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AUGUST 2020



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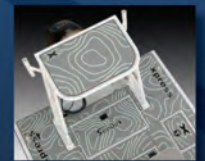
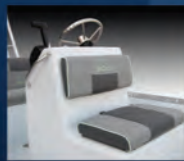


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RIDE THE BULL



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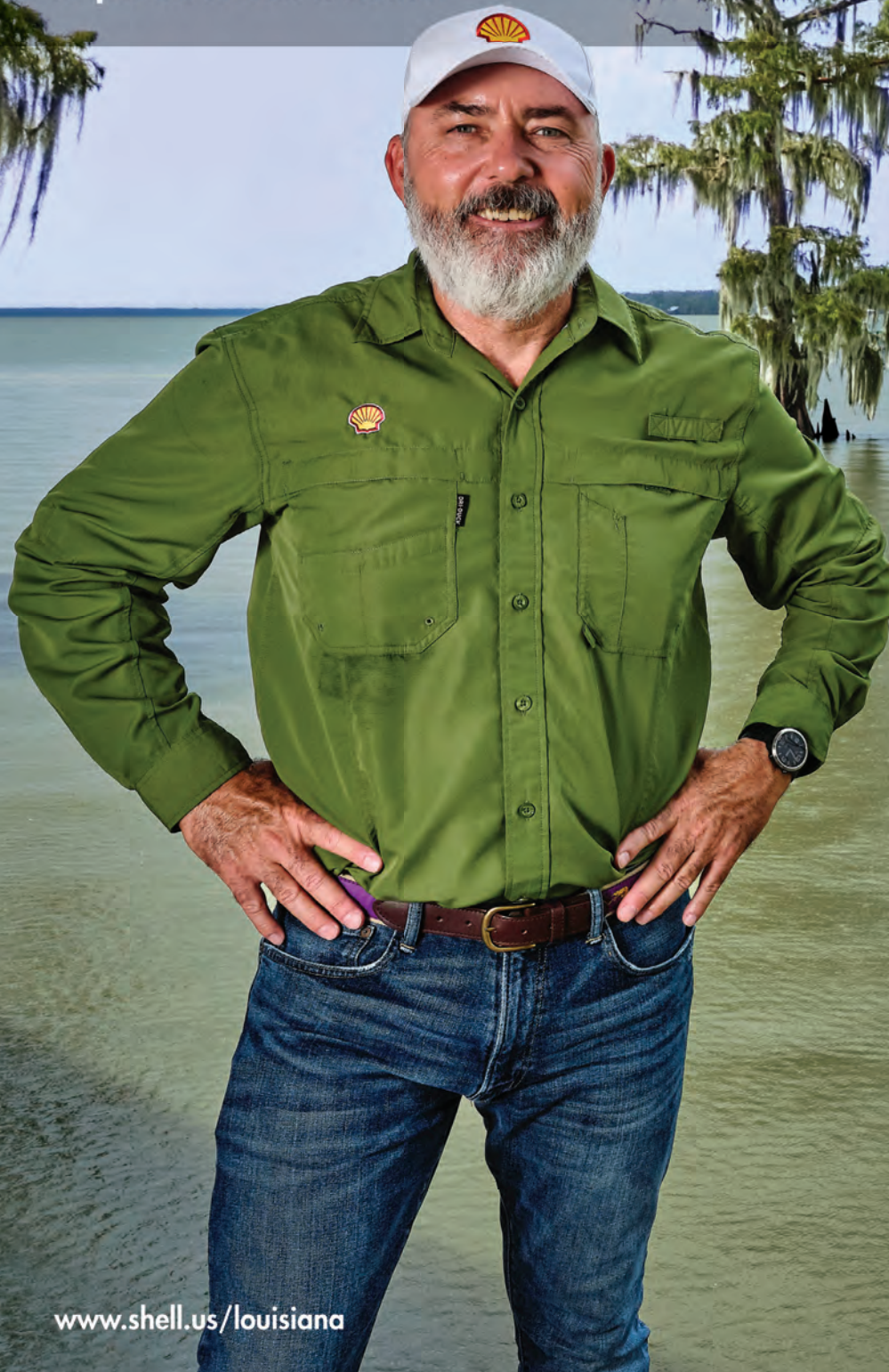
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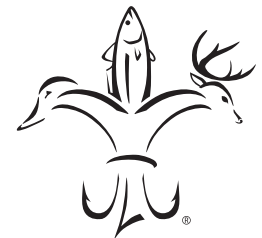


THE *Rhythm* OF LOUISIANA





50
GET JACKED UP!



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Chris Mobley (front) and Pat Paul show off a bull redfish from Grand Isle that was the winner in Louisiana Sportsman cover photo contest. Photo by Sammy Romano.

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Dustin Gates caught this 10.49-pound Caney Lake bass on June 26 on a creature bait.

Outdoor UPDATE



NET MAN GOES ABOVE AND 'BELOW'

JONESBORO ANGLER GETS PLENTY OF HELP PUTTING CANEY LAKE LUNKER IN THE BOAT *By Kinny Haddox*

Fishermen are not always forthcoming with the "whole story" of how a trophy fish was caught, so when Dustin Gates of Jonesboro started to tell about the 10.49-pound bass he caught out of Caney Lake on June 26, listeners were ready for just about anything.

"Well, you probably aren't going to believe this," he said. "My buddy, Casey Pennington, and I just ran out to the lake for a little while to test out his new Humminbird Solix.

"We were headed to a big brush top to see what it looked like on the new depth finder, and we stopped pretty short and started casting."

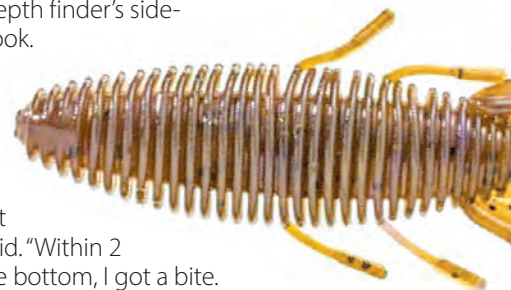
Gates, 35, was throwing a swimbait, and Pennington was throwing a crankbait. Gates made a long cast toward the brush, and after a few turns of the reel handle, he got hung in the edge of

the brush. They started to ease up and get the bait loose, but they turned on the depth finder's side-imaging to take a quick look.

When they did, they saw two big fish in the brush top.

"We both grabbed up our worm rods and made casts in there about 2 seconds apart," Gates said. "Within 2 seconds after mine hit the bottom, I got a bite.

When I set the hook, I knew it was a good one. A few seconds later it came up to the top and jumped, and my heart stopped. It was huge."



GET HER IN THE BOAT!

But then the big fish turned and headed back to the brush. Before Gates knew it, the fish had wrapped him around a snag. He worked it back and forth, back and forth, and it was right under the boat, but he couldn't get it loose. He was about to tell Pennington he was going to jump in and get the fish loose, but his partner beat him to it.

He brought the fish, the green pumpkin Missile D Stroyer creature bait and a chunk of brush back to the top. Gates got the fish in the boat, then helped his buddy back in, and they headed to Hooks Marina to weigh the fish.

The bass tipped the scales at 10.49 pounds, was 25 inches long and had a girth of 19½ inches. Gates planned on releasing the fish and having a replica made, but things didn't work out.

"I hate to even say this, and it made me sick, but that fish didn't even flounce once we got it in the boat," he said. "After we weighed in, I worked with it almost an hour trying to get it to swim, but it was spent. It didn't make it. The water was hot, and it was stressed."

Instead of just letting the fish sink to the bottom, he decided to keep it and get a skin mount instead of a replica.

A GREAT TIME FOR CANEY BASS

Gates has lived on Caney Lake for more than 10 years and has released more than 50 huge bass, and he hated to lose this one, his second 10-pounder; the first was released. But as he said, "It happens," especially in the heat of the summer, when even catching a 10-pound bass is unusual.

Gates thinks so many big bass have been caught out of Caney the past couple of years because of the grass. It has been a mecca for the entire food chain. He hopes officials don't eliminate the grass as has been done before, because it really hurt fishing then and it will hurt it again.

Gates some tips for catching big fish in the summer. Slow down, fish big baits and use your electronics to find good spots that are holding fish. Then, just have fun. And, oh yes, always have a net man who's willing to go above and beyond...or is that above and below? ■

Dustin Gates caught the big fish on a green pumpkin Missile D Stroyer creature bait like this one.



RENOVATED BUSSEY BRAKE WMA HAS OPENED

From News Reports

The newly renovated Bussey Brake WMA in Morehouse Parish was opened to the public July 15.

After a lengthy renovation project, Bussey Brake is once again available for fishing and other recreational activities. The 2,200-acre reservoir is the focal point of the WMA, which will be primarily managed for quality fishing.

"It means a lot to the department to open Bussey Brake WMA to the public," said Jack Montoucet, head of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. "The improved WMA offers an array of recreational opportunities and provides Louisiana residents and visitors alike with another great place to safely enjoy the outdoors — especially important in the age of COVID-19."

Renovations included restocking important gamefish species, the addition of boat lanes and upgrades to the property. The public will also be able to utilize 8 miles of levee around the reservoir for hiking, biking and horseback riding. The WMA features three fishing piers, including a new pier accessible for persons with disabilities, a wave break for those without boats to fish from, as well as a three-lane concrete ramp for launching boats. A site at the south entrance will allow visitors to drag kayaks or small boats over the levee.

POOL STAGE

Although the reservoir is not yet at full pool — 100 feet above mean sea level — LDWF officials have determined it can be safely utilized at a lower level. The reservoir is not expected to reach full pool until 2021.

