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(see page 75, #1 for more information)

Reading A Dove Field

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JOURNAL



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September 2018

For Hunters . . .

- 24 **Passing the Torch-** *September is an opportune time to introduce kids with a genuine desire to hunt to the exciting sport.*
—Bob Zaiglin
- 14 **Just Shooting**
—Kerry O'Day
My AR-15 Rifle-Can It Shoot Better?
- 34 **Early Teal Tactics and Options-**
Waterfowl hunters enjoy the opportunity to knock the dust off their skills, sling some steel, and prepare for the upcoming regular season.
—Nate Skinner
- 46 **Just Hunting**
—Tom Claycomb III
Choosing The Proper Ammo For Your Rifle
- 56 **Reading A Dove Field-** *In order to be successful knowledge of the quarry is paramount.*
—Bill L. Olson



- 62 **Guns N Stuff**
—Harold Gunn
Shotguns, Shells, and Stuff for Dove Season
- 70 **Field Tips & Techniques**
— Bill L. Olson & Danno Wise
Hunt and Prepare



For Anglers . . .

Freshwater

- 16 **Bassology**
—Matt Williams
Rayburn is One Bad Dude
- 22 **Just Fishing**
—Brian Hughes
Drop Me A Line



- 52 **Flipped Out On Punchin'?** *Top Pro's Pointers for gear selection and techniques for flipping or punching.*
—Matt Williams

Lake Roundups — Pros Forecasts

- 28 Central – John Jefferson
38 East – Matt Williams
40 North – Brian Hughes
64 South – Danno Wise
65 West – TOJ Staff
65 High Plains – TOJ Staff
- 68 **Tackle Tips & Techniques**
—Danno Wise
Fall Bass On Top

Saltwater

- 10 **Salty September Surprises-** *As temperatures being to cool off, the coastal fishing only gets hotter.*
—Robert Sloan
- 18 **Seeing Red This Fall-** *September provides anglers with a variety of options for targeting slot and oversized red drum.*
—Nate Skinner
- 42 **Late Summer Laguna Surprise-** *Break away from other activities and indulge in what awaits on the water.*
—Danno Wise



CoastWatch – Danno Wise

- 30 Lower Forecast
31 Middle Forecast
48 Upper Forecast
50 Louisiana Forecast

60 Saltwater Journal

- Mark Sosin
The Killer Instinct

66 Tackle Tips & Techniques

- Danno Wise
Sightcasting to Tails

For Everyone . . .

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

On the Cover . . .

"Mourning Watch"

For more information on "Mourning Watch" and other fine works of art by Roberta "Roby" Baer, PSA, visit www.robys.com/home.html.

Editor's Insight | Bill L. Olson



Back To School – A Time To Teach

As this issue is completed I have read, reviewed and edited all of the stories written by TOJ's Team of outdoor professionals. When it comes to fishing a common theme runs through the features, columns and forecasts — school is back in session so there is less pressure on the water.

The same can be said about the early hunting seasons. Beyond the opening weekend of dove or later in the month teal and early Canada goose season, schoolwork as well as school related activities (football) will garner much of a family's attention. That also means there is less pressure on hunting grounds, private as well as public, during weekdays.

Back to school provides an opportunity for outdoor enthusiasts to teach and pass on to the next generation of hunters and anglers. This is true for children of most any age, but especially true for kids seven to 11 years of age or so.

This is a time when youngsters are the most impressionable and still want to participate in activities with their parents and family. Far too soon other "distractions" will infringe on those times together and this includes afield or on the water.

When it comes to hunting or fishing hopefully they have been already exposed to some degree with the excitement and rewards of these two outdoor traditions. Hopefully the child wants to become a more active participant rather than just a spectator.

Success breeds success when it comes to shooting and a shotgun is a good place to start. Not at flying birds but stationary targets like tin cans or propped up clay targets. Nothing builds enthusiasm and a feeling of accomplishment like hitting a can with a shot load or "smoking" a clay target. Using a youth model 20 gauge semi-automatic shotgun loaded with a single shot shell will encourage the young shooter to concentrate on making a good first shot.

When it comes time to head to the field the focus should be solely on the young shooter. The mentor forgoes his or her own shooting to keep things safe while instilling all of the tenants of gun safety. Once again a single shell should be loaded and the opportunity to shoot should wait until a good up close bird is available.

On the fishing side similar preparation and practice opportunities are available. Young anglers should begin with a "push-button," closed-face spinning reel and a casting plug. Baitcasting or open faced spinning tackle can wait for a later time.

Old fashion hula-hoops or other similar rings can be placed in the parking lot or open field at different distances as targets. This is a great way for youngster to learn how to cast and cast to a target. Making it a game makes learning fun.

Once on the water fish live bait under a popping cork or bobber. If the action does not occur in 10-15 minutes try relocating. Explaining why you are relocating furthers the learning experience.

When a fish is caught, even if undersized, make it a true trophy with photos and praise that instills that feeling of accomplishment. If a fish is undersized and needs to be released follow the regulations as an ethical and conservation lesson is also passed on.

School has begun, but the opportunity to learn about the outdoors is also in session. This month begins the best time of year for a variety of outdoor lessons.

Taking the time to pass on these skills and even learn some new ones together will result in rewards for student and mentor alike.

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

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Call 1-800-222-4TOJ (4865); In Houston, 713/957-3997 to charge your subscription by phone. Subscription prices: one year \$18.95, two years \$29.95, three years \$39.95. Mail inquiries/changes of address to:

TEXAS OUTDOORS Journal

1706 West Sam Houston Parkway North
Houston, Texas 77043

TEXAS OUTDOORS Journal (ISSN 1082-5940) is a publication of Texas Outdoors Journal, Inc. Editorial and advertising offices are located at 1706 West Sam Houston Parkway North, Houston TX 77043. Phone (713) 957-3997. Fax (713) 957-3996.

E-MAIL ADDRESS: toj@airmail.net

TOJ Online: www.texasoutdoorsjournal.com

TEXAS OUTDOORS Journal is published monthly. Photographs and manuscripts for publication consideration are welcomed, but the publisher assumes no responsibility for such material while in transit or in the office of the publication.

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Volume 27, Number 9

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TOJ Notebook

NRA Hunter Education Online Course Now Available in Texas

The National Rifle Association's award-winning NRA Hunter Education online course is now available in the State of Texas, the latest addition as NRA works to make the course available to hunters in all 50 states.

Texas joins Connecticut, Florida and Oregon as states that accept NRA Hunter Education as a prerequisite for hunting licensure. The NRA expects to introduce the online course in Oklahoma and New Mexico by early fall of 2018.

Designed and provided by the organization that built the first-ever hunter education program in the United States in 1949, the NRA Hunter Education online course offers a fresh and fully comprehensive approach to hunter education. The 15-chapter, online sequence features attention-grabbing videos, eye-catching graphics

and diagrams, interactive modules, audio recordings and dozens of action photos presented in appealing, easy-to-access components that provide the best method for teaching future hunters lessons they will remember for the rest of their lives.

As a testament to the innovation and impact of this groundbreaking new program, NRA Hunter Education recently earned seven "Telly" Awards and two Horizon Interactive Awards in recognition of excellence in digital production, animation, and interactive media.

All of this instruction is available at students' fingertips, whenever and wherever they are able to complete it. Removing the sometimes prohibitive cost barrier of traditional courses, the NRA Online Hunter Education course is available completely free of charge, encouraging new hunters to take the first

step and making it easier for seasoned hunters to revisit the material. To take the NRA Hunter Education online course or learn more, visit NRAH.org. **T★J**

RMEF, Sportsmen's Alliance File Brief in Support of Yellowstone Grizzly Management

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation filed a joint summary judgement brief supporting a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decision to remove federal protections from the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem grizzly bear population.

"We stand alongside the Sportsmen's Alliance and our fellow conservation organizations in supporting federal scientists and wildlife biologists who declared the grizzly population fully recovered,"

Cover Art

This month TOJ is proud to introduce the art of nationally recognized artist Roberta "Roby" Baer, PSA. This talented and accomplished artist has been recognized as Artist of the Year by Quail Unlimited as well as Dove Sportsman's Society plus is a recent winner for the 2015-2016 California Upland Game Stamp. The PSA she carries at the end of her name is due to her recent election to "Signature Status" by Pastel Society of America.

This month's cover art is entitled "Mourning Watch," a clever and colorful composition of two white-winged dove watching from stalks of sunflower seeds while a mourning dove gets a drink. This is certainly most appropriate painting for the month in which hunting seasons reopen in Texas on September 1.

For more information on "Mourning Watch" and other fine works of art by Roberta "Roby" Baer, PSA, visit www.robys.com/home.html, email at 4baers@c-zone.net or call (530) 223-1231. **T★J**



"Mourning Watch"



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said Kyle Weaver, RMEF president and CEO. “The next step is keeping grizzly management under the umbrella of state agencies that manage all wildlife in accordance with the North American Wildlife Conservation Model, which uses hunting as a management tool.”

“Despite the emotional rhetoric of the animal rights crowd, the time has come to return this population of bears to state management,” said Evan Heusinkveld, Sportsmen’s Alliance president and CEO. “The truth is, this is a historic moment for the species and the Endangered Species Act as a whole. Returning the Yellowstone area population of bears to state management should be a monumental achievement widely celebrated as a conservation success story.”

Numbering more than 700, the Yellowstone grizzly population meets all delisting criteria. These factors include not only the number and distribution of bears throughout the ecosystem, but also the quantity and quality of the habitat available and the states’ commitments to manage the population in a manner that maintains its healthy and secure status.

RMEF and its partners helped permanently protect more than 169,000 acres of vital wildlife habitat valued at more than \$131 million in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Additionally, RMEF also directly contributed more than \$3.1 million and leveraged an additional \$17.5 million to help enhance wildlife habitat on more than 426,000 acres in the GYE. RMEF also contributed more than \$1 million in funding and leveraged an additional \$10 million from conservation partners to carry out 118 GYE wildlife management and wildlife research projects.

The federal judge laid out a schedule that includes several more filing deadlines as well as a hearing in late August. He has stated he will make a ruling before the hunting season begins in September. **T&J**

2018 - 2019 Federal Duck Stamp

Bob Hautman, an artist from Delano, Minnesota, is the winner of the 2017 Federal Duck Stamp Art Contest. The announcement was made September 18, 2018 by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Principal Deputy Director Greg Sheehan,

at the annual art contest held at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point at the Noel Fine Arts Center.



PHOTO COURTESY U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

2018-2019 Federal Duck Stamp by Robert Hautman.

Hautman’s acrylic painting of a pair of mallards has been made into the 2018-2019 Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, or Duck Stamp, which went on sale in late June 2018. The Service produces the Federal Duck Stamp, which sells for \$25 and raises nearly \$40 million each year to provide critical funds to conserve and protect wetland habitats in the National Wildlife Refuge System for the benefit of wildlife and the enjoyment of people.

This is Hautman’s third Federal Duck Stamp Contest win. His art previously appeared on the 1997-1998 and 2001-2002 Federal Duck Stamps.

Hautman’s brothers, Jim and Joe, are also multiple Duck Stamp artists, having each won the contest five times.

Of 215 entries in this year’s competition, 12 entries made it to the final round of judging today. Eligible species for this year’s Federal Duck Stamp Contest were the mallard, gadwall, cinnamon teal, blue-winged teal and harlequin duck.

Waterfowl hunters age 16 and older are required to purchase and carry the current Federal Duck Stamp. Many non-hunters, including birdwatchers, conservationists, stamp collectors and others also purchase the stamp in support of habitat conservation. Additionally, a current Federal Duck Stamp can be used for free admission to any national wildlife refuge that charges an entry fee.

Ninety-eight percent of the proceeds from sales of the Federal Duck Stamp go to the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, which supports the protection of

migratory bird habitat within the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The 2018 Federal Duck Stamp Contest will be held Sept. 14-15, 2018 at Springs Preserve in Las Vegas. **T&J**

Texas Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame Nominations Accepted Through Nov. 1

The Texas Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame committee is seeking nominations for next year’s hall of fame winners through Nov. 1, 2018.

“Since 1997, the Texas Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame has recognized 34 outstanding individuals and organizations for their contributions to Texas fishing,” said Dan Kessler, TFF Hall of Fame Committee Chair. “There are undoubtedly many, many more who deserve recognition for their efforts. Please help raise their profile by nominating them for the Texas Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame.”

The nominees will be evaluated by the 10 members of the Texas Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame committee made up of anglers, industry professionals and organizations in Texas freshwater fishing. Inductees will be chosen based on the following criteria: ethics, leadership and commitment, unselfish contributions to the sport, scope of impact on freshwater fishing and fishing/fisheries management expertise and impact.

The winners will be announced in Spring 2019 and will be presented with their awards in a special ceremony during Toyota Bassmaster Texas Fest, a Bassmaster Elite Series tournament held May 2-6, 2019.

The most recent inductees to the Texas Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame include Shannon Tompkins and Lake Fork Sportsman’s Association in 2018; and Bobby Whiteside and Gulf States Toyota in 2017.

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

Nomination forms and instructions are available online or by calling (903) 676-2277. **T&J**

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SALTY SEPTEMBER SURPRISES

As temperatures begin to cool, the coastal fishing only gets hotter.

Story and Photography by Robert Sloan

Sweet September — The month when all things hunting and fishing begin to change. We get our first cool fronts after many weeks of sweltering heat, plus we get out the shotguns, load up and go after doves and teal.

Then there are birds to contend with on the bays. As the migration of shad and shrimp move into the open waters of our coastal estuaries trout and reds go on a feeding frenzy and the gulls will lead opportunistic fishermen to the action. It's all good right about now. Just make sure you've got a new hunting and fishing license and you are good to go.

With such a buffet of options where does one start?

"That's easy," says guide Dodd Coffey, who runs fishing charters out of Port O'Connor. "Hit the surf for some of the best trout fishing of the year. We have a lot of calm days during September. After the cool fronts begin moving in the surf is guaranteed to go flat and the tide will be clean and green to the beach."

The unique thing about fishing the surf is that we have the opportunity to catch bigger trout than normal. I'm talking about solid fish in the three to five pound class. One of the best ways to catch them is with topwater plugs early, then switch over to soft plastics as the sun heats things up.

"I like to fish the surf with topwater

plugs and slow sinking Mirrolures," says Matagorda based guide Charlie Paradoski. "I'll be using a She Dog or Super Spook at daylight. As the topwater bite slows down I'll switch over to a Catch 2000 or a Catch 5. Those are slow sinking lures that look a lot like mullet. Right about now the surf run trout are feeding on both shrimp and mullet. The heavier trout will usually be caught on suspending lures. Some of the better colors are pink/silver/chartreuse, black/gold and red/gold/yellow. With the topwater lures I like pink/silver, black/gold/orange and bone."

Probably the most noticeable September transition is the action under the birds. Three of the very best bays for catching



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

trout under the birds are Sabine Lake, East Galveston and East Matagorda. Without a doubt Sabine Lake is the hands down headliner for taking both reds and trout under the birds.

"It's some of the best fishing of the year says veteran guide Randy Foreman on Sabine Lake.

"It all starts happening during the first of September and runs all the way into the first of November," he says. "We'll be catching the small trout at first, then as more shrimp and shad begin moving into the lake we'll be catching bigger trout and lots of reds."

Guide Jerry Norris says that during September Sabine Lake is one of the best



As the migration of shad and shrimp move into the open waters of coastal estuaries trout and reds go on a feeding frenzy with the gulls leading opportunistic fishermen to the action.

places to be fishing.

"We've got a little bit of everything going on," he says. "We can chase the birds on the lake, fish the pass for flounder, work the jetties, hit the surf and even find numbers of trout around the rigs east and west of the jetties. This is the month when the flounder run gets going. Some of the best action will be in the bayous feeding into the lake. Or you can find them in Sabine Pass off points and along bulk heads."

On East Galveston Bay you'll find huge flocks of gulls working the baitfish

that are pushed to the surface by hungry schools of feeding trout.

"Some of the better fish will be under smaller groups of birds," says East Galveston Bay guide Jim West. "That will be on the upper end of the bay during the first couple of weeks of September. October is probably the best month. But by the middle of September, when we've had a couple of cool fronts move through, we'll have birds working all over the bay. The heavier trout will be under small flocks of gulls. A pair of binoculars is one of the best things you can take out on the water



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Inshore is not the only place to get bowled up. State waters out of Port Mansfield is teeming with red snapper, ling, kingfish and other pelagic species.



After the first few cool fronts of fall anglers should head to the surf where thick-shouldered speckled trout await.

when chasing the birds. On weekends there will be lots of boats on the water and the first one to pull up on a flock of gulls will usually get the most bites. Binoculars will give you a little jump start.”

West says that one of the best lures you can use on East Galveston Bay is a soft plastic. He likes to rig them on 1/4-ounce jig heads for two reasons. One is casting distance, the other is a faster fall.

“It’s always nice to be able to make a long cast,” he says. “And a fast-falling jig will get past the smaller trout feeding on the surface. Many of the larger trout will be feeding on or near bottom. Usually early and late in the day the topwater bite will be good under the birds. That’s when I’ll be using a MirrOlure She Dog in bone and orange. The black/gold/orange is also a good color combination. With the soft plastics I think just about any color will get some bites. But red/white is good and so is chartreuse, bone and root beer.”

Over on East Matagorda Bay the action under the birds will crank up about the middle of September and keep going through October. Moving from one flock of gulls to another is a good way to box plenty of fish. If the birds are not working you might consider making drifts wherever you see lots of jumping mullet and slicks.

Further south on the Texas coast fishing on the Lower Laguna Madre flats

out of Port Mansfield will be picking up as September cool fronts begin moving through. Look for some of the best action to be along the ranch shorelines on topwater lures and swim baits. One of the best lures you can use on the flats from Port O’Connor to Port Isabel is a 1/8-ounce weedless gold spoon.

Something else to keep in mind will be the cast and blast trips that Mike Sutton will be having out of his Get Away Lodge in Port Mansfield. I got in on one of those last September and we had a blast. Fishing



With cooler temperatures arriving in September look for the topwater bite along shallow shorelines to last longer in the morning and resume earlier in the afternoon.

in the morning for reds and trout, a quick nap, then off to the grain fields about 10 miles down the road for some fantastic white wing hunts.

September is also a great month to find tarpon along the jetties from Port O’Connor to Port Isabel. This is mostly sight casting to schools of tarpon in the 10 to 100-pound class. They can be caught on flies, soft plastics and live baits. The most dependable action is usually towards the end of the jetties where rolling tarpon can be found. More than one trout fisherman has been surprised to set the hook and have a tarpon come flying out of the water. Tarpon especially like free-lined shrimp. You can also run the surf and look for schooling tarpon.

Two things to keep in mind as we transition out of summer are flounder and offshore fishing.

The annual flounder run won’t really pick up too much steam until we get a pretty good cold front in October. But, flounder can be caught during the last two weeks of September as they stage for their migration to the Gulf. Some of the best areas will be at the mouths of bayous feeding into the bays. An outgoing tide will deliver flounder. They will set up at the mouth of a drain and feed on shrimp, shad and finger mullet. Soft plastic jigs are an excellent option. The scented Z-Man jigs are very good. They are tough and I’ve used them to catch a number of

flounder at the mouths of drains in about four to six feet of water.

Offshore fishing can get really good during September. This is when some of the heaviest ling of the summer are caught around the rigs and buoys along ship channels. One of the all-time best lures for taking a ling is a one-ounce silver spoon tipped with a whole Spanish sardine. Put that in front of a cruising ling and hang on.

One of the best places for a September run offshore is out of Port Mansfield. You can even do an offshore cast and blast out of Getaway Lodge. Bamm Bamm Charters is right next door to the lodge. That's where you can hook up with Capt. Chad Kinney and make a quick run for snapper, wahoo, dorado and ling on his 46-foot Bertram. You can be back at the lodge with plenty of time to get ready for an afternoon dove hunt.

If you're not into the cast and blast scene you might consider making a run offshore in the morning, then turning around and head out for trout and reds that evening.



The author suggests that the very best lure to fish grass flats is a weedless gold spoon.

The rocks that can be fished inside of state waters out of Port Mansfield and Port Aransas hold red snapper year round. They are fun to fish, and also attract bonus fish such as dorado and kings. The best way to fish the rocks is to anchor so that you can fish dead bait or lures directly over the structure.

One of the best things about fishing in September and October is that the number of boats and fishermen will be much fewer than what you'll encounter during the summer months. And once things begin to cool off, the fishing will continue to get better until we have our first hard cold front in November. ★★



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My AR-15 Rifle - Can It Shoot Better?

We were sitting outside enjoying the spring evening and a couple of adult beverages when one of my shooting buddies said to me. "So, what do you think of all this assault weapon talk and what is a real assault weapon?" You always write about how to make my bolt action rifle more accurate, but how about an AR. How can I make it shoot like your custom bolt action rifles?

Well those are good questions. However, first I don't believe there is such a thing as an assault rifle in the recreational shooting or hunting world. Nearly all rifles we use now were a weapon of war or a copy of a weapon used in war. The Germans did have a short barreled semi-auto 9 mm that they called an assault rifle but that is the only one I have ever heard about.

The first hunting rifles we used were muzzleloaders, the same as the ones used in the Revolutionary War. The trap door Springfield rifle that was used in the Civil War and the Indian wars became great game hunting rifles. The Winchester Model 92 and 94's were used to fight Indians and Mexican raiders in the late 1890's.

After WWII German Mausers were converted by the thousands into great quality hunting rifles. Many of the 98 Mausers were rechambered to 8mm -06. Most had the wood stocks made and scopes mounted on the receiver to make them easy to carry and better shooting rifles. I build several custom rifles every year using WWII 98 Mauser actions.

My cousin has used a WWII M1 Garand for hunting big game ever since the early 50s. The Browning BAR has become a great semi- auto hunting rifle. So all of the rifles we use today, which are called hunting rifles were at one time a military rifle or their origins came from what were once military arms. In the hands of soldiers, those firearms were used to assault the beaches and towns occupied by the enemy.

The modern day AR-15's are some of the best hunting rifles around. If you pick the right caliber there is nothing you cannot hunt when using an AR-15. The 6.5 Grendel makes a great deer hunting

rifle and the 500 Beowulf can be used on big bear or moose.

When it comes to making an AR more accurate there are lots of things that can be done. I know that we are doing everything possible to build one of the most accurate AR rifles on the market, but how can I teach a shooter how to make their rifle more accurate?

