

A man with a brown shirt is smiling and holding a large flathead fish. The fish is yellowish-brown with a large head and a flat body. The background shows a body of water with some wooden pilings and a cloudy sky.

# Chasing **OP** **Yellow**

**Giant Flatheads  
of North Texas**

**story by Dustin Vaughn Warncke**



**T**HE FLATHEAD CATFISH, ALSO KNOWN AS the “yellow cat”, is a good example of a humble fish that can grow to gigantic sizes and put up a fight that can wear you out but leave you smiling from ear to ear with excitement from the battle. This time of year marks an excellent opportunity to catch some monster “flatties” in North Texas lakes. Fishing with live bait using conventional rod and reel or even using juglines or trot-lines are very effective ways to land some giant yellow cats. The good news for anglers seeking some North Texas river monster action is that just about every major lake in North Texas has a decent population of flatheads and we will explore some of the best lakes to venture out on for these monumental trophy catfish. The skill and patience required in catching one of these elusive yellow cats drives some anglers to extremes. There is hope for all of us to land a fish of a lifetime, however, if we approach pursuing this wary fish in the right manner and take into account and numerous wonderful lakes they thrive in season after season.

While many big time catfish enthusiasts go after trophy-sized blue cats because they offer for the faster fishing action and larger fish quantities, fishing for flatheads requires a whole different mindset and is many times a far slower pace. Fishing prospects are better during the warmer months and in Texas that is usually between March and October. Typically, the best time to go after flatheads is the evening, night or early morning hours when they are most likely to be feeding. As a general rule, fish at the bottom of damns and in slow moving rivers and river arms which is usually where these big boys hang out in search of an easy meal. In many regards, it is a waiting game if rod and reel fishing but I always recommend throwing out a few jug lines while on your fishing adventure if you happen to be fishing out of a boat of some kind. This can be a productive tactic to cover more water than rod and reel fishing alone.

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**Pat Stewart of Montgomery caught this  
Opelousas catfish on live perch.**

As a rule, yellow cats prefer live baits and are the cleanest of foragers compared with other species of catfish. While I will frequently use cut shad for channel and blue cats when rod and reel or jug fishing, it is vitally important to stick with hardy live baits for flatheads. Chad Ferguson of Catfish Edge guide service, which is based in North Texas, recommends a good sized bream which are fairly easy to catch and usually stay livelier on hook than other live baits.

Chad's favorite North Texas area lakes for flatheads include Lake Grapevine, Lake Lewisville, Lake Bob Sandlin and Lake Ray Roberts. These are just a few lakes in North Texas that harbor big flatties. "This time of year is always interesting because the fishing we do all depends on what the weather is doing. As a general rule, we look for fish in known spawning areas and migration points where fish are moving," said Ferguson. "I

use the sonar on my boat to find catfish runs which intersect since many times runs will cross each other in a pattern. This time of year we fish as shallow as 2-3 feet and as deep 10 feet," he continued.

Big flathead catfish might be one of Lake Texoma's best kept secrets. Bill Carey, owner of Striper Express guide service, says that trophy yellow cats are found in good numbers on this Texas-Oklahoma border lake and many striped bass and white bass fishing enthusiasts usually don't consider this lake for its great catfish prospects. Jug fishing is especially productive on this lake. Since there is an abundance of threadfin and gizzard shad in this Red River gem of a reservoir, large live shad are a great bait to use in your search for these big fish on Texoma.

Another North Texas lake down the road from Texoma that has great yellow cat prospects is Lake Tawakoni. This lake is respected

by some catfish anglers as the best lake in the northern part of the state for all species of catfish. Like Texoma, live shad are in great numbers in Tawakoni and make great baits. Just remember, go big or go home when it comes to your bait size selection. Use the larger shad in your search for that trophy fish of a lifetime for the best chances of fishing success here.

We briefly mentioned Lake Lewisville as a favorite lake of catfish guide Chad Ferguson earlier in this article. Lewisville happens to be a fantastic lake for flatheads as conditions are ideal for spawning activity as well as foraging for food and, in turn, growing big fish. To find a shallower lake that has an ample food source for both large and small catfish alike is not an easy prospect sometimes but, thankfully, Lewisville has both. That makes this lake a contender as one of the best flathead lakes in our great state.

Further north, Lake Bob Sandlin boasts some great flathead prospects but don't be surprised if you reel in a big blue cat while you are fishing this reservoir as many times the blues and yellows intermingle. Look for fish to spawn in deep tree lay downs and sunken structure as well as deep holes in this lake. As a rule, this is a good consideration to find many spawning yellows on other lakes as well.

As a general consideration when approaching the subject of catching trophy catfish, I recommend practicing catch and release with flatheads over 20 pounds in weight. Fish this large are, of course, the matriarchs and patriarchs of our rivers and lake's trophy fish population. Keep the smaller fish for eating. They taste better anyway. Let the big fish go forth and make more trophy fish. This also insures great prospects for big fishing action for generations yet to come and a dream fish for a future angler someday. In doing this, after a hard-fought battle, you will still net an enjoyable experience on the water that you won't soon forget. In addition, you'll have photos and a great story to share about landing a monster slob of a catfish. Be safe, fish hard, and have fun out there on the water!