The boat launch will be open, and boaters will be able to safely navigate around the lake utilizing the marked boat lanes and canals that were dredged to form the levee. Due to the lower water levels, the new boat-mooring dock will not be available for use; instead, boats can be docked on the shoreline adjacent to the launch.

The fish population, though not fully mature, is able to sustain fishing. Special regulations have been put in place to protect the young and expanding fishery and to hopefully ensure a quality fishing experience for all anglers. Black bass will be managed with a 5-fish daily creel limit and 16-inch size minimum, with a one-fish daily exception. Fishermen can keep 25 crappie daily, with a 10-inch size minimum. Fifty bream can be kept daily, with no size minimums. State regulations are in effect for all other species. All fishing gears other than rod-n-reel or cane pole are prohibited.

A valid state hunting/fishing license or Wild Louisiana Stamp is required to use WMAs. Anyone younger than 16 or older than 60 is exempt from this requirement. ■

TOLEDO BEND SPITS OUT FIRST LUNKER OF SEASON

TEXAS ANGLER BREAKS 10-POUND
MARK IN HOUSEN BAY AREA *By Chris Berzas*

It was supposed to be a simple evening fishing trip on Toledo Bend for Terance Corley, his daughter, Taylor, and her boyfriend, Joel LeBlanc, on June 16.

But after only an hour of fishing, Terance Corley, 47, from Hemphill, Texas, scored on the first double-digit bass — 10.17 pounds — of the 2020-2021 Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program season.

“We ended up just fishing for an hour,” he said, explaining that he and his daughter were hoping Joel would catch plenty of fish since he had just taken up bass fishing with the Corley family.

At 6 p.m., the trio launched out of White Oak Landing into some of the best bass waters on Toledo Bend. They entered Housen Bay, and it didn’t take long for Taylor Corley to catch and release the first bass of the evening, estimated at between 4 and 5 pounds.

A little later, Terance Corley was slowly dragging a V&M J-MAG worm in 25 feet of water around some cover in an area close to shallower water.

“I felt the fish hit the lure, and it immediately got hung up,” Corley said.

The fish worked itself free as Corley battled it, only to get hung up again in other cover.

“She came up trying to throw the bait,” he said. “I had a scare then, because it was the first time we could see the fish, and it was clearly big. I was able to get to the trolling motor and move to where the fish got free.”

BOATING THE BIG BASS

Immediately, the huge bass came to the top, and Terance Corley reeled her to the side of the boat, where Taylor Corley’s net was waiting. Once aboard, the anglers admired the fish and weighed it on a portable scale.

“It weighed 10.2 pounds on my scale,” Terance Corley said.

All three anglers agreed to end the trip so the bass could be officially weighed for entry into the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program. Terance Corley phoned Keith’s Toledo Bend Tackle, where a certified scale was ready for their arrival.



Texas Terance Corley displays his Toledo Bend 10.17-pounder taken Tuesday, June 16, in Housen Bay.

Photo courtesy of Toledo Bend Lake Association

On the certified scales, Corley’s bass weighed 10.17 pounds and was recorded as the first double-digit bass for the 2020-2021 Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program.

This bass was the second bass over 10 pounds taken by Corley; his first, taken some years back, weighed 10.33 pounds.

Corley’s wife, Nicole, actually has the largest bass taken in the family: an immense bass weighing 11.93 pounds, the largest taken during the 2017-2018 Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program season. ■

Terance Corley

- Date fish taken: June 16, 2020
- Hometown: Hemphill, Texas
- Location where fish taken: Housen Bay
- Depth taken: 20 to 25 feet
- Lure used: V&M J-PROZ series J-MAG worm
- Other tackle used: 7-foot-6 Castaway rod; Lew’s reel; 20-pound Seaguar fluorocarbon
- Official weigh station: Keith’s Toledo Bend Tackle
- Certified bass weight: 10.17 pounds
- Entry number of bass in the 2020-2021 Toledo Bend Lunker Program: 1
- Tagged, released and eligible for replica from Toledo Bend Lake Association: Yes

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LOUISIANA PONDERS DUCK SPLITS

By Kinny Haddox

LDWF CONSIDERING OPTIONS FOR CHANGES TO SEASONS

Duck hunting in Louisiana is kind of like our good food. Most people are not interested in how it's cooked, but only in the results: *Does it taste good?*

But a lot of planning, preparation and a good recipe goes into every good dish, and it's the same with duck hunting.

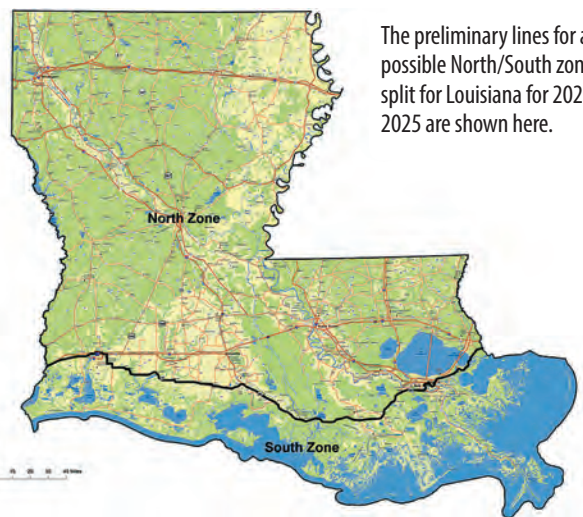
Duck hunters want results: *"Are there ducks in the sky and in the decoys?"* A lot of framework, planning and a good recipe is behind that, too. And just like good food, there are a lot of options and choices, none of which will leave a good taste in a hunter's mouth unless there are lots of ducks. That exercise is under way, but like food, there are so many options, it's still too early to tell what's for supper.

Every five years, Louisiana has options for resetting zones, and this is the year, with changes to take effect at the start of the 2021-2022 season. Hunter-survey data suggests that the two most-popular options would be a two-zone, split season with zone splits either North/South or East/West. Preliminary maps for those two looks have been drafted. Louisiana currently has three zones, including a Coastal zone.

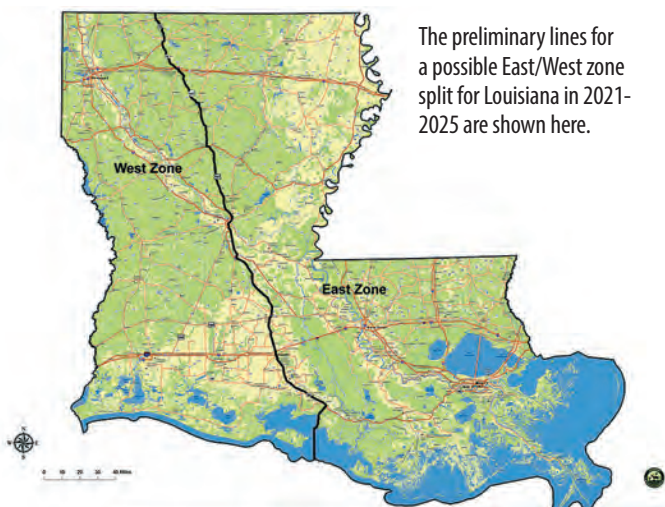
"We'll make our presentation of the data ... in July, and I hope we can, from that, be able to present a recommendation by the August meeting, then by the September meeting, make a decision and move forward," said Larry Reynolds, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' waterfowl guru.



Duck hunters all have opinions on seasons, zones and splits, but one thing they all agree on is "We want ducks in the sky and in the decoys" and that's not always in anyone's control.



The preliminary lines for a possible North/South zone split for Louisiana for 2021-2025 are shown here.



The preliminary lines for a possible East/West zone split for Louisiana in 2021-2025 are shown here.

TIME TO DECIDE

Reynolds actually pushed flyway and federal officials to allow Louisiana an opportunity for two zones, two splits, based on hunter input and the layout of Louisiana's waterfowlers. There is no plan that will make everybody happy, but Reynolds thinks the two zones will work well. Whether that is the final recommendation is yet to be determined.

There's another ingredient thrown into the duck gumbo this year. Because of COVID-19, states haven't been allowed to see all the 2019-20 harvest data yet. While the original deadline to make a decision was Oct. 1, there been given some flexibility in that date as well.

"Because of the delays, if we want more time, the (Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission) can decide that they don't want to make changes yet, and they can just leave it as it is for one more year," Reynolds said. "Then, the changes could be made next year, but it would only be for four years instead of five."

"There's a lot to it. My job is to make sure the Commission is

apprised of all their options and to get as much data and feedback as I can to help them with the decision.

"The most important thing having the best seasons for each particular zone. Furthermore, it's important to spread out the season to hunt good times, both early and late, as well as having another opening day from the second split. That is very attractive to hunters who don't cross zone boundaries. When you consider that about 75% of our hunters are primarily hunting on private land, that sentiment begins to make perfect sense."

HUNTING LATER

Reynolds said some hunters like zones set up where they can "jump" from one to the other, but the data shows that is only a small percentage. Most hunters consider only their own specific situation, while LDWF tries to balance the needs of the entire state.

"There has long been controversy over hunting later in the season," Reynolds said. "If there is one thing I can get majority support from hunters, it is hunting later in the season. According to our harvest data, that opinion is poorly supported. Even in the east zone, we kill lots of ducks in November, and trading mid-November for late January hunt days is not a good idea, but the contention remains. Even in the Coastal zone, where migratory ducks first show up in Louisiana every year, a majority of hunters want to hunt later.

"There is also growing concern that hunting pressure is driving ducks out of the state, or at least into sanctuary habitats where they are no longer available for hunters to harvest. Again, those opinions are poorly supported. If ducks are being driven out of the state by hunting pressure, they are going to states with as many or more hunters that are killing just as many ducks, and our aerial survey and radio-telemetry data have always shown ducks using sanctuary habitat more often once the season opens. But we still kill a higher proportion of them than the nationwide banding data predict. But the contention remains."

