

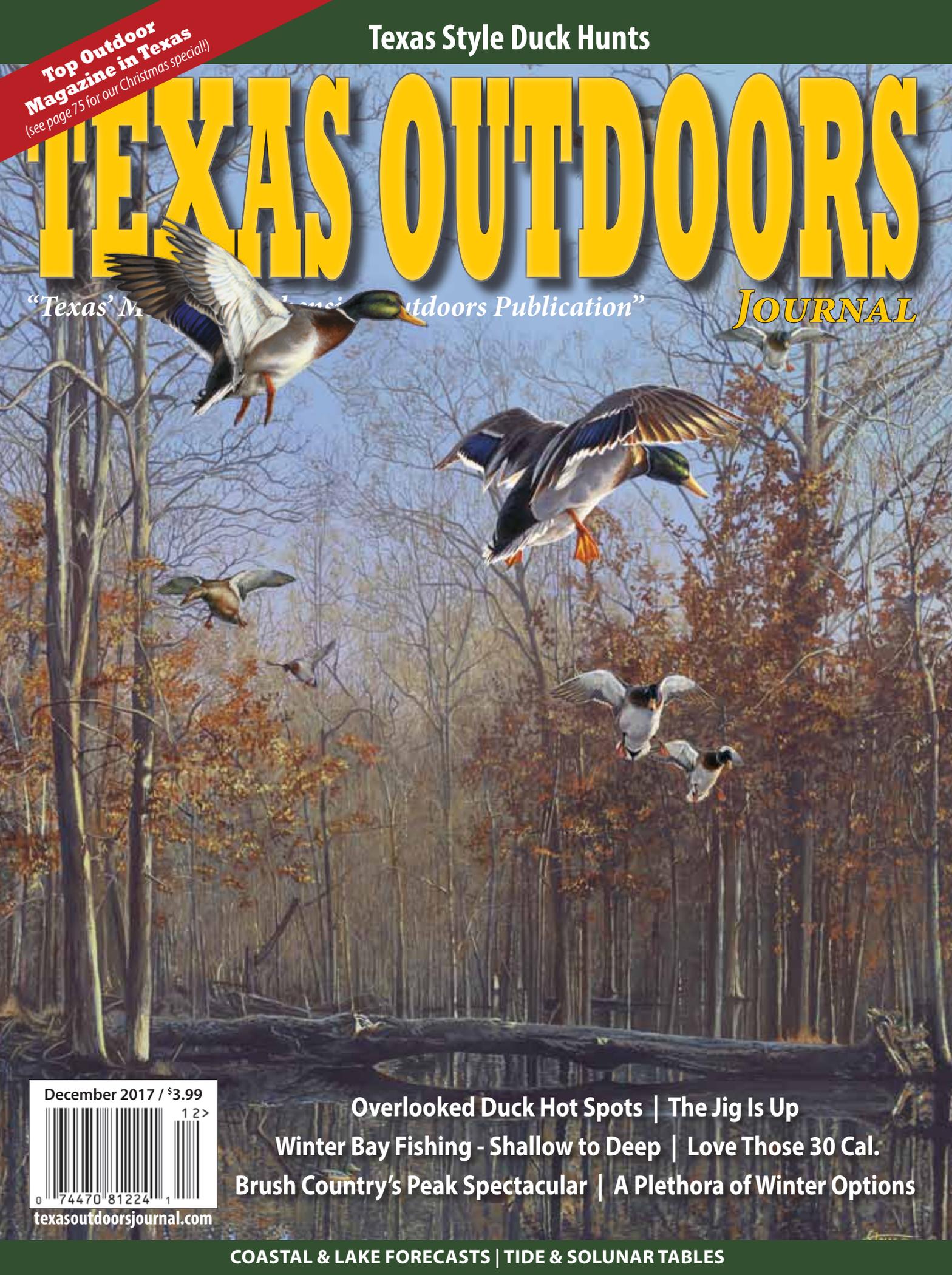
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Texas Style Duck Hunts

TEXAS OUTDOORS

"Texas' Most Comprehensive Outdoors Publication"

JOURNAL



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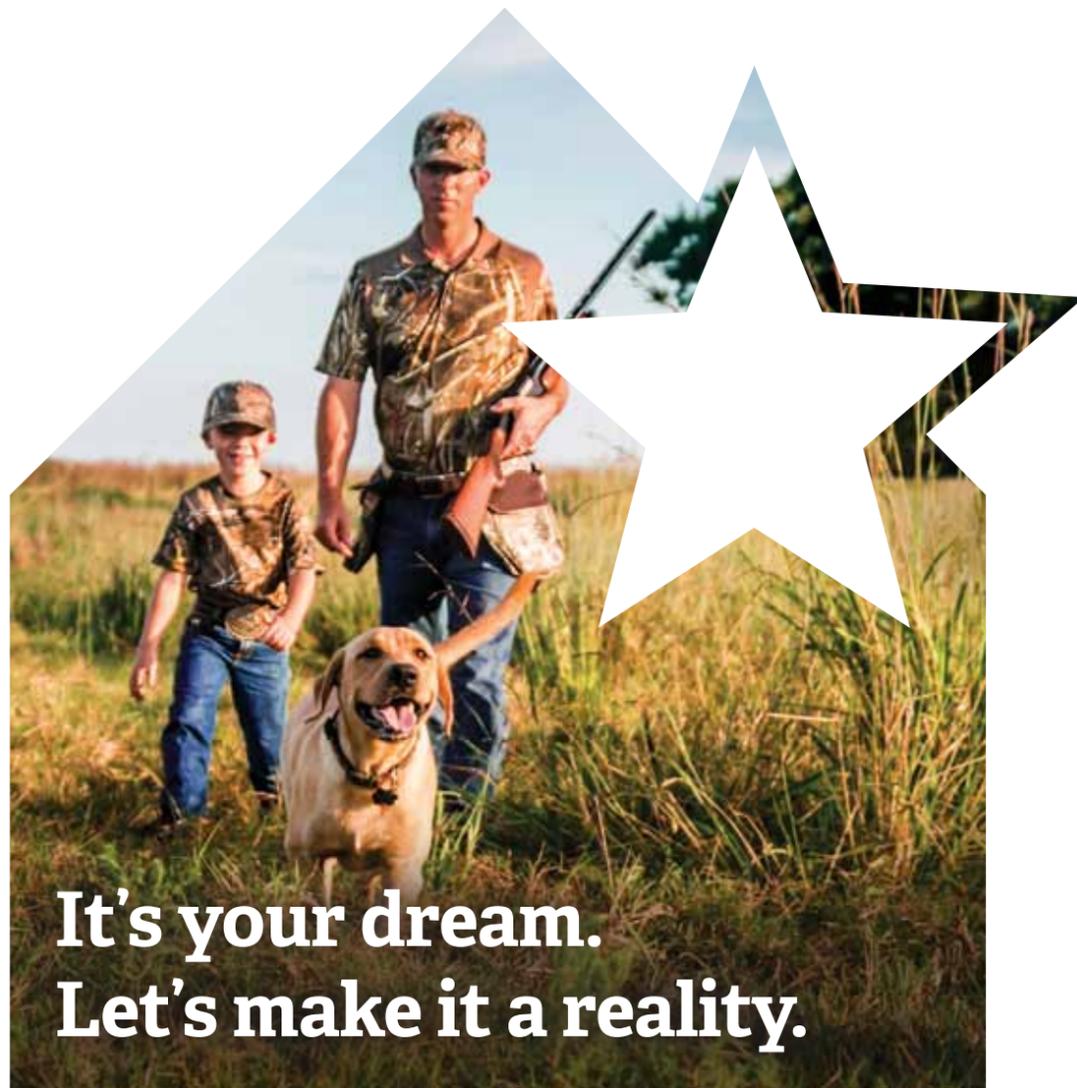


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December 2017

For Hunters . . .

- 10 Overlooked Duck Hot Spots-**
Cattle tanks, stock ponds, or other small water bodies offer outstanding, easy hunting opportunities.
—Nate Skinner



- 20 Just Shooting**
—Kerry O'Day
Why Do We Love Our 30 Calibers?

- 32 Brush Country's Peak Spectacle-**
Ever changing phases of the whitetail rut combined with moves and countermoves between hunter and quarry. —Bob Zaiglin



- 44 Texas Style Duck Hunts-**
There are countless places and ways to hunt most of the popular species of ducks. —Robert Sloan



- 60 Guns N Stuff**
—Harold Gunn
Stocking Stuffers for the Sportsman

- 70 Field Tips & Techniques—**
Bill L. Olson & Danno Wise
Late Season Whitetail Strategies

For Anglers . . .

Freshwater

- 14 Bassology**
—Matt Williams
User-Friendly Bass Baits
- 22 Just Fishing**
—Brian Hughes
'Tis The Season For The Right Stuff

Lake Roundups — Pros Forecasts

- 38 Central – John Jefferson
- 56 North – Brian Hughes
- 58 East – Matt Williams
- 62 South – Danno Wise
- 64 West – TOJ Staff
- 64 High Plains – TOJ Staff

- 48 The Jig Is Up-**
Simulating a slow moving offering these baits will likely catch the big gest fish.—Matt Williams



- 68 Tackle Tips & Techniques**
—Danno Wise
Fishing Winter's Deep Water Structures

Saltwater

- 16 Winter Bay Fishing - Shallow to Deep-** *Know when, where and how to find and target fish based on the prevailing conditions.*
—Danno Wise



- CoastWatch – Danno Wise**
- 26 Lower Forecast
- 29 Middle Forecast
- 52 Upper Forecast
- 55 Louisiana Forecast

- 40 A Plethora of Winter Options-**
Texas' Upper Coast provides anglers with an abundance of diverse opportunities for a variety of conditions.—Nate Skinner

- 66 Tackle Tips & Techniques**
—Danno Wise
Winter Beachfront Fishing Tips

For Everyone . . .

- 4 Editor's Insight – Bill L. Olson
- 6 TOJ Notebook – TOJ Staff
- 67, 69 & 71 Guides, Gear & Getaways
- 72 Outdoors Calendar
- 74 Fishing & Hunting Times
- 75 Subscription Information

On the Cover . . .

"Green Timber Mallards"

For more information on "Green Timber Mallards" and other fine works of art by Scott Storm, contact Wild Wings at (800) 445-4833 or visit www.wildwings.com.

Editor's Insight | Bill L. Olson

PERFECTLY TIMED

Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas. It is so good to hear so many once again openly and joyously proclaiming this special holiday season.

No longer shackled by the intimidation or restraints of the politically correct, Americans across this great land are wishing each other Merry Christmas. What makes us proud is the reality of what is right, is being lead by Texans. That was displayed in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. Plus this group of Texans is composed of y a solid core of outdoors enthusiasts.

For many Christmas is an emotional time of year. It seems these emotions build over a lifetime. At an earlier age many profess their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They learn that Christmas is more than a time to give and receive presents. In the name of the holiday is Christ and we celebrate his birth.

As years pass life has a way of tempering our souls much like a blacksmith tempers and forges a piece of steel into a useful tool. That tool might be a knife that can be used for good or not. It can be cherished or abused. As it ages it carries the marks that tells the tale of its life.

Emotions are the earthly part of our soul. They are what we cling to as important and right while trying to shun the mistakes. It's those feelings that make us vacillate between human temptations or what keeps us grounded.

Timing certainly plays a roll in how we individually carry out our lives. Personal struggles sometimes encourages envy of others that outwardly may be traveling an easier road — but it may not be known what is really going on inside? Right time and wrong place, or wrong place at the right time. We learn from both.

I am a Christian and that is what keeps me grounded. There have been life experiences that have certainly been much bigger than me and the only way to deal with those life challenges is to lay them at God's feet and proclaim, "this is too big for me alone. I need your help."

As an outdoorsman, I am constantly reminded of just how remarkable our Creator is by simply observing His works. It's amazing that at a time of year when all outdoor activities are underway is the time we celebrate Christmas.

Sunrises and sunsets are their most colorful. Across diverse landscapes multicolored leaves display, and then fall to cover ground that in time will be nourished by what has died. In places, colorful vistas are maybe covered by a blanket of white. These changes are endless and amaze every time.

On inland lakes and along the coast water temperatures chilled by colder temperatures clear the water as algae drops out. Without the things that cloud these tranquil places secrets are revealed and we learn. How similar is that to life?

We learn from the past and look to the future. That is also true of those we remember who have been called Home. Emotions rise as we remember and try to fill the Earthly void they left.

Then memories begin to fill that empty space. Laughter and chatter of what once occurred encourage other exchanges with family and friends.

It is a season at the end of a year that is just about used up, but so full of what can be called upon in the future. That optimism of the future is just a few days away — when a New Year arrives.

It is a perfect time of year. All of us at TEXAS OUTDOORS JOURNAL wish each of you a very Merry Christmas and all the best in 2018.

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

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Volume 26, Number 12

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New Report Identifies the Changing Markets for Handguns

The handgun market has many different types of consumers, each wanting to buy for different reasons and uses. Two of these types, women and minorities, are a significant growth opportunity for handgun sales. They share the same passion to become proficient shooters like more experienced handgun owners and are seeking reliable handguns from reputable brands. When this group is combined with active target shooters and hunters who are looking to buy another handgun, the new handgun consumer is now younger, skews female and is ethnically diverse.

As a supplement to the Customer Segmentation Analysis of the U.S. Commercial Firearms and Accessories Market report, Southwick Associates and NSSF have published a new handgun market report examining the demographics, firearm-related activities, motivations, needs, purchase drivers and shopping habits of those who own a handgun and those looking to buy one.

A synopsis of the report reveals

that 41 percent of the current handgun owners are female and 18 percent are non-Caucasian. Not only are these two segments handgun owners, they also are potential buyers of additional firearms. The report reflects that 47 percent of the females and 22 percent of the non-Caucasians surveyed plan on making additional purchases.

When it comes to firearm knowledge, 26 percent of the current owners in these surveys said they were either beginners or had no experience. From this same group 60 percent said they planned on partaking in target shooting at least one time in the coming year. Of those that classified themselves as beginners, 48 percent said they had plans to purchase a firearm while 40 percent of those that planned on target shooting at least once a year said they were going to buy.

Minnesota Wolf Population Grows by 25 Percent

A 2016-2017 winter survey by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

indicates there are an estimated 500 packs and 2,856 wolves in Minnesota, or a 25 percent increase since the 2015-16 survey. The survey's margin of error is about plus or minus 500 wolves meaning the population could top 3,300.

"From approximately 2005 to 2014, a decline in prey appears to have translated into larger wolf pack territories, fewer or smaller packs and a reduced wolf population, said John Erb, DNR wolf research scientist. "Now, the reverse appears to be happening."

This latest estimate places the overall wolf population at approximately 100 percent greater than Minnesota's state minimum population goal of 1,600.

Restored Oyster Reef Holds Post-Harvey Lessons for Island University Researchers

Restoration projects in the Coastal Bend got their ultimate test when Hurricane Harvey made landfall on the Central Texas coast as a Category 4 storm on August 25. Scientists and students with

Cover Art

Special times await Texas waterfowl hunters that set up in and around flooded timber this time of year. At first light the first sound is the whoosh of wood ducks zipping through the flooded hardwoods. As the light increase the big ducks — mallards, make their way into these areas too feed and roost.

Renowned wildlife artist Scott Storm's "Green Timber Mallards" has captured one of those crisp winter mornings as a flight of greenheads start to settle down onto the flooded waters. One of the coveted trophies for duck hunters, mallard numbers remain very good at 34 percent above the long term average.

For more information on "Green Timber Mallards" and other fine works of art by Scott Storm, contact Wild Wings at (800) 445-4833 or visit www.wildwings.com.



"Green Timber Mallards"



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WEDNESDAY

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Gilley's Dallas 6:30 pm to 10:00 pm

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Artist of the Year Award

Weatherby Award
Banquet & Auction - Omni Hotel
Cocktails & Silent Auction 5:30 pm
Dinner & Live Auction 7:00 pm

THURSDAY

Evening Banquet & Auction
6:00 pm - 11:00 pm

Conklin Award

Dave Baxter Literary Award

Dixie Yeatts Award of Excellence



FRIDAY

Ladies' Luncheon & Auction
10:30 am - 3:00 pm

Evening Banquet & Auction
6:00 pm - 11:00 pm

Colin Caruthers
Young Hunter Award

Educator of the Year Award

SATURDAY

Life Member Breakfast & Auction
8:00 am - 10:00 am

Evening Banquet & Auction
6:00 pm - 11:00 pm

Outstanding Hunter Achievement Award

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Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi are now hoping that lessons learned from what survived Harvey's winds and surge can be applied to future restoration as we face the possibility of more frequent and intense storms.

The St. Charles Bay Oyster Reef and Shoreline Stabilization project was one of the newest restoration projects in local waters. The 2,000 linear foot reef had just been installed as a living shoreline along the Big Tree unit in Goose Island State Park in late July, the latest effort of the Oyster Recycling Program founded by Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI) and the College of Science and Engineering at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. The program reuses shell collected from local seafood restaurants and sellers and places it back into the bay to build new oyster habitat, and already has constructed eight acres of new oyster reef in other areas of the park.

"This reef was different than the ones we've done in the past," said A&M-Corpus

Christi Associate Professor of Marine Biology Dr. Jennifer Pollack. "It runs parallel to the shoreline, and the idea is that as we get these fronts coming through and creating wave energy, the reef will help to buffer and break those waves before they can impact the shoreline."

The Big Tree unit had suffered steady land loss from wind and waves, losing as much as 100 feet of shoreline in some areas. The St. Charles reef was the first constructed as a shoreline stabilization project, and consisted of several 40-meter-long by 10-meter-wide ridges of recycled oyster shell with passes between each ridge to allow water to exchange. The reef was designed to buffer erosive wave action, but it took a direct hit from the most intense portions of Hurricane Harvey, Pollack said. Scientists didn't know if the project would survive the intensity of the storm.

"I thought the reef was going to be gone," Pollack said. "But instead, not only is it there — there's new oyster growth on it."

Pollack's graduate student Meghan Martinez visited the site for the first time in the last weeks of September hoping for the best, but prepared for the worst. Martinez is helping to lead the educational component of the restoration project, which employs local undergraduate and high school students in monitoring the progress of the reef and gives them real-world experience in conservation science. The undergraduate students help Martinez to retrieve anchored trays of reef material that provide a snapshot of life on the reef. Scientists, like Pollack and Martinez, can then bring back the reef material to the lab and study it without damaging or disturbing the reef. The high school students are helping to monitor the grasses along the shoreline. Martinez and the students also conduct basic water sampling and take benthic core samples at the site to study what's in the mud.

"When we went to assess everything, we packed as if we were going to be sampling," Martinez said. "At first it didn't

look promising. At our first control reef, the poles we'd used to mark our site and all the trays, which we'd anchored with rebar, were gone."

Miraculously, the restored reef was completely intact. There was even a thin layer of oyster larvae, new growth called a "spat," visible on the reef.

Moving forward, the students will continue sampling the reef each month to see how it and their other sites grow and recover after the hurricane. Although, there will still be challenges — due to heavy rains during the hurricane, the estuary received a large inflow of freshwater and salinity levels have dropped. Too much freshwater can kill oysters, but Pollack said she's hopeful the young oysters on their new reef will be able to survive it.

The hurricane will also open their project up to new questions about how these restoration efforts fare in the wake of major storms. Because they have a mixture of new and established oyster reef restoration projects and natural reefs in Goose Island State Park, scientists can monitor and compare how each site bounces back from the storm. Knowing more about how restoration projects fare in the face of large storms will be increasingly important as scientists anticipate future hurricanes will only increase in number and severity due to the effects of climate change, Pollack said.

"We think the special design of the reef, which allowed water to flow through, aided in its survival," said HRI Chief Operating Officer Gail Sutton, one of the founders of the Oyster Recycling Program. "We take a targeted approach to placing our reefs, using recycled oyster shell that would have otherwise ended up in a landfill to build natural barriers that will protect eroding shorelines. At the same time, we're mentoring a new generation of students in natural coastal resiliency solutions."

For more information on the Oyster Recycling Program visit their website at OysterRecycling.org. 

RMEF Erases Long-Term Debt, Pays off Headquarters, Elk Projects Update

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has announced it is free of all long-term debt after making the final payment on its headquarters facility. "For the first time ever, RMEF has no remaining long-term

debt on our books," said David Allen, RMEF president and CEO. "This is a tremendous accomplishment and milestone."

RMEF began operations in May 1984 in a doublewide trailer just outside of Troy, Montana and soon grew to occupy three buildings in Troy. In 1988, RMEF moved 180 miles southeast to Missoula where it set up shop in a former warehouse.

In 2005, RMEF received a generous 22-acre land donation and built its current 40,350-square foot national headquarters and Elk Country Visitor Center. Additionally, it constructed its 23,556-square foot RMEF Distribution Center that serves members, volunteers, staffers, partners, sponsors, shoppers and many other supporters.

"This would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of RMEF volunteers, members, donors and staff. This is also a testament to the financial health and stability of RMEF," said Allen.

The headquarters loan was scheduled to be paid in full September 2019. Upon evaluation of RMEF's current cash position and analysis of paying off the loan versus carrying the interest to term, it was deemed prudent and appropriate to pay the loan off two years early.

"Paying off this loan early enables RMEF to shift the mortgage and interest investment to where it belongs — the mission," added Allen.

In other RMEF news, the conservation organization provided updates on elk herds in several states east of the Rocky Mountains where they assisted state agencies with the reintroduction of elk to their former range.

Kentucky— Home to the largest elk population east of the Mississippi River, the 2016-17 Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources Elk Report indicates

Kentucky now has more than 11,000 elk. Kentucky's elk restoration zone covers approximately 4.1 million acres in 16 counties in the southeast region of the state.

RMEF contributed more than \$4.6 million to assist with reintroduction efforts and habitat enhancement work. Additionally, RMEF worked with KD-FWR so Kentucky became a source herd to reintroduce elk onto historic ranges in Missouri, Virginia and Wisconsin.

Kentucky's first elk hunt was in 2001 with hunters taking six cows. A total of

910 permits were available in 2016.

West Virginia— In 2016 24 elk were reintroduced onto West Virginians landscape just before Christmas. Nine months later, the herd is enjoying its first fall season back on its historic range.

"This is the time of the year where the bulls have regrown their antlers, and they've rubbed off the velvet. We're into their breeding season—September and October—and this is when the bulls are bugling," Randy Kelley, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources elk project leader said.

There are currently an estimated 22 elk in West Virginia with more scheduled to be reintroduced this winter.

"We've come to an agreement basically with the state of Arizona to trap and transport elk from Arizona to West Virginia. They've agreed to give us this year up to 60 elk," said Kelley.

RMEF assisted with the successful West Virginia reintroduction and is standing by to help with future efforts.

Virginia— Five years after being reintroduced onto their native Virginia historic range, elk are slowly thriving in the Old Dominion State.

