

# THE MAVERICK BULL

The Newsletter of the Maverick Grotto

Volume 17, Issue 8

August 2004



**Bats and Conservation**

# Maverick Grotto Information

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The Maverick Bull is the monthly newsletter of the Maverick Grotto, an internal organization of the National Speleological Society (NSS G-322). The editor invites all individuals and other grottos to submit articles, news, maps, cartoons, art, photographs, and other two- and three-dimensional goodies. If the material is to be returned, a self-addressed stamped envelope should accompany it.

**Reprinting Articles:** Internal organizations of the National Speleological Society may reprint any item (unless copyrights belong to the author as stated in the byline) first appearing in the Maverick Bull if proper credit is given and a complete copy of the publication is delivered to the editor at the time of publication. Other organizations should contact the editor of the Maverick Bull at the address herein.

**Exchanges:** The Maverick Grotto will exchange newsletters with other grottos. Contact the editor.

**Complimentary Newsletters:** The Maverick Grotto will provide complimentary newsletters to persons or organizations that provide cave access (i.e. landowners) or otherwise provide assistance to cavers. The Maverick Grotto will provide one free issue to persons interested in becoming members.

**Subscription Rates:** Subscription rates are \$15 per year for nonmembers and free for members.

**Membership Policy:** Any individual with interests, beliefs, and actions consistent with the purposes of the Maverick Grotto and the National Speleological Society is eligible for membership. Acceptance of new members is based on payment of dues and a mandatory three-trip requirement with at least three different grotto members. These three members shall act as sponsors. At least one sponsor must attend the meeting at which the membership vote is taken. A two-thirds majority vote of the members present will be required for acceptance.

**Meetings:** Meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month at Bodacious BBQ, 1206 E. Division St., Arlington. The time is 7 p.m., and the food is good.

**Carbide:** Currently carbide is unavailable.

**Library:** Support your grotto library. Russell Hill is accepting books, magazines, and videos related to caves and caving for our library. Thanks to Russell for his efforts in transporting the library collection to meetings.

## Cave Rescue

Call collect (512) 686-0234

# Photo & Map Credits

Front cover: Pete Lindsley

Pages 8 & 9, photos & map: Mark Gee

Pages 10 & 11: Diana Tomchick

Back cover: Bill Steele in Mystic Cave, OK, by Diana Tomchick

## Visit Our NSS Award-Winning Web Site!

Butch has done an excellent job at constructing the grotto web site and keeping it up-to-date. You'll find information about getting into caving, trip photos and the PDF version of this newsletter (with color photos!):

[maverickgrotto.org](http://maverickgrotto.org)

## Corrections to June and July issues

Thanks to Carl Kunath, who pointed out some discrepancies in the info I provided about Joe Pearce in the articles about the 2004 TSA Convention:

"In your comments about Joe Pearce, you said that he was a '60s caver. Not so. Joe's experience goes back at least to the mid-1950s, '54 to '58 is my guess. He was NSS # 2903, a founding member of the original Balcones Grotto and a staff member of the *Texas Caver* when it began publication in late 1955. His wife's name is Sue.

===Carl"

## Next meeting, August 10th, 7p.m.

### Bodacious BBQ

1206 E. Division St.

Arlington, TX 76011

(817) 860-4248

Program:

Chad Fenner will talk about the permitting procedures in the Guads.

Be sure to show up at 7 p.m., as we will start the program before the business meeting.

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# July Meeting Minutes

## submitted by Scott Boyd

The Maverick Grotto met July 13th at Bodacious BBQ, on E. Division St. in Arlington. There were 13 members and 3 visitors attending.

Program: Video of Richland Springs Cavern in San Saba County, with an introduction of the video by Butch Fralia.

Reports from Officers: (There were no reports from officers.)

General announcements:

Diana Tomchick asked if anyone was interested in becoming the newsletter editor.

Old Business:

Diana gave an update on possible joint projects with NTSS and/or COG. Diana made a motion to donate \$118 from Grotto funds to the TCMA Acquisition Fund for Deep and Punkin Caves. Sharon Welch seconded the motion and it passed by a unanimous vote.

New Business: Tammy Cox applied for membership, and was voted in as a new grotto member.

Trip reports and announcements:

\* Mark Gee gave a report on a grotto trip to a private ranch in San Saba County during the weekend of July 9 – 11th.

\* Kristopher Megahan asked about the High Guads Restoration Project, and Mark Gee gave him some information about it.

\* Dennis Welch gave a report on a trip that he and Sharon took to Colorado Bend State Park, where they did the wild cave tours that are led by park personnel.

\* Kristopher Megahan and Melissa Marzahn are going underwater caving in Florida on July 30th.

\* Dennis & Sharon are going to Austin to go caving the weekend of July 17-18th.

\* Diana announced that Bill Steele is leading a trip to the QA survey region of Honey Creek Cave on July 31st.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

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## Caving Events Calendar

**Until October Devil's Sinkhole Bat Tours (Rocksprings):** Tours are offered Wednesday through Sunday evenings. The tour bus leaves the Rocksprings Visitor's Center between 5:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. Tours return to the Visitor's Center between 9:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. Evening tour fee is \$12 per person.

**Second Saturday of every month Hilltop Project (Capitan, NM):** Ridge walking and digging in windy blowholes on USFS and BLM lands, about 5 miles south of Fort Stanton Cave, NM. Meet for Cave Diggers Breakfast on Saturday between 7:30 to 8 a.m. at the Smokey Bear Restaurant in Capitan. Contacts: Lee Skinner (505) 293-5723 skinner@thuntek.net or Dick Venters (505)437-3712 cavedigger@msn.com

**Aug 21 EspeleoCoahuila 2004 (Saltillo, Mexico):** The first-ever caving event dedicated to speleology in Coahuila, sponsored by the Asociación Coahuilense de Espeleología AC. It will be similar to a TSA Convention, with presentations throughout the day. Contact: Peter Sprouse peter@purificacion.org

**Aug 28-29 High Guads Restoration Project (New Mexico):** On-going work amid spectacular scenery in beautiful caves of the Lincoln National Forest. Last weekend of the month, permits often include Three Fingers, Virgin, Pink Dragon, Pink Panther, Hidden, Wonderland, and Black Cave. Activities vary from month to month. Contacts: Susan Herpin or Jennifer