After a few minutes of pondering the question, I said, "It is pretty much the same. Making an AR-15 more accurate takes many of the same things as it takes to make a bolt action rifle more accurate."

First, let's work on you and the trigger pull. If you have to think about pulling the trigger on a rifle then you are not thinking about where the cross hairs are. A trigger should almost startle you when you pull it. I like a trigger that is light and creep free.

Now it is harder to make a trigger light on a semi-auto rifle than it is on a bolt action rifle. First, it has to be safe and legal; if it goes off more than once with a single pull of the trigger you have a problem. You can put a spring kit inside your trigger. This will lighten the pull, but will not do anything for the creep or over-travel. I have found the best thing to

do is to replace the trigger with a custom made one.

There are several good custom triggers on the market which will make you a better AR shooter. My three favorite triggers are the Jard, Geisel, and the Timney. The Timney is a very easy trigger to install. Just remove your old trigger and drop in the new trigger and you will have a nice 3 ½ pound trigger pull. Both the Jard and the Geisel triggers can be set lighter but require much more work. If you want a 2 pound trigger you need to use the Jard.

Now you can't bed and float an AR-15, but you certainly can tighten up the action and free float the barrel. Anytime you have something hanging on a barrel you will lose accuracy. If you want a more accurate AR, remove the sights from the barrel and have a free floating handguard installed.

There are many different free float handguards on the market. I like the Yankee Hill or the DPMS handguards. Both are free floating and easy to install. The Yankee Hill is a four rail unit and you can hang all kinds of accessories on it.

Tightening up the action is easy. An accu-wedge is made for tightening up



Bob McKown sighting in an AR15 which is designed for hunting not assaulting a beachhead.

the slop between the lower and the upper receiver. If the upper and lower don't match well there will be vibration and miss alignment between the bolt and the barrel. Anytime you have miss alignment you will lose accuracy.

The next thing is to have a good scope and mounts installed to the right height. There are many scope mounts on the market which are not worth a darn. And most shooters will mount the scope either too low or way too high. Correct mounts are not going to be found at your local big box discount store.

The best one is the Leupold MK 4 extra high rings. I also use the Burris extra high rings, they are almost as good as the MK4 rings at about half the price.

Quality ammunition is also a key factor for having an accurate AR. Ammunition comes in all different types and prices. If you are looking for accuracy then you need to shoot good ammunition.

Last weekend we were shooting some of the Federal 223 ammo loaded with the 50 grain Ballistic-Tip bullet. The ammo worked great and the accuracy was superb. We were able to shoot prairie dogs out as far as 450 yards with this ammo. Hornady also makes some really good ammo for blasting varmints or making small holes in a target. Now if you are a handloader then try the 52 grain Sierra Benchrest bullet, it is tough to beat.

By just doing these few inexpensive things, you can turn an AR-15 that shoots a two inch group into one that shoots a one inch group. However, if you want a real tack driver you will have to spend some big money.

A custom barrel is one of the best ways to make your AR a bench- rest quality rifle. Krieger, Pac-Nor, and Shilen all build custom barrels, and a good gunsmith can install one correctly for you.

You can also have a special rate of twist made in your barrel for special bullets if you want. My company offers a 1 in 12 twist, a 1 in 9 twist or a 1 in 7 twist. Remember, there is a difference between the 223 Remington chamber and a .556 military spec chamber.

If you are looking for accuracy then you will want a 223 Rem. chamber. If



This beautiful rifle was made from an old WWII Mauser 98 which would have been considered an assault rifle during World War II.

you have to be able to shoot the cheap military ammo then you will need a .556 chamber. A good compromise is the 223 Wilde chamber which will keep the accuracy of the 223 and still be able to shoot the mill spec ammo.

You can also buy better lower actions, one that is made from billet aluminum, or a good quality forged lower. You can also find better uppers which are precision built.

The last thing to do is to make the AR suits your needs and also make it special or unique for your taste. Special parts or

accessories and a custom finish can make your standard stock AR-15 unique, just the way you want it.

Add a laser sight or a night vision scope; a five-way adjustable stock or maybe a military green ceramic finish will be just what is desired to make an ordinary black gun stand out in a crowd. And I haven't even mentioned shooting a special caliber like 6mm x 45 or a 6.5 Grendel.

As you can well imagine, anything and everything can be made or done to an AR. You have endless options with AR's. 🌟🌟



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Rayburn is One Bad Dude

If bass lakes were ranked as prize fighters, Sam Rayburn would be the baddest dude in the land these days. That's the word from the folks at Bassmaster Magazine.

Earlier this summer, the popular magazine released its annual rankings of the Top 100 lakes in America for bass fishing. The list includes a Top 10 overall category and Top 25's in four geographic regions.

The heavyweight impoundment east of Lufkin claimed the No. 1 overall spot on the list, largely because it has been fishing in a league all of its own over the last year or so.

The lake's top notch fishing is best reflected by the enormous five-fish limits that have been brought to the scales by tournament anglers since last spring, including several filled by plump fish averaging upwards six to seven pounds apiece.

Two of heaviest tournament limits included a 37.80-pound bag weighed last March by Huntsville anglers Clint Wade and Stacy Spriggs and a monstrous 40.28-pound sack reeled in during early June by Albert Collins of Nacogdoches and Clayton Boulware of Zavalla.

"Although there were some pretty spectacular numbers being produced from other lakes this year, Rayburn was a clear No. 1," said James Hall, editor of Bassmaster Magazine. "While some lakes were boasting of a single 30-pound, five-bass limit being caught, Rayburn was spitting them out in rapid succession."

Another thing that grabbed the attention of pundits is 'Rayburn's knack for producing trophy fish. Hall cited several double-digit fish catches that were factors in its No. 1 ranking, including three 10 pounders that were reported on the same day in February, as well as a 12.05 pounder and a 13.06 pound

ShareLunker. Spriggs caught the bigger fish during a tournament in March.

"The lake is simply on fire right now," Hall said.

Impounded 53 years ago, 'Rayburn is no stranger to Bassmaster's Top 100 rankings. The reservoir ranked among the Top 5 from 2015-17. It has never ranked lower than 26th since the rankings started in 2012.

Opinion's vary as to how the big lake has managed to maintain its fairy tale fishery over the years despite its incredible popularity with fishing tournaments and weekend anglers.

Todd Driscoll thinks it boils down to several positive factors that continue to come together simultaneously. Driscoll is the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department fisheries biologist who oversees Sam Rayburn and several other well known bass lakes in the East Texas region, including Toledo Bend, which grabbed the No. 1 ranking two years running in 2015-16.

"The high quality fishery at Sam Rayburn can be primarily attributed to habitat conditions, forage abundance, routine Florida largemouth bass stockings, the size of the reservoir and voluntary catch-and-release," Driscoll said. "Year after year the lake has an abundance of favorable habitat (either aquatic vegetation at normal water levels, or flooded terrestrial vegetation when the lake is high) that provides cover for young bass to hide in and escape predation. This allows for high survival of young bass. It also promotes abundant and stable year classes of bass essentially every year, which results in high numbers of fish available for anglers to catch. Aquatic vegetation also provides good habitat for adult bass, positions them in more predictable places for anglers to target, which typically results in higher angler catch rates."

Driscoll adds that good habitat also results in lots of goodies for sport fish to eat so they can stay fat and sassy. Like most East Texas lakes, Sam Rayburn's



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forage base is comprised largely of threadfin shad, gizzard shad and sunfish.

“Ample forage equates to good growth rates of bass and increased numbers of trophy-sized fish,” Driscoll said. “In addition, Florida largemouth bass reach larger maximum size when compared to native northern largemouth bass. TPWD stocks at least 500,000 fingerlings in ‘Rayburn every year, which has increased the abundance of trophy-sized fish.”

Another key piece to the puzzle lies in the sheer size of reservoir. Spanning 114,500 surface acres, Sam Rayburn is the largest lake wholly within Texas boundaries. It provides the army of anglers who go there with plenty of room to fish while supporting a huge population of bass.

“When compared to much smaller lakes with similar fishing effort, the overall proportion of the bass population removed each year via fishing mortality (harvest, tourney-related mortality, hooking mortality, etc.) are lower at Sam Rayburn. Eventually, lower overall fishing mortality results in increased numbers of trophy bass.”

The biologist said conservative angler

attitudes also deserve some credit for the five-star fishery. “On average, 60-75 percent of the legal-sized bass caught at Sam Rayburn are immediately released,” Driscoll said.

While ‘Rayburn stole the show in Bassmaster’s rankings this year, it is not the only Texas lake listed among the cream of the crop. As earlier mentioned, the rankings are compiled by identifying the nation’s Top 10 lakes, then breaking down the Top 25 in four geographic regions. Hall says the regional breakdown gives anglers a better perspective of good lakes in their area.

Lake Falcon, which ranked No. 1 in 2012, nailed down the No. 10 spot in the overall rankings. Texas placed 12 lakes in Central region Top 25. Among them are



TTZ PHOTO

Sam Rayburn has been on fire with big bass and numbers alike for years now, but the big lake east of Lufkin has been fishing off the charts in 2018. Here, Clint Wade and Stacy Spriggs, both of Huntsville, display the massive 37.80 pound limit they reeled in last March.

No. 1, Sam Rayburn; No. 3, Falcon Lake; No. 4., Toledo Bend; No. 6, Lake Conroe; No. 7, Lake LBJ; No. 8, Lake O’ The Pines; No. 11, Lake Ray Roberts; No. 12, Lake Palestine; No. 17, Caddo Lake, No. 21, Belton Lake; No. 24, Lake Texoma; and No. 25, Lake Fork. **T★J**



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September provides anglers with a variety of options for targeting slot and oversized red drum.

Story and Photography by Nate Skinner

SEEING RED THIS FALL

The ninth month of the year can seemingly put Texas coastal anglers in somewhat of a limbo. It's a transitional month that can feel every bit like summer. On the other hand, September has the potential to cool off early. This is all dependent on the arrival and strength of the first fall frontal systems. Either way, these variables are enough to make any mindful angler's head spin.

Luckily there is some consistency that can be expected from one inshore species — red drum. From the marshes and flats along estuarine shorelines to the channels, passes and jetties that connect coastal bays with the Gulf of Mexico redfish can be found aggressively feeding almost anywhere. This is due to their biological life cycle, and it's a pattern that you can hang your hat on.

According to information from TPWD biologists, the red drum is a rapidly growing species and has been known to grow to 11 inches in length in its first year of life. A two year old fish is typically between 17 - 22 inches, weighing in at about three and a half pounds. A three year old red is could be as long as 24 inches and can weigh upwards of six to eight pounds.

Somewhere between three and four years of age, redfish reach sexual maturity and begin to take part in the annual spawning process that takes place from mid-August to mid-October. The spawn is often observed through a migration of adult red drum towards the Gulf where they gang up around channels, passes, jetties, and along the beach front.

The late Galveston based outdoor writer A.C. Becker Jr. noted that this migration is usually triggered by stormy, tropical driven weather from the Gulf that creates a large fluctuation in tides. It is often referred to as the bull red run.

What this means for anglers is pretty

simple. Redfish of all sizes are on the move and the locations they will congregate in can be fairly predictable when the current conditions are considered.

The lower Texas coast, coastal bend, upper Texas coast, and southwest Louisiana all boast premier hot spots for anglers to tangle with hoards of red drum. I have been fortunate enough to target them with some of the saltiest pros in the business in a plethora of locations over the years. Anglers looking for a new challenge or a change of scenery should plan to pursue redfish in as many of these areas listed below as they can over the next several weeks while this pattern remains steady.

Port Mansfield

The portion of the Lower Laguna Madre out of Port Mansfield is a special place, and it's hard to think about targeting redfish in this region without fishing out of Getaway Lodge. The outfit provides knowledgeable and professional

guides, not to mention it boasts exquisite amenities, comfortable accommodations, and downright incredible food.

Getaway Lodge guide and operator of Snookdude Charters, Captain Ruben Garza Jr., claims the best areas to find reds schooled up during September near Port Mansfield lie on either side of East Cut, as well as along the jetties.

"We usually have super light winds to kick off the fall which allows us to fish on both sides of East Cut, regardless of the wind direction," explained Garza. "A lot of times we will focus on the sand flats north of the cut. I like to anchor the boat several hundred yards away from the spoil banks lining the channel and wade back in a southerly direction towards the spoils. This can result in some awesome topwater action as the reds are usually piled up in this area and aggressive."

Garza states that the south side of East Cut is lined with oysters in certain areas and that wading the edges of these small



Redfish of all sizes are on the move in September and the locations they will congregate can be fairly predictable when the current conditions are considered.

reefs can produce plenty of reds as well.

Redfish can also be found along just about any grass flat with sand pockets along the Lower Laguna Madre out Port Mansfield. It is not uncommon to find several slot-sized reds in the same areas that are holding speckled trout.

The Land Cut

The Land Cut, which is the stretch of Intracoastal Waterway that separates the Upper Laguna Madre from the Lower Laguna Madre, provides some excellent sight casting opportunities for red drum along its west and east banks. It can be accessed either from Corpus Christi or Port Mansfield.

Veteran Lower Laguna Madre angler and Getaway Lodge fishing guide, Captain J.R. Steve Ellis is a guru at locating redfish in the Land Cut. I've fished the area several times with him running out of Port Mansfield. Each time, the amount of water containing redfish attracting structure like grass and sand pockets that we encountered blew my mind.

Sight Fishing out of Seadrift

Some of the prettiest water on the entire Texas coast can be found in the back marshes of Matagorda Island in both Espiritu Santo and San Antonio Bays. This is where Captain Nathan Beabout of N&M Sportsman's Adventures spends his time sight casting to redfish during the fall months.

Beabout combs through these marshes and back lakes meticulously, and he

knows every nook and cranny that redfish like to hide as they lie in wait to ambush their next prey. I was able to experience Beabout's skills first hand about a year ago. Seeing a fish in its natural environment, then casting to it and watching it engulf an artificial offering is unforgettable. These sight fishing trips are an adventure that every angler should add to their bucket list.

West Matagorda Bay

West Matagorda bay offers some pristine wade fishing opportunities for redfish around Cotton's Bayou, the Middle Grounds, and Green's Bayou. Long time Matagorda Bay fishing Guide, Captain Tommy Countz, claims that both the marsh drains and the grass beds in these areas concentrate swarms of redfish during the early fall.

"Then later in the fall when cold fronts start rolling in and tides get blown out, reds will stack up in the guts of these drains," he confessed. "When this happens it's as close to catching fish in a



Capt. Nathan Beabout of N&M Sportsman's Adventures is one of the best at putting anglers within sight casting distance of solid redfish. Beabout spends his time searching for reds in the back marshes of Matagorda Island in both Espiritu Santo and San Antonio Bays.

barrel as you can get."

East Matagorda Bay

Redfish can be found working a variety of areas in East Matagorda Bay. Captain Trey Prye indicates that the open water and shell reefs on the west end of the bay are perfect for targeting reds while drifting.

"The open water east of Bird Island is another good option for redfish," added Prye. "In this area anglers should focus on slicks and working birds."

Prye states that the south shoreline will also be littered with red drum. "The mouths of coves and marsh drains during an outgoing tide are the prime hotspots," he stated.

Freeport

The nearshore waters of Freeport and the jetties are known for colossal catches of bull reds during the fall months. Captain Mike Segall of Reel Threel Charters focuses on catching these giant reds at the jetties and beachfront.

"The action for bull reds can be nonstop when the tide is right and it gives anglers an opportunity to tangle with some of the biggest fish they've ever caught," explained Segall.



Out of Port Mansfield the Lower Laguna Madre has some excellent options for landing quality red drum like this upper slot redfish caught by the General Manager of Getaway Lodge, Sandra Garza.

Trinity and East Galveston Bays

The open waters of Trinity and East Galveston bays are littered with slicks during calm mornings and afternoons from schools of aggressively feeding red drum. Veteran Galveston Bay guide, Captain Tim Young, is one of the best at reading these open waters and keying on schooling reds.

"I mostly focus on fresh slicks and mud boils," he explained. "It's a blast to have someone in the boat that's never encountered one of these schools before. Folks usually pick up on the signs pretty quick after we start catching them. It's awesome to see the light bulb turn on as anglers learn and perfect the technique."

West Galveston Bay

The marshes within West Galveston Bay can be dynamite for reds. Areas like Green's Lake, Chocolate Bay, and Carrancahua Lake can become off the grid honey holes during the fall for anglers with shallow running vessels.

I have a group of buddies that fish as far back in these areas and in as shallow of water as they can get in with surface drive mud boats. They avoid the crowds and cash in on schools of reds in areas that many folks have never seen in person before.

Another stretch of water that is typically wall to wall with reds during September is the north shoreline of West Bay from Green's Cut to Carrancahua Point. The flats along this bank contain some dense sea grass beds that keep the water super clean and hold plenty of baitfish, which attracts schools of red drum.

Sabine Lake

The south end of Sabine Lake and the estuary's Louisiana shoreline rule when it comes to redfish. Veteran Sabine Guide, Captain Randy Foreman is an expert at finding reds in these areas.

"Open water schools of reds can be found by keying on small groups of terns hovering over the water's surface in the southern portion of the lake," he stated. "The clamshell beds near the mouths of bayous on the Louisiana shoreline are another great option for redfish, and they can produce awesome results during an outgoing tide."

Calcasieu Lake

Some of the most impressive schools of redfish I've ever encountered have been on the east side of Calcasieu Lake

near areas like the Basket Reef, Commissary Point, and the mouth of Lambert Bayou while fishing with Captain Nick Poe of Big Lake Guide Service. I recall one particular occasion when we eased up on a school with the trolling motor and grabbed our rods in preparation to cast towards the feeding frenzy. I nonchalantly asked Poe if he thought they would strike a topwater plug, because that's what I had tied on.

He replied, "They might eat you if you fell in the water!"

That's how aggressive they were.

It's time to take advantage of the pattern that Mother Nature has presented us with. Choose a new area, try something new, and don't be surprised if you start seeing red this fall. 🌟🌟



Redfish can be found cruising up and down the granite rocks of all jetty systems along the Texas coast during September.



Shallow draft vessels like a surface drive mud boat will allow anglers to access the shallowest reaches of marshes and locate redfish in places that many folks have never seen in person before.



Drop Me A Line

I never touched the biggest fish I ever caught. I've had a "personal best" of 12.25 pounds for a long time now and can tell you that "the one that got away" was much bigger. How much bigger? We'll never know.

I wasn't always a fisherman. I was converted by a single large bass that broke both my line and my heart. A friend talked me into going fishing one day many years ago. I grabbed a spinning rod I kept in the garage, picked up some minnows, and met him at the lake. We fished for two or three hours — Scott fishing with lures and me with my minnows. I'd caught a dozen or so small bass, while Scott was skunked so far. I have to admit, I was giving him a really hard time about how I was out-fishing him that morning.

Then I got a bite I'll never forget. A big fish was pulling me into the trees. I pulled back. She came out of the timber and popped to the surface just long enough for us to get a good look at her. When she saw us, she made a lunge back to the depths. The line then started making that singing sound that I now know only too well. It's a sound that any angler that's lost a fish before will know. After the singing, the next sound you hear is a loud, unmistakable "pop," as your line gives way to the pressure. It took me the rest of the day to recover from losing that fish. It was a fish that still haunts my dreams. It was so much bigger than the 12 pounder I caught a few years later.

If I knew then what I know now, I might have actually boated that big bass. Looking back, I really shouldn't have expected anything different in the way of results. I had done everything wrong and did everything I could to ensure failure.

First, that rod and reel I used had been in the garage for at least two or three years without a line change. That's two or three Texas winters and summers inside a garage, with no climate control. Next, I know that the line test was maybe 10 or 12 pounds.

I also didn't realize that we were going to be fishing Lake Fork in its' prime. I knew nothing of the timber there,

or the size of the bass the lake was capable of producing. Plus I also never checked my line after catching those smaller fish, even though some of them had to be wrenched from the timber we fished.

Finally, the drag on that reel was cranked down as far as it would go, leaving no room to work properly. They say, "What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger." I took that to heart as I went the next day and picked out some gear for future fishing trips. I had survived, and I was gonna get stronger.

That was many years ago, and I have caught countless big bass since that day. I've even lost a few big fish as well. But none of the fish I've lost since then was due to bad line choices. Looking back I still see that as my biggest mistake. I should have spooled up some new line, in a higher test strength and adjusted my drag.

We didn't have braided line back in those days, at least not as it is today. If we had, some 30 to 40 pound braid would have been just the ticket. So what did I learn?

First, match your line choice to the fishing you'll be doing. While that sounds like a "duh" statement, you'd be surprised how many people don't consider that when they head out to go fish. I've had clients show up for a trip with the same issues I had. Old line, poor test choices, they come totally unprepared for a big fish, or even a four or five pounder if she's in heavy cover.

With all of the choices available today, there is no excuse for not having the right line at the right time. If you're fishing a lake you're not familiar with, take a little time and research the water clarity, type of cover, average size of the bass, and



There are a variety of types of fishing lines made by a variety of manufacturers. Each type of line has its own set of characteristics that make it best suited for a particular type of fishing.

so forth.

The 25 pound Berkley Big Game (in green) I so loved in east Texas lakes may not be the right choice for Possum Kingdom. The bass at PK are smaller, the water clearer, and the cover is primarily rocks instead of timber. So I might choose a fluorocarbon line in eight to ten pound test, in order to get more bites.

Everything in line choice is a trade-off. Smaller line will always get more bites than a larger diameter, higher pound-test line. Smaller line will also, obviously, break sooner than a larger selection.

In making the decision, go with a line size that matches up with the average size of the fish caught at a particular lake. This information can be found by searching the web, social media and any guides that might service the lake.

Also, consider the lures you'll be using. Matching the line choice to the technique and rod type can be critical to a successful day on the water. Monofilament line stretches, whereas braided line does not. Fluorocarbon has some stretch, actually more than mono, but it takes more force to get it to begin the stretching process. And copolymer line has little stretch.

Fishing a deep diving crankbait on a rod with little flex, and a braid with no stretch, is simply looking for trouble.

There is no “give” in your setup. When a big fish makes a run, a little give will prevent it from pulling loose.

In the above scenario, you’d want a medium heavy or even medium action rod. With monofilament, you’d want a medium heavy or heavy. But honestly, because fluoro sinks and we’re trying to get deep, I’d use fluorocarbon and a medium heavy rod.

Several line types have been mentioned so what are they and how are they different?

