



IF I COULD ONLY PICK ONE

Top Picks from Some Top Anglers for Catching the Texas Saltwater State Fish

story and photo by **PAT MURRAY, CCA NATIONAL PRESIDENT**

There is no more iconic saltwater species in Texas than the beloved red drum. Beyond being the saltwater state fish, a protected game fish and the focus of the launch of the State of Texas' enviable conservation culture, they are strong, durable and have an unforgettable way of crushing a lumbering topwater plug. Undoubtedly, they were also the motivating force that launched CCA in 1977, which in turn created the proverbial Redfish Wars that eradicated the use of coastal gill nets in Texas and beyond, while creating a conservation playbook that continues to be used throughout the U.S. Although they are occasionally mocked as "bay carp" by some elitists (who will remain unnamed), I doubt there is a single angler who would pass up a jarring bite from a redfish.

With this concept in mind, through the duration of the CCA Texas STAR Tournament, I have been asking various experts to share the single bait they would use if they were fishing for a tagged redfish, which for properly registered CCA Texas members fishing the state waters between Memorial Day and Labor Day can add up to a truck, trailer, boat and motor package. By narrowing each expert to a

single bait, it really makes them focus on what they would use if they absolutely had to catch a redfish. It sounds simple, but for many anglers, it creates an entertainingly difficult task. They labor, fret and often stumble as they wrestle through the virtual tackle store that resides in their minds. Some struggle so hard with narrowing to a single bait that I have found myself reminding them that this scenario is not real. They will get their whole mental tackle box back after they answer the question.

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In writing this for the CCA Texas STAR eNewsletters and for this feature, I went down the predictable path of targeting guides, marine scientists, outdoor writers, industry leaders and all-around expert anglers, and jumped from various areas and coasts to get as broad a perspective as possible. There were a few predictable themes in bait choice but that carries its own lesson in remembering that classic baits are classic for a reason, and what catches fish doesn't evolve as quickly as anglers' hunger to find the next secret bait.

THE ONES

AND THE
EXPERT
ANGLERS
WHO SWEAR
BY THEM.



CAPT. BRIAN HOLDEN

TTF Red Killer in Pumpkin on a 1/4-ounce Screw Lock Jig Head

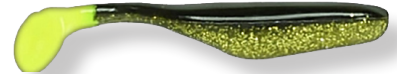
This Rockport-based veteran guide ran the legendary Redfish Lodge for decades and still successfully guides the Rockport area. His intensity and expertise make him an easy target to get a great pick. Holden chose a TTF Red Killer in pumpkin on a 1/4-ounce screw lock jig head.



CHESTER MOORE

Super Pogy By Bomber, Saltwater Grade

Outdoor writer, broadcaster and all-around outdoors expert Chester Moore showed his deepwater roots of fishing the Sabine Jetties and ship channel by selecting the Super Pogy from Bomber Saltwater Grade. "It's design, vibration and rattle are ideal for deep rocks, points and channel slopes."



ROBBY BYERS

3" Bass Assassin Swimming Shad in "Roach" with 1/16-ounce Norton Head

Byers is a longtime angler, conservation leader and the Executive Director of CCA Texas. He has passionately (and successfully) fished the Texas coast for his entire life. His pick of a 3-inch Bass Assassin Swimming Shad in "roach" pattern with a 1/16-ounce Norton head is a timeless selection for all types of water conditions, and is incredibly productive in off-color conditions. This bait has become a classic for a good reason.

SHANE BONNOT

Heddon Super Spook Jr. in Bone

Shane is a marine scientist, past manager at the famed Sea Center Hatchery in Lake Jackson, Texas, and is currently the advocacy director for CCA Texas. As a hatchery manager, he can honestly say that he helped make redfish. That gives him an almost-unsettling familiarity into the ways of the redfish and his pick is a bold one - a Heddon Super Spook Jr. in bone color. Although he is quick to acknowledge that a topwater is not always the best choice due to redfish feeding patterns and anatomical disadvantage for surface feeding, the memorable strikes and ability to induce impulse bites drive his decision.



DR. LARRY MCKINNEY

Heddon Super Spook Jr. in Bone

Dr. McKinney is the recent past Executive Director of Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi HRI and continues to be a leading marine scientist, revered fisheries manager and angler. From his understanding of how wild and hatchery production happens to his knowledge of the guts of how this species is managed, Larry knows every hidden corner of the life cycle of a redfish. Interestingly, like Shane Bonnot, he went to the top and picked a Heddon Super Spook Jr. in bone color.

