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Big Bucks on Small Tracts
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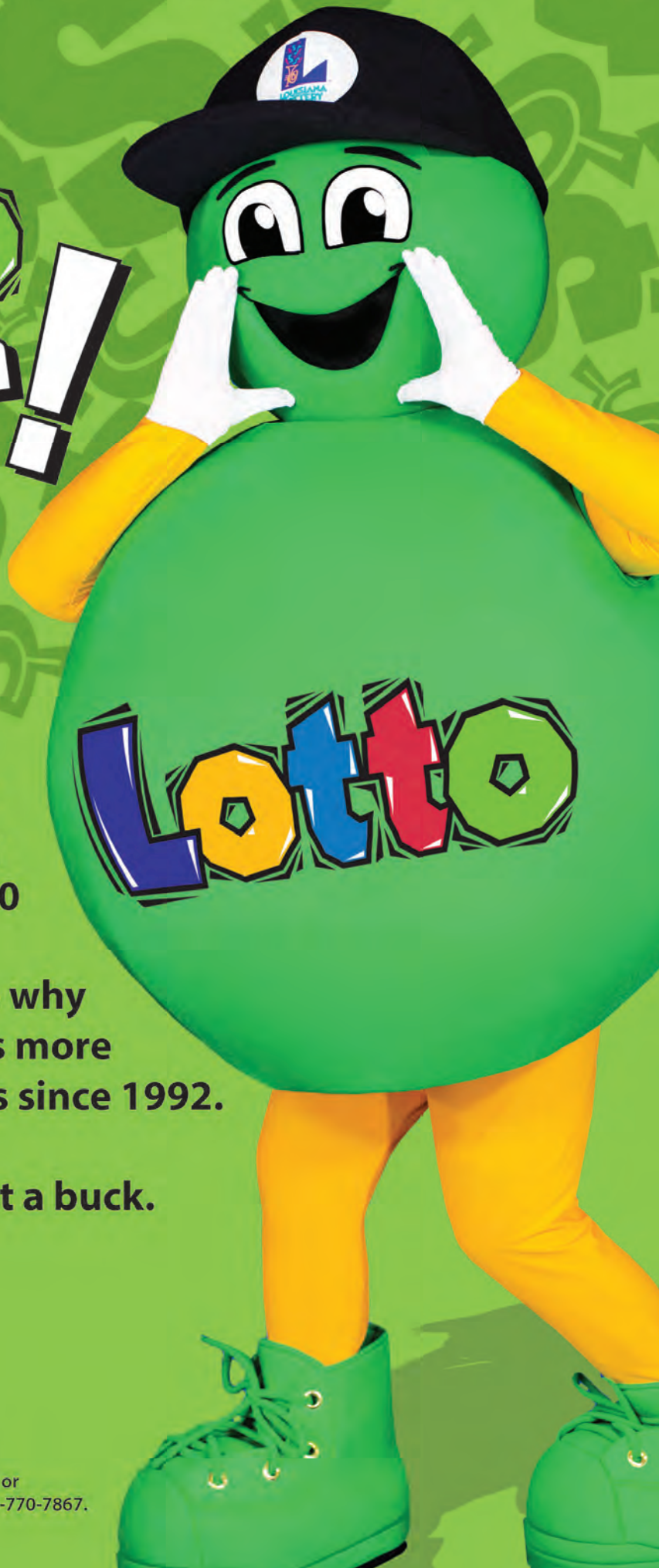

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Tyler Bourgeois, 24, or Raceland, poses with the leucistic red snapper he reeled in on Friday, June 1 in the Grand Isle blocks during the Catholic High School Alumni Rodeo held out of Moran's Marina.

Photo courtesy of Hunter Andras

RARE LEUCISTIC RED SNAPPER CAUGHT DURING CHS RODEO

By Patrick Bonin

BOURGEOIS BATTLED SEASICKNESS EARLY — THEN LANDED A TROPHY

They say it's not how you start — but how you finish that matters.

That was the case on Friday, June 1, when Tyler Bourgeois headed out of Moran's Marina in Fourchon around 6:30 a.m. for a red snapper trip during the Catholic High School (Baton Rouge) Alumni Fishing Rodeo.

Bourgeois, 24, of Raceland, was fishing with Team ABL Fabricators on Capt. Hunter Andras' 38-foot Fountain, along with Chad Vining, Hunter's dad Dwayne and Jonathan Lindley.

But by the time they arrived at their first rig in the Grand Isle blocks a few hours later, Bourgeois was feeling several different shades of green.

"I've only been out four or five times, in good conditions and in rough conditions. But for some reason, we got to the first rig and I caught a migraine. We had 3- and 4-foot rollers, and it smoked me," he said. "I was actually laying on the bottom of the boat for two hours."

But early that afternoon around 1:30, Bourgeois finally felt good enough to fish — and wound up with the "red" snapper of a lifetime on only his second drop of the day.

"I got up and dropped once, had a nibble and he ate my bait, so I reeled up, re-baited and dropped again," Bourgeois said, noting they were fishing with cut up hardtails. "It was basically my second drop of the day and I pulled up a white snapper.

"They were all like, 'Are you serious?' It kind of caught me off guard. I really wasn't sure exactly what it was at first, and then when we got him to the top, it was kind of like a shock throughout the whole boat. They were like, 'Man, a white snapper.'"

LEUCISM EXPLAINED

Jerald Horst, a retired professor of fisheries with Louisiana State University and frequent *Louisiana Sportsman* contributor, said what Bourgeois reeled up from about 120 feet was actually a leucistic red snapper, which resulted from its parents both having a recessive pigmentation gene.

"In simplest terms, leucism is albinism without affecting the eyes," Horst said. "It's a genetic pigment issue."

Bourgeois said while he was literally reeling in the white fish, Hunter Andras was

pulling up a 28.86-pounder that would eventually take first place in the rodeo, which concluded the next day. Team ABL Fabricators also wound up in first place in the five-fish red snapper stringer division, with a total of 96.73 pounds.

His white snapper got culled from the five-fish stringer, but weighed a healthy 13.34 pounds, and was 29 inches long with a 21-inch girth.

The fish has black eyes with a light blue pigment

around them, as well as flecks of orange on its sides, and Bourgeois is planning on getting a replica mount made to commemorate a great day on the water — at least the part after he was seasick.

"It almost reminds me of a koi fish. I love it. The orange gives him a little character … I'm blessed. I'm speechless to be honest with you," Bourgeois said, noting again that he's only made a handful of snapper trips offshore. "It's just crazy. I'm glad I was able to bounce back.

"I guess when it's your time, it's your time." ▪

JUNE NIGHT-FISHING TRIP YIELDS 12.4-POUND TOLEDO BEND HAWG

CARRIERE CATCHES GIANT UNDER LIGHTED DOCK IN LANAN

By Patrick Bonin

Mike Carriere poses with the big 12.4-pound largemouth bass he caught June 10 at 3:45 a.m. in Lanan on Toledo Bend.

Photo courtesy of Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program

Not too long ago, Mike Carriere was wondering if he'd ever get the chance to beat his personal best 8 ½-pound bass.

"Just a few weeks ago, I was saying I might not ever catch a fish over 10 pounds in my life, but I want my grandkids to have the chance," the 59-year-old Church Point angler said. "So that's why we've been telling people to release the big fish and keep the smaller fish.

"Let all those big fish go so some kids can catch them one day.'"

All that good karma apparently paid off June 10 up at Toledo Bend, when Carriere reeled in a 12.4-pound hawg during a night-fishing trip in Lanan. He was with Phil Vidrine and his son Travis, on Vidrine's party barge when the fish of a lifetime bit about 3:45 a.m.

They had been working a point, and moved down a shoreline to a lighted dock when the big fish bit his Texas-rigged, 11½-inch plum-colored Zoom Ol' Monster worm.

"I had constantly cast under that light, I guess five or six times in the same place," Carriere said. "I was like, 'They have to have a fish under this light. They have to.' But nobody was catching, so I said, 'Let's go back to the point where we were, let's turn around.' But I said, 'One more cast.' When I cast it, there she was.

"It just stopped. My rod stopped, and I hollered, 'This is a big fish.' I didn't know what it is, because it's dark. But she came up and she tried to spit it, and then I said, 'It's a real big fish — get the net.'

"She came up two or three times between the boat and the dock and tried to spit it."

Phil and Travis each had a net waiting for the lunker on the first pass.

"I said, 'Here she comes, and she came up right on the side of the boat — and they both missed her," Carriere said with a chuckle. "Then she took a dive again. I said, 'Oh no — two nets and neither one of y'all got it.'"

On the next pass, Phil had the bigger net and safely brought the giant fish aboard.

"I was thinking she looked around 10, but Phil said no — she's more than 10," Carriere said.

Vidrine's scale backed up his estimate — it said the fish weighed 12.7 pounds, and the decision was made to leave immediately to try and keep the fish alive.

27-INCH LENGTH, 20-PLUS INCH GIRTH

At Toledo Town & Tackle, the big bass tipped the certified scales there at 12.4 pounds, and measured 27 inches long with a 20 ⅜-inch girth.

It is the ninth — and largest fish so far — registered in the 2018-19 Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program, which awards anglers who catch 10-pound-plus bass a free replica if the fish is returned back to the reservoir alive.

So as it turned out, Carriere wound up not only catching that elusive 10-pound-plus fish, but crushing his personal best by almost 4 pounds.

"That's a gift to be able to catch something like that," he said. "I'm just so glad." ▪

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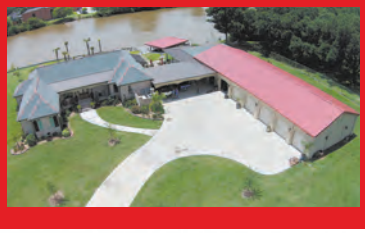

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FARMERVILLE MAN ARRESTED FOR BATTERY, HARASSMENT OF LAKE D'ARBONNE FISHERMEN

DITTA ALLEGEDLY POURED GASOLINE ON ANGLERS LEGALLY FISHING NEAR HIS DOCK, LDWF SAYS

From News Reports

Enforcement agents with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries arrested a 64-year-old Farmerville man early last month after he allegedly confronted fishermen legally fishing in front of his property and dock on Lake D'Arbonne — and poured gasoline on them in an attempt to get them to leave.

Agents arrested Vincent Ditta for simple battery and harassment of fishermen, according to a press release.

Three anglers complained to the LDWF on May 31, after they said Ditta threw gas on them while they were fishing in Lake D'Arbonne. Agents investigated, and found the anglers were legally fishing in front of Ditta's property and dock when he allegedly poured gasoline on them from a handheld gasoline tank, the release states.

After getting a positive identification from the fishermen, agents arrested Ditta June 5 and booked him into the Union Parish Detention Center, according to the release.

Simple battery brings up to a $1,000 fine and six months in jail. Harassment of people lawfully fishing carries a $100 to $350 fine and up to 60 days in jail, the release states. ▪

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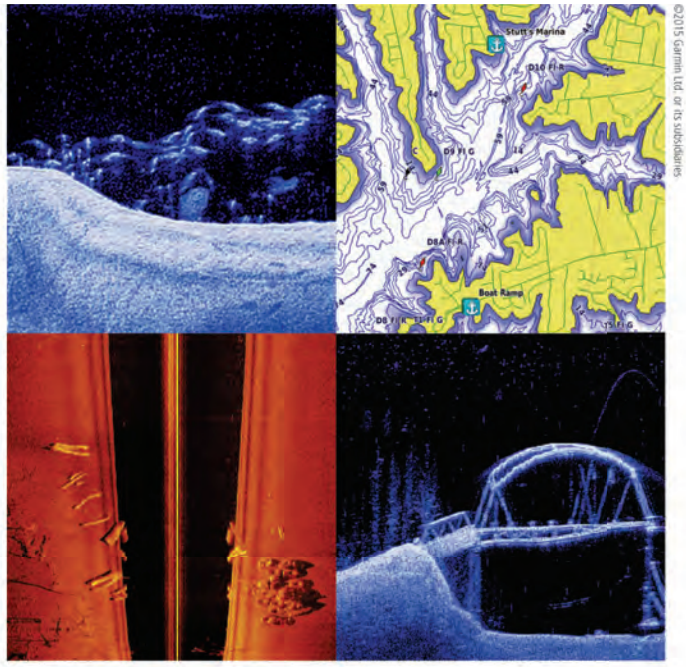

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PITRE'S TROPHY MEASURED 31 ¾ INCHES, TIPPED CERTIFIED SCALES AT 19.4 POUNDS

By Patrick Bonin

Dustin Pitre, 37, poses with the mangrove snapper he speared while freediving in Grand Isle Block 41B on May 23. The giant mangrove measured almost 32 inches, and tipped certified scales at 19.4 pounds — potentially a new spearfishing world record.

Photo courtesy of Coty Cheramie

Even when you're spearfishing, you still gotta go to know.

On a choppy day late last month with dirty water when conditions weren't actually the greatest, Dustin Pitre and Coty Cheramie, both of Galliano, headed out of Moran's Marina in Fourchon and ventured to Grand Isle Block 41B to do some spearfishing while freediving.

Cheramie, an experienced freediver and spearfisherman, served as captain on the trip and brought Pitre out to the rig, but never even entered the water himself.

Freedivers don't use any air tanks, but practice holding their breaths for long periods underwater. According to Cheramie, many freedivers can quickly make it down to between 50 and 100 feet, and can then spear a fish and return to the surface in only about 90 seconds.

But before starting a dive, they perform 'breathe-up' exercises to lower their heart rates, relax and prepare their bodies to stay underwater for extended periods.

However, on this trip on May 23, Pitre didn't even have to hold his breath — and wound up with the mangrove snapper of a lifetime.

"Dustin was at the surface, and the fish was 2 feet underneath the surface. It was on the landing deck of the oil rig," said Cheramie, who was talking on his phone when the improbable shot took place. "He jumped into the water, swam to the rig and held onto it to make his breathe-up.

"While he was doing his breathe-up, he saw the fish in the pipes. He said he didn't even swim down. He just shot it. He was snorkeling — he was breathing when he shot the fish."

Pitre knew instantly the big mangrove he saw was something special, and he shot the fish at close range with his SEAC pneumatic speargun, Cheramie said.

"He knew right away that was the biggest mangrove he had seen before," he said. "I've seen a lot of mangroves come over the side of my boat, but I've never seen one like that.

"I thought it was a cubera .... I knew it was a world record fish. We put it on a tape measure and it measured 31 inches, and I knew right away because I had shot a 15-pounder that was 27 inches long."

Officially, the big mangrove measured 31 ¾ inches, with a girth of 23 ¼ inches. At Moran's Marina, it tipped the certified scales there at 19.4 pounds and has already been certified by a Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries biologist.

Pending final approval by the International Underwater Spearfishing Association, Pitre's big fish will become the new spearfishing world record for mangrove snapper.

"The mangrove snapper is by far the hardest fish to spear, it's an elusive fish," Cheramie said. "A red snapper will come right to your face, but a mangrove won't do that, especially a mature female like that.

"She'll typically stay hidden." ▪

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CCA LOUISIANA'S STAR TOURNAMENT OFF TO FAST START

By Patrick Bonin

Bryan Dorsey, of Youngsville, poses with the CCA STAR-tagged redfish he caught Sunday, May 27, at Dry Reef in Vemilion Bay. Pending a polygraph, Dorsey will win a 2018 Chevy Silverado pickup.

Photo courtesy of CCA Louisiana

PENDING POLYGRAPHS, CHEVY SILVERADO PICKUP, 21-FOOT NAUTICSTAR AND LOUISIANA SPORTSMAN'S $10,000 BONUS PRIZE ALREADY CLAIMED

It didn't take long for fishermen across the coast to start catching tagged redfish in the 2018 Coastal Conservation Association's Louisiana STAR Tournament. The contest, which got underway Memorial Day Weekend and runs through Labor Day, offers more than $500,000 in prizes to registered anglers.

YOUNGSVILLE ANGLER CONNECTS WITH FIRST TAGGED REDFISH IN VERMILION BAY

Less than 48 hours in, Bryan Dorsey staked his claim to the grand prize 2018 Chevy Silverado pickup truck after reeling in the first tagged red of the tournament at Dry Reef in Vermilion Bay on May 27.

Subtropical storm Alberto had forced him to change up his original plans to head offshore out of Grand Isle for Memorial Day weekend. But the Youngsville angler had been working on the engines on his Fountain and wanted to run the boat, so he decided to stay closer to home.

But things still weren't going his way.

"One of the engines was giving him problems, so he said, 'Well, we have rods and bait — we just as soon fish somewhere.' So they stopped at Dry Reef right there in the middle of Vermilion Bay and caught the tagged red about an hour from when he left," said Rad Trascher, Louisiana's STAR tournament director.

Yep, about 90 minutes after registering for the tournament online on his way to the boat launch, Dorsey's persistence was rewarded with the very first tagged redfish of the season.

Pending a polygraph, he'll win a brand new 2018 Chevy Silverado from the Super Chevy Dealers of Baton Rouge, Acadiana and New Orleans.

LULING ANGLER CATCHES SECOND STAR-TAGGED RED, CLAIMS BOAT — AND LOUISIANA SPORTSMAN'S $10,000 SUBSCRIBER BONUS

They say lightning doesn't strike twice in the same place, but don't tell that to Gary and Stacey Kinler.

In July of 2014, the couple was fishing near Elmer's Island

Gary and Stacey Kinler show off the STAR-tagged redfish Gary reeled in June 3 north of Grand Isle. Pending a polygraph, in addition to the $10,000 Louisiana Sportsman subscriber bonus, Kinler also will receive a 21-foot NauticStar boat with a 150 hp Mercury motor.

Ann Taylor

when Stacey reeled in a CCA STAR-tagged redfish. Unfortunately, the longtime CCA supporter simply forgot to register for the tournament that year — and it cost her a brand new Chevy Silverado pickup truck.

Now fast forward to Sunday, June 3, in Raccoon Bay, about 4 miles north of Grand Isle. Gary and his brother-in-law, Joe Lopez, were targeting redfish using live pogies under a popping cork. (Stacey wasn't feeling well and didn't make the trip.)

"The day before, we were in the same spot, the same cut, and I caught the majority of the reds, and it was his birthday, so I brought him back the next day and said, 'You throw where I was catching them yesterday," Gary explained. "And I just tossed off to the side, way to the left to get out of his way, and lo and behold, I got a good smack.

"We saw it blow up on the cork and we pulled it in. He netted it, we unhooked it and it was laying in the boat, but we didn't see the tag. He cast out and I rolled it over to put it in the ice chest, and I was like, 'Holy crap, this cannot be.' I said, 'Joe, we got us a tagged redfish.'"

Sure enough, almost four years after Stacey's missed chance at a truck, Gary was registered, and pending a polygraph is now in line for a 21-foot NauticStar with a 150 hp Mercury 4-stroke motor.

"We're going to name the boat 'Redemption,'" Gary said with a chuckle. "Either that, or 'Too Lucky to be True.'"

To top it off, Kinler also will receive the $10,000 *Louisiana Sportsman* bonus prize for being the first STAR-registered angler to catch a tagged red who was also a subscriber to the magazine. So Stacey might have missed out on the truck in 2014, but Gary looks like he's all set for a brand new boat, plus $10,000 in cash. All in all, not a bad deal.

"They said it wouldn't happen again, but I kept telling them, 'It's going to happen again,'" Gary said with a smile. "We're going to make it happen."

Now the next three registered anglers who catch a tagged red will win a 21-foot NauticStar. After that, the next five registered anglers who catch a tagged red get a 1754 GatorTail Extreme Series with a 40 hp EFI motor.

To register or see the updated leaderboard, go to www.ccastar.com. ▪

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LDWF: SAMPLING SHOWS NO CWD IN NORTHEAST LOUISIANA

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has tested 300 whitetails in Northeast Louisiana since a Mississippi buck tested positive for chronic wasting disease earlier this year, but they haven't yet detected a positive case of CWD in the herd.

300 DEER TESTED IN BUFFER ZONE WITH NO POSITIVE RESULTS; FEEDING BAN LIFTED

From News Reports

Testing of 300 white-tailed deer in East Carroll, Madison and Tensas Parishes did not detect chronic wasting disease, according to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

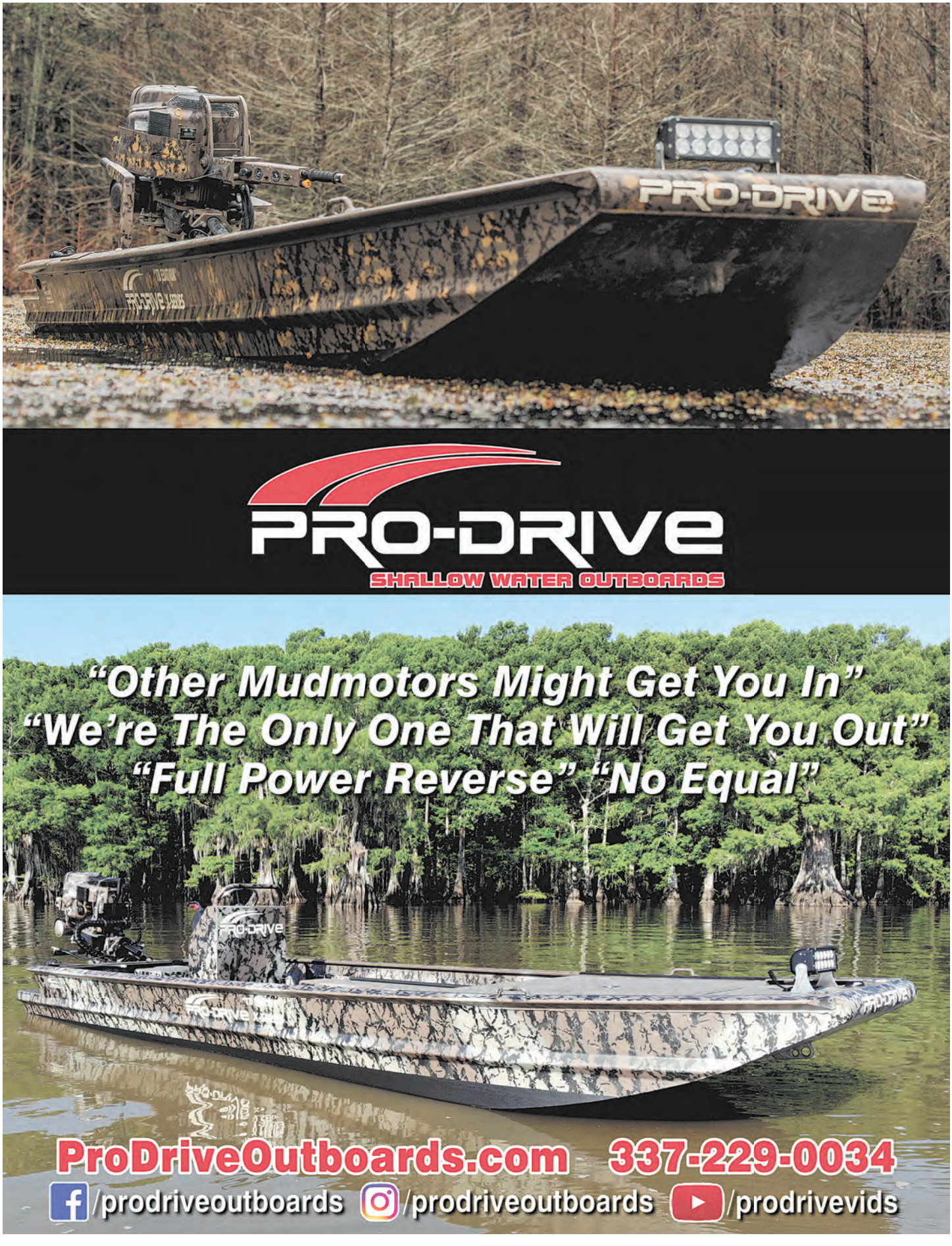
The testing, which occurred in a 25-mile buffer zone from Issaquena County, Mississippi where a buck tested positive for CWD in January only miles from the Louisiana border, provided a 95 percent confidence interval that sampling would detect the disease at a prevalence rate of 1 percent.

As a result, the feeding ban in those three parishes enacted by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission earlier this year was rescinded. However, the LDWF still encourages hunters not to utilize supplemental feeding there, as it increases the chance of spreading disease among animals using the bait station.

CWD is a fatal neurodegenerative disease affecting members of the family Cervidae, which includes white-tailed deer, and it's 100 percent fatal. Infected animals show signs including weight loss, salivation, neurological difficulties and ultimately death. However, symptoms may not become apparent until 16 to 24 months after the deer is infected.

The LDWF will perform increased hunter-harvested deer surveillance for CWD in the Northeast Louisiana this hunting season, and will continue normal CWD surveillance across the state.

So far, LDWF has tested nearly 9,000 deer for CWD since 2002. ▪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Hundreds of kayak anglers will once again descend on Caminada Pass off Grand Isle for the ninth installment of Ride the Bull on Saturday, Aug. 25 at 7:30 a.m.

RIDE THE BULL 9 SET FOR AUG. 25 AT GRAND ISLE

REGISTER NOW FOR MORE THAN $10,000 IN CASH AND KAYAKS TO BE AWARDED

By Patrick Bonin

Photo courtesy of CCA Louisiana

The world's largest kayak tournament will once again churn into Caminada Pass at Grand Isle, as the always-popular Ride the Bull preps for its ninth go round on Saturday, Aug. 25.

The one-day tournament,which is hosted by the Coastal Conservation Association of Louisiana, focuses on catching the biggest bull red from a paddlecraft in about a six-hour window, and has developed an almost mystical reputation revolving much more around camaraderie, friendship, food and music than fishing prowess.

"I think the biggest thing is it's unique," said Rad Trascher, RTB tournament director. "I've said it before — typically a kayak tournament is a very solitary event with you out in the marsh by yourself. Now you get to join 700 of your closest friends and like-minded people, and go have fun.

"It's just as much about the festivities as it is about the tournament itself. And one of the best things about it is you need to be prepared, but there's also a lot of luck to it. Without luck, you're probably not going to win it. Every year, we see kids win, a lady that's never fished before wins it, somebody in a canoe — you just never know what to expect."

Registration is now open, and your $75 entry fee gets you a one-year membership to CCA, a high performance RTB 9 shirt, a ditty bag, as well as a shrimp dinner on Friday night and lunch the day of the event.

For kids 17 years old and younger, the entry fee is $65. The registration fee goes up to $85 after Aug. 1, and shirts and ditty bags are not guaranteed. To register online, go to http://www.ccalouisiana.com/cca11/index.php/rtb-registration.

On the Saturday of the tournament, there will be a 7:30 a.m. shotgun start, the scales will close at 2 p.m. and the awards ceremony and raffle is scheduled to begin at 3 p.m.

Prizes will be provided by Wilderness Systems, Aftco, The Backpacker, Academy Sports and Outdoors, Shimano and more, he said.

"We'll have plenty of cash and tangible prizes, including Wilderness kayaks and Shimano gear, and lots of other gear presented by our sponsors," he said.

Planning a date around tidal movement for a kayak tournament is tricky, Trascher said. You want some movement so fish will be feeding, but not too much movement so that it's difficult on the paddlers.

"Capt. Danny Wray and I picked the date because it fit the Grand Isle calendar, and it also had some decent movement. What's kind of tricky about the Ride Bull is, where people in bay boats want a foot of tide movement in the morning, for the paddlers you don't want a ton of tide movement because it's that much harder on the participants," he explained. "I think the tide will be conducive, and obviously it's the time of year when the bulls should be running." ▪

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2018 SUMMER EVENTS:

JULY

7 – Annual Fireworks and Band @ 10:00 p.m., Bridge Side Marina
13-14 – Louisiana Dental Association (LDA) Fishing Rodeo, Sand Dollar Marina
21 – SLHS Cheerleader Fishing Rodeo, Bridge Side Marina
26-28 – Grand Isle Tarpon Rodeo, Tarpon Rodeo Pavilion Sand Dollar Marina
tarponrodeo.org

AUGUST

4 – Mike Bourgeois "Big Daddy" Memorial Rodeo Saturday, Bridge Side Marina
11 – 3rd Annual Bow Fishing Rodeo, Bridge Side Marina
18– Dufrene Building Rodeo, Bridge Side Marina
24 – Calmwater's GOPRO Film Festival, Bridge Side Marina
25 – Ride the Bull Kayak Fishing Rodeo, Bridge Side Marina
31 - SEPT. 1-2 – 56th Grand Isle Original Redfish Rodeo, Bridge Side Marina

THE 2018 LOUISIANA SPORTSMAN DEER, DUCK AND FISHING SHOW

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The 2018 Louisiana Sportsman Show presented by Reed's Metals and Parish Tractor at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans is certain to be a hit with outdoors enthusiasts of all walks and interests. Deer hunters will be delighted to know that the Quality Deer Management Association is holding its National Convention in conjunction with the Sportsman Show. Duck hunters will be treated to a whole section of the Dome that features nothing but the newest and greatest duck boats and surface-drive motors. All outdoorsmen should bring their wallet, because several retailers will be bringing in actual truckloads of gear to be sold at closeout prices. If that isn't enough, there is a full roster of speakers and educational seminars planned featuring some of the biggest outdoor celebrities and most accomplished hunters and anglers in the world.

Stay tuned to www.louisianasportsmanshow.com for more details as the show approaches. ▪

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DON'T MISS THE SPORTSMAN BIG BUCK CONTEST

With hunting season still a few months away, get your deer hunting fix by bringing your buck to the Louisiana Sportsman Big Buck Contest at the Superdome.

Even if your deer mount isn't complete, you can make arrangements with your taxidermist to bring the antlers to the contest. Besides bragging rights, there are even more reasons to enter the contest, namely a smattering of incredible prizes.

The contest again will be hosted by the Quality Deer Management Association South Louisiana Branch.

Deer may be dropped off beginning Friday, but must be entered no later than 6 p.m. on Saturday. It's free to enter — just bring your unscored deer from the 2016-17 or 2017-18 to the show.

Winners also 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

Your trophy doesn't have to be a state-record to win a prize, because everyone who enters the contest is eligible for the drawing; so you could go home with a prize even if you enter a basket rack.

All deer will be scored by official Boone & Crockett and Pope & Young scorers. Of course, only those past the mandatory 60-day drying period will receive final scores.

Bucks entered in any previous Louisiana Sportsman Big Buck Contest are not eligible to win the contest but are eligible for prize drawings.

Bucks killed 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 the winners are announced July 22

For complete Big Buck Contest rules, visit www.louisianasportsmanshow.com. ▪

Visit www.louisianasportsmanshow.com for further details

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KID'S ZONE

Bring the whole family and be sure to stop by the Kid's Zone. Saturday and Sunday, the Kid's Zone will have seminars and casting clinics tailored just for little ones. There will be prizes for the best casters. Stay tuned to louisianasportsmanshow.com for details on prizes and more.

Courtesy of B.A.S.S.

FETCH-N-FISH

Don't miss the Fetch-N-Fish tank, site of educational seminars on dog training, obedience and of course — long-distance jumps into a tank filled with largemouth bass. Fishing seminars also conducted at the tank.

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Come see the latest in bows and accessories at special show prices on brands such as Mission, Bow Tech, Mathews and Hoyt. Plus, check out the hottest new crossbows from Mission and Raven.

FISHING SEMINARS

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Outdoor journalist Todd Masson has been covering South Louisiana for more than a quarter century. He now does it through the Marsh Man Masson channel on YouTube.

CHRIS HOLMES

of the Hobie Kayak Fishing Team and the Bayou Coast Kayak Fishing Club

CAPTAIN CLYDE "CRAPPIE PSYCHIC" FOLSE

CARL VIDRINE

The "Monster Trout Man" of Grand Isle

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Louisiana SPORTSMAN SHOW JULY 20-22
MERCEDES-BENZ SUPERDOME www.LOUISIANASPORTSMANSHOW.com

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IN THE DOME JULY 20-22

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Sporting goods powerhouse Puglia's will have more than a semi-truck load of gear that's going to be on sale at closeout prices. Gear from Daiwa, Penn, Lew's, 13 Fishing, American Angler, Boat Monkey Floats and more all must go. All in all, there will be more than 30 booths full of closeout prices on items such as deer stands, calls, hunting clothes and more.

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INDUSTRY CELEBRITIES ABOUND
AT THE QDMA National CONVENTION

A laundry list of experts that reads like a who's-who of personalities in the outdoor world will be at the QDMA's National Convention, with several attending the Sportsman Show in the Dome as well. Celebrities will be on hand for meet-and-greets and some of the most accomplished hunters and anglers will be giving seminars throughout the day. In live and online auctions, there will be lots of fantastic prizes, including a five-day all-inclusive Nebraska muzzle-loader hunt with Cuz Strickland that will be filmed for Mossy Oak's "Hunting the Country" TV show. Check out the QDMA Convention app for more details on the online auction.

This edition of the National Convention will feature more educational opportunities than ever before. Topics from the best supplements and food plot plants to professional rattling and calling tactics are all on the roster of more than 20 seminars. At the Sportsman Show, a special must-see panel discussion on aging deer on the hoof will de held along with seminars on food plots, a farm-to-table demonstration about processing your own deer, and understanding wind, thermals and air currents. Also, don't miss hearing from deer hunting expert, author and Louisiana Sportsman columnist Dave Moreland.■

Cuz Strickland of Mossy Oak

Dr. Craig Harper

Dan Perez Whitetail Properties

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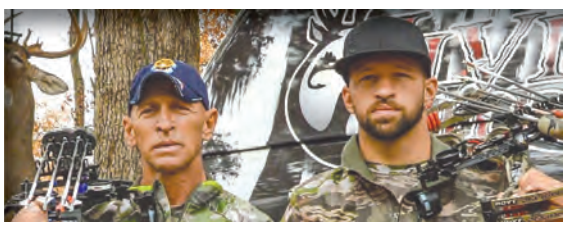

RJ and Jay Paul Molinere of "Swamp People"

Pat & Nicole Reeve of Driven TV

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- **NFL-type security rules apply.** Knives or guns are expressly prohibited. Please leave them home as we have no way of holding them for you while you visit the show.
- **Superdome maximum parking garage height is 6'6".** Most jacked up half-ton trucks and three-quarter ton trucks will not fit. There is a lot across Poydras for oversized vehicles.

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TRAN

Trout will definitely fall for topwaters early in the morning, but Cocodrie's Capt. Tommy Pellegrin knows live shrimp are the real meal ticket to fill out limits as the day wears on.

By Andy Crawford

ISFORMER TROUT

IF YOU WANT TO CATCH SUMMERTIME TROUT IN COCODRIE, THIS GUIDE KNOWS HOW TO TURN LIVE SHRIMP INTO SPECKS THAT WILL FILL THE BOX DAY IN AND DAY OUT.

The sun was just throwing amber light over the horizon when my bone-colored Badonk-a-donk disappeared in a toilet flush.

And my grumbling over the 3 a.m. alarm disappeared like fog in a stiff wind.

"When you hit it right, you can limit out on trout right here and be heading home by 7:30, 8 o'clock," Capt. Tommy Pellegrin said.

That prediction had convinced me to get up at an hour when drunks are still wending their way home from the bars.

And it looked like things would pan out nicely. Pellegrin, owner of Cocodrie's Custom Charters, had just landed a topwater trout and Mississippi's Bill Darsey was setting the hook on yet another speck that fell for a live shrimp dangling beneath a slip cork.

We were set up just off the rocks surrounding the pitiful remains of Wine Island, now nothing more than a sandbar on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico. It was a location Pellegrin had stomped the fish a few days earlier.

>

"IN JULY, THEY'LL ACTUALLY BE MORE ON THE BEACHES," PELLEGRIN SAID.

"THAT'S WHEN THE BROWN SHRIMP MAKE THEIR FINAL MOVE OUT, SO YOU WANT TO BE ON THE BEACHES AND IN THE PASSES."

Yeah, I know, we were on the rocks just off a sandbar, but the principle carries over: Trout swarm the rocks of disappearing barrier islands and sandbars, ambushing shrimp moving out of the bays.

As Darsey fought a speck, Pellegrin explained why he always carries live shrimp on his summer trips for one simple reason.

"Transformer trout: You throw out a shrimp, and it turns into a trout," Pellegrin said with a chuckle.

But it was soon clear the fish — which we all knew were there — weren't going to play nice this morning.

Pellegrin and I each got a couple more swipes at our topwaters. Darsey picked up a trout here and there, but a downed cork was just as likely to end with a hardhead flopping around boat-side.

HEADING TO WEST TIM

Fellow guide Capt. Anthony Kyzar slipped into position just down the rocks from us, but he didn't stay long.

The action was just too slow to keep anyone's attention for long.

"That's the way this year has been: You murder them one day, and then you pick at them the next," Pellegrin said. "You make a box, but ...."

He was soon calling for us to pull in our lines, and he pointed the bow east to West Timbalier Island — only to find another boat anchored exactly where he wanted to fish.

"There's a pile of rocks right there, and it holds a lot of trout," Pellegrin said.

He idled around to get the lay of the land, and the anglers in the spot he wanted didn't set the hook once.

"They're not catching them, either," Pellegrin said. "Let's go to the back of the island."

ONE MAN'S TRASH ...

The new target was a bunch of old pilings just north of West Tim that once had been Caillou Island. Today, it's just open water.

But what lies beneath the dozen or so feet of water is what keeps Pellegrin returning.

"There's a ton of trash down there," he said. "You can't fish on the bottom, or you'll lose your bait."

He said the lost islands of Timbalier Bay are favored stomping grounds.

"What's left are oyster reefs, which hold a lot of fish," he said.

Pellegrin and Darsey immediately began chunking out live shrimp under slip corks.

continued on page 42 >>>

{ You might be able to catch a few specks inside this month, but those fish will be schoolies. Head to the barrier islands and outside bays for action that will really bend your rod. }

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I, on the other hand, refused to listen to reason. As a life-long hater of live bait, I tied on a jighead and prepared to work a plastic cocahoe over the bottom junk.

Pellegrin advised I change the artificial lure.

"What color are you using?" he asked. "You need something that looks like a shrimp."

We dug around in the boat and found a single clear/sparkle sand eel-like lure, which I threaded on the ¼-ounce jig.