From the Berkley website we see that “As its name implies, monofilament fishing line—or “mono” for short—is a single strand of material, as opposed to multi-filament lines, which are strung from multiple strands that are fused, braided or bundled together.” Mono has long been the standard fishing line in use for most freshwater fishing. It is fairly strong for the diameter of the line, has good knot strength, and is affordable.

Wikipedia tells us that, “Braided line was one of the earliest types of fishing line, and in its modern incarnations it is still very popular in some situations because of its high knot strength, lack of stretch, and great overall power in relation to its diameter.

Braids were originally made from natural fibers such as cotton and linen. However, natural fiber braids (with the very rare exception of braided silk) have long since been replaced by braided or woven fibers of a man-made materials like Dacron, Spectra or micro-dyneema into a strand of line.”

Braid has an exceptional strength to diameter ratio and almost zero stretch. This is great for heavy cover and spinning rods, but you do need to be sure of the knot that is tied as braid can be a little “slippy.”

FishUSA reveals that “Copolymer lines are relatively new fishing lines and are made of two different types of nylon line combined, which stretches less than monofilament line and has even greater abrasion resistance than fluorocarbon. Knot strength is also greater than monofilament.”

Currently I am working with some copoly lines and so far I’m really impressed with the results. Strength and ease of use are way up the scale. I’ll just have to catch a few more fish to see about longevity.

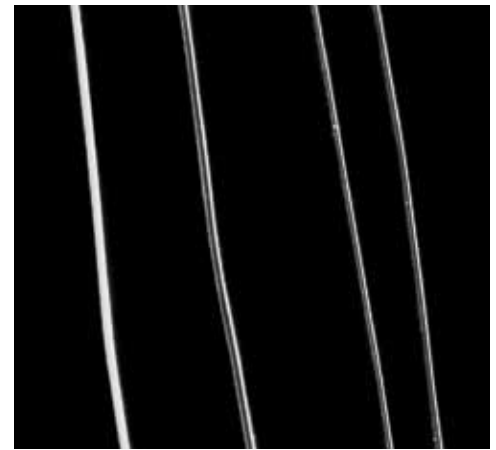
Finally there’s fluorocarbon. Back to Berkley to learn that, “It’s extruded in a single strand similar to nylon monofilament. But because fluorocarbon’s molecules are more tightly packed, the line is denser and noticeably heavier by size. It also differs from mono in visibility, stretch and durability.” All of this means a faster sink rate than mono, more abrasion resistance and less line visibility in the water.

If you’re trying to bed fish a big bass and need to see the line, fluoro is probably not the line you want to use. However, if you’re fishing a heavy braid, and need to downsize for a little stealthier approach, a fluoro leader of two or three feet can be just the ticket.

Another consideration is the cost of fluorocarbon. It is usually twice to three times as much as mono or braid.

Regardless of line choice, it is important to properly set the drag on your reel. And remember, it will tighten up a bit over time, all by itself.

After spooling new line, set the drag to release before the line breaks. Give yourself just a little extra room to



A number of factors go into selecting a line based on conditions that will be fished. Some line needs to be less visible with a smaller diameter while others may be more abrasive resistant.

compensate for hard hooksets.

Then after fishing for three or four hours, check the drag again. Chances are, it will need to be loosened a bit. Also check your knots and the first three feet or so of line after every fish, or if you get hung up and pull a bait loose.

Keep your rods, or at the very least your reels, in a climate controlled environment when not in use. Leaving them in a hot boat, or garage, all summer is a recipe for a broken heart. 🌟🌟

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Passing the Torch



Passing the torch to our youth is of unparalleled importance when it comes to the future of hunting.

September is an opportune time to introduce kids with a genuine desire to hunt to the exciting sport.

Story and Photography by Bob Zaiglin

As I walked towards a mesquite-lined stock tank located in the middle of a coastal meadow with my granddaughter McKenzie at my side, mourning doves — mostly in pairs, exploded skyward from the bare, sandy openings in the grazed canopy of Bermuda. By the time we arrived at our favorite water hole, birds, like fireflies, filled the cloudless sky before making their final approach to the sun-baked clay bank. It was really exciting to me, and I could only imagine how fired up my nine-year-old hunting partner was as we watched birds perform incredible acrobatic skills, dropping suddenly to the bank for a drink.

Armed with a single breakover barrel .410 without a shell in the barrel for safety purposes, it was hard on this old wingshooter, as I would have had several spent shells at my feet and a few birds by now. However, this was Mac's hunt — her first.

Although she had accompanied me on many hunts in the past this time it was her turn to be the shooter. With the amazing number of birds in the sky her chances of collecting a few looked promising.

Although McKenzie had shot the scattergun in the past, I felt like a little practice would prove advantageous, so earlier that evening I had her gather some mesquite sticks which she could use for target practice.

Anchoring the targets in cow patties, we stepped back a few yards and she fired away, toppling every stick. With all the confidence in the world, we then worked our way to the water's edge and positioned ourselves under what little shade an old granjeno bush could provide, hoping a dove or two would land nearby and provide her with a shot.

It was too early in her hunting career to attempt dropping one of those acrobatic polished birds in flight, so we remained sitting tight awaiting a bird to land, — that would allow her time to safely prepare for a shot. With the whistling wings of doves all around us, I was proud of the patience Mac exercised, but once a bird landed not 25 yards from us, excitement overwhelmed us both. I slowly introduced a long, slender shell into the small bore, cocked the trigger, and carefully handed her the gun.

Abruptly, my heart raced to a feverish



The primary reason kids hunt is to have fun and be around loved ones.

pitch no different than when a trophy buck rushes into my rattling horns as I watched my partner prepare for a shot which took a little too long and the bird got nervous, erupting skyward to safety. This happened several more times before Mac figured out that she must not only be safe but shoot swiftly.

Then one dove remained on the bank a little too long and Mac's aim was true. As the rapport of the .410 momentarily shattered the quiescent evening, a beautiful mourning dove fluttered convulsively on the dusty bank momentarily before my proud granddaughter rapidly negotiated her way over the cavernous shoreline to pick up and embrace her first dove.

Dove hunting is one of the most entertaining outdoor activities anyone can participate in no matter where they reside in Texas. There are seven different species of doves and pigeons native to Texas, but only three — mourning dove, white-winged dove, and white-tipped dove—are legal to hunt.

The mourning dove is heralded as the most common game bird in the U.S., and throughout much of Texas. According to a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension report it is found in more places in Texas than the ubiquitous house sparrow, representing much hunter opportunity.

One of the principal attributes of hunting dove is the fact that it is a social activity often conducted in groups which not only serves to sustain birds in flight, but also providing participants a refreshing opportunity to enjoy a sense of camaraderie in the field. It's a family-oriented sport that remains enjoyable long after the hunt as the birds are prepared



That first hunt a child goes on often sets the stage for their future as a hunter.



Making shed hunting a family affair is another way children can be introduced to the outdoors.

satisfying the most discretionary palates. More importantly, doves, unlike deer, are affordable to hunt, providing both the novice and long-time scattergun enthusiast additional opportunities to enjoy the outdoors with long seasons.

It's not only one's dexterity to handle a shotgun effectively, but the opportunity to share the entire event with those closest in their lives. More importantly it represents

Zimbabwe or a trophy buck in South Texas. It was all about my granddaughter; it was her hunt, not mine, which placed immense pressure on me because of my desire for her to enjoy an activity that was so powerfully important to me throughout my life.

Each year thousands of youngsters are introduced to hunting and normally the activity is overseen by a parent or close

an enjoyable way to introduce youngsters to the sport of hunting, which is imperative to the future of all hunting.

In my case I was passing the torch to my granddaughter McKenzie, and the event could not have been more intense than if I was lining up the crosshairs on a leopard in

relative. All have good intentions, hoping the youngsters enjoy the same experience they have for years — the opportunity to hunt. I refer to it as passing the torch which remains of paramount importance to the future of this cherished activity. There is no better way of introducing youngsters to the hunting arena than pursuing small game like dove, squirrel, and rabbit.

Youngsters lucky to be born in a hunting family are usually baptized into the sport by a parent or close relative. Philosophically, it takes a hunter to develop a hunter, but some youngsters are coerced to hunt before they have a genuine interest in it, which could possibly blemish their desire to hunt in the future.

Today there exists a plethora of activities available to youngsters ranging from competitive sports to computer games. All of these compete for a youngster's time and the activities that are most enjoyable to them at an early age will generally be the activities they entertain most as they grow older.

It's important that a youngster's first few hunting experiences not only be successful, but more importantly fun. It's also of paramount importance they have the genuine desire to hunt and request that opportunity.

I know just how hard this can be raising two daughters on a game-rich 100,000 plus acre ranch. Even though I wanted them to hunt with me, I never asked them. I felt it was important that I encourage them but not coerce the girls to hunt simply because I did — so I patiently awaited the day they asked to tag along with me, and I was one proud dad when they did.

Kids who hunt do so because it is first of all fun and secondly to enjoy family and friends. Sure, they all would like to shoot an animal or bird, but that doesn't always happen, but if the experience is entertaining they will more likely want to try it again.

Taking a child on a dove or other small game hunt is always exciting. Seldom are they bored as game is often abundant which keeps them focused.

The same cannot always be said when it comes to deer hunting, particularly when an enthusiastic, hyperactive youngster is confined in a 4'x6' deer blind for hours

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on end facing a galvanized feeder only to hear the words 'Can't shoot that one, it's too young' when a buck finally does show up. Hunting in this manner may have its benefits for the avid sportsmen, but for a youngster it represents another form of time out instead of a memorable event.

A youngster's first hunt has to be fun with no limitations imposed that can eclipse the wonderful memories the experience should represent.

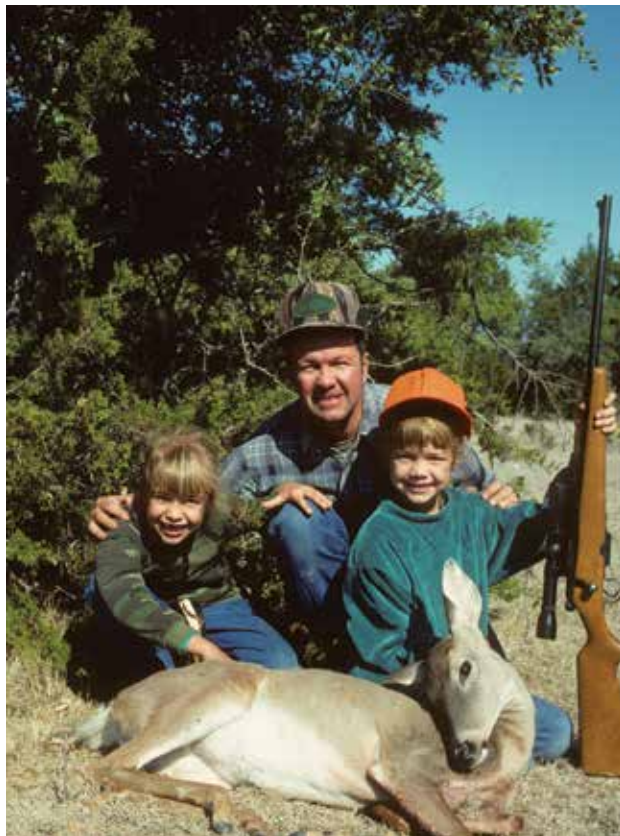
On the other side of the coin, some parents encourage their youngsters to take an outstanding buck on that first trip, a desire that is easy to comprehend, but is it beneficial to that youngster's future participation in the sport? They must have something to look forward to and should they take a huge buck on that initial excursion? It could dampen their enthusiasm or anticipation of what could show up in the future.

My girls enjoyed taking a doe or spike-antlered buck on their first excursions and antler size gradually increased as they grew older. It was the anticipation of taking a little bigger buck in proceeding years that sustained their interest in hunting as they entered high school when a myriad of activities could have

dampened their desire to spend their weekends on the ranch.

The pursuit of small game, particularly dove, is always enjoyable to kids because the birds are abundant, and it usually entails a lot of action, including shooting, whereas a deer hunt often concludes with a single shot regardless the amount of time spent awaiting an animal.

The fact is, September is an opportune time to introduce kids with a genuine desire to hunt to the exciting sport. Mourning dove, the most abundant game bird in the state, is a great reason to have them accompany dad or mom to that favorite stock tank or grain field for a fun-loving experience that generates fond memories and future hunters. **T★J**



That first deer should not be only exciting, but more importantly accent the youngster's anticipation of progressing in both rack and body size of deer hunted in the future.

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Lake Roundup

CENTRAL TEXAS



By John Jefferson

As I write this in late July, Texas is gripped by a strangling heat wave with a recorded 108-degree temperature in the middle of the state. I won't try to tell you it's hot enough to fry an egg on the sidewalk — that's a trite and overworked metaphor. But I can't help but wonder how long it would take a fresh carton of eggs still sitting in the Styrofoam carton and placed on the sidewalk to produce a dozen hardboiled eggs.

Power outages from overworked air-conditioning systems are also forecast. Heaven help us! Please.

Barring a hurricane, we can't expect much change in early September. I once photographed the time and temperature sign on the Austin Convention Center that read 101 degrees at 6:00 p.m. on September 6. Whew! At least, we usually get our first cool front in mid-September — sometime between the 15th and the 20th.

Lake Travis

Ramp Name	Min Lake Level
Arkansas Bend	661
Bob Wentz at Windy Point	653
Camp Creek Park	667
Cypress Creek	666
Gloster Bend Recreation Area	662
Jones Brothers Park	645
Mansfield Dam	633
Muleshoe Bend Recreation Area	660
Narrows Recreation Area	659.5
Pace Bend - Collier Cove	653
Pace Bend - Tatum Cove	653
Pace Bend - Tournament Point	631
Sandy Creek	648

Lake Buchanan

Buchanan Dam Park	1004
Cedar Point Recreation Area	1007
Llano County Park	1006
Shaw Island Ramp	994
White Bluff Park	993

Lately, it been later.

I usually suggest night fishing — especially around the full moon — as a way around the heat that often locks the jaws of largemouth bass. This month, the moon won't even help us. It won't be full until the 24th. Night fishing is still a viable alternative to baking your brains in the sun, though. If you must fish during daylight hours, go early or late, and fish deep. Very deep. In most of our lakes that is 25 feet deep or more. If you should catch a fish during daylight

hours in shallow water you may not have to cook it.

But one caveat: check the water levels either in the Austin American Statesman or on the LCRA website (www.lcra.org) and compare them with the boat ramp closing elevations listed to the left if you fish lakes **Travis** or **Buchanan**. If the lake water level is a number lower than the listed "Min. Lake Level", that ramp is closed. Other **Highland Lakes** are considered "constant level" water-bodies, and don't fluctuate like Trav and Buc. Several ramps are already closed on those two latter mentioned ponds, with more to get *dry-docked* unless we get some rain. Locating a place to launch may be as challenging as finding willing bass.

I talked to my long-time friend, Allen Christenson, Jr., who guides out of Lakeway Marina on Lake Travis. I was glad to hear him answer the phone on the 2nd ring and know he was home in air-conditioning instead of out on the lake. It's after 6:00 p.m. and the temp is still 105 degrees here in late July. He assured me that he's off the water by 10:00 a.m. when it's this hot. By that time of day, his clients have usually caught enough fish and are ready to call it a day.

But he says almost every day, as he leaves the marina after guiding, he sees several bass cruising the shallow water near the shore, apparently looking for baitfish. As hot as it is, he feels they are influenced by the fact that the days have been getting a little shorter every day since June 22, the longest day of the year. And with the declining amount of daylight, fish, deer, and all wild things realize that the seasonal change is approaching, even if we haven't a clue in our near-sightedness. They know it's time to start loading protein like bluegills, baitfish, and crawfish although we can only think about how hot it is and how long before we can sit in the cool with something even cooler to drink.

Christenson has been guiding for nearly 40 years and has seen droughts and sizzling-hot summers come and go. He also knows what his fishing records show for those years. Most years, his

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August catch-rate *exceeds* the total for the previous month of July – 20-25 fish a day in August compared with 8-15 for July. It's usually hotter in August and the lake water probably isn't any cooler, so his theory about the shorter days holds up when you look at his records.

And fishing will continue to improve as we get into September. After all, it's the first month with an "R" in its name, and R-months are always our best fishing months! The number of fish his clients catch goes up every year during R-months.

The topwater bite returns this month, as does the crankbait bite. Do I hear a Halleluia! Allen recommends the Bandit 100 and 200 crankbaits cast toward the shoreline. He says cast long. Accuracy isn't an issue – just keep it on the water. On windy days, he says try willow-leaf spinnerbaits.

To tell when the weather begins to change, and the fishing will start to



PHOTO BY JOHN JEFFERSON

So much water; so little time. Between the seven lakes on the Colorado River, the river below Austin, the Pedernales River, San Gabriel River, Lake Georgetown, Lake Granger, Stillhouse Hollow Reservoir, Walter E. Long Reservoir, Lake Bastrop, Canyon Lake, the Guadalupe River, and all the other Hill Country Lakes and streams, Central Texas is abundantly blessed with an enviable amount of fishable water. Pictured here is the small, uncrowded Brushy Creek Reservoir between Cedar Park and Round Rock, an under-utilized fishery. It'll be an ideal September destination as fall approaches. Motorized boats are not allowed, making it ideal for paddle-powered crafts. And

since the waterbody record largemouth bass is a mere 8.00 pounds, caught in 2009 by junior angler Casey Brady, there are probably bigger bass prowling the lake. Photo by John Jefferson.



PHOTO BY JOHN JEFFERSON.

Fly-fishing Hill Country streams for sunfish and bass provides great sport for patient anglers. Cooler weather later this fall will trigger the trout on the Guadalupe River below Canyon Dam.

improve, watch for the cricket swarm. It usually happens with the first cool spell in September. Sometimes, the first front doesn't trigger it, and the nation of little black insects waits for a cooler, more pleasant night to begin the mating swarm. When it does start, gather your kids or grandkids and take a burlap bag or a minnow bucket and go gather up a

bunch under street lights at night or in front of stores in shopping centers. The latter venue is safer, and most merchants usually appreciate someone gathering the crickets, which they consider nuisances. Perch, catfish and bass snap 'em right up, almost as soon as they hit the water. Use a small hook and get ready for action!

A good place to fish is **Barton Creek** near its mouth where it enters **Lady Bird Lake**. You may be able to park along the park road near Lou Neff Point and walk down to the creek. It's shady and as cool a fishing hole as you're going to find in Central Texas. ★★



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CoastWatch | Danno Wise

Beginning in September, summer's heat will start to subside ever so slightly. By month's end fall will officially have arrived and redfish will have squarely become the focus of most inshore anglers along the Lower and Middle Texas Coast.

Although redfish will be getting most of the attention on the flats, in the passes and along the beachfront or jetties, there will be other target species available as well. As the water begins to cool, speckled trout should begin returning to shallower flats in bays up and down the Texas coast. Flounder should also become a bit more active in September, particularly over the last two weeks of the month.

Although tarpon season will begin to wind down in September, there will still be plenty of silver kings along Texas' beachfront waters. In fact, along the Middle and Lower Coast areas, good tarpon fishing can last as late as November.

Kingfish will also still be holding close along the bottom half of the Texas coast. These fish will most often be joined by Spanish mackerel and bonito. This trio of speedsters should provide plenty of thrills for light-tackle anglers and fly fishing enthusiasts plying the nearshore waters in September.

At the southernmost tip of Texas, snook fishing will begin heating up as the weather cools. Linesiders are consistently caught near the jetties as well as on the flats throughout the ninth month. Anglers fishing for snook should expect to pick up more than a few quality mangrove snapper along the way.

The other benefit for hardcore anglers in September is the lack of crowds. School is back in session in September and football as well as dove seasons are also underway. These factors definitely combine to reduce the traffic on Texas bays following Labor Day. In short, September is a month of change and transition. But, the month that begins in summer and ends in fall can make for some truly memorable days on the water. ★★



PHOTO BY DANNO WISE

Josette Guerra with a solid September school trout. As water and air temperatures cool through the month trout will become more aggressive in their feeding patterns.

Redfish will definitely be the main attraction for fishermen on the southernmost end of the Lower Laguna Madre. Massive schools of fish will be found virtually everywhere in the Lower Laguna Madre during September. It is really just a matter of whether anglers want to catch them along the beachfront or on the skinny flats.

Fishermen opting to fish along the beachfront will have a shot at some truly massive bull reds. While fishing the beachfront and jetties,

anglers can also target kingfish and tarpon. Along the length of the jetties, fishermen will also find plenty of snook during September. Mangroves snapper will begin schooling around the rocks as well as summer turns to fall.

Those who stay in the bay for redfish will be able to find huge schools of fish working their way toward the pass as the month wears on. Early in September, most of these schools will be around Gas Well Flats, Three Islands and the Drum Boat. Later in the month these fish will be found down around the Pasture, around the PI Spoils and over Mexiquita Flats.

Speckled trout will also be moving shallower in September. Gas Well Flats, the east side sand flats, Mexiquita Flats, Airport Cove and Laguna Vista Cove are just a few of the shallow water areas that will be holding good numbers of specks in September.

Flounder will be getting more active in September. The cuts along spoil islands and the shacks along the ICW will be the best bet for flatfish early in September. Later in the month areas close to the pass, such as Children's Beach, will be producing good numbers of flounder.

Port Mansfield guide Capt Steve "JR" Ellis of Getaway Lodge says things begin to open up in September, but there is one thing that stands above all others this month.

"In September, you better be ready to catch some redfish, because that will be happening big time," said Ellis. "We'll have all kinds of redfish stuff going on in September. There will be some big ol' bull reds going off around the jetties. There will be some fish getting up on the flats where we can do some sight-casting to them. And, we'll have a lot of fish working around the drains and along the edges of the East Cut. Redfish won't be the only thing happening in September, but it's so good it's pretty dog gone hard to pass up.

"The trout should start moving up a little shallower. They've been in that four to six foot of water range all summer. But, in September the water will start cooling

off a bit and they'll start moving back up onto the grass flats and into the potholes. We should have a pretty decent topwater bite for them as well.

"Offshore fishing will actually still be pretty good in September as well. There will be a lot of tarpon around the jetties. Really, September is when we have a lot of different stuff we can do and usually have consistently good conditions to do it."

In addition to the outstanding angling action, September will also see the guides at Get-A-Way Lodge running cast and blast trips for dove and teal. Later in the winter, they will also be running cast and blast trips for ducks.

