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Fast Action Predator Hunting

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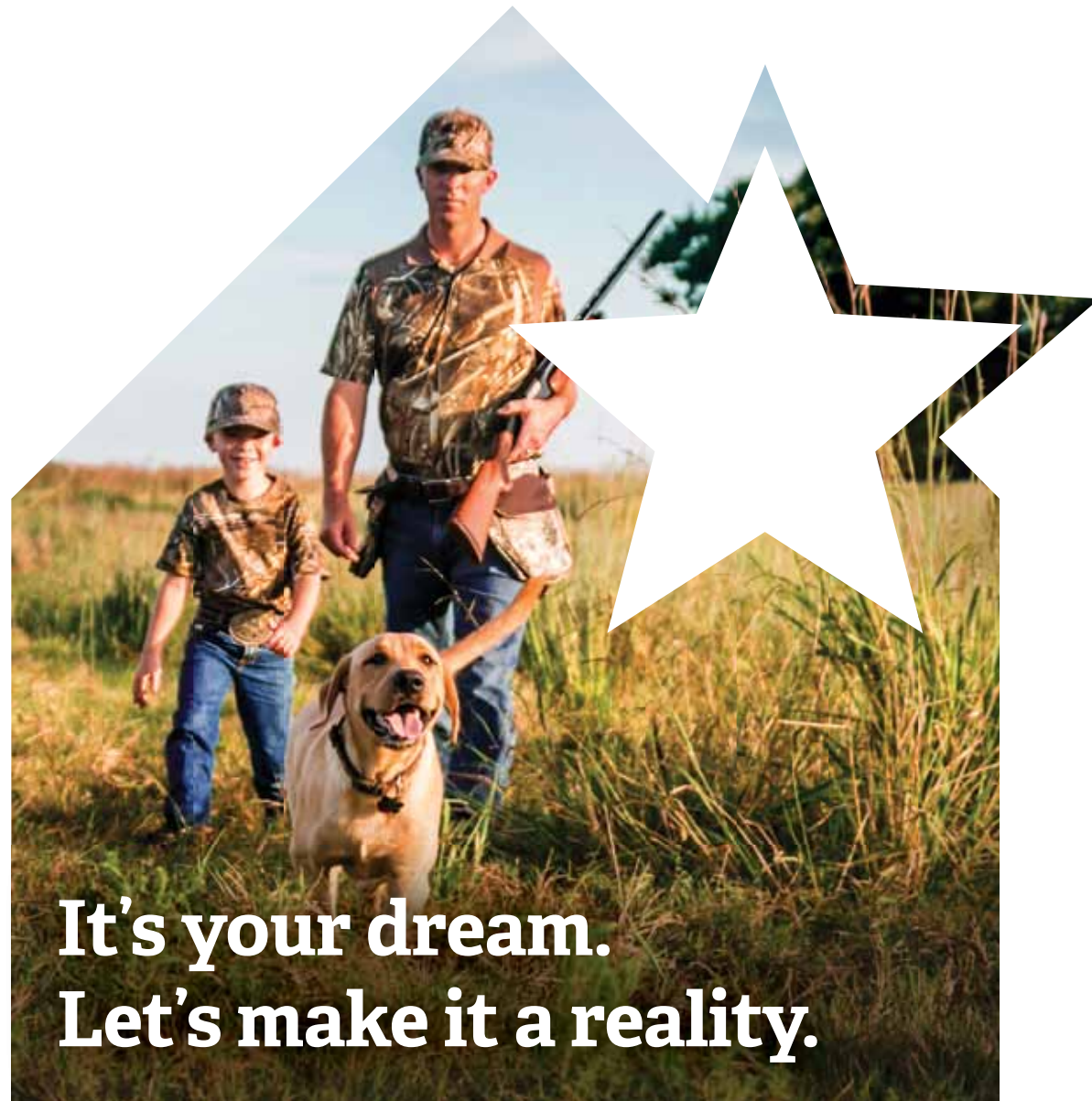
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JOURNAL

January 2018

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For more information on "El Coyote" and other fine works of art or commissions by Howard Dubois, visit www.howardduboisart.com, email buzzardcreek11@gmail.com, follow on Facebook or call (903) 880-6089.

Editor’s Insight | Bill L. Olson

RENEWED HOPE

To start each New Year many make resolutions to improve on some area of their personal life. Many promise to lose a few pounds, exercise more, save more, volunteer to assist some cause and the list goes on. Unfortunately these “pledges to ourselves” are many times broken and forgotten by the time January gives way to February.

Then there are the things we hope will change for the better. Oftentimes these are issues that gnaw relentlessly causing constant anxiety. Every parent has experienced this with most of the concern centered around a child.

Financial matters also top the list, especially for those whose home, business or places of employment were impact by some recent calamity. Many are still reeling from the ravages of Hurricane Harvey.

Health issues, dealing with changes brought about by age, uncertainty of things beyond our control what we obsess and worry. It is just a part of our emotional and mental make up.

However, with the arrival of the New Year most regroup, say a whole bunch of prayers and hope this year will be better than the last. At the very least we look forward to signs that improvement is starting to surface.

Those of us that enjoy the outdoors fixate on issues dealing with the activities we enjoy. This partly stems from a healthy concern for our wild resources, but also as a diversion from those personal issues. It is a mindset of “don’t mess with my sanctuary.”

Each year every coastal angler hopes Old Man Winter is kind and no major fish kill occurs from frigid weather. Milder conditions also present an opportunity to put on another layer of clothes and venture out for a day to fish or just explore salty places.

Freshwater anglers know their favorite gamefish are fairly safe and insulated from cold temperatures. In fact some species like smallmouth bass, walleye and rainbow trout actually thrive in colder water temperatures.

Hunters have similar hope for a mild start to the New Year but for different reasons. Cold, wet weather can adversely impact wildlife, particularly whitetail and mule deer bucks already stressed by the rigors of the rut.

Many of those same big game hunters may obsess with concern over a huge mature trophy buck that disappeared before a shot could be taken. Maybe it was a massive antler monarch that was just reaching his prime, but when the season opened was spotted with a good portion of his rack missing from fighting with another. Did he make it? Did any other hunter that saw him, also let him walk in hopes another opportunity in the fall will present itself when the buck’s headgear is intact.

Upland bird hunters become concerned about the impact hunting and weather will play on quail populations that have been on the rebound. It has been so long since populations were this strong that worrisome thoughts fill the head — will enough birds survive to continue to repopulate the available habitat.

It doesn’t seem to matter whether it is a personal issues, about loved ones, or concerns about our beloved outdoors, we just worry — then hope for the best. All we can really do is to continue to address those problems we may have some control over. If that is done, then seek divine intervention is why prayers are prayed incessantly.

With an optimistic outlook it is time to enjoy a sunrise or sunset on a crisp winter day. It will provide the connection with something so much bigger than any one of us and is what provides us with renewed hope.

Until next month: Pursue all of your outdoor activities in a safe and ethical manner.



FOUNDER/PUBLISHER/EDITOR
Bill L. Olson

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
Adala Ruhge

CONTRIBUTING OUTDOORS EDITORS
Tom Claycomb III
Harold Gunn
Brian Hughes
Mike Holmes
John Jefferson
Kerry O’Day
Bill L. Olson, Jr.
Nate Skinner
Robert Sloan
Mark Sosin
Matt Williams
Danno Wise

WHITETAIL DEER EDITOR
Bob Zaiglin

ART/PRODUCTION EDITOR
Sunni Gonzales

ADVERTISING SALES
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TPWD Announces Rainbow Trout Stocking Season in Texas

With hundreds of thousands of catchable-size rainbow trout arriving at 150 public water bodies across the state this winter, Texas anglers have plenty of cool-weather fishing opportunities to look forward to in the coming months.

A total of 18 Neighborhood Fishin' lakes and ponds located in Texas' 11 most



PHOTO COURTESY TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE.

This angler shows off a stringer of rainbow trout he and his family caught while fishing at Blanco River State Park.

populated urban centers were the first of the season to offer rainbow trout fishing. Stockings began Nov. 22 in most locations and continue every two weeks.

Anglers looking for somewhere to fish for free without having to purchase a fishing license can visit one of 18 state parks being stocked with rainbow trout this year. The list of state parks regularly receiving rainbow trout stockings includes Lake Bob Sandlin State Park in East Texas, Blanco State Park in Central Texas, and Fort Richardson State Park in North Texas. Many of the state parks being stocked with rainbow trout have a free tackle loaner program on-site for anyone who needs it. One of the state's most popular trout fishing destinations, the Guadalupe River fishery downstream of Canyon Lake between Austin and San Antonio, will receive more than 17,000 rainbow trout through February with the first stocking having occurred Dec. 1. Temporary lease agreements with four privately-owned resorts provide free public fishing access to the Guadalupe River.

All of the 150-plus lakes, ponds and river tailraces being stocked around the state will receive more than 300,000

rainbow trout through the first week of March. The full list of public water bodies receiving rainbow trout this year, along with scheduled stocking dates and numbers of fish, can be found online at www.tpwd.texas.gov/troutstocking.

Rainbow trout have a salmon-like shape and make for great eating. They prefer cold water, so in most parts of Texas they can survive only in winter. They love cheese, kernel corn, nightcrawlers, red wigglers or mealworms. Anglers who prefer lures can try small inline Mepps or Panther Martin spinnerbaits or spoons.

Rainbow trout are subject to a five fish per day bag limit, with no minimum length limit. Special regulations are in effect on two sections of the Guadalupe River.

Anglers ages 17 and older must have a valid Texas freshwater fishing license – including while fishing at Neighborhood Fishin' ponds – unless fishing within a Texas State Park where fishing licenses are not required. Kids under 17 fish for free.

For dates and locations of rainbow trout stockings visit, tpwd.texas.gov/fishboat/fish/management/stocking/trout_stocking.phtml **T★J**

Cover Art

A New Year begins and we each find ourselves contemplating what the future holds. In the life of a coyote, January 1st is just another day as it “makes a living” off of the land it lives and the animals it hunts as its prey.

Many hunters lament the hunting seasons that close to start a New Year. The reality is they can benefit the prized game animals they passionately pursue by continuing to hunt. Predator hunting is gaining popularity in the Lone Star State and managing their populations is an important part to any wildlife management program. Coyotes, and other predators prey on whitetail and mule deer, plus destroy ground nesting birds nest in search for their eggs and poults.

Wildlife and western artist Howard Dubois of Canton Texas beautifully illustrates the cunning coyote in his “El Coyote” acrylic painting. Dubois artistic skills captures the keen eyes and disposition of this widely distributed predator.

In 2011 at the National Juried Wildlife Art competition sponsored by Texas Commission for the Arts – Irving Parks and Recreation, “El Coyote” won the Award of Excellence.

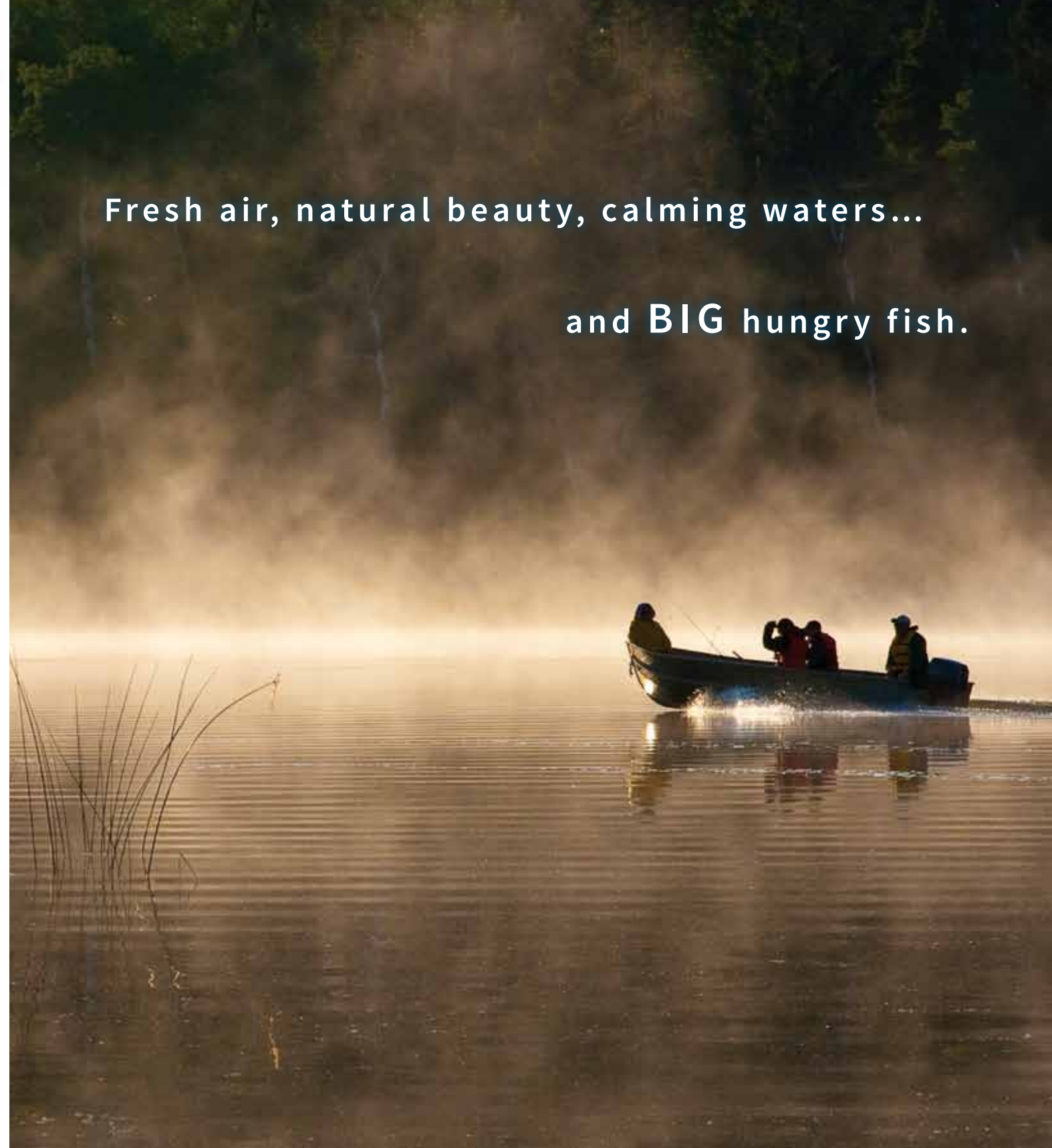
For more information on “El Coyote” and other fine works of art or commissions by Howard Dubois, visit www.howardduboisart.com, email buzzardcreek11@gmail.com, follow on Facebook or call (903) 880-6089. **T★J**



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Sunrise on Otter Lake

Texas Game Wardens Bag High Profile Trophy Deer Poachers

Deer hunters will go to great lengths in pursuit of a trophy white-tailed buck; poachers are willing to go farther, breaking ethical rules and game laws designed to protect and conserve one of Texas' most prized wildlife resources.

Investigations into the illegal take of three whitetail bucks seized by Grayson County game wardens during the 2016-2017 hunting season illustrate just how far some folks are willing to go to bag a trophy deer. Grayson County in northeast Texas along the Red River is known for producing quality whitetails, and is one of only a handful of counties in Texas where bowhunting is the only legal means of harvest. The cases filed against the individuals responsible for illegally taking the three seized deer, which have a combined gross Boone & Crockett score of over 535 inches, and a combined civil restitution value of \$34,954.80, should serve as a warning to would be criminals.

Arguably, one of the most bizarre of the three cases involved the biggest buck. Rumors spread like wildfire after photos of a huge 19-point buck surfaced. Game wardens received information suggesting the hunter's story didn't add up.

On Dec. 16, 2016, the man who killed the big buck, John Walker Drinnon, 34, of Whitesboro, Texas, told game wardens that he killed the 19-pointer on public hunting land in Oklahoma. The wardens had obtained a game camera image of the deer in question, photographed on public hunting land on the Texas side of Lake



PHOTO COURTESY TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE
A game camera image of this 19-point buck taken in Grayson County provided evidence refuting John Walker Drinnon's claim he harvested the big deer in Oklahoma.

Texoma, which contradicted Drinnon's claim.

Working with their counterparts in Oklahoma and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agents to build a case, game wardens eventually obtained a confession from Drinnon that he had killed the buck in Grayson County from a public roadway with a rifle. Charges were filed against Drinnon for taking a deer without landowner consent (a state jail felony), hunting without landowner consent and hunting from a vehicle (Class A misdemeanors). Drinnon was also issued citations for no hunting license, hunting from the public roadway, no hunter education, and illegal means and methods.

On Oct. 12, Drinnon pled guilty to the felony charge of taking a whitetail deer without landowner consent in 15th District Court in Sherman, Texas. Civil restitution on the deer, which scored 202 B&C, was estimated at \$18,048.10.

Advances in stealth surveillance technology have made game cameras essential gear for serious deer hunters. In Grayson County, wary old bucks present a challenge for bowhunters, but seldom escape the camera or coffee shop gossip.

While Timothy Kane Sweet, 37, of Sherman, didn't claim the 19-pointer he bagged originated out of state, he did attempt to hide the fact it was another Grayson County monster buck. Sweet claimed he killed the deer in neighboring



PHOTO COURTESY TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE
A game camera in Grayson County captured this image of a 19-point buck Timothy Kane Sweet claimed he killed in Fannin County, and later displayed on a wall mount at his residence.

Fannin County. What he failed to consider while concocting his tale was that the deer, which scored 177 B&C, exhibited a unique rack that had been captured on a game camera in Grayson County.

Once again, rumors flared and tips sparked a game warden investigation. During an interview with the game warden, Sweet claimed he made a poor shot on the deer that didn't draw blood, but returned to the area later that evening to inspect. When the buck jumped up and began to run off, Sweet said he shot it five or six times illegally at night with a pistol.

On Oct. 20, Sweet pled no contest to charges of illegal means and methods, improperly tagged whitetail deer, and hunting out of season (Class C misdemeanors) in Justice of the Peace Court in Whitesboro, Texas. Civil restitution was estimated at \$10,664.35.

The third case involves an individual who killed a big 10-point buck during the 2016-17 hunting season and attempted to take advantage of hunting license benefits reserved for disabled veterans. Brian Eugene Culp, 47, of Gunter, Texas, tagged the 157-inch B&C whitetail using a Super Combo hunting and fishing license (available at no cost to disabled veterans) that he did not qualify to possess.

On May 19, Culp pled no contest in Justice of the Peace Court in Whitesboro to a charge of hunting without a valid license. Civil restitution was estimated at \$6,242.35. "These cases exemplify the hard work and dedication state game wardens deliver day in and day out to enforce Texas game laws," said Col. Grahame Jones,



PHOTO COURTESY TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE
Brian Eugene Culp illegally used hunting license benefits reserved for disabled veterans to take this impressive 10-point buck in Grayson County, and then posted it to social media.

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Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Law Enforcement Division Director. “I want to extend special recognition and gratitude to Grayson County game wardens Michael Hummert and Daron Blackerby for a job well done.” Hummert was also the lead investigator into a 2014 poaching ring on the Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge in Grayson County.

Working collaboratively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Hummert apprehended a group of five subjects who were sneaking onto the refuge to poach trophy bucks. The investigation led to six felonies and 34 Class A misdemeanor charges filed. Grayson County game wardens would like to thank the public for their assistance in these cases. Game wardens would also like to remind the public that they can report any illegal hunting activity to Texas Game Wardens using Operation Game Thief by calling (800) 792-GAME (4263) or contacting their local game warden. **T★J**

Scientific Team To Conduct Independent Estimate Of Red Snapper in Gulf

A team of university and government

scientists, selected by an expert review panel convened by the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, will conduct an independent study to estimate the number of red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. The research team, made up of 21 scientists from 12 institutions of higher learning, a state agency and a federal agency, was awarded \$9.5 million in federal funds for the project through a competitive research grant process. With matching funds from the universities, the project will total \$12 million.

“We’ve assembled some of the best red snapper scientists for this study,” said Greg Stunz, the project leader and a professor at the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi. “The team members assembled through this process are ready to address this challenging research question. There are lots of constituents who want an independent abundance estimate that will be anxiously awaiting our findings.”

Recreational anglers and commercial fishermen will be invited to play a key role in collecting data by tagging fish, reporting tags and working directly with

scientists onboard their vessels.

“The local knowledge fishermen bring to this process is very valuable and meaningfully informs our study,” Stunz said.

Some stakeholder groups have expressed concerns that there are more red snapper in the Gulf than currently accounted for in the stock assessment. The team of scientists on this project will spend two years studying the issue.

In 2016, Congress directed the National Sea Grant College Program and NOAA Fisheries to fund independent red snapper data collections, surveys and assessments, including the use of tagging and advanced sampling technologies.

“This research will be driven largely by university-based scientists with partners from state and federal agencies,” Stunz said. “This funding will allow us to do an abundance estimate using multiple sampling methods with a focus on advanced technologies and tagging for various habitat types

The project team will determine abundance and distribution of red snapper on artificial, natural and unknown bottom habitat across the northern Gulf of Mexico. **T★J**

Fishing to Back The Badge

In Texas smaller counties there are small Constable Departments that are limited in funds. Most of these small law enforcement deputies make smaller salaries and in most cases are required to purchase their own Personal Protection Equipment, guns and in some cases their cars. These officers still patrol area streets and roads and respond to emergencies without complaint.

Brandi Kelley from Liberty County decided to do something to give back to these agencies. In 2016 Kelley and friend Heidi Simms put together an Open Bass Tournament to raise money for these departments to help purchase bullet proof vest and other PPE. It was a hit.

In 2017 Kelley planned the 2nd Annual Back the Badge Tournament for September 10, 2017. Then Hurricane Harvey arrived just before the tournament date severely impacting Houston and southeast Texas.

With the devastation plus Lake Conroe being closed, the tournament was rescheduled for November 12. It was still a big hit. With over 40 anglers fishing and a stringer of fish weighing in at 30 pounds,

it got exciting and nearly \$5,000 was raised for Liberty County Constable’s offices.

Clint Lipham and David Waut of Montgomery, Texas weighed in a bag of fish weighing 29.83 lbs. and winning the overall tournament. They also managed a 7.90 lb. that won the Big Bass Award. Jason Griffin and Gary Griffin finished with a strong in Second Place bringing in a limit of bass weighing 22.63 lbs. Finishing in Third Place was Gabe Alanis with 16.69 lbs.

There was also a non-Bass event where an anglers could weigh in any legal fish other than a bass. That was won with a 15.29 lb yellow catfish caught by Jullian Clepper and Randy Gunter.

We want to thank all the Sponsors who helped make this possible.

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tion, Bowden Marine, Top Star Construction, Lowes Home Improvement (Conroe) and all the great people and businesses that donated to the silent auction.

“We will be doing this again. It will be bigger and better with a lot more for entertainment in 2018,” said Brandi Kelley of Martin Chrysler in Cleveland Texas. “Be looking for the announcement coming in the spring for the August tournament date and details.” **T★J**



PHOTO COURTESY MIKE LOTT

Clint Lipham and David Waut of Montgomery, Texas weighed in a bag of fish weighing 29.83 lbs. winning the overall tournament. They also managed a 7.90 lb. fish that won the Big Bass Award.



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FINISHING WITH A BANG



Late season strategies and subtle adjustments will ensure hunters fill straps until the very last hunt.

