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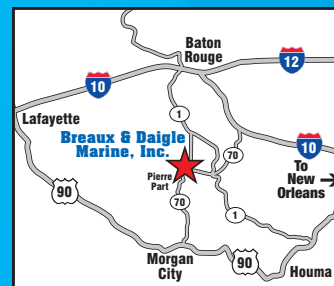


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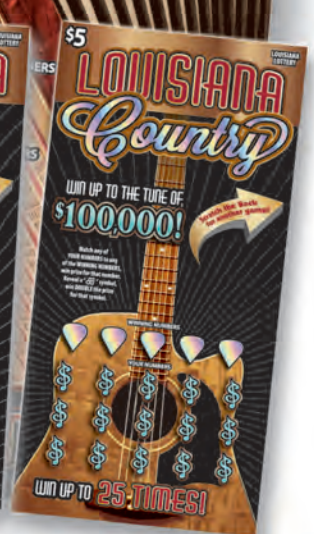


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THE EARLY BIRD GETS THE TROUT



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WHICH CAME FIRST?



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Surf fishing picks up along Louisiana's coast as the waters warm and fish arrive. But there are some do's and don'ts for fishing in the suds. Photo courtesy Ryan Bourgeois.

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THE
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For Shell, being a responsible neighbor means understanding the communities where we operate. And with 4,000 Shell employees living and working in communities all across the state, understanding the people and places of Louisiana comes naturally to us. Shell's people know that conservation and environmental responsibility are the foundation of a bright future for Louisiana. That's why we're working to ensure that Louisiana will remain a sportsman's paradise for generations to come!

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The destruction of our precious marshlands

TO THE EDITOR:

This is a true horror story for any Louisiana fisherman. At a recent LDWF meeting, the discussion targeted the possible reduction in speckled trout you can keep, what size limit would be acceptable, and the lack of big, mature trout. Local fishermen were invited to speak; however, organizers were not interested in solutions to the dwindling number of trout, which is exactly what needs to be addressed.

The waters in southeast Louisiana that include Lake Borgne, Black Bay and the huge marsh area between Point a La Hache and Delacroix were undoubtedly the premiere speckled trout breeding and fishing grounds in Louisiana and arguably the world. This area is where the big, mature trout used to live and thrive. As a result of bad decisions, presumably based on guesswork or neglect, this whole area of pristine breeding grounds is no longer healthy enough due to low salinity levels and pollution. What happened?

The Caernarvon River Diversion Project, the rock jetty across the MRGO and the breach of the levee at Mardi Gras Pass all contributed to this catastrophe. The Caernarvon Diversion began sending polluted river water into the Delacroix and Point De La Hache marsh in 1992. In the name of building land, it has been proven to do more harm than good to the area as a recent article in *The Advocate* pointed out, yet it continues to flow unabated. The next assault came from the rock jetty placed across the MRGO, which effectively blocks the flow of

saltwater from reaching south and west of Lake Borgne, thus preventing trout breeding due to low salinity. The jetty's purpose is to stop a small storm surge from the south; however, it would not be effective in a significant storm, and better walls have been erected to replace the inadequate I-walls formally protecting St. Bernard and Chalmette. The final insult is the levee breach at Mardi Gras Pass, which is flooding the Black Bay area with river water. It started at 40 feet wide, but with no action taken has grown to over 250 feet wide, and no one is addressing or acting on the problem.

These things have combined to put the speckled trout industry into a state of shock. Louisiana would benefit from consultation with true experts in the field of building sustainable land, instead of allowing projects like the Caernarvon, a 28-year failure that is killing our marshland, trout, shrimp and oyster industry.

The time is now; our future depends on it. The LDWF, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the state must act in a coordinated fashion to stop the destruction of our marsh and improve hurricane protection. Build a hurricane system from the outside in, remove the rock jetty from the MRGO, turn off the Caernarvon project, and fix the levee at Mardi Gras Pass; these actions are a good start. Do this not for me, or for us, but for the future generations of Louisianans that want to enjoy this sportsman's paradise that we once lived in and enjoyed.

CARL POCHE
Metairie



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There is no doubt that influxes of freshwater have changed Louisiana's fisheries. In some cases, like speckled trout, fisheries have become more seasonal, and freshwater influxes have moved trout farther offshore during spring months. Other weather events, like freezes, have reduced trout populations, but indications are that catches through last fall and into this spring have been very strong and that trout populations are rebounding some from the harsh winters of two and three years ago.

Louisiana's coast is a dynamic system, built by the seasonal floods and sediment brought by the Mississippi River. The Mississippi River Delta, the marshes that make Louisiana a world-class place to fish, are sinking and washing away. This wetland loss, nearly 2,000 square miles in the last century, is a threat to coastal fisheries, wildlife and the people and communities along our coast. A primary reason for this loss is the lost connection to the freshwater and sediment from the Mississippi River caused by levees that have blocked the river from its marshes and prevented annual floods from delivering sediment. The loss of that connection has also meant great changes in salinity, leading to loss of coastal swamps, freshwater and brackish marshes.

The changes taking place since the early 1990s brought on by the Caernarvon Diversion have altered fisheries in the Delacroix area, as has Mardi Gras Pass, but those places continue to be incredibly productive areas for a variety of fish, including speckled trout, redfish, black drum, sheepshead, largemouth bass, crabs and white shrimp. Caernarvon was authorized and built to bring some freshwater back into the system after saltwater intru-

sion threatened the oyster industry and killed historically fresh and brackish marshes. The rock wall built at Bayou LaLoutre on the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet was built not to just help with storm surge, but to try to reverse the saltwater intrusion that killed tens of thousands of acres of fresh and brackish marshes caused by the channel's construction. Historic flooding in the Mississippi River and in the Pearl River and other areas along the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain have led to unprecedented inundation. This inundation is the reality Louisianans face.

Certainly, better management of our nation's rivers is warranted to alleviate some of these flooding issues. But when you live in the delta of the largest river in North America, flooding is going to be a fact of life. And these floods can ultimately provide many benefits for Louisiana's coast and its fish and wildlife. For some, these changes have been difficult. The loss of wetlands due to saltwater intrusion and a lack of sediment coming out of the Mississippi River has been very difficult for fisheries and sportsmen as well.

The Mississippi River will have to play a key role in helping to stem the loss of our coastal marshes. The anomaly in this system is the river not being a part of it. The fish and wildlife that have evolved in this system are here because they can adapt to those changes. Louisiana's hunters and anglers can adapt as well and continue to enjoy one of the best fisheries in the world.

Chris Macaluso
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Outdoor UPDATE

HOLY LUNKERS, BASSMAN!

CANEY BASS CONTINUE TO SHOW OFF

By Kinny Haddox

Those Caney Lake lunkers keep showing up in wads, like giant strings of beads off a Mardi Gras float. From Feb. 29 to March 2, three anglers teamed with Caney Lake's monster bass for some pretty impressive photo catches and photo ops.

THE GIANT

Kaycee LeBrun of Pea Ridge near Ruston proved you don't have to be a touring pro to catch a giant on this secluded, 5,000-acre Jackson Parish Reservoir. She landed the largest fish she's ever had on her line, an 11.14-pound largemouth, on Feb. 29.

The fish on Caney are still staging for the spawn, but some are already patrolling the

shallows during the warm part of the day preparing for the spawn, which should be on the next two to three weeks. LeBrun and her husband met some friends over the weekend, had a fun fishing trip and caught a few fish. The friends had to leave, but LeBrun and her husband stayed. As they were getting ready to leave, she cast her blue/black Z-man ChatterBait with a black and red sparkle craw trailer just outside a small inlet and, "Pow", the huge largemouth smacked it in about 6 feet of water.

"When I first hooked her and felt her, I knew she was a big fish," LeBrun said. "She swam to the boat, then under the boat and then back out. When she came up and I saw how big she was, I just knew she was going to break off or something, but she didn't. When we got her in the boat, I was shaking. In fact, I'm shaking now even talking about it. It was something."

It was almost dark by the time they made it to Hooks Marina, but the big fish lit up the scales and everyone around watching.

THE PROS SHOW OFF

It doesn't hurt to be a bass pro, either. FLW pros Tyler Stewart and Hunter Freeman took advantage of a couple of weeks off to return to their home lake, and they posted some amazing catches.

Stewart made a short trip on Feb. 29 and caught four



Kaycee LeBrun with her all-time biggest bass, an 11.14 pounder from Caney Lake, caught right at dark on Feb. 29.



This ChatterBait fooled Kaycee LeBrun's 11.14-pound lunker.

OPPOSITE: Hunter Freeman hit the 30-pound mark with four bass at Caney, thanks to a kicker fish that weighed more than 8 pounds.

bass between 6 and 7 pounds. He was fishing hard spots on secondary points he located with his electronics. All the fish were holding in one area, staging for the spawn. He landed them on a 6th Sense C-20 crankbait.

Stewart was fishing in 17 to 20 feet of water and was digging the bait fast and deep, drawing reaction strikes. Stewart said the next two weeks will be a transition time for the fish, with lots more bass moving shallow to spawn in 2 to 5 feet of water. He said the return of the grass to the lake is the key to all the monster bass that it has produced the last few months.

"The whole food chain on the lake has benefited," he says. "It's amazing."

THE RIGHT TIME

Freeman landed four fish that weighed 30 pounds on Feb. 29, then went back on March 2, and his biggest three, anchored by a 9½-pounder, weighed 23½ pounds on his scales. He also caught his on deep-diving crankbaits.

"These big fish are mostly still holding out on points and hard spots, but a few are drifting up in the daytime," he said. "The biggest bite is coming right at daylight. And they are stacked early. It won't be but a few days 'till they are starting to move up into the grass to spawn. When that happens, it's some of the best fishing of the year and it's easier to catch them most days. You just work the shallower water. I would say that 75% of the bass in Caney will be in 6 foot of water or less." ■

Tyler Stewart with four bass weighing nearly 28 pounds.



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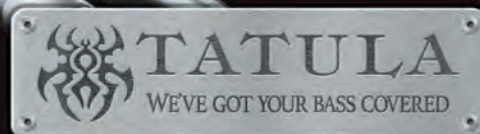
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Terry and Terra Stewart show four of the big D'Arbonne slabs that got them second place, including a big fish of 2.81 pounds.



GIANT D'ARBONNE CRAPPIE MAKE ANGLERS SLAB HAPPY!

By Kinny Haddox

Catching a 2-pound crappie isn't rare, but catching a bunch of them in a pro tournament under changing conditions makes it more of an oddity.

But when angler after angler comes to the scales with crappie weighing 2 pounds or better — many pushing three pounds — it gets folks' attention.

And then, this happened.

Matthew Rogers, 22, and his father, Bruce, from El Dorado Springs, Mo., caught back-to-back 7-fish limits — their opening-day limit was 16.57 pounds — that weighed a total of 30.36 pounds to win the Louisiana State Championship Crappie Masters Tournament on Lake D'Arbonne on Feb. 28-29. That's a 2.2-pound average, and it got them a check for \$10,000.

Terry Stewart of Brandon, Miss., and his daughter, Terra, of Sterlington, La., finished second with 29.64 and a big fish of 2.81. The biggest slab of the event was a 3¼-pounder caught by Dan Langston and James Pegram of Blue Ridge, Texas.

Thirty three teams weighed big fish of more than 2 pounds, including a 2.99, 2.98, 2.87 and 2.86 rounding out the top five slabs. These catches were made in tough conditions as well. A cold front blew through the day before the tournament, and on the first day, winds gusted over 15 miles an hour, limiting how and where the anglers could fish.



Dustin Harris of Vilonia, Ark., with a 2.98-pound crappie.



Matthew and Bruce Rogers with four of their winning Lake D'Arbonne slabs.

Dan Langston shows off this 3¼-pound crappie.



READER REPORT: 3.1-POUND CRAPPIE

Kyle Berry of Grayson hooked this 3.1-pound crappie on Feb. 12, 2020, in Caldwell Parish.

"We had been fishing all morning and had caught a pretty good mess," he said. "The bite had slowed way down; me and my buddy were just sitting there talking and I saw a bunch shad running on top of water. So, I picked up a bass pole I had with us, that had a chartreuse spinnerbait on it, and threw it about 15 feet in front of where we saw the shad running. Within a few seconds, something smoked the spinnerbait. Not knowing it was a white perch at the time, I was thinking this is a decent bass. Well, once I got it up close, I was like, 'damn that's a white perch (aka crappie)'. I flipped him in, and we got scales out and weighed it and cut the spinnerbait off the line and put it away so the taxidermist could put it with mount."



D'Arbonne's crappie were in a prespawn mode, hanging out in deeper water near stump lines and trees. Boat pressure during practice and the tournament made the fish extremely spooky.

"We found the fish on timber in anywhere from 12 to 20 foot of water, but then they moved away from the timber and just suspended a good way out from the timber because of the boat pressure," Matthew Rogers said. "If you tried to use your electronics and drop a bait right in front of the fish, they'd take off the minute it the jig hit the water. I've never seen fish that spooky. We compensated by moving slowly, finding the fish 30 to 40 feet away, and then casting jigs with shiners or small hair jigs and slowly reeling the bait back past the fish. That's the only way they would hit it."

Rogers said that pattern would probably hold for the first couple of weeks of March, then, with four or five warm days, the fish should start moving in closer to spawn on the lake.

"The males should start moving up some any day, but it will have to warm up several days in a row for big females to follow," he said. "But all these big fish won't go shallow. For the same reason they get so spooky out deep, these 3-pounders won't go up and spawn around the banks and all those boats and bobbers. They'll spawn deeper. In fact, I think a lot of these really big ones here spawn on top of tree stumps or just absorb their eggs. They don't all go in shallow where it's easy to catch them. That's how they got so big, being wary."

Tim Hebert and Andre Smith of Thibodaux were the highest-finishing team from Louisiana, taking sixth with 14 fish weighing 28.44. Their big fish was a 2.71-pounder. D'Arbonne locals Jared Riser and Chris Fields finished 16th with 14 fish weighing 25.98.

The average weight of all the fish brought in by the 100 teams was 1.73 pounds, and it took 24 pounds plus to make the top 25. ■

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Spencer Lambert with his personal best bass, an 11-pound, 4-ounce lunker taken from Caney Lake.

CANEY LUNKER WARMS UP LAMBERT'S MORNING

By Kinny Haddox

West Monroe's Spencer Lambert returned from a ski trip to Colorado on Feb. 26. It was a toasty 18 degrees his last day on the slopes, but when he hit the water at Caney Lake the next morning, it felt like it was 10 degrees.

"There was ice everywhere and on everything," he said. "We had a pretty good cold front blow through, too. The moist cold here bites right through your clothes. But I needed to go fishing."

It didn't take long for the Lambert, a former Louisiana-Monroe bass team member, to warm up. About 100 yards down a stretch of hydrilla bed, Lambert hung into an 11-pound, 4-ounce monster largemouth, the biggest bass he's ever caught.

He said he didn't feel cold the rest of the morning.

"Man, when she hit it, the Rat-L-Trap (Rayburn Red/crawfish color) just stopped," he said. "I thought I was hung on a log, but then the bait started moving off slowly to the left. I couldn't even budge the big fish. She just eased along for a few yards, then she realized she was hooked and started making some pretty good runs."

FIRST LOOK

Lambert, a rookie on the BASS Open Tour this year, knew he had a good one, but he wasn't exactly sure how big. Caney has been producing a lot of 8- and 9-pounders lately, and Lambert had recently caught a 10-pounder on another lake. But this fish felt heavier.

"Pretty soon, she started coming up toward the surface, and



when she did, she tried to jump but couldn't get anything but her head out of the water," he said. "Oh my gosh, I saw how big she was and got pretty excited. I worked her back and forth around the boat for a while, but I could see she was hooked pretty well. It's funny, but that ½-ounce Rat-L-Trap looked little in her huge, open mouth. Finally, I got her on her side and lipped her. I knew immediately it was the biggest one I've ever caught."

When he got the fish in the boat, he started shaking, and not from the 30-degree temperature, mind you.

"I was so excited," he said. "I loaded up and headed in to Hooks Marina to weigh the fish. It weighed 11-4, and I immediately took a couple of pictures and went back down to the edge of the pier and turned her loose. I should have taken some more photos, but I was just excited and thinking that I didn't want this big lunker to die."

SPECIAL HYDRILLA FEATURE

Lambert was familiar with the spot where he landed the big fish. He knew there was a small area about the size of the front deck of his bass boat that stuck out further than the rest of the grass bed. As he approached it, he threw the Trap out and started a slow, steady retrieve. Then it stopped.

"The fish was about 6 to 8 feet deep hanging in the grass," he said. "I was just easing the Trap along, just ticking the top of the grass. I didn't even see it on my electronics. I was just working down the edge of the hydrilla."

Lambert said the big fish are staging and getting ready to spawn, but he doesn't think they have started yet. It won't be long. The water temperature was around 52 degrees the day he caught the big bass, but it should be inching up into the 60s any day now. That should trigger the spawn soon.

"I sure would like to be back again, but there are plenty of big fish on that lake," Lambert said. "The grass coming back is the best thing that has happened there in a long time." ■



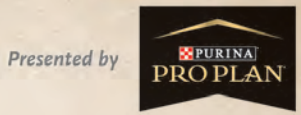
This is the "Trap" that Lambert set for his 11-4 bass, a Rayburn Red/crawfish Rat-L-Trap fished along the edge of a Caney Lake hydrilla bed.



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Jason Fails with his 11.97-pound Indian Creek Lake lunker.

INDIAN CREEK LUNKER LEADS TO WIN FOR EVERYBODY

By Kinny Haddox

When does catching a huge bass turn out to be a win-win situation? Well, here's one example.

Jason Fails and his partner, David Gordon, hadn't been doing much good in the March 7 Ashley Vidrine Benefit tournament on Indian Creek Lake. About 11 a.m., they had been talking about the fishing and made a decision.

"We were talking about it and we said, maybe the Good Lord will shine on us and let us catch a big one," Fails said. "And if we win any money, we are

going to donate it back to the family."

About five minutes later, they rounded a point and caught about a 3-pounder off a bed. They were feeling pretty good, but it gets better.

On his next cast, Fails caught an 11.97-pound largemouth that not only was the big bass of the tournament, but put them in first place; they won \$1,300. Then, they followed through with their promise and donated the money back to the benefit. The rest of the anglers who won prize money followed suit.



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Jason Fails holds his nearly 12 pound win-win-win lunker largemouth as partner and net man David Gordon looks on.



Win. Win. Win.

"We were just so blessed to get to do that," he said. "I wish I could do that every week. This is a family that really needed help right now, and that big fish helped us help them."

LUNKER BASS

When they landed the 3-pounder, that big fish just swam up in an open area on the grass, and Fails saw it. He pitched his 4-inch watermelon red Lake Fork Ring Fry right in front of the fish, and there was no waiting.

"As soon as it hit the bottom, I felt a little tick like a bream picking it up, and I set the hook," Fails said. "When I saw the fish, I thought it was a 4- or 5-pounder, but when she got hooked and came up, oh my Lord, it was huge."

After a short battle, Gordon scooped it up with the net.

"We were both shaking so bad, when I tried to take a picture of it, I couldn't even hit the right buttons on my phone," he said. "Finally, we got some pictures and put her in the livewell. Every time after that (when) we caught a fish, I was afraid to even open the livewell lid because I didn't want her to jump out."

Fails and Gordon don't fish Indian Creek very often, but they are glad they came to this tournament, which drew about 70 boats. They planned on pre-fishing the day before, but Fails had to work and Gordon had boat trouble. He spent all day getting it running.

Then came the tournament and the big catch. He caught the big fish in 5 to 6 feet of water, but a lot of good fish are also being caught up in 2 to 3 feet of water, he said. The 2,250-acre Rapides Parish lake has a lot of grass, and that's key to finding and catching the better fish, Fails said. ■

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This 8.17-pound bass bit on a chartreuse/blue crankbait on Feb. 15 in Lake Fausse Pointe. Joseph Martin of Baton Rouge set the hook and landed the “hawg” with the help of his fishing buddy, Austin Whitaker.

BATON ROUGE ANGLER BAGS FAUSSE POINTE LUNKER BASS

By Don Shoopman

Fate was on Joseph Martin’s side when the Baton Rouge angler launched his bass boat at Lake Fausse Pointe State Park at around 8:30 a.m. on Feb. 15.

That’s a plausible explanation behind the personal best 8.17-pound bass he hooked and boated that day at Lake Faussee Point, which rarely gives up bass heavier than 6 pounds — and the rewarding aftermath.

After fishing about 3 hours with Austin Whitaker, a buddy from his Woodlawn High School days, Martin cranked up, left the big borrow pit he was fishing below the state park and headed to the Texaco Field. He really didn’t want to go there because of the boat traffic in an oilfield known as a prime spawning area.

Martin, 23, was scouting for that weekend’s Fishers of Men event out of Doiron’s in Stephenville. He said he went to his favorite Texaco Field canal and caught a small bass. A few minutes later, his Strike King KVD 1.5 chartreuse/blue crankbait’s path took it by some structure away from the bank, which he had targeted before with a few repeated casts.

“I said, ‘Let me make one more bomb cast.’ I bounced it off the structure and felt it, you know, load up on it,” he said. “It was fighting hard, hard. I said it was a (gaspergoo, a freshwater drum) or catfish. It came up about 15 yards away. I saw it wasn’t a catfish. I saw silver. I still thought it was a goo.”

THE FIGHT TO LAND THE FISH

The next time he got a good look at it, Martin saw it was a bass. “I started hollering for the net. It was under four tackle bags and eight or nine of Austin’s rods,” he said.

Whitaker got the landing net out cleanly and scooped up the big bass with no trouble. Both anglers feasted their eyes on the bass, appreciating how fat it was, how long it was.

“We started hollering,” Martin said.

The bass was longer than his 22-inch measuring board by ¼-inch, so he’s calling the length at 22¼ inches. He took some braided line, pressed one end on the fish and went around to measure the girth, cut it where it met up and measured it at 18½ inches.



Photo courtesy of Joseph Martin

They started trying to find somebody with a scale, pronto. An angler in the first boat they met couldn’t find one. Then, he spied a familiar aluminum bass boat and fisherman.

Martin did a double take and put his trolling motor on “10 or 9” to make a beeline for it.

A HELPING HAND

Martin, who sells crane mats for B&D Mats, knew the boat belonged to Caleb Sumrall of New Iberia, a Bassmaster Elite Series pro who was fishing that day with his wife, Jacie, daughter, Clelie, and son, Axel.

Sumrall readily weighed the bass at 8.17 pounds.

Martin asked Sumrall, the 2017 B.A.S.S. Nation champion, if he would pose for a photo with him and his bass; Sumrall obliged. Then, Martin released the base alive. ■

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“DON’T BE THAT GUY!”

BASSCASHBASH OFFERS CASH TO LUCKY ENTRANTS

By Kinny Haddox

It’s already happened. An angler on Toledo Bend Reservoir caught a largemouth bass with a small blue tag behind the dorsal fin.

Had he been entered in the BassCashBash, he would have won \$1,000. He wasn’t. And he didn’t.

“That’s kind of our theme for this,” said P.D. Vinson of Leesville, originator and director of BassCashBash. “You can buy a \$50 ticket and enter, and every time you make a cast on the lake you’ve registered for, you have a chance to win cash, a new boat or even a truck if you land the right fish. Don’t go, catch a tagged fish and not be entered. Don’t be that guy.”



Vinson said most people like entering because it enhances the fun of their fishing trip. Every time they get a bite, they hope it’s not only a good one, but a tagged fish that will win some money.

The idea came to Vinson when he was driving home from his job at Phillips 66 in Lake Charles one day. The BassCashBash (www.basscashbash.com) began in 2015 on Toledo Bend and has expanded the program to seven different lakes. It is similar to saltwater programs that have been popular for years but is a first for bass anglers in this region. Fish are obtained from tournaments on various areas of the lakes, tagged and then released around

Keagan Trahan has already claimed \$1,500 in cash for catching a 2020 BassCashBash tagged fish on Toledo Bend last month.



the lakes.

Louisiana waters included in the program are Caddo Lake, Toledo Bend and the Louisiana Delta. Other lakes in the program are Alabama’s Lake Eufaula and Guntersville Lake, and Sam Rayburn and Lake Fork in Texas.

The contest began on March 1, and fish have already been caught and turned in for prizes. One of the early winners on Toledo Bend was young Keagan Trahan of Bridge City, Texas, who had to convince his dad to enter, then caught a tagged fish that earned him \$1,000 for his catch and a \$500 for his bonus T-shirt entry.

“That’s my boy. He begged me to sign us up I told him no. But he kept on and on like the fourth or fifth time, I finally said okay,” said Brett Trahan, Keagan’s father. “I told him the chance of us catching one was like someone winning the lottery, and then Bam! on the first day, the second fish he caught was a tagged fish. We were so excited we left and had to stop fishing.”

The Louisiana Delta competition will end May 31, while the Caddo and Toledo prize periods end on July 4. As an added bonus, any angler who enters and who catches a 10-pound or larger bass on Toledo Bend will win \$1,000 and a replica mount. The 10-pounders don’t have to be tagged — just caught by someone who is entered.

The prizes include \$1,000 for each tagged fish caught. One tagged fish will bring a lucky angler a fully loaded bass boat. The potential payout on Lake Caddo is \$275,000 with 150 cash tags paid; \$350,000 on the Louisiana Delta with up to 200 cash tags paid and \$400,000 on Toledo Bend with up to 200 cash tags. ■



This blue tag signifies a winning fish in the 2020 BassCashBlast. It includes a phone number that anglers can call when they catch a tagged fish.

READER REPORT: ODD-LOOKING DUCK



Jino Papania of Meraux shot this odd-looking duck on Jan. 13 while hunting in Yscloskey, La., with his cousin, Trent Tedesco. "It was a very warm day and not very 'ducky', but we went anyway. Right as shooting light approached, this guy flew into my decoys. The only thing I could make out was that he had a lot of white on him and he was larger than normal ducks from that area. I watched him for a few minutes before I decided to take him. Just as I raised the gun, he tried to take off, so I squeezed off a shot and he splashed back down. No one is quite sure what he is, but the closest we could come is a magpie crossed with a mallard. Not knowing just adds to the mystique of it in my opinion. He's at the taxidermist now."

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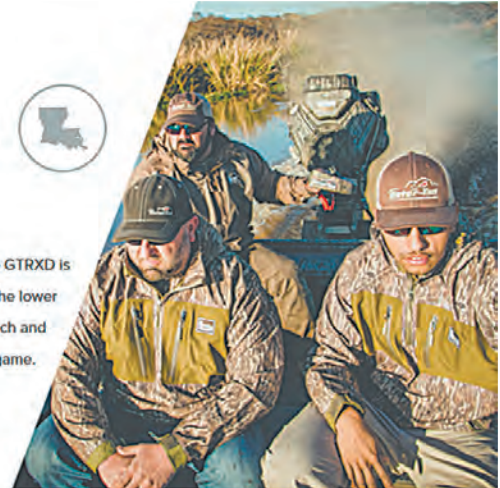


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TOLEDO BEND DELIVERS FOUR DOUBLE-DIGIT LUNKERS IN LATE FEBRUARY

By Chris Berzas

In late February, Toledo Bend continued to deliver double-digit bass to anglers.

All four of the fishermen who caught the big bass had them entered into the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program and, they will receive replica mounts from the Toledo Bend Lake Association, which provides the mounts to fishermen who bring bass weighing 10 pounds or better to participating marinas, then release them alive.

GLOVER'S LUNKER

Zwolle's Justin Glover spent the better part of Feb. 20 fishing with Daniel Lee of Leesville. The anglers launched from the south end of the lake at 8:30 a.m. and braved rains and cold winds to eventually reach areas near the Indian Mounds and Housen.

"The conditions were really unfavorable," said Glover, 35. "The winds were blowing at 20-plus mph, it was raining, and the temperature was at 40 degrees. It was a good duck-hunting day.

"We wanted to fish despite the conditions, and we were dressed in the warmest, driest clothes we had."

Glover and Lee had their boat sitting in 18 feet of water as they cast their offerings into about 7 feet of water.

"At our first stop, we started getting bites regularly, and we were releasing keeper fish," he said. "The bass were feeding in spurts, and we were catching about six fish at a time when they were biting.

Glover was working a custom-made, ¾-ounce, white/chartreuse spinnerbait with Colorado blades on a 7-foot Denali



Zwolle's Justin Glover scored on this Toledo Bend 10.44-pounder on a spinnerbait fishing near the Indian Mounds and Housen Area Feb. 20.

Photo courtesy of the Toledo Bend Lake Association

rod and a Shimano reel spooled with Seaguar fluorocarbon.

Glover and Lee reached an area with submerged wood, and Glover kept on chunking that spinnerbait.

"When the fish bit, she loaded up heavy on that spinnerbait," Glover said. "The fight was on, as she made a big run but eventually came up. At 30 feet away, she came up on top, and I initially estimated it to be a 9-pounder."

The bass kept stripping line as it came back and around the boat Glover said.

"When she got to the boat, I looked at her again and thought she was larger than 9, and even looked to be 11-plus pounds," he said.

As the fish came to the boat, Lee lipped the big bass and brought her aboard, and after admiring her for a while, she went in the livewell.

"We stopped at one area where I lost what I think was another great fish," Glover said.

Finally, Glover and Lee decided to pick up and motor to Fin and Feather Resort to obtain a certified weight on the huge fish.

Glover's lunker officially weighed 10.44 pounds and was the No. 15 bass listed into the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program. The bass was his second double-digit fish to make the program; Glover caught a 10.0-pound bass in May 2019.

TRICHEL'S BIG BASS

Provencal's Dayton Trichel was ready to get to Toledo Bend for his first fishing trip of 2020.

Trichel and his father, Shannon Bolton, launched at Big Bass Marina on Feb. 22, greeted by overcast skies that eventually gave way to some sun later in the day.

"We started fishing south of Big Bass Marina on the Louisiana side," said Trichel, 22. "I backed off the bank a bit, graphing with my Garmin, and eventually found a couple of schools of fish."

Trichel and Bolton started out pitching jigs, then picked up heavy spinnerbaits a while later.

"I then threw a ChatterBait as well, but I wasn't too happy with that, either," said Trichel, who picked up a rod with his favorite hard jerkbait and started working it in 5 feet of water, away from the bank.