A SECOND SPLIT'S ADVANTAGES

Reynolds said that adding a second split addresses both of those concerns.

"By adding a second split, we can spread the season out to allow both early and late-season harvest, while creating a second period of rest to ease the hunting pressure and provide another 'opening day' effect to improve hunting success," he said. "The federal framework has now been extended to Jan. 31, no matter what that day of the week is. So the season can be extended later, from not at all to up to 6 days. That increases the value of the second split in taking advantage of both early and late-season harvest." ■



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READER REPORT

One of my most-treasured memories took place in Big Wells, Texas, when I was 11 years old. That was the day that I harvested my first whitetail deer.

The memory is special for a couple reasons. The first is obvious: it was my first whitetail! The second is quite a bit more meaningful, however. I was hunting with my best friend, my father.

That memory became even more impactful to me on a hunting trip last season. My son, Douglas, and I headed out to Oakdale for the opening weekend of the youth season with my father-in-law, Dave McGee. Douglas had been anticipating the hunt for several months, and he was really excited to get to camp. The opportunity to have a chance to kill his first deer after two years of trying and striking out was something that he was really looking forward to.

We arrived in the afternoon on Friday, Oct. 11. The fall's first cool weather had arrived that day, and the weather for the weekend was supposed to be phenomenal: clear skies and highs in the low 70s. We quickly unpacked our gear and headed to an area where Douglas could shoot his rifle to make sure everything was still good after the drive over. Just as I thought, Douglas and his gun were both just where they needed to be. After a fantastic dinner and fellowship with family, we headed to bed with big anticipation for the next morning.

We awoke to cool temperatures in the low 50s, which was a welcome surprise for mid-October in Louisiana. As we headed to the stand, Douglas could hardly contain himself. The morning was beautiful, and we made ourselves comfortable in a spacious box stand. We watched several squirrels jump from one pine tree to the next as a multitude of doves flew in to feed around our stand. Much to our dismay, however, we didn't see any deer during our 3-hour sit.

After getting back to camp, eating lunch and playing a little football with his cousin, Ryan, Douglas was eager to get back in the stand for the afternoon hunt. I was pretty hopeful it would be more productive. After holding Douglas back for most of the

afternoon, we decided to head to our stand for the final three hours of daylight.

As we settled into the stand, Douglas's excitement level was high once again. The first couple hours were uneventful. We passed the time snacking on beef jerky and enjoying the birds and other wildlife in their normal afternoon routine. With about an hour of light left, I caught movement at the end of the shooting lane I was watching. It was a deer! I slowly turned to Douglas and whispered, "There's a deer on this side."

His head quickly turned away from the lane he was watching. I slowly stood up and helped Douglas move his chair into position for a shot. I could feel his heart beating as he nervously asked me, "Dad, is it in range?" I picked up my binoculars and ranged the deer at 81 yards. "Yep," I said. "It's right around the distance we've been practicing, but let's wait and let it get perfectly broadside before you try to take a shot."

We watched the deer feed for what seemed like 30 minutes. In reality, it was only about 10, but I wanted Douglas to have an absolutely perfect shot. I tried to calm him down as he watched the deer

continues >





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READER REPORT continued >

through his scope and reminded him of all the things we had been practicing on the range. When the deer finally made its way into the right position, I quietly told him, "When you're ready, squeeze the trigger."

I watched Douglas's finger as he slowly squeezed the trigger. "Bang," sounded the rifle. The deer jumped straight up in the air and kicked as it ran quickly back where it came from.

"You got it!" I exclaimed.

After the shot, we shared a moment that was unexplainable. It was a special moment of excitement that I'll never forget. I fought off Douglas's urge to go and look for the deer as long as possible, but after 20 minutes of nagging, I agreed to walk down to where the deer was standing and look for blood.

As we arrived at the spot, I could not find a single drop. Douglas's mind began to spin with thoughts that maybe he had missed. I made my way over to the last spot I had seen the deer before it ran into the brush. As I checked the area for blood, I caught a glimpse of white 10 yards into the pine thicket. "Douglas, come check this out," I yelled.



The moment Douglas realized the deer was just 10 yards from us, he let out a scream that I'm sure everyone within a 500-yard circle heard. The deer was only a small button buck, but it would not have been any more special if it had been a giant 10-pointer. As I fought back tears of happiness, my mind went back to Big Wells, Texas, 27 years earlier, and the moment I walked up on my first deer with my father.

I had come full circle.

My dad is no longer with us, but I'm hopeful that he is up in Heaven with a proud smile on his face. The memories I made with him in the field are some of my most-precious memories, and I hope that I can provide Douglas with some of those same special memories over time. I'm thankful that we were able to share this moment with my father-in-law, and that Douglas will forever have this memory to look back on as the beginning of many years of whitetail hunting ahead. ■

Brett Frey
Gonzales, La.



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WORLD'S LARGEST KAYAK FISHING TOURNAMENT HAS SURVIVED COVID-19, READY TO GO THIS MONTH IN GRAND ISLE. HERE'S HOW TO COMPETE.

By Chris Holmes

RIDE THE BULL

Many 2020 fishing events have cancelled due to COVID-19, but outdoor recreation and exercise have been allowed and encouraged since the beginning of the pandemic, and fishing from kayaks has proven to be an excellent way to get outdoors and stay active while practicing social distancing protocols.

That's one reason that Rad Trascher, CCA's tournament director, said that

RIDE THE BULL II

will go on as planned on Aug. 29 out of Grand Isle.

Although known for its record participation, Trascher is confident that the event can safely take place with the enactment of reasonable safety precautions.

"Our kayak anglers want to fish, and we are monitoring government and health officials' recommendations to put in place safe-distancing practices and other measures to help ensure the safety of our participants, volunteers, sponsors and spectators," Trascher said. "Anglers on the water naturally keep their distance, and we will restructure the onshore activities as necessary."

To say that kayak anglers are eager to participate and return

to some sense of normalcy is an understatement. More than 100 signed up in the first few days after registration opened for the world's largest kayak fishing tournament, a catch-and-release redfish event.

Bull redfish are a prize catch for Louisiana kayak anglers. They are hard fighters, not picky and readily take a variety of live, dead and artificial baits. A "Cajun sleigh ride" is the exiting experience of catching a giant fish from a tiny, plastic boat; that's where the term originated.

As much about luck as it is skill, kayak anglers of all experience levels gather in a defined area of Caminada Pass within

RIDE THE BULL II FACTS

Date: Aug. 29;

Location: Bridge Side Marina, Grand Isle;

Presenting sponsors: Wilderness Systems, The Backpacker, Academy Sports & Outdoors;

**Registration information/
rules:** ccalouisiana.com



Splashed and tired, Vince Wray fought a hard battle before getting this bull red in the net. How do you spell relief? **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Hundreds of kayak anglers begin staging in front of Bridge Side Marina awaiting the shotgun start for the Ride the Bull tournament.



view of the host launch area at Bridge Side Marina. The shotgun start of hundreds of multi-colored kayaks into the pass is a spectacle like no other.

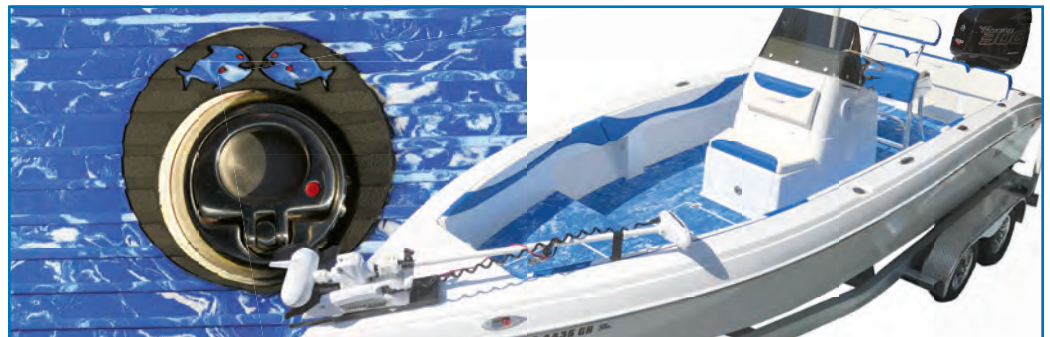
Anglers are advised to bring a selection of baits. Shrimp, cracked crab, chunks of cut mullet and pogies, aka menhaden, are favorites. Some anglers go the extra mile and try to gain an advantage with live offerings. While not necessary, live bait offers the advantage of keeping the pesky bait-stealers at bay. Live crab, white trout and croakers are known to tempt their share of bull reds. One trick is to use a light rod with Gulp to fish for a live white trout while your bull red rod is soaking.

Bull reds are hard fighters, and they can almost outlast the angler during a battle. Gear up with a heavy spinning or conventional gear with 40- to 50-pound braid and a 50- to 60-pound mono leader. The heavier gear helps get the fish under control and landed more quickly, ensuring a healthy release. Rig your baits Carolina style with weights ranging from 2 to 4 ounces, depending on the current. Circle hooks in sizes 8/0 to 10/0 keep the fish from getting deeply hooked. Just remember not set the hook; once the red starts swimming off with your bait, begin to reel steadily, and the circle hook will magically anchor in the corner of the fish's mouth.

Bridge Side Marina is stocked a variety of bait and pre-made "redfish rigs" that are ready to tie on and fish.

Bulls caught in the tournament average around 25 pounds, but several in the upper 30s are not uncommon.

