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Host, "The Given Right"
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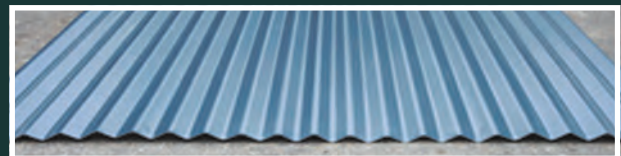
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23

Public Domain



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Bull bream
beatdown



90

Hitting
the spots



Louisiana
SPORTSMAN

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LDWF CAUTIONS HUNTERS ON USING DEER URINE LURES

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is cautioning the state's hunters about the use of deer urine lures, which are unregulated by state and federal agencies and according to the LDWF, could potentially contain chronic wasting disease.

AGENCY SAYS PRODUCTS COULD CONTAIN CWD From News Reports

As hunting season approaches, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is cautioning deer hunters about the use of urine lures because the products could potentially contain chronic wasting disease.

However, it's only a recommendation by the department right now — the lures currently are not banned and are legal to continue using in Louisiana for the upcoming deer season.

Urine production and sale is not regulated by any state or federal agency, according to a LDWF press release. The production of these lures includes collecting urine through grates at captive cervid facilities, where urine can mix with saliva and feces, which typically have a higher CWD-prion content, the release states.

The CWD prion is shed by infected animals through saliva, feces, urine, blood, antler velvet and decomposing carcasses, according to the release.

NO EASY WAY TO TEST

LDWF veterinarian Dr. Jim LaCour said there is no way to guarantee deer urine lure products do not contain the deadly disease.

"There is no rapid, cost effective test to determine if commercial urine contains prions," he said.

Seven states have already banned the use of deer urine lures, including Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Virginia, according to the release.

CWD is a neurodegenerative disease found in most deer species, including moose, elk, mule deer and white-tailed deer. It is infectious and always fatal.

CWD has not yet been discovered in Louisiana, but has been in 25 states including Texas, Arkansas and Mississippi.

When CWD was discovered in a Mississippi deer near the Louisiana border in January, the LWFC enacted a feeding ban in order to minimize comingling of animals at feeder locations in East Carroll, Madison and Tensas parishes.

Although that ban was rescinded in June, LDWF encourages hunters not to utilize supplemental feeds for hunting, as this increases the chance of spreading diseases among animals using bait stations.

LDWF continues cooperative discussions with other state and federal agencies in the fight against CWD and to prevent it from entering the state.

Deer infected with CWD can spread the disease even before symptoms develop. It can take one to two years for infected animals to become symptomatic. When symptoms appear, they can include emaciation, lethargy, abnormal behavior and loss of bodily functions. Other signs include excessive salivation, loss of appetite, progressive weight loss, excessive thirst and urination, teeth grinding and drooping ears. ■

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Guy Cenac of Houma, left, reeled in this 208-pound-plus tarpon on opening day and broke a 46-year-old rodeo record.

208-POUND TARPON BREAKS GRAND ISLE RODEO RECORD

CENAC'S OPENING DAY CATCH BESTS MARK SET IN 1972

From News Reports

They say records are made to be broken — and it finally happened this year at the 90th Annual International Grand Isle Tarpon Rodeo.

Back in 1972, Johnny Guidry of Galliano landed a 206-pound tarpon to establish a rodeo record that stood for 46 years. But Guy Cenac of Houma etched his name into the record books, when he landed a 208-pound, 14-ounce tarpon after a nearly three-hour battle on the event's opening day that wound up the winner.

Cenac told The Advocate he had no idea the fish was a record breaker.

"When we hooked that fish, we knew it was a good one, but we didn't realize that it was quite as big as it was," Cenac said. "I fought that thing for three hours, and that's when I realized how big it was.

"After I got it into the boat, I figured we had a shot at it."

He credited his three co-anglers aboard the Blue Monkey — Billy Cenac and Al Cenac, of Houma, and Mike Arcement of Lockport — for assisting in the record-breaking catch.



"It feels great to catch that record fish, and God has blessed me very much," he told the newspaper. "I'm very grateful for it."

By the way, Cenac's tarpon is a definite rodeo record, but if you're wondering how it compares to the Louisiana record books, the No. 10-ranked fish currently weighs 220 pounds. The state record is held by David Prevost, who landed a 246.63-pound tarpon in 2015 in the West Delta Blocks. ■

FORREST PROMOTED TO VP OF SALES AND MARKETING

Jay Forrest was recently named vice president of sales and marketing for Louisiana Publishing, the parent company of Louisiana Sportsman, Mississippi Sportsman and Carolina Sportsman.

With 15 years of advertising sales experience for the Sportsman, he will now oversee day-to-day sales activities and promotions in four states.

"My goal is to continue to bring consumers and businesses together through all of the Sportsman platforms," Forrest said. "I've hunted and fished since I was a little boy, and very well know the pull of

the outdoors.

"I hope to forge new and long-lasting relationships with our clients, to generate sales for our advertisers and also provide great resources for our readers."

Tony Taylor, publisher, said Forrest was a great fit for the position.

"I've worked with Jay for a long time, and know he's very familiar both with our clients, as well as the way we do business here at the Sportsman," Taylor said. "I'm looking forward to working with him to expand our customer base with



Jay Forrest, the Sportsman's new VP of sales and marketing, will oversee day-to-day sales activities in four states.

products and services our readers will embrace and enjoy."

A native of Baton Rouge, Forrest is married with three children. For advertising inquiries, he can be reached at 225-278-0258, or via email at jayf@lasmag.com. ■

2018 RUT REPORT PREVIEW

By Patrick Bonin

MORELAND EXPECTING RUT TO FOLLOW MORE TRADITIONAL DATES THIS YEAR

Archery season cranks up in Southwest Louisiana in just a matter of weeks, with pretty much the rest of the state getting started on Oct. 1.

But whether you bowhunt or opt for a gun, a big key to getting a crack at one of the big bucks you've already spotted on your trail cams is knowing when main breeding periods will take place later this fall and early next year.

Dave Moreland, who retired from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries as the deer study leader, prepares an annual rut report for the state that will be featured in the October issue of Louisiana Sportsman magazine.

EXPECT TRADITIONAL RUT DATES THIS FALL

And according to Moreland, unlike last year when the rut ran a little early, he's expecting 2018-19 to follow more traditional dates across the state.

"I think what you'll see this year is the normal rut most people think of," Moreland said. "In Area 2, you'll likely see peak breeding the last part of October into the first couple of weeks into November. In your Delta and Basin — Areas 1 and 6 — that also will be typical, where you'll see your scraping in December and peak breeding the first two weeks of January. And with the season structure this year, hunters in 1 and 6 should be able to see both peaks of breeding activity, so they'll benefit this year from an earlier rut.

"In years past, there would typically be a lot of activity in February when the season is no longer open."

Moreland's full report next month features dates and calendars for the pre-rut, first scraping period, first breeding period, second scraping period and second breeding period for every area in the state.

GET THE FULL RUT REPORT IN THE OCTOBER ISSUE

He formulates his report based both on his observations during his career as a biologist, and the moon phase.

"I'm a believer that your peak scraping is tied into that period between the new moon and the full moon," Moreland said. "That's when you see scraping begin, so based on that timeframe after that first peak of scraping — when bucks are checking scrapes every day or twice a day — breeding will follow once that period is over."

So this might be a good year to schedule time off to hunt when the rut traditionally gets going on your lease.

"Last year was earlier than the year before," he said. "But this year, I think the rut will be around the average for what the peak dates are for each area." ■

AUGUST 2018

Areas 3, 7, 8 & 10

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9 Pre-Rut Starts	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

SEPTEMBER 2018

Area 2

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8 Pre-Rut Starts
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

SEPTEMBER 2018

Areas 3, 7, 8 & 10

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8 Pre-Rut Ends
9 First Scraping Period Starts	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24 First Breeding Period Starts	25	26	27	28	29
30						

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Please Contact: Joni McClain, Owner/Broker • Blue Diamond Realty • 601-672-7999 • Joni@mcclain.ms

A Ville Platte man admitted to shooting and killing a male whooping crane with a .22 caliber rifle in Evangeline Parish on July 25, according to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.



LDWF: VILLE PLATTE MAN ADMITS TO SHOOTING WHOOPING CRANE

From News Reports

FACES \$50,000 FINE AND UP TO ONE YEAR IN JAIL

A 52-year-old Ville Platte man faces violations of the Endangered Species Act — which bring up to a \$50,000 fine and one year in jail — after admitting to shooting and killing a male whooping crane in Evangeline Parish on July 25, according to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

Gilvin P. Aucoin, who was working on the land near where the crane was shot, was questioned by enforcement agents after the bird was found near a crawfish pond, the release states.

During questioning, he admitted to shooting the crane with a .22 caliber rifle while working on the property, according to the release. Agents seized his rifle in the investigation.

Violating the Endangered Species Act brings up to a \$50,000 fine and a year in jail, the release states. LDWF has released 125 whooping cranes since 2011 and are

currently tracking 65 whooping cranes. The male crane killed in this case was released in 2011.

THREE CITED FOR ALLEGED FISH-SHOCKING ON THE OUACHITA RIVER

Enforcement agents with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries cited three Columbia men for allegedly shocking fish on the Ouachita River in Caldwell Parish.

According to a press release, Heath B. Rider, 43, Dillon R. Patterson, 26 and David H. Gregory, 41, were cited for taking fish illegally by using a shocking device and fishing without a recreational fishing license. Rider also was cited for operating an unregistered motorized vessel and failing to comply with PFD requirements.

Acting on tips in late July, agents setup surveillance in the area and allegedly witnessed Rider and Patterson in a vessel actively fishing the area with a shocking device.

After making contact with the men, Rider allegedly admitted to shocking fish with Gregory on the night of July 23.

The three men did not possess recreational fishing licenses, and agents seized the 14-foot vessel, motor and two shocking devices, according to the release. Agents also seized 40 catfish that were caught on July 23 and 25 and donated them to a local charity.

Taking fish illegally brings a \$400 to \$950 fine and up to 120 days in jail for each offense. Fishing without a fishing license, failing to comply with PFD requirements and operating a vessel without a registration each carry a \$50 fine and up to 15 days in jail for each offense. ■

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Lance Hebert busted this nice 7-pointer featuring a 23 1/2-inch inside spread on Sherburne Wildlife Management Area.



SPORTSMAN

WMA PREVIEW

Louisiana's public lands hunters have more than 1.5 million acres at their disposal. But which state wildlife management areas offer the best chance to score this fall? Find out in this year's WMA Forecast.

By Don Shoopman

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Photo submitted by Lance Hebert

B iologists from each of Louisiana's seven wildlife management area regions crunched the numbers and analyzed data from last year's hunting seasons to give you an idea of how some of the 50 state WMAs might perform this fall. But drought, flooding, mast production, lactation rates and habitat condition all play a role in determining what public lands hunters might encounter when heading into the field starting this month. So read up on prospects for your favorite tract, or maybe scout some new territory after you're armed with historical harvest information and the outlook for this season.

COASTAL OPTIONS



Waterfowlers enjoy duck hunting each season on the state's public lands, where they can average around 2.5 ducks per effort in Louisiana.

Atchafalaya Delta Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Pass-a-Loutre WMA, Pointe-aux-Chene WMA and Salvador WMA take center stage for gunning down birds along the coast. And you can expect more action and increased harvests in those mostly marshy environments for the 2018-19 season.

Overall habitat conditions are average and should remain that way barring hurricanes and tropical storms, according to program manager Lance Campbell with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

DUCK HABITAT PROMISING

Naturally, all that's needed are ducks to get to the lowest reaches of the Mississippi Flyway. Habitat conditions and submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) won't be a limiting factor.

"The 2017-18 waterfowl season yielded average kill-per-effort on coastal WMAs," Campbell said. "Since habitat conditions are currently in relatively good shape, we are optimistic that the 2018-19 season will be successful."

At Atchafalaya Delta WMA, 1,769 hunter efforts resulted in 2.6 ducks per hunter effort,

he said, noting Pass-A-Loutre WMA had 665 efforts and 3.7 ducks per hunter; Pointe-aux-Chene WMA had 1,383 efforts and 2.5 birds per hunter and Salvador WMA had 385 efforts and a 2.2 duck-per-hunter average.

Overall, there were 2.6 ducks per hunter effort in 4,202 hunter trips across the Coastal Nongame Resources Division.



Boyd Bergeron, left, and Zach Guillot show off full straps after a good day on the Atchafalaya Delta WMA.

Submitted by Zach Guillot

Average SAV production is a good thing, and that's the current status at the 137,695-acre Atchafalaya Delta WMA in St. Mary Parish.

COASTAL OPTIONS

PROS

- Gov. John Bel Edwards announced in July that \$60 million in new coastal projects will be built and paid for with money from the settlement of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Of that total, \$920,440 will go to dredging waters to create improved boating access to Atchafalaya Delta WMA.
- Fortunately, the many WMAs in this region haven't been impacted severely by a hurricane in a while: Hurricane Isaac back in 2012 was the last storm to significantly damage a coastal WMA.
- Atchafalaya Delta's "spoil islands" provide great semi-upland deer habitat, and the size of those continue to improve.
- Pass-A-Loutre WMA, despite its remote location, is a deer-hunting hotspot for those willing to put in the time and effort. Last season, deer hunters there harvested an average of one deer per 9.7 efforts, a very good number for coastal WMAs.

CONS

- Pointe-aux-Chene WMA's rabbit numbers are lower than previous years based on preliminary assessments. Low rainfall totals in the spring may have contributed to lower reproduction there.
- Also, Pointe-aux-Chene's submerged aquatic vegetation is below average, probably because of high water turbidity and salinity. Conditions are better west of Grand Bayou. ■

continues >>>



A good look at Louisiana's wildlife management areas by region. The state operates 50 different WMAs accounting for more than 1.5 million acres of public land.



2017 WMA-Managed Deer Hunts (Top 10)

	Total Harvest	Bucks	Does
1. Fort Polk -Vernon	362	177	185
2. Dewey Wills	203	83	120
3. Richard K. Yancey	186	71	115
4. Boeuf	173	96	77
5. Russell Sage	171	105	66
6. West Bay	165	82	83
7. Sherburne	134	60	74
8. Clear Creek	129	60	69
9. Peason Ridge	127	59	68
10. Big Lake	110	55	55

2017-18 WMA - Top 10 Deer Totals

	Total Harvest	Bucks	Does	Acres/Deer
1. Fort Polk-Vernon	624	306	318	169
2. Dewey Wills	418	216	202	132
3. Boeuf	416	223	193	123
4. Richard K. Yancey	409	212	197	169
5. Sherburne	336	183	153	131
6. Big Lake	316	170	146	61
7. Russell Sage	309	220	89	122
8. Peason Ridge	277	173	104	268
9. Bodcau	276	147	129	122
10. West Bay	254	116	138	233

COASTAL OPTIONS CONTINUED

Pass-a-Loutre WMA's SAV growth also was average in July on the 115,000-acre area in Plaquemines Parish, where waterfowl habitat also is expected to be average or slightly above average. Hopefully, Cambell said, SAV growth will be average by the time the season starts on 33,488-acre Pointe-aux-Chene WMA that spans Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes, a scenario that would attract and hold waterfowl.

As of mid-summer, the coastal operations manager said SAV production also was above average in larger ponds and lakes at the 34,520-acre Salvador/Timken WMA in St. Charles Parish, where waterfowl habitat has declined the past few years because of water hyacinths, salvinia and emergent vegetation growth. However, this year there are less water hyacinths and salvinia there, he said.

GO TO ATCHAFALAYA DELTA FOR DEER

If you are a bowhunter who dreams of getting a shot at trophy deer, head to the Main Delta of the Atchafalaya Delta WMA.

Historically, the area has yielded some of the larger deer harvested across



Brad Romero with a nice swamp buck taken on Attakapas Island WMA in Iberia, St. Martin and St. Mary Parishes.

Submitted by Brad Romero

coastal WMAs, Campbell reported. Adult archery hunting for deer and annual youth lottery gun hunts are allowed only on the Main Delta, 15,000 acres of marsh habitat that feature spoil islands for higher ground.

So how big do the deer get? Last season, these were some notable swamp bucks taken, including a 170-pound 10-point with a 16 1/2-inch inside spread, and a 160-pound 8-point with a 15-inch inside spread.

There is quantity, as well as quality, in the deer herd on Attakapas WMA. Nearly 90 deer were killed by bowhunters there last season.

"The five-year average for deer archery harvest at Atchafalaya WMA is 152 deer. We expect a similar harvest ... for the 2018-19 season," Campbell said.

Pass-A-Loutre WMA and Salvador WMA had higher kill-per-hunter effort last season than Atchafalaya. Hunters averaged one deer per 9.7 efforts at Pass-a-Loutre, and Salvador hunters averaged one deer per 24.5 efforts — very good averages for coastal WMAs, Campbell said.

SQUIRRELS AT POINTE-AUX-CHENES

South Louisiana squirrel hunters in the know understand that some of the best action among the coastal WMAs is at Pointe-aux-Chenes and Lake Boeuf, an



Logan Fife and his buddies enjoyed an awesome day during a hunt at Pass-A-Loutre WMA near Venice.

Submitted by Logan Fife

800-acre area in Lafourche Parish.

Small game hunting for bushytails is at its finest, weather and habitat conditions permitting, at the Point Farm Unit on Pointe-aux-Chene, according to Campbell. The unit is approximately 1,500 acres of forested habitat with more than 500 acres of hardwood trees planted during past mitigation projects.

Generally, squirrel hunters bag an average of two squirrels per hunting effort there based on self-clearing reports in the past five years. ■



Submitted by Adam Bourgeois

Relaxing back at the camp after a successful hunt featuring canvasbacks, greys and blue geese at Pass-A-Loutre WMA.

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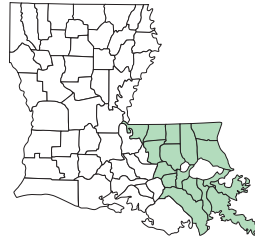
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HAMMOND REGION



Which wildlife management area does a squirrel hunter or someone who loves to walk the woods or other terrain to kill rabbits choose to hunt in the Hammond region?

Brad Breland, biologist supervisor and acting regional manager there, said hunters can't go wrong at any of the region's nine WMAs.

While deer hunting, duck hunting and even dove hunting exploits grab much of the spotlight each season, plenty of squirrels and rabbits are harvested on the region's top three WMAs for small game – Pearl River, Maurepas Swamp and Tunica Hills.

“Our WMAs provide (small game) hunters the opportunity to hunt a diverse range of habitat types, from upland hardwoods down to cypress/tupelo swamps and brackish marsh. Whether it be abundant mast-producing hardwoods or the early successional habitat in our region, all provide ample resources for small game,” he said.

PEARL RIVER FOR BUSHYTAILS

Pearl River WMA's squirrel hunting is hard to beat. Its close proximity to New Orleans makes it a popular destination — in the 2017-18 harvest reported, 1,707 squirrels were taken in 1,914 hunter efforts.

The 35,619-acre WMA in St. Tammany Parish was impacted by Hurricane Katrina, Breland noted, as the storm laid down timber like pickup sticks. The area has opened up and become more accessible since the hurricane, but there remains plenty of understory and early successional habitat.

More importantly, mast production last year was average, which bodes well for the upcoming season.

“We have been seeing plenty of squirrels on the areas and expect to have another successful season,” Breland said.

Maurepas Swamp WMA, a 124,568-acre area that spans Ascension, Livingston, St. John the Baptist, St. James and Tangipahoa parishes and is accessible only by boat, yielded a reported 979 squirrels in 608 hunter efforts last season. The area gives up squirrels consistently, and that should be the case again this year, he said.

Tunica Hills WMA, a much smaller (6,503 acres) area in West Feliciana Parish, is another favorite place for squirrel hunters, with an abundance of mature oaks and other mast-producing trees that provide good habitat. Last season, 463 squirrels were reported harvested in 306 hunter efforts.

MAUREPAS SWAMP FOR DEER

If you don't mind the extra effort to get a good shot at deer, consider hunting at Maurepas Swamp WMA, a very large area that is secluded and difficult to enter. Hunters recommend wearing hip boots rather than waders, and carrying maps, a compass and a handheld GPS. “Most of this area is difficult to access,” Breland said. “As a result, deer on this area do not receive as much pressure as they would on smaller, more accessible WMAs.”

But the tough hunts in those wetlands are productive, as 2017-18 proved

HAMMOND REGION

PROS

- The Hammond Region recently took over the Biloxi Marsh WMA in St. Bernard Parish from the Coastal and Nongame Resources Division. The 35,000-acre area is popular among waterfowl hunters — Shell Beach and Breton Sound Marina are a few of the access points.
- Tunica Hills WMA will be the site of an approved timber operation this year, a move that hopefully will put some sunlight on the ground on the South Tract, improving deer habitat and offering hunters increased opportunities for years to come.
- Joyce WMA's acreage has grown with the transfer of property from Maurepas Swamp WMA. Those sections on the western side of the interstate (the Rathborne Tract) are now part of Joyce WMA (see updated WMA maps).

CONS

- Pearl River WMA had a high harvest of feral hogs last season, but they still pose a threat as vectors of disease and are direct competitors with native wildlife for resources.
- Manchac WMA has been saturated with giant salvinia and water hyacinths. LDWF personnel are making every effort to control its spread with herbicide applications and release of giant salvinia weevils.
- Entry to Joyce WMA's Limited Access Area on the northern end has been restricted because of excessive water hyacinth coverage.



Kolby Louque busted this big 9-point buck on Maurepas Swamp WMA.

Submitted by Kolby Louque

Clay Hano after a nice hunt on Manchac WMA, located in St. John the Baptist Parish near LaPlace.



Submitted by Clay Hano

when 160 deer were reported harvested in 2,284 hunter efforts. The combination of marsh, timber and spoil banks provide habitat. The key, veteran deer hunters say, is to find the transition zones from hardwoods to upland pines, or where older pines meet younger pines.

Pearl River and Tunica Hills are the other top deer-hunting WMAs. At Pearl River, 61 deer were harvested in 2,428 hunter efforts, while 59 deer were taken at Tunica Hills in 1,581 hunter efforts in 2017-18.

MANCHAC A GOOD OPTION FOR WATERFOWL

The leader of the pack for Southeast Louisiana waterfowl hunting on public areas is Pearl River WMA, which has beaucoup habitat – plenty of brackish marsh - below U.S. Highway 90.

“With plenty of waterfowl habitat, this WMA consistently has high harvest numbers in our region. Barring any tropical storm activity, we expect a good upcoming season,” Breland said.

Pearl River WMA’s central region features cypress/tupelo swamp. The upper region has mixed pine and bottomland hardwoods.

In the lower portions of the area, gadwall, widgeon and teal are in the majority. In the upper portions, mallards and wood ducks reign supreme.

Breland also noted that Manchac WMA is another popular destination in the region, despite limited access — it’s paddle-in only. Many duck hunters are successful in the “The Prairie,” a 600-acre area near the shoreline of Lake Pontchartrain.

“This area also provides great waterfowl habitat and consistently sees some of the higher harvest numbers in our region,” he said.

Manchac WMA users are advised to make sure their boats, trailers and other equipment are cleaned and free of giant salvinia before leaving. ■

LAFAYETTE REGION >>>

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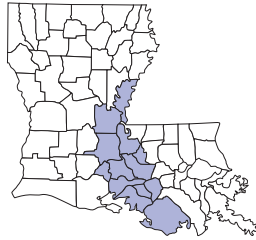
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LAFAYETTE REGION



Potentially good deer hunting success awaits hunters who head to Thistlethwaite WMA in the Lafayette region.

Sure, Richard K. Yancey is known for the big buck potential it offers, and Sherburne's deer herd is rebounding just fine since the flood of 2011. But those are proven WMAs that can be traversed a little easier than Thistlethwaite.

TRY THISTLETHWAITE FOR DEER

The dense understory of palmetto and vegetation on Thistlethwaite, an 11,100-acre area in St. Landry Parish, makes it a challenge to get around in, and no one knows that better than Tony Vidrine, region manager the past 15 years and a 34-year veteran biologist with the LDWF.

That understory, as well as past and recent timber harvest practices, have created favorable deer habitat. Deer hunters can thank Hurricane Gustav for the improvements, he said.

"After Hurricane Gustav, we did select cuts and opened up a lot of good deer habitat at Thistlethwaite," Vidrine said. "Timber harvest continues by the landowners on the area, so

habitat conditions are excellent, but hunting is tough due to the thick palmetto understory and thick understory due to open canopy."

Nevertheless, more than 150 deer were reported harvested in 6,096 hunter efforts, or one per every 50 hunter efforts.

There's another big reason, for deer hunters to spend time hunting on Thistlethwaite in 2018-19: The season has been restructured to give them an increased opportunity to harvest bucks.

The LDWF has taken an experimental season, which was in effect in 2017-18, off the board — which means bucks will be fair game for all deer hunters during the rut in 2018-19.

Vidrine is excited about the prospects — and deer hunters should be, as well.

"Thistlethwaite WMA will see an increase of days of either-sex hunting and bucks-only, so there should be good deer hunting on this WMA," he said.

He noted last year several nice bucks were taken during archery season while the rut was in progress. But archery was the only game in town at the time of the rut. Now gun hunters, including those who hunt deer with primitive weapons, have a green light when bucks are lovestruck.

Elsewhere in the Lafayette region, Vidrine expects more big bucks to come off Richard K. Yancey WMA, where there was a slight decline in the overall harvest last season. More than 500 deer were taken in 9,256 hunter efforts, or one per 18 hunter efforts.

At Sherburne WMA in 2017-18, 7,511 hunter efforts accounted for a reported 465 deer.

RKY FOR SQUIRRELS

Season after season, the most consistent squirrel harvest is on Richard K. Yancey WMA, the 70,872-

LAFAYETTE REGION

PROS

- Logging on Sherburne WMA should increase browse production for several years and make for excellent deer and rabbit habitat.
- Thistlethwaite WMA'S bucks-only season has been adjusted to open during the peak of the rut, and either-sex days have been increased. Also, logging by the landowner continues on the WMA, enhancing habitat conditions to excellent.
- Richard K. Yancey, Thistlethwaite and Sherburne had the highest mast crop production of all the regions' WMAs. Also, lactation rates were average on all three, so there should be a good fawn crop in 2018.

CONS

- Habitat conditions need vast improvement on Attakapas, Grassy Lake, Pomme de Terre and Spring Bayou WMAs. Browse conditions are poor due to a closed forest canopy. The hardwood timber market is very unstable, and getting a stand cut in this area has been difficult.
- Lactation rates were very low on Grassy Lake WMA.
- Hogs are running wild on Thistlethwaite, Richard K. Yancey, Sherburne, Grassy Lake, Pomme de Terre, Attakapas and the Acadiana Conservation Corridor.



Gantt Wyble with a buck from Sherburne WMA located in Pointe Coupee, St. Martin and Iberville parishes.

Submitted by Gantt Wyble

acre area in Concordia Parish.

This upcoming squirrel hunting season should be no different, Vidrine said. The expansive area is rich with a diverse number of hard- and soft-mast producing trees in bottomland hardwood habitat.

How plentiful are the squirrels? Last season's harvest reflects that population and the area's popularity among squirrel hunters — not only in the region but across the state. There were a reported 6,512 squirrels harvested in 4,379 hunter efforts, or 1.5 per effort in 2017-18.



Photo by Chris Berzas

The highest harvest-per-hunter effort last season was on Attakapas WMA, a 27,000-acre area in the Atchafalaya Basin, where there were 450 squirrels reported harvested in 187 hunter efforts, or 2.4 squirrels per hunter effort.

Thistlethwaite's 2017-18 squirrel harvest showed 1,150 squirrels killed in 1,393 hunter efforts, or 0.8 squirrels per hunter.

RKY and Thistlethwaite had the highest mast crop production of all the region's WMAs.

SHERBURNE LEADS FOR DUCKS

Sherburne WMA stands out as one of several top waterfowl hunting areas in the Lafayette region.

While duck hunting historically is fair to good on many of the region's WMAs, Sherburne, Attakapas and Richard K. Yancey often are the best bets depending on weather conditions and the fall flight of migratory waterfowl.

"We expect another good season this winter depending on rainfall and cold weather," Vidrine said.

Each Lafayette region WMA offers its own unique duck hunting experience and access to some prime duck hunting habitat, he said, adding other potentially fair to good duck hunting destinations are Grassy Lake, Spring Bayou and Pomme de Terre.

Sherburne is a 43,000-acre-plus mostly bottomland hardwoods area in Pointe Coupee, St. Martin and Iberville parishes.

continues >>>



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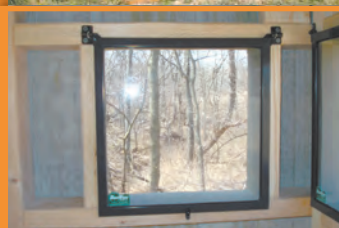
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LAFAYETTE REGION CONTINUED

Vidrine advised waterfowlers to take advantage of lottery duck hunts on Sherburne WMA at the South Farm Wetland Development Area. Tuesdays and Thursdays are on-site drawings, and Saturdays are pre-selected drawings, he said.

The LDWF began taking applications for disabled veterans and for regular waterfowl lottery hunts on Sherburne in early July. The application deadline is Sept. 28.

Applications and more information can be obtained by contacting your local LDWF office, or going to their website at www.wlf.louisiana.gov/hunting/lottery-hunts.

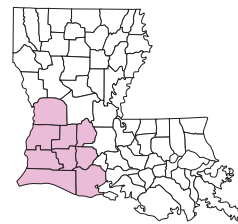
A \$5 administrative fee must be submitted with each application. Hunters may apply for as many as three dates, but will be selected for no more than one. ■



Joey Turner of Marksville busted this big 12-pointer on Richard K. Yancey WMA in Concordia Parish on Jan. 2, 2018.

Submitted by Joey Turner

LAKE CHARLES REGION



LAKE CHARLES REGION

PROS

- Fort Polk-Vernon and Peason Ridge WMAs offer excellent hunting for deer, turkey, quail and squirrels on approximately 180,000 combined acres.
- Clear Creek WMA has excellent deer, turkey, woodcock, rabbit and dove hunting on 52,559 acres with one campground.
- West Bay WMA has excellent deer, turkey and squirrel hunting on 59,189 acres with two campgrounds.

CONS

- Some Fort Polk-Vernon and Peason Ridge areas are subject to closure due to military training. For open areas during hunting season go to posted maps at www.jrtc-polk.army.mil/hunt2/hunt/default.htm.
- Sabine Island WMA is accessible only by boat, and hunters must use hip boots/waders to cross sloughs. Also, hunters need to bring a GPS because it's easy to get lost – the ridges and sloughs look alike and can confuse newcomers.

Talk about a real head-scratcher when it comes to the best squirrel hunting public area in Southwest Louisiana.

West Bay and Clear Creek WMAs are a lot alike as far as size, terrain and habitat. West Bay, however, is clearly the first

choice when it comes to squirrel hunting, a passion for so many small game hunters in the region.

“What sets it apart from Clear Creek, I don’t know. They’re both pine plantations. They cut ‘em down, grow ‘em, cut ‘em down, grow ‘em ...” said Wendell Smith, the biologist regional manager for the Lake Charles region.

WEST BAY THE CHOICE FOR SQUIRRELS

He’s followed the successes of squirrel hunters on West Bay for nearly three decades in his career, and pointed out that 879 squirrels were reported harvested last season on the 59,189-acre WMA in Allen Parish.

The squirrel harvest on the region’s other WMAs dropped significantly after that, with a reported 324 squirrels in the bag last season on Vernon WMA and 314 squirrels harvested on Peason Ridge. Because of flooding, Sabine Island, normally one of the squirrel hunting hotspots in the region, experienced limited hunting pressure, Smith said.

But when the shooting starts this fall, it’s hard to beat West Bay.

“The thing about West Bay, it’s a long WMA. It has a lot of creeks that run through it and it’s got those (mast-producing) trees,” he said. “Also, on the north end, there’s a lot more hardwoods just south of Interstate 10.”

Creeks with pine trees along the banks make the difference, he said, naming Alligator Creek, Little Mill Creek, Middle Creek, Mill Creek, Buster Creek and Curtis



Landon Dowden dropped this hammer 13-point in 2016 at Peason Ridge WMA in Vernon Parish.

Submitted by Landon Dowden

Robert Lestelle shot this nice 8-point buck on Fort Polk-Vernon WMA in Vernon Parish.

creek as magnets for many squirrels. Scouting those creek bottoms is a must before a hunt, he said.

The area is full of cat squirrels, which stick to the bottomland hardwoods, he said. There are some fox squirrels in the "transition areas," where bottomland hardwoods give way to piney woods, he added.

Mast crops are reliable barometers of what the squirrel population will be.

"It's been raining a lot so it should be good," he said, pointing out that some mast-producing trees, such as white oaks, don't put out mast every year depending on their cycle.

As for Sabine Island WMA returning to the squirrel hunting spotlight, Smith has no doubts. Squirrels don't swim off the area during a flood like deer do, he said, and with no flooding events the season should be top-notch again in 2018-19.

FORT POLK-VERNON FOR BUCKS

Smith was out one day in July on West Bay and Clear Creek WMAs and saw sights that should warm the hearts of

public lands deer hunters in the Lake Charles region.

"I was out there ... and saw a bunch of fawns. Sometimes you go and won't see a deer. It seems like every 30 minutes I'd see a couple fawns running with mama," Smith said.

Still, the primary area for solid deer hunting remains Fort Polk-Vernon WMA in Vernon Parish, where 627 deer were reported killed last season, the veteran biologist said. The sheer size of the area - 105,000-plus acres with rolling hills and some flats, fairly large stream bottoms and numerous small creeks, combined with favorable habitat conditions - make it a top destination each season.

