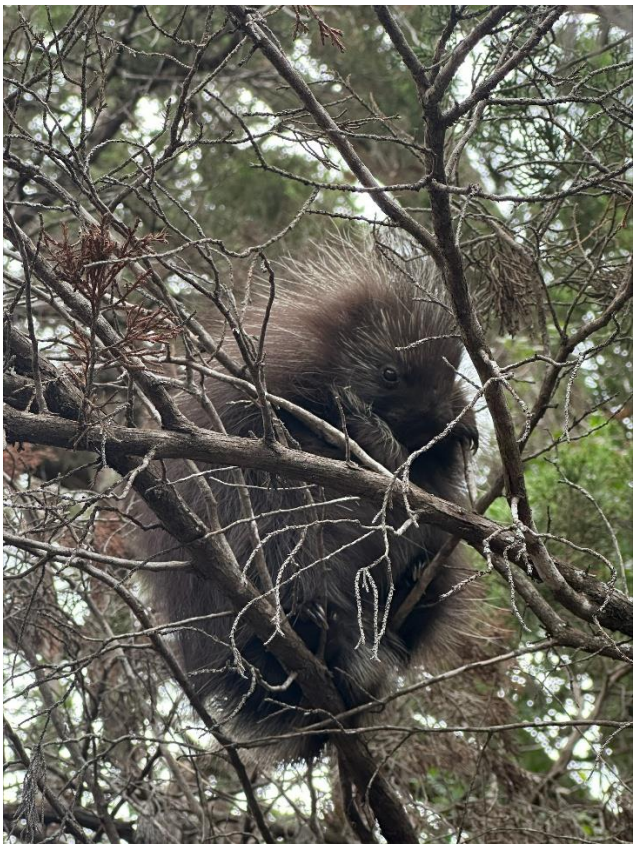
FY 2025 Summary of Wildlife Management Activities on

Travis County-managed Tracts of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve



A young porcupine climbing in a tree.
Photo by Annica Lyssy.

Travis County
Department of Transportation and Natural Resources
Natural Resources and Environmental Quality Division

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INTRODUCTION

The Balcones Canyonlands Preserve was created to protect habitat for the golden-cheeked warbler (*Setophaga chrysoparia*), black-capped vireo (*Vireo atricapilla*), six endangered karst invertebrates, and 27 species of concern. In addition to these rare species, many other wildlife species also occur on BCP. This report summarizes the wildlife management activities conducted on Travis County-managed lands for species not covered in other sections of the FY 2025 BCCP Annual Report.

BAT ACOUSTIC MONITORING

The BCP provides habitat for several species of bats, although little is known about their habitat use or habits. Among these species, the tri-colored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*), recently proposed to be listed as endangered, is of particular concern. To ensure the effective conservation of this species and others, a pilot bat acoustic monitoring program on the BCP was deployed in Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25). The monitoring program was modeled after the North American Bat Monitoring Program (NABat) published by Talbert and Reichert (2018). The program emphasizes the importance of high-quality data collection to ensure accurate species identification and effective conservation efforts. It outlines a comprehensive bat monitoring strategy, and multiple methods for acoustic recording of bats based on the spatially organized Generalized Random Tessellation Stratified (GRTS) system. The GRTS system provides a regional database where governmental agencies, nonprofit groups, and the private sector can collate observed bat activity in a central database, which contributes to collaboration and planning around conservation threats to native bat populations.

For the 2025 acoustic season, Travis County Natural Resources staff and volunteers recorded bat vocalizations during a 9-week period from late April through June 2025 across the Travis County BCP. Seven bat species were identified during the survey, based on acoustic recordings: tri-colored bat, northern yellow bat (*Lasiurus intermedius)*, eastern red bat (*Lasiurus borealis)*, Brazilian free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis)*, cave myotis (*Myotis velifer)*, hoary bat (*Lasiurus cinereus)*, and Seminole bat (*Lasiurus seminolus)*. Three additional species were identified in Auto ID but did not have enough data to confirm identification: big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus)*, silver-haired bat (*Lasionycteris noctivagans)*, and evening bat (*Nycticeius humeralis)*.



Figure 1. A bat acoustic monitoring station deployed at Hamilton Pool Preserve.

MAPS BANDING STATION

Staff and volunteers completed the third year of a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) banding effort on the New Life tract of the BCP in FY25. MAPS is a collaborative bird monitoring program managed by the Institute for Bird Populations that provides long-term age- and sex-specific data on annual survival, reproduction, and recruitment gathered across stations throughout North America. The MAPS station on the BCP was operated on nine mornings between June 3 - July 29, 2025, and collected data on 56 new birds and 26 recaptured birds, representing 15 different species (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of birds banded or recaptured at the MAPS banding station on the New Life tract of the BCP in FY25.