Foot highguads@yahoo.com

**Sep 04-06 Labor Day Regional, Southwest Region (Black Range, NM):** Saturday night potluck dinner. Several caves in the area will be available for visitation. A thorough examination of Robinson's Cave as a potential regional cleanup project is encouraged. Location is North Percha Creek, north of Kingston, NM. Contact: S. Peerman gypcaver@aol.com

**Sept 25-26 GypKaP (Carlsbad region, NM):** Long-running cave survey project in the gypsum plain of southern New Mexico. Contact: Blake Jordan (505) 260-1096 blandevoid@comcast.net

**Oct 04-09 Carlsbad Caverns Lint Camp (New Mexico):** Annual restoration project at Carlsbad Caverns. Contact: Pat Jablonsky (307) 467-5404 patjabo@trib.com

**Oct 08-10 Colorado Bend State Park Project:** long-time favorite of Mavericks, pretty close to home, semi-regular schedule, second weekend of the month. This is a terrific project for beginning cavers. Contacts: Terry Holsinger (512) 443-4241 trhli@sprynet.com or Dale Barnard Barnarddale@yahoo.com

**Oct 22-24 Texas Cavers' Reunion (Flat Creek Ranch):** The annual get-together returns to this popular Blanco County site. Contacts: Allan Cobb ac@kihikihi.com www.oztotl.com/tcr

**Oct 30-31 Powell's Cave (Powell's Ranch, Menard, TX):** Come see the second longest cave in Texas! Cavers of all skill and experience levels welcome. A cave sketching workshop sponsored by the Texas Speleological Survey may take place in Powell's Cave this weekend, stay tuned for details. Contacts: Terry Holsinger (512) 443-4241 trhli@sprynet.com Jerry Atkinson (281) 360-2244 JerryAtkin@aol.com

**Nov 21-27 Proyecto Espeleologico Sierra Oxmolon (Mexico):** Survey and mapping project over Thanksgiving week. Contact: Jerry Fant jerryfant@worldnet.att.net

**Dec 04 Winter Technical Regional, Southwest Region NSS (New Mexico):** Sandia Grotto hosting (tentative).

**Feb 02-06, 2005 7th Mexican Congress of Speleology & 5th Congress of FEALC (The Speleological Federation of Latin American and the Caribbean) (Monterrey, Nuevo León, México):** "Legislation and Protection of the Subterranean Environment." Cost: US\$50 until October 1, 2004, US\$100 later. Contacts: Rodolfo Gonzalez rogonzalez@cydsa.com

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## Editor's Notes

It's hard for me to believe, but this is the 23rd issue of the *Maverick Bull* that I've edited. I've had a great time putting the newsletter together every month, and most months I've been able to get it to you at least a day before the grotto meeting. I've learned a great deal more about caving than I'd expected by editing this publication. In my search for events to include in the calendar, and other newsworthy items to publish, I've discovered there's a big world of caving out there!

Now it's time for me to find my replacement as editor. I've volunteered to edit the next few issues of the *Texas Caver*, and if I really enjoy it, I may continue on in that task for 2005. If you think you'd like to help out the grotto in this way, let me know. Our Constitution requires us to publish a monthly newsletter that includes the meeting location, date and agenda, the meeting minutes from the past month, and a caving events calendar. The rest of the newsletter (trip reports, photos, etc.) are nice but not absolutely necessary. So don't let the job intimidate you—the newsletter is what you (and your fellow grotto members) want to make of it.

# New Member Profile

## Tammy Cox



I am very excited to be a new member of the Maverick Grotto. I have loved caves since I was 11 years old. As a child and teenager I toured numerous commercial caves with my parents such as Carlsbad Caverns, Inner Space, Caves of Sonora, Natural Bridge, Cascade etc. and loved every minute of it. I had no idea that you could actually go in to wild caves and explore them, without paved sidewalks and lights, until about 4 years ago. My family and I were camping in Arkansas and met some people (cavers) that invited us to go caving with them, and we have been hooked since that day. We go back about 4 or 5 times each year to go caving with them. I am 38 years old, married to Lex Cox, and have 2 children- my son Lex is 17 and my daughter Amber is 15. We like to go camping, snow skiing, hiking, swimming, canoeing and most of all caving.

# New Member Profile

## Rodolfo (Fofu) Gonzalez

I started caving in 1995, in college. I knew that the ITESM (the university) had a mountaineering club, and I wanted to be



a rock climber or a mountaineer. My first trip was to Palmito cave, in Bustamante, Mexico. And it just felt right. I got hooked on caving and from that moment on I enjoyed being underground. I eagerly took the caving course at the ITESM. I didn't miss a single trip. My lifestyle changed to accommodate caving. You know, you've all been through this. After a while I started to cave with other groups, first in Mexico and then in the US. I moved to Michigan for a couple of years. Up to then I considered myself proficient in vertical caving, but living in the U.S. taught me another type of caving: tight, wet, cold, and muddy. I joined grottos

and projects, like the Cave Research Foundation and **really** learned how to survey (there's nothing like a tight, meandering canyon where sometimes the length is a few inches to practice reading instruments, especially if you're doing backsights!). I moved back to Monterrey and joined the Proyecto Espeleológico Purificación. I like expedition caving, although my job doesn't allow me as much time to do it as I would like. In the future, I'd like to join as many expeditions as possible, keep exploring, and keep learning.

My other interests include rescue and pre-hospital care (I've taken a few courses on this subject), music (I play the guitar and enjoy listening to it), reading, hiking, rock climbing and traveling. I work for a company that makes flexible film for packaging, which allows me to travel around the U.S. frequently.

Looking forward to caving with y'all!  
- Fofu

# Congress of Grottos and Journal of Cave and Karst Science Poll

## Sharon Faulkner

If you are not currently registered on the NSS Discussion Board or have not been visiting the site lately, take a moment when time allows and visit. The Discussion Board is a means of facilitating and enhancing communication for the NSS Membership. If you are interested in participating in the NSS Discussion Board here is a link to register.

