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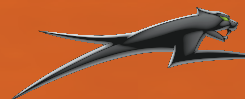


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BAYOU SORREL POND GIVES UP 12-POUND LUNKER BASS

By Patrick Bonin

JACKSON FOOLS MONSTER WITH WACKY WORM

Dequian Jackson hasn't been bass fishing all that long, but the 20-year-old reeled in a true lunker largemouth from a public pond in Bayou Sorrel and experienced a fight most veteran anglers likely will never get to feel in their lifetimes.

Jackson, of Bayou Goula, was fishing with his uncle, Sterling Saylor, on Sunday, Dec. 17 in a small paddle boat when lightning struck — and a giant 12-pound bass inhaled his junebug-colored wacky worm.

"My uncle started fishing for crappie, and I was just throwing my line out," Jackson said. "Then we headed to the other side of the pond where we saw a couple of stumps in the water. He threw a Beetle Spin out and had a bite but got hung.

"So before he went over there to get the Beetle Spin off the stump, he told me to throw mine."

When their trip had gotten underway about noon that Sunday, his uncle had proposed an ill-timed bet to make the day's proceedings a bit more interesting — not knowing his nephew was about to land the biggest bass either man had ever laid eyes on.

"When we first got in the boat, he said, 'Let's make a \$5 bet on who catches the biggest bass,'" Jackson recounted with a chuckle.

Turns out it was the easiest money he's ever made.

"I threw mine a foot or two past the stump, and I felt something hit it," he said. "I jerked it twice to make sure it was on, but I didn't feel it moving, but my uncle was like, 'It's on there.' I had back-lashed, so I had some slack in my line,



Dequian Jackson, 20, of Bayou Goula, shows off the 12.81-pound largemouth bass he reeled in on Sunday, Dec. 17 from a public pond in Bayou Sorrel. The big bass nailed a junebug-colored wacky worm.

Photo courtesy Dequian Jackson

then I saw the line go tight and it was pulling, pulling, pulling."

The anglers got a quick glimpse of the fish and at first suspected it was a choupique, then got a better look about a minute later. "He said, 'If that's a bass, it's a big one,'" Jackson said. "She wasn't jumping or nothing — she stayed down."

Jackson's uncle netted the monster on his second attempt — and as it turns out, just in the nick of time.

"As soon as he got it in the net, the hook fell completely out the mouth," he said. "My heart was beating fast. He said, 'Quian, you can stop — she's in the boat.'"

The men headed over to Jack Miller's Landing, where the giant bass tipped the certified scales at 12.81 pounds. They kept the bass alive and headed to Cabela's later that evening, and left the bass there in a holding tank until picking it up a couple of days later. It weighed 12.81 pounds there, as well. If the catch

is certified by a biologist and ultimately approved by the Louisiana Outdoor Writers' Association, Jackson's lunker bass will be tied for third place for pond-caught bass, behind the No. 1-ranked 13.5-pound lunker caught by Mark Leicher in 1999 in a pond in Waldheim. The overall Louisiana record largemouth bass was caught by Greg Wiggins in Caney Lake in 1994, and tipped the scales at a whopping 15.97 pounds.

Jackson, who hopes to walk-on the Southeastern University baseball team this spring, said they ultimately decided to keep the fish, which will go up on the wall to commemorate a day at the pond neither man will likely ever forget.

And his uncle paid up on that big bass bet. "When I caught it, he said, 'I'm just going to give your money now, because I know I'm not catching anything like that,'" he said. ■

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LOUISIANA SPORTSMAN BOAT SHOW IS BACK AGAIN!

MARCH 15-18 EVENT TO BE HELD IN CONJUNCTION WITH 39TH LOUISIANA SPORTSMAN SHOW

The latest offerings in boats will once again pack the Louisiana Sportsman Boat Show, and you'll be find even more reasons to spend time browsing the incredible selection because the size of the boat show has grown once again.

The boat bonanza is being held in conjunction with the 39th annual Louisiana Sportsman Show March 15-18 at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center in Gonzales, offering two-for-one show value.

While you're looking over this year's boat lines, you can chat directly with factory reps to get the scoop on all the latest features for each model line.

"We now have more boats from more

dealers — you won't find a better opportunity to comparison shop for a new boat," show director Jack Fisher said. "Every major boat line and outboard manufacturer will be in the show, so you don't have to drive all over the place to look at different lines — you can just walk across the aisle. We have dealers in the show from the Baton Rouge area, the Lake Pontchartrain Northshore, Houma and Thibodaux.

"And the special show pricing makes this the best opportunity to compare and save." The show will include offerings for both fresh and saltwater fishing applications, and lots more.

"We'll also have a full range of duck-

hunting boats, along with kayaks and the ever-popular pontoon boats," Fisher said.

And the best part is that entry to the Louisiana Sportsman Boat Show is included in the \$10 general admission price of the Louisiana Sportsman Show.

"This way, you can check out all the boats but move back and forth to the main show to see what fishing tackle and hunting accessories are available," Fisher said. "You also can check out all the special events, like the Louisiana Sportsman Big Buck Contest, the Fetch N Fish demo tank and much more.

"And it's all available for one great price." ■

Find all the newest boats at special prices during the 2018 Louisiana Sportsman Boat Show March 15-18.



BIG BUCK CONTEST RETURNS

GET RACKS READY NOW

The last of the deer zones might be closing this month, but that doesn't mean it's time to forget about the season. Instead, make plans to bring your bucks to the Louisiana Sportsman Big Buck Contest to be held March 16-18 in conjunction with the Louisiana Sportsman Show at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center in Gonzales.

And even if your deer mount isn't complete, you can make arrangements with your taxidermist to bring the antlers to the contest, which is hosted by Quality Deer Management Association Louisiana.

Deer may be dropped off beginning Friday, March 16, but must be entered no later than 6 p.m. Saturday, March 17. Antlers must remain at the show's Big Buck Wall until Sunday afternoon.

And it's free to enter — just bring your unscored deer from the 2017-18 or 2016-17 seasons to the show.

Winners also will be named in the following categories:

- Best Louisiana Gun
- Best Louisiana Bow
- Best Out-of-state Gun
- Best Out-of-state Bow
- Best Ladies
- Best Youth
- Best Muzzleloader/Crossbow

Contest head scorer Dave Moreland has developed a unique system by which all deer — typical and non-typical — within a category can objectively be compared.

Each deer is scored on the Boone & Crockett or Pope & Young system, and then compared to the minimum score for inclusion in those record books. The difference between the minimum score of each deer is then used to decide category winners.

That means a typical deer could beat out a higher-scoring non-typical.

Bucks entered in any previous Louisiana Sportsman Big Buck Contest are not eligible for the contest.

Bucks killed in seasons before the 2016-17 hunting season can be entered for scoring, but are not eligible for contest prizes.

All entries will be displayed on the Big Buck Contest wall until shortly before winners are announced March 18. ■



The Big Buck Contest is a hallmark of the Louisiana Sportsman Show, to be held March 15-18 in Gonzales.

BIG BUCK CONTEST RULES

- All legally killed bucks shot during the 2017-18 season and those deer from the 2016-17 season that have not been officially scored or previously entered in this contest are eligible for entry in any of the seven categories: Best Louisiana Gun, Best Louisiana Bow, Best Out-of-State Gun, Best Out-of-State Bow, Ladies, Youth and Muzzleloader/Crossbow.
- All bucks beyond the 60-day drying period will receive an official Boone & Crockett or Pope & Young score.
- Any buck killed within the previous 60 days will be scored and entered in the contest, but the score will not be official.
- Only free-range whitetails from any of the 50 U.S. states are eligible.
- Bucks killed with primitive arms that aren't true muzzleloaders will be entered in the gun categories.
- Youth-category entrants must have been 15 or younger at the time of the kill.
- Bucks killed before the contest period may still be brought in for scoring, but will not be eligible for the contest or the random drawing.
- Bucks must be brought in during show hours Friday or before 6 p.m. Saturday to be eligible for the contest and random drawing.
- Racks must remain at the show until 2 p.m. Sunday, and may not be removed before that time.
- Louisiana Sportsman reserves the right to add or alter rules at its discretion.

The LA Creel survey — which uses a combination of in-person dockside interviews, phone calls and emails to estimate angler catch and effort in state waters — was certified by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.



FEDS CERTIFY LA CREEL SURVEY DESIGN

LDWF'S REAL-TIME DATA COLLECTION PROGRAM OFFICIALLY REPLACES MRIP IN STATE WATERS

By Patrick Bonin

Photo courtesy Capt. Tommy Pellegrin

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' LA Creel survey, which kicked off almost four years ago in an attempt to provide more precise information on recreational fishing catch and effort — especially for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico — was certified by NOAA Fisheries in January.

It now officially replaces the Fed's outdated Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) in state waters, making LA Creel eligible for federal funding to support ongoing improvements and implementation.

The program uses a combination of data gathered through in-person interviews with biologists at docks and marinas, as

well as weekly phone calls and email surveys to create harvest estimates.

"I think the certification certainly gives credibility to what we've been saying for years: That LA Creel is a robust data set that depicts a more accurate assessment of what's going on in the Gulf of Mexico, and is a very valuable tool for managing fisheries in the Gulf," said Congressman Garret Graves (R-Baton Rouge.) "This is a step in the right direction in regard to giving Louisiana more credibility in managing the fisheries offshore our state."

Graves said the certification of LA Creel's numbers was good news that one day might ultimately lead to more fishing opportunities in state waters. Although MRIP focused on federal species in the

Gulf, including red snapper, LA Creel will be used to determine harvest efforts for all fish across the state.

"I think it means that we're going to have more prescriptive data. What I mean by that is we have to stop looking at the Gulf of Mexico as one body of water and recognize that you have different areas and different habitat with different populations of red snapper," Graves said. "By getting a more accurate assessment and by being able to get more prescriptive data - for example, the areas off the different states - it's going to allow us to do a better job managing the fisheries.

"Rather than coming in and doing a one-size-fits-all, I think ultimately it will demonstrate that you can do more fish-

ing days and higher limits without having an adverse effect on the stock.”

In the spring of 2014, the Louisiana Legislature passed a bill that raised the cost of a saltwater fishing license for state residents from \$5.50 to \$13 to fund the LA Creel program.

The Coastal Conservation Association of Louisiana supported the legislation, and its executive director, David Cresson, said the program has delivered on its promise.

“I’m very proud of CCA’s role in the beginning, because we took a leadership role in supporting a fee increase, which at the time was a little bit controversial amongst some in the angling world,” Cresson said. “But today’s news is validation that it was the right thing to do.

“CCA believed in what the end result would be, and fishermen around Louisiana did — and thank God they did — because now we have the gold standard program and are another step closer to state management.”

Chris Macaluso, marine fisheries director with the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, said the folks at LDWF back when the program was created — as well as legislators and anglers across the state — should be congratulated for making LA Creel a reality.

“This is replacing a suspect federal data collection system with what has proven to be a superior program in terms of determining fishing effort and harvest in Louisiana,” Macaluso said. “When Louisiana decided to separate itself from MRIP, the idea was to create LA Creel and get the support from the Legislature and the license holders and the people who pay fees here in Louisiana to build this better data collection system, and it’s paid off.

“A lot of credit has to go to our Legislature and our anglers in Louisiana for mak-

ing this happen because there are other states that are struggling to get their programs fully-implemented because they haven’t had that legislative support or that increase in funding available. Without that increase, we wouldn’t have been able to develop this superior system.”

Randy Pausina, who served as head of fisheries at the LDWF when the LA Creel program was created, said it was a true team effort with the department, CCA, the Legislature and anglers across the state.

“Something needed to happen. Anglers were upset that they weren’t being

treated fairly and we came up with a plan as an agency,” Pausina said. “... It’s MRIP on steroids. It fixed everything with MRIP that needed to be fixed, then added some stuff for us and stuff for them. It demonstrated the state’s ability to get things done, and get them done right.

“When everybody works together, good things like this can happen.” ■

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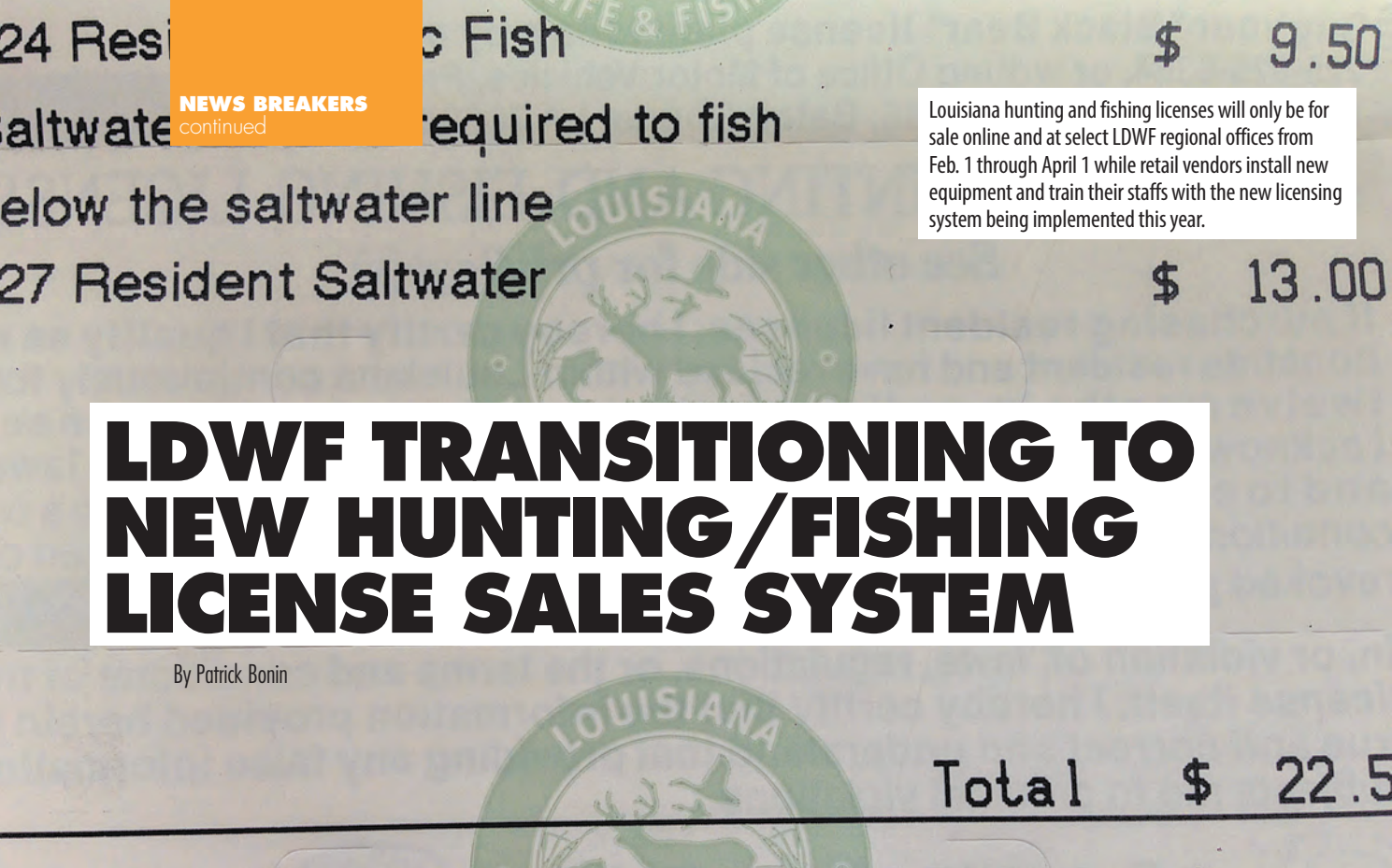
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NEWS BREAKERS
continued

Louisiana hunting and fishing licenses will only be for sale online and at select LDWF regional offices from Feb. 1 through April 1 while retail vendors install new equipment and train their staffs with the new licensing system being implemented this year.

LDWF TRANSITIONING TO NEW HUNTING/FISHING LICENSE SALES SYSTEM

By Patrick Bonin

TRAINING PERIOD MEANS NO RETAIL VENDOR SALES FEB. 1 - APRIL 1

If you typically buy a Louisiana hunting or fishing license each spring at a retail location, you probably need to make your purchase sooner rather than later this year.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will be working with a new vendor for all of its license sales — so retail locations statewide will not be selling hunting or fishing licenses from Feb. 1 to April 1 during the transition period.

“There’s a little bit of a transition process from one vendor to the other,” said Rene LeBreton, public information director with the LDWF. “The online transition is not so difficult, but in terms of our retail vendors, they’ve got to change out the equipment they use and train the staff a bit, so there’s a training and transition period for the retailers that will take a little longer.”

From Feb. 1 through April 1, licenses will still be available for purchase online at www.wlf.la.gov, as well as at LDWF headquarters in Baton Rouge, and regional offices in Monroe, Opelousas, Lake Charles and Alexandria.

“Roughly 60 percent of our licenses are purchased through retailers — that’s a ballpark number — so a lot of people still do it that way,” LeBreton said. “So we

chose the historically low license sales period to make this transition.”

In addition, all license sales will be temporarily suspended Jan. 30 -31 while the system is down for maintenance.

The bottom line is if you want to purchase your license from a retailer for use later in the spring, the department suggests you buy it before Jan. 30.

“If you prefer to only buy at a retailer, we’d rather you do it before Jan. 30,” LeBreton said. “Otherwise, you’ll have to do it at our office or online, which isn’t really that difficult, but some people are averse to the Internet thing.”

The new system will provide some options for hunters and fishermen that don’t currently exist, he said.

“There will be a few more bells and whistles coming. I think the experience will be a little better online — navigating and selecting your license sounds like it will be a little more user-friendly,” LeBreton said. “And you’ll have the ability to create a login if you want to - you don’t have to - which will allow you to track your license history, store your licenses, reprint a license if you need to, and eventually tie that to your boat registrations with us, as well as hunter ed licenses — so it can all be tied together into one system.”

An auto-renew option also will be available in the future for customers who don’t want to have to worry about remembering to buy their licenses every year, he said.

If you need assistance with your online purchase, contact the 24-hour help desk beginning on Feb. 2 at 888-362-5393. If you have other licensing questions, call the LDWF license office at 225-765-2887 or 225-765-2898 during regular business hours (8 a.m. to 4 p.m.) Monday through Friday. ■

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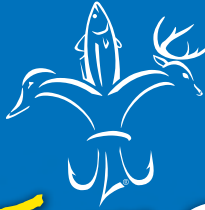
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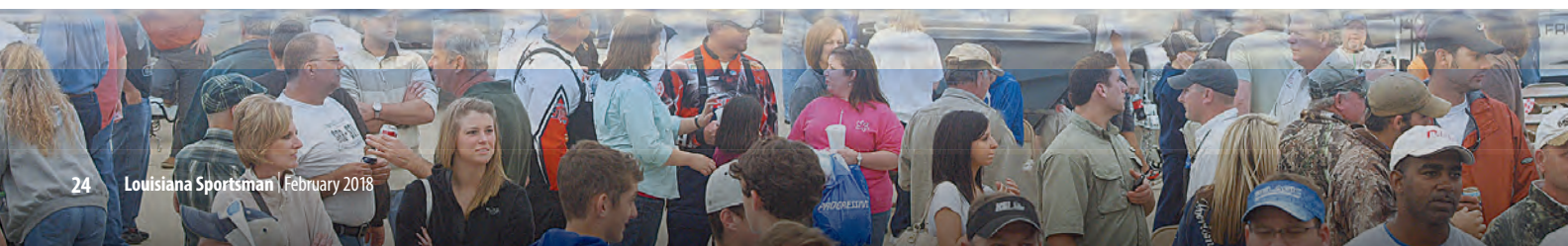
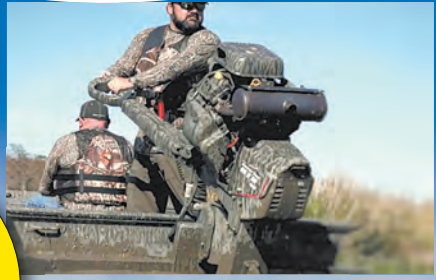


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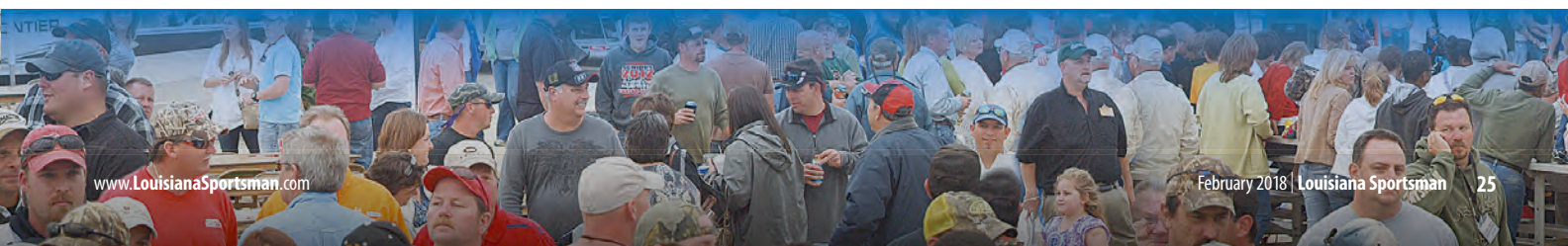


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LETTSWORTH MAN ARRESTED FOR ALLEGEDLY KILLING A LOUISIANA BLACK BEAR

Enforcement agents with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries arrested a 28-year-old Lettsworth man on Jan. 8 for allegedly shooting and killing a Louisiana black bear last fall in Concordia Parish.

Ronald J. Kimble was cited for taking a Louisiana black bear during a closed season and being a convicted felon in possession of a firearm, according to a press release.

On Nov. 29, agents began investigating a dead black bear that was found shot to death on the Richard K. Yancey Wildlife Management Area. A necropsy revealed that the 4 ½ year-old female bear was shot twice with a rifle within a few days of being found, the release states.

Agents began patrolling the area where the bear was killed, and found Kimble hunting there on Dec. 29 and again on Jan. 4. Agents approached him, and during questioning he admitted to killing the bear with a .270 rifle on Nov. 26, according to the release.

Agents also found that Kimble was a convicted felon and not allowed to possess a firearm, the release states. The rifle was seized, and Kimble was booked into the Concordia Parish Jail.

The state charge for illegally killing a Louisiana black bear brings a \$900 to \$950 fine and up to 120 days in jail. Possessing a firearm by a convicted felon brings a \$1,000 to \$5,000 fine and 10 to 20 years in jail.

Kimble may also face up to \$10,000 in civil restitution for the replacement value of the illegally taken bear. ■



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SECURITY GUARDS BUSTED FOR ALLEGED NIGHT-HUNTING VIOLATIONS IN GIBSON

Three security guards at Modern American Recycling Services in Gibson were cited for alleged night-hunting violations on Jan. 6 in Terrebonne Parish.

Enforcement agents with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries cited Terry Hebert, 51, Clarence Thibodaux, 47, and Lacy Thibodaux, 29, all of Thibodaux, for hunting deer during illegal hours and for hunting from a moving vehicle. Hebert was also cited for illegal spotlighting from a public roadway. Clarence Thibodaux was also cited for hunting across a public roadway, according to a press release.

Agents learned security guards at MARS were allegedly placing bait under street lights to attract deer and then hunting them at night, the release states. The guards would either set up the bait after dark, or patrol by vehicle slowly with their lights off looking for deer, according to the release.

The LDWF set up surveillance in the area, and observed night-hunting taking place several nights, the release states. Prior to midnight on Jan. 6, agents made contact with the three suspects, who were allegedly actively engaged in night-hunting activities at the time, according to the release.

Agents seized two rifles with scopes in the case. ■

SEVEN CITED FOR ALLEGED GOOSE VIOLATIONS IN VERMILION PARISH

Enforcement agents with the LDWF cited seven people in two incidents and seized 198 light geese in a Vermilion Parish case involving hunting migratory game birds from a vehicle on a public road, according to a release.

Agents cited Brian Debarge, 53, of Cameron, Brandon Debarge, 26, of Cameron, Jody Trahan, 37, of Cameron, Allen Romero, 51, of Gueydan, and Timothy Nelton, 55, of Houma, for allegedly hunting migratory game birds from a vehicle on a public road on Dec. 21.

Agents also cited Jeremy Debarge, 32, of Cameron and Lakelyn Rougeau, 21, of Bell City, for the same violations on Christmas Day. ■

FRANKLINTON TEENS ALLEGEDLY SHOOT 181-INCH FENCED DEER IN WASHINGTON PARISH

Two Franklinton teens allegedly shot and then stole a 2 ½-year-old farm-raised 181-inch buck sporting a 23-point rack valued at \$8,500 — then posted at least one picture with the dead deer on Facebook, according to a press release from the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

Drake Barber, 19, and Justin Miller, 17, allegedly shot the 200-pound buck on the night of Dec. 26, 2017 and removed the deer from the owner's property, according to the release.

LDAF brand investigators booked both men into the Washington Parish Jail on Dec. 30 for

theft of property valued at more than \$5,000 but less than \$25,000. If convicted, the suspects face a fine and/or jail time, the release states.

“Investigators said after the suspects illegally shot and killed the deer, it appears they posted a photo with the deer in question on a Facebook page,” LDAF Commissioner Mike Strain said in the release. “Going to someone's private property and stealing their livestock is a crime.”

Evidence in the case shows the deer had not escaped the high fence, but was shot on private property, according to the LDAF. ■

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CRAPPIE





TOP 5 CRAPPIE HOTSPOTS

THE FIVE

By Kinny Haddox

**DETAILS ON A HANDFUL
OF THE HOTTEST
CRAPPIE-PRODUCING
SPOTS IN LOUISIANA —**
AND TIPS FOR YOU TO CATCH
SOME SLABS.

Football fans are probably still discussing (and cussing) the recent College Football Playoffs, where the Crimson Tide downed the Dawgs and were crowned the champs.

But now it's time to discuss another type of Bayou State CFP: The Crappie Fishing Playoffs. Our committee considered credentials, strength of creel, results in head-to-head competition and overall performance.

The results are in, and we picked the Top 5 Louisiana crappie lakes in the state. Here they are, ranked from No. 5 to No. 1. So let the discussing (and cussing) and, of course, the fishing, begin

#5

BEUCOUPS SAC-A-LAIT IN THE ATCHAFALAYA BASIN

Heading into the Atchafalaya Basin looking for crappie is kind of like picking out a ride on a Disney vacation — where do you start?

But first, a change in terminology is needed before we go much further.

We are in Cajun crappie country, where the fish are most often called sac-a-lait. And as far as how many sac-a-lait are in the nation's largest freshwater swamp — well, the only word that can cover it is beaucoups.

The Basin welcomes sac-a-lait anglers to the wild side in Louisiana, covering almost a million acres of swamps, bayous and backwater lakes — an area almost 20 miles wide and 150 miles long. It's not full of crappie from one end to the other, but where it's good, it's really good.

"When you talk about crappie fishing in the Atchafalaya, one of the first areas that you think of is Henderson Lake," said Brac Salyers, inland fisheries biologist with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries who oversees the area. "That's the most popular spot. But really, the Basin lakes are loaded with crappie. Another one of the most fished areas is the Grevenberg Lake area on the lower end. It's a little harder to get to, but has great fishing in the spring."

The key to sac-a-lait success in the Basin is watching the water level, Salyers said. If the Atchafalaya River is on a hard rise, you can just about forget catching sight-feeding fish like crappie. The water will be cold and muddy, especially in the early months.

"But when the water has been dropping for about a week and is coming back out of the swamps and begins to level off a bit, that's when you can catch them," he said. "You can catch them in the lakes or in the runout where the baitfish collect."

For the most part, Salyers said people assume Basin sac-a-lait are mostly small to medium. But the record books show otherwise. The No. 1 white crappie in the state is a 3.8-pounder caught by Tim Ricca in Lake Verret in May of 2010. And

the 3.47-pound fourth place black crappie was taken by Floyd Meche in Lake Henderson in 2004.

Cypress trees are natural holding areas for crappie, but perhaps the best spots are treetops, or small trees, that have blown over into the water. These tops are havens for big groups of sac-a-lait — and with all the storms late last year, there will be plenty of those tops this spring.

"As far as bait goes, most anglers like to use minnows," Salyers said. "But you can catch plenty of them on tube jigs or other plastics. A good rule of thumb is a dark color like

black and chartreuse on sunny days, and white or silver on the cloudy days."

Once the water does stabilize in the spring, anglers can also find good crappie holes in the backs of dead-end canals. A word of caution in the Basin, though: It is an ever-changing environment and some areas can silt in, or get blocked by aquatic vegetation. Take care going and coming to your sac-a-lait hot spots.



The Bobby Garland Baby Shad is a favorite crappie lure across Louisiana.

The water level of the Atchafalaya River is a big key to sac-a-lait success in the Basin: If it's rising hard, you can just about forget catching.



Andy Crawford

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#4

ICE CHESTS REQUIRED FOR SALINE-LARTO FISHERMEN

In addition to poles, baits and normal fishing gear, there's one thing that most Saline-Larto crappie fishermen need on a regular basis — an ice chest. And preferably a big one.

Tony Fuqua knows that first hand, from fishing for fun and taking folks on guided trips the past decade or so. (And just for the record, if he was the only voter in the crappie championship poll, he

put up to four jigs on a pole with an 1/8th-ounce weight on the bottom. Black and chartreuse or brown and orange seem to work best for me — and you can fish whatever brand you want. I like to use the big 2-inch tube jigs. It doesn't seem to matter. Of course, shiners work well, too."

As the water warms, crappie follow traditional patterns on the large backwater complex that

regularly receives flood waters from a trio of area rivers. When fish leave the deeper water, they head to the trees — usually the closest trees to the channel. Fuqua says if you catch one crappie by a tree, work it hard: There are usually five to 10 more fish there.

"It's not unusual to take a couple of fishermen out and catch 50 fish in just a couple of hours, especially the first few months of the year," he said. "And there's a lot more to a trip here than just fishing. You may see alligators, ducks or even a deer swim the bayou. And the

area is lined with giant cypress trees and beautiful scenery. Sometimes looking around, you forget that you are there to go fishing."

But the crappie usually remind you pretty quick when your bait hits the water on the 8,200-acre maze of lakes.



The proof is in the ice chest for these lucky Saline-Larto crappie fishermen guided by Tony Fuqua.

knows who he would pick as No. 1.) "When this place is on, it's just hard to imagine anything being any better," the veteran crappie angler said. "And February and March are prime time. It's championship season. You go to deep channels in Shad Lake, Larto Bayou or Larto Lake, and work that 12- to 18-foot-deep water and you'll catch crappie. This time of year, when you find a few, you'll usually find a bunch, especially near bait balls of shad.

"The spring is the time to spider rig fish," he said. "We will rig up several poles and sometimes I'll

LOUISIANA ISN'T A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Horace Greeley was an 1860s farmer who heeded the call to "Go west, young man" because he saw the fertile farmland there as an ideal place for people to succeed.

Had Greeley been a Louisiana crappie angler, though, he would have been well advised to "Go north, young man" — where hard-working crappie anglers regularly succeed in filling livewells with larger-than-life crappie.

"There is good to great crappie fishing all across the state, but the greatest of them all when it comes to crappie lakes are in the north end of the state," said Mike Wood, the recently retired director of inland fisheries for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

Wood has answered questions about the best crappie lakes time and again throughout his career.

"Some folks don't like hearing it, but the truth is that for a variety of reasons, South Louisiana doesn't have the numbers and size of crappie that North Louisiana lakes boast. There are a number of reasons. But just like you can't catch redfish or speckled trout at Toledo Bend, you can't hit the crappie lottery in South Louisiana like you can up north. South Louisiana does have good crappie fisheries, but not great crappie fisheries."

And there is a very good reason, Wood says. "It's habitat," he explained. "Below Alexandria, we just don't have the big reservoirs that are conducive to large populations of open water forage fish like silversides and thread fin shad that crappie populations thrive on. And the truth of the matter is that the older these big reservoirs get, the better habitat they have for crappie populations to boom.

"The standing timber is gone, and so have the heavy bushes, branches, grass and huge amounts of wood. That has given way to more open water, and is favorable to open water predators of a shad-based forage. That's crappie." ■

- Kinny Haddox



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#3 POVERTY POINT'S RECORD 3-POUNDERS

Poverty Point Reservoir may not have won the championship, but if there was a Heisman Trophy for individual outstanding performances, the Richland Parish reservoir definitely would take home the hardware. It might seem ironic that we've put Poverty Point at No. 3, because it is that very number — three — that keeps this lake near the top of the polls.

That's "3," as in 3-pound crappie.

There's no doubt fishing on the 2,785-acre mostly open water reservoir isn't as good as it was for numbers as in the early years after it opened in 2003.



Dwayne Hosea with a three pound Poverty Point monster.

But then, in the spring of 2016, anglers there started rewriting the books on record crappie, with three fish weighing more than 3 pounds caught in just eight days. The first two massive crappie were caught by twin brothers Twayne and

Dwayne Hosea.

Twayne caught his 3.52-pound slab and set a new lake record. That came just a few days after the duo caught a 2.96 and a 2.91. Then Dwayne pulled up a 3.48 pounder. The lake residents caught

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their fish — the No. 2 and No. 3-ranked white crappie in the sate — on Bobby Garland Baby Shad jigs.

A few days later, reservoir angler Rodger McConnell got in a 3.46 pounder that is No. 4 in the state record books. All told, six of the Top 10 white crappie in Louisiana come from Poverty Point — as well as the largest black crappie, a 3.84-pounder caught by Randy Causey in April of 2010.

“We go after big crappie, and we spent countless hours on the lake targeting big crappie,” said Twayne, a soft-spoken angler who doesn’t like to bring attention to himself — but is proud to shine light on the lake he calls home. “It’s a fantastic lake to fish. You just have to put in some time and be patient. Some days there are so many people fishing that it discourages some fishermen. But we are fortunate that we can fish right up until dark this time of year and catch some good ones after everyone else goes home.”

Hosea recommended using electronics to find tops, and then fishing slowly. Some of the best fish are caught in spots where anglers have spent an hour fishing the same structure.

Plastic jigs are their favorites, but a lot of big fish are still caught on shiners. Early in the year, fish are hanging near deeper water, but in the spring they move into the numerous pockets and coves (usually those closest to the deep water.)

