TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

May 2023

Atascosa County Ag Newsletter

Courtesy of: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office
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Redear Sunfish

By: Garrett Stamport
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Fisheries Program Specialist

Species Overview

The redear sunfish, commonly referred to as shellcracker, is a member of the Centrarchidae family just like bluegill, bass, and crappie. Redear are native to Texas and much of the southeast, with the northern portion of their range extending up to Indiana. Redear sunfish, like many other species of Centrarchid now occupy much larger range through human introduction.

Description/Identification

Redear sunfish have a deep compressed body and small mouth, similar to that of a bluegill. Their body coloration ranges from yellow to a dark green with lighter colored sides that often have dark, camouflage-like spots. The belly is typically much lighter than the rest of the body, ranging from light yellow to almost white, with yellow to orange breast. A redear's most distinguishing feature and the origin of their common name, is the orange-red margin present on their ear flap. In some scenarios this ear flap may be much darker and almost rusty brown in color (photo on the left). Redear sunfish are one of the largest species in the *Lepomis* genus with the ability to exceed 16 inches and 6lbs (current Arizona unofficial record is 6lbs 3 oz at 17 inches). Fish of this size are uncommon but redear will frequently reach 12 inches and exceed 2 pounds.

Biology and Life History

Redear sunfish are found near the bottom of ponds and lakes in areas of low current and abundant vegetation. Their diet consists primarily of snails and small mollusks, earning them the nickname "shellcracker." Like other sunfish redear will also feed opportunistically on insect larvae, large zooplankton, and the occasional small fish. Due to their benthic nature, these fish are less likely to consume floating fish food than other sunfish species. Red ear spawn at cooler water temperatures than other sunfish species such as bluegill. Males will locate suitable spawning habitat (usually shallow sand or gravel) in water 3 feet or deeper and construct a circular nest. Like bluegill, redear are colonial spawners and nests are often located near one another in large groups. Redear will spawn once per year when water temperatures stabilize between 65-68 degrees.

Importance in Ponds/Management

Redear sunfish have a unique role in pond ecosystems. While their low reproductive rates prevent them from being the sole forage base for largemouth bass, they are an excellent addition to largemouth bass-bluegill systems. Since their diet consists primarily of snails and mollusks redear do not actively compete with bluegill for food. This means that both fish can be abundant in the pond without limiting one another, leading to more forage production per acre. An increase in forage per acre means more food is available for bass to grow. The diet of redear also plays an important role in parasite control. Many parasites present in fish, especially the grubs found in fish fins and flesh , utilize snails as an intermediate host in their lifecycle. Controlling snail populations through the introduction of redear limits the ability for parasites to complete thier lifecycle, lowering their numbers. Redear also have the ability to reach large sizes and can provide an additional angling opportunity for many pondowners. Adding structure such as brush piles and gravel spawning beds may help promote the survivability and reproduction of redear in ponds with high numbers of largemouth bass.

Redear are a common fish species in Texas that play an important role in bass production and parasite control in ponds. Management for these fish is often not necessary due to their low reproductive rates but in some situations supplemental stocking of adult redear may be beneficial to ponds with high levels of bass predation.

Wildlife with Jacob Dykes

Jacob Dykes is our Extension Wildlife Specialist he shares with us some amazing facts about wildlife!

The temps are rising, Turkey season is in full swing, Bucks are growing antlers. Does are about halfway through gestation. And food plots are on our minds!

Cool-season food plots get all the hype! This is understandable since we hunters will be sitting over them come deer season. However, late summer is the most stressful time for deer, and extra "groceries" could really be of good use.

During late summer, bucks are growing antlers and making a last-ditch effort to build energy reserves for the rut. Does are in late stages of gestation or have fawned and are lactating to feed them. As for "groceries", the lush spring forage is either no longer available or has been reduced to a much lower quality, and hard and soft mast has yet to arrive. This prime time for warm-season food plots to shine.