While bulls are caught throughout the pass, anglers with depth finders are wise to seek out areas between 15 and 25 feet deep. Ledges and drop-offs are good places to stake out. The reds generally move through in small schools, and the action can get frantic as several anglers hook up at the same time. The bridge and rocks along the pass are popular locations that have seen their share of winning fish caught over the years.



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Tournament officials will have several assist boats milling around to pick up caught fish and bring them to the dock for weighing, tagging and release. Anglers often bring a large landing net or fish grip so the fish can be kept in the water until the assist boat arrives.

With so many kayaks on the water, the best strategy is to pick your spot and anchor up. However, in the event you must quickly unhook, have a float tied to the end of your anchor line so you can toss it out and easily return to your spot.

Proper anchoring is a key to success. A 2- to 5-pound Bruce- or Danforth-style anchor has proven best for solid holding on the sandy bottoms of the pass. About 75 to 100 feet of rope and a small length of chain helps ensure proper lie and holding of

the anchor. The pass is not without snags, and the bottom is littered with many anchors that kayak anglers were unable to retrieve. Rigging your anchor to break away and retrieve backwards can save the day. Google “breakaway anchor rigging” to see how it is done.

Early-bird entry is available through Aug. 1. Ride the Bull has evolved into a world-class fishing festival, celebrating everything that kayak fishing has to offer. ■



Chris Holmes has kayak fished in the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and many places in between.

REDFISH HOTSPOTS >

Al Siener gets an up-close look at a Grand Isle bull red. These hard fighters are some of the biggest fish inshore kayak anglers catch in south Louisiana.





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CAMINADA PASS BEGINNING TO FILL WITH BULL REDFISH

Spawn brings big reds within anglers' reach

Louisiana has a different “running of the bulls” than they do in Spain, an event which attracts anglers from all corners of the United States. Every year, from August to mid-October, big redfish swarm into brackish Cajun waters to spawn, and there are few places in Sportsman’s Paradise better to partake in than Caminada Pass.

At one end of Grand Isle, Caminada Pass opens into the Gulf of Mexico, and a multitude of hot spots are there to try. Whether you are land-bound or have access to a vessel, Caminada Pass will be the place to land your best bull red this season, as long as the redfish bite picks up.

PIER FISHING

According to Mike Magee, who has been targeting bull reds around Grand Isle for nearly 40 years, particularly from fishing piers, this hasn’t been as good a summer as others.

“Some reds are being caught from the beaches, but not as many as in the past summers,” he said. “Hopefully, water



Mike Magee catches plenty of bull reds from Grand Island piers from August to mid-October.

temperatures and the coming spawn will cooperate in helping to concentrate larger schools of reds in the passes soon. The redfish are here; we see them under the lights at night when we go pier fishing. They seem uninterested in their usual favorite baits: fresh cut mullet and whole pogies. But this should change soon.”

Magee fishes the piers of Grand Isle when targeting larger redfish, particularly the two piers on either side of the bridge that connects Grand Isle to the mainland. However, they become crowded on weekends during the spawn.

“Make sure to arrive early and be prepared to stay late. It will get a bit crazy out there with people tripping over each other to get their line in the water, and not everyone knows what they are doing,” he said. “The pier fishing this summer has been less than ideal, despite an abundance of bait and good water clarity and tidal range. The reds just haven’t showed up in their usual numbers, so you may have to wait a good while for a quality fish.”

BOAT AND SURF FISHING

If you are more adventurous, you can surf-fish from Elmer’s Island point. Since vehicles are not allowed on the beach, it’s a sandy hike of roughly 1.6 miles, one way, toting your fishing gear.

Boat-bound anglers can drop anchor in the pass and have some seclusion from the crowding on the piers and on the beaches.

“The premier spot is the sandbar outcrop from the private beach, facing Grand Isle,” Magee said. “The sandbar has a steep drop-off into a pocket that the redfish congregate in during low

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Grand Isle has two piers close to the bridge that brings fishermen in from the mainland.

tide — where I usually get all my bites.”

Most boats drop anchor, and anglers cast their live and/or dead bait with the current flow and wait for the bite. The boat-bound angler also has the option of being able to move towards a schooling pod of bull reds that will show up every now and then.

“The tide in Caminada Pass can be a glassy still or a raging current, dependent on wind and pressure,” Magee said. “It is not the be-all, end-all to the redfish bite, but it will influence where the schooling fish are. It is important to remember that redfish migrate with the tides throughout the year, and this does not change much during the spawn.” ■

— Dora Lambert



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BULL RED SCHOOL IS IN SESSION

BIG PODS OF REDS ARE THE TICKET AT SABINE LAKE, LAKE CALCASIEU

Roy Crush Jr., better known as Lil Roy, is no stranger to posing with great fish like this red. He is also a heck of a bass fisherman.

Chasing schooling redfish in open water on Sabine Lake and Lake Calcasieu are some of my fondest memories in fishing.

And I mean “chasing” in every literal sense of the word. Open-water schools of redfish move much faster than their counterparts, speckled trout. Figuring out which direction a school is moving and determining a good approach can help alleviate some of the frustration when attempting to get on them.

If at all possible, approach the school from the upwind side. Letting the wind and current assist you in getting in position to cast to the feeding frenzy will greatly enhance not only getting on the school but also hopefully catching fish for

an extended period of time. Also, utilizing a trolling motor is much more advantageous than motoring in with an outboard.

I come across schooling redfish much more frequently during the hottest parts of the summer than any other time — the kinds seen in YouTube and Facebook videos, the ones where there appears to be acres of redfish blowing holes into the water with fleeing baitfish, shrimp, crabs and any other prey that gets in their path. Getting on these schools is without a doubt some of the most fun you can experience with a fishing rod anywhere along the Gulf coast.

Unless you are just inherently lucky, getting on one of these incredible feeding frenzies typically requires paying your

dues. I always encourage paying attention to the predicted major and minor feeding periods, although the majority of the schools that I have been fortunate to fish occurred during the hottest time of the day.

One thing we can count on with summer redfish is hot, calm weather. It seems more often than not that the wind lays down during the middle of the day, roughly noon to 3, and then the redfish show up. Many anglers have already retreated to the ramp due to the heat, but for the diehards looking to score some gold, the time is right. Calm winds and sunny skies give the angler the edge to locating these schools that are found many times by the vicious explosions

from feeding fish on the surface. Pelicans and seagulls will also give them away from time to time as they try to capitalize on the prey fleeing from the redfish. A darting shrimp or mullet may be all it takes to give them away.

You can pick your poison when it comes to tackle; whatever lure you choose, be prepared to donate it, as they tend to quickly destroy treble hooks, paint jobs, soft plastics and any lure with a wire. I opt for lures that I can cast an extremely long distances, as it can often be difficult to get close to a school before they are spooked. Spoons that weigh an ounce or more, along with plastics rigged on 3/4- to 1-ounce jigheads, work perfectly. If you want to see some incredible blow-ups, a Super Spook will elicit an awe-inspiring assault; however, I would recommend removing the middle treble hook.

Check the areas from Long Point towards mid-lake on Calcasieu, south towards the washout. Over on Sabine, the area from the Causeway Reef to just north of Blue Buck point is most consistent all the way up to mid-lake. The beachfront from Cameron east towards Grand Chenier can be the ticket when conditions are right, as well as the Texas side of the Sabine jetties. Keep your eyes peeled for tripletail any time you are searching for schooling redfish along the beach, as you definitely do not want to pass up one of those tasty critters. ■

— 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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August 28-29 - Ride the Bull Kayak Fishing Rodeo, Bridge Side Marina

SEPTEMBER

September 3-6 - 5th Annual Bloody Decks Rodeo, Wake Side Marina

September 4-6 - 60th Original Isle Redfish Rodeo, Bridge side Marina

September 25-27 - Caminada Redfish Rodeo, Sand Dollar Marina

OCTOBER

October 1-3 - ABC Rodeo, Sand Dollar Marina

October 9-10 - Ladies Fishing Rodeo, Bridge Side Marina

October 24 - Bayou Coast Falling Tide Kayak Tournament, Bridge Side Marina

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HOT WEATHER AND FISHING IN AUGUST AROUND GRAND ISLE

Just about everywhere you turn around Grand Isle in August, the fishing can be excellent, according to Owen Belknap, who runs the *Michi* offshore charterboat.

“One thing I love about August is that it is more opportunities to sight-fish redfish in the marsh. It’s a good way to test new skills and try new lures. It’s also what I really enjoy doing,” said Belknap. “It seems like each week, there is cleaner and cleaner water. August could be really good for inshore.

“Redfish will be cruising the marsh edges, chasing pogies and shrimp as they enter prespawn behavior. They will be feeding more frequently, and the bite should pick up — as long as it doesn’t get too hot and the wind dies down.”

The trout bite has been consistent this year, and this should continue through August.

“It’s been my experience that two people can catch 30 to 35 pretty regularly,” he said. “The East Timbalier Island and the beachfront in Grand Isle will be very productive.”

OFFSHORE PROSPECTS

“August always brings about the hottest temperatures of the year. As the water temperature really warms up, it can negatively impact the bite during the day,” Belknap said. “The tuna will be



Yellowfin tuna are a consistent target for offshore fishermen from the Grand Isle area.



Owen Belknap targets redfish among a variety of species in August.

more active at night and early morning. It’s a better use of your time to fish through the night rather than the day. Marlin, mahi, and wahoo will be more dependent on finding cool temperature breaks in the water. That’s what you will need to look for.

“When it comes to bottom-fishing, the snapper, grouper, deep-drop guys, nothing should really change. The grouper and barrelfish bite will be good.

“Since it’s later in the 2020 snapper season, the fish are being more pressured. The good, quality fish will be thinned out closer. The end of the Grand Isle Blocks and South Timberland 135 have been hit pretty hard. Don’t be afraid to push closer to the shelf if you have the boat to do so. The snapper will be pushed a bit deeper as the weather gets hotter, too.”