Bowhunters in particular consider the area as having the potential to give up a wallhanger at any time. Many still talk about the 140 1/8 typical buck stuck on Fort Polk-Vernon several years ago.

Fort Polk-Vernon was followed closely by Peason Ridge (277 deer reported harvested last season), West Bay (254 deer reported harvested last season) and Clear Creek (234 reported harvested last season).



Submitted by Robert Lestelle

"The more you scout, the better your odds will be for bringing home the venison," Smith said.

CLEAR CREEK TOP FOR RABBITS

Clear Creek WMA's rabbit hunting success last season was logged mostly over the latter days of the season with the use of dogs, according to Smith. With mini-

continues >>>

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LAKE CHARLES REGION CONTINUED

mal pressure, this 52,000-acre area full of pine plantations, rolling hills and draws in Vernon Parish had the top reported rabbit harvest in 2017-18, he said.

West Bay's reported rabbit harvest also picked up late in the season when hunters were able to use dogs, he said.

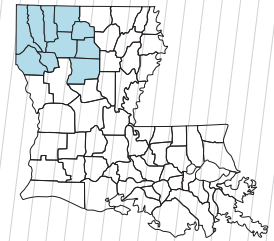
So far this year, the rabbit outlook looks promising, he said.

"When I'm going home evenings, on the side of the road I'm seeing lots of

bunnies. It should be good small game hunting," he said.

Prescribed burning on Clear Creek, Peason Ridge and Fort Polk-Vernon WMAs should produce excellent early successional habitat for all wildlife, consumptive as well as non-consumptive, Smith said. Forest thinning efforts likewise will produce favorable wildlife habitats for several years on all areas in the Lake Charles region.

Rabbit hunters who go with their dogs also can try Marsh Bayou and Walnut Hill WMAs, which allow the use of dogs the entire hunting season. Also, dog training is allowed June 1 through Aug. 31. ■



MINDEN REGION

MINDEN REGION

Want to get away from the maddening crowds (for the most part), and still have an above average chance of shooting a deer?

The Minden region has the place for deer hunters who relish such an opportunity. A "very long and narrow" wildlife management area with diverse habitat features fits the bill in North Louisiana, according to veteran LDWF game biologist Czerny Newland.

GET A BODCAU BUCK

Newland, who has been managing the deer herd and other wildlife in the region for more than 36 years, was describing Bodcau WMA, which gave up a total of 276 deer checked by LDWF staffers last season.

"The neat thing about Bodcau is it has a wide variety of habitat types, everything from

upland pine to cypress/tupelo bottoms. That means anybody coming to hunt needs to scout," Newland said.

He said some of the most successful deer hunters target the transitional zones — the edges of different habitats.

The 34,000-acre WMA in Bossier and Webster parishes is slender and long, stretching from just north of Bellevue about 30 miles to the Arkansas state line.

Veteran hunters know the most heavily hunted spots are on the Bossier City side and the southern end of the WMA.

Regardless, it's important to scout beforehand because along with the diverse habitat, if there's someone on your spot, you need additional options.

Bodcau WMA's prime food sources include acorns, greenbrier and honeysuckle.

Newland said the 2017 mast crop was well below the bumper crop of 2016, but it wasn't a complete failure.

"A good 2018 acorn crop would affect early season deer behavior as well as determine where squirrels would be feeding, but the greatest benefit would be allowing females of both species (deer and squirrels) to obtain optimum breeding conditions," he said.

The best opportunity to get a nice buck is at Loggy Bayou WMA, a smaller 6,558-acre area in Bossier Parish. It's all bottomland habitat and doesn't have any of the upland habitat features that are found on Bodcau, he said.

If you're a bowhunter, your best chance at sending a broadhead into a quality buck is Bayou Pierre WMA, Newland said. Bayou Pierre and Soda Lake WMAs are archery-only areas.

At Bayou Pierre WMA last season, 23 deer were killed by 443 bowhunters.

PROS

- Next year, more acreage will be added to Soda Lake WMA, just 15 miles from Shreveport. Part of a land purchase for the expansion has been completed and the rest of the addition (almost doubling the 2,500-acre area) will follow before 2019-20.
- Bodcau WMA's deer season was set early because the most deer activity is in November, when the rut is on. It serves as a flood control basin, but in all but the most extreme situations has some areas that remain unflooded.
- Based on summer observations, the rabbit population appears to be on the upswing in the Minden region.

CONS

- The Minden region's 2017 mast crop was well below the bumper crop of 2017 ... but is not a complete failure. A good acorn crop this year would impact early-season deer behavior and determine where squirrels will feed.
- Feral hogs are a problem on all Minden WMAs. The population continues to thrive, which raises the threat of disease transmission to other species.



Feral hogs are an issue at numerous wildlife management areas across the state. Andrew Kendrick harvested these at Sherburne WMA.

Submitted by Blaine Kendrick

There are piney woods, upland hardwoods and true bottomland hardwood habitats available to squirrels at Bodcau WMA. This makes it a great choice for hunters.



“Some of the archery hunters really like that they don’t have to compete against gun hunters,” Newland said.

He pointed out both archery-only areas are full of hogs — and there’s no limit on those animals.

BODCAU TOPS FOR SQUIRRELS, TOO

Bodcau WMA offers the best squirrel hunting experience in the area because of the variety of habitat types available to squirrels, Newland said. There are piney woods, upland hardwoods and true bottomland hardwood habitats for them to choose from across the area, with mixed pine hardwood in the hills.

LDWF staffers checked 1,786 squirrel hunters last season, and they reported 2,786 squirrels harvested.

The Minden region’s predominant species is gray squirrels, with a few fox squirrels. All of the region’s WMAs allow dogs for squirrel hunting during specified periods, Newland said.

However, on Soda Lake WMA, small game hunting is limited to falconry, and only on the west side of the area.

TRY LOGGY BAYOU FOR DUCKS

When water levels are favorable for ducks, and there are fresh flights of the migratory birds present in Northwest Louisiana, waterfowl hunting success is fair to good on WMAs in the Minden region, according to Newland.

The biologist points duck hunters to Bodcau and Loggy Bayou WMAs, where both have water control structures to help in holding water. However, he said water levels in both areas are determined by rainfall.

Wood ducks, gadwall, teal and mallards are the most common ducks in hunters’ bags each season, he said.

Bodcau WMA should have the most

action, weather and fall flight numbers permitting. That was the case last season when LDWF staffers checked 1,197 duck hunters who accounted for 684 ducks.

Some of the area’s best duck hunting opportunities are in the 1,600-acre greentree reservoir and in the numerous sloughs and backwater flooded areas, provided the water level is right.

Loggy Bayou WMA’s success rate last season was 212 ducks for the 290 duck hunters checked. But the prime areas there are small and can get crowded, so try to go on weekdays. ■

MONROE REGION >>>

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MONROE REGION



Two wildlife management areas known for deer hunting harvest rates double up as top-notch duck hunting destinations in North Louisiana.

Both Russell Sage and Boeuf WMAs have a higher ducks-per-hunter-effort average than the rest of the public areas in the Sportsman's Paradise. Russell Sage boasted 1.55 ducks per hunter effort, while Boeuf had 1.33 ducks per hunter effort in last season. (The state average for WMAs is 1.03.)

TRY RUSSELL SAGE FOR DUCKS

And that was a subpar waterfowl harvest because of drought conditions and non-functioning water control structures. Managers can't do anything about lack of rain, but they addressed the control structures.

Both areas also give hunters access to a large number of acres managed specifically for waterfowl, according to Mitch McGee, the region's biologist supervisor.

The harvest included resident and migratory wood ducks, mallards, pintails, teal, gadwalls, widgeons, shovelers, scaup, ringnecks, canvasbacks and redheads.

The good news is McGee thinks duck harvest numbers could be higher this season. Low water levels prevented LDWF staffers from using pumps to flood key areas on Russell Sage last year, and worn out water control structures quashed hopes to flood parts of Boeuf WMA, he said.

McGee said the 38,000-acre-plus Russell Sage WMA in Morehouse, Ouachita, Richland and Caldwell parishes provides waterfowl hunters with access to more than 4,800 acres of moist soil units, including Wham Brake, 2,550 acres of green tree reservoir, 2,767 acres of flooded agricultural areas and approximately 1,600 acres of passively managed natural swamp and sloughs.

"We didn't have a lot of water up here," he said, noting the Bayou Lafourche Canal was too low to pump. "If we have normal rainfall, we should have a good duck season. We've manipulated a lot of areas this year to get back in good production for waterfowl."

LDWF also tweaked regulations to enhance

waterfowl hunting on both Russell Sage and Boeuf WMAs. For example, use of motorized vessels is limited on certain units, and use of motorized vessels during certain hours is prohibited, McGee said.

At Boeuf, the faulty water control structures have been repaired, and with favorable weather conditions, managers plan to flood more of the area this season.

BOEUF TOPS FOR BUCKS

Quality browse conditions — the result of recent timber cutting — are among the positives going into the deer hunting season on areas in the Monroe region, particularly on Big Lake, Boeuf and Russell Sage WMAs.

Those typically are the top three areas for deer hunting in the region, according to McGee. With normal summer rainfall patterns underway this year, the outlook is even better, he said.

The average deer-per-hunter ratio was higher than the state average on each of those areas, he said.

The state average of success per-hunter-effort was .07 for deer, so it's important to note the ratio was .32 on Big Lake, .19 on Boeuf and .08 on Russell Sage.

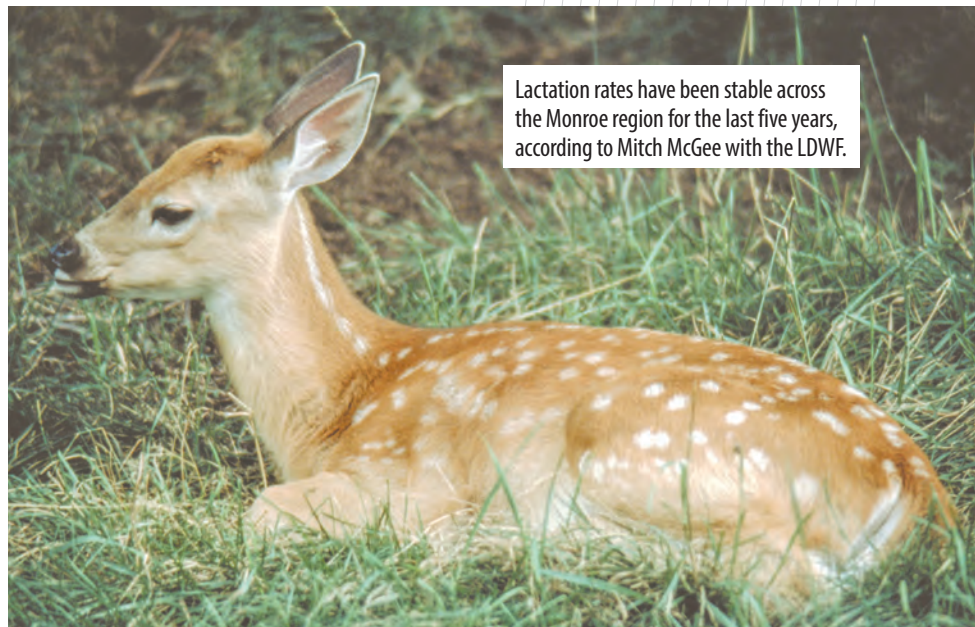
MONROE REGION

PROS

- The 2017 mast crop in this region overall was favorable, and this fall appears to be setting up for good red oak mast.
- Several WMAs in the region are getting timber harvests, which will improve deer browse in those areas this season.
- Lactation rates for white-tailed deer have been stable across the region for the past five years, typically averaging ~65-85 percent for 2.5- to 3.5-year-old-plus does. Also, body weights for bucks and does have remained stable since 2013.

CONS

- Flooding during February and into the growing season may have adverse effects for many of the green tree reservoirs on Monroe-region WMAs.
- Feral hogs are an issue on the region's WMAs.



Lactation rates have been stable across the Monroe region for the last five years, according to Mitch McGee with the LDWF.

Boeuf WMA is charging to the forefront as a deer hunting destination. Before last season, 443 deer were reported harvested there, an increase from 179 deer reported in 2015-16.

Another option for deer hunters is Bayou Macon, where a 600-acre timber harvest on the nearly 7,000-acre area in East Carroll Parish means there "ought to be a lot of browse and habitat for deer up there," McGee said.

Also, Buckhorn WMA is an area where hunters who have the time and don't mind scouting and walking through thick palmetto understory can hunt where there's less pressure. Big deer up to 300 pounds have come off the area the past few seasons.

IT'S BIG LAKE FOR BUSHYTAILS

After an ultra-solid mast crop last season and what looks to be a good red oak mast crop this year, squirrel hunters should make plans to hunt the top three WMAs in the region, which feature mature bottomland hardwood forests that offer quality bushytail habitat.

Big Lake, Boeuf and Russell Sage WMAs all have an abundance of mast-producing trees that produce acorns, pecans and soft mast species – major food sources for squirrels in the fall and winter months. As McGee noted, squirrel populations fluctuate with hard mast yields and, because the mast crop was above average last season, hunters should enjoy more success this season.

Last season's squirrel harvest on those three areas was above



Hannah Robertson, 13, with a nice doe taken during a 2017 youth hunt on Floy Ward McElroy WMA in Richland Parish.

Submitted by Chase Robertson

the state average of 1.55 squirrels per hunter effort, the biologist pointed out. At Big Lake, the ratio was 2.65/hunter effort, at Boeuf the ratio was 2.26/hunter effort and at Russell Sage the ratio was 1.30/hunter effort.

Big Lake features tall trees and far less palmetto than at Buckhorn, which still has its share of fair to good squirrel hunting. Big Lake WMA had a banner squirrel harvest in 2016-17 when 3,616 squirrels were reported harvested in 1,513 hunter efforts. ■

PINEVILLE REGION >>>

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PINEVILLE REGION



There are some valid reasons why Dewey Wills WMA continually leads the Pineville region as an area holding big deer — and lots of them.

Cliff Dailey, WMA biologist supervisor and a 10-year LDWF veteran, said the sheer size of the property — 63,901 acres in LaSalle, Catahoula and Rapides parishes — plus increased hunter effort combine to put it at the top of the region's deer harvest each season.

DEWEY WILLS GROWS BIG BUCKS

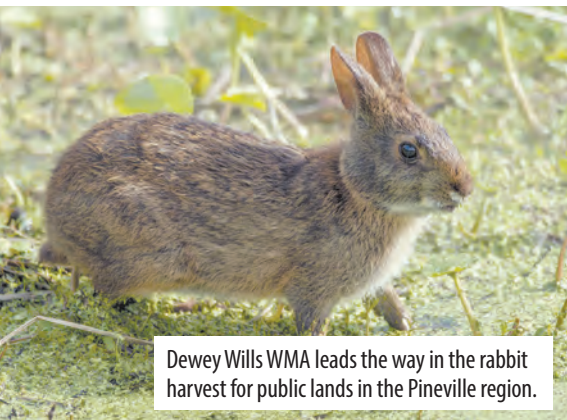
The herd is sizeable, and there are many quality deer roaming the bottomland hardwoods, sloughs and cypress brakes that provide such excellent habitat.

And food's there, too. Nuttall, willow and overcup oak provide fall mast for deer and squirrels.

What's more, old dying trees combined with timber harvesting have created canopy gaps that make briar thickets for the deer to use.

Dewey Wills WMA's deer harvest numbers last season are a testament to these highly favorable conditions. Dailey reported that 418 deer were killed there, up from 375 the year prior.

And because of its fertile soils and the fact that it's adjacent to several thousand acres



Dewey Wills WMA leads the way in the rabbit harvest for public lands in the Pineville region.

of agriculture and WRP area, Dewey Wills grows big deer.

To increase the odds of drawing a bead on a

trophy, the season's deer hunting schedule has been changed, Dailey said.

The either-sex modern firearm season was moved last season from early December to Thanksgiving weekend. The either-sex primitive hunt season was moved from January to early December and was reduced to two days.

Those alterations allowed the majority of does to be harvested before the rut, Dailey said, making for a more efficient rut and providing more food resources to the residual herd in late winter.

Two of the region's other leading areas for deer harvests are Camp Beauregard and Sabine WMAs.

At Camp Beauregard, 118 deer were reported harvested in 2017-18, up three from the previous season.

At Sabine, where 43 deer were reported harvested last season, there are clear cuts in several areas that have been replanted and currently provide both cover and food.

ALEXANDER STATE FOREST A GOOD OPTION FOR SQUIRRELS

Dewey Wills WMA's past two mast crops came in above average — and the area's squirrel population has responded in kind, Dailey said.

As a result, squirrel hunters bagged 6,910 squirrels in 2017-18, nearly 2,000 more bushy-tails than the previous season.

The 64,000-acre WMA's popularity shows in the days leading up to opening day of small game hunting season in Louisiana. Hunters from across the state, well aware of the area's squirrel-hunting notoriety, descend on the WMA and camp out, waiting for that first shot each season.

However, if you want to hunt squirrels and avoid the crowds, Dailey advised to try to get out in the woods on weekdays.



Seth Davis from Glenmora busted this 165-inch 9-point last December on Dewey Wills WMA in Catahoula Parish.

Submitted by Seth Davis

PINEVILLE REGION

PROS

- Dewey Wills WMA had a major spring flood that lasted several weeks. However, deer browse and other wildlife foods are at favorable levels to sustain native populations.
- Little River WMA's prescribed fire rotation (which reduces mid-story competition in upland pine stands to allow food plants to grow) paid off this year with favorable habitat conditions. And several new fire breaks created around timber stands can be used as walking trails. Ditto for Camp Beauregard and Sabine WMAs.

CONS

- Little River WMA had a below average mast crop in 2017. As a result, squirrel numbers should be down this year.
- Alexander State Forest WMA's deer numbers are low compared to other areas, which means the herd has room for expansion and available resources to stay healthy. The removal of roads and trails hinder public access to certain parts of the WMA.

There usually is less squirrel hunting pressure on Little River WMA, another area where squirrel hunters enjoy camping on opening weekend. Last season, the area gave up a reported 583 squirrels, 53 more than the prior year.

Alexander State Forest WMA is another option for squirrel hunters. It has a mix of pine and hardwood areas, with higher concentrations of mast-producing hardwoods along major drainages. There were 303 squirrels reported harvested there last season.

FOR RABBITS, IT'S DEWEY WILLS

Dewey Wills WMA swept the top harvests for deer, squirrel and rabbits last season.

It has great habitat for rabbits inside and adjacent to recent clear cuts and thinning

in bottomland hardwoods, according to Dailey.

Other features that make it a prime rabbit hunting destination in the region include the fact large oak tops left over from logging provide excellent cover, he said.

How'd the habitat conditions play out last season as far a rabbit harvests? There were 129 rabbits reported harvested in 2017-18, 67 more than the previous year.

Dewey Wills is one of the state's Small Game Emphasis Areas, which allows for earlier use of rabbit hunting with dogs. Dailey advised checking into this added feature.

Sabine WMA's reported rabbit harvest last season was 61, an increase of 35 from the rabbit harvest the prior year. The area has numerous clear cuts, plus areas that have been replanted to provide cover and food. ■

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REDS

By Andy Crawford

IN TRANSITION

September is when coastal fishing turns on its head, with redfish moving out and trout moving in. Here's how one guide ensures he's in position to intersect both species.

The water was a sheet of glass when Capt. Austin Plaisance wheeled his Blazer Bay out of the canal into the shallow, grass-filled pocket.

And it was quickly apparent redfish were swarming the cove.

"Look at all the wakes," Plaisance called out.

Indeed, the open water between grass beds looked like a fleet of submarines was on the move.

"There's a big school of fish in here," Plaisance said as he pulled the boat off plane.

The fact that he had spooked every redfish in the vicinity didn't faze the owner of Louisiana Redfish Outfitters.

"They'll settle down and come right back," Plaisance predicted.

He and YouTube's Todd "Marsh Man" Masson began working swimbaits through the grass. I chose a ChatterBait.

I was the first to get a bite, a hard whack that knocked my lure sideways. But somehow, the fish missed the hook.

More bites were in the offing, and Masson and I soon had chunky marsh bass flopping over the gunnel.

But the redfish for which we were hunting seemed to have disappeared.

Until Plaisance switched to a spoon — one my least-favorite baits in existence.

>

Redfish are making their way out of the interior marshes this month, so focus on outer bays for plenty of action.



Several casts later, he sank the hook into something that didn't budge. "That's a redfish," he grunted. And it wasn't a little boy. The fish didn't like the hook in its mouth a bit, immediately stripping drag off the reel. The Duce spinning rod doubled, but held tight.

Moments later the redfish was boatside, and Plaisance was digging through a ball of milfoil to get his hands on the prize.

The red he pulled over the gunnel was a glowing bronze color, thanks to the crystal-clear water.

We took photos, Masson tagged the fish and we released it to fight another day.

That was all the prodding Masson and I needed to switch lures. He went with a standard Johnson spoon, while I chose a Bomber Who Dat.

We were soon wrestling our own reds to the boat.

STICK AND MOVE

Plaisance was correct when he said the fish would settle and start feeding again. He simply put his trolling motor down and fished the area until the reds returned.

Of course, a bull red on the end of an angler's line causes enough commotion to spook its friends. But Plaisance didn't even let that worry him.

If redfish stopped waking near the boat, he would simply crank his outboard and idle to the next active area.

Redfish would scatter, but a few moments later we would pick up more.

It's the kind of action that can be expected this time of year, when redfish are beginning their move outside.

Success is just a matter of getting in position to intercept them.

PRESENCE OF POGIES

"Fish start moving to areas like American Bay," he said.

So if redfish are on your agenda, you can just hit those bays on the edges of the Delacroix marsh. In addition to American Bay, Bay Lafourche, Gardene and Lake Camp fill

with reds heading out of the marshes.

"We're fishing in the bays themselves," Plaisance said. "Fish the islands out in the middle."

He said vegetation is not as much of a factor as during the height of the summer when fishing interior areas.

"It's a lot less congested with grass down there," Plaisance said.

But the fish are still there because that's where the groceries have moved.

"I'm looking for bait," Plaisance said. "They're keying in on pogies this time of year — especially the big fish."

"The pogies are the giveaway."

Again, vegetation is not as prominent in these outer bays, but that doesn't mean he's just fishing wide-open water.

continues >



Target islands, shell banks and reefs in outer bays to catch plenty of September redfish.



If you don't find reds at your usual spots, it's time to venture out and look for new areas.

DON'T MAKE THIS MISTAKE

We anglers are creatures of habit. We use the same tackle trip after trip. We use the same lures time and again.

And we usually head to where we caught fish the last trip.

That's a big problem, according to Capt. Austin Plaisance of Louisiana Redfish Outfitters.

"The biggest mistake anglers make is they never venture off," Plaisance said. "They always go back to the same spots."

Of course, that sometimes works, and we head back to the landing with a box full of fish and plenty of photos to post on online bragging boards.

But the fact is that redfish are mobile.

"Fish don't go back to the same spots all the time," Plaisance said. "They move."

As a guide who has to put his clients on fish day in, day out, Plaisance definitely has a GPS full of waypoints.

However, those are only starting points for his days of fishing.

"I check known spots, and then I start venturing out," Plaisance said.

That's intimidating to many anglers. But it doesn't have to be. Plaisance said the key is to understand why fish were caught in a particular spot.

"You want to find the same type of fishing areas," he explained. "If you're catching fish in moving water, you're not going to go to dead water."

"If you're catching fish off points or in pockets, you want to find similar spots."

The payoff goes way beyond filling your limit on a given day: It makes you a better angler, and expands the number of spots you can run through. ■
- Andy Crawford

Andy Crawford

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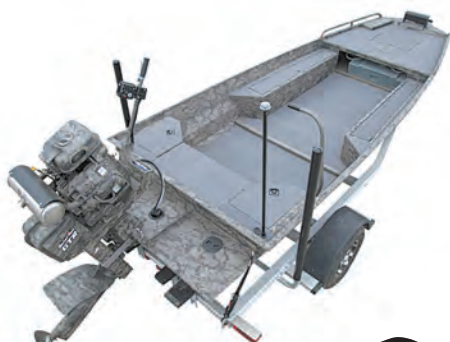
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“You’re going to be fishing the flats,” Plaisance explained. “We’ll be looking for hard current points — something where the water temperature will be a little less.”

And water temp is a real key: Even though cool fronts often push through in early September, cool-downs don’t last long enough to drop water temperatures.

“It’s usually late September before we see the weather really cooling down,” Plaisance said.

And if he does spot a bit of grass, the guide makes sure he spends some time around it.

“Any time you find grass, you’ll have a current break,” Plaisance said. “Where it hits that grass bed, you’ll usually find fish on it.”

DEAD-ON WITH DEAD SHRIMP

Artificial baits are still in play, with spoons and paddletail swimbaits being best.

But Plaisance said he grudgingly begins using that guaranteed redfish producer: dead shrimp.

The key to success with stink crickets isn’t a magic formula.

continues >

BEST TACKLE

Like all anglers, Capt. Austin Plaisance has his preferences when it comes to tackle. Here’s how he’ll rig up for battle this month.

- **Duce Echo 2.0** — This spinning rod is perfect for casting popping cork rigs and the fight that is sure to follow.
- **Daiwa spinning reels** — “These reels hold up the best, from the Fuegos to the Tatula,” Plaisance said.
- **Daiwa J-Braid** — He said he never has trouble with his J-Braid breaking, even when dragging bull reds through submerged vegetation.
- **High Water Fishing Lures Terminator popping corks** — “I like the titanium wire these corks have,” Plaisance explained. “It lasts a lot longer than any other cork.”

• **Capt. Lane’s Deathgrip jig-head** — This is Plaisance’s choice because it includes a sharp, wide-gap black nickel hook that just doesn’t bend when fighting redfish. Plus, it’s a Louisiana product.

And it’s perfect if the fish are active enough to switch to plastics. “It’s got that molded lure holder, so plastics just don’t slide down,” Plaisance said. ■

- Andy Crawford



A Duce Echo paired with a Daiwa Tatula provide plenty of power to boat hard-fighting bull reds.

Photo by Andy Crawford

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“We are usually in about 4 feet of water, so we have the shrimp on a jig-head about 18 inches under the cork,” Plaisance said.

Then it’s just a matter of throwing the rig out and soaking the bait, with a few loud pops of the cork to attract prowling reds’ attention.

One of his other keys is leader size. Plaisance always uses fluorocarbon below his corks, with 15- to 20-pound being his go-to.

If he’s seeing fish on a flat but not getting bit, even using dead shrimp, it’s time to make a change.

“I will go lighter on my leaders if I need to,” Plaisance said. “It makes a real difference.” ■



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.AndyCrawfordPhotography.

intersecting incoming trout >



While dead shrimp are almost guarantees, artificial lures like spoons also can provoke strikes from transitioning redfish.

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INTERSECT INCOMING TROUT

The cool thing about September is that as reds move outside, hordes of speckled trout start their fall migration into the coastal marshes.

That means you can catch specks in the same bays you'll be working to catch redfish.

"(Lake) Campo, Iron Banks, American Bay, Bay Gardene, Grand Point Bay — all those are going to be good," Capt. Austin Plaisance said.

Live shrimp still play a role, and he always gets the largest bait possible.

"The bigger the shrimp, the bigger the (trout)," Plaisance said.

But he also said you can actually do well on plastics as the weather cools.

"It's white shrimp season, so shrimp colors will be the best," he explained. "Something with red or pink works the best."

He said he'll be dangling these lures under corks, as well as tight-lining.

"It depends on the depth you're fishing," Plaisance said.

As always, the presence of bait is a giveaway that predatory fish could be around.



Trout begin transitioning back into coastal marshes this month, so you can catch some specks in the same bays you're targeting redfish.

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But he said there's another necessity for trout success.

"The saltier the water, the better you're going to catch," Plaisance said.

And there's one telltale sign that you're in a high-salinity area.

"Look at your prop wash," Plaisance said. "If it's making a lot of bubbles, the salinity is high. If you see foam behind you, the salinity is high."

"In fresh water, you're not going to have that."

Tidal movement definitely triggers fish, and Plaisance said direction really doesn't matter.

"You're going to be fishing the outer bays, so when you're that far out, tidal direction really doesn't matter," he explained.

Focus on shell banks, old islands and reefs — anything that can create current breaks. ■

- Andy Crawford

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It takes a diehard deer hunter to brave the elements that are pervasive during Louisiana's early bow season, which opens for most residents on Monday, Oct. 1.

But for hunters in southwestern parishes of the state, archery season opens even earlier than that — firing up the last two weeks in September.

Heat, mosquitoes and snakes are just part of the price you pay for hunting deer so early in the season while summer continues to bake.

But despite the harsh weather, those who brave the heat have a solid chance of harvesting deer before many hunters even think about stepping foot in the woods.

"The public land in those parishes don't receive a whole lot of pressure," said Johnathan Bordelon, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' deer program manager. "Because of that, some of those deer are allowed to get really old, growing great antlers.

"The potential is there to harvest deer, and really good deer."

Data compiled by the LDWF shows southwestern wildlife management areas (WMAs) boasting impressive deer-per-hunter efforts.

For instance, one in five hunters harvested a deer on West Bay WMA during October 2017 managed hunts, some of the best results anywhere in the state.

"Hunters in these areas are as successful or more than the rest of the WMAs we have along the Mississippi Alluvial Valley, an area known for quality deer," Bordelon said. "It's an area of the state that's definitely worth checking out."

EARLIER OPENER FOR CERTAIN PARISHES UP NEXT >

Bow season cranks up early in Southwest Louisiana, and while conditions may not be all that pleasant, WMAs there offer some quality hunting — without crowds.

By Jonathan Olivier

TAKING THE HEAT



Gary Fryou drilled this 197-pound 9-point from 7 yards on the Atchafalaya Delta WMA in 2015.



EARLIER OPENER FOR CERTAIN PARISHES

The rut starts earlier in Southwest Louisiana, so for years the archery season there has opened two weeks earlier in that area of the state. In Areas 3, 8 and 10 this year, the season begins on Sept. 15 and ends on Jan. 15, 2019.

New for this season, the coastal parishes of Area 7 will also have those same archery season dates. Most of the available land to hunt is privately owned, and the only public land — the Atchafalaya Delta WMA — will still have an archery opening date of Oct. 1.

“We decided to move the season earlier in Area 7 because it’s not really advantageous to hunt there in late-January since most of the bucks have already cast their antlers,” Bordelon said. “This will afford archery hunters a few more days in advance of the gun hunts.”

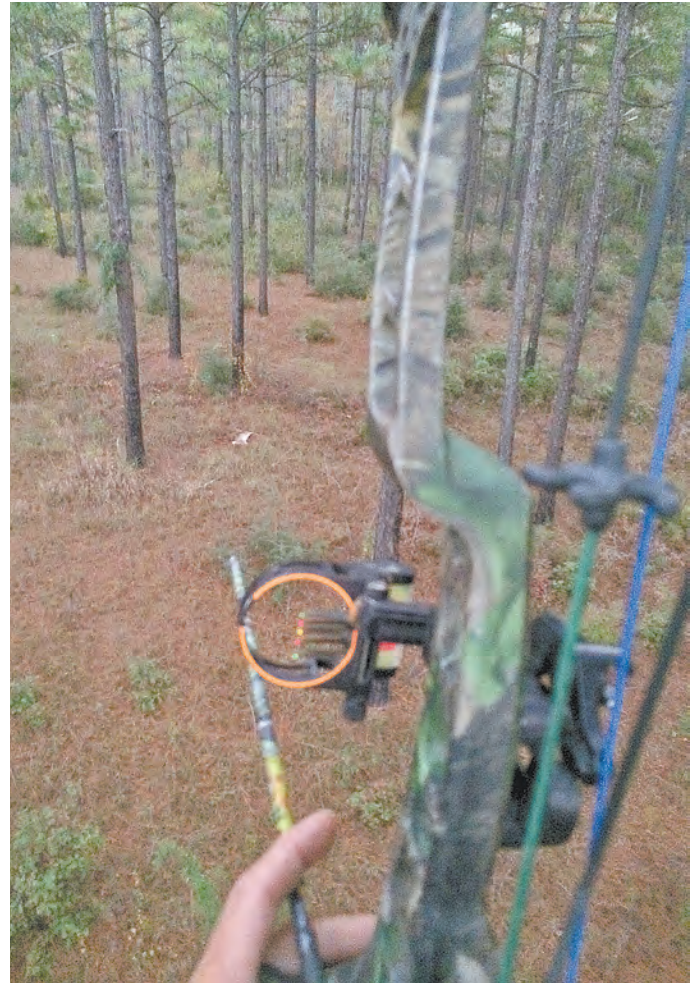
Ricky Aucoin, a Berwick hunter who frequents Area 7 throughout deer season, said he believes the earlier opening date could be advantageous for hunters who can take the heat. “Hunter participation in late January is lower compared to early October, with more deer harvested earlier in the season. The diehards like me, we’ll be out there and make the best of the weather.”

