



# WHITE BASS FISHING IN CENTRAL TEXAS

Written by Michael Tennant, Steve Magnelia, Craig Bonds, and John Tibbs  
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Inland Fisheries Management  
San Marcos, Texas

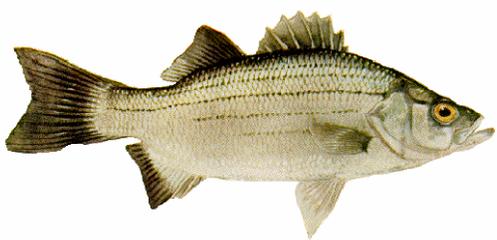


The white bass, commonly referred to as “sand bass”, is an abundant and popular sportfish in Texas reservoirs. This is due to its willingness to bite artificial lures, schooling behavior, and outstanding quality as table fare. White bass provide anglers with exciting action throughout the year, but most notably during their annual spring spawning migration up river and stream tributaries. From January through April, large schools of white bass concentrate in the far upper ends or riverine sections of reservoirs making them more susceptible to anglers. The complete white bass angler understands the biology, migrational behavior, preferred habitat, appropriate fishing techniques and local “hot spots” for this popular species.

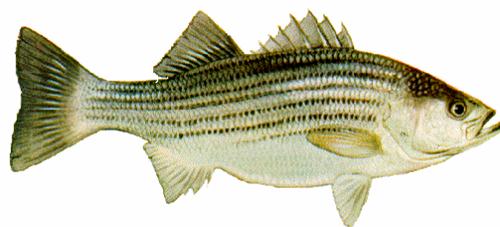
## IDENTIFICATION

The white bass is a silvery, spiny-rayed fish with several incomplete lines or stripes, which run horizontally on each side of the body. The head is fairly small and pointed, and the dorsal (back) fin is conspicuously double, separated into spiny and soft-rayed portions. The white bass can be easily confused with striped bass and hybrid striped bass (a cross between white and striped bass), which are other members of the temperate bass family. However, striped bass and hybrid striped bass grow much larger than white bass. Anglers must be adept at differentiating between them as they often co-exist in the same reservoir. White bass can be distinguished from the others by the tooth patch on the tongue (one is present on white bass whereas there are two on striped bass and hybrid striped bass). Striped bass and hybrid striped bass also have several distinct “stripes” that extend to the tail, while the white bass has only one stripe extending to the tail. Study the pictures below, including the detail of the tooth patches.

WHITE BASS



STRIPED and HYBRID STRIPED BASS



## LIFE HISTORY and BIOLOGY

White bass are migratory open-water fish. Most of their life is spent in the open-water portions of reservoirs chasing schools of small gizzard and threadfin shad. In late winter (December-January) schools of white bass migrate to the upper portion of reservoirs awaiting environmental cues signaling the start of the spawning migration up major tributaries. In February and March they begin their spawning migration seeking clean gravel and rock substrate with good flow to spawn. Riffles and shoals are common spawning locations. How far white bass migrate is extremely variable, but it is not uncommon to find spawning white bass 25-50 miles above the reservoir. This may be related to river and stream flow, which varies among years. Fisheries biologists are unsure if adult white bass return to the same spawning spot each year, or if it is a random occurrence. After spawning, adult fish

migrate back into the main body of the reservoir. The whole spawning migration is usually complete by sometime in May. Interestingly, “tributary” spawning may not be inherent in all white bass. Some white bass may spend their entire lives in the main portion of reservoirs, spawning on wind-blown, rocky shoals instead of in major tributaries.

Of the three temperate basses found in Central Texas (white bass, striped bass and hybrid striped bass) only white bass successfully reproduce in significant numbers, although the other two species may also migrate up tributaries in the spring. Central Texas striped bass and hybrid striped bass populations are completely supported from stockings by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) fish hatcheries. White bass are not nest builders. Spawning takes place in mid-water. The female rises toward the surface enticing males to follow. Fertilized eggs drift to the bottom and adhere to gravel or rock. Eggs usually hatch within 2 to 3 days. The newly hatched fry migrate downstream in schools seeking food and protection. On many Central Texas reservoirs white bass grow rapidly, normally attaining a size of 9 to 10 inches in their first year of life and 12 inches by the end of the second. This is faster than the statewide average. The life expectancy of white bass is short and few reach 5 years old. Although no studies have specifically looked at sexual maturity of white bass in Central Texas, fisheries biologists think that males become sexually mature at age one (8-9 inches) and females at age two (12-13 inches). This would be similar to fast growing populations in Tennessee and Arkansas. No studies in the Southern United States found significant numbers of female white bass less than 10 inches that were reproductively mature. A white bass weighs approximately 0.5 pounds at 10 inches and 0.9 pounds at 12 inches.