"I jerked it, paused, then made a jerk again," he said. "As I moved around to hit the trolling motor, I jerked it again but it felt like the bait hit a brick wall."

Trichel said the fish ran toward the boat and headed to deeper water.

"I remember hollering out to get the net twice," Trichel said. "I could then tell it was a great fish. It was coming to the boat again, so I immediately got up and ran to the driver's seat."

Trichel waited, holding pressure on the fish.

"She came up on the side of the boat with her big mouth opened, and I grabbed her in the mouth, pulling the fish to the side of the boat," he said. "Then, I lifted her and put her into the boat."

Trichel and his father were at first very quiet — quite speechless about how events had quickly played out.

"That's the largest (live) bass I've ever personally put my eyes on," Bolton said.

Trichel and Bolton started fumbling through the boat's

storage to find a set of scales, then weighed the first at 10 pounds, 12 ounces.

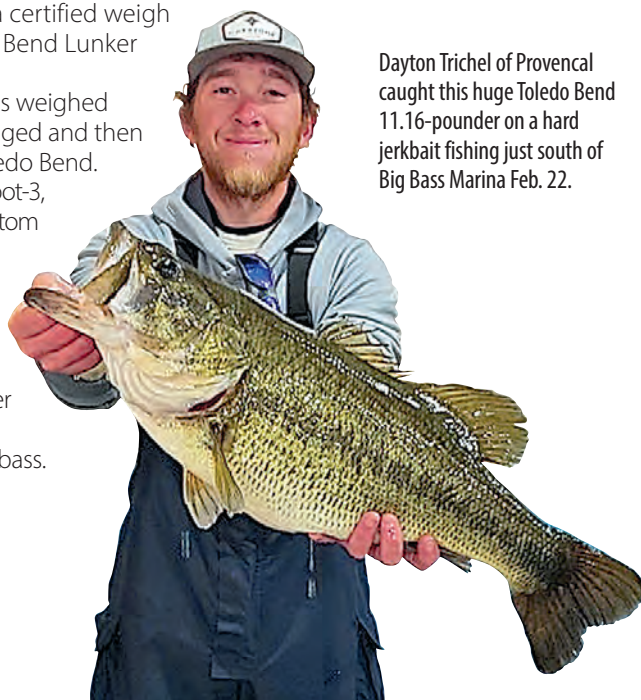
Eventually, Trichel and Bolton motored to Buckeye Landing, a certified weigh station for the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program.

Officially, Trichel's bass weighed 11.16 pounds, was tagged and then released back into Toledo Bend.

Trichel was using a 7-foot-3, medium-heavy K&S custom rod, and a Lews reel spooled with 10-pound P-Line fluorocarbon.

Trichel's lunker was No. 16 registered into the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program. It was Trichel's personal best bass.

HARPER'S LUNKER V



Dayton Trichel of Provencal caught this huge Toledo Bend 11.16-pounder on a hard jerkbait fishing just south of Big Bass Marina Feb. 22.

Photo courtesy of the Toledo Bend Lake Association

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HARPER'S LUNKER

DeRidder's Jonathan Harper and a friend decided that Feb. 28, was a good day to be on Toledo Bend.

"We launched on the south end of the lake to fish the Indian Creek area," said Harper, 39. "It was cold, but the temperatures were going to warm to 60 degrees later in the day."

Fishing offshore around ledges and structure in 25 feet of water, Harper was casting a 3/4-ounce, black/blue Santone football jig with a black/blue Zoom Speed Craw tied to 15-pound Seaguar fluorocarbon, spooled to a Lew's BB1 reel atop a 7-foot-11 Hammer rod.

"We were having a decent early morning," Harper said. "We had taken a few 2-pounders and a couple of 3s. But at 9 a.m., the bite just stalled. It was tough for a while until later."

Harper then moved to shallow water near the banks and caught a couple of non-keepers.

"Then, we went without a bite from 11 to 1:30 p.m.," said Harper, who moved back offshore and continued casting. On his third cast, a fish loaded up on the jig.

"The bite felt mushy as she picked up the jig and tugged on it," he said. "She then put on a good show for us."

The bass soon surfaced, and both anglers knew immediately it was a double-digit fish.

"She made a couple of more nosedives, taking some drag,"

DeRidder's Jonathan Harper displays his Toledo Bend lunker weighing 10.92 pounds taken Feb. 28 on a 3/4-ounce, black/blue Santone football jig with a black/blue Zoom Speed Craw in the Indian Creek area.



Photo courtesy of the Toledo Bend Lake Association

Harper said. "When she came up, my buddy netted her. "We put her on a scale I had on the boat, and it read 10.78 pounds," he said. "We then placed her into the livewell with some Rejuvenade and motored over to Buckeye Landing."

An advertisement for Greenwell Springs Marine. It features a photograph of a light green G3 Bay 20 DLX boat on a body of water. Two men are on the boat; one is standing at the front and the other is at the back near the outboard motor. The boat has a canopy and a steering seat. The background shows a shoreline with trees. Text overlays include the G3 Boats logo, the boat model name, and contact information for Greenwell Springs Marine.

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The bass weighed 10.92 pounds on the certified scale at Buckeye. Landing.

Harper's lunker was released back into the lake and was No. 17 in the 2019-2020 Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program season records. The huge bass is Harper's personal best.

NIGHT-TIME LUNKER

Denni Fetting of Leesville decided to leave his camp around 9 p.m. on Feb. 29 to do a bit of night-fishing and deal with some stress while engaging in some personal prayer.

"With my job, it's about the only time I have to do some fishing," said Fetting, 42. "And on this night trip, I was asking God to see me through some personal issues."

Launching at 9 o'clock, Fetting did not venture too far from his camp near Pirate's Cove and the Army Recreation Cove.

He was casting a Texas-rigged, split-tail, 7-inch plum worm on braided line on a 13 Concept Fishing reel fixed to a heavy-action Duckett rod.

Fetting was fishing submerged grass in 6 feet of water at the mouth of a creek.

It was on his third cast, around 10 p.m. when he got his first bite. "I set the hook, and at first, it felt normal," he said. "Then, it moved and started to feel differently, like a big catfish or a gou."

Fetting said when the fish turned and headed out to deep water, he knew it was a bass.

"Then, she started running in 5 to 6 feet of water," Fetting said. "I saw the side of the fish and then I panicked because I didn't have a net."

This 10.49-pound Toledo Bend lunker taken by Deni Fetting was caught the night of Feb. 29 on a Texas-rigged, split-tail, 7-inch plum plastic worm near Fetting's camp.



Photo courtesy of the Toledo Bend Lake Association

"I prepared to attempt to sling her in the boat, and she hit the side of the boat," he said. "Then, I reached down and lifted her into the boat and put her in the livewell."

Fetting called his brother and met him at a private ramp nearby. "On a scale we had, she weighed 10.49 pounds," he said.

Fetting was able to contact Cindy Salter at Buckeye Landing to get an official weight and to do the paperwork necessary for entry into the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program.

"Ms. Cindy went out of her way to open the store to do that for us at that late hour," Fetting said.

On Buckeye Landing's certified scale, Fetting's bass weighed 10.49 pounds. It was tagged, released alive into Toledo Bend waters. It is recorded as No. 18 in the 2019-2020 records of the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program. ■

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FAUSSE POINTE PRODUCE ANOTHER BIG BASS

NEW IBERIA ANGLER SCORES
IN BORROW PIT NEAR LEEVE

By Don Shoopman

Lake Fausse Pointe gave up another big bass on March 7.

Jarrood Derouen of New Iberia reeled in the “hawg” at approximately 8 a.m. while fishing with his buddy, Troy Laviolette of Catahoula, in a borrow pit along the West Atchafalaya Basin Protection Levee.

It was the third bass weighing more than 8 pounds caught at Fausse Point since Feb. 15, when Joseph Martin of Baton Rouge boated an 8.17-pounder in the Texaco Field. An 8.99 bass was caught on Feb. 25 by Dustin Dore of New Iberia, who was fishing in Sandy Cove.

Derouen estimated the bass he caught on a junebug Zoom Baby Brush Hog at between 8½ to 9 pounds. The batteries in his scale were dead, so he asked some sac-a-lait anglers in a nearby boat if they had a scale. They did, but it was a spring scale; it read between 8½ and 9. The bass, which he released, was 24 inches long and 19 inches in girth.

“Oh, it’s awesome, definitely the fish of a lifetime for sure,” he said. “It feels great. I’ve been trying for a long time to catch one that big. Yeah, they’ve got some big ones in there this year.”

Derouen, a 35-year-old machinist for

Photo courtesy Jarrod Derouen



A bass estimated between 8½ and 9 pounds made Jarrod Derouen’s day when he caught it on March 7 in a borrow pit in Lake Fausse Pointe. The New Iberia angler was flippin’ a junebug Zoom Baby Brush hogs in and around brush when the brute bit.

Axis Energy, and Laviolette got out on the lake about 7 a.m. in Laviolette’s small aluminum bass boat. They had caught one bass before that bite of a lifetime.

“We were just flippin’ the bank, flippin’ the brush, when I hooked it. I thought it was a good fish. I thought it was about 5 or 6 pounds,” Derouen said.

“It fought, but it didn’t really last long. We didn’t have a net, so Troy lipped it on the side of the boat. When he lifted it out of the water, we realized how big it was. It happened so fast. We were more excited when we realized how big it was.”

Derouen was using 30-pound braided line spooled on a Shimano Curado reel seated on a 7½-foot Ark fishing rod.

He said he had no second thoughts about releasing the heavy bass, which appeared to be full of eggs. The spawn seems to be on in the lake.

“Oh, no, I wasn’t going to keep it. I was more worried about getting her back in the water, which was the main thing,” he said. ■



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LDWC MAKES SLIGHT CHANGES TO DEER-URINE BAN, ALSO CHANGES SOUTH ZONE DOVE SEASON DATES

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission adopted amendments to its 2020-21 Hunting Regulation Notice of Intent that would ban the sale of untested deer-urine products in Louisiana and change dove season dates in the South Zone. The action came during the commission's March meeting in Baton Rouge.

Current regulations prohibit the possession and use of untested deer urine products in Louisiana. The amendment passed March 5 would also ban the sale of untested deer urine products in Louisiana. These actions are part of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' efforts to prevent chronic wasting disease (CWD) from entering the state.

CWD has not been detected in Louisiana but has been found in 26 states, including Arkansas, Mississippi and Texas. For more information on CWD, go to <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/cwd>.

The Commission changed dove hunting dates in the South Zone for 2020-21. The first split will be held from Sept. 5-16, the second from Oct. 17-Nov. 29 and the third split from Dec. 19-Jan. 21, 2021.



To see the complete hunting regulation NOI, go to <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/resources/category/commission-action-items>.

A public hearing will be held on the amendments on April 20, 2020, at 10 a.m. in the Joe Herring-Louisiana Room of LDWF Headquarters, 2000 Quail Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70808. For more information or to comment on the adopted amendments, contact Tommy Tuma at 225-765-2349, ttuma@wlf.la.gov or by mail at LDWF Wildlife Division, P.O. Box 98000, Baton Rouge, LA 70898-9000. ■



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LOUISIANA SPORTSMAN SHOW BIG BUCK CONTEST

By Dave Moreland

The Louisiana Sportsman Show and Festival was shut down early as part of Louisiana's attempts to cease all social activities and try and keep the coronavirus from spreading, and as such, the show's Big Buck Contest ended the second night of the show with 27 entries, the quality of the racks being excellent.

In the Louisiana Gun category, Jerry Denman led the competition with his 162½ monster from Red River Parish. Vincent Chauvin Jr. of Bogalusa killed a state-record crossbow buck on the Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge. At 123½, it would probably have been the best Louisiana crossbow buck in the contest had it continued all four days. Riley Pontiff of Gonzales led the way in the Youth category with a 133½ buck killed in Washington Parish.

Some huge out-of-state bucks were entered in the Crossbow category: Carl Holland of Livingston will make the Boone & Crockett Club's Recognition Program with a 164½ typical, and Lonnie Adams of Thibodaux killed a 158½ buck in Illinois.

Andy Dupre of Baton Rouge, Jack Uhle Sr. of Saint Francisville and Keith Russell of Baton Rouge all killed Louisiana bucks that will be listed in the 2019-20 State Recognition Program. Russell's buck scored 154 and was harvested in West Feliciana Parish.

The highest scoring deer that had been entered was a 191½ non-typical rack from Kansas. Eric Garon of Walker killed this deer with his bow on Nov. 1. This probably was going to be the best out of state bow kill. The deer will not only make the Pope & Young record book but will qualify for the Boone & Crockett Recognition Program.

Deer entered in the contest were scored by official Boone & Crockett and Pope & Young scorers, and net scores — with deductions for lack of symmetry, even on non-typical racks — used for comparison. Most big-buck contests in Louisiana judge deer based on the gross score with no deductions taken.

The contest provides biologists with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries with good information about the state's deer herd. If the habitat is providing adequate nutrition, and the deer



herd is in balance with the habitat, growth and development should be good. While trophy hunting is often frowned upon, a whitetail buck that qualifies for trophy listing is a very good indicator of a sound deer management program.

Deer in the contest were scored as typical or non-typical. A typical score of 160 and a non-typical score of 185 are the scores used to determine winners in the categories. This has proven to be a good system over the years since it is difficult to compare the two different rack formations with each other.

In Louisiana, Areas 1 and 6 are generally known as the big-buck regions, mainly due to the intense agriculture and rich bottomland hardwood habitat. These areas have a late breeding season, January and February, and generally, there are quality deer killed in those parishes. However, January weather was very warm and wet, which may have had an impact on deer movement and hunter success. Two days into the show and big-buck contest, no deer from Avoyelles, Pointe Coupee or Concordia parishes had been entered — maybe a reflection on the season, the contest closing or the coronavirus pandemic keeping people away. ■



Vincent Chauvin Jr. of Bogalusa and his state-record crossbow buck killed on the Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge.



Jerry Denman led the Louisiana Gun category with his 162 $\frac{7}{8}$ monster from Red River Parish.



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THE GREEN, GREEN GRASS OF HOME

When inshore anglers talk about grass, they are either cursing the plants that are stealing time away from their fishing or heaping praise on the plants that attract their favorite gamefish species.

In the latter case, the plants are aquatic grass or more specifically, submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV). There is good reason to talk about it, beyond its ability to foul our hooks, because it is one of the richest aquatic habitats found in inshore waters. SAV holds a plethora of baitfish species, from mullet, killifish and silversides, to juveniles of larger species such as spotted seatrout and crustaceans such as crabs and shrimp.

For inshore anglers, the list of aquatic species above encompasses much of what speckled trout and redfish feed on, so it's no wonder that during parts of the year grass beds are a fishing heaven.

SUBMERGED AQUATIC VEGETATION (SAV) IS IMPORTANT TO THE COASTAL ECOSYSTEM, AND IT'S A GREAT PLACE TO FIND AND CATCH SPECKLED TROUT. LEARN MORE HERE.

■ By Jon Miller

WHEN TO LOOK IN THE GRASS >



WHEN TO LOOK IN THE GRASS

In April, speckled trout are found in shallow waters, including flats along channels, medium-sized lakes and the edges of bays. They have not begun to move to higher-salinity waters on the outside to begin the spawn. Where these shallow waters are also home to SAV, anglers are more likely to find trout, redfish and bass, which are there to feed on the plentiful bait. This productive grass habitat can also be found along the edges of channels like the MRGO. Knowing where to find and how to fish the grass will improve your fishing success.

Adult speckled trout are most often found around grass beds during the spring and fall. As the water warms in March and April, trout will move into areas with flooded grass beds to forage because of the abundance of food and access to cover from predators. Similarly, in September and October, trout leaving the sounds where they have been spawning will appear around the grass beds of large, inshore water bodies. Again, grass beds provide excellent feeding and cover habitat until the beds begin to die back as the hours of sunlight decline.

HOW TO FISH GRASS BEDS

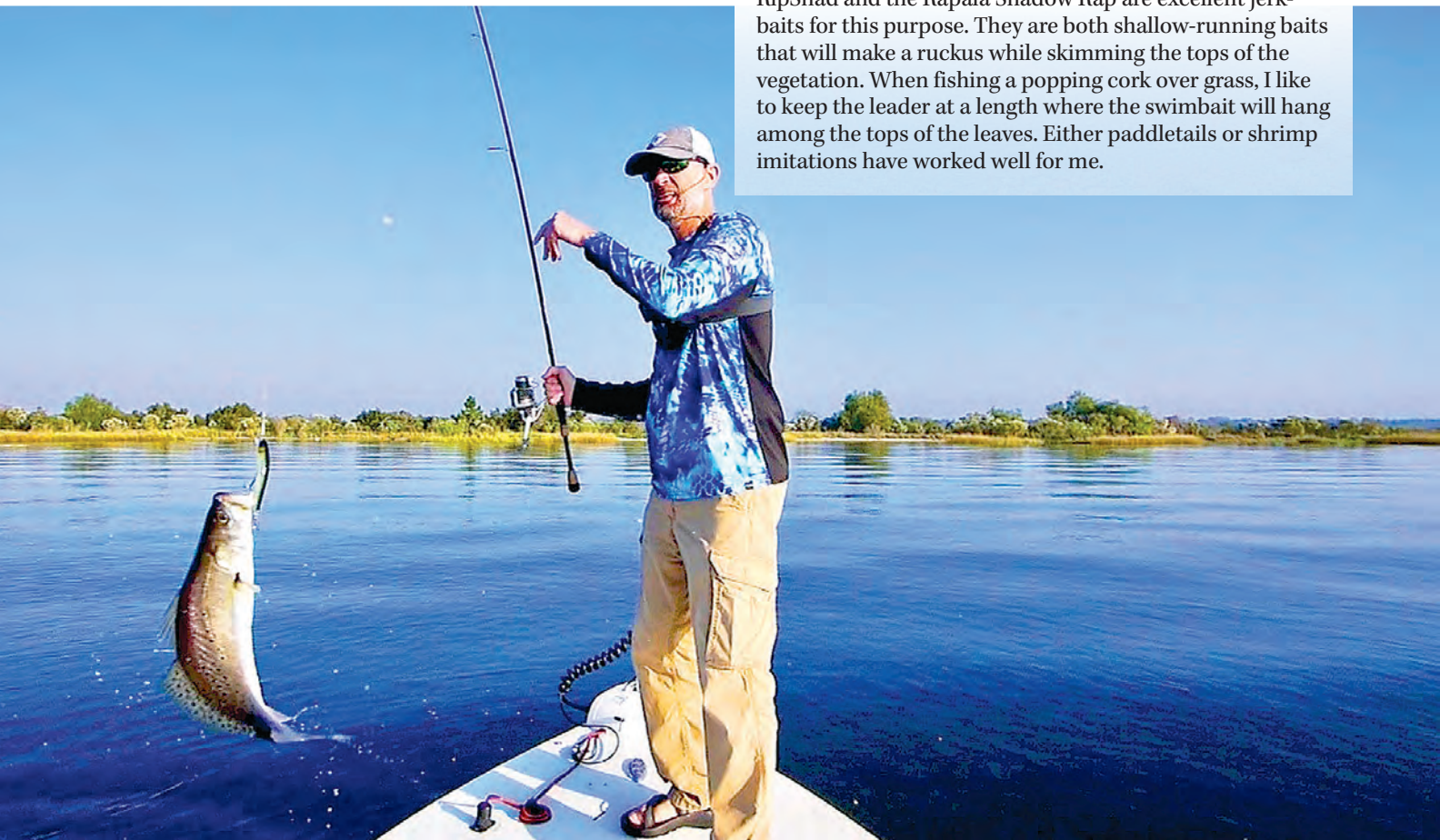
The most-productive time to fish over grass is when the water completely covers grass, such as on rising tides and high-tide



Jerkbaits, twitchbaits and topwater plugs can be fished above submerged grass very effectively.

periods, and when the water is relatively still. With at least a foot of water above the SAV, anglers are able to work lures effectively without continuously snagging, but more important, the flooded grass lets trout and redfish cruise over or through the top of the grass, which is an effective feeding behavior. Marsh bass also frequent grass, but they often ambush from stationary positions inside the grass bed, so high water is less important when choosing when to target them in grass beds.

My most-productive techniques for fishing flooded grass are a shallow-running jerkbait or twitchbait, a topwater bait or a popping cork. For instance, the Matrix Shad RipShad and the Rapala Shadow Rap are excellent jerkbaits for this purpose. They are both shallow-running baits that will make a ruckus while skimming the tops of the vegetation. When fishing a popping cork over grass, I like to keep the leader at a length where the swimbait will hang among the tops of the leaves. Either paddletails or shrimp imitations have worked well for me.





//////
 Eel grass is a prominent SAV in Louisiana's coastal waters; small fish use it as cover and predators as feeding grounds. **OPPOSITE:** Speckled trout love to feed around grass beds because of the food that it holds: baitfish and crustaceans.

TYPES OF GRASS

The most-ecologically productive SAV beds, according to the research work done is American eelgrass. Eelgrass provides an especially rich habitat because it covers the bottom with a mat of thin leaves that smaller fish and crustaceans can use for cover from larger species such as speckled trout, redfish and sheepshead. Despite the cover, eelgrass beds still allow larger species to cruise the tops and perimeter of the beds and grab bait should it wander too far from the protective cover.

Another common SAV in Louisiana is widgeon grass, which provides a more-productive habitat than mud bottom but is not as ecologically productive as eelgrass. The widgeon grass bed structure is taller and less dense than eelgrass, because it has stalks with branching small leaves attached. This provides less cover for small fish than eelgrass but much more cover than a bare, mud bottom. The widgeon grass also holds sediment in place, which improves local water quality and makes that part of the bed more attractive for predators.

SAVs are categorized across the estuary gradient by marsh zones, and eelgrass is found in the intermediate marsh zone, which has salinity in the 3.0 to 10 ppt range. Widgeon grass can be found from intermediate to brackish zones with 10 to 20 ppt of salinity, and even in some saline zone areas where salinity is greater than 20 ppt. Its greater tolerance for salinity allows widgeon grass to thrive over more of the Mississippi River estuary than eelgrass.

THE DECLINE IN GRASS BEDS >

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Trout numbers have dropped in Louisiana waters as SAV coverage has dipped and habitat has been degraded.

THE DECLINE IN GRASS BEDS

Eelgrass dominated the SAV varieties in Lake Pontchartrain in the 1950s, but by 2000, it had lost 50% of its distribution in the basin. Currently, eelgrass in Lake Pontchartrain is mostly found on the north shore and in patches elsewhere, such as the area around Irish Bayou. In the 1950s, eelgrass heavily populated the south shore of Lake Pontchartrain as well but is now largely absent from that area.

Due in part to the completion of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) channel in 1965, eelgrass distribution in Lake Pontchartrain has declined, largely replaced by widgeon grass. The MRGO allowed high-salinity water direct entry into Lake Pontchartrain.

All grass species have seen a decline since the 1950s. While eelgrass was impacted by salinity increases, all species of SAV were negatively impacted by municipal and agricultural runoff and storms. Researchers recorded a 90% decrease in SAVs from 1950 to 1985. A 74% decline in grass in Lake Pontchartrain is attributed just due to damage from Hurricane Andrew in 1992.

The loss of SAV is another, less-visible symptom of the devastating habitat loss in coastal Louisiana, and it's worth noting that the speckled trout stock has also decreased in similar magnitude over the same period of time.

GRASS GROWTH FACTORS

The flourishing of SAVs is dependent on protection from high salinity, high turbidity and excessive wave energy. Natural



turbidity due to tidal flow and normal weather activity is decreased by the presence of SAV, but conversely, hurricanes, marshland loss, and the dumping of Mississippi River water into Lake Pontchartrain can overwhelm the SAV with turbidity, blocking out the sun and creating excessive drag on the leaves, leading to plant damage.

An ever increasing loss of marshland is followed by the creation of open water, and that will increase wave energy in areas where SAV historically exists. Eelgrass is more tolerant than widgeon grass to wave energy, which is a beneficial characteristic where marsh erosion is being fought, so the widespread replacement of eelgrass with widgeon grass is less effective at combating marsh erosion.

WHY CARE ABOUT GRASS? >



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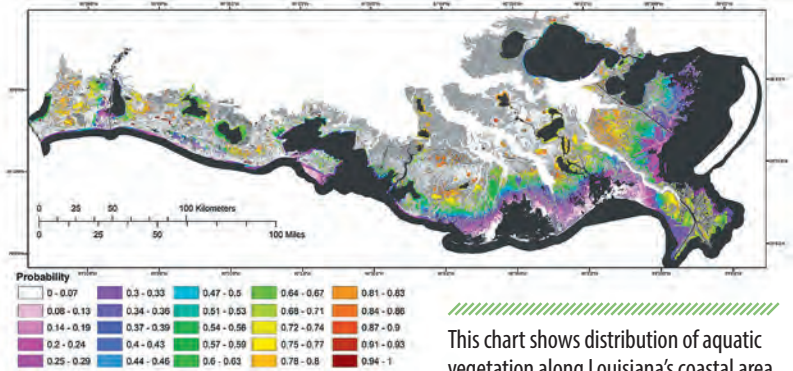
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WHY CARE ABOUT GRASS?

Marshland loss is believed to be a significant reason for the decline in Louisiana's speckled trout stock and, conversely, the restoration of marshland carries hope for a pathway to restoring the trout. However, research shows that SAV beds are far more ecologically productive than mud bottoms, so restoration of SAV alongside land restoration should be a faster pathway to speckled trout stock enhancement.

Research in Lake Pontchartrain showed that while adult speckled trout can be found across all types of bottom structure during the year, SAV is critical to the survival of trout larvae and juveniles. This research has been duplicated in other Gulf states, including Florida.

Expanding SAV coverage as a primary driver for promoting both inshore fisheries and water quality is a practice of management authorities in other regions such as the Chesapeake Bay and parts of Florida, including Tampa Bay. These areas are achieving a growth in SAV through conservation, environment changes and even SAV planting. Since SAV also improves water quality and sediment stability, expansion of SAV beds could be the bridge that links coastal restoration and speckled trout stock restoration in Louisiana. Knowing suitable areas for SAV growth is critical to any SAV restoration plan, and scientists at LSU have already created a model that would help coastal



This chart shows distribution of aquatic vegetation along Louisiana's coastal area.

restoration managers determine where to target restoration activities for expansion of SAV.

Increasing SAV in Louisiana will require improvements to other aspects of the inshore waters. While our inshore area covers more than a half-million acres, the area suitable for SAV growth is decreasing. Suitableness is negatively impacted by highly variable salinity, blown-out marsh where wave energy directly impacts the potential SAV areas, and high turbidity.

Ironically, high turbidity is partly the result of a lack of SAV to stabilize marsh sediment. The best SAV for locking down the sediment despite the wave energy from eroded marsh is eelgrass. However, eelgrass must have salinity controlled to the intermediate zone of 3 to 10 ppt, so expansion of eelgrass beds requires a more controlled salinity gradient from the fresh marsh zone to the saline marsh zone.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, which manages fisheries stocks, has only harvest controls to manage the health of the stock, but coastal-restoration plan managers may well hold the most-effective key to bringing about the change anglers want. Encouraging coastal restoration managers to design in SAV expansion when developing their action plans is one of the most-productive lobbying efforts for anglers and fishery conservation organizations to grow the speckled trout stock in Louisiana. ■



Jon Miller is an engineer, lifetime fisherman, and host of the YouTube channel Jon Miller Fishing.

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TOP 6 SURF-FISHING TACTICS

There's more to catching trout in the surf than showing up and walking into the water. Here are some tips from Sammy Romano, manager of Chag's Sporting Goods, who has perfected the tactics.

• MODIFY YOUR LURES

On topwater plugs, Romano adds an extra split ring between the ring already on the plug and the hook, a trick he learned from Bill Mellor, a retired U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service game warden.

The extra ring makes it difficult for a fish to get enough leverage to twist off the hook.

Romano and fishing buddy Nicholas "Frog" Cioffe also replace the hooks on all their plugs with Gamakatsu hooks, which are stronger and sharper than the hooks that come standard on plugs. More important for trout fishing, Gamakatsu hooks have larger gaps, which results in more hookups with fish that just slap at the lure. This is useful for all fishing, not just surf fishing.

• THE TAG-TEAM APPROACH

Later in the day, after the sun rises, Romano and Cioffe form a tag team, with one continuing to fish a topwater lure while the other shifts to a suspending lure.

When a trout slaps at the topwater but doesn't take it, the suspending bait will be cast to the same spot, and 60 to 70% of the time, a hookup will result.

• FIND THE SWEET SPOT

Look for the suds produced by breaking waves, Romano said, and cast topwater lures close to the whitewater.

With sinkers or suspenders, cast into the suds.

• SCOUT, SCOUT, SCOUT

"Sandbars change every winter," Romano said. "One of my early season tasks is to walk everything walkable to see the lay of the bars. "Knowing where the bars and troughs are is the key to understanding fish movement. Trout follow a feature."

• LOOK FOR THE BEST WATER

"In the surf, I've caught fish in muddy water, and I've caught fish in clean water, but everything is easier in clean water," Romano said.

The best color is "trout green," or green water that is not too clear. Romano likes to be able to see his bait 1 to 2 feet underwater.

"Move up and down the beach to find the cleanest water," he said. "If I can't find clear water, I just fish in muddy water."



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Success in the surf can really be good when you read the beach and figure out where fish are going to be feeding.

• **BE ALERT CONSTANTLY**

Stay on your toes. Don't just blindly and repetitively cast to the same spot. Watch for any bait movement and cast into it immediately.

Watch for feeding slicks, defined as patches of water calmed by the oils released from the bodies of prey fish being attacked by trout. But remember that the fish might be quite a ways up-current from the slick.

Surf fishermen have an advantage in that, with the beach as a barrier, fish are usually up or down the beach, reducing the area that to be searched.

And, being that they are physically in the water rather than in a boat, surf fishermen are in constant touch with the direction of current flow. ■

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8 THINGS NOT TO DO WHEN SURF FISHING

Always fish with someone close by; surf fishing may be relative safe, but in case something goes wrong, you need a helping hand.

A few things can wreck your chances of success when you head to the beach to surf fish. Here are eight things anglers should have on their “what not to do” list:

• DON'T WADE PAST THE FISH

Very early in the morning, fish in the first trough next to the beach, even though it is often only 1 to 2 feet deep. People have a tendency to believe that farther out is better and will wade past the fish.

