

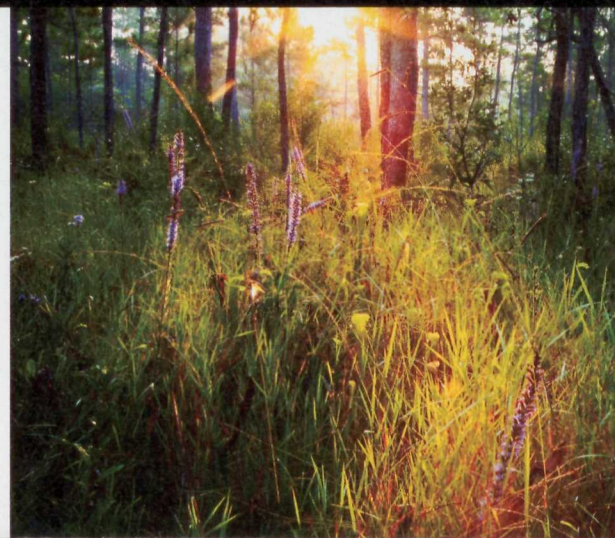
You can enjoy over 40 miles of hiking trails.



Creeks and rivers provide great escapes.



Texas trailing phlox grows only in east Texas.



Carnivorous plants thrive in the sunny savannah.



Scientists study the park's diverse plants and animals.

Unusual Combinations of the Ordinary

People have called the Big Thicket an American ark or the biological crossroads of North America. The preserve was established to protect its complex biological diversity. What is so extraordinary is not its rarity or abundance of species, but how many species coexist here. Once vast, all that remains of this combined pine and cypress forest, hardwood forest, meadow, and blackwater swamp is but a remnant. Because its habitats are so varied "Big Thicket" may seem a misnomer, but it is appropriate. In 1835 an exhausted settler wrote: "This day passed through the thickest woods I ever saw. It . . . surpasses any country for brush."

Major biological influences collide here: southeastern swamps, eastern forests, central plains, and southwestern deserts. Bogs about dry sandhills. Eastern bluebirds nest near roadrunners. There are 85 tree species, over 60 shrub, 20 orchid, and four of the United State's insect-eating plant species. Nearly 1,000 other flowering plants species and 26 fern and allies are found here. Some 185 bird species live here or migrate through. Fifty reptile species include a small, rarely seen alligator population. Frogs and toads abound.

