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'Trophy season' for catching giant blue catfish

By Luke Clayton
Jan 25, 2010

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When contemplating fishing for catfish, many anglers think of lazy warm summer days setting on the bank of their favorite creek or lake. Granted, summer is a great time to boat loads of channel catfish but, if catching a giant blue cat is your goal, there is no better time than right now to get your line stretched!

Texas is blessed with several world class blue catfish fisheries, Lakes Tawakoni, Texoma, Lewisville, Lavon, Cedar Creek and Waco all offer excellent fishing for blues. But day in and day out, it's tough to beat Lake Tawakoni, located a little less than an hour east of Dallas. Guide George Rule has made his living here for many years, guiding clients for numbers of 'eater' channel catfish over holes baited with soured grain during the summer months and big blues during the winter.

"The big blue bite was a little late getting started this winter but once the big fish turned on about three weeks ago, fishing has been steady," says Rule. "Most trips produce several fish in the 20-30 pound range, and forty pounders are common. The biggest so far this winter weighed 58 pounds but it's a good bet those sixty-plus pounders will be turning on any day."

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School Pick-up
and Drop-off



Winter is trophy blue catfish season. Lake Tawakoni guide George Rule says the bite became steady a couple weeks ago. *photo by Luke Clayton*

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I've enjoyed many hours fishing with Rule at Tawakoni and this time of year, it is very common to catch and release between ten and twenty trophy blues in a day's fishing. The action is usually good on smaller fish weighing 15 pounds or less, so the making of a big fish fry can be expected. Proper technique and equipment are key to landing trophy blues.

Rule uses 7-ought circle hooks on a 'Santee drift rig' which is a basic Carolina rig with a small float pegged about six inches up from the hook. The leader on these rigs is often a bit longer than on the conventional Carolina rig, often 4-5 feet in length. As the egg sinker bounces along bottom during the drift, the small float suspends the big baits up a foot or two from bottom, making it easy for a catfish to grab as it drifts slowly by.

A slow drift is key to success. If the wind is blowing much above 12 knots, Rule employs an drift sock which is basically an umbrella shaped piece of material that slows the drift, old timers used to tie a couple of five-gallon buckets off the windward side of their boats to slow the drift speed.

When the weather and water temperature is cold, Rule targets isolated humps, ridges and points at depths of 18-30 feet, positioning his boat upwind from the submerged structures and making multiple drifts. Sonar and the ability to read it properly is important in locating the big fish.

Drifts are seldom done at random, Rule usually first locates the fish holding near or on structure, then sets up for the drift. Big pieces of cut bait are used, either shad or fillets from carp or buffalofish. Rule leaves the skin on the chunks of cut bait, the tough skin helps the bait stay on the big circle hooks.

Rods are usually placed in rod holders. Circle hooks work best when allowed to do their job of threading into the corner of the fishes mouth.

When a big blue picks up the bait and swims away, the angler of the hook causes the barb to thread into the corner of the fish's mouth.

There is no need for a hard hookset, as when bass fishing or hooking smaller catfish with straight shanked hooks. Allow the rod to load up and bow toward the lake's surface, then winch it from its holder and pull back hard a couple times to insure the hook is set. Then.... HANG ON!

It takes several minutes to tire a big blue and the hard battles keep anglers coming back for more, year after year.

After a few days of warming weather and southerly winds, the big schools of shad often stack up in water 3-5 feet deep along the north bank. It's common to catch some of the biggest blues from water as shallow as three feet during these warming periods. I've caught forty pounders while fishing with Rule from shallow water and watched them jump almost completely out of the water when hooked, much like a black bass! This is the stuff from which fishing memories are made!

When dressed properly, winter fishing can be surprisingly comfortable. Always dress in layers and make sure and keep hands and face covered with gloves and face mask, especially when the boat is underway. It's a good idea to carry a thermos of hot chocolate, coffee or soup.

The trophy blue season usually lasts well into March but from all indications, the next few weeks will be the peak of the bite. Hopefully these tips from a veteran cat man will help you catch the fish of your lifetime. If you need a little OJT, contact Guide George Rule at 214-202-6641.

TAWAKONI CATFISH TOURNAMENT- Cablela's King Kat Tournament will be held on Lake Tawaknoi February 27. This is the 3rd tournament on Tawakoni hosted by King Kat Tournament and promises to be an exciting one. This year's event is scheduled near the peak of the trophy blue catfish season and it's a good bet some gigantic catfish will be weighed in. For entry information, go online to <http://www.kingkatusa.com/> or call 270-395-6774

Time for predator hunting

Hunting seasons are coming to a close and now is prime time for hunting predators. Low fur prices the past year years has resulted in an overabundance of coyote, fox and bobcats in many areas.



Luke bagged this coyote last week using his GhostBlind and TC Venture rifle. *photo by Luke Clayton*

If you're not ready to abandon the fields and woods just yet, consider getting an inexpensive digital predator caller and try your hand at calling some varmints in close. Predator pro and videographer Chris Robinson (<http://www.ultimatepredator.tv/>) is a storehouse of knowledge on the subject of predator hunting. I recently picked the pro's brain and gleaned some tips that resulted in a couple of successful coyote hunts recently. Chris tips that the biggest error many predator hunters make is calling too often in the same area.

"Coyotes are extremely wary and, when overcalled, simply refuse to respond. Calling once every couple weeks in the same area won't disturb them too much but any more usually results in spooky coyotes that won't come to the call," Tips Robinson.

Chris suggests wearing camo from head to toe and setting up in areas with good visibility rather than heavy cover.

"Many hunters new to pursuing predators think they need to set up in the heaviest of cover to be successful but I've found it best to set up in more open areas with a little cover and call the animals out of the heavy timber and brush," he added.

It's best to begin calling softly with the volume turned low then increase the volume after a few minutes. Always spend at least 20 minutes at the set up when calling coyotes and thirty minutes when calling bob cats. Robinson is currently filming for the upcoming season and welcomes new areas to hunt. If you've got a surplus of predators on your land and would like a 'sure nuff' pro to reduce their numbers, contact Robinson through his web site <http://www.ultimatepredator.tv/>.

Listen to Outdoors With Luke Clayton Radio at <http://www.catfishradio.com/>. Contact Luke at lukeclayton@prodigy.net.

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