


# Texas Tables Gone Wild

Bring the Bounty of Texas' Wild Game to Your Feasts this Holiday Season

Story by Susan M. Cashin | Photos Courtesy of Marla Camp, Chris Hughes, Elizabeth Cary Mungall and Texas Parks + Wildlife Department




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**TIRED OF TURKEY FOR THANKSGIVING?** Lost your hankering for honey-glazed ham at Christmas? Well, join the crowd! With the holidays just around the corner, *austinwoman* decided to not only liven up your holiday fare, but to add something special to this season of thanks and celebration.

The goal is to make this holiday season a true Texan experience that extols the virtue of Texas' bounty of wild game. In this article you will learn about the BIG SIX. The lineup consists of three introduced exotics - axis deer, nilgai antelope (also known as South Texas antelope), wild boar (feral pigs) - along with three native species - bison, white-tailed deer and wild turkey. We will highlight some of the history on these animals, reliable sources for excellent game meat products, recipes, as well as health benefits to you and the environment in order to help make this year's table not only delicious but unique, educational, and in the true spirit of the season.

Why should you even think of serving wild game this year? Simply put, it tastes great and is some of the purest meat available. None of the animals provided by the sources listed are treated with hormones, antibiotics or

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steroids. The animals live freely in a natural environment, as individuals or in social groups, as opposed to some of the commercially-raised animals that are raised in veritable concentration camps. This results in healthy, stress-free animals with flavorful, tender and most of all, nutritious meat. All the purveyors listed use humane and sustainable harvesting techniques. Each has a licensed USDA inspector present at harvest that is paid by the government instead of the harvester. Also, there is little waste, and much of the animal is used from meat to hides.

According to Chris Hughes, CEO of Broken Arrow Ranch in Ingram, TX, there are several very important reasons to support the wild game meat industry in Texas. His company has set up a unique relationship with ranchers in the Hill Country. "The agreement that we make is that these ranchers have an over population of exotics that they need to control, and we're one of their options. We pay them based on the carcass weight of the animals that we harvest. So, it's a win-win situation all around. They help put their land back into ecological balance. They get paid for it, and we get the meat to process and sell nationwide."

On a trip to Ingram, TX, Hughes shared interesting facts about animals his company harvests year round. For instance, a proscribed hunting season only exists for native species. The species Hughes harvests are axis deer, nilgai antelope, and wild boar, all of which are exotic. Let's take a look at each of these offerings.

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## Axis Deer



Elizabeth Cary Mungall

Axis deer are native to the foothills of the Indian Himalayas and the island of Sri Lanka. The Exotic Wildlife Association has judged the meat of the axis deer as the best-tasting wild game meat. Viewed as one of the most beautiful deer, with their striking, reddish-brown coats marked with white spots in undulating and uneven rows, these animals reach a shoulder height from 2.5 ft. to just over 3 ft. They range in

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weight from 90-to-150 pounds for does and 145-to-250 pounds for bucks. Their habitat is shrinking in their native locales, yet in this country, they are the most numerous and widespread of introduced deer and antelope.

Introduced to Texas in 1932, there are free-ranging and confined herds on ranches in many counties, particularly in Central and South Texas. Their diet consists primarily of grass. However, they will graze on forbs (weeds or broad-leaf herbaceous plants) and browse (leaves of woody plants). Axis deer produce the leanest meat of any deer species. Per ounce, an uncooked Axis steak has .06 grams of fat. In comparison,

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skinless chicken has .88 grams of fat and lean beef has 1.76 grams of fat. Axis deer meat could be called the "fat-free" red meat. Known for its mild, tender and sweet, delicious flavor, axis deer meat is described as the veal of venison. The best news is that, unlike veal, this animal is never caged or force-fed.

### Nilgai Antelope



Chris Hughes - Broken Arrow Ranch

Nilgai antelope were originally brought to United States from India as zoo stock early in the 1920's. The largest of the Indian antelope, an adult male can weigh in at over 600 pounds and take on a bluish hue with age. The King Ranch on property in Kenedy County in South Texas between 1930 and 1941 released them.

Due to protection, restricted

hunting, and few natural predators in the area, they quickly grew in numbers. Nilgai are mainly grass feeders, and like axis deer, will supplement their diets with forbs, plant parts and will also browse. Along with axis deer, nilgai compete with native white-tailed deer. White-tailed deer can only subsist on browsing and forbs, and when these are not available they can die even if they have a belly full of grass. So the harvesting of the prolific nilgai is essential to the survival of healthy populations of native white-tailed deer in Texas. Nilgai meat is mild, low in fat and not as gamey as other venison, like elk and native deer can be.

### Wild Boar



Texas Parks + Wildlife Dept.

Columbus brought wild boar, the last of our introduced exotics, to the

Americas. Descended from domesticated European stock, these porcine interlopers quickly turned feral. Over time, other domesticated hogs escaped into the wild, along with introduced species for hunting such as the Russian boar. Along with many other states, Texas is facing an ecological disaster. The wild pig population is out of control in Texas with an estimated damage to agriculture crops in the tens of millions. Wild pigs are omnivores and are responsible for the decimation of ground nesting birds. They are prolific reproducers and may have several litters a year. Any attempt to curb the environmental and economic devastation they cause must begin with an aggressive harvesting program. That said, wild boar is lean, delicious meat. Many say it possesses a delightfully nutty flavor profile.

