



AUSTIN FLY FISHERS

February 2021
Volume 23, Issue 2



Jim Gray with largemouth bass caught on the Llano River
For more information, see Float Fishing for Big Winter Bass on Pages 3-4



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President's Message by David Bush

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Hopefully everyone was able to winterize plumbing, cars, plants, homes, etc, in anticipation of the epic Arctic blast that's rolled into Texas. As I write this, the forecast I follow is calling for lows of 7 and 0 degrees F Monday and Tuesday mornings, respectively. I've been in Texas since '77 and the coldest temperature I can recall was in '89 when the low got down to 4 degrees F. My landscape lost several young trees as a result of that cold spell, and I recall some friends having busted pipes at their homes. That's good news if you're a plumber, but not much fun if you have to wait days with no water service while they work their way to you.

As a fisherman, my primary concern is the cold weather's impact on our fragile coastal fishery. As water temperatures drop, many fish seek warmer water in deeper holes and channels or go into the Gulf if there's a pass nearby. Unfortunately, some fishermen take advantage of the situation and target the fish as they're stacked in these areas. Knowing this, TPWD has closed fishing in vulnerable areas along the coast for a couple of days. While that will help survival of those fish that have found the warmer water, it won't help those fish that stayed back in the bays as the shallow water temperatures dropped to a deadly cold level.

The February '89 cold spell appears to have been similar to what we're facing this year. Unfortunately, that weather event killed millions of saltwater fish and other marine life in Texas' bays and estuaries and devastated the sport fishery for a couple of years. Speckled trout were especially hard hit with catch rates dropping to about one seventh the rate prior to the cold weather. Hopefully that doesn't occur this year, but it seems inevitable that it will to some degree. I'm sure the Texas coast is experiencing significantly more fishing pressure than it was in 1989. If there's a widespread and large fish kill this year I wouldn't be surprised if TPWD adjusts bag limits while the fishery recovers. Indeed, that is what happened recently in Florida after the devastating red tide there

dramatically reduced fish populations in some areas of the state. I know most fly fishers keep few if any fish, so that's not the concern. It's that a damaged fishery would make it necessary and that means catching fish for release becomes even more challenging. For the next few days I'm going to hope for the best.

Once again, we will be broadcasting our monthly meeting live on Facebook which can also be viewed at a later time. To participate, go to our Facebook Page at www.facebook.com/atxflyfishers/ at 7:00 pm on Thursday, February 18, to join live. Alternatively, if you are a member of the Austin Fly Fishers Facebook Private Group, go to www.facebook.com/groups/22082405715/ at the same time. If possible, I encourage you to join the meeting in real time so you have the opportunity to ask questions of the white bass fishing round table group scheduled for this month. We will be going live a bit before 7:00, so feel free to drop in a little early to make sure you're all set.

Stay warm and safe!

Dave

Financial Report

by Jim Robinson

1/1/2021 to 1/31/2021

Begin Bal. Checking	\$22,477.52
Income:	

Pay Pal	\$339.00
Merchandise	\$30.00
SKIFF	\$475.00
Total Income	\$844.00

Disbursements

SKIFF	\$1,470.00
Total Disbursements	\$1,470.00

Net	\$(626.90)
Unencumbered:	\$14,175.17
Encumbered Funds:	
Casting for Recovery	\$2,365.52
SKIFF	\$5,310.83
Ending Bal-Checking	\$21,851.52

Float Fishing for Big Winter Bass by Jim Gray

With such variable weather, fly fishing for bass in Central Texas is all about timing.

What a difference a week can make with Texas weather. As I'm writing this, we are in the middle of a week of the coldest weather I've seen in 20 years. Two weeks ago, I was floating the Llano chasing big pre-spawn bass with temperatures bumping the mid 80's. Last week I was catching carp on the San Gabriel on a 75 degree day. In winter, I'm not interested in catching a few small fish. I'm searching for big bass and carp, and I'm will to trade quantity for quality. From mid December to mid March, there are opportunities to fish for big bass if you get the timing right, and since one of my 2021 fishing goals is to catch a river largemouth bass over 5 pounds, I've been packing up my kayak or float tube and taking advantage of these opportunities. To be successful, I'll pay attention to 3 things - water temperature, river attributes and fishing technique.