Story and photography by Nate Skinner

Waterfowl hunters seem to have a love-hate relationship with ducks and geese late in the season. And rightfully so. It's a breathtaking sight when they work into a spread, but getting them to do so can be downright tough.

This time of year the birds are dressed in their "Sunday Best" as they sport their breeding plumage. Gorgeous feathers worthy of gracing the wall in just about any trophy room fill the air during the last month of the season. And many hunters succumb to the addiction of filling straps with an assortment of vividly beautiful colors.

Not to be fooled by their mesmerizing appearance, any seasoned pursuer of ducks and geese knows their wary eyes make deceiving them a challenge. The waterfowl wintering in our great state have seen many a decoy spread in a variety of conditions over different terrains during the past few months as they migrated down the Central Flyway. Combine this with the fact they've heard hoards of gunfire while some have even felt showers of steel all around them, and the word spooky just doesn't seem to

accurately describe their behavior. The term educated is more appropriate.

Tricking late season waterfowl requires hunters to make some adjustments in their approach. From the decoy spread to the blind and everything in between, specific strategies will ensure that straps are filled down to the very last hunt.

When it comes to setting decoy spreads during the latter part of the season, hunters should stick to one simple

motto — less is more. Downsizing a spread is necessary in just about all waterfowl hunting scenarios as the final day approaches, and it just makes sense.

At this point, ducks have buzzed over thousands of floating fakes, while geese have flown over a plethora of full body floaters and massive spreads of silhouettes. Hunting pressure has resulted in the spreading out of immense concentrations of birds, and ultra dense decoy spreads will flare approaching waterfowl. Using enough decoys necessary in the given situation to get the birds' attention while avoiding an overdone presentation that is unrealistic in appearance is the formula for success.

I've experienced the effectiveness of downsizing a decoy spread in a number of different regions while hunting a variety of species. On a goose hunt in south central Oklahoma a few years ago, three buddies and I absolutely smoked both



As duck and goose seasons draw toward a close, hunters should be prepared to take the first opportunity to take a shot of approaching birds. The shots will be longer and the author suggests using 3 1/2 inch shells that pack a larger pellet payload.



Green fields of winter wheat are a great place to find geese late in the season.

greater and lesser Canada geese, along with limits of speckledbellies while laying amidst a mere five dozen full body decoys. That small of a spread is almost unheard of when it comes to goose hunting an area chock full of thousands of acres agriculture.

In northeast Texas in Red River County three seasons ago I was hunting a small hole smack dab in the middle of some thick, flooded timber with some friends. We were covered up with mallards as soon as the sun rose. They were in wads of 10 to 15 birds and would circle but refused to commit.

We only had half a dozen mallard decoys in the opening. After watching several groups of greenheads flare after a few looks, we decided to pull all the decoys and hunt without them. It was immediately game on. The action was about as in-your-face as it gets.

The freshwater marshes in southwest Louisiana have become a favorite waterfowl locale of mine and I make

several hunts there every year with Nick Poe of Big Lake Guide Service. I've hunted with Poe both early and late in the season, and his decoy spread gradually gets smaller as the season wears on. Some of our best January hunts have taken place over a thinly dispersed spread of several dozen coot decoys and a handful of duck decoys.

The type of decoy being used is

something else that hunters must consider. Motion duck decoys like the spinning wing apparatuses or Mojo decoys work well to bring early season birds into shotgun range. The opposite is true during this time of year.

Educated ducks begin flaring from these robo-duck decoys late in the season, and geese tend to avoid them as well. Homemade motion decoys that provide



Layout blinds provide the ultimate low profile concealment for waterfowl hunters.

movement to a spread and are out of the ordinary in terms of how they look and operate are a better option.

Feeder butt decoys make a nice addition to any spread and give it some lifelike character. Employing the use of a jerk cord is also a good idea, especially on calm days with little to no wind.

As far as goose decoys are concerned, it seems just about everyone who hunts nowadays uses a massive spread of silhouette and full body decoys. These realistic appearing fakes work, but sometimes its to hard the beat the tried and true methods from the past. Old school style rag spreads will help fool geese when nothing else will, because the birds have not seen these types of decoys used regularly in many years.

The orientation or shape of a decoy spread is also something to contemplate during the final weeks of the season. The majority of duck decoy spreads that the birds have seen have likely been the typical V-shaped spreads incorporating a group of decoys to the left, a group of decoys to the right, and hole in the center used as a shooting lane and landing area.

As the spread is downsized, adjusting the orientation to a pattern that is used less by the majority will produce better hunts. Sometimes a single, small concentration or pod of decoys is all it takes to get the job done. Ducks tend to land on the edges of this type of spread and putting it directly in front of the blind at close range is a dynamite way to ensure easy shot opportunities occur.

Stealthy blinds are a must when pursuing late season waterfowl, and the key to an effective one requires hunters to think out-of-the-box



Plowed ground becomes an excellent option for late season goose hunters once agricultural fields are turned over in preparation for spring.

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Downsizing the decoy spread is a must as the season comes to an end.

—literally. Large, box-shaped, permanent blinds that have been hunted in several times throughout the season should be

left unoccupied. Many times, the birds will flare from these hideaways during this time of year because they expect them to be the focal point of hunting pressure. Instead, low profile concealment that allows for mobility is the ticket to success.

Being able to set up anywhere is a tremendous advantage, and many of the coffin-style lay out blinds on the market today allow hunters to do just that. Whether it's the edge of a pond or a flat, wide open field that is being hunted, these tools can be invaluable for those wanting to fill straps all the way to the bitter end.

Make shift blinds composed of natural vegetation are always an exceptional option. There's nothing like hiding within the vegetation that surrounds an area

that ducks and geese are regularly visiting. Pruning shears or a small, lightweight pair of loppers can be toted along almost anywhere and used to cut brush or other vegetation that can be turned into a blind in just a short period of time. Enclose some small stools or milk crates with a pile of branches from nearby bushes, and a killer, natural blind to hunt from has been constructed.

The type of terrain that is targeted also plays a large roll in late season success. The largest concentrations of birds are going to be found in areas that have received the least amount of pressure over the past several weeks and months. For ducks across the Lone Star State this typically means gravel pits, stock ponds, cattle tanks, and remote sloughs or flooded areas that lie off the grid.

For geese some of the best action will occur over green fields containing winter crops of wheat, oats, and peas that are just now flourishing. Fields of plowed ground that were recently turned over in preparation for the spring are also late season hot spots for geese. The birds visit these acres of dirt regularly to eat grit and remnants of waste grain from the crops that were previously harvested from the area.

Effective late season calling boils down to timing and bird behavior. Ducks and geese that are clearly giving a spread a look should be given the "silent treatment" and



Plowed ground containing waste grain from a recent harvest will attract hordes of geese.

not called. Instead calling should be used to gain the attention of passing waterfowl. Once birds respond to the calling and

begin to work, hunters should put the calls down and have faith in their set-up to seal the deal.

Because the birds tend to be more finicky, hunters should expect to have to take longer shots at this point in the season. Rather than waiting for birds to get right and decoy perfectly, it's better to take the shot the first time opportunities occur.

Many times ducks and geese will only give one look before moving on out of range.

For this reason, I prefer to shoot three and a half inch shells during all of my late season hunts. Knowing long shots are likely, I like to have as much bang for my shell as possible.

Another season is on the verge of slipping by, and will soon pass quickly. There's still a chance to get in on some waterfowl action and the birds make it all worth while.

Consider a different approach, make adjustments where necessary, and close the season out with one heck of a hunt. It's time to finish with a bang. **T&J**



Calling is about timing and bird behavior. Call to get the attention of passing birds, then put the calls down when they are working into the spread.



A hard working retriever adds to the hunt every time.



With proper late season adjustments to how a spread is set up, calling modifications, and taking advantage of the first shot opportunity birds present will help assure waterfowl hunter's success until the last day of the season.



Better Safe Than Sorry

January marks the beginning of another New Year, and with it comes the start of a brand new boating/fishing season on freshwater lakes, rivers and saltwater bays up and down the coast. It's a great time to be a fisherman in Texas, and it will just keep getting better as this month gives way to February and then on to March.

Take this as a timely reminder to pull a little maintenance on your fishing rig before you head out for a day on the water. This holds true especially if your boat has been sitting idle for a while or if you haven't checked on batteries, power connections, hoses, wheel bearings, tires, fuel connections and other critical operational components in recent times.

If you're going with a friend in their boat, be smart and ask about the maintenance history on the boat as well as the trailer before heading down the highway or dumping the boat in a lake or river. It could save you the misery of

having to swap out a blown tire on a dark road, having to get your hands greasy at the boat ramp or, worse yet, getting stranded miles from shore.

While there is some credence to the old saying "if it ain't broke don't fix it" in some arenas, it should never be applied when it comes to boats and motors. In my book it's always best to do whatever you can to help prevent problems before they happen.

Here's a laundry list of few home maintenance checks worth performing before heading out to your favorite lake, river or bay:

Trailer Tires: Trailer tires are no different than the tires on your tow vehicle. They wear out over time. Difference is, tread wear isn't always the best indicator to go by. The rubber used to make tires breaks down with age. Even though an eight-year-old tire looks perfectly good on the outside, odds are it is a potential problem just waiting for an inopportune

time to happen.

It's a good idea to replace trailer tires every four to six years, the sooner the better if you tow long distances on hot roads. Keeping tires out of harsh weather and off bare ground when idle can extend their life somewhat, but it's still a good idea to abide by the four to six year rule.

Check for cracking or dry rotting on the tire wall and between the treads. This is a sign that a tire should be replaced immediately. You can determine the age of a tire by learning to read the tire identification number on sidewall. It's listed after the "DOT" code and looks something like this: DOT U2LL LRM 3514. The last four numbers identify the tire as being manufactured during the 35th week of 2014.

Fuel Lines, Connections and Pump-Up Bulbs: The ethanol fuel we get at the pumps today is one of a boat owner's worst enemies. Not only does it attract water than can contaminate fuel in short

order, it can eat away a fuel line, pump-up primer bulbs and fuel connector O-rings that can put unwanted junk in a fuel system, clog filters or cause serious and costly damage to an outboard. It also causes air leakage in lines and connections or cause a primer bulb to lose its ability hold a prime.

Check O-rings around the connector for cracking. Fuel lines can be inspected by cutting a small section off and checking the interior liner for deterioration. It's a good idea to replace lines, hoses, connectors and primer bulbs every few years, just to be on the safe side. If you can find non-ethanol fuel locally, use it. If not, always use a good fuel conditioner.

Water Impeller: This a cheap part that can cause big trouble in short order if it goes bad. The impeller is a rubber-vaned wheel inside the pump housing that plays integral role in helping circulate water through the engine to keep it cool. Impellers can dry rot over time or "take a set" so they won't flex back into shape. When the impeller fails, the water pump can't function and the engine can over heat.

A good sign of a faulty or damaged water impeller is a weak or intermittent stream of water coming out of the cooling water outlet hole located at the bottom rear of housing, just beneath the cowling. Boaters frequently refer to the stream as "peeing."

You can check an outboard's "pee stream" at home by attaching a water hose to an engine flusher and placing the suction fittings over the intake slots. Turn the water on and crank the engine. If the engine won't pee, the impeller could be the culprit, but not always.

For some reason mud daubers like to build small nests in the water outlet hole, which can prevent water from exiting. Always check the outlet hole for clogging, especially on a boat that has been sitting for a while.

At any rate, it's a good idea to replace the impeller every one to two years. Replacing one requires removal of the lower unit. You can do it yourself with basic hand tools. Otherwise, you should take it to a reputable outboard mechanic. Have them replace the lower unit lube while they're in there.

Bearing Check: A wheel bearing that goes bad can cause you a world of hurt. Not only will it leave you stranded, but it

can do some serious damage to a wheel axle that can't be repaired on the side of the road.

Check bearings periodically by raising the wheel off the ground. Grip the tire on both sides and check for slack by pushing side to side. Spin the tire. If you hear

excessive grinding it may be a sign of a bad bearing.

Pulling regular maintenance should be a part of every boat ownership program. It will help prevent problems before they happen and making owning a boat more of a pleasure than a hassle. ★★

5 Tips For Winter Trailing

1.) **Slow Down:** It is much easier to maintain control of your rig on icy or snow covered roads if you keep your foot out of the accelerator and reduce your speed. Always allow plenty of room between your tow vehicle and the vehicle ahead of you, and let the gearing of your vehicle's transmission slow you down rather than banging hard on the brakes.

2.) **Go 4X4:** Four-wheel drive won't help much with braking, but it is a God-send when it comes to optimizing traction when accelerating on icy roads or boat ramps.

3.) **Keep It Covered:** It is always a good idea keep your boat covered when trailering, especially on icy or wet roads. Many highway departments use salt or sand on slick roads that can make a huge mess if your boat isn't

covered. A good cover also keeps moisture off your carpet that can cause rod lockers seize shut in sub-freezing temperatures.

4.) **Hooked Up:** Always keep the bow hook locked in place when backing down or pulling up an icy boat ramp. If the trailer bunks are frozen, the boat could wind up on the concrete.

5.) **Slip-N-Slide....Don't Panic:** If your rig starts to slide as you back down an icy ramp, try to keep everything straight and don't panic.

The brakes will grab once the rear tires of the tow vehicle enter the water. It might be wise to keep a canister or two of salt in your tow vehicle. Salt thaws the ice, which can be a big help when pulling up an icy ramp. — Matt Williams ★



If your boat has been sitting for a spell it's a good idea to crank it at home before heading to the lake to make sure the motor is "peeing" or discharging water through the cooling system, indicating it is operating properly.





Turn 'Em Loose

The jury reached its verdict a long time ago. Repeated tagging studies on a multitude of species from sharks to striped bass and redfish to billfish demonstrate convincingly that the majority of fish species can survive being caught if they are released correctly. Scientists confirm these findings.

Size, season, and bag regulations make the release of many fish species mandatory. Since you don't have an option when regulations are involved, it's important that you become a fisheries manager and make sure your quarry survives.

Even where regulations don't exist, a personal commitment to conservation through catch and release adds an extra measure of fun to a day on the water. Keep in mind that the population of most of the popular recreational species remains stressed and under increasing pressure.

If you intend to release a fish, the use of circle hooks can make a difference because they usually wind up in the mouth of your quarry rather than in its belly.

Once the fish is hooked, try to land it quickly. If you insist on playing a fish to exhaustion, its chances for survival diminish. If you are dragging a fish out

of deep water, slow down so the fish can adjust to the change of depth and its swim bladder won't expand dramatically.

A bleeding fish prompts the misconception that it will die anyway, so we might as well toss it in the fish-box. These animals don't suffer from hemophilia and don't bleed to death as readily as one would suspect. It's worth the effort to revive and release a bleeding fish. Tagging results show that many will survive.

The first rule of release insists you leave the fish in the water if at all possible and that you handle it as little as practical. Use a tool to remove the hook or, if the fish is hooked deeply,



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

If a fish is being brought up from deep water, slow down so it can adjust to the change of depth and its swim bladder won't expand dramatically.

cut the leader as close to the mouth as possible. This would create the least amount of stress. If you put the fish in a net, remember that the strands of the net tend to remove the mucous body coating that protects the fish against infection. With larger fish, you may have to slip a short release gaff through the fish's lower jaw or grip the jaw with a tool while keeping it in the water. This will enable you to keep the fish in the water alongside the boat.

If you must handle a fish, use a wet glove or towel to obtain a positive grip on the body. Sticking your fingers in the eyes of your quarry or into the gills will seriously injure it.

You may certainly cover the eyes of the fish with a wet towel and hold it upside down horizontally. Largemouth bass fishermen in fresh water insist on sticking their thumb in the lower jaw of the fish, holding it vertically. This is probably the worst thing you can do. Whatever you do, get the fish back in the water as quickly

as possible.

Sharp teeth are not the only danger in handling a fish. Many species have spines on their fins or protruding from their bodies that can make nasty puncture wounds.

Razor edges often trace along the gill plates and these can easily cut a hand. The key lies in knowing where to hold each species and to grip the fish firmly and securely without crushing it to death.

Sharks (even small ones) are one species you don't want to bring in the boat or hold with your hands. Not only are they incredibly strong but they have a cartilaginous skeleton instead of a bony one.

This means they can twist and turn and just about bite their own tail. Holding a shark puts your hands in danger. If you can't remove the hook while a shark is in the water alongside the boat, cut the leader and let it swim off.

Sailfish and marlin rank as the offshore glamour species and most anglers choose to release them. Follow the same basic procedures you would with any other species.

Try to keep the fish in the water at boatside and remove the hook if possible. Don't bring it in the boat. With sailfish, white marlin, and smaller blue marlin, one can grab the bill and hold the head of the fish underwater while the hook is being removed.

When you grab the bill, make absolutely sure that your thumbs face each other. That keeps the fish from jumping toward you, because your hands and arms will automatically steer the fish clear of your body.

Turning the fish loose is the critical aspect of catch and release. You don't want your quarry to turn belly up, sink, or ease off without enough strength to avoid a larger predator. The easiest method is to simply hold the fish in the water facing into the current or any other type of moving water while you support its belly and gently hold the tail. If the fish needs resuscitation, work it back and forth gently, forcing water through the gills. You will sense when the fish regains its strength. It will start to try to swim out of your hands.

With a billfish, hold your quarry by the bill and force its head underwater. Have someone kick the boat in gear and move forward very slowly.

This pushes oxygen through the gills and the fish will eventually swim off on its own.

If you release a fish of any species and it doesn't swim off, try to get the fish again and resuscitate it until it is able to swim on its own.

Research continues to show that the majority of fish survive catch and release even if they don't look like they will survive at the moment.

To me, there's no greater sight on the water than to watch a beautiful gamefish swim off slowly with nothing hurt more than its pride. Try it. Releasing fish becomes habit forming and it makes you feel good in the process. ★★



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

If a fish needs resuscitation, work it back and forth gently, forcing water through the gills until it regains its strength and starts to try to swim out of your hands.



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Repeated tagging studies demonstrate convincingly that the majority of fish species can survive being caught if they are released correctly.

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The 30-06 Springfield - America's Classic Caliber

In a world of “if it breaks throw it away and buy a new one,” or “I have to have the newest and fastest,” why has the 30-06 stayed so popular for over 110 years? It seems that every few years or so a new caliber is touted as the latest and greatest, but the 30-06 still remains in everyone's caliber line-up — steadily performing no matter the situation.

The 30-06 Springfield was invented to be a better military caliber than what the Spanish and German Army were using. The caliber that the 30-06 replaced was not a bad caliber, the 30-40 Krag, which had almost identical velocity and bullet weight as the 308 Win. The main problem was the weak Krag Jorgensen action that the rifles of the day were being made on and how hard they were to reload. If the Spanish would have had more troops and had been better trained to defend the

countryside, they might have won the Spanish-American War.

In 1900, bids were being submitted to replace the 30-40 Krag caliber and rifle with a stronger, faster, more accurate rifle. In 1903, the Springfield Company built a new rifle and cartridge, naming it the 1903 Springfield rifle and 30-03 Springfield caliber. The rifle was a very close copy to the 98 Mauser and the U.S. Government had to pay infringement



(left to right) A 25-06, 270 Winchester, 30-06 Springfield, and 35 Whelen are all in the 30-06 family.

rights to Mauser for copying the design. The 30-03 caliber used a round nose bullet which was still inferior to the 7mm and 8mm Mauser of the day.

In 1906, the U.S. Government changed to a lighter Spitzer bullet which was loaded to a higher velocity. This became the standard issue for the U.S. Military and was named the U.S. 30 caliber 1906 or better known as the 30-06 Springfield.

Now, over 110 years later, the 30-06 is still around while many other great calibers have come and gone. The 30-06 is a great caliber with dozens and dozens of bullet types and weights to choose from. I would not be afraid to hunt any game animal on earth with it, and for all mid-sized animals it is the perfect choice. The 30-06 just seems to do every thing good. There are flatter shooting calibers and calibers which have more energy and calibers which are more accurate but in real life hunting do you really need a ½ MOA rifle, or does it make much difference if your rifle drops 22 or 24 inches at 400 yards? The 30-06 is a very versatile caliber.

You can shoot bullets from as light as 110 grains up to the heavy 220 grain bullets. It seems the perfect bullet weight is from 150 to 200 grains with my favorite being the 165 grain Sierra Spitzer. A good load in a 30-06 will shoot a 165 grain bullet at 2850 feet per second which means it drops about 24 inches at

400 yards and has 1650 foot pounds of energy at the same distance. This is flat enough and with enough retained energy to cleanly kill any North American game animal.

If I planned on using a 30-06 on big bears or moose I would simply move up to a heavier, harder bullet like the 200 grain Swift A-Frame or the Nosler Partition bullet. The larger animals require deeper penetration while the bears have an extra layer of fat that has a tendency to close up a wound channel leaving no blood trail. If you can get a pass through shot then you will have a better chance of having something to follow.

Accuracy with a 30-06 is good, but not great. Most will shoot under an inch at 100 yards but not many will shoot ½ inch at the same distance. The recoil is not bad, just enough to let you know you have shot a rifle with some energy. Energy again is good to above adequate but not a great amount. It could be said that the 30-06 is good at everything but not great. It is kind of middle of the road and that is a good thing. The 30-06 will do every type of hunting most hunters will want to do, and do it without beating them up.

The costs of rifles chambered for this round are less expensive than a Magnum rifle. The cost of ammo is also less than the price paid for other caliber ammunition. The barrel will not shoot out in six or eight hundred rounds like some of the new higher velocity calibers. The 30-06 just works and works well.

The case of the 30-06 has been necked up and down to create more different calibers than any other case. The 25-06, 270 Winchester, 280 Remington, 7mm Express, 338-06, and 35 Whelen are all factory calibers which use the 30-06 as the parent case. I have made 22-06, 6mm-06, 6.5-06, and Improved cases from the 30-06 to make some really interesting calibers. By using the 30-06 case you can make a caliber which can hunt anything in the world.

If a flat shooting varmint caliber is needed then use a 25-06. If hunting moose or elk use a 338-06. There is no type of hunting that the 30-06 case has not been used.

Both my wife Carol and I hunt with a 35 Whelen Improved which is a 30-06 case necked up to 35 caliber and fire-formed to remove the taper of the case. The neck is changed to a 40 degree angle and results



This very nice mature South Texas buck was shot with a 30-06.

in a caliber that will shoot 250 grain bullets to magnum velocity.

When customers ask to have a classic “Estate” rifle built, one of the calibers I always suggest is the 30-06. Like the 375 H&H, 404 Jeffery or 416 Rigby, the 30-06 is a true classic caliber. The fact that it is America's Classic Caliber makes it even better.

After having been around for over 100

years and still performing as well as any of the new Super, Ultra or Magnum calibers, it should be classified as a Classic. If you are pondering about what caliber to buy, that will very capably handle 90 percent of the hunting you will ever want to do from shooting axis deer in the Hill Country of Texas to hunting brown bear in Alaska, the 30-06 is a time-tested, proven and reliable choice. **T★J**

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A Guide To Bass Fishing

Solid tips for the beginning angler or a seasoned mentor recruiting a newbie to the sport.

Story by Matt Williams

One of the really cool things about bass fishing is that just about anybody can play the game. It's a sport that doesn't discriminate against age, gender or skill level. In fact, anyone who is capable of casting a rod and reel can fish for bass, and you needn't be the smartest, fastest or strongest kid in the class to become pretty darned good at it.

