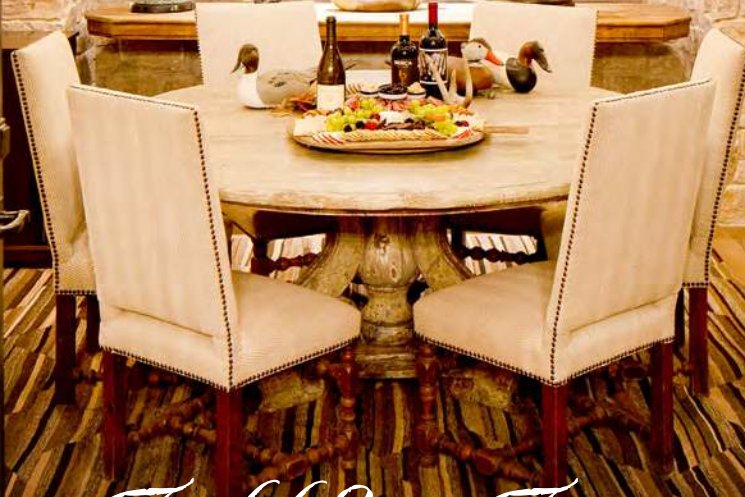




# SPREAD OAKS

## RANCH

*Go Deeper Into the Heart of Texas*



*From Field & Farm to Table*

MAY 2019 NEWSLETTER





## *A Field & Farm to Table Epicurean Adventure*

*June 7-9, 2019 with Chef Ric Rosser at Spread Oaks Ranch*

Spread Oaks Ranch wishes to extend an invitation for up to four discerning couples to spend June 7-9, 2019 at our lodge to enjoy an extraordinary epicurean adventure. Upon your arrival on Friday afternoon, a member of our team will escort you to your luxurious quarters, before you join us in Spread Oaks Ranch's 15,000-square-foot Main House—your headquarters for the weekend's activities. Over the next few days, Chef Ric Rosser will create an unmatched epicurean experience for you—crafting menu items from Spread Oaks Ranch's ranch-raised meats, farm-fresh eggs, ranch-grown organic produce and herbs, wild fish, and wild foraged foods.

### *Friday Afternoon & Evening*

Enjoy creative house-made charcuterie and craft cocktails before taking a guided twilight wildlife-viewing tour on our fleet of John Deere Gators. Upon your return, sit down to a sumptuous supper in our well-appointed dining room and afterwards, relax poolside, at the bar, in the Main House great room, or in one of the rocking chairs on our many porches.

### *Saturday*

Start your day with a ranch-style breakfast, followed by your choice of A) An interpretive greenhouse, barnyard, and organic gardens/crop fields tour; or B) A conservation tour, highlighting restored and created wildlife habitat at Spread Oaks Ranch.

Following the morning's activities, Chef Rosser will prepare an alfresco Cowboy Lunch.

In the afternoon, choose among activities such as skeet shooting, fly fishing, horseshoes, a foraging tour and/or cooking demonstration, or simply relax by the endless swim-spa and the infinity-edge pool overlooking our tranquil lake.

Saturday evening, Chef Rosser will delight your palates with an array of hors d'oeuvres, followed by a five-course formal dinner with exquisitely paired wines. Afterwards, enjoy stargazing in the ranch's dark night skies.

### *Sunday Morning*

We'll depart at sunrise on the Gators for a complete overview of the ranch and its intertwined farming, ranching, and wildlife habitat and view the mighty Colorado River from a scenic overlook.

You'll return to the lodge to be greeted with an elegantly rustic ranch-style brunch prepared by Chef Rosser.

We'll send you off, filled with abundant good memories, along with a curated gift basket brimming with Spread Oaks Ranch items.

***Cost for the three-day, two-night epicurean adventure is \$1,850 per couple which includes luxe accommodations, all food and spirits, and all ranch activities. Please reserve your stay by May 31, 2019.***

Contact Business Manager Tim Soderquist at [tim@spreadoaksranch.com](mailto:tim@spreadoaksranch.com) or (281) 814-5442 for more information or to book your stay.

We look forward to seeing you!





**MAKING HAY WHILE THE SUN SHINES:** A first cutting in May is crucial to Spread Oaks Ranch attaining its goal of 2,000 round bales by the end of the season—the amount needed to sustain its 500 over-wintering breeder cows, its herd sires and its Longhorn herd. **BELOW:** Twin Katahdin lambs from the ranch's first lambing season stand between their mama ewe and a ram; Organic winter wheat will be harvested this month; A brand-new calf experiences his first time in the cattle pens.

