

2019  
FISHING  
CALENDAR

# FISH ALL YEAR

Whether breathing ethereal air at higher elevations or a salt breeze at sea level, Golden State anglers are afforded bountiful fishing options. Make it a great day on the water with any of these great game fish, or just rig a worm under a bobber for bluegills and go back to being a kid again! **By Don Vachini**

## JANUARY

### STURGEON: SAN PABLO BAY

Surrounded by the cities of San Rafael, Vallejo and San Francisco, the vast San Pablo Bay carries the reputation of a wintertime sturgeon Mecca. A combination of moving tides, bolstered by rainfall-induced freshwater flows from the Petaluma River, Napa River and Sonoma Creek, churn up the estuary, providing ideal conditions for concentrations of feeding “diamondbacks.” Most specimens range from sublegal sizes to 20 pounds, but unrelenting

PHOTOGRAPH BY TOSH BROWN

From Southern California, north to the Cascade Mountains, trout offer year-round action at many of California's top recreational fishing sites.



PHOTOGRAPH BY TOSH BROWN

individual battlers can scale well more than 100 pounds. Check the regulations as size restrictions apply. The most consistent action occurs in the "sturgeon triangle" — located between China Camp, Buoy 5 and the Pumhouse — where boaters drift grass shrimp, ghost shrimp or herring roe on the moving tide.

**OTHER OPTIONS:** Lake Berryessa, Rainbow Trout: Catch quality rainbow trout in the heart of wine country, while drifting live minnows under a bobber. Lake Havasu: The crappie bite turns for anglers teasing jigs around submerged

brush piles at Topock Bay.

**FEBRUARY**  
**PACIFIC HALIBUT: CALIFORNIA COASTLINE**  
Halibut start arriving in sheltered bays, from San Diego north to Eureka. Preferring wide expanses of sandy bottoms, this aggressive bottom feeder is a popular target for boaters working these waters. The "flatfish" typically range between 10 to 25 pounds, with some approaching 40 pounds. Toss any back that don't meet the 22-inch, minimum-size length restriction. Noteworthy hotspots include Oceanside Pier, Morro Bay, Monterey Bay, San Francisco Bay, Tomales Bay, Bodega Head, Shelter Cove and Humboldt Bay (among others). Drift live sardines, anchovies or smelt on an outgoing tide; work worm-tailed jigs on the bottom, dressed with anchovy filets doused with attractant; or troll spreader bars with chrome Hopkins or Krocodile spoons.

**OTHER OPTIONS:** Smith River, Chinook Salmon: Catch Chinook salmon bouncing roe sacs through large holes on this NorCal river. Los Vaqueros Reservoir: Channel catfish and landlocked striped bass are the quarry at this impoundment near Livermore.

**MARCH**  
**LARGEMOUTH BASS: COLLINS LAKE**  
Set in the foothills of Yuba County, Collins Lake grows largemouths that feed on a healthy forage base (that includes stocked rainbow trout), many in the 3- to 4-pound range. Good electronics help locate bass suspended in deep water, off points, humps and the main-creek edges. Pitching jigs or plastic worms are effective but must be presented deep and agonizingly slow. As the water temperature increases, bass turn toward seeking food, and topwater action improves. Reaction lures spur aggressive strikes with larger fish preferring spinnerbaits and crankbaits, while others are hooked by anglers "frogging" over the increasing weed growth.

**OTHER OPTIONS:** Sacramento River, Rainbow Trout: The tailwater section through downtown Redding produces hefty, 3- to 5-pound wild rainbows. Coastal Piers/Jetties, Jack Smelt: Runs appear around piers and jetties along much of

# BEST BETS FOR BITES

California's top catches month-by-month.

## JANUARY



### STURGEON

@ SAN PABLO BAY

A stout 8- or 9-foot rod with a sensitive tip, accompanied by a "sturgeon board," helps detect ultra-delicate bites. Boater drift grass shrimp, ghost shrimp or herring roe.

## FEBRUARY



### PACIFIC HALIBUT

@ CALIFORNIA COASTLINE

Drift live sardines, anchovies or smelt on an outgoing tide. Toss worm-tailed jigs with anchovy filets doused with attractant or troll spreader bars with chrome Hopkins.