Species	New Bands	Recaptures	Unbanded*
Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)	17	8	
Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*)	10	10	1
White-Eye Vireo (*Vireo griseus*)	9	4	
Lesser Goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*)	4		
Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii)*	3		
Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)	3	2	
Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)	3	1	
Black-Crested Titmouse (*Baeolophus atricristatus*)	2		
Black & White Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*)	1		
Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*)	1		
Brown-Headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*)	1		
House Finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*)	1		
Red-Eye Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*)	1	1	
Black-Chinned Hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*)	0	0	9
Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*)			1

*Unbanded birds include species captured that were not permitted to band or that were accidentally released prior to being banded.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD CONTROL

Brown-headed cowbirds (hereafter cowbird) are known to parasitize the nests of the golden-cheeked warbler and the black-capped vireo, in addition to many other avian hosts (TPWD No Date_*a*). Population modelling data from Fort Hood military base suggests that sustained cowbird management is required to maintain viable black-capped vireo populations (Wilsey *et al.* 2014). Cowbird management success has contributed to the recovery effort and subsequent 2018 delisting of the black-capped vireo, and continued management is necessary to maintain black-capped vireo populations (USFWS 2018).

Cowbird trapping in FY25 was conducted exclusively in the western half of Travis County. Travis County Natural Resources and Parks staff operated eight metal hybrid cowbird traps (6'x8') and one mega trap (16'x16'), with the addition of three new trap locations. Hybrid traps were operated on the Nootsie tract, Reimers Ranch Park, Flying K Conservation Easement and Steiner Ranch tract. The mega trap was operated at Hamilton Pool Preserve. New hybrid trap locations include the Cuevas

tract, Scott & White tract, and Pace Bend Park (Pace Bend Mid Davis and Pace Bend Maxey).

Table 2. Summary of Brown-Headed Cowbird Trapping Effort, FY25, Travis County BCP, Texas.

Trap	Date Opened	Date Closed	Initial Stocking Numbers (Male/Female)
Nootsie	April 1	June 27	4/14
Flying K CE	April 8	June 19	2/4
Scott & White	April 22	June 19	7/3
Steiner Ranch	April 3	June 18	3/8
Cuevas*	May 9	June 18	3/4
Pace Bend (Mid Davis)*	April 29	July 1	3/1
Pace Bend (Maxey)*	April 29	July 1	2/2
Hamilton Pool	April 11	June 25	3/1
Reimers Ranch	April 2	June 25	4/2

* denotes new trap location for 2025

Traps were inspected and maintained daily throughout the trapping period and any non-target species were removed and released. If staff were unavailable to conduct trap checks, the trap was shut by placing a board over the opening. Water and feed (white proso millet and whole milo) were refreshed three times per week, and as otherwise needed. Plastic water baths and shade cloth were added to the traps to offset the impact of rising air temperatures on bird health and survivability. Some traps were reinforced with poultry fencing along the outer base edges to prevent attempted predation. The traps were shut down in June, and cowbirds were euthanized by placing them in a container with carbon dioxide gas following Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) protocol (TPWD No Date_*a*).

In FY25, a total of 136 individual cowbirds were captured (97 males, 36 females, 3 immature) across 620 days in operation. Table 2 summarizes cowbird capture at each trap by sex, days in operation, and trapping efficiency (or capture rate). Overall trap efficiency was calculated by dividing the number of females captured by the number of days in operation (x 100).

The overall trap efficiency was 5.6% in FY25, a decrease from 17.1% in FY24. It is unclear why trap efficiency decreased from the previous year, but one factor to consider is that no females were caught in two out of the nine traps run throughout the season.

Table 3. Results of Brown-Headed Cowbird Trapping Effort, FY25, Travis County BCP, Texas.

Trap	Days in Operation	Males Captured	Females Captured	Immature Captured	Total Captured	Overall Trap Efficiency %
Nootsie	88	11	4	1	16	4.5%
Flying K CE	73	29	10	1	40	13.7%
Scott & White	59	5	3	1	9	5.1%
Steiner Ranch	77	15	5	0	20	6.5%
Cuevas	34	1	0	0	1	0%
Pace Bend (Mid Davis)	64	9	7	0	16	11%
Pace Bend (Maxey)	64	5	5	0	10	7.8%
Hamilton Pool	76	12	0	0	12	0%
Reimers Ranch	85	10	2	0	12	2.4%
Grand Total	**620**	**97**	**36**	**3**	**136**	5.6%

Of the 79 black-capped vireo nests monitored during the FY25 nesting season, 16 showed signs of cowbird parasitism (cowbird eggs or nestling in nest). The new trapping effort at Pace Bend Park was in response to documented instances of cowbird parasitism in the area. Three black-capped vireo nests were found to be parasitized, with one producing two cowbird fledglings. Observations revealed at least three blue-gray gnatcatcher pairs feeding and tending to cowbird hatchlings, highlighting the impact on native bird species. However, staff did not observe any instances of golden-cheeked warblers feeding cowbird fledglings during enumeration surveys in FY25.

