

Hunting
Texas Wildflowers
by
Rich Olivieri

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Introduction

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A Note from the Author

Hi, I'm Rich Olivieri, the author of "Hunting Texas Wildflowers" and editor of WildflowerHaven.com, an online community for wildflower enthusiasts, photographers, and naturalists. For the past five years, I have traveled across much of Texas in search of its most precious resource, wildflowers.

I spent my early childhood growing up on the edge of the Hill Country area in Georgetown, Texas, a small town just north of Austin. I still remember the Sunday after-church drives in the country with my parents in search of my father's "ranch-to-be." During the spring, these drives would often take us along country roads with roadsides covered with bluebonnets, verbena (vervain), and yellow daisies.

My last duty assignment in the military brought me back to my Texas roots where I was once again presented with the beauty and splendor of the annual spring wildflower show. After moving to San Antonio, I developed a renewed interest in photography. I began to actively look for photo opportunities in the surrounding Hill Country. I had always admired the work of Texas oil painter, Porfirio Salinas, and wanted to find bluebonnet scenes to photograph like Mr. Salinas captured in his oil paintings.

My search led me to Willow City Loop, a 13-mile ranch road that meanders and winds through steep hills and narrow valleys in an area of the Hill Country, which is 16 miles north of Fredericksburg. I was told that this was a "must see" route for viewing bluebonnets in the Hill Country. As I entered the route at the small township of Willow City, I saw mostly small scrub oaks and cedar trees, but very few wildflowers of any kind. Then, as I turned along one of the winding curves in the route, suddenly the view opened up to a wide canyon. Cars in front of me came to a complete stop. Drivers and passengers left their cars with the doors still open and walked as if under a spell toward the edge of the canyon. I turned to see what had captured their complete attention, and there, for the first time in my life, I saw a river of bluebonnets flowing down the steep slopes of the canyon, flowing over small hills, and then finally covering an entire field like a lake of blue.

That first experience, seeing the bluebonnet covered ravines and hills of Willow City Loop, sparked a new love in me of the Texas Hill Country, nature, and wildflowers. I have spent the past five years traveling thousands of miles over ranch roads, farm roads, and county roads seeking opportunities to capture the natural beauty of Texas.

During my journeys, I have seen the moon rise over fall-colored hills and the evening sun slip behind rocky hills sprinkled with color from a palette of Texas wildflowers. I have witnessed morning sunlight glistening and sparkling through clear water falling over rocky cliffs draped with wildflowers. Butterflies and bees have danced before my eyes on petals bathed in the warmth of the afternoon sun. The alluring scent from fields of bluebonnets has intoxicated my spirit leaving me hopelessly addicted.

The sight of the first blooms of a new spring season fills my spirit with excitement, energy, and joy. No man-made structure or garden will ever give me the same experience that I get on my wildflower journeys. I am not alone in this quest to seek those virgin expanses of Texas wildflowers. Thousands of folks visited WildflowerHaven.com last year seeking tips on when to come and where to go to get the best wildflower experience.

I hope the information contained in this book will help those, who have not seen the beauty of Texas wildflowers, to experience the excitement first-hand. For those who already share this interest, the information will help you locate new areas to enjoy.

I also hope that after experiencing the excitement and wonder of native Texas wildflowers, you will join me in supporting efforts to preserve this natural beauty for future generations. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Native Plant Society of Texas, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and Texas Highway Department have made major contributions toward this effort, but more is needed.

It is not enough to merely plant wildflower seeds along the major roadways. Once you have witnessed morning sunlight fall upon acres of wild prairie painted with cactus and wildflowers, you will know what I mean. We need to keep up the fine effort of planting wildflower seeds along roadways and encouraging the use of native plants in our landscaping, but we also need to support the creation of wildflower havens. Roadside parks, state and nationally managed wilderness areas, city parks, private lands, and new housing development areas are all sites where wildflower havens can be created.

Many of the wildflowers and native plants are hardier and more drought resistant than cultivated plants. Some city water districts are encouraging the use of certain wildflowers and native plants to assist in conserving water. However, wildflowers bring much more to the ecological balance than just water conservation.