## MARCH



### LARGEMOUTH BASS

@ COLLINS LAKE

Work poppers, topwater plugs, and frog and crawdad-patterned plugs, or look deep with drop-shot rigs throughout the water column.

## APRIL



### STRIPED BASS

@ SAN FRANCISCO BAY

Toss multiple lures — aimed with Rebel Minnow, Jointed Rapala Minnow and Striper Pezzer lures — and umbrella rigs to simulate searching baitfish.

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM SPORT FISH BY VIC OUNAWAY

the state's coastal shoreline.

#### APRIL

### STRIPED BASS: SAN FRANCISCO BAY

Striped bass of all sizes begin to move through the vast San Francisco Bay at the same time massive schools of anchovies arrive, setting the table for frenetic feeding frenzies. "Schoolies" range from 4 to 6 pounds, but large strippers reach upward of 20 pounds and more, dining heavily on the abundant baitfish buffet. Well-known striper locales include Point Pinole, McNears Pier, Red Rock Pier, the Vallejo Wall, Sausalito Jetty, Fort Point, Fort Mason and Candlestick Point. Fast-moving tides usually spark some memorable bites. Anchor and fish or drift live mudsuckers, bullheads or anchovies. Tow diving plugs through slow-moving tides. Shore-bound anglers can opt to surf cast or walk the bayside trail, soaking cut sardines and patiently awaiting cruising fish.

**OTHER OPTIONS:** Lake Sonoma, Largemouths: Topwater offerings flipped near shoreline brush entice largemouth bass. Lake Almanor, Smallmouths: Crankbaits worked along rocky structure account for smallmouth bass up to 4 pounds.

#### MAY

### RAINBOW TROUT: UPPER HAT CREEK

Icy flows off the northeast flank of Mt. Lassen supports a bountiful insect base in upper Hat Creek, one of the North State's most productive trout streams. Californian Department of Fish and Wildlife weekly stocks 10- to 14-inch rainbows (with a few 2- to 5-pounders) in the creek's campground areas. Holdovers and wild brook trout are joined by some reclusive browns that also inhabit this stretch of Lassen

National Forest located along State Highway 89. A moderate stream gradient creates a pleasant mix of deep pools, pocket water and undercut banks that can be fished with spin- and fly tackle, but the thick pine-and-alder canopy prevents traditional overhead casts. Wading and accurate, short-line casts prove worthwhile. Old Station, Cave, Rocky and Bridge campgrounds are top choices.

**OTHER OPTIONS:** American River, Shad: Prodigious runs of shad begin occupying the river through downtown Sacramento. Anglers bounce weighted flies or shad darts through the riffles. Yellowtail Tuna, SoCal: Once located in the vicinity of Catalina Island, these behemoths are often persuaded by drifting live anchovies.

#### JUNE

### LARGEMOUTH BASS: CLEAR LAKE

Guarded by Mt. Konocti and blessed with substantial nutrients and a phenomenal shad forage base, Clear Lake is noted for producing both numbers and trophy-sized largemouth bass. Many fall into the 5- to 10-pound class, with a few approaching the magical 20-pound mark. Prime habitat exists along the fringes of the 40,000-acre lake in Lake County but locating baitfish is key to success. Bass gather around the tule-ringed coves on the southwest shoreline and take cover amid the docks and pilings on the north side. Fish this structure with buzzbaits, jigs and plastic worms in the top 10 feet of water. Solid lures include Brush Hogs, Senko worms and Zoom flukes. In the evening, "walk the frog" for some incredible topwater action.

**OTHER OPTIONS:** Lake Nacimiento, White Bass: White bass action soars as tem-

peratures rise. Target topwater fish before the sun gets high. Lake Henshaw, Channel Catfish: Fool the cats with a wide variety of baits including chicken livers, dough balls and stink-baits.

#### JULY

### WHITE SEA BASS: SAN DIEGO OFFSHORE

Sea bass populations have rebounded since 1983, and the solid numbers of these predominantly Southern California offshore battlers commonly push 30 pounds. Using live bait, anglers aboard San Diego-based party boats and private boats regularly pursue large schools around Catalina, Coronado and San Clemente islands. Catch the biggest fish using live anchovies, sardines and squid or fast-trolling spoons, action lures or swim-baits. Closer to shore, use light tackle to fish silver-finished lures to find individual fish, or troll or cast plugs and lures. Smaller juvenile sea bass seek the sanctuary of kelp forests.

