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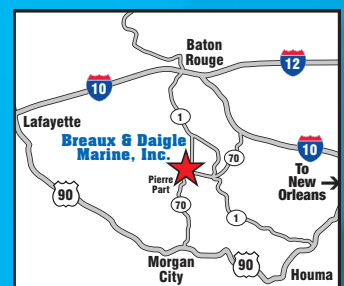


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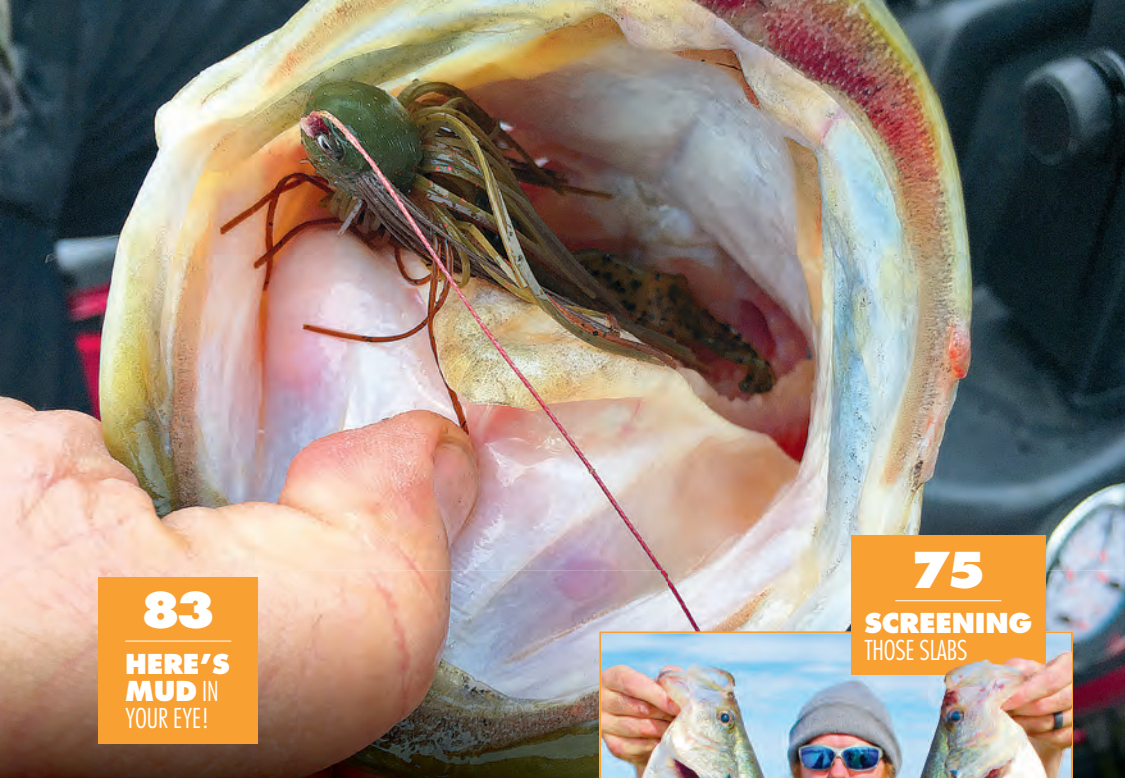
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PUBLISHER: Tony Taylor
MANAGING EDITORS: Dan Kibler, Alicia LaFont
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR: Jeff Caldwell
ASSISTANT PRODUCTION MANAGER:
Desiree P. Lewis
ART DIRECTOR: Kevin Orgeron
GRAPHIC DESIGNERS:
Jeff Cashio, Alissa Zeringue
SALES DIRECTOR: Jay Forrest
225.278.0258/jayf@lasmag.com

ADVERTISING SALES:
Mark Hilzim (National Sales), Asa Faulkner, Mark Boyd, Peter Church, Burton Angelle, John Cain and Bret Holten

CONTROLLER: Juanita Guidry

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR:
Ricky Naquin 985.859.7744/rickyn@lasmag.com

CREDIT MANAGER: Rachel Champagne

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER: Bruce Mehtens

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:

Chris Berzas, Patrick Bonin, David A. Brown, Chris Bush, Josh Chauvin, Brian Cope, Darren, Digby, John Flores, Bill Garbo, Kinny Haddox, Capt. Steve Himmel, Chris Holmes, Keith LaCaze, Dora Lambert, John E. Manion IV, Joel Masson, Todd Masson, Jon Miller, David Moreland, Sammy Romano, Don Shoopman and Rusty Tardo

ADVERTISING INQUIRIES:

Contact Jay Forrest
email: jayf@lasmag.com/225.278.0258

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2020 RED SNAPPER SEASON OPENS

By Don Shoopman

LOUISIANA ANGLERS GET WEEKENDS UNTIL QUOTA IS MET

Larry Doiron Jr. of Stephenville planned to celebrate his 51st birthday on May 22 doing what he loves.

Like many Louisiana anglers, his intention is to take his big boat into the Gulf of Mexico and enjoy the opening of the 2020 recreational red snapper season, set earlier in May set by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission.

Based on his experience and past hauls, he and his family members will return with the two-fish per person limit

“My family’s real excited. We’re ready to get out and fish. All that COVID stuff,” Doiron said. “It’s a blessing I fish with my family. Before I leave the dock, I’ve got six of us in the boat. I make memories every time because we go with family. If I bring a buddy, we still go with family.”

And, he said, enthusiastically, “It ought to be a good season.”

The western Gulf of Mexico’s red snapper population hasn’t been touched by Louisiana fishermen for slightly more than five months. The Sportsman’s Paradise is operating under its first year of state-delegated management, which allows the state agency to manage the recreational red snapper season in state and federal waters.

The season consists of weekends-only (Friday, Saturday, Sunday, plus Memorial Day). LWFC said the season will stay open until recreational landings approach or reach the state’s annual allocation of 784,332 pounds, or 19.1% of the Gulf-wide angling quota adjusted for last year’s average.

Doiron and other fishermen planned to start working on that quota when the season opened. The two-fish per person limit includes a 16-inch minimum length limit.

Doiron has been targeting red snapper, among other offshore species, since he started going with his father, Larry Doiron Sr.,

Outdoor
UPDATE

Bigger baits fished in deeper water will usually result in a bigger class of red snapper, according to angler Larry Doiron.



Photo courtesy Jake Cologne

in the early 1980s. He'll head to the Eugene Island blocks and mostly fish the Eugene Island area after launching from Berwick Boat Landing, sometimes putting in at Bridge Side Marina. He doesn't have to venture very far from Grand Isle to get into red snapper water — generally 200 feet deep. It's a different story from the Morgan City area, but he doesn't mind the 1-hour, 15-minute ride.

Doiron will more than likely be using blackfin tuna for cut bait. He has some frozen from past catches, or he'll catch a blackfin for fresh cut bait.

If he can't get his hands on blackfin, menhaden and Spanish sardines will be served once they get to 150-foot and deeper water in the Eugene Island field, where he fishes old wrecks and abandoned oil platforms. He'll usually avoid structures frequented by many red snapper anglers, unless he wants to catch mangrove snapper, too.

Doiron will use four to six rods, depending on who's on board. There are times when it's just family he'll give his daughter,

Molly, who hasn't missed an offshore trip since she was an infant, a fishing rod with an electronic reel and five hooks and let her catch the limit for all aboard.

Doiron, who owns Doiron's Landing in Stephenville, does more than target red snapper; he targets BIG red snapper. Most of the fish he keeps average 10 pounds, but when he's fishing a rodeo, like the Grand Isle Tarpon Rodeo, he aims for a 15- to 17-pound average.

His fishing rigs are armed with 13/0 Mustad circle hooks. Depending on the current, he'll use an 8-ounce weight, but if it's strong, it sometimes takes a much heavier weight, he said, "with a BIG piece of cut bait. The bigger the bait, the bigger the fish."

Also, he said, "I find the deeper the water, the bigger the fish."

The baits usually are dropped to 15 feet off the bottom and up through the water column until the red snapper are located.

"We read the depth finder and see where the fish are," Doiron said. We let different people in the boat try different depths and go from there."

PRUDHOMES DUCKWEED LUNKER TOLEDO BEND SPITS OUT ANOTHER BIG BASS

By Chris Berzas

Zwolle's Steven Prudhorne and his wife, Jennifer, decided to make an afternoon fishing trip to Toledo Bend on May 2.

Prudhorne, 37, launched at Big Bass Marina and headed out to deep water where he spent some time graphing points on the floor of the lake bed.

"We caught just a few short fish there, so then we headed out to Housen," Prudhorne said.

They motored to a location that usually features some hydrilla, but there wasn't any around.

"I looked straight across from where we were and saw an area with duckweed," said Prudhorne, who headed that way and began pitching a Texas-rigged, black-red flake Zoom Ol' Monster worm in 6 feet of water.

"I pitched it into the duckweed for the third time, working it almost right to the boat when she made a light hit on it," he said. Prudhorne set the hook and the fish responded by running 25 feet from the boat.

"It was when she rolled on the surface then that we saw her and knew she was big," he said. "She went right back under, pulling drag."

Jennifer Prudhorne then began cheering for her husband to bring the fish in.

"The fish ran straight back to the boat and went under," he said. "I was thumbing my drag the whole time hoping I could tire her."

NETTING THE BIG FISH

The fish would turn and Prudhorne would gain on it, but she would head back under the boat; it happened four times.

"On the last run, on her way back from under the boat, she glided to the top of the water, and Jennifer netted the fish," he said.

With huge fish aboard, the Prudhorns celebrated for a while after examining it.

"We were whooping and hollering so much Jennifer believed everyone fishing Housen could hear us," Prudhorne said.

"I didn't have a scale in the boat, but I knew it would be close (to 10 pounds)," he said.

The Prudhorns decided to call it a day and ran back to the launch to trailer the boat and drive to Buckeye's Landing to weigh the fish on a certified scale.

Officially, Prudhorne's lunker weighed 10.57 pounds, making it eligible for the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program.

It is fish No. 37 in the program for the 2019-2020 Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program season; Prudhorne will receive a replica mount of his fish courtesy of the Toledo Bend Lake Association. ■



Steven Prudhorne displays his 10.57-pound Toledo Bend lunker taken on a Texas-rigged, black/red-flake Zoom Ol' Monster worm in Housen on Saturday, May 2.

Photo courtesy, Toledo Bend Lake Association

Branch's Travis Meche holds up an 8.82-pound bass he caught May 2 in Sandy Cove at Lake Fausse Pointe. The big bass bit on a crawfish-colored Strike King jig with a crawfish-colored Speed Craw around mid-day.



Photo courtesy Travis Meche Sr.

LAKE FAUSSE POINTE GIVES UP ANOTHER LUNKER BASS

By Don Shoopman

Some sizeable bass, the kind that stretch your line, were coming in over the side of Travis Meche's boat on May 2 in one of the hottest areas of Lake Fausse Pointe.

Then Meche, who was enjoying a day on the water with his father, Neal Meche, and 12-year-old son, Travis Jr., dropped his 3/8-ounce Strike King jig and Speed Craw trailer, both crawfish-colored, on the edge of a patch of reeds growing in Sandy Cove. He had boated a 4-pound class bass when he got another bite.

"I was all excited when I set the hook. (It) was heavy," he said, describing a bass that wound up being his personal best, an 8.82-pounder. "It didn't pull too much. It was a heavy, dead weight."

Without a net at the ready, Neal Meche swung into action to get the fish in the boat by hand. They boated the bass and admired the fifth 8-pound class Fausse Point fish caught and reported since mid-February, plus two more 7-pounders.

The 2020 Lake Fausse Pointe Hawg Honor Roll: Dustin Dore, 8.99; Travis Meche Sr., 8.82; Jarrod Derouen, between 8½ and 9; Andre Weber, 8.50; Joseph Martin, 8.17; Andre Weber, 7.25; Bo Amy, 7.20.

CATCH AND RELEASE

Before May 2, Meche had never caught a bass heavier than 5 pounds, although he's caught plenty that size.

"I ain't ever caught a big one like that. My little boy thought it was a big goo," Meche said.

While the bass inhaled the jig, the hook wasn't firmly imbedded in the fish's jaw. Meche said it was "kind of skin-hooked" deep in the big fish's mouth.

The Meches quickly weighed the bass but didn't waste time measuring it before releasing it around mid-day.

Meche, 31, who works for his father's construction company in their hometown of Branch, between Rayne and Church Point, took the 1 hour, 14-minute drive to Lake Fausse Pointe and launched around sunrise between 6 and 6:30 a.m. They are no strangers to the lake where Travis Meche Jr. cashed in three times during the annual Big Bass Classic on Feb. 29 out of Marsh Field Boat Landing.

They have been fishing Henderson Lake but have been disappointed by the size of the bass biting in that part of the Atchafalaya Basin, so they chose Fausse Point for the first Saturday in May. They has fished the Iberia Parish lake the last weekend of April, and the youngest Meche had a field day, catching and releasing three fish weighing better than 3 pounds.

Meche urged bass anglers to practice catch and release.

"It'd be nice if everyone let the big ones go. They've got plenty of catfish, bream ... and other fish to eat, he said. ■

READER REPORT



I'm an avid angler around north Louisiana and a proud member of the Cleanwater Bass Club, but when I'm not fishing tournaments, my place of choice to fish just for fun is definitely D'Arbonne Lake. I've spent my fair share of time out there trying to keep up with what the bass are doing on the lake year-round.

On March 14, I decided to ride out to the lake a little after lunch, and that time of year bass can be prespawn, spawning or post-spawn, and you have to decide which ones you want to target. I headed towards Stowe Creek and decided to fish some points for some prespawners, couldn't really find anything that were wanting to give it up, so I headed for some trees and decide to slow-roll a wobble head. I rolled up to a spot and was pitching around, and all of a sudden, I just see my line start swimming off.

My encounters with "bigger" fish in the past is they don't really kill it; they just gently take your bait and start swimming off, so I set the hook and immediately knew it was a better fish. As I'm working it in, I realize it's quite a stud, then she finally came to the surface and jumped, and my heart started pumping; I knew she was a gorilla. I worked her around for a minute and got her to the side of the boat, and with one last effort, pulling her towards me, I reached down with my net and she gave one last good shake with her head and "POP" she spit it out.

I chucked my rod in the bottom of the boat, sat on my knees and just shook my head knowing I had lost a 10-pounder. I regrouped and went back to fishing 10 minutes later, and a little on further down, the same thing happened, but this



time, I landed a 9.27-pound juggernaut; that really made things better after losing the previous fish.

I went home, and all night, I thought about that fish I lost. I couldn't help myself; I had to go back. The next day, I headed back out and fished around for a while, just trying to get my bearings going. I headed for the exact spot where I lost the big one the day before, and I knew in the back of my head the chances of a fish of that caliber biting again was like winning the lottery, but I went for it. I rolled up there, even changing my line to braid just in case, making sure my knot was perfect. I pitched in there the first time, nothing, I pitched in there again, and my line started swimming off, just like the day before. I stepped back and tried to cross her eyes with a hookset from grandma's house. She instantly went to the bottom, and I worked her around. She tried to run up under the engine, but when you've got 65-pound braid on, you can boss 'em. I got her up and into the net and into the boat. My hands were shaking trying to get her on the scales; she tipped them at 10.36. I was about as happy as any one fisherman could be. I went and met with a friend who was fishing on the lake, showed him and weighed it on his scales — it read the same. He asked me, "Well, you gonna go try catch another one?" I said, "Nope, times like these, you just go load the boat up knowing that's as good as it's gonna get for that day." I was fulfilled.

Blake Burnett
Eros, La.

GOT A REPORT?

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CCA STAR TOURNAMENT RETURNS

ALMOST \$500,000 UP FOR GRABS FOR TAGGED REDS, BIG SPECKS

Want to make your love for salt-water fishing really pay off? That could happen in CCA Louisiana's 26th annual STAR Tournament, which runs from May 23-Sept. 7, being that prizes offered include a Chevy pickup, a Keystone RV, a dozen boats — prizes approaching \$500,000 in total.

"With everything going on in the world, one thing all anglers can enjoy is some social distancing, and what better way than going fishing for a half-million dollars in prizes," said Rad Trascher, tournament director for STAR.

The STAR (Statewide Tournament and Anglers Rodeo) Tournament is open to all members of CCA Louisiana and its youth organization, the New Tide. Entry fees are \$35 for adults. Entry blanks can be obtained at any of the 30 weigh stations or at www.ccastar.com.

CCA has tagged and released 100 redfish in state waters. A tagged fish that's caught and turned in at one of the weigh stations will be eligible for one of 10 fantastic prizes. The angler who catches the first tagged red will win a Chevy Silverado pickup, the second a Keystone RV, third through fifth 195XTS NauticStars with 115hp Mercury four-stroke outboards, and sixth through 10th 1754 GatorTail Extreme Series boats with 40hp EFI motors.

Louisiana coastal waters will be divided into four divisions for the event: West, Southwest, Southeast and East.

The heaviest speckled trout caught in the tournament will earn the lucky angler a 2140 Sport NauticStar with 150hp Mercury four-stroke outboard. The next three heaviest specks, one per division, will win a 195XTS NauticStar with 115hp Mercury four-stroke outboard. Second-heaviest trout in each division will receive a \$5,000 tackle package, and the third-heaviest trout in each division will receive a \$2,500 tackle package.

In addition *Louisiana Sportsman* is offering a \$10,000 bonus for any magazine subscriber who catches a tagged fish, to be divided equally among those who qualify and catch a tagged fish.

Prizes will be awarded in a number of other divisions.

- The heaviest mangrove snapper, cobia, dorado and red snapper will win a \$5,000 tackle package.
- The heaviest sheepshead in the Western and Eastern regions will win \$1,500 Academy gift cards.

Will that nice slot redfish you catch this month carry a tag worth thousands of dollars in prizes?



- Fly-fishermen will be eligible for \$1,500 Academy gift cards for the heaviest trout caught in the Western and Eastern regions.
- The heaviest speck caught by a kayak angler will win a Hobie Mirage kayak.
- The heaviest flounder will win a 16-foot Weldbilt boat with a 40hp Mercury four-stroke outboard.
- Entries in the Ladies Division will win a \$2,500 travel voucher for the heaviest specks caught in the Eastern and Western regions.
- The heaviest speck caught by a bank fishermen will win a 16-foot Weldbilt boat with a 40hp Mercury four-stroke outboard.
- In the Youth Division for anglers ages 17 and under, four anglers who enter flounder or trout in the contest will be entered in a random drawing for a 14-foot aluminum boat with a 15hp Mercury outboard and a McClain trailer.
- The heaviest speck caught, weighed and released from Calcasieu Lake will win a \$500 Academy gift card.

For more information, visit ccastar.com. ■



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RESTORATION PROJECT:

WEST BELLE PASS, TIMBALIER ISLAND, TRINITY EAST ISLAND

By Chris Macaluso

Barges, excavators, bulldozers and dredge pipe will be familiar sights to anglers chasing speckled trout from Fourchon west through Terrebonne Bay and Lake Pelto for the next couple years as the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority repairs and restores barrier islands and headlands using \$167 million in Deepwater Horizon penalties.

Construction began on the first phase of the project at the West Belle Pass headland in February, and sand placement and construction of nearly 500 acres of beach, marsh and dunes will continue this summer. Beginning this month, more than 1,000 feet of beach and dunes will be built on Trinity East Island in Terrebonne Parish, while more than 400 acres of beach, dune and marsh will be built at Timbalier Island beginning in spring 2021. The National Marine Fisheries Service is working with the CPRA in all three phases.

The sand used to build the beaches and dunes will be mined from a large sediment deposit off Terrebonne Parish at Ship Shoal, an ancient headland of the Mississippi River. The materials will be dredged and placed on barges, then moved to the headlands and islands and pumped onshore. The same technique was employed during completed restoration projects at the Caminada headlands (commonly known as Elmer's Island) in Lafourche and Jefferson Parish and at Whiskey Island in Terrebonne Parish.

In all, approximately 9.2 million cubic yards will be dredged at Ship Shoal through an agreement with the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. The funding has been provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Guld Environmental Benefit Fund. Composed of \$2.4 billion in fines from the Deepwater Horizon Disaster, the GEBF provides grants to repair and restore fish and wildlife habitat across the Gulf, with \$1.2 billion earmarked for barrier island restoration and sediment diversions in Louisiana.

"We are working on three different areas during this project, because over the last decade, we've taken a more system-wide approach to restoring barrier islands and beaches," said Bren Haase, CPRA's executive director. "In our analysis of the Terrebonne Basin, we saw that there were weaknesses in certain areas of these islands and headlands that we could address that would prevent breaches and help provide more protection to the habitats inside the barrier islands."

The West Belle Pass project builds upon a previous, smaller-scale beach and dune project that was completed in 2012 by the Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act Task Force (CWPPRA), a federal-state effort that has built more than 100 small-scale coastal restoration projects since 1990.

"The CWPPRA project laid a good foundation for the headland, but the area has

eroded some and the sand has shifted to the west over the last eight years," said April Newman, CPRA's project manager. "This current project will build some additional dunes as well as some marsh behind the dunes to help capture sand as the headland shifts and migrates."

Trinity-East is one of three islands remaining from a massive, 25-mile-long island called Isle Dernier or Last Island. Hurricanes and subsidence have battered the remnant headland over the last century or more, splitting it into Trinity-East, Whiskey Island and Raccoon Island. The current project will repair a breach in Trinity Island that was opened by storm damage in 2017.

"In the early 80s, the Last Island area was losing land at a tremendous rate, and the prediction then was that all of those islands would be gone by 2015," Haase said. "There have been a host of restoration efforts made throughout that area that have kept those islands largely intact and the land area has stayed roughly constant over the last 30 years. This is another effort to make sure there is still barrier islands in Terrebonne Parish for decades to come." ■

Chris Macaluso is the Center for Marine Fisheries Director, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership



Photos courtesy CPRA



RESTORATION PROJECT:

QUEEN BESS PROJECT

By Chris Macaluso

Louisiana's largest brown pelican home has been remodeled thanks to a collaboration among Louisiana's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, its Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and federal agencies working to repair the damages from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil disaster.

Nearly \$19 million in fines from the Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA) after the 2010 spill have been invested in Queen Bess Island, 2 miles east of Grand Isle in Barataria Bay, to repair decades of erosion, subsidence and the heavy oiling from the summer of 2010. As a result, the critical nesting habitat for Louisiana's state bird and coastal fish at Queen Bess has grown from 5 acres last summer to 36 acres when the project was completed in late February 2020.

The NRDA process is a collaboration between federal and state agencies, called trustees, that identify injuries to fish, wildlife and habitat from oil spills and other accidents and prescribes restoration techniques to directly repair those damages. Restoring Queen Bess was a top priority for state and federal fish and wildlife management agencies.

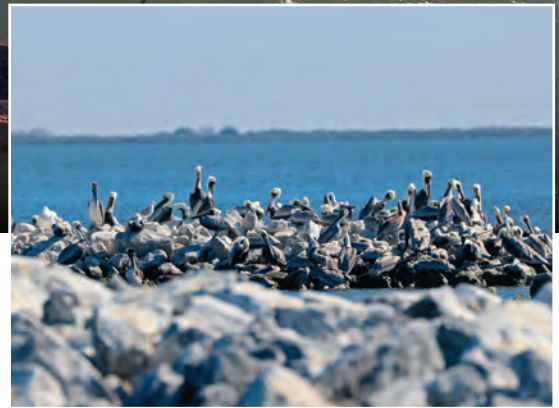
"From Day One, Gov. Edwards has challenged CPRA and Wildlife and Fisheries to get projects off the drawing board and on the ground," said Jack Montoucet,

executive secretary for LDWF.

Construction was compressed into a 6-month period from late summer 2019 to late February 2020 to avoid interfering with the pelican nesting season. It included ringing the island with limestone chunks up to 3 feet above sea level to give it additional capacity to withstand wave action, subsidence and sea-level rise.

Rock breakwaters were also built on the southwest shoreline to provide calm-water areas for pelicans and other birds. Then, more than 150,000 cubic yards of sediment dredged from the Mississippi River was transported about 25 miles to the island in barges. After the sediment was shaped by bulldozers, tidal sloughs were constructed to allow some water flow into the island, and native vegetation was planted to enhance habitat and fight erosion.

Queen Bess is the last remaining brown pelican rookery in Barataria Basin and was home to the first colony of pelicans reintroduced into Louisiana in 1968. After DDT and other pesticides decimated brown pelicans and other bird populations in the 1950s and early 60s, Louisiana was left without a native population of the iconic bird emblazoned on its state flag. Biologists from Louisiana and Florida worked together to bring 750 young



Photos courtesy LDWF

brown pelicans to the Barataria Basin, releasing them on Queen Bess. In 1971, 11 pairs of pelicans had built nests on Queen Bess.

By 2009, there were an estimated 80,000 or more brown pelicans in Louisiana, and the bird was removed from the Endangered Species List. But, several thousand pelicans and critical habitat like Queen Bess Island were harmed a year later by the Deepwater Horizon spill.

Chip Kline, chairman of the CPRA, said the restoration of Queen Bess is one of many steps the state and its federal partners are taking to repair damages to brown pelicans and other birds as well as fish and fishing communities affected by the 2010 disaster.

"This island had experienced degradation for many, many years and that degradation was exacerbated by the BP spill," he said. "But it also shows how much we've recovered and the amount of work we've done to recover from the damages and the injuries we experienced as a result of the spill." ■

Chris Macaluso is the Center for Marine Fisheries Director, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Lake Charles' Brian Windsor displays this 6¾-pound speckled trout taken in mid-April in Calcasieu Lake on a pink-gold Super Spook.



Photo courtesy Brian Windsor

CALCASIEU FIRING UP FOR GREAT CATCHES

LAKE CHARLES ANGLER HAS FOUND QUALITY CALCASIEU TROUT. HERE'S HOW TO CATCH THEM IN JUNE.

By Chris Berzas

Guide Brian Windsor of Lake Charles was elated at what he found when fishing for speckled trout in Calcasieu Lake in April.

Windsor, 32, was scouting locations for an upcoming charter when he ran into some quality trout.

"I caught and released a limit of speckled trout in each of three locations I was scouting before that charter trip," he said.

"I left Turner's Bay and went west on an incoming tide and pulled up on a point that showed baitfish schooling," said Windsor, who ended up catching and releasing 15 trout weighing between a pound and 3½ pounds.

He then left the area and wound up in a small cove on the western side of the lake, casting a chrome-black Heddon One Knocker. He ended up catching a few decent trout, including a 4-pounder.

"I was dog-walking it sorta fast and steady and reached another limit, which I released," he said.