SEPTEMBER ARCHERY INTEL

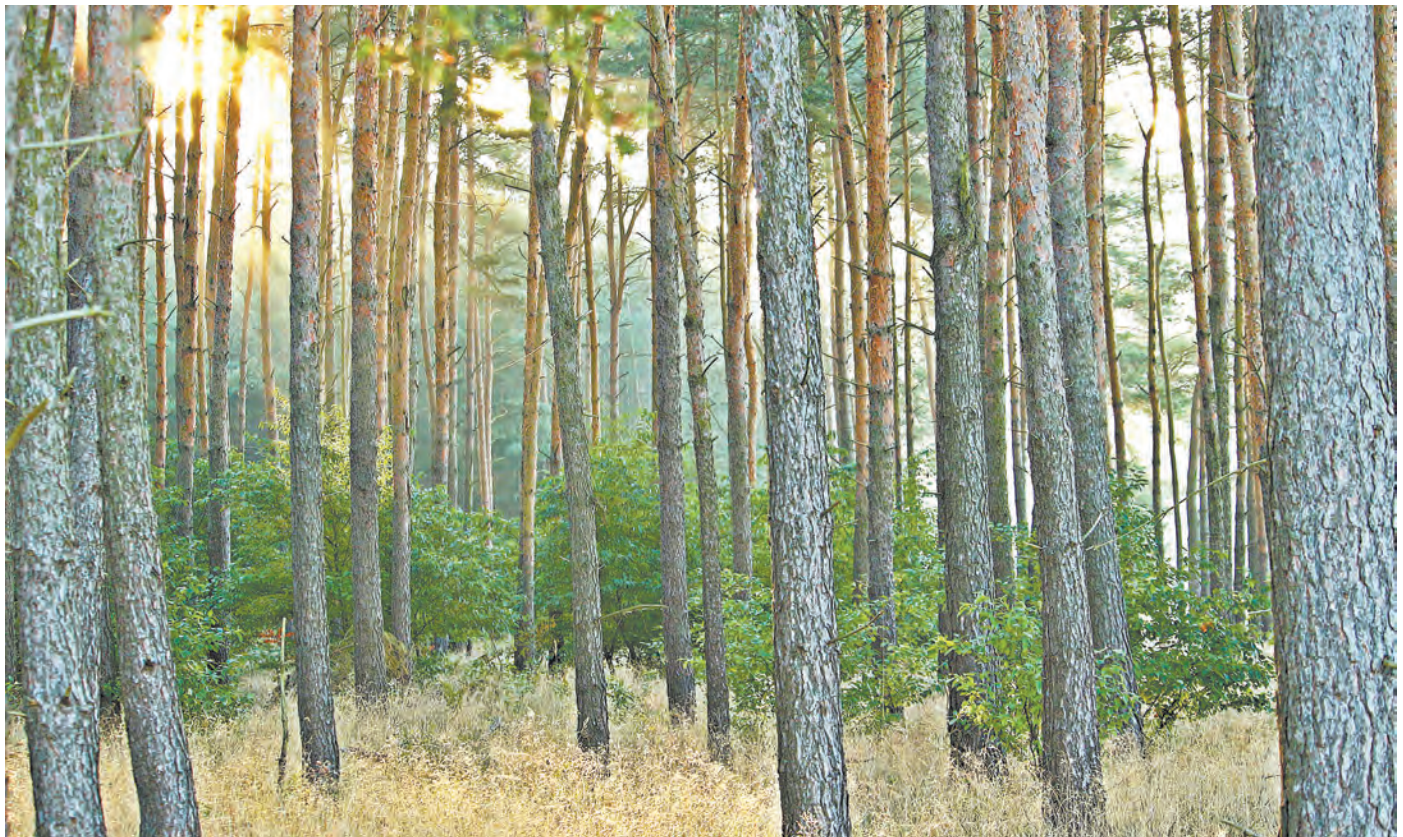
UP NEXT >

Louisiana’s pine country includes much of the north, central and south-western parts of the state. In these areas, timber operations and controlled burns are routine parts of life as the forest is rotated every few years.

By hunting transition areas near mature pines and brush, you can increase your odds of harvesting a deer during the early season.



Courtesy Wesley Lack



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• **Snake boots**

From rattlesnakes to cottonmouths, the woods of Louisiana are ripe with reptiles in September. A good pair of snake boots will give you a piece of mind and prevent any missteps on the way to the stand.

• **Mesh safety vest**

Safety is a priority when climbing trees, and many hunters have opted for vest systems, which are easy to slip on and off. Find a model that's made of mesh to allow air flow and reduce the amount of layers on your body.

• **Scent control**

Consider changing into your hunting clothes after you've walked — and sweated — through the woods. Then, apply a liberal amount of scent control spray to your clothes, and use scentless deodorant.

• **Hydration**

A bladder system can hold a few liters of water, and fits snugly in your backpack. The mostly hands-free system means you won't be slowed down having to fumble with multiple bottles — although taking frequent breaks will help to prevent heat exhaustion. ■

ABOVE: A good pair of snake boots are a must in the early season. With the summer heat lingering in September, snakes are still active.

BELOW: As temperatures climb into the 90s in September, you'll sweat on the trek to your stand. Be sure to keep scent control spray in your pack to spray down in the woods.



Photos by Jonathan Olivier

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SEPTEMBER ARCHERY INTEL

The parishes bordering Texas and those in the central part of the state are known as pine country, with timber operations or controlled burns changing the landscape every few years. Bottomland hardwoods, like those found in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley, are scarce here. It makes for tough hunting, but for those who know what to look for, it's also often fruitful.

"The habitat is pretty unique in that part of the state compared to the rest of Louisiana," Bordelon said. "Some habitat is better than others, but it's usually in motion with ample resources for deer."

Bordelon said pine stands that have been cleared for the first or second time can be excellent deer habitat because it offers woody and herbaceous browse the animals prefer. That new growth will attract whitetails from all around.

"The issue with that, though, is that it's a very short window," he said. "Timber companies will spray that area in order to plant more pine to reduce competition to the seedlings."

If that's the case, he said hunters can look for transition areas between mature pines and clear cuts, creeks or logging roads.

Leesville hunter Wesley Lack has frequented private land in the area for 30 years, as well as Fort Polk WMA more recently. "Some of the new land that was purchased for Fort Polk was my lease for 20 years," he said. "That was 13,000 acres, and I know it like the back of my hand."

When he's hunting the pines, Lack said he prefers to use a climber whenever possible, usually on larger trees near transition areas. But, when he can't find a tree to climb, he'll often sit on the ground in areas with sparser cover that offer a clear shot.

"But in those thick areas with trees to climb, a tripod works best," he said.

Lack often starts scouting near creeks, which have a good chance of supporting oaks — pin oaks drop mast the earliest, often in September in time for archery season. But he said isolated patches of oaks can be found in some sections of pine forest, miles away from any creek bottoms.

"From the creek, I'll look for travel patterns, and sometimes that'll lead to isolated oak stands," he said. "If I can find some producing oak trees, I'll climb a tree nearby and wait it out all day."

He advised to pick your spots carefully to avoid baking in the heat. While the mornings are often cool enough, during the afternoons when the sun is still high, he said to find a shady spot. That will also reduce how much you sweat, which will reduce your odds of getting winded.

"I generally walk in with a light windbreaker and pants," he said. "Wearing as little clothes as possible, I'll carry a light-weight ScentLok suit and put it on when I get to my stand. Sometimes I won't even wear a shirt in the stand, just my mesh safety harness."

Forest managers use fire, or controlled burns, to mimic nature's processes, which historically involved forest fires started by lightning. Browse in charred areas will thrive in subsequent years.





Courtesy Ricky Aucoin

Be sure to pack plenty of water, at least a gallon for the day — adding electrolytes to it is a good idea, too. As snakes are still out in full force, opt for a pair of snake-proof boots. And with tens of thousands of acres available for public hunting, get a comfortable pair you can put some miles on.

“The public land in these areas are vast,” Bordelon said. “Some of the largest in the state. Scouting and learning them can be intimidating for someone who has never been there. But there’s not a lot of folks chasing deer [in September], and the opportunities are there.”

Lack said that’s what keeps him in the woods every year for the archery season, as well as the element of surprise. Deer are still in bachelor groups and haven’t been pressured by any hunters since February, so he can often catch them off guard.

“They’ve been walking the same path for the past few months without human disturbance,” he said. “Come September, by the time they smell you or notice something is wrong, you’ve already drawn back your bow.” ■

WMAs UP NEXT >

In the marsh there are few options to use a climbing stand. But a ladder stand is compatible with even the smallest trees, and allows you to get above the marsh and see further.



Jonathan Olivier is a devoted journalist with a focus on the environment and outdoor recreation. His passion for hunting, backpacking and wilderness conservation has taken him from the swamps of Louisiana to the mountains of Colorado.

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WMAs

SABINE ISLAND WMA

Acreage: 8,343

Parish: Calcasieu

Located near the Sabine River, close to the Texas border, this WMA is characterized by cypress-tupelo swamps and piney ridges. Hunters will likely find hardwoods like white oaks, sweetgum and willow oaks interspersed between loblolly pine. However, due to its small size, harvest opportunities may not be as high as some of the larger WMAs in the region.

CLEAR CREEK WMA

Acreage: 52,559

Parish: Vernon

This huge tract of land is managed primarily as a loblolly pine plantation, with timber companies routinely cutting stands for lumber. However, Bordelon said this is advantageous for hunters. "The forest is always in motion and that's good for the deer," he said. "Those young pine stands and areas that have been thinned for the first or second thinning can be great areas to target and scout because of the new vegetation growth."

While mostly upland pine habitat, between the ridges hunters can find pockets of hardwoods, and along creek bottoms more oaks, as well as huckleberry, greenbrier and honeysuckle. There is a public campground available year-round, offering plenty of room for both tents and campers.

WEST BAY WMA

Acreage: 59,189

Parish: Allen

Mill Creek flows through this WMA, but many smaller streams may be dry during the early archery season. Along the streambeds you can find hardwoods, although much of the habitat is pine plantation on mostly flat terrain. While deer may frequent hardwoods dropping acorns earlier in the season, once squirrel hunters take to the woods in October the animals will disperse. "Stick to transition areas and younger stands of pine," Bordelon said.

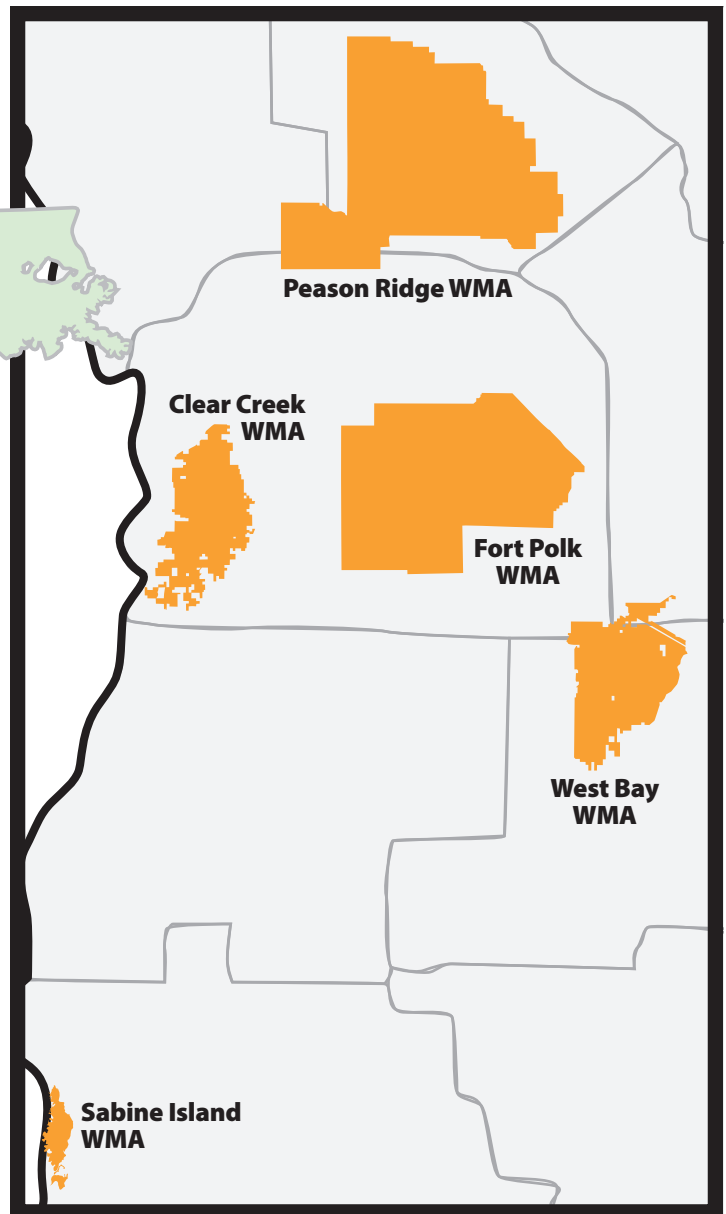
PEASON RIDGE WMA

Acreage: 74,309

Parishes: Sabine, Natchitoches, Vernon

Rolling hills covered in loblolly and longleaf pines dominate this landscape, which is, to a lesser extent, crisscrossed by creeks with oaks, magnolias, maples, mulberries and azaleas. "You get in those bottoms and you can find loads of green briars," Lack said. "The deer are eating that as they're walking through first, then they'll eat all the sage grass."

Although there is no camping on the WMA, you can find plenty of options in nearby Kisatchie National Forest.



FORT POLK WMA

Acreage: 105,545

Parish: Vernon

This large-acreage tract is owned by the U.S. Army and is an active training facility. For this reason, thousands of acres are often closed to hunting throughout the duration of the deer season. "When sections close down, the deer aren't pressured for months, maybe a few years," Lack said. "Those deer get bigger and can be 5 or 6 years old. That's great news for hunters when those sections are opened back up."

You can expect rolling hills and flatlands, prolific with longleaf pines. The tree once covered large portions of the southeastern U.S., but now only remains in small pockets. Deer feed on dropping acorns and, while the understory is sparse, there is browse available near creeks. According to the LDWF, land managers "plant approximately 110 acres of wildlife openings in the area each year with browntop millet, sunflower, sorghum, cowpea, and winter wheat." ■

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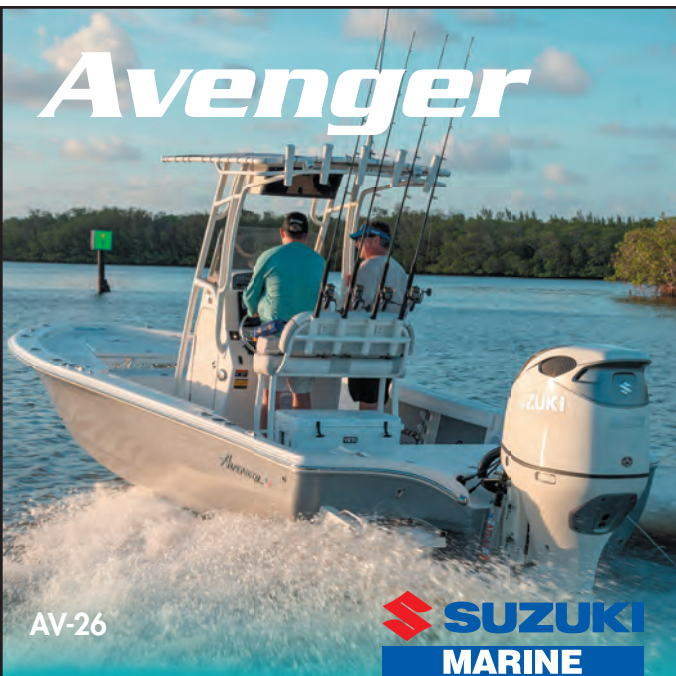
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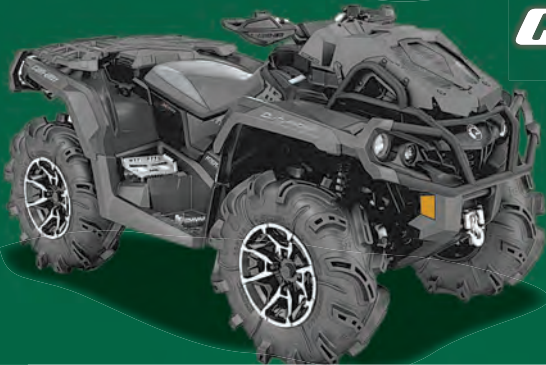
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Cranking the rocks in the main river can still produce lots of bass — as long as you can find some that aren't silted-in.

Hills and Valleys

By Chris Ginn

Recent floods have taken their toll on bass fishing in the Red River, but with a little cooperation from Mother Nature, there are signs a rebound could be on the way.

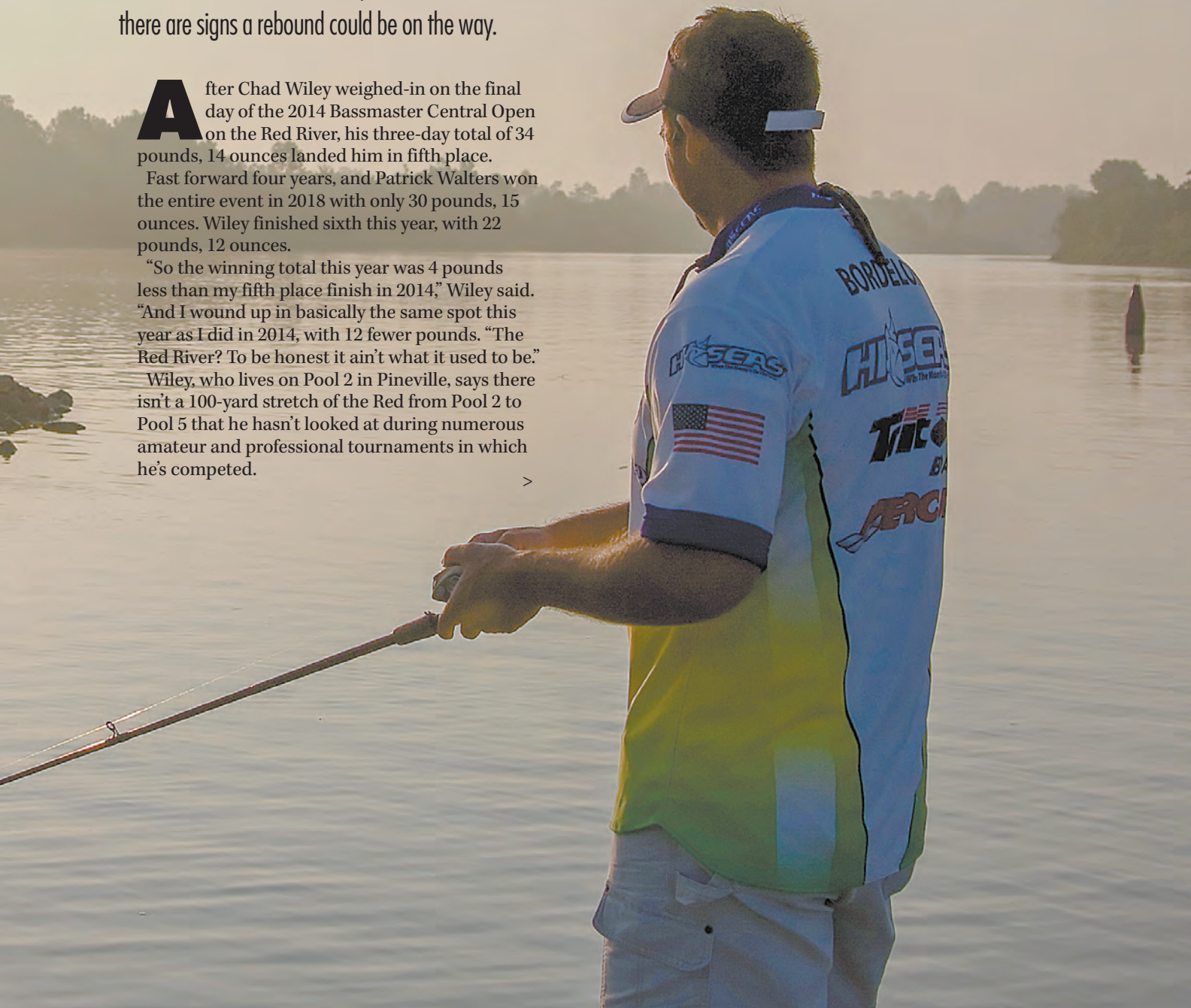
After Chad Wiley weighed-in on the final day of the 2014 Bassmaster Central Open on the Red River, his three-day total of 34 pounds, 14 ounces landed him in fifth place.

Fast forward four years, and Patrick Walters won the entire event in 2018 with only 30 pounds, 15 ounces. Wiley finished sixth this year, with 22 pounds, 12 ounces.

“So the winning total this year was 4 pounds less than my fifth place finish in 2014,” Wiley said. “And I wound up in basically the same spot this year as I did in 2014, with 12 fewer pounds. “The Red River? To be honest it ain’t what it used to be.”

Wiley, who lives on Pool 2 in Pineville, says there isn’t a 100-yard stretch of the Red from Pool 2 to Pool 5 that he hasn’t looked at during numerous amateur and professional tournaments in which he’s competed.

>



What he sees today as opposed to what he saw in the recent past discourages him to the point of wanting to fish just about anywhere but the Red. “And that’s true in every pool,” he said. “Every one of them.”

While Wiley’s most recent tournament on the Red River made him wish for the way things used to be, Red River guide Russ McVey (redriverfishing.com) has a more optimistic outlook for the future.

“It’s definitely changed,” McVey conceded. “The grass is basically gone, and a lot of the places we used to run or fish have silted in. What I do now is fish the river the way we used to fish it when it was first flooded.”

McVey explained that all he fished back then was flooded timber, which is just about all the Red River has to offer today — fishing flooded timber.

“But all bodies of water go through their ups and downs,” McVey reasoned. “I expect the Red River will come back in a couple years. It’s kind of like the Dallas Cowboys. They won all those Super Bowls, and expectations got so high nobody can stand to see what they have become. They’ll come back, though.”

“The fans just have to be patient ... like anglers who fish the river.”

FLOODING ISSUES

Although anglers tend to chase reasons why the Red River has changed so much, there’s no doubt the recent floods that severely impacted the region took their toll on everything from the topography to the tackle boxes.

“Twenty-fifteen was really bad,” McVey said. “And we had

another one the very next year. But we’ve had high water dang near every spring since 2015.”

He feels as though Pool 5 has borne the brunt of the recent flooding, as it is the northernmost pool in the system and has caught the vast majority of silt. In his opinion, the silting, although still present, is not as bad in Pool 4 as it is in 5.

“There’s one little area you can idle through, but I dang sure wouldn’t run it.”

“All that silt has reduced the surface area and volume of Pool 5,” McVey said. “Where we used to have 18 or 20 feet of water, today it’s either dry ground or maybe 1 foot. Places we used to run boats have willow trees growing on them right now.”

The access to Caspiana from the main river is a perfect example. The lane that used to run just inside the rocks right off the main river is now dirt. And the north cut going into White House is now too shallow to run.

“There’s one little area you can idle through, but I dang sure wouldn’t run it,” McVey advised.

One of the aftereffects of the loss of surface area and volume in the river is that the water now is prone to getting dirty with much less disturbance than it used to take.

continues >



Courtesy of BASS

ABOVE: Chad Wiley has had success on the Red, but said it doesn’t take nearly as much weight to win now as it did before the floods. LEFT: Finding where sand meets rocks in deeper water can be the key to catching in the main river.



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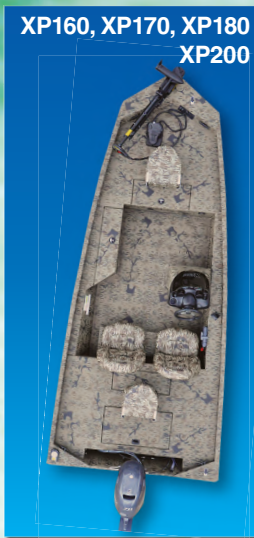


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Bass out in the river can sometimes be suckers for shaky-head worms.

“When you take volume away from a body of water, it becomes more susceptible to getting dirty,” McVey said. “If it used to take a 4-foot rise to make it dirty, now it takes only a 2-foot rise.”

And the disappearance of vegetation has only exacerbated the dirty-water problem, since grass tends to act as a natural water filter.

“All the good grass is gone,” Wiley said. “And what few pads you can find, there is no grass in it — just sand and dirt. There used to be a lot of coontail around the wood, and that could help you almost call your shots. Now it’s all lying on sand. You can still fish the wood, but who knows where the fish are going to be.”

Concerning vegetation, McVey feels as though vibrant grass beds could help the fishery rebound much more quickly if they were allowed to flourish. The problem in his eyes is that whatever grass does come back, gets quickly sprayed in an effort to keep it under control.

PERSISTENT PATTERNS

Although the topography of the Red River has changed dramatically over the years, Wiley and McVey noticed that fishing patterns have pretty much remained the same.

In fact, Wiley’s recent sixth place finish came by running the same kind of patterns he would have run before the floods.



“The shad were spawning around wood off sandy points in the very back of an oxbow in Pool 4, so I threw spinnerbaits as long as the shad were spawning,” Wiley said. “When that was over each morning, I changed to a Texas-rigged creature bait with either a 1/8- or 3/16-ounce weight and let it soak by just barely dragging it back.”

Although he didn’t use it during the most recent Bassmaster Open, Wiley said a squarebill crankbait is still a no-brainer when fishing the Red.

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Russ McVey says he's gone back to fishing the Red the way he did when it was first flooded — which means he spends a lot of time fishing timber.

“Without a doubt — never fails,” he insisted. “And just like before the floods, you can never get too shallow with them. All that high water rearranged a lot of the wood cover, but it's still there. You crawl that squarebill through enough wood and sooner or later you're going to put it right in front of a couple of their faces.”

Wiley didn't fish the main river during this particular tournament, but he did mention that the remaining visible rocks still hold lots of fish — although they tend to be smaller than those in the backwaters.

One of the things he keys on when he does target the rocks is where the sand piles up.

“Instead of fishing right up on the rocks,” Wiley said, “I like to run a medium-diving crankbait, or work a shaky-head worm out in a little bit deeper water where the sand starts piling up on the rocks, at what would be the shallower side of the rocks.”

McVey takes much the same approach, which he said was exactly how he used to fish the river after it was first flooded.

“All we had to fish back then was timber,” he said. “There wasn't any grass. That meant we fished a lot of Texas-rigs,



crankbaits and spinnerbaits. Topwater frogs and all that kind of stuff didn't come into play until the grass started showing up.”

Since there's very little to fish other than the timber now, McVey said he tries to figure out which timber is best by focusing on underwater contours and locating timber near drop-offs, points and channel ledges — any kind of depth change on the bottom.

McVey acknowledged that there were still lots of bass out on the rocks in the main river, but he was adamant that the backwaters were the place to target because of the better quality fish they hold.

continues >

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“It might be harder to get to the backwaters now,” he said, “but as far as the main river versus the backwaters, bass fishermen are going to go to the fish. If that means they’ve got to idle through a shallow stump field to get to them, that’s what they’re going to do.”

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Things may look bleak for the Red River right now, but Wiley and McVey both agreed that there were some positive signs that the fishery could rebound in a big way.

“Take those fish out in the river for instance,” Wiley said. “I could have fished the main river in that Open tournament, but I would have finished in 60th or 70th place because I would have had 5 pounds a day. There were definitely a lot of fish out there; they were just all small.”

In fact, Wiley believes the bass that made it through all the flooding must have had a few good spawns because of the abundance of 8- to 10-inch fish in the river.

“In five or six years, it may be better again,” he said.

McVey said he wouldn’t call it a big population of small bass, but he did say that there was a respectable number of 10- to 12-inch bass that could point to good things to come.

“We’ve got to have some clean water the next couple of spawns,” he said. “I’m a firm believer that fish won’t spawn in dirty water. I may be wrong, but if we can get some clear water spawns the next couple years, I think we’d see a pretty good rebound. Of course, if they’d let the grass grow it would rebound even faster.”

Like most things that are cyclical in nature, the Red River is destined to eventually get out of the rut it’s been in and make its way back to the top of the mountain.

Will it be as good as it was before? Only time will tell.

But one thing is sure — unlike the Dallas Cowboys, it won’t stay down in the valley forever. ■



A good population of smaller bass could be a signal of successful spawns — a positive sign for the fishery’s rebound.



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



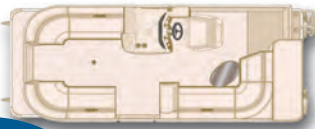
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By Jerald Horst

This Old River bream specialist placed her first bluegill in the state's record books last fall — now she shares a few tips on how to 'run with the bulls.'

BULL BREAM

BEATDOWN





It was September. It was hot, and it was late in the day.

Bream season was long over with in most places in Louisiana — but not on Old River.

The youngish couple was picking and poking their way among the derelict pier pilings on the levee side of the big oxbow lake. Gene Francois, standing on the bow and jockeying the trolling motor, was intense. His focus was on crappie, mostly called sac-a-lait here in Cajun Pointe Coupee Parish.

His wife Padra, at first glance, appeared to be laid back. She was fishing with a simple Zebco 33 spincast reel on a 5-foot Slingshot rod. She was dunking a cricket, mostly straight down.

They called it combo fishing: He was chasing one thing, and she was chasing another.

But looks can be deceiving — Padra was a serious bream specialist.

She was catching bull bream one after the other, but wound up battling a pretty special fish that day.

The bite from the big one came like any bream bite, but the giant fish fought sluggishly. Later she thought that maybe it was just old and it was its time to be caught.

When the beast came up, Gene immediately began hollering and jumped to get the landing net. He knew it was a record book fish.

The 1-pound, 6-ounce monster was so big it looked deformed. Its steep forehead was creased crossways, giving it a hump-headed appearance. Its body was so thick and bulky that it looked stuffed, and ultimately it placed seventh in Louisiana's all-time record book.

Specialist might be a mild word to describe Padra, but fanatic might be more appropriate.



From their camp perched on stilts 18 feet above a high bank on the levee side of the lake, the couple have pursued bream and sac-a-lait since 2004. Normally in September, they would stick to fishing pilings, piers and rafts on the levee side of the lake, but on our 2017 trip, the water was high enough to pound the cypress trees on the lake's other side.

Both of them kept their baits tight to the tree trunks. Although Padra admitted to sometimes using a sliding cork, both were tight-lining, an approach effective in fishing the deep waters they often target.

Gene's 10-foot jig pole was outfitted with an ultralight spinning reel. Padra's rationale for favoring a spincast reel was simple: "Other reels get backlashes and everybody gets frustrated. This is easy and it works," she said. "I don't think fish have a preference for any certain reel."

Point made.

The water in the cypress trees was 4 to 6 feet deep. With the boat close enough to reach a tree with her short rod, she gently dropped her cricket-baited hook to the bottom, picked it up 6 to 12 inches and gently moved it to attract a bream's attention. By not allowing the bait to touch bottom she maintained constant contact with it.

OLD RIVER HABITAT

In the best of times, bull bream bite not by charging off with a baited hook, but rather by grabbing it and holding it. On this day, immediately after a powerful September cold front, the bites were even less aggressive — more like gentle taps than hits.

She fished with deep concentration and a subtle touch, seldom missing a fish. And she caught more than bream, including catfish, gaspergou and even a cricket-eating sac-a-lait.

Although the catch was steady, the duo moved their boat to fish around rafts anchored off Alligator Point on the north side of the lake. (See the accompanying sidebar on Old River rafts, and raft courtesy.) She probed through every gap and opening in the raft and was rewarded by finding a school of bream suspended in the raft's shade 5 feet deep in 12 feet of water.

They eventually left to show off the final type of habitat they fish in the big oxbow lake, the piers and derelict pier pilings set in deep water off the levee (south) side of the lake. There were literally thousands of them.

The fishing structure was impressive — the uncountable number of pilings, the dense concentration of rafts as well as the innumerable flooded cypress trees: There was no shortage of places to hold fish.

With fish to clean, Padra and Gene headed back to the camp. As the boat chugged homeward, she volunteered that she didn't like to eat catfish and that bream taste better than sac-a-lait.

Gene quickly countered.

"The only way a bream could be better than a sac-a-lait is if they could turn into a sac-a-lait," he quipped.

"That's bull," she parried back, with abrupt finality. ■



This 1-pound, 6-ounce bream put Padra Francois in the No. 7 spot in the competitive bream category for Louisiana's all-time fish records.

BELOW: Padra and Gene rely heavily on fishing near old pier pilings during the late summer and fall.



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HOW TO CLEAN BREEM THE FRANCOIS WAY

"I am a bream-eating specialist," laughed Padra. "That's all I prefer. They aren't too fishy; not too strong."

"We fillet a few for the kids (Alli, 5 and Luke, 9), but everything else is on the bone — deheaded, scaled and gutted. I think they taste better on the bone. And I like to eat the fins and tails, too."

"It's way more convenient to fillet them though," expanded Gene. "Cleaning them on the bone is slower; it takes more time."

Slowest, but showiest of all is a family specialty called Francois Butterflies.

Gene shared both ways he cleans bream for his family.

TRADITIONAL CLEANING

This is old-school, the way folks did it for a couple hundred years until filleting became vogue in the 1970s. Some people, like Padra, still prefer the

1 Using a spoon as a tool, scrape all the scales from the body of the fish and rinse it thoroughly.



2 Cut the head off and discard it. Make the cut at a sharp angle to preserve as much of the meat in the nape of the 'neck' as possible.



3 Use a finger to scrape out and discard any viscera remaining in the body cavity. Rinse the fish under running water. It is now ready for breading and frying.

FRANCOIS BUTTERFLIES

This is probably one of the coolest bream cleaning methods around. It gets rid of all the pesky small bones of the fish, but keeps its flavorful skin and highly desirable tail fin intact.

This is the cleaning method used by Gene for prepping fish for the couple's children. The downside (a small one unless you have a hundred fish to clean) is that it's slower than traditional cleaning or filleting. ■



1 Scale the body of the fish by using a tablespoon and then rinse the fish to remove the loose scales.



2 On one side behind the head, cut down to - but not through - the backbone of the fish.



3 Turn the knife blade with its cutting edge toward the tail of the fish and loosen the fillet from the backbone by cutting closely along the bone. Do not cut through the skin attaching the fillet to the tail. This is important.



