

LONE STAR OUTDOOR NEWS

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Texas' Premier Outdoor Newspaper

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Cat's out of
the bag



Archery-only
Grayson County
produces big bucks

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INSIDE FISHING



A new two-part study is designed to help biologists learn more about the behavior of the tripletail.

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Sea Center Texas sports aquariums, hatcheries, and walking tours. But research is the focus of the facility and its staff.

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The elusive gadwall hen

Surgical tracking devices inserted to monitor migration

By KYLE CARTER

When Jacob Gray decided to move from his hometown in Ohio to pursue his master's in wildlife at Louisiana State University, it probably never occurred to him that it might include a few nights sleeping on the hood of his 1997 gold F-250, searching for gadwall hens in Texas in the middle of winter.

And had the thought occurred to him, he would have surely thought there would have been some kind of payoff for his time spent.

Gray, who is in the first year of the two-year program, is working with LSU and Ducks Unlimited in a gadwall satellite tagging and tracking research project designed to give a better idea of the migratory habits of the bird.

A pilot study to assist in preparing for the full-scale study revealed interesting data in the birds' spring migration. While most gadwall hens made temporary stops along the way, one hen made her 1,300-mile journey from Vermilion Parish, La. to Devils Lake, N. D. in fewer than 72 hours.

With more than 15 years of duck-hunting experience under his 23-year-old belt, Gray's job was to capture the gadwall and deliver them to the veterinarian onsite so the tracking device could be surgically inserted into the backs of the ducks.

The goal was to tag 14 gadwall hens, captured from the Texas' coastal

See GADWALL, Page 12



TAILING GADWALL: Biologists hope tracking devices will help them understand the migratory patterns of gadwall hens. But they have to catch them first. Photo by DU.

No changes to red snapper, shark regulations

Texas asked to match federal rules

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission tabled proposals to match proposed federal regulations on red snapper and sharks in the state's territorial area, extending nine miles into the Gulf of Mexico.

Federal officials have requested that Texas change its snapper and shark

regulations to match the rules in federal waters. But Texas Parks and Wildlife Coastal Fisheries Division biologists recommended removing the red snapper consistency proposal — to match regulations for federal waters beyond the nine-mile limit —

See REGULATIONS, Page 18



GOING THE LIMIT: The four-fish red snapper limit will remain in place in Texas' territorial area, despite requests from the feds for stricter limits.

DUCKWEED DINNER

World's smallest flowering plant is food to fowl, pest to people

By MARK ENGLAND

With a name like duckweed, you'd think ducks would be daffy for the stuff.

But wildlife biologists insist that it's more a case of availability than preference when ducks chow

down on duckweed, the world's smallest flowering plant.

"To me, it's misnamed," said Keith McKnight, a regional biologist for Ducks Unlimited who is based in Tyler. "It's not bad for ducks, but it's not something that

See DUCKWEED, Page 22

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NATIONAL

Rios released in Arizona

Fifty-five Rio Grande turkeys were introduced in the Black Rock Mountain area of Arizona by the Arizona Game and Fish Department, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, and Bureau of Land Management, with assistance from the Arizona and Utah chapters of the National Wild Turkey Federation.

Arizona is gaining a turkey population in an area more suited for the Rio Grande subspecies than for the more common Merriam's subspecies.

—Arizona Game & Fish report.



SETTING THE MARK: Fred Barnes with his 73-pound striped bass. Photo by IGFA.

Virginia angler lands state record striper

A Chesapeake fisherman hauled in a 73-pound striped bass on Jan. 23, the biggest ever caught in Virginia and one of the biggest ever registered in the United States.

Fred Barnes, 63, caught the bass while fishing off a boat from the Virginia Beach Fishing Center. The previous state record was 68 pounds, 1 ounce.

John Crowling, general manager of the Virginia Beach Fishing Center, registered the fish at 73 pounds, 52 inches in length and 31 1/2 inches in girth. When Crowling attempted to research national records, he found only two larger striped bass ever regis-

tered in the U.S. — a 78-pounder caught in New Jersey and a 76-pounder caught in New York.

"This one might be the third-biggest ever registered in the U.S., and after this one, the weights drop way off into the high 60s," he said.

Crowling said Barnes does not plan to mount the fish. Instead, he said Barnes had agreed to keep the fish on ice for a few days so that it can be studied by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission. Then he plans to fillet it.

—Mike Holtzclaw, Newport News Daily Press.

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Wisconsin adopts new tournament rules

Allows fishing events to increase while reducing problems

The Wisconsin Natural Resources Board adopted rules for fishing tournaments aimed to reduce crowding at boat landings and the potential of dying fish. The rules begin Jan. 1, 2009.

A permit is needed if more than 20 boats or 100 participants, or the fish are weighed off-site and then released alive.

All tournament participants are required to follow state laws and rules aimed at preventing the spread of invasive species.

Organizers must submit a permit between April 1 and June 30 for a tournament in the following year.

The DNR may write conditions into the permits that catch-and-release events must meet to reduce

fish mortality, including reducing bag limits, if predetermined temperature limits are reached. Research shows that fish mortality spikes when water temperatures reach 80 degrees for bass and 70 degrees for walleye.

Most tournaments large enough to require a permit will be charged \$25. Very large tournaments will be charged \$100 or

\$200, depending on the size of the event purse.

The DNR worked with an advisory group including fishing clubs, lake associations, fishing tournament organizers and the Wisconsin Conservation Congress to develop the rule proposals.

—Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources report.

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CONSERVATION

Retailers partner to boost the number of anglers

Bass Pro Shops, Cabela's and Dick's Sporting Goods will partner with the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation to promote Anglers' Legacy, a program that encourages anglers to share their love of fishing and introduce newcomers to the sport.

Displays, giveaways, coupons and

other marketing materials are expected to encourage hundreds of thousands nationwide to take the Anglers' Legacy Pledge this year. Together, the Anglers' Legacy message will reach customers in more than 400 stores throughout the country.

"The Anglers' Legacy program will

be a key part of our Spring Classic this year, and we look forward to promoting as many pledges as we can throughout the year," said Bass Pro Shops Public Relations and Outdoor Education Manager Larry Whiteley.

The outreach campaign is part of a larger effort to help reverse a nationwide decline over the past five years

in the number of people fishing, according to a recent U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey.

"Most of us were introduced to fishing by an experienced angler, whether it was a family member or family friend," said Cabela's President and CEO Dennis Highby. Anglers' Legacy has collected more

than 22,000 pledges since its inception in May, 2006. The program asks avid anglers to share their passion for fishing and to "Take the Pledge" — promising to take one new person fishing each year.

—Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation report.

Funds to support elephant population

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service awarded \$1,277,921 to support 25 new grants and supplement four existing grants for the conservation of elephants in 15 African countries. Partners' contributions raised the total amount for elephant conservation to more than \$4 million.

The funding will support a diverse range of activities to improve elephant survivorship, including collaring individual elephants to better understand their seasonal movements, supporting anti-poaching efforts (using foot patrols, vehicles, and aircraft), creating environmental education packages for teachers to

use in rural schools, and mapping habitat use by local people and their livestock in order to implement more sustainable land use plans.

Elephant numbers plummeted during the last century from an estimated 10 million animals to fewer than 500,000 by 1989. Congress responded that year by passing the African Elephant Conservation Act, which in turn established the African Elephant Conservation Fund.

Since 1989, elephant populations have recovered in some countries while in other countries elephant numbers are still in decline due to poaching and habitat loss. Some ele-

phant populations in southern Africa are steadily increasing, but lack the habitat to migrate or shift their range in response to their needs for food and water.

The African Elephant Conservation Fund is administered by the Service's Wildlife Without Borders Program. The funds were established by Congress to provide international assistance for conserving species that face a variety of threats, including poaching, illegal trafficking, human conflict, habitat loss and disease.

—U.S. Fish and Wildlife report.

Volunteers sought for crab trap clean-up

The 7th Texas Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Program will run this year from Feb. 15-24.

During this 10-day period, all Texas bays will be closed to crabbing with crab traps and any traps left in the bay will be presumed to be abandoned and considered litter under state law, allowing volunteers to legally remove any crab traps they find.

To volunteer, contact your local TPW Coastal Fisheries Division office or contact Art Morris, TPW Outreach Specialist at (361) 825-3356.

—Texas Parks and Wildlife report.

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NEW SPORTS TECHNOLOGY

New lure's catch rate may be too high for some tournaments.

Out-fishes other bait 19 to 4 in one contest.
Uses aerospace technology to mimic a real fish.

ORLANDO, FL.—A small company in Connecticut has developed a new lure that mimics the motion of a real fish so realistically eight professionals couldn't tell the difference between it and a live shad when it "swam" toward them on retrieval. The design eliminates wobbling, angled swimming and other unnatural motions that problem other hard bait lures. It swims upright and appears to propel itself with its tail.

Curiously, the company may have designed it too well. Tournament fishermen who have used it said it's possible officials will not allow it in contests where live bait is prohibited. They claim it swims more realistically than anything they have ever seen. If so, that would hurt the company's promotional efforts. Winning tournaments is an important part of marketing a new lure.

Fish would probably prefer to see it restricted. I watched eight veteran fishermen test the new lure (called The KickTail) on a

lake outside Orlando FL for about four hours. Four used the KickTail and four used a combination of their favorite lures and shiners (live bait). The four using the KickTail caught 41 fish versus 14 for the other four. In one boat the KickTail also caught bigger fish, which suggests it triggers larger, less aggressive fish to strike. You can see why the company needs to get it into tournaments. An almost 3 to 1 advantage can mean thousands of dollars to a fisherman, and hundreds of thousands in sales to the company.

The KickTail's magic comes from a patented technology that breaks the tail into five segments. As water rushes by on retrieval, a little-known principle called aeronautical flutter causes the tail to wag left and right, as if the lure were propelling itself with its tail. Unlike other hard baits, the head remains stationary—only the tail wags. A company spokesman told me this.

"Fish attack live things, and they determine if something is



New lure swims like a real fish—nearly triples catch in Florida contest.

alive by watching its movements. Marine biologists will tell you that the more a lure swims like a real fish, the more fish it will catch. Well, the only live thing the KickTail doesn't do is breathe. It's better than live bait! It lasts longer and it never hangs half-dead from a hook. It's always swimming wild and free. Fish can't stand it. We've seen fish that have just eaten go for the KickTail. It's like having another potato chip.

Increases catch almost 3 to 1.

"To make the KickTail even more lifelike, we gave it a natural shad color and shaped it like the most prevalent bait fish of all, the threadfin. Game fish gobble up more threadfin shad than any other baitfish.

"We knew the KickTail would out-fish other lures. It had to. Other lures wobble their heads and swim on an angle. But 41 fish to 14? That's huge! I tell you, in ten seconds anyone who has fished a day in his life knows this little swimmer's a home run. Fishermen reserved thousands of KickTails before we produced it! Here, reel it in and watch it swim toward you. Can you tell the difference between it and a live fish? (I said no.) Neither can the fish.

"The flutter technology also

allows the KickTail to swim at the water's surface. Other top water lures must be worked to have any live action, or have a bill that makes them dive on retrieval. Our diver version is the only deep crank bait that let's you do tricks like "walk the dog." Twitch it at deep levels and it gives an irresistible, lifelike action. Other lures "dig." And there's no need for rattles. The five tail segments click together as you pull it through the water, calling fish from a distance.

Whether you fish for fun or profit, if you want a near 3 to 1 advantage, I would order now before the KickTail becomes known. The company even guarantees a refund, if you don't catch more fish and return the lures within 30 days. There are three versions: a floater for

top water, a diver and a "dying shad" with a weed guard for fishing lily pads and other feeding spots. The company says it's the only hard bait of its kind in existence. Each lure costs \$9.95 and you must order at least two. There is also a "Super 10-Pack" with additional colors for only \$79.95, a savings of almost \$20.00. Sh is only \$7.00 no matter how many you order.

To order call 1-800-873-4415 (Ask for item # kt), or click www.ngcspports.com anytime or day or send a check or M.O. (or cc number and exp. date) to NGC Sports (Dept. KT-1234), 60 Church Street, Yalesville, CT 06492. CT add sales tax. The KickTail is four inches long and works in salt and fresh water.

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HUNTING

Gard named Sotheby's senior consultant



DECOY EXPERTISE: Ron Gard, one of the world's top experts and collectors of American waterfowl decoys, stands by a portion of his collection. Photo by David J. Sams.

American decoy expert joins folk art department

Sotheby's announced the appointment of Ronald J. Gard, the esteemed American decoy and Americana expert, as senior consulting specialist of Sotheby's American Folk Art department.

Gard worked closely with collector Dr. James McCleery and was instrumental in Sotheby's sale of the Distinguished Collection of Dr. James McCleery in 2000, which transformed the market for American waterfowl decoys and attracted collectors outside of the traditional marketplace.

The sale brought \$10.9 million, the highest total for a single-owner sale of American waterfowl decoys, also achieving a record for an American waterfowl decoy at the time of the sale when a Sleeping Canada Goose by Anthony Elmer Crowell sold for \$684,000. Sotheby's next sale of American Folk Art will be held in October.

