



The History of the Exotic Industry in Texas

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Exotic Industry in Texas

- According to the Texas A & M University Economic Impact Study, the Exotic Industry in Texas is a 1.5 billion dollar industry.
- This figure only takes into account the direct impact from the breeding industry (\$650 million) and the hunting industry (\$850 million). When the combined secondary impact is combined such as fuel, feed, vehicles, labor, cell phone usage, sporting goods, ammo, rifles – the total economic impact is estimated to be 3.3 billion dollars.
- The exotic industry had very meager and humble beginnings and quite frankly looked nothing like the industry today. The icons in the industry could never envision what the exotic industry would evolve into.

The First Exotics in Texas

- The very first non-native species to be introduced into Texas came in 1854 when Secretary of War, Jefferson David petitioned Congress for \$30,000.00 to purchase the camels.
- The first camels arrived in 1855 from Egypt (33). A second load arrived in 1857 (40). By the end of the war there were 100 camels, but because of budgetary problems the experiment was abandoned. The experiment was a success as it was noted the camels could carry heavier loads, go longer without water and traveled longer distances than horses or mules.
- Camels were released after the experiment was abandoned and roamed the Texas landscape.



The Beginning of the Exotic Industry

1940's – 1950's

- Fluctuating domestic livestock prices and the severe Texas drought caused many ranchers to sell their property and take jobs in town.



- Whitetail deer leases provided a seasonal income.
- Several ranchers who were the so-called visionaries in the industry and who had been on many African Safaris knew the climate and terrain of the Texas Hill Country was similar to that of the African Savannas and bush. If they could obtain brood stock of various African species they could offer a whole new hunting experience to American hunters without those hunters ever having to leave the continent of North America.

The Beginning of the Exotic Industry

1940's – 1950's

- In those years the various zoos across the country were only too willing to either sell or give their access animals to Texas Ranchers.
- Various exotic sheep such as Aoudad, Mouflon, Barbados, and Corsican adapted rather quickly to the Texas terrain.



- Axis, Blackbuck Antelope, Fallow, Sika, Red Deer were soon seen on the Texas landscape. Because these animals multiplied very quickly and required very little care they became known as “Common Exotics.”
- As more and more Texas deer hunters experienced these new “Strangers on the Range” they developed an appetite for longer and longer hunting seasons and because these animals were not native to Texas they had no hunting regulations placed on them and they could be hunted year round.

New Industry Opportunities and Challenges

1960's

- As more and more species became available to the Texas ranchers animals such as Gemsbok, Eland, Scimitar Horned Oryx, Dama Gazelle, Addax, Sable, Kudu, Thomson's Gazelle, Springbok, Wildebeest, etc. found their way onto the Texas landscape. These animals were considered to be specialty animals, were more temperamental and required more specialized care. Thus a new term was developed "Super Exotics."



Beginning of the Exotic Wildlife Association

1967



- The hunting and breeding of exotics was becoming big business in the state. It filled a financial void for many ranchers and literally saved many family ranches from devastation. It was becoming so lucrative for some that they soon sold off their domestic livestock so more and more exotic animals could be run on the land.
- It was evident from the very start that the sheep and goat fencing which was 4' net wire would be adequate for some of the species such as the sheep and goats but they would not hold the deer species. The first attempts at developing an 8' fence was to merely add additional length to the fence posts and put another 4' net wire on top of the existing fencing. This worked very well for keeping many of the exotics within the ranch perimeter.

Beginning of the Exotic Wildlife Association

1967

- In order to stay out from under the regulations of the wildlife agencies Texas ranchers, with the help of the State legislature, were able to get all non-native species placed under the Texas Department of Agriculture and thereby listed as livestock in the Agriculture code. The rules and regulations governing the exotics would now be under the Texas Animals Health Commission and would allow these animals to be privatized and under the care and control of the rancher that owned them. This is where they remain today.
- It was becoming more and more evident that the traditional livestock associations were not really in favor of these new animals on the Texas landscape and thus did not provide for the same representation in the legislature as with domestic livestock. The owner of the famous YO Ranch, along with several other industry icons, started their own association which grew into the Exotic Wildlife Association (EWA). Never having more than a few members the EWA managed to have a presence in the Texas State Legislature and were successful in achieving many of the rules and regulations that this industry still operates under.
- The exotic industry still struggles in many counties today with Ag-valuations on the land with exotics only but through education we are seeing more and more purely exotic ranches enjoy the same tax relief as domestic livestock. Taxes on hunting operations have also been a struggle but again our presence in the legislature has helped hold the so-called wolf at bay.

Conservation through Commerce

- Many animals that were threatened in their native land or who were extinct began to flourish in this country because they were given a value. The other agriculture industries certainly learned this concept but getting those individuals in the US Department of Interior who enforced the Endangered Species Act to accept this philosophy was an extreme challenge. As an example one rancher started with a small remaining herd of 175 Scimitar Horned Oryx. Today these animals are virtually extinct in their native land but number well over 11,000 animals on ranches in this country. The Addax antelope was numbered just over 1500 animals in 2005 and today number close to 7000 in Texas. In 2005 there were 89 Dama Gazelles and today their population well surpasses 1000 animals in Texas. After many court battles it finally took the US Congress to exempt these three species in 2013 from the regulatory requirements of the ESA. What resulted was the explosion in numbers of these three species.



The Future of the Exotic Industry



- The future of this industry is very bright. As more and more regulatory requirements are forced on the native wildlife breeders we are seeing a trend of more and more diversification within the exotic industry. Those that were purest in the whitetail and mule deer industry and would never have considered exotics in the past are turning more and more to diversification or completely converting their native breeding programs with exotics. This is due mainly to the overregulation within the native breeding markets.



Exotic Wildlife Association and Wildlife Ranchers of South Africa

- The unity of these two great associations will lend tremendous credibility to both associations. The beginning of the WRSA/EWA Rhino project is a step into the future of not only saving an African icon but establishing future markets between the two countries. The diversification of blood lines is needed and the future of stud breeding, lineage tracing and DNA testing will do nothing but enhance the quality and future of the animals owned by those breeders in the US as well as South Africa.



- We as members of the EWA sincerely appreciate the opportunity to work with our South African counterparts. As I have said to your African delegation who attended our convention - We are two peoples separated only by an ocean and a common language; we truly share the same passion and overwhelming desire to see the future of the land and animals that God has entrusted to us continue to flourish and thrive. - We can only hope that we leave our children and grandchildren a much better place than what we found.

*Thanks to each of you for your
hospitality and above all your
friendship.*



*There is nothing better than good old
Southern hospitality whether it's South
Africa or South Texas.*