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Rounding up recent books about the state

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HILLINGDON RANCH: FOUR SEASONS, SIX GENERATIONS

David K. Langford and Lorie Woodward Cantu

Texas A&M University Press, \$35

In the mid-1880s, San Antonio architect Alfred Giles founded Hillingdon Ranch near the Texas Hill Country town of Comfort, gradually building a 13,000-acre empire that his descendants have been running with environmental-



ly sound techniques since.

A new book, which is filled with more than 200 photographs,

chronicles life on the ranch, primarily between Oct. 1, 2010 and March 1, 2012 – a time of drought. And it has a strong environmental message that good stewardship of our open lands is key to the ecological health of the state. The new book is part of the Conservation Leadership Series sponsored by the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State University.

David K. Langford, a former executive vice president of the Texas Wildlife Association who lives on the ranch and who is Alfred Giles' great-grandson, provides the photos for the book, while

Lorie Woodward Cantu, president of Woodward Communications in San Angelo, provides the text. She describes how the current family members have been taking care of the soil; managing the grazing by sheep, goats and cattle; and ensuring that a wide variety of plants continues to thrive. "By creating a mosaic of diverse native plants, the family has insured that most of the original 13,000 acres remains home to deer, turkeys, birds, bees, and butterflies, as well as livestock."

The family also has played a crucial role in "managing and improving the watershed's condition," Cantu writes, by replenishing both surface and underground water sources and ensuring adequate environmental flows.

Although six generations of the Giles family have continued to keep the ranch together, the current caretakers are headed by Robin Giles, grandson of Alfred Giles; his wife, Carol; their 28-year-old son, Grant; and Grant's wife, Misty.

The book is divided into four sections: spring, summer, autumn and winter, with numerous photographs illustrating the changes in the Hill Country landscape. But the wildlife, especially birds, get the most attention, with Langford capturing numerous up-close images of cardinals, finches, woodpeckers, hum-

mingbirds, warblers, wrens and killdeer.