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texas parks & wildlife news

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT • AUSTIN, TEXAS 78744

EDITORS: This is just a reminder that if you haven't returned the card which was included in last week's news packet, please do so as soon as possible. If you failed to receive a card, you may call us toll-free, 1-800-252-9327 to be sure you remain on the mailing list.

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Government Documents

OCT 16 1980

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WHITEWING SEASON CALLED ONE OF THE POOREST

AUSTIN -- The white-winged dove hunting season in the Rio Grande Valley was one of the poorest in years, according to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologists.

Dry summer weather followed by torrential rains brought by Hurricane Allen combined to drive most of the birds into Northern Mexico, said dove program leader Jim Dunks. "The unusual weather conditions cut the birds' food supply short in the Valley, so hunters never saw the major flights of doves normally on hand in early September."

Dunks pointed out that the poor season was indicative of bad local conditions rather than a lack of birds. "Portions of Mexico had plenty of birds, but apparently many of the ones which ordinarily remain in Texas or cross the river into the state didn't this year," said Dunks.

Dry weather caused low production of grain and seeds through the summer, and the hurricane's winds and rain knocked down much of the sunflower crop which usually attracts doves, he added.

Hunter participation also appeared to be down, probably a result of threatening weather conditions just prior to the opening weekend. A hunter harvest survey will be conducted soon using receipts of the white-winged dove stamps as the sampling frame.

FALCON LAKE SURVEY
RESULTS ENCOURAGING

NO WATERFOWL HUNTING, cont'd.

AUSTIN -- Falcon Reservoir received a good report card after a recent rotenone survey by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologists.

The huge reservoir on the Texas-Mexico border south of Laredo has been a perennially good fishing spot for largemouth bass, striped bass and other game species.

Department crews used the chemical rotenone in two coves which had been blocked off with nets. Rotenone causes fish to suffocate and brings them to the surface where they can be collected by hand and with dip nets.

The fish are counted, weighed, measured and examined by biologists who use the data to draw conclusions about the overall status of game fish in the reservoir.

Biologist Jimmy Dean of San Antonio said a representative number of largemouth bass were recovered in varying sizes. "We found good numbers of small bass which were spawned this year, and we also picked up large numbers of forage fish," Dean said. Several large bass, in the four- to five-pound range, also were caught in a cove in the Velleno Creek area, Dean said.

Channel and flathead catfish also appeared in significant numbers, he said. "It will take some time to completely analyze our findings," Dean commented, "but it appears that the largemouth bass are achieving a significant spawn each year and the forage fish are allowing them to maintain a good growth rate."

The growth rate of Falcon bass apparently has been good, as the lake scored highest in the department's bass tournament survey for the first half of 1980 in the category of average weight of bass caught, at slightly over two and a half pounds.

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NO WATERFOWL HUNTING
AT GRANGER LAKE

AUSTIN -- No waterfowl hunting will be allowed this fall at the new Granger Lake near Granger in Central Texas.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department officials said the lake proper and Granger Wildlife Management Area will not offer waterfowl hunting until the 1981-82 seasons.

Officials said the lake had not filled when the hunting proclamations were adopted, and boat launching and other facilities around the lake also will not be open until March 1, 1981.

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Fishing is allowed in the lake, although there are few access points. Boating remains prohibited until the lake opens, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

However, Corps officials said waterfowl hunting will be allowed on nearby North Fork Reservoir, which also was impounded in spring 1980. Boating also is prohibited on North Fork until March 1, but those willing to walk a minimum of a mile to reach the lake may hunt waterfowl during the open season.

North Fork Reservoir is located just west of Georgetown on the North Fork of the San Gabriel River.

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PUBLIC DEER HUNTS SET
AT SOMERVILLE AREAS

AUSTIN -- Public deer hunts have been scheduled for the Somerville Wildlife Management Area in Lee and Burleson Counties, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Archery hunters will be able to hunt deer on both the Nails Creek and Yegua Creek units of the area Oct. 4-Nov. 2. No fees or permits will be required, and the limit is one buck deer.

