tarleton State University and a M.S. in Ranch Management from the King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management at Texas A&M University – Kingsville.



James Powell

September 2020

James Powell is the East Foundation's Director of Communications

and is responsible for promoting our mission and programs. James brings senior-level experience to the East team to expand awareness about the cultural, ecological, and economic benefits resulting from a strong private land stewardship ethic. He has spent his career communicating the importance

of land, wildlife, and resource conservation on behalf of organizations including Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and the Lower Colorado River Authority. A former president of the Professional Outdoor Media Association, James holds a B.A. in Communication from Texas Tech University, and a B.S. in Wildlife Science from New Mexico State University.



Sarah Herrin

December 2020

Sarah Herrin is the East Foundation's newest professional

Educator. She is responsible for delivering natural resource education to the communities of South Texas, both virtually and at the San Antonio Viejo Ranch. Sarah has a B.S. in Wildlife Management from Tarleton State University. Prior to working at the Foundation, Sarah worked with Bear Creek Ranch caring for and managing their white-tailed deer herd and with the Texas Wildlife Association's Texas Youth Hunting Program.



Eddie Reyna

January 2021

As the Area Foreman for the East Foundation, Eddie Reyna

is responsible for cattle inventory management, branding, weaning, and all day-to-day livestock management responsibilities. Eddie holds a B.S. in Agriculture Science from Texas A&M University-Kingsville. He has worked in ranching for Cargill Cattle Feeders in Dalhart and Bovina, and as a Unit Manager for the Norias Division of the King Ranch.



Abe Woodard

April 2021

Abe Woodard is a Research Associate for the East Foundation. Although Abe

is a recent hire, he has worked with us as a graduate student for several years. Currently, he is completing his dissertation and publishing findings from the first four years of the sustainable quail harvest project. Abe studies the impacts of harvest on a northern bobwhite population on our Buena Vista and San Antonio Viejo ranches. He has a B.S. in Wildlife Biology from the University of Rio Grande in Ohio and a M.S. from Texas A&M University. Abe has worked for Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University-Kingsville as a Research Assistant. He was a Natural Resource Manager and Wildlife Biologist for Deseret Ranches and a Wildlife Biologist for the Mota Bonita Lease on the Encino Division of the King Ranch.



Garrett Stribling

June 2021

Garrett Stribling recently joined the East Foundation as a Unit Foreman. He

works primarily on day-to-day livestock and rangeland management and assists the Area Foreman and Director of Livestock Operations with additional projects. Garrett holds a B.S. in Animal Science from Texas A&M University and a M.S. in Ranch Management from the King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management at Texas A&M University-

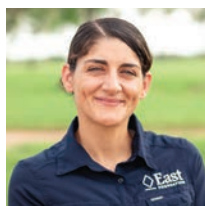
Kingsville. His cattle experience includes working as the Manager of Cattle Operations for 44 Farms in Cameron, Texas.

PROMOTIONS



Cindy Pavlicek was recently promoted from Director of HR & Administrative Services to Chief of Staff for the

East Foundation and continues to offer an extensive background in business management, HR and benefits, and high-level executive support. Working closely with CEO Neal Wilkins, she is responsible for managing benefits administration, maintaining employee records, assisting with recruiting efforts, developing efficient office processes and procedures, and planning office events. Cindy has extensive experience and expertise in the legal and human resources management fields. Prior to joining the East Foundation, Cindy spent 12 years working for a top property tax consulting firm, 16 years working for several prominent law firms in San Antonio, and seven years working at the Austin Bar Association.



Andrea Montalvo recently assumed the role of Research Scientist and Hebbronville Site Director.

In addition to her new Hebbronville location duties, Andrea is responsible for conducting research projects related to wildlife and rangeland ecology as well as assisting our research partners. Originally from Massachusetts, she earned a B.S. in Wildlife Biology from the University of Vermont. Andrea then moved to South Texas for an internship in wildlife management and stayed to pursue graduate degrees. Andrea completed an M.S. in Range and Wildlife Management and a Ph.D. in Wildlife



Awards and Recognitions



The Rotary Club of Corpus Christi
HARVEY WEIL
Sportsman Conservationist Award



Harvey Weil Award – April 17, 2021

The Rotary Club of Corpus Christi honored Janell Kleberg as Conservationist of the Year and Neal Wilkins as Professional Conservationist of the Year during the Harvey Weil Sportsman Conservationist Award Dinner on Saturday, April 17th, in Sinton, Texas. The event raised money for an endowment funding grants that support research and education related to the conservation of natural resources.

The mission of the Harvey Weil Sportsman Conservationist Award is to support research and education in the conservation of natural resources. Since 1998, more than \$1 million in grant funds have been awarded. Funds are awarded to projects involving marine and wildlife species and their habitats, and to issues advocating recreational hunting and fishing.

Science at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. Andrea's research has included aspects of wildlife disease, population sampling and estimation, and rangeland survey and assessment. Andrea will continue to monitor wildlife populations and vegetation as a part of the East Foundation's ongoing long-term studies.

at which time the RCEMT conveyed its assets to the East Foundation. Chris was then promoted to Director of Field Operations and Security Management. He directed daily field operations regarding security and infrastructure matters, and was responsible for the safety, accountability and security of the Foundation's ranch assets, employees, and research personnel.

RETIREMENT



Chris Huff retired in 2020 after an invaluable career with the East Foundation. Chris was originally hired by the

Robert C. East Management Trust – 1995 (RCEMT) in June 2007 and served as the Operation's Manager until October 2010,

Prior to his employment with the Foundation, Chris served as a Captain Game Warden for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. During his 33 years as a game warden, Chris spent countless hours patrolling the East properties, which led to his intimate personal knowledge of them. Chris is a lifelong resident of Hebbronville, continues to live in the area, and remains a close friend and asset for the Foundation.

Thank You To Our Partners

East Foundation engages with like-minded partners, both at the individual and organizational level, to fulfill our mission. Our partners consistently demonstrate excellence in land stewardship and education regarding the conservation of our natural resources.







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eastfoundation.net