"We're absolutely thrilled that Ron Gard is joining us," said Nancy Druckman, senior vice president and director of Sotheby's American Folk Art department. "He is among the foremost scholars and collectors in this field and is widely regarded for his expertise and wonderful reputation. Ron has had a lifelong passion for American folk art, particularly for American waterfowl decoys, a market which has been growing enormously over the past few years and has experienced a broadening base of collectors outside of the traditional decoy collector."

Gard has worked with Druckman and Sotheby's in the past. "They wanted to make it official," he said. "There are new and different

See GARD, Page 12

It's no secret, Grayson County home of big bucks

By BILL MILLER

The monster bucks of Grayson County were once a well-kept secret among archers in North Texas, but several 200-class bucks were arrowed this season in the county along the Red River.

It's hard to keep a lid on good news, especially in the age of the Internet.

Take, for example, Brock Benson's 206 5/8 buck, shot opening weekend, which was the top deer in the low-fence archery division of the Los Cazadores Deer Contest.

It has been featured prominently for months on the contest's Web site.

But the Sherman lawyer's dad, Mike Benson, did nearly as well on Jan. 4 by sticking a buck that scored 205.

"For a father and son to kill two 200-plus deer the same season on a small farm in North Texas — it's just really unique," said Mike Benson, a Sherman physician. "But we've had five or six score over 200 this year in Grayson County."

Included was a 10-point typical

with a gross score of 181 2/8 arrowed by DU Regional Director Jim Lillis of Sherman on the Hagerman, and the 28-pointer shot in November by Donnie Herod of Rockwall.

"He netted a non-typical score of 196 3/8 and he grossed 208 and some change," Herod said. "But most hunters want to know how he grossed. Nets are for fishing as far as I'm concerned."

Herod said he might have missed his chance at the deer if he hadn't blown a shot at a bobcat; he sent out two buck grunts to cover the commotion of the fleeing cat, which he does whenever he can't control a sneeze or a cough.

Perhaps that's what lured the trophy buck, which appeared about 15 minutes later, sporting a wide rack and drop tines.

"When I first saw him, all I could think was, 'Oh, Lord, help me make this happen,'" Herod said.

His shot, about 15-20 yards, busted both lungs.

Grayson County's reputation as big buck incubator was enhanced in 2001 when Jeff Duncan of Sanger downed the legendary Duncan Buck, also called "Big



BIG BUCK COUNTY: Donnie Herod of Rockwall arrowed this 28-point buck with a gross score of 208 in Grayson County, which produced multiple 200-plus, archery-only bucks this season. Photo by Evan Summers.

Boy." Its score of 225 7/8 shattered several records, and not just in Texas.

Many of the Grayson bucks are taken on small, isolated pockets of farmland, which doesn't seem conducive to the production of trophies.

But it absolutely makes sense when you consider that some of these farms back up against the Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge.

The 11,000-acre refuge is where the Duncan Buck was killed.

Local legend also describes how a landowner was raising deer 40 years ago near the town of Fink.

"When he passed away, his wife couldn't take care of them so she let them go," Herod said. "A lot of people think that's when it all started."

Maybe, but Herod and Benson noted that the archery-only rules for Grayson County surely con-

tribute to the quality of local deer.

"People have tried to get shotguns and rifles passed up here, but that's too dangerous," Benson said. "Some of these are just 300-acre farms."

But it is common knowledge that fewer deer are killed in an archery-only situation, which drives down harvest rates and allows a lot of bucks to get bigger.

"So let them grow," Herod said. "You can't eat the horns."

Texas hunting regulation changes proposed

Expanded hunting opportunities for mule deer and pheasant in the Panhandle, and measures supporting young hunters are among the proposed changes to the state's hunting and fishing regulations.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission's Regulations Committee authorized agency

staff to take these proposed regulation changes and others out for public comment and will make a final determination at its March 25-26 meeting.

•Expand Panhandle mule deer season

This proposal would add Sherman and Hansford counties to the northern Panhandle mule

deer season, and Gaines, Martin, and the eastern portion of Andrews counties to the south-west Panhandle season.

•Expand Panhandle pheasant season

The proposal would expand the season length to 37 days.

•Quail Season Closing Change This proposal would change

the close of quail season to the last day in February, adding as much as six days to the end of the season.

•Eliminate bowhunting minimum draw weight

This proposal would remove the requirement of a 40-pound minimum peak draw weight on bowhunting equipment.

•Lower minimum age for hunter education certification

This proposal would lower the minimum age a student may receive hunter education certification from 12 years to 9 years.

Changes adopted will become effective Sept. 1.

—Texas Parks and Wildlife report.

Free-ranging elk seen in Panhandle

Biologists don't believe herds are developing

By CRAIG NYHUS

Trey Trammell was about ready to give up on his Panhandle deer hunt for the day. But a last look in a rolling canyon dotted with cottonwoods and cedars caught him off-guard. "The deer hunting was terrible; I hadn't seen one all day," he said. "I checked the canyon and four cow elk and a 5-by-5 elk came out."

Trammell grew up in Dalhart, and has hunted for years on his stepfather's working cattle ranch in the northeastern Panhandle. "There have always been some elk in the Panhandle," he said. "I've seen them since I was a kid. Some were brought in and some are in high-fence operations."

Trammell had seen elk in the area in past years, but didn't think they were wild. "You can tell when you see the tame ones, they don't spook when you drive by on the road. The wild ones high-tail it."

But he believes the elk he saw on that late December Saturday were wild. "I think these were free-ranging elk," he said. "They were very spooky — they didn't act tame."

Biologists have seen elk in the Panhandle over the years, but don't think any herds are developing. "We get a few that trickle in from New Mexico, especially into Dallam County," said Jeff Bonner, TPW biologist. "But most of the elk up here are what got out of high-fenced areas, or offspring of what

got out."

Bonner said in Olchiltree County a landowner had a 1,000-acre elk farm. "He sold it and the new landowner put in a high fence next to a canyon. The elk got out and were in a wheat field the next day. Some wild bulls then joined the escaped herd."

Bonner said during aerial surveys for antelope some elk have been observed. "We saw some along Wolf Creek in Olchiltree County and five cows in Lipscomb County," he said. "And I've heard people have seen a small group of elk in Oldham County west of Amarillo."

Some people know the elk are there first-hand. "Throughout the years there have been some roaming through the Canadian River breaks," said Mike Castles of Wichita Falls. "No one has ever said that there is a residing herd. But a big bull actually treed one of the farm hands on an irrigation system at the Pitchfork a few years back."

