

On the run for white bass

By Cory Byrnes
For Lone Star Outdoor News

The white bass run is off to a strong start in some parts of the Lone Star State.

On the Nueces River, Pato Hernandez has been fishing out from the Highway 59 bridge with good results.

"For the last two weeks the bite has been hot," Hernandez

said. "And I have noticed we are limiting out quicker lately."

Hernandez has been using tandem rigs with white grub tails to entice the sandies. He said the drought in the area has the river pretty shallow.

"I am on what is like a paddle trail," he said. "Sometimes I have to get off and pull my kayak to get to the next pocket."

His best luck has come from

shallow water with deep water nearby, and he said the low water hasn't seemed to hamper the run.

"I have seen them move in 2 to 3 feet of water with their backs out of the water," he said. "That cold front started things up," Pato said.

North of Lake Houston, the fish seem to be scattered in Kings Creek.

"It's not a normal year for white bass," angler Paul Myers, who guides gar fishermen in the summer, said. "I have heard a lot of people complaining. But when I do find them, I find them in big bunches."

Myers has been putting white grub tails on a pink jig head and has been using a slow retrieve.

"They aren't running up the



Kevin Brown caught this keeper white bass in Kings Creek north of Lake Houston. Photo by Paul Myers.

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Hunting reports have been much better in areas treated with medicated feed and special feeders for quail. Photo by David J. Sams, Lone Star Outdoor News.

Hope for quail in the Rolling Plains

Medicated feed producing astounding results

By Craig Nyhus
Lone Star Outdoor News

A story that began in 2010 is showing great promise for the future of bobwhite quail in Texas, especially in the Rolling Plains. After researchers at the Wildlife Toxicology Laboratory at Texas Tech University concluded that parasites, specifically eyeworms and cecal worm, contributed to the decline of quail numbers, a medicated feed, called QuailGuard, was developed.

Results on "demonstration" ranches, allowed to study the feed over the past four years as

part of what became a 9-year approval process of the medicated feed with the U.S. Food & Drug Administration, are showing incredible results.

Now, the FDA has approved QuailGuard (in 2024), and the feed is available.

A recent article by Hannah Suber, a graduate research assistant at Texas Tech who has worked on the project since 2021, recapped the observations of ranchers, researchers and hunters on the numbers of birds seen on treated vs. untreated ranches.

"I came into the project with an open mind," Suber said. "But from our work, it's pretty obvious the feed seems to be working."

This season on the Snipes Ranch, in Stonewall County, more than 20 coveys were en-

countered within the first three hours of this hunting season.

"Everyone has an opinion, and they are fully entitled to that opinion," said Rick Snipes. "However, we have evidence and proof of the effectiveness of the medicated feed. On the Snipes Ranch, the infection rate has fallen from 100 percent in 2017 to less than 10 percent today. We have lots of birds, and they are very healthy. In fact, we have harvested birds over 200 grams. Here in the Rolling Plains, we have happy hunters and happy landowners."

Joe Crafton, founder of the Park Cities Quail Coalition, hunted the Snipes Ranch this year.

"The last three trips, we pointed 113 coveys in 23 hours," he said. "The good ol' days have

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Duck season is for lovers

By Meghan Olivia Jackson
For Lone Star Outdoor News

When searching for your soulmate, is it your dream to be loved by someone who loves the outdoors just as much as you do?

After being informed a late-season duck hunt was for photography content, Cierra Borak had no idea this day was strategically organized to change her life.

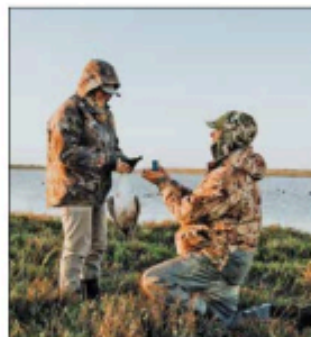
"It was not uncommon for our friend, Hayden Dobbins, to take photos for different brands and I knew about the preparation weeks in advance," said Borak. "Suddenly I was told he needed more people for the photos and was oblivious to what was really happening — I had no idea."