Anglers will be able to find plenty of good fishing between Port Mansfield and Corpus Christi as well. The Land Cut will produce consistent catches of speckled trout, redfish, black drum and flounder this month. Most fishermen will be either free-lining live shrimp or throwing soft-plastics, although the topwater bite can be good that time of year as well.

Heading north from there, anglers can usually find consistent trout action along the King Ranch shoreline, focusing on the guts and drops. The rocks and deeper flats in Baffin will still be holding good numbers of specks, while there will be plenty of reds, along with a few larger trout mixed in, up on the shallow flats.

This pattern holds for the Upper Laguna as well, where anglers can target boxes of solid keepers in the deeper areas. Those looking for larger trout or redfish will find those fish up on the flats throughout most of the day. 🌟



Aransas area anglers will begin concentrating on redfish a little more than speckled trout during September. Big schools of bull reds will be getting ready to leave the bay and are easily spotted on the grass flats. Spoons and soft plastics, as



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

A hot topwater lure that can be fished weedless is the D.O.A. PT-7. It's soft body and weedless design allows it to be fished in grassy areas or areas that have a lot of floating grass.



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PHOTO BY DANNOWISE

For most of September anglers will be trying to "sniff out" schools of redfish. Here Ruby Delgado gets some help from her beagle, Sailor, with a Lower Laguna Madre red.

well as topwaters, will entice reds during September. However, most anglers will be throwing either cut piggy perch or live finger mullet.

There will also be a number of big bull reds found in the surf and around the jetties this month. These fish will most often be caught on mullet, cracked crab

or chunked ladyfish, but can also be targeted with plugs and jigs when the water is clean.

Although redfish will be the focus of most Aransas area anglers in September, there will still be plenty of



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

The author extracts a pearl/chartreuse tail D.O.A. CAL paddle tail soft plastic from an aggressively feeding speckled trout.

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trout around. Early in the month, specks will be holding on the outside edges of channels, just as they were in August. There will also be good trout fishing over the reefs in Aransas Bay. As the month wears on, there will be more and more specks found along the channel edges and on the flats.

The final few weeks of summer will offer plenty of angling options to Rockport area fishermen as well. Both trout and reds will still be stacked around the reefs early in the month. Later in September, the redfish will be schooling up and heading out of the bay. Channels such as the Lydia Ann Channel are good places for anglers to hang out and catch these herds of reds as they move out into the Gulf.

Over the back half of the month, the shorelines will also be holding plenty of fish. As the water cools, trout, reds and black drum will all be moving along the shallows, where they can be easily targeted with a variety of both artificial and natural baits.

Seadrift guide Capt Nathan Beabout says he is looking forward to September for a variety of reasons.



As water and air temperatures continue to cool look for increased opportunities to sight cast to black drum as well as redfish. PHOTO BY DANNO WISE

"After spending the last few months under a ridge of high pressure for the most part with a southwest wind, I believe all of us are looking forward to September," said Beabout. "Usually, this means a return of southeast winds and some big tides - at least we hope! Fishing under this southwest wind and extremely low tides will wear on you a bit. But, I have learned a few things because of it and were to focus our efforts whether chasing big trout or schooling reds.

"Now, since this year has been hard to predict, I am a little skeptical about September. My logbooks over the years show we start to get a few cool fronts in the middle of the month. Once our water temps start to fall a bit the bite becomes aggressive. Most of our fishing patterns and areas that we work will continue to be the same as our summer pattern, but within these areas we may have to make an adjustment or two. Typically the baitfish will look for more cover, such as the grass beds along the shorelines or reeds themselves on the bank.

"If we are fishing on the day of a front under a northeast wind, drains leading into the back marsh can be popular spots. The winds will force water up thus creating a false current on the points or bends of a drain pulling baitfish. Usually just outside that current are the predator fish. The same can be said for some of our oyster reefs in San Antonio Bay. Of course

the wind speed will dictate whether or not fishing the shell will be possible.

"So many game changing variables can come into play for September, it makes it one of my favorite months on the Middle Texas Coast. As always, locate

the bait in the area you choose to fish. If it's not there, move on or make that small adjustment to find it. Be sure to put new hooks on the old topwaters, because September can hold some explosive topwater action all day long." ★

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EARLY TEAL TACTICS AND OPTIONS

Waterfowl hunters enjoy the opportunity to knock the dust off their skills, sling some steel, and prepare for the upcoming regular season.

Story and Photography by Nate Skinner

There's something about teal hunting that is just plain fun. The small ducks tend to zip in and out of the decoys, sometimes swarming a pond or waterhole like mosquitoes on serious steroids. They respond to a call well and provide waterfowl hunters with their first chance to sling some steel in the fall, almost like a sweet tease of what's to come when the regular duck season arrives in November.

An early season teal hunt can be somewhat of a less involved activity when compared to a wintertime duck hunt. With the early teal season opening in mid-September the weather will be mild. At the very least it will not be cold. This means a successful hunt can take place with minimal gear. There's no need for layers of clothes or jackets, and even waders can be optional.

Most teal hunting endeavors don't require a massive spread of decoys either. That alone eliminates the laborious task of hauling heavy loads of the floating fakes in and out of the mud and muck. The biggest factor hunters will likely have to concern themselves with as far as comfort goes are mosquitoes, and that's an easy fix with an affordable can of repellent spray.

All in all, an early season teal hunt is great way to spend time with friends and family in the outdoors regardless of their skill level or hunting experience. Teal hunts can be filled with fast and furious action that is exciting enough to captivate the attention of young hunters. Plus with the comfortable conditions it makes it easy to bring just about anyone along who is willing to hang-out outside for a few hours and watch the sun rise.

The early teal season also gives hunters the opportunity to knock the dust off their shooting skills and make last minute preparations prior to regular waterfowl seasons commencing. For many it's likely been seven months or more since most they have shouldered their shotgun to swing on a decoying duck. Rounds at the skeet or sporting clays range help sharpen shotgunning techniques, but there is no substitute for the real thing.

Teal can be unpredictable as they approach a spread. Sometimes they dive straight in and other times they may swing back and forth before blazing across a pond within shooting range.

They have been known to test the skills of any wingshooter and that's what makes hunting them a challenge. Teal hunts can improve just about any hunter's level of shotgunning efficacy.

Early teal hunts are the perfect time to break out the call lanyard and get reacquainted with both a duck call and a whistle. A raspy, high-pitched, blue-winged teal call paired with a whistle make a deadly combination. The whistle is the easiest call to use, and some short high-pitched peeps while teal are circling can do the trick to get their attention and bring them crashing into the hole.

When it comes to blowing a blue-winged teal call, a long, high-pitched bark, followed by several shorter and choppy notes will mimic a nearby bird the best. This call will sound similar to a

the early teal season can be altered to operate more smoothly. This may include changing how shots are called to signal the hunting group to begin firing at incoming birds or how the decoy spread is oriented according to the wind and hunters' location.

Any equipment that didn't function properly during a teal hunt can be fixed. This could be something as simple as damaged decoy lines that may have been overlooked. Hunters may also discover that other gear and gadgets might need some work before the regular season arrives.

As far as the migration goes, blue-winged teal are the first to arrive along Texas prairies, potholes and marshes each year, and they do so without their distinguishing breeding plumage. The



There is no better way to start the day in September than picking up a downed teal while watching the sun rise.

laugh. The first "Ha" is longer, followed by a short, "Ha ha ha." This cadence can even be imitated on a regular duck call well enough to draw birds in if a hunter doesn't possess a teal call.

If hunters are teal hunting out of a permanent blind in the same areas they will pursue ducks during the regular season, this is a great time to assess the shape of the blind and how successful it is at concealing shooters. Even though it is the early season, teal will likely react to the blind similarly to the way ducks will during the regular season. This will reveal if the structure needs to be brushed in more or tweaked in any way.

Teal hunts can also be treated like a practice run prior to the big show. Any process that seemed to go wrong during

first blue wings arrived around the end of August and more will continue to show up as cold fronts push them further south. Green-winged teal are beginning to make their appearance as well. They typically start showing up in small groups a few weeks after the first waves of blue wings each year.

Many hunters will choose to hire a guide and hunt along the rice prairies that are located west of Houston around Wharton, Eagle Lake, Garwood, and El Campo. Ponds and flooded rice fields in this region will be covered up with teal during the early season, however, there are many other options for teal hunters looking for new challenges.

Some of the most memorable teal hunts I've ever experienced have taken



Early season teal hunts take place under mild conditions when minimal gear is necessary. Heavy jackets are not needed and waders aren't even necessary, not to mention a small decoy spread normally gets the job done.

place along public land within coastal marshes. One area in particular that I've hunted quite a bit lies near the San Bernard River watershed. There is an abundance of marsh ponds, creeks, bayous, and back lake areas west of the San Bernard River lying inside the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge. Many

of these hotspots can be found in and around the Cedar Lakes, Cowtrap Lake, and Cocklebur slough. They swarm hoards of teal every September.

Many of these areas do not require hunters to obtain any special permits. For a complete description of regulations and a map of the hunt areas within the San

Bernard National Wildlife Refuge, visit: www.fws.gov/refuge/San_Bernard/visit/hunt.html

Hunters must use a shallow running boat to access these areas. The most convenient location to launch a boat lies at the southeast end of FM 2918 in Brazoria. The boat ramp is located on the ICW just west of the San Bernard River.

As is the case when hunting any portion of public land, success within the marshes of the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge will be highly dependent on the amount of work and scouting hunters put in prior to their hunt. One of the best teal hunts I was apart of in the refuge took place on a small pond in the Salt Bayou Waterfowl Hunt Area west of Cowtrap Lake.

On the afternoon before the hunt, a buddy and I used his 18 foot aluminum boat to run up a skinny bayou we had found on Google Earth that opened up into a decent sized hole. When looking at satellite images of the area, we just thought the pond looked "ducky," so we decided to scout it out.

Upon entering the pond that afternoon, we immediately jumped up hundreds of blue-winged teal. We saved the track going into the area on my compadre's GPS and were set up before daylight the



The early teal season also provides a great opportunity to prepare gun dogs for the regular waterfowl season that is rapidly approaching.

next morning. When legal shooting time came we had our limits within 15 minutes.

There is a plethora of other public land hunting options within coastal marshes for waterfowl hunters willing to put in the effort and try some new areas. Many of these prime locations are located within Wildlife Management Areas and require hunters to possess an Annual Public Hunting Permit. This \$48 permit provides access to over a million acres of public land throughout the Lone Star State. An interactive map of Texas public hunting areas along with more information about public hunting can be found at: tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/hunt/public

Decoy spreads composed of mostly blue-winged and green-winged teal fakes with a few pintails and shoveler decoys mixed in should do the trick on just about any stretch of public coastal marsh. Hunters should also add a couple of robotic, spinning wing decoys to their spread. Teal seem to lock onto these motion decoys from miles away and at times they will swoop right in to land near them for an easy shot.

Hunting along the coast, especially during the first half of the early teal season means there is a chance many birds could



A blue-winged teal call and a whistle are a deadly combination when hunting early season teal.

be hung up further north on rice prairies and other terrain with abundant waterfowl habitat depending on the weather. This means hunters will need to make the most of their shot opportunities and capitalize on situations when birds give their spread a hard look.

The options are there for those ready to get their first taste of waterfowl hunting to start a new hunting year. Take advantage of the mild conditions, grab a few decoys and calls, and enjoy the challenging wing shooting action that teal provide. **T★J**



Shallow running aluminum boats can give hunters access to shallow marshes, creeks, bayous, and pot holes that when scouted, can become off-the-grid honey holes for teal.



Lake Roundup

EAST TEXAS



By Matt Williams

NACOGDOCHES - For a summer that started off cool and wet, this one turned off hot and dry in a hurry. By the end of July, Lake Nacogdoches and several other East Texas lakes had shrunk in size with more water going out than was coming in.

The 2,200-acre lake was about two feet below full pool as of this writing. That's nothing out of the ordinary, though. Most lakes across region always reach their lowest points at the end of a long, hot summer.

It's not necessarily a bad thing, either. Low water means a smaller playing field. With less room to roam, the fish are naturally easier to find.

Anglers coming here to bass fish this month have several options. One of the best for quality fish is flipping the grass with a big jig or heavy Texas rig. Some of the best stuff is found at the north end of the lake in relation to the Big Loco creek channel. Yellow Bank and Pine Cove creeks aren't near as large, but the grass will be holding some fish.

It's usually best to probe areas where the grass forms distinctive edges. This is usually where shallower, flat water meets with the creek. Bass patrol the edges of the grass and bury up within it as they wait for bream, shad or some other forage to swim dangerously close. To refine the search, key on distinctive bends and channel swings. Places where the grass makes a point or slight intention also are worth a look.

Another option is school bass. While the schoolies chasing shad on the main lake won't be big, they could be the ticket to salvage a dull day. You can run up the score pretty quick on topwaters, spoons and shaky heads when the fish are bunched up and feeding.

Crappie fishing won't be top notch this month, but you can still pick up a few keepers hopping brush piles with live shiners and small jigs. The fish will likely be suspended in or around the brush; it's important to place the bait at the same depth the fish are at or just above it. Otherwise, your chances of getting bit diminish significantly.

PALESTINE - Lake Palestine was about 1.2 feet below normal as of this writing. There's not any flipping grass to speak of in the 20,000-acre Anderson County reservoir, but there is plenty of other good stuff where anglers can soak a bait while it's still hot outside.

Fishing guide Ricky Vandergriff is a big fan fishing brush piles this time of year.

"That'll be one of the main deals down south," he said. "There are quite a few brush piles scattered between and around boat docks. Some of the best ones will be in about five to six feet of water."

Vandergriff suggests probing the brush with assorted baits. Bladed jigs and spinnerbaits work well when the fish want something moving. Otherwise, he'll soak a Big Eye jig or a Texas rigged Zoom brush hog.

Another pattern to check is built around crankbaits and points. Vandergriff likes a medium or deep diver in a citrus shad color. He'll throw it in places where the water drops from around six feet to 12 or deeper.

Channel cat will likely provide the most consistent action of all until water temps begin cooling a little this fall. The guide likes to target whiskered fish around baited holes in water ranging 15-16 feet, but you can also find a few takers around boathouses in six to eight feet of water. Night crawlers and punch bait are the top producers.

Crappie? Brush piles attract the

panfish like magnets, but Vandergriff says you'll also be able to pluck some partial limits of the Highway 155 Bridge crossing support pilings using shiners and white/pink jigs. The fish should be suspended somewhere around 17 feet deep.

White bass junkies will be keying mostly on points down south as well as old roadbeds. Vandergriff will tempt schooling fish early in the day with a lipless crank or topwater, then switch to spoon when the fish go down around the nearest drop.

SAM RAYBURN - Sam Rayburn was about 2 1/2 feet below full pool as of this writing and on a slow fall with the hot summer temps and very little rain. Barring any August hurricanes, anglers can expect to find slightly lower water levels come September.

Fishing guide Tommy Martin says "Rayburn has been fishing strong all summer long and predicts it will continue to do so. "It's going to be interesting to see what happens with it being rated No. 1 in America by Bassmaster, though," Martin said. "Rayburn gets a ton of pressure as it is, but it's probably going to get a lot more now."

At any rate, Martin predicts a good grass bite throughout the month.

"Last September we caught them real good casting Texas rigs on grassy points around several of the creeks in the mid-lake area," he said. "I'm betting it'll be about the same this year. It wasn't uncommon to catch 30-40 a day, sometimes more. There should be quite a bit of schooling activity, too."

Martin says there also could be a good flipping bite on jigs and heavy Texas rigs around areas with grass in water ranging 8-10 feet deep. "The flipping bite would be better if the grass was deeper, but it should still produce some fish," he said. "You probably won't catch a lot of numbers flipping the grass, but it will produce some bigger bites."

Anglers shouldn't overlook the upper reaches the Angelina River this time of year, either. Now is when that area begins to really shine, particularly for those who know the sweet spots comprised of drops,

stumps and hidden brush. Big Texas rigs, jigs and crank baits rule up there.

As for crappie, brush piles in 25-30 feet are going to be the main deal, according to fishing guide Randy Dearman. Dearman says there also should be some fish ganged up around the support pilings at the Highway 147 Bridge to be caught on shiners or jigs.

TOLEDO BEND - The big lake along the Texas/Louisiana border was about three feet below normal and in a serious funk as this was written in late July. That's the word from Tommy Martin, a veteran fishing guide and tournament pro who lives at lakeside not far from the Pendleton Bridge.

"The bass and crappie fishing has been terrible," Martin said. "I'm not sure what is going on, either. The water on the main lake is pretty clear, but up in the coves it's been really dingy and off color and there isn't much vegetation to speak of. Hopefully things will pick up once we start getting a few cool fronts, but at this point I don't really know what to expect because things have been so slow."

In a normal September, Martin says bass anglers can score some good numbers targeting offshore structure like ridges, points and humps in 13-16 feet of water. The standard order is a red bug Zoom Trick Worm rigged Texas style with a 3/16 ounce sinker.

"There is usually quite a bit of schooling activity, too," Martin said. "The schoolies won't be big, but they can be a lot fun to catch on topwaters, worms, Rat-L-Traps or whatever else you can get them to hit. Again, well just have to see how things play out."

September's crappie fishing prospects also remain a mystery, Martin says.

"They should be around brush piles for sure, but they usually start shallowing up some," Martin said.

Fishing guide Stephen Johnston says the bite is normally best around brush piles in water ranging 20-30 feet, but the fish will be suspended anywhere from 15-18 feet beneath the surface. Sometimes they'll be positioned on top of the brush, out to the side or right down in it, Johnston said.

LIVINGSTON - Lake Livingston was in good shape at only three inches below full pool as July gave way to August. The bass bite is historically

pretty tough during the summer months, but things usually begin to improve come September as fall's first fronts begin ushering in cooler air, water temperatures start to cool somewhat and schools of threadfin shad begin gathering along creek channels of the Trinity River.

"Livingston bass are no different than the bass in any other lake," said fishing guide Randy Dearman. "Find the bait and you'll find the fish. They go where the shad go."

Dearman says creeks up and down the lake will be holding fish but advises devoting plenty of time to those channels above the Highway 190 Bridge. Two of his primary baits are a Strike King square bill in a shad pattern and a white or white/chartreuse spinnerbait. He will also keep a Texas rigged Rage Craw and a white buzz bait at arm's reach.

He usually begins his search in the mouth of a creek and works his way in towards the back, where shallower water awaits. Along the way he'll put his bait as tight as possible to any wood cover he comes across, especially in well-defined bends and channel swings. If you see a heron perched on a creek side stump, be sure and check it out. Herons fish for a living.

"There's not much vegetation to speak of in Livingston — wood like stumps, laydowns and brush is mainly what the bass relate to," Dearman said. "It's important to fish as tight to it as possible. Hit it if you can. Often times that's what creates a reaction strike. And it's not uncommon to catch two to three fish off the same piece of wood."

Dearman says it is also a good idea to give boat docks a good look. Some of the best ones are situated on main lake or secondary points near deeper water provided by a channel swing or drop off. Best baits for docks are spinnerbaits, crank baits, Texas rigs and jigs.



PHOTO COURTESY RICHARD JUE

Even though most bass will still be sulking from the heat in September, there are still those that can't resist giving a big tug like this Conroe bass caught by Nancy Jue.

"I always focus on the shady sides and corners, especially when the sun is bright," Dearman said. "It's still pretty hot in September and the fish will be taking advantage of any shade they can find."

CONROE - Fall is just around the corner, but Lake Conroe fishing guide Butch Terpe says there isn't much sense in getting too excited about cooler weather just yet.

Septembers are still pretty hot in East Texas and we probably aren't going to see any big changes until we get towards the end of the month. The days are going to progressively become shorter and the nights longer."

Terpe is a multi-species guide who specializes in fishing for whatever happens to be biting best at the time. In early fall, channel cat get plenty of attention.

"It's full of them," he said. "You won't see a lot the bigger fish like you'll see once the water cools off, but you can still put together a limit pretty quick."

Terpe devotes all of his time to fishing baited holes in water ranging 20-22 feet deep. He does a lot of his fishing in relation to the San Jacinto River channel,

but noted that the edges of major creeks can be equally productive.

The guide likes to bait his holes using cattle range cubes instead of soured maize and other grains, mainly because it doesn't make a mess and works just as good. His go-to bait is a cheese flavored dip bait he secures to a sponge hook.

As bass fishing goes, Terpe says September usually starts off pretty slow and picks up as water temps begin cooling towards the end of the month. He spends the most time keying on old pond dams, points and other structure in 12-18 feet of water using a Carolina rig, Texas rig, jig or deep diving crankbait. Find brush on structure and may find the motherlode.

"Early in morning it might be a good idea to check out bridge rock, retaining walls and any other hard shore cover you come across, Terpe said. "Some of the flooded bushes up north around the national forest also can be good with frogs, wacky worms and Senkos early and late. Otherwise, when the sun is high, the best bite this time of year is almost always going to be away from the bank." ★★



By Brian Hughes

September is upon us once again. The promise of cooler weather is just around the corner. However, it is not close enough to have any effect on our fishing. September will still be a scorcher and the thermocline will still play an important part in our fishing on most any lake in North Texas.

The exception would be if we got a lot of rain and wind that would disrupt the established thermoclines. I don't see that happening so we'll soldier on through the heat.

Speaking of soldiering on, next time you're out on the water, enjoying a day of fishing, please take a minute. Take a minute to imagine you're one of our nation's finest, stationed far from home. Take a minute to imagine you're in the Middle East, where the temps hit over 120 degrees in 2016. Take a minute to imagine you've been at sea for a month, no port in sight. Take a minute to imagine you are in a place where nobody wants to be, and nobody likes you. Then take a minute and say a thank you, maybe even offering a short prayer, for all those individuals that are in those places. They didn't ask to go, but go they did. So to all of those brave Americans, thank you from a humble fisherman, for the freedoms I enjoy.

FORK — There will always be some bass shallow on a lake like Fork. Shallow fish will be found around pads and hydrilla or other grasses. These grass beds don't have to be very big and the ones that don't quite reach the surface get less pressure than those that are matted on top.

Work just over the top of the grass with a spinnerbait. The Johnsons Limit Getter in white and chartreuse is a good choice. You'll probably want to use a ¼ ounce model as the top of the grass probably won't be very deep, but if you find some grass in eight to 10 feet, a ½ ounce model would be a better choice.