## May's a Busy Month at Spread Oaks Ranch

*This unique destination hunting lodge is also an agricultural operation and a true working cattle ranch*

Other prime waterfowl destination lodges might have one, but here at Spread Oaks Ranch, there's no such thing as an "off season!"

The holistic approach that Spread Oaks Ranch takes in managing for waterfowl and wildlife while tending to our prized Brangus cow-and-calf operation and agricultural endeavors including corn, cotton, rice, soybeans, and winter wheat, while also preparing wetlands for the fall arrival of migratory waterfowl keeps us pretty busy in the summertime.

It's also an ideal time to book a family reunion, a bachelor's or bachelorette's party, or simply spend time with dear friends: Challenge your buddies to a friendly competition at the skeet range, swim in the endless swim-spa and the infinity-edge pool,

play horseshoes on the manicured lawn, fish in the stocked bass lake, paddle a canoe, or simply enjoy the views and breezes while sitting on one of our exquisitely appointed, well-shaded porches.

Corporate groups also enjoy the accessibility and privacy of Spread Oaks Ranch: Although the ranch is just 90 minutes from Houston, the remoteness of its 5,550-acre splendor allows meetings to proceed without external distractions and with seamless wireless connectivity, and provides ample recreational opportunities, to boot.

Our mission is to provide our discerning guests with the ultimate in a luxury outdoor experience.

Come join us—and "Go Deeper into the Heart of Texas."





## Meet Spread Oaks Ranch Chef Ric Rosser

*Rosser partners his creative cuisine with a lifelong passion for hunting, fishing, and the outdoors*

**R**ic Rosser vividly remembers his first day of work at Spread Oaks Ranch.

"I hopped into one of the ranch's Gators with my yellow Lab, Roux," he says, "and set out to look for wild dewberries and other foragables. As I drove down one of the ranch roads, and looked at the vast expanse surrounding me, I thought 'Wow ... this is my office now.' I was so overwhelmed, I had to pull over for a moment to compose myself."

As someone who has loved to hunt and fish for his entire life, being able to work with the wild bounty of Spread Oaks Ranch—as well as its organic crops, Katahdin lamb and certified Angus beef—is a dream come true.

Rosser hails from Bryan, Texas, and started in fine dining at the age of 19.

Discovering that the kitchen was his calling, he then enrolled in the Art Institute of Houston, graduating with a Culinary Arts degree.

"I may have received my degree there, but my knowledge truly came from other chefs, by working side-by-side with them," says Rosser. During that time, he met and married his wife, Becky. It was a smart move: Becky is Ric's greatest cheerleader, and loves to join him afield hunting and fishing.

"In fact, she's become quite a competent bowhunter ... probably better than I am," he says with a rueful smile.

After his graduation from the Art Institute of Houston, Rosser returned to Bryan, cooking at Bryan's Café Eccell, a Brazos County culinary fixture since 1989. There, he realized what a difference he could make by working with farmers and local sourcing.

Ric Rosser and his wife Becky reside in Katy, and have two young adult sons, Dalton and Drake.



Rosser spent nearly a decade working for hospitality magnate Tillman Fertitta (chairman and CEO of Landry's, Inc., and owner of the Houston Rockets), primarily as concept chef for the national chain of roughly 50 Salt Grass Steakhouse restaurants—one of the baker's dozen or more restaurant chains under the Landry's brand.

While at Saltgrass, he took time off to spend seven days in a small town in Guatemala, digging wells for people who did not have access to clean drinking water, as part of the efforts of Living Water International.

He most recently worked for Compass Group North America, the country's leading foodservice and support services company, and a leader in advocating for fair pay for farm workers.

A passion for hunting, fishing, and the great outdoors runs through Rosser's inventive cuisine.

"I'm nose-to-tail, roots-to-stem, you name it. I will be butchering hogs to cure hams and bacon here at the ranch, and experimenting with different forms of charcuterie. I'm

constantly on the lookout for what wild foods are in season, and how I can incorporate them into my menu. For example," he continues, "I've made a honeysuckle-infused syrup that I use in craft cocktails." Recently, Rosser also served a wild dewberry flan, and a warm dewberry compote served over Dutch baby pancakes ... both scrumptious!