One Hosea hint for catching the big ones — get there early and stay late: That’s when some of the best big bites come.

#2 >



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#2

D'ARBONNE'S SLABS PUT IT IN CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS

Matching any other Louisiana lake against monster-sized Toledo Bend doesn't seem fair. But if any lake could make a run at that Goliath, it would be 16,000-acre Lake D'Arbonne in Union Parish.

Anglers on this lake score more 1.5- to 2-pound crappie than anywhere, especially when you consider the size of the lake. Smaller fish are everywhere.

The fact that two national crappie tours — Crappie Masters and the American Crappie Trail — make tournament stops at the lake speak volumes. In 2019, ACT will even hold its National Championship on the 'Bone — a tournament that will award in excess of \$125,000 in cash and prizes.

The fact is, D'Arbonne is a miniature Toledo Bend, with a river channel that concentrates the fish in the winter, miles of shallow shoreline and trees that draw spawning fish in the spring, and stump-filled flats and tops that produce fish all spring and summer.

"There are three ways you'll catch fish here for the next several months and they are all good," Steve Danna said.

And Danna's no ordinary crappie chaser. He lives on D'Arbonne, but travels to fish both pro circuits, and is a veteran crappie seminar speaker.

"You'll find fish in the river and creek channels. You'll find fish on the move, staging on the 5- to 8-foot flats. And you'll find the aggressive ones heading up to the trees and water as shallow as a foot as soon as the water temperatures hit close to 60," he said. "And the thing about D'Arbonne, on any given day, there will be crappie in all three of those spots... for a couple of months."

Here's how Danna recommends going after them.

First, in the channel, he uses a modified spider rig, usually with about four poles. He'll find shad on the electronics and move with them, keeping his jig just above the fish. On clear days, he likes Garland's monkey milk, ice blue and blue and pearl colors. On darker days, he goes to a purple and pink Vegas color or pink panther. And he never puts a jig in the water without a chartreuse crappie bite.

As the fish move on the ridges, double minnow rigs are popular on the lake, but you can mix those with jigs in the same colors as listed above. He likes going to a two-pole system with one in each hand, working up and down the ridges.

His favorite D'Arbonne plan of attack comes when the fish hit the trees. He often switches to one of his hand-tied hair jigs for tree fishing. His favorite colors are blue and chartreuse, blue and pink and crawfish color.

Several manufacturers produce those colors and once again, shiners and plastic jigs will also work.

His favorite method is to pitch the jig past the tree and let it slowly fall down by the root system. Fish are likely to hit it anywhere on the fall, and sometimes bigger ones will hit it after it has sat there for a few seconds — all you'll feel is a mushy sensation. Either way, set the hook.

The good thing about D'Arbonne, Danna said, is the quantity of big fish — and the fact that they are literally caught from one end of the lake to the other.

Steve Danna works the edges of a Lake D'Arbonne cypress tree for crappie.



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FOR SHEER NUMBERS, TOLEDO BEND TAKES THE TITLE

How many anglers could look you in the eye and say, “I probably caught 10,000 crappie last year.”

Probably not too many — but Ed Terry could.

Terry’s home is in New Orleans, but he “lives” on Toledo Bend pretty much from February through the end of October. While he’s only been a full-time guide on the big 190,000-acre reservoir on the Louisiana-Texas border for two years, he’s a veteran of crappie fishing the Bend for much of his life.

In 2017, he made 230 guided trips — and he and his clients brought home an average of 40-plus fish each trip. They caught many, many more — so you do the math.

“That’s why I can say unequivocally that Toledo Bend is the best crappie fishing lake in the state, maybe anywhere,” Terry says. “It’s just the numbers of fish. I’m not the only one that does that. And when certain areas like the Chicken Coop line up, it’s just amazing how many fishermen are out

Andy Crawford



Wally Marshall, aka “Mr. Crappie,” reels in a nice slab at Toledo Bend.

there catching how many fish.

“And there are a lot of big fish. You certainly see that all over the lake in the spring during the spawn.”

The coldest weather of the year drives fish to congregate over structure or schools of shad in the deeper waters of Toledo Bend, in areas like the Chicken Coop north of Pendleton Bridge. There is not as much deep water on the north end of the reservoir as there is the south end. Therefore, Terry says, the numbers of fish that gather in the channels is more concentrated than on the south end — where there is much more deeper water to choose from.

“Everybody knows about the Chicken Coop, and when the weather, the water level and the temperatures line up, you can walk from boat to boat in there for several weeks,” he said.

Two things Terry keys on are water surface temperatures around 55 degrees (which mean it's much colder 20 feet down), and a stable water level around 186 to 187 feet. When those conditions line up, you've just got to locate the schools of crappie on your electronics

and get the bait down to them.

There are lots of baits that work, but it's hard to beat shiners. Terry also likes to fish Bobby Garland jigs in monkey milk, electric chicken and Cajun grasshopper.

Because of the sheer number of crappie on the lake, you can catch fish starting to head into shallower water at different times of the spring. Some fish apparently don't ever move shallow, and are caught around the river channels all spring long. But the norm is for the fish to begin to move in to spawn when the water temperatures reach the 60s.

At Toledo Bend, the best places to start looking are in water as deep as 10 to 12 feet if there's good grass. (The Bend is the only lake in Louisiana where that depth of water would be considered shallow.)

You can also catch them all the way up to 2 feet deep around the shorelines and cover there. Again, the best cover is grass beds with clear spots in them for the crappie to spawn. When they hit those areas, there is nothing better to catch them with than Road Runner lures in white or chartreuse colors.

As the year warms up, the fish head

Ed Terry with a Toledo Bend slab caught near the Pendleton Bridge, shown in the background.



to tops, many of which are placed by anglers like Terry. The shad gather there and the crappie follow.

If you want to line up a trip or get the latest Toledo Bend report, get in touch with Terry at slabhunter@sshguideservice.com or visit sshguideservice.com. ■



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 Farmerville.

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From left to right are Ronald Primeaux, Allen Hebert, Robbie Simon.

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2017-18

DEER OF THE YEAR



It almost seems like yesterday that bowhunters in the Bayou State headed into the field in early fall to kick off the 2017-18 deer season in Louisiana.

And it didn't take long to put some truly incredible bucks down, chief among them the amazing 18-pointer by Dr. Frank Sullivan, a St. Francisville dentist who arrowed what could be the state's largest Louisiana non-typical deer ever killed with a bow on Oct. 5.

That deer, estimated to gross between 220 and 230 inches of bone, set the pace for the season, and it didn't take long for other hunters to rack up spectacular wall-hangers, as

well. Geoffrey Henry stuck a 200-class trophy nicknamed after Hurricane Harvey in Richland Parish, and Benny Bell and Donald Alexander each nailed 200-class bucks in DeSoto Parish. Darrin Dawes got into the mix late, knocking down a "Ghost" in St. Landry Parish on Jan. 12 that might just wind up as the new state-record typical buck.

Louisiana Sportsman writers covered hunts on 45 big bucks statewide, with 40 of them scoring at least 150 inches — and 23 of those hitting the 160-inch mark.

Here are details on some of the latest trophy kills, along with a season-long timeline on when — and where — big bucks went down.



DEER OF THE YEAR



**GIANT ST. LANDRY
PARISH 'GHOST'
GREEN SCORES
MID-180S TYPICAL**

Jan. 12
Darrin Dawes
St. Landry Parish
190 5/8 non-typical,
184-185 typical

A massive St. Landry Parish buck dubbed “The Ghost” had never been seen by a hunter during daylight hours until Friday, Jan. 12.

And Darrin Dawes didn’t waste the opportunity when he spotted the main-frame 12-point that could be a state record typical buck.

A biologist and taxidermist grossed the deer out at 190 5/8 non-typical, with a typical greenscore of between 184 and 185 — in line with the current state-record typical buck that measured 184 6/8 inches.

Even though no one had laid eyes on the big deer, The Ghost wasn’t all that shy. Trail cam photos of the monster were readily captured. It’s just that nary a picture of the 6 1/2-year-old buck was captured during hunting hours. That includes images from the 2016-17 season, when the animal first appeared.

“I don’t think anybody had any daylight exposures of this deer,” Dawes said.

The huge deer, which sported dual split brow tines and one more scorable abnormal point to bring the total count to 15 points, lived on a roughly 400-acre patch of woods. And it wasn’t that big of a secret. In fact, everyone in the area knew of the buck’s existence.

“Between Christmas and New Years, when I say I saw 13 orange shirts back there, that’s no lie,” Dawes said. “(The property) was full of people.”

But the crowds gave up after the holidays, so Dawes and his best friend Kevin Spieer had the woods to themselves.

“Last week, everybody got tired of hunting and feeding,” Dawes said.

Even though they had already spent innumerable hours in their stands, Dawes and Spieer never gave up.

“We’d been watching the deer since October,” Dawes said. “As soon as we saw it — you just kind of freak out when you see a deer that could be 200 inches.

“We knew he was special.”

Dawes and Spieer kept feed sites going. But nothing really changed until Friday.

“We never could get a daylight exposure of this deer,” Dawes said.

The hunter knocked off work at 3 p.m. and headed straight for the woods, arriving at his stand about 4 p.m.

His feeding site was clean.

That gave him a hint that the buck could in the immediate area. He texted

Spieer the good news.

“I knew the deer had moved up in front of our property,” Dawes said.

So he settled into his stand, but he didn’t have to wait long.

At 4:45 p.m., something caught his eye in the overgrown high line about 50 yards out from his position.

“The weeds are about 5 feet tall,” Dawes said. “The wind was blowing, and there were some cattails in there moving around.

“But I seen what looked like tree branches moving, so I put the binoculars on it.”

He quickly realized those “tree branches” were connected to the buck he’d been chasing all season.

“I thought, ‘Oh, my God. This is fixin’ to happen,’” Dawes said.

The excited hunter traded his ‘nocs for his 7mm rifle, but when he got the scope on the animal he froze.

“He was looking straight at me,” Dawes said.

Finally, the deer relaxed again. At that point, things moved quickly.

The buck was with a yearling, which the

mature deer pushed out of the weeds into Dawes’ shooting lane.

“He stepped out right behind her,” Dawes said. “He gave me a perfect broad-side shot. I saw his head and neck, and I figured out where his body was in the weeds. I picked a spot and, boom, shot him.

“I hit him right behind the shoulder.” And just like that, the Ghost was finally on the ground.

The 15 scorable points are arrayed around main beams that are incredibly thick.

“It has about 50 inches of mass,” Dawes said.

It must receive a final score of more than 180 5/8 inches to rank in the Top 10 typical deer in the state, according to the Louisiana Big Game Records.

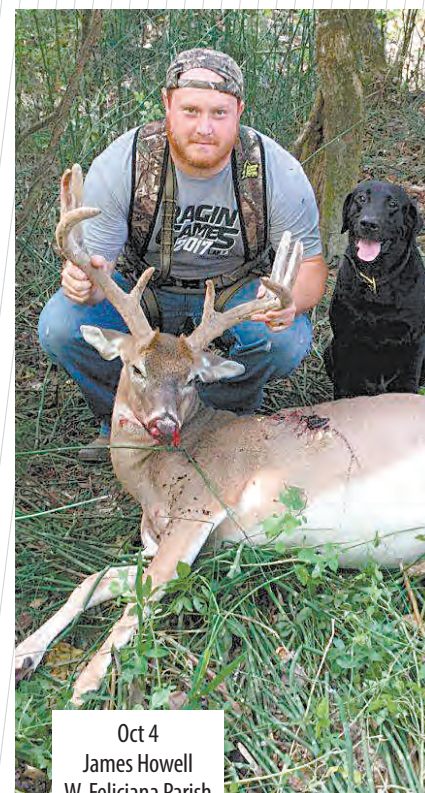
But no matter how the score officially shakes out, Dawes said he feels blessed to have killed the brute.

“It was my day to shine,” he said. “It could have been anybody; it was my turn.” ■

— Andy Crawford



Oct. 3
Geoffrey Henry
Richland Parish
192 1/8



Oct 4
James Howell
W. Feliciana Parish
135

MORE BUCKS >



DEER OF THE YEAR

**FATHER'S ADVICE
PAYS OFF WITH
300-POUND
MADISON PARISH
11-POINT**

Jennifer Wall had hunted her Madison Parish stand practically every day since deer season opened — but hadn't seen a thing.

So it was an easy decision when her alarm sounded at 4:30 a.m. on Nov. 22 to turn it off, roll over and go back to sleep. But advice her dad had given her kept running through her mind.

>

Nov. 22
Jennifer Wall
Madison Parish
177



"I remember my dad saying, 'The morning you don't go is the morning he'll show up,'" Wall said. "So I crawled out of bed, got dressed and headed for my stand."

She and her husband own and operate a corn and cotton farm with a 500-acre lease in the middle of the property — a lease that was CRP land.

"I was on the stand by 5:15. This box stand has sliding wooden windows on three sides with Plexiglass on the other," she said. "My cousin had hunted my stand earlier and said while looking out the Plexiglass window he had seen a big deer but couldn't tell what it was."

Wall said it was cold with a strong wind blowing that Wednesday morning, and her friend in a nearby stand texted her about how bad the wind was, expressing doubt they'd see anything.

"I picked up my phone and sent her a text, agreeing that we were probably both wasting our time," Wall said.

From her stand, Wall has a view of a big open field on one side and a CRP on the other, an area that was thick with brush and briars. She opened the window, laid her beanie on the ledge for a gun rest, took the sling off her rifle — a Remington 7mm-08 — and propped her gun in the window.

"I knew there was no way I'd see a decent deer coming across the open field, but I looked to my left and 50 yards away, I saw what looked like a horse with horns," she said. "I dropped my phone in

my lap, got my rifle up — and although the buck continued walking toward the CRP — I found his shoulder in my scope and touched the trigger.

"The deer buckled, but then took off into the briars and brush."

Hearing the shot, Wall's friend texted her and was told what had transpired. She offered to come immediately, but Wall told her to sit tight for a while.

"After texting my husband, who was hunting in Mississippi at the time, I decided to go to where the action had taken place and was discouraged when I found absolutely nothing indicating I had hit the deer," she said. "I walked into the CRP maybe 50 yards without finding anything. I returned to my stand to allow my friend to hunt a while longer."

Around 9:15, her friend joined her and the pair began scouring the heavy brush and briars for any sign she had hit the deer.

"My friend walked to the right and I headed left when I called to her and said I'd found a couple of drops of blood. She came over, we found more blood, and when we looked into a small clearing up ahead, we saw him lying there," Wall said. "She and I did the 'Rocky dance,' jumping up and down and yelling.

"I took a photo of the buck with my phone, sent it to my husband and his first words were, 'Holy crap!'"

With the help of three other people, the massive 307-pound buck was loaded

up on the side-by-side. The big deer sported a heavy rack featuring 11 points, with an impressive inside spread of 18 5/8 inches.

At Simmons' Sporting Goods in Bastrop, the deer scored 177 inches of bone. Wall's taxidermist estimated the buck's age at 8 ½ years, and had to order a special form from Saskatchewan because of the giant size of the deer. ■

— Glynn Harris



Oct. 5
Dr. Frank Sullivan
W. Feliciana Parish
220-230 estimated



Oct. 7
Jordan Watts
Panther Swamp NWR
(Miss.) 151



Oct. 8
Bobby Albert
Kisatchie National Forest
143 2/8

[MORE BUCKS >](#)

DEER OF THE YEAR

14-POINT NICKNAMED 'MUFASA' GOES DOWN IN JACKSON PARISH

In Disney's "The Lion King," the chief of the lion pride was a stately monarch named "Mufasa."

There also was a big buck hanging around Adam Ponder's 200-acre Jackson Parish hunting lease that was tabbed as the dominant one on the property, so a club member nicknamed it after the big lion.

Trail cameras revealed Mufasa was a 150-inch 11-point last season when a hunter on a neighboring lease shot — but was unable to recover — the big buck.

"We assumed he was dead because there were no more photos of him the rest of the season and on into this hunting season," Ponder said. "However, we were excited when he showed up on one of our cameras on Dec. 1. It was obvious he had not only survived the superficial neck wound from last season, he had grown significantly."

"Then on Dec. 22, we got a second photo of him."

So Ponder, who lives in Quitman and works in the oil field industry, planned a hunt on the Weyerhaeuser lease with his wife on the afternoon of Dec. 28.

"My wife picked me up at work, brought my hunting clothes and we drove to the hunting club near Vernon in Jackson Parish," he said. "I



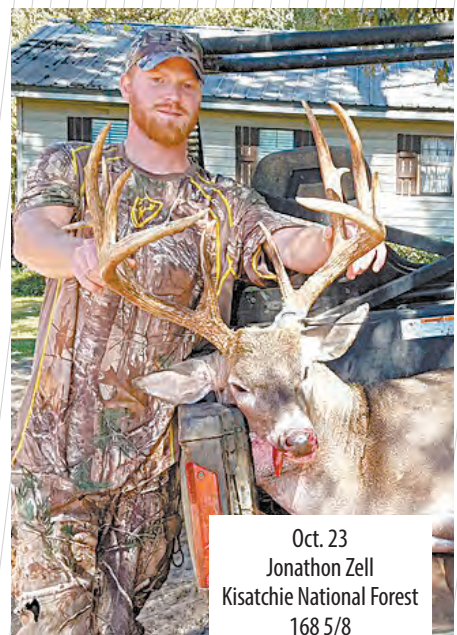
Dec. 28
Adam Ponder
Jackson Parish
171



Oct. 15
Drew Clark
Union Parish
142 3/8



Oct. 15
Meadow McNeal
Winn Parish
139 5/8



Oct. 23
Jonathon Zell
Kisatchie National Forest
168 5/8

LULING HUNTER SHOOT'S BIG TENSAS PARISH BUCK

got my wife set up in a box stand and I continued on down the edge of the woods packing my climbing stand until I found a tree that gave me a good look at the 10-acre clear cut that bordered the pine plantation.”

Climbing some 20 feet up a big pine, Ponder was able to see into the 3-year-old clear cut, as well as the pine woods behind him.

He normally bowhunts, but decided that afternoon to take a rifle — a Browning .270 he had borrowed from a friend because the scope on his own rifle was messed up.

“Every once in a while, I would hit my grunt call a couple of times and watch and listen. Along about 5:15, I hit the call again and shortly afterwards, I heard something coming at a trot through the woods behind me,” Ponder said. “It sounded just like a coyote does when it trots along, and that’s what I assumed it was. Instead of a coyote, I saw legs of a deer and then I saw antlers, so I knew it was a buck — and when he cleared some bushes, I got a better view of the rack and knew it was a good buck.”

With heavy brush obscuring his view, he looked ahead of the deer and saw a tiny opening. Fortunately, the buck stopped there, giving Ponder a view of its shoulder. He touched the trigger at 30 yards and the buck took off.

“I could see him run for a ways, then he suddenly flipped over and hit the ground and didn’t move again,” Ponder said. “I called my wife and a hunting buddy and told them I’d shot a good buck. It took me nearly 10 minutes to calm my nerves enough to climb down the tree.

“When I got halfway to the downed buck, I could see the antlers and knew it was Mufasa.”

The buck, which was rutted down and weighed 175 pounds, sported a heavy rack with 14 points and bases between 6 and 7 inches each. The main beams stretched more than 23 inches with tall G2s and G3s. The inside spread was only 14 inches, but heavy mass and tine length gave the buck an impressive green score of 171 inches.

Adding to his special week, Ponder bowhunted with friends on Tensas National Wildlife Refuge on Dec. 30, and ended the year with a nice 7-point. ■

— Glynn Harris

When the image of a big Tensas Parish buck started appearing on 17-year-old Hayden Theriot’s trail cameras in early October, he had his sights set on meeting up with the impressive deer.

On Dec. 30, the senior at Hahnville High School finally got his chance, but not before a bit of soul-searching — and pulling a little rank on his cousin.

That Saturday afternoon, his cousin and two more friends crawled aboard a woods buggy and headed for their stands. But on the way, the buggy broke down and as time was getting late, the quartet of hunters hurried to get on stands before daylight was gone.

“There are only three stands we could walk to that late in the afternoon, and one of them is a two-man ladder stand,” Theriot explained. “Two of the hunters headed for stands while my cousin and I decided to sit on the two-man ladder.”

As daylight started fading, a doe walked out and Theriot dropped it. The family has DMAP tags and wanted to thin the doe population a bit, so there was no hesitation about taking the doe.

“About 15 minutes later, we looked up and this big buck walked out at 300 yards,” he said. “It was my cousin’s time to shoot, but actually my cousin hadn’t hunted much and this was the buck I’d been after all season — so it was a no-brainer for me to try him.”

Theriot’s first shot with his .300 Win Mag was high and he completely missed the buck. However, the deer took a couple of steps in their direction, apparently

not knowing where the shot came from. “I jacked another shell in and this time when I shot, he hit the ground right there,” Theriot said.

The rack carried 11 points with a drop tine and kicker off the G2. The inside spread was 16 inches, and the bases were impressive at nearly 7 inches each with mass that continued throughout the rack.

The buck was 5 ½ years old and weighed just under 200 pounds. A Buckmaster scorer put tape on the rack and came up with 168 4/8 inches. ■

— Glynn Harris



Dec. 30
Hayden Theriot
Tensas Parish
168 4/8

[MORE BUCKS >](#)

DEER OF THE YEAR

Zach Roszell has access to a couple of hunting leases near his home in Effie, but chose to hunt his family farmland in Avoyelles Parish on Friday, Dec. 22.

A big buck had shown itself on camera for the first time there only three days earlier on a portion of the farm no one had hunted this season.

So in spite of the fact that the only stand there was an old uncomfortable ladder stand, Roszell, 28, decided the trail camera photos were ample reason to give it a try anyway.

“The stand was one nobody wanted to sit on because there was a big limb that had never been trimmed — a limb that meant if you sat on it, you’d have to twist around to allow for the limb in the way,” Roszell said.

After a morning hunt that didn’t produce a single sighting, Roszell actually walked the banks of a canal next to the stand, looking for a suitable place to sit on the ground. Not finding anything to his satisfaction, he resigned himself to climbing back onto the old ladder for the afternoon hunt.

“The weather was anything but suitable that day,” Roszell said. “The temperature hit near 80 degrees and not only was the stand uncomfortable, I had to swat mosquitoes all afternoon.”

With only about 30 minutes of shooting time left, Roszell finally saw his first action of the day: A button buck stepped out into an opening to feed on the corn, rice bran and soybeans there. But Roszell noticed the little buck kept looking back in the direction it had come.

FAMILY FARMLAND YIELDS 13-POINT STUD IN AVOYELLES PARISH

Dec. 22
Zach Roszell
Avoyelles Parish
167 4/8.



DOE LEADS BIG 13-POINT RIGHT INTO CROSSHAIRS

"After the yearling had been there for 10 minutes or so, a big doe stepped out and she soon began looking at me, freezing me in position," Roszell said. "The doe finally walked off and when I turned to see if the yearling was still there just off to my left, there was the big buck.

"I really don't know where he came from."

Realizing this was the same deer that had appeared on camera only three days before and that it was now standing only 40 yards away, Roszell knew everything would have to fall into place for a good shot.

"Since the ladder had no shooting rail, I had carried a forked stick into the stand with me and was able to ease my Remington 7mm onto the stick, get the crosshairs on him and squeeze the trigger," he said. "The buck dropped in his tracks right there."

The big deer was a genuine trophy, sporting 13 points on a rack with configuration that's hard to describe: heavy palmation on one side, sporting three main beams with a kicker off the back. The inside spread was 17 1/2 inches, with one base circumference stretching the tape more than 7 inches. The buck weighed 255 pounds, with antlers that green-scored 167 4/8 inches. ■

— Glynn Harris

If Adam Dalme scored his Dec. 17 deer hunt like a basketball game, the 24-year-old hunter would have to give an assist to a big doe that led a 13-point buck off of neighboring property right onto his shooting lane — and his Remington .30-06 did the rest.

"I was sitting around the house that afternoon, checked the time and decided I since I had nothing better to do, I'd go get on my stand," Dalme said.

Although he is a member of a hunting club between Natchitoches and Many, Dalme has access to property much closer to his home in Clarence just east of Natchitoches.

"My parents own 60-plus acres of land near where we live," he said. "The land is basically a cow pasture, but has about 5 acres of woods adjoining it. I have an old box stand on the ground in the woods at the back of the property."



Dec. 17
Adam Dalme
Natchitoches Parish
167 3/8

Dalme has had a big buck on the trail cameras there for the past three years.

"I hunted him hard for two years without success and this year the construction work I do has kept me out of the deer stand more than I'd like," he said. "I did manage to take a couple of cull bucks off the lease I'm in west of Natchitoches, but the big one here close to home has just eluded me."

Getting to his ground blind around 4, Dalme settled back to see if by chance the big buck would show itself during the brief window of time before darkness settled.

"About 4:40, I had a big doe cross my shooting lane and I heard her walking toward a fence behind me that separates our property from neighboring land," he said. "She jumped the fence and as soon as she did, I heard a buck grunt."

Getting a glimpse of the buck, Dalme knew it was the one he was

continues >



Oct. 28
Benny Bell
DeSoto Parish
215 6/8



Oct. 28
Jason Futrell
Grant Parish
160

DEER OF THE YEAR

>

after — but unfortunately, it wasn't on his property.

The doe, however, had another idea that played perfectly into Dalme's hands.

The female deer jumped the fence back onto his parents' property, went through a ditch behind him and came across his shooting lane at about 172 yards.

"As soon as she crossed, I saw the buck right behind her," he said. "I got my rifle up and as he darted across, I was able to quickly get him in the crosshairs and shoot him on the run. He hit the ground

but then got up and ran."

Sitting in his blind for 10 long minutes, Dalme began doubting his accuracy, and started feeling like he may have made a bad shot on the deer.

"I walked down where he was running when I shot and I found no blood or evidence of a hit although I knew I'd hit him because he hit the ground before running off," he said. "I got my light, shined it out in the direction he ran and got excited when I saw him laying there just off the lane. Thankfully, I didn't have to

blood trail him at all."

The buck, which weighed 200 pounds, had a rack with 13 points that featured a 19 1/8-inch spread with impressive mass throughout. At Simmons' Sporting Goods in Bastrop, the rack measured 167 3/8 inches. ■

— Glynn Harris

MORE BUCKS >



Oct. 28
Kelly Bagwell
Lincoln Parish
169 1/8



Oct. 28
Stacey Mathews
Bienville Parish
163 4/8



Oct. 29
Zack Buckner
Claiborne Parish
164 4/8



Nov. 1
Scott Gill
Claiborne Parish
158 6/8



Nov. 9
Hunter Thomas
Natchitoches Parish
153 2/8



Nov. 11
Brad Martin
Lincoln Parish
167

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DEER OF THE YEAR

EXPECTING CULL BUCK, SABINE PARISH HUNTER DROPS 166-INCH STUD

Jacob Cheatwood had one particular deer on his radar when he got to his stand near Florien in Sabine Parish on the morning of November 11: It was a skinny-racked buck that had been showing up on his camera — and his plan was to take that breeder out of the gene pool.

But instead of the cull stepping out, a heavy-racked 13-point — one he had never seen nor had on camera — eased into his lane at 60 yards. One shot behind the shoulder with his Thompson Center .308, and the buck didn't run far before crashing.

"This cull buck had been showing up regularly on my cameras around mid-morning, and it was my plan to see if I could take him out," said Cheatwood, 19. "I didn't get to the woods until 8:20 or so after dropping my little brother off at

another stand a mile away."

Since the skinny-racked buck had been consistently seen on camera around 10 a.m., Cheatwood felt like he had gotten to the stand in plenty of time to have an encounter with the cull — and also collect some venison in the process.

"About 10:20, a doe stepped from a trail to begin working on the rice bran and I watched her for at least 20 minutes," he said. "I noticed that she kept looking back in the direction she had come, so I texted my brother to tell him what I was seeing.

"I set the phone down, looked up and this big buck I had never seen nor had on camera stepped into the old road with

his head down about 60 yards from me. All I could tell about the deer was he had some tall antlers, but I couldn't really tell much about the rack. He took three steps, I put the crosshairs on him and fired. He went down on the front end and ran into the woods all stiff-legged; I knew I'd hit him good."



Nov. 11
Jacob Cheatwood
Sabine Parish
166 5/8

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Calling his brother and telling him he'd shot a good one, Cheatwood walked down to where the deer had been standing and found good blood. Looking in the direction the deer ran, he spotted the buck on the ground with its head behind some brush.

"I walked up slowly, making sure he was dead," Cheatwood said. "As I stepped around to where I could see his rack, I was just about overwhelmed. I had no idea I'd shot a deer this impressive."

The buck was a trophy for sure, sporting 13 points on a heavy-horned rack. The inside spread was only 15 inches, but the mass and tine length more than made up for it. The buck tipped the scales at 190 pounds, and was estimated to be 5 1/2 years old.

Cheatwood took the deer to Simmons' Sporting Goods in Bastrop to enter in the store's Big Buck Contest. Simmons scored the buck as a 12 point – one small tine was just under 1 inch – and the rack measured 166 5/8 inches. ■

— Glynn Harris



Nov. 12
John Corso
DeSoto Parish
150



Nov. 18
Brady Bogues
Bossier Parish
150 7/8

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DEER OF THE YEAR



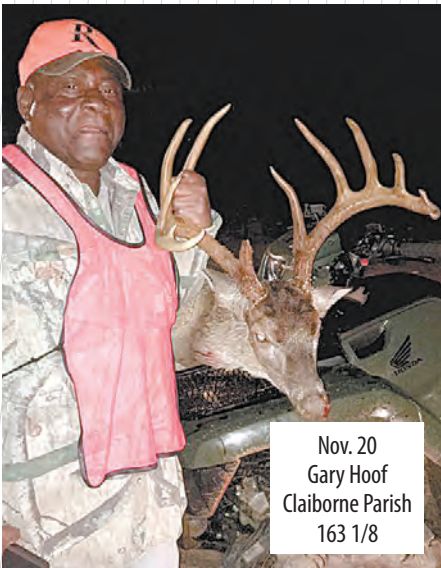
Nov. 18
John Michael Garcia
DeSoto Parish
150



Nov. 19
Dean Wainwright
Vernon Parish
166



Nov. 19
Donald Alexander
DeSoto Parish
199 1/8



Nov. 20
Gary Hoof
Claiborne Parish
163 1/8



Nov. 23
Chris Hart
Union Parish
150 5/8



Nov. 25
Conner Gay
Lincoln Parish
164



Nov. 26
Seth Davis
Dewey Wills WMA
165



Nov. 27
Thomas Bourne
Claiborne Parish
152



Dec. 2
Corey Eppinette
Union Parish
153

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DEER OF THE YEAR

12-POINT PUBLIC LAND BRUTE GOES DOWN ON YANCEY

On Tuesday, Jan. 2, Marksville's Joey Turner and his hunting buddies headed for their camp on the outskirts of one of his favorite hunting spots: Richard K. Yancey Wildlife Management Area in Concordia Parish. "The weather was really cold, and although some of my buddies hunted that morning, I waited until noon to venture out," said Turner, 33, who works for Dow Chemical in Plaquemine. "I had made a couple of hunts on the area earlier in the season and decided with a bucks-only season open, I'd see if I might be able to have an encounter with a particular buck we had not seen, but had found tracks, rubs and scrapes for — indicating it was a mature deer."

Although it was cold, Turner said he worked up a sweat walking into the heart of the management area some 800 yards before reaching the spot he intended to hunt.

"I found a place with fresh scrapes and rubs, a spot along a ridge with thick underbrush," he said. "I figured if a mature buck was going to be traveling,



Jan. 2
Joey Turner
Richard K. Yancey WMA
166 4/8

he would likely cross the ridge in the thicket and I wanted to be there if he did.

"I felt good about the area, and around 2:30 I used my climbing stand to ascend about 15 feet up a tree that gave me a good view of the ridge and thicket."

Settling into his stand, Turner waited half an hour, took out his rattling horns and gave them a couple of crashes. Not seeing anything, he waited another half hour and repeated the rattling procedure. A group of feral hogs came through

and Turner was tempted to shoot one, but decided to hold off because he was more interested in bucks than boars.

"After waiting another half hour, I crashed the antlers together a third time and I heard branches cracking behind me. Looking back, I saw a deer running toward me, and I could see at least eight points," Turner said. "I had killed a smaller buck earlier in the season and decided if I was going to shoot another one, it would have to be a good one."



Dec. 5
Tyler Waller
Webster Parish
152



Dec. 10
Shay Seacrist
Jackson Parish
155 3/8



Dec. 14
Michael Hightower
Claiborne Parish
150

When he realized he was looking at a buck he wanted to shoot, he got his Browning BAR .270 in position and when the deer trotted through the only small opening he could see, Turner squeezed the trigger and the buck collapsed.

"I didn't know what I had shot, just that it was a good buck. When my friends hunting nearby heard me shoot, they texted me and I told them I had a good buck down but I had to sit in my stand a few minutes to calm down," he said. "When I climbed down and started toward the deer, I expected it to get smaller the closer I got — but that didn't happen, it seemed to grow bigger.

"It was hard for me to realize I'd shot a deer this big on public land."

The buck sported 12 points on a massive rack. The inside spread was 18 7/8 inches, bases were more than 6 inches each, with main beams exceeding 25 inches. The buck was unofficially green-scored at 166 4/8 inches. ■

— Glynn Harris

HUNTER STRIKES OUT IN ILLINOIS, SCORES BIG IN EBR PARISH

Hunter McCullough and his father-in-law dished out a hefty chunk of change to make a deer hunt to Illinois earlier this season — but he came home empty-handed and depressed.

So on Saturday, Dec. 9, he headed to a 28-acre plot of land his family has permission to hunt in East Baton Rouge parish just 20 minutes from his home in Walker.

And his depression quickly turned to delight when he settled his scope on a big 15-point buck.

"I was really down on myself after my hunt in Illinois because I had chances at two nice bucks and didn't get either one," he said. "The land we have permission to hunt here is a little skinny piece of property, but it does have some nice features. There are lots of oaks and a ridge situated between two sloughs. I went to hunt there because I was really needing some venison for the freezer and hoped

to shoot a doe."

With snow still on the ground from December's wintry weather, McCullough and his father-in-law decided to pass up a morning hunt and made plans to head for the property that afternoon.