It was difficult for Trammell to contain his excitement. "The bull isn't a wall-hanger," he said. "People travel a long way and pay a lot of money to get a bull elk. To get one at home and not have to pay is a pretty good deal — and the meat is great."

Trammell will keep an eye out for elk in future years. "After I shot the bull," he said. "His granddaddy came out from behind the brush. I hope to see him again."



BIG BULL: Trey Trammell topped off a tough whitetail season when this 5x5 bull elk appeared in a canyon in the northeastern Panhandle.

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FISHING

Getting to know tripletail

'It's interesting that there's a fish like that that we know so little about ...'

By KYLE CARTER

Maybe it's because they look mean and different. They don't mirror the typical sport fish, covered with random splotches of black and silver.

Whether it's looks or luck or lack of time and resources, little is known about the recently popular and supposedly tasty *Lobotes surinamensis*, or tripletail.

"It's interesting that there's a fish like that that we know so little about, but they are not unusual," said Joan Holt, director for mariculture at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute. "There's been some work done on the populations in the Gulf, but not a whole lot."

In order to remedy this problem, the Coastal Conservation Association of Texas recently pledged \$20,000 to Holt and Bill Balboa from Texas Parks and Wildlife to conduct a two-part study to determine the feasibility of spawning tripletail in captivity.

"Dr. Holt and her team at UTMSI are world-renowned for their critical work on Texas fisheries," said Luke Giles, director of communications for CCA Texas. "The science gathered in this study will be a step in the right direction for conserving this important species for future Texans to enjoy."

The work for this team started last summer when Holt's team caught eight tripletail out of Matagorda and took them back to their fisheries in Port Aransas.

"We have some small ones that I think are too young, but we have some larger fish that are 25 to 26 inches," Holt said. "We think we have males and females, but that's always a problem as well. It's hard to tell until they actually start spawning."

Holt said they are currently simulating the seasons with the tripletail in the tanks, controlling the temperature and the amount of daylight the fish see. In some species, such as red drum or cobia, the simulated seasons can be expedited for



See TRIPLETAIL, Page 9

SALTWATER MYSTERY: Little is known about the habits of the tripletail. A CCA Texas study at UTMSI hopes to change that. Photo by David J. Sams.

CENTER OF ATTENTION

Visitors enter a virtual world of coastal fisheries

By BRANDON SHULER

The sight of a father and son holding a fish brings back memories of an angler's first fish. This ageless sight welcomes visitors to Sea Center Texas as they enter into a world of Texas marine environments and one of Texas' best, state-of-the-art saltwater hatcheries.

As visitors enter the front door, they are welcomed by a volunteer. A huge blue marlin and an impressive tarpon flank a modest souvenir stand. Excited kids and a surprising number of equally excited dads race from specimen to specimen.

The story of Sea Center Texas starts like most saltwater conservation stories on the Texas coast. In the '70s and '80s, the redfish populations were decimated by

recreational and commercial fishing. Overharvesting and a freezing Mother Nature brought the red drum population into serious danger. The Dow Chemical Corporation and the Coastal Conservation Association teamed together with Texas Parks and Wildlife to expand upon a successful program to raise fingerling red drum in a 'nursery' pond operating at the Brazosport Dow plant.

The plan morphed into what Sea Center Texas is today — a hatchery and educational outreach center.

Guests walk into a virtual world of Texas fisheries. Kids play in the 'touch' tank, fingering anemones, hermits and blue crabs as a volunteer explains the roles each play in the tidal flat biosphere.

Visitors to the hall of 75,000 gallons of aquariums tour a salt



STATE-OF-THE-ART: Sea Center Texas in Lake Jackson provides youngsters and adults with a face-to-face look at Texas' coastal fisheries environment.

marsh alive with rays and whiting, pass a coastal bay aquarium with pompano, reds and hardheads, and a jetty aquarium with 25- to 28-inch specks, and end up face-to-face with the prize of the offshore Gulf of Mexico aquarium collection — Gordon.

Gordon is a celebrity of sorts: a temperamental, color-changing, shark-biting, 320-pound Goliath Grouper. Gordon has a huge

birthday celebration each May with an average of more than 1000 in attendance. Sea Center director David Abrego says Gordon will move to a few of their commands and changes colors with his moods.

TPW Biologist Shane Bonnot guides the hatchery portion of the tour, and explains that the staff wants to add snook and tarpon to their already thriving maternity

ward of trout, flounder, and reds. Recent breakthroughs by Joan Holt of the University of Texas and Kevan Maine and Ken Leber of the Mote Marine Laboratory in snook breeding has them hoping for funds to expand Sea Center Texas to allow room for tarpon and snook breeding tanks.

Sea Center Texas is free to the public Tuesday through Sunday from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Four boat ramp projects receive grant funding

Four projects designed to enhance boating access will share more than \$1.4 million in matching federal grants through the State Boating Access Program.

Llano County will receive \$403,100 for replacement of a 2-lane boat ramp at Black Rock Park on Lake Buchanan that will be useable at more varied water levels.

Waco will receive \$500,000 for

replacement of an existing boat ramp, parking lot improvements, new courtesy docks, lighting, an access road and signs at Cameron Park East. The park is located at the confluence of the Brazos and Bosque Rivers.

Port Aransas will receive \$112,000 to renovate two lanes of boat ramps, add a fish-cleaning station, shade structure, security

lighting and signs at the Municipal Harbor ramp. The facility provides public boating access to the Corpus Christi Ship Channel.

The Village of Surfside Beach will receive \$125,174 for construction of a new restroom, security lighting, a fish-cleaning station and an expanded parking area at a newly constructed boat ramp. The facility will provide public boating

access to the Gulf of Mexico and the Intracoastal Waterway via the Freeport Ship Channel.

The State Boating Access Program was authorized in 1975 by the Texas Legislature. Construction for approved projects is supported on a 75 percent (federal), 25 percent (local) basis.

Funding comes from the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act.

The Sport Fish Restoration program is funded by revenues from a portion of federal gasoline taxes generated when recreational boaters gas up their boats and a federal excise tax on items such as fishing rods, reels, creels, lures, flies and artificial baits.

— Texas Parks and Wildlife report.

Central Region of Bass Champs opens season with record field

A rare day void of wind, rain or extreme temperatures welcomed a record-setting 234 teams to the Bass Champs Central Region tournament at Lake Travis on Feb. 2. Matt Cannon of Troy and John Perry of Temple topped the field with a five-fish limit weighing 18.62 pounds, winning \$20,000.