Warm-season food plots are typically planted April-May, depending on region. Plant too early and you risk a freeze; plant too late and you're shortening your growing season. It is also important to consider where you are in the world and try to lessen your chances of a drought. I know this is impossible in some places, and yes, it's always a gamble to plant food plots in places like South Texas. However, I have seen some good ones!

Texas Strawberry Season Better than Recent Years

Texas strawberry growers expect better yields and quality following back-to-back disappointing season, according to a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service expert.

Russ Wallace, Ph.D., AgriLife Extension horticulturist, Lubbock, said weather was an issue early, but strawberry producers are now harvesting average to above-average yields and quality.

Much of the state's strawberry crop were hit with a freezing temperatures in January and February, Wallace said. Damage from temperatures around 18 degrees meant surviving plants were very small and needed time to recover. Some producers covered plants to protect them from freezing temperature, but the cloth typically protects flowers only against lows around 27 degrees.

Strawberry plant recovery meant a delayed harvest, but Wallace said Plants are making up for lost time.

"Overall, harvest is looking much better than the previous two years, and yields should be average to good, " he said. "They may have been slow to harvest, but plants are pushing hard now and look better."

Texas strawberry producers overcome challenges

Wallace said recent rains have improved growing conditions, though nearly all strawberry fields are planted into black or white plastic with drip irrigation systems.

Too much water can hurt fruit, Wallace said. It can dilute the brix measurements, which is the sugar content found in fruits like strawberries and watermelons. Typically, 9-13 brix are good for strawberries. Rainfall and humidity can also fuel fungus and mold outbreaks in strawberries can be devastating for the crop.

Severe drought can also negatively impact strawberries, but drier weather can help producers by reducing pest and disease pressure, Wallace said.

Growers also deal with a wide range of pests from insects to rodents, he said. Insects like thrips and lygus bugs damage fruit and crickets eat leaves. Birds peck at fruit, rabbits eat fruit and plants, and mice pick the seeds from the fruit.

"Strawberries are a challenge because there area a number of things that can impact production," he said. "Growers have to be vigilant, whether it's high humidity causing root diseases or covering plants with nets to keep birds away from the fruit. There area a lot of critters that like strawberries as much as we do."

Interest in Texas Strawberry Production Spreading

Planted acres and interest in strawberry production continues to grow across the state, Wallace said. Farms and strawberry acres are difficult to track, but from his experience there are likely more than 60 growers across various regions of Texas with around 400 acres in production.

Most large commercial producers grow their crop on 7-12 acres while smaller operations are from 1,000 plants up to 3 acres, Wallace said. Producers plant around 17,000 bare root strawberry plants or plugs per acre, depending on row spacing and their production capability and goals.

The production standard for Texas is about 1 pound of fruit from each plant. Typically, Wallace said, most strawberry producers can average 1-1.5 pounds per plant during a season.

Most Texas producers welcome consumers into the fields for "pick-your-own" strawberries. Prices have increased some this season, he said, and range from $3.50 -$4 per pound up to $7-$8 per pound for strawberries near metropolitan areas.

Poteet, south of San Antonio, is known for its strawberries. The area boasts the state's largest concentration of producers and recently celebrated with its annual strawberry festival. Wallace said other notable growers can be found around Lubbock, Fredericksburg, Tyler, Dallas-Fort Worth and the Austin area.

"It's important for consumers to understand how much goes into growing strawberries, so I wouldn't mind seeing even higher prices," Wallace said. "Interest in growing strawberries is certainly growing, but acres are hard to tell. Some years I am hearing that acres are static, and then I come across a farm with 55,000 new strawberry plants."

Texas Strawberry Production Poised for Growth

Wallace said he is updating AgriLife Extension's Production Guide for Texas-Grown Strawberries based on ongoing research that should help guide producers and prospective growers.