"My father-in-law dropped me off at one of the ladder stands on the property and he went a little further and got in his climbing stand," McCullough said. "Soon after getting on the ladder, I began to squirm and fidget because it was so uncomfortable. I texted my father-in-law and he suggested I go sit on another ladder stand, so I did."

After relocating to another spot, a doe walked out, and although he needed some venison, McCullough decided to pass on it because the day was still young and weather conditions were favorable.

"I didn't want to shoot the first thing I saw, so I waited. It wasn't long before three spikes walked out and put on a show for me, grunting, fighting and trying to make scrapes," he said. "They finally left, but then came back and started acting really nervous; I felt like they knew something else was in the area. The spikes left but one came back and stopped right under the tree where I sat on my ladder."

Hearing something walking in the leaves to his left, McCullough saw a big deer and was able to make out antlers through the thick brush.

"I could tell it was a good deer and when I counted at least eight points, I knew this was one I was going to take if I could," he said.

The buck continued slowly on down the slough stopping to feed on acorns. Looking ahead of the deer, McCullough saw one small opening where he would have a chance for a shot.

"As the buck took his time slowly walking and stopping to pick up acorns, I could see his rack well enough to count 12



Dec. 9
Hunter McCullough
E. Baton Rouge Parish
160

points so to keep from losing it, I stopped looking at his rack," he said. "Finally he stepped into the opening, I moved my gun just a bit when the spike beneath my stand saw or heard me move and started stomping. When he did, the big buck raised his head and I got him in the scope of my Ruger .270 between two trees and hit the trigger. At the shot, the buck took off and I watched him for maybe 30 yards when I didn't see him any longer and all was quiet."

Texting his father-in-law about what he had shot, the pair began following the blood trail, finding the buck dead only 50 yards away.

Once the deer was hauled out of the woods and examined, it had 15 points with a 19-inch inside spread and main beams nearly 22 inches long. The deer, aged at 4 1/2 years, weighed 220 pounds and green-scored 160 inches.

"My father-in-law's comment was priceless," McCullough said. "He said, 'You paid all that money to hunt in Illinois — and you come home and shoot a lifetime buck 20 minutes from home.'" ■

— Glynn Harris

[MORE BUCKS >](#)

DEER OF THE YEAR

KISATCHIE PUBLIC LAND BRUTE BITES THE DUST

For the past 21 years, Teddy Dupuy has driven two and a half hours from his home in St. Amant to the Kisatchie National Forest — his absolute favorite place to hunt deer.

The 52-year-old contractor takes his vacation the week around Thanksgiving when the rut is kicking in, and he and his wife drive up in their RV and park in the Williana campground in Grant Parish.

While he hunts the whole week, his wife is content to stay in the RV, reading and watching movies.

The area Dupuy likes to hunt is where a select cut has been made with the pines, leaving heavy brush in windrows. He climbs 30 feet up so he can see into the thickets that have grown since the last timber harvest.

On Thanksgiving morning, Nov. 23, he had even more to be thankful for when he downed a huge 8-point buck that green-scored 158 inches.

“I scouted the portion of the forest I like to hunt that Saturday and found evi-



Nov. 23
Teddy Dupuy
Kisatchie National Forest
158

dence of a good buck leaving sign in the area,” Dupuy said. “I started setting up on him Sunday afternoon. On Monday, I got

a glimpse of a big buck - I felt it was the one I was after – but he got by without me being able to get a shot.”



Dec. 25
John Stansbury
Union Parish
156 1/8



Dec. 25
Daniel Colvin
Union Parish
150 3/8



Jan. 3
Taylor Brown
Madison Parish
155 5/8

Undeterred, Dupuy moved his climber some 30 yards in the direction the buck had walked, hoping to be there should the deer decide to take the same basic travel route. But Dupuy hunted all day Tuesday and Wednesday, and didn't see much of anything.

"I saw a spike Tuesday. Nothing happened Wednesday, but on Thanksgiving morning, things started to become interesting," he said. "The spike showed up again with four does; he was messing with them, chasing them around when I turned to look behind me and I saw a big buck about 40 yards away.

"I hadn't heard him, but just happened to look behind me and there he was."

The buck showed an interest in the does and started walking toward them. Dupuy found an opening in the brush, and when the buck stepped into it, one shot from his .35 Whelen did the trick. The buck, obviously hit, took off running.

"I waited probably 30 minutes before climbing down, walked over to where he was standing when I shot and found blood," Dupuy said. "It was no trouble following the blood trail to where he lay. He was every bit as good as I thought he would be."

The buck, a typical 8-point with an inside spread that measured 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, had main beams in the 22-inch range, with G2s that were 10 and 9 inches long with 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch bases and mass carried throughout the rack.

Estimated to be 6 years old, the buck weighed 190 pounds and green-scored 158 inches of bone. 'Godfather' buck goes down in Lincoln Parish. ■

— Glynn Harris

'GODFATHER' BUCK GOES DOWN IN LINCOLN PARISH

On Howard Caviness' Lincoln Parish lease, one buck definitely stood out from the crowd. So he and his son nicknamed the deer "Godfather," and on Dec. 9 finally made it an offer it just couldn't refuse.

Caviness, who has served as chief of police for Grambling State University for the past four years, leases a 79-acre tract of land near Choudrant in eastern Lincoln Parish.

It's been an exceptional year for the chief because the day after Thanksgiving, he downed Godfather's running partner — a fine 10-point that scored in the mid-130s.

"We had these two deer on game cameras since last summer," Caviness said. "Neighbors who hunted land around us had the pair of bucks on their cameras, as well.

"All this season, the trail camera shots we got were always of the pair. If one was in the photo, the other one was as well. After I got the smaller 10-point, the big one just disappeared. We didn't get any more photos of him."

Caviness didn't hunt the morning of the 9th, but headed for one of the two stands he and his son have on the property that afternoon.

"The property consists of cut-over land with young planted pines on each side of a ravine," he explained. "My ladder stand is located across the ravine, and since I couldn't get a tractor across, I hacked out two shooting lanes, about 100 yards each, with a machete. I worked my tail off, but I was able to have two lanes I could watch."

Getting on his stand at around 2:45, Caviness sat nearly two hours without seeing anything. At 4:40, a doe stepped out at the far end of one of his lanes, turned and looked directly at him for several minutes. The deer finally turned and angled back in the direction it had come.

"My stand is well camouflaged so I know she didn't see me. After she walked off, I texted my son, telling him about the doe.



Dec. 9
Howard Caviness
Lincoln Parish
158

When I looked back up, Godfather was standing where the doe had stood and he, too, was looking my direction," Caviness said. "I eased my Remington .300 Short Mag up, got a bead on his neck, touched the trigger and he dropped right there."

The buck, also a 10-point with most of the points on one side of its rack, featured heavy mass throughout. The inside spread was 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, main beams were 24 inches and bases measured nearly 5 inches each. The deer weighed 198 pounds, and was green-scored at 158 inches.

"Next year should be interesting," Caviness said. "We have Godfather's son on camera and by then, he's going to score in the 150s as well." ■

— Glynn Harris



Jan. 7
Dr. Travis Links
W. Feliciana
Parish 158 6/8

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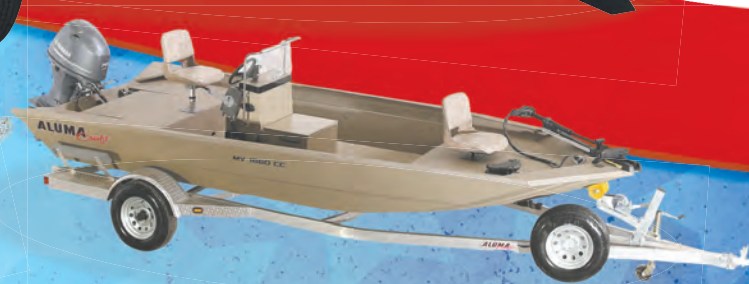
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LUNKER MENTALITY

By David A. Brown

Spawning activity typically starts cranking up across Toledo Bend this month. Use these tips to take advantage of some of the best bass fishing all year long.

Fishing the Toledo Bend spawn means different things to different folks; and not only because of bait and spot preferences. Those factors certainly matter, but so does the calendar. Fact is, this massive Sabine River reservoir holds a load of bass and they have different baby-making schedules, depending on their geographic location.

With 185,000 surface acres, Toledo Bend ranks as the nation's fifth-largest manmade lake and in the south, she's Numero Uno. Shallow and increasingly woody in its north end, deep and grassy in the south; the gem of

Northwest Louisiana sprouts several main creek arms with lots of secondary arteries offering dandy bedding areas with abundant prespawn staging stuff in close proximity.

"As a rule, they spawn earlier the farther north you go; then it follows suit to mid-lake and then they spawn a little bit later the farther south you go," said Toledo Bend guide Glen Freeman. "We have stained, muddier water in the north end and that warms up quicker. This seems to trigger them a little better. There are different factors in there, but there is definitely a wave going from the north

to the south."

With normal weather patterns, February sees the beginning of that upper-lake spawning activity. Mild years can certainly find fish moving onto beds in the second month, but the ones on their way offer a pretty incredible opportunity.

"I like to concentrate on prespawn fish and they're going to be moving toward the mouths and mid areas of the creeks going into the spawning bays," Freeman said. "They're going to be on points and any kind of structure leading up to the shallow spawning areas."



important to note, Freeman's not talking about main lake points; rather, he's looking for those transitional areas coming off a bank line or at the entrance to a secondary arm. As the fish move up, they follow the contour lines, ditches, drains or whatever that leads them into the shallow bedding areas in about 6 feet of water or less. On their way up, the fish may stage on a variety of cover, from simple ledges to deeper stumps, to hay grass growing on the break lines.

SECURE FACILITY

Food-rich areas are important for these staging fish, but so is water temperature. They simply must feel an increase, or there's no sense in progressing.

"The fish will be looking primarily for the north banks in the pockets and the coves because they're going to warm up quicker," Freeman said. "These spots don't have all the west and northeast winds hitting them."

A big fan of flipping/pitching to shallow cover, Bassmaster Elite pro Russ Lane offers this suggestion: "I look for laydowns with small holes because this gives the fish the cover they want, but it allows me to get a bait in there to them. I also want that laydown to be close to a drop-off, because big fish want to have access to deep water."

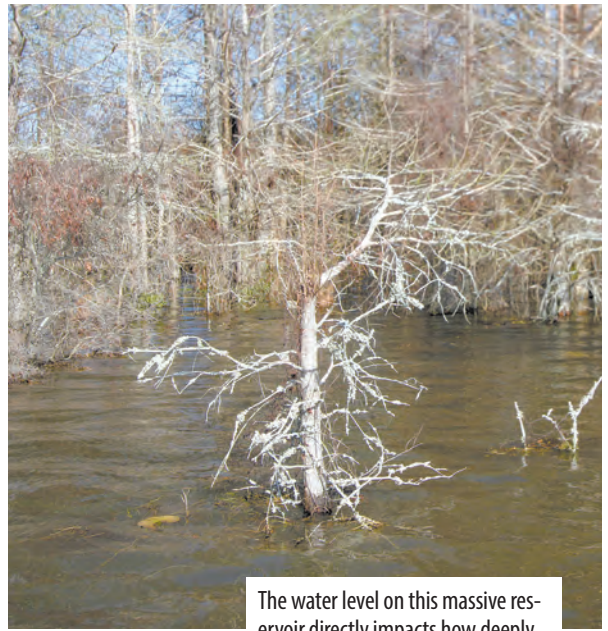
Freeman likes seeking spawners in the bushes, but he knows this game is subject to forces beyond his control. Reservoirs are dynamic creatures and year-to-year anglers may see dramatically different Toledo Bends.

"It all comes down to water level," Freeman said. "If the water is up and it's in the bushes, these are key spots. If that water's in there, the fish will be in there, no matter what. If the water's down and it's not in the bushes, we start looking for structure that's out in front of the bushes — little shallow, protected areas."

Good examples here: In the lake's grassy south end, Freeman would look for staging fish in the grass beds outside the spawning areas. Up north, where grass is less abundant, it's more about woody cover.

"They'll get on the cypress root systems and the stumps; anything that protects them, away from the current," Freeman said. "If the fish have an area with a lot of root systems and cypress knees, they will spawn on the cypress trees."

"Even if the water is in the bushes, at times, they'll be on the trees and not in the bushes. Regardless, we're still looking for areas protected from the wind. Also, the fish have to be away from current to spawn, so farther back in the pockets is going to be the key."



The water level on this massive reservoir directly impacts how deeply fish may push into shallow cover.



continues on page 66 >

Anglers targeting bedding fish can often size up their chances by whether the fish bolts — or holds its ground.

MAXIMUM MOTION TEMPTS PRESPAWNERS

In the early round of Toledo Bend's spawn, much of your success will come from targeting prespawners and those that have started moving into the bedding areas. Covering water is the name of the game and one of your best tools for doing so is a swim jig.

Bassmaster Elite pro Jared Lintner's a firm believer in this 4-wheel-drive bait that performs equally well for bumping along lay-downs and plowing through grass edges. The basic form's not bad, but he uses a modified version with strategic features.

Lintner's customized rig's based on the interchangeable design of Freedom Tackle's Stealth Hybrid Head. A wire coil tucked inside the conical head's sonic brass echo chamber enables anglers to switch out hooks based on application. Lintner's go-to rig around shallow vegetation, wood, etc. is comprised of a 3 1/2-inch Jackall Chunk Craw on a 3/0 Trokar straight shank flipping hook. If he wants

to show super-aggressive prespawners a bigger bait, he'll switch to a 5.8-inch Jackall Rhythm Wave swimbait with 7/0 Trokar EWG hook.

Both options are rigged weedless and are therefore capable of traversing any prespawn to early spawn habitat. Also, with the hook hanging loosely — as opposed to the fixed hook of most swim jigs — Lintner's setup minimizes a fish's ability to shake loose.

One of the biggest benefits of this customizable swim jig is the ability to quickly vary the hook size and trailer to match the scenario — without having to rig a different swim jig every time. This includes the option of including or losing the



Quiet, protected areas off main creeks will be popular spawning waters.

Stealth Hybrid's standard skirt. During the prespawn, when bass are bulking up on larger forage like bream, keeping the skirt makes sense; but if the water's clear and fish are spooky, slimming down the look may help. ■

— David A. Brown

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BEST BAITS

Lane looks for his staging fish with a Big Bite Baits Suicide Shad on an 1/8-ounce Buckeye Lures jighead. Ideally, the ruse convinces any interested parties. If not, he'll send in the closer.

"Even if you don't catch them, if you can make them show themselves, you can follow up with a more targeted presentation like a Texas-rigged plastic," Lane said.

When targeting Toledo Bend bedding fish, Lane knows that the early ones can be awfully nervous. In such times, he'll match his Big Bite trailer according to fish mood. His choices: Yo Daddy (most action), Fighting Frog (less action) and Yo Mama (no action).

"You can let the way the fish react when you trolling motor by the bed tell you which bait to use," Lane said. "Sometimes, they'll turn toward you as you go by and turn with you; watching you. You know those fish will bite."

"Then some will slide off the bed and slowly swim back lazily. You'll probably catch them, too. It's the ones that shoot off the bed as soon as they see you and stay gone that are harder to catch."

When he's looking for staging prespawners, Freeman likes throwing crankbaits — maybe even deep divers — to cover water and find the fish. If he's graphing specific structure like stumps, logs, or distinctive features in a contour line, a jig can prove highly effective at tempting big bites from big fish seeking big meals.

"A Texas-rigged 6- to 8-inch lizard is one of my favorites," Freeman said. "Also, lip-

Bassmaster Elite pro Jared Lintner likes the versatility of Freedom Tackle's Stealth Hybrid Head, which enables him to switch out hooks for diverse swim jig looks.



less crankbaits like the Rat-L-Traps are a big deal in the prespawn. Especially if you have hydrilla or any kind of vegetation, this a great prespawn bait."

MIND THE VARIABLES

If you ever doubt that the moon literally runs the natural world, fish through quarter, new and full phases, then log your results and evaluate your findings. Not to say you won't catch fish between the dark and bright phases, but the major pull of a full moon is the power switch for good times.

"January, February and March; as cold as it gets, we still have warm afternoons with bright, sunny days where the water temperature creeps up a little bit," Freeman said. "We can have water temperatures in the upper 40s and low 50s, and then it comes up a degree or two."

"When I'm moving to a spawning pocket, I'm looking for the warmer water temperature. This usually happens later on, up in the day. You might pull into a place and there's not a fish in there; but as that water temperature eases up in the afternoon, all of a sudden, they're there."

Now, assuming all other factors remain stable, Freeman said he'll usually spend his February mornings looking for prespawn fish and then progress to the bedding areas as the day warms. However, he warns against holding too rigidly to such game plans.

"I'm always going to check the really shallow water in the morning, in case the water temperature stayed up overnight," he said. "It all depends on the water temperature. If we have two or three days of warm temperature, they can stay up there, even in the mornings." ■



A full-time freelance writer specializing in sport fishing, David A. Brown splits his time between journalism and marketing communications (www.tightwords.com).



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COLD WATER CONSISTENCY

IN DELACROIX THIS MONTH, THERE IS NO "IN-BETWEEN" TROUT BITE. FISH ARE EITHER SHALLOW — OR THEY'RE DEEP. HERE'S HOW ONE GUIDE REGULARLY TRACKS THEM DOWN.

By Chris Ginn

Buck Perry, the father of structure fishing, always advised that fish would either be shallow, deep or somewhere in-between.

Perry obviously never fished Delacroix for speckled trout during February — when there really is no in-between.

“Trout are either going to be deep or they’re going to be shallow,” said Capt. Chris Pike with Cast & Blast Charters (504-427-4973).

These bipolar trout are going to be at one extreme or the other because the weather during February — or even during a single day — is just as bipolar as the fish.

“We play the weather this month,” Pike said. “If it’s cold, we fish deep. When it warms up, we fish shallow.

“February is kind of like November

in that way because the trout will move with the water temperature.”

And the transformation can take place within only a few hours, like when a cold morning turns into a warm afternoon.

LIKELY LOCATIONS

Pike advised anglers to look for shallow spots that have deep-water access nearby.

“It’s more the interior bays and interior channels than the open bays this time of year,” he said. “We spend our time fishing the more protected areas.”

Some of the best spots that offer this shallow/deep combination are Pointe Fienne Bay, Skippy Lake and Baker’s Bay because of their proximity to Oak River and Four Horse Lake, with the Twin Pipelines nearby.

All these spots are relatively protected and are great for north winds and low water.

“Except for the Twin Pipeline, it’s really all about Oak River,” Pike said. “It’s just a river... more a bayou now... that runs all the way from Caernarvon to Oak River Bay, but the fish are generally between Orange Bayou and Pointe Fienne.”

This particular stretch of Oak River features lots of drains that connect the deep Oak River water with the shallow bays, which is exactly what you’re looking for during February - deep water with shallow water close by.

Pike explained that Oak River generally runs from 10 to 15 feet deep.

“Each one is different,” he said, “but the shallow water you want when it warms up is as close as 200 or 300 yards away from the drains.”



COLD WATER CONSISTENCY

LOOK FOR SHARP BREAKS

The best spots within these locations are areas where the water goes from 10 feet up to about 6 feet as sharply as possible.

“When the fish move up, they’re going to stop on that first shelf in about 6 feet of water,” Pike said. “I rely more on my depth finder in February than any other time of the year. I look for that first sharp contour jump, and I want it to be as sharp as possible.”

Pike has learned that the sharper the transition from deep to shallow, the more likely the shallow water is to benefit from the clear water of Oak River.

“Oak River usually stays pretty clear in the deeper holes,” he said. “So the closer the shallow water is to the deep water, the clearer that shallow water is going to be because there’s going to be a little eddy there on those sharp breaks.”

TIME THE WATER TEMPERATURE

When it’s cold, Pike usually likes to fish later in the morning.

“I won’t even leave the dock until 9 or

10 just to get that little bit of warm up,” he said. “And I’ll start in the deep water, until the fish or the water temperature tell me to move shallow.”

One sign that it’s time to move up and check the shallow water is a 3-degree bump in the water temperature.

If everything were perfect, Pike would look for it to bump up to 62 degrees.

“That pushes the trout to the shallow shelves,” he said, “and sunshine is the driving force for that bump up in the water temperature.”

On a cloudy day, Pike has found that the trout will stay deeper longer, and that the water temperature doesn’t seem to affect them as much.

“But on the sunny days, the air temperature doesn’t even matter at all,” he went on. “You get that little jump in the water temperature because of the sun, and they’re moving up.”

DOUBLE UP WITH A TANDEM RIG

When first starting out in the morning, Pike loves to fish tandem-rigged purple/chartreuse or straight chartreuse



Capt. Chris Pike opts for a tandem rig to target trout in February, and suggests a 3/8-ounce jig on the bottom and a 1/4-ounce on top.

Bomber Mud Minnows on the bottom in deep water.

“I rig a 3/8-ounce (jig)head on bottom and a 1/4-ounce head on top,” he said. “For some reason, they don’t seem to want to eat a single head this time of year. I put the 3/8 head on bottom just to give my tandem rig some stability and to get it on down to the bottom, but nine times out of 10 they’re going to eat the 1/4 head.”

continues on page 72

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COLD WATER CONSISTENCY

While the bottom bait doesn't catch a lot of fish, Pike says it definitely helps him feel the bottom. Oak River is full of clam shells and old cypress, and it typically has a lot of current rolling through it.

"Being able to feel the bottom so I know my bait is down there working where it should be is instrumental to catching them in that deep water," Pike said.

He almost always fishes his tandem rig with a straight retrieve — there is no bouncing or twitching involved. He reels it as slow as he can without constantly hanging the bottom, with his rod tip down.

"When they eat it, it's kind of a double tap," he said. "A lot of times I'll feel the first tap but can't feel the fish, so I just keep reeling waiting on the second tap before setting the hook."

After making the move to shallow water when he sees the temperature bump up, Pike switches to the same Mud Minnows on ¼-ounce heads fished 3 to 4 feet under a cork.

"I'll run up there and hit a few shallow spots just to see if I can get some reaction bites," he said. "If I hit those spots and don't get bit, I assume the fish are still deep, because when they do move shallow, they move up to eat."

When they are in shallow water, trout tend to be much more aggressive than they are in the deep water. Pike says they'll take down the corks almost like they would during the summer.

He considers February an ideal month for anglers to learn how to fish with artificial lures instead of live bait.

"Unless it's crazy hot outside, they're going to eat the artificials better than live bait," he said. "So

it's a perfect time to get out there and learn the ins and outs of fishing the plastics because they're going to be eating them."

Pike spools up with braided line on his reel while tying his tandem rigs with monofilament or fluorocarbon. He usually ties a swivel to his braided line then ties his leader line to the other end of the swivel.

"I don't think the swivel is necessary, but it sure does help keep your line twist under control," Pike added. "I like the Spro swivels that spin really easy."



February is a great month to learn how to fish with artificial lures for specks instead of live bait.

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CONSISTENT WEATHER IS KEY

If Mother Nature cooperates, Pike loves a consistent weather pattern during February to keep the fish in predictable locations.

"I want the trout to stay in their winter patterns, so I like consistent weather that keeps the water temperature the same and the water level low," Pike said. "Maybe several days in the 40s at night, but warming up into the upper-50s or low-60s during the day."

Although the weather can change rapidly during February, Pike hopes to avoid a lot of hard south winds, and prefers light north winds.

"High water is a definite killer during February," he said. "They'll be locked into their winter patterns, then we'll get south winds and high water and that spreads them out. And high water usually goes with warmer temperatures, which would start pushing them out."

"I want winter to stay winter during February."

On the other hand, Pike doesn't want to see any water temperatures below 54 degrees, because he believes that's just too cold for trout to bite.

GRASS CAN HELP

Generally speaking, where there is warmer water there will be some kind of vegetation that grows from the bottom.

"And that bottom is usually hard with

If Mother Nature cooperates with consistent weather, trout will stay in their winter pattern — putting them in predictable locations.

clam shells or oysters," Pike said. "The combination of the grass and a hard bottom means the water temperature will warm up even more, which can make for some great fishing."

Most of the grass in the interior bays close to Oak River tend to grass up on the north or northwest bank.

"I've always heard it's because the sun rises in the east, and those are the first spots of a bay to get that sunshine," Pike said. "Whatever it is, the closer those grassy banks are to the deep water, the better they're going to be."

So by eliminating those "in-between spots," Pike is able to effectively stay on trout this month.

They're either going to be shallow, or they're going to be deep.

Delacroix presents as consistent and easy a trout bite as you'll find in all of Louisiana during February. ■



Capt. Chris Pike says if water temperatures dip below 54 degrees, specks typically get lockjaw and won't bite.



Chris Ginn has been covering hunting and fishing in Louisiana since 1998. He lives with his wife Jennifer and children Matthew and Rebecca along the Bogue Chitto River in rural Washington Parish. His blog can be found at chrisinginn.com.



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LAKE BISTINEAU IN NORTHWEST LOUISIANA IS HOME TO SOME LUNKER BASS, AND UNFORTUNATELY, LOTS OF SALVINIA, TOO. HERE'S HOW ONE LOCAL ANGLER FISHES THE FIRST HALF OF THE YEAR — AND DEALS WITH THE WEEDY PEST.

BISTINEAU **BIGMOUTHS**

By Jerald Horst



“We fished this very spot,” murmured 59-year-old Rickey Lee. “I can’t remember names and faces, but I can remember where I caught a fish.”

Pointing to a cypress tree, he added, “That’s where I caught my first 5-pound bass. It was on a black and yellow H & H spinner. I was about 11. He said, ‘I knew you had it in you.’”

The “he” Lee was referring to was Derwood Jordan, an adult neighbor who took him bass fishing in Lake Bistineau. Lee’s father fished for white perch (crappie) and catfish with yo-yos. But he didn’t bass fish.

“He (Jordan) had an aluminum jon boat with a 5 ½ horsepower Johnson on it. I ran the motor and he paddled us to fish. His knowledge of the lake was incredible.

“When I started fishing with him, I kept my baits in a matchbox; a black and yellow H & H, a Cotton Cordell Red Fin and some worms.

“Back then, we kept everything. Now I don’t keep a bass. When I want to eat fish, I get my white perch pole.”

He has been a serious tournament fisherman for 30 years, now fishing two major circuits with partner Jeremy Botica, the BOSS Tournament Trail and the H&W Marine Team Trail, plus multiple local benefit tournaments.

But his love has always been Lake Bistineau, and his name is almost synonymous with fishing and hunting the lake.

It was no sweat launching Lee’s boat that morning. He put in right next to his house perched on Bistineau’s shoreline. From there, he ran to the north end of the elongated reservoir.

This end of the lake had a lot of submerged stumps and literally zillions of cypress trees — none of them real big, but plenty of them. He moved from the narrow channel to pick his way through what he called “sloughs” and “flats.”

They didn’t look much different; both had cypress trees in and on them. But the sloughs were 7 to 8 feet deep, while the flats held only 2 to 3 feet of water.

“Lake maps, electronic or paper, are helpful in locating sloughs,” he coached. “Some even give the names of the sloughs.” Some of the more prominent sloughs carry signs tacked to trees, as well.

“Another thing that is useful is to be on the lake during its annual drawdown. The last 10 or 12 years the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has drawn down the lake 7 feet for salvinia control.

“There will be water in the lower lake, but the upper end will be dry except for 1 to 2 feet in the sloughs.” During low water, the locations of the sloughs are simple to learn.

This day, Lee was hunting for spawning fish. According to him, bass begin spawning on the flats in Bistineau in late February or early March. Most spawning is over by April first. His pattern of pitching creature baits on the shallow flats holds through the spawn.

A ONE-TRICK PONY UP NEXT **➤**



A ONE-TRICK PONY

Rickey Lee fished the entire day with a single lure, a Mr. Twister Flip'n Out. The creature bait is his favorite during the spawn.

"I've almost become a one-trick pony, but I've become very good at that trick," he grinned contentedly. The pros say 'fish your strength.' That's what Jeremy (Jeremy Botica, his regular fishing partner) and I do."

Lee noted that he will also occasionally uses 4-inch Reaction Innovations Sweet Beavers.

Favorite colors include variations of black and red, black and blue or watermelon. "Okeechobee Craw, a metal flake blue color, is a particularly good color in this lake," he noted.

"The clearer the water, the lighter color I will use. In dingy water I use dark baits."

He pegs the bullet weight used with the lure with a rubber nail-like Peg-It Sinker Peg. After snubbing the head of the peg to the weight, he clips off and discards the loose tail, then slides the weight down the line to the hook.

Since the peg holds the weight in position, it allows him to move the weight up the line to fish his lure Carolina rig style.

Lee will also work in the use of a lizard, rigged weightless on a 4/0 hook, when he sees a fish on its spawning bed. He either tosses it directly onto the bed or floats it in with gentle movements. "They will attack it to remove it from their bed," he explained.

CASTING, FLIPPING OR PITCHING

Lee fishes in dense stands of trees with lots of overhead branches that interfere with typical overhand casts. Plus, long casts are seldom necessary. Lee worms his boat through the very trees that are the targets of his casts.

"I never cast overhand," he rumbled in a low voice. "For the most part, all we do is flip. The fish in this lake really relate to trees. This gets it under the limbs of the cypresses and presents the lure quietly.

"The pros really call this 'pitching.' When you yo-yo the line with your free hand, it's flipping." What Lee is really doing is precision underhand casting.

"When I was a kid, I thought it would be neat to learn this. My momma gave me a coffee can and I went into the back yard with it. After a month or so, I got to where I could hit the can most of the time.

"The hardest thing is to get the motion down."

This is not finesse fishing. He cast the lure, let it sink, moved it 1, 2 or 3 inches, and then swiftly retrieved it. Most fish hit it immediately, on its way to the bottom.

"You don't have to beg fish here to bite," he grinned.

BISTINEAU'S BEST CONDITIONS UP NEXT >

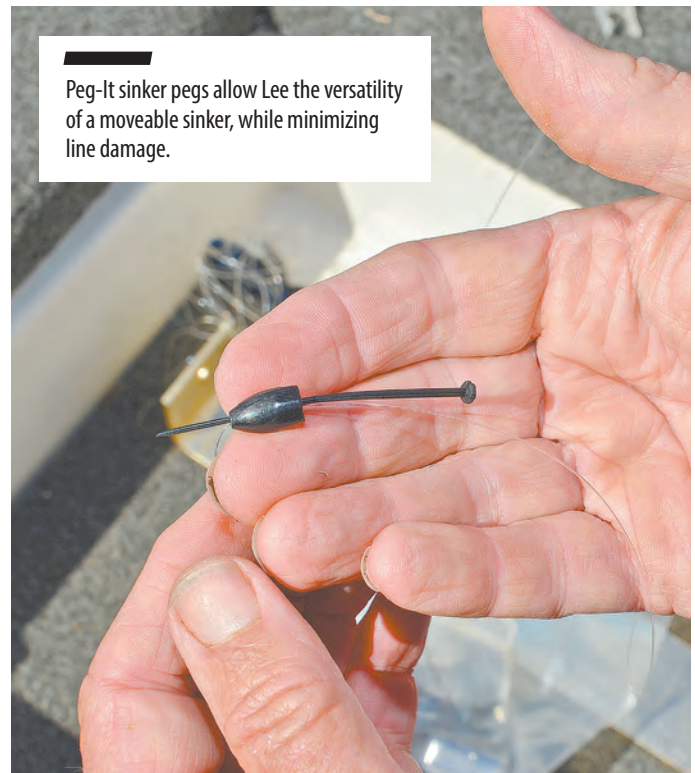


Rickey Lee never buries the hook tip into the body of his creature baits, instead allowing it to ride in the groove on the lure's body.

TIP OF THE DAY

Rickey Lee never buries the point of the hook into the body of his creature baits to make them weedless. Rather, he shoves the hook completely through the body and allows the hook point to lie in the groove on the bait's body.

"If you bury the hook, the bait will wad up on the hook on the hook-set," he explained. "The hook can't easily penetrate through the heavy body of the creature bait into the jaw of the fish." ■



Peg-It sinker pegs allow Lee the versatility of a moveable sinker, while minimizing line damage.

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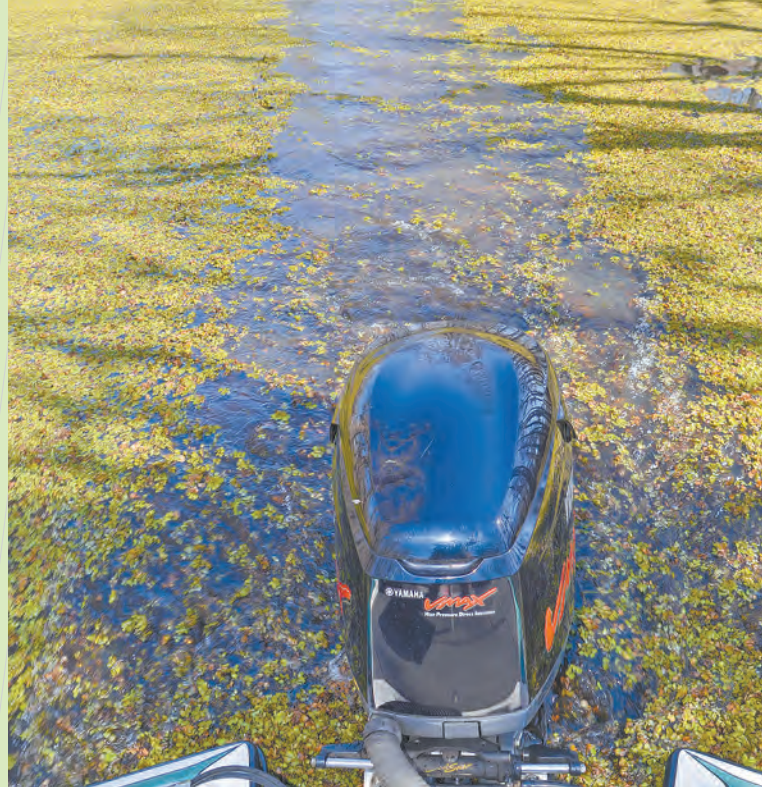
SALVINIA IS TOUGH ON MOTORS

Salvinia causes more than fishing problems. When running and approaching a drift line of the floating weeds, boat operators should keep a sharp eye out for barely floating logs disguised in the plants.