He took and released another limit in another cove on the west side of the lake including a 4½-pounder.

"I am seeing more and more quality trout on the lake, some real chunks," Windsor said.

The next morning, Windsor spent his second day of scouting casting the One Knocker and also a pink/gold Super Spook.

"I was fishing again in that small cove in just 2 feet of water," he said. "I didn't catch as many trout on the second day but ended catching and releasing two 3-pounders and another great trout weighing 6¾ pounds taken on the pink/gold Super Spook.

GOOD ACTION THROUGH JUNE

Windsor believes the quality trout action should get better on topwaters and suspending plugs through June and into early July if high rainfalls from storms do not occur in the estuary.

Windsor expects trout in all the coves on the western side of the lake, including West Cove, and the flats on the east side of the lake near Turner's, French Settlement and Deatonville.

He is also hoping that the slight north winds in April will continue, as he expects action could heat up on the beach between Holly Beach and Sabine Lake — an area that can hold a multitude of trout, including quality fish.

Windsor uses a medium-light Daiwa spinning rod, a Daiwa Fuego LT reel spooled with 20-pound Daiwa J-braid with a leader of 20-pound Berkley Big Game mono.

Besides the One Knocker and Super Spook, Windsor will also be fishing MirrOlure Soft-Dines and Steve Brown broke-back Corkys.

Launches convenient to these areas include Spicer's Marina on the west side of the lake, Hebert's Landing on the east side of the lake and Calcasieu Point Landing on the east side. ■

Brian Windsor guides for Hackberry Rod & Gun; he can be reached at 337-762-3391 or 337-884-9748.

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Brian Carlos of Luling with his 13.80-pound triggerfish caught on cut squid.

ANGLER PULLS 'TRIGGER' ON WOULD-BE RECORD

By Kinny Haddox



Timing is everything, so they say. Had Brian Carlos of Luling dropped his bait to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico in 480 feet of water in just the right spot a little bit earlier the morning of April 8, he would be on the way to being the proud owner of the Louisiana state record for triggerfish.

But a giant red snapper and a full night of fishing the previous evening got in his way.

Carlos boated a 13.80-pound triggerfish that would have smashed the existing state record for that species — except that he was using an electric reel, which disqualifies the catch from the record book, kept by the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association since 1940.

That's where the giant red snapper comes in.

"We had a great overnight fishing trip with some friends; we

went offshore out of Cocodrie," Carlos said. "We caught some blackfin and yellow fins, then a couple of swordfish. We caught grouper and snapper, too. In fact, I had just spent an hour cranking in a big Warsaw grouper and then a huge red snapper. We had fished most of the night, and hand-cranking them had worn me out. I told the other guys to go have some fun, and I rested a minute and grabbed up the rig with the electric reel. I was too tired to do anything else."



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THE FISH OF A LIFETIME

That's when he dropped his hook, baited with a cut piece of squid, to the bottom. As soon as it hit bottom, a big triggerfish hit his bait. It was still quite a battle, and Carlos had his hands full hand-cranking the fish in the last 20 feet or so from a rig in the Green Canyon area.

"At first, I thought this was a grouper, too, when he came to the surface, but it was obvious when we got him in the boat that it wasn't," Carlos said. "I've never caught a triggerfish before, so I wasn't sure what it was. I thought they were a lot smaller."

The group of anglers took a few minutes to make sure they properly identified the fish and ensured it met legal requirements before putting it in the cooler. Later, when they reached shore, they took their fish to an experienced fisherman who always cleans their catches. He told them had never seen a triggerfish that big — and he had seen thousands of them. He said they should weigh it, and Carlos should get it mounted. They found some certified scales, weighed it, and Carlos decided to

LOUISIANA'S TOP 10 TRIGGERFISH

Rank	Weight	Angler	Where Caught	Date
1.	12.40	Chad Bonvillain	Ship Shoal	May 2015
2.	11.35	Jean Savoie	Green Canyon Blk 19	Aug 2007
3.	9.35	Scotty Broussard	Vermillion Blk 412	May 2009
4.	9.00	Brad Fields	Mississippi Canyon	June 2008
5.	8.50	Sam Ishee	West Delta Blks	April 2011
6.	8.35	Edward Frekey	Green Canyon Blk 19	Aug. 2007
7.	8.31	Matthew Touchette	SMI Blk 18	May 2016
8.	7.88	Jessica Lynn Scallan	West Delta Blk 117	June 2007
9.	7.13	Stan Ishee	West Delta Blk	April 2011
10.	6.50	Colten Erwin	Mississippi Canyon	July 2007

The Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association has only been keeping record for this species since 2005.

keep it for mounting.

The existing record for triggerfish is 12.40 pounds, caught by Chad Bonvillain in May 2015 in the Ship Shoal area.

"I'm tickled to death about it," he said. "I wish it would have been a record, but I understand."

Carlos is 37, an air traffic controller, has been fishing for about 10 years. He caught the fish on a Banax electrical reel and a Deep Drop Rod from Frigate Sales.

The big catch came on the boat, *Can't Get Right* captained by Kristopher Dagenhardt. ■

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The spring survey that estimates the population of breeding waterfowl has been cancelled by the coronavirus.

WATERFOWL BREEDING & HABITAT SURVEY CANCELLED

SIDELINED BY COVID-19, OFFICIALS WILL USE LONG-TERM DATA TO PREDICT SPRING 2020 WATERFOWL ABUNDANCE From News Reports

For the first time in its 65-year history, the Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey has been cancelled by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Canadian Wildlife Service and state partners due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The USFWS and CWS also cancelled participation in the American Woodcock Singing-Ground Survey, Mid-Continent Population Sandhill Crane Survey, and Arctic Goose banding program. The U.S. Geological Survey cancelled the North American Breeding Bird Survey, data from which is also important in monitoring bird abundance and regulating harvest of some species.

The survey has been done every May since 1955; its data is used to estimate the size of breeding-duck populations so federal and state waterfowl managers can make informed decisions on season and harvest goals.

The cancellation of these surveys will create a gap in the record of waterfowl population estimates. The USFWS, in consultation with the Flyway Councils, will use long-term data from spring/summer monitoring for these species to make regulatory harvest management decisions.

“Decisions to cancel the May survey and other migratory bird monitoring this spring were based on our priority of protecting the health and safety of the American public, our partners and our employees,” said Ken Richkus, chief of the USFWS’s Division of Migratory Bird Management.

UPCOMING SEASONS

Duck-season regulations are based on the status of mallards in the Mississippi, Central and Pacific Flyways and on the status of four species (green-winged teal, common goldeneye, wood duck and ring-necked duck) in the Atlantic Flyway.

Because of recent changes in how harvest regulations are set, survey cancellations will not affect the 2020-21 hunting season. Proposed regulations for the season were based on population and habitat conditions from the 2019 breeding season and are making their way through the approval process.

For the 2021-2022 duck seasons, Richkus said the USFWS will use the long-term data and models to predict 2020 spring abundances of ducks and habitat conditions in place of the spring 2020 data. These predictions will be combined with

existing harvest strategies to determine appropriate levels of harvest for the 2021-2022 season.

Travel restrictions in Canada, unless modified, may also affect many goose banding program efforts and surveys as well as high-latitude duck banding stations this summer.

“These surveys are the bedrock of effective harvest management in North America and have helped sustain waterfowl populations and abundant hunting opportunities for over 60 years,” said Karen Waldrop, Ducks Unlimited’s chief conservation officer. “Although we will miss the anticipation and excitement that comes with the annual release of the May survey results, we don’t expect the cancellation of surveys to impact seasons and bag limits for the majority of species.

“The combination of healthy, robust waterfowl populations and our long-term experience with these data, gives us faith that the waterfowl management community can project populations with a high level of certainty.” ■

LOUISIANA MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTERS MUST COMPLETE HIP CERTIFICATION

From News Reports

Beginning June 1, Louisiana migratory bird hunters, including waterfowl hunters, will be required to complete the Harvest Information Program (HIP) certification process either online or in person at Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) headquarters in Baton Rouge.

HIP certification, along with an appropriate hunting license, is required to hunt waterfowl, doves, woodcock and other migratory birds in Louisiana. A \$2 fee will be assessed by the LDWF license vendor for online HIP certification.

Retail license vendors will no longer be able to provide the HIP certification service after May 31, necessitating the change. Hunters who purchase licenses from retail license vendors will be reminded to go online to complete HIP

certification. Hunters who purchase LDWF licenses online will see no change.

The change is to make sure that the most-complete information is available to state and federal biologists as they manage the migratory bird resource.

"The primary intent of HIP is to provide the names, addresses, species hunted and past harvest to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service so they can randomly select migratory bird hunters to receive annual harvest surveys," said Larry Reynolds, LDWF's waterfowl program manager. "In this way, more complete information can be obtained from all migratory bird hunters so that harvest estimates will be based on representative sampling and thus be



more accurate than in the past."

For more information on purchasing a hunting or fishing license, go to <https://la-web.s3licensing.com/>. ■



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Commissioner Joe McPherson of Woodworth led the charge to ensure legally-labeled deer-urine products would be available to hunters for the 2020-2021 season.



Photo courtesy of Joe McPherson

COMMISSIONERS GET INTO EXCHANGE WITH DEER-URINE COMPANIES OVER LEGAL LABELING

DEBATE AT MAY 7 MEETING ENSUED OVER THE AVAILABILITY OF TESTED, LABELLED DEER-URINE PRODUCTS ON LOUISIANA SHELVES. By Chris Berzas

Members of the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission voted down at their May 7 meeting an amendment previously passed that banned the sale of untested deer-urine products in Louisiana.

It remains unlawful for hunters to use or possess scents or lures containing natural deer urine or other bodily fluids that have not been tested using the RT-Quic testing process that ensures that no CWD was detected in the urine products.

The regulation was in effect during the 2019-2020 deer season, but one commissioner, Joe McPherson of Woodworth, had plenty to say about the availability of adequately labeled urine during the past season.

"If there was any of that urine that was available for sale in Louisiana that had been properly tested, I didn't see any signs of it," he said. "It wasn't labeled as such in the stores that I frequent, and there were retail merchants and clerks that thought they had properly tested urine and told their customers that."

McPherson said he had searched retail outlets from Woodworth west last season and could not find a bottle labeled as certified.

"It looked like there was urine left over from the previous year that had been shipped in," he said. "I could not find a bottle all the way through the season that had any label on it other than the ATA (Archery Trade Association) label that's always been on there."

LURE DISTRIBUTORS RESPOND

Participating in the online Commission meeting were Phil Robinson of Arcus Hunting and Tink's Lures, and Sam Burgeson with Wildlife Research Center. Both companies are involved in the nationwide sale of deer-urine scents used by hunters.

"All the product we shipped last year was labeled as such (RT-Quic testing) after the month of March," Robinson said "There was the possibility there was carryover; there's always carryover of

product every year. There may have had some bottles out there."

Robinson assured commissioners that correct labelling would be found on the front and back of the product's containers.

"There was some confusion, it seemed, in timing with the way it was announced last year, and so I think it's pretty clear this year," he said.

TESTED AND CERTIFIED

Burgeson was generally in agreement with Robinson.

"I want to add and emphasize that last year was a transition year with packaging," he said. "The testing was just coming into availability with the new rule, so there was product shipped last year.

"All that we shipped last year was tested, although there were some (products) unlabeled, unfortunately. As we are going into 2020, 100% of the product that we're shipping is labeled with the RT-Quic logo and certification," he said.

Burgeson told commissioners that Wildlife Research Center has a policy that their retail customers could switch out old product for new. He said 100% of the products that Wildlife Research Center shipped for 2019 were tested and certified.

"Some of the product early in the season, before we were aware of the changes and got our packaging updated, did not have the label on it," he said "Yet we made that transition as quickly as we could. Every product we ship in 2020 has that RT-Quic labeling on it."

McPherson said the Commission's responsibility to ensure Louisiana's deer herd is not exposed to CWD.

"We don't want to take any chance at hurting the herd, and we want our hunters to be legal with using these urine-based scents," he said.

LABELS TO LOOK FOR

"We are going to produce the pamphlet soon," said Commissioner Chad Courville of Lafayette. "So the issue is, when you go to an outdoor store and you're looking to comply, we've got to make it easy for a deer hunter to understand what to look for."

"We need to see what we can do in getting it on our website and getting it into the hunting pamphlet somewhere.

"Knowing exactly what to look for that complies with our current regulations would be beneficial," he said. ■



The urine in this product was RT-Quic tested. No CWD was detected.

Label showing ATA and RT-Quic tested logo.

Photo courtesy of Tommy Tuma

COMMISSION HEARS UPDATE ON PROBLEMS WITH FLOUNDER

By Chris Berzas

OPTIONS FOR MANAGEMENT CHANGES WILL BE PRESENTED AT A FUTURE MEETING

At their May 7 online meeting, members of the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission heard an update on Louisiana southern flounder fishery.

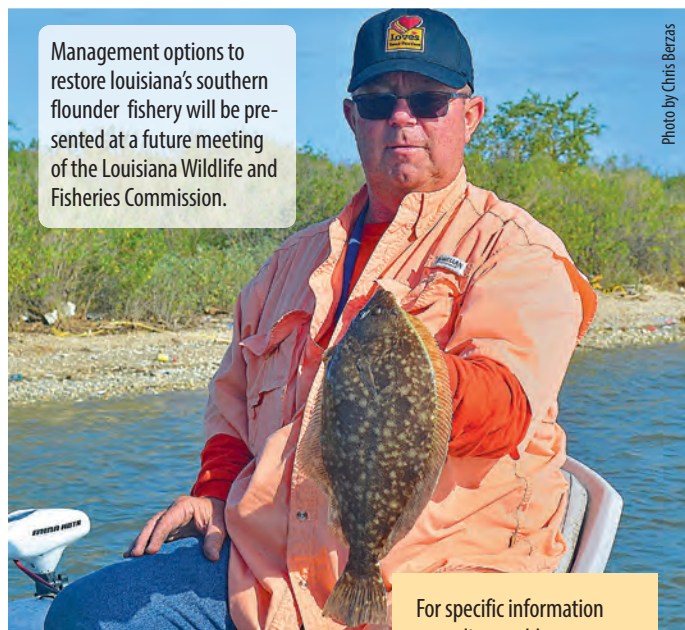
"This is just an update since we presented the results of the assessment for southern flounder to you in February," said Jason Adriance, marine fisheries biologist with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

"Flounder are one of four species where the legislature requires stock assessment reports."

According to the biologist, Louisiana's flounder population did not meet the target in the 2020 stock assessment, signaling required action by legislative regulations.

Management options to restore Louisiana's southern flounder fishery will be presented at a future meeting of the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission.

Photo by Chris Berzas



For specific information regarding problems in the recent flounder stock assessment, visit louisianasportsman.com/dramatic-decrease-in-flounder-stocks/

Adriance presented the %SPR (spawning potential ratio) numbers over the year to Commission members, demonstrating %SPR levels below target criteria.

He also reported that the current flounder declines are not a regional overfishing issue, but has more to do with factors involving reproduction and recruitment.

"LDWF will put together a management options document for the Commission," he said. "Options will likely focus more on how to recover the stock in light of reproductive and recruitment issues — not overfishing related issues," Adriance said.

Adriance did not give any specific date as to when such options will be presented to the commission in the future. ■

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ACT director Matt Morgan gives a pre-tournament address to a group of anglers, something that hasn't taken place since "social distancing" policies have been in effect because of COVID-19.

NO OTHER WAY TO SAY IT: PROFESSIONAL FISHING HAS 'JUST BEEN CRAZY'

By Kinny Haddox

Did you ever see someone blow up a balloon, then let go, and watch it fly around until it runs out of air and crashes to the ground? That's always funny to watch.

That's kind of the way organized fishing has been the past two months because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it hasn't been the least bit fun to watch.

While individuals have been able to "socially distance" to fish, events like bass and crappie tournaments, sportsman's shows and seminars have crashed. They've been postponed or cancelled in the busiest parts of their seasons, with more than 100 major events in which Louisiana anglers have been effected.

"It has just been crazy" said bass pro Cliff Crochet of Pierre Part. "On a professional level, man, it's just been so disappointing and frustrating for us. Not to be able to follow the schedule we've been planning for months, and to not be able to hook up and go to work, it's just something I would have never dreamed. It's just shut down our fishing tours and our whole country.

In Louisiana, the largest number of anglers affected have been those participating in the BASS, FLW and Major League Fishing circuits, plus hundreds of anglers who follow the Crappie Masters and American Crappie Trail events. Some tournaments are being rescheduled, and it's still a moving target.

NEW SCHEDULES

Major League Fishing has announced that, after a 2½-month pause, it will be back in action in early June on Florida's Kissimmee Chain. The BASS Tour also plans to resume in June on Alabama's Lake Eufaula. The two crappie circuits are hoping to resume as soon as possible and reschedule as many events as possible.

"Everything just got the brakes pumped on it without warning," said Matt Morgan, tournament director of the American Crappie Trail, which hosts several events in Louisiana each year. "I think our upcoming championship is still pretty much a go, but frankly, we don't know for sure.

"Look, there's no need to beat your head against the wall or jump out of a moving truck. We just don't know, and it's something that couldn't be helped. It's unprecedented. The effect on people's health, the economic consequences — there's nothing we can do but hope things come back quickly. I feel guilty for the fishermen, too. I would venture to say that half of them may have been laid off from work, and even when we come back, there is only so much disposable income that they can devote to tournament fishing and the expenses around it."



Announcements like these have dotted professional fishing webpages and news releases the past two months.

FAMILY TIME

Crochet agreed that it will be different for some. While the major bass tours have a large group of sponsored fishermen, many others will face a tough time getting going again. There was one bright spot during the shutdown for him.

Crochet's wife, Sara, gave birth to twin boys on Feb. 27, and they remained in the hospital for several weeks. The changes in the tournament schedule allowed him a lot of family time as well as increased chances to fish with his other two sons.

"I'm fishing as much as I can around home," he said. "It's a blessing to be two miles from the boat ramp for me." ■



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SPRING SHORTAGES: CRICKETS, TOILET PAPER?

By Kinny Haddox

The spring of 2020 will be one most people remember for the rest of their lives, one memory being that people were faced with many shortages.

Most people are familiar with the shortages of hand sanitizer and toilet paper, but there was another shortage that required rationing that many people don't know about.

Crickets.

That's right. Crickets.

"I've never seen so many people fishing in my life," said Darren Hebert, manager of the Spillway Sportsman in Port Allen. "So many people were stuck at home because of the pandemic that in early April, we ran short of crickets, and we ran out of crickets.

"Our distributors were working like crazy to keep us supplied, but they just couldn't do it. When we started getting them back in, we had to ration them to 100 per customer just so everybody could get some bait. We couldn't let people hoard the crickets.

"Hoarding crickets. That doesn't sound real, does it?"

The same thing happened with worms, especially cold worms, — and shiners to some extent — but it was crickets that made the top on everybody's fishing needs list.

"I'm glad that people went fishing instead of just staying home," he said. "We saw a tremendous number of people who were coming in who had never picked up a pole and gone fishing before," he said. "We turned over our inventory of everything from bait to split shot to corks three or four times every week for almost a month."

The same thing happened all across Louisiana.

Kenny Kavanaugh of K&M Coffee, Corks & Camo in Farmerville gave the same report.

"It was unbelievable," said Kavanaugh. "We normally stock about 20,000 crickets for a weekend (enough to supply 200 fishermen) and it's usually plenty. But those sales doubled early in April."

Darren Hebert shows off a bucket of prized crickets. This spring, many dealers had to ration crickets to allow everybody to get some to go fishing. **OPPOSITE:** Kenny Kavanaugh serves up a bucket of crickets to a customer at K&M in Farmerville.



Kavanaugh said he had 25,000 crickets on hand the weekend before Easter, but by Sunday, he had sold out. When the cricket distributor came in on Monday morning for his regular delivery, a line of people were waiting with cricket boxes in hand.

"Most of these folks were regular fishermen that we see a lot, but there were many people who haven't fished in a while," he said. "With the COVID situation, they were just looking for something safe to do. Many folks that normally maybe bass or crappie fish were taking their kids on trips. It was a good thing. But I never thought we'd run out of crickets."

The good news reported from both of these dealers was that the fish seemed to be biting.

"Oh yes, everybody was catching some fish," said Hebert. "We tried to send the folks who didn't know where to go to some hotspots our fishermen were telling us about. The folks in boats and those fishing from the banks all seemed to catch fish through April."

The fish are still biting and sales of live bait is still brisk, both these dealers say. And they expect it to stay that way for the next couple of months. ■

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LOUISIANA NON-PROFITS' EFFORTS PAY OFF

By Dora Lambert

Many life-long outdoorsmen and outdoorswomen can point to the first time they volunteered with a non-profit or other organization assisting those with disabilities to enjoy the outdoors lifestyle.

Mine was around age six, helping with a fishing day for those with disabilities in our small town. I was on snack duty for anyone who wanted a pack of crackers and juice box. The event seemed to go by in a whirl of excited laughter, with life-long relationships established. Even though it was only one day, I believe it had a lasting impact on participants and volunteers.

Service is so ingrained with sportsmanship that it's no surprise there are more organizations and non-profits helping disabled outdoorspeople enjoy life to their fullest than you can count on two hands. The outdoors community maintains a unique commitment to inclusivity, and Louisiana is no exception.

LOUISIANA ORGANIZATIONS

A few recognizable groups in Louisiana that are established or just spreading their roots are C.A.S.T. for Kids, Disabled Outdoorsmen USA, Trinity Outdoors Disabled Adventures LA, and Dream Hunt Foundation.

- **C.A.S.T. for Kids Foundation** is a non-profit organization that brings together disabled children, ages 6 to 18, and their families to enjoy a day of quality outdoors experience through fishing. This usually includes 2 to 3 hours of fishing, lunch and an awards ceremony afterwards, made possible by local and national sponsors. Louisiana had two C.A.S.T. for Kids events: on the Louisiana Delta out of Lafitte, and at Lake D'Arbonne in Farmerville.

Website: <https://castforkids.org/>

- **Disabled Outdoorsmen USA**, or DOUSA, is an organization that creates inclusive hunting opportunities for people with disabilities. It started in 2017. The main goal is to provide an unforgettable experience that is not typically possible, especially for mobility impaired individuals. While DOUSA wasn't created in Louisiana, it is establishing a chapter in Sportsman's Paradise.

Website: <https://www.disabledoutdoorsmen.com/>

- **Trinity Outdoors Disabled Adventures LA** is a non-profit ministry founded in 2008 by Jason Bland. The 501(c3) nonprofit was formed as an outreach program from the Acadiana Amputee Support Group. It has been able to help thousands of individuals through hunting, fishing, camping and faith-based summer camps. They cater to no specific age group. T.O.D.A.'s mission is to provide positive influence and one-on-one interactions with every person they help.

Website: <http://www.trinitydisabledadventures.com/>

- **The Dream Hunt Foundation** is a Louisiana-based non-profit that helps disabled, disadvantaged or terminally ill children



go a hunt-of-a-lifetime trip that they would not be able to experience otherwise. Founded in 2013, the mission is to provide a great experience during a tough time in their life and provide life lessons that go beyond the hunt.

Website: <https://dreamhunt.tv/>

BENEFITS

Outdoor activities, including fishing and hunting, are recognized as health-promoting activities for the mobility impaired and those with disabilities. Several reviews from experts describe the benefits of being outdoors as a health-promoting activity. Mental-health benefits, social-health benefits and physical-health benefits are indisputably gained.

There are multiple non-profits and organizations in Louisiana that provide opportunities for disabled citizens to participate in outdoors activities. ■

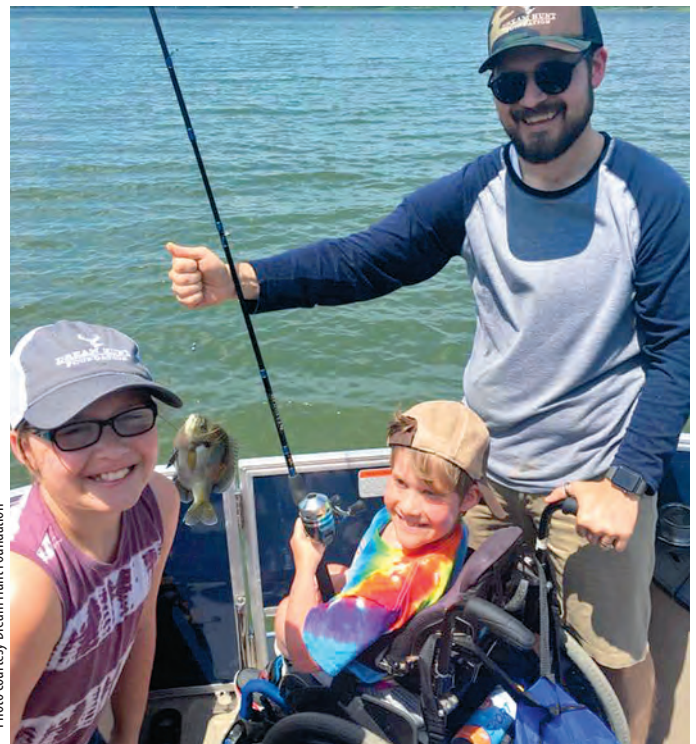


Photo courtesy Dream Hunt Foundation



THE LAST TROPHY TROUT RUN?

■ By Chris Berzas

DOES LOUISIANA HAVE ANOTHER BIG SPLURGE OF TROPHY TROUT IN ITS WATERS TO MATCH THE GREAT FISHING FROM 2013 TO 2016? JUST IN CASE, TAKE SOME TIPS FROM THESE TROUT MASTERS.

In late May, CCA Louisiana's 26th STAR tournament began, and anglers responded by fishing locations known to hold heavy trout and the possibility of tagged redfish.

This big trout-seeking behavior was spurred by April reports of quality speckled trout — and some trophies — taken in Venice, Grand Isle and Calcasieu Lake. Several trout weighing 7 and 8 pounds were reported from those waters.

Fish of that quality showing up in anglers' creels was in stark contrast to the many 12-inch trout taken in the spring and early summer of 2019.

Anglers will recall that fisheries biologists with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries noted a drop in both population samples and recreational landings of speckled trout 3 years or older in the 2019 speckled trout stock assessment.

Would the decrease of these older trout indicate that trophy fish will no longer appear in Louisiana waters for quite some time?

"There are some older, larger fish still out there," said Harry Blanchett, LDWF's fisheries biologist administrator. "They're just rare enough that we see very few of them,

either in the recreational harvest or in our fishery independent sampling programs."

Blanchett wants it known, however, that the production of trophy trout is not a goal in the public management options that were recently released and will be presented to the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission.