Temperature - What we are really interested in is water temperature, and we can make some reasonable assumptions based on air temperatures and sunlight. Simply put, you want to fish after a series of warm days. I'm usually looking for at least 3 days with highs in the upper 60's or above, and lows in the mid 40's. I'll start fishing on the 3rd day, after the water has had a chance to warm up. The longer the warm weather lasts, the better the fishing will be. I'm also looking for parts of the river where the water is the warmest. Usually that means the deeper pools, or the edges of weed beds that drop into deep water. Dark bottom will warm up first, and a dark weed bed will always be attractive to big fish.

River Attributes - Picking the river to fish can be a challenge. I've struggled to find a set of "river attributes" that I can use to pick a river in the winter. Bodies



Jim bass fishing on the Llano River

Float Fishing for Big Winter Bass cont.

of water that seem similar, don't respond the same way. For instance, bass fishing on Brushy Creek can be exceptional in the winter, while the San Gabriel is excellent for carp, but I rarely catch bass. My choice of where to fish is based on experience. The Colorado River is my favorite winter fishery. My best days on the Colorado have come in January and February. I don't catch as many fish as I do in the summer, but I catch quality fish, and there is always a chance for a really big fish. Brushy is another excellent winter spot, and the San Marcos with springs helping regulate temperatures will produce year round. As much as I love the Llano, it takes a long stretch of warm days and mild nights before the river begins to fish well. If those conditions happen, I'll make the trip to the Llano, targeting the deepest pools.

Fishing Technique - Let's start with the flies I'll fish. Since I'm targeting big fish, I like big dark flies. My favorite is a craft-fur baitfish tied on a 2/0 hook. You could even go bigger. I need more than my usual 5wt to comfortably throw this fly all day, so I'll break out an 8wt with a sink tip line. I want to get the fly down and keep it down. You could fish a heavily weighted fly, but I find the sink tip is easier to cast and more effective at keeping the fly in the strike zone. If you don't have a sink tip line, try a big articulated weighted streamer. For inspiration, check out the Circus Peanut or Butt Monkey from Kelly Galloup. I slow my retrieve down. Not only does this keep the fly deep, it's more likely to induce a strike from a bass that is lethargic and eating less.



Jim carp fishing on the San Gabriel River

February Fly Fishing in Texas by Nils Pearson

I am fortunate to have a friend who carefully monitors the weather during the winter months looking for good fishing days in Texas. For me that person is my good friend Brandon Rabke. Over a week ago, he called and told me that he saw a window of good weather for fishing on February 9 and 10th. Our plan was to fish the bayside of North Padre Island for redfish on Tuesday and the Nueces River for white bass on Wednesday.

We traveled down to Padre National Seashore on Tuesday. As we drove the beach, we encountered a stranded sailboat in the surf at about the 4.5 mile-mark. I don't know the story behind this shipwreck, but according to the graffiti on the cabin it must have occurred on January 29. Brandon speculated that the boat might have been anchored offshore in the Gulf, broke the anchor line, and the current pushed it on to the beach.

Driving over the dunes to the bay, we launched Brandon's canoe and paddled in search of redfish. After stopping and wet wading many areas, we didn't find any redfish but we did finally come upon a school of black drum. I don't know how much experience you have with these fish –while they are not easily spooked they are exceedingly hard to hook. The tails of the drum came up every so often in the two-foot deep murky water as they fed. It was a matter of estimating the location of the drum, casting to that area, and slowly strip your fly directly beneath its mouth. Needless to say, that is not easy to do and it took many of casting for us to hook up fish.

As it grew dark, we called it a day and drove over to the La Quinta to rest up for our trip to the Nueces the next morning. We ordered take-out from the Dragonfly. Brandon had crab cakes and I had tuna. We were not disappointed with our se-



Black Drum

February Fly Fishing in Texas cont.

lections. Not long after dinner, the long day of driving and wading caught up with me and I conked out.