• DON'T BE RUDE

Don't get on top of other fishermen. Be respectful. This includes fishermen in boats who often get shallow to fish the surf zone.

“If you crowd a boater, he gets PO'd, cranks up his big motor and tears out, ruining it for everybody,” said Sammy Romano, manager of Chag's Sporting Goods.

• DON'T BE A FENCE POST

You have to move to locate fish; they won't come to you. “Fifteen minutes is a long time to be in one spot,” said angler Nicholas “Frog” Cioffe said. “Move until you find fish; then stop and fish it out before continuing to move.”

• DON'T FISH ALONE

You can get in deep water or get in trouble with hooks, so make sure to take a buddy along.

• DON'T SLEEP IN

The best surf bite usually occurs with the very first light in the morning.

• KEEP IT SIMPLE

“Don't use too much hardware,” Romano said. “I see too many snap swivels and steel leaders. Trout don't like jewelry.”

• DON'T FISH DEAD BAIT

“You are not catfishing,” Romano said.

• DON'T HAVE BLINDERS ON

Look around. Be observant. Watch for feeding birds and bait movement. Study other anglers' success. Look for differences in wave action that indicate something is different. ■

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Todd Masson

Are Louisiana's speckled-trout troubles beyond the control of biologists? Is Mother Nature to blame?



IS OVERFISHING REALLY THE CAUSE OF LOUISIANA'S SPECKLED TROUT DECLINE?

"A change gon' come."
— Sam Cooke

We don't know yet what the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will propose to the commission that oversees it about changes in speckled trout regulations, but it's unlikely Bayou State anglers will, for very long, enjoy the same limits that have been in place for nearly four decades.

I predicted this day was coming in a column I wrote for *The Times-Picayune* less than three years ago, and as I stated then, the regulation tightening is more politically motivated than biological. Some extreme environmental groups HATE the fact that Louisiana's regulations are so liberal and have been fighting hard behind the scenes to get them changed.

Now, does that mean I believe speckled trout fishing has been good lately? No, it doesn't. In fact, it's been pretty poor for

about the past decade, with some years certainly being better than others.

WET, WET, WET

But what has also been true for the past decade? The eastern half of the continent has seen some of the worst flooding in history. In March of last year, 42 locations set record river levels, mainly in the Missouri River valley, stretching into the Dakotas and the Midwest. Most of the previous records had been set in 2011, which was the year the wet cycle began.

All that water has inundated south Louisiana's marshes, lakes and bays via the Mississippi River and the Bonnet Carre Spillway. Between 1931 and 2007, the spillway, which relieves pressure on New Orleans-area levees during swollen-river events, was opened only eight times. In the 12 years since, it's been opened six times.

Compounding the problem are localized heavy rains, like the 2016 Baton

Rouge flood and this year's flood in Jackson, Miss., that swell smaller rivers and freshen otherwise productive areas.

Now, freshwater is **GREAT** for trout populations in general. Juvenile specks thrive in the stuff, but when the fish get to be sexually mature, which is right around the time they reach harvestable size, they seek salty water to spawn. If everything close to the coast is too fresh, they keep going until they find what they need.

That's particularly true of the really big sows that we all love to catch. As a speckled trout ages, its osmoregulatory system degrades, and its ability to tolerate freshwater decreases.



A former editor of *Louisiana Sportsman*, **Todd Masson** has published the *Marsh Man Masson* YouTube channel since 2017.

That necessarily means the fish are farther out and more difficult to locate, so angler success is lower. What's also true is there aren't as many in the areas that biologists sample with gill nets. So anglers are bringing fewer fish to the docks and scientists are netting fewer, so there appears to be a problem that may not actually exist.

DROUGHT PLUSSES?

Back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the southeastern United States experienced a considerable drought. Toledo Bend and other impoundments began to dry up, and there were grave concerns about cities and towns losing their freshwater sources.

Saltwater shoved its way into Louisiana's marshes, and speckled trout definitely took notice. Big fish became commonplace. In fact, seven of the state's top 10 speckled trout were caught during that time.

I caught my personal best, an 8-pound, 8-ounce speck that bit a Norton Bull Minnow on Calcasieu Lake in 2002. That fish would be big news today, but back then, it earned me little more than a pat on the back from buddies.

That 7- or 8-year stretch wasn't a normal weather pattern, and neither is this one. The eastern part of the continent will eventually trend toward its climatological average, and so will the speckled trout fishing in Louisiana.

Until that happens, changing the limits won't help a single angler put more speckled trout in the boat. ■

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Amy Webb

Amy Webb caught this fish in July 2018 in Grand Isle.



Angela Jones

Angela Jones with one of the specks she caught at Four Bayou.

BELOW: Best buds Graham Howard and Jude Lambert with their first two trout caught in Hopedale.



**Graham Howard
& Jude Lambert**



Lucas Schramm

Lucas Schramm was all smiles after he caught this 5.21-pound trout while on a July fishing trip in Venice.



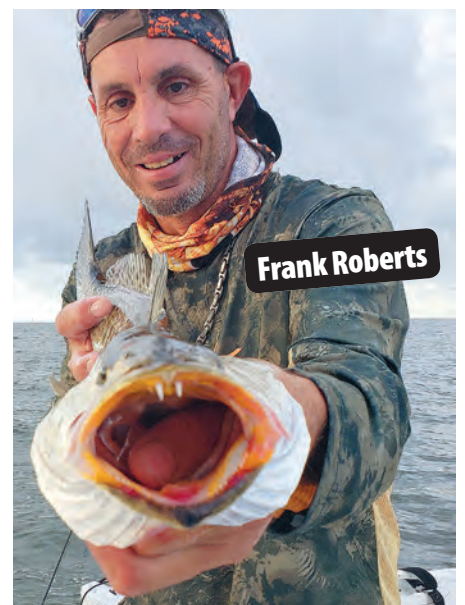
Matt Carroll

Matt Carroll of Baton Rouge caught this 21-inch trout at Grand Terre Beach in July 2018 on live shrimp.



Charlotte Chadha

Charlotte Chadha, 7, poses with her first speckled trout.



Frank Roberts

Frank "Frankiefillet" Roberts with a nice 5-pound trout out of Hopedale.

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WHEN WEATHER CONDITIONS ALLOW, BREAK OUT OF THE MARSHES AND AMBUSH PACKS OF SPECKLED TROUT AT THE MIDWAY POINT BETWEEN GRAND ISLE AND LAFITTE. HERE'S ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW. ■ By Rusty Tardo

THE EARLY BIRD GETS THE TROUT

IN southeast Louisiana, midway between Grand Isle and Lafitte in Barataria Bay, anglers can fight some great battles this month with the sizeable speckled trout that infiltrate the area.

Capt. Keith "Herk" Bergeron called me one day with a surprising invitation.

"You want to come down to Grand Isle and catch some speckled trout?" he asked.

"Now? It's a bit early in the season, isn't it?" I asked.

"No, this is the time to go to get in on some nice trout," he said. "You just have to know where to go."

Since Bergeron is a full-time guide and resident of Grand Isle, I figured he knew what he was talking about, so I drove down the next morning and waited for him at Bridge Side Marina. After launching, we headed out.

Midway between Grand Island and Lafitte are some well-known and heavily fished places with names familiar to area anglers: Manilla Village, Saturday Island and Hackberry Bay.

But most consider these summer destinations and are unaware the action starts as early as April.

“This time of year, the trout are following the bait as it moves south down the Barataria Waterway into the open water,” said Bergeron (985-860-7855). “That is the main channel that drains the whole Lafitte-area marsh, so as it drains the water and bait out of the marsh, the trout will follow right out into the bigger water of Barataria Bay, and we’ll ambush them right there.”

Our first stop was what’s left of Manilla Village.

For 100 years, it was a thriving community of Filipinos who lived in houses on stilts and made their living by catching and drying shrimp, mostly for export back to their homeland.

Hurricane Betsy decimated the community in 1965, leaving only rubble and pilings as silent reminders of what once was there.

“The water surrounding Manilla Village is about 5 feet deep, but where the pilings are, it’s only 2 or 3 feet deep — where the land was,” Bergeron said. “That rise in the bottom causes the water to swirl around it, sweeping bait along with the current. There are oyster shells on the bottom and a lot of underwater debris, so all that subsurface structure attracts fish.

“However, I advise everyone to idle slowly around it, because there are a lot of pilings lurking just below the surface, eager to ruin your day.”

We were the only boat out on a nice, sunny day, and I remarked how unusual that is at such a well-known spot.

“Not many make the long run out here in April unless they’ve heard the trout are biting,” Bergeron said. “Otherwise, they fish more inside. But when you get a good day like this, you have to make the run.”

We were both casting soft plastics about 2½ feet under corks, and I got the first bite on a small, chartreuse beetle. After reeling in a very respectable trout, I quickly caught another just like it, and then a couple more.

“Give me one of those sparkle beetles,” Bergeron said. “These fish are ignoring my bait, but they’re eating up your beetle.”

He switched baits and immediately caught a nice trout.

We were slowly trolling along the pilings, casting up alongside them and popping our corks. At a few spots, we caught a half-dozen or so fish before the action stopped and we resumed trolling.

It’s a tactic that works well anywhere when fishing for specks.

After a while, Capt. Dee Price pulled up nearby with a group of customers, and they started casting near the pilings under a cork.



Capt. Herk Bergeron knows that this time of year the trout are following bait moving south through Barataria Bay.

According to Capt. Paul Titus, the actual Manilla Village is located at 29° 25.686' N. Latitude and 89° 58.591' W. Longitude. This position is the location where the old docks were located. The general area around that site is now commonly referred to as Manilla Village. Use your depth finder and try the reef south of the old village at 29° 25.632' N Latitude and 89° 58.571' W Longitude, about 60 feet due south of the old docks. This reef was at one time actually part of the island.

Manilla Village

Saturday Island Rig

According to Capt. Paul Titus, there are three platforms forming a triangle near the Saturday Island shoal, with the apex at the top indicated as the northernmost of the three platforms:

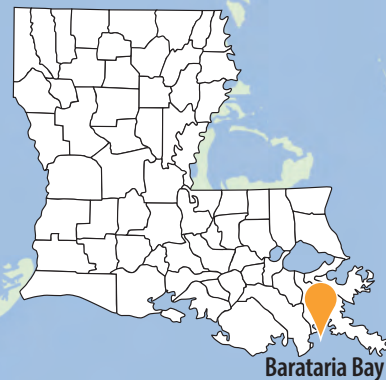
The Northernmost platform is at or about 29° 25.337' N. Latitude ~ 89° 57.001' W. Longitude.

The Easternmost platform is at or about 29° 25.203' N. Latitude ~ 89° 56.527' W. Longitude.

The Southernmost platform is at or about 29° 24.919' N. Latitude ~ 89° 56.755' W. Longitude.

Hackberry Bay

Barataria Bay



Bergeron noticed they had no success, while we continued to catch fish after fish. “What are you using for bait?” Price shouted toward us. “Small, chartreuse H&H sparkle beetles,” Bergeron shouted back. “If you need some, I think I have a pack I can dig out and give you.”

Price trolled up near enough for Bergeron to toss him a bag. They trolled back to the pilings and started catching trout.

“I can’t believe how much difference these baits are making today,” I said. “Usually, if they hit one bait, they’ll hit another. But today these fish want a small, chartreuse bait, and that’s all they’ll hit.”

Bergeron said the fish’s food source was probably the reason for their persnickety tastes.

Solid trout are waiting at the midway point between Grand Isle and Lafitte.



“Obviously, what they’re feeding on right now is small, probably small shrimp, and these beetles best match the hatch,” he said. “It’s why you can’t assume the fish aren’t at a spot until you’ve tried a variety of baits and colors.”

The action slowed at the pilings, but by then, we already had a nice box of fish.

Bergeron pointed the bow toward the big Saturday Island rig, where he had caught some big trout the day before.

“The water is deeper here — about 5 to 6 feet deep — and the bottom is littered with debris,” he said. “If you try fishing the bottom, you’ll hang up just about every cast.”

“I fish here about 2½ to 3 feet under a cork, and if you can get live shrimp, that’s what you want to use.”

Since we didn’t have live shrimp, we threw our plastics. The chartreuse beetle attracted some hits, but the better bait at this stop was a Deadly Dudley in the yellow snow and opening night/chartreuse colors.

BREAKING THE BARATARIA BAY TROUT CODE

Herk Bergeron said there are things you’ll need to know to break the trout code if your Barataria Bay trip is to be successful this month.

- **Tide.** You need a day with a good tidal range, whether rising or falling.

- **Winds.** It doesn’t have to be calm, but east winds in the 15- to 20-mph range will make Saturday Island and Manilla Village unfishable.

Bergeron said Manilla Village is best on a northwest or west wind because it gets protection from the land along the Barataria Waterway.

Any strong wind will nix Saturday Island because it’s in wide-open waters.

- **Water clarity.** “This is probably the biggest factor,” Bergeron said. “If you can find clear water out there, the trout will bite. If not, they won’t; that simple.”

- **Weather.** “Watch the weather and choose days just before a front comes through, or two or three days after the front,” he said. “Don’t fish the day of or the day after a front if you can help it.

“Give the waves and winds time to settle and for the bottom to clear up. Remember: If the water is dirty, you will not catch fish.” ■

Andrew Szush Jr. holds up a trout he caught on a fishing trip with his dad and grandpa. When targeting speckled trout in Barataria Bay in April, try to pick a day with plenty of tidal movement, because current is a key to good fishing.



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These have been the most-effective baits out here in this deeper water," Bergeron said, reeling in a nice speck in the 2-pound class.

Another boat was working around the opposite end of the rig, and I could hear them shouting with excitement, so I knew they were into some action, as well. I couldn't resist the urge to toss a bait without a cork, but after having to break my line off twice, I gave up and stayed with the cork rig.

Our next move was farther into Hackberry Bay, where we worked our baits alongside a structure that could best be described as the Trash Pile.

It's a long structure, covered with oil-field debris, and there's quite a bit of debris in the water alongside the rig, as well. Bergeron hung back from it a ways, positioning us near enough so we could cast alongside it.

The trout were there, too.

We got hammered by some very aggressive fish in the 2-pound class; they hit our baits like it was summer.

We caught fish until we filled our two-man limit, and then we stayed awhile and played catch-and-release with the big fish. ■



Rusty Tardo grew up in St. Bernard fishing the waters of Delacroix, Hopedale and Shell Beach. He and his wife, Diane, have been married over 40 years and live in Kenner.



According to Herk Bergeron, water clarity is a big factor in good trout fishing this month at Barataria Bay.

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TOP FISHING TACTICS

FOR BARATARIA BAY REDFISH

After catching a double-limit of speckled trout, but before calling it a day, Capt. Herk Bergeron wanted to run into the marsh between Grand Isle and Lafitte and make a few casts for redfish.

"Really, all you have to do is find marsh, look for clear water and fish points and cuts," he said. "But the best tactic this month is to fish along the deeper canals at drains and cuts.

"The fish seem extra-spooky right now; that is, any noise at all tends to spook them. So I try to approach as silently as possible, and I tell everyone to move quietly in the boat. If you slam a hatch or splash an anchor, they're gone."

He said live bait is the best way to go.

"For bait, I like to use the biggest cocohoe minnow I can find and fish it right against the bank," Bergeron said. "I only use a 1-foot leader under a popping cork, and I emphasize that you have to get that bait against the grass.

"If you are 4 feet off the bank, you are out of the strike zone."

Our first and second stops failed to produce, but as we trolled slowly toward the cut that was to be our third stop, Bergeron's first cast resulted in a hook-up.



Leah Patterson caught her fair share of redfish during a trip to Lafitte, including this 22-inch red. Fishing live bait under a cork within a foot or two of the marsh grass banks is the ticket for redfish in Barataria Bay this month.

The bite was typical in this shallow water. First, your cork slowly moves sideways because it can't go straight down. As the fish commits to swallowing the bait, your cork will dip below the surface — that's when you set the hook. Reds have hard mouths, so put some yank into the hook-set.

Bergeron said that, whether you fish with braid or mono, you don't have to be in a hurry to put the fish in the boat.

"Unless the fish is trying to get into some structure, like pilings, you shouldn't horse it in," he said. "Take your time, let it fight and enjoy the battle. That's what you came for." ■

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APRIL SPECKS GREAT IN SULPHUR MINE, CATFISH LAKE

Get 'em before they're gone

Capt. Mike Guidry, of Rippin Lip Guide Service said he'll fish the Sulphur Mine and Catfish Lake this month until the trout make their annual transition from the inside waters into the bigger, outside bays.

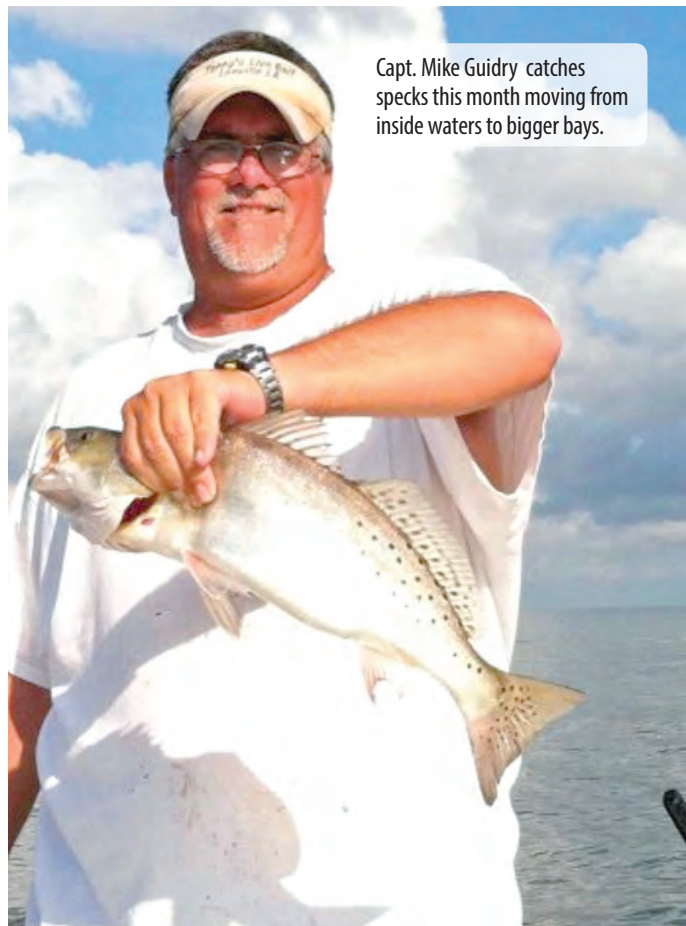
"March and April are the two best months for fishing inside, in both Catfish Lake and the Sulphur Mine," he said. "I get as many trips in as I can until mid-to-late April, when the action really slows down. Once it slows, then I know the transition has begun, and the trout are headed out into Lake Chien and Lake Racourci, where I'll be fishing by May."

Guidry (985-637-4292) said the key in April is to plan to fish about three days after a front blows through, when the winds turn around and blow from the south.

"The north winds mean high pressure, and that really turns the bite off," he said. "Wait for a south wind which means low pressure, and that's when the bite turns on. Tide movement is also important, but it doesn't matter as much whether its rising or falling, as long as you have water movement. You want to find decent water, moving water, and maybe some bait activity on the surface. In the Sulphur Mine I fish off points and around submerged islands, and any of the places I know has a shell bottom. For bait, I use live shrimp or live minnows if they're available, under a cork, or the Matrix Shad plastics in the shrimp creole color either under a cork or just cast and retrieve on a ¼-ounce jig head."

BIRDS WON'T HELP THIS MONTH

Guidry said he pretty much ignores the flocks of diving birds in



Capt. Mike Guidry catches specks this month moving from inside waters to bigger bays.

the spring, considering them a waste of time because the majority of the time he finds either schools of tiny trout or gaff-top catfish under them.

"In Catfish Lake I'll target the numerous oyster reefs on both the north and south sides of the lake," he said. "They're clearly marked by lines of white PVC poles, so just get up in there and drift or troll, casting those same baits. I find we do better when the boat is moving, but as soon as you get some action you want to stick your Power Pole or Cajun anchor down and see if you can put some numbers in the box. You usually have to cull through the undersize trout, but there should also be some nice keeper sizes in the mix."

REDFISH

Guidry said if you want to take home some redfish, you can specifically target them by parking off a point or cut or cove where there's moving water, and soaking a live minnow or dead bait under a cork. He also likes to troll and cast gold spoons or Rapala Skitterwalk topwaters (in chartreuse/white) for some really explosive action on both specks and reds this month. ■

— Rusty Tardo

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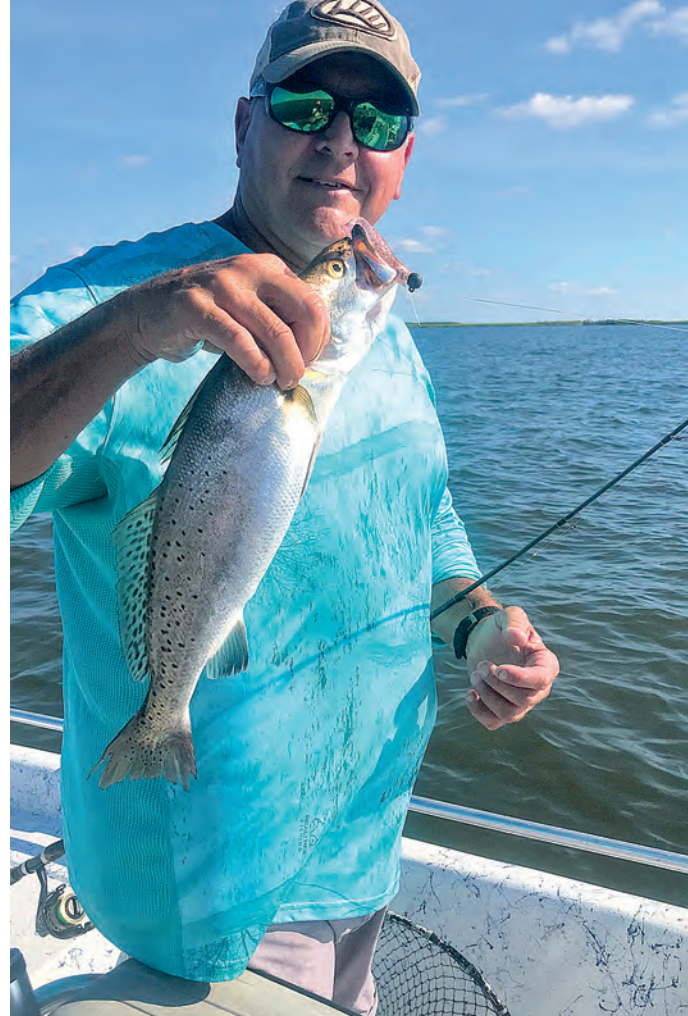
PARK AND SHOP AT THE MRGO ROCKS

Trout, reds are looking for April groceries

Capt. Gene Dugas of Rather Be Fishing Adventures said the cold, muddy river water flowing at high volume through the Mardi Gras Cut will make the fish a no-show in Black Bay again this month, and the trout will shift to the east.

"I still hope the river will fall and we can have a good spring run come May and over the summer, but for now, the high river is pushing the action eastward, over towards the MRGO Rocks, Bay Eloi and all the big bays on that side," he said. "The key will be to look for clean water, look for birds and look for bait in the water."

Dugas said this should be a good month for fishing and anglers have three pretty good April options:



The MRGO rocks are a popular spot for Capt. Gene Dugas in April, especially when high water pushes speckled trout east from the Mardi Gras Cut.

"If you're getting some fish, even though the action isn't fast, you'll probably be better off just staying put and slowly but steadily adding fish to the box," he said.

EAST SIDE OYSTER REEFS

Dugas said there's more than a dozen big bays, all peppered with oyster poles, on the east side of the MRGO. His tactic is to get up in the poles and drift or troll slowly, casting live shrimp or soft plastics under a cork.

Look for decent water and any bait movement on the surface. Birds diving are always tell-tale signs of where the fish are and worth a try. Dugas said he really likes reefs in 5 or 6 feet of water, and he doesn't hesitate to try fishing them by tight-lining soft plastics on a ¼ ounce jig.

BAY ELOI WELLS, PLATFORMS

"On a good weather day I'll tie off or anchor by the wellheads and fish both on the bottom and 3½ to 4 feet under a cork, with live shrimp or plastic," he said. "You can possibly catch anything from trout to bull reds, big sheepshead and junk fish out there, but there's usually plenty of action to keep you busy."

Dugas said you'll likely find some reds mixed in with the specks in all these places, but if you want to target reds, he suggests casting live or dead shrimp under a cork at any of the points and drains in the marsh where you find decent, moving water. ■

— Rusty Tardo

FISH THE MRGO ROCKS

"I know it can look like a parking lot out there with all the boats lined up along them, especially on weekends, but it's usually a pretty good bet this time of year," Dugas said. "The water is deeper; therefore, you can usually find some decent-looking water, and the rocks are long so there's room enough. I normally stay on the Long Rocks side, in the channel, and anchor off about a long cast from the rocks. You want to fish 3 to 3½ feet deep under a cork, so if you anchor too close you'll lose a lot of tackle up in the rocks. Keep your cork at least 3 to 5 feet off the rocks, and you can even do some deeper fishing, casting soft plastic towards the channel on a ¾-ounce jig or a bottom rig with live shrimp, but know you're going to lose tackle in the process because the rocks extend out on the bottom for quite a distance."

Dugas said he gives a spot 10 to 15 minutes to produce, then moves 50 yards or so and tries again.



Popping corks are a great way for a kayak fishermen to present baits to marsh species.

LEEVILLE OFFERS KAYAKERS PLENTY

Paddle your way to reds, speckled trout

The first time I fished from a kayak in Louisiana was one April in Leeville. It took more time than normal to sort out all the gear in my vessel because I was so excited to finally fish the extensive marshes that I saw from a distance on my trips to and from Grand Isle.

The tide was outgoing, so it was stress-free to slide my kayak into the water from the side of the road near the Leeville Boat Launch and Fishing Pier. All that was left to do was to sit patiently until it became bright enough to safely venture into the mist-covered marsh.

With spring in full swing, fish are shifting behaviors and feeding grounds. Occasionally, the bite can be tough to figure out due to the transition that redfish and speckled trout are going through. But once fish are located and you figure out what lure is the hot one that day, the hookups might be non-stop.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The launch is past the toll bridge and the multiple bait shops lining the side of the road. Once you reach the end of Old Hwy 1, a gravel road will lead you to your final destination.

The gravel lot has plenty of room to make the necessary adjustments to your kayak without interfering with other boaters and kayakers. Ensure that you don't leave without GPS electronics. There are so many nooks and crannies in this section of Louisiana's coastal marshland that is easy to get lost.

Check the marine forecast to plan your trip around an incoming tide. This time of year, an outgoing tide will push the baitfish and the bite towards Caminada Pass and out of the marsh. In that sense, the tide can make or break your trip.

The marshes around Leeville fill with redfish in April. Try swimbaits, spinnerbaits and spoons.



INCOMING TIDE BITE

For many fish in the marsh, April is a transition period before they get into summer patterns. Leeville is no exception to this rule.

Speckled trout are beginning to move from the marsh to along the coastline. The bite should heat up by the end of April and the beginning of May. Similar to years past, they will be found around the entrance to bayous or at points near moving water. Anglers should also be on the watch for diving birds. While the speckled trout are moving out, shrimp are transitioning from offshore.

You can't go wrong with a popping cork and a 2- to 3-foot leader. Vudu shrimp, Matrix Shad and/or live bait will usually wrangle a bite. It may be prudent to attach a small bait bucket with cocahoe minnows to your kayak. These baitfish are spawning in the marsh, and every predator has made the cocahoe minnow one of its main forms of sustenance.

Last year, redfish preferred the shallower sections of marshland around Leeville. I had a lot of luck cajoling them into striking by throwing spoons, swimbaits on a 1/4- to 3/8-ounce jighead and spinnerbaits. ■

— Dora Lambert

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SET YOUR SIGHT CASTS on Sabine refuge's colorful redfish

There is something special to being on the water during the spring. The environment is so full of life: the trees are budding out and turning green; birds are chirping; frogs are croaking, and you can hear the mating calls of lonesome alligators. Hopefully, you are able to spend some quality time in the great outdoors and the fish will be biting.

The toughest decisions are where, what and how I want to catch them? The Sabine National Wildlife Refuge opens every year on March 15 and is open until Oct. 15, and my addiction to sight-casting at cruising redfish tends to take precedence these days. Between Lake Calcasieu and Sabine Lake, the refuge is home to 124,511 acres of pristine marsh environment that supports countless species, including a handful that are sought-after among anglers. Redfish are at the top of my list.

The City of Orange public ramp on Simmons from the north and the Deep Bayou launch from the south provide easy access.

TACTICS

Sight-fishing is literally canvassing water that is clear enough for you to actually spot the fish. When teaching others to spot redfish, I recommend looking for key features rather than the whole

fish. Movement is always easiest to spot: a wake, a tailing fish or a flash of color just beneath the surface. I recommend looking for their pectoral fins. Often, they will be extended, allowing the angler to spot the bright white and orange colors. An open mouth is also easy to spot; there is typically a lot of white associated with it. Last, I recommend searching for the fish's orange glow. Redfish that we catch in the marsh tend to be more colorful and vibrant than redfish we catch anywhere else.

TECHNIQUE

I prefer sight-casting with a fly; however, these general presentation techniques should work regardless of your lure choice. In gin-clear and shallow water, redfish can be extremely spooky. Present your lure or fly either perpendicular to the direction the fish is facing or quartered to the fish. Avoid presentations that are either directly head-on or from directly behind the fish.

Patience is key here; allow the fish to get positioned or position yourself to make the best presentation. Definitely avoid casting any shadows over them, as this will quickly blow them out of the area. Quietness is also vital to success. Most often, I am quiet in the boat, not slamming hatches, blaring music, etc.

Vibrant colors on this redfish made it particularly easy to spot, especially with clear water and high sun.

This oversized redfish fell for a shrimp slider in the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge. Sight-fishing for redfish is a combination of hunting and fishing.