The last trophy trout run in Louisiana appears to have taken place from 2013 to 2016. A review of some of these catches and successful anglers' advice on how to catch these super-sized trout may assist anglers' efforts to catch the fish of a lifetime.

JASON ELLENDER >

JASON ELLENDER

It was March 23, 2013, when Jason Ellender of Sulphur caught the eighth-largest speckled trout in the Louisiana record book.

After stepping into Sabine Lake waters and caching trout weighing 4 and 5 pounds on Corkys and Catch 2000s, Ellender's pink saltwater Super Spook was inhaled by a huge fish.

After a rip-roaring, drag-pulling battle, Ellender's fishing buddy, Steve Stroder of Carlyss, put the fish on his Boga, and it showed Ellender's fish to weigh more than 10 pounds.

The official weight of Ellender's trophy was 10.65 pounds.

"It's just gone downhill after that year," Ellender said. "I actually caught a 6-pounder recently during a recent wade. That's the best it's been for me in the past three years."

Ellender continues to be optimistic for this spring and summer, as storms have not been as severe as in previous years.

"These big fish also seem to be cyclical in showing up, as we experienced great years here catching big trout in 2011, 2012, and 2013, and before that during 2002 and 2003," he said.

Ellender is fishing the STAR tournament, a real family affair involving he and his parents. Ellender's mother, Betty, has won the STAR women's division, not once, but twice. She has also taken a STAR-tagged redfish, winning a 22-foot boat, and then another boat with an 8.15-pound trophy trout in 2008. She also placed second in 2010 with a 7.68-pound trout.

Ellender advises anglers to fish the western coves of Calcasieu Lake as well as flats on the southeastern banks. For baits, he uses Super Spooks most of the summer, but he also enjoys casting live croakers for the lake's huge trout.

His optimism for this year's trophy trout hinges on the lack of major storms inundating the lakes with freshwater, as well as the continued improvement of oyster reefs throughout Calcasieu since dredging has been removed as a tool of harvest for commercial oyster anglers.

Jason Ellender caught this stringer of hefty trout, along with his trophy 10.65-pounder, on Sabine Lake in March 2013.



STEVE STRODERD

Steve Stroderd, Ellender's fishing partner, is a noted trophy trout specialist on Sabine Lake.

Over the years, Stroderd, 43, has taken 14 trout over 9 pounds; at least 60 over 8 pounds; and many weighing 5 to 7 pounds — while staying largely out of the spotlight.

“For me, the downturn of catching these huge trout began in March 2015 when Sabine Lake began to receive tons of freshwater from the Neches and Sabine rivers due to severe storms experienced in the Sabine estuary — including Hurricane Harvey.

Stroderd believes large trout will once again return to Sabine Lake, but it will take some time.

Fishing reports from Sabine indicate anglers are finally finding fish better than 12 inches, with a few ranging up to and beyond 20 inches.

Stroderd prefers to cast plugs for these large fish — both topwaters such as Super Spooks and suspending plugs such as Corkys and slow-sinking MirrOlures.

ADAM JAYNES >


Steve Stroderd has caught and released some huge Sabine Lake trout, including 14 weighing better than 9 pounds.



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THE LAST
TROPHY
TROUT
RUN?

ADAM JAYNES

Adam Jaynes of Just Fish Guide Service (409-988-3901) is another trophy trout specialist who concentrates his efforts on Sabine and Calcasieu lakes.

Over the years, Jaynes, 33, has taken many trophy trout: loads of 5- to 7-pounders, as well as many 8s and 9s.

"I started seeing the decline in big fish after 2010," Jaynes said. "In fact, 2010 was so good that I recall offering anglers a \$100 discount if no one on the boat caught a trout weighing 6 pounds or better."

One of his last memorable trips occurred on Calcasieu Lake not far from West Cove in 2012.

After bypassing locations where birds were flying over small school trout and redfish feeding on shrimp, Jaynes happened to see fleeing mullet on the eastern edge of a small cove.

Casting a series of plugs including Super Spooks and slow-sinking Catch 2000s, Jaynes was able to take two trout better than 6 pounds and another two better than 7.

"I tend to stay on trout chasing mullet," Jaynes said. "I'm not talking about the occasional mullet jumping here and there, but small schools of mullet leaping erratically with wakes sometimes following them."

Jaynes also favors wade-fishing as a chief tactic, causing little to no disturbance when getting close to these wary fish. He will fish the Louisiana side of Sabine Lake from Johnson's Bayou north to Coffee Ground Cove, areas near Pleasure Island on the

BRENT ROY

Brent Roy with Venice Charters (225-268-8420) was possibly the last angler to score on a huge speckled trout taken in Venice waters: a 31-inch, 9-pounder taken in March 2013.

Roy has taken several bona-fide trophy trout over the years in Venice, big fish weighing 9 and 10 pounds.

The marshes, bays and beaches in the expansive Venice area have historically delivered trophy and quality speckled trout to Louisiana anglers over the years.

In April 2000, Louisiana angler Ed Sexton scored on a trophy trout weighing 10.50 pounds in the Venice area. This fish is the current No. 10-ranked trout in Louisiana gamefish records.

Roy, 50, has seen the cyclic appearance of these big trout in the area. After he caught his 9-pounder, there were two other trout weighing 8 pounds also taken in 2013.

"With the Mississippi River so high in the last few years, speckled trout here have been pushed out and concentrated in

Adam Jaynes caught this 7-pound speck in 2012 during the last of the trophy trout runs on Calcasieu Lake.



Texas side and shallow waters on flats near the edges of the Intracoastal Waterway.

His lure arsenal includes Super Spooks in black, pink/gold and clown colors, Corky Fatboys, MirrOlure SheDogs, Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnows and One Knockers.



Capt. Brent Roy caught this 31-inch, 9-pound trout was t on a VuDu Shrimp in Venice waters in March 2013.

deeper waters," he said. "I am cautiously optimistic that we will see big fish this year especially at the end of the Passes."

Roy was grateful that the Bonnet Carré Spillway was closed earlier this year as a sign that the river would drop and salinity levels increase as summer fishing heats up.

For larger trout, Roy recommended the Passes; the beaches between Four Bayous and the Pass; and Tiger Pass.

Roy has used an assortment of live bait, plastics and plugs to take his better trout. The 9-pound fish he caught in 2013 hit a VuDu Shrimp from Egret Baits. He will also use Deadly Dudley plastics, Egret's Bayou Chubs and H&H Sparkle Beetles and cocahos.

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TROPHY
TROUT
RUN?

CHAS CHAMPAGNE

Lake Pontchartrain has no finer friend and gatekeeper than Chas Champagne, 37, owner of Matrix Shad fishing lures. He probably spends more time on the waters of this huge lake just north of the Big Easy than any other angler.

Pontchartrain has delivered two monster speckled trout to the top 10 of Louisiana records: the current No. 2, an 11.99-pounder taken by Kenny Kreeger on Super Bowl Sunday 1999; and the state's No. 10 fish, a 10.50-pound beauty taken by Dudley Vandendorre Jr. in April 2002.

"Lake Pontchartrain has basically turned into a fall and winter fishery for speckled trout," said Champagne (985-707-9049).

He laments the most-recent opening of the Spillway, which fortunately closed in the latter part of April.

"The Pearl River is also very high, and the big trout have hit the road," he said. "I have not caught a 7- or 8-pounder in a very long time."

In 2012, Kris Robert and Jonathan Allen, along with Champagne, caught five lunker specks weighing 30 pounds: one of the last runs of great fish in Lake Ponchartrain.

"For fishing in June and July, anglers can expect to make a long run to Lake Borgne and all the way to the backside of the Biloxi Marsh just to find some specks to fish," he said. "We just don't catch big specks in the spring and summer anymore."

"I don't even recall if a 5-pound trout was taken in Lake P. during the spring and summer in quite a while."

Champagne is excited about his new Matrix X-Shad series, one of which imitates a croaker. As most anglers know, quality trout keep croakers high in their diet preferences.

There is also the topwater Matrix Mullet, a walk-the-dog plug that attract quality speckled trout in the summer. ■



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.



Chas Champagne is well-known for the numbers of trophy trout he has taken over the years from Lake Pontchartrain.

LOUISIANA TOP TEN SPECKLED TROUT

Rank	Weight	Angler	Location	Date
1.	12.38	Leon Mattes	Lake Hermitage	May 1950
2.	11.99	Kenneth Kreeger	Lake Pontchartrain	January 1999
3.	11.24	Jason Trouillier	Rigolets (Lake Borgne)	September 1999
4.	11.16	Timothy Mahoney, II	Calcasieu Lake	May 2002
5.	10.81	Kevin Galley	Calcasieu Lake	May 1997
6.	10.75	Randolph Green	Sandy Point	August 1970
7.	10.70	Barry Terrell	Calcasieu Lake	May 2004
8.	10.65	Jason Ellender	Sabine Lake	March 2013
9.	10.63	John Kaparis	Breton Sound	May 1979
10.	10.50	Dudley Vandendorre	Lake Pontchartrain	April 2002
(tie)	10.50	Ed Sexton	Venice — Gulf of Mexico	April 2000

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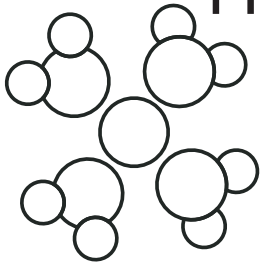


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AT DIFFERENT TIMES OF YEAR FOR
DIFFERENT REASONS.
UNDERSTANDING THE
PROCESS CAN PUT YOU
AROUND A LOT MORE
FISH THIS MONTH.**

■ By Jon Miller

Two things push speckled trout anglers around in the Mississippi River estuary: turbidity and salinity. Turbidity is the visible one — and most anglers know not to mess with high turbidity — but many don't realize that the invisible property of water salinity is also pushing them around in their search for fish.

In water-quality jargon, salinity is the measure of dissolved salts in water, but for inshore anglers it is a measure of the estuary's life blood. It's the salinity gradient of an estuary that creates the most ecologically rich marine habitat on earth and the incredible fishing opportunities. It is aptly called the nursery of the sea, and most fish and shellfish eaten in the United States complete at least part of their life cycles in estuaries.

UNDERSTANDING SALINITY >



UNDERSTANDING SALINITY

For anglers, the best mental map of an estuary is not a splattering of fishing spots on your grandfather's map, but instead, fishing spots overlaid on the most up-to-date salinity map. A map of the salinity gradient tells us where the trout will not be, which is halfway to knowing where they are. That may sound as helpful as a bicycle with one pedal, but finding trout in the massive Mississippi River estuary is about narrowing the odds.

The salinity gradient starts where freshwater and saltwater first mix — for example, the mouth of Bayou Lacombe or Grand Lake near Delacroix Island — and it ends where full saltwater persists: the Gulf of Mexico. Scientists break an estuary into three zones based on salinity: intermediate marsh zone (which has salinity in the 3 to 10 parts per thousand range), brackish zone (10 to 20 ppt), and saline zone (more than 20 ppt).

Trout use the whole of the salinity gradient. They use the saline zone for spawning and for feeding on plentiful summer food. They use the intermediate marsh zone for protection in winter from storms and large predators. They use the salinity gradient to follow food such as shrimp, which grow in low-salinity water but travel to high salinity as they mature. Speckled trout can survive across the entire salinity gradient because they are euryhaline organisms.

THE AMAZING EURYHALINE FISH

A euryhaline organism has the biological capacity to adjust to variations in water salinity. The drum family is one of the most-prolific euryhaline fish in the southern waters. These include Atlantic croaker, black drum, red drum (redfish), and seatrout, including the beloved spotted seatrout (specks).


Animals and fish use electrolytes to balance blood properties, rebuild damaged tissue and hydrate their bodies. Electrolyte strength is created by dissolved salts in the bloodstream, and because the pressure of the water around a fish causes it to adsorb water constantly, keeping a healthy electrolyte level is a constant chore for a fish. Too much or too little dissolved salt in its bloodstream spells death for a fish, and fish species suited to a tight salinity range cannot live outside of that range.

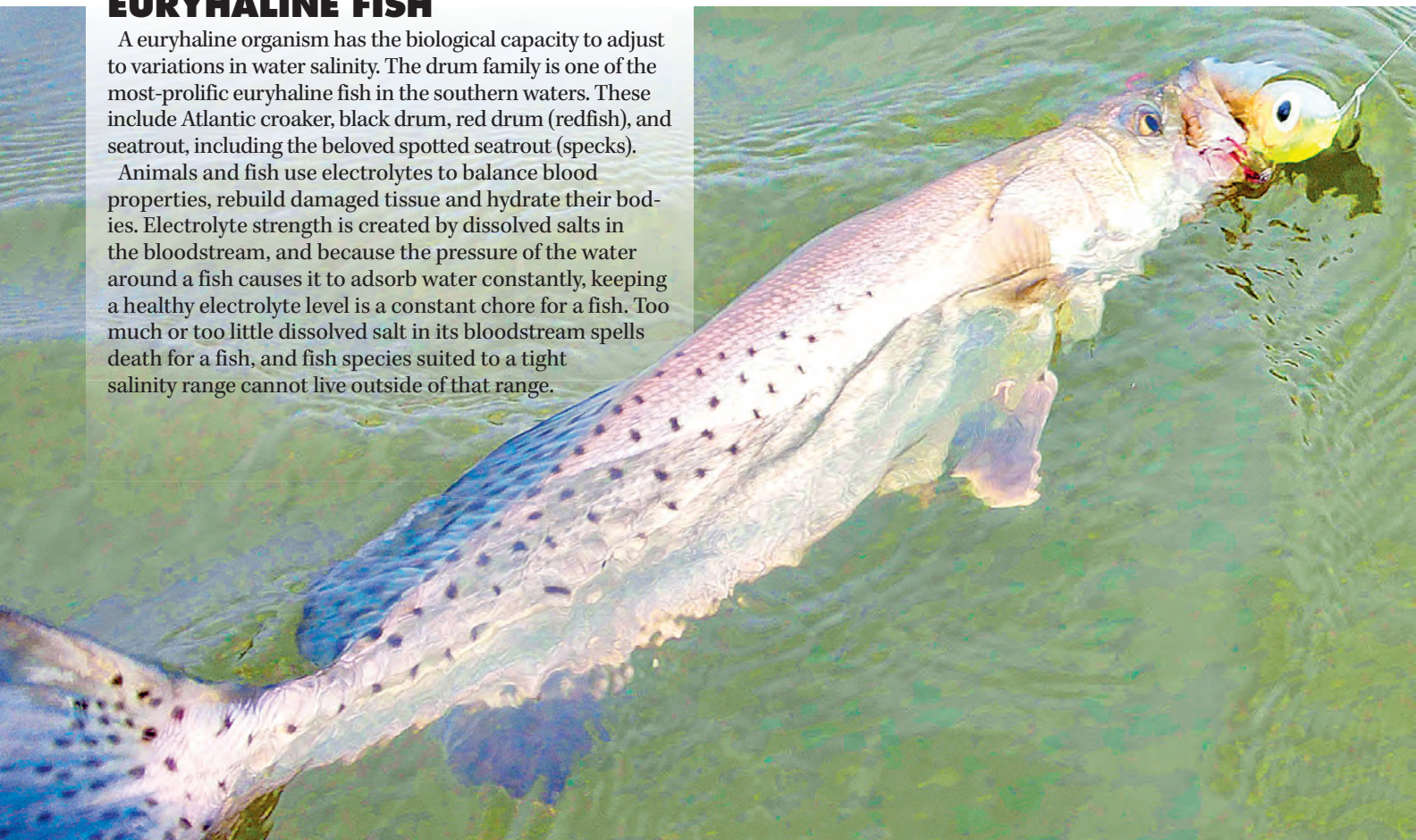
A freshwater fish does not drink water, or not regularly, because it adsorbs plenty of water through membranes. Salt is precious to a freshwater fish because of its constant adsorption of low-salt, freshwater can dilute its electrolytes to dangerously low levels. To compensate, these fish get rid of much water through urination and use a biological system to strip salt out of their urine, which can then be used to maintain a healthy electrolyte level in the blood stream. Tragically, if they become stuck in high-salinity water, their bodies can not get rid of the salt, and their electrolyte levels go too high and they will die.

Saltwater fish are just the opposite. They are in danger of adsorbing too much salt and not enough water, thus becoming dehydrated. To keep their electrolytes balanced, they drink large volumes of saltwater and rid their bodies of much salt by discharging a briny urine. Sadly, if they get trapped in low-salinity water, they will keep chugging the water, dilute their blood stream, drop their electrolyte levels, and die.

Now we can understand how amazing a euryhaline fish is, that it can balance its electrolyte levels when living for months at a time in 3 ppt water or 35 ppt water.

SALINITY AND REPRODUCTION ➤

 Big trout preparing to spawn are going to look for water with the highest salinity in an area — or leave for saltier water elsewhere.



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SALINITY AND REPRODUCTION

In Louisiana, early spawners start around the middle of May, and the spawn can continue into September. Trout do not spawn in beds like a bass; instead, they are broadcast breeders. Male speckled trout school and use their swim bladders to create that iconic drumming sound, which draws in females. Females lay their eggs at the same time the males emit sperm. The eggs and sperm must suspend in the water column to give the eggs time to become fertilized, and then the eggs need to remain suspended until they reach the larval phase. If they fall to the bottom, they are likely to die. During this critical period, salinity shows it is worth its salt.

Less-dense objects float in saltwater, and a drop of oil inside each trout egg makes it lighter than the water it's in, which is approximately 17 parts per thousand in spawning areas.

A salinity hydrograph will locate areas of differing salinity levels within an estuary, allowing fishermen to concentrate on areas when fish thrive.

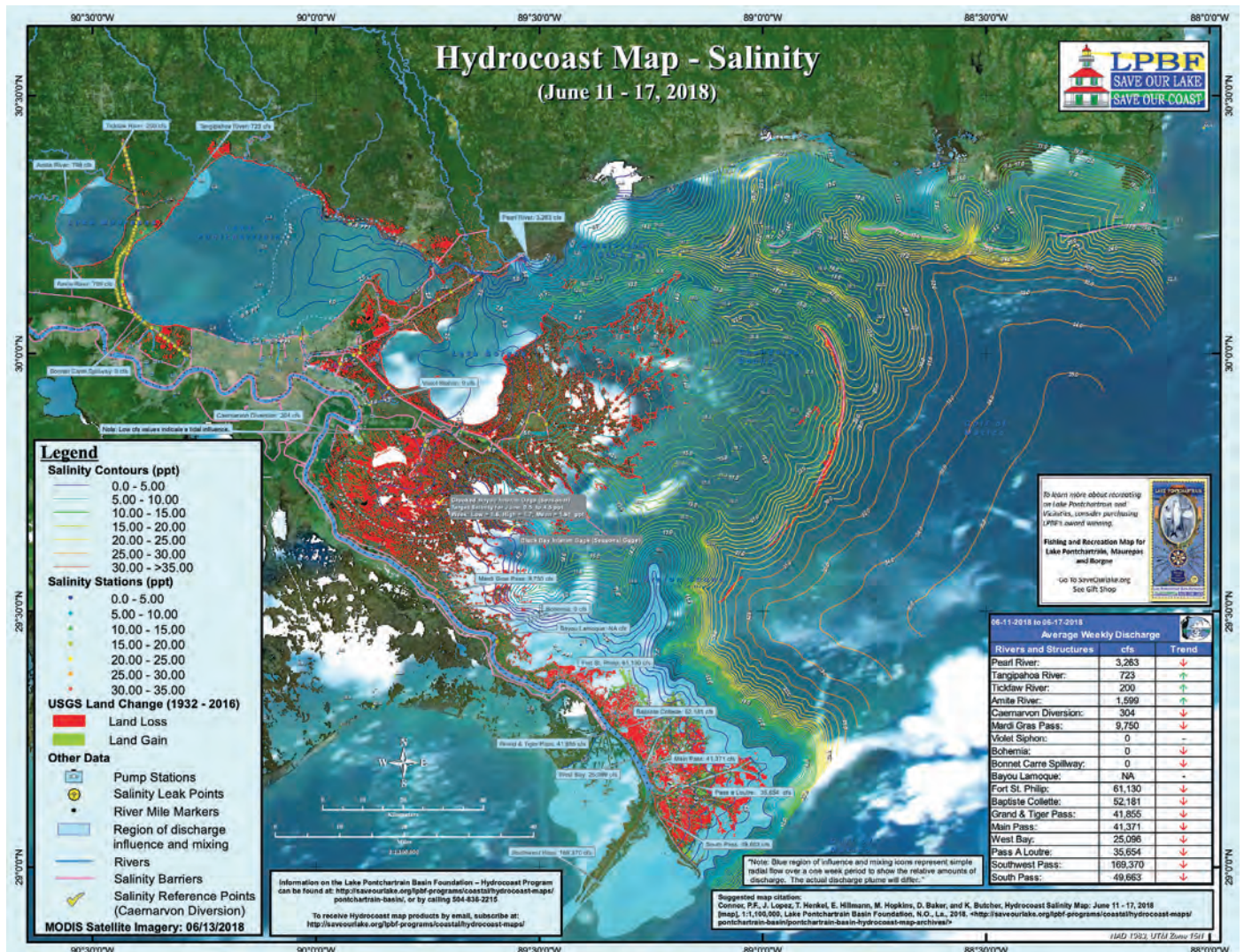
Somehow, a female speckled trout is able to gauge water salinity and spawn in water where her eggs can float. This is not really surprising, because the fish's euryhaline biology is constantly adjusting salt retention to maintain a healthy electrolyte level.

THE MENTAL MAP

With the connection established between the salinity gradient and the locations where trout will be found in June, anglers need to look where the water has roughly 17 ppt or higher salinity; that will eliminate a significant area of the estuary. But how do we know where the 17 ppt threshold is on the day we want to fish?

Look in three places.

First, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has several online water-quality gauges spread along the coast, including: Crooked Bayou (#073745257) near Delacroix, the Mississippi Sound near Grand Pass (#300722089150100), Rigolets at Hwy 90 near Slidell (#301001089442600), Empire Waterway south of Empire (#07380260), and Black Bay near Stone Island (#073745275). There are other useful gauges spread along



Hydrometers and conductance probes allow fishermen to measure the salinity of water they're fishing. They'll know whether to move or stay put.

the coast, and they are found on the at USGS Current Water Data for the Nation website at <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/rt>.

Second, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF) provides hydrocoast salinity maps. The maps forecast salinity and water movement for the Lake Pontchartrain Basin and the Barataria Basin; they are an incredible resource for researchers, government officials, and anglers. They are free and can be found at <https://saveourlake.org/lpbf-programs/coastal/hydrocoast-maps/>.

Third, we can salinity when on the water to get local readings, especially in the 17 ppt threshold areas.

I have caught trout during the spawning season on structure that was close to the threshold, but having salinity around 10 to 15 ppt. I believe they were not spawning but were likely in the period of egg-sack development. At that time, they have freedom to travel up the salinity gradient where advantages in food or protection may exist. Knowing if a productive spot is near the salinity threshold on any particular day becomes helpful.

The least-expensive instrument to measure salinity is the hydrometer, which can be bought from businesses that sell aquarium supplies for about \$15. I use a more-accurate device called a conductance probe, which costs about \$75. The conductance readings from these instruments are easily converted to salinity values.

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BAITS FOR EARLY SUMMER

Biologists believe that speckled trout show a preference for shrimp in their diet during the spawning season; this may be related to the nutritional requirements for egg development. Shrimp are lower in fat than many finfish species but higher in protein and essential minerals. Shrimp are also plentiful in the brackish and saline zones during the summer, so convenience may also be a factor in the diet preferences of speckled trout.

Whatever the reason, fishing with live or artificial shrimp is a productive method in early summer, and the popping cork adds an additional advantage to either of these two types of bait. In early summer, topwater stickbaits produce big blowups and big trout when thrown over shallow flats in the morning. Shallow-running, lipped jerkbaits are also in many anglers'

arsenals for June, but they need to be worked them harder than earlier in the year. ■



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



Live shrimp or soft-plastic imitations are deadly on spawning speckled trout, which are high in protein and essential minerals and lower in fat.

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MARSH MAN MASSON

Todd Masson

The author caught this speckled trout on a Matrix Mullet while fishing northern Plaquemines Parish with Capt. Ty Hibbs.



SOME TROPHY TROUT ARE STILL AROUND

THE AUTHOR HAS PROOF THAT ALL OF LOUISIANA'S BIG SPECKS AREN'T MISSING IN ACTION

No one who has been fishing south Louisiana for more than 5 minutes would argue that speckled trout fishing is as good today as it was a decade ago. There are fewer fish, they're tougher to find and they don't seem to be as big as they were before an emotional Mother Nature decided to use the eastern part of the continent as a catch basin for her tears.

Our state is her gift to anglers because it's positioned at the terminus of North America's greatest river, but that also means our fishing fortunes rise and fall with the level of that river. River water brings sediment, and that can be a long-term benefit to the coast if that silt is allowed to distribute throughout the ecosystem, but it also makes speckled trout tougher to find in significant numbers and outlandish sizes.

However, there are some brutes still around, and I had the good fortune of

running across one on a recent trip with Capt. Ty Hibbs.

I've covered Hibbs for years, since the days when he was a precocious teenager boating far bigger hauls than most adults who had decades more experience. We've remained in contact over the years and decided last month to make a sight-fishing trip for redfish in the marshes of northern Plaquemines Parish.

SPECK STOPOVER

The morning of the trip, however, Hibbs suggested we make a quick stop in a nearby pond to throw topwater baits for speckled trout. Since it's my favorite fishing technique, I readily agreed.

We weren't expecting to load the boat, but a cool front had pushed through a couple days earlier, lowering water temperatures and, we hoped, inspiring any fish in the area to look up for their meals.

On my first cast, it looked like the redfish would have to wait a while. I got

three blowups, one of which sent my Matrix Mullet 2 feet in the air.

My next cast was even more productive, as one of the fish that hit actually got the hooks and became the first to fly over the gunwale.

A cast or two later, Hibbs also connected. And that was it. The incredible flurry of action that started the morning was suddenly choked out by a cold, wet blanket.

For the next 45 minutes, we cast, we retrieved, we twitched, we walked the dog, and our baits seemed less attractive to the fish than Joy Behar does to the average adolescent male.

Then, out of the blue, when we had almost given up hope, the water



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

exploded around my lure like a helicopter pilot had dropped a cinder block. Hibbs and I both let out an involuntary gasp, but quickly came to the conclusion that a bull redfish had decided to snack on what it thought was a garishly colored mullet.