Salvinia is also hard on boat water pumps when idling through it. It will quickly clog an outboard motor's water intake port. Rickey Lee doesn't trust his warning buzzer to alert him of an overheating problem.

He frequently peers over his shoulder to see if the motor's tattle-tail is streaming water. ■

RIGHT: Salvinia will quickly clog a motor's water intake port, so Rickey Lee checks his motor's tattle-tail often.



BISTINEAU'S BEST CONDITIONS

The early March day began with a dominating cold mist, but gave way to blue skies swept by a brisk breeze carrying strong hints of spring.

"This is really a perfect Bistineau day," Lee said. "For some reason, Bistineau is best on a clear, windy day. Because of all the trees, you are setting still, not bouncing on waves. It's protected and you can fish."

"Another good thing is that the wind moves salvinia around, clearing spots you can fish."

"Some people say that they want a cloudy day for bass fishing. On Caddo Lake, cloudy, rainy days are best, even though the lake has a lot of trees."

"It might be because they are different trees. Caddo has bald cypress with big bases. Most people around here call these red cypresses."

PATTERNING THE BASS

The number of trees makes the number of choices for targets overwhelming, but Lee cautioned not to let the number of trees hide the pattern during the spawn that occurs on all lakes.

"Smaller males are in the shallowest waters preparing and guarding nests. Bigger pre-spawn females hold up on the edges of 8- to 10-foot deep sloughs."

He chuckled audibly as he worked the boat down a slough when I asked him how he chose target trees. "I throw at everyone in reach."

"One thing you quickly learn is that every tree has two sides. If the fish is on one side and I throw my bait to the other side, he can't see it."

"When Jeremy is fishing with me, he and I stand on the bow together. He hits one side of the tree; I hit the other."

PATTERNING RICKEY LEE UP NEXT ➤



Dense cypress brakes line the channel in the upper third of Lake Bistineau.



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PATTERNING RICKEY LEE

Bass fishing in Lake Bistineau is a January to July thing for Rickey Lee. Fishing during the pre-spawn and the spawn is done with creature baits.

Post-spawn, from April to mid-summer, he still uses some creature baits, but shifts mostly to Southpaw Custom jigs in “black and something else” colors like blue, amber, brown or red, and to Mr. Twister worms.

Worms are typically 10 to 12 inches long, although smaller 6- to 8-inch worms are also used. All are Texas-rigged.

He admitted that there are some fishing opportunities for crankbaits and Carolina rigs in open water, especially in the lower lake, but it’s not something that he and his acquaintances do.

“Salvinia has been the big game-changer. It will foul up spinners and crank baits immediately.”

By depth, he fishes 5 to 6 feet deep on the edges of flats during the pre-spawn, 2- to 4-foot depths up on the flats during the spawn, 4- to 5-foot depths on the edges during the post-spawn, and when the water gets into the 80s, he will fish 7 to 10 feet deep. “That’s deep for Bistineau,” he posited.

Like other local anglers, Lee breaks the lake into three sections. The upper section is from Bayou Dorcheat (which was dammed to make the lake) down to Port O’ Bistineau boat launch.

The middle section is from Port O’ Bistineau to the Gregg Lake area. The lower lake is from Gregg Lake to the dam.

The further north, the thicker are the stands of trees. “There are trees in every spot, but it gets progressively more open as you go south.

“I don’t change a thing when I fish the other parts of the lake. There’s just less trees to throw at.”

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries draws lake water levels down dramatically beginning sometime between July 4 and Labor Day — and Lee quits bass fishing.

“That’s when I start white perch fishing the lake. I’m really getting after them in August and September.”

In September, he teal hunts on the lake every day of the season, followed by duck hunting it from the season opening to Christmas.

“There are some people who fish for bass all winter on the lake and they catch some good fish, but I feel that if you don’t take a break from something, you burn out.” ■



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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SALVINIA, SALVINIA AND MORE SALVINIA

Rickey Lee sounded worried the night before the trip.

"Man, man, man, the salvinia (pronounced 'silvania, North Louisiana style) is as bad as I've seen it. I tried to fish the middle of the lake today and only found one spot I could get in to.

"I drove through salvinia for miles.

"What's bad is that the wind will move it and where you catch fish one day, you can't fish the next day."

Lake Bistineau is known for two things

Salvinia can completely close off parts of the lake to fishing when winds blow the massive mats into an area.

— big largemouth bass and the floating aquatic weed pest giant salvinia, known to biologists as *Salvinia molesta*. The last part of its technical name gives some clue to its habits.

According to Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) biologist manager Jeff Sibley, the green scourge has been on the lake for 12 years. The department has declared the lake a poster child for salvinia control.

Their war on salvinia is three-pronged:



chemical, mechanical and biological. LDWF has spent millions of dollars on chemical sprays and continues to use them in areas of high concentrations of the weed.

Mechanical control is done with water level draw-downs, a tool that has been in the department's toolbox for management of the lake since 1955. "New lakes are like teenagers — great health," explained Sibley. "But like us, they age and develop aches and pains."

The "aches and pains" Sibley referred to were symptomized by poor fishing. "Each lake is different. Lake Bistineau is essentially a flooded swamp, which if not dammed, would naturally de-water seasonally. "Our drawdowns mimic what would happen naturally. Most lakes need to be de-watered at some point to prevent eutrophication."

Done to firm up the exposed lake bottom when it dries out, drawdowns also work to control aquatic weeds by stranding them on land and killing them.

"A lot of folks around the lake want it to be full all the time," Sibley went on. The lake is heavily used by anglers and waterfowl hunters, but others enjoy water sports like skiing and tubing. All of the various user groups' wishes don't

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always line up.

"But with no control effort, salvinia would quickly make the lake very unusable for everyone."

Biological control, at the present time, hinges around the establishment of the salvinia weevil. Looking very much like a cotton boll weevil, but smaller, the creature has a voracious appetite for salvinia plants.

LDWF has stocked 2 1/2 million weevils in the lake, but so far Lake Bistineau is slightly north of where the animal can successfully survive winter temperatures. The latest effort occurred on June 24, 2017, when the department sponsored a "Weevil Day."

Plants infected with weevils from latt lake were distributed to 86 volunteers, who in turn planted them in the lake. The plants were calculated to contain 123,600 adult weevils and many more eggs and larvae.

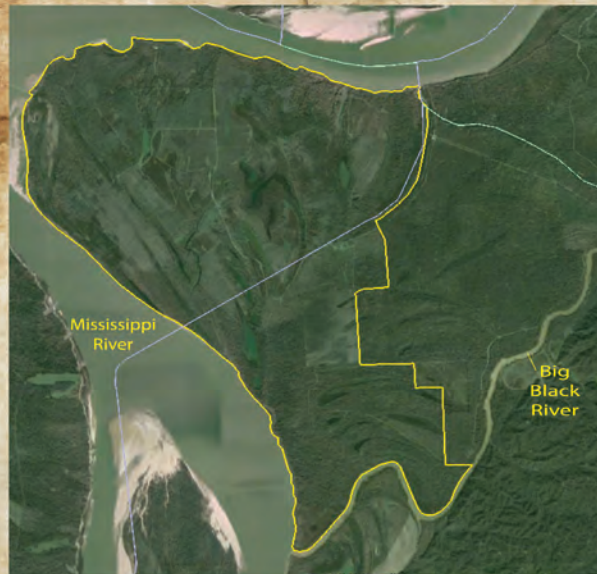
The weevils have successfully overwintered in latt Lake and the hope is that they are a slightly more cold tolerant strain.

In conclusion, Sibley offered that, "we have the ability to manage salvinia to allow the lake to be usable, but not in the historical sense.

"If I had a silver bullet, I would use it." ■

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ON LAKE D'ARBONNE, FEBRUARY MEANS CRAPPIE ACTION IS ABOUT TO KICK IN. AND THAT MEANS LOCAL ANGLER RICK HILL IS READY TO MOP UP.

By Kinny Haddox

If you travel around crappie fishing circles in Northeast Louisiana, you probably heard about how good a crappie fisherman Farmerville's Rick Hill is.

But you won't find him spider-rigging in the front of a big fancy boat. Nor will you find him on the trophy stand at any crappie tournaments.

None of that is for him.

Where you will find him regularly, however, is using the cleaning station at "Hill's Perch" almost every single day during prime crappie time.

On Lake D'Arbonne, where crappie is king, Rick Hill is top of the heap — and he rules with a sharp jig hook and an open livewell.

Hill almost always fishes by himself, but he's helped numerous crappie anglers find their way around the lake, taught them how to catch fish and even brought them along to demonstrate his techniques in person.

I told him if he ever wanted to go give somebody a lesson, I was a willing learner. So I was happy when a text message came through telling me the time was finally right.





FEELING THE BITE

We headed out up the D'Arbonne arm of the lake with the idea of fishing some of his best spots. February on Lake D'Arbonne and most large North Louisiana reservoirs is a special time.

It's when big schools of crappie stay in the deep channels, suspended about 10 to 16 feet deep in 20 to 30 feet of water. It's also when crappie start migrating from the edges of sloughs and creeks onto flats, staging for spawning.

And it's when some of the front-runners are already scoping out their favorite cypress trees in shallow water for the spawn. In other words, the fish can be just about anywhere.

"All the crappie aren't in one place or one type structure all the time," Hill explained. "From winter into spring, there are crappie on the move — and you can catch them in a lot of different areas."



Locating fish is, of course, the top priority. But Hill's expertise in how crappie bite might just be the best thing he can pass on to other anglers.

"I fish jigs, hair jigs mostly," he said. "Here's the deal. There is no set pattern on how crappie are going to react to the bait on a single day. I work the jig differently until I find what the fish want. The main mistake people make jig fishing is going way too fast. I fish slow, and when I think I'm going slow enough, I slow down some more."

"Look, sometimes you have to just let the jig sit there. Sometimes you have to fish around a tree twice before a fish will hit it. Be patient — especially if it's a spot where you think they are."

Some days crappie hit the jig when it's falling. When that happens, he goes to a 1/32nd-ounce jig to keep the lure in the strike zone longer. Some days fish will smack anything you put in front of them. For more feel and control, he uses 1/16th-ounce jigs.



MINNOWS VS. JIGS

BELOW: Rick Hill's built in "tackle box" is a piece of sticky-back foam that has held baits on the front deck of his boat for more than a decade.

If you want to stay on Rick Hill's good side, just mind your manners. Or, to be more exact, mind your minnows. That's easy — don't even mention them.

"If there is a crappie that is going to bite, I can catch him on a jig," Hill said. "That sounds cocky, but it's the truth. I know minnows catch fish, but they are just too much trouble. And I'm not into fishing with eight poles, so I keep my hand on the rod and feel the fish bite."

"That's just how I like to do it."

Some people say you get more bites on minnows, and Hill doesn't disagree with that — but what he will dispute is the percentage of strikes you feel with a minnow versus some sort of jig, whether hair or plastic. And the ones you feel are the ones you catch.

He does break down and put a pole in each hand when the fishing is right, but that's about as far as he goes.

And tournaments just aren't for him: His competition is personal, between

himself and the fish.

But Hill does use a variety of baits. He keeps his favorite proven jigs hooked into a piece of foam attached to the front deck of his boat, always within easy reach. It was given to him a decade ago by another crappie fisherman, and he loved the idea.

But if you're looking for some sort of hint at the bite by looking at the pile of baits, forget it. He's got just about every color and style available within his grasp, and all of them look a bit worn from doing battle with crappie.

"To each his own — and this is my own," he said, with a bearded smile that lets you know when it comes to catching crappie, his confidence can't be topped.

And usually, neither can his catch. ■

— Kinny Haddox



D'Arbonne can often get crowded with crappie fishermen, especially in deeper water this time of year. When that happens, Rick gets away from the crowd and finds another spot.

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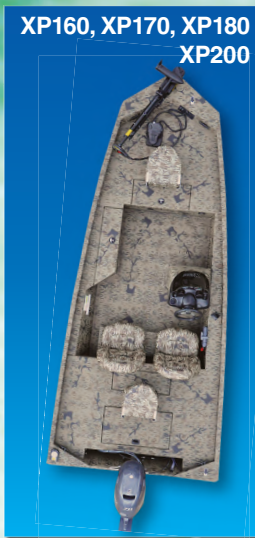


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Another crappie tip Hill shared is not expecting fish to hit with their patented “thump” every day: Fish hit different ways in different conditions. The more of these types of subtle bites you can detect, the more fish you’ll catch.

“A lot of times you do feel a thump, especially in the spring,” he said. “Some days, it is just a tick, which is a barely noticeable bite. Sometimes with bigger crappie, you may not even feel the fish hit at all.

“They may eat it from the bottom and you just notice a sudden feeling of weightlessness. Pay attention to how that is going, and you’ll catch more.”

On occasion, Hill says fish will even nibble and you’ll get a feeling like the bait is dragging over a roadbed or something rough. That, too, is a crappie bite.

To get the most feel no matter what the fish are doing, Hill recommends holding the pole in one hand and running the line between your thumb and forefinger of your free hand: You’ll feel as many hits with the line as you do by hoping to detect them with the rod.

Regardless of how they hit, you won’t catch lots of crappie unless you set the hook firmly, he said.

Don’t be worried about taking it away from the soft-mouthed fish — set the hook with authority.

RIGGING UP

Hill’s favorite equipment includes a Todd Huckabee Pro Series 10-foot, 6-inch rod with Gamma fishing line. He uses 6- to 10-pound test line based on the size jigs he is fishing, with smaller line for smaller jigs.

His favorite hair jig is the Black Lake 120 series, and he also fishes Garland plastic-body jigs. His favorite colors are blue-grass, electric chicken and Cajun cricket, and he uses mostly red, pink and chartreuse jigheads.

When Hill isn’t jigging, he also utilizes the cast-and-drag

Hill approaches a lone cypress with his jig in the water, waiting to see what kind of bite the crappie will exhibit that day.

method he was taught by longtime D’Arbonne crappie angler Don Durrett.

When you do that, simply cast out the bait, count it down to the desired depth and reel it in slowly. The technique works well on staging females and in deeper water situations for crappie, but Hill said it also will work for spawners on the bank. He uses the same baits as when jigging, but also adds the white, green-backed Mr. Twister Little Fishy or Glitter Critter Garland for casting and dragging.

Hill has found true happiness catching crappie, and enjoys sharing his knowledge with willing listeners. He was born just outside of El Dorado, Arkansas and lived there until high school.

In those days, he fished D’Arbonne when it was full of green timber. His family moved to Iowa and he graduated from high school there, then played football at Cornell until he got injured. Ultimately, he moved back to Ruston to finish at Louisiana Tech. After that, he never left the area — or Lake D’Arbonne.

With the uptick in competitive crappie fishing and his routine success, you might think Hill would put all this knowledge and skill into tournaments. But it won’t happen.

“I fish when I want to,” he said. “I don’t need anybody to tell me when to start, or when to quit, or what day to fish. I let the fish do that.”

For lots of big D’Arbonne crappie, that was their last mistake. ■



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 Farmerville.

Hill swims his jig around a cypress tree looking for early-spawning crappie. The more you keep the lure in the water, the more bites you'll get.



TWO QUICK LESSONS

When it comes to finding crappie on trees, concentration and patience are important. But nothing can make up for experience.

"Year in and year out, the same trees usually hold crappie," according to Rick Hill. "It may be the root structure or the bottom soil or a little change in depth. Or maybe they just like it. But if you catch fish by certain trees or groups of trees on one trip, go back to them over and over.

"You'll still catch fish as long as they are on that pattern."

In the spring, there is a constant migration to the trees for six to seven weeks. If you catch a few out by one tree, more will usually move in — often within a day.

But one thing most fishermen never notice happens a bit later in the spring when crappie start spawning out.

Hill approached one of his favorite trees,

preparing to drop a brown hair jig right by the trunk, then said, "Nope, we are too late. See?"

What he saw was literally hundreds of crappie fry swimming around in a bunch. He noted that anyone fishing there would be wasting their time.

The crappie had obviously nested there early and the fry had already appeared, about a quarter-inch long swimming around the tree in a circle trying to figure out what to do next. Most people would have never noticed, much less equated it to what was actually going on.

Lesson No. 2 should have been much more obvious.

When Hill is crappie fishing, he always keeps his bait in the water. He doesn't

raise it from one spot and drop it in the next. He just slowly swims it from spot to spot.

That's why most people he fishes with spend more time holding the dip net for him than he does for them.

The lesson?

"Those fish you caught...," he asked this writer. "Where was your bait when they hit it?"

Yep, in the water.

"Exactly," he said.

How simple is that? ■

— Kinny Haddox

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Joe Shumaker takes a squirrel from one his well-trained mountain cur dogs during a hunt. Using dogs in January and February turns squirrel hunting into a social event.



BY JERALD HORST

DOG DAY AFTERNOON

(or morning)

Hunting with dogs is a great way to bag a winter limit of squirrels — and also introduce youngsters to the sport.

Everything was gray. The woods were drab, leafless and gray. The bare tree trunks and limbs were gray.

The dead leaves underfoot were gray. And the sky was heavily overcast with uniformly gray clouds.

Even the squirrels were gray. So conditions were perfect for a day of squirrel hunting with dogs, a sociable sport.

For most of the season, squirrel hunters are the most-reclusive of

all outdoorsmen. They try to make themselves utterly invisible and silent in the woods. Crossing paths with another hunter ruins their morning.

But something magical happens in January, when all the leaves are off the trees — especially after deer season closes. The sounds of laughter, joking, dogs barking and shotguns banging ring through the woods as the time comes for squirrel hunting with dogs.

This was what Cameron Harris, 34, a lanky, square-jawed 6-foot-5 giant from Ferriday, called, “a big annual family hunt.” Harris’ father, Weldon, 64, and brother Taylor, 31, both cotton farmers from Kosciusko, Miss., were there.

The team’s dean was retired county agent Don Schmidt, 68, from Carthage, Miss. Family friend Shannon McMullin, 34, an oil-rig tool pusher, supplied the kids necessary for a fun hunt: Hunter, 14, Lilly, 10, and Parker, 8.

Most important to the success of the hunt were the two dog men: Joe Shumaker, 57, and Terry Fletcher, 60. Each brought two mountain cur squirrel dogs. Neither carried a gun.

“It’s not about the shooting for us,” Shumaker said. “We will carry a gun early in the season or when it’s just the two of us. We like to let the others shoot late in the season.”

Between 300 and 400 squirrels are killed over their dogs every year.

The final count was 10 people in the woods, not counting me, and it wasn’t a person too many. It takes a lot of eyes to spot a hidden squirrel — and a lot of shots to bring down one zig-zagging wide open through the trees.

ACTION STARTS EARLY...

Thirty seconds after Fletcher and Shumaker unleashed their dogs, the curs barked, signaling they had treed their first squirrel.

The hunters, necks craned upwards, spread into a ring around the tree, working to get the youngsters a shot at the first squirrel. Parker McMullen just couldn’t spot the squirrel sitting in an

open crotch in the tree. But Hunter’s double-barrel boomed and the squirrel tumbled down



A PERFECT START FOR YOUNG HUNTERS

After Joe Shumaker and Terry Fletcher buckled tracking collars on their dogs, Shumaker lined up the youngsters and gave them a short safety lesson.

“Only shoot up. If a squirrel comes down the tree, don’t shoot,” he said. “It will go back up a tree.”

The pace of hunting with a squirrel dog creates an ideal learning opportunity for young hunters. Fast handling of loaded guns to make snap shots are never needed. Young hunters carry their own firearms to become accustomed to handling the weapons.

But until the hunters reach the tree where the dogs are barking treed, kids’ weapons typically remain unloaded. When they do load them, they are under the supervision of adults who make sure the guns are handled safely.

Boredom, a common

affliction of young deer and duck hunters, is never a problem when hunting squirrels with dogs. The group is constantly on the move through the woods, keeping up with the ranging dogs or bee-lining to the excited barking of treed dogs.

When a treed squirrel breaks and runs, shooting can be fast and furious, with young hunters often ending up with empty shotguns and a lot of misses.

Every tree presents a tactical challenge.

Occasionally, a hidden squirrel can be spotted in a tree crotch or plastered on the side of a limb. But very often, the hunters have to shake a vine, light a smoky fire, or beat on the side of the tree to make the squirrel move.

Even the dogs tussling with each other over the right to claim a downed squirrel is amusing. All of it is great fun for kids. ■



Joe Shumaker gives young hunters safety instructions before a squirrel hunt with his dogs. **INSET:** Youngsters enjoy squirrel hunting with dogs because it involves a lot of activity, and being quiet is unimportant to the success of the hunt.

Photos by Gerald Horst

A good hunting vest with a game pouch in back is necessary, a lesson that hunt host Cameron Harris knows all too well.



Jerald Horst

the trunk, obviously crippled.

Somehow, the spunky rodent scrambled between the legs of the four dogs intent on grabbing it, scampered up a tiny sweet gum tree and shot into a 2-inch hole.

Gone!

Fifteen minutes later, the dogs treed again.

"He's in that tree over there," Shumaker announced, pointing at a tree off to the side of the one where the dogs were barking. Squirrels often leave the trees that they run up to hide in another they deem more hospitable.

Of course, the dogs stick to the tree the squirrel climbed.

Taylor Harris' shotgun boomed, and this one went into the bag.

... AND OFTEN ...

The next squirrel quickly ducked into a hollow gum, and the men moved on.

Fifteen minutes later, the dogs put a squirrel up a tall oak tree where it sat in the bald open in the treetop.

Taylor cracked down on him.

As it was falling, he yelled, "I see another one."

Bam!

As it was falling, another hunter yelled, "He's still alive."

Kaboom!

"Not now," Taylor popped off.

Two more squirrels, just like that.

"Let me shake a vine," Shumaker said, grabbing a wrist-thick muscadine vine. One shake and another squirrel soared out of the tree like a flying squirrel. Three shots boomed at the squirrel that was scrambling 50 yards to a hollow tree. All three missed.

This was squirrel hunting with a dog at its best.

A few came easy — one shot at a sitting target, and the squirrel was in the bag.

Most came hard — a shake of the vine, and it was off to the races, 10 shots at a zig-zagging squirrel running wide open through the tree-tops, with no one cutting a hair until the ninth shot.

"That's the fun in this,"

Cameron Harris said.

This wasn't a day for .22 rifles.

The pace was an on-and-off saunter through the woods, with occasional rest breaks that the senior hunters appreciated. It wasn't strenuous, but by the hunt's end, everybody knew they had walked a lot.

... LASTS TO THE END

By late morning, the eagle-eyed Shumaker, first to reach the treed dogs, shouted back to the gang, "There's two coons up there."

continued on page 98

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Shumaker and Fletcher tied the dogs to a small tree.

“They are already tuckered out,” Shumaker explained. “I don’t want them fighting a crippled coon.”

The curs are quick to grab any animal shot out of a tree.

The three McMullen youngsters quickly shot the raccoons and gave them to adults to carry. The dogs were cut loose to find more squirrels.

Shortly after noon, with the adult hunters’ game bags full of squirrels and the raccoons suddenly seeming heavier, the pace slowed.

So did the dogs’ enthusiasm.

Without an official declaration, the hunt was over.

Everyone knew it.

But everyone was smiling.

WHY TREE A SQUIRREL?

At first thought, the idea of treeing a squirrel sounds odd, like hunting a rabbit by throwing it into a briar patch. Squirrels, after all, live in trees. We hunt them to get them out of the trees.

But for a couple months each season, hunting squirrels by treeing them with dogs works as slick as grease on a doorknob.

Most of the year, bushytails find almost everything they want to eat: tree buds, fruit, nuts, seeds and insects — yes, insects — up in the treetops, seldom having to come to the ground, even to drink.

But in winter, trees have shed their nuts, acorns, cypress balls and seeds along with their leaves. In response, squirrels have to come to earth to grub them out of the leaves.

When a squirrel travels on the ground, it leaves a hot scent that a trained squirrel dog can easily find. Dogs work, nose to the ground, in a crisscross pattern, ranging ahead and to the sides of the hunters, just out of their line of sight.

Typically, when a dog hits a solid trail, it opens with a chop bark that alerts the hunters to move in its direction. The striking dog is usually joined by the other dog or dogs, which help work out the trail to a certain tree.

At the tree, all the dogs will bark continuously and loudly, often propping themselves upright on their hind legs.

Knowing which tree a squirrel is in is a huge assist for hunters. Squirrels on the

ground are extremely difficult to hunt. They know that they are out of their safety zone and are extremely wary. In winter, they are difficult for hunters to spot: not silhouetted against the sky and without shaking limbs or falling nut cuttings to give them away.



Hunters, old and young alike — Taylor Harris, Shannon McMullen and Parker McMullen — try to locate a squirrel that’s been treed.

Jerald Horst

EVERY TREE PRESENTS A CHALLENGE

Each time the dogs treed, the hunters would circle the suspect tree, scrutinizing every bump, knot or leaf nest. If a squirrel wasn’t visible, they scanned trees next to that tree in case the squirrel crossed over.

If no one spotted the squirrel, the next step was to “shake” a vine running into the tree by vigorously pulling on it to create a yo-yo like effect. If that produced no results or if the tree was vine-less but held a leaf nest, someone invariably shot a load into the nest. Sometimes that paid off, but most often not.

Holes in hollow trees were and are the bane of squirrel hunters, perfect hideaways for a frightened squirrel. One technique used by Joe Shumaker in an attempt to get a hidden squirrel to expose itself was to sharply rap the

DAMP, CLOUDY AND GRAY

— A PERFECT DAY

While any day spent squirrel hunting in January and February is better than one spent at work or at home, some are definitely better than others according to veteran hunters Joe Shumaker and Terry Fletcher.

Since squirrel dogs hunt by scent, and game scent dissipates quickly in hot, dry weather, damp, cloudy conditions are preferred. Best of all is right after a rain. Shumaker said damp conditions also seem to affect squirrel behavior.

“They seem less scary,” he said. “Lots of times, they will stay out in the open instead of hitting a hole when they are treed.”

Shumaker and Fletcher agree that windy conditions are never good. Tree limbs are constantly moving and squirrels don’t feel as safe. They are spooky.

Also, shaking vines, an essential part of getting hidden squirrels to move, isn’t as productive, because tree limbs all around the squirrel are already shaking.

Squirrel hunting with dogs is just as effective in evenings as in mornings. In fact, many hunters believe that afternoon hunts are better because the squirrels have had all day to lay down scent trails as they forage.

Under cloudy, damp conditions, squirrels stay active later into the morning and become active earlier in the evening. Under the best conditions, squirrel hunting all day is possible, if the hunters and the dogs possess the stamina. ■

Shaking vines produces movement in tree tops, and is a very effective way of making a hidden squirrel move.



Jerald Hurt

side of the hollow tree multiple times with a stout stick.

Smoking is another technique especially favored by Taylor Harris when the squirrel has hidden in a tree with an opening at or near ground level. He raked dry leaves into the cavity, whipped out his trusty cigarette lighter carried just for that purpose, and blew gently on the smoldering leaves to encourage the fire.

Surprisingly often, a squirrel would squirt out of the hollow at full speed.

Another tactic involved poking a long slender branch into the hollow's opening. Preferably, the branch is long enough to reach the tip of the hollow. If the hollow is long, a section of vine will often work better.

A variation of using a vine is called "twisting a squirrel out." The end of the inserted vine is mutilated with a knife. Once the vine reaches the tip of the hollow, the hunter begins twisting the vine vigorously to tangle the hairs of the squirrel's tail in the vine's end.

Once this is accomplished, the squirrel is involuntarily dragged downward to the opening. Grabbing the live squirrel by hand must be done carefully because they will bite viciously.

Every tree was a strategic challenge. It was part of the fun. Everyone's eyes and ideas were welcome.

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TRAINING A GOOD SQUIRREL DOG >



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Photos by Jerald Horst

GOOD TRAINING MAKES FOR A GOOD SQUIRREL DOG

Squirrel dogs are made, not born, according to Joe Shumaker and Terry Fletcher. "A pointer will instinctively point a rock," Shumaker said. "A retriever puppy will pick up that same rock and carry it around in his mouth by instinct. Squirrel dogs have to learn everything."

"Get a good pair of boots and spend a lot of time in the woods with the dog. Part of it is that squirrel dogs need to bond with people rather than other dogs. They are more like Labrador retrievers than trail hounds. Mountain curs want to please people."

Fletcher said that he likes to take a dog to a park with a lot of squirrels and turn it loose to chase squirrels up trees.

"They have to learn what to chase and that squirrels go up trees," he said.

Shumaker said the hardest thing is to get dogs to bark up a tree.

"I've seen dogs that are interested in squirrels chase one on the ground, but when the squirrel goes up a tree, the dog keeps going past the tree, then looks around for the squirrel," he said.

A good training tool is a device called a squirrel tube, said Shumaker. Squirrel tubes are essentially tubes at least 10 feet long made of 1-inch mesh wire, capped on both ends. A live-trapped squirrel is released into the tube for the dog to hopefully chase back and forth. The tube may be laid on the ground or suspended overhead.

"If your dog doesn't get squirrely with one of these, you really have your work cut out for you," he said.

Both men strap Garmin Alpha Track and Train System collars on their dogs before hunting with them or training them.

The GPS part of the system locates how far away from the hunter the dogs have treed. The shocking function of the collar system is used for training purposes, especially to prevent them from chasing other game species, particularly deer, but also rabbits.

"If a dog shows any indication of chasing a deer, I will grab my controller and light him up," said Shumaker. "But the quickest way to ruin a dog is over-discipline — too much shocking."

"Another thing is hunting with



At the end of the hunt, everybody had meat in their hands and smiles on their faces. **INSET:** Treed dogs focus their attention up the tree, barking loudly. The ruckus usually keeps the squirrel frozen until hunters arrive.

someone with an aggressive dog. If a dog like that whips your dog at a tree, it will never tree again."

Shumaker believes in keeping a dog in hunting shape.

"A third thing that can ruin a dog, even a finished dog, is not hunting it enough," he said. "They will get out of condition, get fat. Squirrel dogs need to be worked three or four times a week from October through February. You can't just say, 'Well, it's February,' and get the dog out of its pen." ■

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PICK OUT THE RIGHT DOG

There are no officially recognized breeds of squirrel dogs. It seems that members of every breed, from pit bull terriers to Chihuahuas, can be trained to tree squirrels.

Hunters Joe Shumaker and Terry Fletcher agree that fiests and curs are recognized as the best species for hunting squirrels. Both terms are often used to describe mongrels of no particular breed, but the men have particular dogs in mind. Fiests are small, terrier-type mixes that can be virtually any color a dog can carry.

Most are lively but make good house-dogs because of their small size. Fiests are popular because they eat less than larger dogs and relate well to people.

The word "cur" has a more specific meaning. Types of curs are Catahoula, black mouth, mountain and Kemmer.

Shumaker and Fletcher are mountain cur men.

"They hunt with their eyes as well as their noses," Shumaker said. "And they aren't too aggressive."

Added Fletcher: "... You can turn around at night with them and hunt coons. They are silent trailers until treed. Squirrels get wise to barking and hide."

Shumaker said that puppies are easy to find advertised in farm market bulletins and other places, but it is best to find a reputable breeder.

Fletcher noted that besides word of mouth, puppies can be found on Internet forums, or Facebook.

"Go to squirrel dog competitions, too," Fletcher said. "Often dogs that aren't quite competition-level dogs can be found here, culls essentially. These dogs can be great pleasure hunting dogs."

Squirrel dogs may be purchased as puppies, started dogs and finished dogs. Started dogs may be anywhere from 6

Brindle is the predominant color in mountain curs, although many are some shade of yellow. They are medium-sized, lightly built dogs.

months to a couple of years old, because squirrel dogs can be slow to develop.

"I don't get rid of a squirrel dog until at least 3 years old," Fletcher said.

A finished dog is easier to describe.

"The dog should be able to find squirrels, and when treed, you should be pretty sure a squirrel is there," said Shumaker.

Prices from reputable breeders range from \$300 to \$500 for puppies, \$800 to \$1,500 for started dogs, \$1,000 to \$2,500 for finished dogs and \$2,500 to \$15,000 for competition-level dogs. ■



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 gerald@rockinghorst.com.



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A man wearing a blue and grey hoodie with 'MARINE' and a logo, a black and white baseball cap with 'MARINE' and a logo, and sunglasses is smiling while holding a large bass. He is on a boat, and the background is green water. The text 'Dropshotting might seem simple, but understanding how to make small adjustments to match specific situations can put more bass in the boat. Here are some pros' tips.' is positioned in the upper right. The main title 'DROP by design' is in the center right. Below the title is the author's name 'By David A. Brown' and a small white box with a right-pointing arrow. A text box in the bottom left corner contains information about Bassmaster Elite pro Aaron Martens.

Dropshotting might seem simple, but understanding how to make small adjustments to match specific situations can put more bass in the boat. Here are some pros' tips.

DROP by design

By David A. Brown

>

Bassmaster Elite pro Aaron Martens bases his dropshot bait selection on water temperature.

It's the go-to rig for finessing finicky fish, nudging the cold-weary and lightly probing a variety of hard-cover scenarios from docks to laydowns, to bridges.

No doubt about it: The dropshot gets it done when other baits struggle.

But, while the general rig may be broad-reaching, several design points merit consideration.

Like any tool or tactic, dialing in the details that are most relevant to your objective bears significant impact on the final results.

CONSIDER THESE AREAS OF DROPSHOT VARIATION:

BAIT STYLES

Worms from 4 to 6 inches long comprise the majority of dropshot selections.

Options are many, but Bassmaster Elite Series pro Aaron Martens keeps it simple by basing his selection on water temperature because it relates to feeding aggression levels.

"If the water is in the mid-60s or lower, I go with a 6-inch Roboworm Straight Tail Worm," Martens said. "But if the water's in the upper-60s, or 70s, then I like the Roboworm Fat Worm."

A common worm alternative is a baitfish profile like Strike King's KVD Dream Shot, Half Shell, Yamamoto Shad Shape Worm and YUM Warning Shot. Typically designed with tails that kick and wiggle, these baits are designed to mimic a meandering forage fish.

For a bolder look — especially around hydrilla edges, reeds, etc. — try

a craw-style bait. This beefy profile is particularly effective during winter and spring when crustaceans make up a significant portion of the bass diet.

If a more subtle version of the crustacean look is in order, craw worms like the Gambler Flap Daddy or Missile Baits Fuse blend slender bodies with crawfish claws.

