

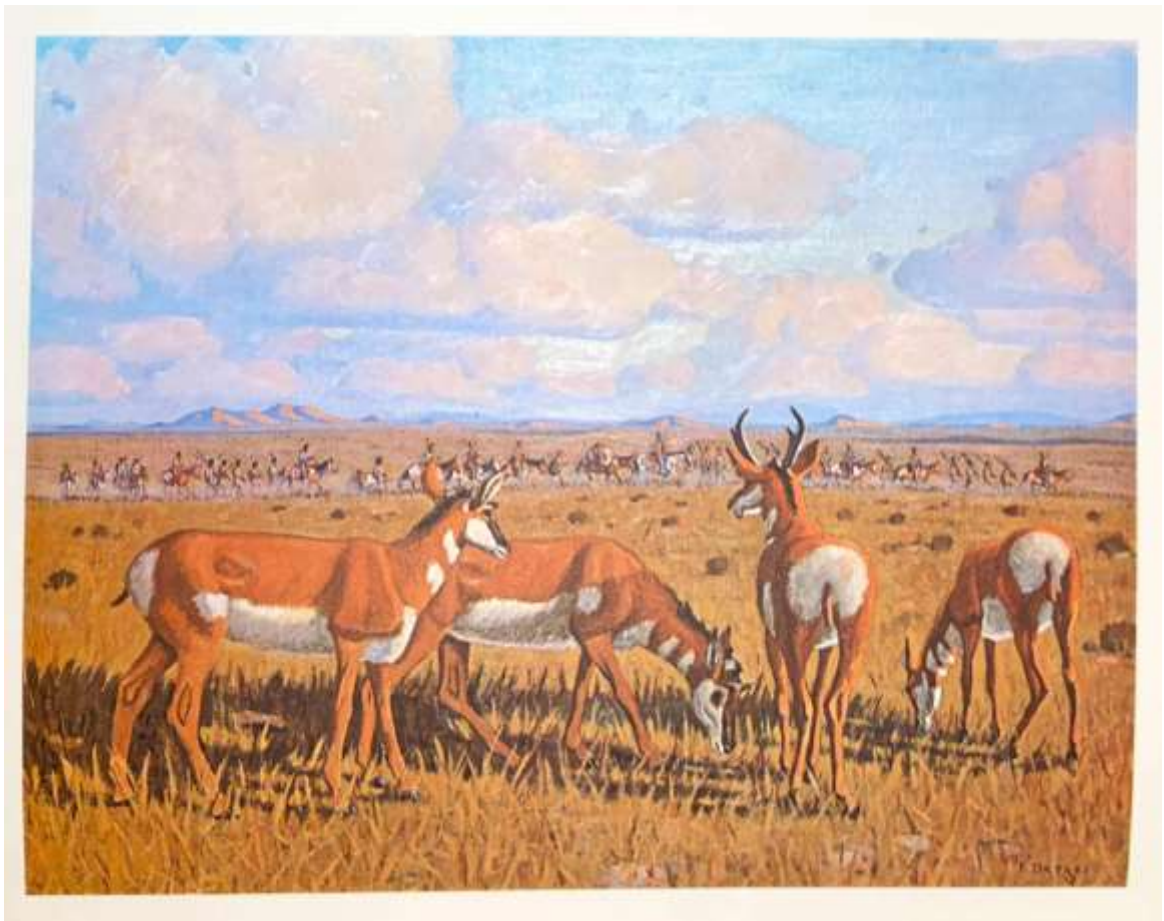
Chapter 23

NORTH AMERICAN WILDLIFE

Inside the front and back cover and flyleaves of *Zeb Pike* by Dr. Howard S. Aronson, personal physician to a number of early Dallas artists including Fred Darge, are multiple drawings of animals and some birds that are prominent members of north American wildlife. These hand drawn figures and the associated map are works of art in themselves. Dr. Aronson wisely chose Fred Darge to illustrate this short, but interesting and insightful book for whom Pikes Peak in Colorado is named.



Take a minute and look hard at the remarkable draftsmanship implemented by this extraordinary gifted artist. Darge's knowledge of wildlife, what and where sets him apart from the traditional. His extensive travels in many of these regions made it all possible.



This is one of several illustrations done by Darge for the *Zeb Pike* book.

It would be impossible to accurately count the number of paintings of free roaming wildlife that Darge completed in his career at the easel, but there are many. There has always been an active demand by collectors for this type of art and it appears he was always there to fill the demand. It is a subject that he liked painting. The particular animal or bird made no difference as long as he could paint.



Early Morning, Ute Mountain, New Mexico, 18" x 24", Oil on Canvas Board, circa 1960's, Collection of Joan Estes (Ute Mountain is in Colorado), Please excuse the error on the part of Fred Darge.