"We are allowing nature to do its thing now, they will reproduce on their own," David Kalb, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries project leader, told the Roanoke Times. "It's just a rather slow process. Right now we are seeing good recruitment numbers and we are seeing excellent health in the animals we have."

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation provided funding and volunteer manpower as it worked with the DGIF and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife to relocate Kentucky elk onto reclaimed mine land in Buchanan County in the western part of Virginia. The first reintroduction began in 2012 and the last in 2014. Today, there are approximately 200 elk in the state.

Wisconsin— Wildlife officials in Wisconsin are reminding the public to be aware of elk on the landscape in central and far northern Wisconsin as they enjoy the fall season. Deer hunters are asked to use caution and are reminded that



PHOTO COURTESY RMEF AND ADAM DUNN

These elk located in Kentucky are part of the largest elk herd east of the Mississippi River.

it is currently illegal to shoot an elk in Wisconsin.

Elk were first reintroduced near Clam Lake in 1995. The Clam Lake elk range includes portions of southeast Bayfield, southwest Ashland, eastern Sawyer, northeast Rusk, and western Price counties.

Although the approximately 190 elk use private lands in these areas, they are often found on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, county and industrial forest lands, and the Flambeau River State Forest.

The Black River elk range is located in Jackson County. While the majority of the herd resides in the Black River State Forest to the southeast of Black River Falls, a few of the approximately 60 animals in the herd have wandered into surrounding counties since their reintroduction in 2015.

"After a very active rut in 2016, we believe we've had an excellent calving season with good survivorship of in both elk ranges. As a result, both elk ranges hold a significant number of calves," added Wallenfang.

RMEF assisted with the successful elk reintroductions in both areas.

About the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation:

Founded over 30 years ago, fueled by hunters and a membership of more than 220,000 strong, RMEF has conserved more than 7.1 million acres for elk and other wildlife.

RMEF also works to open and improve public access, fund and advocate for science-based resource management, and ensure the future of America's hunting heritage.

For more information visit www.rmef.org, elknetwork.com or 800-CALL ELK. 



COURTESY PHOTO

Oyster shell collected from restaurants becomes the base from which new oysters will attach themselves creating a new reef.

OVERLOOKED Duck Hot Spots



Cattle tanks, stock ponds, or other small water bodies offer outstanding, easy hunting opportunities.

Story and photography by Nate Skinner

What makes a hunter get out of warm bed in the chilly wee hours of a winter morning to go spend time in the mud, muck, and brutal elements? This is a question I've often asked myself after a duck hunt, especially when the results of my efforts were straps too barren for my liking.

It's no secret that duck hunting and work go hand in hand. Depending on the location and type of terrain being hunted, the set-up process alone often takes place hours before the sun comes up. Whether the adventure involves drudging through swamp-like mud or toting around hoards of decoys and gear, the sport offers little sympathy to the weary and weak of heart.

Despite the fact that duck hunting can involve some tough conditions and situations, waterfowl hunters continue obsessing with the tradition of fooling birds with fowl-like fakes year after year. This is true even when the outcome of the hard work isn't a pile of ducks. The good news is more exceptional opportunities await, many of which provide easier access to the birds than some might think possible.

Some of the best duck holes across the Lone Star State lie within its interior regions in the form of stock ponds and cattle tanks. These prime hunting grounds often remain untapped by hunters throughout the season, offering a refuge to ducks as pressure intensifies along popular waterfowl infested locations. Setting up on these small bodies of water can be simple and requires minimal gear — not to mention, the action is often hot and heavy.

The first time I ever duck hunted a small cattle tank was several years ago southeast of San Antonio in Wilson County. My father-in-law has a farm in the area. I began to notice plenty of ducks loafing on ponds while commuting along county roads between the farm and his house near Poth during the winter months. Spotting everything from mottled ducks to pintails, plus plenty of teal, gadwall, and widgeon triggered the wheels in my head to begin to turn.

I started asking a few friends that lived in the area if they had ever duck hunted before. My question was almost always met with an uninterested reply.

"Are you talking about hunting the mud hens that live in these tanks?"



The author with his black lab, Kahle, and a full strap of puddle ducks that were willing to decoy over a pond southeast of San Antonio.

one asked. "Those nasty things show up almost every winter," he explained. These farm boys were smitten with deer hunting, but they had never experienced the whistling of wings nor the beauty of a working water dog.

I finally talked a buddy of mine into giving it a try. He called me on a Tuesday afternoon and said he was looking at a tank on his parent's land that was completely blacked-out with ducks. "There's about 300 or so mud hens on the tank nearly every day right now if you want to come hunt them," he informed.

"Don't mess with them and stay away from that tank," I instructed. "I'll be there on Friday."

As I gathered a couple of dozen decoys and the rest of my waterfowling gear in preparation, I was overtaken with the excited anticipation of being able to drive a truck right up to the pond we were

going to hunt. Set up would take just a few minutes.

The weekend finally arrived and on the first morning we shot limits in about 20 minutes, long before the sun rose high in the sky. We picked up quickly and hurried out of there to watch the tank from a tree line several hundred yards away. To our amazement we watched as hundreds of ducks poured back into the hole. The following morning limits took about 10 minutes longer. We enjoyed two barnburner hunts on back-to-back mornings over just a couple of dozen decoys. Who would've thought it could be that easy?

Stock tanks and cattle ponds along inland areas across the state not only provide hunters with some less pressured options and pristine hunting opportunities, they are also becoming a key wintering habitat feature for

migrating waterfowl in the Central Flyway.

According to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Waterfowl Program Leader, Kevin Kraai, our state is littered with water and wintering habitat for waterfowl throughout its many eco-regions which has rendered an all time high in total duck numbers seen over the past 20 years.

"Last year's midwinter survey estimates showed the total number of ducks wintering across the state to be over six million birds," he informed. "That's up from some 4.7 million total ducks the previous year, and well above the average of the last two decades calculated at nearly 3.8 million."

Kraai attributes this increase to the ample amounts of rainfall experienced statewide over the past couple of years. This has contributed to the rapid growth and expansion of habitat features within the interior portion of the state.

"The most important of these features are small cattle tanks and stock ponds," he confessed. "These manmade bodies of water are starting to account for



Holes that contain shallow areas with emergent vegetation will attract the most ducks. No more than a couple of dozen decoys are necessary to coax birds into decoying over small ponds and tanks.

thousands of square miles of waterfowl habitat. Together they compose what is beginning to be recognized as the largest wintering refuge for waterfowl in North America."

Kraai says most of these tanks are less than an acre in size and many are located within the triangle of terrain between College Station, Paris, and Breckenridge.

"This area sees new ponds popping up

everywhere, as landowners are constantly creating new watering holes for cattle and other agricultural purposes," he elaborated.

Kraai claims there is not a silver bullet recipe for the ultimate duck hole, but that some traits seem to be important. "The presence of emergent vegetation, or aquatic plants that have leaves and stems growing above the water's surface, is key when it comes to attracting ducks," he explained. "Ponds with shallow water areas containing vegetation experience the most bird traffic."

"A managed amount of cattle disturbance is also an important factor, and it's something landowners can control," Kraai informed. "Tanks that receive a controlled amount of livestock activity are used frequently by ducks. Too much cattle disturbance and too little tends to produce a pond void of waterfowl."

Kraai states that the largest reason why small ponds across interior Texas are receiving so

much attention from ducks boils down to hunting pressure. "Not only is there plenty of waterfowl habitat in this area of the state in terms of food and water," he elaborated, "there is also very little pressure on the birds."

Kraai says the concentrations of waterfowl hunters in the central portion of the state are just not what they are in other locations.

"Most of the waterfowl hunting in this area takes places on larger bodies of water," he explained. "This leaves smaller tanks and ponds undisturbed for the ducks to rest."

Kraai also informs that the sheer numbers of these features across the terrain is what makes them so valuable to waterfowl. Each pond may only winter a small quantity of birds in comparison to the overall population. But across thousands of miles these numbers add up quickly.

When it comes to setting up to hunt on a tank or stock pond, two dozen decoys or less will do the trick. Hunters should orient their spread on the upwind bank of the hole and try to put the wind at their backs.

As far as concealment goes, nothing looks more natural around these tanks than a homemade brush blind composed of the same type of vegetation that is surrounding it. In situations where the pond is void of any significant cover, low-profile lay out blinds are the best bet.

Finding great areas to hunt is as simple as looking at a portion of land on Google Earth and finding a few square miles that contain multiple tanks. The more ponds that are in the area, the more likely there will be a large concentration of ducks.

Scouting these ponds is also a necessity. There's nothing better than knowing a morning hunt is taking place on a body of water that was loaded with birds the day before.

Hunters that possess some people skills will be able to

tap into these low pressure hunting areas better than anyone. Finding out who the landowner is for the properties containing ponds that are holding the most birds can pay off.

In many situations these individuals are not concerned with the waterfowl wintering on their land. A polite conversation requesting permission to hunt ducks on the landowner's property might score a dynamite hunting location for little to no cost.

Killer duck holes await those willing to get off the grid and try a new approach. They are void of hunting pressure and represent some of the best areas to hunt waterfowl in the entire state.

As the season wears on and the pressure on the birds continues, cattle ponds, stock tanks and other small bodies of water are going to show their true colors in the form of beautiful, fully plumed-out ducks. **T★J**

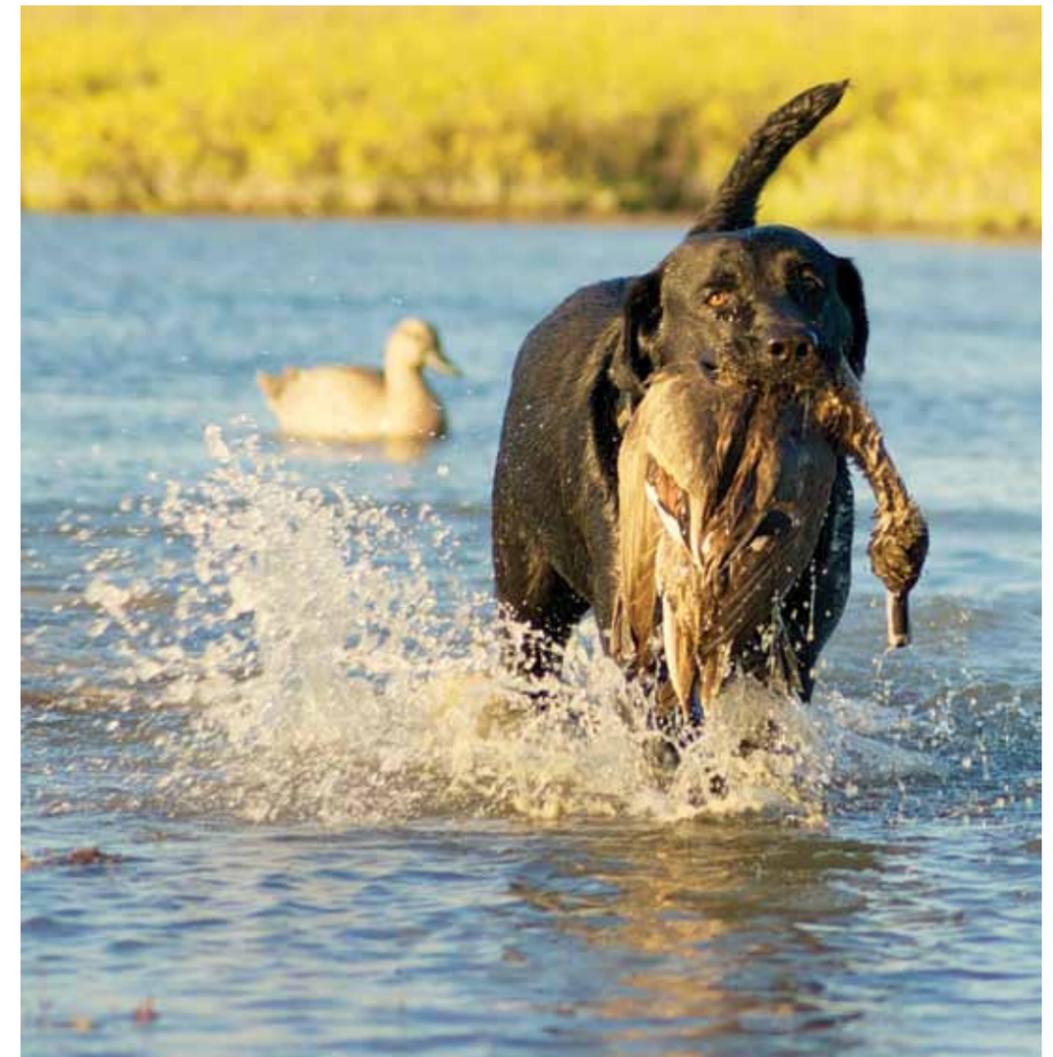
Crops Around Ponds and Baiting

Crops planted around a tank that are attracting ducks must be there for an agricultural purpose in order for it to be legal to hunt that pond. Colorado County Game Warden, Leanne R. Winkenwerder, says that if the sole reason for the presence of the crops is to attract waterfowl, then a game warden would consider that scenario an illegally baited hunt.

"If crops are planted for cattle grazing and ducks are also using them as a source of food, then it is legal to hunt the birds over those crops," she explained. "But if the food source was planted just for the ducks and there is no sign of a true agricultural purpose, then most likely a game warden would issue a citation to anyone hunting the area."★



"These manmade bodies of water are starting to account for thousands of square miles of waterfowl habitat. Together they compose what is beginning to be recognized as the largest wintering refuge for waterfowl in North America."



Hunter satisfaction comes from discovering smaller water hot spots for ducks, easy set up, making a great shot and watching a favorite four legged hunting companion make a beautiful retrieve.



User-Friendly Bass Baits

There are all sorts of artificial baits and tactics that will catch a bass, but some are naturally easier to master and much more effective than others.

In fact, some are so simple to use that a beginning or novice angler with a basic understanding of bass behavior and average casting skills can experience some success in short order with a little bit of instruction.

Here's rundown on a few baits and techniques that easy to use and super effective under the right conditions:

Lipless Crankbaits

The name explains it to a large degree. A lipless crankbait is a crankbait minus a bill or lip on the nose. Elongated in shape, the lipless crankbait has flat sides and is meant to chunk and wind at a steady retrieve causing it to wiggle or vibrate tightly side-to-side.

The depth it runs is dictated solely by

the speed of the retrieve and the size of the lure. Most have a built in rattle chamber that displaces sound as the bait races through the water column.

Lipless crankbaits will catch bass year-round, but they are extremely effective during the winter and early spring on lakes with an abundance of hydrilla. The trick is to cast the bait out and retrieve it just fast enough to keep it ticking the tops of the grass. Strikes often come out of "reaction" when the bait tears free of the vegetation.

Like other cranks, lipless models are available in assorted colors. Reds, browns and oranges are cold weather favorites on East Texas grass lakes because they are believed to imitate crawfish.

Some other popular hues are bone, chrome and gold. The baits come in assorted sizes; 1/2 and 3/4 ounce are the most popular by far.

Wacky Worm

The basic wacky worm rig consists of a five to seven inch straight tail worm that his hooked in the middle of the body, usually through the egg sac. Cast it. Let it sink a few seconds. Then move it towards the boat using slight downward twitches with the rod tip.

The technique was founded using a stiff, straight tail plastic worm like the Creme Scoundrel but also can be performed with other plastics such as soft jerk baits, tubes and even creature baits or craws.

It can be rigged weightless on an open hook, with a weed guard or a special hook with a weighted head.

What sets the wacky rig aside from other worm rigs is the hook placement and action.

The center-punched worm moves slowly through the water column. It pulsates at both ends when you twitch it and sinks with a slow fluttering action when paused. It works best with a twitch-twitch-pause retrieve.

The wacky rig works well around heavily pressured or spooky bass that are holding in shallow to mid-range depths around grass, bushes and other cover. It also can be effective during early spring, when bass are suspended in cold water or nosing out the shallows ahead of the spawn.

Soft Jerkbait

Like the wacky worm, the soft jerk bait is a heavy favorite for bass that are holding in shallow or mid-range depths or suspended in the water column.

The baits comes in varied sizes with five to six inches being the most popular. The Senko, Fluke, Yum Dinger, Bass Assassin, Ocho and Caffeine Shad are among the more popular soft jerk baits on the market.

Soft jerk baits can be fished wacky or Carolina style, but the most popular way to fish them is Texas style, with a light weight or with no weight at all. The technique is similar to wacky worming. Cast, sink and use staggered twitch-twitch-pause retrieve.

The longer the pause between twitches the deeper the bait sinks in the water column.

Strikes on both baits usually occur on the fall. You might feel a slight tick or things might feel a little mushy when you take up the slack. Either way, set the hook.

Carolina Rig

This is a great rig for fishing main lake structure or open water with sparse cover.

What makes the Carolina-rig so effective is the bait is not restricted by weight.

Instead, the weight is staged a couple of feet ahead of the bait using a leader about two to three feet long. This allows the plastic to remain unrestricted and fall very slowly while the weight is on bottom. Bass feel no resistance when they grab it. It's a great winter rig.

Most anglers like a fairly heavy egg or barrel-style weight around 1/2 ounce to 3/4 ounce. The bigger weight makes it easier to maintain contact with what is going on down there.

There are a couple of ways to build a Carolina rig. The easiest way to stage the weight is to use a Carolina keeper.

The circular piece of plastic is designed to slide up and down the main line above the hook, sort of like a bobber stop. It is important to use pliers to open the hole before moving the keeper up or down the line.

Otherwise, it can cause fraying. The weight also can be staged using a barrel swivel to join the main line to the leader.

Fishing a Carolina rig is simple. Just drag the weight across bottom using sideways sweeps of the rod. Don't hop it. Detecting a strike on the Carolina-rig is somewhat different than a Texas-rig. Often times you will not feel a bite until the fish tries to run off with the bait.★

Right: A Carolina rig is an effective year round presentation that is especially effective during the winter months.



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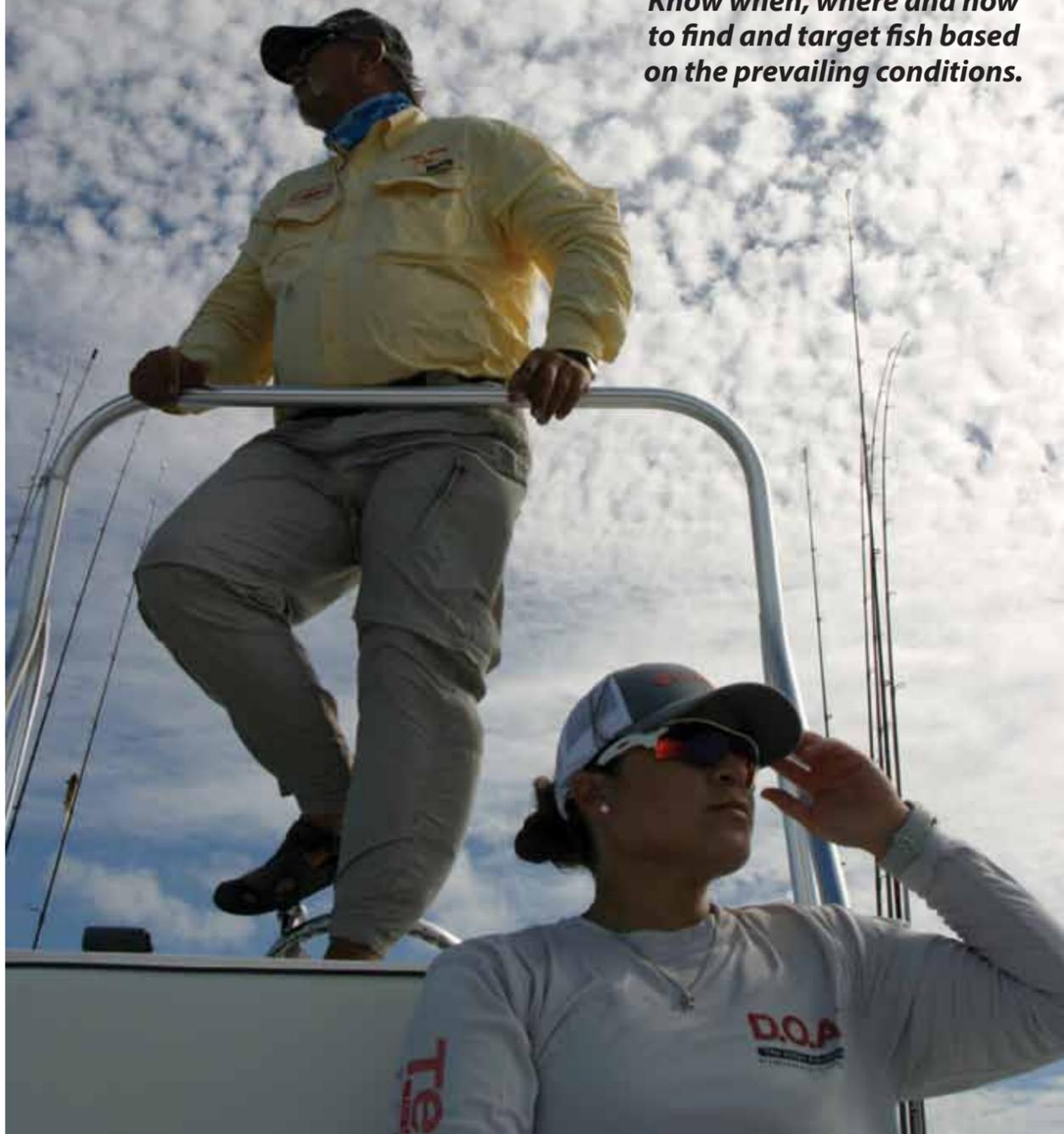
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Winter Bay Fishing

Shallow to Deep

Story and Photography
by Danno Wise

**Know when, where and how
to find and target fish based
on the prevailing conditions.**



December is usually the first month that Texas inshore anglers see fish in a winter pattern. Usually, the first thing that often comes to mind when most fishermen think “winter pattern” is “deep water.” While it is true there will be a lot of fish found concentrated in deep water areas, there will also still be some shallow water options available in the year’s final month. Actually, as Texas winter weather is known to vary wildly, fish will be found at a variety of depths and in different locations throughout the month. Fishermen versatile enough to effectively fish from shallow to deep based on the prevailing conditions will have the most opportunity to be consistently successful.

When discussing winter fishing, it is still best to start with the obvious – most winter bay fishing is about fishing deep water. Deep holes, channels, and port

areas are the best areas to target in most Texas bays, although some of the larger bays (think Galveston and Corpus Christi) have some good deep water structure such as platforms and reefs as well.

When fishing in deep water areas, it is imperative to determine what depth the fish are holding. Fish are sometimes found



There is no need for an early start. Rather, it is better to wait until the sun has been up long enough to warm the water.

on the bottom, but not always. They are quite often suspended at some depth in the middle of the water column. One of the keys is to try to locate thermocline, which is a layer of warmer water that the fish will stay in to insulate themselves from the colder water temperatures.

