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Spawn down south



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The wind can be your friend

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Top 5 bass spawn tips



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Stick it to a tom



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The spawn in South Louisiana is rarely a sight-fishing event, so we asked some experts to share tips that will help you catch more bass this spring. Cover photo by Andy Crawford.

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AVOYELLES HUNTER KNOCKS DOWN GIANT 240-INCH 'ROUGAROU' BUCK

25-POINT NON-TYPICAL COULD LAND IN LOUISIANA'S ALL-TIME TOP 5

By Patrick Bonin

When Amanda Smith departed for her deer stand on Jan. 13 in Avoyelles Parish, her husband Scotty jokingly told her not to come home unless she was bringing back some fresh venison.

Smith, 33, of Brouillette, accomplished that — and a whole lot more — when she dropped a jaw-dropping 25-point non-typical buck that stretched the tape to more than 240 inches Boone and Crockett.

But it wasn't easy — a fogged up scope nearly cost her a shot at the deer of a lifetime when the buck made its way down a trail about 5:40 p.m. that chilly Saturday afternoon.

Smith had gotten to the stand about 3:30 and lit her heater, then shut it off shortly before the big buck appeared.

"As he was coming my way, he stopped behind a tree and stood there for a minute, then continued to walk on toward me. My heart began to race, and I knew I had to calm myself down fast," she wrote in an e-mail to Louisiana Sportsman.

"I got my .444 ready, but when I looked through my scope it was totally fogged up because my heater had been on in my stand.

"Thank goodness I had a couple spare Kleenex with me, so I grabbed one and wiped away the fog from my scope. Finally, I had a little spot I could see the deer through, so I took aim and shot."

After squeezing the trigger from only about 30 yards, Smith turned her head and listened to see if she could hear the deer running — but heard nothing.

"So I turned back and there he was still standing," she said. "Then, he just dropped right before my eyes. It was crazy!"

She hit her knees when she went down



Amanda Smith, of Brouillette, poses with the monstrous 25-point non-typical she shot on Jan. 13 in Avoyelles Parish. The score isn't official yet because the rack hasn't dried for 60 days, but the big non-typical grossed 240 5/8 and netted 228 3/8 B&C, according to an official LDWF scorer.

Photo courtesy Amanda Smith

to examine the "Rougarou" buck, which earned its nickname from the legendary Cajun folklore werewolf creature because the big deer looked like a monster on trail cam pictures.

"Tears came to my eyes as I began to count his horns, and I realized I had done something most people dream of doing and never get the chance ..." she said. "My husband came running down the hill — he was astounded and maybe a little more excited than me.

"We celebrated and thanked God for the meat he provided ... and thanked him for giving me and my family the opportunity to experience the hunt and deer of a lifetime."

The big buck's rack was eventually

green-scored by Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' Deer Study Leader Johnathan Bordelon, who pegged the deer at 240 5/8 gross and 228 3/8 net B&C. The majestic buck, which was aged at about 7 years old, also scored 249 2/8 under the Buckmasters scoring system.

The incredible rack featured an inside spread greater than 21 inches, with base circumferences on both sides over 7 inches. One brow tine was more than 9 inches long, the other exceeded a foot.

Depending on the official score next month after the mandatory 60-day drying period, the giant Rougarou buck will likely land in the Top 5 all time for Louisiana non-typicals. ■

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CWD FOUND IN MISSISSIPPI BUCK NEAR LOUISIANA BORDER

LDWF ENCOURAGING LANDOWNERS IN THREE PARISHES TO CURTAIL SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING

A free-ranging 4 ½ year old buck was officially diagnosed with chronic wasting disease (CWD) in Issaquena County, Mississippi — the Magnolia State’s first case of the fatal brain disease in deer and other cervids, and the 25th state to confirm the presence of CWD.

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks immediately stopped all supplemental feeding in a total of six counties in an effort to slow the potential spread of the disease. Issaquena County is located across the Mississippi River from East Carroll Parish and Madison Parish in Northeast Louisiana.

In response to that discovery, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and fisheries is now encouraging landowners in East Carroll, Madison and Tensas Parishes also to curtail supplemental feeding.

According to the LDWF, deer infected with CWD can spread the disease even before symptoms develop in one to two years. When symptoms do 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.

LDWF has tested more than 8,300 deer since 2002 and has not detected CWD. LDWF is coordinating with MDWFP for sampling and containment measures, as deer routinely swim the Mississippi River, often to escape floodwaters.

CWD is a neurodegenerative disease found in most deer species, including moose, elk, mule deer and white-tailed deer. It is caused by prions, which are proteins normally found in the body that have mutated. These prions kill nerve cells and cause holes to develop in the brain tissue. They are spread through direct deer-to-deer contact or through contact with urine, feces, saliva and body parts of infected deer or infectious materials in the soil.

Decomposing body parts of dead, infected deer can also contaminate the soil. Plants growing in that soil can take up the prions, and deer can become infected by feeding in areas with prion-contaminated soil and plants. The prions can remain in the environment for years, and there is no practical method of decontaminating an infected area.

To report sick deer, contact your nearest LDWF Field Office. ■



'LUCKY 13' ON CANE RIVER

Jeremy Treadway of Centerpoint reeled in a massive 13.03-pound bass while fishing in a Good Ole Boys Bass Club tournament on Cane River on Feb. 11. The bite came about 10 a.m. as he and his buddy Michael Simmons worked a stretch of cattails with a jig. After the tourney, in which Treadway and Simmons placed second, the big bucketmouth was released back into Cane River. ■

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 Hunter Vaughn, 24, of Elm Grove, shows off the giant 12-pound, 5-ounce bass he caught Jan. 24 on Lake Bistineau. The big bass, which bit a wacky-rigged Senko in Mardi Gras color, was released back into the lake.

BISTINEAU ANGLER CATCHES, RELEASES 12-POUND MONSTER

GIANT BASS MEASURED 27 INCHES LONG, WITH A 20 ¼-INCH GIRTH

By Patrick Bonin

Late in January, Hunter Vaughn and his grandpa Jack Elkins decided to make a quick late-afternoon fishing trip on Lake Bistineau. Neither knew it at the time, but they were about one hour from encountering the biggest bass either man had ever seen.

"It's pretty muddy water, so I was fishing probably 7 feet deep just casting on cypress trees," said Vaughn, 24, of Elm Grove. "We were just right off the channel casting and trolling along. We were about

to head somewhere else, and I threw one last time and she was just sitting there.

"It immediately engulfed the bait on the way down, and I just felt her. I set the hook and I knew it was a big one."

Vaughn, who was fishing with a Shimano rod and a Daiwa reel spooled with 20-pound PowerPro braid, said the big bass nailed a wacky-rigged Senko in Mardi Gras color.

"She stayed down pretty good until she got to the boat," he said. "She jumped one time and we got her calmed down and just grabbed her — we didn't have a net in the boat."

His grandpa actually lipped the big fish in.

"He was freaking out," Vaughn said. "He's got a 10-pounder on his wall, and he said, 'That's the biggest fish I've ever seen!' I said, 'Well, you better hurry up and get it in the boat.'

"It was cool. It was crazy. I was kind of at a loss for words."

The pair put the bass in the livewell, and headed out to quickly get measurements. It tipped the scales at a whopping 12 pounds, 5 ounces, with a 27-inch length and a massive 20 ¼-inch girth.

Vaughn released the bass — his biggest ever — back into Bistineau, and ordered a replica mount to commemorate a day on the water he and his grandpa won't ever forget. ■

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39TH EVENT TO BE HELD MARCH 15-18 AT LAMAR-DIXON EXPO CENTER

The 39th Annual Louisiana Sportsman Show and Festival, Louisiana's largest outdoor and boat show, will be held March 15-18 at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center in Gonzales.

The show features acres of boats, fishing and hunting equipment, ATVs, tractors and outdoor power equipment, plus activities for the entire family.

More than 250 vendors will be at the show, offering acre upon acre of fishing

tackle and hunting gear.

But there really are three shows — the main show, a boat show and a power equipment show — held on the same grounds over the four-day run starting Thursday, March 15.

And all three are included in a single admission fee of just \$10 dollars per day.

Show hours are noon to 7 p.m. on Thursday and Friday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday.

The main Louisiana Sportsman Show

includes a variety of family oriented events:

- The QDMA Louisiana Sportsman Big Buck Contest, which will display of some of the largest bucks killed this season in Mississippi, Louisiana and across the country. Assorted trophies and prizes will be awarded to the winners in each category.
- The Abu Garcia interactive casting booth will feature casting competitions Saturday and Sunday, with prizes



presented to winners of the adult and kids divisions. And if you need to hone your casting skills, experts will be on hand to help out.

- Splash Dogs, where participants can enter their dogs in retriever competitions.
- Scout Day is Thursday (March 15), with all uniformed Scouts and leaders getting into the show free.
- A Kids Area, with free admission to the show for kids on Sunday.
- Fetch & Fish, featuring a huge fish tank in which regular fishing seminars and retriever demonstrations will be conducted.
- The Sportsman Zone brought to you by Bowie Outfitters, which houses everything fishing and more. Bowie's has bought truck loads of product just for this event, and huge discounts will be offered on many items. Factory reps also will be on-site.
- Fishing and hunting outfitters from across the United States.
- A full food court.

In addition to the Louisiana Sportsman Show, the Louisiana Sportsman Boat Show is the place to be if you're even thinking about buying a boat.

This huge boat show, sponsored by Neighbors Federal Credit Union, will again provide one-stop shopping with special show pricing from all the major brands of bass, bay and pontoon boats. Plus, loan officers will be on site for special financing offers.

And do you happen to be in the market for a new piece of power equipment? That's no problem, since the expanded Louisiana Sportsman power equipment area will feature products by Kubota, John Deere, Toro, Stihl, Huskavarna, Mahindra, Kioti and many other brands, ATVs, UTVs, golf carts and other forms of power equipment. Again, special show-only pricing will be offered.

For more show details and a schedule of events, visit LouisianaSportsmanShow.com. ■



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The Zone, presented by Bowie Outfitters, will be full of incredible deal on all manner of outdoor equipment.

"The folks at Bowie Outfitters are bringing trailer loads of items to be sold in the Discount Zone; they have been buying merchandise all year to ensure they don't run out of fantastic show deals," Sportsman Show organizer Jack Fisher said.

"They'll be restocking the shelves in the Discount Zone throughout the show, and you won't believe the deals you'll find."

Bowie Outfitter's Lea Benoit said the 3,000-square-foot zone will be stuffed with

all manner of fishing and hunting gear.

"We're still offering great deals on rod, reels, combos, baits

and ice chests," Benoit said.

"Shimano, Daiwa, Lews, Okuma, Abu Garcia, Penn, Falcon, Costa, 13 Fishing and Kysek Coolers are the big boys we'll have in stock. We'll have lure companies, as well.

"We're probably up to five trailers of merchandise now."

And the incredibly low pricing will be available only at the Louisiana Sportsman Show, so be sure and purchase your tickets today. ■

MORE SHOW NEWS >



Louisiana
**SPORTSMAN
SHOW** & festival

MARCH 15-18
AT LAMAR-DIXON EXPO CENTER

SPLASH DOGS

With winter drawing to a close, dog owners are looking for ways to engage their dogs physically and psychologically. Retrievers are looking for something to chase. House dogs are tired of being indoors, and they too are looking for something to do.

This is what prompted Tony Reed to develop Splash Dogs, which allows dogs to stretch out and see how far they can jump. And this dock-jumping competition is fast becoming one of America's most-popular outdoor events!

The competition allows dogs to compete for distance, diving from a dock into a 40-foot-long pool. No other outdoor event brings families and people together better or puts more smiles on faces than Splash Dog events.

"Yes, we add an element of competition,

but we're more about the family fun," Reed said. "We have a set of rules, but we'll bend them. If a dog doesn't quite make it one time, it's not going to hurt to give them back the toy and let them try to experience getting off the dock and feeling confident.

"It's a great experience to watch people having fun with their dogs."

Pet owners travel to these events from all over the region to compete. It's a great new sport that everyone loves.

Competition is open to dogs of all breeds and ages, from lean Vizslas to shaggy Newfoundlands, all the way to Jack Russell terriers, Labradors and pit bulls. ■

POWER EQUIPMENT SHOW

Tractors, farm equipment and lawn mowers and equipment will be displayed and available for sale at the Louisiana Sportsman Show and Festival set for March 15-18 at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center in Gonzales.

Dealers from around the Baton Rouge region will be on hand with all the latest offerings of most brands of tractors and other outdoor power equipment, with low pricing available only at the show.

The power equipment section doubled in size this year, so you can find everything you need to prepare and manage your food plots, maintain your hunting lease or fishing property, or just keep the grass cut.

Both residential and commercial models will be featured, with dealers offering a full line of accessories, and special pricing will be available. Choose from brands including Kubota, John Deere, Toro, Skagg, Stihl, Huskavarna, Mahindra, Kioti and more. ■

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- JOHN DEERE
- TORO
- SKAGG
- STIHL
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- MAHINDRA
- KIOTI
- AND MORE



FETCH-N-FISH TUB RETURNS



Back at the show is the Fetch-n-Fish Tub, with nationally known Jason Reynolds combining fishing seminars with dog shows.

Throughout the show, Reynolds will be featuring his high-flying dogs that will be jumping into his 41-foot-long bass tub.

The show invites audience participation, particularly from children who help mark the longest jumps (and might get wet in the process).

"Basically what we do is a family fun program," Reynolds explained. "We talk a little about obedience, then a little about dog training, and I mix it with some and some fun games and some dog tricks. And the ultimate of the show is when I have the dogs jump in the fish tank."

"This is not just dog training — this is entertainment. This is something the whole family can relate to. The kids love it."

But this show isn't all about dog jumping: The 4,000-gallon tank also is stocked with bass and used to demonstrate fishing tactics.

"It's a home run," Reynolds said of the combined dog and fishing shows.

Go to LouisianaSportsman-Show.com to find a schedule of events. ■



Andy Crawford

The Louisiana Sportsman Show scheduled for March 15-18 will provide an even greater focus on the latest boat offerings.

The Sportsman Boat Show, sponsored by Neighbors Federal Credit Union, is being held at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center in Gonzales in conjunction with the Sportsman Show, and will include more than 20 boat dealers in a dedicated 75,000-square-foot building — including brands never before at the show.

"I think it's safe to say that every major boat line and outboard manufacturer will be represented," show organizer Jack Fisher said. "So you don't have to drive all over the place to compare what's out there — you can simply walk through the Louisiana Sportsman Boat Show to look at all the features available in the current models of boats."

The show will include dealers' offerings for both fresh and saltwater fishing applications, but that's not all.

"We'll also have a full range of duck-hunting boats, along with kayaks and pontoons," Fisher said.

And the best part is that entry to the

Louisiana Sportsman Boat Show is included in the general admission price of the Louisiana Sportsman Show.

"This way, you can check out all the boats, but move back and forth to the main show to see what fishing tackle and hunting accessories are available," Fisher said. "You also can check out all the special events, like the Louisiana Sportsman Big Buck Contest, the 40-foot Fetch-N-Fish Tub and Splash Dogs."

"And it's all available for one price — just \$10 dollars."

Brands to be available at the show include Alumacraft, Axis, Bayliner, Bentley Pontoons, Berkshire Pontoons, Blazer, Blazer Bay, Blue Wave, Boston Whaler, Carolina Skiff, Crevalle, G3, Gator Trax, Hanko Aluminum, Malibu, Nautic Star, Nitro, Premier Pontoons, Pursuit, Ranger, SeaArk, Sea Fox, Sea Pro, Shearwater, SilverWave, Skeeter, South Bay Pontoons, South Fork, Stratos, SunTracker, Tahoe, Tidewater, Tracker, Veranda, War Eagle, Xcel, Xcursion Pontoons and Xpress. Motor lines include Gator Tail, Mercury, MinnKota, Mud Buddy, Pro-Drive, Suzuki, Tohatsu and Yamaha. ■

MORE SHOW NEWS >

Louisiana
**SPORTSMAN
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MARCH 15-18

AT LAMAR-DIXON EXPO CENTER



**BIG BUCK
CONTEST:**
SEE AMAZING
MOUNTS

- **BEST LOUISIANA GUN**
- **BEST LOUISIANA BOW**
- **BEST OUT-OF-STATE GUN**
- **BEST OUT-OF-STATE BOW**
- **BEST LADIES**
- **BEST YOUTH**
- **BEST MUZZLELOADER/
CROSSBOW**

With hunting season in the books, it's time to make plans to bring your bucks to the Louisiana Sportsman Big Buck Contest to be held on March 16-18. Even if your deer mount isn't complete, you can make arrangements with your taxidermist to bring the antlers to the contest, which is being hosted by the Quality Deer Management Association's South Louisiana Branch.

Deer may be dropped off beginning Friday, but must be entered no later than 6 p.m. on Saturday, March 17. No deer will be accepted before Friday, March 16.

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

Winners will be named in the following categories:

- Best Louisiana Gun
- Best Louisiana Bow

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

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

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

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

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

BIG BUCK CONTEST RULES

- All legally killed, free-range bucks shot during the 2017-18 season and those deer from the 2016-17 season that have not been officially scored or previously entered in this contest are eligible for entry in any of the seven categories: Best Louisiana Gun, Best Louisiana Bow, Best Out-of-State Gun, Best Out-of-State Bow, Ladies, Youth, Muzzleloader/Crossbow.
- All bucks beyond the 60-day drying period will receive an official Boone & Crockett or Pope & Young score.
- Any buck killed within the previous 60 days will be scored and entered in the contest, but the score will not be official.
- Only free-range whitetails from any of the 50 U.S. states are eligible.
- Bucks killed with primitive arms that aren't true muzzleloaders will be entered in the Gun categories.
- Youth-category entrants must have been 15 or younger at the time of the kill.
- Bucks killed before the contest period may still be brought in for scoring, but will not be eligible for the contest or the random drawing.
- Bucks must be brought in during show hours Friday or before 6 p.m. Saturday to be eligible for the contest. NOTE: No entries accepted before Friday.
- Racks must remain at the show until 2 p.m. Sunday, and may not be removed before that time.
- Louisiana Sportsman reserves the right to add or alter rules at its discretion.

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HUNTER SHOOTS RARE WHITE-HEADED MALLARD DRAKE

LEUCISTIC BIRD WENT DOWN IN VERMILION PARISH NEAR ABBEVILLE By Patrick Bonin

On Jan. 16, Brock Baudoin of New Iberia took friend Brennan Hebert duck hunting at Wax Lake Outlet just before Cajun country was about to enter the grips of frigid Arctic temperatures.

“My buddy actually shot a banded blue-wing that day,” said Baudoin, 27, of New Iberia. “I was like, ‘You lucky dog. You come hunting with me and I bring you out here one time and you shoot a band.’”

But hunting karma was on his side, and he was about to become a lucky dog, too. The very next day he got invited to Andrew Patin’s lease in Vermilion Parish near Abbeville — and promptly shot an amazing looking leucistic white-headed mallard drake.

But he didn’t notice anything special when the duck was in the air.

“I couldn’t see it (the white head) until I

walked up on it,” Baudoin said. “I really couldn’t believe my eyes. I’ve never seen anything like it.

“I can’t even put it into words — it was just an exciting feeling, like shooting a Boone and Crockett buck or something.”

Patin also was incredulous when Baudoin returned to the blind with the white-headed bird.

“He was just as pumped as I was,” Baudoin said. “We were ecstatic.”

Larry Reynolds, waterfowl study leader with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, confirmed the specimen was a fully-plumed leucistic mallard drake.



Brock Baudoin, 27, of New Iberia, dropped this rare leucistic green-head on Jan. 17 in Vermilion Parish.

Photo courtesy Brock Baudoin

“It’s an issue with pigments,” Reynolds said. “That’s pretty cool looking. It appears to have some mild leucism in its head.

“It’s like anything else: If you get off the couch and get out in the field, you’re going to see some cool stuff.” ■

BLOND GADWALL KILLED IN DELACROIX By Andy Crawford

Prairieville hunter Michael Campo thought his hunting season in Delacroix was wild when he shot a goose the day after Thanksgiving — but things got really weird Jan. 16 when he rolled a gadwall sporting feathers reminiscent of Donald Trump’s signature blond comb-over.

“It looked a little funny, but when we picked it up we knew it was different,” Campo said of the leucistic duck. (Leucism is a partial loss of pigmentation on an animal, except for the eyes.)

After a slow start that morning, action picked up quickly when the wind started blowing — and Campo almost missed his shot at the unique grey.

“We were watching a group of birds, and I looked over and (the blond gadwall) was locked up in the decoys,” he said.

The hunter spun and laid the unlucky duck down, having no clue his kill was anything special.

Something didn’t look right when the bird was floating, but when the wind blew the dead bird to their blind, the men realized it wasn’t your run-of-the-mill gadwall.

“Lionel Serigne (at Serigne’s Landing) said he’d never seen anything like it,” Campo said.

So Campo tracked down Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries’ Waterfowl Study Leader Larry Reynolds, who confirmed the kill was unusual.

“Larry said, ‘I’ve seen it with mallards and I’ve seen it with teal, but I’ve never seen it with grey ducks,’” Campo said.

The hunter plans to have the waterfowl mounted. ■



Prairieville’s Michael Campo shot this leucistic gadwall Jan. 16 while hunting in Delacroix.

Photo courtesy of Michael Campo

TWO BUSTED FOR ALLEGED NIGHT-HUNTING IN WASHINGTON PARISH

Agents with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, working together with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, cited two men on Jan. 27 for alleged night-hunting violations in Washington Parish and Walthall County, Miss.

According to a press release, LDWF agents cited Holden W. Saucier, 19, of Franklinton, and Paul L. Page, 19, of Poplarville, Miss., for hunting deer during illegal hours with artificial light, hunting deer from a public road and hunting from a moving vehicle.

MDWFP agents also arrested Saucier and Page for spotlighting deer, hunting from a public road, hunting from a vehicle and possession of alcohol by a minor.

LDWF and MDWFP agents stopped their truck and allegedly found the men in possession of a spotlight, two rifles, a shotgun and alcohol, according to the release.

Hunting deer during illegal hours with artificial light in Louisiana brings a \$900 to \$950 fine and up to 120 days in jail. Hunting from a vehicle in Louisiana carries a \$250 to \$500 fine and up to 90 days in jail. Hunting deer from a public road in Louisiana brings a \$100 to \$350 fine and up to 60 days in jail. ■



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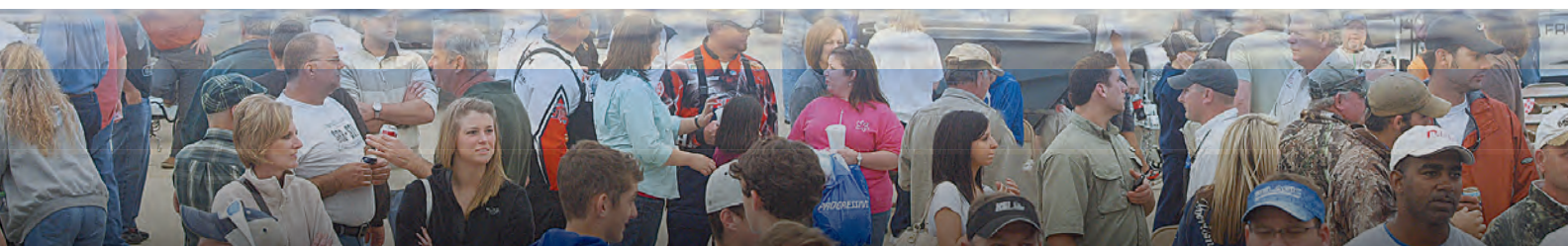
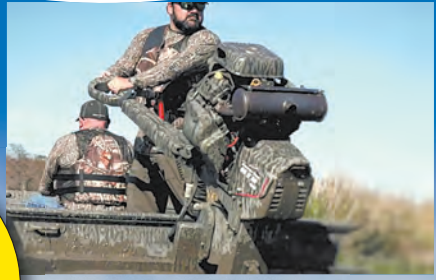


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SPAWN DOWN SOUTH

The stained waters of South Louisiana are packed with bass, but catching them is rarely a sight-fishing deal. So use these tips from Elite Series pros who grew up there to catch more lunkers this spring.

By Andy Crawford

Andy Crawford



The annual spawn is like crack for die-hard bass anglers: They just can't get enough of it.

And what's not to love? Bass gang up in dead-end canals and calm coves, and the big girls are at their most vulnerable.

But fishing the spawn in South Louisiana is different.

Anglers in other regions — even in North Louisiana — are looking at fish on the banks through clear water. They know fish are there; they just have to convince them to bite.

Here in Cajun country, however, things are a little murkier. As in, you really can't expect to see fish on the banks. A swirl as a bass moves in the shallows? Maybe. But you rarely put eyes on the actual fish.

That's no big deal for us, right? We're bank-beaters anyway, no matter the time of year.

However, there has to be better ways of putting springtime lunkers in the boat than just putting down the trolling motor and blindly flipping cypress trees and bushes.

So we turned to four Louisiana-born Bassmaster Elite Series pros who cut their teeth fishing the stained waters of South Louisiana to learn how they consistently put

together tournament stringers of hefty bass.

POSITIONING IS EVERYTHING

Gonzales pro Gerald Spohrer has seen it time and again: A boat runs into a canal, and the anglers get close enough to pitch every piece of cover they can see.

On the face of it, that's a sound approach. But Spohrer said those anglers have absolutely missed out on some big bites.

"You'll get some guys who go in Crackerhead, for instance, and fish the visible targets and — boom — they catch 20 pounds the day before a tournament," he said. "Then they'll go back the next day knowing there are fish in the area and struggle."

So did they sore-mouth all the fish in the area the previous day? Unlikely.

Did the fish up and leave the canal? Equally as unlikely.

"One of the biggest things I find is understanding how the fish set up down here," Spohrer said.

In short, not all the bass will be sucked up to the cypress trees.

"They'll either be right up on that cover to spawn, or they'll get just off that cover," Spohrer explained.



So Spohrer leaves some room between his boat and the visible cover along the banks he knows should hold bedding bass.

“That fish may be 7 or 8 feet away from that cypress tree,” he explained.

He begins by pitching the cover, but he’s patient if he doesn’t get bit.

“Fish the bait out some, maintaining contact with the bottom,” Spohrer explained. “I’ve caught 4- and 5-pounders almost back to the boat in the middle of the canal.”

His weapons of choice include jigs and Missile Baits soft-plastics, but he’s also not afraid to try something a little more aggressive.

“If the fish are active, you can go with something like 6th Sense lipless crankbaits or hard-plastic jerkbaits.”

But the key remains the same: Not all bass will be on their beds — especially in South Louisiana.

“They’re so on-and-off because of the weather we have,” Spohrer said.

PUNCHING IT OUT

Many anglers get so focused on bedding and staging fish that they completely ignore vegetation mats this time of year.

That’s a huge mistake, said Pierre Part Elite Series pro Cliff Crochet.

“Flipping mats never goes away — never,” Crochet said.

The reason is twofold.

First, vegetation provides warmth on chilly spring days, especially when the inevitable fronts push through.

“When a front hits, those (spawning) fish back out, and they become dumb,” Crochet said. “These mat fish tuck under the mat and you’ve got the sun beating down on the (vegetation) and it insulates them.

“That’s when the mats really shine.”

The warm vegetation can overcome some of the impacts of a cold front, resulting in more-active fish.

“I would rather take my chances punching mats than dragging jigs for fish the front has pushed down,” Crochet said.

But mats also offer haven for fish that aren’t on beds — those that have finished their business and moved away from the beds, as well as those staging up waiting for that perfect moment to swim up and do their spawning thing.

“There are always two or three things going on,” Crochet said. “Not all fish do the same thing at the same time.”

The beauty of working over mats is that most anglers charge right past them in their excitement to catch bedding bass.

“You’re fishing less-pressured fish,” Crochet explained. “If you were born around I-10 or Highway 90, once it gets February you’re throwing a Rogue.

“But if you get one bite on a Rogue, you might catch three fish flipping.”

Of course, maximizing your springtime flipping means heading to the dead-end canals, but really nothing else changes for the pattern — it’s simply a matter of figuring out how bass are positioned in a mat.

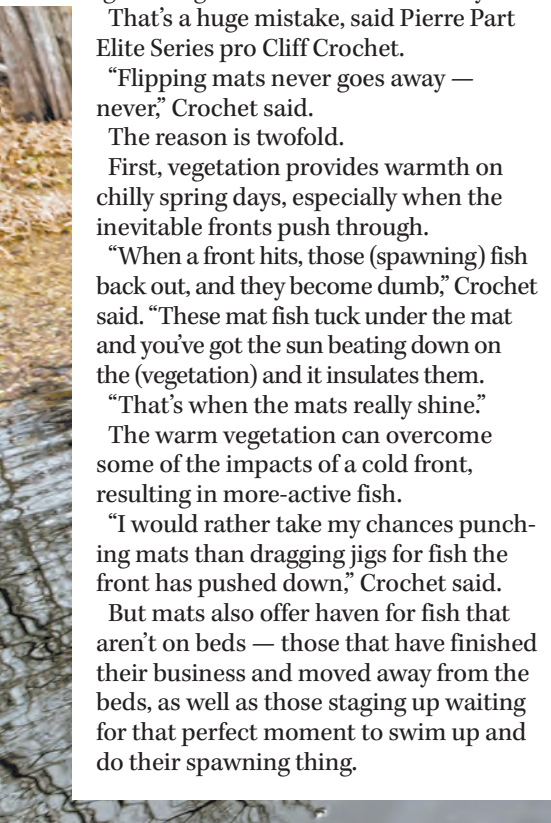
“You’re looking for today’s pattern,” Crochet said. “The really cool thing is those mat fish will drill the bait. You get a lot of bites on the initial drop that are reaction bites (when you flip at other times of the year), but I don’t think that’s what these fish are doing this time of year.

“I think they’re really trying to get (the bait).”

He added that hydrilla isn’t the only vegetation anglers should target: hyacinths and even salvinia can hold big bass.



Gerald Spohrer doesn’t crowd the banks during the spring spawn because he knows big bass often are hanging out in a little deeper water waiting to move up to the shallows. **BELOW:** Cliff Crochet said he flips vegetation mats even during the spawn because the fish are less pressured and more aggressive.



Andy Crawford



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“If you can find the right little patch of (salvinia) in the willow trees or in a laydown, you can catch fish,” Crochet said.

His go-to lure is a 4-inch Luck-E-Strike Drop Dead Craw. “I think with the smaller bait you get better hookups,” Crochet said.

He pairs the craw with a Strike King Hack Attack Heavy Cover Flipping Hook.

“I don’t have a sponsorship deal, but I’ve been flipping that hook for five or six years,” Crochet said. “Trust me, you’re not going to flex that hook.”

His tungsten weight ranges from 3/4 to 1 1/2 ounces, depending on what he needs to get through the mat. He uses a bobber stopper to keep the weight in place.

Sixty-five-pound Seaguar Flippin’ Braid, a high-speed reel and his signature Cliff Crochet Duce rod round out his rig.

TARGET DOMINANT COVER

All cover in a dead-end canal is not equal when it comes to finding tournament-winning bass, Gonzales pro Robbie Latuso said.

“I’m looking for that dominant piece of cover — whatever holds the most heat,” Latuso explained.

In other words, he often ignores shade-draped cypress trees for laydowns soaking in the sun because bass will pull tight to that cover to keep warm.



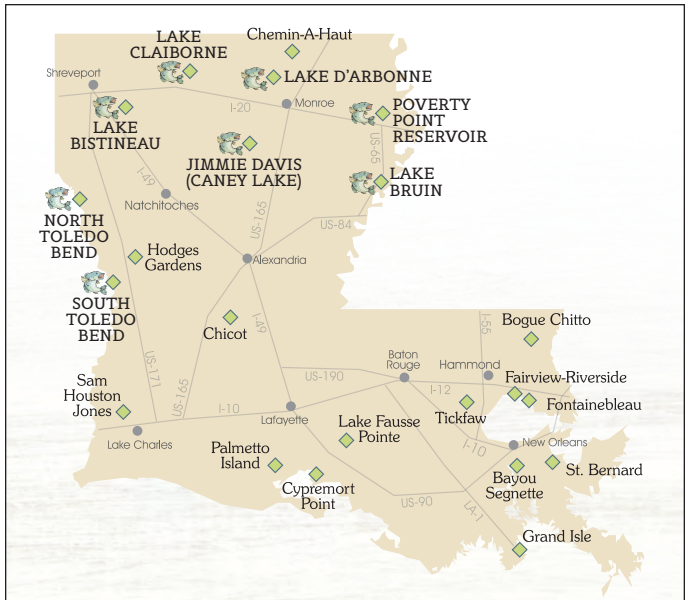
While many anglers are beating the banks, Gonzales pro Robbie Latuso focuses his springtime efforts on dominant pieces of cover out in the sun.