While many teams stayed on the move to find their fish, Cannon and Perry fished one spot all day, a flat off the side of a creek channel. With the boat placed over water 20- to 25-feet deep, they threw Carolina-rigged watermelon baby brush hogs toward shallower water. "On my third cast I caught a 5.9-pounder," Cannon said. "By 8:25 we had a small limit put together, I'd say 12 pounds or so. We had some other spots picked out to go to, but the fish just kept cooperating, so we stayed in that one spot."

The team caught 12-15 keepers, culling three times to their final weight. "We caught some of our fish on a Carolina-rigged watermelon Zoom 6-inch lizard, and some on a large crankbait, just fishing real slow."

Second-place finishers Scott Gover and Richard

Broxton brought in a limit weighing 17.5 pounds. "It was an exceptional day," Scott said. "We went to our first spot and caught one fish. After that we moved to another spot and had a limit in 15 minutes. We stayed there the rest of the day catching fish." They used a Carolina-rigged Zoom lizard in 30-plus feet of water at ledge flats.

Third place went to Randy Cole and Tully Williams with 15 pounds. They focused their efforts in deep water, near main lake points at the mouths of creeks.

Seventy-three of the teams brought in the five-fish limit.

Mike R. Bass landed the biggest bass of the day, weighing 8.38 pounds. "We were fishing a flat off of a ledge, about 14-feet deep," he said. Bass, fishing with his wife, Lila, used a Texas-rigged blue fluke power worm. The big bass brought the only bite for several hours. "That's OK," Bass said. "It was a \$1,000 fish — I'll take it."

— Bass Champs report.



TOURNAMENT TITLE: John Perry, left, and Matt Cannon won \$20,000 at the Central Region Bass Champs event at Lake Travis. Photo by Bass Champs.

Tripletail

Continued from Page 8

a faster spawn (every six to nine months), but because of a lack of research with the tripletail, they are just following the natural seasons.

The tripletail in captivity are living in waters temperatures reflecting those present on the Gulf. As temperatures warm outside, the water temperature in the tank will be raised. Holt said they will try and add to their population once winter ends, but the group has its eye on late May and early June when they hope the tripletail will start to spawn.

"We just have to be patient and see if they will spawn," Holt said. "If they don't, we will take them out of the tanks and use a catheter to find out if they have any eggs or sperm."

"We want to see where they are and what they are doing, and we may have to inject them with something to try and get them to spawn."

And being patient could be easier

said than done. Holt said it took them 10 years to successfully spawn Cobia because they kept getting batches of all male or female fish.

"We don't know whether the tripletail will spawn or not because we've never done this with them and neither has anybody else," Holt said. "There's a big learning curve. I'm hoping that what we've learned from the other species, we can apply to the new species, but that's just a hope."

Holt says the money shouldn't run out any time soon. The UTMSI is as interested in learning about the tripletail as CCA Texas, so they are putting their own financial resources into the project. It's important to be able to study the larvae so they can get a better idea of what the tripletail can handle, which gives them a better chance of enhancing the population in the wild.

"We can see how the larvae develop and see how long they are in certain stages," she said. "Once we get them to spawn and have the larvae, we will be able to do a lot of work with them."

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GAME WARDEN BLOTTER

POACHER HITS A DEAD-END ROAD

FOUR CAUGHT HUNTING WITHOUT LANDOWNER'S CONSENT
 •Galveston County Game Warden Bobby Kana caught four individuals hunting without the landowner's consent. The four were observed creeping ducks off of the Intracoastal Waterway. Two of the four had no hunting license, one was in possession of lead shot and one was a convicted felon. Cases pending.

RETIRED GAME WARDEN STOPS SIX HUNTING BEHIND HIS HOUSE
 •Hockley County Game Warden Jay Oyler was called by retired Game Warden John Caudle concerning rifle shots behind his house. By the time Oyler arrived, Caudle had six men stopped and two rifles secured. The driver of the vehicle had been caught twice before by Oyler for hunting from the road, once with his father. An ice chest full of beer was found in the truck. Cases pending.

WARNINGS ISSUED TO THREE FIRST-TIME DUCK HUNTERS
 •Comanche Game Warden Mike Alexander checked three first-time duck hunters on Lake Proctor. When asked if they had any luck, they proudly displayed two coots and six cormorants. Alexander asked them what they were going to do with the birds, and the hunters replied they were going to take them home and eat them. One citation issued for no PFDs, along with several warnings.

LATE-NIGHT HUNT IN OFF-SEASON LEADS TO MULTIPLE CHARGES
 •Kendall County Game Warden Vance Wallace filed multiple charges this week on two hunters after receiving information about late-night hunting activi-

ties. When caught with a freshly killed buck deer at 2 a.m., the hunters said they didn't know you couldn't spotlight white-tailed deer or hunt them at night, and they didn't know the season had ended for bucks. They did admit they knew shooting the deer with a .22 and not having hunting licenses was not legal.

HUNTERS CHARGED BAGGING 52 DOVES OVER BAITED FIELD
 •Live Oak County Game Warden Carlos Riojas received a call from a landowner advising there was a lot of shooting going on at a neighboring property. The investigation revealed six dove hunters having good success hunting dove over a baited field. The hunters had bagged 52 doves when the warden showed up. The warden filed charges on the six hunters and is coordinating with USFWS on a case against the landowner who scattered the grain.

MULTIPLE CASES FILED AGAINST FOUR DUCK HUNTERS
 •Palo Pinto County Game Warden David Modgling received a call from Game Warden Cliff Swofford for back-up on a camp with four duck

hunters he had been watching in Eastland County. When Modgling arrived, two of the hunters fled, but were later captured. Four cases for hunting with lead shot, three for no federal duck stamp, two for evading arrest, and one for no license or hunter education were filed. Case pending.

HONKING HORN AT HUNTERS LEADS TO HARASSMENT ARREST
 •Hill County Game Warden Mark Hammonds secured an arrest warrant for hunter harassment. The man arrested had been driving in his pasture honking his horn and shining a spotlight at the neighboring hunters. He eventually progressed to the destruction of their feeders and spreading of human hair around them. During the interview, the man admitted to all charges and that he was doing it to harass the hunters. Cases pending.

DEER HUNTER WINDS UP WITH THREE SEPARATE CHARGES
 •Cherokee County Game Warden Brian Bearden received information about a man who had shot several buck deer. The man was located with three buck heads in his possession. The largest, a 23 1/4-inch wide, 11-

point buck was tagged with his friend's tag. Charges of hunting without a license, possession of untagged deer, and hunting under the license of another were filed. Additionally, civil restitution for a 7-point buck, an 8-point buck scoring 121 B&C, and an 11-point buck scoring 134 B&C is pending.