Once the depth fish are holding at is determined, anglers need to try and keep lures and baits at that water level as long as possible. Suspending baits and diving baits are designed for specific depths, so anglers can choose a lure that is meant to work at the depth fish are suspended. Live bait fishermen can adjust the weight added to freeline rigs to keep the bait at the right depth longer.

Finally, among the most effective, but least often used, are vertical fishing techniques such as vertical jigging and/or drop-shotting. Both of these techniques keep lures and baits at a specific depth and can be used by both artificial and live bait fishermen.

While fish will spend much of the winter in deeper water areas, when the sun shines, fish – redfish and monster trout in particular – will crawl up on the skinny flats to feed. This generally happens when there are a few calm, warm days between fronts.

When they are on the flats, anglers can pursue specks and reds in much the same way as they do during summer, with a few notable exceptions. For one thing, there is no need for an early start. Rather, it is better to wait until the sun has been up long enough to warm the water some.

Also, while finding active bait is always



When fishing clear water it is essential to toss light, soft-landing lures – unweighted plastics or plastics rigged on 1/32 to 1/16 ounce jig heads are best.



During those “in – between” times, not too cold or not too warm, fish will be found in transitional areas such as ledges and mid-depth flats, as well as shallower guts and channels.



There are generally fewer but bigger quality fish in the skinny water from December through February.

a key to success, in winter, it is absolutely imperative to find bait in order to find fish. Anglers should run the flats looking for active fish and bait before deciding to shut down. However, they should expect to find acres of bait like there is in the fall. Just a few active mullet are enough to warrant stopping and casting in an area during winter.

Anglers also shouldn't expect huge numbers of fish on the shallow flats during winter. Generally, there are fewer but bigger fish in the skinny water from December through February. This time of year, it is fairly rare to find a small trout on flats, which also means the action will be a little slower, but the bites you get will be from good fish.

Sight-casting can be good to excellent on winter flats. The water is usually clearer in winter because the cold temperatures kill off microorganisms and algae. In fact, the water on some flats is too clear, as the fish are spookier in super clear water. When fishing clear water and sight-casting to spooky fish, it is essential to toss light, soft-landing lures – unweighted plastics or plastics rigged on 1/32 to 1/16 ounce jig heads are best. Fly rods can be very effective in calm, clear conditions.

Whether sight-casting or blind-casting on the flats, it is important for fishermen to realize that fish won't chase bait a great distance during winter because they don't want to expend too many calories (although, there are days when they will feed more aggressively, as noted later in this article). So, fishermen usually need to make repeated casts to blanket an area thoroughly in order to ensure they have drug their lures close enough to any nearby fish to entice them to strike.

Also, big baits work best this time of year because most prey items found in the bay during winter are mature and predators want to make sure they get plenty of caloric intake for any energy they expend feeding. Big topwater plugs, full-size soft-plastics and mullet imitating sinking baits – hard and soft-plastic – are safe bets.

Generally, mullet-imitating lures work better because there are not as many shrimp in the bay during winter. Therefore, mullet are primary food source for specks and redfish during the cold months.

So, in short, most of the fish will be found in deep water during the coldest

periods and redfish and large speckled trout will be found on the flats on warmer days. However, what about all those “in – between” times? During those times, fish will be found in transitional areas such as ledges and mid-depth flats, as well as shallower guts and channels. Depending on conditions, fish may hold in these areas for a single day or for as long as a week at a time before moving either shallower or deeper.

Beyond the water depth, fishing in winter usually requires anglers to employ a mix of power and finesse techniques based on a variety of factors to be consistently successful.

One factor that has begun to be better understood by the average angler is barometric pressure. Falling pressure usually means more active fish, while high pressure can cause a case of lockjaw. Like tides, barometric pressure has the most impact when it is moving.

Temperature, on the other hand, has long been linked to fish activity – or lack thereof. It is the most obvious effect of a passing front and the impact of rising or falling temperatures on fish behavior can be dramatic.

Changes in temperature cause fish to move to deeper or shallower water and act more or less aggressively. To be successful, fishermen must be in tune with how fish react and where they move with the temperature rises or drops.

These factors and the fish's behavior as a result of them make winter a time when anglers need to use a combination of power and finesse baits and tactics in order to be successful under frequently changing conditions.

Pre-frontal fishing generally means power fishing. Prior to a front's passing, temperatures have been warming for a few days. Fish have moved shallower and are usually feeding more aggressively as they sense the impending weather change. The warmer the weather - and the longer it has been since the last front - the shallower fish will move. However, unlike summer and fall, they will rarely stray too far from the protection of deep water. So, anglers should concentrate on flats bordering deep water. Even then, the first few hundred yards of shallows will be the most productive.

During this pre-frontal period, anglers should try and take advantage of the fish's aggressive behavior and cover as much

water as possible. The warmer the weather between fronts, the more aggressive the fish will be and the more rapidly anglers can cover water. When pre-frontal fish are in an aggressive state, they can be taken on a variety of “power baits” – topwater plugs, paddle-tail plastics, spoons, etc.

After a front passes, fish behavior changes - at least for a day or two. In most instances, the behavior change is drastic. Post-frontal fish tend to be found in deeper water — channels and holes.

They also tend to be more lethargic. While they will eat, they will rarely chase a bait very far. This means anglers have to be willing to work their lures as slowly as possible. It also means that every square inch

of water must be covered. Whereas casting to every “quarter hour” may be fine for pre-frontal fish, post-frontal fish require a cast to ever minute position surrounding the fisherman. This is when it is imperative to be slow and methodical while using various finesse baits – jerkbaits, twitchbaits, etc.

Another trait of post-frontal fish is a delicate bite. This subtle bite can be tough to detect. A sensitive rod and low



This redfish was caught while sight-casting in super clear water. Sometimes the clear water experienced in the winter can be so clear fish become spooky and additional stealth and tactics are needed.

stretch line can certainly help, as can sharp hooks. More than perhaps any other type of coastal fishing, targeting post-frontal specks and reds takes persistence.

While the variety of weather conditions found during December can alter anglers' plans from day-to-day, fishermen can still have some very memorable days on the water. The key is knowing when, where and how to find and target fish based on the prevailing weather conditions. **T★J**

The Gift that Gives all Year
 TOJ's 3 for \$39 combo
 See Page 75
 for more information

“Tis The Season For The Right Stuff

It can sometimes be difficult to find the right gift for the sportsman or woman in the family. With all the gear they already have, how does one decide on something they might need or appreciate? We've compiled several ideas here, and ranked them in order of budget. Any of the items here are sure to put a smile on the face of any outdoor enthusiast this holiday season.

\$25 and under

For those looking for a “secret Santa” gift, a stocking stuffer, or simply a few gifts to have on hand in case they've forgotten someone, these will do nicely.

Profound Outdoors — Founded by Bassmaster Elite series angler Timmy Horton, Profound Outdoors has made a name for itself among the nations top anglers. Specifically, Profound crankbaits offer great colors with durable finishes that stand up to the abuse. Ranging from 7.99 to 12.99 these will fill out a stocking quite nicely. They are available at profoundoutdoors.com.

Unfair Lures — With soft plastics at five

dollars, and hard baits running to \$10, Unfair Lures offers several mix and match choices when it comes to gift giving. Known for quality features such as the PvR Turbo-Set 3X cutting point hooks, “Living eyes” that have life sized pupils, and the patented 3-D Bleeding Gill. Unfair Lures made its initial mark along the Gulf coast but has a substantial following in freshwater circles across Texas up to the Great Lakes. Visit unfairlures.com.

D.O.A. Fishing Lures — The new D.O.A. PT-7 is both a saltwater AND freshwater bait that catches fish like crazy. Pre-rigged with a single premium 7/0 EWG hook, the PT-7 has a tight walk-the-dog action that fools redfish and trout in the salt. Plus the internal rattle has the perfect sound and pitch to attract fish.

Fished in freshwater, the PT-7 will catch largemouths, smallmouths and even striper. A couple of these soft-body, cigar-shaped lures will get any angler multi-species ready. Check them out at doalures.com

\$50 and under

If you're looking to spend a little more, but don't want to go overboard, here are a few selections that will be welcomed in any gear box.

Sarge Knives - TK Bird Knife — Made with quality steel at an affordable price, these are good looking knives that will



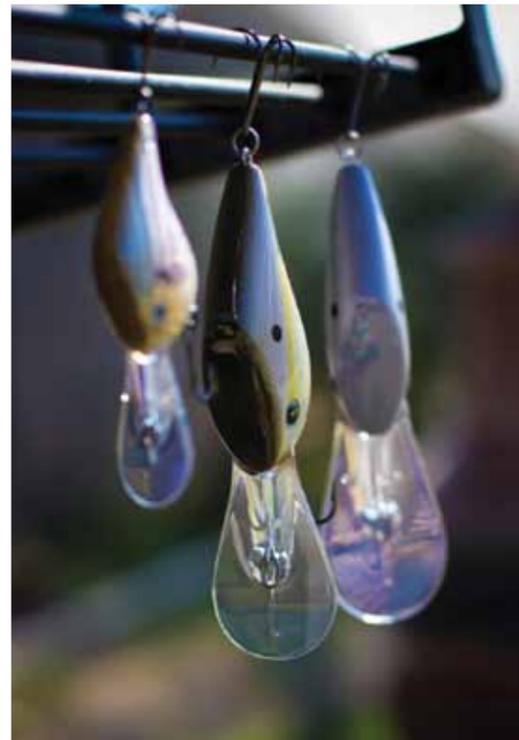
The Shimano Caenan 150 is a mid-priced reel with a 6.3:1 gear ratio that can handle a variety of fishing presentations.

grace the belt of any fisherman or bird hunter. Priced at \$32.95 they are available at sargeknives.com. Be sure to use “TXGEAR” at checkout for a discount.

Chilly Cheeks — I first ran across Chilly Cheeks a couple of years ago at an outdoor event being held in conjunction with a bass tournament. It's no secret that Texas' summers are hot, and the Chilly Cheeks Single will provide both cooling comfort and a cushion effect.

Useful in boats, at the stadium and anywhere you need a soft seat. Not only can you freeze the insert to cool you in the summer, it can be microwaved to provide warmth during those winter fishing trips or long cold mornings in the deer blind. The “Single” is priced at \$39.95 and available at chillycheeks.com.

Leatherman Multi-Tools — Leatherman has built their reputation on quality. The “Sidekick” multi-tool comes with 14 different tools and it bears pointing out that the Leatherman knife blades are SHARP! It's a handy accessory for the truck, boat, or tacklebox, and I would never leave home without a multi-tool within easy reach. The “Sidekick” is



Profound Outdoor's crankbaits are available in great colors with durable finishes that stand up to the abuse.



The “Rev” duck call has a custom look and is easy to blow even for a beginner.

available at leatherman.com at priced at \$49.95.

\$100 and under

Fenix Lighting — The Fenix PD35 is called a “Tactical” light by the company and I'm sure it works well in a tactical situation. But with 1000 lumens of output it is also very handy for the fisherman or hunter in your family. Six modes of operation offer battery saving capabilities, while still being able to light up the darkness like the sun when needed.

The XPL (V5) LED bulb has a life of 50,000 hours, and at five and a half inches long, one inch wide and only 3 ounces this



Considered a tactical light the Fenix PD35 flashlight is perfect for hunters, anglers around the house or in the truck.

light will fit in any pocket, tacklebox or backpack pouch. The PD35 Tactical Light is priced at an affordable \$89.95 and is available at fenixlighting.com.

Shimano Reels — The Caenan is what I would call a mid-price point reel from Shimano. It is not the cheapest reel they offer, and it is nowhere near the

most expensive. But I've never met a fisherman that had enough reels and in this price range this is an excellent choice. With a 6.3:1 gear ratio it will perform multiple tasks when it comes to lure/bait choices, and is an “all around” type reel.

The Caenan 150 is has a retail price of \$99.95 and is available at fish.shimano.com.

Whisker Seeker - Chad Ferguson Signature Series Rod — Chad Ferguson is a well-known catfish guide operating out of North Texas. I've used him as a reliable source for good catfish information for many years in the lake reports for this region.

Recently he teamed up with the folks at Whisker Seeker to produce the rod he wanted, but couldn't



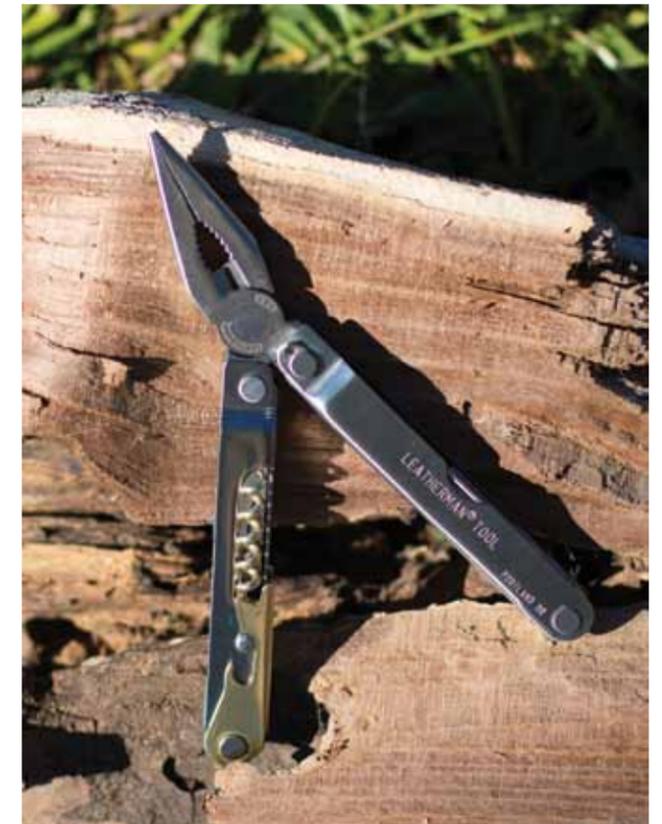
The Abu Garcia Catfish Special reel is available in two models and comes with an extended bent handle for increase cranking ability.

find. And Chad has hit a home run with this one.

Affordable in a day of ever increasing prices when it comes to fishing rods, this will be a go to rod for the whisker kitty chaser in your household. The Chad Ferguson Signature Series Rods are priced at \$74.95 to \$79.95 and available at whiskerseeker.com.

\$200 and under

ABU Garcia - C3 Catfish Special — If you have a catfisherman in the house this



Leatherman has made its mark as a leader in multi-tools. The Sidekick is value priced at just \$49.95.

reel was made for them. It is available in two sizes. The Catfish Special has a Carbon Matrix™ drag system to provide smooth, consistent drag pressure, an extended and bent handle to increase cranking power on the retrieve. The 6500 model has a 5.3:1 gear ratio, while the 7000 has a power generating 4.1:1 ratio. The Abu Garcia reputation was made on the level-wind reel, and it shows in this model. Pair it with the rod mentioned

above for an unbeatable combination. The reels range in price from \$149.99 to \$169.99.

Water Wolf Underwater Camera — This is a really fun accessory from the folks at Okuma. The Water Wolf is an underwater camera that lets you capture the action from a very unique perspective.

Attached to your fishing line, it will record the movement and action of your lures, as well as the strike of the fish you

catch.

Waterproof to 120 meters, it will reach down and get the deep footage, and with four hours of recording time will capture the best parts of your fishing day.

It records in color and has a built-in microphone as well. Aside from the sheer entertainment value, the Water Wolf will allow you to see exactly how various lures are working under the waters surface. It is priced at \$149.95 and available at

waterwolfhd.com

Silver Stag Knives — Silver Stag Knives offer unique knives with antler handles. Made from elk or whitetail antlers, models include everything from skinning to filet to Bowie style knives.

In addition, you can choose a “Slab” style handle, (which is a traditional type of knife handle), or the “Crown” series, (which uses the entire antler base for a striking look).

Other options include making your knife from antlers supplied by you, maybe from a special buck in your past. They will also engrave your knife to commemorate special events like a first deer, or in this case, a Christmas to remember.

The Chef Pro CP8.0 is priced at \$125.00 and available at silverstag.com.

\$250 and up

This category is our highest end stuff. The special gifts for that special someone in your life. If you want a Christmas memory that will last forever consider one of the following ideas.

DRC Call Co — I’m throwing this in for all of those souls that have a waterfowl hunter in the house or for those anglers that enjoy a blast and cast option. It seems as though the obsession with ducks, geese, hunting, and calls may run deeper than any other segment of our outdoor sports.

Death Row Calls are hand made in the USA, and there are several color options available to give a custom look.

The Rev and Short Drop produce great sounds and are relatively easy to blow — even for the beginner. In addition, should the call ever need tuning again they’ll handle it for you. The “Rev” (\$150.00) and the “Short Drop” (125.00) are available at drccalls.com. Use the code “TXGEAR” for discounts.

Leviathan Custom Rods — I’ve written about Leviathan before in these pages, and this is the perfect place to feature them again. It’s not often I will spend a lot of money on a fishing rod. I like to get the best rod that is “affordable”, and will do the job I need it to do. I would imagine most of our readers feel the same way.

However, occasionally there is a good reason to spend a little more. I wish my Dad was still around so I could get him something like this for Christmas.

In my case I got my Leviathan as a wedding present from my beautiful bride. It’s a medium heavy worming and jig rod but what really makes it special (aside

from the occasion of course) is the Texas Longhorns theme.

Burnt orange colors and with the Longhorn logo, it will always remind me of the special day we shared and the

tremendous amount of thought that went into that gift. Check out their line up at leviathanrods.com.

Wishing each of you a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year! 🌟🌟



Chilly Cheeks seat will help keep you cool in the summer and warm in the winter, plus they can be personalized.



The Water Wolf is an underwater camera from Okuma that lets you capture the action from a very unique perspective — while attached to your fishing line.



Sarge - TK Bird Knife is good looking, functional and affordable.

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CoastWatch | Danno Wise

December is one of the most unpredictable months of the year along the Texas coast. Although it is really the beginning of winter, the arrival of cold weather in Texas varies wildly. This year, though, cooler temperatures began to push through the Mid and Lower Coasts at the end of October. As a result, anglers throughout the region are already seeing fish getting into somewhat of a winter routine — primarily deeper flats and channels in the open bays and residential canals and rivers that feed into various bay

systems along the coast.

That can actually be good news, as winter often offers some of the year's best fishing on Texas coast. For one thing, many folks who would typically spend their spare time fishing are now hunting, drastically reducing the amount of pressure on the fish. Secondly, the cooler water serves to concentrate the fish population — particularly trout. Once these fish are found, they typically are cooperative enough to result in full boxes for fishermen. **T&J**



Port Isabel fishing guide Capt. Gencho Buitureira, Jr. says December is a month of near constant change. He says, the Lower Laguna Madre offers anglers enough options to be able to fish in practically any conditions, so he will adjust his plans for day to day based on the prevailing weather pattern.

"In December, our water temperatures are usually getting colder," said Buitureira. "So, that will dictate where I fish most of the time, along with the wind."

"I'll spend a lot of time during December fishing the shacks up north for redfish, black drum and speckled trout. The ICW is another option up there. Reds, drum, sheepshead and trout will be holding in all the side channels up there, too."

"Gaswell Flats and the area south of Cullen's can also be real good — especially if it is windy and the water is not too cold."



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

As water temperatures chill, fishing areas with concrete are good options. The sun warms the concrete and the concrete warms the surrounding water that attracts fish.

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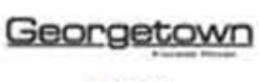


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When I fish that area, I'll be drifting and using live shrimp under popping corks.

"On the lower end of the bay, the causeways can be really good for redfish,

drum and sheepshead. I'll usually be free-shrimping around the causeways.

At times, I'll also go into South Bay in December. If I'm in South Bay, I'm looking



PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. GENCHO BUTUREIRA, JR.

The Brownsville Ship Channel is a go-to option for Captain Gencho Buitureira, middle, in the winter time. A variety of fish can be caught and the Channel affords protection from the elements so it can be fished at most any time.

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mostly for redfish and drum, but we'll also catch quite a few sheepshead in there during the winter.

"The other option we have, and it's a good one, is the Brownsville Ship Channel. You can fish up there under pretty much any weather conditions. It is actually better when the water is cold. I really like fishing for snook up the Ship Channel, but we catch a little bit of everything up there – redfish, flounder, drum, sheepshead, trout and mangrove snapper. I'll usually be freeshrimping or fishing shrimp on the bottom up there.

"When the water gets real cold, I look for concrete structure. The sun warms concrete, which warms that water. Really, it makes more warm water around the concrete.

"There is a lot of concrete along the shorelines of the Ship Channel and they will be holding fish on sunny days. On overcast days, I'll fish the deeper holes and drops. Really, it seems like in the winter you never go up there without catching something."

Port Mansfield guide Capt. Steve "JR" Ellis of Get-A-Way Adventures Lodge says December is a great time for trout fishing on the Lower Laguna – whether you are looking for trophy trout or boxes of keeper fish.

"December is the start of winter and we'll start seeing a lot more cold fronts pushing through," said Ellis. "These fronts do a couple of things. Obviously, the temperature drops. But, when fronts push through the north winds also will blow most of the water out of the bay. Although the low water level eliminates some fishing areas, it also causes the fish to be stacked up in all the channels and deeper holes.

"They will come out of these cuts following the fronts and feed along the edges of the deeper water but staying close to the deeper water. So, fishing in the Intra-Coastal Waterway and along the edges of the ICW can be really good this time of year.

"This is also a good time to start catching some really big trout. But, those bigger fish will act a little differently than the schoolies. They will be on the flats unless it gets really cold. But, they will be over muddy bottoms and won't be too far from deep water.

"So, you should concentrate on the muddy bottom flats next to deep water.

The flats between the spoils and the ICW are a good example of where you can find big trout during the winter.

"Regardless of where you are fishing, in winter you need to slow everything down. Whatever you are throwing — topwaters, sinking plugs or plastics — you need to fish much slower than you do in the summer and fall. If you are throwing soft-plastics, use the lightest jig head you can throw so you can work the plastics slower. And, on really cold days, the bite may be subtle, so you really need to be tuned in to feel any pickup. And, if you think you feel a tap, set the hook."

In the Corpus area, good numbers of fish will be found in four to six feet of water near the JFK Causeway and in areas such as the Humble Channel. Most of these fish will be holding over shell. Redfish will be good on the flats during warm spells and along the channel edges and spoils when it's a bit cooler. Further down in Baffin, fish will be holding around the rocks, but don't overlook the flats on warm days, as plenty of reds and big trout will be feeding in the shallows between fronts. 🌟🌟



In the Aransas Pass/Port Aransas area, anglers can expect to find plenty of redfish on the flats until the temperatures turn bitterly cold. At that point, look for reds in channels and guts adjacent to the shallow flats.

Trout will be consistent along the channel edges as well as over the deeper grass flats. Fishermen working the grass should concentrate on the edges and potholes.