In addition to the beauty and excitement they give to those who enjoy viewing them, wildflowers play an important part in maintaining the food cycle for many insects, birds, and other wildlife. Wildflowers, along with native grasses,

help prevent erosion and return nutrients to the soil. The bluebonnet plant is a nitrogen-fixing legume that can actually boost the levels of nitrogen in poor soils. Regardless of the tangible benefits that wildflowers provide, the aesthetic value is enough for me to want to see wildflowers grow near where I live.

Last spring, I found a small vacant lot just one block from where I live that was packed full of a variety of wildflowers. Hidden from the road by a row of trees and bushes, this wildflower haven is in danger of disappearing in future years as San Antonio continues to grow. Over the past six years I have seen field after field disappear because of new development. In exchange for the delicate beauty of the wildflowers that bloomed in those fields, we now have concrete and asphalt. Only a few sites have retained trees or a few square feet for planting native plants.

The condition worsens as you travel into the hill country. Land along the I-10 and I-35 corridors is being developed into residential housing with lots that are less than an acre in size. As soon as a few new housing areas are started, more acreage is sold and turned into gas stations and shopping centers. Communities that were small hill country towns only 10 years ago are quickly turning into sprawling suburban areas. In most cases, the first casualties of these new developments are the native trees and wildflowers.

This does not have to happen. We can make a difference in how this land is developed. We can set aside areas that are kept wild and filled with native plants. We can encourage the use of native plants and restrict the use of plants that are invasive and destructive to the local ecology.

Please use this book to help you find those remaining virgin expanses of wildflowers. Then please consider helping to support the creation of wildflower havens. You can find resources to help you get started in the Appendix of this book and online at WildflowerHaven.com.

Thank you for your interest and support,

Rich Olivieri

About the Book

“Hunting Texas Wildflowers” represents my five-year journey discovering the beauty of Texas wildflowers. This book is based upon my personal notes and research gathered as I traveled many thousands of miles along hundreds of roads seeking wildflowers in Texas. My desire is to share not only the knowledge I gained during this journey, but also the wonder and excitement I experienced along the way. To accomplish this goal, I adopted a more personal and informal approach to writing this book to make it more than just a travel guide.

The book is organized in sections that will help you understand the what, where, why, and how of wildflower hunting. Included in the Appendix are additional resources, a bibliography and articles to help you photograph and grow your own wildflowers.

“Hunting Texas Wildflowers” is more of a training guide. It is meant to be a supplement and not a replacement to local maps, other navigation aids, and travel guides.

In reading this book, I hope you get the sense that you are taking me along with you as your personal guide to the joyful discovery of Texas wildflowers. I am also hoping that you will begin your own personal quest to becoming a wildflower hunter and guide.

In addition to this book, our web sites, WildflowerHaven.com and [WildflowerHaven Community](http://WildflowerHavenCommunity.com) are available to help you find the best spots for wildflowers throughout the year.

About WildflowerHaven.com

WildflowerHaven.com is a nature tourism service of EquipU, LLC (a limited liability company organized in the State of Texas).

Nature tourism is defined by the Texas Nature Tourism Task Force as “discretionary travel to natural areas that conserves the environmental, social and cultural values while generating an economic benefit to the local community.”

WildflowerHaven.com was developed for a similar purpose. It was developed from a love for nature and the vast natural beauty of Texas.

Presently WildflowerHaven.com provides the following tools and resources to help improve your wildflower experience.

Wildflower Reports

Trip reports written by WildflowerHaven.com staff provide visitors with up-to-date information on the areas to visit. The staff trip reports include photos, directions, ratings and special tips on when to visit. We also provide spotter reports from users who have sighted special places for wildflower viewing.

Wildflower Routes

This section includes maps of popular wildflower viewing routes. Up-to-date reports of these routes are also provided.

Meet the Wildflowers

Photographs and interesting facts in the Meet the Wildflowers series help introduce individual wildflower species.

Wildflower Events

A listing of wildflower festivals and events held each year during the season is provided.

Resource Library

This area contains links to resources to help visitors find, identify, and grow wildflowers.

Forums

Discussion forum topics include wildflower sightings, growing wildflowers, identifying wildflowers and taking wildflower/nature photographs. Forums are hosted at <http://community.wildflowerhaven.com>.

Photo Galleries

Galleries include photos posted from users and WildflowerHaven.com staff.