4 With the first fillet still attached to the tail, turn the fish over and repeat the process on the second side.



5 Cut through the backbone just ahead of the tail with the fillets still attached to the tail.



6 Remove the rib cage from each fillet with a knife.



7 Rinse thoroughly, and the 'Francois Butterfly' is now ready for frying.

LITTLE THINGS UP NEXT ➤

LITTLE THINGS

Like any dedicated fishing specialist, Padra Francois has twists on how she likes to do things, beginning with the crickets she always uses for bait. She inserts the tip of the long shank No. 6 cricket hook into the butt of the insect, and then threads it onto the hook.

The traditional approach is to insert the hook under the collar of the cricket then through the body and then finally



Francois always begins hooking her crickets through the tip of the abdomen, what she calls the "butt," rather than under the collar behind the head.

out the butt. Her justification: The cricket stays on the hook better.

Another slick trick she uses is to clamp 3 B-size (the smallest available) split-shot sinkers on the line a few inches above her hook. Her rationale: the bait flutters down, rather than sinks quickly as it would with a single larger weight.

Weight is necessary because the naturally buoyant body of a cricket tends to float rather than sink to where the fish are.

Finally, she keeps a washcloth handy to grab her catch, not because they are bloody and slimy (which they are), but because the cloth protects her hands from the spines of the active fish. "I'm a wuss," she laughed out loud. ■

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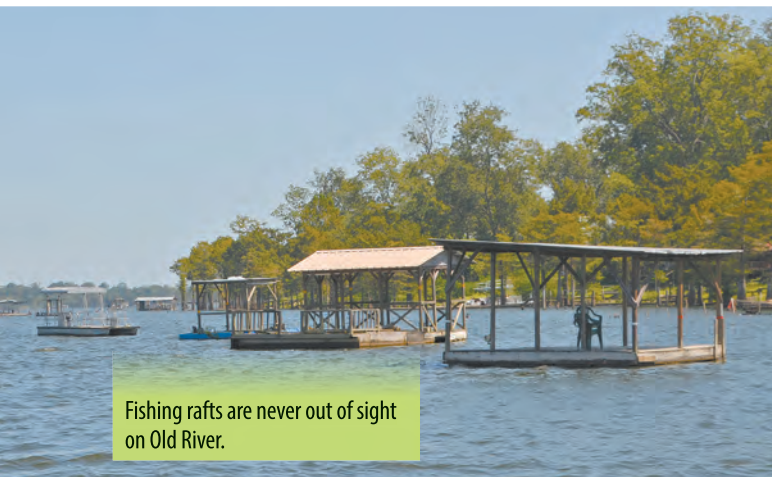
OLD RIVER RAFTS AND RAFT COURTESY

Rafts is the local term for well, rafts — essentially floating platforms that people fish from.

Rafts have a very old tradition on the big oxbow. In the 1950s and 60s, the lake boasted commercial rafts. They were big, permanently moored and constructed of large floating logs chained together and planked over for easy walking.

Raft customers were ferried from the shore to the rafts by flat-bottomed bateaus. Customers fished through holes built in the decking or between the big logs. Raft owners attracted fish to their rafts by sinking untold boatloads of brush beneath them. Fishing was done straight down.

The commercial rafts are gone, but the tradition lives on with dozens and dozens of smaller rafts constructed and owned by individuals for their own use. Every raft is built differently, each to its owner's whims.



Fishing rafts are never out of sight on Old River.

Like the commercial rafts of yore, a few are built of large logs, but most float on plastic barrels, metal pontoons or large foam blocks. Almost all are roofed to provide shade, but most have completely open sides, with some even featuring rudimentary outhouses.

One thing that they all share is their owners have sunken large amounts of brush beneath them to attract fish. Besides local vegetation like buttonwood and willow, recycled Christmas trees are very often used.

According to the Francoises, Christmas trees are in such high demand as fish attractors that people with Old River camps and rafts travel to Baton Rouge with trailers to pick up discarded trees after the holidays.

Padra Francois said unwritten rules of courtesy apply to these private rafts on public waters. "Locals consider it OK to fish around a raft if you don't tie off to it or get on it," she said. "And above all, don't approach a raft with people fishing on it." ■

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THE OLD RIVER BREAM CYCLE

"Bream fishing in Old River is good from spring through October," advised Padra Francois. "And the fishing is good. When people think of bream in Old River, they think of fish nearly a pound in weight.

"It's good — I catch 'em."

For she and her husband Gene, the fishing cycle starts in April. At that time of the year, the lake is flooded by a Mississippi River swollen with spring runoff from half the United States. Backing in through a link to the river called the "Narrows" at the northeastern tip of the U-shaped lake, water levels can easily rise over 20 feet.

Francois begins her hunt for beds of spawning bream by searching on the island-side of the lake in its flooded dense forest. What locals call the island side is the lakeside on the inside of the arc-shaped lake. The land on the island side is a virtual wilderness named Raccourci Island.

In contrast, the other side of the lake

(what she calls the levee side), is densely crowded with camps, including their own. It is paralleled closely by Highway 419 on the outside of the levee.

In their search for fish, they motor over the flooded ridges on the island side and cut their engine off to listen. If bream are present in any numbers, they can be heard 'sucking' on the top of the water as they feed.

Rather than there being just one ridge, a series of ridges and sloughs parallel the open water of the lake. The best beds are located on the first ridge.

Typically, these beds are located in 5 or 6 feet of water. In spite of this being backwater from the Mississippi River, it will stay clear enough to fish, unless extreme flooding conditions entirely inundate Raccourci Island and sheet flow from the river overwhelms it.

Padra targets the bases of the big trees



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Old River offers excellent sac-a-lait and bream options, and Padra and Gene often "combo fish" for them.



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on the ridge. "When you find them, you can catch five or you can catch 20," she said. "Then you use your trolling motor to look for more."

When the river and lake levels start dropping in early summer, the water will come off the ridges and the bream will follow it out. Fishing is best then in the midst of the cypress trees standing in the water, still on the island side of the lake.

By mid- to late summer, Padra and Gene shift their fishing effort to the deeper waters on the levee side of the lake — the side lined with camps. There, they target pilings, old piling posts, piers and privately owned floating rafts.

The pilings they target are in 12- to 14-foot depths. The rafts are mostly anchored in about 20 feet of water, ideal locations for their combo fishing.

The bream are usually suspended about 6 feet deep, and sac-a-lait will be found 1 foot off the bottom. When fishing deep water, what they define as 10 feet or deeper, they either tight-line or use sliding corks.

The couple sticks with this approach through October, unless the water rises enough to allow them to go back into the cypress trees on the island side.

After October, the bream bite slows considerably and by December, muddy Mississippi River backwaters have usually invaded the lake and make it uninviting for bream and sac-a-lait fishing.

They park their poles until April. ■



Jerald Horst is a retired Louisiana State University professor of fisheries. He is an active writer, book author and outdoorsman. Jerald may be reached at jerald@rockinghorst.com.

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A man wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and a blue baseball cap with a logo is smiling and holding a large largemouth bass. The fish is held vertically, showing its side profile. The background is a swampy area with tall, thin trees and water lilies. The text 'BLACK LAKE BIG BOYS' is overlaid on the left side of the image in large, white, bold, sans-serif font.

BLACK LAKE LAKE BIG BOYS

This 13,800-acre North Louisiana lake is home to some lunker largemouths — here's how one local tournament angler targets them during the dog days of summer. By John Flores



THE DRIVE FROM MORGAN CITY TO NATCHITOCHES

was a long four hours after I knocked off from my day job at 5 o'clock. And, by the time my wife and I checked into the Chateau Saint Denis Hotel downtown, it was after 9 p.m. — and I was just hearing from Pure Fishing ambassador Jimmy Jeansonne.

We were attending the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association conference, and that meant doing a little fishing the next morning.

Jeansonne had been busy much of the day organizing the event and pairing writers with local volunteer anglers who would act as our guides. I drew local contractor Jerry Coutee, an avid tournament bass angler and someone extremely familiar with the local waters in that part of the state.

What's more, of the many places Coutee could have chosen around Natchitoches (like the Red River or Sibley Lake), he selected Black Lake for our excursion in late summer — perhaps the most difficult time of year to catch bass.

WHY BLACK LAKE?

For starters, Black Lake is a 13,800-acre public lake, encompassed by some 50 miles of shoreline. Its average depth is a modest 8 feet, with a maximum depth of 18 feet in places. And, according to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the lake's water fluctuates roughly 3 to 4 feet.

Highway 9 essentially separates the lake in two. The portion of lake on the western side of the bridge

The LA 9 bridge traverses Black Lake, and is an excellent location to start fishing for big bass in this North Louisiana lake.

There are numerous flats with groves of tupelo and cypress trees on Black Lake, near sloughs and channels where bass hang out.

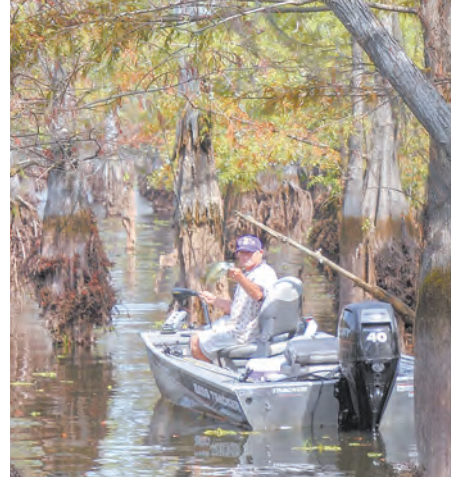
is known as Clear Lake, and the eastern side is called Black Lake.

Considered a 'rift' lake formed by a massive log jam along the Red River back in the 1800s (that also created lakes Bistineau and Saline), Black Lake is a fertile body of water well known for black bass, both largemouth and spotted.

"It's a natural cypress and tupelo bottom lake, where sometime in the late 80s they began stocking it with Florida bass and they took to it very well. It's almost like their native environment in Florida," Jeansonne said. "So, Black Lake has always been known for big fish. It definitely got a boost in the arm with the Florida bass.

"Today, when you go to fish a tournament on Black Lake, the winning stringers are typically in the 25-pound range for five fish. That's pretty stout, even when you compare it to Toledo Bend."

A review of the LDWF management plan revealed some 2.1 million Florida bass have been stocked in Black Lake since 1987. And there's no doubt bass anglers have reaped the benefits of the department's efforts.



Jeansonne's description pretty much jived with Coutee's reasoning when we launched at Chandler's Landing.

"We could have gone somewhere else and maybe caught a bunch of fish, but I wanted to go to Black Lake," Coutee said. "Where we could catch some big fish."

Over the years during tournaments on Black Lake, he's weighed-in two 10-pound bass, one 9-pounder and several 8s, winning big-fish honors each time. He also said his son and a friend had fished the lake the week before — and caught a monster 13-pounder.

HIGH-HEAT TACTICS

There's a reason why they're called the dog days of summer. Essentially, July, August and most of September in Louisiana are flat out hotter than blazes. Jeansonne said it's a time when the fish typically don't bite well, which places a greater emphasis on locating them.

"You have one main channel that runs through the lake — Black Lake Creek,



Jerry Coutee covers a lot of ground and casts with accuracy.



basically. There are huge sloughs that also run through there. So, just imagine an old slough running through the woods that kind of connects up with a channel,” Jeansonne said. “Typically, at this time of year your better fish are going to be close to the channel or on the channel itself. In any case, they’re not going to be very far off of it. It’s a little deeper water, where it’s cooler for them.”

Flats are located in many places along the channel’s edge, and could be 4 to 6 feet deep depending on the lake’s water level. And the channel itself might be 6 to 7 feet deeper.

Bass are going to hang right on the lip of that channel, Jeansonne said, particularly around and beneath the trees that grow along it.

Tactics he suggested include pitching plastic worms, jigs, or squarebill crankbaits along the edges of these creeks.

Black Lake is also subject to periodic draw-downs to control giant salvinia. However, during normal water conditions, Jeansonne said topwater baits like frogs, Zara Spooks and Rapala Pop-Rs are typically all good in the morning even during the hottest times of the year.

We hadn’t been fishing long when the water exploded beneath Coutee’s albino plastic frog near a patch of cypress trees.

Like most tournament anglers, he wasted little time reeling in the almost-5-pounder, and after a few pictures we were on our way again.

He ultimately put on a clinic that morning, catching five Black Lake big boys that easily would have placed him in the money for a tournament.

TOURNAMENT TIPS

When fishing the late summer months, Coutee offered up several tactics he employs to catch a big sack at Black Lake:

1. “You have to cover a lot of water to catch more fish. Every now and then you’ll find a little concentration in one area. But, you have to cover a lot of water.”

2. “You have to fish faster, not only in covering ground,

but actually tossing baits out there. I might pitch at four or five trees trying to find a concentration of them. I catch one, then maybe I’ll slow down a little.”

3. “Pay attention to all of your surroundings. Ask yourself, does it have grass? How close to the creek or channel is it? Does it have trees in it? And, what’s the depth of the water where you’re casting. All of these things I pay attention to.”

continues >

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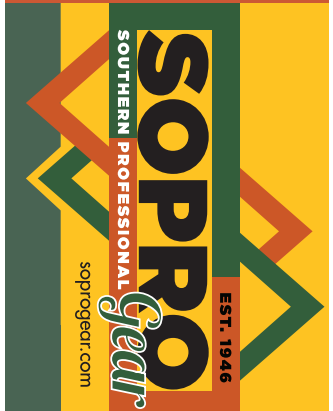
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BLACK LAKE BASS

White topwater frogs are excellent plastics to use on Black Lake during the hot days of summer.

LURES AND COLORS

Besides the aforementioned Zara spook and Rapala Pop-R, Coutee has several topwater baits he relies on based on the day's conditions.

"My favorite topwater bait is the Stanley Top Toad frog lure. I get a lot of bites on it and I'll usually fish it in white color," he said.

"When it's bright and sunshiny, bass looking for baitfish see that white belly and strike it. When it's cloudy out, I'll throw darker-color lures. You can trigger a strike by them going up to see what it is. The August and September topwater bite can be phenomenal, because they're feeding on shad that are starting to congregate in the natural creeks and sloughs."

Coutee also gave high praise to the Whopper Plopper lure from River2Sea, saying he caught a number of big fish on it, including one weighing more than 7 pounds.



A TIP FOR NEWCOMERS

If you've never been to Black Lake, Jeanssonne suggested first-time anglers fish north of the bridge and target curves in the main channel. "The nice big curves in the channel, where it makes nice big swings and the trees are on the outside bend, is the place visiting anglers will want to fish during their first time on Black Lake." ■



John Flores was enticed in 1984 to leave his western digs in New Mexico for the Sportsman's Paradise by his wife Christine. Never looking back, the author spends much of his free time writing about and photographing the state's natural resources.

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Hitting the spots

By Jerald Horst

The scenic Tangipahoa River is home to a healthy population of spotted bass. But navigation can be a bit tricky — here's how to get lucky with Kentuckys.



Spotted bass, named for the rows of small spots arranged longitudinally on their lower sides, are Joe Lavigne's fishing passion.



The grizzled veteran perched on the bow of the small flatboat expertly swung it in a half-circle in the swirling current of the Tangipahoa River.

He tossed a 2-pound spotted bass (locally most often called Kentucky bass) back into the water with a crooked grin. "If I'm eatin' fish, I prefer a 12-incher. I like thin fish. Why kill the big ones?"

He also throws back everything 10 inches and under explaining, "I'm not pressed to keep them if I am confident of getting my limit."

Joe Lavigne speaks with a mixture of awe and regret about his biggest spotted bass, a 4-pound, 6-ounce giant, equivalent to a 10-pound largemouth. "I didn't register it in the record book. The guy I was with ate it."

And he was reverential about the river. I asked why such passion.

"Look at this," he smiled, as he waved his hand over the scenery. "No camps; no people; lots of wildlife; and that right there," he grunted, as he set the hook on another fish.

retrieve was made parallel and as close as possible to logs lying angled downstream. Spotted bass lying in ambush under the logs would streak out to hit the lures.

A friendly neighbor launched Lavigne in the river at a bridge, with the agreement to pick him up at the end of the float. Water color in the river was clear by most bass standards, with a milky cast.

Lavigne started the float at 10 a.m. "Float fishing is best from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.," he explained. "You might get argument from others, but that is what I believe. My brother Ronnie, who fishes a lot, goes at daybreak."

From experience, he projected that the trip to the take-out point would take 5 ½ hours. Typically, floats are from highway bridge to highway bridge. The shortest float he makes is 3 ½ hours, and the longest is 6 hours. The length of the float is determined by bridge locations and water current speeds.

He caught five fish in the first quarter-mile from the bridge. "Man, they are on fire," he said in wonderment. "They won't bite like this all day."



Joe Lavigne controlled his boat with one arm by using a short sculling paddle. Notice he's on alert and looking for a good casting opportunity.

I had to admit the view was breathtaking. "It's a challenge to fish the river," he went on. "How to handle the boat in the swift current and around all the logs by simply using a sculling paddle.

"Also, you need superb casting ability. Sometimes a foot makes all the difference."

Every cast of his seemed to be within an inch of the bank or a nook in the logs.

"The angle of the cast is important, too," he added. "Fish want the bait coming downstream or at a right angle to the current. I'm not hardly ever going to throw the bait ahead of me and retrieve it upstream."

A specialty seemed to be to cast so that the

And they didn't.

Within an hour, the bite slowed to a steady beat, with occasional flurries of fast action.

"Very seldom will you get a hard bite the whole 5 ½ hours," he explained. "Usually I get an alternating hot and slow bite or I nickel-and-dime them all the way down — what I call a 'working bite.'"

"Like yesterday; two fish the first two hours; then 50 fish the rest of the way."

PADDLE POWER

Lavigne worked his short sculling paddle as if it was an extension of his body. He constantly studied the river's obstructions and





likely fish-holding water and the paddle responded unconsciously to his mind.

He only laid it down to cast, retrieve or unhook a fish.

He cast with a quick side-arm motion. When the bait hit the water his right hand was already on the reel's handles to begin motion.

While he caught the bulk of his bass on a spinner bait, he obviously loved topwater fishing. "I'd rather catch one on top than three underwater," he mugged.

"Very seldom do they hit a spinner bait on clay banks," his term for sharply cut banks that plunge near vertically to the water. "Topwaters and Lunker Lures are better there."

He utterly ignored the numerous sandbars that flanked the insides of river bends.

A word about Lavigne's float boat: The venerable battle wagon was a light-weight 12-foot aluminum flatboat sold by Sears, Roebuck and Company over 30 years ago. "A 14-foot is too heavy," he deemed. "And a 10-footer 'whirlybirds'

around my seat on the bow. I have more control with a 12-footer."

He clings to the craft dearly. "They don't make them like this anymore. This is a cheap boat. They make them out of heavier gauge aluminum now, so they are a lot heavier. It's like having another person in the boat.

"I've looked everywhere to find another light one and I can't find one. I've drilled the rivets out twice and replaced them using big stainless steel washers and industrial strength silicone on the rivets. I've also welded a couple of cracks in the floor.

"I'm always looking for another one."

Too soon, it seemed, we neared the take-out point, Hidden Oaks Family Campground near the Highway 190 Bridge. It had been a gorgeous wilderness experience — green jungles on either side of the river, broken occasionally by glistening white sand bars.

He caught 40 bass before 1 p.m., all of them spotted except for one largemouth. They continued to bite hit-or-miss until

TIP OF THE DAY

Swapping hands holding a bait-casting rod with each cast makes absolutely no sense to Joe Lavigne. This is especially true in the chaotic conditions that make navigating a motorless boat through a riverbed full of logs and tree tops challenging, even without trying to fish.

"Learn to cast with the hand that will hold the rod during the retrieve," he preaches. "If you are right-handed, use a left-hand reel. If you are left-handed, use a right-hand reel.

"I want to be reeling the bait when it hits the water." ■

2 p.m., then almost quit.

"As fast as they turn on, they can turn off. You can put that in your article," he advised.

He nailed a nice Kentucky on his Whopper Plopper right at the bridge. "Now that's a nice way to end," he beamed. ■

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A HECK OF A PLACE FOR A TROUT MASTER

Joe Lavigne's name is well-known in South Louisiana fishing circles, but not for float-fishing spotted bass. Rather, his name is mentioned as being in the revered circle of trophy speckled trout fishermen.

The 68-year-old retired teacher and football and basketball coach from Independence started fishing for Louisiana's most popular saltwater fish in the Grand Isle surf with Harvey Theriot, a fellow teacher.

It quickly became a habit when he hooked up with Jay Cambre, a Grand Isle camp owner and cousin of the greatest (arguably) of trophy speckled trout legends, Terry St. Cyr.

He soon became a frequent fishing partner of St. Cyr's and through him met Ed Sexton, Charlie Lieux, Bootsie Toups and Tony Bruce. All of these men have won the state's premier trout fishing competition, the Coastal Conservation Association's STAR Tournament.

St. Cyr, Sexton, Lieux and Toups were also fishermen featured in the book *Trout Masters: How Louisiana's Best Anglers Catch the Lunkers*. In 2004, Lavigne himself won the STAR with a 9-pound brute.

The very next year St. Cyr won with an 8-pound, 4-ounce fish, but his fishing partner Lavigne had a 9-pound 2-ounce fish that was disqualified from entry in the tournament. Contest rules prohibited the same person from winning two years in a row.

The plot thickened. One of the star football athletes that



Joe Lavigne is best known for his speckled trout fishing skills, but his first love is bass in small rivers.

Lavigne coached in high school was a young man named Brandon Carter. Right out of high school, Carter began charter guiding in Venice, specializing in stalking big specks.

Carter was ineligible to enter the STAR Tournament because he was a professional guide, but went on to be featured in the second trophy trout fishing book, *Trout Masters: How the Pros do it*.

Still, Carter's skills became so well known that St. Cyr needed Lavigne for a fishing introduction for two years. "The very first trip we three made together I caught a high-7 (pounder)," grinned Lavigne. "It held first place on the STAR leader board until the last day of the hundred-day tournament, when Ed Sexton beat me out.

"We caught 75 trout with a 3- to 3 1/2-pound average that day in East Bay — no exaggeration. Most people catch a 2-pound trout and call it a 3 1/2. I know what a 3 1/2 looks like."

He still saltwater fishes some, but in his own words "pooped out big trout" after Hurricane Katrina. "I get enjoyment from fish — any size," he chopped the air for emphasis with his short sculling paddle. "But this," he jabbed the paddle downward, "is my first love." ■



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KEEP LURE CHOICES SIMPLE

Joe Lavigne says three lures are all that's needed to successfully float fish the Tangipahoa River for spotted bass: a spinner, a buzzbait and a topwater plug. The "day-in-and-day-out" skirt color for the spinner and the buzzbait is chartreuse and white.

He will shift to chartreuse and black if the water has a "little tint to it." But he warns that if the water isn't clear enough to see a lure 4 or 5 inches underwater, fishing the river is a waste of time.

He was specific in recommending Lunker Lures as buzzbaits and ¼-ounce Humdingers as the brand and size of spinner to use. "Pretty much everyone that fishes the river uses Humdingers," he tossed off.

Typically (80 percent, he said) his blade choices for the spinner are a silver Colorado for the small blade and a #3 ½ gold willow leaf blade for the larger one, although for this day on the river he substituted a gold Indiana blade for the willow leaf blade.

His choice for a topwater plug was an odd one, a blue blood color ½-ounce Whopper Plopper, made by River2Sea. While

The three lures that Lavigne used on the river are, from the top, a Humdinger spinner, a Whopper Plopper topwater plug and a Lunker Lures buzzbait.

he sometimes used it in deeper, slow current areas, its use was mostly very site specific. Every time he approached a steeply cut, high vertical bank, what he called a "clay bank," he reached for the rod with that lure.

Lure choices have evolved. "When I was a kid, we threw River Runts, Nip-I-Dittys, double spinner, black and yellow H & H spinners and Snagless Sallys with No. 4 blades and No. 101 frog color Uncle Josh pork chunks.

"I still use Sallys, but now my main spinner is the Humdinger." ■

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WHAT IS IT?

Spotted bass are the dominant bass species caught in the flowing waters of the Tangipahoa River, but largemouth bass occur as well. This is true for most rapidly flowing creeks and rivers in the state.

But strong populations of spotted bass occur in such different places as the swampy Atchafalaya Basin and the ocean-like Toledo Bend Reservoir. Sometimes it's easy to tell the two species apart, but sometimes even experienced fishermen will scratch their heads when eye-balling the fish.

Sure, largemouths have larger mouths, a deeper division between their two dorsal fins, larger scales on their cheeks and they lack the rows of small dots on their bellies that their spotted cousins possess.

And taken from very clear water — on some days, spotted bass have red eyes (hence one of their nicknames, "redeyes").

But sometimes all those indicators don't seem to work well.

What never fails however is to stick a finger on the fish's tongue. Largemouth bass tongues are glassy smooth. Spotted bass have an impossible-to-miss patch of vomerine teeth on the top center of the tongue that's easy to see or feel. ■



The rough tooth patch on top of the tongue of a spotted bass is both abrasive to the feel and visible to the eye.

WHEN TO GO UP NEXT >



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WHEN TO GO

"Water clarity is a big thing on when to fish the Tangipahoa River," said Joe Lavigne emphatically.

"Rain is the big factor. Most of these banks are clay and a hard shower washes it into the river. The whole river isn't muddy, but about 8 feet from the bank gets muddy. Once you lose that 8 feet, you lose the fish because that's where they are.

"Because of water clarity, I figure the river is only fishable 40 percent of the year. Because it's a dry time of the year, September, October and part of November are best. April and May can be very good, but it doesn't happen a lot that the river is clear.



Spotted bass are agile fighters and are more willing to go airborne than their largemouth cousins.

"June, July and August can be good, but not the best. I think it has something to do with water temperatures. Plus summer has a lot of thunderstorms that pop up. It takes two days to get clear again. With a big rain in Mississippi, it takes a week to clear.

"We look up north, like by McComb, Mississippi. The river can be clear and bone dry at my house in Independence, but a heavy rain in McComb will muddy the river in a day and a half.

"Another thing that affects water clarity more than you might think is road work at bridges. Lots of loose clay is exposed and will wash into the river."

WHATEVER FLOATS YOUR BOAT

Since virtually all the land flanking the Tangipahoa River is privately owned, most access is made over state owned rights-of-way under highway bridges. At one time, float fishermen could leave one vehicle at the bridge where they planned to take their boat out, and then use a second vehicle to ferry the boat to a bridge upstream.

That has changed. Tangipahoa Parish, home of our current governor, has withdrawn the welcome mat. Unlike its neighboring parishes, prominent signs prohibiting parking on highway shoulders have been installed at each bridge in the parish.

"You leave a car at a bridge now; you come back and it's towed," frowned Joe Lavigne. "So you have to get someone to drop you and your boat off and pick it up. Cell phones are great for that. Or you can set up a time for pick-up in advance."

According to Lavigne, the Tangipahoa River has nine separate floats, ranging from 3 ½ to 7 hours, starting near the Louisiana-Mississippi state line in the north and ending near the town of Ponchatoula. He cautioned that the times given for each float

below are for expert boat handlers.

"If you get hung up on trees the whole way down, a 3 ½-hour float can turn into a 5 ½-hour float." He also added that the further north the float is made, the clearer the water will be.

1. Highway 1055 near Greenlaw south to Highway 38 near Kentwood. Here the river is very narrow and many obstructions make it challenging to float. (5 hours.)

2. Highway 38 south to Highway 440 near Tangipahoa. This stretch of the river has no sandbars, so both banks are fishable. Its many obstructions mean lots of boat manhandling. Lavigne noted that he has taken seven or eight people on this stretch of river and each has said, "Don't ask me to go back." (7 hours.)

3. Highway 440 south to Highway 10 near Arcola. Here the river becomes wider and its bed holds fewer trees. He rates this stretch as relatively easy. "You probably won't have to get out of your boat." (5 ½ hours.)

4. Highway 10 south to Highway 16 near Amite. This stretch has many sandbars, but few places to get out of the boat. The current is very swift. "It's like rapids," is how he described it. "You have to really pay attention and sometimes put your rod down to control the boat." (3 ½ hours.)

5. Highway 16 south to Highway 40 near Independence. An easy float with both numerous sand bars and deep banks. (5 hours.)

6. Highway 40 south to Highway 442 near Tickfaw. An easy float. (3 ½ hours.)



Joe Lavigne spent the entire float seated on the bow deck of his 12-foot aluminum flatboat, where the butts of his reels rest in this photo. He values the boat for its light weight and maneuverability.

7. Highway 442 south to Highway 443 at Dunnington. Another easy float. (3 ½ hours.)

8. Highway 443 south to Highway 190 near Robert. The river becomes wider in this stretch, but maintains a significant current. (5 ½ to 6 hours.)

9. Highway 190 south to Highway 22 east of Ponchatoula. The river changes in this stretch. Its current slows down, it has fewer sandbars and it has deeper holes. But its waters take longer to clear up after rains. Bass average larger here, primarily because there are more largemouths in the catch, up to 20 percent of the total. (5 ½ hours.) ■



Jerald Horst is a retired Louisiana State University professor of fisheries. He is an active writer, book author and outdoorsman. Jerald may be reached at jerald@rockinghorst.com.

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CREATURE FEATURE

Jerald Horst

Oyster drills are the most common large snail in coastal marshes. Obvious here is the operculum attached to each snail's foot, used to seal the shell's opening when the animal is out of the water.

THE BIGORNEAUX IS ESCARGOT

(AND THE FIERCEST OYSTER PREDATOR IN THE STATE)

There's a vicious predator out there.

It lurks deep in Louisiana's vast coastal marshes.

It hunts by day and it hunts by night, following the faintest scent trail to its prey. When it finds a victim, in this case a helpless oyster, it may take all day to subdue its prey. When it can't get the job done by itself, it calls in others of its kind to overwhelm the creature.

It is relentless — and it's a snail.

Called a conch (pronounced "conk") by Croatian oystermen, a "bigorneaux" by Cajun oyster harvesters and an oyster drill by the rest of us, this humble creature is the fiercest oyster predator in Louisiana.

Scientists estimate that oyster drill infestations prevent oyster culture on half of all suitable bottoms in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Oyster reefs, besides providing delectable eating in the form of oysters, are prime fish habitat of interest to sports fishermen.

Its shell, not exactly a shell collector's delight, is a nondescript tan mottled with brown, and is up to 4 inches long. The largest specimens in its whole U.S. range come from Louisiana.

Below 54° F water temperature, most of them will bury themselves in the mud. Even at perfect water temperatures and salinities, half of the population of drills will be buried at any one time.

THE HUNT AND THE KILL

Oyster drills crawl easily on the softest of mud bottoms, but on hard surfaces can zoom along at the lightning speed of 10 feet an hour if they smell an oyster up-current. A drill's muscular foot is divided into two halves, and the muscle on each side moves forward in alternating waves.

As it moves, it waves its snout-like siphon from side to side "smelling" the water for prey. Oyster drills are most

noted, naturally enough considering their name, for drilling round holes through the shells of oysters, mussels or clams.

Drilling is a poor word because no rotary motion is involved in making the hole. Rather the snail's snout holds what is called a radula, which looks very much like a J-shaped file or wood rasp.

The drill works this in a rolling, up and down motion to rasp its way into its victim's shell. Once the shell is perforated, the snail uses the teeth on the radula to tear flesh loose, essentially eating the oyster from the inside out.

Apparently drills have other means of killing oysters. When scientists confined drills in cages with oysters, most were killed by the drill creating a very tiny, almost unnoticeable, slit-like hole on the edge of the shell. A significant number were also killed and eaten somehow with no damage to the shell.

A single drill can kill 1,000 to 3,000 oysters in its lifetime. Oyster drills often

eat in groups, with as many as eight drills being found feeding on one oyster.

Oyster drills also eat mussels (probably their most preferred prey), clams, barnacles and even each other when they are hungry.

WHAT KILLS DRILLS?

Besides humans, oyster drills have very few predators. Cold simply makes them become dormant. At temperatures below 50° F, they stop feeding and bury themselves in the mud until temperatures warm.

Each drill comes equipped with an operculum made of shell attached to its foot. Dormant snails, as well as those exposed to air by stranding and those suddenly flushed by fresh or low-salinity water, seal themselves in their shell by plugging its opening with their trapdoor-like opercula.

The one thing that will kill oyster drills in large numbers is low-salinity water, especially when salinities plunge quickly because of springtime river floods. Large adult drills have been found as far as 50 miles offshore, where full strength seawater salinities of 35 parts per thousand (ppt) exist.

SERVE IT UP:

Bigorneaux smothered in an onion gravy and served over rice is a heritage South Louisiana dish.



However, salinities of lower than 10 ppt will kill drills under any conditions. The faster the plunge in salinity occurs, the less that drills are able to cope with it. It is generally accepted that under normal conditions, oyster drills will only be found naturally at salinities of 18 to 20 ppt or higher. Massive river floods can almost exterminate drills from large areas of marsh.

THEY HAVE A WEIRD LIFESTYLE

Oyster drills have separate sexes, but strangely, both males and females have penises, although they are nonfunctional in females.

Spawning starts at 70° F, typically in

April or May and extending into June. After fertilization, females glue huge masses of leathery, pale yellow egg capsules on virtually anything solid.

Each capsule contains from 500 to 900 eggs, and one female may produce 10 million eggs in her lifetime. The free-floating larvae that hatch from the eggs are quickly spread by currents and tides to repopulate areas where adults have been decimated by fresh water floods.

SO WHAT GOOD ARE THEY?

No fish eat drills, so they are useless as bait. But depending upon how adventur-

continues on page 104



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CREATURE FEATURE

continued

Cleaned oyster drill meat has an attractive appearance, very similar to other snails prized for human consumption.

ous one's palate is, they are rated good to excellent as human food. They are best removed from the shell by boiling them a few minutes in salted water, ready to remove when their opercula begin to fall off their feet.

The flesh can then easily be pulled from the shell with a fork or a toothpick. The large sack of viscera can be easily pulled off the rear of the edible foot muscle and discarded.