After all, what were the chances a speckled trout big enough to make such an explosion could have taken up residence in a hydrilla-choked, nearly freshwater pond dozens of miles from the spawning grounds?

SHAKE HIM UP

During the fight, it was obvious that whatever it was, the fish was big and powerful, but as the battle continued, I told Hibbs it really felt more like a trout than a red.

Sure enough, the fish came to the surface to shake its head within 10 feet of the boat, revealing its silver speckled sides, and my knees turned to jelly.

I thumbed my spool release, and applied metered pressure, allowing the fish to have all the line it wanted on each run. Every time it tired, I re-engaged and cranked it toward the boat as I walked across gunwales and hopped over tackle boxes.

Finally, it was boatside, and Hibbs deftly slid a net under what truly was an eye-popping speckled trout. We held it up for a few pictures, measured it, high-fived and sent the big fish on its way.

Although Hibbs had a Boga Grip on his boat, I just didn't have the heart to dangle the fish from it and risk injuring or killing it. I had the good fortune to boat an 8-pound, 8-ounce speckled trout on Calcasieu Lake in 2002, and I knew this fish wasn't bigger than that, so there was no reason to put it through the stress.

At 26 inches, the fish likely weighed 6 pounds — slightly more or slightly less. It ranks as the largest I've caught in

Sure enough, the fish came to the surface to shake its head within 10 feet of the boat, revealing its silver speckled sides, and my knees turned to jelly.

more than a decade of hard-core speckled trout fishing and was really a sight for sore eyes.

Once the continent's weather settles

down, big fish like this will be much more common than they are now. I personally can't wait. ■

SPECKLED TRUTH >

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SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

The author has added a new, improved jighead to the arsenal he takes to the water when he's targeting trophy speckled trout.



TEXAS EYE JIG CHANGES YOUR LURE PRESENTATION

Christopher Bush

Over the course of my angling life, I've experienced, first-hand, the evolution of tackle within the industry. From NED Rigs and Glide baits to braided line and terminal tackle, with every passing year, something new goes to market that gets us excited about the art of fishing.

Recently, I had that experience when I came across the Eye Strike Texas Eye finesse jighead.

For those that don't know, the Texas Eye jighead is a "swing head" weight-and-hook combo. In other words, the weight located on the front of the 3/0 Mustad hook has free range of motion, unlike a traditional jighead style, allowing it to "swing" side-to-side. Paired with an super-sharp and strong, offset wide-gap hook, it's designed is to let an angler fish the lure snagless, depending on the spot within their fishery. For me, that area is on the seagrass-laden flats of the Upper

Laguna Madre.

Skeptical at first, I heeded the encouragement of Dave Fladd, the owner of Eye Strike Fishing and the jighead's designer. Promising to send me a few to try, I politely declined and headed to the local Bass Pro Shops to buy the basics. Months later, I'm glad I listened to his advice. Lately, it's been a huge part of my fishing arsenal for targeting big fish in areas with higher than normal structure. It allows me to fish at a slower pace, vary the profile of my offering and add an unseen action to most inshore areas.

SIZE AND PROFILE

Undoubtedly, fish feed off of instinct to which size and profile play a vital role. Because the jighead is detached from the hook, the size of the soft plastic you choose varies largely on the situation you're fishing. My general rule of thumb is start with a 5-inch, soft-plastic jerkshad (non-paddletail). It is

a great all-around profile that has great castability as well as silhouette. My preferred brands are the ZMan Finesse ShadZ, Cajun Lures Zydeco Shad and MirrOlure Provoker.

However, larger and smaller plastics have also been working extremely well, especially given the variable conditions here on the Texas Coast. Hard, prevailing winds, along with mud/sand sediment quickly cloud the water column. In this particular instance, I've found better success on a 6-inch Gambler Flapp'n Shad. The added inch, along with the exaggerated tail, increases my profile exponentially — giving big fish a bigger target in dirty water. Lately, in remarkably clean



Chris Bush is an Air Force officer and a licensed charter captain, husband and father. He spends his time targeting big speckled trout and sharing his knowledge on his website, *Speckled Truth*.

The Eye Strike Texas Eye jighead is a swinghead. Paired with a soft-plastic bait like (from top): 5-inch Z-Man scented Jerkshad, Gambler Flapp'n Shad, Optimum Baits Victory Tail, it can be a devastating bait on speckled trout.



Christopher Bush

water with areas with dense grass, I've downsized my profile by using an Optimum Baits Victory Tail Shad. This slender minnow imitation has quiet water entry and a diminished presence, not off-putting to any big fish laying low in a high pressure situation. However, here's the key — and why the swinghead makes the difference. Regardless whether you go big or small, the Texas Eye allows you to present the bait exactly the same, every time — which leads me to action.

ACTION, FISHABILITY

The action is unlike anything these fish have seen. Despite swingheads being in the freshwater market for some time, Eye Strike modified it to meet inshore anglers' needs. Instead of the traditional "football" or "rugby" profile, Fladd decided to go with a thinner profile, not only to accentuate the "eye" but to allow the bait to come through structure with greater ease.

Darter profile baits on a traditional jighead provide excellent darting action, designed to trigger a strike. This is achieved by the angler snapping their rod tip in a 2- or 3-count motion before allowing the bait to descend to the bottom. However, with the same soft-plastic profile on a Texas Eye, the range of motion on the head, absorbs some of the shock applied by the anglers rod action.

What happens is, the hard, darting action turns to a more subtle glide, both side to side and up and down. This gives the bait a slightly longer presence in the strike zone, and since you don't have to worry about an open jighead getting snagged on the bottom or on grass, an angler can allow the bait to come to rest before continuing their retrieve, potentially garnering greater curiosity from a large fish.

Since this is a designed finesse application, I throw it solely on a 7-foot-6 Waterloo HP Lite medium/moderate rod, rated for 6- to 12-pound line, with a Shimano Stradic FL 3000 spooled with 20-pound Suffix 832 braid and a 4-foot monofilament leader.

It's important to note that when a fish does hit the bait, I almost always set the hook to the side. It's even greater to note that a softer rod tip like a moderate or moderate/fast is required, so the entire rod loads on the hookset and keeps the fish hooked while fighting the fish. Since I made this adjustment, my hookup-to-land ratio has improved exponentially.

THE DOWNSIDE

There is generally always a downside, kind of like ice cream and calories. In this particular instance, the Texas Eye provides very appealing meals for fish, especially big fish. However, durability equals the calories. In a recent podcast, I described lure longevity as being the least-important feature in my fishing approach. However, for most anglers, it's an important factor in deciding on a soft-plastic brand.

Other than ZMan fishing products (made of ElaZtech) and 3X tough Gambler Flapp'n Shad (plastic hardener), a typical bait will catch no more than five to seven fish, sometimes even fewer. That's due in large part to the bait keeper on the front, which seats the bait on the hook. While fighting the fish, the thrashing around hollows out the nose, which over time renders the bait useless. It's not uncommon when I'm on a good bite to go through a pack-and-a-half of lures.

It's also slightly more time-consuming to rig and takes a little more practice than threading a soft plastic on a traditional jighead. However, it's all a matter of perspective. Just the other day, I only caught four fish while wade-fishing a gin-clear flat that had been holding some really nice fish. Of those fish, two went 27¼ inches and another 26½ inches, and I used three lures in the process. Again, though, to me durability is irrelevant, because I'm not looking for numbers, I'm looking for size — so going one lure for one fish of that size is an acceptable trade-off. ■

PADDLES 'N PUDDLES >

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.

TROUT TIME

SUMMER SPECKS ARE A KAYAKER'S JOY

The trout talk this time of year is all about specks moving to the outside to spawn in the saltier waters near the coastline and around barrier islands. While this is generally true, it doesn't mean that Louisiana's coastal marshes are devoid of trout, and this is great news for kayakers. Trout can be caught in coastal marshes year-round, and summer offers the widest variety of methods for loading the kayak with speckled deliciousness.

Topwater, live bait, soft plastics, hard plastics, popping cork, tight-lining, trolling and wading are all productive methods for targeting summer specks.

Live bait? In a kayak? Absolutely. Live shrimp are a trout favorite, and taking them aboard a kayak is easier than you might think. Be it a specially make kayak livewell or a simple floating bait bucket, shrimp — or other live bait — can easily be transported on your 'yak.

Livewells that recirculate water are best for keeping shrimp alive on hot, summer days; however, a simple, small bucket or ice chest with a battery powered air pump does the trick if you don't overcrowd it. Floating bait buckets also work well but should be put in the kayak when moving from spot to spot to avoid the drag that makes paddling more difficult.

It's hard to beat a frisky, live shrimp fished under a popping cork or on a bottom rig. Trout are generally found in schools, and if you stay with the school, several fish can be caught in the same location. Once fish are located, you can stretch your live bait supply by having a second rig ready with your favorite jighead and soft-plastic tail and/or hard lure. Switch back and forth between the live and artificial baits to keep the school interested, and go back to live if the bite begins to slow.

There is no more exciting method for tricking a speckled trout than with a topwater plug. The explosion is heart-pounding and, in general, you catch larger trout. Learn to walk-the-dog with your favorite topwater lure, and action is nearly guaranteed. Trout have soft mouths, and the treble hooks can tear free during the fight, so many anglers prefer fishing monofilament for topwater lures as the line stretch gives a little cushion and helps keep them hooked. If you use braid, always use a length of mono leader as a shock absorber.

Look for schools of mullet or other baitfish and work the kayak just close enough to make long casts to the edge of the bait. The stealthiness of a kayak allows you to travel with the bait without spooking it as they move along. If you have not tried using topwaters to target speckled trout, you don't know what you are missing. What you are missing may be your opportunity to catch your personal best trout.





Although live shrimp are hard to beat for summer trout, artificial lures are also highly effective. Steve Neece found these nice trout tight-lining a jighead/plastic tail while working his way along a rock jetty.

PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued

Most inshore areas of south Louisiana are not known for wade-fishing due to the soft, muddy bottoms. However, savvy kayakers will have located several areas with hard sand or shell bottoms where they can step out of the kayak and wade. These are generally found along the banks of larger lakes like Borgne, Calcasieu and Pontchartrain, but there are actually some areas in the marsh where you can get in the shallow water and quietly walk along and cast to unsuspecting trout. Wearing a comfortable PFD while wading is recommended due to the possibility of stepping into a hole or even sinking in soft mud.

Depending on conditions, either stake out the kayak or anchor it to the shore. Wading is highly productive, and the standing position makes working artificial lures easier and more precise. There's just something about being in the water with the fish that cannot be explained; it must be experienced. It is also quite refreshing on a hot, summer day.

Popping corks with either live bait or soft plastics probably account for more trout hitting the ice chest than any other method. This is mainly due to their effective simplicity. Sure, there are best ways to use a cork, and you will develop more effective rhythms with experience, but simply tossing it out and popping and pausing will generally attract trout. The depth of the lure under the cork and particular popping rhythms change as conditions dictate, but both are easy to figure out with a little experimentation and noting what is working best in a given situation.

Do not overlook trolling. Kayaks make great platforms for trolling lures or live bait. Their slow, quiet movements allow you to drag baits along without spooking fish. Actively trolling a line or two is a great way to catch and locate speckled trout. Even if you are fishing your way down a shoreline or simply just

moving from spot to spot, trolling a lure or even a cork behind you is a great way to catch a couple of bonus fish.

Birds. Don't overlook the birds. If you see birds, particularly seagulls — terns lie! — quietly work your way just close enough to the action. Chances are that a school of trout has shrimp



Louisiana's soft-bottom marshes are not generally conducive to wade-fishing. However, locating a reef or other hardbottom area provides a chance to step out of the kayak for some fantastic wade-fishing opportunities for speckled trout.



herded up, and as the shrimp attempt to flee to the surface, the birds provide a double-whammy from above. Cast directly into the frenzy, and instant action is nearly guaranteed. Quietly drifting with the school can provide plenty of non-stop action.

There is no better time than now to chase trout in the kayak. The fish are plentiful, hungry, and easy to catch using a wide variety of baits and techniques. ■



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SURFACTANT TECHNOLOGY

TO COMBAT

DIRT & GRIME

THE STAIN

Dirt, grime, gunk, muck. Fish blood, food, drinks. These are your surface stains.

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.

THE SOLUTION

Star brite Boat Wash will definitely remove most surface dirt. For tough grime and gunk, use a cleaner/degreaser, such as Star brite Xtreme Clean or choose a surfactant based on the surface: Non-Skid Deck Cleaner for non-skid, Vinyl Cleaner for vinyl, etc...



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

Star brite Ultimate Magic Sponge uses nano-sized scrubbers to grab hold and erase most marks easily. For your hull, use Premium Cleaner Wax to buff the stain away.





Great speckled trout fishing is one of the Chandeleur Islands' great attractions.

CHANDELEURS OFFER ANGLERS SPECIAL DAYS

Barrier islands are great spots for trout, reds, when anglers catch the weather right

In the human psyche, islands are a symbol of safety and strength in the midst of a daunting and dangerous sea. Think of the countless movie scenes when desperate people drag themselves up the island's beach and gladly collapse onto its solid back.

More than any other Louisiana barrier islands, the Chandeleurs have the power to transport the traveler to that mythical place.

The Chandeleur chain was created more than 2,000 years ago by the Mississippi River's sediment load. It has been battered by many hurricanes, and its sands are continuously being moved inward by the Gulf of Mexico. Still, it exists and is thriving with submerged vegetation, grasses, mangroves, birds and marine life.

This island chain is also remote relative to most barrier islands, and depending on which part of the chain is your destination, it is roughly a 40- to 45-mile boat ride from Venice, Hopedale Marina or Mississippi ports, including at least 20 miles of open water. Due to this remoteness, travelers are advised to have VHF radio communication, well-maintained boats and an informed grasp of the weather forecast. Traveling to the islands when the chance of thunderstorms exist elevates the risk of personal harm and can result in the mariner getting religion.

Despite their remoteness, the Chandeleurs receive a surprising amount of fishing pressure. The most-pursued fish are speckled trout, and many people have caught their personal-best trout at the islands. Redfish are also a common catch, but watch out for gear-busting brutes like jack crevalle and sharks.

A DYNAMIC FISHERY

Speckled trout and redfish can be caught on the inside of the islands and in the troughs of the Gulf side. Fishing on the inside of the islands consists primarily of targeting shallow flats. When navigating, expect these flats to extend far out from the visible land. They are regularly interrupted by deeper channels where



VIDEO: Go to louisianasportsman.com/chandeleur-islands-wading/ to see Jon Miller compare wade fishing to boat fishing the Chandeleur Islands.

water is seeping or flowing through the islands. Some were formed where the islands have been completely broken through by Gulf waters, creating a current. Such areas can be dynamic fisheries, but also a favorite feeding ground for sharks.

Wade-fishing is an effective technique and is a common approach for anglers. The firm, sandy bottom of the flats makes walking almost effortless, but watch out for the numerous sting-rays that cruise these waters. A good practice for avoiding a very painful sting is to shuffle your feet as you walk.



Wade-fishing the shallow flats on the inside of the Chandeleur Islands is popular.

Trout and redfish are regularly found in knee-deep water, so wading anglers should not ignore the shallow water areas closer to the shore.

Anglers using artificial lures find topwater baits to be very effective, along with shallow-suspending or floating jerkbaits and twitchbaits. A swimbait fished on a 1/16- or 1/8-ounce leadhead jig can be used shallow or in the 5- to 6-foot deep channels and depressions. Don't overlook a popping cork matched with a swimbaits just because the water is shallow. This rig can be amazingly effective on the flats. ■

— Jon Miller

TOPWATER TERRORS



BRONZEYE FROG

SIZE: 60mm - 1/2oz, 65mm - 5/8oz
ACTION: WALKING
HOOKS: GAMAKATSU EWG DOUBLE



BRONZEYE POPPER

SIZE: 50mm - 1/4oz, 60mm - 1/2oz
ACTION: POPPING & SOUND
HOOKS: GAMAKATSU EWG DOUBLE



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MRGO ROCKS, OUTER BAYS WILL PRODUCE NUMBERS IN JUNE

Small, male trout replace big spawners

Tim Ursin, a long-time Shell Beach charter guide, said April and May produced some great catches of nice-sized specks, but June is when the big numbers of smaller male trout show up.

"Most of the bigger fish we caught in April and May were fat females, full of eggs," said Ursin, aka "Captain Hook," who runs Escape Charters. "The smaller males show up in swarms this month, and what they lack in size, they make up for in numbers."

Ursin said the MRGO Rocks have been big producers, evidenced by the sheer number of boats anchored along them every day. The rocks should continue to produce this month, he said, but the trout action should really ramp up in the big, outer bays, the ones on the fringes of the open water.

"I look for some good action in Lake Machais, Lake Calabasse, Two Trees, Fortuna . . . anywhere around points and reefs and broken-up grass islands," he said. "I look for decent water, current lines and bait, and wherever you find that, fish there. Live shrimp under a popping cork is the ticket to success. You can probably



Tim Ursin shows off a 22-inch speckled trout he caught at the MRGO Rocks

catch some with plastic, too, but the waters are teeming with brown shrimp, and that's what the specks and reds will be feeding on."

Ursin (504-512-2602) said Bay Eloi is always a good bet in June when the conditions allow it. The big bay is peppered with wellheads and rigs to the east, and all are good places to find bigger fish.

"A lot of anglers will make the run out into Breton Sound on good-weather days and fish any of the barrier islands and the rigs scattered around out there," he said. "The run is farther, so you'll burn more fuel, but the reward is bigger trout and big reds, along with the usual array of sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, etc. Live shrimp or live croakers are the best baits, on sliding sinker rigs around the islands and wells and rigs, and you have to be prepared to lose some tackle to bottom debris and the toothy critters that always show up when it warms up."

Ursin said anglers have another option: go farther east and fish the numerous reefs on the far east side of the Louisiana Marsh, in areas like Fishing Smack Bay, Lawson Bay, Shell Island Lake, Indian Mound Bay or any of the dozen other large bays out there.

"The possibilities over there are endless, there are just so many places to fish," he said. "Look for the trout trinity of clean water, current lines and bait activity, and you should find the spot tails and specks. In June, your options are wide open." ■

— Rusty Tardo

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■ By Don Shoopman

**THE SURF AT ELMER'S ISLAND
USUALLY PRODUCES SOME
GREAT TROUT FISHING,
WITH A CHANCE FOR
SOME REAL TROPHIES.**

Surfing for specks

There's no time like now to fish the surf and catch trophy-sized speckled trout,

OPPOSITE: Dylan Bordelon of Metairie caught this 7.38-pound giant in the surf at Elmer's Island on April 25. BELOW: It's not hard to hit the jackpot, trout-wise, when set up in a productive spot in the surf.

according to veteran angler Cabot Corso of Destrehan, who spends as much time as possible in the waters off Elmer's Island.

One of Corso's fishing buddies, Dylan Bordelon of Metairie, proved that April 25. Bordelon always dreamed of hooking and landing one for the wall, which he did.

"Oh, yeah, that's the biggest trout of my life. I'm so excited. It's always been a dream of mine to get one over 7," Bordelon said after catching a 7.38-pound speckled trout while wading in the surf with Beau Lindsay and Dylan Yancey, both of Metairie. It was Yancey's first time fishing in the surf.

"I mean, I don't care if I don't get another trout this year," Bordelon said. "I mean, I'd love to. I'm definitely going to go out about 20 more times this year, (but) I'm glad to have that one."

Bordelon and everyone else wading in the surf will have a chance to hook another one in the next month or so, because it's prime time, Corso said.

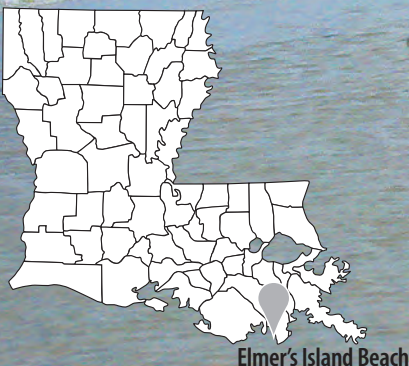
"If you're just targeting speckled trout, large speckled trout, the best time is in April and May," he said. "Basically, that's my take on the surf. Around April, May, the big fish that are spawning in come in behind Grand Isle, Caminada Bay. The warmer it gets, the more fish come in. It gets better and better. The other day in the surf, we caught

a couple sheepshead, a jack (crevalle) or two, a couple redfish, and the speckled trout were there."

Otherwise, he explained, the hotter it gets as June turns to July, the more ladyfish, bluefish, jack crevalle and sharks show up.

Corso has been fishing around Elmer's Island since the late 1980s. At first, he focused and hauled in plenty of speckled trout in a cut between Elmer's Island and Fourchon, but it eventually filled in, so he sought out other cuts leading to the marsh. Why? He prefers to fish moving water, which he believes is the key to catching speckled trout.

"Sometimes, fish are all along the beach. Sometimes when they're not, if you can get by one of those cuts, there will be baitfish there all the time: shrimp, baitfish, pogies. A lot of times, that's a sure bet," he said.





Cross fishes with “old school” tackle: two old, 4-foot and two 5-foot Skyline Graphites with Ambassadeur 4500Cs. His favorite artificial lure is a sinking, red/white MirrOlure.

“It has to be the sinking one. It’s very versatile. If you work it fast, it’s like a topwater. Or you can let it sink. You try to find a pattern,” he said.

Corso met Bordelon in 2017 when Bordelon had a hook imbedded in his hand that Corso extracted. They became friends with a shared passion of fishing in the surf after that experience.

Corso, 59, went fishing with Ryan Bourgeois of Denham Springs the day Bordelon got his hands on the 7.38-pounder. They launched Corso’s bass boat around mid-day at Bridge Side Marina, motored to the west and anchored the boat in the surf off Elmer’s Island. The two buddies finished with 24 speckled trout and two redfish, Corso said, adding that 99% of the speckled trout were full of eggs.

Bordelon’s trout was certainly full of eggs.



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Surfing for specks

“I was fishing the surf,” Bordelon said, in 2½-foot and higher waves and white caps. He was fishing with a “Color X” Down South soft plastic on a ¼-ounce Deathgrip jig.

One particular wave caught his attention before he made his first cast at 3:05.

“I saw some mullet, a school of mullets riding the wave,” he said. “She was following the mullet. I threw (behind the wave) and she hit. I popped it twice, and it didn’t ever hit the ground. That fish just took off.”

His hookset was solid and flawless. It had to be with the brute he stuck.

“I literally hooked her in the corner of the mouth,” he said. “Perfect. Like a redfish, she took off 20 yards. I told my friend, ‘It’s, like, a 5-pounder.’ She ran out on me two, three times. I’d get her close, she’d see me and take off again. I fought her for two, three minutes straight.”

Bordelon was using a 6-foot-6 Shimano GLF spinning rod and Stradic 2500 reel spooled with 10-pound Stren Superior mono, and he was concerned about playing the fish in the crashing surf.

“That’s what I was worried about. She had some big teeth and I thought she’d (cut) the line. That was freaking me out the whole time,” he said.

Bordelon dipped and missed on the first attempt to net the heavy trout. The tiring fish wasn’t so fortunate on the next go-round.

“She was done. She was tired,” he said.

Bordelon and his buddies had gone out in the surf in a dinghy. He knew he wanted to mount the trout and needed a big ice chest the dinghy wasn’t carrying.

Barely within wading distance, however, was Corso and his boat.

“Thank God he was 400 yards away. I had to run over there,” he said.



A fish hook embedded in his hand was what got Dylan Bordelon together with Cabot Corso; both anglers love to fish from the surf at Elmer’s Island. **BELOW:** Playing a speckled trout in crashing surf can be a test for both an angler and his tackle.

Bourgeois was the first to hear about the catch.

“I was farther down the beach,” Corso said. “My buddy, Ryan, said, ‘Dylan caught a big ol’ fish!’ When he caught it, I knew he wanted to mount it. He walked down to our boat. He knew we had a 64-quart ice chest.”

Bordelon said, “He (Cabot) shook my hand immediately. He said, ‘Dylan, that’s a fish of a lifetime.’ I said, ‘I know, man.’ We giggled about it.”

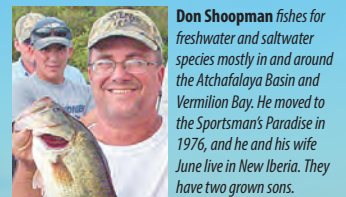
It wasn’t the first trophy fish that Bordelon has caught. On March 13, 2019, he caught a 7-pound, 14-ounce bass in Lake Ponchartrain.

Which one was more exciting?

“Probably that trout. They’re neck-and-neck. I promise you, my heart was out of my chest on both of them,” he said.

“I don’t know if I can catch another trout that big. I think I can catch a bass that big.” ■

TROUT & REDFISH HOTSPOTS >



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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Redfish will be in the marshes around Grand Isle in June.

GRAND ISLE'S DRAW

Trout, redfish are big June attractions

Grand Isle is a must-fish south Louisiana hotspot for the inshore bite in June. Redfish can be caught in the marshes, and speckled trout can be found schooling within casting distance of the beaches.

According to Daryl Carpenter, owner and captain of Reel Screamers Guide Service, "The water is clearing up, and the wind is dying down. The speckled trout have already started to move out front, concentrated more towards the coast, the points and islands, and on oyster beds, while the redfish haven't moved to the coast, yet."

The abundance of fish and prime fishing locations along Grand Isle provides ample opportunities for boat fishermen, kayakers and land-based anglers alike. Depending on what the angler is targeting, there are different techniques and tips to keep in mind to ensure your trip is successful.

REDFISH TECHNIQUES

"As of right now, the redfish are way up in the marsh," Carpenter said. "They haven't made their move south towards the coast, so if you are looking for a limit, stay in the marsh. Everything in between King's Ridge and Little Lake are the hotspots."

Look for washouts around grassy points and/or bait movement.



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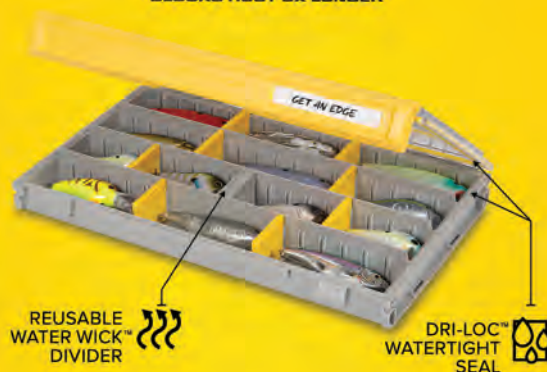
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Also, keep in mind that shrimp do not jump out of the water for no reason.

