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# GUIDE LANDS SIXTH TOLEDO BEND LUNKER BASS

By Patrick Bonin

Toledo Bend guide Jason Courville landed this 11.18-pound giant around 7:30 p.m. on June 28 in the Six Mile area on a Carolina-rigged green pumpkin Zoom Brush Hog.



Photo courtesy of Jason Courville

COURVILLE'S LATEST HAWG WEIGHED 11.18 POUNDS

**F**or a little while at least, Toledo Bend guide Jason Courville figured his trip on June 28 would be about the big one that got away.

He was fishing with a client in the client's boat in the Six Mile area, and both men were throwing Carolina-rigged green pumpkin Zoom Brush Hogs with a ¾-ounce weight in about 15 feet of water.

"We were roughly at the full moon phase, so the evening bite was going to be the best," Courville said, noting the action he was describing took place after 7 p.m. "We were basically just dragging Carolina rigs off the ends of ridges. We kept our boat in deeper water and were throwing up to the tops of these points and dragging them off."

They were catching some smaller fish as they worked the area, until Courville, who lives in Hemphill, Texas and operates Toledo Bend South Guide Service, got a bite that loaded up his rod.

"You could tell it was a big fish the way it bit, so I swung and set the hook on it," he said. "As soon as I did, I turned to the

client and said, 'This is a big one.'

"We fought it for almost a minute, got it close to the boat — and it came off."

Courville said the giant bass — which went at least 10 pounds — bent his hook.

"She made that big turn, and we could see the whole side of her body," he said. "That's when the hook and weight came flying out like a .22. Luckily the client was in the back of the boat paying attention and ducked."

"We were both sitting there kind of looking at each other."

At that point it was starting to get dark, so instead of cutting his hook off and retying, Courville just bent the hook back into position with his pliers, put on another Brush Hog and cast back out.

"I wasn't thinking I was going to get another fish," he said with a chuckle. "I was just trying to finish out the last 10 or 15 minutes of the trip."

They got back in position using the client's trolling motor, and then lightning struck — again.

"Within about two casts, I get the same bite, and it felt the same and I set the

hook," Courville said. "I turned back to the client and said, 'It's another big one.' He got the net and we got this one in — it weighed 11.18 ounces at the Fairmount General Store."

Incredibly, the big bass was Courville's sixth double-digit fish at Toledo Bend, and his fifth entry into the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program. This big bass, which measured 26 ¼ inches long with a 20-inch girth, was returned back to the reservoir — and Courville will have yet another replica mount for his wall next May.

It also earned Courville a cool \$1,000 and put him in first place in the 2018 BassCashBash contest. If no one entered in the tournament catches a bigger bass by Sept. 3, he'll win an additional \$5,000.

"I can't say if it was the same fish or not that bit twice, but more than likely it wasn't," he said. "They're pretty much gone and spooked after getting hooked. But luckily, I was able to get back in there and pull another one out of it." ■

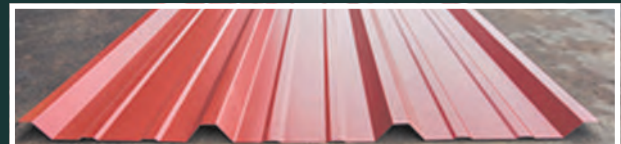
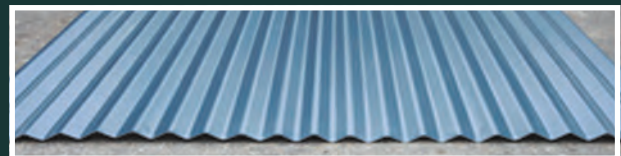
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# CARIBBEAN FISH CAUGHT ON TIMBALIER ROCKS

By Ann Taylor

5-POUND PERMIT IS ANGLER'S BIGGEST YET

Capt. Aaron Pierce shows off the 5-pound permit fish he caught July 1 fishing live shrimp under a 4 Horsemen popping cork on the old Timbalier rocks.



Photo courtesy of Capt. Aaron Pierce

**A**sk a Florida flats angler what his favorite fish is, and he'll probably tell you it's a permit — the darling of Sunshine State fishermen that look and taste very similar to pompano, and gives one heck of a fight when hooked.

For the past three years, Capt. Aaron Pierce has been catching these prized fish in the Timbalier/Terrebonne Bay area and on July 1, he hooked his biggest yet — a meaty 5-pounder he caught while fishing live shrimp under a 4-Horsemen popping cork.

"I was fishing the old submerged rock piles off of East Timbalier for redfish and trout," Pierce said.

The rocks are about 3 feet underwater, and he was fishing live

shrimp on a No. 1 kahle hook with a 3-foot leader so the shrimp was swimming just above the rocks.

According to Pierce, permit love hard structure — making the Timbalier rocks and the old well pads of Terrebonne Bay perfect habitat for them.

He said he doesn't catch many, but he's starting to see more and more. He's caught them as small as 1 pound, which is an indication that they might be staying longer in Louisiana waters.

"I think they might be breeding in the same areas as the pompano," Pierce said.

If that's the case, Louisiana anglers might have another great fish to target. ■

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# ROCKEFELLER REFUGE ANGLER CATCHES STAR-TAGGED REDFISH, WINS NAUTICSTAR BOAT

From News Reports

## TROSCLAIR ALSO CAUGHT A TAGGED RED IN 2017 — BUT WASN'T REGISTERED FOR THE TOURNAMENT

Life is made up of learning experiences, and last year Ty Trosclair got a tough one: He caught a tagged redfish, but wasn't registered for the Coastal Conservation Association of Louisiana's STAR Tournament.

Fortunately, it was an error he didn't make twice.

On June 24, while trout fishing from the bank with his dad Scooter Trosclair and a friend on the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge, the 17-year-old from Grand Chenier reeled in another STAR-tagged red — and this time, pending a polygraph, it will be worth a 2140 NauticStar and Mercury outboard motor package.

"I wasn't going to make that mistake again," the younger Trosclair said in a press release.

"They were fishing there for about 45 minutes when I went to check on them," Scooter said. "Just when I put my line in the water nearby, Ty had set the hook on a redfish."

And it didn't take long for the young angler to realize the fish was tagged.

"That's when I threw my pole down and went over to make sure Ty didn't lose this

one," Scooter said.

"It is the year of redemption," STAR Tournament Director Rad Trascher said. "Ty is the second angler this year to win who has caught a tagged redfish in the past but wasn't registered for the tournament. Congrats to Ty and his family — I know that young man will have a blast in his new NauticStar and Mercury boat."

The fourth and fifth registered anglers to catch a tagged redfish also will win 2140 NauticStars with 150hp 4-stroke Mercury Outboards, while the sixth thru 10th anglers who catch a tagged red will win a brand new Gatortail boat, motor and trailer package.

The Chevy Silverado and two NauticStar and Mercury boat packages have already been claimed, along with the \$10,000 bonus prize from Louisiana Sportsman magazine.



Courtesy of CCA-STAR

Ty Trosclair, 17, of Grand Chenier, reeled in a STAR-tagged redfish on Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge on June 24. Pending a polygraph, he'll win a 21-foot NauticStar boat and Mercury outboard motor package.

The tournament goes until Labor Day, Monday, Sept. 3. Registration is only \$35, but you have to be a CCA member to participate. To register, as well as see a complete list of divisions, weigh stations, sponsors and rules, go to [www.ccastar.com](http://www.ccastar.com). ■

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Sam Rayburn Reservoir in Texas was named the No. 1 bass fishery in America for 2018, according to Bassmaster magazine. Toledo Bend, which held the top spot in both 2015 and 2016, placed fourth in the Central Division.

# BASSMASTER: RAYBURN TAKES 2018 CROWN FOR BEST BASS LAKE IN THE USA



Photo courtesy of B.A.S.S.

## TOLEDO BEND RANKED NO. 4 IN THE CENTRAL DIVISION

**A**fter three years of being in the Top 5 in Bassmaster Magazine's 100 Best Bass Lakes rankings, Sam Rayburn Reservoir finally took home the crown. The Lone Star state fishery has never ranked below 26th in the seven years the rankings have been published, and the 114,500-acre lake was in second place last year.

"Although there were some pretty spectacular numbers being produced from other lakes this year, Rayburn was a clear No. 1," said James Hall, editor of *Bassmaster* magazine. "While some lakes were boasting of a single 30-pound, five-bass limit being caught, Rayburn was spitting them out in rapid succession. And to top it off, a 40.28-pound limit was recorded in June."

But countless limits of solid fish aren't the only thing special about this lake.

"When it comes to double-digit bass, Rayburn also seems to top the list this year," Hall said. "Three 10-pounders were weighed in during a one-day February derby. Plus, a 12.05 and a 13.06 were landed here in March. The lake is simply on fire right now."

Toledo Bend, which was ranked No. 1 overall by Bassmaster in both 2015 and 2016, was ranked No. 4 in the Central Division

for 2018. The only other Louisiana location in the rankings was Caddo Lake, which placed 17th in the Central Division.

The process to create the rankings takes about three months to complete. After the numbers are crunched, a blue-ribbon panel from the bass fishing industry debates the strength of the lakes, then settles on the final rankings.

Tennessee's Chickamauga Lake, which took the No. 2 slot this year, made a strong argument for No. 1, as it also produced 40-plus-pound limits this spring. And although the 36,240-acre fishery hasn't produced quite as many big fish as Rayburn, there were two bass over 10 pounds recorded there since February, the biggest weighing 11.21 pounds.

California's Clear Lake landed in the No. 3 position on the strength of its production of big largemouth. Lake St. Clair, a former No. 1 in 2013, climbed from ninth last year to the fourth spot in 2018, while Minnesota's Mille Lacs Lake (last year's No. 1 fishery) fell to No. 5.

The remainder of the nation's Top 10 are: sixth, Santee Cooper lakes, South Carolina; seventh, Diamond Valley Lake, California.; eighth, Thousand Islands, New York; ninth, Lake Guntersville, Alabama and 10th, Falcon Lake, Texas. ■

Judges in two separate cases found Louisiana men guilty in the killings of black bears, one in Concordia Parish and one in Iberia Parish.

# SHOOTERS FOUND GUILTY IN TWO BLACK BEAR CASES

From News Reports

## LETTSWORTH MAN ORDERED TO PAY \$10,250 FOR SHOOTING BEAR ON RICHARD K. YANCEY WMA

**A** 30-year-old Lettsworth man who admitted shooting a Louisiana black bear because he said he thought it was a hog was ordered to pay \$10,250 in civil restitution and attorney fees, according to a press release from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

Administrative law Judge John Herke revoked the hunting and fishing licenses of Ronald J. Kimble until he pays the assessed restitution of \$10,000 and attorney fees totaling \$250 for the Nov. 26, 2017 incident in Concordia Parish, the release states.

According to an LDWF investigation, biologists received a mortality signal from a radio collar known to be on a female black bear in the area, and agents located the origin of the radio signal and found the dead bear wearing the collar. The bear had been shot twice with a large caliber weapon, the release states.

Kimble was ultimately arrested in the case on Jan. 9 of this year, and he was booked with one count of taking a bear during a closed season and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, according to the release. ■

## NEW IBERIA FATHER, SON SENTENCED FOR KILLING BLACK BEAR NEAR WEEKS ISLAND

**A** New Iberia man and his juvenile son were found guilty in Iberia Parish for the 2015 killing of a Louisiana black bear near Weeks Island.

Judge Gregory Aucoin sentenced Elie Dupre, 60, of New Iberia, to pay \$2,500 in civil restitution for delinquency of a juvenile for his role in his son's illegal taking of the bear.

The juvenile was found guilty for taking a bear during a closed season after he fatally shot a Louisiana black bear back in November of 2015. Aucoin sentenced the juvenile to serve 100 hours of community service, suspended his hunting privileges for one year and ordered him to retake a hunter's education course, according to a press release.

Enforcement agents with the LDWF cited Dupre and his son on June 23, 2017 for their roles in the illegal shooting of the bear, which was a 9-year-old, 250 pound female that wore a tracking collar. Over the eight years the bear wore the collar, it provided researchers with valuable information on black bear populations, productivity and population viability in the state, the release states. ■





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# CCA LOUISIANA EXPANDS EXISTING ARTIFICIAL REEF IN BIG LAKE

Courtesy of CCA Louisiana

An additional 2,000 tons of limestone were being added to the existing Brad Vincent Reef in Big Lake in late July, bringing the new reef's total footprint to about 9 or 10 acres.



## BRAD VINCENT REEF INCREASES BY 3 TO 4 ACRES WITH 2,000 ADDITIONAL TONS OF LIMESTONE

**T**he Coastal Conservation Association of Louisiana recently enhanced a Big Lake artificial reef originally constructed in 2012 in memory of Lake Charles area conservationist Brad Vincent.

Weather permitting, an additional 2,000 tons of limestone were expected to be placed adjacent to the existing 6-acre reef habitat by late July, making the entire reef's new footprint about 9 to 10 acres.

The original reef in the mid-lake area has become a popular hotspot for Big Lake anglers because the

habitat supports a variety of marine life, including oysters, crustaceans and small baitfish, which serve as forage for sportfish like speckled trout, flounder and redfish.

This project marks the first collaboration between CCA Louisiana and Phillips 66, and is the fourth reef project completed by CCA in Calcasieu Lake.

In 2003, CCA built Turner's Bay Reef, followed by the Brad Vincent Reef in 2012. In 2017, "Big Jack's Reef" was completed in southern Big Lake, in memory of conservation

legend Jack Lawton Sr.

The Vincent Reef expansion will be the 23rd artificial reef project overall to be built by CCA Louisiana across the state. In total, CCA has constructed more than \$8 million in marine habitat projects on the Louisiana coast in recent years.

Upon final completion, CCA will send out GPS coordinates so the expanded site can be located by anglers. More information on all of CCA Louisiana artificial reefs can be found at [ccalouisiana.com](http://ccalouisiana.com). ■



By Patrick Bonin

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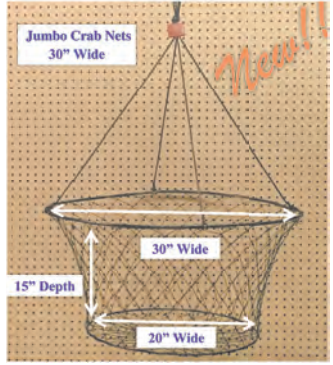
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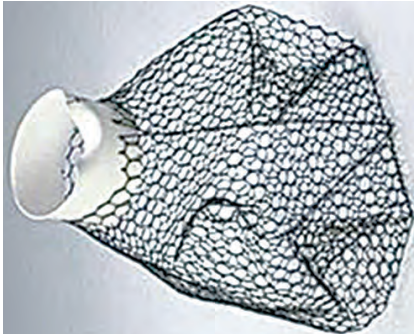


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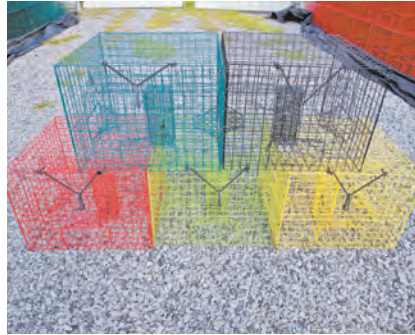
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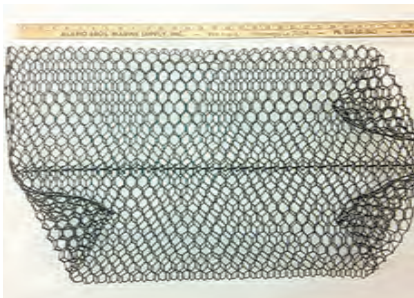
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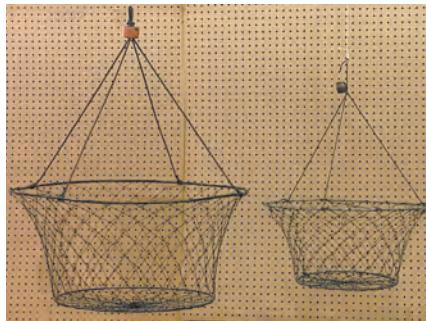
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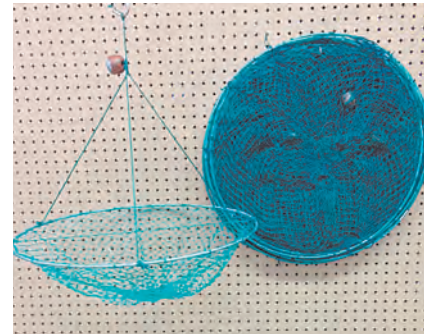
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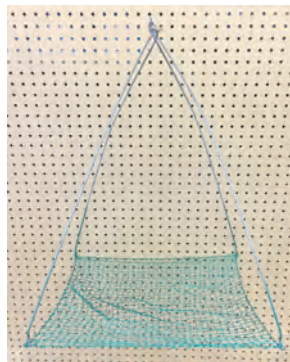
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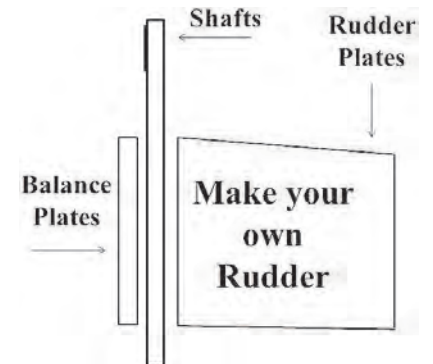
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Oppressive heat means keeper trout have moved to the fringes of the Louisiana coast. So unless your goal is to catch a million throwbacks, you have to make longer runs. These speck experts give you some tips to maximize your time on the water.

# HOT TROUT TIPS

By Andy Crawford

**T**he dog days of summer have arrived, and that means staying on the water for 12 hours to limit out on speckled trout is about as much fun as hitting your thumb with a hammer. Twice.

The problem is that you can't just zip out of the marina and stop at the first big bay for some quick action.

No, the trout have moved out — at least those that you don't have to measure.

So the beaches, rock jetties and barrier islands are the places to be.

But how do you ensure you're heading

home before you wither away from heat stroke?

We turned to some of the most-consistent trout catchers in Louisiana to pick their brains.

Here are their tips to put limits of trout in the boat quickly — even in the heat of the summer.

## GO LIVE

OK, so anyone who knows me understands I have a lifelong distaste for fishing live bait. And Venice Charters' Capt. Brent Roy is on my side.

But this veteran guide said he finally capitulated — and now he never leaves the dock during the summer without a stock of live shrimp in the well.

"I've gotten away from everything else," Roy said. "I tell (my clients) they can stick with (plastics), but if you want to actually participate in the catching, they have to use live shrimp."

That's not really a huge surprise, but there's more to his live-bait fishing than just hooking a lively shrimp on and chunking it out.

So bear with me.

>

## HOT TROUT TIPS

**F**irst, he always uses 4 Horsemen popping corks, and determines his leader length by the depth of water he's fishing.

"The main factor is how deep the water is," Roy said. "In the summer, trout are generally suspended."

There are actually times when his leaders are longer than the water depth, but he said it's never a bad thing to start about halfway down.

How important is paying attention to leader length?

"We were fishing a rig the other day, and the fish were suspended about 6 feet down," Roy explained. "We had two boats come in, and they were fishing regular 20 to 24-inch leaders, and they weren't catching anything. One of the boats actually left."

Meanwhile, Roy's clients were hauling in the meat.

"You're just laying that shrimp in their faces," Roy said. "They're not really hugging the bottom."

But here's the real magic to his cork rig. "I use a split shot on the leader," Roy said. "It's not a huge chunk of lead — barely larger than what you'd use when crappie

If he's looking for specks, Capt. Brent Roy will hook live shrimp through the tail. But when he finds them, he hooks them through the horn — like this.



fishing."

The results, however, can be shocking. "It gets that shrimp down faster," Roy said. "If we throw a live shrimp without a split shot, it's going to slowly make its way down.

Capt. Brent Roy doesn't leave the dock in Venice without a good supply of live shrimp to catch summertime specks.



Photo courtesy of Capt. Brent Roy

"The split shot forces the shrimp down to where the fish are."

He positions the lead well above the hook, with a foot being the rule for long leaders.

"It allows that shrimp to still be able to move freely," Roy explained.

He rounds out the rig with a No. 4 treble.

His general approach to hooking a shrimp is to thread the treble through the horn, but Roy said he sometimes turns the bait around.

"If we're kind of looking for the fish, I'll hook them in the tail," he said. "And then when we find them I'll start hooking them in the horn."

His reasoning is pretty simple.

"You get more bites when you tail-hook a shrimp," Roy said. "But you're not going to hook as many.

"I think you're hookup ratio is better when you hook a shrimp through the horn. Trout like to eat shrimp head first, so you will definitely hook more fish if you horn-hook them."

## STEALTH MODE

Tommy Vidrine is a Grand Isle fixture, specializing in catching lunker trout when others are struggling just to get bites.

A large part of his secret is free-lining

live shrimp, but more importantly is how he approaches his chosen fishing holes.

"I see so many people run right up to where they're fishing and shut down, and then throw out an anchor," Vidrine said. "If you get too close with the big motor, you're not going to catch those fish."

Instead, he comes off plane at least 30 yards (preferably farther) away from where he plans to fish.

"I quietly troll into position so I don't spook the fish," Vidrine said.

This angler has stepped up to a Minn Kota iPilot trolling motor, which he believes has allowed him to be even

more effective.

"You don't have to even put an anchor out," Vidrine explained. "I just push the button, and my boat stays put.



Tommy Vidrine specializes in catching hammer specks like this one in Grand Isle. He said approaching fishing spots quietly and stealthily is a big key to his success.

Photo courtesy of Tommy Vidrine

When fishing with live pogies, this year Tommy Vidrine has had more success hooking them through the lips with a No. 2 kahle hook. This makes a pogy swim deeper, which is especially helpful if birds are attempting to steal your bait.

“My ability to get into the spot quietly has increased dramatically.”

Now, some folks don't even have trolling motors — and Vidrine fished for years without one.

That still doesn't change his thoughts on stealth; it just means you have to do things differently.

“I would just start upwind or upcurrent and drift into my spot,” Vidrine said. “That way you don't make any noise.”

If you own a trolling motor but not one of the newest models that offer Spot Lock, anchoring is a necessary evil.

But Vidrine said that also should be done as quietly as possible — don't just heave it out like you're competing in a hammer throw.

“Ease the anchor over-board,” he said.

By taking a few easy precautions, you'll be able to slip up on spooky trout and put them in the boat before the sun gets too high.

“In the bays (stealth is) even more important,” Vidrine said. “If you're in there where it's 3 or 4 feet of water, you just can't make a lot of noise. I just see so many people who think they can pull up and just throw out an anchor.

“You might catch those fish an hour later, but people don't understand trout are sensitive to sound.”

## ACRES AND ACRES OF BAIT

Capt. Nick Poe spends most of the summer fishing the edge of the Gulf of Mexico south of Big Lake, searching for big trout.

And he said the one thing he's always looking for is bait. Not just a few flicks here and there, though.

“You've got to have the presence of bait,” he said. “I'm not talking about a little bait; I'm talking about a lot of bait.”

That's still a little ambiguous, so the Big Lake Guide

Service captain got a little more concrete.

“I'm talking acres of pogies and acres of mullet,” Poe explained. “If I see that, I've got the utmost confidence that I'll find trout.”

Of course, he also is watching for any activity by predatory fish, a certain sign that the feed is on.

How he finds these telltale signs of speckled trout depends on exactly where he's fishing.



Photo courtesy of Tommy Vidrine

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## HOT TROUT TIPS

Capt. Nick Poe keeps a watchful eye out for the presence of bait — either on the water or via his electronics — to put his clients on speckled trout at Big Lake.

**O**n the beaches and along the rock jetties, the water is shallower. So he's putting eyes on the rafts of baitfish. "On the jetties, it'll be blatantly obvious when there's that much bait," Poe said.

If he doesn't find what he's looking for there, he moves to the beaches. He stays on plane, watching for baitfish scattering.

"A lot of times I'll run the beaches on my way to fish the (nearshore) rigs," Poe explained. "A lot of times, I won't make it my No. 1 spot."

If he makes it to the rigs, bait is often not visible. "You're in 25 to 30 feet of water, so a lot of times you don't see it on the surface," Poe said. "So I'm looking for the bait on my electronics."

"I'm looking for the whole screen to light up."

Now, simply finding a huge raft of bait doesn't necessarily equate to trout in the box. In fact, competing with the masses of swimming groceries can complicate the whole affair.

"Sometimes it makes it hard to catch fish because there's so much bait," Poe said.



Photo courtesy of Capt. Nick Poe

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So what is this accomplished guide approach?  
 "I just throw everything in the tackle box until we find what they want," he said. "Then we stick with that."

Often working the edges of the bait will pick off trout, but don't be afraid to throw into the thick of things.

"If I'm throwing a jig, I try to let the lure fall under the bait," Poe said.

This can elicit strikes from trout that believe the lure is a struggling baitfish.

He also said he changes lure color to grab the attention of hungry specks.

"I'll throw a crazy, off-the-wall colored bait," Poe said. "It's something different that (trout) haven't seen."

On the beaches and jetties, topwaters also can work.

"Make a bunch of racket working a topwater through the bait," Poe said. ■



**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](http://www.AndyCrawford.Photography).



Capt. Nick Poe said he's not averse to changing things up and trying different colors of artificial lures if the trout are acting finicky.



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Approx. Dry Weight.....	2,450lbs.
Approx. Bridge Clearance w/ Top.....	7' 9"



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# SEEING RED



Catching fish isn't necessarily the biggest challenge for visiting anglers on the Red River — but safe navigation is. Here's how one local guide patrols the pools to catch plenty of largemouths.

By Jerald Horst

**L**ouisiana's Red River used to be a mud hole. Or at least, something close to it.

"It was shallow," said 65-year-old Charlie King, of Charlie King's Professional Fishing LLC, based in Ringgold (318-423-4280).

"You could wade across it," agreed his fishing partner and friend Trent Toups (See this month's Louisiana Seafood Bible column on page 148 for a sample of some of his superb cooking.)

"It was slack in the summer," King went on. "With rain, it would become rolling, raging, red muddy — an unbelievably muddy river with strong currents. About the only fishing going on was catfishing."

Then in the 10 years starting in November 1984, when Lock and Dam No. 1 was dedicated, through completion of Lock and Dam No. 5, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers "tamed" the Red.

More than 200 miles of the river from Lower Brouillette to Shreveport turned from red to green and water levels were stabilized and raised, flooding large areas. The five locks and dams were created strictly for navigational purposes — to make Shreveport into a functional river port.





The Corps of Engineers channelized the river,” explained King. “They cut off a lot of the twists and loops in the river, effectively straightening it out. Each of the five locks and dams created a lake called a ‘pool.’

“The lock and dam structures are numbered from the bottom to the top. Number 1 is near Marksville, No. 2 is below Alexandria, No. 3 is at Natchitoches, No. 4 is at Coushatta and No. 5 is close to Shreveport-Bossier.

“Each pool is a lake now, and each pool is 12 or 13 miles long. Some current still exists in the river itself, but very little or none is in the flooded backwaters.”

Normal water clarity in flooded backwaters is 1 foot, which King explained is good for bass. Sometimes the river itself is clearer than the backwaters around it, with visibilities of 2 or 3 feet.

His theory is that algae blooms are more likely to occur in stiller backwaters than in the moving river. But he cautioned that clarity in the system can change quickly, depending on rainfall runoff, as well as winds that stir waters over shallow mud flats.

“If you look at an aerial photograph, you will see four or five different colors of water in one pool.”

## BASS HEAVEN

The barges never came to Shreveport in the numbers hoped for, but what did come was a world class largemouth bass fishery — one good enough to attract the Bassmaster Classic in 2009 and again in 2012.

And also good enough to start King’s guiding business.

He started fishing the river one year after the first lock and dam was built. “They didn’t even have a boat ramp then,” he smiled. “We had to launch an aluminum boat off the bank.”



Both men agreed that they considered the Red River to be one of the best bass spots in the country. “That’s why so many tournaments were held here,” Toups said. “It was a major fishery.”

“We were blessed after the locks and dams were built,” said King, “with five or six years of low rainfall. This produced great spawns. Sometimes 20-pound (five-fish) bags would barely get you into the Top 10 in a tournament.

“Hundred-fish days were so common that it was bizarre. This went on 10 years.

“The normal cycle is three or so wet years and then three or so dry years. That’s river fishing — I don’t care where you fish.”



## AND THEN ...

"Then came the big floods," groaned King.

"We had a 100-year flood in 2015, a 500-year flood in 2016 and 8-foot-high flooding three times in the summer of 2017.

"We lost 50 percent of our fishable waters — silted in. Water that was 20 feet deep became 3 feet deep. Washed out all our vegetation: lily pads, coontail fields, hydrilla beds and hyacinths.

"Topped over wing dams and the rock walls that run parallel with the bank. These made navigation dangerous. All the buoys marking the ends of rock walls were washed away.

"The one thing we didn't lose was our woody cover."

"But there's still bass here — lots of them," interrupted Toups. "Fishing here is a chance to fish a river system. It's different than fishing reservoirs."

"It's like The Wild Kingdom," chuckled King.

"All your major tournament circuits hold tournaments here, year round, from Ultimate Bass Team Tour to the Bassmaster Classic. And the Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Opens, the Costa FLW Series and the Skeeter Bass Champs.

"A lot of my guiding business comes from people practicing for tournaments on the Red.

"I'm a Red River booster. I want to showcase the river — to show people that the fishing is still good. We've had all kind of bad press about the floods." ■

## FOUR SEASONS OF THE RED

UP NEXT >

ABOVE LEFT: Charlie King (left) and Trent Toups label the Red River as still being one of the best bass destinations in the country, although fishing poses its own challenges. **BOTOM LEFT:** Intact wing walls are visible and easily avoided by boat operators. **BELOW:** Hundred-fish days were not uncommon after the lock-and-dam impoundment of the Red River.



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## FOUR SEASONS OF THE RED

The Red River Waterway system offers a huge array of bass habitats, including stump fields, backwater lakes, the original river's banks, rock piles, log jams, reeds (cut grass), oxbow ridges and shorelines, as well as lily pad fields that have bounced back after the floods.

"You would have to fish this one pool for months and months to fish everything," chuckled Trent Toups.

To make things easier for anglers new to the system, Charlie King broke the year into four distinct seasons and shared his secrets for the best production in each.

### WINTER

King defined winter as beginning after Thanksgiving when water temperatures sink below 60° F, extending through late January. Bass have moved from the river into backwater lakes in the fall following the movement of shad.

"This is when I slow down my presentation and throw creature baits like a 5-inch Mister Twister Poc'it Hawg or a half-ounce Santone jig with a Mister Twister Buzz Bug," he said. Go-to colors are black/blue or black, brown and amber for jigs, and watermelon red or black with blue flake for the Buzz Bugs.



A favored tactic on warm January and even February days is to punch mats of frozen water hyacinths using Mister Twister Poc'it Craws on 1-ounce or larger tungsten jigheads with 80-pound test Vicious No-Fade braided line. "That's when I catch my biggest fish," he winked.