We arose at about 7am, checked out of the motel, and headed over to Island Joes to pick up coffee and muffins. We ate and drank as we headed over the Nueces River. As we drove, we encountered some light rain but we planned ahead and had our waders and rain gear with us. We launched Brandon's canoe and fished a number of sections of river that looked promising.

We fished every location along a mile stretch of the river that looked like it might hold white bass. The water was very low. Brandon used a flashy fly on a sink-tip line to probe each pool. I had only brought a full sink line and spent most of the day retrieving branches and weed off the bottom. At the end of the day, Brandon caught a good 2 dozen white bass and I got about half of that.

After we got off the river and spend the night at Brandon's family ranch. On Thursday morning we drove back to Austin in heavy rains and gusting wind. By the time we got back to town and began to unload the canoe, the temperature had dropped so dramatically that the tie down straps were covered in ice. As far as the fishing trip went, Brandon had indeed found a tiny window for a successful winter fishing trip. Who would have thought that in a couple of days we would be in a deep freeze and covered in snow!



Brandon on the Nueces with white bass



My pond looks like a ice covered stream in Colorado

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The following individuals who made presentations to our club in 2017/2019. Please follow the links to get more information on the services they provide. You won't be disappointed.

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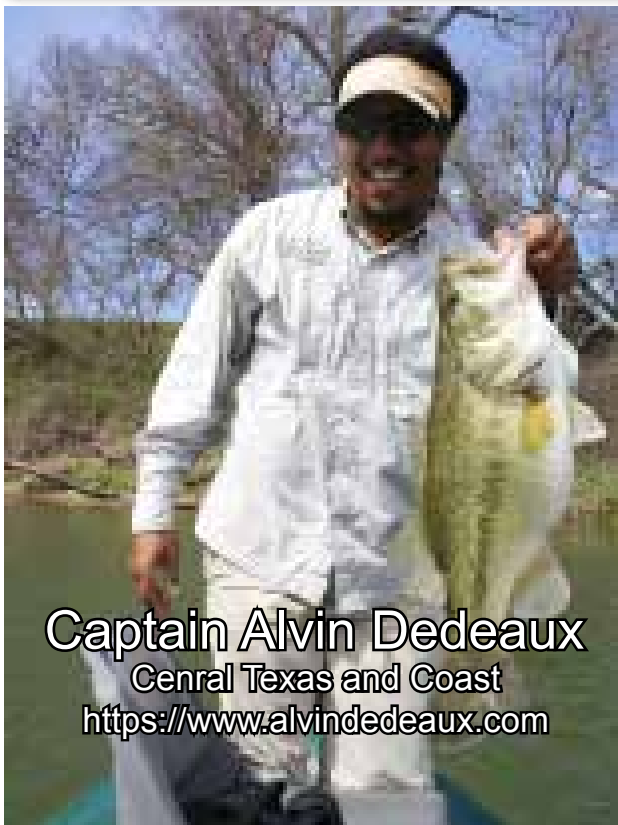
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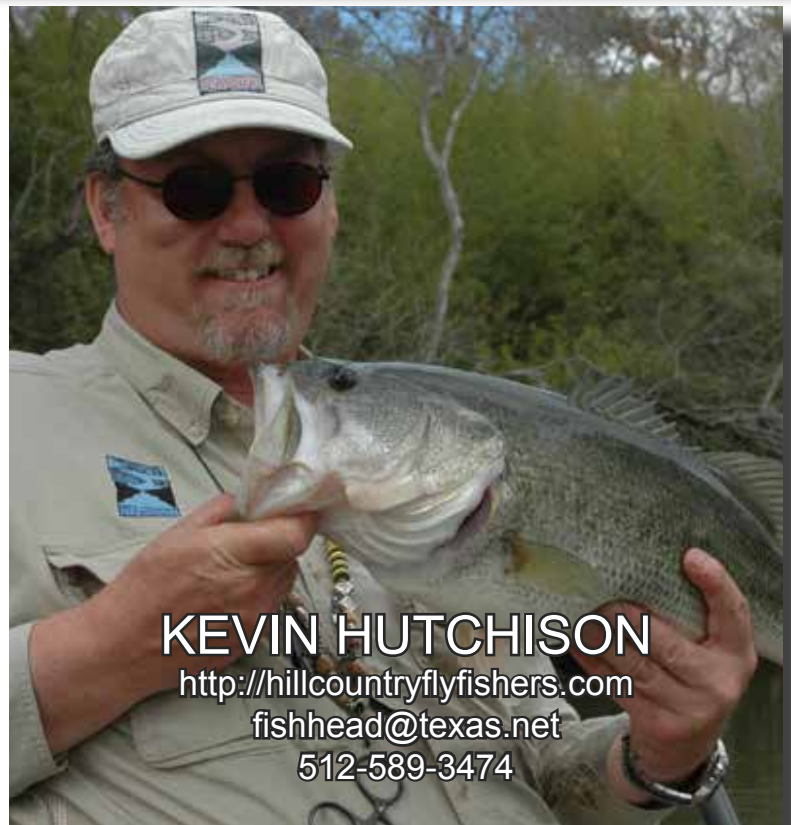
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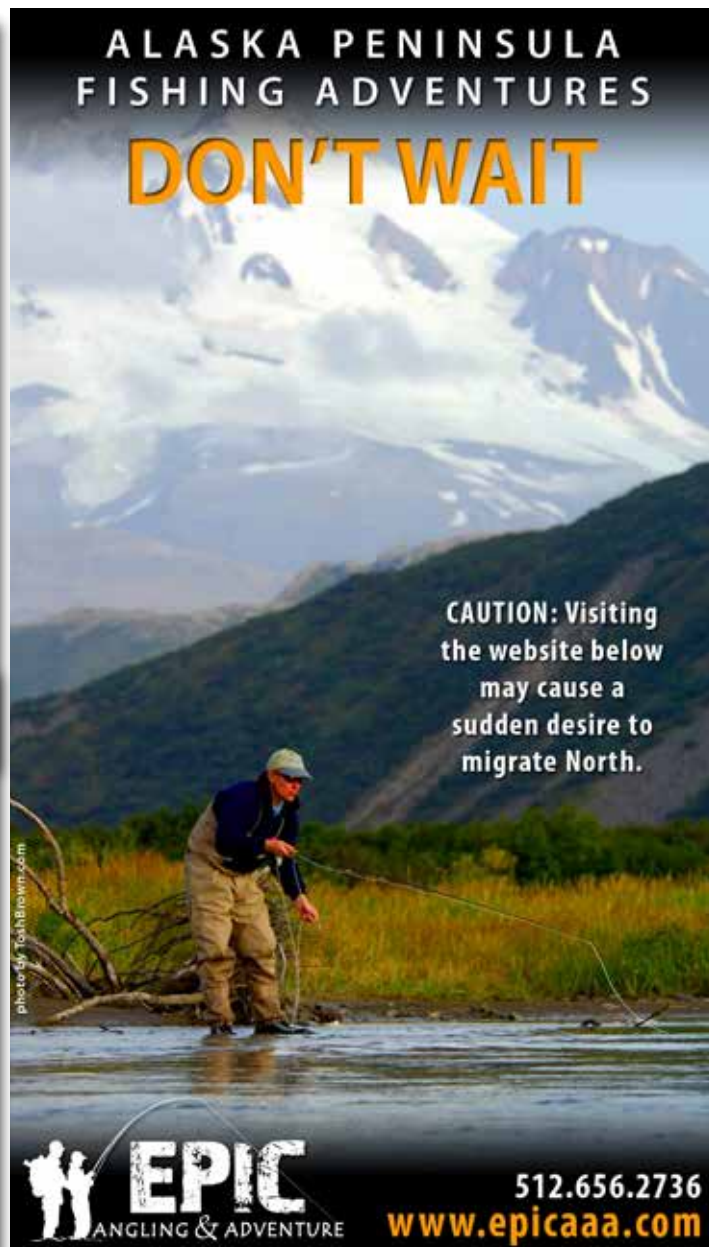
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