### Bison

Bison leads off the native species of wild game. Hugh Fitzsimmons of Thunder Heart Bison raises some of the best bison meat around. His bison are free-ranging and humanely harvested. Grass-fed, the bison raised at

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his Shape Ranch provide nutrient rich meat that is low in fat and cholesterol. Studies have showed that grass-fed bison meat contains large amounts of Omega-3's, selenium, vitamin E and beta-carotene. Ongoing research is looking into the possible beneficial effects that bison's high levels of naturally produced CLA (conjugated linoleic acid) might have in regards to the reduction in risk of cancer, obesity,



diabetes and immune disorders. The meat is the just as tender as can be and the flavor heavenly. Last April, Thunder Heart Bison was a 2007 Gallo Gold Medal Award winner in the Outstanding Meat and Charcuterie category. Each year the Gallo Awards honor the top artisanal food producers in this country.

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### Turkey + White-Tailed Deer

The last two entries in our list are wild turkey and white-tailed deer. Both are low in fat and cholesterol and are simply delicious. The best sources for these are from safe, responsible and conscientious hunters, whether it is yourself, a family member or a friend. Remember that by supporting responsible and humane hunting,

See BOUNTY on page 80

## COOKING TIPS, RECIPES & SOURCE SITES

Best book on exotic game in Texas  
*Exotic Animal Field Guide* by Elizabeth Cary Mungall – Texas A&M University Press 2007

Suggested books for cooking tips, recipes and cooking techniques  
*Wild About Game* by Janie Hibler – Broadway Books 1998

*D'Artagnan's Glorious Game Cookbook* by Ariane Daguin, George Faison and Joanna Pruess – Little, Brown and Company 1999



Wild game meat source websites  
[www.brokenarrowranch.com](http://www.brokenarrowranch.com)  
[www.thunderheartbison.com](http://www.thunderheartbison.com)

### Suggested Wines

*Venison – Boar – Bison*

McPherson Tre Colore – Texas  
Pinotage or Shiraz from South Africa

### *Wild Turkey*

Stone House Vineyards Claros – Texas  
A fruity California Zinfandel  
A dry sparkling Shiraz from Australia



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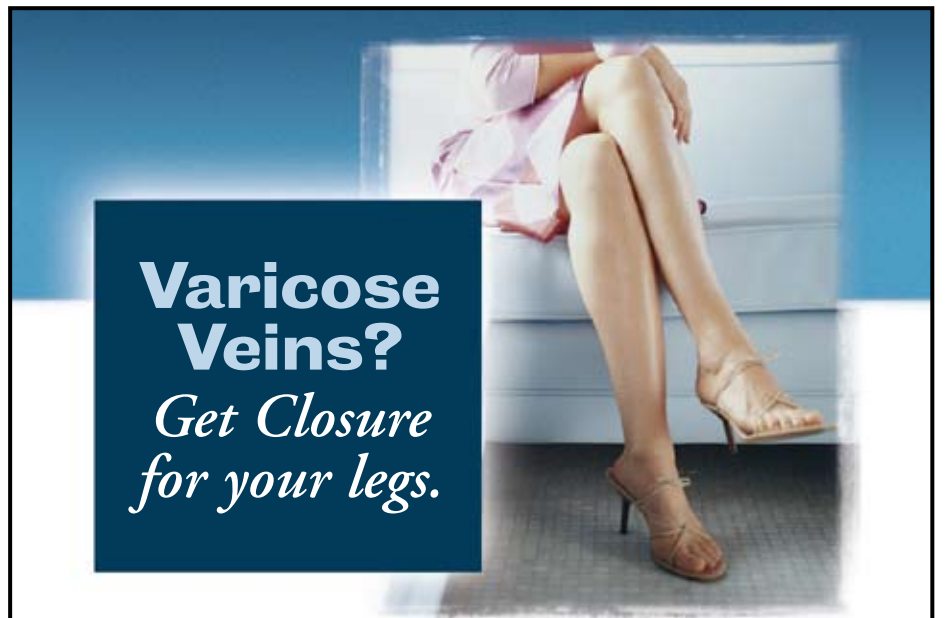
Elizabeth Cary Mungall

Remember that by supporting responsible and humane hunting, populations of these animals are kept viable by regulating their numbers to match available habit and thus preserve the health of the animals and their environment.

populations of these animals are kept viable by regulating their numbers to match available habit and thus preserve the health of the animals and their environment. A portion of all hunting license fees go to conservation. There are many non-profit organizations such as the National Wild Turkey Federation which has contributed \$230 million to the preservation and re-introduction of the wild turkey to areas where it no longer existed.

Through its efforts, this federation has also made sure that more than 11.3 million acres of wildlife habitat have been conserved. Texas now leads the U.S. in the number of wild turkeys.

So in the end, take a look at the list of websites provided for procuring these wonderful meats for your holiday tables. You will be helping the environment, supporting sustainable Texas food purveyors and ranchers, along with serving up a truly Texan table for your family and guests that is healthy, different, and downright delicious. ★



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