PEYOTE PICKERS CAUGHT IN THE ACT
 •Jim Hogg County Game Warden Brad Meloni answered a trespassing call in Starr County. The trespassers turned out to be two individuals trespassing to pick peyote. Statements were given and interviews conducted. The charge for illegally possessing more than 400 grams of peyote is a first-degree felony. The two individuals had 94.5 pounds of peyote in two burlap sacks. Cases pending.

MAN KILLS PELICAN, SAID HE WAS TIRED OF THEM EATING HIS FISH
 •Smith County Game Warden Chris Green received a call about a white pelican being shot and killed on a private lake. The callers were from the Audubon Society, out bird-watching. The birdwatchers

pulled to the shoulder of a county road and were watching pelicans and other waterfowl on a large private lake. The bird-watchers heard the shot and saw the pelican fall. Green responded and located the hidden bird and the shooter. The shooter said the pelicans were eating too many of his fish and he was tired of them. Cases pending.

WARDEN APPREHENDS ILLEGAL MEXICAN FISHING VESSEL
 •Game Warden Sgt. James Dunks and David Kimball, a boat mechanic, apprehended an illegal Mexican fishing vessel in the Gulf of Mexico. Due to the heavy fog in the Gulf, their boat was able to close in because of its radar system. The illegal vessel and three occupants were brought into the USCG station at South Padre Island for prosecution. Aboard the vessel were 32 redfish, the smallest being more than 32 inches long. Cases pending.

DOVE HUNTERS JUST HAD TO COME BACK FOR MORE
 •Cameron County Game Wardens Will Plumas, Hector Leandro and Sanatana Torres checked a group of dove hunters from Louisiana north of Harlingen. Plumas had watched the hunters shoot limits that morning but decided to hold off on checking them suspecting they would be back that afternoon. About 2 p.m., the hunters showed up at the same spot and began hunting. A total of 14 cases were written on the 11 hunters including being over the bag limit and failure to possess a valid Texas Migratory Bird Endorsement. A total of 63 mourning doves were seized.

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Gadwall

Continued from Page 1

marsh and send them back into the wild. Gray hunted three to four days a week from the first of November through Jan. 8 and came out with exactly zero ducks tagged.

"When you're working on a project like this with animals like these, you can count on something going wrong," Gray said. "They just outguessed us. We just never caught a break, and they didn't show a lot of repeat behavior."

Gray said they saw a few gadwall hens in the early stages of the project, but like a typical duck hunter, they were waiting for the larger flock to come in. Gray was using a remote detonated 60-foot-by-40-foot net propelled by rockets to try and capture the birds. The idea was that as soon as the birds hit the water, Gray would detonate the rockets to shoot the net across the water about 2-feet high and cover the birds.

"We saw a few here and there, but it makes so much noise when you shoot rockets that you need to get more than one at a time," Gray said. "But as it got later in the year, we saw fewer gadwall."

It was a three- to four-hour drive from his home in Baton Rouge to the hunting

grounds, so sometimes Gray would spend the night in his truck — and sometimes on top of his truck.

"There were times when I would go alone and that was nice because I could just lie across the seat in the cab," Gray said. "But when there were two of us, one would sleep on the hood of the car. It wasn't too bad except that we would be eaten to death by mosquitoes."

"One time, I actually ended up sleeping in the marsh, and I got killed by the mosquitoes."

Day after day passed with no success, so Gray thought maybe they were coming in and resting on his spots at night, but he said after three long nights waiting for that elusive flock of gadwall hens, he decided that night trapping wasn't the way to go.

"It was frustrating but it made me work harder," Gray said. "I knew that if I could just get the right flock, I would be done. It just never came."

Eventually they moved the operation to the Rockefeller Refuge in southern Louisiana where they caught 36 ducks and marked 13 gadwall hens.

"I know a lot of people are going to wonder why we couldn't catch any in Texas," Gray said. "I feel bad. They were there, we just couldn't find them. I'm pretty optimistic that we'll have better luck there next year."

Gard

Continued from Page 6

challenges as the field of American waterfowl decoys matures."

"I look forward to continuing and deepening my relationships with those in the field who already have an appreciation for this art form," he said, "as well as working with new collectors interested in acquiring the best examples of art across categories."

Gard, a well-known American decoy expert, spent 30 years in management at Smith Barney as an officer, including divisional officer and a member on the board of directors for its predecessor Shearson Lehman/American Express.

He is the author/co-author of three books on American folk art and antique decoys. He has lectured on folk art for museums and outdoor organizations throughout the country and has appeared on CBS, NBC and the BBC.

He is a Diamond Sponsor in Perpetuity of Ducks Unlimited and was Dallas Sponsor of the Year for 1993 and was the Dallas Ducks Unlimited Sportsman of the year for 2002. He is the founder and past president of the Texas Decoy Collector's Association and Texas Wildfowl Festival. He is a life member of Delta Waterfowl & the Grand National Waterfowl Association, and is a life member of the Dallas Woods & Waters Club.

— Sotheby's report.

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CHAIR WITH STORAGE: The Scentite Pack-R-Chair "Outfitter" by Fargason Outdoor Technologies

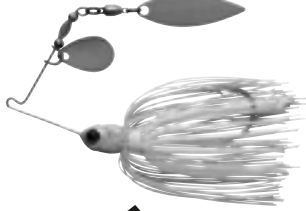
provides hunters a comfortable place to sit out in the field. The 3-pound chair features two roomy main zippered storage compartments, along with pockets for calls, sunglasses, radios, scents and more. Plus, it has a built-in water bottle and generous side pockets for additional storage. Its padded shoulder straps and padded fanny pack with adjustable waist belt makes it easy to carry. It sells for about \$70. For retailers, call (800) 828-1554.



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closer with Tink's Power Pig Dominant Boar Urine. Each costs about \$15 for a 4-ounce container. For information, call (800) 624-5988.



MINI MAGIC: Pond Magic Boogee Bait by Booyah is a 1/8-ounce lure that offers the same frantic jiggle as the larger Boogee Bait. But, its smaller profile is better suited for pond and stream fishing. Features include a flexible hook system, a nickel or painted Boogee Blade, an intricately painted head, an XCaliber Tx3 hook, a bio-flex skirt plus a built-in trailer. It is available in four colors and sells for about \$4.70. For information, visit www.lurenet.com or call (800) 531-1201.