Although he avoids the river proper that time of year, he will target stumps in 7 or 8 feet of water in oxbow lakes, as well. Again, he uses jigs or creature baits, and stressed the lures must be fished very slowly.

### SPRING

Spring in Charlie King's book begins in February, when water temperatures warm enough to approach 60°, and lasts through April and even early May. Bass are moving shallower, in 1 to 3 feet of water, but are still in the backwaters where they spawn.

He works what he calls ridges — firm bottoms that are the old flooded shorelines of oxbow lakes that are shallower than the backwater swamps on one side and the bed of the oxbow on the other.

**BELOW:** King's winter lures on the Red are all made by Mister Twister. Note that he pegs the weights of his Texas-rigged lures with red bobber stops. **RIGHT:** King uses only three lures in the spring, a Poc'it Hawg, a Strike King spinner or a Comida worm with a Keith Poche tail spinner in it.



His targets are stumps and lily pad beds. The lily pad beds are good targets because they are generally found on hard bottoms, which are good for spawning. They cannot be located by looking for the pads, because at that time of year their only visible features are the stubs of brown stems.

King's go-to lures include a Mister Twister Poc'it Hawg, a 3/8-ounce Strike King spinner and a 5-inch Mister Twister Comida worm with a Keith Poche Power Spinner screwed into its tail.

He uses the same colors for Poc'it Hawgs as in the winter with one additional color added, green pumpkin with a chartreuse-dipped tail. Dip is used because water colors are often murky in the spring.

His Poc'it Hawgs are Texas-rigged, and pegged on 3/8- or 5/16-ounce tungsten weights. His rationale for pegging the weight is that "when the fish hit it, they nail it."

His favorite configuration for the Strike King spinner is a chartreuse and white skirt with double spinners, one a silver Colorado blade and the other a gold willow leaf blade.

Comida worms are Texas-rigged as well, with a 1/16-ounce weight and a 4/0 offset Owner hook. He uses one color: black/blue flake. The Keith Poche spinner can be either willow leaf, or Colorado-shaped.

"I don't throw a lizard, a wacky worm or a trick worm," he said emphatically. "But you have to remain flexible enough in the spring to revert to winter-style slow-fishing if conditions call for it."

### SUMMER

Summer extends from early to mid-May and goes to the end of August. Hot air and water temperatures slow the fish down and make them feed at night.

In early summer, King still hits lily pad beds in backwaters, leaning heavily on use of a bluegill color 3/8-ounce Strike King KVD Swim Jig, paired with a watermelon red, 3-inch Gary Yamamoto curly tail grub. "Always put the grub on the hook with the curly tail facing down," King stressed.

On the lily beds, he also often uses a brown/black Live Target Hollow Body frog.

When water temperatures heat up, King gets out of the backwaters and focuses on the Red River itself, fishing crankbaits on river rocks, wing dams, revetments and jetties. On the river, he looks for current breaks where backwaters are draining into the river, or islands or points that create breaks.



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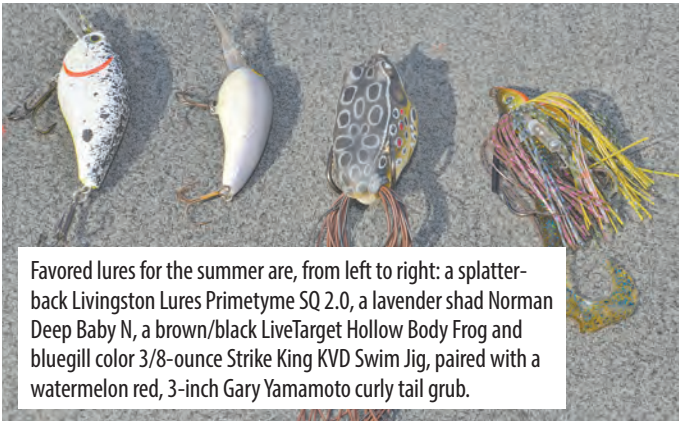
CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

He also hits deepwater (7 feet or so) stumps in oxbows, but if they are not productive he quickly moves to the river. "The summer is all about playing the currents," he noted.

"Summer is a bitch here."

## FALL

Fall fishing begins in September and lasts until around Thanksgiving, and King calls it his favorite season. The weather is stable, so bass can be patterned easier than in other seasons, and he can use his favorite baits: spinners and crankbaits, what he calls his "running baits."



Favored lures for the summer are, from left to right: a splatter-back Livingston Lures Primetime SQ 2.0, a lavender shad Norman Deep Baby N, a brown/black LiveTarget Hollow Body Frog and bluegill color 3/8-ounce Strike King KVD Swim Jig, paired with a watermelon red, 3-inch Gary Yamamoto curly tail grub.

During the fall, he fishes both backwaters and the river. In backwaters, he targets the same ridges he did in the spring, essentially the stumpy former shores (before flooding by the locks and dams) of the system's numerous oxbow lakes.

Although the tops of the ridges only average 2 feet of water on them, King's primary pattern is to work the drop-off from the ridge tops into 7 to 10 feet of water in the old beds of the oxbows.

He especially works stumps on the drop-offs. "Current maps



King is fishing what he calls a ridge, simply the completely flooded old bank of an oxbow lake.

aren't of much use in finding these spots," he counseled. "You have to fish them to learn them."

In the river, he fishes rocks, cut banks, log jams and current eddies, leaning more on lures like Poc't Craws and Sweet Beavers, Texas-rigged with 5/16-ounce tungsten weights pegged on the line. ■

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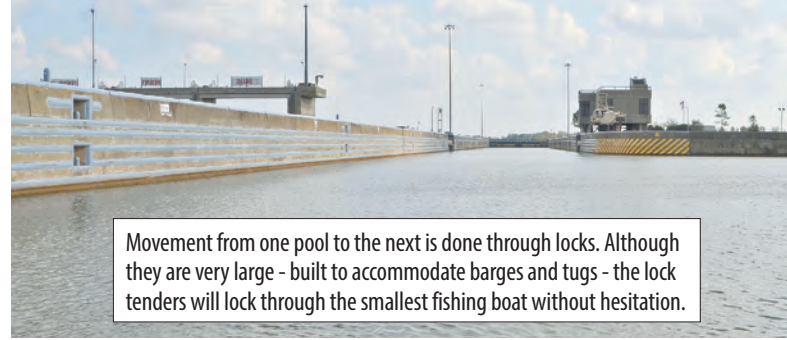
# OFF LIMITS

Pools No. 5 and 4 are large complex areas because a variety of habitats and properties were flooded by the 7- to 8-foot rise in water levels that followed damming. The two pools are where Charlie King focuses his Red River guiding efforts, and also where Trent Toups does much of his personal bass fishing.

The top pool, No. 5, includes eight flooded oxbow lakes, flooded river bottoms and the river channel itself, as well as Twelve Mile Bayou that runs through downtown Shreveport.

Pool No. 4 holds nine oxbows and Loggy Bayou, in addition to its flooded river bottoms and the river bed itself.

Remarkably, with three exceptions, all of the waters are open to public access, according to King. But the first one that isn't is like a finger stuck in the average person's eye.



Movement from one pool to the next is done through locks. Although they are very large - built to accommodate barges and tugs - the lock tenders will lock through the smallest fishing boat without hesitation.

Boats launched at Red River South Marina in Pool No. 5 will be floating in what is called Port Lake. A vast, very bassy-looking flooded stump field stretches to the north, practically begging for casts.

But it's private land that has been flooded by the elevated water levels of the Red River system. Known as Cooley Bottom, and named after the owner, it is off-limits to participants in any major and many local tournaments.

It's easy to recognize by the concrete debris and pipe stakes that have been placed in the deep channels. "You can't even legally cast into the bottom from public water," cautioned King.

Another is the barge turn-around that is part of the Port of Shreveport located on the west bank of the river, across from the Red River South Marina. Although the open "lake" is scantily used by tugs and barges since commercial traffic is not heavy, its closure is a safety issue.

The final off-limits spot is down river in Pool No. 4. Called Stevens Lake, it is an oxbow lake located across from the Coushatta Boat Ramp. A slough leads from the river to the lake, but it is posted against trespassing.

Travel from one pool to the next is a simple, although time consuming, process. A boat must be piloted into the open gate of the huge, somewhat intimidating, lock structure.

If the gate is closed, a lock tender on duty 24-7 will open the gates on the near end after closing the other set. He then raises or lowers the water level as necessary, and then the boat may exit the lock through the open gates on the other end.

As a rule of thumb, when water levels are rapidly changing and the water in Pool No. 5 is muddy due to rainfall, move to Pool No. 4, where levels and clarity are more stable. ■

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Charlie King doesn't go to the Red without a push pole stowed in his boat.

# TIP OF THE DAY

"A push pole is an absolute must to fish here," Charlie King half-grimaced and half-grinned. Even an experienced old Red River dog like King can get stranded on a sand bar or mud flat. In fact, that's exactly how King met Trent Toups. With his boat beached cockeyed on a sand bar and night fast approaching, he was absolutely thrilled when Toups happened along and was able to pull him into enough water to float it. They have been fast friends ever since. Most of the time, a push pole provides enough leverage to move a boat out of shallow spots, he said. And having a push pole is especially important in the winter months, when the water is too cold to go overboard and manhandle the rig. ■



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## THE BIG CHALLENGE ON THE RED

The Red River system has lots of bass —and it has big bass. Catching fish isn't the biggest challenge that visiting anglers face. It's navigation.

The colossal floods of 2015 and 2016 changed the face of what was rapidly becoming one of Louisiana's favorite largemouth bass holes. Swift currents deposited massive amounts of sediment in once-deep spots, and toppled man-made rock walls.

Ever the no-nonsense communicator, Trent Toups put it directly. "You don't want to come over here and run this like you run your lake. And you don't want to run this river the way it used to be. You'll tear your stuff up or beach your boat."

"There are some real good maps of what used to be, but nothing shows what is now" added King. "You still need to use your electronic maps, but you have to remember that their accuracy is limited."

"That's because everything is so recent that nothing is updated," Toups explained. "It's not really dangerous here if you are careful. Don't go running wide-ass open, though."

"Use extreme caution until you learn it," agreed King. "Or better yet, hire a guide the first time you come here."

One particular hazard is toppled wing walls. Originally constructed by the Corps, they are essentially barriers of large rocks that extend from the river's banks toward its center channel to deflect water currents to the center of the river and control sediment deposits.

Intact wing walls are 5 or 6 feet above the water's surface and are easily visible (and are good fishing locations during some

Navigation buoys mark the river's barge channel and for obvious reasons, are located outside the ends of toppled wing walls. King stressed that it is dangerous to operate a boat on plane between any buoy and the shoreline.

seasons). Unfortunately, river currents became strong enough during the floods to topple some wing walls to either beneath the water level, or barely visible above it.

Normal navigational buoys mark the barge channel in the river. The buoys also locate the wing walls that are dangerously near the surface, but not visible.

"Never run between a buoy and the shore," said King gravely, while shaking his head for emphasis.

In spite of their limitations, electronic maps are still very important for understanding the Red River system. What were once obvious shorelines have been submerged by the river's impounded waters so that large areas appear to the naked eye as a simple sheet of water.

But bass still relate to the submerged structure. Perfect examples are some of King's favorite bass habitats, the banks of old oxbow lakes that the dammed waters of the Red River have drowned.

Shallower than surrounding waters and with firm bottoms, they draw bass like magnets, but are very difficult to locate without the use of electronic maps to pinpoint the oxbows' locations. ■



**Jerald Horst** is a retired Louisiana State University professor of fisheries. He is an active writer, book author and outdoorsman. Jerald may be reached at [gerald@rockinghorst.com](mailto:gerald@rockinghorst.com).



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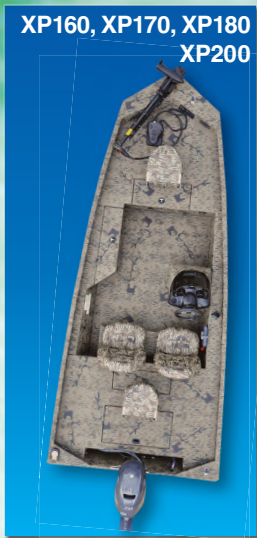


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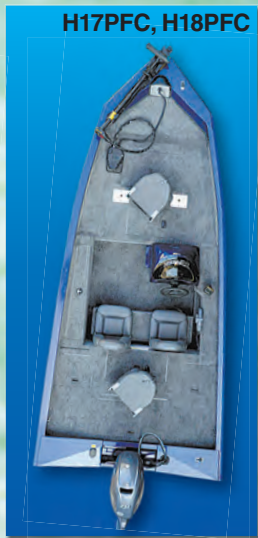
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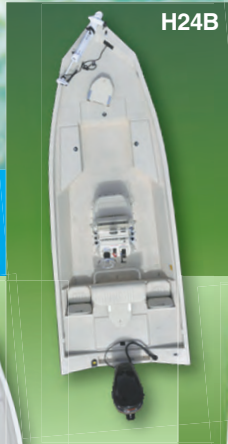
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**M**other Nature typically cranks up the furnace on high this month, enveloping the state in a sticky, humid sauna that practically leaves anglers begging for the first cool fronts of fall.

But any chilly air is probably at least 60 days out, so the dog days of summer are definitely upon us. And while that can make fishing conditions brutal this month, the good news is you can definitely still catch fish.

Out in Breton Sound, Capt. Jakamo Laboureux targets structure this time of year to catch some nice speckled trout, which are enjoying a couple more months of spawning activity in the high-salinity water there before they begin the process of transitioning back inside to the outer bays later this fall.

You might have to do some searching, but Laboureux, who operates Jakamo South Fishing Adventures out of Shell Beach, said live shrimp and croakers — and to some extent artificial lures — all will be effective in catching trout roaming over the shell pad bottoms of the sound's rigs and wellheads.

“In August, I’m typically taking my customers to structures in the sound — the Central Rig and that entire field, including the chair wells,” Laboureux said. “It takes some time to figure them out, but we have the ones we’ve learned with the big shell pads — that’s the key.

“With those shell pads, it’ll be 20 feet deep all around and then it comes up to 10 feet with the shell pad. So you’re not just getting the good bottom, but you’re typically getting an elevation change, and that’s huge because they can get out of the current. And with a structure like the Central Rig that’s so big, they can get behind it and seek shelter on a strong tide.”

**RIGGING UP** UP NEXT >

# DOG DAYS SPECKS

By Patrick Bonin

The heat is definitely on in Breton Sound right now, but you can still catch fish. Here’s how one Shell Beach guide stays on trout when the mercury soars.

Patrick Bonin

V



## RIGGING UP

Popping corks, sliding corks, Carolina rigs, artificials and free-lining live bait all can be effective methods of catching specks holding tight to rigs and structures, depending on depth, current and daily conditions.

But one thing remains constant — when Laboureur ties on a leader, it's always 20- to 30-pound fluorocarbon.

"I know fluorocarbon is expensive, I get it," he said. "But to me it's about abrasion resistance more than it is being clear. It's tougher line, so I can catch more trout without having to re-tie than if I was using a mono leader."

With a popping cork, Laboureur's depth limit is about 10 feet, so even at that point he's throwing corks out with dangling 5-foot leaders. Any deeper, and he shifts over to a sliding cork, but they're not necessarily user-friendly, either.

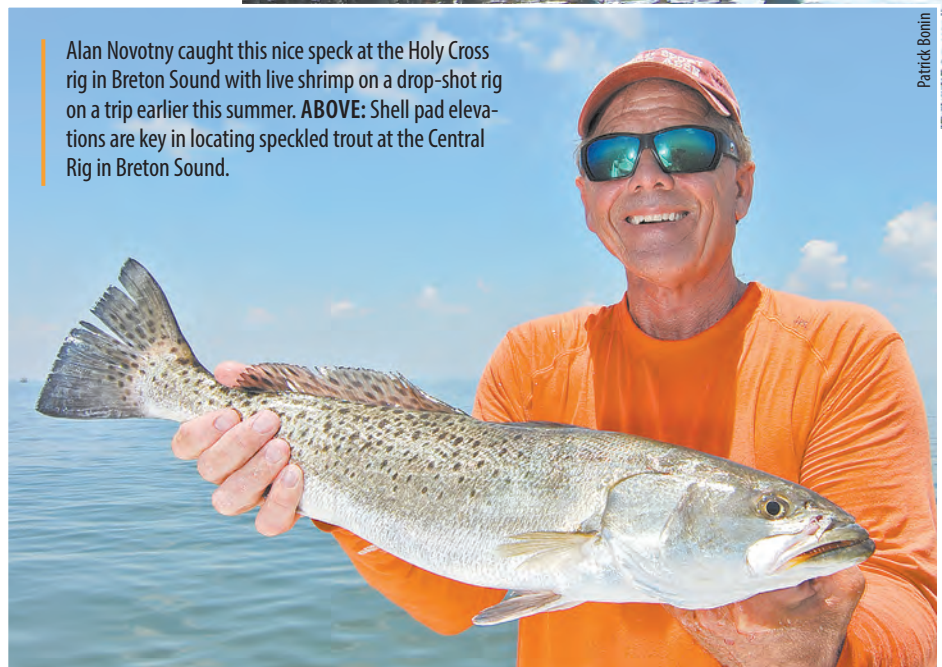
"The braid just doesn't want to hold the stopper very good, so it slides down and controlling the depth can be a hassle," he said. "They say mono works better for sliding corks because the stoppers hold."

And when he chooses a Carolina rig, Laboureur keeps the weight as light as possible.

"Personally, I don't like them to just sit on the bottom. I try to get away with a split shot or a ¼-ounce or maybe a ⅜ because I want to cast side-current where it will drift down, and most of your hits are on the drift," he said. "If you don't get a bite then, I want it to bump across the bottom just like the bait would ... I don't want it going out there like a spark plug, hitting the bottom and just sitting there."

Interestingly enough, he's not a big fan of the drop-shot rig.

Alan Novotny caught this nice speck at the Holy Cross rig in Breton Sound with live shrimp on a drop-shot rig on a trip earlier this summer. ABOVE: Shell pad elevations are key in locating speckled trout at the Central Rig in Breton Sound.



Patrick Bonin

"I don't fool with it. I'm not a drop-shot guy," he said with a grin. "I feel like they tangle. I think they're effective for fishing straight underneath the boat — that's how I used to use them out at Seabrook. But I don't feel like they're any more effective than a Carolina rig."

Soft-plastics are doable if you're a diehard artificial angler.

"If you're there and nobody else is there, you have a real good shot of catching them on plastic," said Laboureur, who favors a ⅜-ounce jighead in the Sound. "Quarters (of an ounce) just take too long to get down. And the bigger plastics are obviously better

for the bigger trout, but as far as action goes, I don't think it's as much about action. I still catch fish on Sparkle Beetles. Sometimes it's color, but at the end of the day, it's really about finding the fish. Schooling trout don't care, they really just don't care."

## LIVE BAIT

Laboureur stops in at Campo's Marina every morning to load up on shrimp and croakers before heading into the Sound.

"I typically get about 100 shrimp per person," he said. "With croakers, I usually grab 50 to 100 if I can get them. But if they're there, bring the croakers — they'll definitely help you."

If you've never croaker-fished for specks before, patience is key. The urge to set the hook can be strong on the first thump, but you have to really give the speck time to get the croaker in its mouth.

"What I tell my customers is don't set the hook," said Laboureur, who uses either a No. 1 kahle hook or a No. 6 treble hook for croakers. "I cast out and leave my bail open with my finger holding it. When you feel the thump, the line will start jumping — you'll see it. What I'll do is I kind of lift up on my rod a little, then click the bail so I have time to come down and come tight, and instead of like a big hook set, I just do a sweeping motion and crank as fast as I can.

"That is pretty much the best way to croaker fish. You cannot do it on the initial pop. The trout has it, but they need to get it a little deeper, and the hook also has to come through the croaker."



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Capt. Jakamo Laboureur favors horn-hooking live shrimp when pursuing summertime specks in Breton Sound.

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**LIVELY LIVE BAIT**  
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## LIVELY LIVE BAIT

Laboureur feels like he has a secret weapon for keeping his shrimp and croakers more lively in the livewell this summer. It didn't cost an arm and a leg, either, but it's proven itself to be effective at keeping his live bait perkier.

It's a simple saltwater aquarium filter recommended to him by his brother-in-law, who builds, maintains and installs saltwater tanks.

"Every summer, it's a battle all day to keep your bait alive when it gets hot," Laboureur said, noting he keeps his livewell recirculating for the most part. "The first day I put that filter in it was unreal."

Just put the foam filter in place of one of your air stones, he said.

"It needs air to work. I had a bubble box with two pancake-style air stones, so I just pulled one of those off and installed this," he said. "It just installs right into your vinyl tubing, so I still have one cake."

The key to the filter's success is that it mechanically filters the water via the foam, and also biologically treats it with bacteria living inside the filter media.

"So it cleans out the waste, and the bacteria that's in the sponge eats up the uric acid, which is the biggest enemy of the shrimp. Not only does it clean up their waste, but also the ammonia issue," he said.

Even better, the filter is readily available at pet stores with saltwater accessories, and it sells for about \$15.



Capt. Jakamo Laboureur



Patrick Bonin

Capt. Jakamo Laboureur uses this \$15 saltwater aquarium filter to keep his live bait lively during the dog days of summer.

"I've spent hundreds of dollars trying to figure that whole thing out, and my brother-in-law was like, 'Dude, try this thing,'" he said. "So far, I've been pretty impressed with it."

## TEETH

Summer predators in the sound are like death and taxes — so plan ahead and make sure you have plenty of terminal tackle onboard when they inevitably show up and try to ruin the party.

"Judging on what I've seen earlier this summer, I have a feeling the teeth are going to be pretty ferocious this year," Laboureur said with a chuckle, referring to the sharks, Spanish mackerel, bluefish and even ladyfish that harassed him on a trip in early June. "To me, that's life in the Sound."

And Laboureur uses his catfish flipper for lots more than catfish. The only predator that doesn't get flipped off the hook is a shark, because the guide said he wants more control over the fish if he has to deal with one up close and personal.

One way he copes with waves of predator fish, which appear to get particularly fired up after a few trout come aboard, is to play the waiting game.

"If I've been on a spot for the summer that I have a lot of confidence in, and we've caught a few and then some predators take over, there's a good chance I'll eat lunch and take a break," he said. "Just have a sandwich, and relax for a while. Then hopefully they slow down, and we can catch a few more trout."



## THE SOCIAL NETWORK

UP NEXT ➤

Capt. Jakamo Laboureur gets a lot of use out of his catfish flipper during summers in Breton Sound. About the only fish he doesn't use it for is sharks. **INSET:** Spanish mackerel can definitely impact a trip, and put a dent in both your live bait and terminal tackle. Laboureur suggests taking a break if predators are in a feeding frenzy at a spot you have confidence in.

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## THE SOCIAL NETWORK

In an area as vast as the Sound, with so many structures to target and fish, Laboureur said one thing recreational anglers can do is team up and share information via their VHF radios to narrow down potential trout locations.

“Just as important as knowing where the fish are, it’s important to know where they’re not. And getting reports from quality fishermen that I trust eliminates areas,” he said, noting fellow captains including Jonathan Sanchez, Larry Sinatra, Brandon and Jon Carter, Rory Rorison and Mark Munson all work together and share information on the bite so their customers benefit. “Try to get a little team and go out there and divide and conquer.”

On our trip in early June, we noticed two boats obviously fishing together, following one another from rig to rig.

“They would have been way better off saying, ‘I’m going to go look at this one, and you go look at that one,’” he said after the trip. “Then just call each other and let each other know what’s going on.”

Capt. Jakamo Laboureur said if anglers can split up and communicate via VHF radio, they can cover more ground and locate fish faster.



Capt. Jakamo Laboureur

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Calm August days without a breath of wind make things incredibly hot, so be sure to bring lots of water, sunscreen and a wide-brimmed hat to try and stay cool.



Patrick Bonin

## BEAT THE HEAT

During hot summer days, Laboureur typically leaves his dock on Yscloskey Highway around 4:30 a.m. so he can make the roughly 40-mile run to the Central Rig field or to Breton Island.

The bite isn't necessarily confined to the morning — we caught some nice specks at the Holy Cross rig in blistering afternoon heat on our trip. But the earlier you wrap up, the more comfortable you'll be temperature-wise.

"Leaving early is for the boat ride, and to try to beat some of the heat," he said, noting lots of water, sunscreen, protective clothing and wide-brimmed hats help with the glaring sun. "Drink a lot of water and hydrate heavily. Don't leave home without it — and bring lots extra." ■

*Editor's Note: Capt. Jakamo Laboureur with Jakamo South Fishing Adventures can be reached at 504-303-1494. For more information, visit [www.jakamosouth.com](http://www.jakamosouth.com).*



Patrick Bonin is the editor of Louisiana Sportsman magazine and LouisianaSportsman.com.






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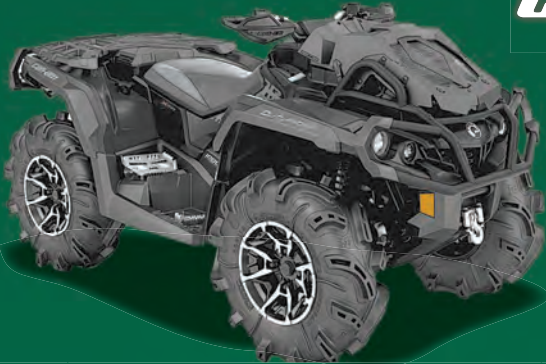
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# GET THE MOST BANG



# FOR YOUR BUCK

GREAT INFO ON FINDING THE RIGHT FIT IF YOU'RE LOOKING TO JOIN A DEER-HUNTING CLUB THIS FALL.

By Capt. Steve Himel

**Y**ou've dreamed about it — a private sanctuary loaded with trophy deer, abundant food plots, all-weather stands, improved roads, a beautiful lodge and a great group of friends and family to share it with.

Could this ever really be your reality? For many hunters, it might seem like an impossible dream, but take heart; it could happen — if you want to be part of the club.

Finding a great place to hunt is always a challenge. Unless you are independently wealthy or have family-owned land, you will probably have to either hunt public land or combine resources with others to lease property. That normally means becoming a member of a hunting club.

The decision to join a club is not one to take lightly. It could be a dream come true — or your worst nightmare.

**T**hose who aren't willing to put much effort in selecting a club are often disappointed, and wind up "club hopping" never quite finding a situation they like.

But those who take the time and effort may very well find what they've always wanted in a hunting club: friendships and memories that last a lifetime.

Here are some tips to help you find your match:

## CLUBS COME IN MANY VARIETIES

Clubs come in all shapes and sizes, from an informal arrangement with just a few hunters on small acreage to large clubs with as many as 100 members, and formal articles of organization and by-laws. Some clubs are strictly managed for serious trophy hunting, while others are managed for maximum harvest. Many clubs are geared toward family participation; others are intended as an "adults-only getaway." Dues for clubs can vary from several hundred dollars to several thousand.

It is very important to understand what's important to you, and then to seek a club that fits your hunting style and personality.

## WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Before you start looking for a club, evaluate exactly what you are looking for. Some of the questions you might ask yourself are: How far am I willing to

travel from home? What size club would suit me best? Do I want a lot of acreage and members, or a smaller venue with less pressure? What can I afford? Does the club have lodging, or will I have to supply my own? What are the values and ethics of other club members, and are their hunting styles similar to mine? Is this a family-oriented club, or is it a men's social club? Does the club allow guests and business entertainment? How is the club run, and what forms of governance and leadership are in place?

## FINDING THE RIGHT FIT

Once you have an idea of what type of club is best for you, the process of finding that club may not be easy — and could take some time. In my experience, the best way to find a club is by word of mouth or networking. (It is possible to find a club through a classified ad, but your chances of finding a good fit are much better if you have some inside knowledge.)

## WHAT ABOUT RULES?

For a club to operate smoothly, there should be clear rules in place that reflect the wishes of the members, and above all, they must be fairly enforced for everyone.

Clubs should consider having rules about:

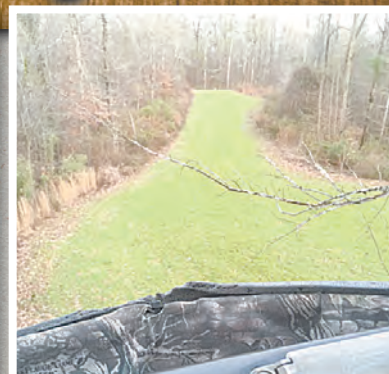
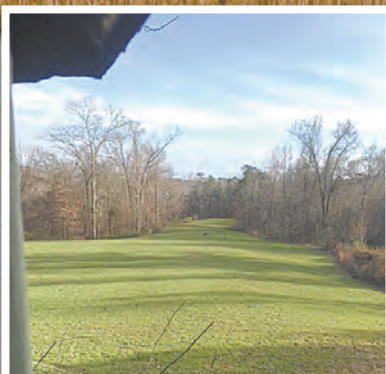
- Safety
- Landowner restrictions
- Voting and officer elections
- Harvest restrictions
- Family and guest policies
- Stand and blind selection
- Scouting and vehicle restrictions
- Feeder and camera policies
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- Fines



**BELOW:** Social gatherings can be some of the most enjoyable aspects of being part of a hunting club. **RIGHT:** Many clubs encourage all family members to participate.

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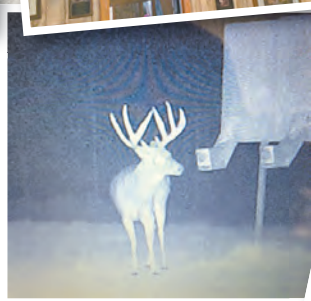
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**T**he first step is putting the word out that you are looking to join a club, including a general description of what you are looking for, such as location, size and annual dues.

You can put the word out to your hunting friends on social media, as well as contacts you have at work, church and through other organizations. If you ask someone and they don't know of any opportunities, always ask if they know anyone else who might be able to help — and always follow up. You might be surprised how quickly you find opportunities.

Once you have the name of a contact for a club, you should have someone introduce you to the person, using a 'soft approach.' Hunting clubs are some-

you can help out on a workday.

One of the best ways to find a club is to go there as a guest. This allows you to see the property and learn more about the

*"Do your research, ask a lot of questions to landowners, ask the local game warden if there is a poaching problem in the area and about harvest data, and talk with other clubs in the area. The key is to surround yourself with good members — people you know and trust."*

-Mark Hartman

club and its members. It also allows others to meet you, so that when a membership does become available, the members are more likely to invite you to join.

## LEADERSHIP IS KEY

The most common reason for members to leave hunting clubs is poor leadership. I am sure you have heard about, or maybe even experienced, both extremes in leadership style.

They range from a total lack of authority, where chaos reigns supreme, to an iron-fist dictatorship, where there is so much overreach that it's almost impossible to have fun.

Like most things, somewhere in the middle is usually best.

Some clubs operate where members are permit holders. The rules are already set, and there are no voting rights. Provided the rules are fairly enforced, this type of organization has the advantage of strong leadership, with members knowing exactly what is expected. The disadvantage here is that members don't have much, or any, say in how the club is run.