Wallace and collaborators from AgriLife Extension, Prairie View A&M and Texas Tech University received a third two-year Texas Department of Agriculture Specialty Crops Block grant designed to improve sustainability for Texas strawberry producers. Two previous grants focused on production methods like low tunnels and hoop houses and then weed control, plant stress, fertilization, irrigation, shading and other production techniques to improve crop yields and quality throughout Texas.

Wallace and other researchers have over 15 statewide trials with growers to evaluate strawberry varieties for their performance in the various climates and soils around the state.

"We've gained a lot of excellent knowledge over the past four years, and identifying the varieties, both old and new, that perform best in the various regions will be another big step," he said. "I think Texas is poised for expanding strawberry production, and this research will be a big part of that growth."

U.S. Texas Cattle Inventory Decreases Following Drought

by Texas Farm Bureau Julie Tomascik

The U.S. and Texas cattle herds showed decreases on the Jan. 1 cattle inventory report released this week by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

There were 89.3 million head of cattle and calves in the U.S., down 3% from 92.1 million head last year. This is the lowest inventory since 2014.

In Texas, there were 12.5 million cattle and calves, down 2% from last year's 12.7 million.

"Lower numbers are a result of prolonged drought, dwindling supplies of feed and hay and the increased cost of raising cattle," Tracy Tomascik, Texas Farm Bureau associate director of Commodity and Regulatory Activities, said. "Farmers and ranchers have endured a difficult year, but hopefully the weather and markets will allow opportunities for them to rebuild and take advantage of the good demand for beef expected in the coming years."

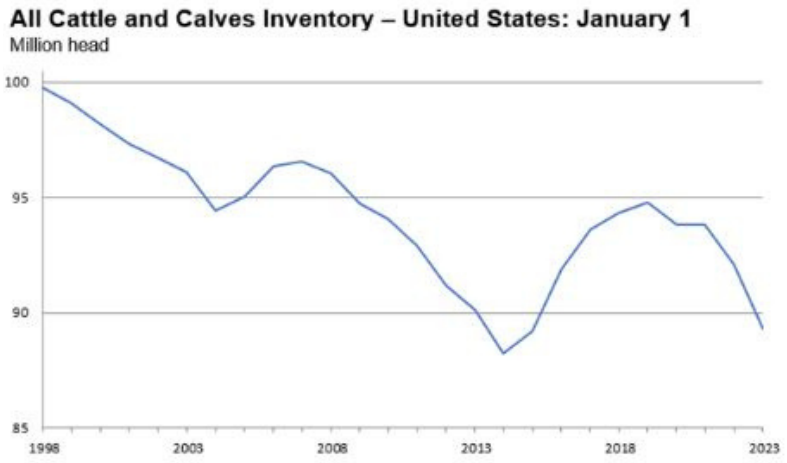
U.S. cattle numbers

USDA's cattle inventory report also showed all cows and heifers that have calved down 3% to 38.3 million head.

Beef cows, at 28.9 million head, were down 4% from a year ago.

Milk cows were up slightly from the previous year at 9.4 million head.

All heifers 500 pounds and over as of Jan. 1 totaled 19.2 million head, 4% below the 19.9 million head least. Beef replacement heifers, at 5.16 million head, were down 6% from a year ago.



Milk replacement heifers totaled 4.34 million head. That is down 2% from the previous year. Other heifers were down 3%, totaling 9.67 million head.

Bulls weighing 500 pounds and over were down 4%, totaling 2.03 million head.

Cattle on feed

Cattle and calves on feed for the slaughter market in the U.S. for all feedlots totaled 14.2 million head. The inventory is down 4% from last year's 14.7 million head.

Cattle on feed in feedlots with capacity of 1,000 or more head accounted for 82.5% of the total cattle on feed, up 1% from the previous year. The combined total of calves under 500 pounds and other heifers and steers over 500 pounds (outside of feedlots) at 25.3 million head, was 3% below last year.

