



ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

REAL ESTATE: A sprawling Hill Country ranch next door to George Strait's resort has hit the market for \$54 million. [ExpressNews.com/RealEstate](https://www.expressnews.com/RealEstate)



BUSINESS

Gas-powered cars can become EVs, but the wait is not short. **B1**

San Antonio Express-News

EXPRESSNEWS.COM

MONDAY, MAY 2, 2022

VOL. 157, NO. 218

\$2.00

Baby formula shortage in area seen as worst

By Annie Blanks
STAFF WRITER

Estefania Chapa, 20, has looked all over San Antonio the past several weeks trying desperately to find baby formula for her 5-month-old daughter, Rosali.

Rosali was born prematurely, and Chapa couldn't supply as much breast milk as she would have liked, so Rosali's pediatri-

cian recommended a special formula for her to be able to grow. The formula was working great, and Rosali was growing strong.

But in early April, Chapa began noticing her formula was harder and harder to come by.

"We go to six, eight, 10 stores in a day, and we can't find anything," she said. "Sometimes we'll go back to the same stores multiple times to see if they got a new shipment in."

Chapa and little Rosali are not alone. Thanks to a major recall involving the most popular maker of baby formula, combined with existing supply chain shortages, thousands of mothers in the San Antonio metro area and the United States as a whole are struggling to feed their babies.

And while the problem is nationwide, grocery research com-
Formula continues on A10



Jessica Phelps / Staff photographer

Jaret Anchondo and Estefania Chapa sit with their 5-month-old daughter, Rosali. They have had trouble finding baby formula.



Photos by William Luther / Staff photographer

Bio-West scientists count and analyze endangered species near the headwaters of the San Marcos River in San Marcos.

Protecting species

Researchers monitor animals that depend on Edwards Aquifer

By Elena Bruess
STAFF WRITER

In the middle of the San Marcos River, near Texas State University, four aquatic researchers are waist-deep in water, counting endangered little fish.

Led by aquatic ecologist Brad Littrell, they drop a weighted net — attached to a rigid, rectangular, 2-square-meter frame — into the river, and it sinks to the bottom. Then they use a smaller net to sweep for specific aquatic life.

Today, they seek the fountain darter, a tiny freshwater fish found in the San Marcos and Comal rivers. It's one of many species that depend on the Edwards Aquifer for life



A crawfish is shown last week during the scientists' work. Counting and collecting animals is a way to examine trends and protect species in the future.

and habitat, and for years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has listed it as endangered because of ongoing development and population growth.

Every fountain darter that they catch is put in a container of freshwater that will go to the reserve population at a center in San Marcos to protect the species from extinction.

One slips through Littrell's fingers, but he catches it as it hits the net. He measures it in millimeters.

"Sixteen," he calls out for a colleague to record.

Littrell and his team are contractors from Bio-West, an environmental and planning consulting company in
Rivers continues on A10

Taller wall on border brings rise in injuries

By Nick Miroff
WASHINGTON POST

SAN DIEGO — In the trauma wards of this city's major hospitals, patients from the border have arrived every day with gruesome injuries: skull fractures, broken vertebrae and shattered limbs, their lower extremities twisted into deranged angles.

The patients have fallen from new 30-foot segments of former President Donald Trump's border wall, a structure he touted as a "Rolls-Royce" that "can't be climbed." His administration built more formidable barriers in the San Diego area than anywhere else along the U.S.-Mexico border, with miles of double-layer steel fencing, but that has not stopped more and more migrants from trying to scale it.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials say they do not tally deaths and injuries resulting from such falls. But new statistics published Friday in the medical journal JAMA Surgery by phy-
Border continues on A8

Bush urges state declare it faces 'invasion' of immigrants

By Taylor Goldenstein
AUSTIN BUREAU

Land Commissioner George P. Bush has become one of the few major candidates in Texas to call for the state to take the extreme step of declaring illegal border crossings an "invasion" under the Constitution in order to expel migrants immediately, bypassing the federal government's authority over immigration.

Bush, who will face Attorney General Ken Paxton in the May 24 Republican primary runoff, said that "Texas has been left with no choice" but to take drastic action because President Joe Biden — and Paxton — won't.

"Texas National Guard and DPS troopers are already deployed to the border yet are handcuffed by our current federal policies," Bush said in a news release last week. "Texas needs an Attorney General who is willing to take every
Immigration continues on A7

GET THE MOST FROM YOUR SUBSCRIPTION



Express-News subscribers enjoy full access to [ExpressNews.com](https://www.expressnews.com), where you'll find breaking news, searchable archives, the e-edition print replica and more. It's already yours!



Vote for your favorite non-profit* to help them win \$100K from Ancira Auto Group!