Darge's skill at placing wildlife in their natural surroundings, exacting anatomy and natural coloration made for beautiful art that collectors soon began to place in their homes and work places with revered pride. Today traveling on U.S. Inter-state Highway 40, the old Route 66 headed west to Albuquerque from Texas, small herds of antelope are often seen in a rancher's pasture along the highway. Many travelers are always on the lookout for antelope when they travel that area. When they do see antelope, they sometimes quickly pull over to the side of the highway and stop and look for many minutes. It is a sight not to be forgotten. The top running speed of antelope is 61 miles per hour. They are the fastest land animal in north America.

For those of you who have traveled the state of Colorado, it is hoped you will forgive Darge for putting Ute Mountain, south of Cortez, Colorado in New Mexico. Artistic location accidents happen. Artists are known to sometimes structure paintings with what they would like to see, rather than what they are seeing. In their mind it makes for a better painting. Famous artist Thomas Moran was a master at rearranging geography.



The Day After the Blue Norther, 12" x 16", Oil on Canvas Board, Courtesy of David Dike Fine Arts 2008

Art collectors are always on the lookout for that right Darge painting of antelope and other wildlife scenes. His wildlife paintings have a look of something he truly enjoyed painting. It may have been his vacation away from cows and horses.

There is just something about the sighting of deer that attracts people's attention. They have a gracefulness and elegance that even though they are plentiful and often seen, still have a presence of allure and beauty.



Deer in Palo Duro Canyon, 8" x 10", Oil on Canvas Board, circa 1950, Courtesy of David Dike Fine Arts Auction 2018

If Darge were here today, he would likely say that no matter where he traveled in Texas, he would always see deer. They are part of the Texas landscape that has become inseparable. One of the most attractive sights is always the does with her new born fawns with the white spots. How could the innocence of deer not appeal to the human heart? The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department estimates the deer population of the state to be approximately 4,000,000.¹ This is the equivalent of almost 15 deer per square mile.

A very common sight seen in all of rural Texas on almost a daily basis is the buzzard. When someone refers to a buzzard, they are really referring to a turkey vulture. They are a member of the New-World vultures. Elsewhere in the world, a buzzard is in the same family as Old-World vultures.² Here in Texas, Darge could have cared less, a buzzard is a buzzard. They are normally seen in flocks and always patiently awaiting their next meal. Any resident of rural Texas will have seen flocks circling high in the sky with as many as two hundred birds at one time. They always seem to attract curiosity as to what they are doing. Oddly enough they



Buzzards, 12" x 16", Oil on Canvas Board, The John L. Nau III, Collection of Texas Art.

seemed to have attracted Darge's attention. Ranchers are often likely to saddle a horse and ride to the pasture to see what was attracting the buzzards, quietly hoping it was not a dead cow.

So far there have not been any paintings of ducks located that Darge may have done. Maybe he left those to his good friend Reveau Basset whose life like paintings of water fowl have ranked him as one of the State of Texas's foremost wildlife painters. It will never be known how Basset was able to get close enough to the ducks so he could paint them with all their magnificent colors but somehow, he managed. He never

divulged his secret to friend Darge, if he had one.



Pheasant, 12" x 22", Oil on Cloth, Courtesy of David Dike Fine Arts Auctions 2006

There are many birds with gorgeous colors, but pheasants rank up there with the best of them, especially in the bright sun light. Their colors give off a delicate glow in the bright sun light. It is unfortunate they are the favorites of hunters. Darge's ability to accentuate these many delicate shades of color is to be greatly admired. Pheasants are truly one of the most beautiful game birds in north America.

Darge completed many paintings of north American wildlife. Today's collectors seem to be very content to keep them in their collections and pass them down to the next generation. They are becoming very hard to find.



Texas is full of bobcats, but this one looks like it may be hard to get along with.

