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The Big Chill 2021

By Jenny Castillo, Neighborhood News Staff Writer

Nature is a beautiful thing. Animals and plants adapt to the environment with subtle changes. This winter, however, nature underwent an instant change, catching not only humans off guard, but flora and fauna throughout the state of Texas. What can we do to help nature along?

Caught off guard

It's going to take time to know the full extent of losses from this prolonged freeze event, because animals have a secretive nature. Damage to plants, however, was evident almost immediately with winter burn making plants, grasses, and trees appear brown and dry. Animals that sustained the most loss were non-native species like axis deer, blackbuck, and nilgai antelope—originally from temperate climates. Native species like the white-tailed deer and mule deer are more tolerant to weather events like this, and do not appear to have sustained damage. Aquatic life may have sustained the most loss. Recent drought conditions have caused low water levels, and fish were not able to descend to deeper water to escape the cold. Smaller animals like bats sustained losses, too. Surviving bats were rescued and taken to rehabilitation for dehydration, starvation, and cold body temperatures. Birds fared well with food sources like backyard bird feeders and foraging in areas of melted snow. Birds also have several methods to deal with the cold temperatures; multiple species will fluff-up their feathers to trap warm air.

Next season

Nature will run its course. According to Alan Cain—white-tailed deer program specialist with Texas Parks and Wildlife—if the white-tailed deer population had sustained any losses, it would have been a natural event of thinning the herd. He does not, however, expect any effect on hunting season in the fall, as deer food sources appear to be returning.

We are now officially in spring, observing the comeback-nature of nature. Plants we thought were a loss are greening up, animals are going about their usual activities, and through it all, weeds never skipped a beat. What can we do to help nature along her route to recovery? We can observe and be good stewards of the environment through responsible actions—mother nature will do the rest.