Most people also remove the head by looking for the small antennae stubs at the base of the foot, then with their fingernail beneath the head, pulling it toward the tail.

Like all snails — escargot, abalone or true Caribbean conch, drills have



relatively tough flesh that benefits from tenderizing or long cooking. In the 1950s a Louisiana company tried canning them commercially. The flavor was acceptable, but canning caused the meat to discolor and the project was abandoned.

Back in the day, before the modern oyster fishery existed, oystermen attempted to control drill numbers on their leases by attaching palmetto leaves to wooden poles. These were staked into the bottom on their reefs during the spawning sea-

son for drills. Periodically, the oystermen pulled the leaves and destroyed the eggs and adult snails, minus the snails kept for personal consumption. ■



Jerald Horst is a retired Louisiana State University professor of fisheries. He is an active writer, book author and outdoorsman. Jerald may be reached at jerald@rockinghorst.com.

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CAPT. PAUL'S FISHING EDGE: GPS WAYPOINTS FOR LAFITTE

I refer to the Lafitte Edge area as the location in the Southeast Louisiana marsh in St. Charles, Lafourche and Jefferson parishes between the Bayou Segnette launch in Westwego, Lakes Cataouatche and Salvador, areas in the Lake Salvador Wildlife Management Area, southwestward to Bayous Gauche and des Allemands, Lac des Allemands and Bayou Boeuf and eastward toward The Pen and Bayou Du Pont, then continuing south to the northern part of Barataria Bay.

There are locations in Bayous Perot and Rigolettes, Little Lake, Mud Lake and along the Barataria Waterway, including more than 180 Edge waypoints that cover prime freshwater as well as numerous salt and brackish locations which offer a wide assortment of fishing.

As an example, the Edge has locations such as the 10-foot deep hole in Bayou Dosgris shown as waypoint LFT136, located at 29°28.3410' North Latitude (N LAT) ~ 90°01.7740' West Longitude (W Long). This hole can be really productive to any kind of saltwater fishing. Nearby it has the old location of Plum Point, now a reef, shown as waypoint LFT82P, at 29°29.2406' N Lat ~ 90°09.6385' W Long, and the old island now also a reef on the west side of Bay L'Ours, waypoint LFT166 at 29°30.6852'



N Lat, ~ 90°13.7713' W Long. Fish the dropoffs in this area for solid action.

In the western part of Lake Salvador I have defined the Bois Chactas Shell Bank as waypoint LFT42, at 29°44.3054' N Lat ~ 90°19.0694' W Long.

In Bayou St. Denis, I marked the 20-foot deep hole as waypoint LFT93S at 29°29.4434' N Lat ~ 90°02.4616' W Long.

In the northern part of Barataria Bay I indicated that waypoint LFT87 at 29°26.3854' N Lat ~ 89°56.0672' W Long. The old point was located to the south about 400 yards, and it too is just a reef now.

GET THE FISHING EDGE ADVANTAGE

As you know, GPS data such as waypoints can now be electronically installed in most GPS units. Each Edge file has an electronic data file that can be downloaded in to a variety of GPS brand units. All of the EDGE programs are sent as an attachment via your email address. This data download enters all of Capt. Paul's Waypoints into the unit in a matter of seconds. To help those of us who are not computer savvy, each download has a general map of the area in 1:100,000 scale, and individual information on each waypoint. These map images cannot be installed in the GPS unit, but offers a location of the waypoints and their descriptions, as well as a READ ME and INSTRUCTIONS file.

Presently, Capt. Paul's Fishing Edge is available for 21 different areas, including Barataria Bay, Lake Borgne, Hopedale to Bayou Terre Boeufs, Delacroix to Point a la Hache, Bayou Bienvenue, Port Sulphur, Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Borgne, Calcasieu Lake, Pearl River WMA, Lafitte, Leeville East and Leeville West, Vermillion Bay, Empire-Buras, the Rigolets, MRGO, Cocodrie/Dulac, Bayou Sauvage NWR, Big Branch NWR, Myrtle Grove

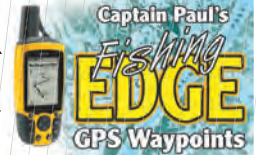
and Hopedale to the Mississippi Sound.

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

All of Capt. Paul's Fishing Edge files may be found in the Louisiana Sportsman Store located at www.sportsmangear.com. Search for Fishing Edge and all of the Edge files should appear. 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.

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

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NEW FLY RODS FOR 2019

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At the International Fly Tackle Dealer show in July, it was yet another record-setting year for premium fly rods.

With rod prices ranging from \$600 to \$975, it begs the question: "Who buys these expensive rods?"

The answer is the same folks who spend \$800 on a smart phone.

People love the latest tech, and are willing to pay for it. Given that nearly half the 6.8 million flyfishers in America have income of \$75K or more, affordability is not necessarily an issue.

For the rest of us, there's good news: There are many great rods in the mid-priced and budget categories, even some starting at just \$69.

RISE OF THE SUPER RESINS

A decade ago, sales of premium rods were headed downward. Graphite technologies had reached their limit.

That's when Orvis took a different approach. They focused on the epoxy used to bind graphite fibers and scrim. Using advanced thermoplastic resins, the Orvis Helios was more responsive and 25 percent lighter than any comparable rod on the market. In its first year alone, it sold 100,000 units.

Other companies responded. Some adapted nano-resins. A nano-resin epoxy is filled with silica particles one-millionth of a millimeter in size — small enough to penetrate and bond the molecular fibers of graphite strands.

Super resin technology (SRT) rods are extremely light, have near zero tip vibration and cast further. From personal experience, they are totally awesome.

But awesome comes at a price — SRT adds about 30 percent to the cost of a rod.

LIGHT AS AIR

Many of today's top selling fly rods use SRT: Orvis Helios 3, Sage Salt HD, Scott Radian, Thomas & Thomas Avant and Winston Air, to name a few.

This year, Winston followed up on their freshwater Air series with the Salt Air (\$975). Like most of the SRT rods, the swing weight is incredibly light.

UPCOMING EVENTS

• **Sept. 22 (Sat) - 10th Annual Rio Grande Rodeo**, hosted by New Orleans Fly Fishers club. Open to the public, entry fee \$10. Sign in 7:30 a.m., fishing time 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. (weigh-in). Fly fishing only. Categories include Largest Rio and Most Rios. For more info, go to www.neworleansflyfishers.com.

• **Sept. 22 (Sat) - Louisiana's National Hunting and Fishing Day**. Venues at Baton Rouge, Minden, Monroe and Woodworth. Free admission. Exhibitors, demos, cooking, and activities for the entire family. Baton Rouge, Woodworth and Minden venues will have hands-on fly casting and fly tying. For details, go to www.state.ldwf.us.

• **Oct. 5-6 (Fri-Sat) - 38th Annual Southern Fly Fishing Fair**, Sheild Convention Center, ASU Mountain Home Campus, Mt. Home, Arkansas. Seminars, workshops, fly tying and casting demos, vendor exhibits, youth activities and more. Hosted by Fly Fishers International, Southern Council. For more info, go to www.fffisoc.org.

In testing, it took little effort to get into the backing. And yet it somehow maintains the classic Winston progressive taper.

Sage introduced two new premium rods. The Igniter (\$900) is an ultrafast rod capable of long casts on windy days. The Dart (\$700) is a small stream rod, ultralight in the hand. In casting tests, the 7-foot, 6-inch 2-weight delivered pinpoint casts, yet also put out 70 feet of line.

FINE POINTS MATTER

You don't need SRT to make a great rod. In fact, as Jason Mauser of Mauser Rods points out, "Putting super resins in a poorly designed rod is like giving a pig a facelift."

Built in North Carolina, Mauser Rods utilize high-modulus graphite, advanced taper design and quality finishing for an outstanding rod.

Like the Mauser Waterman (\$695), the Taylor Anomaly (\$625) and Loomis Shorestalker (\$350) were some of the best rods I tested — yet none use SRT.

HAND-ME-DOWN TECH

With smart phones, each time new advancements are made, the previous technology is pushed down to the mid-priced units.

The same is true with fly rods. For example, Thomas & Thomas has pushed down their Stratotherm resin — found in their premium Exocett rods — to a new mid-priced series, the Zone (\$525). The Zone was very impressive during the casting drills. My peers agreed — it was awarded "Best of Show Saltwater Rod."

Even budget rods are getting the advanced treatment.

The new St. Croix Mojo Trout (\$195) now uses SCIII graphite previously found on their more expensive Legend series. The Orvis Clearwater (\$198) is being upgraded with more advanced tapers found on their mid-priced Orvis Recon.

continues on page 110

TIPPETS

School is back in session: Not just for humans, but also for fish. As water temperatures begin to drop during the month, look for various predatory species to school up as the fall feeding frenzy begins.

On lakes, bass will be busting shad. Crease flies and pencil poppers will entice vicious surface strikes. But in case poppers don't work, switch to shad flies like the Spooky Shad, the Lunch Money and even Clouser Minnows.

Redears and crappie will move back to the shallows. Fluff Butts and other minnow patterns will work for both. Redears will also fall to Cap Spiders, Hares Ears and Tussel Bugs.

September is the best month for Rio Grande perch around New Orleans and Jefferson Parish. The Rios love tiny poppers, wet flies and Zebra Midges.

This is the last good month for a wide range of pelagic species, such as Spanish, kings, cobia, and jack crevalle. Bull reds will be plentiful on beaches, in passes and interior lakes. For all these denizens, try Deceivers and Seaducers on intermediate or sinking lines.

The white trout run peaks this month. Find a hard bottom with moving water and you can load up on 12-plus-inch fish. Use a long leader and a weighted fly. Let the fly get to the bottom, then prepare for a hard bite on the first few strips.

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FLY LINES

continued

Jackie Kutzer of Orvis holds their upgraded Clearwater 8-weight rod, now lighter and more responsive.



GLASS IS BACK

If graphite is so great, why are fiberglass rods still popular? For one, many anglers love the smooth and relaxed casting of glass rods. It's like yacht rock for fly casters.

Fiberglass has also had some advancements. The new S-Glass is much lighter and more responsive than the E-Glass found on your grandfather's rod.

The Echo Bad Ass Glass Quickshot (\$269) is a series of 8-foot rods built on the new S-Glass. They cast great and are ideal for leveraging big bass and redfish.

Small stream enthusiasts will love Echo's new River Glass series (\$249), also built on S-Glass.

THE INFAMOUS LIST

Each year I list my top tested rods. There are many other terrific rods out there, so I strongly suggest — *try before you buy!* (An * indicates new for 2019.)

• **Premium 8-weight** - Winston Salt Air *, Mauser Waterman *, Sage Salt HD, Orvis H3, T&T Exocett, Scott Meridian,

Clutch Archipelago.

• **Mid-Range 8-weight** - T&T Zone *, Taylor Anomaly *, Sage Motive, Orvis Recon, Scott Tidal, TFO Axiom 2, St Croix Legend Elite.

• **Value 8-weight** - Orvis Clearwater *, Clutch Core, St. Croix Imperial, Echo Ion XL, TFO Mangrove, Redington Path.

• **Premium 5-weight** - Winston Pure *, T&T Avant, Hardy Ultralight, Sage X, Scott Radian, Loomis NRX Lite.

• **Mid-Range 5-weight** - Sage Foundation, Diamondback Clout, Scott Flex, TFO BVK, St. Croix Legend Elite.

• **Value 5-weight** - St Croix Mojo Trout *, TFO Finesse Trout *, Echo River Glass *, Fenwick Aetos, Allen Heritage, Redington Classic Trout, White River Classic.

• **Specialty Rod** - Sage Dart *, Echo BAG Quickshot *, Loomis Shorestalker,

Sage Smallmouth, Orvis Frequent Flyer, TFO Bluewater. ■



Glen 'Catch' Cormier has pursued fish on the fly for 30 years. A certified casting instructor and renowned fly tier, he and his family live in Cotile.

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Baton Rouge Area - Sunday, September 23, 1:00-4:00 pm

- Old Alex Box Stadium, LSU
- Bowie Outfitters on Perkins Rd.
- CCA of Louisiana, 12241 Industriplex Blvd
- Baton Rouge Fire Department, 835 Sharp Rd.
- Baton Rouge Fire Department, 150 S. Wooddale
- Baker Fire Department, 3701 Groom Rd.
- Central Fire Department, 11646 Sullivan Rd
- St. George Fire Department, 7027 Antioch Rd
- St. George Fire Department, 16415 George O'Neal Lane
- Cabela's, Gonzales
- Bass Pro, Denham Springs
- Feliciana Seafood, Hwy. 61, St. Francisville
- Grace Episcopal Church, St. Francisville
- Red Boot Deli, 12430 St. Helena St, Clinton

Shreveport - Sunday, September 23, 1:00-4:00 pm

- Head of Texas Street

Monroe - Saturday, September 23, 8:00 am - 4:00 pm.

- NELA Food Bank, 4600 Central Ave.

Alexandria - Thursday, September 20, 5:00-8:00 pm

- Alexandria Riverfront Center

Lafayette - Sunday, October 7, 8:00 am - 4:00 pm

- Giles Nissan, Opelousas
- First Assembly of God, Youngsville
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TOP: Deer in this age class will have a first molar with a flat surface, all the crests have been worn off and the second and third molars will have a narrow strip of infundibulum. BOTTOM: For 8 ½-year-olds, most of the surfaces of the premolars and molars will be worn completely flat and the teeth are worn down to the gum line.

HOW TO AGE WHITE-TAILED DEER: PART V

AGING OLD DEER, 7 YEARS AND UP

The older age classes, 7 ½ on up, represent the end of the trail for a deer population. The average lifespan for a white-tailed deer is around 5 years; in captivity deer may live up to 14 years. Much depends on the degree of hunting that takes place on the landscape. Areas with high hunting pressure generally have a population with the younger age classes; areas that have heavy-buck-hunting-only hunting will have older age classes of does, and young age classes of bucks. In herds where both bucks and does receive equal hunting pressure, all age classes will be present. Some hunters do not shoot the young age classes, (6 months and 1 ½ year age class) and target the adult deer. I have always thought it best to target deer from all age classes, and I recommend this to clubs and landowners. This will provide valuable information for age and growth determinations.

In the older age classes deer in the wild are beginning to decline to some extent, especially the bucks. I have seen older does that are still productive and producing twins, so this is something to keep in mind when developing your harvest program. On low quality habitat,

growth rates will be slow and it may take time for a doe to get physically fit; consequently the older age classes are often the best producers. Generally at age 7, antler growth for bucks begins to decline. The bases may still have heavy mass that might extend for 10 inches or so, but the last half of the main beam typically is smaller than the base. A mediocre 110-class buck could live its entire life on the landscape, always being passed up by hunters because it does not fit the harvest criteria, and die of old age. I suspect this happens more than you think because of the lack of older bucks in the harvest data.

7 ½ YEAR OLD AGE CLASS

We discussed in the last issue that 6 year old deer will have a first molar with a very narrow strip of infundibulum, just a fine line. At age 7 there will be no infundibulum present, and the first molar will be heavily worn with a flat surface. The second and third molars will still have a strip of infundibulum, similar to that of the first molar on a 6 year old deer. Finding deer in this age class, especially

does, is a sure sign that hunters are not killing all the deer.

8 ½ AND OLDER AGE CLASSES

This is a fairly easy age group to recognize; all the molars and premolars will have a flat surface with little or no infundibulum present. Teeth are almost level with the gum line, and if the deer lives much beyond this age, it will probably have trouble eating food. Older deer are present in herds where the hunting pressure is low, especially the doe harvest. I remember hunting one evening with the late Dewey Wills on his club in West Feliciana Parish. A line of antlerless deer came out of the woods right at dark, maybe seven or eight, and I selected the last one to harvest: A nice 7 ½-year-old doe that Dewey suggested I simply grind up into ground meat.

Well now we have reached the end of my "how to" deer aging instructions, just in time for hunting season. There is no reason for you not to be able to age deer and place them in the fawn, yearling, young adult, mature adult and old adult categories. This will allow you to take a

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close look at your weights, antler development and reproduction that is taking place in the various age groups, which will provide valuable insight into how well your management program is working. Hopefully you have kept copies of these various "how to age" columns with the photographs for future reference.

HUNTING SEASON IS HERE

It is hard to believe that a new hunting season is cranking up, this time on the first of September with the opening of dove season. Deer season will be starting this month in the early rut areas of Southwest Louisiana, and then it opens up statewide on Oct. 1. This has been a very hot spring and summer, with long dry spells in between some wet weather. Food plots were hit or miss because of this. I had one dove strip that I planted early with sunflowers that did not do as well as the other strip that I planted two months later, which received more rain during the growing period. It was looking to be a decent acorn crop, but the hot dry weather may take its toll on some of the trees and young acorns may not fill out.

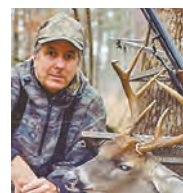
No doubt the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will have a sharp eye out for any sick and potential CWD deer, and I would advise that you assist them and notify them of any sick or diseased looking deer that you may find during the season. The CWD issue is real, and will be a game changer should it show up this season.

Hunt hard but safe, and validate your tags and report your harvest. If you hunt turkeys, the fall is a good time to keep an eye out and determine if you had a successful nesting season or if it appears,



The 2018-19 hunting season officially opens on Sept. 1 — hopefully you have your dove field ready.

as it does in my area, that the turkey population has crashed. If it appears your population is down, contact LDWF and voice your concerns. ■



Dave Moreland is the author of the new book *Louisiana Whitetails*, which explains how to grow big deer and where to hunt them. The book is available at www.SportsmanGear.com and at Amazon.com.

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• 151 Acres \$4,200/AC
• 200 Acres & Camp \$1,120,000
• 209 Acres \$3,348/AC
• 278.5 Acres \$4,000/AC
• 360 Acres & Home \$3,500,000
• 1305 Acres & Home \$7,500,000
• 6.5 Acres \$29,000
• 17.5 Acres \$69,000
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• 20 Acres \$4,000/AC
• 17 Acres \$4,000/AC
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• 40 Acres \$2,800/AC
East Baton Rouge
• 239 Acres \$3,999,000
East Feliciana
• 479 Acres \$2,290,000
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LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

Delta Lures' spinnerbaits are available in 1/4-, 3/8- and 3/4-ounce models.

DELTA LURES' SPINNERBAIT

AVAILABLE WITH TRADITIONAL "R" BEND —
OR IN A "TWISTED" MODEL

Two longtime fishing buddies couldn't keep a good thing to themselves 7 ½ years ago, which was a blessing for bass fishermen who love to catch on quality spinnerbaits.

Fred King and Roy Laborde, both of LaPlace, started making spinnerbaits in 2010, 13 years after they began fishing bass tournaments together. The spinnerbaits they relied on for years were difficult or impossible to get their hands on.

"We couldn't find what we were looking for ... the vibration, the wire, the ball-bearing swivel, so we just started making our own," King said.

They made the spinnerbaits well, obviously, because bass ate them. Word got out about the hot lures and soon, people were asking the outdoorsmen to build them some. And some more.

King and Laborde started mass-producing the spinnerbaits in January of 2011. Their artificial lure manufacturing company, Delta Lures LLC, was born. Their distinctive logo, with a Louisiana map and a bass leaping near the star at LaPlace, can be seen wrapped on the Bass Cat boat Robbie Latuso of Gonzales uses on the Bassmaster Elite Series.

Delta Lures' spinnerbaits, buzzbaits, bladed jigs, jigs and complete lines of tackle are on racks in 41 stores in Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas and Oklahoma. The first to stock them was Scott Russo at the old Russo's Hunting and Fishing store in LaPlace.

"It's definitely growing, definitely picking up in popularity. We're starting to sell more around the country. Our production's grown in the last two years," King said.

The company has grown because its owners emphasize building the artificial lures with quality parts, and the flexibility and ability to build to order and make custom products, like the wide variety of spinnerbaits.

"That's my favorite bait to fish, that and a buzzbait. We've been catching a lot of fish on the spinnerbait the last couple of months. We've been fishing the Venice and Delacroix areas," King said.

The owners pay attention to the slightest details while building the 1/4-, 3/8- and 3/4-ounce spinnerbaits. The stainless steel wire is custom-made, and the heads are painted in Mississippi.

King and Laborde put the blades and other components together once they receive the heads, which have red 3D eyes, and special wire — 20,000 at a time

for the latter. Wire gauges are .032 for ¼-ounce, .034 for 3/8-ounce and .040 for ¾-ounce models.

Delta spinnerbaits feature ball-bearing swivels, Mustad Ultra Point Black Nickel Hooks and H&H rubber skirts or 44-strand silicone skirts.

The blades are top of the line in popular colors and shapes. You can get spinnerbaits single-bladed or double-bladed, mix or match Colorados, willowleafs, Indianas, turtlebacks, etc.

Most Delta Lures' spinnerbaits have the traditional "R" bend to tie the line. However, old school 'twisted' models are available.

Veteran pro bass angler Albert Collins of Nacogdoches, Texas, prefers the twisted models, King said, noting he was the first to ask for them. Count Don Hutchinson of Prairieville also among those who want to throw that model, he said.

Why? Collins, 53, said, "The R bend is just a weak link to me.

"I grew up throwing a spinnerbait with a twist," he said.

After the market was saturated with R bends, he lost bass when the spinnerbait broke, he said. It could only handle three or four 4-pound-and-up bass at a time.

"The R bend spinnerbait cost me a

couple tournaments in the past. I'd throw it and the next thing you know I'd come back with two spinners," he said. "I quit throwing spinnerbaits for a long time."

King said people got away from the twisted bend because sometimes the line catches under the twist, frays and then breaks. However, he said, modern lines are stronger.

Collins got his twisted spinnerbaits and catches 25 to 40 bass on one, he said.

"Just pay attention to the line. Whenever I pull it in, I look at the line. You don't have to pull it all the way to you," he said.

"You can hardly wear them out. They don't have the R to bend and break. That was my whole reason for it. All the guys I've given it to try prefer it now."

For more information on the spinnerbait and other Delta Lures' products, go to deltalures.com. ■



Delta Lures started mass-producing spinnerbaits in 2011, and now their offerings are sold all over the country.



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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DOVE HUNTING PRIMER

IF THE FIELD YOU'RE INVITED TO JUST DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT, DON'T HUNT IT



Dove season's first split begins in both north and south zones on September 1.

The first split of Louisiana's 2018-19 dove season will open Sept. 1 in both north and south zones.

The north zone's first split will run through Sept. 23. Subsequent splits are Oct. 6 - Nov. 11 and Dec. 16 - Jan. 14. In the south zone, the first split ends on Sept. 9. The second split dates are Oct. 6 - Nov. 25, and final split is Dec. 16 - Jan. 14.

The daily bag limit is 15, and the possession limit is 45. The bag limit applies to mourning doves, white-winged doves and fully dressed Eurasian collared and ringed turtle doves in the aggregate (any combination not to exceed 15 total).

There is no bag limit on Eurasian collared doves or ringed turtle doves, provided a fully feathered wing and head remain attached to the carcass of these birds.

Shooting hours are a half hour before sunrise until sunset, except for opening

day of the first split on WMAs and LDWF-leased fields, where shooting will begin at noon. License requirements are a basic hunting license and Harvest Information Program (HIP) certification for anyone 16 years of age or older. Remember, a WMA hunting permit for anyone aged 18 -59 is required for WMAs. See the Louisiana 2018-2019 Hunting Regulations for full details.

DOVE FIELDS: WHAT'S OK - AND WHAT'S NOT

No one wants to get caught hunting doves over illegal bait. But some folks are willing to take the chance, and there are

enough of them around to keep wildlife agents busy on opening day. For the rest of us who would rather avoid the suspense and hunt legally, here are a few things to remember.

Most good dove hunting spots fall into one of three categories. The first is natural vegetation that provides seeds which attract doves and other birds. Such locations include recently cleared timber clear-cuts, and freshly mowed hay or grass fields. They can provide surprisingly good shooting, particularly in pine

timber areas a long way from agricultural crop fields.

Some of the best shooting I have experienced in recent years was on a clear-cut. The timber had been harvested in late winter and early spring. The area had then been control burned. Over the summer croton and other natural vegetation had matured and was shedding seed the doves liked.

The next, and best, dove hunting spot is a field where sunflower, millet, corn or other agricultural crops have been grown. Migratory bird hunting regulations allow for the hunting of doves over areas where crops grown on the field have been manipulated to improve hunting. Examples include harvested corn or milo fields where the stalks are mowed or chopped to ground level, exposing more waste grain, and sunflower or millet fields where the crop is mowed to scatter seeds on the ground. These areas are fine for hunting — so long as no additional seed or other feed is brought into the field.

The last situation for review is the recently planted field. This is one to approach with caution, since 'planting' has been frequently used as a ruse to illegally bait for doves. Planted fields legal for hunting are those where wheat or other seed has been sown on properly prepared soil in accordance with official recommendations, including planting dates and seed amounts per acre for fall planting. Steer clear of areas where large amounts of wheat or other seed have been haphazardly dumped or scattered on unprepared ground on several different locations

In situations where a hunter is invited to a dove shoot and has no idea why doves are lured to the field, he or she should ask the host how it was prepared. Go out on the field and look before hunting. On freshly plowed ground, always kick the turned soil over and look for heavy applications of feed or seed that have been covered or concealed. If it doesn't look or feel right, or if the host's answers are vague or confusing, don't hunt.

continues on page 118



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GAME WARDEN

continued

THINK SAFETY

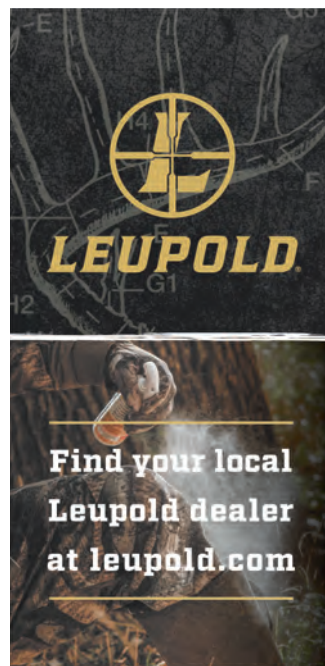
Anyone who has ever dove-hunted with a group has heard shotgun pellets raining down from above. And more than a few of us have been 'peppered' with pellets fired in our direction at a low flying bird. I recall one hunt where a young girl was sitting in her father's truck with the windows down. Her dad fired at a dove passing low between his location and the truck. Some of the pellets entered the cab through the open window and one struck her on the face: It stung and left a mark, but didn't cause serious injury. However, she could have

easily been hit in the eye and suffered permanent damage. Always wear eye and ear protection and establish zones of fire. And be sure to keep track of everyone's location.

Dove season is our first eagerly anticipated fall hunt. Keep it legal, keep it safe and have fun. ■



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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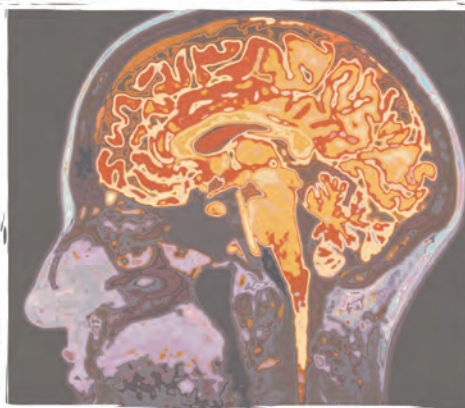
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STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano

A mature doe is one of bowhunting's toughest challenges. Attention to small details led to the author's success.



SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF — ALL THE TIME

DON'T REPEAT COMMON MISTAKES MADE EVERY SEASON

As the calendar flips to September, my thoughts turn to deer and bowhunting. Archery season is already open in some places, and is about to open in many others. No matter where you hunt though, game time is imminent.

With these thoughts in mind, I'd like to point out some common mistakes that lead to unfilled archery tags and empty freezers. While some seem obvious, I hear of hunters making these mistakes each and every year — and the heartache they cause. Hopefully, this will help you be more successful this season.

The first is so obvious, but many people fail to make sure that their archery gear and shooting form are up to par. I know several bowhunters who work on their property and scout year-round, only to head into the field with poorly maintained equipment, or a bow that is shooting "good enough to hit a deer." This is self-defeating, and can be easily avoided with a little planning and practice. Think about it: What good is it to have the perfect stand setup, if you can't close the deal by making a vital shot?

Another common mistake is stand placement and setup. Many hunters put tree stands at the wrong height or shot distance, thereby making it much more difficult to get a shot or to hit the animal when a shot is presented.

NOT TOO CLOSE

Stand height is a subject of much debate, but a rule of thumb is to set a stand only as high as necessary to be above the animal's line of sight and in good cover. Fifteen to 20 feet is my preferred height. Any higher leads to steep shot angles and therefore, reduced vitals exposure. Also, the steep angle causes high entry holes, which generally lead to poor blood trails.

The ideal distance is 20 yards from where the animal will be standing at the shot. Beginning bowhunters have a tendency to set up too close or too far. Setting up too close — under 15 yards — has a tendency to lead to high hits if you are even able to draw. At such close range, clothing noise and/or movement often leads to blown opportunities. Shooting at whitetails at distances over

30 yards leaves room for string jumping or movement by the deer, leading to poor shot placement and wounded animals.

When cutting shooting lanes, put a lot of thought into what you are doing. There is a fine line between trimming enough brush and limbs for clear arrow flight — and trimming away too much cover. Remember, you can always trim a little more, but you can't make new growth appear quickly. A good pole saw or trimmer makes this task much easier. Try to trim lanes that are vertically long rather than wide — since your arrow is travelling an arc — to avoid hitting limbs or alerting deer to your presence. Trim multiple lanes so that if you miss an opportunity to shoot as a deer passes through one of them, you have another chance.

TRIM YOUR TRIMS

A lot of hunters make the mistake of cutting down the woods, which alerts deer to potential danger or exposes their stand, making it hard to draw their bow unnoticed. Deer are far more perceptive than many hunters give them credit for, and mature deer quickly note any

changes to their habitat. More than once, I have seen deer change their travel pattern to avoid a park-like setting caused by over-trimming of shooting lanes. Also, be sure to drag any cut limbs away from your stand.

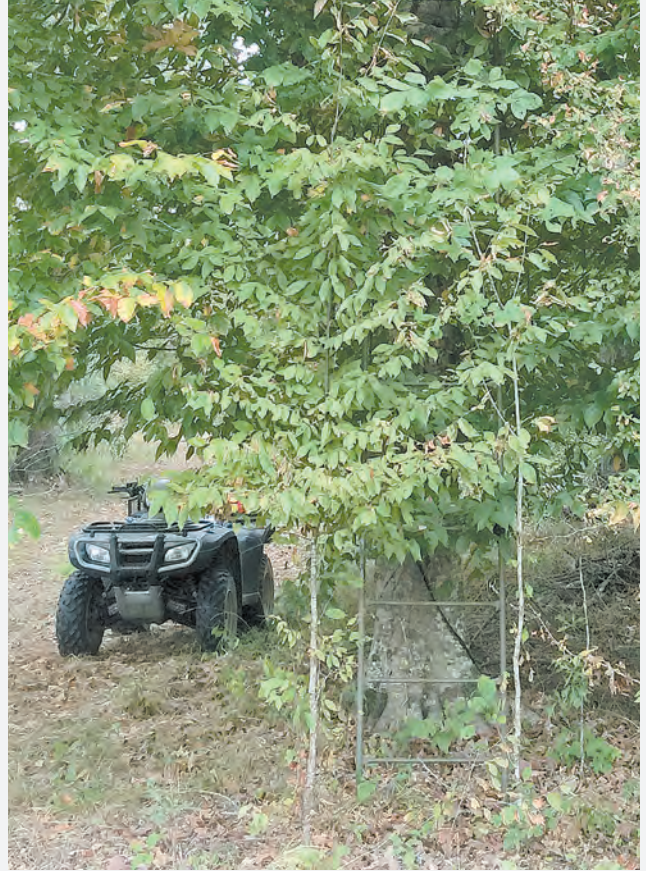
Failure by a hunter to pay proper attention to scent control has saved the lives of many deer. Wash your clothes in scent-free detergent, and make sure to store them in an airtight container. Nothing screams, "Here sits a hunter" like household odors and human scent. If you can't beat a deer's nose, you're done before you even get started. Shower before each hunt with unscented soap, and spray down with a scent-killing product. Use carbon clothing and an ozone generator to give you every edge possible. A whitetail's No. 1 defense is its sense of smell — never underestimate this. Don't hunt stands without a favorable wind or weather. Once deer figure out you are in the area, your chances of success drop drastically.

By avoiding these mistakes, you should drastically increase your chances this season.

While most of this is common knowledge, each year I hear of hunters repeating these mistakes to a bad end. Pay attention to small details, and your opportunities — and therefore, your success — will increase. ■



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.



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HAPPY TRAILS

Bill Garbo

For whitetails, the author's arsenal contains everything from rifled slugs all the way down to a .223. His overall favorite is the .35 Whelen.



PAY ATTENTION TO THE BUSINESS END

PREFERENCE IN WEAPONS, AMMO AND SIGHTS PALES IN COMPARISON TO THE ABILITY TO PUT YOUR SHOT ON TARGET WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY PRESENTS ITSELF

My, how times have changed over the past 50 or so years in the whitetail woods, especially when it comes to the “business end” of the enterprise.

During my first forays into whitetail habitat around 1970, my clothing and equipment were a cobbled-together collection of mostly borrowed or repurposed items. If a hunter wanted to hunt from a deer stand, he had to build it with wood, hammer and nails. A fledgling industry providing portable deer stands was barely off the ground.

Weapon-wise, it was pretty simple in most locales. In the Deep South, hunting deer with dogs was still a dominant and widespread tradition, making shotguns the weapon of choice for many hunters.