Square bill crankbaits would also work. For fishing the sides of a grass bed I'll use a Senko in watermelon/red with a dip of chartreuse on the tail. Texas rigged without a weight it will work down to about five feet, and doesn't catch on the grass stems. If I need to go deeper a weighted 4/0 or 5/0 hook will get the bait down to 10 feet.

Of course, the jig is always a favorite on this lake. Black/blue or green pumpkin is a good start, with a matching Larew craw as a trailer. Other colors such as junebug, red craw, or even white are good choices as well. I prefer to match the trailer and jig colors, but there are times when a slight or bold contrast will increase the bite-to-cast ratio. Fish the jig around channels with timber. You're looking for 10 to 15 feet of water, with plenty of deep water nearby. This is also a good way to start the day in the early morning.

While there are always some fish shallow, most of the fish will probably be

in this 10 to 15 foot range. As the day goes on, you'll want to work out into the deeper water, staying above the thermocline.

You can try Carolina-rigs and dropshots off main lake and secondary points in 18 to 20 feet of water. Use the LFTT 4" Ring Fry in watermelon/red, blue bruise, blue fleck red or red bug. For bigger bass try 10" worms in black/blue or red shad.

There is always the flutter spoon. A big, magnum spoon, the flutter is light for its size and flutters down through the water column, like a dying shad. There are several places around the lake that sell these baits, and some of them are as long as 10-12 inches, and 3-4 inches wide.

Night fishing will certainly be an option in September and you'll do best looking for lighted boat docks. These will be productive using buzzbaits, spinnerbaits, and crankbaits, all in black or dark colors.

Start around the outside edges to catch the actively feeding fish. Then work to the inside of the dock, around dock posts, and under the dock, with jigs and worms, also in black/blue and other dark shades.

Crappie fishermen will do well on the bridges with minnows or crappie jigs, but they'll do even better if they keep in mind the cross members. There are the support members that join the pilings below the water. Crappie will gather under and around this horizontal structure and dropping a bait to the exact level the fish use will get more bites than being above, or below, that level.

RICHLAND CHAMBERS — Hybrids in September will behave according to water temperature. Once the temps get above about 85 degrees they'll spend a considerable portion of the day in water that is 28-38 feet deep. You'll want to focus on humps and structure with either ½ ounce or 1 ounce jiggling spoons, or a large gizzard shad if you're using live bait.

White bass will show up in schools, feeding on shad, and then go down deep again. They chase the shad into large schools, push them to the surface, and ambush the shad on top. If you're near enough you can throw most any bait into the melee and catch a fish. If you're not close enough, oh well.

You might want to keep a tail-spinner bait handy, rigged on a spinning rod with eight or 10 pound test. You can throw

this rig a country mile, and it brings more schools into range. Otherwise you just have to wait them out. Eventually you should find yourself in the right place at the right time.

You can sometimes follow the school, or find others on your electronics. They'll be somewhere around 10-25 feet deep and can be caught using a glitter slab with a crappie jig tied above it. Tie it one or two feet above the slab, and use white or yellow. Often you'll catch two at a time on this rig.

The Pelican Island area is a popular place to begin the search and you can look all the way down to the dam. Use binoculars to help in the search.

Bass will be on deeper structure as well. Drop-shots and deep-diving crankbaits over the oil pads and humps will find a few fish, as will combing the humps. As always, identify any thermocline present and keep your offerings above that depth.

TEXOMA — This is a great summer lake. Striped bass, largemouth, smallmouth bass, crappie, bream, and catfish all exist in great numbers. The bluffs and rocks are great places for baitfish to hide, and bass to ambush them. And the main-lake has an abundant population of Threadfin shad for all of the species to feed upon.

Stripers will usually have a little party early each morning in relatively shallow water. Main lake points in five feet or less can see some crazy topwater action. You can't bet on it every day, but it's always worth a quick look. These same places may be holding quality smallmouth and largemouth as well.

For the stripers you'll want to throw bigger pencil popper baits. For the other bass use Whopper Ploppers, Azuma Z dogs, and other bass standards. You can also throw square bills, spinnerbaits, Senkos, trickworms, and bladed jigs for the fish that are not hitting on top.

Anytime you have fish schooling, the majority of fish will not be crashing the surface. When you see a bunch of fish on top, just know that there is many, many, more underneath.

As the sun gets higher in the sky, the topwater bite will die off. Then you'll need to look to the main channel edges for stripers. Using one ounce and larger spoons will often work but on some

days nothing will catch them but a live threadfin shad.

You'll have to be on the water early, in the dark of the morning, to net these baits. Bait shops don't carry threadfin as bait, it is not legal. And most guides won't catch them for you. So it may be best to just sit out the heat of the day, and wait for the evening bite.

Smallies and largemouths can be caught around the docks and rocks on Texoma. You'll want to drop-shot flats adjacent to the bigger rocks, crash crankbaits into the rocks and lose jigs in the rocks if you want to catch the smallies. They use the boulders as shaded ambush points and you pretty much have to go in and root them out. It can be slow and laborious, but rewarding.

Largemouths are a little more cooperative, hiding in any vegetation and under the many docks on the lake. A wacky-rigged Robo Worm in Morning Dawn is a good choice later in the day. Try to get it as far back under the dock as you can, and work it s-l-o-w-l-w-y!

Early in the morning you can run a buzzbait along riprap and rocky shorelines, as well as around the back of the docks and get a few fish, right up until the sun makes the scene.

MONTICELLO — This lake has an interesting story behind it — one that looks pretty promising. After many years as a power plant lake, the plant went offline. I can remember about 30 years of January and February fishing on Monticello, with the lake being one of the first tournament stops each year on many circuits.

The plant took in water to cool the system, then pumped the hot water back into the lake. In the middle of winter, when all the other lakes were stone cold, Monticello would have 70 degree water. This made for active fish, even when it was so cold the water would freeze on your reel as you fished.

When the plant went offline Monticello became just another lake so to speak, with water temps being the same across the board. But it seems to have had little to no effect on the fish, at

least as far as the summer bassin' goes. The patterns will be the same summer patterns that are effective on other lakes, early on top then going deeper.

Start the day off points with topwaters like buzzbaits, poppers and spook-type baits. As the sun rises this bite will slow and you'll need to follow the fish down in the water column. That doesn't necessarily mean that the fish will immediately go to deeper water. Many times they'll stay in fairly shallow water, feeding on shad and other forage.

You can often extend the shallow water bite with a spinnerbait, square-bill crankbait or other shallow running baits. Texas rigged worms dragged across the points will also catch some good fish.

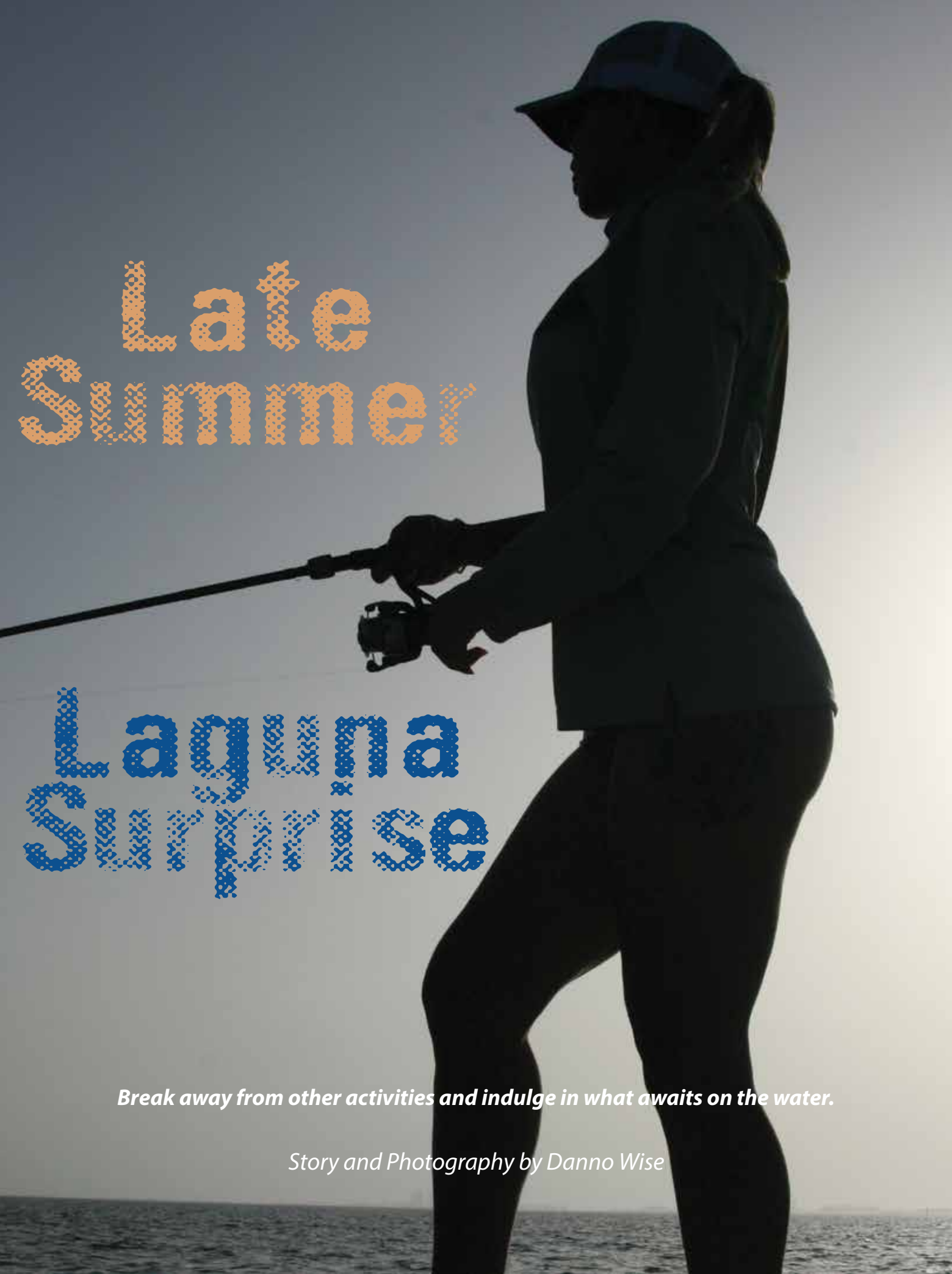
Eventually you'll need to move out in the lake, either in the middle of the creeks or to main lake humps and use the deepwater tactics like crankbaits, drop-shots and Carolina rigs. Try 4" finesse worms on the drop shots, and French fry or bubble fry baits on the Carolina rig.

Yep, cooler weather is right around the corner, and after this summer, I'm more than ready. But I've still got some fishing to do before then, so I'll hydrate, slather on the sunscreen, and get after 'em! 🌟🌟



PHOTO COURTESY RICHARD JUE

Crappie will continue to be caught around summertime brush piles as well as bridge cross-members.



Late
Summer

Laguna
Surprise

Break away from other activities and indulge in what awaits on the water.

Story and Photography by Danno Wise

September. The kids are back in school. Football season is upon us and hunters are roaming the fields for dove and teal. Yes, fall is certainly in the air. However, summer is still here. September is indeed a summer month. And, there is far more summer left in the Lower Laguna Madre during September than many people realize.

For one, September offers great deal of variety — specks, reds, snook, flounder, mangrove snapper, Spanish mackerel, kingfish, tarpon — just about every species that can be caught in South Texas will be caught during September. Plus it is not just the amount of species that are still active, but the amount of venues that remain in play that help make the next few weeks so interesting. Not only is fishing in the bay tremendous, but so is the beachfront, passes and nearshore (not to mention offshore).

Finally, there are a lot of different way to fish in September as well — sight casting, fly fishing, drifting, topwater plugs... Basically anglers can pick their target species and preferred method in September and odds are they'll be successful. This holds true throughout the entire Lower Laguna Madre which runs from just south of Port Isabel to the Land Cut north of Port Mansfield.

BAY

Beginning in the bay, this is one of the best times to consistently catch an inshore slam in the extreme southern portion of the Lower Laguna Madre (Port Isabel/South Padre Island area). Starting in September a large portion of the fish in the bay will be concentrated on the lower end — redfish, speckled trout, flounder, black drum and snook will all be hanging in close proximity to one another making it easier to catch each species without spending a ton of time boat riding. This pattern generally holds through October, making it much easier for anglers to land a diverse bag of fish on a single outing. Although these species will be in relatively close proximity and at times can be “incidental” catches while targeting another species, each type of fish generally needs to be specifically targeted to ensure success.

Snook, the most mystical of these species, will be caught in good numbers throughout late summer and early fall. Snook can be targeted around the jetties

(both South Padre and Port Mansfield), the bridges between South Padre and Port Isabel, and along mangrove shorelines, docks, pilings and areas of scattered shell. Generally, topwater plugs and soft-plastics prove more productive for linesiders. When fishing the deeper structure (jetties and bridges) fast-falling baits like the DOA TerrorEyz are the best bet.

Although snook fishing is best on the south end of the bay, throughout the Lower Laguna Madre, anglers leaving from Port Isabel, South Padre Island, Arroyo City or Port Mansfield can expect consistently good action for redfish and speckled trout.

In regards to both specks and reds, anglers can expect a bit more surface and shallow water action during September. Without a doubt, temperatures are still summer hot during the ninth month of the year. However, the days are much shorter so water temperatures will begin dropping. Due to this dip in water temperature, fish will be much more active in shallower water through a longer portion of the day. Fishermen can expect a much longer topwater bite. Even after fish quit hitting on surface baits, anglers can still experience several hours of sight-casting with soft-plastics and spoons on the flats.

While the topwater bite can be hot, it is a bit different than the spring topwater bite. Because the winds are usually fairly calm in September, “Jr” size plugs and other relatively quiet baits like Cordell Redfins are often more productive than large, loud surface plugs. And, low pitch rattles will usually work better than high pitch rattles this time of year.

Despite the need to use a “quieter” retrieve, anglers can actually work their baits quite a bit faster because fish will be plenty active and aggressive. This allows them to cover a bit more water than they normally can with topwater lures.

But, again, it is still summer, so it will be hot by mid-morning. As the day heats up the majority of the trout will begin heading to deeper water. Given this predictable behavior, summer specks will most often be found on flats that offer quick access to deeper water. After the trout move off the shallow flats, they can usually be easily plucked from this deeper water with live shrimp, DOA Shrimp or a variety of soft-plastics.

Redfish aren't as bothered by the heat and will usually stay up on the flats on the flats throughout the day. In fact, some of the best sight-casting opportunities for spot tails will occur a bit later in the morning, after the sun is high enough to allow anglers to better see the fish.



September, with its light winds and active fish is an ideal time for fly fishing and sight casting pristine flats.



Big trout, like this one caught by Gilbert Rodriguez, are also a possibility during late summer.



Ruby Delgado bowed up with another Lower Laguna Madre late summer surprise.

Once again, this scenario is perfect for fly fishermen, but conventional tackle anglers can enjoy plenty of September sight-casting as well.

Also, during September, the redfish phenomena known in the Lower Laguna as “herding up” will begin. This is when redfish which have spent their entire life in the maturing in the bay begin forming giant schools on the flats and making their way out to the open Gulf through either the East Cut (Port Mansfield) or the Brazos Santiago Pass (South Padre Island). Usually, reds will gather in groups by size. Those groups will merge into

larger schools as they make their way out of the bay. Finding large numbers of redfish on the flats is one of the more exciting angling experiences during September. Once anglers find a school, they can usually follow them day after day as they move ever closer to exiting the bay. When in doubt as to where to find fish, anglers should begin looking for reds on the flats nearest Gulf passes, then work further up the bay until a school is sighted.

The other member of the “Big 3” – flounder – will also be plenty

active during September. Actually flatfish catches have been increasing in the Lower Laguna Madre in recent years. Like redfish, flounder will spend late summer and early fall getting ready to migrate. Usually, they will be concentrated near small drains and along spoil islands this time of year. These fish are usually easily caught once they are located by slowly dragging a live or artificial bait across the bay floor. Since they are usually in fairly shallow water during September, it is much easier to target flounder than it is earlier in the summer.

A “bonus” species for fishermen in extreme South Texas during September is the mangrove snapper. Mangroves will be found around most structures (docks, pilings, bridges, rip-rap shore) during early September and by month’s end will be swarming around the jetties.

SURF

Surf conditions during September can be amazing. During this time, the tides generally run clear/green all the way to dry sand and the beachfront waters are full of a variety of gamefish such as speckled trout, Spanish mackerel, pompano, redfish, and more. While the clock is ticking on the productive time frame for plugging in the surf, this fishing



Ruby Delgado, aka Southern Salty Girl, proves that late summer is great time to catch a mixed bag (black drum, redfish and speckled trout) in the Lower Laguna Madre.

generally holds well into October in Deep South Texas.

During the lowlight period, noisy topwaters such as Heddon Super Spooks and MirrOlure She Dogs produce good results. Dark or dull colors provide the best silhouette during the early morning hours.

Soft-plastic baits that produce a good deal of vibration can also catch plenty of fish before sunrise. Paddle tail plastics such as the DOA 4-inch CAL Shadtail and Egret Wedgetail Mullet are good examples. Free-lined DOA Shrimp will draw plenty of strikes. However, since this bait relies strictly on sight to draw strikes, during lowlight periods it is best to use glow or one of the various glow combination color patterns offered by DOA.

PASSES, BEACHFRONT AND BEYOND

By September, bull redfish will be thick around both sets of jetties, in both the East Cut and Brazos Santiago Pass, the beachfront between the passes and Boca Chica Beach. During September, the vast majority of redfish found in the passes and beachfront waters will be oversize, with many truly monstrous specimens being caught every year. Later in the month, the bull redfish will be joined by upper slot size fish leaving the bays.

Kingfish are also still very much a possibility during September. Due to the usually calm wind and sea conditions and the fact kingfish are found so close to shore right now, practically any size or type of boat is capable of reaching schools of kings during late-summer. Fishermen can also consistently catch kingfish by casting from the jetties during September.

A wide variety of natural and artificial baits will work for kings. When fishing from a boat, anglers can drift or troll with ribbonfish or cigar minnows. Artificial lures such as large soft plastics, 1 oz. Rat-L-Traps, Rapalas, and spoons can be effectively be cast or trolled.

Spanish mackerel, will also be along the beach and near-shore waters in good numbers. It is common to find Spanish in the surf, just offshore, around the jetties and in the passes. Spoons, smaller jigs and Rat-L-Traps, and a variety of flies are all effective for Spanish mackerel.

Of course, one of the most south after "glamor" species is the tarpon. There will still be plenty of tarpon around in

September. In fact, late summer and early fall is the best time to catch truly big tarpon in Deep South Texas. There will be good concentrations of tarpon in both the East Cut and the Brazos Santiago Pass. Tarpon will also be cruising the beachfront and can be targeted by surf fishermen.

Tarpon fishing is consistently good during low light periods, with evening usually being a bit more productive than morning. However, tarpon are easily turned on by current and can become active at any point during the day that has a good tidal flow.

In short, late summer can be an outstanding time to fish the Lower Laguna Madre – if you can find the time to break away from all the other activities going on this month, that is, and spend a little bit of time on the water. ★★



Taylor Garcia "kisses" a redfish goodbye just before it is released.

An advertisement for the PT-7 lure. At the top, a yellow banner reads "PT-7 freshwater and saltwater". Below this, a man in a blue shirt is shown holding a large fish. The word "New" is written in large, stylized yellow letters. The text "Walk where no other topwater has walked before!" is written in white with a black outline. The PT-7 lure is shown in the top left corner, with an American flag and "Made in USA" text. The DOA logo is in the bottom right corner.

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FISHING LURES

Choosing The Proper Ammo For Your Rifle

Decades ago as a kid and even as a young man I'd go into the sporting goods store and buy whatever ammo was cheapest for my big game rifle whether I was going antelope, deer, elk, moose or bear hunting. I knew all men were created equal in the sight of God so I figured all ammo was to. Not so.

I don't want to necessarily say that you have to buy the highest priced ammo to be successful but — you kind of do. Before you say I'm being a little dramatic let me explain. I'd always used the cheapest ammo and it seemed to always work good enough.

However, one year I shot a deer and an antelope within weeks of each other and made perfect behind the shoulder shots and yet neither one dropped. In fact, the antelope had taken off like I'd missed it. I finally found it a couple of miles later and snuck up and made a neck shot on it through the sagebrush. Then on the deer it took two more shots.

Then as I got thinking back about 10 years earlier I'd hit an antelope broadside and it had taken off running. I had to shoot it again.

The above hunts got me doubting cheap ammo and started my quest to find something better. I won't be able to cover every angle in this short article but let's hit



To get ready for upcoming hog, axis deer and whitetail hunts I tested out 13 different flavors of ammo to finally find the right one for my new 30-06.

the basics. Really you have to break the topic down into two categories:

1. Accurate ammo
2. Good performing ammo

ACCURACY

There are some general rules concerning accuracy as to which ammo is the most accurate. When it's all said and done you're going to have to experiment and test various brands, bullet weights and loads of ammo in your particular rifle to determine which one shoots the best.

So in a nutshell, I'd start with some good performing ammo. But in each one of those brands you also have to test

to see which one shoots the most accurately in your rifle.

For instance, I just got a Mossberg Patriot Revere rifle. So let's say I decided to shoot Brand X in my new 30-06. Brand X may have a few choices of good performing ammo

from. But each one of those also

comes in different grains of bullets which will alter your accuracy. So you have to determine which grain of bullet shoots best in your rifle.

Granted, there are some generalities that can help narrow down your search. Like on your .223 you need a faster twist as you go to a heavier bullet or a 165 grain bullet is the most accurate for your 30-06.

Now I'm not a guru on these general rules-of-thumb so if you have a buddy that is more knowledgeable ask them for advice on what grain bullet should be the most accurate in your caliber rifle.

Another, and maybe even better option is to call or contact the rifle manufacturer and ask them which ammo should shoot the best in a particular rifle. They have always given me good advice and that alone will help narrow down and shorten your search.

So as we close on the accuracy angle. To me, accuracy trumps all. I don't care how well your ammo performs, if it doesn't hit your animal in the correct spot, you've got a wounded trophy and that is not good.

GOOD PERFORMING AMMO

One bullet does not perform for all of your hunts. Let me explain. You don't want to use the same bullet when hunting coyotes and moose. On coyotes you want a bullet that starts expanding as soon as it hits. Varmints are smaller, thin skinned animals.

