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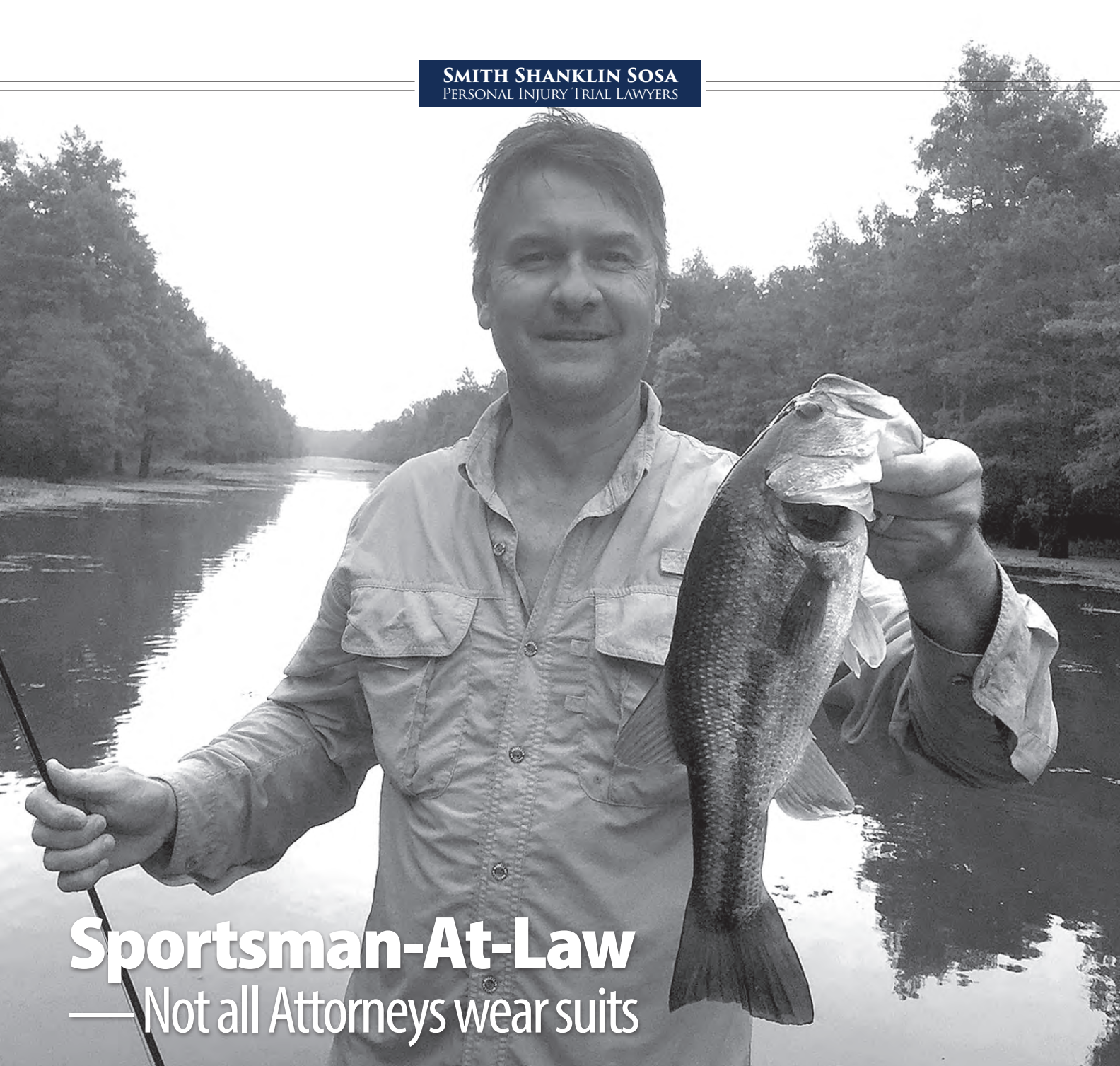
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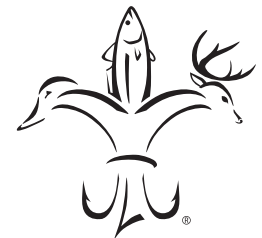
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Crappie fishing takes center stage across Louisiana in April, with anglers trying to fill their coolers with tasty sac-a-laits. Special attention paid to Stephenville, Henderson and D'Arbonne. Photo by Brian Cope.

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MONSTER SWORDFISH LANDED OUT OF VENICE IN MID-FEBRUARY

By Patrick Bonin

Photos courtesy of Alex Negulescu

BUT USE OF ELECTRIC REEL NULLIFIES POTENTIAL STATE RECORD FISH, 328 POUNDS

Alex Negulescu, his uncle, Chris Negulescu, and Eric Hebert ventured out of Venice Marina early on Feb. 16 in Chris Negulescu's 27-foot Glacier Bay, with their plan being to troll for some wahoo and then venture out to the swordfish grounds to see if they could get a bite.

Incredibly, none of the three Baton Rouge residents had ever actually landed a swordfish before — but that dramatically changed when they hooked up on their very first drop in about 1,200 feet of water.

Almost 15 hours after they departed, they triumphantly returned to the marina in dense fog with a massive swordfish that tipped certified scales there at 328.4 pounds. Although heavy enough to qualify as the state's new No. 1 sword, the fish is ineligible for the record books because it was harvested with an electric reel.

"We came into the dock at about 8:45, and some charter captains and customers were upstairs in the bar eating," said Alex Negulescu, 18, a freshman at Southeastern University in Hammond. "That whole restaurant emptied out and came to look at our fish. It took four people to pick him up and put it on the scale."

QUICKLY INTERESTING

Alex Negulescu said the day started successfully as they trolled for wahoo, hooking three fish and putting two in the boat: 43- and 20-pounders. Then, they headed to their swordfish grounds, and things got very interesting on the first drop at about 1 p.m.

"We look at the bottom structure and fish underwater canyons and mountains," Alex Negulescu said. "As soon as I

hit bottom, the rod bent over."

The giant sword bit a skirted mahi belly rigged on an 11/0 Mustad hook, and a 5½-hour battle of give and take got started.

"I think the leader probably came in and out of the reel like 50 times," Alex Negulescu said, noting they were rigged up with a 150-foot, 200-pound mono wind-on leader and 100-pound Power Pro braid spooled on a Kristal Electric XL-621 reel. "We would get like halfway up the leader, and it couldn't reel any more. So I had to hand-line the rest of the 75 feet in because the reel couldn't lift that much weight.

"The spool wouldn't turn."

Over several hours, the anglers made steady progress bringing the fish up from the depths, and Alex Negulescu said it jumped twice during the epic struggle.

"We kept making big, wide circles

OPPOSITE PAGE: Chris Negulescu poses with the massive 328.4-pound broadbill swordfish he landed along with his nephew, Alex Negulescu, and Eric Hebert, out of Venice.

around the fish to keep it from touching the boat,” he said. “Eventually, the fish was about 20 feet behind the boat on the surface. My uncle got the harpoon and hurled it like a javelin through the air and stuck it in the fish.

“We got the harpoon rope and brought it to the boat, but it was still trying to fight us. Then we put three gaffs in it but couldn’t lift it up over the side of the boat. Since it was a catamaran, we got it up in between the motors and dragged it in.”

It was dark and fog was rolling in, so whether the fish was record-sized wasn’t really discussed, he said.

“As soon as we got it in the boat, I guessed around 250 (pounds), and my uncle guessed 275,” Alex Negulescu said. “We didn’t think it was going to break 300.”

The fish’s beak measured 47 inches; Alex Negulescu said they didn’t measure the sword’s overall length or girth at the marina, but he estimated it was between 10 and 11 feet long. After cleaning the big, female fish, he figured they got between 150 and 200 pounds of swordfish steaks

Although it won’t go down as a state record, Alex Negulescu said it’s a day — and a catch — none of them will ever forget.

“To me, honestly, I know we beat a state record. I know it wasn’t the most ethical way of doing it I guess, but I’m just as excited,” he said. “It’s still a huge accomplishment for us.”

The current state record broadbill swordfish, according to the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association, was caught by Thomas Dantin in the Mississippi Canyon in July of 1980. It weighed 31 pounds. ■



Eric Hebert, Alex Negulescu and Chris Negulescu pose with the massive, 328.4-pound broadbill swordfish they caught Feb. 16 out of Venice. The fish was 18 pounds heavier than the current state-record fish but is ineligible for recognition because it was harvested with an electric reel.

An advertisement for SeaArk boats. The top half features the text 'FISHABILITY. DURABILITY. DEPENDABILITY.' in large, bold, red letters. Below the text is a photograph of a woman and a man fishing from a SeaArk boat on a lake. The boat is a catamaran-style aluminum boat with a Suzuki outboard motor. The background shows a lush green shoreline with trees. At the bottom of the advertisement, there is a website URL and a hashtag: 'Find your perfect boat at www.seaarkboats.com #yourstoryyourboat #boatsbuiltforalifetime'. The SeaArk logo is also present in the bottom right corner.

ZOMBIE DEER?

By Brian Cope

Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

HAS LSU RESEARCHER FOUND A CURE FOR CWD? SCIENTISTS SAY, 'NO'

Over the past month, numerous magazines and newspapers have published articles about a Louisiana State University researcher finding a cure for chronic wasting disease (CWD). But the vast majority of state and national wildlife agencies discount these finds, and the claims of a cure actually aren't even new.

Dr. Frank Bastian, a disease researcher and clinical professor of neurosurgery and pathology at Louisiana State University, recently said he is within a year or two of a finding a cure for CWD, and those wildlife biologists and other scientists studying the disease are wrong about its cause.

CLAIMS AREN'T NEW

Bastian said the same things in 2017. In fact, as far back as 2002, he presented similar findings in an interview with

outdoor writer Bryan Hendricks of *North American Hunter* magazine, so skepticism among Bastian's peers is understandable.

"It's been over 15 years since he first made those claims, yet no other researcher has been able to reproduce his findings," said Merrill Cook, a wildlife biologist with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. "And there's no sign he's made any progress since then to suggest he's any closer to a cure."

Bastian's response is that no other researchers are trying to reproduce his results because all the research funding is being swayed by those who believe prions, rather than spiroplasma, is the root of CWD.

WHAT CAUSES CWD?

According to most biologists, CWD is caused by mutated proteins called prions that affect brain tissue and other areas

ABOVE: Scientists dispute findings by Dr. Frank Bastian, an LSU researcher that he has discovered a cure for chronic wasting disease, coined by popular media as "Zombie Deer Disease" because infected deer often salivate heavily, look lost, are emaciated and confused.

of a deer's central nervous system. This is accepted by all state wildlife agencies and organizations like the Quality Deer Management Association. But Bastian disagrees, saying that prions aren't the cause of CWD, but simply a product of bold bacteria called spiroplasma that he believes is the actual cause of the disease.

Bastian said CWD can be produced without the presence of prions, but Brent Race, a scientist with the Laboratory of Persistent Viral Diseases at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, found the opposite while trying to reproduce Bastian's findings. While

failing to duplicate those findings, Race said he found that prion infection can occur even in the absence of spiroplasma.

Chronic wasting disease is a transmissible disease that affects deer, elk, and other members of the cervid family.

Deer pass the disease on through contact with other deer, or through contact with urine, saliva, infected carcasses and even infectious materials in soil, which can hold remnants of the disease for up to 20 years. The disease is 100-percent fatal.

COINED ZOMBIE DEER

CWD is sometimes referred to as the “zombie deer disease” because infected deer often salivate heavily, look lost, are emaciated and confused. But the infection hasn’t led to aggressive biting or other behavior by deer, and so far, no humans have contracted the disease, but scientists worry that’s a possibility.

“A group of individuals that are known to have eaten meat from a CWD-positive deer about 15 years ago are tested regularly, and so far, none has shown any sign

of the disease,” said Cook, who pointed out that mad cow disease, basically a bovine version of CWD, was discovered about 10 years before humans were ever impacted by eating infected meat — leading to Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease.

LOUISIANA STILL CWD FREE

No CWD-positive deer have been found in Louisiana, but Texas, Arkansas and Mississippi all have confirmed cases of CWD among their deer herds. In all, 26 states and four Canadian provinces have deer or elk that have been infected with CWD.

Louisiana is working to keep it out of the state with bans on importing certain deer parts from outside the state.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries can test samples from any deer that you kill or find dead. The agency suggests hunters remove the deer’s head about 5 inches below the ears, then place in a refrigerator or on ice, but do not



Photo courtesy of MDWFP

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For more information on CWD and what Louisiana is doing to stay free of the disease, visit <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/hunting/CWD>. ■

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SIDELINED BY MOTHER NATURE

PORT EADS MARINA CLOSES DUE TO FILLING IN OF SOUTH PASS

By Brian Cope

Port Eads Marina, the last stop before hitting the Gulf of Mexico at the southernmost point of Louisiana, has closed.

Described in recent years by *Sporting Classics* magazine as “the No. 1 marina and fishing destination in the Gulf of Mexico”, the marina has been shut down mainly because of sedimentation buildup that has filled in the South Pass of the Mississippi River.

That buildup has made the South Pass unnavigable for bigger sportfishing boats whose offshore and billfishing crews once enjoyed the convenience of Port Eads Marina, which is only accessible by boat.

BIG LOSS TO ANGLERS

According to Rene Cross, owner of Cypress Cove Marina and a board member with the Port Eads Fishing Refuge, a non-profit that was formed to fight for the best interests of the marina, said it’s a big loss to the region and to anglers.

“Port Eads Marina is an institution to us,” he said. “It’s the closest place to the best fishing in the world, and it has

everything anglers could want: gas, a restaurant, a store, sleeping quarters — all in the most convenient location to the Gulf.

“And it didn’t close down because of politics, poor management or disinterest. It just became unsustainable to operate because the silt has filled in so badly that the bigger fishing boats simply cannot get to it safely. Mother Nature is the reason it’s been closed.”

ECONOMIC DISASTER

Cross explained that when the federal government pitched in \$12 million to help rebuild the marina after the previous structure was leveled by Hurricane Katrina,

it was not economically feasible for anyone to purchase or own the building.

“Nobody could purchase it because you wouldn’t be able to insure it. Flood insurance — if you could even find a company to sell it to you — would be so costly that you couldn’t afford it. So it was placed

in the non-profit, with Plaquemines Parish retaining ownership. We (Port Eads Fishing Refuge) hired High Adventure Company to manage it on a five-year contract.

“That contract is now up. High Adventure did everything we hired them to do. They even went above and beyond what was asked of them, but with the contract now expired, it just wasn’t feasible for them to continue,” said Cross.

MARKERS DON’T HELP

Channel markers still stand above the surface, marking what used to offer safe



Photos courtesy High Adventure Company

passage, but Cross said they just aren't accurate any longer.

"In recent weeks, boats have tried to go through there, and even though they stayed within the markers, they still ran aground. And dredging is simply not an option. The cost is astronomical. It would cost 40 to 50 million dollars to dredge all of South Pass, and over two million to dredge just from the mouth of the Gulf to Port Eads Marina," he said.

FEDS NO HELP

While many people look to the feds for dredging, Cross said they have no help to offer.

"The federal government is committed to dredging Southwest Pass, which is where all the commerce flows," he said. "That pass has got to stay open and must be a priority over all others, because there's just too much money and too much commercial shipping taking place there. If Southwest Pass silts in, it will all come to a halt.

"They dredge daily there, with numerous dredging machines, and it's all they can do to maintain just enough depth to make it navigable by ships that draw up to 45 feet. The only way they could help South Pass is if Southwest Pass didn't need dredging any longer, and that's simply not going to happen. It's unfortunate, but Southwest Pass benefits the most people, so that is where the federal government has to concentrate their dredging."

So what happens to the Port Eads Marina now? Cross said it's in the hands of the parish, and that as far as he can tell, even parish officials aren't sure what comes next.

"At the very least, they will provide security to the marina so that it isn't robbed or vandalized," Cross said. "And who knows? Maybe they will



figure out a way to reopen it. I'm not sure if they know right now what they're going to do with it. But they, and the Port Eads Fishing Refuge have been looking

for ways to keep it open for years, and we'll continue doing everything we can to hopefully see it open again someday," said Cross. ■



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Capt. Renee Luminais's crew caught this 193-pound yellowfin tuna at the lumps on February 28. Luminais is part of the Paradise Outfitters crew that fishes out of Cypress Cove Marina in Venice.



THE BEASTS OF VENICE SHOW UP

GUIDE CATCHES TROPHY TUNA IN A 3-DAY FRENZY By Ann Taylor

When Capt. Hunter Caballero entered his target zone on Feb. 27, he knew the day was going to be different. His fish finder lit up like a volcano spewing out fish instead of lava — showing

hundreds of finned bodies swimming below.

The fish finder foretold a catch they hadn't seen in months, the start of a 3-day frenzy during which three boats from Paradise Outfitter landed an

average of four tuna a day — all of them weighing 100 pounds or more, with seven of the fish weighing more than 150 pounds.

Trophy tuna have finally shown up on the mud lumps in March after a slow



The captains with Paradise Outfitters have caught seven yellowfin tuna weighing over 150 pounds fishing out of Venice.

February. In April they usually move out to the floating rigs, says Caballero.

"It had been real hit or miss the whole month of February, but that's all changed," said Caballero, who blamed the slow month of February on too much scattered bait.

"There were pogie balls everywhere," he said.

But on Feb. 27, everything changed. The pogie balls were few and far between, and the fish returned to their favorite early spring haunt — mud lumps 25 miles south of Venice.

The captains caught their fish by chumming pogie and cut hardtails and free-lining cut bait.

"The bite has been starting mid- to late morning, so you need to wait it out," Caballero said, "but when they begin feeding, most everyone out there have been catching."

Yellowfin tuna are not the only game in town — wahoo and



Capt. Hunter Caballero's crew caught these giant yellowfin tuna out of Venice on February 28.

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swordfish are also willing players.

Caballero hopes the good bite on all three species will continue through April. His captains are already booked on the weekends by trophy seekers, but he has a few days during the week still available. Those interested can visit his website at venicefishing.com.

For anglers planning to head out on their own, he suggests bringing 100 to 150 pounds of pogie for chum and plenty of muscle. ■

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LOUISIANA'S 2019 TURKEY FORECAST

HUNTERS CAN LOOK FORWARD TO A
SLIGHTLY BETTER SEASON ON WMAS *By Brian Cope*

Who is ready to get into the woods with your back against an oak tree, listening for the early morning calls of a gobbler on the roost? It's almost time; turkey season is fast approaching for Louisiana hunters.

According to wildlife biologist Cody Cedotal, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' wild turkey program manager, hunters can look for pretty much the same type of season this year as 2018, if not slightly better.

Cedotal said the population of turkeys throughout the state is between 50,000 and 60,000. Hunters harvested approximately 3,000 during the 2018 season.

Reproduction surveys for the past 12 months have been slightly above average compared to hatches from previous years.

Hunters looking for an edge for the 2019 season will find higher numbers of turkeys in the Kisatchie National Forest, mainly due to management practices there.

"Kisatchie National Forest

supports good populations due to the quality habitat that exists there because of frequent prescribed burning and forest management activities," Cedotal said.

The state is divided into three areas for turkey hunting. In Area A, the season runs from April 6-May 5. Area B's season runs April 6-28, and Area C is open from April 6-21. These dates are for private lands only.

Not all WMAs have turkey hunting seasons. Check the dates for those that do by visiting <http://www.eregulations.com/louisiana/hunting/individual-w-m-a-schedules-l-z/>. The schedule for national forest and other federal lands can be viewed at <http://www.eregulations.com/louisiana/hunting/federal-land-hunting-schedules/>. ■

SCHEDULE FOR HUNTING TURKEYS ON LOUISIANA'S NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES:

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- Bogue Chitto NWR: March 30-31 (Youth Only) and April 6-28
- Lake Ophelia NWR: March 30 (Youth Lottery Only) and April 6-21
- Tensas NWR: March 30-31 (Youth Only) and April 6-21
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Aaron Granger displays his nice Vernon Parish gobbler.





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DO I NEED A LICENSE TO FISH MY OWN POND?

By Brian Cope

A reader recently asked the question, “Do I need a license to fish in my pond?” The answer is, usually, no. But in some cases, pond owners and landowners actually do need a license to fish on their own property.

The basic rule of thumb is this: if you own the entire pond, and the pond isn't connected to public waters by a stream, river or canal, you don't need a license. But if water comes directly into or flows out of your pond, and that water is accessible by the public, you need a license.

Also, if you own land on a public lake, river or other waterway, you need a license because you don't own the water.

The fish in a wholly enclosed farm pond that has no access to public waters are technically owned by whoever owns the pond. So you don't need a license. But if fish can come in and out of the pond freely through public waters, then those fish belong to the public. And in that case, you need a license to fish.

MAKE SURE IT IS LANDLOCKED

And those cases are more common than many people realize. I have a friend in who owns several hundred acres of swampland. He has a small pond on part of that land. The pond is completely on his land, but a canal connects the pond to a stream that runs through his

property. This stream connects to a river, a public waterway. The fish can swim in and out of his pond from public waters. Technically, he needs a license to fish in his own pond.

The same friend has another pond at his house. This pond is completely encircled by land he owns. No public waterways connect to this pond, and the fish are all trapped inside the pond. He does not need a license to fish there.

If you're trying to determine whether you need a license to fish in your own pond, ask yourself whether fish can move in and out of your pond by way of public waters. If they can, you need a license. If they can't, all you need is a fishing pole. ■

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BOWFISHING CHAMPIONSHIP SET FOR BOSSIER CITY

POPULAR EVENT IS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 5-7

From News Reports

The U.S. Open Bowfishing Championship, the largest event of its kind in the fast-growing sport of bowfishing, is coming to Bass Pro Shops in Bossier City this month. The event, which will feature the largest competition and biggest prizes in the sport of bowfishing, will be held April 5-7.

Teams can pre-register online at www.basspro.com/usopen. The entry fee is \$300 per team, and participation is limited to 250 teams of two to four persons.

All teams will receive a free t-shirt and hat. In addition, all teams that

pre-register are automatically entered in the overall big-fish category and have the opportunity to win a new Tracker 1860CC Sportsman Bowfishing boat. The winner will be drawn April 7 immediately after the weigh-in; participant must be present to win.

The championship purse includes more than \$100,000 worth of prizes and giveaways. The winning team will receive \$25,000. The biggest fish harvested wins \$5,000. New prize categories have been added for big buffalo, big common carp and big grass carp. Each winner of those



categories will receive a U.S. Open Limited Edition Oneida Osprey Bow.

Other great prizes include a Textron Prowler 500 ATV, bows, bowfishing gear and more.

The live weigh-in will be held Sunday, April 7, at approximately 9 a.m. at Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World, 100 Bass Pro Drive in Bossier City.

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participants and families, the bowfishing event provides lasting environmental benefits for area lakes.

Bowfishing, which combines elements of fishing with archery to harvest rough-fish species, is one of the fastest growing sports in the outdoors. Unlike traditional rod-and-reel fishing, bowfishing uses specialized bows to target species including carp, buffalo and gar that plague lakes, rivers and streams around the country. Removing these undesirable species improves habitat conditions for native game fish.

ACTIVITIES, EVENTS

Visitors to the event will see custom bowfishing boats on display from across the country, along with vendor booths and free seminars featuring past champions. Attendees can also meet their favorite outdoor TV show hosts and enjoy music, events and games. Throughout



Teams can pre-register online at www.basspro.com/usopen.

the weekend customers can take advantage of great deals on the latest name-brand bowfishing gear. Additional details will be announced as

the championship approaches. To register or learn more visit www.basspro.com/usopen ■

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LOUISIANA SPORTSMAN SHOW **BIG BUCK CONTEST WINNERS**

MANY IMPRESSIVE RACKS WERE SCORED AT THE SHOW — BUT A FEW STOOD OUT.

By JOE MACALUSO

There are so many ways to spend your oohs and aahs at the annual Louisiana Sportsman Show and Festival — big and small boats, that special bucket-list hunt or fishing vacation, tractors for every need, those must-have hunting equipment and fishing tackle to outfit any trip from a peaceful, backwaters bream float to a take-you-take-breath-away bluewater adventure.

But when it came to oohing and aahing, it seemed thousands among the thousands at 2019's show saved most of them for The Wall — the giant racks of antlers hunters brought to the show's Big Buck Contest.

Dvid Moreland, head honcho of the contest, answered each "Where did that one come from?" and "What did that one score?" question. Moreland's name is recognized by most Louisiana hunters for his decades dedicated to the state's whitetail deer, first as a wildlife biologist, then as State Deer Study leader, then, in his last year before retirement, the top

man in Louisiana's Wildlife and Fisheries' Wildlife Division.

AND THE WINNER IS...

During the show's four-day run, the first set of horns they saw belonged to Joe McPherson, a former state senator from Alexandria currently serving on the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission.

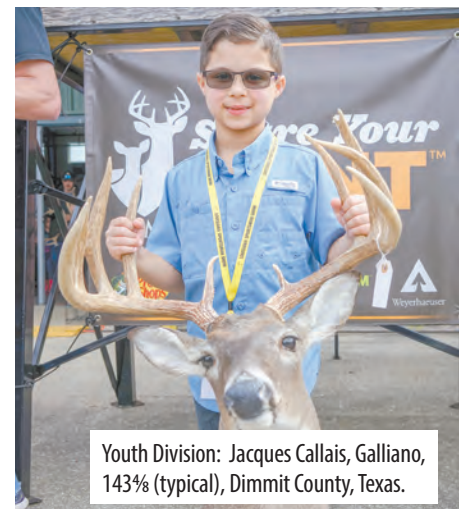
McPherson has been talking about that buck for months, and he's relived that hunt in Avoyelles Parish many times and always with a smile on his face knowing he's waited for a long, long time for a chance to see antlers like the one he saw, and took, that day.

Deservedly so. As it turned out, his take-you-take-breath-away trophy measured out — by Moreland's hand and tape measure — to stand as top entry and win the top prize.

Moreland said the 175% score more than qualified McPherson for the Boone & Crockett book (for whitetails), a list reserved for the highest scoring antlers.



Louisiana Division-Gun: Joe McPherson, Alexandria, 175% (typical), Avoyelles Parish.



Youth Division: Jacques Callais, Galliano, 143% (typical), Dimmit County, Texas.

7-YEAR OLD SCORES BRUTE WITH A CROSSBOW

The oohs and aahs didn't stop there: Consider 7-year-old Jacques Callais drawing down on a big Texas buck with a crossbow — a crossbow! — and dropping

a 143 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch deer. It was easy to see the youngster from Galliano a winner in the Youth Division.

OK, so that was the old and young of it, but there was more.

MISS MISSOURI

How about Alysha Alise standing tall for Louisiana's women in the outdoors. The Franch Settlement huntress ventured to Missouri and took a 164-inch whitetail to win the Out-of-State Gun Division.

That Alise's entry, like that of Out-of-State Bow Division winner Troy Laborde — his came from Missouri, too — didn't outscore the Louisiana entries shows



Out-of-State Gun Division: Alysha Alise, French Settlement, 164 (typical), Missouri.

what Moreland has known for years about Sportsman's Paradise bucks.

"We saw good quality deer from the state again this year and from across the state," Moreland said. "We had a good

mast (acorns and other nuts) crop last year, and that's good for the deer the next season. I know that frustrated some hunters who rely on feeders, because good mast production means the deer tend to stay in the woods."

GOOD GREENS FOR NEXT SEASON

Moreland said there were several scored antlers from deer taken in the agriculture fields (McPherson's was one) and another good mast crop and abundant rains this spring — "We're seeing a green-up in the woods early this year and that means good food sources for the state's deer herds," Moreland said — there's every reason to believe there will be good growth and antler development next season.

Moreland had help scoring from two old wildlife biologist friends, Scott Durham and Tony Vidrine "...because it helps having another pair of eyes when you're scoring," Moreland said. There is a segment of the hunting community he wishes would venture to Gonzales and the Lamar Dixon Expo Center for future contests.

"It's a shame we can't get more north Louisiana hunters to enter their bucks. It would help make our study more complete. We'd like to see those deer, too. Yes, they're scored in other contests, but it seems others use different scoring methods than the more accepted ones."

Oh, and the last ooh and aah came from the crowd when passing one of the last trophies hanging on the Contest's wall: Anthony Alford's trip to the mile-after-mile grain fields in Kansas produced the only nontypical winner. The Houma hunter won the Muzzleloader/Crossbow Division with an antler spread scoring 199%.

"Daddy, that deer had antlers that go



Out-of-State Bow Division: Troy Laborde, Port Allen, 155 4/8 (typical), Missouri.



Mississippi Division-Gun: Branson Trawick, Holden, 132% (typical), Franklin County, Mississippi.

everywhere," a youngster said staring wide-eyed at the buck. "Maybe one day I can see something like that."

Maybe.

Lord willing, there will be a 2020 Big Buck Contest, and hunters are advised to hold their antlers from this year, and hunt hard during next season, and bring your trophies. Make sure to use one of those LDWF-issued tags when you do — next March at the Lamar Dixon Expo Center. ■



Louisiana Division-Bow: David Everett, Denham Springs, 162 $\frac{3}{8}$ (typical), Concordia Parish.



Muzzleloader/Crossbow Division: Anthony Alford, Houma, 199% (nontypical), Kansas.