“You might have four or five pieces of dominant cover in a canal,” Latuso said. “If you have bushes around (these laydowns), that’s even better.”


But identifying these targets doesn’t guarantee bass will cross your gunnel. Instead, you have to thoroughly work over each piece of cover to ensure you don’t miss a potential tournament-winning bite.


“Once I determine the dominant cover, I pick it apart,” Latuso said. “You have to really slow down and fish it hard. You might throw at it 10 minutes.”


“He’s there most of the time; you just have to make him bite.” Latuso loves pitching Delta Lures jigs for South Louisiana stained-water spawners, and size does matter.





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'll go with a heavier jig," he explained. "If everybody else is throwing 1/2-ounce (jigs), I might go with a 3/4-ounce (version)."

When he's flipping, he ties his jig onto 20-pound fluorocarbon and uses a 7-foot-3-inch to 7 1/2-foot heavy-action Kistler rod matched with a high-speed Shimano reel.

But he warned against being one-dimensional.

"You have to switch up baits," Latuso said. "Sometimes when (an area is) heavily pressured, you have to fish plastics. You just have to let the fish tell you what they want."

But also on his deck is a lure few anglers would think about as a spawning lure — a vibrating jig.

"That Delta Lures Thunder Jig can be great during the spring," Latuso said.

Which lure he starts with depends on the situation.

"If a cold front just moved in and it's a blue-bird day, I'll usually start with the jig," the angler said. "Right before a front

when it's cloudy, I might start with that Thunder Jig."

MOVING TARGETS, DRAINS AND STAINED WATER

Bassmaster Elite Series rookie Caleb Sumrall heads straight for the dead-end canals and looks for a couple of things to up his success rate.

First, he considers water clarity, usually preferring dead-ends with stained water.

Why avoid clear-water canals? That's simple, he said.

"The fish in the clear water are more likely to be spooked," Sumrall said.

Secondly, he'll usually be working canals that include a number of drains, which offer sweet spots for spawning bass.

Drains are normally associated with bass ganging up to feed as water pulls out of the swamps, and Sumrall said that is part of it.

"It's an easier source of food," he said.

But even if a drain isn't active, bass can be caught in these openings along the banks.



Bassmaster Elite Series rookie Caleb Sumrall said he watches for subtle water movement along canal banks to find hefty bedding bass, like this 8-pounder he caught in Lake Verret.

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“Fish like to spawn around those drains,” Sumrall said. “They add a little depth to the bank.”

As he’s working a canal, the young pro keeps his eyes open for anything signaling the presence of bedding bass.

“I pay attention for fish movement,” the New Iberia pro said. “You could be fishing down the bank and see just a little swirl or ripple.”

Even the most-subtle movement could be a tip-off that a big female is doing her thing, but Sumrall said he doesn’t immediately fire to the spot.

“I give it about 5 minutes to settle down, and then I’ll come back to it,” he explained. “I’ll work a (Missile) D Bomb in there real slow.”

He likes to keep his soft-plastic creature bait as light as possible, using a 3/16- to ¼-ounce weight so the lure doesn’t streak to the bottom. ■

“Fish like to spawn around those drains. They add a little depth to the bank.”



Andy Crawford has spent nearly his entire career writing about and photographing Louisiana’s hunting and fishing community. While he has written for national publications, Crawford never strayed far from the pages of Louisiana Sportsman. Learn more about his work at www.AndyCrawford.Photography.

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THE WIND CAN BE YOUR FRIEND

By Chris Ginn

Typically, windy conditions affect an angler much more than the fish. Use these tips to keep putting specks on ice this month — even when it's blowing.

I LOATHE WIND.

Mainly because it always blows when I don't want it to. But also because it seems to follow me around.

It's not unusual for me to get texts from charter captains wondering if I was on the water without them knowing it because it was an unusually windy day - a "human wind machine," they call me.

Although wind drains the life out of me, I learned a long time ago that wind affects me much more than it affects the fish.

Captain Lane Zimmer, who fishes out of Lafitte, totally agreed.

"I get used to fishing in the wind around here," he said, "especially during March. Seems like the wind blows hard every day this month. For me, wind keeps me from getting to a spot, keeps me off a spot or interferes with fishing a spot.

"The trout don't care."

In other words, if Zimmer can get to his spot and make a good enough presentation with his baits, he can still catch specks.

Not too far away, Captain Travis Miller also knows all too well the problems that wind can bring to lower Terrebonne Parish.

"Wind can be very defeating," Miller said. "I find that if we don't get on them early when the wind is blowing hard, my anglers tend to want to give up early. I think wind definitely affect fishermen more than the fish, but you've got to remember that trout are a little on the dumb side.

"They're temperamental, but not tricky to figure out... even if the wind is blowing hard."

As Zimmer said, wind can throw some curveballs at anglers. You can still hit them out of the park — but you better make some adjustments if you don't want to strike out.

GETTING THERE

Don't dare diminish the dangers of getting there during strong winds. If you know you can't get there safely, give it up. There is no reason in the world to risk your life to catch a fish that will be there tomorrow.

The main way to get just about anywhere out of Lafitte is through Bayou Rigoletts or Bayou Perot - both of which run in a north-south orientation.

"If the wind is from the east or the west, you can get on the lee side and run," Zimmer said. "But if it has some north in it, the run can get really bad - especially down by the Harvey Cut. That wall reflects all the wave action, and reflects it back out. That's not where you want to be running in a small boat."

Zimmer fishes out of a 24-foot Blazer Bay, and he knows that a bigger boat is a definite plus when running in windy weather.

Over on Bayou Dularge, Miller, who fishes out of a 24-foot Blue Wave, says that there are so many small bayous that anglers can get out of the wind to get just about anywhere.

"You've just got to be selective where you run," he said. "Maybe you're used to going one way but the wind has that all churned up. Odds are there's another route you can take to get there."

WHERE TO GO UP NEXT >





WHERE TO GO

When the weather forecast predicts winds in the 15 to 20 mph range, Zimmer automatically eliminates a lot of water that he knows he won't be able to effectively fish.

"No doubt strong wind keeps you off the bigger waters," he said. "Places like Little Lake and The Pen... I would not be in either of those because the wind just makes spots like that so hard to fish."

It's no different in Dularge. While it might offer more protected places to fish than Lafitte, Bayou Dularge has Mud Lake, Sister Lake and Lake Mechant that can get ripped up when it's blowing.

"The wind effectively cuts down your fishing area to about 30 percent," Miller said. "Say you've been fishing Lake Mechant, but the wind has it messed up. Instead of having access to 100 percent of the lake, you're now restricted to about 30 percent on the lee shore."

And it is this lee shore, wherever you may find it, that dictates where you fish during the wind.

Zimmer believes the attraction of a lee shore is that the wind passes more over his head than blowing right at him. While this may be more comfortable for an angler, it also has an effect on the fishing.

"A big thing is your boat stays quieter," said Zimmer. "I think that slap from the chop spooks the fish more than we might think, especially if there are a few boats

fishing the same area."

To find the lee shore, just pay attention to the direction of the wind. If it's blowing from the northeast, then the northeast shore of a bay will be the lee shore.

"Take a northeast wind at Lafitte for example," Zimmer said. "If that's the case, I'd be heading to the northeast side of places like Turtle Bay and Bay Round. And a spot like Bay Five that has lots of little coves coming off of it gives you way more places to fish than a single shoreline."



Travis Miller likes to fish banks where the wind can push him along, rather than work his way into it.

CONSISTENCY IS KEY

Both captains adamantly pointed out that one of their biggest keys to fishing in the wind is checking its direction in the days leading up to their trips.

"I want to know what direction it has been flowing from," said Zimmer. "If it's been consistent from the northeast for four or five days, I find the northeast side of the bays will have the cleanest water, and that would be the first place I would start looking for fish."

"Yep. The last thing you want is the wind blowing 20 mph from different directions several days in a row," Miller added. "That's when it gets real bad out there... kind of like a washing machine."

Miller added that consistent wind direction not only keeps the clean water on the same side of a lake or bay, it can also bring water levels up if it's consistently from the south.

"This can create opportunities for you to get into ponds you might not normally be able to access because the water has come up a foot," he said. "Conversely, a strong consistent north wind can blow the water out, reducing your area even more."



Adjusting to what the wind gives you when it blows is the key to staying on the trout.

WINDY TECHNIQUES UP NEXT >

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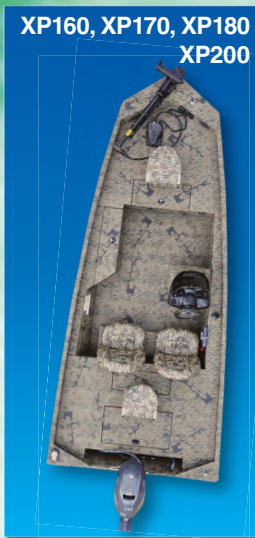


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WINDY TECHNIQUES

Although I expected both of these charter captains to tell me about how they make a bunch of changes to their fishing tackle to combat the wind, neither of them suggested switching things up.

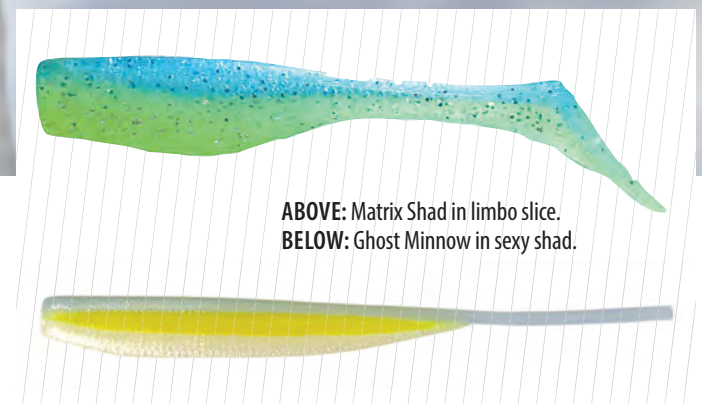
"I might not change my gear, but I definitely change the way I fish," Zimmer said. "First off, if it's not blowing too hard on the lee shore, I stay about a cast-and-a-half off and throw toward the bank. If it's blowing really hard, I get on the bank and throw out toward the middle."

Miller hugs the banks a little tighter when the wind is blowing, and he likes to focus on banks that allow the wind to push him along as he fishes.

"Say it's coming out of the southeast," he said. "In that case I'll start on the southeast side and let it push me north. I let it help me out rather than trying to work my way into it."

Although it's not a wholesale tackle change, both anglers said that they would ditch their casting rods and tightline presentations in favor of spinning rods and popping corks when fishing in the wind.

"You just about can't feel a bite when tightlining a jig when you've got that big bow in your line," said Miller, who fishes with Matrix Shad soft plastic lures. "It's difficult to have bait aware-



ABOVE: Matrix Shad in limbo slice.
BELOW: Ghost Minnow in sexy shad.

ness in that situation, so I just eliminate feel from my presentation and turn it into a visual presentation with the cork.

"I don't have to feel them when I can see the cork go down."

Zimmer added that he only fishes braided line on his spinning reels, which can present its own set of problems.

"Wind knots," he said. "But you can reduce them if you'll just take the time to flip your bail by hand rather than cranking the handle to flip it. Every time you crank it over it puts a twist in your line and that will quickly cause you to get a bird's nest at the end of your rod."

"I also encourage my anglers to flip it by hand as soon as their baits hit the water so they don't get a lot of slack in their lines."

As long as he has clean water and a little water movement, Zimmer gives the trout every opportunity to bite before moving on. But if he doesn't see any water movement, he doesn't stay put very long.

“And I might change to a brighter color plastic,” said Zimmer, who fishes with his own line of Ghost Minnow lures. “But for the most part everything stays the same.”

USGS INFO

One thing Zimmer always does before heading out on a windy day is to check the United States Geological Survey website at nwis.waterdata.usgs.gov to see the wind history.

“You can go back and look as far as you want to for the most part,” Zimmer said. “I always keep it ready to go on my phone. Say the wind has been blowing from the east for six days. That information helps me get a jump-start on my day, and I don’t have to guess what’s going on.”

The website provides information about wind direction, water levels, water temperature, salinity and much more.

“It definitely helps me eliminate water I shouldn’t be fishing without having to burn the gas to look,” Zimmer concluded.

So if the wind follows you around like it does me, you don’t have to tuck tail and head home.

When you feel like you’re just about done, dig into these captains’ bag of tricks to help you catch your second wind.

The trick is to take what the wind will give you. ■



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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What will this winter's unseasonably cold temperatures mean for spawning action this month at Louisiana's premier big-bass location?



Picture a chilled champagne bottle, shaken and gripped in a white napkin; the cork pops and out spews the bubbly. But after that initial blast, the remaining liquid settles and allows you to pour it out in measured elegance.

Given this winter's severity so far, that's kinda what we're expecting at the state's crown jewel of bass fishing — Toledo Bend.

Now, it would take another Ice Age to effectively halt the Bend's spawning season, but in all likelihood, the extremely cold conditions that winter unleashed in January, at the very least, pumped the brakes on this annual parade of piscatorial procreation.

As of this writing, anglers were reporting some of the coldest temperatures seen in several years, but a lake that big — and one so packed with bass — will, no doubt, march forward with plenty of seasonal opportunity.

“We had some really cold water in the mid-40s, and it hadn't been there for quite some time,” said Toledo Bend guide Dave Mansue. “Typically, when it's like this, you're going to have more prespawners, especially early in March, than you're going to have spawners.

“Then, as the month progresses and things start to warm up, that's going to transition into a full-blown spawn. Also, remember that Toledo Bend is so big and there are so many

fish here, the spawn can take a very long time. But if March sees the combination of a warm front where the water temperature comes up pretty quickly and a full moon, you could see a major rush to the bank.”

Indeed, staging prespawners are anxious enough, but add some weather delays and those fish will be revving their engines. Once they feel nature's cue, the ensuing toad fest could deliver what Mansue calls “an unbelievable time to be on the water.”

IN THE WAITING ROOM

For whatever level of prespawn activity March brings, Mansue likes a ¾-ounce football jig with a full skirt and a Zoom Ultra Vibe Speed Craw or Missile Baits Baby D-Bomb trailer. Another of Mansue's prespawn tactics involves a Zoom Baby Brush Hog on a Carolina rig. Slowly dragging his baits across deeper points usually produces well.

“They like those points where they can come up quickly and get on the flat to stage and if it gets cold, they can drop back,” Mansue said. “They're not looking for a long run up to the bank, they're going to look for something that's close to deep water. So, points near a spawning flat with deep water leading into it can be dynamite.”

Another good bet for hungry prespawners is one that many might scoff at — the Alabama rig. But think about it: Prespawners want to hang in a secure, comfortable area and pick off hefty meals without burning any more calories than they have to. Suffice it to say, the old “egg beater” fills that bill.

Mansue suggests running the A-rig through the ditches leading into spawning flats. Also, buzzing the outer edges of any remaining hay grass lines will put that rig in front of the gals with the green backs. >

‘March’-ing on at TOLEDO BEND

By David A. Brown



While the darker habitat of cypress trees presents an attractive scenario in the lake's upper end, Bassmaster Elite pro Russ Lane's a big fan of the hydrilla and milfoil flats in the midsection. Targeting the 4- to 8-foot depths, he'll start with a crawfish or red Spro Fat Papa 70; a wide-body squarebill with a serious wobble like a spinnerbait.

"You reel it slow and 'hunt' for grass," Lane said. "When you reel it slowly, you feel that bait wobbling, your rod tip will be bouncing and when you find that grass, you reel it up slow and steady until your line gets tight and then you pull back on it. It's just like ripping a lipless crankbait out of grass, only this bait gives you the larger profile that tends to get you the bigger bites."

Now, that sounds exciting; but Lane said the fun often requires a significant investment. In short, you gotta put the time.

"Those fish, especially on grass beds, group up," Lane said. "You may go for long stretches without a bite; you may want to give up. But you just haven't gotten a bait in front of them. You just stick with it and it can happen really fast. I've gone for hours and caught nothing, but



then caught them on four casts in a row."

To facilitate the focus necessary for what can be a grinding chore, Lane follows a mental grid pattern to methodically cover large areas. A healthy grass bed outside a spawning area is almost certain to hold fish — it's just a matter of who has the patience to find the sweet spot.

Noting a worthwhile payoff, Lane said:

"Generally, when you find them on a place like that, you'll have it all to yourself."

**DELIVERY ROOM
DYNAMICS UP NEXT >**

When it comes to locating staging prespawners, it's hard to beat a shallow running crankbait. **ABOVE:** Some may scoff at the Alabama rig, but Toledo Bend guide Darold Gleason's a firm believer in its prespawn value.



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TEASING TACTICS

Preferring a Texas-rigged Zoom Baby Brush Hog for his bed-fish duties, Mansue leans more toward natural colors like green pumpkin and watermelon for shallow bedders. Dipping the tails in chartreuse creates a flash of color that resembles a bluegill's light green tail fin accents — signs of enemy activity for territorial bass.

Lane's quick to say that his top choice for spawners is the Big Bite Baits Real Deal Shad — a hand-painted swimbait with a killer bream pattern. But if you're envisioning him fan casting broad areas, think again. While swimming-style baits definitely have their place in this season (see Search Mode), Lane has developed a straight-up switch-flipper.

"It was made to be an upright swimbait, but I Texas rig it with a hook in it sideways, instead of straight up and down, and just pitch it in the beds," Lane said. "I've seen fish look at other baits



TOP: Hay grass lines present natural prespawn areas leading into spawning creeks. ABOVE: Bassmaster Elite pro Russ Lane rigs a Big Bite Baits Real Deal Shad sideways for a killer bed-fishing presentation.

DELIVERY ROOM DYNAMICS

On a broad scale, Lane takes into consideration the top-down progression of this big lake's spawn. With the deep, clear water in its lower dammed end and progressively shallower, muddier water dominating its upper reaches; Toledo Bend's spawn typically begins up north where the earliest warming occurs and then sweeps southward.

Now, when conditions line up for that shoreward rush, bass will set up shop in spots that give their young'ns the best chance of survival. Mansue said that means protected pockets on the north shores, which get maximum sun and minimal wind.

Early on, Mansue expects to find beds in very shallow water, which heats up the quickest. Then, as warming trends extend cozy temps into progressively deeper water, he'll look for fish on deeper beds.

"The shallower water allows more light penetration and more heat, so you'll see them up there," Mansue said. "But as that water temperature starts to rise, you'll see those beds start to move off the bank. Now the water's warmer at a deeper point, perhaps out in that 3- to 5-foot range. So, as the spawn progresses, they start to move off the bank because the conditions are safer in that deeper water."

And don't overlook any hay grass surviving in the shallow zones. Flipping into isolated holes often connects you with a bed fish that you're not likely to see.

"Also, throwing a regular swimbait like a Keitech can be a killer approach," Mansue added. "Because of the hay grass and the hydrilla, I throw it with a belly-weighted wide gap hook"

and not be aggressive, but you pitch that thing in there and they blow up. They change color and just go crazy because it looks so real."

Of course, prespawn and bed fish baits vary with preference and personal style, so find the ones that you're comfortable with and keep 'em wet. The good thing about March on Toledo Bend is that the cork pop is on the way, so get ready to toast some of the year's best action. ■



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

Points, particularly secondary points inside a creek arm, offer the right mix of shallow feeding and deep water access.

SEARCH MODE

During that transitional time when fish are moving up, the last thing you want to do is go racing into shallow water ready to pitch beds. Fine if you've already found a few beds and know just where to go; but what if there are more new beds on your way in?

Good rule of thumb: Speed kills in the shallow spawning areas. Go slow and you'll almost always do better. The key is to identify the productive areas and then stealthily work each one. Polarized sunglasses, a wide brim hat and a hooded sweat-shirt or jersey help dial in your focus, but even before this stage of the operation, you can help yourself by fan casting likely areas with moving baits.

"Once the spawn starts to go, the swimbait is a great search tool," said Toledo Bend guide Dave Mansue. "Many times, especially those fish that are spawning in deeper water, will feel that swimbait over the top of their head and they may not eat it, but they'll come up and try to swat it away from their bed. Sometimes, that will tell you exactly where they're at."

FLW Tour pro Pete Ponds likens it to the requisite stillness of squirrel hunting: He'll set up shop in a promising area, drop his Power-Poles and plan on sitting and looking for upwards of 15 minutes. Once he spots a boil or push, he knows he's close to fish on beds.

"If you get into a shallow flat, swimming a Texas-rigged YUM Lizard with a ¼-ounce weight is a good bait choice," Ponds said. "Just throw it out there and look for movement. A lot of times you'll see them 'shark' behind it."

Drawing a strike is great, but simply irritating a fish enough to move can be just as valuable. Find one bedding fish, and you'll almost always find several peppered along the same shoreline. ■

— David A. Brown



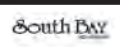
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Caillou Island's 'JUNKYARD TROUT'

By Jerald Horst

Old submerged oil field trash makes this spot a treasure trove for springtime speck anglers. Here's how to target it — without too many snags — to fill your box.

Capt. Tommy Pellegrin called them “junk trout.” It's not often that you hear speckled trout, the fish of fishes in Louisiana, called anything at all relating to junk.

But Pellegrin (with Custom Charters, 985-851-33040), besides showing his irreverent streak, was referring to where he caught the quicksilver predators.

“It's a junk pile fishery,” the 59-year-old Terrebonne Parish charter captain grinned. “We are fishing over the remains of what was Caillou Island, north of West Timbalier Island.”

Back in the day, the once-sizable island was apparently the working headquarters for

Texaco's drilling in the area. The location featured living quarters, a galley and office and shop buildings — all powered by a natural gas-fueled electrical generator.

A canal bisected the island. Pellegrin's fishing partner of the day and long-time friend Hugh LeBoeuf explained that this was where the company kept their barges loaded with drill pipe, production pipe, concrete, drilling mud and equipment.

“When they saw the island begin to disappear, they would dump old pipe and debris on the edges of the island to protect it,” Pellegrin said. “The last piece of the island went under water seven or eight years ago, but the junk is still there.”

>

It didn't happen overnight, in spite of the current belief that coastal land loss is a very recent phenomenon. Arthur "Wootsie" Cenac Jr., Pellegrin's father-in-law and a former independent drilling contractor who drilled many of the hundreds of wells in the original field, noted that by the mid-1960s only about an acre of marsh grass was still above water level beneath Texaco's piling-supported buildings.

"It had been eroding for years and years and years," he said.

Maps from 1839 show that Caillou Island was huge, nearly as large as the modern city of Houma. Apparently, much of the marshland loss was natural, occurring well before the Mississippi River was leveed.

The pink-orange smear of sunrise on a Maya blue sky colored the east as Pellegrin broke his brand new Skeeter SX 240 bay boat out of Petite Caillou Bayou into Terrebonne Bay.

"I fish Caillou Island from March to June, as soon as I can get live shrimp," he said, as the boat scooted across the bay. After 23 years as a noted offshore fishing guide, he transformed himself into an inshore guide in 2014.

"The laws put me out of offshore fishing," he grimaced. "I had enough of telling people, 'That's a good-eating fish. Throw it back.'"

"Now I follow speckled trout, inside to out; outside to in. I am a trout fisherman. I like people on the boat catching fish. Specks offer those numbers."

When Pellegrin neared the island's shadow, he slowed the engine to an idle and eased the boat into his favorite spot. He stabbed his Power-Pole down, even though the boat was equipped with a

Minn Kota I-Pilot.

Each man inserted one prong of a treble hook under a shrimp's horn and gently lobbed it out.

The action was immediate and amazing. Before the sun peeped over the horizon, they had a half-dozen specks in the boat.

These were good fish, not schoolies, averaging 1 1/2 pounds each.

Mixed in with them were enough Spanish mackerel to be worth keeping. "They're good eating fish," said Pellegrin, quite a chef in his own right. (See the Seafood Bible in this issue for some of his recipes.)

It was hard to imagine the bite being any better. When one got a bite in a spot, the other cast to it immediately and usually got bit. Lots of times, both men were hooked up. When the action slacked off there, they cast all around the boat to relocate the fish.

All the while they were laughing riotously.

"There's another one."

"That's a good one!"

"Ooh, that was neat! I saw the fish eat the shrimp."

When Pellegrin hooked one and LeBoeuf reeled in an empty hook, the captain ribbed him. "I catch fish because I use bait. You fish on credit!"

"Ugh" was the older man's only reply.

At 9:05 a.m., it was over. The boat was limited out.

They looked at each other and Pellegrin shrugged. "You wanna go to the beach — you know; just to see if they are biting?"



The least injurious place to hook a live shrimp is beneath the horn on its head.

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A SLIDING CORK KIND OF PLACE

Pellegrin and LeBoeuf both use sliding corks to target trout with live shrimp over Caillou island junk.

“Before we knew how to use a sliding cork, we hung up a lot,” said Pellegrin dourly. “I can’t tell you how many hooks I’ve lost here,” agreed LeBoeuf.

The concept, as former guide Tim Stringer taught them, is simple. A fishing cork is loosely threaded on the line without a stopper. After the cast, the line slips through the cork until it hits a “bobber-stop” or obstruction on the line, in this case a single uni knot made of 30-pound test monofilament.

The knot can be slid up or down the braided mainline to set the maximum depth at which the baited hook will fish. Pellegrin threads a bead on the line above the cork since the hole in the cork is large enough to ride over the bobber-stop.

The beauty of the rig is that it allows the cork to slide down the line to the swivel

above the leader, no matter how deep it is set to fish, making a rig that is much easier to cast than one rigged with a pegged or snap-on cork.

Typically, on Caillou Island, he sets his corks to fish 2 to 2 ½ feet deep.

NOTES ON RIGGING

Tommy Pellegrin is particular about the kind of hook he uses for live shrimp fishing, choosing a No. 4 Mustad UltraPoint treble hook. Because shrimp have spines on their bodies, trout don’t notice the extra points on the treble when they grab the bait.

The small size of the hooks means that speckled trout tend to be hooked deep in the mouth, compared to a the lip-hooking tendencies of kahle hooks. Deeply hooked fish don’t shake off the hook as often.

Plus he added, it’s a lot easier to swing the fish into the boat. “I hardly ever net a trout, unless he is big — 3 pounds or more,” he grunted.

The uni knot that serves as the bob-stop can be slid up or down the line with one’s fingernails to change depth settings.



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“The drawback to trebles is that your boat gets filthy,” cautioned Pellegrin. “Deep-hooked fish bleed a lot.”

Both men prefer inexpensive, oval, foam corks. “The ones with just a hole in them and nothing in them are hard to find, believe it or not,” Pellegrin said.

The egg sinker on the line below the cork and above the swivel is either 3/8- or ½-ounce, depending on wind conditions.

The swivel between the main line and the leader is always black. Spanish mackerel, a common fish in the lower bay, will quickly strike and cut off a silver swivel.

For a leader, Pellegrin uses 2 to 2 ½ feet of 30-pound test Berkley ProSpec monofilament.

How to make a pre-rig >

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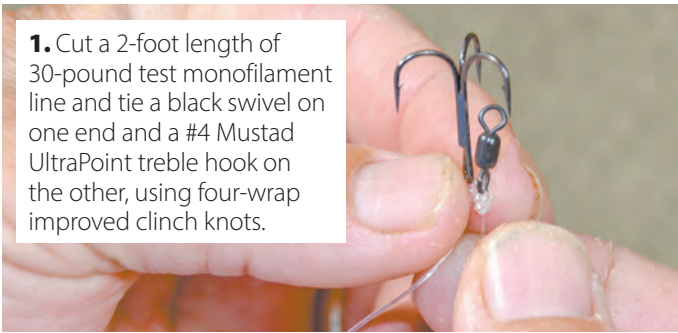
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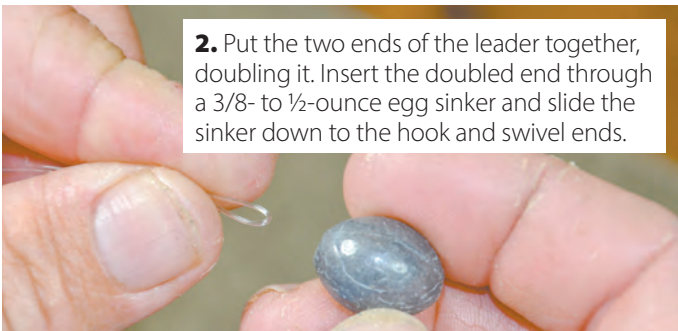
HOW TO MAKE A PRE-RIG

Making pre-rigs is Tommy Pellegrin's answer to the nettlesome task of trying to put together a new rig in the middle of a hot bite. Every moment spent fiddling with lines, corks, sinkers, and hooks increases the chances of speckled trout losing interest in the area and moving off to hunt elsewhere.

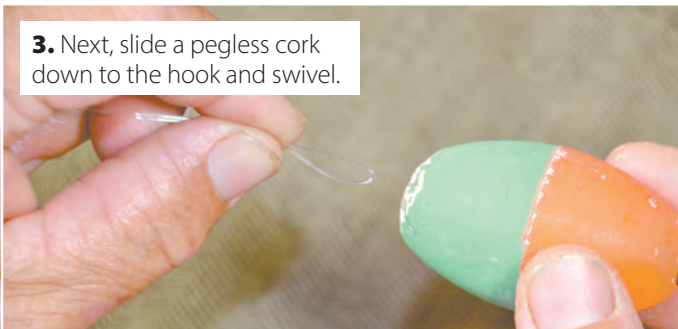
1. Cut a 2-foot length of 30-pound test monofilament line and tie a black swivel on one end and a #4 Mustad UltraPoint treble hook on the other, using four-wrap improved clinch knots.



2. Put the two ends of the leader together, doubling it. Insert the doubled end through a 3/8- to 1/2-ounce egg sinker and slide the sinker down to the hook and swivel ends.



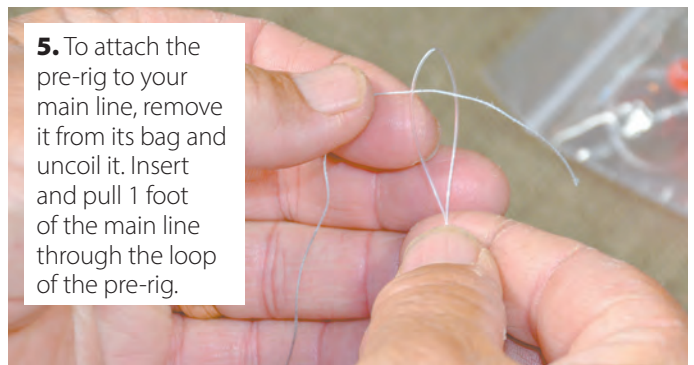
3. Next, slide a pegless cork down to the hook and swivel.



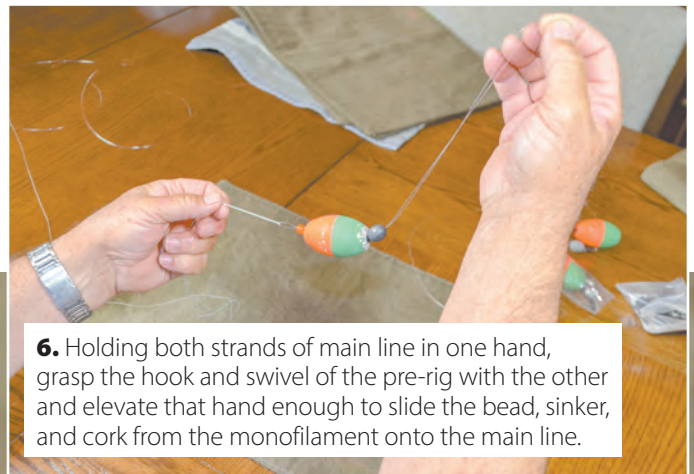
4. Finish the leader by inserting the doubled end through a plastic bead and sliding it down to the cork. Then simply coil the leader and insert the rig into a small plastic zipper bag.



5. To attach the pre-rig to your main line, remove it from its bag and uncoil it. Insert and pull 1 foot of the main line through the loop of the pre-rig.



6. Holding both strands of main line in one hand, grasp the hook and swivel of the pre-rig with the other and elevate that hand enough to slide the bead, sinker, and cork from the monofilament onto the main line.




7. Now just tie your main line to the swivel with an 8-wrap improved clinch knot. To make a bobber-stop, cut 10 inches of 30-pound test mono and tie it on the main line above the bead with a 5-wrap uni knot. Trim the ends closely. The stop can be slid up or down the main line to fish at your desired depth.



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FISH FAST!

Tommy Pellegrin believes in fishing fast. “The more people you have in a boat and the more bait you have in the water, the better the chance you have of getting a speckled trout feeding frenzy going.

“Rapid fire keeps the bite going,” he reiterated.

He doesn’t waste time running to the boat’s livewell every time he needs a fresh shrimp. Instead he scoops a bunch at a time and puts them in a 2 ½-gallon plastic bucket he keeps in arm’s reach.