<http://www.caves.org/soapbox/index.php?referrerid=19>

There is currently a discussion (well, actually there are several discussions) taking place on the NSS Discussion Board regarding not only the Proposed Membership Dues Increase, but also the recent Congress of Grotto report to the Board of Governors at Convention in July that may be of interest to NSS Members.

Also, a poll is taking place with respect to the recent Congress of Grotto report to the Board of Governors at Convention in July.

<http://www.caves.org/soapbox/showthread.php?t=325>

For more information regarding the *Journal* (JCKS) and Congress of Grottos report, see the following link:

<http://www.caves.org/soapbox/showthread.php?t=231>

Finally, registration is currently open for the 2004 Fall NSS Board of Governors Meeting. The meeting will be held on November 6, 2004 in Birmingham Alabama. For anyone interested in attending, further information and registration forms can be found on the website at:

[http://www.bhamgrotto.org/fall\\_bog.htm](http://www.bhamgrotto.org/fall_bog.htm)

Thanks,

Sharon Faulkner  
Birmingham Grotto

# Texas Cave Bats and Conservation

Wayne Peplinski NSS #44055

## Bat World Trinity River

As cavers most all of us know a little about the benefits man reaps with the help of bats. We have all seen them at some time or another on a few of our many cave projects and other trips. Recent articles mentioning cave-dwelling bats have been printed in several caving publications; being a caver and also a wildlife rehabilitator for bats has led me to write this article to try and help educate people about misconceptions concerning bats and give a little information about Texas cave bat conservation (I am better at caring for bats than writing articles so bear with me please!).

Here are a few facts about bats. Fossil records show that bats have been around a long time, over fifty million years. They are separated into two groups: Mega-bats and Micro-bats. In the United States our bats are considered micro-bats, as they all use echolocation to navigate and feed [Editor's note: Mega-bats are Old World fruit bats.]. There are 45 bat species in America. We have quite a variety of bats in Texas, with 32 species recorded and possibly several more.

All bats in Texas are insectivores, with the exception of two nectar-feeding bats along the U.S. border with Mexico. One of these is the Greater Long-nosed Bat (*Leptonycteris nivalis*). Bats eat tens of thousands of tons of insects in Texas nightly during the summer months alone and make a major impact on agricultural pests and other insects that plague Texas farmers and the general public.

Each bat species is differentiated by specialization in the consumption of different types of insects. They also display specialized foraging patterns, roosting behaviors, migration patterns, and distribution and hibernation activity. Bats can also enter a state called torpor, which is similar to hibernation but not necessarily associated with a particular season. Bats, unlike most other mammals, can enter torpor to save energy at almost anytime of the year.

Some cave bats such as *Antrozous pallidus* or the Pallid Bat, a cave species of West Texas, can dine on scorpions, centipedes and even small rodents by hearing their movement on the ground as they hover above. Most other bats prey upon night flying insects like moths, beetles, June bugs, flying ants, the common mosquito (now known to carry West Nile virus in Texas) and many other night flying pests.

There are also many foliage-dwelling bats in Texas such as the Eastern Red Bat or the Silvered-Hair Bat, besides the cave-and-crevice dwelling species. Some bats can be both depending on the season and their location. Moreover, there are fossil records of four more bat species in Texas, three of which are still living in other parts of the United States or Mexico, and one species is extinct.

One of the living species is the *Desmodus rotundus* or the common Vampire Bat of Mexico, which is known to roost within 125 miles of the Texas border in Mexico and possibly closer. It is possible that a thorough search of the Hill Country could reveal additional records of this species (Texas Mammals Online Edition). Another vampire species, *Diphylla ecaudata* (the Hairy Legged Vampire Bat), was already found here in an abandoned railroad tunnel 19 miles west of Comstock, Texas, in Val Verde county, more than 400 miles out of its normal range (Mammals of Texas, Online Edition).

The Free-tailed Bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis-mexicana*) is probably the most common cave dwelling bat species in Texas with a summer population estimated to be about 100,000,000. One baby is born in late spring to early summer. The Free-tailed Bat is actually a tropical bat adapting to a temperate

climate through annual migration.

Where and how bats live is dependent on food availability. When this declines bats have two options: migrate to food sources or hibernate to get through a period of no food supply. Some species do both. Depending upon their location they may migrate to a slightly warmer region to hibernate. The final destination of some bats is unclear, and more studies are needed.

As of 1994 there were 16 major free-tailed bat colonies in Texas, and 13 of those are in large caverns. They do not readily inhabit other smaller caves because free-tails like a large warm cavernous home. High temperatures in roosts are essential for rapid growth of young bats; apparently, the larger the colony, the less the energy expenditure per bat to maintain a given temperature. They also require a big enough area to be able to take flight. Free-tailed bats have to fall a long way to be able to take flight—you may have seen this at the bat flight at the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin, Texas.

Free-tails also need a cave with enough room to be able to raise their young, which develop remarkably fast and by the millions. These large caves are unique and can be safely visited in winter when the bats have migrated south; other caves are just the opposite and are used by hibernating bat species that do not migrate and should only be visited at a proper time during the summer. Other caves may be used as nursery colonies in the spring (avoidance is one of the key factors for bat conservation).

Some of these important bat caves are in private hands, such as Rucker Bat Cave, which is estimated to be the second largest Free-tailed Bat colony in Texas (Veni & Elliott, 1994) with an estimated population of 12,000,000. Bracken Bat Cave near San Antonio is thought to be the largest colony with a population of around 20,000,000 or more. This is believed to be the largest concentration of mammals anywhere in the world (Harvey, Altenbach, Best, 1999). A few other caves in Texas are under protection by such groups as Bat Conservation International, Texas Cave Management Association and others. These protected caves are relatively inaccessible to the public and have such oppressive atmospheres while occupied by bats (they basically turn the cavern atmosphere tropical) that few venture inside.

It is in the smaller caves that bat species such as *Myotis velifer*, commonly called the Cave Bat or Cave Myotis, and other species are harbored. These are bat species that usually form small colonies and have only one baby per year. They also need our protection. It is these smaller caves that are far more numerous and inviting that can sometimes suffer the most.