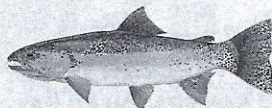
**OTHER OPTIONS:** Crowley Lake, Yellow Perch: Consistent catches are found along drop-offs into deep water. Fort Bragg Offshore, Lingcod/Rockfish: Laguna Point, MacKerricher State Park, and Point Cabrillo Lighthouse remain offshore structural hotspots.

#### AUGUST

### CHINOOK SALMON: BODEGA BAY

This pleasant coastal town has become a favorite salmon fishing port, especially during the end of July and into August. Many Bay-area anglers take advantage of the fact that it offers one of the shortest distances to travel to reach Chinooks that average in the 8- to 10-pound class. As the season moves forward, more fish approach the 15- to 20-pound range. When the

MAY



#### TROUT

##### @ UPPER HAT CREEK

Bounce red salmon eggs on the bottom or maneuver inline spinners through deep pools. Fly-fishermen probe riffles and seams with beadhead nymphs or dry-dropper combinations.

JUNE

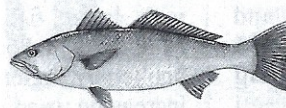


#### LARGEMOUTH BASS

##### @ CLEAR LAKE

Polarized glasses help locate both baitfish and bass. Poppers, frogs and buzzbaits are good AM/PM selections; spinnerbaits, crankbaits and Senko worms during the day.

JULY

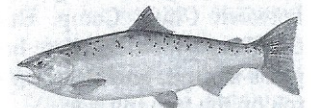


#### WHITE SEA BASS

##### @ SAN DIEGO OFFSHORE

Diversify tactics. Dredge bait deep; or use light tackle and yo-yo a silvery spoon or white curly-tail among the kelp forests.

AUGUST



#### CHINOOK SALMON

##### @ BODEGA BAY

Wrap anchovies on a Rotary Salmon Killer rig; pull a flasher and Apex; deep drift an anchovy; or bait-up cut sardines on mooching rigs. The largest fish are found later in the season.

fish are in, party and private boats alike work from 60- to 200-foot depths just outside Bodega Bay at Whistle Buoy, along Bodega Head, Tomales Point, the mouth of Salmon Creek and along 10 Mile Beach.

**OTHER OPTIONS:** Russian River, Smallmouth Bass: Fish by drift-boat on the Asti, Alexander Valley and Healdsburg sections. Maneuver Countdown Rapalas along the bottom. John Muir Wilderness, Golden Trout: This prize is found by fly-fishing and using small spinning lures on the several streams/lakes near the lofty Humphreys Basin and adjoining French Canyon drainages, northwest of Bishop.

**SEPTEMBER  
KOKANEE SALMON:  
DON PEDRO RESERVOIR**

Located along Highway 49 near Yosemite National Park, this 13,000-acre impoundment of the Tuolumne River carries a reputation for producing some of the state's largest Kokanees (landlocked sockeye salmon). Healthy fish from 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 pounds begin showing around Middle Bay and Jenkins Hill, which are good initial starting points. Huge schools are traditionally found at depths between 30 to 80 feet. Use glow-in-the-dark baits, such as Vance Sockeye Slammers, Dick Nite spoons, Apex trolling lures and Kokanee Bugs before sunrise and ultraviolet patterns during daylight, all liberally sprinkled with enticers, such as Pro Cure.

**OTHER OPTIONS:** Bays/Estuaries, Leopard Sharks: Use light tackle to present cut anchovy, sardines, squid or octopus during high tides on the flooded flats of inshore waters. Shelter Cover, Albacore: Schools of these fine tuna readily take drifted live anchovies or

trolled feather-jigs.

**OCTOBER  
SURF PERCH: BEACHFRONTS**

Hardy, tough-fighting perch, found along the entire coastline wherever sandy stretches of beach exist, offer steady fishing action. Dining on sand crabs and other small crustaceans, most perch run between 12 and 15 inches long and top out at 1 to 2 pounds. The best fishing occurs on an incoming tide, just inside the breaker zone. Light-action spinning rods or 5-weight fly rods are perfect for flipping baits, lures or flies through the "soft" water between waves and for dealing with epic, light-tackle battles in the churning surf. Fishing can be fantastic where the perch feed in murky water.