Mississippi Division-Bow: Nick Louque, Paulina, 141 $\frac{1}{8}$ (typical), Adama County, Mississippi.

WANT TO LEASE YOUR LAND?

LDWF IS LOOKING TO ADD ACREAGE FOR OPENING DAY OF 2019 DOVE SEASON

Opening day of dove season holds a special place on Louisiana hunters' calendars. That's why the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is looking for landowners and farmers from across the state who would agree lease their land on opening day for dove hunting on Sept. 7, opening day of the 2019 dove season.

LDWF handles all the details, including having personnel on hand the day of the hunt to issue permits to hunters and directing them where they can and can't go. The landowner leases the field to LDWF for one day.

"On some of our wildlife management areas across the state, we plant dove fields, and they're very popular on opening weekend," said Dr. Jeffrey Duguay of LDWF. "But we're limited on how many fields we have, and demand is greater

than supply on that day. So we'd like to enlist more private landowners and farmers from throughout the state to increase opportunity for dove hunters. Our staff takes care of all the logistics for that day."

HOW MUCH DO THEY PAY?

LDWF pays based on the size of the field. The payment schedule ranges from \$950 to \$2,500, based on the acreage being leased. The minimum acreage required for leasing is 50 acres.

LDWF also offers assistance to private landowners and farmers with wildlife management activities through its Private Lands Technical Assistance Program. Biologists are able to assist landowners with dove field establishment as well as a wide variety of other wildlife management practices.

For more information on the dove field leasing program, contact Duguay at jduguay@wlf.la.gov or 225-765-2353. For more information on the Private Lands Technical Assistance Program go to www.wlf.louisiana.gov/assistance-private-landowners-and-m. ■



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- **1030 Acres +/- Jefferson Co.** This tract lies in South Central Jefferson County and has frontage on Hwy 33 and McNair Road. The property can be split into two tracts approximately (700+/-) at \$2650/acre, and (330+/-) at \$2500/acre with the final acreage to be determined by a licensed surveyor. The terrain in this area is very gentle rolling hills to flat land and the timber consist of mainly mature pine and hardwood. There is approximately 50 acres of pasture land on the south side of the property as well as numerous food plots, campsites, and a nice pond. The deer and turkey hunting in this area is excellent. List Price \$2600/acre for the entire property.
- **416.5 acres in Jefferson County, MS** - this beautiful property is located in the Red Lick area and has frontage on MS-552. The terrain varies from level to rolling hills and hollows and timber is mostly hardwood. There's a 4-5 acre lake by the small country house which is currently being used as a camp. Asking price is \$2,900/acre.
- **17 Acres in Jefferson County, MS** - this tract is set up and ready to go! It lies in the Rodney area and offers a 600 sq ft cabin that is surrounded by huge pecan trees and has frontage on Rodney Rd. This land is also set up with two plots and box stands. Asking price is \$94,500!

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BIRTHDAY BASS: CADDO LAKE GIVES ANGLER 10½-POUND PRESENT

By Kinny Haddox

Corey Harwell doesn't mind a late birthday present — especially when it is a 10½-pound largemouth bass out of Caddo Lake, one of his favorite fishing holes.

That's just what he got on March 9, two days after his birthday. A Stonewall resident, Harwell was fishing with his girlfriend, Amanda Restivo, next to a small group

of trees in an otherwise open area where he had caught big fish before. He tossed a six-inch black/blue Zoom lizard up beside the first tree in about 6 feet of water and felt a solid tap.

"When I set the hook, it didn't move for a second, then she made a run straight away from me," he said. "I had a brand new rig with the drag down pretty



Photo courtesy of Amanda Restivo

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Corey Harwell used a black/blue lizard to catch this trophy Caddo Lake bass; it weighed in at 10.5 pounds and measured 25 inches long.



tight, so I had to feather the reel button and release some line. I was really worried, even with 20-pound braid. I gained some line, then she made another run before turning and coming right to the boat. When she made that turn, we saw her surface and, oh, my goodness, her mouth looked like a five-gallon bucket.”

When the fish came to the boat, she bounced off the side and surfaced again. When she did, Harwell wasted no time in grabbing her by the jaw and holding on for dear life. He had to ask a neighboring fisherman to weigh the fish, and it said 10.50 pounds. He didn't want to kill the fish, so he put it on a piece of old nylon rope and kept it in the water. When he reached shore, he filled up a huge plastic tub with water, took

her to an official weigh station not far down the road got measurements for a replica, returned her to the lake and released her.

“That was just awesome,” he said. “To catch her, then release her to finish the spawn, it doesn't get any better. When she swam away, she was still as feisty as when I caught her.”

Harwell laughed when asked about his gear, saying he didn't use anything fancy. He had two rod and reels with him, and he fishes out of a 14-foot, 1974 Alumacraft boat.

“You don't need a \$60,000 Ranger to catch a 10-pound bass,” he said. “You've just got to be in the right place at the right time and be ready.” ■



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WILL SPILLWAY OPENINGS HURT APRIL TROUT BITE?

GUIDES SAY NO

By Brian Cope

Anglers targeting speckled trout have a lot to look forward to along the coasts of Louisiana and Mississippi this month. By all accounts, it should be a much hotter bite than last year's. And while the Bonnet Carre spillway on the Mississippi River continues to pour out the remnants of a long, wet winter, the trout bite should still be much better than it was in 2018.

"The main difference between this year's trout fishing and 2018's is that we had a very mild winter this past year," said Capt. Herk Bergeron of Grand Isle's Pair-A-Dice Charters. "The year before, the winter was brutal and while we didn't see many big schools of dead trout, many clearly died off. So last spring, the bite was definitely off."

And Bergeron (985-860-7855) said even though the runoff from Bonnet Carre had an impact on last year's bite, he believes it was overstated.

SCATTERED FISH

"It was the brutally cold weather that made the trout bite difficult last year," he said. "The Bonnet Carre, it didn't kill any trout, it just moved them to different areas. It made anglers look a little farther and work a little harder, but the cold

weather is responsible for there being fewer trout last year.

"That freshwater runoff from Bonnet Carre pushes so much freshwater and silt that the fish just scatter, but it doesn't kill the bite. With all that silt, the fish will travel. They'll still bite when you find them though," he said.

This year's runoff from Bonnet Carre does appear to be less drastic, at least at this stage. According to Chris Brantley of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the number of gates open last month was less than their March average and lower than last year's. They also opened the majority of them later than in most years.

FEWER GATES, LESS WATER

"At this point, we've got fewer gates open than we did last year and fewer than we normally have at this point on the calendar," Brantley said. "We're still waiting on all the snow from up north to melt and come through, and as that happens, we may have to open more gates.

"How long it will last, or how many gates we'll have to open — it's not something I feel comfortable making a prediction on. It's different each year for many

factors. But at least right now, there is less water moving through the spillway than last year. Less than the average year, in fact."

Capt. Stu Scheer of Cocodrie Inside Charters (985-855-1846) is "cautiously optimistic" and said no matter what, the trout bite will be better than last year's, and better than any other place in the world.

"We have such rich estuaries. There's truly not another place in the country that has so much to offer our fish," he said. "Even in a down year, we've got no shortage of fish. Last year was tough. Our speckled trout took a beating from that winter. It got way colder than we're used to, and that's one thing the trout can't take. All the silt the spillway dumped didn't help, but it wasn't the main reason the fishing was tough."

Even if the Bonnet Carre opens more gates and continues to push more of the Mississippi's freshwater into the Gulf, Scheer he said that's just not something anglers should worry about.

GO WEST, YOUNG TROUT

"It will have an impact on the trout fishing, but it's not going to turn it off"

Scheer said. "For selfish reasons, it would suit me better if they open more gates and push more freshwater into the Gulf. That will push the fish further west of the river into Terrebonne Bay where I do most of my fishing. And the silt doesn't kill the fish and doesn't turn the fishing off. If they keep dumping, it will make trout fishing tough east of Lafitte. But Cocodrie — we'll have it good."

MISSISSIPPI-BOUND

Mississippi anglers are expecting a hot trout bite along the western part of that state's Gulf Coast. In fact, the Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources recently granted authority to close down fishing for trout based on how many specks were caught in Mississippi the last time Bonnet Carre opened its gates during March.

"Last time, it pushed all the speckled trout around in the western Mississippi Sound, and everybody was catching speckled trout. We really want to protect the species," said Richard Gollott, a member of the Commission.

That doesn't sit well with Mississippi anglers like Jerod Doucet of Diamondhead.

"As long as we're not keeping more than our limit, what difference does it make? It's like saying the limit is xyz, unless you're catching that many, and then we'll just close the fishing down if that happens," he said. ■

WHERE TO FIND THE TROUT THIS MONTH

GRAND ISLE

Herk Bergeron looks for one of the hottest trout bites in April to be north of Grand Isle. Mendicant Island, North Barataria Bay, and Caminada Bay are all good choices. "Anywhere you find shrimp jumping or birds diving, use Vudu shrimp or live shrimp. The smaller, the better. And if the water temperature is below 70 degrees, you need to fish it really slow.

COCODRIE

In the Cocodrie area, Stu Scheer said anglers should focus on the backsides of islands in areas like Terrebonne Bay and Timbalier Bay.

"There's a lot of sunken islands full of shells in there that were above water just a few years ago. If you can find those islands you can clean up on trout, especially using an H&H Cocohoe Minnow double rig in motor oil color," he said.

MISSISSIPPI COAST

Along the Mississippi coast, Jerod Doucet is looking for the hot bite in areas closer to the Pearl River.

"Last year when the Bonnet Carre spillway flooded the Gulf starting in March, it was like a jubilee in Heron Bay on up to Bayou Caddy. It should be hot again this year. Point Clear and Bay St. Louis should be good too," he said.

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Herk Bergeron looks for one of the hottest trout bites in April to be north of Grand Isle. Mendicant Island, North Barataria Bay, and Caminada Bay are all good choices. "Anywhere you find shrimp jumping or birds diving, use Vudu shrimp or live shrimp. The smaller, the better. And if the water temperature is below 70 degrees, you need to fish it really slow.

COCODRIE

In the Cocodrie area, Stu Scheer said anglers should focus on the backsides of islands in areas like Terrebonne Bay and Timbalier Bay.

"There's a lot of sunken islands full of shells in there that were above water just a few years ago. If you can find those islands you can clean up on trout, especially using an H&H Cocohoe Minnow double rig in motor oil color," he said.

MISSISSIPPI COAST

Along the Mississippi coast, Jerod Doucet is looking for the hot bite in areas closer to the Pearl River.

"Last year when the Bonnet Carre spillway flooded the Gulf starting in March, it was like a jubilee in Heron Bay on up to Bayou Caddy. It should be hot again this year. Point Clear and Bay St. Louis should be good too," he said.

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POMPANO POINTERS

SMALL LIVE SHRIMP, SMALL HOOKS KEYS TO CATCH MORE OF THE TASTY FISH

By Patrick Bonin

For most Louisiana coastal anglers, pompano are considered a savory, delectable by-catch when targeting speckled trout — which is actually a pretty good problem to have when you think about it.

Capt. Tommy Pellegrin of Custom Charters out of Houma said March and April are prime months to put some pompano on ice.

“They’re spawning then, so they’re up on the sandbars with the trout. I’ve caught them from the back of Last Island all the way across to Timbalier Island,” he said. “It’s strictly a timing thing, and it usually goes into April.”

THEY’RE A JACK, JACK

Pompano belong to the large jack family, with almost 30 members swimming in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. They range from the Atlantic bumper to the greater amberjack, and from jack crevalle to the Florida pompano, simply called pompano here in Louisiana.

Pellegrin said he caught pompano almost every day on trips out of Cocodrie in early March on a sliding cork rig with live shrimp, but the size of your hook and bait are critical if you hope to fire up some pompano in your broiler back home.

LET’S GET SMALL

“You need some small live shrimp, 80- to 100-count size,” he said. “I use a No. 4

treble hook — the same exact setup I use for specks. If you go with a J-hook, try maybe a 1/0.

“They have a small mouth with no teeth, so you need a really small hook.”

Targeting pompano is difficult, however, because in the spring, they’re typically in the same spots as specks, he said.

“The hard thing right now is trying to keep trout off your line. It’s kind of a Catch-22: You’re going fishing and generally want to catch trout and pompano. But if you want a better chance at pompano, you have to keep the trout off your line long enough,” he said.

“For specks, I’ve been fishing in approximately 4 feet of water, using my sliding cork to fish a couple feet down because I want that shrimp about 2 feet off the bottom. Channel mullet are spawning, too, and they’ll eat you alive if you’re on the bottom.”

So if your heart is set on pompano, how should you try to catch them?

SPAWN IS ON

“If I went to go out and target pompano any other time than besides the spawn, I would be in 10 to 25 feet of water just off the beach at any of the wellheads,”



Finishing the day off with Pompano put icing on the cupcake for many of Guide Tommy Pellegrin’s March trips.

Pellegrin said. “They always have them on the sandbars, but they’re hard to target there because it’s such a vast area. They like structure. I’ve caught them out to 40 feet, but they’re not on the bottom, they’re suspended.

“Every time I’ve caught them in deep water, I use a sliding cork and slide it down about 10 feet and I catch them.”

A good-sized pompano in Louisiana waters is typically in the 12- to 14-inch range, probably about 1½ to 2 pounds, Pellegrin said.



Pellegrin uses a sliding cork rig like this one baited with a live shrimp to catch both pompano and speckled trout.

And if you're lucky enough to put some pompano on ice, Pellegrin's culinary advice was simple: Cook it quickly.

"It's great eating, but don't overcook it because it's very delicate meat. It's tender, but firm to the touch," he said. "When you cook it, it's similar to flounder — either broiled or pan-fried.

"But be quick: One fillet might take just a minute-and-a-half to 2 minutes in a black-iron skillet." ■

Editor's Note: For more information, contact Capt. Tommy Pellegrin with Custom Charters at 985-851-3304, or visit his website: www.customchartersllc.com.



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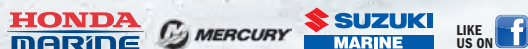
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ARE LOUISIANA'S SPECKLED TROUT OVERFISHED?

By Joe Macaluso

LDWF STUDY SAYS YES

The results of the latest Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries study on speckled trout was surprising to some, but not shocking to most coastal fishermen.

LDWF Marine Fisheries biologists, working on what was called a “preliminary, but incomplete draft,” determined the state’s speckled trout are overfished, and that “landings had decreased to their lowest levels in recent years.”

GRAND ISLE CHARTER CAPTAIN NOT SURPRISED

While eyes arched and ears perked in some quarters, the news didn’t stun guys like Frank Dreher and other charterboat skippers working waters for miles north, east and west of Grand Isle.

Dreher, who operates Laid Back Charters, said there have been good and average years and not-so-good summers since Hurricane Katrina blasted the eastern Louisiana coast 14 years ago this August.

“We had plenty of (speckled trout) the two years after Katrina, but since 2013 it seems like we’re catching springtime fish much earlier than we did before,” Dreher said. “Years ago, we fished the springtime run in late April into May, but we’re seeing those same catches coming in late March now.”

Dreher talked about the years after the 2010 BP-Deepwater Horizon oil-spill disaster and how the spill and elongated periods of rough early summer weather cut into summertime catches.

“But, since 2013, we’ve had a severe drop-off in catches in June and July,” Dreher said. “We’ve been struggling during those

months. Yes, we’ve had good days mixed in those months, but (catches) have been very inconsistent, days when we run 80 to 85 miles to fish one or two spots for 20 fish.

“We should be catching speckled trout during those months, but we aren’t,” Dreher said.

Those decreased catches led some charterboat skippers to



Stringers like this one use to be common along Grand Isle and Elmers Island.

Editors Note: this article appeared in the Advocate on March 17.

shut down their operations after the peak summertime periods to save on fuel and other overhead expenses.

The four-paragraph LDWF proclamation came with an explanation from Patrick Banks, the agency's fisheries top man.

"It will probably not affect speckled trout limits for the 2019 season, as there are additional management steps to be taken between a draft stock assessment and any final regulation change," Banks said. "We will have a better sense of where we are when the stock assessment results are finalized. But we do know that the stock's numbers have dropped."

TROUT ASSESSMENT TAKES TIME

Harry Blanchet, a LDWF marine biologist, said there's more work to be done before any definitive speckled trout management plan can be proposed, then implemented. Blanchet teamed with Joey Shepard, a retired LDWF biologist, to develop the state's highly acclaimed LA Creel system to manage the catch rates of red snapper among other offshore reef fish.

First, Blanchet said, the trout survey can't be held to a timeline, because this assessment needs more time to work out the final details.



Chas Champagne caught these trout in Lake Pontchartrain just before the Bonnet Carre Spillway opened in March.

"In most cases, there are two ways to do stock assessments, and a major stock assessment like this — a total revision of the assessment — is typically sent out for peer review," Blanchet said.

"We will work to finalize our data, and when we've completed our analysis, we will have an internal review here. Then, when that's done, we're going to send it to other state agencies — Texas, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi — and others who have some expertise in spotted sea trout," Blanchet said. "We need this peer review to support our positions. We hope they will handle it quickly and get back to us."

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The “back to us” part could be supporting the LDWF staff’s conclusions, or questioning any and all parts of the paper.

“I don’t have a crystal ball to guess at a timeline,” Blanchet said. “What we said was that we have a first draft, and from that we see the (speckled trout) stock was overfished and landings have decreased.”

MANY FACTORS AFFECT TROUT

There are several factors in the “overfished” scenario: true, fishing pressure is one, but habitat degradation, high river water, the lingering effects of tropical systems and the oil spill, and colder winters are major players, too.

“What’s molded into the assessment is that Mama Nature gives us a certain number of fish to deal with,” Blanchet said. “Fish come from the habitat and when we have no habitat we have no fish.”

“We have good trout habitat here, but our coast has been changing for the last 50 years. The habitat is not as good as it was 50 years ago,” he said.

BROWN SHRIMP NUMBERS IMPACT TROUT SPAWN

Noted here, too, is that catches of brown shrimp, a staple in the state’s spring inshore shrimp season, have declined during the past six years. Brown shrimp provide a grand meal for trout coming from the marshes after a winter of surviving on whatever forage was available.

“What’s molded into the assessment is that Mama Nature gives us a certain number of fish to deal with,” Blanchet said. “Fish come from the habitat, and when we have no habitat we have no fish.”

“What we factor in is recruitment,” Blanchet said, mentioning a biological term for the numbers of young fish entering the stock of a specific species. Low recruitment means fewer fish in an age-class to grow and become breeding stock, and there is an age class every year coming from that’s year’s spawn.

Blanchet said fishing mortality is a factor, too, and predation by other fish, birds and marine and terrestrial mammals — and fishermen’s catches — are factors in overall mortality and how fast those recruits are removed from the water.

What’s left is the overall stock numbers. “If you remove fish from the water too fast, then that’s overfishing,” Blanchet said. “The term ‘overfished’ is not a rate of removal, but how many fish are in the

waters compared to numbers if not fishing that hard, or not fishing at all.

TERREBONNE BASIN NOT AS AFFECTED

“What we know now is that the (trout) stock biomass is going down, but not going past the management threshold,” he said, adding he expects the staff to find differences in basins from seasons to seasons.

“We want to go with this assessment, to look past a lot of local observations, and look at more long-term issues with the stock,” Blanchet said. “We want to determine whether the stock is in good shape or not-so-well-framed, to develop a good estimate where our current condition is.”

His parting shot helped get a handle on the future.

“I think everyone knows we’re reluctant to change regulations,” Blanchet said. “We want to make sure there’s good science is behind what we recommend.”

HIGH RIVERS IMPACT TROUT

Dreher said he believes he can speak for most coastal fishermen he knows when he said, “What we want is good science behind any changes that could come, not just from fishermen’s complaints, and we trust these men will do that.

“For now, all we’re seeing is Mississippi River water in the Grand Isle area,” he said. “We have to run far north to find clean water, and we know the Bonnet Carre (Spillway) has been opened three of the last four years.”

The high rivers, the Mississippi and Atchafalaya, severely impact the eastern half of Louisiana’s coastline and the fish swimming in those waters.

“Where the habitat has been stable, in the western Terrebonne area, trout catches have been better during the times we’ve struggled over here,” Dreher said. “And I haven’t seen it, but I’ve heard about fish kills — thousands of dead fish — during the winter in the interior marshes during the last two winters.

“We saw a lot of 11-inch (undersized) trout on the beaches last year, and we hope that’s a good sign, but we didn’t see the bread-and-butter 13- to- 14-inchers we turn our dollar on.

“What will happen? I guess time will tell.”

The timeline, however long it might be, will bring the final reviewed stock assessment to the seven-member Wildlife and Fisheries Commission.

Banks’ staff indicated the final proposal could “include potential management options to improve the status of the stock ... several possible recommendations, including, but not limited to, bag and size limit modifications.” ■



Barataria Basin speckled trout populations have been off in recent years due to disappearance of the marsh and decreased salinity which has hurt brown shrimp reproduction.

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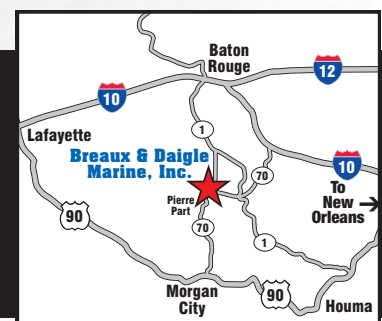
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BIG TIMES AT THE BEND

By Patrick Bonin

Lunker action ramping up as spring takes hold

It's not a matter of if — but when. That pretty much sums up the nature of when the largemouth bass spawn begins in earnest each year as winter turns to spring at Toledo Bend.

Bass anglers preparing springtime trips up to the 185,000-acre reservoir on the Sabine River between Texas and Louisiana eagerly anticipate its kickoff. But will the first wave of action peak during the March full moon? Will Mother Nature throw everyone a curveball, and delay the initial big push into the

shallows? Or perhaps, an early warmup will crank things off slightly earlier than usual.

Who knows? But one thing's for sure: Double-digit bass have been caught each and every month so far in 2019, and action really ramped up during the first week of March, when a 14-pound giant and four 10-plus-pounders were reeled in within days of each other.

Action should only improve as water temperatures slowly rise, so the coming weeks should be prime time to land a lunker — just like these anglers did:



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DEQUINCY ANGLER LANDS 14-POUNDER

By Patrick Bonin

KENNON'S BASS IS BIGGEST LUNKER PROGRAM ENTRY IN THREE YEARS

Even the hottest tip from a stockbroker probably wouldn't yield the quick return on your money that Sean Kennon realized Saturday morning, March 2, up at Toledo Bend.

The 27-year-old DeQuincy angler entered the annual BassCashBash for \$50, and also purchased a \$20 'bonus' T-shirt that would increase his winnings on any double-digit fish by \$500.

Just a few hours later, he headed out to the south end of the reservoir on the Texas side to participate in the Fort Polk Bassmasters Spring Open — and promptly reeled in a giant 14-pound largemouth at about 7:20 that morning, which won him big bass honors and 5th place for the tournament, plus a cool \$1,500 for his hours-old \$70 BassCash-Bash entry.

It gets even better - if no other BassCash-Bass participant catches a bigger fish by July 4 on Toledo Bend, Kennon earns an additional \$5,000 for the lunker catch.

"I'll fish my whole life trying to top her, but she's no doubt the fish of a lifetime," Kennon said during a Tuesday morning interview. "I'm still pumped up over it, man."

He was fishing with his cousin, Matt Hungerford, in overcast conditions with a north-east wind and a chilly water temperature of 52 degrees.

LUNKER WAS STAGING

"With the water temperature, I went there with the mindset knowing fish weren't going to be up doing their thing yet, so I was focusing on staging fish getting ready to move up," he said.

Sean Kennon, 27, of DeQuincy, shows off the monstrous 14-pound lunker largemouth he caught on the south end of Toledo Bend on March 2. **BELOW:** The big fish, which was tagged and released back into the reservoir, bit a Santone Lures 3/4-ounce football jig in peanut butter and jelly color in about 24 feet of water.



Photo courtesy of Sean Kennon

He and Hungerford were positioned in a promising area to start the day, he said.

"We couldn't cast until 6:30, so I got to the spot and actually idled over a big group of fish, so I anchored off to the side of them with Spot-Lock on my trolling motor and we just waited to cast," Kennon said. "So 6:30 hit and we started throwing on them and we got a few little bites, but they were biting really, really finicky.

"So I told Matt we were going to circle around to the other side to get a different angle on them. The school of fish was actually holding up shallow, so when I circled around I threw off the side of the ledge — and the big one I caught was actually in about 24 feet of water."

Kennon was fishing with a heavy Powell 7.5 rod and a 13 Fishing Concept Z reel spooled with 20-pound Seaguar fluorocarbon attached to a Santone Lures ¾-ounce football jig in peanut butter and jelly color when lightning struck.

"I felt my jig hit the actual side of the ledge, and the bite had been real finicky, so I was dragging it back brutally slow," he said. "I felt her when she grabbed it, and I told him, 'That's a bite. I reeled down and I checked her, and then laid into her — and when I did I told him to get the net because it was a good one.

NO STRANGER TO LUNKERS

"Literally whenever I hooked her I felt her head shake and she slowly started coming up, so I immediately shoved my rod down to keep her down and she surfaced one time, but she never jumped. I told him it was a 7 ½- or 8-pounder. She made one little run at the boat and he netted her for me. When he flipped her in, I figured it was about an 11-pounder."

Kennon is no stranger to lunkers — he's already caught an 11-pounder at the Bend, and a 10-plus-pounder on Sam Rayburn — but he was more focused on the tournament than the giant fish he'd just reeled in.

"In my mind, I really wanted to get back on the front of the deck and catch four more

fish," he said. "I literally put her in the livewell, and I never checked her out real good at that time and went back to fishing. I rode around with her in my livewell all day. I had no clue she was 14 pounds.

"I knew she was big and I checked on her all day long, but I didn't take the time to look at her or appreciate how big she was then."

That all changed at the 3 p.m. weigh-in when Kennon got a better look at the giant, which tipped the certified tournament scales at 14 pounds even, with a 27 ½-inch length and a girth of 19 ¼ inches. The massive fish easily qualified for entry into the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program, which awards anglers who return double-digit fish to the reservoir with a complimentary mount.

LONE LUNKER

Unfortunately for Kennon and Hungerford, action was sparse after the huge fish bit, and they didn't boat another keeper all day long. But the lunker by itself was good for a 5th place finish — and a day on the water neither man will likely ever forget.

"The guys that won were 40 yards from me. We watched them catch all five of their fish, and they watched me catch that big one. They had 24 pounds — it was a window from 7:20 to about 7:45 that they just turned on," Kennon said. "Overall, it was a tough day. They bit finicky. Toledo Bend has been fishing tough, probably the toughest I've seen it — and



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TEXAS ANGLER ENJOYS EPIC DAY

By Patrick Bonin

VICKNAIR'S FIVE BEST FISH TOTALED A WHOPPING 39.76 POUNDS

On a cloudy, misty day up at Toledo Bend on March 8, Chance Vicknair enjoyed one of those trips that most bass anglers only dream about.

The 22-year-old — formerly of Livingston but now a resident of Hemphill, Texas — had an epic day on the south end of the reservoir that featured a 9, a couple of 7s, a 6 and his third double-digit bass ever,



Chance Vicknair shows off the 10.43-pound lunker bass he caught March 8 on the south end of Toledo Bend. The big bass choked a Strike King 6XD chartreuse sexy shad crankbait on a ridgeline in about 15 feet of water.

Photo courtesy of Chance Vicknair

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a 10.43-pounder. His five best fish tallied almost 40 pounds.

"I had the best day of my life that day. I doubt I'll ever top that," Vicknair said. "That's probably a once-in-a-lifetime deal."

Vicknair was fishing with his mom, Donna, on the south end of the reservoir on the Texas side, with his dad in another boat in the area. He was positioned in about 18 feet of water working a ridgeline.

"I was throwing to about 12 (feet) and she hit about 15," he said, noting his lure was a chartreuse Strike King 6XD crankbait. "I threw it out there and was cranking, and she choked it. She hit pretty hard and I leaned into her, and when I leaned into her the rod just doubled over. I knew it was a big one.

"She started coming to me and was fooling me, but when she got close to the boat she turned away and was stripping drag."

Vicknair was using a Lew's rod and reel spooled with 16-pound Sunline fluorocarbon.

"The fish came up and jumped one time, and I didn't see the crankbait at all - she had it good," he said. "She went back down and I fought her some more, trying to be slow with her. She finally just swam straight into the net."

The big fish weighed 10.36 on his onboard scale, so Vicknair decided to head in and get it weighed at Fin & Feather Resort.

"My dad was actually fishing near me," he said. "He had about 30 pounds that day, too — but no giants. I called him to come to the spot I was sitting on, because they had a few boats watching me."

At Fin & Feather, the big bass tipped certified scales at 10.43 pounds, with a length of 27 inches and a girth of 19 1/2 inches — easily qualifying for entry into the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program, which awards anglers who return double-digit fish to the reservoir with a complimentary mount. The fish was previously caught in February of 2016 by Lance Duff, when it weighed 10.01

pounds.

Vicknair eventually returned to his spot on the ridge, and did more damage with the crankbait and a Carolina rig featuring a watermelon Zoom brush hog.

