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(see page 75, #1 for more information)

Privilege In The Land of The Turks

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JOURNAL



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No Need for Cabin Fever

February is “put upon” in so many ways. It is the shortest month of the year and provides some of the coldest winter weather. Of the 28 days in the second month of 2019 outdoor enthusiasts might get six to eight good weather days. Looking at the extended forecasts we may need to add in a few “marginal” days to even reach those numbers.

Though the average historic temperatures for most of the Lone Star State is not brutally cold, by Texas standards it is cold enough and it looks like this year it is going to be wet. While that is enough to curtail many outdoor plans at least we are not shut-in like northern parts of the country. We know that by the end of the month and certainly on into March we will see warming trends and the first signs of the spring green up.

Until we get into March and past the Spring Equinox that occurs on March 20, February will remind us this is still winter with gray skies and raw, damp temperatures that will keep many shut in. That alone is enough to “infect” some with a case of cabin fever. Add in a dose of longing for the mild sunny weather Texans normally enjoy through most of the year and frustrations can escalate for those trapped inside.

There are options to overcome this dilemma. It is called mind-over-matter and for outdoor enthusiasts it is to put a positive spin on things. While we may not have the most conducive weather for outdoor activities, we know that will change shortly and we should start planning for that time.

One of the best and most rewarding parts of a fishing or hunting trip is the anticipation that builds while planning an adventure. Looking ahead at extended weather forecasts, contacting sources of information like Chambers of Commerce or Convention and Visitors Bureaus may enlighten to opportunities not experienced on prior forays.

Given recent storms that ravaged parts of the Texas coast there has been significant progress made along their road to recovery. Seek out guides for trends and maybe even check out a new place to stay that may only be a few miles down the road.

February is a great month to do an equipment check. A little cleaning, replacing or updating may be in order. It doesn't make sense to put off what can be done today until just before a trip.

There are those that will look at this month and say, this is the perfect time to do some predator control at the hunting lease. While there are anglers that will bundle up, brave the elements in their pursuit of a lifetime. It might be for a lunker largemouth or some trophy yellow-mouth sow speckled trout. Sitting at home wishing weather was better does not provide the opportunity — you have to be there.

There are some trips even further on down the line that need to be planned for this month. It might be replacing a hunting lease that has been lost or simply looking for new ground. There are hunts in western states that have early draws and February is when many deadlines occur.

On the hunting side there is equipment that also needs to be replaced, repaired or expanded upon. Procrastinate and put these chores off and it could come back to bite you later in the year.

Looking at this list there is plenty to do and we only have 28 days in which to get it done in February. We had better get after it.

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

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TOJ Notebook

New Texas State Parks Division Director Named

Rodney Franklin, a 27-year veteran of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, has been selected as the Texas State Parks Division Director. Franklin, previously the Deputy Director of Texas State Parks, succeeds Brent Leisure who recently assumed the role as Interim Chief Operating Officer for TPWD after eight years in the state parks director role.

“Rodney Franklin’s career with the department is a long and distinguished one,” said TPWD Executive Director Carter Smith. “He cut his teeth on the operations of state parks at an early age and has demonstrated an exceptional ability to lead teams and carry out the mission of our nearly 100-year-old state park system. I have complete confidence in Rodney to lead the teams that steward Texas’ 95 state parks, which represent some of the state’s most iconic landscapes and preserve our rich history.”

As director of Texas State Parks, Franklin will oversee a workforce of about 1,350 employees who proudly



PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

Rodney Franklin, a 27-year veteran of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, has been selected as the Texas State Parks Division Director.

protect and manage the more than 630,000 acres that comprise the state parks system in Texas. State parks represent the principle gateway to the outdoors where nearly 10 million visitors discover adventures in hiking, camping, fishing and countless other outdoor pursuits every year.

Franklin said, “I am extremely honored to have been selected to lead our state parks team. As we approach the Centennial of Texas State Parks, I am truly excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. I consider it a privilege to work alongside an outstanding TPWD leadership team, as well as all the conservation professionals throughout the agency and the state parks division.”

Franklin grew up in the small northeast Texas town of Powderly. It’s here that he first discovered a strong interest in conservation and public service as a seasonal employee at the Sam Bell Maxey State Historic Site in nearby Paris, Texas.

Through his tenure at TPWD,

Cover Art

“Home Grown” might be an appropriate nickname for popular wildlife, sporting art and western art, artist Calvin Carter. TOJ readers have had the pleasure of watching this artist stature within the industry grow, and expand his painting passions from a variety of sources including several covers of this magazine, at a variety of art shows and competitions, on his website plus from endorsements from personal commissions.

This month’s cover art, “Winter Stringers” is appropriate for one of the coldest winter months along Texas coast. It can also be one of the most productive for quality — even trophy trout for those willing to brave the elements and wade.

These anglers seemed to have caught conditions just right. After a frontal passage a few bright, warm days are strung together, water temperatures increase a little and speckled trout venture out of their deep holes or channels and on to more shallow flats. There, topwater lures or slow sinking baits are the enticement for a bite of a life-time or maybe a solid stringer.

For more information on “Winter Stringers” and other fine works of art and commissions by Calvin Carter, visit www.calvincarterart.com, or call (409) 201-6685. ★★



“Home Grown”

Franklin has effectively led teams at state parks such as Lake Bob Sandlin and Cooper Lake, as Regional State Parks Director for north, north-central, and Panhandle state parks, and most recently, as the Deputy Director of Texas State Parks.

"I have spent a number of years working with friends, colleagues, partners and organizations dedicated to caring for the special pieces of Texas represented in our park system," said Franklin. "I look forward to continuing this important work as the Texas State Parks Division Director." ★★

Light Goose Conservation Season Now Underway

The light goose conservation season is underway across the Lone Star State and will run through March 17, 2019 in both the East Zone (123 counties) and in the West Zone (151 counties). Consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual or app for more specific rules and regulations for the county being hunted.

During the Light Goose Conservation Order special season, the following rules shall be effect for the taking of light geese:

The use of electronic calls is legal.

Unplugged shotguns holding more than three (3) shells are legal.

No daily bag or possession limits.

Shooting hours are one half-hour before sunrise to one half-hour after sunset.

Light Geese shall include only Snow (including blue) and Ross' geese.

Area closed for hunting after March 5, 2017: It is unlawful to take light geese in Refugio, Calhoun and Aransas counties on the seaward side of a line beginning at the Gulf of Mexico at Port O'Connor (including Pelican Island), thence northwest along State Highway 185, thence southwest along State Highway 35 to Aransas Pass, thence southeast along State Highway 361 to the Port Aransas Channel, thence east along the Corpus Christi Channel, thence southeast along the Aransas Channel to the Gulf of Mexico.

This closure does not apply to the Guadalupe Delta Wildlife Management Area. ★★

Whooping Crane Festival Registration Now Open

Registration is open for the 23rd Annual Whooping Crane Festival scheduled for February 21-24, 2019 in Port Aransas, Texas. The festival is open to birders, photographers, families, and anyone who loves the outdoors and nature-related activities.

World renowned crane expert, Dr. George Archibald, Co-Founder of the International Crane Foundation, will be one of the featured speakers along with Richard Crossley, internationally acclaimed birder and award-winning author of The Crossley ID Guide series. Additional speakers include representatives from Wood Buffalo National Park, International Crane Foundation, the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, and more. Festival attendees will have the opportunity to take guided boat tours to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge to view the world's last naturally occurring population of Whooping Cranes on their wintering grounds. Additional festival activities include birding and nature boat and bus tours, interactive workshops and seminars, a painting

and wine tasting class, and a free nature related trade show.

For more information and online registration, visit www.whoopingcranefestival.org. Online registration closes at 5:00 p.m. CT on February 18. Onsite registration will open on February 21 at 10:00 a.m. at the Port Aransas Civic Center and run daily through the festival. ★★

DSC Announces Selection of New Chapter Coordinator

DSC is proud to announce the selection of Carson Keys as the Chapter Management and Development Coordinator. Carson began his duties on January 7, 2019.

Carson grew up in Fairbanks, Alaska, chasing some of North America's biggest animals at an early age. After joining the U.S. Army as a medic, and serving in a sniper platoon, he completed a Bachelors in Wildlife and Outdoor Enterprise at Kansas State University.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF DALLAS SAFARI CLUB

DSC is proud to announce the selection of Carson Keys as the Chapter Management and Development Coordinator.

Carson is an avid hunter, active member of a number of conservation and hunting organizations, and lives, sleeps, and breathes the outdoor industry.

Currently a manager at an outdoor industry store, Carson is responsible for inventory management, establishing relationships, working with vendors,

budgeting, merchandising, and training. He has experience in social media and member relations in the outdoor industry and has a proven leadership record through his time in the military.

It is very clear from the interview process, his resume and his expressed professional goals that he will be a

great fit for this position. Carson will be stepping into the role to train with current Chapter Coordinator, Kim Rappleye, who is retiring after creating and establishing DSC's chapter system. **T★J**

Crime and Murder Falls in Major Cities

Crime rates in America's 30 most populous cities this year may have hit their lowest point since 1990, according to a new report from the Brennan Center for Justice, a public policy think tank. The report found the overall crime rate in the 30 largest cities in 2018 to have declined slightly from 2017, falling by 1.8 percent. While this conclusion is based on preliminary data, if the trend holds, the crime rate will fall to its lowest since at least 1990.

The 2018 murder rate in the 30 largest cities is estimated to have dropped by nearly 6 percent, including in the data such cities as Chicago, San Francisco and Baltimore. Overall, the violent crime rate is estimated to have fallen by 2.7 percent, continuing a downward trend from 2017. **T★J**

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HUNT FOR TROPHY TROUT



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Big trout, best lures, tactics and locations during lunker speckled trout season.

Story and Photography by Robert Sloan

For the next couple of months anglers along the entire Texas Gulf Coast will be in the hunt for trophy trout. Of course, the ultimate goal will be to catch a state record but doing that can be just about impossible, considering the fact that the heaviest speckled trout ever to make it to the record books in Texas weighed 15.60 pounds. She was caught on the Lower Laguna Madre on May 23, 2002 and was 37.25 inches long. That remarkable trout was caught on a fly.

The second heaviest trout in the Texas record books was caught on the Upper Laguna Madre on February 6, 1996 and weighed 13.69 pounds. She was 33.13 inches long and ate a slow sinking Corky with a chartreuse/sparkle body.

Corpus Christi Bay is where a 12.44-pound trout was caught on March 18, 2014. She was 32.25-inches long and whacked a Bass Assassin.

On the upper Texas coast the heaviest trout to be caught from Galveston Bay weighed 12.11 pounds. She was 31.50 inches long, and fell for a soft plastic jig on March 19, 2007. The best from Sabine Lake weighed 11.50 pounds. She was caught on March 28, 1999, was 30.50 inches long and hit a chartreuse Mirrolure Top Dog.

When you catch a trout measuring over 30 inches it's more than likely going to weigh over 11 pounds – a definite trophy class trout.

It's been said that wall-class trout predominantly feed on mullet. That might be true but as you can see the state record was fly-fished on a crab-like fly. And others have been caught on soft plastic tails.

Guide Dwayne Lowrey uses soft plastics a lot. He lives in Port O'Connor, but about this time of year spends a lot of time on Baffin Bay.

"The idea is to put a lure in front of a fish that is ready to eat," says Lowrey. "That's when a big paddle-tailed jig fished on a 1/8-ounce jig head will get hammered. But there are plenty of days when I'll definitely use a slow-sinking mullet imitation lure like a Fat Boy."

Lowrey says one of his go-to soft plastics is a six inch Assassin Turbo Sea Shad. His favorite color is plum/chartreuse. A good back up color is red/shad.

"I can cover a lot of water while fish-



During the winter months many anglers will get out of the boat and wade fish for speckled trout.

ing tails," says Lowrey. "Once I find the fish I'll usually switch over to a Fat Boy. Every day is different. You never know what lure is going to get bit. My advice is to keep changing lures and colors until you find out what is going to work."

Two soft plastics that have become popular for catching big cold-water trout are the D.O.A. five inch swim bait and 4-inch shad. Both are part of the C.A.L. line that D.O.A. makes. Mark Nichols, who created and owns the D.O.A. lure company, says the five inch swim baits have a wide vertical paddle tail that allows them to be fished on or near the surface. That's what makes them such a good lure to use when you need a slow presentation. The four inch shad can be rigged weedless on a 5/0 long neck hook with a pinch weight. Ditto that for the swim bait. That type of weight can be clamped onto the shank of the hook. Plus, sections of the weight can be trimmed to make the sink rate of the lure slower. D.O.A. makes them in 1/4 and 1/8 ounce, and they are available in all the right colors.

Something to keep in mind when fishing during the winter months is that some pretty solid trout can be caught while drift fishing over mud and scattered shell. One

of the best drift fishing days I've ever had was about this time of year on East Matagorda Bay. I was with guide Charlie Paradoski who does a lot of wading. However, when that's not the ticket he's not above staying in the boat and drifting over shell.

When doing that he'll be bumping Assassins along bottom. Those tails will be rigged on the spring lock jig heads made by Assassin.

"There are plenty of days when the wade fishing bite is slow," says Paradoski. "That's when I'll get in the boat and set up various drifts over GPS trails that have delivered big trout. The key is to find mullet. Once you are into the mullet over mud and shell the odds of catching fish are greatly increased. Some of my best Assassin colors are opening night, watermelon red/glitter, space guppy and morning glory/limetreuse tail."

He says that using tails on a drift allow you to cover more water and get more bites.

East Matagorda Bay and East Galveston Bay are two very popular areas for wade fishing reefs. One of the best lures you can use is a Paul Brown Original Fat Boy. If you don't have a few of these lures



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

This big trout was caught while fishing the deeper flats adjacent to the deeper depths of the Intracoastal Waterway.

in your wade fishing box get some.

"If you're fishing shallow for big trout it's tough to beat a Fat Boy," says East Galveston Bay guide Jim West. "It's a good mullet imitation lure that is a proven bait. Some of my top colors are roach, pearl/chartreuse back and chicken. During the winter months I'll be doing a lot of fishing over mud and scattered shell, mostly on the refuge side of the bay. In that area I'll be wading about chest deep and fishing slow sinking Fat Boys. I'll also be fishing with a Mirrolure 52MR twitch bait in pink/yellow/silver or green/white/silver. That's a good mullet imitation lure with a faster sink rate than a Fat Boy. It's a lure I use to fish in five to eight feet of water."

West says that after a cold front, when the wind calms down, he'll fish some of the small reefs on the middle and upper part of the bay.

"If we get a couple of sunny days after a cold front the heavier trout will move up on the mud and shell of the shallower reefs," he says. "That's where a Fat Boy can really work well. If I pull up to a reef and mullet are jumping I'm pretty confident trout are going to be there."

Anybody that has fished successfully with a Fat Boy or the Paul Brown Original Corky knows you have to tweak them. By that I mean bending down the tail just enough so that you can see the bend. If you do it wrong the lure will twist.

"I'll bend the tail down, then make a

short cast to make sure the Corky is coming back without twisting," says West. "That's very important. After you catch a trout, always make sure the tail is still

bent like it should be."

Another very popular suspending twitch bait for winter trout is a Mirrolure Mirrodine. Two of the more popular sizes are 2 5/8 and 3 1/8 inches long. It's got a sink rate that the 52 series has. It's just a smaller lure that is a good one to tie on when fishing in clear water on calm days. With a twitching retrieve these lures dart from side to side and look like a crippled finger mullet or shad. Some of the better colors are chartreuse/pearl/silver and black/chartreuse/gold.

A Mirrodine is a good option when you are wading the mouths of cuts on a falling tide. In that situation the trout will be laid up on the bottom of the channel and ambushing finger mullet as they move with the tide. That's the perfect lure for fishing cuts with a depth of three to four feet.

Last winter I used a 2 5/8-inch Mirrodine to catch trout on the flats adjacent to the channel drop in the Lavaca River and the Victoria barge canal south of Sea Drift. In both of those places trout will usually be feeding on shad and mullet.



Setting up drifts over mid-bay reefs can also be productive for big trout.

During February and March, when water temperatures are about as cold as they get along the Texas coast, a good option for catching trout is in the deep-water holes. Two of my favorites are the south end of Sabine Lake and the Army Hole at Port O'Connor. The lower end of Sabine Lake is where there are huge oyster reefs and the water is any where from 5 to 25 feet deep.

"That particular area on Sabine can be hit and miss," says guide Jerry Norris. "But if you hit it just after a cold front good numbers of trout will be on the reef. Some of the most productive depths are 10 to 15 feet deep. This is simple fishing. You set up a drift and bounce jigs along the shell on bottom. I like to use five inch red/shad or fire/tiger Shad Assassins rigged on a 1/4 ounce jig head. The key is to mark the spot where you catch a trout. There will often be several in that one little area. That's when you'll want to make a few more drifts on that some line. The trout won't be that big, but there are solid fish that feed on that reef."

One of the most popular winter fishing spots is the Army Hole at Port O'Connor. It's a small lake located on Matagorda



Two big trout baits are the Corky (top) that anglers should tweak by bending its tail and the D.O.A. C.A.L. four inch shad that can be rigged weedless on a 5/0 long neck hook with a pinch weight.

Island. It's a deep-water area that reds and trout go to right after a cold front moves through. One of the very best lures you can fish here is a four inch fork tail D.O.A. jerk bait. I've been fishing the Army Hole for over 40 years. The key is to fish soft plastics along bottom. The problem is that there is a lot of submerged vegetation

there. But with a D.O.A. fork tail or 5.5 inch diamond tail rigged weedless with a pinch weight the grass is not a problem. You can adjust the weight so that the bait can be fished just over the grass. It's a deadly tactic. Best colors are glow/chartreuse tail, silver/mullet and purple/chartreuse tail. ★★



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Simple Sight In at Point Blank Range

Not everyone can afford to buy a \$3,000 range finding scope and not all scopes have custom turrets that adjust the crosshairs so you can just hold on a 400 yard shot. Most of us will never have the opportunity or the ability to make a 700 yard shot if needed, especially when you consider that most hunting shots are made from 50 to 200 yards.

It would be nice to be able to take that once-in-a-lifetime 350 yard shot or longer and know you could make it. This is where Point Blank Range comes in.

Setting up a rifle and scope for point blank range is pretty simple. All that needs to be known is how fast the bullet is going and how heavy a bullet is being shot.

This is nothing new. Bill Brewster and Jack O'Conner were using this way to sight in and not miss an animal many years ago. Most game animals have an eight inch kill area. Whitetail deer, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, caribou and black bear all have the same eight inch kill area. Most exotic game has the same kill area too.

If you shoot behind the shoulder of the animal you have eight inches up and down and eight inches across the body in which to shoot and kill the animal. If you shoot right behind the shoulder or into the shoulder, you will hit the heart or forward lung. If you shoot four inches high then you will hit the top of the lung and the bottom of the spine. If you shoot four inches low then you will either hit the heart dead center or hit the low lung shot.

All of these shots are kill shots and are easily made when compared to hitting their head, going through an ear or an eye to take out the brain, or trying a risky neck shot in hopes of hitting and breaking the spine. These are what I call show off shots and should only be made if you know exactly how far the animal is and exactly how well you and your rifle shoots.



Custom target scopes make long range shooting easy but not everyone can afford \$3,000 to \$6,000 for a scope.

If you have residual affects from too much celebrating the night before, you might have a few extra shakes and should avoid making a risky or show off shot on anything. Also if it is a buck you want to have mounted, you really must know where you are capable of shooting. I have seen the antlers blown right off the deer when they have been hit in the head with a big caliber deer rifle.

It is nice to know if you are shooting at the kill zone behind the shoulder of the animal you are going to hit. So if you have a deer jump up at 50 yards you can put the crosshairs on the whitetail's shoulder and hit it. The same whitetail deer jumps up and starts feeding at 325 yards you can put the crosshairs on the same spot and you are going to hit the deer. The 50 yard shot is going to hit at just 1.5 inches high and the 325 yard shot will be 4 inches low, but all in the kill zone.

If you know the ballistics of your rifle then you can figure point blank range. So no matter where you are shooting from 50 to about 350 yards, you can just hold the crosshairs on the center of the target and the bullet will not hit any higher than four inches or lower than inches.

I ran some numbers on three of the most popular deer hunting calibers to see how similar they would be. To keep it fair I shot the same bullet type in all three rifles, the Hornady ELDX, which is a hunting bullet with a very high ballistic coefficient.

The 6.5 Creedmoor was shooting a 143 grain ELDX, the 7mm Rem. Mag. was shooting a 150 grain ELDX and the 300 Win. Mag. a 200 grain ELDX. What is surprising is how similar all three of these calibers shot.

All three fell below the four inch kill zone at about 340 yards. All three cali-

Point Blank Range

Caliber	Bullet	50 yd.	100 yd.	150 yd.	200 yd.	250 yd.	300 yd.	350 yd.
6.5 cmor	143	+1.5.	+3.3.	+3.8.	+3.0.	+.90.	-2.7.	-7.4.
7mm mag.	150	+1.3.	+3.1.	+3.9.	+3.5.	+1.9.	-1.0.	-5.3.
300 win.	200	+1.5.	+3.3.	+4.0.	+3.6.	+1.7.	-1.5.	-6.0.

bers would hit zero between 230 and 260 yards. So with any of these hunting rifles if you sight them in 3.25 inches high at 100 yards, they will shoot no higher or lower than 4 inches from 0 to 330 yards. So for most hunting and 99 percent of the hunting I do, I can hold dead on from 0 to 323 and know I will hit and kill the animal I'm after.

Point blank range sight in and shooting is simple and easy. If you can see the animal with your naked eye, see how big a buck he is and maybe even count some of his tines on his antlers, then he is in range to shoot. No spare adjustment on a turret, no using hold over range finding lines in the scope and no using the laser range finder. Just hold on the kill zone and squeeze the trigger and watch the deer drop.