Most clubs use some type of democratic organization, where members elect club leaders and vote on rules and major decisions. In this type of organization, there are normally one or two people who run the club and handle most of the duties, such as dealing with landowners, enforcing rules, collecting dues, organizing workdays and paying expenses.

Running a club is not an easy task, and there will always be members who 'know better' and criticize decisions. Clubs should carefully select even-tempered

## ORGANIZING YOUR OWN HUNTING CLUB

If you think you have what it takes to organize your own hunting club, here's how to get started:

**Locate suitable property** – Use word of mouth, contact landowners and timber companies, bid on school board property and look in Louisiana Sportsman's classified ads.

**Find members** – Activate your social media network, put the word out at sporting goods stores and place an ad in Louisiana Sportsman's classifieds under Club Finder.

**Draft rules and elect officers** – Be careful here; these decisions can literally make or break a club.

**Start working** – Construct stands and blinds, clear trails and plant food plots. Do enough so that everyone can hunt the first year, and then add more projects each season. Just know it's a lot of hard work and will take time.

**Enjoy** – This is where all the hard work pays off. Enjoy what you have accomplished.

Mark Hartman, the president of a deer club in East Feliciana Parish, had this advice: "Do your research, ask a lot of questions to landowners, ask the local game warden if there is a poaching problem in the area and about harvest data, and talk with other clubs in the area. The key is to surround yourself with good members — people you know and trust."

leaders who have the time to properly run the club.

If leadership fails, the club fails.

## SEASONED ADVICE

Mark Hartman is the president of a deer hunting club in East Feliciana Parish that leases about 1,000 acres of land and has about 30 deer stands. Involved in hunting clubs since he was 7 years old, he has been in a leadership role for the past 12 years. He has seen and experienced quite



This father-and-son team both took a buck in the same morning. Many clubs are geared toward family participation.

times leery of 'strangers' inquiring about membership. Simply explain how you found their club, and the reasons you're interested.

Also explain that you understand they may not have an opening at the moment, but that you would like to be considered if one becomes available in the future. Emphasize that you are interested in a long-term hunting arrangement. Try to set up a time to visit the club and meet with the person in charge, or ask to attend a club meeting. Better yet, ask if

Memories that last a lifetime can happen when you find the right club.

a bit over the years, and was happy to share some advice.

When asked what the most important element of a successful club is, Hartman responded, "It's all about the members and how they mesh. I believe everyone needs to respect one another, and the rules should apply to everyone in the club. I feel that everyone has to be a good listener, and all members should be involved."

When asked what the most challenging aspect of running a club was, Hartman said, "Dealing with all the different personalities of the members and sorting out what is important and what is not. And making sure that the landowners are happy with you and your members."

His advice to those looking to find a club?

"Ask how long the club has been on the property, the length of the lease, and how many bucks have been harvested over the last three years."

Hartman also suggested that prospective members get a copy of the club rules and find out how the club hunts, such as private versus club stands, and whether the club is on a management program.

He also advised prospective members on potential mistakes they might make when selecting a club.

"Don't select a club strictly based on price, and make sure the club has good leadership," Hartman said. "Watch out for clubs that have members all over the woods who hunt everyday. This can really hurt your chances if you have a limited time to hunt." ■



**Capt. Steve Himel** has hunted and fished in Southeast Louisiana for over 45 years. He operates Marshland Adventures, LLC and has been a freelance outdoor writer for the past 16 years. He is a member of the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association.

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**H**earing Ronnie Capps' voice cringe at the mere mention of the term "spider rig" made me think he had an acute case of arachnophobia.

It didn't seem like something one of the most successful crappie tournament anglers in the world would react to so negatively.

"I hate the term," Capps warned, as if he didn't want to hear me say it again.

"It's something we did 15 or 20 years ago, but 'spider rig' is not a really good defining term for what we do today, in my opinion. I guess back then it was a reasonable term since a spider has eight legs and we had eight poles sticking out the front — and sometimes eight out the back."

Capps explained that he and his longtime tournament partner Steve Coleman used to use so many poles with jigs or minnows set at so many different depths because they were essentially fishing blind.

"That's how we found underwater structure that would hold crappie," he said. "Now we have such great technology at our fingertips, and that has changed everything."

"Instead of four poles out of each side at the front, we're down to four total — two on each side. Go ahead if you want to call it spider rigging, but that's not what it is anymore."

**DIRECT STRUCTURE FISHING** UP NEXT >

With the advent of today's electronics, this national champion crappie angler says 'old-fashioned' spider-rigging is a thing of the past. Now that he can see underwater structure — he pushes his lure right where it needs to be.

By Chris Ginn



Capps says he and Steve Coleman now fish only four poles out the front of their boat — two on each side. **INSET:** Being able to consistently catch big crappie nowadays means being able to find fish like this on your electronics and put a bait right in their faces.



# FOR SLABS



## DIRECT STRUCTURE FISHING

Capps, who was talking with me as he was getting ready to fish an American Crappie Trail tournament on the Ouachita River out of West Monroe, kept calling what he does today direct structure fishing.

It's direct because he no longer haphazardly has to search for crappie structure with up to 16 poles sticking out of his boat. He relies on his electronics to put his baits right where they need to be.

"Using my Humminbird 360 Imaging, I no longer have to guess where a stump is because I can see it clearly on my screen," Capps said. "Not only can I see the structure, I can clearly see crappie on that structure... even see what side of the stump they're on."

The Tennessee-based angler says he still puts his poles in holders like he used to, but he doesn't have so many sticking out of his boat that are wasting time.

"Fishing structure directly like this, I can tell you exactly when a fish is about to bite and which rod he's about to bite because I'm directly looking at the fish on the stump and my bait in the water."

## PUSHING POLES

Once he's identified productive structure with his electronics, Capps uses his Ranger boat as his arm to control the four poles he has sticking out from the bow.

"We've got our four rods out front, and I'm controlling the boat in such a fashion to ease it right into the structure all the while looking at my Humminbird," Capps said. "By pushing them out front, I can tell exactly when my baits get to the stump. We generally put two baits on each side of a stump, hold the boat as still as we can, catch the fish, then get out and go to the next stump."



Depending on the depth of the water, Capps may try to get in a closer to the structure, or he may decide to stay back a little. He doesn't like to get too close in shallow water, but if he's got about 12 feet, he feels comfortable getting just about right over the structure if he has to.

"A 12-foot pole is great for pushing baits into structure," Capps said. "I don't like to use anything over 14 feet because I want to make sure that stump, the fish and my bait all fit within the cone angle for my Humminbird so I can see everything that's going on."

### KEEPING IT STILL UP NEXT >

ABOVE: Duck Commander's John Godwin works a spider rig for suspended fish on Lake D'Arbonne. BELOW: Steve Coleman landed this crappie while he and Ronnie Capps push-poled jigs around cypress knees.



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## KEEPING IT STILL

If there is any trick to direct fishing structure by pushing baits straight to it, Capps said it's keeping his baits as still as possible.

After watching fish in aquariums, he has come to the conclusion that motion will usually put them in a state of suspense for a while until they can be sure everything is OK.

"Even if that fish is hungry," he said. "I've messed with them a long time, and I've taken it to the lake, and I'll stand by that until I figure out different.

"The truth is that I've carried more big, smart fish to the weigh-in by having completely motionless baits other than a minnow. And even then I'll have everything else motionless while I let him do his thing."

Capps is so adamant about being as still as possible that he does whatever he can to make his boat as heavy as possible to prevent it from bouncing around in a chop.

"I've reversed water flow in my livewell," he said. "I've carried extra lower units... anything that will help me sit still in wave activity. I try to tone down any kind of noise and bounce on the front to keep the rods as still as possible so my baits stay as still as possible.

"I know people with a different attitude than me, but keeping it still works for me."

## ROOM FOR ADJUSTMENT

While he was getting ready to fish the Ouachita River, Capps

## Louisiana crappie fishing getting national attention

Having fished crappie tournaments all over the nation, Ronnie Capps has seen more energy for the professional side of crappie fishing the last couple of years than he has ever seen in his entire 30-year career.

"More people are showing up to watch the weigh-ins, and more people are showing up to fish the tournaments," Capps said. "I've seen guys I fished with in high school and who have always crappie fished now entering these tournaments."

Capps attributes much of this surge in interest to the American Crappie Trail and its expansion into more bodies of

water. He figured out that he wouldn't be fishing big stumps like he might at Ross Barnett, or Grenada in Mississippi.

He discovered during pre-fishing that he and Coleman would be fishing hundreds of tiny stumps no bigger than Coke bottles — rather than one isolated stump.

"That's heavy cover," he said. "And the crappie are in all those stumps. I've never seen so many gar as I have on the Ouachita, and I'm assuming the crappie are hiding in those stumps to stay away from the gar."

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waters than just the old typical crappie lakes across America. "Take the Ouachita River for example," Capps said. "This river is a treasure for the state without a doubt, and now we're going to get to showcase what kind of crappie fishing it has. Having lived at Reelfoot in Tennessee and fishing the Mississippi River for as long as I can remember, I consider the Ouachita River a mini version of the Mississippi. It's the same kind of stuff, just not as wide or as long."

Keeping it in Louisiana, the American Crappie Trail will have it's 2018 National Championship on Lake D'Arbonne on March 28-30, 2019. ■

— Chris Ginn



Jay Stone with Duck Commander landed this crappie by fishing some of the many flooded Coke bottle-size stumps on the Ouachita River.

Because he was faced with the prospect of fishing so many different small stumps at the same time, Capps admitted that he might be better off using eight rods instead of four.

"You can bet each pole is going to be pushing a single 1/16-ounce jig with 6-pound line to cover huge areas of these stumps," Capps added. "These stumps are basically young cypress trees that must have started to grow then got flooded and died out. I don't know the history of what happened, but I do know the big fish are in them. The thicker the structure here, the nicer the fish."

**WATCH THE WATER COLOR UP NEXT** ➤

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## WATCH THE WATER COLOR

If traditional spider rigging still has a place among crappie anglers, Capps said it was in murky water where fish have a tendency to suspend in open water.

"If you want to spider rig, that's the time to do it because fish could be anywhere," he said. "I'd put out a big pole set at that point, with rods up to 20 feet long to cover a lot of real estate to put a hook in front of more fish."

When talking about direct structure fishing, Capps said it was important to have water with more visibility. Being sunfish, that makes crappie want to relate to cover.

"Water color is the number one thing I look at when I go to a new body of water," he said. "What I've found here on the Ouachita River is that the different river lakes can have completely different water color. Some have that black-red water.



Different river lakes can have different water colors. One of Capps' go-to lures is a blue chrome Bobby Garland Baby Shad.

Some have clear black water. And some have been stained up, maybe from algae or something."

Although the water color wasn't murky enough to make him abandon his direct structure fishing technique, Capps did notice that whatever color jig that was working in one lake went totally ignored in another.

"In one lake in particular they were eating a blue chrome Bobby Garland Baby Shad with a silver bottom," he said. "Then I went to another lake that was a little more stained and full of carp and gar, and I had to switch to straight chartreuse. Water color makes a huge difference in how you fish, and what you fish."

So it's not that Capps has an irrational fear of spiders, it's just that he's figured out how to fine tune an old technique of yesterday to make it more effective for a more modern today.

Let's face it, fishing with 8 to 16 poles might have been the thing to do before you could accurately tell what was below the surface. But now that you can see the bottom and the fish in near HD quality, spider rigging seems to be more overkill than necessity.

Maybe we should just call it push-poling. ■

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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](http://chrisginn.com).

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A man wearing a grey and white camouflage Mustad cap, sunglasses, and a light blue fishing shirt is smiling while holding a large green bass. The fish is hooked on a lure. The background shows a blue sky with clouds and green marsh vegetation.

# BUSTING DELTA MARSH BASS

By David A. Brown

LOUISIANA'S COASTAL MARSHES OFFER A VARIETY OF HINTS AND CLUES ON WHERE TO TARGET 'GREEN TROUT' — THE KEY IS BEING ABLE TO INTERPRET THEM.

**W**ith morning glories blooming across the canal, Capt. Cody Obiol was pushing away from the dock as I waited for his boss, Capt. Ryan Lambert to launch his Skeeter bay boat. Obiol was after bull reds that morning, but he knew my mission involved something much different, so his gracious salutation stoked my optimism.

“You gonna find some bass, Mr. David?” Obiol said. “You ought to be able to find some with this good river.”

Indeed, with the Mississippi falling, Obiol’s words of encouragement referred to the likely concentration of largemouth bass in predictable areas. The day’s light winds would help keep our spots clean, while marring summer algae had been blown out by recent tropical weather.

Our mission would take us into areas known for what Lambert calls “Christmas fishing” — catching reds and bass in close proximity. We actually did just that, although in fractured form.

However, two days later, I joined Capt. Joe DiMarco for some marsh fishing a little closer to Buras and I watched Ricky Teschendorf snare a healthy largemouth from a grass edge with scattered roseau cane just moments before Iley Thompson nabbed a beautiful marsh pumpkin on a ChatterBait.

## SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Lambert, who has made his living as a guide and lodge operator for nearly 40 years, mostly targets redfish, speckled trout and other saltwater species, but he’s a big fan of the Delta’s bass fishery. He never tires of the saltwater scene, but largemouth bass are his guilty pleasure. A couple of decades ago, Lambert competed in B.A.S.S. regional

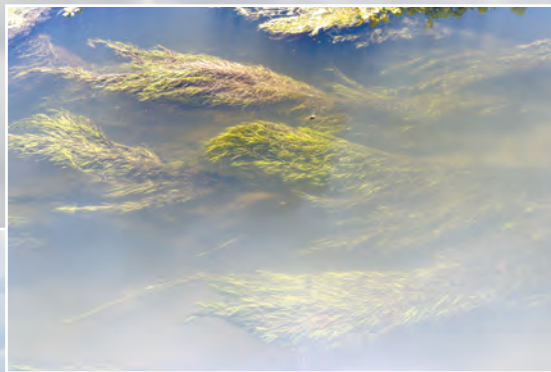
tournaments, but now, he enjoys a more relaxed pace that allows him to chase those Delta bass just for fun.

“The Delta’s largemouth bass action is incredible,” said Lambert, who opened Cajun Fishing Adventures in Buras in 1994. “Toledo Bend has always been great, but the local waters here (in Buras) where I cut my teeth will always be my favorite. And if you go down the Delta to Venice, that’s something special there — you can catch 100 fish a day. When the river is low, there’s no better fishery.”

Just ask Bassmaster Elite legend Kevin VanDam, who’s dominant victory at the 2011 Bassmaster Classic showcased the Delta’s incredible bass potential. Of course, Southeastern Louisiana is a dynamic region given to a roller coaster ride of natural and man-made water influences, but despite the ups and downs, the Delta marshes offer some straight-up legit bass fishing.

continued >

**BACKGROUND:** Despite the Delta’s abundance of redfish, Capt. Ryan Lambert still enjoys tugging on largemouth bass. **TOP:** Bands of submerged grass filter marsh water and leave pockets of cleaner flow that bass prefer. **BOTTOM:** Matted vegetation is a good place to look for bass.



**B**oth sides of the Delta play, too, as the labyrinth-like network of pipeline canals and natural bayous offer extensive avenues through which bass can navigate to their desired clarity and temperature levels. Add to this the expansive habitat features of weed-choked ponds, and you have a something-for-everyone scenario.

One of my personal favorite Delta memories was spending a morning wind-drifting a weed-choked lake in the Delacroix area. Targeting isolated patches of hyacinth, hydrilla edges and storm-blown wood yielded blow up after savage blow up on topwater frogs. I'm certain that pitching those scattered lay-downs would've been productive, but it's hard to leave a good frog bite.

## WHERE TO LOOK

The only downside of Delta bass fishing is the timeless dilemma of where to start. No doubt, promising habitat seems endless, but defining clues exist for those who can interpret them.

"Watch your wheel wash when you run into an area," DiMarco says. "If it's foamier, it's salty. If the bubbles disappear quickly, it's more fresh."

Indeed, largemouth cannot tolerate saltwater, so DiMarco was constantly monitoring wind direction to determine where the saltwater boundary was shifting. For example, too much wind blowing into one of his favorite canals prompted him to pull the plug and head elsewhere. In addition to water quality, DiMarco also checked out local hyacinth mats: Bright and green indicated a freshwater area, while saltwater intrusion turned hyacinth mats a wilted brown.

Lambert pointed to indigenous vegetation for clear signs of Delta bass habitat.

Cattails, American lotus pads and duck potato are some of the best signs he can see. A green, stalky plant that looks something like arrowheads, the latter also provided navigational reference in the often narrowing marsh waterways.

"Duck potato needs that fresh water; they grow on mud flats and sand flats," DiMarco said. "If you read that shoreline, you can find out where a mud point is based on how far out those duck potatoes are growing. That also helps you with navigation so you don't get stuck."

Tides, of course, influence the marsh bass pursuits, as rising water opens the doors to all those drains and cuts and inner reaches; while

falling water ushers fish out to the deeper boundaries. When the outgoing tide starts cranking, you'll usually find Lambert hugging the roseau cane or cattail lines, where he flips into the little hidey spots where bass like to sit. You'll also want to pay attention to the hyacinth mats that float with the tide, often jamming into little corners of shoreline contours.

Another tidal factor DiMarco favored are the countless drains (or "trenasses"), which offer falling tide ambush points. As he explained, bass will sit on the outside edges of these openings and pick off current-carried meals. Moreover, since marshes filter water, the falling tide sends a cleaner plume into adjacent channels. Baitfish tend to cluster in such areas, thereby attracting more bass.

**TOP:** Points where two arteries come together can be one of your more productive areas. **BOTTOM:** Casting Texas-rigged worms will deliver plenty of marsh bass opportunities.



ChatterBaits can prove irresistible for marsh bass.

## WHAT WORKS

More than a dozen times, Lambert and I both tried to set the hook, only to feel our lines go slack, as the shadow of a worm-tugging bream scurried back to the roseau roots. This should clue you in to the applicability of bream-mimicking baits like a Jackall Clone Gill, LiveTarget Sunfish or a swim jig with touches of purple and orange in a green pumpkin skirt.

Typically, DiMarco and Lambert both like pitching jigs with craw trailers or Texas-rigged craws with enough weight to push through hyacinth and moderate density vegetation. Idling along a bayou or a pipeline canal, you'll want to hit all the points, cuts and visible wood, while keeping watch for telltale signs like boils, busts and showering bait schools.

Other productive baits for low-tide bass include spinnerbaits, ChatterBaits and finesse worms. Bass in the Delta marshes eat a lot of the fiddler crabs, so hopping a Ned rig (short stick worm on a mushroom-style jighead) looks a lot like small crustaceans running for cover.

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**F**or just about any shallow bass scenario where you're working defined edges, a weedless-rigged 5- to 6-inch stick bait packs a lot of versatility. You can skip it under willow trees, crawl it across weed mats, pitch it to specific targets, twitch it through interesting areas and dead stick it in key spots like holes in the grass patches flanking main vegetation line.

In shallow areas, especially in clear water, casting distance is critical. A good choice here is a nail-weight in your stick worm — essentially, a Neko rig. Another option is a weighted shank hook like Mustad's UltraPoint weighted Grip Pin. For swimming presentations, consider an articulated head like the TT Lures SnakeLockZ. Use the Grip Pin or the SnakeLockZ with your stick worms or the ZMan SwimmerZ that DiMarco often uses for marsh bass.

Considering that Delta largemouth eat a lot of shrimp, you'll want to keep a selection of these artificials handy. Free-line the bait parallel to the edge of draining vegetation and target any run-outs you find. To boost the appeal and secure the ability to hover a bait in a likely area, Lambert suspends a LiveTarget Rigged Shrimp below a popping cork and works it with the tide.

Don't forget to check the various pumping stations scattered throughout the marsh, especially those with docking platforms. Pitch a jig or Texas-rigged worm, lizard or craw bait around the legs or, if sufficient clearance allows, pitch a bait back into the shadows. Another good bet: A wacky-rigged Senko fluttering along the shadow line can be money.

With any marsh bass offering, the dense vegetation common to this fertile region, compounded by frequent encounters with party crashing redfish, makes braided line a must. Fluorocarbon leaders help prevent bass spooking, but the Delta marsh guards its treasures well, so make sure you're properly tooled for the task. ■

**ABOVE:** Clipping packs of commonly used hooks onto a carabiner keeps terminal tackle within easy reach.



A full-time freelance writer specializing in sport fishing, David A. Brown splits his time between journalism and marketing communications ([www.tightwards.com](http://www.tightwards.com)).

## TACKLE ORGANIZATION BOLSTERS EFFICIENCY

Wherever you hunt largemouth bass, opportunities can rise and fall quickly, so preparation is paramount. An important element of your readiness is the organization of, and easy access to, your terminal tackle. Hooks, weights, swivels, etc. all need to remain conveniently reachable, lest you miss your chance.



Here are a few ideas for keeping those necessary items handy:

**Pin it:** Slide loose hooks, swivels and snaps onto the arms of large safety pins and store these collections in tackle tray slots. Group your items by size/style and draw a grid of your slots on the tray's lid to identify each for quick selection.

**Clip and grip:** Use carabiners to clip multiple packages of particular hook styles/sizes, as well as plastic baits. This keeps you from having to rummage through a container with multiple packages to find the one you want. You might group baits by style, color or size, and for ultimate efficiency, a pack of the relevant hooks or jigs you prefer for each set of plastics. Keep the group handy on your deck without worrying about inefficient clutter. One centralized binder keeps everything within reach.

**Hold it high:** One of the biggest time wasters in bass fishing is fumbling in tackle tray slots for smaller hooks and weights. Eliminate this frustration by lining each slot with high density foam (the material used in workout mats). Elevating your tackle makes it easier to reach and saves you valuable time.

- David A. Brown

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# Old River Jigging up SLABS

By Jerald Horst

A veteran crappie angler shares some of his 30-plus years of fishing experience in catching summertime slabs on this Mississippi River oxbow.

# When it's hot, it's hot. When it's not, it's not.

## That's a pretty good description of Old River.

**P**roperly called “Raccourci Old River,” the 4,900-acre lake, once referred to as the “Big Bonanza” by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, is an oxbow of the Mississippi River. (Oxbow lakes are abandoned channels of rivers.)

The Mississippi left nine of them scattered in eastern Louisiana. All of them are narrow and arc-shaped, resembling what they are — old rivers.

But Old River is unique. Unlike seven of its sister oxbows, it isn't cut off from the big river by levees. So every year, when the Mississippi experiences its spring floods, so does Old River. Dozens of feet of river water will back into the lake, turning it into a cat-fish hole.

Dave Pizzolato calls it “seasonal” as a crappie spot.

That's an understatement.

He also calls it one of his two favorite lakes for crappie fishing — and he fishes in a lot of places.

“It's best from July to December,” he explained. “That's when the Mississippi River backs out of the lake. Sometimes the water doesn't get right until August, and sometimes low water lasts until into January.

“Besides flood waters, wind is the biggest limiting factor in fishing Old River. If it's over 10 miles per hour, the lake is difficult to

fish. You can't place your bait with care, and when you catch a fish, the wind blows your boat yards and yards out of position before you can get your jig back in the water.”

Still, the wiry, silver-haired crappie hound fishes the lake every chance he gets. Here, he shares his expertise:

### WHEN TO GO

Determining when to fish Old River isn't guesswork. Pizzolato watches river gages, specifically the Mississippi River station at Baton Rouge. A weir at the northeastern end of Old River maintains minimum water levels in the oxbow, no matter how low water in the Mississippi proper falls. But high water in the river overwhelms the weir, backing river water into the lake.

The main boat landing, Old River Landing, (the only other one being Serio's Landing) is closed at Baton Rouge gage levels of 31 feet or higher, so the lake is by and large inaccessible to boats, except those that venture in through The Narrows, the oxbow's umbilical cord to the Mississippi River.

Pizzolato starts fishing when the gage drops to 18 feet. At that level, waters are still over the weir, but enough of the structures he fishes are visible to begin fishing. Ideally though, he likes the gage reading at 15 feet or less.

**THE LAY OF THE LAKE** UP NEXT >



Pier pilings are the focus of Pizzolato's attention for crappie in Old River.

## THE LAY OF THE LAKE

Shaped like the letter “U,” Old River still bears the marks of the river bed it once was. The strongest current in a river or stream is thrown to the outside of any sharp bend in the riverbed.

Strong water currents naturally are more erosive than slower currents, meaning that deepest waters are almost always found near the outside shoreline of river bends. True to form, Old River retains that trait, with waters 20 feet deep or more very near the southern shoreline of the lake.

This is also the shoreline with road access, so virtually all the camps, located side-by-side, are strung out along the southern and western banks of the lake. And fishing camps mean piers, most of which extend or extended into deep water.

The piers, and even more importantly for Pizzolato, the remnants of destroyed or dilapidated piers, mainly pilings, are the targets of his attention for crappie fishing. Thousands of such pilings exist.

Many of the more modern camps have floating fishing piers that self-adjust to changing water levels. Pizzolato ignores those completely as fish attractors.

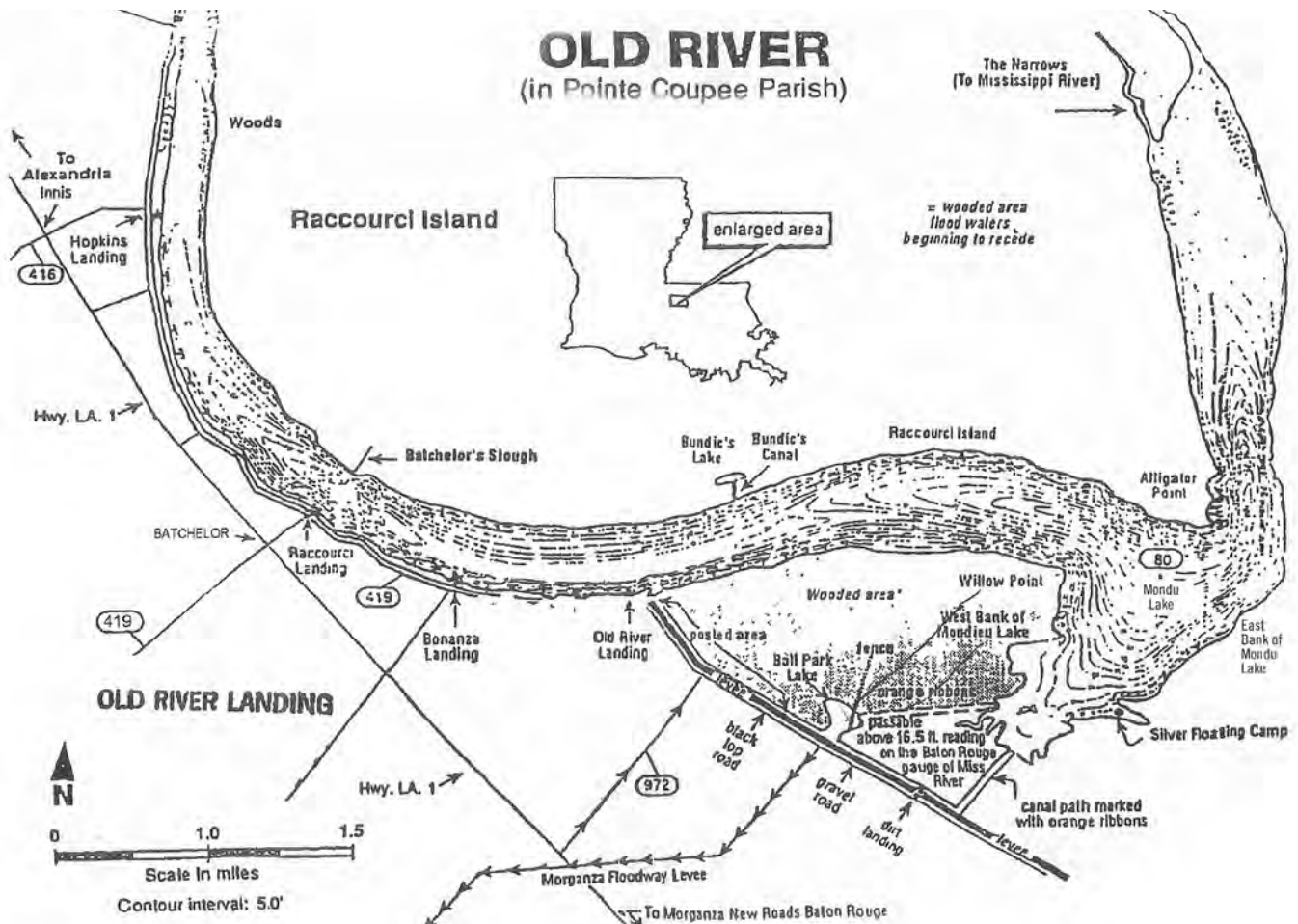
The northern shoreline, called the “island side” by locals or Raccourci Island, is a raw swampland — one giant hunting preserve. Although a few hunting camps are found there, it holds no fishing camps and their associated piers.

Also undeveloped is the eastern end of the lake, shaped like



a giant flexed arm. The deepest spot in Old River at 80 feet is off Alligator Point in Mondu Lake. With its many cypress trees, some in 7 feet of water, Mondu Lake is also a crappie fishing destination for Pizzolato.

## FISHING STRATEGY UP NEXT ➤



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## FISHING STRATEGY

Dave Pizzolato fishes exclusively with jig poles rather than ultralight spinning reels. “Lure placement is critical,” he explained. “Plus, when I get hung up with an ultralight 25 feet away, I have to go in and get it. That drives me up a wall.”

He carries four rigged Salter’s Jiggin’ poles. Two are on deck, one rigged with a cork; the other without one. A spare for each is kept below deck. Salter’s is the brand he uses exclusively. “I’ve tried others over the years, but I always revert back to them.”

Since the water is so deep where he fishes in Old River, he doesn’t mind crowding a piling, often bringing his bass boat to within a few feet of his target.

Surprisingly, he doesn’t necessarily drop his jigs tight on the pilings he is fishing. Typically, he puts them down 1 to 2 feet from the wood. Whether using a cork or tight-lining, he then moves the jig every two or three seconds with short 8- to 10-inch diagonal or vertical hops.

When tight-lining, he doesn’t just drop the bait to free-fall. Rather he lowers it at a smooth pace with enough control to keep some contact with the lure. If the line develops the least lit-

tle “curl” in it above water, it means that either a fish has picked the lure up or it has dropped onto some sort of structure.

Because line-watching is so important for tight-lining, he always re-spools his reels with the same 8-pound test Golden Stren monofilament they come with because of its high visibility. Of course, sometimes crappie take the lure with a thump that is telegraphed instantly to his rod-holding hand.

Cork fishing is somewhat simpler because corks are such visible strike indicators. Not every strike with a cork results in the cork going under. Crappie often pick lures up in their mouths without swimming off. Such strikes are indicated by the cork popping up and laying over on its side.

A typical summer day on Old River for Pizzolato may find him fishing early in the morning in shallow water — 3 to 5 feet, with a cork. He doesn’t fish shallower than 3 feet. As the sun rises on the horizon, the fish move deeper and he follows them.