"I was doing things a little different. A lot of people crank on certain stuff, but I crank really fast with high-speed reels. And boat position was pretty key, because they wanted it a certain way," he said. "It was just the right place at the right time."

The rest of March is shaping up to be pretty special — if Mother Nature cooperates, he said.

"I think these fish were prespawn getting ready to lay. Actually, I almost think the big one I caught had already laid and maybe will lay again," he said. "I think the full moon this month there will be a lot of big fish caught shallow." ■

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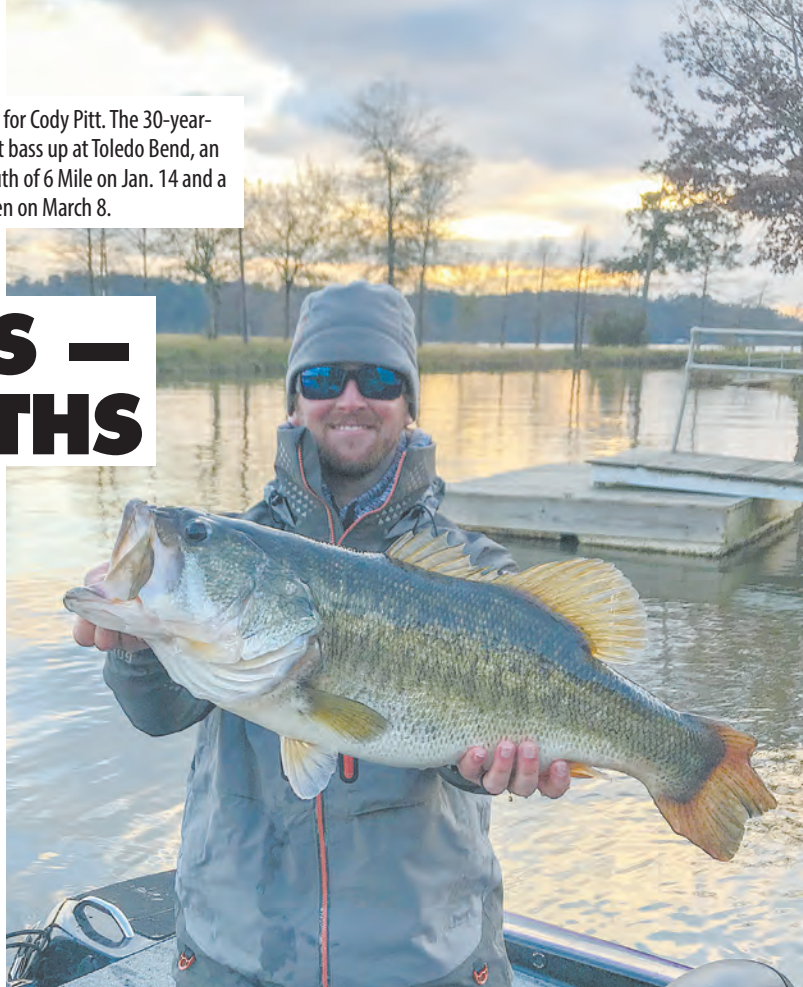
2019 has been a year to remember for Cody Pitt. The 30-year-old angler landed two double-digit bass up at Toledo Bend, an 11.49-pounder (below) at the mouth of 6 Mile on Jan. 14 and a 10.52-pounder (opposite) in Housen on March 8.

TWO LUNKERS – IN TWO MONTHS

PITT LANDS HIS FIRST TWO DOUBLE-DIGIT FISH EVER, JUST 53 DAYS APART

By Patrick Bonin

Cody Pitt has been on quite a roll this winter and early spring up at Toledo Bend. The Many angler got things started on Jan. 14 at the mouth of 6 Mile when he landed a whopping 11.49-pound largemouth on a Carolina-rigged V&M swamp hog in black and blue. That monster was 27 ¼ inches long, with a 19-inch girth — but Pitt wasn't done just yet.



Photos courtesy of Cody Pitt

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Both of Pitt's fish were entered into the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program, which awards anglers who return double-digit fish to the reservoir with a complimentary mount. Below: The V&M Big LeBoom spinnerbait in chartreuse-and-white.



Photos courtesy of Cody Pitt

Lunker lightning struck again on Friday, March 8 when he landed his second double-digit fish in only 53 days after he reeled in a 10.52-pounder from just 3 feet of water in Housen on a 3/4-ounce V&M Big LeBoom chartreuse-and-white spinnerbait.

'Over the last three or four years, I've lost two fish that I know for

sure were over 10, and it's always haunted me," Pitt said with a chuckle. "To catch the one was unexplainable. On the next one, I didn't even know what was happening.

"Now I feel like I've caught back up, so I feel better about myself." ■



Cody Pitt used a Carolina-rigged V&M swamp hog in black blue glitter to catch the 11.49-pound bass he caught on Jan. 14 at the mouth of 6 Mile.



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By Patrick Bonin

NIGHT-FISHING LURE PRODUCES DAYTIME LUNKER

WILKERSON'S BIG BASS TIPS THE
SCALES AT 10.53 POUNDS

T Tyler Wilkerson typically throws a Zoom Baby Brush Hog in the color South Africa Special when he night fishes on Toledo Bend. But the dark-colored lure produced a daytime lunker largemouth for him on a cloudy day on March 8 on the south side of the reservoir.

"The only reason I picked it up was because it was cloudy," said Wilkerson, of Negreet, who noted he was fishing on the Louisiana side. "She was staging. I was sitting in about 15 feet of water casting shallow, but she hit me at about 8 or 10 feet. I knew it was either a big goo or one over 10. When I saw her head pop out of the water, I really knew. She came up one time, and I just played her out until I got her to the boat. My little brother Ryan netted her for me."

The big fish bit about 11:30, and the brothers eventually headed to Buckeye Landing, where the fish tipped certified scales there at 10.53 pounds, with a length of 25 inches and a girth of 19 ½ inches. It easily qualified for the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program, which awards anglers who return double-digit fish to the reservoir with a complimentary mount.

"I've caught several 9s, 8s and 7s, but that's my first double-digit," Wilkerson said. "I was ecstatic. I was pumped." ■



Tyler Wilkerson, 34, of Negreet, shows off the 10.53-pound lunker largemouth he landed on the south end of Toledo Bend on the Louisiana side March 8. **ABOVE LEFT:** Wilkerson's big fish bit a Carolina-rigged Zoom Baby Brush Hog in South Africa Special color in about 8 feet of water.

Photo courtesy of Tyler Wilkerson

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David Burton, of DeRidder, shows off the 10.01-pound largemouth bass he caught near Boone's Crossing at Toledo Bend on March 9. The big bass bit a firetiger Cotton Cordell Big O crankbait in about 5 feet of water.

Photo courtesy of David Burton

DERIDDER ANGLER FINALLY GETS HIS LUNKER

By Patrick Bonin

BURTON LANDS VERY FIRST DOUBLE-DIGIT BASS AFTER 58 YEARS OF FISHING

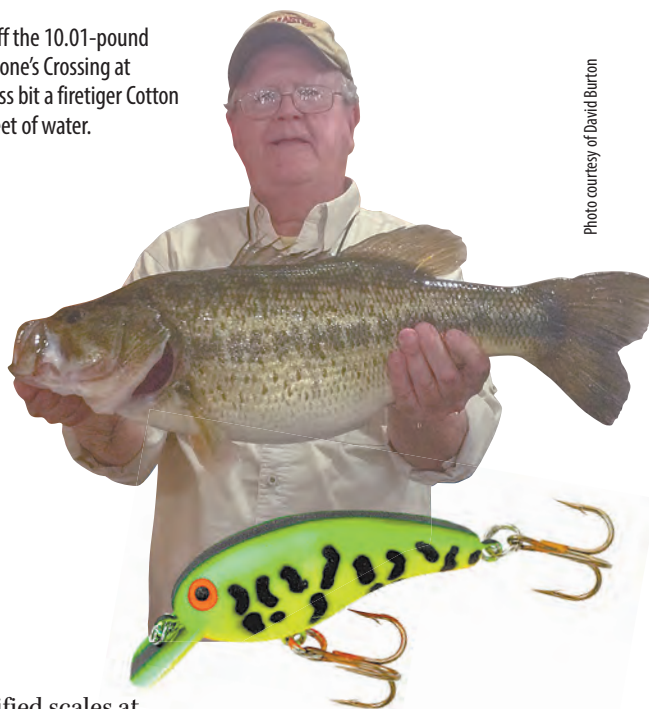
David Burton is 70 years old, and has been fishing since he was 12. On Saturday, March 9, he finally accomplished every bass angler's dream when he reeled in his very first double-digit largemouth near Boone's Crossing at Toledo Bend.

"Several years ago, back in 2005 I think, I caught a 9.12 on a spinnerbait across from Fin & Feather. And I always kicked my rear for not getting it weighed on a proper scale," said Burton, of DeRidder. "I don't think they had the certified scale system at that time, but I always thought

if I had weighed it on proper scale it might have been over 10."

He doesn't have to worry about that fish anymore: His registered lunker, which officially tipped certified scales at Buckeye Landing at 10.01 pounds, bit a firetiger Cotton Cordell Big O crankbait in about 5 feet of water.

It measured 25 3/4 inches long, with a 19 1/4-inch girth, easily qualifying for the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program, which awards anglers who release



double-digit fish into the reservoir with a complimentary mount.

"After working at it for more than 50 years, I finally got one," Burton said with a laugh. "It proves that anybody can get lucky on a given day." ■

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BAKER ANGLER CATCHES 10-PLUS-POUNDER

ONE HOOK ON TREBLE HOLDS JUST LONG ENOUGH TO LAND LUNKER NEAR TURTLE BEACH

By Patrick Bonin

Some days it sure seems like the fishing gods are out to get you, presenting a myriad of problems out on the water ranging from motor issues to missed bites to unexpected birds' nests.

Other times, it's all smooth sailing — and maybe you 'get away with one' and actually land a fish that might have eluded you another day.

That was exactly the scenario for Kyle Alexander up at Toledo Bend on Friday afternoon, Feb. 15 — when a single hook from only one treble on his jerkbait held on just long enough to land his biggest largemouth ever, a 10.41-pounder near Turtle Beach.

"Usually when you're fishing a jerkbait, they get two (hooks) in there, but she had just one single little hook in her," said Alexander, 30, of Baker. "She had grabbed it all the way back. When I grabbed her by the mouth, the jerkbait flew out."

Alexander had just arrived at Toledo Bend the day before to enjoy several days of fishing, and had taken off from a private launch behind Turtle Beach that morning.

"I had caught five previous to the big one, but I didn't start until about 8 o'clock," he said. "It was a fair morning, but it wasn't lights out or anything like that."

That all changed about 12:30 that afternoon, when the lunker bit the jerkbait (that Alexander wanted to keep under wraps.)

CAUGHT ON THE LEDGE

"My depth finder said 17 feet, but I was fishing a drop-off, so I would say



Kyle Alexander, of Baker, shows off the 10.41-pound lunker bass he caught on Feb. 15 at Toledo Bend near Turtle Beach. The big fish bit a jerkbait in 10 to 12 feet of water at about 12:30 p.m., Alexander said.

Photo courtesy of Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program

she was in 10 or 12 feet," he said. "I had found some clear, warmer water and I saw some grass underneath the water. I pitched in there a couple of times and had actually just moved, and it was the second cast I made after I moved.

"I doubled the rod over. Thank God Kistler makes a damn good rod — I don't know how it didn't break. It was all the way underneath the boat."

Alexander was by himself without a net, but was able to lip the big fish aboard after the fight.

"I was shaking," he said. "I calmed down for a minute and threw her in the livewell."

Shortly thereafter, he headed over to Toledo Town & Tackle to officially weigh the big fish.

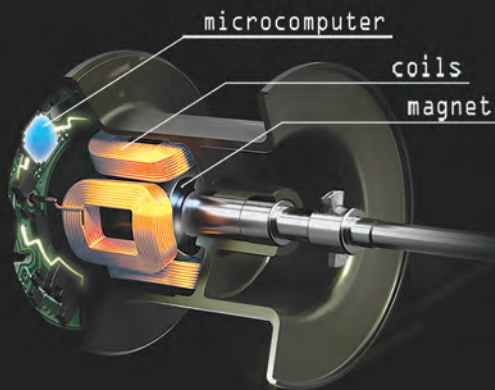
At certified scales there, the bass weighed 10.41 pounds, and measured 24 7/8 inches long with a 19 3/4-inch girth, easily qualifying it as fish No. 23 this season for the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program, which awards anglers who return double-digit fish to the reservoir with a complimentary mount.

After his very first Toledo Bend trophy bass, Alexander, who works as a construction superintendent in Port Allen, said he relaxed and just tried to soak it all in.

"I didn't fish the rest of the day. I put the boat on the trailer, went to Toledo Tackle and got me a 6-pack," he said with a chuckle. "I said, 'Hey, this doesn't happen every day, so you might as well enjoy it.'"

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TOLEDO BEND

Expect bass to be at the height of their spawn

rose to the challenge and came from behind to win with 40 pounds, 2 ounces, when the first-day leader with 22 pounds, 11 ounces, and first-day runner up with 21 pounds, 7 ounces, respectively, both stumbled hard on the third and final day (the second day was canceled by inclement weather). The early leader zeroed and the early runner up brought in 6 pounds.

BITE WAS HIT AND MISS IN MARCH

Getting bit in February and beginning of March was hit-and-miss and more frequent sometimes when fishing deep. Really, it should be the other way around. As of the first week in March the majority of fish weren't up on their beds, based on my observations and field reports from across the lake. If they were there, though, chances are we couldn't see them because of the water clarity.

I'll venture to say they just weren't there yet, which bodes well for April. We really haven't seen the first wave of spawners. I'm figuring the spawn just might be a month behind.

TARGET 3 TO 7 FOOT DEPTHS

You would think bass on Toledo Bend will be at the height of their spawn by April. I sure expect that to be the case and it'll be game on in 3- to 7-foot depths.



This angler holds a 3-pound-plus bass he caught on a spinnerbait while fishing with Dean the last week of February at Toledo Bend. They were fishing in Torro Bay.

While late winter bassin' success leaves a lot to be desired because of weather and water conditions, I'm maintaining a positive attitude and looking forward to late March and April to restore the order on Toledo Bend. Bring on the spring!

Will it happen as far as catching the majority of bass in their traditional spawning environment, something that hadn't happened as of the first week of March?

We'll see what transpires when the average water temperature stays in the mid-60s and, as usual in the past, eventually reaches the 70s in April, I told Caleb

Sumrall over breakfast this morning at Toledo Town and Tackle. Caleb is a Bassmaster Elite angler from New Iberia who also guides on this lake with Darold Gleason's South Toledo Bend Guide Service when he isn't on the tournament trail.

Like myself and so many others, Caleb is anxious to see if the bass fire up after cold water and heavily stained water conditions (in the backs of creeks) subside — hopefully by early spring. A strong cold front in early March pushed water temperatures back down to the low to middle 50s.

The Basspro.com Bassmaster Central Open anglers were challenged by those conditions Feb. 20-22. Gleason, of Many,

Main lake points, ridges, humps and ditches should be productive as warmer water temperatures expand to the open water because of the increasingly longer days and, hopefully, more sunshine.

What I'm saying is anglers shouldn't have to go to backwaters to catch bass consistently in April. More and more bass will be on the move to find their spawning sites, moving out of the 10- to 15-foot depths into the shallower water.

Chances of hooking up with a double-digit bass should skyrocket in April. It should be a banner month for bass 10 pounds or heavier!

It'll be time to target the spawning bass with Carolina-rigged soft plastics, as well as dead-sticking Zoom Super Flukes and whatever soft plastic offering is your favorite.

I'm going to use C-rigs with Flukes and U99s, plastic lizards and creature baits in 4- to 7-foot depths and wacky worms, during the spawn. Top colors year-in and year-out are watermelon/red and green pumpkin/red. Darker colors should be effective in stained water.

It's still a prime time to be throwing horizontal search baits like Chatterbaits, chartreuse/white spinnerbaits, red-hued Rat-L-Traps, Rogues and Redfins.

I've been guiding on this lake most of my life and you're welcome in my boat. April should offer a good chance to catch a bragging-size bass. Give me a call at (936) 404-2688. ■

- John Dean



John Dean has been guiding on Toledo Bend most of his life. If you'd like to join him on a trip, give him a call at (936) 404-2688.

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LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman



LIVETARGET SKIP SHAD

A NEW INJECTION OF TECHNOLOGY

Four years in the making, LiveTarget Lures' Skip Shad with Injected Core Technology debuts this spring and will start hooking up with bass and many other species, freshwater and saltwater, time and time again.

The versatile, flat-sided soft plastic jerkbait's unique three-dimensional textures are realistic anatomically as well as intricately balanced to give anglers a deadly artificial lure that matches the hatch — ever-present shad, alewives, young sunfish and crappie, threadfin herring, pinfish and herring. The common denominator is each of those flat-sided forage species are favorite and fair game for hungry fish.

The Skip Shad is the latest in ultra-natural, lifelike products from the president and founder of Koppers Fishing and Tackle Corp. and the LiveTarget brand, Grant Koppers.

A small number of anglers and industry partners had access to sample Skip Shads before the finished models hit the market, Koppers said the second week of February, which is when Skip Shads were being shipped to retail locations across Canada and the U.S.

PATENT PENDING

Koppers is impressed with the soft plastic's newest injection of technology, LiveTarget's exclusive, patent-pending ICT. "Soft plastic lures all suffer from pre-

cisely the same shortcomings: stated simply, most soft baits don't look anything like the natural forage base that predator fish eat and few behave like a vulnerable prey item that is about to play its part in nature's food web.

Lures manufactured with our Injected Core Technology are effectively a bait-within-a-bait, featuring a vibrant, biomimetic, forage-profile interior that is fully encapsulated and intimately linked to a clear, soft polymer exo-skin," Koppers said Feb. 13.

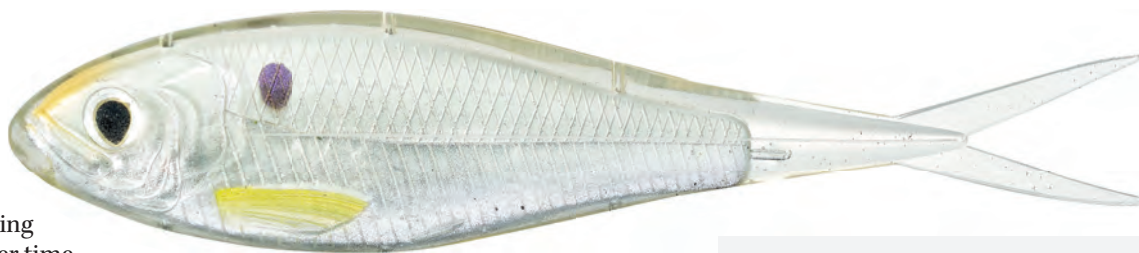
After fishing 10 years as a guide starting in his late 20s, analyzing baitfish patterns all the while, his vision for the artificial lure manufacturing company he started 11 years ago continues to grow.

The first “serious progress toward the development” of Skip Shad began in late 2015, he said, noting the idea expanded over time, and the designers went full steam ahead on product development leading up to its planned release in 2018.

LiveTarget’s Research and Development team went to work with the direction and input of pro staff anglers.

The Skip Shad was unveiled at ICAST 2018 in three lengths and weights — 3 ½-inch, ½-ounce, 4 ¼-inch, 5/8-ounce and 5 ¼-inch, ¾-ounce. It also was introduced in six colors — silver/pearl, silver/smoke, silver/brown, silver/green, silver/blue and silver/purple.

Koppers noted the new soft plastic jerkbait features vibrant color patterns on an interior core, which is fully encased in and protected by a clear, soft polymer shell. ICT, he said, also makes the Skip Shad extremely versatile to rig and present in freshwater and saltwater environments. It can be fished weight-



less or weighted on a Texas Rig, or along the bottom on a Carolina Rig, he said, or rigged to crawl nose down along the bottom on a stand-up jig, or used as a trailer on a conventional jig-and-plastic combo.

SKIP THIS BAIT

As its name implies, Koppers said, the Skip Shad can be skipped easily under docks and overhangs because of its flat sides.

And the smaller models are perfect to use as a drop shot bait, he said.

It’s the balance that appeals to anglers, he said, adding that it has a remarkably slow descent horizontally as it falls and it doesn’t spiral or tumble.

“The technology allows for the most precise balance of interior core and outer shell. The process creates a weight distribution and balance that can’t be

SKIP SHAD:

The Skip Shad is the latest in ultra-natural, lifelike products from LiveTarget Lures.

replicated with existing soft plastics, especially when you have the challenge of producing a lifelike appearance with the lure,” he said.

For more information about the Skip Shad and other LiveTarget Lures products, call (888) 231-4449 or go to www.livetargetlures.com. ■



Don Shoopman fishes for freshwater and saltwater species mostly in and around the Atchafalaya Basin and Vermilion Bay. He moved to the Sportsman’s Paradise in 1976, and he and his wife June live in New Iberia. They have two grown sons.

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SCIENTISTS CAN'T BELIEVE WHAT'S HAPPENING TO SOUTH LOUISIANA MARSH BASS. ANGLERS COULD BE IN FOR DOUBLE-DIGIT CATCHES IN NEXT FEW YEARS.

By Jon Miller

Lately, I have been seeing social media posts from speckled trout-centric anglers who have also begun fishing the marshes around New Orleans for chunky largemouth bass, aka marsh bass. Has the marsh bass really outgrown its kid brother title of "Green Trout" and been elevated to a target species for inshore anglers?

Inshore Louisiana fishermen are a demanding bunch, and a target species must be good to eat, plentiful, and sporting to catch. Based on the social media posts I'm seeing, the inshore crowd is very satisfied with the marsh bass as table fare, and the fish has become plentiful from the Rigolets, all along the MRGO channel, and from Hopedale to Delacroix. What about the last criteria? I think most fishermen would classify a bass as sporting to catch, if it's about 2 lbs. or larger. So will this generation of plentiful 12-inch marsh bass grow large enough to secure a lasting place in the club of universally-targeted inshore species along side speckled trout and redfish?

You may be saying to yourself that marsh bass can't grow as heavy as the standard largemouth bass found in southern lakes, but according to two researchers from LSU, Michael Meador and William Kelso, the growth rate of older marsh bass equalled or exceeded the growth rate of largemouth bass taken from a number of Louisiana oxbow lakes.

MARSH BASS: Where is this Louisiana resource headed?

V

V

Louisiana Sportsman has reported a number of 10 lb. and heavier bass caught in the Bayou Bienvenue area over the last two years. So, it's apparent that if the marsh bass survives into adulthood, their growth rates are adequate to bring them to a trophy size.

This is great news for inshore anglers, but marsh bass do face major obstacles to growing as large as their freshwater cousins.

Water salinity creates a huge barrier to the growth of trophy bass in the marsh. LSU researchers, Meador and Kelso, studied the effect of salinity concentrations on marsh bass and how it effects their seasonal abundance, movement, and health.

They found that marsh bass prefer a salinity of 3 parts per thousand (ppt). Surprisingly, growth rates in marsh bass did not decrease in salinity as high as 8 ppt. However, in salinity of 12 ppt, the bass stopped eating after 1 week and subsequently died.

I pulled salinity data from 2010 to the present from the USGS Crooked Bayou station, located on the north side of Lake Cuatro Caballo, aka Four Horse Lake, and 6 miles southeast of Delacroix Island. This is not an area known for marsh bass, and it's relatively close to Breton Sound where the salinity regularly becomes much too high for bass. However, it's helpful to look at salinity here, since it can be considered a boundary area of habitat acceptable to marsh bass.

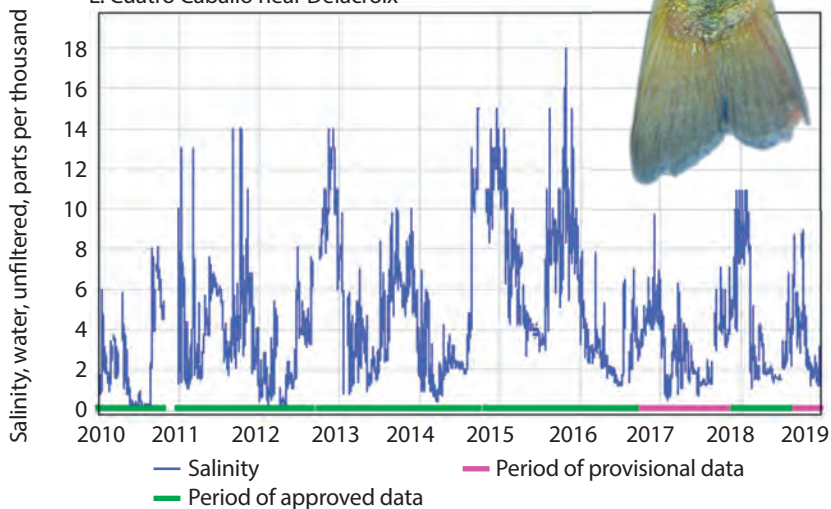
In the Chart 1 we can see that during most years there are many sustained periods of salinity above 8 ppt at the Crooked Bayou station. If you are wondering why the salinity periodically spikes, it's because of the Mississippi River water level. When the river is low the salinity goes up in the marsh and vice versa. Therefore, salinity is typically high in the fall or early winter when the river is low.

The growth rate of older marsh bass equaled or exceeded the growth rate of largemouth bass taken from a number of Louisiana oxbow lakes.



Chart 1

USGS 073745257 Crooked B. NW of L. Cuatro Caballo near Delacroix



Growth rates in marsh bass did not decrease in salinity as high as 8 ppt.

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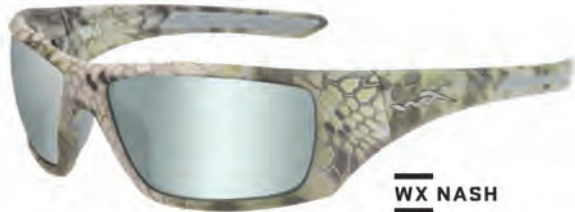


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MARSH BASS



Periods of high salinity will move the marsh bass toward fresher water, which on the east side of the Mississippi River means they get pushed up against the river levies or into areas behind levies. This movement results in a greater concentration of fish, and thus periods of hunger when the bait resources are overcome.

Bass will continue to grow throughout their life if enough food is available, but they can not make up for periods of hunger. Even if they survive, they will not have enough time to reach trophy size, if they are subjected to regular periods of hunger. Therefore, it's most helpful to look at salinity during periods of low Mississippi River level as an indicator for marsh bass growth.

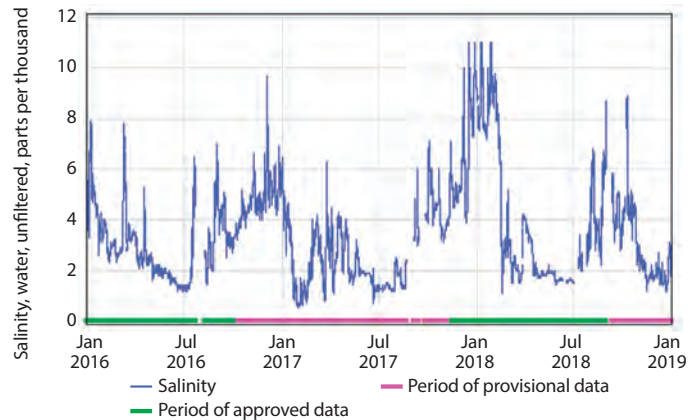
Interestingly, the salinity concentration range from 2016 to present looks different than the prior 5 years.

In the Chart 2 below, we can see that the highest salinity was 11 ppt during the early winter of 2018, and it only reached 11 ppt for short periods of time. The salinity during other periods of low Mississippi River levels was well within the range where marsh bass can flourish, such as in fall of 2016, when salinity was mostly lower than 6 ppt.



Chart 2

USGS 073745257 Crooked B. NW of L. Cuatro Caballo near Delacroix



It's important to restate that the area around Crooked Bayou station is outside the expected habitat area for marsh bass, but even here, the salinity since 2016 has mostly been within an acceptable range.

Case in point, on January 16, 2017, I caught a bass in Lake Fausan that was around 5 years old, based on typical growth curves from fish biologists Dave Willis and Bob Lusk. Lake Fausan is 3.4 miles southwest of the Crooked Bayou station.

To better understand whether this change is temporary or long term, we need to find measurable factors that we can correlate with the recent, lower than expected salinity when the Mississippi River is low. Tracking these drivers and comparing them to marsh bass catches will be one way to verify a possible habitat expansion.

Since the Mississippi River discharge is the primary driver of salinity change in the estuary, the first point of clarification is whether the salinity changes from 2016 to present are solely due to higher Mississippi River discharges.

I have pulled river level data from 2010 through 2018 at the USGS Baton Rouge gauge, which is shown in Chart 3.





