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SPORTS

This week in the outdoors

By Luke Clayton

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What an awesome time of year to be an outdoors person. Whether we spend our time in the outdoors hunting, fishing, exploring or capturing the awesome scenes with camera, the outdoors offers a lot for those that take the time to experience it.

This past week, I've had the opportunity to spend a lot of time outside. Redbuds are in full bloom, as are wild plum. Almost every day, I make an early morning walk in the woods near my home, checking trail cameras around a couple of spots where I have game feeders. I often follow a game trail that winds through a wild plum thicket; if there is a sweeter smell in nature than the blossoms of wild plum, I've yet to experience it. When the plums begin to ripen in late May, the fruit attracts wild hogs in large numbers. I've witnessed them pushing on the trunks of the trees to dislodge the plums. It always amazes me just how good a hog's nose is. My trail cameras keep me pretty well tuned into the hogs that live in the area. When the plums ripen, I'll see a crop of "new" hogs in the area. Who knows how far they can smell the ripe plums. I do know they don't last long. Once the plums ripen, the trees are void of fruit in a matter of a week.

I've hunted and fished on the same land for the past 14 years and during my daily walks, I pass by pecan trees that I planted well over a decade ago. One of the trees, now about 20 feet high, had its first crop of pecans this past year.

I also had the pleasure of fishing a creek that was chock full of spawning sand bass early last week. My neighbor, Mike Price, called and informed that he and his son, Josh, had been enjoying some excellent fishing for spawning white bass in a creek not far from our home. He asked if I would enjoy fishing with them on a morning outing. I enjoy a great deal of what the outdoors has to offer but an early spring fishing trip on a creek loaded with aggressive white bass is one of my favorite things to do.

I learn something new on every outdoor adventure and I certainly gleaned a tip or two pertaining to creek fishing for white bass from Mike and his son. After parking the truck, and just before heading down the creek to the first hotspot, Mike began passing out sections of light rope, about 20 feet long.

"We tie one end to a tree on top of the bank; the rope makes getting up and down the banks much easier," says Mike as we continue making ready for our jaunt down the creek.

Mike notices my little soft pack tackle pouch loaded with a variety of lures.

"Here's how I carry my baits," he continues, as he places several quarter-ounce Roadrunners in a piece of aluminum foil and put them on top of his head, under his cap! In his pocket when a small bag filled with grub bodies of various colors.

"No need packing things down the creek that we won't need," he says. "Before this trip is over, we'll be fishing holes that are a long way from the truck."

In our back pocket went a stringer and a small piece of Styrofoam tied to the end. I later learned that the floater keeps the catch swimming just below the water's surface and out of the tangle of roots that are always along water's edge on the creek.

Male white bass move from reservoirs up into the creeks and rivers first and the egg laden females soon follow. Our trip coincided perfectly with the first major influx of male fish; when filleting our catch for an upcoming fish fry, we noted that every fish was male. Granted, we did catch some fish that weighed around 1.25 pounds that we thought were smaller females but all proved to be the early-arriving males. With more rain in the forecast in upcoming days, the stage for a banner white bass spawn is certainly set. Our plan is to give our hotspot a few days rest and then the current from run off should trigger those fat female spawners into the creek. I'll keep you posted in upcoming columns!

I've found 5-foot, light-action rods with spinning reels to be ideal for fishing creeks. Casts are usually no longer than 30 feet and the shorter rods make maneuvering around the shoreline brush much easier.

Even in a creek packed with spawning white bass, there are always spots that hold the lion's share of fish. Deeper holes around the inside bends are usually very good as are spots where feeder creeks join the main channel. The majority of fish we caught were holding within a few feet of the bank and we tried to fish from spots that allowed us to cast parallel to the shoreline. As is usually the case, the trick to catching fish was remembering to slow down with our retrieve. When I remembered to crank the reel's handle slowly and "feel" the bottom, I would usually feel the "tap, tap" of a sand bass picking up my bait.

Although the little Roadrunners we were using are probably the universal bait for catching spawning white bass in creeks and rivers, I also did equally well using one-quarter ounce lead head jigs with curly tail grubs. On this particular trip, white seemed to be the best color but I've often had great luck fishing with chartreuse soft plastic bodies and with red or black jig heads. It's a good idea to carry a variety of colors when targeting spawning white bass. After all, the extra jig heads or grubs don't take up much space in your tackle box or... wrapped in foil and placed on top of your head under your cap!

SPRING TURKEY SEASON JUST AROUND THE CORNER - If you are searching for a good spot to hunt turkeys this spring, consider Ranger Creek Ranch up in Knox County. I've hunted here many years and never fail to see lots of birds. Ranch owner Ranell Walker says this should be a banner year for longbeards as well as a very abundant supply of two year olds, thanks to excellent hatches in recent years. For more information, visit the ranch's web site at www.rangercreekranch.com or call 940-888-2478.

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