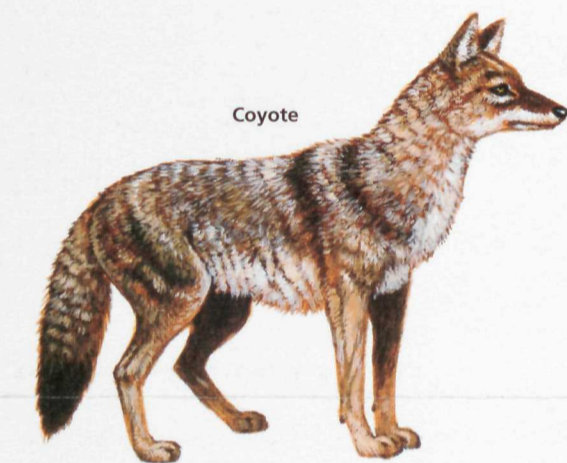
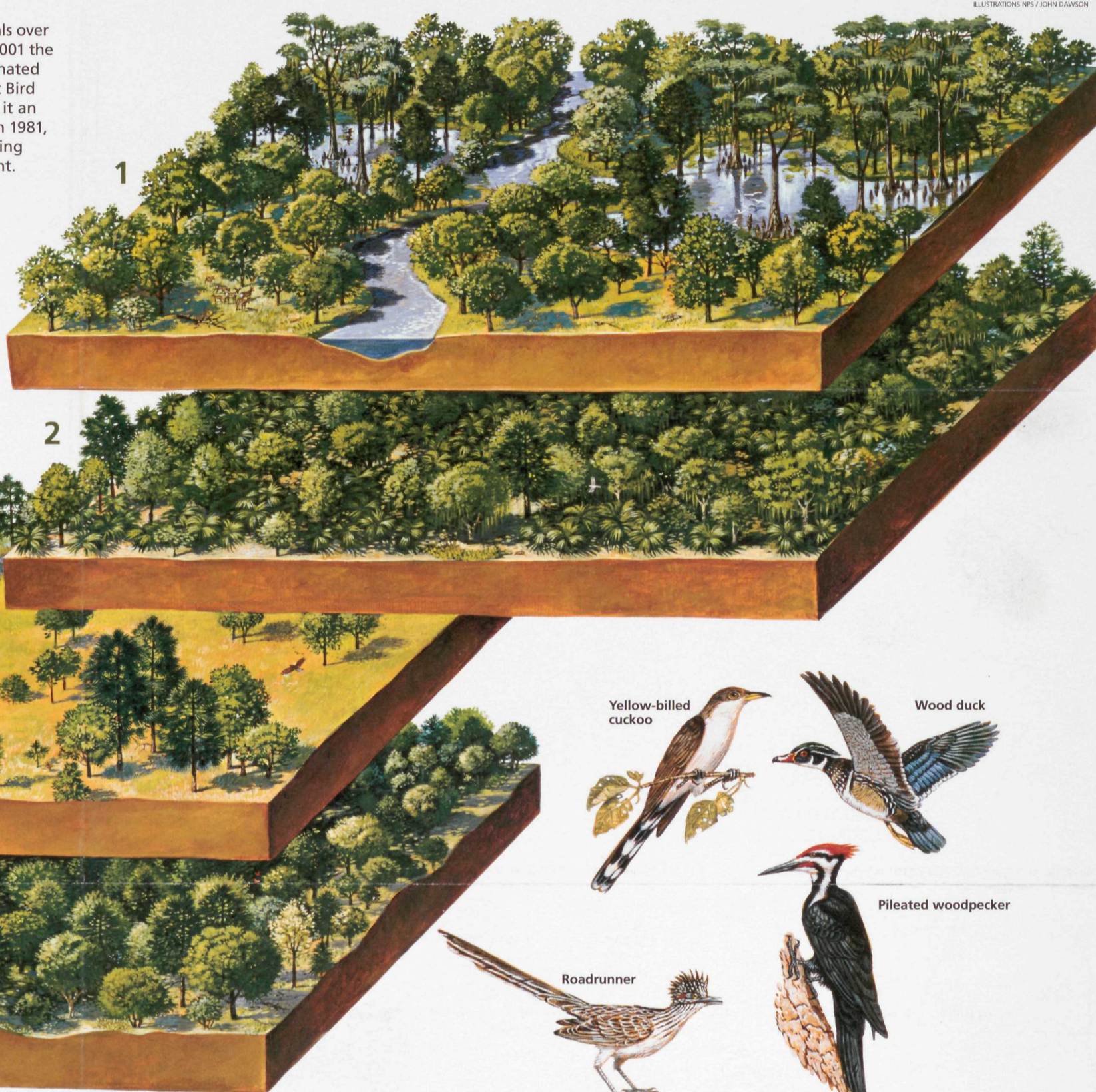
Alabama-Coushatta Indians hunted the Big Thicket but seldom penetrated its deepest reaches, and whites settled the area relatively late. In the 1850s economic exploitation began with the cutting of pine and cypress. Sawmills followed, using railroads to move out large volumes of wood. Ancient forests were felled and replanted with non-native slash pine. Oil strikes around 1900 brought more forest encroachment. Rice farmers flooded some forests nearby; others were cleared for residential and commercial development.

Designation of Big Thicket as a national preserve created a new management concept for the National Park Service. Status as a preserve prevents further harvest of native timber, but cutting non-native tree species for restoration and management of native forests is allowed. Oil and gas exploration and hunting and trapping also continue.

Big Thicket National Preserve totals over 100,000 acres, within 15 units. In 2001 the American Bird Conservancy designated the preserve a Globally Important Bird Area. The United Nations named it an International Biosphere Reserve in 1981, to provide a standard for measuring human impact on the environment.

Four major Big Thicket plant associations are illustrated at right.

- 1 Bottomland hardwoods and cypress sloughs
- 2 Palmetto hardwood flats
- 3 Wetland pine savannah
- 4 Slope forest



Coyote

American Ark

Big Thicket National Preserve boasts an incredible diversity of species; many are most active at night. Ask at the visitor center (see map) for lists of plant and animal species.

These illustrations (above and at right) show just a few of the animals that live here.