Rosser also is canning and preserving seasonal bounty, while he directs the efforts of Lisa Roese, who is planting the greenhouse, its surrounding landscaping, organic row crops, and a citrus grove to Rosser's specifications.

Rosser's humor, his "joie de vivre," and his relentless pursuit of creative cuisine makes each meal a spectacular adventure for guests at Spread Oaks Ranch.



Chef Rosser's fresh-caught bass from the stocked lake in front of the lodge were cleaned, scored, and seasoned before being fried outdoors. The succulent fish accompanied smoked wild boar, a hearty pho broth ladled from a pumpkin, and a variety of condiments as part of a hearty "Hunters' Afternoon Tea."



## Chef Ric Rosser's Working Cowboy Lunch



Chef Rosser prepares for the Working Cowboy Lunch by first slaughtering and dry-aging Katahdin lamb. He then builds a cement-block firepit, over which he and Warren Lowery spit-roast the lamb, to be served with roasted carrots, smoked corn, and Chilean-style squash along with rice, borracho beans, and handmade flour tortillas.



## Spread Oaks Ranch—In the Cradle of the Cow Country



A half-dozen experienced cowboys participate in the May cattle working at Spread Oaks Ranch, which involves rounding up about 500 cows with their calves, and then separating them to administer vaccinations, attach ear tags carrying fly control, and provide any other necessary treatments before turning them back out. Come noon, Oscar, son of Spread Oaks Ranch owner Forrest Wylie, keeps the horses company while Chef Rosser puts the finishing touches on the Cowboy Lunch.



## May Brings Out the Birds and the Bees ... and Butterflies, Too

*Pollinators and uncommon birds are strong indicators for healthy ecosystems*

**H**e perched on a fencepost before flitting off to disappear deep inside the canopy of a huge, spreading live oak tree.

Distinguishable from the female of the species by his red “mustache”—the female’s mustache is black—he probed with his large, pointed bill into the tree’s moss-covered branches for the tree-boring insects that make up much of his diet.

This male pileated woodpecker was just one of the delightful avian species gracing Spread Oaks Ranch in May. The variety of habitat on the ranch—with coastal prairie, hardwood bottomlands, and wetlands all hosting different species of winged creatures—provides an ever-changing viewing opportunity for viewers’ enjoyment.

This prime example of the Texas Mid-Coast ecosystem encompasses bottomland hardwood wetland forests: associated wetlands, oxbows, and sloughs; vast oak mottes; and coastal prairies, some of which Spread Oaks Ranch is

actively restoring.

A slow drive through the pasturelands also brought sightings of a Dickcissel, a neotropical migrant considered “local and irregular” east of the Appalachians; several scissor-tailed flycatchers; savanna sparrows; Eastern kingbirds; and both Eastern and Western meadowlarks—similar in appearance but differentiated by distinctly different songs.

Easing down into the Blue Creek hardwood bottomlands dominated by pecan, elm, and oak trees, we were able to view a variety of different birds enjoying the riverine habitat, including green herons, egrets, belted kingfishers, and a neon-yellow prothonotary warbler.

In yet another distinct habitat rimming the sennabean wetlands along Jennings Lake, spotted beebalm, Texas thistle, and other nectar-producing plants along the levees attracted swarms of clouded sulphur moths, as well as Gulf fritillary, swallow-tailed, and monarch butterflies.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A pileated woodpecker—considered “uncommon” here at the far western edge of its Texas range—searches for tree-boring insects in a live oak; a bumblebee sips nectar from a spotted beebalm; one of dozens of monarch butterflies in early May; a swallow-tailed butterfly alights on a Texas thistle.



## Spread Oaks Ranch's State-of-the-Art Greenhouse

*Organic and heirloom vegetables and herbs to star in Chef Rosser's farm-and-field-to table cuisine*



**L**isa Roese, an organic gardening specialist, is perhaps known best for the work she does at The Inn at Dos Brisas in Washington, Texas, a five-star Relais & Chateaux property: Its certified organic farm, gardens, and greenhouse are so prolific that Dos Brisas has a regular spot at Houston's Urban Harvest Farmers Market.

Spread Oaks Ranch is delighted to have her expertise in setting up our greenhouse, row crops, edible landscape beds, and citrus grove.

Roese, who grew up near Washington-on-the-Brazos, has rolled up her sleeves

for the setup and implementation of Spread Oaks Ranch's greenhouse—in addition to edible landscapes of herbs such as lemon verbena, lemon balm, rosemary, thyme, tarragon, and Mexican mint. She will also plant figs near the lodge, plant organic row crops in one of the already organic fields, and has planned a citrus grove of lemons, limes, and oranges near the front gate.