One such example is Walkup Cave in Hardeman County, where in the mid 80's, locals used shotguns, gasoline and smoke to drive off or kill the bat population. The cave was formerly an important hibernation site for many species of bats, and it was intensely studied from 1958 to 1962 by Dr. David Tinkle (at that time the bat population had reached thousands in winter months). This cave was home to bats such as Townsend's and Rafinesque's big eared bats, the cave bat or cave myotis, the Big Brown Bat and other species as well. I wrote an article for the *Maverick Bull* several years ago about another incident in a cave near Sonora, Texas. The bat population, estimated to be in the thousands, was burned out many, many years before; a single scoop of earth from this cave held over 400 wing bones alone. Today the cave still only has a small population of bats. It takes many years for a cave to recover from destruction like this, if ever. Examples like this have occurred at many caves with bat populations throughout Texas and the United States.

One of the most common bats we see in the smaller caves

in Texas is the Cave Bat or Cave Myotis. *Myotis velifer* has two subspecies, *Myotis velifer incautus* and *Myotis velifer magnamolaris* - Southern and Northwestern; it is not clear when, where, or if they intermingle but it is suspected that they do so in Texas. This is federally listed as a species of special concern. All share a similar reproductive, foraging, and hibernation cycle.

There are a variety of other bats you may see in Texas caves other than the aforementioned; there are at least 17 other species that inhabit Texas caves at one time or another during the year.

One of these species, the Ghost Faced Bat (*Mormoops megalophylla*) of South Texas, also known as "The Old Man Bat" to Texas cavers, is also considered a tropical bat. Like the Free-tailed bat it migrates to Texas in the spring to raise young in a few suitable caves in the southern Texas region, which is an area popular with Texas cavers.

Herein lies a problem; according to Bat Conservation International and respected bat biologist Merlin Tuttle,

"It is of no coincidence that all bats listed as federally endangered, threatened, or of special concern spend at least half of their lives in caves... vastly increased interest in caving over the past 40 years is believed to be one of the most important causes of cave bat population declines. Some species live year round in caves and are especially threatened. Others require caves for hibernation and maternity roosts and even these are highly vulnerable. Human disturbance has eliminated bats from hibernation sites in many areas; summer disturbances often cause abandonment of nursery colonies and the death of baby bats. Professional cave explorers sometimes known as speleologists are becoming increasingly involved in locating and protecting these sites, however many who explore caves are amateurs and do not fully appreciate the disasters caused by seemingly harmless disturbances... these intrusions are sometimes unnecessary, a winter disturbance can cause hibernating bats to arouse, wasting on an average 60 days worth of fat reserves, and since Texas bats are insectivorous they cannot feed during winter and mass starvation can occur before energy reserves are replenished in spring, often accounting for their decline over thousands of square miles around a single disturbed cave" (Tuttle, 1998).

The 1994 NSS Convention Guidebook (Veni & Elliott 1994) states "if accidentally encountered they should not be disturbed, please try to avoid them, move quickly and quietly out of the area and warn others to stay out of those areas, do not shine your lights on the bats. Texas cavers should only enter caves known to have bats at night and at the proper time of year."

Bats comprise an extremely interesting and highly beneficial segment of our fauna, and they should be understood and appreciated. Most U.S. species are already in decline due to human disturbances and the all-too prevalent attitude and belief that "all bats are rabid and the only good bat is a dead one." Early studies are now thought to be flawed and inaccurate, as the latest studies show that actually only a fraction of 1% of bats contract rabies. There are other mammals in Texas that are known to have a much higher rabies percentage rate, some up to 6%. These factors have been important in determining the general causes of the population declines of all bat species. Other factors are things such as loss of foraging areas, habitat destruction, and large-scale pesticide programs and other chemical toxicants. These have taken a heavy toll on bat numbers.

The steady decline in our bat populations, as well as other species, reflects a decline in our overall quality of life.

Few caves are essential to bats year round and less than 5% of temperate caves are suitable for large colonies at any time; most are used or occupied during winter hibernation or spring maternity colonies. These and smaller caves can be safely visited without harm to bats by simply timing trips to

coincide with the periods when the bats are absent.

Most cavers have a great respect for all cave life and it is up to them to become knowledgeable in these areas for conservation purposes. Many Texas cavers and cave organizations such as the American Cave Conservation Association, Texas Cave Management Association, National Speleological Society, Texas Speleological Survey and the Texas Speleological Association, local grottos and other groups throughout the U.S. are becoming increasingly involved in protecting caves and cave life. Activities such as research grants, public education, purchasing, closures, gatings, population censuses with species-subspecies accountings and continued monitoring of sensitive sites help immensely, but much more research is needed in many areas. Information is needed on distribution, ecological requirements, migration and movement patterns and identification of threats (man-made or natural) to be able to insure the safety of all bat populations.

Be knowledgeable and careful when visiting caves and caverns, not just in Texas, but everywhere, and share conservation information with others whenever possible. Conservation of bats will ultimately depend upon more understanding and knowledge.

We as cavers have the opportunity to make conservation of our cave life a priority; bats may be the most misunderstood animals in the United States. Not only are they highly intelligent and interesting as consumers of enormous numbers of insects, they rank among the most beneficial to man... Be Bat Friendly!

**Bat Questions?** E-mail me at [myotisman25@yahoo.com](mailto:myotisman25@yahoo.com) or check out our website at [www.batworld.org](http://www.batworld.org) I will try and give you an answer with the latest available information on bats. More information on Texas bat species can found at the Bat Conservation International website, [www.batcon.org](http://www.batcon.org)

Support Your Local Rescue! BAT WORLD TRINITY RIVER is a licensed rescue and rehabilitation center for the Fort Worth area, with over 70 hours of classroom training in species identification, rehabilitation, and captive care. It is in its 4th year of operation, and receives up to 125 bats per year. Most are releasable but a few each year are not and are taken to Bat World Mineral Wells (headquarters for all Bat World centers in the U.S.), where they can live under loving care in a permanent sanctuary for bats from around the world.

BAT WORLD TRINITY RIVER runs solely on donations and contributions by the public. Special appreciation goes to Dr. Brooks, DVM, for assistance with supplies, Amanda Lollar, Bat World Mineral Wells, for years of educational assistance, Dottie Hyatt, Bat World Twin Springs, for advice and help with educational programs and Barbara French (science officer, Bat Conservation International) for help on specie/sub-specie information.