When the water is over 7 feet deep, he lays down his pole with a cork and shifts to tight-lining.

Pizzolato’s boat has a bow pedestal seat, but the bulk of the time he fishes kneeling down, one hand on his trolling motor and the other holding his jig pole. His boat is only 9 years old, but the carpet on his bow deck is worn to shreds, a testament to how often he fishes.

And he nets every fish. Each step is part of a solid routine.

**PLASTIC TEMPTATION** UP NEXT ➤



Dave Pizzolato fishes most of the day kneeling on his bow deck. Notice the condition of the carpet beneath his feet.

Pizzolato exclusively uses Salter's Jiggin' Poles. Note how close he has taken his boat to the pilings he's jigging.

## Pizzolato's Top 7 tips for Old River

1) Learn to tight-line. Using a cork doesn't allow fishing to be done deep enough to fish the 12 to 14 feet needed on the most important fish-holding structure — piers and pilings in front of camps.

2) Use jig poles, not rods and reels. You need the control they offer.

3) Not every pier or piling is equal. Some are baited and some are brushed. Some are just better than others. Put the time in to learn them; pay your dues.

4) Use solunar tables to narrow your efforts to the best periods.

5) Wind is a big factor on Old River. Always fish a spot upwind. Fishing down- or cross-wind doesn't allow enough boat control to stay on a spot.

6) Move a lot to find out where the bite is best. Jig fishing allows that because it is a faster style of fishing than using live shiners.

7) This is not a particularly productive place for bank beating. The water in the lake is almost always far too high to fish shallow during the spawn. There are times however, that good catches can be made in mid-summer near cypress trees standing in 5 feet of water. ■

— Jerald Horst



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## PLASTIC TEMPTATION

Dave Pizzolato bewitches his crappie with two lures, both soft plastics on jigheads. Although he admits to also using Bass Assassin tails, his real workhorses are both made by Bobby Garland Crappie Baits: The 1.5-inch Crappie Shooter and the 2-inch Baby Shad.

In stained water or on dark days, he leans toward darker colors: black and chartreuse; patriot or live minnow. In clear water or on sunny days his preference is for lighter colors such as blue ice, monkey milk or opening night.

These are just his favorites, but he doesn't limit himself. Pizzolato admits to carrying 15 to 20 colors in his boat at all times and experiments often.

He makes his own jigheads on No. 4 sickle hooks, pouring them to 1/32-ounce. He trims lead off many of these to make 1/64-ounce heads. He uses the smaller heads under a cork, but will use either size when tight-lining.

When he fishes deeper than 12 feet, he goes to the heavier 1/32-ounce heads because the bigger head gets the bait down to the fishing zone faster.

His general preference for use of the smaller jigheads stems from the fact that they fall slower and offer less resistance when fish hit the bait.

Whichever size jighead he uses, Pizzolato tops off his offering with the use of a Bass Pro Shop medium-size hook guard to make the jig weedless. And he always uses the guards — not just when he's fishing in sunken brush. ■



Pizzolato pours his own jigheads, always on No. 4 sickle hooks.



Pizzolato always uses hook guards to reduce snagging of his jig.



## Tip of the day

Dave Pizzolato discards the plastic pegs that come with his corks and replaces them with the tapered tips of wooden chopsticks. "If the peg comes out, plastic sinks but wood floats," he grinned.

And Pizzolato is very particular about his corks, insisting on 1-inch foam versions. He special orders them from Grizzly Jig Company in Caruthersville, Missouri. ■

The tapered end of a wooden chopstick makes a perfect cork peg for Dave Pizzolato because it floats.

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# A crappie hot dog

Very few people can tell you the exact day they got serious about fishing, especially one with 70 years tucked under his belt.

But Dave Pizzolato can.

"My official start date for serious sac-a-lait fishing was July 4, 1987. I went fishing with my sister Mamie in the Atchafalaya Basin. She is about as serious a sac-a-lait fisherman as a person can get."

It's hard to believe that she could be more serious than Pizzolato — if so, she's got it bad.

After a 20-year career in the U.S. Army, Pizzolato retired to Greenwell Springs, where he pitched into the family business — four large fresh produce markets in the Baton Rouge area.



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| Pizzolato nets every fish, every time — no exceptions.

"I did that until 2010, when I seriously retired," he quipped. "All I do now is fish, take naps and cut grass. I specialize exclusively on sac-a-lait fishing. It's not the easiest fish in the world. It's all about the challenge."

"And," he added "they are the best-tasting fish in the world. I love to eat sac-a-lait, especially fried."

Pizzolato started tournament fishing in 2000 with a club, Louisiana Best. Competing in the South Division, he was awarded Angler of the Year and won awards for the biggest fish of the year and the heaviest (10-fish) stringer of the year.

He still fishes in the non-club tournaments organized by well-known Glenn Davis, averaging one event per month between February and September.

Tournaments aside, Pizzolato crappie fishes an average of twice a week, year-round. He fishes multiple locations and has become a familiar face in noted crappie haunts. "For the most part, the serious sac-a-lait fishermen of South Louisiana know each other," he grinned. ■

— 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](mailto:jerald@rockinghorst.com).

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A close-up photograph of a man smiling, wearing a tan baseball cap and sunglasses. He is holding a spotted bass fish. The fish's mouth is open, and it is holding a green, spotted, worm-like lure. The background is a clear, bright blue sky.

They don't get as big as largemouth, but spotted bass offer plenty of aggression.

**F**inding three Bassmaster Elite Series pros working a hot bite less than a rod length from one another is a rarity, if not the prelude to a heated interaction.

But nothing could have been further from the truth when Gerald Swindle, Casey Ashley and Matt Lee lined up along the starboard side of Swindle's Triton and enjoyed a rod-bending rally with Toledo Bend spotted bass.

SCREEEECH go the brakes. Wait — spotted bass? Aren't those Toledo Bend giants Florida-strain largemouth?

Yes, the mossback monsters that win tournaments and earn state-sponsored replica mounts are, indeed largemouths. But we're not talking about big heads, we're talking about those feisty little boogers with glaring red eyes,

prominent spot patterns along their flanks and a distinct connection between the primary (spiny) and secondary (soft) dorsal fins.

No doubt, Toledo Bend's national renown (#1 on Bassmaster's Top 100 Best Bass Lakes for 2015 and 2016) comes from its stellar largemouth fishery; however, a lesser-known spotted bass fishery makes this Texas/Louisiana powerhouse somewhat of a geographical oddity — at least in terms of awareness and interest.

**MORE THAN AN AFTERTHOUGHT**  
UP NEXT 

Toledo Bend is famous far and wide for its amazing largemouth fishery, but spotted bass call the reservoir home, too. Here's how you can get in on the fun.

# AN UNLIKELY 'SPOT' SPOT

By David A. Brown





## MORE THAN AN AFTERTHOUGHT

How big do Toledo's spots get? Well, the lake record is 3.4 pounds, but Darold Gleason of South Toledo Bend Guide Service says he utters the phrase "Man, that's a big spot," for anything over 2. At any size, he points to the species' accessibility and cooperative nature as a great first impression.

"If you're trying to get kids into fishing or you're trying to get a family member interested, spotted bass are great because the techniques you use to catch them are fairly easy to learn and when you get around them, they bite pretty well," Gleason said. "They're not really targeted much by tournament fishermen, but for the recreational anglers, they're really fun."

True, you're not going to be calling the IGFA for any of the spots you'll catch in Toledo Bend; but don't think these fish are push-overs. Spots pack a load of attitude into those modest bodies, so count on aggressive feeding and spirited

fighters. Moreover, Swindle said the little hellions fill in nicely when their big green cousins play hard to get.

"I think on Toledo, tournament anglers may not go out there targeting spots, but what you have to realize is that if you're fishing a multi-day tournament, having a place to fall back and catch a few spots can be the key," he said.

## WHERE TO FIND 'EM

Ashley, who's well acquainted with spotted bass thanks to his Lake Hartwell home waters, offers this noteworthy observation: "As a rule of thumb, spots are always a month ahead of largemouth. They spawn deeper, so they spawn earlier and they'll get on that offshore stuff earlier than largemouth."





**BOTTOM LEFT:** Main lake points are almost always a good starting spot for spotted bass. **INSET:** Dropshots are one of the most productive tools for spots. **LEFT:** Coming from South Carolina, Bassmaster Elite pro Casey Ashley's fond of Toledo Bend spotted bass.

As Gleason points out, summertime often finds spots inhabiting similar areas as largemouth, so you don't necessarily need to learn a new game. Humps and deep brush can be good options, but day to day, you'll fare best by targeting main lake points like the one right across from the Cypress Cove launch ramp where Swindle and pals found a pile of spots.

"You'll also find them on creek channel swings," Gleason said. "It's all deep water; I've never caught spotted bass shallow."

Swindle said he'd focus his summer search for Toledo spots on those points and the river channel. Again, nothing alien to largemouth pursuits, except for depth preference.

"The spots will usually be out a little farther," Swindle said. "If the largemouth are in 20-25, if you look out in 30 you may find you a bunch of spots."

Also, Ashley said spots are more current-oriented than largemouth. While the latter typically tuck into the slack side of a current break, spots like to sit on the upcurrent side.

**WHAT THEY LIKE**  
UP NEXT

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## WHAT THEY LIKE

When it comes to summertime spotted bass bait selection, Gleason says you can't go wrong with a dropshot rig. He likes a V&M Pork Pin worm with a foot-long leader and enough weight for a targeted presentation. He'll also use a football head jig with a craw trailer and a Carolina-rigged V&M Baby Swamp Hog on a 2-foot leader.

"When you're catching spotted bass you go through a lot of baits because they're feisty little things that tear up your baits a lot. That Swamp Hog is a really durable bait, so I tend to get a couple more fish out of every bait."

Ashley likes a scaled down finesse jig with a Zoom Creepy Crawler twin tail or the Fat Albert twin tail grub. He and Gleason agree that adding chartreuse accents to spotted bass baits can be a real deal closer.

"Spotted bass love chartreuse," Ashley said. "If they're in deep water, dying the tips of your jig trailer is a big plus. Also, I like a jig that has a strand or two of chartreuse in it."



**ABOVE RIGHT:** Toledo Bend guide Darold Gleason knows spots love chartreuse tips. **RIGHT:** Jigging spoons can be one of the most productive spotted bass baits for deep habitat.



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Elite pro Gerald Swindle put a black/blue jig package to work on Toledo Bend spots.

Swindle likes the jig and dropshot, too, but he knows those spots dig a ¼-ounce shaky head. A Zoom Trick Worm in green pumpkin or green pumpkin/blue does the job. "That time of year, those fish won't be suspended, they'll be down there within a foot or two of the bottom," Swindle said. "That's why the dropshot and the shaky head work so well; it's right there on them."

And don't forget the shiny stuff, Gleason said: "A jigging spoon is something we use more in the wintertime, but it's not a bad idea to have one tied on in the summertime; particularly if you have kids or someone who's new to fishing onboard. It's an easy bait to work and it's something that will catch fish."

One of the most endearing traits of spotted bass is their highly competitive nature. That means firing up a school — maybe with a crankbait or swimbait — can deliver extended rallies that offer everyone aboard multiple opportunities.

"The biggest thing I tell people is to make sure you have more than one (of your favorite bait) tied on," Gleason said. "That way, if you get into them and you have a tangle or a backlash or you break off, in the time it takes you to sit down and tie a new rig, they can quite biting. It's beneficial to keep someone fishing for them so you can keep them biting." ■



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



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A jig is a very effective spotted bass bait because it casts well and quickly reaches the bottom.

## KEEP THE PARTY GOING

Spotted bass are an aggressive, competitive lot; but even a robust school sees peaks and valleys in its feeding. When this happens, you certainly have the option of giving them a rest and returning later. However, Bassmaster Elite pro Gerald Swindle would first try a little spot stimulation strategy.

"One thing I'll do if the fish are kind of dormant is I'll drop my 3/4-ounce Buckeye Lures Ballin' Out Jig on them. It's a round ball head finesse jig and I'll hop it to them; jump it to them really fast to make one bite.

"Even if I miss him, a lot of times, that first one will bite so aggressively, it will trigger the school. Then, I'll pick up a worm and start catching them. If it slows down again, I'll hop that jig through there again."

If the fish need a different form of pot stirring, Elite pro Casey Ashley suggests working different angles.

"Be mindful that spotted bass like hanging on the upcurrent side of things, and sometimes, they even like it when you get on top of the structure, throw off to the side and bring your bait up," Ashley said. "This makes your bait look like something the current would wash up onto a point, a hump or whatever you're fishing.

"So change up your cadence just like you would with a jerkbait or a crankbait. If you're dragging a jig across a point or up a drop and they stop biting it, you can stroke a jig. They'll follow a bait, so if you hop it off the bottom really quick, that will trigger them to bite and fire up the school so you can catch them and catch them." ■

— By David A. Brown



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A photograph of a man, Tyler Stewart, wearing a black baseball cap with a green logo and sunglasses, smiling while holding a large largemouth bass. The fish has a frog lure in its mouth. The background shows a boat on a body of water with green vegetation.

A frog is a killer topwater lure this month, and FLW rookie bass pro Tyler Stewart shares some tips to help you hook up.

# THE 'FROG' DAYS OF Summer

By Kinny Haddox

**F**or most folks, it's almost too hot outside to go fishing. You've really got to want it to go chasing largemouth bass this time of year.

But August is "Take a Frog Fishing" month. (OK, not really, but it should be — especially if you want some fast action and a livewell full of bass.) Nothing works better than an imitation frog to wake up big summer-weary largemouth bass.

"There is no better bait to throw this time of year than a frog," said up-and-coming FLW pro Tyler Stewart of West Monroe. "There are just so many places that you can throw a frog and put it right on the nose of a big old bass. You can throw it in bushes, grass beds, lily pads or over a log. You can throw it basically anywhere that a bass can hide."

Of course, the most common frog territory is grass or weeds. And there is so much vegetation this time of year in Louisiana waters that a frog is just a natural choice, in more ways than one.

"You can toss today's frogs anywhere and not worry about getting it hung up. They are extremely weedless and there are a lot of places you can't get another bait in like a frog. Fish will get way back up in cover this time of year in water that is way more shallow than most anglers would expect," Stewart said. "That makes it a great time to take a frog fishing."

On an average day, he said fishing a frog is also one of the easiest lures to catch fish on. Simply throw it out and reel it in across the surface. There aren't many hot summer days when you do that and won't get bit. And, it's a great lure to teach young people to bass fish for those very same reasons.

**REFINE YOUR APPROACH** UP NEXT ➤



## REFINE YOUR APPROACH

But if you take a professional approach to it, you can refine your presentation for more — and better — catches.

“To be honest, I’ve never seen a real frog swimming across the surface, but the frog really resembles a baitfish dancing across the top of the water, and gets the attention of a bass quickly,” he said.

Stewart said while a basic approach to casting and reeling will catch fish, varying your technique according to the situation makes a huge difference.

His most simple plan is this: If it’s super hot and there’s no wind and he’s fishing around pads or grass, he will fish it slow and pick apart the structure from one end to the other. Early in the morning, on cloudy days or during a shad spawn, Stewart will fish it fast and cover as much water as he can. That’s when the bass will be most aggressive with the lure.

“Another technique is to use the stop-and-go retrieve,” he said. “That works especially well around pads or grass fields where there are holes in the cover. Buzz the bait across the pads, but then stop it when it comes to a small opening. Let it sit there until all the ripples are gone, then twitch it. If you don’t get a bite, just keep repeating that retrieve.”

There are dozens of thoughts on how and when to set the hook on a bass when it engulfs a frog. Some say set it quickly, others say count to three.

Stewart has a simple approach.

“When I can’t see the frog anymore, I lean into him and set the hook,” he said.

One of the problems for the average angler is that huge pad fields and grass beds may all look the same. Stewart said the best way to approach those places is to look for irregularities in the structure. Look for little points in the grass, or little pockets in the pads. Often there will be a stickup or small top in the grass or pads. Those are excellent places to throw a frog more than once. Just look for something different — that’s what the fish do.

## KNOCK ON WOOD

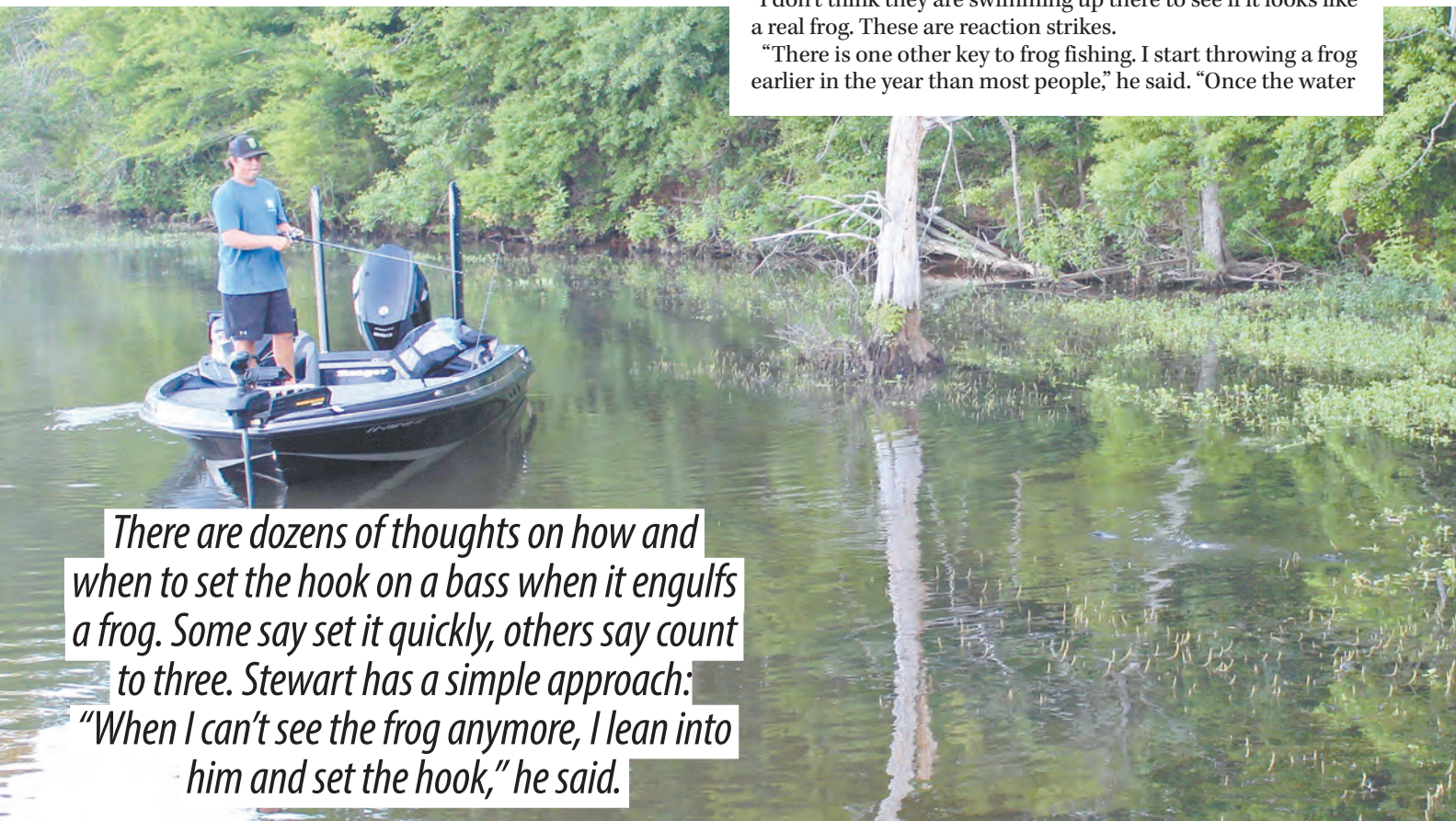
“When it is really hot and you are fishing a body of water that doesn’t have a lot of grass, look for something that will give the fish shade. It could be a canopy provided by low-hanging branches, or wood in the form of stumps and trees,” Stewart said. “Get the frog as close to the structure as you can. Bump it with your lure if you can. You can also throw a frog right up in bushes along the bank. Twitch it, then rip it out of there.

“Bass also hang around boat houses, and you can fish the poles on them. You’d be surprised, but one of the best places to throw a frog this month is beside floating boat houses. The fish will suspend under those and come up and bust a frog without a second thought.”

There are dozens of different colors of frogs, and while actual frog-colored imitations will catch bass, Stewart usually sticks to just two colors: White for early in the year and early in the morning, and black the rest of the time.

“I think the main thing is that they just see the bait,” he said. “I don’t think they are swimming up there to see if it looks like a real frog. These are reaction strikes.

“There is one other key to frog fishing. I start throwing a frog earlier in the year than most people,” he said. “Once the water



*There are dozens of thoughts on how and when to set the hook on a bass when it engulfs a frog. Some say set it quickly, others say count to three. Stewart has a simple approach: “When I can’t see the frog anymore, I lean into him and set the hook,” he said.*



**ABOVE:** Following Navionics maps of a lake can show you the types of areas that are going to hold frog fish even if you aren't familiar with a lake. **BELOW:** Tyler Stewart knows that working grass beds and aquatic vegetation is the best bet for success on a summer frog.

temperature reaches 55 degrees, you can get a frog bite. I'll stick with it until the water cools back down to 55. At that time, you might as well give up on any topwater bite.”

Stewart doesn't look for deep water or contour breaks on his electronics to find frog fishing holes, but using Navionics mapping can show you where good frog fishing areas will be even if you aren't familiar with a lake. ■

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There are dozens of top-quality frog lures on the market: The best approach is to find one that gives you confidence and take it fishing.



## Finding 'Mr. Right'

Selecting the right frog lure isn't easy. A quick and unofficial count at a local Bass Pro Shop revealed more than 150 sizes, shapes and colors of frogs. Only a few of them looked like 'real' green frogs. But the choice might be as simple as black and

white, which will work almost anywhere. If you are after huge bass, bigger frogs are best. Keep your selection simple by choosing hollow-body frogs for slower fishing, and solid-body frogs for buzzing. ■

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# THEY BUILT A **better frog**

Frogs are becoming more popular fishing lures because they are a more realistic representation of a real frog, said professional fisheries biologist Mike Wood. In other words, they're building a better frog. The hookup ratio on newer versions of frog-type lures is also much improved. And as more anglers catch fish with them, the baits become more and more popular. ■



Tyler Stewart stays busy landing large-mouths in the heat of summer on topwater frogs.

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# STEWART'S AN ANGLER TO keep an eye on

You might say that motocross's loss is bass fishing's gain.

The largemouths might not like that, though. If you've paid attention to pro bass fishing this year, you know why.

As the 2018 FLW bass season winds down, Tyler Stewart of West Monroe is among the top rookies on the tour, and he's in the running to qualify for the prestigious FLW Cup national championship.

"In 2003, I was big into motocross and even won a national championship," Stewart said. "The week after the championship, I was walking down the



Big bass like this one have helped Tyler Stewart make a big splash during his first year on the FLW tour.

creek behind my Mamaw's house and caught a 5-pound bass. I told her I would give up my national championship before I'd give up that 5-pounder. It's still mounted and on my wall in my room."

That got Stewart hooked on fishing. A few years later he was injured in motocross, and channeled all his competitiveness into fishing.

After four years as a successful member of the University of Louisiana-Monroe team, he is now making a splash on the professional level. You can follow Tyler's tournament action on the FLW website, or his Facebook page. ■

— Kinny Haddox



**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](http://lakedarbonnelife.com). He and his wife, DiAnne, live on Lake D'Arbonne in Farmerville.

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Red snapper may get all the glory, but mangroves are well worth your attention.

# THE *'OTHER'* SNAPPER

By David A. Brown

Mangroves may not get all the publicity their rosy relatives receive, but they taste great — and you can catch 10 per day year-round. Here's how one Buras guide fills the box.

**I**t took us all day to find our targets, but Capt. Ross Montet delivered.

In fairness, the day presented challenging conditions, but let's just say that when the peach ripened, the top-shelf guide with bloodhound instincts put us in position to take a big bite.

Our August outing had a singular focus — snapper; but not the one that most folks probably envision. While those rosy beauties known

as American red snapper may hold a higher ranking among sport-fishing enthusiasts, Montet had set his sights on mangrove snapper — a sporty and tasty option with considerably more availability, both in season and bag limit.

"As far as food quality, mangrove snapper are pretty close with red snapper," he said. "The other thing is our limit on mangrove snapper is 10 a person; our limit on red snapper is two a person."

>



Leaving Buras-based Cajun Fishing Adventures, we launched at Joshua's Marina and ran out the Empire Waterway. Shrimpers crisscrossed the area with muddy wakes, as oystermen worked their bivalve bounty. Our first priority was loading up with bait. We'll discuss the particulars later (see the Pogy Prudence sidebar), but suffice it to say your time is well spent rounding up fresh offerings.

## WEATHER INFLUENCE

Like all angling pursuits, meteorological factors can greatly impact snapper fishing. This day's clear, flat conditions made for easy running, but those bright skies put the shut-mouth on our quarry. We nearly ran Montet's Skeeter bay boat out of gas as we hit a dozen or so rigs where he's caught mangroves in the past; nevertheless, our efforts were largely fruitless. A couple of bluefish, cobia, jacks and a lone red snapper kept us from falling asleep, but the day was shaping up to be a big disappointment.

Montet's dad, Capt. Jude Montet, was running a similar program that day and frequent VHF correspondence revealed an equally dry effort on his boat. About an hour before sunset, the elder Montet let us know he was packing it in for the day, but his son had that look of half frustration, half determination in his eyes.

"Let's try one more spot before we head in," Ross said.

With the blazing hot sun now tempering into a softer warmth, we noticed

also that a little breeze was cooling the scene. More importantly, the captain nodded to the chunky clouds forming on the horizon.

"That high pressure's getting out of here," Montet said. "Those fish might start biting."

Gary Abernethy nabbed this Gulf mangrove snapper under a rig's crew quarters.



Sure enough, about 10 minutes into what would be our final stop, LiveTarget's Gary Abernethy came tight on a chunky mangrove snapper that bit a piece of pogy about 20 feet down. Moments later, Jose Chavez of 13 Fishing doubled over with another nice one. Not to be outdone, Capt. Ross put the brakes on one of the day's biggest fish to launch us into an all-out snapper slappin' rally that put a pile of mangroves in the 3- to 7-pound range on ice.

At one point, the action became so intoxicating, I actually put down my camera and grabbed a rod. Two heavy hits connected me with serious snapper, both of which got me into the rig and broke the line. At that point, I was asked to stay in my lane and just shoot pictures — which I did.

Now, such action usually doesn't take so long to develop, but we were dealt a limiting scenario. When summer days roll out more cooperative conditions, bagging keeper mangroves can be a lot easier. Here are some tips to facilitate your mission.

## FIND THE FISH >

Day to day, you can't go wrong by targeting snapper near rig structures.



# BIC Media Solutions launches 'Leisure Connection' TV

*BIC Media Solutions moving forward with several exciting projects*

**B**IC Media Solutions has relaunched its popular "The Leisure Connection" magazine, this time as a new regional television series. "The Leisure Connection" is a 30-minute television show that showcases the best in lifestyle experiences, locations and events that you, your friends and family can enjoy together. The first episode of "The Leisure Connection" featured the Keels & Wheels Concours d'Elegance event, a classic car and vintage wooden boat show in Seabrook, Texas. Viewers of the show were guided through the festival, and the show featured interviews with the owners to highlight the history and restoration of their classic cars and boats. The first episode of "The Leisure Connection" aired twice in the Houston area on KIAH-TV.

Additional episodes of "The Leisure Connection" will explore unique Gulf Coast tours and cruises, sporting events and tailgating, Southern-style music and food venues, local restaurants and chefs, hunting and fishing adventures, favorite getaways, pastimes and hobbies of the rich and famous, and much more. The show producers welcome feedback from viewers on their favorite hotspots, events and activities to showcase. Submissions are being accepted online at [www.bicmediasolutions.com/the-leisure-connection](http://www.bicmediasolutions.com/the-leisure-connection).

Provicom, a state-of-the-art video production company based in Houston, is partnering with BIC Media Solutions to produce "The Leisure Connection" episodes. BIC Media Solutions is also working with Provicom to produce videos of its own, including one that explores BIC Alliance's many ancillary services.



"The Leisure Connection" host Lauren Leal, left, interviews Billy Cain of The Fishbone Family of Cos. during the Keels & Wheels Concours d'Elegance event.

"Thanks to Provicom and all of our co-sponsors that helped make the first episode of 'The Leisure Connection' a huge success," said Earl Heard, founder and CEO of BIC Media Solutions.

"We are getting a lot of interest in 'The Leisure Connection,' and we're excited to film our next segment."

## 'Urban Country'

BIC Media Solutions is also moving forward with its latest film, "Urban Country." The film now has a theatrical release date of Aug. 3, and it will be released in Walmart stores Sept. 4. "Urban Country" stars Brighton Sharbino, Lou Diamond Phillips, Jason London, Candice Michele Barley, Saxon Sharbino, Dean West, Arthur Bryan Marroquin and C. Thomas Howell.

"We are thrilled to help bring 'Urban Country' to audiences everywhere," Heard said. "Since 2014, BIC Media has helped fund and/or co-produce several films, including 'Classic Restoration,' 'A Gift Horse,' 'Rock Bottom and Back™' and now 'Urban Country.' All these films have been viewed by many. 'Rock Bottom and Back' will be the next to air on local television in the Houston area. It's scheduled to air in August."

**For more information about BIC Media's books, films, speakers bureau, events or video production capabilities, contact Earl Heard at [earlheard@bicalliance.com](mailto:earlheard@bicalliance.com) or call (281) 538-9996.**

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The smaller, less obvious structures often can be some of the most productive.

## FIND THE FISH

Just about any Delta rig will hold mangrove snapper, but Montet has found some consistencies.

First, the bigger the rig, the more habitat and food sources, but larger structures also attract more angler eyeballs. That doesn't necessarily doom a rig's potential, but just know that you're fishing for

educated fish, while the more modest rigs may hold a stack of overlooked fish.

Another upside of avoiding larger structures is less interference from crew boats. Recreational vessels must give way to these approaches, but all the commotion and prop washing can blow out the snapper bite.

"One thing I like to look for is the (non-operating) rigs," he said. "They still have

the sound beacons, but there's no processing on them. I find those rigs have more fish on them because they don't get messed up by crew boats."

Of the mangrove snapper's positioning, Montet says this: "I find that mangroves tend to hang closer to the rig and they tend to stay up a little bit higher in the water column than red snapper. You'll catch them anywhere from just below the surface, to about 40 feet down."

Something worth noting: The rig that produced our big haul was a manned platform with housing quarters. As Montet pointed out, every evening the kitchen crew dumps table scraps into the water — and the ensuing chum line brings the food chain of baitfish and progressively larger species, including mangrove snapper, topside.