The Top five nominated companies per category (15 total) have moved onto the voting round, where three amazing local non-profits from the San Antonio and South Texas area will win \$100K from the Ancira Gives Back program.

Vote now at www.AnciraGivesBack.com or scan QR code.

VOTE NOW!

Vote daily for a chance to win \$500 in a weekly drawing!



* All nominated non-profit must be a 501(c)(3) organization.

NOMINATIONS
MARCH 27 -
APRIL 24

VOTING
MAY 1 -
MAY 31

WINNERS
ANNOUNCED
JUNE

www.anciragivesback.com

FORMULA

From page A1

pany Datasembly found that San Antonio has the highest percentage of out-of-stock shelves of any metro area in the country. Fifty-six percent of shelves in the region were out of stock as of mid-April, the company said after analyzing more than 11,000 baby formula sellers.

That means mothers of formula-fed babies are scrambling to comb shelves, reach out to strangers on Facebook, scour the internet and hound their pediatricians' offices for answers to the shortage problem.

Chapa had a brief glimmer of hope recently, when by some miracle she found four cans of her daughter's Similac formula at a San Antonio CVS store. The store, however, didn't accept WIC (Women, Infants and Children), a state assistance program that helps mothers purchase formula. Chapa was forced to return the \$22 cans to the shelves.

"It worries me because I think, 'Where am I going to go? How am I going to feed her?'" she said.

Recall effects

Abbott Nutrition's plant in Michigan makes the three most popular and widely used brands of baby formula: Similac, Alimentum and EleCare. The formula-maker voluntarily recalled all its products in February after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration found that a rare bacteria in some of its powder formula caused four infants to get sick, killing two of them.

"While Abbott's testing of finished product detected no pathogens, we are taking action by recalling the powder formula manufactured in this facility with an expiration of April 1, 2022, or later," the company said in a news release announcing the recall.

An FDA investigation re-



Jessica Phelps / Staff photographer

Jaret Anchondo prepares formula for his 5-month-old daughter, Rosali. Anchondo and his partner, Estefania Chapa, have spent hours searching the city for the baby's special formula.

leased in March revealed that the Michigan plant was found to have an unsanitary manufacturing environment in multiple instances.

Upon learning of the recall, pediatrician Subhashini Valavalkar with the Children's Hospital of San Antonio took all samples of Abbott formulas off her shelves and alerted all her patients' mothers that the formula should not be consumed. Valavalkar, like pediatricians across the nation, then began the task of helping mothers figure out what to do in the event that they couldn't find the specific formula they needed for their baby.

She said she had to switch mothers who were using Abbott formulas to brands such as Enfamil or Goodstart. But that led to supply shortages of those brands, too, as more mothers

were buying them, and now all formula is hard to find.

Switching a baby's formula is extremely difficult on the baby, Valavalkar said, because babies' systems are still very fragile and the slightest change in their nutrition can wreak havoc on their bodies.

"Any formula change is a problem," she said.

Valavalkar has been reaching out to representatives who work for formula companies, as well as wholesalers, to find anything she can.

Valavalkar said some mothers are attempting to dilute babies' existing formula cans to make them last longer, which can throw off critical electrolyte balances in the formula and sicken the baby.

Mothers whose infants are formula-fed are "nervous and panicking," she said, because

they don't know where their baby's next meal will come from.

"I have one mom who said, 'I have four (cans of formula) left, and that'll last me maybe a week,'" she said. "They keep calling us, and we are supposed to have answers for them, but this is beyond our control."

When will it end?

No one knows when the shortage might end, but moms are doing everything they can in the meantime to make sure their babies have the food they need.

Kelli Whitley's 4-month-old son Parker tried nine different formulas before he found one that he could tolerate. Whitley, 28, can't produce enough breast milk to feed him, so formula was the only option for her little boy.

Whitley, who lives in Victoria, has traveled and called all over South and Central Texas looking

for formula since the shortage began. Not being able to find the only food that her son can eat "makes me sick to my stomach," Whitley said.

"It's a hard feeling to describe, not knowing where my kid's meals are going to come from," she said.

Stores from Corpus Christi to San Antonio are "completely wiped out" of any formula. She said that at first, she thought that only the special formula her son needed was out of stock, so she sent her husband into an H-E-B last month to find some hypoallergenic formula that could tide Parker over until his special formula came back in stock.

Her husband called her from the store and said there was nothing on the shelves.

"He was like, 'We've got to feed him, we have nothing to give him,'" she said. That's when Whitley realized "how bad the shortage really was."

Through Facebook, Whitley managed to buy some cans of Parker's formula from a woman in San Antonio, and the cans should last her a couple of weeks. After that, she isn't sure what she's going to do for her son.