And I was soon reeling in a trout.

Darsey and Pellegrin stuck with live bait, and they definitely caught more fish — but I was holding my own.

Until I lost the lure to some submerged junk.

We never located another sand eel, so I bit off the paddle of a cocahoe that, to me, looked pretty close to the lost lure.

But the trout largely turned their noses up at my offering. I still hooked one here and there, but the live-bait anglers were spanking me.

When the tide went slack, so did the bite. Pellegrin counted the fish, and we had 51 trout in the boat.

It never seemed like we spanked the fish, but picking at them had resulted in a growing pile of fish to be cleaned.

But the captain wasn't about to waste time waiting on the tide to turn. Instead, he said he wanted to make one more stop to use up the last of the shrimp.

Fifteen minutes later, he pulled off plane at a large facility featuring pilings radiating out from the platform.

Three boats already were in position, with one being over what Pellegrin characterized as "the honey hole."

But he simply adjusted and slid into position several casts away from the other vessels.

And, again, the captain warned of copious amounts of junk littering the bottom.

Two live shrimp were soon dangling over the trashy bottom, and Darsey was the first to strike gold.

I stubbornly stuck with plastics again — until the other two anglers had put several fish in the boat. As soon as I threw out a live shrimp and popped the cork, a trout swallowed the bait and I was wrestling it to the boat.

Hey, I'm a knucklehead, but I'm not completely stupid.

It only took 30 minutes for us to round out our three-man limit, and we were motoring back for the marina.

Pellegrin's watch showed it was noon on the dot. ▪

You might not catch absolute hammers at the islands, but you probably won't have to measure many trout, either.

TREBLE HOOKS HOLD TIGHT

Capt. Tommy Pellegrin knows live shrimp are key to quick summertime limits because trout just can't leave the crustaceans alone.

He uses slip corks because they make it so easy to cast, even working over deep water.

And on the terminal end of the leader is something he said is critical to suckering even finicky trout.

"I use a No. 4 treble hook," Pellegrin said.

The reason is pretty simple.

Pellegrin uses a No. 4 treble hook when fishing shrimp because he knows they will sink into flesh and won't let go without the use of pliers.

"When you hook one, you can pull it in the boat and never have to worry about it (coming off)," Pellegrin explained. "You have to use pliers to pull (the hook) out."

And solid hookups are much more likely than when using J hooks.

"That No. 4 treble hook is so small, (trout) don't even know different when the hook sticks them," Pellegrin said. "They don't even feel the hook when they swallow it." ▪

Capt. Tommy Pellegrin looks for sweet spots when he's fishing jetties and beaches. If you find water pulling out faster than the surrounding surf, actively feeding trout are almost guaranteed.

BEATING THE BARRIER ISLANDS

When conditions are slick enough to allow you to work the beaches on the barrier islands, ice chests can quickly fill with solid trout throughout the summer.

But Capt. Tommy Pellegrin said there's more to success than just trolling down the sand banks.

Instead, he focuses on the sweet spots.

"I look for the drains," Pellegrin said. "That's where the fish will be concentrated because the bait's got to come out of those troughs."

Finding these productive spots is a matter of reading the water.

"On a calm day, you can see the water pouring out of the drains," Pellegrin said. "Even on a rough day, you can see where the waves are going against the current, and you see some nervous water.

"That's where the drain is."

He said the same concept holds true for sandbars.

"The sandbars aren't just continuous," Pellegrin said. "The ends are openings that are just drains. On a falling tide, you can kill the trout there."

Once drains are identified, catching trout is pretty easy.

"You want to cast into the drain and let the tide pull your bait to the fish," Pellegrin explained.

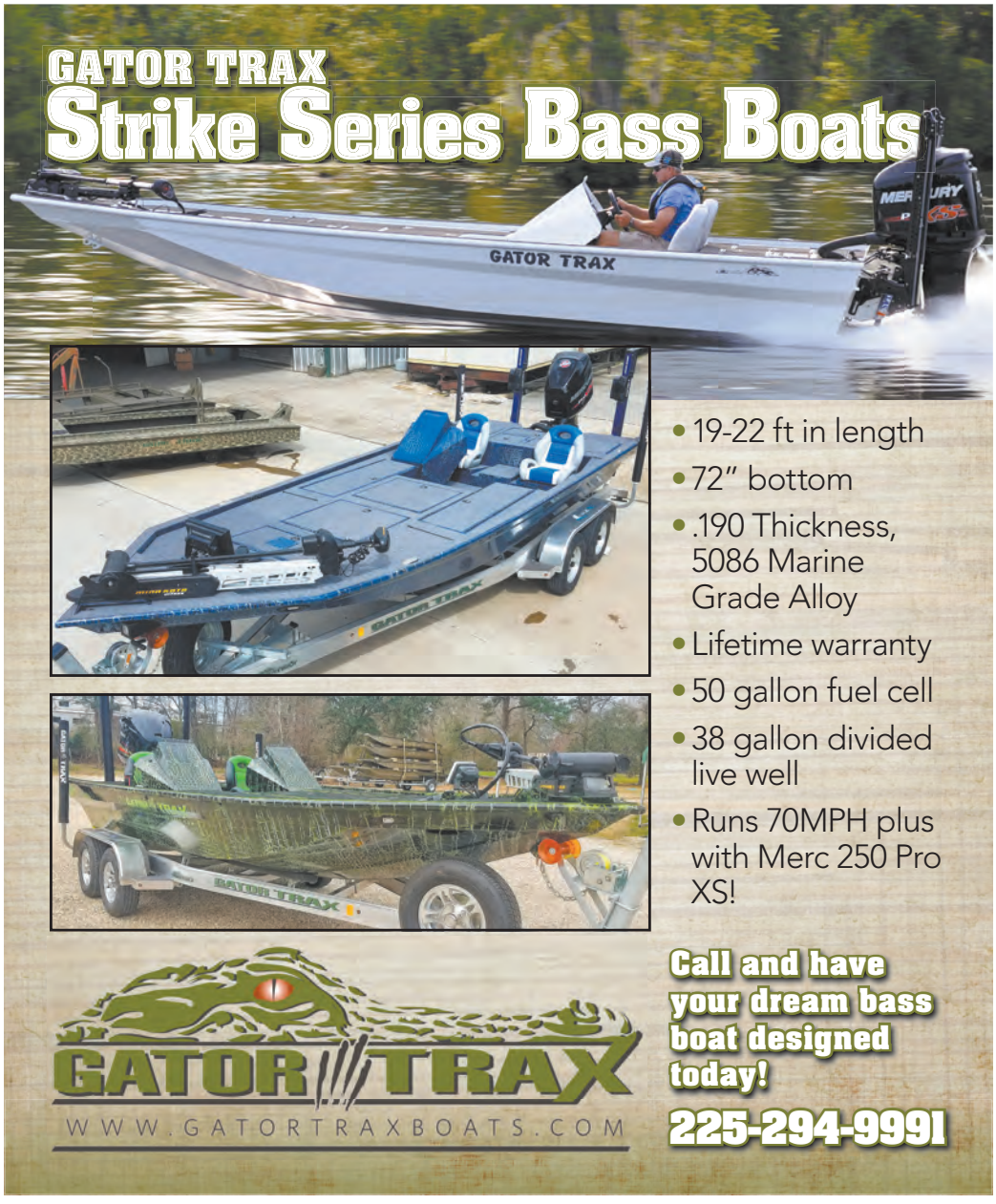
He said boat positioning depends on the direction the current moves through the drain: Pellegrin puts his boat on the upcurrent side of the drain, casting into the submerged ditch.

"The trout will be on that upcurrent side, waiting to ambush bait as it washes through," he said.

The whole trick to drains, however, is that they aren't permanent.

"Each year you have to relearn the beaches," Pellegrin said. "You've got to pay attention." ■

continues >>>



BE FLEXIBLE TO FILL TROUT LIMITS

Capt. Tommy Pellegrin always has a plan in mind when he leaves the dock. But he said he's ready to zig and zag because, well, stuff happens.

"It's hard to pick a spot before you leave the dock," Pellegrin said. "Different things happen: Somebody's there, the tide's not moving, whatever."

So while he always has a starting point in mind, he works like a chess player, with several moves mapped out in his head even as he leaves the marina.

"When you get on the water, you start seeing what's happening," Pellegrin said. "This morning, we started at the beach, and nothing was going on there. We went to another spot on the beach, and somebody was there.

"So we headed to a third spot (Caillou Island), and pecked at the trout until we had a nice box." ▪

WHY SLIDING CORKS ARE BEST

After the early morning topwater action dies out, it's pretty much a sure bet Capt. Tommy Pellegrin will turn to live shrimp.

And, because he's often fishing around rocks and tangles of trash, sliding corks are his No. 1 weapon.

The reason is simple: They're just easier to cast than standard titanium-wire corks.

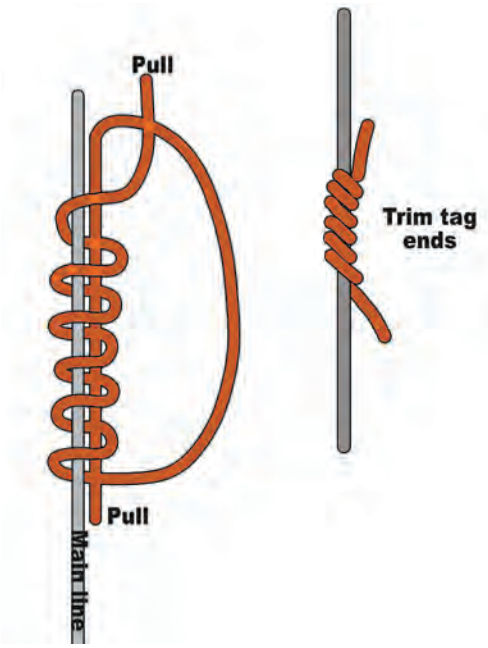
"I fish a lot of junk piles," Pellegrin explained. "All this structure out here is oil-field junk. So you can't fish on the bottom.

"You can't throw a 7-foot-deep bait effectively with a (static) cork. With a slip cork, you just set the stopper at 7 feet, and you've only got to throw your leader length. So now you can cast, and you're fishing right over the bottom."

He pre-rigs leaders and corks in small plastic bags so he can quickly replace any lost rigs, and he uses monofilament as stoppers.

"All you have to do is tie a uni-knot with a piece of mono around the main line, and then you have the perfect stopper," Pellegrin said. "You can just slide the stopper up and down the line to adjust the depth.

"And that uni-knot will go through the eyes of your rod, so you can cast without any problems." ▪



HOW TO TIE A UNI-KNOT STOPPER

Tying a uni-knot stopper is easy and quick, once you get the steps down.

Here's how you do it:

1) Run a length of mono parallel to the main line above the cork.

2) Form a loop, with the ends of the stopper mono facing opposite directions.

3) Loop one end of the stopper mono five or six times around both the main line and the stopper mono running parallel to the main line.

4) Pull the tag ends of the stopper mono tight to form a neat knot.

5) Clip the tag ends.

Now all you have to do is move the stopper up and down the line to set the depth for your bait.

TOP: July is a month where you might have to bounce around a bit, picking up a few fish at each stop. But those fish will quickly fill the cooler. **ABOVE:** Slip corks are the best tools for working live shrimp over fish-holding trash in Timbalier Bay because it's easy to cast the rigs no matter what depth you need to be fishing.

Andy Crawford *has spent nearly his entire career writing about and photographing Louisiana's hunting and fishing community. Learn more about his work at www.AndyCrawford.Photography.*

Birds just haven't shown up this year, so you'll likely not find any trout drifting the bays. Instead, find oilfield locations and satellite rigs, and work shrimp over the junk on the bottom.

THE BAY IS ALL ABOUT STRUCTURE

If conditions rule out fishing the beaches — or if the bite just isn't on — plenty of action awaits in Timbalier Bay.

And that means fishing structure, whether it's the satellite wellheads, oyster reefs or active oil-field facilities.

"It's all about structure," Pellegrin said. "Everything is about structure behind the (barrier) islands."

That doesn't mean every structure will hold trout every day. Pellegrin said you might have to bounce around to find active schools.

But don't just pull up to a piece of structure, make a couple of casts and move on.

Instead, Pellegrin advised working all the way around the area to determine if there's a sweet spot.

"Today they might be on the northeast side," he said. "Tomorrow, they might be on the northwest side. You have to just fish and move around until you find a pattern.

"The best thing to do is get on the side (of the structure) and fish up and down and along the side. If you don't find fish, move to the other side and do the same thing."

It won't take long to determine if trout are home and where baits should be placed.

"Do that until you find the pattern for the day, and now (every piece of structure) will be the same, as long the tide is the same, the water clarity is the same, everything is the same," Pellegrin said. ■

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HIGH NOON AT CRACKERHEAD

By Jerald Horst

Bream bite best when the sun is up, and Leonard Kleinpeter knows how to catch them. But this is a 'cricket-free zone' — here's how he uses grass shrimp to mop up.

"There's a good one," he said, glancing over his right shoulder. "And there's a good one," he said, throwing an eye over his left shoulder. "That's a good one, too," he nodded at another one.

"Oh hell, they are all good. I don't know why they aren't fished more."

The iron-haired man was Leonard Kleinpeter, at 74 a recognized bream-fishing ace. The "good ones" he was talking about were canals located in the Crackerhead oil field, 25 or 30 of them by his count.

Easy to find, the entrance to the oil field canal complex is located on the east side of Lake Verret, directly across the lake from the impossible-to-miss Shell Beach Landing — the lone camp community located on the lake's western shore.

While it wasn't high noon yet, daylight was well advanced when we launched Kleinpeter's boat in Pierre Part, the small commercial fishing community situated just north of the big lake.

That's the nice thing about bream fishing. Bream bite best when the sun is on the water. None of that crack-of-dawn stuff. The bream Kleinpeter was after were bluegills, well known for creating spawning beds with one nest almost touching the other.

When you find one big bull bream, the colorful spawning males who guard the nests, you usually find others nearby. Bluegill spawning season begins in May and lasts well into summer.

Kleinpeter's road trip to Lake Verret didn't involve a stop at a bait shop. He prefers to catch his own bait, right from the waters of the lake he fishes in.

He always uses grass shrimp for bream bait instead of crickets, the usual standard. "One bite on a cricket and they take it all," he explained. "And with crickets, sometimes smaller bream nibble around on them."

After getting his bait, it was off to the races.

FINDING THE BREAM UP NEXT >

FINDING THE BREAM

"I always fish Lake Verret for bream," said Kleinpeter unambiguously. "Not the lake proper. You hear about people catching 150 in one spot in the lake. I guess that I don't have the patience to find those spots."

Crackerhead is the name of the bream game for him.

By his own estimate, 90 percent of the bream beds he fishes are located at the very back of dead-end canals. "They love being kind of boxed in," he said. There are exceptions. His "Old Buddies" spot is located along the side of a canal bank, well away from a dead-end.

Best spots tend to be in the shade of trees rather than in the open sun. Move your bait from spot to spot, completely combing the area, he advised. "If you catch a colorful breeding male, don't keep moving. Re-bait and throw right back in the same vicinity. Do that until they stop biting.

"Their beds are spots fanned out in the bottom with their fins. They are territorial about their individual spot, but like to build their beds in clusters."

FISHING TACTICS

"Approach canal dead-ends carefully. Slow to an idle at least 50 yards out," Kleinpeter instructed. "At 20 to 30 yards out, begin using a trolling motor for a final approach.

"Keep the boat away from the shallows. Use the full length of the jig pole and line to reach the spots to be fished. Stay seated if at all possible, so that the fish don't see you. They are in very shallow water and easily scared."

Kleinpeter uses 3 feet more line than the length of his pole. With one hand on the pole, he uses his other hand to take up the slack and shorten the line, making pole handling less awkward.

On the outswing, he lets the line in his line-holding hand go slack to get maximum distance.

Finally, he coaches to pay attention. "Big bull bream often give a classic bull bream bite—just one tiny twitch of the cork that shows that they picked the bait up and are holding it.

"If you don't instantly respond, they will swallow the hook and get deep-hooked. That slows down your fishing because you have to dig the hook out of their throat."

Kleinpeter says that he has taken as many as 80 or 90 bull bream from a single bed, but that 20 is a more typical catch. "If something spooks them and they stop biting, leave and come back in 10 or 15 minutes. You can move back then and catch more."

FISHING TOOLS UP NEXT >

ABOVE: Breeding male bluegills are easily identified by their bright colors, especially their rust-colored chests. BELOW: Kleinpeter makes his rig easier to handle by using his free hand to take up slack in the line as he retrieves and sets out his baited hook.

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FISHING TOOLS

For bream fishing, Kleinpeter exclusively uses 10-foot long graphite jig poles instead of rods and reels. Each pole is rigged with a Mr. Crappie Jigging Reel, making line storage, pay out and retrieval a snap.

His reels are spooled with 10-pound test high-visibility Golden Stren monofilament line. He picked up the high-vis habit fishing for crappie, where he often doesn't use a cork, and being able to line-watch is a big advantage.

He uses a No. 8 bream hook and a small foam cork cut in half crossways. "You don't want a lot of racket in shallow water," was his explanation for the modified cork.

Unlike cricket fishermen, who almost always use split shots on their lines to take their buoyant cricket down, Kleinpeter seldom uses a split shot unless he is fishing over 3 feet deep.

"All fish like to hit baits on the fall. The slower the fall, the better." ▪

Each of Kleinpeter's jig poles is rigged with a Mr. Crappie Jigging Reel. INSET: Kleinpeter's terminal rig is fairly standard for bream fishermen, except for the modified half-cork.

THE MAN and his boat

In spite of having lived a high-powered life, Leonard Kleinpeter is living proof that effective fishing doesn't demand investment in an expensive fiberglass bass boat.

He served as Louisiana's assistant secretary of state for 12 years, chief of staff to the lieutenant governor for eight years and special assistant to the governor for four years. But he is an unassuming, if driven, man.

The boat is like the man, a simple 14-foot bateau (that's 'flatboat' for you non-Baton Rouge/Atchafalaya Basin folks) powered by a 25-horsepower tiller handle outboard motor.

"I like a small boat because it's easier to approach spawning fish," he explained.

His front pedestal seat is mounted on a stand made of scrap 2x4 pieces. His trolling motor, while incongruously large at 55 pounds of thrust, is a simple hand-controlled clamp-on version.

It's a basic fishing machine, for one that fishes as much as he does.

He fishes seated, with one hand on the trolling motor and the other clasping his jig pole.

Everything is about function first, not form. And he never removes the Bluetooth headset he uses to keep track of his business, Southern Hydroseeders. ▪

— Jerald Horst

Kleinpeter keeps one hand on the trolling motor to position his boat carefully to avoid spooking the fish, while fishing with the other hand. Note the homemade pedestal seat mount.

HOW TO CATCH YOUR OWN GRASS SHRIMP
UP NEXT >

>

How to catch your own GRASS SHRIMP

Leonard Kleinpeter stresses that a proper dip net is needed to effectively catch grass shrimp from their preferred habitat, dense beds of coontail and other aquatic plants.

Store-bought nets with their deep floppy mesh material and flimsy handles just won't cut it.

He makes his own net by stretching metal window screen across a dip net frame. It is stretched just tightly enough to allow it to sag very slightly, and wired to the frame with picture frame-hanging wire.

Grass shrimp are tiny but lethal baits. Virtually every fish species eats them. The larger shrimp is a female bearing eggs on the swimmerets beneath her tail.

Kleinpeter offered three cautions. First, the screen wire must be smooth so that a small bait dip net doesn't hang up on a burr. Also, the net handle has to have "some horsepower," as he puts it, to work in heavy grass beds.

His metal handle is reinforced enough for him to use the net as a paddle to help push his boat through grass beds as he dips for shrimp.

Finally, allow enough time to find water grass beds. For reasons he can't explain, water plant beds have become scarce in the Lake Verret area. "There used to be grass everywhere. In just a couple of years they have almost disappeared," he moaned.

Kleinpeter used re-purposed plastic margarine containers to cornmeal his shrimp. Whatever container is used, it should be high-sided because grass shrimp hop actively when out of water.

"The cornmeal makes the little rascals easier to catch and hold," he explained. "You need to re-bait rapid fire when you are on a bed of fish." ▪

— Jerald Horst

TIP OF THE DAY UP NEXT >

1 Leonard Kleinpeter's shrimp net looks like nothing so much as a giant tennis racket.

2 Dip the net under dense water plant beds and lift it clear of the water. The net will be quite heavy.

3 Remove the plants from the net, shaking them briefly before discarding them.

4 With the bowl of the large wire net held slightly submerged, scoop the shrimp from it with a small bait dip net and drop them into a container of water.

5 After dipping is finished, net several dozen shrimp and drop them into a plastic container with about a half-cup of cornmeal.

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TIP OF THE DAY

He smelled so good I wanted to lick him.

Leonard Kleinpeter has just sprayed himself with bug repellent, but not the stinky stuff in a can.

He had filled a pump spray bottle with vanilla extract to keep the gnats away.

"When they are so bad that they will choke you without it, they won't bother you with it on," he smirked. "It has no residual effects, either — no nasty smells; it doesn't make your skin hot — it's wonderful." ▪

— Jerald Horst

Leonard Kleinpeter applies vanilla extract from a pump spray bottle to keep gnats at bay.

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THE PLAQUE in the swamp

Bass, crappie and bream fishermen who frequent the canals of Crackerhead can't help but to have seen a solid brass plaque mounted on one of a pair of modest-sized cypress trees standing in the water off a canal bank.

Many wonder about the story.

Well, Leonard Kleinpeter put the plaque there.

When Bubbie Duplantier and Kleinpeter were both in their late 30s, they began bream fishing together and became best friends. "He just loved to catch bream," Kleinpeter chuckled.

They fished together for decades. Then in October of 2016, Duplantier and his wife Suzy were brutally murdered in a robbery in Baton Rouge. The loss affected Kleinpeter deeply.

Leonard Kleinpeter mounted this brass plaque in Crackerhead to commemorate a long bream fishing friendship.

He knew right away where to mount the plaque after it was made.

"The spot is where my old podnah and me used to fish all the time," he said. "If he ran the motor, that's where he went first every time."

The "Old Buddies" plaque stands as a silent sentinel to a long fishing friendship. ▪

— Jerald Horst

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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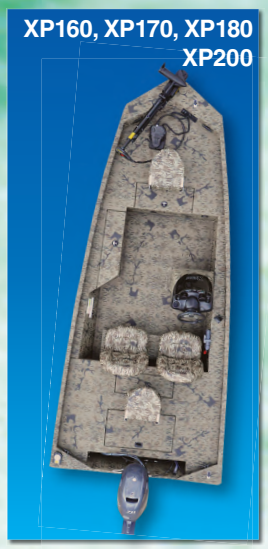

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HIGH HEAT TROUT TACTICS

When the mercury rises and the temperature ramps up this month, try these tips to keep putting speckled trout on ice.

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

By David A. Brown

Sunscreen, wide-brim hats, those little handheld fans that blow a cool mist on your face ... yeah, speckled trout will never benefit from such high-heat indulgences.

So, when summer's swelter makes this temperature-sensitive fish uncomfortable, you may have to spend a little more time looking — but the payoff will often justify the effort.

WHERE TO LOOK

Working out of the Golden Meadow area, Capt. Troy Robichaux of Saltwater Guide Service has fished the Southeast Louisiana marshes for more than 30 years. The Gulf's relentless gnawing, he said, has significantly altered his trout game plan, especially when hot months challenge the pursuit.

Inshore gas wells are one of his main options, largely because of coastal erosion. The shade and feeding opportunities are undeniably attractive to trout; but this has not always been such an obvious move.

>

Nearshore drilling rigs provide the shade, shelter and food that trout need.

"I'VE BEEN GUIDING FOR 25 YEARS AND DURING THE FIRST FIVE YEARS, I'M NOT SURE IF I KNEW TROUT FISHING ON INSHORE RIGS WAS AN OPTION," ROBICHAUX SAID.

"That's because it didn't take as much knowledge and versatility as it does now to stay on the fish. I used to fish mainly islands, reefs in Timbalier Bay and the barrier islands along the Gulf.

"Other options besides these rigs are the beaches of the various barrier islands, as well as the jetties and underwater rock piles of East Timbalier Island, plus sandbars and coves on the back side of the big barrier islands."

Capt. Anthony Randazzo, who operates Paradise Plus Guide Service in Venice, said it's all about the food. Trout don't feel like moving as much in the tepid brine, so fishing near the best feeding opportunities keeps him close to the specks.

"We generally know where the most bait is going to be located along the coast, which equates to about 40 miles along either side of the lower Mississippi River," Randazzo said of his necessary recon efforts. "This includes several jetties and shoals along the coast, as well as submerged rock piles and wrecks. We will search the entire coastal area day by day, looking for concentrations of mullet and menhaden."

On the west side of the state, Capt. Eric Rue of Calcasieu Charters targets grassy flats, rock/shell reefs and drilling rigs within the brackish body known as Big Lake. As the warm season ensues, he finds trout move closer to the Gulf to take advantage of a baitfish and shrimp influx, and to escape decreasing salinity levels in the upper-end.

THE VARIABLES

Once summer arrives, there's no escaping the stifling heat; but savvy anglers will meet their objective by paying attention to the day's conditions. Cloud cover helps moderate the hot stuff, while a cooling breeze makes fish and fishermen a little less burdened.

METEOROLOGY: Robichaux regards summer storms — either the gradually building thunderheads that overtake the horizon, or those wickedly unpredictable pop-ups — as a bite killer. The main influence, he said, is the high wind that stirs up the water and usually puts the fish in a negative mood.

"The calmest side of the Delta is generally most productive, but sometimes we opt for the windward side when needing a little help from Mother Nature to offset weak tide movements," Randazzo explained. "Wind can move water and make fish eat when nothing else will. The fish will usually stay closest to the moving water, and also the deepest water, in an attempt to remain comfortable.

"You can bet if a strong line of storms forms during the nighttime hours, the early morning bite will be off. We try to choose the areas that we can tell were least affected by the wind and waves based on the location of the storms, and the wind direction associated with these storms during the night."

One thing trout anglers don't like is storms at sunrise, as the chances of catching a box of specks those days become slim. When this happens, Randazzo said he'll look for any weather windows that allow him to target redfish, tripletail or red snapper while he waits for the trout to regain their composure.

LUNAR INFLUENCE: Before each month's full moon, Randazzo expects trout to move up shallow and find hard sandy bottoms to spawn. Most of the larger females, he said, will remain deep around offshore structures, while smaller females and males can be found from the coast to offshore structures.

"Typically, we are targeting numbers, other than on the slack tide days on the front side of a full moon, when larger females are more likely to be caught," Randazzo said. "Trout are generally aggressive throughout the summer. When it's time to eat, they do so with a vengeance.

"Only the full moon can cause the trout to become finicky feeders. The remainder of each month and its moon cycle are very comparable with fish feeding aggressively at peak feeding times."

WATCH THE TIME: "The early morning and late evening hours are generally the most productive when the water is coolest and the fish are inclined to exert energy for feeding," Randazzo said. "The trout fight hard and come aboard spewing partially digested bait all over the

Summer months are known to yield some of the year's biggest trout.

deck of the boat. Once the sun is high in the sky (9:30 a.m. when it's sunny, later on cloudy days) the bite quickly fades."

BEST BAITS

Artificial lures are most efficient, as they allow you to quickly cover water and find active areas. However, Robichaux said bringing live shrimp and croakers along increases your chances for quality bites — especially during July, which he considers a big-trout month.

"My favorite way to fish live shrimp is using the 4 Horsemen cork with 2 to 3 feet of leader and a kahle hook," he said. "Also I will throw shrimp and croakers on a kahle hook with a small split shot weight so it sinks slowly in the water column."

Favoring Bass Assassin Sea Shads in natural colors like opening night/chart tail or avocado/red tail, Randazzo sizes his baits to the quality of fish he's expecting. He'll start with 4-inch plastics and move up to a 5-inch Texas Shad (soft jerkbait) for larger trout. He's also keen to work a Rapala Skitterwalk Jr. for explosive topwater strikes.

"Trout along the surf and barrier islands are generally shallow, so we use ⅛- and ¼-ounce jigs," Randazzo said. "As we move out to deeper structures, we try to figure out how deep the fish are suspending in the water column with our electronics and choose the best weight to reach them.

"Sometimes ⅜-ounce jigs or heavier are needed. However, there are many days where the fish prefer a slow-sinking lighter jig — even when they're 10 to 25 feet below the surface. If we're using live shrimp, free-lining the bait and/or sliding corks are the preferred methods to get the bait in the strike zone. We use the

continues >

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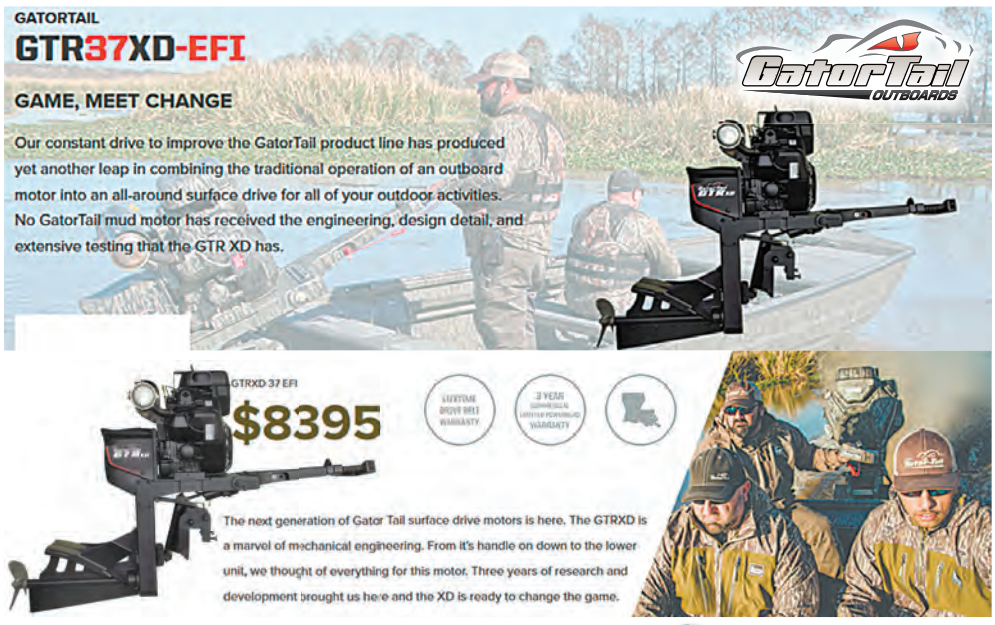

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same tackle as other times of the year, but may opt for 20-pound leader material (vs. 30-pound) and use longer leaders for finicky summer trout."

Rue prefers covering water with MirrOlure Top Dogs and She Dogs, along with Norton Sand Eels on light jigheads. However, when big fish often flee summer's discomfort by slipping into deeper, cooler water, he'll drift a live pogy or finger mullet under a popping cork.

When depth permits, Rue offers this tactical tip: "Get outside the zone of the boat" by silently wading or approaching from upwind. Making long casts with braided line and a 20-pound fluorocarbon leader will deliver the goods.

Notably, big trout often bite on the outer end of a long cast, so don't nap on the retrieve — expect a bite as soon as your bait hits the water. Also, Rue said trial and error will lead you to general areas frequented by big fish, but close attention to water clarity and temperature, salinity levels and bait will help you establish consistency.

The fact of the matter is that we're going to be saddled with the heat until fall starts sliding its way south. Until then, drink plenty of water, lather on the sunscreen and map out your route to a hot trout bite. ▪

ABOVE: When the bite is on, doubleheaders are common. **BELOW RIGHT:** Idling past coastal drilling structures and side-scanning the area will show you where baitfish and trout are holding. **BELOW LEFT:** Coastal barrier islands are a popular summer trout destination.

STAY MOBILE FOR MAXIMUM TROUT ACTION

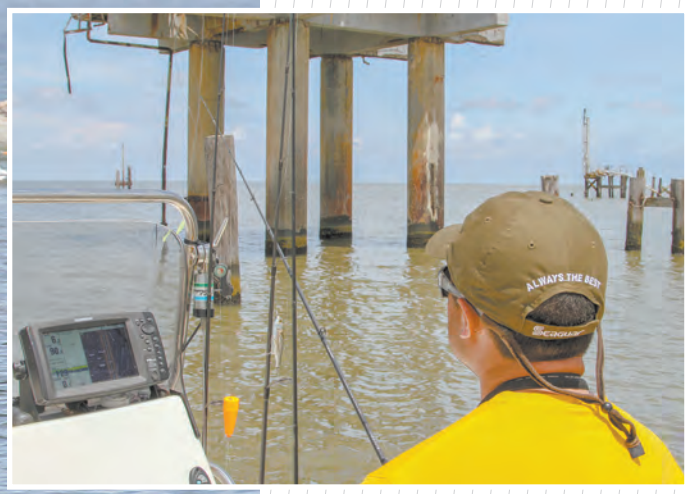
If the notion of "shooting fish in a barrel" appeals to you, summer trout fishing probably won't be your cup of tea. Sure, you may find a pile of fish, but finding implies looking — and this time of year often requires a lot of that.

"The one thing that separates the guys who constantly catch more trout than others is the willingness to run-and-gun 'til you figure out a pattern or area where the fish are biting," said Capt. Troy Robichaux. "The number one mistake most anglers make is sitting in one spot hoping the fish will start biting or come to them. We believe in going to the fish.

"There are some days when you have to understand that it's a slow bite, and you have to stick and stay and make them play. This comes from years on the water, determining if it's a slow bite or if it's a bite that's just going to stop and start, and it's time to move to an area with better tide or more bait or better water."

Capt. Anthony Randazzo agreed, and amplified that point with this parting note: "The number one key to summer success while trout fishing is to start very early. You want to watch the sunrise from the boat, and hopefully be casting at the safest early light you can coordinate." ▪

— David A. Brown



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Lyle Johnson chairs the Louisiana Fish Records Program, and spends lots of his spare time targeting Blind River bass. Here's how he fills the box — and maintains the books.

THE RECORD KEEPER

By Jerald Horst

The hits were explosive — water and pieces of vegetation flew wildly.

Or maybe it was Lyle Johnson's violent reaction to the hits. He doesn't like 'em to get away, and he fusses at himself for every missed fish.

That figures. Johnson is the president of the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association, and serves as chairman of the Louisiana Fish Records Program, the official repository for the Top 10 records on fish caught by the state's sportsmen and women.

"Probably 85 percent of my fishing is for bass," he confessed. "Right here — in the Blind River-Amite Diversion Canal Basin. A lot of people describe Blind River as 'hard to fish.' I'm not one of them.

"They come out here one day and fish and their success rate is not good, so they give up. The way to success in anything in the outdoors is to put your time in."

Lecture complete. >

Johnson is close to fishing in his back yard. From his home on the Diversion Canal, he ran south this morning, through a murderer's row of upscale waterfront homes, and popped out into the green wilderness edging Blind River.

At the river, he hung a left downstream, and stopped shortly at a slough draining the swamp into the river. The lures he chose for the day were lures that work most effectively in the extremely heavy vegetation of the river: A pointed nose frog and a Strike King Rage Tail Rage Craw.

Johnson's favored colors for the craw are watermelon red or green pumpkin. His craws were rigged Texas style with a 3/16-ounce head, preferably tungsten because it's smaller than lead and easier to pull through vegetation without it as much of it collecting on the lure.

He invariably dipped the craw's claws in chartreuse Spike-It Garlic Dip-N-Glo. "When I finish, you can eat it," he beamed. "The lure is salt-impregnated, and I added garlic."

It was mid-summer and promised to be clear and hot, but the early morning sky was hazy. That and the noticeably cleaner water draining down the slough prompted Johnson to start with his frog.

It produced and it produced early, but it was hard weaning him off using the craw. He always pitched his craw instead of casting it.

"It's so accurate and if you do it right, it makes so little splash when it hits the water," he explained. "Another advantage to pitching is that it's less strenuous on the angler."

He compared it to ball pitching.

"A baseball player throws overhand, but is done for after a few innings. A girls' softball pitcher pitches underhand and can play every game," he said.

He developed a routine. As he picked and poked down the bank, he relied on his craw. When he hit a slough, he shifted to the black frog. It worked, but it was making him crazy. Bass would blow up the frog and he'd miss them. When he threw the craw, they ate the claws off over and over.

Lots of them were chubby goggle-eyes, and he caught some of them. But most were largemouths, many 1-pounders he called "normal OK keepers." But he was quick to add that enough 3 ½- to 4-pound bass are caught from Blind River to be considered "not rare."

The overcast skies hung on, so Johnson began bouncing from slough to slough to take advantage of the extended topwater bite. Then, at 9:30 a.m. the sun popped out and that action stopped. He was near the mouth of Blind River, where it dumped into Lake Maurepas.

From there, he moved back upriver and took Alligator Bayou, a 2 ½-mile loop off the river's left bank. "The water tends to be clearer in the bayou and its sloughs run harder," he said. "Of course, you don't need a lot of current to catch fish in sloughs."

The fish bit there too, but Johnson became quiet as morning wore on and time became short. It was like he was quietly soaking in the placid swamp around him.

He didn't even fuss when he missed a fish. ▪

> *"It's so accurate and if you do it right, it makes so little splash when it hits the water."*
>
> *-Johnson, on pitching versus casting*

Johnson likes to dip his craw's claws in chartreuse Spike-It Garlic Dip-N-Glo to make them more attractive to the fish.

