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Low-Down on Sabine Lake Reds

TEXAS OUTDOORS

"Texas' Most Comprehensive Outdoors Publication"

JOURNAL



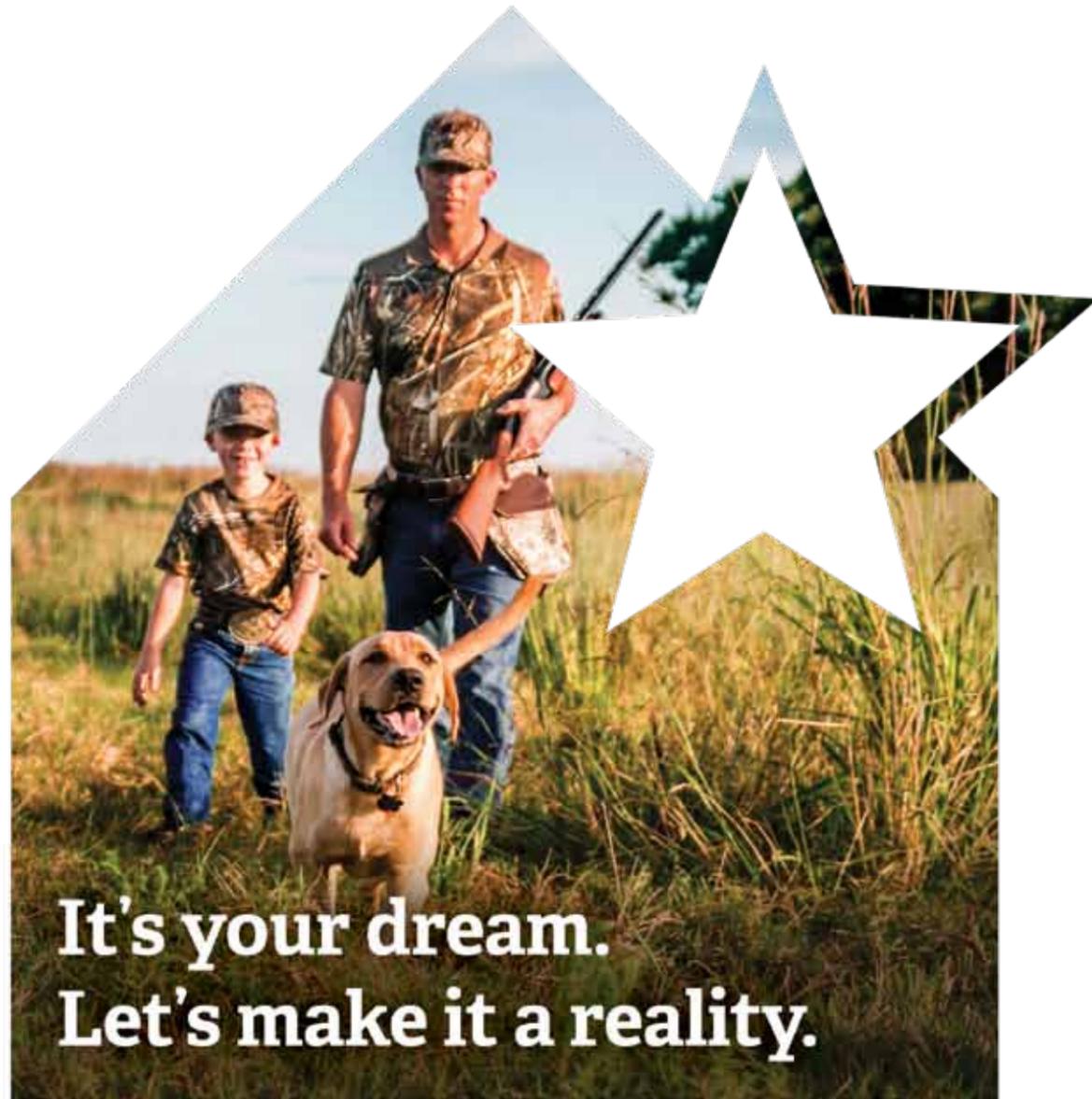
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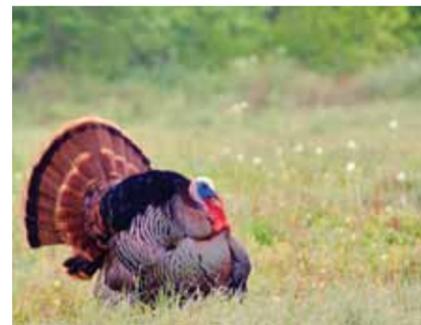
TEXAS OUTDOORS

"Texas' Most Comprehensive Outdoors Publication" **JOURNAL**

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WHEN IT'S REAL

Last fall my best friend from Baylor days, Buck Payne and I were sharing our impressions of a football game over the telephone while we watched. He was at his home and I was at mine.

As the game progressed he kept making a comment about a play he just saw and I had not yet seen. We had different cable providers and he was seeing the action 10 to 12 seconds ahead of me.

It dawned on me that no matter how much I shouted at the television screen, or offered up prayers for divine intervention on an "upcoming play" the outcome had already been determined. I was like the fan that walks into a room, sees a touchdown run on the television and goes nuts during the run — not knowing it was a replay.

The proverbial light bulb went off at that moment. It made me consider many facets of life — what is really real and what is not.

On that day, if we had not been in the stands on game day, we really would not have known if what we are watching had occurred or was a delayed reproduction. The only way to experience reality is to be there as it happens.

The same is true of the outdoors, plus just like a sporting event it is liberally sprinkled with subtleties or "gifts" we begin to see or appreciate as we gain experience. There is nothing about the electronic age that can replace the real thing.

I remember an early season teal hunt on the old Skull Creek Ranch in Altair decades ago. A family friend's foreman took me to a remote cigar-shaped gravel pit he thought would hold a ton of teal. As we snuck up on the gravel pond we could hear the chatter of teal and saw the water covered with the fleet-flighted fowl.

Then from my back a Mexican eagle swooped down, snatched one of the small ducks from the water with its talons and flew off. I was stunned to have witnessed such a sight.

Even if I had a camera with me I don't believe I could have reacted to the sight. There is no way I could have been that lucky.

Even if I had been so lucky to capture a frame or two there is no way that would have represented the spectacle of the teal lifting up and settling right back down as the danger flew off with one of their own. It was truly a gift of a special sight on an otherwise normal hunt.

More recently Payne and I were fishing for speckled trout along the Sabine Channel. We had been out to the jetties and were working our way back in when in deeper water we saw some bottle-nose porpoise really churning up the water.

At first we thought they had a school of fish balled up and were feasting. Then it became apparent several porpoise were circling a single porpoise.

It became apparent what we were actually watching was a female giving birth to her calf. The other porpoise circling action created an uplifting current that help keep the mother on the surface during the final moments of the delivery. It was obvious the instant the birth had occurred as the bloody embryonic fluid spread across the teal green surface. Then mother, calf and the rest of the pod swam off as a new life had begun.

Spring begins on the 20th of this month. The only way to know what is real is to be there. It is a great way to bond with friends, spouse and certainly children.

Keep it real. The experiences are priceless with memories that last a lifetime.

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

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Texas Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame Announces 2018 Inductees

The Texas Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame committee announced Shannon Tompkins and the Lake Fork Sportsman's Association, will be inducted into the hall of fame in 2018.

Shannon Tompkins, of Porter, is a reporter and columnist at the Houston Chronicle who focuses on the Texas outdoors – with an emphasis on freshwater fishing and hunting.

Tompkins is a past president of the Texas Outdoor Writers Association, has won national and state awards to include the Sierra Club's Lone Star Environmental Reporting Award, multiple Excellence in Craft awards from the Texas Outdoor Writers Association and the Outdoor Writers Association of America, and an award from the Texas bureau of The Associated Press.

Tompkins has covered a wide range of freshwater fishing topics in his articles including highlighting recreational fishing, state fisheries management and regulations, and aquatic invasive species and their impact on the environment. His

writings have reached millions of people all across Texas.

The Lake Fork Sportsman's Association, nominated into the industry or organization category, has worked to protect and promote Lake Fork's natural resources since 1999.

The LFSA has partnered with state and local agencies, community organizations, and high schools on many projects to include operating a live release boat to decrease tournament stress on the fishery, donating fishing tackle to high school fishing teams, hosting free fishing events to draw kids into the outdoors, placing artificial habitats into the lake to enhance recreational fishing, and planting native aquatic vegetation to improve habitat for fish and wildlife.

The LFSA also established the Jesse Parker Memorial Scholarship, named after a long time Lake Fork fishing guide and businessman, to provide tuition money to high school seniors pursuing a career in outdoor fields like fisheries biology and wildlife management. To date, the

LFSA has given more than \$20,000 to these students.

The Texas Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame is housed at the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center in Athens. Its mission is to “recognize and honor those who have made a lasting contribution to freshwater fishing in Texas, and to foster a sense of appreciation, awareness and participation in the sport of fishing.”

Both inductees will be formally inducted into the Hall of Fame at the 2018 Toyota Bassmaster Texas Fest benefiting Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in May. 🌟🌟

RMEF Soars to 9th Straight Year of Record Membership

Riding a wave of conservation success, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation enters 2018 with 227,650 members, marking its ninth consecutive year of record membership growth.

“This continual sustained growth is a reflection of our on-the-ground conservation mission and improved advocacy

Cover Art

Coastal water temperatures are warming, the official start of spring arrives on March 20 and speckled trout are beginning their annual spawn. With increased activity saltwater anglers will pick their days to wade or drift grass flats and sandy potholes.

Popular marine artist Steve Whitlock has painted a scene entitled “Spotted Seatrout” that stirs the passion of coastal fishermen — speckled trout feeding on a live shrimp. Shrimp will be making their way back into coastal bays this month and are the staple for gamefish through early spring.

Coastal Conservation Association – Texas has once again selected Whitlock as its artist for this year's fundraisers. One framed “Spotted Seatrout” will be available at each CCA-Texas banquets in 2018.

For more information on “Spotted Seatrout,” other fine works of art, chart-art or commissions available by Steve Whitlock, visit www.stevewhitlock.com, email steve@stevewhitlock.com, follow on Facebook or call (941) 359-8106. 🌟🌟



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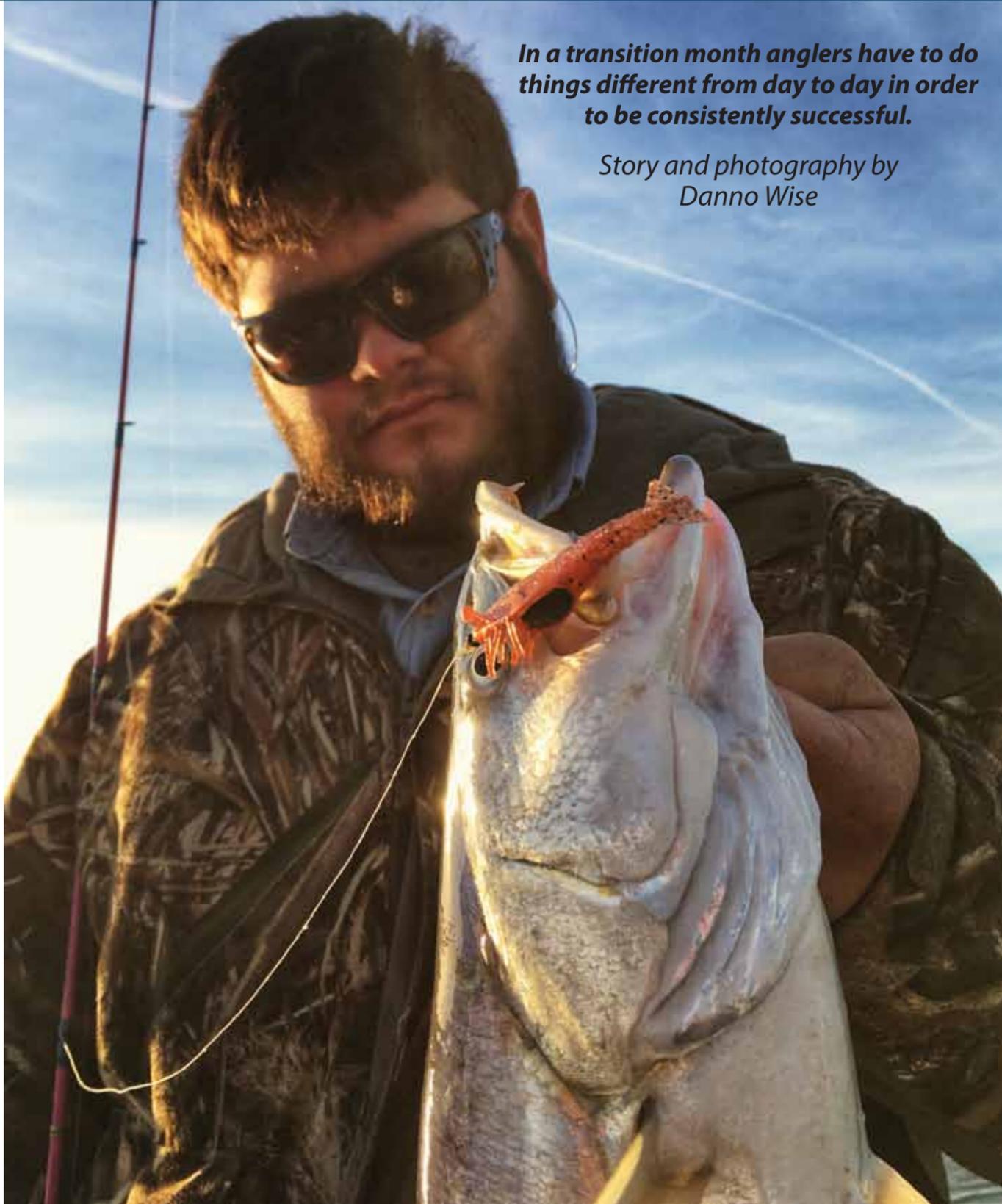


Flying into Scott Lake in Saskatchewan's far north.

TIME OF EXTREMES

In a transition month anglers have to do things different from day to day in order to be consistently successful.

Story and photography by Danno Wise



March is a transition month. It is a simple fact that as winter fades to spring, fishing patterns, weather and water conditions begin to change.

Often times in March, these changes are very dramatic, but then occasionally there can be periods that are surprisingly subtle. It really the third month of the year is a month with lots of extremes. So, while anglers are accustomed to change during the seasonal transitions, it is not so much that things vary that sets March apart but how wildly they vary.

Weather

The weather in March can vacillate from winter to nearly summer-like temperatures. Winds can vary from dead calm to gusty, gale-force breezes.

There are times in March when anglers can end up fishing as if the fish are still in a winter pattern. For the most part, this means a finesse-fishing pattern — slow and methodical, just the same as winter. To be effective, fishermen must find a spot where fish are likely to be holding and wear it out with repeated casts. As is the case in winter, areas holding fish will likely be holding substantial concentrations of



As winter gives way to spring, fishing patterns, weather and water conditions begin to change.

them, so catching good numbers are a very real possibility.

Hot

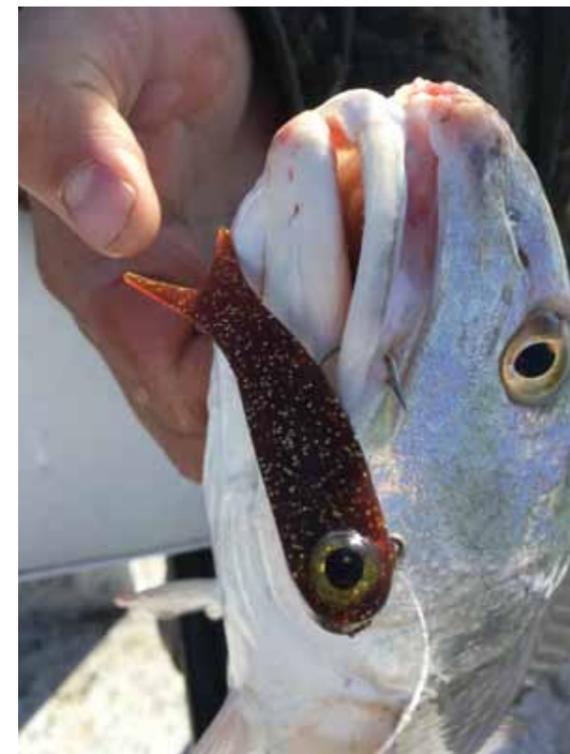
There are days in March when the air temperature can rival summer. However, the water won't get quite warm enough this month to trigger summer fishing patterns. But, it will be warm enough to allow fish to get further up on the flats if there is a period of extended warm weather. This means anglers can work baits more quickly, utilizing power fishing tactics while covering lots of water.

Water Clarity

Muddy

Late fronts or sustained southerly spring breezes usually mean March sees its fair share of windy days. These windy days usually result in dirty water - lots and lots of dirty water. Far too often anglers spend the majority of their time running around and looking for 'good water.'

Not only is this not necessary, it is often counterproductive. Some of the spring fishing happens right in the middle of some of the muddiest water. So, rather than avoiding dirty water, anglers should learn how to fish in it.



Matching color to water clarity plus appropriate size to available bait and then adding a little extra fish attracting vibration when needed are all choices anglers will need to make this month. The D.O.A.'s TerrorEyz that caught this redfish was fished in off-colored water.

Most often, anglers fishing dirty water for the first time resort to live bait, believing artificials won't produce in such conditions. While live shrimp, croaker and mullet will catch plenty of specks in off-color water, so will plugs and plastics. The key is choosing the right colors - usually darks and brights work best - and the right action - a paddle tail plastic will give more vibration than a straight-tail bait.

Also, since visibility is reduced, baits - natural or artificial - should be retrieved fairly slowly to allow fish to hone in on them. With plastics and live baits, a cork can aid anglers with a slow retrieve and also induces fish attracting sound. With plugs, patience is the key - work the lure as slowly as possible and practical.

One final note on off-colored or muddy water - the fish are usually less spooky, allowing fishermen to catch fish closer to the boat and not worry as much about a stealthy approach.

Clear

Every now and then, conditions calm enough to allow waters to clear. In early spring, the water is still not warm enough for all the various marine blooms which often cloud the water. So once the wind stops long enough to allow suspended sediment to settle, the water becomes quite clear. While this allows anglers some sight-casting opportunities, it also means that fish will be a little more spooky, so stealth is the name of the game on clear water days.

Water Depth

Deep

At times it will be just like winter fishing in March, meaning that fish are in deep holes and channels. On many "cool" days, the mid-depth and deep flats will also produce good numbers. In fact, "schoolie" trout will stay fairly deep throughout the month of March. So, an-



When the wind stops long enough to allow suspended sediment to settle, the water becomes quite clear, which allows anglers some sight-casting opportunities. It also means fish will a little more spooky, so stealth is the name of the game.

glers looking for consistent numbers can usually do well in channels, channel edges, deeper flats and mid-bay reefs or humps.

Shallow

As the month wears on and the water continues to warm, fish will begin spending more and more time in the shallows. This is especially true for redfish and sow speckled trout. However, often times they haven't moved to areas with complete sand bottom yet, so anglers should continue to look for mud or mud/sand mix bottoms.

Baits

Large & Loud

During spring, it is often still a "big bait for big fish" scenario. Anglers should certainly use big baits when the water is muddy

or rough. These conditions also call for big, bulky plugs that displace a lot of water - paddle tail plastics, prop baits, large popping corks, rattles - anything that moves water or makes noise can be effective in off-color water during spring.

Small & Silent

March is the month that ushers in spring. Spring's warmer weather and warmer water welcomes new life to Texas' inshore bays. Shrimp, crab and finfish have - or soon will - release this year's crop of younglings. When this happens, the bay's resident predators will shift their focus from large, hard to catch adults to the young, naïve hatchlings populating the flats. Because there will be lots of newly hatched prey, anglers can often score big on small baits.

Smaller lures are particularly good when water is clear or fishing around swarms of small fry. Basically it goes back to the "match the hatch" principle. In clearer water, anglers should use quieter, stealthier lures - straight-tail soft-plastic jerkbaits, floater/diver plugs, and cigar-shaped Mansfield mauler type cork rigs.

Dark

As spring winds and rain runoff turn bay waters a turbid tan, dark lures are much more productive than translucent or natural colors. From topwater plugs to soft-plastic jigs, black is the go-to color when fishing murky water. However, other dark colors such as red shad, plumtreuse, and LSU work well also.

Light

Fishermen are fascinated by color. In fact, most anglers spend a great deal of time determining the best color to use in order to get a fish's attention under various conditions.

Although lures come in every color of the spectrum, natural prey items do not. Very few finfish - and even fewer crustaceans - living along the Gulf Coast are brightly colored. The vast majority of the prey items sought out by speckled trout and redfish are decorated in a manner that allows them to blend into their environment. And, particularly during their juvenile stage, many of them aren't colored at all. These tiny fish and shrimp are translucent, often appearing as clear 'globs' with tiny black eyes.

When the water is off-colored, predator fish usually have to rely on vibrations sent out by their prey in order to locate it. Under these conditions fishermen can

often up their odds by choosing colors that help fish find their lures. However, when the water clears, these same opaque colors seem out of place and actually can reduce the number of strikes anglers get during the day.

In order to up their odds on ultra-clear water days, anglers often need to go against their normal habit of choosing a 'something they can see' and pick something a little less visible.

Tides

Last extreme to mention for March is the extremely high spring flood tides. When these tides flood in, they push fish way back into the marsh and, further south, behind lines of mangroves. High tides will also submerge bars that are normally exposed. Anglers have to adjust because flats have an additional foot or two of water as well. The high water level changes the way fish act and where they are found.

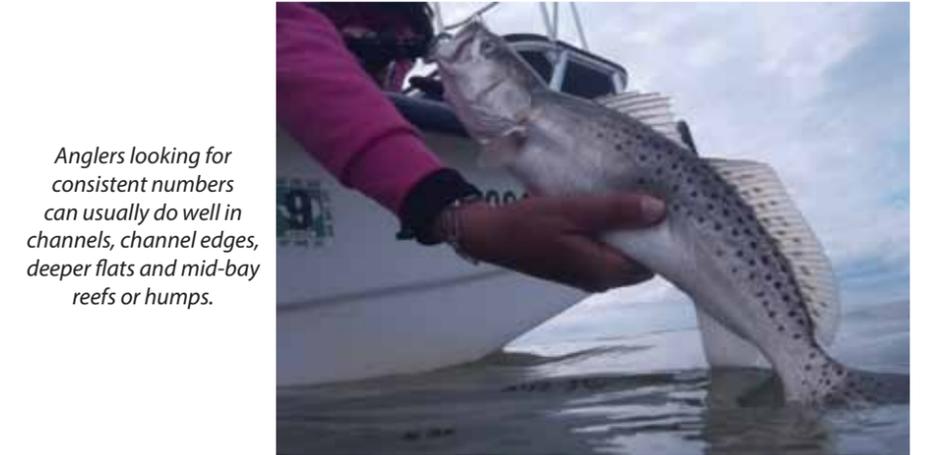
Redfish like to push up on newly flooded areas to feed while trout that were hanging on mid-bay reefs will be found deeper than they were prior to the flood tides. Both reds and specks will push up along the shores and into back lakes and marshes. When the tides begin to fall, these fish will move out and be found outside the mouths or drains in the main bay.