Now there are all types of ways to sight in a scope for hunting. The old one inch high at 100 yards still works well from 0 to 250 yards.

If you have a custom turret on a scope just sight your scope in at 200 yards then have the turret set up for ranges with the ballistic information of the bullet you are shooting. Then all you have to do is dial the turret to the same range the game animal is at, hold the crosshairs on the animal and shoot. The numbers on the turret correspond to the range you are shooting.

If you have the turret on 2 then you should be making a 200 yard shot. If you have the turret on 4 then you will shoot at 400 yards. This should be the same for 5 on the turret for 500 yards or 6 for 600 yards. It is very simple.

If you want an easy way to sight in a rifle try Point Blank range shooting, it is simple and it works. ★★

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Reel Styles and Gear Ratios

Spring is just around the corner and the big bass are already chomping. If you are new to bass fishing and looking to invest in a baitcaster to get in on the action, remember this: Not all of them are created equal.

Some are built with premium components, cast like dream and are made to hold up for the long haul with the proper care and occasional maintenance. Others, not so much. I've seen reels come straight out of the box that might offer better service as a paper weight.

There are round baitcasting reels equipped with large spools designed to accommodate gobs of line, gears for bear and working oversize lures. These are the ones that many of us grew up fishing with because that's about all that was around.

While round reels will always have a place in freshwater arenas, low-profile models are way more popular in these



Lew's BB1 with a 5.1:1 gear ratio a great match for hard pulling, deep diving crankbaits.

days. Especially in bass fishing arenas.

Next time you're at a crowded ramp, take a look on the decks of the bass boats that pass by. My guess is you'll see 20 low profile reels for every round one, if you see a round reel at all.

As the name implies, low profile reels sit closer to the reel seat than the round reel does. These reels are significantly smaller in size and hold less line, but are much lighter, more ergonomically correct for less fatigue and generally well suited for a wide range of baits fishing applications.

There are left handed models and right handed models. This is determined by which side the handle is on when the reel is in the seat.

The only way to tell if you are a lefty or righty is play around with both and go with what is most comfortable. I cast with my left hand and kick with my left foot, but I write with a pen, shoot a shotgun and reel a baitcaster on the right side. I've experimented with the left-handed reels and they feel downright awkward.

One of the main things to keep in mind when choosing a baitcaster is its gear ratio.

Think of the gear ratio on a fishing reel like the gear ratio on a vehicle. Some reels are built for speed at the top end. Others are built for low end pulling power and torque.

Things have changed a lot with gear ratios in recent times. This is especially true with high-speed options.

Years ago, a reel with a gear ratio of 7.1:1 was considered a hot rod in many respects, but that's hardly the case nowadays. The industry's major players have continually pushed the envelope for speed

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and reel ratios have progressively gotten faster and faster, mainly at the behest of consummate pros who demand them.

Numerous manufacturers are making reels with gear ratios of 8.1:1 or faster. Last summer, Abu Garcia introduced at baitcaster with a blazing 10.1:1 gear ratio. Fittingly, it's called the Revo Rocket and retails for around \$300.

What do all the numbers mean?

The last one represents one revolution of the reel handle. The first two numbers represent the number of times the spool rotates each time the reel handle turns a full circle.

On a reel with a 5.4:1 gear ratio, the spool will turn 5.4 times for each revolution of the reel handle. A 5.4:1 gear ratio is slow. Though it doesn't recover line very quickly, it provides gobs of low end torque and power.

Think of it like granny gear in a 4x4. Low gears equal power. High gears mean speed. If you want torque and pulling power to climb hills or plod through the mud, low gears are the ticket. If you are more concerned about going fast down the highway, higher gears are the deal. The same principles apply with reel gear

ratios.

Reels with low gear ratios work better for fishing certain styles of lures or performing certain techniques than reels with high gear ratios and vice versa.

Take a deep diving crankbait like the 10XD, for instance. It's a hulk of a plug weighing nearly two ounces with a massive bill that enables it to dredge the bottom at depths beyond 20 feet. Resistance can vary from one lure to the next, but as a rule most deep divers pull like a bulldog.

The best reel ratio for fishing a hard-pulling plug is slow one in the neighborhood of 5.4:1. The slower gear ratio, the less effort it takes to turn the handle when retrieving a hard-pulling lure. A high-speed reel will work you to death when used in combination with a deep diving crankbait, a swimbait or a big, heavy spinnerbait with large blades.

Some anglers also prefer a fairly slow gear ratio for crawling square bills and others lures around shallow cover when the water is cold. Though a faster gear ratio like a 6.4:1 would suffice, the slower ratio helps prevent you from working the bait too fast when going after lethargic bass.

At the upper end of the spectrum are reels with gear ratios of say, 7.1:1 and faster.

High speed reels are advantageous when flipping plastics or jigs tight to cover or targets like matted grass, bushes, stumps and docks, where the bait is typically in the strike zone for only a short period of time. Once the bait passes through the strike zone, the faster reel allows you to hustle the bait back to the boat much faster than you can with a slower reel. This saves time between casts, which can add up over the course of a fishing day.

High speed reels also gather up excess or slack line quickly. This is conducive to faster, better hooksets when Texas or Carolina rigging. A high speed reel also works well for waking a spinnerbait or keeping a swimming worm on or near the surface.

Specialty tactics aside, probably the best all-around gear ratio for a beginning angler is something in the neighborhood of 6.4:1. The 6.4:1 covers just about all the bases sufficiently. In some cases you might just need to make yourself turn the handle a little faster or slower in order to achieve the desired result. ★★



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Cindy Bonilla landing a winter redfish for Josette Guerra.

Flexible Fishing

in February

Opportunities abound as many days are bright and sunny with blue skies and almost warm.

*Story and Photography
by Danno Wise*

It is often said the morning gets darker before the sun rises. Just as often, it is said the weather gets colder before it gets warmer during the final days of winter.

Enter February. This is the role of the year's second month – to throw the coldest, nastiest weather Old Man Winter can serve up at the Texas coast before the season gives way to spring. True enough, February is often blustery and cold. However, not every day sees Siberian like weather along the Texas coast. In fact, many days are bright and sunny, blue skies and, well, almost warm. As a result, in order to be consistently successful, anglers need to remain flexible in February.

A “typical” February day, if one exists, is overcast and cold. The gunmetal gray skies often meet water churned muddy by strong winds associated with frontal passages. “Duck hunting weather” – days with a little drizzle or fog mixed in – are not uncommon, either. These days don't usually see large numbers of anglers on the water, but they do often result in catches of rather large speckled trout and a surprising number of redfish as well.

So, what's the best way to catch fish



Cindy Bonilla with a black drum caught on a 3-inch Clear-Holographic/Glow DOA Shadtail under clear water/clear sky conditions.



Taylor Winzeler with a Lower Laguna Madre redfish caught on a D.O.A. PT-7 fished in clear water under cloudy skies.



Josette Guerra caught this redfish on a paddle tail soft plastic while fishing on a cold, clear winter day.

on days when most people prefer to stay home drinking coffee in front of the fireplace? Well, step one, as simple as it sounds, is to actually go fishing. Don't let the weather discourage you.

Once on the water, cold weather days generally require patience and a slow, methodical fishing style. This is true whether the sky is cloudy or clear and whether the water is muddy or not.

Fish will eat on cold days, but they won't generally be as aggressive and won't exert quite as much energy to catch a meal. As a result, lures need to be placed relatively close to the fish and moved slowly enough to represent an easy meal. More than at any other time of year, late winter usually requires repeated casts in a given area in order to assure that the lure has been drug within easy reach any nearby fish.

On those cold days that are overcast with muddy water (often the result of a strong north wind), anglers should look around channel edges and mid-bay structure, such as reefs. Most often, darker colors and larger baits work best under these conditions.

Topwaters can produce fish along the



It is not unusual, especially along Texas' Lower Coast, for weather to turn unseasonably warm, as it did on this particular day, that allowed Cindy Bonilla to fish the afternoon in shorts.

edges, but anglers usually want to throw larger, noisier surface plugs. When working plastics beneath the surface, paddle tail baits are usually more productive than straight tail models in murky water, as the flapping tail produces a fish attractive vibration.

As usual, anglers should vary their retrieves until the hit upon the right combination. However, a slow rolling soft-plastics (slow, steady retrieve) will produce strikes under these conditions more often than not.

On those bright, bluebird days when the sky is sunny – often not a cloud to be seen – and the water is clear water, those same channel edges, along with deeper flats and mid-bay structure will hold fish. However, anglers will need to do a 180 with lure selection. Very often, these are the coldest of cold days as the clear sky lets any low-lying heat rapidly escape upwards into the cosmos.

They are often accompanied by high pressure. As a result, fish may be a tad bit more lethargic and finicky. Couple that with clear water conditions and it is a recipe for finesse fishing tactics.

Under these conditions, smaller baits



Mark Nichols with a solid speckled trout taken on a gray winter day.

and more subdued colors are better choices. Straight-tail lures are effective in the clear water because fish are feeding more by sight. When the water is really clear – as can happen during winter due to the lack of algae blooms in the water

– translucent colors are generally more effective than opaque ones. When fish are extremely finicky, clear baits such as the clear/holographic color pattern offered by D.O.A. is a top pick and can typically entice finicky fish to strike.

As mentioned at the onset, not every February day is cold. If there is a long period (several days) in between fronts, the weather can get downright warm – unseasonably warm at times. This is especially true on the Lower Texas Coast where air temperatures can yo-yo between the 40s and 80s.

As the weather warms, the fish will begin working up into the shallows. At first they will be found strictly along the edges of channels and deep water areas. As warm days begin to string together, they will work progressively further up onto the flats. However, they will still leave themselves a relatively short run to the safety of deep water in the event of dropping temperatures. Therefore, flats adjacent to deep water – preferably with mud, mud and shell, or grass and mud bottom – are the best options. Many Texas bays have narrow, mud bottom flats sandwiched between the ICW and spoil islands. These are ideal areas to target on warm days in February.

On warm, overcast days, topwaters and slow-sinking plugs can be effectively used to target big trout and redfish. With clearer water – even on overcast days – a variety of baits can be utilized, including

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Dave Stewart with a winter redfish caught on a soft-plastic jerkbait.

smaller topwaters and soft-plastics of all sorts. The fish will be a bit more aggressive, so it is possible to retrieve lures a little more quickly in order to cover more water.

Warm days with sunny skies and clear water can result in awesome sight-casting for speckled trout, redfish, black drum and sheepshead on the flats. These types of conditions are also an ideal opportunity to pull out the fly rod.

Wind of course, is another factor that must be considered during February, as it is any time one is looking to cast along the coast. Gunboat grey winter days can see winds at opposite extremes. It may be dead calm (which often is combined with foggy conditions) or blowing hard from the south or north (pre- or post-front).

On cold, windy days, one issue is safety since the fish are often found in deeper water. So long as conditions allow anglers to safely fish deep channels and structure, a drift sock should be used to control drift speed and stabilize the boat. On warm, windy days anglers fishing the shallows can drift, but most often if they are working slow-sinking plugs and/or looking for big trout, it is better to get out and wade.

Calm, cold days with no wind can be ideal for deep water structure fishing. Anglers can use a trolling motor. But, often this is not necessary as fish are usually concentrated on the structure or channel edges, so these conditions don't require covering a vast amount of water, but rather staying on the fish once you find them. This is true for fishing cold, calm days whether the sun is shining or not.

Speaking of the sun, those bluebird

days are often accompanied by little or no wind. Anglers can use a trolling motor on mid-depth flats, but these calm conditions definitely make stealth more important. If there is not enough wind to drift, it is best to pole or wade – especially when sight-casting.

Those are just some of the more typical type of conditions anglers may face during February. In truth, there is an entire spectrum that includes numerous combinations of sky and water clarity along with temperature, plus wind direction and velocity. To be successful, anglers should

pick the dominant conditions and pick the lure and technique best suited for that condition as a starting point.

Fishermen should also be flexible throughout the day as well. In February, it is not unusual to start the day in jackets and end in bathing suits – especially in deep South Texas. So, if you do intend to make a full day on the water, you may spend time doing everything from dead-sticking along deep channel drops to sight-casting to fish in less than a foot of water, which is why flexibility is the key to successful fishing in February. **T★J**

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Some people can afford to pay \$10,000 or more to hire a guide to elk hunt on a private ranch. A whole lot of us can't.

Maybe you just want to try the adventure of doing it yourself so it doesn't feel like a "canned hunt." For sure it's a lot more rewarding to do the scouting, the packing and all of the work yourself instead of someone taking you and pointing out an animal for you to shoot on their private ranch. Plus the pre-hunt planning and logistics is part of the fun of doing it yourself.

Before getting into the heart of this DIY article, let's consider some instances when hiring a guide makes sense:

If you are planning on backpacking 14 miles into a wilderness area, setting up a camp to hunt for 10 days and you don't have horses. That kind of challenge takes a lot of gear, food and supplies. Then if you kill something that alone would be five trips.

If moose hunting, it might take 10 to 12 trips even if you are only back six miles beyond the trailhead. Just packing out the meat of a moose would be 144 miles of hiking and half of that is loaded down with a heavy pack. If planning to hunt the wilderness areas for big game you really need horses or a guide to pack you in.

There is a compromise to hiring a guide. One time we hired a guide in Colorado to pack us in 14-16 miles and drop us off and come back to get us in a week. We fished the high country and had a ball. Sure, on a fishing trip you can backpack in but on horses you can pack in ribeyes, a camp stove and a few more amenities that will make the trip more enjoyable.

Along with items mentioned above you may not have all of the gear that you'd need. Or, you may have horses but if they're not mountain horses you're asking for a train wreck. Even with mountain horses it can be dangerous. One



Is it worth all of the effort to hunt out West? Absolutely, take off at the trail head and you can hike forever, but it is tough country. This is sunset at the breaks of Hell's Canyon which is deeper than the Grand Canyon.

hunt we ended up with two horses and a mule rolling off the trail and down into the river below. And these animals had been on plenty of pack trips. Plus don't forget the tack, feed and supplies needed for the horses.

If you've never hunted out West then it might be smart to hire a guide the first time to learn the ropes or at least go with an experienced buddy. I always say, the first trip into a new area is more of an exploratory or scouting trip until you learn the lay of the land and how the animals move.

I do a lot of bear hunting but if you live out of state then you have to hire a guide to bait or spot/stalk hunt. Even in my primo areas I don't start setting on a bait until at least the second week. The bear are just not hitting it consistently yet. Plus, you need to fill your bait two to three times per week. You just can't do that if

you're an out-of-stater.

There are also downfalls to hiring the wrong guide. You hear plenty of stories about shady guides. They haven't spent time scouting so they're of no benefit.

There are instances where they don't show up when they should. I've even heard stories of unscrupulous guides disappearing altogether.

Maybe wolves have moved into the area they hunt or there's been a big fire that torched their area and they can't guide in other spots so they still take you to their deadbeat spot. There could have been a big winter kill in that area, early snowfall and everything had already migrated, or for whatever reason, animals did not show up that year where they were supposed to be.

Do your homework and ask questions. Also ask and call referrals of successful hunters as well as those that did not

harvest an animal. Just because a hunter does not harvest an animal does not mean the guide is not worthy.

Now let's talk about what you'll need to do on a do-it-yourself hunt. I'll tell you what works for me, the gear used, etc. but please understand, this is what fits in my world. You'll want to adjust to your individual desires, preferences and ability.

To begin, get in shape. Hunting in the mountains is tough duty especially for those coming from lower elevations found in Texas. I now live out here and it's still a killer. This is especially true if hunting in Colorado due to that state's higher elevations.

When I moved to Colorado from Texas I lived down low at 5,200 ft. The first year if I hit a double in softball, I was winded by the time I got to second base. You get up to 10-11,000 feet and try to hustle up a small hill to check out some elk or deer that went over the top and your lungs will be burning within 20 feet.

If you're a flatlander there's not much you can really do other than hiking at home and working out before coming out west to hunt. If there are hillsides nearby go up and down them and even diagonally across their face. This will improve leg strength as well as strengthen your ankles.

One thing that helps is to come out a couple of days early to help get acclimated. Even hiking around town or camp those few days will help your body adjust.

It seems everyone gets a little altitude sickness at first but drinking more water than normal tends to help. With a mild case, you'll feel nauseated. My wife and I felt like that frequently the first year but got over it so I never thought of altitude sickness as anything more than a slight inconvenience.

However, after talking to a guide, I changed my perception. He was paranoid, and rightfully so. He'd had two clients with extreme cases that almost died.

In one instance the hunters had flown in from low elevation states and he'd packed them in right away. They became deathly sick. He had to pack one down and the other a helicopter had to come get him.



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

If hunting a wilderness area, setting up a camp for 10 days takes a lot of gear, food and supplies. Plus once an animal is harvested, packing out the antlers, cape and meat can become an arduous task.

The only treatment for extreme cases like this is to get down to a lower elevation. I've never seen extreme cases like that, but that story did get my attention.

Elk hunting in the high country will be

your toughest duty all year. Even when I was younger and in good shape without a pound of extra fat, by the third day I could hardly walk. So whatever you do to get in shape, you'll be glad you did.



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It's easy to get in trouble in a blizzard. Carry a compass, GPS and map all of the time to keep track of how to get back to camp.



Camping in zero degree weather is tough duty. You'll be hiking hard during the day and you'll need your sleep at night.

Like any new species you hunt, it's going to take time to become proficient. I wish I could tell you where you'll find mule deer or elk every time but I can't, however there are generalities. A lot of

times I'll find mule deer feeding down low and then heading back up to bed for the day at daylight.

They like to bed on ridges or overlooks so they can watch below and have an

escape route. Out in the sagebrush country you'll see them lay under sagebrush in the heat of the day. In Colorado I hunted them in the sagebrush of the foothills.

If it's dry country and there's a reservoir, catch them after daylight as they're headed back up high after watering and feeding all night.

Elk are thought of as only dwelling in the high country, and they do. I also see herds of 200-500 out in the high desert country here in Idaho. And it is wide open for miles and miles.

I love hunting for elk where there are small meadows for them to feed in surrounded by dark timber. Hunt around the meadows at daylight and dusk, and in the timber during the day.

You need to learn how to call elk. You can cover so much more ground by simply calling. Here's what I mean.

If hunting a good-looking alpine bowl it may take all morning to walk it. Set-up and call and make the elk walk the half a mile to you. Learn to bugle as well as cow call, and when to do both.

Don't worry if you're not a good caller. I have buddies that are championship callers and they always make fun of my calling, but I still call in plenty of animals. My point is, some people talk weird, don't they? You see I've called in plenty of bulls I thought were some newbie first year hunter from California. In fact, the biggest

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bull I've ever called had the weirdest sounding bugle ever heard.

I want to dispel another myth. Some say elk don't talk as much as they used to due to increased hunting pressure and wolves zeroing in on them while elk are vocalizing. Granted, there is some truth to that but just because they're not talking doesn't mean they won't come in to your calling. I've called non-stop for up to an hour and a half and had bulls come in without making one peep.

Let me touch briefly on where to hunt. I'm convinced, the number one way you'll be successful is to scout. If you're the normal guy what do you do? You have two weeks of vacation each year. You can't spend one week scouting and the other hunting or you'll have hot hunting and a luke-warm wife.

So what if you take a family vacation and use the early mornings before everyone wakes up to do a little scouting? I find a lot of my fishing and hunting spots while out with the family.

Also call the local game warden. Usually they're helpful. I've gotten a lot

of advice from them.

I am suspicious of biologist in western states, especially Colorado. They have always misled me. They seem to forget our taxes pay their salaries and they have the mistaken view that their job is to mislead hunters so as to protect "their" wildlife. At least that has been my experience.

Lastly get maps of the area you're going to hunt. Grab a Forest Service map to check for access to areas as well as understand where National Forest or BLM public lands lay compared to private

lands. You do not want to trespass out west.

After you have determined where you're going to hunt get a more detailed map from MyTopoMaps. Plus don't forget to take a look at the area to be hunted on Google Earth. This satellite imagery can reveal a lot of helpful information shown on the Forest Service maps as well as topos.

I hope this is enough to get you stirred up and started. Good luck.

Next month: Part II will discuss what to take. T★J



The author at a trailhead with everything he hopes he needs on his back for another do-it-yourself hunt out west.

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Big Bass Season

February marks the beginning of “bass season” in Texas — specifically Big Bass. Statistics from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department’s ShareLunker program show that February through April will yield the most double-digit bass during a calendar year.

South Texas and power plant lakes will see activity much sooner due to the warmer water temperatures generated and discharged into those lakes. However, temperature alone is not the end all, be all of big bass fishing. Length of daylight, moon phase, and water temperatures all factor into the equation.

Big bass are female bass. That’s a biological fact. Female bass are at their biggest when they are spawning in the

late winter and spring. They’ll also put on weight in the summer months when they gorge on schooling shad, but that’s another story. Mathematically your best bet at the fish of a lifetime will be during the next three months.

Doug Hannon was known as the “Bass Professor.” In the course of his illustrious career, Mr. Hannon was credited with more than 800 bass over 10 pounds. To put that into perspective, if you caught a bass over 10 pounds every month of every year, it would take over 66 years to equal his feat.

If you can find a copy of his books, “Catch Bass,” “Field Guide for Bass Fishing,” and “Big Bass Magic” I would recommend you read them all. His insight

came from years of research and experience. An angler looking to catch a really big bass will learn what makes a big bass tick, the habits, haunts, and motivation behind the things they do, day in and day out. Doug left this earth in 2013, but he left a legacy we can all learn from.

One of the staples behind Doug’s theories is that big bass live in shallow water. All else being equal, this is a true statement. Given the food, cover, and oxygen needed, a big fish will stay shallow.