The Flap Daddy sports full-sized pincers, while the more-finesse Fuse includes slender appendages offering just enough action to garner attention.

WEIGHTS

Starting with materials, lead sinkers cost less than those made of tungsten, but the latter offer distinct advantages.

For starters, tungsten's density means you can decrease your weight profile. Also, because that density creates a sharp impact with whatever the weight hits, you're getting constant bottom "reads."



A properly balanced dropshot can be a highly effective rig for finicky bass.





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Before  **After** 

As far as shapes, elongated cylinders and teardrops are the common selections. Martens likes a cylinder weight when he's fishing a dropshot across any type of entangling bottom like brush, wood, etc., because the slender profile tends to slip in and out of tight spots better.

A teardrop weight isn't necessarily snag-prone, but it is particularly effective when Martens needs to interpret the bottom to detect key changes. The round bottom presents greater surface area, which combines with tungsten's sensitive composition to deliver info straight to your fingertips.

"The rounded edge of a teardrop weight rolls well, and it transfers signals well from the bottom," Martens said. "That tells you if you're coming through mud or rock or over wood."

Martens also will use a cylinder weight when vertically fishing a dropshot in deeper water, as the streamlined form suffers less water drag and therefore reaches bottom more quickly.

Most prefer the lightest weight possible, but consider that water pressure increases with depth. That means you can often get away with less weight than you might think in deeper spots.

Heavier weights help most for punching through rough water and current to ensure your bait reaches the target area.

Also, faster-falling baits can trigger suspended fish to bite rather than lose a potential meal.

LINE & LEADERS

Martens' rule of thumb for standard leader measurement is simple: Match your worm length.

He will, however, alter that for situational needs. Earlier in the year, for instance, bass tend to feed closer to the bottom, particularly when post-cold front conditions have them holding lower.

In such scenarios, by decreasing his dropshot leader to half or one third of his worm's length — sometimes, as short as an inch — he not only puts his bait where the fish are looking but he creates an enticing presentation that leverages the dynamics of bottom proximity.

"A short leader gives your bait a quicker bounce," Martens said. "It's like dribbling a basketball: If you dribble it standing up, the ball moves slowly, but if you get

closer to the ground, it tightens up.

"It's the same with a dropshot. You get a quicker action in the worm."

Noting that he considers anything 3 inches or less "short," Martens said low-lying bass generally respond better to a sharp, snappy action held right in their faces, as opposed to the subtle, waving action from a leader of 20 inches or more.

Martens is certainly not averse to longer leaders; in fact, he'll extend his leaders anytime fish are suspending in the water column — perhaps over a brush pile or stake bed that's likely to ensnare baits dropped into the thicket.

In any case, Martens noted the snappy action characteristic of a short leader is less important in that situation because bass are more likely to be looking up and feeding more actively.

Tip: Try a long-leadered dropshot around drain pipes with light current. Minnows often hold in a manageable outflow to feed on tiny stuff that tumbles out with draining water. Holding a small dropshot bait along the current edge creates the illusion of a minnow that's not watching his six.



FLW Tour pro Cody Meyer often turns to a dropshot for bridge fishing. **INSET:** A teardrop-shaped dropshot weight is the common choice, but for snaggy bottoms, a cylinder tends to snag less often.



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SWIVELS

Line twist is the bane of dropshotting. A bait standing perpendicular to your line creates water drag, which creates the spinning motion that can twist line and lead to those dreaded wind knots that often plague spinning gear.

FLW Tour pro Cody Meyer cures this ill by linking his main line and leader with a small swivel (see “The right outfit” sidebar for more).

Whether he’s pitching his dropshot into 6 feet of water by a dock or dropping it into 15 feet of water by a deeper bridge piling, Meyer knows bait rotation won’t impact his main line.

Simplifying the dropshot rigging, Gamakatsu offers the Swivel Shot, essentially a swivel connected to a line clip with a hook mounted on a wire stem between the two parts. Just tie your main line to the swivel and add a leader to the clip.

With the hook free to rotate on the stem, bait movement won’t affect your line.

Similarly, the VMC Spin Shot mounts a hook on a wire stem between two ends of a swivel.

more action. There’s less constriction on the bait, so it moves more freely.”

• **Wacky rigged** — Inserting a hook through the bait’s middle so it sits perpendicular to the hook with the ends wiggling freely, this dropshot option is a good bet for pressured fish that need a little more convincing.

“Let’s say I fish a spot and I’m catching a few by nose-hooking them, but the bite stops: That’s when the wacky rig is going to come into play,” Meyer said. “You also want to throw this in open water, but it is superior around cruising fish and bed fish.”

• **Texas rigged** — A small worm hook allows Meyer to create that classic weedless arrangement that keeps snaggy cover at bay. Anywhere Meyer’s concerned about snagging, the Texas-rigged dropshot bait gets the call.

“The hook-up ratio is a little better on a Texas rig, but I don’t throw it in open water because the bigger hook will constrict the worm

and limit the action,” Meyer said.

Fully analyzed, the dropshot technique is actually more detailed than it might appear.

But don’t be intimidated by the complexities: Time on the water will guide you to the right formulas for the scenarios you fish. Dial in your preferences and keep a couple

of different dropshot rigs handy — this is a bona fide fish catcher. ■



The common dropshot hooking styles are (left to right) wacky, Texas-rigged and nose-hooked.

BEST RIGGING

Most of the major hook brands offer light-wire task-specific hooks that you can size to the bait of your choice. As far as specific models, base that on a handful of common rigging options:

• **Nose hooking** — “This is what I’m going to throw in open water,” Meyer said of this straightforward hook placement. “For one thing, there’s



A full-time freelance writer specializing in sport fishing, David A. Brown splits his time between journalism and marketing communications (www.tightwords.com).

THE RIGHT OUTFIT

Bassmaster Elite pro John Crews is so exacting with his dropshot tackle that he helped Cashion Rods design one to his specifications.

Noting that he’s not hesitant to use a longer, stouter rod for dropshotting, Crews wanted a 7-foot, 4-inch medium-heavy spinning outfit that would quickly subdue big fish and minimize their chances of coming unbuttoned.

“I like a longer dropshot rod because it gives you more control, especially when you’re fighting those big fish,” he said.

The rod’s well-designed dropshot weight

Elite pro John Crews helped design a dropshot rod with a counterweighted butt section and a conveniently placed weight holder.



holder is positioned near the rod butt, so terminal tackle stays out of the way.

Also important is the 3 ounces of counterbalancing weight built into the rod butt.

“When you hold the handle, the tip wants to stay up, and that makes the rod very light, so you’ll detect every bite,” Crews said.

Recent years have seen dropshot aficionados spooling their spinning reels with braided line and capping the spool with 20 to 30 feet of 6- to 8-pound fluorocarbon. The braid benefits delivery, as well as the bite response.

“Your casting is better with the braid-to-fluorocarbon leader,” pro Aaron Martens said. “And, if you get bit on the end of your cast, it’s like getting bit beside the boat because there’s no stretch.” ■

— David A. Brown

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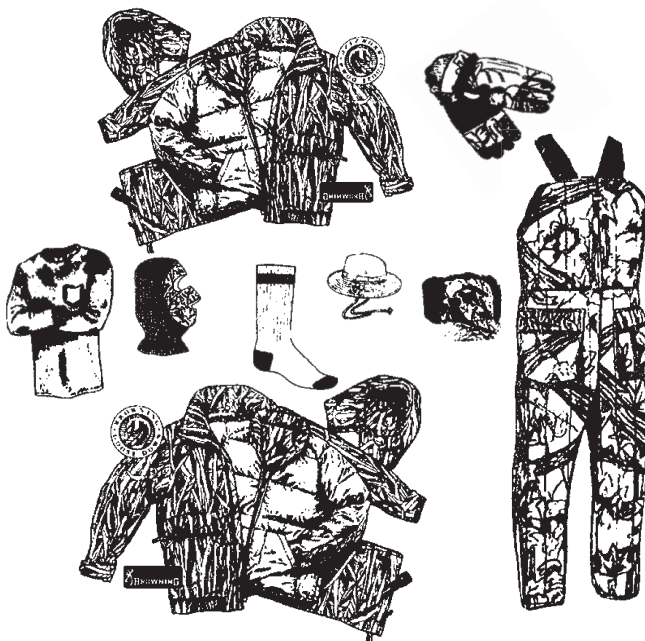


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CREATURE FEATURE

Jerald Horst

Florida pompano have long been regarded as one of Louisiana's premium saltwater food fish.



POMPANO: THE GLAMOUR FISH

Some fish are work horses: They're strong and can pull heavy loads all day. That's a redfish. Others are race horses. They are sleek and fast, but poop out quickly — that's a speckled trout.

But a few are glamour fish. They are elegant; they have grace and speed; they are attractive; they have good taste — er, they taste good. Such would be the case for the Florida pompano, simply called pompano in Louisiana.

McFadden Duffy, the late, great outdoors writer for the Louisiana Conservationist magazine, called it “a prince among game fish” in a 1961 article. He wasn't ashamed to admit that he was quite taken with the fish. To him, its delightful table qualities were secondary to the challenge of catching the picky creature.

Pompano belong to the large jack family. Twenty-nine members of the family swim the U.S. waters of the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. They range from the runty little Atlantic bumper to the bruising greater amberjack; from the bloodily inedible crevalle jack to the scrumptious Florida pompano.

IDENTIFYING POMPANO

Florida pompano are attractive fish, shading from blue-greenish silver on their backs to silver on their sides to canary yellow on their bellies. The only other fish that it can be confused with are permit and crevalle jacks.

Young jack crevalles (as we call them, reversing the names) under 12 inches long share the bright yellow colors of pompanos and are found in the surf zone, where pompano hang out.

They are easy to separate though. Jack crevalles have a row of enlarged raised scales called scutes along each side of their bodies just ahead of their tails. Neither pompanos nor permits have these.

Permit are uncommon in Louisiana waters, although they turn up once in a while. Viewed from the side, their bodies are almost round in shape, while a pompano is slightly elongated. They also share very little of the yellow coloration that is found on pompano.

Permit grow large, up to 60 pounds. The IGFA world record pompano is 8 pounds,

4 ounces. Strangely, Louisiana's all-time record is larger, an 8-pound, 8-ounce fish caught in 1969.

That eight of the other top 10 fish were caught between 1970 and 1979, with only one pompano caught in 1986, shows just how far the fish has fallen off the radar screens of recreational fishermen in the last 30 years.

WHERE TO FIND POMPANO

Pompano are found on the Atlantic coast from Cape Cod, Massachusetts in the north down through the Gulf of Mexico, to the South American coast well into Brazil.

Pompano have been recorded in waters 246 feet deep, but are really a coastal fish, reaching peak abundance in sand or mud-bottomed coastal bays and lakes, and sandy beach waters.

Their movements are triggered by changes in water temperatures, and to a lesser degree salinity. They may be found in waters from 63° to 90° F, but their preferred temperatures are above 82 degrees. Water temperatures below 50° F will kill them.

They are a distinctly saltwater fish, avoiding even brackish water. Preferred salinities are 28 to 37 parts per thousand (35 ppt is considered full strength sea water), although young fish can tolerate lower salinities.

During the summer, juvenile and adult pompano are common in the waters of beaches and passes. In September and October, the adults move inshore and stay there until falling water temperatures in November and December move them offshore, where they spend the winter.

SPAWNING AND FOOD PREFERENCES

Pompano have never been observed spawning, but from the presence of newly hatched larvae and spawned out adults, spawning is assumed to take place offshore with peaks from April to June and during September-October. Females as small as 10 inches long have been found filled with eggs.

They grow quickly. Youngsters grow 1 to 2 inches a month. Adults grow an average of 1.4 inches per month, with females growing faster and reaching larger sizes

than males. The average pompano life span is 3 to 4 years, with a few fish living more than seven years.

Young fish have small cone-shaped teeth that disappear by the time they grow to 8 inches long. From then on, they have no teeth in their jaws or on their tongue. They use hard plates in their throats to crush their prey.

Pompano have a blunt nose and an underslung mouth. But the mouth is protrusible, meaning it can be extended outward, almost like a short tube.

The location of the mouth is ideal for their feeding habits. Large schools of pompano will cruise over the bottom, nose into the sand or mud, hunting for their preferred food items, which include small clams and mussels, shrimp, beach fleas and even smaller crustaceans, as well as small fish.

Pompano are best known for the delectable table qualities. Duffy put it perfectly in his 1961 article.



The location and shape of a pompano's mouths is ideal for bottom feeding.

"As a food fish, there is none better than the pompano, either in the fresh waters or the sea. This is practically the unanimous verdict of epicures and all others who have had the pleasure of eating pompano, fresh from the water or quickly cleaned and processed for the freezer. The flesh is firm and rich, and possesses a delicacy of flavor peculiarly pleasing to the palate." ■



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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GPS WAYPOINTS FOR THE BILOXI MARSH

The Biloxi Marsh area located in St. Bernard Parish encompasses the general area north of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) Canal to the Mississippi Sound, and from Lake Borgne to Chandeleur Sound. There are several boat launches/bait sites in St. Bernard, New Orleans, St. Tammany and even some along the Mississippi coast, which offer easy access to the area. The entire region is criss-crossed with natural bayous, lagoons, bays, lakes and reefs.

In addition, there are two wildlife management areas: The Breton National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1904, is the second oldest refuge in the NWR system, and is located on and along the Chandeleur barrier islands. The state's Biloxi Marsh Wildlife Management Area located near the center of this area has hosts a broad range of marsh game and fish species.

A VARIETY OF FISHING

Specks, white trout, reds, flounder, croakers, sheepshead, black drum, triple tails, plus catfish and sharks, are found in

various parts of the area. A friend of mine recently caught a pompano deep in the marsh near Lake Eugenie, and another landed a tarpon near Three Mile Pass.

My Fishing Edge of GPS Waypoints for Hopedale ~ MRGO to the Mississippi Sound features over 310 specific locations. It would take several years to fish all of them, as it is an enormous area.

Some of the more common hotspots are the mouth and nearby turns of **Bayou Biloxi at Lake Borgne**, shown as BYBLX in the Fishing Edge files, at 30°00.0375'N ~ 89°33.4316'W. The turns in the bayou have deeper holes.

Stump Lagoon (STUMP 1) just north of Bayou La Loutre at 29°53.0500'N ~ 89°29.9151'W offers a starting point for the lower part of the WMA. This small cut usually always has moving current.

The bends and cuts in **Crooked Bayou (STUMP7)**, which is northeast of Stump Lagoon at 29°54.2100'N ~ Crooked Bayou (STUMP7) at 89°28.5700'W where the bayou opens to Flabus Bay, offers another choice location.

Continuing on Crooked Bayou leads you to **Lake Eugenie**, one of the bet-



ter spots for specks. The remnants of a small island (TROUTSPT) near the eastern side of the lake at 29°54.9649'N ~ 89°25.082'W has been a great location for me. There is a sandy reef just to the southeast where fishing under a cork is almost a sure producer.

In addition, various lagoons such as Pete's, Cutoff and Biloxi all good fishing locations. And the various bayous that empty into Lake Borgne, such as Grande Bayou, Lakeshore Bayou, Bayou Hasouse (Bayou Sue), Bayou St. Malo, Padre Bayou, False Mouth and Bayou LaFee all offer a respite from Lake Borgne bad weather, and provide great fishing options. Couple those with Grand Pass and Creole Gap and the Mississippi Sound end of the **Flatboat Key Reef (FLTKEY)** by Isle Au Pitre @ 30°09.0517'N ~ 89°13.4879'W and

you have some great spots to try in the northern part of the area. **Deadman Island** in Eloi Bay (DEADMN) at 29°44.1201'N ~ 89°21.1632'W, with its hard sand area on the south side, and locations in and around Morgan Harbor and Comfort Island, are great locations on the eastern edge.

All of these positions were determined using WAS 84 Datum, and are stated as degrees, minutes and ten-thousandths of minutes. (DDD,MM.mmmm)

As you know, GPS waypoints can now be electronically installed in most GPS units. This feature allows the user to install a tremendous amount of data in just a few minutes.

Each Edge location features an electronic data file that can be downloaded into a variety of GPS brand units. All of the EDGE programs are sent as an email attachment to your computer. This data download enters all of Captain Paul's waypoints into the unit in a matter of seconds. To help those of us who are not computer savvy, each download has a general map of the area in 1:100,000 scale, as well as information on each waypoint. These map images cannot be installed in the GPS unit, but offer a location of the waypoints and their descriptions, as well as a READ ME and INSTRUCTIONS file. Latitude~longitude value of the waypoints, and in some instances a "How to Fish" the location, are also provided.

ORDER YOUR FISHING EDGE

I started Captain Paul's Fishing Edge because I believe it give the fisherman an advantage in getting to, finding fishing spots, moving around and getting back from some of the top areas in the state.

Presently, Captain Paul's Fishing Edge is available for 21 areas statewide, including hotspots like Barataria Bay, Delacroix, Lake Pontchartrain,

Leeville, Calcasieu Lake, Vermilion Bay and many more.

I always suggest that you have a reliable compass and a map of the area whenever you venture outdoors.

To order a specific Edge file, you must have an email address that accepts attachments. Go to Louisiana Sportsman's Sportsman Store (www.sportsmangear.com) and select the location you're interested in. Remember, your order must include the brand of your GPS unit, your email address and the selected area. (Edge files are NOT interchangeable, so make sure you enter your correct GPS brand.)

ORDER YOURS TODAY  **Captain Paul's Fishing EDGE** GPS Waypoints

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Captain Paul's Fishing Edge will definitely give you an edge in navigating and fishing the Biloxi Marsh. ■



Capt. Paul Titus has been responding to GPS questions on LouisianaSportsman.com since 2000. He has been fishing and hunting in Louisiana since 1957. Titus holds a USCG license and conducts instruction courses in the use of GPS for private individuals and government agencies.

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NEW 'WORM' ORDER

TOY TENTACLES MAKE A
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A little over six years ago, Dave Hise took a children's play toy and turned it into one of the most productive flies since the Woollybugger.

Using the silicon tentacles of Puffer Balls, a.k.a wormy balls, the North Carolina resident created the Squirmy Wormy, a variation of the popular San Juan Worm. Competitive anglers started using it with great success, and in 2014, the U.S. Youth Fly Fishing Team won the world championships with it.

Immediately, a love-hate affair began among fly anglers with the Squirmy. Traditionalists refused to call it a fly, and the Czech Republic sought to ban it from international competition.

But for all the uproar, last year it was the talk of all the shows. Trout guides from Georgia to Maine and even out west now keep a large supply in their boxes.

THE CAJUN CONNECTION

It was on a North Carolina fishing trip that John Zeringue saw the potential of the fly in South Louisiana.

John grew up in Vacherie fishing for

bream and sac-a-lait in the adjacent cypress-laden bayous and swamps with his dad and maternal grandfather. His first experience with a fly rod was at 13 years old casting popping bugs to bream.

Four years ago, a guided trout trip to North Carolina reawakened his love for fly fishing, and since then he has fished bream and crappie with fly rod only.

Last spring, John started playing around with Squirmy Worms for bream. As he puts it, the fly was extremely productive — but had issues.

"The problem was after a few fish the Squirmy would start looking tattered and eventually fall apart," he said. "At that point, I started trying to tie a better Squirmy."

They say that necessity is the mother of invention. In this case, John found a solution, but it required adaptation.

"During a trip to Gatlinburg, I found some chartreuse wormy material in a fly shop. It was slightly better quality. When I got home, I was trying to figure a way to conserve the material — so I replaced the body with chenille.

"It was basically a black and chartreuse Fluff Butt, but replacing the marabou

UPCOMING EVENTS

• **Feb. 10 (Sat) - Orvis Fly Fishing 101**, 7601 Bluebonnet Blvd, Baton Rouge. 8 to 10:30 a.m. Free clinic covering the basics of tackle and rigging, with hands-on fly casting. Class size limited, so registration required. Other dates available. For more info, call 225-757-7286.

• **Feb. 10 (Sat) - Dr. Ed Rizzolo Fly Tying Festival**. Bethany Christian Church Center, 3223 Westheimer, Houston, TX. 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. \$10 adults, \$5 seniors, free under 12. Over 80 tiers from across the south, seminars, tying clinics. For more info, go to www.texasflyfishers.org.

• **Feb. 17 (Sat) - Little Mo Fly Fishing Fest**, Community Hall, Murfreesboro, AR. 9 a.m. - 7 p.m. Celebration of southern Arkansas trout fishing, with seminars, fly tying, exhibitors and more. Admission: \$5. Website: www.littlemissourifyfishing.com.

• **Feb. 23 (Fri) - 2018 Fly Fishing Film Tour**, Orvis Store, 7601 Bluebonnet, Baton Rouge. 7 to 9 p.m., doors open at 6:30 p.m. Tickets \$15, cash or check only. Proceeds benefit Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana. For list of films, go to www.flyfishingfilmtour.com. For tickets, call 225-757-7286.

• **Feb. 24 (Sat) - Fly Fish Texas**, Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center, Athens, TX. 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Admission \$10, kids free. Seminars, fly tying demos, vendors, and fishing for rainbow trout. Website: www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

• **Mar. 3 (Sat) - Red Stick Day Fly Festival**, BREC Perkins Park Community Center, Baton Rouge. 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Free admission. Seminars, fly tying, casting, kayak demos, fishing, raffles and more. Sponsored by Red Stick Fly Fishers, website www.rsff.org.

with the wormy material. I was catching bull bream, little bass, little sac-a-lait.”

With a couple more improvements, John’s fly reached its full potential. While he continues to use other flies for crappie — such as woolybuggers, Fluff Butts and the Crappie Candy — the Squirmy Butt is approaching legendary status.

“I catch crappie in my neighborhood ponds while guys fishing shiners and jigs are getting skunked! My biggest crappie was almost 2 pounds, but I regularly catch fish over a pound.”

FISHING THE SQUIRMY BUTT

John says there are multiple ways to fish his fly.

“If I’m fishing over a fairly

clean bottom, I’ll cast them out and count down — usually to seven — then increase or decrease from there. Then retrieve with long, slow strips. When I get a hit, I know I’m at the right depth.”

Since crappie are notorious for their tepid strikes, John urges that anglers watch where the fly line connects to the leader for any suspicious activity.

“If fishing over a brush pile or snags, I use the Squirmy suspended under a small float or VOSI. Fish this like you would a jig under a cork.”

“If you’re fishing from a kayak or boat over tree tops or deep structure, you can also vertically jig the Squirmy Butt in the cover. I’ve done this on my favorite tree in the Amite River and been very successful.”

continued on page 120

TIPPETS

By now, most of the “rainbeaux trout” that were stocked in ponds across the state have been harvested. But there’s still plenty left to make for some exciting action.

They’ve acclimated to a diet of bugs, and will be feeding along the edges of ponds late on hatches of crane flies and midges. Any dry fly matching the size and color will work.

Mop Flies closely resemble crane fly larvae. The trout will also be feeding on the larvae during the hatch, so keep a few Mops on hand.

Crappie will be spawning this month. Work the edges of shorelines where the depth drops off a bit, and where there’s grass or structure. Minnow imitations like the Fluff Butt, Silli Butt, Squirmy Butt, and Crappie Candy will work either suspended under a tiny float or by slow-strip retrieve.

Hybrid striper action kicks off this month on False River, Lake St. John, Concordia, Indian Creek, and Claiborne. Look for surface activity as they bust schools of shad. While a variety of shad patterns like the Puglisi Shad work best, a white Clouser Minnow never fails. Cast, strip fast, and hold on!

Pre-spawn bass action picks up later this month. Work potential spawning areas with large, action flies. Articulated streamers are best, but Seaducers, Fleeing Crawfish, or Magnum Woolybuggers can be dynamite.

On the coast, algae and grass are setting up in ponds — and that means clear water. Look for reds to work flats adjacent to deeper water. Darker flies still prevail, such as purple Toads, black Charlies and copper Spoonflies. ■

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FLY LINES

continued

As for tackle, John's favorite rod for crappie is an 8'9" TFO Finesse Series 4-weight. He likes the 4-weight because it lets him get a good firm hookset without risking tearing the fly out of the soft parts of the crappie's mouth.

Crappie are dogged fighters, and will immediately head for cover once hooked. John's experience is that size 3X knotless leaders are the perfect compromise between frequent fish breakoffs and "must break" situations when tangled up.

For those looking to purchase Squirmy Butts, they'll soon be available at Bayou Adventure in Lacombe. For those looking to tie their own, check out John's blog at vacherieboy.wordpress.com, or his YouTube channel at bit.ly/vacherieboychannel. ■



Glen 'Catch' Cormier has pursued fish on the fly for 30 years. A certified casting instructor and renowned fly tier, he and his family live in Cotile.



FOR MORE:

Check out John's column at northshorefishingreport.com for the latest fly fishing reports in Southeast Louisiana.

John Zeringue's version of the Squirmy can be fished multiple ways for sac-a-lait.

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THE SEASON MAY BE OVER — BUT MEMORIES REMAIN

EVEN DISAPPOINTMENTS CAN BE LEARNING
EXPERIENCES TO HELP YOU IMPROVE FOR NEXT YEAR



Collin Guillot, 9, of Loreauville, recently busted his first-ever deer, a 145-pound doe in Winnfield.

For the most part, the 2017 deer season is over, although some DMAP cooperators in the Tier 1 classification can still hunt a couple of weeks in February. For Area 1 and 6 hunters, this could still give you time to connect with a deer, and perhaps even that elusive trophy. February is the month for rabbit hunters, and no doubt the hounds are out and about chasing bunnies. Years ago we did a rabbit study with LSU, and we already knew rabbits pretty much breed year-round. But February, March and April were the months that all the female rabbits we collected (we collected about 15 rabbits every month) were either pregnant or lactating. The management areas are

open for small game hunting, so public land hunters still have good opportunity to be out in the woods and fields.

MEMORIES FROM 2017

Did you make some memories this past season? Memories are always good, especially when they happen with family or friends. Even those bad memories are good — disappointing certainly, but still good. Maybe you missed that good buck this season, but you still all the right things to put you in position to see and harvest the deer. Learn from it, and be prepared next year.

I had the joy of watching one of my grandsons shoot doves and squirrels. He

is on his way toward joining the ranks of the hunting community. I know a father who experienced the joy and thrill of a son killing his first doe and buck — it was quite a season for Liam and his father Evan.

Another son I know had the joy of seeing his 84-year-old dad harvest a doe — now that is a hunt I know Jimmy will remember for the rest of his days. Jimmy's son David James had the experience of arrowing a nice buck, only to have it run off. The blood trail the next day eventually led to a buck that had been feasted on by the coyotes all night long. Needless to say he got no meat from that deer, but he still tagged it and has a rack to go with the story.

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Frank Sullivan had the joy of bagging a true Boone and Crockett/Pope and Young buck that started off the 2017 season. Perhaps you connected with a trophy like Frank. If so, come to the Sportsman Show next month and see how it ranks compared with the other fine bucks taken this season.

Of course all hunts don't end with the harvest of a deer, but they are still good memories. I hunted with my friend Ken up in Bossier Parish and had no luck during the November rut, but Ken tagged out with bucks during the first week of the season. Now that's an accomplishment, and a sign that deer hunting was good and the rut was right on track. Our Old Fart hunt up in Union Parish was also low on the deer harvest, but I had the experience of watching a very large black bear stroll across a right of way one evening. Now I have seen bears in the Basin where they have been for years, but never in the piney woods of Northwest Louisiana. Maybe next time I see one I might have a bear tag in the pocket. My friend Mark and I hunted Pearl River as we always do, along with the Stafford Clan, and while some pigs hit the ground the deer kill was low. I did have a doe come running in after I bleated a few times and that was exciting. And of course, hunting on the snow day was exciting since snow is a rare winter commodity in South Louisiana. Overall, I would say it was a great season and one for the photo albums and scrapbooks.

TURKEY SEASON IS AROUND THE CORNER

One of the best ways to scout for turkeys is to keep an eye on them during deer season. If you saw both toms and hens that's good, because once spring arrives the hens

will be looking for nesting ground and the gobblers will be following them.

If you saw only gobblers, you need to remember that the habitat for turkeys changes with the seasons, so the toms that were around in your woods eating acorns may move to the fields where the hens will be nesting.

It appears that there has been some disease problems with the turkeys in the Florida Parishes, so if you encounter a sick bird let the biologists at LDWF know. Tag your toms and report your harvests —and make some memories during the 2018 turkey season.

BIG BUCK MEASURING

The quest for trophy bucks and some new state records begins when we start measuring deer at the Louisiana Sportsman Show in Gonzales. Remember that a rack has to air dry for 60 days before it can be officially scored. If you cannot attend the Sportsman Show in March, you will have another opportunity at the Superdome in New

continues on page 124

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GRUNTS & GOBBLES

continued

Orleans this summer. If you cannot attend either show, call LDWF and get one of the official measurers with the department to score your deer. An official score is one done according to Boone and

Crockett and Pope and Young methods, with deductions taken for lack of symmetry. It will be interesting to see if a new state typical gun-killed buck shows up. ■



Dave Moreland is the author of the new book *Louisiana Whitetails*, which explains how to grow big deer and where to hunt them. The book is available at www.SportsmanGear.com and at Amazon.com.



Four longbeards showed up on the author's property in late December — but come spring, they will be looking for hens.

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LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

The 3-inch Vudu Vixen soft plastic shad imitation comes in 14 colors, and a 3 ½-inch model is due out this summer.

THE VUDU VIXEN:

MEET EGRET BAITS' 'TOUGH AS HELL' SHAD IMITATION

Speckled trout and other saltwater species feed on shrimp and baitfish, shad, mullet, cocahoes and more.

Take away shrimp, which usually are in salty and brackish systems for only so long each year, and that leaves only the baitfish, a development that prompted many successful speckled trout fishermen over the past few years to request a baitfish-shaped soft plastic from Egret Baits. The company makes the wildly popular (among speckled trout and redfish anglers) Vudu Shrimp, which was followed by the equally popular Vudu Mullet. "We get calls and emails all the time saying, 'Why don't you make a cocahoe?' and 'What are you going to do next?'" Egret Baits owner Ken Chaumont said.

With the shrimp side of the food chain covered, Egret set out to work on a baitfish lure.

So Chaumont and his team developed the Vudu Vixen, which is tough as nails and already has a proven track record on getting speckled trout to bite.

The 63-year-old outdoorsman, who has been in the artificial lure manufacturing business 34 years, pointed out shrimp are in the water for a relatively short time — but baitfish are always present.

"So we modeled it after shad. That's the reason for the shad-style baits. When you look at the cocahoe, they're everywhere," he said.

"We've got another winner. I think this will be as big as the Vudu Shrimp."

DURABLE CONSTRUCTION

Just like Vudu Shrimp, Vudu Vixens, which hit the market in November, are made with almost indestructible TPE, a mix of rubber and plastic synthetic materials. The benefit of using thermoplastic elastomers is their ability to stretch and return to their original shape, thus creating a longer life and better physical range than other materials.

"We call it tough as hell. It's tougher and more durable than soft plastics. It's in a million products. TPE is a great product for the future of fishing," Chaumont said.

Two other qualities are that TPE doesn't melt, and paint doesn't run or bleed when it is painted. Chaumont said one of the most ideal storage spaces for the lures is a Plano Pocket tacklebox.

The Vudu Vixen is 3 inches long, and has a built-in 1/4-ounce leadhead. A 3 ½-inch model should be on the market

in June, he said.

There are two Vudu Vixens in each pack and they come in 14 colors armed with a sharp, strong hook, with a suggested retail price of \$7.99.

"I believe you can catch 500 fish in one pack," he said.

The first prototypes arrived from overseas this summer. All Vudu prototypes are pearl, so that is the Vixen color Chaumont and others fed speckled trout and other saltwater gamefish for half of 2017.

"We hit schoolies all year long," he said. "On my line, one bait has been tied on 3 ½ months. I've caught over 200 fish on one bait — average-size trout, redfish and flounder."

Ray Christy, Chaumont's long-time fishing buddy who lives at Hebert's Landing on the eastern shore of Big Lake, has caught more than 100 speckled trout on the Vudu Vixen he has been throwing since June, Chaumont said.

Another Louisiana angler with years of experience behind him has been wearing out the speckled trout with the new soft plastic out of Houma.

Capt. Bill Lake, a veteran charter guide who owns Bayou Guide Service, has been

a longtime believer in Egret Baits and is sold on the Vudu Vixen.

"It's a really nice-looking little bait, a little 3-inch shad. It's a brand new product that's tough as hell," Lake said. "It'll be a great bait to target fish (this winter.)"

Chaumont likes to fish the Vudu Vixen on 12-pound test monofilament line with a 10-inch long, 17-pound flourocarbon leader.

Chaumont said he is proud of "another key feature" on the Vudu Vixen: the lure's eyes.

"We developed a painted eye so you can't destroy it," he said, noting the eyes glow. "Every Vudu Vixen has glow eyes."

For more information on the Vudu Vixen and other Egret Baits, go to egret-baits.com or call (318) 256-6904. ■



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



A built-in 1/4-ounce leadhead and painted on glow eyes are just two features of Egret's new Vudu Vixen.

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GAME WARDEN

Keith LaCaze

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TIPSTER PROGRAM EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR LDWF'S ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

LOGT tipsters provide information which leads to the arrest of poachers and the seizure of illegally taken wildlife, like this alligator.

In the late 70s, some of the western states began establishing reward programs for information leading to the arrest of fish and wildlife violators. One of the original names for the programs was Operation Game Thief (OGT). The idea worked, and similar programs were established in a majority of states by the early to mid-80s.

In 1984, Louisiana Operation Game Thief, Inc. (LOGT) was formed and started paying out rewards. Funds contributed by generous conservation organizations, companies and individual sportsmen were the initial source of the cash. Over time, other funding mechanisms have been implemented, but more on that later.

LOGT members and its board of directors are private citizens who donate their time, money and efforts to raising funds used for rewards, determining the amount paid for the information provided and transferring the money to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' law enforcement division for payment to tipsters. They meet quarterly to perform these functions, and other duties necessary for the health and well-being of the organization.

I served as the enforcement division's LOGT coordinator for 27 years. The job involved meeting with the board of directors to report on enforcement activities, presenting cases for reward consideration and routing reward money

to tipsters.