Deeper shell pads will also produce plenty of fish this month. Soft-plastics and free-lined shrimp will be the best bets for consistent catches of speckled

trout during December. Black drum will be found in the deeper channels, while sheepshead will be common catches around the reefs.

Rockport area anglers should focus their efforts over mud and shell. After a string of warm winter days, fishermen will find both specks and reds over muddy flats.

A topwater bite is possible under these conditions. However, the odds-on favorite is throwing soft-plastics on light jig heads. In both instances, a slow retrieve is the ticket.

For consistent action, anglers should target the deeper shell reefs. The bulk of the speckled trout will spend the winter months congregated around this structure. A good number of redfish will also be attracted to these mid-bay reefs. Black drum and sheepshead are also frequent catches around the reefs during winter.

Live or DOA Shrimp or soft-plastic jigs are the best choices for probing a winter reef.

Anglers specifically target redfish should look around the creek mouths and

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marsh drains, particularly on a falling tide. With an outgoing flow of water, spot tails typically stack in front of these drainages awaiting an easy meal.

Seadrift based guide Capt. Nathan

Beabout of N&M Sportsman Adventures says weather will dictate when, where and how he'll fish this month.

"December on the middle Texas coast can be a blessing and a curse," said



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Behind Mustang Island and near Rockport, anglers should fish shorelines and spoil islands that have deeper water, holes or channels nearby.

Beabout. "

Depending on how strong our winter pattern is, we can either experience many mild days with great fishing action or periods of bitter cold followed with a huge drop in tides due to the north winds. Fish that were once patterned and fished over for days can suddenly end and force anglers to completely re-adjust their plan of attack.

"As a guide, I take December day by day. I concentrate wades in areas I know hold a good winter time trout pattern.

A typical month that offers four to five days of what I call normal conditions (partly cloudy and moderate winds with plenty of bay water), I will be found in areas with shallow mud/grass bottoms and secluded marsh. All the pre- and

post-front strategies and rules still apply during this month, but when Mother Nature takes all our water out of the bay, making some areas inaccessible, I turn my attention to chasing the many redfish that will fall out of area back lakes with the tides.

"During periods with little or no water in our bays, many outside shoreline spots can hold big schools of reds. Some of these fish can be hard to get close to or tough to catch, but just keep working different areas along the shorelines and you can run across schools that are aggressive.

"Now, if this December is like the last two years, where winter doesn't show up, our water levels will remain normal and even higher than normal. On those days when flooded tides occur during the winter, it can be very frustrating, because the shallow flats we rely on where fish normally use the shallow warmer water to sun no longer exist. Not to mention normal thigh deep wades are now wader deep and we are forced to look for completely new spots and patterns. Fish scatter on these higher tides chasing baitfish into the grass, and area lakes that held fish in a small area are now opened

to miles of water.

"Personally, I hope winter does show up this year, because when water temperatures drop and water falls out it triggers a major feed.

"Some of our best days of fishing in the winter have been on days when many have stayed in the house. Boat traffic is at a minimum this time of year and fish have a chance to resume their normal feeding pattern. Coming off the last couple months that we have had here on the Middle Texas Coast, I am going to say we are in for one awesome winter bite, and there are going to be many trophy class trout caught.

"Being that I am retiring from duck hunting after a very fun 10 years, I look forward to a lot of epic winter fishing. Whether it's guiding trips out of my home base in Seadrift or special winter trips I offer in Port Mansfield you will not want to miss out on the fishing this winter is going to hold.

"Always remember to be courteous of others, as we are all trying to enjoy this wonderful resource of our Texas Gulf Coast." 🌟🌟



PHOTO COURTESY N & M SPORTSMAN'S ADVENTURES

Captain Nathan Beabout releases another quality winter trout. In December he will wade waters out of his home base in Seadrift as well as make special forays to fish Port Mansfield.

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BRUSH COUNTRY'S Peak Spectacle



Bucks high on testosterone engage in a major spike in activity sometime around mid-December in search of does in estrous.

Ever changing phases of the whitetail rut combined with moves and countermoves between hunter and quarry.

Story and Photography by Bob Zaiglin

Taking a wide, symmetrical, tall-tined buck in the thorn scrub of South Texas is on every serious deer hunter's checklist of things to accomplish. Each fall this lofty goal is reflected in the surge of hunters in small towns across the vast South Texas landscape. Small communities like Hebbbronville, Benavides, and Cotulla, to name a few, actually experience a taste of big city rush hour traffic as huge four-wheel drive rigs arrive like a plague of locusts inundating their communities as sportsmen acquire supplies for their sojourn into the brasada.

At no time is this activity more evident than mid-December. With the Christmas season representing quality time with family and friends in the outdoor environment, I can't think of a better time to pursue those brush country whitetails, and the fact that the peak rut occurs around mid-December, the brush country is the only place to be for the serious deer hunter.

The breeding season for deer begins in November and continues through January, with some breeding activity extending into February. However, the peak activity period within this time frame, referred to as the rut, varies by region. In the Hill Country, for example, the peak rut occurs in mid to late November. But in South Texas, the time to be in one's favorite stand is mid to late December.

Peak rut is nothing less than a naturally occurring spectacle as mature bucks high on testosterone make their appearance at escalating rates. When it occurs, hunters often find themselves asking "Where did all these bucks come from?" That's right — it's that dynamic — representing a fortuitous time to see just what caliber of headgear deer on your favorite piece of deer real estate exhibit. One simply never knows what will show up next, making the rut a must-see phenomenon for all deer hunting enthusiasts.

If rattling is something you would like to try, the rut is "the ultimate time" to perform this technique on those love-stricken mature bucks. I have entertained rattling sessions that attracted multiple bucks in a single rattling sequence, and upon occasion had fights break out between bucks within feet of my position. At no time are mature bucks more mobile, in turn visible, to hunters than during



Rattling up a mature whitetail is considered one of the most exhilarating events a hunter can experience.

that first surge in rutting activity, which is frequently ignited by the arrival of a cold front.

Rattling up bucks during the rut is a "make us feel good" endorphin-releasing activity that keeps us coming back for more, but it is particularly attractive to youngsters because it represents action, thus nonstop entertainment.

Although the peak rut is documented to occur in December, exactly when

remains the question. One indicator to predicting when it will occur is the weather pattern. For example, if the first week or two of December remains slightly warmer than normal, it is highly likely that the peak rut, or at least that initial surge in buck activity, will accompany the first significant drop in temperature. Nothing spurs buck activity like a sudden drop in temperature, especially when preceded by unseasonably warm weather. This



Most of the initial surge in big buck activity is made up of middle-aged males vying for a position in the breeding hierarchy.

response to temperature change occurs throughout the season, but is most obvious in December.

The duration of rutting activity is also variable. The increase in buck movements can continue for several days, which is rare, to as short as one afternoon. It's much like the amazing caribou migrations in the northern hemisphere. We know about when they occur, but can't predict the day the major movement will occur. But one thing is for certain, when the peak rut occurs, it's worth the effort to witness it.

The rut is also a time when hunters become susceptible to the pressure of seeing too many bucks, and take a nice, not great deer. The fact is bucks in the six-plus-year-old age category supporting racks most sportsmen

can only dream about sometimes fail to participate in that initial surge in activity demonstrated by the younger cohorts. This doesn't mean that an outstanding buck will not surface, but it is not likely. Most of the rampant, energy-depleting activity is performed by middle-aged bucks that are just shy of their optimal antler-producing years, as they aggressively compete for a position in the breeding hierarchy. Older bucks often remain sequestered in the brush until much later in the breeding season. Some of these old monarchs do little breeding while others may not participate at all.

One of the management-oriented benefits derived from rutting activity is the sportsman's opportunity to critique overall buck quality, particularly since most of the bucks will be middle-aged deer that represent potential future trophies. This is even more important if on a new lease that is to be managed.

Pursuing a particular buck during the peak rut is like fishing for a trophy brown trout during the fall spawning period in Montana. There are simply so many fish upriver it's hard to locate, alone concentrate, on the larger fish. This is not

a bad problem, but it does lure sportsmen into believing that the robust activity will extend over a long period of time, but that is seldom the case. Once the initial wave of activity subsides and buck movement returns to normal levels, sportsmen often get discouraged, but they must remember that persistence equates to success when it comes to taking a trophy in the latter stages of the rut.

A major shift occurs when bucks travel to their breeding core area in mid-to-late December, but once that desirable area is reached, they simply do not move much, making it imperative for sportsmen to concentrate around these areas normally preferred by older males.

I have seen some outstanding deer during peak rut, but I normally see the largest racked bucks much later in the season.

Once the rut subsides, and sometimes it comes to an abrupt halt, hunters will fall into the trap of believing that deer have dispersed. Amazingly, one day one can't help but see a large number of bucks, and the next day only a few.

At one time I believed that a buck could be disturbed and forced to vacate a particular area, but that is not necessarily the case based on my experience with several bucks that I pursued back in the late 1980s that were radio collared, facilitating their relocation. The fact that they were mature and supporting substantial headgear made them even more important.

Locating the deer was easy; sneaking up on them, however, was an experience. The largest-racked buck gross-scoring 188 demonstrated just how challenging it was to stalk a mature buck, as it demonstrated an uncanny ability to move every time I followed the electronic signal towards it. When I paused, it would stop; when I moved, it moved, but never at a rapid pace. The deer moved just enough to prevent me from seeing it. The fact that I stalked this animal several times each week throughout the late fall and winter should have disturbed the animal. However, over the four years this buck was monitored, it never once parted the area. The only thing that changed was it became more efficient at outmaneuvering me. I am sure this behavior is demonstrated by all deer, as a result of man's activity, along with predators like the coyote.

Knowing that it is difficult to force a

buck out of a particular area doesn't mean that we can continually disturb deer without impacting their behavior. The less human disturbance deer experience, the greater the probability of seeing the animals, particularly on small landholdings. Thus the fewer times you frequent that favorite crossing, particularly outside the hunting season, the greater the chance of getting a look at those older bucks that use it. Even when hunting the animal, noise and human scent should be kept to a minimum. Wind direction should always be of paramount concern. Thus it is wise to avoid your favorite stand when the wind



The whitetails' keen sense of smell is not only its primary defense mechanism, but the way in which they locate does in estrous.



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Competition for breeding privileges is an energy-dispersing, intense activity.

is not in your favor.

On days when the wind is unfavorable, use it to your advantage by stalking or rattling into the wind. But if rattling is conducted too early in the year or too often, it can subdue deer activity by educating deer of man's activity. Man's presence doesn't necessarily force deer out of an area, but can force them to behave differently such as becoming nocturnal, which is often the case on intensively hunted areas.

The whitetail is an elusive animal, but remains a creature of habit. They have no ability to rationalize a situation. Their survival depends on hunter error supported by an incredible defense mechanism "the olfactory system". A deer's sense of smell is acute and must be respected by hunters in order to realize any possibility of success. Hunting for a particular deer requires knowledge applied to a plan that must remain as flexible as possible. Some hunters rely strictly on luck, which I would have to say has been the reason most trophy bucks have been taken in the past. But I would also say for those who prepare, the harder they work, the luckier they get. **T★J**





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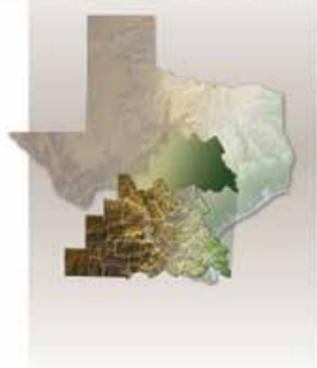
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Lake Roundup

CENTRAL TEXAS



By John Jefferson

It sounded like one of those mornings that photographers pray for – clear, just enough chilliness to make you button up your jacket, and just cool enough to make a little fog rise off **Lake Buchanan**, whose surface temperature was a little warmer than the atmosphere. Max Milam’s thermometer read 39 degrees. Mornings like that make unique photo images.

Bob Linder said conditions like that made for a “breezy” ride across the lake.

It was late October, and a cool front had just blown in. Linder, his wife, Diana, and grown son, Chris, had booked a striped bass fishing trip with Max. They had fished with Max several times before, and had been successful.

Max is the son of Kenny and Karen Sue Milam. They all live in Tow, a community on Lake Buchanan. Max has more-or-less taken over Kenny’s striper-guiding business since Ken has become a media



PHOTO COURTESY JOHN JEFFERSON

The last month of the year will likely provide a number of mornings that have just enough chilliness to make you button up your jacket, and just cool enough to make a little fog rise off of the lake when the water surface temperature is a little warmer than the atmosphere.

star with his own outdoor radio show on KVET on Saturday mornings.

Bob and Diana Linder were hosting their son, who lives in Berlin, on this fishing trip. Don’t bother looking for Berlin on the Texas map. Unlike Athens, Paris, Warsaw, London or Fredericksburg – cities in Europe — the early Texans didn’t name a town after Berlin. That’s a place in Germany. And that’s where Chris lives, teaching English and German. After this trip, he could probably teach fishing, as well.

Some of you know Bob Linder from his work with the National Wild Turkey Federation and Rocky Mountain Elk

Foundation. Some might not know he is an accomplished, nationally regarded symphony conductor.

According to the maestro, they fished the northern part of the lake. That was a little early for stripers and whites to start moving upstream to spawn, but could have been why Max found them there. Before readers send e-mails to TOJ telling the publisher that stripers don’t spawn in fresh water, let me say I know that. Somehow, they still somewhat go through the motions and move upstream during the winter to prepare for the spring spawning run into flowing water whether they actually spawn or not. My dogs are biologically incapable of breeding, but they occasionally act like they have forgotten that trauma.

Max motored into a likely spot and anchored. They began catching stripers, using live shad for bait. An hour later, Max pulled up the anchor and they headed to the dock with a full limit of 15 stripers and hybrid stripers, combined, for the three Linders, plus one nice-sized white bass, and two good stories of big ones that got away. Max told me later that his clients have had several big ones break off, one that they saw that he estimated weighed



COURTESY PHOTO

Lake Buchanan striper guide, Max Milam, left, holds a nice hybrid striped bass caught by Bob Linder, on the right.

nearly 20 pounds.

With as many stripers and hybrid stripers as have been stocked in Big Buck and how little pressure there was on stripers during the unending drought in the mid-teens of this decade when the lake was a long way from the shore and boats had trouble launching, it wouldn’t surprise me if a huge one emerged sometime soon.

And stripers can get large. Although Buchanan has been considered the premier lagoon for striper fishing in the Colorado River chain for years, it has produced the smallest lake record fish (27.8 pounds). Other lakes, though, have produced trophies. Eight of the states’ top 26 stripers came from lakes below Buchanan in the Colorado, and had stripers ranging from 30.5 pounds (Travis) to 45.5 pounds (Lady Bird). Many think these fish originally washed out of Buchanan during floods.

One similar day earlier in the century, I saw a huge striper up close. Mike Hastings, another Central Texas lakes guide, and I pulled away from the dock on Lake Travis in a light fog. I remember it was December 8, my oldest son’s birthday. We were bass fishing; soon the mild fog burned off. Hastings was in the bow manning the trolling motor and I was in the stern trying not to backlash. Mike had tied on

a “Jumping Minnow”, a topwater lure and favorite of his. I was looking behind the boat and heard a formidable splash off the bow. Hastings let out a startled gasp, and I asked if he had missed the strike. When he didn’t answer, I turned to see why. His knees were bent, and he was rearing backwards. His rod was bent almost to the breaking point. The fish didn’t come to the boat easily. Immediately, it dove. When it finally became visible in the deep, blue water, its silver sides looked like a shark. Hastings couldn’t talk; he was intently fighting the biggest freshwater fish he had ever had on the line. He didn’t answer when I asked if he wanted the net.

I guess he figured I would realize what a stupid question that was.

Finally, on board, I think it actually struck at Mike as he started to remove the hook. We weighed it at a marina: 22 pounds, 4 ounces, and 38 inches long.

Jay McBride, manager of the fishing shop at McBride’s Guns, tells an interesting story of Max Milam’s guiding prowess. Jay had booked two trips with Max: one in the morning for one of his kids and a couple of grandkids, and an identical trip for his other kid and a couple of other grandkids. He dropped the morning cadre of kids and grandkids off at the Milam dock and went back to his lake house, planning to take a nap.

As he was lying down, Max called

and said they had caught a limit and were heading back to the dock; come get ‘em. On the way back to their house after picking up the first bunch, Max called again and said the bite was still on, and if Jay wanted to bring the others over right then, he would get them on the stripers. So, he did.

After dropping them off, he headed back to the house, by now knowing the road well enough to know where to slow down to avoid hitting deer. He got home and started to lie down again, when Max called. It wasn’t even noon, yet, but his second boat-load of McBride’s had their limit of stripers. By then, Jay was probably feeling like an Uber driver on a Saturday night.

The limit on striped bass and hybrid stripers combined is five fish, 18-inches long or longer – not five of each flavor. Hybrids count as stripers.

Max said that the many big fish break-offs that his clients had lost made him feel the spring bite would yield some really nice fish after a few more months of gorging on the abundant shad that have hatched the past couple of years since the lake refilled after the floods. The stripers will continue to bite all winter, especially on truly cold, blustery days. They are traditionally cold-water fish. The colder weather, however, will keep many fishermen at home, warm and dry.

The U.S. Census Bureau says 157 new residents move to Austin every day. Some of these may well be from northern states. If you’re one of them, know that our lakes have not frozen over since the ice age. Mount your ice auger on the wall to test Texans to see if any know what it is. And know yourself that there is good fishing in Texas off and on almost all winter, except for times of cold frontus-interruptus. **★J**

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A PLETHORA OF *Winter Options*

Texas' Upper Coast provides anglers with an abundance of diverse opportunities for a variety of conditions.

*Story and Photography by
Nate Skinner*

Transition. It's a term that seems to be a nearly constant topic when it comes to fishing, and the last month of the year is no different. The fall months have zipped on by and December has the potential to bring about more abrupt changes in the conditions along Texas' Upper Coast.

Some days may be mild and provide anglers with pleasant, autumn-like weather. Others may see Mother Nature showing her ugly side, with spitting rain, frigid temperatures and blustery winds. It's not unusual to see the wind blow from all points on a compass in a week's time. Plus the air temperatures are likely

to span a range of 20 degrees or more during that same period.

This yo-yo affect of cooling down, warming up, and then cooling down again can make patterning fish an arduous task. Combine that with ever changing wind directions and all of a sudden finding consistent action starts to sound downright impossible.

Luckily for anglers, the diversity of the large open bays along the upper portion of the Texas coast provides an abundance of opportunities for a variety of conditions. The massive amounts of water within these estuaries sport everything from shallow flats to deep channels, as well as

shell reefs, rivers, bayous, creeks, marshes, and other fish concentrating features. There's literally a place for anglers to confidently find fish in just about every condition or scenario possible.

Rivers and Bayous

Rivers and bayous provide upper coast bays with the freshwater inflow that make them extremely productive. These same features also provide a refuge for fish, particularly during less than desirable conditions when water temperatures are cold and open bay waters have been turned upside down by the strong winds of a norther.

One of the most well known rivers for producing exceptional action during the winter is the Colorado. Located smack dab in the middle of the Matagorda Bay system, the Colorado River is a favorite hot spot of Captain Tommy Countz, a veteran Matagorda fishing guide. Countz confesses that December is the best month for fishing the inlet.

"Early on in the month when water temperatures are in the 60's, most of the fish will be stacked up along the sand bars that line the west bank of the Colorado," he explained. "Working the edges of these bars with topwaters and soft plastics is the best tactic, and the fish are generally pretty aggressive."

Countz says that as water temperatures continue to drop, the fish will pull off the sand bars along the bank and into deeper water near the middle of the river. In this situation he prefers to idle upstream and drift back down working soft plastics



Slow sinking twitch bait plugs like the Unfair Lures Rip-n-Slash are preferred by savvy anglers when water temperatures begin to cool and fish become lethargic.



The mud flats along East Matagorda Bay's south shoreline are exceptional places to find trophy trout lurking this month.

down the ledges of the bank along the bottom.

"The Colorado is an absolute blast to fish," he stated. "We can fish it under just about any conditions, as the high banks keep it protected from the wind. Strong winds from passing cold fronts do not mess up the fishing in the river, which makes it a go-to spot for me in December and other winter months."

Countz adds that he's caught fish as far upriver on the Colorado as the FM 521 bridge. He also claims that he's experienced some of the best bird action of his life fishing the river when swarms of shrimp were stacked up inside the waterway.

Further north, the Brazos River also provides anglers with a solid winter option when water temperatures begin to

cool down. Captain Mike Segall of Reel Threel Charters out of Freeport states that when the water in the Brazos is in good shape it's definitely going to be full of fish.

"I like to work the dropoffs along the banks of the Brazos and the edges of the turnarounds after a strong cold front moves through," he confessed. "On sunny days there's usually some birds working up the river over schools of fish. It's a great



On mild days speckled trout will be found feeding aggressively in a typical fall pattern during the month of December.

excellent structure to target as fall transitions to winter, and Texas' upper coast is chock full of them. Anglers can plan to find plenty of trout on the west end of East Matagorda Bay, which is almost completely covered by heavy oyster shell reefs as well as stretches of scattered shell.

Matagorda Bay fishing guide, Captain Kendall Kersh of Pure Salt Adventures, says the best approach when fishing the reefs in East Matagorda is to look for areas with streaky water and make long drifts throwing mullet imitation baits.

Until the water temperature drops below the 60 degree mark, anglers should also be on the look out for working birds over schools of trout and reds on the west end of East Matagorda Bay

place to catch plenty of trout and reds, along with some fat sand trout."

The Galveston Bay complex has several rivers and bayous flowing into it that concentrate large numbers of fish during the cooler months. In lower West Galveston Bay there's Bastrop Bayou, Chocolate Bayou, and Halls Bayou. Another West Bay option is the Diversionary Canal located near Hitchcock. On the upper end of Galveston Bay, Dickinson Bayou offers an additional option. In Trinity Bay both the Trinity and San Jacinto Rivers hold a great deal of fish as well.

The Neches River located on the northwest end of Sabine Lake is another prime winter honey hole. It is a favorite of veteran Sabine Lake fishing guide, Capt. Randy Foreman. Foreman states that the best time to fish the Neches River is after a passing cold front has brought strong northwest winds to the area, draining the tide and the marshes of the inlet's watershed.

"I'll fish a variety of locations in the Neches, including the edges of the bank, flats off of points, drop offs, and turn arounds," he explained. "As conditions get colder, the fish will stack up along deeper drop offs in the river."

Reefs

Clam and oyster shell reefs are

while fishing oyster reefs. Some prime areas to start include Cleveland Reef, Long Reef, and 3-Beacon Reef.

In West Galveston Bay there is literally acres of shell located around South Deer Island on Confederate Reef. Captain Ryan Battistoni of Battistoni's Guide Service spends the majority of December wading and drifting this area looking for trophy trout. Mecom's Cut, Green's Cut, and Carancahua Reef are other exceptional areas containing shell in West Bay.