It is only when other factors come into play that they move deeper. Fishing pressure for example. I recently talked to a gentleman that had caught four fish over 10 pounds in the previous year. A great accomplishment, no doubt. What stood out in our conversation was that he had caught them all in water over 20 feet deep. Fishing structure (humps), he used deep diving crankbaits to catch his trophies.

This particular angler fishes a lake with a tremendous amount of both fishing and boating pressure. It is my opinion that the bigger fish moved deep for two reasons, the pressure being one.

The second reason I believe he caught his fish deep is actually several reasons. First, he spends all of his time fishing deep. He is very good with a crankbait and his electronics. He can find deep fish, and he can then catch them. Because he always fishes deep, he’s obviously not going to catch any shallow fish.

Also, he caught his fish in the post-spawn months. After the spawn bass will feed heavily. Early on, the food sources are also shallow, but as we move into the late spring and early summer, shad will move to deeper water. Combine pressure with a deep-water food source, and big bass will be nearby.

One of the contributing factors to Mr. Hannon’s success was his proximity to big bass. In other words, he fished where big fish lived. He was a Floridian, the home of the Florida-strain largemouth bass. He had access to some of the best bass lakes in the world and he took advantage of that.

The message for you is to fish where the big fish live. Several lakes in Texas



PHOTO BY BUCK PAYNE

Give a bass food, cover and oxygen and most times it will stay in shallow water. Billy Payne shows off this 12.4 pound lunker caught from one of his private lakes on his ranch.

are known for big bass, the most notable being Lake Fork. Others include Toledo Bend, Conroe, Sam Rayburn, Alan Henry and more. These lakes experience cycles of producing big bass according to a host of factors. These include the amount of hydrilla present, lake levels, stocking rates and so many more. All of these lakes have been up and down in the last 20 years or so, but a look at the ShareLunker records will give you an idea of the lakes you should be focusing on for big bass.

There are countless other Texas lakes that will put out double-digit fish at any given moment. But all of these lakes have a couple of things in common. Cover and food. Big bass need a place to hide, and plenty of food to eat. Given that, almost any lake can produce a giant.

As an angler you must do a few things to up your chances at a big fish. First, you have to put in the time on the water. We've all heard the stories of the anglers that had never fished before and caught a 10 pound fish the first time out. Or the kid fishin' minnows off the bank that caught the eleven pounder. Or the one about the guys wife, just dragging a worm behind the boat when she caught a 12. Well, these folks were lucky.

Luck does play a part in catching a trophy bass. But there are those that will tell you that luck is what happens when proper preparation meets opportunity. Just being on the water is the first step, because you're not going to catch that fish from your couch.

Second, you need to make sure your gear is ready for a big fish. While big bass don't fight all that long, they'll put a lot of stress on your stuff in the first couple of minutes. Make sure you are using enough rod for the job. Medium-heavy is the minimum strength I would use if I thought a big bass was possible. You need strength to set the hook in a big bass. Given the baits I like to fish for big fish, I'd say Heavy is the best choice.

Speaking of hooks, use good, strong, sharp hooks. The bigger the fish, the bigger the bones in the mouth and the more you'll need to get a good, powerful hookset. Strong wire and sharp points will do the job. Sharpen your hooks, or at least check the point after EVERY fish you catch.

Which brings us to the most important tip of all. BE READY!

The mental aspect of big bass fishing



Jennifer Hughes shows off a big jug headed bass that today may have reached 10 pounds or more.

is the toughest to master. The hook point is a prime example. Here's the thing. If you do get a shot at a big fish, you're likely only going to get one — one chance to catch the fish of a lifetime. One chance to set the hook, play the fish, get the fish to hand, and land the fish. If one little detail has been overlooked you lose.

If you caught three or four smaller fish, and you hook point got dull and you didn't touch it up..... Well, maybe next time.

If your drag is not set, if your line is frayed, if you're not paying attention when the fish strikes, all will conspire to ruin your day. You must concentrate, you must check everything, twice.

If you find yourself losing focus, stop fishing for 10 or 15 minutes and have a snack. Or visit with your fishing partner, anything to relax for a few minutes. But if you have a line in the water, you need to be 100 percent committed to the task at hand. I'll leave you with a painful example from my past, in hopes that the lesson from my pain, can be your gain.

There was a big-bass tournament going on, at a lake known for huge bass. I had a good spot to fish and no other anglers were in my area. I felt pretty good about the day. Throwing a lizard, Texas rigged, in about eight feet of water I got a hit. After a "swing for the fence"

hookset, I reeled in a fish that was easily over 10 pounds.

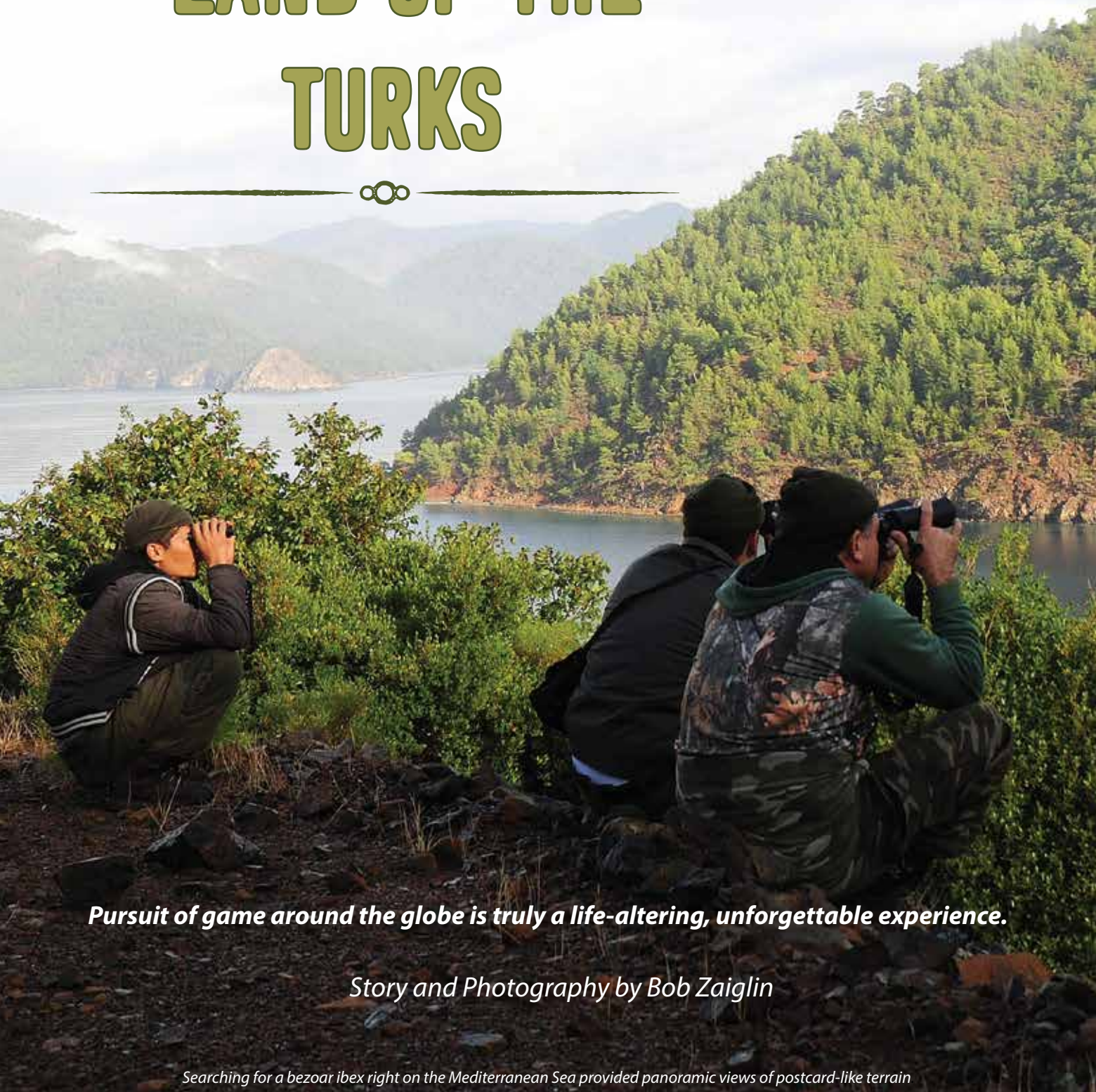
I know this because I got her up next to the boat and could clearly see all of the fish. I could see the hook in her open mouth. I could also see that the hook point was not buried past the barb. As a matter of fact, I could tell that only a smidgen of hook point was holding my trophy. About the time I realized the situation, she shook her head, came unpinched, and was gone. Not only was she a trophy fish, turns out she would have won me first place in the tourney, and six figures in prize money.

So what happened? Why didn't my hook penetrate better?

I'd read an article about reels and drag. Specifically the article suggested that the drag washers would get flattened out over time, unless you backed off the drag when not in use.

Taking this advice to heart, I backed off the drag on all my reels at the end of the day. You can see where this is going right? On that particular rod and reel, I had forgotten to tighten the drag before casting. I could have been Superman and not had enough strength to set that hook properly. With no drag to hold the spool, I had no pressure on the hook. Bye bye fish of a lifetime! Just goes to show you, never take the advice of a writer. ★★

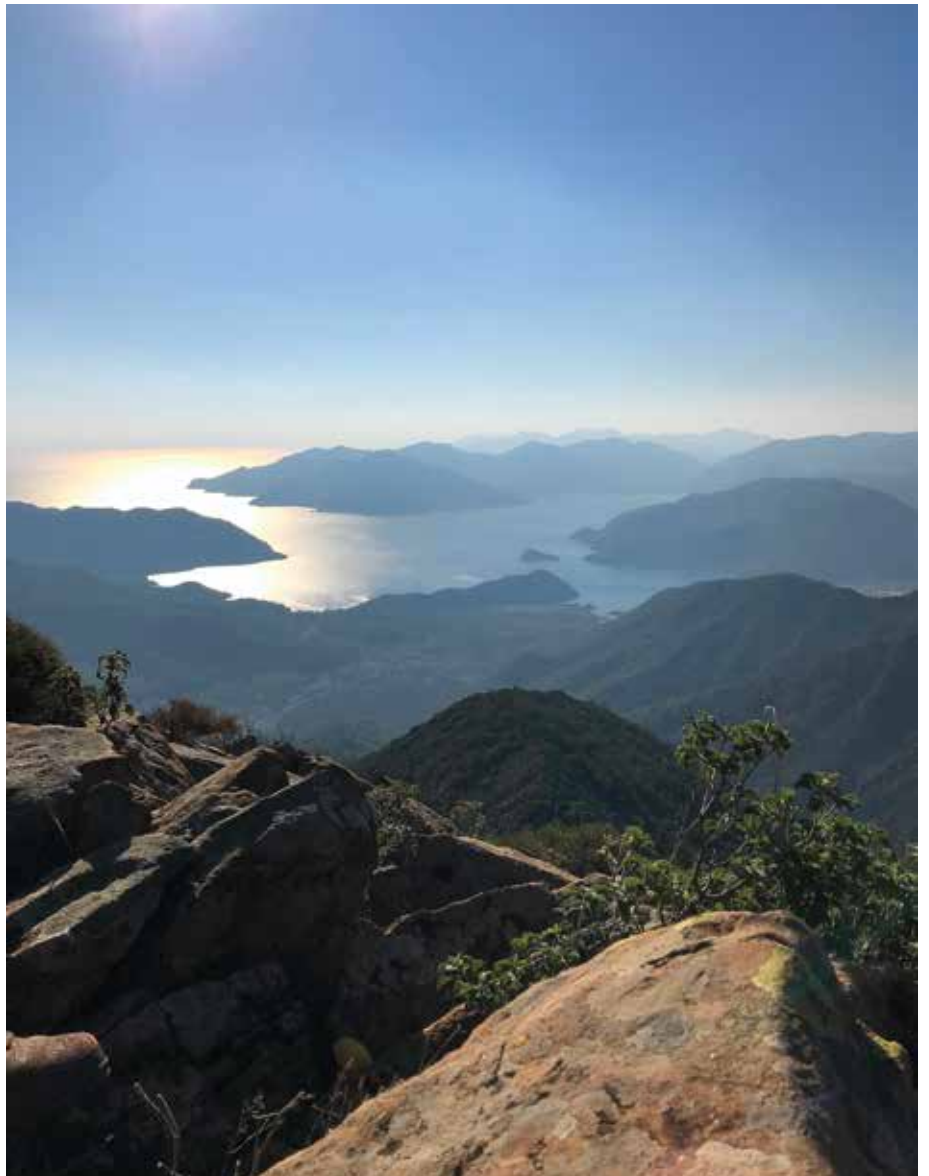
PRIVILEGE IN THE LAND OF THE TURKS



Pursuit of game around the globe is truly a life-altering, unforgettable experience.

Story and Photography by Bob Zaiglin

Searching for a bezoar ibex right on the Mediterranean Sea provided panoramic views of postcard-like terrain



Panoramic views of the Med below only enhanced the entire adventure in one of the oldest places on earth.

Hunting North American big game has always been my preference and still is. However, the lure of pursuing Cape buffalo on the Dark Continent, ibex in Spain, and now the largest member of the ibex family, the bezoar, in Turkey, always represented incredibly alluring challenges in sometimes inhospitable, hard to get to places, generating incredible memories.

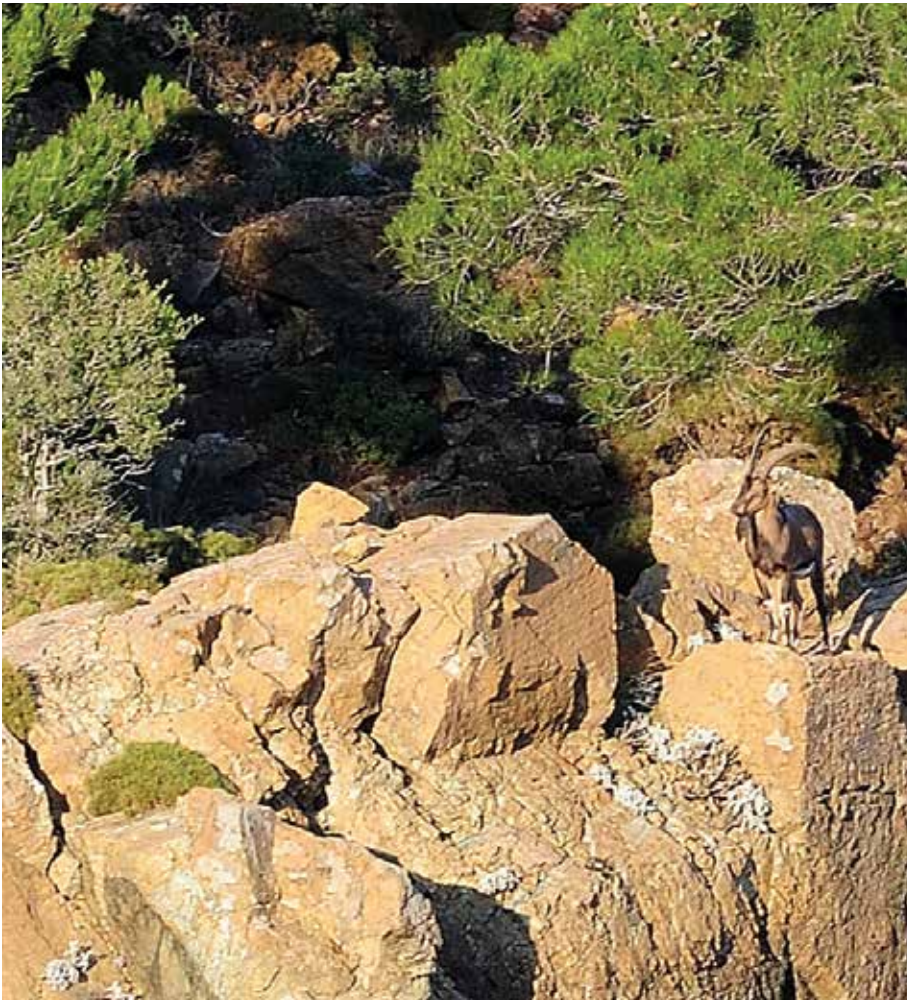
Amusingly, Jan's mom asked my daughter Nan one day why her father drags her daughter all over the world in places oftentimes considered dangerous. Nan responded emphatically "You don't understand, grandma, Mom books those trips".

It was no different at the 2018 SCI

convention when we visited with Volkan Gokalp, owner of Safari Tours in Turkey, about a hunt for a bezoar ibex. Fueled with the anticipation of another adventure together, Jan booked the hunt.

With my rifle on a backpack laid on a rock the size of a suitcase on a steep mountainside, I could not get comfortable for a shot at the ibex standing broadside on top of the opposing slope. Rapidly changing positions, I still could not stabilize those crosshairs, then my guide Ibo stacked three backpacks upon which I laid the forearm of my rifle, and with the butt of the gun in the pebbly soil, I found stability and prepared to shoot.

It was the fourth morning of my five-day hunt for a bezoar ibex in the Taurus



With suction cup-like hooves, ibex are comfortable negotiating extremely dangerous rocky environments high above their predators.

Mountains in southern Turkey and with rain expected on the fifth day there was a little pressure on my guides to locate a shootable goat.

For me, going down to the wire seemed to be the rule and not the exception as three of the four species of ibex I shot in Spain were taken in the waning hours of the hunt.

With warm temperatures and a full moon, my hunt began on Thanksgiving Day. Instead of relaxing in the States dining on turkey, I was ensconced on a steep, rocky mountainside on the other side of the world pursuing the largest member of the ibex family. With ominous clouds overhead and periodic showers throughout the day, we spent the wet morning glassing the rocky slopes littered with pine 3,000 feet above the Mediterranean Sea. The entire day, except for a mid-day break, was spent negotiating narrow, eroded roads with five of us crowded in a land cruiser to various points providing panoramic views of deep-cut valleys and steep and rocky slopes, where ibex called home.

At first I experienced difficulty locating the animals even when pointed out to me, but by mid-afternoon my searching instinct kicked in and I began picking out the camouflaged mountain dwellers. By evening we had looked over 15 males, but none met the discretionary

standards of my principal guide Ibo.

After a day in the mountains, I realized that I was going to be required to make a significantly long shot as all the goats observed were at considerable distances in extremely rugged, unnegotiable if not dangerous, terrain.

Averaging 140 pounds, ibex possess extremely long horns in relation to body size, making it a highly sought after trophy. Males, called bucks, exhibit a dark brown summer coat which changes to a gray color, appearing white in the winter, and both sexes have a unique tuft of hair dangling from the chin referred to as a goatee. What makes ibex hunting so challenging is the fact that their hooves act like suction cups, enabling them to traverse rocky bluffs with ease, high above any predator.

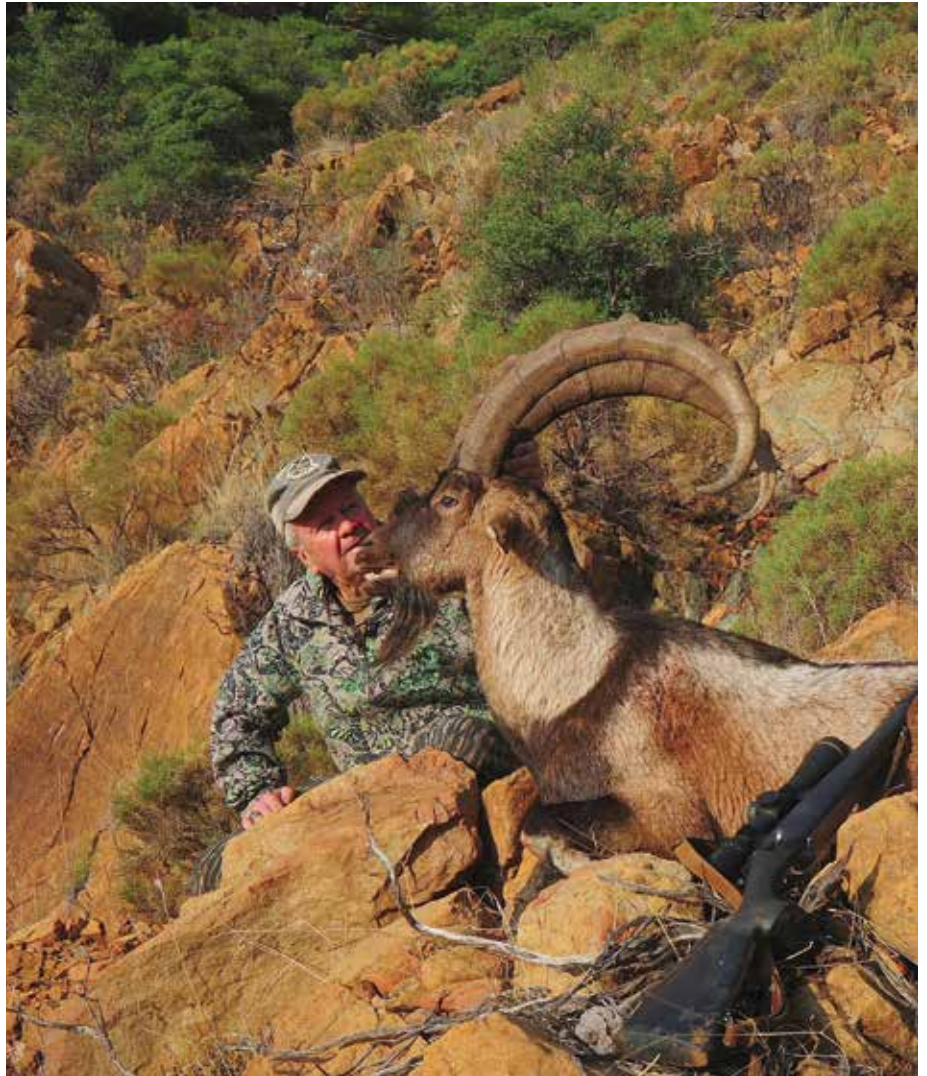
Although hunted from August to the end of March, the rut occurs in November and December. I anticipated seeing some older, larger-horned males that are normally hesitant to move much outside the breeding season, but that was not the case.