When sight-fishing it is also important for your lure to enter the water quietly, without a huge commotion. Dropping ¼- to ½-ounce worth of lead on a redfish's nose will most likely not receive a warm welcome. It is rather simple to deliver a fly stealthily, but to do that with conventional tackle is more easily accomplished with a weightless swimbait hook. Rigging a weightless Reaction Innovations Skinny Dipper can be absolutely deadly. If you are having trouble spotting fish, blind-casting with a spinnerbait is likely to produce some solid redfish as well as bass.

CAUTION

If you have never ventured out into the refuge, make sure and read up on the rules and regulations before going. It would also be very wise to familiarize yourself with the map and boundaries. I would encourage going with someone that has been before to assist with getting your bearings. However, if you are a DIY'er like myself, make sure and keep the trail function activated on your GPS so you can find your way back out. Not doing so might end up resulting in a long night with the mosquitoes and alligators. ■

— Capt. Adam Jaynes

Capt. Adam Jaynes can be found at justfishsabine.com.



Capt. Adam Jaynes grew up fishing both Sabine Lake and Lake Calcasieu and their surrounding bays, marshes and rivers. He specializes in light tackle with artificial lures in the year-around pursuit of speckled trout and redfish.



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SURF SHARKING AT ELMER'S ISLAND IS STAND-UP FUN

Line up your gear, bait and have at it

Sharks are too often portrayed as “menacing man-eaters” thanks to Hollywood’s notorious 1975 film *Jaws*. Not only are sharks important to the ecosystem, they are an irreplaceable commodity for coastal communities. Due to overfishing — mainly for shark fins — and commercial by-catch, oceanic populations of sharks have been decreasing. However, shark-fishing and dive-related activities are still in high demand across the Gulf of Mexico. Louisiana, even though a lesser-known shark destination, is no exception to the demand. Shark-fishing has been recently interwoven with conservation efforts to protect the species. Whereas, TAG Louisiana hasn’t started an Apex Predator Program, shark anglers are encouraged to volunteer for other tagging initiatives such as NOAA. Even if your

The surf at Elmer’s Island is a great destination to catch sharks.



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interests in shark fishing around Louisiana, especially Elmer’s Island, is purely recreational, gear and cognizance handling techniques are a requirement.

GEAR FOR SURF SHARKS

The surf around Elmer’s Island that borders Caminada Pass is known for producing trophy bull reds year-round. However, as many anglers can confirm, nice-sized sharks are abundant, too. Without the right gear and knowledge, however, there is no way you can land one over 4 feet.

Typical, surf-fishing for sharks requires some preparation. Sand spikes, or rod holders, should usually be around 5 feet in total length so a few feet can be pushed down into the sand for security. I have had several rod holders break due to a shark taking off with my bait. Quality sand spikes can be made relatively inexpensively using PCV pipe.

You will also need shark rigs made with about 4 feet of wire leader. Sharks can shred a mono leader before you get a chance at battling the apex predator. Also, their sandpapered-textured skin can break mono. Hooks should be non-stainless steel, non-offset circle hooks with the barbs filed down. This allows for a quicker release.

My go-to shark bait is freshly netted mullet. However, stingray is the preferred bait for bigger sharks. You want to be able to sling the bait out as far as possible or paddle it out in a kayak. The further you get it out, the better chance a big shark will take it.

A medium-heavy surf rod around 8 to 10 feet is needed. My preference for Elmer’s Island sharking includes heavy spinning tackle and a 7000 series or larger reel spooled with high-capacity braid, 80-pound test at a minimum. This will allow for a stronger hookset.

Don't forget to bring bolt or cable cutters capable of cutting through the hook and/or wire leader. There may be a situation where the hook won't come out and you need to quickly release the shark. Also, when picking your spot to shark, ensure that the location you intend to fish is not around any swimmers.

SAFETY AND CONSERVATION

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission provides a shore-based, shark-smart fishing education course. There is no cost and all you need is a log-in. The course helps educate anglers on safe practices, maximizes shark survival rate, minimize conflict between beach-goers and shark anglers, and assist with identification knowledge.

Three parting tips for future shore-bound shark anglers around Elmer's Island. Don't fish for sharks if the surf is too rough. Continue around the furthest point to the sheltered shoreline within Caminada Pass. If you cannot identify the shark, release it as quickly as possible. Educate yourself as much as possible about the targeted species as you would with any other quarry. ■

— Dora Lambert

A medium-heavy surf rod and 7000 series reel are the beginnings of a shark-fishing outfit.



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On the road again....

LOUISIANA'S POST-SPAWN CRAPPIE ARE 'GOING WILLIE NELSON' ON ANGLERS

■ By Kinny Haddox

For the most part, the crappie spawn is over in Louisiana, which means fish are on the move. But that doesn't mean you can't catch them just because "they're on the road" again, you know, like country singer Willie Nelson.

Crappie are in a state of transition, heading from the extremely shallow waters of the spawn in search of a good place to hole up for the summer. Basically, they are retracing their "road" back to the deeper water that they used when coming into the shallows a couple of months ago.

Two of Louisiana's top crappie thumpers, Clyde Folse of Raceland and Greg Davis of Tullos, share their best tips for making your April and May fishing trips good ones. Both of these experts know crappie baits inside and out, being lure manufacturers as well as anglers.

"It's a tough time to catch crappie, but it doesn't mean you can't catch crappie," said Clyde Folse, known as the "Crappie Psychic" for the lures of the same name he makes. "The thing that makes it tough is that they are on the move. What it means is that fishermen are going to have to do a lot more searching, a lot more moving around. That's what the fish are doing, and that's what we have to do, too."

THE SAC-A-LAIT PSYCHIC >

THE SAC-A-LAIT PSYCHIC

Folse's main fishing spots are in south Louisiana. In fact, he laughs at the grief his Cajun buddies gave him about his nickname.

"They said, 'Man, you should be the Sac-a-lait Psychic, not the Crappie Psychic,'" he said.

But Folse had to stick with crappie because that's the common name for the fish across the country. But everywhere he goes teaching crappie seminars, he lets folks know it's the sac-a-lait that got him going.

"I can tell you, without a doubt in my mind, whether you are fishing for crappie, sac-a-lait or white perch, they'll all be doing the same thing, and you can catch them the same way. I'll guarantee that," he said.

The lakes in Folse's backyard are prime examples of how he approaches the post-spawn.

"There are two big lakes; Lac des Allemands and Lake Beouf are great crappie lakes," he said. "If you looked on Google Maps, you'd see that they are connected by the long Bayou Beouf. Lake Beouf is a great spawning lake, and thousands of crappie head there to spawn, but when they start coming out, they head down Bayou Beouf and make their way back to Lac Des Allemands. All along the way, you can find them moving this time of year.

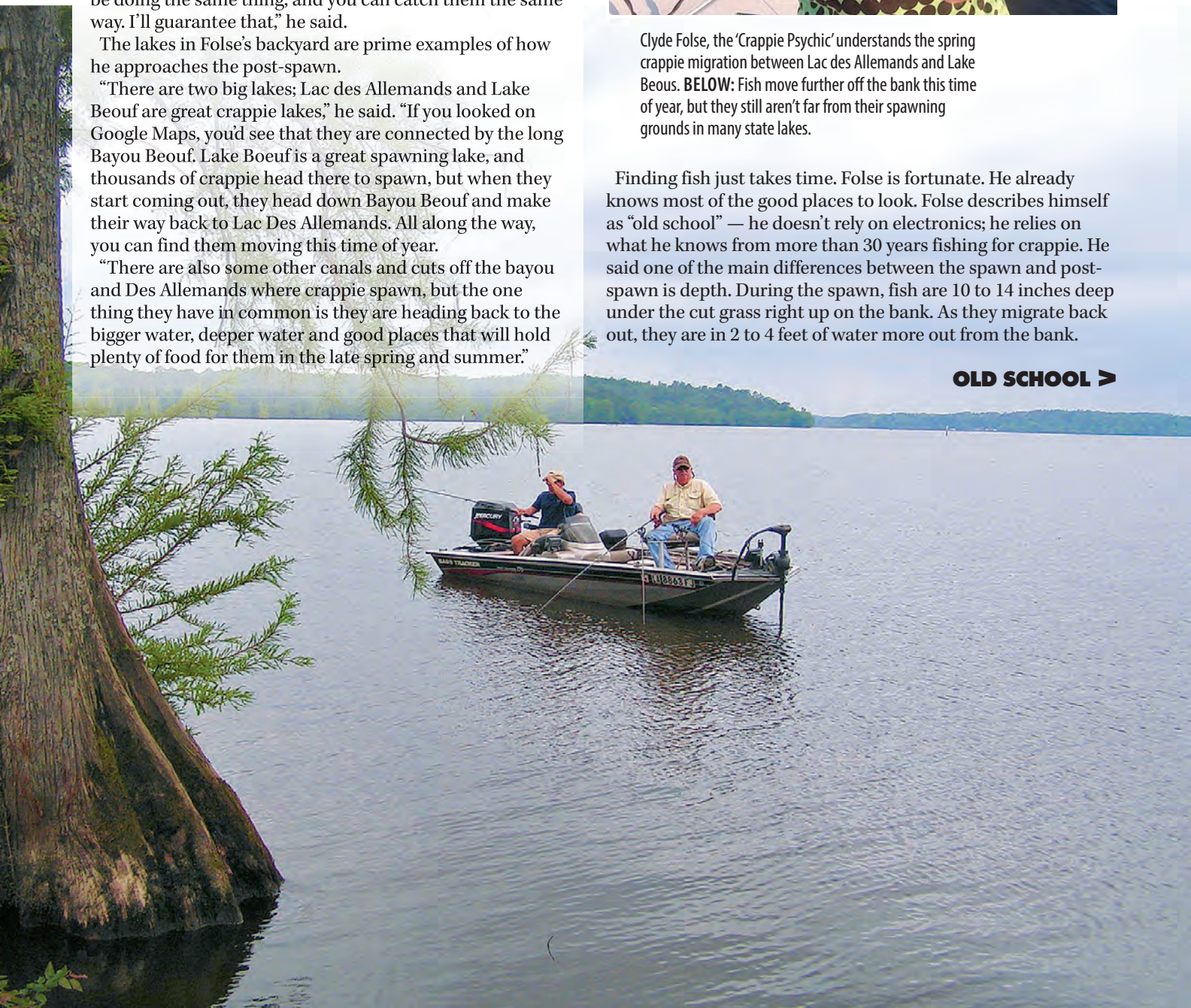
"There are also some other canals and cuts off the bayou and Des Allemands where crappie spawn, but the one thing they have in common is they are heading back to the bigger water, deeper water and good places that will hold plenty of food for them in the late spring and summer."



Clyde Folse, the 'Crappie Psychic' understands the spring crappie migration between Lac des Allemands and Lake Beous. **BELOW:** Fish move further off the bank this time of year, but they still aren't far from their spawning grounds in many state lakes.

Finding fish just takes time. Folse is fortunate. He already knows most of the good places to look. Folse describes himself as "old school" — he doesn't rely on electronics; he relies on what he knows from more than 30 years fishing for crappie. He said one of the main differences between the spawn and post-spawn is depth. During the spawn, fish are 10 to 14 inches deep under the cut grass right up on the bank. As they migrate back out, they are in 2 to 4 feet of water more out from the bank.

OLD SCHOOL >



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OLD SCHOOL

Folse is also old school when it comes to lures, too. Unless somebody is beating him with another color, he sticks with his go-to black and white jigs. He uses a 1/2-ounce jighead, not because of the weight, but because the larger No. 2 hook allows him to add his soft-plastic lures to the jig.

“I always put a Crappie Psychic trailer on my hook first. I like using the chartreuse color on the black and white jig. I push it all the way up to the back of the tube or plastic tail,” he said. “Then, I add a Psychic Ammo bead on the hook and slide it down where it holds the trailer in place. The ammo is loaded with scent; it plays a double role. Never underestimate the importance of scent in fishing for crappie. It’s an awesome combo, and I always use them both.”

Folse has added a new lure to his arsenal, the just-released Crappie Weapon, a tube jig with two legs. He fishes it under a cork, popping it a few times to get the fish’s attention when they are aggressive and then letting it sit without moving when the fish are a bit more timid. He changes his tactics some, but that black and white jig, Psychic trailer and ammo and a cork are standard equipment year-round.

“I tell my buddies and my pro staff crappie anglers that are fishing in other areas on the big lakes and reservoirs that they’ve got it easier when the fish are on the move,” Folse said. “They are fishing for a captive audience. Their crappie aren’t going anywhere. They may be on the move, but they can’t go as far as ours can down here.

“We’ve got literally hundreds of miles of canals and bayous and lakes and swamps that they can swim to. They can be anywhere. When they are in transition, you can catch the fire out of them one day and think you are on them, then the next day, they are gone. You can’t let that deter you. You just have to get back on the move again and find them again.”

SAME GAME, DIFFERENT WATER

Fishing in some north Louisiana waters is a bit different, but in some of the smaller, river-like lakes, it is more similar than you would think. Greg Davis of Tullos not only manufactures excellent crappie lures — Crappie G Custom Hair Jigs — he’s an



This black and white crappie tail teamed up with a chartreuse Crappie Ammo and to bring in a nice spring sac-a-lait.

expert fisherman. Crappie on big lakes like Toledo Bend, Caney and D’Arbonne go to deeper holes in the transition period. They head out to 10 to 15 feet of water, and even though they suspend shallow, they do switch depths.

Davis fishes lakes in the north and central part of the state like Old River below Jena, Woolen Lake at Hebert, Lafourche Lake in Richland Parish and Saline Lake near Winnfield. These lakes are not that much different than south Louisiana crappie holes. The crappie do move, but sometimes it isn’t as far as some anglers might think.

“For sure, the fish are tougher to catch this month because they are tired from the spawn and need to go somewhere they can rest and rejuvenate,” he said. “They are sluggish, but if you move around and find them, you can catch them.”

Davis fishes a hair jig most of the time. Some of the lakes he fishes have cypress trees, and after the spawn, fish move out to the deeper trees. They also look for brushtops and laydowns, logs in the water or man-made tops that anglers have sunk. But one thing that he’s found might surprise some anglers.

“Once the fish get feeling a

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little bit better this month, they will often move into extremely tight cover, and the water may not be but a couple of feet deep,” he said. “A couple of examples of that include floating mats of salvinia vegetation, lily pads or any kind of floating grass. The fish will get up under them and stay there for months. They’ll also get up in the green brush along the banks, and they’ll get way up in there.

“In the green brush, it’s like fishing in a briar thicket. You actually have to reel your jig all the way up to the tip of your pole, poke it through an opening and then drop it down a foot or two in the water. If they are there, they’ll nail it immediately. In the floating grass mats, it’s very similar. We will take a rake or something and make a hole in the mat, then drop the jig in.”

HERE’S WHY

Here are several reasons Davis thinks fish go to those places in the post-spawn. First, there’s abundant food, from minnows to grass shrimp to all kinds of bugs and baitfish. Second, it’s shady, and third, they have some protection from predators.

Davis usually goes with black/chartreuse jigs in just about any kind of water. He fishes orange/white when the water is muddy, and when the water is greenish to clear, he likes Millwood Monkey: a dark green jig with a black tail.

“I make every color combination that you can imagine and several you probably couldn’t imagine,” he said. “It’s all about what you are confident in and what works for you.” ■



Kinny Haddox has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 45 years. He publishes a daily website, lakedarbonnelife.com and is a member of the Louisiana Chapter of the Outdoor Legends Hall of Fame. He and his wife, DiAnne, live in West Monroe.



Greg Davis shows off a late-spring victim of a Crappie G hair jig.

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A man with a grey beard and sunglasses is holding a crappie fish. He is wearing a blue and green baseball cap with 'B'n'M' on it and a bright orange jacket. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

■ By Kinny Haddox

LOOP KNOTS ALLOW LURES TO WORK MORE NATURALLY, WHICH IS A BIG FACTOR WHEN SLABS AREN'T IN A REAL FEEDING MOOD.

'CLOSE THE LOOP' ON PICKY CRAPPIE



Despite what you may have heard, crappie don't just swim around and eat all day-long.

They usually feed actively a couple of times a day, and that's when they'll hit just about anything. But other times, you have to convince them to bite. There are lots of tricks and lure modifications to do that.

If you talk to a dozen experienced crappie anglers, there's a good bet at least 10 will tell you the importance of one thing: your jig sitting level, horizontally in the water, especially when jigging vertically.

And a jig swinging on a loop knot has more natural movement.

Yes, the knot matters. It is often the difference between getting a "thump" or not. Tying your lure on with a crappie loop knot makes a big difference. It isn't easy to learn to tie and takes a few seconds, but once you get the hang of it, it's an invaluable tool to catch more crappie.

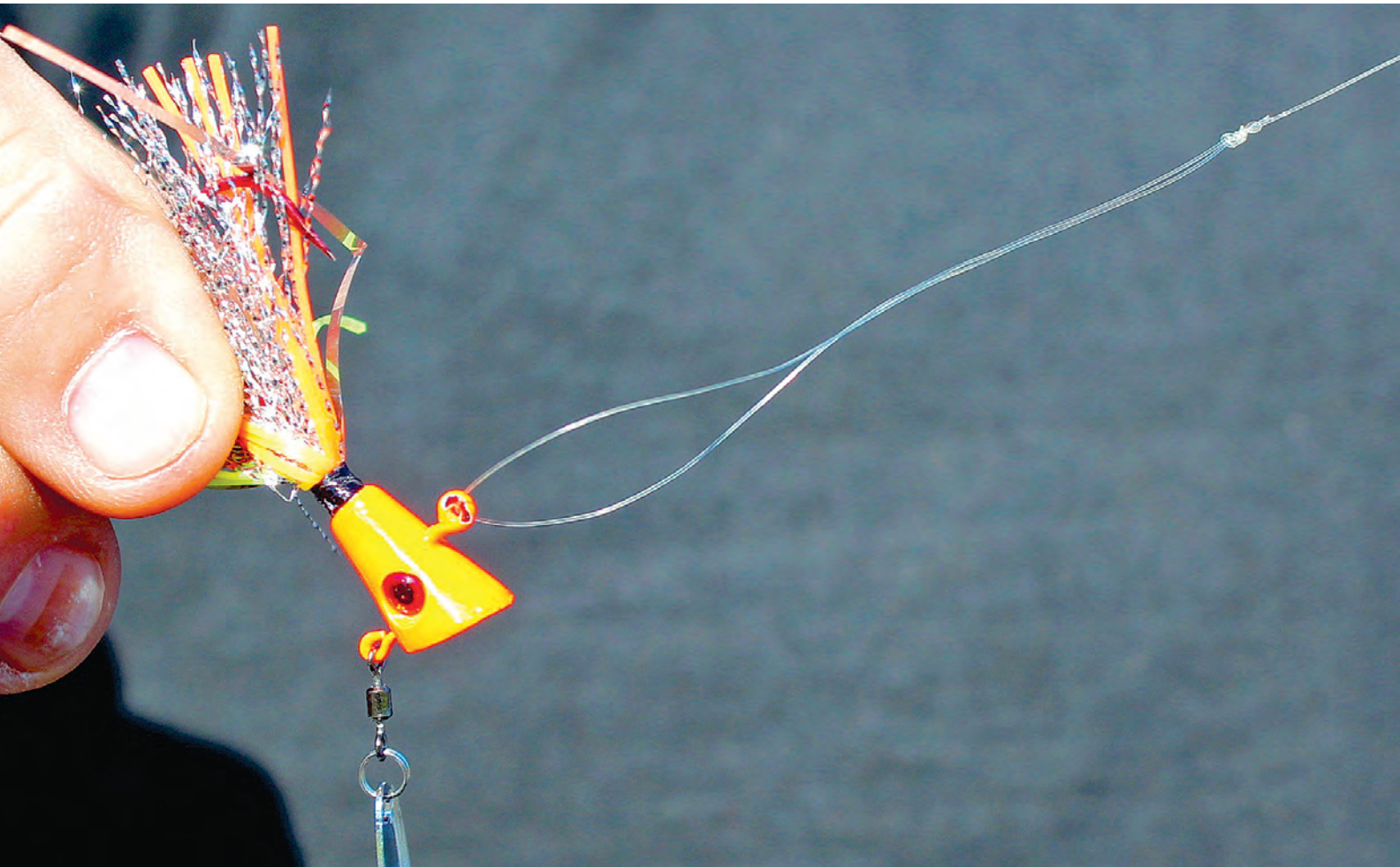
Here's how you tie a classic loop knot. Put enough line through the eye of the lure's hook, then take both lines and wrap them

around two forefingers two times. Then, cinch it tight, pulling on the knot and line at the same time. Cut off the tag end, and you are ready to go. Your jig will float level and move realistically through the water with even the slightest movement.

The easiest way to learn is have someone show you in person, watch a video such as [youtube.com/watch?v=MpWQ2oeS0QI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpWQ2oeS0QI) or search for "crappie loop knots" on the internet. Follow the instructions, practice before you get on the water and catch more crappie.

"There are so many types of jigs and colors of jigs and even live bait rigs that fishermen are faced with all kinds of decisions on every fishing trip," says Steve Danna, a veteran crappie pro from Farmerville. "But there's one decision that should be easy to make. That's tying on your bait with a loop knot. The loop knot does make a difference. If you don't know how to tie it, just ask another fisherman. They'll be glad to show you."

BELOW: A loop knot allows a crappie lure like this tiny underspin to operate with the best possible action when it's in front of a fish.



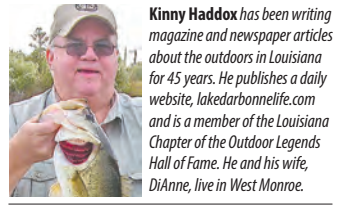
Knotless fast-snaps are available that allow for lures to work like they're tied on with a loop knot and be changed quickly.

Danna said he'll sometimes see several boats filled with crappie fishermen using the same lures and fishing pretty much the same depth. Everything will be the same, but one angler will be catching a lot more than the others. There could be a lot of factors involved, but under closer inspection, the fishermen who aren't catching fish are tying directly to the lure.

"That just doesn't work as well as a loop knot," he said. "Oh sure, there are times when you can get a crappie to hit a rock on a rope when they are in a feeding frenzy, but under normal circumstances, and especially in a tough bite, the knot makes a difference. Remember, it isn't the knot, it is what the knot is allowing your bait to do. That's the game changer — the action of the lure."

Fishermen have success using loop knots with as small a loop as a half-inch, but the norm is about an inch. Longer loop knots also work well, but if you go much more than an inch or so, the lure can tangle on brush or even get the jig's hook caught on the extra line. Keep an eye out for that when you are fishing loop knots.

There are also no-knot fast snaps available that you can tie on your line and then hook jigs to them. Tying on the snaps isn't easy, but it allows you to change jigs quickly and helps them swing freely, much like the slip knot. They come in several sizes for various size lures. One popular model is the "No-Knot Fas-Snap." You may have to look in the trout fishing section of larger sporting goods stores for these as they are also used by trout anglers. ■



Kinny Haddox has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 45 years. He publishes a daily website, lakedarbonnelife.com and is a member of the Louisiana Chapter of the Outdoor Legends Hall of Fame. He and his wife, DiAnne, live in West Monroe.

A NEW "PERSPECTIVE" >



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Andre Smith, left, and Tim Hebert with four D'Arbonne slabs they found using LiveScope and Perspective electronics.



A NEW "PERSPECTIVE"

By Kinny Haddox

SERIOUS CRAPPIE ANGLERS GAIN ANOTHER NEW TOOL

It's been less than a year since the Garmin LiveScope brought more excitement to crappie fishing than a livewell full of 3-pounders. And now, there's even more, a new "Perspective mode" using the same technology and a simple rotation of the transducer.

In addition to the existing LiveScope Forward and Down modes, anglers can use the Perspective mode for overhead visibility that's perfect even in shallow water.

To understand the new tool, one only

has to understand the meaning of the word "perspective" — the art of viewing objects on a two-dimensional surface to give the right impression of their height, width, depth and position in relation to each other when viewed from a particular point.

Although the new brackets are a few weeks out from being on the market, Louisiana anglers Tim Hebert and Andre Smith from Thibodaux got a jump on its use by constructing a homemade bracket

and using both LiveScope Down and Perspective imaging to help them to a sixth-place finish in the Crappie Masters Louisiana State Championship on Lake D'Arbonne. They landed two 7-fish limits for a total of 28.44 pounds and a big fish of 2.77 pounds.

"There's no question using the LiveScope Down imaging and the Perspective mode helped us in the tournament," said Hebert, a member of the Crappie Psychic fishing team. "I can see the Perspective mode

also playing a big role for bass fishermen in the future."

There are two ways to rig up the new Perspective mode. Anglers who already have LiveScope can just buy a hinged Perspective bracket to let their transducer tilt from Down-imaging to Perspective (150-degree forward) imaging. You can use that without another transducer or screen; the bracket costs about \$100.

But to change between the two modes, anglers have to lift the transducer out of the water and physically reposition it by turning it sideways to enable the new Perspective



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SURFACTANT TECHNOLOGY

TO COMBAT

DIRT & GRIME



THE STAIN

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THE SCIENCE

Most surface dirt will wash right off with boat soap and water. However, some gets ground in, especially on non-skid surfaces. That's where surfactants come in. Surfactant molecules fully surround the dirt molecules and lift them from the surface that you're cleaning. This allows them to be washed away with water. Chelating Agents are supercharged surfactants for specialized cleaning.

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ACID TECHNOLOGY

TO COMBAT

RUST & TANNIC STAINS



THE STAIN

Tree leaves, hull stains, rust stains, waterline stains, hard water stains, orange stains.

THE SCIENCE

Tannins are naturally produced in the decomposition of plant-based matter, and their signature orange-hued stains are dyeing your hull and fiberglass. Rust stains occur on the fiberglass around metal, where water leaches color from underneath the metal and deposits it on the surface. Removing these stains requires a chemical reaction with an acid.

THE SOLUTION

Star brite Instant Hull Cleaner contains a modified oxalic acid that safely neutralizes tannins and rust. There's much more science behind it but trust us on this one, simply spray or wipe on and watch the stain disappear.



BLEACHING TECHNOLOGY

TO COMBAT

MOLD & MILDEW STAINS



THE STAIN

Black, brown, green, and pink mold and mildew stains.

THE SCIENCE

Similar to grass stains, these stains are caused by organic material, and need something stronger than a surfactant alone to remove them. The oxygen in a bleaching agent attacks and breaks up these types of stains, and removes any discoloration.

THE SOLUTION

While most people believe that regular chlorine bleach is the answer, it also causes a lot of problems, such as breaking down fabrics and stitching and destroying gelcoats. Instead use Star brite Mildew Stain Remover—a buffered bleach formula—that attacks the stain without harming the surface.



ABRASION TECHNOLOGY

TO COMBAT

SCUFF MARKS



THE STAIN

Black shoe marks, rub rail and bumper scuffs, marks left from dragging hoses and equipment.

THE SCIENCE

Scuff marks—or “transfer stains”—happen when material is transferred onto a surface and is mechanically bonded. Chemicals are rarely strong enough to remove these marks, since many times the material that has transferred is chemical-resistant (think of a rubber shoe). These abrasive marks require the same to remove them: abrasion.

THE SOLUTION

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A NEW "PERSPECTIVE" >

mode to see a wide view of what's in front of the boat. The more-expensive way to do it is to buy a separate transducer, depth unit and bracket — which can run as high as \$4,000 or more, depending on the size of the screen. That way, anglers can see both ways — directly below and in front of the transducer and in a 150-degree semi-circle around the boat at the same time.

"That's a little out of the average fisherman's price range, but it's amazing technology," said Hebert. "You are going to need it to compete regularly in big tournaments. The biggest advantage of LiveScope and Perspective is it gives you a live, real-time view of the fish. When the fish were so spooky because of all the pressure, it enabled us to see the fish far enough away to cast to them and catch them before they spooked. Once they got nervous, there was no catching them."

Hebert also feels like the original LiveScope Down mode, in combination with a separate Humminbird Mega 360, is a great way to go as well. Even though they come from different manufacturers, the LiveScope can give anglers a live view while the Mega 360 can give detailed images of structure, down to the smallest branches on sunken timber. He plans on using them together for the ultimate in crappie fishing. ■



The bow of Tim Hebert's boat looks more like an airplane with the LiveScope Down chart (upper left), Perspective Mode (upper right) and Humminbird Helix Sonar (bottom).

SAC-A-LAIT HOTSPOTS >

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SAC-A-LAIT A SURE BET AT BAYOU BLACK

Penchant, Turtle Bayou Pipeline can be local hotspots when marsh starts to warm

April gets a green light for awesome sac-a-lait fishing in the Bayou Black area.

Barry Henry of Morgan City, who makes the most of his time away from his job in the Gulf of Mexico, knows that perhaps better than anyone. Henry, 55, has been catching sac-a-lait for around 30 to 35 years, perhaps longer.

"Oh, yeah, this is a good time of year for the sac-a-lait," Henry said. "It gets good. Sac-a-lait are moving up to the bank, which makes them easier to catch. That water warms up faster than water near the (Atchafalaya River). That's why we go to Bayou Black every year. When I'm home, I go pretty much every day."

When Henry fishes Bayou Black's waters, he usually returns from a 4-hour trip — often with Bill McCarty of Morgan City — with 25 to 50 fish averaging between 11 and 14 inches, he said.

Henry has been pointing the bow of his boat east since he had his first boat at age 14. Why? The fishery is more stable that way than around the river at this time of year, he said.

"I'd say the marsh is a more-consistent fishery. It holds more fish," he said, adding

that fish in the nation's last great overflow swamp vamoose into the woods when the river rises above flood stage, which is 4.0 at Morgan City.

Conversely, in the marsh, he said, "They've got so many ponds and so many places to go they can get away from the pressure. It just holds more fish in the marsh."

Henry knows how and where to catch them. His proven waters in the area include the canals off Bayou Penchant, namely the Gate, Trappers, Pecan and Willow Tree canals.

"That's all right there in the Penchant," he said, "and in the main Penchant bayou itself, by that time, grass starts growing back and the waters always pretty right there. Most of the time, the grass is the best producer. Find good grass, you'll find good sac-a-lait."

Other potential hotspots, he said, are often along the Turtle Bayou Pipeline, which runs parallel to the Penchant.

"If you catch in the Penchant, you can catch in the Turtle Bayou Pipeline. You catch in the Turtle Bayou Pipeline, the whole area produces," he said.

When Henry heads to any of those

Plenty of big sac-a-lait come out of the Bayou Black area in April.