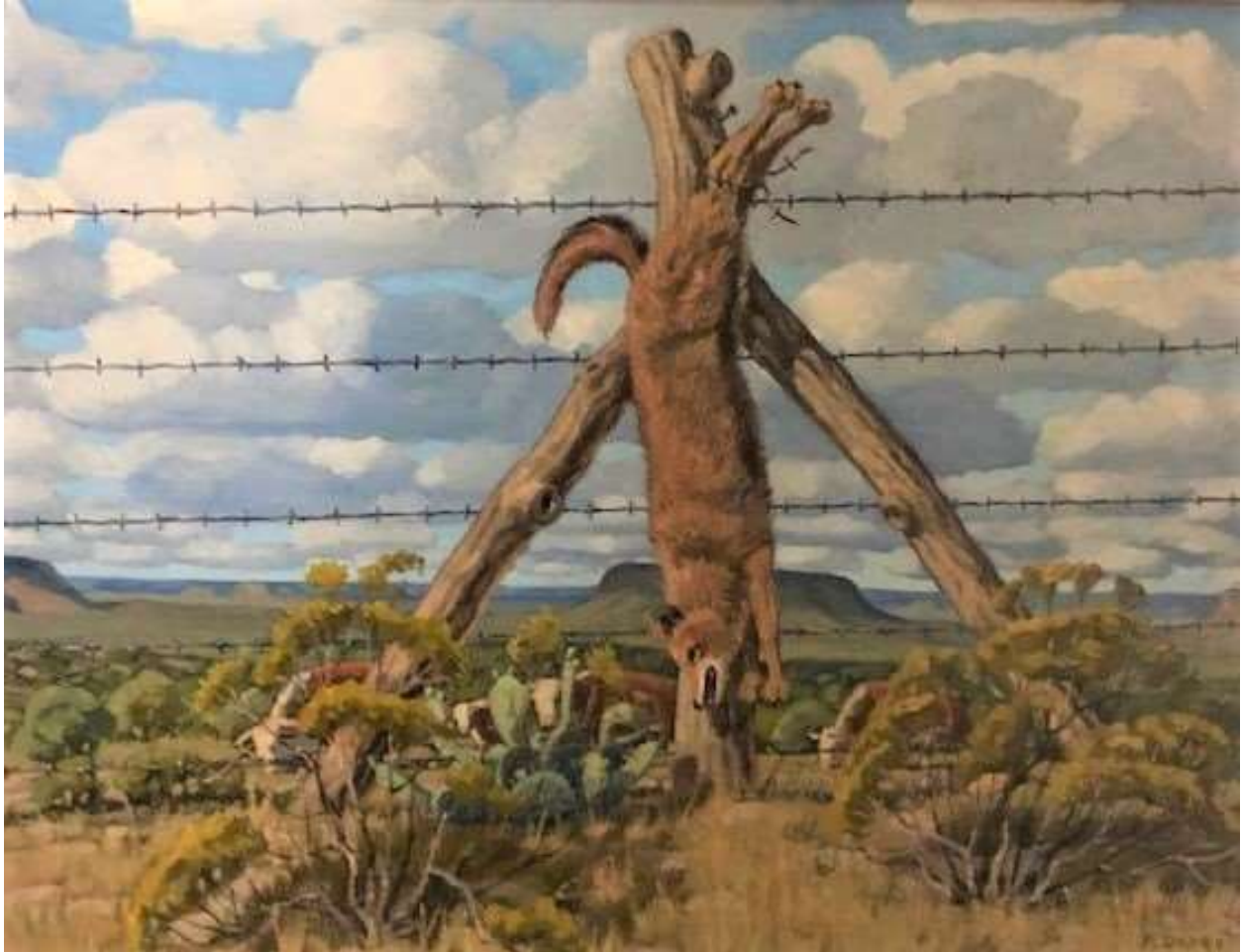
The Bobcat, 8" x 10", Oil on Canvas Board, Courtesy Heritage Auction 2010



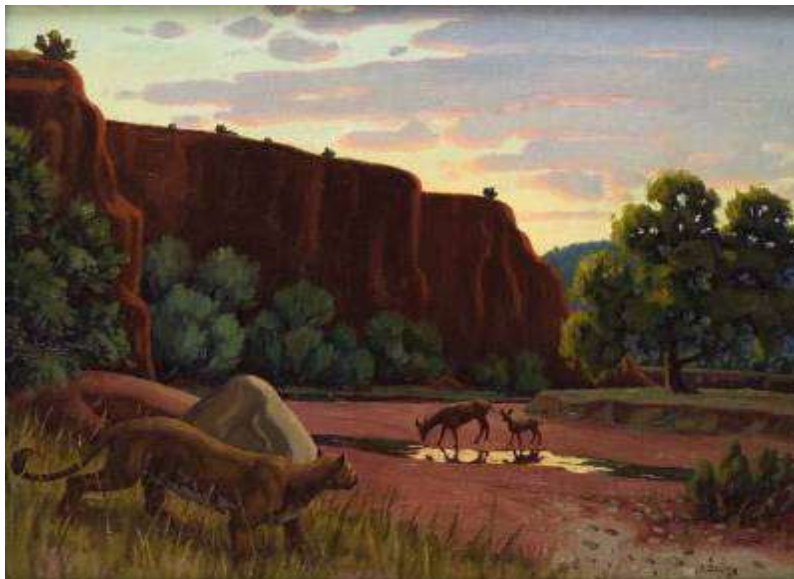
Open Country, 14" x 18", Oil on Canvas Board, Collection of Mark Kever

Nothing in Texas is harder to get along with and more disliked than the reptile quietly hiding behind the rocks.

An unfortunate ending for a cattleman's biggest nuisance.