As darkness blanketed the slopes on that first day, we returned to our petite hotel located right on the north bank of Lake Koycegiz in the town of the same name — a quiet, quintessential village established long before America was discovered. The ambiance of the lake and the friendly people made it a special place for Jan and me to call home for the week.

The nine-hour time difference hampered a good night's sleep, and at 5:30 the second morning I was downstairs in the dark dining room using my cell phone light to make a cup of coffee. At six Volkan showed up and moments later Ibo appeared with several loaves of warm, fresh-baked bread from the local bakery, igniting my olfactory system, not to mention my taste buds.

While loading gear in the truck in the predawn hours, a brisk cold wind smacked our faces, and it only intensified at the higher elevations. We hiked to various vantage points and glassed for several hours, observing several males, all of which looked big to me, but none that satisfied the guides.

Sometime around mid-day, we got within 200 yards of two beautiful mature males bedded down on the sunny side of a rocky slope. Passing over the larger



Once the author's rifle was solidly anchored, he was able to drop this 10-year-old bezoar ibex in its tracks at 360 yards.

animal made me wonder just how big they had to be before I got the green light to shoot.

As the wind intensified, few animals exited their vegetative lairs, and sightings plummeted. We ended the day seeing 10 rams, most of them in the morning, but a cloudless sky provided hope that day three would be more productive, particularly if the wind decreased.

On the third clear morning we hiked a little over a half-mile up through a pine forest to an open mountainside littered with boulders as big as Volkswagens, with a postcard view of the Mediterranean Sea below. With five pair of eyes intensely scrutinizing the various openings, only a couple of young males and a few ewes were seen before we ventured back down the mountain to our vehicle.


Attempting to drive completely

around the mountain to check out the other side we came upon a washout that we manually resurrected by tossing rocks into the sizable cavity. Unfortunately only a quarter mile further the road was completely gone and we were forced to turn back.

While enjoying olives, freshly baked bread, and tuna fish at mid-day, a plan was developed for the evening hunt which would require a considerable hike, with one of the guides picking us up at the bottom of the valley at dark.

At three we began our trek, initially negotiating a dense pine stand which opened up to several expansive boulder-laden slopes gilded by the soft evening sun which we glassed for several hours without seeing a single mature male. Our hike continued over dangerous rockslides as we made our way to various vantage

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Periodic rain showers proceeded by clear blue skies periodically augmented sightings but strong winds forced the animals to remain in vegetative cover, reducing our ability to locate the goats.

points without experiencing much luck.

By dark we reached the bottom of the valley, paralleling a small creek to our pick-up point, completing the third day of the hunt. With only five males seen all day, my guides were starting to feel a little pressure, and without any rutting activity, so was I.

With stars flickering in the jet-black morning sky on the fourth day of the hunt, we ventured to a different area where the guides felt confident we would find what I had traveled so far to hunt. As the morning sun began to light up the boulder-ridden mountainside, one of the guides located several males that got them excited. Before I knew it, I was preparing for the most challenging shot I had ever attempted. Once Volkan verified that the animal was a shooter, he whispered that it was 360 yards from us.

With a final adjustment on my turret, I laid my rifle on Ibo's backpack lying on a huge, rectangular-shaped rock protruding precariously from the mountainside, but I could not position myself adequately enough to stabilize the crosshairs. Rapidly I changed position as the ibex remained broadside high above us, but even then I couldn't get comfortable.

Finally I simply laid flat and had Ibo place three backpacks, one on top of the

other for a rest. With the barrel on the backpacks and the butt of my rifle on the gravelly soil, I realized some stability. With my neck arched backward in a challenging, painful position, I placed the crosshairs several inches above the animal's shoulder and squeezed the trigger.

Upon the crack of the rifle, the ibex dropped to the rock-riddled ground layer, and the high fives began as I realized the privilege of taking a 10 year-old bezoar ibex.

It was now Jan's turn to hunt as we returned to Istanbul, a city of 13.5 million people, with a plethora of shopping opportunities. This included a visit to the renowned Grand Bazaar, not to mention the sightseeing of ageless structures like the Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, and the incredible Topkapi Palace where we viewed a bowl used by Abraham, David's sword, and the staff Moses used to separate the Red Sea. This culminated a successful hunt and a memorable tour of the land of the Turks.

The pursuit of game around the globe is truly a life-altering, unforgettable experience. The opportunity to share it with Jan, my wife of 39 years, has only magnified each and every one of those adventures. ★★



The creeks and majestic waterfalls resulting from recent rain showers made passage by vehicle challenging if not impossible at times.

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A Kudu antelope stands in profile, facing right. It has a light brown body with a darker reddish-brown neck and head. Its long, spiraling horns are a prominent feature. The background is a dry, scrubby landscape with green bushes and trees under a clear sky.

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EXOTIC GAME HUNTS IN TEXAS



CoastWatch | Danno Wise

As winter enters its homestretch along the Upper Texas and Louisiana coasts, the search for sow specks is in full swing. Those going hard in search of trophy trout know full well they'll likely be doing it in some brutal weather, as February usually tightens winter's grip on the coast before releasing it to spring's warmer weather beginning next month.

Trophy trout hunters are a dedicated bunch. No matter how cold and nasty it gets in February, it's a safe bet there will be plenty of fishermen wading over mud bottom and seeking sow specks.

Although trophy trout will be tops on most lists, they certainly won't be the only fish to be found during February. Redfish will continue to be plentiful and on warm, sunny days, will still be found in relatively shallow water. Additionally, the rivers, deeper guts and channels, and mid-bay reefs will be holding good numbers of keeper specks, sheepshead and black drum for those wanting to catch a box of 'eating fish'. ★★



UPPER COAST

Matagorda guide Capt. Tommy Countz says the top priority for most Matagorda area anglers during February will be chasing trout in East Matagorda Bay.

"February usually finds us in East Bay," Countz said. "We will be drifting scattered shell and looking for streaks of dirty water in the clear water. We will be throwing mostly bright colors.

"If you want big trout, that's a different story. You have to pay your dues to

get those fish. You have to wade through a lot of mud and make a lot of casts. There are a lot of big fish in East Matagorda and if you can find bait, you will probably find some big trout. But, you've got to put in the effort to catch them consistently.

"You can still catch some big fish drifting. We regularly catch good fish when we are drifting the deeper shell. It is not uncommon to catch multiple fish between 24 and 27 inches while drifting. Six or seven-pound fish are commonly taken over the shell in February.

"Of course, the Colorado River is always a good wintertime option for us as well. When the fish are up there, we either drift and kind of troll our lures while drifting or anchor up and cast into the deep holes. It is also possible to get into some redfish while fishing for trout up there.

Speaking of redfish, Countz says that is his favorite February fish, despite all the attention heaped on trout this month. "My favorite thing to do in February is wait until after a front has blown all the water out and the water level is super low," said Countz. "About the second day after a front – when the wind has started to die down, but the water hasn't jumped back up – I will wade the guts along the south shore of West Matagorda Bay for redfish. I will be throwing Black Magic Norton Sand Eel Jrs on 1/8 ounce Lazerlock jig heads. Once you find a red under these conditions, you can usually catch them until your arm falls off."

There will also be plenty of people looking in East Matagorda Bay for trophy trout during February, including Sergeant-based guide Capt. Trey Prye of Captain Trey's Trophy Charters. Prye says the keys to finding trophy trout will be mud and shell, drains and bait. Top baits according to Prye will be slow-sinking plugs and topwaters.

Freeport guide Capt. Mike Segall of Reel Threel Charters says there will be



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPT. TOMMY COUNTZ

While wading with Captain Tommy Countz, this angler caught this big Matagorda speckled trout.

both inshore and offshore action available in his area, with weather being the largest determining factor as to where he'll be fishing in February.

"For the most part, I'll be fishing in the bay in February," said Segall. "I'll still be doing some state water snapper fishing and, if we have the right conditions, we'll make some tuna trips. But, because of the weather in February, we'll be fishing inshore most of the time.

"I'll be making some trips down to East Matagorda Bay and fishing the reefs some. But, I'll also be fishing around Oyster Creek and Bastrop Bay. When the Brazos River clears up some, we'll also have some good trout fishing in there. A lot of these areas hold good concentrations of trout in the winter, so we can usually pick up our fish pretty quick.

"So, for me, it will be mostly inshore. But, if the weather breaks we will head offshore. We can have some really good tuna trips this time of year if we get the right weather."

Galveston area anglers will have a surprising variety of target species available in February, says guide Capt. Greg Verm of FishGalvestonTX.com.

"One of the things we'll be doing in February is targeting sheepshead along the Galveston Jetties as well as areas in the bays and back lakes," said Verm. "Live shrimp free-lined along the jetty rocks is a sure bet for these tasty fish. We usually catch some big fish in February – double digit fish are definitely possible.

"Big black drum will also be making their annual spring runs. After we limit on sheepshead we will bring out the big rods and target giant black drum. Some of these fish will weigh in between 20 and 50 plus pounds. While we are fishing for the drum, it is not uncommon to hook into a number of bull reds, too. Cracked crab are the best baits for these fish.

"Of course, fishing the open waters of the Galveston Channel isn't for everyone. It can be rough out there. But, we can usually find calmer waters in the back bays, lakes and bayous.

February is also a great time to target slot reds, speckled trout and flounder in these spots. We will target mud flats in one to three feet of water. These areas are the first to begin to warm up on sunny February days. Mud will hold heat which

will attract baitfish and in turn the gamefish will follow. Live shrimp under popping cork and live mullet fished on bottom are sure bets during February.

"I am expecting good late winter flounder gigging as well. February is usually pretty good and considering we had a regular winter this year, I expect us to have some really good nights gigging."

Sabine Lake guide Capt. Randy Foreman says salinity will have a lot to do with where and how he fishes.

"Overall, we've had a wet year," said Foreman. "I think we'll be back to our normal salinity in February, but if the lake is a little fresh, that will keep our fish down on the south end of the lake during February. If that happens, I'll be working the areas from the mid-lake south. I will also be in the Bessie Heights marsh at times, especially if we have a front blowing through.

"But, assuming everything is normal,



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPT. MIKE SEGALL, REEL THREEE CHARTER
Bull redfish remain an option in state waters as well as near the jetties out of Freeport.

then we'll be fishing for both trout and redfish this month. When I'm fishing for trout, I'll still be on the north end of the lake and in the river – again, assuming it's not too fresh. I'll mostly be fishing in four to seven feet of water. On warm days,



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those fish will move shallower and you can find them in two to four feet of water.

"For redfish, I'll be on the south end of the lake, fishing the deep drops along Louisiana shoreline most of the time. I'll be running the shorelines, looking for mullet.

"Mullet will be the key to finding fish in February. If you don't find mullet, you ain't gonna find any fish. Finding bait is always important, but in February it is absolutely critical. If you don't see bait in an area, just keep on going until you do.

"I'll also still be fishing over mussel and shell beds in two to four feet of water. Again, bait will be the key. You can't just start blindly fishing over shell beds. You've got to have some bait in the area.

"By the end of February, I'll start fishing for flounder as well. I'll be working the points, drops and eddies along the Sabine Channel. You will want to fish on an incoming tide. Usually the flounder bite starts right around Valentine's Day – it happens right around then almost every year. Again, I'll start on the lower end and just keep working my way up, following the fish." ★★



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

In southwest Louisiana there are lots of good fishing areas along the course of the old and current Calcasieu River Channel. Even Lake Charles in the heart of downtown has areas that produce fish this time of year.



In Lake Calcasieu, Capt Nick Poe of Big Lake Guide Service says February is the beginning of some truly good fishing on Big Lake.

"We always look forward to fishing in February because it is a great start to our fishing season," said Poe. "The beginning of February is often cold, so it is similar to January fishing. Toward the end of the month, days become longer and temperatures begin to rise. This is a great time to target large speckled trout.

We focus our efforts on shallow oyster reefs in three feet of water or less using



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPT. GREG VERMS

Flounder giggering will gather momentum during the latter part of February. This angler caught this saddle-blanket on a trip with Capt. Greg Verm.

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suspending baits such as Paul Brown Fat Boys and Mirrodines. Often times, wading is the most effective way to successfully catch larger trout. Wading allows the angler to cover the area more effectively than drift fishing. If you are drift fishing, always be as stealthy as possible. Big trout are hypersensitive to their environment, so stealth is key.

“If you are more interested in quantity over quality, try jig fishing over reefs in five feet of water. When jig fishing, use lighter jig heads such as 1/8 or 1/16 ounce head. We primarily stick to shrimp imitations, but Mirrolure Lil’ Johns seem to produce fish year around.

“Redfish will be present in their usual winter locations. The weirs and banks adjacent to them will be productive during the entire month of February. Toward the end of the month, as temperatures and water levels begin to rise, redfish will slip off the shore lines into deeper water. This is when we will begin targeting them under birds.”

February is a well-rounded month for Venice area anglers, as a variety of both inshore and offshore action will be available. Offshore fishermen can still find

some tuna over the mud lumps. In fact, at times the tuna action can be outstanding in February. However, anglers should be cautious because although the lumps are only about 15 miles offshore, winter weather can make for a rough and sometimes dangerous run to the fishing grounds. However, when the weather allows for safe passage there is usually good action for late winter tuna around the mud lumps.

Inshore the majority of the best fishing in February will be on the west side of the Mississippi River. Trout will be holding in the deeper holes along the west side, where they can be targeted with soft-plastic jigs and lipless crankbaits. Hot spots include the Buras Canal and Taylor's Point.

Redfish will also be holding in the river. At times the reds will be mixed in with the trout, but most often they will be found along stretches of rocky rip-rap shoreline. ★★



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPT. MIKE SEGALL,
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TEXAS' OTHER BASS

Story and Photography by Matt Williams

Everybody knows Texas is blessed with some of the very best bass fishing on the planet. Sort of like they know the big bite can come at a whole bunch of different lakes during any season of the year. On more than one occasion I've said that a guy could pick a spot near the epicenter of the state, head off in just about any direction and sooner or later wind up in close proximity to a freshwater lake or where catching a lunker largemouth upwards of 10 pounds is a legitimate possibility.

Adding to the appeal of Texas' bass fishing is the diversity of "other bass" that are out there finning around waiting to be caught. While the largemouth is king in these parts, some Texas water bodies also support abundant populations of smallmouth bass, spotted bass, Guadalupe bass and Alabama bass, as well.

Pay a visit to the right lake and you might even stumble across a "Meanmouth" or two.

It's worth noting that the meanmouth bass isn't designated as a species of black bass. Meanmouth is a slang term used to describe the genetic cross that results when a smallmouth bass and northern spotted bass share the same spawning bed during springtime. Like other bass, the meanmouth has a rather cranky disposition. It also has the genetic potential to grow shoulders.

Just ask Cody Morrison of Pilot Point.

Morrison was off work on a stormy Saturday morning last October and a bad dose of cabin fever was eating him alive. To cure it, he decided to hook up to his boat and head to nearby Lake Ray Roberts.

"It poured rain that day and we even had a little bit of hail and lightning," Morrison said. "Some of my friends texted me and told me I was out of my mind for being out there. It was pretty miserable, but I really didn't have anything better to do."

Morrison said he fished for about three hours and caught only two largemouths. With no docks to take shelter from the rain, he dealt with the passing storm waves by beaching his boat as far back in the timber and brush as he could get it.

Around 11 a.m., Morrison took advantage of a break in the weather and headed to the ramp. Along the way, he decided to stop off at one of his sweet spots — an old hardwood tree on a flat in the mouth of Wolf Creek. The isolated tree sits in about four feet of water.

Morrison said he lofted a 1/2 ounce white double willow Nichols spinnerbait past the tree and began a slow, methodical retrieve when something big slammed it. It took some doing, but Morrison eventually managed to work the 22 inch fish to the boat. "It fought like crazy," he said. "It was a lot of fun."

Morrison said he initially thought the fish was a big smallmouth bass until he texted a picture it to his friend, Adam Pels, also of Pilot Point. Pels looked at the picture and told Morrison he thought the fish looked remarkably similar in color and build to a 4.9 pounder he caught at Lake Ray Roberts in April 2018.

Genetics testing confirmed Pels' bass was a hybrid cross between a smallmouth and spotted bass. Pels' bass was subsequently certified as a state record meanmouth that eclipsed



the former state record of 4.68 pounds caught in March 2016, also from Lake Ray Roberts.

Morrison took his fish to Isle du Bois state park where it weighed 5.96 pounds on a certified scale. Genetics testing determined the bass was indeed a hybrid cross between a smallmouth bass and spotted bass. Last November, it was officially declared the new state record meanmouth — the third of its kind out of Ray Roberts in less than four years.

While hybridization among bass



The appeal of Texas' bass fishing is the diversity of "other bass" species waiting to be caught.

PHOTO BY MATT WILLIAMS

While largemouth bass are king in Texas, there are multiple other black bass species finning around in Texas lakes for anglers to catch.

populations is not uncommon, what makes Morrison's fish unique, and the two other state record meanmouths before it, is the fact TPWD has never stocked smallmouth bass in Ray Roberts. Instead, biologists believe the bronzebacks were illegally introduced to the lake several years ago, possibly by anglers who transported them there from nearby Lake Texoma. Texoma, a Texas/Oklahoma border lake, has abundant populations of

smallmouth, largemouth and spotted bass.

Bennett says hybridization is fairly common among bass as well as sunfish. It is usually an indication that one or the other species is low in abundance or struggling. Bennett says the spotted bass are way more abundant at Ray Roberts than smallmouth bass.

"I suspect these recent record entries from Ray Roberts are the result of one spawning event several years ago,"

Bennett said.

Brian Van Zee, TPWD inland fisheries regional director, says Ray Roberts and Texoma are the only two Texas lakes he is aware of where meanmouth bass have been documented.

"But that doesn't mean that it's not happening in any lake where we have smallmouth bass and spotted bass," Van Zee said. "Other species of black bass will also hybridize. We've documented



PHOTO COURTESY OF FLW

Select Texas lakes boast good populations of smallmouth bass. Texoma is one of them. FLW Tour pro Jim Tutt of Longview boated this six pounder at the Texas/Oklahoma border lake few years back.

hybridization with smallmouth bass and Guadalupe Bass. Also, Guadalupe Bass and spotted bass will also hybridize."

As earlier mentioned, there are several other species of black bass other than admirable largemouth swimming around in Texas lakes and rivers. Here's a little background history on each one, followed by some of the top spots to find them in number:

Guadalupe Bass: The 'Lupe is special. So special, in fact, it was declared the official state fish of Texas in 1989 by the 71st Texas Legislature.

Native only to the rivers and streams of Central Texas, the Guadalupe thrives in swift running water riddled with rocks, boulders and still water pools. They also can be found in catchable numbers in deep, clear, riverine reservoirs across the Edwards Plateau.

Just don't expect a limit of Guadalupe bass to take you very high in the standings of a bass tournament. Any fish over two pounds is a big one. Anything over three pounds is a giant. The current state record is a 3.71 pounder caught in 2014 by Bryan Townsend.

Townsend caught the fish while flyfishing on the Colorado River between Austin and Bastrop. TPWD fisheries biologist Marcos De Jesus says Guadalupe's can be found in waters all around Central Texas. However, he thinks

the 25 mile stretch of Colorado where Townsend caught the record is the best for numbers of quality fish because good habitat is abundant and water flows are steady.

Alabama Bass: Alabama bass are native to the Mobile River basin of Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi. They were considered as members of the spotted bass family until 2011. That's when the American Fisheries Society designated them a separate species, mainly because of their genetic potential to grow extremely large. A big northern spotted bass is a three pounder. Alabama bass have been documented beyond 11 pounds.

Several state agencies have

stocked the fish in public waters. In 1996, TPWD stocked 150 adult Alabama bass in Lake Alan Henry as an experiment. Apparently, the fish have fared pretty well. The lake produced a 5.62 pounder in 2011 and a 5.98 pounder in 2016. Genetics testing showed both fish were pure Alabama bass. In 2017, TPWD created state record category for Alabama bass.

Alan Henry is the only Texas lake where Alabama bass have been stocked. TPWD says it has no plans to stock the fish in others lakes.

Spotted Bass: "Spot" is the abbreviated term many anglers use when referring to the northern spotted bass. Also known as Kentucky spotted bass, the sport fish are widely distributed throughout the Ohio River basin as well as the central and lower Mississippi River basin. The fish are found in several coastal states, including Texas, where they are



PHOTO COURTESY OF TPWD

Guadalupe bass, recognized as the official state fish of Texas, are native only to river systems across Central Texas. Bryan Townsend landed the 3.71 pound state record in 2014 on the Colorado River between Austin and Bastrop.

native to several river systems from the Guadalupe to the Red River, exclusive of the Edwards Plateau region.

As earlier mentioned, spotted bass rarely grow beyond three pounds. Anything larger is highly suspect of carrying hybrid genes. Texas lists a 5.56 pounder as the state record for that species. The bass was caught at Lake O' the Pines in 1966.

Spotted bass can be found in a number of lakes, but they are most abundant in East Texas reservoirs like Cypress Springs, Palestine, Jacksonville, Bob Sandlin, Toledo Bend and Sam Rayburn. The fish are especially plentiful on lakes Jacksonville and Cypress Springs, where they account for a high percentage of the bass caught. At Jacksonville, anglers host Thursday night open tournaments and sometimes award a "Kentucky Derby" side pot for the five heaviest spotted bass brought to the scales.

The statewide daily limit spotted bass is five fish, but there is no minimum length limit.