Once you find a suitable rig, motor drifting is one option, but to focus on a promising area, use a rig hook (metal pole with a crooked end that



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looks like a candy cane) or tie off with a rope. With the latter, use what Montet calls “the triangle” — secure the rope to a cleat on one side of the boat, run it over a support bar on the rig and then cleat it off on the other side of the boat.

## BAITS & RIGS

There aren't many natural baits a mangrove snapper won't eat, but their favorites include live croakers, shrimp and freshly netted pogies. Montet used the latter for our trip and he offered a few tips for their effective deployment:

**Hook it:** For live baiting, he'll run a 3/0-4/0 Mustad circle hook through the pogy's clear nose cartilage. This makes the fish swim down and tends to yield better hook-ups, as fish gobble the bait before detecting a hook.



Adding multiple split shots to your pogy rig will help get it down in swifter currents.

Montet also uses cut pogies, both for chum and baiting. Here, he likes to hide the hook with one of two methods. With a center chunk, he inserts the hook into the corner, runs it through the bait and reinserts the point in the opposite side. For tail pieces, he inserts the hook into the anal vent, runs it out the cut end and then turns it back into the bait chunk.



Hiding your hook is a key strategy for using dead bait.

**Weights:** When snapper rise near the surface, a chunk of pogy drifting downward presents an irresistible sight. But if the fish are deeper, or if the current's blowing free-lined baits off target, Montet adds two or more split shots above his hook.



Tipping bucktails with cut bait can be highly effective.

Another rig that yielded bites was a Mustad bucktail jig tipped with a pogy chunk. If you get a bite on this rig but drop the fish, keep working the jig, as that pulsing bucktail and lingering bait scent may attract a follow-up bite.

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## PRESENTATIONS & BITE RESPONSE

Medium-heavy spinning tackle is ideal for mangrove snapper, as it's easy to cast or drop your baits to rig targets. Montet spools up with 80-pound braid and about 4 feet of 40-pound pink Seaguar fluorocarbon.

"If I can get away with 60-pound leader I will, but I find that 40 tends to work best, just because these fish are really good at seeing," he said. "I have gone as light as 20 or 30, but that's when I know I won't have too many snags on the rig I'm fishing, or if I'm catching the fish farther off the rig and I don't have to worry about them going back in."

Straight drops or pendulum style swing casts work just fine, but Abernethy demonstrated his bass-fishing skills by pitching his bait to specific spots with accuracy and good distance. His style is best employed in calmer conditions with light current, so the bait falls pretty much where you send it.

However you deliver the bait, a hooked snapper will do his best to take line-busting refuge in the rig. It's not always avoidable, but Montet offers this advice:

"As soon as you get a bite, you have to do everything in your power to turn that fish away from the rig," he said. "I'd rather break off a fish because I had too much tension on him, than have him get into the rig."

"If a fish does get you in the rig, give him some slack and a lot of times he'll swim back out."

And when he does, get him in the boat and put him in the box. ■



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

## POGY PRUDENCE

Prior to a recent mangrove snapper trip, Capt. Ross Montet loaded up with fresh pogies he cast-netted in the West Delta. He started in open water, but found he was chasing fast-moving schools that were outrunning his net in the 10- to 12-foot depths.

On a hunch, Montet ran in toward Schoefield Beach where we found birds diving and multiple oil slicks indicating a gold mine of smelly baitfish. Fortunately, the baits on the beach were the right size — about a third of the

length of the few adult pogies we had gathered in deeper water. These juvenile "peanut" pogies are highly effective baits for a variety of coastal and offshore fish, including snappers.

Throughout the bait-gathering process, Montet shared a few technique pointers:

- Hunting pogies may require a lot of idling and looking, so keep the net ready and watch/listen for telltale surface pops.

- Because Louisiana limits recreational anglers to 8-foot cast nets, accuracy is particularly important. Judge your approach speed and watch out for sneaky waves that can shift your balance and



send the net off course.

- Whenever possible, try to avoid throwing into the wind, as the oncoming blow will stall your net in the air and give fast-swimming pogies a head start on escaping.

- Dropping fresh bait into a laundry basket or a 5-gallon bucket keeps them in better shape than dumping them on a hard deck and scooping them with a dip net.

- When shrimp and glass minnows show up amid your poggy netting, keep the former for bait diversity and the latter for chumming.

- David A. Brown

**LEFT:** Bass-style pitching is good way to put your bait exactly where you want it. **ABOVE:** When netting live pogies, dump your net into a plastic bucket -rather than on the deck - for longer bait life.



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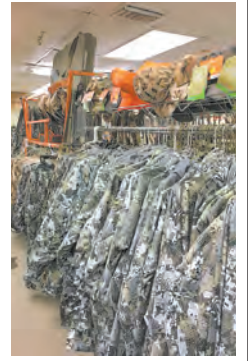


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## CREATURE FEATURE

Jerald Horst

**TOP:** Dollar sunfish are small, with a steep forehead, but are similarly colored to longear sunfish. **BOTTOM:** Longear sunfish have a more elongated ear flap than dollar sunfish, but are otherwise very similar to them.

# SO WHAT'S A SUNPERCH?

**L**ouisiana's bream fishermen have a pile of fish to choose from. Tops on the list are bluegills and redear sunfish (also called lake runners or chinquapin). And fat-bellied goggle-eyes are always in the mix somewhere. In a lot of places, you can throw in some green sunfish (slick perch) or red-spotted sunfish (stumpknockers).

But without a doubt the prettiest of the bunch are what anglers call sunperch. Not one species but two, the longear sunfish and the dollar sunfish are both stunningly and similarly colored, with green backs and bright red-orange bellies.

Their entire body, and especially the head, is painted with bright turquoise spots, giving the fish a jewel-like appearance. And both have pronounced ear-like

black lobes that extend rearward from the back of each gill cover.

## WHAT THEY AREN'T

These are the most misnamed members of the bream clan. What they are not is red bellies or pumpkinseeds, two names often misused in Louisiana. Redbreast sunfish (red bellies) are a fish of the northern U.S., found south of the Mason-Dixon Line only on the east coast and only as far south as Georgia.

The other species, the pumpkinseed, has an unusual range. It is found in Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas, but completely skips over Louisiana and Mississippi. Its range then resumes in Alabama and extends to the east coast. Neither occur in Louisiana.

## HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR SUNPERCH

Dollar and longear sunfish very closely resemble each other. Scientists tell them apart by counting the rows of scales on their cheeks and by counting the rays in their pectoral fins. Fishermen are not likely to do that, but for anglers who care, they can be told apart by where they were caught.

Dollar sunfish live in swamps like the Atchafalaya Basin. Longear sunfish are always found in flowing streams, especially upland streams with clear water and sand or gravel bottoms. Dollar sunfish are found in largemouth bass habitats. Longears are found where spotted bass live.

Another difference is in size. Dollar sunfish seldom grow larger than 4 inches long, usually making better trotline bait than human table fare. Longear sunfish will grow to 7 inches long (rarely to 9), which is still small but big enough to clean. The IGFA world record longear sunfish weighed 1 pound, 12 ounces and was caught in Elephant Butte Lake in New Mexico.

## WHAT THESE JEWELS EAT

More is known about the biology of longear sunfish than dollar sunfish. They are definitely creatures of clear water. When a stream becomes predominantly murky or muddy, usually because of human-caused erosion, longears disappear.

Like bluegills — and unlike redear, green and redspotted sunfish — longears feed heavily on items on the water's surface, such as fallen insects. In spite of their small size, they are aggressive predators.

Their diet includes land and water insects, small crustaceans (amphipods, grass shrimp, etc.), fish eggs, small fish including young bass and sunfish and leeches. Their most important prey is terrestrial (land) insects, followed by fish, aquatic insects and fish eggs. Insects of some sort make up almost 60 percent of their diet.

On sporting tackle, they will take small jigs, lures, spinners, spoons, plastics, flies, and live bait including worms, crickets or minnows. What they will take is limited only by the size of their tiny mouth, one of the smallest in the sunfish clan.

These spunky little fish are not only fierce about chasing food, but will also bully each other. Because of their beautiful colors, they have become popular aquarium fish in Europe. If two longear sunfish are placed in a 5-gallon tank,

the larger fish dominates, and chases and bites the smaller fish until it dies. Only if placed in a large enough tank can longear sunfish peacefully coexist.

## SPAWNING HABITS

Like other sunfish, including black bass, which are in the same family, longears construct a nest by sweeping a depression into a water bottom. Gravel and sand are strongly preferred bottom types, and many nests are located in water so shallow that it barely covers their backs.

The nest is constructed by the male with powerful sweeps of its tail as it swims nose-up at a 45 degree angle to the bottom. The dish-shaped nests are 14 to 18 inches in diameter. Longear sunfish

nests can be found in colonies with nests almost touching each other, or they may be solitary.

In the clear, shallow water where their nests are located, water temperatures will range from 73° to 88° F. Spawning takes place from late May through August. A male longear sunfish will attempt to lead a mature female to his nest by swimming directly to her, spreading its fins and returning to its nest. Females prefer males with longer ear flaps.

Once in the nest, the pair swim side-by-side in repeated circles over the nest, with the female on the inside. The female

continues on page 118

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## CREATURE FEATURE

continued

will release as few as 100, and as many as 2,800 eggs. After spawning the male chases the female from the nest and vigorously fans the nest with its tail to mix the sperm and eggs and help drive the eggs into the gravel bottom.

After hatching, the young take two to three years to reach sexual maturity. They live on average only three to four years, although 9-year old fish have been recorded from the wild. Aquarium-kept fish can survive to 12 years old.

Crystal clear flowing water is not a requirement for their look-alike relative, the dollar sunfish. It is never found in the waters of rapidly moving streams, seeming to be adapted to slow-moving streams and ponds, pools and lakes in low-land areas. Bottoms in these areas may be sand or clay, but are often silt or muck.

Longear sunfish are aggressive feeders much to the delight of many youngsters.

They are not aggressive feeders like their longear cousins and seldom eat other fish, probably partly due to their small mouths. Their diet is heavy in small insect larvae, tiny crustaceans such as water fleas, stringy algae and bottom debris.

During spawning season, from May to August, males will sweep out a solitary nest, preferably on a sandy bottom. After spawning, males rigorously guard the nest. Dollar sunfish mature at 2 years old and have a life span of 6 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 [gerald@rockinghorst.com](mailto:gerald@rockinghorst.com).



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# ASK CAPT. PAUL

Capt. Paul Titus



## GPS WAYPOINTS: DELACROIX TO POINT A LA HACHE

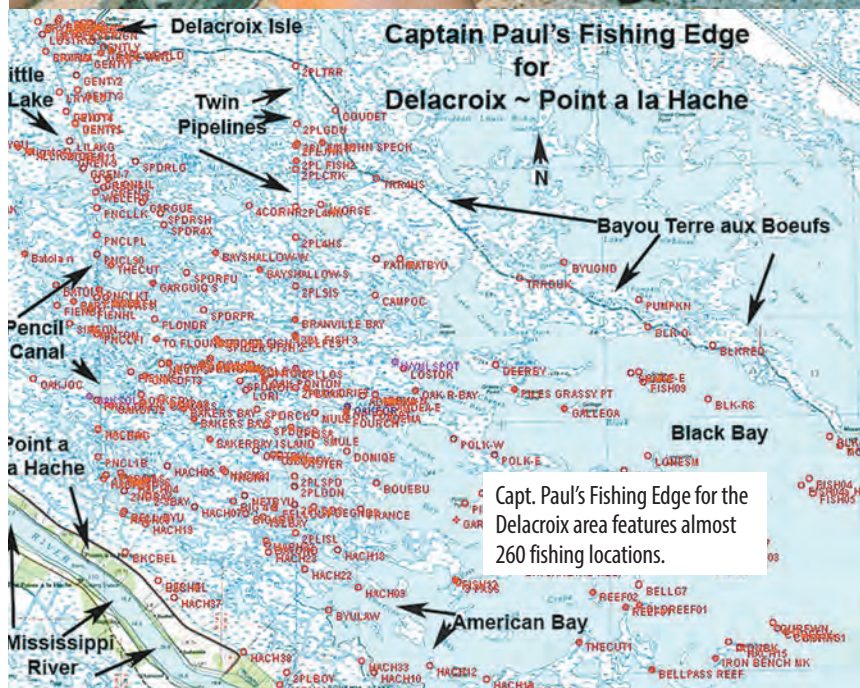
**GOT A QUESTION FOR THE CAPTAIN?**  
EMAIL IT TO  
[CAPT@LASMAG.COM](mailto:CAPT@LASMAG.COM)

**T**his area is actually where Capt. Paul's Fishing Edge got started. The interest generated from this location allowed me to start marketing waypoints for 21 different areas, including Barataria Bay, Lake Borgne, Hopedale to Bayou Terre Boeufs, Bayou Bienvenue, Port Sulphur, Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Borgne and many more.

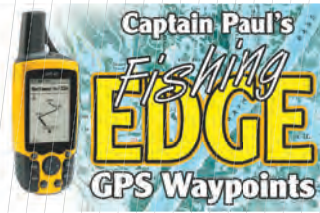
As a fisherman of the Delacroix area, I had a vast library of locations to fish, and almost 260 of these are included in this Edge area.

You will find locations from Delacroix Isle to Point a La Hache, and from Lake Lery to Breton Sound, like the beginning of the Pencil Canal at the south part of Little Lake (Petit Lake) shown as waypoint PNCLLK and plotted as 29°42.0802' N Lat ~ 89°47.3502' W Long. This is a key location to get to a great bit of the southern part of the Delacroix area.

It also has the Grave Yard location just southeast of Bayou Gentilly and Terre Aux Boeufs as waypoint GRVYRD at 29°45.4241' N Lat ~ 89°47.2624' W Long. Also included is the deep hole just north of the Spider in Bayou Ponton, shown as waypoint PNTN1 which is located at 29°38.6750' N Lat. ~ 89°43.5017' W Long. This hole is one of the deepest spots in the area. Many nice specks were caught between it and Oak River just to the south.



Capt. Paul's Fishing Edge for the Delacroix area features almost 260 fishing locations.



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Also included is a location on the Twin Pipelines at Branville Bay, which is always worth a cast or two. It is shown as waypoint BRNVLL and is located at 29°39.7307' N Lat ~ 89°42.4906' W Long.

Closer to Point a La Hache, it shows locations such as Drum Island shown as HACH12 at 29°32.3090' N Lat ~ 89°39.1890' W Long, and numerous locations in American and California Bays.

It also has some great locations in and around Second and Third Bay. One of these is marked as waypoint 2BAY1S at 29°36.4251' N Lat ~ 89°46.7643' W Long.

To the east, it has locations such as Stone Island and Lonesome, shown as waypoint LONESM located at 29°36.7800' N Lat ~ 89°33.8090' W Long.

As you know, GPS data such as waypoints can now be electronically installed in most GPS units. This feature allows the user to install a great amount of waypoint data in just a few minutes. Each Edge features an electronic data file that can be downloaded into a variety of GPS brand units. All of the Edge programs are sent as an email attachment for your computer via your email address. The Edge download includes a Read Me and Instructions file.

Some GPS brands may require you to use their proprietary data transfer programs, but the EDGE programs will work with those, as well.

All of Capt. Paul's Fishing Edge locations may be found online in the Louisiana Sportsman's Outdoor Store ([sportsmangear.com](http://sportsmangear.com)).

Remember that you must state your brand of GPS unit, your email address and the selected area. The Edge files are NOT brand name interchangeable, so be sure to make the correct GPS selection.

Capt. Paul's Fishing Edge of GPS Waypoints will give you a definite edge in navigating and fishing the entire area.

I always suggest that you have a reliable compass and a map of the area whenever you venture outdoors.

And please show respect to other anglers around you and do not trespass.

All positions are determined using WGS datum and are stated as degrees, minutes and ten thousandths of a minute (DDD.MM.mmmm). ■



**Capt. Paul Titus** has been responding to GPS questions on LouisianaSportsman.com since 2000. He has been fishing and hunting in Louisiana since 1957. Titus holds a USCG license and conducts instruction courses in the use of GPS for private individuals and government agencies.

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## FLY LINES

Catch Cormier

This bluegill taken by Greg Babin may be small, but could be a big winner in a species-related contest.



**IT'S A  
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NOT SIZE

**S**everal years ago, I went to see the movie “The Big Year” starring Steve Martin, Jack Black and Owen Wilson. While it was enjoyable, I also found it somewhat educational.

I had no idea what a big year was, even though some of my birdwatching friends had mentioned it before. For birders, a big year is a challenge or informal competition to spot as many different species of birds in one year, within a specific geographical area.

Considering that several members of the New Orleans Fly Fishers and Alexandria-based Kisatchie Fly Fishers are active birdwatchers, it's not surprising that the two clubs would independently come up with the idea of having a contest based on the birding challenge.

The NOFF Big Year and the KFF Mixed Bag are both members-only contests

where the objective is to catch as many different species of fish on a fly rod and document those catches. Both contests run from March 1 to Dec. 1.

### HOW IT WORKS

For both contests, the rules are fairly simple: All fish must be caught in public waters, within a certain geographic area and photographed with a contest token. While keeping the fish is optional, the photo must be of the live fish taken at the time of the catch. (In other words, no driveway or ice chest photos allowed.)

For the NOFF Big Year, submissions are emailed to the contest director. For the KFF Mixed Bag, data about the catch can be entered via an online form on the club's website, but photographs are emailed to the tournament chair.

As for species allowed, the NOFF tournament is pretty wide open, while

the KFF event restricts things to species listed on either the Louisiana, Texas or Arkansas record lists.

For both events, the highest number of different species wins. In the event of a tie, the earliest last entry wins. For the KFF Mixed Bag, the biggest prize will be selected in a grand drawing among all those who entered at least one fish.

### QUANTITY OVER QUALITY

Most passive CPR (catch-photo-release) tournaments award the longest fish of one or a few species. For example, the Bayou Coast Kayak Fishing Club and the Lafayette Kayak Fishing Club have year-long CPR tournaments for the longest bass, redfish and speckled trout.

NOFF Big Year director Sean Gilthorpe explained why their format was chosen.

“The goal was to get NOFFC members excited about flyfishing. We felt a species-oriented contest would encourage members to pursue a wide variety of fish and explore new angling opportunities,” he said. “We didn’t place any size requirements, as this makes it easier for participants, as well as tournament organizers.”

KFF Mixed Bag director Bill Morrison agreed with Gilthorpe.

“A common idea about pursuing big fish is that one must be an expert,” Morrison said. “Collecting species is something anglers of any age or experience can be successful at.”

## COCAHOES ON THE FLY?

Morrison pointed out an unexpected benefit of this type of contest.

“I had no idea how many fish could be caught on fly. So far, we’ve had 21 different species entered — including gou (freshwater drum), yellow bass and channel catfish. Our entry form gives us a database so members can know where certain fish were caught, and on what flies.”

Gilthorpe also pointed out that his biggest surprise was interest in non-traditional species.

“For example, one of our members entered a gulf killifish (cocahoe minnow). Since his entry, we have had five other participants make cocahoe minnow entries.”

Other unique entries in the NOFF Big Year contest include striped mullet, spotted gar and bullhead catfish.

continues on page 124

## TIPPETS

August is the last full month of “SweatFest 2018,” the festival nobody likes to celebrate. While a combination of hot water and high tides make for tough fly fishing, late summer does offer a few unique opportunities.

Pelagic species are at their peak. Cobia and kings are close to shore, while Spanish mackerel, jack crevalle and tripletail can be found in bays and passes.

Of those, jack crevalle offers one of the more appealing targets. Look for schools of mullet busting the surface. Jacks love large baitfish patterns. But you’ll need a 10-weight or 12-weight rod and a large disc drag reel to have any chance of bringing these bruisers to the boat.

While many bull reds can be found cruising the edges of larger lakes, the next two months are the best time to enjoy a redfish blitz. Schools of bulls will be busting pogies. Look for the birds working over the frothing surface activity, and cast large baitfish patterns.

For speckled trout, nighttime is the right time. Cast Clousers and weighted shrimp patterns around lighted piers and docks. Let it sink down, then strip fast.

That same technique works during daytime for sand (white) trout. Small in size, but strong in fight, a sandie in the 12 inch range on a 5-weight rod can be more fun than the law allows.

The Red River has been fishing great this summer. Barring any tropical rainfall, look for continued schooling bass in the oxbows around Coushatta and Pineville. Cast Crease Flies into schools of shad. Most of the big bass will eat just before sunrise.

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# FLY LINES

continued

## YOUTH MOVEMENT

There are no age divisions within either contest. This pits young members against those older, typically with more experience. But as Morrison pointed out, this type of contest benefits those with drive — and younger folks have no shortage of that.

As of this writing, 12-year-old David Karcher of the New Orleans club had a solid lead in that competition, with 13 species. In the Kisatchie club, 9-year-old Spencer Hackney was within striking distance of the club leaders, while 14-year-old Will Cameron had made a late surge to move into the top grouping.

## A BIGGER YEAR

Both Gilthorpe and Morrison are ecstatic with the interest and participation among their members, and plan to continue the contest next year. They've been in contact with each other, and hope to share ways to improve the track-

ing process of entries.

One change for the KFF Mixed Bag was implemented last month. Members no longer have to show the contest token in their photos. Instead, the photo metadata is used to validate an entry. According to Morrison, in cases where the fish will be released, this greatly reduces the amount of handling and time the fish is out the water.

The KFF club is also looking at a customized app that would allow a single source of entry. That way, you could take a photo with your smart phone, go to the app and enter the info, and upload directly to the database. ■



Big Year contests level the playing field among anglers, giving young Will Cameron a shot at beating veteran anglers in his club.



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



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# HOW TO AGE WHITE-TAILED DEER: PART IV

AGING THE WALL-HANGERS, 4- TO  
6-YEAR-OLD DEER

Mature bucks are the trophies that hang on the wall, and are usually 4- to 6-year-old deer.

**T**he bucks that most hunters mount are generally 4 to 6 years old and are considered to be mature bucks, exhibiting their best antler growth. Does in these age classes should be producing fawns annually, and may even be smarter than bucks that are the same age. These deer have been around for many years and are familiar with the game of hunting.

While these are the bucks hunters are looking for, the bad news is these are the bucks that if infected with CWD, will begin to spread the disease throughout the environment. So in areas where CWD is present, it is probably not wise management to allow bucks to get this old.

While these mature bucks are at the age when antler growth should be at its best, hunters should keep in mind that deer living on poor or average habitat may not have big racks. As I have often said, bucks on habitat dominated with pine timber and lacking in browse and mast will not produce the big racks hunters desire. It is not uncommon for a 4-year-old piney woods buck to score less than 100 B&C — a deer most hunters would not mount. But, these mature bucks with low-end racks are still challenging

to hunt, and if you hunt in this type of mediocre habitat, don't hesitate to shoot one. The nutrition is simply not there to produce a real wall-hanger, so if you pass on these deer you might want to consider another type of recreation.

## 4-YEAR-OLD DEER

As discussed last month, the third cusp of the third molar of a 3-year-old deer is cup shaped, somewhat like the letter U. As this 3-year-old ages, the third cusp of the third molar continues to wear and becomes slanted at a 45-degree angle toward the outside of the mouth, somewhat like a diagonal line (/). This is the key that separates the 3-year-olds from the 4-year-olds. The wear continues on the crests of all the molars, and the line of dentine between the crests increases in width (this is the space between the two crests of a tooth, referred to as the infundibulum). The taller lingual crests of the second and third molar are still sharp, but the line of dentine between the crests is distinct.

## 5-YEAR-OLD DEER

The lingual crests of the molars and premolars are blunt, and there is much

heavier wear showing the darker dentine on these teeth. The infundibulum is becoming more distinct. Let me emphasize again that it really does not matter if a buck is 5 or 6 years old, it is a mature deer and if living on good habitat should have desirable antlers. To pass up a 5-year-old in hopes of bagging it next year is definitely a crapshoot.

## 6-YEAR-OLD DEER

The key for this age class is the first molar; the infundibulum is a fine line that will disappear as the deer becomes older. The lingual crests are very blunt, and the darker lines of dentine are very visible on all molars. Generally with wild deer, the antlers will begin to decline after age 6, so this would certainly be the year to harvest a trophy.

## REMEMBERING OUR WILDLIFE LEGENDS

The hunting community is decreasing every day as members of the greatest generation slowly pass away. These were the hunters who paved the way in the 50s and 60s for the rest of us who enjoy the thrill of the hunt. Their money and sup-

port of wildlife management did much to restore the game populations that we enjoy today.

Harold Barnette of Homer in Claiborne Parish was one of these wildlife legends. Harold was an active hunter, primarily a bowhunter, and did much to develop the sport of bowhunting in this state. He was a founding father and leader of the Bayou State Bowhunters Association. He and his wife Nita, along with several other bowhunter enthusiasts, worked hard to bring the organization to the forefront in this state, making it a strong and active voice for bowhunters, both at Wildlife and Fisheries Commission meetings and at the state legislature. The BSBA provided money for deer research and management, as well as bow-

continues on page 128

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## GRUNTS & GOBBLES

continued



As the enamel wears away, the brown dentine line becomes more distinct, and by age 6 the infundibulum of the first molar is just a fine line.

hunting education. They were a true asset to me when I was the state's deer study biologist. Harold had a great knowledge of bows and hunting, and was much fun to be around. We extend our thoughts and prayers to Nita and the family.

Joe Herring passed away in early June, and is a name well known in the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, as well as most other game agencies — not only in the Southeast, but around the country. A graduate of La. Tech, Joe began his wildlife work in this state in 1955 as a biologist in the Monroe region. He soon became the district fish and game supervisor, and did much to increase game populations in the state, as well as help to shape the agency. He later became the chief of the fish and game departments, then chief of game when the two departments were separated. Mr. Joe went all the way to the top, becoming assistant secretary of wildlife, and then secretary of the whole department. There wasn't much he was not involved with regarding wildlife and wildlife management. He was on many working groups with other Southeast agencies, as also served on national organiza-

tion working groups. A recipient of numerous awards, his name is synonymous with wildlife management and Wildlife and Fisheries in this state. I was blessed during my career to not only have been hired by him, but to work for him and numerous others who were the founding biologists that developed a sound wildlife program and agency for this state. Richard Yancey, Dewey Wills, Louis Brunett and J. B. Kidd are just a few of the men who worked with Joe and helped shape our wildlife programs. All of these men were still working when I was hired, so I was able to glean much from them. With the passing of Joe Herring, much of the historical knowledge about our wildlife and fisheries agency is gone. While it is always good to press on and move forward with knowledge and technology, it is still important to remember where we came from and how we got there. We also extend our thoughts and prayers to the Herring family. ■



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](http://www.SportsmanGear.com) and at Amazon.com.



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## LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

Mike Cork of Benton holds a good-sized bass that bit on a Tri-Alive 6.5 Nightcrawler made by Minden-based Mister Twister.

# MISTER TWISTER'S NIGHTCRAWLER

UNIQUE COLORS OFFER FISH SOMETHING NEW

**G**len Freeman of Zwolle has a new weapon in his bass fishing arsenal when he goes out to Toledo Bend. So does Zack Hughes of Quitman, Texas, who boated a 10-plus-pounder on the first day he fished with it at Lake Fork.

The two guides are catching bass on brilliantly colored straight-tail plastic worms that hit the market in early June. Manufactured by Minden-based Mister Twister LLC, The Tri-Alive 6.5 Nightcrawler lives up to its name because, well, it looks exactly like an earthworm.

But the true calling card for the 6 ½-inch plastic worm is the color, or, in this case, multi-colors. There are 15 different hues available after

approximately 25 were eliminated in the decision-making process by Mister Twister General Manager Chuck Byrd, Sales Manager Darryl Laurent and FLW Tour pro Clent Davis. At the request of many bass anglers, Byrd took the mold of the artificial lure manufacturer's plastic worm discontinued 12 years ago and had it adjusted to accommodate tri-colored plastic worms in January and February, Laurent said.

## COLORS ARE KEY

"We started running colors in March. We ran about 40 to choose from to pick the 15 we have," Laurent said. "He sent the mold off to have it re-gated so we could shoot three colors at one time to

get those laminated as clear as they are. We have colors for clear water and for off-colored water, also."

And they aren't just any colors, Freeman and Hughes agreed.

"Well, I just started fishing it this year. Their colors are pretty unique. That's the main thing. That's the dominant deal. It's just the right size," Freeman said. "You can finesse or power fish it, either way. You can fish it deep or shallow. I love them."

He said his favorite colors — the ones triggering bite after bite at Toledo Bend — were watermelon fire and grape mist. "Here's the deal. They've got some colors fish haven't seen before. All the pressure this lake's seen the last two, three years, it's something the fish haven't seen.



That's where the colors come in handy. Their colors are pretty unique. I love them," he said.

"There is not a color out there like it," Hughes said after returning from another successful fishing trip. He and his customers rigged Nightcrawlers on a football swinghead jig that day and caught 17, and Hughes noted that although none were lunkers, all were good-sized bass.

"I just got these a week ago ... and caught a 10.38 the day I got them," the 36-year-old Texan said about the hawg. That big bass fell for a drop-shotted Nightcrawler.

"It's my go-to bait this year," Hughes said. "Obviously on a drop-shot, you always use a straight tail worm. The fish haven't seen that. It gives fish something different. It gives customers something differ-

ent to throw," Hughes said.

"We even Carolina-rigged it this week," he said, "but it's best on a drop-shot and football swinghead jig."

"I can see in the spring using it as a wacky worm," he said.

Mostly, Hughes fishes the Nightcrawler in deep brushpiles and deep timber on his primary spot, Lake Fork.

And the Nightcrawler is tough, Hughes said, noting on his recently completed guide trip that day he caught multiple fish with it.

Freeman is fishing his Nightcrawlers differently, but with the same results.

The 68-year-old veteran guide and tournament angler said he has been strictly Texas-rigging the new plastic worm in 15- to 25-foot depths, targeting everything from points to ridges to humps, "not around any grass or anything, some-

times wood, natural structure."

The biggest bass he's caught in the short time he used it was an 8-pounder, he said.

## HOLD THE SALT

Laurent said the plastic worm doesn't contain salt. Many shaky head-style specialists told him during its development stage they wanted plastic worms without salt because salt weighs them down.

For more information on Mister Twister's Nightcrawler and other Mister Twister artificial lures, go to [www.mistertwister.com](http://www.mistertwister.com) or call (318) 377-8818. ■



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

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## GAME WARDEN

Keith LaCaze

Whitetail deer program manager Jonathan Bordelon (left) and private lands biologist Justin Ebarb inspect plants browsed by deer during a late June survey. INSET: Place game cameras at feeders or near browsing areas to get a look at summer bucks.

**GOT A QUESTION FOR KEITH?**  
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# SUMMERTIME PREP FOR FALL HUNTING



**A** line from a Mark Chesnutt song goes: “It’s too hot to fish, and too hot for golf and too cold at home.” I have an amen for his estimation of the current fishing and golf conditions, and am happy to report good weather at home. But when it’s too hot to do much of anything else, I start thinking about what can be done to prepare for hunting season. Let’s take a look at some summer work we can do now that will improve chances for success later this fall.