Bass fishing is more about hand/eye coordination and making good decisions than six-pack abs and tall grade point averages. Some of the very best bass fishermen I know are overweight and probably couldn't jog non-stop around the block if their life depended on it. Many never attended a day of college, but it didn't stop them from earning their masters in a sport with an estimated following of 30 million anglers in North America, more than 1 million of them in Texas alone.

I was just a kid when I caught my first bass and it was my brother-in-law who christened me into the club. Rather than bore you with details I'll just say catching that fish was a true blessing. Bass fishing eventually turned my life around in the middle of a rocky road that was headed downhill on a very dangerous slope. Looking back, I'm thankful for that.

Maybe that's why I always jump at the opportunity to turn a newcomer on to the sport whenever I get the chance. Never mind the inevitable backlashes and occasional cast that goes astray. Screwing up is a huge part of the learning process. Mistakes can teach you a lot if you let them, no matter if you're a beginning angler or a seasoned one facing the inherent challenges that come with recruiting a newbie to the sport.

Here are some useful tips and pointers that beginning anglers to bass fishing mentors might want to ponder:

Home Schooling

There is no substitute for getting on the water. These days a beginning angler can learn a lot about the sport without ever leaving home. There was a time when television shows, newspapers and magazines like this one were the only sources of information on bass fishing and other sports. The Internet changed all that.

With the click of a button a novice can be neck deep in informative articles and countless YouTube videos pertaining to everything from worm fishing, to reel selection, choosing fishing line and how to interpret electronics. When in doubt, just Google it and someone will be there to show you the ropes.



TPWD PHOTO

Bass fishing doesn't discriminate against age, gender or skill level. Here, young Lillian Klapper displays her junior angler Lost Creek lake record caught in 2016.



PHOTO BY MATT WILLIAMS

You're never too old to get started in bass fishing. Here, Thomas Alexander (left) and his dad, Dan, admire a chunky largemouth that took a shaky head worm on Lake Nacogdoches.

Casting Course

Learning to cast accurately can be a huge hurdle for a novice. While some are prone to catch on quicker than others, no one can become accurate with a baitcaster overnight.

One thing modern day anglers have in their corner is premium equipment. Today's low-profile baitcasters come

equipped high quality braking systems designed to help reduce the likelihood of backlashes and overruns. The key is to make sure the braking systems and spool tension knob are adjusted properly before the first cast is made.

There are two types of braking systems — magnetic and centrifugal. Magnetic brakes can be easily adjusted by turning

a small dial on the left face of the reel. Adjusting centrifugal brakes sometimes requires removing the faceplate and is inconsiderably more time consuming, but just as effective.

One of the best ways to improve casting proficiency is to practice at home. I always encourage beginners to set up a casting course in their driveway or yard



PHOTO BY MATT WILLIAMS

Lipless crankbaits like the Bill Lewis Rat-L-Trap are a great bait for choice for beginning anglers because they are simple to fish with, easy to cast and extremely effective

using paper plates, trees in the yard or any other object to simulate stumps, stick-ups, lay downs and other viable targets that you might come across in a lake setting. Elevating yourself on the tailgate of a pick-up or on the casting deck of a boat will help make the set up more authentic. Practice a few minutes each day and you'll be surprised at how quickly those casting skills will improve

When practicing at home it's important to tie something to the end of the line of sufficient weight that casts easily and doesn't catch a lot of wind. Remember, practice time is all about developing accuracy and gaining confidence. You can't concentrate if you are constantly having to free snagged lures from the grass.

Several companies make rubber casting plugs that weigh around 3/8 ounce. The elongated plugs cut the wind with very little resistance and there is no hook to contend with. Another good option is a rubber skirted jig. The hook point can be covered using a piece of electrical wire sleeving to prevent snagging.

Coaching A Caster

If you're on the water teaching someone to cast, it's always a good idea to get away from the bank and any obstacles like stumps, brush or grass. Position the student so the wind is at their back and tie on a bait that casts easily with minimal wind resistance. A 1/2 ounce Rat-L-Trap is an excellent choice. A buzz bait or spinnerbait is a poor one; the blades tend to catch too much wind.

I've taken this approach with several first timers and it works like a charm. I recently put a Lew's bait caster in the hands of my 17-year old great nephew and had him chunking a Rat-L-Trap and swim jig in a matter of 15 minutes. He only backlashed twice in five hours and caught close to a dozen bass.

Take Them

Textbook knowledge and hours of home instruction won't do a

beginner much good unless they get the opportunity to put to use what they learn in a real time setting. If you have taken a student under your wing, make it a priority to take them to the lake every



PHOTO COURTESY LEW'S

Lew's new Mach Crush combo outfit is a great choice for beginning anglers that won't break the bank. You can pick one up for around \$200.

chance you get.

Spending time on the lake allows for casting in varying wind conditions, seeing how different lures perform, learning about different types of habitat and becoming familiar with other aspects of the game that cannot be simulated on dry land. All of this adds up to building confidence, which plays a big role in conquering any obstacle in life.

Be Patient

Teaching a beginner to bass fish can be an exercise in frustration, but the rewards can be worth it. Somebody had to teach Kevin VanDam the basics of bassin'. My guess whoever that lucky guy was is pretty darned proud of their student and what he has accomplished.

Patience is a huge virtue for bass fishing coaches, particularly if the student is a youngster. Losing your cool with a kid who backlashes your favorite reel, casts into the bushes or gets hung up repeatedly is a good way to break their confidence. It could cost you a fishing partner for life.

If you lack in the patience department, it would be best to enlist someone who doesn't, to carry out the chore. Ask a friend you trust or hire a guide who specializes in instructional trips. It'll be worth it.

Equipment Choices

If you're looking to outfit a beginning angler with a few baitcasting outfits, be smart and don't waste money on crappy gear. You get what you pay for when it comes to fishing equipment, so you

should always buy the very best you can afford.

By no means is that to say you should always go for the most expensive level wind or rod on the shelf. Some low profile baitcasters and top-of-the-line rods ring the bell to the tune of \$300 or more, and there's not much logic behind dropping that kind of dough on an outfit for a novice unless money is no object.

There are plenty of good baitcasters on the market for under \$200 and some decent rods available for even less. Some things to look for in a baitcaster are stainless ball bearings, a quality braking system, good ergonomics, light weight, a reliable drag, good handle and premium grips. Reel ratio is another key consideration. This determines how many times reel spool will turn with one revolution the handle. The more times the spool turns, the faster it gathers line. A good middle-of-the-line ratio like 6.3:1 is sufficient for throwing most styles of baits.

You might consider checking out a combo outfit rather than buying rods and reels separately. Lew's makes several really



PHOTO BY JIM TUTT

Thirteen-year-old Rob Lucas of Longview is proof positive of what can happen when a youngster gets bitten by the bass fishing bug. Now 16, Lucas qualified for the FLW Series Costa Championship as a co-angler, the youngest ever to do so.

nice combos that include rods and reels of good quality. The Mach Crush combo is one you might to consider. It includes a seven foot, medium/heavy action rod and a high quality reel with 10 stainless ball bearings a 20-pound drag, over size handle and high quality Winn grips. The outfit is color coordinated in a cool orange/black scheme if you are into that sort of thing. It sells for around \$200.

Baits for the Beginner

There are dozens of different styles of lures and fishing techniques, but some are more difficult to master than others. For obvious reasons it's always best to stick with the basics when stocking a tackle box for a beginner.

Here's a laundry list of viable options to consider:

Lipless Crankbaits: Baits like the Rat-L-Trap are tailor-made for beginners. The baits cast easily and require very little skill to find some success. Just chunk it, wind it and hold on tight. Can be effective over open water and around shallow vegetation, especially hydrilla. Best colors are crawfish, bone or chrome.

Chatterbaits: Another chunk and wind bait that works best around shallow cover. It's equipped with a single hook and designed so fish hook themselves when they eat it. They come in assorted colors with white, watermelon and chartreuse being among the most popular.

Spinnerbaits: Spinnerbaits are extremely weedless, making them a good choice around shallow grass, brush and bushes. They can be fished several ways but a slow or medium steady retrieve is hard to beat when bass are holding shallow. Spinnerbaits come with several blade styles. Double willowleaf and willowleaf/Colorado combinations are the most popular for shallow water applications when the water is relatively clear. Baits weighing 1/2 ounce and less rule in the shallows. Best colors are white and white/chartreuse.

Swimbait: Soft plastic swimbait like the Kicker Fish Tail Slapper or Reaction Innovations Skinny Dipper can be deadly around shallow cover or over open water. The four to six inch baits are designed to fish at a slow, steady pace on a wide-gap hook. Hits can be vicious, but it is



PHOTO BY MATT WILLIAMS

The Senko is arguably among the easiest bass baits there is to fish with

necessary to set the hook to get good penetration.

Shaky Head Worm: It's one of the most deadly and easy to use worm rigs around. The specially designed jig head will accommodate a variety of plastics but finesse style plastics like a Zoom Trick Worm are heavily favored. Works well around scattered cover and away from the bank hard bottoms. It can be thrown on baitcasting gear, but is most effective in combination with spinning gear.

Soft Jerkbait: Soft jerk baits like a Senko are arguably among the most user-friendly family of bass baits ever invented. They can be rigged wacky style (hooked through the egg sac) or Texas rigged in combination with a slip sinker or with no weight at all.

Just cast it out, let it sink for a few seconds and gradually work it back to the boat with slow, intermittent twitches. They require a solid hook set to drive the hook in to the bass' jaw.

Learning to bass fish isn't rocket science, but it definitely helps to have some direction. Following the aforementioned tips won't guarantee an angler a ticket to the big leagues, but they are sure to make those initial experiences more enjoyable for students and coaches, alike. **T&J**

CoastWatch | Danno Wise

January usually finds only dedicated anglers on the water along the Upper Texas and Louisiana coasts. Many casual anglers don't realize the opportunities that can be found fishing these bays during the year's first month.

Weather is definitely a factor during the first month of the year. Whether it is cold, warm or somewhere in between, the angling action should be hot for fishermen willing to vary their locations and techniques.

If January turns out cold and bitter, savvy anglers will find fish stacked up in deep holes and channels.

During warm spells, trout and reds will begin easing back up into the shallows, where sight-casting can be excellent during January.

Added bonuses for anglers willing to work the water in January is the lack of pressure and the ability to sleep in a bit, as much of the better action doesn't get going until later in the day. The later start time, reduced pressure and cooler

afternoon temperatures can make for a good day on the water, regardless of how the bite is.

If the weather is too extreme to fish, there will be plenty of boat shows and other activities to occupy anglers' time. However, when the weather cooperates during January fishermen should make every effort to get out on the water. **T&J**



Matagorda guide Capt. Tommy Countz says that, contrary to popular

belief, January fishing is actually really good in the Matagorda area.

"Most fishermen think that it's too cold to fish in January," said Countz. "But, we live in Texas where we usually don't get much really cold weather. We fish year around in Matagorda. East Matagorda Bay can produce some trophy size trout to the angler that doesn't mind wading a bit of mud and working a suspended bait slowly. I'd say that it is only surpassed by Baffin in the winter for yielding 30 inch plus speckled trout.

"Drifting scattered shell on the west end or big mud flats on the east end can produce some nice boxes also. I like to throw 52 MirrOlures or bright colored plastic rigged on 3/8 ounce lead heads keying on streaks of off colored.

"The Colorado River is another option for a January fishing trip. Heavy lead heads rigged with chartreuse paddle tails are my first choice. Drift with the current and cast to the bank working the drop offs.

"If catching redfish is your game

then wading the south shore of West Matagorda Bay can be very productive. Throw weedless gold spoons or dark plastics on 1/16 or 1/8 ounce heads. Remember that fish aren't very aggressive when they are cold so slow down your retrieve and feel the bite.

"Also, in January remember to dress plenty warm. You can always take clothes off."

Freeport guide Capt. Mike Segall of Reel Threel Charters says January is a mix of inshore and offshore fishing for him.

"In January, I will be doing some state water snapper trips if the weather allows," said Segall. "In between the fronts is usually pretty good.

"I will also be fishing the deep holes in the old river and Brazos River for specks and sand trout.

"Usually anything will work on those fish, but GULP!s and live shrimp work the best. In January, you need to fish slower than normal and use light jig heads.

"I will also be bay fishing on warmer days. Fishing will usually be good over hard bottom and oyster shell bottom. I'll usually be fishing with plastics or GULP!s rigged on light jig heads and popping corks with live shrimp.

"I look for bait activity and make long drifts. If you find bait and cover some water on your drifts, you will come out with some decent redfish and specks."

In Galveston, most fishermen actually hope for a cold spell during winter, as the state's biggest bay system is renown for its winter fishing hot spots.

"Areas like Offatt's Bayou, Green's Bayou, and Chocolate Bayou are names that every angler recognizes. However, there are plenty of other areas that hold good numbers of fish during the winter months.

Over the next two months, any area of deep water with a combination of mud and shell bottom will likely be covered with speckled trout. This is true in Trinity, Galveston, and East and West bays.

Ideally, anglers should look for areas of mud and shell covered with about six feet of water with active bait or mud streaks. MirrOlures, Corkys and 5-inch soft-plastics are the best baits during January.

Anglers looking for jumbo fish can work topwaters or slow-sinking plugs along muddy bottom shorelines with good success.

"One of the best, yet most overlooked,

trophy trout spots is the Kemah shoreline, which has plenty of mud, shell and pilings to attract big trout in January.

Sabine Lake guide Capt. Randy Foreman expects to have good fishing to start the New Year.

"We should have a real good redfish bite on the north end of the lake, in the river and in the ICW in January," said Foreman. "When we have northers come in, I'll make long drifts on the north end of the lake, throwing Red Shad and Midnight Money DSL Southern Shad.

"For the most part, we're fishing flats in two to four feet of water on the north end. I'll also be fishing the shell humps and the mud and mussel flats for trout. Plus, I'll be following mullet. Mullet are my only key in January. I find mullet and I stay on them.

"I'll also be drifting the Louisiana shoreline, fishing four to seven feet of water for trout. Again, I'll be fishing over mud and mussels and be looking for mullet.

"This is a sensitive bite, so you have to



PHOTO BY NATE SKINNER

Noel Skinner shows off a mid-slot redfish caught while fishing around fishing pier pilings in deep shell in Galveston Bay.



PHOTO BY NATE SKINNER

Not to be outdone by his Dad's success, Brandon Skinner landed this solid Galveston Bay speckled trout also while fishing around pier pilings. Throughout the winter months pilings warmed by the sun will heat the surrounding water and attract gamefish.

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PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. MIKE SEGALL

Weather permitting Reel Threel Charters out of Freeport will make runs offshore to catch some nice red snapper in state waters.

use good equipment if you expect to feel it. I, personally, use G-Loomis rods, but whatever brand you use, make sure you spend the money to get a good quality, sensitive rod.

“If it gets really cold, I’ll fish in the ICW for drum and redfish. What I do then is anchor in about four feet of water on the edge of the channel, then cast across the channel and work the bait up the face of the ledge.

“You’re casting into about 18 to 24 feet of water and bringing it back up the edge of the channel. I’ll do the same thing in the Sabine Channel.”★



Lake Calcasieu guide Capt. Mary Poe of Big Lake Guide Service says most people are surprised when they learn how good mid-winter fishing is on Big Lake.

“January isn’t a month most folks think of when they think trout and redfish fishing,” said Poe. “It can be miserably cold and windy, but on nice days it can produce the trip of a lifetime.

“Trout fishing is very weather dependent, but can be excellent. Warmer days and lighter winds give the best opportunity to catch a giant trout. Suspending baits keep the lure in the

strike zone for a longer period of time giving you the best opportunity to catch fish. Paul Brown Fat Boys, Devils, and Softdines are excellent choices. Finding water temperatures north of Commissary Point in the mid-to-upper-50s is ideal.

“Redfishing on the other hand is very consistent. The east bank of Calcasieu Lake and south of Commissary Point, is where most of the redfish action will take place. Any wind with an easterly tilt is fine for fishing the wiers. Grand and Lambert Bayou will be excellent.

“If the boat traffic is unbearable at the actual wier, try the banks adjacent to them. Fishing pressure is usually limited, and the reds are usually thick. GULP! rigged on ¼-ounce jig heads are our baits of choice for reds.”

Redfish will be the primary focus for fishermen in the Venice area. The most consistent action will be on the west side in areas like Yankee Pond.

“Trout will be stacked up in and around the Burrias Canal on the west side of the river as well. These fish will be holding deep, but will readily take live shrimp and jigs.

Although the vast majority of fish will be on the west side, some areas on the east side, such as Taylor’s Point, will also have some fish stacked up in the deeper water.★



PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. RANDY FOREMAN

On Sabine Lake look for speckled trout and some redfish around the clam shell beds.



PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. RANDY FOREMAN

These two couples bundled up and caught some big schooling redfish on Sabine Lake while fishing with Captain Randy Foreman.

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A Blood Trained Dog

Story and Photography by Bob Zaiglin

Research confirms using a trained dog expedited the process of recovering wounded deer.

There's nothing more discouraging than expending all one's energy locating an outstanding buck only to make a bad shot on the animal. Unfortunately, wounding an animal is inevitable if one hunts long enough. What's critical, however, is the effort exerted to recover the animal. Some sportsmen have the skill to follow a blood trail, but for the majority of deer hunters, a wounded deer that fails to drop is history. After a short search for the deer, they may even convince themselves that they actually missed the animal. Some will go as far as soliciting the aid of a helicopter to recover a trophy animal when the most effective method is to rely on man's best friend.

The employment of blood-trailing dogs was investigated in South Carolina by Deer Project Supervisor Charles Ruth and Haywood Simmons. According to these researchers, it took 603 shots to harvest 493 deer, demonstrating an 81.7% shooting success with 50%, or 247 of the deer shot, traveling an average of 62 yards before dropping. More important was the fact that of 221 deer recovered dead, 61

(28%) left no discernible sign "hair, blood, etc." in the vicinity of the shot. By using a trained dog, the researchers expedited the process of recovering deer. They also recognized significant differences in distances deer ran depending on whether they would be recovered; (a) easily (46 yards); (b) with some difficulty (85 yards); or (c) not recovered without the aid of a dog (147 yards). Their findings demonstrated that a trained dog increased the harvest by approximately 20% because it almost eliminated unrecovered dead deer and crippling loss.

A blood-trailing dog not only facilitates the recovery of wounded deer, it adds another dimension of excitement into an otherwise agonizing event. Watching a trailing dog as it winds in and out of the maze of understory unraveling the trail of a wounded deer is as exciting as watching a classic shorthair work a wily ring neck pheasant. Once a deer is bayed, the relentless loud bark of the dog is an adrenalin rush that escalates to a feverish pitch as the animal is approached, eclipsing the somber mood of losing one's deer.

The use of dogs to track wounded deer is prohibited in some states, but in the South, particularly in Texas, it's not only legal, it plays an important role in the recovery of otherwise lost deer.

To circumvent problems that often occur when tracking wounded deer, some hunting operations in Texas retain a well-trained blood-tracking dog on the premises to take advantage of the fresh scent dispersed by the animal that can, dependent on weather conditions, rapidly dissipate, making it difficult for a dog to trail.



A well-trained blood trailing dog not only enhances recovery of wounded deer, it adds another dimension of enthusiasm into an otherwise somber event.

It's difficult to estimate the number of deer lost due to wounding on an annual basis, but I am confident that the employment of blood-trailing deer dogs would substantially reduce wounding loss in most situations. However, before a dog is obtained, several questions must be addressed, one being the legality of using a blood-trailing dog in your area, and more importantly, what constitutes the ideal deer dog.

Obviously, the legal issue can be satisfied by simply contacting your local game warden who should always be notified when such an event occurs, particularly after dark which is often the case. The breed depends on several variables, including the terrain and its inhabitants.

Most all hounds are equipped with an exceptional olfactory system "sense of smell" and can trail a wounded deer, but the dog of my choice is the Catahoula. After 20 years of managing several expansive South Texas ranches, I have owned and trained three Catahoulas, all of which excelled.

For example, during the 1995 season alone, one of my dogs named Rowdy relocated seven out of eight wounded deer and could have recovered all eight, but one deer, wounded with an arrow, was bayed



The chance of observing a trailing deer dog as it winds in and out of virtually impenetrable thornscrub unraveling the trail of a wounded deer is as exciting as watching a classic shorthair work.

Opposite Page: Once the deer is discovered dead, there is no barking, thus its location is facilitated by the often muffled sound of the bell as the dog characteristically gnaws on the animal.

several times and was even observed by the unprepared hunter before the deer experienced a surge in adrenalin and literally outran the dog.

The Catahoula (sometimes called leopard dog) evolved in the swamps of central Louisiana, around the Catahoula Lakes. Their ancestors were the result of Indian dogs, or red wolf, mating with surviving “war dogs” or mastiffs used by the Spaniards in battle, sometimes left



A variety of dogs can be used to trail wounded deer, but my dog of choice is the Catahoula—a dog that is strong enough to survive the rigors of a long chase through the desert-like hog, javelina and sometimes bobcat-infested country.

behind either wounded or captured by the Indians.

The Catahoula is a dog of stature exhibiting a broad chest, muscled legs, and a bulky head. The weight of these dogs can vary from 50 to 95 pounds.

Various breeds can trail wounded deer, but few can survive the gauntlet of an extended chase through the hog and javelina-invested brush country of South Texas, and still hold a sometimes aggressive buck at bay. A desirable dog must be large enough to handle any altercation, even with coyotes that frequently pursue the same animal.

The optimum time to initiate training of a blood-trailing dog is at the pup stage in the environment that it will be used in most.

The first dog

I ever used was a hound trained by dog handlers in Arkansas. Following a short acquaintance period, I attempted to work the dog and unfortunately it ran into a group of javelinas, ‘non-existent in Arkansas’. Dogs raised in the brush country are more apt to avoid injury when such encounters occur.

I recommend getting a pup around deer season, so that it can spend much of its early life around the location where deer are processed and the scent of blood is prolific as is the opportunity to consume portions of deer, stimulating its interest in deer.

I will take the dog on short trailing excursions even when a pup. It may not trail the deer, but it will follow its master. More importantly, this type of activity demonstrates to the dog what its master is trying to accomplish.

One of the greatest assets Catahoulas exude is an overwhelming desire to please their master. My first Catahoula, Rowdy, not only tracked wounded deer, he would retrieve mourning doves and quail, depending on what I hunted.

I use deer blood collected and frozen during the hunting season to work younger dogs throughout the summer. This is particularly effective when the dog is rewarded at the end of a man-made blood trail with raw hamburger placed at the site.

The use of a trained dog with a youngster is ideal, but caution must be exercised whenever a wounded deer is recovered. Catahoulas particularly become extremely possessive of the downed animal they located and must be approached with caution. My catahoulas initially allowed no one (man or dog) to approach a recovered deer. If I approached too quickly, Rowdy would clamp down on my boot to let me know he was not ready for me to interfere. I would carry a chain, and after the dog calmed down, I would call him off the deer, chain him, and walk him away from the animal. The introduction of a new dog, particularly a pup, could be disastrous. Thus, it’s important to use dogs that normally work together. The same is true for people accompanying the dog handler. In all the excitement, someone, particularly an excited hunter, could rush in to see the deer unaware of the possessive dog and get hurt.