Redfish can also be located tailing in the shallower water of the narrow canals around marshes where kayak anglers can easily reach them. Targeting redfish this way will take minimal paddle/peddle movement.

Vudu Shrimp, Matrix Shad, spoons and Deadly Dudleys (color dependent on water clarity) are great options for artificial lures. Carolina rigs with live bait will work fine, as well.

SPECKLED TROUT TECHNIQUES

"When it comes to speckled trout, look for the breaks in the sandbars along the beach," Carpenter said. "The majority will be schooling anywhere along the coast, from Timberlier Island to Four Bayou Pass. On the days you can't get out front, your best bet is to go to the platforms and the oyster reefs."

"Currently, the speckled trout are biting on live shrimp. When June comes around, cast-netting live pogies and croakers is a go-to choice for fishing along the beach."

Land-based anglers have the unique opportunity to surf-fish for quality speckled trout in June. If Elmer's Island is open, that's a good option. Public beaches along Grand Isle are good spots, too. Look for evidence of bait and/or diving birds to indicate where the school is. The trout will not stay in one spot, however, so the angler will need to be on the move.

On calm days with a foot or less seas, kayak anglers can drift with the current, following moving baitfish and schooling trout along the beaches. But conditions will need to be just right.



Holden Jacob, 5, with his first fish, a trout, caught in Grand Isle.

PARTING ADVICE

"Bring patience with you, because there are people everywhere right now," Carpenter said. "People are trying to avoid what's going on, and they are doing so at Grand Isle."

Check the wind and marine forecast before planning your trip, if you are fishing from a boat or kayak. Wind over 10 to 12 mph will make fishing in June relatively tough in open water. Anglers will need to focus their efforts within the marsh or other sheltered locations.

If you are a beginner, it may be a good idea to go on a guided trip first. The guide services and charters are still running and perfect for a family get-away. ■

— Dora Lambert

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Capt. Owen "Big O" Langridge targets redfish this month with shrimp under a popping cork.



JUNE IN VENICE: REDS AND TROUT ACTION SHOULD BE GREAT

Live shrimp fished under a cork is the ticket as brown shrimp fill up the marshes

Owen "Big O" Langridge, a guide who fishes out of Venice Marina, said the trout and redfish action was excellent through April and May, and he's expecting more of the same in June.

"For sure, our action is better than last year, when we actually had two strong months in April and May but the bottom fell out in June," he said. "This June should continue to be excellent, as the river is expected ... to fall down to the 11- to 12-foot range by then. When that happens, the redfish show up in big numbers in the outer bays by the passes. I fully expect that to happen this month, everywhere from Racoon Point northward on the east side of the river, at the bottom end of Quarantine Bay, fishing all the points which should be stacked up with reds this month; and also in Garden Island Bay, at any good pockets, cuts, drains and points."

Langridge (225-978-1136) said his favorite bait for reds is live shrimp fished under a noisy cork; his second favorite is fresh, market shrimp under a cork — with the emphasis on fresh, not frozen.

"I know some folks insist that live shrimp is unnecessary for catching reds, but I've seen many, many times when the reds would eat up live shrimp but nothing else," he said. "If you do use dead bait, be sure to use fresh market shrimp, not old nasty stuff. Reds hunt by smell, and they know the difference. I know you can say you catch them on old, stinky shrimp, but I promise I'll catch more fish and catch them more consistently on live or fresh shrimp. People don't think it but reds can be finicky, too."

To catch trout in June, Langridge said live shrimp or live

croakers are an absolute necessity.

"I know we get away with catching loads of trout on soft plastics in April and May, and I love to catch them that way," he said. "It's a whole lot cheaper than buying live bait, and you don't have to reload your hook with every catch or nibble. But in June, the waters are loaded up with brown shrimp, and the trout will be

zoned in on them. I find the best action is in Breton Sound from Delacroix to Grand Gosier Island and even over to Curlew Island. I'll fish the islands and the rigs with live shrimp or live croakers, under corks, free-lined and on bottom rigs, depending on the depth of the water. Also, the beaches will hold trout from Empire to the mouth of the river, and by mid-to-late June, we'll see nice trout on the west side of Southwest Pass at the wells and rigs in about 15 feet of water. All in all, this should be a fantastic month for anglers out of Venice." ■

— Rusty Tardo

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 1 red onion (diced)
 1 cup mini sweet peppers (diced)
 4 tbsp cilantro (finely chopped)
 1 cup of Lime Juice (freshly squeezed)
 ½ cup of orange juice (freshly squeezed)
 1½ tsp of black pepper
 1 tsp sea salt

REDFISH MANGO CEVICHE

By Dora Lambert

Blackened redfish, redfish on the half shell, shrimp-stuffed redfish, and deep-fried redfish are just some of the more common

recipes found in Louisiana kitchens using one of the state's preferred inshore catches.

All are great ways to cook redfish; however, you are missing out if you haven't used it to make ceviche, yet.

Ceviche is a South American dish prepared by cooking with acidic juice rather than heat. There are multiple varieties dependent on country and geographic region. It made its debut in Florida during the late 1980s and exploded in popularity from there.

The ingredients for redfish mango ceviche are similar to those for mango salsa. It can be

prepared as an appetizer or a main dish and is perfect for summer. It's relatively simple to make, just make sure you have fresh ingredients on hand. ■

**PREPARATION:**

Combine the redfish pieces, black pepper, sea salt, and the lime juice into a bowl. Make sure that the lime juice completely covers the fish. Cover and place in the refrigerator for twenty minutes or until the redfish pieces become opaque.

Mix the orange juice in after the fish is "cooked."

Add the mangos, red onions, sweet peppers and cilantro.

Serve with avocado, chips or tostones.

TARGET TRIPLETAIL: THEY'RE FUN, TASTY

Look for fish floating around any debris

As the mercury continues to rise in the thermometer, new opportunities abound for the avid angler. Although the heat can be stifling, I relish the opportunity to chase after some of the best table fare our local waters have to offer. The coveted and targeted species is the tripletail.

Tripletail get their name from their dorsal and anal fins being set well back toward their tail fin, which give the fish a tri-lobed appearance. They can range from very dark to light brown or bronze in appearance, to mottled. The average fish we catch in southwest Louisiana and southeast Texas is in the 5- to 15-pound range. I like to believe that their flesh is so tender and flaky due to their laziness. Tripletail are frequently mistaken for floating trash, as they are commonly found floating on their sides, just beneath the surface.

We target tripletail by running the beachfront, visually searching for fish. They will frequently stay close to floating structure such as crab-trap buoys, oil-rig legs, debris such as milk jugs, logs, etc. When running the beach or near-shore, I will check for tripletail under anything floating that I run across. Especially check floating debris or seaweed found on rip lines. The clearer the skies and water the easier they are to spot.

I will not specifically go searching for tripletail until the sun has risen a decent amount, usually around 10:30 or so. Fortunately, they are not particularly spooky. Many times, we nearly run one over before spotting it, but they do not go far. After spotting a fish, I kill the big motor and will troll slowly into casting range.

Tripletail may be willing to hit an artificial lure, but live or dead bait is generally much more effective. Live shrimp, croaker or piggy perch are nearly irresistible to them; however, they will



Aaron Hommel caught this very nice tripletail just off the beach on a shrimp fished under a cork.

readily eat a dead shrimp if you don't have live bait. Whether fishing live or dead bait, I will rig it weightless on a Kahle hook. The hook size is dictated by the size of the bait; typically, a 4/0 or 5/0 hook will do. If fishing dead shrimp I definitely prefer to tie on the same hook, but under a cork with about 12 to 15 inches of monofilament leader. Pitch the bait just beyond and in front of the fish, and then reel towards it, presenting the bait where it flutters just in front of the fish's face. If it does not eat quickly, reel in and cast again.

The only thing better than getting to sight-cast to a tripletail floating peacefully on its side is getting to savor the flavor of its delicate meat. I prefer to dredge the fillet in an egg wash, then

batter in a half-and-half mixture of flour and Panko bread crumbs and pan fry in butter. After frying, I top with lump crabmeat and a beurre blanc sauce, and c'est bon! ■

— Capt. Adam Jaynes

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



Capt. Adam Jaynes grew up fishing Sabine Lake and Lake Calcasieu and surrounding waters. He specializes in light tackle with artificial lures in the year-around pursuit of speckled trout and redfish. He can be contacted at justfishsabine.com



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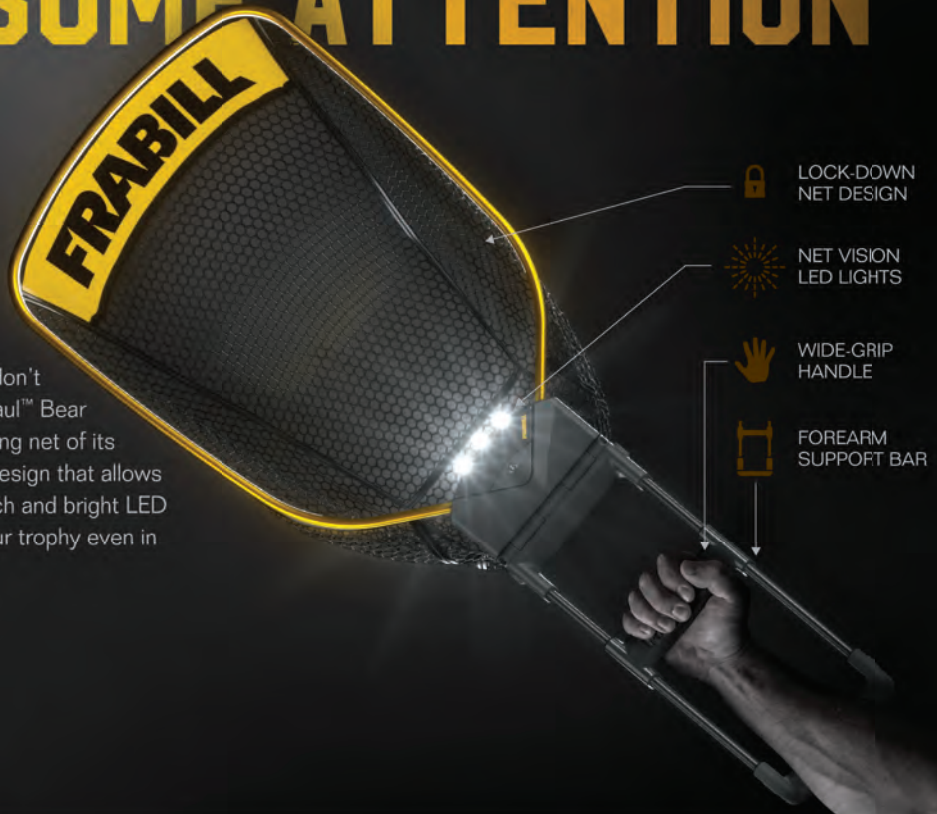
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■ By Kinny Haddox

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Fishing for bream isn't child's play.

"I know that bream were the first fish we caught when we were children, but it doesn't make it any less fun for an adult," said Ray Jones, a retired botany professor from West Monroe who also has earned the nickname "Dr. Bream."

"Bream fishing is easy. Bream catching isn't always as easy, unless you are prepared with equipment for several different ways of fishing," he said. "The amount of gear you have probably should relate to how serious you are about bream fishing. Bream follow patterns just like other fish."

The "patterns" Jones is referring to are that bream — especially big bream — don't always stay in the same place, at the same depth. Usually, when the weather is warm, you can catch bream in shallow water, but where they're located may vary. Sometimes when they are on their beds, they are in open spaces with a clean bottom. At other times, they are close to trees, stumps or brushtops. And still other times, they move a little bit deeper and hang out on the bottom.

The good news is that you don't have to spend a fortune to buy bream equipment. One rod will do, but having some different tools can also help you catch them more consistently.

Most bream fishermen started out with a cane pole, a bobber and a cricket. That still works, but there are a whole lot of other choices. Some are personal preference, but others give anglers a chance to catch bluegills, sun-perch and chinquapins on a more consistent basis.

And you can even come up with your own outfit if you are creative and still love to catch bream — no matter how old you are.

"I don't mind saying it one bit," Jones said. "I still love to go bream fishing when I get the chance."

His love for bream or any kind of panfish in heavy cover led Jones to develop an outfit that you won't find in any tackle store, but it's one on the list of possibilities.

He took a simple crappie reel, made years ago by the Miles Bait Company in Winnsboro, and attached it to an inexpensive, hollow, fiberglass rod. He carefully drilled a small hole about two inches above the reel, sanded it down to protect the line and then threaded his fishing line on the inside of the pole all the way to the tip. He controls depth by letting line off the reel, and the rig allows him to stick the pole up in heavy brush or under tree limbs without having to worry about the line between the guides getting hung in the brush or limbs.



Ray Jones, aka "Dr. Bream" says bream aren't just for kids; they are for fishermen of all ages

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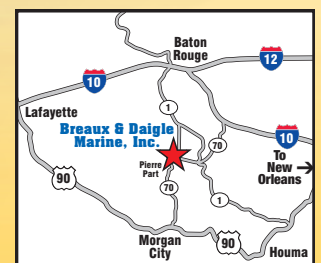


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If you don't want to design your own outfit like Jones did, there are plenty of choices. Bream fishermen don't have to use a different outfit for every type of lure or presentation like bass fishermen might, but it doesn't hurt to have some options.

Here are some of the combos that are popular among the state's dedicated perch jerkers:

CANE POLE

No, they aren't extinct. You can buy them at most sporting goods stores, especially ones that sell live bait. It is the least expensive way to fish and lets you fish with just about any kind of live bait, from crickets to worms and grub worms.

You can buy and rig out a cane pole for less than \$5.

JIG POLE

These commercially produced "cane poles" are a little more sturdy than their natural companion, but they also allow a little more feel and control. Many of them also collapse, which makes transportation and storage easier. They can be fished much the same as a cane pole with a float to adjust depth, but they can also be fished effectively with only a weight and hook by "tight-lining" to vary depths easily while fishing.

A lot of bream fishermen also like to feel the bite, much like their crappie fishing friends enjoy feeling "the thump."

FLY ROD

Fly rods aren't just for trout fishermen. The use of a small popper with flexible legs and a bright-colored body is a long-standing tradition among bream fishermen. In open areas, you can work the line and rod in harmony to lay your bait right by the edge of an old log or alongside the edge of a weed bed.

Most-effective flies for bream are the floating baits that resem-

A LITTLE BREAM FISHING HUMOR

My oldest granddaughter learned to fish at a young age, and she learned not to be afraid of sticking her hand in a cricket box. She could bait her own hook by the time she was four and loves catching fish almost as much as I do.

One day, we were down on the pier and she was playing with the cricket box. I noticed her throw something out in the water and walked over. She was catching crickets and tossing them out in the water, one at a time. Some of them were still swimming, but most of them were disappearing in a big, old swirl of bream.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Just fishing, Poppa," she said. "And look, they're biting." ■

ble a bug or spider. The best way to work the popping bug is to cast it out and let it sit a second. Most times, if a bream is nearby, he'll suck it in before the ripples disappear. If they don't, simply "pop" it a few times and work it back toward you until it is away from the area the bream are hanging out in.

SPINNING TACKLE

Open-faced spinning rigs that start with light rods allow anglers several options. You can fish it with a cork like a pole, or you can flip your bait out 10 to 20 feet from the boat or bank. You can also use this rig to fish as deep or as shallow as you want.

Some fishermen use the same outfits for bream that they do for crappie.

Bream-fishing tackle runs the gamut from the simplest of cane poles to home-made outfits, fiberglass poles, spinning rods and fly rods.





Bream were the first fish caught by a majority of today's freshwater anglers, from the bank, piers, docks or small boats.

SPIN-CAST TACKLE

Spin-casting reels are easy to use and provide the same benefits as the open-faced spinning gear. The biggest difference is the ability for anybody to fish with it by simply pushing the button and casting the bait out.

These rigs are especially effective for fishing small spinners or Beetle Spin-type lures where you can cast out past where the fish are hiding and slowly retrieve it back to the boat. You can cover a lot of good bream water with one of these combos.

D-I-Y OUTFIT

We've already covered what Jones did with his homemade rod-and-reel combo. You can combine just about any element you want from the wide assortment of tackle available and still keep the cost reasonable. Pick and rod and reel that you like, modify it to fit your needs and go fishing.

SUMMARY

No matter what type of fishing outfit you decide to use to catch bream, summer is the time to do it. Fish are more active this time of year, and in most lakes, they will bed at least twice. When you find a big bed of bream, you can catch 20, 30 or 40 or more in one spot. If you get on a bed and the action slows, don't leave, just give them about 10 minutes to regroup and try again. You might be surprised how many you catch right back out of the same spot. ■

THE LASHMASTER ➤



Kinny Haddox has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 45 years. He publishes a daily website, lakedarbornlife.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.

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THE LASHMASTER

An early edition of the Zebco 33 reel, which hit the market in 1953, selling for \$19.50.

It was — and still is — the “bomb!”

It began as a vision of watchmaker R.D. Hull in a Roten, Texas, grocery store in the late 1940s, then, moved into production at the Zero Hour Bomb Company in Tulsa, Okla., and soon after it's release in 1953, it became an overnight sensation.

The Zebco 33, originally named “The Lashmaster,” became the first reel that would cast easily and not backlash. It was used for all kinds of fish at first, but by the 1960s, became a staple of almost every bream fisherman who didn't use a cane pole.

And of course, the Zero Hour Bomb Company became ZEBCO. That was for a lot of reasons, like when a package of reels was sent to President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956 with the company's name in the return address; it was even submerged in water by White House security.

Today, it's still “the bomb” — modern-day slang for “something really cool.” It is made for 10-pound line but easily handles 6-pound for anglers who like a smaller presentation for finicky bream. It also pairs nicely with an inexpensive, light-action, 4- to



6-foot fiberglass or graphite rod for bream.

More than 40 million have been sold, and many have been submerged in water as well. There is no way to even guess how many bream that little reel — which started out as a prototype made with nails, a bolt and a Folger's Coffee can lid — has out in the boat. ■

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RENOWNED OKLAHOMA GUIDE SAYS TECHNOLOGY HAS CHANGED THE WAY HE TARGETS CRAPPIE AND OTHER GAMEFISH SPECIES. HERE'S WHAT HE THINKS.

SCREENING - By Kinny Haddox THOSE SLABS



Josh Jones kept his eyes glued to the LiveScope display screen at his feet. He slowly moved his boat across the water, rod cocked, reel loaded and ready to cast. He was just waiting for his target — a big bass — to appear on the screen. And then, there it was.

He fired out his bait and turned the reel handle a few times, never taking his eye of the screen.

“Oh my gosh, I got him. That’s a giant,” Jones said, netting the bass, which weighed 9 pounds on the scales a few seconds later.

Five minutes later, the scene was repeated. Jones cast his Alabama rig out 12 to 15 feet past the fish, watched the rig sink and started reeling. The big bass started following it.

“Here he comes. Here he comes,” Jones said excitedly,

watching the underwater action on his electronics. But the bait came to the top of the water untouched. “He followed it all the way to the boat. He was just looking at it. He never intended to bite it. He was over 10 pounds, easy.”

Jones was obviously disappointed. Without LiveScope, he would have never known what was going on.

A minute later, he saw yet another one.

“There’s another huge one,” he said, his bait barely hitting the water. “He sees it. He’s watching it. Oh my gosh. He’s got it! Oh, it’s a monster.”

But almost as fast as the fish hit, it let go. Jones dropped the tip of his rod and sighed, “He got off.”

NORMALLY, IF A FISH GETS OFF THE HOOK, IT'S OVER.

Jones waited a minute, watching the LiveScope as the big fish swam back to where it came from. He gave him a couple of minutes and decided to make one more cast to see if the fish would react. It did.

"He sees it. He's coming up. He's got it," Jones said, almost like a play-by-play announcer on a football game. Seconds later, he grabbed the fish, which weighed nearly 9 pounds. He held the lunker up closer to his cell phone to give an outdoor writer a better look.

His cell phone? Yep. Welcome to 2020.

Jones, a renowned Oklahoma angler, was doing an hour-long interview over iPhone Face Time, wearing wireless earbuds and watching his LiveScope. The fish? His best five weighed 41.6 pounds. They were just innocent bystanders, probably wondering where the old guys with 5-foot fiberglass Speed Sticks and old flasher depth finders have gone.

"Technology has dramatically changed fishing," Jones said. "It has become hunting for fish instead of fishing. Sometimes, it takes some of the fun out of it, but heck, if you want to go after the big ones, or compete in a tournament, you have to have it. I was the first one to ever get one of these LiveScope type units back when it was just regular Panoptix. I'm still learning every day. I'll never go without one. And if they make something better, I'll get it, too."

Jones is ahead of the curve. He set the curve. Some argue, but there are always detractors when you are really good at what you do. He likes helping others become better fishermen. He said some of the things we've thought for years just aren't true. LiveScope is helping bust some of

those myths. He gladly shares that information and makes presentations to crappie anglers from all over.

It may sound strange to informed anglers to hear about Jones bass fishing. He is best known for changing the crappie-fishing world in the past two years, when some of his videos got more than a million views. A 32-year-old crappie guide from Kiefer, Okla., Jones has the maximum number of Facebook friends allowed — 5,000 — and fishes every day when he's not working. Some of the best crappie fishermen in the world will stop and listen to every word he says at a tournament weigh-in. People in the crowd whisper, "That's that Josh Jones guy."

Earlier this year, he injured his knee, and the resulting surgery interrupted his guiding. But he couldn't stop fishing, and he wanted a break from daily crappie angling. Part of his healing process was returning to his first angling love, bass fishing. He found that the LiveScope was equally useful for both.

"I love catching big fish, so the transition was easy," he said. "I plan on still doing crappie guiding and crappie fishing, but I am enjoying trying out competitive bass fishing, too. I don't know where this will take me, but I do think it will be fun. I don't have to win every tournament; I just want to be consistent and take home a check. There are lots of great fishermen out there and it's very competitive."





Oklahoma guide Josh Jones has his boat rigged with the most up-to-date electronics to help find fish. ABOVE: Jones is better known for putting his guide-trip customers on lots of crappie, but while convalescing after an injury, he picked up bass fishing.



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SCREENING THOSE SLABS

Josh Jones and his lab, Dixie, didn't whistle this slab up, they caught it the new-fashioned way by finding it on a LiveScope and dropping a jig right on its head. **BELOW:** Jones teaches plenty of crappie fishermen about the advances of electronics in seminars around the country.

The new technology has allowed Jones and other anglers using it to learn tons about fish behavior. "It's amazing, but the fish are generally terrified of boat and motor noises," he said. "You can see fish 20 feet out from the boat on the scope, step on your trolling motor, and they are gone, either swimming away or holing up deep in the brush. But sometimes, they'll actually swim up closer and stare at the trolling motor. In the summer, when it's hot, I've even had them swim up under the boat and come up from 15 feet deep to 5 feet deep to get in the shade. We would have never known that without LiveScope. It's crazy."

Nine times out of 10, Jones sees a reaction from fish that see his bait. It's good when they see the bait above them, lift their heads and look at it. When that happens, the fish usually bites. But other times, when they see a lure, they will look and "swim off 100 miles an hour," said Jones, who has learned that's a time to downsize your lure and be extra slow and quiet.

"LiveScope has taught me that in most lakes, fish all over the lake in deep water, shallow water and in between, pretty much all year-long," he said. "I've caught 3-pound crappie in 6 foot of water when it was 35 degrees. No one knew, and I don't think anybody tried to catch them there."

Whether it's bass or crappie. He has also learned that sometimes, it's time to move on.

"When you see a giant fish, and he won't bite, you've got to learn to move on," he said. "If he isn't reacting positively to your bait in one or two casts, don't waste a lot of time. I've actually hit them in the head with the lure, and they don't move. I guess they are asleep, or some weather condition like high pressure



has them locked up. Sometimes fishing pressure makes them numb to a bait. It's hard to do, but if you aren't getting a reaction, move on."

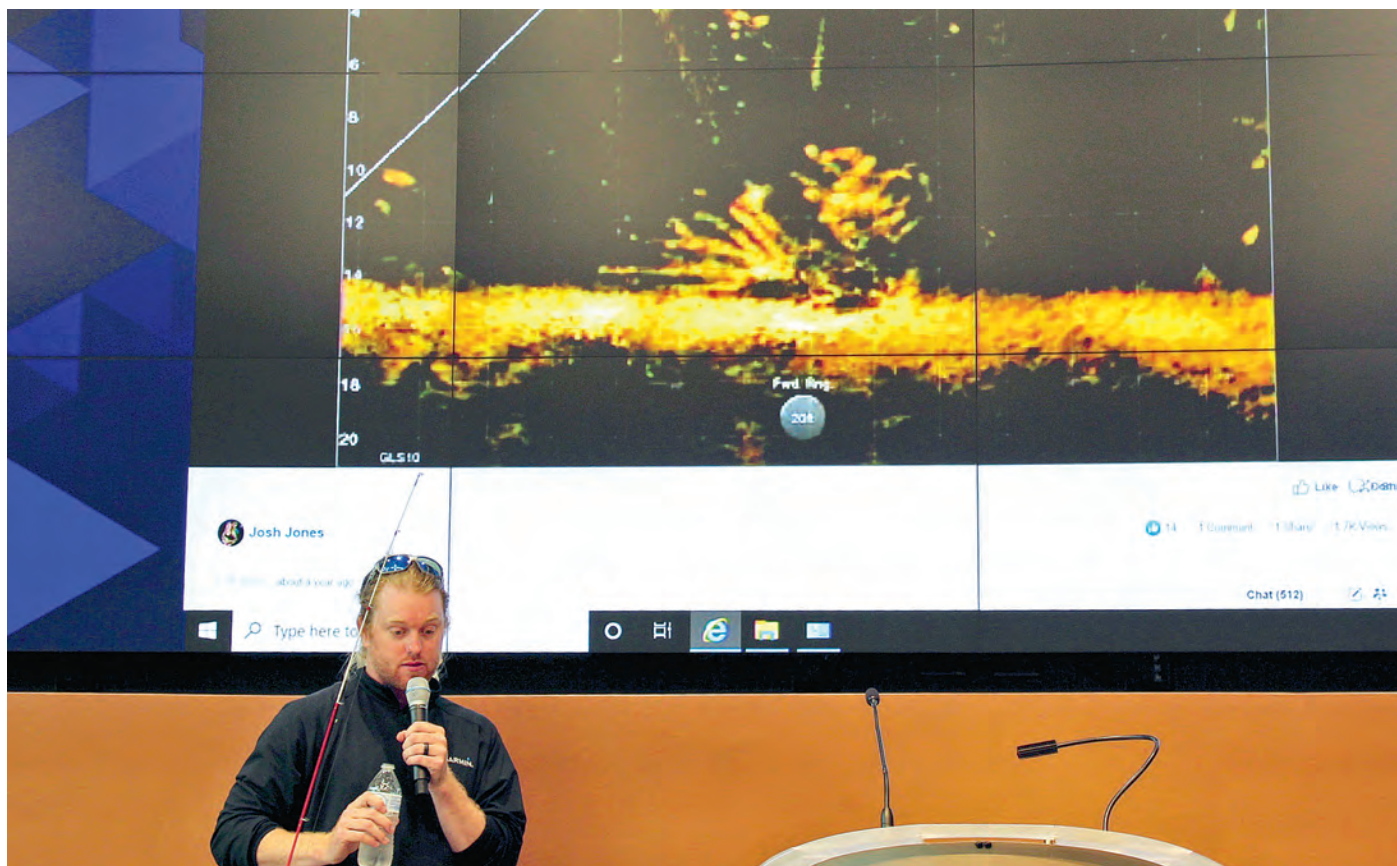
What's next with technology?