I well remember using my 16-gauge, Remington 870 pump with a modified-choke barrel and running to the store a

day or two before opening day to buy a five-pack of No. 1 buckshot shells. There was really more luck than skill involved when blasting away at a buck that a dog pack ran by your appointed stand.

When you fast-forward to today, the list of available weapons, calibers and loads is almost mind-boggling by comparison. Over my almost 50 years of deer hunting, the development and continued evolution of rifles and shotguns, ammunition and telescopic sights has been more a matter of refinement than revolution. In today's world, telescopic sights are better optically, much easier to adjust, more reliable and mounted more securely. Ammunition, primers and bullets are more uniform and reliable than they have ever been.

IT LOOKS EASY

The one thing that hasn't changed is that in order to make the shot, the

hunter has to put his sights on what he intends to hit, and with a steady hand, get the shot off without disturbing his aim. It all sounds pretty simple in theory, but in practice, several things must happen simultaneously and correctly for the end result to be as intended.

It all works if the rifle or rifled shotgun is correctly sighted-in, and if that weapon is inherently accurate, if trajectory can be ignored — it cannot if the shot is long — and if windage lead is not a factor, as it would be on a running deer. If that's all there is to it, why aren't all hunters great shots?

This party can be spoiled so easily by just a few simple facts. First, even in the case of the most-seasoned rifleman, the rifle must be held absolutely steady, which is difficult even from a sandbag on a bench rest. It's next to impossible not to have at least a little bit of wobble when

continues on page 124

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HAPPY TRAILS

Bill Garbo

the hunter is using a rail or a window sill or the side of a tree trunk, or having to shoot offhand. Secondly, pulling the trigger without disturbing one's aim is every bit as difficult as holding the rifle steady. Even under the most-perfect conditions using a heavy, well-balanced rifle with a light trigger pull, the simple act of squeezing the trigger will cause a slight movement. In the real world, at the moment of truth, a breeze is usually blowing and adrenaline is pumping, before even taking into account the rifle rest or lack thereof, the distance to the target, air temperature, angle and on and on, making it infinitely more difficult than it would be at the range on a sandbag.

DETAILS, DETAILS

But how does a deer hunter compensate for all of these factors and become a competent marksman who is able to consistently make good shots? Besides the basics of regular target practice, good shooting skill in the field can be boiled down to learning how to quickly get

SHOOTING BASICS:

- Always identify your target
- Gain a solid shooting position
- Estimate the range — and allow for it
- Squeeze the trigger
- Make a clean kill



The author drew a scope reticle on a piece of see-thru Mylar in order to practice aim point on random deer photos. This is a very useful tool for teaching kids or newcomers about the proper place to aim.

into the most-steady shooting position possible under the prevailing conditions — and then executing and controlling the trigger squeeze properly to make the shot count.

The hunter's choice of weapon, ammunition and sight should be governed by whether the hunter hunts in deep woods or fields, is presented with shots of 50 to no more than 100 yards, or shots out to 300 yards and beyond. I personally do not like to take lower-percentage shots at distances of more than about 200 yards. Have I successfully made long shots in the past? Absolutely, I made several long, difficult shots on elk and deer a number of years ago, back when I practiced more and had better eyesight. But it takes skill developed over years of practice to turn what are low-percentage

shots — to the average hunter — into routine shots.

Accurate marksmanship is a "perishable" skill with a definite shelf life, unless one regularly and consistently practices in order to stay sharp. Go to the range, and after confirming on the sandbag that your rifle is "on the money," put the sandbag away and shoot sitting, standing, prone and everything in-between to see how you do under more realistic conditions. ■



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.

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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.

RIDING BARATARIA BULLS

IT'S PRIME TIME FOR A 'CAJUN SLEIGH RIDE'



Kayak anglers are always looking to catch big fish out of their tiny boats. In coastal Louisiana, bull redfish easily fill the bill. They are hard fighters and regularly weigh up to 40 pounds. Plus, bulls are easy to catch in the right locations — and there's no better time than the present.

Catching bull reds from a kayak is where the term "Cajun Sleigh Ride" originated. Once hooked, they will engage you in a hard-fought battle, which often leaves an angler wondering who really caught who.

September is a great month for catching bulls that gather near the passes in South Louisiana in preparation for the spawn. They are there throughout the late summer months, and remain in good num-

bers until regular fall cold fronts push through.

The strong tidal action and high salinities of the passes in Grand Isle and similar areas are great places to target bull reds from a 'yak. Caminada Pass on the western end and Barataria Pass on the eastern end of Grand Isle both provide bull red opportunities for kayak anglers. But Caminada is shallower, more protected and does not get traffic from large offshore vessels like Barataria does.

However, under the right conditions, Barataria Pass can safely be fished with a kayak as long as common sense and good safety precautions are used. First off, always wear your PFD. And in Barataria, stay out of the main channel and constantly be on the lookout for large vessels. Be aware of the current, and do not get into situations

where it's so strong that you can't make headway or control the path of your kayak.

Although Barataria Pass is deeper than 100 feet in many places, the sweet spot for bull reds is usually about 15 to 25 feet. A depth finder is a must for consistently locating the schools that randomly roam the area. When the screen lights up with big arches, you can pretty much bet you are going to get bit.

Bull reds aren't very picky, and hit a variety of artificial or natural baits. Chunks of cut mullet, pogeys, shrimp or cracked blue crab all attract a hungry bull. If fishing artificials, large curly-tail grubs get their attention, and a local favorite is a 6-inch Gulp Swimming Mullet in chartreuse, pink or white. Rig the grubs either Carolina-style on a circle hook, or on a 1- or 2-ounce jighead with a strong hook.

CONTINUES >



Fishing Barataria Pass can get a bit rough, but if you wear your PFD and keep an eye out for large vessel traffic, it can be done safely.

>

Bulls reds don't have teeth, but their rough mouths and crusher plates can easily fray or cut thin leaders, so use at least 60- to 80-pound mono leaders. Conventional or spinning gear with heavy mono or braid and a stout rod helps bring these hard-fighting fish under control.

If you're fishing natural baits, a 10/0 circle hook helps keep from hooking the fish deep in the throat, and is much better for a healthy release.

Typical bull reds found in the Pass will be 25-plus pounds and 3 feet long, although larger ones are routinely caught, as well. The fight can last up to 15 minutes or more and tow a kayaker quite a distance. Although regulations allow one fish over 27 inches to be kept, bulls are not great table fare and are generally released.

During your sleigh ride, the red often dictates where you go, so just hang on and enjoy. Fighting the fish this way helps get it under control sooner, as both the drag of the reel and pulling the 'yak tire the fish faster.

Proper revival techniques help ensure that the big red gets to take another angler for a ride. After carefully removing the hook, tow the fish alongside the kayak to revive it. A good lip-grip tool allows you to hold the fish with one hand and easily release the big red when it's ready.

A bull red in a kayak is likely the largest fish many coastal kayakers will catch. And Grand Isle is a perfect location to go for a "bull ride." ■



Clayton Shilling combined this nice 42.25-inch bull red with a 14.125-inch trout to win first place in the IFA kayak fishing tournament in Grand Isle.

'YAK TOURNAMENT TACTICS

Clayton Shilling is no stranger to the podium when it comes to kayak fishing tournaments. He has won several and regularly finds himself in the money.

"Winning the IFA Kayak Tournament is special," he said. "I've placed in several of the events and even came in second, but this is my first win."

Although the tournament was based in Houma, Shilling and most of the other competitors chose to drive their kayaks down to Grand Isle knowing that a bull red provides a huge advantage in the tournament's catch/photo/release format (where the angler that catches the longest total combination of one speckled trout and one redfish comes out on top).

Unlike most, though, Shilling decided to try for his red first and headed straight to Barataria Pass after launching at Sand Dollar marina at the 6 a.m. start time.

"Sometimes the bulls are caught early, so I went straight to the Pass," he said. "However, I wasn't seeing anything on the screen and didn't get a bite."

He changed strategy and headed over to a nearby rock jetty to try for speckled trout. The tide was high and the water was covering most of the rocks. Pelicans were lined on top of the submerged rocks waiting for baitfish, and Shilling worked the jetty with a popping cork and scored a 14.125-inch speck.

"It wasn't a giant, but it would get me on the board," he said.

Shilling continued to work the area in hopes of upgrading to a longer trout, but caught a 23-inch redfish instead.

"I had my two fish, but knew a big red was a must so I headed back to the Pass," he added.

As Shilling approached, he kept his eyes on the Lowrance screen as the

depth climbed from 40 feet until he reached an area ranging from 20, up to about 14 feet.

"It wasn't long until I spotted those tell-tale arches and knew I had found some fish," he said. "I jigged a chartreuse Gulp Swimming Mullet rigged on a circle hook to the fish that were holding 2 to 3 feet off the bottom."

It didn't take long and Shilling landed a 38-inch bull.

"It was kind of rough out there so I headed to the beach where it would be much easier to get the fish positioned on the measuring board for the required photograph," he said. "After reviving and releasing the fish, I headed back out to the Pass. Overall, I was gone about 20 minutes."

Shilling credits spending time to get familiar with his depth finder and making tweaks and adjustments to the settings.

"This was my first time using this particular unit, but once I had it figured out, there was no doubt that I was seeing fish on the screen," he said.

He wasted no time connecting with another bull. This one was larger and measured out at 42.25 inches, and gave him a combined total length of 56.38 inches, which earned him first place.

How close were the winning lengths? Owen Caraway won second, Arlo Burgos took third and Jimmy Baker won fourth, with each coming in at exactly 56 inches. (Their places were ultimately decided by weigh-in time, with the earliest weigh-in used as the tie breakers.) Fifth place went to Brandon Thibodaux, with a total length of 55.25 inches.

"Sometimes nothing just seems to go right," Shilling said. "However, everything went smooth for me, and when it's your day, it's your day."

How smooth? Shilling's win earned him the \$1,000 first-place prize, a \$400 Anglers' Advantage cash prize and a Power-Pole Micro valued at \$700.

There are a few more out-of-state IFA kayak divisional events before the national championship is held in Grand Isle this October. ■

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NEW GEAR REVIEWS

RELIEFBAND 2.0

Many people are prone to getting seasick, and if you fish a kayak in rough waters, the tiny craft is prone to being tossed around — which can make things even worse. Also, sitting so close to the water can cause you to lose sight of the horizon, which can also trigger nausea, vomiting and the inherent wish to die. While there are many folk remedies, prescriptions and over-the-counter medications, no one method has proven to be a cure-all for everyone. (Trust me, I have tried them all.)

Enter the Reliefband. Developed many years ago as a non-medical alternative to help relieve nausea and vomiting associated with pregnancy and cancer treatments, the unique device is similar in size to a wristwatch and is worn in the same general area. The latest model, the Reliefband 2.0, still uses the same original concept, but has been updated with a slimmer, sleek band with LED indicator lights, and is rechargeable with standard USB chargers. The principle, in a nutshell, is that the unit uses a patented, FDA-cleared technology to deliver gentle pulses to the underside of the wrist. The signals travel through the body's nervous system to the part of the brain which controls nausea. A conductive gel is used

to lubricate the wrist, and the intermittent pulses can be felt through the hand and up to the fingertips. The intensity can be adjusted to 10 different levels. The pulse is not uncomfortable, but can be felt when properly placed. I have been a Reliefband user since they first came out. I'm not prone to any other motion sickness other than that of blue-water offshore fishing, but if the seas are rough and I'm offshore, chances are high that I will vomit. However, although I cannot claim 100 percent success using the Reliefband, I can say that much more often than not, it has helped prevent or stop my symptoms of nausea.

I am often asked whether or not it works, and my answer is always the same: I cannot tell you whether the results are physiological or psychological, but I don't care. I never head offshore without my Reliefband, and it has certainly helped save many a trip. Unlike medications, the Reliefband can also calm and quell nausea symptoms even after they have started. Ask anyone in the violent throws of seasickness, and they will agree to pay nearly

anything if you could make the symptoms go away. The Reliefband 2.0 is comfortable and unobtrusive, and no one will know it is anything other than a watch, unless you choose to tell them — and you



The Reliefband 2.0 is a wearable device that uses electronic pulses to prevent or lessen the effects of seasickness.

likely will. One word of caution for using the Reliefband 2.0 for kayak fishing: It is rated as water resistant, not waterproof. I have used mine for several trips where it has received splash and spray with no ill effects, but it should never be submerged. If you suffer from a wide variety of nausea-related causes such as motion sickness, seasickness or vertigo, give the Reliefband 2.0 a try. MSRP: \$174.99.

More information:
www.reliefband.com

LIVETARGET'S CROAKER

Croakers are a staple food source for both trout and redfish. Live croakers are a preferred bait for big trout, but finding them at your local bait shop can often be difficult.



Also, without a sophisticated livewell, they are extremely difficult to keep alive in a kayak. But LiveTarget's new Croaker

swimbait is about as exact a replica as you can get. Made from tough soft plastic with a strong, internally rigged and precisely weighted saltwater hook, the bait swims

true straight from the package. The Croaker swimbait has LiveTarget's Oscillator tail, which provides life-like movement and vibration at any retrieve speed. And the flexible dorsal fin acts as a debris

shield to make the bait virtually weedless without affecting the hookset. With three-dimensional anatomical features, the

natural color and profile makes it hard to tell from the real thing. It's hefty enough to cast, but still easy to impart a variety of retrieval styles with its medium-slow sink rate. Working the lure from the seated position of a kayak is not an issue. An eye just behind the throat provides an attachment point for a small spinner blade or an extra hook to customize as you wish. The lure comes in two ultra-realistic color patterns: Atlantic croaker and Yellowfin croaker. The 4-inch model weighs 1 ounce and the 5-inch model weighs 1 ¾ ounces. MSRP starts at \$9.99.

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PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued

HITCHIN' A RIDE



After Chris Holmes landed a small bass, this young brown pelican swooped in and tried to steal a free meal. The bird wasn't successful — but it didn't give up easily, circling around and eventually landing on the kayak for a quick free ride.

*Due the lag time from information to print, weather conditions can change the bite so check in regularly with LouisianaSportsman.com for the latest updates.

SEPTEMBER'S BEST BETS

SALTWATER

WHERE: Barataria Pass, Grand Isle

WHAT: Bull reds

HOW: Launch at Sand Dollar Marina and make the short paddle to Barataria Pass. Stay outside of the channel markers and look for areas in the 15-25 foot range. Using a depth finder is a big advantage in locating schools of bull reds, and fishing with a small group helps cover more area. Watch for a group of large arches to appear on the screen, and toss the bait a few yards toward the school. If you don't have a depth finder, look for bait showers and diving birds to give up a school's whereabouts. When another angler hooks up, give them room, but casting in the same general area usually means additional hook-ups. Use strong 1- or 2-ounce jigheads to get your lure down to the fish quickly. Natural baits like pogy and cut mullet work great, but also attract sharks. Six-inch Gulp Swimming Mulletts offer movement, color and strong attractant. Use medium to medium-heavy rods with 40- to 50-pound braid, which helps get these fish to your 'yak in a reasonable amount of time. Mono leader in the 60- to 80-pound range is recommended.

LAUNCH: Sand Dollar Marina at the east end of the island. Two concrete back-down ramps are available, with a \$5 launch fee. Live bait, tackle, deli, and ice are on-site. Rooms are for rent across the parking lot from the marina.

INSIDER TIP: Pick a day with light winds and moderate tidal range, and you can fish most areas of the Pass. Activities on the island have slowed now that school is back in, and if you fish weekdays, there likely will be no crowd and lots of willing fish.

FRESHWATER

WHERE: Caney Lake

WHAT: Schooling bass

HOW: September is a transition month — not yet finished with summer, but not quite yet fall, either. School bass are feeding on large groups of shad at or near the surface. The action can be hot when bass herd



Steve Neece caught this big bull on a Gulp Swimming Mullet in Barataria Pass at Grand Isle. Fishing a catch/photo/release tournament, the angler took the red to the beach to take the required photo before reviving and releasing it.

the schools of bait and then raid them. Look for action on the surface near the mouths of coves and around points. Resist the urge to move right up to the bait schools, as it's best to sit back and make long casts. The schools form and then break up as the feeding bass cause them to scatter. However, if you wait it out, they will usually regroup at or near the same area where they first appeared. For schooling bass, a lipless crankbait like a chrome/blue black Rat-L-Trap can't be beat. It can be ripped at the surface to fool the frenzied bass, or allowed to sink a bit if the bait has gone down. Other lures like white or yellow spinnerbaits, or crankbaits resembling shad, can also be effective. Larger fish will still be holding on deep points and brush, and can be caught with large plastics or deep-diving crankbaits.

LAUNCH: Brown's Landing, 7777 Highway 4, Jonesboro, which features a boat ramp, convenience/tackle store, bait, ice, restaurant and RV park. (318) 259-6649.

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SEAFOOD BIBLE

Jerald & Glenda Horst

MISSISSIPPI COOKING ... LOUISIANA STYLE

FEATURED RED SNAPPER RECIPE FROM OLD GOLDEN MEADOW RESTAURANT

Ricky Ruffin lives with his wife Pam near Bay Springs, Mississippi. And he's got all the credentials to prove that he's Magnolia State all the way.

His great-great-grandfather settled on former Indian land there in Jasper County in 1842. His Ruffin ancestors and relatives were cotton farmers, with the exception of his father, who raised beef cattle. On his mother Martha



The meunière sauce that makes Ricky's dish so attractive and delicious is much more than a simple brown butter sauce. **INSET:** Ricky Ruffin's passion for cooking has to compete with fishing, hunting, gardening and travel for his attention.

McAlpin's side, her great-great-grandfather patented land there in the 1850's. But the apple didn't fall from the tree. While Ricky is a successful attorney by day, the rest of the time he raises cattle on rye grass and wheat in the winter.

For all the Mississippi in the man, he loves Louisiana. He enjoys the people, who he calls, "my kind of people, who like to have a good time. I love Cajun people. They love to hunt; they love to fish; they love to cook."

He loves the cooking, which he calls the best in the world. And he loves the fishing, which he considers as good as the cooking.

Four or five times a year, he rounds up a gang of his Mississippi friends and relatives to invade

Louisiana, where they head offshore from Fourchon. He loves to catch fish that pull hard: snappers (the bigger the better), groupers, amberjacks, cobia, wahoo and tuna. "I like offshore fishing; the adrenaline rush of catching a big fish. You can't get that from speckled trout."

And he fills his freezers with his share of the catch to satisfy his passion for seafood cookery year round.

We have paired Ricky's recipe with one of our originals, a re-creation of the one dish that most represents San Francisco, a cioppino. For soup lovers, this one is delightful and light, but still loaded with seafood. ■

PANÉED SNAPPER WITH MEUNIÈRE SAUCE

"This one I ate at Randolph's restaurant in Golden Meadow," said Ricky, explaining the history of the dish. "He (Randy Cheramie) used to put pecans in it. I leave the pecans out. We got to be friends because we were going down there to fish twice a month from March to July. He gave me the recipe.

"He would have four specials on Saturday

night. The kind of specials he had were the kind of cooking I like. He did a lot of sauces, plus he cooked a lot of the kind of fish I like — amberjack, snapper and lemonfish."

Randolph's is closed now: The Cheramie family sold it in 2001 and a few years later, it was permanently closed and the building demolished. But the recipe lives on in Ricky's kitchen. ■

PREPARATION: Serves 4.

Add Worcestershire and hot sauce to a medium sauce pan. Stir lemon and lime pieces and 1/2 tsp. Season-All into the sauce and sauté about three minutes, breaking up the citrus pieces as they cook. Remove the remnants of the lemon and lime pieces, lower heat and add the butter. Do not allow to boil. Slowly add half & half, whisking constantly. When the meunière sauce has thickened, turn the heat off and set it aside. Season the fillets with Season-All. Mix the fish fry and flour in a bowl. Dredge the fish in the fish fry mixture. Heat the grape seed oil and butter in an iron skillet. When heated, add the fillets and fry until browned. Plate the finished fillets and top them with the meunière sauce. ■



The lemon and lime are removed after sautéing.

INGREDIENTS:

- ½ cup Worcestershire sauce
- 6 tbsp. Crystal hot sauce
- 1 lemon, peeled and cut into small pieces
- 1 lime, peeled and cut into small pieces
- Season-All
- ½ lb. butter
- ½ cup half & half
- 2 lb. snapper fillets
- 1 cup seasoned fish fry
- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup grape seed oil
- 1 stick butter

TIP!

Where this recipe calls for "Season-All," Ricky uses his favorite Catalpa Plantation Seasoning. It can be ordered by calling 1-800-417-9591.



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 gerald@rockinghorst.com.



CAJUN CIOPPINO
UP NEXT >

CAJUN CIOPPINO

On a 1999 visit to San Francisco, we had the pleasure of eating cioppino, considered to be the city's signature dish. Cioppino is to San Franciscans what gumbo is to Louisianans. Cioppino (pronounced chuh-PEE-no) is basically a fish stew. Supposedly, the dish evolved in San Francisco from northern Italian immigrant fishermen. Must-have ingredients include tomatoes, wine and spices. But the dish is wonderfully versatile in that almost any kind of seafood can be used. A California cioppino will use Dungeness crabs, mussels and clams. Here, we use blue crabs, shrimp and oysters. The choice of fish to use is endless, just so long as it is a firm-fleshed species that will not cook apart in the liquid. Freshwater fish, inshore fish and offshore fish work equally well. Our last one used redfish, the one before that used mangrove snapper... You get the idea.

PREPARATION: Serves 6

Pour olive oil into a medium-sized saucepan. Add onion, green pepper, and garlic and sauté until soft. Add tomatoes, tomato paste, wine, half of the parsley, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, lower heat, cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Place crabmeat, shrimp, fish, and oysters in a large saucepan. After simmering the sauce, pour it over the seafood. If the sauce doesn't cover the seafood, add water. Bring to a boil, cover and simmer a maximum of 10-12 minutes or until the fish is white and flaky and shrimp are pink. Do not overcook because the fish will fall apart. Garnish with parsley and serve in large bowls with French bread.

INGREDIENTS:

- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 bell pepper, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 28-oz. can diced tomatoes
- 2 tbsp. tomato paste
- 2 cups dry white wine
- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley, divided
- 2 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. black pepper
- 1 lb. crabmeat
- 1 lb. peeled medium shrimp
- 1 ½ lb. fish, cut into 1 ½ inch cubes
- 3 dozen small shucked oysters

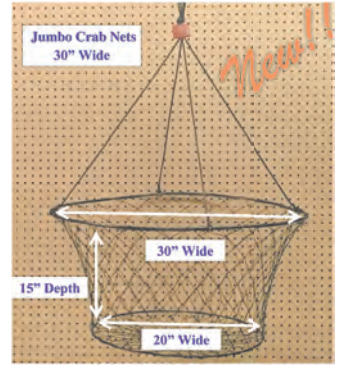
Cioppino is essentially a seafood soup, but unlike gumbo, it is tomato-influenced rather than roux-dominated.

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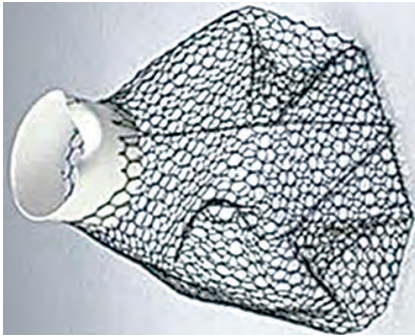


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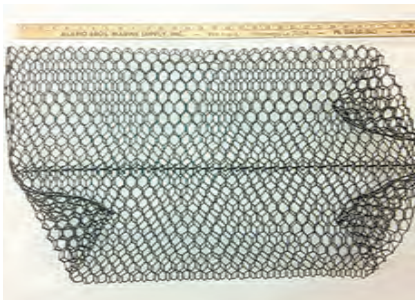
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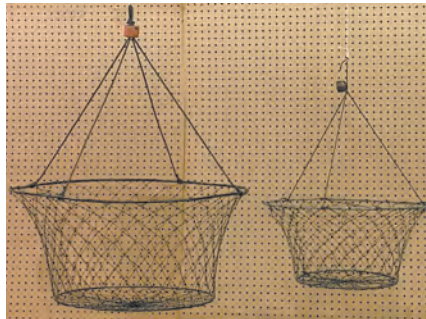
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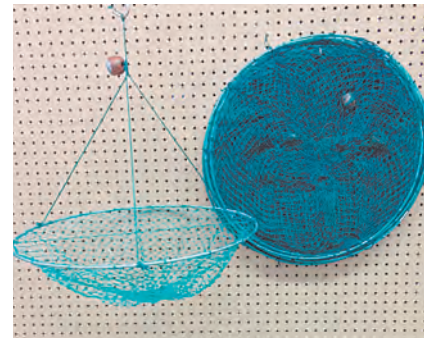
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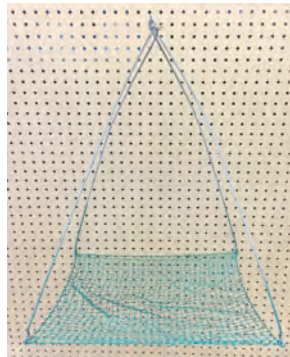
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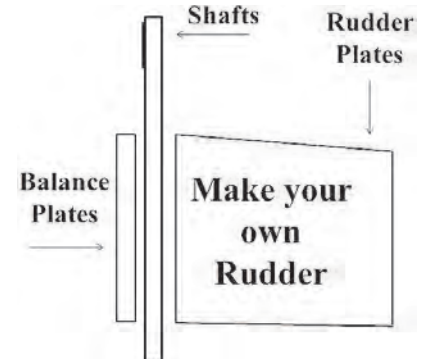
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SCOUTING FOR TEAL

IF YOU CAN, STAY MOBILE AND TARGET SHALLOW AREAS

By Darren Digby

As some early-migrating blue-winged teal are already arriving in the Bayou State, hunters are gearing up to chase the feathered rockets from Cameron to Caernarvon and Monroe to Morgan City. Though some will simply head to their favorite blinds and hope for the best on Sept. 15, hunters with the ability to move around a bit would do well to put in some scouting time for best odds on opening day.

With the abundance of public hunting acreage in our state, there's plenty of room to move around to find habitat where the birds will congregate.

Keeping a few key points in mind will help you reduce your mileage by focusing your efforts in promising areas.

The blue-winged teal's diminutive size is a major factor in its feeding habits, so hunters should be thinking shallow when looking for areas where the birds might congregate. Early-arriving teal prefer to feed on the surface, or on resources just below the surface, as their smaller bodies are unable to reach food at the bottom of deeper ponds. Before setting out, use aerial imagery to identify broken marshes and other areas where the water appears to be shallower than average.

In your area, shallow might mean a mudflat flooded at certain times of the day, or a lowland area that might be flooded only seasonally, or even a pasture flooded from recent rains. But if you can

find a local food source, you're likely to catch them coming in to feast.

One way to identify shallow feeding areas is to seek out congregations of wading shorebirds. Arriving blue-wings will often use the same habitat as the shorebirds, as both prefer a similar water depth. The presence of local mottled ducks is also a good indicator that duck-friendly food is available.

Teal often feed on seeds and small invertebrates, but will also eat some aquatic grasses such as algae and various weeds. Some of the best hunting I've enjoyed during the September season was in an area where native grass had been flooded with high tides and was dropping seeds into the water. It was no wonder that we found birds full of those seeds when we cleaned them after the hunt.

X MARKS THE SPOT — OR DOES IT?

Though a shallow feeding spot may define the proverbial "X", that's not to say straps can't be filled by hunting nearby.

Louisiana's teal season kicks off Saturday, Sept. 15. Staying mobile and targeting public lands with shallow water will improve your odds of success over the 16-day season.

During the 2017 season, I was successful hunting a pond that was 3 feet deep — but it was adjacent to some shallows matted with aquatic grasses. If just next to the "X" affords better concealment and/or easier access, set up there and rely on calling and decoys to sway the birds over for a look. As always, never be afraid to move if your initial setup appears out of the game.

Teal are as apt as any bird to be here today and gone tomorrow — so staying mobile will help keep your barrel hot throughout the 16-day season. ■

TIP!

If you're using Google Earth to scout, use the historical imagery tool to review past images, as some might have been taken during low water conditions in the marsh — thus highlighting mud flats or areas that are particularly shallow.



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Todd "Marsh Man" Masson catches numbers of marsh bass using weightless worms in clear water.

By Andy Crawford

HOW TO USE WEIGHTLESS WORMS TO CATCH MORE BASS

FISH FIND SLOWLY FALLING PLASTIC LURES IRRESISTIBLE

Todd "Marsh Man" Masson is best known for his speckled trout-catching prowess. After all, he wrote a book on the subject.

But during the summer, he often turns to his other fishing love — catching marsh bass.

And it's a safe bet he'll have a weightless worm tied on one of his rods.

"I think it looks extremely natural," Masson said of the lures. "It just looks like a dying baitfish, and the fish can't resist it."

The angler, who was the longtime editor of Louisiana Sportsman and is now a YouTube celebrity for Nola.com, said fishing with weightless worms is really pretty easy.

RIGGING UP

He uses a medium-heavy rod and a reel spooled with braided line. He ties a 3- to 6-foot fluorocarbon leader because the technique is mainly a clear-water deal.

"I use 20-pound fluorocarbon, which is probably overkill," Masson said. "But let's face it: Here in South Louisiana, there's not a whole lot of water you've got to worry about fish seeing your leader — especially fluorocarbon."

The fluoro leader also helps get the bait down because the line doesn't float.

"I really want that bait sinking quickly," Masson said.

If he thinks the rig needs a tad more weight, he adds a split shot to the leader. That gets the bait down faster without killing the lure's action.

He connects the braid and leader with a uni-to-uni knot, creating a connection that's strong and easily passes through rod eyes.

A 4/0 Gamakatsu EWG hook is tied to the terminal end of the leader, and he goes with either a Zoom Speed Worm or a Yum Dinger.

And then it's just a matter of casting close to cover. The lure will work around any cover, but Masson has his favorite.

"What I really like (using weightless worms) is in sparse vegetation," Masson explained. "I also like to focus on the backsides of a point being hit by current."

"I throw it into the dead spot behind the point and twitch it into the current: That's where the fish are."

SLOW IT DOWN

Patience is key, which makes it a challenging approach for many South

Louisiana anglers.

"You really have to slow down," Masson said. "Here in South Louisiana, we're power fishermen — move, move, move. But you can't do that with this bait. You have to be patient."

He simply casts it out, lets the worm sink for a few seconds and then gives his rod a couple of jerks.

"It's just twitch, twitch, pause — a long pause," he explained.

The strikes almost always come as the lure is fluttering down. But be aware that you will likely never feel a bite.

"You go to do another twitch, and it feels spongy, it doesn't feel right," Masson said.

That's the indication a fish has picked it up.

Therefore, it's important to put a little pressure on the lure before starting another twitching rhythm, he said.

"You don't want to give it a hard twitch (after the pause)," Masson explained.

"You want to pick up your rod to feel if something is on there." ■



Andy Crawford

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UNDERSTANDING HOW WATER FLOWS THROUGH THE MARSH

FISH USE 'SIDEWALKS, STREETS AND HIGHWAYS' TO TRAVEL AND CHASE BAIT

By Devin Denman

It's easy to look upon Louisiana's prairie marsh and only see a bunch of grass and water.

But a closer look reveals there's much more than meets the eye: It's a complex and thriving ecosystem.

As inshore anglers we need to understand this system, because that kind of understanding will help us enjoy fishing. Gaining that kind of knowledge can be tough, but this simple analogy breaks it all down in an easy-to-understand way that will help you catch more speckled trout and redfish.

HIGHWAYS, STREETS AND SIDEWALKS

Understanding how water moves

through the marsh is everything, because without moving water you don't have a fishing trip.

Louisiana's best anglers possess this understanding, knowing when and where tidal waters will move best.

HOW MOST SEE THE MARSH

If you only fish spots — and not conditions — then chances are you see the rest of the marsh as just places that 'aren't your spot.'

It's all just water you use to get to where the fish have always been — or maybe not.

But if you saw each body of water in the marsh as being like a path for fish to travel, and categorized them according

to the traffic they can bear, then you'd see new opportunities to catch more fish.

A NEW WAY TO SEE THE MARSH

Each body of water is used by marine life to travel from one area to the next, and can be classified by the amount of traffic they receive:

- Sidewalk
- Street
- Highway

So a trenasse bleeding into a pond would be a sidewalk, the bayou upon which the pond sits would be the street and the nearby pass where the bayou is situated would be the highway.

Check out the picture to get a better

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idea of how the fish might move around.

HOW THIS KNOWLEDGE BENEFITS YOU

This understanding of how water moves through the marsh reveals spots that are worth trying because they might yield great catches at certain times.

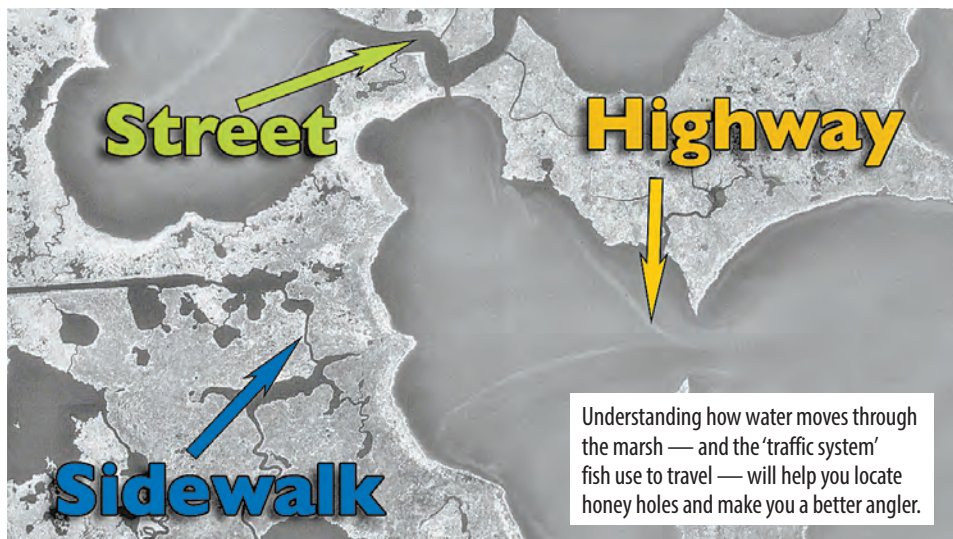
ONE EXAMPLE

Every spring and fall we have a mass exodus of shrimp from the marsh. They leave for saltier water to procreate and, as they do, are ambushed by speckled trout and redfish.

