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San Jacinto County Agricultural and Natural Resources Newsletter

NEWS TO USE

March 2003

Hello everyone!!! I hope winter has not been too hard on everyone and you still have enough hay in the barn for another month. Bud break and sprouting seems to be taking a little longer this year. So with this, you still have a little time to finish pruning trees, but you must be quick.

This newsletter is coming out a little quicker than normal, but I wanted to remind everyone about the spring clinics that are quickly approaching. There is also some additional information contained that I feel is very useful. I hope you enjoy this abbreviated version of **NEWS TO USE** and your next one will be to you in mid May.

Spring Clinics Scheduled

Thursday, March 20, 2003

beginning at **1:00 pm** at the Annex in Coldspring will be a pond/wetland clinic. At 1:15 pm we will leave the Annex and travel 1 ½ miles to the clinic site. This site has 3 impoundments of various sizes with 3 different problems.

For the clinic bring all questions you have, water samples from your ponds and note taking material. Free water test for your pond will be available. The speaker will be Dr. Mike Masser, TAMU Fisheries and Wildlife Specialist. If you need any other information call 936-653-2396. There will be 2 CEU's available.

Thursday, March 27, 2003

beginning at **1:00 pm** will be a Forage Field Day. We will meet at the Annex and then travel to Coldspring High School to observe

forage research plots then on to a second site to observe a truly unique 150 acre pasture. This location has 3 different soil make-ups. The location is unimproved. We will go through every step in improving this location, including when to spray and how to ID insects.

Speakers will be Dr. David Bade and Dr. Carlos Bogran. There will be 3 CEU's available. Call 936-653-2396 if you have any questions.

Saturday, March 29, 2003

beginning at **9:00 am** at the San Jacinto County Fairgrounds will be a Livestock clinic on injection sites. Dr. Buddy Faires from TAMU Veterinary Medicine will begin with a talk on herd health. This is very helpful to inform us when to vaccinate to get the most for our money.

Billie Jo Schiel of Fort Dodge will be here to show the significance on injection sites. Livestock animals will be injected with dye to show the travel routes of vaccines through the body. Also how improper injections can be harmful to the meat. I would like to see all of you with Livestock at this clinic due to its importance. There will be 1 CEU available. We will break for lunch from 12:00-1:00 pm. There will be a lunch available at the Fairgrounds for \$6.00. If you would like more details please call 936-653-2396.

Each of these three clinics will have great amounts of valuable information for

all who attend. I know there is a clinic for you and we will see you there.

Strange Acting Birds...Our office, as well as other TDH regional offices, has been receiving several calls about dead birds—mostly robins, but we have also had reports of dead cardinals. Some theories regarding these bird deaths mentioned fermented berries consumed by the birds. However, a recent conversation with a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) representative indicated that the berries may have some impact, but they are not believed to be the major cause of the deaths. The TPWD staff continues to study the deaths and to work with laboratory resources and other consultants.

Today I received a copy of an email from a TPWD person concerning the die-off. I am sharing excerpts of the email for your information. Please note that I chopped segments out of the email to share with you. It is not a verbatim copy. Here is the excerpt:

The main “odd behavior” I have been observing in robins here is that they appear “lethargic”. By this I mean that you can walk almost up to them before they fly away. They just aren’t as alert or “flighty” as birds usually are—they don’t seem to want to fly. Some citizens have reported this same observation and that the birds look “puffed out”. Some citizens have been reporting birds just falling off of roofs or tree limbs and hitting the ground (not necessarily killed by the fall). One woman this morning called to report large numbers of robins feeding on berries in her yard and observing a bird falling out of the flock and sort of staggering around.

The dead robins I counted for the initial investigation were in an urban area (neighborhood near a hospital). They were all over sidewalks, roads, in yards etc. Not necessarily distributed near feeders or water or anything. When I went back in the evening, the area was receiving thousands of robins flocking in to roost in trees. I think that is why there was such a large number dead (I estimated 200 conservatively)

concentrated in a 5 city block area (roosting area); it is also why I wanted to have them tested for disease. I have since seen dead robins in various areas of town (smaller numbers). The reports we are getting are from both urban and suburban areas and do not seem to be associated with any particular landscape feature.