Smallmouth Bass: The smallmouth isn't the big player in Texas that it is around the Great Lakes region up north, but there are a few fisheries across the state that have gained reputations for producing numbers and quality, alike. Among the best are lakes Belton and Texoma.

Belton is a 12,385 acre reservoir built on the Leon River in Bell and Coryell counties near Temple. It's looks like smallmouth central with plenty of steep banks, long, rocky points and lots of deep water. There are quite a few tournaments held on the lake, many of them won with mixed bags of smallmouth and largemouth.

The lake record of 6.43 pounds has stood since 1999, but biologists believe bigger ones have been caught and released without being reported. TPWD has stocked Belton off and on since 1978 with hatchery raised fingerlings.

Texoma is a 74,700 acre reservoir along the Red River that TPWD co-manages with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. It's got plenty of deep water and rocky habitat where the smallies grow fat and sassy. The Texas lake record is listed at 7.06 pounds while the Oklahoma side record is 7.8 pounds.

The best smallmouth fishing usually



PHOTO COURTESY OF NICK DULLECK

Nick Dulleck, pictured here, holds the IGFA world record for Alabama bass with this 11 pound, 4 ounce beauty caught in 2017 from Bullards Bar Reservoir in California. Alabama bass can be found in only one Texas lake, Lake Alan Henry, which produced a 5.98 state record in 2016.

takes place around the lower one third of the lake in relation to steep bluffs around Eisenhower State Park, the Denison dam and up the Washita River to an area known as Willow Springs. Areas with big boulders, rocky points and gravel bottoms have the best potential. The fish can be caught on a wide range of baits including Carolina rig plastics, grubs, topwaters, spinnerbaits, shaky heads and Alabama rigs.

Three other smallmouth fisheries to check out include the scenic Devil's River that feeds Lake Amistad, Lake Grapevine (6,700 acres) and Stillhouse Hollow (6,400 acres). 🌟🌟



PHOTO COURTESY OF CODY MORRISON

Cody Morrison of Pilot Point with his state record 5.96 pound meanmouth bass caught at Lake Ray Roberts in Oct. 2018. The meanmouth is a genetic cross between a smallmouth bass and spotted bass. It's the third state record from Ray Roberts over the last four years.



Pulling Plugs

Let's get right down to hard facts. Pulling lipped plugs behind a boat produces fish whether you drag these baits in open ocean, coastal estuary, or past the points and pockets of a tidal creek. One of the best skippers I know trolls plugs whenever he has to move slowly in a no wake zone. Rigging them is quick and easy and they don't take up much room in the tackle box. They don't have to be frozen, packed in ice, or sewn with the delicate skill of a plastic surgeon.

Lure makers tell us to choose plugs based on the species you seek and the speed with which you will be trolling. If there are baitfish in the area, you may want to match the size and color to them. Sinking plugs will track a few feet deeper than the floaters. Keep in mind that most plugs are carefully balanced at the factory, so if you decide to change hooks or make other modifications, make sure the artificial perform as it should.

I treat each point of a treble hook on a plug as a separate hook when sharpening. At times, I'll mash the barbs for better hookups and easier removal if I inadvertently get one in my hand or arm. On plugs with three sets of trebles, I always remove the middle set. For toothy critters such as bluefish, you may also want to remove the front set of trebles as well so it is much easier to release the fish.

Captain Butch Constable, a well-respected Florida guide, frequently clips one point on each set of trebles. He reports that it seldom interferes with hooking a fish, but it makes it much easier to remove the hooks.

Loop knots make sense when tying a plug to the end of the leader. They allow the lure to move easily through the water without restriction. Some anglers prefer to ignore a loop knot when the lure has a split ring, but I still opt for the loop knot. The best way to make a decision lies in trolling the plug close to the boat where you can see it. You'll know quickly which approach looks more appealing.

While you're checking whether or not to tie the plug on with a loop knot, you



Even with a split ring the author still prefers to tie a loop tie to provide even greater lure action.

can also monitor performance. If the lure does not track straight, but it tracks to one side or the other, take a pair of needle nose pliers and bend the nose ring on the plug slightly one way or the other until it tracks straight. Plugs provide a virtual approach to trolling. An assortment can be fished in a spread tailored to probe the water column as well as the surface. It's not uncommon to add a plug or two to an array of live or dead natural baits. Personal preference dictates the options.

In any spread, you should be concerned with depth as well as distance astern. It pays to stagger the offerings, changing their positions frequently along with the depth until you find the combination that produces results. If you are fishing lipped plugs, particularly with lighter line, the farther back they are trolled (up to a point), the deeper they will dive. If you troll them too far back (you'll have to experiment to find out what is too far), the drag of the line through the water will cause the plug to rise in the water column.

If you want to benefit from more

depth, torpedo-shaped trolling sinkers or old-fashioned drails offer another option. Fishing with wire line also has an effect. A planer will take a plug down deeper where the fish reportedly live. If you enjoy battling a bruiser on light line, use a downrigger to attain depth. And, if maximum depth is your goal, think about combining a planer with a downrigger.

Depending on whether you are trolling with the current, against it, or across the flow of water, plugs perform differently. To monitor the variations, hold the plug close to the boat where you can see it. Skilled skippers make these baits dance in front of gamefish by using current to their advantage. They will approach structure from one direction and then another. With a bit of forethought, you can hold the boat away from the structure and let the current sweep the plugs past the obstruction. Remember that fish can be on the upcurrent side as well as the downcurrent side of any submerged structure.

Plugs make a lot of sense in tidal

creeks, canals, back channels, and along the edges of flats. If you have a spare outfit or two, rig them with plugs and keep them handy. Otherwise, have the plugs ready to attach to the rods and reels you are using.

In a meandering creek, the fish will probably favor the deeper sides which would be the outside bends. Trolling well behind the boat enables you to swing the plugs over those deeper spots in narrow waterways and cover the maximum amount of productive water. And let me remind you again about trolling plugs in a no wake zone where you are limited to frustratingly slow speed. The catches may surprise you.

Once you gain confidence in fishing trolled plugs and convince yourself that they can produce a lot of fish, you're going to be anxious to tie them on whenever possible. Over a reefline, they produce everything from snapper and

grouper to the pelagic species. Countless other species will strike them along bridges, pilings, rocks, and other forms of structure.

No matter where you prefer to fish,

if your quarry will strike a live bait, it will inhale a plug. Vary the spread continuously, change the colors, the size, the shape, and keep experimenting. It won't be long before you are smiling. **T★J**



A variety of lures can be trolled when proceeding through "no wake areas" as well as around structure or channel bends.

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Adventure Travel — Off the Beaten Path

There are those that travel the interstates and highways in their vehicle simply to get somewhere quickly. For many it is the only way they know how to drive or the route to take.

Then there are others that will slow down, take their time and run the Farm-to-Market, state highways or county roads to get away from the crazies that don't know or won't observe the rules of the road. These back roads or other off-the-beaten paths also provide a panorama of vistas most never see.

Get into more remote regions of Texas or the United States and roads that cut through National Forests, Bureau of Land Management or other public areas offer even more sight-seeing opportunities. Besides the old bridges over "hidden" creek/river crossings, ghost towns and other sights few see there is a chance to see more game as well as native vegetation, forests and wildflowers.

I grew up with a dad that tested the limits of his Ford Country Squire station wagon. Countless trips to the high country of Colorado and other western states found my father seeking out truly "roads less traveled."

Later Dad moved up to a Jeep Waggoner that he loaded with potential needed equipment. It had everything from a winch to tools and supplies to get



The most important item the author always carries on trips is an Iridium Extreme 9575 satellite phone.



Whether traversing snow covered forest service roads in the high country, 4-wheel drive trails or county roads these off the beaten path roads provide vistas and wildlife viewing opportunities unmatched on more improved roads. Just be prepared.

him or others out of a jam. It was always a bit of a smug boost when his Jeep, with Texas plates/registration pulled some local out of a rut or off high-center.

Well this apple didn't fall far from that tree. "Olson Air," my Ford F-250 Super Duty FX4 regularly makes road trips and is always looking for off-road options.

As with most adventures the key is to be prepared and having planned ahead. That begins with a good set of maps. That is maps (plural). It begins with studying a detailed road atlas, state produced highway maps, topographic atlas of the state being traveled plus Forest Service maps. These published pieces offer opportunities to explore plus maybe find a few short-cuts. Google Earth provides even more insight as to what may lie ahead.

Roads traveled will range from paved highways, two lane roads, all-weather roads to 4-wheel drive trails. Traversing the backcountry by-ways means road-warriors need to handle situations that may come up. The more remote the road, and depending upon the time of year, means you will be your self-help and first responder to get out of any trouble or call for assistance regardless of where travels have taken you.

A good set of tools including wrenches,

socket set, various pliers/cutters, slot/Phillips screw driver, duct tape, tire repair kit and more should be kept in a surplus Army tank bag. Even if not mechanically inclined, just having the tools available becomes an asset should someone that knows how to use them comes along. A good set of jumper cables and d/c air compressor take care of obvious problems.

Traveling in my F-250 means I have room to carry gear to get unstuck. This includes a tow straps (heavy duty 3" x 20 feet and medium weight 20 foot strap with hooks) and a 20 foot length of 3/8" chain with hooks on each end plus a short three link double grab hooks set to shorten the chain length as needed. With the double grab hook set simply hook into the main chain and then again further ahead on the main chain to shorten its overall length.

A 48 inch Hi-Lift jack is always on-board on adventures. It can lift a vehicle out of a hole, or with the chains and tow straps can be set up to be used as a come-along to winch the vehicle out of trouble.

A new item added to options of getting unstuck is a set of "Rubber chains." This is a web strap and buckle with a rubber tread-block about the width of an all terrain truck tire. The "Rubber chain" is securely attached on top of the each

drive wheel away from the valve stem. The design is to provide a slight lift and additional traction in snow, sand and mud.

The “Rubber chain” is a modern version of a do-it-yourself trick of cutting a two inch diameter limb about six inches longer than the width of a tire. Put the limb on top of the tire and tightly secure it with rope through the wheel on both the inside and outside of the tire.

A full sized shovel and ax are also on board. The shovel is a round point model, not a square blade. It will allow for digging as well as moving dirt, sand, mud, or muck. For space a short handle works but a long handle may make the job easier for some.

The ax carried is a single bit ax instead of a double bit model. The reason is safety first, plus this tool will be used to get out of a problem, not clear a forest. In the tool bag a 10 or 12 inch file will touch up an ax bit that needs attention.

Another highly effective cutting tool that doesn't take up space is a Sven saw. It folds into itself, and when open is a handy, effective bow saw. Go with the 21 inch model as opposed to the 15 inch version.

So what happens if a problem arises and you have to spend the night out in your vehicle? If prepared that should not be a problem either.

In the bed of my F-250 is a cooler with “backup” food provisions. Inside the cab behind the console is a cooler with water, drinks, cheese, jerky and other munchies. I also carry my medium sized daypack with a plastic Army canteen and metal



A rubber chain attaches to a drive wheel and provides more traction to get out of snow, sand or mud.



A 48 inch Hi-Lift jack, various tow straps, 20 foot length of chain with hooks plus a double grab hook set chain shortener are always in “Olson Air,” the author's Ford F-250 Super Duty FX-4.

cup. A few packages of Lipton Chicken Noodle Cup of Soup makes for a nice warm meal in colder climates or at night.

In the truck door is a stuff sack filled with fire-making provisions. Tinder, wind-proof matches, magnesium bar, striker & steel and a lighter mean a warming or even signal fire is available.

A good compass is carried for obvious reasons. An altimeter when traveling at higher elevations is helpful as well as entertaining. An emergency whistle and various size flashlights and spare batteries are other useful tools.

A good medical kit should be in all vehicles. In a larger sized stuff sack kept under the back seat is a micro-fiber blanket, insulated bivy bag and space blanket. Even though there is plenty of bottle water on board I still carry a Sawyer mini water filtration. Check out www.campmor.com for these products and stuff sacks.

The last, most important piece of equipment is a satellite telephone. Even with all of the coverage the cell phone providers claim, a sat-phone may save a life in the event of a medical emergency and can certainly “call the cavalry” when needed. There is not cell phone service everywhere and particularly in remote areas or in a good portion of the high country and offshore.

As mentioned in previous articles, I carry an Iridium Extreme 9575. It has built in GPS and is the first satellite phone with dedicated Satellite Emergency Notification Device

(SEND) compliant SOS button. Press the button and a signal is sent alerting the need for help. The great thing is the response — it is a call-back to assist and/or assess the nature of the emergency. For more information visit Gardline Communications at www.g-comm.us.

It is time to hit the road to explore remote portions of Texas and beyond. However, when you do, be prepared for whatever might be encountered. Safe travels on ‘r off the road. ★★

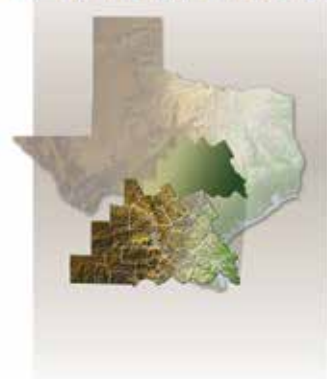


A cooler filled with bottled water, drinks and backup provisions along with a daypack containing a surplus canteen and metal cup. Also included is a stuff sack with fire making materials. In another stuff sack holds a compass and altimeter, some Cups of Soup and jerky, plus a medical kit.



Lake Roundup

CENTRAL TEXAS



By John Jefferson

Most calendars say the New Year begins on January 1. That's after New Year's Eve when my neighbors rain bottle rockets down on my roof and into flower beds of dead and dried vegetation. But most bass fishermen would argue that the New Year for them begins a little closer to February when the lake water temperature inches its way up to 60 degrees. That temperature is considered to be ideal for spawning. Most of the Legacy Class ShareLunkers 13 pounds or over have been caught between February 15 and March 15. Some years, like 2018, the big bass catches have come a little later.

Unusually cold weather in January, last year, may have had something to do with that, although my friend Tim Cook, state conservation director for Texas Bass Nation, and another Esquimo wannabee, Aaron Hernandez, actually went out in windy, 20-degree weather on January 1, 2018 and caught the first entry into the new ShareLunker program that accepted any bass eight pounds or better. Hernandez caught it using a Yum Alabama rig. That's a device that has three or five clips to attach hooks baited with artificial lures, like soft plastic minnow-like baits. I thought that was a dubious choice but Cook explained that the multiple lures simulate a school of baitfish and is a top producer of reaction strikes from big bass in cold water.

Catching the first entry under the new

rules was their goal, and they succeeded. Hernandez' cold water bass weighed 9 pounds, one ounce. What price glory? I was at home in front of the fireplace, as I am now while writing this, instead of enduring the *brass monkey weather*.

The first bass over 13-pounds last year and donated for spawning was caught by John LaBove in **Lake Fork** on March 2. It scaled in at 15.48 pounds. The next two also came out of Fork. Only six total bass over the lucky 13 mark were entered in the Legacy ShareLunker Program. The other three lunker bass came from **Kurth Lake** (near Lufkin; permits required), **Twin Buttes Reservoir** (near San Angelo) and **Sam Rayburn**. All six were caught in March.

The sixth one almost didn't make the cut on the last day of March. Ms. Stacy Spriggs caught her lunker just a few hours before the March 31 deadline, fishing in eight feet of water using a Carolina rig.

Who knows what this February will be like. All we know for sure is that the big, fluctuating lakes – **Travis** and **Buchanan** – were at full pool at the end of 2018 and, barring a rupture in the dams, should be near there this month. We also have heard reports that the shad populations in the lakes are extremely high and contributing to heavy, healthy bass. But, remember that lakes **Marble Falls** and **LBJ** were lowered beginning on December 30 and won't start refilling until February 19. Refilling should be completed by February 23. LBJ will be lowered four feet and Marble Falls will go down seven.

That raises questions about whether boats can be launched during the lowerings. It appears that the Granite Beach ramp on LBJ might be O.K. since it will be open and operational unless the lake level drops to 818 feet msl. If my Aggie arithmetic is correct, the lake should drop to only 820 feet. Marble Falls ramps, however, *might* be closed. Both ramps on MF close at 731 feet and it appears that lake will drop to about 729 feet. But rely on my calculations at your own risk; call for the best answers. For LBJ, call (830) 798-6250. For MF, call

(830) 693-9172.

And while we're talking about lowering the **Colorado River** lakes, the LCRA says **Lake Austin** will *not* be lowered this year, primarily due to the replacement of flood gates in Tom Miller Dam, which backs up water to form Lake Austin.

So how will the fishing be? If you have an electric fish-finder on your boat, it will be worth its weight in bass this month. If the water is still cold, bass may be deep. If it's at a comfortable spawning temperature, they may be shallower. Like *the Shadow*, only the graph will know. Lacking that, you'll just have to experiment at numerous depths until you get a strike. But that's why they call it fishing!

Bait-wise on any of the Central Texas lakes, soft plastics like worms, jigs with



PHOTO COURTESY OF TIM COOK

Aaron Hernandez proudly, though probably shivering, holds the nine-pound, one-ounce largemouth bass he caught while fishing with Tim Cook on a windy, 20-degree New Year's Day 2018 on Lake Dunlop. The two guys wanted to catch the first bass over eight pounds caught when new ShareLunker rules became effective in 2018. They succeeded.

crawfish trailers, lizards and any other lures of choice should be successful. As the water temperature climbs, I'd try topwater lures, too, in the shallower water closer to shore. And crankbaits and swim baits will produce, too. To begin with, however, go with the plastics fished deep and slowly.

Anything else biting? Duh! We're going into probably the best fishing time of the year. Trout, striped bass, white bass, crappie and even catfish will be on the prowl throughout the spring, in addition to the largemouth bass mentioned above.

Cold weather favors rainbow trout. Some say the worse the weather, the better the trout fishing. TPWD stocks a number of sites with catchable-size trout in many locations throughout Texas. A couple of these trout fit easily in a frying pan! These hatchery-raised trout aren't as weather- finicky as the larger trout stocked by the **Guadalupe River** Chapter of Trout Unlimited (GRTU) in the Canyon Dam Tailrace on the Guadalupe River. I've caught and seen others catch the state-stocked trout on sunny days. Good baits are canned yellow corn, earthworms, salmon eggs or small pieces of Velveeta cheese. TPWD will stock the catchable-size trout at various sites through February, ending on March 8. The last two state stockings in the Canyon Dam Tailrace take place on January 25 and February 1. For dates and places of all sites, click on https://tpwd.texas.gov/fishboat/fish/management/stocking/trout_stocking.

The trophy-size trout – 18-inches, or better – have already been stocked in a special restricted area starting 800 yards below Canyon Dam and extending about nine miles downstream. See page 46 of the *TPW Outdoor Annual* for the restricted area and regulations regarding tackle and bag and length limits. The *Outdoor Annual* is free when purchasing a fishing license at any TPWD office and most retailers of fishing gear.

If you want to learn more about fly-fishing and trout, GRTU is again holding its TroutFest on February 22-24 at Lazy L&L Campground at 11699 River Road between the 3rd and 4th river crossing coming from New Braunfels. There'll be exhibits, demonstrations and even fly-casting lessons. But don't think you have to fly-fish to catch trout. Light spinning gear works well, especially

with small lures like the Panther Martin or Mepps spinners.

And that gets us to white bass. The spring spawn of the whites sees them leave the lakes and head up creeks and rivers to make baby bass. The limit is 25 per day, at least 10 inches long. Early morning and late evenings are the most productive times to fish, but when the peak of the spawn hits, they'll bite later into the day, too.

Traditional places to intercept them are the **Pedernales River** west of the Highway 71 Bridge all the way up to the Reimers Ranch and the next bridge, the **Llano River** at Kingsland, from the Highway 95 Bridge over the **San Gabriel River** eastward to **Granger Lake** and just about any stream flowing into any



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

John LaBove caught the first bass over 13-pounds to be donated to TPWD for spawning on March 2, 2018. It weighed a whopping 15.48 pounds.

lake! Their favorite food is shad, so live shad or any lure resembling shad should work. Jay McBride at McBride's Guns can recommend a few. ★★

The advertisement is set against a background of a desert landscape with yellowish-brown rocks and a white RV parked on the left. Two people are standing near the RV. On the right side, there is a wooden-textured overlay containing text and a logo. The text reads: "The FURTHER YOU GO THE CLOSER YOU GET" in a stylized font, followed by a star icon. Below that is a logo for "AUSTIN RV EXPO" inside a white shield shape. At the bottom, it says "FEBRUARY 21-24", "AUSTIN CONVENTION CENTER", and "austinrvexpo.com".



CoastWatch | Danno Wise

February is the final month of winter and often brings with it some of the year's coldest and wettest weather. With spring right around the corner, it is hard not to think of the warmer, sunnier days ahead. However, as gloomy as the weather may be at times in February, the fishing can be red hot.

It always happens that some of the largest speckled trout of the year are taken during the late winter and early spring. Not coincidentally, many of those finding their way to the water in February will be seeking sow specks. Fabled trophy trout haunts like the Laguna Madre and Baffin Bay will certainly produce plenty of super-sized specks during February, but practically every bay system in Texas has the potential to give up a true trophy. And, February is one of the best times to get the trout of a lifetime to bite.

It won't be all big trout fishing in February, though. Anglers more interested in quantity than quality will be able spend their time fishing deepwater structure for both reds and specks. More often than not they will end up with full boxes of fish. On warm, sunny afternoons, schools of reds will also be found roaming the shallow flats and, on calm days, can provide for excellent sight-casting opportunities.

Surf fishermen will also have a variety of species to target, including whiting, jacks, bluefish, and, further south, pompano. Mangrove snapper and snook will also be common catches in the deeper port areas along the Lower Coast. 🌟



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

With deep water of the ICW nearby, fishing the flats along the adjacent spoil islands can produce some nice fish during the winter months.