U.S. calf crop

The 2022 calf crop in the U.S. was estimated at 34.5 million head. That is down 2% from the previous year's calf crop. Calves born during the first half of 2022 were estimated at 25.3 million head, down 2 percent from the first half of 2021. Calves born during the second of 2022 were estimated at 9.16 million head, 27% of the total 2022 calf crop.

Texas cattle numbers

The 2022 calf crop in Texas was down 1% and estimated at 4.55 million head.

Beef cows, at 4.3 million head, were down 3% from a year ago.

Milk cows were also up in Texas. There are 650,000 head, up 4% from last year.

Cattle and calves on feed for the slaughter market in Texas for all feedlots totaled 2.78 million head. The inventory is down 5% from a year ago.

More information

The full cattle inventory report can be found **here**.

To obtain an accurate measurement of the current state of the U.S. cattle industry, USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service surveyed about 35,400 operators across the nation during the first half of January. Surveyed producers were asked to report their cattle inventories as of Jan. 1, 2023, and calf crop for the entire year of 2022 by internet, mail, telephone or in-person interview.

UPCOMING EVENTS & EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Multi County Reproduction Management Workshop

On Tuesday May 9th from 9:00 am -2:00 pm the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service of Atascosa, Wilson, Frio, Medina, McMullen, Live Oak, and Bexar Counties will be hosting a Multi County Reproduction Workshop coving the topics of Pregnancy Testing, Anatomy of Cows Reproductive tract, Rectal Palpation and much more. The workshop will take place at the **Tom Brothers Rach 770 Co Road 412 Campbellton, Tx 78008 t**o sign up RSVP by **May 4th to 830,569,0034 the cost is $30 Per Producer.,**

**** Participation in workshop will require attendees t bring 3-5 docile cows that have been exposed to a bull over 90 days and possibly one cow that is open.**

Multi County Beef/Forage Workshop

Friday May 12th Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Services of Atascosa, Bexar, Gaudalupe, and Wilson Counties are putting together a Beef/Forage workshop from **8:30 am- 2:00 pm at Brehm Farms - 7381 FM 775 Seguin, TX 78155.** There will be 2 CEUs (1 IPM, 1 General). The Cost of registration is **$20 per person** that can be paid in the form of Cash, or Check payable to Bexar County Ag & Natural Resources Committee. **To register please call 210-631-0400 or email kennedy.green@ag.tamu.edu**. For more information please see attached Flyer

Agri-Land Resources

We have partnered with Alamo RC&D Area Inc. to bring you the **Agri-Land Resources workshop focused on assisting agri-land owners and mangers.** topics include USDA/NRCS Programs, Rural Energy, Grazing Management, Wildlife Habitat, Brush Management, Beekeeping and more. The Program is to be held **May 25th 2023 from 9:30 am -5:00 pm** at the **Jourdanton Community Center** this is a **free workshop but Pre-Registration is Required** online at **www.almorcd.org by May 21st 5:00 pm** for more info see flyer on page 10

2023 Summer Camp Schedule

JUNE	7-11	ROLLING PLAINS BOBWHITE BRIGADE THE 1687 FOUNDATION	RISING STAR, TX
	11-15	SOUTH TEXAS BUCKSKIN BRIGADE CHAP ARROSA RANCH	LA PRYOR, TX
	24-28	SOUTH TEXAS BOBWHITE BRIGADE BUCK HORN CREEK RANCH	MCCOY, TX
	24-28	SOUTH TEXAS RANCH BRIGADE DUVAL COUNTY RANCH	SANTA ANNA, TX
JULY	5-9	BASS BRIGADE WARREN RANCH	SANTA ANNA, TX
	12-16	WATERFOWL BRIGADE PINTAIL HUNTING CLUB	GARWOOD,TX
	17-21	RANCH BRIGADE WARREN RANCH	SANTA ANNA, TX
	23-27	NORTH TEXAS BUCKSKIN BRIGADE WARREN RANCH	SANTA ANNA, TX
	25-29	COSTAL BRIGADE SEA STAR BASE GALVESTON	GALVESTON,TX