Working a dog while on a leash may

work in a hardwood situation with an open understory, in South Texas I discovered it to be extremely difficult and time consuming, spending more time untangling the dog than tracking the deer.

Trailing a wounded deer should always be conducted with the dog wearing something indicative of the event. I used a bell that I secured to the dog’s collar whenever we worked a trail. The dog immediately knew what we were about to do when he saw the bell. The sound also facilitated the location of the dog in thick vegetation, especially after dark. I particularly relied on the bell when my dogs recovered a deer that was dead and no barking was involved as they often muzzled the deer, muffling the sound of the bell, which was an identifiable sound.

One of the objectives when training a blood-tracking dog is to discourage the dog’s attraction to unwounded deer without dampening their desire to trail wounded ones. The optimum way to circumvent this problem is to ignore the dog when it pursues a healthy deer. I often drove off and made the dog find me — a good run of a mile or so.

Do this often enough, and the dog realizes that what he did was not only wrong, but not worth the additional running. As the frequency of locating wounded or dead deer increases, the dog’s desire to pursue healthy ones diminishes.

Recovery rates are often dependent on the severity of the wound, but more importantly, how quickly the dog can be placed on the trail. The biggest mistake one can make is to try and find the wounded deer prior to the dog’s arrival, wasting valuable time and destroying critical scent.

The use of hounds for hunting purposes has a rich history. The fascination of working with man’s best friend adds another dimension to deer hunting, not to mention the reward of a grand smile on the hunter’s face.★★



A dog must be strong enough to retain a deer until the handler can reach it, as the deer could realize an increase in adrenalin which could facilitate its escape.



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Ladies ON THE Coast

Texas boasts a rich history of successful female anglers. Here are profiles of some of today's best.

Story by Danno Wise



PHOTO CREDIT STUART WEB

Texas native Meredith McCord has traveled the world to fish and caught this Giant Trevally in Seychelles.



PHOTO BY DANNOWISE

Capt. Sally Black admires another Baffin Bay redfish she caught.



PHOTO CREDIT SAM ROOT

Left: Houstonian Cindy Nguyen shows off a nice tarpon she caught on light tackle.



PHOTO BY DANNOWISE

Right: Port Isabel native, Capt. Ruby Delgado shows off a slot-sized Lower Laguna Madre redfish.

Saltwater angling has become increasingly popular among women in recent years. Texas actually has a lengthy history of notable women anglers. Many of the early women on Texas fishing scene – lady anglers such as Judy Wong and Kathy Magers – were on the freshwater side. Others, like recently retired, long-time Coastal Bend guide Capt. Petra Schulz, plied their trade on the coast. So, it should come as no surprise that the impact of the recent surge in women anglers has been felt in the Lone Star State.

Most fishing industry observers would agree that today's professional female fishermen essentially break down into two groups – the social media “click bait chicks” and the legitimate professionals. Texas is lucky enough to be home to some of the leading members of the latter group. Here are just a few of the top flight female professional saltwater anglers, personalities and guides that call Texas home.

The Angler — Cindy Nguyen

Odds are you've seen Cindy Nguyen, even though you may not have realized it. As one of the faces of Columbia's Women's PFG clothing line, Nguyen's likeness is seen nation-wide in advertisements and promotional materials. And, while she does travel the globe fishing for fun and promotional shoots, this lifelong Houstonian is all about Texas saltwater fishing as well. But despite being one of the most recognizable women anglers in the country, Nguyen's career in the fishing industry was almost accidental.

“This was not something I ever planned on or could even dream about,” said Nguyen. “Some days I still have to wonder if it's real.”

“Fishing, however, has always been part of my life. I first got interested when I was a kid. My parents always took us to the beach or the park or the jetties. They always presented it to us (her and her siblings) as how much better it was for us to fish instead of sitting around watching television. They told us watching TV would fry our brains. So, I guess I was

really born into fishing.”

Nguyen explains that while she was a lifelong fishermen, she was always just a recreational angler. Little did she know that posting photos of her fishing escapades would eventually turn into a career in the fishing industry.

Her social media posts caught the eye of many, including renown photographer Sam Root. It was root her first took photos of Nguyen fishing for bonefish in Columbia gear. Although those photos never made it into Columbia's catalog, Nguyen remained on the clothing company's radar as she began making rounds to fishing shows and continued posting fishing photos on social media. After returning from a trip to the Miami Boat Show, she said she was quite stunned to receive a contract to represent the Columbia Women's PFG clothing line.

“That's when I was really like, ‘wow, this could be a career,’” said Nguyen. “It was never a dream for me or even a thought in my brain to be sponsored. I am so grateful for Columbia. And, I am



PHOTO BY SAM ROOT

Cindy Nguyen fights a permit over some grass beds in super clear water.

extremely grateful to Sam Root, who has been a mentor and is really responsible for most of this.

“It has been a dream to be able to travel and fish. I am grateful for all these exotic species I get to go target, but really taking somebody fishing and getting them to get as excited about it as I am about it is really more thrilling and rewarding to me. I took my sister tarpon fishing last summer and she literally came to tears fighting this fish. I almost feel a little guilty taking these trips without my family because they have been such a big part of my life. They kind of live the trips through my pictures.

“For me, it’s still all about my love of fishing. I mean, I see bodies of water from airplane when I’m flying or from the car when I’m driving and start wondering what is in there. If it has water for two weeks it has to have life and I want to fish it. I think it’s pretty cool to be able to pull up to a body of water and, if you do your homework, you can catch a fish. When I was a kid at the beach, I would use a Coke can with mono and catch whiting, speckled trout and even shark. I could catch a shark with a coke can!

“Sometimes it’s not about the actual fishing, but when you’re out there and absorbing everything it’s special. It is really what do you enjoy about fishing. For me, it’s really just about being out there.”

The Explorer — Meredith McCord

Another native Texan, Meredith McCord, knows how big the world is – largely because she has traveled most of it fishing for exotic species and doing missionary work. Born in Houston and raised in Navasota, McCord spent the

majority of her youth outdoors.

“Dad believed in raising us outside,” said McCord. “He started fishing with all three us – me, my brother and sister – before we could even walk. All of us loved it, but for me it was like striking the right cord on the piano. I just couldn’t get enough of it. We

would spend our summers in Lake of the Woods, Canada – in fact, our family still goes to same location each year – and I would fish all day, every day.”

Though she is a native Texan, McCord spent a good deal of her formative years outside of the Lone Star State – first at boarding school on the East Coast, then at Vanderbilt University. McCord, who owns and operates The Mad Potter chain of paint-your-own-pottery studios, says it was at Vanderbilt that her angling life took a turn.

“When I was in college, I was exposed to A River Runs Through It,” said McCord. “I know it sounds cliché, but the movie spoke to me. Fly fishing is an art form. As an artist, I appreciated the art of it. I was studying art at Vanderbilt at the time and art is another lifelong passion of mine.”

Early in life, McCord says art was an expressive way to overcome her dyslexia. Once she began fly fishing, she felt it had the same affect on her angling life. After college she began taking once-a-year fly fishing excursions abroad with her father and a group of his buddies. Her father eventually quit making the outings, but Meredith continued to take trips with the group. It was one of

these trips that turned her passion into a career.

“I had a unique opportunity on a trip to Bolivia,” said McCord. “Within about 3 hours of arriving we found out there had been an accident the day before and one of the chiefs had drowned on a fishing boat. Over the next week, we got flooded in and couldn’t get out. I spent a lot of time with the people from the village during that time and found out most of them couldn’t swim. I got home from that trip and decided I wanted to combine mission work and fishing.

“I was a competitive swimmer and offered to give swim lessons plus survival skills to the natives as way to trade off my trip. So, I went back to Bolivia to do that. It was a little more difficult than I imagined. They did not want to get in water because of superstitions, but we eventually taught them to swim. Since then, I have led fly fishing trips and done missionary work all over the world.”

McCord is also an avid competitive angler – having fished numerous top-flight fly fishing tournaments and owning numerous IGFA records (87 fly rod records, 55 line class records and 37 species records to date). But, she is quick to point out the beauty of fishing is the opportunity to continue learning about the sport.

“I say thank you to every guide who has taken me and taught me about fly fishing,” said McCord. “I have been very



PHOTO COURTESY OF MEREDITH MCCORD

Meredith McCord with a massive bull red she caught on a fly.

lucky with guides I’ve fished with. I believe the best anglers are open to being molded and shaped and I am always looking to learn. Two well-known names that have encouraged me are Andy Mills, who encouraged me and pushed me to do well competitively, and Lefty Kreh, who has taught me so much and always keeps me grounded.”

The Guides

Capt. Sally Black

Widely considered the senior member of the unofficial fraternity of female guides on the Texas Coast, Capt. Sally (Moffit) Black has been putting anglers on fish for nearly two decades. Black is considered a pioneer among Texas guides in many ways beyond her gender. She was the first full-time guide to offer kayak trips on the coast and among the earliest full-time fly fishing guides, having been a protégé of the late, legendary Capt. Chuck Scates.

Originally from Michigan, Black grew up learning to hunt and fish from her father

“I was my dad’s only son,” laughed Black when asked how she got into fishing. “Really, that’s what it felt like sometimes. We did everything together – fished, hunted. I loved spending time outdoors with my dad. And, really, that got me hooked on it.”

She moved to Houston and eventually Rockport in the 1980s, working as a



PHOTO BY DANNOWISE

As a veteran professional angler, Capt. Sally Black is also very conservation minded. Here she practices what she regularly preaches by releasing this Baffin Bay redfish.



PHOTO BY DANNOWISE

Capt. Ruby Delgado fights another solid redfish in her home waters of the Lower Laguna Madre.

paralegal during those years. Although she had a hand in several major cases, she wasn’t satisfied working in the legal world and knew fishing was calling her name. So eventually she bought a boat, got a captain’s license, quit her job and started guiding. She has been full time guide since 1998. Although she was a successful guide in Rockport, once she married Baffin

Bay guide Capt. Aubrey Black, she relocated to Baffin Bay, where the couple now guide and run their hunting and fishing lodge, Baffin Bay Rod and Gun.

Capt. Ruby Delgado

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Capt. Ruby Delgado is just beginning her career as a full-time guide. But, she didn’t just start fishing.

“I grew up on Pompano Street in Port Isabel, so the bay was literally our backyard,” said Delgado. “As a kid, I was always fishing -

whether out on a boat with my dad or off the dock behind the house.”

After college, Delgado moved to San Antonio and only came back to help dad with his business (Manny’s Boat Repair). She didn’t intend for the move to be permanent.

“Of course, once I was back down here it was a lot easier to fish more often,” Delgado reflected. “Still, I never really thought about making it a career. After I’d been back awhile, I kept getting more and more people asking me to go fishing with them or take them fishing. So, I got my captain’s license and started guiding. It has been great. I’m also very lucky to have several sponsors. My dream would be to travel around fishing for and learning about different species, but I can never get enough fishing, wherever I am.”

For more information on these these professional lady anglers visit their websites or call: Cindy Nguyen, www.cindynguyenfishing.com; Meredith McCord, www.meredithmcord.com; Capt. Sally Black www.baffinbayrodandgun.com, (361) 433-0828 and Capt. Ruby Delgado, Southern Salty Girl, (956) 443-7796. 🌟🌟

Lake Roundup

CENTRAL TEXAS

By John Jefferson

One of my most impactful memories began one foggy morning near Clear Springs, on the **Guadalupe River**, between Seguin and New Braunfels.

There the river is wide and deep, slow moving, and an inviting shade of green. In the fog, that morning, it almost had a

mysterious look about it. It is influenced by the dam on **Lake McQueeney**, several miles downstream. I was about ten at the time. Maybe 11. I know I wasn't 13 because I hadn't abandoned all else in life for baseball, nor yet discovered girls.

My grandparents had developed Elm Grove Camp on the river, built a small store, some cabins, and sold lots – mostly to military men stationed in San Antonio. I considered it *Paradise*. The river was full of fish, and the slough behind their house held backwater from the Guadalupe – and its own stock of goggle-eyes and catfish. It was made for a *Huck Finn* of a kid with a cane pole and a can of worms.

My widowed grandmother gave me the run of the entire camp, and even let me walk alone from her house on the far, east end of the property to the camp store, almost a mile away. A little kid could do that in those bygone days.

I had gone to the store to either buy a can of worms or a Grapette, my favorite



PHOTO COURTESY DUKE KINLEY

Duke Kinley and the 41-pound smallmouth buffalo he caught in Walter E. Long Reservoir in November on a crappie jig.

soft drink. They each cost a dime. When I got to the store, I heard voices downhill by the water and noticed about a dozen people standing by the big dock where the chain swing hung. That was unusual, especially at that time of the morning.

I ran down to the riverbank and asked what was happening. A man said the fisherman on the dock had a big fish on the line. The fisherman was using a fancy rod and reel like I dreamed of someday owning. He was trying to land something that seemed big enough to perhaps pull me in had I been holding the rod.

He finally got it up on the dock. Even before the fish was visible, I noticed that he had baited several treble hooks with little cubes of yellow cheese. I had never seen cheese used for bait.

Then I saw the fish. And I had surely never seen anything like that. I expected to see a catfish. Instead, it was a big, sort of silvery fish with a funny looking mouth – the biggest fish this little boy had ever seen. I wondered if it was a bass, although I had only seen pictures of them, and a few in a fish tank at the South Texas State Fair in Beaumont. Someone said it was a buffalo.

I had never heard of a fish called a buffalo, but figured it was named that since it was so big. It would have even been too big to fit in my grandmother's skillet!

I've never seen a buffalo-fish since that clammy morning. The accompanying photo is of our friend, Duke Kinley, with one he caught in November on **Walter E. Long Reservoir (Decker Lake)**. Kinley's fish weighed 41 pounds, and was caught on a crappie jig.

My mentor, Russell Tinsley, penned the book, *Fishing Texas*, and in it he wrote that buffalo are suckers and resemble carp, but lack the barbels (whiskers). They are more active in cooler waters. Decker is a fairly warm, power plant lake, but the cooler November weather may have turned the fish on. The Decker record buff was caught in October 2013, and the weather may have been similar. It weighed 62.31 pounds and was caught by Keith Thompson on plastic maize, whatever that may be. He was unable to be located to ask.

The state record is 82.22 pounds, and was landed by Randy Collins in June 1993 while fishing on Lake Athens, which probably stayed cool a little longer than Decker does. Records don't show what he caught it on.

Tinsley's book also tells us that buffalo are pretty good eating – white meat – but boney. Duke couldn't be reached to ask how it ate, probably because I called at supper time. The same day he caught the buff, he also caught a mess of crappie.

Bass fishing will pick up this month, despite the cold weather, although it probably will ebb and flow with the cold fronts. The new Toyota ShareLunker season rules go into effect this month but weren't available for publication by deadline. Check the TPWD website for details: www.tpwd.texas.gov/sharelunker.

Expect bass fishing to steadily improve well into March, and continuing at a slower pace into May. The water temperature will need to warm to near 60 degrees for the better fishing, but fishing deep prior to that will induce strikes. I spoke with Craig Bonds, TPWD's Inland Fisheries Division Director, in late November. He says with the lake levels remaining high, he expects excellent fishing all spring. Anecdotal reports from fishermen back that up. As the lakes rose, more habitat was created, and the bait fish had more place to hide until maturity. Consequently, bass have had plenty to eat for the past couple of

years.

The same day I talked to Bonds, I visited with Carl Adkins, a seasoned bass fisherman who is active in the Texas Bass Federation Nation. Carl told me he and Robert Whiteside, another respected fisherman, put in at Pace Bend Park on Lake Travis and fished to the mouth of the Pedernales River, and caught 89 bass. Sure, Carl's a fisherman, and has an unwritten license to lie, but I believe him. Everybody I've talked to says Travis is as good as it's ever been.

Lake LBJ is getting good reviews, this year, too. Between the two of them, they provide many miles of productive bass fishing.

It's also the peak of the **Guadalupe River** trout season. Voted one of America's 100 best trout fisheries, the area downstream from **Canyon Lake** dam resembles a Rocky Mountain trout stream with its cold-water current and numerous riffles. Flow coming out the bottom of Canyon Lake provides chilled water, and the rocks in the river keep it stirred up and oxygenated. Phil Dopson, with Guadalupe River Chapter of Trout Unlimited, reports that trophy-sized rainbow trout were stocked twice in the Guadalupe in November and December, and brown trout were stocked after that. See the TPW Outdoor Annual (the regulations pamphlet), page 37, for special trout regulations in that stretch of the river. Experienced guides are available.

Some may question calling January the "peak" of the Guadalupe trout season, since January is often a month of severe cold, wet, and icy weather. Bill Ward, in the fishing department of the Field and Stream store in Cedar Park/Leander, says the best time to fish for rainbow or brown trout here is during the worst weather of the year. January's a good time to find

that. By the time the weather turns sunny and pleasant, the trout begin losing their appetites. So, go now.

TPWD has also stocked smaller but catchable-size trout in several places along the river and in many other places in Texas – about 150 sites totaling 300,000 trout. Most of the 17,666 Guadalupe trout stockings this year have already occurred, but additional stockings will take place on the river on January 5, 12, 19 and 26. This is great sport for kids and parents. The limit is five trout per person, and a fishing license is required. **T★J**



PHOTO BY JOHN JEFFERSON

A proud father and two sons with their three limits of rainbow trout caught in the Canyon Dam Tailrace on the Guadalupe River. TPWD is stocking 17,666 catchable-size trout in the river this winter, and hopes they will all be caught before striped bass in the river devour them.

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Just because deer seasons are winding down doesn't mean hunting comes to a stop. Instead switch species, maybe firearm used, make a few other adjustments and go predator hunting. Coyotes, bobcats, gray fox, and other varmints awaits. If you've never hunted predators, you're in for a treat.

If you hit it right, it can provide fast action shooting and lots of excitement. At some set-ups you may have three or more coyotes rush in at once. It can get wild. Furthermore you're not going to be setting in one spot for hours like when in a deer blind. Most of the time no more than 30 minutes are spent at any one set-up location.

Before the hunt a little insight as to why predators are hunted. Some may wonder why anyone would want to call in and shoot a coyote or bobcat. The answer is fairly simple, because it's a part of managing a deer herd. Predators need to be managed just like the rest of the critters on the landscape.

Coyotes are death on newborn fawns and fawns in general. Later in the spring do you think predators bypass a doe that has laid down and goes into labor? No way, they'd kill her and her soon to be born offspring as well. Plus a pack of coyotes will relentlessly chase a pregnant doe causing her to abort and many times kill the stressed-out doe.

Then there are post rut bucks. My buddy runs dogs in Idaho to hunt cougars in January and February. He looks for magpies feeding on cougar kills. He says 90 percent of the time nice mature bucks are what have been killed.

The results are not that surprising. After all the mature breeding class of bucks have just finished the rut after having run hard for weeks. They haven't been sleeping or eating adequately and are in a weakened state. Cougars take advantage of this.

A similar scenario plays out in Texas after bucks have finished the rut. They too are in a more vulnerable and weakened condition. Those most stressed are the

biggest mature bucks that are in their prime — the ones that breeds the majority of the doe.

In the Lone Star State any weakened state means possibly easier prey for coyotes. Coyotes are the biggest threat to the deer herd in Texas.

Another consideration is why plant food plots, put out minerals, feeders and invest in all of the hard management work to only let some predator have a negative impact on the deer herd. Keeping predator numbers down is part of the work, but this work is also a lot of fun.

A number of coyotes are shot each year by incidental encounters. That is not what is being discussed. This column outlines how to target predators, proper equipment, set-ups and more.

WHEN

In my hunting career I've called coyotes all day long. Like many other forms of hunting dawn are dusk are best. The nighttime is the ultimate time of the day to call and hunt them.

As a general rule, and depending upon the time of year, coyotes will hole up and rest during the day. They are opportunistic hunters that want to expend the least amount of energy and receive the greatest return. Then again, hunting is hunting so go whenever, and as often as possible.

CONCEALMENT

The most popular way to hunt predators is to set up and call. They have good eyesight, so you'll want to be concealed. Many times I'll just hide behind a fence line or brush pile. Other times I'll carry a piece of camouflaged burlap and lay it over a couple of bushes and hide behind it as a quick, make-shift blind.

I found a portable blind by Amerstep called a THROWDOWN Blind. It only weighs 1.8 lbs. and is great for a running and gunning style of predator hunting.

It goes without saying to wear full camouflage, including gloves and facemask. Your hands are a big source of your movement. Also wear a net over the face to prevent any flash from the sun. Since a lot of the action is at dawn/dusk wear a cap to shield your eyes from the sun.



Dressed in full camouflage and armed with a modern sporting rifled built on an AR platform in .223 caliber helped the author harvest this big coyote.

COVER SCENT

No matter the direction a coyote or other predator comes in from, when they get close they're going to circle downwind trying to get the scent of the source of the call. Some scent control is necessary.

I spray Tink's Coyote Mist on a bush by me as well as my decoy. My brother-in-law has a roll of toiler paper in a can soaked with skunk scent. All I can say is you definitely want it placed downwind of you!

Whenever possible, set-up so there's an open field downwind of your position. That'll put the incoming predator in the open so a shot can be taken.

DECOYS

You want to mask your scent, be concealed and anything else to make a predator comfortable when they approach. An additional tactic is to use a decoy.

I like Montana Decoys. They're lightweight and easy to transport but they're only one dimensional — so I use two. When calling coyotes, I use their coyote decoy and their rabbit. I turn the decoys in opposite directions so no matter the direction a coyote comes from one of the decoys will be seen.

Varmints like to see movement. Especially cats. It wouldn't hurt to tie a



PHOTO BY BOXIE KALLINA

Coyotes are a cunning, animals with a keen sense of smell and good eyesight. If coyote populations are left unchecked they can have a significant impact on a deer herd.

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This coyote defines big. Stretched out it is as long as the author is tall.

rag on the rear-end of the decoy. Another inexpensive option is to tie a turkey feather to a stick with a six inch string and stick it into the ground at an angle. With the slightest breeze it will flutter back and forth.

Over the last 10 years or so motion decoys have hit the varmint hunting market. Some are an actual decoy that bounces around. Others are as simple as a white rag or piece of fur tied to the end of a wire. The wire is affixed to a small battery operated motor that twirls the rag around in a circle. This visual attraction draws the incoming predator's attention away from the hunter's set-up position.

CALLS

Back in the day, some 60 years ago, all that were available were mouth blown hand calls. The accepted calling sequence was to call for a few seconds and then wait five minutes. I still have Dad's original Thomas wood call.



Some motion decoys are simply a piece of fur on the end of a wire, attached to a battery powered motor that twirls it around.

Colorado with Andy Marvin. We were actually rabbit hunting but heard a coyote howling so we set-up around an old abandoned homesteaders house.

He started calling as loud and fast as he could. I thought he'd lost it and messed up our chances. About that time we looked up and here came three coyotes. That converted me to the non-stop calling technique.

Back then everything learned was by word of mouth or from experience. There was no internet, YouTube and only a few outdoor magazines. Today, reliable information is available from a variety of sources. There is also some bad information on the internet, so be ware.

A word of caution. I conduct 50-60 seminars per year from Texas to Alaska and here's a danger I see. A lot of presenters or writers are monkey see, monkey do. They all preach the same "gospel."

For that reason, I occasionally attend seminars by a gung-ho an up and coming "new hunter" — one that hasn't been brainwashed and may not follow the accepted old rules of how something is supposed to be done. Instead they have good hunting skills but experiment and come up with tricks the rest never thought of.