The other factor, which is often overlooked dealing with spring tides is the velocity of current during periods of tidal movement. It only stands to reason that when more water is moving in and out of the bay, the current will be stronger and, often longer.

Stronger current doesn't always mean better fishing. In fact, some areas close to major passes may be unfishable during periods of peak tide movement as the current may be rushing through too fast. Those areas are better fish as the tide first begins moving or as it slows right after peak movement.

In some of the back bay areas that rarely see a noticeable tidal flow will often benefit from a strong, sustained flow during spring. If fishing a peak tidal movement, anglers will need heavier heads to get baits down and keep them lower in the water column.

March fishing can be outstanding on the Texas coast. But, anglers have to be prepared to do things radically different from day to day in order to be consistently successful. 🌟🌟



Anglers looking for consistent numbers can usually do well in channels, channel edges, deeper flats and mid-bay reefs or humps.



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What Varmint Calibers Are Best?

Any caliber can be a varmint caliber. I have a customer who shoots little varmints with a .375 H&H. Another customer uses a .375 Ultra Mag for long range shooting. Both of these individuals shoot prairie dogs as practice for the primary type of hunting they do.

I have used a variety of different calibers for shooting prairie dogs — everything from .22 LR to .25-06. There are several standard calibers used for prairie dog shooting like the .223 Rem, .22-250, .243 Win, 6.5 Grendel, and 6mm-284.

There are pros and cons to using any of these calibers. I hope to straighten out a few ideas on their performance.

First, we have to decide what is a varmint. While trophy hunting in New Zealand we were hunting Spanish goats on a particular ranch. When we showed up, the land owner asked us to kill as many as possible. Their numbers were out of control and if we didn't kill enough, the New Zealand government was going to come in and shoot them out of helicopters at a charge to the landowner. All of a sudden a trophy animal had become a varmint. My 7mm STW and my wife's .35 Whelen became varmint calibers.

I have also done culling of both whitetail and axis deer in Texas. Their numbers have gotten so out of control that the doe would weigh less than 60 pounds. In those instances, deer had become varmints.



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

The author suggested several rifle calibers as choices for varmint hunting. It just so happens TOJ's Bill Olson has heard that advice and has rifles chambered in three of the four calibers mentioned. Pictured are (front to back) MG Arms Tarantis (AR-15 platform) in 6.5 Grendel, DPMS Coyote in .223 and MG Arms Varminter in 22-250.

In most cases, the most common varmints we have in Texas are coyotes, bobcats, grey fox, prairie dogs, and wild hogs. Some people don't put feral hogs in with the varmint family, but with more than six million in Texas and all the damage they do to ranch and farmland, they have to be considered varmint. Plus Texas Parks & Wildlife and the Health Departments continues to look for some sort of poison that can "safely" be used to help reduce the number of wild swine in the Lone Star State. So yes, wild swine

have become varmints or at the very least destructive vermin.

So, what are the pros and cons to the typical varmint calibers and what bullet should be used?

My two favorite calibers for shooting varmint have always been either the .22-250 or the .220 Swift. Both of these are what I consider universal calibers. I can shoot any varmint from hogs on to gray fox or bobcats. These two calibers shoot fast and flat plus have enough retained energy to punch big holes in hogs or slam coyotes.

Now here is one of the problems — if you are coyote hunting and want to save the fur, these calibers have a problem of tearing the hides up really bad. The same if you want the meat off a hog — there are better rounds for this.

The .223 Remington is a great varmint caliber and it doesn't blow things up too bad. If you are trying to save the fur off coyotes then nothing beats a .223 using a hardcore bullet or even better a FMJ bullet.

This caliber is perfect out to 350 yards and the available ammunition makes it

inexpensive to shoot. Plus, whether you buy factory ammo or handload there are hundreds of bullet types available for the .223 Rem.

My bolt action and AR15 rifle in this caliber seem to shoot the 50 to 55-grain bullets best. My favorite bullet for shooting prairie dogs is a Nosler 50-Grain Blista Tip, or the 50-grain Sierra Blits King. They will blow up a Pot Gut with any type of a hit.

For hogs, a little heavier bullet like the 60-Grain Partition or the 53-grain Sierra Match King works well.

To save the fur on a coyote I always use the 55-grain FMJ. Some guns don't shoot them as well as I like, so I try several different brands to find what my rifle likes best. Speer makes a good FMJ bullet that shoots well in most guns.

For shooting long distances and in windy conditions nothing beats a good .243 Win or the 6mm-284 Win. I have made more 500-yard shots with these calibers on ground hogs than any other caliber.

If you have a lot of wild hogs on your ranch and want to make good one-shot kills, there are several calibers that work much better than the .22 caliber guns.

I think the best all-around bullet for the 6 mm rifles are 85-grain bullets. I noticed Hornady is loading 70-grain tipped bullets which will be fine for prairie dogs or taking down coyotes. The bigger bullet should also work better at long-range or on bigger game like hogs.

The other nice thing with these calibers is if a nice whitetail or fallow deer show up I know I can make a clean, one shot kill on one.

The last group is the 6.5 caliber guns. The 6.5 Creedmoor and the 6.5 Grendel are wonderfully accurate rifles and make the perfect dual-purpose hunting calibers.

I have built several 6.5 Creedmoor rifles and shot many of them but so far have never had the chance to hunt with one. However, I have shot several critters with the 6.5 Grendel.

The Grendel shoots the 120 to 130-grain bullet best but I have an AR I built that shoots the 100-grain A-Max in the same hole. When you hit a prairie dog with this bullet there is nothing left of them.

The Hornady 120-grain G Max work great on the bigger stuff, like hog and deer sized animals. As this is written TOJ's Bill

Olson is on a hunt in far west Texas using his 6.5 Grendel. I am looking forward to hearing how he did with it.

It is real simple, if you just want to go out and have fun on a varmint hunt than take a .22-250 bolt action and a .223 AR15 rifle. If you are going to need something bigger for wild hogs or if a deer steps out

than bring a little bigger rifle chambered in .243 Win, or a 6.5 Grendel built on an AR15 platform.

Varmint hunting is a lot of fun and you'll enjoy being able to shoot many times over the course of a day or two — not just once or twice like during a deer hunt. **T&J**



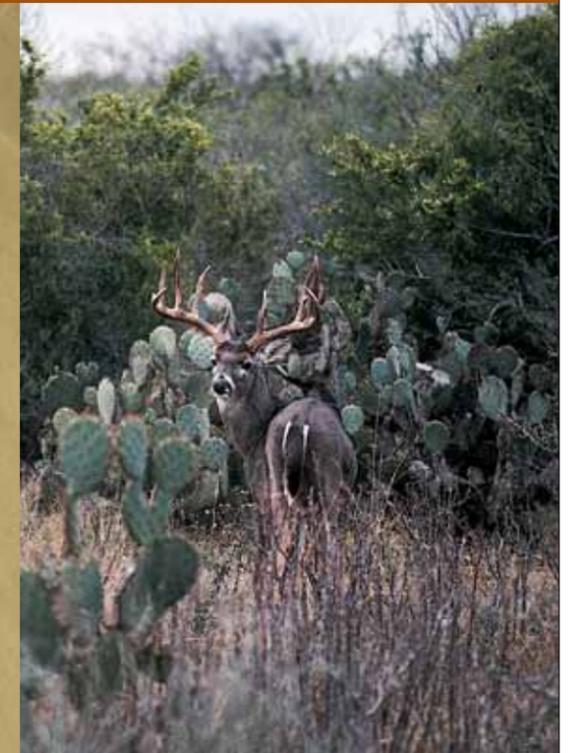
PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

The author says his two favorite varmint rounds are a 220 Swift or a 22-250. Hornady loads consistent, reliable ammunition that fills the need of varmint shooters as well as hunters of larger game.

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Big O Tragedy

A tragic boating accident that occurred last January at Florida's Lake Okeechobee should serve as a grim reminder to boaters and anglers everywhere as to how quickly a fun day fishing can turn into a nightmare.

The accident took place during the opening round of the first Costa FLW Series Southeastern Division bass tournament of the 2018 season, sending shockwaves throughout the fishing community while grabbing the attention of watermen everywhere.

Originally slated for three days, the tournament was cut short after two of the competitors - Bill Kisiah of Slidell, La., and Nicolas "Nik" Kayler of Apopka, Fla. - failed to make it back to the designated weigh-in site where the remainder of the 250-plus boat field gathered to weigh their catches at the end of the first competition day.

Kisiah was competing in the pro/boater division while Kayler was competing as a co-angler.

Often heralded as The Sunshine State, Florida turned windy and unseasonably

airish during the days leading up to the tournament as gusty winds ushered in a strong cold front that dropped outside temperatures near the freezing mark in much of the state.

Spanning 730 square miles with an average depth of nine feet, Okeechobee is a massive water body that can turn into a frothy sea of white-capping rollers under the right conditions.

The details about what happened out there remained sketchy at press time, but news reports indicated that Kisiah's 21-foot Ranger bass boat encountered rough water and speared a wave that ejected Kayler from the vessel, tossing him into the chilly water miles from shore. Kisiah subsequently lost power to his outboard engine and was unable to recover Kayler from the water.

Kisiah was located by search parties hours later when he and his boat came ashore about 11 p.m. near Pahokee Marina. Kayler, meanwhile, was nowhere to be found.

Kisiah was taken to a local hospital and treated for hypothermia, a potentially

dangerous condition resulting from a significant drop in body temperature caused by prolonged exposure to cold temperatures. An FLW photo of the two anglers before takeoff shows that both men were wearing lifejackets, as required by tournament rules.

FLW initially cancelled Day 2 of the event to aid in the search for the two anglers. The final tournament day was subsequently cancelled after early search efforts to locate Kayler were unsuccessful.

Despite intense search efforts involving the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the U.S. Coast Guard, numerous law enforcement agencies and hundreds of local fishermen and boaters, there were no signs of Kayler until searchers recovered his body nearly a week after he went missing.

Thankfully, accidents like this one don't happen very often. But when they do it always spurs a wake-up call to remind everyone from recreational boaters to fishermen and hunters of the inherent dangers and risks associated with being on the water while it's chilly outside.

While cold water doesn't pose much risk to anyone so long as they are able to stay dry, that is not the case if you happen to fall into the water unexpectedly. Simply bumping a stump with the boat or a sudden shift of the vessel created by wave action is all it takes to make a person momentarily lose their balance and fall overboard.

Either way, taking a tumble into chilly water can be a shocker. It also can also be fatal, especially if you are unable to reenter the boat promptly.

Probably the greatest danger facing anglers and boaters who take an unexpected dip is a health disorder known as hypothermia.

Hypothermia is sometimes referred to as "the silent killer" because it causes individuals suffering from it to gradually lose their motor skills and become fatigued or exhausted.

It can eventually cause a victim to become groggy or fall unconscious,

which could lead to drowning, even when wearing a lifejacket.

As earlier mentioned, the main cause of hypothermia is overexposure to a cold environment.

It occurs when a person loses body heat faster than they are able to produce it. While cold air alone can cause hypothermia, exposure to cold water can accelerate the process up to 25 times faster.

Cold Water Safety Tips

Water doesn't have to be extremely cold to cause hypothermia. Any water that's colder than normal body temperature causes heat loss. The following tips may increase your survival time in cold water if you accidentally fall in:

* **Wear a life jacket:** If you plan to ride in a watercraft, wear a life jacket. A life jacket can help you stay alive longer in cold water by enabling you to float without using energy and by providing some insulation. Keep a whistle attached to your life jacket to signal for help.

* **Get out of the water if possible.** Get out of the water as much as possible, such as climbing onto a capsized boat or grabbing onto a floating object.

* **Don't attempt to swim unless you're close to safety.** Unless a boat, another person or a life jacket is close by, stay put. Swimming will use up energy and may shorten survival time.

* **Position your body to minimize heat loss.** Use a body position known as the heat escape lessening position (HELP) to reduce heat loss while you wait for assistance. Hold your knees to your chest to protect the trunk of your body. If the lifejacket you are wearing turns your face down in this position, bring your legs tightly together, your arms to your sides and your head back.

* **Huddle with others.** If you've fallen into cold water with other people, keep warm by facing each other in a tight circle.

* **Don't remove your clothing.** While you're in the water, don't remove clothing because it helps to insulate you from the water. Buckle, button and zip up your clothes. Cover your head if possible. Remove clothing only after you're safely out of the water and can take measures to get dry and warm.

Source: Mayo Clinic ★

The textbooks define hypothermia as a drop in the temperature of the body's internal organs such as the heart, lungs and brain. Normal "core" body temperature is 98.6 degrees. Symptoms of hypothermia become evident once the "core" temperature drops below 95 degrees.

Early signs of the condition include the loss of motor skills, numbness of the body or nausea.

A hypothermia victim may eventually begin to shiver uncontrollably, develop pale skin, have difficulty speaking or become incoherent as to what is going on around them.

A person who develops hypothermia while immersed in water could eventually fall asleep or experience heart or respiratory failure.

Drowning is a common occurrence when hypothermia progresses to the latter stages. While a lifejacket will prevent you from drowning initially, it can't stop you from going face down in the water should you happen to fall unconscious.

Though drowning is a common denominator in boat-related deaths, experts believe the ultimate cause in

many wintertime drowning is probably hypothermia.

This holds especially true of victims who venture out alone and fall into the water unexpectedly. Some are able to reenter their boat without assistance. Others are not.

I fish a lot by myself and I keep two ladders on my boat at all times for this very reason.

One is made from aluminum and bolts onto the transom. The other is made from heavy-duty nylon rope. The three-step rope ladder rolls up and secures to a cleat near the bow.

I've never had to use either ladder, but it's good to know they are there in case the need ever arises.

Naturally, the likelihood of hypothermia taking hold when a person is immersed in water hinges largely on how cold the water is.

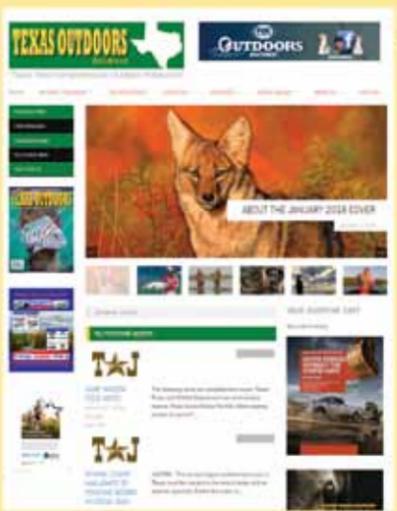
The survival time in 32 degree water is about 45 minutes; exhaustion, 15 minutes or less. Survival time in 40-50 degree water is only 1-3 hours; exhaustion sets in within an hour. Survival time in 50-60 degree water is 1-6 hours; exhaustion, 1-2 hours. ★★



COURTESY PHOTO

This photo illustrates the H.E.L.P. position, which aids in retaining body heat.

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Low-Down on SABINE LAKE REDS

Located on the Texas/Louisiana border, many consider this as the best estuary for catching redfish.

Story and Photography by Robert Sloan



For about five decades Harry Clark had Sabine Lake's redfish figured out. He'd launch his flat-bottom boat down the road from the four way stop in the tiny town of Sabine and motor out to the jetties. He'd make a few shots with his cast net, box enough mullet to fish with and proceed to catch one red after another.

One day I idled by him, where he was anchored at the east jetty boat cut. He was hooting and hollering beneath his signature white pith helmet and held up a stringer of reds. Later that evening I called Harry and asked him how he always caught so many reds. He was in his mid-70's at the time, and that was well over a decade ago.

"Well that's a no brainer," he said, laughing out loud. "The reds want fresh dead mullet. I've got that. They feed in a current. I've got that. And sooner or later they are going to show up at the boat cut. That's a fact.

And more often than not I'll be there reeling them in. Some folks retire and do nothing. I retired and went to fishing like there was no tomorrow."

It's also a fact that Sabine Lake, Sabine Pass and the Sabine jetties produce some of the best fishing for reds on the Texas Gulf coast. Even though it's called a lake, it's actually a bay that is a perfect set up for holding more redfish than you can shake



The author states an orange/gold/black patterned fishing lure is the perfect color combination to fish the tannic-colored water of Sabine Lake.

a stick at. The Neches and Sabine rivers feed in to the lake on the upper end. From there the lake feeds into Sabine Pass and funnels out through the jetties and into the Gulf of Mexico.

I've been fishing there for about 30 years and can say for sure that it's the BEST place to catch redfish that I have ever seen. This body of water is set up

on the Texas/Louisiana border. A Texas fishing license is reciprocal on most areas of the lake.

However, if you do fish past the mouth of a bayou on the Louisiana side of the lake you'll need a Louisiana license. Ditto that on the Gulf side of the east jetty. Most of the fishermen out of Beaumont bite the bullet and buy an annual non-resident Louisiana fishing license. That way there are no limits to where you can fish.

Another good thing about Sabine Lake is that it's a year-round fishery for reds. When the water is cold during late winter and early spring the best pattern for reds is to set up a drift with the wind and current.

The area of the lake between the Causeway Bridge and Blue Buck Point, on the lower end of Sabine, is like one big bowl with water that is around 20 feet deep. It's an excellent staging area for reds right about now.

It's easy fishing, too. You simply tie on a 1/4 ounce jig head with a soft plastic tail and you are good to go. Cast the bait out, allow it to hit bottom and bounce it along



The main thing is to keep an eye out for baitfish. Lots of reds cruise the rocks feeding on mullet and shad.



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Above Coffee Ground Cove and below the Intracoastal Waterway on the Louisiana side of Sabine Lake there are cane lined back lake and marsh areas that attract redfish. However, if you penetrate the mouth of these coves, Texas anglers will need a non-resident Louisiana fishing license.

the shell with your drift. This area of the lake is almost all shell and attracts a wide variety of marine animals like crabs, shrimp, eels, mullet and shad.

Usually where you catch one red you'll catch more. That's why it's a good idea to carry along a couple of buoys to mark various spots. Some of the proven colors of jigs to fish here are chartreuse, LSU, fire tiger and red/shad.

On the Texas side of the lake you'll find numerous piers that extend way out into the lake. Those piers are great structure for attracting mullet and shad. If you like catching slot reds on topwater plugs and wake baits fish the piers.

The usual drill is to ease along with the trolling motor and work something like a Super Spook Jr. or a Heddon Pop'n Image up close to the bank and around the pier pilings.

Toward the northwest end of the Texas shoreline are a few piers with shell reefs. These are like redfish magnets. This is a real good area to fish early and late in the day.

When you get up to the northwest end of the lake you'll see the south revetment wall. It looks like a jetty and is a few miles long. This is where you can use the trolling motor to ease down the rocks while fishing a variety of lures.

The main thing is to keep an eye out for baitfish. Lots of reds cruise the rocks feeding on mullet and shad. This is where a shallow running gold and black wake bait is a big time producer of reds. Super Spooks in pink/silver and pink/chartreuse are deadly on reds feeding shallow up against the rocks.

Farther off the rocks you can fish jigs along bottom in 5 to 8 feet of water. Lipless crank baits are a good option along the rocks. Rat-L-Traps in silver/black, or bone are good for reds feeding at mid-depths along the revetment wall.

The Louisiana shoreline from the Causeway Bridge and on up to Blue Buck Point has several redfish hotspots. This is several hundred yards of blue ribbon water.

There are three shell reefs towards

the north end of this shoreline. On the lower end you'll find a cluster of tall reeds. About 20 yards off those reeds is a small shell reef. That entire area almost always holds a few reds.

I like to fish it with a chartreuse/white spinner bait with silver willow leaf blades. If that doesn't work I'll switch to a 5 inch Yum Money Minnow in silver shad or pearl/black back rigged on a 1/8-ounce, 2/0 Assassin spring lock jig head in chartreuse. This is my favorite swim bait just about anywhere along the Texas coast. Cast it out and reel it in just like you would a spinnerbait.

While you are on the south end of Sabine you might want to make a run into Sabine Pass. It starts on the south side of the Causeway Bridge. A place called Lighthouse Cove is located at about the middle of the pass along the Louisiana shoreline. It's huge, and looks like a big lake.

This is one big and shallow shell reef that reds love to feed on. Remember that this is shallow shell that's anywhere from

a foot to three feet deep. A lot of the reefs here are coated on top with fiberglass from boats. Your best bet is to idle in and out.

At the very back of Lighthouse Cove there's a ditch that leads into a shallow backwater lake. Reds will often stack up in the deeper cut leading into the lake. It's a good place to work jigs and spinnerbaits. From there you can use the trolling motor or push pole to fish the lake. This is where you are most likely to find tailing or waking reds.

On Sabine Lake from Blue Buck Point you'll have several miles of Louisiana shoreline to fish. Along that shoreline are bayous and coves. Remember that if you go past the mouth of a bayou you'll need a Louisiana fishing license.

Just past Blue Buck Point is Garrison Ridge. This is a great area to wade, or drift fish. Reds will likely be feeding along the clam shell shoreline, or near the pilings in this area.

Heading north from Garrison Ridge you'll find Greens Bayou. The mouth of that bayou will hold reds on an outgoing tide. A few miles past Greens you'll find Johnson Bayou, Willow Bayou and Bridge

Bayou. Your best bet along this stretch of shoreline is to use the trolling motor and fish topwaters, tails and spinnerbaits in two to four feet of water.

There is several miles of shoreline with small coves along the way. Reds especially like feeding right up against the bank in the coves. These little areas are best on an incoming tide.

About a mile past Bridge Bayou you'll come up on Coffee Ground Cove. This is a huge flat that's two to three feet deep. It's mostly mud, with a little shell. This is a great area to work with a trolling motor or by drift fishing with the wind or current. Early and late is a good time to fish this area with topwaters and wake baits.

Super Spooks are always good. But a local redfish favorite is a gold and black jointed Rebel Minnow. Another proven lure here is a Rebel Jumpin' Minnow in copper/black/orange. This is an absolute killer color pattern for reds in the tannic-colored water of Sabine Lake.

Past Coffee Ground Cove you'll find the mouth of the Sabine and Neches rivers. At the mouth of the Neches River is where you'll find Stewts Island, located

on the Intracoastal Waterway. From there you can use the trolling motor to fish jigs, lipless cranks and spinnerbaits for reds in three to five feet of water. You'll eventually come up on the north revetment wall. The fishing is good there but not as good as what you'll find along the south revetment wall.

One last thing, later in the year during September, October and November the reds will be schooling out on the open water of the lake. This is something that has to be seen to believe. This is when they will be feeding heavily on menhaden, shad and shrimp - and it's all happening on the surface.

You can see schools of reds running baitfish — it kind of looks like a wake from a boat. These are usually upper slot reds, and they will hit just about any lure they can see.

One of the best is a three inch Yum Money Minnow in white/chartreuse that's rigged on a 3/8 ounce jig head.

The best boat ramps are located in Sabine Pass about a half mile east of the four way stop. That's where you'll find a bait camp, store and gas. **T★J**



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An Impressive Legacy - A New Horizon

Way back in 1986 an idea was born. After several years of stocking Florida-strain largemouth bass in Texas lakes, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department started noticing a lot of big bass were being caught.

“Big” was a relative term, but the northern strain of native Texas bass usually only grew to eight or nine pounds, the double-digit bass being the Holy Grail of bass fishing.

After the introduction of the Florida strain of bass, the double-digit mark was being broken on a regular basis. TPWD noticed this trend. As a vehicle to study these fish and learn what makes them grow to such a size, promote catch and release, and in an effort to breed these big fish, the Share-A-Lunker program was created.