## **FISHERIES MANAGEMENT and FISHING REGULATIONS**

White bass in Texas are currently managed with a statewide 10-inch minimum length and 25-fish daily bag limit. An experimental 12-inch minimum length limit was implemented on several Central Texas reservoirs between 1995 and 2003. The purpose of the experimental regulation was to test whether additional protection would delay harvest of immature female white bass and increase population abundance and average size of white bass. Evaluation of the 12-inch minimum length limit indicated this regulation failed to improve white bass populations in Central Texas Reservoirs. In addition to fast growth, a high level of angler harvest was required for this regulation to work. These requirements were based on computer generated models utilizing fisheries data collected on these populations. Angler creel data collected by TPWD, suggest that harvest rates for white bass were likely below the threshold level needed for the greater length restriction to be effective. Other research conducted by TPWD, and supported by recent scientific literature, indicates white bass reproductive success is highly correlated with springtime reservoir inflows. In other words, higher than average spring inflows to reservoirs correspond with higher than average white bass spawning production and vice versa. Environmental conditions can play a large role in determining white bass densities.

TPWD will continue to monitor white bass populations and angler harvest rates to determine what length limit is best suited for these fisheries. If fishing pressure significantly increases in the future and harvest levels reach a critical point, TPWD will consider alternative regulations. Currently, alternative regulations are not warranted.

## **SEASONAL FISHING PATTERNS**

**Spring (March-May):** White bass will be in the rivers or major creek tributaries. A variety of artificial lures will work, but this is a good time for small jig fishing. Small, medium-running crank baits also work well. Trolling the river or creek channel with small crank baits is a good technique. Fishing early in the spring can be inconsistent, but if the bite is on you can have the day of a lifetime. Many old timers say “when the redbuds (or dogwoods) are blooming the white bass are running”. This

old saying usually holds true. April and May can be the most consistent months as many white bass have finished spawning and are hungry as they migrate back to the reservoir. Spring is also a good time to try night fishing using lights. Floating or submersible crappie lights, which attract baitfish, work well for this. Flats at the mouths of major creeks, main-lake flats, and floating breakwaters near lighted marinas are consistent producers of white bass at this time.

**Summer (May-September):** May to early June is characterized by good schooling action for white bass. The mouths of major creeks and main-lake points are good areas to try. Look for birds chasing baitfish. The whites and stripers won't be far behind. Topwater lures, lipless crank baits, and small twister tail jigs cast into schools are good bets. Anglers might also try night fishing as described for spring, although this pattern often weakens as the water warms throughout May. As the water heats up, anglers should concentrate on main lake structure near deep water, or look for schooling fish at dawn or on cloudy days. In the heat of summer good marine electronics for finding the fish in deep water are vital to consistent success.

**Fall (September-November):** Early-fall fishing is much like summer. Keep looking for the schools with your electronics. As the water cools, white bass will begin feeding at the surface in earnest. Cloudy days with a little wind are the best. Concentrate on creek mouths and major points. October and November can be good for surface schooling. Look for stripers mixed in with whites.

**Winter (November-February):** The water is coldest this time of year. Two patterns are noteworthy. One is to locate schools in deep water on major structural elements such as river channel ledges, humps, and tips of points. Vertically jigging spoons and tail spinners in these areas will produce some of the most consistent action of the year, if you can locate the fish. In January and February structure in the upper end of reservoirs near major tributaries is a good choice. A secondary pattern is night fishing around lighted boat docks and marinas in the main lake. Fishing from lighted dock to lighted dock casting a small twister tail jig into the light will produce consistent action, if you can stand the cold. Don't be surprised if you catch some nice stripers as well. January and February are two good months to try this pattern.