## HOW ABOUT A BROWSE SURVEY?

Our hunting lease is enrolled in the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP). Last season our deer harvest was low compared to previous years. Members of the lease reported seeing fewer deer, and even more concerning was the harvest of very few mature bucks. Our buck harvest criteria are

designed to allow bucks to reach 4 ½ years of age or older. It has worked well for several years, but few “shooters” were seen last season — which led to a discussion with Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries deer biologists.

A late-June browse survey was suggested, and we spent an interesting day on the lease conducting the survey and making observations on quality and availability of browse. The biologists offered suggestions for habitat improvement and harvest recommendations. As of this writing, we don’t have survey results yet — but without a doubt the data will help us better manage the deer herd.

A formal survey is great, but most of us can get an idea about how well the deer

are doing by making our own observations. By simply taking morning and afternoon rides in the pickup and slowly cruising open areas, we can spot browsing deer. Bring a good pair of binoculars and look for fawns. Check out antler growth and development on any bucks spotted, and place some game cameras on feeders or browsing areas. Make note of where mature bucks are seen. During archery season, chances are that buck won’t be far from where it spent the summer.

And keep an eye out for turkeys as well, continues on page 134



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and get a count on poults. Pass that information along to LDWF's Private Land Management Assistance Program biologist in your area. The information will help with overall turkey management, and the biologists can provide technical assistance to improve turkey habitat on your land.

## NUISANCE ANIMAL CONTROL

Way back in the late 70s when I began my career at LDWF, nuisance animal control was one of the federally-funded activities we were encouraged to perform on public land — and to document on our daily time and activities report. During the dog days of summer, we did not find very many people fishing or doing much of anything else requiring our attention. So it was a good time to patrol wildlife management areas and address the coyote, armadillo, nutria and beaver problems.

Those nuisance and outlaw quadrupeds are still out there, along with plenty of

feral hogs. And the summer months are a great time to focus on the problem. We need not worry about disturbing other hunters, and coyotes and pigs are less wary and easier to stalk than they will be during hunting season. Just remember to renew hunting licenses, don't shoot from public roads and confine hunting to private land with landowner permission.

## TRESPASSING

We do not have a great deal of trespassing on our hunting lease, and for that I am thankful — but we do have some. Most of it involves OHV and ATV riding. The offenders usually gain access by cutting fences or finding little-used trails leading into the property from nearby residences. It is no surprise that most of the trespass occurs in the summer when no one is hunting and there is little chance of getting caught.

So it's a good idea to patrol during the summer and look for tracks or other evidence of trespass. We may not catch the offender, but we can usually follow tire tracks and trails to entrance and exit

points. Then camera surveillance can be set up for identification, or the trail can be blocked and no trespass signs posted. Whatever preventative measures you choose, now is the time to address the problem. Don't wait for it to get worse, and be sure to notify your local wildlife agents and sheriff's deputies about the problem.

Use caution and good judgement when confronting trespassers, and don't even think about any citizen's arrest ideas. Get names or other identifiers, and photographs if possible, and let law enforcement take it from there.

Long hot summer days are not nearly as enjoyable as cool, crisp autumn mornings. But we can do things now to make those sportsman's paradise mornings even better. ■



Retired Wildlife Enforcement Lieutenant Colonel Keith LaCaze spent 34 years with the LDWF beginning in 1977. LaCaze is happily married to wife Mitzi and the father of two children.

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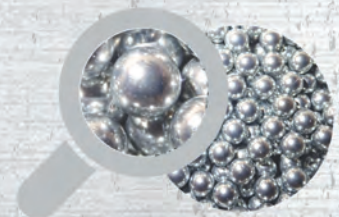
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## STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano

Paper-shooting your bow is a big part of the process of getting your equipment ready for the season.

# BOW PREP NOW IS TIME WELL SPENT

A TRUE-SHOOTING SETUP IS THE RESULT OF ANNUALLY TUNING YOUR EQUIPMENT

Sammy Romano

**A**s we enter August, early archery seasons are around the corner in many areas. With that in mind, my thoughts always shift from fishing to bowhunting. It's time to prepare for the season, and what you do now could very well determine outcomes later this fall.

The first and perhaps most important step is checking your equipment and performing any preventative maintenance needed, as well as tuning your bow for maximum performance and accuracy. Here are a few tips to help you get the most from your bow this season:

## RUN THAT CHECKLIST

Although a lot of archers shoot year-round, for many people, this is the first time your bow will be out of its case since last hunting season. Before beginning the tuning process, check over your bow's limbs, string, cables and cams. Check the limbs, looking for any cracks or fractures; although rare, these could lead to a catastrophic limb failure. Check your string and cables, looking for any nicks, frays, severe discoloration or extreme serving wear. Make sure you don't have any chips or dings in the cams that could cut a string or cable. If you find anything, have these parts replaced immediately. If you're unsure,

consult your local pro shop. If your string set looks good and is less than 2 years old, apply a quality string wax to the unserved areas of both string and cables and rub it in gently. Wipe off any excess to prevent attracting dirt.

## DO THE TWIST

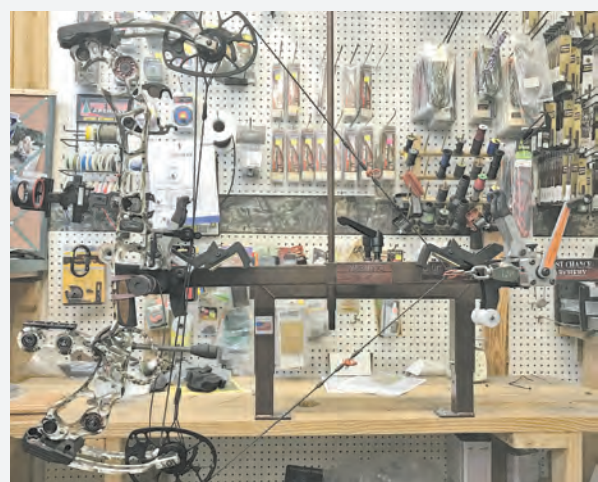
The next step is to add twists to the string/cables to compensate for elongation, and return the bow to factory specifications for axle length and brace height. Modern compound bows are designed to exacting specs, and will

perform best when they are correct. This requires the use of a bow press, and in most cases is best performed by a pro shop technician. Doing this will help to eliminate any excess noise and vibration caused by string over-travel, making the bow more efficient. It will also allow the bow to reach full poundage.

Once the string and cables are twisted to the proper length and several arrows have been fired through the bow, put the bow on a draw board to check for proper cam timing and straightness. Once your bow is properly set to specs, timed, and

## BACK TO THE DRAW BOARD

A draw board is a device that uses a winch to slowly draw back a bow, allowing you to stop the draw at any time and examine timing and cam length. Being able to look at those factors without holding the bow, you are able to be more precise — which yields better results. Adjustments can then be made to correct any issues, making your bow more accurate and efficient. I use a draw board from Last Chance Archery; it fits onto my Last Chance Bow Press and allows for micro-adjustments by adjusting the worm gear on the press itself.



the cams are straight, double check for proper peep rotation and arrow rest timing — if using a fall-away rest. Next, check both nocking point and center shot: If everything looks correct, it's time to paper-shoot your setup and check for proper arrow flight.

## ALWAYS PAPER TUNE A BOW

By shooting a field-tipped arrow through a tight sheet of thin paper from 6 to 9 feet away, you will be able to evaluate your arrow's flight and make adjustments to correct any problems.

For a hunting setup, I always try to achieve a "bullet hole," of perfectly symmetrical rip with all three fletches visible — which indicates perfectly straight arrow flight. Once you achieve this, double-check by firing a broadhead-tipped arrow at a target, followed by a field-tipped arrow. If they fly to different points of impact, you may need to repeat the previous steps. Once these arrows impact the same spot on the target, you are ready to sight your bow in.

After dialing in your bow's sight, all that remains is to practice and practice — then practice some more. Make sure to use proper form, as this builds good muscle memory, which is critical in clutch field situations. Remember, it's not the total number of arrows shot, it's the quality of the shots taken. With time at the range, you'll be ready when an opportunity presents itself. A little time spent now can lead to a full freezer and the trophy wall later. ■



**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](mailto:samboka31@aol.com).



## 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL DUCK AND GOOSE STATE CALLING CONTEST

August 26, 2018

Hosted by the  
**GUEYDAN DUCK FESTIVAL ASSOCIATION**

Presented in part by:



*The Gueydan Duck Festival is proud to host the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Louisiana State Duck and Goose Calling Contest. The contest will be held at the Gueydan Civic Center in Gueydan LA. The contest is sanctioned by the World Duck Calling Contest Committee of Stuttgart, Arkansas and conducted under the auspices of the Gueydan Duck Festival Association.*

### REGISTRATION TIME:

7:30 am - 9:30 am for Duck Calli  
7:30 am - 12:30 pm for Speckle-Bell

The State Duck Calling Contest will begin at 10:00 am and the Goose Calling Contest will begin at 1:00 pm. Boys/Girls and Men/Women compete together.

### REGISTRATION FEE:

\$50 LA Sr. Duck  
\$35 LA Intermediate and Junior Duck  
\$35 LA Specklebelly  
\$50 Two man team  
\$25 Duck Festival Duck and Specklebelly

There will be two categories: Speckle-Belly Goose and Duck. The Contestant will only be allowed to call in his or her age division. There will also be a Two Man Meat contest. Winners in the duck calling divisions will be eligible to represent Louisiana at the World Duck Calling Contest in Stuttgart, Arkansas in November. Winners are also eligible to receive a \$300.00 expenses aid for competing in the World Contest.



### Hunting Dog Trials Saturday, August 25th

Registration: 8:00 am  
Start Time: 9:00 am

Categories: Starter, Seasoned and Finished  
Trophies awarded for 1st, 2nd, 3rd in all categories.  
For more info contact [dogtrialinfo@duckfestival.org](mailto:dogtrialinfo@duckfestival.org)

### CALLING AGE DIVISIONS

#### Goose Calling Age Divisions

Junior Division — 16 and under  
Senior Division — 17 and older

#### Duck Calling Age Divisions

Junior Division — 13 and under  
Intermediate Division — 14-16 yrs old  
Senior Division — 17 and older

\*\*\*Contestants must be a Louisiana resident. Verification of birth date and residency may be required.\*\*\*

Thank you to the following sponsors: Doug's Hunting Lodge, G&H Seed Co, Paradise Louisiana, UBS Financial, Tangle Free Duck Calls, Louisiana Fish Fry, Haydell Game Calls, Flow Petroleum, Crescent Crown, The Bank, Lounsberry Law Firm, Purina Feeds, Jessie & Sam Fluitt, Rabideaux's Sausage Kitchen, Sun Sports

## HAPPY TRAILS

Bill Garbo



If you want to consistently bag a buck like the author's, pay attention to the little details. INSET: The author keeps detailed records of his sight-in targets and how each weapon is sighted in.

# TIME IS SHORT

WITH DEER SEASON JUST OVER THE HORIZON, IT'S TIME TO DO ALL OF THAT PRESEASON WORK ON TRAILS, STANDS AND WEAPONS

**M**y goodness, where has the time gone? In another month, SEC football games will be playing live on television, and the opening of archery season for deer will be less than 30 days away. If you haven't already been working hard in your spare time to ensure that your hunting property, tree stands and weapons of choice are all ready to rock-n-roll, you are already behind the proverbial "8 ball."

As far as my own personal task or to-do list, it all starts during late summer with the mowing of woods roads, shooting lanes and food plots. As I've said before, the devil is always in the details, even when mowing and Bush-Hogging. Along woods roads and around the perimeter of food plot fields, always make note of where last season's communal scrapes and overhanging licking branches were located. A good number of these scrapes repeat from year to year, as long as the critical overhanging branch or branches are not cut or run over. This is very

important from the standpoint of trail-camera setup during the pre-rut and rut time frames. Always keep the best and most-used communal scrape sites under surveillance throughout the season. You will be amazed at just how many different bucks use them.

## TREE STAND SAFETY

This is a topic where every one of us can improve. Most hunting properties have a varied inventory of tree stands and blinds that range from hang-on stands to ladder stands, box blinds, tower stands and everything in between. This means that scattered throughout a typical inventory of stands, the only thing standing between a hunter and serious injury, disability or even death, are nylon ratchet straps, screw-in tree steps, wooden ladder rungs, ropes, nails, bolts and any number of other fasteners and supports.

It takes time for corrosion or rust to take their toll on metal objects, but it will happen, given enough time. It's a totally

different story, however, when it comes to straps and ropes. Damage and weakening caused by UV light and weather can happen amazingly fast. For example, a hang-on or ladder stand can be perfectly safe when you climb down from your last hunt in January, only to become a death-trap by the following October or November.

## ALWAYS CHECK

If it has been in place for even a few months, every stand and its straps and fasteners should be looked at closely before ever climbing in to hunt. Look at them, tug and pull on them, and if there is the slightest indication of stress, strain, and deterioration, replace them immediately. The wrong time to find out that there is a problem is at 0-dark-30, with your rifle or bow slung across your back.

You may have to buy a case of straps each year, but hey, what is the alternative cost of being injured, maimed or even killed. I have learned this through

continues on page 140

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the school of hard knocks and am exceedingly lucky to have come through the past 48 years of deer hunting relatively unscathed.

## YOUR WEAPON

Regardless of what your weapon(s) of choice is, this is the time to double check everything and ensure that when you pull the trigger, what you intend to have happen, happens exactly as planned. This is another area where the school of hard knocks has taught me many lessons. I can still see several impressive whitetail racks today only through my mind's eye, due to me having neglected to properly service and check my weapons beforehand.

With a bow, it's a fairly simple exercise of checking your bow string for wear, checking screws for tightness, and above all, checking your sight and sight pins for accuracy. After the mechanical parts are confirmed to be in order, it becomes an exercise in practice at various ranges and from various heights and angles, to approximate actual hunting conditions.

Regarding a rifle or slug gun, when was the last time you checked to make sure

that your gun's zero point at various distances matches your hunting conditions and expectations? Even though modern-era rings and mounts are way more positive and stable than in the past, dragging a scoped gun in and out of its case, up and down tree-stand ladders, and in and out of narrow blind entry doors, can potentially change the aim point.

So go to a safe place to shoot or an actual range and check it out. For example, a .30-06 sighted in dead-on at 100 yards may be fine if your shots are never over, say, 150 yards. But if you need accuracy to 300 yards, a 150-grain, .30-06 bullet should be 2¾ inches high at 100 yards in order to be about 3 or 4 inches low at 300 yards. Don't take chances. Match your sight-in parameters to what your anticipated hunting conditions will require. ■



*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 old mature southern whitetail bucks is his favorite pursuit by a country mile.*



This photo shows typical fasteners, straps and ropes that could be the only thing standing between you and a wheelchair — or worse.

- Inspect every stand.
- Replace every suspect strap and fastener.
- Continue to enjoy this great hobby.

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## PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

Chris Holmes



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](mailto:cholmes@att.net).

# PLASTICS FOR PANFISH

GET BACK TO THE BASICS AND TARGET BREAM IN YOUR 'YAK





A plastic boat and plastic lures make a good combination for catching a mess of panfish. Reliving childhood memories, Robyn Bordelon shows off a hefty basket of hand-sized fish just like she caught when she was a child. Scores of these tasty fighters can easily be reeled in across a wide variety of locations statewide.

**M**any kayak anglers dream of catching giant fish from their small plastic boats. However, going in the completely opposite direction can be even more fun. Imagine catching scores of tiny, delicious fish — using nothing more than worms and a cane pole, or lightweight spinning gear. And kayaks are a great platform for pursuing these colorful, hard-fighting fish that can be found in all but the extreme coastal areas of the state.

“It’s the gateway drug,” said Robyn Bordelon, on a recent kayak trip specifically targeting bream. “I remember when I was a kid at my grandparents’ camp. I’d be the first one up each morning catching bream off the dock.”

True enough.

For a vast majority of Louisiana fishermen, some species of panfish is likely their first fish — and the one that got them addicted to fishing. However, for many, it has also become a lost art as they moved on to bigger and more glamorous species.

Bordelon found herself lamenting how long it had been since she last caught a perch, but the returning memories were certainly welcomed.

Perhaps it’s the nostalgia, but kayak anglers turning back the clock to those simple days of minimal gear are finding joy in getting back to basics.

“A box of worms and a couple of cane poles are all you need to have a great time,” said James Kellum. “I take my son along in the kayak and we both have a blast catching perch (bluegill).”

While a bamboo cane pole works just fine, Kellum prefers inexpensive, retractable fiberglass models.

“These poles are only about 3 feet long when retracted and fit easily in the kayak. They are strong and easy to rig,” Kellum said.

A long-shank bream hook, a small split-shot weight and an adjustable cork are all the tackle that’s needed. Just thread half a small live worm onto the hook and you’re all set.

Kellum starts off with the bait about 12 inches under the cork and adjusts the depth as conditions dictate.

“It shouldn’t take more than a minute or two to get a bite if the fish are there. I like to fish docks or pilings where the fish hideout in the shadows. We usually catch several in one spot and then just move a kayak length or two to the next,” he said.

In addition to worms, grass shrimp and crickets, tiny pieces of fresh shrimp also work well.

**CONTINUES >**

>

For those that prefer tricking fish on artificial lures, baby spinnerbaits like a 1/16-ounce Beetle Spin can't be beat. Of course, you'll need a lightweight rod-and-reel combo to cast such tiny lures. Four- to 6-pound line is about the heaviest you want to go, and that still gives a little working room for the stray bass that occasionally will be hooked. Catching a hand-sized bluegill on such light equipment is still an epic battle.

Lure color can definitely make a difference. Have a good selection of colors and extra tails on hand. If fishing with more than one person, have each try a different color to see which one is getting better results. Even if you are catching on one color, a change may produce even more fish. And remember the hot color last week may be totally different for your trip.

Bream are often seen gathered in small groups around a piling, hovering over a rock or sitting next to a stump. Cover is the key. Repeated casts at the same structure can mean multiple fish caught.

The simplicity of catching panfish is amplified in the kayak, without being confined to one spot sitting on a dock or along the bank. The freedom to quietly move from spot to spot offers a change of scenery and access to many prime areas.

Bream fishing really is a minimalist pursuit. A small tackle box, a stringer, rag and a hook remover are all that's necessary. So leave the depth finder and landing net at home.

These fish have small mouths so it's best to carry a needle-nose pliers rather than a regular fishing pliers or hook-out. Even better, a small pair of stainless steel locking hemostats can be clamped to your shirt for ready availability and easy removal of hooks from even the tiniest fish.

Getting back to chasing panfish brings a flood of great memories and some unexpected excitement. You'll find yourself hooting and hollering with each hookup, as if you've just latched onto a marlin.

Yes, it still is just that much fun. ■

## BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR RIOS

**R**io Grande cichlids are an invasive species that has spread throughout the metropolitan New Orleans area. Found in fresh and brackish areas, they are becoming a more common catch by anglers fishing for bream and sunfish. Rios are more aggressive at defending their territory, and the concern is they could possibly totally displace native bream.

Rios readily take live worms, small spinners and flies.

They vary in color from light gray to dark black, and often have brilliantly colored yellow and blue spots. Large males often develop a large hump on their forehead.

They are strong fighters and good to eat. So next time you're catching a bunch of bream, be on the lookout for some Rios in the mix.

**Note:** As an invasive species, there is no catch-and-release allowed. You must either put the fish in your ice chest or otherwise kill it.

The Louisiana fishing regulations provide as follows:

"No person shall have in possession or sell in this state a piranha or Rio Grande cichlid. If an angler catches a Rio Grande cichlid using legal methods, the fish shall not be returned to the water or kept alive while in the possession of the angler." ■

Rio Grande cichlids are an invasive species that has spread throughout Southeast Louisiana. They are beautiful and tasty little creatures, but they compete with native fishes and therefore, by law, cannot be returned to the water alive after being caught.



**NEW GEAR**  
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## NEW GEAR REVIEWS

### REEL STEADY ROD STABILIZER

Designed to add stability to heavy offshore fishing rods, the Reel Steady is a great addition for kayak anglers who need all the help they can get. Be it snapper or tarpon, fighting these bruisers from the seated position of a kayak makes handling heavy rods even more difficult. However, adding a Reel Steady provides an additional point of contact that eliminates rod twist. It makes fighting fish easier, and lowers wrist and

forearm fatigue. Made of durable ABS plastic, it simply attaches to the rod with the included stainless bolts, and it's lightweight and ergonomically designed. Reel Steady puts the pressure where it needs to be — on the fish. It also acts as a great carrying handle. MSRP: \$25.99.

**More information:**  
[www.getreelsteady.com](http://www.getreelsteady.com)

### CLIP-ON ROTOGRIP PADDLE HOLDER

Many kayak anglers like to stand and fish, especially for reds. However, it never fails: You spot a nice fish and try to quietly set your paddle down to make a cast, and BAM — the paddle hits the kayak and off goes the red. No more. This simple but effective clip-on paddle holder from the folks that make the Action Hat provides a quick and quiet attachment point for your paddle. Pairing the YakAttack RotoGrip Paddle Holder with a 360-degree fully-articulating clip-on mount, the paddle is securely held in any direction. The device has a strong spring clamp with gripping teeth that simply latches over your waistband. Set it where it fits you best and then lock in the preferred angle with a simple set screw knob. MSRP: \$21.99.

**More information:**  
[www.actionhat.com](http://www.actionhat.com)



### STINGRAY FISHING LINE CUTTER

Cutting fishing line while on the water is a necessity. But knives can be dangerous in a kayak, and clippers often don't provide a clean cut. Biting through braid is impossible — and chewing on mono can lead to a trip to the dentist. Now, problem solved: The unique Stingray line cutter handles all line from the thinnest mono to the heaviest braid. It can be worn around your neck or easily mounted, using the included lanyard and Velcro mounting pads. The Stingray makes cutting all fishing lines easy and safe.

Stainless steel blades are enclosed in a child-safe opening that prevents cutting fingers, but allows for effortless line cutting. It's great for trimming tag ends close to the knot, and also cutting off lures for change-out. Simply slide the line down the slot and it cuts quickly and cleanly. Lightweight and corrosion resistant, the Stingray is a handy gadget that you can use on every kayak fishing trip. MSRP: \$13.99.

**More information:**  
[www.stingraylinecutter.com](http://www.stingraylinecutter.com)

\*Due the lag time from information to print, weather conditions can change the bite so check in regularly with [LouisianaSportsman.com](http://LouisianaSportsman.com) for the latest updates.

\*\*Yes it is hot. Get out early or late to avoid the brutal heat and drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.

# AUGUST'S BEST BETS

## SALTWATER

**WHERE:** Grand Isle: Caminada Pass, Barataria Pass and Elmer's Island beach

**WHAT:** Bull reds and jack crevalle in the passes, and trout on the beach

**HOW:** Make the paddle across Caminada Pass to the beach along Elmer's Island for some early-morning topwater action. Stake out or pull the kayak up onto the beach and get out and wade. Watch for schools of mullet as you slowly make your way along. Toss topwaters along the edges of the bait schools. If fishing with a friend (which is highly advised), have one person use topwater and the other throw a suspending lure. Follow up on any missed topwater strikes with the suspending lure. More often than not, that fish, or another close by, will hit the suspending. For bull reds and jacks, a wide variety of artificial, live and natural baits do the trick. Throw large topwater plugs with good hooks for heart-stopping explosions. Carolina-rigged cracked crab, or chunks of cut mullet, ladyfish and white trout all do the trick. Free-line a live croaker or white trout into the current, or cast to fish busting the surface. Watch your depth finder as you slowly move along. If the screen turns red, you've just rolled over a school of reds or jacks. Toss large curly tail plastics, especially Gulps, rigged on heavy jigheads and hold on. If you don't have a depth finder, look for bait showers and diving birds to give up their whereabouts. Medium to medium-heavy rods with 40- to 50-pound braid help get these fish to the 'yak in a reasonable amount of time. And if conditions allow, fight the fish from an unanchored kayak for an exciting ride.

**LAUNCH:** For Caminada Pass, launch at Bridge Side Marina to your right as soon as you come off the bridge. For Barataria Pass, travel across the island to the east end and launch at Sand Dollar Marina. Both marinas have supplies, food, bait and room rentals. It's a \$5 kayak launch fee for both. The current in both passes gets extremely strong depending on the tides and wind, so always wear a PFD.

**INSIDER TIP:** Golden Meadow is notorious for handing out traffic tickets. Not only for speeding, but also for riding in the left lane when not passing. Strictly obey all traffic laws on your way to and from the island.

## FRESHWATER

**WHERE:** Throughout the state

**WHAT:** Bream

**HOW:** You can find these hand-sized fighters wherever you find fresh and even light-brackish water. Lakes, rivers and most roadside canals are all great places to load up on these delicious little demons. The fight on a cane pole or ultralight spinning tackle provides great sport. Earthworms, grass shrimp, crickets or a variety of tiny spinnerbaits all do the trick. Look for bream

(collectively referred to as bluegill and a variety of sunfish) near stumps, docks and pilings, and under overhanging trees. A fiberglass cane pole rigged with a long-shank bait hook about 1 foot under a small cork is great for all manner of natural baits. For rod and reel action, use an ultralight spinning combo with 6-pound line. Throw 1/16-ounce Beetle Spins in white, yellow, green or black. Watch your retrieve speed, and reel so the tiny bait swims upright without excessive wobbling or riding sideways.

**LAUNCH:** Be it designated boat launches or roadside combat put-ins, the locations to find bream across the state are virtually endless.

**INSIDER TIP:** Bream have spread far south across the state into areas that once strictly held saltwater species. Many are aware of these locations where catching bass and redfish are common, but never think of catching bream. But if bass are there, so are the bream. Try some tiny gear, and you're likely to tap into an untouched fishery.



Kaleb Kellum hoists a feisty bream while his dad, James, looks on. A simple cane pole and a box of worms are all that's necessary for a great day of catching some hard-fighting panfish.

# CAJUN COOKING IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

TOUPS STAYS BUSY IN HOUSEBOAT KITCHEN



Trent's seafood stuffed potatoes are hearty and filling, without losing the delicate taste of the crabmeat and shrimp. **INSET:** Trent Toups' houseboat has a modern, completely equipped kitchen.

"Tonight we do Cajun," proclaimed the rugged man's man with a flourish. "I'm a Coonass — but I'm really half-Italian and half-Cajun. My Momma was a Baldissaro."

Trent Toups was holding court on his 65-foot houseboat in the Red River South Marina, south of Shreveport.

"This houseboat is my fishing base and it's a place for my kids to come swim and water tube," he said. "Not many people in Bossier-Caddo have houseboats. It must be a relic of my heritage. My great grandmother Champagne and her daughter, my grandmother Baldissaro, lived on houseboats."

The 39-year-old owner of Air-Care Heating and Cooling Services was born in Marrero, but has lived in Shreveport since he was about 10. He credits his family for his cooking skills.

"I watched my mother cook. Mom was a very good cook — one of the best cooks I know. One of things I like is she cooks oyster dressing two different ways: one rice and the other bread. I like the bread one 10 percent more than the other," he said, rolling his eyes and licking his lips.

"She taught me how to use seasonings — how to pair them with dishes. And she taught me not to overcook seafood. A lot of people do that.

"Her momma, Dot Baldissaro, cooked Italian because her husband was Italian. She stuffed melatons (mirlatons) with shrimp. I remember stuffed bread crumbs. I like that with a spaghetti sauce on the outside and baked a little.



continued >

"My Toups grandma is from Lafitte. They lived on the bayou. In the summer, me and my brothers would work on the family shrimp boat. Five uncles had shrimp boats. We would take a can of ravioli and set the closed can on the engine block. That was our stove.

"Grandpa liked white beans; that was his favorite. Legend has it that my grandma would soak the beans and then peel every one of them."

Trent readily admits that he cooks a lot, in fact, he's the cook of the house. "I fish and I hunt; that's what I do, but cooking is a passion. I would love to have a small hole-in-the-wall restaurant and cook for people." ■

# TRENT'S SHRIMP AND CRABMEAT STUFFED POTATOES

Trent Toups is a totally spontaneous cook. He humorously mumbled in the kitchen. "I don't know where I got the idea for this. I think it was when I needed to make something at the deer camp. I love seafood and I wanted to give a different twist to it."

Because he cooks off the top of his head, he constantly rummaged through the

houseboat's kitchen cabinets to see what he could try adding. Although the next time he cooks the dish, it may have different ingredients, this version is a guaranteed winner.

It is decadently creamy — and a must for baked potato lovers.

## PREPARATION: Serves 6.

Wash the potatoes, wrap them individually in aluminum foil and place them in a 400° oven. Allow enough time for the potatoes to cook 1 1/2 hours and be ready for the stuffing. Wash the shrimp and set them aside. Fry the bacon until it is done, crumble it and set it aside. Add oil and flour to a heavy pot. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly to prevent burning until roux is blond in color. Reduce heat to medium-low and stir in bell peppers, garlic and onion. Cook, stirring often, until the seasonings are soft.

Add the half & half and butter. Add liquid and powdered crab boil and Velveeta. Heat over low heat until the Velveeta melts and the sauce thickens slightly, about 15 minutes. Stir often. Add the shrimp and cook a few minutes until the water released by the shrimp cooks out. Stir in the crabmeat. When the sauce is thick, stir in cayenne pepper and Creole seasoning to taste. Split each potato and generously ladle the sauce on top. Sprinkle with bacon crumbles and green onions. ■

### TIP!

Using ripe bell peppers instead of green ones creates a sweeter, less sharp flavor. Using three colors is simply for appearance. All ripe peppers taste alike, so for taste's sake, using one color is fine.

## INGREDIENTS:

- 6 very large baking potatoes
- 1 1/4 lb. large shrimp, peeled, deveined and split lengthwise
- 3 slices thick-sliced brown sugar cured bacon
- 1/3 cup cooking oil
- 1/3 cup flour
- 1/2 cup chopped red bell pepper
- 1/2 cup chopped yellow bell pepper
- 1/2 cup chopped orange bell pepper
- 1 head of garlic, minced
- 1/4 large onion, chopped
- 1 qt. half & half
- 1 stick butter
- 1 jar cap of liquid crab boil to taste
- 1 tsp. powdered crab boil
- 1/2 lb. Velveeta
- 1/2 lb. lump crabmeat
- Cayenne pepper to taste
- Creole seasoning to taste
- 3/4 cup chopped green onion tops



Trent used the cap from the liquid crab boil's jar as a measuring device.



Jerald and Glenda Horst are the authors of six excellent books on Louisiana seafood — *The Seafood Bible: Shrimp*, *The Seafood Bible: Crawfish*, *The Seafood Bible: Crabs*, *The Seafood Bible: Oysters*, *The Seafood Bible: Fish: Volume 1* and *The Seafood Bible: Fish: Volume 2*. Jerald and Glenda may be contacted at [jerald@rockinghorst.com](mailto:jerald@rockinghorst.com).