For 31 years the program took in any bass over 13 pounds, caught in Texas waters, and recognized the anglers catching these giants. Fish were kept at the hatchery and spawning was attempted in an effort to pass along the genetics of those big bass. The idea was that these fish would help grow bigger bass for anglers all across the state. The program had many corporate sponsors, and underwent several name changes, but remained basically the same over the entire run of collections.

Recently I received a press release from TPWD announcing major changes to the program. In an effort to understand why the program was changing, I reached out to the new program coordinator, Kyle Brookshear.

I first asked for an overview of the first 31 years of the program. “I think the program has been very successful,” said Brookshear, “We gained a fountain of knowledge from the fish collected.”

Over the first three decades, Share-A-Lunker accepted over 500 largemouth bass, from 55 public reservoirs and more than a dozen private lakes. It all began with Mark Stevenson and a new state record, a 17.67-pounder caught from Lake Fork in November. From that fish grew a program that not only provided

valuable information to the biologists about big bass (such as the fact that it takes 8 to 10 years for a bass to grow to 13-pound size) but helped promote catch and release by providing anglers with a free replica of their trophy.

And as Brookshear also pointed out, “In addition, much was learned about the care and handling of bass. This was helpful to fish of all sizes when being released back into the water, ensuring they were returned in the best shape possible, and giving them the best chance at survival.”

While successful, the program provided information that showed changes are needed.

“We noticed that over time the data showed that early and late entries wouldn’t successfully spawn, or had already spawned,” Kyle said. “In the previous program model, which ran over a period of seven months, fish caught in October and November would be held until spawning season.”

That is hard on both the fish, and the biologists charged with keeping these giants healthy. The new dates capitalize on the prime spawn period, and give the fish the best survivability chances.

The data over 30 years showed three areas of improvement available. First was the need for servicing, (increasing) ShareLunker offspring by making adjustments to the brood stock and using only direct ShareLunker descendants.

Second was the need for a better understanding of impacts of current ShareLunker stockings. And third, TPWD wanted more public engagement of the program, to expand the program to more anglers.

The goals moving forward are for



PHOTO COURTESY TPWD

The fish and angler that started it all and led to the creation of the ShareLunker program — Mark Stevenson with “Ethel.”

TPWD and anglers to be engaged, to achieve the program mission increase stocking numbers to four to six million annually, and to increase data and knowledge of fish over eight pounds.

They also want to identify the DNA elements and gene strains that allow a fish to grow to 13 pounds and bigger. While the new program will run in a year-round cycle, from January 1 to December 31, only those entries collected between January 1 to March 31 will be accepted as broodstock for spawning. Genetically pure offspring will be maintained on the hatchery, grown to adulthood, then distributed to production hatcheries and used as broodstock. Eventually, all hatchery-held Florida largemouth bass broodstock will be descendants of ShareLunkers.

“Brood stock” are the fish used to spawn the offspring, which are then stocked into the lakes. Additionally, attempts will be made to spawn all donated eligible ShareLunkers — regardless of the degree of genetic introgression. Offspring of female genetic intergrades will be combined and stocked back to the source locations for all ShareLunker entries for the year.

Another program change has TPWD expanding the weight categories and

participation methods available to anglers. Now, anglers catching bass eight pounds or larger can submit information about their catch through online participation as well as a mobile app, to report catches in four categories:

Lunker Legacy Class:

Every angler who loans a 13 pound or larger bass to the Toyota ShareLunker program during the spawning period Jan. 1 to March 31 will join the prestigious Lunker Legacy Class.

These anglers will receive a Toyota ShareLunker Catch Kit containing branded merchandise and fishing tackle items, a 13+ pound Legacy decal, VIP access to awards programing at the Toyota Bassmaster Texas Fest, and a replica of their fish,

These anglers will also be entered into the Legacy Class Prize Drawing for a \$5,000 shopping spree and an annual fishing license at the end of the spawning period March 31.

Lunker Legend Class:

Anglers who enter a 13 pound or larger largemouth bass Jan. 1 through Dec. 31 will become a part of the Lunker Legend Class. These anglers will receive a Toyota ShareLunker Catch Kit containing branded merchandise and fishing tackle items, a 13+ pound decal to display their achievement, a replica of their fish, and an entry into the year-end ShareLunker prize drawing for a \$5,000 shopping spree and an annual fishing license.

Lunker Elite Class:

Anglers catching double-digit largemouth bass 10 to 12.99 pounds Jan. 1 through Dec. 31 will become a part of the Lunker Elite Class.

These anglers will receive a Toyota ShareLunker Catch Kit containing branded merchandise and fishing tackle items, a 10+ pound decal to display their achievement, and an entry into the year-end ShareLunker prize drawing for a \$5,000 shopping spree and an annual fishing license.

Lunker Class:

Anglers entering largemouth bass of at least eight pounds or 24 inches Jan. 1 through Dec. 31 will be recognized at the Lunker Class level.

These anglers will receive a Toyota ShareLunker Catch Kit containing branded merchandise and fishing tackle items, an 8+ pound decal to display their achievement, and an entry into the

year-end ShareLunker prize drawing for a \$5,000 shopping spree and an annual fishing license. In addition, all categories may see additional prizes included in these prize drawings, prior to their entry deadlines.

When changing a program of this magnitude, it is common to re-brand the product and TPWD is no exception to the standard.

While still named the Toyota ShareLunker, you’ll now see new logos and the catch phrase “Bigger Better Bass.”

No matter the name the ShareLunker

program has an impressive legacy of science, welfare and outreach. Now let’s see what’s on the horizon for this historic program.

For complete information and rules of the ShareLunker program, tips on caring for big bass and a recap of last year’s season, see www.tpwd.texas.gov/sharelunker.

The site also includes a searchable database of all fish entered into the program. Or follow the program on social media at www.facebook.com/sharelunkerprogram. **T★J**

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CoastWatch | Danno Wise

March is a time of transition along the northern Gulf Coast. As seasons transition from winter to spring, fishing patterns begin to change as well. Speckled trout, redfish, sheepshead, founder and drum will all be active and caught in good numbers this month.

March is also the time when the bay traffic transitions from a relatively few hardcore pluggers to growing masses of casual fishermen.

But, since there will be more fish, more active in more parts of the bays, the increased number of anglers will go virtually unnoticed. **T★J**



PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. TOMMY COUNTZ

The mouths of drains coming out of the Matagorda peninsula in West Matagorda Bay are also a great place to start your wade and can produce some impressive results.

Matagorda guide Capt. Tommy Countz says March fishing can be better than most expect.

“March can be a great time to be on the water in Matagorda,” said Countz.

“By March, more of the stronger cold fronts should be over and water temps are on the rise. It’s a perfect time to dust off your topwaters and start your morning off looking for a few explosions.

“The south shore of West Matagorda Bay is one of my favorite destinations in March. If conditions are right I look for bait activity first, and zero in on that. I like to start my morning off tossing



PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. GREG VERM

March is a great time of year to catch a speck of a lifetime fishing the Galveston Jetties.

topwaters near the oyster reef lined shore. The mouths of drains coming out of the peninsula are also a great place to start your wade.

“Grass beds can also produce some excellent topwater action. If I don’t get the response that I’m looking for with my topwaters then I won’t hesitate to switch to soft plastics rigged on light lead heads. An early morning wade has the potential to provide a nice stringer of trout and redfish for an angler.

“East Matagorda Bay is better suited for boat fishermen. Long drifts on the west end throwing 1/4 to 3/8 ounce lead heads can produce some pretty good action. The west end of the bay is lined with oyster shell and holds a lot bait fish which can make it a very productive area.

“The east end of the bay is mainly made up of big mud flats that can also be productive for drifting.

“Live shrimp under a popping cork, GULP! under a popping cork, and plastics rigged on a heavier are your ticket for success on the water.

“Whatever you decide to do, a day on

the waters of Matagorda in March can be a very productive outing.”

Freeport guide Capt. Mike Segall of Reel Threel Charters says in March he will begin fishing offshore a little bit more often.

“In March, we start going offshore a bit more,” said Segall. “We’ll do some state water snapper around the reefs and rocks. If we get the right weather, we might run out looking for kingfish. But, I’ll also be doing some bay fishing trips in March.

“Most of my trips, though, will be beachfront or nearshore. We’ll do some bull red trips along the beachfront, near the mouth of Brazos River and around the mouth of the jetties. This time of year, you’ll find those bull reds in 30 to 40 feet of water.

“We just fish for them with sardines on bottom. When we’re fishing for bull reds, we usually catch a few sharks as well. During March, most of the sharks are sharpnose and blacktip.”

Galveston guide Capt Greg Verm of FishingGalvestonTX.com says March will be a busy month.

“The first four days will find me at the Houston Fishing Show, but I will have captains out fishing as well, so we will be running trips the entire month,” said



PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. TOMMY COUNTZ

As water temperatures continue to increase through the spring, look for flounder to make their way back into bay areas.

Verm. “I will be doing another seminar this year on Sunday, March 4 talking about ‘Fishing Galveston 12 months a year’.

“The beginning of March we will be in the middle of the bay snapper spawn (sheepshead).

“Live shrimp free-lined with only enough weight to compensate for the current and get the bait to the ‘fish zone’ will be the way to go. This is such an exciting time of year for us fishing along the jetties with full boxes of fish as the norm on a half day trip. By the end of

March, we will still be catching some spawning bay snapper – but it will be on the last leg.

“Speckled trout and redfish will be finding their way to our decks as we get to the end of March. This is a great time of year to catch a speck of a lifetime fishing the Galveston Jetties. We will also be catching big uglies — black drum during March. Fresh, cracked crab fished along the bottom are the go-to bait for these beasts.

“On March 23 and 24 we will be

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PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Catch the weather right in March and state water red snapper trips are an option out of Freeport.

volunteering two boats for the Turning Point Drum Tournament for the Physically Challenged. This is such a great event, and I encourage everyone to come out and enjoy this event.

“Fishing the back lakes and bays of Galveston during March, can be very rewarding especially on the days we are experiencing the March winds that keep open water fishing from happening.

Puppy black drum, slot reds, rat reds, flounder and specks are great in these back lakes of West Galveston Bay. Live shrimp under popping cork is our go to in these areas.

Also, plastics work very well for the anglers that are experienced enough to chunk ‘em.

“Flounder gigging during March here in Galveston becomes very difficult. As water temps rise, winds increase and gives way to the ‘brown moss’ that forms during the winter along the oyster reefs – water clarity suffers. When water clarity is good, flounder gigging can be stellar. However those days are few and far between during March.

“Wadefishing San Luis Pass and Cold Pass begins to get right at the end of March. Topwaters, plastics and Mirr-O-dines are a lethal combination fished in the guts and sand flats of San Luis Pass for upper slot reds and solid, solid speckled trout.

“Christmas Bay, Drum and Bastrop will begin to warm up, and more slot reds, rat reds, specks, flounder, puppy drum and sheepshead will be eating well. We fish these areas with live baits and artificial for our wading customers.

“Offshore season will be on the horizon, and we may run a trip or two during the month of March to see how our red snapper spots are holding.

“Kingfish will be further out – 60 plus miles and wahoo will be in the areas as well.”

Sabine Lake guide Capt. Randy Foreman says mud and mullet will be the keys to consistently finding fish during March.

“March fishing can be really good,” said Foreman. “But, you’ve got to find mullet and you have to fish on an incoming tide.

“For the most part, I’ll be drifting the flats on the Louisiana side, fishing two to four feet of water over mussel flats. I’ll still be throwing the same baits – Down South Southern Shad in dark colors for the most part.

“That will change once the shrimp move in. Then I’ll switch to glow/chartreuse. Usually, March is when we start seeing the shrimp come back into the lake. When they’re here, glow is the color you want to throw.”

“As everything starts warming up in March, those shrimp will start coming back in. If we have a good, strong incoming

tide, it will push those shrimp in. On the south end of the bay, we’ll start seeing some good bird activity over the shrimp. Early in the month, it will mostly be small fish under the birds. By the middle of March you can catch some pretty good fish under the birds.

“The reds will still be on the banks in March. Just like February, the reds will be on the drops against the shorelines over shell. Plus, those big redfish will start showing up around the jetties. There won’t be many days you can fish out there in March because of the weather, but you can catch plenty of big reds out there when you can fish it.

“And, we’ll start seeing some good flounder fishing during March. I’ll be working the points and eddies and bayous along the Louisiana shore. I’ll also be fishing the drops along the Sabine channel.

“I’ll find areas where four feet drops to 10 feet and fish there for both flounder and trout.” **T&J**



Over in southwest Louisiana, Lake Calcasieu anglers should have plenty of options this month. March is still prime big trout time on Big Lake.

Fishermen looking for sow specks should concentrate on the shorelines, throwing slow-sinking baits. On warm days, topwater plugs can produce good results as well.

Fishermen looking to box numbers of keeper specks should concentrate on the reefs. When seeking school-size specks, soft-plastics and shrimp are the best baits.

Additionally, good numbers of redfish will be found throughout the south end of Calcasieu during March.

The majority of the redfish will be found along the shorelines in knee-to-waist-deep water. However, there will also

be plenty of redfish around the weirs. A variety of soft-plastic lures and natural baits will catch reds during March.

Tuna will be the main focus in March for anglers leaving out of Venice. Fishermen making the run can expect to find tuna over the offshore lumps.

March is the month when most of Louisiana’s record fish are caught, so anglers can expect to tangle with big bruiser tuna. In fact, most of the yellow fin tuna on the lumps in March are over 100 pounds, with 200 pounders being a real possibility.

March is also a great month for wahoo, which will also be thick around the lumps. Like the tuna, the wahoo run big in March, averaging around 50 pounds with 95 to 100 pound fish being

common catches.

Inshore fishing in the Venice area is mostly influenced by the condition of the Mississippi River in March. The water level, salinity and temperature of the river water is most affected by the amount of snow melt and runoff up north. If the river is in good condition, anglers can expect good trout fishing with solid specks. **T&J**



PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. RANDY FOREMAN

The reds will still be on the banks in March. Just like February, the reds will be on the drops against the shorelines over shell.

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MOUNTAIN MAGIC TROUT

Bows, Cuts and Browns await in waters recognized as the Mecca for trout fishing.

*Story and Photography by
Bob Zaiglin*

The Mackenzie style drift boat is the ultimate means to fish the big waters in the West, providing access to trout as well as awesome panoramic vistas.

A sudden appearance of a brilliant gold streak in the scotch-colored water resulted in a malicious attack on the small nymph I employed as a dropper below my ostentatious chubby Chernobyl floating high on the water's surface.

With a quick flick of my wrist, the tip of my nine-foot five-weight fly rod bent like a bow in the swift current while I carefully played the 21-inch brown trout

on the end of my line.

While I enjoyed the aggressive maneuvers, the fish attempted to separate itself from the barbless hook. My guide and good friend Ryan Brewer swiftly and methodically negotiated the drift boat into the milder waters of the Yellowstone River, facilitating our ability to net the brilliant, golden-colored trout. Moments later we celebrated the entire event by taking several photographs before

releasing the fish back into the river.

When it comes to fly fishing, it's all about access, and the Montana Fish and Game Department has done a remarkable job of providing fishermen with ample opportunities to fish some of the most bountiful trout waters on the planet with the Yellowstone River, considered by most ardent sportsmen as a trout fishing Mecca occupied by rainbow, cut bows, and brown trout in abundance.

Over the last 15 years or so, my wife Jan and I have ventured north each summer to not only take advantage of the quality fishing, but to escape the extreme temperatures of South Texas. Last year, as always, our home away from home was the quaint western town of Bozeman, Montana. Unlike most conventional towns, Bozeman represents a time warp where one can relive the past.

With exceptional cuisine and a plethora of sporting shops, even I enjoy shopping as one can always find unique fly-tying materials as well as reliable information pertaining to one's fishing success on nearby rivers from avid fishermen working in the fly fishing shops only to support their own addiction to fly fishing.

More important is the fact that this western town represents the gateway to legendary trout waters like the Gallatin, Madison, Missouri, Jefferson, and the unprecedented Yellowstone Rivers. The mystic of Bozeman really changed when the movie, narrated by Robert Redford and featuring Brad Pitt, "A River Runs through It", was filmed in the Bozeman and Livingston areas.

When it comes to trout fishing, the Yellowstone River is considered ground

zero by most dedicated trout fishers. It is my favorite water to test my fly-fishing skills, plus the abundance of native trout in the river make up for any inadequacies I have with a fly rod.

The headwaters of the Yellowstone lie just outside of the Yellowstone National Park in the Absaroka mountain range of Wyoming. It travels north across Montana for approximately 700 miles before meeting up with the Missouri River in North Dakota, making it the longest free-flowing river in the lower 48.

North of the park it passes through one of the prettiest valleys in the world, Paradise Valley, and a favorite place to float as the scenic vistas of the Absaroka mountains overlooking the verdant valley can make up for a slow day at fishing.

North of Livingston, however, is my favorite portion of the river to fish as it is often overlooked by tourists, affording an opportunity to drift for miles without seeing another fisherman.

Growing up in the southwestern town of Masontown, Pennsylvania, my dad, brother Richard, and I fished in three states, West Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, and always enjoyed taking our share of trout. At the early age of 12, I acquired the skill of tying my own flies, streamers, and nymphs, and to this day I still enjoy mimicking the insects desirable to trout. Like one's religion, trout fishing is hard to give up, and today I enjoy fishing waters I only could dream about in my youth.

Similar to hunting, fishing is all about timing, with weather playing a critical role in one's success. Early spring is a great time to fish the blue-ribbon rivers of Montana as the snow remains on the mountaintops. In June, however, the snow melts, creating high, swift-running coffee-colored waters that are extremely challenging to fish — thus we plan our trips around August when water is clearer and levels are more static. Warmer temperatures



Landing big trout in swift water is a team effort facilitated by negotiating the drift boat into milder waters.

augment insect hatches, making fly fishing an effective and most enjoyable method of catching trout.

We arrived in Bozeman last year on the 31st of July. Shortly afterwards, we dined at Bob's Burgers on Main Street, enjoying a burger delicacy! Following a leisure walk around town, we returned to our hotel for a comfortable evening.

Communicating with Ryan about my float trip the following morning, he informed me of a heavy rain storm in Gardiner generating a huge mud pod flowing north towards Livingston, eliminating any fishing through Paradise Valley. In other words, Ryan had to plan a trip where we were either in front of or behind the muddy coffee-brown water.

The following morning Ryan and I parted Bozeman around 8 am. After a short stop at the most famous fly-fishing sports center in the country, Dan Bailey's, to pick up a license, we headed north



Matching the hatch and deceiving trout to rise to one's fly is an endorphin-stimulating event.

of Livingston where the waters were undisturbed by the muddy waters in the Valley. With a high floating chubby chernoble and a brown rubber legs as a dropper, I fished the entire day catching 20 or more trout, the best being a 17 inch

brown trout that fell for my chubby at the surface.

Fishing was great, but the clear blue sky did little to block the strong rays of warm sun which subdued the feeding activity of the larger fish. With 12 miles



The variety of wildlife on the banks of the Yellowstone makes up for a slow day on the water.

of river floated, we called it a day and planned for the following morning.

Conditions on my second float were climatically different. The light shirt wearing weather experienced the day before was gone as I sat in the boat shivering until I put on one of Ryan's extra jackets. Bald eagles perched on the massive cottonwoods that line the bank appeared lethargic as if they were waiting for the sun to appear, but that failed to happen.

Determining how good the fishing was going to be didn't take long as I landed several nice brown trout before we floated the first mile. The cloud cover appeared to have ignited the trout's appetite as they relentlessly smacked the surface in an attempt to engulf my chubby that floated high on the water.

Fishing was superb in the morning, but slowed in the afternoon. We anchored several times to fish sets of ripples off the side of the main channel, and each and every time we did, rainbows smacked my chubby.

The 11.5 mile stretch we fished produced over 30 trout with the largest one a brownie exceeding the 21 inch mark. Quite possibly, it was the best day I have ever enjoyed on the Yellowstone, verifying just how big a role weather plays in one's success.

The rest of my week was spent on the Gallatin where I hoped to catch the annual pine moth hatch as I had tied several of these white-colored moths back home in Texas. However, that event never occurred, which only represents another reason to return to this fabled trout-rich region.

I know of no serious trout fishermen who spend too much time on the water, and one doesn't have to travel out west to enjoy exceptional fishing.

Matter of fact, the most southern blue ribbon trout stream in the United States is the Guadalupe River only minutes out of New Braunfels right here in the Lone Star State.

Below Canyon Dam, the regulated release of water represents ideal trout habitat and water temperature.

Thanks to the local Trout Unlimited chapter, the river is stocked with exceptional-sized trout throughout December and January, providing Texans an excellent opportunity to test their fly-fishing skills close to home.

The catch and release fishing provides ample opportunity for both experienced and novice fishermen to enjoy the outdoors on one of the most scenic rivers in Texas.

Although some trout reproduction has been documented in the river, most of the trout are stockers willing to take a variety of insect imitations.

However, over the years, I have found these fish extremely attracted to flamboyant-colored streamers and woolly buggers; that is until they have been caught or disturbed a few times. It doesn't take long before they adjust and become extremely discretionary as to what they

eat, forcing fisherman to fish with smaller imitations of the various aquatic insects that inhabit the river.

Once again, access is paramount to success, and much of the river bank is under private ownership. To circumvent this problem, one can become a member of the local chapter of Trout Unlimited, and for a fee one can fish in any of the designated areas leased by the local chapter.

So whether you are an avid fishermen or simply one who would like to try it out, you don't have to travel out west to enjoy premier trout fishing, as it can be enjoyed right here at home. **T&J**



Texas can entertain premier trout fishing close to home on the Guadalupe River, regarded as the most southern blue ribbon trout fishing river in the U.S.



Spring Bear Hunting

About 1:30 in the morning my daughter softly whispered “Daddy, something is rubbing against our tent.” Slowly I woke up, slipped on my glasses, gripped my .44 Mag. and flashlight and quietly unzipped our tent door.

We had arrived late in the evening at the trailhead of the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho. Instead of hiking in and setting up a tent in the dark we just threw up our tent at the trailhead and would backpack in the next morning.

Whatever was rubbing on our tent had scattered by the time I peeked my head out but when we packed out after our flyfishing trip was over we saw a sow and two cubs not 200 yards from where we’d camped. I assume that’s who had paid us our midnight visit.

When I started bear hunting there was no internet and not even many videos on the subject. In the small town where I lived at the time in Northern Colorado I rented and devoured both of the bear hunting videos available at the local video shop.

After moving to Idaho I met and hunted a lot with a couple of good bear hunters which greatly increased my



Always be on the lookout for bear sign, then you'll know where to set up your bait or where to bear hunt in general. A big bear marked this aspen.

knowledge and shortened my learning curve. Over the years, maybe I felt sorry for new bear hunters because it had taken

me so long to learn how to be successful so I started teaching the first bear hunting seminars in Idaho some 15 years ago.

There are basically three ways to hunt bears.

HOUD HUNTING

Hound hunting can be exciting. Usually the houndsman will drive old logging roads and hope to cut the trail of a bear. He'll have a dog box in back with a rail around the top. There he'll chain his striker dog and as he's coasting along the dog will be trying to cut a scent.

If the striker's loose he'll stop and let the dog look around. If he thinks it's a fresh track he'll unload the dogs and the race is on. The goal is to tree the bear, however, some bears can be runners and don't always cooperate as planned.