TIPS FOR BLIND RIVER BASS UP NEXT >

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TIPS FOR BLIND RIVER **SUMMERTIME BASS**

- **Look for places that bass go to eat.** That's where they congregate. Focus on sloughs and points without ruling out bank fishing.
- **Never pass any wood,** including camp pilings.
- **Be patient.** Some competitive bass fishermen fish half the day with no fish but end up winning the tournament. Bass have definite feeding periods. Keep fishing until they occur.
- **Keep bait selection basic.** You don't have to go through 20 baits. Keep it simple by sticking to a few. Limit plastic baits to crawfish or worms. For clearer waters, use green variations. For murkier waters, use dark colors like dark purple.
- **Fish topwaters** like frogs, buzzbaits and Chug Bugs early in the morning.
- **Blind River is subject to tides.** Falling tides are always best. West winds move the tide, while east winds hold it back.
- **Hit every isolated piece of cover.** A trotline pole with a clump of grass hanging on it is almost a sure-fire spot. It's cover out in open water. Cypress trees in open water away from the bank are great.
- **Go with realistic expectations.** Blind River is an excellent fishery, but not a trophy fishery. A trophy bass here is 4 pounds.
- **Give yourself some time.** If you come the first time and don't catch fish here, don't give up. By the third or fourth trip, you will figure out the pattern.
- **Bring a camera.** Blind River has lots of wildlife and swamp scenery. The yellow, white, pink and purple water lily blossoms are beautiful. ▪

— Jerald Horst

Never pass wood in Blind River without casting to it.

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JOHNSON'S BLIND RIVER **BAIT CALENDAR**

Topwater frogs and Texas-rigged craws are "in season" on Blind River for Lyle Johnson from March to November. But he is quick to admit that the Texas craw is his mainstay lure. The clear water coming out of the sloughs draining into the river is what prompted his heavy use of the frog the day we fished.

Also, starting in late June, bass "gang up" on points to ambush shad and pogies, prompting him to throw blue and silver, blue and white, or chartreuse mid-running Bandit crankbaits.

He will also have a rod ready-rigged with a blue and chrome Rat-L-Trap or a Strike King Red Eye Shad. Finally, he will also hit points with a 7 ½-inch, Texas-rigged Zoom worm in sprayed grass color.

Overall, a Texas-rigged Strike King Rage Tail Rage Craw is Johnson's go-to lure on Blind River.

Starting in November, bass move off points and spread back out along the river's banks. Lunker Lure spinners with one gold and one silver Colorado blade and swim jigs become effective.

It's at this time of year, November to the end of the spawn in March, that Johnson shifts his attention to the Amite River from Port Vincent to 5 miles south of French Settlement, what he called his "favorite place in the world to fish."

If he fishes Blind River during the February to April spawn, he likes Zoom Brush Hogs in watermelon red and red bug.

January and February are also good topwater months, when he likes to fish with Smithwick Rogues. His favorite color is a black-backed version with gold sides and an orange belly. ▪

— Jerald Horst

DON'T COOK A RECORD FISH UP NEXT >

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DON'T COOK A **RECORD FISH**

"Get in the books." That's Lyle Johnson's message to his fellow fishermen.

As chairman of the state's Fish Records Program, he encourages people to enter their fish, even if it isn't a No. 1.

"Catching any fish in the all-time Top 10 is a real accomplishment.

"Most of the time, the reaction from people when they get their certificate is they are really happy. Whether the fish is No. 1 in the category or No. 10 doesn't really matter."

It takes a lot of his time, but Johnson loves the interaction with his fellow fishermen and the memories it has produced. One of his favorite stories concerned an 11-year-old boy who caught a 114-pound blue catfish, a potential new state record.

"One of our requirements is to have a biologist identify the fish. I called the biologist who signed the application and he mentioned that he never saw the fish, just a photograph. I was faced with having to call the family and tell them that the fish didn't qualify.

"It had been over a week and I didn't think it would turn out well. But, fortunately, they had frozen the whole fish. It breaks my heart to disqualify a fish, but you can't change the rules for one person and not another."

The application form is simple to fill out, but the most difficult part is finding an available biologist to sign off on it. "Calling the Baton Rouge office of the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will get you to a regional office to talk to someone.

"Another option is checking with a local university, because any degreed biologist is qualified to sign the form. If the fish is small enough to freeze whole, it can be held for later identification if need be."

Johnson cautions anglers to look at the official version of the records, which are housed on the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association website, the designated keepers of the records. Many other websites will list the records, but they are often out of date and not accurate.

"What I encourage everybody to do is go look at the records. I guarantee if you fish any at all, you have thrown back or cooked a fish that qualified for the books. We have quite a few categories that don't even have the full 10 entries.

"We are always adding new species or dividing categories. For example, a few years ago, we separated blue and channel catfish into separate categories. There are only about five entries in each now. That means that someone in Lake Verret will catch and eat a record fish this weekend. Any size fish will get an entry in an open category."

One that personally surprises him is the bluegill category in the Fly Rod Division. It isn't filled, in spite of this fish being a prime target for fly rodders.

The Fish Records Program maintains separate divisions for fly rods and for rod and reels. They also have a Pond Division for fish taken from private ponds. ▪

— Jerald Horst

Lyle Johnson serves as both president of the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association and chairman of the Louisiana Fish Records Program.

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Lyle Johnson devotes a lot of time he could be fishing to maintaining the Louisiana Fish Records Program.

A 'CONSUMPTIVE CONSERVATIONIST'

Lyle Johnson wears a lot of hats.

The Gonzales native is the long-serving president of the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association (LOWA), the state's professional organization for outdoors writers and communicators.

And he's the chairman of the Louisiana Fish Records Program, the official repository for the Top 10 records of fish caught by the state's sportsmen.

He does a weekly sports and outdoors column for the Ascension Advocate and is the owner, executive producer and cohost of Ascension Outdoors Television.

And he's got a full-time day job as a planner for Turner Industries.

So how does he find time to hunt and fish?

Active in the East Ascension Sportsman's League, he calls himself a "consumptive conservationist" explaining, "I am a very active conservationist, but I am an active consumer.

"I believe that harvest — not greed or overharvest, is important. A large percentage of fish and wildlife will die every year, even without harvest."

The majority of Johnson's hunting is small game, especially squirrels and rabbits. "Squirrel and rabbit hunting is very social. It's good for kids because they don't have to sit still and behave. Duck hunting is social, too.

"Still hunting for squirrels is solitary, but allows a lot of time to observe nature."

He admits that his "all-time" favorite fishing is for bass, adding that he took after his father Jerry, who friends would say could catch bass in a dish rag. "He would fish for everything though. With eight kids, fish was a big part of the family diet."

In spite of Johnson's largemouth bass passion, he readily admits that he loves to fish for panfish like bream and sac-a-lait. He also regularly angles for catfish off the pier of his home on the Diversion Canal in St. Amant.

But he doesn't ignore speckled trout, redfish and flounder. "My biggest fish so far is a 118-pound yellowfin tuna," he said proudly. ▪

— Jerald Horst

BLIND RIVER: PROS AND CONS UP NEXT >

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BLIND RIVER: PROS AND CONS

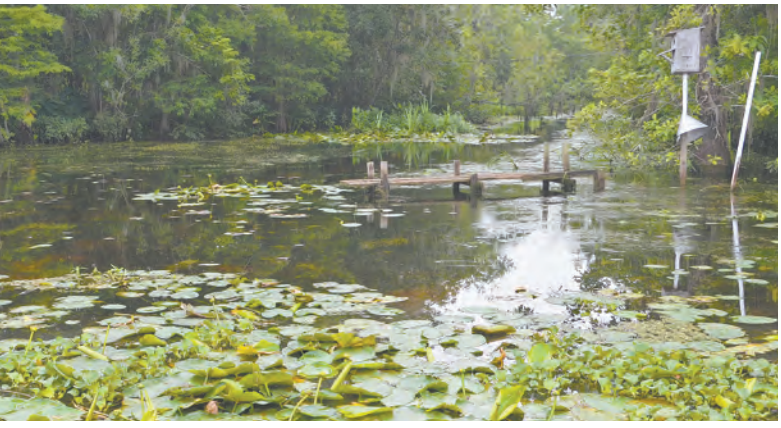
Blind River is one of Southeast Louisiana's secret spots. Located between the major population centers of urban and suburban New Orleans and Baton Rouge, it may be accessed from U.S. Highway 61, which parallels Interstate Highway 10.

It is easily one of the state's most scenic cypress-tupelo swamps, and the river itself is an official Scenic River in Louisiana's Natural and Scenic Rivers System. The swamp along the river is a riot of green — a jungle.

There are enough old growth cypress trees left from the old days to add majesty to the subtropical tapestry of irises, lily pads, elephant ears, cut grass, duck weeds, tupelos and wax myrtles.

"I never get tired of looking at the scenery while I fish," murmured Johnson reverentially.

There are lots of largemouth bass too, but compared to other places, they are smaller, he explained. "People look at the habitat and come with expectations that are too high. They expect bigger fish.



"There's a local evening tournament on Wednesdays here. Twenty-five to 40 boats will enter it. Eight or 9 pounds will win it. But the bass are very plentiful here."

The worst thing about this area are the effects of hurricanes and tropical storms. The water comes up extremely fast with several days of south and east winds, plus rains. Then it takes a long time for the water to go out.

"The water gets bad — it's hot that time of year already, and the low-oxygen water kills fish," he rolled his eyes for emphasis. "Massive — it takes a couple of years to recover.

"Another problem is the weir on the entrance of the Diversion Canal from Amite. It's designed to allow 30 percent of the Amite River's flood waters to enter Blind River. The rocks in the weir have sunk and now 70 percent comes down to Blind River.

"So much water can come down the Diversion Canal that it can force Blind River to flow backward and fill the swamps. This results in poor water quality and minor fish kills, mainly shad. It also makes the river muddy." ■

— Jerald Horst

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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IT'S PRIME TIME TO TARGET OUACHITA RIVER CRAPPIE IN THE TOPS. HERE'S HOW ONE NOTED ANGLER CATCHES HIS SHARE OF SUMMERTIME SLABS HUNKERED DOWN IN THE BRUSH.

— By Kinny Haddox —

If you want to make Bobby Phillips smile, don't tell him a joke. Just say, "Ouachita River crappie," and that's pretty much all it takes.

The amicable 74-year-old crappie fisherman will light up and say, "Where's my pole? They're calling my name. "

A legend in Northeast Louisiana as a noted slab chaser and founder of the well-known Honey Hole Tackle Store in West Monroe, Phillips is always ready to hit the river in July.

"We have some fantastic crappie fishing around here, but there's no better place to be than the Ouachita River in the summer," Phillips said. "You can catch them in the tops single poling. You can catch them in the sloughs and river lakes spider-rigging, and you can catch them in the creeks using either technique.

"There are plenty of fish and plenty of places to fish. But here's the deal: The river system is full of treetops, brush tops and all kinds of laydowns. They are easy to find, fairly easy to fish and provide a consistent way to catch summer crappie."

His approach to fishing tops is simple: Be thorough, like a detective working a tough case. Fish tops from front to back, and top to bottom. And remember, don't give up too soon.

START OUT, GO IN UP NEXT >

START OUT, GO IN

"When you find a good looking top, start on the outer edge in deeper water with a 1/32-ounce jig and swim it across the top," Phillips said. "Work around all the edges good and see if there are any fish suspended shallow. Then fish your way in, fishing all the outer structure before moving in toward the bank. Start deep and work your way shallow. That way you don't leave any limb unturned, and you don't disturb any of the fish before you get to put a jig in front of their mouth.

"If you don't have any luck, switch to a 1/16th jig and work it right down in the thickest part of the top. Go all the way to the bottom if you can and work it up slowly. If there are crappie in there, you'll be putting the jig in front of them at some point."

Learn as you go. And pay attention to where you are catching fish in the top, and at what depth. When you go to the next one, make sure you work that same part of the structure thoroughly. And here's an important lesson from Phillips: Crappie don't bite all the time. If it's a good looking top — even if you don't catch one — come back and try again later. They might have decided they're actually hungry by then.

Phillips fishes river tops with hair and plastic jigs this time of year. If you are out in a slough or river lake spider-rigging, shiners will catch fish. But in the tops, shiners will just keep you hung up, and you won't be able to control where your bait needs to be.

Phillips has a good tip for keeping jig fishing from getting expensive, too.

"You lower your jig slowly and when it bumps something, gently move it to the side," he said. "When you lift your jig to move it, gently lift it. If you move it fast, you are going to get hung. The more touch you can put on moving your jig, the fewer times you are going to get hung."

If you do get hung, the best way to get your jig back is to point the fishing rod at the jig, reel up all the slack and push the jig off the limb with the end of your pole. Nine times out of 10, that will work unless you have wrapped your line around the limb.

"Fish generally like the jig presented in a vertical manner, straight up and down," Phillips said. "And do your best to hold the jig still. You'll see some guys jigging it up and down 6 inches or a foot. That isn't the best way to fish it anywhere, and especially in a river top. Fish like the jig sitting still — and that's also how you'll keep it from getting hung."

BLUE BLAZES UP NEXT >

Keeping your distance from a top and fishing it from the outside in helps you catch more crappie.

WHAT'S A "TOP"?

A top is simply a submerged brush top, the top of a bush or tree or a fallen tree with lots of submerged limbs. Tops sometimes lay where they fall, and other times current washes them onto sandbars or into river lakes. Tops hold baitfish — and that's where you'll find the feeding fish. Tops also give fish like crappie a good place to hide from predators. ▪

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BLUE BLAZES

"It's an unfortunate fact for us old men, but the river crappie seem to like to feed best in the middle of the day this time of year," he said. "When it's hot as blue blazes, that's when they are going to bite, especially the good ones. That usually comes between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. I stick with it long as I can, but when it gets too hot, I just have to go home even if they are biting."

Phillips' other best tips for summer tops?

Keep your eyes open when you are running up and down the river, boating through the sloughs and easing up creeks. Look for tops that have lots of limbs and cover up shallow, but also extend out into deeper water. Mark those in your mind and fish the best looking ones. As you spend more time fishing that way, remember which ones you've caught fish at before. Don't be afraid to run a lot of the river looking: Sometimes you have to hit several tops before you find fish.

One important tip is to try and stay in areas that don't have much current. Crappie don't like current, but if they are in a slight current, they typically position themselves below structure facing into it.

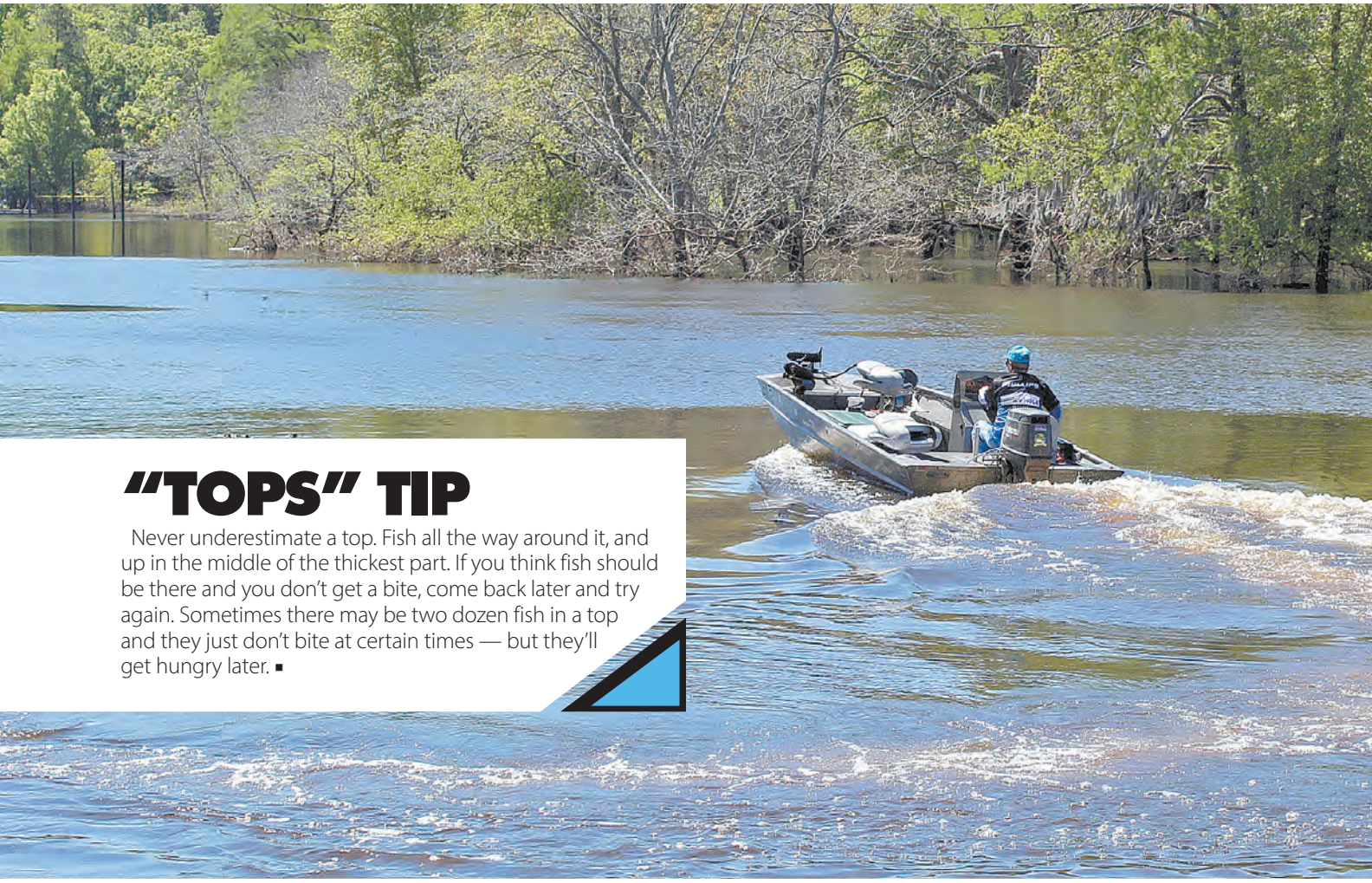
And while you are looking for tops to fish, also keep your eyes open in the creeks and sloughs for shad "flicking or flashing" around on the surface. They aren't jumping for exercise, but are eating algae that has been washed up into the sloughs. When the shad are doing that, you can bet the crappie will be a foot or two under them looking for lunch, as well.

"When you see that, put out a couple of poles in a pole holder and a pole in your hand. Work through the area fishing about 18 inches deep and cover the entire area you see the shad working," Phillips said. "It's kind of a modified spider-rigging approach. You may feel like you are in open water, but there's a good bet there are stickups and small sunken tops in that area as well."

One other thing to remember: This river system is almost always on a rise or a fall. When the river is rising, go up into the creeks and back toward the banks. When the river is on a fall, Phillips said to go out with the water. Those fish love to move into new territory when the water rises, but they'll scoot back out to the nearest deep water when it's falling. ▪

GEARED UP AND READY TO GO UP NEXT >

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.*



"TOPS" TIP

Never underestimate a top. Fish all the way around it, and up in the middle of the thickest part. If you think fish should be there and you don't get a bite, come back later and try again. Sometimes there may be two dozen fish in a top and they just don't bite at certain times — but they'll get hungry later. ▪

THE OUACHITA'S LONG AND WINDING PATH

There are more than 90 miles of Ouachita River between the Arkansas line and the Columbia Lock and Dam in Northeast Louisiana. The river lakes, bayous and cuts off the river are too numerous to mention. But the nice thing is that good access is available up and down the river, and prime fishing isn't far away.

Starting on the northern end of that stretch, there is improved access and parking at Lock and Dam No. 6 at Felsenthal; Finch Bayou (Alabama Landing) near Marion; Sterlington (on the Ouachita parish side) and in Monroe/West Monroe there are three big landings: Moon Lake to the north, Forsythe Park in Monroe and Lazarre Point in West Monroe.

Prairion Bayou Recreational Area is the last major area south of Monroe before Columbia. The Columbia Lock and Dam offers access from both sides of the river at Riverton, and there is a large landing on Pearl Street in the town of Columbia. ▪

— Kinny Haddox

Bobby Phillips cruises the river system, searching for tops that might hold crappie.

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GEARED UP AND READY TO GO

With tackle stores full of a thousand sizes, shapes, styles and colors of crappie jigs and fishing equipment, you could spend days or weeks just trying to figure out what to fish with. Or you could just let Bobby Phillips tell you his favorite go-to gear, and copy this veteran guide's success.

"On the river, I have two favorite hair jigs, the Black Lake Tackle 120+ (gray, red and chartreuse) and the 180 (gray and white) in two sizes, 1/32nd and 1/16th ounce," Phillips said. "Sometimes size does make a difference, and usually the heavier jig is used in deeper water or thicker tops, especially if there is a little hint of current."

His top choices for plastic are the Triple Threat red head, blue body and chartreuse tail jig; the Stinger Shad in popsicle pink, purple and chartreuse and Bobby Garland Baby Shad in baby crawdad and bluegrass.

He never puts a jig in the water without a white or chartreuse crappie nibble. In fact, he buys those by the case.

A lighter action rod with plenty of backbone like the Jenko Wohali with a rear seat for the reel is his favorite rod. He fishes with fly reels only, and his favorites aren't even in production anymore. But today's reels like the Pflueger Summit or Monarch are the closest match to his old favorites. He spools them with Izorline Platinum Hi Viz 6-pound test, tipped with a 4-pound, 18-inch Cajun Red Cast line leader. ▪

— Kinny Haddox

When Bobby Phillips gears up for Ouachita River crappie, you can bet these lures will be on deck.

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"I like fish that pull hard, ones that fight. I'm fishin' for fun," twanged Jeb Ard in a patented country accent. "If I want to eat fish, we go to a catfish buffet."

By "we," he was referring to his wife and regular fishing partner Tina, as well as himself.

Jeb, a self-employed refrigeration repairman, and Tina, a manager/instructor for a nonprofit job training program, have perfected the art of catching fish for pure relaxation — not for food, and not to catch more than the other guy.

Their targets are redfish and black drum, and the bigger the better. And their hunting grounds are limited to five bridges that span the passes and bayous near the eastern end of Lake Pontchartrain.

They are the CSX (L & N) Bridge over Rigolets Pass, the Little Rigolets (Blind Rigolets) Pass Bridge, the Miller Bayou (Miller's Ditch) Bridge, Unknown Pass Bridge and the U.S. Highway 90 Bridge over Rigolets Pass. The first four are train bridges, and the fifth one is for vehicular use.

The couple claims that fishing at the bridges is good year round, but they do most of their fishing during the hottest months of the summer — a surprising revelation considering that Jeb is a self-professed night owl with a strong aversion to sun exposure.

But it fits their schedule. "I hunt in the winter," said Jeb. "And I don't like fishing in the cold," said Tina emphatically.

Their solution is to fish directly under the bridges, always parking their boat where the bridge spans provide deliciously cool shade.

Fishing with the couple is relaxing from the get-go: They didn't launch their boat until 9:40 a.m.

"That early stuff don't mean anything," growled Jeb. "I fish by the tides and I focus on high tide. The best fishing is from three hours before high tide to three hours after high tide.

"Some places you can only fish on a slack tide because you can't get your bait to the bottom on a strong tide. Once, we tied on an 8-pound downrigger ball at the CSX Bridge. We ran out 500 yards of steel wire and never reached bottom. The current in these passes is some of the strongest tidal flows in Louisiana.

"The bottom is where the big boys are — drum and reds up to 30 and 40 pounds. They look for the deepest water under the bridges."

The Ards move from bridge to bridge, typically starting at the CSX Bridge, in search of their prey.

Here's Jeb's bridge-by-bridge description of each:

CSX BRIDGE UP NEXT >

MADE IN THE SHADE

By Jerald Horst

Stifling summer heat can sap the energy of any angler. Find out how this couple uses the cover of bridges near Lake Pontchartrain to stay cool while they catch.

Tina and Jeb Ard are regular fishing partners and nowadays wet their lines most often beneath the bridges that span the passes and bayous southeast of Lake Pontchartrain.

>

CSX BRIDGE

This is a relatively long bridge spanning Rigolets Pass, one of the two major passes (Chef Menteur Pass is the other one) draining Lake Pontchartrain into Lake Borgne. Tidal currents may be ferocious here, even though the water is up to 60 feet deep.

The bridge is high enough to allow the largest of bay boats to anchor beneath it, but it is a swing drawbridge which allows larger vessels such as shrimp boats and tugboats to pass through it.

Jeb's favorite spot on the bridge is next to the wooden bumpers on the eastern side of the draw opening. (This is the only spot he fishes in direct sun.) Next favorite is a 60-foot hole midway to the eastern end of the bridge from the draw.

This bridge and the Highway 90 Bridge, also spanning the Rigolets, produce the biggest fish for the Ards.

LITTLE RIGOLETS PASS BRIDGE

This much smaller pass prongs off Lake St. Catherine and Rigolets Pass and into the Intracoastal Waterway, slightly west of the bulk of the rest of the flow of Rigolets Pass. This is a modern concrete bridge with low overhead clearance that will prevent a bay boat with a T-top from getting under it.

Drum and redfish are common at this bridge, but average smaller in size. But as Jeb noted, "A 15-pound drum is nothing to sneeze at." Favored fishing spots are two 25- to 26-foot deep spots under the short bridge.

MILLER BAYOU BRIDGE UP NEXT >

ABOVE: Even the smallest fish bring a glittering smile to Tina Ard's face. Note the heavy rig, chosen to stand up to the brutal fighting power of large redfish and black drum, their primary target.
BELOW: The wooden bumpers in the draw of the CSX Bridge are a favorite spot for Jeb, even though the spot offers no shade.

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MILLER BAYOU BRIDGE

Miller Bayou is a short, narrow, twisting bayou about the same width as Little Rigolets Pass. It connects the southern shore of Lake St. Catherine with Unknown Pass just before its junction with the Intracoastal Waterway.

The span is the shortest of the bridges the Ards fish, and like the Little Rigolets Bridge, is too low for a boat with a T-top to squeeze under. Jeb's favorite spot here is 32 feet deep.

UNKNOWN PASS BRIDGE

This bridge, like the Little Rigolets Bridge, is a low-slung modern concrete affair. It replaced the old railroad bridge which was damaged by Hurricane Katrina. The pass is larger than Little Rigolets and Miller Bayou, but the bridge is tricky to get positioned beneath.

Water currents here hit the bridge at an angle, and the spans between its abutments are short, making it difficult to position the boat in the shade without banging into concrete.

U.S. HIGHWAY 90 BRIDGE

The lone auto bridge of the five that the Ards fish, the Highway 90 Bridge (sometimes called the Fort Pike Bridge), is a mile-long high rise bridge that soars to provide a 72-foot clearance allowing marine traffic to pass unhindered beneath it.

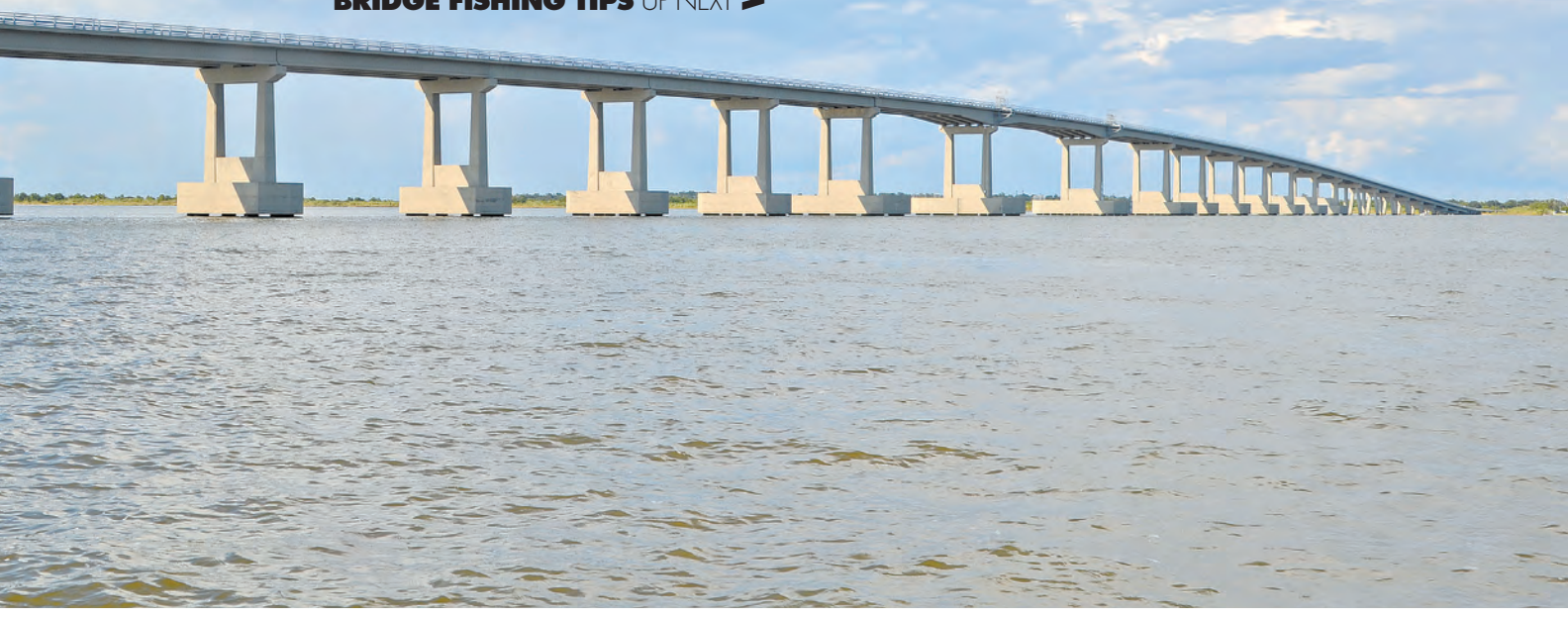
Its height and slick concrete construction provide very little for the Ard's rig hook to latch onto. Boat-hooking and therefore fishing is essentially limited to the large concrete caissons on each side of the channel. Each of these two caissons has what Jeb calls "man ladders" ascending vertically up their sides.

After hooking to these, Jeb allows his boat to drift just far enough down-current to fish immediately behind the pilings under the caisson. While more difficult to fish than the old rickety, clanky swing bridge it replaced in 2008, Jeb targets it simply because it produces some of the largest drum and redfish he catches at any of the bridges.

"I miss the old bridge terrible," he grumbled softly. "It had wooden pilings. Concrete is good, but wood is better."

BRIDGE FISHING TIPS UP NEXT >

TOP: The Miller Bayou Bridge is a very short span, but offers good fishing. **ABOVE:** The railroad bridge over Unknown Pass is difficult to position a boat under because its abutments are spaced close together. **BELOW:** The U.S. Hwy. 90 automobile bridge crosses Rigolets Pass closer to Lake Pontchartrain than does the CSX Bridge.



Jeb's terminal rig is built around a lot of weight, a 2-ounce pyramid sinker, plus a ¼-ounce jighead.

THIS IS BRUTE FISHING

"This isn't finesse fishing," chuckled Jeb loudly. "We want to get them in."

It starts with their terminal tackle. He ties a ¼-ounce jighead to the end of his line. Eighteen inches above that he ties a 2-ounce pyramid sinker directly to the line. (A pyramid sinker is better than other shaped sinkers because it plants into the bottom better without twisting up, he explained.)

Tina's rig differs only in that she uses a 2/0 Mustad Ultra Point Wide-Gap Croaker Hook, which she feels gives her better hooking results.

Both stick to 30-pound test monofilament, although they admitted they break lines on fish "all the time." Jeb said he'd rather fish with 50-pound line, but that it's too difficult to break off when their hooks snag cables and other debris under the bridges.

Both he and Tina use one-piece, solid fiberglass rods, Shakepeare Sturdy Stiks in medium-heavy power, and muscular Zebco Quantum spinning reels to go with them.

"I've broke a bunch of hollow poles on fish," Jeb explained as to their preference for solid rods. "These are cheap, too," he grinned.

The clunky-looking equipment doesn't impair their fishing, since long casts aren't called for. They either make short lob casts or drop their hooks straight down.

The couple has a shed full of expensive lighter rods and reels, but seldom use them. "You can't do this with 2-pound test line and light rods," he exaggerated for effect. "The fish always break off." ▪

— Jerald Horst

BRIDGE FISHING TIPS

Mentally mark spots. Over the years, Jeb and Tina have fished the whole length of each bridge, but have found that some spots are consistently better than others on the same bridge. Remembering high-action spots is key to efficient fishing.

Buy a fish finder. This type of fishing doesn't demand a big investment in electronics, but Jeb strongly recommends that newcomers purchase a simple fish finder to quickly locate the deepest spots under each bridge. The deepest spots often correspond to the best fishing spots. "Remember, this isn't trout fishing," he cautioned.

Make an inexpensive rig hook. It is much easier to use a metal rig hook to latch onto a bridge than to tie and untie the boat's bow rope. Also, some bridges are too high to comfortably reach to tie off on. Jeb's hook is simply made by using an acetylene torch to heat a metal reinforcing bar enough to bend a large hook in one end and a small loop for the rope in the other.

Bring lots of spare tackle. Jeb claims that every bridge has cables laid on the bottom beneath the span. "I don't know what they are for, but they are there and they are snags. You know it's a cable because you can feel a little give when you snag one. You lose a lot of tackle fishing like this, so definitely come prepared."

Stick with market bait. Black drum and redfish love shrimp, but live shrimp or for that matter, any live bait, just isn't necessary. Dead shrimp, often locally called "market bait," are very effective, but should be fresh. ▪

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.*

A homemade rig hook made of light steel rebar makes latching onto a bridge a snap.

BACK IN THE DAY UP NEXT >

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BACK IN THE DAY

Jeb and Tina Ard weren't always catch-and-release, fish-for-fun anglers. Early in their marriage, the couple, both 43, fished for food. Especially for Jeb, fishing meant eating.

He grew up deep in the country, near Cranky Corner (near Uneedus in Tangipahoa Parish, if that helps). "I grew up dirt poor. Many a time, all we had to eat was bread and syrup.

"Sometimes we got molasses instead of syrup," he shuddered at the thought. "I was a hillbilly.

"Growing up, we ate a lot of freshwater fish: bream, bass, white perch and mud cats. We fished creeks and farm ponds. After we married, I got introduced to saltwater fishing. I've never been skunked saltwater fishing. But I've been skunked thousands of times in freshwater."

"In saltwater you always catch something," chimed in Tina, who grew up between Franklinton and Enon in Washington Parish, very near where they live now. "Even hardheads are fun to reel in. It's relaxing.

"We started fishing because we were looking for something that we both liked doing together. Jebbie hunts, but I don't."

When they started fishing, they did it with a vengeance. They fished some for drum and redfish in Rigolets Pass, but their specialty was fishing for speckled trout and white trout under camp dock lights in Lake Pontchartrain, the Rigolets and Lake Catherine.

They regularly fished three nights a week.

"We would load the boat gunnel-full," Jeb noted matter-of-factly.

No matter how blistering hot it is in the sun, the Ards find oases of cool air in the shadows of the bridges they fish under.

"We would just load up."

As if that wasn't enough, they would fish cut bait for sharks at the "gas rig" 3 ½ miles into Lake Borgne from the mouth of Rigolets Pass.

"We would catch Atlantic sharpnoses, bulls, blacktips and a few bonnetheads," said Jeb. "We always threw the bonnetheads back; their meat was orange and we wouldn't eat them because of the color.

"We would steak the sharks, skin-on, then bake or grill them. The skin peels right off when the meat gets soft."

As a young couple on a tight budget, they ate a lot of fish, explained Tina. "Three times a week," grinned her husband.

Stringent new regulations put the kibosh on their shark fishery. Then, people gradually began to turn off their dock lights at night. The finishing blow came with Hurricane Katrina, which took most of the camps, as well as their docks and lights.

Instead of quitting fishing, they began fishing under bridges during the day, an activity that clicked for the couple. "Jebbie hates the sun," intoned Tina, "so that's why he likes fishing in the shade under bridges."

The big change occurred about 10 years ago when they started fishing strictly for fun, and began throwing everything back.

"I got tired of cleaning them," he grunted. "Then I got tired of eating them.

"Bottom fishing like this is simple. You just throw your bait out and you don't have to work it or anything. It's relaxing."

"You never know what you're going to catch," trilled Tina. "It could be a stingray. It could be anything. I just love to reel them in." ▪

— Jerald Horst

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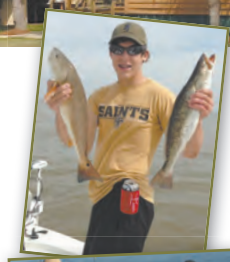

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SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Class is in session, and a Simsboro tournament angler breaks down how he targets schooling bass — including using his electronics to locate deep schools you wouldn't otherwise notice.

By Chris Ginn

The siren song of schooling bass has lured many an unsuspecting angler to spend the rest of his days wondering what the heck just happened.

They're up. They're down. They're 10 yards farther than your longest cast.

Then, just when you're ready to give up and head back to the launch, they blow up within easy reach, and reward you with a catch or two confirming your decision to stick it out just a little while longer.

Simsboro tournament angler Sid Havard has pulled his hair out many times chasing schooling bass.

But through trial and error, he's figured out how to catch more of them — without driving himself crazy by having a plan.

"I'm going to throw in a little twist right from the start," he said. "I figured out a few years ago that there are three kinds of schooling bass. First, you've got your small schoolies that are up feeding on threadfin shad. Then you've got 5- and 6-pound fish that are up feeding on gizzard shad. In either case, you'll see all the action on top."

But the third kind of schooling bass won't be found on the surface. These are the kinds of schools that earn professional anglers a lot of face time on television .

"They're no different than the surface schoolers — except that you won't see all the action," Havard continued. "Lots of big fish will school under the surface over humps and ledges in deeper water. You've got to learn how to find them with your electronics, but when you find them you'll see that they're schooling for the same reason as those on the surface — to eat.

"And I've found that a lot of times they're even easier to catch."

SPOTTING A SCHOOL UP NEXT >

SPOTTING A SCHOOL

For whatever reason, Havard has found that bass don't school on the surface as much as they used to, and he contends that it has something to do with the amount of shad they have corralled.

"I've seen it on Toledo Bend when they would just school all day long," he said. "Now they seem to bust up a school of shad then go five or six different ways, and you get a little action here and a little action there.

"I guess the more shad they have pressed against the surface, the more likely they are to stay up on the surface."

Although many anglers come across schooling bass somewhat haphazardly, Havard says keeping a lookout over any kind of structure near deep water can put you within casting distance before other boats spot them and show up.

These kinds of locations are great for initiating schooling activity because bass that have been pushing shad around will eventually push them over the shallower structure. This will drive the shad closer to the surface, where bass will have them trapped: That's when all heck breaks loose.

