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Erin O'Connell performs telemetry to find a collared pronghorn on the Rocker B Ranch by using a radio antenna and receiver that picks up a signal emitted from the GPS collar. Photo by Kai Yun Lai.

Finding greener pastures

Translocated pronghorn move through modified fences

By Nate Skinner
FOR LONE STAR OUTDOOR NEWS

Erin O'Connell, a graduate research assistant at the Borderlands Research Institute (BRI) at Sul Ross State University, is studying the movements and behaviors of pronghorn while conducting a Pronghorn Restoration Behavior project with a team of BRI colleagues. This study will provide the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and landowners with insight to improve the future of pronghorn restoration efforts

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Taking advantage of green water



When the water is clear to the beach, anglers are finding speckled trout and redfish, often fishing top-water lures. Photo by Robert Sloan, for Lone Star Outdoor News. Right, Heidi Sweet shows her personal best 26-inch red drum she caught while using a live croaker. Photo by David J. Sams, Lone Star Outdoor News.

Fishing the surf for trout, reds

By Robert Sloan
FOR LONE STAR OUTDOOR NEWS

This time of summer, the surf can be green to the beach, bringing some excellent fish-

ing for trout and a few scattered redfish.

Guide Charlie Paradoski said the best fishing in the surf on the middle Texas coast is when a variable wind results in 1-foot waves along the beach.

"To hit it right you have to watch the weather, and when

it does get right you have got to be ready to go," Paradoski said. "That can be a pretty good run from Matagorda Harbor where I keep my boat. But when the surf is green, the top-water bite can be some of the best of the entire year."

The guide runs his boat par-

allel to the Matagorda Island beach, looking for birds and baitfish working in the first and second guts.

"Sometimes the best bite will be in the first gut," Paradoski said. "That's where you are more than likely going to find both trout and reds. But

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Bass both shallow, deep

By Nate Skinner
FOR LONE STAR OUTDOOR NEWS

With the summer heat, most bass anglers are focusing their efforts during the early morning and late evening hours. Stretches of water with offshore structure have been providing consistent action, but surprisingly enough, many anglers are also having good success catching green fish up in shallow

waters. A variety of bait presentations are producing strikes, depending on the water depth.

Lake Fork guide Greg Hill has been finding some solid large-mouths from 3 to 7 pounds over bluegill beds in 5 to 10 feet of water.

"Stretches that have long humps that are similar to old pond dams have been the ticket lately," Hill said. "These areas

might be surrounded by deeper water on either side, with the hump portion being as shallow as 5 to 6 feet. The beds are located on these shallow flats or dams and there are plenty of bass feeding in and around them."

Hill spots these shallower areas with bluegill beds by using side imaging sonar.

"Using today's electronics,

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Mike Laubauch caught this smallmouth bass on a small swimbait along a shallow, rocky point while fishing with guide Hunter Jenkins on Lake Texoma. Photo by Hunter Jenkins.

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Lake Palestine reliable, not as crowded.

Moving pronghorn

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Erin O'Connell, a graduate assistant at the Borderlands Research Institute, has been studying pronghorn movement and behavior as a part of restoration efforts on the Rocker B Ranch. Photo by Kai Yun Lai.

in West Texas.

"Pronghorn have gradually faded from the West Texas landscape," she said. "Many factors have caused this decrease in populations over time, including drought, restrictive fencing, and anthropogenic expansion, all of which contribute to habitat loss. Overgrazing, parasites, habitat fragmentation, fawn predation and food availability also played a role in their decline."

In 2011, TPWD began a long-term program to restore pronghorn in the Trans-Pecos region. They began by partnering with the Borderlands Research Institute, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation, landowners and other conservation organizations. Efforts to restore pronghorn populations are now being explored on several private ranches in the Trans-Pecos through translocations.

"Restoration efforts can be challenging to implement," O'Connell said, "especially when animals must be translocated, or moved from areas with surplus populations to areas where they could possibly enhance declining populations. The behaviors of translocated pronghorn versus those of resident or native pronghorn are not well understood. So, a big part of our project has focused on how the movements between translocated pronghorn and resident pronghorn differ, based on data transmitted from collars, worn by both translocated and resident animals."

O'Connell said understanding how pronghorn move is essential, because their movements provide insight into post-translocation pronghorn behavior and spacial use. Her efforts have focused on analyzing the movements of both translocated and resident pronghorn on the Rocker B Ranch.

"Pronghorn strongly rely on their memory of the landscape by using what we refer to as a cognitive map, to choose their habitat," O'Connell said. "We initially thought that translocated pronghorn were going to learn from resident pronghorn in order to develop their cognitive map when they were placed on a new landscape, by benefiting from the residents' experience."

Instead, O'Connell said they learned translocated pronghorn readily crossed

modified fences and moved freely throughout the ranch, while residents did not exhibit the same behavior.

"Collar data showed that translocated pronghorn were significantly more willing to go through or across fences with modifications that made them easier for them to cross, when compared to the movement data gathered from resident pronghorn that had collars," O'Connell explained. "Our guess is the memory of past restriction along fences before modifications were implemented still limited their use of the landscape. This is of great concern to biologists and land managers, because without connectivity between pronghorn populations across the landscape, it becomes increasingly more difficult to increase their numbers when physical barriers like fences hinder their movement."