In the Port Isabel/South Padre area, top guides such as Capt Austin Camacho will offer clients plenty of options during February. Trophy trout will be very much in play this month. Most of the big trout will be caught along the west side and along the spoil islands along the Intracoastal Waterway. Topwater plugs and big soft-plastics will be best baits for those targeting big trout.

Anglers looking for a box of keeper trout can do well in the deeper flats and channels, as well as along the edges of the ICW. Black drum, redfish and trout will all be stacked up in the South Bay channels, where they can be caught on live shrimp either free-lined or fished on a bottom rig.

Another excellent option for Deep South Texas fishermen in February is the Brownsville Ship Channel. The Ship Channel is generally fishable under almost any weather conditions and holds a wide variety of species, including snook, mangrove snapper, trout, redfish, flounder, black drum and sheepshead.

According to guide Capt. Steve "JR" Ellis at Port Mansfield's Get-A-Way Adventures Lodge, February is prime

time to be looking for trophy trout.

"We'll have some big trout, really big trout, caught in February," said Ellis. "The best way to find them is to find some good muddy bottom flats with bait working. But, you want to find flats that are close to deep water. Those big trout will be in the deeper water when it's cold, then move up shallower to feed when it warms up a bit. Those little flats on the inside of the spoil islands along the ICW are perfect.

"As the day warms up, the fish will spread out over the flats, but they will never get too far from that deep water. If we have several warm days, that's a little different. Then they will move up a little more. But, they will always give themselves a way to escape quickly to deep water, so they won't push too far through really shallow water.

"Topwaters and slow-sinking plugs are probably the best thing to throw for big trout. If you are just looking for numbers of keeper fish, you can do well with plastics or D.O.A. Shrimp under popping corks along the drop offs and channel edges.

"We will have some good redfish action, too, in February. Same thing –



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Out of Rockport this angler is wading just off a shell reef that lies just behind him. In the winter time these areas attract bait and gamefish while providing productive areas to wade.

they'll usually hold on the flats closer to deep water, but they roam a little more than trout if we get some warm weather. And, during the middle of the day, if it's calm and the water's clear, we can have some good sight-casting for redfish in February."

Fishermen heading out of Corpus will often head to the King Ranch shoreline to seek sow specks during February. Typically mid-depth grass flats in three feet of water near deeper guts or channels will be holding big fish. These areas are best targeted with slow-sinking plugs and topwater lures.

Wading is generally the accepted approach in this area. The rocks of Baffin will also be producing plenty of quality trout during late winter. Fishermen looking for reds can generally find plenty of fish in the Humble Channel. Black drum will be consistently found on the muddy flats throughout the Upper Laguna and Baffin. ★★

MIDDLE COAST



For Aransas area anglers, February's cold temperatures usually make Nueces Bay a top spot for late winter fishing. The

combination of mud and shell bottom that comprises most of Nueces' bay floor makes for an attractive winter home for speckled trout and redfish. Both of these species will be found in abundance both around the reefs and over the muddy bottom flats at the back of the bay.

Waders can do particularly well in the back end throwing topwaters, slow-sinking plugs or soft-plastics. Around the

reefs, live shrimp or soft-plastics will be the best bet.

The reefs in Aransas Bay and the deep well pads in Corpus Christi Bay are also good options during February. That is assuming the weather permits a run to these open, deeper water areas.

Additionally, the old Navy base in Ingleside generally yields good numbers of black drum during February. Live



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shrimp and sea lice are the best bets for big black drum. Most of the black drum caught from the old Navy base this time of year are oversize, so it is more-or-less a catch-and-release fishery, but a great way to get a big tug during late winter.

Rockport area anglers should expect good catches of both specks and reds over the next few weeks - provided they can find some good, muddy bottom with some scattered shell. Of course, lots of areas in St. Charles Bay, Copano Bay and Espiritu Santo Bay fit this description. And, any of them can get hot in February.

Once fishermen find the key ingredients of mud, shell, mullet all in three to five feet of water should find plenty of willing speckled trout. Soft-plastics and live shrimp will be the ticket to numbers of keeper specks.

Up a bit more shallow, but over the same bottom composition anglers can expect to find sow specks and redfish. Big topwaters and slow-sinking plugs will be the baits of choice for trophy trout. Soft-plastics and finger mullet will account for most of the reds.



PHOTO COURTESY OF N&M SPORTSMAN'S ADVENTURES

This angler benefitted from Capt. Nathan Beabout's theories on catching big trophy trout in the winter.

Seadrift guide Capt. Nathan Beabout of N&M Sportsman Adventures says February fishing can be phenomenal along the Middle Texas Coast.

"If 2019 will start off as cold as our November and December was on the Middle Texas Coast, I see our February trout fishing being phenomenal," said Beabout. "With these big cold fronts triggering some aggressive big trout feeds, I think we could see more big trout numbers up and down the Texas coast than in previous years.

"I know it's not likely, because we all know Texas' winter starts in January. But, if for some reason January turns out to be unseasonably warm, we will still see a triggered bite in February. As water temperatures could climb into the high 60s or low 70s will begin their yearly spawning rituals.

"Are you not excited yet? It looks like a win-win for avid trout fisherman to start off the year. Knowing how to read the weather and choose your location for that given outing is key. With wind direction, speed, water color and depth, structure, and the all-important signs of life, be sure to set up your wade accordingly. Yes,

The image features a large, stylized logo for the "San Antonio Boat and Outdoor Exposition". The logo is shield-shaped with a blue border and contains a boat, mountains, and the text "San Antonio BOAT and OUTDOOR EXPOSITION". Below the main logo is a smaller version of the same logo. The background of the entire section is a scenic view of a body of water with mountains in the distance.

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PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Deep water ports along the Lower Laguna Madre like the Brownsville Ship Channel can be fished throughout the winter and in most any weather condition. This area holds a variety of gamefish for winter time anglers.



PHOTO BY DANNO WISE

there might be days that we have to walk super slow, or even re-wade an area to catch the fish we are hunting.

"I have always believed there are many more variables to be accounted for in winter fishing, than over summer fishing. But, when one figures out how to adjust or overcome certain variables the day's success shows it. To each his own on releasing trophy class trout. If you plan on releasing your catch be sure to handle it with care and give them time to swim out of your hands."

Port O'Connor area anglers would do well to concentrate on mud and shell in February. This type of bay bottom will be holding good numbers of both specks and reds.

San Antonio Bay, with ample quantities of both mud and shell, is a well-known winter hotspot on the Mid-Coast, but West Matagorda Bay will produce plenty of good fish as well. Flats adjacent to channels will be good areas to look for big trout.

The channel edges, mid-bay reefs and deeper holes will have good numbers of keeper size specks. Redfish will be on the flats during high-water, warm weather conditions and in the channels and guts when it cools and/or the water drops out.

★★

After a few bright, warm days look for redfish and trout to move up on a flat where they will readily hit a topwater lure. This redfish hit a D.O.A. PT-T.

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Lake Roundup



By Brian Hughes

February will mark the beginning of the bass spawn in North Texas. To one degree or another this spawning activity gets underway.

There are many factors that come into play and need to be understood in order to keep up with the fish and their movements. When the winter solstice ended on December 21, 2018 the days started getting longer. The sun is out more each day and the water temperatures start to warm daily.

At around 50 degrees, give or take a couple, bass will start moving from deeper winter hangouts to a shallower "staging" area. The first move usually occurs in early February and brings fish into the 12-15 foot range. The best staging areas will be close to a channel or drop-off. This allows bass to retreat to deeper water if and when a cold front comes through. Feeding on whatever they can find, bass will hang around this area for a couple of weeks.

They'll make another move, this time even shallower, into six to eight feet as the water gets warmer and the days get longer. The males will move up first and this is the last staging act before they move onto the beds. They'll be very near the spawning flats. These flats are typically in the back of coves and creeks in one to five feet of water.

When the water hits 64-65 degrees the spawn will be in full force. This will not happen at the same time all over the lake. You'll want to scout the lake looking for the warmest water you can find and begin your search there.

The depth of spawning activity is determined by water clarity since sunlight is critical to the incubation process. The muddier the water, the more shallow the beds will be and vice versa. Remember, the beds you can see are not the only beds. There are beds you can't see in deeper water and the wash from a trolling motor prop will destroy those beds. Since that's where the fish we like to catch come from. Take care not to disturb them.

Jig-and-pig combos in black blue or watermelon red, and deep diving crankbaits or magnum swimbaits in shad colors, will catch fish in the first stage. Once bass move into the second stage switch to hard body jerkbaits, spinnerbaits and over-sized plastic craws on a Texas rig. For bedding fish, a tube bait is a good choice, along with Texas rigged lizards and craws.

I'll share a couple of tricks a little later in this column for catching bedding fish, without fishing beds, so to speak.

WHITNEY — The secret to February fish on Whitney are the creeks. Creeks are protected from the wind and as the sun warms them bass will be drawn in to explore and feed. They'll show up first in the backs of the creeks to take advantage of the warm temperatures.

This attraction is not unique only to largemouth bass. Stripers will be drawn to the warmer water as well. Early in the month this may only last a couple of hours, usually late in the day, when the water is its warmest.

Stripers will hit 3/4 oz. bucktail jigs with a 6" worm trailer. Start shallow, work your way deeper until you connect with fish. Chartreuse and white are the colors of choice, and once you find the depth in a particular creek, you can replicate the same results in others.

Sand bass may also be in the creeks and a swimbait like the sassy shad will catch them here. Of course, you always want to keep an eye on the main lake for birds. If you see them working, you'll know you can catch some sandies there too.

Whites in the Brazos above the lake will be in a pre-spawn mode. Look in the 25-30 foot range here. Look to the bends and deeper holes with brush and you'll find sand bass and crappie.

For sand bass use the slabs, for crappie try a 1/16th or 1/8th ounce jig. Brush is the key for crappie.

Painted Rock, Ham Creek and any rocky shore with brush should hold some fish. You should also fish where the Nolan river branch joins the main river.

FORK — What can you say about Lake Fork in February? Everyone fishing this lake feels an enhanced sense of potential.

As the water temps creep into mid-50s the creeks come alive. Starting about half-way back in creeks, look for grass. Surviving hydrilla from the previous season, or new grass, it doesn't really matter. Find water five to six feet deep with grass and you'll find fish.

Various moving baits like a squarebill crankbait in chartreuse, or a trap-style bait in red, will work. Also old-school jerkbaits, the hard-body treble hook kind, in gold/black/orange or firetiger are other good options.

Another good choice in moving baits would be the 1/2 ounce spinner bait. A red or chartreuse bait with one nickel or white, and one gold blade is a good color choice. Use the double willow-leaf for flash and bulk, or an Indiana combination for vibration.

Those that like a swimbait should throw a five inch variety with a one-eighth or one-quarter ounce weighted hook. Throw it out and let it sink, then move it faster than you think you should. You're looking for a reaction bite.

I always hark back to something Mark

Stevenson told me many years ago about deep fish on Fok in February. "Throw a Carolina rig with a long four to five foot leader, 1 oz. weight, and full sized fluke, or a 10 inch worm. We often catch double digit fish that way. It may be slow, and bites can be few and far between, but it's worth it."

He advises to, "Rip the weight way off the bottom and then drop it right back down. Be aggressive with the upward motion and let the bait settle back naturally. This just drives those really big fish crazy."

Crappie at Fork are a "social" fish" this month. That is, you'll be fishing with a lot of other anglers nearby, usually around the dam or the bridges. Either way, fish your preference of minnows or jigs. And keep in mind that you must keep the first 25 crappie you catch, regardless of length, through the end of this month.

TEXOMA — There are those that believe February is the best month of all for fishing Texoma, even though the weather conditions can be tough on the angler. By February bigger stripers will be moving up the river to spawn. As stripers don't spawn until they are five years old, these fish will be the big double-digit fish everyone wants to catch.

A white Hyper Stryper with a pure white worm type trailer is a good bet, as is the five inch Sea Assassin in a glow color. Those wanting to catch numbers of "box fish," or smaller keepers, should look to the points and flats, following the birds. Live baits and the A-rig will catch plenty of these keeper fish.

Catfishermen should look to the main channel and the deep holes along there, for big catfish. Use a three or four inch gizzard shad, and use your electronics to find the "hooks." Then drop a bait right on top of them. You'll be scanning water as deep as 75 feet but the fish will probably be 25-35 feet deep.

The Little Mineral arm of the lake is a good place to look, as is the Willis Bridge area. Another good place to catch some cats will be around any guides cleaning station. When they toss off the remains of the day's stripers, the catfish move in to feed.

Texoma is one of the best smallmouth lakes in the state. Smallmouth bass will be in the pre-spawn mode and they are a different from the largemouth. Look for pre-spawn smallmouth where the larger

rocks play out into a gravel bank, and around the main lake points. They'll be hanging around the larger stuff in 15 -20 feet of water waiting to move in for the spawn. Jigging spoons from ½ to ¾ ounce in chrome/shad colors will catch not only these pre-spawn smallmouth, but spotted bass and largemouth bass as well.

CEDAR CREEK — Early in the month you'll find the crappie in the brush piles. They'll still be in 20 to 30 feet of water. As the weather warms, they'll move shallower.

At first, early on, they'll stay shallow for just a few hours and then later for the whole day. Eventually they'll stay shallow, unless a severe cold front comes through. As the month passes, either brush or the many docks will hold the fish. Of course, some folks will always catch fish at the bridges.

Hybrid stripers at Cedar Creek should be on the main lake humps and points. Look in the 20 to 30 foot range first, with a Sassy Shad on a ¾ ounce head. If you don't catch fish you'll want to take a trip to the backs of the creeks. Toss your shad out and drag it back, or dead-stick it, using the wind or trolling motor to move the boat.

Largemouth will be looking to move shallow for the spawn. Start the day around the points and creek mouths leading into good spawning waters. Anywhere north of the Highway 85 Bridge is a good place to look. Clear Creek and Lynn Creek are good for bass as are North and South Twin Creeks. Since these creeks are all a little closer to the main lake, they should hold good fish populations throughout the year.

Your basic spawn baits like the Texas rigged lizard or craw are good bets, as is the treble-hooked jerkbait. Colors will depend on water clarity. Darker, muddy water will call for dark or shock colors, while clearer water calls for more natural colors.

I mentioned earlier that I'd give some tips for fishing bedding bass without fishing beds. Typical bed fishing involves spotting a bed, pulling up on it and throwing some bait at it until you aggravate the fish into biting. It is very effective, especially on big bass as you can see the fish and gauge its reaction to your bait.

I find this type of fishing extremely boring and prefer to fish other methods. In

addition, when you use you trolling motor to pull up that shallow, you are running over and ruining other beds. These are usually a little deeper, and not visible.

I prefer to stay off the beds in deeper water and throw a bait up into about four to six feet of water parallel to the bank. I can then bring my bait very slowly along that water, waiting for a strike.

Using a Texas rigged Kreature, Lizard or craw, I imagine or visualize that my bait is in a bed that I can't see. Giving it a few shakes, I'll wait a couple of minutes and shake it again. If I don't get a bite after another couple of minutes, I move it a couple of feet and shake it again.

I've mentioned it before, but I also like to run a rubber band through my weight so I can pull the weight away from the hook and make a mini-Carolina rig. They really hate that when it comes across that bed, and will often hit it as soon as they see it.

Good luck in February, and remember, always wear your lifejacket. Especially in these colder months when a fall from the boat can mean much more than a dunking. 🌟🌟



By Matt Williams

CONROE - Just so you know, Major League Fishing's all new Bass Pro Tour is coming to Lake Conroe on February 12-17. The timing of the event should land 80 of the nation's best bass anglers on the 20,000-acre reservoir during the heart of the pre-spawn.

Translation: Look for some big bass to be caught.

"February is one of my favorite months to fish Conroe," says veteran guide Butch Terpe. "The big fish always start nosing around in the shallows in early February and there could actually

be some fish on beds towards the middle to end of the month — especially on the north end of the lake. It always warms up the quickest."

Terpe says he will spend the majority of his time working the middle to upper portions of major and secondary feeders towards the lake's upper reaches all month long. Water depths of one to five feet should be ideal for probing with a Chatterbait, square bill, spinnerbait and Texas rigged plastics.

The guide said crappie fishing should be picking up in some of the same areas throughout the month as papermouths begin gravitating towards skinny water to spawn. He suggested fan casting over shallow flats in one to five feet of water using a small shiner or jig under a cork. Lay down logs, stumps and overhanging bushes will be prime targets.

"I'll usually put my bait about a foot to 18 inches below my cork, two feet at the most," Terpe said. "The key is to cover water. You might catch 10-20 out of one stretch once you find them."

February can also be a good month for boxing a few Conroe channel cat for the freezer. As always, Terpe recommends concentrating his efforts around baited holes using range cubes to concentrate the fish and cheese bait on a sponge hook to exploit them. The best water depth is 18-22 feet.

NACOGDOCHES - Lake Nacogdoches was on the receiving end of major runoff from big rains in early and late December. It was a muddy, sloppy mess leading up to the Christmas holiday. Hopefully, things will have settled out and cleared a little as we enter one of the year's best months for reeling in whopper largemouths on the 2,200-acre lake.

Barring any recent Arctic blasts, water temperatures should be in the low 50s as January gives way to February. That's pretty chilly but it won't stop the bass' biological clock. Although there may not be any actual spawning activity for a few weeks, there are sure to be some heavyweights cruising around in the shallows during the early part of the month. There always are.

The best places to look will be wind protected pockets and flats in water ranging two to six feet with deeper water provided by a creek channel or drop off nearby. Hopefully the off color water will have cleared by now and the hydrilla will

still be in fairly decent shape up north.

Any number baits will work this month, but it's hard to beat a crawfish pattern square bill, lipless crankbait or a bladed jig like the hard thumping Z-Man Jackhammer. All three will produce some big hits around the grass.

The key is to fish them slowly, just fast enough to keep them ticking the top of the vegetation. If you feel a snag in the grass be on point as soon as it pops free. That's usually when most strikes occur.

In addition to the shallow bite, there will also be some fish to be caught deep on hard bottom structure in water ranging 15-25 feet deep. Good electronics are essential away from the bank for finding sweet spots and marking them for future reference.

The best baits? Overall, it's hard to beat a Carolina rig. Other good producers include shaky heads, football jigs and deep diving crank baits.

SAM RAYBURN - Sam Rayburn was slightly more than four and a half feet high as the New Year rolled in, so chances are good high water will still be in place by the time this issue of TOJ hits the streets. It could be considerably higher if January turned out to be a wet one.

If this February is like most, there will be some monster sacks of bass showing up at tournament weigh-ins and they'll be caught a variety of ways.

"There are going to be fish shallow, at mid-depths and deep," says veteran fishing guide Tommy Martin. "The trick is figuring how to catch the big ones. It seems like every year that the lake gets high that there are quite a few big limits that are caught in 15-25 feet of water around the edges of main lake flats that fall into deeper water. The numbers may be better shallow but the

quality could be much better deep. I've seen it happen time and again."

Martin says the offshore bite tends to shine from the mid-lake area south with Carolina rigs, deep cranks and jigs producing most of the bigger bites.

Up shallow, there will plenty of fish to be caught around underwater hydrilla beds on everything from lipless crankbaits and square bills to slow rolling spinnerbaits, swim baits or working suspended jerk baits. Flipping jigs and creatures in buck brush and willow bushes and casting Texas rigs or Carolina rigs to the edges of the woody cover also could get you bit.

February also has a history of yielding some outstanding white bass and crappie action up the Angelina River. Some of the best crappie fishing takes place along the edges of distinctive channel swings in the vicinity of Estes Lake above the Marion Ferry launch. Live shiners work best.

White bass fishing this time of year



PHOTO BY RICHARD JUE

Crappie fishing should be picking up this month as papermouths begin gravitating towards skinny water to spawn.

revolves around the early spring spawning run that sends thousands of the prolific sport fish upstream to create the next generation of white bass. The bite can be good as far north the U.S. 59 Crossing between Nacogdoches and Lufkin. Small jigs, Roadrunners and crankbaits are the orders of the day. It is close quarters fishing with lots of brush to navigate and cast around.

TOLEDO BEND - Fun fishermen with a taste for adventure and fast action may want to check out the Sabine River some time over the next 30-45 days. Toledo Bend supports one of the most prolific populations of white bass in the state, and now is when thousands of them begin finning their way up the Sabine on their annual spawning run.

The fishing can be outstanding from the Logansport Bridge in Joaquin north as far as Longview when river flows are favorable. The best conditions occur when the river is within its banks and rolling along at a leisurely clip with pretty decent water clarity. The absolute worst is when the river jumps its banks and spills into the adjacent woods. This allows the fish to scatter and makes them difficult to find.

The best bite typically comes on 1/4 ounce Roadrunners (white or chartreuse/red) and crawfish pattern crankbaits fished slowly in relation to underwater sand bars and still water eddies. Stumble across the right spot and it's entirely possible to catch a limit on as many casts. There is a good chance the takers will have shoulders, too. Big females weighing upwards of 2 1/2 pounds are fairly common on the Sabine.

As popular as the white bass fishing can be, the largemouth always gets most attention on T-Bend during the springtime. The 181,000-acre reservoir is loaded with black bass that can be caught a variety of ways at varied depths from the bank to as deep as 30-35 feet. That's the word from veteran fishing guide Tommy Martin of Milam.

"Spring is a great time to fish Toledo Bend," Martin said. "The water temperatures should be warming and there are going to be a lot of fish roaming around the shallows up and down the lake."

As lures and fishing techniques go, anglers can pretty much pick their poison and have a good shot at finding some takers, especially up shallow. Rat-L-Traps, Chatterbaits, spinnerbaits

and Senkos fan cast over flats and along shorelines adjacent to major and secondary feeder creek are always good choices for numbers and an occasion whopper.