Theory, but NOT proven. This is not a TPWD diagnosis—just a POSSIBLE explanation:

The robins are here in unusually large numbers and earlier than usual, and their migration has been interrupted. They may just not have enough energy to meet their requirements and deal with cold; if they are eating irregularly this can be stressful and they can die of hypoglycemia fairly rapidly. Fermented or toxic berries have been discussed; and we can’t rule out that this is happening in some locations. It doesn’t seem a likely explanation for all of the birds dying from Dallas to Gonzales, and both amateur and professional observers are not reporting “drunken bird” behavior; Dr. Wigle also said that when he has made this diagnosis in Cedar Waxwings, they had berries in them (and none of our 4 did). Someone asked if the birds had been tested for metals, and I don’t think we have. So maybe we should consider that. We can’t rule out that something happened in their winter areas prior to coming here; also there are undoubtedly other diseases we haven’t looked at.

If we (TPWD) have to give a recommendation, I would recommend that people leave sick birds alone. If they must pick up a dead bird, use a couple of plastic bags to avoid touching it and dispose of it in an outside trash container or throw it out in the weeds or whatever (common sense approach should be advocated).

My thanks to our colleagues at TPWD for sharing this information concerning their ongoing investigation. It is obvious that they do not have an answer to the deaths. The information they have shared is to help us deal with our citizens and clients.

Bass Fishing... San Marcos- If having excellent bass fishing in a private pond or lake is a goal, missing Bass 101 March 28-29 at the Activity Center here is not an option.

That's according to Dr. Billy Higginbotham, Texas Cooperative Extension wildlife specialist.

"If you've been looking for information on how to best manage ponds and lakes for better bass fishing, you'll find the latest information at this course," said Higginbotham, who with Dr. Michael Masser, Extension fisheries specialist, is coordinating the conference.

The statewide workshop will be co-hosted by Texas A&M University's department of wildlife and fisheries sciences, Extension and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Pre-registration by March 14 is \$75 per person or \$125 after that date and at the door.

"Private pond owners who attend will benefit from learning techniques to manage their ponds, lakes and reservoirs for better bass fishing," said Masser. "Participants will hear speakers well known for their expertise in fish pond management."

A tour of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department-A.E. Wood Fish Hatchery will be available before the workshop. The program starts with talks on pond ecology and pond renovation techniques mid-afternoon on March 28. That day will end with social, dinner and a panel discussion on improving fishing in ponds.

Experts on other aspects of managing private waters for better fishing will speak March 29. Included in the topics will be water quality, stocking and management strategies, improving existing ponds, aquatic vegetation management, troubleshooting problems, and an ask the experts panel.

Among the speakers scheduled are Bill Deauman of U.S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resource Conservation Service; Paul Dorsett of Total Lake Management; Gereald Kurten, Mark Webb,

and Rick Ott of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department; Stan Smith of Aquatic Management Services; Bill Wingo of Magnolia Fisheries; Bob Lusk of Texoma Hatchery; Malcolm Johnson of Johnson Lake Management; Barry Smith of American Sportfish; Allen Rudd of Lone Star Lake Management; and Rich Noble of North Carolina State University.

Also speaking will be Masser and Higginbotham; Ken Hasson and Patricia Varner of Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Lab; and Jan Loven of USDA-Wildlife Management Service.

Three continuing education units for private, commercial and non-commercial pesticide applicators recertification will be offered to participants. A trade show will run throughout the event, and exhibitors may reserve space for \$200 per booth.

Participants will receive the program proceedings with extensive pond management information. To register or for further information, contact Masser at (979) 845-7473 or mmasser@wfscgate.tamu.edu or Higginbotham at (903) 834-6191 or b-higginbotham@tamu.edu.

Mosquito trapping... This message is going to some people not directly involved in mosquito surveillance. However, you may know a person who needs this information and who will not receive it if you do not tell them about it. Please share this message as you think appropriate.

Last fall counties and cities were invited to apply for mosquito trapping grants from TDH. Several jurisdictions in East Texas applied. Below is the list of jurisdictions that received grant awards. If your name is not on this list, and you really want to participate in doing mosquito surveillance in your community, call Alice or me. We may be able to find some funds to purchase traps for you.

On April 15, beginning at 9:00 am and going into the afternoon, Alice and I plan to host a mosquito trapping seminar in Tyler at the RTDC (It now has a new name-call if you need directions) on the west loop.

At the seminar, we will discuss trapping and deliver the traps that come with the grant (assuming they have reached us by that time).

Chemical Collection... There will be a free pesticide collection and disposal site set up at the Sons of Herman Hall in Giddings. This will take place Monday, April 14, 2003 from 8am-1pm.

Aaron Sumrall

San Jacinto County-CEA Agriculture

Educational programs of the Texas Cooperative Extension are open to all citizens without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

The Texas A&M University of System, U.S. Department of Agriculture and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating