

# Polk County AgriLife Extension Beef/Forage & Natural Resources Newsletter

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## Local Programs

10/17, Polk County Game Management Series, Waterfowl

10/24 Beef 101, Predator Management

11/8 Fall Wildlife Habitat Workshop

11/22 Pesticide CEU Conference

12/13 Beef & Forage Workshop

## Additional AgriLife Programs

11/18 Cow Country Congress

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October 2019

## Bluestems: The good, the bad, and the ugly

If you have every attended any lecture or workshop on wildlife management, you have likely heard that bluestem grasses are important for wildlife. However, not all bluestems are created equal and in fact many of the grasses we call bluestems are not even related to each other. Many landowners are unaware of this difference and believe all bluestems are created equal.

If you are managing your property for wildlife such as ground nesting birds, you should strive for “good” species of bluestem which can include big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) and little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*). Little bluestem and big bluestem can both provide excellent cover for ground nesting birds and are good forage plants for livestock. These two grasses when managed properly can provided cattle up to 4,000 lbs. per acre dry forage a year. Big bluestem is easily recognizable by its turkey foot seed head. During early summer, little bluestem crude protein levels can reach 8-9 percent but can become as high as 12 percent. Both grasses produce culms or seed heads during late summer and fall. Here in east Texas, a unique variety of little bluestem called pinehill bluestem has become adapted to the sandy hills commonly found throughout our area.

The next species of bluestems may be called the “bad” species as they generally have less wildlife value, do not produce as much forage, and are rated poor for livestock grazing value. These bluestems our bushy bluestem (*Andropogon glomeratus*), splitbeard bluestem (*Andropogon ternarius*), broomsedge bluestem (*Andropogon virginicus*), and silver bluestem (*Bothriochloa laguroides*). Distinct from the rest of this group, silver bluestem is rated as being fair grazing for livestock. As a land manager you should obviously strive for the “good” species of bluestems. But sometimes you must work with what is present on the site and should strive for performing good wildlife habitat techniques and not worrying about the presence of “bad” bluestems. Typically, these “bad” bluestems are found more on disturbed sites, waste sites, old crop fields, overgrazed pastures, invading hay fields, and clear-cut sites.

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Lastly, is the “ugly” bluestems and one species claims this title; King Ranch or KR bluestem (*Bothriochloa ischaemum*). KR bluestem is invasive, can outcompete our native bluestems, and has a lesser value to wildlife than the “good” bluestems. Sadly, eradication options require intensive management, is expensive, and can still fail. Prescribed fire typically used to promote growth of “good” bluestems will not have any negative impact on KR bluestem stands. It should be noted KR bluestem is rated fair in value for livestock grazing.

After reviewing the bluestems, you may feel overwhelmed with ID and distinguishing between the good, the bad, and the ugly. Most of these species are easily recognizable with a little practice and sample grasses are available at the extension office for your reference.



Little Bluestem



Bushy Bluestem



King Ranch Bluestem

### Polk County Game Management Series, Waterfowl, October 17th

This series will focus on increasing the knowledge of game management practices for landowners, hunters, and wildlife managers. October 17<sup>th</sup> will focus on waterfowl biology and management. The program will start at 10:00 a.m. at the AgriLife Extension Office meeting room. Cost is free, but **please RSVP to the extension office by October 11<sup>th</sup>**

### Cow Country Congress, October 18<sup>th</sup>

A multi county program that will take place at Stalwart Ranch in Crockett. Topics will range from bio security to weaning and marketing. Cost is **\$20 if registered before October 11<sup>th</sup>**. For more information call 936-544-7502. Online registration is available at <https://houstoncountyextension.wufoo.com/forms/cow-country-congress-participant-registration/>

### Beef 101, Predator Management, October 24<sup>th</sup>

We will conclude the Beef 101 seminar series with a discussion on predators and management in beef cattle operations. Seminar will start at 6:30 at the extension office meeting room with light refreshments. **1 CEU will be available. Please RSVP to the extension office by October 21<sup>st</sup>.**

### Fall Wildlife Habitat Workshop, November 8<sup>th</sup>

This all day workshop will include both classroom sessions and in field demonstrations. Wide range of wildlife topics will be covered including food plots, economics of timber and wildlife management, and yaupon control. **2 CEU will be available for applicator licenses.** The workshop will take place at First Baptist Church in Livingston with registration starting at 7:30. Lunch provided. **Cost is \$20 and please RSVP to the extension office by November 1<sup>st</sup>.**

### Pesticide CEU Conference, November 22<sup>nd</sup>

Our annual pesticide certification and re-certification course will be held at the First Baptist Church in Livingston. Registration will begin at 8:00 and lunch will be provided. Cost is \$45 for re-certification course and \$70 for certification. **5 CEU will be available in the re-certification course. Please RSVP to the extension office by November 8<sup>th</sup>.**

### Beef and Forage Workshop, December 13th

This program is still in the planning stages so be looking for more information to come.



**October 2019**

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## Management Tips

- Don't forget to take your soil samples this fall and winter. You should take your soil sample during the same time from year to year for better comparison of results.
- Applying lime in the fall allows time for soil pH to be raised before the growing season.
- If you have a pond with a total alkalinity below 20 ppm an application of lime should be applied between the months of November to January. This will increase fish production.
- <http://texasforestinfo.tamu.edu/> is a great resource for forestry information both private and commercial.
- Draw down you ponds 1-3 feet in November and refill before March. Draw downs can help to kill problematic weeds and concentrate forage for bass.
- Keep an eye out for fall armyworms. For more information on ID and management contact the extension office.
- Keep records of deer harvested this season to allow you to better manage your herd.

### Black Vulture Predation of Livestock

Vultures play a vital role in ecosystems by cleaning up animal carcasses. For the most part vultures should be left alone and allowed to perform their gruesome, but essential role. However, there is a growing trend of vultures coming into conflict with humans. These conflicts can occur in both urban and rural settings.

Two species of vultures can be found in the U.S. Turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura*) can be found throughout the country, while black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) concentrate in the southeastern part of the country including Texas. Turkey vultures have a red head compared to black vultures which have gray heads with a white patch near the end of the wings. Both species are scavengers, however black vultures have been known to attack and predate on live animals. For this reason, black vultures can be a concern for livestock producers especially in our part of the state.

Vultures are a protected species and the birds, nests, and chicks cannot be killed or destroyed. However, there are several management options including obtaining a depredation permit, harassment methods such as air cannons and screamers, animal husbandry, and use of real or constructed effigies (sculptures to replicate dead vultures). If you are having trouble with black vulture predation contact the extension office and we can help you get in contact with the appropriate wildlife specialist to assist you in developing a management plan.