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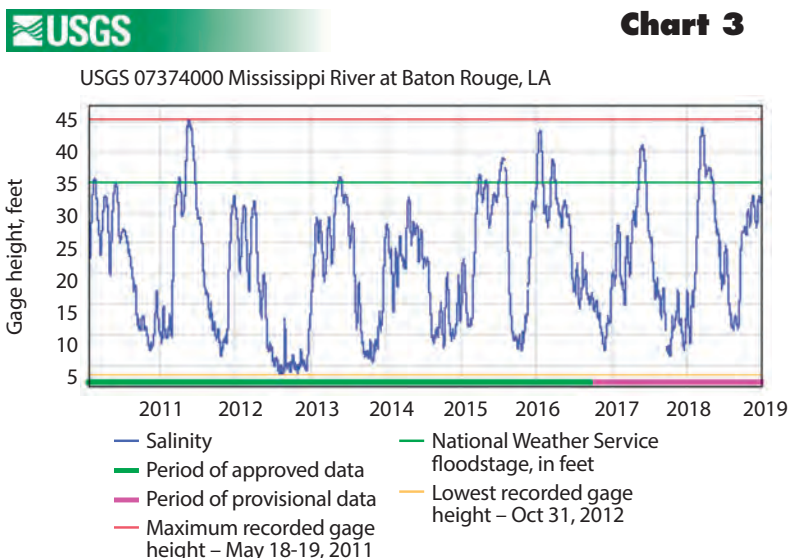
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We can see that in the 2016 to 2019 period, the river rose and fell seasonally as it did from 2010 to 2015. It's evident that the maximum river levels were higher from 2016 to present than the average for the entire period, but the important factor, the minimum river levels, were not significantly different than during the 2010 - 2015 period. Based on what I see in the Mississippi River data, I don't believe that the river level alone can explain the lower salinity at Crooked Bayou.

After a review of data from USGS Water Resources and the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF), I believe that the combined freshwater flow rates of the Pearl River and the Mardi Gras Pass are measurable factors we can use for predicting habitat size.

I have populated Table 1 on the following page with data from LPBF's salinity maps, and only chose data from the periods of low Mississippi River water level for the reasons stated above. I used a convention of X-Small to X-Large as a qualitative measure of the size of the marsh areas where salinity is within a healthy range for marsh bass. I also added Mississippi River levels in the table, so that we can evaluate the affect of river level on the habitat area. The green box in the Table 1 outlines the time period when



the marsh bass habitat is expanded. We can see that the discharge rate of the uncontrolled Mardi Gras Pass has been increasing since it opened in 2012, and is significantly higher during the period since 2016.

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The Pearl River alone has an affect on bass habitat, especially in the Bayou Bienvenue area, and this is visible in the data from 2012 through 2015. However, I believe that the factor to watch is the combined discharge rates of the Pearl River and the Mardi Gras Pass.

We can see in the data that when the combined discharge rates of the Pearl River and the Mardi Gras Pass are above 6,000 cfs, the marsh bass habitat is expanded.

Further, I believe the increasing affect of the Mardi Gras Pass is seen by looking at the relationship of the Pearl River discharge and the habitat around Bayou Bienvenue. When



the Mardi Gras Pass discharges are low prior to 2016, the discharge rate of the Pearl River had a direct impact on the Bayou Bienvenue area habitat. But, after 2015, the Mardi Gras Pass discharge had reached a high enough rate that low Pearl River discharge rates no longer reduced the size of the habitat around Bayou Bienvenue.

We also have to consider that these bass

Date	Delacroix Habitat	Bayou Bienvenue Habitat	Pearl River, cfs	Mardi Gras Pass, cfs	Combined P. River & M. Pass, cfs	Mississippi R. at Low Level* (Baton Rouge), ft.
Dec. 7-13, 2012	S	XS	—	N/A	—	4.5
Dec. 2-8, 2013	M	S	4,400	900	5,300	11.5
Oct. 6-12, 2014	S	XS	2,300	500	2,800	8.5
Oct. 19-25, 2015	S	XS	2,000	2,500	4,500	8
Nov. 28 - Dec. 4, 2016	L	L	2,100	4,000	6,100	8
Oct. 2-8 2017	XL	XL	2,200	6,900	9,100	7.5
Dec. 25-31, 2017	M	L	3,500	3,400	6,900	11.5
Sept. 3-9, 2018	L	L	3,200	6,500	9,700	11.5

* Flood stage is 35 ft.

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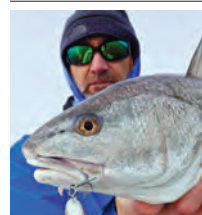
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There is a link between lower salinity in the marshes and increased cover in which bass can hide to avoid predation.

8 and 12 ppt, they have the potential to grow to a respectful size before they succumb to old age.

So in conclusion, I'm hearing about many bass being caught in the marshes east of the Mississippi River, and some of them are becoming respectable in size. It also appears that the salinity concentration on the east side of the Mississippi River has become more favorable for the expansion of the marsh bass habitat, and the longer this continues, the bigger the bass will grow. The real proof of this change will be catches of larger marsh bass over the next few years. ■



Jon Miller is an engineer, lifetime fisherman, and host of the YouTube channel Jon Miller Fishing.

are living in a wilderness and they are in the middle of the food chain. Jerald Horst wrote an informative paper on the marsh bass where he points out the predation risks bass face from larger predators.

These include alligators, alligator gar, redfish, bull sharks, dolphin, and others. Predation impacts the size of the marsh bass because they need to live a long life to reach a trophy size. For example, Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries reports aging a female bass in 2009 that was 11 years old and weighed 9.16 lb. So predation and consequently access to safe cover is a significant factor in the growth potential of marsh bass.

However, there is a link between lower salinity in the marshes and increased cover in which bass can hide to avoid predation. Louisiana DWF reports that decreased salinity in the marshes increases the growth of submerged vegetation. This in turn, decreases the rate of predation on marsh bass, and increases recruitment of the juveniles.

So if a marsh bass can avoid getting eaten, and have an adequately large habitat area with plentiful food and where the water salinity stays below a critical concentration, which is somewhere between

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How to **MAXIMIZE THE SUNRISE BITE**

By David A. Brown

Why do bigger bass bite best at sunrise and how to make the most of it

Why do bass anglers get up early? Is it to beat the morning rush hour? To avoid the boat ramp chaos? To make sure we get a good parking space? Sure, all of this matters, but the bottom line objective is to capitalize on the “magic hour” that follows the sun’s emergence.

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SUNRISE BASS



Photo courtesy of Strike King

Topwaters like the Strike King Mega Dawg create a tempting image for big fish looking to grab a big meal at sunrise.

Indeed, barring atmospheric calamity, the sunrise bite is often the period of highest opportunity the day will see. Even if tidal waters find the day dawning with a lackluster stage, the likelihood of encountering a flurry of activity are best at sunrise.

HERE'S WHY

CONCENTRATED FORAGE

Baitfish huddled tightly near their overnight spots are easy targets for sunrise bass. Once the day gets going and predators fracture these bait schools, the fish have to work harder for their meals.

OPPORTUNISTS AT WORK

Bass do their best work in low light. That includes cloudy days and nighttime, but that transition from dark to light gives them a best-of-both worlds scenario, as sunrise tends to stimulate forage. This new activity coupled with the waning minutes of low-visibility puts the bass in full-throttle feeding mode.

What you'll find is a heightened aggression level that makes the fish more willing to run after an enticing lure. The strike zone increases, so casting accuracy becomes less strict.

FRESH FACES

Let's face it, the bass see a lot of baits during daylight hours and, even if they have long memories, nights allow them sufficient time to shake off the annoyances and refocus their feeding interests. In other words, sunrise finds bass rested and ready to go.

BAITFISH BOOGALOO

Following the bass spawn, nature provides hungry postspawners a handy feeding option via the shad spawns that occur along docks, sea walls, grass edges and any solid surface. These reproductive flurries happen mostly at night, with the activity spilling into the first hour of daylight. With thousands of baitfish distracted by their seasonal priority, they become easy targets for lurking bass. Targeting shad spawns at sunrise holds slam dunk potential.

To maximize your sunrise potential, keep a few key points in mind.

GO BIG OR GO HOME

Capitalizing on the sunrise aggression means throwing baits that appeal to a big fish with a big appetite. Topwaters, sizable jerkbaits, big profile spinnerbaits and hefty squarebills like the Strike King 8.0 fit the bill; but keep a pitch bait handy, just in case a fish misses a bite attempt. Often a quick shot with a more subtle follow-up bait can close the deal.



Photos by David A. Brown

Covering water is the name of the game because fish are often out roaming at sunrise. INSET: With fish feeding aggressively in the low light conditions, topwaters can be incredibly effective at sunrise.

KEEP IT MOVING

No one's saying you won't catch 'em flipping a Texas-rigged creature bait, dragging a Carolina rig or jiggling a dropshot, but if you've ever watched a bunch of puppies during play time, they focus their attention on the one toy you're throwing, not those piled in the corner. Same with bass; when you know they're likely to chase, make 'em chase — you'll quickly dial in to the biggest, most aggressive fish that know they need to grab breakfast quickly before the rising sun closes the door.

MAKE IT LAST

Fish don't wear watches, so no matter what time you're reading on yours, the fish will respond to the actual light conditions. You can't stop the sun's ascension, but you delay its impact by "chasing shade." That means avoiding west banks where a rising sun first reaches. Rather, fish the east sides where you can work the shadow angles of tree lines, docks, etc. to stay in shaded areas the longest.

Hit the Ground (Water)
Running: Given your short window of daybreak activity, you'll want to carefully plan your starting lineup and have several back-up baits rigged and ready. Moreover, keep a spare rod rigged with what you believe will be your top producer in case any of fishing's mishaps claims your first one.

The sunrise bait can be the most amazing period of fishing you'll ever experience, so make the most of it. ■



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FIND THE BASS IN SHALLOW WATER

Richie Dickey is a third generation bass fisherman and it shows. He has caught some big stringers of large-mouths from many area lakes, but when it comes to April's bite, he knows it's time to head to Lake Bruin. "Lake Bruin has got some good fish in it," he says. "The good thing about the bite right now is that the fish are in a post-spawn pattern and they are active in the shallow water for the most part. It's a great time to fish the lake."

START OUT HERE

The 34-year-old Winnsboro native starts out his quest for bass in the shallows, usually around the trees in 2-3 feet of water. If he doesn't have luck there, he moves to the deeper trees and then if the fish aren't there for some reason, he goes to his electronics and finds mats and tops that people have put out around piers and the drop-offs.

"There was a time six or seven years ago when I wouldn't fish in water that I couldn't touch the bottom in with my seven-foot

rod," he said. "There are lots of fish there. But there are times you need to go deeper and I've learned to do that, too."

GO TO LURE

No matter where he has to find the bass, his go-to lure at Bruin is the jig with a trailer.

"I'm not typically crazy with colors," he says. "If the water is clear, I'll go with green pumpkin and if it is stained, I may try a black and blue. The key thing that helps me is that, if I'm not catching on that jig, I'll just change the color, shape or size of my trailer. If they aren't hitting a Rage Tail, I'll try a Craw Worm or something like that. That will usually do it."

Typically, both ends of Lake Bruin receive a lot of pressure — from the State Park end on East side to the other end of the



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oxbow where Brushy Bayou provides more narrow passages and shallower water. Fish can be caught throughout the lake as well, but they seem to move from one spot to the other with changing weather.

FISH THE WEATHER

A spring cold front can move the fish out pretty quickly, but that is where the electronics come in. Fish will move out on the tops and the best bait besides a jig is a deep diving crankbait like the Strike King 5XD. In stained water, you can't go wrong with chartreuse and black. In clear water, he likes shad colors.

"It's a beautiful lake and has a lot of bass in it, but just like any other lake, you have to spend some time finding them," he says. "Once you do that, it's on. You won't regret taking a trip here." ■

- Kinny Haddox

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PARK PARADISE

By Kinny Haddox

Pick 6

From fishing, hiking, boating and birding to passing the time like it's standing still - these Louisiana State Parks are worth visiting.



Poverty Point: Not only can you rent a cabin here, but you can fish in the lake right off the back porch.

Photo courtesy P.J. Hahn©2018

April is for crawfish boils, baseball and hunting Easter eggs. But for Louisiana's outdoor oriented families, it's also the start of parking season — State Parking, that is.

Warmer weather, blooming trees and flowers, biting fish and the need for a full dose of cabin fever medicine gets people moving this month, peaking on the long Easter weekend.

And nothing captures the diversity of Louisiana's outdoors like the possibilities of the Louisiana State Park System. Make a list of what

you want to do outdoors, and one of these parks has you covered.

Here are a couple of quick tips. First, whichever park you pick, take some time to study the park map and other details about it online. Just google Louisiana State Parks.

Learn the lingo of the map icons (boat launch bait, fishing pier, trails, cabins, camping, etc.) so you can catch what's available at a glance.

Second, check the calendar of events to see if there is something going on there that you want to take part in, or perhaps avoid if it is going to attract more of a crowd than you want. Most of the parks have Facebook pages, too, so it's another great source of up-to-date information. State parks are governed by the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism.

>





Photo courtesy P.J. Hahn ©2018

Speaking of those activities, perhaps the favorite activity of all is no activity - like sitting around the camper or campfire passing the time like it is standing still. Or you can take on high-tech activities like roasting marshmallows or making smores; skipping rocks across the lake or chatting with your new-found neighbors like you've been friends for life. Each park has regular educational presentations and displays as well.

Every state park is worth a look, but here's "Park Paradise Pick Six" that you should try.

NORTH TOLEDO BEND

We start on the western side of the state, where the North Toledo Bend State Park out of Zwolle in Sabine Parish is one of two state parks on the 190,000 acre manmade reservoir. The North park covers 900 acres. Main attractions are camping in a secluded environment and fishing. Cabins are available, but most spend their time in campers or primitive camping spots.

This time of year the big bass and catfish are biting and the bream are starting to warm up to bobbing your cork. A great double boat ramp sits protected from winds and waves, which can be an issue this time of year. Hikers can take on the piney woods by walking trails from 1.5 to 4 miles long.

PALMETTO ISLAND

Ask your average outdoor enthusiast about Palmetto Island and you might get a blank stare, unless you live near Vermillion Parish. The park is located just south of

There's something for everyone at North Toledo Bend. You can even wade out in the shallows looking for a big bass, especially in the spring.

Abbeville. It is the newest of Louisiana's state parks, opening in 2010.

It has plenty of camping spots, cabins and hiking. The Visitors Center even has a splash pad and water playground, although it may be too early for that this time of year.

The boat ramp and dock put boaters right into the waters of Vermillion River where they can run as far south as Vermillion Bay. There is a viewing platform at the river so visitors can take in the view. The water area gives anglers access to a mix of fresh or saltwater fishing experiences. The 1,300 acre park is a mixture of swamps, rivers and, of course, stands of palmetto almost everywhere.

CHICOT

Located near Ville Platte, Chicot State Park has a little bit of everything, from fishing in a 2,000 acre freshwater lake to nature lessons galore in the Louisiana State Arboretum, now located within the park.

The Arboretum is home to a magnificent mature beech-magnolia forest and almost any type of vegetation or terrain found in the state, except for coastal marsh. It was established in 1961 and covers 600 acres.

Like other areas, Chicot also has all kinds of campings, picnic facilities, fishing piers and boardwalks. this park has been around a long time after being established in 1939.

THE COST TO PARK

It's obvious there is a good time to be had by all at Louisiana's State Parks. But how much does it cost?

Whether it's a day trip or a week-long excursion, state parks are an exceptional value. For \$3 per person (unless you are under 3 or 62 or older, when it's free), you can enjoy most everything in the park. Make sure you check for any additional fees when you arrive at the park's main gate.

Some rental fees vary from park to park due to size or amenities in the specific facilities. Camping fees range from \$25 to \$33 a night for premium campsites with sewer hookups or prime locations. The average cost for water and electric hookups at improved campsites is around \$25 a night and a primitive camping spot is \$18 per night.

Cabins can run from \$85 a night for standard cabins to \$150 on weekdays or \$175 a night for weekends for larger deluxe cabins. Group pavilions range from \$50 to \$120 a day. Once you are inside, you pay no boat launch fee, but you are required to have valid fishing licenses for anyone who goes fishing. ■

- Kinny Haddox

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TICKFAW

Travel across the southern part of the state to Livingston Parish for the next stop at Tickfaw State Park, located just west of Springfield. This park is extremely popular with residents wanting to get away from large nearby cities like Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

Within the 1,200 acre park, the Tickfaw River traverses standing hardwood and pines, which can cause problems in years with high water. Visitors to the park can pitch a tent, bring a camper or rent a cabin.

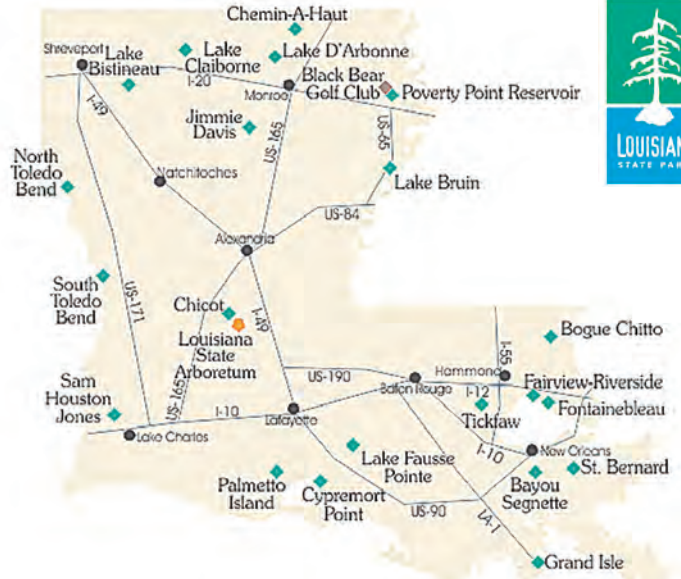
The Nature Center even boasts an 800-gallon aquarium stocked with fish found in the Tickfaw River.

If you are a hiker, you'll enjoy more than a mile of boardwalks through diverse outdoor habitat. This is also a great park to canoe in.

One word of caution here. Tickfaw is a low-lying area and has experienced some pretty serious flooding, including this past January. But the park received no substantial damage and re-opened quickly. Check on current conditions in plenty of time before you go here.

POVERTY POINT

Heading north, we end up at one of the top crappie and catfish lakes in the state in Poverty Point Reservoir State Park. Here you are just a few miles from the nationally acclaimed Poverty Point World Heritage site, a magnificent collec-



tion of earthen mounds and ridges constructed by native Americans that overlook the Mississippi River flood plain.

Not only can you rent a cabin here, but you can fish in the lake right off the back porch, which is constructed over the water. You can also do any kind of camping or boating in the 2,700 acre man-made lake. A nature trail winds along Bayou Macon where you may see just about anything, including an occasional Louisiana black bear.

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Visitors to the park north of Delhi can walk across a raised wooden archway spanning a section of the lake which leads to two fishing piers.

LAKE D'ARBONNE

If you keep up with fishing, this name will probably kick off thoughts of giant white perch, crappie or sacalait, depending on what you call them. D'Arbonne is the site of two national crappie tournaments and is known for numbers and size of crappie.

But the state park offers much more than that. Camping, trails through the woods, bike riding the rolling hills or canoeing the cypress lined banks of the lake are all favorite activities in this site located between Farmersville and Bernice in Union Parish. The park itself is only 650 acres of piney woods. The lake covers 16,000 acres. If you don't have a boat, no worries. This park has five long fishing piers which give you ample chance to catch a mess of fish for supper. ■



Kinny Haddox has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 40 years. He also publishes a daily website, lakedarbonnelife.com. He and his wife, DiAnne, live on Lake D'Arbonne in Farmersville.



Photo courtesy P.J. Hahn ©2018

A campsite at North Toledo Bend State Park is a great home base for chasing big largemouth bass like these spring lunkers.

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WAIT, THERE ARE MORE...

If you don't like our short list, no worries. There are more choices. "Louisiana's 21 State Parks all offer a uniquely rewarding experience of our state's natural beauty and you are never more than an hour away from a State Park," says Louisiana State Parks Assistant Secretary Gene Reynolds. "Obviously, the bulk of our visitors are coming in to stay at our cabins, or camp in RVs or tents. We also have many visitors that fish, as all of our parks are located on a body of water – rivers, lakes, the Gulf of Mexico. And with several of our parks located on migratory paths, there's ample opportunities for birdwatching. In fact, eagles have been spotted in increasing numbers at Fontainebleau and South Toledo Bend State Parks over the last few years."

MOST VISITED PARKS

As you would expect, Reynolds says the top parks for attendance over the past few years have been the ones near large population centers.

"Based on a five-year visitation average our top two visited parks are

Fontainebleau SP outside Mandeville and Bayou Segnette SP south of New Orleans," he said. "After that, the rest of the top five in attendance are Poverty Point SP near Delhi, Chicot SP near Ville Platte and Jimmie Davis SP on Caney Lake near Jonesboro.

Reynolds says the bulk of visitors come to stay in cabins or to camp in RVs and tents. The next biggest draw is fishing, from small to large lakes to rivers and the Gulf of Mexico.

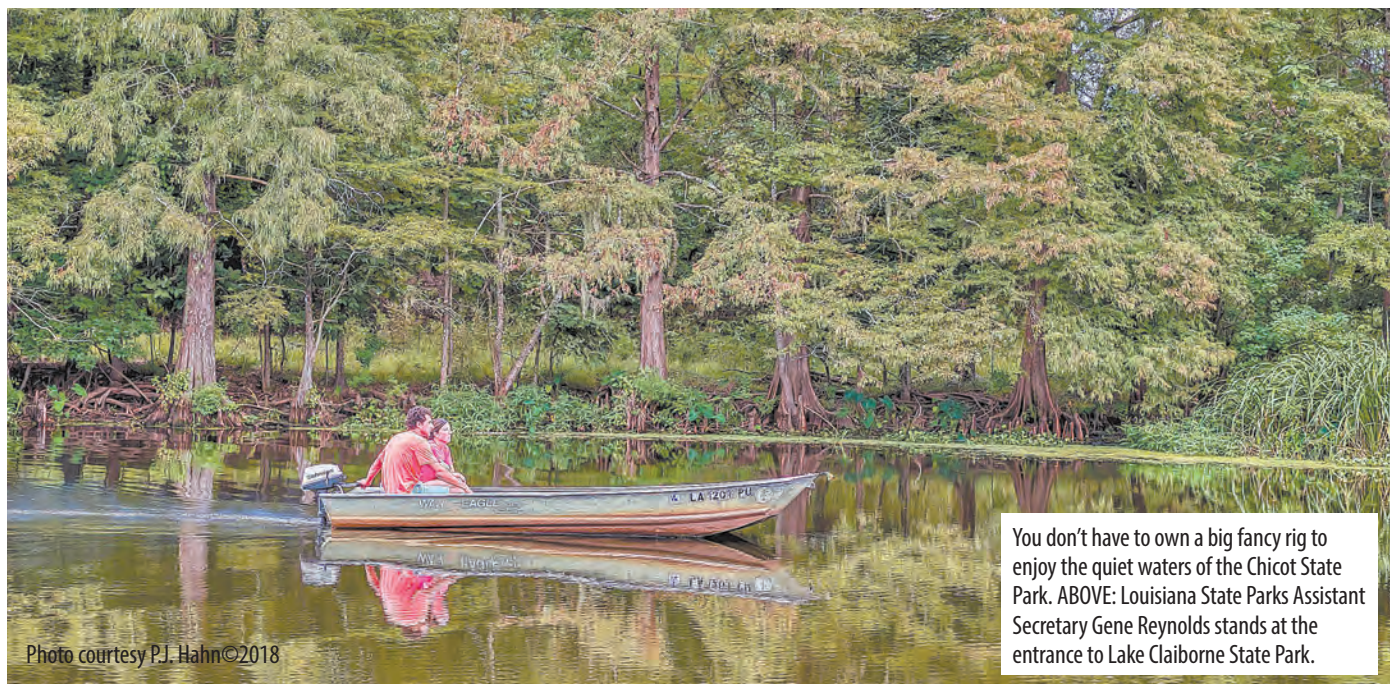
In addition to these activities, there are disc golf courses at five parks – Bogue Chitto, Lake Bistineau, Lake Claiborne, Lake D'Arbonne, and Sam Houston Jones State Park. Disc golf has grown in popularity across the nation, and the installation of these courses has brought in a new type of visitor. With more than 160 miles of trails, visitors can also hike, bike, and even ride horses through various natural settings.



SWIMMING ANYONE?

For water play, beaches at Bogue Chitto, Cypremort Point, Fontainebleau, Grand Isle, Jimmie Davis, Lake Bruin, Lake Claiborne, Poverty Point Reservoir, and South Toledo Bend State Parks are open year-round. Water playgrounds are open April through September at Bogue Chitto, Chicot, Fontainebleau, Lake Bruin, Lake Fausse Pointe, Palmetto Island, and Tickfaw State Parks. And when summer rolls around, the wave pool at Bayou Segnette State Park opens as do pools at Chemin-A-Haut, Lake D'Arbonne and North Toledo Bend State Parks; these pools are open Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day. ■

- Kinny Haddox



You don't have to own a big fancy rig to enjoy the quiet waters of the Chicot State Park. ABOVE: Louisiana State Parks Assistant Secretary Gene Reynolds stands at the entrance to Lake Claiborne State Park.

Photo courtesy P.J. Hahn ©2018



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MAP FEATURE:

STEVENSVILLE SAC-A-LAIT MAPPED OUT!

By Don Shoopman

OILFIELD CANALS AND WARMING WATERS ARE A HARD COMBINATION TO BEAT IN THIS FRESHWATER HONEY HOLE

There was silence as the slender, oblong cork slipped below the surface. Then followed an audible, slurpy pop as the cork, pulled under by a heavy sac-a-lait resurfaced noisily. The fun tug-of-war was on but eventually the angler behind the light tackle prevailed. Soon, Bill McCarty got his hands on the biggest, fattest sac-a-lait of a trip in mid-February to Stevensville. We were fishing the Duplantier Canal, also known as the “L” Canal, under budding cypress trees. The canal is part of a fish-laden maze of Union Oilfield canals near Stephensville. Duplantier Canal was the first of four destinations that included Barbier Canal and Pisani Slough, also in the Union Oilfield, and Hebert Canal in the nearby Oxy Field. >



POST SPAWN TACTICS

The takeaways from that scene are keys to putting sac-a-lait in the ice chest on the Stephenville side of the East Atchafalaya Basin Protection Levee: Oilfield canals, Hard hookset, Poppa Chop, chartreuse Crappie Nibble and budding cypress trees. The combination is hard to beat.

“They’ve got to feel the steel,” McCarty said.

The lifelong Morgan City resident caught a few on shiners but most on his favorite blue/white hair jig and a black/blue/chartreuse minnow-shaped soft plastic. After starting with shiners, he switched to the Poppa-Chop, which he fished 2-feet deep, and said, “It’s a good bait. I’ve caught a lot of fish on it.

“When you get the first one, there’s usually three or four (in the vicinity). Typically,” he said with a robust chuckle, “the trick is to get the first one. I just want to see the cork go under, like that!”

Sure enough, the orange/white cork did a diving act and he set the hook on a sac-a-lait. Then he proceeded to hook and boat many more, starting with that first sac-a-lait weighing about 1 pound. A few minutes later, one of the day’s heavier sac-a-lait bit and instantly felt the steel. The tussle on light tackle was the kind that keeps fishermen fishing but in the end the angler held a solid 1 ½-pounder.

“That fish hit it when it was sitting still,” he said after unhooking it, kind of. The hook, imbedded so well in the bony part of the mouth, broke.

“I’m like you. I thought that was a bass,” he said.

The biggest was caught soon after. It was a beauty by any standard. On this day quality overruled quantity.

“This is generally more a numbers game. But you’re also going to have what we have in there (the bigger sac-a-lait),” he said, noting there are plenty of slabs weighing “a couple pounds” lurking in the depths.

McCarty, 49, made deft casts with the Zebco on a baitcasting rod spooled with 6-pound test line. The casts required placement under branches and around trees and deadfalls with the occasional hangup.

“If you get aggravated every time you get hung up, this is not the game for you,” he said.



Bill McCarty of Morgan City holds two big sac-a-lait caught on a trip to the Union Oilfield and the Oxy Field in the Stephenville area in mid-February. They were caught on a blue/white Poppa Chop hair jig and blue/chartreuse soft plastic on Luck E Strike jighead.

He has an answer to hangups, one he made himself with a 1-inch diameter PVC pipe and wood at the end shaped like a V. It has saved many hair jigs, tube jigs, etc.

Some sac-a-lait weren’t eager to eat the hair jig or soft plastic jig he presented. Those fish just nibbled and stayed safely in the water. After one particularly agonizing nibblefest on a Poppa Chop, jigging the cork to and fro, McCarty said, “Oh, yes, it happens. They can be finicky, for sure. McCarty prefers the littlest cork he can get away with while jigging.

“A lot of times I’m hard-headed. If they don’t want to eat blue/white or black/

chartreuse, if they ain’t going to bite it,” he confided, the result is fewer, if any, sac-a-lait to show for his time on the water.

He retrieved the artificials and the shiners as close as possible to cypress trees and other wood. Sac-a-lait stay tight to the cypress trees and root system, he believed, to have a hard surface to lay their eggs.

Sac-a-lait relate to structure much like another popularly targeted gamefish in the Union and Oxy fields.

“Typically, a good place to catch a bass is a good place to catch sac-a-lait,” he said.