HI-TECH FLYBOX: The C1 Carbon Flybox was

designed for the traveling angler. Made of a graphite composite with aerospace grade fasteners and really strong magnets, this lightweight and tough flybox will hold plenty of flies. It measures 3.5 by 5.5 by 1.5 inches and costs about \$65 at www.carbonflybox.com. For information, call the Carbon Flybox Company at (248) 426-8746.



HEATED CLOTHING: The ThermoLogic Bomber Jacket by NTA

Enterprise allows the wearer to control the heat. Using INK-TEX Technology, an electronically conductive printed strip of silver/carbon-based ink is applied directly onto the lining of the apparel, then protected with a polyurethane lamination and cured. Energy can then be pulsed through the patterns allowing the carbon in the ink to produce a soft, radiant heat. The jacket has a removable control unit in the front pocket that allows the wearer to select the temperature at 85 (for up to four hours), 98.7 or 110 degrees (for up to two hours). The washable microfleece jacket is available in black or All-Purpose, Max-4 and Mossy Oak Break-Up camo patterns and costs about \$150 to \$175 (for Deluxe hooded jacket). It comes with a battery charger plus two batteries and two pulse modulators. For retailers, visit www.thermologicgear.com or call (877) 945-6837.



THRILL OF THE KRILL: The YUM Bait Company

has incorporated krill (tiny organisms that convert plankton into a useful food source for predator species) into its TroutKrilla fishing bait. The krill combines with YUM's Live Prey Technology (LPT), which replicates enzymes of distressed prey species, to give the bait an unmatched double punch in trout waters, according to the company. The TroutKrilla floating bait comes in paste and bite-sized pellets and is available in 8 sparkle colors. It costs about \$5.75. For more information, call (800) 531-1201.



SAFEGUARDS OPTICS: Nikon's Field Recon Team Optics

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WATERPROOF JOURNALS: ASA, Inc.'s target shooting journals are made of synthetic paper that won't warp or disintegrate when wet. The tear-proof pages, which easily wipe dry, allow shooters to store vital data without risk of losing information to rain, sleet or snow. Sportsmen can record stats in the data fields and scorecards of the 50-page range/reloading journal that measures 3 inches by 5 inches. It has a rustproof spiral binding and costs \$10.50. For information, call (973) 808-8707.



OUTDOOR DATEBOOK

HAVE AN EVENT?
E-mail it to
editor@lonestaroutdoornews.com

Feb. 13: The Dallas Safari Club monthly meeting will be held at Embassy Suites Outdoor World in Grapevine, featuring Craig Boddington and Ivan Carter on hunting "the big five." Call (972) 980-9800 or e-mail debi@biggame.org for information.



Feb. 14: The Dallas Woods and Waters Club dinner meeting will be held at the Wyndham North Dallas Hotel, with Robert Goodwin speaking on wilderness fly-fishing. Call (214) 570-8700 for information.

Feb. 15: The Lake Proctor/Comanche DU dinner will be held at Melody Oakes Ranch in Priddy. Call Gayle Jones at (325) 356-5231 for information.

Feb. 16: The Lee County DU dinner will be held at Sons of Hermann Hall in Giddings. For information, call David Michael at (979) 366-9366.

Feb. 16: The Lone Star chapter Delta Waterfowl banquet will be held at the Marshall Visual Arts Center. Call John Oswalt at (903) 407-2586 for information.



Feb. 16: The Hildalgo County Strutters NWTf dinner will be held at the Palmer Pavilion in McAllen. For information, contact Dora Fankhauser at (956) 649-4571 or valverdefanhausen@yahoo.com.

Feb. 16: The Houston County NWTf dinner will be held at La Hacienda Banquet Room in

TROUT STOCKING SCHEDULE					
Stocking Location	City	Dates			
Canyon Tailrace	New Braunfels	Feb. 8	Nolan Creek	Belton	Feb. 20
Comanche Trails Park	Odessa	Feb. 17, Mar. 9	Possum Kingdom Tailrace	Graford	Mar. 3
Fort Richardson State Park	Jacksboro	Feb. 20	Tyler Nature Center	Tyler	Call for Special Event dates and times (1-903-566-1615)
Lewisville Tailrace (Elm Fork Trinity River)	Lewisville	Feb. 28			
Louise Hays Park	Kerrville	Feb. 13			

For more trout stockings locations and dates, visit <http://www.lonestaroutdoornews.com/content/view/260/115/>

Cypress. Contact Steve Peters at (832) 492-1400 or sdp_ironhorse@sbcglobal.net for information.

Feb. 16-17: Cabela's in Buda will hold GPS 101 courses in the optics department at 10 a.m. each day. Call (512) 295-1100 for information.

Feb. 21: The Huntsville DU dinner will be held at the Walker County Fairgrounds. Call Bill Pitts at (936) 662-8876 for information.

Feb. 21: The Southeast Texas NWTf dinner will be held at the American Legion Hall in Beaumont. For information, contact Patrick Larson at (409) 250-5506 or plarson@gtr.com.

Feb. 21: The Boerne DU banquet will be held at the Kendall County Fairgrounds. For information, call Mark Gross at (210) 826-4429.



Feb. 22: The Pearland/Friendswood DU dinner will be held at the Lutheran Church. For information, contact Betsy Grubbs at (281) 997-7351 or tdxfeather@sbcglobal.net.

Feb. 23: The Hood County NWTf dinner will be held at De Cordova Bend in Granbury. Contact Lee Overstreet at (817) 573-7700 or lee@overstreetrealty.com for information.

Feb. 23: The Fowl Play chapter Delta Waterfowl dinner will be held at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Palestine. Call Jon Graham at (903) 729-0380 for information.

Feb. 23: The Sherman/Denison DU Casino Couples Night will be held at Grandpappy Point Pavilion. Contact Jim Salling at (903) 463-1151 or jsalling@cableone.net for information.

Feb. 23-24: Cabela's in Fort Worth will host its 2008 Spring Great Outdoor Days and Youth Education event, including the 2nd Annual Scout Challenge. For information, call Stephanie Perry at (817) 337-2400 or visit cabelas.com.



Feb. 27: The Lake Grapevine DU Texas Hold'em Poker tournament will be held at Stacy's Furniture in Grapevine. Contact Rudy Boyd at (972) 768-1682 or rb.idg@verizon.net for information.

Feb. 28: The Corpus Christi NWTf banquet will be held at the Ortiz Center. Contact Kyle Albrecht at (361) 906-2151 or kalbrecthctcx@aol.com for information.



Feb. 28: The Montgomery County NWTf dinner will be held at the Lone Star Convention Center in Conroe. For information, contact James Alpha at (936) 756-1707 or jalpha640@yahoo.com.