On something as big as a moose,



To further tighten down your groups you may also need to work on your trigger. And for sure a clear, crisp scope is needed.



PRO-STAFF ACCURACY TIP

If you're not getting a good group or if you were and then it starts spreading out, try giving your rifle a good cleaning. On a particular rifle I obtained some decent groups and then they jumped out to 2 ¼ inches. I gave it a through cleaning using Barnes CR-10 and they tightened right up.

Also throw out the first shot after cleaning since the barrel has oil in it. And don't test a non-gilding metal bullet after shooting other ammo without a through cleaning or you're almost guaranteed to have bad groups.

Sometimes a rifle can be super picky and a good cleaning can greatly increase its accuracy.

you want the bullet to pass through the thick hide, through some thick muscle and break through a rib before it starts expanding. You want it to expand and do some damage in the vital area (chest cavity where the heart and lungs are located).

If you used a varmint bullet on moose it would hit the hide, start expanding and just blow out a chunk of meat but never

penetrate to hit the vitals. The moose would run harmlessly away and survive. So, you need a bullet for the animal being hunted — one for varmints, one for deer sized animals and another for elk, bear and moose.

What you need to do is to decide which ammo you want to use. Hornady, Nosler, Barnes and Swift all have reputations for manufacturing good performing ammo

loads. Then test ammo from each of these four companies to determine which load shoots the most accurately in your rifle. For my new Mossberg 30-06, I tested 13 different loads before I found the best one.

If you take time to determine the most accurate bullet for your rifle and choose some good performing ammo, you'll be trailing less and packing more. Good luck this season. **T&J**

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CoastWatch | Danno Wise

Although most people consider Labor Day Weekend to be the end of the summer season, summer actually extends a full three weeks into the ninth month of the year. Even then, summer-like temperatures are likely to be felt throughout the month. However, summer-like crowds will be long-gone by the time summer actually ends.

Of course, just because there will be fewer people fishing doesn't mean there won't be plenty of good fishing to be had. In fact, September can provide those fishermen who do make their way to the coast with some stellar angling action.

In most areas of the Upper Texas and Louisiana coasts, September offers a variety of action. September is somewhat of a transition month, when several patterns overlap. Redfish are schooling up and moving out to the beachfront for their annual spawning ritual. As the water begins to cool, speckled trout will begin to move shallower. Flounder are also getting friskier, in anticipation of their annual run later in the fall. Tripletail will be filtering through the bays and beachfront waters as well.

Despite all the preparation for fall by the bay species, the beachfront and nearshore gamefish are still playing as if it were summer. Kingfish will remain within reach of small boat anglers. Tarpon will continue to hang out along most beaches. Tuna will actually be swinging in closer and ling, dorado and other popular offshore fish will still be found in good numbers. ★★



Matagorda guide Capt. Tommy Countz says September is a slow month for fishing traffic, but actually offers some of the year's finest fishing action.

"September is really interesting," said Countz. "It is one of my slowest months for bookings. I'm always amazed by that, because we have some of our best fishing of the year during September. But there's hardly anybody out fishing, so you can pretty much have it all to yourself."

"The main thing about September is the redfish will really start schooling up. I absolutely love fishing West Matagorda Bay on a falling tide during September. There are redfish all over West Bay in September. For the most part, we'll be fishing the shorelines and flats. But when we get some higher tides, which happens in September, we'll get back in the back lakes. You catch them on a gold spoon or just about any soft-plastics. But because we have consistently mild wind, September is a great time for sight-casting and fly fishing."

"September is actually a pretty good trout fishing month. We'll still be catching trout, but it's such a good time for sight casting for reds that sometimes it's hard to get away from fishing for reds and fish for trout. If you are looking for trout, all you have to do is wade the grass beds. It's pretty much still a summer patter. Early in the morning you can get them on topwaters. Then switch to plastics. My go-to plastics are still the darker colors."

Freeport guide Capt Mike Segall of Reel Threel Charters says September sees some easy fishing in his area.

"September is time to relax a little after a long hot summer of some good fishing," said Segall. "The nearshore beachfront will see the start of some hot



PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. TREY PRYE

As water and air temperatures begin to cool look for big speckled trout to come out of their summer funk and start to aggressively feed. Capt. Trey Prye shows off one of East Matagorda's trophies that he released.

bull redfish action, so we'll be fishing the mouth of the Brazos River and areas off the beachfront out a few miles. We'll be looking for schools of bait and large schools of redfish. For the most part, we will fish sardines. They are a good bait when fishing on the bottom.

"The state water fishing is still good for snapper and there are always kingfish and Spanish mackerel hanging around as well. Will be fishing trolled divers over reefs or bump trolling sardines."

"The deep sea action is also good. Shrimp boats will be holding kingfish, cobia, dorado and blackfin tuna out in deep water. Lures and jigs work well, as do live blue runners. Also, look to find weed lines or grass to look for the dorado. It's always fun to take a bay rod with you to catch chicken dolphin on light tackle!"

Galveston guide Capt. Tim Young has high hopes for this month. "September could bring us some of our best fishing of the year in Trinity Bay, barring excessive runoff from any tropical systems," said Young. "The migration to the northern reaches of Trinity Bay continues for speckled trout just like in August. Well pads and deeper shell will still produce good numbers of fish for both live bait and lure chunkers."

"If we get a cold front or two to pass through and drop the water temperatures, anglers could see some early bird action from the Cedar Point Wells to Dow's Reef and along the West shoreline all the way to Jack's Pocket. The Anahuac Pocket on the east side of the mouth of the Trinity River should see some bird action as well.

"In September, lures of choice will be soft plastics like the Z-Man EZ Shrimp or scented Jerk Shadz in your favorite color on a 1/4 or 3/8 ounce jighead. Topwaters like the Bill Lewis Lures StutterStep will draw the bigger bites if larger trout are in that school.

"Fishing the slicks over deeper oyster and clam shell should be in full play as well for trout and reds in September. Keying on the new, small slicks and a stealth approach with the trolling motor will greatly improve your odds of putting some quality trout in the deck. Soft plastics and Rat-L-Traps will help you cover water quickly to find where the school is.

"Remember, a slick is where they were, not where they are. They are always moving and if there is any wind you can bet they will be quartering into that wind

one way or another. When the feed is on and they are slicking like crazy you can see the direction the school is traveling just by watching the slicks pop. Use the trolling motor to get just ahead of them and go to work.

"September is full of opportunities for Trinity Bay anglers. Take advantage of it and catch a bunch, keep enough to eat, and release the rest for our future anglers."

Sabine Lake guide Capt. Randy Foreman said the end of summer generally sees bird activity kick into high gear on the Texas/Louisiana border.

"By September, we'll be seeing birds working hard," said Foreman. "When those first few fronts start pushing through, the shrimp will start leaving the marsh.



PHOTO COURTESY REEL THREEEL CHARTERS

Inshore or offshore are both options for Capt. Mike Segall, Reel Threel Charters. Here he shows off a solid speckled trout that came from one of back bay areas out of Freeport.



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PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. TOMMY COUNTZ

Redfish will take top billing along much of the Texas coast. Mary Covington caught this big red while wade fishing the bars and grass beds of West Matagorda Bay.

When they do, those birds will be on them. Then, all you got to do is find the birds and you'll find the fish.

"The bird activity usually starts on the north end of the lake. It will move south as the shrimp keep working south to go out of the lake. All this usually starts happening around the second or third week of September. Once it starts, it will last the rest of the month.

"A lot of times when those fish are under the birds, just about anything will work. You can throw a lot of different soft plastics and catch fish. My favorite bait to throw under the birds is a 3/4-ounce weedless spoon. I like to slow roll it right along the bottom. That's how I'll usually catch the bigger fish. So, you've got to let it drop, because the bigger fish will be below the smaller ones.

"The surf will still be good in September, too. There will still be a lot of trout along the beachfront. Plus, we'll start seeing big redfish showing up around the jetties. And, the short rigs will still be paying off. You'll still have trout at the short rigs, as well as Spanish mackerel. We'll also start seeing tripletail around the buoys and rigs.

"Actually, you can also pick up a few reds while you're fishing under the birds. They'll be mixed in with the trout. But, the best bet for redfish will be the points and dropoffs along the Sabine channel. They'll be staging there before they start heading out to the Gulf.

"Our flounder will also be staging.

They'll be gathering around all the marsh drains, waiting for the shrimp and small baitfish to start migrating out of the marsh. They'll be feeding mostly on shrimp and shad. I'll be throwing the same soft-plastics I use for reds and trout, but will tip them." **T★J**



The fish on Lake Calcasieu will be transitioning as the seasons change, according to Captains Jeff and Mary Poe of Big Lake Guide Service.

"September is a month of transition, as fish move from their summer patterns to fall patterns," said Poe. "During the early part of September trout and redfish will generally be found in their usual summer locations - ship channel, jetties, the beach and on the south end of the lake. But by the end of the month, most trout fishing will be done in the lake over reefs, under birds and north of



PHOTO COURTESY CAPT. TOMMY COUNTZ

Tripletail will still be an option in West Matagorda this month as well as out along the beachfront.

the Intracoastal Waterway. Target areas will be Commissary Point, areas in the northern end of the lake and all of West Cove. Gulls picking over shrimp will be your best indicator of busting trout and redfish.

“The best soft plastics will be Lil’ Jons, H & H split tail beetles and salty grubs. The best colors to throw will be Chartruse Ice, Watermelon/Red, Opening Night in Little John’s, clear metal flake and chartreuse in beetles and grubs. Topwaters such as She Dogs, She Pups and Skitter Walks will all be good for topwater action. Pink, chrome, bone and chartreuse will all produce fish up on top.

“September is also our best month for tripletail and cobia. Tripletail can be found in the lake under any floating debris or crab trap. In the Gulf both species can be found under floating debris, along the buoy chain and close platforms.”

For fishermen heading out of Venice, September will see both inshore and offshore fish still stuck in a summer pattern. Flounder and redfish will be found in the river and the tributaries feeding into the river. Anglers should concentrate on the various points and



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

On Sabine Lake as well as in southwest Louisiana the migration of shrimp out of the marsh will stir redfish and trout to feed.

drains.

Specks, however, won’t move into the river until later in the year. In September, they will still be found offshore. The key to finding specks in September will be locating structure such as productive platforms in 10 to 20 feet of water.

Offshore, there will still be tuna and

dorado around the floating rigs between 30 and 50 miles out. Amberjack will be hanging around the deep water rigs in 300 to 500 feet of water. The closer rigs will be holding plenty of mangrove snapper and cobia, while tarpon will still be found cruising a couple miles off the beachfront and hanging around the major passes. **T★J**

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FLIPPED OUT ON PUNCHIN'



Late summer and early fall are when grass mats often top out near the surface after a long growing season. The mats are particularly noticeable when water levels are low.

Top Pro's Pointers for gear selection and techniques for flipping or punching.

Story and Photography by Matt Williams

It is sometimes hard to find much humor in bass fishing, but I can't help but crack a grin each time I recall the story behind Tommy Martin's crushing Bassmaster win on Toledo Bend in November 1981.

The veteran Toledo Bend guide flipped up more than 81 pounds of bass from 30-plus feet of hydrilla to win the three-day event. What's funny about the deal is the unconventional equipment he relied on to get it done.

"I was using a six-foot, heavy action pistol grip with a 1/2 ounce jig," recalled Martin, 77. "For years a 1/2-ounce was the heaviest jig you could get, so we pegged a 1/4 ounce slip sinker on top to help get it straight down through the grass on heavy monofilament line. And those pistol grip rods — man, it was something else wrestling a five to six pound bass out of a jungle of deep grass with one of those. We lost a lot of fish. But we did the best we could do with what we had. Things have definitely changed a lot since then as far as the gear we have available. It's much better."

While the modern tackle that anglers rely on to snatch bass out of the thick grass is much better suited to task than it was decades ago, one thing that hasn't changed is the bass' affinity for playing hide and seek in the heavy stuff.

Martin may have been the first to discover the connection between big bass and matted hydrilla in the early 1970s. That's when the aquatic plant first showed up in Toledo Bend and Sam Rayburn, both in eastern Texas. Some of the grass was growing in water as deep as 37 feet.

The Nitro pro won numerous tournaments taking a vertical approach around the grass while other bassers chose to skirt the edges or avoided the green stuff altogether.

At one point Martin donned a scuba mask and jumped in the lake so he could get a visual beneath the canopy. What he found was a maze of root systems that resembled an aquatic jungle laced with openings and canals where fish of all kinds could roam freely about.

It was also evident why the fish were so inclined to eat his jig as it came racing by on a vertical fall. Not only were the bass using the grass as shelter from big sun — they were also relying on it as cover to ambush shad, perch and other

unsuspecting forage and they still are.

In fact, flippin'/punchin' around heavy vegetation is just as deadly as it ever was. The difference is, it is more popular among anglers than ever before. Furthermore, the gear they are using to play the game around heavy grass, tules, lily pads, willow bushes, huisache and other thick cover has been refined to the point that there are rods, hooks, lines, sinkers and a variety of jigs and soft plastic baits specifically designed with the techniques in mind.

Florida bass pros Peter Thliverous, Scott Martin and Randall Tharp have flipped their way to some plump pay days over the years, as have Oklahoma's Bradley Hallman and Ish Monroe.

Not surprisingly, each angler is super selective when it comes to choosing gear for targeting bass in places where the sun

doesn't shine.

What follows are a few tips they offered up regarding gear selection for flipping and punching:

Hooks

A heavy-duty, straight shank hook is heavily favored by many anglers for most heavy cover situations, mainly because it is believed to result in more consistent hook-ups when used in combination with a snell knot. The snell causes the hook to kick out and up when you swing on a fish, which many believe results in more consistent hook-ups when fishing vertical in the water column.

Tharp's favorite for probing creatures and craws like the Zoom Z-Hog and Super Speed Craw (both four inch baits) around matted vegetation or bushes is a straight shank 4/0 VMC Heavy Duty Flippin' hook. He says the wire is stout enough to



Give them grass and the bass will come. A big jig is one of the best baits for busting through the canopy and getting at lunkers below during the dog days of summer and early fall.



A heavy action rod with some back bone is a must for wrestling big bass out of heavy over. Power Tackle's Grass Mat Special is designed with the task in mind.

withstand violent hook sets with braided line or low stretch fluorocarbon, but not so big in diameter that it hampers penetration. It also has a double spike bait holder with a resin closed-eye to prevent line slippage.

"About the only time I'll deviate from that hook is if I'm flipping hollow body bait like a tube," Tharp said. "That's when I'll go to a 5/0 VMC wide gap."

Martin uses the TK130 flippin' hook for probing thick grass mats and smaller bushes or stumps in combination with a meaty creature style bait or a craw worm.

"The only time I won't use the TK130 when I'm flippin' is when the fish are buried deep in the center of those big,

barky willow trees," he said. "The angle of the point is such that it wants to come through the plastic really quick. If you happen to snag on something it's a lot easier to get hung and break off."

Martin prefers a Trokar MagWorm EWG hook in larger willows, because it sits "flatter" and isn't as prone to snag as badly as the straight shank. "I'll also use it if I'm flipping skinner soft plastics like a paddle tail worm," he said.

Line

Most anglers prefer braided line over fluorocarbon or mono when punching vegetation because it tends to slice through grass, resists abrasion, has no stretch and is super strong. Some like

braid around wood too, while others favor a heavy fluorocarbon because it doesn't saw into bark and hang up near as bad.

Hallman prefers 55 pound Power Pro for punching grass; 25 pound Seguar Invisx for wood cover. Tharp relies on a similar combination using the Gamma brand. "I don't like braid around wood, mainly because it wants to dig into the wood and tends to get hung up more," Tharp said. "Plus, it makes a sawing noise when it comes over limbs."

Weights

Bullet weights made from lead, brass or steel will work, but tungsten weights (3/4 ounce and up) are by far the most popular choice for punching in thick vegetation. Tungsten is harder and heavier than the other metals. This allows for better sensitivity and a significantly smaller profile, which helps it get in and out of thick cover much easier while remaining less visible.

Hallman likes Reins tungsten for all those reasons and more. "I think the hook-up ratio is way better with tungsten. It's smaller, so it doesn't blow the mouth open on the hook set," he said. "I think Reins sinkers are little bit smaller in size than other brands. Plus, they have a high quality insert."

He likes a 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 ounce weight for a fast fall when the fish are aggressive but will switch to a slightly lighter weight the bite gets tough.

Thliveros is tungsten guy, as well. He has a stockpile of weights from one of his former sponsors, Tru-Tungsten (now defunct), so that's what he uses. The Florida pro prefers tungsten over lead because it provides better sensitivity, a smaller profile and tends to come through cover better due to its slick surface.

"Lead is more coarse, which can actually create some drag in really thick stuff," he said.

Grass Jigs and Punching Rigs

The grass jig is made specifically for probing grass beds like hydrilla or milfoil. It's built with a conical shaped head for slipping in and out of grass easily. The jig should be equipped with a heavy wire hook to withstand violent hooksets using heavy action rod braided line. Jigs weighing 1 to 1 1/2 ounces will optimize efficiency with a vertical presentation.

As good as grass jigs work, many anglers are opting for punching skirts

these days. The skirt is designed to be fished between the slip sinker used for Texas rigging and your flipping hook of choice. Some companies are building tungsten weights with necks specially designed for securing a punching skirt. The punch skirt rig provides the large profile of a jig and the weedless properties of a Texas rig, so it comes through thick cover extremely well.

Martin says he prefers to use a Gambler KO punching skirt during periods the year when the fish aren't under a lot of fishing pressure and they are feeding up for spawn. On Lake Okeechobee, he says one of the best periods to use it is during September through December.

Pegs for Punchin' and Flippin'

Most punchers prefer to use a bobber stop above the weight to keep it snugged against the bait head. This prevents separation on the fall and promotes better penetration. Some anglers prefer to use a stop beneath weights larger than 3/4 ounce to help protect the knot.

Hallman prefers a good quality stop from Sixth Sense Lure Co. or Bass Pro Shops. He will use two stops when punching with weights 1 ounce and larger to prevent slippage and save time spent re-adjusting over the course of the day.

Monroe likes a pegged weight anytime he's punching matted vegetation, but

prefers to go pegless flipping about brush. "I won't peg my weight in brush or trees," Monroe said. "Instead, I keep light pressure on the bait and actually fish it through the brush. I think this gives the bait a better action."

Rods and Reels

You need a rod with some backbone when fishing big jigs and Texas rigs in thick cover at close range. The idea is to have plenty of leverage to drive the hook deep then get the fish turned and coming your way quickly. Rods with a long handle that are upwards of seven feet long with heavy to medium-heavy action are heavily preferred in this arena.

As reels go, baitcasters rule. Many pros prefer one with a high gear ratio of 7.0:1 or faster. The higher gear ratio helps to gather slack line and set the hook quickly when a strike is detected. It also allows you to get the bait back to the boat quicker once it is out of the strike zone. **T★J**



The punch skirt rig provides the large profile of a jig and the weedless properties of a Texas rig, so it comes through thick cover extremely well. Note the bobber stop peg above the weight, which keeps the weight snugged against the bait.



Grass jigs are designed with a conical-shaped head to help them penetrate thick cover with ease.



READING A DOVE FIELD

In order to be successful knowledge of the quarry is paramount.

Story and Photography by Bill L. Olson

Optimism and expectations run high on the opening first day of hunting seasons in Texas. September 1 marks the beginning of traditional fall hunting as dove seasons open statewide. The North and Central Zone begin their full first “split” and will continue until November 4. The late second season opens December 21 and closes on January 14, 2019.

The South Zone celebrates with an abbreviated opening the first two weekends of the month on September 1-2 and 8-9. Hunting is restricted to noon until sunset each of these four days. The first split of the regular South Zone season runs September 14 – October 30. The second split is open December 14 – January 21, 2019.

In order to be a successful hunter, knowledge of the quarry is paramount. However, many take the paloma for granted and assume the swift gray birds will be there or not. If they are there then plenty of shooting will be available while if weather events have changed they may not be around.

To better understand the migration as well as required habitat and other needs by both mourning as well as white-winged dove Texas Parks & Wildlife Department’s Owen Fitzsimmons was consulted. He is the Webless Migratory Game Bird Program Leader and said, “Overall, mourning dove and white-winged doves have pretty diverse migratory patterns. A lot of folks think birds either migrate or they don’t, but it’s much more complicated and varied than with many species. Generally, mourning dove breeding north of the 39-40th parallel (Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, etc.) migrate south for the winter. How far south? That depends on the flyway and also depends on the bird. Birds south of that line may migrate a few hundred miles or may go down to deep Central America.

“Banding/harvest data for Texas mourning doves indicate that most of the birds harvested in the Lone Star State come from Central Management Unit states,” Fitzsimmons continued. “A very few come from more eastern states like Michigan, Missouri, Illinois, and Iowa. Again, there’s no hard and fast rule to this.”

The program leader explained that mourning dove banded in Texas have been



Scouting in advance of a dove hunt will help a hunter determine the direction birds will fly into a dove field.

recovered in the Dakotas, Mississippi, New Mexico, central Mexico and beyond. White-winged dove have been recovered as far south as Panama.

Overall, Texas and Mexico host over one third of the continent’s mourning dove wintering population. Texas is lucky as a major breeding site for doves, a major continental wintering site, and a major stopover site for birds going further south.

When it comes to white-winged dove they have experienced loss of nesting habitat in citrus groves due to freezes but have adapted well to the changed conditions. “White-winged dove have

expanded in abundance and distribution rapidly over the past few decades, and are now found in just about every corner of Texas and into the surrounding states,” Fitzsimmons stated. “Little is known about migratory movements for Mexican white-wing populations, but the historical Rio Grande Valley population was considered migratory. Now 70 to 80 percent of white-winged dove are found in and around urban/suburban areas throughout the state. The Texas population is considered at least partially migratory or probably even mostly non-migratory these days.”



PHOTO COURTESY CHRIS NELSON

When a plan comes together and results in a limit of dove and a great day afield with a friend. TOJ Reader Chris Nelson’s retriever Rutger relaxes after “a day at work” retrieving dove.

With a basic understanding of dove migration, a successful dove hunter also needs to understand what attracts and hold these birds. This will help increase shooting opportunities and increased hunting success.

“As for local movement, doves need three things; food, water and cover,” Fitzsimmons explained. “Available research indicates that juvenile dove typically won’t go farther than they need to get these things. Some juveniles have local home ranges of 500 acres or less, and on average they tend to fly around two to three miles to get from one resource to another, if possible.