Nor does he open the ice chest for each fish caught. Rather, they toss their catch into a plastic half-champagne shrimp basket until the basket gets so full that the fish are able to jump out.

Only then does he dump the fish into the ice chest, counting them as he dumps them. “I only count what’s in the box,” he clipped.

He considers building a new terminal rig from scratch while on the water the biggest waste of time of all. Most aggravating is trying to thread the limp

braided line (all he uses on his reels) through the cork’s hole.

To get around that, Pellegrin makes what he calls, “pre-rigs” that can quickly be strung on his line. He makes pre-rigs at home on his days off. (He also makes pre-rigs to sell to the public for \$4 each, with phone orders.)

IT’S A COMMUNITY HOLE

The trout-attracting nature of the metal debris left on what was Caillou Island is so well known that Tommy Pellegrin refers to it as “a community hole.” The short morning the two men fished there, eight other boats worked various parts of the island’s ghostly footprint.

The coordinates of the former island are generally given as latitude 29° 06’ 39.6” North and Longitude 90° 28’ 32.1” West. Lying generally on the imaginary border between Terrebonne Bay and Timbalier Bay, it is northwest of Brush Island and west of Casse-Tete Island.



Long pliers make it easier to remove trebles from deeply-hooked fish.

But knowing where the former island is doesn’t necessarily make it less challenging to fish. The iron “trash” isn’t everywhere. Pellegrin and Hughes, a former guide himself, know where the most fish-attracting junk is located.

They fished the island over the years as it gradually disappeared and



Doubles were common. Tommy Pellegrin (left) and Hugh LeBoeuf limited out by 9:05 a.m.

retain a mental map of what is where. Newcomers will have to experiment to find the best spots.

Three to 4 feet of water now cover the island and there is little to mark it except single pilings and piling clusters that delineate the former canal that once penetrated the island's heart.

Of more concern are many of what Pellegrin called, "short pilings," ones whose tops are just beneath the water's surface or just barely visible above it.

"Come in to the island at idle speed," he advised, "or better yet with a trolling motor.

"Sometimes even that doesn't help. A friend of mine broke the fiberglass shaft of his trolling motor on a submerged piling."

TIP OF THE DAY

When your dip net turns a dead shrimp from the live well, don't toss it overboard and waste it. Tommy Pellegrin simply hooks it in the last segment of the tail, rather than under the horn on top of its

Pellegrin doesn't discard dead shrimp. Rather he hooks them in the tail and works his popping cork to impart life-like action.

head, like he does with a live shrimp.

"You have to work the cork with a dead shrimp," he instructed. "Pop it!"

When fishing with live shrimp, neither man popped the cork though, except to set the hook. They let the live bait do all the work.

When chased by a voracious speck, a lively shrimp would often jump clear of the water. Many of the strikes were visible, causing the two grown men to laugh like kids.

"Customers love to see that, especially people from way 'Up North,' he grinned. "They don't get to see that." ■



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

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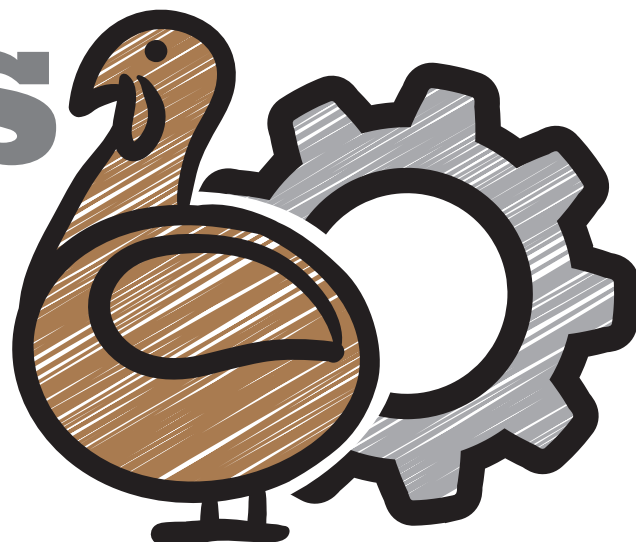
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Your shotgun, choke, sights and ammo all play a big part in your success — or lack thereof — out in the woods. Try these tips to tweak your gobble gun, and you'll be talkin' turkey this spring.

Tuning up for turkeys

By Gordon Hutchinson and Kenny Long



We have a love/hate relationship with our turkey shotguns. If they knock over a big gobble on an improbable shot, we love them and take the credit. But if the gobble runs off after what should have been an easy kill, it's always the gun's fault.

Now is the time to increase the odds that you'll love your shotgun this season by spending a little quality time with it before you take it for long walks in the turkey woods starting next month.

I was musing over these thoughts, and talking to a friend in the Ozarks, Kenny Long, who had some interesting observations on choosing the proper turkey gun — and then tuning it for hunting turkey.

His methods struck me as really practical for the average shooter/turkey hunter — so I asked to interview him and put some of his suggestions to paper. Hopefully this will help all you feather dusters, whether in the flatlands, the hill country or those traveling to the mountains, to collect birds this spring. I know his ideas definitely helped me design my next turkey gun.

The following are Long's thoughts on the ideal combination of shotguns and turkey loads. Here's what he's settled on — and how you can build your own personal gobble gun:

PUMP IT UP

"I've never considered anything other than a pump," he said. "The main reason is silence in loading on the stand. I always slip two shells in the magazine before I leave the house so I won't get to the turkey woods without ammo. I slide a shell out of the magazine and slip it into the chamber when I sit down, 45 minutes before sunrise, sometimes within a hundred yards of a roosting gobble.

"Other hunters tell me they had to let the bolt slam shut on a semi-auto to get it to function properly. After the slam of the bolt shatters the night silence, I fear every turkey I hunt within a mile would say nothing at gobble time — equating to 'Thank you very much — bye.' With a pump gun, you can close the shell into the chamber with a very slow stroke of the forearm. You can feel the shell seat in the chamber and the bolt close and lock. And it is much quieter.

"A cousin let a big gobble escape because he checked the bolt on his semi-auto by pulling on it, and letting it back down easily. When the gobble showed up, the bolt was not completely shut and the gun wouldn't fire. That's a real heartbreaker, considering how hard it is to even get close enough to a turkey to shoot it with a shotgun.

"On occasion, I have slipped into place in the dark and loaded a shell in the barrel from the two in the magazine (for safety, I carry with the chamber empty.) The gobble wasn't where I thought he would be when he started his morning calls, and I was way too close. Fortunately, he didn't know I was there, and I managed to collect him. Had I used a semi-auto, and had to slam the bolt shut to ensure it seated properly, I would have lost the bird.

"On one hunt that comes to mind, it was a fully moonlit pre-dawn and I periodically bawled like a calf to attempt to fool the bird as I walked to my position. Being in a pasture, I figured the bird heard me walking in, but couldn't tell the difference between me and the cows.

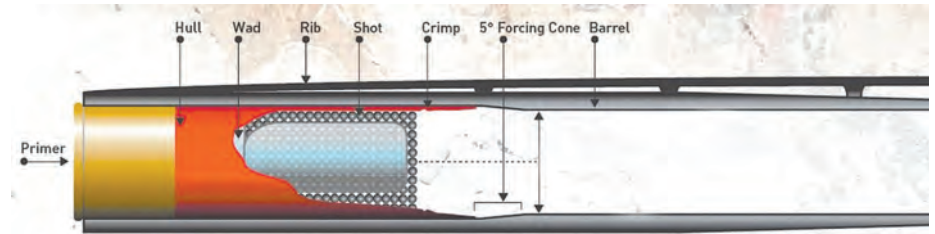




“I didn’t count on the cows. They stopped chewing their cud, and with bemused expressions, watched this really strange-looking two-legged calf passing by.

“It was barely shooting light when the gobbler sailed out and landed about 15 yards from me. In a few seconds he figured me out, and took off running straight away through the fescue. I mowed down a wedge of fescue between him and me to bring him down. To prove you can assume nothing, the previous morning he had still been in a tree at 9:30 a.m. — about a hundred yards farther north of my position. This proves yet again how important complete silence is in assuming your position when hunting turkeys. You can never know exactly where the bird is, and you may need to slip into your site in complete darkness, settle in, and charge your gun — and the bird may be practically overhead — or a hundred yards away.

“On all three of my guns, the forcing cone has been relieved (that’s the area of the barrel just ahead of the chamber) to cut down on deformed shot that won’t fly true. A gunsmith lengthens the sloped cone-shaped area ahead of the shell — which compresses the shot chain into the barrel, a smaller diameter than the chamber, of course. The lengthened cone allows the shot chain more space to



⚙️ The Forcing Cone is the area immediately in front of the chamber that compresses the shot chain from the chamber to the diameter of the barrel.

compress to the diameter of the barrel, reducing the number of deformed pellets that would fly outside the main pattern.”

SIGHT IT IN

“Everyone says you don’t aim a shotgun — you point it. But everyone doesn’t hunt turkeys — and you AIM at turkeys, specifically their heads and necks. So good sights are a welcome help on a gun where you will be aiming at something perhaps 40 yards away, the width of a small hand, and the length of a foot-ruler.

“I prefer ghost-ring sights...those large peep sights are easy to see through in dim light, and like all peep sights, you naturally center the front sight in the middle of them. The Mossberg Ghost Ring package includes an orange iridescent front sight. I find these really stand out in the early morning dimness.”



⚙️ The Mossberg “Ghost Ring” sighting system is an excellent choice for turkey hunters.

This Indian Creek choke concentrates the 2 ounces of No. 6 Hevi-Shot into a lethal dose for turkeys. But you should “pattern” any choke, whether it comes with your gun, or you have it installed.



CHOKE CHOICES

“The end of the barrel is the key to a tight pattern. My Browning Game Gun has an Indian Creek choke screwed into it (www.indiancreekss.com). I have a pattern I shot on my desk. It showed an actual count of 275 pellets in a 12-inch circle at 40 yards.

“Save high-dollar ammo for the final shots by using inexpensive birdshot at only 20 yards. You can draw several targets on one piece of target paper that way. Shoot by taking rest on your knee. Adjust your sights after each shot.” (Note: I had to put shims under one Ghost Ring back sight to get the gun to shoot high enough.)

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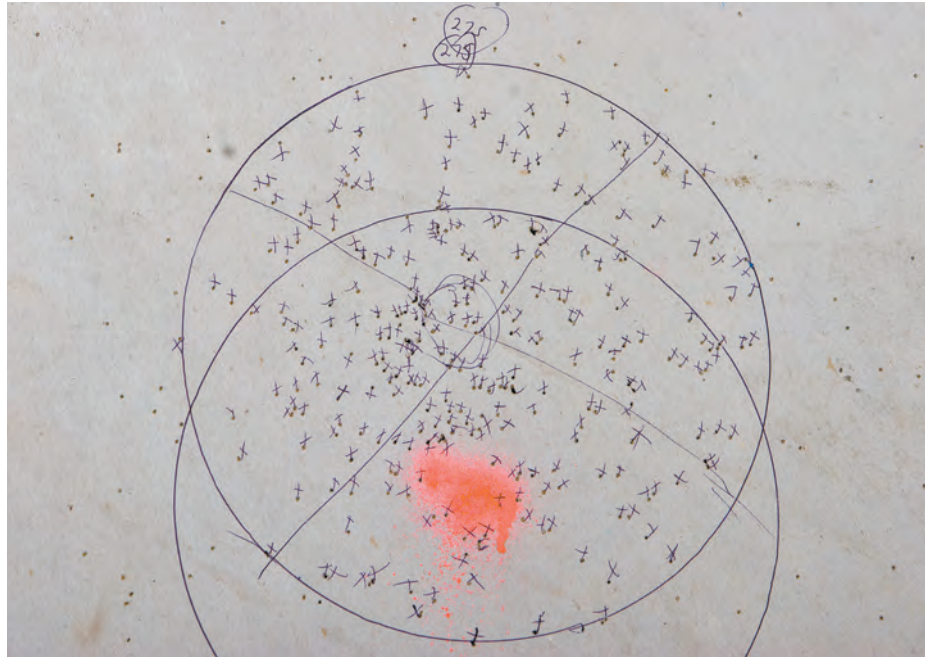
"I now use the lid off a 5-gallon bucket as a template. That will give you roughly a one-foot circle — about the area of a gobbler's head and neck. Draw this circle on a large piece of cardboard and cut it out, leaving a hole that is 12 inches in diameter.

"Spray paint a dot about the size of your fist onto your pattern paper, which should be white or off-white and clean. If your pattern sheet is large enough, you can paint several dots, and pattern several times on the same sheet.

"Sit down with your back to a tree, as you would hunting a turkey, and aim at the dot from 40 yards.


"Use proper shooting technique:

- 1. Natural point of aim** (Don't muscle the gun one way or the other.) Relax, look away, then look back to see if you are still close to being on the target.
- 2. Breath control** – Take three deep breaths and hold the third one. Let



out half of it and shoot within 15 seconds. If you take too many deep breaths you may tremble.

- 3. Trigger squeeze** – Have the tip

 This shows the pattern of the shot "cloud" or "chain" hitting slightly high and left of the aiming point. This is where your adjustable rear sight becomes invaluable.

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of your finger on the trigger so you press the trigger straight back into the web of your hand, wrapped firmly around the pistol grip of the shotgun.”

(Note: these same tips work with a scoped rifle, too.)

“After you fire at the target, if the center of your pattern is not the center of the target, place your cutout template over the largest perforated area to redraw the target. This will tell you where the shotgun is throwing its heaviest concentration of shot in relation to your aiming point. You can count the number of pellets within the 12-inch circle to get an idea of which shell and shot patterns best with your gun and choke.

“This is where your adjustable rear sight comes into play — you move the rear sight in the direction you want the center of the shot pattern to move. By adjusting the rear sight, you move the heaviest portion of the shot pattern to where your eye places the sights on the target.”

BEST AMMO, CHOKE COMBO

The shotgun will tell you. “A friend in Birmingham says his shotgun patterns best with 2 ounces of No. 5 Hevi-Shot. All three of my shotguns like 2 ounces of No. 6 Hevi-Shot. Another friend told me he loves duplex ammo — a combination of shot sizes within one shell.

“Whatever your gun likes best, try to use only that shell, of course. Two of my guns have Indian Creek chokes. My late father’s shotgun has a MADD Hevi-Shot tube. There are many choices on the market, and a competent gunsmith can advise you.”

IF YOU CHANGE AMMO

“Start all over again, even if

you just change the amount of shot in the shell. I’ve seen it change the pattern and the point of impact.”

THE FINAL ACT OF DESPERATION

“If a gobbler gets too close to you, he has the advantage. At a normal distance, your target should be its head and neck — but this would be at 15 to 40 yards — and you will get a pattern.

If its at 10 feet, take a body shot. Aim about the hip joint and you won’t ruin the breast, the beard or the fan.

“Or you can just sit there in the awful silence and blame the shotgun, the call,

or your bad luck — after the gobbler gives its alarm putt, and makes a run for it — with its wing beats subsiding in the distance instead of thrashing and pounding the ground right in front of you.” ■



Gordon Hutchinson is the senior Louisiana concealed permit instructor - a former airborne infantry officer and law enforcement firearms instructor. Read more at his website: www.gordonhutchinson.com.



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TOP 5 TIPS

Largemouth bass know they're vulnerable when they move shallow. Employ these tactics this spring, and you just might land the lunker of a lifetime.

TO CONNECT DURING THE SPAWN

By David A. Brown

Big fish moving shallow — seems like a can't-miss opportunity with home run potential, right? Yes, the largemouth bass spawn can certainly bring the fireworks, but if you think you can just stick your nose into a creek or shallow pocket, flip a Texas-rigged plastic into one of those smoothed-out white spots and yank out a chunky one, think again.

Is it ever that easy? Sure. We've all heard the glory tales of "ready" fish and one-cast wonders. But if that were always the case, each spring tournament would see every angler weighing-in 20-plus sacks.

Truth be told, those lightning strikes are the exception to the rule: Plan on working long and hard for your spawn bites. These fish realize the vulnerability of their shallow migration and make no mistake; they don't miss anything. You have to play their game; get inside their wheelhouse and leverage their preferences, tendencies and anxiety points.

The exact formula varies day to day; sometimes fish to fish, as the variables of conditions, habitat and fishing pressure constantly shuffle the deck.

For example, say it's an overcast day and you luck into an established bed fish under a laydown where no one else has found her. That fish will likely display a higher level of comfort and, therefore, more aggression than a bass bedding in shallow clear water on an open bank with sunny, clear conditions that allow her to spot you as soon as you roll out of bed that morning.

We can't cover everything in one conversation,

but the following pointers could help you land a lunker during the spawn:

1. TANTALIZING BED BAITS

There are times when anything that lands in or near a bass bed gets hammered, but often-times, it's more of a chess match. Watch the fish's

Bassmaster Elite pro Mike Iaconelli rigs his Berkley Havoc Devils Spear sideways for a bluegill profile.



response; does she lazily reposition, as if more annoyed than defensive? Or, does she hover directly over the bait, frequently changing angles in noticeably rising aggression?

If you want the latter, try these strategies:

Super-size it: Anytime you get close to a bed fish and she holds her ground, she's committed and ready to defend. She'll let the smaller male handle the light work, but serious threats earn mama's wrath.





To red line her rage, pitch a 7-inch (or larger) lizard, creature bait, a big worm or a jumbo tube like the 6-inch Gitzit Super Tube or 7-inch Mizmo Ish Tube. It's a yes-or-no deal, but a fish that doesn't run from a whopper bait will almost always try to kill it.

Sidework: Nothing irritates a bass like a nest-raiding bluegill. Color choices like green pumpkin, black and blue, etc. can help you mimic the appearance, but Mike Iaconelli has a unique strategy for making his Berkley Havoc Devil's Spear resemble the bluegill profile.

"A shad has a very thin, sleek profile; but a bluegill has more of an oval profile, so when I'm trying to imitate a bluegill, I'll purposely rig that Devil's Spear sideways (hook coming through the thin side) on a VMC weedless swimbait hook, instead of flat," he said. "This changes the profile in the water.

"The Devil's Spear, as a flipping bait, is what I call an 'in-and-out bait.' As it falls to the bottom, you pretty much just have tail movement. When you rig it sideways, you get the tail movement and you get a side-to-side shimmy almost like a soft stick bait."



Paint Job: When a bed fish plays hard-to-get, subtle details like color accents can close the deal. Bassmaster Elite pro Gary Klein often touches up the pincers of his

crawl baits, but warns against overdoing it. Never dunk bed fish baits in dye; rather, use a Q-tip or the edge of a paper towel to dab just the tips.

Nifty trick: Rub the tip of a Yamamoto Senko between your fingers and as salt crystals exude, watch the bait color change. Instant accent ...

2. HOP TO IT

What gives a bass more anxiety than an intruder standing in its bed? A bad guy lurking over-

head. Think about it, a bass can keep a close eye on anything in its territory and attack if the intruder looks like it's threatening. But a topwater frog offers the doubly enticing element of a protein-rich meal for fish that have just moved up, with the element of unpredictable peril for established fish.

"A frog is even better during the spawn than the prespawn because you can keep it over the top of them for a long time," said Bassmaster Elite pro Kevin VanDam. "A lot of times, bass spawn on lily pad roots, so shallow pads are a great place to catch them with a frog."

Favoring natural frog patterns with brighter colors like yellow and chartreuse, VanDam mostly throws the traditional pointed nose Strike King KVD Sexy Frog, as it comes through pads, grass, etc. with minimal resistance. However, he'll also keep the noisy KVD Popping Perch — a frog style bait with a concave face and bream-like fins instead of fringe legs — on standby.

"If the water is clear, I think a standard frog is hard to beat; it doesn't make as much commotion and you can still make it walk really well," VanDam said. "But if the water is more stained or if you have a little wind, the popping style frog makes more noise and you can work it faster.

"With both baits, you can make them move back and forth without moving a lot of water with subtle twitches."

Frogs will serve you well for searching broad areas and probing those where you can't get a good line of sight. Example: When fish spawn around trees, docks, bushes, etc. If fish are just arriving, they may or may not eat, but

they'll definitely attack. Even if they only blow up at it, identifying where they are gives you a reference for targeted presentations.

STAY BACK
UP NEXT



Frogs allow you to search broad areas, but also hold your bait in one spot — over a bedding bass. **ABOVE,** **LEFT:** Subtle accents to soft plastic baits can trigger stubborn bed fish.

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3. STAY BACK

The politics of proximity tell us that if you can see the fish, she's probably already seen you. That's particularly important in clear, still conditions when bedding bass are on high alert.

Helpful moves include standing on the trolling motor mount. Believe it or not, gaining a handful of inches in altitude can make a world of difference by raising your line of sight. Magnifying this angle increase over the distance to your target yields a significant sight advantage.

Also critical is blocking out peripheral glare. Wrap style sunglasses do some of this, but hooded sweatshirts, jerseys or lightweight performance sun shirts like the new SIMMS SolarFlex Armor Shirt can aid the effort. Pull the hood over your hat to effectively block all light intrusion and create an unhindered vision lane.

4. HARD-HEADED

We tend to think about soft baits for beds — generally Texas-rigs, jig trailers and dropshots — but don't overlook your treble hook lures. Similar to a frog's overhead intrusion, try using a suspending jerkbait in open water scenarios like a clear bank to hold a bait mid-depth and make the fish play the deadly staring game.

If you really want to push the big gal's buttons, upsize your front treble so the bait hangs nose-down in a taunting posture.

5. THE COLOR OF SUCCESS

Braided line is often preferred for bed fishing for the immediate response of its zero-stretch composition. However, the thinner diameters can be difficult to see from a distance when dim conditions challenge your vision. You can't afford to miss the subtle line movement when a fish you can't clearly see picks up your bait, so use a permanent marker to add 1-inch stripes a few inches apart for a visual aid that clearly stands out, even in low light scenarios. ■



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



TOP: Sight fishing can play a big role for spawning season success, but you'll do more harm than good, if you don't move stealthily. **ABOVE:** Often overlooked for the spawn, a shallow-diving jerkbait can work wonders on fussy fish.

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GET PUSHY WITH SPAWNERS

Your trolling motor is essential for easing in and out of spawning areas, but when matching wits with skittish bed fish, even low power can ice the game. And if you're working water with lower visibility and you make a hard move on the troller, you might blow out a spot before you see another bed fish.

For this fine detail work, a push pole provides an option for making minor advancements without the noise and surge of a trolling motor. Here are a few points to consider:



For making small adjustments to your sight-fishing position, you can't beat the stealth of a push pole.

Easy in, easy out — Even though the push pole enters the water behind your position, it can still spook fish if it splashes on the entry or exit. Smooth, measured movements are what you want.

Bottom impacts — Considering that fish spawn over hard bottom, you have to consider how sound echoes below the surface. Think swimming pools: Duck your head below the surface and every foot step sounds like thunder. So, how do you think Mama Bed Fish is going to handle the thump of an awkwardly-placed push pole? Not well; not well, at all.

Design options — For space management, bass pros typically use multi-part or telescoping push poles that stow out of the way behind the seats. Budget-conscious anglers might make one out of a wooden dowel or heavy gauge PVC. If you go with wood, durable tape (athletic, electrical, duct) makes a nice slip-resistant, splinter-free hand grip. ■

— David A. Brown

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Keith Poche invented his KP Power Spinner while he was still a teenager.



CANE RIVER TAILSPIN

By Jerald Horst

ELITE SERIES PRO KEITH POCHE CREATED A VERSATILE LURE WHEN HE WAS A TEENAGER THAT HE STILL USES ON TOUR TODAY. FIND OUT HOW THE INVENTOR OF THE KP POWER SPINNER RIGS UP — AND THEN MOPS UP — ON BASS.

The darkly tanned professional fisherman paused when he walked out of the country convenience store and looked at the boat hanging on the back of his truck, a 21-foot Triton TrX Elite with a big 250-horse Mercury.

He shook his head gently from side to side, as if not believing his fortune.

“I can’t believe where I am. It’s pretty amazing. Growing up here fishing for fun; I never thought I would be coming back here as a pro, doing an article on fishing in Cane River.”

Keith Poche (pronounced PO-shay), a member of the coveted Bassmaster Elite Series, is listed on the organization’s website as being from Pike Road, Alabama, but he grew up in Natchitoches Parish.

I was with Poche to learn the art of using the lure he invented, the Keith Poche Power Spinner, which he usually shortens to KP Power Spinner. He was back in Louisiana to visit his family, including his brother Burt Poche Jr., who accompanied Keith to fish Cane River Lake.

Burt, owner of Poche’s Wood Specialties, is a custom cabinet builder who lives in Natchez, Louisiana, hard by the shores of the lake. “It’s so convenient.

I fish it once a week.”

After launching at Shell Beach Ramp in the tiny settlement of Bermuda, about mid-way on the 34-mile long river-lake, Keith ran north and stopped at the outside of a big bend in the river, speckled with floating lily pads.

The inside of each bend usually has a shallow flat extending from the bank,” he explained. They assumed spawning fish would be using the flats.

Keith started with the lure he would spend the rest of the day using, a 5-inch green pumpkin Luck-E-Strike Chris Lane Pow Stik rigged with no weight and a buried hook to make it weedless.

The salt in the plastic worm and the added spinner provide enough weight to the worm to make casting it easy without extra weight, he said. (See “How to Properly Rig a Keith Poche Power Spinner.”)

Burt started with a black and blue Gary Yamamoto Senko, later shifting to a black and blue Pow Stik.

Both added KP Power Spinners with hammered nickel Colorado blades. The spinners are also available in either hammered or smooth Colorado blades, or willow leaf blades in either gold or nickel, as well as in seven bright colors of Colorado blades.

>

The two men presented their lures by flipping, pitching and casting, depending on the circumstances. Besides the lily pads where they started, the lake offered them a variety of other habitats, including laydowns, residential docks and boat houses, grass beds and cut-grass clumps. Few standing stumps exist, as the bed of the lake is identical to the river bed it once was.

The speed at which the lures were fished was unexpectedly fast compared to how worms are usually fished. A normal retrieve was spinner bait speed with the lure running about 6 inches beneath the surface.

Occasionally, they paused the worm. When paused, the worm backed up while sinking due to the weight of the spinner on its back end. While sinking, the spinner kept spinning. Often strikes came during the pause and sinking, although most fish simply hammered it during a steady retrieve.

“This is a good search bait,” said Keith firmly. “You can cover a lot of area, but with more finesse than a spinner can.”

“Worms are proven fish producers. This rig allows you to fish a worm a little faster and cover more area.”

Bass hammered the worms regularly, although the bite was better in the many beds of lilies than on straight banks.

The lure was impressive, producing a sackful of bass for the pair. Keith’s professionally wrapped boat gave away to most other fishermen his professional status. Chatter with the anglers in other boats by the two friendly men revealed that most other anglers had boated just two or three bass at best. But the Poches’ success wasn’t due to them finding secret spots on the tiny river — everyone was beating the same bank. ■

THE BIRTH OF A LURE

Lots of anglers can claim tournament wins, but few can claim a lure invention.

Keith Poche can.

“When I was a teenager, we did all kinds of things with baits,” he grinned. “One day, I was playing around in a pond and I took a spinner from a broken Beetle Spin and shoved it into the back end of a worm. It worked.

“As I got more knowledgeable about fishing, I attached the blade and a swivel to a Hitchhiker screw-in. I didn’t know then that it would become such a big part of my arsenal as a professional fisherman.”

“In the 2012 Bassmaster Classic, almost every fish I weighed in came from that bait. They hadn’t ever seen it before. I was still hand-making every one.

“I was already being sponsored by Tony Landry, owner of Humdinger Spinners, so it was simple to negotiate a deal for him to manufacture and dis-

tribute them for me.”

Poche called the lure “a condition bait,” an ideal lure for use in 5 feet of water or less. “Any time bass are up on the bank in spring, summer and fall, they will eat this bait. It is particularly good in the pre-spawn.”

It is also versatile, working in any water but muddy water. He estimated that he uses the KP Power Spinner in its various options 35 percent of the time when he fishes.

Poche regularly carries four colors of Colorado blades (blue, green, gold and silver) when he fishes, as well as silver and gold willow leaf blades. He carries two sizes of blades, No. 1 and No. 3.

He offered a few tips: During the shad spawn or when bass are schooling, he uses willow leaf blades. He likes gold or blue Colorado blades in the spring, when bass are getting ready to bed. Finally, in gin-clear water and grass beds, he opts for small No. 1 willow leaf blades.

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HOW TO PROPERLY RIG

A KEITH POCHE POWER SPINNER

Before putting the worm on a hook, Keith Poche uses his teeth to bite about ¼-inch of plastic off of the worm's tail (the smaller end). Then he simply screws the corkscrew on the Keith Poche (KP) Power Spinner into the bitten end of the worm.

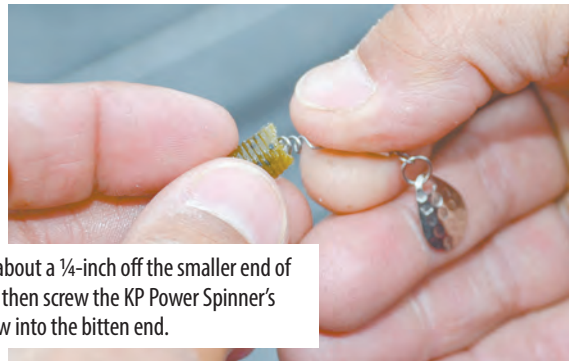
A critical point in rigging the power spinner in a worm is to place the hook further back in the worm than is done with other rigs. "The fish focus on the spinner so they hit the back of the worm."

"I am convinced that not knowing how to do this cost me the 2012 Bassmaster Classic on the Red River. The fish were really eating it; they wanted it. And I was the only one using the lure.

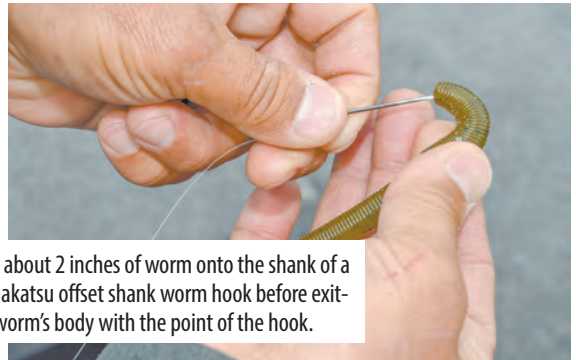
"But I kept missing them. I saw 5-pounders sharking it and then I'd lose the fish. I came in third place.

"It didn't occur to me what I did wrong until months later."

IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR >



1. Bite about a ¼-inch off the smaller end of a worm, then screw the KP Power Spinner's corkscrew into the bitten end.



2. Work about 2 inches of worm onto the shank of a 5/0 Gamakatsu offset shank worm hook before exiting the worm's body with the point of the hook.



3. Push the worm 1 ½ inches up the line, past the eye of the hook.



4. Bury the tip of the hook in the worm's body to make the lure weedless. Because fish focus on the spinner and hit the back of the worm, the hook is placed further to the rear than it would be for a Texas or Carolina rig.



The lower river has a less settled, more wild appearance.

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FAMILY IS A BIG DEAL

The first thing one notices about Keith Poche's truck and boat are large images on each side of his nephew, brother Burt's son, Dylan Kyle Poche. He even has the youngster's initials embossed on his boat's windshield.

In January 2016, Louisiana's competitive bass fishing world was rocked by the murder of the 18-year-old in a Sibley Lake boat launch parking lot. The youngster, a sophomore engineering student at Northeastern State University, was on the school's fishing team.

"He was a natural born fisherman," said Keith softly.

"He was a duck hunter and a bass fisherman. He was worse than me about fishing," smiled Burt.

"He was a heck of a baseball player, too," added Keith. "When my brother called to tell me that he wanted to be a tournament fisherman, I was hesitant for him. I knew how competitive and expensive it is to tournament fish."

"But he quit baseball in high school to fish," Burt took over for his brother. "In

college he fished in the local sanctioned tournaments. At his death, he was entered into the Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Central Open."

"That's how you qualify to get into the Bassmaster Elite Series," explained Keith. "That's where I fish."

"His death has brought the whole family together."

The night before the two brothers hit Cane River Lake, they joined their 66-year-old father Burt Sr. for supper at his home.

The rugged individualist ("hardcore" is Keith's term) traps hogs, hunts deer, raises a big garden, makes his own seasonings and cooks.

He outdid himself for supper — wild pork ribs, venison in onion gravy, beans and rice, corn on the cob, baked beans, smothered okra and potato salad.

Over supper, the two brothers laughed



Family is important to Keith (kneeling) and Burt Poche.

and reminisced about how they spent every moment they could on "the river." Although they were eight years apart in age (Burt Jr. is older) the river exerted its magical effects on both of them.

And bass it was. To this day, neither cares a lick about fishing for white perch, bream or catfish.