LOGT guarantees anyone providing information anonymity. At times, this wasn't easy. Some tipsters were so fearful of having their identity revealed they would not meet with local wildlife agents or anyone else who might recognize them. In some instances it was necessary for me to travel to a pre-arranged meeting location to deliver a cash reward. Needless to say, I met with some interesting characters.

"MEET ME UNDER THE RED HORSE"

On one occasion, I was to meet with a young man who had provided a wealth of detailed and accurate information

which lead to the arrest of a serious poacher. The plan was to call from a pay phone (there were no cell phones back in those days) when I arrived in his very small hometown to deliver the cash.

He answered the phone and asked where I was. I told him, and he asked if I could see the sign with the red horse on it. I looked across the street at the old Mobil service station with its running red steed logo displayed proudly on a pole near the street, and assured him I could see it.

“Meet me under the red horse,” he said and hung up. He arrived a few minutes later, got out of his truck and came over to shake hands and receive the money. He then explained how sorry he was that I could not be invited to his home, but the guy he had turned in was there visiting and they were drinking beer.

I told him it was totally understandable — and got out of town.

In another case I had a roadside meeting set up with a female tipster. She earned her reward by providing information that placed wildlife agents at the perfect place and time to arrest a night hunter who had been busy reducing the local deer herd with little regard for “no trespassing” signs. We met on a sunny afternoon and the attractive young lady got out of her vehicle and walked over to accept the cash. She counted it, smiled and said “The no-good %#!@ is my ex. I’d turn him in for free, but getting paid makes it that much sweeter.”

Hell hath no fury

I include money in my short list of three reasons someone will turn in a violator. The other two are revenge, and elimination

continues on page 130

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GAME WARDEN

continued

of competition for the resource. The last two may be more personal, but money is still in the top three — which is why reward programs like LOGT are so effective.

But as members of any non-profit conservation organization will tell you, fundraising is becoming very difficult. One reason is lack of recruitment and continued membership. Throughout the 80s and 90s, conservation organizations such as the National Wild Turkey Federation and Louisiana Wildlife Federation had throngs of members. And LOGT enjoyed their support in the form of financial donations to the reward fund. But nowadays it does not take long to call the roll at any conservation group meeting. Interest has waned as hunters age and numbers decline.

LOOKING FORWARD

But LOGT has received some assistance in resolving funding issues. One has been in the courts in the form of innovative



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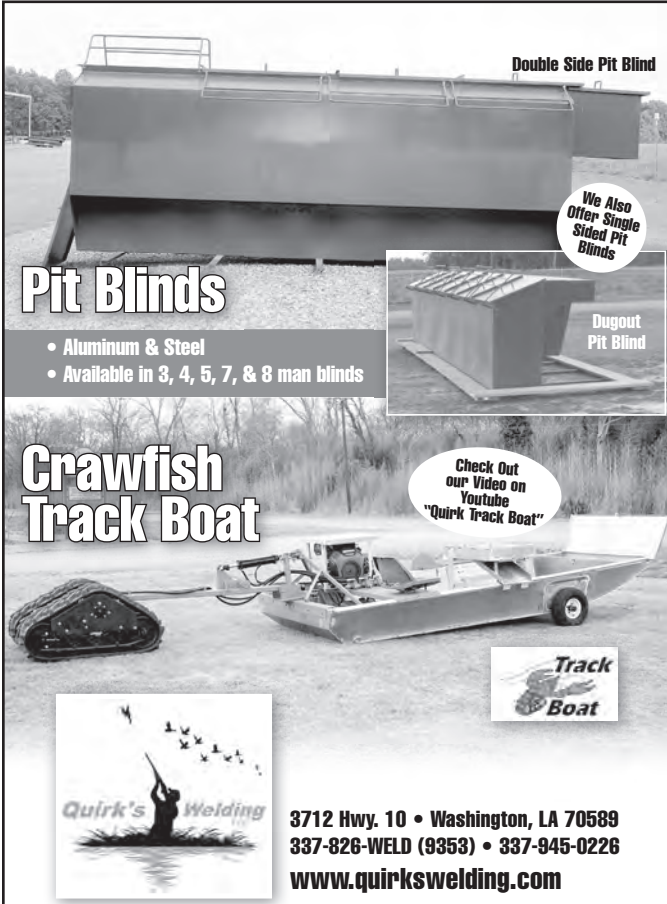
sentencing. Some Louisiana Judicial District Courts and US District Courts have ordered convicted offenders to donate money to LOGT as a condition of probation. District attorneys have taken similar action, and required mandatory donations to LOGT as part of a pre-trial intervention process. Avoyelles Parish District Attorney Charles Riddle is a leading proponent of such intervention requirements.

LOGT's founders and members provide

a very useful and effective weapon in the fight against wildlife violators. They are wildlife's best friend, not to mention the wildlife enforcement agent's biggest supporter. ■



Retired Wildlife Enforcement Lieutenant Colonel **Keith LaCaze** spent 34 years with the LDWF beginning in 1977. LaCaze is happily married to wife Mitzi and the father of two children.



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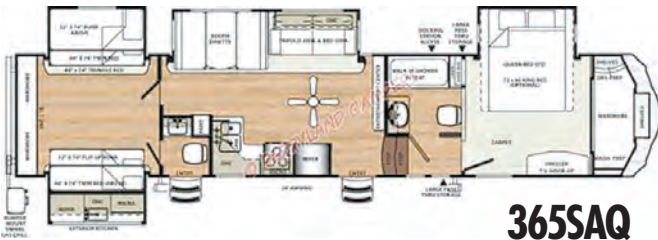
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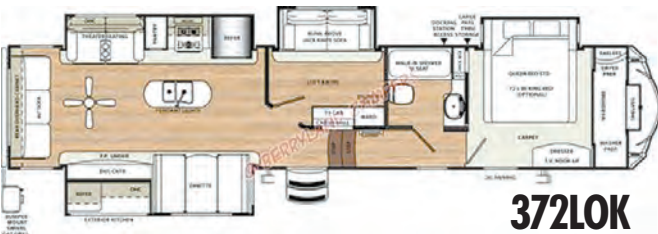
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STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano

Want to see more than just trail camera photos of a big buck on your property? Learn to keep hunting pressure to a minimum.

LEARN TO MANAGE HUNTING PRESSURE

KEY TO SUCCESSFUL HUNTING IS KEEPING DEER FROM KNOWING YOU'RE AROUND

This month, I'm going to touch on a subject that applies to deer hunting with any weapon: managing hunting pressure on your herd. In my opinion, no single factor is more important to your success in terms of seeing and harvesting deer — especially mature bucks.

Not everyone is fortunate enough to control the land where they hunt, and not every hunter is after a trophy buck, but I hope every reader can take something away from this that will help them have more success in the woods. Although I'm focusing on mature bucks, a mature doe is every bit as intelligent, and is also a worthy opponent. Every day in the woods is a learning experience, and the following are some things that I have personally found to be true.

READ AND REACT

From the time it is born, a buck learns from and reacts to hunting pressure. For the first few years of its life, luck plays a large part in its survival. But if a buck makes it to 3½ years of age, it becomes almost a completely different animal

when it comes to hunting — or even just laying eyes on one. These bucks have learned from their encounters with hunters, and were fortunate to survive that far.

Each encounter or close call causes the buck to eliminate the habit that exposed it to that danger. Let me be clear: A buck's wariness or lack of daytime movement is a reaction to past negative stimuli caused by hunting pressure. By eliminating as many of these negative stimuli as possible, the bucks on a given property will often become more visible and easier to pattern effectively.

Many times over the years, I have had customers walk into our archery shop and tell me all about "Old Split Toe," the huge buck that haunts their trail-camera images — but only in the middle of the night. It could be the buck is bedded a long way from their property, but often-

times it's due to sloppy hunting habits or excessive traffic that can be corrected or reduced.

Tree-stand or ground-blind location is key to minimizing pressure. Ask any hunter who consistently harvests mature bucks, and a majority will tell you the most-important factor in stand location is access. Being able to sneak in and out of your stand area undetected by deer is



The author killed this hit-list buck, nicknamed "Saban," on Christmas Eve — after taking plenty of care not to put too much pressure on it.

huge. Let's say you have a tree stand in the highest deer-traffic area on your property, but you have to walk through a bedding area to access it. Or you have to climb down into a field full of feeding deer to leave that stand at dark. You've just shot yourself in the proverbial foot, with not much chance of success — but very good odds of educating a lot of deer to the fact they're being hunted. It won't take long for the herd to adjust and feed elsewhere, or become nocturnal. A better option would be to relocate the first stand to an area of lower deer traffic — but with better hunter access. In the case of the evening field-edge stand, having someone else pick you up by driving in with a vehicle would be a better option.

SCENT CONTROL

Managing human scent is another key to minimizing pressure on your herd. Your scent can linger long after you leave the area, and deer are not fans of it, believe me. Showering with scent-free soap before each hunt, washing clothing properly, wearing scent-control clothing and/or the use of an ozonator all help to minimize your "human scent footprint."

I'm always amazed at how many hunters don't play the wind to their advantage. Hunting a stand on the wrong wind is taking a huge gamble, and usually results in an unsuccessful hunt and an educated deer herd. Study the wind carefully and use it to your advantage — deer definitely use it to theirs. I use the Weather Channel's hourly forecast, which shows wind speed and direction, to anticipate the winds.

That way, I don't have to climb down in mid-hunt because of an unexpected wind shift.

If you reduce pressure on you herd, you should enjoy greater numbers of both deer sightings, and harvests. White-tailed deer are far better at patterning hunters than most people realize, because their survival depends on it. Use low impact hunting tactics and scent control to increase your future success.

A BUCK CALLED 'SABAN'

We have been naming our bucks after SEC coaches lately. The top buck on our hit list was a deer we named

Saban. As LSU fans, we wanted to outsmart him the most. For three years, he avoided us, with only a few trail camera images each year, mostly at night. This shows how adept these animals are at patterning hunters. Even so, by managing hunting pressure, we were able to close the deal, and the old buck's luck finally ran out. This was a gun hunt, due to the necessity of accessing and exiting the field without bumping deer that were feeding there daily. ■



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A mature buck like this one is hard enough to kill without a hunter broadcasting his whereabouts while traveling to and from his stand.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: IS THE CONVENIENCE OF AN ATV WORTH THE DISTURBANCE WHEN IT COMES TO GETTING TO YOUR STAND UNDETECTED?

By the time you are reading this, unless you live in the extreme southern part of Mississippi, the 2017-2018 deer season will already be “in the books,” as they say.

While my memories are still fresh, I want to bring to the reader’s attention something that stood out to me while spending time in the whitetail woods.

Early one cold morning just before New Year’s Day weekend, I parked on the side of a blacktop road that flanks an area I hunt, with the idea of easing down an adjacent hardwood ridge to where the ridge-toe overlooks a hollow complex — a location that has proven in the past to be a favorite haunt of rutting bucks on the prowl.

The predawn sky was crystal clear, and the morning low was forecast to be in the mid- to upper-20s. I was dressed well for a long sit in the cold and slowly worked my way to a particular pine that I could sit against that afforded a great view of

the bottom of the hollow. The great thing was that the location was high enough on the toe of the ridge to give me the equivalent elevation of a ladder stand.

THE WALK-IN

As I carefully walked in, the only sound I made was the low rustle of leaves under my boot soles. Upon reaching my destination, I was quite content, having not jumped or spooked any deer during my slow and careful walk in. After donning my fleece neck gaiter, heavy insulated pile hat and gloves, I sat down and got myself properly situated at the base of the big pine.

There was no wind yet, so the super-cold morning air hung in the hollow with an almost palpable heaviness. We have all noticed many times how well sound can carry on a cold, still, heavy morning. The train’s whistle on the track 6 miles away sounded like it was a mile away. A dog’s bark from a mile away sounded like

it was a quarter-mile or less away.

After sitting quietly for a while, I noticed a low, rumbling sound in the distance. I could instantly tell it was coming from an adjacent neighbor’s property and was an ATV, most likely a 4-wheeler. The low, rumbling noise continued, slowly increasing in volume, with only the pitch changing as the small, wheeled vehicle made twisting turns and went up and down grade changes.

The most-remarkable thing to me was that I could easily tell where the vehicle and its hunter were through the entire trip. I am just a slightly hard-of-hearing, almost 70-year-old human, and I could tell exactly what was going on and where — so what information was the noisy passage imparting to every deer in the nearby woods?

A whitetail deer’s hearing is infinitely better than a human’s ear, so was the hunter helping or hurting himself by riding to his stand rather than walking?

Whitetail deer, especially wily, old bucks, are hard enough to see and outwit, without advertising one's presence and intentions to all within ear shot. And remember, being "within ear shot" on a cold, clear, still morning, means a much larger area than normal, especially with bare trees after leaf fall.

DID HE HAVE A CLUE?

Once the hunter on the ATV had reached his stand or a parking spot within easy walking distance, the vehicle stopped and the engine was turned off. As I saw it, the saddest thing for the hunter was that a human some distance away had been listening and knew where he had come from, what route he had taken and where he had stopped. All of the deer in the area knew much, much more. I could only imagine how many were at that moment quietly slipping away from the hunter, all the way around the compass dial.

When that key was turned off and the sound stopped, that information was telegraphed in a circular pattern for all to hear. I could hear it all very well, and by using simple high school geometry, if the straight-line distance from that

NOISY NEIGHBORS:

Sound carries surprisingly far on a cold winter morning. So, why would a deer hunter, who stores his outer wear in a bag with pine boughs, bathes with unscented soap, sprays down with scent-killer spray and uses any number of other techniques to avoid detection, hop on an engine-propelled ATV to travel to and from his or her deer stand? This totally defies logic to me. Additional noise pressure in the woods cancels out, to a degree, a hunter's other best efforts to remain undetected.

location to me represented the radius of a circle, a quarter-mile radius would equate to a minimum circle of disturbance of approximately 145 acres. A half-mile radius would equate to a circle of disturbance of 500 acres. I hope you see my point.

That revelation should be shocking to all. I can't count how many frosty mornings I have spent listening to ATVs buzzing to and fro as they come and go from stands on neighboring properties. There is certainly a place for using ATVs, but I have become, over time, less and less enamored with their use going to and from a deer stand. ■



One of the author's nephews with a fully mature buck taken after a long, quiet hike to the stand.



Bill Garbo is a petroleum engineer and avid whitetail hunter from Madison, Miss. He has lived and hunted out west and taken numerous big game species, but hunting big old mature southern whitetail bucks is his favorite pursuit by a country mile.

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PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

Chris Holmes

DESPITE BITTER COLD, BAHAN WINS 2017 BCKFC CHAMPIONSHIP



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.



Courtesy of Lance Burgos

New for 2017 was the championship belt presented to winner Chuck Bahan.



Dec. 9, 2017 was a day that many will remember for years to come across South Louisiana.

A blanket of snow covered many areas of the state and kept lots of folks snuggled up to a warm fire, marveling at the winter wonderland that happens in the Deep South only so often. Fishing charters were cancelled, and most fishermen with any common sense left their boats tied to the dock or on the trailer.

Few, if any opted to fight the wind, ice and extremely low water. Surely no fish could be caught in these miserable conditions.

Well, nobody told that to the dozens of crazy kayakers that descended on Cocodrie to participate in the Bayou Coast Kayak Fishing Club's 2017 Championship tournament.

New for 2017, the club reformatted its annual tournament series to provide qualifying events for the opportunity to participate in a shotgun start, cash payout, championship event. Four qualifying events were held during the year at various locations using different formats. Participants that fished a minimum of two of the qualifiers and placed in the Top 15 in at least one event qualified to fish in the championship. Thirty-eight anglers were invited to participate.

The format for the championship was entry of a combined

CONTINUES >

PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued

stringer of up to two slot redfish and five speckled trout. In true kayak tournament fashion, the weather went from bad to worse in the days leading up to the event. Jackson Kayak team member Chuck Bahan pre-fished the area extensively in the weeks leading up to the tournament. "I was able to make three trips down to Cocodrie before the tournament and patterned the reds well. I also located some decent trout. However, when I saw the weather on Friday, I knew all my scouting was for naught," he said.

Despite the miserable conditions, Bahan launched his 'yak on Friday with little hope of finding fish — any fish. With rain and ice all around, it quickly proved to be a bad decision. "I put in and tried to fish for 45 minutes. I was getting soaked and my hands were starting to get mild hypothermia. I realized that my decision to launch wasn't smart, so I wisely came in and found shelter and dry clothes," he said.

Day 2 saw little improvement in conditions. Launch time at 6 a.m. was not mandatory, but leaving later meant less time for fishing to make it back for the 2 p.m. weigh-in deadline. "Saturday I woke up to thick ice all over my Yukon and kayak. I looked at my fishing partner Lance Burgos and said, 'We are crazy fishing in this.' We put on so many layers that when we left the launch we started sweating.

"The water temperature was 42 degrees and there was nothing but a lot of pedaling for the first four hours. I saw a mullet at 10:30 and got excited."

It was 11 a.m. before Bahan saw his first redfish. However, it simply wouldn't eat. He said the whole idea of extensive pre-fishing was to devise plans B, C and D if needed. Clearly, this would be a day to run through the alphabet.

He saw reds for about an hour, but just could not get them interested. He decided to wait them out in hopes that a rise in the water temperature would get them a bit more active.

"I realized that the noisier baits like a spoon were just spooking them, so I switched to a paddle tail swimbait on a light jighead," he said.

Knowing that water temperature was a key to feeding, Bahan moved a bit to get to areas between little canals and duck ponds to find warmer water.

"I waited them out and found water in the low 50s. I caught about eight in the next hour, with one that later weighed in at 6.34 pounds," he said.

Persistence and precision casting paid off.

"You had to put it in their face and still, the ratio of casts to bites was extremely high. It was super tough to get them to eat. Time was not on my side and the clock was approaching noon, so the pressure was on. I had seen several big fish, but no takers. That would change in a hurry. My next fish was big and I thought to myself it was a small bull, but I pitched to it anyway and she ate it immediately. Once I netted her I thought she was over (size), but pinching the tail she was right under 27 inches — and fat," he added. The fish weighed in at 8.48 pounds

and was the heaviest red caught in the tournament.

Not a single trout was entered at the weigh-in, but Bahan was impressed with the number of redfish caught.

"It's a testament to the quality of anglers that participated in this series and championship to see the number of fish weighed in. Fishing from a kayak can often be an advantage, but certainly not this day. It was the worst of conditions, and these guys proved that they have fishing skills," he said.

Bahan's two-redfish total of 14.82 pounds earned him first place and a \$1,500 check.

He also took home the club's new championship belt that he must show off at all club tournaments in 2018. The belt will be awarded to next year's champion. ■

Snow is not a typical sight in South Louisiana, but members of BCKFC braved the harsh elements to fish the 2017 Championship Tournament in Cocodrie.



PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued

BCKFC 'FISH PICS' TOURNAMENT MARRIED BY ALLEGED CHEATING SCANDAL

OFFICIALS SAY PHOTO ALTERED TO MAKE WINNING FISH APPEAR LARGER

The Bayou Coast Kayak Fishing Club holds several tournaments each year. Most are traditional catch/weigh-in tournaments, but one is a little different.

The Massey's Fish Pics Tournament is a catch and photo tournament that lasts nearly all year and is open only to members of the club. There is no entry fee, but the idea is for a year-long fishing contest that allows members to potentially catch a contest-winning fish each time they are out on the water fishing in their kayak. Eligible fish must be photographed, with a specific tournament token on an approved measuring device. Participants must then submit a properly completed Catch Entry Card, along with the photograph of the entered fish.

The popular contest has taken place for the last few years and is sponsored by Massey's Professional Outfitters.

But this year's event, which concluded on Nov. 30, was marred when one of the contestants was allegedly caught by tournament officials attempting to submit a last-minute photo that was determined to be fraudulent.

Josh Reppel, a wildlife tour and kayak fishing guide, was confronted by Massey's tournament officials and BCKFC officers after the submission. Reppel entered a photo that appeared altered to make the fish longer. If it had been accepted, he would have been in first place and could have won a new Hobie Outback kayak valued at more than \$2,500.

"It is with a mix of both disappointment and anger that we announce that we were notified ... of a fraudulent entry into our Massey's Fish Pics Tournament



Bayou Coast Kayak Fishing Club members prepare for an early-morning shotgun launch in Golden Meadow.

submitted by angler Josh Reppel," BCKFC president Aaron Larose said in an online post on the club's website.

After the club was notified by Massey's manager and tournament director Dave Woodard, several of the club's officers and board members also reviewed the photo, which made a 41-inch redfish appear to be about 44 inches long.

"Upon confronting Mr. Reppel about the photo, he immediately admitted to falsifying the entry and apologized for his actions, stating a more formal apology was forthcoming," Larose wrote.

Reppel was immediately disqualified from the tournament, as well as all future club-related tournaments and banned from the BCKFC.

Angler Wayne Lobb was named the winner of the conventional tackle division, and received his Hobie Outback in early January at Massey's in New Orleans.

Many sportsmen are not aware that cheating in a Louisiana hunting or fishing contest can be a felony if the highest prize value in the contest is \$100 or more.

The specific statute is as follows:

LSA-R.S.14:214. Fishing or hunting contest fraud

A. The crime of fishing or hunting contest fraud is the act of any person, who, with the intent to defraud, knowingly

makes a false representation in an effort to win any prize awarded in any fishing or hunting contest.

B. When the most valuable prize offered in the contest amounts to a value of less than \$100, the offender shall be fined not more than \$500, imprisoned for not more than six months, or both.

C. When the most valuable prize offered in the contest amounts to a value of \$100 or more, the offender shall be fined not more than \$3,000, imprisoned, with or without hard labor, for not more than one year, or both.

The 2018 Massey's Fish Pics Tournament will go on as planned, but some new requirements on submissions will be added to help prevent any future issues.

"I believe it is important that we all take what we have learned from this unfortunate development and apply it in the most positive way possible as we move on to future business," Woodard added. "Thank you everyone for your patience and participation this year and I look forward to working with everyone again in 2018."

Editor's Note: The author, Chris Holmes, is a member of the BCKFC. ■

NEW GEAR UP NEXT >

PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued

NEW GEAR REVIEWS

YAKATTACK OMEGA ROD HOLDER

From the innovative minds at YakAttack comes “the last rod holder you’ll ever need.” The Omega is designed to handle casting, spinning, large conventional and even fly rods — all with the same holder. Utilizing the all-new LockNLoad mounting system, the Omega easily attaches to all rail mount systems that are common on many brands of fishing kayaks. A rotating collar locks the rods in the holder, but easily releases if you need to get it out quickly. The base locks securely into the track and is solid enough to withstand strikes from big fish while trolling.



A security latch prevents accidental release of the rod holder from the base. The Omega offers a wide range of adjustability to get your rods at the perfect height and angle you desire. It also comes in the Omega Pro model that adds an extension arm to get rods higher off the water, and helps with longer butt rods. Tough and durable, the Omega is packed with one-of-a-kind features that solve all of the issues common with other kayak rod holders. MSRP: Omega, \$30, Omega Pro \$40.

More information: www.yakattack.us

OLD TOWN PREDATOR PDL

The Predator PDL is a fishing machine that offers stability, maneuverability and fishability. Pedal power provides forward or reverse propulsion, all while keeping your hands free to handle your fishing rod. The rudder control knob is positioned for easy access and makes steering almost effortless. The Element seating system provides dry, all-day comfort and has easy adjustments. It comes in four colors: urban camo, lime camo, black cherry and regular camo for those wishing to also use the 'yak as a stealthy hunting platform. It's packed with fishing-friendly features like rod holders, mounting tracks, dry storage and a built-in transducer scupper that makes

mounting fish finders a breeze. Six removable mounting plates allow easy customization for accessories without having to drill into the hull. Slip resistant Exo-Ridge on the deck and tankwell provides sure footing and fast drainage. Of course, the PDL drive is the engine of this kayak. The self-contained unit quickly and easily drops in and locks securely. The drive is quiet, dependable and provides fast propulsion that is easy to use. The propeller propulsion provides a 10.3:1 gear ratio and can reach speeds up to 5.5 mph. The drive has a 16-inch draft when deployed, and can quickly be pivoted for docking or avoiding underwater obstacles. The PDL Drive console weighs 21 pounds, and includes a carry handle for easy transport. Another unique feature is that the drive unit floats. The Predator PDL is an advanced pedal-powered fishing kayak that provides precise boat control, while keeping your hands free for fishing.

More information: www.oldtowncanoe.com



Specs:
Length: 13' 2"
Width: 36"
Weight: 117 lbs
Max Load: 500 lbs
MSRP: \$2799

*Due the lag time from interview to print, weather conditions can change the bite so check in regularly with LouisianaSportsman.com for the latest updates.

FEBRUARY'S BEST BETS

FRESHWATER

Where: Caney Lake

What: Bass

How: Caney Lake in North Louisiana holds six of the top 10 record bass in Louisiana. All are over 15 pounds, but all were caught in the 1990s. The lake experienced a decline when all of its grass beds were destroyed by carp, but the carp are almost gone and the grass is bouncing back. So are the fish. Double-digit bass are regularly caught, and many locals are convinced there is a new state record swimming around now. Caney has many kayak-accessible areas close to launch sites, and offers a real chance at catching the bass of a lifetime from a 'yak. The spawn usually occurs late February and on into March. On any given day, the fish may be in the shallow pockets and fingers, or out on the dropoffs in deep water. Lipless crankbaits like Rat-L-Traps are a killer lure for big Caney spawners. They allow you to cover all depth ranges with just a change in retrieval technique. Crawfish colors are particularly effective, as well as silver and natural shad colors. Search the shallow areas with a fast retrieve, and quickly ripping the bait if it gets hung in the grass often triggers a reaction strike. If the fish are on the deeper ledges and dropoffs, let it fall to the bottom and work it back with a pumping retrieve. Large soft plastics like 10- to 12-inch worms are also effective when the fish start getting on beds. Caney water is usually clear, so use lighter colors on cloudless days and darker ones if it's overcast. Also, don't overlook large swimbaits in natural baitfish patterns. There's a potential for a giant bass on every cast, so don't bring wimpy tackle: 15- to 25-pound mono is recommended, and a bit more if you're using braid.

Launch: There are several marinas and launches around Caney. You won't be able to cover the lake by kayak from a single launch, but each has easily accessible areas with a myriad of pockets and coves.

Brown's Landing: \$3 kayak launch fee, food, supplies, tackle and bait. RV camping with hookups. 7777 Highway 4, Jonesboro, Louisiana. (318) 259-6649

Hooks Marina: \$3 kayak launch fee, food, supplies, tackle and bait. 400 Spillway Road, Chatham, Louisiana. (318) 249-2347 Facebook: Hooks Marina on Caney Lake

Jimmie Davis State Park: \$3 per person daily use fee. Boat launch. Camp sites and cabin rentals (fees vary). The park is located on a peninsula on the lake and provides great paddle fishing access. 1209 State Park Road, Chatham, Louisiana. (318) 249-2595 www.crt.state.la.us

Insider tip: Don't pass up fishing close to the launches. Double-digit bass have been caught in these overlooked areas within sight of the launch.

SALTWATER

Where: Big Lake (Calcasieu Lake)

What: Speckled Trout

How: February can often be a slow month, but for big trout, the West Cove area of Big Lake is a not-so-secret secret. Most of these trout are caught by boat anglers that don waders and hop in. However, some of these areas are accessible by kayak and you can choose to remain in the 'yak or wade, depending on conditions and the crowd.

If there are wade fishermen in the area, give them a wide berth. Many have perfected the art of silently fishing the areas reefs and routinely haul in some giant trout. If it's calm, you can move in quietly and stake out a spot to fish from the kayak. However, it is generally more productive to park the kayak and quietly wade. A pair of breathable waders with shoes that won't easily come off is recommended.

Hefty mullet imitations like Corkys, MirrOdines and the Egret Kick A Mullet are go-to favorites.

Work them slowly over reefs and near any baitfish you see. If you're following a warm spell, don't rule out walking your favorite topwater plug.

Launch: Free launch ramp at West Cove Recreation Unit on LA 27 south of Hackberry. *Note that the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge is closed until March 15, but you can use the launch and canal as passage into the lake only. Just don't stop and fish any of the canals or marsh area in between.

Sabine NWR: 337-762-3816

Insider Tip: Watch for schools of bait to signal the presence of trout in the area. Use your depth finder, or poke the bottom with your stake-out pole to locate reefs.



SEAFOOD BIBLE

Jerald & Glenda Horst

GOURMET TASTE CAN BE GLUTEN-FREE

SPEEDY SEAFOOD RECIPES STILL PACKED WITH FLAVOR

Although the shrimp and chicken dressing can be served as an entrée, it's delightful as one of the fixings with a holiday meal. **INSET:** Stefanie Rogers works full time, but cooks a full meal most days — often featuring seafood.



Stefanie Rogers lives with her husband Scotty in the rural Louisiana community of Pine — the same village where they grew up. Considering where they live, it would be easy to assume she would simply cook Southern style dishes, with little seafood other than fried catfish.

But you would be wrong — really wrong.

It started with her mother Jean, who Stefanie said cooked anything — Italian, Chinese, wild game, seafood, and of course, country style. But she didn't learn from her mother — at first.

"I couldn't cook when we got married; not a thing," she admitted. "I



thought he was eating my cooking. What he was doing was pushing the food aside and when I wasn't looking, he would put it in his napkin to throw away."

The young couple moved to Baton Rouge for a couple of years and that's when Stefanie became serious about cooking. "I called my mother and grandmother Roena Seals a lot.

"Now cooking is my stress relief. Cooking is fun. I work full time as a nurse in Bogalusa and get home between 5 and 5:30 p.m. every day.

"I'm a fast cook," she said. But she has to be. Some of her dishes are very elaborate tasting, and beginning to cook at 5:30 p.m. doesn't allow much time.

"We eat mostly at home and only eat out once in a blue moon." Their two children, Nikki (31) and Dusty (30) eat over often with their families, including every Sunday. Nikki, she noted

proudly, "is actually a very good cook herself."

The satin-skinned, brown-eyed blonde looks more like her children's sister than their mother. But she was diagnosed with celiac disease, meaning her body can't tolerate wheat flour.

That hasn't stopped her, however, from creating epicurean meals. She grew up on seafood and calls her cooking "Cajun style." She makes lots of rouxs (using Pillsbury Gluten-Free flour) and relies heavily on the holy trinity of onions, bell peppers and celery.

Scotty and Dusty operate the family food business, John Fortenberry's Meat Plant, just across the Mississippi state line from the Louisiana settlement of State Line. They produce high quality cuts of meat for individuals from their own cattle and hogs, as well as process deer for hunters and are famous for the specialty pork sausages they make and sell. ■

SHRIMP & CHICKEN DRESSING

We've eaten all kinds of dressings: cornbread, bread and giblet, rice, oyster — but never shrimp. When Stefanie told us about her invention, we almost tore the wheels off our car to get there.

"This came out of my head" she laughed. "We

were sitting around one day watching TV. I said I was in the mood for a dressing and for shrimp. Scotty said, 'Try it.'"

They cook it often now. "It's good as part of the fixin's that go with turkey, ham or fried chicken. It doesn't have to be a holiday."

PREPARATION: (Serves 6 generously)

Place the chicken in a large pot and cover with enough water to cover the meat. Boil until very tender. Remove the chicken from the broth and set aside to cool. Save the broth. When cooled, debone and shred the chicken, and set it aside. In a large bowl, mix the corn meal, flour, baking powder and salt. Stir in 1 cup melted margarine and the milk and mix well. Stir in the eggs until blended. Pre-heat the oven to 425 degrees. Pour olive oil into a cast iron frying pan (or oven proof dish) and place in the oven. When the oil starts to smoke, add the cornbread mixture and bake for 30 minutes. Remove the pone from the pan and set aside. Put the green onions, celery and bell pepper

in a food processor and chop fine. Season the shrimp generously with Slap Your Mama seasoning and sauté them in 1/2 cup melted butter until the shrimp turn pink. Add the green onion mixture and sauté until the liquid cooks out. Stir in the chopped boiled eggs. Crumble the corn pone into a large oven-safe pan and mix in the shrimp mixture. Add the shredded chicken and enough of the chicken broth to make the cornbread mixture very moist, but not soupy. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. If the dressing becomes too dry during cooking add a little more broth. If the dressing is too moist, bake an additional 15 minutes or until done. ■

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 chicken leg quarters
- 2 cups Aunt Jemima Corn Meal (gluten-free)
- 1 cup Pillsbury Gluten-Free Flour
- 2 tbsp. baking powder
- 2 tsp. salt
- 1 ½ cup Parkay margarine, divided
- 1 cup milk
- 2 eggs, beaten
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 bunches green onions, coarsely chopped
- 1 bunch celery, coarsely chopped
- 1 bell pepper, coarsely chopped
- 6 boiled eggs, chopped fine
- 1 ½ lb. medium shrimp, peeled
- Slap Your Mama Cajun Seasoning

TIP!

Use a tall pan for baking the dressing to keep it moist.



It's important not to overcook the shrimp used in the dressing recipe.



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.



CATFISH STEFANIE

Stefanie compares this invention of hers to Catfish Pontchartrain, or a similar but thinner-sauced dish served at Bino's Seafood Restaurant in Bogalusa. "But mine," she ventured both confidently and cautiously, "is

better than theirs."

She has been cooking this dish for 15 or 20 years and it's a popular one for the family, finding its way onto their plates once or twice a month. "They all love it, even our four grandkids," she warbled. ■

INGREDIENTS:

6 8-inch catfish fillets
Slap Your Mama Cajun Seasoning
2 cups Zatarain's Southern Crispy Fish Fry
Canola oil for frying
1 stick Parkay margarine
1 bunch green onions, diced
5 medium mushrooms, diced
1 lb. crawfish tail meat
½ lb. crabmeat
1 8-oz. package of cream cheese
1 cup half & half
½ cup shredded Italian Five Cheese Blend
1 12-oz. package gluten free pasta, cooked according to package directions

PREPARATION: (Serves 6)

Generously season the fillets with Cajun seasoning. Dredge each fillet in the fish fry. Pour the oil 1 inch deep in the frying pan. When the oil has reached 350 degrees, fry the fish until it floats in the oil. Turn the fillets and fry an additional 5 minutes. Remove them from the pan and drain them on paper towels. Set the fillets aside. Melt the margarine in another frying pan. Add green onions and mushrooms and sauté until tender. Add the crawfish and sauté for 5 minutes. Stir in the cream cheese and continue stirring until it is melted. Add half & half and cheese and simmer until the cheese has melted. Gently fold in the crabmeat. Place a serving of pasta on a plate. Put a fish fillet on the pasta, then top with the sauce.