I'm not saying not to watch all the videos or attend as many seminars as you can, I'm suggesting to not become stuck in a rut — be creative. You are trying to outsmart an animal that makes a living in the outdoors 24/7.

Hand held calls still work but electronic calls are today's ticket. They are remotely operated and can be set out by the decoy about 40 yards away from where a hunter is concealed. When a predator comes in, it will focus on the source of the sound and movement of the decoy, but not on you.

It constantly amazes me at how coyotes and other varmints can pinpoint exactly where a sound is coming from. With this setup a hunter has a little bit of flexibility to slowly shoulder a rifle.

SPOTLIGHTING

Hunting at night is the ultimate. That's showtime for predators. In the old days to clean up coons around the feeders we'd plug a Johnny Stewart cassette tape in the truck and hop in back. My brother Eddy would pan the spot light in a circle on the ground 15 feet out or on the skyline. If we saw eyes he'd say get ready, and then drop the light on the animal. You had about two seconds to take a fast shot.

Coons and foxes would come pouring in. This method works for bobcats too — just don't expect to see one for at least 30 minutes. They come in very slowly.

GUNS/AMMO/LASERS/OPTICS

When two hunters are hunting together have one carry a shotgun. It is my experience that about 40 percent of the shots will be up close and personal.

Coyotes are notorious for rushing in and not being spotted until they are super close. In a shotgun I use Hevi-Shot Dead Coyote loads. The 12 gauge three inch shells are loaded with either 00 Buck Shot or T-shot. The three and a half inch shells are loaded with T-shot. The specs say they are effective out to 70 yards.

A modern sporting rifle chambered in .223/5.56 and built on an AR platform is very popular. You can get fast follow up shots when multiple predators come in. I am currently testing the Mossberg MMR .308. It could also double as a hog gun.

Hornady's line up of ammunition is some of the most reliable and consistently loaded of the factory ammo on the market. The .55 grain .223 Varmint Express shoots well in my rifle.

For shooting at night, consider the selection of laser sights by Crimson Trace. They really reach out there.

For optics I prefer the Leupold VX3i 4.5-14 scope. I use their BX3 Mojave Pro Guide HD binoculars for glassing areas looking for predators responding to the calling. **T★J**



The author often hunts with a 12 gauge shotgun loaded with Hevi-Shot Dead Coyote loads. He says many times coyote encounters are at very close range. He also masks his scent with Tink's Coyote Scent and uses a Johnny Stewart caller operated with a remote control.

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JOHN SMITH

444 TEXAS AVE

**FIRST TWO DIGITS ARE THE MONTH
LAST TWO DIGITS ARE THE YEAR**

CoastWatch | Danno Wise

Thanks to cool weather pushing across the Lower and Middle coasts earlier than usual this fall, as January gets underway, there's no doubt the fish along the Texas coastal curve are firmly entrenched in a winter pattern. This isn't all together bad news. When the temperature plummets – assuming it's not to the point of a fish killing freeze – fishing can actually be pretty good. For one thing, fish tend to be concentrated during the cold weather months, meaning once they're found, it is possible to stay in one location and catch a box full.

Winter weather also tends to keep traffic on Texas bays to a manageable level. About the only ones willing to go out when the mercury is dipping are the fishermen who are serious about catching speckled trout and redfish. So, no worries

about overwhelming crowds at the boat ramp.

Many those making their way to the bay are typically doing so with a specific goal. Starting this month, the odds of landing a trophy trout begin to increase dramatically.

Now through spring are actually the best times to hang into a bragging size speckled trout. So, even if the weather seems to say stay in bed, time spent on the water in January means time spent in the company of big fish.

Sight-casting can also be outstanding along the Lower and Middle coast during mid-day hours. Winter water is usually clear and with a few warm days between fronts, there will be plenty of specks and reds cruising the shallows, giving fishermen yet another option. ★



Port Isabel guide Capt. Gencho Buitureira, Jr says winter is a time when fish will most often be found in deep water haunts – even in the super shallow Lower Laguna Madre.

“In January, I’m usually fishing in deep water areas like the Brownsville Ship Channel,” said Buitureira. “The ship channel is one of the best options we have in January. There will be lots of snook in the ship channel, but you can also catch mangrove snapper, trout, reds, drum and sheepshead. You can always catch fish up there. And, you can always fish, no matter how hard the wind is blowing. It’s a good option if you’ve got a hard north or south wind and don’t want to be out in the bay when it’s rough.

“If the water is not too cold, the South Bay channels will also produce drum and sheepshead, as well as a few reds and trout. If it’s windy, South Bay and Mesquite Flats can also be good for reds, drum, sheepshead and trout. The ICW up north, along with the shacks, are great options as long as the water is not too cold. They will also have reds, drum, sheepshead, a few flounder and trout.

“Once I’m done there (if fishing the ICW or shacks) the Gaswell Flats or right behind Prime Island can be good once the wind picks up. Really, we have quite a few options during the winter. You really just need to pick your spots based on the water temperature and wind.”

Port Mansfield guide Capt. Steve “JR” Ellis of Get-A-Way Adventures Lodge says winter means lower tides, cooler temperatures, but really good fishing.



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PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. GENCHO BUITUREIRA JR.

Dr. Greg Johnson of Port Isabel shows off a nice speckled trout caught along a bulkhead while fishing with Capt. Gencho Buitureira Jr. In January there are lots of options to catch a variety of fish on the Lower Laguna Madre.

“January is when we go back to super low tides in the Lower Laguna Madre,” said Ellis. “A lot of people freak out when they see these drastically low tides, but, really, it can be a good thing. There is still

plenty of fishable water. What you want to do when the tide drops is concentrate on the areas that are normally deep – holes, access channels, and cuts - because now they are shallow. Also, avoid the back lakes,

because they won’t be holding enough water. Overall, this means there will be more fish in less water, which makes them easier to find.

“If it gets really cold for a long period of time, the fish will begin stacking up in the few really deep areas we have in the Lower Laguna – the ICW, side channels and a few deep holes. These deep holes will hold all kinds of fish when it gets really cold, including specks, reds, snook, mangrove snapper and flounder.

“We usually don’t get a long period of cold. Instead, what we usually get is a cycle of fronts followed by warm days. Once that pattern gets established, we’ll usually have about four or five days in between fronts, the last two or three of which will find fish cruising the shallows. So, January can also be a lot like August for us. By that I mean we get a lot of light wind days. Couple that light wind with bright sun and the fish will be on the flats. The only real difference is during January you want to fish the flats from mid-morning through the afternoon. That actually works pretty well because you don’t have to get up early and the sun is up enough for good sight-casting.

“And, there isn’t as much suspended particle in the water during January, so the water is clearer. This allows you to work areas that are generally off-colored and sight cast to fish on flats that you can’t sight cast to during other times of the year because they’re too murky. Really, people don’t realize it, but January can be a really good time for sight-casting.

“When I find fish up shallow, I’m usually using topwaters, but will switch to soft-plastics if the fish aren’t very aggressive. But no matter what we’re throwing, the key is to fish very slowly. This is the time of year you have to fish extremely slow, let those soft plastics drop down in the potholes and ‘kick up some sand.’”

Corpus Christi guide Capt. Justin Cooper of Laguna Adventures says the year starts off with him looking for trophy trout.

“For those of us who love to fish, cold weather means trophy trout time,” said Cooper. “Deer season is coming to an end and many hunters will begin hunting the elusive 30-inch-plus trout. You have to put in the time to gain the knowledge to find where the mature trout lie. A professional guide could help you find the trout of a lifetime and teach you new techniques and the waters.

“I will check the weather the night before the trip and just before I leave the dock. We all know how fast the weather can change. The location I will fish will depend several things — the direction and intensity of the wind, can I safely get the boat across the bay, where can I find shelter and clarity of the water. It’s almost impossible to see the clarity of the water when I arrive at sunrise to the first fishing spot. I will always be looking at water conditions of the bay during my previous trips.

“Baitfish and trout are located in the deeper waters during the winter months. Trout will gorge themselves on mullet during winter. Look for mullet in the six to eight inch range. There won’t be schools of mullet on the surface, but the splash of single mullet may mean there are fish feeding around the area.

“The water temperatures will continue to drop pushing the fish deeper. Just like you and I the fish will be looking for shelter and something to keep them warm. Deeper rocks will hold heat and mud will hold heat longer than sand. I will

PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. GENCHO BUITUREIRA JR.

In late fall Aaron Fuentes of San Antonio, his wife Darlene and son Nick celebrated Nick’s birthday by catching some nice black drum. In January black drum will be in the South Bay Channel as well as the Brownsville Ship Channel.



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PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

With clear winter water on the Upper Laguna Madre Captain Justin Cooper will scan the flats from atop his console for speckled trout and redfish.



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Out of Port Mansfield sight casting opportunities abound for winter redfish.

be fishing waist to knee deep with deeper water nearby.

"I use a Down South Lure paddle tail with a 1/16-ounce jig as my fish finder. Start out with a destination. Slowly and thoroughly fish the area. If I start catching

fish in knee deep water I will switch over to a UnFair Lure DawgWalker. If I start catching mature trout in waist deep water I will switch to a Fat Boy and allow it to drop deeper.

"Drum will begin to school in pools of

four to five feet deep water with muddy bottoms. Dead shrimp on a Carolina rig can produce easy limits of drum. Redfish will come into the grassy flats after the sun has heated up the water which is why we target redfish during our cast and blast trips. Sportsmen already have their wadding gear on, so we will leave the shotguns in the boat and grab the fishing rods with some Down South Lures or gold spoon and begin to wade the flats."★



Aransas area anglers will have plenty of good fishing in January. Speckled trout will be the most consistent, with plenty of solid specks working over mud and scattered shell. Anglers hoping to catch trophy trout during the winter months are best served throwing topwaters, slow-sinking plugs or lightly-weighted soft-plastics while wading. Anglers should concentrate on muddy flats with deeper channels, guts or holes nearby. During cold spells, expect the fish to hide in the



PHOTO COURTESY N & M SPORTSMANS ADVENTURES

Capt. Nathan Beabout shows off a solid winter speckled trout he caught while wade fishing. Trout will be on the move along shorelines once conditions warm follow a cold front.

deeper water. However, they'll spend their time feeding in the adjacent shallows during warmer periods. Bait is another key. As a rule, finding active bait on a muddy bottom flat near deep water is a sure bet to find trout during January.

There will also be plenty of redfish action this month. During January, redfish will still be on the flats, except for periods of extreme cold. Grass and mud flats will be holding good numbers of reds. During the winter months, a wide variety of soft-plastics will work for reds, as will cut mullet and live shrimp. Fishermen should concentrate on the potholes and grass breaks when blind casting, although winter waters are often clear enough for good sight casting opportunities. Anglers looking primarily for redfish should concentrate on East Flats and the St. Joe Island shorelines.

Black drum will also be found in good numbers during January, giving Aransas-area anglers an additional target. Look for black drum in the channels and adjacent flats. Live or fresh dead shrimp work best for black drum. It is always a good idea for anglers to carry some shrimp on board during January in case they run across schools of black drum while targeting specks or reds.

Rockport area anglers should expect to find plenty of solid specks working over mud and scattered shell. Wading while throwing topwaters, slow-sinking plugs or lightly-weighted soft-plastics is the best way to fish for big trout during the winter months. Anglers should concentrate on muddy flats with deeper channels, guts or holes nearby. During cold spells, expect the fish to hold in the deeper water. However, they'll spend their time feeding in the adjacent shallows during warmer periods.

Redfish will also be on the flats. Grass and mud flats will be holding good numbers of reds, which anglers can typically tempt with cut bait, live shrimp or a variety of soft-plastics.

Fishermen should focus on the potholes and grass breaks when blind casting, although winter waters are often clear enough for good sight casting opportunities.

In addition to reds and specks, black drum will also be found in good numbers during January. Look for black drum in the channels and adjacent flats around Dagger Island. Live or fresh dead shrimp

work best for black drum.

Seadrift guide Capt. Nathan Beabout says he'll have a few different options for winter fishing in January.

"Depending on our winter weather, we will be chasing fish either in our back marsh or down muddy shell shorelines," said Beabout.

"With boat traffic only showing up on the weekends during this time of year, if the weather is nice, fish should be easy to pattern during the winter month of January.

"Depending on how hard the wind blows and what our water color looks like each day will determine our color

selection for lures. One thing will be for sure Corky Fat Boys and Softdines will be a big bait of choice, as these fish will be eating larger targets this time of year."★



PHOTO COURTESY N & M SPORTSMANS ADVENTURES

Cool clear water in January combined with light winds provide the perfect set up to wade fish and sight cast for quality speckled trout.



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Can-Am, Ox Ranch Adventure

It began as an invitation to test drive the new Can-Am Defender MAX Lone Star HD10 side by side ATV. My acceptance turned to excitement as I learned my test drive would include a hunt at the increasingly well known Ox Hunting Ranch near Uvalde.

Can-Am is a division of BRP which began life as Bombardier in Canada. The company has long been famous for Evinrude outboards, Ski-Doo snowmobiles, Sea-Doo personal watercraft and in 2007 they introduced the innovative and popular line of Spyder three wheel motorcycles. The heart of these machines is the mighty Rotax engine made in Austria by a company BRP now owns.

The Rotax engine in the Lone Star Defender is a liquid cooled V-Twin offering 72 horsepower and 61 lb. ft. of torque. Top speed is somewhere over 60 though we never had the chance to totally wring it out due to windy conditions.

This ATV can not only carry six people and gear with ease it can tow 2,000 pounds and carry 1,000 pounds in the large multi function cargo box. The front end carries a 4,500 lb. winch under the heavy-duty steel bumper. The long and wide wheelbase along with a 13-inch ground clearance make this Can-Am both comfortable and capable.

This was my first time to experience an ATV that had not only a tilt steering wheel, but Dynamic Power Steering and what a difference that makes by removing the fatigue from fighting a steering wheel in rough terrain. For every demand we put on the Lone Star Defender it

more than met the challenge.

Some of the many standard features include a full hard roof and full skid plate, the Pro-Torq with an easy to use 4-mode traction system with locking differentials and drive modes for Eco-Normal-Work, plus electronic hill descent. Interior features include easy to understand multi-functional analog and digital gauges, dual Versa-Pro bench seats with 40/20/40 split with foldable armrests with cup holders, and the front seat has an enclosed 5.6 gallon waterproof storage compartment.

Some of the Can-Am Defender Max Lone Star specialty features are unique Lone Star trim and badging on the seats and body, 28-in. Maxxis Bighorn 2.0 tires on 14-in aluminum wheels, and a deep metallic black finish on the body. This is the most capable, comfortable and best executed ATV I have driven to date. More details and pricing are available at www.Can-amoffroad.com.

The Ox Ranch first came to my attention through television and newspaper coverage as the place you could

go and for a nominal fee drive WW II tanks like the U.S. Sherman and German Leopard and for extra bucks shoot their guns or touch off a Howitzer, spray lead with a Mini Gun, play human torch with a flamethrower or indulge in assorted full auto fire and more. I did not know it is a world class hunting operation but no, not with any of the above weaponry.

The Ox Hunting Ranch is a pleasant and increasingly more scenic drive south of San Antonio to a short hop to the north of Uvalde in the Hill Country. My first impression through the gate was the habitat. A mixture of planted and native fields created from what was at the time the state's largest cedar clearing project, glorious oaks, lovely valleys, high hills, and many lakes created by dams on several creeks. This is the most well manicured 18,000 acres you will most likely ever see and home to a vast herd of free ranging exotics, whitetail deer and of course, feral pigs.

My second positive impression as I drove toward the main lodge was not



The author with a very nice blackbuck antelope he took at the end of a long day hunting The Ox Ranch.



The Can-Am Defender MAX Lone Star sits beside the author's cabin while at The Ox Ranch.

only the increasing variety of animals I encountered, but their overall body size and condition. I have been to some well known "trophy" ranches whose game was in such poor condition that shooting them would be considered a mercy killing. Two days of driving all over this place reconfirmed my first impression about how well they manage their habitat and herd.

The Ox Ranch whitetail opportunities go from a management meat hunt up to the possibility of a 300+ SCI Score. The exotic species on the hunting list number over 70 with choices from addax to zebra, axis to wildebeest, oryx, elk, eland, gazelle, ibex, kudu, nilgai, nyala, red stag, blackbuck, a variety of sheep and more.

Two species that I had never seen in the flesh and just blew me away were the herds of white buffalo (bison) and watusi cattle. The white buffalo are a tribute to the ranch breeding program as according to the National Bison Association only approximately one in ten million births deliver a white buffalo.

The watusi from Africa weighs from 900 to 1,600 pounds and their horns never stop growing. Think a longhorn on steroids as their mass is greater than the

longhorn and horns can grow to a spread over 12 feet. I saw one that had to work at holding up its head. Their breeding operation to build other sustainable herds such as warthog and kangaroo provides pens and shelter that are large, clean and well maintained.

The amenities at Ox are top notch. The impressive 6,000 sq.ft. main lodge features a massive stone fireplace, game mounts galore, full service antique

bar, pool, games, big screen, plush leather chairs and sofas and great hospitality all overlooking a lovely lake and a short walk to the dining hall and antique cabins. Special treats are the norm here.

One evening during cocktails one of our hosts asked us to bring our libations outside in front of the lodge. After we had gathered he shouted, "Light 'er up," and one of his coworkers fired off a flamethrower. How cool!

Hidden behind the old log walls of the antique cabins are luxurious appointments including living rooms, kitchenettes, stocked bars and Jacuzzi tubs. The row of cabins I stayed in were a tribute to knotty pine. They are spacious, comfortable, well

stocked bar, front porch overlooking a lake, and the first motion sensing open and closing trash can I have experienced.

Meals are worth the trip to the Ox Ranch. It is a farm-to-table experience with ingredients sourced from their wild game, organic garden, cattle, chickens, orchard, and beehives. I experienced both outstanding buffets and choice of entrée meals. Extra needs requests were immediately handled by the friendly and



Still wearing his helmet after dismounting the Can-Am the author was able to place the Mossberg MVP on target.

most courteous staff.

One of the special extras is night vision hog hunting with equipment provided. The ultimate experience is hunting from

the “Big Blind.” This custom whopper holds more than 10 people and features soundproof walls, AC and heat, poker table, fully stocked bar with ice machine,



Just a few of the mighty watusi cattle grazing on the ranch. The author called them “longhorns on steroids.”

and the special feature of a live game camera feed. Eight cameras are placed in clearings with feeders to lure the hogs and the images are displayed on a big flat screen. That’s entertainment.

The Ox Ranch has a raft full of activities for the non-hunter or folks that want a great getaway without hunting. With the aforementioned outstanding lodging, food and game watching you can choose from a list of activities including bass fishing, off roading, racing jet skis, kayaking, cave exploring, hunting for arrowheads, hand feeding the giraffes or just lounging by the pool.

For the hunting portion of my experience, the Can-Am promotional professionals frosted the cake by providing test rifles from O.F.Mossberg and Sons, plus accessories. The rifle I chose was the new Mossberg MVP-LC for Light Chassis. This target grade bolt-action is now at the

top of the heap in their MVP lineup. It features a lightweight MDT aluminum chassis with a tan finish, black polymer Magpul Mil-Spec CTR adjustable stock and MOE pistol grip, and a SilencerCo Saker muzzle brake on the end of the free floating bull barrel of carbon steel and button rifled. This modular design is engineered for flexibility and accuracy.

They are AR compatible so the 5.56mm (.223 Rem.) version feeds from AR style magazines and the 7.62(.308 Win.) model feeds from M1A/M14 and AR-10 style magazine. I requested the 7.62/.308 model for the hunt.

More accuracy enhancement is provided by Mossberg’s Lightning Bolt Action Trigger System with a crisp, creep-free pull and is user-adjustable from 3 to 7 pounds. Additional design features include: spiral fluted bolt; oversized tactical-style bolt handle, Picatinny top rail for ease of adding optics, and an adjustable bipod are standard along with Magpul P-Mag 10-round magazines. I appreciated the adjustable stock as I am neck-less and one click forward gave me a perfect sight picture.

My rifle was topped with Bushnell’s

new Engage 6 to 24 by 50 mm. It features their new Deploy MOA reticle with 1-MOA windage and elevation hashmarks, and can reach short and mid-range targets. Dialing in the scope is easy with the Toolless ZERO Reset Locking Turret. I felt this combination was the perfect choice as I hoped to score a blackbuck antelope.

Ox Ranch claims to have the largest herds of axis deer, scimitar horned oryx and blackbuck in Texas. After this trip I will not argue the point.

Blackbuck originate in India and are a desirable trophy for several reasons. Though small in size with adults weighing from 75 to 90 pounds, their beautiful spiral horns length is impressive with a keeper running from 19 to 29 inches. The male’s coloration is outstanding, plus they are very tasty.

They also offer a demanding hunt. I swear the longer the horns the sooner they run when hunters approach. When they take off they can hit 50 miles per hour in a dead run. When they jump and run you may say “Shucks!” but they are fun to watch.

My guide, Austin worked very hard to get me on a good buck. Though we saw several it took most of the day to get within range. When that time came I was rewarded with a handsome gentleman who so far has graced me with a great pot of chili and I am honoring him with a shoulder mount.

Accessories provided gave me the opportunity to try the NOMAD system of performance fabrics. The shirts, pants and vest were in a vivid Mossy Oak camo pattern. These fabrics are extremely lightweight, offer sun protection, breathability, moisture wicking, and odor blocking with their SilverZ Scent Suppression System. Above all they are very comfortable.

I took my blackbuck standing on my hind legs with the help of the Primos Trigger Stick Gen 3 tripod.

Hold the tripod out in front at arm’s length, squeeze the trigger and the legs deploy. Release and they lock — all quick

and easy.

The legs adjust from 24 to 62 inches. The smooth panning head has a quick detach system that conveniently allows changing from a V-Yoke for shooting to the mounting of optics or camera.



These curious big boys are not for hunting, but they love to be hand fed.

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Lake Roundup

SOUTH TEXAS



By Danno Wise

January is usually a time of year reserved for serious fishermen. There is a good reason these diehards are found on South Texas lakes during the dead of winter. January starts the prime time to catch giant largemouth bass from reservoirs across South Texas.

Make no mistake, plenty of lunker largemouths are caught during what is usually one of the two coldest months of the year. Anglers looking to try winter fishing in hopes of a big bass should be forewarned that the action typically isn't "hot and heavy." Bites are often hard to come by this time of year, but the fish responsible for those bites are usually worth the effort.

The only real exception to the hardcore bass crowd on most South Texas lakes this month involves white bass fishermen. Usually, the white bass 'run' is getting going good by the end of January. Anglers who favor light tackle, and the white bass run is a much anticipated annual event, will flock to the water as soon as word is out that the run is on.

COLETO CREEK - "Fishing in January should be great," said long-time Coletto Creek bass pro Dennis Lala. "We'll be seeing a lot of pre-spawn bass. The water temperature won't be too low and the bass will be moving up looking to spawn. During this time of year, my go-to lures will be spinnerbaits. I like to use either white or white/chartreuse. But, I'll also fish that Berkley Power Jerkshad quite

a bit.

"When I'm fishing a spinnerbait, I'll pitch it right up to the bank and draw it off real slow. If I run it all the way to the dropoff without getting a bite, I'll stop it just as it comes off the edge. I'll let it fall for about two beats, then start a real slow retrieve again.

