

BOW TIE A



BUFFALO

BOWFISHING FOR BUFFALO is a blast!

However, don't get the buffalo fish—the subject of this article—confused with that bovine behemoth, the Great Plains bison, often called “buffalo.” Although the two critters sometimes share the same name, the two species could not be more different.

Buffalo, the fish, is revered by bowfishers all over North America as a worthy target of many bowfishing adventures. They are definingly not as tasty as a bison, but pursuing them is a fun way to keep your archery game on point.

The sport of bowfishing is quickly becoming a major force within today's outdoor sporting traditions. Not only does bowfishing combine the arts of fishing, archery and hunting, but it's a great way to keep your archery skills sharp year-round.

The buffalo has been hunted in Texas waters since the days of the Native Americans spearing them with crude weapons for food. Many folks think buffalo and the common carp are interchangeable, but they are very different species that share some similarities in appearance.

The two main buffalo species bowfishers target here in Texas are the bigmouth and smallmouth buffs, or simply “buffs” as many bowfishers call them. They can stack on weight and many times will outweigh the common carp in a big way.

To date, the state record bigmouth buffalo was taken by my good friend and professional bowfishing guide, Marty McIntyre (GARQUEST.com) on Toledo Bend in 2011. It was 81.5 pounds and measured 47.5 inches.

The state record smallmouth buffalo was even larger and longer than that. It tipped the scales at 92 pounds and measured 48 inches, coming out of the Sabine River by bowfisher Kent McDowell in 1999. Those are some big fish to say the least.

That being said, it is more common to find buffalo in the 15- to 20-pound range. However, many 30- to 40-pound fish are to be found, in most rivers and lakes in Texas.

Not a Bison, Not Even Tasty Like A Bison, but Legal to Bowfish. And... They Get HUGE

BY DUSTIN VAUGHN WARNCKE

They are a blast to hunt (I mean fish) for on a general bowfishing excursion. Buffalo traditionally frequent clear rivers and lakes all over the great state of Texas, but can thrive in just about any environment, as they are a hardy species.

They begin to spawn when water temperatures reach the 60 to 75 degree mark. The spawning season, which usually begins in April or May, is perhaps one of the best times of year to sling arrows at these fish, as they are plentiful and fairly easy to single out in the water.

Key in on structure and vegetation during the spawn. You can many times find a target-rich environment around the spawning grounds. As a general rule, buffalo can be spooked easier than carp, but they are a worthy adversary for anyone willing to take to the waters with a bow. If you have never connected with a big buff, you are in for a seriously thrilling time.

Many times, big buffs hide out by themselves. So, if you are trolling around to find one, you always want to be at the ready to pull that bow string back and send your arrow in the water.

You don't need a fancy high-end bow for bowfishing. Bowfishing bows such as the Diamond Sonar, come fully rigged and ready to bowfish. This or a similar budget-priced bow is all you need for a bowfishing adventure. Or you can outfit an existing bow for bowfishing rather inexpensively with an AMS- or Muzzy-style reel, string and arrow.

Do you need a fancy boat rigged for bowfishing to declare “arrows from above” on big buffalo?

Not really.

I always suggest new bowfishing enthusiasts use what you have at first. Afterward, you can decide whether a bowfishing-rigged boat is right for you. Or get some friends together and make an adventure happen any way you can.

Many strides have been made in bowfishing lights, generators, bows, arrows, and other gear used for the sport. If you don't have access to a guide or a boat, try bank fishing action with a bow-mounted white LED flashlight. Stalking buffs on the bank is a great sporting tradition, The challenge, as with a boat trip, is to get a shot off before the fish realizes the game is even on.

Hiring a bowfishing guide is not terribly expensive for a local trip for buffalo and other non-game fish compared to hiring a regular rod and reel-fishing guide. In fact, it is many times less than you might expect. Many bowfishing guides plan a four-hour trip that starts around dusk and goes into the late night hours, sometimes even into early morning hours, if the fishing is good.

So, can you eat buffalo? Well, you can, but I don't. They have a light flakey flesh that is not so “fishy” tasting as a carp would be. However, the meat is oily and not the best for table fare in my humble opinion.

My friend Marty McIntyre, mentioned above, is well-known for frying up buffalo ribs, which are known as a “finger food” in some circles we both run in. Again, I am not a fan, but your mileage may vary.

Bowfishing is a fun family activity. It is exciting to see the sport grow and thrive with new bowfishers picking up the sport every day.

If you want to see how bowfishing is done, check out my YouTube channel by searching for my name and find the bowfishing playlist. Also, check out our Texas Fish & Game podcast, “The Best of the Outdoors,” where we visit the subject of bowfishing on a regular basis.

So, sling some arrows into the water at some big buffs and have some fun!