O'Connell said the level of disregard the translocated pronghorn showed toward fences is advantageous, as they are not restricted to the boundaries of a single pasture.

"This allows them to be more selective, and to better balance the energetic costs and risks of moving more to find certain resources," she said. "It also allows them to colonize areas beyond the limits of the resident population, expanding the species' range in the state. Translocated pronghorn just might be able to teach the residents something new about finding greener pastures, if they can teach them to cross fences the way they willingly do."

O'Connell's research and monitoring of pronghorn is ongoing. As the project continues, she hopes to learn more about the social behaviors of pronghorn and wants to see how these behaviors change or evolve as the translocated populations and resident populations mix.

"I am also going to focus on their movements and habitat selection in response to the development of oil and gas infrastructure on the landscape," she said. "I want to see how much the activity from the day-to-day operations of the old and gas industry on the landscape will affect what portions of the terrain they will use."

Slabs in the heat

Continued from page 8

have something to do with that, but for the most part I'll keep moving around until I find the fish I'm looking for."

His approach to crappie fishing has a lot to do with the electronics on his boat.

"The LiveScope is a big help on just about every day I'm on the water," he said. "It's a big help in locating where the crappie are. Sometimes they will be on top of the brush, or off the side. It used to be that we used a buoy to mark the brush pile and then fish until we find them. That's-old school now. With today's electronics, I can locate crappie and precisely fish a jig or minnow right with them. No wasted time."

Benson mostly fishes with jigs, and hair jigs are his favorite. But on some days the plastic jigs will work. The small 1/16-ounce jigs are his favorite. They are about 1 1/4

inches long. His reels are spooled with 20-pound test braided line that has the diameter of 6-pound mono.

"I don't use a leader," he said. "The braided line is so thin the fish don't seem to mind it. I don't normally use live minnows. But there are days when the fish are reluctant to hit a jig. In that situation I'll cut a minnow in half and attach the tail section to a jig. In the clear water I'll use white/chartreuse or shad-colored jigs. In stained water I like a black/chartreuse or blue/chartreuse."

His heaviest crappie from Palestine weighed 2 1/2 pounds.

The lake, 15 miles southwest of Tyler, covers more than 25,000 acres and is located on the Neches River.

Summer largemouths

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these beds stick out like a sore thumb," he said.

Large 10-inch worms, swimbaits that mimic bluegill, crankbaits, and spinner baits in a bluegill color pattern have been producing bites.

"Anything that looks like a bluegill coming up off of the bottom works well," Hill said.

Mike McFarland has been targeting deeper areas on Lake Fork to catch quality fish.

"Offshore structure like long points, ledges, road beds and bridge pilings in 16 to 22 feet of water have held steady action," McFarland said. "Most of the best fish are being caught on big worms in plum and red shad color patterns. Football jigs and swing head jigs with creature baits have been working well, too."

McFarland said a lot of the have been in the 3- to 5-pound range with an occasional 6- to 9-pounder mixed in.

On Lake Lewisville, guide Brandon Dillard said shallow rip-rap in 2 to 4 feet of water adjacent to deeper water has been holding some fish during the early morning hours.

"Top-waters and square-billed crankbaits have been the ticket along the shallows," he said.

Rock piles and brush piles in 12 to 20 feet of water also have been holding largemouth bass.

"The fish I'm catching up shallow are in the 2 to 3 pound range, but we are seeing fish in the 4 to 9 pound range out deep," Dillard said. "Texas-rigged soft plastics, jigs and flutter spoons have been the best bait presentations over deeper structure."

Offshore structure like rock piles and

rocky points on Lake Grapevine are also starting to concentrate larger bass.

"Structure in 6 to 18 feet of water has been pretty good on Grapevine lately," Dillard said.

Guide Hunter Jenkins is still finding good numbers of largemouth and smallmouth bass up shallow on Lake Texoma.

"A lot of these fish are in less than 2 to 3 feet of water," Jenkins said. "Buzzbaits, small swimbaits, chatterbaits, and anything that moves quickly and will draw a reaction strike has been getting bit up shallow."

Shallow points and the backs of coves and pockets have been productive, as well as rocky banks and areas with lay downs, logs, and wooden structure.

"These fish are holding super tight to the bank," he said. "Most of the fish are in the 2 to 4-pound range, and the smallmouths and largemouths are mixed in together."

Shallow structure on Lake Bonham has also been working well.

"Later in the day, any structure along the bank that creates shade has been holding fish," Jenkins said.

On Lake LBJ, guide Travis Cockerham has been fishing in the mouths of creeks and catching bass in about a foot of water.

"Big top-water lures have been working well early and late, and square-billed crankbaits have been the best bet during the midday hours," Cockerham said. "Texas-rigged soft plastics pitched around docks have also been catching plenty of bass."

Cockerham also fished Choke Canyon Reservoir recently, and the bass were shallow and hitting frogs and wake baits.

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