

HAPPY NEW YEAR

2024



January 2024

Newsletter

friends of
LAGUNA ATASCOSA
national wildlife refuge

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JANUARY EVENTS

THINGS TO DO



Wild Friends Storytime, The Tortoise and the Jackrabbit

Fri, Jan 5 11am-12pm at the Visitor Center

Wed, Jan 31 6pm-7pm at the Laguna Vista Library

Friends Science Series: Outdoor Skills

Thu, Jan 9 1pm-3pm



Bike with Mark

Sat, Jan 13 8am-10am Wildlife Drive

Say, Jan 27 8am-10am Bahia Grande

Naturally Native Garden Team (monthly volunteer event)

Fri, Jan 19 8am-10am

Special Veteran's Bird & Nature Hike

Thu, Jan 25 10am-12pm

Bird & Nature Walks with Mark Warner

Jan every Friday & Saturday Morning 9am-10am



REGISTER: <https://flanwr.org>

Please note events are separated into General, Volunteer or Membership functions. See the home page for a full list and the appropriate link to register. Membership exclusive events require login to view.

Check out Mark Salvatore's [Blog](#) on Biking the Refuge!

**Join him for a ride at the Wildlife Drive & Bahia every month.
Fills up fast, register early.**



Another successful TXLA CBC!

Our deepest gratitude to the dedicated birders that serve! Your time & talents are crucial to this citizen science program.

It was a record year! more details and photos soon.

Refuge Conservation Science



4 October 2023

[FREE-RANGING OCELOTS \(*LEOPARDUS PARDALIS*\): HEMATOLOGY AND SERUM CHEMISTRY REFERENCE VALUES](#)

Thomas W. deMaar, Linda L. Laack, Jody L. Mays, Mitch A. Sternberg, Hilary M. Swarts, Jeremie Korchia

Our local Ocelot team authored the article and published it in the Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine in 2023. The study establishes reference intervals (RI) for hematology and serum chemistry in free-ranging ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*) in the United States. Blood samples were collected between 1990 and 2020 yielding 139 blood samples from sixty-seven individual ocelots. The team collected blood samples from live-trapped and anesthetized ocelots during census and radiotelemetry studies. The study also presented a summary of published RIs for various species of wild felids.

THIS IS A BIG DEAL!

Reference intervals (RI) are essential for clinical laboratory test interpretation and patient care. Without the accompanying normal RI for comparison, a lab result is just a number. RIs provide a range of values for a laboratory test result that is expected to be seen in a healthy population. RIs are used to interpret laboratory data accurately and to link that data to clinical action. Typically, an RI refers to the central 95% of the reference population of subjects. Previous statistical analysis of blood normal values relied on simple averages. However natural variations cause 5% of all results from "healthy" individuals to fall outside of the average and would flag as being "abnormal".

Establishing RIs is a complex process that requires a large sample size of healthy individuals, accurate measurement methods, repeatable protocols, and appropriate statistical analysis. In wild animals this process is difficult requiring sustained access to acquire sufficient samples, faithful adherence to collections protocols, and persistence. However, once established, RIs diagnose and monitor diseases, assess treatment efficacy, predict disease outcomes, and illuminate population health status.

Enjoy the full published document with the link above.



This is an urgent request for your help. As you may know, our refuge is home to more than 400 bird species, including endangered whooping cranes and aplomado falcons. It also protects over 100,000 acres of coastal prairie, wetlands, and thorn scrub, which provide vital ecosystem services and recreation opportunities for our community.

However, much of our refuge is not accessible by private cars, and the loss of government funding for vehicles has left us severely limited in our ability to educate and inspire visitors about the magnificent habitat and wildlife. That's why we need your help to purchase a van that will allow us to resume habitat and birding events, which have been suspended for over a year due to the lack of transportation.

A van is a big deal for us. It will enable us to reach more people, especially students, seniors, and low-income families, who otherwise would not be able to visit our refuge. It will also allow us to showcase the diversity and beauty of our refuge, and to raise awareness and appreciation for the conservation challenges we face. A van will also help us reduce our environmental impact, as we will be able to transport more people with fewer trips and less fuel consumption.

Our goal is to raise \$70,000 by June 30, 2024, to purchase a 15-passenger van that meets our needs and standards. Every dollar you donate will go directly to this fund, and we will provide you with regular updates and reports on our progress and expenses. We have already secured \$7,000 from the Walk for the Wild Fundraiser, and we are confident that with your support and grants, we can reach our target and bring back our habitat and birding events as soon as possible.

Please consider making a donation today to help us bring back our habitat and birding events. You can donate online at our website, by mail, or by phone. Please specify your donation goes toward the van and we will reserve it for that goal. No amount is too small or too large, and every donation is tax-deductible and greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your support and generosity. We hope to see you on our van soon!