Photo courtesy Barry Henry

locations, he starts fishing close to the shoreline and works his favorite soft-plastic lure back to the boat. Some fish might be close to the bank and others may be 4 to 6 feet off the shoreline, anywhere from 18 to 28 inches deep in many places.

Success can be fair to good on either an outgoing or incoming tide, he said. "But if you can catch it falling, it's always better on a falling tide."

Henry fishes Strike King Mr. Crappie tube jigs on a 1/2-ounce jighead.

The color?

"You can't go wrong with the blue and white," he said.

The 1/2-ounce weight, he said, gives the tube jig a little bit slower descent.

"Whenever you're twitching your cork, it gives it a slower fall on the way down versus the 1/6," said Henry, who uses 4- to 6-pound Stren mono spooled on a Zebco 33 on a 5- or 5 1/2-foot H20 Tournament Choice fishing rod. ■

— Don Shoopman

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For Hank Cherry,

there was nothing “finuh” than being from Carolina, holding perhaps the most-coveted trophy of all in Birmingham, Alabama, and standing atop of the bass fishing world March 8.

Cherry, 46, from Lincolnton, N.C., who has fished the Bassmaster Elite Series for eight years, basked in the limelight on the weigh-in stage at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Center. He composed himself after the initial shock of the triumph to talk about how it all happened, how he ran away with the 50th annual Bassmaster Classic.

Cherry told the crowd a story about the underlying key to sealing the deal on the final day of the three-day event with a five-bass limit weighing 19 pounds, 8 ounces, for an unbeatable three-day total of 65-5, good enough for a paycheck of more than \$300,000. He followed advice from a fellow bass pro and friend before heading out to Lake Guntersville that morning.

“I talked to Paul Mueller in the boat yard, and he told me the devil was going to try to get in my head today,” Cherry said. “He said just tell the devil to get out of your boat. He said tell him you don’t have time for him.

“That’s what I did. I caught my first fish, and then I lost a big one. I could hear those voices in my head, but I didn’t listen to them. I just went out and caught four more.”

He also wind-milled his right arm between casts on the day of reckoning as therapy for a shoulder injury suffered when he fell in the boat while reaching to grab a fish on the first day of competition, when he bagged more than 29 pounds.

2 LOUISIANA PROS MISS OUT >

NORTH CAROLINA PRO WINS 50TH BASSMASTER CLASSIC; LOUISIANA PROS EACH HAVE ONE BIG DAY, FINISH BACK IN PACK.

■ By Don Shoopman

CLASSIC

Cherry picking

Gary Tramontina / Bassmaster

2 LOUISIANA PROS MISS OUT

Louisiana's two Bassmaster Classic qualifiers, meanwhile, both had one good day on the water but watched the final day from shore with 28 anglers in the field of 53 who missed the Top 25 cut after two days.

Bass pro Darold Gleason of Many, who also guides on Toledo Bend Reservoir, summed it up the day before the tournament when he said, "It's kind of exciting; a couple of Louisiana boys trying to take home the trophy."

Caleb Sumrall of New Iberia, Gleason's friend and fellow Toledo Bend guide, finished 26th, missing the cutoff by 3 ounces with his 25 pounds, 10 ounces, worth \$10,000. Gleason finished 35th with 21 pounds, 3 ounces, and also went home with \$10,000.

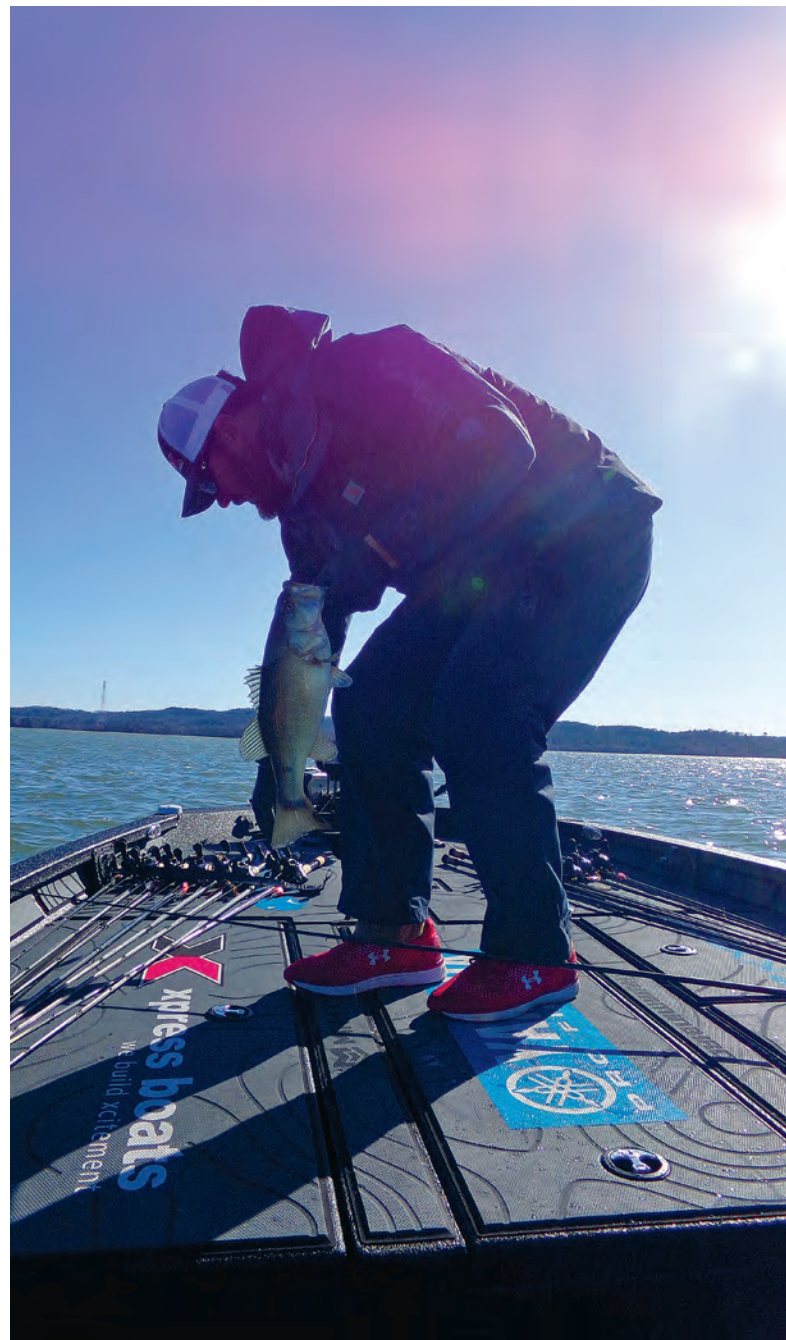
While Cherry was exorcising the devil and getting the right bite to finish first, another Carolina pro, Todd Auten of Lake Wylie, S.C., emerged as the closest challenger. Auten finished second with a three-day total of 58 pounds, 10 ounces, and collected \$50,000, plus \$2,500 for scoring the Berkley Big Bass of the Classic, a 7-pound, 9-ounce "hawg" he hooked and boated on a windy first day.

Stetson Blaylock of Benton, Ark., was third with 58 pounds, 1 ounce, to win \$40,000.

Cherry, fishing his fifth Bassmaster Classic, stayed close to the boat launch and concentrated on a causeway near a bridge and grass flat.

"I never put gas in the boat all week. Y'all know me. If it's windy, I'm not going to be making a lot of long runs. And, anyway, I just didn't need to," Cherry said.

Many's Darold Gleason was oh-so proud of boating this 4-pound bass in the waning minutes on the second day of the Bassmaster Classic at Lake Guntersville. **ABOVE RIGHT:** New Iberia's Caleb Sumrall gets his hand on a keeper bass on the first day of the Bassmaster Classic.



His 29-pound, 3-ounce stringer the first day, most on a Z-Man Jack Hammer Chatterbait, opened some eyes and backed up Lake Guntersville's tremendous reputation. Cherry had 16 pounds, 10 ounces, the second day and more than 19 pounds the final day.

Sumrall, 32, fishing his second-ever Bassmaster Classic, made short runs and long runs on Friday and came back two bass short of the 5-bass limit. He got two of them far upriver from the same spot — a shallow area with lots of vegetation, much like he fishes in the heart of Cajun Country — and one of them was a 4-pound class bass to give him 9 pounds, 9 ounces.

Rather than start near the boat launch on the second day, Sumrall ran far upriver and caught 16 pounds, 1 ounce. The switch nearly got him into the Top 25 to fish the final day.

SUMRALL CONFIDENT ALL WEEK >

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SUMRALL CONFIDENT ALL WEEK

Sumrall never lost confidence on the second day. His long, deft casts found their mark in mostly 5- to 7-foot depths before he probed the shallows in 3 feet and less.

Sumrall began the first day with 12 rods on the front deck of his boat, all loaded with moving baits. Nearly two hours after the start, he boated a 2-pounder on a Spro Wameku lipless crankbait in a grassy area at his third stop of opening day.

He covered that stretch thoroughly before deciding to go upriver to another shallow, grassy area. A few casts later, he slammed the hook home on a 2¾-pound bass, fought it quickly and flipped it in the boat.

“Yeah, I just need a couple more fish to show up,” he said.

They never materialized. He traveled farther upriver, turned into a creek and entered into a sprawling lake, where he kept a punching jig in his hand most of the time. He left 45 minutes later, saying, “This was a big ol’ waste of time. That was my best area of practice.”

Sumrall rallied on the second day. Gleason didn’t get the right bites that day.

A Northwestern State University graduate who taught elementary school seven years before turning to pro bass fishing, Gleason opened the tournament in fairly strong fashion, leaving the stage with 14 pounds, 4 ounces, to put himself in good position.

On the second day, he didn’t catch his first keeper, a 2-pound fish, until around 1 p.m. He said, “I ain’t going to zero. I still have a chance.... It’s one o’clock. I’ve still got a lot of time.”

Gleason had boated four non-keeper bass before his first



Caleb Sumrall of New Iberia decides on his next move during the first day of the Bassmaster Classic on Lake Guntersville.

ABOVE RIGHT: Sumrall gets ready to deposit a 3-pound bass in the livewell late on the first day of the Classic.



A smiling Darold Gleason holds a solid bass that bit a lipless crankbait on the second day of the Bassmaster Classic.



keeper. Two hit in the first three minutes after he turned off his outboard after takeoff. After his first keeper, he caught another fish that didn't make the 15-inch minimum.

"Thanks for playing," he said as he released the bass. "Maybe Caleb caught them today so one Louisiana boy will make the last day."

GLEASON GETS 4-POUNDER

At 2:43 p.m., with slightly less than 40 minute before weigh-in, Gleason was rewarded for his persistence and perseverance with his second bass, a hefty one in the 4-pound range. It slammed the ½-ounce Rayburn gold Rat-L-Trap.

"We ain't done yet. That fish nailed it," he said.

The clock inevitably ran out on him. After announcing "last cast" before the 10- to 12-minute run to the boat ramp, he made as many casts as possible until 3:19 p.m., when he made his final "last cast."

"My wife will be heartbroken. I'll have to cheer her up. When you got one (spouse) like that who cares that much, you're doing all right," he said.

Then he got back to business. ■



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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4 BASS PROS, 4 FAVORITE BAIT'S

By Don Shoopman

Across the country, there's more than a hint of spring in the air this month. In Louisiana, which boasts some of the most accomplished pro bass anglers around, the trees are budding, and it's full-blown spring, with the spawn finished in many areas along the state's Gulf Coast.

Four Louisiana pros will be on the water this month, either relaxing or competing, and one way or another, they will deliver their favorite artificial lures to bass.

Randy Despino of Colfax plans to have a soft-plastic bait tied on the business end of his fishing rod. Gerald Spohrer of Gonzales turns to a spinnerbait when it counts. Greg Hackney of Gonzales, will stick with the swim jig that bears his name. A third Gonzales pro, Robbie Latuso, will serve up a spinnerbait that never lets him down.

They have their reasons for choosing their go-to lures for this time of the year.

BASS JUST GO FLAT WILD OVER DESPINO'S V&M BAIT IN APRIL

Randy Despino, 58, of Colfax, a 30-year bass pro who spent the past two years on the FLW Pro Tour after 12 years on the Costa FLW Series, will rely on his favorite soft-plastic bait this month, whether he's fishing shallow or "offshore," particularly at Toledo Bend.

Despino will have a V&M Flat Wild tied on, whether he's fishing shallow or deep. He relies on the Flat Wild.

"It's probably my go-to bait," he said.

The V&M Flat Wild was designed by Cliff Pace of Petal, Miss, the 2013 Bassmaster Classic winner, whose intent was to get a better hookup and catch ratio on a smaller creature bait.

Mission accomplished, according to Despino.

"It's kind of like a Beaver," Despino said. "He designed it so it's not a thick bait, but a wide bait. You just don't lose many fish with it. You get a good hookset because of its design," he said.

Despino said the 4-inch V&M Flat Wild has a half-ribbed, half-stair-stepped body with appendages that are resilient and flexible to allow full hook penetration on the hookset. He either crawls it along or hops it, depending on how the bass want it.



Photo courtesy Randy Despino

He uses a 4/0 Gamakatsu straight-shank hook. "The hook's very critical. I try to get by with as small a hook as I can," he said.

Despino's setup includes 20-pound Seaguar Yellow Label fluorocarbon and a Lews Super Duty 300 Speed Spool on a 7-foot-4 Dobyns EH Casting Rod.

Despino will Texas-rig the V&M Flat Wild if he's fishing in 3 to 5 feet of water around outside cover: stumps, bushes or any other kind of cover.

"A lot of big fish have spawned out by then, and they're just setting up where the bait's at," he said.

Many other bass will be caught far from the bank on the soft plastic.

"I'm going to say April is a big month for offshore. The big females start spawning (in mid-February) and move out," he said.

Despino's favorite colors are South African black or watermelon/red both deep and shallow. It's a can't miss soft plastic that rivals and often outpaces V&M's Wild Thing, he said, appreciatively. ■

V&M Flat Wild



“You get a good hookset because of the design.”

DELTA LURES SPINNERBAIT ➤

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SHAD SPAWN ON? SPOHRER CAN'T MISS WITH A SPINNERBAIT

Get out for some bass fishing when the sun comes up, and chances are good that anywhere you go in April, you'll capitalize on the shad spawn, just like the bass are doing.

To trigger bites, Gerald Spohrer of Gonzales turns to spinnerbaits made by Delta Lures.

"You could throw a spinnerbait in just about any state, especially in Louisiana — Toledo Bend around docks, Verret around cypress trees. The biggest way to find the shad spawn is to look for the white birds," Spohrer said.

The time to take advantage of the shad spawn is when night turns to day. Get out early, he advises, because the bulk of the shad spawn is winding down then.

After sunrise, Spohrer said, "You'll be catching feeding fish capitalizing on the shad spawn. It's pretty much true wherever you go in the country."

Spohrer, who fishes the Major League Fishing Pro Tour, said his favorite spinnerbait has carried him in many contests.

"I use Delta Lures because they're local guys in Louisiana," Spohrer said. "They're built locally, and it's got a good hook in it. I just know every component in it is quality. (It) is as



Photo courtesy majorleaguefishing.com

good as you could possibly make a spinnerbait. A buddy said, 'What's good about it?' I said, 'What's wrong with it?'"

Spohrer uses a white, 3/8-ounce bait most of the time. He also likes the combination of a gold willow-leaf blade and a silver Colorado blade. If he's in clear water, he chooses double willow-leaf blades "a lot."



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“You’ll be catching fish capitalizing on the shad spawn.”

Sometimes, he adds a soft-plastic trailer, depending on water conditions. It helps during the shad spawn, he believes, to hide a “stinger” hook, because often, during the shad spawn the “bass hit it and play with it like a mouse, with the intention of killing it and not eating it.”

Spohrer, 38, fishes spinnerbaits on a 7-foot-3 Offshore Angler Sea Lion MH rod. He likes to use fluorocarbon because it’s more sensitive, usually 15-pound Seagaur Abraxs. If he’s fishing boat docks and piers, especially during the shad spawn, he goes to 17- or 20-pound test. His reel of choice when casting the spinnerbait is a 7.3:1 ratio Quantum Smoke. Why? “I want it to be fast, but if you get too fast of a reel, it can be annoying,” he said. ■



Delta Lures spinnerbait

Photo courtesy deltalures.com

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HACKNEY'S APRIL ATTACK HINGES ON HIS HACK ATTACK SWIM JIG

One of the most-successful and recognizable Louisiana bass pros plans to be swimming when he fishes this month — swimming a jig, that is. And he's good at it.

"I like swimming a jig in April, for two reasons. The fish are just coming off the bed, and the shad are spawning. That's why it's a good choice," said Greg Hackney of Gonzales.

As an afterthought, Hackney said it's a good choice because, as far as water temperature is concerned, the water's on the cool side still, not hot.

"It's a way to cover a lot of water, and it catches a lot of fish on braid. It's fun. Fish like to bite it."

The bass, many of them in a post-spawn period, are in the kind of mood that prompts them to hit it, he said. If you're fishing a lily pad field or hyacinths, for example, that's a more sight-oriented presentation to show them something different.

Hackney's swim jig of choice is, typically, a 3/8-ounce Strike King Hack Attack. His color preferences are green pumpkin or white or black/blue.

"You can take those three colors and catch fish in every state that bass are living in," he said.

Hackney adds a Strike King Rage Craw, which gives the bait a wider, more-aggressive action coming through the water column. He matches the craw's color to the swim jig's skirt — white to white, green pumpkin to green pumpkin and black to black/blue. He threads it on in its center so that it swims straight, which aids in the desired result.

Hackney, 46, television the host of *Sportsman TV*, nearly always throws a white jig in clear water, even in stained water if the bass are eating shad. If they're dining on bluegill or crawfish, he'll choose a green pumpkin.

He'll tie it to 50-pound braid spooled on a Lew's Custom Pro reel with an 8.3:1 retrieve ration, critical because retrieve is critical because it's fast, and fast counts when fishing a swim jig. He fishes it on a 7-foot-2, Lew's Hack Attack swim jig rod.

"A lot of times, they hit it fast and move fast. A lot of times the fish are real shallow. You need to keep up with them," he said.

His swim jig was designed to be fished in and around heavy cover. Its strength is centered around the extra-strong Gamakatsu Siwash hook that provides an extra bite with a heavy weed guard to enable it to weave through the heaviest cover, he said. Also, Strike King's Perfect Skirt gives the artificial lure more life-like action. ■



“I like swimming a jig in April for two reasons: the fish are just coming off the bed and the shad are spawning.”

Hack Attack Swim Jig

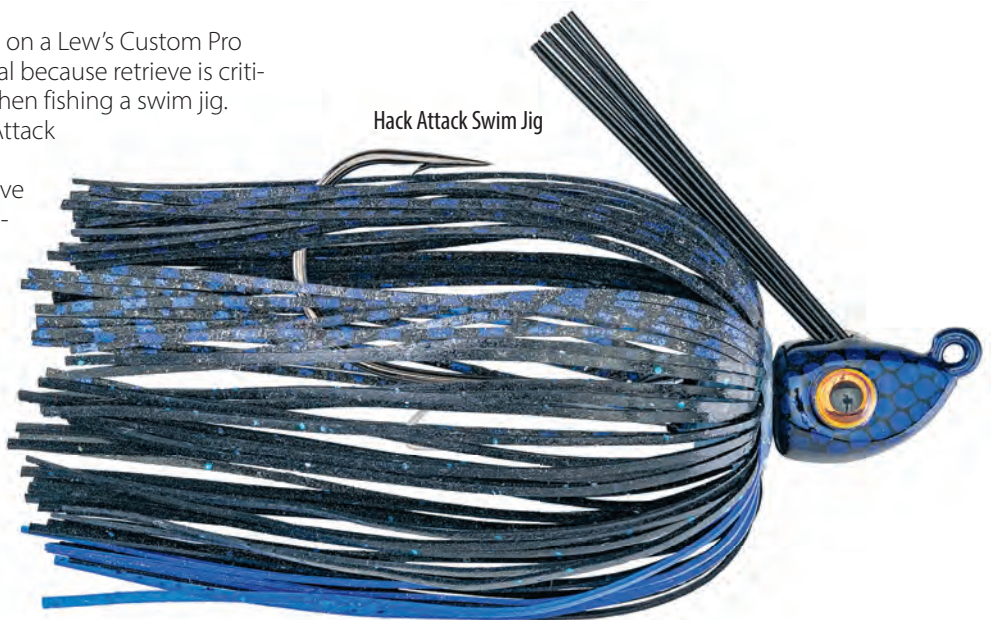


Photo courtesy directfishingsales.com

LIGHT WIRE A HEAVY CHOICE WHEN LATUSO WIELDS DELTA LURES SPINNERBAIT

Robbie Latuso, a 53-year old Bassmaster Elite Series pro from Gonzales, had a ready answer for what he wants to throw for fun or in crunch time in April.

"April? That would be easy ... spinnerbait. A Delta Lures spinnerbait. The reason for that? That's when the shad spawn starts. You can be pretty much successful if you find the shad," Latuso said.

Latuso said the lighter wire makes the difference. It is made with .035 wire; he believes that's why the hookset-catch ratio is so much higher, no matter if it's a 3/8- or 1/2-ounce model. Wire size matters, he said.

Latuso has been fishing with that spinnerbait since it was introduced by Delta Lures. The Mustad Ultra Point black nickel hook and the way it runs true on the retrieve are other selling points, he said.

The spinnerbait is deadly when fished during the shad spawn, he said, and during the post-spawn, when many bass get their appetite back big-time. That's why his color choice is white, chartreuse/white or chartreuse/blue/white.

"In South Louisiana, any shade of shad," he said, adding that in clear water, he uses one with a silicone skirt. "If you're in dirty water like down South, I throw a rubber skirt."

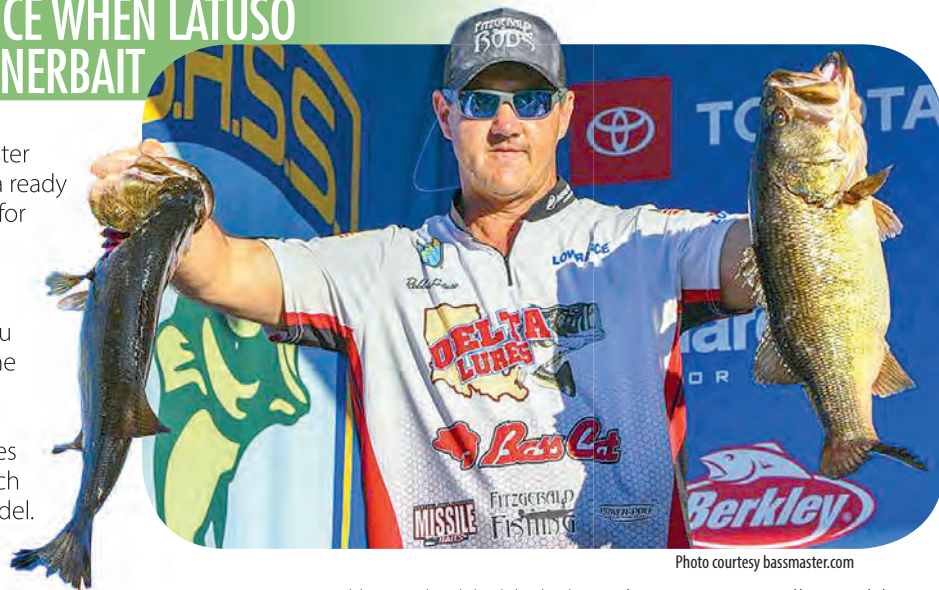


Photo courtesy bassmaster.com

Latuso likes a double-bladed combination, normally a gold willow-leaf in the back and a nickel Colorado in the front.

Latuso prefers to fish the spinnerbait on 40-pound Fitzgerald Vursa Braid, unless he's fishing ultra-clear water; then, he chooses monofilament.

"If it's clear, I take the braid off," he said.

He fishes the spinnerbait on a medium-heavy, 7-foot Fitzgerald Stunner Rod HD with a Shimano Metanium baitcasting reel. ■

LURE REVIEW >

““ You can be pretty successful if you can find the shad.””



Delta Lures spinnerbait

Photo courtesy deltalures.com

LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman



Missile Baits' Quiver comes in 4½- and 5½-inch sizes, either size working perfectly on a Tokyo rig.

FILL YOUR QUIVER

MISSILE BAITS' NEW SOFT-PLASTIC BAIT IS A WINNER FOR USE WITH NEKO, TOKYO RIGS.

Photos courtesy John Crews

At the 2019 Bassmaster Classic, John Crews, owner and president of Missile Baits, unveiled a soft plastic that has been an unqualified success. The Ned Bomb took the finesse fishing game to another level.

At last month's Bassmaster Classic on Alabama's Lake Guntersville, Crews and his staff from Salem, Va., introduced another new soft plastic, this one designed specifically to be fished on a Neko Rig or Tokyo Rig; the latter can be punched effectively and also triggers bites when pitched around cypress trees and cypress knees across the South.

Crews, the 41-year-old bass pro and founder of Missile Baits, was excited

about launching the Quiver, which will be available in 4½- and 6½-inch models. The new bait was born out of necessity, according to Crews, who fishes the Bassmaster Elite Series circuit and finished sixth in this year's Classic.

"About halfway through the year last year, I went through like three tournaments in a row where I caught all my fish on a Neko Rig," said Crews, who started using a Neko rig in 2016. "I was using other brands. It dawned on me I wanted a thicker-bodied worm so the hook stays in it and a little thin tail to give it action. I wanted a head with a flat spot on it to be able to insert the weight."

He got right on that task.

"I drew it up in the fall, probably

September," he said.

Crews knew what dimensions he wanted and relayed them to the professional who has crafted the molds for 10 previous Missile Baits products.

"I nailed it right off the bat," he said. "I basically took the head of the Ned Bomb and used it on both Quivers because I knew the size and shape of the head I wanted."

The result pleased him.

"I didn't know what to expect when I



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.

did the Ned Bomb. I thought it'd be pretty good, and we sold a ton of them. I think this bait has got the same potential," he said, noting it should catch "a ton of bass" mainly using two techniques.

"They (Quivers) look amazing underwater. It's an ideal bait for the Neko Rig and the Tokyo Rig.

Crews and some anglers in the office have been catching bass on the Quiver for a while, he said, noting one of them caught five bass on one of the soft plastics and still has it tied on, proof of its durability.

As for using a Tokyo-rigged Quiver around cypress trees, which are common bass habitat in Louisiana and across the South, Crews suggested using two 1/8-ounce worm weights that will clack together and "to just pitch it around cypress knees and hold on."

Quivers will be available in 10 colors with many options, he said, adding there will be single colors, core colors, laminated and triple laminated. ■

For more information about the Quiver and other Missile Baits products, go to missilebaits.com or call 855-466-5738.



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APRIL: A BANNER MONTH AT THE BEND

Higher, warming water signals a great month for bass in all stages of the spawn

I wore a smile non-stop while on the water one weekend several weeks ago on Toledo Bend.

The bass I was catching on a Carolina-rigged soft plastic off ridges that would have been out of the water in December — or close to it — were a positive sign that things were getting right. I'm pretty sure you'll be smiling this month, with the traditional red-hot patterns paying off.

Why?

After so many months, the pool level started rising late this winter and at the end of February, it was at 171.24, about 7 inches from full pool.

That means outside ridges like I was fishing on the lake's lower end had enough water on top of them to hold bass, and that should make bass anglers salivate at least into the month of May. That bass were up there in the prespawn and spawn period was so encouraging.

Their presence means the lake's bass were very, very close to a full-blown spawn on the full moon on March 7. April, for sure,



Nick Terry of Overland Park, Kan., smiles as he holds a hefty bass that hit a Fluke on an April day in 2019 at Toledo Bend. He was fishing with guide and columnist John Dean.

Photo courtesy John Dean

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will be a banner month. It's just going to be stupid good! It'll be a time for soaking soft plastics like Super Flukes and Senkos on and near beds as well as for spinnerbaits, namely the 3/8-ounce golden bream Stanley 305DW and golden bream Stanley 258DW, and bladed jigs, namely the Delta Lures Thunder Jig, for any bass in transition or living in the bushes, particularly up north.

You can't get much better than that. Fish are in the most-vulnerable and most-aggressive stage of the year. The majority will be in depths of 5 to 10 feet, up and down the lake, west to east, with some regions firing earlier than others.

What we don't want this spring is for the lake level to go higher than 172.0. That's when the water gets beyond the hard bank line and bass get so far back you can't get to them.

About those ridges. Mostly, vegetation has grown on bare spots that I'm fishing down south, as well as other ridges across Toledo Bend. You can't see the grass now — you've just got to understand the lay of the land.

That's what the "inside grass line" is now. Haygrass and other underwater vegetation will fill up when there is more water in the lake.

I'll work those ridges over with a Fluke on a Carolina rig. I'll put my boat in 5 feet of water and fish 3- to 4-foot depths. Dominant colors this time of year are watermelon/red and green pumpkin/red, depending on the water color.

No doubt, many of the bass are going to be picked off on or around their bed. Flukes and Senkos will do the job, but something else people overlook in the prespawn and spawn is a white topwater plastic frog when the water temperature is in the upper 60s and gets into the 70s. Work it s-l-o-w-l-y and keep it still as long as you can stand it.

Two other oft-forgotten old-ies but goldies are the gold/orange Rogue and the newer Whopper Plopper; bone seems to be the best color day-in and day-out, followed by Sexy Shad in the spring.

About April — If you're super

pumped to latch onto a bass weighing 10 pounds or better, there is no better time than now. The double-digit opportunity is so great for the next eight to 10 weeks at Toledo Bend. I tell you, my goal this spring is to set the hook on two bass weighing more than 10 pounds and get them in my hands.

Remember, the lake's bass won't all be storming the beach to spawn at the same time. Typically, the last area to go into full-spawn mode for bass is the south end of the lake. ■

— John Dean



John Dean has been guiding on Toledo Bend most of his life. If you'd like to join him on a trip, give him a call at (936) 404-2688.

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Raceland's David King displays one of the heaviest bass taken after a front passing through on Lac Des Allemands Feb. 5.