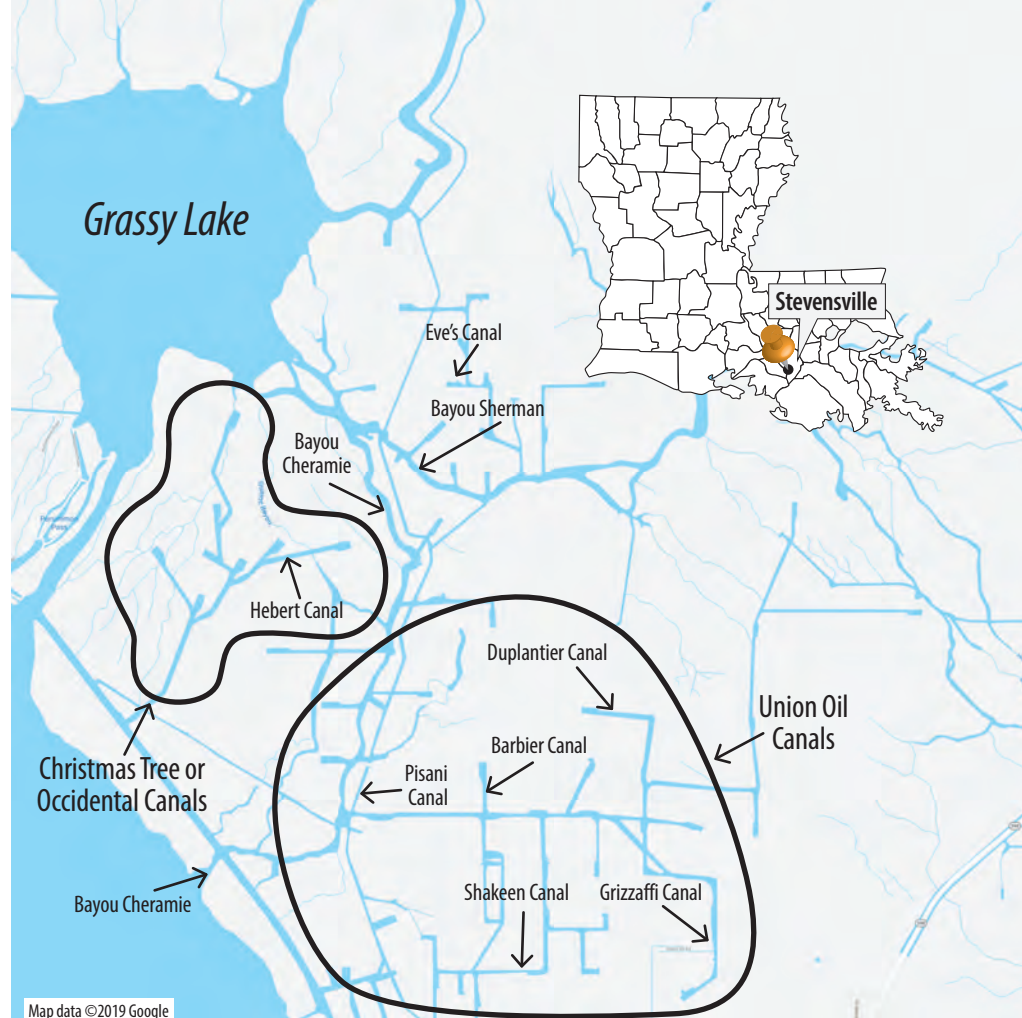
McCarty, an accomplished bass angler whose biggest bass is an 8-14 at Lake

Falcon in Texas, cut his sac-a-lait and bream fishing teeth as a boy with his father, Philip McCarty of Morgan City, and his uncle, Al Belaire of Morgan City. Many days found them, including Belaire's daughter, in the latter's small boat wetting a line in and around Stephenville.

One late winter or very early spring day in the 1990s, McCarty was fishing the Stephenville side with Dwight Barbier, his brother-in-law, and Dwight's father, "Mr. Mo," when they met an elderly fisherman in an Oxy Field canal who confided the sac-a-lait bite began two weeks earlier.

"We'd be in a canal catching and say, 'They finally started biting.' It seems like we were always two weeks behind. Finally, we ran into the old guy who told us when the cypress trees start budding, the sac-a-lait start biting," McCarty said.

"Yep, when the cypress trees start budding, it's usually Stephenville sac-a-lait time," he said.



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And the sac-a-lait bite is “pretty darned good” after the spawn, too.

“It usually is. It’s a time to eat and regain some strength. Something like this ought to be ideal in April” he said as he scanned the scenic shoreline.

The owner of WHM Services LLC, which conducts marine surveys on boats and barges, remembers limiting out many times in the days when the sac-a-lait limit was 50 per person. He’s had his fair share of trips with 25-fish limits over the past couple of decades.

He also put a handful of nice-sized bream in the boat, plus five bass up to 2 ½ pounds – the biggest giving him a battle royal on light tackle. His fourth and last stop of the day, one of his favorite long and narrow canals in the Oxy Field, usually is chock-full of bream but there were no takers while he fished for sac-a-lait.

“This is the canal we ran into that old man” who told the McCartys and Belaires about the correlation between the cypress trees budding and the start of good sac-a-lait fishing in the Stephenville area, he said.

That bream didn’t bite along with the sac-a-lait he caught that day in that canal surprised him. Regardless, he said, the bream fishing there and in other Oxy and Union canals should be red-hot in April-May.

“This is a good spot in late April. Oh, yeah, it’s a bluegill and chinquapin honey hole, too,” he said. ■



Don Shoopman fishes for freshwater and saltwater species mostly in and around the Atchafalaya Basin and Vermilion Bay.



ABOVE: Bill McCartney said he reties as often as possible when sac-a-lait fishing because he uses 6-pound test line. He has a plastic tray full of artificials and terminal tackle at the ready to do just that. INSET: McCartney shows a blue/chartreuse soft plastic on a 1/32-ounce Luck E Strike jighead that is one of his favorite artificials for sac-a-lait. BACKGROUND: McCartney, who enjoys catching sac-a-lait and bream as much or more as he does bass, talks about an area in the Union Oilfield in the Stephenville area as he fishes in mid-February.

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John Godwin with a slab crappie from Lake D'Arbonne on "hump day." INSET: The new Pro Series Crappie Magnet is going to be a hot bait this month, Godwin says.

IT'S HUMP DAY ON D'ARBONNE

Crappie are still spawning on flats in the middle of the lake

The crappie spawn is mostly over by early April in most areas, including Lake D'Arbonne at Farmerville. But some fish spawn out a little deeper and actually hang around all this month on the underwater humps on the 16,000 acre reservoir.

That's where famous duck hunter and crappie fisherman John Godwin likes to target them.

HUMPS ARE MAGNETS FOR CRAPPIE

"I love fishing the humps this month because there are still a lot of crappie coming up on them to spawn. The humps act like magnets to crappie this time of year.

Some fish spawn there and it isn't unusual to catch big females off the humps. But the big males will stay there guarding the nests on up into the month.

LOOK FOR THE FLATS

"Lake D'Arbonne has big open areas of water that look like it may all be deep water, but there are dozens of seven to eight foot flats out there. What you need

to look for is the humps that come up three to five feet deep," he says. "They really hold the fish."

Godwin's favorite approach to catching them is to long line across and around the humps with a 1/32-ounce Fin Spin lure going about one mile an hour. Long lining is like spider rigging, only you put the lures out of the back of the boat and troll with multiple lines.

ELECTRONICS ARE KEY

The keys are first, finding some fish. The best way to do that is locate the flats and the humps with your electronics. Second, make sure you know where your bait is and that it is at the right depth. A good rule of thumb is to cast the bait out about 40-50 feet behind the boat, engage your reel and put it in a rod holder with the rod up at about a 45-60 degree angle, keeping your eye on the rod tip for a "thump".

"There's nothing better than putting



out a few lines, sitting in your comfortable Millennium boat seats, watching your Hummingbird "TV" and catching crappie off the humps."

FAVORITE COLORS

Godwin's favorite colors are the Mermaid color (which is like bluegrass) black and chartreuse. The new Pro Series Crappie Magnet is just coming on the market, but Godwin says the prototype of it has been hard to beat.

There are still some good fish on the deeper trees in D'Arbonne this time of year. They are males, still guarding the nests, but they are very active and easy to catch if you put your bait right on the side of the tree, Godwin says. ■

- Kinny Haddox



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Fish with 1/48-ounce hair jigs or tube jigs when possible. If the current is strong, use a 1/32-ounce hair jig or tube jig.

9 HENDERSON HOTSPOTS

HERE'S A LIST OF THE PRIME DESTINATIONS FOR APRIL SAC-A-LAIT

Tie on a red/blue/chartreuse or red/black/chartreuse tube jig or hair jig, fish 2- or 3-feet deep (shallower if the spawn's still on) and chances are good to tussle with sac-a-lait averaging ½- to ¾-pound at one or more of nine hotspots hand-picked by one of the most experienced anglers on Henderson Lake.

That angler is Laurette Mequet of Cecilia, who along with her husband, Mitch, owns Cypress Cove Landing along the West Atchafalaya Basin Protection Levee. Mequet has been fishing the lake in St. Martin Parish since the late 1980s, much of the time by herself, learning when, where and how to put fish in the ice chest.

April ought to offer good sac-a-lait fishing success on the lake, she said.

"Sac-a-lait fishing should be good. We should catch them at the end of the spawn," Mequet said in mid-February. "If the spawn is not done, you want to fish 1 foot."

How can anglers tell if the fish are spawning still? She said the sac-a-lait, particularly the males, are darker, whether they're black crappie or white crappie.

She urged anglers to release females full of eggs.

Mequet, a sales associate 17 years at BoatCity USA in Henderson, had a ready list of the prime destinations for April, weather and water conditions permitting.

"I would fish in the **borrow pits** (George Dupuis Pit) first because when the water's up it's over the bank (on the levee side)."

Mequet also favors the **Butte La Rose Canal**.

At the latter, she said, start fishing the reed grass on the left shoreline as soon as you get in there because the sac-a-lait "hide up in there."

One of her other top favorites is **South Lake Bigeux**, where water skiers won't be out in numbers like they usually are because the water's still on the cold side. The most consistent pattern there is to pitch the artificials in the flooded woods

and work them out. The shoreline is a long one, she noted, and if you fish the length of it you eventually wind up in Pelba Bay.

Sac-a-lait anglers who don't mind getting in the thick of things should do well in **Lake Atotoy**.

"I also like to fish in Lake Atotoy around the buttonbrush trees, especially if there's some water lilies around them. That's good cover for the sac-a-lait. Now . . . the buttonbrush has a lot of sticks and wood, so it's easy to get hung up in there," Mequet said.

There are other areas to fish for sac-a-lait, for sure. Mequet also pointed anglers to the **Phillips Canal area, North Lake Bigeux above Interstate 10, Texas Canal, Opelousas Bay, and Five Points**.

Fish with 1/48-ounce hair jigs or tube jigs when possible. If the current is strong, use a 1/32-ounce hair jig or tube jig.

Overall, she said, Henderson Lake's sac-a-lait fishing still has its banner days, particularly in April.

"You have to fish a little harder for them than you used to. The water stays up more than it used to. And you have to fish a little harder because there's more fishermen out there," she said.

Acadiana's sac-a-lait fishermen who like a little competition with money on the line are regulars on Wednesdays for the Mequets' Take Dat Sac-a-lait Fishing Tournament each Wednesday out of Cypress Cove Landing. The entry fee is \$35 per boat (two anglers maximum). There is a three-fish limit on sac-a-lait, plus a trash fish pot. A dinner is served at the weigh-in. ■

- Don Shoopman

Cayden Meche of Duson, who loves to fish and hunt, shows off two "big hammers" he caught at Henderson Lake.





North Bigneux

Phillips Canal

Opelousas Bay

North Lake Bigneux

Borrow Pits

Texas Canal

Atchafalaya

Lake Atotoy

Lake Henderson

South Bigneux

Five Points

Butte La Rose Canal

Atchafalaya Basin

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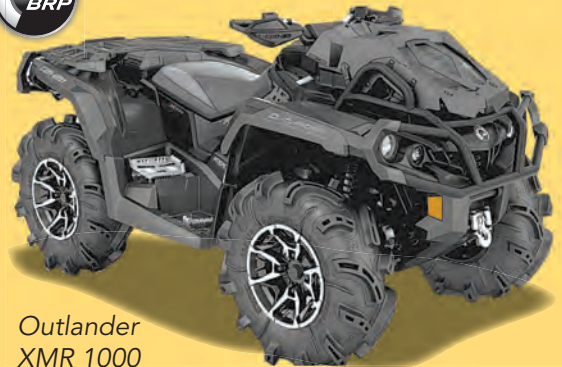
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In most places you'll fish, the desirable fishing hotspots and the underwater hazards you may have to traverse to get to them are two entirely separate things. But in Louisiana's inshore and near-shore waters, the two are often one and the same.

This is partially due to the uniqueness of Louisiana's coast. Our rapidly eroding coastline means that many structures that were onshore just a few years ago are now submerged and pose an underwater hazard. And it's partially due to shifting sandbars caused by strong coastal winds, tides and storms. And then there's the hazards left behind by some negligent oil companies that continues to wreak havoc on boat hulls, lower units and lives.

One of the areas where all of these hazards combine is East Timbalier Island, one of Louisiana's few remaining and rapidly disappearing barrier islands. Located just off the southeastern coast of Terrebonne Parish, the island is one of few that separates Timbalier Bay and the fragile marshes of Louisiana's mainland from the Gulf of Mexico.

A mere sliver of its former self, erosion and hurricanes have battered the island to near extinction. >

BY RUSTY TARDO

EAST TIMBALIER HAZARDS AND HOTSPOTS

WHEN THE TWO THINGS ARE THE SAME THING!



HUNDREDS OF ROCKS WERE DROPPED

Back in the 1980s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers attempted to buttress the island by dropping piles of huge break-water rocks along the 6 mile stretch along the gulf side of the island. Those rapidly sank, and today none of them protrude above the surface. Most now sit deep enough to safely navigate over. But in some spots they lurk just enough below the surface to be undetected except on very low tides.

These rocks have become a serious hazard and have collected many a lower unit.

When the big rocks sank and the shoreline retreated, The Corp dumped smaller rocks a good distance behind them to slow the erosion. Most of those also sank and pose additional underwater hazards, though in some places you can see them peeking just above the surface.

Add to that the huge concrete slabs that once anchored cell towers, a couple or three submerged walls of sheet pilings, numerous pipes and pilings and constantly shifting sandbars, and you have an entire submerged obstacle course.

THE ROCKS BARELY UNDER THE SURFACE ARE BEST

But what we deem underwater hazards, fish consider underwater habitat. That very same maze of rocks and sandbars and oilfield debris is home to some of the best speckled trout and redfish fishing in the state. Here in Louisiana, the hazards are the hotspots!

Today the sliver that's left of East Timbalier is broken almost in half, with a huge gap between the two parts.

Capt. Aaron, of Aaron Pierce Charters and inventor of the popular 4-horseman Corks, fishes the area regularly and is well aware of its underwater hazards.

"I tell everyone unfamiliar with the area to exercise extreme caution," Pierce said. "There are rocks and debris just below the surface that'll tear up your hull, rip off a lower unit and possibly cause someone serious harm.

You have to cut off your motor and troll carefully over 100 yards out from the island, and study your depthfinder. You'll see the hump when you pass over the deeper rockpiles, and those are good places to fish. But the barely-under-the-surface rocks are often the best spots of all. The key is to find them



Some rocks lurk just enough below the surface to be undetected except on very low tides. These are the ones that hold the most fish.

before they find you," he said.

How do you do that?

"Slowly and carefully," he said. "And once located, back as far off from them as you can while still able to reach them with a long cast."

COORDINATES OF THE KNOWN SHALLOW HAZARDS UP NEXT >

OH THE PLACES WE'LL GO

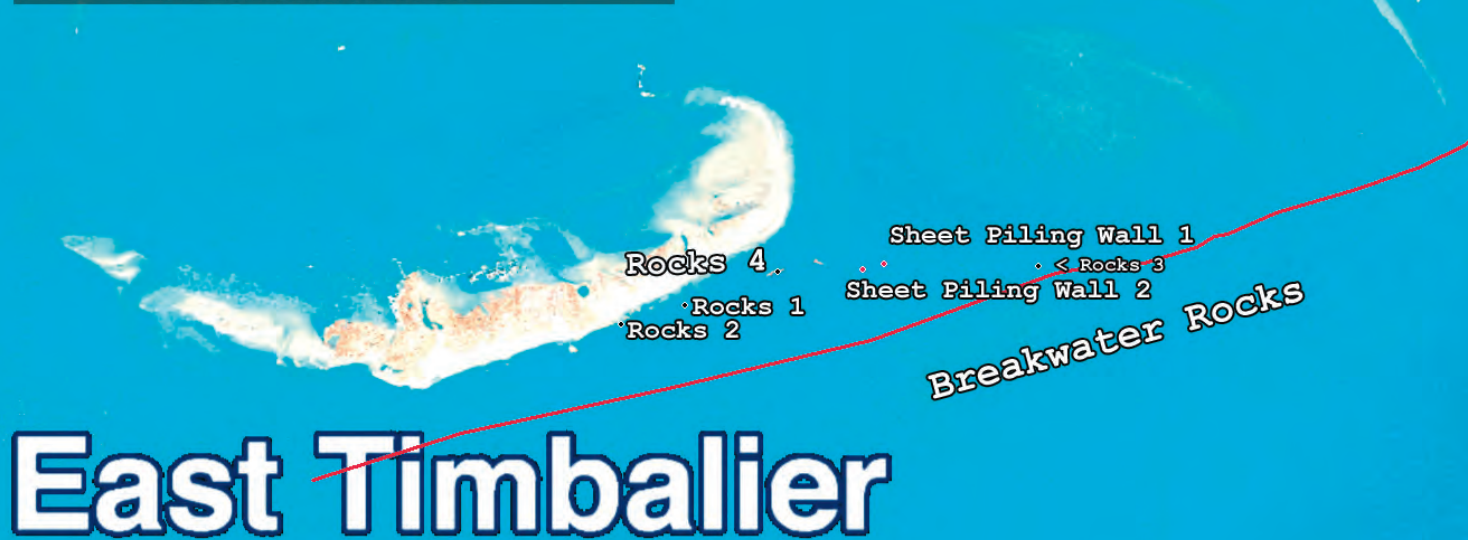


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East Timbalier

Image captured from the Standard Mapping e-card © 2019

COORDINATES OF THE KNOWN SHALLOW HAZARDS:

SUBMERGED BREAKWATER ROCKS

29° 04' 06.68" N, 90° 18' 09.55" W

SUBMERGED ROCKS

29° 04' 05.12" N, 90° 18' 56.23" W

29° 04' 02.05" N, 90° 19' 06.41" W

29° 04' 11.21" N, 90° 18' 32.97" W

29° 04' 10.30" N, 90° 18' 41.46" W

SUBMERGED SHEET PILING WALLS

29° 04' 11.71" N, 90° 18' 24.53" W

29° 04' 10.73" N, 90° 18' 27.96" W

SUBMERGED BREAKWATER WALL

29° 04' 31.3280" N, 90° 16' 51.4319" W

29° 04' 30.4496" N, 90° 16' 52.4136" W

29° 04' 27.0343" N, 90° 16' 59.3864" W

29° 04' 23.6194" N, 90° 17' 09.5060" W

29° 04' 19.8246" N, 90° 17' 22.3408" W

29° 04' 16.4845" N, 90° 17' 30.0289" W

29° 04' 16.1458" N, 90° 17' 32.0464" W

29° 04' 14.2885" N, 90° 17' 34.9868" W

29° 04' 13.8000" N, 90° 17' 36.8999" W

29° 04' 11.7998" N, 90° 17' 43.3000" W

29° 04' 10.9229" N, 90° 17' 53.2831" W,

29° 04' 10.1687" N, 90° 17' 57.3043" W

29° 03' 59.4738" N, 90° 18' 26.7156" W

29° 03' 51.9023" N, 90° 18' 58.8510" W

29° 03' 44.6890" N, 90° 19' 31.9051" W

29° 03' 37.2881" N, 90° 19' 55.5766" W

Bell Pass >

< 29 04 31.32N
90 16 51.43W

Outer Line
Breakwater Rocks
29 04 06.68N
90 18 09.55W

Rocks 1
29 04 05.12N
90 18 56.23W

Rocks 2
29 04 02.05N
90 19 06.41W

Rocks 3
29 04 11.21N
90 18 32.97W

Rocks 4
29 04 10.30N
90 18 41.46W

Sheet Piling 1
29 04 11.71N
90 18 24.53W

Sheet Piling 2
29 04 10.73N
90 18 27.96W

NOTE: All these coordinates are approximate and taken from the center of the hazard, and danger can extend out from the center in all directions for a good distance.

The Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries said they do not have the coordinates of any of the hazards in the area, and none of them are marked with poles, signs or buoys.

Capt. Chuck Comeaux of the Region 6 office in Thibodaux calls it a very hazardous area, but one that is already producing big trout.

He advises boaters to enter the area slowly and cautiously, or better yet, go with someone experienced and familiar with the area.



Timbalier Island

A GOOD ANCHOR SPOT IS KEY UP NEXT >

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- April 6 - FOGI Annual Meeting, GI Multiplex Center, 4:30 p.m.
- April 12-14 - Blessing of the Fleet, Tarpon Rodeo Pavilion
- April 12-14 - Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration & Cultural Weekend, Grand Isle School
- April 13 - Historical Home Tours, Grand Isle School
- April 13 - Grand Isle Rotary Club Wild Game Cookoff, GI Multiplex Center
- April 21 - Easter Sunrise Service, Artie's Back Bar Deck, 7:30 a.m.

MAY

- May 3-5 - Serenity by the Sea, Grand Isle School
- May 4 - 8th Annual Cruising the Beach Car Show, Tarpon Rodeo Pavilion
- May 4 - Paddle Palooza Kayak Tournament, Bridge Side
- May 17-18 - ABC Rodeo, Sand Dollar Marina
- May 17-18 - Stan Brack Black & Gold Classic, Bridge Side Marina/Wake Side Marina
- May 24-26 - Grand Isle Speckled Trout Rodeo, Bridge Side Marina
- May 25 - Island Wide Garage Sale, GI Community Center
- May 25 - E.D. White Rodeo, Sand Dollar Marina
- May 30-June 1 - New Orleans Electric Association Rodeo, Sand Dollar Marina

More event information at www.townofgrandisle.com.



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A GOOD ANCHOR SPOT IS KEY

Pierce said you'll ideally want to use the anchor feature on your fancy trolling motor because it's too deep for a power pole, and while you can anchor off in the sand, positioning the boat presents the challenge.

"Since I went to the i-Pilot I can position my boat right where I need to be and stay on that spot," he said. "When you have to use an anchor you just never seem to be able to fall in the right position.

"Next, the most important thing is a cork you can toss a long distance, and live bait under it, either croakers, shrimp or pogies."



Capt. Aaron Pierce holding a 4-pound permit he caught at the East Timbalier rocks.

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Pierce is also something of a fishing tackle entrepreneur, and co-founder of the 4 Horsemen corks, made for multiple applications but perfect for casting far distances such as here and known for the loud "popping" noises they emit.

"You can't bottom fish without snagging, but you can also try freelining a live bait, and if you're careful you can try throwing soft plastics, just cast and retrieve," he said.

Pierce says his go-to soft plastics are Matrix Shad's in either the Lemonhead or Green Hornet colors, but he said when the fish are there they'll pretty much hit anything you throw.

"But no matter how you fish it, be prepared to lose some tackle," he said.

WINDS AND SEAS

Pierce says the biggest challenge is actually the weather. "The fish will be there, and they'll eat up baits when you can get out there, but the winds make our windows of opportunity so limited," he

- MARCH 11 - Duke Gallagher caught this 25 3/8-inch
- mule speckled trout estimated to weigh 6 pounds on a
- live shrimp fishing with Guide Tommy Pellegrin.

said. "The area is so wide open in the gulf waters, there is just no protection from winds and seas.

"That means you have to pick your days. West winds are the worst for muddying up the water, and if a strong west wind has been blowing for days, it'll take at least two to three days for the water to clear up enough to fish. Ideally you want to fish winds of 5-10 mph. Up to 15 is iffy, over 15 forget it."

Pierce says he prefers fishing rising tides because they bring in clean gulf water, but falling tides will produce also.

BAYSIDE

Pierce says the bayside of the island is too congested with oil-field activity, shallow sandbars and debris to even bother.

"There are a numerous wellheads and platforms I fish a good ways off the bayside, and they produce trout and reds," he said. "But by far the best action and biggest fish are on the gulf side."

And, he added, don't be enticed to fish under the birds out there because all you'll catch is sailcats. ■

Contact Capt. Aaron at 985-637-9720 or visit his website at 4horsementackle.com.



Rusty Tardo grew up in St. Bernard fishing the waters of Delacroix, Hopedale and Shell Beach. He and his wife, Diane, have been married over 40 years and live in Kenner.



Photo by Capt. Tommy Pellegrin.

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COMPETITION DRIVES ACTION AT THE RIGS



The engineers who designed all of the well heads, tank batteries and oil rigs that dot the state's near-shore waters probably never thought once about all the fish that would be drawn to their structures. >

TOP: David Price of Luling fished the upcurrent side of this Fourchon Rig to land this big sow. RIGHT: Capt. Herk Bergeron of Pair-A-Dice Charters often finds specks at rigs in Timbalier Bay.



But these towers of tangled steel are more attractive to trout than a 9-pound sow dressed in high heels and a leather mini-skirt.

That's because the intricate and complex design of the structures gives baitfish plenty of shadowy crevices in which to hide as well as escape from fierce currents.

Anglers most often begin their search for trout at a rig by fishing the downcurrent side, but when tides are particularly swift, trout will typically congregate on the upcurrent sides of rigs.

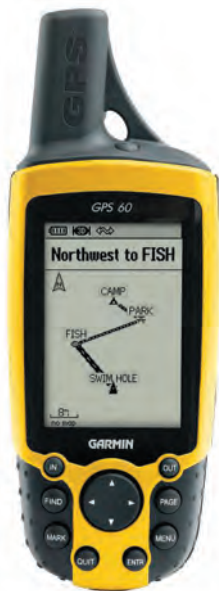
When tides are particularly swift, trout will typically congregate on the upcurrent sides of rigs.

Scientists aren't exactly sure why trout — and many other fish species — do this, but it probably has to do with competition, said Jerald Horst, retired LSU fisheries biologist.

"The upcurrent side of the rig is the first place to intercept creatures that are drawn to the structure," he said. "A trout doesn't exactly have a high IQ, but he's competitive enough to want to stay ahead of the pack."

Horst pointed out that this sometimes leads trout to position themselves 100 feet or more upcurrent of the structure.

During times of swift current, Horst explained, there will be an eddying effect even on the upcurrent side of the rig because the rushing water encounters water that has been blocked by the actual structure. This tends to disorient bait, which is advantageous for trout. ■



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- Port Sulphur
- Lakes Ponchartrain & Maurepas
- Calcasieu Lake
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Steven Wright



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A man wearing a green jacket and a cap with sunglasses on top is smiling and holding a large speckled trout. The fish is held vertically, showing its side and tail. The background is a bright, overcast sky.

DEEP BAYOUS

GET HOT AGAIN

TROUT ARE FOLLOWING BABY CROAKERS

Although springtime is when most anglers forget all about the inside bayous and target super-charged specks in the open bays, many fish remain in interior waters to feed on baby croakers.

These fish will be found in many of the same holes they inhabited during the heart of the winter.

The only difference is that they feed much more aggressively when tomatoes are ripening than they did when they were hanging tinsel on their Christmas trees. Rather than the dead weight wintertime anglers feel on the ends of their lines, springtime deep-water specks tattoo soft plastics; their strikes are unmistakable.

To find productive areas, look for deep water in bayous or at the intersections of canals. The fish will most often be oriented to a steep shelf, which anglers will typically find at the inside turns of bayous.

At canal intersections, the fish will likely be at one of the two upcurrent points.





The most productive technique is to position the boat slightly downcurrent of the bend, and cast upcurrent across the point. Use double-rigged grubs on ¼-ounce jigheads (3/8-ounce in very swift currents), and be certain the baits reach the bottom.

Baits that match croakers in color are most effective.

This pattern is productive until about the middle of May, when the croakers get big enough to abandon the relative safety of the deep holes, and head out to the bays.

STRONG TIDES MAKE INLAND TROUT EASY TO PINPOINT

Islands in open bays draw speckled trout in the late spring and throughout the summer like a neighborhood snow-ball stand draws sweaty kids.

Many anglers believe the islands serve as meeting places for amorous specks looking to spawn, but actually, that's a fallacy.

Because trout are batch spawners, they need to “hook up” in areas with high current velocities, and that's just not true of islands. Specks go there not because they provide good current but, quite to the contrary, because they provide good current breaks.

Although specks handle currents pretty well, the smaller fish that they feed upon — especially finger mullet — don't, and they must seek shelter from the swift water.

In moderate to strong tides, mullet will often be seen to line up behind tide breaks such as points on islands. For hungry speckled trout, this is like having a free night at the Ryan's all-you-can-eat buffet. Specks feast upon the hapless mullet, but the baitfish have no choice but to stay in the lee of the point. All each mullet can do is hope that the specks find its friends more attractive.