Whitley works in early childhood development, and the shelves at her office are usually stocked with formula to give out for free to struggling mothers. Now, however, they're bare.

"It makes my heart hurt, and it makes me sick to my stomach" that her son and others don't have access to formula, she said. "There's literally no other options for our babies. When is this going to end?"

Annie Blanks writes for the Express-News through Report for America, a national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms. ReportforAmerica.org. annie.blanks@express-news.net.

RIVERS

From page A1

Texas hired by the Edwards Aquifer Authority for the agency's Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan. It's been 10 years since the conservation plan was devised to rehabilitate the San Marcos and Comal rivers and protect the endangered plants and animals in it.

Since then, the aquifer authority has restored some balance in the river, reducing murky sediments and removing invasive species. Counting and collecting endangered animals, such as the fountain darter, is one way to examine trends and protect species in the future — one fish at a time.

"We've seen a lot of change here," said Kristy Kollaus, an environmental scientist with the conservation plan. "But we're still working at it."

A wild rice comeback

Throughout the San Marcos River, *Zizania texana* — more commonly known as Texas wild rice — has grown extensively for the past decade.

The species is rare, having been found only in the upper San Marcos River in Hays County. Before the introduction of the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan, this kind of wild rice was overrun by invasive plant species, which kept the native plant from growing at its normal rate and surviving in its natural habitat.

However, from 2013 to 2018, the wild rice experienced a nearly 200 percent increase in coverage, springing up in the river and protected from harvesting in accordance with the conservation plan, Kollaus said.

"What used to be a mix of nonnative plants is now long stretches of wild rice," she said. "We have the area listed as a state scientific area, which makes it illegal to uproot or trample Texas wild rice."

One way the conservation team improved the wild rice's habitat was to strengthen the sides of the river to prevent erosion and sediment from falling into the water. Such sediment clouds the water, keeping the wild rice plants from absorbing sunlight, which they need for healthy growth.

Large landscaping stones known as butter blocks were installed at certain areas to keep the sediment at bay and to create access points for recreational swimming. So far, seven access points have been built under the conservation plan, and the tactic



Photos by William Luther / Staff photographer

Bio-West scientists Chance Boatright, from left, Cara Wade, Brad Littrell and Kyle Sullivan count and analyze endangered aquatic species last week near the headwaters of the San Marcos River in San Marcos.



Texas wild rice grows near Pyramid Park on the river. The rare species has grown extensively in the river for the past decade.

has resulted in clear water for photosynthesis. The butter blocks also prevent the sucker-mouth armored catfish, which is an invasive species, from burrowing into the banks, which increases erosion.

Meanwhile, the aquifer authority strongly advises that

people who swim in the San Marcos River — an activity that will increase as temperatures rise — use these created access points and avoid fenced-off areas. Doing so will help minimize erosion and muddy waters.

"We're not entirely sure what this area looked like before de-

velopment since that first started happening in the mid-1800s," Kollaus said. "But we do know we can rehabilitate it to a point where we are getting rid of the invasive species and letting the native plants make a comeback."

In the field

Littrell and the team from Bio-West sweep their smaller net 15 times over the drop net area in the river. After about two hours in the morning, they had caught several fountain darters, putting each one in their bucket. And with a cooler of snacks in their boat, they planned to continue counting fountain darters until about 5 p.m.

Before they ventured into the river, a team surveyor mapped the area, identified the different types of habitats there and randomly pinpointed locations to drop nets. It all helps the team better understand how the fountain darters are doing.

"We want to monitor that what we're doing with invasive and native plants is not negatively impacting the river species," Kollaus said. "We can track and follow the trends and then make changes if we see something that doesn't look right and minimize the impact."

So far, the fountain darter population hasn't changed much. The river is a dynamic

system, Littrell said, and conditions appear fairly stable. At the same time, it can be hard to detect changes.

"It's some noisy data," he said. Contractors are also counting the Texas blind salamander at the river and at Spring Lake, in some cases diving with scuba equipment to collect aquatic life.

For the trip to the river, Sarah Valdez, senior STEAM outreach educator at the Edwards Aquifer Authority, brought two coolers to collect native and nonnative species for the agency's new education center. It wants to include endangered species eventually, which requires obtaining a permit.

The hope is to make this last decade of conservation work — such as with the fountain darter and the Texas wild rice — more understandable. The various species will be taken to the education center and displayed with infographics and other explainers regarding their habitats.

"It'll be exciting to really see what's there," Valdez said, "and what we can learn from it."

Elena Bruess writes for the Express-News through Report for America, a national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms. ReportforAmerica.org. elena.bruess@express-news.net