

Ranching

livestock specialist says cattleowners must use technology

By RICHARD WILLIAMS
Reporter

Technology that could save many ranch operations in Texas has been available for many years, but livestock specialist Dr. Tom Troxel says Texas ranchers aren't using it.

Troxel, a livestock specialist with Texas Agricultural Extension Service, says he is perplexed by the lack of acceptance Texas ranchers have shown towards this technology.

The ranching industry should learn from the successful practices throughout the United States," Troxel says. "There isn't one successful industry today that is operating the same way it operated 50 years ago. To stay in business, the successful industries have had to change with the times."

Troxel says the ranching industry

in Texas hasn't changed with the times in the areas of management or technology. He says 85 percent of ranchers involved in beef cattle production don't use growth implants, which stimulate growth in their cattle.

"This is in spite of the fact that (growth) implants can increase weaning weights around 10 percent and give you a return of \$10 for every one dollar you invest," he says.

Troxel also says 80 percent of the ranchers in Texas do not make use of breeding technologies such as artificial insemination, or fertility testing.

Management is another area where ranchers are lagging behind, he says. Too many ranchers, he says, are using the "hope management system" to run their ranch.

Troxel explains the "hope management system" as when a rancher "doesn't check the fertility of his bulls, but hopes they're fertile, refuses to give supplemental feed to his cattle and hopes they find enough nutrients, forgets to give vaccinations to cattle and hopes the cattle don't get sick."

"And finally, after all else fails," Troxel says, "he hopes the banker will give him a loan to survive."

"Ranchers must start running the ranch like a business because only those that can read the writing on the wall and start making modern financial and management plans will make it."

But the use of technology and sound fiscal planning might not be enough to save Texas ranches. "The saddest part is that even

modern ranching may never pay for a modern lifestyle," he says. "Most people who ranch want that modern lifestyle."

Troxel says inheriting a ranch may be the only feasible way for young people to obtain a ranch of their own.

But Troxel urges young people to be patient. "A young man cannot expect to start in the ranching industry and after only a short period of time, have what his father and grandfather had after working for 20 or 30 years," he says.

No matter what happens in the near future, Troxel says he doesn't believe there will be any agency intervention, governmental or private, to save the day.

Troxel says he sees no winners playing the ranching game in the near future, just survivors.

Aggies spend holidays exploring caves

By D. ANN BEELER
Reporter

Surrounded by jungle, two Aggies celebrated New Year's Day by eatingologica Chicken steamed over corn leaves and preparing for the day's caving exploration.

Steve Robertson, a biology graduate student, and David Locklear, a senior industrial education major, set out on their expedition with a team of spelunkers to explore and map unmapped caves of Veracruz, Mexico, and collect specimens of blind catfish.

Robertson and Locklear are members of the Aggie Speleological Society. Members of the club explore caves around Austin, in New Mexico and in Mexico.

Robertson, who has explored caves for 10 years, said he is attracted to caves by the lure of the unknown.

"You never know what you'll meet," he said.

Robertson says he considers finding plants and animals discovered in caves valuable to his education.

Finding specimens and photographing cave phenomena are inter-

"You never know what you'll find (in a cave)."

— Steve Robertson, biology graduate student.

esting as long as the cave is not altered or destroyed in any way," Robertson said.

Locklear said he began exploring caves seriously almost two years ago and is currently vice president of the Aggie Speleological Society.

He said his favorite activities include cliff diving and waterskiing.

"I'm sort of a crazy person, and I've been that way all of my life," he said. "I live on the edge of life and love it."

In a cave, spelunkers occasionally discover unusual species of plants and animals, he said.

"Unfortunately, we confront more common little creatures like snakes, mice, rats and millions or sometimes billions of bats as well," Locklear said.

According to Robertson, the highlight of his Christmas excursion was

collecting several blind catfish in Cueva del Tunal for his personal study.

"The fish is roughly two to eight inches long and is yellowish-white or light brown in color," he said.

The tiny fish are ferocious eaters — they eat just about anything, Robertson said.

Some of the fish have a layer of skin covering their eyes, Robertson said.

"The group traveled 200 feet into the cave, encountering knee-high warm white water, whirlpools, and climbed a slippery 30-foot waterfall without ropes."

— David Locklear, Aggie Speleological Society.

"Other fish have vestigial developments that resemble eyes, but have been reduced to non-functioning formations," he said.

The catfish Robertson found are members of the genus Rhamdia but may be of an unknown species classification, he added. The tiny catfish is most unusual in its sleeping habits, Robertson said.

"The fish sleep either on their heads or resting upright on their tails," he said.

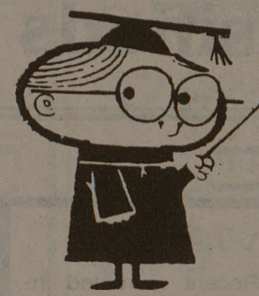
Locklear said he was intrigued by the Tolantongo cave located on the Rio Tonto River. The cave is hidden behind a beautiful waterfall, Locklear said.

"The group traveled 200 feet into the cave, encountering knee-high warm white water, whirlpools, and climbed a slippery 30-foot waterfall without ropes," he said.

Locklear said he found an albino crayfish inside the cave that was totally blind.

Locklear said he regrets not spending more time in the Tolantongo cave.

"I hope to return to the cave with the Speleological club members next Christmas Break," he said. "The Tolantongo cave is one of the most exciting caves in the world."



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