For anglers, hard-plastic plugs are particularly productive under such a scenario. Mullet-colored topwater baits will draw



Bogalusa Representative Malinda Brumfield-White and son Parker catch fish in a deep drop off along Coup Abel Pass.

heart-stopping strikes, especially throughout the late spring.

As the waters get hotter in July and August, anglers will find suspending baits like Catch 5s and Bomber Long A's to be more productive, especially in the early morning hours. In mid-day hours during the smoking-hot summer, live croakers or mullet are about the only baits these fish will bite.

In weak tides, the mullet flee from the current breaks and spread out in the bays, making the trout schools more difficult to find. ■



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SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

Dont overlook bright colors in overcast, clear water conditions. This 27 1/2-inch fish fell for a Double Bubble DD.

JUST BELOW THE SURFACE

THREE TWITCH BAITS THAT LURE UNCOMMITTED TROUT

In case you are following along, and for those new to the column, I mentioned in my opening article that I'll be discussing lures and techniques in an ascending manner.

Remaining true to form, we explored the middle part of the water column with various jerkbaits and as we progress to the surface, I would be remiss if I didn't discuss the zone just below the top.

Year after year at about this time, anglers start to unveil a seemingly neglected box of topwater plugs. Split ring pliers and fresh hooks often accompany a cold beverage of choice to the serenade of a Spotify playlist on workbenches or boats across the Gulf Coast.

Along those same lines, experience on the water during this time of year, proves to us that fish may not be as eager to reward our spirited intent. To help bridge that gap, insert this month's article.

The 6-8 inches of water just below the surface can be extremely productive if fished effectively and with specific purpose. Short strikes and swirls often confirm lack of fish commitment to surface baits, but providing the right lure targeting those mere inches remain invaluable.

Three lures I want to discuss to help you fish that part of the water column effi-

ciently is the Borboleta Lele, the Texas Custom Lures Mirrolure Double D and the tried and true Mirrolure 7M. Let's first talk about the Borboleta Lele'.

BORBOLETA LELE'

Produced by a company in the Southeast region of Brazil, Borboleta's self proclaimed most famous lure is the Lele. Smaller in stature (3 inches) compared to the other two lures, this bait not only produces plenty of bites but big ones as well.

Outfitted with No. 4 treble hooks and weighing 3/8 of an ounce, its unique shape provides not only great profile but excellent action. Designed to be twitched down on a steady 2-count cadence, the bait darts downward approximately 8-10" and floats back to the top.



Borboleta Lele

It can be fished on an accelerated walk the dog cadence, but most bites come on the pause as the bait retreats back to the surface. Speaking of floating back to the

surface, the Lele is slower than a 7M but faster than the Double D. In other words, if you wanted a smaller profile offering with an exaggerated ascent profile, this bait gives you that capability.

MIRROLURE 7M

The angling world is fortunate that the 7M exists. Decades ago, experienced anglers wouldn't be caught without the "topwater" capability of this ever so consistent bait, but somewhere along the way we lost our appreciation for this lure's fishability.

On a recent trip with 3-time IGFA World Record Holder for Speckled Trout on fly in various line classes, including the most recent, a 9-pound 2-ounce fish on 2-pound tippet, I asked Doc Jay Wright, "What is your favorite artificial lure to throw when looking for big fish?" Without hesitation, he says "a 7M" then reaches under the gunwale of his Hells Bay flats boat and pulls out a Spinning rod outfitted with a Mullet Color pattern 7M.

For those that haven't fished this bait or know its capability, it's very similar to the Borboleta Lele, but its ascent rate is very fast.

In other words, from the time you stop your twitch cadence, the bait retreats to the surface in less than a half second.

Having said that, this bait provides an exceptional offering and perfect solution to connecting with those fish that remain uncommitted to eating a surface plug.

Unlike the other two baits, it has three sets of treble hooks, which can be cumbersome, but can be adjusted. As stated,



MirrOlure 7m

the 7M is the subsurface extension of a topwater since it ascends so quickly, and a great “stand by” option on less committed topwater fish.

MIRROLURE DOUBLE D

Newer in terms of packaging and sales, this lure is the most recent to hit the market. Actually, many anglers outside of Texas have yet to see the Double D, let alone fish it exclusively.

Fortunately, Speckled Truth spans the angling reaches of Virginia to Texas and when I saw and understood this lure’s capability, it was a no brainer before it

started producing some large fish.

At first glance, people confuse the MirrOlure Double D with a MirrOlure MirrOdine XL (27MR) since its profile is the exact same. Fortunately, the internal mechanism is different and instead of sinking like the 27MR, the Double D floats back to the top after an angler’s twitch cadence.

Of the three lures discussed, this lure has the slowest ascent rate as well as dive depth (9-12”). The majority of the bites come on the exaggerated pause, which can be upwards of 3 seconds before surfacing.

In other words, this bait is a great cold water offering or when a more pronounced below the surface profile is to be achieved.

Having said that, do not be fooled by its slow fishability. Big fish in water temps as cold as 53 degrees have completely engulfed these baits at or near the surface after an exaggerated pause, and they do so with authority. Bottom line, add this lure to compliment your topwater arsenal when fish won’t commit — it’s the easiest decision you’ll ever have to make.

So, in a nutshell, below the surface twitch baits provide the perfect hybrid capability for those finicky spring top-

HOT TIP:

The 6-8 inches of water just below the surface can be extremely productive if fished effectively and with specific purpose.

water trout. If you haven’t explored these types of baits or their capabilities, I encourage you to do so and don’t forget about those critical inches just below the top — it can pay huge dividends.



Texas Custom Lures MirrOlure Double D

Until next month — Tight lines, God bless, take what you need and release the rest! ■



Chris Bush is an Air Force officer and a licensed charter captain, husband and father. He spends his time targeting big speckled trout and sharing knowledge on his website, Speckled Truth.



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4 RULES TO FISH BY ON LAKE MECHANT

Here's how Capt. Marty LaCoste consistently puts his customers on schools of hungry speckled trout in April

Capt. Marty LaCoste with Absolute Fishing Charters says if you're shopping for speckled trout from now through spring, he knows the places to shop and the rules for successful shopping.

"The speck action has already begun and it's only going to get better as we move farther into March and April, as the cold water warms and the bait shows up," he said.

"All the signs point to an early spring," LaCoste said.

By mid-March, anglers were already finding trout in a spring pattern.

"So if the rest of winter stays mild we'll have some outstanding action the next few months in the big lakes," he added.

LaCoste says he'll concentrate his efforts in Lake Mechant and just south of it, at four focal points.

RULE #1

"Look for birds," he said. "The shrimp show up as early as late February in mild winters, but either way they'll show up full force by April.

"That means the birds will be following and feasting on them from above while the trout maul them from below. We'll sneak into the fray and cast double rigged plastic minnows on ¼-ounce jigs, tight lined, and haul in the specks two at a time."

LaCoste says to look for birds over reefs and the mouths of bayous draining into any of the big bays.

RULE #2

Some of the best fishing will occur where water is draining from the marsh into the lake.

"Fish the mouths of any of the major bayous where they pour into Lake Mechant, and fish it on a falling tide," he said. "Same bait, double rigged, tight lined. Don't be fancy, just cast out and slowly retrieve. Don't bounce it or twitch it, just reel it in and the specks will slam-dunk it."

RULE #3

"Fish prominent points where you see current," he said. "It's always good if you see shrimp jumping, which means fish chasing them. But either way, try a

good current line when you don't see birds.

"In shallower water I'll fish a single rigged Matrix Shad, again, just cast and retrieve. I will occasionally use a cork, but this time of year we do 90% of our fishing by just casting out and using a slow but steady retrieve. In shallower water, just use a single rig so you don't hang up on the bottom. In water 3 feet and over, cast double rigs."

RULE #4

"Fish reefs— We often see birds over the reefs, but even when you don't this is the time of year the trout will forage over them, and your single rigged plastic minnow on a ¼-ounce jig will provoke the bite," he said.

As for conditions, LaCoste says you can catch fish on any winds, but west winds are the worst because they muddy up the water, and it's preferable if the winds are 10 MPH and under. And he says his favorite Matrix colors for spring are Glow, Green Hornet, Avocado, Shrimp Creole and Purple Haze.

- Rusty Tardo

Editor's note: For more info contact Capt. Marty LaCoste at absolutefishingcharters.com or 985-856-4477.



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CURRENT CONFUSION

By Todd Masson

Predicting tides is an exact science that isn't exactly exact.

If you're an angler who likes to spend your off days shrouded by green wire grass, with a rod in your hand and your foot on a the trolling-motor control, you've probably cursed us a time or two.

Go ahead and admit it: You've muttered under your breath about the good-for-nothing so-and-soes at Louisiana Sportsman and their worthless tide charts.

It's O.K.; we forgive you. At least you were kind enough to keep your comments to yourself rather than calling us and giving us an earful — like many of your fellow anglers have done.

Actually, we don't mind. We know how you feel. We've cursed the tide charts ourselves a time or two.

We've had days in which we knew we could catch a limit of trout over a particular oyster reef as long as the tide was

rising. We checked the trusty tide charts to discover when the tide would be rising, and scheduled our trip accordingly, only to find upon arrival that the tide was still falling when it was supposed to be rising.

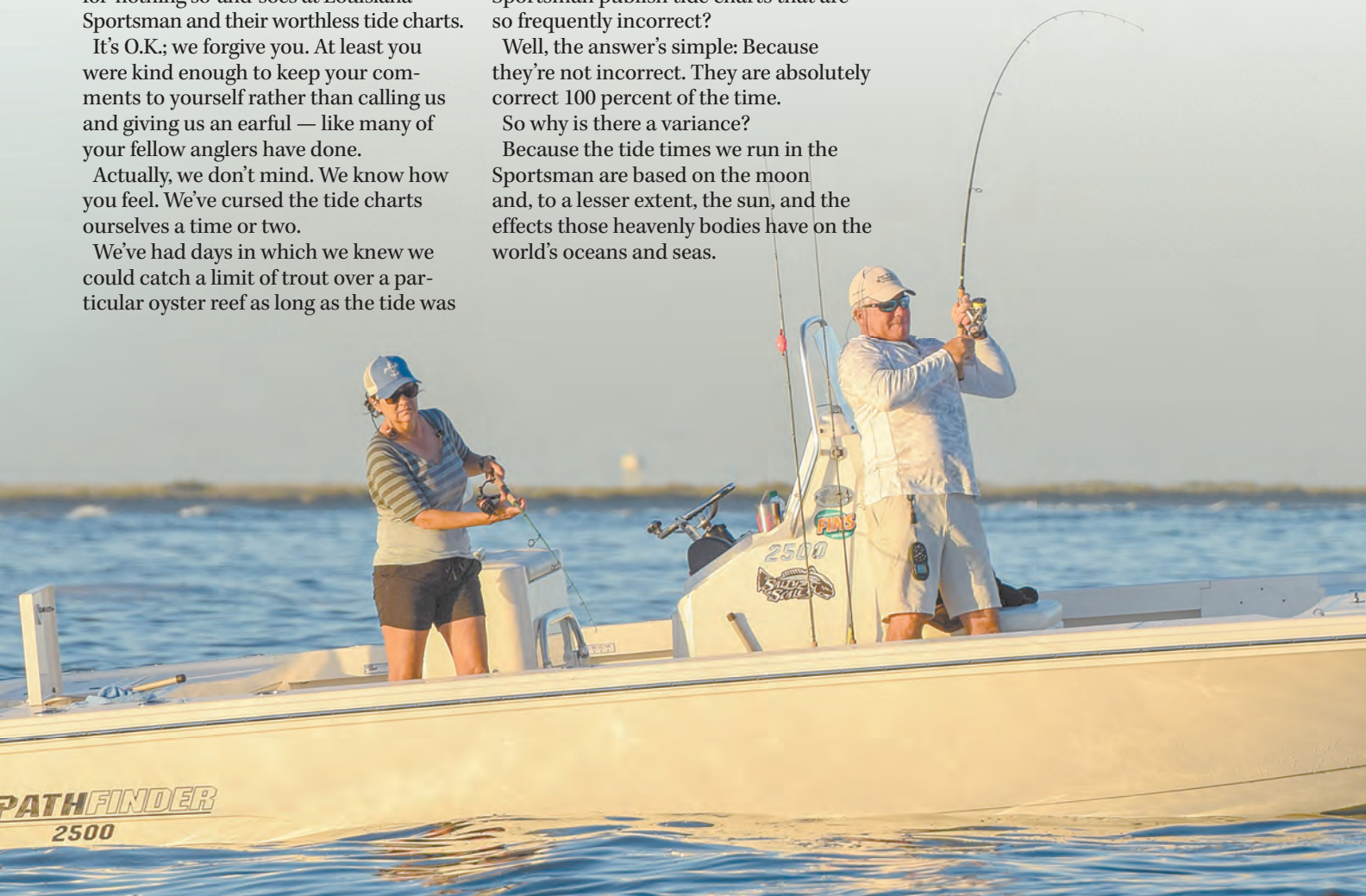
Hours later, it was still falling.

So what gives? Why would Louisiana Sportsman publish tide charts that are so frequently incorrect?

Well, the answer's simple: Because they're not incorrect. They are absolutely correct 100 percent of the time.

So why is there a variance?

Because the tide times we run in the Sportsman are based on the moon and, to a lesser extent, the sun, and the effects those heavenly bodies have on the world's oceans and seas.



Scientists can pinpoint to the exact minute the times when the tides will peak and valley at any point on the entire globe based upon lunar and solar influence.

WIND MATTERS

But what they cannot do to any similar level of precision is predict what impact atmospheric conditions will have on the tides at a given location.

To illustrate the point, let's consider an example.

Say a mutual friend of ours knows he can catch fish at Manila Village on a rising tide, so he checks the tide chart and discovers that the water should bottom out at 8:06 a.m. on Friday.

That's perfect; it'll be rising most of the day. So he calls three buddies, and tells them to meet him in Lafitte in the pre-dawn hours on Friday for some sure-fire speckled trout action.

On Thursday night, however, a late-spring cool front moves through, bringing strong north winds with it. Undaunted, he meets his buddies at the launch early Friday morning, and then

Tidal movement greatly affects the trout bite along the Gulf Coast. Jimmy and Matt Watkins caught these on an incoming tide.

motors to Manila Village to find the tide low and falling.

At noon, it's still falling, and his ice chest is still empty. Finally at 2 p.m., he gets disgusted and throws in the towel.

The tide didn't come anywhere close to doing what the Sportsman tide chart said it was going to do, and our good friend is tempted on his way home to make a stop at the magazine's office in Boutte and wring a certain editor's neck.

O.K., well that's an easy one. Most any angler who's been fishing the Louisiana coast for more than a day knows that a strong north or northwest wind will blow the water to Cuba.

DELAYED REACTION

But what about the days when you're out there and winds are calm. Shouldn't the tide then do exactly what the tide chart says?

Well, not necessarily.



Photo by Capt. Tommy Pellegrin

What many anglers don't consider is what the atmospheric conditions were like on the days leading up to their trip.

Let's continue with the above scenario. Say our friend gets home from his ill-fated trip, and now he's got a serious yearning to catch some fish. So he decides to forget about the trout and chase some redfish. He knows he can catch some reds on a falling tide in a favorite pond just north of Manila Village.

So he checks the tide charts for that Sunday. Low tide is at 10:18 a.m. That's not ideal, but at least he'll have four hours between sunrise and the bottoming out of the tide. That's plenty enough time to catch a limit of reds.

>>>



CURRENT CONFUSION

But our buddy has wised up. This time he checks the forecast as well, and Margaret Orr assures him that winds will be light and variable on Sunday. Perfect! He can't lose.

He pulls his cell phone out of his pocket, and calls his three buddies again. This time he promises them action. They somewhat reluctantly agree to meet him at the Lafitte launch on Sunday morning before the chickens are even stirring.

That morning, winds are non-existent. There's even a wisp or two of fog hovering over the surface of the water. Our buddy's got ants

in his pants. His friends spend the car ride home carefully choosing the words they'll use the next time our buddy calls to invite them fishing.

But actually the tide charts weren't wrong at all. The moon and sun were doing their best to pull the water from our buddy's pond all the way until 10:18 — or at least a couple of minutes thereafter (more on that in a moment) — but the atmospheric conditions wouldn't allow it.

But how can that be? Weren't the winds negligible?

Indeed they were, but they were anything but on the two days leading up to our buddy's trip.



Winds can greatly affect how much tides rise and fall.

in his pants. He can't wait to be sitting at his favorite trenasse mouth throwing live cocahoes to schools of marauding redfish.

But lo and behold, he pulls into his favorite pond to find the water is rising.

Six hours later, he returns to the launch with a sunburned neck, a lone sheepshead in the cooler and a catfish sting on his ring finger. He spends the car ride home carefully choosing the words he's going to use in his post on louisianasportsman.com telling anyone who'll read it how worthless the Sportsman's

The strong north winds had blown a significant amount of the water out of the Barataria Basin. The tide didn't rise for two days.

Then when the winds relented, the water level began to equalize. All that water that had been blown into the Gulf slowly returned to the "vacuum" that existed in the basin. Although the tide was supposed to fall at Manila Village until 10:18 a.m., it actually bottomed out much earlier, and it didn't stop rising for 36 hours.

>>>



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Aubrey Hyde caught this nice trout fishing the Terrebonne Bay area.



Photo by Capt. Tommy Pellegrin

Why our snake-bitten buddy didn't abandon the reds and go try the Manila Village trout on the rising tide, we don't know. Some people are just that way. They couldn't catch fish with a dip net in a pet-store aquarium.

So it's obvious that winds have a profound impact on our tides, but they're not the only atmospheric conditions that affect when our waters fall and rise. High- and low-pressure systems also serve to push and pull tides, depending upon where they're located.

A high-pressure system over the Gulf, for instance, will put pressure on the water's surface there, which will cause tides to rise — or, at least, not fall as substantially — along the Louisiana coast.

A low-pressure system will have the opposite effect. As Katrina and Rita demonstrated on an extreme scale, a low-pressure system raises the water level under it. If the low-pressure system is located over our marsh, then the tides will be higher than they would have

been without it. If, on the other hand, it's located out in the Gulf, our tides will be lower because the water will be "sucked" into the low.

All of these atmospheric conditions are at play every day to some degree, and their impacts on our tides range from negligible to profound. And they obviously can't be predicted by any chart.

CHOKES POINTS MAKE TIDES UNRELIABLE

Complicating matters further is the fact that Louisiana's coast is among the most intricate in the world. Every bay is connected to a lake that's connected to a bayou that's connected to a pond that's connected to a canal that's connected to a trenasse, and all of those choke points constrict water movement, which makes the tides exponentially more vulnerable to the impacts of the atmosphere.

That means the tide charts are much less reliable at an inland area like the Paris Road Bridge than they are at a point much nearer the Gulf, like Bayou Rigaud.

The water has to pass so many choke

points on its way in and out of the marsh that anything can happen, and any change in the atmosphere will alter that tidal flow in some way.

So are the tide charts worthless? Certainly not. We at the Sportsman check them before scheduling any fishing trip. But we use them as a general guide, and we try to guess how recent

atmospheric conditions — winds especially — have impacted the tides, and how that might alter what we find when we're out on the water.

Sometimes our calculations are right; other times we go home scratching our heads wondering where we erred in our "educated" guesses.

We'll never be right 100 percent of the time, but isn't that what makes fishing fun? If an angler had everything figured out, and all of his plans always worked, he'd find a new hobby.

And if you ever think you get this whole tide thing mastered, spend a few days on Lake Pontchartrain with a watch and a tide chart.

Humbling, ain't it? ■



Todd Masson has covered outdoors in Louisiana for a quarter century, and is host of the Marsh Man Masson channel on YouTube.

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FISH BITE TURNS ON IN COCODRIE

Speckled trout, black drum, redfish and sheepshead all easy targets

Fishing guide Tommy Pellegrin with Custom Charters has been slamming the fish in the Terrebonne Bay area. Since January, he and his son Capt. Eric have caught over 1000 trout and plenty of redfish, black drum and sheepshead.

"The sheepshead are really fixing to turn on at the wellheads as they move in to spawn and you'll be able to catch them even on artificial during April," Pellegrin said.

WINDY? FIND PROTECTED WATERS

When Pellegrin brought Rusty Critselous

and his grandson Hudson Brister from Ruston fishing, he fished a pattern that he expects to last through April.

"I wondered how the fish would react with the wind up and the fog thick, but it didn't take long," he said. "I didn't go to the honey hole because the wind was wrong so I tried some protected reefs and every one we went to had trout on it."

Many islands on maps no longer exist because of erosion, Pellegrin added.

"Now, they are essentially oyster reefs. All of those reefs can hold good fish in the month of April and as the water warms

Fish for black drum and redfish at the wellheads.



Photos by Capt. Tommy Pellegrin

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Hudson Brister from Ruston said that his hands and arms were hurting too much to catch any more fish. He's pictured here with his grandpa, Rusty Critselous.



up the fish will begin moving to the outside of the islands into the Gulf," he described. A strong incoming tide kicks the fish into feeding mode according to the long-time Houma fishing guide.

LIVE SHRIMP GUARANTEE

"It sure was nice to see the numbers of small trout because last year we didn't have very many," he said. "With little Hudson on the boat I brought live shrimp for the first time this year and it paid off for him. I always do what it takes to get the kids catching. It was amazing that the fish could find a 100 count shrimp in stained water so fast."

REEFS, ROCKS OR WELLHEADS?

Pellegrin has been catching his trout on the reefs and rocks and his reds on the wellheads. He added that the black drum are also all over the well heads and that he expects fishing in the Terrebonne Bay area to remain good until July. He said this pattern will last until it gets hot.

"Rusty asked about reds for Hudson and how close we were to a limit of trout," Pellegrin said. "I told him we were at 44 in the box. He said let's get to 50 and go after the reds. By the time I turned around again we had 55 and shut it down."

On that particular day, the guide's first stop at a wellhead only produced drum around 15 pounds so he moved just a little and found the reds.

"At one point Hudson said that his hands and arms were hurting too much to catch any more fish," he said. "Music to my ears. That is how I know

that I have a kid hooked on fishing for life."


He added, "Again, the Berkley Rattle Shrimp in Coastal Candy was the plastic of choice with live shrimp catching their fair share. The trout fishing is real good right now so don't wait till summer. Come get you some now." ■ - Ann Taylor

For more information about guided fishing trips with Capt. Tommy Pellegrin, you can call him at 985-851-3304 or visit his website at www.customchartersllc.com.




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TO FIND TROUT AT POINTE-AUX-CHENES THIS SPRING

With the relatively warm, wet, dreary winter Louisiana has experienced so far this year, Capt. Ronnie Lisotta is expecting some serious speckled trout action this spring — and it should really start ramping up this month.

“April is going to be really good this year,” said Lisotta, with Shoreline Charters out of Pointe-aux-Chenes. “Trout will be early this year because of the hot weather. It’s already been

feeling like summertime. If it stays hot like it’s been, the trout are going to be out in the lakes.”

Based on the weather and catches earlier this year, the veteran charter captain said he wondered if specks ever migrated deep into interior marshes this winter.

“In my opinion, I don’t think they ever came in like they normally do. Last year was a tough time fishing. I think what happened is we had a fish kill that put a damper on fishing

After last winter’s freezes and some tough trout fishing in 2018, Capt. Ronnie Lisotta has great expectations for solid specks like this one this spring.



Photo courtesy of Capt. Ronnie Lisotta



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with a couple of those big freezes, and I think it hurt the fishing," he said. "But that happens every seven or eight years — you have a big freeze, and then the fish come back strong."

Lisotta said anglers were already catching trout out in Lake Felicity and Lake Chien in February, and the Sulphur Mine in Lake Pelto was producing earlier than normal as well.

"That's unusual for this time of year, and it shows summer could be here a little early this time," he said.

If you want to target specks out of Pointe-aux-Chenes this month, Lisotta listed his top three areas to target, and how he fishes them:

1. THE POWER LINES

Just a few hundred yards from Pointe-aux-Chenes Marina on Highway 665, Lisotta said the power line area was a great place to target — and you don't even have to crank up your big motor.

"If you have a trolling motor on your boat, that's all you need from Pointe-aux-Chenes Marina," he said. "When you leave the marina, head south and you'll run straight into the power lines about 300 yards away. You can't miss them."

Lisotta said he targets the main canal and the bay behind the power lines with a Berkley Rattle Shrimp or a Vudu Shrimp under a popping cork in the shallows, and tight-lines artificials in the middle of the bayou, which can range from about 17 to 20 feet deep.

2. LAKE FELICITY AND LAKE CHIEN

When he heads south to these big lakes, Lisotta likes live bait — and if he can get croakers, so much the better.

"In April, you have to cast net for them and go get them yourself," Lisotta said. "But if you can get some live croakers, that's key. I hook them through the dorsal fins, and fish them

on a Carolina rig with a 2/0 kahle hook on the bottom with a 1/4-ounce lead head around structures in the lakes like platforms.

"There's a lot of snags, but the way I see it, the more snags you get, the better the fishing is," he said. "With live croakers, you'll catch 2- and 3-pound trout."

3. BAY BILLIOT

Live shrimp, croakers or artificial shrimp also are the way to go in Bay Billiot, which is located east of Lake Chien.

"They have some structure inside there — a couple of sunken boats — that you can fish that produce some big trout," he said.

And if chasing down bull reds is your

thing, Pointe-aux-Chenes is a great location to target in April, Lisotta said.

"You can catch bull reds — some 25- and 30-pounders — at just about any deep hole using cracked crab and cut mullet on the bottom, and you can catch big drum at the same time on cracked crabs," he said. ■

- Patrick Bonin

Editor's Note: For more info, contact Capt. Ronnie Lisotta with Shoreline Charters at 985-688-2772, or visit his website at www.shorelinecharter.weebly.com.

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29-INCH SPECK CAUGHT IN MARCH NEAR LAUNCH

Among friends and relatives, Ted Samanie is known as “the man” in Schriever when it comes to speck fishing, and his latest achievement might spread word of his title to more of south Louisiana. On Friday, March 31, 2017 he bagged a speck that measured 29 inches and reportedly weighed a touch heavier than 10 pounds.

Samanie and his partner Brent Verdin, also of Schriever, were fishing close to the ramp in Pointe-aux-Chenes and were on their way to a limit when Samanie thought he hooked a shark.

“He said, ‘I think I’ve got shark,’ and I told him that ain’t no shark,” Verdin said. “When he got it a little closer to the boat, I got the net and scooped the fish up. When I got it into the boat, the bottom of the net ripped out.”

The pair put the monster on ice and resumed working on their limit. According to Verdin, there was never any question as to what would happen to the fish.

“Ted said he’d rather eat it than it collect dust on the wall [as a mount],” he said.

While fish of this size are unusual, the spot Verdin and Samanie



were fishing has a record of kicking out larger-than-average fish. Verdin heard about the spot from his cousin who has pulled 26- and 27-inch trout from it.

The duo was tight-lining soft plastics along the bottom when the beast struck. All told that day, they caught 41 fish.

“Usually when we go, we take turns beating each other,” Verdin said. “Sometimes he’ll catch more than other times I will, but that time he put a whipping on me.” ■

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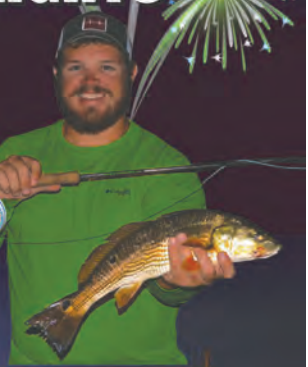
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PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

Chris Holmes

FISHING ON THE EDGE

KAYAKERS CAN FIND HUNGRY BASS AND REDFISH SKIRTING THE WATERS OF THE MUDDY MISSISSIPPI.



Chris Holmes has kayak fished in the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and many places in between. He can be reached at cholmes@att.net.



Normally when talking about a marsh fishing trip in southeast Louisiana, anglers mean catching speckled trout and redfish. However, with seemingly permanent salinity changes in many areas, marsh fishing increasingly means fishing for redfish and bass (called green trout by many).

While Venice's unique proximity to the Gulf of

Mexico and the mouth of the Mississippi River has always experienced such a mix, other areas of Plaquemine's Parish are joining suit.

On the east side of the river, a crevasse developed several years ago that was named Mardi Gras Pass to coincide with the day it was discovered. Since then, this natural diversion has sent river water into many areas and changed the mix of habitat and common species.

CONTINUES >

This bass was caught in east Pointe-a-la-Hache working a LiveTarget Hollow Body Mullet across the top of grass beds.



PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued



POINT A LA HACHE

Although there are not many public launch areas, kayak anglers can put in at Beshel's Marina in Point-a-la-Hache and take the back levee canal to access a large complex of ponds and bays.

The river water keeps the area muddy-looking often, but lots of submerged aquatic vegetation helps filter the water. Look for coves and pockets where the grass thrives and the water gets clear fast.

WHERE TO GO

When the river is high, the water in the area is naturally fresher, many kayakers head north. After a mile, the back levee canal leads to a pipeline that kayakers can use to get into Bay Schayot, Bay Caquin and several bayous and pond complexes. If the river is low, go south in the back levee for about half a mile to paddle into Felicity Bay.

On a recent trip with the high river, reds and bass were located in the clearer ponds around Bell Bayou. Early in the morning, topwater baits worked over grass beds brought explosive action from both bass and redfish.