Another option is flipping and pitching jigs and plastics around stump fields laced with drainages, ditches and rises. The old Highway 1215 area between San Miguel and San Patricio on the Louisiana side is a good area to do it.

There will also be some fish holding away the bank on main lake flats, underwater points and other pre-spawn staging areas in water ranging 13-18 feet, and along select stretches of the river in 30-35 feet of water. Martin says this will be more of a big fish deal than anything else. Carolina rigs, big Texas rig worms and jigs are all good bets.

PALESTINE - Lake Palestine is prone to produce the big bite any time of the year, but if there is one month that offers more potential than all the others it would have to be February.

"We always see a lot of big fish caught in February, especially at the north end of the lake," said fishing guide Ricky Vandergriff. "Just about all of the early spring tournaments are won up there. It's not uncommon to see some 25-30 pound sacks."

February is just another word for pre-spawn on most East Texas lakes. It's a period when big females start nudging towards the shallows in preparation for the upcoming spawn by way of creeks, ditches and other underwater highways.

The water always warms faster at the north end of Palestine than it does farther south, mainly because it's shallower and more protected than the south end. Some of the better areas to go looking for pre-spawners are Old Folks Playground, Kickpoo Creek, Flat Creek and the Neches River. Jigs tipped with plastic chunks, bladed jigs, weightless Senkos and spinnerbaits usually produce the best results, Vandergriff said.

Anglers who had rather fish the more open waters at the lake's south end should key on boat docks, lay downs and stumps in water one to five feet deep. Saline, Cobb and Caney creeks have plenty of good stuff worth checking out.

Crappie probably won't be gravitating towards the shallows just yet, but it won't be long. Vandergriff says anglers should key on deeper structure for the next 30

days or so until the fish go on the move. He recommends tossing small jigs or soaking shiners around the bridge pilings at the Highway 155 Crossing, brush piles or the old cedars along the Neches River in the vicinity of the dam.

LIVINGSTON - February on Lake Livingston can be feast or famine for bass junkies looking for the big bite. Fishing is always at its best during years with stable conditions, limited water flow down the Trinity River and relatively clear water.

"It can be really good provided we don't get any floods upstream," says Randy Dearman, a veteran guide who knows the 90,000-acre lake better than most. "The Trinity can get really muddy after a big rain and it can turn the lake into chocolate milk pretty quick. Keep an eye on the weather, river flows and water levels. If we get a big rise, you can pretty much bet it's going to be muddy."

When conditions are good, Dearman says February ranks among the best months of the year for catching big bass on Livingston. The fish are likely to be getting into a pre-spawn mode so you'll be able to catch them on spinnerbaits, square bill cranks, bladed jigs, Texas-rig lizards and jig craw combos fished in relation to channels, ditches and guts dissecting any shallow flat.

Dearman likes to key on backwaters in major and secondary feeder creeks. Places were little ditches and canals stem off the channels can be especially promising.

"Bass use the ditches to move from deeper water to shallow sort of like we use highways to travel from one place to another," he explained. "They like to stage or hold around any brush, stumps or underwater logs that they might come across. If you don't know the lake extremely well, the best advice is to key on the main creeks and cover water."

Some of Dearman's favorite creeks up north are White Rock, Carolina, Bethel, Caney, Harmon, Newton, Brown's and Palmetto. At mid-lake, he likes Kickapoo and Penwaugh. His favorites down south are Indian and Wolfe.

Dearman says it is always a good idea to seek out the clearest, warmest water you can find. Check out the upper reaches of isolated pockets and canals not influenced by a major channel. Wind-protected pockets on the north and northwest shorelines will usually hold the warmest water. **T★J**

Camo — Pick Your Pattern

When I started hunting my clothing color choices ran from blue denim to brown. The deer I encountered didn't seem to care. Occasionally an older family member or friend who had served in WWII would show up in some old olive drab stuff they didn't care got messed up.

Historically military wear to help you hide started wide spread use in the mid 18th century with drab brown and green outfits like those worn by Roger's Rangers in the "French and Indian War." Camouflage use picked up speed in World War I, and then started getting mission specific in World War II. As a short kid I had limited outdoor wear options, but that began to change in the 1950's.

Southern Sales Army/Navy Surplus opened in Houston in the late 40's. By the early 50's they had grown to five locations and I had grown to my max height of 5'5." After the Korean police action ended in 1953 surplus clothing choices grew and I acquired my first olive drab outfits and some camo patterns started showing up. As a sidebar, Southern Sales was sold in 1973 and became what is now known as Academy Sports and Outdoors.

My army service in the early 60's

increased my camo wardrobe with jungle foliage patterns. Again, the deer still did not care. Camouflage clothing Valhalla was created when in 1972 the amazing Strand Surplus Senter was opened in Galveston by my late great friend Meyer Reiswerg, known to the world as Col. Bubbie. Meyer's family had long been involved in importing and those global connections allowed him the ability to import surplus from armed forces from around the world. Due to these countries needs to "hide from the enemy" in various environments it created a wide variety of patterns for being deployed in mountains, deserts, jungles and more. During its 42 years in operation Strand Surplus was the greatest store of its type on the planet and nobody could promote better than Col. Bubbie.

As far as the hunter is concerned, 1986 was the beginning of the camouflage revolution as two companies were created that year.

Bill Jordan entered the hunting industry in 1983, with Spartan Archery Products in Columbus, Georgia manufacturing t-shirts at a local mill. Meanwhile, he was constantly searching for ways to separate his company from the crowd. He found himself sitting in his parents' front yard one day with



New DST patterns and products from Slumberjack.

paper and colored pencils, sketching and coloring the bark of a giant oak tree. He believed that by layering the images of twigs and leaves over a vertical bark background, he could create a three-dimensional appearance that would match a variety of terrain and make his pattern distinct. Spartan-Realtree Co. grew from the original Realtree pattern to Advantage, Max X-tra and more.

Meanwhile over in Mississippi Toxey Haas had the vision to take a handful of Mississippi dirt, sticks and leaves and transform them into a brand new type of camouflage comprised of natural earth elements and colors all designed to help hunters blend in to the environment. That first pattern, Mossy Oak Bottomland, was the birth of a company that has continued to grow with patterns such as Break-Up, Shadow Grass, and Elements among others.

These companies growth has not been through manufacturing products, but through licensing their patterns to companies that make everything from clothing to coolers, firearms to footwear, ATV's to trucks, and on and on. Over the years improvements in cameras, computers and printing equipment have allowed these patterns to be applied to



A selection of well used Wranglers in Realtree patterns.



The author in Mossy Oak from NOMAD.

NOMAD Outdoors. A signature design element is the use of hunter orange splashes to spice up the Mossy Oak and Realtree patterns. They have a wide range of products from top to bottom including pants, shirts, jackets, vests, pullovers, hats, gloves, bibs, socks and even boxer shorts. For cold weather offerings feature microfleece and Primaloft insulation. Many items feature the Silverz Scent Suppression System to mask body odor. Check the goods at www.nomadoutdoor.com.

Slumberjack has

been around for over 50 years and well known for their tents and sleeping bags. They have recently expanded with a clothing line featuring their proprietary pattern called Perception DST Camouflage. The DST stands for Disruptive Shadow Technology and is also being featured in their sleeping bags and packs.

The Tactical Hunting Gear line has such features as MountainPRO 3-layer waterproof and breathable construction with a 2-way stretch fabric for freedom of motion, zippered hand warmer pockets, large chest pockets, micro-fiber lined collars and "Quiet Touch" polyester outer layers. The full line from SJK is at www.slumberjack.com.

There are many products and many patterns from which to choose so choose wisely. Also, don't get carried away on your camouflage search and buy silly products like small camo fire-lighters, flashlights and knives. What happens when you drop them in the woods at dusk?

The dumbest product I ever saw at the S.H.O.T. Show was camouflage toilet paper. I'll say no more. **T★J**

a wealth of products. Also these folks devote a great amount of time, energy and money promoting their patterns through everything from NASCAR to the National Wild Turkey Federation. The more they promote the more products get made and the more we buy. The American way!

These technical improvements have enabled products to become more specific so we can pick a pattern based on location, time of year and weather. Still some hunters do not care what pattern they throw on while others are very particular about what pattern is worn and who made it. Some just want to make a fashion statement and that is just fine.

As to my personal preferences, if I am sitting in an enclosed deer stand I do not care what I have on as long as I am warm. If I have the opportunity to get out and walk among them I want a pattern close to my environment to conceal my shape. Remember great camo is no cure for sloppy stalking.

Waterfowl hunting certainly requires concealment and turkey hunting is the one endeavor that requires that we camo-up from head to toe. Turkey have exceptional eyesight and they live their lives nervous.

One popular clothing line comes from

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A person wearing a bright green jacket and a matching hat is standing on the side of a boat, holding a fishing rod. The boat is on the water, and the background shows a sunset or sunrise with a cloudy sky and a calm sea. The person's reflection is visible in the water.

PICK. PLAN & CHOOSE

The second month of the year offers productive opportunities to plan for future success.

Story and Photography by Nate Skinner

February is one of those months that many anglers have a love-hate relationship with, which seems almost fitting with Valentine's Day falling at its mid-point. There are times I'm grateful the second month is the shortest of the year, and then there are moments that make me wish I could freeze frame time. It all depends on the prevailing conditions.

From an early taste of spring to downright frigid temperatures and everything in between, February can produce all of the above in its brief 28 day stretch. The affects of this consistently inconsistent pattern can be seen in the behavior of the salty species pursued.

It's a yo-yo like transition with plenty of ups and downs. Anglers that make plans according to the current conditions can find on the water success for a variety of species, as well learn valuable information about the waters they target will be helpful in the coming spring months.

One approach that will result in consistent action is to simply fish for what's biting. Speckled trout and redfish always seem to be in the spotlight, but situations during this transition period don't always lend themselves towards catching numbers when it comes to targeting these highly sought after gamefish. Luckily, there are plenty of other species that can produce bent rods, new memories, and piles of fillets.

Just about any structure that holds barnacles and attracts crabs and other crustaceans is sure to have schools of sheepshead lurking nearby. From now through mid-to-late April, the jetties will become one of the main, key spawning grounds for the convict fish.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Galveston Bay Ecosystem Leader, Glen Sutton, states that jetties are ideal structures for sheepshead to feed around during the month of February.

"They are situated in the nearshore waters of the Gulf where sheepshead spawn, plus they are littered with various crabs, crustaceans and barnacles that make up most of the species' diet," he explained.

With sheepshead spawning season reaching its peak over the next several weeks, it is not uncommon to land fish pushing double digits. Anglers can expect

dense concentrations of large females or giant sow convict fish to be present along jetty systems through the spring.

In addition to the jetties, bulk heads, pier pilings, oyster reefs and areas with rip rap will also hold numbers of sheepshead during February, especially if there is deep water nearby.

A technique involving a square bladed shovel or scraper, that many folks may not know about, can be used along pier pilings and bulkheads by bank fishermen to bring hungry sheepshead right to them. The key to this strategy is being somewhere where there are ample amounts of barnacles growing on the structure that is being targeted.

Anglers can use these "garden implements" to scrape barnacles off the sides of a piling or bulkhead, allowing them to fall into the water. If sheepshead are present, they will often come swimming up to the surface for an easy snack. This method is sort of like chumming and can turn a spot into a convict fish honey hole in a matter of minutes.

Black drum are also on the prowl during the second month of the year as their spawning season is kicking off. Eating sized, "puppy" drum can be found in all the same places as sheepshead. They have a similar diet and provide anglers with tasty, white fillets.

Oversized female drum will be schooled up along deep drop offs and channels near passes as the annual spring "Drum Run." It commences as adult populations of the species gather to spawn in deep water.

For targeting slot sized drum, anglers will get the best results by using live or fresh dead shrimp fished along the bottom. Chunks of cracked crab are hard to beat when it comes to pursuing monster female black drum. Live crawfish is another excellent option. Rig these baits on a large circle hook or J hook on a deep drop rig with a heavy enough weight to keep them along the bottom during periods of strong tidal movement.

Make sure to have a venting tool handy, as the swim bladder in many of these large drum will fill with air and become bloated as they are brought to the surface from the deeper depths. A bloated fish that is released without being properly vented will likely not survive.

Sand trout provide anglers with another option during the month of February and the weeks to follow. Mid-bay oyster reefs, channels, passes, and jetties all attract this feisty species that gets little attention.

Probably the best thing about sand trout is that they will eat almost anything. From live and fresh dead natural baits to artificial lures, these fish often strike



Impressive catches for specks will occur this month when conditions are right.



By mid February, anglers should have flounder on their radars as dense numbers of flatfish will begin to return to estuaries, marshes, bayous, creeks and back lakes.



Sheepshead will be found roaming around jetties, oyster reefs, pier pilings, and areas with riprap.

aggressively when they are feeding. Typically if there is a sand trout caught in a given area, anglers can bet there's a whole lot more nearby.

According to Sutton, sand trout populations have been higher over the last decade. He attributes this increase to the reduction of commercial inshore trawling, as sand trout are often one of the bycatch species caught in trawls.

Sand trout produce tasty fillets, that are best enjoyed when cooked fresh. The consistency and integrity of their meat is sacrificed when they are frozen and then thawed out. TPWD Coastal Fisheries Biologist and Aransas Bay Ecosystem Leader, Dr. Chris Mace, claims this is due to their muscle texture, as well as naturally occurring enzymes and bacteria that break down proteins in the muscle over time.

"Care of the fish and the fish fillet is extremely important," he indicated. "Sand trout are a delicate fish. I always recommend anglers only keep what they can eat fresh. They should avoid freezing them at all costs."

When fishing for sand trout to keep and eat, Mace suggests anglers to place them in an ice water slurry, immediately after landing them and to fillet them cold.

An additional species that anglers should have on their radar by the middle of February is flounder. As water temperatures warm, flatfish will make their way back into estuaries, bayous, marshes and back lakes. This migration is often overshadowed by the highly celebrated fall flounder run. However, the springtime action for flatfish can be just as exciting.

Impressive catches of specks and reds are still a good possibility during February, anglers just have to be ready to adapt to ever changing conditions. Late season cold fronts can drop bay water temperatures rapidly, while mild conditions can send the fish into an early spring pattern. Some of the best windows of opportunity will occur during the major and minor feed times as indicated on solunar tables.

One thing anglers can count on as far as late season cold fronts are concerned is for tide levels to drop to all time lows. Getting out on the water a day or two after a fierce frontal system passes may not produce very many bites, but it is a great



Sand trout produce tasty fillets when they are cooked fresh.

way to learn more about a specific area.

Extreme low tides reveal scattered shell and uncharted reefs in shallow water, as well as where small ditches, creeks, and channels lie. Understanding how to navigate a bay system during ultra low tides will give anglers the confidence to run it under a plethora of other more favorable circumstances.

Making plans according to the wind is going to be crucial from now through the spring months. Some of the strongest breezes of the year are on the horizon and they will dictate where anglers can fish and where they can safely operate their vessels.

If all else fails, February can be used as a planning period for the next several months. Check out different launching sites and boat ramp options in relation to specific fishing grounds. Also take notes of where areas that provide shelter are located in relation to both the launch site and the areas that will be targeted. Come up with a game plan that will keep all passengers safe if treacherous conditions or foul weather were to occur in the midst of an outing.

Taking advantage of the variety of options that are available this month will give anglers an opportunity to operate their boats in a number of areas, conditions and scenarios. This will allow them to become more comfortable with maneuvering their craft in different situations, and give them a better understanding of their vessel's limits.

Pick an estuary to fish, make plans according to the prevailing conditions, and choose a species to target. Keep an open mind, be willing to grind, and improve your skills before the second month of the year passes you by. ★★



Eating sized "puppy" drum can provide consistent action during February around structure near deep water.

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Lake Roundup

SOUTH TEXAS



By Danno Wise

February generally sees anglers with fewer time conflicts, meaning they have more time to spend on the water than they have in recent months. However, February also sees a little more in the way of foul weather than previous months. In fact, February usually serves up some of winter's worst weather but it is also when some of the year's largest bass are caught as well.

As a result, there will generally be a fair crowd of dedicated bass fishermen on South Texas lakes during February. Although these anglers won't be catching the same numbers that summer and fall yield, the time when late winter bleeds into early spring usually produces some the most memorable catches, often rewarding those fishermen with the biggest bass of their lives.

Beyond big largemouths, anglers on South Texas lakes will also have reasonable expectations of bagging good numbers of white and hybrid bass as well, as some South Texas lakes and rivers will still be in the midst of the white bass run. And, crappie fishing will be improving on the South Texas lakes that have a population of papermouths.

COLETO CREEK – What happens on Coleto Creek in February will have a good deal to do with what happens with the local powerplant, says Victoria bass pro Dennis Lala.

"We usually rely on the power plant discharge to warm the lake," said Lala.

"There have been some changes at the plant recently, so it really just depends on if they are pumping or not as to what our fishing pattern will be in February.

"If they are pumping, the water will be warm and the whole lake will be spawning in February. If we have clear water, there will be some sight casting to spawning fish. This can be a tough lake to sight-fish because of water clarity, especially now that we don't have any hydrilla or moss in the lake. If the water does clear, it will be possible to cast to bass on beds. In that situation, a lizard or watermelon fluke will be the best choice. I will cast them weightless and drag them over the bed.

"If the water is too murky for sight-casting, I'll be trying to cover a lot of water where I know there are spawning fish. My number one bait for looking for fish this time of year is a spinnerbait. You can cover a lot more water with this bait and will be able to take pre-spawn bass as well. My favorite model is a 3/8 or 1/2 ounce, chartreuse and white bait with double gold willowleaf blades. If the water gets real murky, I may change to colored blades, like white or chartreuse, but they will hit that bait will gold blades most of the time. Throwing a spinnerbait is a great way to find fish on the shoreline.

"The other thing I do a lot in February when I'm fishing the shallow flats along the shorelines is to look for sand spots or depressions where the bass are bedding. If I'm doing that, I'm going to be using a Berkley Power Jerkshad. Just rig that Jerkshad on a 5/0 hook and braided line – no weight. Pitch it right up against the shoreline and drag it off. They'll spawn right in those sandy spots, so they'll be in there and they'll usually hit it right when it comes into the sand spot.

"If they are pumping, the hot water discharge is the number one prime location for steady action on Coleto Creek in February. That's where you can catch the biggest variety of fish. You can catch black bass, hybrids, yellow cats, channel cats, blue cats – you name it.

"If you fish with minnows, you can catch hybrids, blacks and yellow cats. Otherwise, Tony Acetta spoons with

either chartreuse or white feathers will work good for the hybrids. Rattletraps and spinnerbaits will catch both blacks and hybrids.

"And, of course, the channels and blues will be on bottom and will hit the usual catfish stuff – shrimp, nightcrawlers – stuff like that. It does get crowded up there that time of year, but it is some of the best fishing on the lake.

"If they aren't pumping at the plant, the water will still be cold and the fish will be in pre-spawn mode. In that case, we'll be focused on the offshore structure and, of course, the points. As the water warms, the fish will move up shallower to spawn. So, if they plant is pumping, the bass will be spawning. If not, the spawn will probably not happen until late February or March."

MEDINA — The clear, deep waters of Lake Medina make it unique among South Texas lakes. And, it takes different tactics to be successful here – especially in winter.

In February, most successful fishermen on Medina will still be employing vertical fishing tactics – at least early on. With the lake virtually full entering February, the water will be plenty deep, as will the bass that live in it.

"The first couple of weeks of February, we'll be in a real winter pattern," said Jim Gallagher of Jim's ReBait Tackle. "Some people are intimidated by winter pattern fishing because the fish are so deep. Actually, in a way it helps because it's very predictable and usually the fish are pretty concentrated. You have to fish real slow and real deep in order to catch them. But, if you find them you can usually have a pretty good day.

"This time of year, vertical fishing techniques are usually the most productive. Jigging spoons are probably the number one lure for vertical fishing on this lake, at least partly because most of our fishermen know how to use them. Drop-shotting and other vertical tactics will work as well. Not as many South Texas anglers are comfortable using those techniques, so jigging with spoons is usually the easiest for them to master.



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Photos provided by photographer Erich Schlegel, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and the U.S. Coast Guard.

“You can do pretty well with deep diving crankbaits also, especially along the channel edges. This is definitely something more fishermen are comfortable doing, and if we get a few days of warm weather, the fish will start moving up a little bit where they’ll be easier to catch on crankbaits.

“Over the last couple weeks of February, we’ll start seeing our fish move up to spawn. This happens in two different ways on Medina. We really have two types of spawning fish on Medina. The smaller fish will usually spawn in shallow water, like they do on most South Texas lakes. The bigger fish, on the other hand, will actually spawn in about 15 feet of water. Since we have clear water, the sunlight gets down that deep, no problem. So, they’ll build their beds right on the ledges. They’ll be way down there, but with our clear water you can still see the beds.

“Our white bass run a little later than those on other lakes, too. There will be a lot of schooling whites and hybrids in February, but they won’t be running yet. They’ll be getting schooled up in the lake, but if you come across a school, you can have some fast action.”

CHOKO CANYON – The New Year found Choke Canyon almost twice as full as it was in January 2018, which is good news for fishermen as they enter February. For the most part, February on Choke means spawning bass. Although there will be some spawning activity on the main lake, most of the spawning fish will be located in the river. Therefore, anglers should concentrate their efforts up the rivers and creeks that feed into Choke Canyon and the increased water level will open up much more water for spawning bass and the anglers pursuing them.

The best bet is to fish over shallow, muddy shorelines. While working along the shallow shorelines, a 3/8 ounce white and chartreuse spinnerbait is the best way to cover water. When working flooded brush along the shorelines, a jig or Texas-rigged lizards is a good choice.