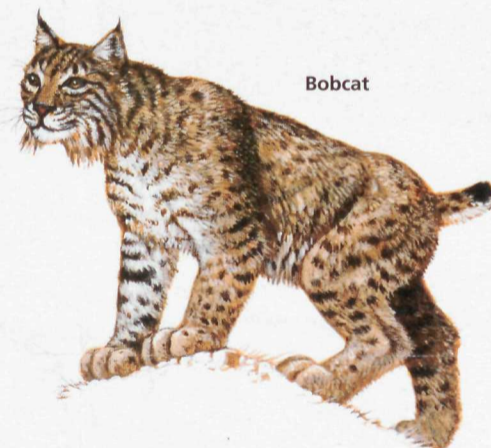
Speckled king snake



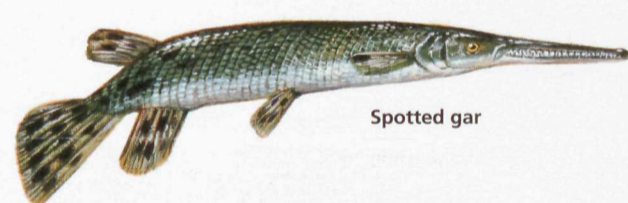
Coral snake



Marbled salamander



Bobcat



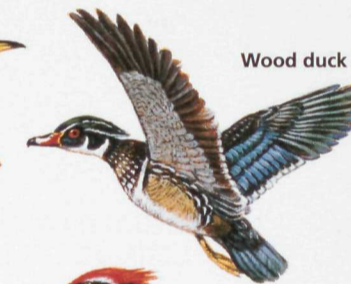
Spotted gar



Armadillo



Yellow-billed cuckoo



Wood duck



Pileated woodpecker



Roadrunner

Ecotone

Plants and animals characteristic of many regions live together in Big Thicket largely because of the Ice Age. Continental glaciers far to the north pushed many species southward. Conditions varied enough that when the glaciers retreated, many species continued living here.

An elevation change of just a few feet can produce a dramatic change in vegetation. Where habitats meet, called ecotones, life forms are most varied. Big Thicket has an abundance of these ecotones.



Big Thicket Legacies

The area's human history is as rich as its natural history. Northern Caddo Indians and southern Atakapas called it Big Woods. Much later, Alabama-Coushatta Indians, pushed westward, found shelter here before finally relocating to a reservation (see map).

Early Spanish settlers avoided this "impene-

trable woods," as did American settlers before the 1820s who built farms around its perimeter and named it Big Thicket.

Pioneers from Appalachia settled here in search of new land. During the Civil War many Big Thicket citizens moved deeper into the woods to avoid conscription.

In 1876 a narrow-gauge railroad came through, spurring logging that doomed the old-growth forest.

The Big Thicket that once spread over 3.5 million acres is now less than 300,000 acres. Over 100,000 acres are protected within the national preserve.

Noteworthy Residents Martha Jacobsen lived alone in the woods until she was nearly 100. Lance Rosier, self-educated naturalist, dedicated his life to preserving Big Thicket. Bruce Jordan preferred mules or oxen to haul logs from the thicket—they "do better in mud and water . . . and don't bog down so bad."



Martha Sultana Jacobsen



Lance Rosier



Bruce Jordan

JACOBSEN, ROSIER, AND JORDAN PHOTOS: CAMPBELL AND LYNN LOUGHEIMER, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PRESS

Plants That Eat Insects



Four of the five species of carnivorous plants found in the United States grow here: (left to right)



pitcher plant, bladderwort, butterwort, and sundew. Venus fly trap does not grow here.



The most common ones you'll see are pitcher plant and sundew. Sundew's sticky globules look like dew



drops, attracting and holding insects for the plant to digest.

Planning Your Visit

Big Thicket Visitor Center and Headquarters The complex is north of Kountze at U.S. 69/287 and FM 420. It is wheelchair accessible; service animals are welcome. Information, permits, films, and exhibits are available daily except Thanksgiving Day, December 25, and January 1.

Weather Expect rain, heat, and humidity. Summer daytime temperatures are in the mid-80s to mid-90s°F. Winter daytime temperatures average in the mid-50s°F.

Accommodations Find food, lodging, stores, and services in nearby communities. There are no accommodations in the preserve.