Due to the introduction of the Canadian wolf into the lower 48 problems have arisen. My hound hunting buddies tell me if the dogs tree a bear, hunters have to arrive on the scene quickly or the wolves will beat them there and kill all of the dogs.



A bear has been digging grubs out of this tree.

When hunting with hounds more than likely it will be with a guide. Your guide explain how he likes to hunt, what can be expected and what he wants you to do.

BAITING

I love baiting. It puts the hunter in control. It's like being the setter on the volleyball team and controlling what's happening. After you get good at baiting it's a blast because you'll see a lot of bears. In Idaho almost every canyon has a bear. However, you don't just want one bear coming in, you want multiple bears coming to the bait sites.

If you there is only one bear hitting the bait, he can and will visit on his time table. If he goes nocturnal that's not good.

What you want is to get multiple bears hitting your bait. That way they get jealous of each other and come in earlier and earlier. If you have to, you can only put out a certain amount of bait so the bruin doesn't come in after dark and fill up.

I'm not suggesting that you only put out 20 pounds of bait or there won't be tempting treats for the last two, three or more bears. After things are situated you'll always want to have your barrel full.

To understand the bears' motivation put yourself in their shoes. They see the bait as a kill.

They'll hang around until it's gone and then move on to greener pastures or the next opportunity. That is not what you want. You want them hanging around and continuing to come back.

In my mind they get into a “pecking order” routine. The smaller ones will come in earlier and then by late evening the big one will come in.

Bears don't have anti-bullying laws. When the less dominant bears come in, they'll be jumpy and always looking around. If one is at the barrel, gets nervous then runs off, get ready —there's another bear, more dominant bruin, in the area.

It is obvious when the town tuff “alpha bear” shows up. There is an aura about him. He'll come swaggering in like Billy Bad Boar. The smaller bears are nervous to lay down and get comfortable. If you have big chunks of bait they'll grab a chunk and run off into the brush to eat.

Yes, the big one may come in cautiously due to a savviness acquired over the years. He may circle and smell the air for a while but when he commits he'll come in and flop down and shovel down the food. No bear is going to run him off.



The author, right, and his 16-yr. old nephew Monty Statton from Midland TX with this nice bear Monty took with a black powder rifle.

The anti's would have you think all you have to do is hang a donut in a tree and poor little ole Booboo comes a running in a hypnotic state of mind. Not so. To be a good baiter takes a lot of knowledge and strategy. Anyone can get one bear hitting his bait but what if that one bear isn't a big one? What is desired are four to six year old bears.

While bears will eat anything they still have their preferences. I've had them dig through piles of day old bread to pick out the Twinkies and they definitely like Krispy Kreme Donuts!

In the old days I had access to barrels of rancid meat. Yes, bears eat meat but it's not the bait of choice. After a long winter their stomachs are queasy and they just don't gorge on raw meat.

Plus, if you put out big pieces of meat

they'll grab a chunk and run off in the woods to eat. You will only see them for a split second.

Everyone has their favorite baits. Every bear hunting article you read the author shares his secret bait or lure. Burnt honey, anise scent, beaver tails and the list goes on. After it's all said and done what it really boils down to is what you can get a lot of and inexpensively.

If you've got six bears an afternoon coming in they can put away more food than a table full of teenage boys. Small pieces of bait is what is best because they can't grab a bunch of anything and go hide. They have to sit there and scoop up the treats by the handfuls, so they can't fill up as fast. Expired bags of dog food are another good option.

You also don't want to just throw a big

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pile of bait on the ground. Bears can free feed, fill up fast, and leave. Plus they can eat you out of house and home.

It's best to have a 55-gallon barrel with a snap ring on top. The snap ring makes it easier to fill. Cut an 8-10 inch hole about two thirds of the way up the barrel. Make the hole big enough so they don't cut up their forelegs while digging out the bait. Also strap the barrel to a tree or they'll carry it off.

You'll want your barrel near the brush so bears feel comfortable coming in but not in thick brush where you can't get a shot. It usually takes about three weeks before bears begin hitting my bait hard enough to make it worth setting on.

Here's my theory. If you've baited in the same spot for 10-15 years they're used to it. It's just like the fall salmon run. They expect it and things happen faster.

SPOTTING and STALKING

Due to all the time and work involved in baiting, if you live out of state it probably just won't work for you. The other option is to hire a guide or, you can spot/stalk. This is a great method, particularly in a state like Montana where neither dogs or baiting is allowed. The spot and stalk option is the only way to hunt bears in that state.

We do this a lot in the spring but it's also a good method in the fall. By then I'm usually elk and deer hunting so it is nice to have a bear tag available, just in case.

To spot and stalk in the spring I'll go up on a ridge at snow line where we can see some country and set up a spotting scope. The activity begins happens about bear thirty (late afternoon).

I used to help Ed Sweet, the host of Kid Outdoors and we'd take kids after school. He'd get on one end of the ridge while Gary Kirkpatrick and I would set on the other end. Some afternoons we'd see up to five bears between us.

That's where I learned the importance of good optics. I had some lower end glass and in two afternoons we saw 10 bears and I only spotted one first. I knew then I needed better optics.

The old saying, "you get what you pay for" is never more true than in the world of binoculars, spotting scope and optics. Most everyone is on a budget so when you buy your next optic, don't leave any pennies in your pocket.

Well, for this edition I am out of room and just getting started. There's a lot more

for another time like use of cover scents, where to put baits, how to set up a stalk after a big bear has been spotted plus what rifle caliber to use. Hopefully this has at least piqued your interest in this springtime hunting option.

One final thing to consider — guided spring bear hunts are relatively inexpensive in the United States as well as Canadian provinces — even at some of the most luxurious lodges or areas. It affords a great opportunity to continue hunting through the "off-season."

It's also an excellent way to get know an outfitter or survey an area for the fall for other big game options like elk, mule deer, moose, or more. ★★



Tom Statton, Monty's 12-yr. old brother got his bear five days later. That week we saw up to 11 different bears.

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Lake Roundup

CENTRAL TEXAS



By John Jefferson

Shortly after I arrived in Central Texas from the edge of the Big Thicket, there was a brewery in San Antonio that advertised that its product was so good because its water came from “the country of eleven-hundred springs — the land of the **Medina**, the **Frio**, and the **Sabinal**.”

That sounded so good to me, a guy who had grown up near dark-stained water liberally inhabited by cottonmouths and alligators that I had to find out for



PHOTO COPYRIGHT JOHN JEFFERSON

The Colorado River at Colorado Bend State Park upstream from Lake Buchanan is a favorite haunt for white bass fishermen on years of adequate water. This is one of those years!



PHOTO COPYRIGHT JOHN JEFFERSON

The Llano River is a likely place to catch the official state fish, the Guadalupe bass.

myself. I spent years researching it.

I failed to prove that their product was any better than those brewed in Houston or New Orleans, which got their water from sources which I didn't want to think about drinking. But it introduced me to the country of eleven-hundred springs, and rivers named the **Guadalupe**, the **Llano**, the **Pedernales** (pronounced *Perd-i-nalis*), the **Nueces**, the **San Marcos**, the **Blanco**, the **San Saba**, the **San Gabriel**, and the **Colorado**.

I can go for extended periods of time without drinking any of the grain-infused by-product referred to above, but if I go more than a week or so without at least being near the rivers, I suffer from countless psychological afflictions, irritability, and maybe even bad breath.

The only remedy is getting on one of the streams and fishing. Ask my wife, if you don't believe me. I become a river-deprived pseudo-psycho, of sorts.

A Thanksgiving weekend road trip through much of this spring-fed land last fall took us across all the listed rivers except the San Marcos, the San Saba, and the San Gabriel. I felt almost human, afterward.

I've caught fish from most of the rivers and many of their tributaries, but catching's not a requirement. Just *being there* is what counts. A fishing rod in hand is just for show. Catching fish is simply a bonus.

Spring is an excellent time to fish

the streams. White bass will be running upstream from the lakes on many of them, and largemouth bass are becoming more active each day — even as you read this. And remember, the official state fish is the Guadalupe bass, named for perhaps the Queen River of the Hill Country — the Guadalupe. Ironically — and sadly — the purest strain of Guadalupe bass is not in the Guadalupe River, but is found in other streams, like the Llano, since the feisty little bass hybridized with really cute smallmouth bass in their namesake stream, and many are now hybrids.

But that doesn't mean they're bad. They still fight like mad bulldogs and taste just like other bass. I don't know of any research that proves it, but I've felt for years that bass that have grown up in swift-flowing streams seem to fight harder than lake-bred bass. Science may debunk my theory, but it seems that way.

Although Guadalupe bass do not get as large as other black bass, a 14-inch Guad seems to fight like a much larger lake bass. They live in an environment that requires near constant swimming action, while lake bass live in still water conducive to becoming almost akin to aquatic couch potatoes. Perhaps that explains it.

What started this river-bass bantering was a video sent to the *TOJ* publisher, Bill Olson, by Cody Vanacek, who lives near Kerrville. Cody fishes with Keith Lawrence, also from there, and they primarily fish the rivers and streams in



PHOTO COPYRIGHT JOHN JEFFERSON

The Llano River offers varied scenery, plenty of fish, and few folks, none of whom are on skis.

their part of the Hill Country. And they do well, often fishing from a canoe.

Flatbottom johnboats and kayaks also work well in streams. We used canoes for years until kayaks started becoming available. That's our choice, now. We're on our second big-boy fishing boat, but prefer the kayaks for the streams. They're also easy to carry in my truck with a tailgate extender, available at most truck accessory shops.

I spoke with Cody to hear more of their adventures. He and Keith fish the Guadalupe as well as other streams, especially the Medina. He says the Frio is difficult since it is so clear that it's hard to sneak up on bass. It also suffers from the drought.

I usually like to have two vehicles involved in the process, and leave one downstream where we intend to “take out”, and then drive the other with our boats to the “put in” place. A time or two, back in the day, I would just take one vehicle to the “put-in” point, float to the take out, and hitch-hike back up to the “put-in”. That worked well in those days. Nowadays, maybe not so well, if at all. I was younger, then.

Cody and Keith go in one vehicle and leave it where they launch. They paddle upstream, fishing along the way, until they get tired of dragging the canoe over shallow spots. Then, they reverse

directions and go downstream with the current — again, fishing as they float.

They fish with baitcasting equipment, using an assortment of lures, ranging from Cotton Cordell “Wally- Divers” to topwater lures. They primarily target river bass, but often tangle with large sunfish. Baitcasting rods and reels handle the occasional large bass they encounter better than spinning rigs. Keith has boated an eight-pounder, so they want to be prepared. Most river bass don't get that big, but they do happen. A nine-pounder was pulled out of the San Saba just before we floated it a few years ago. We caught fish, but not that large.

We take both spinning rods and baitcasters in our kayak rod holders. But we secure them flatly along the sides with small bungies to avoid breakage or loss when we encounter brushy bends in the river or drops in elevation.

Spring is a great time to fish the rivers. The weather is cooler than later during the summer, the water levels are currently high enough, and the fish are biting. Check it out.

The frigid weather in January slowed fishing ... and catching. Checking the Toyoto ShareLunker totals, NO 13-pounders have been donated. About 20 bass have been entered in the new 8-12 pound category. By the time this gets in print, that will all have changed.

Changing subjects, an article in the Austin American Statesman on Thursday, January 4 reported on a lawsuit filed by former Travis County Judge, Bill Aleshire,

charging that the City of Austin, through its Parks and Recreation Dept., has banned commercial and rental boats from using the Walsh Boat dock on **Lake Austin**, near the end of Enfield Road (West 15th St.). Former Judge Aleshire says the city has no legal right to charge a fee or get a permit to use the dock.

Permits were required for “commercial use” of the dock, and the Statesman article indicated that the fee and permit requirements were aimed at “rental boats”, like the large party crafts that operate on **Lake Austin**.

But then city stopped allowing new permits to be issued and stopped allowing “commercial and rental boats” from using the dock. It even returned a check for renewal of an expired permit. Those quotation marks are mine, since I was quoting the newspaper. If the Parks and Rec. ban uses the word “commercial”, *Austin, we have a problem.*

That could easily be interpreted as banning use of the dock by recreational fishing guides that charge for their services. And this column considers that a serious overreach of their authority. We'll follow the story as it progresses. **T★J**



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The Guadalupe River upstream from Lake Ingram in Kerr County is a serene place to fish with a good public boat ramp on Highway 27.

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GET THEIR ATTENTION

Anglers that conquer the hurdles Mother Nature throws will find success this spring.

*Story and Photography
by Nate Skinner*



Springtime tends to have a washing machine effect on our upper coast bays and estuaries. Typically strong winds gust from the south on a regular basis, while lingering late season cold fronts will add occasional, stiff north winds to the equation. There's a chance that the wind will blow from all directions of the compass in a week's time, especially during the month of March.

Spring additionally provides some of the largest variations in tide levels for the calendar year. Extreme low tides along with bull high tides are the norm throughout the third month.

To top it all off, this time period is also when the watersheds that drain into estuaries from the Matagorda Bay system to Sabine Lake begin to receive some of their heaviest rains. March to June are historically the wettest months for the Lone Star State, particularly in the central and eastern portions of Texas where freshwater run off ultimately ends up flowing through bays along the upper Texas coast. Combine this with the fact that the Old Farmer's Almanac indicates this year will see above average rains starting in March, and dealing with another year of significant freshwater inflows seems almost inevitable.

These variables are what anglers are met with to kick off spring fishing on Texas' upper coast. These conditions will most certainly turn bay waters upside down, inside out, and produce churned up, off-colored water clarities—hence the phrase, the “washing machine effect.”

Despite this difficult scenario that make finding and patterning fish an arduous task, this spring still offers some premium angling opportunities. Speckled trout are approaching their peak spawning period and heavy sows await the fanatics that pursue them. Redfish are once again cruising back lakes and marshes, while flounder have already made their return back into the bays.

With the prevailing conditions, anglers will have to get the attention of the fish in order to provoke a strike. This is nothing adding a little noise and scent to bait presentations can't take care of.

For years freshwater anglers have raved about the lateral line of largemouth bass. The idea is that triggering this sensory tissue on the fish by pairing noise and



D.O.A.'s PT-7 is the perfect match the hatch topwater lure for marshy areas and stretches of water with floating grass.

vibrations with artificial baits will draw more strikes.

The lateral line of a bass is composed of sensory receptors that detect changes through vibrations in the water, allowing them to pinpoint where prey or predators might be in relation to their own body. These receptors are especially important when their vision may be impaired by low light or murky water. It's sort of similar to the way mammals use their ears to hear.

According to Dr. Greg Stunz, Endowed Chair for Fisheries and Ocean Health and Director for the Center for Sportfish Science and Conservation at the Harte Research Institute of Gulf of Mexico Studies, redfish and speckled trout also sport this impressive sensory system, even though there is no physical distinction along the sides of their body.

“Although trout and reds do not have a distinct line in the coloration pattern along their sides, they still have plenty of sensory receptors,” Stunz explained. “These receptors alert them of changes through the water column. This is about as close to hearing as they can get without



A She Pup by MirroLure is an excellent match the hatch topwater with a loud, high-pitched rattle.



Capt. Paul Johnson enticed this trout to bite during windy spring conditions by pairing a scented soft plastic with a popping cork.

the market and each have their purpose according to the situation. One thing to keep in mind is that springtime hatches of shrimp, glass minnows and other baitfish will be prevalent throughout estuaries. Matching the hatch with smaller, puppy size plugs is a must when swarms of small baitfish are present.

The Top Pup and She Pup by Mirr-O-Lure are excellent surface options for matching the hatch. The Top Pup has a deeper, knocking rattle while the She Pup creates a higher pitched sound similar to a maraca or baby rattle. My experience has been that the higher pitched She Pup works better in water depths deeper than a few feet, while the deeper sounding Top Pup will produce more hits while drifting or wading

actually having ears.”

Stunz states that the receptors help the fish feel pressure differences in the water, as well as any vibrations and changes around them.

“These feelings are so intense that trout and reds can find a bait sending out noises and vibrations, without actually looking at it.” he elaborated. “It doesn’t matter if the bait is behind them, below them, above them, or if the water clarity is poor with limited visibility, the receptors will tell them where they need to strike.”

Because the lateral line of sensory receptors on specks and reds draws these game fish to the noisy vibrations produced by certain artificial lures, it just makes sense to chunk baits that make a bunch of racket in the spring.

One of the loudest types of baits is the topwater plug. These floating fakes not only sport obnoxiously noisy rattles, they also produce significant vibrations as they walk and wake their way across the water’s surface. This makes them a perfect candidate for drawing bone crushing strikes during the prevailing spring conditions.

There are several styles of topwaters on

in shallow water depths of three feet or less. Anglers should vary which model they throw and let the fish tell them which sound they prefer.

When fishing back lake marshes, areas with seagrass beds, or stretches of water with floating grass, it’s hard to beat the PT-7 topwater lure by D.O.A. This



Cuts and drains leading to and from marshes will become hot spots this spring during outgoing tides

plug is unlike any other surface bait on the market. It encompasses a soft body rather than hard plastic, so it feels real to a striking fish. The PT-7 is the perfect, bite size at three inches in length, making it great for matching the hatch. It also comes rigged weedless, allowing it to walk across grass, vegetation and other structure without getting hung up. The bait also contains a loud rattle chamber that helps fish find it during difficult springtime fishing conditions.

In extremely windy conditions, while fishing in deeper water depths over four feet, and when targeting trophy trout I prefer to use full sized topwaters like the Rapala Skitterwalk and the Unfair Lures DawgWalker. Pink is my favorite color in both of these models.

The Bill Lewis Stutter Step 4.0 is a new surface bait on the market that is extremely easy to use. It has a tantalizing action whether it is retrieved with a twitching motion or by simply reeling it in. The lure creates a ton of vibration as it can be walked or waked across the surface of the water, and it sports a paddle shaped tail that produces a splashing action when worked at a fast pace.

When casting topwater plugs anglers should vary the angle of their retrieve in relation to the wind. Often times, the fish prefer a retrieve that is quartering to the wind at a 45 degree angle or perpendicular to the wind direction. When a lure is chunked straight down wind and walked directly back against the surface chop its action is hindered.

An excellent way to add noise and vibration to a sub-surface bait like a soft plastic is to rig it under a popping cork. Some of the loudest corks on the market that also cast long distances are made by MidCoast Products.

Anglers should vary the length of the leader under a popping cork according to the depth they are fishing and where the fish seem to be located. If the fish are on the bottom a longer leader will be necessary. When the fish are suspended a shorter leader will do the trick.

Pairing a popping cork with a scented soft plastic like a Gulp Shrimp or a Z Man scented jerk shad is a killer combination when bay waters are windblown and off colored. Paddle tail soft plastics will also give off additional vibrations throughout the water column when rigged under a popping cork. They can be treated with a scent product such as Pro Cure for added success.

Scented baits can also be worked by themselves on a jig head with good results. Gulp Shrimp, Gulp Jigging grubs, and other soft plastics treated with Pro Cure are dynamite when fishing cuts, channels, and out-of-the-wind marsh drains for

flounder.

Anglers should plan to employ the above bait presentation tactics in the lower portion upper coast bays to combat the effects of freshwater run off. Depending on how much rain falls over a given period of time, there is a strong chance the upper reaches of bays will be too fresh near the source of freshwater inflows.

During periods of significant run off, fish will stack up along the bottom in deeper mid bay areas. This is where the saltiest water will be located.

Along shorelines hot spots will be found near the mouths of marshes as well as around any cuts and drains leading to and from back lakes. These areas will be best during outgoing tides when the current pulls baitfish out of the back reaches of marshes and satellite bays.

The anglers that are prepared to conquer the hurdles Mother Nature throws at them this spring will find success.

Make the adjustment with bait presentations and pay close attention to significant rain events along upper coast watersheds. Create an adaptive game plan, and go get ‘em **T&J**



Flounder can be found near the mouths of marsh cuts on an outgoing tide and will readily hit scented soft plastics rigged on a jig head.

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What Was Hot At S.H.O.T. 2018

In January the Sands Expo Center in Las Vegas was the site of the annual Shooting, Hunting and Outdoor Trade Show. Lovingly known as the S.H.O.T. Show, this was the 40th annual and I was pleased to join the over 60,000 attendees fondling the merchandise. Here is a small sample of some of the standouts.

The current rage is precision bolt-action rifles able to reach out and touch something at ever longer distances be it punching paper, ringing gongs or whacking coyotes and hogs. Winchester Repeating Arms gets in to the game with the new XPC precision chassis rifle.

The heart of the XPC is the proven XPR receiver that is machined from through-hardened chromoly steel barstock. The massive front locking lugs on the bolt offer a fast flipping 60-degree bolt lift that is smooth and slick with plenty of clearance for larger target scopes.

The large diameter steel bolt adds to the rifle's accuracy potential. The bolt body is coated with Nickel Teflon for smoother operation and added corrosion resistance and can be field stripped in just seconds without using tools. The extended bolt handle features a large cone-shaped knob for added leverage and more positive operation. The ejection port is wide open for easy loading of single cartridges.

This rifle is topped with a MIL-STD M1913 optics mounting rail with a full 20 MOA built in for more usable elevation adjustment at longer ranges. The XPC's ultra-rigid barrel is a button-ripped, free floating chromoly unit that's .75" in diameter at the muzzle so there's plenty of mass to absorb the heat of sustained firing.

Other features include a Perma-Cote black finish on the receiver and barrel, M.O.A. adjustable trigger, Cerakote



From the top, the CRKT Pack Axe, Williams Tactical Pen II and Ruger RTD.

coated fully machined alloy chassis frame, MagPul fully adjustable buttstock, full length Picatinny rail for mounting optics, M-Lok on forearm and butt stock for attaching accessories; QD sling mounts on butt stock, MagPul MOE-K grip and includes one 10 round MagPul P-MAG magazine.

The Winchester XPC is available in .308 Winchester, .243 Winchester and the hot 6.5 Creedmoor. Sticker price for this bad boy is \$1,599.99, but there will be better deals at the dealers.

For shotgunners wanting top shelf merchandise for shoot and show Browning enters its sixth year of their High Grade Program with the introduction of the limited production Citori 725 Grade VI Field 12 and 20 gauge shotguns that will be a dandy choice for clays or birds.

The guns feature gold enhanced

intricately detailed engraving on the receiver with hand-fitted grade V/VI gloss oil finished walnut stocks. The stock has a close radius pistol grip and palm swell with an Inflex recoil pad. The steel low profile receiver has a silver nitride finish. The gun uses Browning's Fire Lite mechanical trigger system.

The Citori 725 Grade VI Field Model has a ventilated top rib barrel with Vector Pro lengthened forcing cones and comes with three Invector-DS extended choke tubes. Ivory front and mid bead sights class up the 26" or 28" barrels. The Citori 725 Grade VI Field Model comes with a Browning Canvas/Distressed Leather fitted case and sells for a MSRP of \$5,999.99.

My favorite firearm of the 40th Anniversary S.H.O.T. Show is the Ruger Precision Rimfire Rifle. Sturm, Ruger & Co. have already made big waves with their outstanding big bore Precision Rifle, but they understand not everyone has a 1,000 yard range to play with a .308, 6.5 Creedmoor or .338 Lapua. How

about creating an honest 200-yard .22 Long Rifle?