Havard also mentioned that anglers should keep an eye out for bird activity.

"I look for diving birds and great blue herons," he said. "You can spot the diving birds at a distance, and you can bet they're diving on shad. Nine times out of 10, bass will be under them for the same reason.

"And the blue herons? At Toledo Bend you'll see them just dropping out of the sky, or you'll see 30 or 40 of them on stumps. That's where you need to be."

WHAT'S ON THE MENU? UP NEXT >

ABOVE: When schooling bass disappear from the surface, the key to staying on the bite is going down after them with lures like deep-diving crankbaits. **BELOW:** Havard finds bass like to school around the channel ledges and out on the flats at Lake D'Arbonne.

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WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

Once he's within range of schooling bass, Havard tries to determine if they're feeding on threadfin or gizzard shad. It doesn't really affect how he fishes the school, but he likes to know what kind of fish he's dealing with.

"Catch a few and you'll know quick what they're eating," he said. "Of course, if they're on gizzard shad your first couple fish will likely be pretty good. But you can verify it by taking a look at what they're spitting up. Threadfin will be about 3 inches, while gizzard shad will be around 6 inches. I'll also take a look in their throats to see if there is a tail sticking out. If I see one, I know it's not just a threadfin."

Havard typically targets schooling bass on three north Louisiana lakes — D'Arbonne, Caney and Black Lake at Campti.

"Caney used to be awesome, but they don't come up there like they used to," he said. "I'd say D'Arbonne and Black Lake are my two favorites for schooling fish. The funny thing is what works on D'Arbonne won't work at Black Lake or Caney. They all have their own little deals when it comes to baits."

Havard throws a Spook Jr. or a Pop-R at D'Arbonne, a clear Tiny Torpedo or white Ribbit at Black Lake and a chrome/blue Rat-L-Trap at Caney. And although he doesn't throw it much, Havard said an Alabama rig can really be effective at Caney.

"But I've got couple more little things I like to do no matter where I get on schoolies," he said. "One's kind of old school - a Sidewinder spoon. I can throw it a mile and reel it as fast and crazy as I can… even make it come out of the water… or I can kill it and let it flutter down. The other is a pearl Fluke."

Both baits are really good at catching larger bass that frequently suspend beneath the surface activity waiting on a wounded shad to fall their way.

"You can throw that Fluke past the schooling action and just let it fall," Havard said. "I mean don't do anything but strip out line and let it float down dead-stick style. That's a great way to catch a really big bass under a school."

Of course, tail spinners like the Little George and the Wing Ding work well, too.

WHAT TIME DOES SCHOOL LET IN?

Although you never can tell when a school of bass will appear on the surface, Havard says some times seem to be better on certain lakes.

"Mid-morning seems like the best on Black Lake, but on D'Arbonne they school early and late up toward the flats," he said. "All you can do when they come up is try to make as many casts as you can. Get your fish off quickly and get back in there before the action stops."

Schools that disappear as quickly as they surface can be frustrating for many anglers; however, Havard said those fish haven't left the country. They typically stick around in the same spot and go back down to whatever structure helped them push the shad to the top.

"They're still there," he said. "Just put down your schooling baits, and pick up something you can fish the bottom with — and you'll find them again."

Havard loves to fan cast a Texas-rigged worm, but he noted that Carolina rigs and deep-diving crankbaits also work well.

"Just sit on them a while and pick apart whatever that structure is underneath," he said. "Just remember: They may not be in a feeding mood, so you may have to make multiple casts. Before too long, they'll probably surface again. If you leave, you'll wind up in the wrong place at the right time."

GOING DEEP

As frustratingly fun as the surface schooling action is, Havard really gets excited when he finds a school of bass on structure that never surface.

These fish are feeding just as voraciously as those on the surface, but you'll never see them.

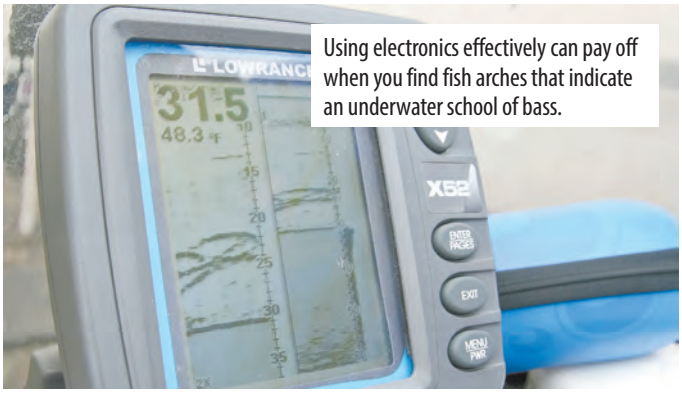
"In fact, you'll ride right over them most of the time and never know what you're missing unless you learn how to read your

Tail spinners are great baits for schooling bass because they can be worked on the surface or on the bottom.

electronics," Havard said. "It's a matter of learning what bait balls look like on your screen, and then being able to pick out the arches that show the bass nearby."

Havard says most bass fishing today has turned into riding around looking at your fish finder until you spot a school of fish off shore, marking them and then turning around to fish them.

"I've done it at D'Arbonne, Claiborne and Caney," he said. "It's no different than when you see those guys do it on the tournament shows. Only they may be riding a 40-foot river channel and looking on a 20-foot shelf, where I'm running a 20-foot channel looking on a 12-foot shelf. It's the same principle — just in a little bit shallower water."



Using electronics effectively can pay off when you find fish arches that indicate an underwater school of bass.

When he spots a school on his electronics, Havard throws several different baits to see what the fish prefer.

"I may have to throw a DD22 or a 6XD crankbait… maybe a big Texas-rigged worm, or even a Carolina-rigged finesse worm. As long as they're eating, they'll usually hit one of those," he said. "It's really easier to catch these schooling fish than those on the surface, once you learn how to do it."

SUMMER SCHOOL PRECAUTIONS

Since surface schooling is more of a summer thing, Havard said it's really easy to get so caught up in chasing them that you forget to take care of yourself on the water.

"Man, it's really easy to get too hot this time of year," he said. "You need to be careful with your body and wear sunscreen, wide brim hats, long sleeves and stay hydrated. Stay on top of it, because once you figure out you're too hot, it could be too late."

There's no doubt trying to stay on top of schooling bass can make you pull your hair out. The key to catching them, though, is to have a plan amidst all the chaos. Because if you're as reactionary as the fish, you'll be just as scattered as they are. ▪

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 chrisginn.com.*

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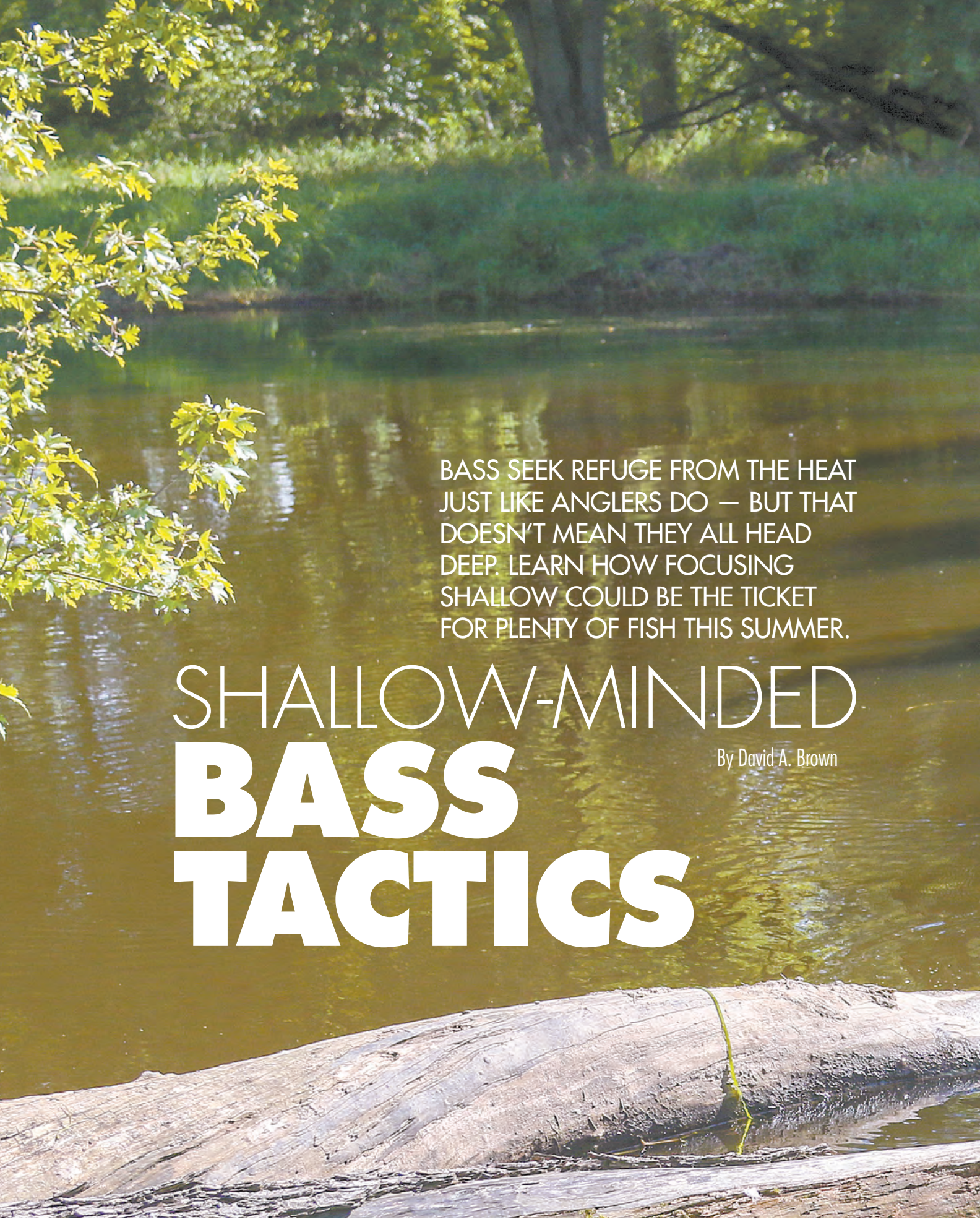

BASS SEEK REFUGE FROM THE HEAT JUST LIKE ANGLERS DO — BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THEY ALL HEAD DEEP. LEARN HOW FOCUSING SHALLOW COULD BE THE TICKET FOR PLENTY OF FISH THIS SUMMER.

SHALLOW-MINDED BASS TACTICS

By David A. Brown

Nature is dynamic; and like a well-composed symphony, its performance comprises multiple complementary elements that rise and fall at the conductor's direction.

With summer bass fishing, there is a time for the fish to be directed offshore, but that movement doesn't always hold a steady note 'til fall's arrival.

After the spawn, skinny, stressed-out females will slip into deeper, cooler water to continue their recovery and to begin feeding more regularly. Once the males conclude their fry-guarding duties, they'll join the mamas for some deep-water R&R, with "deep" being a relevant term, depending on where you're fishing.

Regardless, there comes a point during the summer dog days when those humps, contour lines and deep trees just won't cut it. At the end of the day, a bass just wants to be comfortable and well fed — so expect them to go where they can fill this order.

"There's just a point in the summer, it just gets so hot that there's not a lot of oxygen out in that deeper water and these fish will get up there in the shallows," said Bassmaster Elite pro Jason Christie. "I've caught them in inches of water in the summertime. I think the waves from the boat traffic and the wind hitting the bank create a little more oxygen in the shallow water."

Of course, this is attractive for bass, but baitfish also find the slightly cooler and more oxygenated water appealing. What's the old-school rule of bass fishing? Find the food, find the fish.

MADE IN THE SHADE

Now, ask yourself if you'd sooner patronize a hot dog cart standing out in the open under direct sunlight, or one with a big umbrella that created a cozy shaded area for customers. If you like Option 2, you understand why trees, docks, overhanging brush and laydowns are such great summertime targets.

Here, the bass find lower water temperatures with feeding opportunities created by the very cover under which they're lounging. If you need some perspective, follow Christie's hands-on — make that feet-on — investigative strategy.

"I've gotten out of my boat and walked down the bank, knee-deep in water in the sunshine, and it's like you're standing in a hot bathtub," he said. "And then you walk under the shade of a tree and it's instantly cooler. I think that's what those fish do; in the morning, when it's low light they get the fresh oxygen from the previous night and during the day, they try to stay in the shade.

"I like to fish these spots when the shade is as minimal as possible. At 8 o'clock in the morning, that shade could be halfway across the pocket off one tree because of low sun angle. But you come back at 11 and the shade will be much more limited. That makes your strike zone more defined."

BEST BAITS

Shallow summer bass will bite a mix of reaction baits and slower presentations, so fish the scenario. Early mornings, a buzzbait can be surprisingly effective, but once the sun gets up, put that away and switch to more target-specific techniques like flipping laydowns with jigs or Texas-rigged creature baits, skipping docks and punching matted vegetation.

Hands-down, one of the most consistent and entertaining ways of catching summer bass is staking out bream beds and picking off opportunistic predators. As Christie noted, bass form small wolf packs, which linger in nearby shade or hold in adjacent deeper water, only to rush forward and gobble a plump panfish when their bellies start to rumble.

"I treat that bream bed like a ledge; I want to sit as far off of it as I can before they know I'm there," Christie said. "Those bass may not be sitting directly over that bed, they may be cruising around it. I want my first cast to come right across that bream bed and then my third or fourth cast, I'm going to start fan casting to see if they're off the beds." >

ABOVE: Poppers will fool 'em during the summer — especially around bream beds. **BELOW**: Docks are one of the most promising summer habitat features to target.

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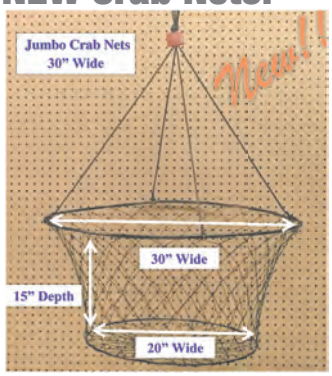

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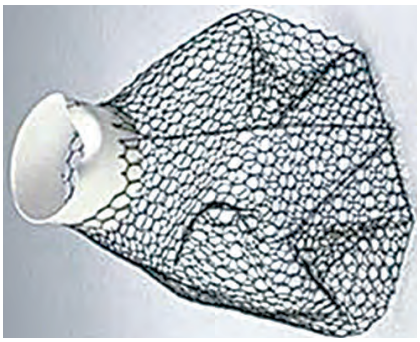

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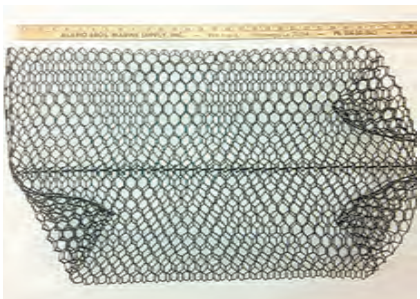

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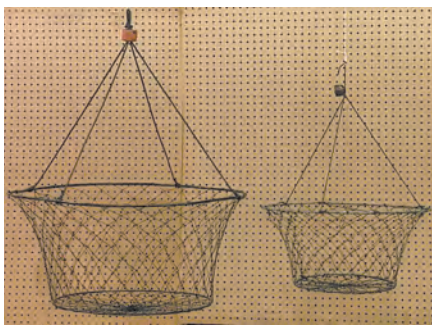

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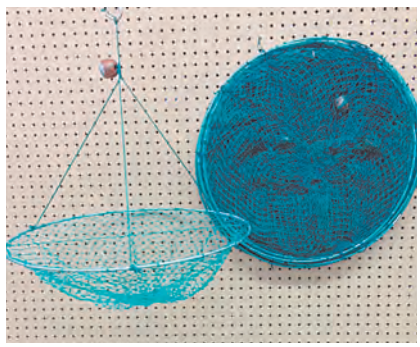

Shafts

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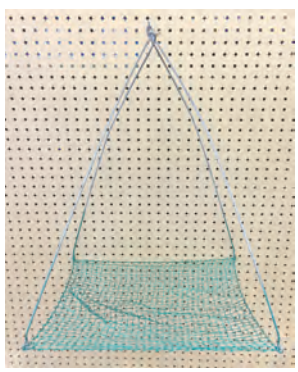
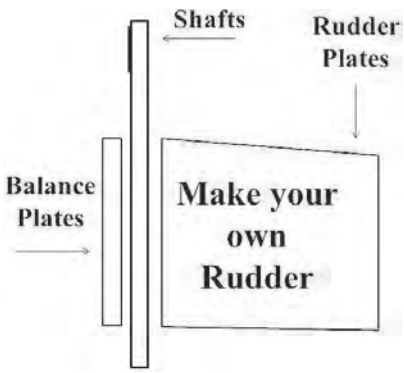


Rudders



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Topwaters are the favored presentation and, while walkers and prop baits catch plenty of bream bed bass, a popper — dressed with a feathered rear treble — is a good choice when the fish are either finicky and/or heavily pressured. Reason being, poppers can make a lot of commotion without leaving the bedding zone. Sharp downward rod snaps make an intrusive blooping sound, but the bait remains on target.

Similarly, this time of year, Elite pro Ish Monroe puts a frog to good use, as it skips easily under cover and allows him to hold position and work an enticing display without making much forward progress. Walkers or poppers will work, but the latter proves more versatile, by offering an attention-getting splash.

ABOVE: Finesse rigs like the dropshot can be highly productive during the summer months. **BELOW:** Time invested in thoroughly probing laydowns is usually rewarded. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Rigging a Berkley Devil's Spear sideways creates a bream profile.

FLW Tour Pro Russell Cecil knows there aren't many wrong times to show a bass a bream imitation, and when he misses a topwater bite or if he only gets follows or boils, he'll toss a Big Bite Baits Warmouth in the hot zone — but, rather than the traditional Texas-rigging that brings the hook through the bait's broad side, he rigs it elliptically (up and down) by bringing the hook through the narrow side.

Bassmaster Elite pro Mike Iaconelli employs a similar technique for when bluegill are near the beds, but swimming mid water column. Using a VMC swimbait hook, either unweighted or 1/16-ounce for deeper water, he'll rig a Berkley Havoc Devil's Spear sideways. This allows him to swim the bait through the water column, only with a bluegill profile, not that of a shad-imitating swimbait. A steady retrieve with frequent pauses to kill the bait earns many of his bites on the fall.

And this is a great time of year to keep those chartreuse dye pens handy for touching up the tips of soft plastics. Mimicking a bream's tail accents may be just the thing to turn a looker into a biter.

On the point of bait coloring, Wesley Strader knows the value of adding such highlights, but he won't hesitate to go heavy when the situation calls for it. If he's using a pearl white trailer for a spinnerbait or bladed jig, intense sunlight might make the bait too harsh. In such cases, he'll use a chartreuse marker to basically paint the entire sides and tail of his bait with an overlay that tones down the white and adds a more tolerable color.

Elsewhere, FLW pro T-Roy Broussard

HOT TOPICS

When planning your summer bass outing, keep these points in mind:

Weather windows: Summertime means thunderstorms and, while you'll often see a fierce pre-storm bite as the falling barometer and rush of cooler air makes everyone kinda goofy, don't let one of these big thunderheads sneak up on you or it'll be a rough ride to the ramp. We all love a good rally, but no fish is worth your life.

Hydration: Pretty straightforward stuff — drink lots of water. A busy bite can lead to one procrastination after another, so get in the habit of carrying a bottle of water to the front or back deck so there's no excuse. And if you notice that you've stopped perspiring on a hot day, stop immediately, find some shade and hydrate. Sweat stops when the body's dehydrated, and all kinds of bad outcomes are just around the corner.

Sun protection: Wide-brim hats, liberal doses of sunscreen, polarized glasses; most anglers know to reach for these items on their way out the door. But you'll also benefit from neck and face protection like BUFF's multi-functional headwear. In collapsed form, these lightweight, UV-blocking items keep the sun off your neck, but pulled up to your desired level, you can cover your ears and face, or even lock your hat into place with full head/neck protection.

Limited opportunities: One thing worth noting about the shallow summer bass game is that it's a lot easier to fish out an area than it is when fish are deeper. The very fact that shallow fish are typically more spooky feeds this point. Beyond that, be aware that the idea of beating on a spot too much has a short shelf life.

"I used to win a lot one-day events fishing shallow for bass in the summertime, but it's hard to win four-day (Bassmaster Elite) event because it's hard to do that four days in a row," said Bassmaster Elite pro Jason Christie. "But for the weekend angler; absolutely — there are fish that live up there shallow, even when the water's 90 degrees." ▪

— David A. Brown

often swims a Texas-rigged Strike King Rage Craw across hydrilla and targets holes and lanes where bass hiding in the shady cover can spot passing meals. The flappers kick when pulled forward, but killing the bait and letting it flutter to the bottom can be a highly convincing move.

One of the most versatile baits you can keep on your deck is an unweighted worm, either a stick worm or a magnum finesse worm. Use a Yamamoto Senko, a YUM Dinger or a Strike King Ocho as a primary bait for skipping into shade pockets, a deal-closing follow up bait for missed topwater strikes or a quick-fire option for pinpointing a boil, bust or sporadic schooling activity.

Lastly, you'll cut yourself short if you don't have a drop-shot on your deck. Designed to hold a bait vulnerably in the water column, this rig is one of your best bets for coaxing tough bites. Alternate your bait size, shape and colors to dial in the fish's preference. ▪

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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Tall reeds generally indicate deep banks, whereas shorter reeds are typically a sign of shallow banks.

By Chris Ginn

Pitch**BLACK**

Great tips on targeting shallow summertime bass on Bayou Black.

The Pipeline Canal was completely impassable.

And with that, Patrick Engerran immediately resorted to Plan B.

"I was hoping we'd get to fish the School Board this morning," he said as he spotted a few other boats in front of us turning around. "In four years fishing here, I've never seen it completely blocked like this."

Engerran and I were fishing Bayou Black, the real happiest place on earth.

"We can still get to the School Board," he said, "but it's going to be a 40- or 50-mile run now, rather than 9."

Even though it was a brutally hot morning, and it would have been nice to have his 250-horsepower air conditioner running for an extended period, Engerran decided we would just fish our way there.

He pointed his boat toward a nondescript bank in the Lower Copasaw and picked up a 7-foot, 6-inch flipping stick rigged with 65-pound braided line and a Texas-rigged craw.

The craw was a green pumpkin magic Toups' Tackle Mighty Mudbug, which is no longer in production. As we would find out later, this particular color would be ridiculously productive. (Since it's no longer available, Engerran said the next best bait is the Missile Baits D Bomb in Cali love color.)

Before I could even pick up my rod, Engerran was already slinging bass into the boat one after the other, and I soon found myself on the short end of a 10 to 2 count. The only difference between what we were doing was that he was flipping his Mighty Mudbug, while I stuck with a ½-ounce jig and crawfish trailer.

I accused him of front-ending me, but I knew there was no way he was hitting every target along that bank. I was paying close attention to where he didn't fish so I could put my jig on those spots.

Engerran tried to be a gracious host, so he pointed out what he thought I might be doing wrong.

>

"I'VE BEEN FLIPPING BACK INTO THE COVER,

but you're staying out on the edge," he said. "The water is moving, but it's slow. I don't think they're out here on the edge where you're pitching. They might move out there if it starts moving faster, but right now they're back in the cover a little bit."

At that point, we had no clue that the difference might have actually been the bait.

Each spot we fished as we made the long way around and up Turtle Bayou toward the School Board gave up a few bass. By the time we got to where Engerran wanted to start the day several hours earlier, he was chomping at the bit to show it off to me.

GREEN PUMPKIN WAS MAGIC

His favorite spot was full of bass, but few were actually willing to bite.

Our swimbaits, frogs,and spinnerbaits got a lot of swirly and half-hearted strikes, but the fish just weren't in the mood to eat.

"It's just too still in here," Engerran said. "A little water movement would definitely help. Even just a light chop would make a big difference."

Eventually, he made the decision to abandon the School Board and told me that we would spend the rest of the day like we started - pitching to matted vegetation.

"Better tie on one of these green pumpkin magic craws," he advised. "The more you adjusted to where the fish were back in the mats a while ago, makes me think it might have been the bait because you still weren't getting bit much."

We started fishing a seemingly endless line of matted vegetation down one of the straightest banks I had ever seen, and we went at least 200 yards before I asked Engerran if we could go for another boat ride to cool off.

"I know it can get monotonous," he said, "but all that goes out the window when you start hammering them. You can go 100 or 200 yards without getting a bite — then get on a pile of them in 20 feet."

I guess he had just been waiting to call the shot because about five minutes after telling me that, we came across a clump of hyacinths mixed with hydrilla on the edge of some open water between the canal and a marsh pond behind it.

Engerran instantly hooked up on a nice fish. I pitched right back into the same spot and caught another one as he battled the first. Five feet later, we caught a few more. Then, just as quickly as it had begun, it was over.

We eventually wound up down by Lake Penchant, where I continued to pick up bass on the green pumpkin magic Mighty Mudbug. Engerran decided to conduct an on-the-water experiment, and tried several different style baits to see if the bass wanted to eat something else better.

Every bait he tried was a swing and a miss, but the green pumpkin magic continued to produce. It was very evident that our success all along had been the bait more so than any other variable.

We wound up ending our day back where we started, and Engerran decided we'd both finish the day throwing the Mighty Mudbug - the very same bait he started with.

It was definitely the right decision, as he finished with a flurry of fish that rivaled his hot start.

>

There's no doubt bass wanted the green pumpkin magic Mighty Mudbug, but since it's no longer made, Engerran said a Cali love-colored Missile Baits D Bomb would be a great replacement.

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MOVING WATER IS KEY

After processing his thoughts on the ride back home, Engerran gave me his rundown on our day, along with some sound advice on how to score more summertime Bayou Black bass.

"Except for the size of the fish we caught, today went pretty much like I thought it would," he said. "Obviously for us, other than the bait, moving water was key to getting bit. And if you noticed, it wasn't moving all that much, but any kind of movement is better than not at all. I think the School Board hammered that point home. Every fish we caught today was around moving water, and every dead spot was around slack water."

Although he wasn't disappointed in how our day played out, Engerran surmised it would have been a different story if we had we been able to get to the shallow grass at the School Board early in the morning.

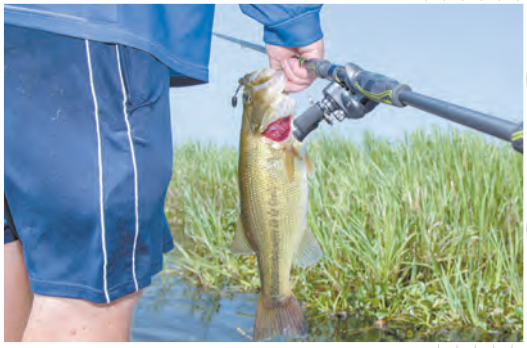
"We got bites in there, but most of the fish just wanted to follow and swirl," he said. "Without moving water, I don't think it would have been as good as I hoped it would be — but the low light of early morning would have played to our favor."

Finding a little depth was also important to the bite. Of course deep is relative in South Louisiana, where 3 to 5 feet could be the deep water.

"A lot of the banks around here are flat," Engerran said. "So if your boat is sitting in 3 feet, it's going to be 3 feet up close to the bank. Sometimes the reeds on the bank can help you find a deeper bank. Generally speaking, tall reeds indicate a deeper bank and short reeds usually grow on the shallow banks."

Where fish position in the vegetation is dependent on the speed of the tidal movement, and the height of the sun.

Engerran says the faster the current, the more out on the edges they'll be, and the slower the current the more they'll tuck back into the cover.



"And the higher the sun gets the more they'll pull back into the cover, too," he added. "If you're fishing the outside of the cover, you can get away with ½-ounce weights, but when they retreat into the thick stuff you're going to have to go with something heavier. I like 1 ½-ounce tungsten weights when they do that." >

PITCHING TIPS FOR BAYOU BLACK

Pitching plastics at Bayou Black doesn't have to be complicated, but there are a few tips Engerran passed along to help you be more successful.

1. Engerran says fishing with braided line is a must, which is why he selects a 7-foot, 6-inch Tangi Rods MH Bushido blank.

"I'll fly them with a heavier rod and tear a bigger hole," he said. "Braid is essential, though, so the little bit softer rod gives me the shock-absorber I need for 65-pound braid."

2. Pegging your sinker is essential.

"If you don't, your heavy weight is going to fall through the hole while your bait is stuck on a piece of grass," Engerran said. "You want everything to stay together, because you'll never get a bait separated from the weight to fall correctly through the mats."

3. Tie a heavy-wire hook with a snell knot. Light wire hooks will flex too easily, and the snell knot transfers all the energy of your hook set directly to the hook point.

"A snell knot is going to help your hook kick up and catch bone — instead of the side of the mouth," he added. ▪

The size of bass Engerran was hoping for didn't appear, but the numbers he and the author caught more than made up for it. **INSET:** When the tide is moving hard at Bayou Black, bass can be found out on the edges of the reeds.

Although a swimbait can be extremely effective, Engerran knows it's hard to go wrong pitching a Texas-rigged soft plastic at Bayou Black.

COMBINATION OF COVER

The heavier weight is so Engerran doesn't have to sit there and dance his bait to get it to fall through. He pegs his weight so he can get his entire bait to punch through in an instant, make its case and get out.

"I think it's also important that you look for a combination of cover," Engerran said. "Hydrilla is good. Hyacinths are good. Mix them together and you've got something special. The same could be said for reeds and hydrilla, or reeds and hyacinths."

Finding this mixed vegetation in front of a drain or the mouth of a marsh pond is even better. Bass love marsh ponds, and their only way in and out is the cuts.

"Look for spots where bass have a place for bass to go," Engerran said. "Anywhere fish can leave from where you are and get farther back is going to be good. Like mixed vegetation, a drain is good, but a drain with matted vegetation is even better."

Although they didn't show off on this particular trip, Engerran told me that swimbaits can be awesome at Bayou Black.

"Pitching was the deal today, but most of the time you can cover the flats with just a steady swimbait retrieve," he said. "Baitfish generally don't travel by themselves, so when a bass sees that kind of single prey they can focus on it and easily catch it."

And the best thing about Bayou Black during the summer is that bass stay shallow. Engerran and I pitched our green pumpkin magic craws all day and landed close to 40 bass on a hot, sweltering day that would make most other bodies of water 'cry uncle.'

"I'm sure somebody's figured out how to fish a deeper hole around here," Engerran concluded, "but when all you've got is shallow water, bass don't have a choice but to be in it.

"That makes it easy to target them because you don't have to wonder if they're deep or shallow, and there isn't anything in between." ▪

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 chrisginn.com.*

Big fish with sharp teeth require crafty rigs made of bite-resistant wire.

STING THE KING

By David A. Brown

Ruthless aggression is the name of the game for king mackerel — so big baits and wire rigs are key when tackling this toothy predator.

Lean, mean biting machines, king mackerel pack a mouthful of sharp teeth that'll make short work of monofilament or even fluorocarbon line. These fish are also notorious for snipping baits in half and missing single-hook rigs. A double dose of frustration, to be sure, but this worthy opponent can be beaten — with the right equipment.

Solving both of these problems, savvy anglers employ rigging wire for leaders, and for building the all-important "stinger rig" — a main hook trailing a treble "stinger" on a short piece of wire. This arrangement not only repels those wicked choppers, but it also ensures the king gets snared no matter how it bites.

Now there are definitely tastier fish in the Northern Gulf, with tuna, cobia, snapper and speckled trout all coming to mind. So, why go to the trouble of trying to outmaneuver such a headache-maker?

Well, why did people pay big money to see Mike Tyson fights they knew wouldn't last one full round? Ruthless aggression — since the days of Rome's gladiators, ruthless aggression has always been a marketable commodity.

And if ever there was a fish that truly does not care; it's the kingfish. "Reckless abandon" simply doesn't do them justice. No, this is full-throttle, vicious savagery in its truest form.

>

"These fish can skyrocket out the water 20 to 25 feet, they're very acrobatic and you get these big, long runs," said Venice Marina co-owner Bill Butler. "When you have that (reel) clicker running like it's about to blow out the side, it's a great feeling. These are very aggressive fish — and there's a lot of them."

Capt. Donnie Jackson, who runs Tails Up Offshore Fishing out of Venice Marina, offered this perspective: "It's very fast-paced; a lot of action. When they're feeding, you can't get two lines in the water. If the bite's on, we try to put out bait after bait to take advantage of the opportunity."

So, you want a front row seat to the bite show? Butler and Jackson shared their insights on the key areas of baits, rigging and fishing strategy.

MEAL FIT FOR A KING

This one's as straightforward as it gets: Big, fresh, live baits are the surest path to giant kings. Troll plugs, spoons or rigged ballyhoo and you'll catch all the little ones you can stand, but when 50-plus-pounders are there for the taking, why burn daylight on the riffraff?

Butler's fond of big hardtails (blue runners), bluefish and big greenies (threadfin herring). Jackson seconds that opinion, and adds in bonita and pogies.

Pogies are almost exclusively a cast net deal, but anglers often use sabiki rigs — strings of gold hooks on dropper loops with a weight at the bottom — to nab hardtails and greenies. When Butler's looking for whopper hardtails or bluefish, he'll fish a double shad rig (lead heads with plastic shad tails).

"When you get the cleaner water, the bigger baits will be on the surface, so we'll throw a green and white or a yellow and white shad rig," Butler said. "You rip the shad rig or a Gotcha plug across the top of the water and your bigger hardtails will eat it. Usually when you catch one, you'll catch two."

WIRED FOR SUCCESS

Whatever the bait, both anglers know that their only hope of boating a giant fish with scissors for jaws is to rig up with stout wire "stinger" rigs. Essentially, a lead single hook set through the nose or forehead of a live bait trails a treble hook on a piece of wire hanging from the bend or the eye of the lead hook. By positioning the firepower at both ends of the bait, a stinger rig greatly improves your chances of snaring whatever bites.

Wire is also necessary for leaders, as a big king's choppers occasionally reach past the bait. Butler says he's not interested in wasting time with smaller fish, so he snells his lead hooks and trailing stingers directly onto his 90- to 130-pound, 7-strand wire leaders.

"I'm not a believer in small wire," Butler said. "These are predator fish; they'd eat a shoe, so when he hits, we'll catch him. You go through so many 40-pound cookie cutter fish to get a big one and you don't want to spend 30 minutes on every fish.

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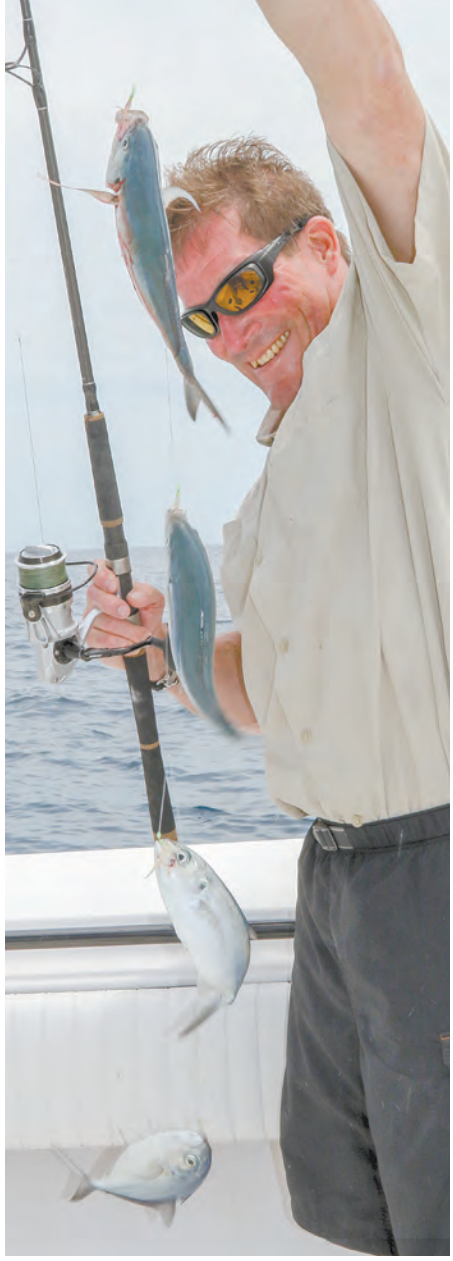

TOP RIGHT: A string of plump hardtails equals kingfish candy. **RIGHT:** The basic stinger rig puts a hook at both ends of the bait to prevent short strikes.

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"Also, with lighter wire, one fish and your rig is done. But with that 7-strand, we can catch more fish per rig."

Dead ribbonfish, aka "silver eels," make dandy big king baits, but you have to manage that lanky profile with a specialized rig. Replace the standard lead hook with a narrow jig and enough sequential stinger segments to cover the size of the eels you're trolling. Set the jig through an eel's jaws (bottom-to-top) to keep the mouth closed while trolling and pin those stingers along the flank with enough slack to allow a swimming motion.

For extra enticement, try a "double-trouble" rig with two live hardtails, greenies or pogies staggered on a pair of stinger segments. The baits fighting against one another create a cluster of activity that big kings can't resist.

Another creative option originating in the Carolinas is the Zombie rig. This one positions a rigged ribbonfish on a wire leader trailing a stinger-rigged live hardtail. The appearance of a predator keeps the hardtail struggling to flee, while the whole drama looks like easy pickings to opportunistic kings.

Yet another tip for attracting attention involves accessorizing your rigs. Skirts, aka "dusters," comprise a metal sleeve surrounded by strands of Mylar or other flashy material that pulse and flair in the water. Slipping a duster or simply a colored bead onto your leader can help kings locate your bait when overcast days or rough water impair visibility.

SPREAD IT OUT

Slow trolling a spread of baits around emergent or cut-off rigs is the main deal for big fish. Jackson said he's looking for that pretty "king green" color that's not crystal clear, but not too dingy. From his experience, returning to the site of past success is usually a good move.

"I like to say that big kingfish are creatures of habit; they'll keep coming back to the same places year after year," he said. "I've kept a log book of where I've caught big kings and a lot of times, they've been within a mile or so of where I caught them the year before."