## References

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# TEXAS CAVE BATS

GENUS/SPECIES	COMMON NAME	COMMENTS
<i>Tadarida brasiliensis (mexicana)</i>	Mexican Free-tailed Bat	Estimated 100,000,000 in Texas in summer months.
<i>Nyctinomops macrotis</i>	Big Free-tailed Bat	Some reports, more research needed.
<i>Nyctinomops fermorosacca</i>	Pocketed Free-tailed Bat	Cliffs, cave entrances, rocky outcrops.
<i>Myotis velifer</i>	Cave Bat or Cave Myotis	Hibernates in Texas, colonies 2 to 5 thousand.
<i>Myotis velifer (incautus)</i>	Southern Cave Bat	Sub-species, may intermingle.
<i>Myotis velifer (magnamolaris)</i>	Northwestern Cave Bat	Sub-species, may intermingle.
<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	Little Brown Bat	One baby born, May to July.
<i>Myotis yumanensis</i>	Yuma Bat	Far West Texas. Walks on ground, can hover.
<i>Myotis volans</i>	Long-Legged Bat	West Texas caves, one baby is born in July.
<i>Pipistrellus subflavus</i>	Eastern Pipistrelle Bat	Individuals may inhabit same spot in cave for consecutive winters.
<i>Pipistrellus hesperus</i>	Western Pipistrelle Bat	Also hibernates, West Texas caves.
<i>Corynorhinus townsendii</i>	Townsend's Big-Eared Bat	Formerly <i>Plecotus</i> , West Texas –Panhandle.
<i>Corynorhinus rafinesquii</i>	Rafinesque's Big-Eared Bat	Rarely sighted in caves, formerly <i>Plecotus</i> .
<i>Antrozous pallidus</i>	Pallid Bat	Occasionally enters caves, known to eat small rodents.
<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	Big Brown Bat	Moves to caves during coldest weather, common.
<i>Mormoops megalophylla</i>	Ghost-Faced Bat or Old-Man Bat	South Texas, common winter resident, South Edwards Plateau.
<i>Idionycteris phyllotis</i>	Allen's Big-eared Bat or Lapped Brown Bat	Far West Texas, roosts may include caves, research needed.
<i>Leptonycteris nivalis</i>	Greater Long-Nosed Bat	Endangered, Big Bend area, colonial, prefers large caverns.

(only incidental reports of other species)

# Proyecto Espeleologico Sierra Oxmolon 2003, Part 2

## San Luis Potosí, México

Mark Gee, NSS #49625

WEDNESDAY: Got up at seven a.m., dressed, ate and left camp at 12:00 noon to go and check out the two pits that we had discovered last Sunday. Arriving at the pits, I volunteered to check the first pit and survey it. I rigged my seventy five-foot rope and dropped to the bottom. Chris helped me get a measurement to the bottom of what turned out to be a fourteen-meter blind pit. I sketched what there was while Ron, Chris, and Enora rigged their pit. The entrance to their pit was two meters by eight meters, but breakdown covered it. Three small holes were found in between the large breakdown slabs, the largest being one and one-half meters by two meters. Ron rigged for a free hanging drop around a large piece of breakdown, with a slight rub on a smooth rock, over the entrance drop. Ron went down first, then Enora and Chris. They called back up to report a muddy slope down to a second drop. I



11-26-03 Sotano It Sounded Big. Ron Rutherford, first to descent into Cueva de Sonido Grande. The drop was 84 feet.

called for Jerry on the FRS radio. Jerry and Ben had climbed over the mountain at the end of the valley and found a two hundred-foot pit on a saddle between two ridges. Jerry answered that they were already on their way down. I told Jerry about the second drop and they quickly made their way back. Ron hollered back up from the bottom of the first pit that he needed Jerry to come back down and place two bolts for a second rope. Jerry got his drill and bolt kit and rappelled down. He asked Ben to follow. A few minutes later Chris came back up and out. Chris had taken a few photos and described the cave to us. He said the first drop was 125 feet. About forty feet from the floor was a ledge that sloped up to another ledge and maybe another pit. At the bottom of the drop was a mud-floored room with a few formations that measured ten by fifteen meters. The floor sloped to the west to a six-foot climb down to another mud-covered floor and another twenty feet to a second pit. This drop was forty-five feet. The second level had two pits in the floor down to a third level. The second level measured the same as the first, ten by fifteen meters. The third pit was ten meters down to a flowstone-covered floor with a tight climb down through breakdown that dropped another five meters to a small 0.3 meter hole that dropped another 0.5 meters to five-

inch washed cobbles. It was too tight to continue. They didn't survey the cave, but we did measure the 125-foot entrance drop at 84 feet. Ron drew a sketch of the cave named Cueva de Sonido Grande. When all had climbed back out, we rolled up the rope, got our gear and went back to my truck. It was dark when we arrived at the truck. We got back to camp at 7:45 p.m. and we all fixed our dinners. At 10:30 I went to my tent, but as I walked into it, I noticed that a large number of ants were covering the floor. As I looked around the ants were everywhere, thousands of them. A swarm of soldier ants, "Had they come to eat us to the bones?" Suddenly, I became aware that they were also on my legs and feet, and were biting. I brushed the ants off my legs and grabbed my broom. I began walking in place to keep the ants off of me and began to sweep the ants out the door of my tent. The ants were everywhere and under everything. I swept the open areas first, then moved the ice chest, swept underneath, then moved a plastic container of food and swept underneath, and continued for forty five minutes until I had all but a few ants out of my tent. The ants never crawled up on anything but they did scare several insects into my tent, including a large tarantula. I swept the tarantula, several other insects, and about five thousand large ants out of my tent. After 45 minutes I had the ants out and then sprayed mosquito repellent around my tent door to keep the ants out and this worked. I zipped my tent door up tight and then went to bed. The ants were still swarming outside, as the others in camp had to contend with the ants as they reached their tents. About fifteen minutes later, I turned on my light to check for ants, as the others still in camp laughed. They had been outside describing the ant highways coming out from underneath my tent.