This scaled down version maintains the same ergonomics, trigger and manual of arms as its big brother. The Ruger Precision Rimfire features a molded, one-piece chassis and adjustable buttstock assembly manufactured from glass-filled nylon for strength, stiffness and stability. The Quick-Fit adjustable stock allows for length of pull and comb height to be quickly and easily adjusted for proper fit over a wide range of shooter sizes, outerwear and shooting positions. Indicating marks molded into the chassis help you quickly return to a previous position.

The oversized bolt handle makes for positive bolt manipulation. The 18" target barrel is cold hammer-forged from 4140 alloy steel to create ultra-precise rifling for excellent accuracy. The 1/2"-28 thread at the muzzle allows for attaching Ruger's Silent-SR suppressor if you do the proper federal paperwork or other muzzle devices.

The 15" hard black anodized aluminum, free-float handguard features Magpul M-LOK slots on all four sides for improved scope clearance and easy mounting of M-LOK-compatible rails and accessories.

The Ruger Marksman Adjustable trigger has a pull weight range of 2.25 to 5.0 pounds and the adjusting wrench is conveniently stored in a buttstock compartment on the rifle.

The Precision Rimfire ships with one 15-round BX-15 magazine or two 10-round BX-1 magazines. For increased long-range elevation capabilities, the rifle is topped with a 30 MOA Picatinny scope base.

For practice, plinking or hunting this well thought out and executed rifle is a



The outstanding Ruger Precision Rimfire.

bargain at the suggested retail of \$529.00 which means it will hit guns stores in the \$400.00 range.

Since the S.H.O.T. Show is so much more than firearms I must always pass by the Columbia River Knife and Tool display to find out what's new with sharp edges. Again, they did not disappoint by displaying several new tools created in collaboration with some of the best custom blade designers on the planet. Here are a few examples.

Elmer Roush spent 18 months in Vietnam. So his vision of a new axe is inspired by more than just aesthetics. The Pack Axe is refined down to the minute details and wilderness-ready on every last level.

It's an all-around outdoor-savvy axe with a hot forged 1060 carbon steel head complete with a hammer finish. Sitting snugly atop a highly ergonomic Tennessee hickory handle, it's at once good looking, durable, and compact.

"Perfectly portable, seriously serviceable, the Pack Axe is further proof that Elmer is at the top of the pack." Well said and well priced at \$ 89.99.

The Pack Axe is part of the Forged by War program. CRKT cares deeply about our returning veterans and they saw a way to give back to the community that created them. In 2016, they launched the Forged by War program. These are

mission ready tools, designed by veterans, with 10 percent of the CRKT net profits of the program donated to the veterans' charity of choice.

Part of the CRKT Ruger line, the RTD is named for and inspired by the Ruger 10/22 Takedown. Designed by Matthew Lerch and featuring Ken Onion's innovative Field Strip Technology, it can be taken apart for easy cleaning and maintenance when out in the field or at the range.

This folding knife has a textured glass-reinforced nylon handle with clip and locking liner for secure lockup while in use. The 3.665 inch stainless steel blade opens with a quick acting flipper and the handles are of glass reinforced nylon. Slick and quick for \$89.99.

The pen can be mightier than the sword if it's the Williams Tactical Pen II and you have been practicing properly. Former Army officer and martial arts instructor, James Williams is a man who is fluent in employing self-defense tools and years ago, he designed a tactical pen from his shop in Encinitas, California. The knife world loved it. Now, he's touched it up and it's better than ever.

The 6061 aircraft-grade aluminum body houses a legendary Fisher Space Pen ink cartridge. The sleek instrument features a black, hard anodized finish and shapely grooves to improve grip. On one end, a cap with a removable pocket clip clicks securely in place, on the other a blunted point innocuously stays at the ready if trouble arises. Confidence in hand for just \$59.99.

There's more to come. 



The Browning Citori Grade VI Field.



Above: The long range Winchester XPC Chassis Rifle.

BED TRICKS

March and April are the best months to look for spawning bass on most Texas lakes.

Story and Photography by Matt Williams

Fishermen are among the world's greatest storytellers. Ask around and you will find that they all have a skeleton or two in the closet about the big ones that got away. As much as I like hearing the heartbreakers, I enjoy hearing tales about hard fought battles that culminate with a happy ending even more.

One of the best big bass stories I've ever heard belongs to Mark Mowery.

Mowery is a 59-year-old retired firefighter from Longview who takes his

bass fishing pretty seriously. He likes to catch 'em anyway he can, but sight fishing ranks near the top of the list when it comes to fun fishing.

Sight fishing is a popular technique that involves targeting fish that you can visually see in shallow water. It is most effective when bass are locked onto spawning beds in the springtime.

Bedding fish tend to be extremely protective of their nests and will often times pounce on anything that is perceived as a potential threat. Sight fishermen

attempt to spur the aggression by tossing jigs and plastics onto spawning beds to make the bass think a salamander, perch or some other critter is plotting to steal its eggs.

Mowery was sight fishing at Brandy Branch Reservoir back in 1994 when he spotted a circular opening in a matted hydrilla bed in about eight feet of water. Thinking there might be a spawning bed there, he quietly inched his bass boat to the edge of the hole so he could peep over the edge and see the bottom in the

gin-clear water.

The angler guessed right. A dark shadow stood out in stark contrast to the sandy bottom, so he picked up a Texas-rigged lizard, dropped it into the hole and fed line until the bait reached bottom. The fish ate the bait on the first drop. It turned out to be large male that Mowery estimated to weigh close to five pounds.

Well aware that spawning bass usually run in pairs, Mowery eased the boat back to the edge of the hole in the grass to see if there was a female in the area. There was.



The backs of isolated pockets protected from north winds are good places to look for bedding fish. These types of areas will be the quickest to warm during early spring.

"I'll never forget it," he said, Mowery said. "I was looking straight down on the bed. I didn't see anything at first. Then, all of the sudden this big ol' head pokes out of the grass. I knew right away she was a giant."

Mowery lowered his six inch lizard onto the bed and actually saw the big bass' gills flare as it inhaled the bait on the third drop. It weighed 11.67 pounds. That's a huge bass to catch using any tactic, but it is a particularly good accomplishment to boat one that large while sight fishing.

The fish was Mowery's personal best, but not for long. Less than an hour later he was easing down a nearby shoreline and spotted an even bigger fish hovering over a bed in about three feet of water, about 15 yards away.

This one wasn't near as easy to fool. Mowery toyed with the fish for about 45 minutes with no success. He even bumped it with his bait on several occasions to try to entice it to bite, but the heavyweight female wasn't having any of it.

"She kept moving off the bed and then she'd come back," Mowery said. "I could tell she was getting aggravated, but she still kept swimming off. One time she disappeared for about five minutes and I thought she was gone for good. I'd just pulled up my anchor to leave and she came cruising back in there."

Mowery fired the lizard back to the bed twice more and the bass gobbled it up. It weighed 13.97 pounds and eventually became the 160th bass entered in the

Toyota Sharelunker program.

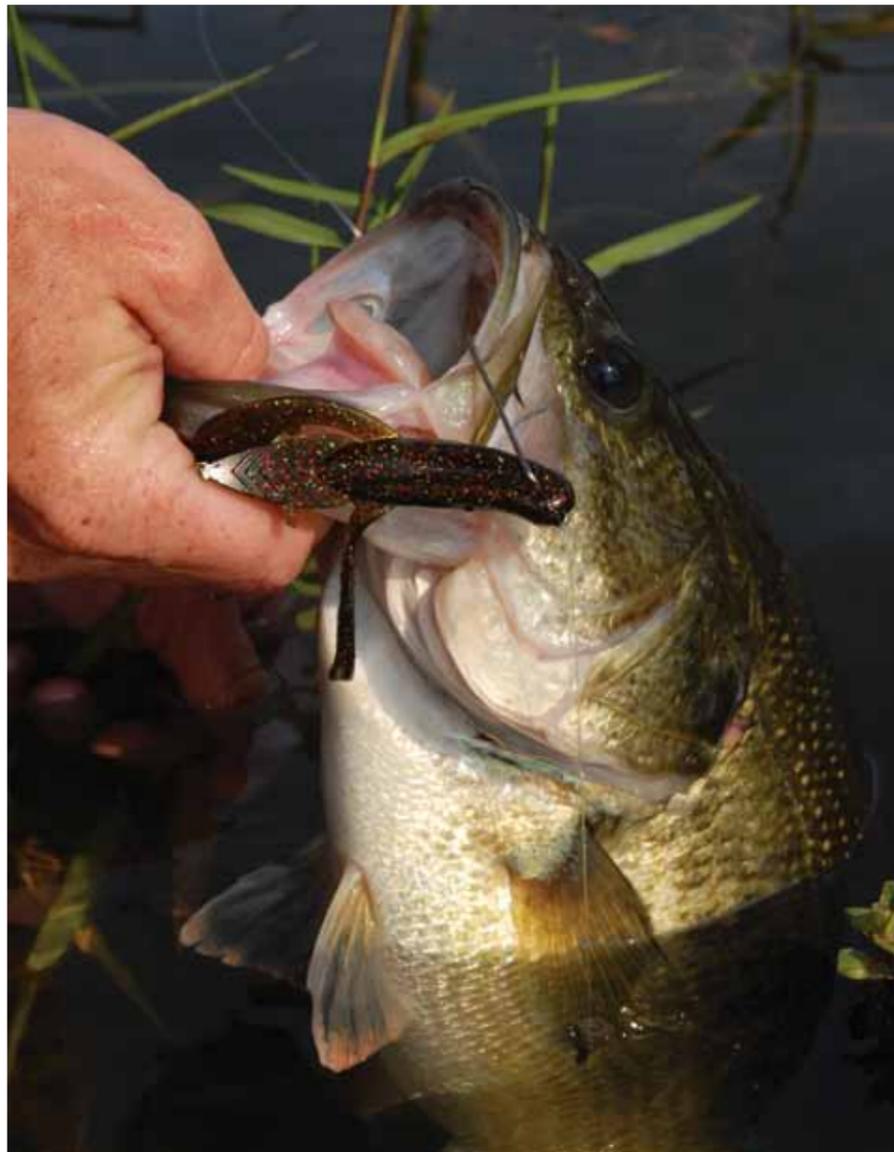
Amazingly, Mowery's story gets even better.

"I was trolling out of there I saw another hole in the grass, probably 30 feet from where I'd just caught the 13.97," he said. "I stopped and pitched a lizard in there and another big one grabbed it right off the bat. I set the hook and the fish shot up and out of the hole like bottle rocket. Then it broke my line. That bass was at least 10 pounds, maybe more."

While Mowery's fairy tale sight fishing experience ranks among the best I have ever heard about, Dean Rojas' is no doubt the most fabled of all.

Rojas is a veteran Bassmaster pro from Havasu, AZ., who set a single-day, five-fish weight record of 45 pounds, 2 ounces during the BASS Top 150 event held in Jan. 2001 on Florida's Lake Toho. Included in the mix were an army of heavyweights weighing 10-13, 10-0, 9-0, 8-2 and 7-9 pounds. A well known sight fishing specialist, Rojas caught the fat bass as they hung around spawning beds in one to three feet of water at the mouth of a well known Toho spawning area called Shingle Creek. He ultimately won the event with 108 pounds, 12 ounces that ranked as the BASS record for four-day events for several years.

Although a couple of anglers have since flirted with Rojas' single day weight record, no one has come remotely close to reeling in such a monstrous sack during a pro bass tournament while targeting



Small, compact baits like creatures and craws are heavily favored by bed fishermen. Colors like pink or white are heavily favored by some anglers because they are easy to see beneath the surface, whereas others prefer something more translucent.

bedding bass exclusively. I'm reluctant to say no one ever will, but things are going to have to line up better than picture perfect in order for it to happen.

All records and tournaments aside, sight fishing for spawning bass is a facet of the sport that can be every bit as intriguing as it is enjoyable. That's because you can actually see how the fish reacts to your presence, as well as a bait that comes slithering into its turf. It also can be super challenging at times, mainly because every bedding bass is different. While some are easy to catch, others can be more difficult, if not impossible, to fool.

March and April are the best months to go looking for bass on most Texas lakes. Keep that in mind as you ponder the

following list of sight fishing tips gathered from nearly three decades of interviews and dozens of days on the water spent watching some of the nation's top ranked sight fishermen at work on the front deck:

* Spawning beds are normally circular in shape and measure about one to three feet in diameter. Male bass construct beds by using their tails to "fan" away moss and other debris until the bottom is clean. In many cases the bed will stand out in stark contrast to its surroundings.

* Largemouth bass will build beds in water as shallow as one foot deep, but you will rarely find the really big girls that close to the bank. It's not uncommon for big bass to spawn at depths of eight feet or more.

* Spawning bass have a tendency to be spooky, especially in ultra-clear water or high pressure fishing situations. Skilled bed fishermen target fish by using their trolling motors or push poles to propel their boats quietly through shallow water with a high degree of visibility. Several companies manufacture push poles or you cut down on the expense by making your own using a 10-12 foot section of 1 1/2 or two inch PVC pipe with a tee connector at one end.

* When using a troll motor, set it to low speed and keep the shaft adjusted so the prop stays out of the mud but beneath the surface. The idea is to be as quiet as possible when moving about.

* A good shallow water anchor like a Minn Kota Talon or Power Pole is a very handy tool for sight fishing. It allows you to stop the boat quietly and maintain optimum position for casting without having to rely on the trolling motor repeatedly. Trolling motors create turbulence and noise that may cause bedding bass to become increasingly spooky.

* A bass on a bed is much easier to catch if it has no idea you are around. If you spot a big bass that spooks, you can mark the location by stabbing a small diameter wooden dowel into the bottom or placing a marker buoy. This allows you to return later and blind cast to the sweet spot from a distance. It's best to place the marker on the backside of the bed so it doesn't interfere with your cast. Tournament anglers frequently use this trick when scouting for bedding bass before a tournament gets underway.

* Good places to look for beds are wind-protected pockets with sandy or gravel shorelines that offer some cover from the outside world. To refine the search, key on secondary points and flats located in close proximity to deeper water provided by a creek, ditch or some travel route that connects deep water to shallow.

* A sight fisherman's best friend is a pair of quality sunglasses. Polarized sunglasses reduce sun glare on the water's surface. This makes it easier to detect beds from farther away. Buy the best sunglasses you can afford. Dark colored lenses work best under bright sun; amber lenses are best under overcast skies.

* Some bass are easier to catch off beds than others. Learning to "read the fish" can help you determine if a bass is catchable

or not, or how much time you might have to invest in the fish to trigger a bite. A bass that runs from a bait and stays gone for minutes at a time isn't near as easy to catch as one that leaves and comes back immediately, or one that refuses to leave the nest at all.

* A bedding bass that won't bite can sometimes be triggered into a strike by getting aggressive. Try bumping the fish in the side with a Texas rig when it swims by.

* Try to remain incognito. If you can see a bass on a bed, chances are it can see you. Put some cover (a tree, patch of cattails, etc...) between you and the bed whenever possible. It is best to approach beds with the sun at your back.

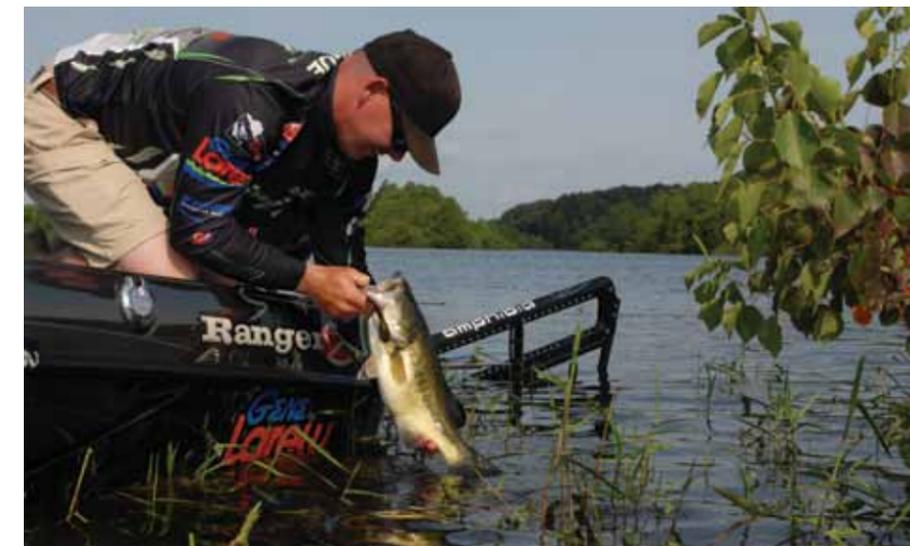
* A subtle lure presentation is essential. Cast past the bed and bring the bait back to it. Land a bait on top of a bedded bass and you run a high risk of spooking it.

* The best sight fishermen are those who can present lures quietly and accurately. Develop good casting skills, particularly with pitching and flipping. Both casting styles allow lures to maintain low trajectory and enter the water with minimal disturbance.

* Bright colored plastic baits like white or bubble gum are ideal for sight fishing, because they are easy to see from a distance. Being able to see your bait makes it much easier to stay in full contact with what is going on down there.

While fishing for bedding fish can

be just as challenging as it is fun, it isn't always the best option because only a small percentage of the fish in a lake will be on beds at the same time. Find one fish on a bed in skinny water and there may be a dozen hanging around in slightly deeper water behind you. 🌟🌟



A shallow water anchor like a Power Pole or Minn Kota Talon is a useful tool for bed fishing because it allows you to hold the boat in position without running the trolling motor, which could potentially spook the fish.



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Tilting the Odds

A simple mistake can be final. There are no second chances. The frustrating limpness when a hook has pulled free or the sudden sickening sensation of a line that just surrendered to too much pressure spells defeat. That fish is gone forever, moving off somewhere in the depths to regroup and eventually resume its pattern of normal activity. Angler error or tackle failure succeeded in creating another fish story about the one that got away.

No one boasts of unflinching perfection in successfully landing every fish. Even the leading fishermen suffer the indignities of failure on occasion and lose fish, but they work overtime to hone their tackle and techniques to minimize this from happening. The key lies in tilting the odds in your favor so that losing fish becomes the exception rather than the rule.

The obvious place to start is with the hook or hooks you are using. Dull hooks

lead to disaster. The point of the hook must penetrate the fish's mouth and the barb has to hold it there. Smaller, lighter wire hooks give you an obvious advantage when it comes to penetration, particularly when you sharpen the point and even file cutting edges on the side. If you are using a circle hook, remember that you don't want to haul back on the rod to set it. In fact, with any hook, when you feel a strike, all you have to do is start to reel. That takes up any slack and the pressure against the drag will usually do the job. And, when I'm fishing for species with a hard mouth, I often tie a new hook on after every fish.

The line forms the only link between you and the fish. Nicks or abrasions on the line weaken it considerably by forming points of stress concentration. If you feel anything but smoothness when you run your hand over the end of the line, cut

that portion off and retie the terminal tackle. Reel spools should always be full. Change the line at least twice as often as you currently do and don't look for bargains when you buy line. Choose the break strength that matches the tackle you are using. Too light a line on a heavy outfit won't perform well and neither will a heavy line on a light outfit.

Too many fishermen take a rather cavalier attitude toward setting the drag on the reel. Whenever possible use a scale. With the rod tip pointing directly at the scale, pull back on the rod until line begins to slip. The reading on the scale should be 20 to 25 percent of the line's breaking strength. With lighter lines, this number drops to 15 percent. You can add additional drag by clamping the line against the rod and by using your fingers on the reel.

The drag on your reel should be

smooth. As the fish runs, watch the rod tip. If the tip jerks and bobs, the drag is erratic. The tip should remain in one position if the drag is yielding line smoothly. You can improve a drag by changing washers, cleaning them, and lubricating the drag with special compounds.

When an inexperienced angler hooks a good fish, he usually insists on babying his quarry. If you want to land oversized fish, you must battle them continuously without resting or reducing the pressure on them.

The idea is to deplete the fish's oxygen supply just like a runner trying to go uphill at full speed. The only time you reduce pressure is during the initial run. The instant a fish is hooked it usually takes off at full speed. This is the time to point the rod directly at the spot where the line enters the water and let the fish speed off against minimum drag. Trying to snub a fish short usually leads to instant failure. When it stops, start trying to pump it back.

The longer a fish remains in the water, the greater the chance you will lose it. If that critter turns broadside and "dogs it," try to pressure it toward you. The key here is to hold the rod parallel to the water and use side pressure. Unless a fish is deep and you are trying to drag it to the surface, side pressure is far more effective than vertical pressure. If you give a fish a breather, it will recover faster than you will.

A simple overhand knot in the middle of the line can reduce its breaking strength by one-half. Knots are generally the weakest points in any setup. Each knot should be selected carefully for the task at hand as well as your ability to tie it. It's better to use a weaker knot that you can tie perfectly than a stronger one that you can't tie to its maximum strength. If you can put a Bimini Twist in the terminal end of the line, you can tie in the terminal tackle and still keep the line at its determined strength. Knots tend to slip before they break. That's why it's important to seat every knot to the maximum. Loose knots fail easily.

More fish are lost at the boat than at any other time. The instant your quarry sees that hull, it's going to make a desperation bid for freedom. That sudden surge can pop a line or pull a hook. As the fish darts away, drop the rod tip to minimize the pressure and let it go. When



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

One key to success is to always use sharp hooks and jig heads. A dull hook will lead to disaster.

you can gain control, work the fish back toward you.

If the fish dives under the boat, push your rod as deep as you can in the water and work the line around anything under the hull until your rod and the fish are on the same side of the boat clear of any

obstruction.

Telling the tale of the one that got away isn't much fun.

The more you can hone your skills in battling big fish, the fewer stories of lost fish you will have to tell and that will put a smile on your face. 🌟🌟



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

When an inexperienced angler hooks a good fish, he usually insists on babying his quarry. If you want to land oversized fish, you must battle them continuously without resting or reducing the pressure on them. Here Capt. Nathan Beabout uses side pressure to battle and quickly subdues a monster redfish.

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Scoring a LONGBEARD

Understanding the birds' breeding habits and other traits will result in spring hunting success.

Story and Photography by Nate Skinner



Turkeys are an addictive creature to hunt. They can provide exhilarating experiences in the field or become the source of a hunter's immense frustration.

With a keen sense of hearing and out-of-this-world eyesight, gobblers give a whole new meaning to the word "arduous." If they had any sense of smell, harvesting a boss bird would be almost out of the question. Simply chasing them takes dedication and hard work.

Despite these odds, most spring turkey hunting fanatics know exactly what they're up against. Many hours in the field may fall between the few short moments in which close encounters with a mature Tom occurs.

When primo hunting strategies are applied, the time between unforgettable harvests can be significantly shortened. Then nothing but solid memories await.

Preseason scouting is an excellent way to ensure success in the field this spring, especially early on in the season. According to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Turkey Program Leader, Jason Hardin, the spring seasons for Rio Grande Turkey in the north and south zones open about two weeks prior to the peak breeding period.

"Peak breeding periods for turkey vary about two weeks between south Texas and north Texas, and our season dates reflect this variation," he explained.

Hardin informs that hunters can initially expect to find hens and gobblers in relatively large flocks from the season opener through the second week of the season.

With the birds in large groups, hunters can plan to scout a few days prior to opening day and make note of what travel routes the birds are taking once they leave the roost. In order for this to be productive, hunters must first pinpoint the birds' roosting location.