"I don't see how it could get better, I really don't," he said. "They asked me, and I can't think of anything. But you have to have an open mind, just like with development of the iPhone. People think every year that they can't do anything else, and then look, they are bigger and better." ■



Kinny Haddox has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 45 years. He publishes a daily website, lakedarbornlife.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.

WHEN THE CRAPPIE BITE GETS HAIRY >



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WHEN THE CRAPPIE BITE GETS HAIRY

Josh Jones gets more bites off hair jigs than any other crappie lure, but they're often difficult to detect.

When it comes to putting the bait right in front of a crappie's mouth, it often doesn't matter what color you use.

"I'm not really much of a color guy," guide Josh Jones said. "I used to be, and sometimes it does make a difference, but when you are using a LiveScope and dropping it right on the fish's head, they are either going to hit it or not."

One thing Jones has discovered is that under these conditions, a hair jig gets more bites and catches more fish.

"The smaller-profile bait is less likely to spook them, and they must like hair jigs, because that's about all I use much of the year," he said. "You have to really pay attention, though. Most of the time, the jig is so light, and the bite is so light — especially with big ones — that you need to watch your line or feel your

line. You won't get the thump like you do with a big plastic bait."

One of his favorites is the Crappie G jig, hand-tied in Louisiana. Jones likes to fish it with a bell sinker up the line from the jig and pegged so it won't move, but keeps the bait down.

He still fishes shiners and likes plastics, too, but the hair jig is his go-to crappie killer. ■

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■ By Jonathan LePera

Here's mud
in your eye!

Greg Hackney of Gonzales, a Major League Fishing pro, isn't one to gripe about weather conditions. At the end of the day, he knows he has to consistently catch bass. Excuses don't cash checks.

One of those conditions is muddy water.

Some anglers are rattled by the sight of it, but Hackney's approach is founded on simple beliefs: for largemouth bass to hit a bait, they must see it, and in muddy water, the light penetrates only about 10 inches under the surface.

"When holding on a piece of wood or a cypress tree, bass will still be high in the water column. Everything is blacked out beneath that depth," Hackney said. "Whether you're fishing in dirty or clear water, a largemouth is a sight-oriented feeder. He'll only be as deep as the light is penetrating, because if he can't see the forage, he can't find it to attack it."

There are times when bass will pull out into slightly deeper water, but still hold within 10 inches from the surface.



Light penetration through muddy water is a key consideration to bass pro Greg Hackney when he picks lures and areas.

LEAVE IT ON THE TRAILER?

Hackney is not a fan of "trashy, dirty water." That's his description of fresh, muddy water still rife with sediment throughout the water column. He's convinced that bass don't want to be anywhere near that kind of water, because it suffocates them. Once that water takes on a cloudy tinge, albeit still dirty, he'll regain his confidence in an area.

Don't bother fishing muddy water on cloudy days or in the dark; he said it robs the opportunity for natural light to work its magic. If Hackney is in a tournament and has to fish under those conditions, he's going to the shallowest inhabitable water possible, since the sun will most likely penetrate that area first.

PERSISTENCE IS KEY >



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Here's mud
in your eye!

PERSISTENCE IS KEY

The biggest mistake that Hackney sees anglers commit is strictly mental: they lack perseverance. Hackney makes repetitive casts to a target from a variety of angles. Anglers need to understand that under such conditions, the strike zone of a bass isn't much better than 10 inches. Even when the bite is hot, he'll continue changing his casting angles to keep fish biting and may utilize the T-H Marine HydroWave to keep them fired up when the bite begins to be fall off.

THE WAR CHEST

Hackney believes that reaction baits retrieved steadily are the deal in muddy water; it isn't the time to be imparting action to a bait.

"You don't want to move the bait erratically; they'll miss it since they can't see as well," he said. "The fish will tell you the rate of speed, but I'll start slow.

Baits that displace the most water also get the nod.

The lazy, side-to-side wobble and pronounced rattle of a chartreuse/black Strike King 4s requires Hackney to fish the bait more slowly. So he uses a Lews BB1 Pro baitcasting reel with a 6.3:1 retrieve ratio, spooled with 12-pound Gamma Edge fluorocarbon on a 7-foot medium action, Lews Hack Attack freshwater casting rod.

A spinnerbait may have escaped the interest of some, but Hackney always has one tied on. He still fishes old, production models made by Strike King featuring a small, gold Colorado and turtle blade combo outfitted with a chartreuse skirt. Ever the tinkerer, Hackney also builds $\frac{3}{8}$ - to $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce spinnerbaits with an orange Colorado blade and a gold turtle blade in the rear. An orange Colorado blade has long been a secret of many pros when fishing muddy water.

GETTING JIGGY

Hackney's favorite mousetrap is the Strike King Thunder Cricket bladed jig.

"Every strike feels like they're trying to rip the rod out your hands," he said.

To be able to cover water while keeping the bait high in the water column, he adds a bulkier Strike King Perfect Skirt and a Rage swimmer trailer. On a half-ounce bladed jig — especially when bass are feeding on shad — a 4.75 Rage Swimmer gets the nod over the standard 3.75 model.

For anyone who has followed Hackney's career, it comes as no surprise that he's always looking for opportunities to fish a jig.

"If I can catch them on a jig, I'll catch all of them," he said. "The hookup is better with a jig than a



Crankbaits with built-in rattles, like the Strike King 4, are effective in dingy to muddy water; just as important is a wide, side-to-side wobble that displaces water. **BELOW:** Make repeated casts to spots likely to hold bass to make sure the bait comes through their visual strike zone.



Texas-rigged bait.”

Hackney will fish a ½-ounce Strike King Hack Attack jig, and to slow the rate of fall, he'll add a Strike King Rage Tail Lobster trailer because it displaces more water than a Rage Craw.

Hackney wants a compact presentation, so he'll trim the bait at the second or third knuckle before threading it onto the jig.

“You aren't trying to get them to react,” he said. “It's not like flipping in clear water where you want them to run out and get it. You want to let it hang in front of the bass, giving them the opportunity to see it.”

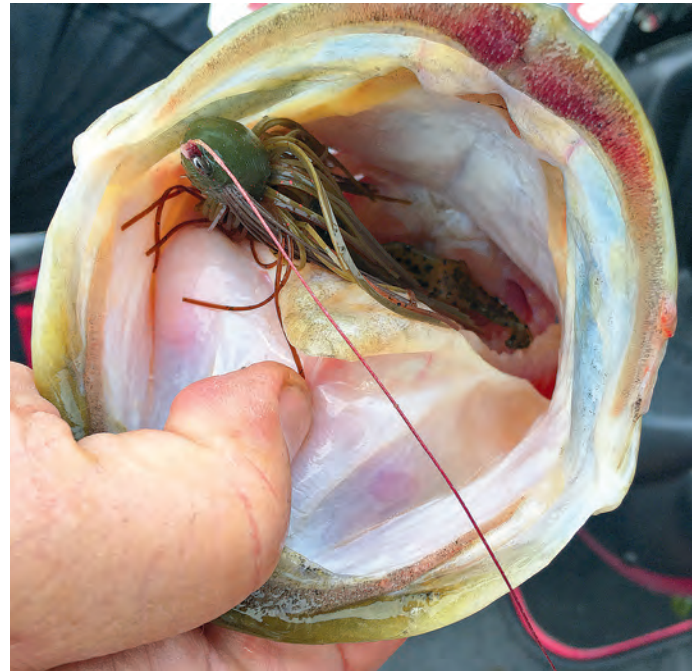
Many anglers might believe a ½-ounce jig is too heavy in shallow water, but Hackney disagrees.

“Consider this: a ½-ounce jig with a Rage Craw has the same rate of fall as a Rodent rigged on a ¼-ounce slip sinker,” he said. “A ½-ounce jig with a Lobster falls at the same rate as a Magnum Rage Bug rigged on a ⅝-ounce sinker. That Lobster moves a lot of water on a ½-ounce jig, I'm a big fan.”

When flipping or pitching a bait weighing ¾-ounce or less, Hackney opts for the 7-foot-6 model of his signature series Lews flipping stick, and the 7-foot-11 model for anything heavier. The only reel he needs is a Lews Custom Pro — 8.3:1 retrieve ratio — spooled with 65-pound Gamma Torque braid, which also helps slow the rate of fall. ■



Jonathan LePera is an avid angler and outdoor writer from Ontario, Canada. He lives near lakes Erie and Ontario, home to world class bass, walleye, and trout fishing, which are separated by the Niagara Falls.



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It's that time of year when homeowners swell with pride as neighbors, guests and passersby pass out compliments. "Lawn's lookin' nice," they say.

Well, bass anglers also love their grass, if only the aquatic type.

"It's 100% important to summertime bass fishing," Stephen Johnston, a guide on Toledo Bend reservoir, said of aquatic vegetation. "It pumps out so much oxygen (that) it brings baitfish in, and that brings fish in. It doesn't have to be 20 feet deep — it can be 5 to 20 feet deep. It just varies based on where you are in the state."

Just like that diligent homeowner who studies the growing cycles of his lawn, notes the impacts of climate, pests and competing weeds, the savvy bass angler looks at grass with an equally discerning eye.

"Grass," in bass-fishing parlance, is a rather broad term, often loosely used in reference to an array of aquatic vegetation.

Hands-down, hydrilla dominates the show, day-in and day-out. Not so popular with lake managers and waterfront homeowners, this thick-growing plant forms broad banks that grow from the bottom and often top out to form dense mats that collect a variety of drifting plants.



MOST BASS FISHERMEN KNOW THAT GRASS MEANS BASS, BUT WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN FACED WITH MILES OF SALAD? THESE PROS OFFER THEIR TOP TIPS.

■ By David A. Brown

GRASS GAME PLANS



BASS PRO DENNIS TIETJE

of Roanoke, who fishes the FLW Pro Circuit, pointed out that hydrilla might also mix with coontail and milfoil — particularly in rivers.

Depth for the hydrilla foundation varies by location.

“In the Red River, the grass can be in 5 to 7 feet, while down in the Atchafalaya Basin it can be 4 to 6, but in big reservoirs like Toledo Bend, it can be as deep as 12 to 18 feet,” Johnston said.

Elsewhere, other vegetation fits the grass game by offering the shelter, oxygen and feeding opportunities bass. The smaller, surface-topping leaves of peppergrass make for prime bass habitat, as does the wiry, emergent alligator grass.

Tietje also includes the wispy pencil reeds in this scenario.

“Anything that provides shade for the bass, you can’t go wrong,” he said.

Finding grass often requires little more than visual recon — by June, a lot of the shallow hydrilla, peppergrass and alligator grass will have reached the surface, while pencil reeds are usually airing out their tips.

Using Toledo Bend as another example, deeper lakes might hold a lot of their grass below the surface year-round.

“In deeper spots, I’ll locate the grass with my electronics, and then I’ll idle around to find the edges and the (contour),” Johnston said.

When evaluating grass opportunities, consider these criteria:

ACCESS

What types of baits can make it through the cover, and how easy will it be for bass to reach the surface?

“First of all, I look at the thickness — that’s No. 1,” Tietje said. “Is it matted grass or structured grass, where the fish can move around at will like pencil reeds or peppergrass?”

“When fish can feed up through the canopy, they’re more likely to hit a surface lure.”

WATER CLARITY >

A plastic frog bait is a favorite for anglers who are searching for bass under thick mats of aquatic vegetation.



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Bass or other fish, gamefish or baitfish, will use grassbeds for a number of reasons, including protection and ambush.

WATER CLARITY

At first blush, it might sound like circular logic, but clear water hastens grass growth; grass filters water to improve clarity. But the point is, areas less given to stained outflows typically see the most-robust growth of bottom-anchored grasses.

“The matted grass is going to be your key areas,” Tietje said. “The grass needs sunlight to grow, so it grows really well in clear water. If you get into grass in muddy water, the fish aren’t as attracted to it as they are in the clear-water conditions.”

GATHERING SPOTS

In any scenario, but particularly in the marsh, Tietje likes grass on the edges of points. Water dynamics and fish behavior are the beacons here.

“Points are always the most-active area of any grass bed,” Tietje said. “It’s your passing zone, your current break, the ambush points. You can call it a number of things; it’s just where the party happens.”

Greg Hackney of Gonazles, host of Sportsman TV and a Major League Fishing pro, also looks for drains that channel baitfish, and holes within a hydrilla bed that indicate rocks or stumps below. Solid objects block grass growth, and bass often gravitate toward this additional structure.

Contour points or boat lanes cutting through a grass mat are always attractive, but J.T. Kenney a former pro and now an analyst for Major League Fishing’s television show, looks for established patches of hydrilla.

These floating bouquets can clear out hydrilla below to form spacious bass-friendly caverns with overhead cover.

SIGNS OF LIFE

When you first approach an area of emergent grass, pause on the perimeter and listen. Hackney said he anticipates good things when he hears the telltale popping and cracking of bluegill sucking insects off the surface.

Even if the bass aren’t specifically targeting bream, the presence of bream is always a good indicator of a healthy and food-rich environment.

WHAT’S THE WEATHER?

When gauging the day’s conditions, think light penetration. Windy days break up the surface, while dim skies further reduce the sun’s reach.

“When you have to put your sunglasses on, the fish are the same way,” Johnston said. “On those drizzly, cloudy days, they’ll be out roaming the edges, but bright conditions will push them deep into the grass.”

In looser vegetation where bass can reach the surface without pushing through a foot of salad, weedless topwater presentations can offer a ton of fun.

Johnston often starts his mornings by working a hollow-bodied frog across stands of leafy peppergrass.

Straight vegetation is certainly attractive by itself, but add in some laydowns, stumps or any other structure and the opportunity level rises.

The same strategy works in shorter duration over those random holes in weed mats, as well as any little cuts and dips in



the contour or sections of scattered hydrilla clumps.

Complementing the floating frogs, a noisy, water-sputtering surface presentation also appeals to grass bass. Buzzbaits have their place in those less-dense scenarios, but Johnston suggested buzzing the lawn with a weedless swimbait or a 7-inch ribbontail worm rigged with a 1/16-ounce weight.

Tietje tempts grass fish with a Strike King Rage Toad rigged on a Stanley Double Take hook. He’ll further extend his Toad’s bite by sliding on a Lake Fork Tackle frog trailer, which adds a third barb while remaining virtually weedless.

Around grass edges, particularly those spots where subsurface objects stunt its growth, Hackney said a spinnerbait or vibrating jig can call up a mean bass bite in those dimmer conditions.


He might also work the grass edges for reaction bites by flipping a 1-ounce Strike King Hack Attack jig with a Rage Craw or Rage Menace trailer.

A BIG PUNCH

In healthy weed mats, Kenney punches through the vegetation with a black/blue Gambler Why Not, a beaver-style bait, Texas rigged on a 4/0 Cobra flipping hook with a 1½-ounce Reins tungsten weight.

Pitching presentations allow him to stay back and reach his targets without spooking the fish.

Bass might vary their preference for mat thickness, but when Kenney targets super-dense weeds, he’ll use a 2-ounce punch weight to swing his bait upward, then drive it through the cover.

 Structured grasses can be fished with a number of different lures because it grows vertically, with space in between strands.

Tietje follows a similar plan with a Strike King Rodent. He'll match his weight size to grass thickness, but he likes to start out with a ½-ounce model to cover water quickly.

Regardless of grass thickness, Tietje uses a bobber stop to keep the weight in contact with the bait so the rig falls as one unit at all times.

EDGE MASTERS

Crankbaits can also trigger bites when bass roam grass edges. Johnston favors the Strike King 5XD or 6XD around shallow to mid-depth grass, but he won't hesitate to dig deep with the hefty 10XD when working deeper grass beds.

Now, grass types and appropriate bait selections will vary by location and angler preference, but here's a constant: pulling power. Leave those whippy rods in the locker and eliminate fears of tangled break-offs by spooling up with braided line.

Grass holds serious bass potential, and when you connect with a whopper that collects its body weight in weeds on your line, you'll just chuckle in victory as that braid slices cleanly through the impediment. ■



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



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TOP BAIT COLORS

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You can't go wrong with the conventional wisdom of darker-colored baits for dim days and/or stained water and brighter colors — or at least bright, reflective flecks — on sunny days.

However, when punching thick mats, former pro J.T. Kenney finds most of his strikes occur as soon as his bait penetrates the grass, so color plays a minimal role in these reaction bites.

That being said, presentations in more-open



The color of lures is more important in situations where matted grass isn't a factor.

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grass scenarios can benefit from a little more color-conscious approach.

Options are many, but pro Dennis Tietje considers color patterns that mimick bream good fallbacks.

"On colors, you get a double-dip by staying with green pumpkin and watermelon, because not only are those fish are eating crawfish, but they're also transitioning to bream that time of year, he said. "Green pumpkin and watermelon really imitate a bream."

As Tietje pointed out, bluegill present a wide range of hues, so experimenting beyond those two basic colors is a good bet. Observation, he said, is your best tool.

"You really have to look at your bream in your areas and match your bait color appropriately," he said.

Brightly colored braid helps anglers notice subtle strikes while flipping and pitching, but it's also pretty obvious to fish. So avoid spooking your quarry by coloring the last 6 feet of your line black with a permanent marker. ■

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4 BASS PROS, WITH 4 FAVORITE BAITS

By Don Shoopman

With the last cold front far behind them and summer on its way, four Louisiana bass pros were eager to talk about the artificial lures they'll use to catch bass in June.

It's usually a time when more and more anglers get on the water. However, there were more boats out than usual in March and April as people took social distancing to heart during the first few months of the coronavirus pandemic.

Restrictions and guidelines put in place on the national and state levels put a hiatus to the pro bass tournament circuits, so pros Brett Preuett, Tyler River, Randy Allen and Greg Hackney had time to talk about the way they intend to catch bass this month in and out of state.

CREME, SPRO PLASTIC FROGS TRIGGER JUNE BITES FOR PREUETT

Fishermen addicted to the thrill of a topwater bite — everything from a blasting blowup or a subtle “suck it under” bite — will absolutely love what bass pro Brett Preuett of Monroe ties on in June.

“If you only gave me one bait, it'd probably have to be a frog, I've had a lot of success with it all day, daylight to dark. I'm a topwater guy,” said Brett Preuett, a former Louisiana-Monroe college fishing star now in great now in his fourth year as a Bassmaster Elite Series pro.

Preuett relies on a frog, for sure, and more than one: a Creme Du-Dad or a SPRO Poppin' Bronzeye Frog.

“There are a lot of good frogs out there. Those are my two favorites,” said Preuett, who was a boy when he got hooked on hooking bass on plastic frogs.



Photo courtesy Brett Preuett

“I started liking frog when I grew up fishing a cypress tree lake. When I was 10 years old I caught my first one. I haven't put it down since ... as soon as the water gets 58 degrees,” he said.

Preuett throws the Du-Dad where vegetation — grass, lily pads, coontail and such — is sparse, with plenty of holes. The bait, with a typical frog-shaped design, a baitfish paint job and paddletail feet, is murder during the shad spawn, he said, and his go-to choice when he needs to cover water. He uses a steady retrieve across the surface, like a buzzbait, and



SPRO Poppin' Bronzeye Frog

Photo courtesy tacklewarehouse.com

“If you only gave me one bait, it'd probably have to be a frog.”

waits for the strike.

When he's targeting heavier cover and cypress trees, he goes for the SPRO frog; he likes to skip the bogus amphibian. He leaves slack in the line while he uses a "walk-the-dog" retrieve with the SPRO bait, which has a cupped-mouth, designed by bass pro Dean Rojas.

Preuett has the two frogs tied on different rods, but he fishes the same line and reel: 60-pound Sunline Fx2 braid on a Shimano Mitanium DC with an 8:1 retrieve.

For the Du-Dad, he prefers a 7-foot-5 Shimano Zodias EH baitcasting rod. His choice for the Pop-pin' Frog is a 7-foot-2, heavy action Shimano rod.

He uses a 1/8-ounce Gamakatsu Superline Offset extra wide gap hook on the Du-Dad.

When bass hit either plastic frog, he's learned over the years to be disciplined on the hookset.

"I try to do 'Two-Mississippi' and let that fish have it," he said, noting he likes to bend the twin-hook setup up slightly on the SPRO Bronzeye Poppin' Frog. ■



Creme Du-Dad

Photo courtesy cremelure.com

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IT'S NO FLUKE! ZOOM'S GREAT BAIT WOWS BASS AS ALLEN FISHES IN JUNE

From Caddo Lake to Lake Seminole, Toledo Bend and Lake Sam Rayburn, bass pro Randy Allen of Gilliam knows what he'll thread on a 4/0 wide-gap hook to catch bass in June.

Allen, an FLW Pro Tour angler, said his choice is a Zoom Super Fluke, the soft plastic that has carved a well-deserved niche in the bassfishing world since its heyday in the 1990s. Allen and countless other anglers swear by it, no matter where they fish.

"Because it's so versatile," said Allen, who put the Fluke to work during an FLW tournament on Georgia's Lake Seminole when he noticed an area that looked a place on Caddo Lake where he fished a Fluke regularly. He caught a 4½-pound fish on the first cast, repeated that success a few casts later and found a handful of similar places and rode the bait through the tournament.

"The same thing worked there ... up north in New York. It's amazing how that bait's so productive. You don't have to be in a certain place to fish it. It's definitely one of our go-to baits year-round," Allen said.

And, he said, the Fluke continues to entice the right bites on his favorite lakes in the region, noting, "I've been fishing Rayburn a lot. Rayburn's been a bigger home lake to me than Toledo Bend."

Allen adds three little extra touches to enhance the bait's fishability. First, he inserts an aluminum nail into the bait's head, adding weight. He also dips the tip of the bait's tail in chartreuse JJ's Magic



Photo courtesy Randy Allen

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“It’s amazing how that bait’s so productive. You don’t have to be in a certain place to fish it.”

Dippin’ Dye and lathers the Fluke in crawfish or baitfish Smelly Jelly.

His “absolute favorite” two colors are watermelon/gold and green pumpkin/candy, the latter a custom color that seems to be more effective in clearer water.

Allen said he mostly fishes the Fluke in 2- to 6-foot depths, particularly around grassy areas and structure early, then hooks one on a Carolina rig to probe deeper depths later in the day.

“I throw it out and let it sink early in the morning around creek beds with ditches off them, twitch it a couple times, and if they don’t hit, go (cast) to the next spot. I fish it pretty quick but slow during the presentation,” he said.

Carolina-rigged, Allen favors a 7-foot-5 Gloomis medium heavy or heavy baitcasting rod and a Shimano Metanium reel with a 7.5:1 ratio. Otherwise, he uses a 7-foot Power Tackle rod.

Allen fishes the Carolina-rigged Fluke on 17-pound Seagaur Tatsu fluorocarbon tied to 40-pound Power Pro braid. Otherwise, he uses 15-pound fluorocarbon. ■

Photo by Tony Taylor



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SCUM FROG IN BLACK OR WHITE IS RIVET'S NO. 1 BAIT IN JUNE

A Cajun Country angler loves to do some froggin', and he gets excited about it when he does. Tyler Rivet's froggin' success story isn't about grabbing or sticking the tasty, four-legged amphibians and putting them in the ice chest, although he's probably pretty good at that. It's all about tying on a plastic frog and setting the hook on heart-stopping bites when he's bass-fishing, especially in June. Rivet, a Bassmaster Elite Series pro from Raceland said, "I do it all year-round in Louisiana. They hit it in January."

But June is when bass really love to eat the bogus frogs, which explains why they are his top choice this time of year. Rivet, however, hedged his pick ever so slightly.

"Yeah, it's like my No. 1 thing about this time of year. If I ain't punchin', I'm froggin'. That frog fishing's my favorite. Well, it's about 50-50," he said.

Rivet is very serious about his penchant and passion for catching bass on plastic frogs, namely Scum Frog Pro Series models.

A former collegiate bass angler at Nicholls State, Rivet, 25, works the bait quickly and effectively with his 7-foot-6 Laken Sixgill Rod, Sixgill Wraith baitcasting reel and 65-pound Power Pro braid.

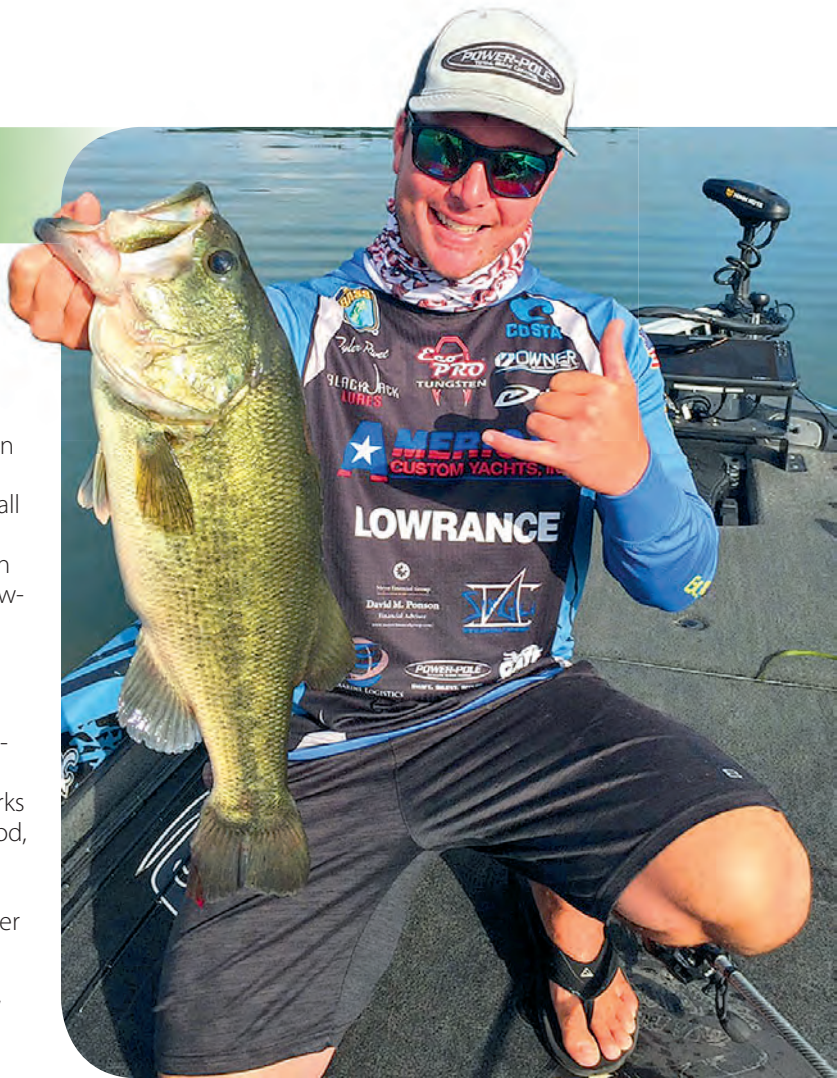
"Everybody says, 'Why do you always work the frog so fast?' A lot of people go slow. I do it fast. It's a reaction bite. I like to cover water. It's all about the bite," he said.