**WHITE PERCH**  
UP NEXT >

## WHITE PERCH — WITH THE BARK ON

This recipe perfectly illustrates Trent Toups' willingness to boldly try new ingredients. Trent picked up a jar of Milani dill sauce out of curiosity at a local Shreveport seafood market. Dill is commonly used in Scandinavian seafood, but is probably the last herb one would expect to be used in Louisiana. If this sauce isn't available where you shop, try mixing some dried dill weed into the butter sauce instead.

Trent grills catfish more often than crappie, but is quick to admit that the mild white flesh of crappie is perfect on the grill, as long as it isn't over-seasoned. The flesh is eaten right off the crisped skin with a fork.

### **PREPARATION:** Serves 4.

Heat a barbecue pit to medium-low temperature. While pit is heating, wash the crappie fillets to remove any stray scales, lightly dry them and set them aside. Over low heat, melt the butter in a small sauce pan. Add the dill sauce, parsley, lemon juice, onion powder and Worcestershire sauce and stir to blend. Add Creole seasoning to taste. Spread the fillets, skin side down, on a platter and dust them with more Creole seasoning to taste. Spread the fillets, skin side down on the grill's grates and baste them with the butter mixture. Repeat the basting 3 or 4 minutes later. Cook until the flesh flakes with a fork, between 5 and 10 minutes total.

### **INGREDIENTS:**

16 medium to large crappie fillets with skin and scales left on  
2 sticks butter  
2 tbsp. Milani dill sauce  
2 tbsp. chopped parsley  
3 tbsp. lemon juice  
1 tsp. onion powder  
1 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce  
Creole seasoning to taste



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# KEEP YOUR TACKLE TANGLE-FREE

By Devin Denman

HOOK BONNETS AND ROD SOCKS ARE EASY FIXES FOR A FRUSTRATING PROBLEM

**H**ow annoying is it when you grab one rod and two others are attached to it?

Time spent untangling rods is time spent not having a line in the water, which ultimately results in time spent not catching fish.

Use these easy tips to keep your rods tangle-free, and make your precious time on the water that much more productive.

Courtesy of Devin Denman

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**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Rod socks (left) and hook bonnets are an easy and relatively inexpensive way to prevent your rods and reels from becoming a tangled mess. **TIP:** You can modify a hook bonnet with scissors to accommodate the treble on your rod's hook keeper to keep things even more tangle-free.

## KEEPING RODS UNTANGLED

It's the weekend, and you're on your way to the ramp with your rods in the back of the truck.

By the time you get there, all of your tackle has become a jumbled mess and pulling the rods apart without breaking anything is like solving a Rubik's Cube.

Not only is it a total pain in the behind, but it's also an accident waiting to take out a guide or rod tip, nick up your fluoro-carbon or mono, or even weaken your blank that might break on hook-set.

## EASY SOLUTIONS

There are two items I use to prevent all these problems: hook bonnets and rod socks.

Hook bonnets are a lifesaver because they're great for securing lures with treble hooks.

Popular lures like gold spoons, suspending lures and topwaters all have multiple treble hooks, with one being secured to the hook keeper and the other left dangling around. A hook bonnet will protect that second treble from snagging anything other than the corner of a fish's mouth, so it's a great tool.

Plus, they're great for storing those same lures in tackle trays, so they don't tangle with other hard baits.

Best of all, a bag of hook bonnets isn't expensive, usually around \$3.

**Pro tip:** They can be modified with a pair of scissors to accommodate the treble kept by the hook keeper on your rod. Snipping off one side of the bonnet exposes the one hook you need to keep the lure in place.

## ROD SOCKS

My boat comes with a rod locker for safely securing my rods, but even then fishing line somehow snags reel handles and rod guides ... you get the picture.

An easy fix is using rod socks to isolate each one, keeping tangling from happening in the first place.

But they're not good just for rod lockers. Use them when transporting equipment in the back of your truck — they're good to keep the blanks and fishing line protected from nicks and scratches.

**Pro tip:** Rod socks can be fairly inexpensive at \$6 to \$8 each. But that can add up pretty quickly, even if you're protecting just a few rods. A good place to shop is eBay or even Amazon, where you can get them direct from the factory for \$2 or less.

## CONCLUSION


You're a good angler, and should take care of your tackle to protect your investment and execute your fishing trips more efficiently. Hook bonnets and rod socks are tools to aid you in that endeavor.

Tight lines, y'all. ■

*Editor's Note: Capt. Devin Denman is an avid inshore angler who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit [lafishblog.com](http://lafishblog.com).*

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Photo courtesy of Josh Chauvin

## GO 'SIGHT-CRABBING' TO TARGET MONSTER BLUES

INSTEAD OF LETTING TASTY CRUSTACEANS COME TO YOU, GO AFTER BIG CRABS THIS WAY

**ABOVE:** Instead of putting out nets and simply letting them come to him, Josh Chauvin prefers targeting and hunting down jumbos by 'sight-crabbing' with a rod and reel in his 10-foot boat.

**N**ets, traps and other methods can easily catch numbers of crabs, but I really don't have any interest in catching small or medium-sized crustaceans. So instead of waiting for a crab to come to my bait, going out to hunt the crab is my preferred method.

On sunny days, I go to the clearest moss-filled marsh bays I can find with my small aluminum flat boat. (These brackish water crabs are the sweetest tasting ones, in my opinion.)

I look for bays with 1 ½ to 3 feet of water, with the bottom being a mix of about half moss and half hard mud. (When the bottom is all moss, the crabs are extremely tough to spot. And areas coated with scum make seeing the crabs much more difficult.)

Oftentimes the ponds are filled with monster crabs, which seem to like shallow, hot water. Nearly half the crabs spotted are large selects. (Maybe small crabs stick to the muddier water to avoid predators.) The bay crabs seem to be very fat and full, compared to bayou crabs, which are often skinny with less meat.

## POLARIZED GLASSES ARE KEY

A small aluminum boat works great because it gives you the stability to stand in the front and go into very shallow water. My 10-foot flat works great either solo or with a friend.

To get the best view, polarized glasses to see through the sun's glare are a must. The mirrored, coated lenses let in less light, which makes seeing crabs more difficult — so light grey or amber lenses work best. Also, standing or sitting high is important so a long paddle is needed.

Also, I often see redfish — so I keep a pole or my fly rod ready to cast out to any tasty fish I see during the trip.

I prefer to slowly paddle with the wind in my face, which helps keep the boat from running over the crabs. I often spot several large crabs together, but they usually won't leave unless the boat runs over them.

To catch these massive crabs, I use a simple rod and reel with a ½-ounce jighead baited with a slab of catfish skin. (Any bait will work, but the catfish skin covers the crab's eyes well and is very tough, and lasts for dozens of crabs.)

## REELING THEM IN

Once I spot a crab, I toss the bait out in front of it. Then, I stick my paddle in the mud to anchor while the crab begins to feed. (If the boat is moving with wind and current, the crab often gets pulled loose from swimming too fast or

from sharp jerks caused by wave action.) The crab can see the boat, so if it's not allowed to get a good taste of the bait, it'll swim off and hide for good.

While the boat is anchored, I slowly lift the crab from the bottom, with my net ready to scoop it up with my other hand. Crabs can strongly hold to grass, but once they're in the water swimming while feeding on the bait — it's game over.

The best part is not having to waste time or effort dealing with small to medium-sized crabs.

I much prefer a few dozen jumbos over a limit of 12 dozen mixed crabs, anyway. (Though in the bays — when you spot a

crab every 30 to 100 yards of slow paddling — a limit of large crabs in a day is very possible if you want that many.)

So if you're looking for a fun workout to make crabbing more of a sporting challenge — where you actually hunt for the crabs instead of letting them come to you — try 'sight-crabbing' for monster blues in the clear mossy bays along Louisiana's coast. ■

*Editor's Note: Josh Chauvin is a non-stop outdoorsman who also writes the Apex Predator column for LouisianaSportsman.com.*

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A violet goby is a speckled trout favorite, and just might be the reason we have purple-colored lures. Keeping a close eye on what a trout throws up when you reel it in can give important clues on what it's eating that day — and might ultimately help you catch more fish.

# MYSTERY BAITFISH REVEALED

KEEP AN EYE ON WHAT A TROUT THROWS UP IN YOUR BOAT — IT MIGHT HELP YOU CATCH MORE FISH

By Devin Denman

**W**e were fishing Delacroix when a speckled trout coughed up this weird thing shown in the picture above. Read on to learn what exactly it is — and why it's important to you as an inshore angler.

## THE MYSTERY BAITFISH

It was another spring day of targeting trout off of Oak River in Delacroix, and the specks were doing what they always do — holding in deep water with current and flowing bait.

Given this, the winning pattern was easy to discern: locate deep holes and fish bottom structure slack-lined, with a  $\frac{3}{8}$ - to  $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce jighead.

But the trout were also doing something else they always do: Sliming up anything they touched, pooping everywhere and barfing up their food. (I swear they aim for upholstery and GPS screens.)

Given this, I have a habit of looking at what they upchuck, because it could give me a clue as to what they're eating. Even when half-digested, trout favorites like shrimp, pogies, and mullet are easy to identify.

But a few trout that day coughed up something that we could not get an ID on. A quick glance might lead one to believe it's a mullet, but the shape of the tail ruled that out. And the face? Nothing like a mullet's.

We were stumped.

So, as a last resort, I took a picture and sent it to a marine biologist I know and trust to provide the correct answer ...

And she did.

## WHAT IS A VIOLET GOBY?

Violet gobies are ugly, bottom-dwelling fish that feed on organic detritus, a fancy \$10 word that means crap.

But they could also be the reason why we have purple lures.

The only ones I've seen in the marsh are what trout coughed up, but those seen in a cursory image search online reveal a fish with a near-exotic color.

Look for yourself and see how radiantly purple this fish is: It sort of reminds me of a purple Sparkle Beetle. Take it a step further: The shape and size remind me of a queen-sized Sparkle Beetle.

And these weirdo fish feed on the bottom, right where we catch speckled trout on a jig.

This begs the question: Do trout bite purple on certain days because they best see that color in those water conditions? Or are they biting purple because that's the color of the gobies they are feeding on?

## BEING A SMARTER INSHORE ANGLER

Of course, I'm making the assumption that violet gobies appear very purple in the wild. I don't know, but maybe a shrimper could tell us.

Either way, this is part of an inshore angler's journey: The learning curve.

When you learn, you ultimately catch more speckled trout and redfish — but the key is paying attention and knowing which questions to ask.

So keep a close eye on what that trout



Courtesy of Devin Denman

just spewed all over the bottom of your boat — it might actually help you put more fish in the box.

Tight lines, y'all. ■

*Editor's Note: Capt. Devin Denman is an avid inshore angler who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit [lafishblog.com](http://lafishblog.com).*



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Watching a stationary object in the water — like these pilings at the Trestles in Lake Pontchartrain — will reveal which way the current is moving, and how quickly. Wind has a big effect on tidal movement, so no matter what your tide guide might say, there's nothing like real-time information on the water to plan your day.

# GET REAL-TIME TIDAL CONDITIONS — RIGHT ON THE WATER

Patrick Bonin

CRAB TRAP BUOYS, PILINGS PROVIDE ACCURATE INFO ON WIND'S TIDAL IMPACT By Patrick Bonin

**W**indy conditions are pretty much a way of life, especially along the Louisiana coast — and those breezes can have a big impact on tidal flow and the timing of high and low tides. “Typically the speed of the tide is relatively accurate on those tide charts everybody gets off the internet,” said Chas Champagne, owner of Matrix Shad soft plastic lures. “But ... the wind changes everything all the time. Those charts are just five-year predictions off the lunar table, so that's like if the world was in a vacuum. Now by the coast, lunar gravity does create an issue because you're dealing with the whole ocean, so it's more accurate down around places like Grand Isle. But in any kind of bay or lake, the wind is such a big factor on it.

“If you get a big southeast wind, you'll get a rising tide. If you get a northwest wind, it blows everything out and you get a fall in the tide.”

To get a real handle on a particular day's conditions at his locale — in and around Lake Pontchartrain — Champagne simply keeps a close eye out as he starts his day. What he sees on the water goes a long way in determining where he might venture to target specks, or even sight-fish reds in ponds.

“What I do all the time, when we come out the pass first thing

in the morning, I'm looking for any stationary object to run my boat 5 feet from so I can see the way the current is breaking on a piling — or crab traps work real well, too,” he said. “Then I can gauge the velocity around the break of the piling or the trap, and the direction of it, then I make my decision: I might like one area on a hard filing tide, so I'll go there. If it's lightly coming in, I might go somewhere else.

“For redfish, I have some ponds that hold a foot of water on average, and some that hold 8 inches of water on average — so if I see the tide is really coming in at Mach 3, then I'll know I'll be able to get into those skinny ponds that day,” he said. “But if I see it falling at Mach 3, I'll know I need to stay away from the shallow ponds so I don't get stuck.”

Just be aware of the wind's impact on tidal estimates for your particular area, he said, then plan accordingly and get a good real-time reading using a piling or other stationary object in the water when you actually head out.

“If you have a 20 mph northwest wind and an incoming tide, it's going to shake that tide up. It's not going to be right on time,” Champagne said. “That water will drop a foot lower than a normal mean tide, and that goes for the whole state of Louisiana — northwest winds blow everything out.” ■



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# TRACKING TROUT MOVEMENT AT THE MRGO

By Devin Denman

RECAPTURE INFO SHOWS SOME SPECKS HAVEN'T GONE TOO FAR

**B**ack in May, me and some of my closest fishing buddies targeted speckled trout to be tagged and released at the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) Long Rocks.

It's been only a couple months, but already several recaptures are in.

## THANKS

First, a big thank you goes out to the anglers who reported specks they recaptured, and to the volunteers at TAG Louisiana.

I really appreciate all of you for being a team player in this effort, and I feel that TAG Louisiana has done a great job despite the tumultuous changes in years past.

## ABOUT THOSE RECAPTURES ...

If you already read my blog, then you're aware of the great trout action inshore anglers saw at the MRGO Long Rocks near Hopedale.

In just a few fishing trips, we caught 300-plus specks, with some of the bigger ones fall-



Devin Denman and some fishing buddies tagged and released lots of speckled trout along the MRGO rocks earlier this spring, and he's already received several recapture reports on some of the fish.

Photos courtesy of Devin Denman

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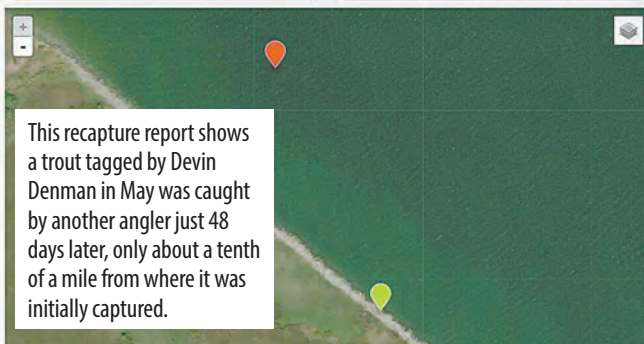
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July 11, 2018 - The following information pertains to a Speckled Trout which was tagged, released, and later recaptured. We thank you for your participation in this important research and wish you the best of luck in your fishing future. Recapture Details for Tag No. LV442055

Initial Capture		Recapture	
Date : 05/10/2018	Angler: Devin Denman	Date : 06/27/2018	Angler: 
Length : 13.0 inches		Length : 13.0 inches	Distance Traveled : 0.13 miles
Location Description : Riprap on shoreline of ship channel		Days at Large : 48 days	Recapture Disposition : Not Released
		Location Description : Beginning of rocks at the MRGO	



ing prey to artificial lures like lipless crankbaits, jerkbaits and jigs.

We had a blast, and kept some specks for delicious trout tacos — but a good number were also tagged and released.

## HOW THE TAGGING PROGRAM WORKS

Should an angler recapture one of the tagged fish, they can call the phone number printed on the tag to supply the recapture information (in exchange for a reward of some sort), and then they can do as they please with the fish.

Because TAG Louisiana is a cooperative program, they share the recapture information with the person who originally tagged the fish in the first place. (In this case, moi.)

So, a few recaptures already have come back, and almost all of them have the fish remaining very near the place they were initially captured.

## WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

For me (someone who is not a marine biologist), these handful of recaptures are not enough to indicate a trend, but it does show us that at least some speckled trout are still on the MRGO Long Rocks.

So maybe a lot of trout are still there, and that's why those three were recaptured. Or maybe only those few were left, and that's why they were recaptured so quickly.

See? You can slice it any way you like.

## CONCLUSION

I enjoy tagging because it helps me learn more about speckled trout, though it certainly doesn't provide all the details.

But it's a way I can give back to a fishery that's been so good to me, and also learn more about the fish I love and share what I discover with those who have the same passion I do.

Tight lines, y'all. ■

*Editor's Note: Capt. Devin Denman is an avid inshore angler who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit [lafishblog.com](http://lafishblog.com).*



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## BIRCHWOOD CASEY'S BUSHWACKER RIMFIRE TARGET

By Dan Kibler

I inherited a .22 WMR rifle several years ago upon the death of my father-in-law, and until a few weeks ago, I didn't really shoot it very much, because I'm not all that keen on punching holes in paper just for fun.

That was before I discovered Birchwood Casey's Bushwacker Rimfire Target. In 30 minutes, my son and I sent 50 rounds downrange and had a blast; I could hardly get the gun out of his hands, particularly because he

kept trying to top my personal best of six straight hits at 50 yards with iron sights.

The heavy, steel target features two ¼-inch thick, 4-inch wide steel target paddles equipped with 3-inch Target Spots (stick-ons that are easily replaceable after each use). The paddles are rigged so they alternate between upright and down, one target popping up when the other is knocked down. After setting the Bushwacker up and securing it, we never had to waste time resetting it, even after dozens of shots.

The Bushwacker requires nothing for setup; it's ready to shoot right out of the box. MSRP is \$79.99.

**More Info:** [www.birchwoodcasey.com](http://www.birchwoodcasey.com)

## OFF GRID TOOLS' SURVIVAL AXE

By Dan Kibler

My son, the Eagle Scout, is in his late 20s now, but I can only imagine how he'd have been the toast of his troop 10 years ago if he'd showed up at camp with Off Grid Tools' Survival Axe.

This cool little multi-tool weighs about 1 ½ pounds, and at 11 inches long, it's small enough to carry on your belt or in your tool box. It has so many uses that it would have probably gotten worn out during a weekend camping trip — except that it's way too tough.

The base tool is a stainless-steel hatchet, but that just gets things started. Off Grid lists 31 different features, including the hatchet blade, a hammer head, nail claw, pry bar, a 6-inch reciprocal saw blade hidden in the handle, a handful of hex sockets, a cutting blade, a gas valve wrench, bottle opener and a hardened-steel glass breaker.

I understand that the Survival Axe would be a must for off-road camping, and with wood to cut and tent pegs to drive in the ground, it's a winner in that regard. But I love the idea of all the additional uses I could come up with for the hunting camp, several of them involving the rough butchering of deer or other big-game animals. I'm sure I could think up more — just maybe not 31. The MSRP is \$39.99.

**More Info:** [www.offgridtools.com](http://www.offgridtools.com)



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New product submissions can be emailed to **Mark Hilz** at [markh@lasmag.com](mailto:markh@lasmag.com).



## CULPRIT'S WATER DRAGON

By Dan Kibler

Soft-plastic lizards were all the rage 20 years ago when the Carolina rig ruled the bass-fishing world, but over the past decade, you haven't heard much about them. The creature bait has been the hot lure.

"A lot of people have forgotten about lizards with so many creature lures out there," said bass pro Dustin Wilks of Rocky Mount, N.C., a six-time Bassmaster Classic qualifier "There haven't been any very exciting changes in lizards in a long time."

So Wilks got together with one of his sponsors, Culprit, and after six months of design, a new bait was born, the Culprit Water Dragon.

A 7-inch bait available in 12 colors, the Water Dragon debuted at the recent ICAST trade show.

"We wanted to see what we could do to a lizard to catch bigger fish," said Wilks, who designed a bait with bigger, thicker rear legs and gills that come off the rear of the bait's head.

"You'd think the gills would make the most difference, but the thing I like best is the bigger, thicker back legs," he said. "That helps it float when you're Texas-rigging it. The gills have a bigger effect on it when you Carolina rig; it helps keep it planing a little better."

But Wilks likes two other, less noticeable features.

"The Water Dragon has a noticeable lateral line, which is perfect for guys who like to dye a bait's tail with chartreuse," he said. "And the back of the bait isn't smooth; it's got bumps. That makes it much easier to skin hook. If the bait was smooth, the tip of the hook would pop out more easily."

Culprit Water Dragons come eight to a pack, with an MSRP of \$5.29.

**More Info:** [www.culprit.com](http://www.culprit.com)

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## OTTERBOX COOLERS

High performance coolers have been around for several years now, and it seems like more and more companies are making them. And while many are content with making clones of other brands, OtterBox has taken things a step further, making their own Venture Series coolers with unique features that allow you to mount many of their other products directly to the coolers.

One knock against all high performance coolers is their weight. But that's what it takes to keep ice for days. OtterBox thought of that though, and makes the easiest set of wheels to add (and remove) whenever you want some help. An easy-to-mount pull handle helps, and can be used in multiple positions.

With 2-inch, refrigeration grade insulation, these coolers can keep ice up to 14 days, and allow for the mounting of numerous accessories in multiple locations on the coolers. Mount bottle openers, cup holders, a fishing rod holder, phone mounts, side trays, and OtterBox's signature series dry boxes to keep everything conveniently located.

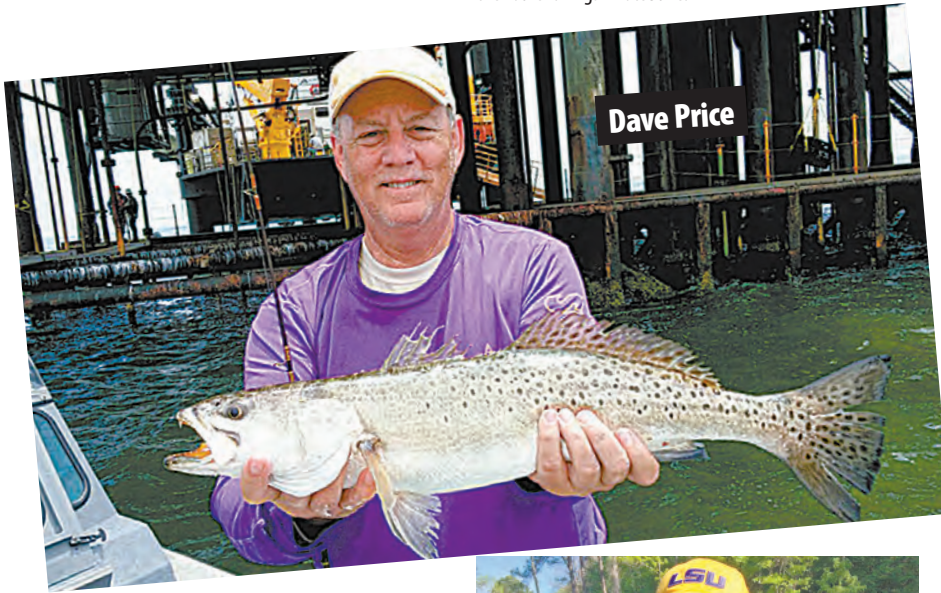
Tie-down kits, ice packs, locks, trays, and cutting boards specifically designed and shaped for onboard storage and use with these coolers are also options offered by OtterBox. The Venture coolers are offered in three sizes — 25, 45 and 65 quarts, and the sizes are based on true interior capacities.

Otterbox also offers soft-sided coolers which are available in 20- and 30-quart sizes, and keep ice up to three days.

**More Info:** [www.otterbox.com](http://www.otterbox.com)



Dave Price of Luling with a nice trout caught on live croaker at the Fourchon rigs in late June.



**Dave Price**

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Digital images must be at least 200KB and in jpeg format.



**Brian Frey**

Brian Frey with his first fallow deer killed in Texas.



**Dian Obanion**

Dian Obanion caught this speckled trout in Grand Isle.



**Jack McKay**

Jack McKay, 13, caught bass, sac-a-lait and bream while fishing with his grandfather, John F. McKay, on April 4. The sac-a-lait was the biggest Jack's ever caught.



**Laila Grace Hidalgo**

Laila Grace Hidalgo killed her first 8-point buck, which weighed-in at 160 pounds.



**Keith & Parker Lambert**

Keith Lambert, 7, and brother Parker, 6, with their first fish — a catfish and bass.



**Caden Moreau**

Caden Moreau, 11, killed his first deer at Boeuf WMA last fall. It was taken out of a pop-up blind with his father at his side during the youth hunt.



**Braden Bryant**

Braden Bryant with a big flathead catfish caught on Loggy Bayou.



**Matthew Buckelew**

Matthew Buckelew took this nice 9-point buck with a 15 1/4-inch inside spread while hunting on his family farm located in Vermilion Parish on Dec. 20. Matthew killed the deer with a Browning 7 Mag A-bolt with Leupold optics.



**Curt Lawrence**

Using live shad on a drop line, Curt Lawrence of Woodworth took advantage of the lower side of Pool 2 on the Red River to catch this 36-pound catfish.



Tony Heyward, back, of Denham Springs holds a Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries tag from a trout he caught in Grand Isle. Bruce McKean, left, from Castle Rock, Colo., and his two sons, David and Evan, got in on the speck action as well.



**Zane Fontenot**

Zane Fontenot killed his first deer in Area 6 in St. Landry Parish. The 100-pound doe was taken with a 7mm-08 at 100 yards.



**Jennifer Arceneaux**

Jennifer Arceneaux killed this massive boar in Centreville, Miss. late last year. It weighed approximately 450-475 pounds.



**Ali Mae Leblanc**

Ali Mae Leblanc, 8, was on a fishing trip with her daddy in Dularge when she caught her first redfish.



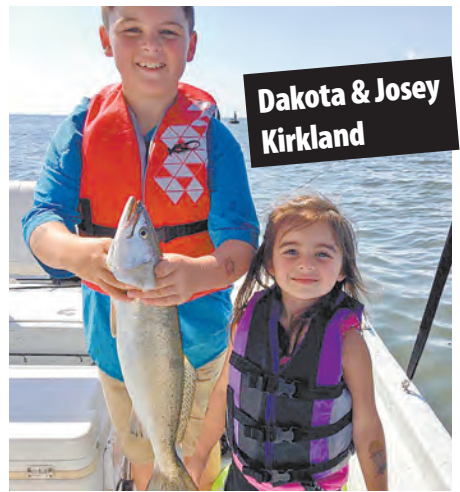
**Derek Gaubert**

Derek Gaubert of Des Allemands took this nice 4-point on a rainy December morning on his lease in the back of Bayou Gauche.



**Jared Vallere**

Jared Vallere reeled in his first-ever redfish in Golden Meadow.



**Dakota & Josey Kirkland**

Dakota and Josey Kirkland pose with a nice Hopedale speck.



**Brody Newton**

RIGHT: Bryce, Brody and Bradley LeBlanc made great memories yo-yo fishing with their papa on Lake D'Arbonne during the spring spawn.



**Bryce, Brody & Bradley**

LEFT: Brody Newton, 10, killed his first deer, a 100-pound spike, while hunting with his grandfather, Marion Newton, on their lease south of Baldwin in St. Mary Parish.



**Teresa LeBlanc**

Teresa LeBlanc caught this 22-inch long and nearly 4-pound speck south of Leesville at Casse-Tete Island.



**Karlie Duhe'**

Karlie Duhe' caught a couple of nice Hopedale redfish before heading back to Waco, Texas.



**Maddox Champagne**

Maddox Champagne, 7, shot his first buck, a 178-pound 8-point, with a 7 mm mag while hunting with his dad Shawn.



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Shift 4x4



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## FISHING REGULATIONS



# 2018

These regulations are unofficial. For official regulations, always check the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries pamphlet and/or the federal pamphlet. [www.wlf.louisiana.gov](http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov)

### SALTWATER

#### STATE REGULATIONS (0-10.357 miles<sup>Δ</sup>)

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 <sup>^</sup> & Black <sup>^</sup>	24" TL	4/day (aggregate)*
Nassau & Goliath	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS	
Red <sup>^</sup> & Yellowfin <sup>^</sup>	20" TL	
Scamp <sup>^</sup>	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, & Bluefin 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.  
<sup>Δ</sup> 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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Date	Sunrise	Sunset
1st	6:19 a.m.	7:53 p.m.
2nd	6:20 a.m.	7:53 p.m.
3rd	6:21 a.m.	7:52 p.m.
4th	6:21 a.m.	7:51 p.m.
5th	6:22 a.m.	7:50 p.m.
6th	6:22 a.m.	7:49 p.m.
7th	6:23 a.m.	7:49 p.m.
8th	6:24 a.m.	7:48 p.m.
9th	6:24 a.m.	7:47 p.m.
10th	6:25 a.m.	7:46 p.m.
11th	6:25 a.m.	7:45 p.m.

Date	Sunrise	Sunset
12th	6:26 a.m.	7:44 p.m.
13th	6:27 a.m.	7:43 p.m.
14th	6:27 a.m.	7:42 p.m.
15th	6:28 a.m.	7:41 p.m.
16th	6:28 a.m.	7:40 p.m.
17th	6:29 a.m.	7:39 p.m.
18th	6:30 a.m.	7:38 p.m.
19th	6:30 a.m.	7:37 p.m.
20th	6:31 a.m.	7:36 p.m.
21st	6:31 a.m.	7:35 p.m.
22nd	6:32 a.m.	7:34 p.m.

Date	Sunrise	Sunset
23rd	6:32 a.m.	7:33 p.m.
24th	6:33 a.m.	7:32 p.m.
25th	6:34 a.m.	7:31 p.m.
26th	6:34 a.m.	7:30 p.m.
27th	6:35 a.m.	7:28 p.m.
28th	6:35 a.m.	7:27 p.m.
29th	6:36 a.m.	7:26 p.m.
30th	6:36 a.m.	7:25 p.m.
31st	6:37 a.m.	7:24 p.m.