"The warmer the water is, the closer the fish will be to the bank. They like to spawn up on those sandy spots along the shorelines. But, they also like spawning in some of those shallow little creeks. Sometimes you find those shallow creeks with gravel bottoms. You'll know the bass are in there because it looks like a bunch of doodle bugs have been playing up there – there are so many beds. When you find a spot like that, man it is good. You can fish a spot like that all day long.

"When I'm not throwing a spinnerbait, I'll throw that Power Jerkshad weightless. The other thing I may do is use a real light Carolina rig if the fish are a little deeper. But, that's pretty much my January bass arsenal – Power Jerkshad and spinnerbaits.

"The other good thing about when these fish start moving up shallow, is then they are much more vulnerable. Usually, especially big fish, are most vulnerable when they're up shallow and hungry.

"We also have real good action around the hot water discharge in January. We usually catch some black bass there, but also stripers (hybrids) and lots of catfish. The best thing for those hybrids is usually minnows, but a lot of guys will fish for them with spoons. If you throw minnows, you have a chance at catching a hybrid or a black bass or a yellow cat. There will also be plenty of blue cats and channel cats around the discharge then. Those you can catch on just about anything, but most everybody uses dead shrimp on the bottom."

MEDINA - Jim Gallagher of Jim's Re bait Tackle says Medina's winter fishing is very predictable – which can be a good thing if you know how to fish deep.

"Fishing on this lake will be very predictable in January – fish will be deep and fishermen will need to fish slow," said Gallagher. "Vertical jigging is the best

method when fish are suspended at 30 – 35 feet, as they will be most of January. This gives everybody a chance to practice their vertical jigging skills, which isn't something very many people are adept at.

"But, fish can also be taken on deep running crankbaits. Of course, more people are used to throwing cranks than using jigging spoons, so that's something you'll see a lot of in January. This lake is still a 'downsize' lake, so those cranks need to be small.

"While the fishing stays the same 90 percent of the time, the weather can change the pattern for short periods in January. If we experience a few days with temperatures in the high 70s and nights in the mid-50s, fish will move up a little. If that happens, concentrate on the main and secondary lake points and shorelines. If they're on the points, crankbaits are the way to go.

"Every January everybody wants to start looking for the white bass run to start. That's usually a little early for us – it is usually a February or March thing. So, the whites and hybrids won't be running, but they can be found schooled up on the surface around the lake. There's no predicting where they'll be from day to day, but if you run across them, you can have some good action. Anytime you run across them, a KT Spoon in chrome or white is the absolute best thing to throw."

CHOKO CANYON – For bass fishermen on Choke Canyon, January means it's time to head up river - whether they are after largemouth or white bass. Lake level, of course, is a concern, but those fish will still be pushing as far upriver as they can this month.

The white bass run should be going on in Choke Canyon throughout January, with fish being found from the Highway 99 bridge up on the Frio River or as far as they can get with the current water level. Rat-L-Traps or small, flashy jigs will take plenty of whites during January.

Black bass will also be finding their ways up the rivers, creeks and arroyos in January. Although there will be some fish hanging on the edges of grass beds in about 12 feet of water in the main lake,

January is the time to head up river in search of pre-spawn fish. Anglers should concentrate on brush in shallow water in places such as Sam McGill Creek or Coodie Creek. Soft-plastic jerkbaits and spinnerbaits will produce plenty of bass around the shallow brush, as will football jigs and Texas-rigged lizards.

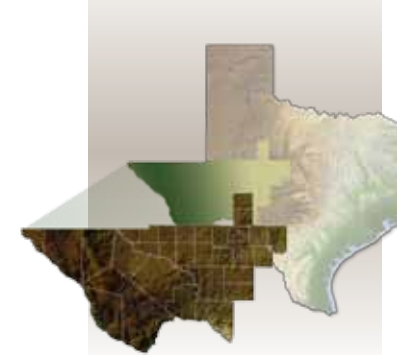
FALCON - Texas' southernmost major reservoir will also have its share of pre-spawn bass during the year's first month. Over the course of the first few weeks of the year, Falcon's resident population of black bass will be moving into the coves and backwater in preparation for the spawn. As a result, anglers can expect good catches of big bass during January.

Spinnerbaits are considered the 'go-to' bait when fishing the back coves and creeks on Falcon during January – especially since they are somewhat "snagless" and can be used to cover water quickly. However, soft-plastic jerkbaits and crankbaits can also produce plenty of strikes.

Catfish action should also be steady in the upper part of the lake and in the river itself – especially during periods of warmer weather. The upper reaches of Falcon will likely see some schooling black bass activity as well.

These fish won't be big, but will be numerous and aggressive. This provides anglers with plenty of fast action and is a good option for fishermen just looking to catch numbers of fish. **T★J**

WEST TEXAS



By TOJ Staff

AMISTAD — By the time the New Year unfolds look for "Big Friendly" to be about 25 feet below conservation pool. That is about the same level as January 2016 and a little over eight feet below the start of January 2017.

With a fairly mild fall, look for water

temperature to be either side of the 70 degree mark and black bass fishing to be very good. Bass will be feeding in coves, along the first drop as well as around the mouths of creeks and river channels.

Anglers should cover water fishing a blue/black or red/black spinnerbait or crankbait. Once fish are found thoroughly fish an area with a Texas rigged soft plastic or jig.

Stripers will be in deeper water in front of the dam. Best depth will be 30-65 feet deep. Use electronics to find bait balls and fish. Then go after them with slabs, spoons and jigs.

White bass will be working around the mouths of creeks and river channels. Fish deeper water with slabs and jigs.

Catfish will be in their deep winter holes. Best depth will be over 40 feet deep.

O.H. IVIE — As of early December this popular bass producer seems to be running about a month behind. Normally in early December water temperatures have already plummeted to either side of the 50 degree mark – about the normal water temperature for January.

However, as of early December 2017 this lake still had water temperatures in the lower-to-mid 70s, a temperature normally seen in late October and early November.

Water level in Ivie was a little over 37 feet low, about two feet lower than at the start of 2017. With the warmer water temperatures and lake level, look for black bass to make making their final move toward deeper water where they will remain until spring warm up.

Start your search for these fish on top of the first break fishing spinnerbaits and lipless crankbaits. Medium diving crankbaits are good options to work off of, and down the first drop.

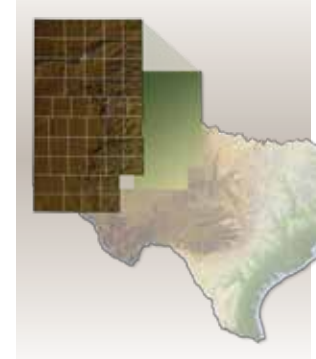
If what you are looking for is not there, then use the electronics to find deeper structure. Carolina and Texas rigs fished all around the deep structure should produce.

BROWNWOOD — As of early December this popular lake was about three feet below conservation pool and about eight to 10 degrees warmer than a year ago. Normally through the month of January, Lake Brownwood see temperatures fall through the 60s and by the end of the month are in the mid-to-upper 40s. Look for temperatures to start the New Year to be in the mid-60s, with the potential to

hold at that level throughout the month based on extended weather forecasts.

With the prospects for warmer water temperatures, but shorter photo-periods of the day look for bass to be just off of the first drop. As long as temperatures remain mild continue to fish as though it was fall. **T★J**

HIGH PLAINS



By TOJ Staff

COLEMAN — This west Texas lake has seen good fishing this fall. That trend should continue into the New Year. At the start of December the lake was a little over two feet below pool level. Water temperatures were in the mid-to-upper 70s.

In January look for water temperatures to fall through the 60s. By the end of the month, if there has been some cold weather water temps could be in the upper 40s.

To start the month, use lipless rattling crankbaits, spinnerbaits and Chatterbaits to cover water. Texas rigs and jigs are good options to thoroughly fish an area.

Crappie should retreat to deeper brush piles or vertical timber along creek and river channels.

ALAN HENRY — As of early December this lake had water that was muddy to stained and was over four and a half feet low.

Typically water temperatures run in the mid-40s by the start of the year, however look for those temperatures to be about 10 degrees warmer to start 2018.

Jigs, jigging spoons and crankbaits are the best options for bass. Look for bass around rocky slide areas or exposed rocks that rise from the bottom of the lake.

After several warm sunny days trying fishing deep rocks warmed by the sun, particularly if the water has cleared. **T★J**

A New Beginning



Ring in the New Year by becoming a better coastal angling student.

Story and photography by Nate Skinner

January is one of those months that greet anglers with plenty of ups and downs. Depending on the prevailing weather conditions, it can offer some phenomenal fishing opportunities or keep many off the water. The bite between cold fronts can be exceptional, but it's the timing of these systems that makes things tough.

In a perfect world, we could all just hit the water when optimum conditions occur. Unfortunately that is not the reality the majority of folks live in. Instead, those that are unable to go fishing at the drop of a hat will likely miss the best windows of rod bending action.

It's no secret that some of the largest speckled trout of the year are caught

during the first month of the year. The species is gearing up to spawn and the heart-of-winter pattern makes targeting them an attainable task. These highly sought after trophies feed best under particular scenarios and seem to acquire lockjaw more often than they jump into the boat.

Despite the odds, anglers can still

be productive this month. Even if their time spent on the water is met with less than desirable conditions and a slow bite. There's always something to learn and take away from a fishing trip. After all, that is the reason we love the sport.

There are numerous reasons why thousands are motivated to fish coastal bays and estuaries. No matter what these reasons are per individual, one remains static across the board — fun. At the end of the day, we all fish because we enjoy it. Tricking a creature that lives underneath the surface of the water to strike a bait, and then fighting it with a rod and reel is good old fashioned fun.

Regardless of the kind of on-the-water situations anglers are presented with, they can use the month of January to ring in the New Year by planning to become better students of fishing the brine. There are a number of ways anglers can prepare through the winter months to improve their skills, land more fish, and create many more memories.

Set Goals

Setting angling goals is the first step to achieving more success on the water in 2018. These may vary per individual. The following are some basic goals that I would suggest all anglers strive to

obtain: explore unfamiliar waters, try new strategies, add some variety to the list of preferred targeted species, and spend more time on the water.

Learning new areas and bay systems will make anglers better versed in "reading the water," and well rounded when it comes to their abilities to make a presentation that results in success. Anyone can learn to consistently find and catch fish in a single estuary over time. Many coastal anglers have spent the majority of our lives fishing the same areas in the same



Using a chart to learn the lay of the land is vital for boater safety as well as providing a basis from which potential angling hot spots might be found.

bays, the same way with pretty much the same results.

The saltiest anglers can confidently locate fish in a variety of systems and under an assortment of conditions. These individuals have learned to relate what they know about particular stretches of water in their home estuaries with areas containing similar characteristics many miles away. This skill is invaluable. A fish is a fish, regardless of the bay system it is swimming in. The best fishermen have adapted and learn how to catch

them anywhere.

Experimenting with different strategies and techniques will also help to hone one's angling skills. There are a variety of tactics out there that will bring fish to hand. This includes testing out new baits and adding them to the arsenal. The more diverse an angler's bag of tricks is, the more prepared the individual will be to handle any on-the-water scenario they are presented with.

Targeting new species will improve anyone's game. Anglers sporting the complete package know how to catch just about anything that swims. I love catching trout and redfish until my arms are numb, but our bays and estuaries offer so many other species for us to enjoy. Make a point to pursue sheepshead, black drum, flounder, mangrove snapper, and Spanish mackerel. These less mentioned species can provide plenty of sporting action and tasty fillets. Not to mention, they can be easier to target under certain conditions than specks and reds.

There's no better way to become an expert at a sport than to repeatedly practice it. Setting a goal to spend more time on the water this year will ensure that anglers give themselves plenty of



Satellite images provide the proverbial "birds-eye view" and can reveal minute details about the structure or features of an estuary.

opportunities to enhance their abilities.

Study Charts and Satellite Images

Charts and satellite images provide anglers with valuable insight to the waters within bay systems before ever navigating them by boat. Some of the best charts on the market are produced by Hook-N-Line. These charts provide GPS coordinates to popular fishing grounds, as well as reefs, other structure, and navigational hazards. They are available for purchase at better tackle retailers or at www.hooknline.net.

Google Earth offers interactive satellite images that display bay features in immense detail.

Viewers can adjust the date of the image by accessing “historical imagery” under the view tab. This will reveal different structure and features as tide levels vary with the date the imagery was captured.

Latitude and longitude coordinates of unique features can also be obtained from Google Earth. When an inlet, gut or channel that provides a change in depth or provides access to less accessible water is observed, make a note, set a waypoint on the GPS, then confirm it once on the water.

Studying charts and satellite images allows the lay of the land to be learned rather quickly. This is vital when it comes to boating safety. Understanding how a



The author has a set of Hook-N-Line charts for every bay system he fishes, regardless of whether the waters being fished are familiar or relatively new.

bay system, the launch sites, and areas that offer protection lay out is extremely important. Anglers need to have a plan for where they will run, should the weather conditions become hazardous while they are on the water.

Heading back to the dock may not

always be an option, especially in situations when a squall or an approaching storm cell lies between the boat and the ramp's location. Boaters should study charts and satellite images and come up with safe lines of navigation for a variety of scenarios.

If the waters being fished are familiar, a chart should be available and examined to confirm the way things are oriented. I always keep a chart handy for any given bay system I am fishing and navigating, regardless of how confident I feel about running it.

Take Advantage of Low Tides

As cold fronts continue to roll onto the coast, some of the lowest tides of the year will occur. Over the course of the coldest months to start the year these extreme drops in tide levels will take place after a front passes and strong northwest winds blow water out of the bay. Though not necessarily a great time for anglers to expect to find aggressive action from fish, it is a valuable time to learn more about a given area.

Super low tides reveal uncharted characteristics along



When conditions line up just right, some quality trout can be landed during the coldest months of the year.

the bay floor, especially on shallow flats. Reefs, bars, and mud flats are often exposed, leaving only channels, guts, and deeper areas covered with water.

Anglers should try to get out on the

water during these low tide periods to take note of features that are usually hidden. Taking plenty of pictures and video is a good way to chronicle the details. Later in the year when these shallow areas are

flooded with normal tides, the uncharted structures and features previously learned will become fish attracting hot spots that may be passed up by those unaware of their existence.

Consider Hiring a Guide

Hiring a guide is the ultimate way to gain an unlimited amount of information in a short period of time. The next month or two, during late winter, represents one of the best times to employ the knowledge of a guide when it comes to learning more about an area. Whether anglers plan to fish their home waters or explore somewhere new, a professional fishing guide can offer immediate insight during a time period that may be the most difficult of the year to fish.

Hiring a guide should be treated like a job interview. Anglers should provide the captain with their needs, desires, and expectations. The most valuable experience will come from a trip that incorporates covering a lot of areas within a bay system. The purpose of a trip like this is centered more around learning as much as possible, rather than filling the cooler with fillets. This type of excursion will be extremely beneficial in the long run.

New beginnings are on the horizon. Anglers that make the most of their time spent on and off the water this time of year will achieve the most success. Fishing is only as good as the effort the participant puts into it.

Don't hold back — leave it all out on the water. Because the better you get, the more fun it becomes. **T★J**



Part of trying new strategies involve testing new baits and adding the proven ones to the arsenal. Pictured is the PT-7 by DOA Lures. It is a weedless topwater that is deadly when fishing flooded grass in back lake areas or when floating grass is a problem in open bays.



Times of low winter tides can reveal potential navigational hazards or potential areas that will attract and hold fish.



Overlooked Species

Texas freshwater anglers are blessed with an almost unlimited fishing opportunities. Long abundant rivers and diverse lakes offer a variety of fishing options. Bass, catfish, and crappie, are some of the most popular targeted species. Add in the striped bass, white bass and hybrid striped bass and a fisherman has more than he can say grace over.

However, as is said on television, “But wait, there’s more.” By that I mean more opportunities to catch fish, if you’re willing to go after some of the overlooked species that are available. In addition to widening your angling experience, these species will offer exciting fishing with very little competition.

Other benefits include widespread distribution since these species are everywhere, less regulation (very often with no size or bag limits), and you don’t need a lot of expensive specialty gear. A sturdy rod and reel, plus bait that might be right in the kitchen is often all that is

needed.

So what are these magical mystery species? Let’s take a look.

Perch

“Perch” is often used to refer to all of the smaller sunfish in Texas, meaning the bluegill, redear and redbreast in particular. Pound for pound they fight as hard as any gamefish.

Crickets, worms, small grasshoppers, small minnows and the like will catch perch when suspended under a cork. Most fishing is in shallow water around some type of shoreline cover.

Monofilament line from two to four pounds is plenty strong, and #1 Aberdeen hooks will work just fine.

An interesting side note is that the largemouth bass is technically a sunfish, not a bass. Another specie that is commonly called a perch is the barfish or yellow bass.

This fish is technically a member of the bass family along with the striped bass, white bass and hybrid striped bass. They don’t get very big, with a 10 inch fish being a good one. They are excellent on the table, and can be caught with a rod and reel. While the smaller fish eat primarily small insects and such, bigger yellows are usually caught while fishing for white bass. Like the whites, yellow bass will hit small spoons and jigs. They are excellent as a food fish and have good distribution throughout the state.

Richard Ott is the District Management Leader for Inland Fisheries over lakes Richland-Chambers, Cedar Cedar Creek, and Palestine, among others. He has seen good populations of all perch at these lakes, and many guides at Lake Fork will attest to the healthy population present there.

Remember, perch are a

small species. When fishing for them, the lighter the rod the better. Not only will a light rod make the diminutive perch feel like a real trophy, a softer rod will help prevent ripping the lips off a fish on the hookset.

Carp & Smallmouth Buffalo

For some reason the common carp is much maligned in Texas as a sporting fish. They certainly are not going to win any beauty contests, but a good-sized carp will stretch your line and give a good fight.

Growing up in the city, there weren’t a lot of fishing hot spots within range of a boy and a bicycle. I can remember many days spent at a creek that ran through the neighborhood. We’d bait hooks with dough balls made from a freshly purchased loaf of white bread and catch fish like crazy. Occasionally someone would mix up some Big Red and cornflakes, or add a little vanilla to the bread bait and we thought we were fishing royalty.

One thing I remember more than anything is the fight those big ones would give us. The biggest we ever caught was probably only about 20 pounds, not all that big when you consider that the Texas rod-and-reel record is currently 43.13 pounds, but they felt like a truck on the end of that line. And more than one left us heartbroken when the line snapped!

Unregulated as a game fish except on Lady Bird Lake, always check the Outdoor Annual, or the TPWD website for regulations whenever fishing a new lake, or for a new species you are not familiar.

Often confused for the carp is the smallmouth buffalo. They look a lot alike except the carp has barbels on either side of the upper jaw. They will both readily take the above mentioned dough balls as bait, and can be quite sporty when hooked.

Additionally the smallmouth buffalo is a food fish and the number one species sold by commercial fishermen. Euro style carp fishing is becoming popular, with anglers using exotic baits and prepared formulas called “boilies.” You

can believe those formulas are guarded like a precious treasure. There is a plethora of information on this type of fishing on the interwebs free for the asking. So when it comes to carp and buffalo, set up a “post” and fish.

Walleyed Perch or Walleye

After a terrible battle with drought, Lake Meredith is at about three-fourths full, and responding well to once again having water. Another member of the perch family is the walleye perch commonly called walleye. It is surmised that many more walleye survived the depleted conditions Meredith experienced than was originally thought. Then came golden alga which really knocked their numbers back. However, in 2016 and 2017 5.8 million walleye fry were stocked by TPWD that will help get the lake back in shape.

Many might think it would take several years for these fry to become catchable sized fish, but young walleyes are fast growers and can grow to 10 inches or more during their first year. Officials at Meredith believe there may be keepers available by the end of 2018.

The traditional walleye “season” is during the coldest months of winter, with angler numbers increasing in December,

and peaking in February. No doubt there will be some die-hard walleye fans out on Meredith this winter, hoping to connect with at least a few small fish.

In addition to Meredith, the Palo Duro Reservoir and White River Reservoir are also home to walleye, although both of these impounds still suffer from low water levels. Palo Duro is only about two percent of capacity and the White is at about 29 percent.

Walleye can be a voracious feeder and has the teeth to get the job done. Be sure to use a leader on your main line to prevent line cutting. The state record walleye comes from Lake Meredith and stands at 11.88 pounds. While it may be awhile before the lake sees another one like that, here’s hoping it comes back soon.

Tilapia:

Although considered an invasive species, some tilapia are stocked by private pond owners as an algae control measure. Their introduction to Texas waters cannot be absolutely stated but TPWD has never introduced them.

The common theory is that in the late 60’s tilapia were introduced by commercial fishermen, as a possibly income source. Mostly shot by bowfishermen, tilapia have no size or limit regulations restricting the taking of fish.

It is possible to catch them on a rod and reel with a small hook and worm, watermelon rind or small vegetable like broccoli. However they have a very small mouth and can be quite the challenge.

Texas law requires any anglers to eviscerate any tilapia caught immediately, in order to possess the fish. This is to prevent them from being moved to another location. Any legal method such as gigging, bowfishing or handfishing is allowed for tilapia.



A carp is certainly are not going to win any beauty contests, but a good-sized one will stretch your line while putting up a good fight.



Often confused for the carp is the smallmouth buffalo. The smallmouth buffalo is a food fish and the number one species sold by commercial fishermen.



Bowfin are most often taken either with a bow and arrow or by accident while fishing for something else as they readily hit lures.

According to Wikipedia, “Tilapia have very low levels of mercury, as they are fast-growing, lean and short-lived, with a primarily vegetarian diet, so do not accumulate mercury found in prey. Tilapia are low in saturated fat, calories, carbohydrates and sodium, and are a good protein source. They also contain the micronutrients phosphorus, niacin, selenium, vitamin B12 and potassium.”

Recent reports have tilapia showing up as far east as Toledo Bend on the Texas-Louisiana border. It is believed that since they have the general appearance similar to the bluegill, that some smaller tilapia are often mistaken for large bluegill on that lake.

Gar

The gar consist of three varieties in Texas, Alligator, Longnose (Needlenose) and Spotted.

The big ones, the ones targeted by trophy hunters, are the alligator and longnose. Rod and reel anglers use bait,



Mostly tilapia are shot by bow fishermen, have no size or limit regulations restricting the taking of this fish.

usually cut carp or shad or even parts of a chicken to entice big fish to bite. Using a Kahle hook to help penetrate the tough mouth of the gar, these baits are soaked on a tight line, preferably just off the current in a river. Lakes have a good population as well and backwater, heavy cover areas will hold fish.

The longnose gar can easily reach five to six feet in length, and 80 pounds, while alligator gar can go to eight feet long, and weigh in at up to 300 pounds. Obviously a very stout rod, reel and line combo is needed.

Alligator gar for years had no protection and were considered by most to be a "trash" fish. Now there is some recognition of the true worth of these creatures, as really big gar can exceed 85 years of age.

Not to mention that gar date back to the Cretaceous period, some 65 to 100 million years ago.

Their history dates back to the dinosaurs. They are now officially considered a "Regulated Nongame Species" and there are special limits on Falcon Reservoir.

Statewide regulations now allow for the harvest of only one per day, with special allowances for some fisheries to be closed to gar fishing during the spawning period.