## **PLACES TO GO**

Some of the best white bass fishing in the spring can be done from the bank and while wading in the upper reaches of tributaries. County road maps available from the Texas Department of Transportation, or "The Roads of Texas", Shearer Publishing, Fredericksburg, TX, (800-458-3808) are invaluable for locating some of the access points described. Always get permission from the landowner if you cross private land to enter a river or stream. Topographical reservoir maps are often available from controlling authorities or at retail fishing stores. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department maintains an internet web site which contains information on many fishing-related topics, including reservoir access, regulations, and fishing news, among many others. Check it out at <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us>.

**Canyon Lake**, an 8,308-acre reservoir located just north of San Antonio, has a strong spring white bass run in the Guadalupe River above the reservoir. Rebecca Creek boat ramp is located in the river, and anglers with small boats can easily access the area without crossing open water. Off State Highway (SH) 306 (past the lake) turn south on Eagle Rock Drive which becomes Tanglewood Trail. Go 2.3 miles, and take the first road on the right past "Chapel in the Cove". Rebecca Creek boat ramp is at the end of this road. Most anglers head upstream to an area called "the rapids" but other areas can be good and less crowded. Look for high spots in the river channel that concentrate fish as they move upstream. The area around Cranes Mill Park is legendary in the winter and early spring as white bass school up, staged for the spawning run up the river. In late spring check the mouth of major creeks. Main lake fishing can also be quite good. The island near Comal Park and humps near the dam are

good during the summer. There are many good boat ramps available. For those without a boat, a fishing pier at Crane's Mill Park is a good option. For more information, contact the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers at (830)964-3341 or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (512)353-0072.

**Lake Georgetown** is a 1,297-acre impoundment of the San Gabriel River located just west of Georgetown. White bass fishing in the spring can be excellent if water conditions are right at Tejas Camp, which is located on County Road (CR) 258 between Farm to Market (FM) 305 and SH 183. In addition, anglers can access the entire southern and most of the northern shoreline of Lake Georgetown from Tejas Camp via marked trails. Three public boat ramps are available on the main lake as well. For more information, contact the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers at (512)863-3016 or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (512)353-0072.

**Granger Lake** is a 4,009-acre impoundment of the San Gabriel River located just east of Granger. A good place to access the upper river for spawning white bass in the spring is Parking Lot 7. From SH 95, go east about 1.5 miles on county road 347 until it T's, then turn right. No ramp is provided, but small portable boats can be launched. Shore anglers can also access the river at a pull-off on county road 347 about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile east of SH 95. Be careful, because the bank is steep. Willis Creek is another option for anglers and can be accessed at two locations. Head east on FM 971 from SH 95 at the town of Granger. Take CR 348 south, to Parking Lot 4, which is by the bridge over Willis Creek. The second location is Willis Creek Park, which provides full-service camping, shore angling, and a boat ramp year-round. Take CR 346 east from SH 95 at the sign for the park and follow the signs. Four other public boat ramps are available on the main lake. For more information, contact the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers at (512)859-2668 or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (512)353-0072.

**Lake Limestone**, located 50 miles east of Waco between SH 164 and SH 7, is a 13,860-acre impoundment of the Navasota River. It provides cooling water for the Houston Power and Light generating plant. In addition to opportunities for schooling white bass throughout most of the year, white bass migrating up the Navasota River to spawn are especially vulnerable in the spring. There are four public boat ramps on the main lake. For more information, contact the Brazos River Authority at (903)529-2141 or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (254)666-5190.

**Lake Lyndon B. Johnson**, located near the town of Granite Shoals, is a 6,449-acre impoundment of the Llano and Colorado Rivers. Both rivers can be accessed from two fee boat ramps in the city of Kingsland. Riverbend Marine and Storage ramp is accessed via Harris Loop, directly across from the Llanorado Lodge just west of the CR 1431 bridge crossing. The Kingsland Lions Club also maintains a ramp. Take Euel Moore Drive off of CR 1431 (there is a sign advertising the ramp at the turn-off). Go about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile and take a left on Williams street. This road ends at the ramp. The Llano River directly above Kingsland is popular with fly anglers targeting white bass. For more information, contact the Lower Colorado River Authority at (800)776-5272 or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (512)353-0072.