More information
Big Thicket National Preserve
6044 FM 420
Kountze, TX 77625
409-951-6700
www.nps.gov/bith

Big Thicket is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

Things To Do

Hiking Five preserve units have hiking and nature trails. You don't need a permit to hike, but please register at the trailhead. Don't wander off the trail—you can get lost. Be prepared for rain and wet trails. Don't follow a submerged trail when streams are flooded; you could step into a deep waterhole. Horses and all-terrain bicycles are permitted only on the Big Sandy Trail. No motorized vehicles are permitted on preserve trails.

Day Use and Picnicking Areas are open from dawn to dusk. Some picnic areas have grills; contained charcoal grills are permitted. Alcohol is not allowed.

Nature Study The preserve's plant and animal diversity makes it an ideal outdoor laboratory. Birding is popular, especially in spring and fall. From late March to early May hundreds of species pass through on their way north. Fall migrations are in October and November.

Naturalist Activities Call 409-951-6700 for information and reservations for guided hikes, talks, canoe trips, and educational field experiences.

Boating or Canoeing Small watercraft may be launched at locations along the Neches River, Pine Island Bayou, and Village and Turkey creeks. Choose your water: a broad alluvial river, sluggish bayou, or free-flowing creek. Creeks don't have developed access points, but you can launch at most road crossings. Some boat ramps on private property charge launch fees.

Camping Backcountry camping is allowed in certain areas. Campfires and collection of dead and down wood are permitted in areas open to camping. There are no developed campgrounds. Private and public campgrounds are nearby.

Hunting/Trapping These are allowed in specific areas only; permits required. For firearms and other regulations, see the park website.

Fishing Fishing is permitted. A Texas license is required; state laws apply.

Some Places To See—South to North (see map)
Beaumont Unit This area is surrounded by water. There is great fishing and paddling in both the northern freshwater area and the southern estuarine habitat. Private boat tours and canoe rentals available; contact the preserve.

Neches River Corridor (Lower and Upper Units) The broad river meanders through forests and swamps with options for day or overnight trips. There are several public and private launches.

Village Creek Corridor Unit A free-flowing stream threading through sandbars, sloughs, and forests, Village Creek is one of the most popular paddling trails in Texas. There are several launch points and local outfitters; contact the preserve.

Turkey Creek Unit Turkey Creek Trail leads 15 miles north-south through this diverse unit. The Pitcher Plant Trail, a 0.3-mile wheelchair accessible boardwalk, explores the bog. The Kirby Nature Trail loops through four plant communities in less than two miles.

Hickory Creek Savannah Unit Dry, sandy uplands and wet lowlands result in abundant flowers and grasses. Longleaf pine forest and wetlands mix here. When exposed to natural wildfires, this community becomes a park-like glade. A one-mile trail winds through the savannah. The 0.5-mile boardwalk is wheelchair-accessible.

Big Sandy Creek Unit A forest of beech, magnolia, and loblolly pine descends into dense stands of floodplain hardwoods on the 5.4-mile Woodlands Trail. Beaver Slide Trail, a 1.5-mile loop, winds around a series of ponds formed by old beaver dams. Horse and all-terrain bicycle riding are permitted on the 18-mile Big Sandy Trail. The trail is closed for hunting season; contact the preserve.

Menard Creek Corridor Unit Birdwatchers Trail is a short stroll to the Trinity River where you can see many migratory and resident bird species.

Beech Creek Unit A one-mile loop trail leads through a slope forest community of northeastern and southeastern species.

Safety and Stewardship

Your Safety The preserve is natural and wild; dangers exist. *Your safety is your responsibility.*

- Stay on the trails; it is easy to get lost.
- Carry water; don't drink from creeks or ponds.
- Water hazards, like strong currents and underwater debris, are common and change with floods.
- Chase quiet areas away from currents.
- Never dive into water.
- The use of rope swings is unauthorized and dangerous; you can be badly hurt.

Swimming Safety

- Never swim alone.
- Wear a personal flotation device (PFD).
- Water hazards, like strong currents and underwater debris, are common and change with floods.
- Chase quiet areas away from currents.
- Never dive into water.
- The use of rope swings is unauthorized and dangerous; you can be badly hurt.

Protect the Preserve All plants and animals are protected by law. Do not collect any specimens.

- Pack out what you pack in; do not litter.
- Pets must be leashed and attended.