Occasionally a bass might miss when he's retrieving the bait with a "walking" cadence, "but most of the time they destroy it."

Bass in his home waters of Bayou Black, Lake Boeuf and Des Allemands have seen plenty of the Scum Frog.

"I just like it. What they have is a No. 4 Owner frog hook on there. That's like win/win right there," Rivet said. "I stick to just two colors: black or white. Normally, I have both of them tied on."

A Scum Frog helped Rivet win the Louisiana B.A.S.S. Nation state tournament with partner Jared Bascle on Bayou Signette. Rivet got a big bass to blast and miss his frog. His follow-up cast, with a Senko, produced a 6-pound fish that anchor a 19.2-pound limit.



"That's another thing. If they miss it, throw a Senko. (About) 60, 65% of the time, they'll get it. You want to get it in there as soon as possible, before the ripples go away," he said. ■

“Everybody says, ‘Why do you always work the frog so fast?’ A lot of people go slow. I do it fast. It’s a reaction bite.”



Photos courtesy americanbaitworks.com

HACKNEY CRANKS UP GOOD BASS IN JUNE ON KVD 1.5, 2.5 SQUARE-BILLS

In places where few anglers cast any lure with more than one hook, Greg Hackney of Gonzales fishes his go-to lure for June: a Strike King KVD 1.5 or 2.5, both baits that carry two treble hooks.

Hackney's favorite places to fish the crankbait — or a Strike King Pro Model 4S — are around cypress trees and cypress knees, which often seem to reach out and grab any lure, whether it's got one barb or nine. He's learned over the years what needs to happen to pull it through those and other wood structures without getting snagged frequently, if at all.

"I've got a lot of trial-and-error. Everything is to increase fish catches," said Hackney, 48, who fishes the Major League Fishing Bass Pro Tour.

He said it's mostly the presentation and the type of rod he uses. The key is not using a graphite rod to fish a crankbait, he said, suggesting a composite or even fiberglass model to get the job done.

"I've always thrown a crankin' rod designed to throw crankbaits," said Hackney, who chooses which crankbait to fish depending on the size of the baitfish that are around. "You'll catch more fish, and you won't get hung up as much. If you get a bite, you won't react as quick. The other thing; it won't rip the hooks out of the mouth. It's just win/win."

Another tip to lessen the number of hang-ups in the cypress trees, cypress knees and heavy, wooded structure is to fish the 2.5 bait on 20-pound monofilament. He'll use 16- to 20-pound Gamma flourocarbon when he's got a 1.5 or 4S, unless he wants to get a 1.5 down deeper with more action, which calls for 14-pound Gamma flouro.

For increased hookups, Hackney changes out the hooks on the 1.5 and the 2.5, even though, he said, the hooks the crankbaits are packaged with are "good hooks." He exchanges the 1.5's No. 4 treble hooks for two No. 2 short-shank trebles. He exchanges the 2.5's No. 2 trebles for No.1 short-shank trebles. The benefit is a larger treble that doesn't hang any lower than the stock treble.



Photo courtesy majorleaguefishing.com

Why a crankbait in the first place?

"June's just a big crankbait month. Most of the time in our area, there's a lot of cranking. Fish are shallow. It seems those fish like something moving that time of year," he said. "They like to chase (shad and perch). They're really more susceptible to a crankbait. When it gets hot, they like a crankbait," he said. "The KVD 1.5, cold water, hot water, year-round, it catches a 6-pounder as much as a 2-pounder."

Hackney, host of Sportsman TV, uses two basic colors.

"Really, a black/chartreuse or a sexy shad are the only two you need," he said, noting that a black/chartreuse SK 4S is hard to beat on his home waters. The SK 4S excels around cypress trees and cypress knees because of the way it deflects off the wood, like a balsa crank bait, he said.

His reel of choice is Lew's BB1 Pro, which has a 6.3:1 retrieve and was designed by the crankbait king himself, David Fritts.

"You need a reel to make long casts, short casts. And speed is an important thing on a crank bait — 6.3:1 is perfect," Hackney said. ■

“It seems those fish like something moving that time of year. They like to chase.”



Photo courtesy strikeking.com

TOLEDO BEND ➤

SHALLOW AND DEEP

High water gives Toledo Bend anglers a few more exciting options this month

It's getting to be that time of year to gas up the boat, then idle around Toledo Bend focusing on your electronics to pick out ridges, creeks and drains in deep water — a great way to find and put bass in the boat.

I can't wait for June, after so many of the bass transition from shallow to mid-range depths to depths of 20 feet or more. I got a sampling earlier this year of the wonders of Garmin Panoptix LiveScope. When the time comes, I'll look for schools of bass out there where times you can catch them quickly on drop-shots, crankbaits and Carolina-rigged soft plastics.

The bass you find in deeper water seem to be consistently the same size — larger than the ones caught shallower. And while you're fishing, keep your eyes peeled, particularly over drains where bass push shad to the surface and maul as many as they can in typical schooling action.

All that said, however, successful bass fishermen will still start the day shallow. That's my first choice until the water gets too hot and/or the baitfish leave the shallows.

The option of fishing depths of 8 feet or less ought to be a very good one considering how high the lake's pool stage got in March and April. In February and March, the pool stage was 169 to 170, but by the end of April, it was up to 173.13. We have touched on the possibility that the water might get up in the bushes. Well, it has happened, and there is prime bass cover everywhere in the inundated areas.

One of my favorite spots with flooded cover has given up quality fish and plenty of bass recently. I admit I haven't been to the Solon's area in 25 years, but making the latest trips there was rewarding; there was 3½ feet of water around many of the bushes.

Bass are free to move into hard-to-get-at places along the flooded shoreline. As the water falls out, whenever it does, they'll be positioned on the outside stuff before they leave, which gives anglers easier access to them.

By late May and June, the bass spawn should be played out, with the exception of a few very late spawners. Mostly, bass will be in the post-spawn stage. When it's time, they will migrate to their early summer and summer haunts, a lot of them in 15- to 20-foot depths. Until then, topwaters (Chug Bugs, Zara Spooks) — including my favorites, plastic frogs like the Top Toad — and bladed jigs like the Delta Lures Thunder Jig are so effective, as well as chartreuse/blue/white or golden bream-colored spinnerbaits. Golden bream is the bullet on this lake.

There are acres of shallow milfoil in drains around the lake; I would target those, too, if possible. It was great to see that lily pads are growing and should be prolific by June. That bodes well, as last year, the plastic frog bite was on in the lily pads, and I



Jean Ledet has a firm grip on a 3-pound bass that nailed a Fluke in late spring 2019 while fishing with John Dean near the dam at Toledo Bend.

Photo courtesy John Dean

had a blast every time I fished them.

I will play that shallow game until something tells me to go find bass in deeper water. That's where plenty of gas, and the marine electronics come into play as you search for structure holding bass.

Top June colors for soft plastics on drop-shots, Ned rigs, Neco rigs and Carolina rigs are redbug, junebug/red and plum apple. That's the deal right there, starting with redbug at the top. For crankbaits, choose baitfish colors.

Later on, when the dog days of summer arrive, that early bite's duration is usually an hour or so first thing in the morning. Then, it'll be time to head out to deeper stuff.

The water clarity should improve tremendously before June, so it helps to downsize to 10- or 12-pound fluorocarbon on a spinning rig for the drop-shots, Neco rigs and Ned rigs and 12- or 14-pound fluorocarbon for crankbaits. I'm partial to 40-pound test Power Pro green braid for my frogging. ■

— John Dean



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

THE BUZZ AT CHICOT ➤



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THE BUZZ AT CHICOT

Black buzzbait is June killer, if lake is open

Bass-fishing success at Chicot Lake, nestled in the hills of Chicot State Park north of Ville Platte, has been like a time bomb, ready to explode.

All that needs to happen is for state park officials to reopen it to the public. Chicot State Park, Bayou Segnette State Park and Lake Bistineau State Park were tagged as regional medical staging areas, intended for people waiting on test results for coronavirus who couldn't be sent home. Those quarantined have been living in the state park's rental cabins and mobile homes.

Chicot State Park, which provides public access to the lake with three boat ramps, was closed to the public March 18. State-park officials, angler Andre Oliver of Eunice said recently, closed the front gate, and that was the end of that.

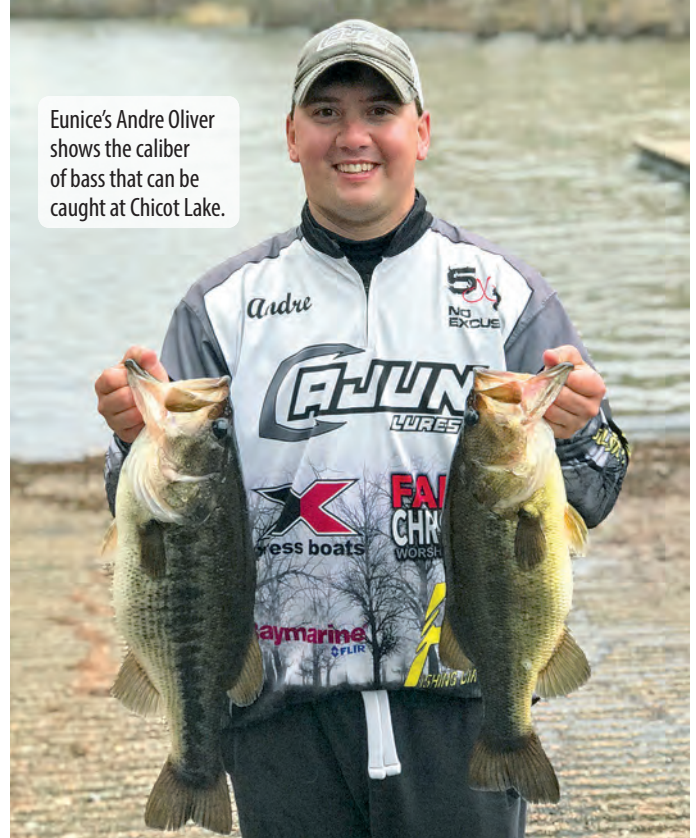
"We haven't been able to fish it for about a month-and-a-half now," he said.

Oliver, 31, was chomping at the bit to fish Chicot, hopefully starting in late May and for sure in June. So were hundreds of other bass anglers.

"I know when it opens back up, it's going to be on fire," Oliver said.

Why? The lack of fishing pressure for such an extended period will make a big difference in the bite, he said. The lake's bass haven't been bombarded by lures day after day after day.

Eunice's Andre Oliver shows the caliber of bass that can be caught at Chicot Lake.



Photos courtesy Andre Oliver

"Typically, it gets a lot of fishing pressure starting in May," said Oliver, who has been fishing the 2,000-acre lake since the mid-2000s. His two biggest bass were both close to 9 pounds, one in August 2015 and the other in March 2018.

Oliver has learned where, how and when to target bass with the



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most-effective lures. June, one of his favorite months, is when he relies mostly on a black buzzbait with a black blade

After wearing out the bass in the weeks before the state park's closure on a homemade, bladed jig, a hand-tied chartreuse/white hair-jig skirt, silver-bladed Calcutta Jig made in Opelousas, Oliver has been biding his time to get back in there with his trusty all-black 3/8-ounce Chunk Buster buzzbait.

"Typically, from this time on, I throw a Chunk Buster all the way into October. It's made by a guy in Shreveport. He makes a really good buzzbait," he said.

If it's a bluebird sky, he'll change to a white buzzbait, he said.

"I kill them on that buzzbait no matter what time of year. It's easy to target," he said.

On days when bass might turn up their noses at the buzzbait — or heavy vegetation discourages its use — he'll tie on a green pumpkin/silver Cooyon Croaker, a frog bait made by Cajun Lures in Nunez.

Oliver concentrates on the southern end and midsection of Chicot and rarely fishes up past the Ski Lake area.

"We fish in there, too, before the grass gets too bad," said Oliver, who prefers to fish in the Turtle Island area and the "Community Hole" near the bridge.

"Where I like to fish, basically, is where the boat lane ends. I keep on trucking. I love that place. Cypress trees mixed with tupelo trees. Two things I'm looking for that time of year ... duckweed and cypress trees with hydrilla around them. Bass get up under the duckweed and wait."

Oliver ties the Cooyon Croaker to 30- or 40-pound Power Pro braid, noting that when a bass hits the frog, it's a violent strike.

When he's fishing around cypress trees and hydrilla, Oliver's approach involves a weightless, Texas-rigged Senko-style soft plastic — either a Cajun Lures Baton Jr. or a Big Bite Baits Can Stick — fished on spinning tackle with 20-pound braid and a 14-pound fluorocarbon leader. A spinning combo, he explained, allows him to skip the soft-plastic stickbait up under the branches.

The average depth he fishes is anywhere from 1 foot to 5 feet and as deep as 8 feet. On overcast days, he said, anglers can stay shallow and still catch plenty of good-sized bass. ■

— Don Shoopman



A black buzzbait with a black blade is Andre Oliver's go-to lure when he fishes Chicot Lake in June.

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LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman



MISTER TWISTER SASSY SWIMMER

SWIMBAIT IS A GREAT JIG, SPINNERBAIT TRAILER, BUT IT WORKS GREAT WHEN RIGGED BY ITSELF

Pro angler Clent Davis picked just the right soft-plastic bait for his 4-year-old daughter to use on a half-day bass-fishing trip in late April on Lay Lake in east-central Alabama.

Davis, a Bassmaster Elite Series pro from Montevallo, Ala., had Kayt, who caught the first bass of her life March 16, casting and catching fish on Mister Twister's new 4-inch Tri-Com Sassy Swimmer, which is scheduled to hit the market in June.

Davis, his daughter and his cousin, Matt Davis, all fished the Sassy Swimmer on handmade, ¼-ounce ball-head jigs, landing 15 to 20 spotted bass in about four hours. It was one of his best outings with the new soft plastic from Mister Twister.

"We had a blast catching spotted bass just off points. They were feeding up, just eating any shad that swims by ... or the swimbait," Davis said.

It was one of those cases where bass resisted anything but Sassy Swimmers — and Davis believes he knows why. The Sassy Swimmer's tail design is ideal for bass that don't want a big, thumping tail. And there are many times when the bass are in that mode.

Davis has fished it successfully many other ways to put bass big and small in his boat. They are effective on a shaky head jig when the bite's tough and Carolina-rigged, he said.

"It's got a lot of uses, definitely," he said, noting it shines as a soft-plastic trailer on swim jigs, bladed jigs and spinnerbaits.

Greg Yates of Oak Point, Texas, agrees. A veteran pro angler and angler relations manager for the Bass Pro Shops/Cabela's Big Bass Tour, said the Sassy Swimmer can't be beat as a soft plastic trailer.

Mostly, Yates said, it doesn't overpower the swim jig or bladed jig. In other words, while it has its own action, the Sassy

Swimmer lets those jigs do what they're designed to do.

"It's absolutely magic on a swim jig. I see this bait being a superior trailer than others on the market," Yates said, citing its soft, thin, ribbed body as the major reason.

What the new soft plastic really, really has going for it, Davis and Yates said, is one of the reasons it was created: the sharp, enticing triple-color look. The Sassy Swimmer is the first artificial lure in the TRI-COM series, according to a spokesman for Mister Twister, the lure manufacturer based in Minden.

Davis and Yates began using them



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.

consistently in January. All 16 TRI-COM colors impress them tremendously.

“They look great; they really do. They definitely did a great job with the colors,” said Davis, who said his favorites are pro blue chartreuse and AYU.

Yates, who fishes the oft-stained waters of Lake Fork and Lake Ray Roberts, said the lemon-melon shad can't be beat in those waters and in Louisiana waters.

“Every time. I really, really like that the best. It's got white and chartreuse to it and a little green pumpkin down the center. I love whites and chartreuses,” he said.

Yates said the new soft plastic triggered plenty of bites when he fished in Florida.

“I've had it actually since the first part of the year. I got to try it out in Florida in January. I was lucky to be in Florida ... bass are in all three stages then — prespawn, spawn and post-spawn. You get a good read on a bait. It's a great time to try one out, for sure. It did good. It performed beyond expectations,” he said.

Davis said it can be thrown on a spinning combo as well as a baitcasting rod and reel.

“They're not too big for a spinning rod and not too small for a baitcaster,” he said.

“It's not too small. I think it's (4-inch) a great size for it,” he said. ■

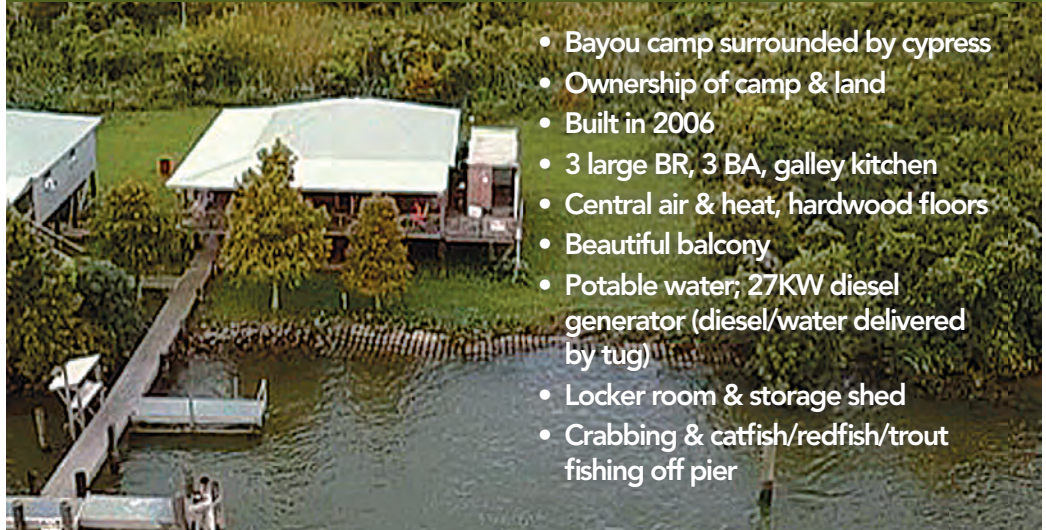
For more information about the Sassy Swimmer and other Mister Twister products, go to www.mistertwister.com or call 318-377-8818.

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bigger, healthier animals.

New for 2020 are five different seed mixes: Rack 'Em Raddish (2-pound bag), Sugar Beets & Bulbs (2-pound bag), Turnip

(2½-pound bag), Mean Bean (10-pound bag) and Clover (2- and 4-pound bags).

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For more info, visit: evolved.com.



MILLENNIUM SPYDERLOK ROD TREE

Millennium Marine's Spyderlok Rod Tree is made for fishermen who want to separate baits they're trolling or drifting.

The Rod Tree, made from anodized aluminum with stainless steel hardware, features three rod holders with oversized tubes for quick rod removal, gimbals in the bottom to prevent the rod from turning or twisting, and a durable rubber boot to protect rod handles.

The Rod Tree swivels 360 degrees horizontally and 180 degrees vertically. Anglers can adjust and position the rod holders as needed to spread their baits. A rod tree on each side of the

bow or stern will allow six baits or lures to be positioned to run at different distances from the boat, and/or at different depths. It mounts on a base-plate or track system, and the mounting plate is flush with the carpet, preventing any stubbed toes.

Two knobs allow for easy removal or adjustment of individual rod holders.

The Rod Tree measures 31x6.5x30.

MSRP: \$199.99.

For more info, visit: millenniummarine.com.

BLACKJACK 256 COASTAL

BlackJack Boats has added a new center console model to its 2020 line, the 256 Coastal, which is sure to be a hit among inshore and nearshore fishermen.

Combining elements of offshore boats and bay boats, the 256 Coastal measures 25-foot-6, with a deeper casting deck and open stern deck to increase inshore fishability without sacrificing the ability to head offshore for bluewater battles.

The 256 Coastal has an 8-foot-6 beam and drafts 16 to 18 inches of water. It is

rated for 400 HP, has an 80-gallon fuel capacity and weighs 2,900 pounds.

A 75-quart YETI cooler is the forward console seat, and the 256 Coastal has three fish boxes, a fiberglass leaning post, four rod-holders, storage and livewell.

Inshore fishermen will love the 6-gauge trolling motor harness, plus an insulated forward baitwell with a re-circulator and fill

For more info, visit: blackjackboats.com



THE JIG IS UP

DEEP-WATER JIGGING IS THE TICKET FOR BOTTOMFISH, EVEN WHEN THERE'S LIVE BAIT ON EVERYONE ELSE'S MENU.

■ By David A. Brown

IT'S A FACT OF LIFE.

Drop a piece of bait over any structure in the northern Gulf of Mexico, from the Midnight Lump to the countless wrecks and reefs to the legs of any drilling rig, and something is gonna eat it.

But is that something always something you want to catch? There are a bunch of sharks and jacks out there, you know.

Well, the easy way will also yield plenty of snapper, grouper, cobia, amberjack and tuna — but for precision targeting, for efficient time management, for the ability to weed out a lot of the riffraff, big jigs are a tool no offshore trip should exclude.

A few basic types of jigs get most of the work in Gulf waters:

- **Bare leadheads.** Fitted with curlytail or paddletail bodies, these straightforward, utilitarian jigs are light on fancy but heavy on effective. Trolling models have narrow noses, while the ball-head style works best for vertical drops.

- **Bucktails.** A dressed-up version of the basic lead-head, hair or synthetic fiber skirts pulse in the water and add a lifelike appearance.

- **Lucanus jigs.** Shimano's proprietary model and Tsunami's Facet Jig feature painted lead heads with dangling hook harnesses and silicone skirts.

- **Diamond jigs.** Faceted like the precious gem but long and thin in form and made of polished metal, this jig hangs a treble hook on a split ring from its aft end.

- **Blade (aka Speed) jigs.** Flat-sided metal forms made to cut through the water for fast up-and-down action. One or two short-shank hooks dangle via harnesses from the top eye, with an optional stinger harness rigged to the jig's bottom end for extra grabbing power.

Probably a good representative of most northern Gulf anglers, Capt. Billy Wells of the Mexican Gulf Fishing Company out of Venice likes blade versions, particularly the Shimano Butterfly jig. But no matter which type of jig you use, Wells noted, these lures offer viable options for days when you can't find live bait or when a hot bite exhausts your supply.

Moreover, there's often a discernible quality principle.

"A lot of times, like with snapper, a jig will produce larger fish than a piece of cut bait," Wells said. "I think the smaller fish may be a little more timid; they're not willing to chase something away from the rig. They're waiting for something slower, easier to catch."

Wells said a jig is also a good tool for reaching deep fish that won't rise in the water column.

A good example: if he marks a school of tuna holding deep that chumming won't get to rise, firing a shiny jig into their midst often triggers a bite.

"On those super-calm, slow-current days, you can drop the jig down on top of them, and, if you have a good fish-finder, you can actually watch the jig go down, and you'll see the tuna start following it down," Wells said "That allows you to work the fish up and down because you know the jig is in the fish."



Bigger red snapper are more likely to leave structure to chase a jig than a smaller fish.

GET 'EM OUT, GET 'EM UP

For fishing a butterfly jig, Capt. Billy Wells uses a 5½-foot Shimano Trevalla rod and Shimano Stella reel loaded with 80-pound PowerPro braid.

Built with an amazingly flexible tip for heavy jigging without excessive exertion, such specialized jig rods also pack the power to whip a big fish way down deep.

On the bite, Wells said it's time for battle.

"You really need to stick that hook (firmly) with several hard sets, and then maintain the pressure," he said. "This is where your braided line is helpful. I use 80-pound braid, and I tighten down my drag."

Past the solid hookset, your sole objective is halting the fish's forward progress. Whether it's a reel stripped by a blazing tuna or a line snapped on a rig leg, you simply must put the brakes on your fish.

Strong side pressure is the most-basic tactic. Lean away from the fish and hold the rod tip at a high angle. Direct, vertical pressure isn't necessarily wrong, but this just creates a tug-of-war between you and the fish.

It's better to add the challenge of directional pressure, as this forces the fish to fight the vertical lift as well as the diagonal influence.

Also, do what you can to increase the angle by running to the other end of the boat or moving the boat away from the rig, wreck or whatever structure you're jigging.

Motor drifting past a rig or backing into the fishing zone affords you the advantage of surging away from the structure when someone hooks a big fish.

When working the rigs for big redfish, Capt. David Iverson starts upcurrent of a rig and uses his trolling motor for controlled drifts past the structure. Minor adjustments keep him at a good fishing proximity with the proper angles for pulling fish out of the structure. ■



A Shimano Flat-Fall Butterfly Jig requires a heavy jigging rod with a flexible tip to drive the hook home and maintain pressure on a fish..

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THE JIG IS UP

For this tactic, Wells likes PowerPro Depth-Hunter braided line, which features alternating 25-foot segments of blue, yellow, green and orange with a black marking every 5 feet for accurate and immediate depth measurement. “You’re basically just trying to get a reaction strike,” Wells said. “When those tuna are just kind of sulking down there, you can drop a live bait right in them, and they won’t eat it. “They’re not feeding, but they’ll bite the jig just to make it go away.”

There are two schools of thought on presentation.

First, a jig can be essentially a transport mechanism for natural bait: a chunk of squid, a dead cigar minnow, a strip of bonito belly. In this case, you’re swapping a lead-and-hook fish-finder or knocker rig for a streamlined, all-in-one package that adds profile and presence to the meat.