**OTHER OPTIONS:** Trinity River, steelhead: Fish the tailwater section below Lewiston Lake. Use drift-boats to locate productive lies out of the main current. Eastern Sierra Streams, Trout: From Bridgeport south to Lone Pine, the streams accessible from U.S. Highway 395 hold feisty rainbow, brook and brown trout.

**NOVEMBER  
STEELHEAD: KLAMATH RIVER**

For more than 200 miles, the Klamath River is arguably well known for California's largest steelhead runs, especially throughout its upper courses. Some of its best winter prospects occur between Somes Bar and Iron Gate Reservoir, which are accessible from shore, drift-boats and jet-boats alike. Healthy numbers of 2- to 6-pounders move upstream steadily as winter progresses. Excellent bank access is available along Highway 96 to the Interstate 5 bridge, where

bouncing roe on the bottom is a popular method. Private property above Interstate 5 to the dam dictates drift-boat tactics, which include backtrolling Hot Shots, Wee Warts and various crankbaits, as well as casting Glo Bugs and fly-fishing leech and Woolly Bugger streamer patterns.

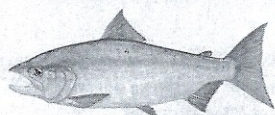
**OTHER OPTIONS:** Sacramento Delta, Striped Bass: Try bait-fishing with cut shad or troll pet spoons or worm-tailed jigs among myriad channels and sloughs. Lake Oroville, Spotted Bass: This fast-paced, winter fishery kicks in gear as water temperatures dip. Rig a 4- to 6-inch plastic worm on a dart head and work along deep, rocky shorelines.

**DECEMBER  
RAINBOW TROUT: LOWER OWENS RIVER**

Meandering through the desolate Owens Valley and overlooked by the snow-capped Sierra Nevada Mountains, the lower Owens River remains open year 'round and offers bona fide winter trout fishing between Bishop and Big Pine. The California Department of Fish and Game regularly stocks rainbows in the 12- to 14-inch range, plus a few upward of 5 pounds, all of which augment hold-over 'bows and a wild population of brown trout. Best spots for planters are Law's Bridge, Collins Road, Westgard Road and Steward Lane. Between these road crossings, kayakers and canoers can explore winding oxbows and undercut banks.

**OTHER OPTIONS:** San Luis Reservoir, Striped Bass: Landlocked striped bass in the 2- to 5-pound category are the prize for patient anglers. Lake Perris, Largemouth Bass: Winter provides a less-crowded option for those seeking largemouth bass that can be teased into striking a trout-patterned swimbait. ■

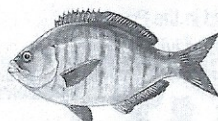
**SEPTEMBER**



**KOKANEE SALMON  
@ DON PEDRO RESERVOIR**

Needlefish, Hum Dingers and kokanee "bugs" trolled behind dodgers are reliable. Hooks should be covered with scented white corn.

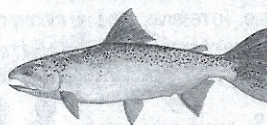
**OCTOBER**



**SURF PERCH  
@ BEACHFRONTS**

Use waders and wear a personal floating device. Top producers include soft-shelled sand crabs, pile worms and cut fish; plastic worms and streamer, rubberlegs and crawdad fly.

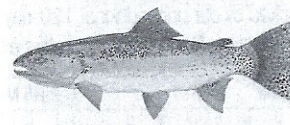
**NOVEMBER**



**STEELHEAD  
@ KLAMATH RIVER**

Fly rodders use 8-weight Spey rods, large arbor reels with plenty of backing, and a sink-tip line. Spin-anglers amp up with 8-foot rods, 10-pound Maxima line, and prepared leaders.

**DECEMBER**



**RAINBOW TROUT  
@ LOWER OWENS RIVER**

Beadhead Prince, Zebra Midge or Copper John nymphs make good droppers below an Adams or Elk Hair Caddis. Inline spinners and small minnow-type plugs are standby lures.