“Better and better bait will begin to show up, and as long as no hurricanes show up, the tuna bite will be consistent,” Belknap said. “Live bait is my go-to for red snapper fishing, but dead squid and cut bait will work the same.”

PARTING ADVICE

“It’s important to remember that we are getting summer afternoon storms. I know anglers will be pushing further and further, offshore chasing the quality fish. Keep in mind that it can go from slick to 3 to 5 feet in a second. There is no reason to kill yourselves over fish. Just go again in the morning and forgo the afternoon, if the weather is looking spotty.

“I strongly recommend leaving the beer at the house and just bring water on your day trips. You can have beers back at the camp. In August, it’s important to stay hydrated. I see a lot of guys drinking all day and becoming dehydrated and not being able to fish. It isn’t a situation anyone wants to find themselves in.” ■

— Dora Lambert

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BEAT THE SUMMER HEAT AND CATCH FISH!

By Rusty Tardo

The dog days of summer are upon us, when August's sweltering heat and shirt-drenching humidity sends even the most-ardent anglers scurrying for shade and makes us all oh-so-thankful for Mr. Carrier's life-saving invention, the air conditioner. Without it, summer in the deep south would be near intolerable.

So you know it's gonna be a hot month. But is it fishable?

"Yes," according to the consensus of experienced fishing guides and long-time anglers questioned. But there are vitally important measures to be taken to increase your chances for a successful trip, and to preserve you and your fellow passengers from heat exhaustion and even possible sun stroke. So, gather some tidbits to beat the summer heat, catch some fish and have fun on the water despite the temperatures.

LEAVE EARLY

Leave the dock as early as safely possible. Make sure your fore and aft lights are working. The better trout bite is generally early morning and late afternoon, so plan accordingly.

SUNSCREEN

Slop on the sunscreen and repeat the process throughout the day. Wear the best sun-protective gear you can afford.

LIVE BAIT

Live bait is essential for summer success. You don't just have to buy it, but you also have what you need to keep it alive. The water in your livewell is very warm, and the water your pump cycles in and out is also very warm. Extra aeration helps, even a simple, battery operated bubble-pump. Consider freezing a small bottle of water or adding a small Zip Lock sandwich size bag of ice — zipped closed so not to leak — into the bait well to cool down the temperature. Also, consider taking extra bait, but don't overcrowd your bait well. The thinking is, some of it will die (unavoidable), and the bait-stealing critters are out in full force Catfish, small croakers, ladyfish, needlefish, etc).

OUTSIDE BAYS

Fish the bigger outside bays, at any structure such as wells, rigs,



Peyton and Brian Hawkes enjoyed catching trout and reds on live shrimp off the ship channel near 9 mile cut in Lake Calcasieu.

islands and oyster reefs. Don't neglect deeper passes between bodies of water or mouths of lakes and bayous where tides are moving and carrying baitfish.

GO DEEP

Fish deeper than you do in spring and early summer. You can catch fish 2½ to 3 feet under a popping cork, but you'll catch the bigger fish 4 feet under a cork, or even deeper. You can fish sliding corks over reefs and structure with debris-laden bottoms; sliding sinker rigs on softer bottoms, or just a live shrimp with a split-shot pinched on about 6 inches above your cork, without a cork.

HYDRATE

If you don't have to urinate, you're not drinking enough. Dehydration can happen quickly and heat exhaustion and heatstroke is a real danger. Know the signs: heavy sweating; pale and clammy skin; fast, weak pulse; muscle cramps; weakness; dizziness; nausea and headache. Take immediate measures to cool down, and get out of the sun.

QUIT EARLY

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Sterling Cardon with a Bay Eloi speckled trout.

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THE RELATIVE LACK OF TROPHY SIZED SPECKS IN LOUISIANA WATERS OVER THE PAST HANDFUL OF YEARS HAS FISHERMEN ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THOSE BIG FISH. HERE ARE SOME ANSWERS AND THEORIES.

■ By Jon Miller

BIG TROUT? WHERE? WHY?

It seems as if the era of trophy speckled trout in Louisiana has ended, and many anglers are wondering if it will ever return.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' 2019 Assessment of Spotted Seatrout in Louisiana Waters showed through landing data and gill-net sampling, the number of speckled trout 3 years of age and older has been dropping and is at a shockingly low 6% of the total trout population.

For a speckled trout to reach trophy size, it needs to survive for 10 years, give or take a few, so the young age of the population cuts "big" out of the vocabulary of trout descriptors. But is that the whole story of why the catches of big trout have been down lately?

There are good reasons to think big trout should live in Louisiana waters. There is as much bait or more in Louisiana than in Florida or Texas, both trophy trout spots. In 2016, shrimpers harvested 102.5 million pounds of shrimp in Louisiana and 20.8 million pounds in Florida. Louisiana also has a higher trout spawning stock biomass (SSB) than Florida or Texas, and Louisiana has more fresh and saltwater marsh than either. So, before hope is lost, it's worth the time to discover what it takes for speckled trout to live a long life and what that life is like.

FLORIDA'S HOLD ON RECORDS >

FLORIDA'S HOLD ON RECORDS

Florida is an interesting case study on record-sized speckled trout. It owns 72 of the 100 IGFA records for speckled trout, and 45% of these are clustered around a 100-mile stretch of coast, with Cape Canaveral at the center.

To protect the Canaveral space port, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge was created in 1962, and two areas in the refuge are No-Take Reserves: Banana Creek and North Banana River, which cover 15.4 square miles, 22% of the MINWR.

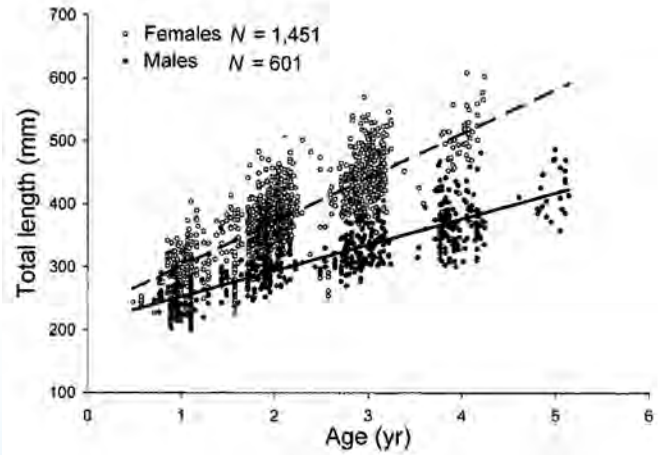
A fisheries researcher, James Bohnsack, conducted a study comparing the presence of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Florida and the record-book catches of speckled trout, red drum, black drum and snook. He found a correlation between MPAs that had No-Take Reserves and IGFA records. He found that 74% of the state records for those species were clustered in two areas equalling just 20% of the Florida coastline, surprising because many other areas have equally adequate habitat and have MPAs.

Each of the sections of record-breaking coastline includes at least one NTR. Two are at Cape Canaveral, and the Everglades National Park (ENP) has one. While there are different explanations for why these sections of coastline produce the most big fish, Bohnsack believes that the simplest explanation is that NTRs result in greater numbers of fish, increased individual survival and greater individual growth, and these results spill over into surrounding waters. This spillover is documented by recapture of fish outside the NTR that were tagged inside it. By contrast, there is no correlation between record-sized fish and coastlines with MPAs that are by state creel and minimum length limits.

There is certainly room for argument that other factors can contribute to the correlation between record-sized fish and NTRs, but the presence of an NTR where fish survival is greatly increased is consistent with the mathematical relationship between length and lifespan. Even a fish that spends a portion of its life inside the NTR before capture outside has a greater advantage to reach trophy size.

GROWTH FACTORS

There is a range in the length of speckled trout for a given age-class, as a chart of speckled trout captured in Barataria Bay and reported by David L. Nieland. For example, 4-year-old trout were recorded from 400 to 600 mm (16 to 24 inches). However, each year of life for a trout results in some length gain, and therefore, the survival



rate of a speckled trout is directly proportional to the size of the fish.

While genetics may play a role, fish growth is strongly related to the amount of available food that can be efficiently captured. When food is scarce, trout must exert more energy to feed compared to fish living where food is plentiful. Because of the relationship between age and length, a trout that experiences a year of scarcity will never recover the growth it loses. Therefore, we can expect to see larger trout where food is plentiful, and that would be the case within an NTR. It was found that the biodiversity in the Banana River NTR was twice as high as the biodiversity in the waters outside the NTR, and biodiversity is an indicator of the abundance of life in the food chain.

A reduction of biodiversity will negatively affect the species targeted by anglers, such as can happen through habitat loss and commercial overfishing of species such as menhaden and shrimp. The Speckled Truth podcast interviewed Angelos Apeitos, a biologist from Gulf Coast Research Institute who studies speckled trout growth and reproduction. Angelos said that speckled trout will choose to increase their intake of shrimp during the prespawn and spawning periods; this is believed to be a nutritional choice. For example, if shrimp numbers are down due to overfishing or another environmental effect, it's logical to wonder if the diet of speckled trout will support their full spawning potential for that season. A reduction in the spawn means a reduction in the stock, and that lowers the chance that some trout will survive to trophy size.

BALANCE: SALINITY & SAFETY ➤



Age and food availability are much bigger factors than genetics in speckled trout making it to trophy sizes.

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BALANCE: SALINITY & SAFETY

If there is an abundance of food, strong recruitment (trout less than 1 year old), and adequate habitat, what can explain the lower numbers of large trout being caught in Louisiana compared with Florida and Texas?