Gun hunts for deer on both units have been set for Nov. 15-17 and 17-19, and applications for the public drawing must be submitted by Oct. 6. Applications and instructions may be obtained by writing the Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, TX 78744, or by calling toll-free 1-800-252-9327.

Successful applicants will be required to pay a \$20 fee, and hunters must report to check stations prior to hunting. The limit will be one deer per season, with sex to be determined at the time of the hunt.

All hunters except migratory bird hunters are required to visibly wear 400 square inches of daylight fluorescent orange material with 144 square inches appearing on both the chest and back.

As always, the public hunts are not necessarily indicative of high game populations, but rather are part of an ongoing management program. Hunters should be aware that the wildlife area comprises only a small portion of the lands associated with Somerville Reservoir, and is located on the upper end of the reservoir on Yegua and Nails Creeks.

JC 9/24/80

RAIN IMPROVES TEXAS'
DEER SEASON OUTLOOK

DEER SEASON OUTLOOK, cont.

AUSTIN -- Drought-breaking rains have improved the outlook for the deer hunting season which will open Nov. 15 in most Texas counties.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department officials believe the deer situation which was approaching the critical state two months ago has improved enough to forecast a generally good hunting season.

The late August and early September rains which fell on most of the state caused rapid growth of forbs and other plants for deer food.

Biologist Fielding Harwell said the spring and summer drought caused poor fawn production over the western half of the state, which may be reflected in a lower buck harvest in 1981-82. Also, the dry range caused antler development of bucks to be below par in that area.

However, the overall picture is much brighter than it was just a few weeks ago, Harwell believes. "Body weights of deer are increasing now, and hunters should find deer in good body shape by the opening of the season," said Harwell.

There still are problem areas in the state, Harwell noted, particularly in about eight counties west-southwest of San Antonio. "Kinney County and portions of the counties surrounding it had a sharp decline in population during the drought, coupled with a very poor or nonexistent fawn crop."

However, most of the rest of the state should have good hunting. Harwell said the eastern one-third of the state has a deer population equal to or slightly higher than last year at this time, along with a fair fawn crop.

In the Cross Timbers and Prairies area west of Forth Worth, populations are down somewhat and fawn production was poor. The same applies for the Edwards Plateau, but Harwell added that losses in that area were mostly in areas of chronic overpopulation.

South Texas has to be considered in separate parts, as the eastern half of the region has maintained deer populations equal to last year, while the western portion was hit hard by the drought and deer populations are down. However, Webb County had fewer losses than other South Texas counties, and even produced a fair fawn crop, Harwell pointed out.

Harwell said if more rainfall occurs it will continue to benefit the deer herds, but rank vegetative growth and ample food will make hunting more difficult as the deer will move less.

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Another plus for the deer situation is the acorn crop, which was expected to be disastrous because of the dry weather. "We have noticed a surprisingly good acorn crop in many areas, which will help maintain deer body condition through the fall," Harwell said.

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LOW LAKE LEVELS
CAN BE DANGEROUS

DALLAS -- Water levels in many lakes around the state are lower than usual because of the severe summer drought. Some reservoirs have become obstacle courses for boaters because of submerged logs, stumps, fence rows and islands.

At Lake Lewisville just north of Dallas, the water level is 15 feet below normal and still dropping, according to the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. A number of minor boating accidents have been reported, including some fires aboard boats.

Since the July 4th weekend, four fires have occurred at Lake Lewisville as boaters attempted to transfer gasoline from portable containers into fuel tanks. All gas docks are high and dry at the marinas, and will be unusable until the lake fills with more water.

Lake Fork, the newly opened reservoir in Wood County northwest of Quitman, is another reservoir where boaters will be unable to purchase gasoline. The lake contains only 7,200 acres although it will eventually fill to 27,690.

Because the lake is still filling with water, boaters will notice large amounts of floating debris which have not yet settled, said Steve Smith, P&WD biologist of Tyler.

"The water is dark and heavily stained, so it will be hard to see some of the submerged logs and stumps before it's too late," he said.

Boaters should use extra caution in passing across obvious tree lines at Lake Fork. Many fences were left in the reservoir, which could damage a boat's propeller.