APPLY NOV.1 - MAR.15 • TEXASBRIGADE.ORG/APPLICATIONS

MULTI-COUNTY REPRODUCTION MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

ATASCOSA, WILSON, FRIO, MEDINA, MCMULLEN, LIVE OAK AND BEXAR COUNTIES

Location:

Tom Brothers Ranch
770 Co Rd 412
Campbellton, TX 78008

Date/Time:

May 9th
9:00 am – 2:00 pm

SPACE IS LIMITED SO SIGN UP EARLY!!
RSVP BY: May 4, 2023 (830) 569-0034

*Participation in workshop will require attendees to bring 3-5 docile cows that have been exposed to a bull over 90 days and possibly one cow that is open

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.

TOPICS

"INS AND OUTS" OF PREGNANCY TESTING

"HANDS ON" ANATOMY OF A COW'S REPRODUCTIVE TRACT

RECTAL PALPATION
(Demonstration and Exercise)

ESTRUS SYNCHRONIZATION MADE EASY

Reproductive Diseases

Overall Bull Fertility

(Demonstration and Exercise supplies will be provided)

Taught by:

Dr. Bruce Carpenter
Livestock Specialist

Atascosa, Wilson, Bexar, Frio, Live Oak, McMullen and Medina
County Extension Agents Ag/NR

For more information:

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
Atascosa County Office
Dale Rankin

830.569.0034

Multi County Beef/Forage Workshop

Friday, May 12th, 2023
8:30 AM – 2:00 PM
Brehm Farms - 7381 FM 775 Seguin, TX 78155
2 CEUs (1 IPM, 1 General)
$20 per person
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Services of Atascosa, Bexar, Guadalupe, and Wilson Counties

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

Participants are welcome to bring their own lawn chair.

Cost:
$20, Cash or check, payable to 'Bexar County Ag and Natural Resources Committee'
3355 Cherry Ridge, Ste 212
San Antonio, TX 78230

Register by calling at 210-631-0400 or email kennedy.green@ag.tamu.edu

Program Agenda

8:30 am - Registration

9:00 am - Selection and Development of Breeding Bulls
Dr. Jason Cleere - Associate Professor & Extension Specialist, Texas A&M University

10:00 am - What Happens During a Breeding Soundness Evaluation and Why It Matters?
Dr. Thomas Hairgrove - Professor & Extension Veterinarian, Texas A&M University

10:30 am - What Can I Pay For a Bull and Average Longevity?
Dr. Yuri Calil - Assistant Professor & Extension Specialist, Texas A&M University

11:00 am - External and Internal Parasite Management
Dr. Thomas Hairgrove - Professor & Extension Veterinarian, Texas A&M University
Dr. Christine Navarre - Extension Veterinarian, Louisiana State University

Lunch

12:30 pm - How am I Benefitting from the Checkoff?
Molly McAdams - Executive Vice President, Texas Beef Council

1:00 pm - Pasture Management Considerations Following Drought
Dr. Josh McGinty - Associate Professor & Extension Specialist, Texas A&M University

Agri-Land Resources

A workshop focused on assisting agri-land owners and managers

Topics include USDA/NRCS Programs
Rural Energy for America, Grazing Management, Wildlife Habitat Management, Brush Management, Beekeeping in Agriculture, and Pesticide Laws & Regulations and more!
CEUs will be available.

May 25, 2023

9:30 am – 5:00 pm

Jourdanton Community Library, 1101 Campbell Ave.
Jourdanton, Texas 78026
FREE Workshop! Pre-Registration REQUIRED online.
Go ONLINE NOW, at www.alamorcd.org
DEADLINE May 21, by 5:00 pm

This workshop is sponsored by Alamo RC&D Area Inc. in cooperation with USDA and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), Atascosa County Texas Agricultural Extension Service, The USDA Pleasanton Service Center and the Jourdanton Community Library.