It was the morning of the duck hunt and nothing out of the normal occurred. Borak said for some reason when the

sun began to rise, it crossed her mind that this would be the perfect time to receive a proposal.

"Even though that happened to cross my mind, the sun rose and we just kept shooting," Borak said. "All of a sudden, I am being yelled at for shooting a banded bird when I was certain I did not shoot one."

Dobbins and her fiancé, Mason Matejcek, used a customized duck band they previously



After surprising Cierra Borak with a special band on a drake pintail, Mason Matejcek officially proposed. Photo by Hayden Dobbins.

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returned where habitat meets healthy birds. Based on conversations with other Rolling Plains hunters, I have no doubt that this feed is a difference maker."

On the ranch, preliminary evidence indicates that suppressing infection leads to not only population growth but also the sustainment of those populations through the years. The treatment of wild bobwhite with the medicated feed began after the population crashed again in 2018. The property was treated twice a year in three-week intervals, once in the spring and once in the fall, using feeders placed approximately every 200 acres.

Despite occasional fluctuations, the bobwhite population on the treated site has remained resilient, even in years with severe environmental challenges. In 2022, a year marked by extreme drought conditions, the treated site still managed to sustain huntable populations, even though Texas Parks and Wildlife Department roadside counts during this time recorded the lowest bobwhite numbers ever documented for the Rolling Plains.

A nearby 2,000-acre property, the Ribelin Ranch, is estimated to hold more than one bird per acre after a few years of methodical treatment. On a late-season hunt, 11 coveys were found in less than four hours of hunting on foot. Two of those coveys contained more than 30 birds each.

"Since we started using QuailGuard, quail very rarely fly into our windows and die anymore, which in the past was a common occurrence," said owner Brad Ribelin. "We are consistently seeing and hearing quail every day and hunting has been consistently good year to year since we began using

QuailGuard. When we hear so many hunters complaining how there are no quail to hunt and you know your ranch is flush with them, you realize what you are doing is working."

At the W7/Williams Ranch, in Garza County, owner David Williams reported 16 coveys after three hours of hunting on foot. When hunting via truck, hunting dogs would find quail within five minutes each time the vehicle stopped.

"I stopped hunting quail at the ranch in 2017," Williams said. "We would occasionally see a covey or two, but essentially the quail were gone. In the first year of the program there was little success; however, each year thereafter, quail populations have steadily increased. Now, we expect to push 15 to 20 coveys on two hunts a day. We've completely turned around the Ranch's quail populations, in just over four years. W7's quail are back."

Suber concluded the restoration of once-thriving bobwhite populations remains within reach, and the "boom and bust" cycles may be able to be mitigated.

"Although population fluctuations will continue in response to factors such as weather patterns and food availability, addressing parasitic infections appears to mitigate the severity of these fluctuations," she wrote. "The medicated feed, when used as prescribed 2x/year for 21 days, may provide an effective way to maintain populations while the time-intensive solutions to other pressures are addressed."

QuailGuard also is economically feasible, Suber wrote. The medicated feed costs \$1/acre annually to administer.

Popping the question

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purchased and snuck it on a drake pintail.

"I guess they slipped it on," Borak said. "This was when it all transpired and they successfully surprised me."

When Matejcek got down on one knee while she examined the band that read, "Will you marry me," Borak said she felt all of the joyous feelings, but was completely shocked more than anything. She still cannot believe the boys pulled it off and is excited for this next chapter of their life.

Before ever meeting, the couple grew up hunting and fishing. Borak said she and Matejcek credit their fathers for exposing them to the outdoors and nurturing their love for it.

"Ultimately, this led to Mason's career route toward becoming a fly-fishing and duck-hunting guide," Borak said. "I love being on the water and will admit fishing is something I know I want to do the rest of my life."

When finding your soulmate, Borak believes if your foundations align and you share similar passions while meeting in the middle, that is what truly matters.

Borak described this engagement as one of the happiest moments of her life. As they are enjoying this current season, she is certain their wedding plans will somehow include being outdoors in some way, shape or form.



A special band reading "Will you marry me?" was put on a drake pintail for Cierra Borak. Photo by Hayden Dobbins.