A proven tactic for finding a roost involves using a shock call, such as a crow or peacock call, and aggressively calling from a high, central point on the property being hunted at dusk or dawn. Gobblers will sound off in response to the shrill noises from these calls, revealing where they are roosting each night.

Then hunters can observe the terrain adjacent to the roost from a distance, using a pair of binoculars or a spotting scope during the morning and evening hours. The path mature gobblers use to travel to and from the roost then become the central location as to where hunters

should set up.

Last spring I had the best opening weekend I've ever experienced thanks to the scouting technique described above. Two days before the opener I arrived at our family farm in south Texas about an hour before sunrise and quietly made my way to a small hill located near the center of the property. A few piercing calls from my crow call were immediately met by a cacophony of gobblers.

I ventured off in the direction of the birds and then after closing the distance a few hundred yards, called again. The response this time was much louder and gave me a good idea of where the birds were roosting along the oak lined creek bottom before me.

After the sun came up I watched from a concealed location several hundred yards away as several stud gobblers flew down into the field next to the creek bottom they were roosting in.

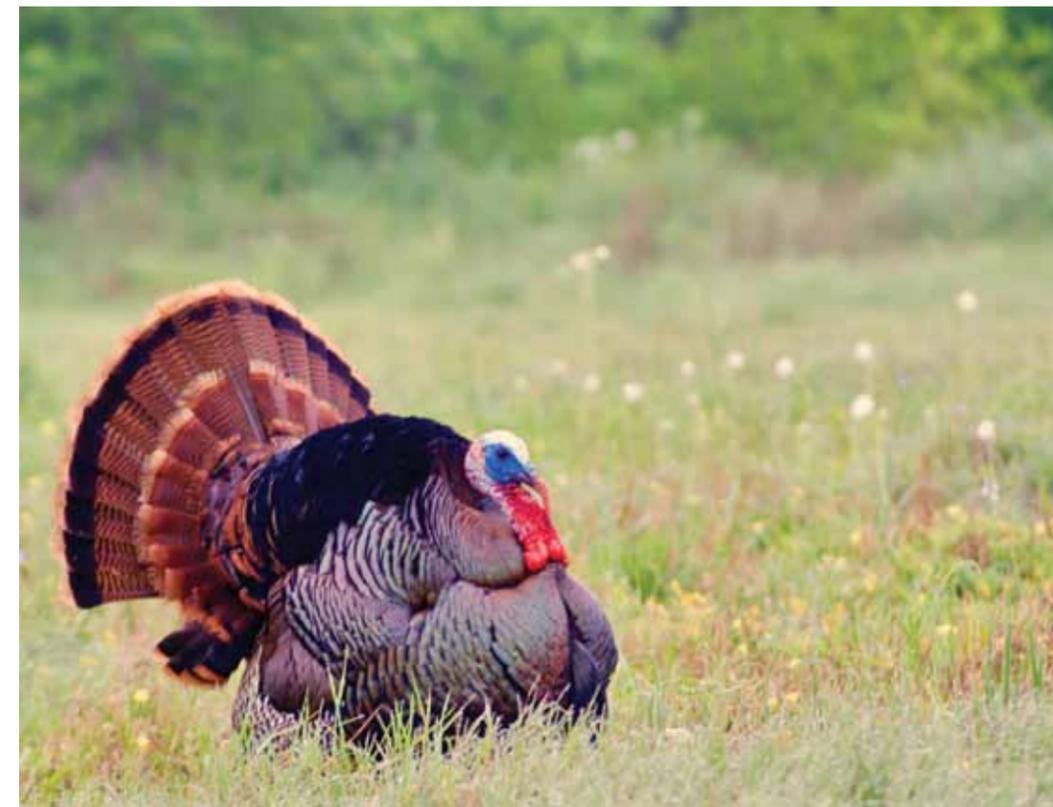
On opening day my Dad and I stealthily snuck into that field and got set up well before sunrise. We ended up doubling up on two outstanding birds before nine o'clock in the morning, one of which turned out to be a double bearded Tom.

When it comes to Eastern turkeys in east Texas, productive pre season scouting and finding a set up location will look a little different.

"The east Texas season for Eastern turkey opens closer to their peak breeding period, so the birds won't be grouped up," confesses Hardin. "Scouting a few days before the season should be focused on finding the travel routes hens take to and from the roost. Hunters will need to set up near these paths, because the gobblers won't be far behind."

The key to a successful set up and effective calling constantly changes as turkey season wears on. Hunters that understand the different stages of the breeding season will be able to adjust their strategies accordingly.

TPWD wildlife biologist, Blaise Korzekwa, claims that the breeding season is highly dependent on the condition



To a turkey hunter the colorful spring pageantry is not complete without a close encounter with a boss gobbler.

Turkey Breeding Process

In general, hens come to gobblers when it comes to initiating the turkey breeding process; however, this is not always the case or hunters would have a difficult time harvesting Toms during the spring season. The following steps are provided by TPWD Turkey Program Leader, Jason Hardin:

- * Hens become receptive and choose a male
- * The male breeds the hen and will stick with her for a while until he loses interest and goes in search of other hens
- * The female will split off from the male and often other hens.

- * Once the hen is ready she will select a site to lay her eggs
- * She will lay one egg every day or two until her clutch is complete (11-12 eggs on average, but this can vary).
- * Once the last egg is laid the hen will begin incubation. This is the only period of the hen's adult life that she does not roost in a tree at night and many die because of this effort.
- * Typically, at least half of turkey nesting attempts fail. This failure is mostly due to predators taking the eggs and/or killing the hen
- * Incubation will last approximately 28 days with the hen only leaving the nest for short periods of time every day or two for food, water, or perhaps to just stretch her legs
- * If the hen is successful (at least one egg hatches) she will lead her precocial chick(s) away from the nest site in search for insects. Poults cannot fly until they are 10 days to two weeks old. Most poults do not survive the first four weeks of life. Those that do survive to four weeks of age have a good chance of becoming part of the local population. ★



In the natural world when a hen yelps and a gobbler gobbles the hen goes to the Tom. When calling spring turkeys hunters have to go against this normal response to lure a gobbler to their call site.

gobblers.

“At about the midpoint of the season most Toms are henned up,” informed Korzekwa. “They may respond to a call but will more than likely not be willing to leave a hen.”

Hardin claims that one way to overcome this is to call in a hen.

“Gobblers are going to follow hens when the majority of them are receptive,” he explains. “I like to mimic the loudest hen’s cadence and try to call her in. If a hen comes to check out your set up, chances are you can get a shot at a gobbler.”

Another way to overcome mid season hurdles is to hunt later into the day and spend more time out in the field calling during the mid morning to mid afternoon hours.

Hardin states that this an effective strategy because during these periods of the day most hens are nesting or incubating their eggs, while the remaining hens are already bred and non receptive.

“Gobblers will lose interest in whatever non-receptive hens are still out and about by mid morning,” he elaborated. “At this point they will be willing to come check out the hen that is calling in the distance.”

There is typically an increase in gobbling activity at the tail end of the season as most hens have been bred and are spending the majority of their time incubating their eggs. Softer, more subtle calls can be more effective during this period as hunting pressure could have the birds shy towards aggressive calling.

National Wild Turkey Federation District Biologist for West Texas, Gene T. Miller, claims that his favorite time to hunt turkeys is right at the end of the spring season.

“Once the breeding process is complete, Toms will continue to look for other hens until there are no other receptive hens available,” he informed. “The smaller the number of receptive hens becomes, the easier it is to lure a gobbler in with a call. For this reason, the end of the spring turkey season can sometimes be phenomenal.”

There are a variety of ways to pursue long beards throughout the season including using a pop-up style blind, or the traditional way of sporting full camouflage from head to tow and becoming one with their environment.

Archery hunters will find that the

concealment of a blind makes it much easier to draw a bow when in the presence of a gobbler.

Those chasing turkeys in full camouflage must ensure that the color schemes of their clothing match the vegetation that is present. Effective camo patterns will contain more green as the

vegetation greens up and the spring season wears on.

Turkey hunting involves considering copious amounts of variables, as well as an excellent understanding of the birds’ breeding habits. The hunters that do their homework will score an incredible gobbler — long beard, spurs and all. ★★



Ryan Welch took this beautiful spring long beard while bow hunting from a pop-up blind.





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of habitat, as well as late winter weather patterns.

“If winter conditions are mild and wet, breeding may occur in the first part of the season,” he elaborated. “If conditions are cold and dry, breeding may begin a little later due to a delayed spring green up.”

Keeping these factors in mind, Korzekwa states that hunters can generally expect to encounter plenty of vocalization from gobblers during the beginning of the season.

“This period of time should be approached with aggressive calling, including plenty of cuts and yelps,” he suggested.

Hardin confirms Korzekwa’s assertions and explains that because of this, he looks forward to hunting the beginning of the season each year in south Texas.

“Most of the hens are not receptive to begin the season and the gobblers are fairly naive,” he stated. “The Toms are ready to breed and will readily respond to a call.”

The middle of spring turkey season can present a frustrating time for hunters. The peak breeding period is underway and there are many receptive hens available for



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Lake Roundup

EAST TEXAS



By Matt Williams

SAM RAYBURN - Bass anglers had better batten down the hatches. March marks the heart of the spawn in eastern Texas and Sam Rayburn is poised to rock the fishing world with some whoppers. Of all the lakes in Texas, there may not be one hotter right now than the 114,000-acre impoundment east of Lufkin.

Veteran fishing guide Tommy Martin says there will be a wide variety of patterns working this month, but the most productive ones will unfold in shallow to mid-range ranges. "There are going to be a lot of fish on the banks spawning," Martin said. "It's a time when guys are going to have to hunker down and fish slow."

While moving baits like a Rat-L-Trap, Chatterbait, spinnerbait or swim jig might get you bit from time to time, Martin pointed to Senkos, Texas rig Brush Hogs and Carolina rig lizards as the orders of the day for consistently good results.

He likes to fish them in the backs of main lake and secondary creeks where he will key on secondary points and flats where the fish have a history of gathering to spawn.

"Again, the main thing to remember when the fish are spawning is to slow down — they probably won't be in mood to chase very much," Martin said. "If I catch one I'll put my power poles down and work the whole area thoroughly."

The common denominator in most of the best fishing areas this month will be hydrilla.

Grass is growing in abundance up and down the lake, but most of the best stuff is south of the Highway 147 Bridge. You can find grass in just about any creek from Indian south to Buck Bay.

Another pattern that could come into play if we got some big rains in February is flipping bushes. Rayburn was nearly three feet below normal in late January, but that could change in fast order in the event of an early spring flood. Put two to three feet of water in the buck brush and willow bushes and the bass will go to it. High water also will create an inside grass line that will attract pre-spawners like a magnet.

TOLEDO BEND - Toledo Bend was slightly more than four feet below normal as January gave way to February and most shorelines were void of cover other than stumps and laydowns.

Unless something drastic happens with the water level, the traditional shoreline patterns that bass anglers can always bank on during the spawn may not be the only games in town.

That's the word from veteran T-Bend salt Tommy Martin of Hemphill. According to Martin, the low water has brought numerous ridges, points and humps on the main lake closer to the surface. He is predicting more fish will spawn away from the bank if the lake remains four to five feet below normal going into March.

"The fish are going to be spawning in March," Martin said. "But if the lake stays low I think there are going to be lot fish spawning offshore. There will still be some fish on the bank, for sure. Just not as many." Regardless of where a spawning bass sets up camp, the time tested tactics that will catch them on relatively clean bottoms will always produce. Among Martin's favorites are a Texas rigged Zoom Baby Brush Hog, wacky worm and a Carolina rigged lizard.

"The main thing to remember in March is to slow down," Martin said. "If I catch one I'll put my Power Poles down and pick the whole area apart really slow."

Another viable option now is sight fishing. This involves moving the boat

slowly through skinny water, looking for bass that are visibly on spawning beds and tempting them into a defensive posture by dragging a bait across their nests. Texas rigged creatures, craws and lizards work well for sight fishing. A drop shot rig also can be deadly at times.

March should also be a good month to go after spawning crappie and reeling in few white bass at the end of their annual spawning run up the Sabine.

Veteran crappie guide Stephen Johnston says the crappie fishing is always best towards the back of creeks when the water is clear. He likes to cast for the fish using a cork and jig or you can use live bait. As for white bass, it's best to venture north of the Logansport Bridge and fish slowly around underwater sandbars and river bends using Roadrunners, Rat-L-Traps and live crawfish.

LIVINGSTON - Lake Livingston fishing guide Randy Dearman says March ranks among very best months of the year to go after bass on the 90,000-acre reservoir north of Houston.

"It's also one of the easiest months when it comes to catching fish," Dearman said. "The main thing to remember is to try not to over think things. The fish are going to be on the bank in water three feet deep or less."

Dearman says certain types of water will be more prone to hold fish than others. The backs of creeks are always good places to look.

"Any little inlet, cut or pocket off of a major or secondary creek will be good provided the water is relatively clear," Dearman said. "Just about any creek up or down the lake will be holding fish. Kickapoo, Indian, Palmetto, Brown, White Rock and Carolina can all be good."

Livingston doesn't have any aquatic vegetation to speak of but it's got quite a bit of wood. For that reason Dearman will never pass up a lay down log, shore stump, bush or stick in one to three feet of water.

"Anything that's in the water could hold a fish," he said. "Just put the trolling motor down, cover water and throw at every piece of cover you come across."

Dearman says he will use of a variety

of baits this time of year, but plastics like a Texas rig Rage Craw, lizard or worm are hard to beat. These baits are designed to be slowly bumped across bottom. They do a great job of imitating some sort of creature attempting to steal the bass' eggs.

Lake Livingston crappie fishing is another good bet come March provided the water remain fairly clear. Fishing guide Dave Cox has made some good hauls this time of year using jigs and shiners beneath a cork to target fish that have set up camp around shoreline brush and log jams located towards the rear of major and secondary creeks.

PALESTINE — Lake Palestine fishing guide Ricky Vandergriff stays plenty busy throughout the month as bass and crappie gravitate towards the bank to do their thing in skinny water.

"March is great month," Vandergriff said. "The water temperatures are going to be warming up and there will be a lot of fish relating to the shallows. If you're after a big bass, now is the time to come to Palestine."

The 20,000-acre lake near Bullard can be good from one end to the other, but Vandergriff likes to spend the majority of his time up north on shallow flats in the vicinity of Kickapoo Creek, Old Folks and the Neches River. Numerous flats are dissected by shallow channels and ditches that the bass use as roadways when moving to their traditional spawning areas. Fishing along the depressions is good way to intercept fish that may be on the move, or you can key on any available shore cover like stumps, lay downs, brush and grass to target fish that may already be on beds.

"I like to throw a spinnerbait, buzz bait or Mister Twister Comida soft jerk bait a lot this time of year," Vandergriff said. "It's also a good idea to have a Texas rigged lizard tied on. The main thing to remember is to fish slow."

Vandergriff says there also should be some fish pulling up in creeks down south towards the end of the month. He suggests fishing tight to docks the backs of the creeks using lizards, jigs, Comidas and craws. Docks with brush always get special attention.

The guide says crappie should be occupying many of the same areas as the bass. He suggests going after them using a slip cork rig matched with a live shiner or casting a small jig on light tackle.

CONROE - Lake Conroe was brimful and surface temps had chilled to the mid-40s as of this writing following the big freeze that brought ice and snow flurries to the region in mid-January.

Things should be back to normal now as the weather goes, which should mean cool nights, brisk mornings and warm afternoons that will heat water temperatures into the 60s.

From a bass fishing standpoint, anglers can pretty much bet the fish will be hugging the banks and hanging around spawning beds all month long. In other words, its time for anglers to get their shallow water game faces on.

"If you're hoping to catch big fish or numbers it's hard to beat March on Conroe," said fishing guide Butch Terpe. "There are going to be a lot of fish up shallow now, and they'll be pretty aggressive if you get bait in front of them. Early in the month I'll probably be fishing more of a pre-spawn pattern, but by the middle of the month the spawn should be going strong."

Early in the month, Terpe suggests targeting bridge rock and other hard stuff around the bank using plastics, square bill crankbaits and lipless crankbaits. Brush piles found along creek channels also attract pre-spawn staging fish that are waiting for things to get right in the shallows before they commit.

Once the spawn gets underway, Terpe will gravitate to the backs of secondary and major creeks where he will work slowly down the shoreline and cast Senkos, Texas rig lizard or Flukes around any available shoreline. He typically begins the search in channels located at the lake's upper reaches first. That's because the water is shallower there and tends to warm up a little faster than the water down south. Areas around the National Forest are definitely worth a serious look during the first week of the month.

About mid-month he will start duplicating the pattern in secondary and major creeks in the mid-lake region south to the dam. It's entirely possible the water



PHOTO BY RICHARD JUE

March should be a good month to go after spawning crappie on a number of East Texas lakes.

down south may be clear enough to sight fish, particularly in secluded backwaters that are protected from Conroe's heavy boat traffic.

NACOGDOCHES - Lake Nac was just over a foot low as of this writing and fairly clear, except at the extreme upper reaches where big winds had churned up a bunch of mud. It's impossible say in advance what shape the lake will be in when March rolls around but I'm banking on more of the same. If this March is like most the bass are sure to be in a spawning mode or real close to it. If you're planning a trip here over the next 30-45 days, think shallow, say eight feet or less.

Two dates to keep in mind now are March 1 and March 31. The moon will shine full around those dates, so you can bet there will be some waves of fish that will go to the bank during those time periods. There will likely be quite a few fish in the pre-spawn mode during the early days of the month. Moving baits like a square bill, Rat-L-Trap, Chatterbait, swim bait or spinnerbait are choices for targeting staging bass around grass edges and channel swings, but once the fish go on beds you'll need to take a slower approach with a Texas rig, wacky worm or weightless Senko.

Sight fishing could be another option if you can locate some flat water that's clear enough to see.

A buzz bait, Whopper Plopper or a

frog also could trigger some aggressive strikes from territorial bedding fish. Even if the fish don't get hooked it could give away their location so you can tease them into biting a different bait.

Just about any shoreline up and down the lake will hold bass this month, but some of the better areas will be found towards the rear of major and secondary creeks. Big Loco, Little Loco and Yellow Bank are among the bigger creeks. There also are several no-name creeks on the east and west sides that are worth a look.

Anglers are also reminded of the 16 inch maximum length limit that has been in place the last few years. The limit allows anglers retain five fish daily under 16 inches. Any fish bigger must be immediately released, unless it is a potential candidate for Toyota ShareLunker. The same limit is in place at neighboring Lake Kurth and Lake Naconiche. **T★J**

NORTH TEXAS



By Brian Hughes

March is the month all anglers have been waiting for. Sure, some dedicated die-hards fished throughout the winter months and some of the tournament guys have already had two, or even three tournaments this year.

For most of us spring is the time of year when we can get excited about fishing again. Bass are moving shallow, crappie too. Sand bass begin to return from their spawning runs, and catfish are once again cruising the banks. All of this means that more fish are more accessible to anglers now, than any other time of the year.

The nice thing is you don't have to have a million dollar rig to catch them either. Kayaks, canoes, jon boats, inner tubes, and even those anglers fishing from the bank will have plenty of opportunities

in March.

Baits will be as varied as the anglers fishing them. Shad, minnows, earthworms, grubs, waterdogs and artificial baits will all see some "hook time" this month. So let's see where and how the fish will be found.

FORK — To catch bass on Fork, you have to understand what the fish are doing this time of year. Many male bass are beginning to make beds, while females are cruising the shallows looking to find a bed. There will be staging fish as well — those staying out a little deeper in the water column — waiting to move up.

Weather will really be a factor as will a lack of grass. Where the hydrilla of old would warm the water and encourage spawning activity as early as late February, now the lack of grass means a later spawn, usually around the first full moon in March. This year March has two full moons, one on March 1 and the other on March 31.

The best chance for catching bass will be by fishing the pre-spawn patterns in six feet of water with jigs or hard jerk-baits. The old hard jerk-bait with two or three treble hooks is a great bait for catching big bass. Most anglers nowadays use the soft plastics like the Flukes and Senkos.

While these are very good baits, the old school Smithwick Rogue and the like are time proven producers. Black/gold, clown or firetiger colors are all good choices, as is the chrome/blue in clearer waters.

Jigs will catch their share of March bass as well. Use a couple of sizes, one in a ¼ ounce will offer a slow fall while a ½ ounce model will get down quicker and work a little deeper. Black/blue is a good color choice as is brown/green and black/watermelon red.

If you're looking for numbers of fish try Flukes and Senkos with a light weight. Fished around channel bends and timber points these baits will get active fish looking for an easy meal. Try 'Traps and spinnerbaits in those areas between the actual beds and the first breakline for cruising fish. Throw red and orange traps, and white/chartreuse spinnerbaits, between four and eight feet and cover water. Once you locate fish, go back over the area with baits like a Texas rigged Creature or lizard, looking for a bigger fish.

Once the water temp reaches about 55-58 degrees the fish will be on the move to shallow water. Spend your time in those

areas that offer a transition from deeper water to shallow, creek channels and ditches and the like. That's where you'll want to be to intercept that big Fork bass!

CEDAR CREEK — Get in the creeks and jig laydowns. That's the March pattern for Cedar Creek crappie. Use 1/8 oz. jigs in chartreuse. Go as far back into a creek as you can get and work the laydowns.

Also be sure to work all sides of a particular piece of cover. On one day the crappie will hold on one side, and the next they could be on the other side, or underneath. One thing for sure, they'll be shallow. Twin, Lacy, Lynn creeks are all good ones as are Kings and Clear. Look from one to three feet early, moving deeper (five to eight feet) later in the day.

For sand bass the ticket will be a Roadrunner in these same creeks. Looking from back to front and making a lot of casts will show the location. Once found it is just a matter of catching your limit. The hybrids will be moving as well and a ½ ounce jighead with a 4" shad body will catch these fish.

Just be sure to use a little stronger line! Where you may use four to eight pound test for crappie and sand bass, hybrids will require a little more persuasion. A good 10 pound line would be a start, 12 pound is even more sure.

For bass fishermen, the Clear and Caney arms are a good place to start the day. Early in the month, look for the structure such as roadbeds and humps to throw your drop-shots and Carolina rigs at. Later look to the rocks and docks for spawning fish. Texas rigged lizards in black/blue or watermelon/chartreuse will be the ticket here. Moving baits like the 'trap and spinnerbait will catch the cruisers along the bank, and a Senko in watermelon/red is always a good bet for shallow bass anytime.

PURTIS CREEK — For many years Purtis was known as a big bass lake. In fact, at one point I would have said that an angler's best chance at a double digit fish would be at Purtis Creek. This was because of the number of big fish, combined with the small size of the lake.

Then came the grass carp and the lake changed. Gone are the days when you can just fish down a grassline and catch all the fish you want. However, the big fish are still there and they still come shallow to spawn in the spring. Look to deeper structure as the key holding area

for bass before they move up shallow. For reference here, deep is over eight feet and shallow is less than four feet. Start at the boat ramp and look to the fishing pier. Between the pier and the dam is a cove containing an old brood pond. The water in the main lake at this area, given normal lake levels, is about 20 feet deep. The pond dam comes up to eight feet or so, then drops again to about 10 or 12 feet. This is a great place to throw Carolina rigs, 'Traps, diving crankbaits and jigs.