Upper Galveston Bay contains some extremely productive shell that holds fish in the wintertime as well. One of my favorite areas is the shoreline from April Fool's Point to Eagle Point.

This stretch contains scattered shell around the piers and pilings that line the bank. It's a great drift fishing option during December and other winter months.

In Trinity Bay many of the mouths of bayous located in Jack's Pocket contain uncharted clam shell

reefs that are known for holding monster specks as well as schools of reds during the winter. The East shoreline of Trinity is also covered with dense areas of oyster shell perfect for wading or drifting.

The Louisiana shoreline of Sabine Lake is littered with clam shell beds. These small reefs often produce awesome action for redfish during an outgoing tide. A good area to target is around Blue Buck Point and Garrison Ridge.

Marshes and Back Lakes

Marshes and back lakes offer an out of the wind option for anglers during windy conditions. The Cedar Lakes and Cowtrap Lake near the San Bernard River are hard to beat. There are guts leading into these areas that are lined with shell, and trout and reds stack up in these channels during cooler weather when tides are blown out by fronts.

Another excellent back lake option is Moses Lake in Texas City. This satellite bay contains a 40 foot deep hole in its northwest quadrant that attracts hoards of fish during extreme low tides and frigid temperatures.

Scott, Tabb's, and Burnett Bays, all of which are back bays off of the San Jacinto River near Baytown, are known for concentrating schools of trout and redfish during the winter months. These areas offer protection from a variety of wind directions.

Flats

Shallow mud and grass flats with scattered shell are hunting grounds for trophy trout when water temperatures heat up between cold fronts. These areas



Shorelines in Upper Galveston Bay with piers from waterfront properties hold plenty of fish attracting shell.

are best approached by wade fishing and thoroughly working stretches of shoreline with topwaters or slow sinking twitch baits.

One of the best locations is the south shoreline of East Matagorda Bay. Prime hotspots lie near marsh drains, coves, and bayous.

The north shoreline of West Galveston Bay from Green's Cut to Carancahua Point is another exceptional shoreline to find heavy trout this month. This stretch of water contains grass beds with sand pockets that heat up quickly on sunny afternoons.

East Galveston Bay's south shoreline from Marsh Point to the spoils at the mouth of Rollover Bay offers some dynamite winter fishing when the wind is blowing from the southeast. Scattered shell along this stretch of shoreline typically holds the most fish.

The north end of Sabine Lake contains some primo flats for searching for fat specks around Stewart's and Sydnes Islands. The mouth of East Pass and Coffee Ground Cove are additional top-notch areas.

Anglers should be prepared to encounter just about anything when



Wading flats with mud and grass beds, as well as scattered shell are good options when water temperatures warm a few days after a front has passed.

it comes to scenarios and conditions as wintertime approaches. They must analyze the situations they are presented with, and choose a location that fits best with the prevailing weather patterns.

The upper coast offers a plethora of

options to counter anything that Mother Nature composes.

The rest is left up to the angler. Success boils down to combining the right advanced game plan with savvy on the water decisions and adjustments. 🌟🌟



Rivers and bayous will provide plenty of hook-ups when open bay waters are turned upside down by strong winds and frosty temperatures when cold fronts push through this winter.

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Texas Style Duck Hunts



There are countless places and ways to hunt most of the popular species of ducks.

*Story and Photography
by Robert Sloan*

Every bird hunter is into shooting multiple species, especially ducks, and that can definitely happen here in the great state of Texas. Variety is the spice of life and when it comes to shooting we've got the best variety of quackers you'll find in just about any state. Take your pick from mallards, pintails, teal, gadwall, widgeon, black ducks, blue bills, red heads, buffleheads, woodies, canvasbacks and even mergansers plus the almighty coot.

It goes without saying that the king of ducks is a greenhead mallard, followed closely by a drake pintail, a.k.a. bull sprig. This season we're allowed to shoot a total of six ducks per day. I'm pretty much sure the ultimate duck strap would have to be two greeners, two bull sprig, a drake woody and widgeon. Is that possible? You bet. I've done it. It's not an easy thing to do. But it can be done if you're in the right place at the right time.

The most likely place is a backwater area on one of our big East and Central Texas lakes. The best possible place to take the ultimate duck limit is on flooded river flats. When rivers are out of their banks

they flood nearby stands of timber. That is the type of water mallards, woodies and pintails prefer.

I've been hunting ducks for about 55 years. The absolute best day of hunting I've ever had was on a flooded river. We were standing in timber and the mallards and pintails were rocking down on cupped wings through the limbs of oak and pine trees. It's a hunt I'll never forget.

How did we get in on that hunt, one that was on public water in Texas? Scouting, and lots of it. If you don't get anything else out of this story just remember one word – SCOUTING. Do enough scouting and you'll become a much better hunter with much greater success.

The key to duck hunting success is knowing where to go to find and shoot the kind of birds you are after. For example, without a doubt Port O'Connor is the redhead capital of Texas. Rockport is a close second.

Some of the best pintail hunts are on the open flats anywhere along the coast. But you can also find big flights of pintails working shallow flats of lakes

and definitely in flooded rice and plowed fields.

Mallards are most often found in flooded timber and back water sloughs off rivers and lakes. Ditto that for woodies.

Canvasbacks love the open water on big lakes, while widgeon are apt to show up where ever you can find pintails. They are especially fond of bay flats with lots of grass.

Big time numbers of teal can be found on flooded fields in Southeast Texas. And you might be surprised at how many teal you can find buzzing down our rivers. Black ducks are most abundant in the small marsh ponds of Southeast Texas.

I've had the good luck to get in on some of the best mallard hunts Texas has to offer. But one of the most unusual hunts was on Elm Bayou south of Winnie. I was with outfitter Forrest West. We left the lodge one morning and headed down the road. Forrest parked his truck and said to load up and get ready to shoot. I'm looking around and thinking nothing seemed right. No blind, no decoys not even a pond.

"We're gonna walk down this bayou



Hunting flooded timber in East Texas can result in special memories, like watching a good dog retrieve a greenhead mallard drake. Wood ducks and widgeon are other species to round out a hunter's strap.

and jump mallards that come in after their morning feed. It's kind of a sanctuary for mallards."

That was an understatement. We began easing along the bayou and small groups of mallards started busting out. It was one of the strangest mallard hunts I'd ever been on. But one of the most challenging, too.

I don't recall ever seeing as many mallards as I've seen in the Hill Country. There are quite a few duck hunters up around the Austin, Burnett and Waco area. You don't hear much about them because folks up there keep quite.

But the truth be known, the hunters that know what's going on get in on some excellent mallard hunts on the big public lakes in Central Texas. Most of the better hunts are on shallow flats in flooded timber.

Some of the most dependable pintail hunts are on flooded rice fields and back marsh areas along the coast. One of the best scenes you can witness are mallards floating out of the sky and settling into a spread of decoys in flooded timber. Another fantastic visual is a huge flight of pintails circling back around and over a goose spread in rice stubble. Quite a

few pintails get whacked over the stubble in rice fields.

However, they can also be pretty reliable on coastal flats, as well. Back in the 60's and 70's it was nothing to take a limit of 10 bull sprigs by each hunter.

Back when the limit was 10 ducks per hunter we used to head over to the Army Hole at Port O'Connor. That's where the state conducted hunts on the freshwater potholes off the big runways on Matagorda Island that were once used to train pilots. Back then we would sign up, draw a number for a blind, load up in a cattle trailer and they would take us hunting.

The best hunts were after about 9 a.m. That's when flights of pintails and widgeon would head to the island potholes after feeding in nearby rice fields. The key was to pick out the big drake pintails. At the time it seemed like there was an endless supply of them. Now we're down to one per hunter, but that's better than none.

Coastal duck hunts from Port O'Connor to Port Mansfield are excellent, thanks in big part to the numbers of redheads that use the middle Texas flats as their winter home.

Redheads are big ducks and they decoy easily. They'll work to calls, but in most situations calling is not necessary. The neat thing about redheads is that they will fly by, do a u-turn and come right into the decoys in big groups. It's a great way to introduce kids into the duck hunting scene.

The thing about hunting the coastal flats these days is that there are so many hunters. And a lot of them will take advantage of any blind they can find. It's legal, but very unethical. The best hunts are usually in makeshift blinds well off the beaten path.

I had a heck of a hunt last season with guide Dwayne Lowrey. We timed it with the arrival of a cold front. There were four of us on that run. We headed out across San Antonio Bay in his airboat, and went way south for well over an hour in the dark.

By shooting time we had set up a brush blind in the mangrove bushes overlooking a pond that covered about two acres.

For the next three hours we had hundreds of ducks come in over the decoys. Included were flights of pintails 30 feet off the water, widgeon, gadwalls, teal and redheads. It was one of those hunts

we'll never forget. I asked Lowrey how he had found that spot.

"We found it this morning," he said with a big grin. "I've never hunted that area. But it's got so many birds because nobody hunts this far south. It took us 90 minutes to get there. That's a long run and lots of gas. Not too many other hunters will push it that far."

Public hunting areas can be good and bad. The main problem is getting in line and checked in, so you'll be one of the first to head out. The early bird gets the worm, or in the case of duck hunting the best spots.

One of the top public hunting spots I've visited is the J.D. Murphree W.M.A. in Port Arthur, just below Beaumont. It's well run and usually holds a good number of ducks like teal, pintails and gadwall. I've had some incredible gadwall hunts there. About 20 years back I hunted there with Jerry Norris and we had a limit of greenheads, pintails and gadwall. It was so cold there was ice on the water, along with a hard blustery wind out of the north and very few hunters. We picked a hotspot, pushed it to the limit and the



One of the treasured trophies by duck hunters is a bull sprig, pintail drake.

birds were there.

The trick to being successful on public hunting areas is to scout them well before the season opener. Some of the best duck shoots I've had on public hunting areas involved getting permits from the Corps of Engineers, or getting an Annual \$48 Public Hunting permit from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. On places like the open bays along the coast it's a

matter of getting out early and claiming your spot.

The bottom line is determination and that has a heck of a lot to do with scouting. Do enough scouting and you can get to be pretty good at shooting a variety of ducks just about anywhere in Texas.

For more information on duck hunting in Texas give me a call at (409) 782 6796 or email - sloan288@aol.com. ★★



Flooded flats are a good place to find pintail as well as widgeon, teal and other puddle ducks.

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The Jig Is Up

Simulating a slow moving offering these baits will likely catch the biggest fish.

Bass junkies share differences of opinion on plenty, but if there is one thing we all agree on it's that jigs will catch some of the biggest fish in the lake. That's largely because jigs are designed to easily penetrate the thick cover where heavyweight largemouths like to set up camp. Plus, they simulate a slow-moving offering that represents a tasty and sizable meal.

There's nothing complicated about the anatomy of the bait. It consists of a lead head molded around a hook that is usually protected by some sort of weed guard to help the bait get in and out of logs, limbs and grass without fouling or hanging up. The hook is hidden beneath a living rubber or silicone skirt that undulates with the bait's every move.

Most anglers like to outfit the jig with some sort of plastic trailer to enhance the action, create an even larger profile and cause the bait to move more water. A trailer also can make a bait more buoyant and slow the fall rate to a degree.

Like other families of lures, jigs have undergone some big time changes over the years.

Back in the 1970s, when rubber-skirted jigs started gaining popularity within the bass fishing community, there were limited designs available for performing a broad range of techniques. To hear Lonnie Stanley tell it, if you wanted to swim a jig through shallow shore grass or lotus pads, you did it with the same jig you used to fish around thick vegetation, brush, rocks



As the name implies, Grass jigs are intended for use around aquatic vegetation such as hydrilla or milfoil.



Story and Photography by Matt Williams

and other junk.

“Back in the early days we didn't have all the different jigs and head designs that we have now,” said Stanley, a well-known lure designer from Huntington who introduced the first Stanley Jig in 1979. “Things are a lot more specialized now. There are jigs for all sorts of different techniques.”

Here's a look some of those jigs, where they work and a brief explanation of what sets them aside from the rest:

Flipping Jigs

Flipping jigs are ideal for fishing in or around heavy cover like grass, bushes, brush, log jams, etc.... because they designed in a way that helps them navigate the rough stuff like a 4X4 without hanging up. As such, the head on a flipping jig will be slender and compact in shape. It should be accompanied by a fairly stiff weed guard to help protect the hook point and cut down on hang ups.

The flipping jig is intended to be fished

at short range, usually in combination with a heavy-action rod and braided or fluorocarbon lines that provide very little stretch. The hook must be made from heavy duty wire stout enough to withstand the violent hooksets that come with the territory.

Flipping jigs come in assorted sizes but those ranging 3/8-1 ounce will generally cover most of the bases. Lightweight jigs sometimes work best in cold water because they provide a slower fall that may



Most anglers like to outfit the jig with some sort of plastic trailer to slow the fall, enhance the action, and create an even larger profile that causes the bait to move more water.

appeal more to lethargic bass suspended in the water column.

The jig should come with some sort of keeper on the hook shank to help hold a compact soft plastic trailer like a Zoom Salty Chunk or crawdad in place. Add a little dab of super glue on the nose of the trailer and press it against the base of the head to help keep the trailer from sliding down the hook shank and tearing prematurely.

Fishing Tip: It's always best to use a reel with a fast gear ratio when using flipping jigs. This allows you to gather up slack line and set the hook quickly when you feel the bite.

Grass Jigs

Grass jigs are intended for use around aquatic vegetation such as hydrilla or milfoil. Hydrilla is capable of growing to depths of 20-30 feet under optimum conditions. It forms a dense canopy once it reaches the surface during summer and fall while remaining somewhat open beneath with upright stalks that closely resemble an underwater forest.

The head of the grass jig should be somewhat conical in shape so it can penetrate the dense canopy and resist snagging on the way in and out. Grass jigs come in assorted sizes. Many anglers prefer jigs weighing upwards of one ounce in order to achieve maximum penetration and efficiency when the pattern is in play. These jigs should always have a stout hook

to absorb the shock of a hard hookset with a heavy-action rod and braided line.

Heavy grass jigs work best with a vertical presentation. The trick is to make short pitches or flips 10-15 feet from the boat and allow the bait to free fall through the vegetation on a semi-slack line. Most strikes occur out of reaction, usually on the fall, but not always. Once the jig reaches bottom, hop it a couple of times, reel in and repeat the process.

Fishing Tip: Most reaction bites occur on the fall. Be sure watch your line where it enters the water. If the line goes slack prematurely, reel up the slack, set the hook hard and apply steady pressure to turn the fish and get it coming your way as quickly as possible.

Swim Jigs

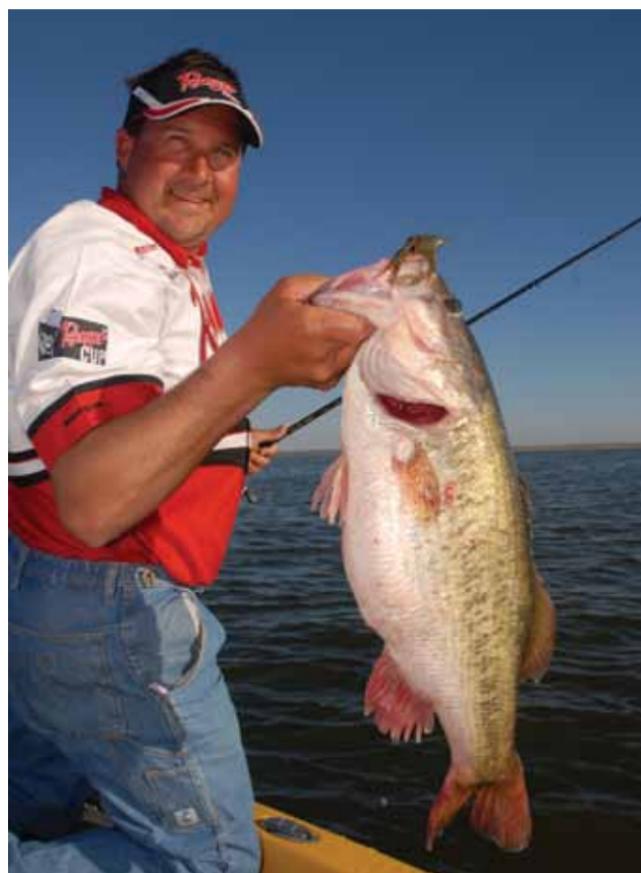
Swim jigs are a good choice any

time you suspect the fish are hanging out around flooded, scattered cover in shallow water such willows, buck brush, pepper grass or scattered clumps hydrilla and feeding on bluegills or shad. They are intended to be fished at steady or staggered retrieve — similar to a spinnerbait or crankbait — and have the reputation for producing some really big bites.

The swim jig head is typically bullet shaped to help it snake through heavy cover without hanging up. Fish typically hook themselves on a swim jig because the bait is moving when they eat it. For that reason it is important to have a hook that is super sharp and built to take some abuse.

Swim jigs come in assorted sizes ranging 1/4 to 1/2 ounce with 3/8 ounce being the all-around favorite. Like other jigs styles, the swim jig works best when dressed with some sort of trailer. Crawfish trailers like a Net Bait Paca Craw, Jr. are extremely popular but you can also use a boot tail swim bait.

Fishing Tip: When fishing around “clumps” of hydrilla, try stopping or killing the bait during the retrieve to allow



Like any bait, jigs don't always work, but when they do they will catch some of the biggest bass in the lake.



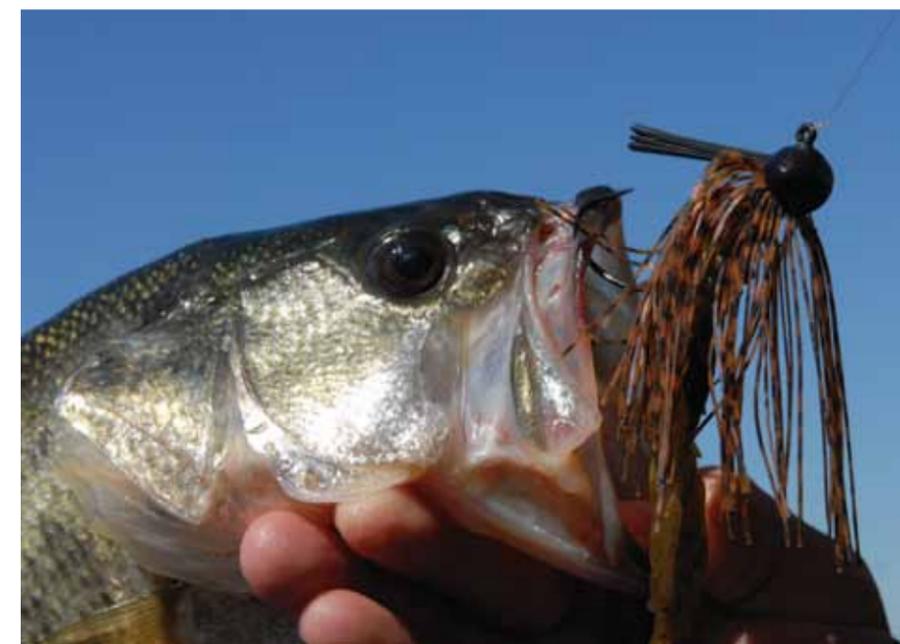
The blade on a bladed jig catches water and creates resistance, causing the bait to shutter side-to-side as it moves through the water column. It works best when lots of fish are relating to shallow grass, bushes or brush.

it to free fall along the outside edge. The best overall color patterns for swim jigs are bluegill, black/blue and white.

Football Jigs

The football jig is heavily favored when fishing on hard bottoms with lots of pea gravel, chunk rock and small boulders or scattered brush and stumps. It comes equipped with a fat, football-shaped head that helps prevent the bait from falling into crevices or cracks that might snag other jig styles. It does great job of crawling slowly across bottom and keeping you abreast of what is going on down there. One of the more popular ways to fish it is to drag it slowly across bottom like a Carolina rig.

Football jigs will work throughout the year, but are particularly effective when bass are feeding heavily on crawfish. Most come with a weed guard, but some anglers prefer to trim or remove it altogether to help improve hook-ups on long casts in deep water. The jigs perform best in combination with some sort of color-coordinated trailer like a grub, creature or crawfish.



Football jigs will work throughout the year, but are particularly effective when bass are feeding heavily on crawfish.

Fishing Tip: An alternate method of fishing a football jig is to “stroke” it. To perform a stroking retrieve, let the bait settle to bottom then give it a couple of aggressive hops by jerking your rod tip upwards, then allowing the bait to fall back to bottom. This will sometimes trigger strikes that you might not get with a standard dragging retrieve.

Bladed Jigs

The bladed jig is designed similar to the swim jig, with addition of a flat, metal blade that pivots on the line tie.

The blade catches water and creates resistance, causing the bait to shutter side-to-side as it moves through

the water column. This causes the skirt and trailer to undulate wildly while creating a significant amount of vibration

to help the fish home in on the bait from a distance.

Bladed or vibrating jigs will work year-round but tend to shine brightest when there are lots of fish relating to shallow grass, bushes or brush. It's designed to be worked on a steady retrieve and does not have a weed guard, so you have to be careful when casting into areas with heavy brush.

The bait can be fished with or without a trailer. Small swim baits like the Lake Fork Magic Shad are great trailers on the bladed jig.

The Magic Shad has broken sides and is ultra-responsive the bladed jig's vibrating action.

Fishing Tip: Bladed jigs come with a full skirt. You can trim the skirt about an inch long or remove it altogether when using a swim bait trailer to alter the appearance and change the action.

In summary, the jig is a super-versatile bait that can be effective when fished shallow or deep in water that is clear, stained or muddy and around all sorts cover and structure. The keys to finding success are to choose jig style that is best suited in size, style and color for the existing conditions and making the proper presentation in combination with the correct tackle.

Jigs don't always work, but when they do they will catch some of the biggest bass in the lake.★

CoastWatch | Danno Wise

Many are predicting a colder than normal winter for the Texas' coast. While some may view this prediction with cynicism, cold winter temperatures aren't all together bad news for coastal fishermen. In fact, the only real drawbacks are having to put on a few extra layers of clothes and the possibility of a fish-killing freeze. But, killer freezes aside, harsh winter weather can lead to hot fishing action.

As most fishermen know, cold temperatures concentrate fish in the deeper portions of the inland bays and rivers. And, although they may be a little sluggish, speckled trout and redfish are more than willing to strike lures and baits presented to them at these depths.

The final option during the last month of the year will be the one that draws most hardcore anglers to the bay on cold days – big trout. From now through spring, some of the biggest sow specks of the year will be taken from bays up and down the Texas and Louisiana coasts. Although landing a trophy trout is far from a sure thing on any day, the odds certainly rise during the winter months. **T★J**



Matagorda guide Capt. Tommy Countz says there are plenty of angling options during December – more than most anglers realize.