Wildflower Hunting Code

Viewing Texas wildflowers during the spring is a favorite event of the year for Texas residents and visitors.

Several cities go all out to welcome wildflower seekers and photographers, but a few cities and counties don't seek the extra attention. Often the best wildflower viewing is located in areas that are also the best rangeland or farmland. On my wildflower trips I often find horses, cattle, sheep, and goats providing backdrops to my wildflower photographs. While out viewing Texas wildflowers, I urge you to observe the following wildflower hunting code.

Watch the children! While you stop to view the wildflowers or take a photo of your child in the bluebonnets, other cars speed by to get home to watch their favorite show or sports game. Keep your children in hand at all times when leaving your car to view the wildflowers. While you are on your way to your next wildflower viewing, please watch for stray children wandering on the side of the road.

Watch the road first and not the wildflowers. Take along a designated wildflower spotter, if possible, or take extra care to drive safely when seeking or viewing wildflowers. It's always good to have a second pair of eyes. Also, find a safe spot to pull off the road and not on the wildflowers. Some counties in Texas do not allow parking or stopping along a county road.

Leave the livestock and wild animals alone. Livestock can get aggressive if they feel endangered just as wild animals can. After being approached by wildflower seekers all day long, you can understand why an animal might want to be left alone to graze. Ranchers may have special feeding programs, so do not feed the animals. Watch out for snakes and other wild creatures that might be enjoying a stroll through the wildflowers or grass.

Honor private property! A fence or wall is usually an indication of private property, but a “Posted: No Trespassing” sign is enough warning in most counties to allow the local law enforcement to issue you a citation for trespassing.

Take home photos of the wildflowers, but please do not pick the wildflowers. Picking or destroying the wildflowers before they can seed could prevent annual wildflowers from returning next year. Also, find a bare spot to pose your children and family for the “family bluebonnets photo.”

Leave with what you brought along. I carry a plastic bag with me at all times to keep my trash, and I often return home with more trash in it than I brought. Check to see that you have picked up your camera equipment – the most often lost item is the lens cap. And, most importantly, make certain all your kids are in the car before leaving the area.

Have Fun! Please do get out and see first-hand the wondrous natural beauty of Texas wildflowers. While you are there experiencing the fragrance and colorful sight of our Texas wildflowers, remember how fragile that beauty is. Your support and help is needed to safeguard this wonderful resource for future generations.

Be prepared. To make certain you can get back to make your report, please take along the following:

- ☼ A good map that includes county roads
- ☼ A cell phone with roaming capability
- ☼ Water and food
- ☼ An emergency road kit

Finally, come back safely and share your experience with us at WildflowerHaven.com.

More about Hunting Texas Wildflowers...

Hunting Texas Wildflowers (HTW-2006) contains 17 maps and detailed descriptions of over 75 wildflower routes and locations covering the Hill Country, East Central Texas, North Central Texas, and Southeast Texas.

Featured communities include:

- ✿ Hill Country: Burnet, Fredericksburg, Johnson City, Llano and Mason
- ✿ East Central Texas: Brenham
- ✿ North Central Texas: Ennis
- ✿ Southeast Texas: Cuero

Special spots are highlighted where you can find unique views of wildflowers including:

- ✿ Large fields of wildflowers
- ✿ Old buildings with wildflowers
- ✿ Windmills with wildflowers
- ✿ Farm houses with wildflowers
- ✿ Animals with wildflowers

Safety is a big concern when out viewing wildflowers, so roadside parks, nature centers, and natural areas are listed where you can safely stop and view wildflowers up close.

Hunting Texas Wildflowers is more of a wildflower hunter's training guide than merely a collection of maps and routes.

Also Included:

- ✿ Sample color photos of wildflower locations
- ✿ How to hunt wildflowers and find new locations
- ✿ How to grow wildflowers
- ✿ Wildflower photography tips
- ✿ Lists of resources for finding, identifying, and growing wildflowers
- ✿ Coloring pages

Hunting Texas Wildflowers retails for \$19.95 and can be ordered at:

<http://community.wildflowerhaven.com/store>

Discounts are available to retail outlets and non-profit organizations (contact: sales@equipu.com).

*Don't wander aimlessly looking for beautiful Texas wildflowers; get **Hunting Texas Wildflowers** and easily find them.*