Predation needs to be considered as a factor in the development of trophy sized trout. LDWF uses a survival number of 30% per year for speckled trout when modeling the stock. Therefore, the mathematical relationship dictates that there is less than a 1% chance for a 12-inch trout surviving until it reaches 10 years of age. However, it seems clear that the survival rate must increase with age because there are fewer predators capable of eating a trout more than 5 years old, and large trout are more cautious around human activity, which will reduce the chance of being harvested by an angler. An increased survival rate with age can explain why we catch trout older than 5 years.

The need for a long life span suggests that water less frequented by large predators, such as sharks, provides greater possibility of a longer life span for speckled trout. The shallow, big-trout waters around Cape Canaveral and the inshore waters of the lower Texas coast certainly have sharks, but do they have many large sharks? Biologists say the typical habitat for large sharks is the beach and offshore waters, so these shallow areas in Florida and Texas are safer for trout.

There is also a general agreement that trophy sized speckled trout prefer to remain in water of higher salinity. The salinity in the waters around Cape Canaveral and the Texas coast are high compared to similarly protected waters in Louisiana. Areas such as Indian River Lagoon and Laguna Madre consistently see salinity above 15 parts per thousand (ppt) and often greater than 30 ppt, so there is no reason for specks to leave the safer, inshore waters.

By comparison, in the past 5 years, salinity greater than 15 ppt in southeast and central coastal Louisiana is found only along the inner edges of the sounds, the lower regions of bays, the barrier islands, and at nearshore rigs where speckled trout are sometimes found. These waters overlap with the habitat

of large sharks, and in fact, some of the best areas for catching larger speckled trout are the surf side of Grand Isle, Elmer’s Island and Timbalier Island, which plants speckled trout in the house of the sharks. Having your speckled trout bit in half by a shark in Louisiana is so common that anglers refer to these events as a visit from the “tax man.”

So if the preferred habitat for trout older than 5 years places them in areas less protected from oil spills, storms, commercial fishing and large predators than the marshes where they spend the first years of their lives, this could have the effect of shortening life spans. It also needs to be recognized that these areas are more difficult for anglers to access and to fish, so there may be somewhat of a negative bias affecting the numbers of big trout documented in Louisiana by anglers. If life span is the major barrier, is there a historical example of when high salinity and protection converged?

PONTCHARTRAIN’S TROPHY ERA

Lake Pontchartrain experienced a big-trout period from the late 1990s to roughly 2011, a period of higher lake salinity due to inflow of seawater from the MRGO and no high-water Mississippi River events. The Bonnet Carré Spillway was not opened between 1998 and 2008, and seawater flow up the MRGO was not restricted until after 2009. During this period, Louisiana’s No. 2 trout, an 11.99-pound giant, was caught from Ponchartrain by Kenneth Kreeger in January 1999; Louisiana’s No. 3 trout, at 11.24 pounds, was caught in the nearby Rigolets Channel by Jason Trouillier in September 1999, and Louisiana’s No. 10 trout, at 10.50 pounds, was caught by Dudley Vandenborre in April 2002. It’s reasonable to view the geographical position of the lake as protective, so that when suitable conditions developed for big-trout habitat, Ponchartrain became the theater that housed the show. In 2020, the places where suitable conditions intersect do not have the same level of safety from predation, poor water quality, and other environmental factors.

HOW MANY BIG TROUT? ➤





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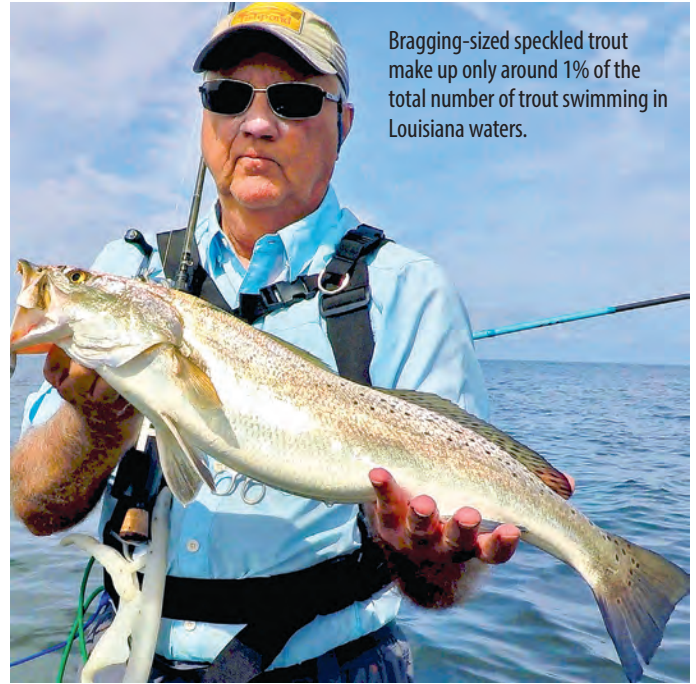
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HOW MANY BIG TROUT?

Ever wondered how many large trout live in Louisiana waters? With a conceptual model, you can get an idea. The key assumption is there is a 1% chance a 1-year-old trout will live to be 10 years old, based on LDWF's 30% annual survival rate for the spawning stock biomass. Then, add a bias for older trout having a higher survival rate due to fewer predators. The current SSB sits at around 3.5 million pounds, and the 2019 trout assessment said that in 2018, 75% of the SSB was 1-year-old and 95% was 2 years old or younger. Using comparison data from the Gulf Coast Research Institute, we can assume that the average weight of a female trout in Louisiana is currently 0.75 pounds. When we divide 3.5 million pounds by 0.75 pounds per fish, we get a total of 4.7 million fish. If 1% reach trophy size, that is 4,700 fish. When the SSB was at 9 million pounds in 2008, 1% survival equals 12,000 fish reaching trophy size, which is a considerable difference.

How do these numbers relate to the likelihood of being within casting distance of a trophy trout? According to the Nature Conservancy, Louisiana has 10,700 square miles of coastal marshes, and assuming that only 25% is suitable habitat for large speckled trout, that is 2,700 square miles. Evenly spreading large trout over this area, it equals 1.8 large trout per square mile. The area that can be covered by an angler from a single point is only 2.5% of a square mile, so good luck fishing a square mile of water. Of course, spreading the trout equally



Bragging-sized speckled trout make up only around 1% of the total number of trout swimming in Louisiana waters.

across every square mile of water is not the best assumption, since we know not every piece of water will hold a large trout. Still, it gives us an idea of how infrequently we may be within casting distance of a trophy trout, and how important it will be to understand where they might be so the odds are improved.

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THE LOUISIANA SITUATION

So are big trout still in Louisiana waters in 2020? There has been positive news this year related to bigger trout. Chris Berzas reported a slight rebound in large trout coming from Calcasieu Lake and Sabine Lake. Carl Vidrine reported recently catching a number of sizable trout around Grand Isle, and an 8-pound trout was caught at the MRGO dam by Ian Kelly.

Some trout must survive to a respectable age in Louisiana waters, and the fact that so few are caught is more related to angler habits than a complete lack of big trout. I am reminded of a video taken in 2017 on Mississippi's Cat Island that caused a tremendous uproar from anglers. It showed a commercial fishing net pulled up onto the island beach, and struggling in the mass of fish were what appeared to be multiple trophy sized trout. That area is not widely known for trophy sized trout, even though it's fished heavily, but there they were. Therefore, relying on recreational landings to determine how many large trout exist in Louisiana is likely to bias the numbers to the low side.

Most anglers in Louisiana are not fishing for trophy trout, and therefore, they rarely catch trophy trout. The most commonly used bait is live shrimp, which big trout may on occasion consume, but the primary food for big trout are finfish such as menhaden, mullet and croakers. Likewise, anglers typically fish where they are catching good numbers of legal-sized trout. If an angler is catching 13-inch trout nearly every cast, there is little chance of the next one being a 10-pound gator. Last, since most anglers are not targeting big trout, they are not concerned with stealth, and therefore, many unnatural sounds are transmitted into the water that trophy trout anglers consider detrimental, especially for big trout in shallow water.

The continuing barrier island restoration projects give hope for the survival of more large trout in Louisiana, because these structures provide habitat and cover in zones suitable for trophy trout. As well, changes to stock management that results in an increase in female trout will directly improve the possibility of more trout reaching true trophy size. ■



If anglers are happy catching good numbers of barely legal trout, that probably lowers their chances of running into a really big fish.



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

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TIGER SHOALS STILL PRODUCING SPECKS

Despite fewer fish-holding structures in abandoned oil field, trout haven't left

Even miles almost due south of Southwest Pass, on the westernmost edge of Marsh Island, South Marsh Island Blocks 208-239, once were a thriving area oil and gas field in the Gulf of Mexico.

They also happened to be an excellent choice much of the time for anglers who wanted to fill an ice chest with speckled trout. Despite most of the visible, physical structures having been pulled out of the water, specks still roam the remaining structures and use the shell pads left from extracted rigs.

The area, better known as Tiger Shoals, will get repeated visits in late July and August from, among many others, Keo Khamphilavong of New Iberia, one of the most-successful saltwater anglers in the heart of Cajun Country. Also an accomplished redfish fisherman, his passion and specialty is putting speckled trout in the boat.

"My love, really, is speckled trout fishing," he said. "I love to fish trout. I could fish (them) all day," he said.

Khamphilavong and guests in his 22-foot boat have been reeling in speckled trout from nearshore waters since May, mostly in



Photo courtesy Monique Khamphilavong

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OPPOSITE PAGE: Keo Khamphilavong (left) and his fishing buddy, Craig Landry, both from New Iberia, relax after a big day catching speckled trout at Tiger Shoals. The area, once populated by many oil field structures, still yields fair to good catches. While many structures have been pulled out, the shell pads remain and offer habitat for specks trout and other species.

the Ship Shoal blocks of the northern Gulf. He planned to sample the speckled trout population to the west in summer, particularly in August and specifically at Tiger Shoals and the nearby artificial reef at SMI 233.