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THE LAY OF THE LAKE

Cane River Lake is simply an abandoned channel of the Red River. Two hundred years ago it was a commercial waterway, heavily navigated to and from the south by steamboats carrying cotton and passengers to service the local plantation economy.

Historically, riverboat traffic was blocked beyond Campti, north of Natchitoches by a great raft of logs jamming the river that extended north to Shreveport.

Captain Henry Shreve (after whom Shreveport is named) undertook removing the log jam raft. When it was completed in 1838, something strange happened. Instead of the improved flow cutting the river deeper, it jumped its banks near Grand Ecore and cut an entirely new channel down to the vicinity of Colfax, where it rejoined the old channel.

Gradually, the old river channel shrank in size and was renamed as Cane River, with the new Red River paralleling it to the east. In the early 1900s, earthen dams were constructed on the northern end of Cane River near Grand Ecore and on its southern end near Derry.

In 1949, a modern spillway was installed on the southern dam, essentially finishing what is now Cane River Lake. The present length of the lake is roughly 34 miles, with an average width of 340 feet and an average depth of 8.9 feet.

For fishing purposes, the river can be divided into northern and southern segments, with the Shell Beach Boat Ramp demarking the two sections. The northern segment is shallower, in some places only 3 feet deep, and waters are murkier.

The southern segment is deeper, up to 22 feet. It holds more grass beds, which in turn, keep the water clearer.

“The whole thing is good for bass fishing,” claimed Burt Poche, who fishes it regularly and lives on its shores. “But the fish can be picky, probably because of the amount of fishing pressure they get.”

Much of the shoreline north of the boat ramp, toward Natchitoches, is heavily developed residentially. Some are new mansions; others are time-worn old trailers and buildings dating from the 1950s. South of the ramp, the shoreline becomes

less and less residential, giving way primarily to agricultural fields.

Besides the public boat launch at Shell Beach, another launch is located on Washington Street in Natchitoches, and a third one is at the spillway at the extreme southern end of the lake.

Signs are posted at each launch notifying that the completion of an approved boating safety class is a requirement for anyone to operate a powerboat on Cane River Lake.

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THE ROAD TO PROFESSIONAL FISHING

Every tournament bass fisherman harbors a dream of somehow, someday becoming a full time professional fisherman, with the apex being named one of the 108 Bassmaster Elite Series pros.

Keith Poche is one of them.

His route was almost accidental, although he was always an avid fisherman. “My brother Burt and I stayed out fishing,” he laughed. “When Burt was doing something else, I’d go wake my cousin C. E. Poche to go with me. We were 7 or 8 years old.”

But fishing had serious competition in Poche’s life — football. “I was agile, mean and athletic in high school football,” he said matter-of-factly. “I never left the field on offense or defense. On offense, I was a running back.

“I had an opportunity to play for Troy University in Alabama, but in my sophomore year there, I had a shoulder injury and couldn’t play.

“I brought my dad’s aluminum boat over and was fishing in a county pond named L & L Lakes. A guy in a Ranger, Daniel Sanders, saw me fishing in a sling. He felt sorry for me and asked me if I wanted to fish with him.

“You ever fished in a tournament?” he asked. I said, “No man; I don’t know anything about tournaments. I just fish for fun.”

“He took me to a club tournament for Little Oak Bass Club. I was hooked the first time. I think the competitive side got me. We practiced and fished together for a year.”

With all the fishing, Poche was missing a lot of class, so he dropped out of college and went to work laying floors. He bought a 1992 model 17-foot fiberglass boat and started fishing tournaments in 2004.

He continued to fish club tournaments until Bassmaster started its Weekend Series, a bigger arena where an angler

could potentially move up to the Bassmaster Classic.

“I was slowly working my way up,” said Poche. “At each step, I would work my way up. In 2008 I said, ‘Let me take this up a level,’ and signed up for the Bassmaster Open. I had a bigger boat by then, a 20-footer with a 250 horsepower engine.

“I finished almost last in the first two events and was so far out that I didn’t fish for the last one.

“I said, ‘I’m going to give it one more year. This is my hard-earned money.’ I was on my knees. So in 2009, I signed up again, three events; \$1,200 each.

“My first one, I finished 22nd and caught the biggest bass I ever weighed — 8 pounds, 11 ounces. The second one I came in 49th. The third one, held in Santee-Cooper in South Carolina, I took 6th place.

“I finished in 6th place overall. In those days they took the top 7 fishermen from the Open into the Elite.

“In Santee Cooper, I caught a 7 (pounder) and a 6 off one stump. The 7 threw the hook when my partner was netting it and it flipped into the net. If it hadn’t, I wouldn’t have qualified for the Elite and I wouldn’t be a tournament fisherman today.”

But the road was still tough. He had to quit his floor-laying job because his employer wanted him full time. In 2010 he took four out of eight checks fishing, but still lost money. He had only one sponsor. His brother-in-law Joel Mitchell helped him out with an offseason job.



Keith Poche’s road to professional fishing developed through a career-ending collegiate football injury. BELOW: Water lily beds provided the best action of the day.

Not until 2011 did he feel that he established himself as a professional fisherman. Since then he has been Top 10 Angler of the Year, has a 3rd place Bassmaster Classic finish, is a two-time Major League Fishing winner and has taken 4th and 5th place finishes in the Elite Series. ■



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



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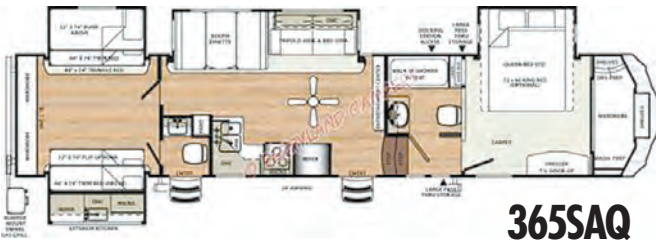
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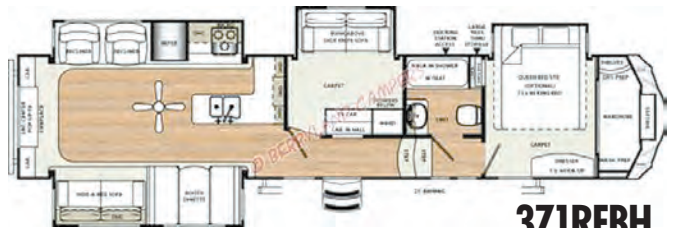


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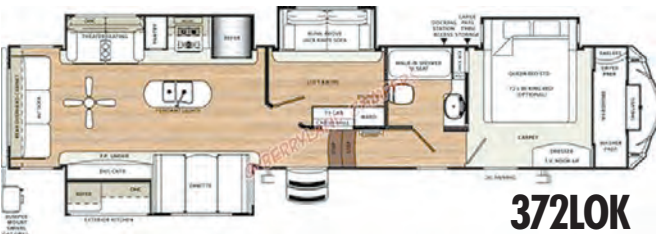
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By Jonathan Olivier

STICK IT TO A TOM

Turkey hunting is tough enough with a shotgun, but if you really want to increase the challenge, break out the sticks and string. Here's what you need to know to bowhunt gobblers.

Harmon Carson will tell you that turkeys are smarter than you think. He should know — he's been chasing them from Louisiana to Texas since he was in high school.

While he's harvested his fair share of toms over the years, the 30-year-old from Haughton wanted more of a challenge — so he decided to pick up his bow.

"I've chased them all over with my bow," he said. "But I haven't killed many because they are a tough animal to bowhunt."

A turkey's keen eyesight means

it can pick up even the slightest movement, which sends it running for safety. While most turkey hunters avoid detection by remaining still at the base of a tree with shotgun propped up and waiting, a bowhunter must move in order to draw back. For that reason, Carson said there's no room for error.

While he's harvested a few birds in Texas, it wasn't until last year he was able to knock one down in Louisiana with his archery gear — with a long bow, to top it off. From a ground blind, he shot a nice tom from a distance of 16 yards. For him, bowhunting turkeys isn't



Photo courtesy Harmon Carson

about filling tags — but rather about the challenge of it all.

“In 2011, I stopped using a compound and went straight traditional — for deer and everything,” he said. “I like the challenge of having to get the animal close. It’s much more intimate.”

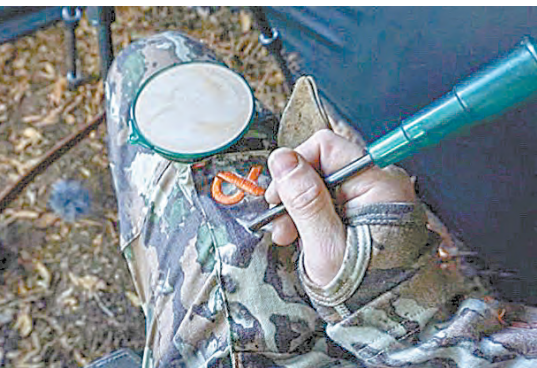
Chad Lafleur, an Opelousas hunter who chases turkeys near Roxie, Mississippi, said it’s about the challenge, as well. He harvested his first gobbler with a bow about 18 years ago and since then, he said he’s only bagged a few more — a testament to the tough nature of bowhunting for turkeys.

“I’ve hunted turkeys in Nebraska, but our birds here are fewer and harder to hunt,” he said. “To me, killing one bird with a bow is more of an accomplishment than killing a limit with a shotgun.”

THE RIGHT GEAR

The good news is that you can use the same bow to hunt turkeys as you do for deer. However, with turkeys, the goal isn’t a complete pass through. Instead, hunters are looking to keep an arrow stuck in the bird, which prevents it from flying off. While some will lower the poundage of their bow, Lafleur said he keeps his set to 70 pounds. But to slow the kinetic energy of his arrows, he uses expandable broadheads with at least a 2-inch cut.

“Just the feathers on the bird or the wing bone will also stop that arrow



before it punches out the other side,” he said. “Last year, I put an arrow in a bird at 12 yards, and it went through the wing butt and into the chest cavity, but it didn’t get more than about 3 to 4 inches of penetration.”

Carson won’t drop his poundage, either, and opts for a large fixed-blade. His go-to is the cut-on-contact Tree Shark, a 190-

grain head made by Simmons Sharks.

“The reason I like that blade is the concave design,” he said. “When it goes in, you will have an entry and exit wound that is 50 percent bigger than the broadhead. It puts turkeys down quick.”

Although Lafleur carries a slate call in the woods, he seldom uses it. He said a diaphragm is a must for hands-free operation. When a turkey is within shooting range, there’s no time to reach for a call, but he’s easily able to emit a few soft



When bowhunting turkeys, Carson uses two decoys — a hen and a jake — to entice a gobbler close enough for a shot. BELOW: A hunting blind is a bowhunter’s best friend when it comes to chasing turkeys, as it helps to conceal movement such as drawing back and using calls.

Photos courtesy Harmon Carson

purrs with a diaphragm to further entice a gobbler.

CONCEALMENT

When Carson is chasing turkeys with his shotgun, he sits at the base of the tree, and that’s usually enough. But with his bow, he prefers to use a ground blind because it helps keep him concealed as he’s drawing back.

If he has patterned a few gobblers with the help of game cameras, he’ll set up his ground blind where they’re known to hang out and wait for them to show up. His decoys and calling do most of the work.

“Normally, I put the hen close to me facing away and put my jake a little farther out facing toward me,” he said. “Normally the toms are going to approach another tom straight on. I want birds to come in right on top of the decoys. Even if a bird hangs up, you increase your chances of them being in bow range.”

If he hasn’t patterned any turkeys, he starts his hunt before first light with locator calls. That helps him to pinpoint the location of a gobbler so he can get an idea of where to spend the morning. By the time the sun rises, he’s set up with the same decoy tactic.

“Turkeys don’t mind ground blinds,” he said. “I set them up that same morning and they aren’t bothered by it like deer.”

Lafleur keeps his blind at home after opening weekend. He’s found the birds are more dispersed on the property he hunts as hunting pressure increases. So remaining mobile has been his ticket to success. He prefers to stay light and use the terrain to keep him concealed.

“Typically, I use a large tree to block the turkey’s view,” he said. “I set up to where

I can see the bird coming and let it cross behind a tree. It’ll give me time to draw and once he comes out, I can shoot.”

Lafleur uses decoys to lure the toms in exactly where he wants them. If they’re focused on a decoy, he said they’re not looking at him.

“I always use a jake with a hen,” he said. “Most of the time, even a 2-year-old bird is going to be focused on that jake. I never use a full strut decoy because I’ve had too many birds get spooked by it. Even mature birds don’t want to interact with that.”

But he doesn’t set up too close to the birds’ roost so that he doesn’t spook them. “Decoys are a must,” he said. “If you’re not using one, a bird could be 15 yards off to your right and you’d never be able to turn to get a shot.”



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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SHOT PLACEMENT

"The target area you're aiming for is about the size of a grape fruit," Lafleur said. For that reason, shot placement is everything. A heart and lung shot is ideal, but one that disables the bird due with an arrow in the body so that it can't fly away is also lethal. "If you hit the top of the drum stick it can't go anywhere," he said. "Then, you can run him down. Even if he does fly away, turkeys bleed more than you think. I've seen a good blood trail from a turkey. If it's flying, then you can typically see where he lands."

In the field, you may never get a perfect shot opportunity. However, it's possible to disable a turkey from various angles and still make a harvest. You just need to know where the vitals are and exactly where to place your arrow. Here are those scenarios and the best place to aim. ■

BROADSIDE

"If you put the arrow in between the wing butt, where it meets the body, and the beard, that's a good spot to hit," Carson said. This shot will not only break both wings, but likely hit the lungs and heart, ensuring a kill.

"Some people also aim for the top of the drumstick where it meets the body," he continued. "This disables the bird. In that case you'll have to finish him off."



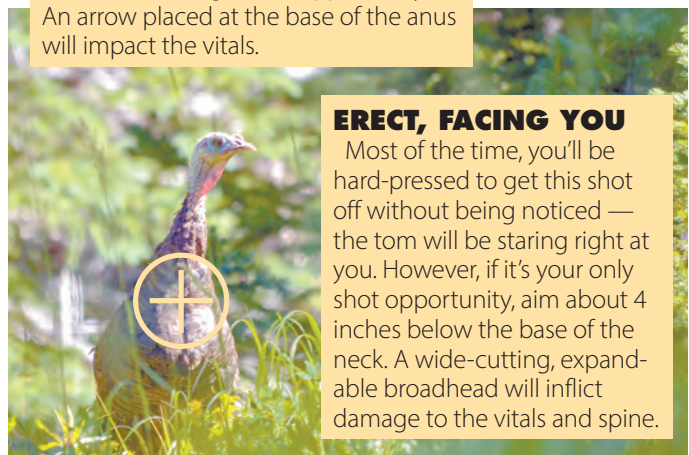
ERECT, FACING AWAY

In this scenario, it's best to aim for the spine a few inches below the neck. This will break the spine. "Obviously if you hit the bird in the spine he's not going to go anywhere," Lafleur said. "If you shoot low, you'll hit the guts or the vitals." Just be sure to wait until the bird is standing upright and not feeding. In the latter position, you may miss the spine as it's curved downward.



STRUTTING, FACING AWAY

With a turkey in full strut, it's feasible to shoot when it's not facing you. Not only are his eyes off of you, but its feathers are erect, offering a shot opportunity. An arrow placed at the base of the anus will impact the vitals.



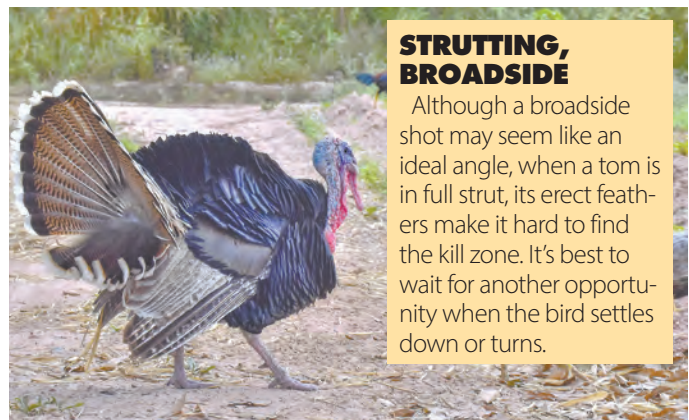
ERECT, FACING YOU

Most of the time, you'll be hard-pressed to get this shot off without being noticed — the tom will be staring right at you. However, if it's your only shot opportunity, aim about 4 inches below the base of the neck. A wide-cutting, expandable broadhead will inflict damage to the vitals and spine.



STRUTTING, FACING YOU

When a gobbler barges into your decoy spread at full strut, his eyes are likely focused on the decoys and not you. As you would with the previous shot scenario, aim below the base of the neck, about where its beard starts.



STRUTTING, BROADSIDE

Although a broadside shot may seem like an ideal angle, when a tom is in full strut, its erect feathers make it hard to find the kill zone. It's best to wait for another opportunity when the bird settles down or turns.

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BEATING THE DRUM

By Jerald Horst

Gaspergou may be looked down upon by some bass anglers, but Mike Kelley Sr. has etched his name into the state record books with plenty of False River freshwater drum.





My eyes popped. I was scrolling through the Louisiana Fish Records Program when I got to the category labeled “Freshwater Drum (Gaspergou),” I saw that four of the Top 10 entries were held by one man — Mike Kelley Sr. — and all were caught in False River.

Furthermore, another two drum caught by two other anglers also came from the same big oxbow lake in Point Coupee Parish. Was there something magical about this lake? And what did Mike Kelley know about it?

I was determined to find out.

I expected that I would find a high-strung, intense hot dog. What I found was a low-key, slow-talking, seemingly hard-to-rile 64-year-old retired widower. Only the fire in the slim, tanned man’s brown eyes gave away his fierce passion for fishing.

His modest but immaculately neat brick house in Oscar was set on the shores of False River in the middle of “Millionaires’ Row,” so named because of the size of its camps and residences.

“I tell people I am the gardener for those places,” he joked.

He had a sense of humor, too.

Before I left home, Kelley directed me to bring an ice chest if I like to eat “gou-fish.” (Louisianans invariably contract the gaspergou’s name to “gou.”)

Kelley releases all the freshwater drum he catches unless they look to be record book size. “I catch them for the love of fishing,” he said softly. “I love to feel the pull on my rod.”

Fishing with him was almost too easy and laid back. The entrance to Lighthouse Canal, his destination, was only a quarter-mile from his home. He anchored in 8 feet of water outside the mouth of the canal, and cast away from the bank toward the open lake.

A gentle current was moving into the canal from the lake.

“Gou and hybrid stripers are my main catch here,” he said, “but I also catch a lot of catfish.” All he had for bait was 2 or 3 pounds of live crawfish — not the tiny bait-sized ones, but rather crawfish big enough to boil and eat.

>

False River freshwater drum

The entrance to Lighthouse Canal is bulkheaded into a sort of funnel shape.



He kept the crawfish in a 5-gallon bucket with a small block of ice to keep them cool. In spite of the ice in the bucket, Kelley assured me that it didn't matter if they die. "They are still good bait."

"Hybrid stripers love crawfish. It's hard to believe that an active gamefish would take a dead crawfish off the bottom."

Things happened quickly. A tap on his bait sparked Kelley to throw a vicious hookset on a channel catfish, the first of many good-eating size 1 ½ to 2 ½ pound cats he reeled in.

"You can tell fish apart by their bites," he said quietly. "Catfish go 'tap-tap-tap' and then take it. Gou-fish and hybrid stripers hit it hard and go. They hit it like they want to kill it."

He seldom let the bait set in one spot long, rather off-and-on slowly retrieving it. The bait was always in contact with the bottom though.

When his bait becomes ragged from repeated hits, he just left it on the hook and kept on fishing. "Appearance means nothing. I usually fish with them until they fall off," he chuckled.

Although the hybrid stripers seemed to have business elsewhere that day, generous numbers of catfish and the usual strong run of gou more than made up for their absence.



TIP OF THE DAY

You won't need dainty equipment to unhook these fish. Catfish and gou have tough mouths. On top of that, catfish pack wickedly serrated spines.

Hybrid stripers' mouths aren't quite as tough, but one slip can hurt. Their fin spines are needle sharp, and their gill covers are like razors.

Mike Kelley emphasized that a set of steel fisherman's pliers are essential. Their sturdy construction allows the twisting and wrenching necessary to quickly unhook fish before they can stab or cut an angler's hands. ■

During each fight, he could pick what species was on the end of his line with 100 percent accuracy. "Catfish spin and roll coming in," he explained. "Gou throw their head from side to side and hybrid stripers make hard straight runs. They can make the line zing going through the water."

It was a peaceful day with an easy, gentle breeze. No water skiers, jet skis or tubers were in sight. "It gets hard after the water warms up," he admitted about the water sports activity on the lake.

The traffic on nearby Highway 1 hummed as people hustled and bustled along with their busy lives. Likely, few of them even noticed the man catching fish after fish not far off the bank.

THE SWEET SPOT

Unlike many fishermen, Mike Kelley doesn't mind sharing the location of his honey hole. All six record freshwater drum taken from False River came from just outside the mouth of Lighthouse Canal.

Formally known as the Bayou Grosse Tete Drainage Canal, Lighthouse Canal serves as the "drainage ditch" that carries excess rainwater from the lake to Bayou Grosse Tete.

Formed from an abandoned channel of the Mississippi River, False River is shaped like a giant letter C. The lake's shoreline on the outside of the C (western shore) is paralleled by Louisiana State Highway 1, and naturally called the "Highway 1 Side." The opposite shore, on the inside of the C (eastern shore), is always referred to as the "Island Side."

Lighthouse Canal exits the lake on the southern end of the Highway 1 Side. Lake

water levels are controlled by three movable 8-foot by 8-foot roller gates set under the highway. The canal itself is only about 75 feet wide.

Legally considered private, access to the canal is restricted, but Kelley gets all the action he wants outside the mouth of the canal. Bulkheaded shores on either side of the mouth of the canal create something of a funnel to the canal's entrance.

At one time or another, Kelley will fish the entire area of the "funnel," typically casting toward the open water of the lake.

"Fishing is best here when there is a current going into the canal," he noted. "Rainfall into (the lake) raises water levels, resulting in drainage out the canal. Long periods without rain mean no current."

Slightly complicating fishing plans are drawdowns by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in recent winters. The drawdowns are conducted to firm up the exposed bottoms for better bass spawning success, and to improve plant habitat.

The gates are usually closed to restore water levels to normal in mid-January, although this year an unexpectedly heavy rain forced earlier closure.

Although the normal flow of current is from the lake into the canal, flood rains in the Grosse Tete basin can raise water levels in the bayou enough to create a temporary reverse flow situation.

Kelley was turned on to the spot by his brother-in-law Kirby Jarreau, who used to be chief of police in New Roads. "He tied to a bulkhead and fished live crawfish, primarily for catfish."

Kelley said that he entered his first freshwater drum in



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the records in 2005. “I caught a big one from my boat. I was going to turn it loose when a guy named Jimmy Doiron, who was fishing from the bank encouraged me to enter it in the records. He had two in the books at the time from the same spot.

“He said, ‘I’ll show you what to do.’ He even took me to get it weighed.”

“After pictures of my first two record fish were printed in the newspaper, a guy from Livonia, Stephen Morgan came here the next week and caught another one.”

KEEP IT SIMPLE

This is leisurely fishing — no high-tech, high-paced grind. In tune with that, the gear used is not demanding fine-tuned, like it is for the finesse crappie jigging that Mike Kelley also loves.

You can use economically-priced reels, he says. There is no need here for long, pin-point casts. He uses level wind reels, but admits that spinning reels will work just as well. “I just never was a fan of spinning reels,” he quipped.

Because of the fighting qualities of the fish he catches, he spools his reels with 20-pound test line.

He favorite hooks are 4/0 Eagle Claw O’Shaughnessy Lazer Sharp hooks. Two #4 split shots pinched on the line immediately above the hook provide enough weight for casting, and are also heavy enough to keep the bait on the bottom.

HITTING THE BOOKS

In the Louisiana Fish Records Program, the Freshwater Drum category is a very competitive one — and the fish grow to respectable sizes. It takes at least an 18-pound, 4-ounce fish to make it into 10th place. The No. 1 fish is 25 pounds, 7 ounces.

Freshwater drum don’t receive the respect they are due, according to Mike Kelley. Once an avid bass fisherman himself, he speaks with authority about how bass anglers view a freshwater drum that strikes their lures.

“When the average bass fisherman catches a gou, they think it is the slimmest, trashiest fish that swims. They are as low as a fish can go. How dare they take my bait?”

“I just take it with a grain of salt,” he grinned. “If they had four fish in the records, their chest would be sticking out.

“Gou fight harder than largemouths,

RIGGING CRAWFISH THE KELLEY WAY

Mike Kelley doesn’t like to dip for “ditch crawfish” as do many fishermen who use mudbugs for bait. “They are on the small side and you can’t get them early in the season,” he explained

Instead, he buys them from seafood markets. “Sometimes it’s a little hard to

talk the staff into breaking a sack for me, but I usually get them,” he grinned mischievously.

He is very particular about how he puts his crawfish on the hook. Here is how Kelley preps his bait:



1. After removing the crawfish’s claws, insert the hook beneath the tail, near the tail fins.



2. Curl the crawfish onto the hook while pushing the hook through the tail and back out in the center of its legs under the body, ensuring the mudbug is straight on the hook shank.



3. Crush the body of the crawfish from side-to-side to release the juices and the smell, then pull the top two rings from the tail to expose the meat to the water.

especially at first. Some of them kind of give up at the very end though.”

Placing a fish of any species in the record books is relatively easy if a few points are remembered. The fish should be kept from drying out to retain its weight, and it must be weighed on an officially certified scale (like at a grocery store or marina).

Most challenging is finding a biologist to certify the species of the fish. Most people opt for Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries biologists, but university or privately employed biologists are qualified to do so as well. The Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association, which maintains the records, requires the certification to protect the integrity of the records.

A listing of current records, plus the program rules, and an application can be found on the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association website. The records may also be found on other websites, but they are often not updated as frequently as they are at the official location.



Small clams and snails, such as these excreted in the feces of a freshwater drum caught by Kelley, show what the fish feed on in the lake.

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GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER?



Grilled gaspergou is mild and has a delightful steak-like texture.

Having spent a lifetime eating my way across the watery landscape of Louisiana, I've eaten a lot of fish that were delectable, a few fish that were really close to inedible and quite a few fish that were good if you knew what you were doing in the kitchen — and bad if you didn't.

The gaspergou is in the latter category.

It is a certified member of the drum family, which includes such excellent food fish as speckled trout, black drum, redfish and croaker.

All of these saltwater cousins of the gou have flesh that is lean and more or less tender. All lend themselves well to frying, Louisianan's favorite technique for cooking fish.

But the gou is an oddball. Its flesh is firm, almost tough — similar to a steak. And as for frying, that's out. The flesh is so oily that any breading applied simply slips off the fillet while it is being cooked. The oiliness of the flesh also gives the

fish a strong taste when fried.

Historically, the fish was a favorite for use in preparation of courtbouillons. Because of its texture the flesh resisted falling apart, and its oiliness was unnoticeable in the strong red gravy of the dish.

But there is another cooking technique in which the gaspergou is not just acceptable, it is superb — grilling. Most fish are poor candidates for the grill unless the skin is left on to hold the fillet together, or they are cooked in a wire basket. Their flesh is simply too tender.

Also, most fish, with a few exceptions such as pompano and tuna, are so lean that they can only be grilled when slathered with butter or olive oil while cooking.

We were shocked when we first experimented with gaspergou on the grill at our hunting and fishing camp in the Atchafalaya Basin. Its firm flesh meant that skinless fillets could be flipped with tongs like a beef steak, and besides what

was left of the marinade on the fish, it never needed basting.

Best of all, it was delicious off the grill.

Preparation is simple. After filleting, the fillet should be put in a container or plastic bag for marinating. For a half-gallon of fillets, add a half cup of Italian salad dressing and a tablespoon of liquid smoke. Stow the fillets overnight (they may be kept in the marinade up to two days) in a refrigerator.

To cook, simply remove them from the marinade and grill until the flesh is white through and through. No salt and pepper is needed. ■



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



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PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

Chris Holmes

DEMO, DEMO, DEMO

TRY IT BEFORE YOU BUY IT



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.



Demo days are great opportunities to try out and compare many different brands and models of kayaks before making a purchase.



Spring is coming this month, and kayak anglers welcome the warm weather and hot fishing action. Kayak fishing continues to grow in popularity, and it's a great time to be in the market for your first kayak — or to upgrade from an entry-level model. Many exciting new fishing kayaks are available to suit any angler's needs. The mild weather also provides a great opportunity to get on the water and sample some great new kayaks at the many available demo days.

Purchasing a kayak is not difficult, but there are some important considerations that help you make the right decisions. Kayak fishing offers a level of excitement that can't be found fishing from conventional power boats. The combination of manual power, the ability to access secluded waters and fishing right at the water's surface all combine to add a thrill factor that hooks many new kayak anglers every day.

However, choosing a brand and model of fishing kayak should not be done lightly. What's best for you and your particular style of fishing will likely not be the same for others. While pedal kayaks like Hobie have been around for well over a decade, nearly all other major kayak brands now offer pedal-drive models. Hobie relies on its patented Mirage Drive system that was designed for propulsion similar to a penguin's wings, and the other manufacturers use differing forms of propeller-driven systems that are similar to trolling motors. Therefore, the first decision to make when selecting a kayak is whether you prefer to paddle or pedal.

Pedaling a kayak is generally more fishing-friendly and allows anglers a virtually hands-free fishing experience. You use larger leg muscles, and many anglers find that they can pedal farther and longer than with a traditional paddle. Unless you are just anchoring to fish a particular spot, pedaling provides more actual fishing time since it's impossible to cast and paddle at the same time.

But paddle kayaks are the least expensive, and most manufacturers offer entry-level models. However, getting a cheap new kayak is often not the best choice. Entry-level models are generally not as comfortable, and don't offer as many standard features that make fishing easier and more enjoyable. If you really think you are going to like the sport and stick with it, you are often better advised to look for a higher-end model on the used market. Oftentimes you can save a ton of money and get a much better kayak that's in great shape.

CONTINUES >

PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued

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The golden rule of purchasing any kayak is to actually test drive, or “demo,” the brand and model you are considering purchasing. In fact, it is best to demo as many different kayaks as you can to see what works best for you. Some dealers also offer a rental option so you can actually try out a particular kayak for a day of fishing. This is best done once you have whittled down your choice to a couple of models. If you don't like that particular model, the only cost is for the rental. However, if you decide to purchase one, the rental cost is often deducted from the purchase price. It's a great way to make an informed purchasing decision.

All of the major kayak dealers in the state offer demo days where they bring out a wide variety of the brands and models they sell. You can try out as many as you want, and it's a great opportunity for side-by-side comparisons. New models generally come out at the end of the year, so the demo days are packed full of the latest and greatest that the manufacturers have to offer. Demo days typically start in early spring and go through the summer. Check out your favorite dealer's web page and they usually have an events calendar listing of the dates for their upcoming demo days. ■

KAYAK TOURNEY NEWS

Fishing a kayak tournament is a great way to meet new kayak-fishing friends and hone your fishing skills. A wide variety of formats are available across the state, and the friendly competition offers a chance to win some great prizes and bragging rights. Check out these events coming up in the next few months to get in on the fun:

Date	Tourney	Location	More Info
3-10-18	Paddle Palooza XV	Grand Isle	bckfc.org
3-17-18	Caddo Tourney	Caddo Lake	Bayou Pirates (Facebook)
3-24-18	Boats on the Bayou	New Orleans	neworleanscitypark.com
3-24-18	Marsh Madness	Cocodrie	lafayettekayakfishing.com
4-15-18	IFA Kayak Tour	Hopedale	ifatours.com
4-14-18	Cypress Tourney	Cypress/Black	Bayou Pirates (Facebook)
4-21-18	Redfish Rumble	St. Bernard	bckfc.org
5-05-18	PAC Spring Fling	Pointe-Aux-Chenes	packayakrental.com
5-05-18	Oak Point Classic	Pointe-Aux-Chenes	lafayettekayakfishing.com
5-12-18	Toledo Tourney	Toledo Bend	Bayou Pirates (Facebook)
6-02-18	To be named	Grand Isle/Leeville	bckfc.org
6-09-18	PAC Rip Tide	Pointe-Aux-Chenes	packayakrental.com
7-21-18	LA1 Slamboree	Leeville	lafayettekayakfishing.com
8-05-18	IFA Kayak Tour	Houma	ifatours.com
8-25-18	Ride the Bull	Grand Isle	ccalouisiana.com
9-08-18	Spec-n-Redfish	Statewide	lafayettekayakfishing.com
9-15-18	PAC Legacy	Pointe-Aux-Chenes	packayakrental.com



Bass action is heating up for the spring, and there's no more exciting way to catch them than on topwaters. Chugging lures and frogs worked near stumps, weedlines or lily pads bring explosive strikes from feisty bass.