Using this highway analogy, it'd be a lot easier to guess where we should begin fishing, wouldn't it?

It would. Because we would know where they are traveling, and how they will travel there.

Good examples of places to try fishing



Devin Denman

would be large points in big, open water.

A poor example would be a single trenasse.

The difference is that more water flows across one than the other, and more water equals more bait — which equals more predator fish like speckled trout and redfish for us to catch.

CONCLUSION

I wanted to introduce this idea so you might gain a better understanding of your current honey holes, and how to

locate new ones.

Fall is right around the corner, and some of the best fishing of the year will come with it. 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.

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AUSTIN'S HANDY DANDY LINE WINDER

By Andy Crawford

MAKES CHANGING LINE ON-BOARD A SNAP

Is there anything worse than having to spool a reel while on the boat? I mean, after you spend the time to snatch the old line off the reel, you then have the pleasure of fighting a plastic spool of new line rolling around the boat — and it's a pain to ensure you're putting the line on the reel tightly.

Well, Barataria Bait & Tackle's Austin Plaisance has found a product that takes all the work out of that chore.

The contraption is so simple it's hard to believe it's not more ubiquitous in the fishing world.

WHAT'S THE NAME OF THIS WONDER TOOL?

"I don't know what it's called," Plaisance said. "It's made in China and comes in just a clear package — no name on it. Call it 'Austin's Handy Dandy Line Winder.'"

There's room for several pools of line to be slipped onto the metal rod. The plas-



This simple line winder allows anglers to quickly and easily respool reels and change out leaders.

Andy Crawford

tic spools are held tight with a spring-loaded nut.

"That way, the spools can't turn unless you're pulling on it," Plaisance explained.

The frame is bent to allow the terminal end to be inserted into a suction cup that holds tightly to a boat's console.

And Plaisance usually keeps a few spools of line on the winder.

"If I have a customer who breaks off or gets a big wind knot in the braid, I can quickly cut it and wind on more line so we can keep fishing," he said.

It's also perfect for keeping leader material handy.

"I like to downsize my leaders if the fish are finicky," Plaisance said. "I usually start with 15- to 20-pound fluor-carbon, but I go down from there.

"With this line winder, I can quickly change leader material."

Austin's Handy Dandy Line Winder retails for \$14.95. Call Barataria Bait & Tackle at (504) 347-4012 or log onto www.baratariabaitandtackle.com for more information. ■

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In addition to color, the profile of the lure you're throwing also will determine its effectiveness depending on what forage predators are feeding on at the time.

LURE PROFILE - NOT JUST COLOR - AN IMPORTANT FACTOR

By Devin Denman

Patrick Bonin

CONSIDER WHAT FISH ARE LOOKING FOR WHEN THEY'RE HUNGRY

We inshore anglers love discussing, choosing and experimenting with lure color. It's no surprise the most asked question is, "What color were they biting on?"

It's a good question, and you can't blame anyone for asking. After all, it really can make a difference.

But one thing about artificials most people don't pay attention to is the profile of a lure.

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE 'PROFILE?'

Simply put, it's the lure's shape.

Think about it: a craw is shaped radically different than a shad-imitation bait.

That's an obvious difference to illustrate my point. Here are a few more: A pogey is shaped differently from a cocahoe, which is shaped differently from a potbelly minnow, which is shaped differently from a croaker.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Consider what it is fish are looking for when they're hungry.

Speckled trout hunting croakers are accustomed to looking for that humped back, flat belly and yellow-tinged fins.

If your bait looks like their forage, there is less chance for scrutiny. When the two

meet, it becomes business as usual and they'll bite.

DOES IT REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Yes and no.

Let me explain: The key to success, on almost every fishing trip, is covering as much water as possible to find a school of fish so hungry that they'll hit anything that enters the water.

You've probably seen those videos of redfish and trout being caught on Legos, Barbie dolls, gummy worms and rubber chickens.

However, fish aren't always feeding hard, and you can't find them eating like that on every trip.

But when you do eventually run across that feeding behavior, you can up your game by tossing them something they're really looking for.

Give them a color, profile and presentation that matches the hatch.

Doing that is the difference between catching a half-limit, boating 30 to 50 fish or icing down an ice chest-full.

SOME FISH ARE 'DUMBER'

The majority of fish hitting the cleaning

tables are 'young and dumb.'

Redfish under 27 inches are juveniles, and most speckled trout we catch haven't been around that long.

Almost all of them barely pass the 12-inch mark, with a 14- to 16-inch speck considered big by a lot of anglers. These smaller trout are more ready to eat than larger trout, and throwing a more exacting bait probably won't make that much of a difference to them. But it'd be nice to catch a big trout, wouldn't it?

The tactic of matching lure profiles shines with larger, more finicky fish who are already grown so much they have fewer predators to worry about.

CONCLUSION

When it comes to artificials, inshore anglers rarely consider lure profile.

It's not a deal breaker for fishing trips, but when it's factored in, it could make a big difference in your success. At the bare minimum, it's something you should be aware of to boost your inshore knowledge.

Tight lines, y'all. ■

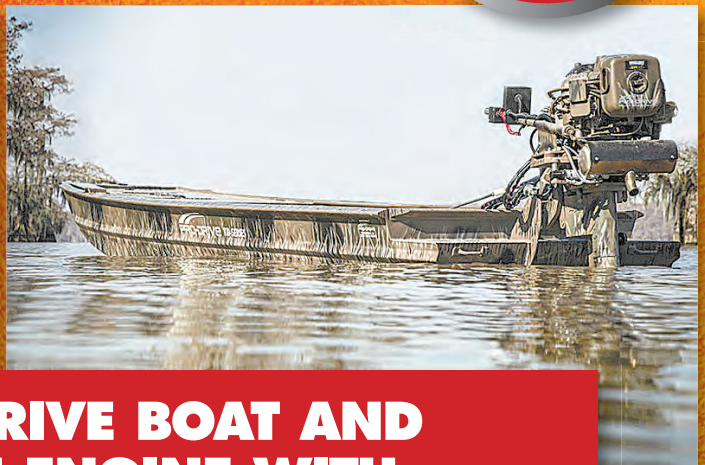
Editor's Note: Capt. Devin Denman is an avid inshore angler who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit lafishblog.com.



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DON'T TOSS IT — BUTTON IT UP

By L. Woodrow Ross

EVEN IF THEY'RE NOT GOING ON THE WALL,
ANTLERS HAVE MANY USES

Deer hunters are often guilty of discarding items that are useful, and could be used to create reminders of a special hunt.

So rather than discarding antlers from a buck that might not be worthy of mounting, consider making buttons for a coat, jacket or shirt.

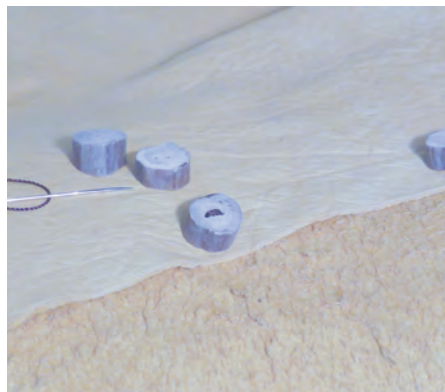
And these buttons are as functional as they are decorative.

FOLLOW THESE EASY STEPS TO MAKE YOUR OWN:

- Just saw an antler to your desired button thickness, making them as symmetrical as possible. (A band saw is the easiest way to accomplish this.)
- If you want a glossy button, coat it with epoxy, polyurethane or some other coating. This will also increase the buttons' durability. Epoxy may be mixed 50/50 with denatured alcohol to make it easier to apply.
- Drill two small holes in each button.
- Measure and mark button spacing and button-hole spacing; 3 ½ inches is a good starting point for a shirt.
- Use an appropriate-sized needle and strong thread to attach the buttons to the garment.

Antlers can also be sawed into toggle button sizes with appropriate holes if you want to use them as secure attachments.

Of course, they can also be cut into sections of the appropriate length and used as knife handles. ■



Turn a discarded deer antler into decorative buttons, step by step (clockwise from top left): Pick out an antler of appropriate size, then saw the antler into thin sections. (You have the option for a glossy finish by applying epoxy or a polyurethane finish.) Then drill two holes in each button and use thread to secure them to a piece of material; in this case, a piece of buckskin that may become a jacket. Thicker sections of antler or cannon bones from whitetails can be turned into knife handles.



Photos by L. Woodrow Ross

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All prices are SSW-SRP. Available at participating dealers while supplies last. †The actual listed guide bar length can vary from the effective cutting length based on which powerhead it is installed on. ©2017 STIHL SSW173SMAN-12-135484-3

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BAIT-UP CONTAINER MAKES TOTING MINNOWS EASY

By Dan Kibler

Anglers who like to fish with live minnows but don't like to drag along a bucket — especially if they're wading or fishing from a kayak or other paddle boat — will feel like somebody is thinking about them with the introduction of the Bait-Up live bait container.

The cylindrical container comes in two sizes — 20 and 35 ounces — and can hold up to two dozen minnows. Each container comes with a special lid that allows you to exchange stale water for fresh water as needed without losing any bait. When the lid is removed, a plastic mesh basket that rides on the bottom of the cylinder floats to the top filled with minnows. This allows anglers to remove bait without the need for a dip net, or digging their fingers into a minnow bucket and risking the loss of other baits.

A lanyard attached to the lid can be clipped onto your belt for easy carry, or onto the rigging of your kayak for a weekend float trip.

MSRP for the Bait-Up 20 is \$19.95, and \$24.95 for the Bait-Up 35.

More Info: www.bait-up.com



MALUNA: COOLERS WITHOUT HINGES

By Dan Kibler



The seal is the deal.

That's what Scott Hoyt, an expert in thermodynamics, discovered when he set out to build a better cooler, just introduced under the Maluna brand. "The seal on the lid is the most important part of a cooler," he said. "Heat acts a lot like electricity or water. It seeks the path of least resistance and can enter through even the smallest opening."

And two of those openings were around the hinges on coolers — even high quality ones. So he eliminated them, making Maluna coolers "unhinged."

Four rubber tensioning straps — two on the back wall and two on the front — create a much better seal to keep heat out and cold in. Hoyt said tests show his coolers outperform industry leaders by 23 percent.

Another great feature is a thermometer built into the rotomolded cooler's drain plug, which shows the internal temperature to the outside world. A test cooler, filled with ice and vegetables on a Friday, showed an interior temperature of 39.4 degrees the following Tuesday.

Maluna coolers sit on non-slip feet that keep it from sliding around in your pickup or on the deck of your boat. Unhinged Maluna coolers come in 40-, 50-, 70- and 111-quart models, with MSRPs between \$269 and \$449.

More Info: www.maluna.com

DANCO PRODIGY PLIERS

By Brian Cope

Whether crimping a split-shot, unhooking a fish, bending a hook back to its original shape or cutting fishing line, pliers are essential tools that no angler should be without.

And you can't go wrong with Danco's 7.5-inch Prodigy pliers. The aluminum frame is lightweight, rustproof and strong, and features silicone handle inserts for comfort and slip-resistance. Replaceable tungsten carbide side cutters make quick work of mono, fluorocarbon and braid, and the replaceable stainless steel jaw inserts are durable and corrosion-resistant.

These pliers automatically spring open when pulled out of their included sheath, and the coiled lanyard keeps them handy at all times. They come in 15 colors, and custom engraving is available for a personalized touch. At \$39.99, they won't break the bank.

More Info: www.dancopliers.com



New product submissions can be emailed to **Mark Boyd** at markb@lasmag.com or call 601-829-8080.



SHIMANO CURADO DC BAITCASTING REELS

By Patrick Bonin

The DC stands for Digital Control, and quite honestly it's one of the coolest things I've ever seen. I got the chance to fish with one this spring at Grosse Savanne Lodge during a Shimano media event, and it certainly didn't disappoint. Basically, each reel features a microcomputer that monitors the spool speed 1,000 times a second and applies the perfect amount of brake for each cast — which prevents backlashes and maximizes distance. We fished in some howling 30 mph winds to give the reels a workout, and they performed flawlessly — no "thumbing" required. Four easily adjustable external brake settings allow for different line and weather conditions. Reels are available in both left- and right-hand retrieves, with 6.2:1, 7.4:1 and 8.5:1 gear ratios. The reel went on to win Best Freshwater Reel at the New Product Showcase at ICAST in July. It's great for beginners, and also advanced anglers who want the ability to skip docks without overruns or bomb super-long casts. Reels started shipping last month, and should be available at your local tackle store now. The MSRP on all six models is \$249.99. (Not wasting valuable fishing time fighting backlashes — priceless.)

More Info: www.fish.shimano.com



THE FIRMINATOR: ALL-YOU-NEED FOOD PLOT TOOL FOR ATVS

By Dan Kibler

If you've ever had a hunting lease with perfect spots for food plots or a small dove field, but had no access to a tractor, you were probably out of luck when it came to planting clover, buckwheat, rape, sorghum, millet or sunflowers.

But now it's no sweat — if you have an ATV and a Firminator.

A 3-in-1 tool made to roll along behind a 500 CC or larger ATV, the Firminator is a unit that discs, seeds and cultipacks with the flick of a switch. From breaking ground to putting in seed that turns a quarter-acre of dirt into a wildlife magnet, it's all a hunter needs in the way of equipment to get green

stuff growing — except for maybe a soil test.

Manufactured by Ranew's Outdoor Equipment in Georgia, the Firminator comes in a variety of sizes, with the ATV model perfect for most hunters with food plots to plant. It features 12-inch discs, an ACCU-Seed seed delivery system and an agriculture-grade, cast-iron cultipacker.

The ATV model weighs 800 pounds, heavy enough to dig in when lighter units won't get the job done. It comes with a tow bar sized for a 1 7/8-inch ball, but it also has a 3-point hitch in case you have a small tractor handy.

MSRP is \$6,000.

More Info: www.thefirminator.com

Hunting/Fishing
SCRAPBOOK



Taylor Veazey

Taylor Veazey caught this trophy 6 1/2-pound trout on a fishing trip near Fourchon with his dad in July of 2018.



Noah Griffin

Noah Griffin, 5, killed his first deer while on a hunting trip in North Louisiana with his dad and grampy.



Cooper Gardner

Cooper Gardner caught this 10-pound hawg on a private lake in Woodworth.



Tommy Strogh & Jed Inzerella

Tommy Strogh and Jed Inzerella with two nice cobia from SMI Block 10.



Whitney Denison

Whitney Denison caught a beautiful 4.71-pound trout on June 10, 2017 in the Calcasieu Ship Channel. It was caught on live shrimp on the bottom with an outgoing tide.



Camille Tullier

Camille Tullier harvested her first buck on Dec. 28 after a long and very cold week of hunting at her lease in North Louisiana.



Katie Guidry

Katie Guidry with a big buck killed while she was hunting in Mississippi with her family for Christmas break.

**GOT PHOTOS?
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Send us your photos, and you may appear on the pages of the most widely read outdoor magazine in the Bayou State. Send clean, sharp shots of you with your fish, deer, ducks, rabbits, squirrels, etc. to alicial@lasmag.com. Digital images must be at least 200KB and in jpeg format.



Liam Casey

Liam Casey, 12, of New Orleans, killed his first buck in Sidon, Miss. on Jan. 3, 2018. He shot the 212-pound 9-point at 250 yards.



Sebastian Spurlock

Sebastian Spurlock poses for a photo after his first fishing trip, a good one in Lake Des Al-lemands.



Stefan Schexnayder

Stefan Schexnayder, 9, with a 5 foot, 11 1/2-inch garfish he caught around Pilottown on June 1, 2017.



Tyler Hatrel

Tyler Hatrel with a nice mahi-mahi caught out of Fourchon.



Claire Tate

Claire Tate, 15, of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., caught her first of many redfish at the MRGO Rocks during Easter break while fishing with her grandfather, Dale Oriol.



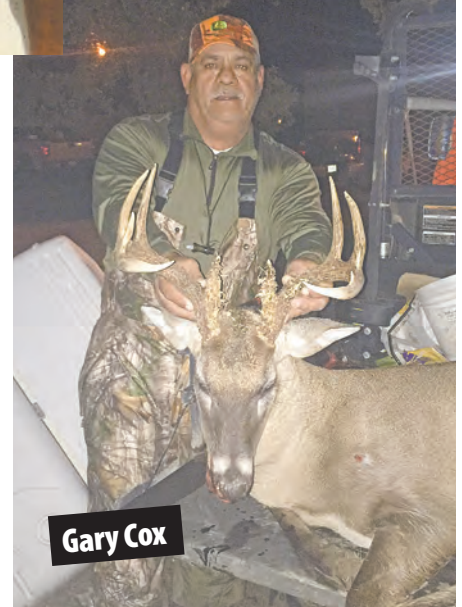
Hannah Gautreau

Hannah Gautreau's 6-point buck was killed on her paw paw's stand in Ascension Parish.



Lawrence Plaisance

Lawrence Plaisance of Galliano with a 60-pound yellowfin tuna caught free-lining a pogy in the Green Canyon.



Gary Cox

Gary Cox shot this big 10-point in Terrebonne Parish on Dec. 9, 2017.

Hunting/Fishing
SCRAPBOOK



Charles & Nell

Charles "Chip" White and his daughter Nell, 12, pose with her biggest fish ever: A 15-pound red snapper caught out of Grand Isle while participating in Swollfest.



Ethan Defelice

Ethan Defelice, 10, of New Iberia, shows off his biggest redfish ever, caught this summer on the south side of Marsh Island. His "red bull," as he called it, weighed almost 35 pounds.



Beau & Ben



Capt. Tommy Pellegrin

Capt. Tommy Pellegrin killed this big 180-pound buck while hunting with his wife Laurie in Fayette, Miss., on Dec. 30, 2017.



Corbin & Ashlie

Corbin Cloutre and Ashlie McGowan loaded the straps hunting flooded ag fields and timber in Columbia on Dec. 31, 2017.



Garrett Aucoin

Garrett Aucoin, 12, of Mamou, hooked this big black drum in the Lake Charles Ship Channel.



Ella Burrall

Ella Burrall, 6, of Covington with her first bass ever, caught in a pond in Covington.



Isaac Fontenot

LEFT: Beau and Ben St. Romain of Ville Platte caught these beauties while spending the weekend at their grandparents' camp on Joe's Cove in Hackberry.

Isaac Fontenot, 8, caught a bass while fishing at Chicot Lake with his Zebco 404 using a Zoom brush hog.

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SEPTEMBER

AUG. 1 - SEPT. 1 & 2 – Original Grand Isle Redfish Rodeo, Bridge Side Marina

SEPT. 28 - 30 – Caminada Redfish Rodeo, Sand Dollar Marina

OCTOBER

OCT. 5 & 6 – Ladies Fishing Rodeo, Bridge Side Marina

DECEMBER

DEC. 4 - 18 – Annual Christmas Programs, Grand Isle Community Center



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Not an official document. Refer to LDWF's official hunting regulations pamphlet or www.wlf.louisiana.gov

HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT	
DOVES+	(South Zone) Sept. 1 - 9 Oct. 6 - Nov. 25 Dec. 16 - Jan. 14	(North Zone) Sept. 1 - 23 Oct. 6 - Nov. 11 Dec. 16 - Jan. 14	15	45
	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31		3	9
WOODCOCK^	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31		3	9
TEAL (blue-winged, green-winged, cinnamon)	Sept. 15 - Sept. 30	6	18	
RAILS* King & Clapper Sora & Virginia	Sept. 15 - 30	Nov. 10 - Jan. 2	15	45
	Sept. 15 - 30	Nov. 10 - Jan. 2	25	75
GALLINULES*	Sept. 15 - 30	Nov. 10 - Jan. 2	15	45
SNIPE	Nov. 2 - Dec. 2 Dec. 15 - Feb. 28		8	24
QUAIL	Nov. 17 - Feb. 28		10	30
RABBIT	Oct. 6 - Feb. 28		8	24
SQUIRREL	Oct. 6 - Feb. 28	8	24	
	May 4 - 26**	3	9	

*An extended falconry season for ducks, rails and gallinules will take place from Nov. 3 - Jan. 31. ^An extended falconry season for woodcock will be Nov. 2 - Jan. 31. +An extended falconry season for mourning doves will be Sept. 15 - Oct. 1. **Spring squirrel season is CLOSED on the Kisatchie National Forest, National Wildlife Refuges, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers property and some Wildlife Management Areas.

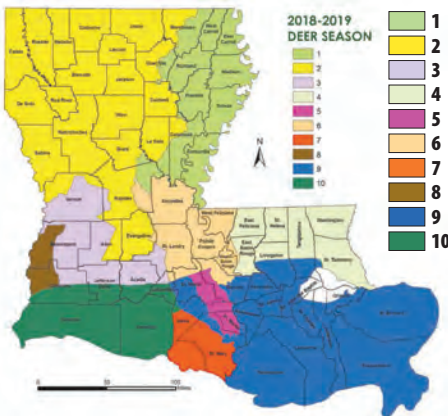
WATERFOWL SEASONS

	EAST ZONE	WEST ZONE	COASTAL ZONE
DUCKS*, COOTS & MERGANSERS	Nov. 17 - Dec. 2 Dec. 15 - Jan. 27	Nov. 10 - Dec. 2 Dec. 15 - Jan. 20	Nov. 10 - Dec. 2 Dec. 15 - Jan. 20
The daily bag limit for ducks is six and may include no more than four mallards (no more than two of which may be females), two canvasback, one mottled duck, one black duck, three wood ducks, three scaups, two redheads and two pintails. Daily bag limit for coots is 15. Daily bag limit for mergansers is five, only two of which may be a hooded mergansers. The merganser limits are in addition to the daily bag limit for ducks. Possession limits for ducks, coots and mergansers is three times the daily bag limit. Youth waterfowl hunts will be held Nov. 3 and Jan. 26 in the West Zone, Nov. 10 and Feb. 2 in the East Zone, and Nov. 3-4 in the Coastal Zone.			
GEESE (snow, blue, Ross & white-fronted [specklebelly])	(Statewide) Nov. 3 - Dec. 2 Dec. 15 - Feb. 10	Daily bag limit for light geese (snow, blue, Ross') is 20, with no possession limit. The daily bag limit for white-fronted geese is two, with a possession limit of six.	
CANADA GOOSE SEASON	(Statewide) Nov. 3 - Dec. 2 Dec. 15 - Jan. 31	The daily limit for Canada geese is one per day, with a possession limit of three.	

CONSERVATION ORDER FOR LIGHT GEESE (Statewide) Dec. 3 - 14
Feb. 11 - March 10
Only snow, blue and Ross geese may be taken under the terms of the conservation order, which allows the use of electronic calls and unplugged shotguns, and eliminates the daily bag and possession limits. Shooting hours begin one-half hour before sunrise and extends until one-half hour after sunset.

DEER SEASONS

2018 - 2019 Deer Hunting Areas



AREA	ARCHERY (Either-sex)	PRIMITIVE FIREARMS (All either-sex, except as noted)	STILL HUNT (No dogs allowed) (All either-sex, except as noted)	WITH/WITHOUT DOGS (All either-sex, except as noted)
1	Oct. 1 - Jan. 31	Nov. 10-16 Jan. 21 - 31	Nov. 17 - Dec. 7 Jan. 7 - 20	Dec. 8 - Jan. 6
2	Oct. 1 - Jan. 31	Oct. 20 - 26 Jan. 14 - 20	Oct. 27 - Dec. 5	Dec. 6 - Jan. 13
3	Sept. 15 - Jan. 15	Oct. 13 - 19, Nov. 26 - 30	Oct. 20 - Nov. 25	Dec. 1 - Jan. 6 (certain areas)
4	Oct. 1 - Jan. 31	Nov. 10 - 16 Jan. 21 - 31	Nov. 17 - Dec. 7 Jan. 7 - 20	Dec. 8 - Jan. 6
5	Oct. 1 - 15 (bucks only) Oct. 16 - Feb. 15 (either-sex)	Nov. 10-16 (either-sex) Jan. 21 - 31 (bucks only)	Nov. 17-18, Nov. 23 - 25 (either-sex) Nov. 19-22, Nov. 26 - Dec. 7 (bucks only)	Dec. 8-9, Dec. 22-23 (either-sex) Dec. 10-21 (bucks only) Dec. 24 - Jan. 20 (bucks only)
6	Oct. 1 - 15 (bucks only) Oct. 16 - Feb. 15 (either-sex)	Nov. 10 - 16 Jan. 21 - 31	Nov. 17 - Dec. 7	Dec. 8 - Jan. 20
7	Sept. 15 - Jan. 15	Oct. 13 - 19 Nov. 3 - 9	Oct. 20 - Nov. 2 Nov. 10 - 25	Nov. 26 - Dec. 30
8	Sept. 15 - Jan. 15	Oct. 13 - 19, Nov. 26 - 30	Oct. 20 - Nov. 25	Dec. 1 - Jan. 6
9	Oct. 1 - 15 (bucks only) Oct. 16 - Feb. 15 (either-sex)	Nov. 10-16 (either-sex) Jan. 21 - 31 (bucks only)	Nov. 17-18, Nov. 23 - 25 (either-sex) Nov. 19-22, Nov. 26 - Dec. 7 (bucks only)	Dec. 8-9, Dec. 22-23 (either-sex) Dec. 10-21 (bucks only) Dec. 24 - Jan. 20 (bucks only)
10	Sept. 15 - Jan. 15	Oct. 13 - 19, Nov. 26 - 30	Oct. 20 - Nov. 25, Dec. 1 - Jan. 6	

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September 2018

Date	Sunrise	Sunset
1st	6:37 a.m.	7:23 p.m.
2nd	6:38 a.m.	7:21 p.m.
3rd	6:38 a.m.	7:20 p.m.
4th	6:39 a.m.	7:19 p.m.
5th	6:40 a.m.	7:18 p.m.
6th	6:40 a.m.	7:17 p.m.
7th	6:41 a.m.	7:15 p.m.
8th	6:41 a.m.	7:14 p.m.
9th	6:42 a.m.	7:13 p.m.
10th	6:42 a.m.	7:12 p.m.
11th	6:43 a.m.	7:10 p.m.

Date	Sunrise	Sunset
12th	6:43 a.m.	7:09 p.m.
13th	6:44 a.m.	7:08 p.m.
14th	6:44 a.m.	7:07 p.m.
15th	6:45 a.m.	7:06 p.m.
16th	6:45 a.m.	7:04 p.m.
17th	6:46 a.m.	7:03 p.m.
18th	6:47 a.m.	7:02 p.m.
19th	6:47 a.m.	7:01 p.m.
20th	6:48 a.m.	6:59 p.m.
21st	6:48 a.m.	6:58 p.m.
22nd	6:49 a.m.	6:57 p.m.

Date	Sunrise	Sunset
23rd	6:49 a.m.	6:56 p.m.
24th	6:50 a.m.	6:54 p.m.
25th	6:50 a.m.	6:53 p.m.
26th	6:51 a.m.	6:52 p.m.
27th	6:51 a.m.	6:51 p.m.
28th	6:52 a.m.	6:49 p.m.
29th	6:53 a.m.	6:48 p.m.
30th	6:53 a.m.	6:47 p.m.

*Time based on New Orleans, sunrise/sunset; source U.S. Naval Observatory. Corrections (in minutes)

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Rise/Set
+5/+4

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Rise/Set
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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.

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2018 SEP	BEST DAYS				LUNAR PERIODS				MOON RISE	TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED		MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		MOON PHASE
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE	MOON OVERHEAD	MOON UNDERFOOT	MOON OVERHEAD		MOON UNDERFOOT					
Sat 1					51			11:32 pm	4:10 am - 7:06 am		12:30 pm	4:35 pm - 7:31 pm			
Sun 2					64				4:56 am - 8:02 am	☀	1:32 pm	5:21 pm - 8:27 pm		HALF	
Mon 3					56			12:15 am	5:45 am - 9:01 am	☀	2:36 pm	6:10 pm - 9:26 pm			
Tue 4					52			1:05 am	6:40 am - 10:02 am		3:39 pm	7:05 pm - 10:27 pm			
Wed 5					53			2:02 am	7:40 am - 11:02 am		4:38 pm	8:05 pm - 11:27 pm		HIGH	
Thu 6					64			3:05 am	8:41 am - 12:01 pm		5:34 pm	9:06 pm - 12:26 pm			
Fri 7					73			4:13 am	9:46 am - 12:56 pm		6:23 pm	10:11 pm - 1:21 am		Perigee	
Sat 8					80			5:24 am	10:52 am - 1:48 pm	☀	7:08 pm	11:17 pm - Midnight			
Sun 9					82			6:34 am	11:54 am - 2:36 pm	☀	7:48 pm	Midnight - 2:13 am		NEW	
Mon 10					68			7:43 am	12:57 pm - 3:19 pm		8:25 pm	12:19 am - 3:01 am			
Tue 11					53			8:50 am	1:56 pm - 4:02 pm		9:01 pm	1:22 am - 3:44 am			
Wed 12					40			9:55 am	2:55 pm - 4:43 pm		9:37 pm	2:21 am - 4:27 am			
Thu 13					31			10:58 am	3:52 pm - 5:24 pm		10:13 pm	3:20 am - 5:08 am			
Fri 14					29			11:59 am	4:46 pm - 6:08 pm		10:51 pm	4:17 am - 5:49 am			
Sat 15					31			12:57 pm	5:40 pm - 6:52 pm		11:31 pm	5:11 am - 6:33 am			
Sun 16					39			1:53 pm	6:32 pm - 7:38 pm	☀		6:05 am - 7:17 am	☀	HALF	
Mon 17					28			2:46 pm	7:23 pm - 8:25 pm	☀	12:15 am	6:57 am - 8:03 am	☀		
Tue 18					21			3:36 pm	8:11 pm - 9:13 pm		1:01 am	7:48 am - 8:50 am		LOW	
Wed 19					20			4:19 pm	8:57 pm - 10:03 pm		1:51 am	8:36 am - 9:38 am		Apogee	
Thu 20					20			5:00 pm	9:41 pm - 10:53 pm		2:43 am	9:22 am - 10:28 am			
Fri 21					32			5:38 pm	10:22 pm - 11:44 pm		3:37 am	10:06 am - 11:18 am			
Sat 22					44			6:12 pm	11:00 pm - 12:36 pm		4:32 am	10:47 am - 12:09 pm		Fall	
Sun 23					56			6:45 pm	11:38 pm - Midnight		5:29 am	11:25 am - 1:01 pm			
Mon 24					63			7:17 pm	Midnight - 1:26 am		6:26 am	12:03 pm - 1:51 pm	☀	FULL	
Tue 25					55			7:48 pm	12:14 am - 2:20 am		7:23 am	12:39 pm - 2:45 pm	☀		
Wed 26					48			8:20 pm	12:53 am - 3:11 am		8:22 am	1:18 pm - 3:36 pm			
Thu 27					42			8:54 pm	1:30 am - 4:06 am		9:22 am	1:55 pm - 4:31 pm			
Fri 28					40			9:32 pm	2:10 am - 5:02 am		10:24 am	2:35 pm - 5:27 pm			
Sat 29					44			10:13 pm	2:53 am - 5:59 am		11:27 am	3:18 pm - 6:24 pm			
Sun 30					46			11:01 pm	3:41 am - 6:57 am		12:30 pm	4:06 pm - 7:22 pm			

25 50 75
AVERAGE

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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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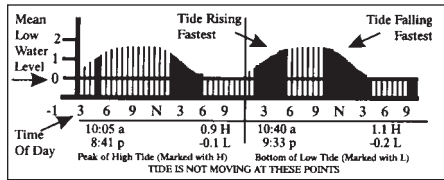
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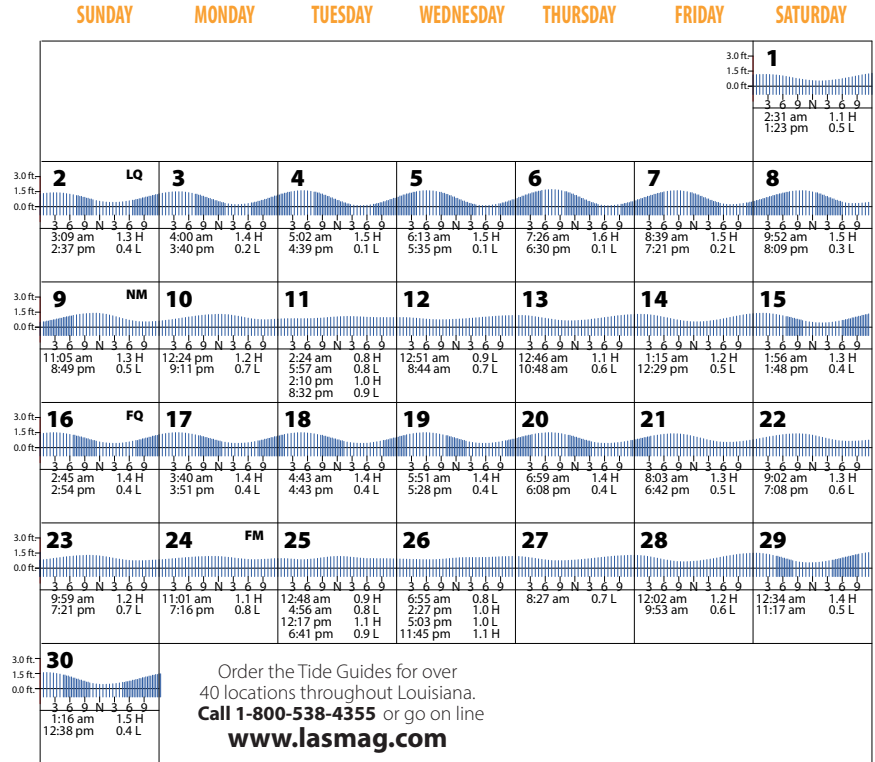


Fish feed most actively when the tide is moving. Louisiana Sportsman has made it simple to spot the most-active feeding periods each day in the Tide Guide. Just fish those times indicated in black. To find the best time to fish your favorite honeyhole, find the spot under Tide Corrections that is closest to the area, and add or subtract the time from the corresponding daily prediction.