"It ought to be good if a storm doesn't get us this year," said Khamphilavong, who knows from years of experience how productive Tiger Shoals can be.

The area is targeted by anglers who launch at several access points along the central Louisiana coast. Cypremort Point, 26 miles from the north end of Tiger Shoals, is a primary jumping-off spot. The area is south-southwest of Southwest Pass on the western side of Vermilion Bay.

Speckled trout hang around the mostly 10- to 12-foot depths because the water's cooler than it is in and around Vermilion Bay.

"Tiger Shoals. They pulled (out) so many rigs over there. There are still some wellheads and shell pads," he said, pin-pointing TS 221 as one of the top producers but refusing to reveal the many pads he's got marked on his GPS.

He didn't mind sharing tips on how to catch them, however. Most of the time, he and his buddies tight-line for them, casting and bumping the bottom with soft plastics on a ¼-ounce leadhead, heavier if the current is strong.

Khamphilavong uses strictly Matrix Shad, mostly ultraviolet and glow. "Try any color. When you find one that works, keep fishing it," he said.

One of his buddies, Bret Bishop, uses tandem-rigged soft plastics and catches speckled trout consistently, he said.

When the bite shuts down, Khamphilavong and his crew often fish a live mullet about 18 to 24 inches under

a popping cork, and he wouldn't rule out topwaters for getting some action.

"When the fish are there, when they're feeding, they'll eat anything," he said.

When Khamphilavong pulls up to a shell pad or structure, he'll fish it for 10 or 15 minutes. If there are no takers, he'll pick up the trolling motor, crank the big engine and go to the next spot.


"I'm not hanging around if they're not biting. You just hop around. Honestly, that time of year, you'll find them," he said.

This August, Khamphilavong is counting on the new artificial reef at SMI 233. If Tiger Shoals doesn't produce, he'll run over to that man-made structure — completed last summer — that is about 10 miles northwest of Tiger Shoals. That artificial reef rises 6 feet above the sea floor in approximately 18 to 20 feet of water. ■

— Don Shoopman

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HOPEDALE LAKES FULL OF AUGUST SPECKS

Move deep, use live shrimp and fill your cooler, according to 'Frankie Fillet'

Frank Roberts, aka "Frankie Fillet" — the fastest fillet knife in the Gulf south — is also widely known as a storehouse of knowledge when it comes to St. Bernard Parish waters.

Where does he find fish in August, the hottest month of the year? He answered immediately,

"Fish the oyster reefs anywhere on the Hopedale side," he said.

By the Hopedale side, Roberts meant Lake Robin, Lake Coquille, Lake Calabasse, Lake Machais and Lake Fortuna.

"Then, you head north across the MRGO and fish Lake Athanasio, Bay Eloi and on up to Morgan Harbor and Christmas Camp Lake," he said. "All of those lakes and bays are loaded with oyster reefs, and the fish will be in there."

Besides choosing to fish on days with milder winds and good tide movement; there are a few additional factors to keep in mind in August.

"Fish early, because its so hot," he said. "The fish will generally bite better in the early morning, so hopefully you can find them and head in before the temperature hits heat-stroke levels.

"Fish a little deeper this month, because the trout do tend to hang deeper where the water is cooler. So if you normally fish 2½ feet under a cork, now you want to fish 3½ to 4 feet, or even 5 feet under a cork, depending on how deep the water is where you're fishing.

"Fish with live shrimp, because it's always going to produce. On rare occasions, the fish will actually prefer plastics, and when they do, I throw the High Water Get 'Um shads."

Where to fish?

"Just pick a spot," he said. "Head to any of those lakes or bays, get up in the oyster poles that mark the reefs, and fan-cast all around the boat. You can anchor or drift. Generally, I stick the Power Pole, and I like to have one person fish shallower under a popping cork, the other person fish a foot or so deeper but also under a popping cork, and I give a spot two or three casts, all around the boat. If nobody catches anything, move, but don't move far. Just move 30 or 40 yards over, and try again. If an area only produces small, under-size trout, move again, 30 or 40 yards or so. If a whole area comes up dry, move a bit farther, but keep repeating the process until you find the keeper size trout."

Frank Roberts shows off a beautiful Hopedale speck that's ready to meet the fillet knife.



Roberts said it's possible to also catch some nice reds in those same lakes; just anchor off prominent points or good coves, and fish live or dead shrimp about 2 or 3 feet under your popping cork.

"And when you need your fish cleaned, whether reds, drum, sheepshead or trout, call Frankie Fillet, the fastest knife on the planet," said Roberts (504-657-4028). ■

— Rusty Tardo

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Cade Hurst of Liberty was fishing out of Bay St. Louis, wading Flatboat Key, when he and a buddy caught these speckled trout.

MAKE SOME NOISE!



Photo by Cade Hurst

ADDING SOUND TO LURES By Brian Cope WILL GET A TROUT'S ATTENTION

Noise — at least the right noise — can attract speckled trout and give your bait or lure a better chance at being eaten. Popping corks are great noisemakers, and they add an extra or sound to live bait or artificial lures equally, as long as they are used as more than just strike indicators.

But popping corks aren't the only way to attract trout with noise. Many lures come with built-in noisemakers that can draw attention to themselves. Some of them are topwater lures, some work just under the surface and some on the bottom.

RATTLE, RATTLE

Egret Baits makes a rattling version of the popular Vudu shrimp, which is designed to be worked on the bottom. Numerous companies — Heddon, LIVETARGET and MirrOlure to name a few — make

topwater plugs with cupped faces that cause water to splash, creating noise. Many walk-the-dog plugs also incorporate rattles, and the ones that don't also make noise on the surface as the bait works left and right, causing subtle noises.

Rat-L-Trap is one of the most well-known rattling lures; saltwater and even floating versions are available. The floating versions are great to work over submerged oyster rakes, as anglers get the full effect of the rattles without fear of hanging up in the shells.

The Bomber Badonk-A-Donk SS is a slow-sinking lure that gives anglers the ability to walk-the-dog just under the surface. This lure is made with rattles and is available in high-pitch or low-pitch version.

BAITFISH SOUNDS

Livingston Lures takes things even

further. Instead of a generic rattling noise, this company's lures contain a small chip that, when wet, emits the sounds of bait-fish. This makes it, according to pro staffer Jess Haynes of Redfish Charters in Hilton Head, the only artificial lure that makes noise while sitting still.

Even when using soft-plastic lures along the bottom, such as Norton Sand eels, Z-Man Trout Tricks or Billy Bay Halo Shad, noise can easily be added by using a jighead from Rockport Rattler. These jigheads come in a variety of colors and sizes and have a built-in rattle chamber on the head that has no impact on the action of the lure. ■

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FLOUNDER GIGGING 101

By Dora Lambert

Late summer and fall bring an assortment of fishing opportunities, from the redfish spawn to the flounder run. Most anglers look forward to the time when flounder migrate from the marshes to the Gulf of Mexico to spawn.

There are multiple ways to put flukes in the cooler, including gigging, which is typically done at night and involves impaling the fish with a pronged spear.

Once speared, the flounder more than likely cannot be released. Do not spear what you do not intend to keep.

WHERE TO GIG?

Multiple great spots to gig flounder are found along Louisiana's coastline, from Venice to Cameron. Look for channels and



Photos courtesy Andrew Folse

around passes. They will be plentiful in these areas in late summer and fall as they migrate to deeper water.

A few good locations include the many channels around Venice, the Grand Isle beaches around the state park side of the island, Sabine Lake and the Cameron ship channel.

It is better to gig in clear water so you avoid stingrays. Also, do not go so deep that you can't see the bottom, unless your destination is a sandbar. If you do, it's a good practice to do the stingray shuffle, to avoid any potential injuries.

Once you find the flounder, you will typically find the fish at the same depth. This will fluctuate from night to night, however.

GEAR NEEDED

The setup will vary, based on whether you are wading or boat-bound.

When wading, most anglers attach a rope at the end of the spear with a float at the end. Think of a surf-fishing stringer, except modified for the gig. Do not attach the stringer to your body at any point. There is a possibility that a shark or a dolphin may steal your flounder, and you don't want to be dragged off.

If you are boat-bound, make sure you have several good lights to shine into the water. You will be able to visit more

Gigging flounder in shallow water is an excellent way to fill your cooler with tasty fillets.

locations and find the flounder more quickly. However, you will need to turn the motor off and use a push pole to get to the shallower spots. This may end up being a two-man job.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Wear closed-toed shoes with hard bottoms. Flounder gigging typically happens at night, and if you are not gigging from a boat, you will be walking. In Louisiana, there are areas that have reported flesh-eating bacteria cases and, not only that, an unintended injury could ruin the trip.

Make sure to pay attention to tidal charts. You do not want to get caught out on a sandbar, if you venture into the Gulf on a quickly rising tide.

Most important, bring an extra light and make sure your phone is fully charged. The GPS will help you get back to your boat or vehicle, and if your light goes out, the extra one will end up saving the night. ■

Andrew Folse gigs for flounder around Grand Isle.