Feb. 28: The South Texas RMEF Big Game banquet will be held in San Antonio. Call



Dennis Harwell at (210) 889-8332 for location and information.

Feb. 29: The Hunt County DU dinner will be held at the Texas National Guard Army in Greenville. For information, call James Handley at (903) 455-1631.

Feb. 29: The Gulf Coast NWTf banquet will be held at the Charles T. Doyle Convention Center in Texas City. Contact Troy Alexander at (281) 534-2890 or talexander@alexair.com for information.



Feb. 29-Mar. 16: Bass Pro Shops will hold its Spring Fishing Classic at each of its Texas stores. Visit basspro.com for information.

Mar. 1: A Women in the Outdoors NWTf event will be held at Cuthand United Methodist Church in Bogata. Call Julie at (903) 737-7080 for information.

Mar. 1: The Henderson County NWTf dinner will be held at the Cain Center in Athens. Contact Bubba Matthews at (903) 489-2408 or bubbasabrina@earthlink.net.

Mar. 1: The Bosque County DU dinner will be held at the Clifton Army. Contact Jay Hutchins at (254) 597-7756 or brenda.hutchins@clifton.k12.tx.us for information.

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Regulations

Continued from Page 1

which would have changed the regulations in state waters to a two-fish daily bag limit and a 122-day season. The current rules remain for red snapper in state waters — a four-fish daily bag limit and 365-day season.

Larry McKinney, director of the Coastal Fisheries Division, told commissioners the decision to recommend tabling the red snapper con-

sistency proposal was a difficult one and involved a trade-off between biological and economic benefits.

"If we match the federal regulations, it reduces the risk of not meeting long-term goals for the entire Gulf of Mexico. From a conservation standpoint, it is an end we would wish to achieve," McKinney said. "And, certainly from a law enforcement perspective, it would make it easier to enforce the regulations."

On the other hand, McKinney said, recruitment of juvenile red

snapper to the fishery in Texas waters has been steadily increasing — most likely as a result of reduced shrimping effort and bycatch — and biologists generally do not have a great deal of confidence in National Marine Fisheries Service population and modeling data for the species.

Four scoping meetings held along the Gulf coast in December generated almost unanimous opposition to the consistency issue, as red snapper are a key target of Texas nearshore and offshore anglers.

The Coastal Conservation Association and Ocean Conservancy favored matching the federal regulations. The Recreational Fishing Alliance opposed consistency.

"For us to make the recommendation to follow the federal regulations and drive a nail in the coffin of an important coastal fishery is very difficult," McKinney said.

Biologists did tell commissioners that the issue may need to be revisited later this year or next if new information comes to light or feder-

al action requires it.

Also tabled was a proposal to adopt a regulation on the taking of sharks in state waters that would mirror a forthcoming proposal from NMFS that would prohibit the taking of blacktip and bull sharks, among others. The final federal regulation has not yet been published, and Coastal Fisheries biologists told commissioners they would like to wait and see what the final rule is before making a recommendation.

—Texas Parks and Wildlife report.



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HEROES



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HOLT DORRIS with his first buck taken in Baylor County.



WALKER WILSON, 8, of Keller, with a 7-point management buck, 154 field dressed. This was his first deer.



CARLTON ALLEY of Detroit, Texas, shot this 5 1/2-year-old management buck at the Rio Rojo Ranch in Red River County. With him is Bambi the deer dog. The gross score was 130 B&C.

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GABRIEL ZARCO, 7, of Katy shot these two Winkel Ranch hogs on his first big game hunt.

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DINNER TABLE: An East Texas pond covered with duckweed provides high-protein food and holds larvae and insects for ducks, but when overgrown can harm the fish population. Photo by Ron Gard.

Duckweed

Continued from Page 1

ducks really seek out.” Duckweed consists of a round, flat body with, in some cases, tiny roots that dangle underneath the water. The three major species of duckweed are lesser duckweed, which grows to 4 millimeters across and has a single root; big duckweed, which can reach 10 millimeters and has a cluster of roots; and watermeal, which rarely grows larger than 1 millimeter. Even in winter, duckweed keeps its green color. However, while alive, the plant’s real growth occurs in spring and summer, experts say.

Hunters and anglers may have witnessed ducks shredding a pond or lake of duckweed, but looks can be deceiving as far as the plant’s succulence, said Kevin Hartke, a wetland habitat and waterfowl specialist for Texas Parks and Wildlife.

“They will eat a lot of it,” Hartke said. “But they have to eat a lot of it to get the nutrition they need. It’s all about nutrition.”

Compared to some plants, duckweed is relatively high in nutrition. For example, duckweed has 2.5 times as much protein per acre as the best alfalfa pasture and 10 times as much protein as a soybean field.

However, plant foods like millet, smartweed and rice offer “more bang for the buck” to ducks, McKnight said.

“If you look at duck food habitat studies, duckweed doesn’t come out as being preferred,” he said. “I think part of it has to do with digestibility. Duckweed has a waxy coating that hampers its digestion. It’s sort of an OK food for ducks.”

Duckweed, though, can serve as a healthy “soup” for ducks, holding treats such as larvae, insects or other invertebrates, McKnight

said.

“As we turn the corner to spring, waterfowl are gearing up to reproduce and the protein in invertebrates is invaluable,” he said.

Ultimately, duckweed may offer more benefits to man than ducks. Genetic engineers see the plant as a way to produce cheaper and safer pharmaceuticals. With duckweed, there is the absence of potentially dangerous animal proteins and viruses, which simplifies production and lowers manufacturing costs.

Also, scientists are studying ways to use duckweed to improve wastewater processing systems.

Many outdoorsmen, especially those with ponds, consider duckweed a pest.

Duckweed has a phenomenal growth rate: A square inch of lesser duckweed, for example, can cover an acre in 55 days. Duckweed can quickly overpower other plants and cover a pond. In such cases, duckweed can block out the sunlight, harming the pond’s oxygen level and disrupting its natural balance. TPW often fields calls from people wanting to rid their pond of duckweed, Hartke said.

“It’s better than having algae,” he said. “But as it dies off, it can lower the oxygen level in the water and affect the fish population. Usually, though, callers are more concerned about the aesthetics than anything else.”

While not many people purposely transplant duckweed into ponds or lakes, the job is done for them by the wind and birds.

“If you have a pond, it will probably get there by itself,” said Dave Morrison, TPW waterfowl program leader. “Most ponds that are created eventually have duckweed. Just see that you have a variety of stuff to offer waterfowl. That’s the key. You don’t like to eat the same thing every day and neither do ducks.”

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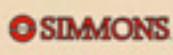
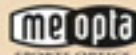
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