“December in Matagorda gives an angler many options,” said Countz. “If water temperatures are still on the warm side, bird action in East Matagorda Bay should still be good -- especially in the first part of the month. As soon as water

temperatures drop significantly, the shrimp will head to the Gulf. After that happens we will start drifting either mud flats on the east end or scattered shell on the west end. I look for off-color streaks running through clear water. My go-to rig for drift fishing is brighter paddletail plastics rigged on a 1/4 ounce lead head. Chartreuse or hot pink baits seem to produce best.

“If I’m wading, I like to fish the south shore of West Matagorda. If tides are low, I’ll fish the drains or guts running out of the peninsula and through sand bars and grass beds. I’ll use Mirrolure Lil’ Johns rigged on 1/16 ounce lead heads. The lighter heads allow me to work the baits slower and keep them up off the bottom. Glo/Chartreuse and Purple Demon/Chartreuse are my favorites.

“Our third option is fishing the Colorado River. As water temperatures drop, fish will seek deeper, warmer water. Drifting with the current and working baits just off the shelves along the bank can produce some great boxes of trout and reds. In the river I toss 1/4 to 3/8 ounce lead heads rigged with bright tails.

“Any way you choose to fish, December can produce some great fishing in Matagorda.”

Also fishing the Matagorda area, Capt. Kendall Kersh of Pure Salt Adventures says he’ll be focused on the deep water areas in December.

“In December, I expect winter to have set in,” said Kersh. “So, we will focus our efforts fishing deeper water like the Colorado River, the diversion canal and the Intercoastal waterway. As far as lures go, soft plastic swimbaits rigged on a



PHOTO COURTESY CAPTAIN TREY'S TROPHY CHARTERS

Captain Trey Prey shows off a really nice East Matagorda Bay speckled trout. December is when he says trophy trout options increase and the “big girls” come out to play.

heavy jig heads will be our go-to baits. In West Matagorda Bay, wade fishing will be good in the deep marsh drains. Soft plastics rigged on light jig heads with a slow fall usually work best for both trout and redfish in those areas.”

Trophy trout is the name of the game in December for Sargent guide Capt. Trey Prye of Capt. Trey's Trophy Charters.

“December is all about big trout for me,” said Prye. “All I’ll be doing is wading with clients in search of trophy trout. We will be throwing topwaters, slow sinking plugs and big plastics. I will fish structure and areas with concentrated bait during the cooler months. The warm mud flats and deep guts on both the North and South shorelines of East Matagorda Bay will be where I am most of the month.”

Freeport Guide Capt. Mike Segall of Reel Threel Charters says his main focus will be bull reds in the year’s final month, although he’ll be mixing in some other inshore and offshore fishing as well.

“December should still hold some bull reds off the beachfront,” said Segall. “Sardines and herring work the best and you need to make sure to do a bunch of chumming to get them started.

“The deep holes in the harbor and Brazos River and jetty areas will hold lots speckled trout and sand trout. Live shrimp

freelined usually work wells, along with plastics or GULP!s. The open bays will produce specks and reds, too. I’ll usually be drifting over hard bottoms or oyster beds. When fishing in the bays, plastics and GULP!s work the best for me, but I’ll also throw live shrimp with popping corks.

“Offshore, snapper will be holding in state waters over reefs. The best bet is to work the edges and look for fish on your fish finder.”

Galveston guide Capt. Tim Young of Tim Young Outdoors says December fishing is constantly changing on the Galveston Bay complex.

“The main thing I usually do in December is wade fish before and after fronts,” said Young. “We had a lot of rain runoff from the hurricane and we got cooler temperatures earlier than other years. So, our bird activity may end a little sooner this year, but there could still be some birds working in Trinity early in December.

“Once we get into our normal December routine, I’ll usually be wadefishing East Bay, playing the winds and fishing the shorelines. If we have a hard south wind, we’ll be on the south



PHOTO COURTESY TOMMY'S GUIDE SERVICE

East and West Matagorda are both options for those fishing with Captain Tommy Countz. East Matagorda's shell or the grass and guts of West Matagorda are areas to fish this month.

shoreline fishing the best water we can find. If we have a north wind, we’ll be on the north shoreline. What you want to do is look for the most mullet you can find, then wade that area throwing those slow-sinking plugs.

“More than anything else, I throw slow-sinking plugs like Corkies and the different MirrOlures during December. You can catch some fish on topwaters, but it’s not as consistent. You will usually do better with slow-sinking plugs like Corkies, Catch 2000s, and 51 Series MirrOlures.

“Another option for us in December – especially later in the month — is fishing the rivers. If the water gets cold and the rivers don’t have too much freshwater, there should be plenty of fish up there. We don’t usually have to fish the river because we usually have plenty of fish in the bay. But, there are usually fish up the rivers once it gets cold and it’s a good option on really windy days.

“Another thing to look at is our deep shell. If it gets really cold during December, we’ll fish the deeper shell. But once it warms up, we’ll go right back to

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PHOTO BY NATE SKINNER.

Captain Tim Young hooks up with another Galveston Bay fish around a well shell pad. Fishing the deeper shell in Galveston and Trinity Bays are options for him in December.

wadefishing the shorelines. Basically, we just adjust to the weather conditions, which seems like it is always changing in December. But, overall, I'm expecting good fishing this month."

Sabine Lake guide Capt. Randy

Foreman says there are plenty of options in December and he expects to be doing a little bit of everything this month.

"Early in December, we'll still have some flounder," said Foreman. "But, I'll be fishing for them around the jetties and

along the channel. I'll be using jigs, but usually tipping them with shrimp.

"When I'm not fishing for flounder, I'll be fishing the lower end of the lake for redfish. The marshes won't have any water in them because of the north winds, so those fish will be moving out of the canals. They'll still be schooling under small shrimp. I'll be throwing DSL Southern Shad in glow/chartreuse.

"We also have some really good fishing for black drum and sheepshead starting in December. Peeled, dead shrimp is usually good, but the bigger fish a lot of times like live shrimp better.

"We'll also start seeing some trout on the flats behind the islands on the north end of the lake. I'll be drifting and fishing in one to four feet of water. I'll be throwing DSL Southern Shad in either Midnight Money or Red Shad. You can swim that bait just like a mullet and catch some good trout.

"And, up in Keith Lake you'll be able to find a mix of redfish, black drum and sheepshead. When I'm fishing in Keith Lake, I'll use the same DSL Southern Shad, but I'll rig it under a cork." ★★



On Lake Calcasieu Capt. Kimberlee Poe says fishing will be outstanding right before the New Year begins.

"We are looking forward to December fishing," said Poe. "The trout fishing is usually excellent, and the red fishing is at its height at this time. Good numbers of nice trout can still be found under birds, as well as on scattered oysters in three to five feet of water. Soft plastics, like MirrOlure's Lil' Johns, rigged on 1/8 and 1/16 heads, are our most productive lures this time of year. Turner's Bay, West Cove and Joe's Cove are all December hotspots for trout.

"Redfish will be another story

completely — it's catching not fishing. Any of the weirs scattered along the east bank will be full of reds. The banks adjacent to the weirs are also excellent if the boat traffic is crazy. GULP! is helpful, but if conditions are favorable, they'll eat anything. When fishing cold conditions, tipping a GULP! with dead shrimp works very well.

"The fall has been pretty productive with both trout and reds, so we are very anxious to see what the winter has in store for us."

December inshore fishing around Venice all depends on the Mississippi River. If the river is not too fresh, trout will move up into the river. On the other hand, if the river is full of rain runoff, the trout will be stacked up on the outside



PHOTO BY NATE SKINNER.

On Lake Calcasieu in southwest Louisiana, Big Lake Guide Service will put clients on speckled trout and redfish by drifting shell reefs, shorelines as well as fishing around the weirs.

beaches. Redfish, however, will be found in the marshes off the river regardless of the river's condition.

Tuna action will still be good offshore. The availability of the winter tuna fishery is just as reliant on the weather. But, when weather allows, anglers can usually find fast action for tuna offshore." ★★

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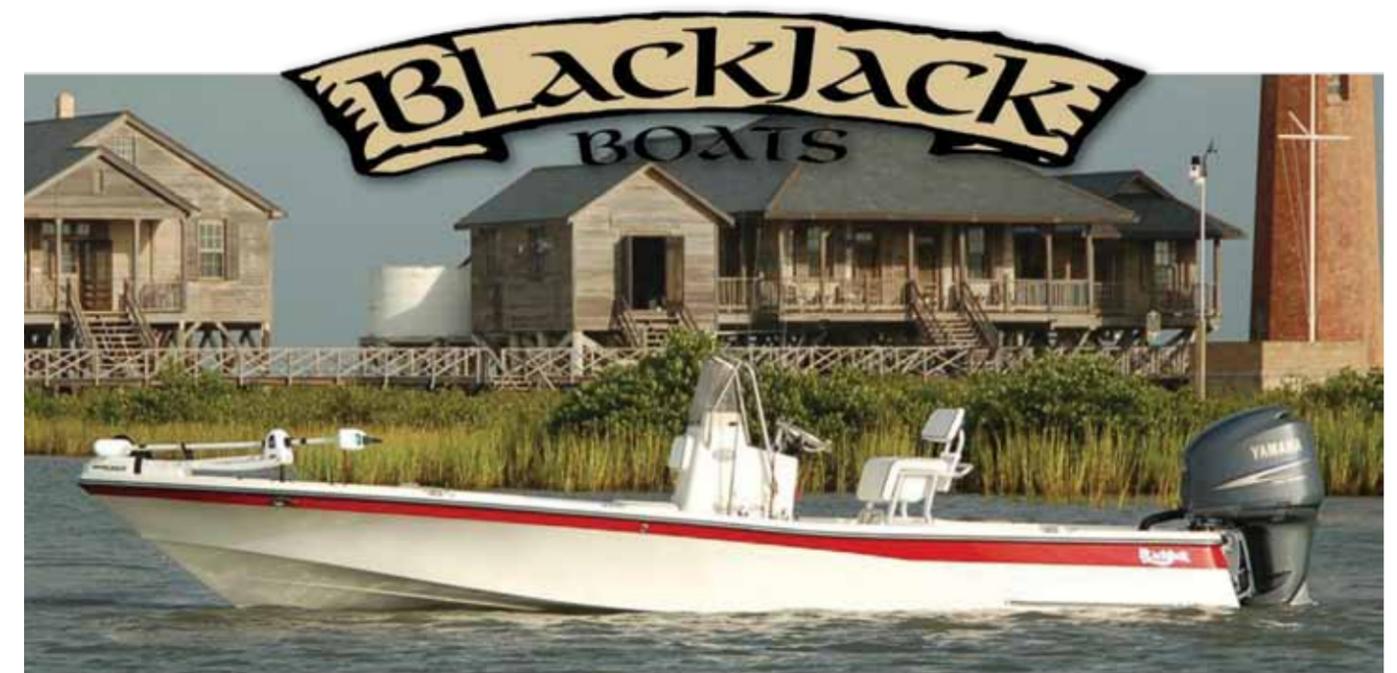
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PHOTO COURTESY FISHINGGALVESTONTX.COM

Bull redfish like this caught while fishing with Captain Greg Verm are options around the Galveston jetties and the beachfront on southward to Freeport.



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NORTH TEXAS



By Brian Hughes

December can be both a frustrating and very rewarding month for Texas anglers. Bass fishing can be slow, especially for the largemouth species. Smallmouth bass will usually be more active and can be a good choice to consider if you want to catch bass.

Blue catfish on the other hand will see the trophy sized fish moving up and becoming much more active. Many huge blues are caught every year in December.

So it really depends on what is wanted or expected from a fishing experience. If you're just looking to spend a few hours out of the house and catch a few fish, maybe for the grill, why not consider some close to home fishing? Such as the rainbow trout offered up by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Each year, starting in early December and continuing into March, the folks at Texas Parks and Wildlife will stock rainbow trout in over 100 locations across the state. The idea is to provide accessible angling for everyone.

Stocking locations are usually in urban areas near highly populated areas. There is probably a trout-stocking coming to a pond near you as you read these words. The TPWD website, tpwd.texas.gov will have all of the stocking dates, locations and rules for trout fishing, as well as some tips for catching the fish.

Trout don't take a lot of special gear or knowledge to catch. These are not wild trout in a mountain stream in Montana.

They are hatchery fish, bred to be stocked, and caught. All you really need is a light spinning rod, four to six pound test line, small hook, and some kind of bait rainbows will bite. Velveeta cheese or mini-marshmallows and canned kernel corn are go-to bait for rainbow-seeking anglers.

Other options include salmon eggs, prepared trout baits and nuggets. Fly-fishermen will use artificial flies, and the standard tackle fan can use the Super-Duper, Rooster Tail, or Panther Martin Classic or Nature Series lures.

If the weather is nice remember to take a child fishing, as the trout are usually pretty easy to catch. If it's cold, wet or blustery leave the kids at home. You don't want to give a beginner a bad experience, no matter their age.

Of course, rainbow trout are not for everyone. Some anglers will brave the elements and go after their favorite gamefish species no matter how slow the action may be on a particular day. The thing is, some of these anglers may be rewarded with outstanding numbers of fish, or even a personal best catch. Such is the nature of fishing in one of our Texas lakes in the winter.

One thing is for sure, you can't catch 'em if you don't go.

CEDAR CREEK — As a general rule, December means deep fishing for sand bass. Somewhere around the 30 foot mark the sandies will set up shop, usually near a channel. You'll need a jighead of about 1/2 ounce or better just to get a bait down to the fish. Fluke and assassin-type baits will be the best choice in some shade of blue.

Hybrids will follow much the same pattern through December. Catfish will be moving up into the creeks and hanging out around the dam.

Bass fishermen will want to either drop-shot or Carolina rig deep structure. Four inch ring fry baits in chartreuse/pepper, watermelon, or June bug are the baits of choice. Fishing the deeper docks will also produce on Cedar Creek using jigs in black/blue, shades of brown with some orange, and greens as well.

RAY HUBBARD — While I avoid Ray

Hubbard during the summer months due to the recreational traffic, winter fishing can be great. Fishermen should look south of the Rush Creek Yacht Club, for the sand bass. They'll gather in schools right off the bottom. Be ready with strong line and you may catch hybrid stripers or big blue catfish there also. The area around the Red barn will hold hybrids as well.

The cove below the power plant is another preferred location. Drift a sassy shad-type bait, or live bait, across the point at about 20 feet.

For crappie, the bridge at Harbor Bay Marina, and the pilings, (especially pilings two, three and four) are where you want to soak a baitfish or jig.

The I-30 Bridges, and the rocks they contain, will hold plenty of bass, especially early in the month. As long as temperatures are moderate, sunny days will see the rocks providing reflected warmth and this will draw in the bass. Slow moving baits like the Texas-rig and jig along the base of the rocks is a good plan. Deep diving crankbaits along the middle portion of rocks will also produce some fish.

LAKE 'O THE PINES — A few years ago, guide Chuck Rollins happened across some great winter crappie fishing, almost by accident. When the crappie action at Cedar Creek started slowing down he happened to go to LOP one day. That experience convinced him that "Lake 'O the Pines is one of the best winter crappie lakes in the state."

Contour changes are the key at LOP. Humps, points, channels, any change will be a good location to start a drift. Drop down a crappie jig and let the wind do the work. Drop your bait to just off the bottom, and cover lots of water. Key on 20 to 35 feet of water.

And remember, black and white crappie caught from December 1 through the last day of February, must be retained. There is no minimum length limit during this time. This regulation was put in place because crappie do not survive well when brought up from deep water. You should always consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual when fishing or hunting in Texas,



PHOTO COURTESY BILL L. OLSON JR.

Through the early part of winter bass anglers will key on main lake points as well as vertical structure. Jigs and Texas rigs are good options once a few fish have been caught from an area.

so as to be sure of the rules and regulations at any given time and location.

FORK — Fork can be a fickle mistress in December. If we see mild temperatures you'll be able to catch bass on a variety of baits, including the moving baits. Spinnerbaits, 'Traps, even topwaters can still be effective, depending on the weather. You'll be targeting active fish on the flats and mouths of creeks. Look for grass and you'll find fish. Spinnerbaits in chartreuse white will cover water quickly as will the red 'Traps.

Once you find a few fish, work the grass thoroughly with Texas rigged worms and craws. That's the consensus for early December.

However, later in the month you'll most likely want to focus on slower baits. Big 10" worms and jigs will catch a lot of winter bass. Use black/brown, black/blue, green pumpkin, red shad and Junebug. Suspending hard jerkbaits are another option. Go with loud colors like Chrome/blue in clear water, firetiger in stained water, and in muddy water use a bait that rattles in gold/black.

The drop shot is also a good choice for presenting a bait slowly on deep structure.

Speaking of deep structure you'll need to be using your electronics. You're looking for several things. First, look to see at what depth the fish are holding. Once you determine that you can count on them being at the same depth throughout most of the lake.

Depth will also help determine lure options. If fish are in the upper section of the water column, you can use a flutter

spoon. if they are on the bottom, try a Johnson's Limit Getter jiggin' spoon.

Also, look for the baitfish and the yellow bass on your graph. You'll find these in large schools and they are easier to see than individual fish. Once located, drop a bait on them. Bass will be feeding on these fish and if they are active

you'll soon know it.

Finally, don't forget a swimbait. Rigged on a 1/4 oz. belly weighted hook, the swimbait can be worked out to about 10 feet of water. For deeper fish switch to a 1/2 oz. weighted hook and allow the bait to fall a little longer.

Crappie at Lake Fork will be near the dam and should be easy to find. Just look for the boats. Pull in the area quietly and politely and nobody should object to sharing.

Remember, Fork is another lake with the special crappie regulations and all fish must be retained through the end of February, regardless of length. Most crappie anglers agree that for whatever reason crappie jigs out-produce minnows in the winter here.

It wouldn't be a December report without mentioning some of the power plant lakes in the area. These will be popular through the winter months. When power plant lakes generate power, they draw in cold lake water in order to cool the systems. That in turn heats the water which is then discharged back into the lake. The areas near the discharge will have much warmer water, and the nearby fish will be more active, and spawn sooner. That makes for a happy angler and good catches

SQUAW CREEK — At Squaw you have many options for bass. You can use Carolina-rig rigged with either a seven inch Power Worm in Blue Fleck, or a French fry-type bait in chartreuse/pepper. Be sure to use a three to four foot leader on this rig.

Deep points and the main lake humps are also a great place for a deep diving crankbait. Try the Fat Free Shad or Foxy Shad, or an XD. Use primarily shad or chartreuse colors.

When fishing in the thick timber areas, switch to a Texas rigged worm, staying in the five to fifteen foot range. Stick with blue flake, black/blue or a June bug color.

Catfish will show up in both the colder water and the warm water areas of the lake. Fresh cut, or live, baits will be the ticket and you'll want to fish near the creek mouths and timber edges there.

Another catfish spot is under trees with cormorants in them. When a cormorant feeds it doesn't completely digest all the fish it ingests. When it roosts on a tree branch it will "expel" bits of this undigested fish into the water below, and the catfish feed on the undigested fish.

Squaw Creek is a property of the Luminant energy company and as such it has some specific regulations put in place by the company. The lake is only open to boaters on Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 7am-4pm.

Only bank fishermen may use the lake on Thursdays. Additionally only 100 boats will be allowed at any one time and you can only sign up for one day at a time, per weekend. You must pre-register for access and registration can be found at www.luminant.com/squawcreekpark/register.aspx--

WELSH — Welsh bass will hit a variety of offerings including lizards or craws in watermelon/red, or Junebug black/blue, when fished on a Texas rig. For shallow bass, Senkos, 'traps and the old hard, treble-hooked jerkbaits will work. Use watermelon/red or green pumpkin and fish any grass near timber. If rains stain the water, then use your bubblegums, chartreuses or such.

The Ribbit frog in white with chartreuse feet will work over the tops of the vegetation. Throw spinnerbaits around the main lake on windy points, along with square-bill crankbaits. As with the plastics, tick with the basic natural colors unless the water is stained, then go with brighter colors.

That's a rundown for some good fishing options in December. Be sure and make some time for family to fish together this holiday season.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all. 🌟🌟

EAST TEXAS



By Matt Williams

NACOGDOCHES - Things are set up for some outstanding winter fishing on Lake Nacogdoches. That's because the grass is back in a big way. Just about every creek and shoreline up and down the lake has got it, and much of the green stuff is growing out to depths of 9-10 feet.

This should add up to an outstanding Rat-L-Trap bite once Mother Nature knocks the grass back a few feet. Hydrilla goes dormant and dies back in cold water. Plus, coots and waterfowl tug and pull on the stalks, stripping them of succulent leaves as deep as they can reach.

Some of winter's best fishing occurs when the grass is around three feet below the surface. Even when the water temperature dips into the low 50s the bass won't leave it. Fishing around the grass with a moving bait, like the lipless crankbait, can pay off with some really big fish this time of year.

The main key is to work the bait fast enough that it ticks the top of the grass periodically as the offering speeds through the water column. Most strikes will come as the bait tears free of the grass. You need a pretty stiff rod and a reel with a fairly fast gear ratio to make this technique work for you. Otherwise, the bait will bury up and foul.

Some other good bait choices for casting around the grass are spinnerbaits, Chatterbaits and square bill crankbaits. Swim baits and suspending jerk baits can be effective around winter grass as well, especially when the water has decent visibility.

There also will be some schools of holding around main lake points, the old pipeline and isolated hard bottoms. The fish won't be much on size, but you can

rack up some good numbers of one to two pound Kentucky bass and largemouths using spoons, Carolina rigs and shaky heads once a large school is pinpointed.

PALESTINE - When December rolls around in eastern Texas is when Lake Palestine fishing guide Ricky Vandergriff starts getting his big fish game face on. That's because the 20,000-acre has a history of producing some whoppers during the winter months when the right conditions exist.

According to Vandergriff the bite is almost always best when weather conditions are fairly stable and outside temperatures are moderate. The guide says strong cold frontal passages can stifle the bite to a degree, so it is always best to try to plan fishing trips during warming trends whenever possible. Vandergriff says both the north and south ends of the lake can be productive. Up north, he'll spend a high percentage of his time in the Cade's Lake area where he'll target pad stems with a 1/4 ounce black/blue Big Eye jig, Texas rigged brush hog and a 3/8 ounce white/chartreuse spinnerbait. Kickapoo Creek also can be good. The best bet is to fish stumps and other wood adjacent to the channel break using a jig or Texas rig.

Farther south, Vandergriff will focus mostly on boat docks in three to six feet of water. Docks that have been doctored with brush are always best. His go-to bait is a 3/8 or 1/2 ounce black/blue jig tipped with a matching trailer. The guide pointed out that main lake points also can be good bets from time to time with deep cranks and Carolina rigs being the best offerings.

Vandergriff says crappie and channel cat prospects are always good through the winter months. Crappie fishermen typically fare best beneath highway bridge crossings, with the State Highway 155 Bridge between Dogwood City and Coffee City and the Flat Creek Bridge being the most reliable for consistent action on pink/white jigs and live shiners. Best depth range is 20-25 feet. The fish will most likely be holding near bottom.