The state record gar of 302 pounds came on a trotline in 1953, while the rod and reel record is also from the 50's at 279 pounds and caught in the Rio Grande River.

The smallest gar is the spotted, which can reach about three feet and eight or so pounds. Both the spotted and longnose are often caught using a frayed nylon rope as bait. The frayed end of the rope is presented to the fish just as you present a lure to a bass. When the fish strikes, the teeth will become entangled and allow the fish to be brought to hand, or more safely, to net.

Bowfin or Grennel

Bowfin have given me a couple of the best scares I've had while fishing. Both came at night, while fishing for bass. Each time I was flipping jigs in and around stumps, trying to catch a trophy sized bass. Both times I thought I had caught that bass when actually I had a bowfin. And both times I realized my mistake just in time to bring my hand back from the tooth-filled mouth of an angry fish. I can personally attest that you do NOT want to lip an angry bowfin.

Bowfin are another species most often taken either with a bow and arrow or by accident while fishing for something else. As they readily hit lures I would guess most anglers would have caught one, but that is not the case. I suspect that is because they seem most ready to attack a spinnerbait or jig only in the cover of darkness.

Bait for bowfin includes shrimp, chicken livers, and shiners.

Artificial choices include everything from the spinnerbaits and jigs to small crankbaits, plastic worms and even a sculpin fly.

For more info and a great source for bowfin hotspots check out bowfinanglers.com

This year you may want to avoid the crowds and check out some of these species. I'm not saying they will replace that bass addiction, or pull you off those trophy blue cats for good.

But just maybe you'll have a little fun and at the same time get to try something new. **T&J**

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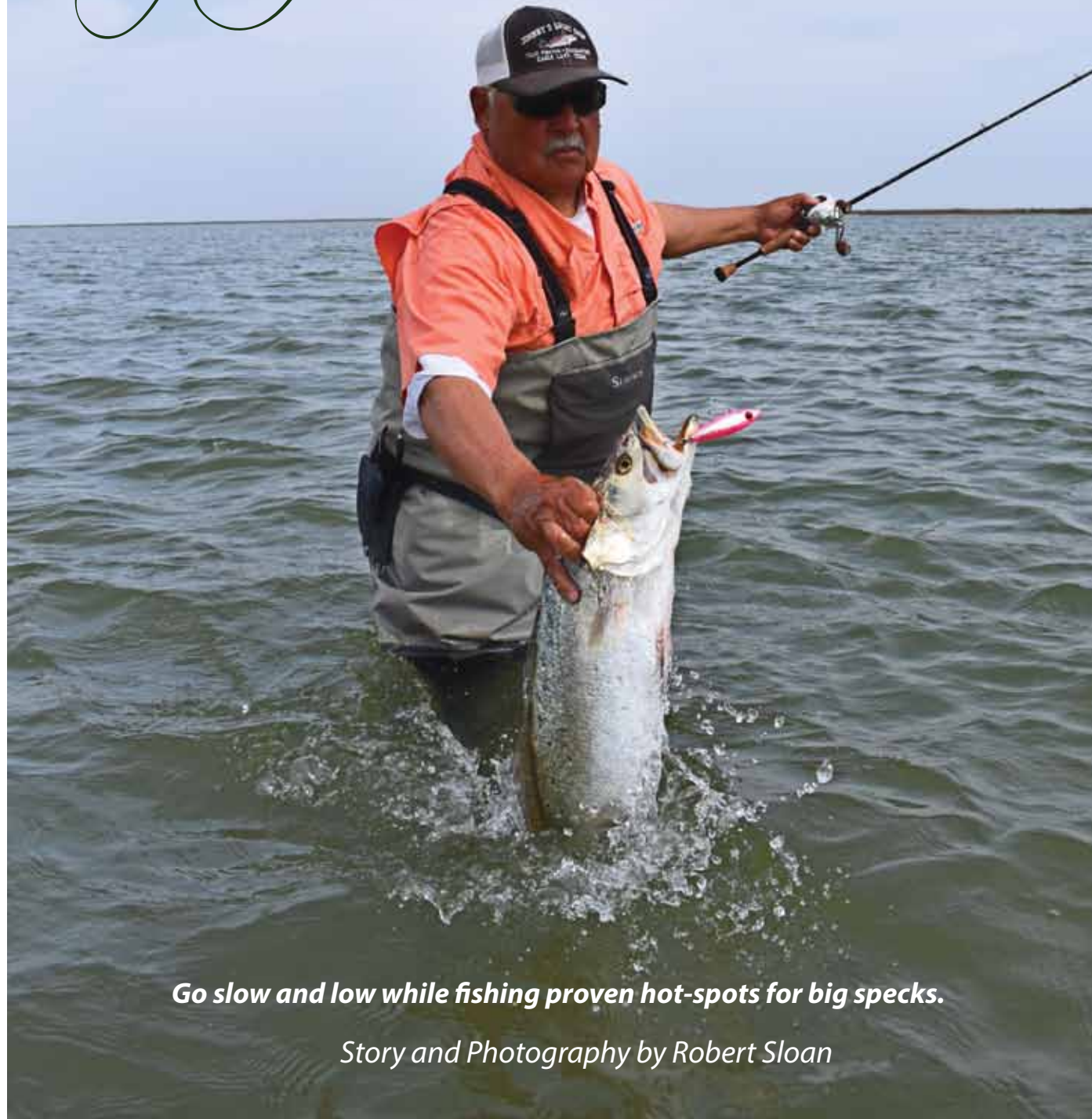
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FORMULA FOR

Trophy Winter Trout



Go slow and low while fishing proven hot-spots for big specks.

Story and Photography by Robert Sloan

Matagorda guide Charlie Paradoski lands a seven pound sow speckled trout he caught on a slow sinking Mirrolure.

The first time I used one of Paul Brown's Corky lures I could not have been more disappointed.

It was very similar to fishing a worm for largemouth bass – low and slow and boring. But it didn't take long for me to see the light. After that first thump, a hook set and bringing to hand about a four pound trout I was sold.

Not long after that I was fishing with guide Dwayne Lowrey on the upper end of Sabine Lake near Stewts Island, just off the Intra-Coastal Waterway. We were on a long flat, about four feet deep, that was covered with clam shells and mud. It was where the trout wanted to feed because mullet were all over the place. The tide has just started to come in and it was game on. Just about every cast with one of the original Corky's was smacked by a solid trout, most of which were in the three to five pound class. We were both fishing a Corky in a pearl/chartreuse color pattern. We ended up on that wade with two heavy stringers of trout to seven pounds.

The state record rod and reel trout, weighing 13 pounds 11 ounces, and measured 38 1/8 inches long, was caught on a Corky by Jim Wallace while fishing Baffin Bay on February 6, 1996. That set the pace for the sale of thousands of Corky's. But long before that catch



A small box full of the author's go-to baits he uses to catch trophy winter speckled trout.

the trend of fishing slow sinking mullet imitation plugs was the way to go during the winter and early spring just about anywhere along the Texas coast.

The Mirrolure 52M series was a killer bait back in the 70's and 80's. There is no telling how many of these lures were sold. It was a simple design made of hard plastic

and was 5-5/8 inches long. It weighed a half ounce and was a slow sinker. This plug would catch trout year-round, and was a favorite in the surf.

It was a deadly mullet imitation on East Galveston Bay, East Matagorda Bay, Baffin and the lower Laguna Madre. Some of the top color combinations were, and still are, hot pink back/yellow belly with silver sides, chartreuse back/pearl belly silver sides, green back/white belly/silver sides and red head/white back and belly with silver sides.

Shortly after Wallace made his record catch I fished with him on Galveston's East Bay. I noticed that he had a small-go to plastic box of lures. Usually that box contained a few Corkys, a Jumping Minnow, a broken back Redfin and maybe a Zara Ghost.

"At times I'll use a Ghost to find them," said Wallace. "Then I'll catch them with a Corky. But if I'm fishing a proven big trout area I'll tie on a slow-sinking Corky from the get-go."

His top Corky colors were chartreuse/sparkle for muddy or clear water, pearl/chartreuse and chartreuse/black back sparkle. Strawberry was also good. A purple/white pattern was his favorite for a while.

Over the years the Paul Brown Fat Boy seems to have taken center stage in many tackle boxes. It's 3-1/2-inches long, weighs 7/8 of an ounce and has two treble hooks



PHOTO COURTESY TREY PRYE

Capt. Trey Prye shows off one of East Matagorda's trophy specks he caught and released while wade fishing.



Sabine Lake guide Jerry Norris with a trout caught on a Corky Fat Boy near the Gator Hole.

like the original Corky.

Last spring I was fishing with East Galveston Bay guide Jim West. We had a limit that morning pretty fast. And all those trout, up to seven pounds, were caught on gold/black Fat Boys.

“It’s not a whole lot different than the original,” said West. “But it’s a little thicker and has a better profile in the water.”

You fish it the same way you do the original with a slow up and down motion. A lot of anglers add a few jerks to give the lure a little more action.

Another type of mullet imitation lure that is especially affective just about anywhere along the Texas coast is a five inch swim bait. One of the best is a Yum Money Minnow in pearl/chartreuse or pearl/red head. You can rig these baits on 1/8 or ¼ ounce jig heads. The Assassin Spring Lock jig head is excellent for swim baits. It’s built on a short shank

wide gap hook that does a good job of getting a solid bite in the mouth of heavy trout. These lures are easy to fish. Just cast them out and reel ‘em in. It’s that simple. The lighter jig head will allow you to make a slower retrieve and keep it in the strike zone longer.

There is always going to be something new to test drive for big trout. One of the latest slow sinkers to hit tackle store shelves is made by Unfair Lures. It’s called an Arrowhead Slow-Suspending Twitch bait. This is a hard-plastic bait that looks a lot like a menhaden. Another slow-sinker made by Unfair Lures is the Mullet. It’s 3-1/2 inches long and looks like the real deal. I’ve done well

with the pearl/gray and pearl/olive color patterns.

There is no doubt that slow-sinking mullet imitation plugs are deadly on big trout right now, and on into late spring. The reason this type of lure is so good is that trout predominantly feed on mullet throughout the winter months when shrimp and shad are in short supply on our many bays.

“The key is to be in the right spot when the fish are feeding,” says Matagorda guide Charlie Paradoski. “I rely on the solunar tables quite a bit. I make it a point to be fishing where I think big trout will be feeding on both the major and minor times. That’s very important. This time of year I’ll be looking for mullet over shell and mud. East Matagorda Bay has a lot of that type of structure.”

East Bay is all about fishing the reefs with slow sinkers. Some of the more well-

known reefs include Half Moon, Bird Island, Cleveland and the Oyster Farm. These are all excellent wading spots. Some have a semi-hard bottom but others have a combination of mud and shell that will sink you up to your shoulders.

Conversely, on Sabine Lake the best fishing for big trout is usually over clam shell reefs, and around the mouths of bayous and guts on the upper end of the lake. There are also a couple of islands on the upper end that provide very good wade fishing.

If you prefer drift-fishing you might want to head to Coffee Ground Cove. This is one gigantic flat that holds good numbers of mullet and trout throughout the winter months. It’s especially good between fronts that warm up the water a few degrees.

The Gator Hole on the northeast side of the lake has produced some nice trout over the years. It’s about 2 to 4 feet deep and is ideal for fishing a slow-sinking lure like a Mirrolure Soft-Dine. This is a lure you don’t hear too much about. But it’s an excellent slow sinking lure and is designed to be fished in two to four feet of water. The original is 2 5/8 inches, and the Soft-Dine XL is 3 1/4 inches long. Good color combinations are Texas chicken and chartreuse/black back.

Probably the most popular place to fish for big trout in Port O’Connor is Pringle Lake. It’s located just south of the old Army base. It’s a massive backwater lake with an average depth of two to three feet. Drift fishing is big time popular here. The main cut to get in is a couple of miles past the Army base, and is a challenge to navigate on a low tide. I saw one of those shore-burner boats last year that hit a high spot so hard it tore the tower off and removed the lower unit.

Baffin Bay is still the king of big trout. If you have never fished Baffin I highly recommend a trip on that water. What I don’t recommend is that you take your own boat and run wide open across the flats. There are rocks all over the place and they definitely will wreck you and your boat.

As for fishing the Laguna Madre you’ll probably do best by putting in at Port Mansfield and fishing along the ICW. The flats along the channel have been known to give up some nice trout. Another option is to hire a guide. Or you might want to set up camp at Getaway Adventures Lodge.



Once photos are taken, releasing a big sow speckled trout completes the angler’s reward of having won the battle and knowing she swims to spawn another day.

You can fish out of the lodge with your own boat, or get a guide.

When fishing along the lower coast I think a guide is a very good option, especially if you’re unfamiliar with the

miles upon miles of shallow flats in the Laguna and on Baffin.

Regardless of where you opt to target trout during the winter months keep in mind three things. One is to fish major

solunar periods at spots that are known to hold trout. Second, look for mullet. Third, never leave the house without a good supply of slow-sinking mullet imitation lures. ★★

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Lake Roundup

EAST TEXAS

By Matt Williams

NACOGDOCHES - For months I've been saying things are setting up perfect for some great winter bass fishing on Lake Nacogdoches. We're about to find out if the predictions were true or nothing but smoke. I've got a good hunch it won't be the latter.

Hydrilla is back in the lake in a very big way. The grass is growing from the bank out to about 10 feet in some areas. Factor in the big fields of lily pad stubble to be found on numerous flats from mid-lake north and there won't be a shortage of good places to get bit over the next couple of months.

If it sounds like I'm pointing towards the shallows as the best place to fish that's because I am. If bass have grass they won't leave it, no matter how cold it gets outside. That's not to say every fish in the lake will be hanging tight to hydrilla this month because they won't. But a bunch of them will, and there will be some good ones in the mix, too.

As mentioned, there is a lot of good grass on the lake right now. Some of the best is located towards back of Yellow Bank Creek and in the Big Loco/Little Loco arms. Pine Cove and just about every other no-name creek up and down the lake have plenty of the green stuff, as well.

One of best baits you can have tied on over the next 45 days is a 1/2 ounce Rat-L-Trap in a bone, crawfish or chrome color pattern. Throw it in areas where there is window of two to three feet of open water

between the surface and vegetation. The key is to keep the bait moving at a pace just fast enough to keep it ticking the grass on occasion. Most strikes will come out of reaction when the bait tears free of the grass.

Some other good bait choices to have handy this month are a five inch shad pattern swim bait, 3/8 ounce white Chatterbait and a black/blue or white swim jig. Don't forget those square bills. I've seen times times when a crawfish pattern Bandit crank bait would fish circles around any other lure.

There also will be some groups of fishing holding around main lake points and hard bottom areas in water ranging 14-25 feet. You won't catch much size in these areas but the numbers can be outstanding at times. Some of the better baits away from the bank are a spoon, Carolina rig, drop shot, shaky head, football jig and deep diving crankbait.

CONROE - Lake Conroe fishing guide Butch Terpe rates January bass fishing prospects as fair, but far from fantastic.

"It's not near what it was back when we had grass in the lake," Terpe said. "Back in those days some of the best fishing of the year was in January. There were lots of 20-30 pound sacks caught this time of year."

Things have changed significantly since grass carp wiped out the grass (again) several years ago. The fishing can still be good, but the patterns have changed somewhat.

Terpe will spend a high percentage of his time over the next 30-45 days targeting shore rock, boat docks and concrete break waters in water ranging two to eight feet. Walden, Seven Coves, Harbor Town and any number of bridge crossings offer good stuff to ply. According to Terpe, the main attraction around rock structure is crawfish.

"That's a big part of the reason crankbaits work so well," Terpe said. "I throw a lot of them this time of year. Color can make a huge difference. I'll throw a lot of red, brown and orange to imitate the crawfish."

Some other good bait choices include soft jerk baits like a Senko or Fluke,

spinnerbait and Chatterbait."

In addition to the rock bite, Terpe says there will be some quality fish caught around brush piles and hard bottom structure like points, pond dams and channel ledges in water ranging 8-15 feet. Carolina rigs, football jigs, Texas rigs, deep crank baits and jigging spoons get the call most often away from the bank.

As popular as green fish are, Terpe says the best bite going on Conroe this month will be whiskered fish, mainly channel cat. The guide puts the most faith in baited holes in water ranging 18-22 feet near some sort of channel break. "We always catch quite a few limits this time of year," Terpe said. "They will be really good quality, too. We see quite a few 2-3 pounders during fall and winter."

Terpe ranks January's crappie fishing prospects as about average. He likes to target brush piles and bridge crossings in water ranging 20-25 feet. Live bait typically rules this time of year, but you can also pick up some fish on small jigs fished 1-3 feet of bottom..

"Crappie are bad about suspending, but during the winter months you'll usually find them pretty close to bottom," he said.

SAM RAYBURN - Sam Rayburn is arguably the hottest lake in Texas these days.

Got doubts? Just sit back and watch the fireworks over the next few months. According to fishing guide Stephen Johnston things are likely going to get stupid out there.

"Sam Rayburn is fishing off the charts right now and it's just going to get better," Johnston said. "I think we're going to see a lot of 27-30 pound sacks brought in to tournament weigh-ins this spring. As far as big fish go it's as good as it was before we had the fish kill in 2000."

Among the primary reasons are the banner spawns that occurred during consecutive years of high water several years ago and the resurgence of lush hydrilla beds up and down the lake. Bass populations have responded with a vengeance.

"It's full of 4-6 pounders right now and

there are some giants swimming around out there, too," Johnston said. "It is almost scary to think what might happen."

Johnston says there will a number of ways to catch fish this month; all revolve around hydrilla beds.

"It's going to be a total grass deal from the dirt out to 10 feet," he said. "We'll be throwing a lot of jerk baits, Chatterbaits, Senkos, lipless crankbaits, swim jigs and swim baits. It'll be hard to go wrong with any of those baits."

Johnston says grass can be found as far north as The Canyons and Deer Stand, but the best stuff is south of the Highway 147 crossing. Just about every creek and pocket has it. There also is some grass showing up in a few areas on the main lake that haven't seen it in years.

The guide says crappie fishing can be hit or miss this time of year, but there will be some limits to be caught around the Highway 147 and 103 bridge crossings and along the upper reaches of the Angelina River. Now also marks the early stages of the annual white bass run for the Angelina. The earliest action typically kicks in around Kingtown and progresses northward to Shawnee Landing and the Highway 59 crossing as water temperatures grow warmer in February.

TOLEDO BEND - Despite Toledo's close proximity to Rayburn Johnston says the two lakes fish entirely different during the dead of winter. Among the main reasons is Toledo Bend is bigger, deeper and doesn't warm up as quickly. Another biggie is it doesn't have near as much hydrilla as it did a few years ago. Hausen Bay, Mill Creek and Indian Mounds are among the few places that have it.

"Toledo is way different than Sam Rayburn," Johnston said. "It doesn't have much grass so the fish don't have much other than stumps and brush to relate to except when the water gets high and they can get into the bushes."

Johnston says he will spend a high percentage of his time in January with a crawfish pattern square bill crankbait tethered to his line. He'll be throwing it along creek channel breaks in water ranging 6-12 feet deep.

"I'll be fishing midway up the creeks towards the back, keying mostly on channel swings and well-defined bends," he said. "It's a lot like fishing in the fall."

The guide also pointed to shoreline

stumps as a another viable pattern. He said any wood cover in water ranging 5-10 feet will be prone to hold a bass or two. Best baits around the wood will be lipless cranks, square bills, casting jigs and swim jigs.

"There will also be some fish holding on main lake ridges in 12-20 feet," Johnston said. "Those fish will be relating a lot to individual stumps or drops. Stumble across the right spot out there and you can get right on a hurry with a deep diving crankbait or a Carolina rig."

Johnston says January's crappie fishing prospects are going to hinge a lot on the weather and how much rain falls in the area. The bite is always best around Sabine River at mid-lake during the winter months, but only when the weather is stable and the water is clear. Perhaps the best stretch of water is known as the Chicken Coop. The fish move and up the channel with the bait. Find the balls of shad and the crappie probably won't be far away.

"If we get bunch of rain it will stir up the water and create a bunch of current," he said. "That can really hurt the fishing," Johnston said.

PALESTINE - Lake Palestine always kicks out some monster bags of bass during January and February and veteran fishing guide Ricky Vandergriff isn't looking for things be any different this go-around. The bite can be good up and down the lake, but the shallow upper reaches always seem to shine brightest early in the year as groups of hefty pre-spawners begin gravitating towards skinny water.

"We always see some 25-pound-plus limits this time of year," Vandergriff said. "The upper Neches, Kickapoo Creek, Cade's Lake and around the islands can all be really good. I'll be fishing mostly around the stumps that line the channels

with a jig/craw combo, spinnerbait and Texas rigged plastics. The lily pad stubble around Old Folks Playground also can be really good, but you'll need flatbottom rig to get there unless we get some rain."

Father south, Vandergriff says he likes to target boat docks and the backs creeks with brush and stumps. He says the best docks are those with four to six feet of water in front of them. His preferred baits are Big Eye jig/craws (black/blue or black/blue/amber) and chartreuse/white spinnerbaits.

The guide says wintertime crappie and channel cat fishing also can be good at times. For crappie, he suggests fishing around the bridge pilings at the Highway 155 crossing, old cedar tops along the rock ledge at the dam and brush piles in 17-20 of water. Live bait typically rules but pink/white jigs also will produce.

As for channel cat, baited holes on humps and ledges in about 16 feet of water are the ticket. Vandergriff likes to attract fish using cattle range cubes, but you can also use soured maize or chicken scratch.

Something else to keep in mind this month is the annual white bass run up the Neches River. The flatbottom affair typically gets started towards the end of the month and runs through February.



PHOTO COURTESY RICHARD JUE

On Lake Conroe over the next 30-45 days bass anglers should target shore rock, boat docks and concrete break waters in water ranging two to eight feet.

Anglers can access to good fishing by running up the bottleneck from the lake or launching at the public boat ramp near Chandler off State Highway 31. Best baits are Roadrunners, Beetle Spins and small crawfish pattern cranks.

LIVINGSTON - January doesn't have rich history of being a great month for catching big numbers of bass on Lake Livingston. Anglers might chunk and wind for hours in exchange for a few bites, but chances are the takers will be pretty decent fish, according veteran fishing guide Randy Dearman.

Dearman has been fishing Livingston from the get-go and he's learned from experience that the 90,000-acre impoundment isn't near as good for numbers in January it will be in another 30 days after the water temperature warms up a few degrees.

"But it can be a great time catch a really big one," Dearman said. "The bigger fish are sometimes the first ones to spawn. They won't necessarily spawn in January, but they'll be up there milling around making their way to the shallows. They'll feed pretty aggressively at times, especially if we get a few days of warm weather to heat up the upper water column."

In other words, it's a good idea to fish during warming trends whenever you can. Big sun can be a huge plus this time of year."

Dearman says certain areas on the lake are more prone to hold fish than others. He's particularly fond of creeks at the lake's upper reaches.

"Secondary creeks and ditches that stem off main creek channels will definitely be worth checking out," said Dearman. "I really pay attention to stumps and lay downs in these areas, especially those located in a channel bend."

Dearman stresses the importance of seeking out the clearest water possible, especially if it has been a wet, cold winter and the Trinity River has been rolling.

"The only thing that's worse than fishing for bass in really cold water is fishing in cold, muddy water," he said. "If the water gets muddy, you'll be better off fishing south or hunting around behind islands or in protected coves that aren't as likely to be influenced by the river."