THURSDAY: Woke early and wrote in my journal. At 8:30 a.m. Jerry and I walked to the store in La Laja for a Coke. Then we stopped by the local school to give a gift of colored pencils and markers to the teacher.

Later that afternoon, Walter and Ray Olenick came by camp. Jerry, Chris, and Ben left camp to give some more clothes away that Jerry and Chris had brought. At camp, Walter and Ray wanted someone to show them Cueva Linda. Enora and I took them to the end of our 2002 survey. I brought my video camera and started filming at the canal just before the cave entrance. I got some shots of the entrance as it sloped into the Left Hand and Right Hand Passage, then some more footage of some of the cave-adapted worms, the isopod pool, the many formations, rimstone dams, and the two passages through the breakdown. We climbed up on top of the breakdown and walked along a ledge, both up and down the passage looking at the columns, stalagmites, cave popcorn, cave coral, flowstone, soda straws, and rimstone dams with pools. The video turned out pretty good. After a few minutes we turned to leave the cave. Walter and Ray had to be back in town at 4:00 p.m. for a party. On the trail back to the truck we ran into Ron, who wanted to survey, but I chose not to because we had very limited time before our Thanksgiving dinner back at camp. Sitting around camp all day had made me lazy. Enora, Ron, Ben and I began cooking around 6:45. The Perez and Vasileo families showed up at 7:00 with roasted coffee for us that we had asked for early in the week. They brought forty-four kilos on Wednesday and seven more on that Thursday night.

We had a very good dinner. Fourteen gathered and there was plenty for all: turkey, dressing, yams, corn, green beans, squash, steak, sausage, and whole berry cranberry sauce. Drinks and cold beer was provided for everyone. At 8:00, a storm was blowing in along with some thunder and lightning. Jerry had set up his laptop to show some photos of Cueva Linda. We enjoyed the viewing until it started to rain heavily



around 9:15. It rained for two hours. I retreated to my tent when the rain came. I told Juan and Carlos that their families could come in my tent to get out of the rain until it stopped, if they wanted to, but they didn't.

Somewhere around 10:00 I must have fallen asleep. Sometime during the night, Ron opened his tailgate and fell out of his truck as it opened and this woke me up. He needed to go pee, when the tailgate dropped and he fell to the ground trying to hold it.

FRIDAY: Everyone was up early to survey in Cueva Linda. Ron, Enora, and I left for the cave at 8:45. Jerry, Chris, and Ben were behind us by about thirty minutes. By 10:00 we began our survey. Our team started at a drop above a large room. The entire floor sloped down to a lead along the left wall. We shot down to the floor and then down to the entrance of a small passage trending down. We shot eight shots in this passage and discovered that it came back up to a second entrance above the one we had surveyed into. With this lead surveyed and sketched, we then shot to the bottom of the next rope. The



11-26-03 Late Friday night in Aquismón, Chris Vreeland at a taco stand.

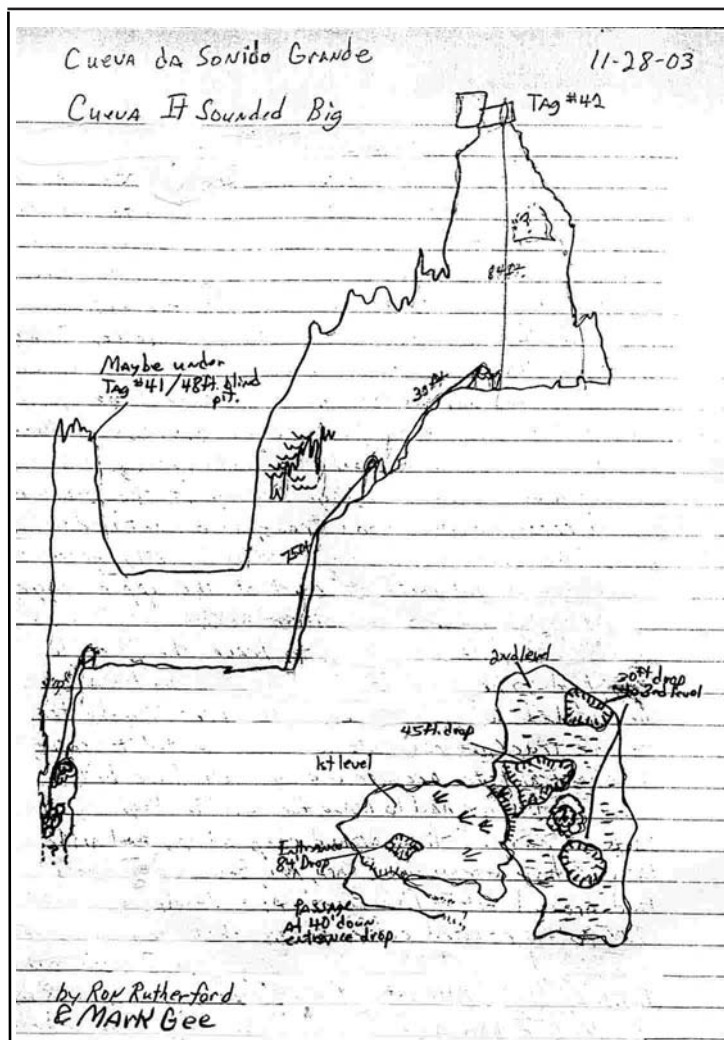
next shot was a vertical shot up to the anchor that held the rope. The shot was almost ten meters, and then another short shot up to another plateau of flowstone-covered breakdown.

The floor was very flat. Some mud was found along the left wall with many mud cracks. A lead was noticed going up at a steep angle in the left wall. The shot was +42 degrees and measured eleven meters and ended at the lip of a funnel-shaped pit. The room measured twelve by six meters. The pit opening measured 3.5 meters. Later at camp, on the computer, the Walls program showed that this lined up with a surveyed lead from below. We will need to tie these together next year.

We continued our survey until we tied in with Jerry, twenty-four meters below. Ron made a shot to Jerry on the floor and Jerry made one more shot to tie into his survey.