Outlaw, 14" x 18", Oil on Canvas Board, Collection of Mark Kever



The Big Cat, 16" x 20", Oil on Canvas Board, Courtesy of David Dike Fine Arts

Another interesting figure in Texas that isn't all that popular and dangerous to go along with it.



Big Cat, 9" x 12", Oil on Canvas Board, Collection of Carolyn Rankin

Mountain lions are animals that have earned their deserved dangerous and bad reputation when it comes to relationships with ranchers. These strong and beautiful felines are often the subject of photographers and artists who diligently work at spotting them in the wild. While they are of interest to these artists and those interested in wildlife, they are exceedingly dangerous. Frequently livestock owners are negatively impacted by

mountain lions that kill cattle, goats and sheep as well as other animals typically found around farms and ranches. Homer Wilson ([see The Homer Wilson Ranch, Chapter 6, Page 4 of this book](#)) was constantly alert to these predatory beasts and suffered significant losses of his goats and sheep.



Photograph by Richard Landry, Courtesy of [twistedsifter.com](#)

The males of this species are normally an average weight ranging from 115 to 198 pounds with females typically weighing between 64 and 141 pounds. In the wild, longevity ranges between 10 to 11 years; in captivity they have been known to live much longer. The danger lies in the fact they can jump to an approximate vertical height of 20 feet and pounce on an unsuspecting prey at 20 – 30 feet away. The lions can run as fast as 55 mph, but is best adapted for short, powerful sprints rather than long chases. The strength and fierceness, is in their two proportionally large hind legs and exceptionally oversized paws. They have no match in many domestic and other wildlife animals. A large, solitary cat, they have the greatest range of any wild terrestrial mammal in the Western Hemisphere, extending from the Yukon in Canada to the southern Andes of South America.³

The diet of the mountain lions primarily consists mainly of animals felled by their highly developed hunting skills – deer, elk, moose and bighorn sheep as well as domestic cattle, horses, sheep and goats. When necessary, they will hunt and kill a variety of species such as insects and rodents.⁴

Mountain lions were once common across the state of Texas but over the past century of human settlement and the invasion of their natural habitats, they are much fewer in number and are found mainly in the rugged landscapes, confined to the isolated and rough areas of the state. Recent years have seen the beginning of a return to their historic homelands, areas that have been documented to have hosted these animals for well over a hundred years. Unfortunately, the mountain lions have never been popular with ranchers and have been recognized as solitary, secretive creatures that are controversial, often provoking love-hate responses from the humans who have overtaken their home ranges.⁵

Although mountain lions have been known to more or less roam an extended area, covering a lot of ground, they usually do not stay long in any area before moving on. The males of the species seem to maintain home ranges varying from 80 to 200 square miles while females normally stay within a 20 to 100-mile range. The males are can be very territorial, sometimes challenging another male for range that ends with fatal consequences. Resident male lions have been noted to recognize their territory and to even seek out other males. Likewise, females are aware of the location of resident males within their range.⁶

Mountain lions appear to stalk their prey, carefully strategizing their moment of attack. It is common for them to kill by crushing the prey's esophagus, causing suffocation. Biting the neck and thus separating the vertebra is another preferred killing technique. These animals have been known to bite through the prey's brain case. Once they have successfully killed their prey, they cache it in an area of heavy vegetation, covering it with grass, leaves, dirt or other debris, but do not bury it at that time. They often remove the internal organs of the animal, stashing them under cover close to the kill site. Afterward, the lion might uncover the carcass and feed, then drag it to another location and again cover it for later use.⁷



Photograph by nhpanda, Courtesy of twistedsifter.com

Animals are interesting creatures, each species having their own behaviors and mountain lions are no exception. When they have sheep readily available for food, they usually down multiples during the hunt and kill session. It is not uncommon to find up to 30 sheep killed by the same lion even though they normally feed on just one or two. They will return to feed on these sheep and at the same time, the lions will fell additional sheep. Some lions become habituated to preying on sheep. All age classes of sheep are subjected to being their prey although younger ones are preferred over the older sheep. The mountain lions do not appear to customarily cover all their sheep kills, generally just their chosen meal. ⁸

While goat kills do not appear to be quite as dramatic as sheep kills, the lions also down goats in multiples; goat fells of 5 to 10 animals are not uncommon. Lions seem to feed more from a goat kill than a sheep kill and the lions do not discriminate between the classes and age of the goats. ⁹

Understanding the tenuous relationship between the mountain lion and cattlemen illustrates the reason the 30/30 Winchester is always a necessity. Ranchers out on the range never know when the illusive mountain lion will appear and begin the stalking of his livestock with food in mind. Missing a chance to down the predator which costs the rancher valuable funds could mean the loss of animals soon thereafter. Ranchers have to protect their herds. It is their livelihood.