FERAL HOG CONTROL

Staff continued to control populations of non-native, feral hogs (*Sus scrofa*) to minimize negative impacts to the native wildlife protected within the BCP. Hog rooting habits create severely disturbed areas, which may lead to a localized shift in plant succession and increase the potential for soil erosion (Bradley and Schmidly 2016). Feral hogs also destabilize wetland areas, springs, creeks and other riparian areas through excessive rooting and wallowing.

Standard feral hog trapping operations conducted by staff involved the use of corral-style stock panel traps baited with game feeders containing dry corn. Staff operated up to six traps simultaneously. Each trap was equipped with a wireless camera system

that transmits real-time images to the trapper's mobile device, allowing the trapper to monitor feral hog activity and remotely close the trap door at the appropriate time. Trappers attempted to capture the entire sounder in a single event. Captured feral hogs were humanely dispatched, and carcasses were composted on the BCP.

In FY25, a total of 26 feral hogs were trapped and removed by staff. Efforts were largely focused on the Woody Hollow tract when damage was first observed.

Table 4. Results of Feral Hog Trapping Effort, FY25, on Travis County BCP, Texas.

Tract	Sex (Male/Female)	Total
Woody Hollow	6/12	18
Sam Hamilton	3/5	8

WHITE-TAILED DEER MANAGEMENT

White-tailed deer populations were monitored and maintained at a level that allows for successful recruitment of plant species that make up habitat supporting the Golden-cheeked warbler and other protected species. Past research in Central Texas (Russell and Fowler 1999, Russell and Fowler 2002, Russell *et al.* 2001) indicated that little or no regeneration of vital habitat components may occur in areas with an over-population of deer.

To stay within carrying capacity, TPWD recommends population levels in the Texas Hill Country of one deer per 8-35 acres (TPWD No Date_*b*). Since a primary goal for the BCP is to maintain successful hardwood regeneration to provide long-term golden-cheeked warbler habitat, Travis County recommends a conservative density of one deer per 20-35 acres for the BCP.

Staff conducted nighttime spotlight deer surveys on the Hamilton Pool Preserve/Reimers Ranch Park/Pogue Springs Preserve (hereafter HP/RR/Pogue Preserve). Additionally, camera surveys were operated as described in Oetgen *et al.* (2008) on the Jollyville Unit. This camera survey method provides a more accurate population estimation of white-tailed deer in areas where there is a lack of infrastructure needed to perform nighttime spotlight surveys (Roberts *et al.* 2006).

Deer harvest in FY25 was conducted by staff under the Managed Lands Deer Program (MLDP) through TPWD. Deer were shot from stands located near game feeders baited with dry feed corn. Biological data was collected from all harvested deer and reported to TPWD at the conclusion of the season. Throughout the season staff also collected lymph nodes from harvested deer to be tested by TPWD for chronic wasting disease. All meat from harvested deer was donated to Caritas of Austin through the Hunters for the Hungry Program.

Deer population survey data gathered from August to October 2025 will be used to estimate deer densities and provide harvest recommendations for the FY26 season. The recommendation for FY25 harvest numbers was from data collected in FY24. Table 4 summarizes deer population data on the BCP collected from the FY25 spotlight and camera surveys. Surveys were done on the Kotrla Unit, but due to road construction and the July 4th flooding event, data was found to be inaccurate and was omitted from this report. Deer population densities on the BCP remained within the TPWD recommended population level and Travis County's management objective of one deer per 20-35 acres. A summary of the deer harvested on Travis County BCP properties in FY25 is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of White-tailed Deer Population Survey, FY25, Travis County BCP, Texas.

Location	Estimated Acres/Deer	Estimated Composition (Buck/Doe/Fawn)
Jollyville*	31	14/20/2
Kotrla	Not calculated due to low quality data	Not calculated due to no harvest
HP/RR/Pogue Preserve	15	Not calculated due to no harvest

*Includes Snowden and Vireo Ridge tracts

Table 6. Results of White-tailed Deer Harvest on the MLDP Units, FY25, Travis County BCP, Texas.

Location	Bucks	Does	Total
Kotrla Unit	2	9	11
Cypress Creek Unit	13	5	18
Lucas Unit	1	0	1
Medway Unit	2	0	2
Total	18	14	32

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