Leadheads, bucktails and Lucanus-style jigs do a good job here, although they can also tempt fish without any natural bait being added.

Keep the action moderate when bait’s involved, but add a little pep to the step with standard jigs (tails included here).

Second, when using a diamond or blade jig, you want to work up a sweat. Wells said you just can’t overdo it when you’re trying to imitate a terrified baitfish.

“It’s an active style of fishing — you have to want to do this,” he said of the exaggerated, side-to-side ripping style necessary for a convincing, tempting presentation with the slender chunks of metal.

Wells stressed that effective metal jig presentation requires much more than submersion. Will a big sow snapper or beast AJ intercept a jig on a dead fall? Sure, it happens. But, you’ll



An aggressive hookset and immediate rod pressure can often get a big grouper away from structure quickly.

enjoy greater consistency when you jig it like you mean it.

“It’s very tiring to work these jigs the right way,” Wells said. “The biggest mistake I see people making is not working them hard enough.

“You can’t be (lackadaisical); you can’t just drop it down and wiggle the rod tip a few inches. If you get worn out, it’s better to just make a few drops where you jig it the right way, take a rest and then pick up that jig rod again.”

Think of it this way: You’re trying to imitate a baitfish fluttering and struggling in the water column. If that baitfish spots a set of jaws headed his way, how’s he going to respond?

Make your jig look like that terrified baitfish and you’ll get plenty of attention. ■



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



Amberjack are just one of a handful of fish that can be caught around rigs and wrecks by anglers deep-jigging.

REDS OF THE RIGS

Bull redfish hanging around shallow-water rigs in the Gulf are prime targets for fishermen with jigs.

Capt. David Iverson typically runs out of Red Pass and targets bull reds in 40 to 50 feet of water around West Delta rigs. However, when he's up for a challenge and the weather permits, he'll take South Pass out his favorite East Delta rigs, where close proximity to the Continental Shelf puts 300-foot water wells within the reach of his bay boat.

But wherever he ends up, he said jigs are really efficient baits.

"I believe in covering territory, and you can cover a lot of territory with a jig," Wells said. "The fish are very seldom just all over a (drilling) platform. Usually, they're on an area of the platform."

"Sometimes, you'll fish on the upstream side of the platform and fish back to the platform. A lot of times, you'll have to throw into the legs and work it back out of the legs."

A ¾- to 1-ounce Bomber Saltwater Grade jig with a large, glow curlytail is his favorite. The luminescent appearance is a real fish-getter in the depths, Iverson said, but it's also a great sight-casting bait when the big, brown shadows appear.

"If you see a cobia out there, you just hurl that baby out there, and they'll eat it," Iverson said. "Glow is just a deadly, deadly color." Iverson casts upcurrent and let his bait fall through the strike zone.

In a swift current, attempts at vertical presentations only end in frustration, as the water blows your bait off course. Similarly, casting downcurrent leaves you fighting the flow to gain any meaningful descent.

Throw upstream and work with the water, not against it.

"I don't like fishing with anything heavier than a 1-ounce jig, and if you throw downcurrent, it's harder to get it to the bottom, unless you use a 2-ounce jig," Iverson said. "I throw upcurrent, let it bounce underneath you, pick it up and do it again."

Iverson said jigging serves him well, because he usually finds the redfish suspended down near the bottom.

When he ventures out to those deeper East Delta rigs, his mix might include cobia, grouper, snapper and amberjack — all spread throughout the water column and all quickly reachable with a jig. ■

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Photo courtesy Mary Flynn

BIG RED SNAPPER TECHNIQUES

By John Phillips

BIG BAITS FOR BIG SNAPPER

Capt. Art Jones of Orange Beach, Ala., said he double-hooks a big bait like a mackerel fillet that is 6 to 8 inches long and 3 to 4 inches wide.

"I've found that bigger baits produce bigger red snapper," Jones said. "A bigger, tougher bait like mackerel will give you more chances to take a red snapper than a smaller bait will."

Other big natural baits include speedo minnows (aka northern mackerel), goggle-eyed snapper or whole squid stuffed with cigar minnows.

PLAY THAT FISH

Once an angler hooks up with a snapper, it's important to know how to get that fish to the boat.

Jones said the key is to stop reeling when a snapper makes a run and peels off drag.

"Wait until the fish stops its run, and then begin to pump and wind — just like you will to land a marlin or a king mackerel," he said. "As long as the fish pulls off line, you'll know your tackle has done the job of helping you land the fish."

"When the line stops, you've got to pump and wind to help the tackle bring the fish to the boat."

But once the fish gets to the boat, the battle still isn't over.

Anglers can lose a snapper at the side of the boat for two reasons.

First, he might get the fish's head out of the water before the first mate is ready to net or gaff it. When the snapper's head is out of the water, and the boat is rocking back and forth with the waves, the weight on the line actually can help pull the hook out of the fish's mouth.

Second, if the hole in the fish's mouth made by the hook is larger than the hook, the hook will fall out if there's any slack in the line, so it's best to keep a snapper under the water until you're ready to land it.

USE THE RIGHT LINE

Jones said the line you use has a direct relationship to the size and number of snapper you take.

For instance, he doesn't like braided lines that have no stretch. Jones said the stretch in monofilament acts like a shock absorber: before the drag begins to slip, the monofilament will stretch like a rubber band, which helps keep the line tight and the hook set firmly in the snapper's mouth.

This stretching also prevents the line from breaking. Jones thinks no-stretch lines allow the snapper to jerk against the line. Because the line doesn't stretch, a snapper will tear a bigger hole in its lips, and the hook will fall out.

So if you're fishing for a really big snapper, don't use no-stretch lines like braid. Instead, stick with old-fashioned monofilament. ■



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USE MACARONI TO CHUM FOR MANGROVE SNAPPER

The absolutely transparent water churned with fish, like a giant aquarium.

The slightly-built, heavily suntanned man threw another handful of macaroni into the seething mass of Bermuda chubs and mangrove snappers.

Macaroni?

You betcha — macaroni.

I shook my head, just like the first time I had heard about using boiled macaroni as chum to lure mangrove snappers out from the legs of offshore oil and gas platforms.

The man who told me about the tactic I leading the fishing expedition that day. David Myers is the owner

Use the biggest elbow macaroni you can find when preparing it for mangrove snapper chum. **ABOVE:** Mangrove snapper will hang around oil and gas platforms during the summer, and chumming will sometimes bring them out where they can be reached with baits and lures.



and president of Acadian Elevator Inc. in Lafayette, but his real passion is offshore fishing from the *Sea Ca Bye*, his 32-foot Scarab Sport.

Beginning in late May, Myers runs 10 or more miles offshore from Grand Isle to chase mangrove snappers and cobia. Some time later in summer, when the Atchafalaya River discharges slacken and offshore waters there clear up, Myers moves closer to home, launching at Cypremont Point for the minimum 30-mile run offshore.

"I was at the Grand Isle Tarpon Rodeo," Myers said, "when an old timer told me about using macaroni boiled in crab boil for mangrove snapper chum.

"He said, 'Sometimes it works; sometimes it doesn't. Usually it does.'"

“ An old timer told me about using macaroni boiled in crab boil for mangrove snapper chum. ”

Myers' preference is for the largest-sized elbow macaroni in the store. The night before the trip, he boiled five 2-pound bags with crab-boil seasoning and stored it in a covered 5-gallon bucket for the trip.

"Be careful not to overcook your macaroni or it gets super-soft," he said.

Overcooking makes it difficult to handle — as does allowing it to dry out — and almost impossible to put on a hook. At times, Myers will use the macaroni for bait, as well as chum.

I asked him why crab boil is added.

He shrugged.

"I don't know if it would work without the boil seasoning," Myers said. "I've never tried what the crab boil has to do with it."

On the water, the men liberally tossed handfuls under and near each rig's legs.

It was cheap, and they didn't have to spend time on the messy job of cutting up fish for chum. ■

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT >

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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

This yellowfin was caught about 45 miles south of the South Pass of Venice by Maurice LeBlanc of Cecilia in mid-May.



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: YELLOWFIN TUNA

THESE BIG, BLUEWATER FISH ARE FUN TO CATCH, QUITE TASTY ON THE DINNER PLATE

Yellowfin tuna, *Thunnus albacares*, swim throughout all the tropical and subtropical oceans of the earth.

Recreational anglers chase them, trolling lures and pitching baits. These fish are fun to catch and excellent table fare.

Among the largest of all tuna species, yellowfins have surpassed 400 pounds. Their name comes from the bright color of their second dorsal fin, their anal fin, and the smaller fins between those fins and the tail. The main body appears a dark metallic blue, fading to silver on the fish's belly. Twenty vertical lines, which vary in visibility, run along the belly.

The oldest yellowfin tunas have disproportionately long second dorsal and anal fins. For decades, fisheries biologists believed they were a different species of tuna entirely.

Often misidentified as a pelagic fish, yellowfins are actually epipelagic, meaning they live in the open ocean, or pelagic

zone, but spend the majority of their lives above the thermocline in the upper layer of that zone. This upper layer, called the epipelagic zone, is usually no deeper than 330 feet. However, yellowfins do infrequently dive as deep as 3,800 feet.

During certain times of the year, in certain regions and under the right conditions, yellowfins swim very close to shore. This expands the numbers of anglers who can target them, as smaller boats can reach them when they are closer to shore.

Yellowfins are a schooling species, and their schools often travel with schools of similarly sized fish in a variety of species. It's common to find them schooling with other tunas, dolphin, and even larger fish like billfish and sharks.

WHAT THEY EAT

In some parts of the world, yellowfins show up in large numbers for several years, then disappear for years. Most fish-

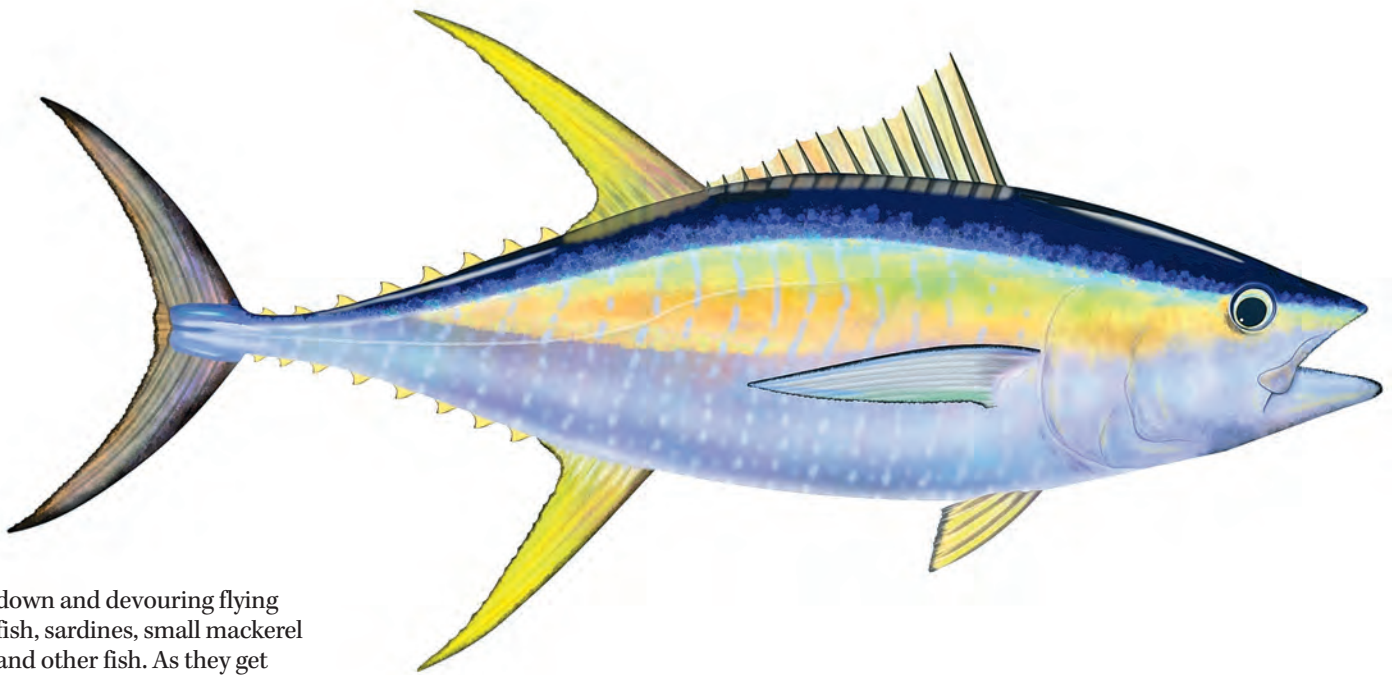
eries biologists believe this is mainly due to the species temporarily finding more suitable conditions in other areas, which change due to weather and other factors.

Anglers trolling for yellowfins never miss the opportunity to troll past floating debris like logs, pallets or other floating objects. These objects attract baitfish, so tuna are always nearby. Likewise, off-shore anglers who encounter grass lines on the surface often throw surface plugs or pitch baits all around the edges, drawing strikes from these fish.

Yellowfins eat mostly zooplankton for the first few weeks of their lives, then turn to other fish and squid. They are skilled hunters and fast swimmers, easily chasing



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.



down and devouring flying fish, sardines, small mackerel and other fish. As they get larger, smaller members of the tuna family become prey.

When younger, yellowfins commonly become food for larger tuna, seabirds, wahoo, sharks and billfish.

They are extremely strong swimmers that can reach speeds of 50 miles per hour and can maintain a high rate of speed for long durations. This offers them an advantage over fish-chasing predators — and the fish they are chasing.

As table fare, yellowfin are often prepared as sashimi and other raw dishes. Another popular way of preparing yellowfin is to sear it on the grill.

Across the globe, yellowfins are referred to as Allison tuna, true tuna, long fin tuna, yellow tuna, YT, and tunafish.

Despite their telltale yellow fins, anglers sometimes misidentify yellowfins as bluefin tuna, albacore and bigeye tuna.

The Louisiana state record yellowfin tuna weighed 251 pounds. Elliot Sale caught this fish in W. Delta Block 122 in October 2012.

Mike McElroy III caught Mississippi's state-record yellowfin, a 236.6-pound fish, on March 30, 2020, while fishing 80 miles out of Pass Christian.

The world-record yellowfin was caught in Cabo San Lucas by Guy Yocom in September 2012. That fish weighed 427 pounds. ■

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AFFORDABLE FATHER'S DAY GIFTS DAD WILL LOVE

What fishing or hunting father wouldn't like to wake up on June 21 and find smiling relatives with colorfully wrapped presents for Father's Day? If that sounds like it would be a great idea, here are a few gifts

that fishing and hunting dads might like to unwrap.

They are all reasonably priced and would be welcomed additions in any tackle box or hunting fanny pack.

1 GAMAKATSU'S SPRING LOCK MONSTER SWIMBAIT HOOK

Bass fishermen are familiar with the concept of big baits producing big fish, but Gamakatsu, the company that produces some of the industry's best hooks, has taken that to a new level.

If Dad is interested in a double-digit bass, a bull redfish, big striped bass or a super-sized speckled trout, its new Spring Lock Monster is an oversized swimbait hook that can hold the biggest soft-plastic bait imaginable.

The Spring Lock Monster features a 3/8- or 1/2-ounce weight near the bend of the forged, heavy wire hook. There's a center-point spring lock to keep even the biggest bait in place through long

casts, fast retrieves and jarring hooksets.

They're the biggest swimbait hooks on the market, coming in 9/0 through 12/0 sizes.

Size 9/0 hooks come in 3/8-ounce, with a three-pack retailing for \$7.98. Size 10/0 and 12/0 hooks come in 3/8- and 1/2-ounce models, with a two-pack retailing for \$7.98.

Available at www.gamakatsu.com.



2 SPORTSMAN HYDROTECH NECK GAITER

We all want our loved ones to be safe on the water. That's why we should make sure they are covered when it comes to sun protection. In addition to sunglasses and sunscreen, neck gaiters act as a protective shield against UV rays. The mesh-type fabric also allows the garment breathability and keeps the angler dry and comfortable. You can keep your neck, ears, mouth and nose hidden away from the sun, wind and even bugs. Once you go fishing with one of these, you'll never go without one!

These new styles retail for \$14.99.

Available at sportsmangear.com.



3 RAYOVAC SPORTSMAN BLOOD TRACKING FLASHLIGHT

This 18-lumen, 3-in-1 LED flashlight will get you to your hunting stand safely in the darkness of early morning, and back to your truck after the sun goes down. And where it really shines is when you're tracking a wounded animal in the dark.

The light has three modes: red, which allows you to see while staying undetected to game animals, white, for standard use, and blood tracking, helping you track and recover your quarry quickly.

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FATHER'S DAY GIFTS continued >

4 SPRO'S BRONZEYE FROG

How about a "birthday" present for Father's Day?

If Dad is a bass fisherman, it's perfect — and fitting.

SPRO's Bronzeeye Frog turns 15 this year, and it's still one of the premier frog baits on the market after a decade-and-a-half.

Designed by bass pro Dean Rojas, it features a Gamakatsu 2X EWG Double Frog Hook, which allows fishermen to use heavy braid to pull big fish out of the thickest cover. It is weedless and moves through vegetation without hanging up, and it can be retrieved with a walk-the-dog cadence.

The Bronzeeye Frog has a weight molded into the body that keeps it upright at all times, and the bait's nose is anchored behind the line-tie eye to keep it level on retrieve. The legs are made of living rubber strands so they'll wiggle even when the bait is paused.

The Bronzeeye Frog is available in 60 and 65mm sizes, weighing ½- and ¾-ounce, respectively. The 60 comes with a 3/0 hook, the 65 with a 4/0.

Bronzeeye Frogs are available in two-dozen colors.

Available at www.spro.com.



5 HOOK-EZE KNOT TYING TOOL

This is a great addition to any dad's tackle box!

This multi-function fishing tool helps you tie on a variety of tackle and get the perfect knot every time. All ages and skill levels can tie their own knots, quickly, safely and easily. Your father will never have to lose another fish from a faulty knot.

Hook-Eze fits hooks sized from a standard 4/0 hook down to the smallest No. 28. It also helps to tie swivels, jigheads and speed clips for attaching lures or other rigs including a small variety of Flies.

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FISHING REGULATIONS

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^Δ)

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 ^Δ & Black ^Δ	24" TL	4/day (aggregate)*
Scamp ^Δ	16" TL	
Nassau & Goliath	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS	
Yellowfin ^Δ	20" TL	
Red ^Δ	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
Seatrot, 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 (Gaspergou)	12" TL	25/day
Channel Catfish	11" TL*	***
Blue Catfish	12" TL*	***
Bowfin	16" TL	None
Flathead Catfish	14" TL*	***
Crawfish	None	150 lbs./day
Paddlefish	30" max LJFL	2*
Shad	None	50 lbs./day
Black Bass (largemouth & spotted)	None*	10/day*
Striped Bass or Hybrid Striped Bass	**	5/day*
Sturgeon	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS	
White Bass	None	50/day*
Yellow Bass	None	50/day*

* see exceptions in pamphlet.

** no more than two may exceed 30 inches.

*** catfish limit is 100 in aggregate; however, 25 fish in aggregate may be undersized.

only one fish may exceed 27 inches.

@ Shark season is closed between April 1 and June 30.

^Δ Closed season for gag grouper Jan. 1 - May 31. Closed season for black, red, yellowfin,

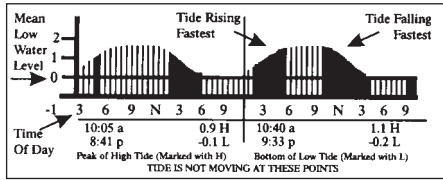
yellowmouth & scamp grouper from Feb. 1 - March 31. ~ Greater amberjack season is open May 1-31 and Aug. 1 - Oct. 31. * Closed season on gray triggerfish Jan. 1 - Feb. 29 and June 1 - July 31.



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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

Location	HIGH	LOW
Barataria Pass	+1:00	-0:10
Bastian Island	+0:41	+0:12
Bay Gardene	+2:51	+2:44
Bayou BonFouca	+9:59	+10:11
Breton Islands	+0:54	+0:48
Caillou Boca	+0:40	+0:48
Caminada Pass	+0:20	+0:12
Chandeleur Light	+0:37	+0:34
Chef Pass	+5:17	+5:07
Cocodrie	+1:22	+1:33
Comfort Island	+1:34	+0:54
Delacroix Island	+3:42	+3:31
Empire Jetty	-1:03	-1:45
Four Bayou Pass	+2:18	+0:17
Gardner Island	+0:40	+0:47
Grand Pass	+1:48	+1:16
Head of Passes	-0:48	+0:00
Hopedale	+4:17	+4:56
Independence Island	+2:29	+1:59
Jack Bay	+1:59	+1:28
Joseph Bayou	-0:36	-1:37
Lafitte	+1:45	+2:51
Long Point, Lake Borgne	+2:28	+2:11
Manila Village	+2:32	+3:13
Michoud Substation	+5:24	+5:02
New Canal (Bucktown)	+10:34	+10:49
North Pass	-0:31	-0:37
Paris Road Bridge	+5:53	+5:58
Pelican Islands	+2:26	+2:26
Pointe a la Hache	+3:12	+3:01
Port Eads	-0:17	-1:37
Raccoon Point	-0:03	-0:20
Shell Beach	+4:32	+4:25
Ship Shoal Light	-1:54	-1:50
South Pass, Miss. R.	-1:13	-1:20
Southwest Pass, Miss. R.	-0:38	-1:33
Tchefuncte River	+10:23	+11:01
Timbalier Island	+0:19	+0:23
Wine Island	+1:08	+1:02
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

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
East Point Grand Isle	1	2	3	4	5	FM	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	28	29	30	Order the Tide Guides for over 40 locations throughout Louisiana. Call 1-800-538-4355 or go on line www.lasmag.com			

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Calcasieu Pass Lighthouse Wharf	1	2	3	4	5	FM	6
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	28	29	30	Order the Tide Guides for over 40 locations throughout Louisiana. Call 1-800-538-4355 or go on line www.lasmag.com			



Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK

Alyx Carboni with a nice bass caught in a farm pond.



Alyx Carboni



Brayton Grow

Brayton Grow, 11, killed his first deer, a 4-point, in Evergreen.



Scott McCubbin

Scott McCubbin with a redfish caught on March 24, 2018, in Cocodrie while free-lining a live minnow on a white jighead. His dad, Tim McCubbin, handled the net for the 16-pound, 34-inch fish.

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Margaret Eckert

Margaret Eckert killed this big buck, which scored 165, while she was hunting with her dad and family on private land in southern Illinois.



Drake Duet

Drake Duet, 7, caught his first bull red out of Pointe-aux-Chenes.



Trevor Kingston

Trevor Kingston caught this giant on March 26, 2020, in the inlet at Oak Harbor in Slidell.



Braydon Vidrine

Braydon Vidrine, 9, hooked this 26½-inch, 9.04-pound bass in Vernon Parish.

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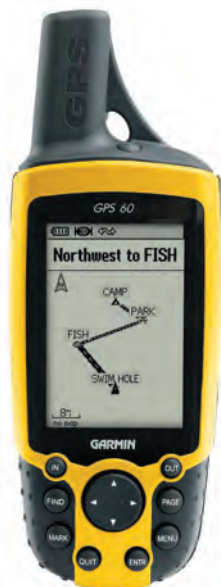
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- Port Sulphur
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Devin Andrus



Britten Nolte

Britten Nolte, 10, was hunting with his grandfather, Brit Green, and Kenneth Mason when he killed this adult doe at Red Dirt Hunting Club in Bossier Parish on Jan. 7, 2020.



Blake Andrus

Devin Andrus and Blake Andrus put the hammer down on some monster bucks in Sabine Parish during the 2018-19 hunting season.



Weston Scates

Weston Scates, 6, had a great afternoon catching speckled trout about 5 miles out from his family's camp in Southern Comfort in Dulac.



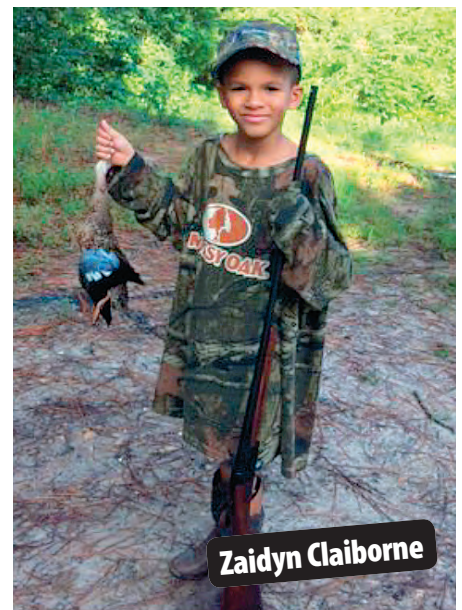
Dylan & Everett Zechman

Dylan Zechman took his son Everett, 3, on an April trip to Fourchon, and Everett caught his first redfish with a Gulp swimming shad under a Four Horsemen cork.



Jake Drury

Jake Drury, 5, caught this bass in Money Hill. He used his football glove to hold it.



Zaidyn Claiborne

Zaidyn Claiborne holds up his first duck at Little River.

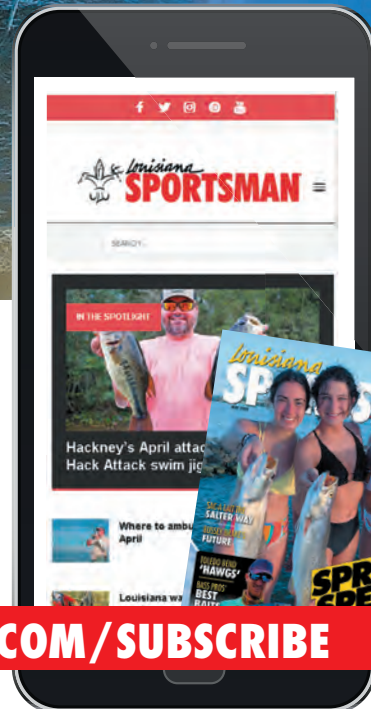


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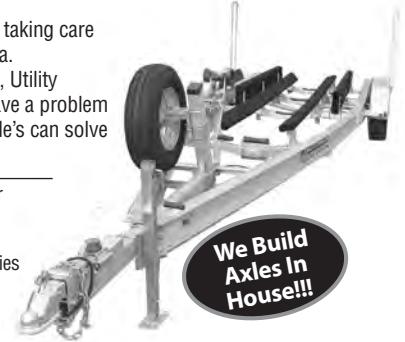
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