POST-FRONTAL CONDITIONS SURPRISE ANGLERS WITH QUALITY FISH

Raceland's King, McMath hit the jackpot at Lac Des Allemands in early February

As anglers, we've all heard that the best time to go fishing is before a frontal passage. And sure enough, most any bass angler can tell you that such advice is right on — 99% of the time. By comparison, bass fishing immediately after a front can be down outright awful. That's when anglers often say — bass have a solid case of lockjaw.

But such certainly didn't happen Feb. 5 for Raceland's David King and his fishing buddy, David McMath of Houma.

HOW THEIR DAY WENT

King and McMath had formulated a plan after checking the weather, and they were going to score early that morning in canals bordering Lac Des Allemands.

"We started out by launching at sunrise that morning," said King, 30. "We knew a bad storm was coming, but we had a few hours to fish before it arrived."

The duo decided to fish the man-made, dead-end canals, and both were working Delta Lures' Thunder Jigs, the gold-delta shad versions.

"We tried a few areas in the canals, fishing in 1 to 5 feet of water," King said. "We caught nothing at all."

And then a storm came through, and it hit the area hard. There is no cover at all along the banks of the dead-end canals in Lac



Photos courtesy of David King

Des Allemands.

"It was torrential," King said. "We were in the boat and just kept fishing. We really felt the winds at one point, and we were pretty wet."

Eventually, the rains came to a halt, and the winds shifted, coming out of the north.

"It was 10 a.m., and we reached the end of the canal, so I turned the boat around and began heading south," King said. "We were going back to fish everything we had just fished during the rain."

AFTER THE RAIN

King made a couple of casts, and on his next throw a good fish hit hard.

"I worked it over to the boat after it pulled a little drag and saw it was a good bass," he said, estimating the fish at a little heavier than 5 pounds.

They continued south along the canal and cast up close to the base of some shoreline reeds.

"In just 1½ minutes, I had another good fish on, and this one looked to be closer to 4 pounds," he said.

McMath was catching fish, too, as they pushed south along the shoreline with the trolling motor.



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"The catching continued like that ... we caught a fish every three to five minutes," King said.

Altogether, King said they caught nearly 40 bass, with the majority ranging between 2 to 4 pounds.

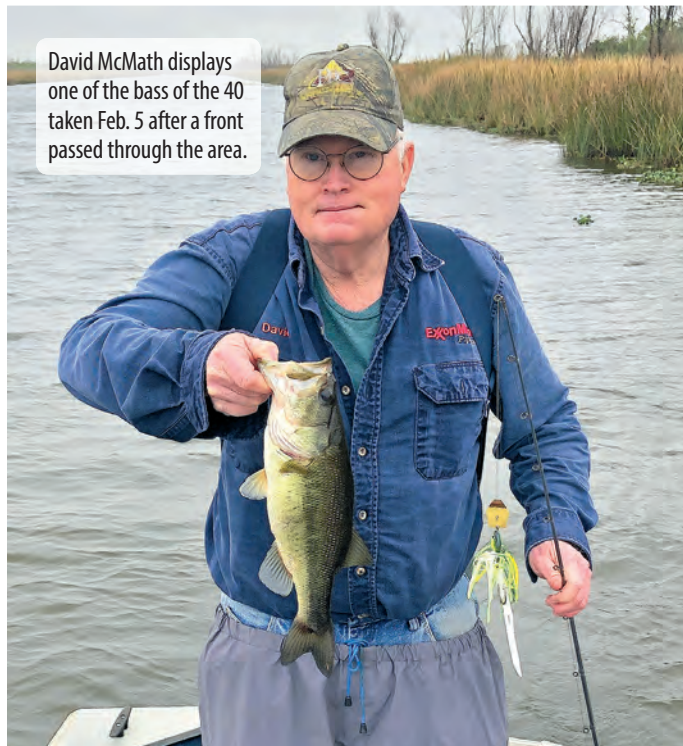
"It ended up to be a great day out there fishing despite the aftermath of the front pushing through," he said. "It was just so unusual that the fish really turned on after the front and not before it."

WHAT THEY USED

King was fishing the Thunder Jig on a 6-foot-10, medium-heavy Falcon Rod and an Abu Garcia Revo STX reel spooled with 18-pound Sunline Super FC Sniper fluorocarbon.

The bass taken were all in the prespawn mode, but King knew that it wouldn't be long until the fish would be sitting on shallow flats in the area engaging in spawning behaviors.

"When they start spawning in this area, I usually switch up to pitching wacky worms, Senkos and even Smithwick's Rattlin' Rogues," he said.



David McMath displays one of the bass of the 40 taken Feb. 5 after a front passed through the area.

In April, Lac Des Allemands' bass will be about through the spawn, and then they will be chasing shad, bream and baitfish.

"I'll catch bass after the spawn along points and near structure in several areas of the lake," King said. "And of course, the post-spawn bass will certainly be deeper."

In April, post-spawn bass will be feeding on shad and other baitfish. King will fish spinnerbaits, square-bill crankbaits, Whopper Poppers and Rat-L-Traps with success. ■

— Chris Berzas

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TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SHAD SPAWN AT TOLEDO BEND

Largemouth bass will take advantage of baitfish spawn through April and into May

At Toledo Bend, spawning season is winding down for the reservoir's bass population. In April, only a few of these lady largemouths will be taken on beds — with even less fish pushing toward the shallows as spring progresses.

But not to worry; prime time is not over. The summer doldrums have not arrived, and a great window of opportunity is coming open to catch numbers of quality bass.

It's called the shad spawn; it usually begins in mid-April and runs into May.

Doug Guins of Lake Charles and his daughter, Annabelle, enjoyed a great April day on the water in 2019 — the duo ending up with 22 bass.

"We were fishing right in the middle of the shad spawn," said Doug Guins, 48-year-old. "The bass were pushing those shad, and most ranged between 2 and 4 pounds. Our largest weighed 5."

Annabelle Guins, a sophomore at McNeese State University and vice president of the school's fishing team, has been fishing for bass with her father "as early as I could walk," she said.

At Toledo Bend, she had much to say about catching largemouths during the shad spawn.



CW Custom Baits' Ol' Faithful is a favorite of Doug and Annabelle Guins when the shad spawn begins on Toledo Bend.

Photos courtesy Doug Guins



Annabelle Guins and her father, Doug, know very well how to take quality Toledo Bend largemouths during the shad spawn.

"I would advise anglers to stay in shallow waters in the back of the coves," she said. "And it seems always better on the north sides of the coves."

Anglers will often see shad pushing through buck brush, aka buttonwoods, and schools of bass will be ambushing them as the shad pass by. This usually happens in the early morning.

"And this could be happening in coves on both sides of the lake," she said.

Shad spawn lures of choice for Guins and her father are spinnerbaits.

"Clint Ward with CW Custom Baits came out with a prototype which is a 3/8-ounce spinnerbait designed on a 1/4-ounce frame," Doug Guins said. "With the way it is designed, it is easier to sling it up under the trees. And although it's a smaller-frame spinnerbait, it is heavier and doesn't rise above the water column as it is worked."

"It has a Colorado blade in the front and a willow-leaf blade, and we cast chartreuse-and-white as well as blue-chartreuse-white colors."

The spinnerbait is being marketed by CW Custom Lures as the "Ol' Faithful." ■

— Chris Berzas



VIDEO: Go to louisianasportsman.com/shad-spawn-at-toledo-bend/ to see Doug and Annabelle Guins fishing the shad spawn.

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A stream of bubbles coming from the bottom of a body of water can mean a lot of things, most of them good for fishermen. **BELOW:** Aaron Gerberg proudly displays a bass from Lac Des Allemands.

CATCH BASS ON THE BUBBLE

BUBBLE TRAIL CAN LEAD TO FISH By Kinny Haddox

Mike Wood, a retired state fisheries biologist, guided the boat out across an open area of the lake, looking ahead to locate a big log pile that often held bass.

He wasn't looking at the depth finder. He was looking for bubbles.

"There it is," Wood said. "See the bubbles?"

Old, decaying logs regularly give off small, methane bubbles, even when they have been underwater for decades.

Picking up on those clues is just one of Wood's tricks to finding bass' hiding places.

"Just because you see bubbles doesn't mean you'll catch fish, but something is going on down there," he said. "In lakes like this one, the bubbles usually mean there is a log pile down there.

"They usually hold largemouth bass."

Of course, bubbles can mean a lot of things. Seasoned old commercial

fishermen often locate schools of buffalo by seeing bubbles and use that to set their nets. It's a dying art, but veteran swampers can locate big snapping turtles by seeing bubbles and knowing how to distinguish them from other bubbles. And watching a trail of big bubbles heading off in a straight line can reveal where an alligator is underwater.

Wood has even fished with bream fishermen who locate bream beds in the summer by finding the right areas, then looking for bunches of tiny bubbles.

That technique is used often by fishermen on Caney Lake to locate big chinquapin bedding areas.

"I've caught a lot of fish by throwing around the bubbles," Wood said. "It was structure I probably wouldn't have even known was there, or certainly wouldn't have seen had I not been paying attention." ■





■ By Don Shoopman

JUST DROP A RIVER SHRIMP IN THE ATCHAFALAYA RIVER IN MORGAN CITY FOR THE NEXT 10 WEEKS AND YOU'LL HAVE BLUE AND CHANNEL CATFISH BURNING A HOLE IN YOUR ICE CHEST.

CATFISH ON FIRE

Bill McCarty's main goal on some of his favorite fishing trips from mid-April through June is to make catfish happy.

When they're happy, this avid, all-around outdoorsman is happy.

Minutes after anchoring his aluminum boat in the Atchafalaya River about 80 yards from the Morgan City floodwall, parallel to the large "M" in the MORGAN CITY and directly upstream from the third leg of the Mr. Charlie, the oil-field rig museum, McCarty pried the lid off a round plastic container and dumped frozen river shrimp into the swift water.

"The first thing I'm going to do is chum. You've got to make the catfish happy," said McCarty, a 50-year-old Morgan City native who was practically rubbing his hands in anticipation of the catfish-catching bonanza that rarely fails to materialize when catfish are in the lower end of the river, several miles upstream from where it empties into the Atchafalaya Bay.

His routine is borne of years of experience, almost guaranteed to produce.

First, McCarty unfolds and sets up on the floor of his boat a custom-built wooden rack — his uncle, Al Belaire of Morgan City, built it — that has notches for five fishing rods. Then, he readies five identical 6-foot-6 Shimano Sojourn rods with matching Daiwa RG reels spooled with 15-pound Trilene Big Game mono tied to a 1/0 Gamakatsu offset shank hook under a 2-ounce bank sinker. About 10 inches above the weight, he doubles the line to make a loop for a 6- to 8-inch leader, which keeps the shrimp off the river's bottom.

His routine is nearly finished. He always pulls out two "fish towels," one for him and one for a fishing guest, to wipe the slime off after handling so many blue and channel catfish.

McCarty impales two river shrimp on each hook on four of the fishing rods and shows a visitor to his boat how it's done. He catches the shrimp himself in wire-mesh traps he strategically places in spots downriver along the flooded shoreline. Otherwise, river shrimp can be purchased by the pint at D&B Seafood and Convenience Store, he said, or at residences in Morgan City, mainly along Second Street, which bear signs that read "River Shrimp for Sale."

Bill McCarty waits behind the two fishing rods on a specially built wooden rod rack while fishing for catfish in the Atchafalaya River at Morgan City.





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“ always put two shrimp on — one at the top of the hook and one at the bottom. When a fish hits the first one, he has to hit the second one,” McCarty said.

Then, and only then, is it time to cast into the high and muddy water on a partly cloudy morning at the height of the spawning period. He uses two rods, and his fishing buddy uses the other two. The fifth is a spare, which is needed because backlashes are common — the visitor eventually back-lashed one of the reels so badly it took two days to unravel.

To keep the lines from tangling, he advises anglers to cast one rod directly behind the boat, the other at a 45-degree angle to the left and behind the boat. He fished the other side similarly.

Game on. He described what the bites would be like and when to set the hook.

“Don’t set the hook on the first bump, but be ready, because he is coming back. Soon as you feel the second half tap, set the hook. Hard,” McCarty said.

The river shrimp, bumping around on the bottom, 15 to 17 feet deep, got the desired result within minutes. He picked up

the rod, waited, then set the hook hard and reeled a 1½-pound channel catfish in against the swift current.

It was the first catfish to hit the ice chest. Within a few hours, there were 45.

Usually, McCarty gets on the water about 7:30 a.m. after launching his boat on the Berwick side of the river about 45 seconds away from his sweet spot. Most of the time, he has 40 to 80 blues and channels, ranging from 1 to 2½ pounds, with the occasional 8- to 10-pounder, and is back home before 10 o’clock.

He learned how to fish that particular spot from his wife’s uncle, the late Sonny Billiot of Morgan City, who took him on catfish trips during his college days at LSU.

“(He) showed us how to do this. He’s gone now, but he could catch some catfish,” McCarty said.

When he was younger, he tied up to the railroad bridge near the shoreline and dropped his lines in the river, which in April is usually above 4.0 feet at the Morgan City gauge.

On the day he and his fishing buddy caught 45, he was the first one fishing that area.

“Sometimes, when it gets good and the word gets out, and it’s easy to get to, there’ll be 15, 20 boats. A lot of people go farther upriver, to (Conrad Shipyard) and (Candy Fleet Corp.),” he said.

About 15 minutes after he started fishing, two more

Bill McCarty empties his catch of Atchafalaya River shrimp, which blue and channel catfish love to eat.



//////
A 2-ounce bank sinker and hook baited with two shrimp are an unbeatable combination.

small boats idled into the area from upriver and anchored just below the railroad bridge near the Mr. Charlie. Anglers in a crawfish skiff arrived an hour later, and soon, another small boat anchored several yards upriver of the railroad bridge and 90 yards from shore.

The catfish run starts in mid-April and usually is over by mid-June, unless the river stays unseasonably high, like it did well into last summer. You know it's over when the river drops like it does at some time during the summer, McCarty said.

"It usually stops when crabs come up the river. They're aggravating," said McCarty, who sometimes goes on evening trips.

There's a special treat, lagniappe, for all who go on late afternoons in that area near the floodwall.

Café Jo Jo's on the 600 block of Front Street has live music — old country, swamp pop, Cajun rock — on Friday evenings from mid-April into June. The musical notes waft over the river and across the city during each Rhythms on the River event.

"That's definitely a neat deal. You can sit on the river, drink 'pop rouge' and listen to swamp pop and catch catfish. It's fun," McCarty said.

It isn't unusual to catch two, even four catfish at a time, any time of the day. If there are simultaneous bites, McCarty sets the hook on each and judges how heavy each hooked catfish is, then brings in the heaviest first.

"We did five (at one time) yesterday," McCarty said.

The action can be fast and furious, exciting as all get-out. If there are lulls, that's a real good time to strike up conversations about sports, politics, the family, you name it, and enjoy being on the water.

It's also a very good time to count the number of catfish that come over the side of the boat and get deposited in the ice chest. His wife and daughter are accustomed to it.

"They don't like the 'score tracker update' as we compete," he said.



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SHIMANO



An ice chest starts filling up with catfish halfway through the trip on the Atchafalaya River.



Don't be surprised to catch species other than catfish. Plenty of fish want to dine on local river shrimp. Gaspergoo (freshwater drum), stingray, gafftop catfish and even sturgeon have been boated in the past. Yes. Sturgeon.

"A buddy of mine caught a sturgeon about three weeks ago. It wasn't a big one, probably about 3 pounds," he said.

If you doubt the power of river shrimp, McCarty will prove you wrong. Sometimes a fishing buddy he takes along argues that he can catch all the catfish he wants on something other than river shrimp. One of his friends once confidently brought hot dogs, but the river shrimp outfished them 5 to 1. Saltwater bait shrimp don't hold a candle to river shrimp, either.

Those native crustaceans can be used frozen for a long period or freshly frozen, but never alive, because it seems the longer they stay in a covered plastic container, the more they smell and become firmer, which helps them stay on the hook, according to McCarty.

And, of course, they are "cute." ■



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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The three main species targeted by kayak fishermen in Louisiana waters are unquestionably speckled trout, reds and bass. However, whether incidental or on purpose, many other species provide great sport in a kayak and some even taste good.

Virtually no one targets choupique, aka bowfin or mudfish, but if you have ever fished for bass, you've more than likely thought you had a giant bass on the line, only to find out it was a lowly choupique. While some say they are good to eat, if fresh, others, like myself think they taste like a fishy cotton ball. They are tough fighters and often put on an aerial show like a bass. Catching one in a kayak is always a thrill.

Choupique have a penchant for black plastic worms, especially scented ones like Berkley Power Worms. These prehistoric fish date back more than 70 million years. If you catch a choupique, don't make the mistake of trying to lip it like a bass or you'll come back with a nub as they have a mouthful of sharp teeth. Bowfin are bimodal breathers; they have the capacity to breathe both water and air and are often found in backwater areas.

Garfish are present in both freshwater and coastal brackish waters. Another ancient bimodal species, gar can thrive in waters with low dissolved-oxygen content. Louisiana waters hold four different species of gar, with the largest and most common being the alligator gar. Other species are the longnose and less-common shortnose and spotted gars. Alligator gar can be massive beasts and are known to weigh 300 pounds or better. The current Louisiana state record rod-and-reel alligator gar is 179 pounds. Garfish are fond of live or dead bait, primarily fish, but are known to sometimes strike artificial lures. Due to their extremely bony mouths, they are often hard to get solidly hooked. Anglers specifically targeting gars often use a wire leader and allow the gar to swallow the hook/bait so that it gets lodged in their throat or stomach.



PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

Chris Holmes



Chris Holmes has kayak fished in the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and many places in between. He can be reached at cholmes@att.net.

TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT

LOUISIANA WATERS ARE FULL OF OPTIONS FOR 'YAKS

"It's a big one, it's a big one." Many bass anglers have made that cry only to disappointedly find out the beast bass they thought they hooked is a lowly choupique. Hard fighters, these ancient creatures are good for sport, but their table fare is marginal. They make for a fun fight in a kayak.

PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued

Gars put up a good fight and sometimes even jump out of the water, which is quite an impressive sight, particularly if it is right next to the kayak. Handling a gar yak-side should be done with the same precautions as a shark. A strong fish-grip is recommended to get control of the fish's mouth to avoid sustaining some nasty cuts from that jaw full of dangerous teeth.

Gar are difficult to clean, as their scaled, armored shell must be hacked or sawed into to get at the meat. However, they are all considered as providing table fare, with a particular Louisiana favorite of using the meat to make garfish balls to be used as fried patties or cooked in a gravy.

Jack crevalle are generally not usually sought-after by kayak anglers due to their poor quality as table fare. However, lack of dinner aside, catching a jack from a kayak is an awesome experience, and one you won't soon forget. A kayak battle with a good-sized jack can easily last longer than 30 minutes. Often, the angler will be ready to throw in the towel long before the fish is ready to be brought boatside. Jacks can be found nearly anywhere one regularly fishes inshore for trout and reds. Although often caught in deep passes and bayous, it's not uncommon to be ambushed by one in water only a foot deep.

Jacks are notorious for herding up large schools of bait and then crashing and slashing through them. Jacks are not hard to fool and readily attack a wide variety of artificial lures as well as live or natural dead bait. A jack hitting a topwater plug is one of the most-vicious strikes a fisherman can experience.

Although jacks will fight to near full exhaustion, they are hardy and will readily revive after a long battle. Move the fish back and forth in the water in an upright position until you feel it regaining strength. Since you likely won't be keeping it to eat, using a gaff to land a jack



Garfish are hard fighters with a mouthful of razor sharp teeth. Their food value is good, but they are difficult to clean. Most are caught accidentally by kayak anglers rather than being specifically targeted.

is not advised. To handle a jack for a photo or release, wearing gloves is recommended, as you can easily be cut by their mouths, gill plates or rough areas near the tail.

Of course there are a wide variety of other species in Louisiana to target by kayak that provide great sport and a delicious meal. Catfish, bream and crappie are additional freshwater fish that are a blast to catch from the 'yak. Other saltwater species like sheepshead, black drum and flounder can be specifically targeted.

If you're looking for a change of pace and a chance to increase your kayak fishing skills, step out of your comfort zone and try your hand at catching some of the less popular fish species Louisiana has to offer. You'll be glad you did. ■

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT >



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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

Most wahoo have black-blue vertical bars the length of their bodies.



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: WAHOO

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Wahoo are among the fastest fish in the ocean, are hard-fighting, and are also one of the tastiest species in the sea. For those reasons and more, they are highly sought-after by anglers throughout the world.

These fish are long and cylindrical, with toothy mouths. They have steel blue coloration along the upper portion of their bodies and are pale blue to silver below their lateral lines. Twenty-five to 30 blackish-blue vertical bars mark the length of the fish in an irregular fashion. The bars are more prominent in smaller wahoo, but they become very noticeable in even the largest wahoo when the fish is excited. Their scales are very small, and barely visible.

Wahoo have a movable upper jaw that is lined with many sharp teeth. The fish is sometimes misidentified as king mackerel or barracuda by inexperienced anglers. They are members of the *Scombridae* family, making them cousins to mackerels, tunas and bonitos. They rarely travel in large schools, but younger fish often swim in loose groups of between two to 20 fish. On rare occasions, anglers have reported seeing wahoo in schools up to 100 fish.

TROLLING AT SPEEDS

These fish exist in the bluewater oceans throughout the world and are often caught by recreational anglers fishing in offshore and nearshore waters. Trolling is one of the top tactics for catching

them. Most experienced anglers switch between trolling at high and low speeds, depending on conditions and how the fish react on any given day.

Areas with deep, blue waters that feature sunken rocks, wrecks or livebottom are good areas to troll. No matter how deep the water is, spots with any submerged structure are good spots to look, especially in water that ranges from 70 to 74 degrees. Floating weedlines are also good areas to target. Artificial lures and fresh ballyhoo are good baits.

GROW, THEN DIE

Wahoo grow at a rapid rate, and have a short life span. Some studies with tagged, released and re-caught wahoo have shown growth rates of as much as 22 pounds per year. Most die before 10 years of age. These fish can reach speeds of 60 mph and can chase down a variety of intended prey, which includes numerous fish and squid. Biologists believe wahoo sometimes kill fish larger than themselves, shredding them into bite-sized chunks with their razor sharp teeth.

Anglers often find a giant stomach worm (*Hirudinella ventricosa*) in the bellies of wahoo. However, the worms do not seem to have any negative impact on the fish and also do not taint any part of the fish eaten by humans.

Wahoo spawn every month of the year, and most reach sexual maturity by the end of their first years. The length of the spawning session varies widely between

different regions of the globe, but most extend for long periods of time. Females release millions of eggs into the ocean each year, and males fertilize them as they float freely in the pelagic zone.

REAL MONSTERS

Wahoo are commonly referred to as 'Hoos by anglers across the southeastern United States. In other parts of the world, the fish are sometimes called ono, oahu and peto.

Sara Hayward caught the world-record wahoo, which weighed 184 pounds, in 2005 while fishing out of Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. A 202-pound wahoo was caught off the coast of Florida in 2016, but the fish was ineligible as a world record because three different anglers took turns reeling it in.

The Louisiana state record wahoo weighed 139.25 pounds. Angler Myron Fischer caught the big fish in the West Delta Block 153 in April 1976.

The Mississippi state record wahoo weighed 111 pounds, 3 ounces, and was caught in 1998 by Jeffery Lee of Supply, N.C. ■



Brian Cope of Edisto Island, S.C., is a retired Air Force combat communications technician. He has a B.A. in English Literature from the University of South Carolina and has been writing about the outdoors since 2006. He's spent half his life hunting and fishing. The rest, he said, has been wasted.

■ By Kinny Haddox

CALLING IS WAY DOWN THE LIST OF TALENTS THAT TURKEY HUNTERS HAVE TO MASTER. ACCORDING TO ONE LOUISIANA TURKEY HUNTING LEGEND, SCOUTING AND LISTENING ARE FAR MORE IMPORTANT.

WHICH CAME **FIRST,**
THE **GOBBLE**
OR THE **CLUCK?**



Turkey hunting boils down to getting the basics covered and getting things in the correct order. So when it comes to successfully chasing and calling wild “thunder chickens,” which came first — **the gobble or the cluck?**

Dan DeWitt of Dry Prong, a veteran turkey hunter and professional outfitter and a member of the Louisiana Outdoor Legends Hall of Fame, said the answer is easy. It's neither.

“What comes first is scouting,” DeWitt said. “To be a successful turkey hunter, you have to learn how to go out and find the turkey sign, from tracks, feathers, turkey droppings to scratchings. Then you can find where they are living,” he said.

Now, how about those calls. No, not yet.

“The second thing you have to do is listen,” he said.

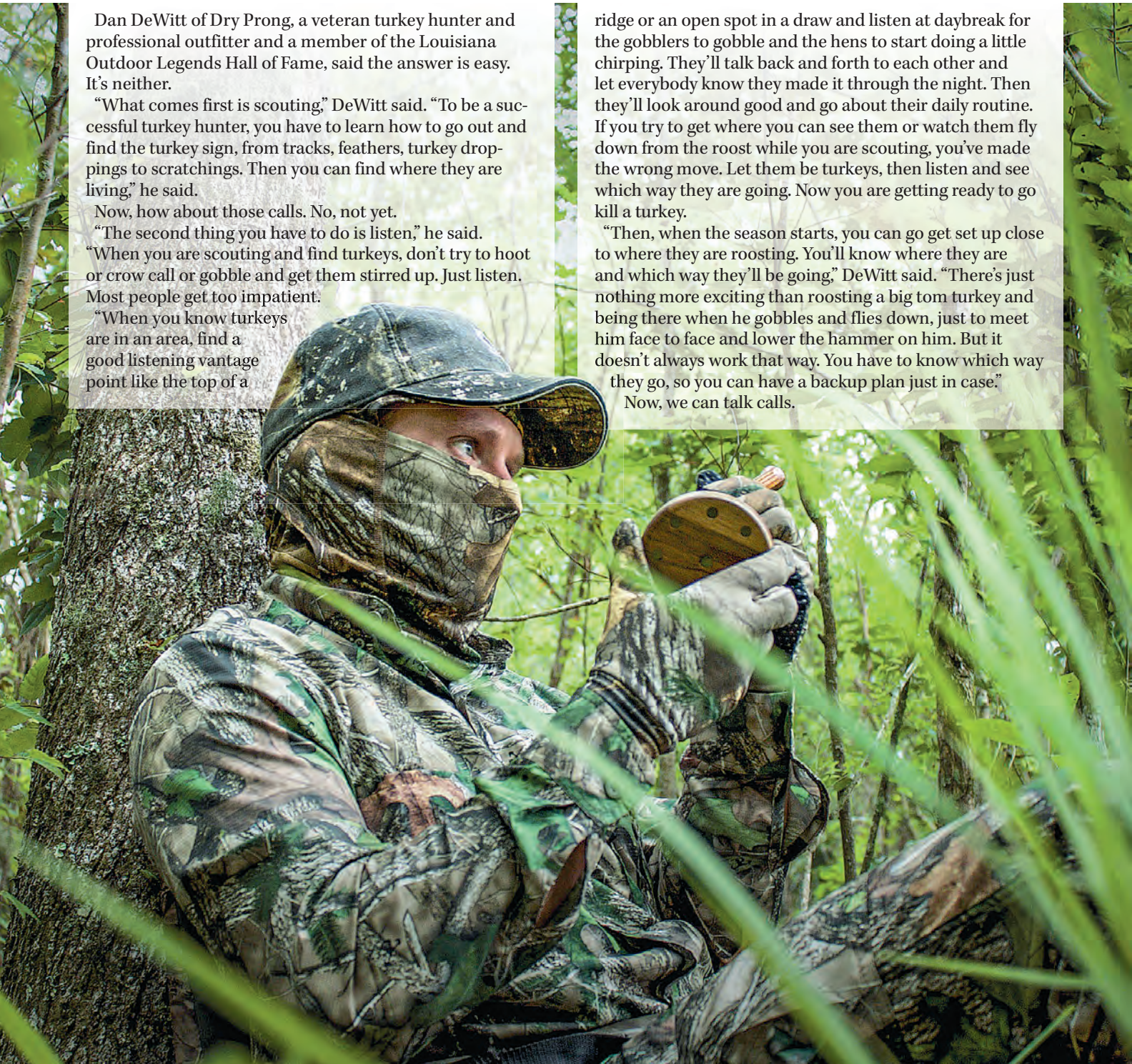
“When you are scouting and find turkeys, don't try to hoot or crow call or gobble and get them stirred up. Just listen. Most people get too impatient.

“When you know turkeys are in an area, find a good listening vantage point like the top of a

ridge or an open spot in a draw and listen at daybreak for the gobblers to gobble and the hens to start doing a little chirping. They'll talk back and forth to each other and let everybody know they made it through the night. Then they'll look around good and go about their daily routine. If you try to get where you can see them or watch them fly down from the roost while you are scouting, you've made the wrong move. Let them be turkeys, then listen and see which way they are going. Now you are getting ready to go kill a turkey.

“Then, when the season starts, you can go get set up close to where they are roosting. You'll know where they are and which way they'll be going,” DeWitt said. “There's just nothing more exciting than roosting a big tom turkey and being there when he gobbles and flies down, just to meet him face to face and lower the hammer on him. But it doesn't always work that way. You have to know which way they go, so you can have a backup plan just in case.”

Now, we can talk calls.



2020 LOUISIANA TURKEY SEASONS

Area A: April 4 – May 3

Area B: April 4-26

Area C: April 4-19

Youth & Physically Challenged Hunt: March 28-29, statewide, on private lands only. Restricted to youth and wheelchair confined physically challenged hunters.

Bag limits: one gobbler per day, two per season.



A big gobbler strutting on a sunny, April morning is one of the most-impressive sights in the outdoors. **OPPOSITE:** Being able to call is important, but it's not nearly as important as knowing the woods you're hunting and where turkeys like to walk.

“When you have a gobbler close in the morning and you (call), and he answers, just shut up. He knows where you are, and unless he heads the other way and you know it, just wait,” he said. “One mistake people make is calling too much. Another thing is, when you are hunting a 4- or 5-year-old, mature turkey, remember this: if you are calling, and he cuts you off, he has you in his plans. It may not be immediate, but sometime that day, he’s coming right back to where he heard you. You can bank on it. It may be a few minutes. It may be a few hours. But if you want that big turkey, just be patient. I’ve had that happen time and time again. Heck, if it’s a long time, just take a nap. When he gets back close, he’ll wake you up with a gobbler you won’t forget. These are smart birds. Real smart birds.”

