

What happened to the rainbows?

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The fog lays close on the water. You can barely see the far bank. The temperature is at the edge between cool and cold...55-degrees. To fill time while I wait for Mark Campbell to park the truck, I make a cast.

Two turns of the reel handle and the lure is smashed. I put five on the bank before Big Bird gets back. They are all stocker browns about 10-inches long. What happened to the rainbows? The Caney Fork changes.

We float slowly along, our float boat riding gently on the slow current. The boat is one of our better purchases. We went in partners on it a few years ago just for floating the Caney Fork. The boat is stable and rides high in the water. If you don't want to, you seldom have to step out of the boat for shallow water. It is also a perfect small pond boat. It fits on a trailer or in the back of a truck. The stockers are everywhere. Even a young brookie takes a swipe and Bird lands him. However, the rainbow trout are absent.

The Caney Fork is still an excellent provender of trout fishing action. It matters little if you are using spinning gear with artificial lures or fly rod or live bait. The trout are there. They are just mostly small, stocker fish. That has not always been the case.

We stop at the head of one of my favorite runs. I walk one side of the island and Bird walks the other. It feels good to stretch my legs and back. On my first cast, I hook and lose a rainbow of about 18-inches. It is the first "bow" of the day. We catch another four or five smaller fish between us.

We use a lure called a Flash. It weighs 1/8-ounce and is silver and blue in color. I doubt if the trout would have cared what color we threw. You can get them at Wal-Mart in a package of five. Trout were rising everywhere and I doubt they would care what you cast. We even caught three; small yellow bass and a bluegill or two. On the Caney, it is not uncommon to catch stripers,

white bass, sauger, walleye and smallmouth in addition to the main fare of trout.

Something has happened to the rainbow trout in the Caney. The few you catch are better than average, there just are not many of them.

Just three years ago, what you predominantly caught were rainbows-smaller ones. Now the stocker browns have taken over. A stocker brown is a recently stocked brown trout. They are small, well below the 24-inch legal limit to keep. Still, they are fun to catch if nothing else is hitting. I just wish they were larger. The trout limits on the Caney are, I believe, in order. For rainbow and brook trout, you may keep five fish per day under 14-inches with one of them a trophy fish over 20-inches.

All fish from 14-20 are protected. Brown trout limits are one fish per day over 24-inches. We throw all our fish back. The total trout in any combination cannot exceed five.

We launched that morning, two weeks ago, at Betty's Island launch ramp. There was no generation and the pattern had been for only one hour of generation flow per day. Not the best for fishing. Our take out was 6-hours downstream at the new Gordonsville ramp. What an asset that has been to the float fishermen. On that day, we saw not one other angler.

Floating is not required to catch fish; we just enjoy the changing scenery. Any of the access points provide some action and with the low flow, the water is warm enough to wade. Obviously, caution is required when wading any body of water but more so on the Caney with its' rapid rise when generating.

If you are spin fishing, just about any small, inline spinner will work. You can also do well on small to medium jerk baits such as a Rapala or an A.C. Shiner. For live bait, it is hard to beat corn, crickets, salmon eggs or night crawlers plus any of the designer trout baits on the market.

So, it was a pleasant float, the temperature rising from 55 to 84 making it perfect for six hours of floating. I broke a sweat just as we reached the take out. Some days it is hard to stay warm on the river, others, you have trouble staying cool. This time of year, it is smart to dress in light

layers.

Go online and check the generation schedule at TVA Center Hill. That makes it easy to plan a trip. If they are only running one generator, we try to get at least 45-minutes of floating in when the rise hits. More than one generator and it is too high and too fast to float without a gas engine.

Maybe you need a break from the routine. Grab a light or ultra-light rod and go hit the Caney. You just might get into the bigger fish. We caught 60-fish in the six hours, mostly browns with a few brookies and rainbows mixed in.

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