**Lake Somerville** is an 11,456-acre impoundment of Yegua Creek located about 25 miles southwest of Bryan/College Station. It provides outstanding white and hybrid striped bass action, particularly in the spring. Beginning in early to mid-February, both species migrate up reservoir tributaries, primarily Yegua Creek. The lower reaches of Yegua Creek can be accessed by boat from the main lake, but two public areas provide access for the shore angler. Newman Bottom is reached from SH 21 at Dime Box by taking FM 141 south. Turn left on FM 1697, then left on CR 125 to CR 140. Follow the signs on CR 140 to a self-pay, day use only, parking area. Irvin Bridge can also be accessed by following the same directions to get on FM 1697, and then turn left on CR 124 to a primitive parking area on Yegua Creek with no fee. During the summer months, numerous "humps" and main-lake structure provide hot-spots for white and hybrid striped bass anglers. For those limited to fishing from shore, Welch

Park on the main lake provides good opportunities for bank and wade fishing. For more information, contact the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers at (979)596-1622 or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (979)822-5067.

**Lake Travis** is an 18,622-acre impoundment of the Colorado and Pedernales Rivers located just west of Austin. Traditionally, strong white bass runs have occurred on the Pedernales River. Travis County Milton Reimer's Park provides bank, boat, and wade fishing opportunities to the public. The park is located on Hamilton Pool Road (CR 3238), about 11.5 miles west of the intersection of Hamilton Pool road and SH 71 and 1.3 miles east of the low-water bridge over the Pedernales River. Anglers should contact Travis County Parks for more information on this park (512-854-7275). The area near Pace Bend Park, where the Pedernales River enters the lake, is always a good bet for early season deep water jigging spoon fishing. The area upstream from The Narrows boat ramp, located on the upper reaches of the reservoir, as well as the area directly below the Lake Marble Falls dam can be very good during the spring, if there is adequate water. This area should be boated with caution especially if the reservoir is below normal pool. The Narrows boat ramp is located west of Austin, near the town of Spicewood on County Road 411. Some of the bigger creeks in the lake also have good white bass fishing. These include Sandy, Cypress and Cow creeks. The main body of Lake Travis is good during the winter for fishing lighted boat docks. At least nine public boat ramps provide access on the main lake. For more information, contact the Lower Colorado River Authority at (800)776-5272 or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (512)353-0072.

**Lake Waco** is a 7,173-acre impoundment of the Bosque River located in the city of Waco. White bass migrate up the North, South, and Middle Bosque Rivers in the spring, resulting in dense concentrations and excellent opportunities for anglers. Six boat ramps provide access on the main lake. For more information, contact the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers at (254)756-5359, or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (254)666-5190.

**Lake Whitney** is a 22,180-acre impoundment of the Brazos River located approximately midway between the cities of Fort Worth and Waco. White bass run up the Brazos and Nolan rivers, with best angler catches below sand and gravel bars and along sandy shorelines. Sixteen public ramps provide access on the main lake. A popular spot for white bass anglers is Kimbell Bend Park, which has a 2-lane boat ramp and is located just off of SH 174. For more information, contact the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at (254)694-3189 or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (254) 666-5190.

**Lake Buchanan** is a 22,211 acre reservoir located in Burnet and Llano Counties near the town of Burnet. It is the uppermost reservoir in the Highland Lakes Chain and has excellent white bass and striped bass populations. The Colorado River above the lake has one of the strongest white bass runs in Central Texas. For wade or bank fishing Colorado Bend State Park, near the town of Bend, is a great place to try your luck when water conditions are right. This portion of the Colorado River is popular with fly anglers. Bend is located about 20 miles out of Lampasas on SH 580. Call the park (325-628-3240) to check on conditions before going. Several private fishing camps in the Bend area also have bank access. Signs in the town of Bend will direct you to the camps. The area from Silver Creek (also called Beaver Creek) to the town of Tow is an excellent choice from winter to late spring. Buchanan has lots of main lake structure to try during the summer months. Public and private boat ramps are located on the lake. For more information, contact the Lower Colorado River Authority at (800)776-5272 or the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at (512)353-0072.

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