NEW GEAR REVIEWS

ACTION HAT

Kayak fishing is somewhat of a solitary sport, and anglers are often off by themselves when they make a great catch. The first thing your buddies want to see is proof of your fish story. The Action Hat makes it easy. A specially designed frame allows you to mount your GoPro or cell-phone on top of the hat for perfect, hands free point-of-view photos or video while out on the water. A simple but innovative design places a lightweight skeletal frame inside the hat for a solid mounting base that also provides flotation in the event the hat and camera fall overboard. In the normal position, the Action Hat provides camera mounting locations at the front and top of the hat. However, the frame can also be moved to the rear in the event you want to film what's going on behind you. One size fits most and it is available in several hat or visor models. Want to convert your lucky fishing hat into an Action Hat? No problem. The frame is removable or can be purchased separately and can be added to your own hat with a few simple steps. Never miss another shot with the Action Hat. MSRP:\$39.99


More information: www.actionhat.com

RAM ROD HD ROD HOLDER


Kayak rod holders must be sturdy, easily adjustable and hold an endless variety of rod/reel combinations in many different positions. The Ram Rod HD Rod Holder is all that and more. Built with all the durability and ingenuity that kayakers have come to expect from Ram Mounts, this holder is strong and versatile. Holding both spinning or casting rods, the HD has the unique ability to lock solidly while trolling and also act as a rod tube for storage. Not just a simple rod holder, the optional snap-in double ball & socket attachment allows you to affix a GoPro camera or X-Grip phone holder. Now you can film that epic fish strike, or use your phone to connect to your

favorite fishing app or do a Facebook Live Feed while being hands free on the water. And your phone is safe with a rock-solid attachment. The HD offers a variety of mounting options including bulkhead/flat surface and track mounting. Several available extension arms get your rods in the perfect position to fit your particular style and needs. Made tough for harsh environments, Ram products are proudly made in the USA and come with their simple, "if we built it, we guarantee it" warranty. MSRP: \$41.49 (*varies according to mounts and accessories.)

More information:
www.rammount.com



The Action Hat's lightweight frame can be easily adapted to fit in your favorite fishing hat.



No matter your choice of gear or style of fishing, the Ram Rod HD fits it all and offers secure mounting options with nearly endless adjustability.

BEST BETS UP NEXT >

PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued

Small bug imitations work great on the fly rod for bream, but don't be surprised if you catch a few bass also.



MARCH 2018 'YAKIN' BEST BETS

*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.

FRESHWATER

WHERE: Northshore Lake Pontchartrain

WHAT: Bass, bream, sac-a-lait

HOW: The freshwater rivers and bayous that abound in St. Tammany Parish are great areas for springtime freshwater 'yakin'. Bayous Bonfouca, Cane and Lacombe, along with the Tchefuncte and Pearl rivers, all provide great freshwater action. Bugs and buds are starting to hatch, and the fish are transitioning to shallower areas as the water and weather warms up. For bass and bream, topwater is the name of the game. Bass will hit any manner of topwater plugs, with the more natural colors being local favorites. For bream, you can't beat the action of using a light flyrod with a tiny popping bug. Spider and frog imitations with multiple rubber-band legs get devoured almost on impact. The best part is that you don't really have to know anything about fly fishing to have success. Plop the bug near some floating vegetation, near a stump along the bank or just under some overhanging branches and be prepared for it to quickly get sucked under. But don't be surprised if a feisty bass inhales your bug. Look for sac-a-lait near brush piles ready to take live shiners, or tiny tube jigs in blue/white or black and chartreuse.

LAUNCH: There are several public launches and endless kayak combat launch locations in the area. Check out www.louisiananorthshore.com for more launch information.

SALTWATER

WHERE: Lake Ameda (Hopedale)

WHAT: Redfish and Speckled Trout

HOW: March is known for being windy, but on calm days, a short paddle to this small lake and surrounding area can get your spring season kicked off right. From the launch, head up Bayou LaLoutre to Hopedale Bayou and turn right into Hopedale Lagoon which runs into Lake Ameda. Fish your way towards the lake and you may never even need to get there. Trout are still in the area and are moving to the shallower flats. The best way to catch them is by trolling or drifting. Set up a mental grid and cover the lake from one end to the other (select your direction by using the wind to your benefit). At the end of each run, move over half your casting range and repeat. Of course, if you have several hook ups in a particular area, fish it hard before moving on. Drag a plastic tail or Gulp on a 1/16- or 1/8-ounce jighead out the back as you slowly move along. Keep that rod in the holder and fan-cast another under a popping cork covering water on both sides of the yak to search for bites. Look for reds near, but not on, the bank. More often than not, they are holding 30 to 50 yards off the shoreline at this time of year. Spinnerbaits in white, black or yellow and weedless gold spoons can't be beat.

LAUNCH:

Launch at the old Pip's Place launch. No facilities, only a concrete boat launch with a \$5 honor box. Ample parking across the highway. The launch is located on the right side of Hopedale Highway in St. Bernard Parish.

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GATOR TROUT IN LEEVILLE

Sean Rastanis is the assistant tournament director for the Bayou Coast Kayak Fishing Club, and on Dec. 30, he was doing some scouting in Leeville.

The morning started off pretty slow, but after getting a tip on some nearby action, he made a move and ran into fellow club member and two-time Hobie Fishing Worlds Champion Steve Lessard — who invited him to join in..

“Steve showed me what the fish were hitting and how to fish the lure. The next four hours were nothing short of epic,” Rastanis said. “We caught and released probably 40 to 50 trout ranging in size from 17 to 22 inches, and I can’t thank him enough”

Many trout fishermen mistakenly put away topwater lures once the summer ends. However, Rastanis is sure glad he had his: Fishing a MirrOlure She Pup, he caught three consecutive 20-inch trout.

Then every speck chaser’s dream happened: The next fish was a 27 ¼-inch beast that clicked the Boga Grip scale at 7 ½ pounds — his biggest speckled trout ever.

“The entire time I spent with Steve was a huge tutorial on how to target big trout, observing changes in the water to figure out where they might be located, and figuring out which baits to fish and how to fish them,” Rastanis said. ■

IT ALL ADDS UP TO MORE FISH IN THE BOAT.



"I was fishing 15lb Tactical and 30lb X-Braid in isolated reeds and stick-ups. That lighter line got me more bites and I had absolutely no trouble getting them out of everything." *Tim Frederick*
2018 FLW Tour Lake Okeechobee Champion.

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PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued

With spring on the way, kayak anglers will soon be looking to get into the mix of another great springtime trout bite at The Trestles in Lake Pontchartrain.



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MEET THE BEST-TASTING GROUPER: YELLOWEDGE

A COMMON CATCH FOR DEEP-DROPPERS

In recent years, a whole new world has opened up for offshore fishermen. Beset by lengthy season closures for gag and scamp groupers, red snappers, amberjacks and even triggerfish, as well as tight bag limits and restrictive size limits, many offshore fishermen began to wonder if owning a boat was worth it.

Some turned to tuna fishing; most found there was a limit to how many red-meated Volkswagens they wanted to reel in and eat a year.

Then along came deep-dropping.

Deep-dropping is simply a term for bottom fishing in waters deeper than 400 to 600 feet, all the way out to 1,200 feet deep. Early deep-droppers found a wide array of new species available to them, things like queen and silk snappers, longtail bass, golden tilefish, barrelfish, speckled hinds and snowy groupers.

But the poster child for deep-drop fishing is the yellowedge grouper.

YELLOWEDGE GROUPERS ARE COMMON

With the possible exception of golden tilefish, which really prefer deeper waters, the yellowedge is the most common fish caught by deep-droppers. And just as good, maybe better yet, they are almost universally acclaimed to be the best tasting member of the entire grouper clan.

For those willing to venture into deep water, they are very common. Their range starts off of the Carolinas on the East Coast, wraps around Florida through the entire Gulf of Mexico, rings every island in the Caribbean and goes down the South American Coast to

southern Brazil.

Within that range they are most common at depths of 400 to 900 feet, although juveniles can occasionally be found in waters as shallow as 100 feet. The deepest water that scientists have taken them from was 1,287 feet.

They are an oddity within the grouper family, in which most species prefer reefs, shipwrecks, rock piles and other high-profile bottom structure for their homes. The yellowedge is perfectly happy with flat bottoms.

Most preferred seem to be hard bottoms liberally encrusted with coral-like growths on them, called "live bottom." But the fish is also found on clay, sand and even mud bottoms in their preferred depth zone.

There, each fish stakes out its own turf. Big yellowedges dominate smaller specimens and will hog the available

The grouper most resembling the yellowedge is the snowy grouper, shown on top. Snowy groupers always have orderly rows of white dots, but never have yellow fin margins. Some yellowedge groupers (bottom) will also sport identical white dots, but the yellow on the fins gives them away.

food supply. So a baited hook will usually catch the biggest fish in an area.

IDENTIFYING THE CREATURES

Yellowedge groupers are neither the largest nor the smallest members of the family, very commonly growing to 30 pounds and occasionally 40 pounds. They have a typical bass-sea bass body shape: A big head and mouth and a chunky, meaty body.

Their adult body color is a nondescript gray-brown, but their dorsal (back), pectoral (side), anal (belly) fins and sometimes their tail fins are edged in brilliant yellow.

Small yellowfin groupers' bodies are often marked with orderly, widely spaced rows of white spots. These spots will sometimes also be present on larger fish, but they rapidly fade after the fish is landed.

White body spots are a signature marking on their close deep-water relative, the snowy grouper. But snowy groupers never have yellow edges on their fins.

The yellow thing gets a little confusing at first glance, but is easily sorted out. The yellowmouth grouper also has small yellow fin margins, but has a mouth heavily spashed with yellow, something never seen in yellowedge groupers.

The yellowfin grouper has wide yellow margins on its fins, but never has an evenly-colored body like the yellowedge grouper. They are most commonly colored gray or pinkish, and heavily marked with mottling or blotches.

AN ODD LIFESTYLE

Yellowedge groupers, like other groupers, have an odd sex life. Every one of them begins life after hatching as a female. At about 24 inches

long and 2 to 3 years old, they begin to spawn.

After several years as spawning females, some of them flip gender, becoming males. It isn't known what the trigger is for the sex change. In other, more studied "protogynous hermaphrodite" fishes, it appears that the removal of males from the population triggers females to change to males.

In any case, the change apparently happens very quickly, as biologists seldom examine a fish in transition from female

to male. Studies show that in the Gulf of Mexico, females average 27 inches long and males average 35 inches.

Not every female will change sex in her lifetime. Females as long as 43 inches long have been captured. Females range in age from 2 to 29 years old, and males range from 13 to 75 years old. Females begin turning into males at about 23 inches long and 13 years of age.

Females outnumber males by an average of two to one.

continues on page 128

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CREATURE FEATURE

continued

Spawning takes place from January through October, peaking in May to September. Nothing is known about how many eggs they spawn at each spawning or over the whole season, nor how often they spawn each year. The unique lifestyle of the yellowedge grouper gives cautious



Yellowedge groupers are most common at depths of 600 to 900 feet. Fish reeled in from those depths show severe effects of decompression. Note the distended eyes on this fish. Close inspection will also show that the eyeball is cracked like a glass marble.

biologists reason for worry of overfishing for two reasons. First, they are long-lived fish that are slow to mature.

Second, since they are protogynous hermaphrodites and males are found only in the larger (and more aggressive and easy to catch) size classes, heavy fishing pressure on larger fish may take enough males to lower spawning success in this species. ■



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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ASK CAPT. PAUL

Capt. Paul Titus

Big Lake is famous for trophy speckled trout, but is also home to big bull reds like this one.



WAYPOINTS FOR BIG LAKE

The Calcasieu Lake area is located almost entirely in Cameron Parish south of Lake Charles. It is part of the estuary of the Calcasieu River, and is just north of the Gulf of Mexico. It is more commonly referred to as Big Lake.

This area is known for trophy-sized speckled trout. It has many oyster reefs, mainly in the larger parts of the lake. Along with the specks are white trout, reds, flounders, croakers, sheepshead, black drum and catfish. Some area residents even reported that sharks are found in various parts of the lake.

As a help in fishing the area, I have compiled fishing waypoint positions throughout the area. Captain Paul's Fishing Edge of GPS waypoints of Calcasieu Lake has more than 135 locations — and it is one of 21 different Edge Fishing Areas offered.

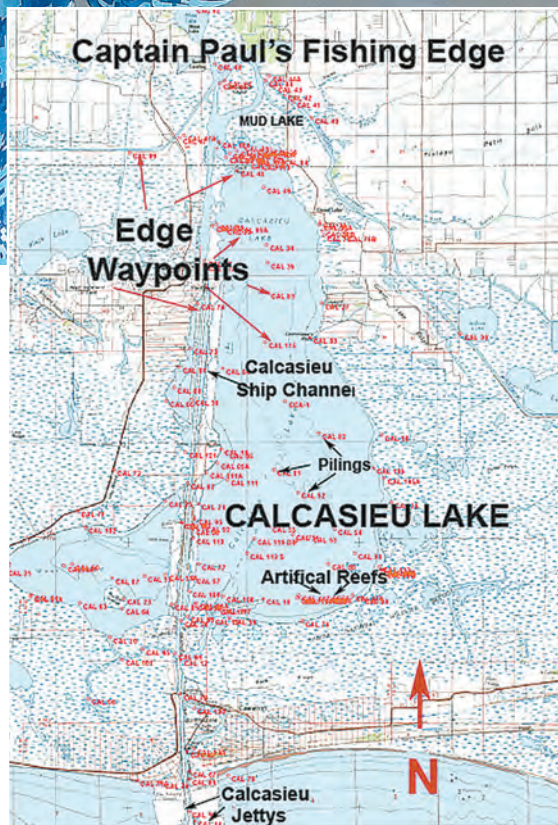
The Edge offers anglers a way to quickly locate some prime fishing locations in

and around the lake. There are also many positions that are just north of Big Lake for fishing.

One of those, waypoint **CAL 97** in Moss Lake, at 30°07.6386' N. Lat ~ 93°20.4277' W. Long, offers very good speckled trout fishing in the late fall.

It also has many positions that are around or in Turner's Bay, such as **CAL 31** at 30°03.7339' N. Lat ~93°18.8393' W. Long., which advises to fish the structures along the shoreline.

Waypoint **CAL114A**, indicates a position at 30°03.2375' N. Lat ~93°18.6356' West Long. in Mud Lake, which is just north of Big Lake, and suggests that anglers fish the oyster reef from the small island to the three tanks: Large fish are by the island, more fish by



the tanks." There are 12 more locations in that general area.

Many anglers fish the shallows on the west side of the lake over the oyster reefs such as waypoint **CAL04** at 29°57.4396'

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N. Lat. ~

93°19.4550' W. Long. The waypoint advises: "Fish the Oyster Reefs: Caution shallow water."

One of old pilings in the lake is indicated as waypoint **CAL34** at 30°09.9237' N. Lat ~ 93°18.0273' W. Long. It is generally a draw for smaller fish which draw the monsters.

The Edge file also has the new Artificial Reefs in the south-west part of the lake, one of which is **CAL117 REEF**, which is located at 29°51.0320' N. Lat ~ 93°16.9740' W. Long.

The file also has locations along the Calcasieu Ship Channel where canals and natural cuts link the waterway and the lake and the jetties of the channel at the Gulf of Mexico. These listed locations are only some of the more than 135 Edge locations.

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 Captain Paul's Waypoints into the unit in a matter of seconds. To help those of us who are not computer savvy, each download has a general map of the area in 1:100,000 scale, 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, Captain 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.

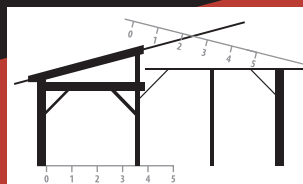
I always suggest that you have a reliable compass and a map of the area whenever you venture in the outdoors.

All of Captain 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.

Also, please show respect to other anglers around you and do not trespass. All positions are determined using WGS datum and are stated as Degrees, Minutes and ten thousandths of a minute (DDD, MM.mmmm). ■



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



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The author's longtime favorite bream rig is a TFO rod with an Allen reel, a \$200 setup with lifetime warranties.

GEARING UP FOR GOBBULES

BEGINNER OR EXPERT, BUDGET TACKLE WORKS

Longtime readers of this column know that I often refer to sunfish as “gobbules” (pronounced gah-bools). Many might wonder how the term originated.

When my boys were young, Jacob caught a big, colorful bluegill in the neighborhood lake. He took it home and placed it in an aquarium. The kids decided to give it a name, and Jacob suggested “Gobble” because it gobbled up everything in the tank.

Kevin thought the name needed to be Cajun. He told us that the French word for gobble was “gobbule.” (Maybe incorrect, but the name was catchy — so Gobbule it was.)

After that, every sunfish we caught was referred to as a gobbule.

GET NO RESPECT

Unfortunately the fly fishing community considers sunfish as a “gateway species” — one that beginning fly anglers can use to learn with before pursuing more acclaimed gamefish like trout, redfish and others.

Case in point — at this year’s Atlanta Fly Fishing Show there were over 130 presentations covering 26 different species — but none on bream.

To make matters worse, many beginners are lured into buying “pan-fish outfits” that come in plastic-wrapped packages with pictures of Spongebob Squarepants, Spiderman or the Ninja Turtles.

In general, stay far away from any fly fishing outfit associated with a cartoon character.

There’s inexpensive, and then there’s cheap. Cheap rods are made of fiberglass. Not the new grade of glass (which make for great rods), but the old grade that your grandfather used. The black EVA foam handles are a giveaway the rod is poor quality.

THE RIGHT STUFF

A good inexpensive rod will be made of graphite, have stainless snake guides and ceramic stripping guides. It should also have a moderate

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Mar. 3 (Sat) - Red Stick Day fly festival**
BREC Perkins Park Community Center, Baton Rouge. 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Free admission. Seminars, fly tying, casting, kayak demos, fishing, raffles and more. Sponsored by Red Stick Fly Fishers, website www.rsff.org.
- **Mar. 10 (Sat) - Orvis Fly Fishing 101**
7601 Bluebonnet Blvd, Baton Rouge. 8 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Free clinic covering the basics of tackle and rigging, with hands-on fly casting. Class size limited, so registration required. Other dates available. For more info, call 225-757-7286.
- **Mar. 10-11 (Sat-Sun) - Texas Fly Fishing and Brew Festival** Plano Center, Plano, TX. Exhibitors, seminars, casting clinics, micro-brew samplings, film festival and more. Over a dozen nationally-known speakers including Ed Jaworoski and Pat Dorsey. Website: www.txflyfishingfestival.org
- **Mar. 24 (Sat) - New Orleans City Park Big Bass Fishing Rodeo & Fishtival** Registration: 6 to 8:30 a.m. at Parkview Café. Fishing begins 6:30 a.m. Weigh-in at 11 a.m. Entry fee: \$10 adults, \$5 kids (12 & under). Eight categories including Fly Rod Bass and Fly Rod Cichlid. Website: www.neworleanscitypark.com.
- **Apr. 6-7 (Fri-Sat) - Lake Athens Fly Fishing Festival** Lake Athens Marina, 5401 Marina Dr, Athens, TX. Admission free, Sunfish Tournament free, Big Bass Contest \$40 entry fee. Fishing, seminars, fly tying, casting, exhibitors and more. Special guest: Jen Ripple. Website www.johnnyonthefly.com.

action to better cast strike indicators and wind-resistant popping bugs.

The rod should also have as many guides as length of rod. For example, if the rod is 8 feet long, it should have at least eight guides not counting the tip. Fly line is heavy — a rod with only five or six guides will have too much sag between the guides and won't cast well.

For bream fishing, I prefer an 8-foot rod in either 4-weight or 5-weight. This length is a good compromise between casting accuracy and distance. It also allows for close work in trees and around docks, and it's stout enough to land the random bass or catfish.

Good inexpensive rods without a warranty include Cabela's Bighorn (\$69), Bass Pro's Dogwood Canyon (\$69) and the Redington Crosswater (\$79).

Spending a little more, though, gets you a warranty. Depending on the series, the manufacturer will replace your broken fly rod within five years or 25 years of purchase, or maybe even a lifetime. Just send the damaged rod back for a nominal fee.

Such models in the budget category include Echo Base (\$89), Fenwick Eagle (\$99), Allen Compass (\$99), St. Croix Rio Santos (\$120) and TFO Signature (\$125).

I don't always recommend outfits, but you can't beat the value of the Orvis Encounter (\$169) or Redington Path (\$189). This includes a high quality rod, reel, fly line, backing and case.

continues on page 134

TIPPETS

This month, redfish enthusiasts welcome the return of thick grass in coastal ponds. The grass not only attracts small crabs and baitfish, it also maintains clarity. And that means great sight-casting opportunities.

Getting a fly through the vegetation is best done with bendback style flies like the Prince of Tides, Bendback Mullet and Borski Sparrow. On the edges of grass, try traditional early-season flies like Charlies and small crab patterns.

Throughout the month, bass will be spawning. In grassy marsh areas like Delacroix and Lacassine, poppers and Sea-ducers will garner strikes. In the deeper lakes, try weighted flies like Bass Bullies, Y2K Buggers and Kray Phish.

Late in the afternoons, bluegill will start hitting popping bugs and spider flies around trees, docks and close to shorelines.

Redears will be bedding this month in slightly deeper water. For the chinquapins, let your Cap Spider, Fluff Butt, Cajun Tickler or weighted Woollybugger get to the bottom, then strip in very slowly. The strike often comes on the rise.

Crappie action remains good this month. Cast Crappie Candies and Fluff Butts along cypress trees, shallow water structure, edges of grass beds and docks.

Trout enthusiasts in the northern part of the state will be making the short trip to the Little Missouri River in Southwest Arkansas for the start of the March Brown hatch. Some of the best dry fly trout fishing in the south can be had. Cast Parachute Adams and A&W Emergers in runs and flats and wait for the rise! ■

THE NATURE OF COMPETITION



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FLY LINES

continued

This 5-weight outfit that cost \$79 has landed countless bream — and twice avoided a drowning thanks to a section of pool noodle.



DON'T SKIMP ON LINE

A good fly line is as important as a good rod. Even those \$800 fly rods that can cast a mile will have difficulty shooting a bad line.

The good news is that there are some really good lines that won't break the bank. I've used the Orvis Clearwater, Rio Mainstream, TFO Floating Series and Cabela's Prestige — all under \$40 — on my bream rods. They've casted well, and with good care, are still in good condition after several years.

Stick with a weight-forward floating line. It's the best all-purpose line for Louisiana freshwater.

When using popping bugs or flies under a strike indicator, it's better to have a line that quickly loads the rod so you only make one or two false casts. Accuracy is also critical.

For these reasons, it sometimes benefits to slightly overload the rod. For example, using a 5-weight line on a 4-weight rod. Or you could buy a "plus-one" line. These are a half-weight heavier than their rated weight. For example, a plus-one 4-weight line actually weighs halfway between a 4- and a 5-weight.

If you're looking for where to go cheap, it would be the reel. For bream, the reel is simply a line holder. There are several good die-cast reels between \$30 and \$60. You can also check with your local fly club. Many members often have used reels they're looking to sell cheap.

Those hard-charging gob-bules will be bedding starting this month. Give them the respect they deserve — and make your fly fishing experience a great one — by using good tackle. ■



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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GRUNTS & GOBBLES

David Moreland

The author's turkey blind survived the snow, but won't see hunting action this month because of the new later turkey season opening.

NO TURKEY HUNTING IN MARCH

AND POST-FREEZE, HOW'S YOUR DEER HABITAT DOING?

Yes, that's right — for the first time in the lifetime of this author there is no turkey hunting in Louisiana in March. Of course, I grew up hunting in North Louisiana in the 60s and there were no turkeys to hunt in those days. LDWF was trying to restock birds in that area but for various reasons, the restocking effort was not working.

Hopefully you read the hunting regulations and saw that the state season does not open until April 7. So what exactly is going on — have the LDWF turkey biologists gone off the deep end? While some probably think so, this new season structure is an attempt to make sure hens have been bred and are sitting on eggs when the season opens before toms

are removed from the population. The later season structure has been in effect for many years in North Louisiana and it seems to be working. When I go deer hunting in Bossier Parish on my friend's lease I see adult gobblers, jakes and hens. The habitat is very similar to what we have in East Feliciana Parish: lots of pine timber, hardwood drains and fields. But the fact is we do not have a good population of turkeys in my area of the parish and I'm ready to see if this late season will help.

In 2015, I had a good population of turkeys visiting our property — but when the 2016 March flood hit, the turkeys disappeared. Our property does not flood, so I'm not certain what caused the birds to move out. Three hens came

back in early summer with some poults, and then the August 2016 flood hit and the turkeys were gone again — and this time they haven't returned. The 2016 season was a bust, as was the 2017 season. I found a dead gobbler on the property during the 2017 season that died from a disease which affects the immune system and causes organ failure. Unfortunately, this disease has been found in other locations in the state.

The fact is Louisiana does not have the turkey population that other southeastern states such as Mississippi and Alabama do. This new season structure is an attempt by LDWF to increase turkey numbers where populations have declined. It will take several years to determine if this strategy will work. No

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doubt there are hunters in the state who are much opposed to this new season structure, and will make attempts to change it. A quote from the book "Turkey Hunting- A One-Man Game" by the late Ken Morgan sums it up: "Spring turkey seasons are often set according to politics and sometimes have little to do with sound biological reasons given by game biologists. This needs to change for the good of the turkey."

WHAT CONDITION IS YOUR DEER HERD IN?

LDWF biologists have begun looking at harvest data from the deer killed this past season across the state. As a hunter or deer manager, you should already have an idea of what condition your deer herd is in. Antler quality, body weight and reproduction are all indicators of herd health. The Big Buck Contest at the Louisiana Sportsman Show will provide some insight as to herd condition. Deer scoring 130 or better are good quality deer, while adult deer that score 110 or less probably indicate that there are problems in the paradise you hunt.

A better question might be, 'Do you know what condition your habitat is in?' March is usually the month that green-out begins in the state, although in past years with mild winters green-out started earlier in February. This year we experienced a bitterly cold winter; there were three fronts that brought severe freezing temperatures to the Bayou State in December and January. Two of these fronts came with snow, with the snow from the last front lasting for several days. From what I saw the deer hunkered down and did not move too much, but the habitat took it on the chin.

The freezing weather killed or set back much of the native

vegetation. If your habitat is lacking in quality browse and nutrition, deer may spend a lot of time this spring trying to catch-up with body growth and maintenance. This could equate to lower body weights and smaller antlers next season. If, on the other hand, you have been managing your habitat and doing the timber work to put quality browse species such as blackberries, greenbriar, honeysuckle, elderberry and a few other species on the ground and available for deer, the population should be in good shape at the start of green-up. In addition to the timber work, food plots

planted with nutritious forages would have also benefited the deer during the freeze days.

Despite what you may have heard over the years, the acorn crop is important to our Louisiana deer herds. At the start of the season there was a decent white oak and cow oak acorn crop that deer feasted on. The red oak crop, other than striped oak in some of the bottomland

continues on page 138

PROPERTIES FOR SALE IN MS & LA

ADAMS COUNTY		HARRISON COUNTY		• 58 Acres.....\$2,637/AC	
• 854 Acres & camp.....\$3,500/AC		• 81.3 Acres.....\$4,500/AC		• 77 Acres.....\$5,181/AC	
AMITE COUNTY		• 243 Acres.....\$4,900/AC		• 80 Acres & Home.....\$219,000	
• 23 Acres.....\$3,476/AC		• 129 Acres.....\$3,900/AC		• 132 Acres.....\$2,401/AC	
• 25.52 Acres.....\$2,500/AC		• 47 Acres.....\$4,100/AC		• 135 Acres.....\$2,350/AC	
• 40 Acres & Home.....\$205,000		• 82 Acres.....\$3,950/AC		• 140 Acres.....\$2,350/AC	
• 40 Acres & Home.....\$370,000		HINDS COUNTY		• 275 Acres.....\$2,350/AC	
• 51.85 Acres.....\$5,303/AC		• 92 Acres.....\$3,700/AC		• 423 Acres.....\$3,850/AC	
• 99 Acres.....\$3,787/AC		• 184 Acres.....\$2,700/AC		• 335 Acres.....\$2,950/AC	
• 115 Acres.....\$3,750/AC		JASPER COUNTY		• 467 Acres.....\$2,795/AC	
• 125 Acres.....\$4,300/AC		• 114 Acres.....\$1,400/AC		TALLAHATCHIE COUNTY	
• 127.5 Acres.....\$4,200/AC		• 69.5 Acres.....\$2,500/AC		• 27 Acres.....\$2,962/AC	
• 151 Acres.....\$4,200/AC		• 58.5 Acres.....\$3,418/AC		WALTHALL COUNTY	
• 200 Acres & Camp.....\$1,120,000		• 40 Acres.....\$2,500/AC		• 15 Acres.....\$3,500/AC	
• 209 Acres.....\$3,348/AC		• 38.5 Acres.....\$2,077/AC		• 38.78 Acres.....\$2,307/AC	
• 278.5 Acres.....\$4,000/AC		JEFFERSON COUNTY		• 20 Acres & Camp.....\$204,000	
• 360 Acres & Home.....\$3,500,000		• 722 Acres w/2 houses.....\$2,100,000		• 386 Acres & Home.....\$1,495,000	
• 1305 Acres & Home.....\$7,500,000		• 2260 Acres & Lodge.....\$8,300,000		• 34 Acres.....\$3,808/AC	
ATTALA COUNTY		JONES COUNTY		• 160 Acres.....\$2,181/AC	
• 540.5 Acres.....\$950/AC		• 21 Acres.....\$2,000/AC		WAYNE COUNTY	
CALHOUN COUNTY		KEMPER COUNTY		• 120 Acres.....\$1,500/AC	
• 75 Acres.....\$1,599/AC		• 40 Acres.....\$6,000/AC		• 220 Acres.....\$2,050/AC	
CLARKE COUNTY		LAMAR COUNTY		• 39.5 Acres.....\$1,974/AC	
• 800 Acres & Lodge.....\$3,375/AC		• 20 Acres.....\$11,250/AC		WILKINSON COUNTY	
• 185 Acres & Camp.....\$550,000		• 35 Acres.....\$8,750/AC		• 153 Acres.....\$3,790/AC	
• 40 Acres.....\$2,025/AC		LAWRENCE COUNTY		• 26 Acres & Lodge.....\$425,000	
• 132 Acres.....\$2,651/AC		• 52 Acres.....\$2,304/AC		LOUISIANA	
• 135 Acres.....\$2,651/AC		• 710 Acres & Camp.....\$1,225,000		Bienville	
CLAIBORNE COUNTY		LINCOLN COUNTY		• 89.78 Acres.....\$2,449/AC	
• 222 Acres.....\$3,148/AC		• 87.49 Acres.....\$2,857/AC		Bossier	
• 176 Acres.....\$3,181/AC		MADISON COUNTY		• 76 Acres.....\$4,500/AC	
COPIAH COUNTY		• Home & 116 Acres.....\$3,250,000		• 68 Acres.....\$5,515/AC	
• 166 Acres.....\$2,289/AC		MARION COUNTY		• 79 Acres.....\$5,950/AC	
• 339 Acres.....\$2,651/AC		• 84.56 Acres.....\$2,944/AC		• 120 Acres.....\$3,958/AC	
COVINGTON COUNTY		• 113 Acres.....\$2,876/AC		• 272 Acres.....\$4,600/AC	
• 40 Acres.....\$2,950/AC		• 14.5 Acres.....\$3,813/AC		Caddo	
• 162 Acres Cabin & River.....\$4,650/AC		• 40 Acres.....\$2,800/AC		• 1 Acres & Camp.....\$100,000	
FORREST COUNTY		PEARL RIVER COUNTY		• 170 Acres.....\$4,600/AC	
• 30 Acres.....\$5,833/AC		• 303 Acres.....\$3,500/AC		East Baton Rouge Parish	
• 80 Acres river front.....\$2,850/AC		PIKE COUNTY		• 239 Acres.....\$3,999,000	
• 80 Acres.....\$3,125/AC		• 10 Acres & Home.....\$199,000		East Feliciana Parish	
• 123 Acres.....\$2,500/AC		• 24.87 Acres.....\$3,397/AC		• 64 Acres & Camp.....\$349,000	
FRANKLIN COUNTY		• 28 Acres.....\$4,625/AC		• 113 Acres & Lodge.....\$1,125,000	
• 15 Acres.....\$3,200/AC		• 31.57 Acres.....\$4,497/AC		Sabine County	
• 277 Acres.....\$2,775/AC		• 40 Acres.....\$2,475/AC		• 21 Acres.....\$3,500/AC	
GRENEADA COUNTY		• 48 Acres.....\$3,227/AC		• Home on Toledo Bend.....\$550,000	
• 160 Acres.....\$4,000/AC		• 48.13 Acres.....\$3,9067/AC		Webster Parish	
				• 958 Acres.....\$1,252/AC	
				Western Washington Parish	
				• 150 Acres.....\$3,993	



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GRUNTS & GOBBLES

continued



Winter grasses such as wheat and oats provide deer with high quality forage during freezing weather.

forests, was poor and consequently this was a year that corn feeding would have benefited the deer. Striped oaks are the last acorns to fall in late winter, and on some areas that I visited both deer and hogs were feeding on them heavily. Kidney fat is an indicator of good herd health, and I saw low kidney fat in my area due to the poor acorn crop — but in the bottomland areas that had a good striped oak crop, the kidney fat levels were high.