“In southern latitudes, research indicates that most juvenile mourning dove harvested in the early season are shot within five to seven miles of where they were banded that summer. This means they tend to find a place with needed resources and stick to it — at least through the early part of the season. I would imagine this is true all year long for white-wings.

“I tell this to hunters a lot, because it’s important to think not only of your dove field, but of what the surrounding few miles provides as resources as well. The best thing you can do to attract and hold doves is provide all three of these things in close proximity — within a couple miles or less. Basically, if you can provide adequate food, a water source, and structure for dove to breed (during spring/summer), roost and loaf, you’ll have birds all season long.

“Of course, a lot more goes into that, like providing the “right” food sources, making sure there is bare ground for them to feed, bare ground around the water source, etc. but that’s basically it. Hunters often underestimate the importance of providing structure for birds to roost and rest in. Research indicates that birds may spend up to 20 percent or more of their time during the day resting and preening.”

Once in the field it has been my experience of years of hunting throughout Texas as well as Mexico that mourning as well as white-winged dove use changes in terrain or vegetation as landmarks or travel corridors. Decades ago my Dad introduced me to hunting white-winged dove in Mexico and he always love to hunt a corner or gap in a fence row. Like many lessons he taught he was spot-on and we shared many excellent hunts



Mo-Jo type spinning wing decoys can help pull dove in for closer shots.

together.

Fitzsimmons said, “As far as I know, no one in the scientific community has ever looked at local movement corridors like you mentioned; gaps in brush, down fencelines, etc. however, I imagine that changes quite a bit based on where they’re shot at and disturbed and with changes in resources (i.e. water hole drying up, etc.) at a local level.”

He said one of the most important factors in reading a dove field is to know what’s in the surrounding area as far as food, water, cover, and what time of day your hunting.

“Many dove hunters underestimate the value of scouting the field and area that is going to be hunted,” he encouraged. “I grew up a big-time waterfowler, so scouting has always been part of the game for me, but it’s astonishing how few hunters do it for dove. Spend a few mornings and afternoons in the dove field before the season starts and note where the dove are coming from. Drive around your area during the day and see where they’re holing up between feeding times.

“Also note where all the surrounding watering holes are located in your area. Find out what other fields are going to be hunted and try to

anticipate where birds might go after they have been shot at. Once you figure that out, then you can start to look at where in your field they’re going to come from and how they’re going to fly in.”

Fitzsimmons said he has hunted fields in areas with heavy hunting pressure and the birds will arrive there before daylight to feed, so you had to be already set up before shooting light. He has also hunted fields where you might as well wait till mid-afternoon before you even think about getting out there. Scouting is key.

During our conversation he agreed with other in-the-field observations from my years of hunting dove. “You are right, dead snags and other structure is important, because particularly mourning dove like to fly in, perch, and check things out before getting down on the ground



Roost sights, available water and food like croton/goat weed provide the three ingredients dove require to be attracted and stay in an area.

to feed,” he agreed. “I’m sure you’ve seen this, but I’ve hunted fields where birds will go a couple hundred yards to the neighboring property and perch on power lines and watch you shoot from there, perfectly comfortable and knowing they’re in a safe spot, so roosting/loafing structure nearby is very important.”

We also agreed on several other elements to successful dove hunt including the use of full camouflage. “You have to give these birds credit, they’re not as dumb as some people think,” he said. “I’m a big advocate of camo and cover for dove hunters, too. I get that you can sit on a bucket in shorts and a t-shirt in the open and get your limit, I’ve done it, but in my experience your wound/loss rate goes way down if you cover up a little and get the birds in close. Reading a dove field should also take into account how the birds see it and see you from the air and whether or not you are obviously visible.”

Other field tips to help increase success include using shadows to help a hunter blend in and setting up with something to help break the human silhouette. Using a low profile swivel bucket-seat will provide a lower profile of the hunter, be more comfortable and still, thus encouraging birds to fly in close. Waiting until a bird is close before mounting the shotgun in a smooth, fluid motion will result in easier shots.

Along fence rows there are gaps in vegetation and setting up a few yards to one side or the other will many times afford good shooting opportunities. Right handed shooters should set up on the left side of the gap while lefties will have an easier, more natural left to right swing by being on the right side of the opening.

To aid in the retrieval of downed birds, particularly early in the season when vegetation is still green and high, shoot a single bird and mark the position it fell. Lock on and focus on that position, and immediately go to the downed bird. Pass on other shots until the down bird is in hand. Doing otherwise will result in more time walking around in the open searching for “lost” birds.

Also if caught in the open don’t drop down and try to hide – the dove has more than likely already spotted you. Instead continue slowly walking or come to a slow stop. Don’t look up but rather use the bill of your hunting hat to conceal your face and eyes. Many times dove will



The author’s son is decked out in full camo, is using the shade from the brush to help him blend in, is seated on a swivel bucket-seat to lower his profile and is positioned along a lane dove use as a flight corridor.

continue on their same flight path and are less likely to flare.

On windy days hunters can many times walk up dove feeding in a field. Use the wind to your advantage and walk into the wind. When dove flush they will usually catch the wind flying to the right or left as opposed to trying to fly into the strong breeze.

One final tip is once the shooting

begins and the dove are flying if the position you have taken is not producing move to a position that has been observed that may produce better results. However, when hunting with a group, let them know in a loud, clear voice you are moving and where you are moving.

Hunting seasons are opening and the best time of year to be afield is at hand.

★

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THE KILLER INSTINCT

It's a personal thing. A friend of mine doesn't apologize for his attitude. He goes fishing to catch fish and is extremely disappointed with his performance the few times he fails to reach this goal. Tournaments and contests don't interest him, yet he is extremely competitive in his approach. Competition to him is between the angler and the fish, not between anglers..

Every good fisherman has this thread of desire and determination woven into his approach to the sport. It's the killer instinct and it can make all the difference when the going gets tough. Many of us put in our time on the water and enjoy every moment of it, but the catch becomes incidental to our efforts. Just being aboard a boat and relaxing can perform magical therapy for the rigors of a week at work.

For the competitor, victory is

everything. Everybody likes to catch fish, but the majority of anglers don't take it quite as seriously or work at it quite as hard. As a boy, I can remember my father fishing with a passion. Even though he released many of the fish he caught, it was critical to him that every day he spent on the water yielded results. Watching him work to achieve this goal taught me a great deal about fishing and the subtleties involved. Little things mean a lot. Dad would keep changing techniques and work on the smallest details until he found the answer on any given day.

Fishing is a game of minor variations. The difference between a blitz and a bust may manifest itself in the speed of retrieve or the



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

Sometimes we learn to think like a fish, but that's an impossibility. Fish respond out of habit, conditioning, and instinct rather than a thought process. What they should be telling you is to learn and understand a fish's habits.

diameter and breaking strength of line or leader. When a person is driven by the killer instinct, he is observant. Not long ago, when I caught two fish in a row, my partner noticed that my rig was slightly different than his. He immediately changed his tackle to coincide with mine and he caught the next fish. I've been in situations where my partner vibrated his wrist as he retrieved his lure and that produced strikes. When I followed his lead, fish struck my artificial as well.

Not only is it important to rig and retrieve properly, but one has to be in the right spot. Careless positioning of the boat or running a casual course can be expensive in terms of catching fish. Sometimes, you have to drag baits from shallow to deep or work both edges of a current or try to find the right depth. A very experienced professional captain told me that he once ran a boat that fish rejected baits in a standard trolling spread. He discovered if he fished all the baits longer than normal, his ratio of strikes



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went up dramatically.

No one can fault an angler who prefers a more relaxed approach to the sport. If catching fish is your goal, the key lies in total concentration and focusing on every detail. Top ranking fishermen boast tremendous powers of recall. Years later, they can refer to specific situations similar to what they are currently facing.

Writers sometimes suggest that we learn to think like a fish, but that's an impossibility. Fish respond out of habit, conditioning, and instinct rather than a thought process. What they should be telling you is that fish are creatures of habit and it is critical to learn and understand those habits. The killer instinct teaches one to constantly observe every detail of the current situation, try to compare it to successful previous experiences, and keep experimenting until one discovers how to make fish strike.

Think of the challenge facing the charter captain. Every day he is on the water, his party expects him to put them on fish with a success ratio far above what they could achieve by themselves. In most cases, he already has Plans B and C in mind if he can't produce the primary species. Even he faces those days when nothing seems to work. Unfortunately for him, he can't kick back and relax. Instead, that skipper has to use everything he knows to try to find fish for his customers.

There's no way for the average angler to face the difficult challenge of constantly finding fish and getting them to strike. A more meaningful alternative lies in compromising. Decide on a reasonable time span during your day on the water and give it all you have, working hard to produce fish. If nothing happens in the allotted time, you can go back to casual fishing or just relax and enjoy the rest of your day on the water. Be particularly alert to details and don't be afraid to experiment, particularly if the standard routines are not working.

If you see others catching fish, don't stick with one technique too long. That's the time to make changes until you find the answer. Usually, the difference between what they are doing and your approach is minor, but not always obvious.

Try to match every move of the successful fishermen. If that doesn't work, consider that they may be using lighter line or pausing momentarily during the retrieve. Bottom fishermen

may be using a smaller sinker or aboard a boat that is drifting more effectively. There is a reason why others are catching fish and you are not. Your challenge is to find it.

No matter how observant you are, it takes a positive attitude to consistently catch fish. You have to believe you will be victorious and then keep trying until you are. Everybody has good days and bad days when it comes to catching fish. Newcomers sometimes believe that the experts harbor secret lures and techniques that are closely guarded. The truth of the matter is that these experts work harder at catching fish than most people and they use all of their physical and mental skills in the process. That's what the killer instinct is all about. 🌟🌟



PHOTO BY BILL L. OLSON

If you see others catching fish, don't stick with one technique too long. That's the time to make changes until you find the answer. Usually, the difference is minor, but not always obvious.

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Shotguns, Shells and Stuff for Dove Season

Some folks think the 12 gauge shotgun is the answer for all game from geese to grasshoppers. Those folks are missing out on some lightweight thrills. Shotguns for dove hunting should be light in the hands, fast to the shoulder and quick to swing on target. Dove hunting may be relaxing, but dove shooting is not.

The Browning Cynergy line hit the market to great fanfare due to a laundry list of technical advancements and a very low profile for an over-under stack barrel shotgun. Innovations include the Reverse Striker ignition system; a striker-based, mechanical trigger that offers the benefits of a crisp feel, reduced lock-time and less over-travel. Because inertia is not needed for the hammers to set, the design eliminates the worry of the second barrel not firing.

The Inflex Technology recoil pad system provides long travel recoil reduction for a claimed 25 percent decrease in felt recoil on 12 gauge guns. On other models it offers recoil next to nothing on small gauge guns.

The MonoLock Hinge design is the engineering behind the Cynergy's low profile receiver. The MonoLock Hinge is the integration of the monobloc and the hinge, and has up to 300 percent more surface area to pivot on than traditional trunnion-style hinges. Impact Ejectors are aided by the punch of a secondary striker spring for more positive, reliable ejection of fired hulls from the chambers. Unfired shells are elevated for easy removal. Now they have put all of this in a smaller package, the Cynergy Micro Midas.

The Browning Cynergy Micro Midas is a scaled down beauty in 20 gauge. It is promoted as having a shorter length of pull and barrels for smaller shooters. It's the perfect shotgun to start your children in the shooting sports, or trying to find a good clay buster for the more petite adult. I won't argue those points as I am vertically challenged with a short sleeve length, small hands and the 13 inch length of pull is welcomed. The average person can handle that length of pull by chocking



The lightning fast Browning BPS Matte Hunter.



The beautiful Browning Cynergy Micro Midas over and under.

up slightly on the forestock and those with longer limbs can add a thicker recoil pad. All will wind up with a gun that is gorgeous and lightning fast weighing only six pounds.

The Cynergy Micro Midas features matte blued barrels 24 inches in length with three inch chrome plated chambers and their Invector-Plus flush choke system. The engraved steel receiver carries a classy looking silver nitride finish. The grade I/II black walnut stock has a protective Dura Touch finish. Nice extras are the gold plated trigger and trigger guard engraving of the Buck Mark in gold. Real world prices for this gun that will last generations is around \$1,500.00.

For those that want the ability to send more rounds down range the Browning BPS is just the ticket. This well respected pump gun holds one round in the chamber with four rounds of 2 3/4 inch shells in the magazine. The BPS has built its reputation as a reliable, tough performer constructed of solid steel all connected to a receiver machined from a block of forged steel.

The dual machined steel action bars eliminate twisting and binding for super smooth pumping. With bottom ejection and loading the BPS is ambidextrous and the empties dump at your feet, not in your buddies face.

The black walnut stock has their Dura Touch finish and features 18 lines-per-inch cut checkering. The top tang safety rounds out the reasons why this gun is so well balanced.

For even more light weight adventure, the Browning BPS is now available in 28 and .410 gauges with their Standard Invector choke tube system. Fast handling is the key and a bargain at around \$500.00.

Of course we need something to shuck in our shotguns and Kent Cartridge has just introduced three new loads for dove hunters. The Diamond Dove 12 gauge loads feature heavier payloads of #7 1/2 shot and higher velocities than standard dove loads, making them a great choice for fast flying mourning or white-wing dove. These loads use their proprietary Diamond Shot technology with the



Kent's Diamond Dove featuring Diamond Shot.

emphasis on uniformity for consistently tight patterns. The shot is harder than standard lead, offering increased down range energy.

Kent's Steel Dove loads are the only loads specifically designed for dove hunters who are required to use non-toxic shot. Steel Dove is available with #6 shot in both 12 and 20 gauge loads, with velocities up to 1,400 fps plus, these loads use specially blended clean burning powders for reduced felt recoil.

Their new First Dove loads offer value priced performance for high volume shooting. These loads use clean burning powders with quality components to ensure consistent patterns and reliable functioning. First Dove from Kent Cartridge comes in 12 and 20 gauge with #7 1/2 shot.

While loading up on shotgun shells remember accessories are on the next aisle. MOJO Dove has quite a selection of decoys. The Voodoo Dove has a large, realistic body in the correct landing position, with magnetically connected wings and the works sit on a three foot steel pole. The Voodoo will flap away for up to 16 hours on 4 AA batteries and it sells in the \$40.00 range.

The Wind Dove decoy has wind-driven spinning wings and is a popular decoy, especially where motorized decoys are not allowed. The wings spin in a breeze as light as five miles per hour and its priced around \$15.00.

The value priced option is the MOJO Clip On with a 4-pack of hard body molded

plastic decoys fitting a patented breast peg mounting system that also comes with a clothes pin adaptor allowing the mounting on just about any support, including limbs, wires, branches or support poles. The set is about \$15.00.

A cheap insurance policy is a pair of Chippewa snake boots. The popular Descaro boot features a

17 inch olive green woven upper with smooth golden tan leather vamp and collar.

This boot provides maximum protection by combining the thickness of leather and lining in order to withstand the strikes of venomous snakes.

It has Texon Flexwelt insoles that give a flexible and comfortable fit allowing for freedom of movement and a triple ribbed

steel shank for stability and protected stomping if needed. The Vibram outsole offers traction on wet and dry surfaces and various terrain. An added advantage is you will look darn good wearing them. The Chippewa boots run around \$250.00 and are worth every penny.

Always get a swivel seat. Even if it is something simple like the GameGuard Dove Bucket with a swivel seat that fits over a five gallon bucket you will be glad you did. My preference is a seat with a backrest.

The Action Products Bird and Buck Sport Seat features a 360° swiveling foam padded seat with a fold down backrest covered with 500-denier cordura. The works sits on a thick foam cooler to hold your bottles of water and downed doves, and all is carried with an adjustable shoulder strap. Your favorite sporting goods store will have several choices for test sitting.

All of this being said, if you still want to stick with your tried and true old 12 gauge so be it, just practice on some fast crossing clays before you hit the field. You may change your mind and get a 20. **T★J**

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Lake Roundup

SOUTH TEXAS



By Danno Wise

September is finally here and, although it is still a summer month, it signals the beginning of a change in weather and fishing patterns. That said, temperatures will still be plenty high over the next few weeks. After all, summer doesn't officially end until September 22, when the autumnal equinox kicks off fall. Even though the calendar says the seasons change that day, the weather doesn't automatically follow suit.

However, despite having high mercury levels in the thermometer most of the month, the days will be shorter, which should usher in a period of cooling water temperatures despite the high air temperatures. Even this slight dip in the water temperature will be enough to encourage fish to begin moving shallower as the month goes on. This should also lead to a little longer topwater bite early and late in the day.

COLETO CREEK – Victoria bass pro Dennis Lala says September ushers in a change in fishing patterns on Coletto Creek.

"Come September, we should be catching fish like crazy," said Lala. "It will still be kind of like August, but the water will start cooling off a bit just because we'll have shorter days. As the water temperature starts dropping, those fish will move up shallower. So, instead of being suspended in 18 feet of water, they'll start working along the shorelines, points, shallow flooded timber and any flooded vegetation. When they're up there

can catch them on spinnerbaits, shallow crankbaits and Texas or Carolina-rigged lizards and fluke-style baits. All we need is about a five degree drop in water temperature for the shallow water fishing to get good.

"We'll also start seeing a bit more of a topwater bite early and late. We have been having a pretty good topwater bite, but in September it will be even better. You can also get a pretty good spinnerbait bite early and late during September. If it's cloudy or overcast, you can stick with that spinnerbait all day long.

"When they are up there, they will blast a topwater bait. The topwater bite is real good at that time – mostly on buzzbaits, Pop Rs and that kind of stuff.

"If they blast a topwater and miss, follow up with a spinnerbait and usually you can catch them on that. I like throwing the Rattlin' Buzz this time of year and they rarely miss that bite when they hit it.

"Usually, the topwater bite will only last a couple hours. After that, you're going to need to look a little deeper. For the most part, Carolina-rigs or Texas-rigs work best when they moving back out to the deeper points, ledges and onto the deeper structure. I like using a Berkley Power Jerkshad on a Carolina-rig. You can also do real well with a Berkley Power Swimbait and a variety of other soft-plastics.

"We'll still see some schooling bass in September. Just like in August, when those fish are schooling, they'll hit pretty much anything. It can be a lot of fun when you find a school feeding on the surface.

"A lot depends on the weather – basically, how soon it starts cooling off. But, September can be one of our better months. And, the sooner the water temperature starts to drop, the better our September fishing will be."

MEDINA – According to Jim Gallagher of Jim's ReBait Tackle, fishermen on Medina should start seeing some easier fishing soon.

"Summer is always kind of tough on this lake and, at least in the beginning of the month, September is still summer," said Gallagher. "The lake's a little down

– just around half full – but nowhere near as low as it was a few years ago. But, as usual, bass have been a bit harder to come by during the summer than they were in the spring or will be in the fall. Some of that has to do with the dropping water level, but it's mostly because of the summer heat and our bass are really, really deep during summer. However, as I always say, things can change in a hurry on this lake, and September is usually the time of year when we see that change start taking place.

"The first couple weeks of September will probably be about the same as August – hot, dry and kind of tough fishing. But, the days are shorter in September, so the water temperatures will slowly be cooling off. By the last couple weeks of September, we should start seeing a few early fronts as well, which will cause the water temperatures to drop a bit more. As the water temperatures start dropping, the fish should start being more active.

"But, again, the start of September we'll still be in a full summer pattern. That means fishing deep. As usual, vertical fishing techniques – jigging spoons, drop-shot rigs, that sort of thing – will produce the best results. Once it cools off a bit, everything changes. Then, we'll start seeing a little topwater action. We'll also start seeing a lot more fish caught on other shallow baits like spinnerbaits, shallow cranks, and jerkbaits. In general, the fish will just be more active and more aggressive."

"It won't just be bass getting more active as the water cools. This is usually a pretty good catfish lake and the catfish will be getting more active in September. There will be a lot of channel cats and a good amount of blue cats caught this month. There will also be a lot of active panfish. So, for somebody who just wants to go out and catch something and maybe take home some fish to eat, they should be able to find fish just about anywhere in the lake."

CHOKE CANYON – As of now, Choke Canyon is only filled to about a quarter of its capacity. However, despite the low water level, September should

begin to provide more shallow water action for bass fishermen on Choke Canyon Reservoir.

Generally, September and October offer excellent topwater and shallow water fishing for big bass on Choke. Notably, Choke Canyon has always been a lake where noisy topwater plugs produce the best results once the fish start feeding shallow. Therefore, baits such as Pop Rs and buzzbaits have long been the staples of anglers surface bait arsenals. Although hydrilla isn't as prevalent in Choke as it once was, the isolated beds of this aquatic vegetation will still hold plenty of fish, as well as any other type of vegetation or cover such as flooded brush and timber along the shorelines.

Although there will be increased shallow water activity in September, the majority of fish will still be down around deep water structure. After all, September is still a summer month and the water, while cooling by the day, will still be plenty warm. Once the topwater action begins to die down during the day, fishermen should move to the outside edges of any grass beds that around found, but will be more consistently targeting offshore structure such as brush piles, tank dams, humps and channel edges. When found on this deep structure, bass can be targeted with jigs, Texas rigged lizards and deep-running crankbaits.

FALCON - As usual, late summer is when bass fishermen headed to Falcon Lake start to have some possibly epic days to look forward too, as late summer and fall are among the best times to fish this border impoundment. During the September through December window, both quality and quantity of bass being caught on Falcon jumps dramatically.

As is happening on lakes across South Texas, Falcon fishermen will experience a decent topwater bite in September. The final two weeks of the month should be especially good. Noisy topwater baits are always best on Falcon. Some of the more popular topwaters for fishing on Falcon are the Pop R, Devil's Horse, Torpedo, buzzbait, and Super Spook.

Although good numbers of solid fish can be found throughout the lake, most of the bigger bass are mostly going to be caught on the lower end of Falcon. While those fish will occasionally grab a topwater plugs, they are more likely to hit jumbo worms, big crankbaits or jigs.

September should also be an excellent month for catfish. Fishermen looking to catch a stringer of catfish should take a "top down" approach to selecting their fishing spots. While, catfish can be caught along the full length of the lake, the majority of the fish will be found in the top end of the lake and in the river itself. 🌟🌟



By TOJ Staff

AMISTAD — Rain runoff or the release of upstream water seems to help keep this lake within a fairly consistent level to offset the downstream demands and agricultural needs. As of early August this lake was about 34 feet below conservation pool. Last year at the same time it was about 32 feet low, but improved to 23 feet low by year's end. In 2016 the lake was 24.5 feet low to start August but increased its depth by eight feet to close out that year.