The Carolina rig can be thrown over the dam into the main lake. Put your boat on the shallow side of the dam, make a long cast, and retrieve your bait to the base of the dam, up the face and into the pond. Jig fishermen can do the same. The 'Trap can be used along the banks inside the pond itself, while the diving crankbaits can be used parallel to the dam face, on the deep side.

The back of this cove is also one of the first places to warm in the spring, and one of the first places you will see cruising bass and beds being made. Spinnerbaits will work along with the 'Trap for aggressive fish, while a jig or Texas-rigged lizard will catch those fish in the two to four foot range. White, chartreuse or a combination of the two, and red/black in the spinnerbait. Jigs will be black/blue, white on white, or green pumpkin and chartreuse. 'Traps can be blue/chrome, black/chrome or red.

Up the lake you'll want to fish the spawning coves. Any cove on Purtis is a spawning cove. Along the shallow banks in between the points throw the hard jerkbait like the Rapala X-Rap, Husky Jerk or Original Floating Minnow (size 9 or 11) in firetiger. This is meant to cover water between points.

Another approach is to Texas rig a creature, craw or lizard. The best colors are black/blue, neon black/chartreuse, or red shad. Throw this along any point and into any brush or cover that is visible.

The west bank is where the main channel swings and where most of the remaining timber is standing. Starting back by the island the west bank also has several small feeder creeks running into the lake.

This is a jig fishermen's dream come true, as there are about ten gazillion trees, stumps and laydowns you can pitch to with a craw, or Creature, on a jig. Texas rigged lizards will also produce here.

Watermelon/red, black/blue, bubblegum and white-on-white will catch fish.

ATHENS — On nearby Lake Athens the pattern will be a little different. Athens has emerged as a vegetative lake in recent years. Growth of hydrilla and other grasses has made this lake a much better fishery than it was a few years ago. The bass are bigger and there would seem to be more of them, at least there are more of them being caught.

Look to the area under the bridge for lots of grass fishin' with baits like a jig. Later in the month and into April, this area will also be great for throwing frogs on top. Early in the month you'll want to work the edges and holes with a weighted bait, feeling for the thump of a solid bass. Baits like a Senko can be worked along the edges as well.

The baits that can be used will often be determined by the thickness of the vegetation. If possible a 'Trap worked over the top of the grass will dredge out good bass, as will a spinnerbait. At other times the grass is just too thick for this approach.

Out on the main lake, you should find more areas where this will be effective. Up by the dam there are a couple of points

with submerged stump fields around them. Combined with the vegetation, these hold plenty of fish and will be a good place to start on that end of the lake.

Work from shallow to deep until you connect with some fish, then slow down and work the area thoroughly with Texas rigs and jigs. Black/blue, red shad, junebug and green pumpkin are good color choices. Lizards and Creatures make good profile choices.

The docks on Athens are both numerous and productive. Look to the back of the docks for spawning fish, and under the docks for fish holding prior to moving in to spawn. Drop-shotting the edges can produce a few fish, as will swimming a jig along the dockline. Otherwise it will take a skilled angler to skip or shoot a jig underneath the dock. A wacky-rigged worm or Spanky can also be skipped under these docks.

Yes, March is the month we've all been waiting for, and now it is up to us to get out there and make the best of it. Don't forget to share your knowledge with a youngster. Mentor those youngsters so we will always have an outdoor heritage to pass along. **T★J**



CoastWatch | Danno Wise

March is really the first “active” fishing month of the year. Due mostly to the warmer weather, March is the first month to see the crowds returning to the bays. Most of these anglers will be seeking speckled trout, although down south redfish will be a prime target and sheepshead will offer a nice diversion for Coastal Bend fishermen.

Additionally, snook action will be heating up in the Lower Laguna and the first few tarpon of the season should begin making their way up from Mexico. Some state water snapper fishing will be going on in March, although the prime offshore action is still a month or so away. **T★J**



Port Isabel/South Padre Island guide Capt. Austin Camacho says he’ll be doing a couple of distinctly different things during March.

“We’ll be fishing for trout quite a bit in March,” said Camacho. “But, we’ll also be fishing for sheepshead quite a bit.

“For sheepshead, it really depends on when they come in and how long they stay. It can happen anytime from the second week in February through March. When they’re in, we can usually get them pretty good free-lining shrimp around one of the causeways. I’ll hit ‘em at the jetties every now and then, but we don’t get that many days where it’s calm out there in March.

“By the second week of March, we’ll start seeing our trout out front. So, I’ll be fishing Long Bar and the ICW spoils. I’ll fish both the east and west side of those bars. I throw a lot of topwaters – Super Spooks, Super Spook, Jrs, different MirrOLure Dawgs – during March. I really like Ghost or Bone that time of year. When

I’m not throwing topwaters, we’ll usually throw popping cork and shrimp. We’ll have a lot of shrimp in the bay that time of year, so we do really well on popping cork and shrimp.”

Port Mansfield guide Capt. Steve “JR” Ellis of Get-A-Way Adventures Lodge says March is when fishing action really start picking up on the Lower Laguna Madre.

“Things start happening on the flats in March,” said Ellis. “This is the time of year when we traditionally see some bird action over the flats and fish begin working shallow more consistently. The days are a little longer and a little warmer, which allows those fish to come out of the deeper water for longer periods and push a little farther back on the flats.

“The muddy bottom flats can be really good for big trout this month. However, this is usually a midday or evening bite. This is the first month of spring and we get a little warmer weather. So those fish will be exploring the flats during the day, but come evening, they head back to that ‘charged’ water – those mud flats that hold



Sheepshead are a tasty fish to catch through the month of March on the Lower Laguna Madre.

heat and keep the water warmer in the evening and at night.

“We’ll throw topwaters for bigger trout. But, if you want numbers, it’s hard to beat a popping cork rig. Anyone throwing live shrimp under a cork – or a DOA Shrimp under a mauler – will catch fish if they concentrate on the off-colored or streaky water”



Several options are available to mid-coast anglers says Capt. Justin Cooper of Laguna Adventures. He will fish for sheepshead around Penascal Point, take refuge from the wind in the Land Cut on windy days, or warming flats.

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PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

During the first part of March one of the best options will be to fish soft plastics under a popping cork for redfish and trout.

Baffin Bay guide Capt. Justin Cooper of Laguna Adventures said March will see a little bit of everything happening in his area.

“In March, I will be fishing on the south side of Baffin Bay around Penascal Point for drum,” said Cooper. “I actually prefer to eat drum over trout. When cooked the drum will be firmer, allowing you more options to cook it. I like to grill mine, but you can cook them a variety of ways.

“This month drum will hold in the deeper water east of Penascal Point. I will be fishing the bottom with live or dead shrimp. This is also the same area

my Baffin Floating Cabin is located. Customers fishing from the cabin will catch limits of drum during the day and weed through the little trout under the light at night for a limit of keeper trout.

“Once the water temperature begins to rise I will start fishing the Land Cut. I like to start the morning by throwing topwater lures in the sand pockets just past the grass line on the edges of the channel. Once the sun rises high enough the drop off can be seen I will start fishing the drop offs with a popping cork and live shrimp. When fishing in the Land Cut you must find current. If you have current, you can usually catch plenty of fish.” **T★J**



March offers Aransas area anglers several options. Early in March will be the end of the black drum run. There will still be a lot of oversize drum up in the Corpus Christi ship channel. Those fish will be in 30 to 40 feet of water. The best way to catch them is using live shrimp and a 1/2-ounce slip sinker.

There will also be some black drum on the flats. The fish found on the flats are much more likely to be in the keeper class than those found in the ship channel. Mud patches are usually a dead give-a-way that a school of drum is in the area. When they are located, the best bet for tempting black drum is live shrimp either free-lined or fished under a popping cork.

In addition to black drum, the bays surrounding Aransas Pass and Port Aransas will also have a lot of redfish. Like the keeper size black drum, the redfish will be scattered on the flats. So, to increase your chances drifting is a better bet than anchoring.

Although they will hit plastics and spoons, most fishermen will be throwing live shrimp under a cork for reds on the flats during the early part of March. Later in the month, schools of shad will

start showing up and many fishermen will switch to cut shad as opposed to shrimp.

Trout fishing will be fair in early March, but should get better as the month goes on. Early in March, live shrimp under a cork will be the offering of choice for most trout fishermen. As the water starts warming up, croaker will start moving in. Once the croaker reach 2 3/4 to 3 1/2 inches in size, many Aransas area trout fishermen will switch to live croaker as their bait of choice.

Rockport area anglers can expect good action for both specks and reds during the month of March. Early in the month, the fish will still be holding primarily over soft bottom. As the weather and water warms, specks and reds will be transitioning to the sandy bottom areas. Early on, the biggest concentrations of fish will be around the reefs in four to six feet of water. Over the second half of the month, fishing over knee to waist-deep sand and grass flats will be the best bet.

For numbers of fish, soft-plastic and live shrimp will be the best offerings. Later in the month, there should be a supply of bait-size croaker readily available as well. Anglers specifically looking for bigger trout should stick with slow-sinking plugs or, on warmer days, topwaters.

Another option or two for Rockport area anglers looking for a box of fish is to hit the reefs for sheepshead and black drum. Freelining shrimp around the deeper reefs should provide plenty of action with each of these overlooked species. And, don't be surprised to pick up a scattering of specks and reds while fishing for sheepshead and drum.

Seadrift guide Capt. Nathan Beabout of N&M Sportsman's Adventures says this spring will be a bit different, considering the winter weather the Texas coast experienced this year.

“With a true winter this year, with the New Year's freeze and ice storm in mid-January, we have witnessed some activity I have never seen before in all my years on the water,” said Beabout. “As strong as these winds have been during



PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. NATHAN BEABOUT

Capt. Nathan Beabout of N & M Sportsmans Adventures shows off a big speckled trout. Beabout said after the cold weather back in January he spotted a number of schools of big trophy trout cruising the south shoreline when back lake areas were without any water. By March look for trout to be back in the back lakes, but also don't forget about the mouths of drains

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PHOTO BY BILL OLSON JR

In March the black drum run will begin to wrap up throughout the Lower Laguna Madre northward to the Aransas bay system. Bill Olson Jr. caught this "big ugly" while fishing live shrimp around the Packery Channel jetties.

the fronts we have lost an impressive amount of water in the San Antonio Bay system, with tides dropping three to four feet. With this, there wasn't much of the water column left that was at a safe warm temperature for some of our big trout. Unfortunately, we did lose a lot of trout in Pringle Lake, but from what I have seen it was just confined to that lake. We have seen this before back in 2008-09 and we rebounded later that winter and on into the spring.

"What I haven't seen before is the behavior of some of the big trout that did survive the cold. Over the past trips, we have been witness to schools of trout from five to eight up to 15 to 20 fish in the five to eight pound range roaming on the outside shorelines of our bay (i.e. south shoreline). Typically this time of year, our south shoreline is a desert, with gin clear water and no signs of bait or predator fish. The main reason we were on the south shoreline is because our back lakes were inaccessible, so we focused our efforts around deep drains that came out of the back in areas where under these conditions were just sheet water, with no deeper lakes to retreat to. Knowing the bait had to fall all the way out to the bay front. The bait was definitely located, as it was easy to spot in the gin clear water.

"Once we jumped out of the boat and began our wade, we started to see schools

of two to three and up to 15 to 20 trout — all bigs come cruising by. We threw the tackle box at them, but with no success. We were able to catch trout from 17 to 22-inches and redfish of all sizes until our arms were sore. Each day for a week of being in this same area, we were only able to snag one or two trout a day over 26-inches.

"My opinion on this phenomenon that we saw was a staging game. With six to eight feet of water just 10 yards away, but at the same time shallow clear flats that warmed up with the sunlight, these big trout were patiently waiting

for the all clear to return to their homes of the secluded ponds and creeks of the back marsh.

"We see it time and time again with redfish, when they are in a staging mode for whatever reason, they can be hard to catch. Many of these fish aren't interested in feeding, but trying to get back home. I believe as the water starts to return to our bay these fish will slowly start to leave this staging area and once again our south shoreline will be a desert. I do believe these fish can sense big weather events, and take the necessary precautions.



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

As water temperatures continue to climb look for speckled trout and redfish to move up shallow along spoil and mangrove islands to feed. Use a trolling motor or set up drifts to thoroughly cover these areas.

"Now in saying that, let's go back to Pringle Lake. Why didn't those fish do the same thing? I believe this is because unlike the area we witness these schools, there were still deeper pockets of water in the back lakes where the baitfish didn't have to fall all the way out to the bay front. Just as if you or I were stranded in the wilderness, we wouldn't stray too far from the food source, and that's exactly what these big trout did in Pringle. I am not a scientist, but I do pay attention to what I see going on around me each and every time I go out on the water. This is just my explanation of what I was witness to for weeks during a very cold time on the Middle Texas Coast, and you can bet that when we encounter some weather like this again, the light bulb will go off in my memory bank and we will be back there searching for more schools of giants. We will figure out how to trick more of these fish into eating, next time."

Port O' Connor area anglers will start seeing fish move up onto the shallows and shorelines as the water warms during March. Espiritu Santo and Mesquite bays will begin to turn on as the weather and water gets warmer.

Most of the trout will be found in knee to waist deep water where they can be targeted with topwater and slow-sinking plugs, soft-plastics and live shrimp under a popping cork. Redfish will also be found on the flats, along the shorelines and in potholes during March.

Topwaters, soft-plastics and weedless spoons, as well as cut mullet will produce plenty of redfish. **T★J**

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Lake Roundup

SOUTH TEXAS



By Danno Wise

March is the first month of spring, and most South Texas fishermen are anxiously awaiting steadily warming temperatures – especially after this somewhat bizarre winter. As spring begins, the black bass spawn is over or winding down on most South Texas lakes, but there is still plenty of good fishing to be had.

White bass are still active in the rivers and creeks that feed into the main lakes. Additionally, many of these lakes will see crappie begin moving into the shallows in preparation of their spawning rituals. And, catfish – most notably channel and blue cats – will start becoming much more active as March wears on and March 20, the official start to spring draws near.

Of course, there will still be plenty of opportunities to tangle with largemouth bass. Some lakes will still have some straggling spawners during March. In fact, most South Texas lakes will still have pockets of fish on beds. But, even the post-spawn fish won't be too deep this time of year. Anglers concentrating on shallow structure can usually find success with post-spawn and late-spawning fish at the onset of spring.

COLETO CREEK – “March is almost always a good month for us,” said Coletto Creek bass pro Dennis Lala. “You can find bass in all stages of the spawn – post-spawn, spawning, and still some pre-spawn. So, this will be the month when you can catch fish doing just about anything.” Although post-spawn bass have a reputation of being a bit tight-lipped,

Lala says, given a little time, they are likely targets for Coletto Creek anglers.

“After those fish spawn, they back off those beds. But, those post-spawn fish will eat just about anything once they get straightened out. This time of year, you can do real well with a Rattling Frenzy. You can also do real well by slow-rolling a spinnerbait.”

Spinnerbaits, Lala says, will also produce results when tossed at spawning bass. “You can drag chartreuse and white spinnerbaits across beds and do real well. I like throwing one with double gold willowleaf blades. And, in March, there will still be quite a few spawning bass – especially up Coletto Creek and in the little creeks that cut off Coletto Creek.

“We'll also start getting a pretty good topwater bite going in March. Noisy baits like the Rattlin' Buzz and Frenzy Popper work real well in March. As the water warms up, we'll have a few more fish pushing up shallow, so you can get pretty good action along the shoreline and around the shallow grassbeds.

Although a number of baits will work during on Coletto Creek black bass as spring gets underway, Lala will still rely heavily on soft jerkbaits.

“My number one bait in March will still be a Power Jerkshad. I'll use it rigged Carolina-style when the fish are deep. Otherwise, I'll use it weightless when the fish are shallow.” As usual, black bass won't be the only active fish on Coletto Creek.

“Catfish will be real active in March as well,” Lala offered. “Hybrids will also be pretty active in March. Although it is warming up, the hot water discharge will still be a pretty good place to fish.”

MEDINA – “March and April are our best fishing months on Medina,” Jim Gallagher of Jim's Re bait Tackle offered. “March is an excellent month and that generally carries on into April. Fishing's pretty easy for us this time of year.”

Gallagher says barring any late season cold fronts, black bass should be preparing to spawn in early March. By mid-month, he says the spawn will have begun on the upper lake and will quickly work down.

“By mid-March, the fish on the upper

end should begin to spawn,” Gallagher explained. “A week later they should be spawning in the mid-lake and a week after that the fish in the lower end of the lake should start.”

Worms, lizards and spinnerbaits will be the top choices for anglers looking for spawning bass. Although the baits are similar, the water the fish spawn in on Medina differs from that of other South Texas lakes. “Sure, you'll have a few fish spawning shallow,” Gallagher said. “But, the majority of the bigger fish will be spawning in deeper water, because the lake level tends to fluctuate. If all you're catching are little males off the bank, the females are on the other side of the boat. Turn around and fish the deeper water.”

Rain or cold weather can alter the spawn of black bass to some degree, but Gallagher says it is the white bass that are particularly affected by these conditions.

“Hard rain will affect the white bass spawn,” Gallagher said. “For the whites to run, we need a water temperature above 62 degrees. Then we just need clear water and good flow. That is where a heavy rain could set them back. They need clear water to spawn. If it gets muddy, they will hold off until it clears.”

Gallagher says the males will be up in the rivers early in March, but the females will hold in the lake until the conditions are right. For lures, Gallagher suggests crankbaits, KT spoons and Rapalas while the fish are still in the lake. Once they head up river, Gallagher says to switch to inline spinnerbaits, Roadrunners, and of course, minnows.

Crappie action should also be good on Medina in March, provided you can find them. “There are plenty of brushpiles on Medina,” said Gallagher. “But, they are closely guarded secrets. If you find one, there will be plenty of crappie on it and they will eat minnows and Roadrunners.”

CHOKO CANYON – The spawn will be almost over on Choke Canyon by the time March rolls around. The bass on Choke generally spawn a little earlier than those in other Texas lakes, especially when the area has experienced a warm winter, such as this year.

However, the early portion of March will still see some spawning activity on Choke. The majority of the fish yet to spawn will be located on the lower end of the lake. Anglers should look for bedded fish along sandy shorelines or behind hydrilla beds. In the river and upper portion of the lake, the fish will already be in a post-spawn pattern by the beginning of March. When the fish transition to post-spawn mode, they'll be concentrated around mid-depth structure (10 to 12 feet). Look for deep grass beds, points and channel edges to be holding plenty of fish.

As a final option, anglers on Choke should be able to locate some spawning crappie during March. Look for spawning papermouths to be holding tight to shorelines in flooded brush. Minnows, as well as small jigs and downsized crankbaits, will produce plenty of slabs this month.

FALCON – By March, all but a handful of Falcon's largemouth bass will be done spawning. Those that remain on beds this late in the year will most often be found in the far back reaches of the coves – way beyond the brushlines. Most fishermen seeking these fish have to work their way deep into heavy brush to find them. Once found, however, some of these bed sitters can be tempted with creature baits and jumbo worms. Because of the extremely dense cover, anglers should rig extra heavy – 65 pound test braid, stout sticks and locked-down drags.

Despite a few remnant spawners, post-spawn fish will be the dominate target on Falcon during March. The majority of these fish will be found on the outside edge of the brushline and over main lake and secondary points. Spinnerbaits and crankbaits are the best search tools for post-spawn fish. **T★J**

WEST TEXAS



By TOJ Staff

AMISTAD — Based on data and recent trends at the start of February it looks like by the first day of March “Big Friendly” could be heading into spring about 24 feet below conservation pool. This deficit will be further compounded as the third month of the year progresses if no rain falls. The spring draw down for agricultural needs could increase the deficit by another six to seven feet making the lake about 30 feet low by April 1.

This lake has been lower and its size alone can overcome some “shrinkage” due to low water levels. The biggest loss will be some great spanning flats that will sit high and dry. In March look for the black bass spawn to be heading out of the rivers and occurring in the main lake. Look for spawning bass to be around shallow flats or having beds near vertical structure. Find a place that provides cover on three sides and flip a jig, Texas rig or Senko into it. If a small male is caught then try fishing the other side of the boat for females staging in the deeper water.

Catfish will still be fairly deep. Look for them in water 20 to 40 feet deep.

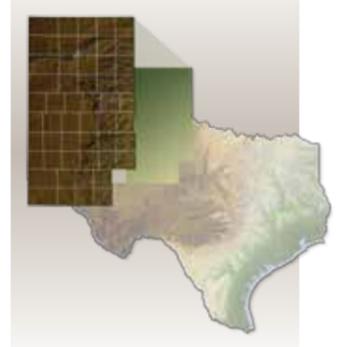
Stripers will be active in the deep water in front of the dam. Look for surface activity early and late. In between rely on electronics. Big topwater lures, broken-backs and slabs are good options.

O.H. IVIE — As January gave way to February anglers were still seeing cold water temperatures that had not been experience on this popular bass lake in several years. Temperatures ranged from 41 to 51 degrees due to a series of frigid cold fronts that descended on the Lone Star State. Lake levels at the same time were about five feet lower than a year earlier, but were still eight feet higher than in 2016. Anglers should refer to their notes as a good starting place for spring fishing. Look for bass to be spawning up the creeks and river channels. As the month progresses the spawn will progress out to the mouths of these watercourses and into the main lake by next month.

BROWNWOOD — Things could be different this spring on this popular lake. That is based on extreme cold temperatures in January that still had lake temperatures well below the norm in early February. Plus the lake is over three feet low to start February compared to above conservation pool levels the prior two years. Black bass should be in full spawning mode throughout the third

month of the year. Look for bedded bass in shallow areas or around vertical structure that provides cover. If colder temperatures persist and the spawn is delayed early in the month, simply fish deeper water from where small buck bass have been caught. For deeper fishing use crankbaits, spinnerbaits and lipless rattling crankbaits. Crappie anglers should find papermouths around deeper brush piles. As the month wanes look for them to make a move to more shallow waters to spawn. Small spinnerbaits are perfect for catching shallow spawning crappie. **T★J**

HIGH PLAINS



By TOJ Staff

COLEMAN — The book on this High Plains lake says pre-spawn bass are caught early in the month with spawning black bass on beds by the time March gives way to April. Given cold water temperatures that also recovered in January, and with the lake level about two to three feet low, anglers may need to make a few adjustments in 2018.

The first is to key on buck bass and where they are caught. The egg-laden females will be in the deeper water on the opposite side of the boat. The other is making subtle adjustments because of where fish will spawn. It may only be slight changes but make the adjustments around traditional spawning areas.