Over the next few months I will be writing about harvest data and what it means to hunters and managers. I am looking forward to seeing you at the Louisiana Sportsman Show this month in Gonzales. ■



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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BOMBER'S JOINTED WAKE MINNOW

BASS, REDFISH SMASH NEW TOPWATER

Russell Garner remembers the days in South Texas and elsewhere along the Gulf Coast when anglers modified jointed Redfins to make a “wake” bait that redfish found hard to resist.

Anglers would heat the lip and bend it down toward the back end of the body so the Redfin wouldn't go as deep, he said.

The practice eventually spread to the point the modification was used to catch bass and stripers in inland lakes, he said.

Garner wanted to give anglers a “wake” bait right out of the package. So he started kicking around the idea seriously about five years ago. The Bomber Jointed Wake Minnow, two years in the making, hit the market in April 2017.

“I think it'll be a great bait. This spring will be its first real heavily distributed spring, and I anticipate hearing good stories as topwater gets to be more of a deal. Topwater's always fun,” Garner said.

He's proud of the artificial lure's look and action. It wasn't easy, he confided.

“It's pretty complicated ... more difficult than building a deep-diving crank bait. It took us two years to get there, to get to the finish line,” he said.

At times during the design of a new artificial lure, he said, physics don't allow the designer to get the product to do what they want it to do. In this case, the challenge was making a waking bait with

an open cavity (air) in the body, he said. Solving that problem included weighting the artificial lure so that it performed as desired, as well as positioning the lip at the optimum angle.

“Obviously, to get it to swim, you've got to get the bait lip right under the water,” he said.

Durability was another factor in design. “You've got to make it strong enough to put up with big fish. It's made pretty stout,” he said. “Redfish will tear something up if you don't build it right.

“This bait is a wake minnow, jointed, and has incredible action. With it being jointed like this, we've got it working just right.”

GREAT WAKING ACTION

The PRADCO Fishing brand manager and veteran artificial lure designer won't get an argument from Jimmy Mason of Rogersville, Alabama — a bass fishing pro who praises the Bomber Jointed Wake Minnow. He started throwing prototypes more than a year ago and provided his input for the design.

Mason, 45, believes strongly in the finished product. It's put keeper-sized bass in the boat for him at tournament time, and he's caught redfish with it along the Alabama Gulf Coast.

His most productive tournament outing

with the lure was during a Bassmaster Open in April at Chickamauga Lake.

“It's a neat bait and it's got such a great waking action. A lot of the bites are pretty aggressive. I'm using a long rod with a soft tip to help land that,” he said.

For years, Mason caught bass on a Bomber Long-A. It was one of his go-to baits when he started fishing Bassmaster Open tournaments in 2003 and, later, for a few years, Bassmaster Elites (and the Top150s that preceded the Elites). Now he focuses on Bassmaster Opens.

“I mean, I love the Long-A,” he said. “(But) you've got to fish it painstakingly slow on the retrieve, on a spinning rod with light braid, 15-pound braid.

“The Bomber Jointed Wake Minnow, you can fish on heavier tackle and you can fish a little faster,” he said. “I use up to 20-pound test Vicious Ultimate Co-Polymer line and a lot of times a 7-foot, 10-inch baitcasting rod. You don't have to fight it going under and losing that waking action.

“It has more aggressive waking action than the Long-A, and it has a loud rattle on it. At the same time you can slow it down and get a very similar action to a Long-A.”

He takes advantage of the 5 3/8-inch long, 3/4-ounce artificial lure's capabilities. It has a 3D body and 3D eyes, a raised gill plate on the side and HD decoration to

Jimmy Mason holds up a 6-pound bass caught on a Bomber Jointed Wake Minnow at Wilson Lake.

go along with sturdy hardware and No.2 black nickel treble hooks.

“You don’t use it for a target casting bait. I make as long of casts as I can,” he said, noting it draws suspended bass up from timber, the tops of trees and grass beds that haven’t reached the surface. With the prespawn and spawn the order of the day as you read this in March, Mason knows from experience that on clear lakes the bigger females “kind of suspend on points and deep pockets before they go into the pockets (or shallows at the back end of creeks) to spawn.” The Bomber Jointed Wake Minnow gets those fish to bite consistently, he said.

AVAILABLE COLORS

The lure is available in colors popular for saltwater and freshwater species, he said. Tennessee shad, bone flash, chrome/black and chrome/blue are among the favorites for bass, while mullet, chartreuse herring and gold/orange are some of the favorites for saltwater

gamefish like redfish and speckled trout. Of course, some anglers might prefer a freshwater color for saltwater purposes, and vice versa.

Mason’s choice is bone flash for large-mouth and smallmouth bass, and his backup is Tennessee shad.

“When I fish, I have both tied on. If I had to pick one, I’d pick bone flash. It’s a catcher,” he said.

For more information on the Bomber Jointed Wake Minnow and other PRADCO Fishing products call 1-800-531-1202 or go to www.pradcooutdoorbrands.com. ■



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

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HUNTING AND TRAPPING FERAL HOGS

TAKE THE HOG-HUNTING CHALLENGE

Whether we call them nuisance animals or outlaw quadrupeds, the laws addressing the take of those less-than-desirable species are more liberal than ever before. That's a good thing made necessary by the ever-increasing number of feral hogs. Before we get down in the weeds on how to eliminate unwanted feral hogs, let's take a look at the current regulations.

Holders of a hunting license may take hogs, coyotes, nutria, beaver and armadillos year round during legal daylight shooting hours. On private property, the landowner or any licensed hunter he authorizes may take the four-legged outlaws during nighttime hours the last day of February through the last day of August. Written landowner permission and contact information, along with a basic hunting license are all that's needed. The only other stipulation is notification of the LDWF Enforcement Division (1-800-442-2511) and the sheriff of the parish in which the property is located 24 hours prior to night hunting. Contact LDWF Enforcement Division

regarding information on night hunting for outlaw quadrupeds during the months of September through February.

Hogs may also be trapped with cage or corral traps and a basic hunting license. The traps must have an opening in the top measuring not less than 22 x 22 inches, or 25 inches in diameter. A trapping license is required for the use of snares for hogs, and please don't use snares in areas where bears are found.

HOG TRAPPING BASICS

I have no experience with night shooting hogs but do know it is effective

Place corn or other feed where hogs will find it. Hogs are every bit as challenging to hunt as deer. **INSET:** This 170-pound sow readily came to corn and provided some great pork chops. Use gloves and eye protection and wash up after processing a hog, just as you should with deer or any other wildlife.



in some situations. I have done some trapping using both cage and corral traps. Taking hogs with traps works, but it takes some know-how, time and patience. We are limited on space here, so I won't detail how to trap. But here are the quick-start instructions: Use corn for

bait. Soak it in a bucket of water until it sours to enhance the lure and attraction. (You'll love the smell.)

Place the trap in an area frequented by hogs. Bait it and leave it open until hogs are feeding on the corn regularly and have lost any suspicion about going in and out of the enclosure. At that point set the door to close on the cage trap or close off the corral so it has one way in and no way out. Check traps daily because it's the humane thing to do, and to remove captured hogs and get the trap ready to take more. Don't expect to catch very many big, old wise hogs. They are smart and most won't enter a trap, but younger pigs and shoats will.

TEST YOUR HUNTING SKILLS ON HOGS

In January I decided to do some hog hunting by stalking and stand hunting. A herd of a dozen or so hogs were rooting on the power line right of way and were visible from the main road through our hunting lease. They were frequently seen mid-morning. After a morning

deer hunt, I drove up to the power line and glassed for the hogs. Sure enough there they were. Leaving the truck with rifle in hand, I walked the half mile or so toward the herd, staying in the woods and out of sight. The wind was good and I got within comfortable range, which means close for me. From behind a large oak I took a peek. The hogs had moved into the woods as they fed, but within a few minutes returned to the power line. When a chubby young sow in the 80-pound range stepped out, I took the shot and some prime pork hit the ground.

A few days later, hogs hit one of my food plots and rooted extensively. I scattered some corn in the plot and when the hogs began regular visits to feast, I placed a trail camera. Photos indicated the hogs were showing up at mid-day and in the afternoon. Going to the stand a little after lunch with a good book along for company, I sat through the afternoon. Around 3:30 members of the group began trickling in and enjoying the corn. Among the hogs in the photos was a

large sow, in great condition. About 20 minutes after the first arrivals, the big sow approached cautiously from the woods. After looking things over and testing the wind, she went for the corn. The Kimber .30-06 was true as always, and the hunt was over. The hog weighed 170 pounds and even more prime pork was in the freezer.

Feral hogs have keen senses and offer as much hunting challenge as deer. So after the venison is in the freezer, don't let your hunting season end. Get out there and take the hog hunting challenge. Try some trapping as well and help control feral hog numbers. You'll have fun while doing some good. ■



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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STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano

With deer season in the rearview mirror, take time now to scout your woods for sign you might have missed last season. **INSET:** If you're going to change archery gear, even just your release aid, do it now so you have time to prepare before next season.

THERE'S NO BETTER TIME THAN NOW TO PREPARE

REVIEW THIS SEASON'S SUCCESSES AND FAILURES, THEN ADJUST TO UP YOUR ODDS NEXT FALL

As I write this, another year's deer season has come to a close. For many hunters, this is a sad time, as thoughts of a long offseason become reality.

I've often heard it said, "Every ending is a new beginning." This is especially true when it comes to deer hunting with a bow. After the season, I like to reflect back and compile a list of things that went right or wrong. This is no different than a football team watching film to analyze its performance.

By doing this, I am able to isolate and focus on problems like my shooting form, stand placement or scent-control regimen so these errors are not repeated next season. The time to identify and correct these issues is now, not several months down the road when they are easily forgotten or overlooked.

ADJUST BOW, FORM

This past season, I struggled with a bad case of target panic, which made it very difficult to hunt with my bow. I was punching the trigger on my release aid so much that I had little confidence in my ability to make a clean kill. I switched over to my crossbow, but I am a vertical bow guy at heart.

I am already working hard to manage

my target panic. By lowering my draw weight, shooting a hinge-style release aid and temporarily removing my sight, I am reducing my tendency to punch the trigger. This requires developing new muscle memory, which takes quite a while and a lot of practice.

I don't typically take long shots at game anymore, so I have decided to start shooting heavier arrows, which should help with penetration at my new, lighter draw weight. I am also going to resume shooting fixed-blade broadheads. I never make major changes to my form or setup during the season because it takes time to become proficient after doing either. By making these adjustments now, I should be ready in plenty of time for next year's bow opener. Bowhunters who wait until just before the season to make adjustments put themselves in a bad spot.

SCOUT THE WOODS

I also noticed that a lot of deer were skirting several of my stands this past season. I made a mental note of these, and I am going to relocate those stands to take advantage of what the deer were doing.



Late winter and early spring are the best time to scout and locate stands for next year. Post-season scouting is key to understanding how deer move through and utilize any piece of property. Because it is eight months before next season, a hunter can move about the woods freely without worrying about disturbing deer. In fact, jumping a big buck from its bed

will only help to pinpoint one of its bedding locations, because it will have plenty of time to settle down and get over the intrusion.

Also, with the woods barren, rubs and scrapes are easier to spot from longer distances. Game trails are usually well-worn from heavy use, making them stand out. Most hunters have accumulated a long list of "honey-dos" that might make it difficult to get into the woods after the season. Even so, I can assure you, any time spent scouting now will pay off in spades when hunting season rolls around next fall.

Another advantage to post-season scouting is the ability to clean trees that you intend to hunt next season. I am extremely allergic to poison oak/ivy, and during the late winter/early spring these plants are dormant, making it less likely for me to have a reaction. I try to cut a section covering several inches out of all of these vines around the base of any tree I intend to climb or hang a stand in. This way, by the time I climb the tree, the vines have withered and died. Shooting lanes are also easier to trim without the weight of leaves on limbs and branches. Just be careful not to overdo it, as the woods will look much different after green-up in late spring, and thus, next fall.

By reviewing this past season, you can make adjustments to improve your odds this fall. Like most things in life, you get out of deer hunting what you put into it. Success favors the organized and prepared hunter. ■







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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Nothing in Capt. Tommy Pellegrini's appearance would lead one to believe he is a chef.

But the Houma charter guide has a big confession to make.

"I'd rather cook than fish. It's just easier being in the fishing business. When people get in a boat, they are getting into their happy box. In a restaurant, people are harder to please."

So he's a charter guide, and cooks for fun.

"I cook because I like to see people enjoy good food", he explained. "It's great to come up with something original

"I consider myself a Cajun cook. My mother Carolyn and my grandmothers Nin Pellegrin and Clara Boudreaux Carlos were Cajun cooks from down the bayou — Bayou Dulac and Little Caillou. They cooked stews, gumbos, fried seafood, rice, white beans, red beans and soft potato salad that you put in your gumbo."

Tommy still cooks traditional Cajun, but has branched out into making his own original dishes and is fearless in the kitchen. "I just think of something and I cook it," he grinned.

"Both my wife and I cook, about equally. In a seven-day week, we cook five of them. On Thursdays we go out. The other day, we eat leftovers."

And he is obviously creative. He makes his own Creole seasoning and never cooks anything out of a box, including pancakes, muffins, beignets and biscuits. ■

Balsamic Shrimp has a distinct sweet tang from the honey and the balsamic vinegar, but there is no sour component in its taste profile.

INSET: Tommy Pellegrini is a creative cook and cooks for the family often.

TIP!

If you can't find Guidry's Fresh Cut Creole Seasoning mix in a plastic container in the fresh produce section of the store, you can make your own, using 2 ¼ cups chopped onions, ½ cup chopped bell pepper, ½ cup chopped celery, 1 cup chopped green onions, ¼ cup chopped parsley and five cloves of minced garlic.

BALSAMIC SHRIMP

The idea for this dish came to Tommy while he was watching a television commercial in which honey balsamic vinegar was used to season chicken. "I said, 'What, I never heard of this.'"

"I had some leftover live bait shrimp in my boat's livewell that I used to try this. It resembled traditional New Orleans barbecued shrimp, but had a totally different flavor spectrum. I added Creole seasoning for the salt, oil to lubricate the shrimp and for flavor, and the vinegar just for its flavor.

"This is extremely not spicy. It's flavorful

without being peppery hot. My wife Laurie loved it. My son Eric, who is a part-time charter guide, thought it was great. My daughter Sarah thought it was really good, but she wanted more spice, so she added cayenne pepper at the table."

Like barbecued shrimp, this dish has a lot of broth, but it isn't as thick and oily. Serve it with plenty of French bread to sop up every drop. This isn't a dish for the delicate. Dive into it with your fingers to peel the shrimp and keep a napkin handy. ■

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 1/2 lb. large shrimp, head-on
- 1/4 cup Creole seasoning
- 1 stick of butter, melted
- 1/4 cup Worcestershire Sauce
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 2/3 cup honey
- 1 stick of butter
- 2 1/2 cups Guidry's Fresh Cut Creole Seasoning
- 1 yellow bell pepper, coarsely slivered
- 1 red bell pepper, coarsely slivered

PREPARATION: Serves 4.

Wash the shrimp, place them in a large mixing bowl, then sprinkle them with the Creole seasoning. Mix the melted butter, Worcestershire Sauce, and olive oil, and pour over the shrimp. Mix balsamic vinegar, white wine and honey in a bowl or measuring cup and stir to dissolve the honey. Pour the mixture over the shrimp and stir well to mix. Allow to marinate for 30 minutes. Melt remaining stick of butter in a heavy pot and add Guidry's seasoning and the bell peppers. Cook over high heat until the seasonings are soft, stirring often to prevent sticking. Add the shrimp and stir into the seasonings. Cover and cook on high until the mixture boils. Stir once more, reduce heat to medium-high and cook until the shells of the shrimp begin to separate from the flesh. Do not over-stir or the heads will come off the shrimp. Do not overcook. Serve with French bread to sop the juices.



Cook the seasonings for Balsamic Shrimp until they are soft.

TROUT RECIPE UP NEXT >



Jerald and Glenda Horst are the authors of six excellent books on Louisiana seafood — *The Seafood Bible: Shrimp*, *The Seafood Bible: Crawfish*, *The Seafood Bible: Crabs*, *The Seafood Bible: Oysters*, *The Seafood Bible: Fish: Volume 1* and *The Seafood Bible: Fish: Volume 2*. Jerald and Glenda may be contacted at jerald@rockinghorst.com.



TOMMY'S DELICIOUS TROUT

The background on this dish is ridiculously simple: Tommy didn't spend long hours in the kitchen refining it through trial and error. Instead, I was at his home to cook his Balsamic Shrimp recipe. I told him that we needed two recipes for this column.

"Hmm," he mused a moment, then dug out a plastic bag of speckled trout fillets that we had caught that very morning (see "Caillou Island Junkyard Trout" on page 66). Almost anything wrapped in bacon is good; fresh trout ought to be even better."

The savory smokiness of the bacon melded perfectly with the smooth, mild taste of the fish. We wondered why we hadn't tried this before ourselves. ■

Frying Tommy's Delicious Trout instead of broiling or grilling it plays to Louisianans' love affair with fried seafood.

INGREDIENTS:

8 5-oz fish fillets
2 tbsp. olive oil
Creole seasoning to taste
1 12-oz. package of thick-sliced bacon, cut in half-slices
Round toothpicks
Cooking oil

PREPARATION:

Serves 4.

Trim the fillets of any bone or skin, wash, and cut into thirds. Place in a bowl and add olive oil and Creole seasoning. Mix by hand to coat the fish pieces. Wrap each piece with a half-slice of bacon and pin the bacon in place with a toothpick. Pour 3 inches of cooking oil in a frying pan and heat the oil to 375° F. Add the wrapped pieces of fish one at a time and fry until the bacon is done. Remove and drain.



Fry the bacon-wrapped fish until the bacon is done.

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Sometimes subtle changes with your lure or presentation are all that's needed to get trout with lockjaw to start biting.

TOP 3 TIPS

TO CATCH FINICKY SPECKLED TROUT

SUBTLE CHANGES MIGHT MAKE THE DIFFERENCE WHEN FISH HAVE LOCKJAW

By Devin Denman

Louisiana inshore anglers dream of that often elusive fast-paced trout bite — one so fast and furious specks hit anything tossed into the water.

On those days, you return to the dock with plenty of fish to clean. But what if specks weren't biting that easily? Will you still have anything for the cleaning table back at the marina — or will you go home empty-handed?

Knowing how to adapt when speckled trout are being finicky is what separates anglers who are only successful under great conditions from ones who consistently catch limits.

1. TRY A "SOFTER" PRESENTATION WITH A DROP-SHOT RIG

Fast-moving, aggressive baits can be unappealing to finicky fish. Sometimes a softer presentation of the lure — where it sort of just hangs in the water — is a better bet,

and a drop-shot rig is an excellent solution.

But you don't have to get fancy with it: There's no need for extra swivels and terminal tackle. I keep it simple with a Mustad KVD Drop Shot Hook tied directly to my line with a Palomar knot, leaving a long pigtail to tie a loop into, with which I attach a bank sinker of the appropriate weight.

That pigtail is usually 12 to 18 inches, depending on conditions. You can tie directly to the bank sinker, but the loop allows you to change out weights as the current and depth dictate.

2. GET MORE ACTION WITH A RAPALA KNOT

Most inshore anglers utilize an improved clinch or Palomar knot, but these can restrict a lure's motion. Tying a loop knot lets your line slip in and out of the eye, giving the lure a little more action.

And that might just be the subtle difference you need to get finicky fish to bite.

3. TRY SMALLER BAIT

Sometimes fish see a bait as being just too big to eat. Yes, we all know fish will eat prey half their size — but doing so is extra work. Smaller bait is easier to chase, bite and digest. So presenting a smaller bait is sometimes a good idea.

To do this, simply rip the head off a soft plastic then thread it onto a jighead. Or maybe try downsizing to a MirrOlure Ultralight 4M sinking twitchbait, or a Matrix Mini. Both of these are practical to throw with spinning tackle.

CONCLUSION

It's easy to catch when specks are biting anything that swims. But when they don't, now you have a few tricks up your sleeve to still fill a limit.

Editor's Note: Devin Denman is an avid inshore fisherman who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit lafishblog.com.

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WATCH YOUR LINE FOR MORE BITES

By Andy Crawford

Jig fishermen know one of the keys to catching more bass is concentrating on the fishing line — with any anomaly indicating a fish has picked up the lure, even if the strike isn't felt.

But Pierre Part Bassmaster Elite Series pro Cliff Crochet said he doesn't eyeball his line just when pitching jigs.

"Watch your line no matter what bait you're using, except topwaters," Crochet said.

The four-time Bassmaster Classic qualifier said bass often pick up spinnerbaits, jerkbaits, crankbaits and plastics without transmitting the strike through the line and into the rod. This can happen when

bass swallow a lure while swimming toward an angler, for instance.

Seeing the line jump prevents anglers from missing those strikes or misunderstanding what's happening.

"If you're not watching your line, you might think you hit grass," Crochet said. "The line could jump to the side or just get a little slack in it."

But making a habit of being a line watcher can up your odds of success even when the fish absolutely smash lures.

"Even when they are hitting hard, you'll get a little (advanced) notice because you're eyes will tell you (a strike has occurred)," Crochet explained. "That

way, you won't be as surprised when you feel it.

"When you feel (strikes) with your rod, you might be 50 percent, but when you see (the line jump) with your eyes, you might (catch) 80 percent."

Focusing on the line can be hard on your eyes, especially when using fluorocarbon or small-diameter braid, but Crochet said it can help you avoid that sinking feeling when a huge bass spits a lure at the boat.

"That could be the difference between getting a good hook in (a fish) and getting him in the boat, and not getting a good hook in him and missing him," he said. ■

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MAKE GULP "JERKY" FOR LONGER LASTING LURES

By Devin Denman

Berkley Gulp products have certainly earned a spot in my tackle box.

My personal favorite is the 3-inch shrimp in new penny. I call it "artificial live bait" because it does a great job of imitating live shrimp, without actually being a living, breathing crustacean.

This lure helped me reduce the number of actual live shrimp I'd use, which was great for keeping expenses down on my charter business. After all, costs adds up when you need up to 300 live shrimp for each trip.



With Gulp shrimp, I was able to get lines in the water faster, and ultimately catch more speckled trout.

Gulp lures come in a container containing a stinky liquid that works as a fish attractant.

It works great — but the prob-

lem is that it can over-saturate the lures themselves. When that happens, they get spongy and tear off the hook easily.

But, over the years I learned a pretty nifty trick to save my hard-earned dollars: Just rig them on whatever hook or jighead you plan to fish with, and leave them out in the open air in direct sunlight.

Without the "juice" to keep them moisturized, the lures shrink down to a much smaller size. And when they do, they basically mold themselves onto the jighead or hook and became somewhat permanently attached.

Afterwards, just put the baits (still on the jigheads or hooks) back into the container and let them re-absorb the attractant, and they'll return to their normal size — while retaining the toughness from being dried out.

This tip saved me a ton of time, energy and dollars — and it will work for you, too.

Editor's Note: Devin Denman is an avid inshore fisherman who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit lafishblog.com.

EFFICIENT FISHING KEY TO MORE BASS BITES

By Andy Crawford

VARY RETRIEVE TO DETERMINE PATTERN

Consistently building hefty stringers of bass requires maximizing the time spent on the water — and Pierre Part's Cliff Crochet said that means working every piece of cover for all it's worth.

"Make different retrieves and work different angles to single targets," the Bassmaster Elite Series pro said.

For instance, when he approaches a cypress tree, his goal is to make at least three retrieves past the cover.

He begins with a long cast well past the tree.

"Maybe on that cast, I might retrieve the bait past the tree — just a steady retrieve," Crochet said.

If he doesn't get a bite, he sends the lure back at the tree. But he changes things up a bit.

"When I get closer, I might cast past it and then kill (the lure) when I get to the tree,"

he explained.

If that retrieve doesn't result in a strike, the angler then makes another cast at a different angle. Perhaps he pulls the lure past the opposite side of the tree while pumping the rod to give the lure extra action.

"That way I get three casts on that tree, and I did it efficiently," Crochet said.

But he can do so without sacrificing speed.

"I never quit working down the bank," Crochet said. "You get more casts at the same piece of structure and you're steadily working down the bank.

"It's about being efficient, not going fast."

Varying the retrieve also allows him to figure out what will trigger bites that day.

"Once you figure out what retrieve is most productive, you can spend more time doing that retrieve," Crochet said.



Photo courtesy Bassmaster/Andy Crawford

Pierre Part Elite Series pro Cliff Crochet fishes methodically, working baits around cover from different angles and alternating retrieves until he discovers the pattern triggering bites. **INSET:** Allowing Gulp baits to dry on your jighead will toughen them up, and make them more durable to fish with once they're re-hydrated in the liquid attractant.

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HOW TO KEEP LIVEWELL BASS HEALTHY

By Andy Crawford

Livewells have come a long way over the years. But everyone sometimes struggles to keep bass healthy because ammonia can build up and water temperatures can rise inside the enclosed space over time — especially during brutal summer months.

But Prairieville's Kurt Cook found a modification that ensures noxious gases escape while the water remains as cool as possible in his boat's livewell.

He installed New Pro Products' V-T2 Livewell Ventilation System.

"You just cut the holes in the top of your livewell and screw the vents into place," Cook said.

It's really that easy, but the results are dramatic.

"It lets all that bad gas escape," Cook said.

The vents provide openings for air to circulate while the boat is sitting still, but any movement increases the amount of air exchange because the covers are designed to capture air flow.

"The V-T2 works by any movement of air from a breeze, your trolling motor or running your boat to direct ambient and oxygen-rich air into the livewell that cools the ... water by the processes of convection and evaporative cooling," according to the company's website.


The V-T2 system can be used to retrofit any boat, and finished installation doesn't cause any tripping hazards. Stepping on the covers isn't a problem because the vents are designed from super-tough nylon.

A UV inhibitor is also used in the system, so sun damage is minimized.

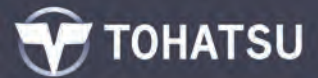
And the company even points out another advantage that goes beyond on-the-water use: It allows livewells to dry out while trailering, thus eliminating any odor or mildew associated with damp, enclosed spaces.

The system, which is made in the United States, is also very inexpensive: Just \$44.99.

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ELITE'S LOWEN JUMPS ON THE 'XPRESS' TRAIN

SHALLOW-WATER SPECIALIST TO FISH OUT OF ALL-WELDED ALUMINUM BOAT IN 2018

By Patrick Bonin

Veteran Bassmaster Elite Series shallow-water specialist Bill Lowen is on a mission to change anglers' perceptions — particularly tournament bass fishermen — on the advantages of an aluminum boat.

To that end, the Indiana angler will be running the original all-welded aluminum Xpress Xclusive Series X21 Pro for the 2018 season.

"I think aluminum has that misconception — it's flat-bottomed and can't do the things that a fiberglass boat can do," Lowen said. "Well, I want to be the one that says to the world, 'This ain't your grandpa's jon boat.'"

"This is a padded hull that can handle big water, and the performance is exactly what you're going to get out of a fiberglass boat, except it's aluminum."

In fact, performance-wise, the only thing Lowen said he's lost is the ability to hold an extra 2 gallons of fuel — his new X21 Pro has a 45-gallon tank.

"But I feel like I'm going to make that up in not having to run as hard to achieve those types of speeds," he said. "If anything, I've gained because it will give me the ability to fish 110 percent like I do,

without having to worry about tearing up my fiberglass.

"And potentially, I have the ability to access shallow water that I never have been able to access before. So for me, it's huge. It's just going to make me attack things a little differently."

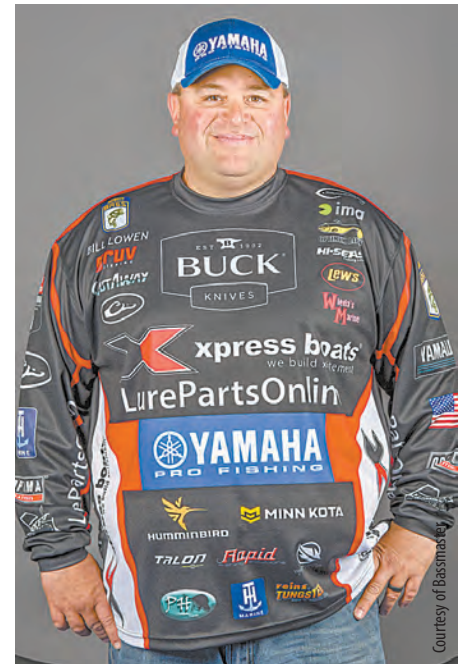
Yamaha's Performance Bulletin on the X21 was an eye-opener for Lowen, who has fished the Elites since its creation in 2006 and has nine Classic appearances and more than \$1 million in career winnings.

"I think what really got my attention was at 5,200 rpms we're in the low 60s on it," he said. "Typically, on a big 21-foot boat, you're having to pour the coals to her to get 64 mph out of her ..."

"I tell you, if I would have had a blindfold on during my first test drive and he would have run me across that lake, I would have had no idea that I was in an aluminum boat. None whatsoever. When I got out of that boat, I was shocked. It was really cool."

A spacious front deck and plenty of storage space also made the Pro Series X21 stand out.

"I believe the front deck is bigger. I had it at home packing all my stuff — rods,



tackle, gear, life jackets — and I was blown away at how much room I have in there," Lowen said. "You might automatically think, 'Aluminum — you're not going to have any storage.'"

"But the more and more time I spend in it, I don't know what to say — I'm just amazed. I'm going to have a lot of fun this year when people ask, 'Hey man, what do you think about your boat?' I'm going to say, 'Park yours and get in this one, and let's go for a ride.'"

Xpress Boats has been family owned and operated by the Herndon family since 1966. Xpress operates out of a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Hot Springs, Ark. producing top of the line boats for nearly any application. See more about the Xpress Xclusive Series X21 Pro Lowen will run at xpressboats.com.



Elite Series Pro Bill Lowen is fishing out of an all-welded aluminum boat from Xpress this season.

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GORE-TEX lines the leather uppers of these 2.64-pound pair of boots, and the open hook eyelets allow for quick lacing. The boot offers padded ankle support, and the Vibram outsole makes quick work of all types of terrain.

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BUBBA BLADE FISHING PLIERS

By Andy Crawford

Bubba Blade has long produced top-quality filet knives, but now it's also offering fishing pliers that should be on any angler's boat.

Bubba Blade's Fishing Pliers are designed to offer maximum control, strength and durability. They come with the company's patented no-slip grip handle just like their knives, so you don't have to worry about the tools slipping out of your hand.

But even better are the new super-tough tungsten cutters that provide dual-cutting blades. One snips braided line, and one cuts hooks. And if the cutter becomes grooved, you can unscrew the blades and replace them for longer tool life.

The pliers' stainless steel jaws are titanium bonded for strength and durability, and feature three sets of crimpers that make quick work of split shot and leader sleeves.

Bubba Blade Fishing Pliers come in a hard case and are outfitted with a lanyard. Retail: \$54.95.

More Info: www.bubbablade.com



New product submissions can be emailed to **Mark Hilzim** at markh@lasmag.com.



GAMAKATSU NAUTILUS LIGHT CIRCLE HOOKS

By Andy Crawford

OK, I'll admit it: I can't fish with circle hooks. I mean the danged things take all the fun out of fishing, since setting the hook almost always results in a miss.

But there's one thing I can't take away from the hooks: Used properly, they have astounding hook-up ratios.

Gamakatsu has finally offered a hook that provides the best of both worlds in their Nautilus Light Circle Hook.

"You can still somewhat set the hook," Gamakatsu's Syd Rives said.

This is a light wire hook developed specifically for fishing fragile live bait — the Nautilus Light is formed from forged high-carbon steel. A nickel silver black finish offers superb corrosion resistance.

Other features include a straight eye and offset point for superior hooking performance.

It's ideal for live-bait and cut-bait anglers.

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More Info: www.gamakatsu.com

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Technology behind them, we can provide light, sensitive, yet powerful rods for all types of inshore saltwater techniques — what anglers know and have come to expect from G. Loomis — and all at a very comfortable price."

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Teresa Sansone

Teresa Sansone, 6, took 3rd place in the Junior Angler's Division in the 2017 New Orleans City Park Big Bass Rodeo with this .55-pound perch.