TIP!

Stefanie uses the specific brand products listed in this recipe because they are gluten-free.



As elegant as Catfish Stefanie is, it's a relatively simple dish to prepare. Inset: The sauce for Catfish Stefanie contains a riot of seafood.

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Taking the time to go through your boat and trailer to identify and repair problems now will ensure you can enjoy your days on the water when fishing really cranks up again.

BOAT TIPS TO GET READY FOR FISHING SEASON

By Andy Crawford

Andy Crawford

If you're a die-hard hunter, the odds are pretty good you haven't looked at your fishing boat very much since October. So with hunting seasons finally closing out, it's time to pull the cover off the old girl and get her ready for the spring fishing bonanza.

But don't just hook up and head to the landing. Instead, take a few minutes to ensure everything is in working order before you launch.

"Most people wind up just parking the boat (during hunting season) — don't check batteries, don't charge batteries, stuff like that," said Ken Sherman, of Front to Back Boat Service in Baton Rouge. "So you pretty much need to go through a whole go-through, especially with this cold weather that we've had."

Sherman said he starts by ensuring batteries will hold a charge.

But don't stop there. The extremely cold temperatures that settled over Louisiana in December and January might have caused all kinds of problems.

"I just had a lower unit (that) had water in the lower unit, and it burped oil out the sippie hole, froze the lower unit up and (the owner) had seal problems," Sherman explained. "We had to rebuild the lower unit."

A clue that this has happened to your outboard can be seen in the garage.

"You're going to walk in and see an oil spot right underneath it," Sherman said. "If you've got an oil spot underneath it, you might as well call (a repair shop) and line it up to rebuild it."

Water freezing inside bilge and livewell/aerator pumps also can cause damage, so be certain to check these important pieces of equipment.

Sherman also recommended pulling the engine's cowling and looking over the outboard block to find any obvious problems.

But the best bet is to have the outboard serviced every year by a certified mechanic to change out the lower unit oil, rebuild the water pump and ensure

there aren't any mechanical issues that will leave you paddling to the landing.

"If you do (preventative maintenance) every year, you never have to worry about it," Sherman said. "Get on a yearly basis where you do the service every year: You'll be surprised that your problems disappear. Change the fuel filters once a year; do the water pump impeller once a year; change the oil once a year. It's cheap insurance.

"Oil is cheap. Getting it put in is cheap. When you crack a housing, it gets expensive. When you've got to start rebuilding lower units, it starts getting expensive."

He also pulls a bit of fuel out of the tanks to ensure no water has accumulated.

"Pull a fuel sample and let it sit to see if it separates," Sherman said. "Smell the fuel. If you've got a full tank and you smell the fuel and it smells like old varnish, I'd pump it out and put fresh fuel in it.

"Old fuel in these new motors — they just do not like it."

While Sherman now runs ethanol through his Mercury 250 ProXS, he said he always uses a quality fuel additive. His weapon of choice is Ultimax, which is made by Baton Rouge Industries.

"Some people call it a mechanic in a bottle," Sherman said. "It's along the lines of Stabile and Sea Foam, but a few years ago, they took it to (Texas) and it tested the best of the best."

"I run pumped fuel. I don't run premium, 92 octane; I run pumped fuel, 87 octane. But I always use Ultimax."

He said he just adds the recommended amount when he fills up to keep things running smoothly.

"If you're running it as a constant thing and something happens and you get hurt at work or you put up the boat for three months for hunting season, (that outboard) will still run when you pull it out," Sherman said.

Of course, just because the batteries, electronics and pumps on your boat check out doesn't mean much if you end up stuck on the side of the road with a blown bearing.

So Sherman said it's imperative to inspect the trailer.

"I would pull the wheel bearings off and check the grease because a lot of times the grease gets a water mixture in there and you don't want to just slap grease on them without looking," he said. "Sometimes you can pump a little grease in and you see grease pump out and you're good, but if you see water come out of it, I'd definitely repack it."

Water in the grease could have frozen during the winter, blowing the seals as it expanded. But even if that didn't happen, water will reduce the effectiveness of the grease and result in damage.

But forget the old maxim of pumping grease into a bearing until it squirts out the back.

"You really don't want to do it until it squirts out," Sherman said. "What you want to do is pump it until you feel it get tight. You don't just pump it in to blow it all out."

The key is to ensure there's enough grease in the bearing to keep the hub cool without blowing the seals.

Checking Bearing Buddies to ensure they look good is another check-list items.

"Getting (to the landing) is critical, because you don't want to be sitting on the side of the highway," Sherman said. "As cheap as this stuff is, it's cheap insurance."

Finally, Sherman said it's important to look at that one thing we boaters detest: Trailer lights.

If you have old incandescent lights, it's just a matter of time before you have bulbs go out — again.

So Sherman recommended moving to LED lights, which are waterproof and much more durable.

"If you tie-wrap all your wires up tight and keep all that clean, put LED lights on (the trailer)," Sherman said. "LED lights have gotten to be so much better. If someone has to change out any lights and they don't put LED lights on it, I think they're wasting their time."

"LEDs are going to be the longest lasting lights." ■



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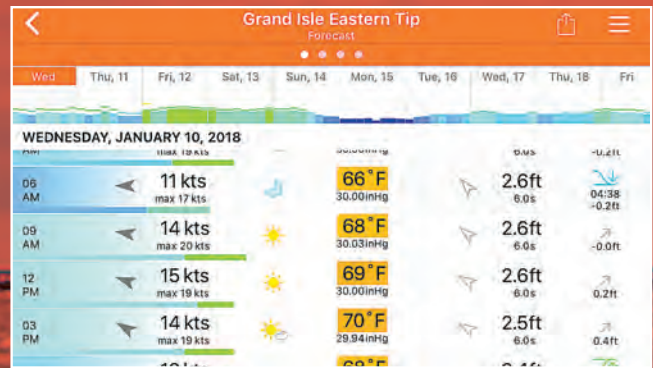
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With the Windfinder app, you can get wind predictions for numerous locations across the state, and all along the Louisiana coast.

SMARTPHONE APP PROVIDES MORE RELIABLE WIND FORECASTS

Instead of 24-hour predictions from the NOAA Marine forecast, the Windfinder app provides wind estimates for specific locations every three hours.

Devin Denman

By Devin Denman

You've probably heard the old saying, "Ya gotta go to know." If you're not familiar, it just means that you really don't

know the fishing conditions until you actually launch the boat and head out.

But it's nice to at least have an idea as to what the winds will do — especially since wind dictates everything in a fishing trip.

I've always had a pretty rough idea about wind predictions with the NOAA Marine forecast, which I have used for years. But recently I've discovered a far more reliable source for wind predictions.

This tool has significantly improved my fishing trips: It's called the Windfinder smartphone app.

Experience has shown me that Windfinder works the best, and here are

some reasons why:

PRECISION FORECASTING

The marine forecast I used for many years only predicted winds on a 24-hour basis. So if there was an afternoon slump, or winds actually picked up unexpectedly, that wasn't included in the forecast.

This made for missed fishing opportunities — and some bumpy rides back to the launch.

However, Windfinder doesn't lack in this area. Its forecast is more exact, reporting in three-hour periods instead of the less-precise 24-hour timeframe.

So should the wind lay down for a few hours, you'll know — and you can take advantage of it. This additional


information opens up new fishing opportunities, especially in places like Lake Pontchartrain, where there is little protection from strong gusts.

A BIGGER PICTURE

With Windfinder I'm also able to view current wind speeds across the entire state, giving me an idea as to what's going on all along Louisiana's coast.

And because of its easy-to-use interface, I'm able to discover new weather stations providing wind data I need to make informed decisions before I launch the boat. ■

Editor's Note: Devin Denman is an avid inshore fisherman who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit lafishblog.com



Instead of leaving your batteries cooking 24/7 on a trickle charge, unplugging the charger after all the lights turn green can help protect you from damaging power surges.

HOW TO KEEP BATTERIES PROPERLY CHARGED

By Andy Crawford

Andy Crawford

We've all been there. You know, you walk out to the boat the morning of the trip you've been planning for a week and the batteries aren't charged.

No power. Nada. Zip.

Then it's off to blow your budget on a new set of batteries.

But Front to Back Boat Service's Ken Sherman offered some thoughts on maintaining the components that start the outboard and run all the electronics we count on.

His first piece of advice is to stop leaving the trickle charger on 24/7. This flies in the face of some other experts' advice, but Sherman said there's a simple reason.

"In reality, in South Louisiana, you see these vicious storms we have come through here with all the lightning," he explained. "Well, what happens is: You leave (the charger) plugged into 110 (volts), lightning strikes down the road, hits the power line, surges — bam, burns the charger.

"Next thing you know we've got round batteries, and the batteries are not in good shape."

He said trickle chargers have a component called a fet that regulates the charging amps being sent to the battery. When a battery fully charges, the fet kicks in to reduce the amps to a trickle — thus the name "trickle charger."

If a surge hits the charger and burns out

that regulator, the charger sends a full charge to the batteries — even when full charge is reached. The result can be an overcharged battery.

There's an easy test to ensure you don't have an overcharged flooded-cell battery that could leave you dead in the water.

"If you push the ends of a flooded-cell battery, it should be soft," Sherman said. "If (your batteries are) hard, you just as soon look at getting some new ones."

To guard against overcharging, Sherman simply plugs in his charger after a trip until all the lights turn green, and then he unplugs the charger until he's ready to go out again.

"Just before you leave, plug it in, let it go through a cycle," he said. "The good thing about it is that if you did have something happen to a charging system with lightning striking it and you didn't catch it, you're not going to burn a battery up by leaving it on all the time.

"So if you charge it when you get in (from a trip), get up the next morning (and see) all green lights — unplug it. You know you're leaving on Saturday morning; Friday you get in from work, plug it in. You may plug it in and within 10 to 15 minutes, it's all green, you can unplug it."

He said doing this will prolong the life of your batteries.

But just how long should a battery last? That depends on the type of battery you use.

It's a safe bet most anglers still use flooded-cell batteries because they are widely available and are generally the least-expensive option.

Sherman said maintaining the proper water level is important in getting the most out of these batteries.

If you find a battery isn't lasting all day, you can use a conventional charger to force a full charge.

"Get a good punch on it, get it warmed up, get it to pull up to temperature, and you may be able to save it," Sherman said. "But you're probably going to find your day usage may not be as long if you're working on a saved (flooded-cell) battery."

The simple fact is flooded-cells just don't last as long as the more-expensive AGM batteries.

"If you've got two years on a flooded-cell battery and you're a hard-core fisherman, pull them out and put new ones in," Sherman said. "That's the best move you can make on flooded-cell batteries."

AGM batteries that are properly maintained, on the other hand, can last for years. That balances out the initial cost factor.

"The new AGM batteries are really getting the prices down where they are very affordable," Sherman said. "These batteries are lasting six, seven, eight years."

And, even better, AGM models aren't as susceptible to cold weather. ■

You can secure the hooks of your double rig by running one jighead through a rod guide, back up towards the other jighead and then just hooking the two together. If the guides are too small, just wrap one pigtail around the reel stem and then secure the hooks.



Devin Denman

TYING AND SECURING A DOUBLE RIG

By Devin Denman

Catching speckled trout two at a time is a hallmark of an excellent Louisiana fishing trip — and few rigs are better for the job than the double rig. The best way to quickly fill limits means two hooks are absolutely better than one — but how do you go about tying a double rig?

It's easy. It's just a length of leader line, usually 20-pound test monofilament, with a figure eight loop knot tied into it with uneven pigtails.

Jigheads, normally a ¼-ounce each, are tied to the two pigtails with a palomar or improved clinch knot. After that, use whichever soft plastic lure your heart desires. (I like Matrix Shad.)

HOW DO YOU SECURE A DOUBLE RIG FOR TRAVEL?

The double rig is an awesome way to load up on trout, but it can be a pain to secure when not in use. Normal rigs utilizing one hook are simply affixed to the hook keeper on your rod, but the

double rig has two. So what do you do with that second hook?

Perhaps you've already had that experience: one jighead secured, while the other is flailing about wildly, becoming tangled on everything around it. Not only can this damage your equipment, but it's also dangerous. Hooks need to be secured, not loose.

AN EASY FIX

The best way to secure a double rig is to run one jighead through a rod guide, back up towards the other jighead and then just hook the two together. If the guides are too small, just wrap one pigtail around the reel stem and then secure the hooks together. ■

Editor's Note: Devin Denman is an avid inshore fisherman who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit lafishblog.com.

HOW TO FIND SPRING BASS NO ONE ELSE TARGETS

By Andy Crawford

Most bass anglers wait anxiously all year for the spring spawn, and then head straight to the banks of their favorite lake to pluck big girls off their beds.

But one Louisiana touring pro said ignoring the depths can be a big mistake this time of year.

“Usually from January until the first part of May, I stay in water anywhere from 15 to 25 feet (deep),” said FLW Tour’s George Jeane Jr., who cut his teeth fishing Toledo Bend.

In fact, Jeane even ignores the deeper spawning flats.

“If you catch one of those fish, you’re not targeting them,” he said. “You’re just getting lucky.”

Instead, he focuses on travel routes — namely small underwater creeks — providing access to spawning areas.

“All fish don’t spawn at the same time,” Jeane said. “I’m catching fish that have already spawned and are coming out (into deeper water), and I’m catching fish that are coming in to spawn.”

The first step to success is poring over contour maps of your home reservoir to find submerged ditches that once drained into main creeks.

“These are highways they’re using to come in and spawn, and head out after the spawn,” Jeane said. “A lot of your fish stay shallower after the spawn, but your bigger fish are going to head out to fatten up after the spawn.”

“I’m fishing on the freeway.”

Once ditches are identified on the map, it’s time to hit the water to narrow things down even further. Quality electronics — like today’s down-imaging units — allow anglers to really key in on the best spots.

Jeane said he’s looking for drop-offs, but that’s not all he’s searching for.

“I’m watching my depth finder, looking for fish,” he said. “Most of the time it’s a school of fish. A lot of these fish will suspend 18 to 20 feet deep and feed in 12 to 13 feet of water.”

And then it’s just a matter of getting the fish to bite. Jeane has earned a lot of money using suspending jerk baits to trigger big bites.

“You can suspend it down to 6 to 8 feet, but a lot of times I’ll use those (Storm) SuspenDots if the fish are in the bottom of these ditches,” he said.

The key to properly adding weight to a jerkbait is to center the small lead stick-ons on the side of the lure so the action is not affected.

“The first time I tried them, I put the dots on the front of the bait, but that made it stand up,” Jeane said. “I moved them back and the lure worked perfectly.”

He also said line choice is important.

“The lighter your line, the more depth you get,” Jeane said.

He normally uses 10-pound Berkley Trilene Big Game, unless he still can’t get his jerkbait far enough down.

“If I want to get it a little deeper, I throw it on 12-pound Vanish (fluorocarbon),” Jeane explained.

Fluorocarbon line absorbs water, so it helps get extra depth — and it provides

an advantage over monofilament.

“It’s got twice the feel that mono has,” Jeane said.

The key is to work the lure parallel to ledges, twitching it down to the proper depth and keeping it in the strike zone as long as possible.

“You have to play with it until you figure out the retrieve,” Jeane said. “They may want two jerks and a pause for four or five seconds, or three jerks and a pause



Courtesy of FLW

for two seconds.

“Usually the fish will hit it on the pause.” The bonus is that he normally has little competition.

“Ninety percent of your bass fishermen go in to fish shallow,” Jeane said. “You usually have it all to yourself.”

And once you find some fish, the numbers can add up quickly.

“You’re going to catch a bunch of fish,” Jeane said. ■

HEYBO FISHING SHIRTS

By Andy Crawford

Gone are the days of choosing between caking yourself with sunscreen or wearing bulky long-sleeved shirts to hide from the sun's UV rays. Now there are lightweight performance shirts that offer protection and comfort — and Heybo has entered the market with a bang.

The company is based in South Carolina and offers a full line of fishing shirts to meet any need.

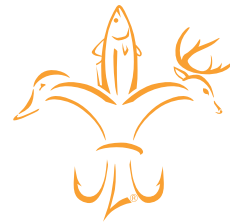
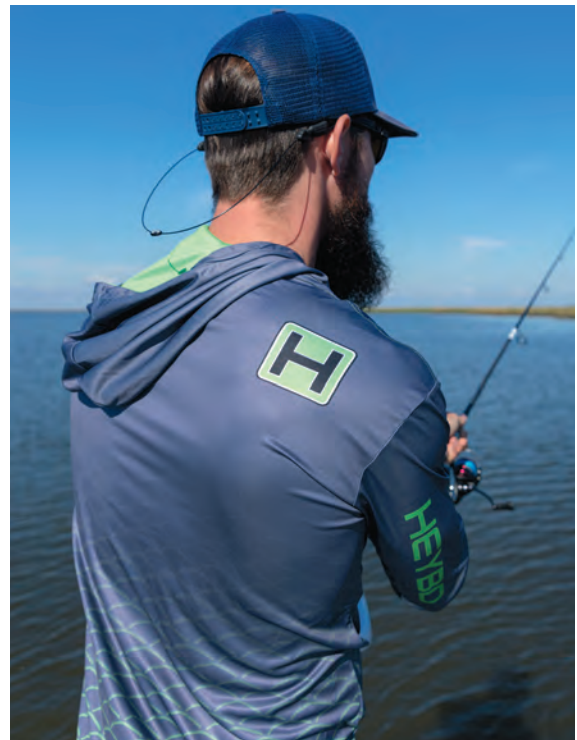
Choose from long- or short-sleeved performance shirts with or without hoodies, or you can go with button-up options for a more finished look. All are designed with comfort in mind.

The company's background in the graphic T-shirt industry shows in the proliferation of design options, from the subdued to wild splashes of color.

And there are even options that fit the boat and the restaurant equally well.

Prices start at \$39.99.

More Info: www.heybooutdoors.com



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JACK HAMMER: A NEW, IMPROVED CHATTERBAIT

By Andy Crawford

Z-Man turned the fishing world on its head when it introduced its ChatterBait, the first vibrating jig that just flat out catches fish of all kinds.

And now it's elevating the line of lures with the Jack Hammer.

This version of the lure is a partnership between Z-Man and Japanese lure manufacturer Evergreen, and the result is a lure composed of the highest grade materials possible.

The Jack Hammer features Gamakatsu hardware, including a heavy wire flipping hook with the proper length, gap and point to ensure high hook-up ratios. And the double-wire trailer keeps soft plastics securely in place.

A redesigned stainless steel blade enhances the action of the lure. The head has a flat bottom and low center

of gravity combined with the blade to allow the lure to start vibrating quickly and move in an erratic, side-to-side motion that perfectly mimics a fleeing baitfish.

"It's more aggressive," Z-Man's Denis Breaud said.

The design allows the lure to easily deflect off of cover, as well as skip beneath docks and overhanging trees.

As if all that weren't enough, a channeled groove along the bottom of the head positions the blade low enough to strike the head, producing a signature chattering sound.

The premium hand-tied silicon skirts come in 10 colors, and the heads and blades come in highly detailed color-matched schemes.

The Jack Hammer retails for \$15.99.

More Info: www.zmanfishing.com



QMAXX'S BLU

Gun owners have a long menu of choices when it comes to protecting their firearms, and a St. Louis-based company, QMaxx Products, has joined the fray with a pretty powerful entry.

QMaxx's "BLU" is a one-step gun and knife cleaner, lubricant and rust/corrosion preventative that comes in packages as small as 2 ounces up to 1 gallon — a big drawing card for professional gunsmiths.

BLU can be used to clean firearms, from rifles and shotguns to blackpowder weapons, and it can be sprayed on all surfaces to prevent rust. It dries quickly and is not oily or tacky, and it prevents the blued or steel surfaces of firearms from picking up any dust, grit, grime or even fingerprints. The company boasts that salt-fog tests in laboratories prove that BLU protects up to 300 percent longer than leading gun oils.

BLU is available in wipe packets, lubricating pens, 2-, 8- and 16-ounce spray bottles and a 1-gallon bulk container, priced from \$1.99 for individual wipe packets to \$28.99 for the 16-ounce trigger spray bottles.

More Info: www.qmaxxproducts.com

G. LOOMIS E6X

Lightweight, strong, and sensitive: That's the recipe for a fishing rod that bass anglers strive to find. But it can be elusive, especially when you add affordability into the mix — or at least it used to be. But the G. Loomis E6X changes that.

With modern technology and materials, it's become common to find that some of the lightest rods on the market are also the strongest. But that combination has always come at a price that has kept many of those rods out of reach of the average angler.

This E6X won the "Best New Freshwater Rod" award at ICAST in 2015, and it's now available in 30 models of spinning and casting rods, including numerous technique-specific models, as well as classic models that are good for all-around use.

So whether you're flipping, pitching, jigging, cranking, or using spinnerbaits, swimbaits and everything in between, the E6X has a model to fit your needs.

The rods are available at Academy Sports. Check them out at

www.academy.com/shop/pdp/g-loomis-e6x-freshwater-casting-rod#repChildCatSku=104981499



SILVERSPORT



Hunters have long been trying to block or camouflage their natural smell from game animals, using scent sprays to hide those aromas, storing their hunting clothes in containers that keep them away from unwanted odors or even buying clothes treated with scent blockers.

NFL Hall of Famer Franco Harris has entered the market through his Pittsburgh-based company, Silversport, which is offering hooded sweatshirts, t-shirts and socks treated with his Silver Clean technology in Mossy Oak camouflage.

Silversport hunting clothes are infused with nano-sized particles of silver — silver ions — that block odor-causing microorganisms from attaching to or penetrating clothing, which largely prevents the human body odor that game animals can detect with their superior sense of smell.

Balacavas, neck guards, camouflage hoodies, T-shirts and socks are available from Silversport in Mossy Oak. Prices start at \$15.

More Info: www.silversport.com

BELOW: George Burch, 15, with a nice red he caught sight-fishing out of his camp in Dulac.

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George Burch



Chris Blappert

Chris Blappert killed this deer on his 75th birthday, and said it was the best present of his life. He tagged the deer in Lumberton, Miss.



Cayden DeForest

Cayden DeForest, 14, of Ruston, shot this 8-point deer on Dec. 28, 2017 at The Wetlands Hunting Club in Caldwell Parish.



Jack Rabalais

LEFT: Jack Rabalais reeled in and later released this 36-inch redfish in Hopedale while fishing with Capt. Jakamo Laboureux.



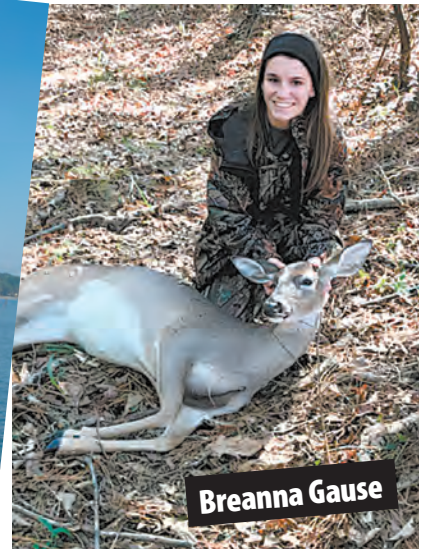
Charlie Payton

Charlie Payton, 13, got his first deer, an 11-point which he named "Crabtree," with an 85-yard shot. He was hunting on Oct. 21, 2017 in the Hicks area of Vernon Parish with a .223.



Paul Sparacino

Paul Sparacino holds up a 5.88-pound bass he caught during a Baton Rouge Bass Club tournament on Toledo Bend.



Breanna Gause

Breanna Gause, 15, harvested this deer in Liberty, Miss., on Nov. 19. She was hunting with her grandfather, Robie Poche.



Alex Hatch

Alex Hatch of Houma shot this 7-point, 190-pound buck in Jackson on Nov. 11.



Cynthia Bonaventure

Cynthia Bonaventure of Ventress was fishing Thanksgiving week out of Bayou Lafourche in Leeville when she caught the biggest redfish of her life — a 32-incher.



Carlye Hayes

Carlye Hayes took this Grant Parish 11-point on Oct. 28. It had an 18 1/8-inch spread, and Simmons scored it at 147 7/8.



Lauren McGee

Lauren McGee killed her first deer, a 250-pound 10-point, in Tensas Parish on Nov. 11.



Libby Klein

Libby Klein had some great summer frogging adventures in the bayous south of Abbeville with her daughter Chloe. She said her lucky Louisiana Sportsman hat is a must on each trip.



Kevin Bordelon

Husband and wife duo Kevin and Cheryl Bordelon had a great Labor Day weekend fishing trip on Calcasieu Lake.



Cheryl Bordelon



Justin Morrissey

Justin Morrissey hooked his first bull red in Leeville. It was 40 inches long.

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FISHING REGULATIONS

2018

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 [^] & Black [^]	24" TL	4/day (aggregate)*
Nassau & Goliath	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS	
Red [^] & Yellowfin [^]	20" TL	
Scamp [^]	16" TL	
Atlantic Sharpnose & Bonnethead shark@	None	1/day
Other sharks (except prohibited species)@	54" FL	1/day/vessel/aggregate
King Mackerel*	24" FL	2/day
Spanish Mackerel*	12" FL	15/day
Striped mullet	None	100 pounds/day
Black seabass	None	None
Hogfish	12" FL	5/day
Seatrout, Spotted (Speckled Trout)	12" TL*	25/day*
Red Snapper*	16" TL	2/day*
Other Snapper		
Mutton Snapper	16" TL	10 in aggregate*
Cubera, Yellowtail, Gray (mangrove)	12" TL	
Queen, Blackfin, Silk, Wenchman	None	
Vermilion Snapper	10" TL	
Schoolmaster, Dog, Mahogany	None	None
Gray Triggerfish*	14" FL	2/day in aggregate
Lane Snapper	8" TL	
Almaco Jack, Goldface Tilefish, & Blueline 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. ~ Closed season for greater amberjack from Jan. 27 - June 30. * Closed season on gray triggerfish Jan. 16 - Feb. 28 and June 1-30.

February 2018

Date	Sunrise	Sunset
1st	6:50 a.m.	5:38 p.m.
2nd	6:50 a.m.	5:39 p.m.
3rd	6:49 a.m.	5:39 p.m.
4th	6:49 a.m.	5:40 p.m.
5th	6:48 a.m.	5:41 p.m.
6th	6:47 a.m.	5:42 p.m.
7th	6:47 a.m.	5:43 p.m.
8th	6:46 a.m.	5:44 p.m.
9th	6:45 a.m.	5:44 p.m.
10th	6:44 a.m.	5:45 p.m.
11th	6:43 a.m.	5:46 p.m.

Date	Sunrise	Sunset
12th	6:43 a.m.	5:47 p.m.
13th	6:42 a.m.	5:48 p.m.
14th	6:41 a.m.	5:48 p.m.
15th	6:40 a.m.	5:49 p.m.
16th	6:39 a.m.	5:50 p.m.
17th	6:38 a.m.	5:51 p.m.
18th	6:37 a.m.	5:51 p.m.
19th	6:36 a.m.	5:52 p.m.
20th	6:35 a.m.	5:53 p.m.
21st	6:34 a.m.	5:54 p.m.
22nd	6:33 a.m.	5:54 p.m.

Date	Sunrise	Sunset
23rd	6:32 a.m.	5:55 p.m.
24th	6:31 a.m.	5:56 p.m.
25th	6:30 a.m.	5:57 p.m.
26th	6:29 a.m.	5:57 p.m.
27th	6:28 a.m.	5:58 p.m.
28th	6:27 a.m.	5:59 p.m.

*Time based on New Orleans, sunrise/sunset; source U.S. Naval Observatory. Corrections (in minutes)

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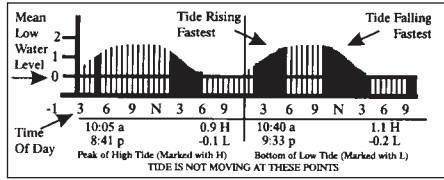

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Tide Corrections

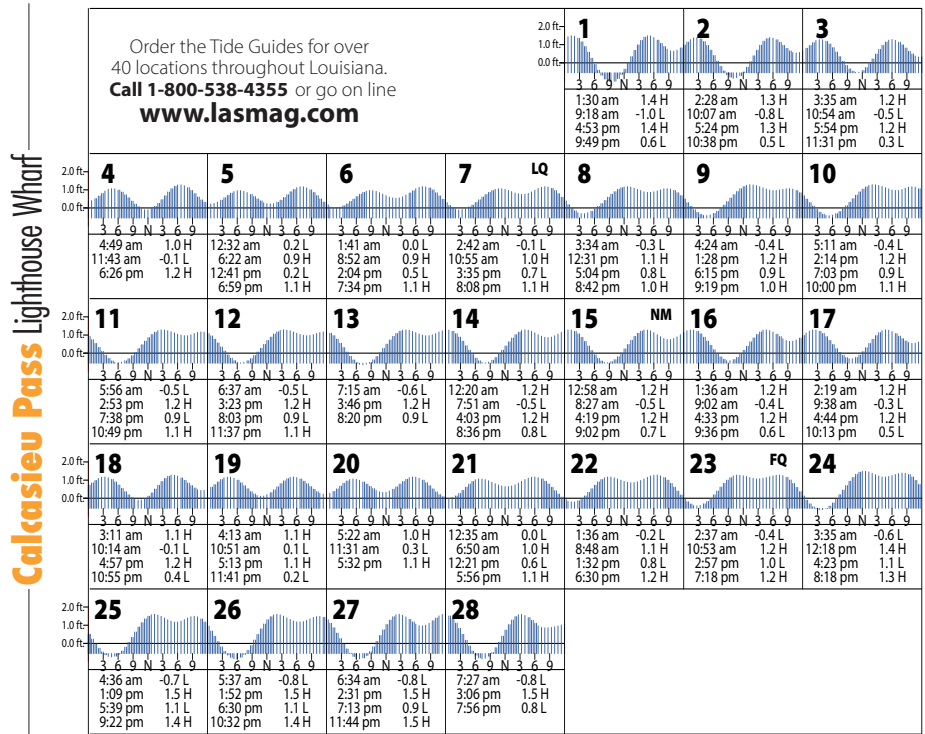
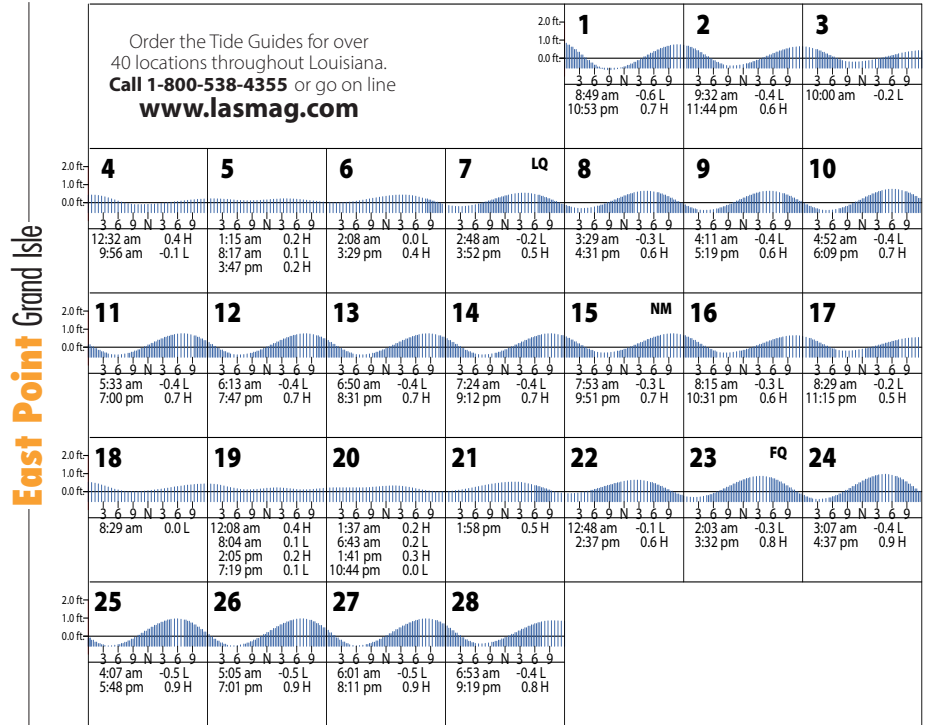
East Point, Grand Isle

	HIGH	LOW
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
Chef Pass.....	+5:17	+5:07
Cocodrie.....	+1:22	+1:33
Comfort Island.....	+1:34	+0:54
Delacroix Island.....	+3:42	+3:31
Empire Jetty.....	-1:03	-1:45
Four Bayou Pass.....	+2:18	+0:17
Gardner Island.....	+0:40	+0:47
Grand Pass.....	+1:48	+1:16
Head of Passes.....	-0:48	+0:00
Hopedale.....	+4:17	+4:56
Independence Island.....	+2:29	+1:59
Jack Bay.....	+1:59	+1:28
Joseph Bayou.....	-0:36	-1:37
Lafitte.....	+1:45	+2:51
Long Point, Lake Borgne.....	+2:28	+2:11
Manila Village.....	+2:32	+3:13
Michoud Substation.....	+5:24	+5:02
New Canal (Bucktown).....	+10:34	+10:49
North Pass.....	-0:31	-0:37
Paris Road Bridge.....	+5:53	+5:58
Pelican Islands.....	+2:26	+2:26
Pointe a la Hache.....	+3:12	+3:01
Port Eads.....	-0:17	-1:37
Raccoon Point.....	-0:03	-0:20
Shell Beach.....	+4:32	+4:25
Ship Shoal Light.....	-1:54	-1:50
South Pass, Miss. R.....	-1:13	-1:20
Southwest Pass, Miss. R.....	-0:38	-1:33
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

SUNDAY MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY



Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS



TROLL THE BOTTOM FOR TROUT

USE VARIETY OF SOFT PLASTICS AT SHELL BEACH

Speckled trout can be found in deep water this time of year, and Robert Campo advised anglers to target them slowly on the bottom.

South Louisiana's speckled trout fishing is the best in the nation. Nowhere in the country can the sheer numbers of speckled trout compare.