\*Time based on New Orleans, sunrise/sunset; source U.S. Naval Observatory. Corrections (in minutes)

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## ASTRO TABLES

**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.

### AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:

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	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	
Wed 1					38
Thu 2					42
Fri 3					49
Sat 4					62
Sun 5					55
Mon 6					53
Tue 7					56
Wed 8					67
Thu 9					78
Fri 10					88
Sat 11					89

Sun 12					76
Mon 13					62
Tue 14					49
Wed 15					40
Thu 16					37
Fri 17					39
Sat 18					46

Sun 19					33
Mon 20					26
Tue 21					25
Wed 22					24
Thu 23					34
Fri 24					45
Sat 25					55

Sun 26					63
Mon 27					54
Tue 28					48
Wed 29					41
Thu 30					39
Fri 31					42

25 50 75  
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LUNAR PERIODS						TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED	
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT				
11:12 pm	3:38 am - 5:36 am	10:38 am	4:03 pm - 6:01 pm				
11:44 pm	4:12 am - 6:28 am	11:35 am	4:37 pm - 6:53 pm				
12:17 am	4:50 am - 7:20 am ☀	12:34 pm	5:15 pm - 7:45 pm				HALF
12:53 am	6:12 am - 9:12 am ☀	2:38 pm	6:37 pm - 9:37 pm ☀				
1:34 am	7:01 am - 10:11 am	3:43 pm	7:26 pm - 10:36 pm ☀				
2:22 am	7:53 am - 11:13 am	4:49 pm	8:18 pm - 11:38 pm				
3:16 am	8:53 am - 12:15 pm	5:53 pm	9:18 pm - 12:40 am				
4:18 am	9:56 am - 1:18 pm	6:53 pm	10:21 pm - 1:43 am				HIGH
5:26 am	11:01 am - 2:17 pm ☀	7:47 pm	11:26 pm - Midnight				Perigee
6:37 am	12:08 pm - 3:10 pm ☀	8:35 pm	Midnight - 2:42 am				NEW
7:48 am	1:12 pm - 4:02 pm	9:17 pm	12:33 am - 3:35 am				
8:58 am	2:15 pm - 4:47 pm	9:56 pm	1:37 am - 4:27 am				
10:05 am	3:14 pm - 5:30 pm	10:32 pm	2:40 am - 5:12 am				
11:10 am	4:12 pm - 6:10 pm	11:06 pm	3:39 am - 5:55 am				
12:12 pm	5:08 pm - 6:50 pm	11:41 pm	4:37 am - 6:35 am				
1:12 pm	6:03 pm - 7:31 pm		5:33 am - 7:15 am ☀				
2:10 pm	6:56 pm - 8:14 pm ☀	12:17 am	6:28 am - 7:56 am ☀				HALF
3:07 pm	7:48 pm - 8:56 pm ☀	12:55 am	7:21 am - 8:39 am ☀				
4:00 pm	8:38 pm - 9:44 pm	1:36 am	8:13 am - 9:21 am				
4:51 pm	9:28 pm - 10:30 pm	2:20 am	9:03 am - 10:09 am				LOW
5:38 pm	10:14 pm - 11:20 pm	3:07 am	9:53 am - 10:55 am				
6:22 pm	11:01 pm - 12:09 am	3:58 am	10:39 am - 11:45 am				Apogee
7:01 pm	11:42 pm - Midnight	4:50 am	11:26 am - 12:34 pm				
7:38 pm	Midnight - 1:00 am	5:45 am	12:07 pm - 1:25 pm ☀				
8:12 pm	12:23 am - 1:51 am	6:40 am	12:48 pm - 2:16 pm ☀				FULL
8:44 pm	1:02 am - 2:40 am	7:36 am	1:27 pm - 3:05 pm				
9:15 pm	1:37 am - 3:33 am	8:33 am	2:02 pm - 3:58 pm				
9:46 pm	2:15 am - 4:23 am	9:30 am	2:40 pm - 4:48 pm				
10:19 pm	2:51 am - 5:17 am	10:29 am	3:16 pm - 5:42 pm				
10:53 pm	3:30 am - 6:10 am	11:28 am	3:55 pm - 6:35 pm				

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

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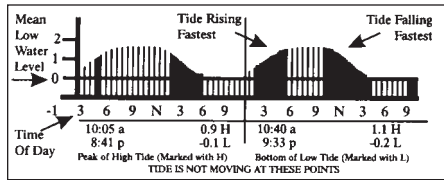



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Tide Corrections

Location	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
<b>Calcasieu Pass, Lighthouse Wharf</b>	<b>HIGH</b>	<b>LOW</b>
Cote Blanche Island	+4:33	+3:40
Eugene Island	+1:49	-0:39
Lighthouse Point	+0:58	-0:53
Mermentau River ent.	+0:20	+0:25
Point Au Fer	+1:53	-1:02
Point Chevreul	+3:16	+0:30
Rabbit Island	+2:01	-0:36
Shell Island	+3:08	+0:45
South Point	+1:55	-0:33
Southwest Pass, Vermillion Bay	+1:42	+0:51
Weeks Bay	+3:58	+3:56

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5	6	7	8	9	10	11 NM
12	13	14	15	16	17	18 FQ
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26 FM	27	28	29	30	31	

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1	2	3	4	LQ		
5	6	7	8	9	10	11 NM
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# Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

## BEAT THE HEAT FOR AUGUST SPECKS

Plan early trips for falling tide in Lake Borgne

Get an early start, keep an eye on the radar and take advantage of the falling tide for Lake Borgne trout this month.

Courtesy of Capt. Matt McCabe

**F**ishing is all about stacking as many odds in your favor as possible, and something you should certainly put in your favor this month is leaving the dock early. Not only do you beat the heat, but you also get a much better speckled trout bite, according to Slidell guide Capt. Matt McCabe.

"We're only finding about an hour of falling tide every day," he said in early July. "From what I'm seeing and what the tide tables are showing me, it's going to be like the second week of October before we get the falling tide during the day."

With that being the case, McCabe said it's critical to go early so you can catch the last of the falling current.

"It's falling most of the night, and we're catching that tail end," he said. "When it quits, it's done — time to go redfishing."

McCabe likes fishing the Lake Borgne platforms this time of year, and said which one he goes to is based upon the conditions.

"It's just a matter of having some experience of fishing around them and knowing where the shell pads are," he said. "You

have to always play the current and the wind."

McCabe throws live shrimp with his clients, but he said soft plastic lures can also be effective — although not as good as the real stuff.

August can be a downright tough month to speckled trout fish, so another thing that McCabe stacks in his favor is history of what has happened in past years.

"I always keep a log and write everything down: What the tide was doing, what the wind was doing, and I always refer back to that when I get into these months," he said.

McCabe said when fishing in August, being mindful of the radar — particularly when you're in a wide open body of water like Lake Borgne, is critical for safety.

"We start dealing with waking up in the morning, and there's rainstorms all over at daylight," he said. "If it gets on to 8:30, 9 in the morning, we just call it because if the rain does pass and the sun does come out, that water gets 88, 90 degrees and those fish are not going to eat." ■

- Joel Masson



Capt. Chad Dufrene with a Delacroix Island redfish caught tight-lining glow soft plastics on a ¼-ounce jighead in deep bayous.

## DELACROIX'S REDFISH SUMMER

Previously, on a typical August day, Delacroix anglers would head out into Black Bay and fish the same islands and structures that have produced trout for decades. Stone Island, Lonesome Island, Belle Island, the Wreck, the Black Tanks,

Iron Banks and Battledore Reef were landmarks thick with trout and consistent producers, year after year.

But that was then. Now Delacroix stays inundated with muddy river water flowing unchecked through Mardi Gras cut, and the freshwater bath caused explosive grass growth throughout the interior that's never been seen before. Combine that with a brutally cold winter and the sudden onslaught of summer heat, and the result is an absence of shrimp and trout throughout the region.

The one saving grace has been an abundance of redfish, and most anglers have contented themselves with chasing hard-fighting spot tails.

Capt. Chad Dufrene (985-637-6357) said he expects that pattern to continue this month, unless we get a strong surge of south or southeast winds to bring in higher tides and salty water — and the shrimp and predators that follow them.

"We've had strong and consistent west winds for months that have kept the fresh water in, the saltier water out, the tides low, and the shrimp far outside," he said. "The redfish action has been great along the sides of the big outer bays and in the deeper canals and bayous, and in some of the deeper channels between the bays. The thing to beware of is very low tides, almost like winter, and thick grass everywhere. We see boats getting stuck and hitting crab traps just about every day due to the low water. But stay in the deeper bayous such as Oak River and False River ... The reds are hanging along the edges of the grass wherever you find a decent current line. Fish market shrimp under a cork and they'll find you."

Dufrene said he's never seen the grass so thick and extensive as it is right now.

"What we need is a good saltwater flush to kill off some of the grass and bring in some shrimp, and the trout will show up with them," he said.

"Then all the action will resume at those Black Bay typical late-summer hotspots. Otherwise, we'll be fishing reds." ■

- Rusty Tardo

# SLICK TOPS AND SPIDERS FOR OUACHITA CRAPPIE

**T**he Ouachita River runs some 90 miles from the Arkansas line south to the upper-end of Catahoula Parish. This time of the year,

fishing has slowed down quite a bit, but it isn't the fish — it's the fishermen.

"Fishing is tough sometimes on the river in August, but it's more about the fishermen not wanting to go in the heat than it is about the fish biting," said Stuart Baum, a veteran river crappie angler.

And since the river is so big, Baum likes to concentrate on the area between the I-20 bridge at Monroe and just south of Columbia. He catches fish consistently using two methods this time of year.

"You are going to have a lot of crappie bunched up in the tops in the river itself," Baum explained.

"There are all kinds of tops, but I concentrate on the ones I call 'slick' tops. Those are the treetops that have been in the water a year or two and the grit and mud in the current have washed all the bark off the limbs, making them more desirable for fish. They are also easier to drop a jig or minnow down in without getting hung up. When you work a top, start at the deeper water end and work your way in. Don't be surprised if you find fish way up near the bank in 2 feet of water even though it is hot as blue blazes."

Baum also gets off the river in some of the deeper backwater lakes and sloughs and fishes a spider rig, a system employing four to eight poles at once to scour an area quickly.

"The key to making spider rigs work is to find the deeper water and find the schools of shad on your electronics," he said. "These schools will be on the move,



Stuart Baum, right, likes to catch big summer crappie like these both for fun and in tournament competition on the Ouachita River.

so you have to move with them. One thing that is important to remember is that these fish for the most part will be high in the water column, usually 2 to 3 feet deep."

Baum is partial to the double-minnow rig for spider rig setups, and likes to use single-rigged minnows in the tops. One thing that's important this time of year is to also keep a live minnow on your hook. That's no easy task in 80- to 90-degree water, but it is important. He also uses jigs — his favorites are a red-head jig with a Mid-South pearl and red plastic body, or a white-head jig with a Garland blue thunder plastic body. ■

- Kinny Haddox

# HOW TO FIND BASS IN THE ATCHAFALAYA BASIN

The Stephenville side is your best bet

**U**nless the lower Spillway turned on in late July, at least one Morgan City bass angler will be fishing on the other side of the East Atchafalaya Basin Protection Levee in August.

As of July 5, bass fishing success was spotty for some reason in the Atchafalaya Basin, many say from as far up as the Bayou Benoit area all the way to Morgan City. Grass was all but gone in key areas like Flat Lake, which was an unpleasant surprise to many bassers when the nation's last great overflow swamp dropped to a fishable level.

With catches at probably an all-time low at the time for the Morgan City area of the Spillway, Bill McCarty is pretty confident in his patterns on the other side of the Spillway, the Stephenville side, which includes the outer trees in Lake Verret and Lake Palourde as well as the points in Bayou Melhomme and Belle River. Also try Four Mile Bayou and Grassy Lake: All are in close proximity to Morgan City.

Those lakes definitely have promise and a proven track record, even in August. How's that? An estimated 1.2 million Florida bass were released by the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in Lake Verret, Lake Palourde and Grass Lake from 1993 to 2011.

However, genetic samples taken in 2016 indicated the Florida gene in only 6 percent of the bass.

Florida bass or native bass, the fish should be there.

McCarty, an all-around outdoorsman, said first thing in the morning he'll target one of those lakes and fish with a ½-ounce white or black/white buzzbait in the best water color he can find, a "pretty green" with a visibility of 10 to 12 inches.

He'll concentrate on finding that color water wherever he goes on the east side of the levee, in lakes and natural bayou.

After the sun gets up over the trees, he'll switch to a 3/8- or ½-ounce chartreuse/white spinnerbait with a yellow soft plastic trailer, which he said for years has been a trigger for bites in those areas. McCarty likes models with big willow leaf blades, a No. 2 or No. 3 blade in the front and a No. 5 blade in the back, he said.

If there isn't much action on the spinnerbait, or the action tails off, he'll go back over the same area he just fished with a chartreuse/black Bandit 200 series crankbait, one of his favorite go-to artificial lures, and bang it off stumps and any other structure, he said.

Later in the morning, he'll target points and other prime areas



Boo Grizzaffi of Morgan City holds a bass he just caught on the Stephenville side of the East Atchafalaya Basin Protection Levee.

along stretches of Bayou Melhomme and Belle River with a 7 ½- or 8-inch tequila or red shad plastic worm.

If bass turn up their nose at some of those offerings, McCarty said he's had beaucoup success fishing with white or shad-colored Flukes on a weighted head. ■

- Don Shoopman

## NIGHTTIME IS THE RIGHT TIME AT TOLEDO BEND

**G**etting bites during the heat of the day in August could be a challenge for bass anglers at Toledo Bend. It isn't an easy time of the year to get that opportunity during daylight hours to slam the hook home on a bass of a lifetime, or good-sized bass to keep or release, whether you're targeting matted grass beds or deep structure.

However, it should be a different story for those who want to fish after sunset and before sunrise on this lake shared by Louisiana and Texas. More and more bass anglers are catching bass at night, including a 12 ½-pounder in June that was released to fight again.

That was one of three double-digit bass caught in June and weighed at Toledo Town and Tackle. I'm sure there were others weighed on certified scales all along the lake.

And those in the know are picking their nighttime bass off some of the most ideal structure in the world ... boat docks and boat-houses that are springing up all around the shoreline. That aforementioned big ol' bass came off one of those man-made structures.

Many of them have sunken brush piles around them, most if not all have lights, and all of them have pilings in the water anchoring them to the bottom. Most are sitting in 5- to 15-foot depths.

I've been bass fishing on this lake for 40-plus years, and I have never targeted docks and boathouses like they are doing now at night. I haven't ever seen as many as I do now, either. They're everywhere, including some pricey ones.

I'd make a strong effort to hammer on boat docks and boat-houses, especially the pile-driven ones in grassy areas. Pick out a string of those and go fish them.



Louis Laville of Baton Rouge caught this 4 1/2-pound bass in June while fishing with John Dean.

That 12 1/2 was caught on a square-bill crankbait, an artificial lure that has been producing well in the overnight hours. A lot of guys are catching on those in shad- and bream-colored models.

Plenty of other artificials are working at night, too. I'd also throw a wacky worm or trick worm. And you can't go wrong with topwaters, including buzzbaits, spinnerbaits and plastic worms.

Based on the warm water (lower- to middle-90s in the afternoon) and time of year, night fishing prevails.

But not everybody can or wants to fish at night. So they have to contend with the dog days of summer. If that's the case, get on the water as early as possible and head for the grass. Offer a plastic frog or other topwater, as there's plenty to throw at.

After that, target matted grass beds, which I hope show soon. At 169.4 feet pool level in late-June, it's just below the surface in

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**Toledo Bend** continued >

12- to 14-foot depths and that makes bassin' a little tougher because the bass have room to roam until the grass comes up and mats. That's when bass are pushed to the break line, and can be caught on soft plastics and jig-n-pig combinations. I'll stick with my favorite, a junebug-red Senko, or a trick worm under a pegged 3/16-ounce worm weight, especially if the drop bite isn't doing well.

Other top soft plastic colors for this time of year are plum apple and red bug.

There are many, many bass on or over deep structure, but there's no guarantee they'll bite — particularly if baitfish aren't around. For those bass, try the drop-shot method and use either a football jig or equally effective Carolina-rigged soft plastic.

There has been no significant schooling bass action despite a lake full of shad. I don't know why those shad aren't being pushed to the surface by bass in big numbers. They might be schooling in isolated places, but it isn't widespread.

Crappie fishing should be good to great, like it has been for a few months. Limits are being caught from brush piles in 22- to 25-foot depths on minnows, mostly, and black/chartreuse or pink/white tube jigs and Roadrunners.

If you want to catch bass in August, 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.

## BIG LAKE BEACH FISHING

Look for clear water, bait and slicks, guide says

**W**ith speckled trout fishing success up and down this year in Calcasieu Lake, particularly during a summer plagued by high west winds, it's time to point the bow of the boat to the beach from Johnson Bayou to Holly Beach.

Specifically, target the rocks in the water that parallel the shoreline, advised Jeff Poe, who along with his wife, Mary, and son, Nick, own Big Lake Guide Service (337-598-3268).

"Obviously, it's one of the best spots down there, ..." Poe said. "Fishing's tough. It's been pretty inconsistent," he said, noting locals are wondering if the freezes over the winter might have had a lingering effect.

He said strong, persistent west winds are definitely taking their toll on fishing attempts this summer, while the heat drives many speckled trout to the Ship Channel and Gulf of Mexico. But those fish that head to the Gulf can be nailed along the rocks along the beach.

Poe said the most important thing about fishing the rocks is to look for clear water and, whenever possible, tell-tale slicks that indicate feeding fish.

"Most of the time you'll see a lot of bait, mullets and pogies, even shrimp, and the birds working sometimes," he said.

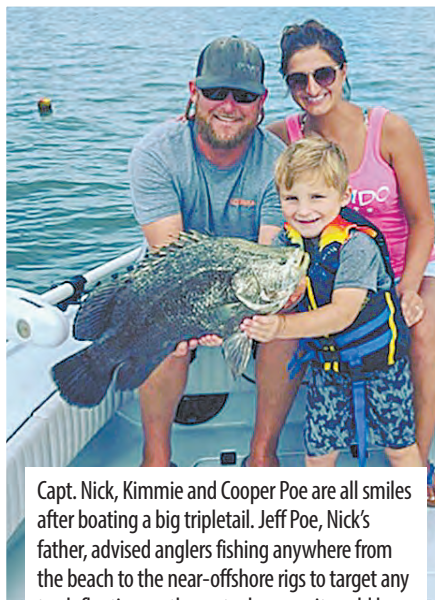
"Sometimes the trout are stacked on them (the rocks), sometimes in between them and sometimes far from them on the Gulf side. Most of the time they're on the Gulf side and usually the points are pretty good," he said.

The rocks mostly are in 7- to 8-foot depths on the Gulf side, and some of them have land between them and the beach, which means they're doing their job, he said.

Artificial lures that trigger bites around the rocks are topwaters and soft plastics.

For topwater fishing, Poe throws ShePups, SheDogs, big or small Zara Spooks and Skitterwalks.

His favorite soft plastics, mostly on a 1/8-ounce leadhead, are opening night, watermelon red, golden bream or white Lil



Capt. Nick, Kimmie and Cooper Poe are all smiles after boating a big tripletail. Jeff Poe, Nick's father, advised anglers fishing anywhere from the beach to the near-offshore rigs to target any trash floating on the water because it could be a tripletail hangout.



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**Big Lake** continued >

Johns, or clear, chartreuse or smoke H&H Sparkle Beetles. The latter, he said, are effective in August because they imitate shrimp and “they (speckled trout) like shrimp in August.”

Does the tide play a role? Definitely.

“What you’re looking for is clear water and most of the time there’s clear water on an incoming or rising tide,” Poe said.

If the water along the beach is dirty, head for the near-offshore oil field structures in search of speckled trout. On the way out and way back, or even while you’re fishing along the rocks, look for trash floating in the water because often a tasty tripletail will be hanging around.

“I’ll go look at anything. I’ve seen two or three (tripletail) on a floating gafftop,” Poe said.

Fish a jig under a popping cork around the trash to keep the bait in front of the tripletail’s face. Also, he said they love live shrimp. ■

- Don Shoopman



Capt. Hook poses with some Breton Sound hammers at the dock.

said. “They haven’t been all stacked up in one place, so you catch a few in one spot and hop to another and catch a few there and so on until you run out of time or fill your box.

“Fourth, if the river falls, I’d head to Black Bay and fish those structures. Stone Island, Lonesome, Belle, Iron Banks... all that should hold some nice fish. It usually does this time of year.”

Fifth, if you’re left with no freckled fish options, chase redfish. Hook said he often has charters who only want to chase the hard fighting bronze backs, and thankfully there has been no shortage of them.

“Redfish tolerate the fresher water really well, and they’re definitely more tolerant of the cold, and they also seem to tolerate the heat better than the trout because you can still catch reds in the warm shallow inside waters, as well as along the banks in the bigger lakes and bays,” he said. “Find a nice drain or cove or a point with current on it, and fish it shallow with dead or live shrimp under a cork.”

Hook said you’ll want to bring live shrimp (or croakers if you can get them) for the specks, and fish them under a cork or on the bottom, depending on the depth you are fishing.

Capt. Hook’s Escape Charters can be reached at 504-512-2602. ■

- Rusty Tardo

**Dularge** up next >

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# HOPEDALE HOP

## Just move to find the groove

**H**ot. Sizzling, searing, scorching, broiling, roasting — all describe our summer weather, and the trout don’t seem to like it any more than we do. Perhaps it’s why they pulled a disappearing act in June and have had anglers scratching their heads ever since.

Not to fear. The freckled finfish we so highly prize haven’t gone away, and my old friend Capt. Hook has the scoop on where to find them and how to fish them, even in an oven-like August.

“First, I’d say you should leave early because you’ll have to quit once the heat gets up into blow-torch mode,” Hook said. “And second, you need to plan on the longer runs to the outside bays where the deeper water makes the bottom temperatures cooler. I usually start by hitting a few structures in Bay Eloi, and if I don’t find anything I just keep heading farther out into Breton Sound, as long as the winds and seas allow it.”

Hook said the various wells, platforms and structures in Bay Eloi should hold a variety of fish this month, as will the rocks at the end of the MRGO.

“The rocks have not really produced as much as they usually do this summer,” he said. “Maybe because of freshwater inundation or maybe because it got so hot so fast, or maybe because we didn’t see shrimp out there like we usually do, or maybe because of all of that, but it made the rocks mostly unproductive, with some fairly decent days where you’d catch some nice fish one day but then nothing at all the next,” he said. “It was discouraging, but hopefully we’ll have much more favorable conditions this month. A lower river, saltier water and shrimp swarming into the sound and Bay Eloi along with the tides of salty water. That’ll turn everything on, and the fact is, I’ve seen that happen before, almost overnight.”

Third, Hook said to hop from structure to structure.

“The Dope Boat, Little Central, Big Central, Five Wells, Holy Cross, Breton and Gosier Islands... just move until you find them,” he

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# SLOW BUT STEADY

Trout fishing action in Dularge heated up later — so it should last longer



Capt. Marty LaCoste likes throwing double-rigged Matrix Shad lures in green hornet, avocado and purple haze for August specks.

**A**ugust can be a slow month for speckled trout fishing, but in the Dularge area this month, local guide Capt. Marty LaCoste expects it to be really good.

"I think our July and August trout bite is going to be better than normal just because (the trout) are late showing up," he said.

LaCoste mentioned this summer is far from a typical one.

"In a normal August, we're fishing trout usually up until the second week of August," he said. "Then it



gets so hot, the trout bite usually slows down and then we start targeting redfish in the deep holes on cracked crab.

"The way things are going this year, it looks like everything is late," he said. "The trout are showing up late, so I'm thinking we're actually going to be catching trout probably all of August."

He said it's also not out of the realm of possibilities for the trout bite outside to last even longer than that.

"Last year, we were actually still catching trout through mid-September offshore," LaCoste said.

He pointed out many places that hold fish offshore out of Dularge.

"Anywhere from the island — West Timbalier, Last Island, Whiskey Island — any rig from West Timbalier all the way to Ship Shoal 26 (holds fish)," he said. "The fish spawn in the passes, they spawn on the beach all the way through the last full moon in August."

LaCoste fishes those structures with ¼-ounce double rigs. His favorite colors are green hornet, avocado and purple haze in the Matrix and Vortex Shad line of lures.

"If the water is super clear like last year, that holy joely was on fire for a whole month straight in July," he said.

LaCoste will occasionally throw live bait, but only when plastic fails him and it's absolutely necessary.

"If I'm going to fish live bait in August, it's probably going to be croakers," he said. "The only way I throw live bait is I go out and have a tough day — I struggle, and I see two or three other boats out there catching on live bait and they're tearing them up on croakers, I'll make it a point to have croakers the next day." ■

- Joel Masson

# COOL OFF WITH 'BASS ON THE ROCKS'

## Red River's rocks ... rock!

**T**he hot summer weather got you down? Well, why not cool off with some bass on the rocks — Red River south style.

"Man, I'm telling you, this is a great time to catch bass on the Red River, but you have to go early and you have to fish the rocks. Rock jetties, rock levees or rock banks, that's where you'll find them," said veteran river fisherman Jerry Mitchell.

Mitchell lives in Alexandria and fishes all around his home area, including Toledo Bend, but when the summer fishing gets hot on the Red, he's right there with them.

"The main cover, really the only cover, we've got left in the river for this time of the year now is the rocks," he said. "There's not any grass left, and while there is a lot of hard structure left out in some of the river lakes, most of the bass head to the deeper water this time of year.

"They'll stack up in the deeper water off the rocks along the river channel,



Bass like this one caught by Jerry Mitchell make an August Red River bass run worth the effort.

continued >

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Red River continued >

then follow schools of shad up and down the rock banks and ledges.”

His early baits of choice include several topwaters, including the Chug bug, small Spook and Yellow Magic in chrome with black back and shad color. When the fish quit schooling or chasing shad, he backs off into the deeper water off the rocks with a KVD or Bandit crankbait in bream or parrot color. He tosses the bait parallel to the rocks and gets the lure down 8 to 10 feet, and the bass nail it.

“When it’s hot, especially early, they are pretty aggressive,” he said. “The best bite is in the morning. You can still catch them later, but early is better. There’s no question.”

With rocks up and down a good portion of the river to the south, Mitchell said picking the right stretch is important. He likes to fish the inside bend of the river where the current is strongest. If there is no current, he gets on the outside bends where the water is deeper — up to 15 to 18 feet. The key is holding close to the rocks.

There’s a good little fishing bonus this time of year, too. The Red is chocked full of white bass, or as they are more commonly called, oarfish. They frequent the same spots and often school later than the largemouths, and the same lures work on either fish.

The Red River has several great launching areas such as Montgomery, Red Bayou and St. Maurice. ■

- Kinny Haddox

# MINIMAL TACKLE KEY FOR GRAND ISLE BEACH BITE

## Downsize in clear water to prevent spooking fish, guide says



Capt. Frank Dreher likes to downsize his tackle and free-line croakers so specks don't spook in the ultra-clear water on Grand Isle beaches this month.

**N**o matter what kind of fishing you're doing in the marsh, finding clean water is almost always helpful.

However, too much of a good thing can be like poison.

Capt. Frank Dreher said that's sometimes the case this month on the Grand Isle beach.

"The problem we run into on the beach in August is the water is too clear," he said. "It'll



clear up so much that you can spook the fish."

To combat that, Dreher spurns the always popular Carolina rig and sets up his rods with minimal hardware.

"When that water gets clear, we free-line (croakers)," he said.

Dreher free-lines his live croakers with 1/0 kahle hooks when the tide is mellow.

"I try to stay in contact with it but try not to bump it too much," he said. "You want that croaker to stay like he's swimming free."

When the water is a little more stained, or if the current is strong, Dreher likes throwing Carolina-rigs with croakers.

He uses 1/2-ounce egg sinkers and 1/0 kahle hooks.

"Shrimp are good early in the morning before it gets too hot, and then we go to the bottom with the croakers and really start getting on those big fish," he said. "We're trying to throw it in that first trough. That first trough around Elmer's and Fourchon is anywhere from 3 1/2 to 5 feet."

One of the nice things about fishing on the beach is the quality of fish.

"You're going to catch your 2 1/2, 3-pounders, and you'll catch the 14-, 15-inch fish," he said. "As long as you have a little bit of tide movement on the beach, you can generally stay in that 1 1/2- to 2-pound range."

How Dreher approaches the beach is dependent upon what day of the week it is.

"On weekends, you're going to have to anchor immediately just because there are so many boats," he said. "During the weekdays where there's not as many boats, you can troll until you hit something and then anchor up." ■

- Joel Masson

Venice up next >

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Capt. Boola Landry likes to target big bull reds like this one with purple or chartreuse soft plastics on a 30-pound fluorocarbon leader a couple of feet under a 4 Horsemen popping cork.



# RUN WITH THE BULLS IN VENICE

Grouper, cobia also solid offshore options

**I**nshore action out of Venice has been consistent this summer, and may be one of the best parts of the state if you're looking to battle bull redfish.

A bull red is considered any redfish over 27 inches in length, and in Louisiana, you are allowed to keep one bull out of your five-redfish limit. On light tackle, they put

up a tremendous fight and are a lot of fun.

Capt. Boola Landry of Reel Tite Fishing Charters recommends looking for slicks, or the sheen on the water created by predators eating in schools of baitfish. A lot of times you actually can see the bulls attacking.

"We've been using the 4 Horsemen cork

with 2 ½ feet of 30-pound fluorocarbon leaders, with soft plastic baits," Landry said. Generally, he recommended purple and chartreuse as solid colors, as well as lemon head Matrix Shad, but said when they're feeding they aren't picky. And if you're checking tides, the bite tends to be best just after high tide on a falling tide.

Just remember, when you release a big bull give it ample time to recover beside the boat. Move water through its gills until it regains enough strength to swim away on its own.

Offshore, deep-dropping has been popular lately, as the summer has been somewhat inconsistent for tuna so far. If you're looking to weed through red snapper for some grouper, be sure and send baits down with a heavy enough weight so the current doesn't move your bait off the target spot.

Two- to 3-pound weights aren't too much. Be sure to drop your baits to the bottom, and crank up two to three times so that it's not slack — but stay as close to the bottom as you can while maintaining a tight line.

If you're not on the rigs, look for sunken wrecks, reefs and pipelines in generally more than 400 feet of water for species like yellowedge, scamp and gag grouper. Ideally, live baits work best, but if you don't have that be sure to at least pick up some frozen squid. Unlike a red snapper, grouper take longer to commit to the bite, so be sure to let them eat. If you miss one, send the bait back to the bottom quickly because a grouper will not chase your bait up.

Cobia have also showed up on rigs. They are a naturally curious fish, and aren't tremendously picky about baits. If you're using artificial lures, be sure and have a sturdy rod and reel, like a Shimano Saragosa or Stella. A good weighted sparkle jig or plastic grub will lure them in by jigging: Start around 100 feet and work your way up.

When you do land a cobia, they can be notoriously difficult to gaff — so be ready and have a bat in the boat as well. ■

- Capt. Martha Spencer

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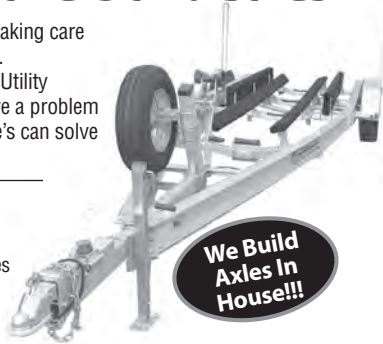
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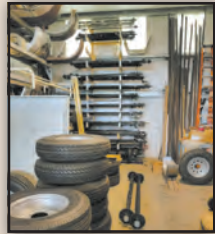
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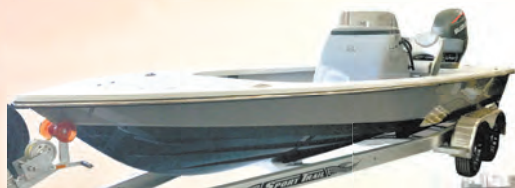
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