Weedless topwater baits like a LiveTarget Hollow Body Mullet and plastic frogs worked well by crawling them across the large expanses of grass.

As the sun came up, fishing the deeper edges of the grass with spinnerbaits and gold spoons also produced both bass and reds. While speckled trout may also be caught in the same areas and on the same lures, there is a better chance of catching them later in the summer when the river has gone down and the salinities rise.

Fortunately redfish are extremely fresh-water tolerant and mix and mingle with bass in the area. Many redfish lures were born out of the bass fishing world and can be used interchangeably to catch both.

BAITS THAT WORK

However, redfish have strong crushers that can wreck lighter lures.

When fishing these areas, it is best to use lures with salt-water grade construction to avoid having them destroyed when a red hits instead of a bass. Heavier wire, split rings, and hooks are usually the main



This red hit a Z-Man Trout Trick tail rigged on a Weedless Eye jighead for ease of working through the grass.



Topwater plugs attract both bass and hungry reds alike. Using stronger hooks and split rings help keep from destroying the lure and losing the fish if a red strikes instead of a bass.

construction difference. However, the general categories of topwater, spinnerbaits, spoons, soft plastics and crankbaits all fool bass and redfish equally well.

The Texas-rigged plastic worm is a staple for bass fishermen. However, it also works well on redfish. The weedless design and quiet entry keeps from spooking reds that are hiding in thick cover.

Grass is the key for finding co-mingled

bass and reds. Even though it may seem impenetrable, the fish use pathways below to easily travel through. Working your lures along the edges and through small holes and cuts is the key to getting in the strike zone.

VENICE

The bass fishing in Venice has been legendary for years, but many think of the

river and its many large passes, which are no place for a kayak. However, combat launching off of Tidewater road provides access to the famed Wagon Wheel and nearby bays.

While the wheel area has greatly eroded over the years, it still provides good areas for both bass and redfish. Some areas have silted in which prevents access by powerboats, but is not an issue for kayakers.

Large expanses of Roseau cane provide cover for a variety of baitfish which in turn keeps hungry bass and reds in the area. Flipping plastic baits into the edges of the canes is a great technique to catch both species.

All lures and techniques mentioned above also work great in this area. Also, don't overlook using a popping cork with Gulp or your favorite plastic tail.

The good news is that there really isn't a big learning curve for those kayakers that come from the bass fishing side or those that come from the red fishing side. Use your standard techniques and you can easily put together a nice stringer of both. ■

Author's Note:

At the time of this writing, the Mississippi River is extremely high and at or above flood stage for many Louisiana areas. The Bonnet Carré Spillway was recently opened to help reduce water levels and relieve pressure off of the levees. Areas mentioned in this article are currently receiving high volumes of fresh water which may adversely affect fishing. You may need to paddle further away from the river for better opportunity to find clearer water.

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Redfish thrive in brackish water and will be feeding like crazy as the water warms up this month. Inset: In April, redfish often gravitate toward fresh river water. Here's Ryan Bourgeois with a bronze-colored bull.

DELACROIX'S HIGH RIVER REDS



AN INFLUX OF RIVER WATER BOTHERS ANGLERS WAY MORE THAN DELACROIX REDFISH

Delacroix has become the unofficial redfish capital of Louisiana. Many redfish tournaments are held here each year, and tournaments held in other areas are often won by anglers who make a long run to the Delacroix area.

This fertile marsh is teeming with hungry redfish, and at times fishing for them can almost seem too easy.

With its shallow depth, and clear water, Delacroix is often the perfect environment for sight-fishing redfish. That being said, in recent years, the Mississippi River has drastically influenced fishing in this area, especially during the late winter and springtime. A breach in the levee called Mardi Gras Cut to the south, and the Caernarvon Freshwater Diversion to

the Northwest both allow water from the Mississippi River to flow into the marshes of Delacroix affecting water salinity, clarity and temperature.

The good news is, unlike their cousin the speckled trout, redfish thrive in lower salinity water. Redfish have an excellent sense of smell, and are capable of feeding in extremely low clarity water. And feed they do because besides the fresh, muddy water, the Mississippi dumps tons of baitfish and other food into the Delacroix marsh.

FIND SUBMERGED VEGETATION

Avoid muddy conditions by leaving the main canals and bayous and heading into backwater ponds where coontail and hydrilla further filter the water. In this tidal system, daily flushing keeps the oxygen content freshened, but it's best to avoid the choked and stagnant water of dead-end canals or sloughs.

This fresh water also grows acres of submerged vegetation, which creates additional structure and helps to filter the water, clearing it up in the process. In spite of all of the river water, anglers who make

some slight adjustments to their fishing strategy to target these areas rich in hydrilla and clearer water can catch limits of redfish in April.

With the Mississippi River running extremely high during the springtime three of the last four years, savvy Delacroix anglers have a solid track record of how it affects fishing.

Chris Pike Jr., who owns and operates Cast and Blast Charters, fishes the area extensively. When asked how river water affects redfish, Pike was happy to share some tips.

"Early in the year (February and March) redfish will often avoid river water because it is a few degrees colder; but in April, they often gravitate toward it," he said.

This might seem counterintuitive, but Pike went on to explain.

"The fresh water typically clears much faster than salt water, and is loaded with pogies, which the redfish are feeding on heavily at this time of year," he said. "Even if the water isn't clear, anglers can still successfully catch redfish using other methods, such as bait or Berkley Gulp suspended under a popping cork."



CATCHING FISH DESPITE A COLD AND WINDY DAY IN DELACROIX

Johnny Schmidt, an avid fisherman and certified diver from Covington, scored big with redfish on a cold morning, in a bay south of Oak River in the Delacroix marsh.

Schmidt said he and his friend, Mandy Montreuil, grabbed the boat and headed to Delacroix for a fishing trip, but the weather was foggy and cold. They stopped at Sweetwater Marina while waiting for the fog to lift and ran into Capt. Casey Brunning of Hurricane Bay Charters.

"We started talking and I asked him what he recommended when fishing on a windy, foggy, cold day," Schmidt said. "He told me that on a day like this, use a .25 ounce jig head with shrimp under the cork and on the hook and to fish wind-blown points."

Casting your line along the bank as the wind blows the water against the bank is a technique used to fish wind-blown points.

Schmidt and Montreuil rode down to Ponton Bay in 50-degree weather with the wind whipping. They adjusted their lines under the corks so that the bait stayed on the bottom.

Within the hour, fish starting tugging at Schmidt's line. In a 4-hour fishing trip, he said he caught one bull red, seven slot reds, 36 rat reds and two bass.

"I changed from a regular hook to a jig head and I had a blast on a cold and windy day. There is nothing better than catching fish all day," Schmidt said. ■

- Gina Rivere

Pike's advice mirrored my own experiences, as I've often had great success catching redfish during April and early May in areas of Delacroix that many would consider more suitable for bass.

AREAS TO TARGET

When asked what areas he generally fishes during the month of April, Pike was happy to offer some additional advice.

"Generally, some great areas to target in Delacroix during the month of April are the North shoreline of Grand Lake, the area around the Garigue, and Lake Fausan," he said. "These areas have consistently yielded good catches the last several years, and are not too difficult to get to."

Capt. Charlie Thomason said he catches redfish throughout the Delacroix marsh, but he finds his best action within a 3-square-mile area around Four Horse Lake.

"This area gets a lot of water flow, and all of the small ponds and bayous are like veins through the marsh," he said. "With all the grass we have there and the baitfish, all those variables come together to make a pristine habitat for those fish to live in year-round."

Other hotspots include Lake John, Lake Lery, Grand Lake and Lake Robin. To newcomers, it all looks fishy, but the redfish definitely have their preferences.

Thomason prefers fishing in and around natural bayous that bring food sources with the tides.

In April, many redfish move to the outer edges of bays and lakes such as Oak River Bay and Lake Campo to feast on the mullet, pogies and shrimp gathering there.

Target the outside bends of bayous and canals and look for steep dropoffs where you're in 12 feet of water 5 feet off the bank. Reds will lie in that deep water and look for food to wash over them.

LURES

When asked what lures he recommends, Pike responded "Use something that you have confidence in, and that matches the conditions."

Building on Pike's advice, my personal

favorite and go-to lure for redfish is "The Secret" weedless gold spoon by H&H Lures. This spoon comes with a ball bearing swivel attached, and a unique red plastic cap which slides over the swivel, streamlining the lure and covering the tag end of the knot. The red plastic cap is a game changer, because with other weedless spoons, the exposed tag end often catches grass, snagging up and causing redfish to shy away from them.



"My personal favorite and go-to lure for redfish is "The Secret" weedless gold spoon by H&H Lures," said Sammy Romano.

Other lures to try are suspending baits, shallow diving crankbaits and topwaters for fast action on artificial.

Although this year's high river presents some challenges when it comes to speckled trout fishing, catching limits of redfish should be no problem in the Delacroix marsh. ■

- Sammy Romano

For a great trip, contact Capt. Chris Pike Jr. at Cast and Blast charters (504)427-4973.



THE MANY BENEFITS OF USING **ARTIFICIAL SHRIMP**

By David A. Brown

The artificial version of this popular coastal crustacean offers a wider array of performance than the real deal.

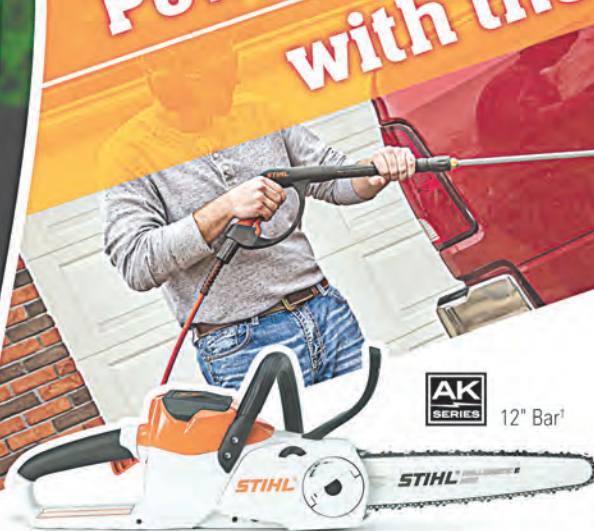
In 1968, Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell told us: “Ain’t nothing like the real thing, baby.”

Well, that’s kind of like the adage: “All that glitters is not gold.” I get the point, but factually speaking, gold glitters; so the syntax is incorrect. A more accurate statement would be: “All that glitters is not, necessarily, gold” or “Not all that glitters is gold.”

And to quickly connect this to fishing, Gaye and Terrell probably weren’t including shrimp in their message. Reason being, the artificial version of this popular coastal crustacean offers a wider array of performance than the real deal.

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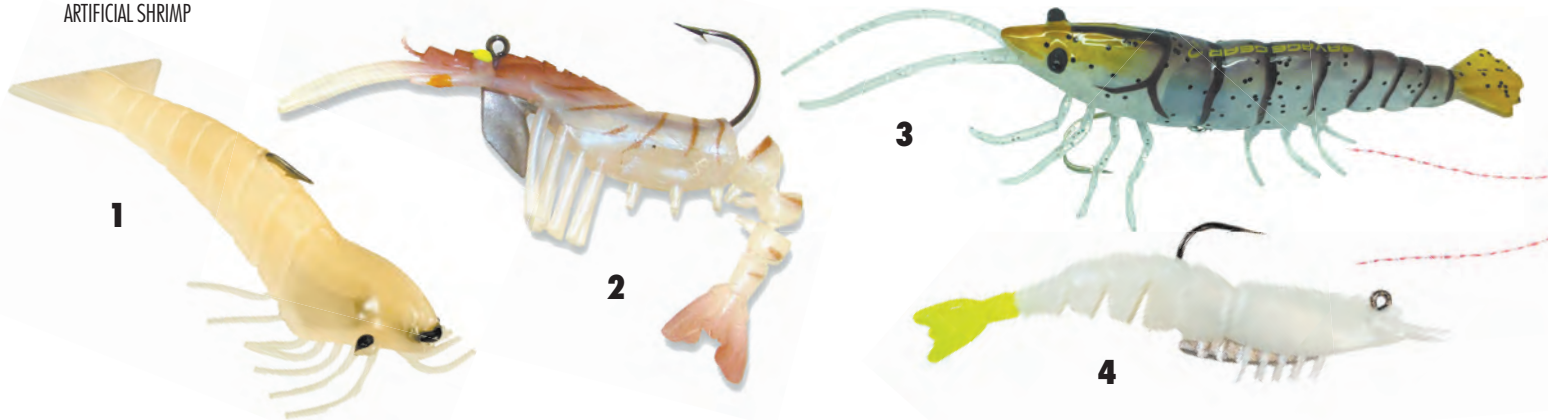
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ARTIFICIAL SHRIMP



Now, hold the hate mail; no one's dissing live shrimp. It catches fish — no question. But there is a daily cost and time investment for obtaining live shrimp; you have to have a livewell or, at least, a flow-through bucket; and, at some point, your bait supply will end.

Some find these considerations well worth the desired outcome and, to those, we say: "Live like you want to live."

However, some find that foregoing baits with heartbeats and working with the impostors has its benefits, as well. No

muss and fuss of handling natural bait, one-time investment, rarely run out of bait — the argument for artificials stands on solid legs.

Models vary from the original DOA Shrimp, to Unfair Lures Rattlin' Shrimp, Egret's Vudu Shrimp, Livetarget's Rigged Shrimp, ZMan EZ ShrimpZ, Savage Gear TPE Hard Shrimp and Storm 360GT Shrimp Jig. Some are made with their own jigheads or weighted hooks, or you can opt to fit your preferred bait on the rigging of your choice.

Whatever your preference, you'll find

artificial shrimp comprise a highly versatile lure family well deserving of prime space in your tackle tray. Here's a handful of ideas for their use.

COVERING WATER

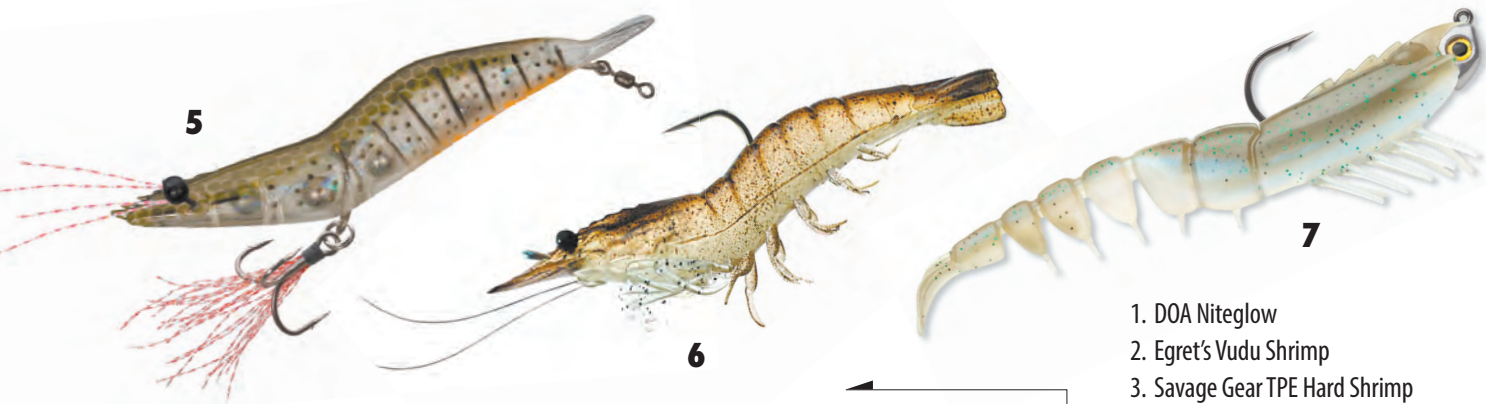
Let's be honest, the very thing that makes live shrimp so appealing to just about everything with a mouth is exactly what limits its performance. Despite its shell, a shrimp is a relatively soft forage species that is easily caught and easily gobbled. That means short shelf lives, especially when casting and retrieving.

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Not so with synthetic shrimp. Sling 'em as long and hard as you wish, and barring any toothy encounters, the bait will last all day.

Adjust jig or weighted hook sizes for water depth and wind conditions.

SIGHT FISHING

This one's as simple as it gets. If you spot redfish finning, tailing or obviously foraging (when are they not?), cast your shrimp ahead of their course and snap it into the water column like fleeing prey when the fish approach. If they pass, they're vegans.

POPPING CORKS

Predation attracts predation; that's the key principle behind suspending a synthetic shrimp below a popping cork. Of course, depth control is a valuable tool when fishing over oyster reefs, grass or any other ensnaring risk; but noise is key.

Specifically, the gurgling, blooping disturbance a popping or clacking cork rig produces grabs the attention of nearby fish and calls in others from a distance. When fish come to inspect what sounds like another fish feeding, the image of a shrimp twitching vulnerably below is an easy sell.

Paul van Reenen, president of Unfair

1. DOA Niteglow
2. Egret's Vudu Shrimp
3. Savage Gear TPE Hard Shrimp
4. Z-Man Shrimp
5. Unfair Lure Rattlin Shrimp
6. Livetarget's Rigged Shrimp
7. Storm 360GT Shrimp

Lures, suggests popping the cork a few times for his backwards-swimming shrimp.

"Then keep slowly retrieving the cork. Do not stop the cork and your hook-up rate will drastically improve," he adds.

When free-line fishing, van Reenen suggests keeping the rod tip high when casting and retrieving.

continues >

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“You will see the shrimp skip just like a live shrimp,” he said. “Try suspending it ever so often. Fish your shrimp like an escaping shrimp. Create the panic to attract your fish.”

ROCKING THE RIGS

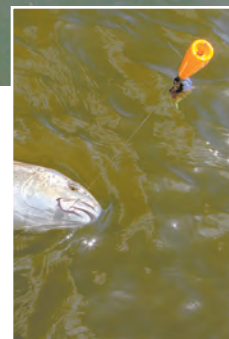
Use heavier jigs or weighted hooks to sink your shrimp along the legs and any adjacent structure like crew boat piers. Cork rigs may work better once you dial in the target depth. With either presentation, a lone shrimp won't last long once the speckled trout spot it.

BASS BLAST

Largemouths in tidal fisheries from the Venice marsh to Delacroix have come to appreciate the taste of traditionally saltwater forage. Blue crabs delight these gluttons, but shrimp are much easier to catch and they don't fight back.

Casting synthetic shrimp toward laydown trees, wellheads and pumping stations or Roseau cane points is a good bet. Falling tides will find bass rubbing elbows with redfish and flounder at the mouths of marsh run-outs, so toss your shrimp (free lined, or corked) into the outfall and work it past those corner ambush spots.

For a full day of diverse fishing, keep an assortment of artificial shrimp lures on standby. Change up your body styles and colors and if the bite's slow, enhance your baits with chartreuse tail dyes. ■



ABOVE: Not many lure styles are as universally appealing as a shrimp. RIGHT: Suspending an artificial shrimp beneath a popping cork is one of the most effective presentations for big redfish.



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TO COMBAT



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THE SCIENCE

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ACID TECHNOLOGY

TO COMBAT



THE STAIN

Tree leaves, hull stains, rust stains, waterline stains, hard water stains, orange stains.

THE SCIENCE

Tannins are naturally produced in the decomposition of plant-based matter, and their signature orange-hued stains are dyeing your hull and fiberglass. Rust stains occur on the fiberglass around metal, where water leaches color from underneath the metal and deposits it on the surface. Removing these stains requires a chemical reaction with an acid.

THE SOLUTION

Star brite Instant Hull Cleaner contains a modified oxalic acid that safely neutralizes tannins and rust. There's much more science behind it but trust us on this one, simply spray or wipe on and watch the stain disappear.



BLEACHING TECHNOLOGY

TO COMBAT



THE STAIN

Black, brown, green, and even pink mold and mildew stains.

THE SCIENCE

Similar to grass stains, these stains are caused by organic material, and need something stronger than a surfactant alone to remove them. The oxygen in a bleaching agent attacks and breaks up these types of stains, and removes any discoloration.

THE SOLUTION

While most people believe that regular chlorine bleach is the answer, it also causes a lot of problems, such as breaking down fabrics and stitching and destroying gelcoats. Instead use Star brite Mildew Stain Remover—a buffered bleach formula—that attacks the stain without harming the surface.



ABRASION TECHNOLOGY

TO COMBAT



THE STAIN

Black shoe marks, rub rail and bumper scuffs, marks left from dragging hoses and equipment.

THE SCIENCE

Scuff marks—or “transfer stains”—happen when material is transferred onto a surface and is mechanically bonded. Chemicals are rarely strong enough to remove these marks, since many times the material that has transferred is chemical-resistant (think of a rubber shoe). These abrasive marks require the same to remove them: abrasion.

THE SOLUTION

Star brite Ultimate Magic Sponge uses nano-sized scrubbers to grab hold and erase most marks easily. For your hull, use Premium Cleaner Wax to buff the stain away.



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By Brian Cope

HOG DOGGING

These hunters lay the hammer on swine in East Louisiana

John Storey of Slidell, Warren Ostarly of Covington, and Mike Gettle of Chalmette hunt hogs with dogs year-round, but in February, they lay the hammer on swine in the Bogue Chitto and Pearl River Wildlife Management Areas. And this past February was no exception.

"It's only open for hog dogging in February, and we always waylay them that month. It's full of hogs, and it's a fun area to hunt," said Storey. >



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AN ACTIVE TYPE OF HUNTING

It's a very active type of hunting, and that's one of the reasons these friends enjoy it so much.

"This isn't sit-and-wait hunting," he said. "You're constantly moving, sometimes long distances, and once you get a hog, getting it back to the boat can be a very physical chore."



The three hunters take a big boat into the swamps, carrying five or six dogs and necessary gear, which sometimes includes a smaller boat for more secluded areas. They tether one or two dogs to the front deck and then creep slowly through the swamp, letting the canines sniff around.

When the dogs get a whiff of pork, they let the hunters know. Then, it's time to beach the craft and let loose the dogs — each one equipped with a GPS tracking collar that transmits to a unit the hunters carry. A screen on the unit shows each dog's location.

HOW TO HUNT DOGGY STYLE

"The dogs hunt silently, pretty close together, but when you see them all in one small cluster, you know they're on a hog," Storey said. "They'll bark up a storm once they find a hog, but they are sometimes too far away for you to hear them. But you'll know it's time to walk when they're all clustered on the screen together."



That's when it's time for the hunters and the "catch dog," to move in.

"It's mainly black mouths, Plott hounds, and Catahoulas that do the running," Storey said. "They'll get a hog cornered and hold it there until we come in. You've got to have the bulldog on a leash because they're so aggressive. Once it's time, you let the bulldog free, and he'll just run in there and grab the hog, usually by one of its ears. And they'll hold on until you have to coax them off."

MAKING A CLEAN KILL

The hunters then slip up beside the hog with a knife and end the hunt by stabbing it under the pit of its front leg.

"It's by far the quickest and most humane way to kill a hog," Storey said. "The blade goes in smooth as silk, and it just stops the heart immediately."

And that's when the real work begins. The hunters take turns dragging the hog back to the boat, or if they're close enough to water, they'll float the hog back.

"Floating it is the way to go. That definitely beats dragging it over cypress knees through the swamp," he said. "And once we get everything loaded up, we crank the boat and do it all over again." ■

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FOLLOW THESE STEPS TO PREVENT CONTRACTING HOG-BORNE DISEASES

Feral hogs can carry a number of diseases, some of which can be contracted by humans. And at least one of those nasty bacterial infections can be fatal.

But cleaning and consuming feral hogs can be done safely, as long as you take some common sense steps to prevent contamination.



The results of a five-hour hunt with Warren Ostarly and Mike Gettle's excellent hunting dogs.

HERE ARE THE TOP 6 WAYS TO SAFELY HANDLE FERAL HOGS:

- Always wear rubber, vinyl or nitrile gloves when handling feral hogs. This includes when handling raw meat before cooking.
- Wear a mask and glasses/goggles or a face shield when processing feral hogs to prevent body fluids from feral hogs contacting your eyes, nose and mouth.
- After processing, burn or bury disposable gloves and parts of the carcass that will not be eaten. Do not feed raw meat or parts of the carcass to dogs.
- Always clean knives, utensils, coolers, cutting boards and other equipment used while preparing feral hogs or raw meat with a disinfectant such as diluted chlorine to kill any bacteria.
- Wash hands as soon as possible with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.
- Always cook feral hog meat to an internal temperature of at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit. Freezing, smoking and pickling does not kill the bacteria that causes brucellosis. ■

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LAFAYETTE CAJUN SEASONING MAKER COOKS BOLDLY

Mikey Legendre knows no rules; everything is up for grabs when he cooks. And the Lafayette barber is young, only 37, so his best years for culinary creativity are probably still ahead of him.

We first met him at the Louisiana Sportsman's Show in Gonzales, where he was promoting his Ay Yi Yie Cajun Seasoning. He is proud of it.

"I was never pleased with the flavors of

anything that I tried," he said. "During a New Orleans Saints game, I went into the kitchen and started mixing all the different flavors I enjoyed cooking with."

He brought a sample of the mix to his wife Ashley to try. "Where did you get this from?" was her reply.

"The flavor was different than anything we had ever tried before," she said. "It has some sweetness to it."



"It has flavor," Mikey asserted vigorously.

"The 'Ay Yi Yie' name comes from an expression a lot of Cajun people use. In Cajun, it has multiple meanings. It's what you say when you hurt yourself or what you say when something is really good." ■

OPPOSITE PAGE: Deep-Fried Deviled Shrimp Eggs are unique in contrasting textures and bold flavor. **INSET:** Mikey Legendre took his cooking to a new level when he invented his Cajun seasoning.

DEEP FRIED DEVILED SHRIMP EGGS

I saw a picture of deep-fried deviled eggs and said to myself, 'I'm going to try something like this.' Theirs had a piece of bacon on it. It was on Ash Wednesday that I first tried cooking it, so I did it with sauteed shrimp instead of bacon.

This dish is beyond description. The texture is absolutely amazing. The fried egg is delightfully crunchy, and the filling is creamy-smooth, creating a great contrast and mouth-feel. Then each egg is set off by a savory shrimp.

PREPARATION: Serves 6 as an appetizer.

Remove the stems and seeds from the jalapeño peppers and puree. Add brown sugar and mix thoroughly to make a jalapeño relish.

In another bowl, mix the shrimp, olive oil and Cajun seasoning. Place in the refrigerator to marinate.

Peel the eggs and cut each egg in half lengthwise. Remove yolks and place in a mixing bowl. Set the whites aside.

Mix the yolks, mayonnaise and mustard and jalapeno relish to taste.

Season with Cajun seasoning and then set aside.

In a separate bowl, make an egg wash by whisking the raw eggs and milk.

Fill a one-quart, plastic zipper bag half full of potato chips and crush them by hand.

Combine the crushed chips with the panko bread crumbs in a plate. Mix well.

Dip the boiled egg white halves in the egg wash, then dredge them in the flour. Repeat the egg wash and flour steps again, then roll the egg whites in the potato chip and panko mixture.

Deep fry at 350 degrees until golden brown. When cooled enough to handle,

TIPS!

According to Mikey Legendre, this dish is just as delicious when boiled, peeled crawfish tails are substituted for the shrimp.

The jalapeño relish used in this recipe can be made immediately before use, but is best if made several days ahead of time and stored in the refrigerator.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 pickled jalapeño peppers
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- ½ pound peeled and deveined medium shrimp,
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Cajun seasoning, to taste
- 1 dozen large eggs, boiled and cooled
- ¾ cup mayonnaise
- 1 tsp yellow mustard
- 3 raw eggs
- ½ cup milk
- 1 cup flour
- 1 5-ounce bag Zapp's Spicy Cajun Crawtators potato chips
- 1 cup panko bread crumbs
- Oil for deep frying



fill the egg whites with the egg yolk mixture. Sauté the marinated shrimp in a frying pan until just done. Top each egg with a sautéed shrimp. ■



Jerald and Glenda Horst are the authors of six excellent books on Louisiana seafood — *The Seafood Bible: Shrimp*, *The Seafood Bible: Crawfish*, *The Seafood Bible: Crabs*, *The Seafood Bible: Oysters*, *The Seafood Bible: Fish: Volume 1* and *The Seafood Bible: Fish: Volume 2*. Jerald and Glenda may be contacted at jerald@rockinghorst.com.



**AY YI YIE
CRAWFISH PIE**
UP NEXT >

SEAFOOD BIBLE

continued

INGREDIENTS:

4 tbsp butter
4 tbsp flour
1 large onion, diced
½ green bell pepper, diced
1 medium tomato, seeded and chopped
2 tsp Cajun seasoning
½ cup seafood stock
½ cup heavy cream
1 pound peeled crawfish tails
2 dashes hot sauce
2 dashes Worcestershire sauce
16 small pie shells or one 9-inch pie shell

AY YI YIE CRAWFISH PIE

"This recipe was passed down to me from my mom, who in turn got it from Cathy Murray, a really good cook from Labadieville and who probably created it," said Mike Legendre of Lafayette.

When made in small pastry shells, it is a really good party food, but it is just as good made with large pie shells. This recipe provides enough for one 9-inch pie shell. ■

PREPARATION: Serves 4 as an entrée or 8 to 16 as an appetizer.

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Melt butter over moderate heat.