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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.



Mark Borne

Mark Borne poses with an 8-point he harvested in Tylertown, Miss., in November. The buck weighed 182 pounds and sported 8 points with a 15 3/4-inch inside spread. Borne shot the deer at 130 yards with his .243 Savage rifle.



Ella Deshotel

Ella Deshotel caught this 22-inch redfish on a Zebco 33 under a popping cork using dead shrimp at Cypremort Point.



Ashley Marshall

Ashley Marshall hooked this monster bull red using a purple haze Matrix Shad at the mouth of Northeast Pass in Venice.



Karlee DesJardine

Karlee DesJardine, 12, shot her first deer while hunting with her father, Josh, in Oakdale on Oct. 21, 2017.



Austin Leger

Austin Leger killed his first black fox squirrel on family property in Lafayette.



Keith Smith

Keith Smith of Covington shot this 20-pound turkey, which had a 10 1/2-inch beard and 3/4-inch spurs, while hunting on a private lease in North Alabama.

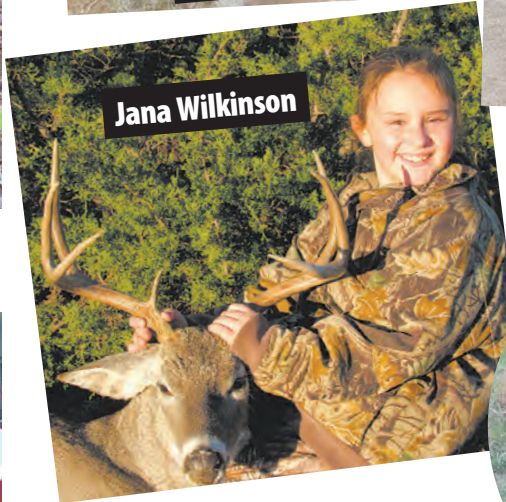


Jordan Wilkinson

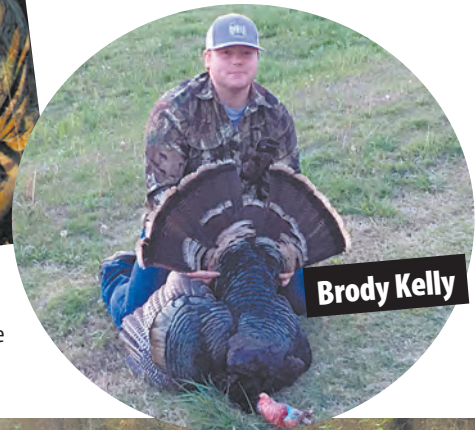


Jansen Wilkinson

Jordan, Jansen and Jana Wilkinson killed their first bucks on their grandparents' lease (Craig and Phyllis Duhon) in Crockett County, Texas.



Jana Wilkinson



Brody Kelly

Brody Kelly with a nice Rio gobbler taken in Oklahoma.



Sherrie Foret

LEFT: In from Florida to redfish with her father-in-law Carroll Foret and her husband Brad, Sherrie Foret hooked these nice reds in Golden Meadow.



Larry Richardson

Larry Richardson poses with a 42-inch gar caught on an 8-weight fly rod while fishing with Capt. Al out of Cypress Cove Marina in Venice.



Logan McGaha

Logan McGaha, 9, (right) killed his first buck when he took a 130-yard shot with his .243 and dropped this big-bodied 11-point in Sabine Parish. He is pictured with his brother, Dylan.

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FISHING REGULATIONS



2018

These regulations are unofficial. For official regulations, always check the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries pamphlet and/or the federal pamphlet. www.wlf.louisiana.gov

SALTWATER

STATE REGULATIONS (0-10.357 miles[^])

FISH Species	Minimum Length	Bag Limit (per person)
Greater Amberjack*~	34" FL	1/day*
Lesser Amberjack, Banded Rudderfish*	14-22" FL	5/day (aggregate)
Yellowfin Tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin Tuna	73" CFL	1 per vessel per year*
Bigeye Tuna	27" CFL	None
Blue Marlin	99" LJFL	None
White Marlin	66" LJFL	None
Sailfish	63" LJFL	None
Swordfish*	29" CL or 33 lbs. DW	5 per vessel per trip
Cobia (ling or lemon fish)	33" FL	2/day
Drum, Black	16" TL	5/day#
Drum, Red (redfish)	16" TL	5/day#
Flounder, Southern	None	10/day
Groupers*		
Gag [^] & Black [^]	24" TL	4/day (aggregate)*
Nassau & Goliath	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS	
Red [^] & Yellowfin [^]	20" TL	
Scamp [^]	16" TL	
Atlantic Sharpnose & Bonnethead shark@	None	1/day
Other sharks (except prohibited species)@	54" FL	1/day/vessel/aggregate
King Mackerel*	24" FL	2/day
Spanish Mackerel*	12" FL	15/day
Striped mullet	None	100 pounds/day
Black seabass	None	None
Hogfish	12" FL	5/day
Seatrout, Spotted (Speckled Trout)	12" TL*	25/day*
Red Snapper*	16" TL	2/day*
Other Snapper		
Mutton Snapper	16" TL	10 in aggregate*
Cubera, Yellowtail, Gray (mangrove)	12" TL	
Queen, Blackfin, Silk, Wenchman	None	
Vermilion Snapper	10" TL	
Schoolmaster, Dog, Mahogany	None	None
Gray Triggerfish*	14" FL	2/day in aggregate
Lane Snapper	8" TL	
Almaco Jack, Goldface Tilefish, & Blueline Tilefish	None	20/person/day in aggregate*
Blackline Tilefish, Anchor Tilefish	None	None
Tripletail	18" TL	5/day

CFL = curved fork length LJFL = lower jaw fork length CL = carcass length
 DW = dressed weight LJTF = lower jaw to tail fork FL = fork length

FRESHWATER

FISH Species	Minimum Size Limit	Bag Limit (per person)
Crappie	None	50/day*
Buffalo Fish	16" TL	25/day
Freshwater Drum (Gaspergou)	12" TL	25/day
Channel Catfish	11" TL*	***
Blue Catfish	12" TL*	***
Bowfin	16" TL	None
Flathead Catfish	14" TL*	***
Crawfish	None	150 lbs./day
Paddlefish	30" max LJFL	2*
Shad	None	50 lbs./day
Black Bass (largemouth & spotted)	None*	10/day*
Striped Bass or Hybrid Striped Bass	**	5/day*
Sturgeon	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS	
White Bass	None	50/day*
Yellow Bass	None	50/day*

* see exceptions in pamphlet. ** no more than two may exceed 30 inches.
 *** catfish limit is 100 in aggregate; however, 25 fish in aggregate may be undersized.
 # only one fish may exceed 27 inches. @Shark season is closed between April 1 and June 30.
[^] Closed season for gag grouper Jan. 1 - May 31. Closed season for black, red, yellowfin, yellowmouth & scamp grouper from Feb. 1 - March 31. ~ Closed season for greater amberjack from Jan. 27 - June 30. " Closed season on gray triggerfish Jan. 16 - Feb. 28 and June 1-30.

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From The
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To The
Blue Water



230CC



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March 2018

Date	Sunrise	Sunset
1st	6:26 a.m.	5:59 p.m.
2nd	6:25 a.m.	6:00 p.m.
3rd	6:24 a.m.	6:01 p.m.
4th	6:23 a.m.	6:02 p.m.
5th	6:22 a.m.	6:02 p.m.
6th	6:21 a.m.	6:03 p.m.
7th	6:19 a.m.	6:04 p.m.
8th	6:18 a.m.	6:04 p.m.
9th	6:17 a.m.	6:05 p.m.
10th	6:16 a.m.	6:05 p.m.
11th	7:15 a.m.	7:06 p.m.

Date	Sunrise	Sunset
12th	7:14 a.m.	7:07 p.m.
13th	7:12 a.m.	7:07 p.m.
14th	7:11 a.m.	7:08 p.m.
15th	7:10 a.m.	7:09 p.m.
16th	7:09 a.m.	7:09 p.m.
17th	7:08 a.m.	7:10 p.m.
18th	7:07 a.m.	7:11 p.m.
19th	7:05 a.m.	7:11 p.m.
20th	7:04 a.m.	7:12 p.m.
21st	7:03 a.m.	7:12 p.m.
22nd	7:02 a.m.	7:13 p.m.

Date	Sunrise	Sunset
23rd	7:00 a.m.	7:14 p.m.
24th	6:59 a.m.	7:14 p.m.
25th	6:58 a.m.	7:15 p.m.
26th	6:57 a.m.	7:15 p.m.
27th	6:56 a.m.	7:16 p.m.
28th	6:54 a.m.	7:17 p.m.
29th	6:53 a.m.	7:17 p.m.
30th	6:52 a.m.	7:18 p.m.
31st	6:51 a.m.	7:18 p.m.

*Time based on New Orleans, sunrise/sunset; source U.S. Naval Observatory. Corrections (in minutes)

Alexandria
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+12/+8

Baton Rouge
Rise/Set
+5/+4

Lafayette
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+8/+7

Lake Charles
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+13/+12

Monroe
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+10/+5

Shreveport
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ASTRO TABLES

Astro Tables is far more effective than "moon tables," because it takes into account critical solar energies as well as lunar.

The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black bars).

The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Noon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each... 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)

Astro Tables is a quick-reference version of its parent publication, the **PrimeTimes Wall Calendar**, which is recommended for those wishing more complete data on the best days and times to go fishing and hunting for the entire year (see "Available Products" below).

PrimeTimes' forecasts are based on solar/lunar research at a leading college of astrophysics and our own research pond/wildlife area. Annual data is supplied by the U.S. Naval Observatory. All times are adjusted to the center of your time zone and for Daylight Saving Time.

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:

The 2018 PrimeTimes Wall Calendar. \$12.95 (plus \$4 s&h). Know the best days, best times, and their relative strengths for all of 2018 with this information-packed, full-color, 11-inch by 17-inch, graphic peaks

-and-valleys forecaster. Includes rise and set times for the sun and moon, space to log your catches, "Timely Tips," plus fish and game symbols showing you each month's don't-miss periods. Also includes exclusive summary charts revealing the best and worst days of 2018, the year's best periods, a look ahead at 2019, and more. Comes with FREE 2018 Astro Tables pocket calendar, which sells separately for \$7.95, plus \$3 s&h.

Book: "How to Know When to Go" by Rick Taylor. \$14.95 (plus \$4 s&h). 100 pages, 43 illustrations. A comprehensive look at the main factors influencing fish and game activity periods, plus how to devise an effective when-to-go game plan using any year's PrimeTimes calendars. Individual assessments of bass, panfish, deer, turkey, and more.

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BEST DAYS					
2018	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	VALUE
MAR					
Thu 1	█	█	█	█	78
Fri 2	█	█	█	█	67
Sat 3	█	█	█	█	53

Sun 4	█	█	█	█	40
Mon 5	█	█	█	█	31
Tue 6	█	█	█	█	28
Wed 7	█	█	█	█	25
Thu 8	█	█	█	█	28
Fri 9	█	█	█	█	37
Sat 10	█	█	█	█	25

Sun 11	█	█	█	█	19
Mon 12	█	█	█	█	19
Tue 13	█	█	█	█	19
Wed 14	█	█	█	█	32
Thu 15	█	█	█	█	44
Fri 16	█	█	█	█	57
Sat 17	█	█	█	█	67

Sun 18	█	█	█	█	60
Mon 19	█	█	█	█	53
Tue 20	█	█	█	█	47
Wed 21	█	█	█	█	45
Thu 22	█	█	█	█	48
Fri 23	█	█	█	█	55
Sat 24	█	█	█	█	67

Sun 25	█	█	█	█	58
Mon 26	█	█	█	█	53
Tue 27	█	█	█	█	50
Wed 28	█	█	█	█	57
Thu 29	█	█	█	█	65
Fri 30	█	█	█	█	72
Sat 31	█	█	█	█	75

25 50 75
AVERAGE

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LUNAR PERIODS						TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED	
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT				
5:59 pm	11:19 pm - Midnight	6:33 am	10:43 am - 1:39 pm	☉	☾	☉	FULL
7:06 pm	Midnight - 2:01 am	7:14 am	11:44 am - 2:26 pm	☉	☾	☉	
8:10 pm	12:19 am - 2:45 am	7:51 am	12:44 pm - 3:10 pm	☉	☾	☉	
9:13 pm	1:18 am - 3:26 am	8:26 am	1:43 pm - 3:51 pm	☉	☾	☉	
10:13 pm	2:14 am - 4:06 am	9:01 am	2:39 pm - 4:31 pm	☉	☾	☉	
11:11 pm	3:08 am - 4:46 am	9:36 am	3:33 pm - 5:11 pm	☉	☾	☉	
12:08 am	4:01 am - 5:27 am	10:12 am	4:26 pm - 5:52 pm	☉	☾	☉	
1:03 am	4:53 am - 6:09 am	10:51 am	5:18 pm - 6:34 pm	☉	☾	☉	
1:55 am	5:44 am - 6:52 am	11:32 am	6:09 pm - 7:17 pm	☉	☾	☉	HALF
	6:33 am - 7:39 am	12:17 pm	6:58 pm - 8:04 pm	☉	☾	☉	LOW
3:44 am	8:21 am - 9:27 am	2:05 pm	8:46 pm - 9:52 pm	☉	☾	☉	APOGEE & DST
4:30 am	9:08 am - 10:16 am	2:56 pm	9:33 pm - 10:41 pm	☉	☾	☉	
5:13 am	9:54 am - 11:06 am	3:49 pm	10:19 pm - 11:31 pm	☉	☾	☉	
5:52 am	10:36 am - 11:58 am	4:45 pm	11:01 pm - 12:23 am	☉	☾	☉	
6:29 am	11:17 am - 12:49 pm	5:42 pm	11:42 pm - Midnight	☉	☾	☉	
7:04 am	11:57 am - 1:43 pm	6:41 pm	Midnight - 1:14 am	☉	☾	☉	
7:38 am	12:35 pm - 2:37 pm	7:40 pm	12:22 am - 2:08 am	☉	☾	☉	NEW
8:12 am	1:15 pm - 3:31 pm	8:41 pm	1:00 am - 3:02 am	☉	☾	☉	
8:46 am	1:55 pm - 4:27 pm	9:43 pm	1:40 am - 3:56 am	☉	☾	☉	
9:22 am	2:36 pm - 5:26 pm	10:46 pm	2:20 am - 4:52 am	☉	☾	☉	Spring
10:01 am	3:22 pm - 6:24 pm	11:51 pm	3:01 am - 5:51 am	☉	☾	☉	
10:44 am	4:11 pm - 7:23 pm		3:47 am - 6:49 am	☉	☾	☉	
11:32 am	5:04 pm - 8:24 pm	12:55 am	4:36 am - 7:48 am	☉	☾	☉	HIGH
12:26 pm	6:01 pm - 9:23 pm	1:58 am	5:29 am - 8:49 am	☉	☾	☉	HALF
1:26 pm	7:01 pm - 10:21 pm	2:58 am	6:26 am - 9:48 am	☉	☾	☉	
2:29 pm	8:03 pm - 11:15 pm	3:53 am	7:26 am - 10:46 am	☉	☾	☉	Perigee
3:35 pm	9:04 pm - 12:06 am	4:43 am	8:28 am - 11:40 am	☉	☾	☉	
4:42 pm	10:04 pm - 12:54 am	5:28 am	9:29 am - 12:31 pm	☉	☾	☉	
5:48 pm	11:04 pm - Midnight	6:08 am	10:29 am - 1:19 pm	☉	☾	☉	
6:52 pm	Midnight - 1:36 am	6:46 am	11:29 am - 2:01 pm	☉	☾	☉	
7:55 pm	12:02 am - 2:18 am	7:21 am	12:27 pm - 2:43 pm	☉	☾	☉	FULL

ANY LUNAR PERIOD IS ENHANCED WHEN IT OVERLAPS A KEY SOLAR PERIOD. THE BEST OF THESE OVERLAPS ARE DESIGNATED BY THE SUN SYMBOLS:
☉ = DAWN ☀ = HIGH NOON ☹ = DUSK
WHILE THE LESSER MOONRISE AND -SET OVERLAPS (ABOUT 30 MIN. BEFORE AND AFTER THE LISTED TIME) ARE DESIGNATED BY BOLD BLACK TYPE.

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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

SUNDAY MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY

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1	2	3
7:41 am 10:26 pm	-0.3 L 0.7 H	8:22 am 11:36 pm
8:45 am 0.1 L		
4	5	6
1:03 am 8:14 pm 12:26 pm 7:34 pm	0.4 H 0.3 L	12:12 pm 9:57 pm
0.5 H 0.1 L		
7	8	9
1:18 pm 0.7 H	12:38 pm 11:47 pm	1:08 am 2:06 pm
0.6 H 0.0 L		-0.1 L 0.7 H
10	11	12
3:08 am 4:06 pm	3:08 am 4:06 pm	3:08 am 4:06 pm
0.2 L 0.8 H		
13	14	15
6:27 am 8:24 pm	6:27 am 8:24 pm	6:27 am 8:24 pm
-0.1 L 0.8 H		
16	17	NM
7:03 am 9:20 pm	7:03 am 9:20 pm	7:03 am 9:20 pm
-0.1 L 0.8 H		
18	19	20
12:29 am 7:42 pm 12:11 pm 6:38 pm	0.6 H 0.3 L	2:22 am 6:29 am 11:59 am 8:27 pm
0.5 H 0.4 L		0.5 H 0.2 L
21	22	23
12:16 pm 10:06 pm	12:16 pm 10:06 pm	12:16 pm 10:06 pm
0.7 H 0.1 L		
24	25	26
12:29 am 7:42 pm 12:11 pm 6:38 pm	0.6 H 0.3 L	2:22 am 6:29 am 11:59 am 8:27 pm
0.5 H 0.2 L		0.5 H 0.2 L
27	28	29
5:36 am 7:57 pm	5:36 am 7:57 pm	5:36 am 7:57 pm
-0.1 L 1.0 H		
30	31	FM
6:28 am 9:30 pm	6:28 am 9:30 pm	6:28 am 9:30 pm
0.0 L 0.9 H		

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1	2	3
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Sportsman FISHING HOTSPOTS

TROLLING FOR SPRINGTIME TROUT

Stan Mathes likes trolling soft plastics in deeper canals for March specks.

Many anglers love to know great fishing locations, and although that's certainly important, avid angler Stan Mathes puts a lot of thought into his technique this time of year.

In fact, despite the relatively chilly month, he throws topwater baits to big speckled trout in the marshes around Delacroix, Hopedale and Pointe a la Hache.

He said there's one factor, though, out of anglers' control that can have a big impact on the fishing in the area.

"The biggest factor now, with all the breaks in the river and levees on the east side, is how much river water comes down because the river water is so much colder," he said.

Assuming the river is down, Mathes fishes the inside marsh, and finds water clarity to be ultra important.

"I will start fishing the inside bays where I can find clean water," he said.

When drifting in the bays, Mathes throws

MirrOlure She Dogs in bone and purple colors.

Mathes said anglers shouldn't expect to catch numbers of trout, but the quality can be impressive.

"You might only catch 15 or 20 fish, but I'm talking solid 2-, 3-, 4-pound fish," he said. "There's nothing better than a topwater strike."

Generally, topwater baits catch much larger trout than soft-plastic swimbaits, and Mathes thinks it's purely due to the size of the lure.

"Every now and then you get a smaller trout that thinks he's King Kong and he's going to hit it, but the big fish that can handle a bait that's 4, 5, 6 inches long — you're going to (catch) them," he said.

Bigger baits allow fish to expel less energy, and get more food for the calories burned chasing it.

"Those are the big trout that made the winter in the marsh, they're hungry, and they need something big to eat," Mathes said. "They're not looking for a half-inch shrimp coming out the marsh."

Many elements have to line up for

topwater fishing to be good, and if Mathes isn't having success on topwater, he opts for a different method.

"If I can't find them on the top, I'll troll for them," he said. "I love to troll in the springtime."

Mathes trolls in canals and deep passes all across the marsh. When doing so, he likes to troll a variety of baits behind the boat.

"I usually put out four lines: I'll put out a

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Rat-L-Trap, a sinking MirrOlure and a couple of pieces of plastic.”

Although he experiments, he doesn't feel like having tons of different colors is necessary during the colder months.

“A lot of times that time of year, they're not particular because they're so damn hungry, they'll eat anything that moves.”

One of the biggest keys when trolling is going at the correct speed. Most boats can't go slow enough with an out-board, so Mathes, along with many other trollers, relies on his trolling motor.

“I don't like to go anything less than 1.5 mph, and I don't like to do anything over 2 mph,” he said. “Optimal for me is about 1.8, and I can do that with my trolling motor.” ■

- Joel Masson

'BED'TIME STORIES ON CANEY LAKE

Tyler Stewart graduated from college, finished his apprenticeship and is taking his skills into the workplace. And the point of this? That can help you catch more fish.

How? He is a graduate of University of Louisiana Monroe, where he was a highly successful college tournament fisherman. His “apprenticeship” included regular sessions catching bass on Caney Lake. And now he has gone to work in his first season as a professional bass angler. That helps readers catch more fish because he's glad to share what he knows for anglers back home.

Like the fact that this is a great month to catch largemouth bass on the beds around the bank on Caney.

“It doesn't get any better for bass fishermen than this month on Caney, whether you just want to catch some good fish or want to catch the fish of a lifetime,” Stewart said. “During March, most of the fish are spawning. What I like to do is turn on my trolling motor and cruise the bank looking for beds. You'll see them as light

spots on the dark bottom.”

On Caney, those beds are usually 2 to 5 feet deep and are easy to spot because of the crystal clear water on the lake. When he spots a bed and sees a fish, he tries to first determine the mood of the fish.

“By that I mean is the fish spooky or pretty confidently holding to the bed,” he said. “If it's spooky, I'll back off and make long casts with something like a wacky rig or a Senko. If the fish is locked in, I'll just lower the Power-Poles down and cast something like a white V&M J-Bug creature. I usually throw the bait just past the bed and work in to the bed. Sometimes the fish will hit it in three to five casts. Sometimes it takes more. Be patient.”

If it's windy or the water is off color, Stewart suggests finding patchy spots of grass and throwing a swim jig, ChatterBait or a Rat-L-Trap around and over the grass. Either way, he does encourage anglers who are bed fishing to take pictures of their fish, handle them gently and release

them this time of year —especially if they are loaded with eggs.

The 5,000-acre Jackson Parish lake is well known for lunker bass, and has a limit of eight fish daily, with a protected slot limit of 15 to 19 inches. No more than two fish may exceed 19 inches maximum total length. However, the LDWF is considering changing that limit, so anglers fishing the lake need to ensure they know slot regulations.

Stewart is concerned that over time, if that change is made, it could impact the lake. “Right now, you can go catch 15 pounds of fish in the slot and have to throw them back. But if you get to keep them, more and more tournaments will start coming there because everybody will want to come fish it. Over time, I think it might hurt it, but because so many tournaments will go there if the slot is lifted, it's going to get a lot of pressure.” ■

- Kinny Haddox

Tyler Stewart and his girlfriend Allison Searcy with three big Caney bed bass.



HOW TO CATCH SPAWNING BASS AT TOLEDO BEND

When I see a big ol' bass on a bed in March at Toledo Bend, one of the techniques I use to get her to bite, even though she really doesn't want to, is "soak" the soft plastic I'm casting.

I'll leave that trick worm, wacky worm or Senko right in front of her face until she can't stand staring at it for a minute, two minutes or, even longer, and finally engulfs it. If it doesn't happen, rinse and repeat, as they say.

That's my most effective method of putting spawning bass in the boat at this time of the year. Soak the bait — deadstick it — that's something that's been working for years, particularly on hawgs on their nest.

It's that time of year, early spring, when Toledo Bend's bass fishing shines. As I write this, I cannot wait for that time. From this point on it's going to get better and better for bass fishing success on this great border lake shared by Louisiana and Texas.

I tell you what, a lot of people are fishing right now, cold or no cold, despite water temperatures as low as the middle 40s, with some in the

low 50s.

A 10-pounder was weighed this past weekend, and the B.A.S.S. collegiate anglers had a good run until an eerie, heavy fog blanketing the water ended their tournament prematurely. I'll say this: 14 10-pound plus bass have been weighed in the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program since May, and I expect that number to rise and this year's total to possibly break last year's total of 72. It's going to be a pleasure to see boats line up behind Toledo Town and Tackle to weigh lunkers in March.

In fact, those big girls should start showing up with regularity in late February. You see, whether the water's 45 degrees or 55 degrees, when those huge female bass are swollen with eggs and ready to lay them, they will. They don't have a clock or thermometer in their body.

The surest way of finding spawning bass, after some days of 65- to 75-degree weather, of course, is to look for the "dirt spots," clean, sandy bottoms on the other side of the grass. Look for that inside grass line ... The hard bottom area can be no bigger than your boat or stretch

John Dean III of Overland Park, Kansas, holds a 4 1/2-pound bass he caught in the spring of 2017 at Toledo Bend while fishing with his father, Louisiana Sportsman columnist and Toledo Bend guide John Dean.

continued on page 176 >

WHERE AMATEURS

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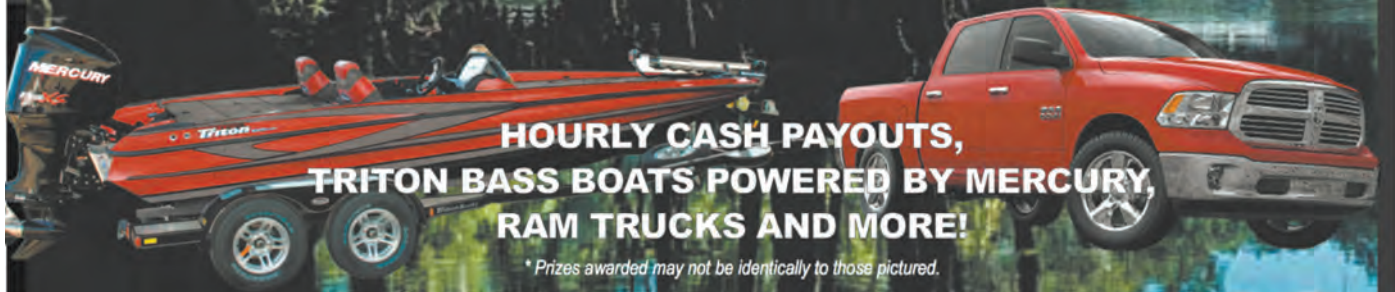
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Toledo Bend continued

for half-a-mile.

The pool stage now is in the 167-range like it has been since late summer due to the construction at the dam. For the second straight spring, for sure, I don't anticipate a high-water period, so fishing for bass in the bushes won't come into play (except for isolated places up north).

The spawning bass you're in search of should be in 3- to 6-foot depths. Sight fishing will be the real deal when they lock up on their beds. And that means a steady diet of soft plastics such as Carolina rigs, which I use 75 percent of the time, trick worms, wacky worms and Senkos.

Also try Flukes and the old reliable U99s with 3/0 EWG hooks and a 1/32- or 1/64-weight to keep the nose down. Otherwise the slightest of breezes can move your presentation out of the strike zone before you want it to leave.

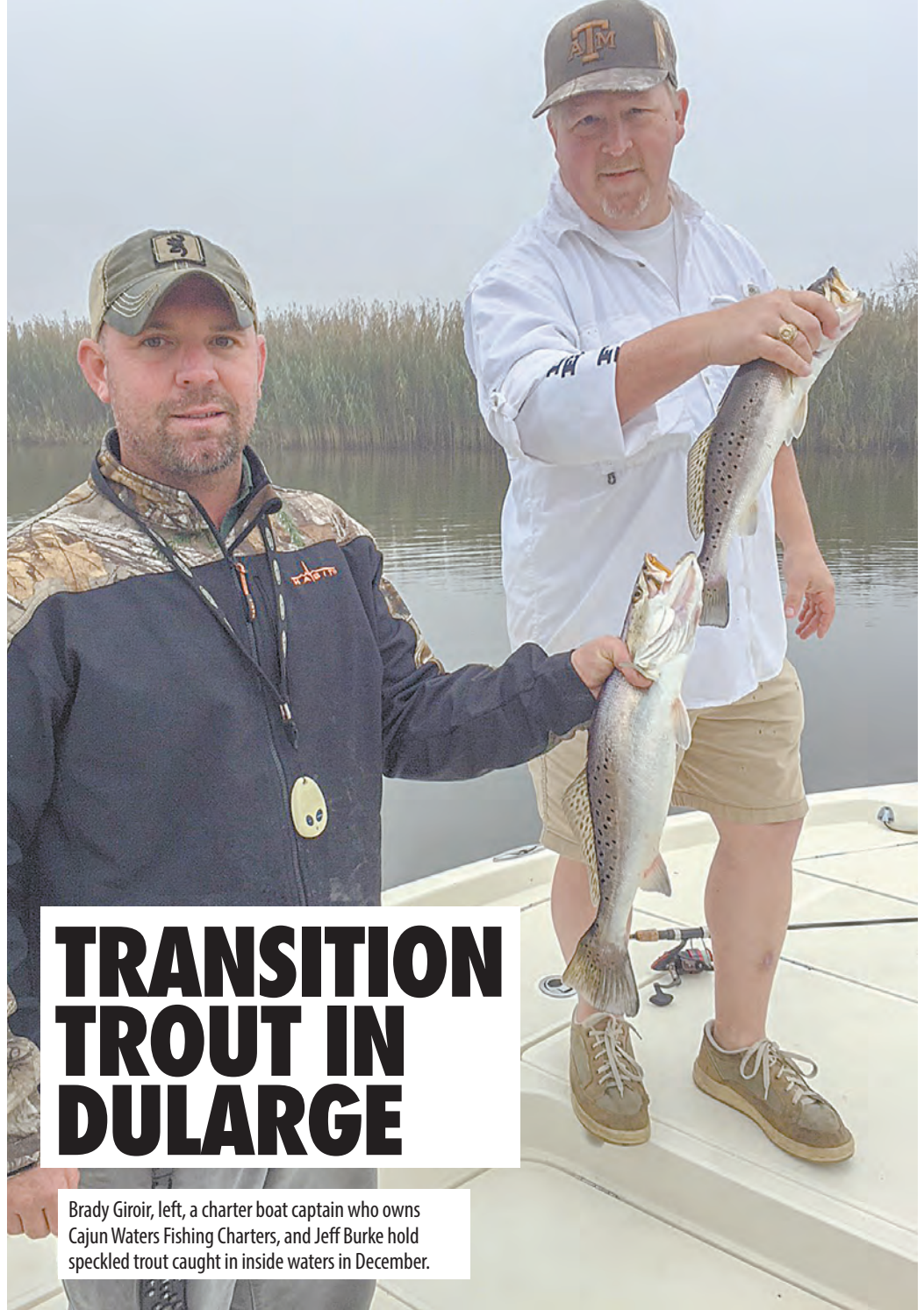
Top color for the soft plastics? No question, the No. 1 hue is watermelon/red, followed by green pumpkin/red.

Remember, not all the fish will be spawning. But you can intercept migrating bass in the "highways" — drains, ditches, creeks, (whatever terminology you use) and catch them on red Rat-L-Traps, gold/orange jerkbaits and shad-colored ChatterBaits.

I added a Minn Kota Ul Tracks I-Pilot to my Skeeter. After using a hand-controlled trolling motor for four decades, I can't wait for such a useful tool to keep me where I want to be.

If you want to catch bass in March, and see how those new trolling motors work to keep you on the fish, 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



TRANSITION TROUT IN DULARGE

Brady Giroir, left, a charter boat captain who owns Cajun Waters Fishing Charters, and Jeff Burke hold speckled trout caught in inside waters in December.

Want to find and catch speckled trout in the Dularge area in March?

Fish the inland lakes to catch the fish as they move out of the deeper canals and holes on their way to near-offshore waters to spawn, advises Brady Giroir of Houma, a seven-year veteran charter boat captain who owns Cajun Waters Fishing Charters (985-870-0311). Specifically, he said, target the points and flats of Lake Mechant, Mud Lake, Sister Lake and Monclouse Bay, all in the Grand Pass area.

"They (speckled trout) should be in transition, moving out of the marsh, heading into the lakes,

then heading offshore to go spawn," Giroir said.

"It's a lot nicer when you can catch them inshore. By that time, you might have birds working and you can catch them under the birds," he said, noting the latter often happens if it's warm in early spring.

For sure, he said, find clean water, and fish 4 to 6 feet deep over shells and, even mud bottoms, particularly where there are current lines. The key is to fish on the lee side of a body of water because, otherwise, the water gets churned up and muddied by the wind.

"Direction (side of the lake) doesn't matter as long as you're on the calm side," Giroir said.

Whatever wind there is, use it to your advantage in your quest to catch speckled trout.