Jerry, Ben, and Chris had followed a lead and surveyed one hundred meters into a stream passage with plunge pools and several low, muddy crawls. The passage continued to a flowstone restriction that will need to be removed before further exploration can continue. Next year we will pick up the survey down the Right Hand Passage and through this flowstone blockage. Our total survey this year was only 540 meters but a lot of fun, new friendships, and rewarding experiences were had.

That night back at camp, we all began to pack up. We would return home the next day. I had my gear all packed by 8:30 p.m. and then waited for Chris to pack his gear. We all were going to stay at Mike's house in Aquismón tonight so we could get an early start in the morning. Much later that night, Chris and I went out to eat tacos at the square.



SATURDAY: We left town around noon and headed for Jerry's home in Wimberley. Chris had left his truck there. We got through the border with little time wasted and arrived at Jerry's around 4:00 a.m. Chris unloaded his gear into his truck and we parted with a handshake. I made it home to Balch Springs by noon on Sunday. It was a long-drive, but a great trip. I look forward to next year.

Till Next Time, Happy Caving!

## 2005 NSS Convention, Huntsville, AL, July 4-8

Located in the foothills of the Appalachians just north of the Tennessee River, with 4000 caves within 70 miles and 200 foot pits within the city limits, the North Alabama area holds a myriad of outdoor opportunities.

At the Monday evening Howdy Party you will have a prime seat for Huntsville's Fireworks show! Other events include an auction, a reception at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center followed by a party at the campground, the Slide and Video Salon, and the Banquet and Awards/closing ceremony.

The 2005 Convention will be offering a variety of cave trips. From ages 3 to 93, we have something to fill the "craving for caving" for all who have the desire to spend their vacation underground!

\$125 Adult NSS member; \$158 Non NSS; \$90 Child, 7-17; \$0 Child, 0-6.

See the 2005 NSS Convention website at <http://www.nss2005.com/> for more information and registration forms.

# Vultures in Caves

Bill Steele & Butch Fralia

I have heard of vultures being in cave entrances before, but until recently I had never seen one in a cave. On January 17th, 2004, on a trip organized by Woodrow Thomas and John Brooks to Oklahoma to visit the ranch where Mystic Cave is located, I had two experiences with vultures in caves.

One small cave we did (Crawling Dog Cave) was said to have a small pit in it. I was impressed with how Mark Gee took the lead and squeezed into the small opening, which looked



*Woodrow Thomas at the entrance to Crawling Dog Cave.*

snakey to me. Mark made a lot of noise and listened for a rattle sound, but proceeded on out of sight when he didn't encounter a snake. As I squeezed into the small entrance opening I noticed two vulture eggs below me, and smelled that telltale vulture, rotting-carcass smell.

The 20-foot pit was rigged when I crawled to its edge, and I joined the others on the bottom. As they surveyed I looked around and found a digging lead in dirt, which I could see passed to a small room. I asked if anyone had a digging tool of any kind, and Woodrow handed me a geologist's pick. I got through the dig and checked out the small room, which ended. Back with the others on the surface with the cave de-rigged, I realized that I had forgotten the geologist's pick at the bottom of the pit.

After we did another small cave I returned to the cave with the vulture eggs to get the hammer. As I crawled past the eggs I thought they looked different, this time covered with what looked like vomit with blood in it. I crawled toward the pit, throwing a rope in front of me, and then I heard a sound. It sounded like the beating of wings. Diana Tomchick was coming along behind me, and I told her I thought something alive was in the cave. As I tied the rope I heard it again, this time quite loud and close! It startled me and I shouted to Diana that I thought the mother vulture was back in the cave. Just then the vulture stuck her head out of a hole at the top of the pit on the other side, and she agitated like she might attack me. I yelled to Diana that a large vulture was very close to me and she advised me to forget the hammer and buy Woodrow another one. I thought about it for a minute, gained my composure, and decided that no bird was going to keep me from retrieving something I'd left in a cave, and from doing a little pit. I reasoned that the worse that could happen was that she might vomit on me.

I did the pit and fetched the hammer, looking down as I climbed the rope. I coiled the rope and didn't hear mama vulture

as I began crawling again, but I did wonder if she was going to take advantage of my undefended rear side, and attack my butt. I remembered my caving friend Mark Minton telling me about a vulture trying to vomit on him in a cave, I thought of Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*, and wondered if a vulture can project their vomit like that possessed girl did in the movie. Nothing untoward happened as I exited the cave.

Later that day we went to Mystic Cave, the big cave on the property, and went into it far enough to see the deep water at the entrance. We climbed down a climbable pit entrance and heard loud hissing, which turned out to be two baby vultures. The chicks are cute, with their beige downy feathers, but they make a hissing noise that is anything but pleasant to the ears. Overhead the parents flew about nervously and landed in an over hanging tree to watch what we would do. We passed them and went on into the cave. On the way out they hissed loudly again, but we passed them without incident.

I went on CaveTex and asked if there were any other stories about vultures in caves and a couple got posted:

This one was posted by Rex H.

"I remember that on one of my early trips (in 1991 or so) with L.A.G. (Lubbock Area Grotto) we visited McKittrick Cave. There are (I think) two entrances. We entered through one, which was virtually a hallway, with wide walking passage. A significant way back, this intersects with a larger perpendicular passage, with a room on the right and passage to the left, which leads to a climbable pit. As we approached the intersection, we heard a God-awful noise, I can't remember it well enough to describe it, but it was very creepy! We could not initially identify the source of the sound, but eventually, a fairly large vulture, climbed up on a rock, where we could see it. After finding the bird, several unsuccessful efforts were made to herd it back towards the entrance passage. We made every effort to stay out of vomit range. After a significant amount of time, we continued on our way to the down climb, and on to the larger part of the cave. We made a through trip, exiting through the second entrance."

And from our own grotto member Butch Fralia:

"Back in my formative years, I did a lot of caving in the Arbuckle Mountains. Buzzards were pretty common there. My first experience was in the Bitter Enders area where walking



*John Brooks prepares to rappel into the pit in Crawling Dog Cave, OK*

down a small ravine, something started growling like crazy. Since we'd seen and heard mountain lions in the area, we ran out of the ravine like heck. When nothing followed us out, being crazy cavers we went back down to investigate. It turned out there was a small opening behind a tree and there was a small buzzard there just beginning to lose his/her pin feathers. It sure sounded like a cat but then I think even a puma would have turned away from that smell.