However, even with our speckled trout being top-notch, anglers still have to work to find fish. Speckled trout don't just magically jump in the boat, and if you're looking for insanely good action, this month isn't the best.

That's because February can be a tough month to fish, and Campo's Marina owner Robbie Campo said anglers need to be prepared to deal with the cold, and fish accordingly.

"Fish the hand that you're dealt with," he said. "If your water temp is 48,49 — where you don't have a warming trend, throw plastics on the bottom."

As a marina owner, Campo sees loads of fishermen every day, and he said the deep

water trolling method has become a lost art, which is effective in this chilly month.

"People don't do that style of fishing anymore," he said. "They want the water to be 53 and catch them on the flat."

Campo recommended areas like Crooked Bayou, Bayou Biloxi and Redfish Bayou, and said there are a couple of features in all those places that make them so productive.

"Any one of those bayous is lined with oysters on it," he said. "It's got 10 to 12 feet of water."

The oyster-carpeted bottoms filter the water, and the deep water is slightly warmer — two things fish like during this frigid month.

Campo suggested anglers troll down the bayous, and drag ¼-ounce jigheads behind the boat. It's the old-style of fishing he grew up doing with his grandpa, and it still works today.

The marina operator also made note that anglers need to have a variety of soft-plastic lure colors and styles on their boat.

"I'm not telling you to run out and buy every soft plastic they have, but you're going to have to try a few," he said. ■

- Joel Masson

GOT PICS? Send 'em in!

Email images to:

images@LouisianaSportsman.com

All images will be considered, but those taken on the water or in the woods will have the best chance of being featured.

*Digital images must be sent in jpeg format. High-resolution images (taken on your camera's highest setting) will work the best. All images (physical and digital) become property of Louisiana Sportsman and cannot be returned.

A man wearing a blue jacket, a cap, and sunglasses is smiling while holding a large bass fish. He is on a boat with a red seat. The background shows a body of water and a forested shoreline under a clear blue sky.

10-POUNDERS ARE HOT TOPIC AT **TOLEDO BEND**

Wouldn't you know it? About a month ago, I wrote that January should be a month when unseasonably warm temperatures prompt bass to move into shallower depths at Toledo Bend.

I based that on January of 2017, and the fact is winters just aren't like they once were in Northwest Louisiana. Heck, multiple 10-pound-plus bass — some real hawks — were caught last January.

Well, we've already experienced an Arctic cold front that swept through all of Louisiana. It dropped the lake's water temperatures into the 40s, — something that hasn't happened in quite some time, which means those bass anglers who have been scoring well on ½-ounce C.C. Spoons and tailspinners should continue to catch bass deep like they have been at times in December.

As for February, I foresee it being a lot like March as far as successful bass fishing patterns north to south and east to west on Toledo Bend. I believe bass anglers who want to fish the lake that was ranked No.1 two consecutive years by Bassmaster Magazine have to throw the old

playbook away if they want to catch bass in February. Oh, sure, I'm positive some bassers will continue to catch bass in 25- to 35-foot depths on the aforementioned spoons and tailspinners, but that's subject to change in February.

Why? Warmer temperatures aside, the pool level should be somewhere around 167 feet. Toledo Bend was low like that last year at this time, and when the water warmed — even a little for several days — bass stormed the beaches in the back end of creeks and coves. That is likely again this year barring heavy rain in late January. Bass will seek those areas where the water temperature is 1 to 2 degrees higher than other areas, which makes the back end of creeks and coves hotspots if and when the water temperature rises into the 62- to 65-degree range, which normally happens in the afternoon. Yeah, you definitely don't have to be an early bird to catch bass in February.

I'm talking about bass of all sizes, notably double-digit bass. Ten-pound-plus bass should make a major move to hit the beaches in February, just like they did last year.

continues >

John Dean's go-to lure in February is a ½-ounce Rat-L-Trap in Rayburn red, crawfish or gold.

Toledo Bend continued

Their aim is to get on their beds, but it remains to be seen how much bedding activity there might be. For sure, the big girls don't have to have ideal conditions to swim into the shallows, get on a nest and lay their eggs. When those big ones are biologically ready, they'll be there — it doesn't have to be prime time.

If ever there's a time to hook up with a double-digit bass, it should be sometime in February. It's the pre-spawn. The key to getting them in the boat is to spend time on the lake, and the law of averages will eventually catch up with you favorably.

Last February, there were 10-pound-plus fish being weighed at official weigh stations two and three times a day sometimes.

Yes, I'm confident we'll be looking at warmer days and warmer water at times. Sure, we'll have cold fronts, but we'll also have consecutive days of warm weather following them.

February's going to be good. It might be up and down a little bit due to the systems. But stick with it and stay in the drains, the migration routes to the back end of creeks and coves, and when it warms up to the 60s or so, target bass in 8-foot depths and less.

What to throw? Search baits.

And the No. 1 lure in February is the ½-ounce Rat-L-Trap. I've got 100 Rat-L-Traps of different colors ready to go for February. Sometimes I'll throw a ¾-ounce (Magnum) model, which the hawks like to eat at times.

Color? This is the month to rely on Rayburn red, crawfish-colored and gold models of Rat-L-Traps.

Also try other search baits, like shad-colored ChatterBaits. They'll be effective, too, as will the newest player, A-Rigs, which will continue to make a statement each February.

Jerkbaits? Generally, the water temperature usually has to be in the 70s for them to produce as consistently as Rat-L-Traps and ChatterBaits.

In late February and March, it'll be high time to offer more Carolina-rigged soft plastics. Heck, the C-Rigs might work well in February, too.

And if and when bass are on their beds, soft plastics produce.

If you want to catch bass in February, I've been guiding on this lake most of my life and you're more than welcome in my boat. Give me a call at (936) 404-2688. ■

— John Dean

February is a great month to get out of the boat and wade-fish for speckled trout and redfish at Big Lake.



For those who want to experience wade-fishing at its best, February is the time to get out of the boat and enter the water along the shallow shoreline of Calcasieu Lake from Deatonville to Commissary Point.

A veteran charter boat captain knows how effective the method can be this time of year because he wade-fished plenty of times when he was younger — he said it's a prime time to put ol' yellow-mouth in the boat.

However, walking in waist-deep water in the mud can take its toll, despite the rewards.

**WADING IS WORTH IT
AT BIG LAKE — IF YOU
CAN TAKE THE COLD**

continues >

"I hardly do it at all now. That's a younger man's sport. Several of my guides do," said Kirk Stansel, co-owner of Hackberry Rod & Gun Club ((337) 762-3391.)

"February is a really good wade-fishing month for speckled trout. There are quite a few good spots," Stansel said.

"I would target the east side of the lake from Deatonville to Commissary Point, and wade-fish the shoreline for trophy trout."

The best places to wade are those with mud bottoms, he said, which warm up in the afternoons, even on the coldest days. Avoid solid oyster bottoms unless it is unseasonably warm.

"Most of the time the water's clear. Dark mud warms up. That water warms up," he said. "Baitfish move in on it, and the trout will follow.

"Of course, you want to look for areas that have bait," he said, and added that brown pelicans diving on the water is a good sign.

Stop the boat, get out and try along a shoreline. However, he cautioned, don't use a Power-Pole at low tide to anchor the boat because at high tide, the boat will float away. Always use an anchor, he said.

Naturally, wear good waders and dress appropriately. Stansel and many others wear Simms Fishing Waders, he said.

And don't let extremely cold weather deter you from going wade-fishing for speckled trout. Afternoons on those frosty days can provide some of the best action for large specks.

And don't expect to get a bunch of bites, unless it's unseasonably warm. Two to five bites from quality speckled trout usually is a fair trip during cold weather — but if it's really warm don't be surprised to catch 10 to 20.

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Big Lake continued

Stansel said he uses 20- to 30-pound Power Pro braided line with a 2-foot long 30-pound mono leader. Baitcasting or spinning outfits work equally well, as long as you can cast far. He also uses a Boga Grip rather than a landing net, and wears a backpack and a wade belt with a stringer attached.

Stansel, whose personal best speckled trout is a 9-pound, 6-ounce monster (although he caught a 10-pound class fish and released it without weighing it) advises waders to fish along the shoreline and to make long casts.

At low tide, generally, the fish are farther from shore while at high tide they are close to the shore.

"You're not looking for a lot of bites. You're just looking for a big bite. You really have to be patient. Fish an area and if you don't get a bite in an hour, try another area," he said.

The colder it is, the slower you must fish. When the water temperature is in the 40s, it's time to fish extra slow. Usually, it's at its best when the water warms into the 50s and lower-60s.

When Stansel wades out to fish for speckled trout, his No. 1 artificial lure is a Corky Fat Boy. For clear water, he suggested pearl/chartreuse, pearl/black/chartreuse belly and pink. The top off-colored water color is a model that is brownish gold with a black back and orange belly.

Make long casts, and on the retrieve "every now and then give the rod tip a twitch.

"They're not going to hammer it. These fish are not going to hit it hard."

On warmer days, topwaters can provide plenty of action, too.

A solid bycatch is redfish, which is a nice lagniappe. And, if you find a school of redfish, a lot of the time speckled trout hang around with them, Stansel said. ■

— Don Shoopman

FANTASTIC FEBRUARY!

THROW TOPWATERS FOR SPECKS IN THE SULFUR MINE

I think of huddling in front of my space heater in February. But Capt. Mike Guidry (985-637-4292) says it's time to go fishing — and not just the routine bottom-fishing you'd expect in February. He breaks out the topwater gear and targets hefty trout in Catfish Lake and the Sulfur Mine.

"I know it seems crazy, but I do this every year, and every year we catch some beautiful trout in February on topwater baits," Guidry said.

And I know it's true, because I've gone with him to see it for myself.

"The key is to pick the right days to fish," he explained. "You know we get a steady barrage of cold fronts in January and February and even into March. Those cold winds bring frigid temperatures to the south and send the trout into deeper holes. I watch the wind direction very carefully, waiting for the front to pass and the winds to switch back to the south, bringing warmer weather before the next front comes through. That's when you go fishing with your topwater baits — between the fronts."

Guidry's tactic is to fish the shallower flats with easy access to deeper canals in Catfish Lake or the Sulfur Mine.

"The trout will forage over those flats, but they'll stay near the deeper water so they



Capt. Mike Guidry with a hefty February Sulfur Mine trout.

can quickly retreat when the next cold front arrives," he said.

He said to especially look for places with an oyster bottom. Guidry's favorite topwater bait is the Rapala Skitterwalk in chartreuse/white.

"If you choose to fish during the front on the cold days, fish the deeper holes and the Texaco Canals around Catfish Lake and the Sulfur Mine, with live minnows on a Carolina rig, or fish a live minnow on the bottom on a plain 1/8- or 1/4-ounce jighead, or you can fish plastic real slow, bounced off the bottom," he said. "I like the old tuxedo-color H&H cocahoes, or sparkle beetles in the motor oil or smoke colors. People give up on the old tried-but-true baits and switch to all the new stuff, but the older ones still work very well."

Guidry says you can also chase redfish along the banks at pockets, points and cuts with beetle-spins or gold spoons.

"If you see one moving along the bank, throw a live minnow on a plain jighead up in front of him," he said. "He'll hit it fast and hard." ■

— Rusty Tardo

SAC-A-LAIT SHINE THIS MONTH OUT OF MORGAN CITY

Like many other sac-a-lait fishermen, Bill McCarty is ready to make a well-placed cast, set the hook and pull in slab after slab when February rolls around in South Central Louisiana.

McCarty, an all-around outdoorsman from Morgan City, knows just the area to target to work on putting sac-a-lait in the ice chest during the second month of the year, weather and water conditions permitting.

He'll point the bow of his boat east to fish the dead end and dogleg canals along Bayou Penchant and Bayou Copasaw, including the Bluebird Canal and canals off the Hooch.

"I'm looking forward to it," McCarty said.

"The Bluebird's really good ... just any of the dead ends off Bayou Penchant, or doglegs where you can get out of the wind and fish the back end.

"The main deal is the water has to be pretty. Look for clear water where you can see the bait 18 to 24 inches down. A couple days of warm weather is all you need down there. Pretty water warms up quickly."

Sac-a-lait start getting into spawning mode when the water temperature gets into the upper 50s and above, he said, noting they start spawning earlier than bass, but don't all spawn at the same time. The sac-a-lait spawn will go into March and, even, April, he said.

Males move up first then, hopefully, females follow to spawn, he said.

"Sometimes you catch them feeding. Sometimes when you filet them, they're full of minnows," he said.

McCarty said to look for canals with clear water and with scattered grass. The sac-a-lait, which average 1/2 to 1 1/2 pounds, could be 3 inches off the bank to 20 feet out, and in depths of 3 feet or less, to 6 feet.

He catches many sac-a-lait

along undercut banks, he added.

For sure, he'll have tied on a blue/white Poppa Chop hair jig (made by Paul "Chopper" Viator and his wife, Angela in Delcambre and sold at Ivy's Tackle Box in Morgan City and Gayle's Texaco in Maurice) with a chartreuse Crappie Nibble, or a blue/black/chartreuse Luck-E-Strike tube on a 1/16-ounce leadhead with a chartreuse Crappie Nibble. McCarty likes to fish under a very small, oblong Styrofoam orange/white cork — "the little bitty ones," he said.

That way, when a sac-a-lait bites, there is as little resistance as possible.

He fishes for sac-a-lait with 6-pound line loaded on a spinning reel seated on a 5 1/2-foot light action casting rod.

"It's hard to beat a Zebco Delta 2," he said about his reel choice. ■

— Don Shoopman



Depending on the status of the spawn, sac-a-lait could be 3 inches off the bank — or 20 feet out.

Bill McCarty

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Capt. Mike Gallo, left, and his uncle Dan Couvillion with a 35-pound redfish caught at the Air Products Canal with dead shrimp on the bottom.



TOP 5

COLD-WEATHER TACTICS FOR CHALMETTE SUCCESS

TARGET MORE THAN JUST SPECKS THIS MONTH

My old friend Capt. Mike Gallo (504-259-3474) says the frigid cold water will pile the fish up in the deep holes of Chalmette's waters — and that's where they'll stay until it warms up.

"You have to recognize that trout are not the only fish to target in the cold water months," he said. "Talk yourself into the realization that you are hunting for a mixed bag this month that could include redfish, drum, sheepshead,

flounder, bass, specks and freshwater catfish.

"The frigid weather at the first of the year sent water temperatures plunging into the low 40-degree range, giving trout lockjaw and driving them deep — but don't get discouraged because there's plenty fish in the water to fight."

Gallo offered these suggestions to anglers heading to Chalmette:

1. Fish the locks and rock points along the MRGO. The water is deep, there is plenty structure on the bottom and a variety of fish congregate there. Fish the down-current side with dead or live shrimp on the bottom, preferably on a drop-shot rig to minimize hang-ups, but be prepared to get snagged and re-tie your lines. Gallo said sliding sinker rigs snag up quickly on the littered bottom, so even a plain jighead loaded with market shrimp is a better choice.

2. Fish the Wall. Gallo said you park your boat on the down-current side and out of any hard-falling tide.

"Cold, lethargic fish won't park in the hard current. They'll back off out of it and so should you if you want to catch them," he said. "Don't neglect the big support pipes on the New

Orleans side of the wall. It's deep there, and we consistently catch sheepshead and drum around them. But there are lots of snags down there, too, so be prepared to re-tie."

3. The Air Products and Michoud Slip Canals, and the rocks by Boh Brothers.

"I target the points or corners first, and then poke along seeing what else I can find," he said. "I don't fish a fast moving current, so ignore points during cold months with hard flowing water currents. Find points with what I call a soft current, and fish live or dead shrimp on the bottom. That'll usually produce reds and drum and sheepshead."

4. The ICW. "There are many good, deep holes along the ICW. Old favorites are the shell bank and the Pumping Station where depths plunge to 40 feet," he said. "I like to fish the ledges in the real deep holes instead of dead on the bottom, again, using live or dead shrimp, just slow jigging, waiting for the fish to find your bait."

5. Be opportunistic. "Use your depth sounder in the winter whenever you run a bayou or canal," he said. "Look for deeper holes and don't hesitate to try a new spot. If I see a deep hole I'll park and try it, and if it has an oyster bottom, you'll feel it with your bottom rig. Mark that spot, and give it another chance, even if it doesn't produce that day. You know its deep and has structure, so it may produce next time in cold water conditions."

Gallo said live shrimp might be scarce, but they really aren't necessary this month, anyway.

"The water is so cold they aren't going to be frisky anyhow," he said. "So you might as well use dead ones." ■

— Rusty Tardo

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SLOW DOWN IN DELACROIX

TROUT WANT AN EASY MEAL THIS MONTH

Fishing, a lot of times, isn't about following a path as much as hacking your own.

Avid Delacroix angler Brian Epstein does just that in a unique way: He fishes a ringworm lure this time of year for cold Delacroix speckled trout.

"It mimics a baitfish most people don't know exist — the violet goby," he explained. "They get stuffed with some in February and March. People will say they're eating eels. "It's not an eel; it's a goby" Epstein fishes the bait on a

alarm clock this time of year. "Leaving before the sun comes up to be there at the crack of dawn is not necessary," he said. "Sometimes the best bite is in the latter part of the morning to the middle of the day."

The reason for that, Epstein said, is because of the warmer water that's created from the warmth of the day.

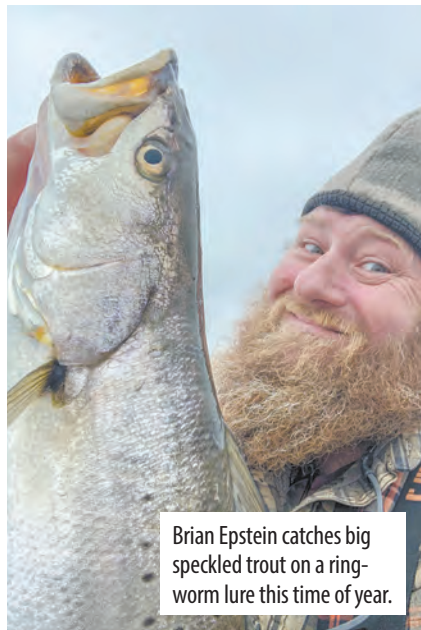
"Sometimes a difference of a degree or two will make all the difference in the world, and the fish will start biting," he said.

When working his lures on the bottom of deep bayous, canals and holes this time of year, Epstein said fishing the baits aggressively is not essential. "You really don't have to impart much action to it," he said. "Just let the current wash it along and take up the slack. Every now and then, if you so desire, give it a light twitch, but less is more in cold temperatures for the trout."

Also, the experienced angler likes throwing double rigs instead of single rigs.

"They're not going to chase this time of year in the cold," he said. "You're going to have to sweep that bait right in front of their face, and you pretty much get an instinctive response. With a tandem rig, you're doubling your chance of actually sweeping a bait in front of a lethargic trout." ■

— Joel Masson



Brian Epstein catches big speckled trout on a ringworm lure this time of year.

¼-ounce jighead, and he said it's an extremely easy lure to use.

"You don't have to do any kind of twitching or anything," he said. "The bait does all the work. It's a big-fish bait."

Epstein said if he's not using the ringworm, he throws Matrix Shad or Saltwater Assassin lures.

Additionally, Epstein noted it's not imperative to set an early

Upper Basin up next >



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Westside Bassmasters member Darren Hernandez catches tournament bass in the spring by focusing on cover in at least 4 feet of water — with punching being his main tactic.



BEST BETS FOR UPPER-BASIN BASS

The sprawling Atchafalaya Basin offers bass anglers a lot of playing room, but when Addis angler Darren Hernandez heads to this swamp, he's likely to be working the waters surrounding Big Bayou Pigeon.

And, while February is a fun month to be on the water, Hernandez said the frigid temps that hunkered down over South Louisiana beginning in December will likely make for an interesting spring.

"Normally, down here we think of cold water as being in the mid- to upper 50s," the Westside Bassmasters member said. "That's really an optimum water temperature for bass, so our fish don't really get sluggish in what we think of as cold water."

"But this year will be kind of different because of the cold weather we've had. I'm looking forward to figuring it out."

His normal approach is to start on primary points going into canals off main bayous, moving farther back as the spring ages.

"That first point is where I'm always going to start," Hernandez said. "In February, I don't think the fish will be starting to move back (into the dead ends) because of the cold water."

What he hopes to find is cover in the form of hyacinths or submerged vegetation in water with at least 4 feet of depth. If there are stumps mixed in, all the better.

He said that's where the bigger bass will live. The day starts with Hernandez working the

edges of this vegetation with spinnerbaits and crankbaits to search for productive water.

"Usually if there's fish in a mat, something will strike on the outside edge," Hernandez explained. "Flipping is just so slow it's hard to cover a lot of water."

Once he gets a couple of bites with the moving lures, the tournament angler switches to a flipping stick and really gets down to business.

"I always start on the outside edge and work my way in," Hernandez said. "I'll punch farther back until I get to the bank, depending on the water depth."

He's not looking to finesse fish into biting, though. Instead, his goal is to pop his lure through the vegetation and provoke reaction strikes.

His flipping rig consists of a 7-foot, 11-inch extra-heavy, fast-action flipping stick matched with a high-speed reel spooled up with 65-pound Power Pro braid.

On the terminal end of his line will be a 4/0 Strike King Hack Attack flipping hook beneath a pegged 1 1/2-ounce tungsten weight.

A creature bait will be threaded on the hook. Hernandez likes Zoom Z Hogs.

"There's a Baby Z Hog and a full-sized Z Hog, so you can go up or down in size," Hernandez said. "I want something with that kind of slick body and some flappers."

Now, that's his normal approach, but Hernandez expects to be challenged this year because even if it warms up this month in South

Louisiana, cold water from the northern snow melt could keep water temps depressed.

"My process might not work this year," he admitted. "If it doesn't, I may switch to a wacky worm. A lot of people don't fish a wacky worm down here, but that's lights out."

"Just drop it along those breaklines (of vegetation)." ■

— Andy Crawford

SPIDERS TRACK DOWN OUACHITA RIVER CRAPPIE

Tim Elrod hasn't been a crappie fisherman for decades like some anglers, but when he started picking up the sport a few years ago, the West Monroe angler was hooked. There are lots of places to hit for crappie this time of year, but he is a big believer in the Ouachita River. He fishes it 12 months a year trying to stay on the crappie, and this has become one of his favorite times to fish the lakes and creeks off the meandering river. He finds the most crappie in the ones with a little deeper water.

"There are a lot of lakes around where crappie congregate in bigger numbers and concentrate in deeper water this time of year. But I love fishing the river lakes," he said. "I'm a minnow man. I love to take minnows and set up six to eight poles in a spider rig. This time of year, we fish the river lakes and creeks like White's Lake, Moon Lake or even Coon and Frank Lapere

Creeks. I guess my favorite areas are around Monroe or up around Alabama Landing.”

The advantage to fishing a spider rig this time of year is that the fish are staging in 6 to 10 feet of water, he said. When they are that shallow, you can't always find them consistently with electronics, so spider rigging lets you cover a lot of water quickly. You can also vary your depths on some poles and find out which depth the fish are holding. In deeper spots the electronics may work, but sometimes you just have to find river lake crappie the old fashioned way: Fish until you find them.

“The fish will stage in deeper water, but not too far from the cypress trees,” he said. “That’s where they are going to spawn when it warms up a bit. We like to find cypress trees closer to that deeper water, then back off from the trees and fish minnows. We use 15-pound hi-vis line, but tie on an 18-inch leader with a barrel swivel and a 1-ounce weight. Then use 8-pound line on that leader. These lakes are full of trash and we get hung up a

Tim Elrod shows another healthy cold weather crappie caught on a minnow off the Ouachita River.



lot, but that way if you break off, you just lose your hook and minnow and not the expensive bell weight.”

Elrod likes to use 2/0 hooks with large shiners, and fishes them on Jenko rods.

There are excellent public ramps up and down the Ouachita. Some of the larger ramps are in Columbia, Monroe, West Monroe, Sterlington and at the Alabama Landing near Haile.

Elrod says there are good crappie lakes within a short boat ride of almost all of them. If you use the techniques he's shared, you can catch fish. And this time of year, most all the river lakes are accessible from the main channel. ■

— Kinny Haddox

Des Allemands up next >

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Luling angler Tim Bye said February and March are prime times to be in the canals around Lac Des Allemands, with water temperature dictating when the crappie spawn occurs.

GET READY FOR LAC DES ALLEMANDS CRAPPIE SPAWN

Andy Crawford

Sac-a-lait can spawn in the Lac Des Allemands area starting in January, but Luling angler Tim Bye said this month is when it's most likely the fish will pull onto the banks. Especially with this year's frigid winter.

"If that water hits 60 degrees, they're going to move closer to spawning," Bye said. "And when it hits 65 degrees, they're doing it. "If you go in a canal and (water temps are) 65 degrees and you

don't catch any fish, there are no fish in the canal — they didn't show up."

The first key is to head to the dead-end canals around Lac Des Allemands, with water clarity being of paramount importance. And then ignore all of the sloping banks. Instead, look for banks where the water drops immediately to at least 2 feet.

"There are stretches of canal that they'll spawn on every year," Bye said. "They'll be right on the bank — right next to the cut grass.

"Where they're at, they're all together."

He said once the water hits that magic number, he goes into a canal watching the banks, looking for slight surface disturbances that give away their locations.

"You'll see there's something strange about the water," the die-hard crappie angler explained. "If you don't see movement on the bank when that water is 65 degrees, move to the next spot."

Bye uses a 10-foot B'n'M crappie pole to drop his jig right off the grass, targeting 2 to 5 feet of water.

"That's where that long pole comes in handy," he said. "I can put that jig right where I want it — I don't have to cast. I can just pick it up and drop it down where I want it.

"I'll catch three fish to your one (on a casting rig) because you're

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too busy reeling in."

But having the jig dangling at the same depth as the fish is critical.

"They won't go down (to bite)," Bye said. "If they're feeding, they might go up a little, but they'll never go down."

Bye's lure of choice is a Crappie Assassin jig — he never fishes live bait — but he doesn't have a favorite color.

"I don't think color makes a difference," he explained. "Crappie are reaction-bite fish."

If a cold front pushes through and drops water temps, don't get all worked up because crappie haven't moved far — and if the spawn has already begun, there will still be some on the banks.

"Once the water temperature hits 65 degrees and the females drop their eggs, the males are going to stay on that bank no matter what," Bye said. "They will sit on that nest; they won't leave."

But actual spawning activity isn't a prolonged affair.

"When they move up, they'll spawn quick," Bye said. "Two or three days, and they move back out."

Fortunately, the spawn happens in waves, so there will be fish moving in and out of the shallows for the next several weeks.

And then they'll disappear from the canal systems.

"They'll be in (Lac Des Allemands) at the end of March," he said. "When the water hits 70 degrees, don't even go in a canal — they'll be gone." ■

— Andy Crawford

Dularge up next >



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Redfish can be found this month in the dead-end canals around Dularge, according to Capt. Anthony Kyzar.

Two of Homer Humphreys' happy clients with some Lake Bistineau slab crappie.

FIND REDS IN DULARGE'S DEAD-END CANALS

Calm days are few and far between this month, but if you can snag one, there are plenty of tackle-busting fish waiting for you, according to Dularge guide Capt. Anthony Kyzar.

"We run out to the platforms and catch redfish, sheepshead and drum," he said.

The coolest part about making the long run out there, Kyzar said, is the fact that anglers can see the fish strike.

Kyzar remembered a trip in early January with Capt. Chris Venable and company where this was particularly true.

"We had probably 100 (sheepshead) around the boat," he said. "You watched them eat it. If one of them didn't get it, and the other one got it, they were fighting for it."

And the best thing is catching them couldn't be easier, Kyzar said.

"They're right under the surface of the water," he said. "You just drop a shrimp on a jighead and you can watch them eat it."

This makes the fish especially good for kids. They're easy

to catch, and you'll likely go home with some sore arms.

"They're all huge that time of year," he said. "The sheepshead are powerful. It's like hooking an 8-pound bluegill."

For anglers that squawk at running that far out, Kyzar said the redfishing can be good in the dead-end canals on the inside, which have no tidal movement.

"The fish get out of the moving water," he said. "One thing because it's cold, and another because of the sediment.

Whenever we get these big 3-foot tide ranges, you've got all that sediment in the water, and the water's going to be colder."

Kyzar said the canals are around 7 feet deep, and he likes throwing Matrix Shad soft plastics tipped with dead shrimp on the bottom.

However, he did say the water temperature dictates how agreeable the fish will be to a straight plastic.

"When the water temperature is in the upper-50s, you don't even need to put the shrimp on there," he said. ■

— Joel Masson



CRAPPIE BRINGING IT ON LAKE BISTINEAU

When you talk to a guy like Homer Humphreys, who has guided and fished professionally for more than five decades, and he's excited talking about the fishing in a certain lake, you can bet it's good.

That's the way Homer feels about crappie fishing on Lake Bistineau, located south of Minden, this month.

"The lake's been down 7 feet for a drawdown and as it comes up, the crappie are heading up the channels and creeks just like we head down I-20 to get somewhere," he said. "You can follow the edge of that deeper water this month and find the fish staging to go in for the spawn. Then, if the water does warm up into the upper 50s, they are going to head for every tree and top on the flats they can find. And it's on."

The water level coming out of the drawdown is a bit uncertain, but Humphreys said adjusting to whatever is happening isn't hard.

The main reason is that the lake is chocked full of big crappie.

"If we are getting lots of rain and the lake is coming on up, the fish will move up those creeks into Skinner Slough, Brushy Creek and all the sloughs," he said. "They'll stay there staging on the edges of those creeks until the water temperature gets perfect, then move in to spawn. The big females will move in a couple of days before that full moon, and it won't last long with them, but the males will follow up and they'll be shallow. The females will move back off to the edges of the creeks."

One thing is certain for the spawn, Humphreys said.

continues >

"All the crappie don't spawn at the same time. There will be several waves of them coming shallow," he said. "But one thing is for sure, that first wave usually has the very biggest of the crappie in it. They are busting with eggs and ready to get it done."

If the water doesn't fill up the creeks, the fish will just move out into the flats close to where they are in the big channels, which will make them even easier to catch. They'll be congregated more and it will be like fishing 1 acre instead of 4 to find them.

You can catch crappie on live bait like big shiners or jigs, he said. Favorite colors are pop-sicle or gray ghost.

Of course, there is always the lake's namesake Bistineau jig, a pink head wrapped with purple thread and chartreuse hair. More and more people are fishing the jigs under a

cork — a tactic Humphreys recommends because it makes it easier to control the depth of the jig.

One thing Humphreys said is critical is fishing above the crappie.

Crappie only feed up, so if you get your bait below them, you're out of luck. A good rule of thumb this time of year is to fish halfway to the bottom, no matter what depth of water you are in. If fish are hitting it and coming up, you need to shallow up a little bit more. If you are fishing a cork and the cork lays flat when they bite, that means they're hitting it and coming up — so again, go a bit shallower.

You can set up a trip with Humphreys by calling (318) 422-1192, or messaging him on his Facebook page. ■

- Kinny Haddox

Grand Isle up next >

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Tommy Vidrine shows off a nice wintertime speck caught in one of the deeper holes situated along Highway 1 heading into Grand Isle.

HIGHWAY 1 BRIDGES ARE TROUT HOTSPOTS ON GRAND ISLE

BUT ON COLDER DAYS, MOVE TO DEEPER ROADSIDE PITS FOR SPECKS

February is pretty much a mixed bag weather-wise, but whatever the conditions, you can bet Tommy Vidrine always has a plan to catch speckled trout near Grand Isle.

The bulk of the action happens along Highway 1. Vidrine, who lives in Baton Rouge but spends as much time on the island catching trout as possible, said he lets the weather conditions determine his course of action.

"When it's pretty and maybe 70 degrees, I'm going to be hanging out at the first bridge going onto the island," Vidrine said. "When it warms up a little, the trout are getting out of those deep holes and they go in the current. All that bait is going back into the marsh, and they follow it."

"The current comes through those bridges, so they sit there waiting for the bait to come to them."

But if it's cold and nasty, Vidrine switches to Plan B — and fishes deeper pits along Highway 1 like the Forbidden Hole and the Snake Pit.

"When it gets cold again, both reds and specks will go back into those deeper holes, so you get away from the bridges and find 10 or 12 feet of water," he said. "The shallow marsh is going to get cold

first, so they're going back to those holes because it might be 10 degrees warmer down deeper. So they come back in there, along with the bait."

Whether he's at one of the first two bridges leading onto the island or off Highway 1 fishing deeper pits, Vidrine's go-to lure is Tsunami's 3-inch Swim Minnow in sea trout pattern.

"The Tsunami is the best bait - just make sure you get the Swim Minnow. The Swim Shad is heavier, and in shallow water, it sinks too fast," Vidrine explained. "But if you're in deeper water, the Swim Shad has a little more action because the body is flat underneath."

At the bridges, if conditions are right, he'll also throw a topwater lure.

"If the tide and wind aren't too strong early, I'll throw a topwater," he said. "Just pick your favorite — almost any one will work."

The key to getting bit at the bridges is current, and getting your bait to the bottom. On the first bridge leading onto the island — Vidrine's favorite — he likes an outgoing tide and usually fishes the Gulf side of the bridge.

"The current has to be moving for it to be good there. I let the bait hit the bottom," he said. "The trick is with good current, you have to throw into the current,

which isn't always easy to do depending on the wind, so the bait has time to sink and hit the bottom. Then just slow down and lift it and drop it."

"But if you're throwing with the current, your bait will never get close to the bottom because the current is too strong and the bait is too light. So I like to throw it with the current coming into my face."

If the tide is coming in on the first bridge, Vidrine usually stays on the Gulf side — but makes a shorter cast and then manually plays line out to get his lure to the bottom.

"When the current is going away from you, you don't have to work it much," he said. "Just bounce it off the bottom and let the current work it and get strikes."

If he's in the mood for a boat ride, Vidrine targets the Bay Rambo area and Palmetto Bayou northwest of Grand Isle to catch numbers of reds and smaller specks. Just plan to go on high tide, especially if you're not familiar with the area, because of the numerous shallow oyster reefs there.

"All that marsh around Bay Rambo, just work the edges of the grass and the ponds," he said. "You have to learn it, but it's a great place to catch a lot of fish if you want a wintertime spot to get lots of bites." ■

— Patrick Bonin

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