Creature Feature



Nilgai: The Blue Bulls of Laguna Atascosa

Laguna Atascosa NWR is a wildlife haven in southern Texas, where you can find a variety of habitats and species, from wetlands and waterfowl to thorn scrub and ocelots. But one of the most distinctive and abundant animals in the refuge is the nilgai, a large antelope native to India and Pakistan.

What are nilgai?

Nilgai are the largest Asian antelopes, standing about 4 feet tall at the shoulder and weighing up to 600 pounds. They have a stocky body, a long neck, and short horns that are present only in males. Their coat color varies from gray to brown, with a bluish tinge that gives them the nickname of "blue bulls". They also have white markings on their face, chest, and legs.

Nilgai are herbivores that feed on grasses, shrubs, and fruits. They can survive in arid and semi-arid environments, and can go without water for long periods. They are mostly active during the day, and form loose groups of females and young, or solitary males. They have a lifespan of about 10 to 15 years in the wild.

How did nilgai get to Texas?

Nilgai were introduced to Texas in the 1920s and 1930s, when a few individuals were brought from India as exotic game animals by ranchers and hunters. They escaped or were released from captivity, and quickly adapted to the Texas landscape. They found suitable habitat and food sources, and faced few natural predators or competitors. They also reproduced rapidly, with females giving birth to one or two calves every year.

By the 1950s, nilgai had established a feral population in southern Texas, especially in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. They spread to neighboring areas, including Laguna Atascosa NWR, where they are now one of the most common large mammals.

How is the refuge managing the nilgai population?

The refuge is implementing various strategies to manage the nilgai population and reduce its negative impacts. One of the main methods is hunting, which is allowed for nilgai and feral hogs during archery and firearm seasons. Hunters can help control the population growth and provide funding for conservation through the sale of Federal Duck Stamps and hunting permits. Hunting also helps maintain the genetic diversity and health of the nilgai population, by removing the weaker or diseased individuals.

If you want to see the nilgai and other wildlife in person, you can visit the refuge and explore its trails, observation decks, and visitor center. You can also join guided tours, bird walks, and other programs offered by FRIENDS volunteers. You can also participate in hunting, fishing, photography, and other recreational activities, as long as you follow the rules and regulations of the refuge.

Nilgai are fascinating and formidable animals that have become an integral part of the Laguna Atascosa NWR. By learning more about them and the refuge, you can help ensure their coexistence and harmony with the native species and the environment.

The dawn of a new day reveals the beauty of nature's bounty, as mushrooms emerge from Nilgai dung.



Laguna Blecuna

For Want of a Physical Location

David & Marianne Book

view the [BLOG](#)



Did you get all your packages delivered and holiday greetings mailed in time? Did you lose anything to porch pirates? You think you have trouble with mail delivery? Check this out. In December, 2002, new Refuge manager, John Wallace, checked mileage from the refuge to several rural route mail boxes on nearby Ted Hunt and Buena Vista roads. There needed to be some resolution to a prolonged problem getting personal mail delivered by the U.S. Postal Service directly to the refuge. The major problem: the refuge had a post office box seventeen miles away in Rio Hondo but no "physical address." Without a physical address, it is nearly impossible to get anyone to believe that you even exist.

In an interview several years ago, Manager Wallace imagined this scenario: "Help, my husband is having a heart attack, and the house is on fire! What? Where am I? Oh, just drive 14 miles east of Rio Hondo, Texas on Route 106 until you get to Buena Vista Road. Turn north on Buena Vista Road and drive three miles north. Look for the burning house and I will be outside in my blue nightgown waving my arms wildly." To exacerbate the problem, the refuge got its mail at the Rio Hondo Post Office, and it was against USFW regulations to have personal mail coming to the same post office. However, the refuge is located within the rural route zone of the Los Fresnos Post Office. Past contacts with the two postmasters resulting in pointing at the other as the solution to the problem. The Los Fresnos postmaster would not agree to deliver mail to the refuge office because it would extend his route one tenth of a mile from the five mile limit from the last existing mailbox on the route. Regulations are regulations, after all. The matter was resolved when Wallace presented the Los Fresnos postmaster with all documentation required, adding these words. "We families and multiple voters were being treated as second-class citizens and that I would have to contact my elected representatives if they wanted U.S. citizens, U.S. government employees, and voters deprived of mail delivery over one-tenth of a mile." Within two weeks, mail delivery to the refuge began. Sometimes a little threat goes a long way.

OPERATIONAL HOURS

See you at the Refuge!

Visitor's Center

Monday - Saturday
7:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Nature Store

Monday - Saturday
7:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Refuge Access

Sunday - Saturday
Sunrise to Sunset

SUPPORT US

[Save Texas Ocelots](#)
[License Plates](#)



[Get Yours Today!](#)

The Nature Store



[GO SHOPPING!](#)

[Adopt an Ocelot](#)



[Adopt Here!](#)





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