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**WHICH CAME FIRST,
THE GOBBLE OR THE CLUCK?**

DeWitt said it doesn't matter if you use a mouth call, slate, box, scratch box, wingbone or any kind of call, the most-effective call you can use is a properly timed, three-part yelp call.

"Those old hens, if you listen to them, they are going to go 'yelp, yelp, yelp' with three ... yelps. Learn that sequence and the cadence. It's important," he said. "When you have that down, you have the old bearded ones in trouble. That is real to a gobbler — as real as it gets."

DeWitt should know. He's killed more than 200 wild turkeys, in 30 different states, and he has guided other hunters that have killed substantially more than that over his career. He



No matter what kind of call you prefer, a simple, three-note yelp is the most important call to learn. Decoys can also be a help.



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is also the only turkey hunter who has killed a double grand slam twice in the same season. He has turned more to archery hunting in recent years, but his tips work for gun or archery hunters.

Of all his turkey wisdom, this may be the most important. "Before you can be a great turkey hunter, you've got to become a good turkey hunter," he said. "Before you can become a good hunter, you have to be a bad turkey hunter. And to be a bad turkey hunter, you've got to start. Too many people are impatient and want to be an expert overnight. It doesn't work that way." ■



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Kinny Haddox has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 45 years. He publishes a daily website, lakedarbonnelife.com and is a member of the Louisiana Chapter of the Outdoor Legends Hall of Fame. He and his wife, DiAnne, live in West Monroe.

**BIG GOBBLE'S
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**WHICH CAME FIRST,
THE GOBBLE OR THE CLUCK?**

Dan DeWitt loves to find a gobbler's strutting zone because he can set up close by and expect a visit.



MEET BIG GOBBLERS IN THEIR 'STRUT ZONE'

Every dominate gobbler has a special place Dan DeWitt calls the "strut zone". It's not a place regular hunters go, and it isn't something he usually talks about.

"My absolute favorite thing to do in spring turkey hunting is, once you light them fly down, then listen for what they do and find their strut zone," DeWitt said. "The big, old gobblers may not ever roost in the same tree, but about 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning, he's going to make his way to that special place where he struts his stuff and puts on a show for all the hens that are following him. When you are scouting, find that place, and when you hunt, go set up there before he gets there. It's the best place to kill a big mature bird."

DeWitt said once you've found a gobbler's strutting area, you can verify the exact spot at other times of day by finding feathers, strut marks where he's been dragging his wings or where he's really been tearing up the ground. When Dewitt has that spot

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pinpointed, he doesn't worry about hunting the roost or calling to the bird, he just visits the strut zone and sets up in a good spot. It can be a pretty long way from the roost, too, he said.

Normally, when he and the turkey are in the strut zone, he doesn't even have to call, but if he does, he uses what he calls a spit and drum call. The turkey makes a spitting and drumming sound when he's in the zone. DeWitt said if you have to make that call to get him close, be ready.

"That is his spot, and he's the dominant turkey there," he said. "He's already run off the other turkeys. That's his house. If you gobble at him, he's going to be mad and come right at you. Make sure you are ready." ■

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No doubt about it, turkey hunting in Louisiana has seen better days.

Before the recent scourges of flooding, persistent heavy rainfalls and feral hogs, turkey hunters once were able to have two to three birds roosted before opening day.

Not anymore; many hunters are happy to hear one.

The 2020 population estimate of Louisiana's statewide flock is 35,000 to 40,000 birds — half the size of the 2010 flock. Turkey hunter numbers have also declined to 10,800, compared to 25,800 in 2003.

Yes, Louisiana's habitat is suffering from a silent spring, and it doesn't appear to be getting better anytime soon, with even more season closures and reductions on Louisiana's Wildlife Management Areas planned for 2021 and 2022.

"I would like to be able to dismiss some of these concerns and offer security in the fact that birds across the state are doing well, but that simply is not

the case," said Cody Cedotal, wild turkey study leader for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and an avid hunter himself.

Cedotal does provide a share of both optimism and pessimism this year, depending on where hunters choose to hit the Louisiana forests.

"Based on moderate-to-good reproduction the last couple of years, I would predict a good season in 2020 for the northwest and southeast parts of the state," he said. "Based on the same information, the outlook appears pretty bleak for the parishes up and down the Mississippi River, as severe and prolonged flooding has impacted these areas for multiple years now and is currently threatening to do so again."

PREFERRED PUBLIC LANDS



TURKEY HUNTERS HAVEN'T DONE WELL ON LOUISIANA'S PUBLIC LANDS FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS. BUT SEVERAL TRACTS OF FEDERAL AND STATE LANDS STILL PROVIDE DECENT CHANCES AT SCORING ON A LONGBEARD THIS SPRING. ■ By Chris Berzas

GOVERNMENT LAND GOBBLERS

PREFERRED PUBLIC LANDS

Despite low public-lands harvests in other areas, Cedotal recommends the 600,000-acre Kisatchie National Forest for the spring of 2020.

Hunters need to scout for longbeards near clear-cuts, burns and stripped rows. Doing some cutting and running at mid-day and the afternoon has worked well for hunters who have had a hard time working gobblers after sunrise.

The seasons are as follows:

• **Caney Ranger District:** April 4-19; all remaining KNF lands: April 4-26. Youth-only turkey hunts: March 28-29 on all Ranger Districts (except Vernon Land Units within Fort Polk-Vernon WMA).

• **Catahoula and Red Dirt National Wildlife Management Preserves:** Youth-only turkey: March 28-29; General hunt: April 4-26.

Other public areas that usually offer a decent number of gobblers include Fort Polk WMA near Leesville and nearby Peason Ridge WMA — together offering over 175,000 acres of turkey

hunting habitat.

It's important for hunters to know that all or portions of these areas can be closed daily due to military activities, and daily clearance must be obtained. Information on open areas and special ATV regulations can be accessed at: <https://home.army.mil/polk/index.php/my-Fort-Polk/fort-polk-huntin>.

The turkey seasons on these two military WMAs are as follows:

• **Fort Polk WMA, Vernon:** Turkey youth lottery: March 28; General hunt: April 4 – May 3.

• **Peason Ridge WMA:** Turkey youth lottery: March 28; General hunt: April 4-May 3.



PUBLIC LANDS STRATEGIES >

Fair to good reproduction over the past few years have biologists liking turkey hunters' chances in northwest and south-east Louisiana.



2020 LOUISIANA PUBLIC TURKEY HUNTING

State Lands

- Bayou Macon WMA:** Turkey lottery April 25-26.
Big Lake WMA: Youth March 28-29; general April 4-19.
Bodcau WMA: Youth: March 28-29; April 25-26; general April 4-19.
Boeuf WMA: April 4-19.
Camp Beaugard WMA: April 4-12.
Clear Creek WMA: Youth lottery: March 28; Turkey general lottery: April 4-5; 11-12; General: April 13-May 3.
Fort Polk WMA – Vernon: Turkey youth lottery: March 28; General: April 4 – May 3.
Hutchinson Creek WMA: Same as outside.
J.C. Sonny Gilbert: Turkey youth lottery: March 28; Turkey General lottery: April 4-6; 10-12; 17-19; 24-26; May 1-3.
Lake Ramsay Savannah WMA: April 4-19.
Little River WMA: April 4-19.
Pearl River WMA: Turkey youth lottery: March 28; Turkey general lottery: April 4-5.
Peason Ridge WMA: Turkey youth lottery: March 28; General April 4-May 3.
Pomme de Terre WMA: Turkey youth lottery: April 18-19; April 25- May 3.
Richard K. Yancey WMA: Turkey youth lottery: March 28-29; General April 4-12.
Sabine WMA: Turkey general lottery: April 10-12; April 24-26.
Sandy Hollow WMA: April 4-19.
Sherburne WMA: Turkey youth lottery April 11; Turkey general lottery: April 18-19; General April 20-22.
Spring Bayou WMA: Turkey youth lottery: April 25-26.
Tangipahoa Parish School Board WMA: Same as outside.
Tunica Hills WMA: Turkey youth lottery: March 28; Turkey general lottery: April 4-5; 11-12; 18-19. Turkey general: April 20-26.
Walnut Hill WMA: Same as outside.
West Bay WMA: Turkey youth lottery: March 28; Turkey general lottery: April 4-5; 11-12; 18-19.

Federal Lands

- Kisatchie National Forest:** Caney Ranger District: April 4-19; all remaining KNF lands: April 4-26. Youth-only turkey: March 28-29 on all Ranger Districts (except Vernon Land Units within Fort Polk-Vernon WMA).
Catahoula and Red Dirt National Wildlife Management Preserves: Youth-only turkey: March 28-29; General April 4-26.
USACE Indian Bayou Area: Turkey youth and physically challenged: March 28-29; Turkey general lottery: April 4-5.
USACE Old River Control and Lock Area: Turkey: April 4-12.
Bayou Cocodrie NWR: March 28-29 (Youth lottery only).
Bogue Chitto NWR: March 28-29 (Youth only) and April 6-28.
Lake Ophelia NWR: March 28 (Youth lottery only) and April 6-21.
Tensas River NWR: March 28-29 (Youth only) and April 6-21.
Upper Ouachita NWR: March 28 (Youth lottery only).

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PUBLIC LANDS STRATEGIES

The No. 1 strategy is to scout and locate turkeys before opening day arrives, and the best way is to frequent edges of clear-cuts, streamside management zones and burn areas.

Look for tracks, feathers and droppings and listen for gobblers at daylight in areas you find sign.

Hunters walking dusty roads and fire lanes when scouting should make a mental note of areas where tracks and strut zones are found, then cover them with sand or dirt so you won't have any competition on opening day.

Baton Rouge's Oscar Long has scored on many longbeards on various public lands in Louisiana.

"Kisatchie National Forest is absolutely a great area to find turkeys," he said. "It's phenomenal just due to its sheer size . . . so vast and spread out."

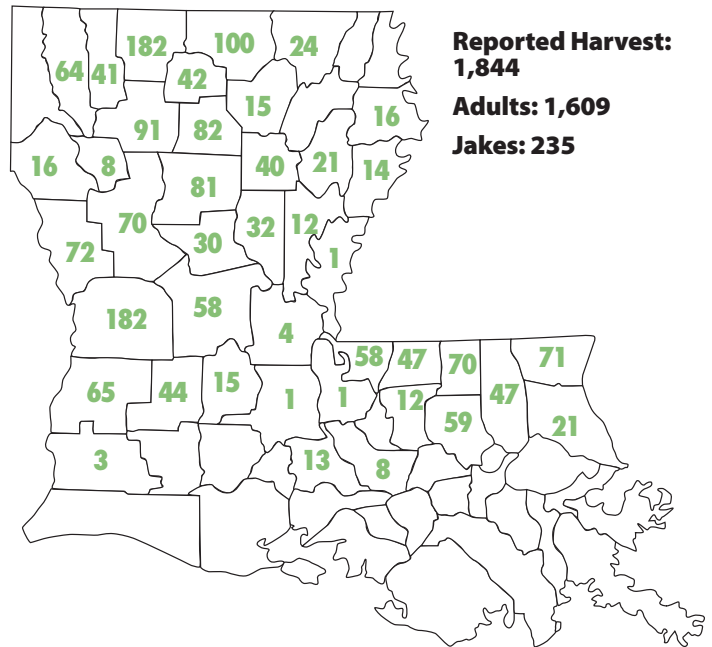
On opening day, success can be easy or difficult depending on the circumstances, according to Long.

"On opening day, you get a real good opportunity to kill what I call a young, dumb bird, one that may just jump down off the roost and come in right to you," he said.

On the other hand, Long advises patience if hunters find other competition that pressures gobblers to shut up or just stay on the roost a while longer.



2019 WILD TURKEY HARVEST

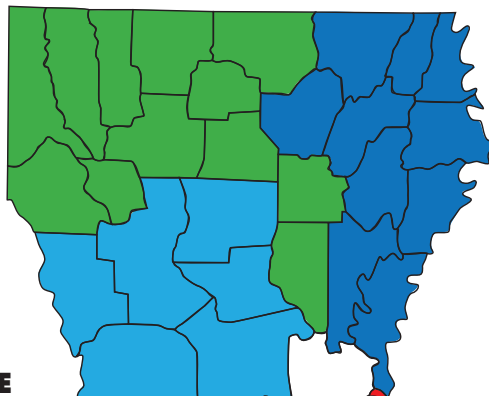


2019 LOUISIANA WILD TURKEY POULT PRODUCTION INDEX

NORTHWEST LOB/SH/HD

2019 – 1.6 Poults/Hen

2018 – 1.5 Poults/Hen
 2017 – 2.1 Poults/Hen
 2016 – 1.3 Poults/Hen



N. MISS. DELTA

2019 – 0.7 Poults/Hen

2018 – 1.6 Poults/Hen
 2017 – 0.7 Poults/Hen
 2016 – 1.2 Poults/Hen

WESTERN LONGLEAF PINE

2019 – 1.2 Poults/Hen

2018 – 1.3 Poults/Hen
 2017 – 1.1 Poults/Hen
 2016 – 0.6 Poults/Hen

SOUTHEAST LOBLOLLY

2019 – 1.5 Poults/Hen

2018 – 1.1 Poults/Hen
 2017 – 1.2 Poults/Hen
 2016 – 1.0 Poults/Hen

ATCHAFALAYA & L. MISS DELTA

2019 – 0.7 Poults/Hen
 2018 – 0.3 Poults/Hen
 2017 – 0.6 Poults/Hen
 2016 – 0.5 Poults/Hen

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was once hunting a bird I located on Sherburne WMA," he said. "I left him at 10 a.m. as there were other hunters calling at the bird.

"When I returned to my truck, there were three others parked in the same area. Eventually, the people came out, climbed into their vehicles and left the area.

"I went back in and pulled my box call out, did a few clucks, and the turkey gobbled," Long said. "I walked closer to him, using my diaphragm and doing some cutting.

"At 50 yards, I see three gobblers coming. I yelped, and all three gobbled at the same time. I shot the one strutting and rolled him."

As the season progresses, Long knows that hunters are left dealing with birds that have been called to, walked on and shot at during the early season.

"I find those public-lands birds go silent later in the season," he said. "I



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Oscar Long displays this longbeard taken from public land. According to Long, opening day gobblers can be easy or difficult to kill depending on hunting pressure.

have taken late gobblers by not calling as much and doing so softly while scratching some leaves.

"You just have to be more patient on public lands and get even quieter and more hidden as the season progresses."

For more information regarding locations, dates and regulations for public lands of choice, consult the Louisiana 2019-2020 Hunting & WMA Regulations pamphlet.

Louisiana hunters are limited to one gobbler per day, and only two per season. ■



Chris Berzas has fished and hunted in the Bayou State ever since he could hold a rod and shoot a shotgun. Berzas has been a freelancer featured in newspapers, magazines, television and DVDs since 1989.

Caden Jolie, 10, had a very successful youth turkey hunt in St. Helena Parish.

WHY ARE TURKEYS SO TOUGH TO HUNT?

By Jonathan Olivier

So what is it about turkeys that make them so difficult to kill? Biologist Richard Buchholz of the University of Mississippi ran down some of the reasons hunters can easily miss out on tagging out.

• SIGHT

"They've got big eyes relative to their heads," Buchholz said. "I think they probably have a fairly large visual field, but we don't actually know. The visual field of turkeys has never been measured.

"We can make an assumption that because their eyes are on the sides of their head that they're able to see behind them as well as in front of them."

• SPEED

"Getting airborne is pretty slow for a turkey, especially a big tom, because they weigh so much," Buchholz said. "But once they've got their forward motion going, they can disappear pretty quickly.

"It also depends on the density of the habitat; in heavy forest, there's a lot in their way. But if you're out in a field and they can get above treetop level, then they're going to keep going for some distance."



• PREDATION

"They go up in the tree to be protected from terrestrial predators," Buchholz said. "That's why it's so important for the young poults to grow in their flight feathers as fast as possible so they can fly up into the tree with their mom. Otherwise, mom has to sit on the ground with them and keep them warm, and that's where opossums and raccoons and bobcats and foxes are. That's a very dangerous place for them to be.

"They're not totally safe in the tree. Barred owls and great horned owls potentially are predators, particularly for hens. Gobblers are pretty big, but hens are much more likely to be taken by those owls." ■

GRUNTS & GOBBLES ➤

GRUNTS & GOBBLES

David Moreland

It's not difficult to manage your hunting land for better wild turkey habitat, which results in more smiles.



Photo courtesy Kendall Reed

MAXIMIZE YOUR TURKEY HABITAT

EARLY SPRING, BEFORE THEY NEST, IS A GOOD TIME TO GET HABITAT IN SHAPE FOR TURKEYS

The habitat of the wild turkey changes with the seasons. In the fall and winter, birds move into hardwood drains, searching out the hard mast that is generally available.

Turkeys are in winter groups, with a hen and her poults often joining up with other hens and poults. Jakes may form another winter group and usually, the adult toms are together in a flock. As spring approaches, the hens begin to search out nesting sites, typically around fields and openings. Adult toms begin to split up and search for receptive hens. The jakes, young toms, will stay together to avoid getting whipped by a mature gobbler.

As hens begin to nest, and when the eggs hatch, brood habitat that provides the small birds with areas to feed is criti-

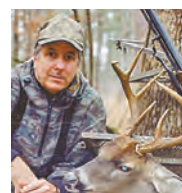
cal. Insects are the primary food item of these small turkeys, and finding food is a must. As fall approaches, turkeys again begin to gather in their various groups, and the cycle starts again.

LONG WALKS

Turkeys can travel several miles during the course of the day, and they do best in areas with large, contiguous tracts of timber. Forest fragmentation seems to work against the bird; however, in some eastern cities, one can find good turkey populations primary due to protection and supplemental feeding.

A small landowner is at a disadvantage because of this nomadic behavior. In my area of east Feliciana Parish, we had a very good turkey population up until the 2016 floods. Turkeys, for some reason,

disappeared after these record rainfalls and floods, and I am at a loss to understand why. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries doesn't know why this happened, with some biologists simply throwing out the habitat card and blaming it for the decline. This however, does not explain why a very good turkey population disappeared overnight. It was not due to declining turkey habitat. I really suspect that the decline is due to a disease issue that came about after these historic rains and floods.



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.

While the turkey population has virtually disappeared in our neck of the woods, I will continue to manage the habitat for turkeys with hopes that at some point they return. The following pictures illustrate some of the management work that I am doing to keep the habitat viable for turkeys.



OPEN AREAS

As mentioned, turkeys need open areas for feeding; particularly, the hens need good brood habitat. This open site provides good opportunity for young birds to search for insects. There is some escape cover available, because a site such as this provides high visibility for hawks.

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SPRING FIELDS

As spring progresses, the winter grasses begin to seed out and provide adult turkeys with various seeds. The site is too thick for young turkeys to move around in and find insects. Poul survival would be poor if all of the available habitat was in this stage of growth. These fields provide adult turkeys with high-protein plants such as clover, which helps with egg production. A field such as this would also provide hens with nesting habitat.

VEGETATION STRIPS ➤

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GRUNTS & GOBBLES

continued

VEGETATION STRIPS

I like to use a bush hog in my management work and will cut strips in areas with heavy growth to provide young turkeys with brood habitat. The red mulberry trees in the strip of trees in the above photo provide birds with an excellent soft-mast fruit. Red mulberry and black cherry are two trees that can be planted for turkeys. Maintaining various heights of vegetation will also provide diversification of insects. Katydid and grasshoppers will be in the taller grass, while crickets and other insects will be under the debris piles left from the strip cutting.



TREE PLANTING

It is getting a little late to be planting trees and shrubs unless one has the means to water them during the summer. It is best to plant trees in late winter and allow time for the root systems to take hold and the tree become acclimated to the site. My focus on tree planting is to provide a mast source for both turkey and deer. Our habitat had no white oaks, so my focus has been on establishing white oaks and cow oaks. Sawtooth oaks are a good tree to plant for both deer and turkey. I have a video of a two turkeys standing on a sawtooth oak branch; one of them stretches out and eats an acorn.

I have to believe that at some point the turkey population will recover, and once again, I will have turkeys walking around on the landscape. The more active I am in my management work, the better chance I have of this becoming a reality. ■

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With many states going to special early youth turkey hunting days or seasons, ground blinds are an option many adults are choosing to help keep the young hunters out of the unwavering eyes of a boss gobbler.

Ameristep's new Care Taker Magnum blind is just the ticket. It's big enough — 59x59 inches, 66 inches high — for three adults, much less an adult and a young hunter. It comes in Mossy Oak Break-Up Country camo, with shoot-through windows and ShadowGuard coating inside so that gobbler can't

see inside.

The blind comes with brush-in loops for adding natural foliage, an easy access zippered door, ground stakes and tie-down cords, and it weighs just 14 pounds.

The shell is Durashell Plus fabric with a matte finish. The Rigger Spider Hub frame makes for easy set-up and takedown.

MSRP: \$139.99.

For more info, visit: ameristep.com

ESCORT FIELDHUNTER TURKEY SHOTGUN

Escort has added a gun specifically designed for turkey hunters to its line of pump-action shotguns. The FieldHunter Turkey is available in 12- and 20-gauge models, as well as .410, chambered for 3-inch magnum loads as well as standard 2¾-inch shells.

The FieldHunter Turkey is available in Realtree APG and Mossy Oak BottomLand patterns and comes with three interchangeable chokes. The 5-inch optics rail on top of the receiver will accommodate a variety of Weaver mounts for additional optics, and sights are green and red fiber

for low-light hunting.

All models come with an extended forend for faster cycling of shells. The forend and stock are both made from a

MSRP: \$399.99.

For more info, visit: productwebsite.com



durable synthetic polymer to withstand the elements, and both are equipped with mounted sling studs. All three models weigh less than 7 pounds.



MILLENNIUM TURKEY SEATS

One of the biggest challenges for turkey hunters setting up on a gobbling tom is being able to sit still for long periods of time. And yes, being comfortable is a key to doing just that.

Padded seats are many hunters' solutions, but even they aren't the answer in some situations — like having that tree root right under one side of

your posterior when you sit against that big oak.

But Millennium Outdoors may have made it easier, introducing two portable seats for turkey hunters: the TU01 Field Pro and TU02 Run & Gun seats. The Field Pro is foldable, with a 17x20x21-inch aluminum frame, and a padded carry strap. It weighs just 6.4 pounds.

The Run & Gun seat has the same seat frame and strap, but no back and weighs 4.2 pounds. Both come in Mossy Oak Obsession camo.

MSRP: TU01, \$89.99, TU02 \$69.99.

For more info, visit: millenniumstands.com



TU01 Field Pro



TU02 Run & Gun

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Glenn Hughes, President
American Sportfishing Association

The American Sportfishing Association encourages all anglers to get outside and enjoy some time on the water. Please check your state's natural resource agency website to ensure you'll stay safe and healthy.

www.ASAFishing.org

GRUNDEN'S GORE-TEX FOUL-WEATHER GEAR

By Chris Holmes

When getting wet is out of the question, Grundens Gore-Tex is the answer. Guaranteed.

Grundens' reputation is legendary for keeping fishermen warm, dry and safe while facing the harshest forces of nature. Teaming up with Gore-Tex, Grundens has combined functionality and durability with Gore-Tex's breathable, waterproof technology. The new line consists of the flagship Buoy X and the workhorse Downrigger (jackets and bibs), and the packable Charter jacket.

The Buoy X features an ultra-rugged outer shell with exceptional water beading and a three-layer Gore-Tex laminate. The liner is bonded, and neoprene inner cuffs keep water out of the sleeves. The jacket has two zippered pockets and a kill-switch anchor. The bibs have Grundens suspenders, dual cargo and hand-warmer pockets, zip to the knee legs and a removable belt.

The Downrigger shares the same rugged and water-beading face fabric as the Buoy X and is paired with a two-layer Gore-Tex laminate. It has the comfort of a next-to-skin inner liner. A single chest pocket, hook and loop cuff closures and a hood that defeats wind and rain without flopping while running in the boat. The bibs have hand warmer pockets and lower leg zippers for easy on and off.

The Charter jacket provides grab and go packability and features Gore-Tex Paclite Plus for improved interior next-to-skin feel. There is no reason to ever be without a high quality rain jacket. The face fabric is highly resistant to abrasions and tear comfort.

Available at B&B Tackle in Belle Chasse.

For more info, visit:
grundens.com
MSRP: \$269.99-\$479.99



BUBBA MULTI-FLEX FULL TANG INTERCHANGEABLE SET

BUBBA, which debuted the original BUBBA fillet knife in 2011, has recently brought to the market its first-ever fillet knife with interchangeable, full-tang blades, the Multi-Flex Full Tang Interchangeable Set.

The set features four different full-tang blades — 7-inch Tapered Flex, 8-inch Ultra Flex, 9-inch Serrated Flex and 9-inch Stiff. Each blade is made of high-carbon stainless steel and coated in Titanium Nitride to prevent corrosion.

An easy-to-squeeze and slide mechanism allows you to switch between blades seamlessly. BUBBA's Flex-Change locking system keeps the blade in use safe and secure while you're taking fillets off a grouper, speckled trout or anything else that swims.

The 6-inch, BUBBA iconic red, non-slip grip handle provides a classic feel for this knife.

The set comes in a premium EVA carrying case with a puncture-resistant inner lining, removable tray for easy cleaning and magnetic insert for blade security.

MSRP: \$125.99
For more info, visit: bubblade.com



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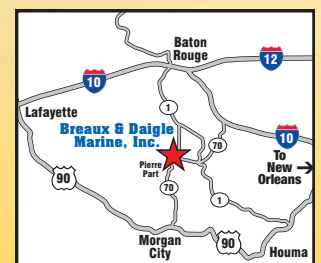


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2020

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
Grouper [*] Gag [^] & Black [^]	24" TL	4/day (aggregate)*
Scamp [^]	16" TL	
Nassau & Goliath	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS	
Yellowfin [^]	20" TL	
Red [^]	20" TL	2 of 4 grouper total
Atlantic Sharpnose & Bonnethead shark [@]	None	1/day
Other sharks (except prohibited species) [@]	54" FL	1/day/vessel/aggregate
King Mackerel*	24" FL	3/day
Spanish Mackerel*	12" FL	15/day
Striped mullet	None	100 pounds/day
Black seabass	None	None
Hogfish	14" FL	5/day
Seatrout, Spotted (Speckled Trout)	12" TL*	25/day*
Red Snapper*	16" TL	2/day*
Other Snapper		5 mutton in 10 snapper aggregate
Mutton Snapper	18" TL	
Cubera, Yellowtail, Gray (mangrove)	12" TL	10 in aggregate*
Queen, Blackfin, Silk, Wenchman	None	
Vermilion Snapper	10" TL	
Schoolmaster, Dog, Mahogany	None	None
Gray Triggerfish*	15" FL	1/day in aggregate
Lane Snapper	8" TL	
Almaco Jack, Goldface Tilefish, & Blueline Tilefish	None	20/person/day in aggregate*
Blackline Tilefish, Anchor Tilefish	None	
Tripletail	18" TL	5/day

CFL = curved fork length LJFL = lower jaw fork length CL = carcass length
 DW = dressed weight LJTF = lower jaw to tail fork FL = fork length

FRESHWATER

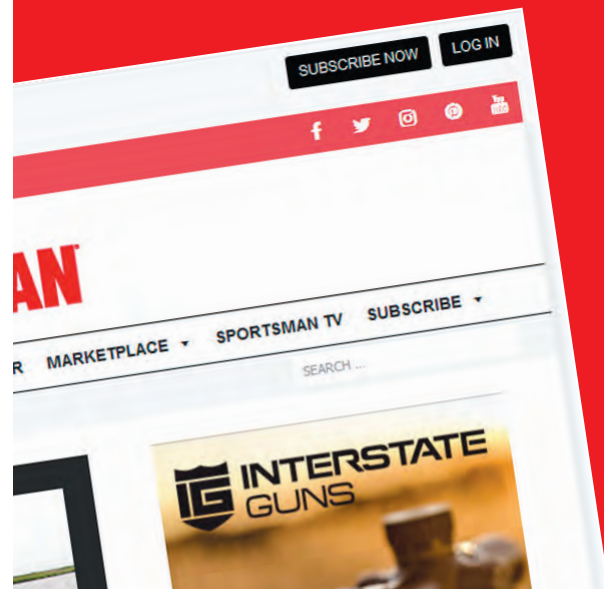
FISH Species	Minimum Size Limit	Bag Limit (per person)
Crappie	None	50/day*
Buffalo Fish	16" TL	25/day
Freshwater Drum (Gaspargou)	12" TL	25/day
Channel Catfish	11" TL*	***
Blue Catfish	12" TL*	***
Bowfin	16" TL	None
Flathead Catfish	14" TL*	***
Crawfish	None	150 lbs./day
Paddlefish	30" max LJFL	2*
Shad	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. ~ Greater amberjack season is open May 1-31 and Aug. 1 - Oct. 31. " Closed season on gray triggerfish Jan. 1 - Feb. 29 and June 1 - July 31.

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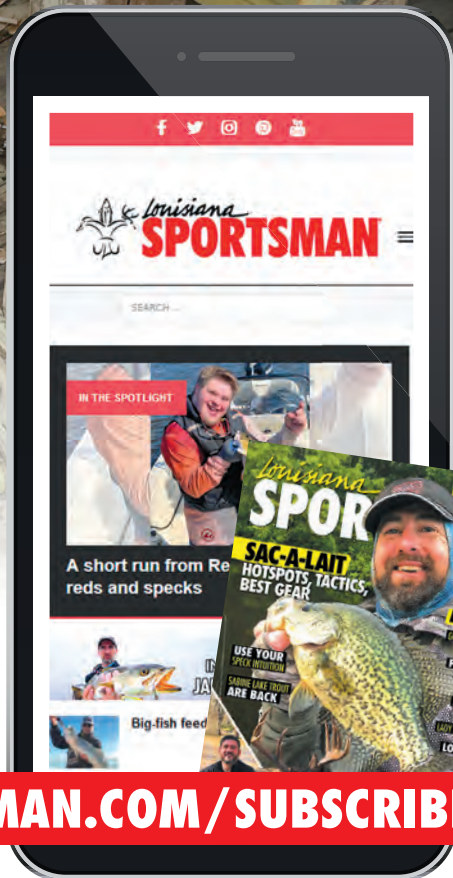
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Astro Tables is far more effective than "moon tables," because it takes into account critical solar energies as well as lunar.

