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Wichita Falls Times Record News (TX)

January 21, 2003
Section: Local News
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The art of learning Teacher moonlights as wildlife photographer

Michelle Kann, Times Record News

The first time **Russell Graves** sent photos to Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine for printing, a response from the publication came quickly.

"At the time I lived in the country and so I had to go into town to mail them," Graves said. "I think they had that rejection letter in the mail before I even got home that night."

But with hard work and dedication, Graves has earned his way into this month's Texas Parks and Wildlife cover story called "Shooting the Shooters" by Scott Sommerlatte. The article profiled four recognized statewide photographers-Grady Allen, Wyman Meinzer, Earl Nottingham and David J. Sams.

"I thought it was pretty neat to be in the same article with people that I grew up looking at their work," Graves said.

The article also highlighted notable photographers from around the state that work with Texas Parks and Wildlife to show the nature and beauty of the state.

"Photography has really been the heart and soul of this magazine," Susan L. Ebert, publisher and editor of Texas Parks and Wildlife, said. "This was a way to show the men and women that are behind the lens for which the readers mostly only see their little six point photo credit."

Graves, who is an agricultural science teacher at Childress Independent School District, started taking pictures when his brother gave him a second-hand camera 12 years ago.

"In 1997 I really turned a point in my career and started shooting photos for magazines like Outdoor Life and North American Hunter," Graves said. "I have done work for just about every magazine that deals with beef or hunting."

But unlike photographers like Meinzer, Graves pursues his passion while working full-time at Childress High School.

Rising before the sun, he is able to capture wildlife in their natural setting on the weekends while the rest of the state is still asleep.

Ebert said Graves is constantly pushing himself.

"He has a great work ethic and he is also dedicated to an ethic of self improvement," she said. "He works to be better each time he takes a photograph."

This winter, Graves used 80 rolls of film while working on his next book.

"During Christmas break, I have to switch from school mode to photographer mode," he said.


Graves' first book, "The Prairie Dog - Sentinel of the Prairie" was released in October 2001 and his latest book "Hunting Dogs - A Photographic Tribute" is now available in bookstores.

"I did a photo essay for Texas Parks and Wildlife about hunting dogs. Not about the training, but everything about the relationship between the person and their dog," he said. "It was a mood piece and I received tons of e-mail and photo calls about it."

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This public response pushed Graves to continue photographing hunting dogs and produce a book about the subject.

"I can be proud of the book and it looks really good," he said.

With stock shows and FFA team competitions to organize during the week and wildlife to photograph on the weekends, Graves plans to continue his hobby for as long as he can.

"I feel really lucky in the sense that I'm ahead of the curve for my age," Graves said. "I mean to be 33 and already have done three books and working on a fourth is great."
Courtesy

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