Even with lower levels black bass fishing has been excellent. Anglers simply need to adjust depth of structure they fish based on the current lake level.

In September look for bass to still be deep, but willing to hit topwater lures, buzzbait, spinnerbait or Rat-L-Traps. As the ninth month gives way to October look for fish to have started their rise to more shallow depths at or near the first drop.

Stripers will still be in the deep water in front of the dam. Red Fins and large Rat-L-Traps or spoons are good options.

Catfish will remain in deeper water for another month. Start at about the 60 foot mark and work to more shallow depths.

O.H. IVIE — At the beginning of August this big bass producer was 44 feet low. The last time the lake was that low was the end of 2015. Downstream releases and other demands have kept this lake giving up whatever increases it experiences during the rest of the year.

In September black bass fishing

should be fair to good. Veteran Ivie guide Kevin Burleson has said for decades that September is the toughest month of the year to catch bass. "The first move a bass makes as temperatures begin to cool is a vertical one," he began. "That means suspended fish and a suspended fish is the toughest fish to catch."

There will be schooling activity in the coves and pockets. Look for schools of whites, blacks and smallies to hit smaller Rat-L-Traps, spinnerbaits and smaller topwater lures.

BROWNWOOD — This lake was over six and a half feet low at the start of August. It had not been that low since May of 2015, just prior to the heavy rains that refilled and replenished this fishery, and kept it at or near pool levels for several years.

Even with lower levels look for September to see summer-like fishing to start the month. Continue to fish around the shade of the boat docks.

Toward the end of September the fall patterns will begin to develop. Fish will start moving shallow and hitting topwater lures as well as lipless crankbaits.

Crappie should still be holding around brush piles in water 10-20 feet deep. 🌟🌟

HIGH PLAINS



By TOJ Staff

ALAN HENRY — Summer's heat will result in continued fair to slow black bass fishing. The lake is almost nine feet low at the start of August. The last time it was that low was April 2015.

COLEMAN — Look for black bass fishing to pick up in September. With the lake level down nearly five feet bass will be starting a transition to fall patterns.

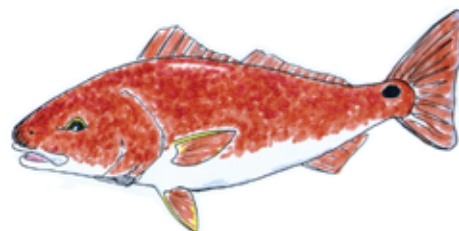
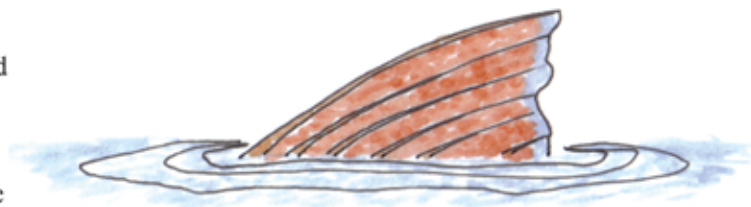
Fish moving baits like spinnerbaits, lipless crankbaits and buzzbaits to find and stay on fish. Anglers should fish travel corridors in reverse that fish used as the moved from shallow to deep water.

Sightcasting To Tails



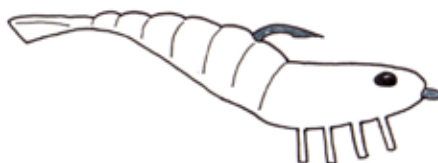
During September, winds begin to calm and waters begin to cool. As the water cools, fish begin to spend more time feeding in the shallows. And, thanks to the consistently calm conditions, both conventional tackle and fly anglers are able to experience tremendous sight-casting in most Texas bays this month.

Of course, nothing gets the pulse of a shallow water angler moving quite like seeing a tail pop above the water's surface. This happens when a fish puts its nose down to feed in shallow water. A behavior most commonly associated with redfish, black drum, sheepshead and even speckled trout will at times be seen "tailing" on Texas flats. Spotting tails is often the most consistent way to sight cast during the early morning and late evening when there isn't enough light to spot fish beneath this surface.



Presentation is key in successful sight-casting. Anglers should first determine which direction the fish is facing, if it is moving and, if so, how fast. Moving fish must be "led" by dropping the cast several feet in front of them in the direction of their movement (1). This would also be landing zone for extremely spooky fish. Fish that are just lazing around should be cast to a bit tighter (2). If fish are nose down and actively feeding -- or have been refusing casts made further away -- the bait should be dropped right in front of them (3). When in doubt, anglers should always start with an outside-in approach, making the first cast further from the fish then working progressively closer until it either eats or spooks.

Small jigs are excellent for sight casting and can be tipped with Fish Bites or chunks of shrimp to increase your odds, particularly with finicky fish. DOA Shrimp are a good choice when fishing calm, clear water, as they cast well, yet land softly. Fly fishermen can do well with either Clouser Minnows or shrimp imitations. And, natural bait fishermen can always use live shrimp for sight-casting.



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Fall Bass On Top



Although September is still summer and the air is certainly still hot, the water temperatures will slowly begin to decline through the month thanks to shorter daylight hours. As a result, bass will begin spending more time in the shallows, signaling the start of the much anticipated topwater bite.

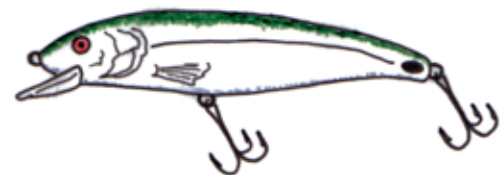
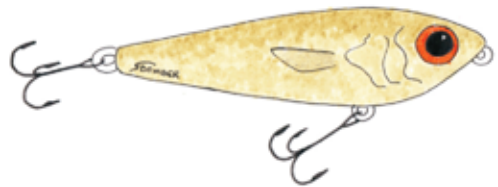
Every bass fishermen knows how to throw a dog-walking topwater. And, when fishing open water areas (ie, not vegetation near the surface), these baits are still very productive. Recently, DOA introduced it's PT-7, which is a weedless soft-plastic dog-walker that has proven effective in areas with thick vegetation such as hydrilla beds or stands of lily pads.

Long known as the four-wheel-drive of topwaters, the buzzbait can churn its way through a variety of cover without becoming snagged. The key when fishing this bait around vegetation is to begin reeling as soon as it hits the water so that it comes to the surface as quickly as possible.

In calm water conditions or when fish are less aggressive, lipped floater/divers such as the Bomber Long A and Cordell RedFin can be effective. These baits briefly dive beneath the surface when twitched, then float back to the top on the pause.

Over the last several years, weedless-rigged artificial frogs have been very popular for fishing areas of dense vegetation. These lures are essentially soft-plastic buzzbaits and often draw impressive strikes. One advantage to these baits is if a fish misses the initial take, it can be paused and allowed to sink beneath the surface, where fish will often inhale it.

If fish are just swirling on topwaters but not aggressively striking, it is often handy to throw a soft-plastic jerkbait to the area immediately. More often than not, the fish that missed the topwater will hammer the follow up bait.



Fly anglers can also get in on the surface bite during late summer and fall. Popping bugs have long been the popular favorite surface patterns for long rodders. Fly fishermen are actually able to very efficiently work areas of dense hydrilla or lily pads by employing a pick up and put down presentation and hitting all of the "holes" in the vegetation.

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Hunt and Prepare



Traditional fall hunting seasons open on September 1 with the start of dove season over much of the Lone Star State. The entire state will hear the report of shotguns as this most social of hunting seasons is fully underway.

Besides harvesting and grilling dove breasts with family and friends this is also a time hunters should finalize plans and preparations for the upcoming deer season. The state-wide archery season opens on September 29 and runs through November 2. The North Zone general season opens November 3 and continues through January 6, 2019. The South Zone general season opens November 3 and runs through January 20, 2019.

Most of the preseason preparation for the whitetail deer season entails adjustments, modifications or replacement, scouting and planting. The adjustments and modifications are fairly simple and may necessitate clearing paths to hunting stands for a more quiet approach. Pruning entails new growth being removed that may have grown up over the summer and could inhibit a clean shot being taken. Even clearing a new shooting lane to better observe where deer were seen moving last season may be appropriate.

Tools needed are fairly simple and may include nothing more than pruning shears or limb-loppers, to full-on-work with a chain saw. Whatever is done it is better to do it early to allow game time to become comfortable and accustom to any significant change.

Stands of all types need to be checked. Swivel seats need to be greased and anything that rattles in the wind should be secured.

Those that hunt from lock-on type or ladder stands should check to see if the nylon webbing has rotted and needs to be replaced. Many stands are left out year round and the natural elements can deteriorate the securing material making the stand unsafe.

Anything that needs to be replaced on or in the stand as well as the feeder should be done now. Also stands and feeders that are being relocated should be a first-priority.

Now is a good time to reconfirm or even mark shooting distances around stands. Something as simple as wrapping a tree with surveyor flagging, or spray-painting a tree trunk will provide quick reference and instill greater confidence when a quick shot is to be taken



Scouting should continue with hunters checking on available natural forage. Check out the mast crop of any nut bearing trees. In South Texas hunters should check the abundance, or lack of bean pods on mesquite trees. Natural forage is preferred by whitetail deer over corn or supplemental feed, particularly early in the season. Available water should also be confirmed.

Any food plots that will be planted should be scheduled. Based on the location in the state and combined with weather forecasts will provide a "best guess" as to when ground should be plowed and seed broadcast or drilled.

September is a month to hunt and prepare. The combination of these activities help heighten the anticipation of hunting opportunities to come while providing additional information that could be of benefit in the future. Deer season opens the end of this month.

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Outdoor Calendar

THROUGH SEPTEMBER 3,

Coastal Conservation Associations Annual S.T.A.R. Fishing Tournament, **Statewide**. Call (800) 626-4222.

SEPTEMBER 1 – NOVEMBER 4,

Dove Season, **North Zone**. For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

THROUGH SEPTEMBER 3,

C.C.A. S.T.A.R. Tournament, **Statewide**. For more information call (713) 686-4222 or visit www.ccatexas.org.

SEPTEMBER 1 – NOVEMBER 4,

Dove Season, **North Zone**. For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

SEPTEMBER 1 – NOVEMBER 4,

Dove Season, **Central Zone**. For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

SEPTEMBER 1, 2, 8, 9,

Dove Season, Special White-winged Dove Days, **South Zone**. Special regulations apply with legal shooting hours of noon to sunset. For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor

Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

SEPTEMBER 1 – AUGUST 31, 2019

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

SEPTEMBER 1 – AUGUST 31, 2019

Squirrel season, **Other Open Counties**. For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

SEPTEMBER 8,

Shelby County Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraiser, **Center**. For more information and reservations call (936) 598-8853.

SEPTEMBER 8,

Lake Ray Roberts Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraiser, **Sanger**. For more information and reservations call (940) 390-6369.

SEPTEMBER 8,

Archery 101, Estero Llano Grande State Park, **Westlaco**. We're providing all equipment, an Eagle Scout Archery range, and Rangers to teach Archery. We provide bows and arrows (please DON'T bring your own equipment), a new range, and teaching Rangers, so just bring yourself and your friends. Meet on the deck outside the Visitor Center Park Store. The pro-gram is FREE but Park Admission is required (adults \$5, children 12-and-under free). For more information and registration call (956) 565-3919.

SEPTEMBER 10-30,

Alligator season, 22 counties and special properties (by permit only). For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

SEPTEMBER 14 – OCTOBER 30,

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

SEPTEMBER 15,

Lake Lewisville Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraiser, **Flower Mound**. For more information and reservations call (417) 576-5582.

SEPTEMBER 8,

Whitesboro Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraiser, **Whitesboro**. For more information and reservations call (903) 814-5826.

SEPTEMBER 8,

Shore Fishing Clinic, Sea Rim State Park, **Sabine Pass**. Come learn about Shoreline Fishing from the beaches of Sea Rim. We will supply the gear or bring your own. Fish for everything the Gulf Coast has to offer. You will have the opportunity to gain a wealth of knowledge from a couple of experienced shoreline fisherman. NO fishing license required when fishing from the shore at Texas State Parks. Bring water, sunscreen, and a snack so that you can enjoy the rest of the day at the beach. 8:00 a.m – 12:00 p.m. For more information and reservations call (409) 971-2559, x222.

SEPTEMBER 15 - 30,

September Teal Only Season, **Statewide**. For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

SEPTEMBER 15 - 30,

Canada Goose Only Season, **Eastern Zone**. For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

SEPTEMBER 18,

Jacksonville Chapter Ducks Unlimited

Mail your Outdoor Calendar items to:

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ed fundraiser, [Jacksonville](#). For more information and reservations call (903) 721-1975.

SEPTEMBER 22,

6th Annual West End Anglers KID'S TOURNAMENT, West End Restaurant & Sand Bar – Sea Isle, [Galveston](#). Youth Division (12 & Under), and Teen Division (13-15) for various species. For registration information visit www.fish-westend.com, or call (713) 594-4252.

SEPTEMBER 22,

Crabbing 101, Sea Rim State Park, [Sabine Pass](#). Join us for some basic instruction on how to catch blue crabs in our tidal pools. Bait and tackle will be provided. No fishing license required. Free with park entry. 10:00 a.m. until noon. Call (409) 971-2559, x222.

SEPTEMBER 22,

National Hunting and Fishing Day — Go Fish Event, McKinney Falls State Park, [Austin](#). Youth and adults can learn the basics of fishing through fun, hands-on activities. Take away a fishing fun pack and enter the drawing

for a door prize. Equipment and bait provided for you to use during the event, or bring your own. No fishing license necessary. Event is free, but park entrance fees apply. Adults must accompany children. Bring sun protection and water. Meet: On the Onion Creek Trail behind the Amphitheater Restrooms. Event time is 9:00 a.m. — 12:00 p.m. For more information and reservations call (512) 243-1643.

SEPTEMBER 25,

Wharton Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraiser, [Hungerford](#). For more information and reservations call (979) 453-0719.

SEPTEMBER 27,

Midland Chapter Ducks Unlimited fundraiser, [Midland](#). For more information and reservations call (432) 664-9559.

SEPTEMBER 29 – 30,

Squirrel season, Special Youth Season. [In all counties that have an October 1-February 24, and May](#)

[1-31 Open squirrel season](#). For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

SEPTEMBER 29 – OCTOBER 7,

Pronghorn Antelope Seasons (by permit only) [Trans-Pecos](#), [Permian Basin and Panhandle](#). For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

SEPTEMBER 29 – NOVEMBER 2,

Rio Grande Turkey – Fall Archery Only Season, [Statewide](#). For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

SEPTEMBER 29 – NOVEMBER 2,

Whitetail Deer – Fall Archery Only Season, [Statewide](#). For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.

SEPTEMBER 29 – NOVEMBER 2,

Mule Deer – Fall Archery Only Season, [Trans-Pecos & Panhandle](#). For more information refer to TPWD Outdoor Annual, or call (800) 792-1112.



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Tide Tables

SEPTEMBER 2018

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
L1:52A 1.5 H5:38A 1.6 L2:25P 0.3 H11:18P 1.8 30						L1:51A 1.1 H7:33A 1.4 L3:07P 0.4 H11:26P 1.4 1
L2:43A 1.3 H7:23A 1.4 L4:05P 0.2 2	H1:02A 1.5 L4:04A 1.4 H7:03A 1.5 L5:09P 0.1 3	H2:15A 1.6 L6:14P 0.0 4	H3:07A 1.7 L7:17P -0.1 5	H3:48A 1.7 L8:47A 1.5 H11:53A 1.6 L8:17P -0.1 6	H4:24A 1.7 L9:11A 1.4 H1:27P 1.6 L9:14P -0.1 7	H4:56A 1.7 L9:48A 1.3 H2:45P 1.7 L10:08P 0.1 8
H5:25A 1.6 L10:30A 1.1 H3:59P 1.7 L10:59P 0.5 9	H5:53A 1.6 L11:16A 0.9 H5:12P 1.7 L11:49P 0.5 10	H6:19A 1.5 L12:05P 0.8 H6:26P 1.6 L12:56P 0.6 11	L12:39A 0.7 H6:44A 1.5 L12:56P 0.6 H7:45P 1.6 12	L1:32A 1.0 H7:06A 1.5 L1:48P 0.5 H9:10P 1.6 13	L2:35A 1.2 H7:25A 1.4 L2:43P 0.4 H10:43P 1.6 14	L4:31A 1.3 H7:32A 1.4 L3:42P 0.4 15
H12:25A 1.6 L4:44P 0.4 16	H1:56A 1.7 L5:48P 0.4 17	H2:56A 1.7 L6:47P 0.4 18	H3:34A 1.7 L7:39P 0.4 19	H3:58A 1.7 L10:08A 1.4 H12:20P 1.5 L8:24P 0.4 20	H4:15A 1.6 L9:59A 1.4 H1:30P 1.5 L9:02P 0.5 21	H4:30A 1.6 L9:57A 1.3 H2:29P 1.5 L9:35P 0.5 22
H4:46A 1.6 L10:09A 1.1 H3:24P 1.5 L10:06P 0.2 23	H5:03A 1.6 L10:31A 1.1 H4:19P 1.6 L10:37P 0.7 24	H5:19A 1.6 L10:59A 0.9 H5:15P 1.6 L11:10P 0.9 25	H5:33A 1.6 L11:31A 0.8 H6:15P 1.6 L11:45P 1.0 26	H5:45A 1.5 L12:06P 0.7 H7:20P 1.6 L11:45P 1.0 27	L12:22A 1.2 H5:51A 1.6 L12:46P 0.5 H8:31P 1.7 28	L1:04A 1.4 H5:49A 1.6 L1:31P 0.4 H9:52P 1.7 29

OCTOBER 2018

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	L2:59A 1.6 H5:18A 1.7 L3:26P 0.3 1	H12:42A 1.8 L4:37P 0.3 2	H1:47A 1.9 L5:11P 0.3 3	H2:32A 1.9 L7:03P 0.3 4	H3:06A 1.8 L8:42A 1.5 H12:39P 1.6 L8:09P 0.4 5	H3:35A 1.8 L9:06A 1.3 H2:08P 1.7 L9:08P 0.5 6
H4:01A 1.7 L9:40A 1.1 H3:24P 1.8 L10:02P 0.7 7	H4:25A 1.7 L10:18A 0.9 H4:34P 1.8 L10:53P 0.8 8	H4:47A 1.6 L10:57A 0.7 H5:42P 1.8 L11:42P 1.1 9	H5:08A 1.6 L11:37A 0.5 H6:48P 1.9 L11:42P 1.1 10	L12:33A 1.3 H5:26A 1.6 L12:18P 0.4 H7:55P 1.8 11	L1:29A 1.4 H5:38A 1.6 L1:01P 0.4 H9:06P 1.8 12	L2:52A 1.5 H5:30A 1.6 L1:45P 0.4 H10:21P 1.8 13

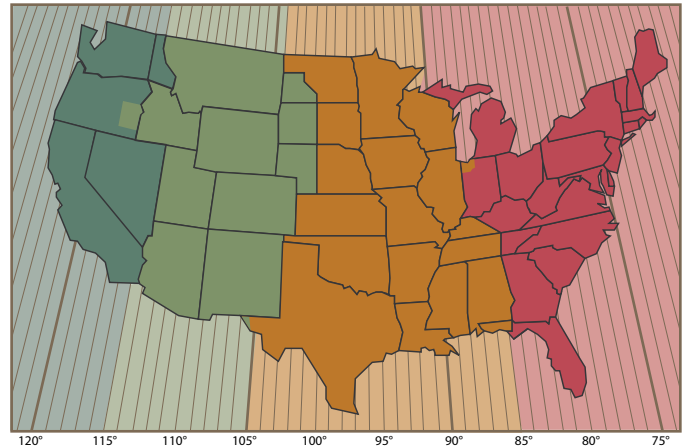
Times are for Galveston, Galveston Channel

TIME DIFFERENCES	High	Low
Calcasieu Pass, Louisiana	-2:14	-1:24
Sabine Pass Lighthouse	-1:46	-1:31
Sabine Pass Jetty	-1:26	-1:31
Sabine Pass	-1:00	-1:15
Mesquite Point, Sabine Pass	-0:04	-0:25
Galveston Bay ent. south jetty	-0:39	-1:05
Port Bolivar	+0:14	-0:06
Galveston Bay		
Texas City, Turning Basin	+0:33	+0:41
Eagle Point (1)	+3:54	+4:15
Clear Lake(1)	+6:05	+6:40
Morgan Point (1)	+10:21	+5:19
Round Pt., Trinity Bay (1)	+10:39	+5:15
Point Barrow, Trinity Bay	+5:48	+4:43
Gilchrist, East Bay	+3:16	+4:18
Jamaica Beach, West Bay	+2:38	+3:31
Alligator Point, West Bay	+2:39	+2:33
Christmas Point, Christmas Bay	+2:32	+2:31
Galveston Pleasure Pier	-1:06	-1:06
San Luis Pass	-0:09	-0:09
Freeport Harbor	-0:44	-1:02
Pass Cavallo	0:00	-1:20
Aransas Pass	-0:03	-1:31
Padre Island (South End)	-0:24	-1:45
Port Isabel	+1:02	-0:42
Tidal adjustments are not predictable for Port O'Connor, Matagorda Bay; Port Lavaca, Matagorda Bay; and Riviera Beach, Baffin Bay since they are driven by wind and weather. — NOAA		

Fishing & Hunting Times

US TIME ZONES

PACIFIC < (+) (-) > MOUNTAIN < (+) (-) > CENTRAL < (+) (-) > EASTERN < (+) (-) >



SEPTEMBER 2018

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

OCTOBER 2018

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1 ☾ 4:40A - 9:40A	2 ● LQ 5:30A - 10:30A	3 ● 6:20A - 11:20A	4 ☾ 7:10A - 12:10P	5 ☾ 8:00A - 1:00P	6 ☾ 8:50A - 1:50P
7 ☾ NEW 9:40A - 2:40P	8 ☾ 10:30A - 3:30P	9 ☾ 11:25A - 4:25P	10 ● 12:25P - 5:25P	11 ☾ 1:20P - 6:20P	12 ☾ 2:15P - 7:15P	13 ☾ 3:10P - 8:10P

● BEST ☾ GOOD ☾ FAIR ○ POOR

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

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