

Keep Texas Wild

BEACH TIDINGS

Texas' shores are home to plenty of living things, even though saltwater comes and goes.

» OCEANS ON THE MOVE

SPLAT!! You just finished your super sandcastle and the ocean washed it away. What's the big idea!? The water wasn't that close an hour ago. "Tides" are the big idea. Oceans all over the world have tides because of the moon and gravity. About every 12 hours, water from the beach travels its farthest toward land for "high" tide. Your sandcastle washed away because high tide came in. "Low" tide happens about every 12 hours, too. That's when the shoreline will be its farthest out at sea. Here in Texas, our beach water comes from the Gulf of Mexico, a special part of the Atlantic Ocean. Because of its bowl shape, the Gulf of Mexico seems a lot like its own ocean.

PHOTO BY CHASE A. FOUNTAIN/TPWD

» Sandy Lands

Walk along the shores of the Gulf of Mexico and you might find cool stuff washed up from far away, carried in by the waves and tides. But Texas has plenty of its own cool stuff living right here!

» Sea oats handle harsh beach conditions like constant saltwater spray and little fresh water really well!

» Beach morning-glory climbs all over the sand dunes; it's nicknamed "goat's foot."

» Spotted ground squirrels skitter among the dunes in search of seeds, roots and treats that wash up on shore.

» Snowy plovers line their nests with pieces of shells gathered from the seashore.

» Gulf Coast kangaroo rats get most of their drinking water from the seeds they eat.

» Keeled earless lizards have no outside ears, so no sand gets stuck in them.

» Blackback land crabs have to get in the saltwater to get their gills wet every now and then.

» Beach Houses

Sand dunes might just look like lumps of sand, but for our beach animals they serve as important homes. So as fun as it looks, please don't climb on the dunes, Dude! Instead, let the plants do all the climbing. It's their job to stick their roots down and keep the wind from blowing the sand away!

» Laughing gulls really do sound as though they're laughing when they call out to one another.

» Gulf Coast ribbon snakes don't have venom, but they do have stripes down their backs, which look cool as they zip through the sand!

» Beach evening primrose has bright yellow flowers.

» Ghost crabs got this name because they run and camouflage so quickly into the sand, you wonder, "Did I really see something?"

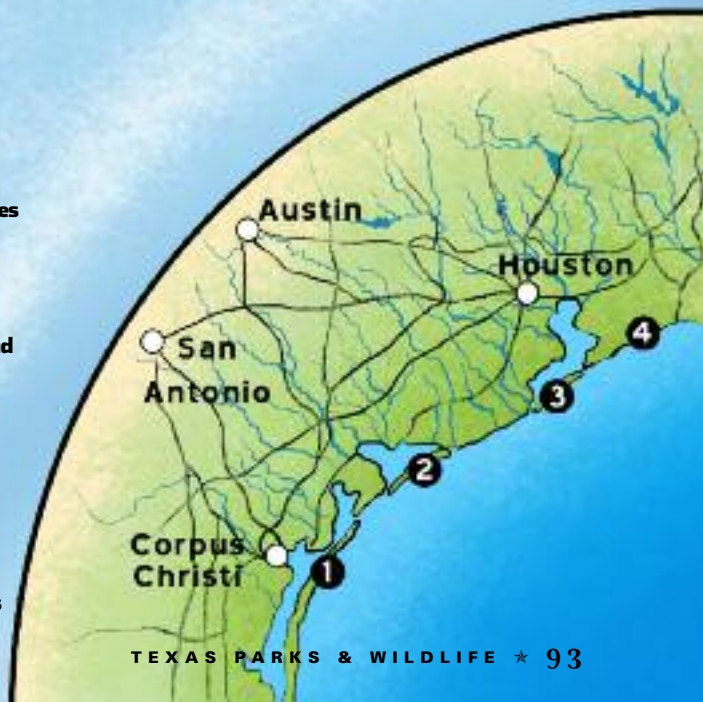
» Willets walk along the surf poking their long bills in and out of the wet sand in search of food.

» Sanderlings like to chase one another as they bop in and out of the water's edge.

» Sargassum or "seaweed" grows in the ocean, but tides and waves wash it ashore, where tiny beach critters snuggle in to hide. Shorebirds often search for supper in the sargassum.

Wiggle in the Waves

- 1 Mustang Island State Park got its name from wild horses that used to roam here. Today the horses and the Karankawa Indians, the first people to live here, are all gone, but it's a very cool place to camp!
- 2 Matagorda Island Wildlife Management Area is an island that has more than 19 endangered species and an awesome lighthouse built in 1852.
- 3 Galveston Island State Park marks the spot where Cabeza de Vaca and his crew shipwrecked in 1528. And did you know that pirates once used this island as a hideaway?
- 4 Sea Rim State Park was once home to prehistoric Indians. How do we know? From the clamshell mounds (called "middens") discovered here.





Spike's Activity Page



>> WILD SOCIAL STUDIES

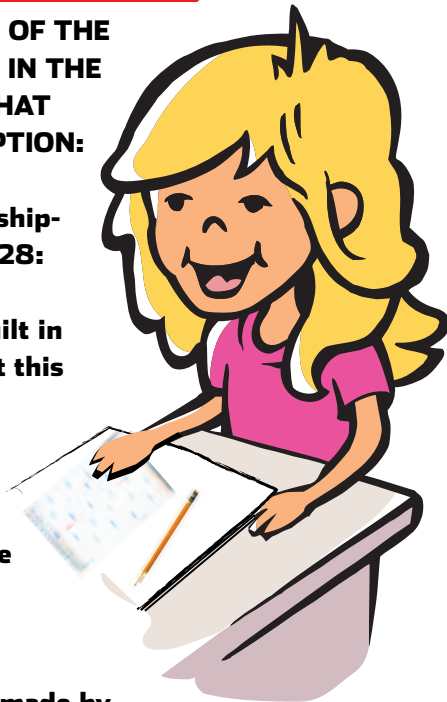
WRITE THE NAME OF THE SPECIAL "WIGGLE IN THE WAVES" PLACE THAT FITS THE DESCRIPTION:

1) Cabeza de Vaca ship-wrecked here in 1528:

2) A lighthouse built in 1852 still stands at this special spot:

3) Karankawa Indians were the first people to have lived here:

4) Here you'll find clamshell mounds made by prehistoric Indians:



>> WILD SCIENCE

Plants and animals that live on sandy beaches must have special adaptations. List one adaptation for each sand-dweller below:



Keeled earless lizard



Gulf Coast kangaroo rat



Ghost crab



Sea oats

>> KEEPING IT WILD

DO YOU LIKE TREASURE HUNTING ALONG THE SHORE TO DISCOVER WHAT THE WAVES WASHED IN?

Beachcombing can be a blast! The next time you go beachcombing for cool stuff, bring along a reusable bag and keep an eye out for bumper stuff, too, like trash. Not only

will you help keep our Texas beaches beautiful, but the critters that call the sand and dunes home will thank you!



NEXT MONTH:
Caves

TEACHER RESOURCE

Visit www.tpwmagazine.com to download a printable PDF, access lesson plans, find additional resources or order copies.

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