"At Lake Fork in particular, it is dangerous to go fast in a boat," Smith said. "There's not enough open water for running wide open."

Many other Texas reservoirs pose similar hazards while lake levels remain low. Boaters are urged to use extra caution, especially at night.

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LOWER LAGUNA BOATERS
SHOULD BE CAUTIOUS

LOW WATER, cont'd.

AUSTIN -- Fishermen and other boat operators in the Lower Laguna Madre area are reminded that Hurricane Allen's tides may have created some unfamiliar hazards in the shallow bay.

The on rushing high water created some shallow areas and deposited potentially dangerous debris on the bay bottom, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Water Safety Section.

Boaters are advised to drive slowly, keep a close lookout and use depth finders when available.

Wearing a personal flotation device is advisable, and passengers should keep as low as possible to avoid being thrown out if the boat hits an obstacle.

Officials advise that boat operators should not trust their memory of the bay bottom, especially in the wake of a hurricane.

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BOAT RAMPS IMPROVED
AT TWO SITES

AUSTIN -- Improved boat-launching facilities now are available at two South Texas locations, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Repairs to a ramp on Falcon Lake in Zapata County will enable boats to be launched in high water, which is the present condition of the lake. This ramp had been submerged at such times, but now launchings will be possible in both high and low water.

The newly expanded boat ramp at Goose Island State Park in Aransas County will allow for similar convenience. Additionally, at Goose Island, the docking area has been improved in the immediate area of the ramp, the parking area has been surfaced, and a sheltered fish-cleaning table with lights has been installed.

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LOW WATER SOMETIMES
HELPS FISHING

DALLAS -- The summer drought has significantly lowered many levels and inconvenienced boaters and marina operators. While it may not be a consolation now, the low water conditions will have some positive benefits in the future from a fisheries standpoint.

"While the lake levels are low, there will be new growth of grasses and other vegetation around the fertile perimeter of the reservoir," said Bruce Hysmith, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologist. "When the lake level returns to normal, this vegetation will provide additional habitat for fish to spawn."

Even as the weeds and grass begin to die and decay in the water, there are other positive benefits. The decayed matter becomes a part of the food chain and in some cases, releases a mild acid into the water which has a clearing effect on muddy areas.

"Even now as the lake levels are low, there are some benefits," he said. "Many of the small forage fish have been forced from their sheltered areas around the shoreline into deeper portions of the lake. Basically, you have the same number of fish occupying a smaller area of water."

In a concentrated situation like this, game fish are able to obtain food without exerting as much effort. With more food available, they may grow more quickly.

Low water conditions also may help eliminate noxious vegetation in water, although this is not a problem in many reservoirs affected by the drought.

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LAKE LAVON GETS
TWO FISH REEFS

DALLAS -- Two new fish attractor reefs recently were placed in Lake Lavon through the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department's "Adopt-a-Lake" program.

Some 3,000 old automobile tires were bound together and dropped near the intake and discharge areas of Garland Power Plant, well within casting distance of the shoreline.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plans to mark the areas soon with permanent floating buoys. The cooperative project was sponsored by a group of Garland Power Plant employees and the Plano Bass Anglers Club.

Organizations and groups interested in participation in the Adopt-a-Lake program should write Kirby Gholson, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 134 Braniff, San Antonio, Texas 78216.

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FISH 'TELEPHONED';
WARDENS ANSWER

DALLAS -- A group of illegal fishermen at Lake Ray Hubbard recently modified the technique of "telephoning" catfish with some new electronic technology.

In the old days, fishermen used crank-style telephones to electrically shock fish in the water. However, three men recently used a 12-volt automobile battery and a homemade amplifier to boost the electrical charge.

"The amplifier was so small it fit into a plastic prescription bottle from a pharmacy," said P&WD district supervisor Skip McBride of Dallas. "It required a good knowledge of electronics to make it."

Despite the compactness of the illegal shocking rig, McBride will attest to its effectiveness. In only 45 minutes the trio caught four yellow catfish weighing a total of 250 pounds. The largest weighed 79 pounds.

The three men were arrested and paid fines totaling \$1,400.

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