The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black bars). The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Noon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each... 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)

Astro Tables is a quick-reference version of its parent publication, the **PrimeTimes Wall Calendar**, which is recommended for those wishing more complete data on the best days and times to go fishing and hunting for the entire year (see "Available Products" below).

PrimeTimes forecasts are based on solar/lunar research at a leading college of astrophysics and our own research pond/wildlife area. Annual data is supplied by the U.S. Naval Observatory. All times are adjusted to the center of your time zone and for Daylight Saving Time.

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:
The 2020 PrimeTimes Wall Calendar. \$13.95 (plus \$4 s&h). Know the best days, best times, and their relative strengths for all of 2020 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 2020, the year's best periods, a look ahead at 2021, and more. Comes with FREE 2020 Astro Tables pocket calendar, which sells separately for \$8.95, 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.

2020 Ultimate PrimeTimes software for PCs. \$29.95 (plus \$3 s&h, or no s&h if downloaded from web). The world's best forecaster allows you to fine-tune the peak times to your exact location, quarry, and even weather. Too many features to list here, including making your own App. For more details, please call us or visit our web site (see below).

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 #2: **Same as #1, plus Software...\$47.95** (plus \$6 s&h).
 #3: **Same as #2, minus book...\$38.95** (plus \$5 s&h).

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For credit/debit card orders, call 515-964-5516, or go online to primetimes2.com and click **Catalog**.

2020 APR	BEST DAYS				VALUE
	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL	
Wed 1	██	██	██	██	66
Thu 2	██	██	██	██	56
Fri 3	██	██	██	██	50
Sat 4	██	██	██	██	59
Sun 5	██	██	██	██	67
Mon 6	██	██	██	██	77
Tue 7	██	██	██	██	82
Wed 8	██	██	██	██	67
Thu 9	██	██	██	██	53
Fri 10	██	██	██	██	40
Sat 11	██	██	██	██	31
Sun 12	██	██	██	██	29
Mon 13	██	██	██	██	32
Tue 14	██	██	██	██	42
Wed 15	██	██	██	██	32
Thu 16	██	██	██	██	27
Fri 17	██	██	██	██	28
Sat 18	██	██	██	██	29
Sun 19	██	██	██	██	41
Mon 20	██	██	██	██	52
Tue 21	██	██	██	██	64
Wed 22	██	██	██	██	73
Thu 23	██	██	██	██	66
Fri 24	██	██	██	██	60
Sat 25	██	██	██	██	53
Sun 26	██	██	██	██	50
Mon 27	██	██	██	██	52
Tue 28	██	██	██	██	53
Wed 29	██	██	██	██	58
Thu 30	██	██	██	██	69
25 50 75 AVERAGE					

For more, visit primetimes2.com

MOON RISE	LUNAR PERIODS		MOON SET	TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED		
	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT				
12:30 pm	6:11 pm - 9:43 pm	5:40 am - 9:12 am	2:29 am	6:36 am - 10:08 am	HALF	☾
1:30 pm	7:11 pm - 10:37 pm	6:36 am - 10:08 am	3:22 am	7:36 am - 11:02 am	LOW	☾
2:37 pm	8:12 pm - 11:28 pm	7:36 am - 11:02 am	4:12 am	8:37 am - 11:53 am	HALF	☾
3:47 pm	9:15 pm - 12:17 am	8:37 am - 11:53 am	4:57 am		LOW	☾
4:59 pm	10:20 pm - 1:02 am	9:40 am - 12:42 pm	5:37 am		HALF	☾
6:11 pm	11:25 pm - Midnight	10:45 am - 1:27 pm	6:15 am		LOW	☾
7:24 pm	Midnight - 1:47 am	11:50 am - 2:12 pm	6:51 am		HALF	☾
8:37 pm	12:31 am - 2:29 am	12:56 pm - 2:54 pm	7:27 am		LOW	☾
9:49 pm	1:35 am - 3:13 am	2:00 pm - 3:38 pm	8:04 am		HALF	☾
11:00 pm	2:39 am - 4:01 am	3:04 pm - 4:26 pm	8:44 am		LOW	☾
	3:43 am - 4:49 am	4:08 pm - 5:14 pm	9:28 am		HALF	☾
12:08 am	4:45 am - 5:43 am	5:10 pm - 6:08 pm	10:16 am		LOW	☾
1:11 am	5:45 am - 6:37 am	6:10 pm - 7:02 pm	11:09 am		HALF	☾
2:07 am	6:40 am - 7:32 am	7:05 pm - 7:57 pm	12:05 pm		LOW	☾
2:56 am	7:29 am - 8:27 am	7:54 pm - 8:52 pm	1:04 pm		HALF	☾
3:38 am	8:15 am - 9:21 am	8:40 pm - 9:46 pm	2:02 pm		LOW	☾
4:14 am	8:55 am - 10:13 am	9:20 pm - 10:38 pm	2:59 pm		HALF	☾
4:46 am	9:32 am - 11:04 am	9:57 pm - 11:29 pm	3:56 pm		LOW	☾
5:15 am	10:06 am - 11:54 am	10:31 pm - 12:19 am	4:51 pm		HALF	☾
5:42 am	10:40 am - 12:42 pm	11:05 pm - 1:07 am	5:46 pm		LOW	☾
6:09 am	11:12 am - 1:30 pm	11:37 pm - Midnight	6:41 pm		HALF	☾
6:35 am	11:44 am - 2:20 pm	Midnight - 1:55 am	7:36 pm		LOW	☾
7:03 am	12:18 pm - 3:10 pm	12:09 am - 2:45 am	8:32 pm		HALF	☾
7:34 am	12:55 pm - 4:01 pm	12:43 am - 3:35 am	9:30 pm		LOW	☾
8:08 am	1:35 pm - 4:55 pm	1:20 am - 4:26 am	10:29 pm		HALF	☾
8:47 am	2:20 pm - 5:50 pm	2:00 am - 5:20 am	11:27 pm		LOW	☾
9:32 am	3:11 pm - 6:43 pm	2:45 am - 6:15 am	12:24 am		HALF	☾
10:23 am	4:05 pm - 7:37 pm	3:36 am - 7:08 am	1:24 am		LOW	☾
11:21 am	5:01 pm - 8:31 pm	4:30 am - 8:02 am	1:18 am		HALF	☾
12:23 pm	6:01 pm - 9:23 pm	5:26 am - 8:56 am	2:08 am		LOW	☾

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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LAND FOR SALE

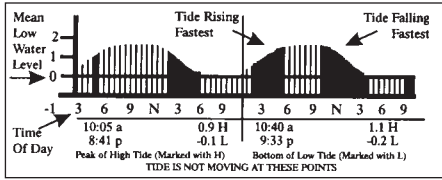
- **106 acres of hunting land for sale in Eola, LA, Avoyelles Parish**
106 ACRES OF LAND FOR SALE IN AVOYELLES PARISH
Price: \$530,000. Only 45 minutes north of Lafayette, just off of I-49, near the community of Eola, sits 106 +/- acres of some of the finest hunting that Avoyelles Parish has to offer. Kent Juneau, (318) 729-4920
- **Commercial Property For Sale, Mansura, LA, Avoyelles Parish**
DRASTICALLY REDUCED!! AVOYELLES PARISH COMMERCIAL PROPERTY FOR SALE!! Price: \$612,150. Looking to locate in the fastest growing area in the parish. Look no further. Located within the corporation limits of Mansura and only 60 of a mile from the city of Marksville, sits this commercial property. Tract size is 17.49 acres. Kent Juneau, (318) 729-4920
- **17.76 Acres with home in Mansura, LA, Avoyelles Parish**
NEW!! Acreage and Home For Sale in Avoyelles Parish
Price: \$215,000. Located at 212 Airport Rd, this property has a Mansura address but is right next to the Marksville city limits. It consists of 17.76 acres of land with possible development potential and a 3BR 1BA, 1692 sqft home and several older outbuildings. Troy Thompson, (318) 447-7676.
- **Camp and 2 +/- Acres For Sale on Red River, Avoyelles Parish**
NEW!! Camp and Acreage in Marksville, LA. Price: \$279,000. Stunning camp and 2 +/- Acres that won't last long in Marksville, LA. Jay Garvin, (318) 361-7880.
- **Commercial Office/Medical Building for Sale or Lease in Marksville, LA, Avoyelles Parish**
MOTIVATED!!! COMMERCIAL PROPERTY FOR SALE IN AVOYELLES PARISH
Price: \$475,000.00
Kent Juneau (318) 729-4920
- **Hunting Land For Sale in Concordia Parish**
LAND FOR SALE NEAR MONTEREY, LA!! Price: \$1,316,250. Located a few miles southeast of Monterey, between Eva and New Era, this 585 acre WRP tract offers both deer and duck hunting which is sometimes hard to find in the same property. Carl Foreman, (318) 481-0092 or Troy Thompson, (318) 447-7676.
- **Concordia Parish Duck & Deer Hunting Land For Sale**
MOTIVATED!!! MONTEREY DELTA HUNTING LAND FOR SALE!!
Price: \$922,500. Located in the Monterey Delta near Acme, LA is a 307.5 +/- acre tract of managed timber with the perfect location for big deer and duck hunting. This tract has it all! Its timber has been managed by a forester. Chris Lemoine, (318) 359-2394.
- **211.1 +/- Acres of Hunting Land in Caldwell Parish, LA**
Caldwell Parish Hunting Land Bordering Boeuf WMA For Sale! Price: \$580,525. Located in southeast Caldwell Parish, on the Ouachita River, this 211.1 +/- acre tract is bordered by the river. This property may just have it all: water frontage, income producing farmland, and woods! Troy Thompson, (318) 447-7676.
- **Deer and Duck Hunting Land For Sale Tallulah, Louisiana, Madison Parish**
MADISON PARISH, LA HUNTING LAND FOR SALE!! Price: \$3,000,000. 734 +/- acres in Madison Parish near Tallulah, LA. It is all set up with 3 acre food plots, box stands, feeders, roads, irrigation wells, underground piping to each duck hole, pit blinds, and a very nice lodge. Chris Lemoine, (318) 359-2394.
- **389 +/- Acres in Boyce, LA, Rapides Parish**
NEW!! Beautiful Acreage in Rapides Parish! Price: \$1,089,200. 389 +/- Acres of pasture, levee, and fishing along the Red River in Rapides Parish, with great access and views to the Red River and oxbow lakes. Barbara Bonnette, (318) 308-6614.
- **2246.9 Acres For Sale in Grant Parish**
NEW!! RARE HUNTING PROPERTY FOR SALE NEAR BOYCE, LA
Price: \$3,370,350. Situated near Boyce, LA in Grant Parish and north of the Red River is a 2246.9 Acre tract of rare hunting ground just available for sale and new on the market! Chris Lemoine, (318) 359-2394.
- **1761.6 Acres For Sale in Natchitoches Parish**
NEW!! PRIME HUNTING LAND NEAR CHOPIN, LA
Price: \$4,000,000
Chris Lemoine, (318) 359-2394.
- **209.77 Acres in St. Landry Parish**
Price: \$524,429. NEW!! Acreage in Big Cane, LA! Offering deer, duck, and small game hunting. 164.19 acres of this tract are enrolled in a Wetland Mitigation Covenant similar to WRP while the remaining 45 +/- acres are unencumbered. Carl Foreman, (318) 481-0092 or Troy Thompson, (318) 447-7676.
- **CAMP FOR SALE on Bayou Rouge in St. Landry Parish**
NEW!! Camp in Palmetto, LA. Price: \$115,000.00. Camp was built in 2009, has 2 B/R, 1BA and features double insulated walls, on slab, central air and heat, and fully furnished! Beth Brown (337) 207-6871.
- **304 +/- Acres in Lebeau, LA, St. Landry Parish**
New!! Acreage and camp in St. Landry. Price: \$1,200,800. Located in the northern half of St. Landry Parish, next to the Lebeau Community, this 304 +/- acre tract has been aggressively managed for the last 5 years and is now producing some high quality bucks in both antler and body size. Carl Foreman, (318) 481-0092 or Troy Thompson, (318) 447-7676.
- **Mississippi Hunting Land For Sale**
REDUCED!!! PRICED TO SELL!! Price: \$2,696,110. 1,017.4 +/- acres of prime big Black River Bottomland with just enough hill high area to keep you high and dry in any river flood situation. Call Chris Lemoine, (318) 359-2394.



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How to use the SPORTSMAN Tide Guide



Fish feed most actively when the tide is moving. Louisiana Sportsman has made it simple to spot the most-active feeding periods each day in the Tide Guide. Just fish those times indicated in black. To find the best time to fish your favorite honeyhole, find the spot under Tide Corrections that is closest to the area, and add or subtract the time from the corresponding daily prediction.

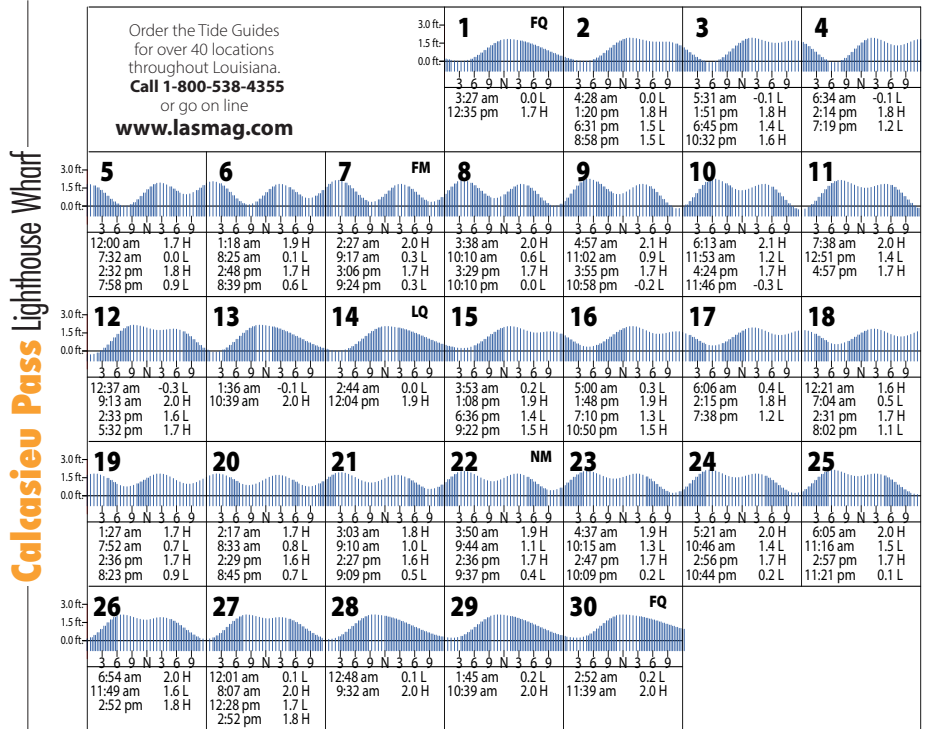
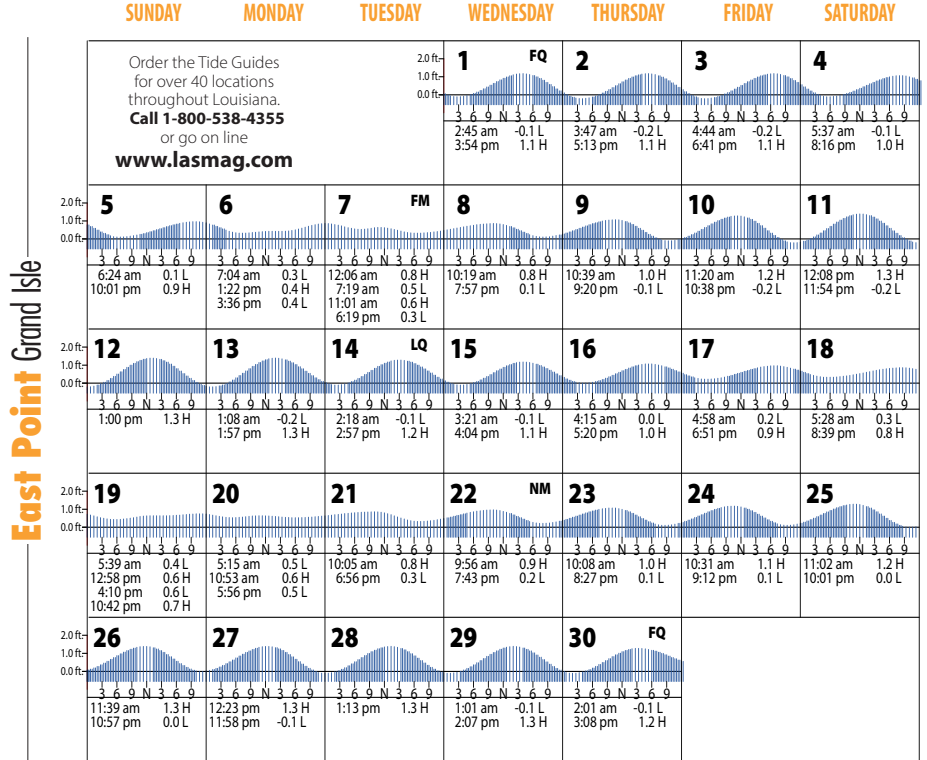
Tide Corrections

East Point, Grand Isle HIGH LOW

Barataria Pass	+1:00	-0:10
Bastian Island	+0:41	+0:12
Bay Gardene	+2:51	+2:44
Bayou Bonfouca	+9:59	+10:11
Breton Islands	+0:54	+0:48
Caillou Boca	+0:40	+0:48
Caminada Pass	+0:20	+0:12
Chandeleur Light	+0:37	+0:34
Chef Pass	+5:17	+5:07
Cocodrie	+1:22	+1:33
Comfort Island	+1:34	+0:54
Delacroix Island	+3:42	+3:31
Empire Jetty	-1:03	-1:45
Four Bayou Pass	+2:18	+0:17
Gardner Island	+0:40	+0:47
Grand Pass	+1:48	+1:16
Head of Passes	-0:48	+0:00
Hopedale	+4:17	+4:56
Independence Island	+2:29	+1:59
Jack Bay	+1:59	+1:28
Joseph Bayou	-0:36	-1:37
Lafitte	+1:45	+2:51
Long Point, Lake Borgne	+2:28	+2:11
Manila Village	+2:32	+3:13
Michoud Substation	+5:24	+5:02
New Canal (Bucktown)	+10:34	+10:49
North Pass	-0:31	-0:37
Paris Road Bridge	+5:53	+5:58
Pelican Islands	+2:26	+2:26
Pointe a la Hache	+3:12	+3:01
Port Eads	-0:17	-1:37
Raccoon Point	-0:03	-0:20
Shell Beach	+4:32	+4:25
Ship Shoal Light	-1:54	-1:50
South Pass, Miss. R.	-1:13	-1:20
Southwest Pass, Miss. R.	-0:38	-1:33
Tchefuncte River	+10:23	+11:01
Timbalier Island	+0:19	+0:23
Wine Island	+1:08	+1:02

Calcasieu Pass, Lighthouse Wharf HIGH LOW

Cote Blanche Island	+4:33	+3:40
Eugene Island	+1:49	-0:39
Lighthouse Point	+0:58	-0:53
Mermentau River ent.	+0:20	+0:25
Point Au Fer	+1:53	-1:02
Point Chevreul	+3:16	+0:30
Rabbit Island	+2:01	-0:36
Shell Island	+3:08	+0:45
South Point	+1:55	-0:33
Southwest Pass, Vermillion Bay	+1:42	+0:51
Weeks Bay	+3:58	+3:56



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Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK

Dylan Hoyt, 10, his sister, Ellery Hoyt, 13, and their friend, Ella Romero, 13, all shot their first deer on the same afternoon south of Morgan City.



Dylan, Ellery & Ella

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Hunter Wheat

Taylor Cross, 7, caught this 31-inch, 12-pound redbfish on May 4 out of Venice.



Taylor Cross

Hunter Wheat, 17, of Livingston killed this 4-point in full velvet on private land in Livingston on Jan. 20.



Braxton Hill

Braxton Hill, 12, caught this 6.4-pound bass, and little brother Grady Hill caught a 7-pound catfish, both from a pond in East Feliciana.



Grady Hill



Matt Willis

Matt Willis killed this 140-inch, 9-point buck on Dec. 6, 2018, in Chatham.



Ashley Marshall

Ashley Marshall with a Long Tail Sea Bass caught out of Venice in about 700 feet of water, while deep-dropping for grouper using squid for bait.



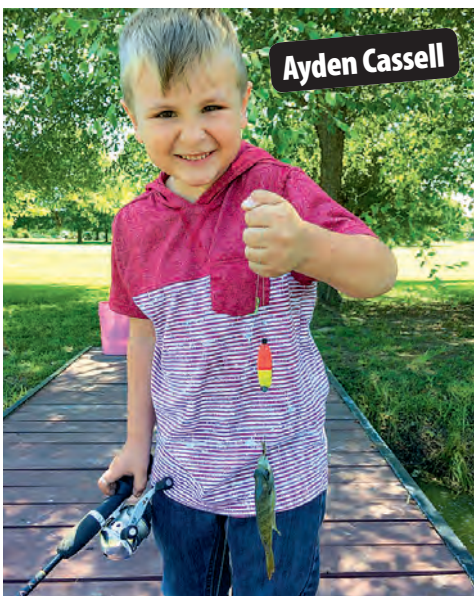
Paydan St. Romain

Paydan St. Romain holds up a 2½-pound sac-a-lait and 2-pound bass from Lake Rosemound in St. Francisville.



Gavin Troclair

Gavin Troclair, 9, got his first crossbow kill, a 90-pound boar, while hunting with his dad, Todd "TJ" Troclair, at their family lease north of Greensburg on Oct. 12.



Ayden Cassell

Ayden Cassell caught his first fish at Kincaid Lake.



Graeme Fidelak

Graeme Fidelak killed this 12-point buck with a double drop tine on Oct. 12, opening morning of the youth season, in Natchitoches.



Hunting/Fishing
SCRAPBOOK



Bryan Frey

Bryan Frey with his first greenhead mallard, killed in the Klondike area.



Gia Quintanilla

Gia Quintanilla, 7, of Pearland, Tex., was fishing West Fork Calcasieu River when she caught her first white perch, aka crappie or sac-a-lait.



Dr. Kurt O'Brien & Dr. Darryl Elias

Dr. Kurt O'Brien and Dr. Darryl Elias hold up a nice ling caught by Dr. Elias while fishing the Eugene Island blocks out of Cypremort.



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Don't miss **SPORTSMAN TV!**

The NEW Louisiana Sportsman TV features experts of their fields to bring you the most exciting and informative hunting and fishing video content out there. This month on Louisiana Sportsman TV, Greg Hackney will be showing you some tips and tricks for bass, Capt. Charlie Thomason will be highlighting inshore techniques, Hampton Rutland will take you along on his duck hunting adventures and much more! Tune in every week on Cox Sports Television Thursdays at 6:30pm, Saturdays at 8:30am, and Sundays at 9am. Also subscribe to our Youtube Channel [youtube.com/sportsmantv](https://www.youtube.com/sportsmantv) to see our video segments posted to the web.

This Month On SPORTSMAN TV, Captain Charlie Thomason will be breaking down all of the inshore fishing techniques you will need to know this Spring, Greg Hackney will be back at it showing how he wins bass tournaments, and we'll also have segments on wild game cooking and duck hunting. Come go with us.

Cox Sports Television Thursdays - 6:30 pm, Saturdays - 8:30 am, Sundays - 9:00 am

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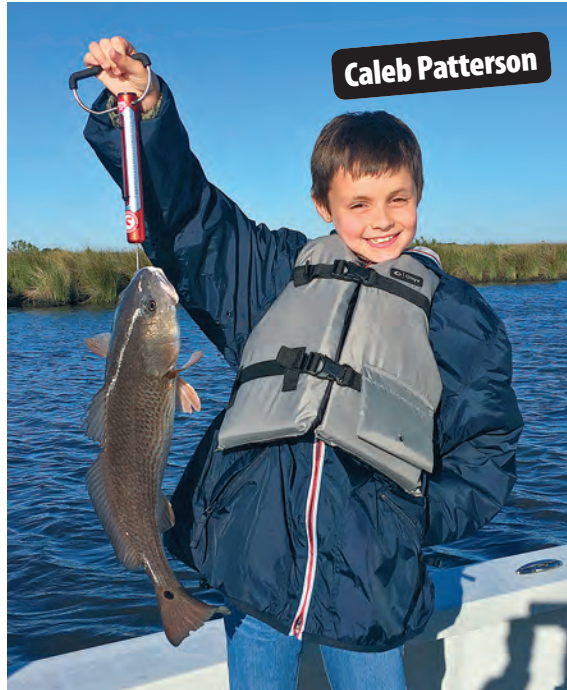


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Read Areingdale

Read Areingdale of Alexandria and his dog "Mojo" on his last-ever Louisiana youth hunt for ducks.



Caleb Patterson

Caleb Patterson of Harahan caught this 26-inch redfish while on a trip with Capt. Josh of Big Dog Charters just south of Lafitte.



Zack Gandee

Zack Gandee and son Conner both killed deer on the same day at the end of October in Area 2. It will be a day they remember the rest of their lives.

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Doug Talbot

Doug Talbot tagged this 200-pound, 7-point buck in East Feliciana Parish on Nov. 23.



Rick Jones

Rick Jones with nice red snapper caught in East Cameron out of Cypremort Point.



Flake Sexton

Flake Sexton caught this 52-pound flathead catfish out of the Red River.

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Ty Barras

Ty Barras, 7, was duck hunting with his dad and paw paw near Evergreen during the first split this year.



Elizabeth Mcgee

Elizabeth Mcgee with her kill from Buckhorn WMA.



Duane Jeansonne

Duane Jeansonne with a blue catfish caught on Feb. 12 at the Intracoastal Waterway.

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Charlotte Thibodeaux

Charlotte Thibodeaux had a nice day catching reds near the Sulfur Mine in February.



Jamie Williams

Jamie Williams of Mire poses with her first deer. It was shot at 120 yards with a .270 in San Diego, Tex.



Kaitlyn Pastor

Kaitlyn Pastor of Destrehan had a great 21st birthday fishing trip in Grand Isle.



Cameron Thompson

Cameron Thompson got an unexpected, early ninth birthday present on Jan. 1, 2019, when he shot his first deer while hunting with his Pawpaw and Roro.

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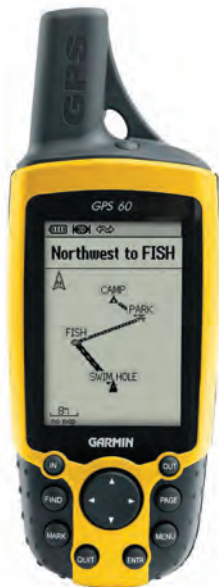
Cyrus Sloane Jr.

Cyrus Sloane Jr., 10, was all smiles after he got his first duck hunting the marshes in Grand Chenier.



Larry Ural

Larry Ural killed this 190-pound, 8-point buck in southeast Texas on Dec. 15, 2019.



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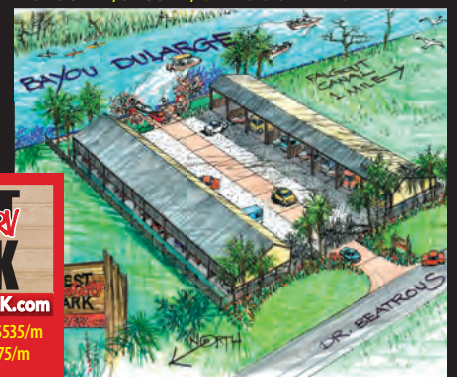
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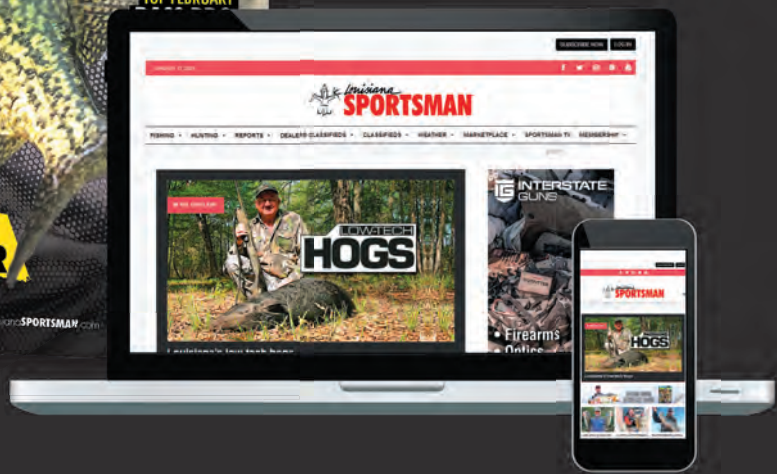
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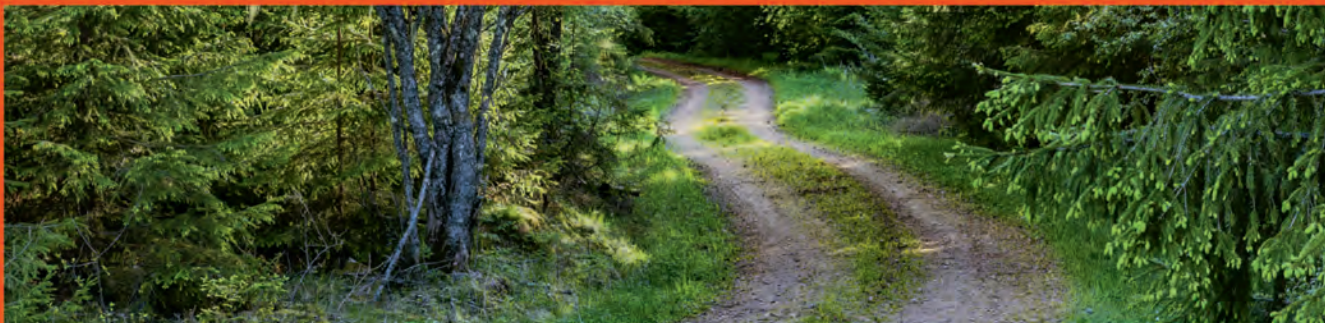
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