For catfish, Vandergriff says baited holes in about 16 feet of water should produce steady limits using punch bait and night crawlers. Palestine produces some big fish on jugs tipped with shad and bream. Flatheads and blues weighing upwards of 40 pounds are pretty common.

Anglers looking to go on a white bass meat run should find plenty of keepers in

6-10 feet of water on Henderson Point and main lake points south of the 155 Bridge. Chrome 'Traps are the best bet when the fish are feeding near the surface, while spoons are the ticket when the schools go to bottom.

SAM RAYBURN - Big Sam entered November in great shape with water levels close to a foot low and lush hydrilla beds growing out to 12 feet in places that hasn't seen it in several years. According to veteran bass pro Tommy Martin, things are setting up for some for outstanding winter fishing and a spring that could be downright spooky.

"It's really fishing good — lots of bites and some good quality," he said. "The grass is in excellent shape. It's matted up in just about every creek from the Highway 147 Bridge south. So long as the weather holds the water temperature doesn't drop below the mid-50s there are going to a lot of fish up shallow around the grass and you'll be able to catch them variety of ways. December is all about the weather."

Should water temperatures remain moderate, Martin says he will key on outside grass edges using a Texas rigged red bug worm or possibly even a jig. He likes to key on areas where the grass makes a point or gut, because it often indicates some sort of contour change.

"There also could be a strong topwater bite," Martin said. "And you can't forget about the Rat-L-Trap, either. There are always Rat-L-Trap fish around the grass on 'Rayburn no matter how cold it gets. You'll just have to cover water to find them."

If winter does turn off abnormally cold as the Old Farmer's Almanac is predicting, Martin thinks the better numbers and quality will come away from the bank in water ranging 15-25 feet deep around channel swings, points and other structure. He'll use a jigging spoon, casting jig and a big Texas rigged worm to get at those fish.

December's crappie fishing prospects can be hit or miss. Some of the best fishing typically occurs around the Highway 147 Bridge and along the Angelina and Attoyac rivers north of the bridge.

TOLEDO BEND - Toledo Bend was about five feet low and hydrilla was sparse to none in most areas as of this writing. According to fishing guide Tommy Martin, the best bass fishing bets in December will be associated with

fishing deep, away from the bank, around old roadbeds, bridges, timberlines and channel swings using spoons, jigs, Texas rig Zoom Ol' Monster worms, football jigs or Carolina rigs. There also could be some fish holding around main lake points and outer rims of flats in water ranging 12-20 feet.

"The shallow bite starts to fade on Toledo once the water temperatures drops below 60 degrees," Martin said. "It's been that way for years. With no cover up shallow to hold them they'll have to go deep."

Another deep water game that can pay off big time once water temps dip into the 50s is crappie fishing. According to fishing guide Stephen Johnston, the bite can be exceptionally good around the old "Chicken Coop" area located at mid-lake where the Sabine River winds close to the Texas side. The water in the river channel drops as deep as 80 feet in places and the shad move up and down the breaks at suspended depths that provide them a comfort zone.

"The water is pretty shallow on the flats around there and the colder water pushes everything to the river," Johnston said.

"The crappie and shad will suspend a lot, so you'll need good electronics to pinpoint the depth at which the fish are holding. It's real important to fish at the right depth. These fish will be pretty lethargic and they won't go down to get a bait."

The stretch of Sabine north of Huxley Bay also can be good this time of year, according to Charlie Shivley at Bill's Landing. Shivley likes to key on channel swings with brush using shiners and jigs.

Good as the crappie fishing can be, two things that can bring it to a screeching halt are current and dirty water.

"If we get some big rains and the river starts to flow the bite will really slow down," said Johnston.

CONROE - Lake Conroe fishing guide Butch Terpe says December almost always offers up good prospects for multiple species including lack bass, crappie and catfish.

"My guess is water temperatures will still be the low 60s and everything is going to be feeding up strong for the winter," Terpe said. "We're far enough south that we generally don't get a lot of really cold weather."

Terpe say any number of patterns should produce some solid limits of bass. Given the choice, he'll probably stay fairly shallow and target a lot rock and breakwater structure around bridges, the dam and any number of marinas including The Palms, Walden, Seven Coves and Harbor Town.

"A lot of those breakwaters will fall off into 15 feet of water or so, but I like to stay in about six to eight feet," Terpe said. "I'll also spend some time around boat docks with brush."

Terpe said anglers can make use of any number of baits now and stand a good chance of getting bit. His favorites include Texas rig worms, Senkos, medium diving cranks (shad) and wacky worms.

For crappie, the guide likes the FM 1097 Bridge better than any other area. He says the fish are usually holding about five feet off bottom in 30 feet of water. Jigs and shiners will produce equally well at times.

"There will be quite a few limits, too," Terpe said. "Most will be around 11-13 inches." Like last month, Conroe's channel cat will be the prowl in water ranging 17-25 feet and there will be some quality keepers up to four pounds in the mix.

"We always catch better quality in fall and winter," Terpe said. "It's pretty easy to catch a limit, too."

Terpe fishes exclusively over baited holes along creek and river channel breaks and ledges north of the FM 1097 Bridge, but says there are also quite a few fish caught off the ends of points down south. "The main thing is be really close to a creek channel," Terpe said.

LIVINGSTON - Veteran Lake Livingston salt Randy Dearman says his one lake was nearing one foot below full pool was fairly clear of this writing. If those conditions hold, some banner fishing should be in store for bass anglers this month.

"It should be good," Dearman said. "The main thing to watch is water clarity. If we get a bunch of rain and the water gets muddy it'll really hurt the bite. The fishing is always best on Livingston when the water is pretty clear. Especially in the creeks."

Dearman says just about any major



PHOTO COURTESY RICHARD JUE

Crappie fishing in the winter should yield good results. Concentrate on deeper water around bridges, brush piles and marina boat docks.

or secondary creek up and down the lake should be holding fish throughout the month. He says it is a good idea to begin the search midway up the creek and work your way back. The water in the channel will be around 8-10 feet and 0-3 feet right on the lip. The fish generally like to hold right on the break where shallow water meets deep.

"The main thing is to cover water and fish tight to any wood cover you come across," Dearman said. "The fish are going to be holding right up against the wood, be it a stump, lay down or brush. Hit stuff with the bait if you can. It could trigger a reaction strike when the bait deflects off the wood." Assorted baits will catch fish this month but Dearman says moving baits like a spinnerbait, square bill crank or bladed jig usually produce the best results. He'll switch to a Texas rigged Rage Craw or Strike King jig if he needs to take a slower approach.

Another option this month are hybrids and stripers. Dearman said both species will be running shad off and on around main lake docks situated on points in close proximity to deep water. Lipless cranks will get you bit when feeding binges are underway. "It seems like the fish are more active on those cold, nasty days," Dearman said. "Sometimes it can be good all day long." **T&J**



Stocking Stuffers for the Sportsman

Tis' the season for trying to figure what to get the sportsman on your list. Here are hopefully some helpful suggestions.

Columbia River Knife and Tool Co. continues to create new edged products due to their long time collaboration with some of the world's most famous custom knife makers. The end user gets the advantage of owning a custom design at a factory made price. They have a quartet of new items just in time for the Christmas season.

One of the early designs that helped kick-start Columbia River Knife and Tool Co. was the M16 line created by the legendary late Kit Carson. They are releasing three new versions of the M16 as a tribute to Carson.

These new ones come from a long line of military grade tools. With an extremely tough black oxide finish, these 3.1", 3.6", and 3.9" blades are built tactical tough. Both the M16-02KS and the M16-04KS tout Tanto blade shapes while the M16-03KS boasts a spear point, and all deployed with a sizeable flipper.

The knives in this series feature a traditional frame lock for safety and are built around the widely recognizable stainless steel handle bored with five holes to keep them clean and light. MSRP is in the \$50 to \$60 range.

The handy CRKT Largo everyday-

carry folding knife was created with portability and utility in mind by designer Eric Ochs. Ochs is an outdoorsman that feels a good day is made complete with a cold microbrew. So he gave his trusty daily blade a bottle opener.

The compact stainless 2.5 inch drop point blade is satin finished and has lots of belly for slicing. The OutBurst assisted opening mechanism is activated by an ambidextrous thumb stud. Once you push it open to 30 degrees, the spring will automatically engage and propel the knife fully open and held solid with a frame lock. The powerful mechanism also holds the blade securely closed when not in use.

The handles have a brushed stainless finish offset with a black stonewash. The Largo retails for \$49.99.

Last year CRKT began producing a special series of Ruger branded blades. The new Accurate is a locking liner folder following in the footsteps of the Accurate full tang hunters. This knife is built with field dressing in mind.

The Accurate folder features a satin-finish 3.38 inch plain edge blade with nail nick for easy opening, a solid liner lock, glass-reinforced nylon handle with inset Ruger medallion and comes with a rugged nylon-fabric belt sheath. The Accurate Folder is priced at \$79.99.

The CRKT Pryma is a multi-tool so

compact; it fits on a key ring. This tool punches far above its weight and was designed by Jesper Voxnaes, a knifemaker renowned for both clean lines, and impressively utilitarian multi-tools.

When you first look at this tiny titan you'll go, Huh! When you read the instructions you'll go, Ahh!

Built of black oxide coated stainless steel on the nose there is a scraper that doubles as a pry bar, a feature that inspired the name and near this is a lanyard hole. There is a hex wrench series featuring sizes 1/4, 3/8, 5/16, and 7/16 inch. On the upper edge of the tool sits a compact, effective bottle opener, balanced out by a carabiner on the opposite edge.

Finally, the top of the tool features an inconspicuous yet powerful ceramic glass breaker with wings on either side, effectively protecting hands from glass shards and all in a length of just 3.2 inches. With no sharp edges this should get through airport security, but sometimes you have to deal with stupid.

An added bonus of the Pryma is the suggested retail is only \$9.99 so stock up and all may be seen at www.crkt.com.

I have long relied on Tipton Gun Cleaning Supplies for everything from cleaning rods to jags and bore brushes. New for this year is the Tipton Power Clean Electric Gun-Cleaning Brush Kit. Powered by four AA batteries in the sealed from solvents handle this unit has four interchangeable heads with bristles of stainless steel, plastic or bronze depending on the surface you are tackling.

There is also an interchangeable bronze bore brush head that accepts all 8-32 thread cleaning brush tips. A .22 caliber bronze bore brush is included. It features pulse and continuous scrubbing running at 3600 oscillations per minute. This makes for fast work in a lot of hard to reach spots and is perfect for bore cleaning and polishing those feed ramps.

The Tipton Power Clean Kit goes for \$47.99 from Battenfeld Technologies at btibrands.com.

For the collector or curious on your list, get the 8th Edition Firearms Guide.

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includes a removable shooting rest that can be attached to the top of the bag and a zippered target organizer in the bottom of the bag.

The SportLock standard shooting bag sells for \$31.20 and the deluxe version for \$94.50. Visit the Birchwood Casey website at www.birchwoodcasey.com,

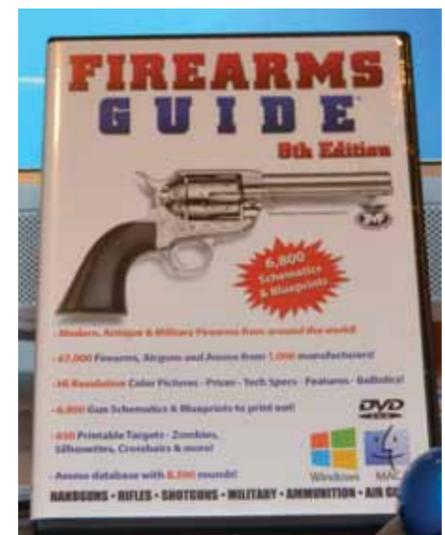
Happy shopping and Merry Christmas. **T★J**



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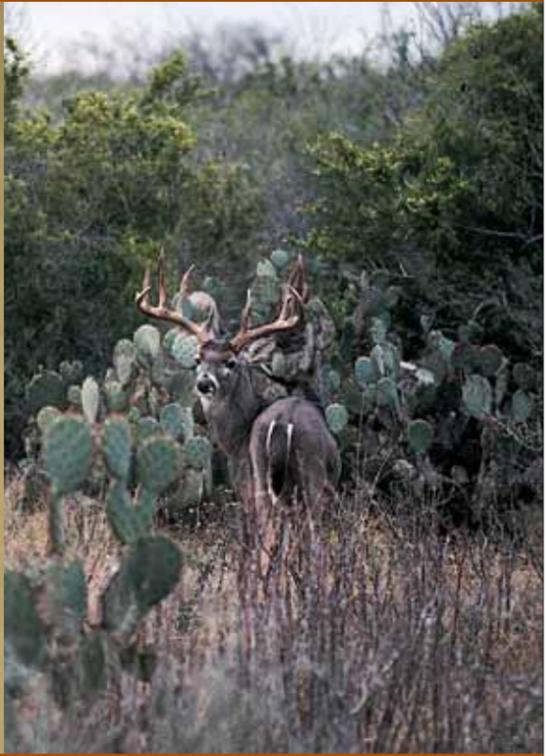


New from CRKT are (left) The M16 Classic, (right) Ruger Accurate Folder, (center top) The Pryma, and (center bottom) The Largo.



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Lake Roundup

SOUTH TEXAS



By Danno Wise

Just when it appeared summer was going to extend through fall, a few fairly strong fronts blew through South Texas. The cooler temperatures that arrived at the end of October began changing fishing patterns a bit earlier than most years. Because of these fronts, fish on South Texas lakes reacted to the cold weather, rather than the calendar month. This was the trigger for the transition to the winter pattern. In order to be successful, the fishermen must also follow suit.

Most South Texas bassers are more comfortable with shallow water fishing than deepwater tactics. So, with the weather actually following the seasonal calendar this year, these anglers may have to switch strategies earlier than they had hoped.

The cold weather can actually play to the angler's favor by concentrating the fish in a relatively small area. Plus, there is no denying the fact that many more truly big fish are caught this time of year by anglers who know how probe the depths, than are caught during any other season.

With plenty of big fish stacked up in a relatively small portion of the lake, anglers willing to master vertical fishing and other deepwater tactics may be in for quite a December of fishing on South Texas lakes. Here's what to expect.

COLETO CREEK – Victoria based bass pro Dennis Lala says Coleta Creek has the potential to be an outstanding winter fishery.

"Fishing has been pretty good," said Lala. "We've been catching a lot of fish and some pretty good fish, too. That should keep going into December. In fact, we should have even better fishing this month."

"We'll still have some pretty good topwater action in December. On really warm days, we'll also get a good bite on spinnerbaits worked over points and along the shoreline. You can also catch some fish by working those spinnerbaits around any submerged brush."

"Our best method of catching bass during December has been dead-sticking Berkley Sinking Minnows or flukes. Watermelon/red is usually our best color. We'll throw those baits either unweighted or with just a little BB at the most. Sometimes I like to put a little BB on the front so the bait falls nose down, just to change it up a bit. But, basically, you don't want to move that bait much – just let it fall. Sometimes the fish don't want any action on the lure."

"During December, I'll stay mainly on the points. I'll just move from one point to the next."

"Because this is a power plant lake, our pattern is a little different than on other lakes. We always have some warmer water and the bass can begin spawning as early as mid-December."

"As the water gets colder, everything will start moving closer to the hot water discharge area. You can catch all kinds of stuff up there. It will be real good for hybrid stripers during the winter. You can catch those fish on spoons, crankbaits or big minnows and shiners."

"There will also be some good catfish action around the discharge. You can catch yellow cats on live shiners. Blues and channels can be caught on shrimp and Canadian nightcrawlers. In fact, a lot of those guys will set a couple rods out the back of the boat on bottom for



PHOTO BY DENNIS LALA

Colorful and solitary times await anglers fish south Texas lakes. Look for fish to be making a transition to slightly deeper depths on many lakes. On power plant lakes look for warm water discharge to play an increasing role as plant generate electricity and heat the surround lake waters.

catfish, then fish the front of the boat with crankbaits and spoons for stripers until one of the catfish rods goes down.

"It also isn't unusual to catch some black bass around the discharge as well, especially once the weather gets colder. You can really catch a lot of different stuff around that discharge, which makes it really fun to fish."

MEDINA – Unlike most fishermen on most South Texas lakes, anglers on Medina are used to fishing deep water. Because of its depth and clear water, this lake rarely sees much of a shallow water bite. And, in winter, the fish are certainly going to be found deep.

"December is usually a deep bite, and a tough bite," said Jim Gallagher of Jim's ReBait Tackle. "With us actually having some cool weather this year, I'm sure that will be the case for the whole month of December. The fish will be deep, like they are in summer. And, again, it will be a main lake and secondary point pattern."

"We've had pretty good fishing ever since the lake refilled and have had some really good bass caught this summer and fall. So I expect we could see some good fish this winter. But, even when it comes to big bass, this is a small bait lake. You will always do better with smaller, finesse style baits here because our water is so clear."

"The fish typically stay deep all winter on this lake. But, if we have a few days of bright sun where the temperatures climb into the high 70s – and that can happen – the fish will move a little shallower. When that happens, you want to find rocks that are in direct sunlight for most of the day. The water will be a little warmer there and that can make a big difference."

CHOKO CANYON – Choke canyon is holding about one-third full, which is down a bit more from last winter. However, anglers should still be able to find plenty of good fishing this month.

Typically on Choke Canyon, December generally means fishing for bass up the river. The fish will be holding in around 10 feet of water along the drops. If it gets especially cold, look for fish to fall off into the deeper river channel, but in moderate weather they'll be holding along the drops, ledges and edges. Pay particular attention to areas that have standing timber along the old riverbed. The vast majority of these fish will be taken on Texas-rigged plastics and crankbaits.

If the temperature remains warm or during extended warm spells between fronts, the fish will move shallow along the banks. Look for fish to be holding in areas with muddy bottoms and flooded brush.

Spinnerbaits work well for covering water when the fish are found shallow. Bear in mind, once these fish move shallow, they will remain there until post-spawn so long as the weather and water temperatures don't drastically drop.

White bass will be another option up the river during December for fishermen on Choke Canyon. The annual spawning run can begin anytime during December or January, depending on the conditions.

When the fish move into the river, they'll keep working their way further upstream until they reach the shallows. Most years, good concentrations are first found around the Highway 99 bridge. Once anglers find schools of fish, they can follow them up river over the successive days and weeks. Most whites will be taken on small jigs and downsized lipless crankbaits.

FALCON – Despite its low water levels, Falcon should still yield some big bass over the next couple of months. Beginning in December, fishermen specifically targeting big largemouths on this border lake should focus on main lake and secondary points on the lower end of

the lake. Crankbaits and jumbo soft-plastics are among the best weapons when hunting trophy bass on Falcon. Be sure to rig with heavy tackle, as there is still plenty of submerged brush in the lake and stout tackle is needed to pull the bigger fish clear of the structure.

Fishermen who are looking for steady action as opposed to trophy bass can still find lots of action on the shorelines. Unless temperatures drop unexpectedly low, fishermen will still be able to get plenty of bass to strike spinnerbaits, shallow cranks, plastics and jigs along the brushy shorelines throughout the lake. On warm, sunny days, there's even the possibility of some surface activity in these shallower areas.

Additionally, the catfish bite will be good in the river. **T&J**

WEST TEXAS



By TOJ Staff

AMISTAD — At the start of November, "Big Friendly" is about 10 feet lower than it was one year ago. Plus the water temperature is about five degrees cooler



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

On Amistad Reservoir points and mouths of creeks are prime winter hot spots for black bass. Look for catfish in water 40 feet deep and deeper.

than it was in 2016.

By the time December rolls around look for this impound to see water temperatures in the lower 70s to the upper 60s by the start of the New Year. Even with the lower lake levels and cooling temperatures fishing should still be good as the year draws to a close.

Look for largemouth bass to be feeding over the first drop with even deeper water nearby. On those occasions when there are several warm, sunny days strung together bass will move up to feed. Topwater lures, chatterbaits, spinnerbaits and Rat-L-Traps will cover water to help find fish. Once found the proven drill is to thoroughly fish an area with Texas rigs or jigs.

In the afternoon anglers should look for rocky areas that are warmed by the late morning and afternoon sun. These rocks will warm the surrounding water and will attract baitfish that will attract gamefish — black bass. Weightless worms or wacky worms are good to probe these areas.

Striped bass will be in the deep water in front of the dam. It is no secret they will roam this deep depths until the warmth of spring returns. Look for any early arriving sea gulls to point the way to feeding fish. Otherwise use chart recorders to find bait balls with stripers nearby.

Winter months are a great time to catch a mess of clean, tasty catfish. Catfish head to deeper holes as winter approaches and the water temperature drops. Best depths will be 40 feet deep and deeper.

O.H. IVIE — Old Man Winter normally settles in once Thanksgiving has come and gone. In December water



PHOTO COURTESY RICHARD JUE

Downtown Houston restaurateur Richard Jue of China Garden shows off a nice, healthy largemouth bass he caught this summer while fishing Lake Coleman. Look for some quality bass to be caught this month as feeding activity of gamefish increases.

temperatures that had been in the lower 70s through much of November will have plummeted to the lower 50s. If winter arrives as cold as predicted there could be water temperatures in the upper 40s by Christmas.

As of early November Ivie was about two feet above the water mark of one year ago. Basically, any notes and patterns fished in 2016 should be a good starting point for December 2017.

Crankbaits, slow rolled spinnerbaits, swimjigs and Texas rigs are go-to baits to find and thoroughly fish an area. Early in December fishing along the first drop or cranking down the deep side of the drop is an option. As temperatures continue to drop look for black bass to retreat toward deeper water via corridors used as they moved up from those depths to spawn this past spring.

White and smallmouth bass will be active on warm days. Look for them roaming the areas toward the mouths of the major rivers and creeks.

BROWNWOOD — As of early November this popular lake was a couple of feet below conservation pool with water temperatures that were running about two weeks ahead of it's annual drop in temperature. By Christmas look for Lake

Brownwood to see water temperatures in the mid-to-lower 60s depending upon how cold the early season fronts drop area temperatures.

This lake has been a proven performer once again throughout this year. In December, as temperatures drop out of the 70s and through the 60s, look for black bass to become more aggressive in their feeding.

Notes from 2016 say to fish Bass Hogg spinnerbaits, craw Bass Hogg jigs, Persuader crankbaits and Grande Bass along the shorelines of creeks and off points in coves. Look for fish along the top of the first drop and pay attention to grassy areas.

Crappie will continue to concentrate around brush piles in 12-15 feet of water. Li'l Fishies and tube jigs are best options through the winter months. **T★J**

HIGH PLAINS



By TOJ Staff

COLEMAN — Look for this 2,000 acre lake located on Jim Ned Creek to see some good bass fishing through most of December. How and where to fish will be determined by how quickly winter and colder temperatures settles in.