Marking baitfish on the sonar always bodes well, but Butler's also watching for topside clues. Specifically, baitfish behavior will tell you a lot about the kind of day they're having.

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LOAD THE WELL

Gathering a day's worth of live bait requires skill and strategy.

Everyone appreciates a packed livewell, but minding the details of kingfish bait collection can advance your trip's success.

Here's a roundup of important points to consider:

- If you remove an entire sabiki rig from its package prior to securing both ends, you'll have a mess on your hands. Make life easy by tying your line to the rig, affixing the weight to the swivel clip first and then pulling each sabiki segment off the packaging card one at a time.
- In a hurry, it's easy to reel the upper-end of a sabiki rig into the eye of your rod tip. To avoid tangles and eye damage, add a plastic bead to your line before tying to the sabiki.
- Fresh, lively baits perform best and look the most attractive to predators, so use a de-hooker to minimize touching — and drop each bait off the sabiki rig directly into the livewell.
- Keep watch for surface "raining" — baitfish rising to the surface. Sling sabiki rigs around the school's perimeter, but don't bomb the school or they'll sound.
- Multiple sabkis will maximize the bait effort, but watch your spacing and give everyone room to operate because hooked baits tend to tangle adjacent lines.
- When sharks detect your bait gathering, they'll be naturally drawn to the feeding opportunity. If bite-offs persist, find another bait spot or you'll end up burning rigs — and valuable daylight.

- David A. Brown

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"When you see those big schools of hardtails spread out, they're relaxed, but when you see them tucked tight to the rig, that means something's eating them," he said.

You might think that slow trolling live baits around a massive existing food source would be futile, but it's just the opposite. Terrified baits huddle close, so when yours come sauntering by the outskirts, that vulnerability flips the king's feeding switch.

Rough weather may curtail how many lines you can fish, but when conditions allow, Jackson wants a half dozen baits in the water. First, he'll deploy big baits, often those ribbonfish, on two downriggers. He'll stagger the depths with one about 30 feet off the bottom and the other at mid water column.

On top, he'll set four flats at progressively shorter lengths. First is the longest, and this "shotgun" bait goes back about 80 feet. He'll set a mid-range bait at 50, add another at 25 and then drop one right behind the boat in the turbulent prop wash.

That prop bait often produces memorable moments — suffice it to say that 5 feet of silver missile launching maybe a rod-length off the transom is better than dark-and-bold coffee.

Butler's trick: Tow a large, dead Spanish mackerel on the long shotgun line. Kings love munching on their smaller cousins, so giving them an easy opportunity often pays big dividends.

Tip: When setting a downrigger bait, anglers often twist the line before putting it in the release clip to create a loop for the clip to grip. Do yourself a favor and don't wrap the line around your finger while forming the loop because big kings won't hesitate to grab a bait mere feet from the boat — and if a smoker hits the jets with line spun around your finger, you'll likely have a much less impressive handshake.

TO CAPTURE A KING

When your presentations convince a big king to chew, it's gonna be fierce and it's gonna be fast. Expect a couple of monster runs and lots of trickery near the boat, so crew cooperation is critical. One man on the wheel, one on the rod and everyone else clears the spread to avoid tangles.

"Once we get a fish on, we leave out one bait close to the boat," Butler said. "Those other fish hear all that commotion and that excites them. A lot of times we get another big bite that way."

Now, if there's one step in the big king process that'll make you look silly, it's the gaffing. No telling how many tournaments were lost or how many friendships broken with a last-second mistake that inadvertently bumped the line and freed a nearly-caught whopper.

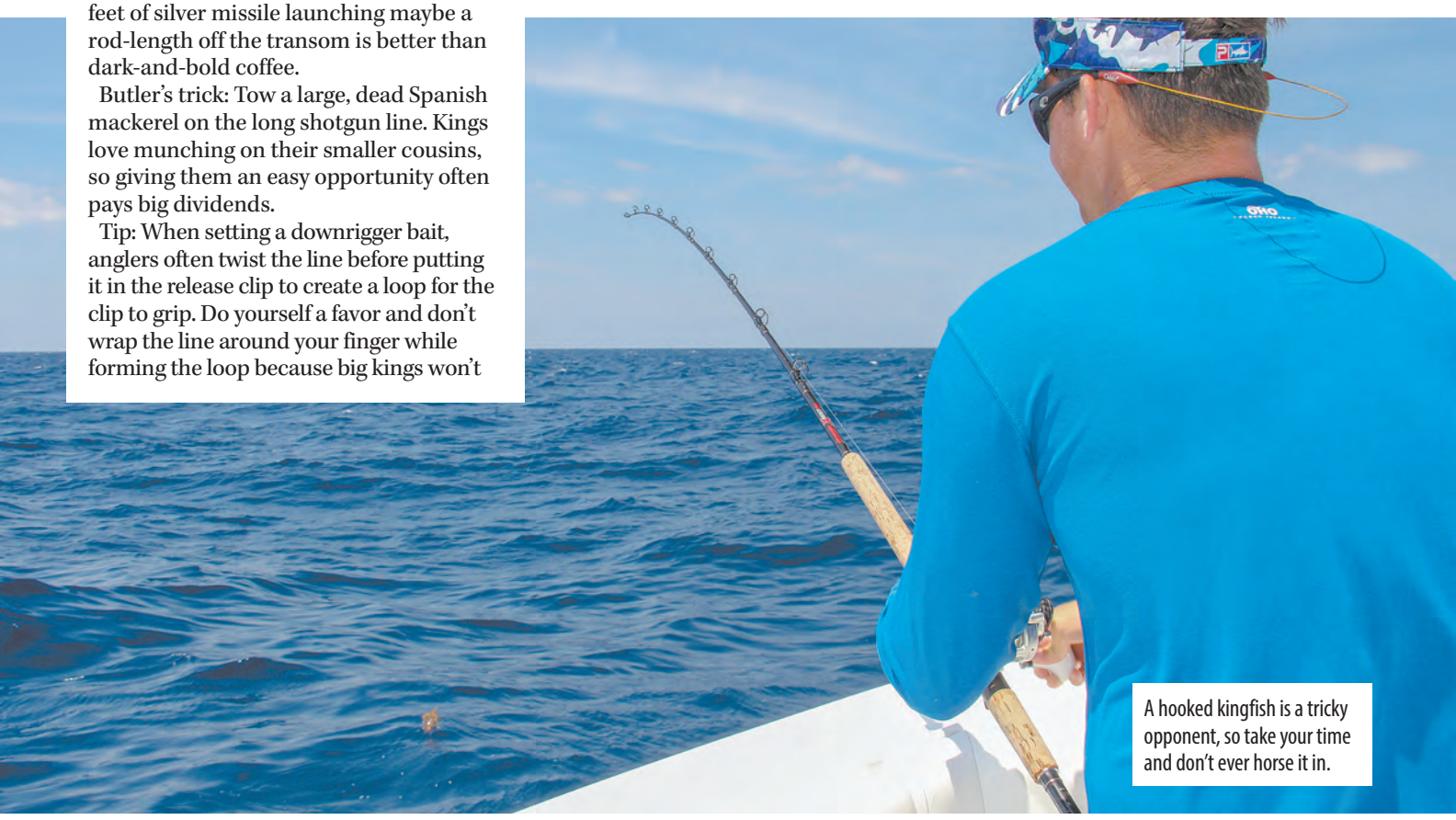
"No 1: Pay attention," said Jackson. "It's easy to get excited when a big fish is coming in, but that's the time for everyone to get locked in. I like to gaff the king above the lateral line, so it doesn't bleed."

Once a king starts running out of gas, it will make big death circles by the boat, similar to a tuna. On the rod, you want to gradually steer the fish higher in the water column as each pass heads away from you. When the circle comes back around, reel down to gather line and keep the fish heading upward.

Once the fish surfaces, lay the gaff across the back — always behind the line — and smoothly pull it into the fish. Controlled movements win; frantic stabbing — not so much.

In and out of the water, the king's teeth are some of the sea's most formidable. Don't underestimate the biting power of a big fish and keep your fingers well away from the business end. Long-handled hook pluckers will keep you out of harm's way. ▪

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



A hooked kingfish is a tricky opponent, so take your time and don't ever horse it in.

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CREATURE FEATURE

Jerald Horst

Tarpon are spectacular fighters and are prized for their jumping ability.

TARPON ARE QUIRKY CREATURES

BUT DO THEY ACTUALLY SPAWN IN LOUISIANA WATERS?

Photo courtesy Erik Rue

For all their glitz and glamour, tarpon are very close to just being giant pogies (menhaden) that eat fish. They are really primitive beasts. On the evolutionary scale, they and their close cousins ladyfish and bonefish are just one step ahead of garfish and bowfin (choupique), but more primitive than eels, shad, sardines and pogies.

Like shad, sardines and pogies, their dorsal (back) and anal (belly) fins are completely spineless. All their bodies have bright silver sides covered with round, primitive (there's that word again) cycloid scales.

Tarpon scales are one of the distinguishing characteristics of the fish. Larger than a silver dollar, they are the genesis of the Cajun French name for the fish, *grande ecaille,* meaning "big scale."

YOU GOTTA HUNT 'EM

Another primitive characteristic of tarpon that affects how you fish for them is that like freshwater gar and bowfin, their swim bladders are laced with spongy blood vessels that allow them to "breathe" atmospheric air.

These bladders are connected directly to their mouths, which allow them to gulp air from the surface. In fact, gulping air isn't just an option. Studies have shown that tarpon, especially young tarpon, must have access to surface air to survive.

The gulping action is referred to as "rolling" by tarpon fishermen. The mindset that they must "hunt" tarpon by looking for rolling fish is the single most important skill that tarpon anglers must develop to be successful.

JAWS OF STEEL

Although they are voracious fish eaters, tarpon are considered to be completely toothless by most anglers. Scientists, who have lots of patience and access to good magnifying lens, disagree — and point out that many parts of their jaws and mouths are lined with extremely fine and densely packed teeth.

Whatever the case, they certainly aren't the sharp teeth found in many other fish that must eat fish to survive. What they lack in teeth, they make up for in their huge upwardly-turned jaws that are among the toughest, boniest jaws of any fish that swims.

Besides their outsized chompers, tarpon are equipped with an elongated and movable bony gular plate that lies in the floor of the mouth between their lower jaws. The plate is used to crush and kill food items, making up for their lack of teeth.

But those bony jaws mean that tarpon are very difficult to hook — and to keep hooked. Fishermen most often set the hook viciously several times on a fish after giving the circle hook a chance to get positioned. Still, landing one in 12 of the tarpon they hook is considered average.

Confounding the hookset is that tarpon do not strike like most other predator

fish. Rather, they take the lure in a gentle half-roll and then head downward to swallow it. A fisherman simply feels his lure stop moving.

Adult tarpon eat a variety of smaller fish species, including mullet, pinfish, marine catfish, needlefish, sardines, shrimp and crabs. Sport fishermen have long known that mullets are one of their favorite foods.

So much so that in the early days of the modern tarpon fishery, the late 1920s through the 1930s, as many tarpon entered in the Grand Isle Tarpon Rodeo were caught on live mullet as on big spoons, the only artificial lure used back then.

Neither live mullet nor spoons are in regular use now. Instead, the universal lure of choice in Louisiana is a Coon Pop, invented by famous charter guide, Lance "Coon" Schouest in the 1980s.

It is simply jig made of a lead head glued to a piece of PVC pipe with BBs in it, followed by a soft plastic trailer. This contraption is wired to a large circle hook. Coon Pops lend themselves to both casting and trolling.

TARPON VISIT LOUISIANA, BUT DON'T SPAWN HERE — OR DO THEY?

For a century, conventional wisdom has been that Louisiana tarpon are summertime visitors to our coast enjoying the fine dining here, much like cobia and tripletail, then retreating to the Caribbean with the onset of cold weather.

But they are cold-sensitive and begin to die at temperatures of 50º F or lower. So they must leave our coast in the winter. But otherwise, tarpon are tough creatures.

They can tolerate almost any salinity found in nature, including pure freshwater. Because of their ability to breathe from the air, they survive well in waters with little or no oxygen.

Juvenile tarpon in Florida thrive inshore in stagnant pools and ditches, backwaters, coastal ponds, hurricane overwashes, mangrove swamps, marshes and even man-made mosquito impoundments.

It has long been assumed that since they are a more tropical fish, they only spawn in South Florida, the Caribbean and Central America — but not Louisiana.

New research seemed to find otherwise. In 2010, juvenile tarpon were reported inshore from Cocodrie, Hopedale and Grand Isle. In the same year, University of New Orleans (UNO) biologists collected a total of 57 4- to 10-inch tarpon with cast nets from a ditch less than 3 feet deep near Port Sulphur.

Supporting evidence of tarpon spawning in Louisiana came from another UNO biologist working with University of Southern Mississippi scientists. Together, they microscopically examined the ovaries and testis of large northern Gulf tarpon and found that they had ripe eggs and sperm, and that one female had likely spawned within 24 hours before capture.

We can only assume that tarpon spawned here must chug down to more tropical waters with their parents when winter temperatures settle over Louisiana.

continues on page 124

Dedicated tarpon anglers like David Prevost make every effort to revive exhausted fish before they are released.

Photo courtesy David Prevost

IS THERE TROUBLE IN PARADISE?

A number of fisheries biologists are concerned that tarpon are "overfished," which sounds odd in a fishery that is dominated by catch-and-release. Strange as it seems for such a glamorous fish, biologists have never conducted a formal stock assessment on the species.

But they point to "multiple lines of evidence that suggest that Atlantic tarpon appear to have declined from historic levels throughout their range." They point out that commercial landings in Central and South America (particularly Brazil) have shown large declines.

Both the eggs and the flesh are eaten in Mexico, and the flesh is relished by the people of Brazil, Columbia, Panama, the West Indies and even Africa. The scales are also used for medicinal purposes in Brazil.

But catch-and-release sportfishing comes at a biological cost as well. Under the best of conditions, 5 percent of the fish released die from the stress of capture. Worse is shark predation of hooked tarpon.

In Boca Grande Pass in Charlotte Harbor, Florida, the self-proclaimed Tarpon Capitol of the World, a large percentage of tarpon handicapped by being on a hook or exhausted from a fight are gobbled up by big hammerhead and bull sharks.

Slow-growing, long-lived fish, a description of tarpon, are the most susceptible to overfishing. Tarpon must be 7 to 10 years old before spawning their first time, and they live 60 to 80 years. ▪

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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Capt. Paul Titus

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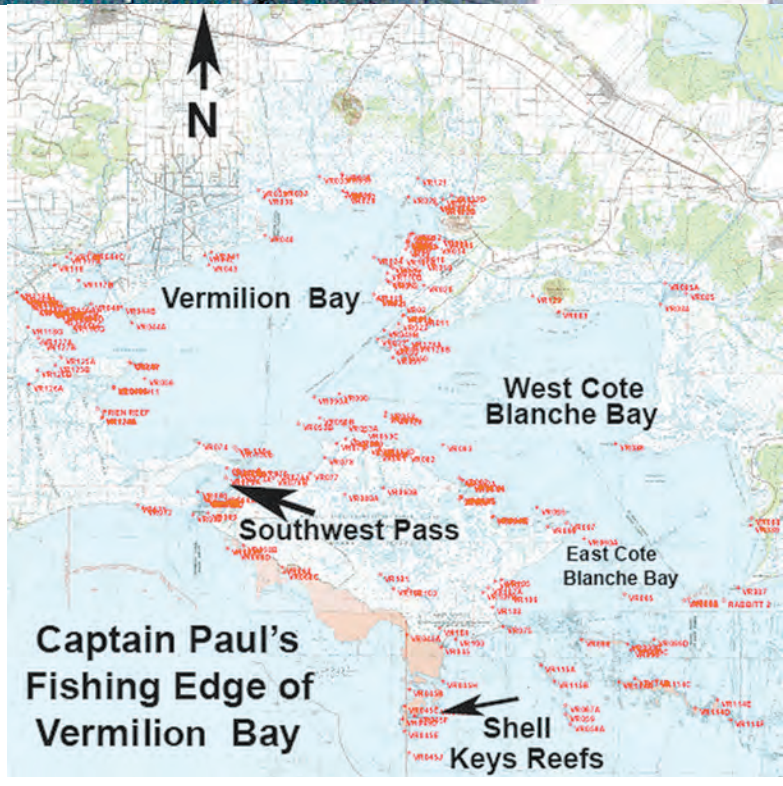
It includes the 25-foot-deep hole in Weeks Bayou, which is waypoint VR122D at 29°49.7535' N. lat ~91°48.6924' W. long. It also has positions in and around Cote Blanche Bay at Point Marone, to East Cote Blanche Bay to the East Cote Blanche Bay reefs at the Gulf of Mexico, to the Shell Keys Reefs, which is waypoint VR045E at 29°24.3941'l N. lat ~ 91°51.2224'W. long.

It also has the Grassy Island Point Reef at waypoint VR068C at 29° 31.8229'N. lat. ~ 91°57.7649'W. long., as well as Diamond Reef located at 29°31.0729' N lat. ~ 91°59.1192' W. long, to waypoints VR068B, VR068E around Pavy's Shell Reef ,and waypoint VR068D located at 29°32.8289'N lat. ~ 92°00.477' W. long.

It also has positions around Tete Butte Reef at the Gulf of Mexico, and features the deep hole in Southwest Pass near Porpoise Point, which is waypoint VR069A at 29°35.4970' N. lat. by 92°01.2551'l W. long. Of course, it has other waypoints in and around Southwest Pass, such as several near the Boxcar Reef in Vermilion Bay at Waypoint VR130A at 29°37.8246' N. lat. ~



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And naturally it has Redfish Point, and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' artificial reef near Cypremort Point.

The Captain Paul's Fishing Edge of GPS Waypoints will give you an edge in navigating and fishing the Vermilion Bay area, which offers a great variety of year-round fishing.

GET THE EDGE

As a means of assisting my readers I started publishing these locations which included a description of the area and a Latitude~longitude or UTM value which had to be manually entered one at a time into a GPS unit. As technology advanced and GPS units could accept maps and data, including waypoints, routes and track downloads, it fell right in with my published waypoints. So I began marketing these waypoints as ***Capt. Paul's Fishing Edge of GPS Waypoints.*** I call the program Fishing Edge because I believe the information will give fishermen an advantage in getting to, finding fishing spots, moving around and getting back from some of the more favorite fishing areas in the state.

Presently, Capt. Paul's Fishing Edge consists of 21 different areas statewide, including Barataria Bay, Lake Borgne, Hopedale to the Mississippi Sound, Hopedale to Bayou Terre Boeufs, Delacroix to Point a la Hache, Bayou Bienvenue, Port Sulphur, Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Borgne, Calcasieu Lake, Pearl River WMA, Lafitte, Leeville East and Leeville West, Empire-Buras, the Rigolets, MRGO waypoints with six routes around the new Hopedale Dam, Cocodrie/Dulac, Bayou Sauvage NWR, Big Branch NWR, Myrtle Grove and Vermilion Bay, which has been highlighted here.

WAYPOINTS CAN NOW BE ELECTRONICALLY INSTALLED

Each file has 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 address. This data download enters all of Capt. Paul's waypoints into the unit in a matter of seconds from your computer.

To help those of us who are not computer savvy, each download has a general map of the area in 1:100,000 scale, and individual 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.

To order an Edge file, you must have an email address that accepts attach-

continues on page 128

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HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS:

With hurricane season now underway, I strongly suggest that you mark or capture GPS waypoints for your home, office or other important locations where you may want first responders to reach you. I know all these locations have a street address, but some of the responders may not be from this area, and as such are not familiar with street names — or the street names may not be visible. This is especially true from the air. Save the latitude~longitude, the position format and the datum used to determine the location. Save them as a hard copy in a location where they can be acccessed — this could save a life.

Should you need any assistance in determining a position, contact me and I will try to assist you. — Capt. Paul

ments. All of Capt. Paul's Fishing Edge files can be found in the Louisiana Sportsman Outdoor Store at sportsmangear.com. In addition, there are several links throughout the website which will bring you to the Fishing Edge ordering page.

Remember that you must list your brand of GPS unit, your email address and the selected area you want to order. The Edge files **are not** brand name interchangeable, so be sure to make the correct GPS selection. ▪

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 instructional courses in the use of GPS for private individuals and government agencies.*

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HAIR TODAY, BUGS TOMORROW

EXPERTS SHARE ADVICE FOR MAKING HAIR BUGS

Deer hair can be used for a variety of flies, adding color, buoyancy and realism. Pictured here are, left to right, Kamatcha mouse, frog, Dahlberg Diver and popper.

If you love flies made with hair, then July is your lucky month. The second weekend of this month, the annual Contraband Fly Fishing Expo in Lake Charles will feature America's premier deer hair tier, Pat Cohen.

Two weeks later, Kelly Galloup will be the headliner for the annual North Louisiana Fly Fishers Master Series in Bossier City. Galloup is not only a master of articulated flies, but also one of the country's top deer hair experts.

AN ALL-PURPOSE MATERIAL

There's a reason why top professional guides like Cohen and Galloup use flies made of hair — whether it's deer, elk, etc. It can be used for all sorts of flies — from bodies of poppers, divers and sliders, to trout flies like Dave's Hopper and Elk Hair Caddis.

What makes deer hair special is its cellular nature. It's spongy and buoyant. Hair follicles also trap air, so when the fly sinks — like with divers and sliders — it releases bubbles that aid in the attraction of predatory fish like bass.

For making bass bugs, the best hair is long and thick. Since southern winters are short and mild, most material companies use hides from northern whitetails.

The belly section is what is used for poppers and sliders. This hair is white, easy to dye, and produces vibrant colors. It also tends to have shorter tips, which makes for denser bodies.

>

UPCOMING EVENTS

• **All month - CCA STAR Tournament.** Runs through Labor Day. Divisions include Fly Fishing East and West for heaviest speckled trout. For details, go to www.ccastar.com.

• **July 13-14 (Fri-Sat) - 14th annual Contraband Fly Fishing Expo,** Friday: Noon to 4 p.m., Saturday: 8:30 a.m. - 4 p.m., Isle of Capri Casino Hotel, Lake Charles. Free admission. Sponsored by the Contraband Fly Casters club. Seminars, fly tying demos, fly casting clinics and instruction, vendors, raffles, food and refreshments. Special guest: Pat Cohen. For more info, go to www.contrabandflycastersinc.net.

• **July 19 (Thu) - Fly Tying Clinic,** Bass Pro Shops, Bossier City. 6 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. No cost. Bring your tools if you have any, otherwise, sets are available for use. Materials are provided. For more info, call Jamie at 318-707-5959.

• **July 28 (Sat) - 6th annual North Louisiana Fly Fishers "Masters Series" featuring streamer legend Kelly Galloup,** 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Red River Wildlife Refuge Headquarters, Bossier City. Pre-registration required as seats limited to 75 attendees. Cost of $40 includes admission, lunch, refreshments. For more info, go to www.northlaflyfishers.org.

FLARING, SPINNING AND STACKING

When tying bass bugs, three techniques are employed to give the bug its desired look. In each case, a small amount of hair is cut from the hide, tips are trimmed off and the hair is aligned along the hook shank.

The first is flaring. The thread wrap goes midway over the hair and is pulled tight. This causes the hair to flare out, but to stay on one side of the hook.

The second is spinning. A couple of loose wraps are made, then as the thread is pulled tight, the hair rotates around the hook and flares out at the same time.

The third is stacking. This is used to create contrasting patterns such as spots. A small amount of hair is placed into an already flared section. The hair is held tight while the thread is pulled tight, which forces the small amount of hair to stay in place.

SOME EXPERT ADVICE

Tying hair bugs isn't complicated, but it is tedious. It's as much art as it is skill and for that reason, very few tiers take it on. Two Louisianans who've done this exceptionally well are Pete Sturgis of Greenwell Springs and Kevin "Doc" Andry of Baton Rouge.

Readers may recall Andry as Louisiana's "Crease Fly Ambassador." But when he's chasing big bass, he prefers using one of his hair bugs. His favorite is a frog pattern, with which

continues on page 132

TIPPETS

Early July should be great surf fishing for speckled trout. Try poppers starting at first light. An hour after the sun rises, switch to Clouser Minnows or other baitfish patterns. An intermediate or sink tip line will help get the fly down in the trough areas where the larger trout are feeding.

Later in the month, pelagic species become more dominant in the surf and passes. On a rising tide, casting Clouser Minnows with a fast retrieve will likely result in vicious strikes from "El Diablo" — the Spanish mackerel. Jack crevalle and bull reds may also be present, so make sure you've got a rod with some backbone.

Delacroix has been hot for redfish this spring, and July should continue that trend. Work the holes in the grass with crab flies, sliders, spoon flies or charlies.

Elsewhere, reds have moved out of the small interior ponds and into large ponds and lakes. Early in the morning, cast poppers along shorelines and be ready for a blowup.

Bream action in the Atchafalaya Spillway should continue to be good this month. Same for large reservoirs like D'Arbonne and Grand Bayou. The sure-fire Tony Accardo method of a slow sinking spiders (ligon) suspended under a popping bug sometimes gets hits on both flies.

In Orleans and Jefferson parishes, the large Rio Grande Perch — we call them 'brainiacs' — are slamming popping bugs and wet flies early in the day.

Fly fishing guru Kevin 'Doc' Andry catches more big bass on hair bugs than anything else.

he's caught more multi-pound bass than on any other fly.

Sturgis prefers a slider, like the Dahlberg Diver — one of my favorite flies for big bass. He ties his with a short collar so they're easier to cast.

Both Sturgis and Andry agree that poppers are the best all-around fly — good for redfish and bass in the marsh, and specks in the surf.

THE RIGHT STUFF

Tying a good bass bug requires the right materials and tools.

Andry and Sturgis both tie on Regal vises. The jaws give a firm grip on hooks and the rotary feature allows for better trimming of the hair body.

Both men use Gamakatsu B10S Stinger hooks for their flies.

Cinching hair down requires tough thread. Flat waxed nylon will do, but both men prefer gel spun, as it's stronger and slides over the hair.

Packing deer hair is what gives it a tight body and keeps it floating longer. For that, a good packer is required. Sturgis uses a Brassy packer. After each "pack" to compress the hair back, he makes two half-hitch knots, then applies head cement on the knot.

Andry uses a Fugly Packer (created by Pat Cohen) and calls it "a game changer" as far as getting highly-compressed bodies. He too secures each pack with adhesive.

For trimming the hair, good serrated scissors are needed. Andry uses Dr. Slick brand, while Sturgis gets his from office supply stores. Afterwards, the final trim is done with a razor blade.

A FEW MORE TIPS

Sturgis notes that the denser the hair, the longer the fly floats, but also the less air bubbles. For that reason, sometimes a lesser-compressed slider can be the ticket.

Andry says his best color combinations — after the green/white for his frogs — are firetiger (orange/chartreuse) and pink and chartreuse for speckled trout.

Both men agree that hair bugs are a must-have. The combination of popping, gurgling and bubbling will entice strikes when other flies fall short. ▪

Glen 'Catch' Cormier
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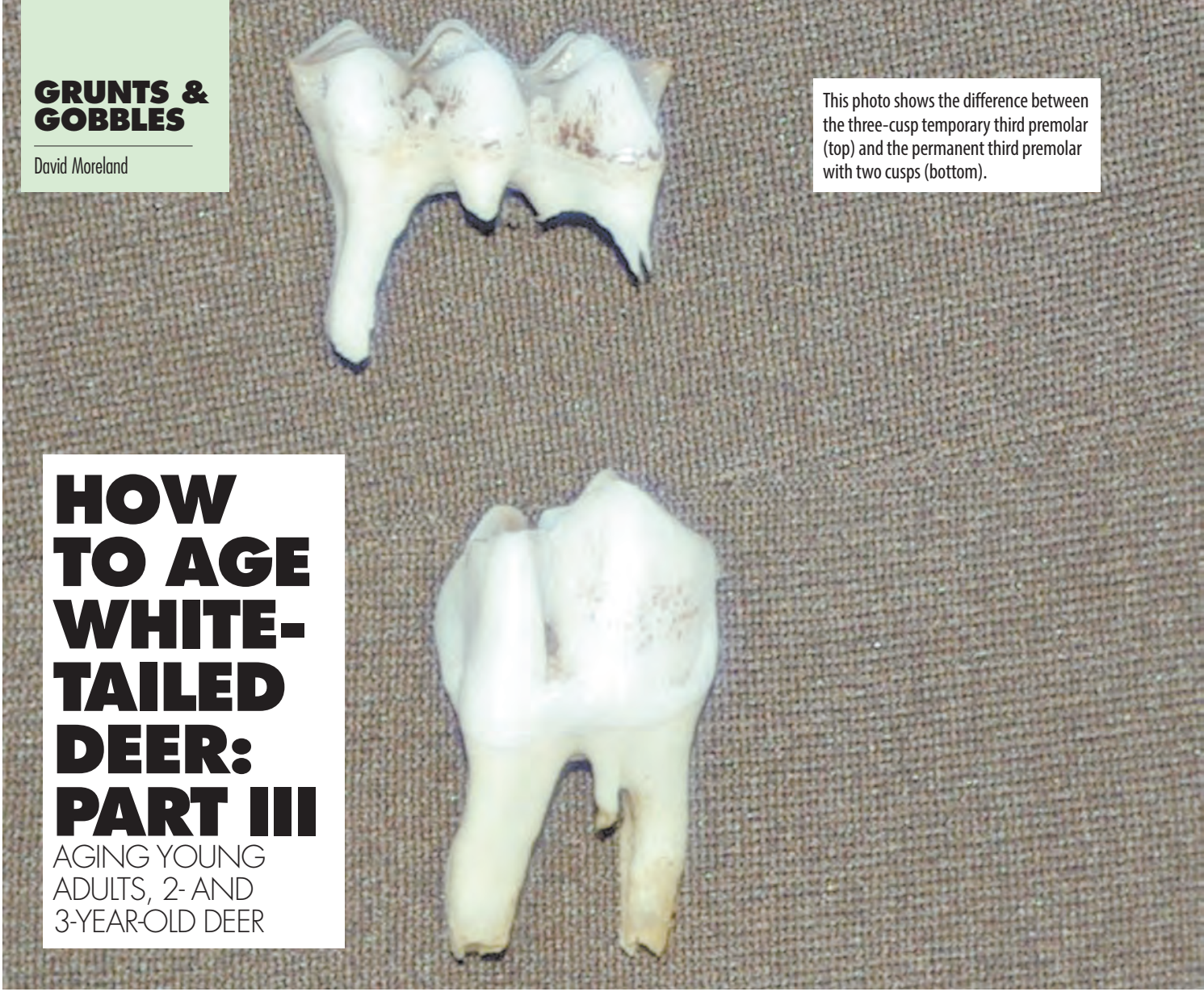

This photo shows the difference between the three-cusp temporary third premolar (top) and the permanent third premolar with two cusps (bottom).

HOW TO AGE WHITE-TAILED DEER: PART III

AGING YOUNG ADULTS, 2- AND 3-YEAR-OLD DEER

Last month I wrote about the 1 ½-year-old age class, or yearling deer. The key that separates the yearling age class from the 2-year-old age class is the third premolar. Yearling deer have three temporary premolars that begin to break up and are shed when the deer is 17 to 18 months old. These temporary premolars are replaced with permanent premolars, with the third premolar now having only two crests. The yearling deer's temporary third premolar has three crests (refer to the June Sportsman issue and the picture of this tooth.) Generally by the time the deer is 2 years old, these new permanent teeth are fully erupted and in place. The third molar is also now fully erupted (see photograph of the typical 2 ½ year old jawbone.)

Once more keep in mind that in the late breeding areas of the state, tooth eruption and wear is several months behind the early breeding areas. This will be especially true with those deer in Areas 1 and 6 that can be born late, in October and November. This can cause some difficulty in separating the 2- and 3-year-old adults. But again the key for separating adults from yearling deer is the third permanent premolar that now has two crests instead of three.

CHEW ON THIS ...

The typical 2 ½-year-old adult jawbone will have the three fully-erupted premolars and three fully-erupted molars. The two-crest third premolar will now show wear on the two crests. The white part of the tooth is enamel, and I generally tell hunters to look for white touching white at the tip of the crest — an indication this is a new tooth showing no wear. The first and second crests of the third molar should also have white touching white, with the third cusp showing no wear at all (or cone shaped.) When teeth begin to wear the enamel down, a brown strip will begin to appear between the two crests, called dentine. If dentine is present between the crests of the third premolar and molar, the deer is probably older than 2 ½ years. The first and second molar will have slight wear on the crests, with dentine visible between the crests.

The food that deer eat plays an important part in tooth wear, as does the type of soil. Deer eating acorns and browse with woody stems will have more wear on their teeth than deer eating soft crop forages or protein pellets. Corn is probably similar to mast. And sandy soils will result in more tooth wear than deer living on clay/loam soils.

As deer grow and become 3-year-olds, their teeth will begin to wear on all the crests, and there now will be dentine showing between the crests of the third premolar and third molar. The crests will still be sharp, but the line of dentine

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is distinct. The third cusp of the third molar will now be worn and cup-shaped. Look at the rear end of the jawbone with this third cusp being the first part of the tooth that you see, and this cup-shaped condition should be evident. These are the keys for separating 2-year-olds from 3-year-olds. Deer that are in the 3-year age class killed in the late-born area may not show distinct wear on the crests, but if there is any wear at all I would suggest moving them up into the 3 ½ year age class. It is generally best to age up rather than down.

The 2- and 3-year-old bucks are generally the ones passed up on areas managing for trophy or higher-end deer. However, as I always say, there are low-end deer in all age classes, and hunters need to learn to recognize the bucks below the desired growth trend and harvest them. On the typical Louisiana hunting club, these 2- and 3-year-old bucks are probably the animals most targeted. Clubs generally use antler growth trends to identify them. Some clubs limit the 2-year-old bucks killed, which generally means more 3-year-old bucks are harvested along with the occasional older buck. Landowners managing for mature bucks, 4- to 6-year-olds, pass the 2- and 3-year-old bucks, again generally using antler criteria. However in our piney woods habitat where nutrition is limited, growth trends will generally be low — and hunters may not see much increased antler growth as deer grow older. Nutrition is the key to a sound and productive management program, especially if hunters are looking for wall hangers.

GET THE HABITAT READY FOR FALL

Late April and May was a dry time for much of the state. I planted a strip of sunflowers in the dove field after a good rain in early April, but no rain came until the last week of May, and the growth of this crop was poor. Rains came in late May and I planted another strip hoping the drought trend was over. This is the problem with food plots without rain — forage production is poor. I had been clipping two large plots that were planted with jointvetch in June. I simply clip the grass and keep it low, broadcast the seed and fertilizer and skip the plowing. I have found that the vetch will germinate and begin to grow, and when it starts getting hot in July and August growth really kicks in. This vetch will be my late-summer crop for deer, and will actually provide hunting opportunity in October.

The clover planted last fall was my crop forage for deer during the spring and early summer months. Legumes are the forages that provide the protein deer need for best growth. Native forages such as elderberry, smilax, trumpet creeper, blackberry and honeysuckle are readily available for deer on our property and they have been eating them. The dry spell during the spring days provided good opportunity for logging, so hope-

continues on page 136

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A 2 ½-year-old jawbone will show no wear on the crests of both the third premolar and the third molar. The third cusp of the third molar will be cone shaped with no wear.

A 3 ½-year-old jawbone will show wear on both the third premolar and the third molar (note the dark line of dentine between the white enamel crests), and the third cusp of the third molar will be cup-shaped due to wear.

fully if you needed to cut some trees you took advantage of those days. Keep in mind that if you plan to replant a cut site with pine, site preparation with a heavy chemical mix to kill the hardwood competition will reduce the benefit deer receive from the native browse species.

Wildlife and Fisheries sent out a harvest survey via the internet and if you got one hopefully you took the time to report your 2017 hunting data. Good harvest data is a must for sound management of our state's resources. ▪

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.*

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LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

LIVETARGET'S SCALED SARDINE TWITCHBAIT

DETAILED, REALISTIC LURE IS IRRESISTIBLE TO MULTIPLE SALTWATER SPECIES

A veteran saltwater fishing guide out of Sarasota, Florida, has an artificial bait that looks so much like the real thing, it's irresistible to speckled trout, redfish and snook in the shallow waters he fishes along the coast.

Another professional angler and television personality, Henry Waszczuk, has the same realistic looking artificial lure in his arsenal, one blackfin tuna can't resist in the warm waters of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico.

They both rely on LiveTarget's Scaled Sardine twitchbait. LiveTarget's floating and suspending models, which hit the market in 2012, are available in 3- and 3 ½-inch versions.

Waszczuk said the artificial lure "is the most lifelike representation of a sardine that I have ever seen … whether they are brand new or old classics, like the sardine twitchbait, they fool fish — every time."

The North Port, Florida, outdoorsman starred as an offensive lineman in the CFL before spending his days at the office in a Boston Whaler. He is host of Fishing the Flats TV and Fins & Skins Celebrity TV Series.

In April, Waszczuk and his 33-foot Boston Whalers were 35 miles offshore from Venice, Florida, fishing in 100-foot depths.

"A group of fish that we also thought were AJs (amberjack) got active about 80 yards away, so we quickly repositioned the boat, and I grabbed a lure that has become a big confidence bait for me: a LiveTarget Sardine Twitchbait. I made a long cast out in front of the group, twitched it hard twice, and the water absolutely erupted with foam and fury," Waszczuk said.

"I rig with 40-pound braid and 50-pound fluorocarbon leader, and this fish's first run nearly spooled me … During battle, I started to realize that we weren't hooked up with an amberjack. I was astonished with my first glimpse of the fish shimmering beneath the boat — indeed, we weren't wrestling with a stout AJ, but instead a monster blackfin tuna, the biggest I had ever hooked on an artificial lure."

The huge 35-pound blackfin was boated.

LiveTarget's Scaled Sardine twitchbait comes in 3- and 3 ½-inch floating or suspended models, and is available in four color variations.

"A fish that old and big has seen a lot of lures in its day, and I truly believe that my sardine twitchbait was the reason I was able to seal the deal," Waszczuk said.

He won't get an argument from Geoff Page, the Sarasota-based guide who's been on LiveTarget's pro staff three years.