"Get the wind to your back. Let the wind move you. The more you run the trolling motor in shallow areas, the more you scare the fish," he said. "When you catch a fish, Power-Pole down or put down the anchor."

Giroir said anglers can catch speckled trout in those areas by tightlining on the bottom or by fishing with a popping cork.

Artificial lures are all you need — no live bait is necessary.

The Houma saltwater fishing guide's preferences are bunker-colored Tsunami swimbaits and Cajun pepper and chicken-on-a-chain, purple/gold and avocado Bayou Chub Minnows. He's getting hooked, and so are the fish, on a new "coastal candy" Berkley Rattle Shrimp fished 1 ½ feet under a popping cork, one that makes an aggressive pop when it's pulled.

Those soft plastics will net you fish averaging 12 to 14 inches long, with the occasional 16-incher, he said. If you want bigger speckled trout, try topwaters, such as a blue/silver Top Dog or a 3-inch chartreuse Zara Spook. Sometimes those artificial lures will trigger bites from fish averaging 2 and 3 pounds, perhaps even a 4- or 5-pounder.

Whatever you use this time of year, look for current lines and points with baitfish, such as mullet, flicking on top of the water.

When Giroir goes on a March trip, he usually starts on the north end of Lake Mechant, then works his way south to Sister Lake.

"I usually like to go to the farthest spot and work my way back," he said. ■

- Don Shoopman

Delacroix up next >



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DESTINATION DELACROIX

Capt. Chad Dufrene (985-637-6357) is trying to think positive after this year's brutal winter.

"I'm hoping those Arctic blasts won't have had a detrimental effect on our speckled trout," he said. "I know we did have a fish kill after the first big freeze, because I saw gulls and pelicans in a feeding frenzy on the carcasses of speckled trout in Lake Lery. After the second Arctic blast I saw the same thing in Grand Lake. I'm hoping that was a very limited effect, but I didn't do a wide search so I don't know how extensive the fish kill actually was, although by the time March gets here we



Capt. Chad Dufrene caught this 8-pound redfish in Baker's Bay on a Bomber Mud Minnow.

should have a pretty good idea."

Nevertheless, Dufrene said he plans to fish this month like every other March.

"I'll target the transition areas, the various bays and lakes and bayous these trout traverse every year about this time," he said. "A frigid cold February could definitely delay trout action for a couple weeks, and a real good spell of warmer weather could speed it up, but generally, March means transition areas. That means Point Fienne, Bay Jack, Bakers Bay, Four Horse Lake, Pato Cabell0 — all those areas start turning on. If it's still chilly try anywhere along the Twin Pipeline or any deeper holes and canals and bayous."

Dufrene said live shrimp is the best bait if it's available, but soft plastics should do the trick.

"I like to throw double- or single-rigged plastics in the current lines off points," he said. "I doubt you'll see much bird action simply because I suspect the shrimp will be very small due to the cold winter, but the trout should be in the current lines feeding on minnows or anything else swept along it."

Dufrene said the redfish action should be solid, with fish spread out from fringe bays to deep interior ponds.

"Nice sized reds should be on the points in the big lakes and bays like Oak River Bay, Lake Campo, Baker's Bay and others," he said. "Just park a dead shrimp under a cork at a point right up against the bank and you'll catch them. You'll also find reds inside the shallow ponds that have grass. Throw weedless spoons or spinners in pockets and coves along the edges of the grass, and you'll get your rod bent."

"I think we'll have a lot of 16- to 18"-inch redfish this month, and a lot of really big reds also. All in all, I expect a great month." ■

- Rusty Tardo

False River up next >

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KEYS TO FALSE RIVER SPAWNING BASS

False River hasn't been on anyone's radar for years, since it was dropped from the state Quality Lakes system in the wake of siltation that wrecked what once was a legendary fishery.

But there are signs the old Mississippi River oxbow could be on the rise again, thanks to a restoration project.

"It's not what it once was, but it's definitely showing some potential," Addis tournament angler Blake Bourque said.

Spring brings to mind shallow beds and big bass, and Bourque said that's going to be happening on the lake this month — but it might be delayed this year.

"Usually, the bass would begin to spawn in late February, have a big wave in March and then another small wave in early April," Bourque said. "This year, with the weather we've had, I think the fish will not move up to spawn until late March."



When water temperatures warm enough to allow False River bass to move to the banks, Addis angler Blake Bourque uses a Mister Twister Flip'n Out to put fish in the boat.

Whenever it happens, Bourque said it'll be time to work shallows all around the lake, targeting 1- to 6-foot depths.

"Mostly, I'm targeting shallow flats that are blocked from the wind and have good, hard bottom," he explained. "I've seen them so shallow their backs were

just covered."

Fish also move into the canals on the north and south ends of the lake.

"The fish will get in the bushes and spawn," Bourque said.

The restoration project also has provided perfect spawning areas.

"They ... dumped gravel on the south flats," Bourque said. "I found (the gravel areas) with my side imaging/down imaging unit."

Sight-fishing isn't usually a part of his plan, since water normally is too murky to allow him to actually put eyes on bedding bass.

"The way I determine if fish are on the beds is the (bass) will swat at the bait, and I can see fish flash," Bourque said.

He said he chooses a bait that False River bass simply can't resist.

"For the spawn, I will be shallow, throwing the Mister Twister Flip'n Out," Bourque said. "I'm not sure what it is about that bait, but they absolutely crush it."

His choice of tackle includes a 7-foot-3-inch medium-heavy Duckett Micro Magic rod and an 8.3:1 Lew's reel spooled with 17-pound Berkley Vanish fluorocarbon. ■

- Andy Crawford



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Spring crappie techniques are generally pretty standard — single-poling, jiggling trees, spider-rigging and the like. But sometimes you can meld crappie methods with a bit of a bass approach and pick up a mess of crappie faster than you imagined.

This is a good time to do just that on Lake Bistineau south of Minden. Even though anglers on the 15,000-acre lake seem to be constantly battling giant salvinia, the patches of floating grass can actually hold a lot of fish — especially crappie in the spring.

“If you are willing to take some time to find them, there are pockets in the salvinia patches that are almost like coves,” Monroe fisherman John Jones said.

“It takes some effort, but you can slowly work your way up into the weeds, find open pockets and kind of flip or pitch your bait into the openings. You’ll be surprised how many of them hold crappie.”

All of these “coves” don’t hold fish, but once you find the ones that do, you can replicate the same approach around the lake.



John Jones with two nice Bistineau springtime crappie.

Flipping a bait for crappie isn’t a normal technique, but it does work, Jones said.

“We fish with a 10-foot crappie pole and keep out about a pole’s length of line. We use a small spinning reel with the drag set fairly tight,” Jones says. “You have to be quiet and ease up to the

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Salvinia continued

openings. The best technique seems to be flipping a small jig with a small cork into the openings."

Jones said jigs seem to work better than shiners, and you can control the bait in the small openings better as well. You don't fish deep using this method, only a foot and a half or 2 feet deep. You normally only catch one or two in a spot, unlike deeper top fishing, but you can catch plenty of fish this way.

Bistineau is narrow, winding reservoir that covers part of Webster, Bossier and Bienville Parishes. It offers a lot more than just catching crappie.

"Honestly, as a photographer, I just love going there because of the cypress trees, the moss and the scenery. It's amazing," he said. Smaller line and jigs work best in this type fishing. Hair jigs or plastics in black and chartreuse work well. Once you locate a few spots holding fish, the best way to add to your catch is just go back and forth working the spots you've had success in. Sometimes the wind will shift the pockets of salvinia and you have to modify exactly where you fish, but the crappie will still be in the same general areas.

"It's a lot like bass fishing because you are constantly on the move and flipping a bait up into cover instead of just holding a pole or casting and reeling a small spinner," he said. "It's a good change of pace, and productive as well." ■

- Kinny Haddox



Catching reds at the mouth of the Mississippi River this month is as easy as running to one of the exterior bays, Capt. Brent Roy said.

Photo courtesy Capt. Brent Roy

REDFISH PROWLING VENICE BAYS

Winter makes for tough fishing at the mouth of the Mississippi River, but things are on the upswing this month as redfish invade the exterior bays around Venice.

And Venice Charters Unlimited's Capt. Brent Roy said getting in on some of the action is pretty straightforward.

"Find clean, green water and bait to catch redfish," Roy said. "If you can find those things, and a little tidal movement, you'll find fish."

He said reds can be in shallow ponds if everything lines up, and then numbers can add up quickly.

"You can catch them on spoons, especially in March," Roy said.

But, by and large, this is an exterior bay game. "Everything from Pass a Loutre to South Pass will hold fish," Roy said.

Areas like Blind Bay are just dynamite, even though the bays aren't what they used to be in terms of protection — erosion has eaten huge chunks of the roseau marshes.

"Everything is so open now," Roy said. "There aren't nearly as many protected bays."

However, when you find that pretty, clean water with baitfish flicking around, catching redfish should be a shoe-in.

He said most of the time he'll fish shrimp — live preferably, but dead stink crickets work, as well — under H&H Coastal Rattle Corks.

"I use 30-pound mono leaders, the cheapest stuff I can get at Academy," Roy explained. "I think they're all the same when you get to 30 pounds."

He starts with 1 1/2-foot leaders, with 1/4-ounce round-headed jigs at the terminal ends. But he's not stubborn about leader length.

"I vary that according to the water depth," he said. "If the water is shallower, I'll go with a shorter leader. If it's deeper, I might go longer."

No matter what, he pays close attention to what's going on: If he discovers a certain jig depth results in more-consistent catches, the veteran guide quickly reworks the other setups.

"If I figure out one or two rods are getting more bites, I hold those rigs side by side and make sure the jigheads are within 1/2 inch of each other," Roy said. "Jig depth can make a huge difference."

Another option is to fish the passes, which can be great options even if the Mississippi River jumps as snow melts begin up north.

"If the river is 11 feet in New Orleans, you can still go to Southwest Pass and tuck in behind the jetties and catch redfish," Roy said.

While trout fishing is hit and miss, Roy said they do show up when the weather cooperates.

"If we can get four or five warm days in a row, especially if the river is low, we'll start catching trout in the bays," he explained. "They'll come out of their deep (winter) holes and feed." ■

- Andy Crawford

Golden Meadow up next >



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THE PERFECT SPOT TO FIND GOLDEN MEADOW SPECKS

Golden Meadow guide and 4 Horseman cork owner Capt. Aaron Pierce does very well with speckled trout in two places this time of year: Catfish Lake and Bayou Blue.

Pierce said Catfish Lake is the main attraction area, and he mentioned the presence of oyster fisherman can really give anglers a great starting point in the wide-open lake.

"All the oyster guys have white PVC pipes marked everywhere," he said. "I've been there for so long I know where



Nice speckled trout come from Catfish Lake this time of year, according to Capt. Aaron Pierce.

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they're at, but if you're a newbie, you can see the PVC pipes."

Once you spot the pipes, you're obviously in the right area, but Pierce said there's one more thing you can do to make sure you're over the fish-attracting oysters.

"You can tell if you're on an oyster reef by bumping a jig-head on the bottom. You can feel if it's oysters or just mud," he said.

Since the lake isn't very deep, Pierce, a lot of times, opts for a cork.

"You can fish a jighead on the bottom, but a cork with an 18-inch leader is doing just as well," he said.

Pierce likes throwing Matrix Shad, Vudu Shrimp and Cajun Lures threaded on light, 1/8-ounce jigheads under the cork,

"(The light jighead) pops the bait up more, and gives it more action," he said.

Although he does not care about tidal direction in Catfish Lake, when focusing on Bayou Blue, Pierce makes a concerted effort to fish a falling tide.

"In Bayou Blue you want the outgoing tide draining the marsh, pushing that bait out, and you're hitting those focal points," he said.

The focal points can be found more toward the shorelines of the bayou, according to Pierce.

"You're not fishing so much in the middle; you're fishing those cuts and canals that are draining into Bayou Blue," he said.

Pierce likes throwing soft plastics on different size jig-heads in the bayou.

"I start off with 1/4-ounce, but if I see they're in the deeper water – 8 to 10-feet – then I might switch over to 3/8-ounce." ■

- Joel Masson

Hopedale up next >

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HEAD OUTSIDE FROM HOPEDALE

Capt. Sal "Gotcha Hooked" Fontana (504-812-7773) said he heads outside this month out of Hopedale to hunt both specks and reds in deeper water.

"I switch gears in March and head outside to the bigger bays, where I'll fish rigs, rocks and reefs either on the bottom or under a cork, depending on the depth of the water," he said.

Fontana said the various rigs in Black Bay are really where he wants to fish in March, but he said the river will determine whether he gets to or not.

"Last year the river was high and that cold, muddy river water spilled over into Black Bay and messed up

the fishing for months," he said. "I had to head all the way to Breton Island to find good water, and even then every day was a challenge. We had a good season, but we searched hard for good water. We fished a lot of days in the Lake Fortuna area, or along the MRGO rocks, or in Bay Eloi and Breton Sound, but we found fish consistently."

Fontana said on windy days when the outside was just too rough, he fished up in the Biloxi Marsh.

"All the bigger lakes and bays in the Biloxi Marsh will produce this month," he said. "I fish over oyster reefs and around points where I see current lines or signs of bait."

And speaking of bait, Fontana says

Capt. Sal Fontana and 7-year-old granddaughter Madison caught this 7-pound redfish in the Biloxi Marsh on market shrimp.



continued on page 190 >

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- 12** – Grand Isle Alumni Washboard Tournament, Grand Isle Multiplex
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- 18-19** – Stan Brock Black and Gold Classic, Bridge Side Marina
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Hopedale continued

live shrimp is a no brainer.

"I always use live bait because it always produces," he said. "It's hard to fish it wrong. Hang a live shrimp 2 feet or so under a cork and let it do the job you bought it to do."

Fontana said when he uses plastics, its the H&H double-rigged Glass Minnows in the blue/silver color, or the old B2 squid in glow or chartreuse on a 1/4-ounce plain jighead.

"I'm hoping the river will be down this March and April so we'll be able to fish Black Bay, but I know there's been a lot of snow up north and a lot of rain, so all of that usually means a high river and muddy water in Black Bay," he said. "It won't bother the reds, but if you want trout you may have to fish more on the east side." ■

- Rusty Tardo

SCORE BIG WITH HENDERSON LAKE SAC-A-LAIT

If anglers want to catch sac-a-lait in March at Henderson Lake, they should go to the borrow pits along the East Atchafalaya Basin Protection Levee.

Head there and fish on the levee side, which is shallower and, as a result, warmer — a suitable place for the sac-a-lait to spawn if and when the water temperature gets into the 50s and 60s. If it's a cold late winter and/or there's a big snowmelt, though, the best sac-a-lait fishing action might be delayed until April.

Laurette Mequet of Cecilia, who knows as much or more about sac-a-lait fishing on the lake as anyone, said as much when she volunteered a report.

Mequet, who along with her husband, Mitch, owns Cypress Cove Landing and works as a sales associate at BoatCity USA in Henderson, said most of the action should take place in Kern's Pit and George Dupuis Pit, plus an unnamed borrow pit connected to the latter that she called George Dupuis Pit No. 2. They are all along the western edge of the lake.

Her favorite, she confided, is the George Dupuis Pit because "it's like three pits in one."

However, she fishes any of them in search of slabs.

The sac-a-lait are darker in color, particularly the males, when they spawn.

Mequet said she prefers to fish with a 10-foot jig pole in order to



Connie Anderson of Church Point with a nice sac-a-lait caught on Henderson Lake.

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Henderson Lake continued

position the boat away from the shoreline as much as possible. She fishes with 8- to 10-pound test line.

To put sac-a-lait in the ice chest, she likes to use either a red/chartreuse or red/blue/chartreuse tube jig or hair jig with a preferred weight of 1/48-ounce.

"You want it to fall a little slow. When they see it falling slow, they hit it hard," Mequet said from beau coups hours of experience.

She likes to use a "slim" cork that weighs the "smallest smidge," the red/green one with a red top, which are available at Cypress Cove Landing's bait shop.

Fish about 2 feet deep on the levee side and move along with the trolling motor, she advised.

Hopefully, she said, sac-a-lait fishing this spring, early and late, "will be an even better year than last year. It was pretty good last year."

Capt. Eddie Berthelot Jr. said this winter's frigid temperatures will likely delay the speckled trout transition out of coastal marshes, but fish are still being caught with twitchbaits, topwaters and soft plastics on the north side of interior lakes and bays.

Sure, she said, those borrow pits get crowded — but the key is to be patient.

Sac-a-lait anglers might want to try their hand at the weekly Take Dat Sac-a-lait Fishing Tournaments hosted by Cypress Cove Landing. The season starts on March 14, the Wednesday after Daylight Savings Time starts. Tournaments are from 5 p.m. to dark-thirty — whatever the announced weigh-in time is before the start of the contest.

Entry fee is \$35, which includes the launch fee and a supper. There is a three-fish limit on the sac-a-lait, as well as a trash fish category.

Usually, there are 18 to 20 boats in each tournament field, providing there are favorable weather conditions, Mequet said. For more information call (337) 228-7484. ■

- Don Shoopman

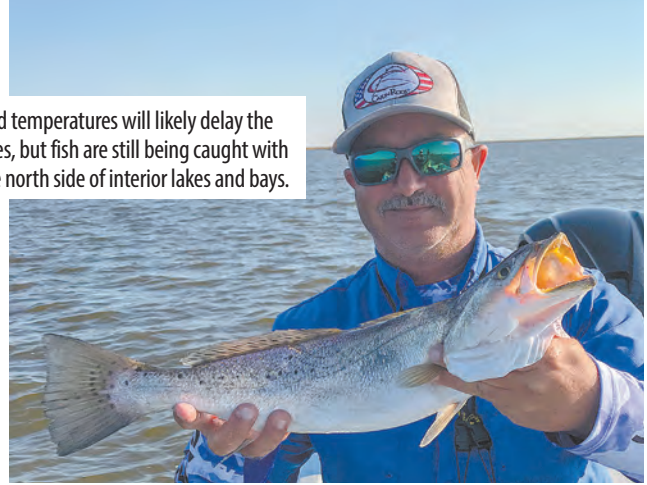


Photo courtesy Capt. Eddie Berthelot Jr.

FRIGID WINTER LIKELY MEANS DELAYED TROUT TRANSITION

SPECK ACTION OUT GOLDEN MEADOW, GRAND ISLE FOCUSED ON INTERIOR LAKES AND BAYS

Unlike the last couple of years with relatively mild winters, Mother Nature brought her full force down on South Louisiana this time — and the speckled trout that endured those frigid conditions likely will take a little longer to transition out of the marsh this year.

"The last couple of winters, we stayed up in the 60s and 70s for lots of the time, and the transition was early," said

Capt. Eddie Berthelot Jr., with Spots & Specks Charters out of Grand Isle and Golden Meadow. "But this year, we've been in the 40s and 50s most of the last couple of months, so the water temperature is going to have to come up.

"We'll probably need a good three weeks of 75- or 80-degree temperatures before they'll start moving out."

To that end, Berthelot said he would focus his efforts on the north side of lakes and bays north of Caminada Bay out of Grand Isle, looking at exit points from moderate-sized duck ponds or where large bayous pour into bigger bays.

"They should hold some nice trout this year," he said. "The trout we're seeing in the marsh right now are actually a little oversized."

And as long as the weather is cool, roadside action is also a good bet.

"Every time it gets cold, the

continued on page 194 >



The Fishing

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by Captain Paul

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Trout continued

action is great between Fourchon and Grand Isle on the highway. Those fish are there, and it's on," Berthelot said. "But when it warms up, they go back into a little shallower water."

In Golden Meadow, Berthelot said oyster beds and clam reefs in Catfish Lake, as well as some big duck ponds when the tide is high enough to enter them, are where he focuses his efforts this month.

"I like using suspending twitchbaits like the MirrOdine XL, and topwater baits when it's a little colder and the wind's not blowing. Other than that, tightline Matrix Shad and stay away from the shrimp right now," Berthelot said. "More or less, you're staying with plastics. And I stay away from chartreuse and go with the more natural colors, like the browns and greens."

Whatever you're fishing, Berthelot said the key is to slow it down.

"You want the bait to move slow. Fish all your baits slow; drag them on the bottom with slow bumps and no fast retrieves at all," he explained. "The fish are more on the slow lethargic side, sitting with their bellies on the bottom waiting for a bait to pass in front of them."

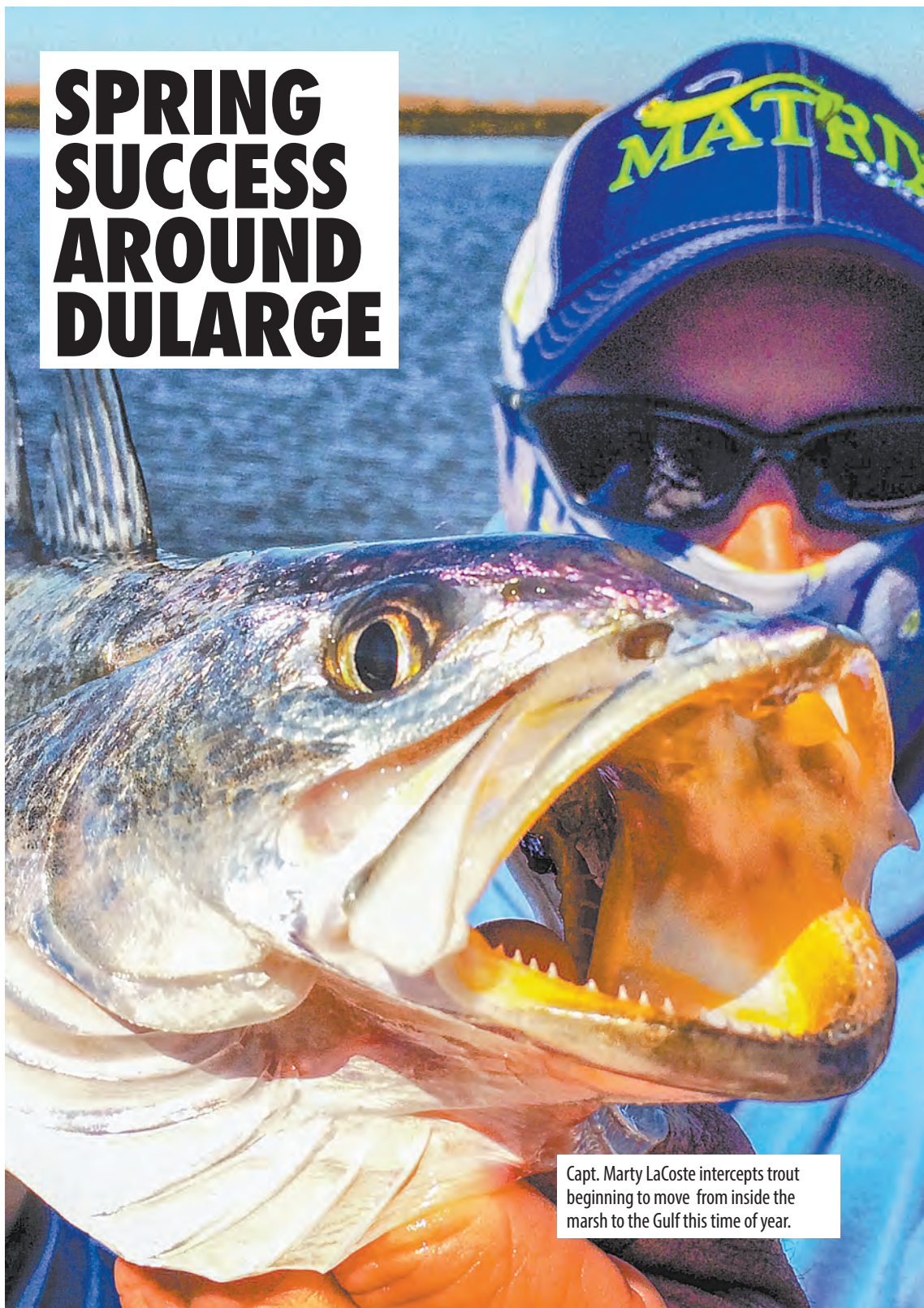
Even his twitchbait is moving pretty slow.

"One small twitch at a time and then let it sink," he said. "Everything has to be moved slow these days. One twitch about every five seconds just to make the bait move, and then it starts to fall — that's when they usually hit it."

Editor's Note: Capt. Eddie Berthelot Jr. with Spots & Specks Charters can be reached at 985-637-3177, or through his website, www.spotsandspeckscharters.net. ■

- Patrick Bonin

SPRING SUCCESS AROUND DULARGE



Capt. Marty LaCoste intercepts trout beginning to move from inside the marsh to the Gulf this time of year.

In fishing, many factors can determine your success, but in a transition month like March, temperature can be among the most critical elements.

That's certainly true in the Dularge area, according to Capt. Marty LaCoste with Absolute Fishing Charters.

"Everything is dependent on the water temperature," he said. "Usually, if you have a warm winter, the trout are starting to show up in the lakes in February. In a cold winter, it's March."

With the severity of this winter, LaCoste believes it won't be until this month when the trout make their presence known in the lakes.

"This March we're thinking the trout are going to show up in the lakes and in the bayous that funnel into the lakes," he said.

Every spring, the lakes around Dularge hold speckled trout, and with good reason, the guide side.

"All the areas in the marsh where the fish are in the wintertime, all funnel into these lakes, and then the lakes lead out to the Gulf," he said.

LaCoste prefers Sister Lake and Lake Mechant, but looking for baitfish in those areas is critical.

"A lot of times, we're looking for mullet," he said. "Usually, that time of year over the reefs, the trout will be where the mullet are."

LaCoste likes throwing a Matrix Shad threaded on ¼-ounce jigheads. He'll throw both a single rig and a double rig.

"Most of the time, its tight-lined, but the shrimp do start showing up that time of year, so if we get on a good bird bite, we'll throw a double rig," he said. "Every now and then, they will want it under a cork."

When looking for trout under birds, it's particularly important for the surface to be calm so the seagulls can spot the shrimp, and LaCoste said the wind is certainly not your friend.

"You always want it to be as calm as possible," he said. "High winds are never good for trout fishing. It causes waves, the waves dirty up the water, and the trout need clearer water because they feed by sight." ■

- Joel Masson

Chicot Lake up next >



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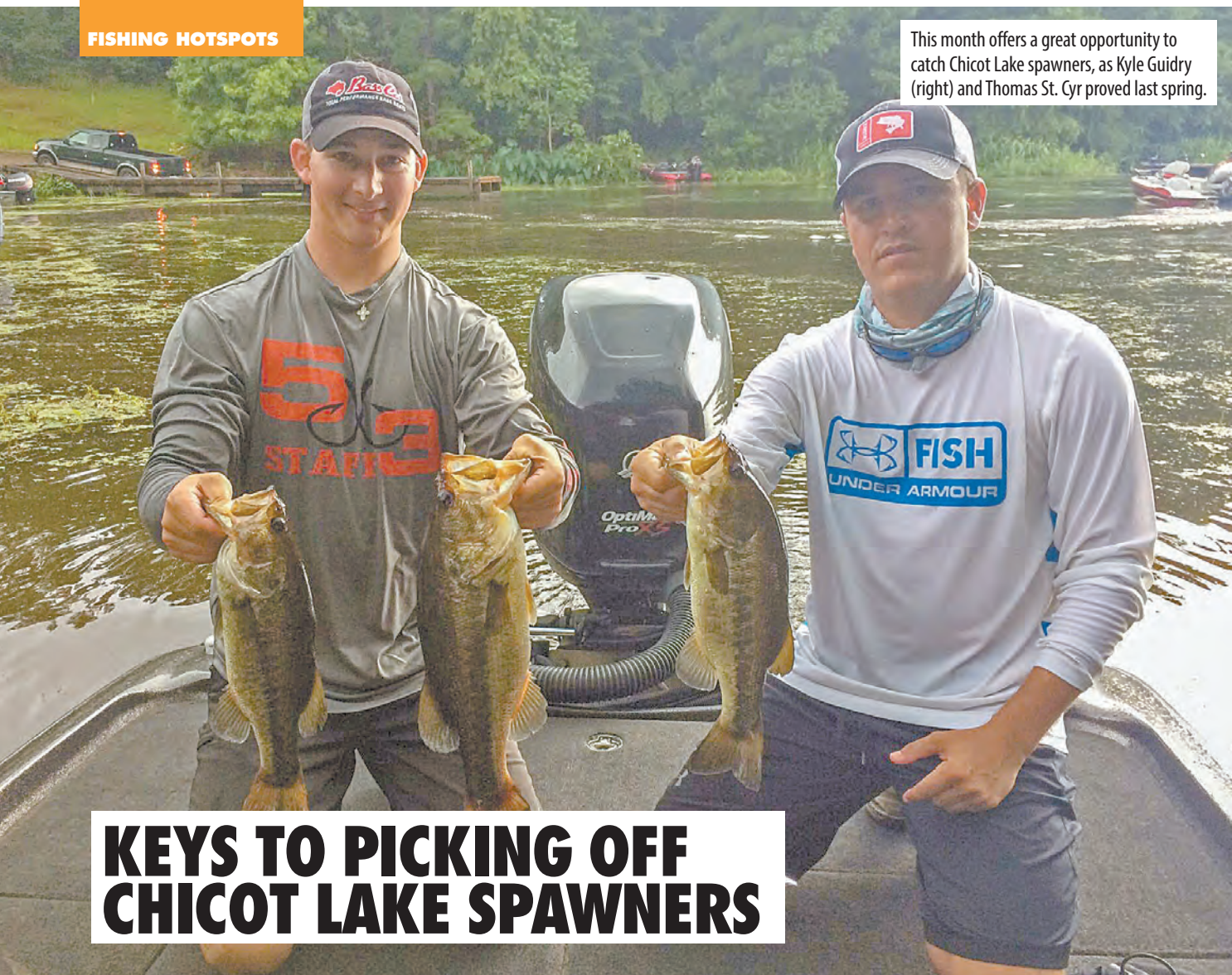
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This month offers a great opportunity to catch Chicot Lake spawners, as Kyle Guidry (right) and Thomas St. Cyr proved last spring.



KEYS TO PICKING OFF CHICOT LAKE SPAWNERS

Chicot Lake can be a persnickety fishery, but there are plenty of bass swimming in the reservoir north of Ville Platte to reward time spent on the water.

And Opelousas angler Kyle Guidry said this month is one of the best opportunities to catch them.

The only problems are the lake is of relatively uniform depth from bank to bank, and is packed with cypress and gum trees presenting likely targets.

So what are the keys?

"It's a place where you can put the trolling motor down and put it on 80 (percent power) and flip the trees as fast as you can," Guidry said.

There are a few areas that sometimes hold clear water, providing true sight-fishing options. However, Guidry said it's not something he counts on.

"The water in Chicot gets clear (in some

areas), but it's that black water," he said. "It makes the fish hard to see because they're dark and blend in. It has to be very sunny."

So he's lucky if he sees a bass moving on its bed; most of the time he's fishing blindly.

One thing he doesn't do is go to the banks. Instead, he sticks with flipping the seemingly innumerable trees.

But, while any of the thousands of flooded trees can hold big spawners, the angler said there is a way to narrow down the options and up your chances of success.

"I will not pass up a tree growing sideways," Guidry said. "Every tree I see that is at an angle, there is a bedded bass on that tree."

He also said laydowns are great options.

His go-to bait is a black/red jig.

"If I'm going for (high numbers of) bites, I'll go black/blue," Guidry said. "You'll catch some quality fish with black/blue, but when I go black/red, the quality is always there.

"I don't get the number of bites as with the black/blue, but I catch better fish."

While heavier jigs are in vogue, this angler said he sticks with 3/8-ounce versions.

"I like slow falls," Guidry said.

If the bite is finicky, Guidry switches to a Mister Twister Buzz Bug. He said he also can catch them on a swim jig at times.

"I'll shake the rod tip, giving (the swim jig) a little flutter as it swims," Guidry said.

Tackle includes 7-foot-6-inch or 7-foot-3-inch Power Tackle medium-heavy rods paired with 8.1:1 Daiwa Tatula reels spooled with Seaguar InvizX fluorocarbon.

What is a little surprising, given the cover he fishes, is the line size he chooses: 15-pound test.

"I am not afraid to throw 15-pound InvizX," Guidry said. "I have used it around docks on Toledo Bend, and I've pulled fish off cross beams without any problems." ■

- Andy Crawford

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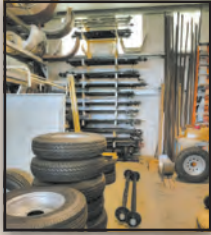
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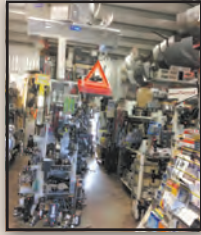
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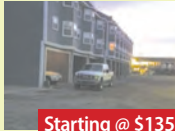


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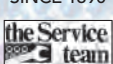
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