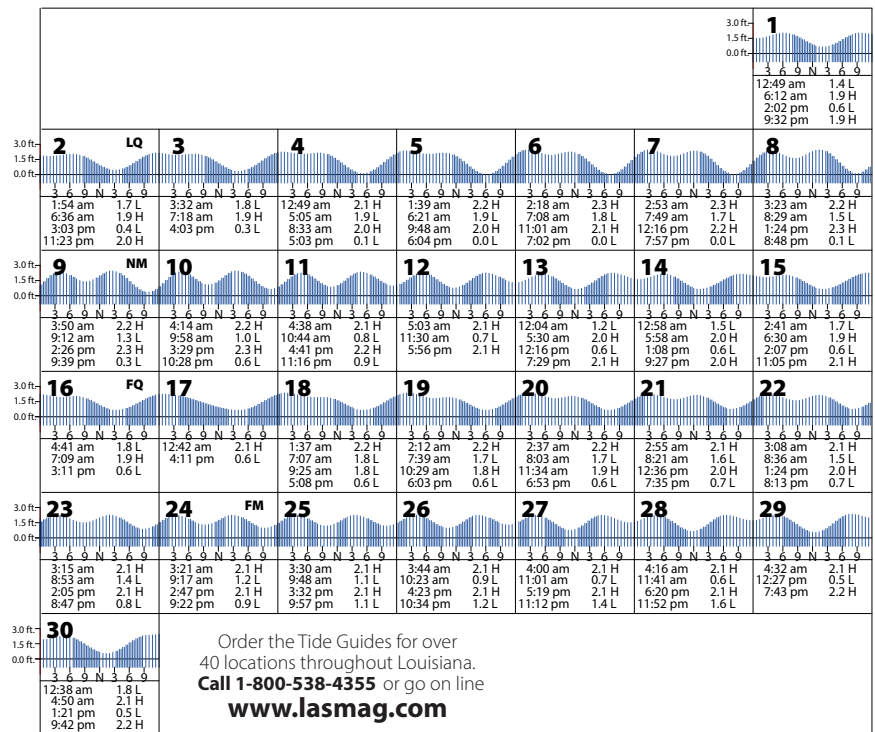
Tide Corrections

East Point, Grand Isle	HIGH	LOW
Barataria Pass	+1:00	-0:10
Bastian Island	+0:41	+0:12
Bay Gardene	+2:51	+2:44
Bayou BonFouca	+9:59	+10:11
Breton Islands	+0:54	+0:48
Caillou Boca	+0:40	+0:48
Caminada Pass	+0:20	+0:12
Chandeleur Light	+0:37	+0:34
Chef Pass	+5:17	+5:07
Cocodrie	+1:22	+1:33
Comfort Island	+1:34	+0:54
Delacroix Island	+3:42	+3:31
Empire Jetty	-1:03	-1:45
Four Bayou Pass	+2:18	+0:17
Gardner Island	+0:40	+0:47
Grand Pass	+1:48	+1:16
Head of Passes	-0:48	+0:00
Hopedale	+4:17	+4:56
Independence Island	+2:29	+1:59
Jack Bay	+1:59	+1:28
Joseph Bayou	-0:36	-1:37
Lafitte	+1:45	+2:51
Long Point, Lake Borgne	+2:28	+2:11
Manila Village	+2:32	+3:13
Michoud Substation	+5:24	+5:02
New Canal (Bucktown)	+10:34	+10:49
North Pass	-0:31	-0:37
Paris Road Bridge	+5:53	+5:58
Pelican Islands	+2:26	+2:26
Pointe a la Hache	+3:12	+3:01
Port Eads	-0:17	-1:37
Raccoon Point	-0:03	-0:20
Shell Beach	+4:32	+4:25
Ship Shoal Light	-1:54	-1:50
South Pass, Miss. R.	-1:13	-1:20
Southwest Pass, Miss. R.	-0:38	-1:33
Tchefuncte River	+10:23	+11:01
Timbalier Island	+0:19	+0:23
Wine Island	+1:08	+1:02
Calcasieu Pass, Lighthouse Wharf	HIGH	LOW
Cote Blanche Island	+4:33	+3:40
Eugene Island	+1:49	-0:39
Lighthouse Point	+0:58	-0:53
Mermentau River ent.	+0:20	+0:25
Point Au Fer	+1:53	-1:02
Point Chevreul	+3:16	+0:30
Rabbit Island	+2:01	-0:36
Shell Island	+3:08	+0:45
South Point	+1:55	-0:33
Southwest Pass, Vermillion Bay	+1:42	+0:51
Weeks Bay	+3:58	+3:56

East Point Grand Isle



Calcasieu Pass Lighthouse Wharf






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FOCUSING ON REDS

A man with a beard and sunglasses, wearing a blue shirt and a grey cap, is holding a large fish. The fish has a golden-brown head and a white belly. The background is a clear blue sky and a body of water.

Trout typically become scattered this time of year, but redfish more than pick up the slack.

September winds can make catching scattered specks tough

Mother Nature unfortunately doesn't always cooperate for fishermen, and that forces anglers to change their patterns this time of year, according to Hopedale guide Capt. Charlie Thomason.

"We're going to start getting a lot of winds in September, so the pattern starts to be where we want to still be fishing out in the Sound or Black Bay, but the wind and weather is going to drive us into having to start fishing toward the inside," he said.

Speckled trout are hard to come by this time of year. They become sparse and scattered, and Thomason usually only catches a few.

"Because of (the weather), the trout fishing is going to be kind of canceled out because the trout won't be moving in; they'll still be outside," he said.

Instead of fighting the trout battle, the veteran guide spends his time focusing on redfish.

And a big key to red success this time of year is knowing how to fish a hard tide.

"Normally, we have a lot of east and south-east winds that start blowing, so you'll start getting these harder incoming tides, so you'll be looking for banks where the water runs along those banks," Thomason said.

Focusing on banks with defined points — but not spending too much time on them, is key.

"In September, you stop, use your Power-Poles, fish a little bit, and just move up like two boat lengths and stop again," he said. "They're not going to stack up really heavily because there's so much water movement they're not going to hang together; they're going to be a little bit scattered."

On these points, Thomason throws live shrimp threaded on a jighead.

"Threading the shrimp on keeps them on the hook better, whereas if you just had it through the horn, as you're popping it and fighting that current, it rips those shrimp off," he said.

He's a huge fan of the Versamaxx line of corks, and he likes the Hybrid style this month.

"It floats kind of high in the water, and it produces a really high-pitched sound that the fish that are around will pick up," he said. ■

- Joel Masson

BILOXI MARSH: TROUT IN TRANSITION

Target oyster reefs in fringe bays

Despite lingering warm temperatures, September's trout transition is already underway, according to Capt. Casey Kieff.

"This month you'll find the trout are scattered, from deep inside the Biloxi Marsh

all the way to the outside waters of Breton Sound, and throughout the in-between areas," he said. "But they just won't likely be all stacked up in any one spot."

Kieff said the rigs and structures in Breton Sound will still yield some nice fish in September, even though trout catches out there haven't been consistent all summer.

"It's definitely worth taking a shot at some bigger fish on a calm day," he said.

But Kieff said he plans to target the oyster reefs in the big fringe bays because this is the month action there should really turn on.

"This is generally prime time for areas like Christmas Camp Lake, Drum Bay, Morgan Harbor and Lawson Bay, and even around Comfort Island," he said. "You can get over the reefs and drift or anchor, and fish live



Capt. Casey Kieff said live shrimp under a popping cork will catch trout this month, as will gold spoons for reds in the upper Biloxi Marsh.

shrimp and plastics under a cork. As we move more into the fall months action should turn on in Lake Anastasia, Lake Eugene, Lake Eloi and in the various Biloxi Marsh lakes."

Live shrimp fished under a popping cork is the best bait for trout action, but soft plastics will catch some fish also.

Kieff said the redfish action has been good in the upper Biloxi Marsh, especially in ponds around Bayou Biloxi and in the interior lagoons. Weedless gold spoons fished along the edges of the grass or market shrimp parked at a drain, cove or at a point with current movement should be irresistible to the red maulers, he said.

Capt. Casey Kieff can be reached at 504-512-7171. ■

- Rusty Tardo

NO BULL ABOUT BOEUF RIVER CRAPPIE

FOCUS ON EDGES OF DEEP STUMPS

The Boeuf River's name comes from the French, and means beef or bull. The Boeuf won't win any beauty contests or make it on many peoples' Top 10 lists, but that doesn't mean it isn't a great place to fish — and that's no bull.

Just ask Jeff Collins of Crowville.

"I've been crappie fishing on the Boeuf River all my life, and there aren't a lot of

people who fish for white perch," he said. "But I love it. It's fairly simple here and it's away from the crowds. When the crappie start biting, fishing pressure picks up, but usually it's a laid back relaxing fishing spot."

This time of the year is when Collins starts getting more company on the Boeuf (which is pronounced "Beff").

"Some people use an umbrella or spider rig, but I just use one pole in each hand and lay an extra pole out to the side of the boat," he said. "That's the way I'd recommend fishing it because you feel the bite and you control where your bait goes. This time of year, we usually just troll slowly down the edge of the outside stumps. The water is 7 to 8 feet deep on the edge of the stumps, and the fish will suspend there. The fish will suspend about 3 to 4 feet deep. According to how much rain we've had, the water may be a little bit deeper, or more shallow. A lot of farmers pull out of the Boeuf for irrigation, and once that's done, the water usually comes up a bit."

That doesn't seem to move the fish, though. Until the weather gets cold, they'll stay on the edges of those deep stumps.

"There are dozens of baits that will work but I like a black-and-chartreuse jig with a chartreuse head. If I can't catch them on that, then they probably aren't going to

hit anything else," he said.

The Boeuf is a long, winding river that meanders 216 miles from well north of the Arkansas line all the way down to Sicily Island, where it joins the Ouachita River. Some areas are better than others, you just have to spend some time finding the sweet spots. But Collins said you can catch fish pretty much anywhere along



Whether you call them white perch, crappie or sac-a-lait, that's a nice fish Jeff Collins is about to put on ice.

the small river. His favorite areas are down near the Tressler Bridge, or the landings in Alto or Woolen Lake. ■

- Kinny Haddox

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All images will be considered, but those taken on the water or in the woods will have the best chance of being featured.

*Digital images must be sent in jpeg format. High-resolution images (taken on your camera's highest setting) will work the best. All images (physical and digital) become property of Louisiana Sportsman and cannot be returned.

TROUT TOUGH - BUT STILL DOABLE

Bayous Liberty and Lacombe offer specks a bait buffet

If you asked avid Louisiana trout anglers what their favorite month for targeting specks was, you'd be hard-pressed to find a single one that said September. However, that doesn't mean trout can't be caught — and after a long hot summer, one of the best places to catch during the transition is Bayous Liberty and Lacombe.

That's something avid angler Jeff Bruhl does all month long. The fish get in these bayous that pour into Lake Pontchartrain because it's a bait party, Bruhl said.

"Usually around the end of August, first of September, you'll get a dual migration: You get the saltwater shad start leaving, going out in the lake, and you also have shrimp come in to the mouth of the bayous and up the bayous," he said. "You have a trout buffet of food for them."

Bruhl finds a lot of the hot

action takes place in the mouths of bayous, and a couple bends up the bayou. He likes to look for bait on the surface.

"If you see shrimp jumping and shad flicking, that's a good place to start," he said.

Bruhl uses MirrOdine baits, as well as Matrix Shads on ¼-ounce jigheads.

"You want to fish it slow," he said. "The fish are suspended, so you can just reel it back to the boat and catch them that way."

Bruhl also fishes down the shoreline of Lake Pontchartrain just outside of the bayous. Although the speckled trout are smaller inside, Bruhl said some really nice trout hangout on the lake's shoreline.

"Sometimes you can catch 3- or 4-pound trout out there — it just depends on the year," he said.

When fishing the lake, Bruhl focuses on grass beds a little



Jeff Bruhl targets speckled trout this time of year in Bayous Liberty and Lacombe, and occasionally catches some hammers fishing grass beds on the Lake Pontchartrain shoreline.

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bit off the shoreline.

"You use polarized glasses and you're looking for the grass bed," he said. "It'll be just a dark patch out there. You need to figure out if you should fish it over the top or the edges of them."

Bruhl throws either a topwater bait over the grass beds, or a MirrOdine on the edges.

"You're fishing within 50 feet of the bank," he said. "When you go out a little deeper than that, the (grass beds) disappear." ■

- Joel Masson

Toledo Bend up next >

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HEAT ON HIGH AT THE BEND

FISH EARLY OR LATE UNTIL WATER TEMPS COOL

Toledo Bend bass anglers stymied by the dog days of summer can't wait to escape the blistering heat and welcome the cooler temperatures of (hopefully) late September.

Until then, the oft-unbearable high temperatures have got the lake's bass in nighttime or early morning mode. Some of the best bass anglers on the water are getting half-dozen or so bass in the boat early, while the nighttime guys are getting more quantity and quality — including some 8s and 9s over the past few weeks.

Otherwise, getting bit with any kind of consistency during the heat of the day is a challenge. Those sticking it out are probing the 20- to 22-foot depths with drop-shot rigs and Carolina-rigged soft plastics — water temps nearly in the 90s will do that.

Barring unseasonably early cool fronts, that's going to be the status quo well into September, probably until at least the latter half of the month when cool fronts start blowing through with some semblance of consistency. That's when I really believe we'll see catch numbers go up significantly.

Until then, I don't see anything changing. The lake may be a little lower than it is now, but barring a prolonged, heavy rain event, it'll still be H-O-T.

Until the cool down, you've really got to

be on the water at breaking daylight. After that, you've got a one- to two-hour window when the odds of getting bit are good. I'd choose thick peppergrass (or even haygrass) in 3-foot average depths to fish at that time. Personally, I tie on a Stanley Top Toad, watermelon red/pearl mostly, but sometimes black or white. They eat it. It's a bulkier, bigger profile, and it tends to get bigger bites.

Also try that pattern with your favorite plastic frogs and topwaters the last few hours of the day. And, if it's heavily overcast, sneak back into the peppergrass.

Just before the furnace really got cranking in July, I took Brian Matthews of Kansas City and his son, Max, 12, out on the lake. Talk about good timing. They caught bass up to 5 pounds, 10 ounces, on plastic frogs. It was a special two days, but the bite was short-lived. After that, the average water temperature stayed 87 to 90 degrees, after it had been averaging 83 to 87.

Speaking of peppergrass, the growth has

intensified rapidly and it's a beautiful sight to see. Six Mile has the prettiest stuff I've seen so far beside Housen. Plenty of shad are in it, and I've seen bass move in it, even in 2- to 3-foot depths. Hopefully, the water doesn't get any lower, or the shad and bass could leave the peppergrass. The deepest I've seen the peppergrass is 3 1/2 feet. We sure could use another 2 feet or so in the pool level to ensure some late summer and early fall bassin' success in the peppergrass.

After fishing the first few hours of the day, it'll be time go deep and either drop-shot or Carolina rig. Top colors for the soft plastics are plum apple and red bug. I've also been having success dropping



Brian Matthews holds a 5-pound, 10-ounce bass he caught on a plastic frog while fishing with his son Max and guide John Dean at Toledo Bend.

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a plastic worm rigged wacky style under a ¼-ounce worm weight alongside deep grass, so you may want to try that too, in September.

The heat wave has slowed the crappie fishing considerably. Those anglers are also waiting for a consistent cool spell.

If you want to catch bass in September, 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.

Ouachita up next >

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While many river bass are around a pound or two, fall is an excellent time to land Ouachita lunkers like these.

BASS FOLLOW BAIT ON THE OUACHITA

Target drains with crankbaits for river bass

It's been a crazy year on the Ouachita River. Spring flooding pushed waters far out of the river's banks. Then a summer drawdown by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for repairs on the Columbia lock and dam drew the river down to a 40-year low. The drop emptied many smaller tributaries, brought D'Arbonne Bayou back to its channels and cut off most river lakes.

But one thing stayed consistent, and is still that way going into the fall.

"Those fish are going to follow the baitfish," said Nick Young. "Wherever the food goes, the bass will follow. The

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only time that isn't true on the river is when sandbars of shallow areas cut off access and the fish are trapped in backwater lakes. When that happens, they still follow the shad, bream and crawfish because that's what they eat."

The main pool of the Ouachita in Louisiana between the Felsenthal, Arkansas and Columbia lock and dams is the one affected. Currently the river remains down for the lock repairs, and instead of a flowing stream, it's more like a 90-mile long meandering lake. The water in the Columbia pool is much clearer than usual because the river isn't really flowing. The water below the dam at Columbia remains somewhat lower, but is still off-color as usual this time of year. There's still uncertainty as to how long the river will remain low, but how to catch fish is pretty predictable.

Access is limited for bigger boats, but at the Monroe end, the public landing at Joe Bob's is open and below the lock and dam, the big landing at Columbia is functioning. Finding a way to get in is worth it, Young said.

"You've got run outs, creek channels and drains that run into the river, and fishing the mouths of these is the best place to consistently find fish," Young said. "Fish the points that extend out in the river with crankbaits and work your way all the way up close to the bank with plastics."

At that point, specific colors and sizes don't seem to matter. Just pick some lures you feel confident in and find the ones they are hitting, Young said. His favorite is a Bandit 300 series in shad or crawfish color and for plastics, he likes junebug or some dark color. ■

- Kinny Haddox



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CHASING REDS IN COCODRIE

And nothing beats topwater blowups from big bulls

Redfish in South Louisiana are plentiful 12 months out the year, and there are as many ways to catch them as lures to use. As with almost any fish, though, there's no more fun way to catch a bull red than on a topwater lure.

That's exactly what Cocodrie guide Capt. Tommy Pellegrin does this month.

"On the calm days, or any day with north wind where you can get on the beach, that's what I'm going to look for to put customers on some of that stuff," he said.

Pellegrin chases school of redfish on the beach from Little Pass to Coon Point.

"You have to spend your time," he said. "You can't just give up on it. It's a timing deal."

That timing can make things tricky because chasing schooling fish isn't always dependable. Pellegrin said once you hit them, it's important to note the

conditions.

"The first time you find them — either remember it or write it down — what the situation was," he said. "Was the tide going in, tide going out, what time of day — all of these things. Each day it'll change an hour or half hour because of the tide change and wind change and moon change."

In order to find fish, Pellegrin cruises the beach and keeps an eye on the surface of the water.

"It'll happen most days, but the one thing that cuts you off is weather," he said. "If it's rough, the schools are there, you just can't see them. The calmer it is, the more you can see them because even if they're in 4 or 5 feet of water, when you get 300 fish swimming, it's going to ruffle the water."

Another easy way to locate the fish, Pellegrin said, is to find the birds.

"They don't have to be busting the surface for you to find them, and when the water is calm and the redfish are there, the birds are flying overhead waiting for the (redfish) to start feeding," he said. "When they start (crushing) everything, then the birds get to feed. They'll always have birds pretty much on top of them."

Once he locates a school, Pellegrin positions the boat in a strategic way.

"You can get right on top of them," he said. "Some schools will get kind of spooky, but if you've got a 4-stroke engine, that's quiet and you're idling, take your motor and go way in front of them and let them come to you."

Pellegrin simply follows the school and catches the fish throwing topwater baits and jigs. ■

- Joel Masson

Big Lake up next >



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CATCH BIG LAKE'S TRANSITION TROUT

Fish move in more as month progresses

September is a month that drives anglers crazy. "You can smoke them one day, and then next day wonder where they went," Calcasieu Charter Service's Capt. Erik Rue said.

It's not that fish aren't around — they are just in that annual fall transition when they are constantly on the move. For Big Lake, that means focusing more on inshore waters than down along the coast. "The fish are making their way into the system," Rue explained.

At the beginning of the month, trout and reds will be found in the best numbers in the lower part of the ship channel, the jetties and the beaches. (Just like in August.)

But as the month ages and cool weather slowly begins lowering water temperatures, things change and boat rides become shorter.



As September progresses and water temps cool, bait — and specked trout — move further up into Big Lake.

"Between Labor Day and about Sept. 10 — that's when I drive away from the jetties and wave goodbye: 'See you next year,'" Rue said. "The bulk of the fish move inshore."

The reason is simple: Bait like shrimp are beginning to migrate up the system and into Big Lake proper.

"About the end of teal season, you're going to start seeing birds," Rue said.

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And where there are birds picking on shrimp, there will inevitably be trout and redfish underneath.

"When the birds start showing up, you leave the dock and you know you're going bird fishing," he said.

When birds are diving-bombing bait, Rue and his clients ease into position upwind of the flock and drift through the school.

The great thing about fishing these schools is that, while you can still use live bait, artificials will definitely produce. Rue's preference is to tight-line, but he said dangling a plastic beneath a cork is a good way to go, as well.

"Whatever it takes," he said. "With a cork, you can keep it in the strike zone a little longer; it helps."

Unfortunately, this is when you'll also catch a lot of catfish. He said there are times when it's quickly apparent nothing but gaff-tops will be caught under a flock of birds.

But he gives the area a few minutes to yield some specks.

"If you see fish busting, you might have a group of (trout under the birds)," Rue said. "But if you catch six or eight gaff-tops, it's time to move on."

And that's a key to success this month: Staying mobile.

"You just have to pick at them," Rue said. "You might catch four or five at one spot, move and catch another handful, and just keep moving around."

Another productive approach is to head straight to the reefs north of Long Point.

"These reefs are in good shape," Rue said. "I start upwind and drift the reef. When you hit a fish, Power-Pole down and work the area."

There are always key spots along any reef that produce consistently, so he ensures he hits those thoroughly.

"Those spots are amazing because they hold fish day after day after day," Rue said.

But a word of warning: These reefs are community holes, so don't sleep late during the fall if you want to get the most out of them.

"If you leave the dock late, you'll find someone has beaten you to the best spots," Rue said. "The early bird gets the worm." ■

- Andy Crawford

Buras up next >



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BURAS FISHING 'WILL BE OFF THE CHART' THIS MONTH

Falling river good news for anglers

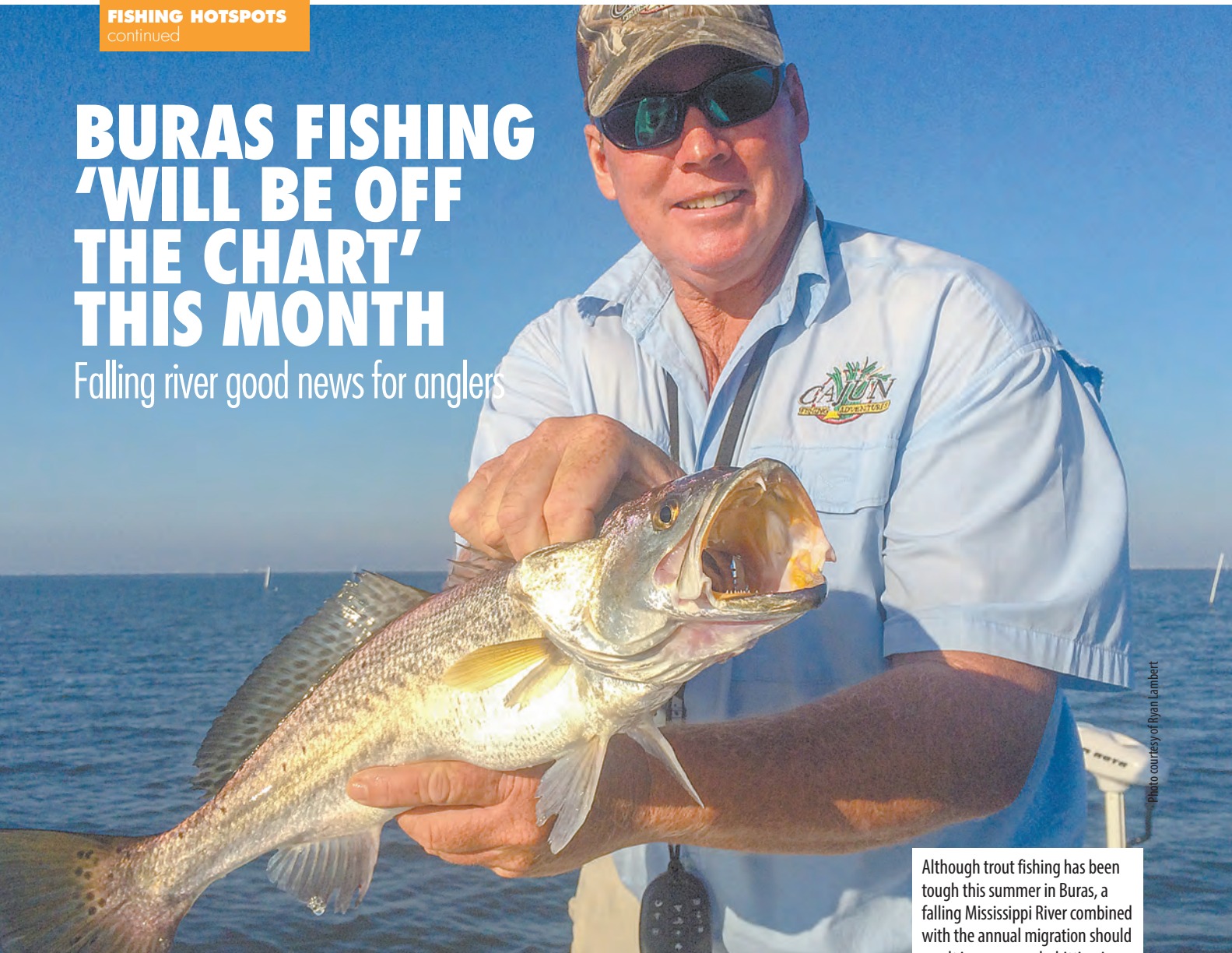


Photo courtesy of Ryan Lambert

Although trout fishing has been tough this summer in Buras, a falling Mississippi River combined with the annual migration should result in more specks hitting ice.

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Redfish have been the star of the Buras stage throughout the summer, but this month should add speckled trout to the mix for anglers heading to the fishing village south of New Orleans.

"I think September will be off the chart," veteran fishing guide Capt. Ryan Lambert said. "As soon as the (Mississippi) river hits the 3-foot range, the water will clean up and the fishing will turn on on both sides (of the river)."

The owner of Cajun Fishing Adventures said his crew has been pounding redfish that

have crowded the marshes on both sides of Highway 23.

"Trout (have been) very limited," Lambert said in early August. "The wind has been horrendous."

Redfish, on the other hand, have been prowling tight to the banks of the larger bays.

"You have to be on your toes on an incoming tide," Lambert said. "(Redfish) are on the bank, and if you're not (casting right) on the bank, you're not going to catch them."

That will continue this month, with clearing water as the Mississippi River falls opening up the possibility of sight-fishing, he said.

"Bull reds will be off the chain until the full moon — then they'll head out to spawn," the guide said. "One day they'll be gone for a week, and then they'll show back up."

Dead shrimp are always deadly on redfish, but you should also be able to catch them on artificials.

"Topwaters and ChatterBaits have been killer," Lambert reported.

Adding to that action should be a wave of speckled trout — especially if the wind lays down.

Plenty of specks should gang up around rigs in 15 to 18 feet of water, and along the beaches on the edges of the marshes.

"If you get the mullet on the beaches with this river going down, it should be good," Lambert said.

Live bait will definitely produce, but it's not necessary. Lambert said plastics either tight-lined or under corks will put plenty of fish in the boat.

"I have schooled them with that (Z-Man) Trout Trick," Lambert said.

Productive colors include shrimp po-boy and iquana daiquiri. ■

- Andy Crawford

Grand Isle up next >

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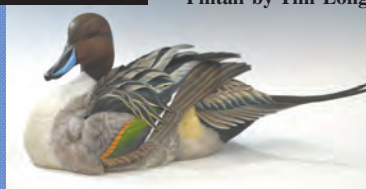
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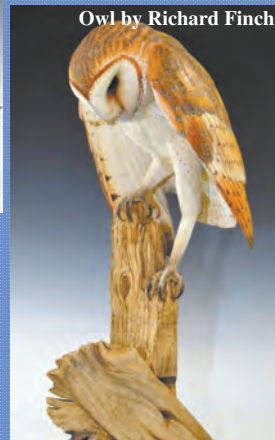
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Capt. Keith "Herk" Bergeron said free-lining live croakers is a good way to catch trout deep.



GRAND ISLE — STILL HOT IN SEPTEMBER

Trout moved out of shallows to deeper, cooler water

My old friend Capt. Keith "Herk" Bergeron said there's still plenty nice trout to catch this month, but you'll have to fish deeper for them.

"The trout have moved out of the shallow water and retreated to deeper, cooler haunts," he said. "That means I'm fishing in water anywhere from 6 feet to 30 feet deep, and finding some really nice sized specks in the process."

Bergeron said water temperatures just got so warm it pushed the bigger trout off the shallows into deeper water.

"I'm fishing structures in Bay March in 30 feet of water," he said. "The trout aren't directly on the bottom, but suspended at around 6 to 8 feet in the water column. So for bait, I'm mostly free-lining live croakers — that is, just put a hook under their top fin and cast it out and let them swim — no cork, no weight. The trout find them

and smack them hard, and these are nice sized fish.

"I'm reluctant to say it, but I'm also catching some real nice trout around the East

Timbalier Rocks, fishing the same way, free-lining live croakers or just casting H&H smoke-colored Beetles on a plain 1/4- or 3/8-ounce jig head. Don't bounce it on the bottom or you'll snag the rocks: Just cast and swim it, and the trout and reds are hitting them hard."

The trouble is, every other kind of toothy critter is out there competing for your bait, he said.

"We're catching a lot of red-fish, ladyfish, bluefish, Spanish mackerel and sharks, and hooks are consistently snagging up in the rocks, so we're constantly having to re-tie our tackle," he said. "Bring plenty extra tackle."

Bergeron's reluctance in mentioning the East Timbalier Rocks stems not only from the mere loss of tackle — but the submerged dangers posed by the treacherous rocks there.

"Those unfamiliar with the area don't realize the danger just below the surface," he said. "More boats have crunched hulls and damaged props and lost lower units than you can count. I advise you to fish with someone experienced with the area before you run out there, or somebody might have to tow you home."

Capt. Herk can be reached at 985-860-7855. ■

- Rusty Tardo

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Wendell Hebert of New Iberia and his son, Mason, had plenty of redfish to clean after their trip to Marsh Island with Lydia-based Smokin' Reels Charters.



MONSTER REDS AT MARSH ISLAND

Deep holes in The Worm holding fish

Hot weather has redfish right where many Acadiana fishermen want them this summer — in the deep holes of bayous inside Marsh Island. And the good news is they'll still be there in September.

The holes started paying off big time in July, especially for Capt. Brian Romero of Lydia, who has owned Smokin' Reels Charters (337-577-8441) since 2008. Romero and his son, Drew, have been putting redfish in the boat consistently despite the heat.

"It'll definitely still be great this time of year. It'll still be hot until the fronts come through. To me, that's when the fish hit the deeper holes," Brian said. "We've been doing well. Everybody's catching now."

Romero, who was an oilfield boat captain 40 years before retiring in 2016, advised anglers to use their depth-finder to locate deep holes as they go through The Worm and Bird Island Bayou, two of the most popular bayous for redfish. Some are 10- to 30-feet deep, with the deeper holes mostly in the curves.

"If you find water 7 to 8 feet deep, you can find them, too," he said.

Outgoing tides usually are more productive, particularly the first half-hour after the

continues >>>

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tide starts moving and the last half-hour before it stops moving, according to Romero. But there will be days when redfish bite all day long, he said.

Before trying the deep holes, however, redfish can be caught early in the morning fishing the shoreline and points. He especially likes to fish grassy areas. Romero catches most of his redfish then on a lemonhead Matrix Shad on a ¼-ounce leadhead under a Four Horsemen popping cork.

"To me, it's more than a popping cork. It's a fish caller. I've been using the cork the last five, six months. It really works. It's a fish-catching machine," he said, noting he usually fishes the leadhead about 18 inches to 2 feet under the cork. "It's a great product. I can't wait to use it on speckled trout when they come in. We just need a cool spell."

Around 9 a.m. or so, he switches tactics when he's targeting reds and heads for the deep holes. When he does, he fishes on the bottom with a Carolina rig and uses either cut bait, shrimp or crab.

"Sometimes you have to bring everything to keep up with them," he said. "Go to the deep holes for your best opportunity."

The Carolina rig he uses will have a 1 ½-foot leader and a 3/8- or ½-ounce weight and probably a 4/0 hook, he said. He'll bait up with different baits — cut bait, shrimp or crabs — to find out what the redfish want that day. ■

- Don Shoopman

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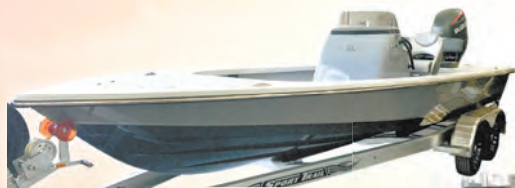
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