If temperatures remain in the mid-to-upper 60s then fish the shorelines for black bass with crankbaits, spinnerbaits and chatterbaits. Around the rocky areas, ledges and points try hoping a jig or letting a fluke work it's way to deeper depths.

Another option is to fish the standing timber in the upper half of the reservoir. Jigs and Texas

rigs are good options. Thoroughly work the jigs or Texas rigs around the timber, particularly on warm, sunny days once daytime temperatures have warmed.

December could well see some hybrids still schooling in the main lake. This is particularly true on warmer days.

ALAN HENRY — December should see some very good fishing for black bass, particularly through the first part of the month or until water temperatures drop into the lower 50s. Fish the steep sloping rocky sides of the lake with jigs or crankbaits. Rat-L-Traps are a good option to cast parallel to the shoreline to cover lots of water. Once bass are found in an area, then fish it again with Texas rigs and football jigs.

OTHER OPTIONS — **Lake Meredith** continues to capture more water and has 12 feet more water than one year ago. As of early November this lake is 49 feet below conservation pool.

Anglers looking for a different fish to pursue might see if any of the walleye that TPWD has stocked will hit a moving bait fished along a breakline. These cold water fish use to be a staple on this impound and their return is going to provide another specie to pursue in the colder months.

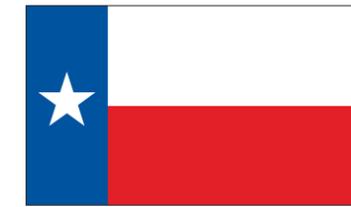
Mackenzie Reservoir continues to be extremely low. As of early November this lake was over 73 feet low, but the black bass fishing has picked up. If you like fishing a fairly isolated area due to low fishing pressure and low lake levels, try this water body.

Black bass fishing has picked up with catfishing still taking top honors while lake levels remain low. **T★J**



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Mackenzie Reservoir continues to remain 70+ feet below conservation pool, black bass fishing has picked up while catfishing remains good.



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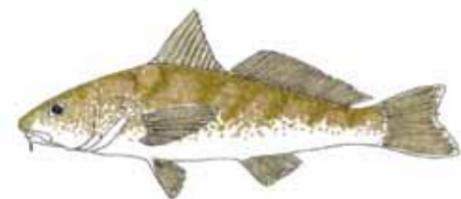
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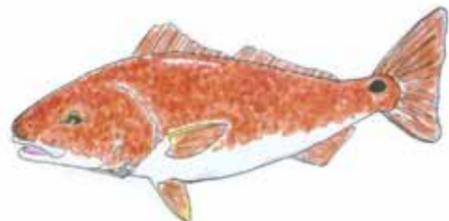
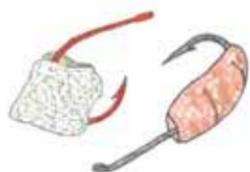


Winter Beachfront Fishing Tips

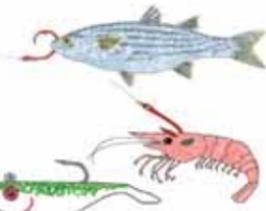
During December, the Texas coast begins to see true winter weather. However, the change in seasons just serves to signal the start of one of Texas' most commonly overlooked fishing opportunities - winter surf fishing. From December through February, the beachfront waters hold a variety of hard-fighting, good eating fish.



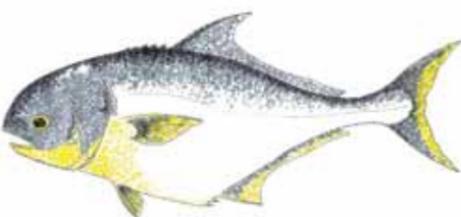
Whiting - Plentiful along the entire length of the Texas coast, whiting are excellent on the table and are under rated when it comes to fighting ability. The best way to target whiting is using natural bait on the bottom. Chunks of squid and shrimp are usually best.



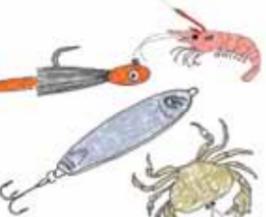
Redfish - Both bull and slot-size redfish can be found in the surf throughout the winter. When water conditions are rough and/or muddy, the best bet is to use bait such as crab, mullet or shrimp. When the surf is calm and clear, a variety of artificial lures such as swimbaits and jigs can be effective.



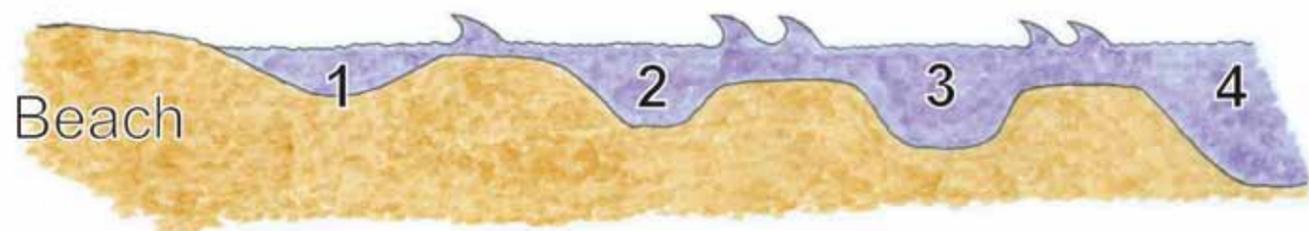
Black Drum - The redfish's under appreciated cousin, the black drum, is also in the surf in reliable numbers during the winter months. The majority of black drum caught along the beachfront this time of year are oversize, but put up a good fight. Natural baits such as shrimp and crab are the best bets for big drum.



Pompano - The 'glamour' species of the winter surf, pompano can be found along the entire length of the Texas coast, but are most common from Corpus Christi south to the Mexican border. Pompano can be taken on a variety of natural and artificial baits including shrimp, crab, spoons, swimbaits and jigs. But, whatever you throw, it needs to be small.



Each of these four fish will be found in different water depths at different periods of the day. Pompano will usually be found in the first gut (1) early, but after that will be beyond the first bar (2). Ditto for whiting. Bull reds will most often be found in the deeper water beyond the second bar (3) and even beyond the third (4), while slot size reds will move between the second (2) and third (3) guts. Big black drum will venture in as close as the second bar (2/3), but will usually be found out in the deeper water beyond the bars (4).



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Fishing Winter's Deep Water Structures



December is the first month that sees black bass moving onto deep water structure on most Texas lakes. Although there are a number of ways to target bass in deep water, vertical fishing is one of the most successful - yet least used (at least in Texas) - methods of target bass on deep structure. While most Texas bass fishermen are not as familiar with vertical fishing techniques, there are a couple of simple ways to target bass using vertical presentations.



Jigging spoons are simple slabs of metal fitted with a single treble hook. In order to fish them, anglers need to simply lower them to the desired depth, then jig them up and down by moving the rod tip. To determine the depth the spoon is at, anglers can either count down as the line feeds off the reel or drop the bait to the bottom (as long as the bottom is free of debris) and crank up to the correct depth.

Although they are typically used with a cast-and-reel retrieve, lipless crankbaits can be fished in a vertical manner in the same way as jigging spoons.



Drop shot rigs (left) have become the "go-to" vertical presentation for most bass fishermen. This rig consists of a bell sinker at the terminal end and a single hook staged 12 to 16 inches above the sinker. Virtually any soft-plastic can be utilized on a drop shot, although flukes, Senkos, and swimbaits are the most common. A drop shot can be fished with the weight bouncing off the bottom, but can also be fished higher in the water column. Anglers can simply drop the rig until the weight touches the bottom, then crank up until they reach the desired depth.



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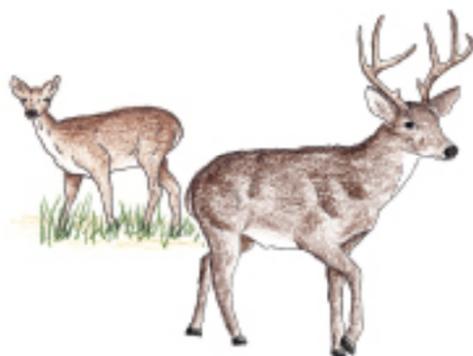


Texas whitetail deer hunters have a long general hunting season in the North Zone that runs through January 7. In the South Zone whitetail the general season continues through January 21. Add in ranches with management programs or late special seasons and Texas certainly boast one of the longest whitetail seasons in the country.

With peak of the rut occurring at different times across our huge state, many hunters will adjust how they pursue whitetail deer this time of year. This is particularly true in areas where the peak rut has occurred and breeding activity beginning to wane.

The biggest challenge for many deer hunters is the decrease in deer sightings. A contributing factor is increased activity that pressures deer into being less visibly active, or restricting their movement during daylight hours.

Late season hunting should focus on areas where doe congregate. Bucks continue to search for doe that were not bred earlier in the season and have cycled back into estrus, or for young doe entering estrus for the first time.



By December, most, if not all of the acorn crop will have been consumed by deer, hogs and other critters. Food plots, feeders and areas boosting preferred natural forage will continue to attract deer. Many of these locations are near heavier cover used as travel corridors or even bedding sites.

Hunters that hunt from a permanent blind might consider scouting these trails. By backtracking these travel corridors there may be an opportunity to set up a portable pop-up blind off a trail as an ambush site. Many times wary, older bucks remain secluded in these areas before

Hunters may opt to become more mobile and test their still-hunting skills against whitetail deer senses. Mature deer have gotten old by being smart. Unfortunately, still-hunting takes more patience and skill than most urbanite hunters' posses.

When still-hunting full camo is required including clothes, facemask, and gloves. Everything should be as scent free as possible and a natural cover scent is recommended.

Still-hunting is not like taking a stroll in the park. It is slowly and meticulously working an area literally one step at a time. Each step taken provides a different vantage point to view or be viewed by a deer.

Even the way a step is taken is different from a normal "lunging stride" that lands on the heel and rolls to the toe. When still-hunting balance is required with the toe slowly placed down first, then rolling to the ball of the foot and finally the heel. Some call this a "coyote walk."

Hunters should pause frequently to completely survey an area to see if deer are moving toward that position. There will be times when deer will need to be allowed to pass before resuming the hunt. Use a tree or other cover to hold your position until clear or as a make-shift natural blind to hunt from.

SUN	MON	TUE	WED
1 ☉	2 ☉	3 ☉	4 ●

Finally spend as much time in the field as possible. Prepare a pack with water, jerky and other necessities to be gone all day — particularly when hunting on days around the influence of a Full Moon. A Full Moon occurs on December 3 and January 1, 2018.

Check out TOJ's Fishing & Hunting Times at the back of this issue for more solar information.

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Outdoor Calendar

THROUGH DECEMBER 3,

Mule Deer general season, Panhandle, **40 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH DECEMBER 10,

Mule Deer general season, Trans-Pecos, **19 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH DECEMBER 10,

Mule Deer general season, **Brewster, Pecos & Terrell counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH DECEMBER 10,

Mule Deer general season, Trans-Pecos, **19 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH DECEMBER 27,

Gallinule, Rail, & Moorhen, **Statewide**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 7, 2018,

Whitetail Deer general season, North Texas, **226 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 21, 2018,

Rio Grande Turkey fall season, South Texas, **26 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 21, 2018,

Whitetail Deer general season, South Texas, **30 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

Light and Dark Geese season, East Zone, **123 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

"Dusky" Duck season, High Plains Mallard Management Unit. **92 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

Sandhill Crane season, Zone A. **103 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

Sandhill Crane season, Zone B. **63 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH JANUARY 28, 2018,

High Plains Mallard Management Unit: Regular duck season. **Second Split**. For information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 4, 2018,

Light and Dark Geese season, West Zone, **151 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 11, 2018,

Wilson's Snipe (Common snipe or Jacksnipe) season, **Statewide**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 25, 2018,

Javelina season, North Zone. For

more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 25, 2018,

Squirrel Season, **51 East Texas counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 25, 2018,

Quail season, **Statewide**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 25, 2018,

Rio Grande Turkey fall season, **Brooks, Kenedy, Kleberg, Willacy counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 26, 2018,

Chacalaca season, **four Rio Grande Valley counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH AUGUST 31, 2018

Javelina season, **South Zone**. For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

DECEMBER 1, 8, 15, 22, 29,

Fishing with the Ranger, Inks Lake State Park, **Burnet**. Come out and try to catch the big one! Everyone welcome for free catch and release instructional program. No fishing license required while on state park property. We have the poles and the worms. Meet behind the Park Store. 4:00 – 5:00 p.m. Free with park entrance fee. For more information call (512) 793-4689.

DECEMBER 2 — DECEMBER 31,

Pheasant season, **Panhandle 37 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

DECEMBER 2 – JANUARY 28, 2018,

Duck regular season, second split, **North Zone (139 counties)**. 139 coun-

ties. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

DECEMBER 2 – JANUARY 28, 2018,

"Dusky Duck season, second split. **North Zone. 139 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

DECEMBER 9,

Intro to Archery, Lockhart State Park, **Lockhart**. Learn how to shoot like Robin Hood or Katniss Everdeen. Registration required. Join us for a lesson in international style archery. Learn the basics in a safe and fun 2-hour workshop. All equipment provided. Requirements: Must be at least 10 years of age and sign a liability waiver. Anyone under the age of 15 must be accompanied by an adult. Strict space limit, so participants must sign-up by calling (512) 398-3479. Please be on time to this workshop. If late, your spot will be given to someone else, and you will not participate. Dress for being outside (layers + sturdy shoes) and bring water. Meet at the volleyball court, just past the pool on the main road into the park. Park in the pool or day use lot. Regular park entrance fees apply (\$3/adult, free for children 12 & under).

DECEMBER 9 – JANUARY 28, 2018,

Duck regular season, second split, **South Zone, (54 counties)**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

DECEMBER 9 – JANUARY 28, 2018,

"Dusky Duck season, second split. **South Zone. 54 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

DECEMBER 15 — 31,

Dove, Late Season, **North Zone, 105 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

DECEMBER 15 — JANUARY 7, 2018,

Dove, Late Season, **Central Zone, 138 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or you can call (800) 792-1112.

DECEMBER 16,

Archery 101, Resaca de la Palma State Park, **Brownsville**. We're providing all equipment and instructors. We provide bows and arrows (please don't bring your own equipment. Recommended for children 5 and up. Meet at the Visitor Center. Ad-

mission: Adults: \$10, Children 12 and Under: \$6. Registration required. For more information and registration call (956) 350-2920.

DECEMBER 16 – JANUARY 21, 2018,

Sandhill Crane season, **Zone C. (51 counties)**. Migratory Game Bird Stamp & Federal Sandhill Crane Permit Required. For more information you can consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

DECEMBER 17 — JANUARY 21, 2018,

Dove, Late Season, **South Zone, 32 counties**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

DECEMBER 17,

Perryton Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraiser banquet, **Perryton**. Call (806) 228-5945.

DECEMBER 18 — JANUARY 31, 2018,

Woodcock, **Statewide**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

DECEMBER 25,

Christmas — And all of us with Team TOJ wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. 🌟🌟

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Tide Tables

DECEMBER 2017

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
H12:13A 1.0 L8:15A -0.9 H4:23P 1.3 L9:05P 0.9 31					H12:48A 1.2 L7:53A -0.1 H3:28P 1.4 L8:32P 1.0 1	H1:08A 1.3 L8:32A -0.3 H4:23P 1.6 L9:24P 1.1 2
H1:33A 1.3 L9:15A -0.5 H5:18P 1.6 L10:13P 1.2 3	H2:03A 1.4 L10:02A -0.6 H6:14P 1.6 L11:01P 1.3 4	H2:28A 1.4 L10:52A -0.6 H7:11P 1.6 L11:55P 1.2 5	H3:18A 1.3 L11:45A -0.6 H8:09P 1.6 L12:41P -0.4 6	L1:09A 1.2 H4:03A 1.3 L2:50P -0.4 H9:05P 1.4 7	L1:42P -0.2 H9:57P 1.3 L2:50P -0.4 H10:41P 1.2 8	L4:56A 0.8 H7:17A 0.9 L2:50P 0.0 H10:41P 1.2 9
L5:44A 0.7 H9:39A 0.8 L4:10P 0.3 H11:17P 1.2 10	L6:25A 0.4 H11:43A 0.9 L5:37P 0.5 H11:46P 1.1 11	L7:01A 0.2 H1:24P 1.0 L6:57P 0.7 H1:46P 1.1 12	H12:10A 1.1 L7:34A 0.0 H2:39P 1.1 L8:05P 0.8 13	H12:31A 1.0 L8:04A -0.2 H3:35P 1.1 L9:00P 0.9 14	H12:48A 1.0 L8:31A -0.3 H4:20P 1.2 L9:43P 0.9 15	H1:04A 1.0 L8:56A -0.4 H4:56P 1.2 L10:12P 1.0 16
H1:20A 1.1 L9:22A -0.4 H5:29P 1.2 L10:25P 1.0 17	H1:37A 1.1 L9:49A -0.4 H6:02P 1.2 L10:34P 1.0 18	H1:55A 1.1 L10:19A -0.4 H6:38P 1.2 L10:56P 0.9 19	H2:11A 1.0 L10:51A -0.4 H7:16P 1.1 L11:31P 0.9 20	H2:21A 1.0 L11:24A -0.4 H8:39P 1.1 L9:57P 1.1 21	L11:59A -0.3 H8:39P 1.1 L9:17P 1.0 H9:17P 1.0 22	L12:37P -0.2 H9:17P 1.0 L8:16P 1.2 H9:17P 1.0 23
L1:18P 0.0 H9:49P 1.0 24	L2:07P 0.1 H10:15P 0.9 25	L5:33A 0.4 H10:24A 0.5 L3:07P 0.3 H10:35P 0.9 26	L5:41A 0.1 H12:17P 0.7 L4:26P 0.5 H10:54P 0.9 27	L6:10A -0.1 H1:37P 0.9 L5:55P 0.7 H11:14P 0.9 28	L6:47A -0.4 H2:39P 1.0 L7:14P 0.8 H11:39P 1.0 29	L7:29A -0.7 H3:33P 1.2 L8:16P 1.2 H3:33P 1.2 30

JANUARY 2018

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	H12:47A 1.1 L9:02A -1.0 H5:17P 1.3 L10:00P 1.0 1	H1:35A 1.1 L9:52A -1.0 H6:07P 1.3 L10:43P 1.0 2	H2:28A 1.1 L10:43A -1.0 H6:57P 1.2 L11:33P 0.9 3	H3:27A 1.0 L11:36A -0.8 H7:44P 1.1 L12:30P -0.6 H8:29P 1.0 4	H4:33A 0.9 L12:30P -0.6 H8:29P 1.0 L11:45P 0.7 5	H5:59A 0.8 L1:26P -0.3 H9:09P 0.9 L1:26P -0.3 6
L3:37A 0.4 H7:51A 0.6 L2:28P -0.1 H9:45P 0.9 7	L4:46A 0.2 H9:58A 0.6 L3:43P 0.2 H10:15P 0.8 8	L5:39A 0.0 H12:04P 0.6 L5:21P 0.4 H10:42P 0.8 9	L6:22A -0.2 H1:49P 0.7 L6:57P 0.6 H11:04P 0.8 10	L7:00A -0.4 H3:00P 0.9 L8:14P 0.7 H11:25P 0.8 11	L7:33A -0.5 H3:49P 0.9 L9:12P 0.7 H11:45P 0.8 12	L8:04A -1.0 H4:24P 0.6 L9:47P 0.7 H4:24P 0.6 13

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



DECEMBER 2017

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

JANUARY 2018

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1 ●	2 ●	3 ☽	4 ☽	5 ☽	6 ☽
	9:45A - 2:45P	10:45A - 3:45P	11:45A - 4:45P	12:45P - 5:45P	1:45P - 6:45P	2:45P - 7:45P
7 ☽	8 ○	9 ☽	10 ☽	11 ●	12 ☽	13 ☽
LQ						
3:40P - 8:40P	4:10A - 9:10A	5:00A - 10:00A	5:45A - 10:45A	6:30A - 11:30A	7:10A - 12:10P	7:50A - 12:50P

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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.

Feeding Times by Dan Barnett have been proven by analysis of 124 - 3 day bass tournaments between 1967 through 1983 to be reliable and accurate in predicting wildlife feeding activity. The Feeding Times are not a cure-all. Weather and other environmental conditions affect wildlife feeding activity. Annual vest pocket books, which show all the major and minor periods, can be ordered by sending a check or money order for \$19.95 per book. For S&H, please add \$4.95 to an order of 1 to 4 books. Make check or money order payable to: Feeding Times, Send to: Feeding Times, P.O. Box 2240, Covington, GA 30015. After Oct. 1, please indicate book year. For questions or comments, you can call 404-373-7151.

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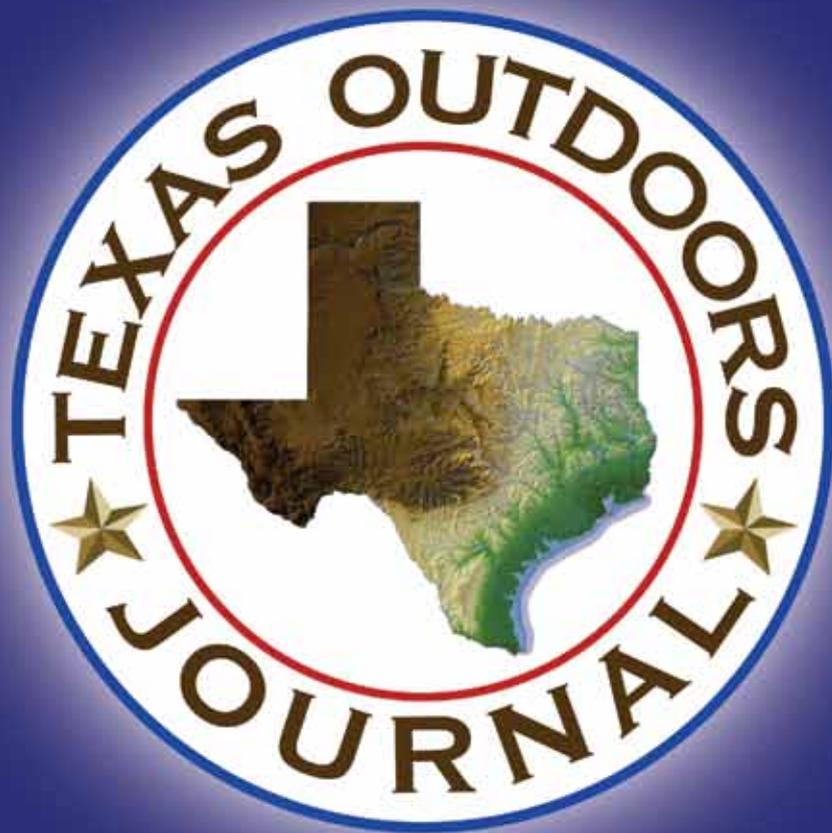
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