Black bass won’t be the only species headed upriver from Choke Canyon this month. Anglers headed up the rivers and creeks are also likely to encounter crappie and white bass in February. Crappie will hold tight to brush along the shorelines, while white bass will be

pushing their way to the headwaters for their annual spawn.

FALCON – As is the case with bass on other South Texas lakes, Falcon’s resident population of largemouth will be in either pre-spawn or spawning mode in February. As is the typical pattern on South Texas lakes, the spawning activity will begin with bass on the upper reaches of the lake and work its way toward the dam as the month wears on.

Falcon is now more than half full and the water has been rising throughout the fall and winter, opening up more shoreline and back water areas. As the spawn gets into full swing, anglers are well-advised to search shorelines of coves off the main lake. The majority of bedding fish will be in three to five feet of water. The back end of most coves should hold clear enough water for sight casting. However, the majority of anglers will simply work their way along the shoreline, slow-rolling spinnerbaits or pitching jigs as they go.

★



By TOJ Staff

AMISTAD — As the New Year began “Big Friendly” was about 25 feet below conservation pool. That is a couple of feet lower than one year earlier and about the same level it started 2016. If the weather forecast is correct and this winter proves to be a wet one, combined with the heavy snowfall in New Mexico, we could see a continued slow rise heading into spring.

Until then look for bass to be relating to deeper water. Buck bass may search out potential spawning flats, but the sows will remain in the deeper water. Texas rigs and jigs are good options to thoroughly fish an area.

Toward the end of February, look for black bass to become active up river and creek channels. These areas will be the

first to warm and see pre-spawn activity.

Stripers will remain active in the deep water in front of the dam. Look for birds or electronics to find fish.

Catfish will remain deep this month. Best depth will be 50-60 feet and deeper.

O.H. IVIE — Get ready for a great spring spawn. As of early January this lake was 18.5 feet low. The lake has 19.5 more feet of water than the same time in 2018, 16.5 more feet than 2017 and 27.5 more feet than 2016. That means a lot of brush and old familiar spawning flats have come back in play.

Through February anglers should fish around every deepwater target marked by their electronics. Texas and Carolina rigs, or jigs are good choices.

BROWNWOOD — At the start of 2019 anglers that fish this lake found it about a half a foot high. That compares to 3.5 feet low in 2018, and within the same high range for 2017 and 2016. The notes made of patterns bass were on in those two years will pay dividends once again this February.

Look for crappie to holding around deeper depths on brush piles or deeper vertical structure. Minnows and small tube jigs are the best offerings. ★

HIGH PLAINS



By TOJ Staff

Two of the best options based on the level of water are **Lake Coleman** and **Stanford**. Both are a little high and should hold some good fishing prospects this month.

Lake Meredith should be a good winter time option for walleye this month. TPWD had stocked these fish and consistent reports have come in of anglers catching some smaller walleye. Look for fish to eclipse the magic 16 inch size. Daily bag limit is five fish with only two allowed under 16 inches. ★



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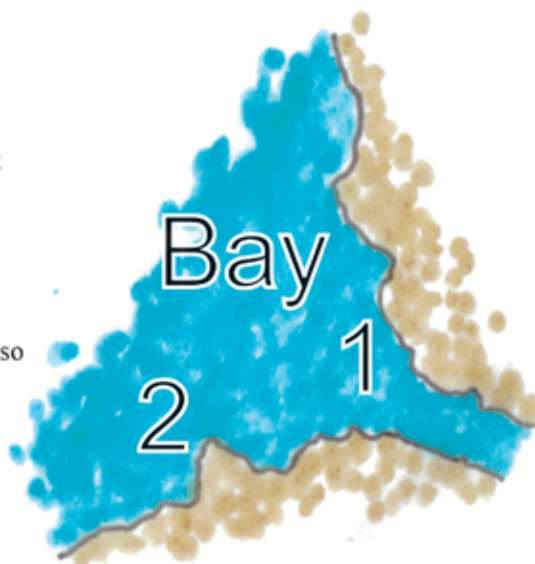
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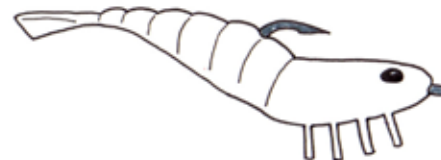
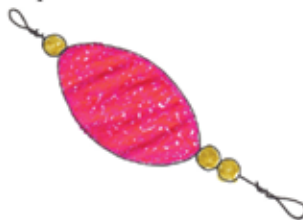


Redfish dominate the Texas inshore fishing scene on a near year around basis. However, February presents an excellent time to target the other saltwater drum -- black drum. Black drum have become increasingly popular on the Texas coast in recent years. During February, there are a variety of ways to target drum of all sizes.

One of the most common ways to target black drum in February is to look for channels entering the main bay (right, 1) or channels cutting through the bay, such as old gas well channels. The colder the weather, the more fish will stack up in these channels. When the weather turns truly cold, ship channels and shrimp boat basins will also see huge concentrations of drum hiding from the winter weather. Although these fish are seeking shelter from the cold and will generally be holding deep, they will also eat. Anglers dropping live shrimp or jigs tipped with bits of shrimp or Fish Bites (below) can usually score easy limits of slot size drum. In the larger channels, such as ports, bull drum will also be common catches.



On warmer days, schools of black drum -- both slot and oversize -- will be found roaming the flats. They are particularly fond of the muddy flats found adjacent to channels and spoil islands. Depending on the water conditions, these fish can be targeted in a variety of ways. If the water is off-colored, live or dead shrimp on bottom or live or artificial shrimp under popping corks is the way to go.



However, when the water is clear, anglers can easily sight-cast to black drum. Schools are often spotted by their "mud stirs", but solo fish can also be spotted cruising and, at times, tailing just like redfish. When sight-casting, live shrimp, jigs and DOA Shrimp all work well, as do a variety of flies such as Clouser Minnows in black.



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Rigs — Texas, Carolina and Alabama

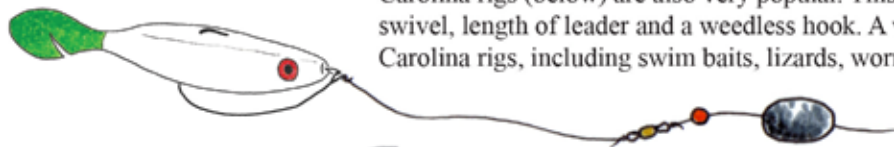


It is well known that various soft-plastic artificial lures can be very effective on largemouth bass. However, once one really begins to shop for soft-plastics, they are often overwhelmed with the dizzying array of baits, colors, sizes, etc that are on the market. Additionally, so many of these soft-plastic lures can be rigged in a number of ways and fished by various methods. Here are but a few of the more popular type of soft-plastic bass lures and methods to rig them.

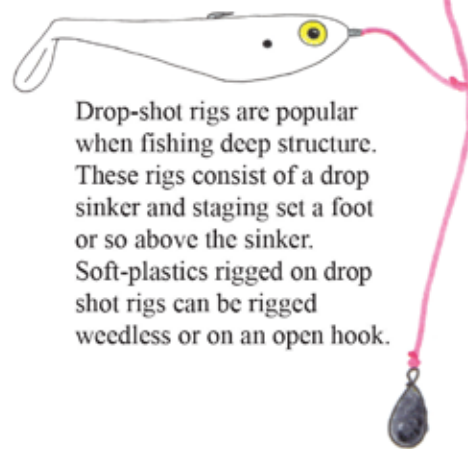
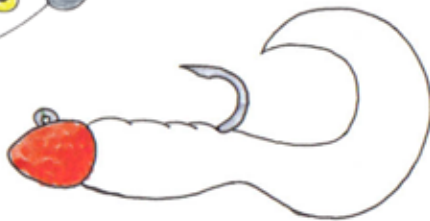
Texas rigged worms and lizards are at top of the soft-plastic totem pole in Texas. A Texas rig consists of a weedless hook and bullet weight, although a glass or plastic bead is sometimes placed between the hook and weight. The soft-plastic is then rigged weedless.



Carolina rigs (below) are also very popular. This rigs consist of an egg sinker, bead, barrel swivel, length of leader and a weedless hook. A wide variety of soft-plastics can be used on Carolina rigs, including swim baits, lizards, worms and jerkbaits.



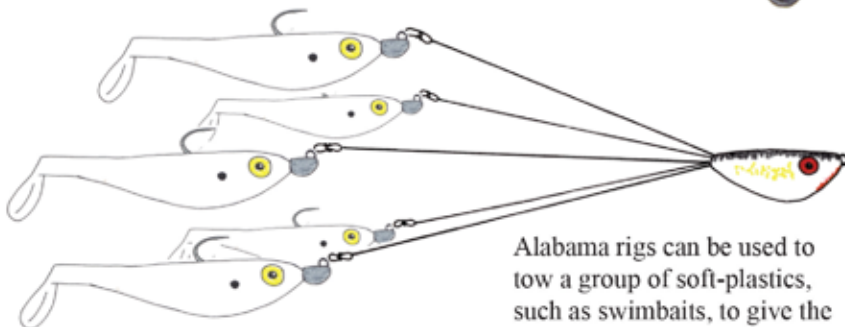
A variety of soft-plastics, including C-tails (right) and hollow body swimbaits (above), can simply be rigged on a jig head.



Drop-shot rigs are popular when fishing deep structure. These rigs consist of a drop sinker and staging set a foot or so above the sinker. Soft-plastics rigged on drop shot rigs can be rigged weedless or on an open hook.



Baits such as artificial frogs (above) and soft-plastic jerkbaits (below) can effectively be used on or near the surface by rigging them with just a wide-gap weedless hook and no weight.



Alabama rigs can be used to tow a group of soft-plastics, such as swimbaits, to give the impression of a school of baitfish.

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New Start — Air & Rimfire



January 1 may be been the start of a New Year but February provides an opportunity to start a new hunter down a lifetime road of outdoors adventures and fun. February is when most traditional fall hunting seasons ends so there is less pressure on mentors to focus on their own hunting success. In fact it is mentors that hold the prospects of hunting continuing to be the time honored tradition so many cherish for future generations.

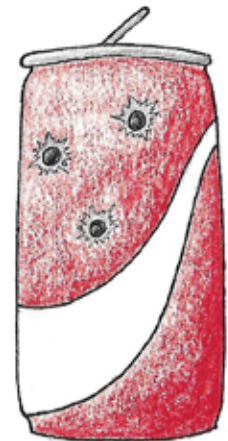
With the change in life-styles, mentoring is the path Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is relying upon to provide the hands on guidance and oversight for future hunters. Classroom and on-line instruction will still provide an understanding of the rules and regulations, but individual mentoring from family and friends are now cast as the primary shooting instructor in the major of cases.

In the beginning, for most shooters, there is an air rifle of some description. It may be the legendary Daisy Red Rider or something with a bit more punch like a break-open pellet rifle. Shooting air rifles is where shooters learn how to align the front and rear sights and “aim small” on a target.

Early success may come in the form of “tinking” a soda can or breaking clay targets. The fun with clay targets is once it is initially broken there are smaller pieces to target to further refine aiming, holding on target and refining shooting skills.

With a soda can the sound of a hit is unmistakable. And once knocked over it provides varying degrees of target angles to increase the challenge of repeat hits.

The object for the beginning shooter is to be successful making shots on target. Success breeds the desire to repeat that success time and again.



For hunters that have become proficient hitting targets, February and on through the spring offers opportunities for true hunting experiences. Squirrels and cottontails are how many older hunters got their start and has become a much overlooked and under utilized pastime.

Plus there are plenty of opportunities to pursue both game species. The fall squirrel season in 51 East Texas counties closes on February 24. The spring season in those same counties is open May 1-31. In other parts of Texas, in 157 counties, there is no closed season or bag limit.

When it comes to rabbits the season is open statewide in all 254 counties. There is no bag limit on rabbit. The great thing about both small game species is they are tasty to eat and provide the first sense of hunter's pride of putting meat on the table.

Squirrels and rabbits can be hunted with higher power pellet rifles, however most hunters move up to .22 rimfire rifles. Either with an open sight or low power fixed scope the crack of a .22 is a special sound that will remain with the hunter the rest of his or her life.

Places to hunt both include National Forest lands, Corp of Engineer property around some reservoirs and on some property accessible with the \$48 Annual Hunting permit.



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Outdoor Calendar

THROUGH FEBRUARY 3, 2019,

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 10, 2019,

Wilson's Snipe (Common snipe or Jacksnipe) season, **Statewide (254 counties)**. For more information consult the TPWD Outdoor Annual, website, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 24, 2019,

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 24, 2019,

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

THROUGH FEBRUARY 24, 2019,

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

THROUGH FEBRUARY 24, 2019,

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

THROUGH FEBRUARY 24, 2019,

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

THROUGH MARCH 17,

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

THROUGH AUGUST 31, 2019

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

THROUGH AUGUST 31, 2019

Squirrel Year-Round Season, **(open counties with no bag limit)**. For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

FEBRUARY 1-3 & 7-10,

Dallas Fort Worth Boat Expo, Market Hall, **Dallas**. For more information visit www.dallasboatexpo.com or call (469) 500-6155.

FEBRUARY 2,

Mexia Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, **Mexia**. For more information and reservations call (903) 388-5471 or (254) 562-7117.

FEBRUARY 2,

Gillespie County Chapter Mule Deer

Foundation fundraising banquet, **Fredericksburg**. For more information and reservations call (816) 289-9299.

FEBRUARY 2,

Llano Estacado Upland Game Bird Chapter National Wild Turkey fundraising banquet, **Muleshoe**. For more information and reservations call (806) 787-9217.

FEBRUARY 2,

Austin Chapter Safari Club International – Hunter's Heritage fundraising banquet, **Dripping Springs**. For more information visit www.sciaustin.org.

FEBRUARY 4 – MARCH 17,

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

FEBRUARY 7,

Tomball Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, **Tomball**. For more information and reservations call (281) 851 – 9776 or (281) 799 – 1829.

FEBRUARY 8,

Rusk County Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, **Henderson**. For more information and reservations call (903) 738-9897 or (903) 657-5790.

FEBRUARY 8,

Victoria Chapter Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Big Game banquet, **Victoria**. For more information and reservations call (361) 649-4751.

FEBRUARY 8 - 10,

All Valley Boat Show, McAllen Convention Center, **McAllen**. For more information visit www.allvalleyboatshow.com, or call (866) 639-8940.

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FEBRUARY 9,

Big Thicket Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, [Cleveland](#). For more information and reservations call (281) 593-9118 or (281) 432-7922.

FEBRUARY 9,

AWOL Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraising banquet, [Nacogdoches](#). For more information and reservations call (936) 552-1942.

FEBRUARY 9,

West Texas Chapter Mule Deer Foundation fundraising banquet, [Hersford](#). For more information and reservations call (620) 334-9026.

FEBRUARY 9,

Houston Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraising banquet, Houston. For more information and reservations call (281) 543-0185.

FEBRUARY 9,

El Paso Chapter Safari Club International – 16th Annual Safari Night Gala, Auction & Banquet, [El Paso](#). For more information and reservations visit www.scielpaso.org or call (915) 584-9300.

FEBRUARY 15,

Sulphur Springs Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, [Hopkins](#). For more information and reservations call (903) 521-4595 or (903) 243-7099

FEBRUARY 15,

Whitehouse Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, [Bullard](#). For more information and reservations call (903) 245-9088 or (903) 539 – 8606.

FEBRUARY 16,

Red River Valley Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, [Gainesville](#). For more information and reservations call (940) 736 - 3885 or (940) 390 - 0081.

FEBRUARY 19,

Houston County (Crockett) Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, [Crockett](#). For more information and reservations call (936) 544-2500

or (936) 54 -9826.

FEBRUARY 21 - 24,

Austin RV Show, Austin Convention Center, [Austin](#). For show hours and more information visit www.austin-rvexpo.com, or call (512) 481-1777.

FEBRUARY 21-24,

Whooping Crane Festival, [Port Aransas](#). The festival is open to birders, photographers, families, and anyone who loves the outdoors and nature-related activities. On line registration is available through 5:00 p.m. on Feb. 18 at www.whooping-cranefestival.org. Onsite registration will open on February 21 at 10:00 a.m. at the Port Aransas Civic Center and run daily through the festival.

FEBRUARY 21,

Brazos Longbeard Chapter National Wild Turkey Federation fundraising banquet, [Richmond](#). For more information and reservations call (512) 966-9539.

FEBRUARY 22,

Pioneer Chapter of Northeast Texas

National Wild Turkey Federation fundraising banquet, [Clarksville](#). For more information and reservations call (903) 219-1874.

FEBRUARY 23,

Northwest Prairie Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, [Cypress](#). For more information and reservations call (713) 594-5359.

FEBRUARY 23,

Weatherford Chapter Mule Deer Foundation fundraising banquet, [Weatherford](#). For more information and reservations call (817) 565-7121.

FEBRUARY 23,

Texas Hill Country Chapter Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Big Game banquet, [Georgetown](#). For more information and reservations call (512) 771-6190.

FEBRUARY 26,

Gilmer Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraising banquet, [Gilmer](#). For more information and reservations call (903) 576-6680 or (903) 843-2555. 🌟



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Tide Tables

FEBRUARY 2019

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					L8:09A -0.7 H4:42P 1.0 1	L8:45A -0.7 H5:10P 1.0 L10:04P 0.8 2
H12:55A 0.9 L9:19A -0.6 H5:33P 0.9 L9:46P 0.8 3	H1:39A 0.9 L9:50A -0.6 H5:54P 0.9 L9:51P 0.7 4	H2:22A 0.9 L10:20A -0.5 H6:16P 0.8 L10:20P 0.7 5	H3:05A 0.8 L10:49A -0.4 H6:39P 0.8 L11:02P 0.6 6	H3:52A 0.8 L11:19A -0.3 H7:03P 0.8 L11:50P 0.5 7	H4:50A 0.7 L11:50A -0.2 H7:25P 0.8 8	L12:42A 0.4 H6:07A 0.6 L12:23P 0.0 H7:44P 0.7 9
H7:49A 0.6 L12:59P 0.2 H7:56P 0.7 10	L2:28A 0.1 H9:45A 0.6 L1:43P 0.4 H7:56P 0.7 11	L3:21A -0.1 H11:37A 0.7 L2:45P 0.5 H7:35P 0.7 12	L4:16A -0.3 H1:07P 0.9 13	L5:13A -0.5 H2:10P 1.0 14	L6:09A -0.6 H2:58P 1.1 15	L7:06A -0.8 H3:40P 1.2 L8:08P 0.9 H11:25P 1.0 16
L8:01A -0.8 H4:18P 1.2 L8:33P 0.9 17	H12:49A 1.1 L8:56A -0.8 H4:54P 1.1 L9:10P 0.8 18	H2:04A 1.2 L9:49A -0.7 H5:26P 1.0 L9:56P 0.8 19	H3:17A 1.1 L10:41A -0.6 H5:56P 1.0 L10:48P 0.5 20	H4:32A 1.1 L11:33A -0.3 H6:24P 0.9 L11:45P 0.3 21	H5:53A 1.0 L12:26P 0.9 H6:51P 0.9 22	L12:46A 0.1 H7:23A 1.0 L1:23P 0.3 H7:16P 0.8 23
L1:50A 0.0 H9:02A 0.9 L2:37P 0.6 H7:40P 0.8 24	L2:57A -0.2 H10:52A 1.0 L1:43P 0.7 H7:59P 0.8 25	L4:04A -0.3 H12:41P 1.1 26	L5:09A -0.3 H2:05P 1.1 27	L6:10A -0.3 H3:02P 1.2 28		

MARCH 2019

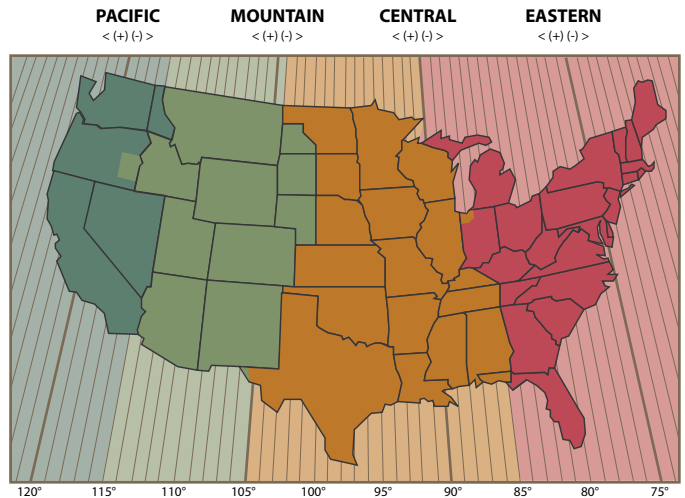
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					L7:03A -0.3 H3:42P 1.1 1	L7:50A -0.3 H4:10P 1.1 L9:29P 0.9 2
H12:20A 1.0 L8:30A -0.3 H4:27P 0.9 L9:18P 0.9 3	H1:15A 1.0 L9:04A -0.2 H4:41P 1.0 L9:16P 0.8 4	H2:06A 1.0 L9:3A -0.1 H5:46P 1.0 L9:34P 0.7 5	H2:56A 1.0 L10:03A -0.1 H5:12P 1.0 L10:04P 0.6 6	H3:48A 1.0 L10:31A 0.1 H5:29P 1.0 L10:39P 0.5 7	H4:43A 1.0 L11:01A 0.2 H5:46P 1.0 L11:16P 0.4 8	H5:44A 1.0 L11:33A 0.4 H5:58P 0.9 L11:55P 0.3 9

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

US TIME ZONES



FEBRUARY 2019

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

MARCH 2019

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
31					1	2
10:20A - 3:20P					8:45A - 1:45P	9:20A - 2:20P
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10:00A - 3:00P	10:40A - 3:40P	11:20A - 4:20P	12:30P - 5:30P	1:20P - 6:20P	2:15P - 7:15P	3:05P - 8:05P

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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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