When you first hear it, you think

you've met up with a bobcat, puma or something, then the smell penetrates the sound. There's a cave in the Arbuckles called Growling Cave because it's apparently a buzzard nest. Anytime you get close to the entrance, it starts hissing and growling but the smell tells the final tale.

A story told me by some Ardmore cavers is that they were familiar with buzzards in caves because there are a lot of them in that area. I won't give their whole names but it was Dennis T., Joe Ben and Dennis J. They "discovered" a hands-and-knees crawl cave. About 100 feet in, further than they'd ever



*A vulture chick in the entrance pit of Mystic Cave, OK*

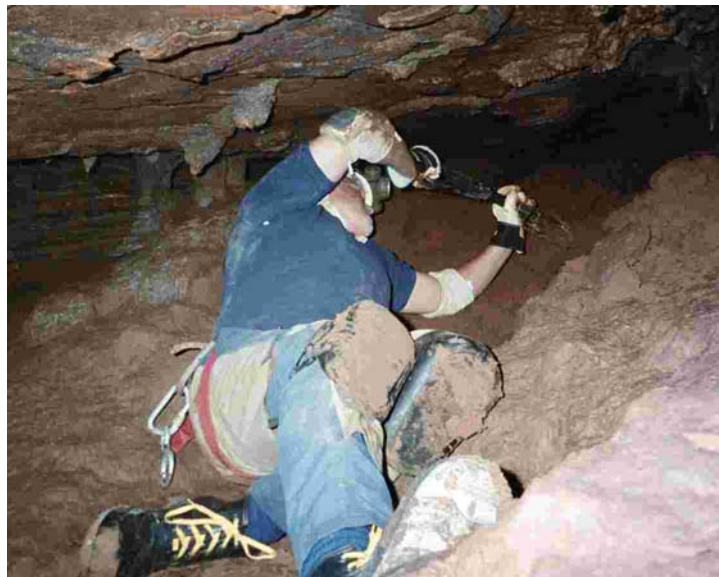
seen buzzards before, a momma buzzard came out of a side passage and promptly charged at them with her wings spread and slinging her head back and forth vomiting all the way. The order of the cavers into the cave was Dennis T., Joe Ben and Dennis J. Dennis T. started

screaming, "back up, Joe Ben, back up!" Joe Ben had sort of a weak stomach and promptly joined the buzzard in demonstrating the finer points of vomiting, no projectiles, just a mess. So there was the buzzard in front, Joe Ben in the back and poor Dennis caught in the middle.

Some years ago, some of us involved in TPWD projects visited Hill Country State Natural Area every Memorial Day weekend. We did that for several years. Seemed like that was a good time of year to find lots of Black Buzzards nesting in the caves. Nothing spectacular, they would just sit there and look at you. They probably knew they had the upper hand when it came to grossness.

Keith Heuss mentioned baby buzzards commonly found in Dynamite Cave at Colorado Bend. This story involves the first time we ever saw them. Dynamite has the large dynamited entrance that park visitors go into today. At the back, there's a small passage going straight up that's filled with Harvestmen. This makes it fun to chimney up and out or down and into the

cave. When the chimney meets the ceiling of the cave, it opens up and there's a pretty good stretch to reach the first foothold. I don't remember who all was involved but Alvis Hill had gone down before me. I got down and was hanging about halfway out of the ceiling when my cheap antique Justrite electric light went out. I hollered to Alvis to shine his light on the foothold so I wouldn't fall and break something. It seemed like only a



*Bill Steele digging in Crawling Dog Cave.*

few seconds before when Alvis had gone down. It's about a hundred and fifty feet to get out and back to the chimney entrance. I heard Alvis above me yelling down that he thought there was a bobcat in the cave. We discussed the sound and I said it was probably a buzzard. I was still trying to either go up or down when all of a sudden Alvis was back below me saying I was right, it was buzzards and he shined his light on the foothold.

The babies aren't old enough to project but give a nice disgusting demonstration of pushing gross stuff out of their trap and down their side. To this day, the annual babies are part of the visitors wild cave tour. The buzzards don't seem to mind, they just keep upchucking and the momma sits in a tree outside. I can almost imagine her laughing and saying 'aren't they cute.'"

## Access Policy for TCMA Caves in Austin

Access to TCMA managed caves in Austin, such as Whirlpool and Maple Run is through

Julie Jenkins  
Vice President, TCMA  
(512) 832-1965 (home)  
(512) 289-1336 (cell)  
[julesjenk@sbcglobal.net](mailto:julesjenk@sbcglobal.net)

Typical timeframe for access requests: two weeks notice in the busy summer months when most caves are booked way in advance, one full week during the rest of the year.

Note from Julie: "Please refer any cave trip requests to my attention, and that includes city caves. Please do not bother the city folks. TCMA has an agreement w/the city to handle all trip requests from cavers for TCMA caves and for the city caves. TCMA has agreed to intercept all caver requests for Austin caves."

## Encyclopedia of Caves

The new *Encyclopedia of Caves* (ISBN 0121986519), edited by William B. White and David Culver, is available at a substantial discount from Amazon.com (\$67.97 instead of \$99.95), but it has not yet been published. Amazon's web page announces an October 8th release.

This book contains over 100 articles by international cave experts, but is geared toward a diverse audience of scientific researchers, teachers and cavers. Below is a listing of articles that were authored by Texas cavers, past and present.

"Biodiversity in Anchialine Caves," Thomas M. Iliffe;  
"Chemoautotrophy," Annette Summers Engel; "Huatla System, Mexico," C. William Steele and James Smith; "Passages," George Veni; "Protecting Caves and Cave Life," William R. Elliot; "Spiders and Related Groups," James Reddell.

This is not to be confused with the similarly titled *Encyclopedia of Caves and Karst Science* edited by John Gunn (ISBN 1579583997), which is available from Amazon.com for \$195 plus shipping. In this case the book can be had for only \$150 directly from the publisher. See <http://www.routledge-ny.com/ref/caves/> This book is aimed at the academic and scientific market, not the typical caver.



**The Maverick Bull**  
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