Page's blowups on the artificial lure come in shallower water. Speckled trout, redfish and snook eat the lifelike sardine hard plastic bait. Most of the time they hit it hard with a bite that rocks your fishing rod.

When Page uses the topwater model, he relies on a few time-proven methods.

"For the floater, you can walk the dog and V-wake it just below the surface," he said, noting it's at its best on the toughest of days.

"When the fish are real spooky in real calm conditions, it's really good," he said.

The Scaled Sardine twitchbait suspending model works 1 to 2 feet deep, Page said, and is very effective.

Occasionally, he arms his Scaled Sardine twitchbaits with an in-line single hook, replacing treble hooks with a 2/0 Owner Single Replacement Hook X Strong. He believes the hookup/catch ratio improves.

"They are getting more popular with hard baits," he said.

REALISM IS KEY

Vic Cook understands Page and Waszczuk's fondness for the Scaled Sardine twitchbait. He's proud of it, too. LiveTarget's product and development exec, who has been with the company since its inception in 2007, was the lead designer on the vision and product development team.

"It's one of our top saltwater lures in terms of catching all kinds of saltwater gamefish, probably our best-selling topwater lure," Cook said. "It's my favorite. It's my go-to."

Both 3-inch models weigh 7/16 ounces and the 3 ½-inch floater weighs 5/8 ounces ,while the suspending bait weighs 11/16 ounces, he said. They are available in four colors: ghost/natural, ghost/amber, silver/green and natural/metallic.

They all look and act like the real thing. Also, each has a rattle.

For more information on the Scaled Sardine twitchbait and other LiveTarget artificial lures, go to www. livetargetlures.com or call (888) 231-4448. ▪

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

GOT A QUESTION FOR THE KEITH?
EMAIL IT TO KLACAZE15@ATT.NET

Cage traps like this are portable and affordable. They use a release trigger with trip wire, and spring tension shuts the door and keeps it closed. INSET: Leave the door open a few days and allow hogs to become comfortable feeding in the trap before sealing the deal.

TRY TRAPPING HOGS

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BREAK THE BANK TO PUT A HURTIN' ON SOME WILD PIGS

We've talked about hunting feral hogs to thin the herd. I don't know about you, but I'm not much on summer hunting. The sweat tends to rust my rifle. So when the thermometer reaches into the 90s, I think it's time to trap hogs. Summer is a good time for hog trapping for a few other reasons, as well.

Sows will have produced litters of pigs in late-winter and early-spring. The pigs are weaned by now and are busy doing pig things like breeding, rooting up the world, breeding and competing with deer and other wildlife for food. Did I mention breeding? But the youngsters are not as experienced and wary as adult hogs, and are easier to trap now.

Mid- to late-summer can also be a lean time for hogs. During summer's dog days, soft mast such as berries are gone, along with clover and lush spring grasses. Summer sun with little rain can turn the ground to stone, making rooting for roots, worms and grubs very difficult. Food is scarce, and hogs will more readily enter traps baited with corn or other feed.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TRAP

So what's the best hog trap? Nowadays a wide selection of good traps are on the market and are being used effectively. They range in price from thousands for high-tech designs, down to a few bucks for some hog panel or fence wire and steel posts. I have seen all work well, and not so well.

But before investing thousands in the latest and greatest model, try some low-tech designs. Case in point: Members of a hunting lease had lots of hogs on the property and wanted them gone. They invested more than $7,000 in a big trap with battery powered cameras and cell phone-operated remote controls. It looked impressive. Then I heard they

were having trouble with the cell phone signal and weren't catching any hogs. I hope they got things worked out, but don't know for sure. I do know that years before, former members of that lease used old-fashioned corral and cage traps with good success on hogs — no batteries required.

That certainly does not mean the newest designs don't work. I have a friend winning his hog war with one of the advanced technology traps. He has taken more than 70 hogs off his lease in the last six months. But those of us on more limited budgets can catch hogs, too. The key is in learning where and how to place traps.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SPOT

Hogs are nomads and move with the seasons as different food sources become available. In fall and winter, they go to hardwoods for acorns, pecans and other mast. In spring, it's clover and ripening berries. Summer will find them near agricultural crops or any other forage they can find. Even more important in summer is water. Hogs can't take much heat, so they will seek out water for drinking and wallowing in the cool mud. This makes them somewhat predictable, and they will usually be found in the same areas at the same time each year.

Bedding areas are even more reliable. If an area has the right combination of cover, nearby water and reasonable proximity to a food source, hogs will use the same bedding spot consistently.

continues on page 141

LAND FOR SALE

- **654 acres Wilkinson Co.** Located 9 miles east of Hwy 61 at Woodville. Utilities available and campsite, lots of river frontage on Buffalo River, gentle rolling hills & excellent road system, hardwoods & pines. Full of deer & turkey. $3,400 per acre. **SOLD**
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- **Home & 49 acres in Jefferson Co.** Deep in the woods on the Adams/Jefferson co lies this rare gem, lies west of Hwy 553 b/w Church Hill & Anna's Bottom, 2,200 sq ft home, this property is known for producing big bucks and turkeys. $399,000.
- **722 acres in Copiah Co.** Located just 10 minutes from Hazelhurst and just a few off I-55, this is incredible hunting tract, food plots with stands and great interior road system, electricity & water are available, tons of investment opportunities. $1,995,500.
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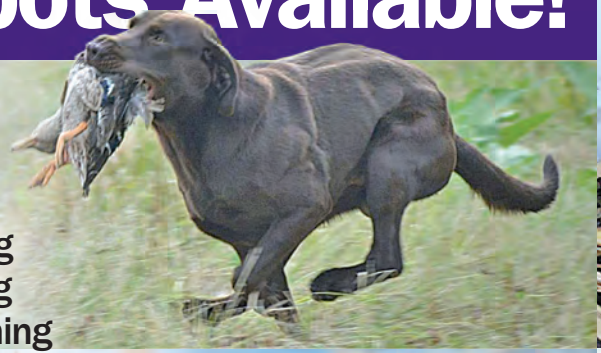

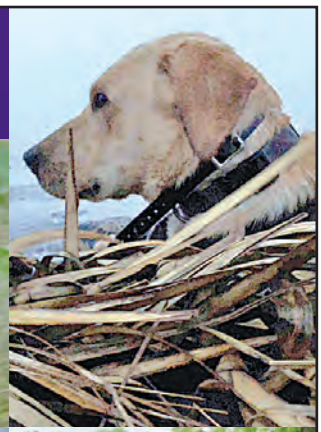

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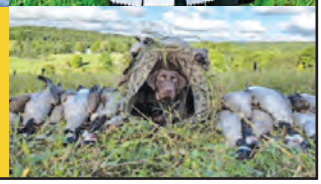


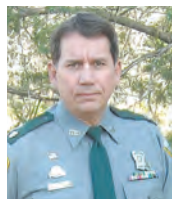
In summer, place traps near bedding areas along trails to and from feeding grounds. If hogs are grazing pastures or summer wildlife food plots, place traps along the edges — preferably where trails from bedding areas enter the open ground.

A land manager friend has been trapping hogs on his employer's property for many years. He uses corral and cage traps in locations described above. Those traps are rarely moved, and continue to catch hogs year after year. Portable cage traps are a great option for quick set-up at hotspots where fresh hog sign is found, or if the trapper only has one or two traps and needs to hit several locations.

BAIT AND WAIT...PATIENTLY

Never bait and set a trap immediately. Hogs are smart and suspicious, and will be very hesitant to enter the trap at first. Scatter corn around the outside of the trap as well as inside. Tie the door open and allow them to feed in and out of the trap unharmed for a few days. Gradually put less feed outside and more inside. Use a game camera to monitor progress. Once hogs are comfortable going in the trap, set it and catch them.

A basic hunting license is required for trapping hogs with corral or cage traps, and traps must have an opening in the top measuring at least 22 X 22 inches, or 25 inches in diameter. So get the hogs now — before they compete with wildlife for mast this fall. ▪



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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Sammy Romano

Garmin's Xero Bow Sight combines a rangefinder and a bow-sighting system in one unit.

TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT THIS NEW SIGHT

GARMIN COMBINES RANGEFINDER, LASER-SIGHTING SYSTEM FOR BOWHUNTERS

Each year at the Archery Trade Association's trade show, there's usually one new product that has the most "buzz" around the show.

No matter where you go, this "buzz-worthy" product enters the conversation; you can hear people talking about it as you walk up and down the aisles.

Usually, it's the hottest new compound or crossbow, but at the most-recent show, all eyes were on the new Garmin Xero Bow Sight.

This sight has features and advantages never before offered in the archery world, and many archers were quick to take notice. Garmin has long been a magnum force in electronics and GPS technology, and now it has brought that experience to our industry.

FIRST OF ITS KIND

Garmin's Xero Bow Sight is the first bow-mounted, laser rangefinder and sighting system that measures the angle-compensated distance to the target, and then provides an exact LED sight pin for the shot. This offers several advantages over previous technology, one of which is less movement due to no longer needing to raise a rangefinder to your eye and then lower it to draw your bow.

A typical shot scenario will go something like this: When a shot at an animal or target is presented, the archer simply squeezes the grip mounted pressure switch, which illuminates an LED ranging dot in the sight. The archer then places that dot on the animal's vitals — or the target — and releases the pressure switch. At that point, the LED will move to the correct aiming point, and the archer uses that LED as a sight pin.

There is no need to consciously choose a correct pin; the Xero sight automatically adjusts for distance. Another huge advantage is a shorter shot time. Many times, I have ranged an animal, only to have it turn to an unfavorable shot angle while I am trying to get drawn.

Also, because there is only one pin displayed at a time, the archer's sight pic-

ture is much less cluttered. I especially appreciate this fact as I age, and multiple pins begin to blur together for me.

In the past, bow-mounted rangefinders have been extremely heavy, adding a lot of weight to the setup and drastically affecting its balance. When I first held the Xero sight, I was immediately impressed with its relatively light weight. At slightly less than 15 ounces, it is lightweight and feels great on my Mathews Halon 6. It must be calibrated to your individual bow, but setup is menu-driven and prompts you throughout the process. And brightness of the LED pins is easily adjusted to an archer's eyesight for precise, crisp aiming points that are easily visible. Within 30 minutes, this sight can be set up and sighted in out of the box on most setups. Range to target is clearly displayed at the top of the sight on an LCD screen, but it's not necessary to read because the correct pin is automatically illuminated.

TWO MODELS

The sight comes in two models, the Xero A1 Bow Sight and the Xero A1i. Both offer the same basic functionality, but the Xero A1i offers several advanced features, including dual-color (red or green) LED pins, multiple arrow profiles and a laser-locate function. I believe the green LED pins (A1i only) will offer an advantage because it differentiates them from the initial ranging pin (which is red).

The laser locate function enables the user to "project" a waypoint to where the animal was standing at the shot, as well as where it was last seen or entered cover, and sync that with some handheld Garmin GPS units or the Garmin watch.

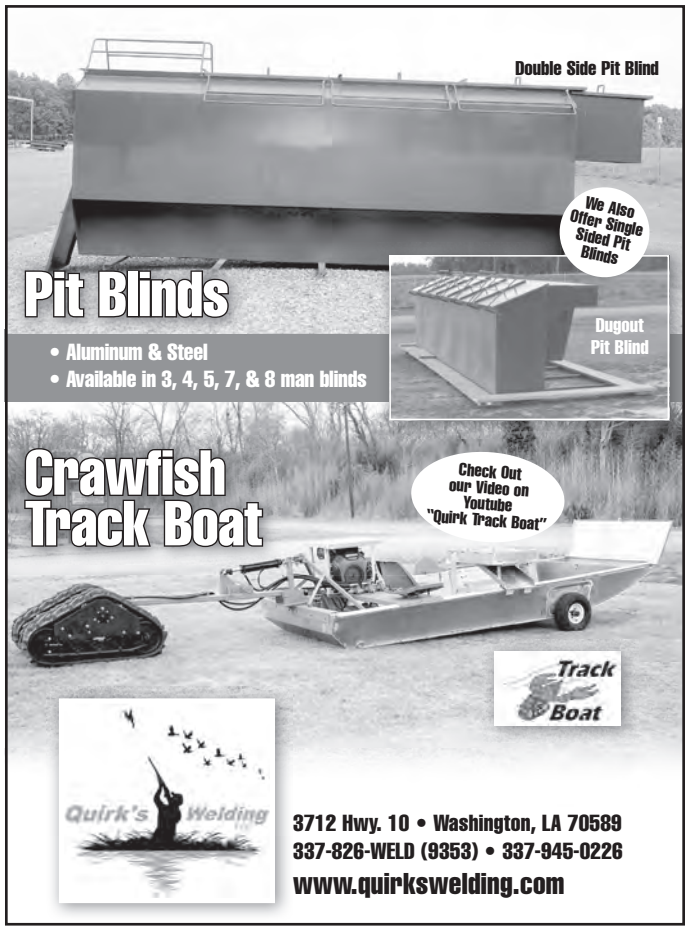
If there are any drawbacks to the new sight, they are cost and legality. Suggested retail for the Xero A1 is $799.99, and the Xero A1i is $999.99.

And although it is legal in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and the South in general, the unit is currently not legal in every state, so check regulations where you will be hunting before purchasing one.

That being said, the simplicity, clear sight picture, quicker target ranging and shorter shot time — coupled with less movement — makes this product a game-changer, especially for spot-and-stalk hunting out West.

Stop by your local Garmin dealer and check one out for yourself. ▪

Sammy Romano *is a lifelong hunter who has worked in the archery industry for more than 24 years. His expertise includes compounds and crossbows. He can be reached at samboka31@aol.com.*



Bill Garbo

The author's son aligns a trail camera to see what's cooking in the deer woods. **INSET:** The most interesting trail cam photos aren't always bucks growing antlers.

NEVER TOO EARLY FOR TRAIL CAMS

A question I was asked by a deer hunter the first week of June stands out as July rolls around. He wanted to know in what stage bucks' antler growth would be, but the big question was, "Would it be worth it to put cameras up?"

My considered response was that bucks would be showing anything from "nubs to hat hooks" but in 30 days, you'll be seeing some early definition of the bucks' racks.

In my viewpoint, as a huge proponent of the use of trail cameras pretty much year-round, there is nothing but upside when you can keep an eye on your deer herd and your hunting property during the offseason. If you are relatively new to the use of trail cameras, there is no better time than now to begin testing ideas and learning all you can. Over time, you will pick up the "where" and "how" regarding surveilling your unique hunting property with a web of trail cams. For me, early scouting with trail cameras generates a continuous stream of photographic data from the preseason time frame right on through hunting season. My mantra is to have as many cameras out as possible, to obtain more photos rather than less and to have them out early at as many varied locations as efficiently feasible. As the data comes in, I comb through and analyze it, looking for new information, surprises, trends or patterns — and to just get a general idea of what exactly is going on in my deer woods.

LOCATION, LOCATION

I have on many occasions been accused of being fanatical about trail cameras, and if the accumulation and analysis of vital records — as I refer to my photo database — fits that description, then I am guilty as charged.

The hunter/land manager should have the mindset of looking at his/her property as a field laboratory that is ripe to reveal things such as herd density and composition, age structure, adult sex ratio and fawn recruitment. Is it expensive to have and to maintain a web of cameras? Not now, as the price for quality trail cameras has dropped a great deal in recent years.

Battery life and battery replacement costs were big issues when D and C batteries were the norm, but with most cameras now using from eight to 12 AA batteries, greatly improved battery life and much-lower seasonal battery costs have been the result.

All hunting properties are not created equally from the standpoint of what will work to your best advantage when camera scouting. Some properties will be hilly and even rugged, while others will be flat, with agriculture fields or hardwood bottomland. Still others will be covered with plantation pines, and so forth and so on. In other words, the camera techniques that work well in one location might not work at all in another.

The obvious point here is that in order to maximize your efforts and gain your best advantage, your goal will be to obtain photos of game animals, especially whitetails. Just like the old real-estate cliché, success depends on location, location, location. Your trail camera should be where deer are concentrated for many reasons, which would include food sources — agricultural and hunter introduced — water sources, especially in a time of drought, and travel ways and pinch points, to name a few.

DETAIL ORIENTED

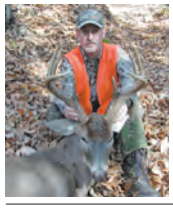
The No. 1, most-obvious location for a surveillance camera is overlooking a feed station or mineral-attractant site, but this only works if supplemental feeding is allowed where you hunt. If it is, try and place any camera that overlooks a feed site close enough to be able to see detail but far enough away to be able to get the whole site in the frame. Place it high enough to be out of a deer's normal sight plane, for example, just above head height.

If you can put a camera in an elevated orientation, tilt the upper side of the camera housing at a sufficient downward angle to be face-on to the feeder. The camera can be canted slightly downward by placing a piece of a stick between the upper part of the camera and the tree trunk on which it's mounted.

The key to my success with using trail cameras over the past 10 or 12 years has revolved around effective camera placement — not the use of fancy or expensive cameras. I use basic brands and models that are economical and readily available to every hunter. ▪

TRAIL CAM LOCATIONS:

- Field edges and corners
- Access points to food plots
- Supplemental feeders and mineral stations
- Heavily worn travel routes
- Pinch points and funnels
- Woods road intersections
- Active communal scrapes during the season



Bill Garbo *is a petroleum engineer and avid whitetail hunter from Madison. He has lived and hunted out west and taken numerous big-game species, but hunting big, mature southern whitetail bucks is his favorite pursuit by a country mile.*

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Chris Holmes

FIRST CAST

HOBIE OFFERS POTENTIAL KAYAKERS REAL HANDS-ON FISHING EXPERIENCE

When someone is interested in beginning kayak fishing, the standard advice is to demo several kayaks before deciding which one to buy. However, you still can't truly get the feel of how a kayak performs under actual fishing conditions. Enter Hobie's "First Cast" program. We recently tagged-along to see what the program is all about, and according to all of the participants, it was an overwhelming success.

Teaming up with local dealers, the program is designed to get potential kayak anglers into the Hobie model of their choice for a day of guided fishing and instruction. Pack & Paddle is a Hobie kayak dealer located in Lafayette, and regularly runs First Cast trips out of PAC Kayak Rentals in Point-aux-Chenes. The program is inexpensive, unique and answers all the questions an aspiring kayak angler might have.

Meeting at the marina, the group's participants milled around as various Hobie models were set up. Questions were asked and answered about the boats and equipment supplied for the trip. Most of the necessities were included, except fishing rods and tackle. (Rods and reels are available for a small rental fee, and participants can purchase a small tackle pack specifically selected for the trip. To make it easier for those that don't know how to tie fishing knots, rental rods come with tactical clips to make changing lures simple.)

This trip was led by Pack & Paddle marketing manager Eli Braud, along with Hobie Fishing Team member Butch Ridgedell. Braud and Ridgedell acted as instructors and guides for the day, with the goal of introducing

CONTINUES >

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.*

Hobie Fishing Team member Butch Ridgedell makes sure everything is just right for Elizabeth Blades as she heads out to participate in the First Cast program.

several anglers to the addictive world of fishing in a kayak.

Ridgedell gathered the group together to go over three simple rules for the day's trip: 1. PFDs had to be worn at all times while on the water. 2. No alcohol was allowed during the trip. 3. Participants had to stay in sight of the guide.

READY FOR LAUNCH

With the assistance of the participants, the kayaks were launched and each angler boarded their chosen 'yak. The group then moved to the harbor, where any necessary seat/pedal adjustments were fine-tuned and they got a feel for pedaling, steering and also had any additional questions answered.

The nice thing about launching at PAC is that the anglers can begin fishing in less than five minutes. The trip isn't billed as a fish-catching adventure, but that's one of the obvious goals. Really though, it's designed to get each individual a hands-on kayak-fishing experience that combines teaching kayaking skills, basic navigation and tips for locating and catching fish. Kayak fishing is a little different: As a solo occupant, you are the captain, the deckhand and the angler all rolled into one. That is one of the many alluring aspects of the sport, but it can take some getting used to.

Once the fishing began, the group split in half, but stayed in the same general vicinity. The three anglers in Ridgedell's group all had some fishing experience, but this was their first time in a kayak. Bret Rogers was joined by the husband-and-wife team of Chris and Elizabeth Blades.

"A GREAT EXPERIENCE"

The morning proved tough for fishing, but as the day wore on, everyone caught and boated several fish. While slowly working down a shoreline, Rogers found that a purple and chartreuse plastic tail under a popping cork was his ticket for some consistent, albeit undersized, trout action. However, he was thrilled to be catching his first-ever kayak fish. The trip cemented his decision to buy a boat. "Everybody should try it. I will definitely be doing it again, and my only decision now is which kayak I am going to buy," he said.

As we pedaled over to a new location, Elizabeth Blades was struck by how easy it was to get acclimated to the Hobie Compass. Even though she had not yet caught a fish, she was having a great morning.

"I'm just thrilled to be out here and can't believe how easy it is to maneuver. I'm having a great time," she said.

At the next spot, Ridgedell explained to Elizabeth about using the current to her advantage, and letting her popping cork/dead shrimp combination drift over a point on the shoreline. She pedaled into position and after feeding a few bait stealers, she hooked into a nice black drum that put up a good fight on her light tackle. From there, her day got even better.

She landed the fish and got it secured on the fish grip. That's one of the things new kayak anglers quickly realize — catching and landing fish is a solo proposition with no calls to "get the net."

Meanwhile, Chris had located a nearby multi-species honey hole. Also using a popping cork/dead shrimp set up, he found small reds, drum and trout all in the same spot. Blades said he had been contemplating purchasing a kayak for fishing, but had a lot of questions.

"This was a great experience being able to pedal around, and actually realizing how far of a range these kayaks have. It was comfortable, stable, and alleviated any concerns I had about fishing out of such a small craft," he said.

Without much need for actual fishing instruction, Chris chose his own fishing spots and went home with some fresh speckled trout and redfish for dinner. A kayak is definitely in his future.

Back at the dock, the participants had nothing but excited words about the First Cast program and the guides.

Elizabeth summed it up best: "It was a great experience. Even as a rookie, it was a fun and easy day. That kayak really scoots and cuts through the water."

As an added bonus for participants who decide to buy a boat, Pack & Paddle will credit 50 percent of the cost of a First Cast experience toward the purchase of a new kayak if it's made within 30 days.

Kayak curious?

Then get on board a Hobie First Cast trip and try it for yourself. For more information and to see other trips offered, go to www.packpaddle.com.

Although the overall fishing was slow, Chris Blades managed to bring home some fresh trout and redfish for dinner.

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Before

After

PAC KAYAK RENTALS REVISITED

It was a little over two years ago when we reported on Louisiana's first and only kayak-specific marina. When Eddie and Lisa Mullen opened Pointe-aux-Chenes (PAC) Kayak Rentals, it was something special. It's even better now. They wanted to make a place that was specifically designed for the needs of kayak anglers. With no fuel sales and no powerboat launch facilities, they started with a unique floating kayak launch equipped with two launching bays. It has now been expanded to six.

"Since the dock rises and falls with the tide, the distance to the water never changes and there are no slippery ramps. Safe and easy, in and out," Eddie told us back then.

The tripling of the launch bays is far from the only changes the Mullens have implemented since opening. PAC Kayak Rentals has absolutely become a full-service kayak fishing marina. They've increased their fleet of rental kayaks, opened a tackle store and sell ice. Live and dead bait is still available, and for those wanting to stay on site, they have RV and tent camping sites available as well as a stationary houseboat that is great for small groups. All of the accommodations are available for nightly, weekly or monthly rentals, and the RV spots can also be rented yearly. A large lighted fishing pier was constructed for use by overnight guests, and provides a lot of after-hours action just steps away from the houseboat.

Need more? Many marinas have storage buildings where anglers can leave their boats to avoid towing them for every fishing trip. So they constructed secure wooden storage boxes that kayak anglers can rent to keep their kayak on-site. Eerily resembling a small mausoleum, the four-slot storage has proven popular and will soon be expanded. For those wanting to experience kayak fishing via a guided trip, PAC has an experienced guide that can take care of everything. Of course, the mothership trip that has been offered since the beginning is still one of the most popular options. Either renting a kayak from PAC or bringing your own, Eddie will load it up on his Carolina skiff and bring the anglers to secluded areas that are too far to reach by paddling alone.

A long day of kayak fishing can make an angler hungry. They'll soon be able to take care of that, too. On my recent visit, a large prefabricated building sat in the parking lot. Lisa pointed out some new pilings and a superstructure, and advised that the building would soon be lifted up top to become the new on-site restaurant. It will have a large covered patio for dining with great views of the Point-aux-Chenes marsh.

I'm sure Eddie and Lisa still have additional plans for their remarkable kayak fishing marina, and who knows what they will dream up next? They have truly created a kayak-friendly operation located in the heart of a great kayak fishing area. If you have never been, you don't know what you are missing.

Check out www.packayakrental.com.

Kayak anglers can rent mini-sheds at PAC Kayak Rentals and keep their boats on site, eliminating the need to transport 'yaks for each trip. It's proven a popular option, and additional sheds are currently being built.

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NEW GEAR REVIEWS

SEADEK KAYAK TRACTION PADS

Made from closed cell PE/EVA foam, SeaDek pad kits for kayaks offer an exceptional traction surface, and also add to a kayak's stealth factor by reducing noises caused by dropping or hitting gear against the plastic deck. The cushiony foam also lessens fatigue from prolonged standing, and keeps the deck much cooler to the touch on hot summer days. The kits come precut for a wide variety of major kayak brands and models, but can also be easily custom designed for any kayak with an available template kit. The deck pads come in a wide variety of customizable colors, with the ability to add on graphic options, fish rulers and more to make your kayak truly one of a kind. Adding a complimentary colored border makes the pads really stand out. There are two available surface textures: brushed or embossed. The durable foam is easy to clean and resists staining from fish blood and even Louisiana swamp mud. The pads come backed with a powerful peel and stick adhesive that goes on and stays on. It's easy to apply as a do-it-yourself modification, or it can be professionally installed by most kayak dealers. Applying SeaDek to your kayak is a great upgrade that makes fishing more comfortable, cleaning more effortless and your kayak more cool. SeaDek also will send out a free sample kit of several color, texture and thickness options. Prices vary depending on the amount of pad coverage and any chosen custom options. Expect the average standard kit to cost between $150 and $250.

More information: www.seadek.com

THE FISH GRIP

Although not technically a new product, the Fish Grip has gone through many changes and upgrades since it was originally introduced more than 16 years ago. This little plastic tool is great for landing and handling all types of fish in a kayak, but especially toothy ones. And it's inexpensive, light weight and it floats. Handling fish in the close confines of a kayak can be a dicey proposition. However, the Fish Grip allows the angler to get complete control of the business end of the fish without causing any harm. Whether it is for catch-and-release or putting the fish in the cooler, this handy tool should be on every kayak. They come in a variety of colors, including glow, and have an attached wrist lanyard. The Fish Grip was developed by avid anglers with the goal of finding a safer way to land a fish — safer for the fish, and the angler. It comes in both original and a new junior size for handling smaller fish, or for those that find the original size just a bit too big. MSRP: $14.95 original and $10.99 for the junior.

More information: www.thefishgrip.net

*Due the lag time from information to print, weather conditions can change the bite so check in regularly with **LouisianaSportsman.com** for the latest updates.

JULY'S BEST BETS

FRESHWATER

WHERE: Toledo Bend
WHAT: Bass, sac-a-lait
HOW:
Even though it is hot, the fishing on Toledo Bend has been good. Early mornings and late evenings are the most productive — and the most comfortable. Bass are hitting topwater baits fishing shallow early morning and evenings, but as the day wears on, they are heading deep. Throw drop-shot rigs, Texas-rigged plastics and deep-diving crankbaits. Fish shady coves when looking for shallow bass, and move off of points and creek channels for bass holding in deeper waters. Toledo Bend is big water, and having a fish finder is crucial to locate depths and structures to key in on areas where the fish are congregating. The sac-a-lait bite has been consistent, with live shiners the ticket for putting together a hefty box. Use an aerated livewell if possible, and don't overcrowd the container to help keep the baits frisky in the 90-plus degree temperatures. It's unlikely that kayakers have personal brush piles, but that is where the sac-a-lait have been holding. Keep an eye on your electronics and watch for piles sitting in 15 to 20 feet of water. Many confrontations have occurred over fishing brush piles constructed by others, so if you didn't build it, it's best to move on if asked to do so. Yes, you have the right to fish them — but it's not worth the hassle — especially since you'll likely be the smallest vessel on the lake.
LAUNCH:
There are numerous launches and facilities all along the Louisiana side of Toledo Bend. From dirt roads to full-service marinas, the launch options are nearly endless. Several locations offer cabins and camping areas. Louisiana has north and south state parks on Toledo Bend that offer cabins, camping and boat launches. Check out www.crt.state.la.us/louisiana-state-parks Jolly Roger Marina- Facebook

*Note: The July 4th holiday and that following weekend is extremely popular for recreational boating and fishing: Lots of skiing, drinking and not paying attention. Be careful no matter where you kayak fish during this time, and keep your head on a swivel.

SALTWATER

WHERE: Pointe-Aux-Chenes
WHAT: Redfish, speckled trout
HOW:
The summer temperatures are here and the grass beds are getting thicker by the day. Good fishing for reds can be found within site of the marinas. Much of the surrounding marsh is shallow and filled with thick grass. Reds will be in and near the grass. Start off with topwater plugs in the early morning hours, then switch to weedless spoons, inline spinnerbaits, and weedless plastics as the day wears on. Don't overlook dead shrimp under a popping cork as a time-tested method for hauling in reds from the marsh. Find cuts and points with moving water and let your shrimp sit for a while. With the use of dead bait, you may also find sheepshead, black drum and perhaps even an elusive flounder or two. The only downside is that you will probably entice a few hardhead catfish. The trout fishing can be hit or miss, but you can increase the odds if you offer them a live shrimp. Look around for deeper, clean water at the intersection of pipelines and canals.
LAUNCH:
Launch at PAC Kayak Rentals — $5 for a specially designed kayak launch that is simple to use. Ice, bait and tackle available on-site. Overnight accommodations also available. 179 Paw Paw Ct., Montegut, La.
INSIDER TIP:
Talk to Eddie Mullen at PAC and he will give you the best current intel on where to go and what to use.

Thomas Dameron caught this red while kayak fishing in Pointe-aux-Chenes.

'YAK ATTACK

Andrew Szush Jr., 6, was out kayak-fishing with his dad when he caught this nice 22-inch redfish in Leeville.

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SEAFOOD BIBLE

Jerald & Glenda Horst

SOME REAL 'HUMDINGER' RECIPES

LURE MANUFACTURER, WIFE STAY BUSY — BUT ENJOY TIME IN THE KITCHEN

"She's a foodie," said Tony Landry admiringly. "Everything she does revolves around food. When we go on trips, the first thing she does is go to an app on her phone for local foods—to find interesting and intriguing things to eat."

"I like to eat," admitted his wife Patricia, almost shyly. "It does help that he eats everything. Cooking is almost a hobby. I kind of enjoy it."

Tony and Patricia, residents of Donaldsonville, live a busy lifestyle. Patricia works 50 hours a week as a chemical engineer in Convent, and Tony averages 60 hours a week as a production supervisor for a chemical plant in Plaquemine.

On top of that, Tony devotes 25 to 30 hours a week to his fishing lure business, T & J Lures, makers of the Humdinger spinnerbaits so well known in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Patricia is the executive chef of the family, while Tony commands the outdoor Pitman Fryer, the smoker, the seafood boiler and the barbecue grill.

He grew up in a Cajun-Italian family. His mother's parents, Tony and Shirley Falsetta, ran Tony's Pizza in Donaldsonville. He credits his grandparents and his parents, Debra and Hank, for his cooking skills.

Patricia credits Ruby and Mike Conti, her grandparents who reared her, with the foundation of her skills. "Style-wise, my grandmother cooked everything: roux dishes, spaghettis, meat and potatoes — everything. My grandfather ran Cuti's Café in Amite."

"What we are cooking next is always the topic," laughed Tony. "As soon as we finish breakfast, the topic is, 'What are we having for dinner?'" ▪

TIP!

If the grits get too thick, use heavy cream to thin them without making the dish too watery.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Cajun shrimp and grits is everything the original South Carolina dish is — and more. Note how Patricia got her 5-minute grits to stand up so magnificently. **INSET:** Tony and Patricia Landry are a high-octane couple who still find time to cook and bond over food.

TIP!

If you can't find smoked Gouda cheese, Patricia recommends using Havarti instead.

CAJUN SHRIMP AND GRITS

This is Patricia's recipe. It is unusual because it uses 5-minute grits. Most South Carolinians, where the original dish was invented, insist that stone ground grits are the only usable grits for the dish.

To that, Tony has a good answer. "If you make a good gravy, it's good on any kind of grits."

And indeed, Patricia, using her magic, got her grits to "stand up" like stone ground grits, rather than run all over the plate.

"I've been to Charleston, South Carolina four or five times, my favorite city. Tony and I go to Big Rock Sports Outdoor Distributor to sell Humdingers. We started eating shrimp and grits there and the three times we have been to Raleigh, North Carolina. I enjoy shrimp and grits every time I eat them."

Tony asked her if she could put a Cajun flair on the dish. She added sausage, explaining that her husband wants her to put sausage in everything. And she decided to use cheesy grits.

"I was raised on grits," she said. "My grandmother cooked grits every single morning of my life."

INGREDIENTS:

1 lb. medium shrimp, peeled, deveined and rinsed
2 1/4 tbsp. Cajun seasoning, divided
1 lb. smoked pork sausage, bias cut 1/4-inch thick
3 cups water
3/4 cup Quaker Quick 5-Minute Grits
3 tsp. chicken bouillon
3 tbsp. butter, divided
1 1/2 cups shredded smoked Gouda cheese
1 cup shredded extra sharp cheese
3/4 cup heavy cream
Salt to taste
1 tbsp. olive oil
1 clove garlic, minced
1/2 cup chicken broth
1 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
Kitchen Bouquet, as needed

PREPARATION: Serves 6-8.

Sprinkle 1 tbsp. Cajun seasoning over the shrimp and set them aside for 30 minutes. Brown the sausage in a large frying pan. In a separate pan, bring water to a boil. Add the grits and 1/4 tsp. Cajun seasoning and cook for five minutes. Add bouillon, 2 tbsp. butter and the Gouda and extra-sharp cheese. Stir to mix well. Add 1/4 cup heavy cream and salt to taste. When sausage has browned, remove it from the pan and add the shrimp to the pan. Sauté until most of the water has cooked out of the shrimp and they have turned pink, then remove them from the pan. Add the olive oil, 1 tbsp. butter and the garlic to the pan and sauté over medium heat for 30 seconds. Add chicken broth, 1/2 cup heavy cream, 1 tbsp. Cajun seasoning and Worcestershire sauce and sauté for 7 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Add the shrimp and sausage to the sauce. Stir Kitchen Bouquet into the sauce as needed to obtain a light brown color. Remove from heat. Serve the shrimp and sausage sauce over the grits. ■

One of the things that makes Patricia's shrimp and grits unique is the addition of smoked pork sausage.

CUPCAKE OYSTERS UP NEXT >

***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: Volumn I and The Seafood Bible: Fish: Volumn 2. Jerald and Glenda may be contacted at jerald@rockinghorst.com.*

Cupcake Oysters is shockingly good — and not just because of all the butter to sop up. Tony's blend of seasonings gives the dish its own very distinct flavor.

CUPCAKE OYSTERS

Tony's dish is the essence of simplicity, but he knocks it out of the park.

"These are the same thing as char-grilled oysters in the shell, except that I use cupcake tins" he said modestly, but not quite accurately. The herby blend of green onions, oregano, thyme and red pepper gives the dish an entirely different (and great) flavor.

"It's cooked in the oven, but not being on a grill doesn't affect the taste. A big advantage is that I can use pre-shucked oysters. Oysters in the shell are hard to find some places.

"Another advantage is that you don't lose any of the juices. My wife and I, and my kids' favorite thing, is dipping bread in the juice."

"Bread is fattening and I don't want to eat it," admitted Patricia. "But this is so good that it forces me to eat bread."

"Someone gave me the idea at our duck camp," said Tony, by way of explanation for the dish. "We cooked it and we all enjoyed it. Now I cook it four or five times a year."

"Especially when we have company," added Patricia. "It's very good." ▪

INGREDIENTS:

2 sticks butter
1/4 cup chopped green onion tops
1/2 cup minced garlic
1 tbsp. red pepper
3 tbsp. dried thyme
3 tbsp. dried oregano
Juice of 1 lemon
1 tbsp. Worcestershire Sauce
1 pint oysters
Grated Parmesan & Romano cheese to taste

PREPARATION: Serves 4 as an appetizer

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. While it is heating, melt the butter in a saucepan. Add the green onion tops, garlic, red pepper, thyme, oregano, lemon juice and Worcestershire Sauce. Stir to mix well and sauté for 2 minutes to blend the flavors of the ingredients. Remove from heat and set aside. Spoon the oysters into the cups of a 12-hole cupcake pan. Fill each cup about 2/3 full. Add enough oyster liquor to just cover the oysters. Pour the butter mixture over the oysters, filling the cups to about 90 percent full, making sure each cup has an equal amount of the seasonings. Bake in the oven for 8 minutes. Remove the pan from oven and add a tablespoon of Parmesan & Romano cheese on top of each cup. Return the pan to oven and bake until the cheese has melted. Serve with plenty of French bread for dipping the juice.

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The tip of this swimbait hook lies just beneath the surface of the soft plastic lure, allowing it to run through grass without getting snagged.

If you hold your lure up to the light and can see a gap between the hook point and the lure, it's not weedless and is subject to getting snagged in the grass.

HOW TO SKIN-HOOK A SOFT PLASTIC LURE

SIMPLE TIP KEEPS YOUR RIG WEEDLESS

By Devin Denman

Photos by Devin Denman

You've probably heard it before: the only constant in Louisiana is change.

Mardi Grass Pass opened in 2011, and the MRGO was dammed off two years before that. Since then, marsh that had grown accustomed to higher salinity is now experiencing a "freshening."

As a result, a lot of aquatic grass has been growing in Louisiana's marsh.