Bait-wise, Dearman likes something that moves some water and closely resembles Mr. Bass' preferred forage. A double willowleaf or willow/Colorado

spinnerbait that is chartreuse/white in color can be hard to beat this time of year. He also likes a Texas rigged Strike King Rage Craw, jig/craw combo and crawfish or shad pattern square bill crankbaits. 🦗🌟



By Brian Hughes

January is the month of new beginnings. We all get a chance to start a new year, fresh with promise ahead. We can dream of big fish, trips we've always wanted to take, lakes we always wanted to visit, and all the things that may await us in the coming months.

There are also new things in store with Texas Parks and Wildlife and the Sharelunker program. January marks the opening of the 2018 season, with new regulations. TPWD has made changes to the program and by the time you read this they will have all of the rules and details available.

January also marks the end, the end of forty years as a power producing lake at Monticello. After four decades the powers that be have deemed Monticello to be no longer viable as a source of electricity generation, and therefore no longer will "old Monte" have the warm water fishing so many have been accustomed to for all these seasons.

Other changes are on the horizon as well. We'll have to wait to see what 2018 has in store for us, but it sure can be exciting to contemplate.

CEDAR CREEK — This lake can be good for crappie around the planted brush on points and deep structure during the winter months. Sand bass can also be found on main lake humps.

While crappie fishing will get tougher as winter progresses, sandies will be good throughout the colder months, as will the hybrids. Look to 25' for sandies, and

deeper for the hybrids, around 35 feet. Deadsticking will be the key, adjusting the size of your bait to the species you are targeting. Bigger baits for hybrids and smaller ones for the white bass. If you want to focus entirely on hybrids go with a swim bait body on a ½ ounce jighead in white with some silver flake, or chartreuse and silver.

Once located, sand bass will be easier to stay with, whereas hybrids will move a lot more. Use your electronics to stay with them.

WELSH — With Monticello shutting down generating operations in January of this year, Welsh will become the go-to lake for power plant fishing. At least, as long as Welsh is generating.

Power plant lakes depend on the generation of electricity, which in turn means that the lake water is drawn in to cool the generating equipment. This now warmed water is released back into the lake, creating a warm water haven for bass and other gamefish.

Spawning activity on these lakes will occur much earlier in the year, and overall fish activity is increased as well. This means anglers can have good fishing days even in the coldest weather, since the water temps stay much higher than the air temperature. Once known as one of the best lakes for big bass, Welsh is now more of a numbers lake. You can still catch the occasional good one, so be prepared. Start around the upper north end, near the channel, timber and hydrilla.

January will see post-spawn fish if they've been generating. A topwater like a Yellow Magic in alewife or Japanese shad could work all day, if there is some cloud cover. A ¼ ounce spinnerbait will also work if there's some wind. If you get one of those bluebird skies try a Senko around the hydrilla. It's hard to go wrong with watermelon-red, but junebug, green pumpkin and even bubblegum will also work.

If not getting the action shallow, take those colors deep on a drop-shot or Carolina rig on the well-known main lake hump. There's timber and a pretty good drop into the channel. Use your electronics to locate the hump, toss a buoy and catch some fish!

FORK — Crappie are easy to find on Fork in the winter. You can usually just look for the boat flotilla on the lake near the dam. You'll want to use jigs unless the

wind is up, then go with the old fashioned crappie rig and minnows.

Lake Fork is one of those lakes with special regulations on crappie through the winter months. The first 25 crappie caught, regardless of length, must be retained. This is due to the fact that winter crappie usually come from deeper water. When pulled to the surface the bladder of the fish expands, and they will not survive being released. Rather than waste fish, TPWD decided to make an exception to the minimum length limit.

Sand bass will be on main lake points and structure. You'll need to scan a point as far as 100 yards offshore to get a true picture of where they are holding. Once located your jigging spoons and Alabama rigs will catch a limit.

Bass will be where you find them. January can see two or three days of warm weather followed by a cold snap. Warm weather will see fish moving out of the 30' range, up into 15' or so. They do this on and off throughout the month in anticipation of the spawn.

This month bass are looking for a warmer environment. Three days of sun will warm the shallower water a few degrees and bass will take advantage of this. While they are there, they'll scout around for pre-spawn holding areas, usually near a channel with a deep drop.

That is the place to be with a jig-and-pig. A ½ or ¾ ounce black & brown, or black- brown- green with four to five strands of orange will get their attention. Crawl the jig across the bottom until it hits something, then shake it for a few shakes. Most days you'll want to fish deep with the drop-shot or Carolina rig, even a deep diving crankbait. Four inch worms on the draggin' rigs and shad colors in the crank.

You can't forget the spinnerbait and lipless crankbait. Many huge fish have been caught on red 'Traps. One-quarter ounce in a red craw or variant has tallied a lot of giants, as have the ¼ to ½ ounce spinnerbaits in chartreuse/white or various reds also.

Anglers in the know will have some of the old school jerkbaits tied on. The hardbait jerkbait with three treble hooks is what you want to fish. Fire tiger, Tennessee shad or black/gold are the color choices.

LEWISVILLE — I only fish this lake in the colder months as it carries way too much pleasure craft for my liking when it warms to comfortable temperatures.

For hybrid fishing it is a fantastic lake when you get the chance to fish there. Use a ½ to 1 ounce leadhead with a Zoom Super Fluke in white, bone or chartreuse. You'll want to experiment with the colors as some days they prefer one or the other.

Find the bait that will be balled up over deep water near the dam. Look near the timbered areas. Usually the deadstick technique is the way to go. Walloping the bottom of your boat with a mallet will break up the bait ball, and trigger the hybrids to feed. Now it's just a matter of getting your bait down to the fish and hanging on.

LAKE O' THE PINES — Once the water temperature at Lake O' the Pines reaches the low 50s or below, crappie will pull out of brush and trees and go to creek channels. Drift across the channel with jigs or minnows, using a dropper and two 1/8 oz. jigs on a line. Let them drop to 20 to 30 feet deep. The best colors are shades of chartreuse and/or blue with green.

When the water temps rise into the mid-fifties and higher, you'll see a move to shallow water. Follow the temperature and find the fish.

This is another lake with special crappie regulations through the winter so be sure to consult the TPWD annual or check the TPWD website for specifics.

WHITNEY — According to biologists, this lake is in the best shape in its 60+ year history. Surveys have all confirmed that Whitney is back with a vengeance after drought and algae ravaged it over the last 10 years.

As for the fishing, stripers should be out from the state park shoreline at old Highway 22. Check your electronics and try strolling with swim baits in chartreuse, or dead-sticking Assassins in chartreuse or pearl with a chartreuse tail.

Sand bass fishermen should fish the Bee Bluff area, on the humps, with slabs and spoons. Catfishing fans will find blue cats on the flats. Try cut shad over the channel edges in the tops of the trees. You'll be fishing in 60-80 feet of water, but keep your bait in the tops of the trees.

In the Brazos River proper you can catch hybrids from Steele Creek to the mouth of Nolan river. You'll want to fish the deeper water in the bends of the river. Dead-sticked Assassin baits will be the ticket. Sand bass will take downsized leadhead/grub combinations.

RAY ROBERTS — If you did well on

Ray Bob in December, you should be fine in January. The two months fish much the same unless there is a radical change in weather.

Bass should be active and catchable on suspending jerkbaits in firetiger, especially around rocky points with a drop-off nearby. Deep-diving crankbaits like a Profound Lures bait in firetiger or chrome/black back in these same places will also work. Look to the roadbeds and timbered to produce bass on Texas rigged blue flake worms. A black/blue jig and pig combination is a good choice as well.

When the largemouths won't bite, the sand bass will. Take a one ounce slab out to the main lake ridges, points and humps. You'll be looking at your electronics for fish in the 30' range. The "hayfield," just north of Wolf Island will also hold fish, at least until they move to the creeks late in the month.

Crappie on Ray Roberts should be in the deeper water around the State Park cove and the old 455 roadbed. These are clearly marked on the better maps of the lake, as are the old Corps of Engineers' brush piles, which can also hold fish.

Every year I remind folks that catfishing should be great under the birds, and by birds we mean Cormorants, not gulls. Cormorants eat fish and then, well, they poop! This material will contain undigested fish which the catfish will eat. Find a tree with lots of Cormorants, and you'll find catfish. Drop a prepared bait in a white color and you'll start catching right away.

Here is one final fishing tip for this month. TPWD stocks thousands of rainbow trout in various ponds and waters each year as part of the Neighborhood Fishing initiative. All that is needed is a light or ultra-light spinning rod spooled with four to six pound test line and some small hooks. You can bait with Velveeta cheese, marshmallows, corn, salmon eggs or any number of prepared baits. Small Mepps spinnerbaits are also good options for those that want to "chunk 'n wind."

These fish are easy and fun to catch, taste great and are an excellent way to introduce kids to fishing. Check out the TPWD website for rules, stocking locations and tips on catching the fish.

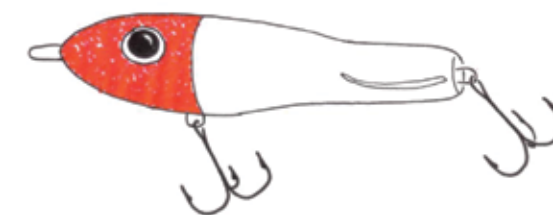
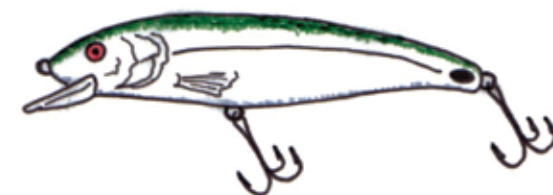
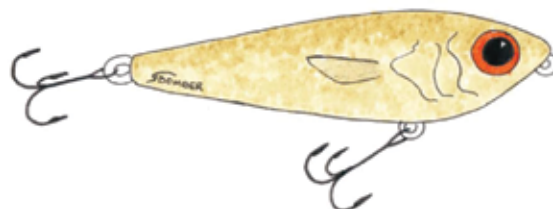
January can be a great month for fishing in this part of the state. Take a child fishing, secure our heritage for another generation! 🦗🌟



Slow Down for Trophy Trout



January is the time when the hunt for trophy trout begins in earnest. While catching big trout takes skill and patience, it doesn't take an extraordinary selection of different lures. During the winter, trophy trout feed almost exclusively on mullet. So, serious trout seekers should limit their selection to mullet imitating plugs that can be used at various water depths.



Big, dog-walker style topwater plugs are a good starting point. Giant trout will often inhale a well-worked surface plug even on a cold day -- especially over shallow mud flats. The key to consistently drawing strikes on topwater lures this time of year is to work the bait slow and make it seem like an irresistibly easy meal.

When fish are swirling on topwaters but not taking them aggressively, they can often be enticed to strike floater/diver plugs. These baits can be retrieved twitch-and-pause style, which allows the bait to float back to the surface between twitches, or can be made to swim just beneath the surface with a slow, steady retrieve.

Slow-sinking and suspending plugs are perhaps the most popular among trophy trout fishermen -- especially when fish are found in between two and four feet of water. These baits work by finesse and must be retrieved slowly, with anglers imparting just enough action to draw strikes by twitching the lure every so often. But, patience is a prerequisite to utilizing slow-sinking and suspending baits.

If fish are found in four to six feet of water, sinking baits like the DOA Baitbuster are good choices as they quickly get to depth and remain there throughout the retrieve. These baits can be retrieved with a steady reeling retrieve or twitched like a slow-sinking bait.

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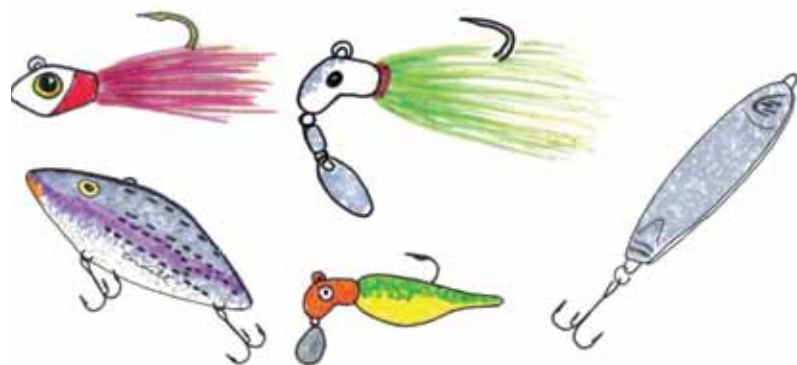
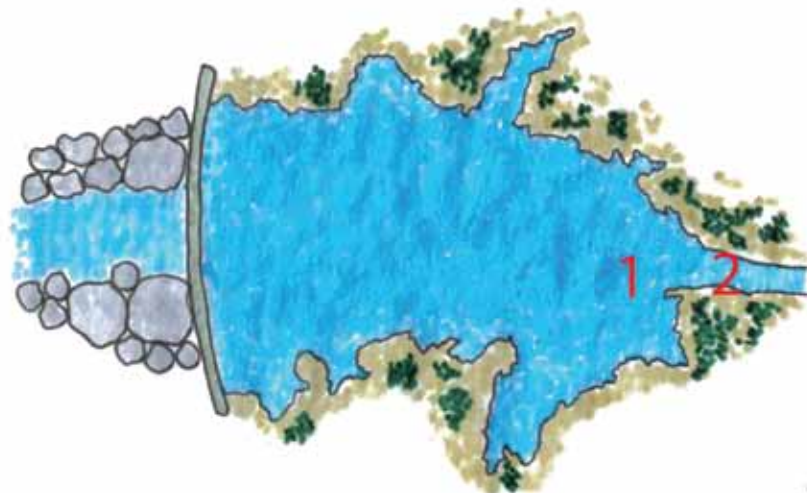


Staging for a Run



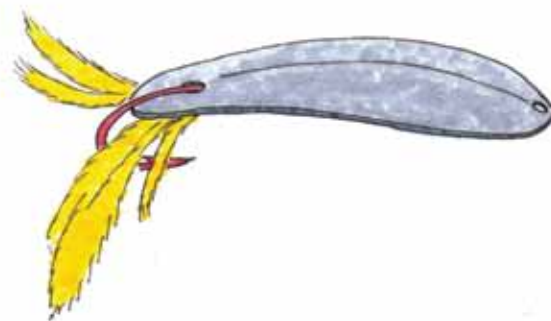
As the calendar turns to a new year, the attention of many Texas freshwater fishermen will turn to white bass. Depending on the particular lake, the annual white bass run can begin anywhere from January to March. But, just about every body of water will see an uptick in white bass action during the year's first month.

Before beginning their annual run, white bass will begin staging in front of rivers and creeks that drain into reservoirs (1). Once the run begins, the fish will enter the rivers and creeks (2) and push as far upstream as possible -- only stopping once the water level is too shallow. When fishermen find the school, they are usually able to follow them on their migration over the course of days and weeks.



When white bass are feeding near the surface -- whether in the main lake or up rivers and creeks -- they will take a variety of lures. Lipless crankbaits are popular, as are various jigs and spoons. Typically "flashy" baits work best. And, when the action is hot and heavy, it is usually advantageous to use single hook lures as they are quicker and safer to use when unhooking fish quickly.

When white bass are holding deeper, which often happens when they are staging in the main lake, anglers can target them by trolling spoons and lures at various depths. Utilizing electronics can help pinpoint schools of fish suspended beneath the surface. It is not uncommon to also catch hybrid and striped bass while trolling on lakes where those species are also present.



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Keep on Hunting

This month the general whitetail deer seasons wrap up in the North Zone (Jan. 7) and in the South Zone (Jan. 21). Many hunters that only pursue deer lament the long “layoff” until seasons reopen in the fall.

The same frustration also befalls some waterfowl hunters. Duck seasons statewide close January 28 as does the goose season in the East Zone. The West Zone goose season closes Feb. 4. After that, waterfowl hunters have the Late Conservation Season for Light Geese. Otherwise many sit and wait for mid-September and the early teal season.

However, there are a lot of other hunting opportunities in the Lone Star State. All a hunter needs to do is adjust and adapt.

Birds hunters can take advantage of hunting wild bobwhite and scaled quail statewide until Feb. 25. Populations have rebounded with lots of options for these native birds. Even through the month of March many gamebird operations continue to hunt a variety of released upland birds.

Shotgunners should also practice their calling, pattern a shotgun and get ready for spring turkey season. This underutilized resource is a kick to hunt, and other than elk is the only animal a hunter can call, get a vocal response with the game seeking out the caller. The North Zone season runs March 31 – May 13. In the South Zone the season is March 17 – April 29. In the counties with a Special One Gobbler Bag Limit the season is April 1 – 30.

For hunters that like to call game, try predator hunting. Late winter and spring are an excellent time to call. There are a number of electronic calls that are easy to use and very effective on coyotes, bobcats, gray fox, and other predators that prey on deer as well as ground nesting birds. In a game management plan, predators need to be managed just as well as the game animals.



When May rolls around it is time to return to the ways of our youth. The spring squirrel season is opened in East Texas, May 1-31. It is a great way to introduce a youngster to small game hunting, stalking and still hunting, as well as call with a chatter call. It's also a great way to reminisce with an “old buddy” about younger days afield.

From the time deer season and waterfowl seasons close well into the time Texas starts to really heat up there are a number of big game hunting options. Free range exotics like nilgai in South Texas has a growing following. These exotics are tenacious and wary, have excellent eyesight, take a big hit to put one down and provide excellent table-fare.

Free-ranging axis deer and other escaped imports only adds to the challenge of hunting a variety of unrestricted game. There are certainly some excellent large game ranches that also provide hunts, however, when these animals have to fend for themselves without benefit of protein feed stations the challenge to hunt them increases. As unrestricted game they can be hunted year round and even at night using artificial light.

Plus don't forget about the ever-growing population of wild hogs. With a little effort and a few phone calls, a variety of hog hunts across the state can be found at a very reasonable price.

In South Texas hunting javelina is available. The season opens on September 1 each year and runs through August 31. That season alone defines year around hunting.



For more information on seasons, bag limits and other hunting opportunities, check out the Texas Parks & Wildlife Outdoor Annual, Outdoor Annual app, or website. There is no excuse not to keep on hunting.

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Outdoor Calendar

THROUGH JANUARY 7, 2018,

Whitetail Deer general season, North Texas, **226 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 7, 2018,

Dove, Late Season, Central Zone, **138 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 21, 2018,

Rio Grande Turkey fall season, South Texas, **26 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 21, 2018,

Whitetail Deer general season, South Texas, **30 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 21, 2018,

Sandhill Crane season, Zone C. **(51 counties)**. Migratory Game Bird Stamp & Federal Sandhill Crane Permit Required. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 21, 2018,

Dove, Late Season, South Zone, **32 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

Light and Dark Geese season, East Zone, **123 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

"Dusky" Duck season, High Plains Mallard Management Unit. **92 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

Sandhill Crane season, Zone A. **103 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

Sandhill Crane season, Zone B. **63 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

High Plains Mallard Management Unit: Regular duck season. **Second**

Split. For information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

Duck regular season, second split, North Zone (139 counties). **139 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

"Dusky" Duck season, second split, North Zone. **139 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

Duck regular season, second split, South Zone, **(54 counties)**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

Duck regular season, second split, South Zone, **(54 counties)**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 31, 2018,

Woodcock, **Statewide**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 4, 2018,

Light and Dark Geese season, West Zone, **151 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 11, 2018,

Wilson's Snipe (Common snipe or Jacksnipe) season, **Statewide**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 25, 2018,

Javelina season, **North Zone**. For

more information you can consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, visit the TPWD website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 25, 2018,

Squirrel Season, **51 East Texas counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 25, 2018,

Quail season, **Statewide**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 25, 2018,

Rio Grande Turkey fall season, **Brooks, Kenedy, Kleberg, Willacy counties**. For more information you can consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 26, 2018,

Chacalaca season, **four Rio Grande Valley counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or you can call

(800) 792-1112.

THROUGH AUGUST 31, 2018

Javelina season, **South Zone**. For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

JANUARY 4-7,

Dallas Safari Club Annual Convention and Exposition — Adventure, Kay Bailey Hutchinson Convention Center, **Dallas**. For show hours and more information you can visit www.biggame.org or call (972) 980-9800.

JANUARY 4-7,

San Antonio Boat & Travel Trailer Show, Henry B. Gonzales Convention Center, **San Antonio**. For show hours and more information visit www.sanantonioboatshow.com, or call (512) 481-1777.

JANUARY 5-14,

63rd Annual Houston International Boat, Sport & Travel Show, NRG Center, **Houston**. For ticket information and show hours, you can call (713) 526-6361 or the website

at www.houstonboatshows.com.

JANUARY 18-21,

Austin Boat & Travel Trailer Show, Austin Convention Center, **Austin**. For more information visit www.austinboatshow.com, or call (512) 494-1128.

JANUARY 27,

West Bay Big Trout Tournament & Fundraiser, West End Marina, **Galveston**. For more information visit fishwestend.com or call (713) 594-4252.

JANUARY 26-28,

Houston Safari Club's Annual Convention and Worldwide Hunting Expo, George R. Brown Convention Center, **Houston**. For show hours and more information visit www.houstonsafariclub.org, or call (713) 623-8844.

JANUARY 29 – MARCH 18,

Light Geese Conservation season, East Zone, **123 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112. **TAJ**

Mail your Outdoor Calendar items to:

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Tide Tables

Table with 7 columns (SUN to SAT) and 6 rows of tide data for January 2018. Each cell contains high/low tide times and heights, with day numbers 1-31 at the bottom.

Table with 7 columns (SUN to SAT) and 6 rows of tide data for February 2018. Each cell contains high/low tide times and heights, with day numbers 1-29 at the bottom.

Table titled 'Times are for Galveston, Galveston Channel' with 3 columns: TIME DIFFERENCES, High, and Low. Lists various locations and their corresponding tide differences.

Fishing & Hunting Times

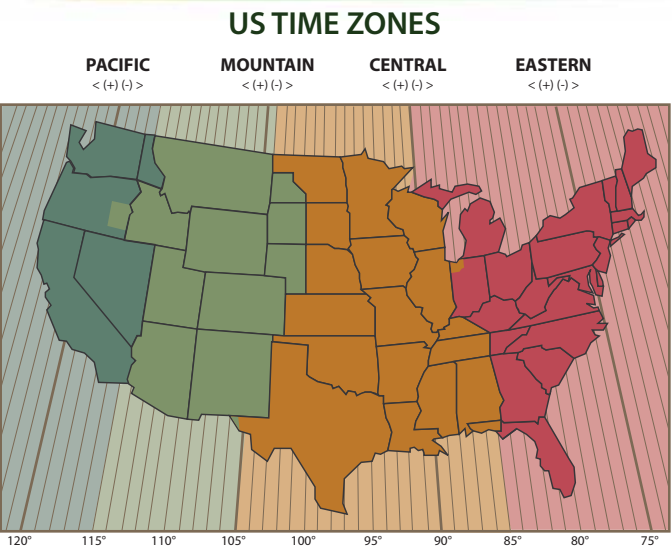


Table with 7 columns (SUN to SAT) and 6 rows of moon phase and feeding time data for January 2018. Includes moon phases (Full, New) and time ranges.

Table with 7 columns (SUN to SAT) and 6 rows of moon phase and feeding time data for February 2018. Includes moon phases (Full, New) and time ranges.

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