Stir in flour and continue stirring frequently until browned (approximately 10 minutes) to make a roux.

Add onion, bell pepper and tomato and sauté until tender.

Add Cajun seasoning, reduce heat to medium-low and simmer for an additional 10 minutes. Stirring constantly, slowly

add seafood stock and cream. Increase heat to medium and simmer until the volume is reduced by half.

Remove the skillet from heat and add crawfish, hot sauce and Worcestershire sauce. Stir to combine.

Spoon filling into pie shells, about 2 heaping tablespoons in each. Don't overfill.

Bake until the crust is golden brown.

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THE DOUBLE-WHEELIE SHARPENER

A SIMPLE, CHEAP SHARPENING TOOL FOR ALL YOUR BLADES

Over the years I've found one type of blade sharpener that has outperformed all others. And good news: its inexpensive, fits in your palm and only takes seconds to use. I'm talking about the double-wheelie sharpener.

From its looks, with two small hardened stainless steel wheels, many might think, no way will this little gadget work. Well let me tell you, it's been the hunting item that I've used more than any other in the past few years.

CURVED BLADE DILEMMA

A couple of years back, I switched to using the large concave Simmons Sharks broadheads for my traditional bow hunting. The curved blade made normal sharpening methods using files and diamond stones tough and time consuming.

Then, I saw this cheap wheel contraption and thought why not give it a twirl. To my delight, the wheelie had my Simmons Sharks in hair-shaving condition in seconds with its first few passes. I gave some of my older practice blades a spin and was completely shocked at

how they were ready to hunt again. What I thought used to be a well-sharpened blade from my files and typical v-sharpeners didn't even come close to the superior results I achieved using the wheelie in a fraction of the time.

KNIVES NO PROBLEM

Even better, the sharpener worked on my normal stainless steel knives and other broadheads better than all other methods. Even my used non-hunttable practice pile of mechanical broadhead blades and thin Ramcat blades were transformed back into hunting condition.

It works well with large thicker blades too. I used it to resharpen my machete after cleaning many large alligator gar fish.

WORKS ON CHEAP STEEL

The \$7 purchase on Amazon of this Rada sharpener has already paid for itself dozens of times over just with the lack of replacement blades I've needed to buy. Also, I don't have to waste money on the more expensive knives. Those expensive blades do take longer to dull, but still end up dulling. The cheaper steel knives

work well with the wheelie-sharpener.

SIMPLY SIMPLE

To use the sharpener is simple: I just hold the base of the sharpener firmly on a flat surface. Then, I run the blade centered between the two metal wheels in a motion coming back towards me. I hold the blade at a 45 degree angle from the ground to catch the back side of the wheels on a nice downward edge.

The wheels are constantly turning as the blade slides along, which is different from any typical fixed V-style sharpeners. I find those wear out quickly since the same contact point is always being made with the blade. The two wheels on mine still look brand new on all 360 degrees after sharpening hundreds of knives and broadheads.

If the blade is dull or has minor dings, I'll apply more force to the wheels for several strokes to begin. I'll see the metal shavings from the blade fall with this step as a new edge is being formed.

After that I'll repeat about 10 strokes at a moderate level of force. If the blade was already in decent condition and still sharp, I'll start with this step.

Finally, I'll run several ultra-smooth

Joshua takes no chances with new broadheads either. He always touches them up before the first outing.



light strokes with the same backward motion. The motion or direction never changes, just the amount of force depending on how sharp the blade was.

I'll rub all parts of the blade across my finger tip to feel for sharpness after each step. After the final step the blade can shave hair with no trouble.

TIME TO TOUCH-UP YOUR BLADES

After a weekend of hunting in my quiver experiencing the elements, I'll touch up all my fixed broadheads with only the final step above before the next hunting trip. It really doesn't take much time, but by touching up the blades before each expedition, I have full confidence to slice anything whenever the moment arises.

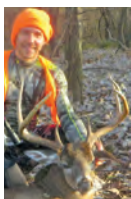
I take no chances with new broadheads either. I always touch them up before the first outing. There is often an extra sharpness felt from these sharpened blades versus the ones straight out of the packaging.

Some of the small broadheads may take a forward to reverse stroke to get the entire blade. Still I haven't used a broadhead type yet that I couldn't get back in razor condition in seconds with my wheelie sharpener.

I've used my Rada wheelie sharpener for several years now and take it with me on every trip. It fits perfectly in my hunting bag and is very durable. It survived many backpacking trips in the Rocky Mountains and is still in perfect condition.

One day I took it in the kitchen and sharpened all of the cutting tools in the house. It took less than five minutes to make dozens of dull knives into field-dressing capable razors. The only problem since then was with me being so used to the dull knives; I cut myself numerous times when cooking and eating.

With over 50 public-land big game animals downed from the self-sharpened blades using my wheelie sharpener, I'm glad that I stumbled upon this magnificent little device. Who knew such a cheap odd looking investment would be one of the best hunting purchases I have ever made. ■



Joshua Chauvin is a health-focused ultra-marathon runner who goes on solo manual-powered public land adventures focusing on hunting big game and large fish by using challenging methods and weapons. He enjoys self-filming and sharing the tactics and details from his expeditions to help others learn from his unique techniques.



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CREATURE FEATURE

Jerald Horst

IS RED SNAPPER DATA FLAWED?

A 2018 SCIENTIFIC STUDY INDICATES SO

Without a doubt, the most contentious fisheries management issue in Louisiana today is how red snappers are being managed. It began in the 1980s, when scientists monitoring the catches of recreational and commercial fishermen noticed a severe shortage of larger, older fish in the harvest.

Deeming the scarcity of older fish in catches to be the result of overfishing, the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council and the National Marine Fisheries Service began clamping down on harvest.

Between 1990 and 2008, the daily limit went from seven fish to two, where it remains. The minimum size was raised from 13 inches in 1990 to 15 in 1995 and

then to 16 in 2000.

The open season in federal waters steadily declined from 365 days a year as recently as 1996 to fewer than 50 in 2017. Even with the shortened seasons, recreational fishermen overfished their quota every year between 2007 and 2013 — except for 2010, the oil-spill year.

Recreational fishermen were seeing more fish and catching more fish. On top of that, the average fish they caught doubled in size between 2007 and 2013.

Yet scientists refused to budge. Their position remains that the species was and is overfished!?

WHAT GIVES?

Scientific management is only as good as its data, and there is part of the issue. The data collected that supported the

conclusion of overfishing came from fishermen's catches, not sampling of the population by biologists.

That data, called fisheries-dependent data, can be good by itself, but only if fishermen by habit or by being allowed by regulation to catch fish of all ages and sizes equal to their representation in the wild population.

If, let's say, older and larger fish are in places that few recreational people fish, few will be in the catch. Or if certain areas where older and larger red snappers concentrate are placed off limits to the only gear that can catch them — such as bottom longlines, which were outlawed in 1990 — few of them will show up in the commercial catch.

The lack of these older and larger fish in catches then may be incorrectly inter-

CREATURE FEATURE

continued

Bandit rigs were most used to target artificial and natural reefs, as well as some open non-reef bottoms. Longlines were set anywhere, without regard to the presence or absence of reefs.

Captured fish were aged counting the growth rings in a cross-section of an otolith (ear bone) for each fish. What the researchers found was that red snappers definitely use different habitats during three phases of their lives.

Young fish, from less than a year old to 2 years old, used open bottoms, away from all structure. Mud was preferred over sand and shell bottoms. These fish were 1 to 10 inches long.

By 8 inches, some of them began to move to natural and artificial reefs. By 11 inches, virtually all of them had moved from

More often than not, big sow snappers like this are found on open mud bottoms, away from any reef structure.



Photo courtesy of Amanda Menard

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mud bottoms to reef areas. Some remained on reefs until they were 37 inches long and up to 8 years old.

Red snappers between 2 and 8 years old were four times more abundant on artificial reefs than natural reefs and 27 times more abundant than open, unstructured bottom. These reefs are where most fishing pressure on red snappers occurs today, and it targets these middle-aged fish.

As red snappers aged, they spent less and less time near reef structure and more time on open, mud bottoms. These are the larger and older snappers that fishermen call “sow snappers.” They were found at all depths sampled in the study, from 60 to 300 feet deep, but not near structure.

The big, old fish scattered on open bottoms are very difficult for recreational and commercial fishermen to target and, naturally, are under-represented in their catches. ■

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Jerald Horst is a retired Louisiana State University professor of fisheries. He is an active writer, book author and outdoorsman. Jerald may be reached at jerald@rockinghorst.com.



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Week 5

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Week 4

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Week 3

Waterloo Spinning Rod



Week 2

Pair of Costa Sunglasses



Week 1

K2 Coolers 70 qt. and Arctic Ice



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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

Fishing for sac-a-lait in Bayou Des Allemands, Lloyd Brandt ended up catching this choupique.



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: CHOUPIQUE

BOWFIN IS KNOWN BY SEVERAL DIFFERENT NAMES

The bowfin, *Amia calva*, whose more common name is mudfish, is a close relative of the gar. Its stout body and long dorsal fin, which covers almost three-quarters the length of its body, give the fish a snaky or eel-like appearance.

It has a rounded tail and can range in color from light green, dark green, to black with mottling, depending on diet and quality of the water in which it swims.

In Louisiana, the fish is known as choupique (pronounced 'shoe pick').

Adult males are easily identified by a distinct black spot with an orange halo at the upper section of their tail.

Choupique are found throughout North America. They are found nowhere else on earth, although fossils in the *Amia calva* family have been found on every continent except Australia.

BREATHING MACHINE

Like most fish, mudfish have gills that allow them to breathe under water, but they also have modified air bladders that give them the ability to gulp air above the water's surface. This helps them live in times of extreme drought, as they burrow into the mud to stay wet, breathing air

through their bladders when other fish would die.

Large lakes, small ponds and slow-moving rivers with mud and dense vegetation are ideal habitats for mudfish. They are highly tolerant of stagnant water and are not negatively impacted by poor water quality.

Mudfish are opportunists and very adaptable when it comes to eating preferences. When young, they eat mostly insects and tiny plankton. As adults, they eat other fish, crawfish, snakes, turtles, leeches and even rodents.

PRIME TARGET

Most anglers catch mudfish while targeting other species, especially large-

mouth bass.

Soft-plastic worms, jigs, live minnows, and even topwater lures will draw strikes from mudfish. Most anglers are happy to tussle with these fish, which are sporty fighters when hooked. Some anglers even report targeting these fish once they know of locations they inhabit.

Mudfish typically spawn from March through June, but it can begin much earlier in the year during unseasonably warm weather.

The nest-building duties are performed by the males, who fan out nests with their tails while clearing vegetation with their mouths. Once females lay their eggs, which they usually do in the dark, males protect the nests, then stay with

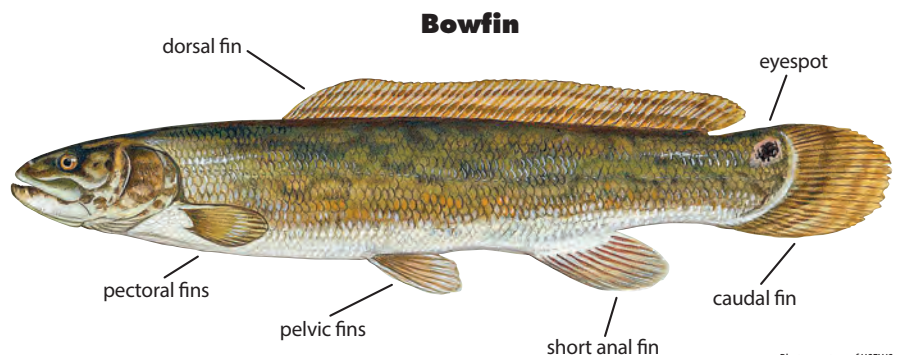


Photo courtesy of USFWS

the young hatchlings as they learn to fend for themselves.

While a select few anglers report enjoying eating this fish, the majority of people do not eat them. Their eggs, however, are highly sought after and are prepared just like caviar.

LAST SURVIVOR

This fish is believed to be the only remaining member of a group of fish that lived almost 200 million years ago.

Mudfish are native to both Louisiana and Mississippi but are often misidentified as the Northern snakehead, an invasive and destructive fish.

Aside from the name choupique, mudfish are known colloquially throughout the southeast by several different names, including grindle, grinnel, dogfish, blackfish, bowfin and leather fish.

STATE RECORD

The Louisiana state record choupique was caught at Toledo Bend by angler Brian Fant in April 1976. The fish weighed 20.5 pounds.

The Mississippi state record stands at 18 pounds, 14 ounces and was caught by B.H. Toney at Ross Barnett Reservoir in November 1978.

The current world record, a 21-pound, 8-ounce fish, was set in Forest Lake, a community lake in Florence, S.C., by Robert Harmon in January 1980. He was trolling with a Rebel Deep Runner when the big fish hit. ■



Brian Cope is a retired Air Force combat communications technician. He has a B.A. in English Literature from the University of South Carolina and has been writing about the outdoors since 2006. He's spent half his life hunting and fishing. The rest, he said, has been wasted.

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ANCHORS AWEIGH!

By Jerry Dilsaver

CHOOSE YOUR BOTTOM-HOLDING DEVICES WITH SITUATIONS IN MIND

When it comes to fishing, anglers often need to have skills and knowledge other than casting and retrieving in order to be successful. Some are apparent: the ability to throw a cast net to collect live bait. Others, including the ability to anchor quickly, quietly and successfully, aren't often at the forefront of fishermen's thoughts.

All it takes is a few minutes of looking through a marine retailer's catalog or visiting an Internet website to, see an abundance of anchor designs. Each touts some feature or situation that claims superior service. Certain bottoms or fishing situations call for one style or anchor over others.

1 THE DANFORTH ANCHOR

The Danforth, blade-style anchor is one of the best-holding anchors, regardless of bottom type, when used with an appropriate weight and enough anchor chain. The blades dig into the bottom to hold a boat steady. Holding power increases as heavier anchors are used, but it also can be increased by adding a longer and heavier length of chain.

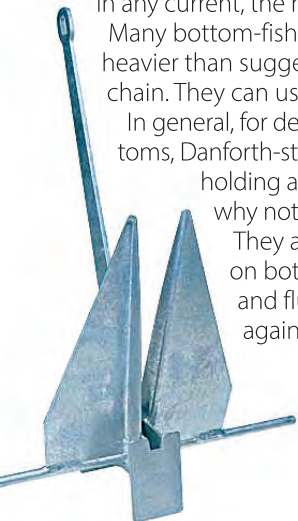
When rigged correctly, it will seek out a hold even on shell bottom and almost always digs its way to a secure hold.

Many fishermen use the least-expensive anchor rated for their boats and one of the 3-foot pieces of chain that come in packages, complete with a pair of shackles for attaching it to the anchor and anchor line. They often must use the full 7-to-1 scope recommended by the Coast Guard. With harder bottoms in any current, the hold is precarious at best.

Many bottom-fishermen use an anchor at least one weight heavier than suggested for their boats and add 20 to 30 feet of chain. They can usually anchor with a scope of 2-to-1 or less.

In general, for deeper water, higher currents and harder bottoms, Danforth-style anchors, with extra chain are excellent holding anchors. If they work so well in these extremes, why not use them everywhere?

They are not easy to untangle when they get hung on bottom structure, and they're noisy. The shank and flukes rotate and clank, and the chain clinks against everything it touches.



2 NAVY STYLE ANCHOR

When the current isn't too strong and the bottom isn't too hard, a rubber-coated Navy style anchor is amazingly quiet and brings a high-degree of stealth to anchoring when you're fishing for speckled trout or red drum in coastal creeks. This anchor can be used without any chain.

Navy style anchors bite well in soft bottoms, but they slip on rock or shell bottoms. Mushroom-shaped river anchors work to a point for this application, but I've found the Navy-style anchor works better in more situations.

3 'CAJUN' ANCHOR

Cajun anchors have been gaining popularity with shallow-water fishermen, but they have a few limitations. Cajun anchors are simply long, steel poles, with an eye on one end and a slight point on the other. They can be pushed into the bottom in shallow water and tied to the eye or dropped over the side where their weight holds the boat.

Cajun anchors work well for staking in softer bottoms, but so does a push pole, which is longer, serves a dual purpose and can work in deeper water. If there is much current, a Cajun anchor laid on anything but the softest mud bottom will drag.

4 WRECK ANCHOR

As the name suggests, wreck anchors work well at wrecks and also are a good choice at many other kinds of underwater structure. These anchors consist of a 2- to 3-foot-long heavy steel center bar with three or four grapnel hooks of lighter material welded to the bottom.

The grapnel hooks grab in the structure and hold while anglers fish, but they can be pulled hard to straighten and release from the bottom.



FROM TOP: The Danforth-style anchor is a good all-around choice. Mushroom anchors are great when holding a soft bottom. Wreck anchors are great for holding onto uneven bottom structure; the grapnels will straighten out when pulling it loose is needed. **LEFT:** Cajun anchors, aka anchor pins or shallow-water anchors, are great for holding boats in place in marshes.

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These regulations are unofficial. For official regulations, always check the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries pamphlet and/or the federal pamphlet. www.wlf.louisiana.gov

SALTWATER

STATE REGULATIONS (0-10.357 miles^Δ)

FISH Species	Minimum Length	Bag Limit (per person)
Greater Amberjack*~	34" FL	1/day*
Lesser Amberjack, Banded Rudderfish*	14-22" FL	5/day (aggregate)
Yellowfin Tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin Tuna	73" CFL	1 per vessel per year*
Bigeye Tuna	27" CFL	None
Blue Marlin	99" LJFL	None
White Marlin	66" LJFL	None
Sailfish	63" LJFL	None
Swordfish*	29" CL or 33 lbs. DW	5 per vessel per trip
Cobia (ling or lemon fish)	33" FL	2/day
Drum, Black	16" TL	5/day#
Drum, Red (redfish)	16" TL	5/day#
Flounder, Southern	None	10/day
Groupers* Gag ^Δ & Black ^Δ	24" TL	4/day (aggregate)*
Scamp ^Δ	16" TL	
Nassau & Goliath	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS	
Yellowfin ^Δ	20" TL	
Red ^Δ	20" TL	2 of 4 grouper total
Atlantic Sharpnose & Bonnethead shark@	None	1/day
Other sharks (except prohibited species)@	54" FL	1/day/vessel/aggregate
King Mackerel*	24" FL	3/day
Spanish Mackerel*	12" FL	15/day
Striped mullet	None	100 pounds/day
Black seabass	None	None
Hogfish	14" FL	5/day
Seatrout, Spotted (Speckled Trout)	12" TL*	25/day*
Red Snapper*	16" TL	2/day*
Other Snapper		5 mutton in 10 snapper aggregate
Mutton Snapper	18" TL	
Cubera, Yellowtail, Gray (mangrove)	12" TL	10 in aggregate*
Queen, Blackfin, Silk, Wenchman	None	
Vermilion Snapper	10" TL	
Schoolmaster, Dog, Mahogany	None	None
Gray Triggerfish*	15" FL	1/day in aggregate
Lane Snapper	8" TL	
Almaco Jack, Goldface Tilefish, & Bluefin Tilefish	None	20/person/day in aggregate*
Blackline Tilefish, Anchor Tilefish	None	
Tripletail	18" TL	5/day

CFL = curved fork length LJFL = lower jaw fork length CL = carcass length
 DW = dressed weight LJTF = lower jaw to tail fork FL = fork length

FRESHWATER

FISH Species	Minimum Size Limit	Bag Limit (per person)
Crappie	None	50/day*
Buffalo Fish	16" TL	25/day
Freshwater Drum (Gaspergou)	12" TL	25/day
Channel Catfish	11" TL*	***
Blue Catfish	12" TL*	***
Bowfin	16" TL	None
Flathead Catfish	14" TL*	***
Crawfish	None	150 lbs./day
Paddlefish	30" max LJFL	2*
Shad	None	50 lbs./day
Black Bass (largemouth & spotted)	None*	10/day*
Striped Bass or Hybrid Striped Bass	**	5/day*
Sturgeon	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS	
White Bass	None	50/day*
Yellow Bass	None	50/day*

* see exceptions in pamphlet. ** no more than two may exceed 30 inches.
 *** catfish limit is 100 in aggregate; however, 25 fish in aggregate may be undersized.
 # only one fish may exceed 27 inches. @ Shark season is closed between April 1 and June 30.
^Δ Closed season for gag grouper Jan. 1 - May 31. Closed season for black, red, yellowfin, yellowmouth & scamp grouper from Feb. 1 - March 31. ~ Greater amberjack season is open May 1-31 and Aug. 1 - Oct. 31. " Closed season on gray triggerfish Jan. 1 - Feb. 28 and June 1- July 31.

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\$419/mo or \$62,495

STK #26523. MSRP \$102,450. Sale Price \$62,495 plus tax, tag, title, and license fee. Dealer discount of \$39,955 on approved credit. Offer available with 10% down and approved credit. \$419 Per Month for Months with 6.49% APR Financing. Not all customers will qualify for the advertised rate. Expires 4/30/2019



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Gavin Troclair, 8, with his first deer, a 120-pound spike, he killed Dec. 28, 2018 with his .243 at 50 yards. He was hunting with his "PAW J" at their family lease north of Greensburg.



Gavin Troclair

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David Rabenaldt

David Rabenaldt with a fine turkey killed in St. Martin Parish.



Ashton Gautreau

Ashton Gautreau was fishing in a lake behind his parent's home in Denham Springs when he caught this lunker bass.



Beth Luke

Beth Luke hooked this 21-inch speck on a gold spoon at Grand Isle beach.



Matt Monroe

Matt Monroe caught his first bull red, this 29-inch beauty, on July 24 in Cocodrie.



Lucas Gary

Lucas Gary took his first deer while hunting with his uncle in Union Parish over his Thanksgiving visit.



Jack Stefanski

Jack Stefanski had a successful hunt in Klondike.



Oliver Pichon

Oliver Pichon holds up a red from the Hopedale long rocks.



Logan Fenfro

Logan Fenfro enjoyed catching perch and catfish on a fishing trip to Bayou Copasaw with his grandparents.



Christian Gonzalez

Christian Gonzalez of Breaux Bridge took this buck on Jan. 1, 2019.



Jack L. Uhle Sr.

This 248-pound, 10-point, which green scored at 158, was shot by retired La. State Police Lt. Jack L. Uhle Sr. of St. Francisville at the Bayou Sara Hunting Preserve owned by George Woodside. The deer was killed on Jan. 2, 2019, in flooded timber.



Glynn Hollier

Glynn Hollier pulled in this 9.46-pound lunker bass, which measured 25 1/4 inches long and had a 20-inch girth, on Jan. 18, 2019, at Toledo Bend.

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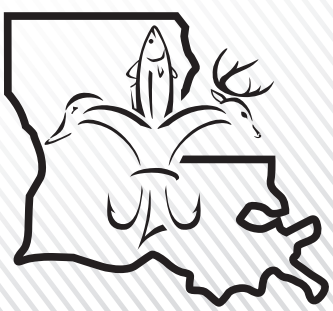
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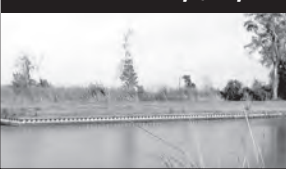
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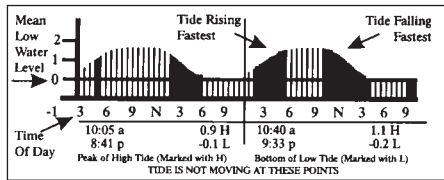
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Tide Corrections

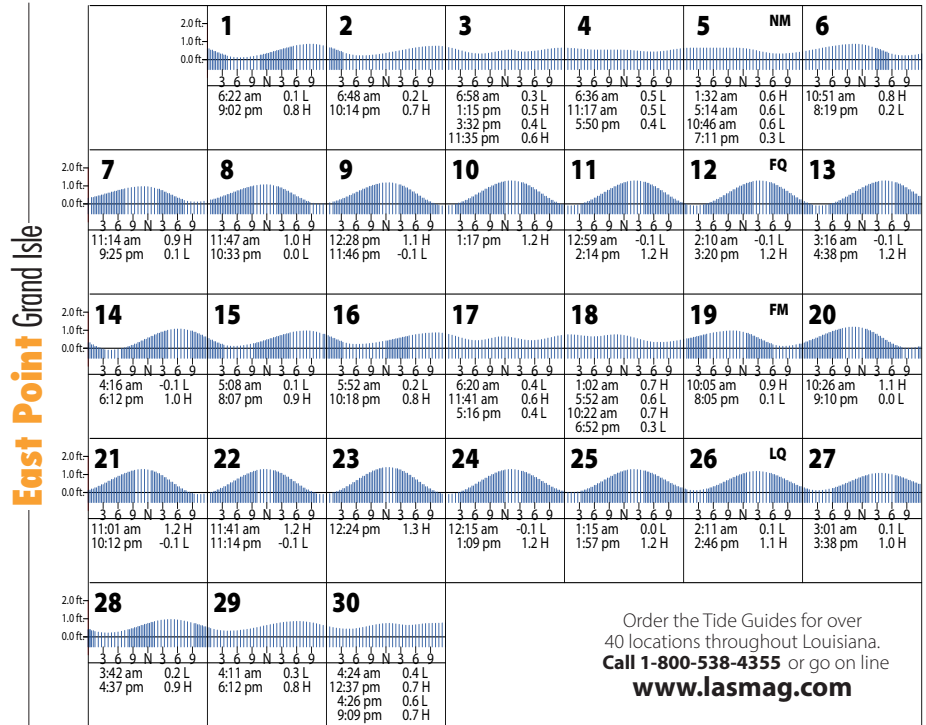
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Barataria Pass	+1:00	-0:10
Bastian Island	+0:41	+0:12
Bay Gardene	+2:51	+2:44
Bayou Bonfouca	+9:59	+10:11
Breton Islands	+0:54	+0:48
Caillou Boca	+0:40	+0:48
Caminada Pass	+0:20	+0:12
Chandeleur Light	+0:37	+0:34
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Hopedale	+4:17	+4:56
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South Pass, Miss. R.	-1:13	-1:20
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Tchefuncte River	+10:23	+11:01
Timbalier Island	+0:19	+0:23
Wine Island	+1:08	+1:02

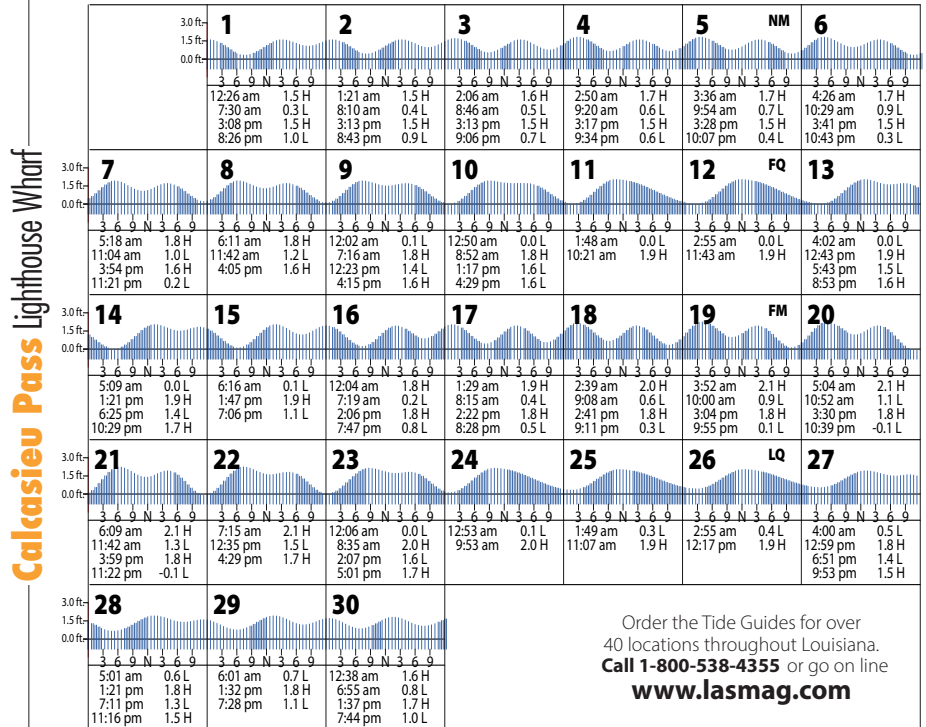
Calcasieu Pass, Lighthouse Wharf HIGH LOW

Cote Blanche Island	+4:33	+3:40
Eugene Island	+1:49	-0:39
Lighthouse Point	+0:58	-0:53
Mermentau River ent.	+0:20	+0:25
Point Au Fer	+1:53	-1:02
Point Chevreul	+3:16	+0:30
Rabbit Island	+2:01	-0:36
Shell Island	+3:08	+0:45
South Point	+1:55	-0:33
Southwest Pass, Vermillion Bay	+1:42	+0:51
Weeks Bay	+3:58	+3:56

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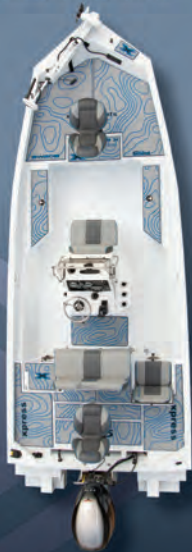
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