Sometimes it will choke out entire ponds — you probably don't need to look far to read fishing reports from disgruntled anglers complaining about the thick stuff.

Jigheads get mired in the grass, so old inshore tackle and techniques don't necessarily work as well as they once did.

Because the game has changed, inshore anglers have to adapt — and skin-hooking your soft plastic lures is one way you can do it.

WHAT IS SKIN-HOOKING?

It's a simple technique to mask the point of your hook from snags, including grass.

Skin-hooking is advantageous because it allows you to cast alongside and across thick grass, effectively presenting the lure to fish — but without getting hung up.

Look at the attached pictures and you'll see examples of what I'm talking about.

IS IT REALLY THAT NECESSARY?

Only if you want to keep your lure from snagging. Remember, it only takes that one piece of grass to put the kibosh on your cast.

If it appears the hook point is snug against the lure's body, try holding it against a light to see if any penetrates the space between.

HOW TO SKIN-HOOK A LURE?

Take the exposed hook point in one hand and gently pierce a thin layer of the soft plastic, or "skin," of the lure.

But go shallow — not deep.

WILL THIS AFFECT MY HOOK SETS?

It's a safe assumption it could hamper some hook sets, but you won't have that problem if you skin-hook lightly enough, and whip that rod like the Hulk.

Remember, when fishing around grass, you may want to run a medium-heavy over a medium power rod — that's just my two cents.

ONE MORE BENEFIT

Skin-hooking helps your lure stay straight on a swimbait hook, instead of falling down. This is useful for the softer plastics that yield more action, but don't last as long. (Ya gotta make the most of your dollars.)

CONCLUSION

Good inshore anglers adapt to changing conditions, so try out this weedless setup. You'll be catching fish while everyone else is getting snagged and scratching their heads.

Tight lines, y'all.

Editor's Note: Capt. Devin Denman is an avid inshore fisherman who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit lafishblog.com.

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Capt. Kris Robert shows off a nice tripletail he caught in mid-May, one of the earliest times he's seen the fish show up in Lake Borgne.

Photo courtesy of Capt. Kris Robert

TRIPLETAIL TRIPLE THREAT

By Patrick Bonin

GUIDE SHARES TOP 3 TIPS TO CATCH MORE TRIPLETAIL

Considered by many to be the best eating inshore fish, tripletail melts in your mouth and is the classic white, flaky fish many anglers crave.

Now is the time to be checking crab trap buoys or just about anything that floats, like a log or even a dead fish, because a tripletail might be lurking underneath it.

Capt. Kris Robert, with One Last Cast Charters in Slidell, targets the fish on crab trap buoys in Lake Borgne and shared three great tips to catch more tripletail this summer.

1. USE 21-25 COUNT SHRIMP — OR SMALLER

"For whatever reason, I've had big shrimp on the boat and pitched at them, pitched at them, pitched at them — and they'll run right up to it, and then they kind of go away from it," Robert said. "Somebody once told me they see that big shrimp with a big horn on it, and they don't want to deal with that.

"All they're feeding on is baby crabs and small shrimp that are coming through there or trying to hide out around that trap with them."

2. WHEN A TRIPLE-TAIL GOES DEEP — GO DOWN AND GET IT

"If you go by a crab trap and the fish

goes down, it really hasn't gone anywhere. What I learned last year was to take a slip cork or a popping cork with maybe a 4-foot leader and slide it right past that crab trap, and they'll come out of the depths and eat it," Robert said. "He's still hanging out down there — he's not going anywhere."

Robert typically uses only a 6- or 8-inch 20-pound leader and 40-pound braid to target tripletail floating up near the surface, along with a No. 3 kahle hook.

"I want to keep that shrimp as high up as long as possible. I don't use a sinker or anything, just cast it out there," Robert said. "I want that shrimp to be up high in the column so when it comes floating by that tripletail sees it. I don't want it going down too deep if they're floating on top."

3. WHEN YOU HOOK UP, RIP THE FISH AWAY FROM STRUCTURE ASAP

"A tripletail is similar to fishing for grouper or amberjack or lemonfish: If you catch one, you have to rip him out of that rig and start cranking down on him to get him away from that structure," Robert explained. "Well, you have to do the same thing with tripletail to get him away from that trap.

"I don't know how many times I've had people, and I tell them, 'When you set the hook, rip him out of there.' Tighten down your drag, rip him out of there, then once you get him away, you can loosen up the drag so he can start peeling off a little bit of line."

"I want that shrimp to be up high in the column so when it comes floating by that tripletail sees it."

Robert likes to get upcurrent of a fish he's spotted, then just free-line the cork and shrimp back to within inches of the crab trap he's targeting.

"All of a sudden, you'll see that tripletail swim off and come upcurrent and grab the bait," he said. "Then you just have to rip him away from that trap."

BONUS TIP: HEAD OUT EARLY

"If you're leaving at noon targeting tripletail thinking the sun is at its highest point and you'll be able to see them better, guess what? Guides are finishing their charters around 10 or 11 trying to get back, so the sun is up and we're running those same traps on our way back in.

"We're getting ready to beat them up on the way in, so by the time you launch the boat, you're going to be in trouble."

Editor's Note: For more information, contact Capt. Kris Robert with One Last Cast Charters at 228-284-9502.

Berkley's 5-inch Grass Pig, shown here in swamp gas color, is a heavy soft plastic lure with lots of action that Devin Denman finds especially effective when targeting redfish across the Louisiana coast.

Devin Denman

A KILLER REDFISH SWIMBAIT

BERKLEY'S 5-INCH GRASS PIG GETS IT DONE

By Devin Denman

Everyone has their favorite lure. Usually it's the lure they always catch fish on (duh), or maybe it's one gifted to them by someone well-versed in inshore fishing, like their grandfather.

I know I've had my favorites growing up, but over the years I've learned (from anglers much smarter than me) to step outside of my comfort zone and try new things — even those lures not designed with inshore fishing in mind.

It can be tough making that step, as fishing with something new on the end of the line can feel like going on a walk with your shoes on the wrong feet.

But the effort paid off and, after much use across Louisiana's coast, I've discovered one versatile swimbait redfish just can't ignore.

WHAT KIND OF SWIMBAIT, EXACTLY?

To be specific, it's a Berkley Grass Pig.

It's a 5-inch long soft plastic swimbait that resembles a finfish, something more like a mullet.

WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT IT?

It's heavy. I don't have an exact weight for you, but it's substantially heavier than other 5-inch soft plastic swimbaits.

Plus it's streamlined. And when you combine these two qualities, you have an artillery piece that's easy to cast a country mile.

In addition to this, the plastic used is pretty soft. This means it has great action, giving off a strong wobble indicative of a crippled fish that would make an easy meal.

Yes, I understand the downside to this is a lure that's easily torn, but six-packs of Grass Pigs can be had for $3 depending on where you buy them. I think that's pretty darned good for 5-inch swimbaits.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE COLOR?

Berkley has a lot of colors available, but my favorite would have to be swamp gas, which is the color shown in the photo.

After that, I like pearl white silver fleck, black blue silver and watermelon, depending on the conditions and the mood of the fish on a particular day.

HOW DO YOU RIG IT?

With a 6/0 Owner Beast Hook. It's pretty simple: Just screw-lock the nose, then rig the hook point up through the belly and out of the back.

In really thick grass, I'll skin-hook the bait so it doesn't snag at all.

After all, redfish want to eat a delicious mullet — not a vegan salad.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

This article just scratches the surface of my use of swimbaits to catch redfish in Louisiana, not to mention everything else in my tackle box: jerkbaits, spinnerbaits, jigs, spoons, topwater lures and more.

I reveal all of that inside Inshore Fishing 201, my course teaching inshore anglers how to use artificial lures with casting tackle to create presentations fish can't resist.

It's a great way to save the expense of live bait, outfish it and target larger, harder-to-catch fish.

Editor's Note: Capt. Devin Denman is an avid inshore fisherman who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit lafishblog.com.

Chas Champagne, with Matrix Shad, always keeps a close eye out for snot grass like this because he typically finds redfish in the area.

SIGHT-FISHING SUPPORT

STINGRAYS, SNOT GRASS DEAD GIVEAWAYS REDFISH ARE NEARBY

By Patrick Bonin

If Matrix Shad lure owner Chas Champagne is cruising through marsh and duck ponds sight-fishing for reds — but doesn't actually spot any fish — he's typically keeping a close eye out for two other reliable indicators of reds in the neighborhood.

The first thing he's looking for is stingrays.

"It seems like when you're in ponds that stingrays are floating around in, those are the same ones redfish like," Champagne said. "If I'm daydreaming, texting or my phone rings and I see two or three stingrays in a row, I'll really start paying attention. However stingrays scavenge the bottom in those ponds and look for food, redfish must treat it the same.

"I see stingrays on a redfish's back all the time."

The second dead giveaway to redfish in the area is the stringy algae local anglers refer to as snot grass.

"When I'm up on my stand with the trolling motor and see stingrays, I start paying attention. But when I'm running around the duck ponds or canals or creeks and I don't really know where I'm going, and I'm wiggling and winding and zigging and zagging and going from Spot A to Spot B, if I start seeing this neon green stuff, I just shut it down," Champagne said. "I know they're there somewhere.

"Typically, they'll be on the edge. If it's too grassy or the water is real low, you have to get to where they can float over it. If they can't swim over it or around it, it pulls the oxygen out of the water and makes it hard for them to deal with. Once I find it growing on the banks or in the middles of the canals or ponds, I'll find an area deep enough that's got it — and that's where some fish are gong to be."

Photos courtesy of Chas Champagne

The Matrix Craw, rigged with a ¼-ounce swimbait hook, is Chas Champagne's go-to summertime sight-fishing lure because it's great for catching reds, but can also be used on cloudy days for bass in the marsh.

Champagne acknowledged redfish can get in all kinds of different grass, including coontail and hydrilla.

"But personally, my favorite is snot grass," he said. "It makes the water pristine clean, so you can see the reds from a mile away. It makes the redfish contrast real hard against the bottom, so you can see them real easy."

His go-to summertime sight-fishing lure is definitely the Matrix Craw, rigged on a ¼-ounce swimbait hook. Redfish slam it, but its versatility is key during the summer: He skin-hooks it to keep it weedless if he's in the thick stuff.

"I only blind cast if the clouds pop up and I can't see them all that good," Champagne said. "If we go out there and think it's going to be a nice sunny day and it turns out to be a cloudy day, I'll just run that thing like a frog on top of the surface by reeling it in kind of fast, because those crawfish legs flap real good.

"Then you can catch bass — plus a handful of reds." ▪

Recon Marines use the GOTWA technique to keep the team informed on each other's whereabouts. You can use it to let others know about your fishing plans — and what to do if you don't return.

Devin Denman

USE 'GOTWA' TO DEVELOP A GAME PLAN ON THE WATER

INFORM OTHERS WHEN YOU'LL BE RETURNING — AND WHAT TO DO IF YOU DON'T

By Devin Denman

There are a lot of concepts I learned during my time in Marine Reconnaissance that I still use today. In this article, I am going to share a favorite you can use to go fishing safely.

THE GOTWA

This is a weird, incorrectly organized acronym (for ease of pronunciation) used by Recon Marines when conducting patrols — specifically when the team is to temporarily split up.

The idea is to inform everyone what's going on — and what to do if/when certain things happen.

WHAT DOES IT STAND FOR?

The acronym covers five main points:

G = Where I'm going
O = Others going with me
T = The time I will return
W = What to do if I don't return
A = Action taken if attacked

So, if I'm a team leader going over the hill to conduct a recon with the point man, then I'll leave my assistant team leader there with everyone else, tell him I'm taking the point man, and that I expect to be gone a couple hours. Also, he is to raise me on team comms if I don't return by then, and if attacked, break contact and rendezvous at the nearest rally point. If I'm attacked, I will break contact toward the same rally point and we will reassemble the team there.

That's a little down and dirty, but you can see how this same technique can apply to inshore fishing, as in this example if you find yourself fishing out in Breton Sound.

G = I'm going to fish the long rocks all the way to Breton Island
O = Two of my friends, Mike and Ben
T = I'll be back no later than 6 p.m.
W = Call my phone. If I don't answer after the second attempt, call the Coast Guard, give them my boat's description and registration numbers and where I said I'd be fishing
A = If we break down, we'll hang tight and call Sea Tow for marine assistance, then try to contact you. If things are really bad, we'll don our life vests (if needed) and prepare signaling devices for long-distance recognition by search parties.

CONCLUSION

I know this example was pretty down and dirty, too.

So this is not a template for you to copy, but to communicate the idea that danger does exist out there — and any situation can quickly deteriorate into a bad one.

The key is to have that safety net when it does, and using GOTWA helps to achieve that end.

Tight lines, y'all.

Editor's Note: Capt. Devin Denman is an avid inshore fisherman who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit lafishblog.com.

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Abby Panepinto (left) and Logan McMahan caught these redfish in Calcasieu Lake on live shrimp.

LEFT: Olivia Dauzat, 8, of Carencro, killed her first duck in Grand Chenier — a beautiful green-wing drake — using her .410 shotgun.

GOT PHOTOS? WE WANT 'EM

Send us your photos, and you may appear on the pages of the most widely read outdoor magazine in the Bayou State. Send clean, sharp shots of you with your fish, deer, ducks, rabbits, squirrels, etc. to **alicial@lasmag.com**

Digital images must be at least 200KB and in jpeg format.

Gus Lea, 9, and his dad, Will, pose with the 200-pound 8-point Gus dropped in DeSoto Parish on Dec. 5, 2017 with a 30-yard-shot.

RIGHT: Drake Burchfield limited out on redfish at Myrtle Grove.

After multiple hunts, Hunter Galmiche took his first buck — a beautiful 160-pound, 7-point on private land owned by family friend, Uncle Chubby, in Washington Parish.

Trent Sparacino, 6, of Geismar, used a Beetle Spin to snatch this neighborhood pond bass back in April of 2017.

Dr. Brad Smith caught some nice bass on his paddle board at Lake Bruin.

Tucker Welch, 11, of Hackberry, shot this 8-point with an 18 ½-inch spread in Camden, Ark., on Nov. 11.

Andre Bergeaux and John Henry Stefanski with ducks killed in Klondyke.

Logan and Savannah Lindgren, of Sulphur, pose with a spotted cat Savannah caught all by herself.

Luke Culberson caught his first sac-a-lait and his first bass while fishing in a private lake in Pearl River County, Miss.

Jay Young and Susan Smith of Lafayette had a successful trip to Toledo Bend and caught their limit of sac-a-lait.

Micheal Deems of Columbus, Ga., caught this 5-pound speck out of the Galliano marshes while fishing with his brother-in-law.

This big buck was killed Oct. 29 by Scott Liriano on Davis Island — his first-ever bow kill.

Lester Lazarus killed this big 8-point on the morning of Oct. 31 in Natchitoches Parish. The buck sported 25-inch main beams and weighed 202 pounds.

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The designers at Cooalla Coolers noticed most conventional coolers — even soft-sided ones — were bulky, clumsy to carry and took up too much space.

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Its sleek and lightweight appearance is packed with enough hard core cool for the beach, the park or the back of an SUV.

And the fashionable exterior is constructed from durable, sweat-proof limestone-based neoprene sandwiched with advanced micro-cell insulation.

Its surprisingly large capacity is lined with a welded, puncture resistant, high-grade thermo material that virtually eliminates leaks and locks in the cold. The cooler also features rust-proof hardware, one-handed zipper technology, a textured, padded shoulder strap with a low-profile Velcro handle wrap, a convenient outside pocket with magnetic closure, and two-layer nylon webbing with daisy chain stitching for comfort and extra strength.

Cooalla Coolers are available in a range of colors and retail for $179.

More Info: www.cooalla.com

FIELD & STREAM BUG-FREE CAMO

Field & Stream has added some lightweight hunting clothes to its product line, and although two particular items were designed for turkey hunters, they should be big hits for early-season archery hunters across the Southeast.

The Men's Insect Repellent balaclava long sleeve shirt features a trademarked insect repellent, No Fly Zone, thumb holes in the sleeves and a built-in balaclava with options for an adjustable hood and facemask — perfect in Realtree Edge camo for coolness, concealment and a bug-free hunt.

The Every Hunt lightweight cargo hunting pants are light, that's for sure, made with polyester ripstop material good for wicking away perspiration to keep hunters dry and comfortable. They feature plenty of pockets for accessories and an elasticized waist with belt loops.

No Scent C3 scent control is built into both shirts and pants, which retail for $49.99 each.

More Info: www.fieldandstreamshop.com and www.dickssportinggoods.com

COSTA DEL MAR SUNGLASSES

Costa Del Mar targets fishermen with a large percentage of their sunglasses, and two of their latest offerings, the Cape and Montauk, are perfect examples.

Introduced in March, both new styles feature wraparound frames that feature temple ventilation ports to make it tougher for the lenses to fog, and also help wick away moisture and sweat.

The ultra-wide nature of the frames and the ear pieces in the temple area block peripheral light. Both styles feature Costa's 580 lens technology that provides 100-percent UV protection and polarization, and they're available in both polycarbonate and glass.

Capes are available in four frame colors and seven lens colors; Montauks are available in three frame colors and seven lens colors.

More Info: www.costadelmar.com

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New product submissions can be emailed to **Mark Hilzim** at **markh@lasmag.com**.

STRUT COMMANDER'S SCARECROW CROW CALL

You think the guys from Duck Commander can make calls that command other game birds or animals to flock their way?

Apparently so. The Louisiana company debuted a handful of calls this past spring for turkey hunters, and one of them has uses beyond the spring season.

Duck Commander's Strut Commander division introduced six diaphragm calls — Sandman and Voodoo calls — plus an owl call dubbed the Hootie, and a crow call named the Scarecrow.

In addition to its designation as a locator call designed to elicit gobbles from tom turkeys within earshot, the Scarecrow is also a heckuva crow call for those hunters who like a little variety in their wingshooting.

MSRP for the Scarecrow is $8.99.

More Info: www.strutcommander.com

4 HORSEMEN TACKLE'S POPPING CORK

By Patrick Bonin

A new cork is popping up with South Louisiana's inshore anglers, and it's getting a reputation for both durability and a sound that seems to be a hit with speckled trout and redfish.

Aaron Pierce and Roger Dowdy, co-owners of 4 Horsemen Tackle, started cranking out popping corks to test last summer, and began selling them online in December.

Like many new products, the 4 Horsemen corks came about because the pair weren't satisfied with the performance of the corks they used while guiding.

"We couldn't find one that lasted and sounded good, with the right beads, so we started fooling around and testing and making our own," Pierce said. "Once we put the epoxy on the bottom, that was a game-changer for us because it locked in the bottom of the cork, which takes all the abuse. It holds everything together, and also helps make the lower-frequency sound which fish hear better."

But sound is only half of the cork's appeal, he said.

"The cork has extra heavy-grade wire, a compact shape you can cast a lot further with less tangles, and the beads and weight slide really easily to create the best sound of all the corks on the market," he said.

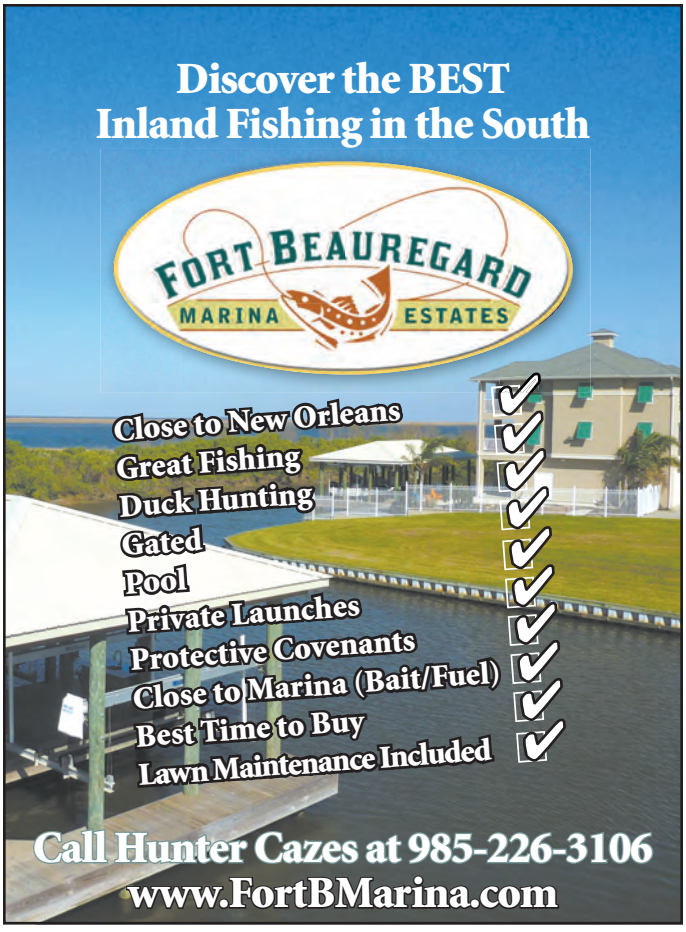
All 4 Horsemen corks feature a 130-pound Spro swivel, and are assembled in Pierce and Dowdy's hometown of Cut Off.

Three-inch poppers and oval corks (with 3/8-ounce weights) are available in yellow, orange and pink, and the 4-inch, ½-ounce model is available in orange only.

All corks, no matter the size, retail for $7.50 each.

The corks are now available at many local tackle stores, as well as through the company's website.

More Info: www.4horsementackle.com



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^)

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	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.
^ 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.

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July 2018

Date	Sunrise	Sunset
1st	6:03 a.m.	8:05 p.m.
2nd	6:03 a.m.	8:05 p.m.
3rd	6:04 a.m.	8:05 p.m.
4th	6:04 a.m.	8:05 p.m.
5th	6:05 a.m.	8:05 p.m.
6th	6:05 a.m.	8:05 p.m.
7th	6:06 a.m.	8:05 p.m.
8th	6:06 a.m.	8:05 p.m.
9th	6:06 a.m.	8:04 p.m.
10th	6:07 a.m.	8:04 p.m.
11th	6:07 a.m.	8:04 p.m.
12th	6:08 a.m.	8:04 p.m.
13th	6:09 a.m.	8:03 p.m.
14th	6:09 a.m.	8:03 p.m.
15th	6:10 a.m.	8:03 p.m.
16th	6:10 a.m.	8:02 p.m.
17th	6:11 a.m.	8:02 p.m.
18th	6:11 a.m.	8:02 p.m.
19th	6:12 a.m.	8:01 p.m.
20th	6:12 a.m.	8:01 p.m.
21st	6:13 a.m.	8:00 p.m.
22nd	6:14 a.m.	8:00 p.m.
23rd	6:14 a.m.	7:59 p.m.
24th	6:15 a.m.	7:59 p.m.
25th	6:15 a.m.	7:58 p.m.
26th	6:16 a.m.	7:57 p.m.
27th	6:16 a.m.	7:57 p.m.
28th	6:17 a.m.	7:56 p.m.
29th	6:18 a.m.	7:56 p.m.
30th	6:18 a.m.	7:55 p.m.
31st	6:19 a.m.	7:54 p.m.

*Time based on New Orleans, sunrise/sunset; source U.S. Naval Observatory. Corrections (in minutes)

Alexandria	Baton Rouge	Lafayette	Lake Charles	Monroe	Shreveport
Rise/Set	Rise/Set	Rise/Set	Rise/Set	Rise/Set	Rise/Set
+12/+8	+5/+4	+8/+7	+13/+12	+10/+5	+17/+13

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Astro Tables is far more effective than "moon tables," because it takes into account critical solar energies as well as lunar.

• The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black bars).

• The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Noon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each . . . 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)

• **Astro Tables** is a quick-reference version of its parent publication, the **PrimeTimes Wall Calendar**, which is recommended for those wishing more complete data on the best days and times to go fishing and hunting for the entire year (see "Available Products" below).

• **PrimeTimes'** forecasts are based on solar/lunar research at a leading college of astrophysics and our own research pond/wildlife area. Annual data is supplied by the U.S. Naval Observatory. All times are adjusted to the center of your time zone and for Daylight Saving Time.

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2018 JUL

	BEST DAYS (POOR / FAIR / GOOD / EXCL)	VALUE	LUNAR PERIODS: MOON RISE	PRIMARY: MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY: MOON UNDERFOOT	
Sun 1		33	11:01 pm	3:02 am - 4:18 am	9:01 am	3:27 pm - 4:43 pm	
Mon 2		34	11:35 pm	3:45 am - 5:07 am	9:56 am	4:10 pm - 5:32 pm	
Tue 3		37		4:23 am - 5:59 am	10:51 am	4:48 pm - 6:24 pm	
Wed 4		40	12:07 am	5:00 am - 6:48 am	11:47 am	5:25 pm - 7:13 pm	
Thu 5		48	12:39 am	5:37 am - 7:39 am	12:44 pm	6:02 pm - 8:04 pm	
Fri 6		61	1:10 am	6:14 am - 8:32 am	1:43 pm	6:39 pm - 8:57 pm	HALF
Sat 7		55	1:43 am	6:52 am - 9:28 am	2:44 pm	7:17 pm - 9:53 pm	
Sun 8		53	2:18 am	7:34 am - 10:24 am	3:48 pm	7:59 pm - 10:49 pm	
Mon 9		67	2:58 am	8:20 am - 11:26 am	4:54 pm	8:45 pm - 11:51 pm	
Tue 10		78	3:43 am	9:12 am - 12:28 pm	6:02 pm	9:37 pm - 12:53 am	
Wed 11		90	4:35 am	10:10 am - 1:32 pm	7:09 pm	10:35 pm - 1:57 am	HIGH
Thu 12		96	5:35 am	11:13 am - 2:35 pm	8:13 pm	11:38 pm - Midnight	NEW
Fri 13		87	6:41 am	12:18 pm - 3:38 pm	9:10 pm	Midnight - 3:00 am	Perigee
Sat 14		74	7:51 am	1:24 pm - 4:34 pm	10:01 pm	12:43 am - 4:03 am	
Sun 15		61	9:02 am	2:29 pm - 5:25 pm	10:45 pm	1:49 am - 4:59 am	
Mon 16		53	10:11 am	3:31 pm - 6:13 pm	11:24 pm	2:54 am - 5:50 am	
Tue 17		49	11:17 am	4:30 pm - 6:56 pm	12:01 am	3:56 am - 6:38 am	
Wed 18		49	12:21 pm	5:28 pm - 7:34 pm		4:55 am - 7:21 am	
Thu 19		56	1:23 pm	6:22 pm - 8:14 pm	12:34 am	5:53 am - 7:59 am	HALF
Fri 20		43	2:22 pm	7:17 pm - 8:53 pm	1:08 am	6:47 am - 8:39 am	
Sat 21		35	3:20 pm	8:08 pm - 9:34 pm	1:42 am	7:42 am - 9:18 am	
Sun 22		33	4:17 pm	9:00 pm - 10:16 pm	2:18 am	8:33 am - 9:59 am	
Mon 23		31	5:12 pm	9:52 pm - 11:00 pm	2:56 am	9:25 am - 10:41 am	
Tue 24		39	6:05 pm	10:43 pm - 11:45 pm	3:38 am	10:17 am - 11:25 am	
Wed 25		48	6:55 pm	11:32 pm - Midnight	4:23 am	11:08 am - 12:10 pm	LOW
Thu 26		56	7:41 pm	Midnight - 12:34 am	5:11 am	11:57 am - 12:59 pm	Apogee
Fri 27		61	8:23 pm	12:18 am - 1:24 am	6:02 am	12:43 pm - 1:49 pm	FULL
Sat 28		52	9:01 pm	1:02 am - 2:14 am	6:56 am	1:27 pm - 2:39 pm	
Sun 29		44	9:37 pm	1:45 am - 3:03 am	7:51 am	2:10 pm - 3:28 pm	
Mon 30		37	10:10 pm	2:23 am - 3:55 am	8:46 am	2:48 pm - 4:20 pm	
Tue 31		35	10:41 pm	3:00 am - 4:46 am	9:42 am	3:25 pm - 5:11 pm	

25 50 75 AVERAGE

For more, visit primetimes2.com

ANY LUNAR PERIOD IS ENHANCED WHEN IT OVERLAPS A KEY SOLAR PERIOD. THE BEST OF THESE OVERLAPS ARE DESIGNATED BY THE SUN SYMBOLS: = DAWN = HIGH NOON = DUSK

*WHILE THE LESSER **MOONRISE** AND -**SET** OVERLAPS (ABOUT 30 MIN. BEFORE AND AFTER THE LISTED TIME) ARE DESIGNATED BY **BOLD BLACK TYPE**.*

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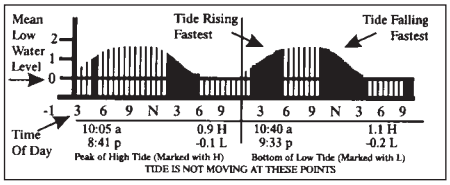
How to use the SPORTSMAN Tide Guide



Fish feed most actively when the tide is moving. Louisiana Sportsman has made it simple to spot the most-active feeding periods each day in the Tide Guide. Just fish those times indicated in black. To find the best time to fish your favorite honeyhole, find the spot under Tide Corrections that is closest to the area, and add or subtract the time from the corresponding daily prediction.

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

East Point Grand Isle

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6** LQ	**7**
11:42 am 1.2 H 10:48 pm 0.0 L	12:08 pm 1.1 H 11:07 pm 0.1 L	12:29 pm 1.0 H 11:16 pm 0.2 L	12:33 pm 0.9 H 11:08 pm 0.3 L	10:43 am 0.7 H 10:28 pm 0.4 L	7:41 am 0.7 H 8:00 pm 0.4 L	6:56 am 0.9 H 5:29 pm 0.2 L
8	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12** NM	**13**	**14**
6:56 am 1.0 H 5:38 pm 0.1 L	7:20 am 1.2 H 6:13 pm -0.1 L	7:57 am 1.3 H 6:57 pm -0.3 L	8:43 am 1.4 H 7:47 pm -0.3 L	9:33 am 1.5 H 8:39 pm -0.4 L	10:25 am 1.5 H 9:31 pm -0.3 L	11:16 am 1.4 H 10:20 pm -0.2 L
15	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19** FQ	**20**	**21**
12:04 pm 1.3 H 11:04 pm -0.1 L	12:46 pm 1.1 H 11:34 pm 0.1 L	1:07 pm 0.9 H 11:36 pm 0.3 L	9:58 am 0.7 H 10:14 pm 0.5 L	7:02 am 0.7 H 5:18 pm 0.4 L	6:21 am 0.9 H 5:09 pm 0.2 L	6:26 am 1.0 H 5:38 pm 0.1 L
22	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27** FM	**28**
6:52 am 1.1 H 6:13 pm 0.0 L	7:28 am 1.2 H 6:49 pm -0.1 L	8:07 am 1.3 H 7:25 pm -0.1 L	8:47 am 1.3 H 8:01 pm -0.1 L	9:25 am 1.3 H 8:34 pm 0.0 L	10:02 am 1.3 H 9:04 pm 0.0 L	10:35 am 1.2 H 9:30 pm 0.0 L
29	**30**	**31**				
11:06 am 1.2 H 9:51 pm 0.1 L	11:35 am 1.1 H 10:03 pm 0.2 L	12:03 pm 1.0 H 10:04 pm 0.3 L				

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Calcasieu Pass Lighthouse Wharf

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6** LQ	**7**
7:23 am 1.9 H 12:12 pm 1.6 L 3:10 pm 1.6 L 11:42 pm 0.3 L	7:57 am 1.9 H 1:01 pm 1.5 L 3:53 pm 1.5 L	12:19 am 0.4 L 8:31 am 1.8 H 2:56 pm 1.4 L 5:39 pm 1.4 L	1:00 am 0.6 L 8:57 am 1.8 H 3:36 pm 1.2 L 7:27 pm 1.3 H	1:51 am 0.8 L 9:17 am 1.8 H 4:06 pm 1.0 L 9:30 pm 1.4 H	2:55 am 1.0 L 9:36 am 1.8 H 4:41 pm 0.7 L 11:13 pm 1.5 H	4:00 am 1.2 L 9:56 am 1.8 H 5:19 pm 0.4 L
8	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12** NM	**13**	**14**
12:51 am 1.7 H 5:10 am 1.4 L 10:22 am 1.8 H 6:03 pm 0.1 L	1:49 am 1.9 H 6:26 am 1.5 L 10:54 am 1.9 H 6:48 pm -0.2 L	2:38 am 2.0 H 7:29 am 1.6 L 11:35 am 1.9 H 7:35 pm -0.4 L	3:29 am 2.2 H 8:19 am 1.6 L 12:23 pm 2.0 H 8:22 pm -0.6 L	4:21 am 2.2 H 9:06 am 1.6 L 1:12 pm 2.1 H 9:11 pm -0.6 L	5:10 am 2.2 H 9:53 am 1.6 L 2:01 pm 2.1 H 10:02 pm -0.6 L	5:55 am 2.2 H 10:42 am 1.5 L 2:53 pm 2.1 H 10:53 pm -0.4 L
15	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19** FQ	**20**	**21**
6:37 am 2.1 H 11:33 am 1.4 L 3:54 pm 1.9 H 11:44 pm -0.1 L	7:18 am 2.0 H 12:30 pm 1.3 L 5:09 pm 1.8 H	12:37 am 0.2 L 8:00 am 1.9 H 1:39 pm 1.1 L 6:38 pm 1.6 H	1:37 am 0.6 L 8:39 am 1.9 H 2:55 pm 0.8 L 9:14 pm 1.5 H	2:55 am 0.9 L 9:13 am 1.8 H 3:58 pm 0.6 L 11:21 pm 1.6 H	4:18 am 1.2 L 9:42 am 1.8 H 4:51 pm 0.4 L	1:02 am 1.8 H 5:42 am 1.4 L 10:09 am 1.8 H 5:39 pm 0.2 L
22	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27** FM	**28**
2:10 am 1.9 H 6:59 am 1.5 L 10:39 am 1.8 H 6:25 pm 0.1 L	3:04 am 2.0 H 7:58 am 1.6 L 11:13 am 1.8 H 7:07 pm 0.0 L	3:54 am 2.0 H 8:45 am 1.6 L 11:53 am 1.8 H 7:45 pm 0.0 L	4:36 am 2.0 H 9:25 am 1.6 L 12:35 pm 1.8 H 8:22 pm 0.0 L	5:09 am 2.0 H 9:58 am 1.6 L 1:14 pm 1.8 H 8:57 pm 0.0 L	5:33 am 1.9 H 10:20 am 1.6 L 1:50 pm 1.8 H 9:33 pm 0.0 L	5:52 am 1.9 H 10:37 am 1.5 L 2:24 pm 1.8 H 10:08 pm 0.1 L
29	**30**	**31**				
6:07 am 1.9 H 10:59 am 1.5 L 3:01 pm 1.7 H 10:42 pm 0.2 L	6:23 am 1.8 H 11:31 am 1.4 L 3:46 pm 1.7 H 11:16 pm 0.4 L	6:40 am 1.8 H 12:11 pm 1.3 L 4:46 pm 1.6 H 11:51 pm 0.6 L				

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SLEEP IN IF YOU'RE SIGHT-FISHING REDS

Use trolling motor sparingly for more hookups, angler says

While all the speckled trout anglers bust their tails to get on their favorite spots before the sun comes up, avid fisherman Jonathan Ryan hits snooze a few times on his alarm clock and starts his trips around 8 a.m.

That's because he does almost nothing but sight-fish reds this time of year.

"You have to prepare yourself because it's going to be hot," he said. "The closer you get to that August heat, it starts to burn you up right around 2 o'clock.

"It's beaming on you."

If you can get past the heat, the sun can really help you out, according to Ryan.

"Let (the sun) come up enough to where you can utilize the sun to see into the water column," he said. "About 8:30 to 9 a.m. is typically where I would expect it to be."

>

Jonathan Ryan prefers bright sunny days and calm water when sight-fishing summertime reds.

On days when a glaring sun isn't out, Ryan said anglers can still see the fish, but they have to scan areas more thoroughly.

"If the water is gin clear, you can still see traces of them," he said. "You can see that shiny bronze color on their fins — especially if you catch them sideways, you can see them pretty well. Say you have calm conditions but it's cloudy, you can always see their pushes. Because of that depth of water you're looking for, you can see that movement from them."

Speaking of depth, Ryan likes ponds that have enough water in them so the redfish can roam around the entire pond.

"Typically, you'll find a small trench next to the shorelines," he said. "Once you get into a pond, there's a main drain, and then there's a couple of drains or trenches that lead to that main drain. In those trenches, you can utilize your trolling motor and get around some of that grass area because it should be clear in those areas."

In the shallow ponds, the redfish can be extremely spooky and very sensitive to vibrations in the water. Push-poling around a pond is ideal, but if that's not an option, Ryan recommended using a trolling motor sparingly.

"My trolling motor speed is a max of 10," he said. "I'll go to four, and then start to gain that speed, and once I start to coast, I turn it off. If I need that little extra kick to get moving again, I'll continue to do that same pattern."

One final element that's key when sight-fishing is to find calm water. This makes the fish a whole lot easier to see, Ryan said.

"Wind is the same to golf as it is to fishing, except it's a lot more difficult for fishing because you're on the water," he said. "I want it nice and smooth so I can see every intricate little movement underneath the water column.

"If a tail pokes out slightly, I want to be able to see those things. When you get those high winds, you have to find those shorelines that break the wind so you can get that soft, calm water." ▪

- Joel Masson

OUTER ISLANDS OF BILOXI MARSH HOLDING TROUT

Artificials work, but live bait good insurance

Capt. Bubby Lamy with In & Out Charters takes a lot of his speckled trout clients to areas like Isle au Pitre and Martin Island this time of year.

The waters around the islands are relatively shallow — 3 feet or so — he said, and believe it or not one of the most important factors to having success there is fishing a tight-lined jighead.

"A large mistake people make is thinking when you get into that shallower stuff that you only need to throw a cork because lots of times those fish will just be sitting all the way on the bottom and looking for something that is staying on the bottom," he said.

Lamy concentrates his efforts on the oyster reefs and shell pads, and bounces a 3/8-ounce jighead off the bottom with a Matrix Shad soft plastic.