BILL KINNEY

Gulp! Scented Soft Plastic

CCA Texas STAR Tournament Director Bill Kinney, one of the initial architects who created the wildly popular tournament, has seen a lot of redfish caught and has caught plenty himself. When asked what one bait he would pick to lure a redfish, he appropriately hedged himself by noting that he would prefer to throw topwater baits, but "if I were fishing in a tournament and particularly if I had kids with me, I'd likely opt for a Gulp! or some other scented soft plastic. You get all the advantage of the scent but also the ability to adjust the retrieve to adapt to the feeding pattern."



DR. GREG STUNZ

Gulp! Scented Soft Plastic

Renowned marine scientist and angler Dr. Greg Stunz, who specializes in fisheries ecology and sport-fisheries at Texas A&M University Corpus Christi's Harte Research Institute seconded Kinney's pick, noting that the scent aspect is critical in motivating redfish to feed when a traditional unscented lure might not garner a glance.

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JOE DOGGETT

1/2-ounce Gold Spoon

Doggett's name is synonymous with Texas coastal outdoor writing. His picturesque descriptions of the surf still ring in my mind as a young angler reading his work. He was a part of a small group who really embraced the power and beauty of Texas lure fishing before it became mainstream. Unsurprisingly, his pick is a 1/2-ounce gold spoon. Honestly, I would have been crushed if he had chosen otherwise.

DR. JOAN HOLT

Gold Spoon

Dr. Holt is a living legend along the Texas coast. She is as storied and acclaimed as a scientist as she is passionate about marine biology and the coastal environment where she lives and fishes. Dr. Holt's pick is another affirmation that every redfish angler better have a gold spoon...or ten.



TIM STRICKLAND

1/2-ounce Weedless Gold Spoon

Strickland is a longtime angler, past fishing guide and past Coastal Fisheries field technician and now serves as the current General Counsel for CCA. He lives and breathes the Texas coast and his pick is...wait for it...a 1/2-ounce weedless gold spoon. As he correctly notes, it is the most versatile and adaptive lure you can choose for redfish in all bays and all depths.

SHANNON TOMPKINS

Venerable Johnson Spoon

I cannot imagine there is an outdoors newspaper and magazine writer who has covered more subjects in such depth as Shannon. From cutting-edge conservation pieces to how-to articles, Tompkins' years at the Houston Chronicle left a legacy. His pick reflected his unabashed old-school leanings and he went with the venerable spoon (which was the hands-down favorite among this crowd of experts).



CAPT. JAY WATKINS

MirrOlure Lil John XL in Watermelon/Red Glitter

Jay is one of the most respected and successful guides on the Texas coast and beyond. His drive, energy and profound abilities have him on the water more times in a year than many people will fish in their entire life. As he ranges the coast in his guiding practice, he has had a lot of experience with redfish...a lot. His pick is a MirrOlure Lil John XL in watermelon/red glitter.

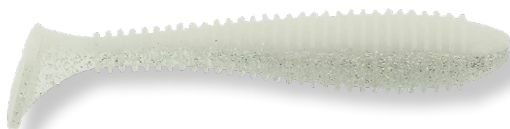


DAVE PFEIFFER

Shimano Coltsnipper Twitch Bait 80

Pfeiffer is the President of Shimano North American Fishing Inc. so he

knows a lot about all things tackle, but he is also a proven tournament angler and has fished literally all over the world. His pick is a refreshing change from the parade of classics and is a Shimano Coltsnipper twitch bait 80.



FINAL PICK

3.5" Lit'l Boss in Silver Ghost on a 1/16-ounce Jig Head

I figured I would have to put myself on the spot as to a single bait choice for a redfish bite. Anyone who has spent much time fishing

around me is shaking their head right now dismissively saying, "Oh, let me guess...a gold spoon." I have been mocked by some truly legendary anglers for my blind adherence to the cult of the spoon. But in an act of defiance, I will select a relatively new bait to my wading box - a 3.5-inch Lit'l Boss in Silver Ghost pattern on a 1/16-ounce jig head. Longtime and acclaimed guide James Plaa turned me on to these a couple of years ago, and I find it is deadly on fish in general and on redfish in particular. That's my pick and it's not a spoon...even though I would probably switch to a spoon shortly after.

Pat Murray is the national president of CCA, an active coastal angler and published author. Prior to coming to CCA, he was an in-shore fishing guide on the upper Texas coast. To read more of Murray's insights into the angling life, his latest coastal angling book, It's More Than Fishing, can be found at Amazon.com. 