ALAN HENRY — Early in March this big bass producer should see black bass in a solid pre-spawn mode. However by the second half of the month look for bass to be on beds. That was the way things shaped up in 2017 when on March 21, Johnny Vineyard of Lubbock caught a 13.34 ShareLunker from Alan Henry. In fact, of the 27 ShareLunker from this lake, Vineyard was the only recent trophy fish caught in recent years in March. **T★J**

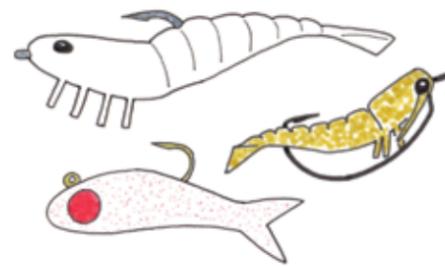


Catching Tasty Black Drum and Sheepshead

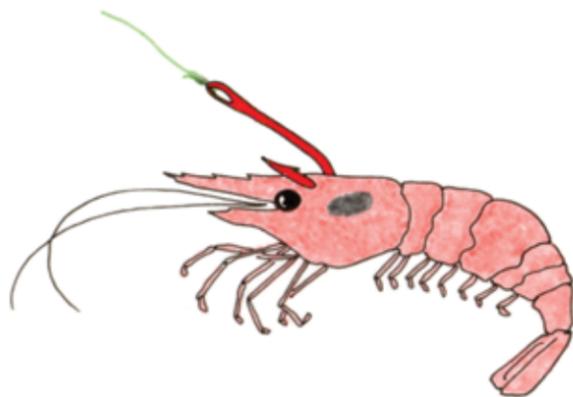


Although most of the focus along the Texas coast during March will be on trophy specks and redfish on the flats, the third month of the year is also a great time to pick up a mixed bag of 'eating' fish from Texas bays. This is especially true during the first couple weeks of March, when a blend of black drum, redfish, sheepshead and speckled trout will be mingling on the outside breaks and open bay reefs.

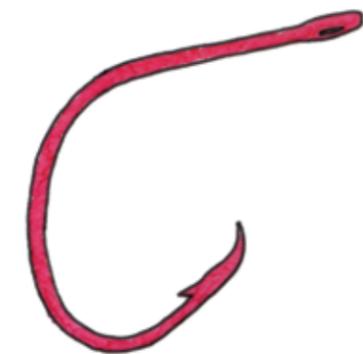
Artificial shrimp, as well as other soft-plastic lures and jigs, will produce plenty of specks and reds throughout the month of March. Every so often, even black drum and sheepshead will be tempted into taking a plastic. However, anglers tossing artificials will most often pick up primarily reds and specks. But, freelining artificial shrimp along the channel and reef edges, bouncing plastics along the bottom or floating either type of artificial beneath a mauler will produce plenty of each species.



Fishermen intent on including black drum and sheepshead in their bag should focus on throwing natural baits. Live shrimp is usually the best bet in this instance, as it can be used to attract specks and reds as well as drum and sheepshead. During March, kicking shrimp can be freelined or fished beneath a popping cork with equal effectiveness.



One other thing bait fishermen may want to consider is utilizing light wire circle hooks. Traditionally, Texas anglers using live shrimp have pinned their baits to treble hooks, which have a high incidence of deep or gill hooking fish. Anglers throwing baitfish, whether it be mullet, croaker or shad, have typically used a j-hook or Kahle-style hook. While these hooks are less likely to do damage than a treble hook, none of these is as fish-friendly as a circle hook. Some years ago, most circle hooks were made from such heavy gauge wire that threading delicate baits such as live shrimp was virtually impossible. With the advent of light-wire circle hooks like the Daiichi Circle Chunk Light, fishermen can hook even the most delicate baits without harming them. Of course, fishing with circle hooks does take some getting used to, as a standard hooksetting motion is not utilized. Rather, a steady pressure is all that's needed to sink the hook in the fish's maw. Often times when fishing circle hooks on a popping cork rig, the pressure the fish exerts pulling the cork under is enough to set the hook.



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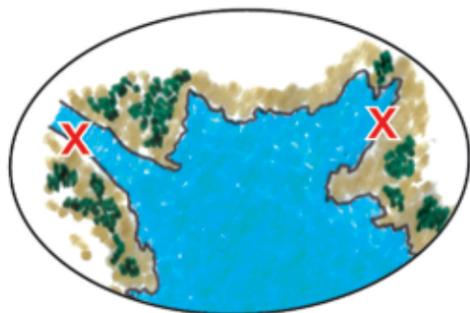
ON **STITCHER**
SMART RADIO

Hooking Up With Spring Crappie



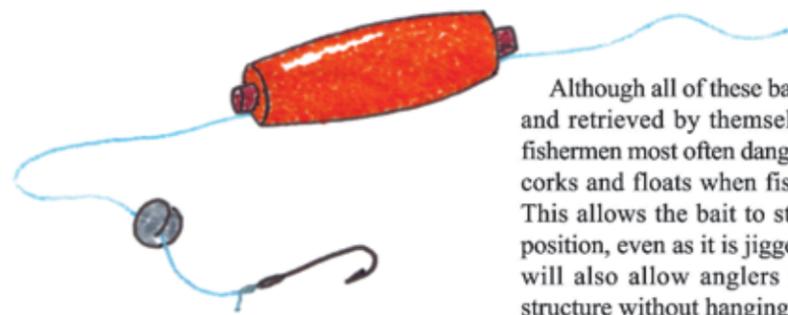
Crappie - both black and white - are arguably the most popular panfish swimming in Texas lakes. This is due to the appealing combination of a sporting fight and tasty fillet. For the majority of the year, fishermen must probe deep structure in order to look for suspended schools of crappie. However, during spring, hordes of crappie will make their way into the shallows in order to complete their annual spawning ritual.

Similar to white bass, which will also be making their way into shallow water during their spring spawn, crappie will leave main lake structure and filter into feeder creeks, bayous, and even the back end of coves. However, unlike white bass, crappie do not require a substantial amount of flow in order to spawn. So, they can be found in even a lazy flowing creek. But, even though they'll no longer be on the main lake, they still won't stray far from cover. Anglers should concentrate their efforts along grassy shorelines, near overhanging branches, standing timber, brush piles and other structure situated in shallow water.

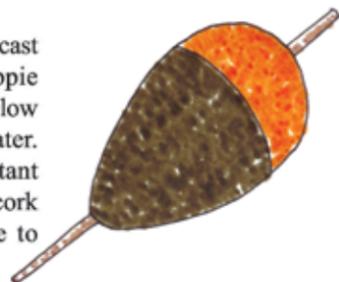


Once located, crappie can be taken on a number of natural and artificial baits. As any experienced crappie fisherman knows, it is almost impossible to beat a live shiner or 'minnow' for tempting papermouths. However, grubs, softshell crawfish and even nightcrawlers will also pick up plenty of crappie.

Artificial lure fishermen should use small jigs and spoons. Blakemore Roadrunners and Cordell CC Spoons are among the best bets. Inline spinners, small tube jigs and even small swimbaits will also produce good catches as well.



Although all of these baits and lures can be cast and retrieved by themselves, seasoned crappie fishermen most often dangle these offerings below corks and floats when fishing in shallow water. This allows the bait to stay in a fairly constant position, even as it is jigged up and down. A cork will also allow anglers to drift baits close to structure without hanging.



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Spring Turkey — Art Of The Call

When hunters hit the turkey woods this spring, they will be toting all sorts of gear in hopes of harvesting a trophy long beard. No matter what innovative equipment hunters use, their efforts will be for naught if they do not understand the behavior of the bird being pursued.



The basis of spring turkey hunting revolves around the art of the call during the breeding season. Hunters will send a cadence of sounds across acres of terrain that mimick a coy hen in hopes a love struck gobbler will become interested and come their way. Three popular and basic calls include yelps, cuts, and purrs.

A series of yelps can be used to represent a female casually talking to nearby Toms. Yelps are considered a love call, as if the hen is openly flirting with whatever gobbler might respond in the area.

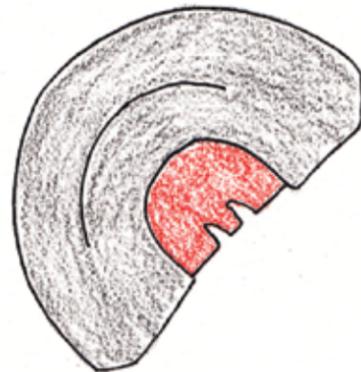
Cuts are a more demanding sound used by a dominate hen. They are aggressive and point out to gobblers within earshot that she is ready to mate. It is a call from a hen telling the gobbler he has to come to her, rather than her going to him.

Purrs are more of a finesse-like or subtle call used by hens that are content. These hens may be feeding or traveling. When mastered, purrs make a great finishing call to bring a hesitant Tom into shooting range.

Box calls, friction calls, and diaphragm calls are used to create all of basic turkey sounds. Box calls produce loud, piercing calls that are great for locating distant birds. With smaller high-pitched box calls aggressive cuts can be made on windy days when a louder style of calling is necessary.

Friction calls, made of slate, glass, acrylic and other materials, make a great all around call when turkeys are nearby. They can be used to create soft yelps and purrs, as well as aggressive cuts.

Diaphragm calls can be carried anywhere and are hands-free. When a hunter becomes proficient with a diaphragm call, a variety of turkey talk can be produced, both loud and subtle.



The key to effective calling is understanding the general breeding chronology for the area being hunted in relation to the time of season. TPWD Turkey Program Leader, Jason Hardin says breeding activity typically varies about two weeks between north Texas and south Texas. This time differential is reflected by the difference in open season dates.

“Spring turkey seasons open up about two weeks prior to peak breeding periods for Rio Grande turkey in the north and south zones,” explained Hardin. “The East Texas season opens closer to the peak breeding period for Eastern turkey.”



Knowing what stage of procreation the birds are in help hunters make the best decisions when it comes to calling. Early in the season, prior to the majority of hens becoming receptive, gobblers will be quite vocal and readily respond to a variety of calls.

At the season’s mid point many hens become receptive. Toms may be less vocal after leaving the roost because they are already paired with a receptive hen. Calling a gobbler away from a breeding hen is almost an impossible task.

During the mid-season gobblers will be looking for other hens to “cover” while the majority of hens tend to their nests. Hunting and calling during midday hours is an excellent way to find success.

Late in the season, gobbling activity often increases as the majority hens having been bred and are busy incubating their eggs. With fewer receptive hens available, gobblers once again become more responsive to aggressive calls.

Throughout the season hunters can also use the curious nature of Toms to their advantage by simply giving them the silent treatment. Once a Tom has started your way, clearly indicating his interest, staying silent may be the trick to bring him in to seal the deal.

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Outdoor Calendar

THROUGH MARCH 4,

43RD Annual Houston Fishing Show, George R. Brown Convention Center, *Houston*. For information and times visit www.houstonfishingshow.com.

THROUGH MARCH 18,

Light Goose Conservation Season, *East Zone (123 counties) and West Zone (151 counties)*. For more information consult the Texas Outdoors Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH AUGUST 31,

Javelina season, *South Zone (50 counties)*. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

MARCH 2,

Red River Valley Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraiser banquet, *Paris*. For more information call (903) 715-2461.

MARCH 2,

Texas A&M-Kingsville Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraiser banquet, *Kingsville*. For more information you can call (817) 637-3836.

MARCH 3,

Northeast Texas Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraiser banquet, *Mount Pleasant*. For more information call (903) 563-4748.

MARCH 9,

April A.W.O.L. Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraiser banquet, *Nacogdoches*. For more information call (936) 552-1942.

MARCH 9,

Cross Timbers Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraiser banquet, *Decatur*. For more information call (940) 393-8908.

MARCH 9,

Highland Lakes Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraiser banquet, *Marble Falls*. For more information call (830) 693-7520.

MARCH 10,

Kimble County Chapter Mule Deer Foundation fundraiser banquet, *Roosevelt*. For more information call (325) 446-2604.

MARCH 10,

Kaufman County Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraiser banquet, *Terrell*. For more information call (972) 965-0795.

MARCH 16, 23,

Fishing With A Ranger, Inks Lake State Park, *Burnet*. No fishing license required while on State Park property. We have the poles and the worms. 10:30 a.m. until 12:00

p.m. For more information call 512) 793-4689.

MARCH 17 – APRIL 29

Spring Turkey Season, *South Zone, 54 counties*. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

MARCH 18,

Canadian River Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraiser banquet, *Canadian*. For more information call (806) 255-5789.

MARCH 22,

Tri-County Longbeards Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraiser banquet, *Temple*. For more information visit www.nwtf.org.

MARCH 23 - 25,

Hunting & Fishing Extravaganza, American Bank Center, *Corpus Christi*. The focus will be more fishing outfitters, fishing products as well as hosting a Celebration of Rebuild Fundraiser. For more information visit www.HuntersExtravaganza.com

MARCH 24,

Greater Texas Hill Country Chapter Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Big Game banquet, *Fredericksburg*. For information call (830) 864-5400.

MARCH 24,

Hopkins County Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraiser banquet, *Sulphur Springs*. For more information call (903) 348-7372.

MARCH 24,

Pecos County Chapter Mule Deer Foundation fundraiser banquet, Fort *Stockton*. For more information call (432) 290-4563.

MARCH 24,

Kaufman County Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraiser banquet, *Terrell*. For information call (469) 719-4909.

MARCH 24,

Texas Chapter Mule Deer Foundation fundraiser banquet, *Van Horn*. For more information call (361) 645-5050.

MARCH 24,

Ladyfish 2018, Living Waters Fly Fish-

ing Shop, *Round Rock*. Free Women's Fly Fishing Festival for novice and experienced women fly fishers. led by TPWD certified instructor Emily Johnson. It will feature a wide variety of learning opportunities within the sport of fly fishing. Preregistration is required at www.livingwatersflyfishing.com/ladyfish. For more information call (512) 828-3474

MARCH 29,

Palo Pinto County Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraiser

banquet, *Mineral Wells*. For more information call (940) 452-8430.

MARCH 29,

Williamson County Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraiser banquet, *Georgetown*. For more information call (512) 818-0415.

MARCH 30,

Panola County Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraiser banquet, *Carthage*. For more information call (936) 248-4583.

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Tide Tables

MARCH 2018

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				H2:17A 1.2 L9:42A -0.5 H4:57P 1.1 L9:55P 0.6	H3:25A 1.2 L10:31A -0.3 H5:25P 1.0 L10:40P 0.5	H4:33A 1.1 L11:19A -0.1 H5:52P 1.0 L11:27P 0.3
H5:43A 1.1 L12:07P 0.2 H6:17P 0.9 4	L12:16A 0.2 H6:58A 1.0 L12:56P 0.4 H6:40P 0.9 5	L1:08A 0.1 H8:20A 1.0 L1:53P 0.7 H6:59P 0.9 6	L2:02A 0.0 H9:52A 1.0 L3:32P 0.8 H7:10P 0.9 7	L3:00A 0.0 H11:33A 1.1 L3:32P 0.8 H7:10P 0.9 8	L4:03A 0.0 H1:07P 1.1 L3:32P 0.8 H7:10P 0.9 9	L5:06A 0.0 H2:09P 1.1 L3:32P 0.8 H7:10P 0.9 10
L7:05A -0.1 H3:46P 1.2 11	L7:57A -0.1 H4:11P 1.1 L9:57P 0.9 12	H12:39A 1.0 L8:41A -0.1 H4:32P 1.1 L9:44P 0.9 13	H1:43A 1.1 L9:19A 0.0 H4:32P 1.1 L9:45P 0.9 14	H2:39A 1.1 L9:54A 0.0 H5:09P 1.1 L10:03P 0.8 15	H3:32A 1.1 L10:28A 0.1 H5:58P 1.1 L10:31P 0.7 16	H4:26A 1.2 L11:02A 0.2 H5:46P 1.1 L11:04P 0.5 17
H5:23A 1.2 L11:37A 0.3 H6:01P 1.1 L11:40P 0.4 18	H6:24A 1.2 L12:15P 0.5 H6:15P 1.0 H6:24P 1.1 19	L12:20A 0.2 H7:32A 1.2 L12:57P 0.7 H6:24P 1.1 20	L1:05A 0.1 H8:47A 1.3 L1:44P 0.9 H6:27P 1.1 21	L1:55A 0.0 H10:10A 1.3 L2:40P 1.0 H6:21P 1.1 22	L2:54A -0.1 H11:38A 1.3 L2:40P 1.0 H6:21P 1.1 23	L4:01A -0.1 H1:02P 1.4 L2:40P 1.0 H6:21P 1.1 24
L5:16A -0.1 H2:09P 1.4 25	L6:33A -0.1 H2:57P 1.4 L8:48P 1.1 H11:45P 1.2 26	L7:45A -0.1 H3:35P 1.4 L9:01P 1.0 H6:08P 1.1 27	H1:23A 1.3 L8:49A 1.0 H4:06P 1.3 L9:29P 0.9 28	H2:42A 1.3 L9:46A 0.1 H4:32P 1.3 L10:03P 0.7 29	H3:52A 1.4 L10:38A 0.3 H5:57P 1.1 L10:40P 0.5 30	H4:57A 1.4 L11:26A 0.4 H5:19P 1.2 L11:17P 0.4 31

APRIL 2018

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
H6:00A 1.4 L12:13P 0.6 H5:39P 1.2 L11:55P 0.2 1	H7:03A 1.5 L1:01P 0.8 H5:57P 1.2 H6:08P 1.1 2	L12:33A 0.2 H8:06A 1.4 L1:54P 1.0 H6:08P 1.1 3	L1:13A 0.1 H9:12A 1.4 L3:07P 1.1 H6:02P 1.2 4	L1:56A 0.1 H10:23A 1.4 L3:07P 1.1 H6:02P 1.2 5	L2:43A 0.2 H11:39A 1.4 L3:07P 1.1 H6:02P 1.2 6	L3:40A 0.2 H12:54P 1.4 L3:07P 1.1 H6:02P 1.2 7
L4:46A 0.3 H1:54P 1.4 8	L5:57A 0.3 H2:34P 1.4 9	L7:03A 0.3 H3:01P 1.3 L9:28P 1.0 10	H12:41A 1.1 L7:57A 0.4 H3:23P 1.3 L9:16P 0.7 11	H1:54A 1.2 L8:44A 0.4 H3:41P 1.3 L9:21P 0.9 12	H2:57A 1.3 L9:26A 0.5 H3:58P 1.3 L9:38P 0.7 13	H3:55A 1.4 L10:07A 0.6 H4:13P 1.3 L10:05P 0.5 14

Times are for Galveston, Galveston Channel

TIME DIFFERENCES	High	Low
Calcasieu Pass, Louisiana	-2:14	-1:24
Sabine Pass Lighthouse	-1:46	-1:31
Sabine Pass Jetty	-1:26	-1:31
Sabine Pass	-1:00	-1:15
Mesquite Point, Sabine Pass	-0:04	-0:25
Galveston Bay ent. south jetty	-0:39	-1:05
Port Bolivar	+0:14	-0:06
Galveston Bay		
Texas City, Turning Basin	+0:33	+0:41
Eagle Point (1)	+3:54	+4:15
Clear Lake(1)	+6:05	+6:40
Morgan Point (1)	+10:21	+5:19
Round Pt., Trinity Bay (1)	+10:39	+5:15
Point Barrow, Trinity Bay	+5:48	+4:43
Gilchrist, East Bay	+3:16	+4:18
Jamaica Beach, West Bay	+2:38	+3:31
Alligator Point, West Bay	+2:39	+2:33
Christmas Point, Christmas Bay	+2:32	+2:31
Galveston Pleasure Pier	-1:06	-1:06
San Luis Pass	-0:09	-0:09
Freeport Harbor	-0:44	-1:02
Pass Cavallo	0:00	-1:20
Aransas Pass	-0:03	-1:31
Padre Island (South End)	-0:24	-1:45
Port Isabel	+1:02	-0:42

Tidal adjustments are not predictable for Port O'Connor, Matagorda Bay; Port Lavaca, Matagorda Bay; and Riviera Beach, Baffin Bay since they are driven by wind and weather. — NOAA

Fishing & Hunting Times



MARCH 2018

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1 FULL	2	3
				10:00A - 3:00P	10:55A - 3:55P	11:50A - 4:50P
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12:45P - 5:45P	1:40P - 6:40P	2:35P - 7:35P	3:30P - 8:30P	3:55A - 8:55A	4:45A - 9:45A	5:30A - 10:30A
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
7:15A - 12:15P	7:55A - 12:55P	8:35A - 1:35P	9:15A - 2:15P	9:55A - 2:55P	10:40A - 3:40P	11:25A - 4:25P
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
12:15P - 5:15P	1:10P - 6:10P	2:05P - 7:05P	3:00P - 8:00P	3:55P - 8:55P	4:25A - 9:25A	5:20A - 10:20A
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
6:15A - 11:15A	7:10A - 12:10P	8:00A - 1:00P	8:50A - 1:50P	9:40A - 2:40P	10:30A - 3:30P	11:20A - 4:20P

APRIL 2018

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12:15P - 5:15P	1:10P - 6:10P	2:05P - 7:05P	3:00P - 8:00P	3:55P - 8:55P	4:15A - 9:15A	5:05A - 10:05A
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
5:50A - 10:50A	6:30A - 11:30A	7:10A - 12:10P	7:50A - 12:50P	8:30A - 1:30P	9:15A - 2:15P	10:05A - 3:05P

● BEST ☉ GOOD ☽ FAIR ○ POOR

Fish, game and all wildlife move in search of food in cycles relative to the moon's location to the earth. The time spans listed above are the prime times to start each day at and along each time zone meridian of longitude 75 degrees (Eastern) 90 degrees (Central) 105 degrees (Mountain) and 120 degrees (Pacific) during Standard time and Daylight Saving during the time it is in effect. To determine the feeding cycle time for best fishing and hunting in the area you plan to fish or hunt advance the sum of 4 minutes for each degree west and back up 4 minutes for each degree east. The next prime feeding cycle (not listed on the calendar) will be approximately twelve and one-half hours later. There are minor periods that occur between the prime or major periods. The minor periods are typically fair periods and last only about half as long as the prime periods.

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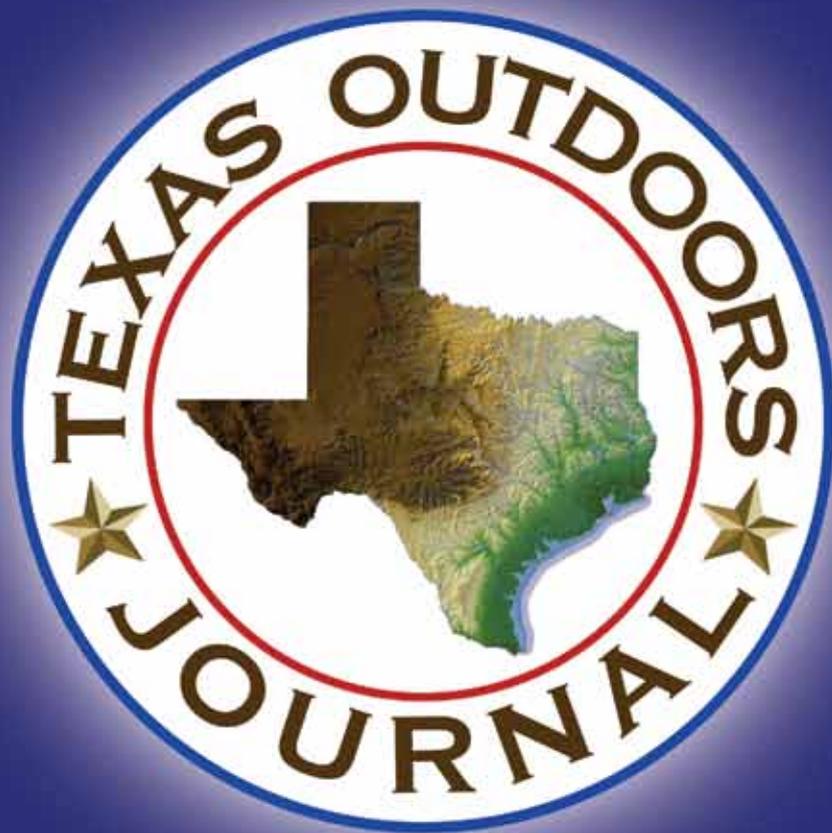
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