"If there's no tide, then I'll throw a ¼-ounce just so it will sink a little bit slower and hangout in the water column a little longer," he said.

His favorite colors are ultraviolet and holy joely. However, he keeps another color handy that's dynamite in clean water.

"Lemon head is a good one to have because in July when you do get those super clean-water days, it's almost like a fluorescent green, and the lemon head works well in that fluorescent green water," he said.

Lamy loves fishing soft plastics, but he said some days the fish respond much better to live shrimp.

"You can catch them on plastics in July," he said. "Live bait is huge, and it's a day-to-day differential. Today you can catch a limit on plastic, and tomorrow they won't bite plastic at all, and the guy on side of you with shrimp is stroking them.

"I always say if you can get it, at least get some, or be OK if you catch way less than somebody else who has it," he said.

Besides the oyster reefs and shell pads, Lamy said it's never a bad idea to hit diving birds out there to see what kind of fish are underneath them.

"The birds are always a good sign of what's going on," he said. "This time of year, a lot of times under the birds you'll find schools of catfish, but that's not always the case," he said. ▪

- Joel Masson

Capt. Bubby Lamy said tight-lining jigheads — instead of using popping corks — can be effective for specks in shallow water around islands in the Biloxi Marsh.

TROUT ACTION SHOULD BE 'WIDE OPEN' OUT OF DELACROIX

Head to outside structures with live shrimp, guide says

Capt. Ron "Ahab" Broadus with a 21-inch Delacroix redfish caught on live shrimp.

So it was a banner redfish day, one for the record books.

I was aboard Capt. Mike Wittich's boat, fishing with both he and Capt. Ron "Ahab" Broadus, on what was supposed to be a scouting trip.

They had some important clients to take out the next day, and they wanted to see where the fish would be waiting. We bought some live shrimp from Serigne's, and Wittich pointed the bow down Bayou Gentilly and motored us straight into Grand Lake, via Little Lake and Alligator Pass. It took less than 15 minutes and the Power Pole went down. It stayed down for all of 15 more minutes, and when it came back up we had 15 keeper redfish on ice. Like I said, it was a banner day. We caught everything on live or dead shrimp, and almost every cast ended in a hookup. None of the reds were huge, the average being about 17 inches, but a few were 20 to 21 inches — making them the perfect size for the grill.

The question then was what we would do with the rest of the morning. It was 6:45 a.m., and we already had our limit of reds. We had two choices: Either head farther out into the big bays where the trout action was hit-and-miss (with more misses than hits due to so much fresh water in the area from the Big Muddy), or poke around the inside waters and play catch-and-release with more redfish. We chose the latter — and after we had our fill headed back to the dock early.

Ahab said Delacroix anglers have been forced to focus on redfish solely because of the sheer volume of fresh water inundating prime trout habitat.

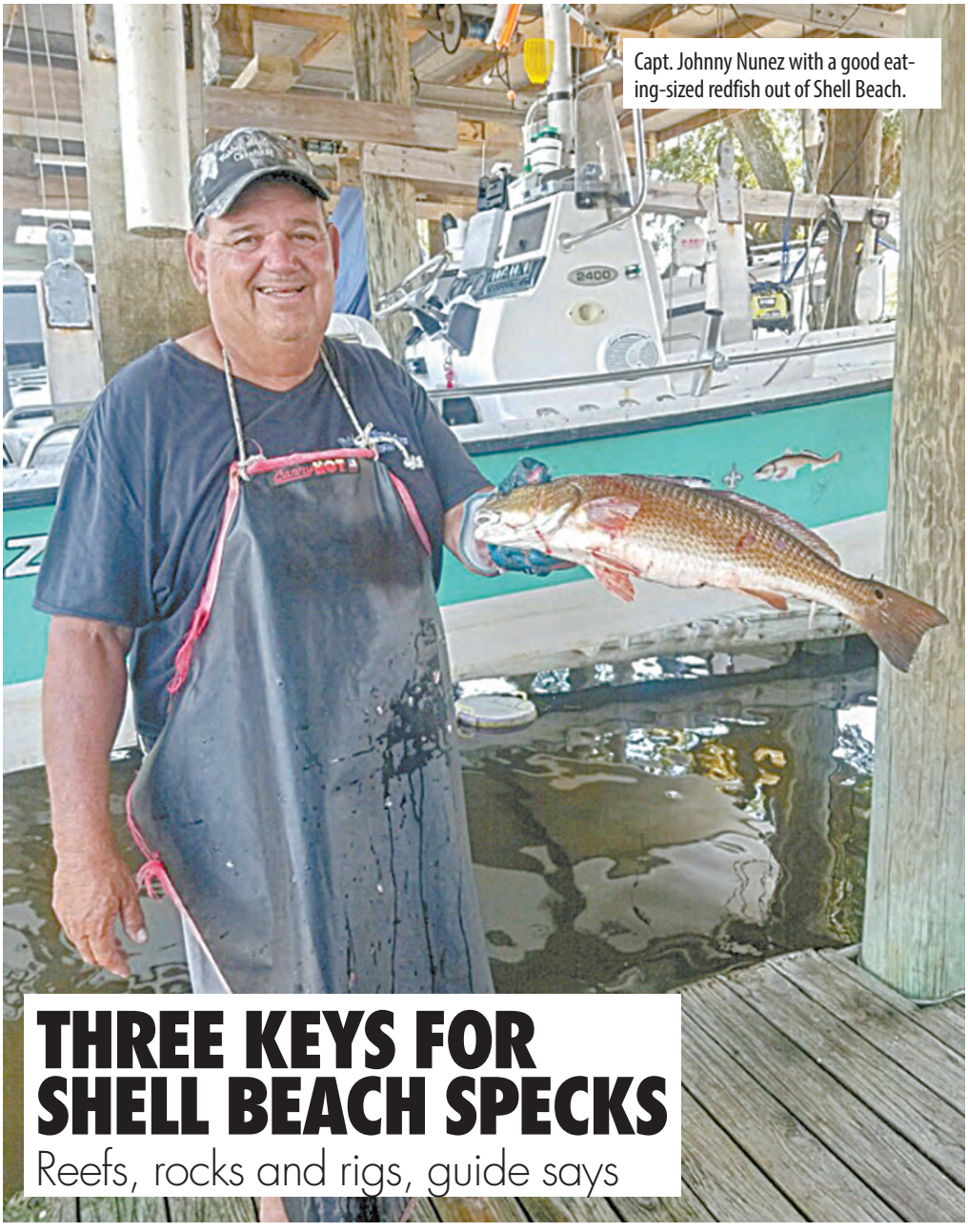
"May was tough, June will be better, and by July the trout action should be wide open," he said. "The river should be down enough to allow our salinities to soar, and shrimp and baitfish and all the critters that eat them will show up in abundance. Now is when we head outside to Stone Island and all the surrounding islands and structures, over to Battledore Reef, Iron Banks, the Wreck — and even on out to Breton Island. Right now the action is really picking up in the outer bays like Bay Lafourche, Lake Campo and Oak River Bay, also."

Ahab's advice for July anglers: "Leave early, wear sunscreen, stay hydrated, bring live shrimp and quit early." ▪

Capt. Mike Wittich can be reached at 504-577-4774.

Capt. Ron "Ahab" Broadus can be reached at 504-914-6063.

- Rusty Tardo



Capt. Johnny Nunez with a good eating-sized redfish out of Shell Beach.

THREE KEYS FOR SHELL BEACH SPECKS

Reefs, rocks and rigs, guide says

Capt. Johnny Nunez, AKA the Fishing Magician (504-239-3159), was born and raised in Shell Beach and has spent his life pulling fish of every kind from the surrounding waters. When Nunez speaks, fishermen listen — and he told me the keys to speckled trout success this month are rocks, reefs and rigs.

"The trout are along the coast," Nunez said, "so head straight out and bring a livewell stocked with live shrimp. There will be fish along the MRGO long rocks and you'll catch some there, but I generally avoid the rocks simply because of the crowds. So I make the run to the east side of the Biloxi Marsh and fish all the big oyster-laden bays out there, from Morgan Harbor to Christmas Camp Lake, Fishing Smack Bay, Lawson Bay and Shell Island Lake. Those bays are full of oyster reefs — and the trout are on the reefs."

Nunez said if you're familiar with the area you can head straight to a spot that produced fish for you before and anchor. But if you're a rookie to the area, just get up along the oyster poles and drift/troll until you bump into fish. Then anchor and see if you can put some numbers in the boat. If the bite stops, resume drifting or run to another set of poles.

"You'll probably have to move around because they'll not likely be concentrated all in one spot," he said. "If the water is dirty from oyster boats working that area, move to another lake or another part of that lake with better water. If you're persistent, you'll catch some trout and you should have a nice box by quitting time. I always use live shrimp whenever I can get it, and hang them about 2 ½ to 3 feet under a cork."

Nunez said it doesn't matter if the shrimp are small or large, as long as they're alive, and he doesn't care whether the tide is rising or falling, as long as it's moving.

Another option this month is the various structures in Bay Eloi, where you might find larger trout, and big reds, sheepshead and drum.

"If you want to catch reds, then fish the shorelines of those same big outside bays," he said. "I like to fish pockets, coves and points, with live or dead shrimp under a cork, about 2 feet deep." ▪

- Rusty Tardo

Leeville up next >

Capt. Bobby Gros said getting an early start is a vital to summer-time trout fishing out of Leeville.

3 KEYS TO BEING LUCKY IN LEEVILLE

Trout and redfish await the savvy angler

Veteran charter guide Bobby Gros, over at Bobby Lynn's Marina in Leeville (985-637-0118), says the fishing is as hot as the weather this month.

"Redfish action has been phenomenal all over the area, and that won't subside in July," he said. "The speckled trout action got off to a slower start than usual, but by now it should be hot and heavy."

Gros says there are three vitally important keys to a successful trip this month.

1. Start early. "You really have to get an early start because of the heat, and because the trout bite tends to shut down early," he said. "I like to start the morning fishing along the beaches in the shallow water between the first and second sandbar. The rocks around the old barges in Fourchon are also good first thing in the morning. On the beach, I'll fish live bait under a Carolina rig, and on the rocks I'll fish live bait under a cork. The fish on the beach have been nice-sized, both reds and trout, but the trout action will shut down early. By 9 or 9:30, its over."

2. Fish deeper platforms in at least 6 feet of water in Lake Raccourci, Timbalier Bay and Lake Barre, or the Fourchon Jetties. "Once the heat turns up the fish will move off the beaches into cooler, deeper water, and those platforms in 6 to 7 feet of water and the deeper jetties is where they'll go," he said. "You can fish them with live bait on the bottom, which is generally the most productive, but you can also catch good fish on the bottom with soft plastics. I've done best with a H&H glow/chartreuse cocohoe or the Saltwater Assassin chicken-on-a-chain color. Offer it slow on the bottom and you should find a buyer."

3. Bring live bait. "It doesn't matter if its croakers, shrimp, pogies or minnows, live is always good insurance," he said. "And a little secret: I've been hammering the trout on an EBS bait (electronic bait signaling) called Livingston Lures Poboy 90. It's a hard plastic, slow-diving imitation shrimp that emits the biological sound of actual shrimp. The trout are just eating it up."

Bonus: Gros said reds are everywhere. "We're consistently catching limits of 16- to 25-inch reds, the perfect eating size, all along the beaches, and bulls are also on steady patrol along the beaches, barges and jetties. They'll devour live croakers, cut bait and cracked crab," he said. ▪ - Rusty Tardo

BIG BASS FIREWORKS ON D'ARBONNE

It's July — time for fireworks on Lake D'Arbonne in Union Parish.

But not just the dazzling display of rockets and bombs bursting in air over the lake on the Fourth. It's also time to find big bass exploding on your bait along the channels of the big 16,000-acre reservoir.

Just ask lake resident David Harrell.

He'll be easy to spot on the lake this time of year because there won't be many people out there — even though the fish are biting.

"It's just too blame hot for most people," he said. "But when you get in the right spot at the right time, you won't even realize what the temperature is."

The old D'Arbonne Bayou and Caney Creek channel contours meander under the surface from one end of the lake to the other. It's the bends in these creeks that offer a good hiding place for bass — and when they get hungry, they'll swim up on the backside of the creek bends, find a school of big gizzard shad and belly up to the buffet.

"When the water is pretty still, you can see big gizzard shad, some of them 4 or 5 inches, jumping out of the water when the big bass are chasing them," he said. "That's when you know you are in the right place at the right time. Sometimes you have to move from hole to hole, but when you see the shad on your depth finder or flicking on the surface, the bass aren't far away."

Harrell said you don't catch them all day long because when the bass aren't chasing shad, they lay up and can be tough to catch for a while. Believe it or not, the hottest part of the middle of the day seems to trigger a better bite. The brighter the sun, the better the bite. That's why there aren't a lot of folks out there during the next two months — but the bite is on.

"You can catch them on a lot of different lures that imitate shad, but my favorite is the Norman DD22," he said. "Those fish come up chasing shad, then they go back down. That bait allows you to catch them while they are still shallow, then reaches the depths you need when they go back down deeper."

You can also catch quantities of good bass around grass beds and lily pads at D'Arbonne this time of year, especially early. Buzzbaits, frogs and wacky worms will work there, but the big ones will be more consistent deeper along the channels.

The fish won't be on every channel bend, so it takes some time to find them, but keep your eyes on the graph and the surface looking for shad. That's a tell-tale sign feeding bass are nearby. ▪

- Kinny Haddox

David Harrell caught this big D'Arbonne bass chasing shad along the channels.

Toledo bend up next >

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NOTHING TOPS TOLEDO BEND BASS FISHING

NIGHT BITE HEATS UP IN JULY

Hanna White of Baton Rouge holds a chunky bass caught on a white Stanley Ribbit earlier this summer at Toledo Bend on a trip with guide John Dean and her husband, Zach.

I can't believe I'm already writing about midsummer bassin' on Toledo Bend.

The year is flying by, and it's already time to talk about deep patterns that are effective in July.

In late May, the pool stage was 170.13 feet and falling slowly. It's basically still high. And, yes, we already are in the dog days of summer. We went from spring to summer pretty quick.

Just when temperatures started to climb and more and more bass anglers began targeting deep water, two 10-pound plus bass were caught on crankbaits in 5 to 7 feet of water. My buddy Joey Lester of Zwolle reeled in one of them, an 11.52-pounder the first day of the Sealy Outdoors Big Bass Splash tournament — the only double-digit bass of the annual contest. The other bass was a 10.52-pounder brought into Toledo Town & Tackle caught during a night-fishing trip.

Lester, who hadn't been on the lake for about three months, went to one of his favorite places and hooked his hawg about noon. It was a short strike with about 5 feet of line out, so imagine what that tussle was like.

I saw the other man's lunker bass, and it was pretty.

That it was caught at night is a reminder night bass fishing can be good to great on this lake. I believe more double-digit bass caught after sunset will hit the scale this summer. Toledo Bend always has been a super, super nighttime bass fishing lake. I used to do that a lot but I got away from it. It's certainly an option for people who don't want to sweat it out on a hot, calm day.

Late June and July is prime time for the night bite. Fish the same general areas — ridges, main lake points, etc. — you fish during the day with black or june bug plastic worms, trick worms or Senkos. My first option would be a topwater, though; either buzzbaits or poppers or even plastic frogs.

Otherwise, there are a few ways to put bass in the boat during the day. What I like to do is fish in 12 to 14 feet of water under hydrilla that has matted and formed a canopy, where it's two or three degrees cooler and bass and bream like to congregate. The water temperature's hot, and just about right, but much of the grass I've been looking at hasn't canopied. I'm ready to punch it with soft plastics — usually a June bug/red Senko — under a ½-ounce tungsten weight. I can do that 10 to 12 hours a day playing in the grass,

with an outside chance of nailing some bass on a plastic frog.

Bassers up here can't go wrong fishing ½-ounce, black/blue/purple or PBJ-colored football jigs in 12- to 14-foot depths. A lot of guys are catching bass that way on the main lake over ridges and drains. Crankbaits will work in those depths, too.

I'm still catching on Carolina-rigged soft plastics in and around peppergrass and eel grass with some plastic frog action. That pattern should hold true for the first few hours of the day in midsummer.

I haven't seen any schooling action yet. When the shad move over the deep drains, it should fire up and provide some exciting bites.

The crappie fishing has exploded. It's awesome, all my buddies say, as the slabs have moved onto the brushpiles in 20- to 25-foot depths, where they're devouring minnows, and even crappie jigs. Most people are getting their limit before 11 a.m. We've lost some good bass sticks to white perch fishing — and you can't blame them because it's on fire.

Bream fishing success started up north, as usual, with plenty being caught shallow from Converse to Bison to 1215. Anglers are catching all they want.

Have a Happy Fourth of July. Be safe on the water, and catch some fish.

If you want to catch bass in July, 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

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

Little Finch Lake up next >

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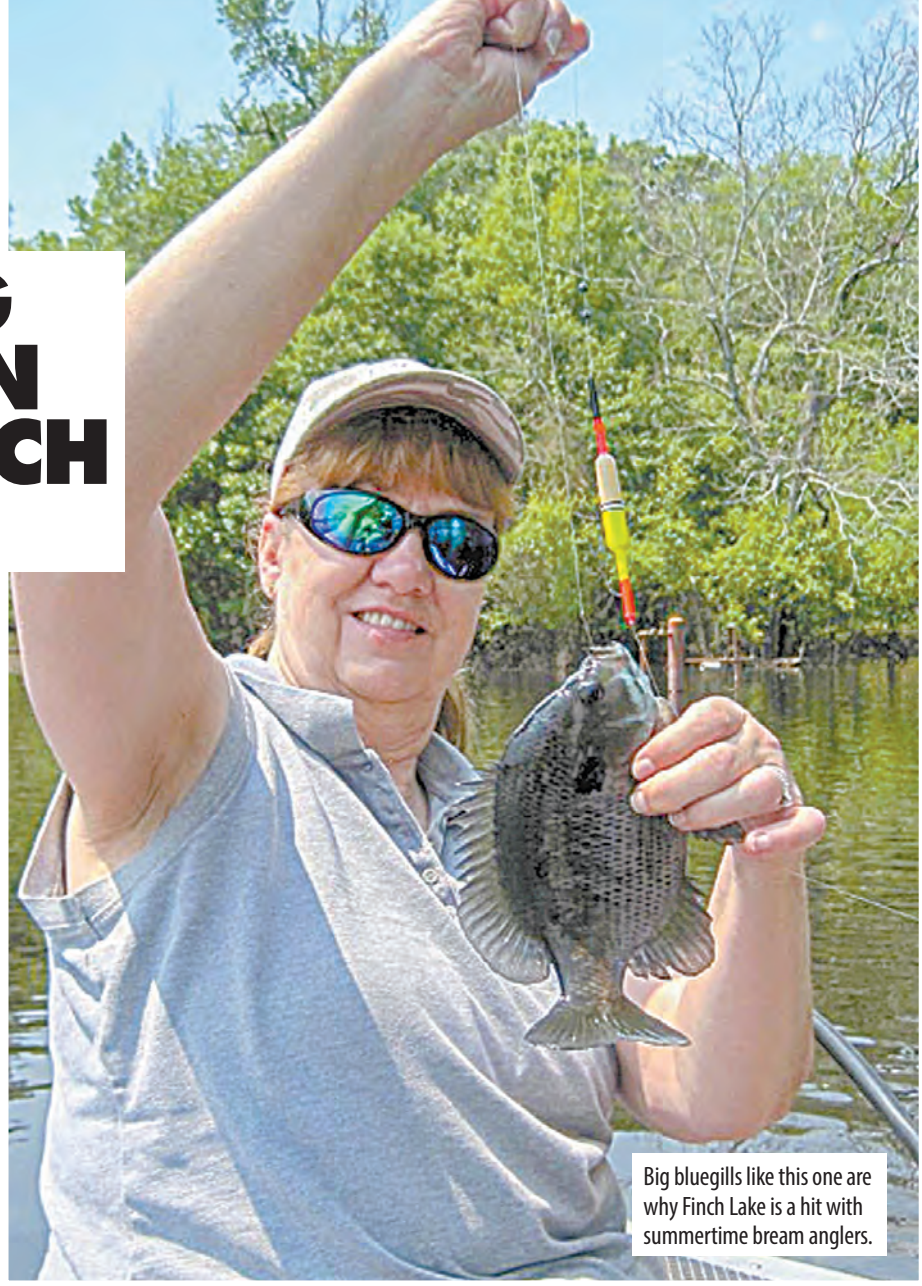

Big bluegills like this one are why Finch Lake is a hit with summertime bream anglers.

It was a bad year for flooding on Finch Lake and the Ouachita River near the small community of Haile — so that means it's a good year for big bream.

Scott Whitlock runs the Finch Lake Campground, where the road hits the water in Finch Lake. He is an avid bream fishermen and is amazed at the number of people who find this small Union Parish lake. But he's surprised at the number of big bream as well.

"It's a good problem, but sometimes when the word gets out about how good the big bream are biting, we get just about everybody we can handle in here," he said. "This year is one of those years when we had bad flooding from the river, which means we have good fishing for big bream."

Whitlock has been there for 30 years, so he should know.

"It can be hit or miss, but once the lake is down to pool stage for a while, the fishing is really good," he said. "You have to spend some time finding them. I target the big bream, so I look for the deeper banks and areas where the grass isn't so thick. Everything was late this year, so the summer fishing should be great for a while.

"There are about 3 miles of lake between here and the spillway at Harrell Lake, and then another mile of lake above us to the headwaters. The lake turns and winds and has acres and acres of good fishing, mostly around or out from the bank a short way," he said. "I just fish along in places that look good to me, and I don't stop unless I catch a big bream. We don't stop for the little guys. That's the way we approach it. And I love using crickets. That's the best big bream bait for me."

The flooding river restocks Finch every year. Whitlock said the big bream get out of the cold, muddy river and head back into the cleaner, warmer waters of Finch. When the river falls, they stay — and that's why the lake is noted as a big bream hatchery. Besides big bream, Finch also offers something else valuable to fishermen: peace and quiet.

"This isn't some big marina or big busy lake," he said. "You can come get away from it all here. Even on a busy day, you can get away from the crowd. One thing to remember: Bring what you need with you. It's a long way to town."

There is a concrete ramp at the campground at the end of Finch Lake Road (Highway PAR 2285). The other is a dirt ramp on the north end on the way to the Finch Bayou Landing on the Ouachita River.

For up-to-date reports or more information, give Whitlock a call at 318-372-1800. ■

- Kinny Haddox

PERFECT TIME FOR PANFISH

LUCK-E-STRIKE TUBE JIG WITH A CRAPPIE NIBBLE IS ANGLER'S BAIT OF CHOICE

Bill McCarty cleans a lot of panfish for frying this time every year as he taps the bream, chinquapin and sac-a-lait population in the lower Spillway, better known as the Atchafalaya Basin.

The Morgan City outdoorsman often brings back 35 to 40 panfish before 10:30 in the morning — and probably will do that consistently (weather and water conditions permitting). In July, his go-to spots include Flat Lake, Bayou Jesse, Bear

Bayou, Bayou Grosbec, Bayou Cane, Little Bayou Sorrel and Logan Canal.

"Anything from Duck Lake down will be really, really good" in July, McCarty said.

Earlier this summer, the Atchafalaya River was falling fast to a highly fishable level. He knows each drop brings fish, bass included, to the edge of the swamp where they are more accessible to the anglers.

"That's when you can really catch them," he said.

McCarty, who owns WHM Services LLC,, will go out with his trusty 5 ½-foot light action spincast rod with a Zebco Delta reel and 6-pound test monofilament line. Most of the time, the all-around outdoorsman said his first stop is Flat Lake, where he targets panfish around cypress trees and knees on the north side of the lake with a Luck-E-Strike tube jig on a 1/16-ounce Luck-E-Strike jighead about 2 feet deep under a small cork, depending on the water clarity. If he can see his bait, he'll adjust and fish deeper, he said, until the tube jig is out of sight.

His first color of choice is brown/orange, adorned with a chartreuse Crappie Nibble. If that color doesn't produce, he'll switch to black/chartreuse.

He said he was concerned at the time he volunteered his site specific fishing report about the lack of underwater vegetation in Flat Lake.

His fish-catching route after that first stop usually takes him to nearby Bear Bayou, then Bayou Grosbec, Bayou Cane, Bayou Sorrell and Logan Canal, where he fishes around stumps, deadfalls and other structure along and away from the shoreline.

He also stressed that points can be hotspots for bream, chinquapin and sac-a-lait, such as wherever canals intersect with Bayou Sorrell. In addition to his Luck-E-Strikes, McCarty fishes points in the area with Beetle Spins, the white/black stripe or yellow/black stripe models that imitate the small fry and minnows panfish gorge on. Those Beetle Spins match the hatch "pretty well," he said from experience.

Find grass, even scattered grass, and that's what the fish relate to more than anything else in the summer, he said. Again, he was hopeful there would be some grass beds to fish in once the water settled for the summer after the drop, especially in Flat Lake. ▪ - Don Shoopman

Venice up next >

Julie McCarty of Morgan City holds a fat bream caught while fishing with her husband, Bill.

A rip line is a great place to land a big bull dolphin like this 45-pounder, caught with Capt. William Wall of Pelagic Charters.

Photo courtesy of Capt. William Wall

RIP LINES PROVIDE LOTS OF OPTIONS OUT OF VENICE

PLUS, SOME RED SNAPPER FISHING TIPS

Summer is in full swing, and that means rip lines and red snapper. If tuna isn't your thing, finding a well-defined rip line can be your key to finding mahi-mahi, wahoo and other pelagic species. And if you have larger live bait like hardtails or blackfin, you could even catch a blue marlin.

A rip line is a well defined line of grass, trash, etc. that acts as a nursery for many baby fish and baitfish. It is also a distinct dividing line between green and clear blue water, and marks a noticeable temperature change with warmer water on the blue side.

Rip lines tend to fluctuate day to day, so if you can find someone at the docks who has fished one recently, you may be able to get some idea on how far out it can be found. Twenty to 30 miles would not be uncommon. There also are apps like RipCharts and Hilton's that you can subscribe to for finding rip lines.

If you find a rip, slow troll 5 to 7 knots with artificials on the blue side, and watch for grass on your line. With live bait stay slower — 3 to 5 knots — or you'll drown your bait.

You can bait with dead ballyhoo, rigged

A nice catch of red snapper and mahi-mahi displayed at Venice Marina from Capt. John Duplass with Louisiana Offshore Fishing Charters.

Photo courtesy of Capt. John Duplass

to swim like live bait, or troll subsurface treble hook shaky baits like a Russelure or Rapala. Color choice is not critical, but thinking about what wahoo and mahi are feeding on may help you decide.

Mahi-mahi can be a bit crazy once they're in the boat, so watch for hooks. You won't need to gaff small chicken dolphin, but be careful when gaffing larger fish as they tend to flail near the boat.

June produced many jumbo red snapper in excess of 20 pounds, but don't be surprised to see slightly smaller averages as they become more heavily fished. There are still tons of fish on structures and rigs within state waters. Live pogies hooked in the chin and out through the nose work well, but dead bait also will produce.

A 16-ounce weight is a good average size, but taper or add more weight depending on the strength of the current. Also, the depth you're fishing will determine how far to drop, but a good average is a third to halfway down for vertical structure. And you don't need to set your hook — let the fish eat, then steadily reel up as you feel it eat.

A quick tip for inshore anglers this time of year as we head into our hottest months — throw an Arctic Ice ice pack or two into your closed-circulation livewell: This will give your live shrimp or croakers a little longer lifespan. ▪

- Capt. Martha Spencer

Cocodrie up next >

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From left to right, Rick Bergeron, Capt. Brady Giroir, Andy Ruff and Clayton Breaux show off a nice box of fish.

FILL THE BOX AT COCODRIE

ARTIFICIAL BITE SHOULD CONTINUE WELL INTO THIS MONTH, GUIDE SAYS

Catch two speckled trout at a time, before the heat of the day, then add a limit of redfish — now you've got the scenario for a day in the life of saltwater fishing guide Brady Giroir in July.

The charter boat captain from Houma does just that when he goes to two of his favorite near-offshore fishing holes — Ship Shoal 26 and Ship Shoal 28. They are located about 5 miles off the coast, so you must be cognizant of the weather, and they aren't secret spots. In fact, they are notorious.

"A lot of times, I go out and hit the trout for three hours. I try to get out of there before 10:30 (a.m.) It gets hot," Giroir said. "Then I come back in and target redfish on the shorelines of Sister Lake and Lake Mechant. I look for a calm bank with pretty water and baitfish, and use a

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spinnerbait."

That game plan is a winning one for Giroir, who has owned Dularge-based Cajun Waters Fishing Charters (985-870-0311) since 2012. The 26-year-old outdoorsman loves to fish those three fairly new artificial reefs at SS 26, formerly the site of The Pickets. The reefs, made with recycled concrete, are fairly circular in shape and rise 3 feet in places in depths that average 10 feet.

Speckled trout use those artificial reefs as much or more than they did the oil field structure, Giroir said.

"They can be anywhere around it, depending on which way the tide is," he said.

Early in the morning and late in the day, a dead giveaway to the speckled trout's location often is the sight of birds picking.

Giroir favors an incoming tide because it's bringing in clear water.

What to fish with? He uses tandem-rigged soft plastics, mainly Cajun pepper or chicken-on-a-chain Bayou Chubs on a ¼-ounce jighead. Glow also puts fish in the boat, he said.

However, toward the end of July, when it's really hot, he switches to Carolina-rigged live bait like shrimp or croaker on a No. 3 kahle hook tied to a 1 ½-foot leader under a ½-ounce weight.

When the surface is calm, bigger speckled trout and lots of fun can be had with topwaters such as Top Dogs and MirrOlures. Having veteran anglers who know what they're doing is a must.

"You catch some real nice fish," Giroir said. "We've made some good trips on topwaters with people who know what they're doing. You have to be careful with treble hooks."

At Ship Shoal 28, nighttime fishing can be good as there are lights on the oilfield platform.

Sometimes on the way back, Giroir stops and taps the speckled trout population at the rip-rap at Raccoon Island.

But keep an eye on the weather. If a storm comes from the east, you can get back via Oyster Bayou. If inclement weather approaches from the west, go through Grand Bayou Dularge or Grand Caillou Bayou. ■

- Don Shoopman

Grand Isle up next >

TARGET SPAWNING SPECKS AT GRAND ISLE

LIVE BAIT — CROAKERS AND SHRIMP — ARE THE NAME OF THE GAME THIS MONTH

Live shrimp and croakers are your best bets to target spawning speckled trout in July around Grand Isle, according to Capt. Mark Scardino with Hard Times Fishing Charters.

Photo courtesy of Capt. Mark Scardino

July means another month for big spawning speckled trout in and around Grand Isle, and Capt. Mark Scardino with Hard Times Fishing Charters said bait selection couldn't be any easier.

"July is going to be a live bait game with croakers and shrimp — that's the ticket right now," he said. "But the croaker bite is not like a shrimp bite. A trout will just eat a shrimp. For croakers, the trout will hit him and turn him around and take him head first, so you have to give him time to swallow.

"It's hard for people to wait — they want to pull that line quick."

Lower-salinity water has been an issue at some points this summer, but Scardino said he expected the action to pick up at spots like Four Bayous, Hackberry Bay, Caminada Pass, Port Fourchon and the Gulf.

Scardino said he typically hooks croakers through the back with a 2/0 kahle hook, and Carolina rigs them with an 18-inch, 30-pound fluorocarbon leader and a ½-ounce bullet weight. His main line is usually either 15-pound mono or braid, depending on where he's fishing.

"I use a bullet weight instead of a round lead because the bullet shape comes over the oyster shells and doesn't hang up as easy," he said.

Redfish-wise, he said live shrimp or minnows under a cork should be successful in spots like the marsh toward Hackberry Bay, around Little Lake and in Bayou St. Denis.

Offshore trips also have been successful: Scardino said he's been fishing wrecks and running to rigs 30 miles out of Barataria Pass and fishing in 200 feet of water, catching red snapper, king mackerel, vermilion snapper and mangroves.

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For red snapper, he rigs up with an 8-ounce weight, a 50-pound fluorocarbon leader, 80-pound braided main line and No. 9 circle hook. Cut bait is usually pogies, squid or bonito.

To target mangroves, he downsizes to light line, typically 20- or 30-pound fluorocarbon, and drifts it with no weight whatsoever.

"You're going to lose a lot, but if they see that line they aren't coming to it," Scardino said. "They'll swim right to the hook and turn around."

Chumming for mangroves is OK, he said — to a point.

"A lot of people want to chum them up so much they fill up and go in the rig and don't come out anymore," he said. "You might throw just a little bit out to see if they're at a rig, and that's it. Then leave them alone, because you want them to come out of the rig to you."

Scardino watches his electronics to see where fish are holding in the water column offshore. For red snapper, it might be 120 feet down. Typically, mangroves are in the 10- to 40-foot range, he said.

"Get upcurrent on mangroves and drift back to the rig, or you can rig hook and throw to the rig," he said. "It all depends on how many people you have on the boat with you to help you." ▪

Editor's Note: For more information, contact Capt. Mark Scardino with Hard Times Fishing Charters at 985-787-3529 or 504-382-5286, or email him at hardtimesfishing@viscom.net.

- Patrick Bonin

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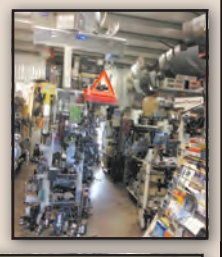

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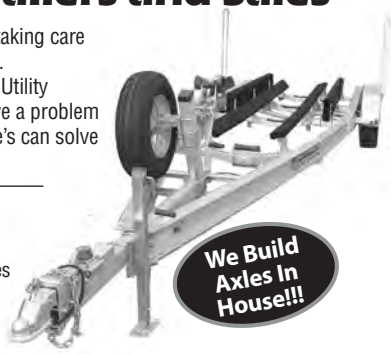

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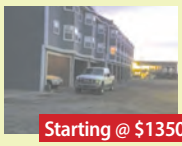

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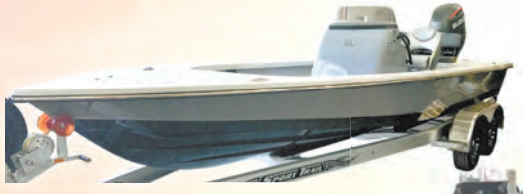

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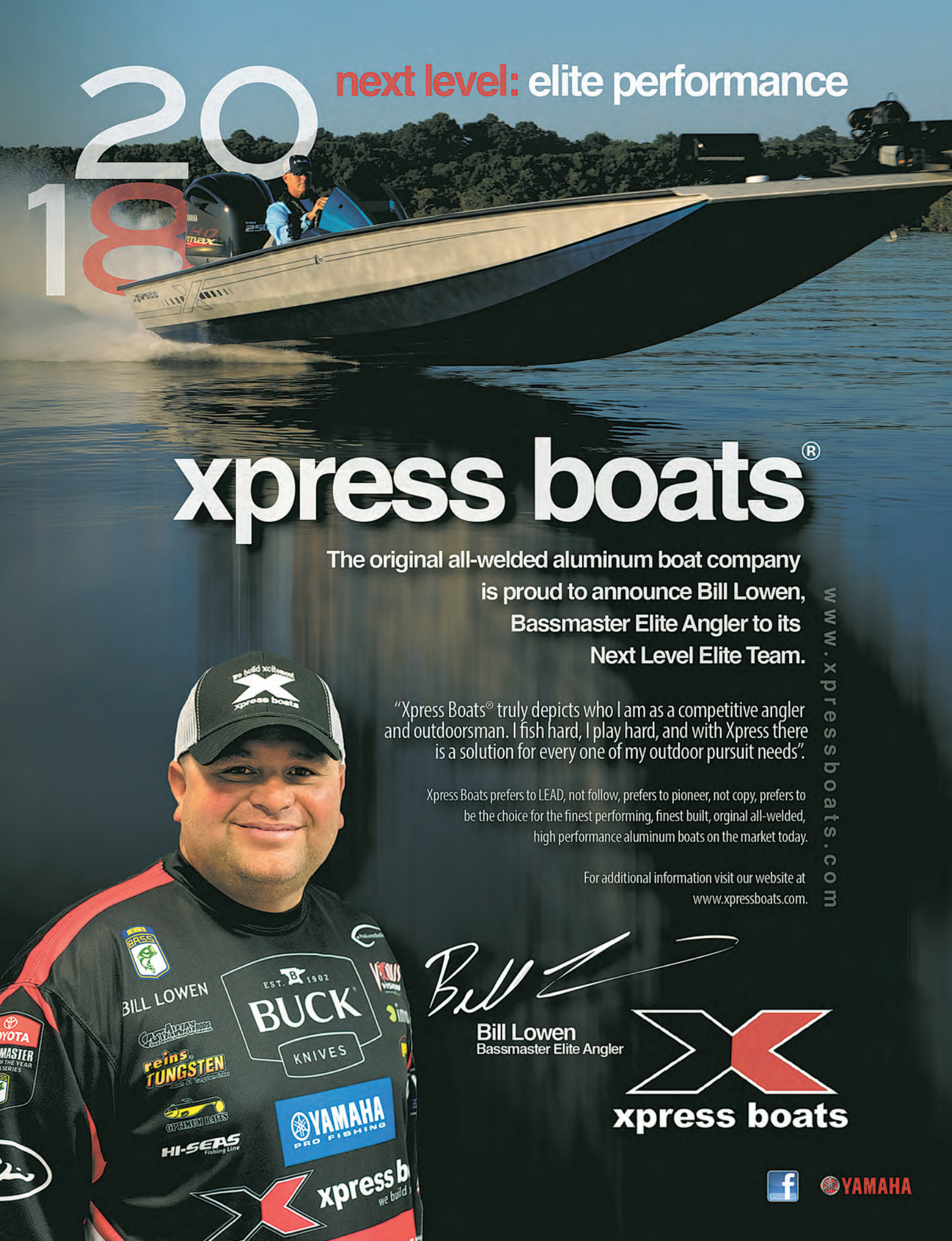
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