In the greenhouse, she plans to implement a "Dutch bucket" system for indeterminate plants such as tomatoes and cucumbers. Using this method, the buckets containing the plants stay in a

fixed position and instead of having a fixed trellis to climb, the tops of the vines are continually inched along an upper line by a pulley system in an ingenious Rube Goldberg-type of growing system.

"In large-scale greenhouse operations in West Texas, such as Marfa's Village Farms, tomato plants can produce for three to five years," says Roese. "Here, I'm predicting we can get a tomato-growing season of at least 10 months."

Until our own crops mature, Spread Oaks Ranch continues to proudly serve Dos Brisas organic produce; we welcome Lisa Roese and her substantial expertise!



**TOP:** The climate-controlled greenhouse features an air-conditioned potting room at one end. **ABOVE:** Heirloom tomatoes and both green and purple basil, as well as a variety of mild and hot peppers, okra, cucumbers, and other vegetables—as well as culinary herbs—grow in and around the greenhouse, just steps from the kitchen.



## Resident Mottled Ducks a Special Treasure

*Non-migratory mottled duck pairs now raising broods at Spread Oaks Ranch*

According to the 2018 Western Gulf Coast Mottled Duck Survey, nearly 78,000 mottled ducks make their home along the Texas Coast. That might sound like a lot of ducks, but the North American Breeding Bird Survey shows a population decline of 79 percent since 1966, making the mottled duck a species of conservation concern.

Spread Oaks Ranch Business Manager Tim Soderquist spent nearly 20 years in the employ of Ducks Unlimited, and much longer than that hunting the wetlands and marshes on what is now Spread Oaks Ranch, as his second duck hunt as a youngster, with his mentor Porter Johnson, was on Jennings Lake—now a part of Spread Oaks Ranch.

“Mottled ducks hold a special place in my heart,” says Soderquist, “as they are truly a signature duck of the Texas Mid-Coast. As they’re a nonmigratory species of dabbling duck, they are great indicators that the habitat that we’re focusing on building at Spread Oaks Ranch is not only ideal for them, but will be for all other dabblers—including teal, pintails, and mallards.”

That habitat includes flooded rice fields, emergent wetlands, and shallow ponds—all likely to hold the grasses, aquatic plants, seeds, snails, and insects on which mottled ducks dine. In addition, Soderquist points out that management of seasonal freshwater wetlands, moist-soil impoundments and fallow rice fields can encourage the growth of important seed-producing plants such as wild millet, panic grasses, smartweeds, paspalum and spikerush, and promote an abundance of aquatic insects.

Hen and drake mottled ducks begin their courtship rituals in late fall, and by early winter, will have established pair bonds, often going off by themselves to small, isolated wetlands. The



pair will select a site that provides ample available forage, a discreet “loafing” area, and a small island or mud flat for preening. The females like to nest in moderately dense, knee-to-waist-high native bunch grasses, in coastal cordgrass meadows, and in slightly brackish marshes where they have both concealment from predators and access to groceries. She’ll raise her brood in a wetland that provides sufficient cover, food, and water—preferring a water depth of six inches or less, with submerged vegetation within easy grasp of the ducklings—and one that offers easy access to an “escape route” to avoid raptors, alligators, raccoons, and other predators.

On a recent visit, we drove one of the ranch’s John Deere Gators

up onto the levee of a manmade pond. Up ahead of us, a hen mottled duck—her bill is bright orange, while the drake’s is more golden—walked ahead of us, dragging a wing to feign injury. Knowing that the mama duck was attempting to lead us away from her nest, we slowly backed out, content to know that the next generation of mottled ducks will soon grace the ranch.



### COMING NEXT MONTH:

In the June newsletter, we’ll highlight Spread Oaks Ranch’s waterways and their impact on a property that integrates waterfowl habitat with large-scale farming and ranching operations with holistic care. Sign up for our newsletter at [spreadoaksranch.com](http://spreadoaksranch.com)—don’t miss a single issue!

*“Ninety minutes from Houston,  
yet a world away.”*

Visit Spread Oaks Ranch online at [spreadoaksranch.com](http://spreadoaksranch.com).

To arrange your adventure, contact Business Manager Tim Soderquist at [tim@spreadoaksranch.com](mailto:tim@spreadoaksranch.com) or (281) 814-5442.

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