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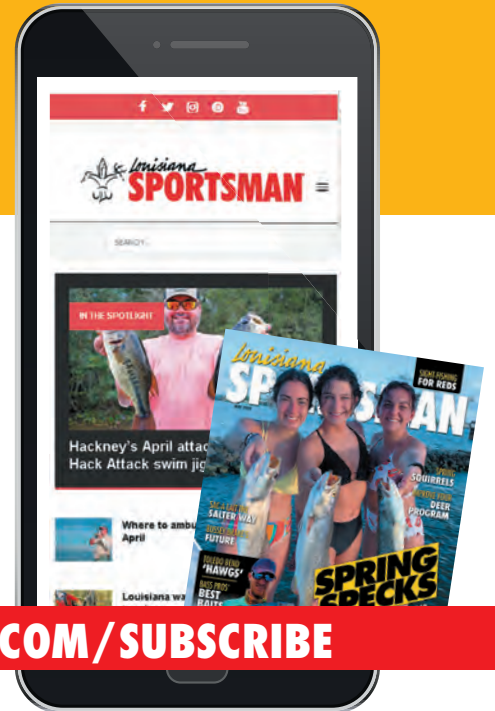


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AMBERJACK ARE BIG, POWERFUL FISH; THEY CAN PUT A BEND IN THE STRONGEST, HEAVIEST FISHING ROD. SO WHY NOT GIVE THEM A CHANCE? LEARN HOW TO DRAG THEM UP FROM LOUISIANA'S GULF WATERS.

■ By Steve Himel

GET JACKED UP!

Before I caught an amberjack, I must say that I vastly underestimated their brutality. Sometimes referred to as “tuna on steroids,” I soon found out these brutes can take you for a wild ride early on in the fight, even though they quickly tire into submission. But that fight leaves the angler and the fish exhausted.

Then, I was fortunate enough to be the guest of two hardcore offshore fanatics affectionately known in the Grand Isle area as “the Tobler boys.”

Jonathan Tobler and his older brother, Chad, grew up spending their summers at Grand Isle, first pursuing inshore species and then venturing into the open Gulf of Mexico in pursuit of offshore fish, now their passion.

Our trip began well before dawn at the Tobler’s “Big Easy” camp, scurrying around to gather the equipment, food, drinks and supplies needed for a full day offshore. After loading up with provisions and ice, we were off in their 29-foot Everglades boat as the eastern horizon began to brighten.

“Are you ready for some hardcore fishing?” Jonathan Tobler shouted over the blaring music as we passed the beach and hit the smooth, Gulf waters. “We go all day until dark. We fish hard and go as far as we need to go. There is no quit in us.”

I silently began to question whether I really wanted to do this. I normally pursue trout in the quiet coastal waters, returning in the early afternoon with enough time for a nap before dinner.



THIS WAS NOT GOING TO BE THAT KIND OF TRIP.

On the way out, Chad Tobler spoke about his passion for offshore fishing.

"I learned from experience, mainly fishing with friends and other charter captains prior to my family getting an offshore boat," he said. "I'm also a student of fishing, reading whatever literature I can get my hands on from reputable sources.

"We're mainly going after (amberjacks) today," he said. "The thing I like about AJs is that they bite really well once you locate them. They fight like a mule — that's why we call them 'rig donkeys' — but they wear out after about 10 or 15 minutes."

Chad Tobler said rigging up for effective amberjack hunting is pretty straightforward.

"We'll be using very heavy gear and live hardtails for bait, and will be fishing in water between 300 to 400 feet deep," he said. "Normally, the AJs are between 175 to 250 feet down, but we'll be using our sonar to find the exact depth.

He said the key is keeping them from breaking off.

"Amberjack hit like freight trains and head straight for the rig," Chad Tobler said. "You have to pull the fish off of the rig with the boat where you can fight them. If they make it to rig, it's game over."

The boat slowed as we approached some rigs southeast of

Barataria Pass in water about 100 to 170 feet deep.

"Time to catch some hardtails, so let's get the Sabiki rigs out," Jonathan Tobler said as his brother sprang into action, rigging two spinning rods, handing them to me and another guest on board.

"Just cast it out and start jigging hard," he said.

Soon we had two lively hardtails going into the livewell. We added about 20 more before heading south.

"Boat handling is everything, especially with AJs," Jonathan Tobler said. "It's not like snapper fishing, where you just hook on to a rig. You have to be mobile and be ready to pull the AJ off the rig with the boat after you hook up."

But there is more involved than that — and it begins even before lines are dropped.

"When you approach a rig that's holding amberjack that you've spotted on the sonar, you have to determine how the current is running so you can position the boat close enough to the rig to get your bait in the strike zone, but not too close so the fish is already under the rig when you hook it," he said.



"It takes experience to learn how to fine-tune boat handling, but it's the key to catching and landing AJ's."

Our first stop was a rig in about 300 feet of water where big red snapper were so thick they ate our hardtails before any AJs could get to them.

So the Tobler boys had a short conference and decided to head to the Midnight Lump, where there were some good reports of AJs.

The ride to the Lump was not a short one from Grand Isle, and there were no guarantees. As we arrived, we saw a handful of boats, and it looked like one was hooked up.

Chad Tobler quickly had a hardtail rigged and dispatched. After the desired depth was reached, he put the rod in the holder.

"Watch that rod," he said.

It wasn't long before there were a couple of hard jerks, followed by the rod tip nearly bending into the water.

"He's on!" Jonathan Tobler screamed, putting the boat in gear.

I had already put the fighting belt on, and Chad Tobler told me to grab the rod.

As I did, I felt the unbridled power of this fish. I almost felt he would pull me overboard. I straightened my back and took a few steps backwards before another powerful run.



A big amberjack is a handful for fishermen on stand-up tackle. The key is getting the fish away from the structure as soon as he's hooked. **ABOVE:** Gulf amberjack are caught around rigs and other bottom structure in 150 to 300 feet of water.

Before long, the runs became less frequent and shorter in duration. As sweat poured off of me and my muscles trembled, the fish finally lost the will to fight and was quickly gaffed.

It was an amberjack, roughly 60 pounds.

"Another AJ virgin bites the dust," Jonathan Tobler said, dancing around the boat, before rolling the fish into the fish box.

The action was steady while drifting over the Lump, and all of the guests were able to put an AJ in the fish box, but the day was still young, so the Tobler boys decided to head for the rip, about 53 miles out from Barataria Pass, to try to catch some mahi mahi.

I had never been out to the bluewater off Louisiana's coast, and I saw for myself how incredibly beautiful the crystal-clear waters are.

This rip held lots of grass, and the mahi mahi were everywhere. We used spinning gear baited with squid, and it was an absolute feeding frenzy.

I have been on some awesome trout bites, but nothing compared to this. We caught as many as we wanted and then took a break to eat lunch.

A few guests on board couldn't resist the urge to take a dip in the warm cobalt-blue Gulf waters to escape the heat.

The ride back to Grand Isle seemed much longer than the trip out, but the Tobler boys were not ready to call it a day.

"How about some mangroves?" Jonathan Tobler asked.

I was starting to like this offshore stuff.

A brief stop at some shallow-water rigs yielded some mangrove snapper, which nicely topped off the fish box filled with the AJs and mahi mahi.

With daylight fading, we made the final turn into the marina after traveling about 150 miles round-trip. We were exhausted but satisfied with the great day we had on the water.

"I told you that we fish hard," Jonathan Tobler said. ■

DAMON MCKNIGHT'S AJ SECRETS >



Capt. Steve Himel has hunted and fished in Southeast Louisiana for over 50 years. He operates Marshland Adventures, LLC and is a member of the Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association.



A big amberjack is a handful for any angler, even an experienced one, but heavy tackle normally wears them out after 15 or 20 minutes.

RIGGING UP FOR AMBERJACK

Chad Tobler and Capt. Damon McKnight of Venice agree that heavy tackle is critical when it comes to amberjack fishing, and a common mistake of inexperienced AJ anglers is to go too light.

Here are these anglers' setups:

• **Tobler.** Penn International 50W or 80W reels spooled with 150- or 200-pound mono and the stiffest rod (i.e., tuna rod) you can find. He builds Carolina-rigs with 200-pound mono leader and various egg sinker weights

(depending on current), but 8-ounce weights are normally used. He finishes off the rig with triple-strong 8/0 circle hooks. And don't forget the stand-up fighting belt.

• **McKnight.** Shimano TLD 50 reels spooled with 250-pound mono and Shimano Tallus 80-130 rods. His Carolina rigs include 400-pound mono leaders and 32-ounce weights tipped with 13/0 circle hooks. ■



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OPPOSITE PAGE: Don't scrimp on tackle for amberjack; go as big as you can for these powerful fish.

DAMON MCKNIGHT'S AJ SECRETS

Damon McKnight of Super Strike Charters out of Venice shared some of the secrets he's learned during his 25 years of battling amberjack out of his Venice headquarters.

Q: What do you like about amberjack fishing compared to other offshore species?

A: They are not very finicky most days and put up a great fight for customers. They also are very good to eat.

Q: How do amberjack fight compared to tuna?

A: An 80-pound tuna is a good fight to the end; that means a tuna will stay consistent throughout the fight. An 80-pound amberjack puts up an unbelievable fight for the first five minutes — after that, they start to wear out. It is critical to get the fish up quick or he will usually get you wrapped up in something and break you off. But for the first five minutes, that 80-pound AJ has a yellowfin tuna beat, for sure.

Q: Where do you stop to catch hardtails for bait — block number and depth of water? How many should you catch for bait? Can other baits be used?

A: We fish hardtails on any rig, rip, or buoy that might be holding them. It can be any block number, usually in 400 feet or less. Fishing AJ's with live bait can be quick some days, and it can take a while if there are other fish down there such as barracuda or sharks. A good number to have is about 30 hardtails for amberjack. They should be on the larger size, about a pound or larger.

Other baits that you can use are jigs: Any type of diamond jig or metal jig will usually work if they are thick. We have caught them trolling Stretch 30's and Rapalas, as well.

Q: What is the best depth of water to fish for amberjack? Block numbers?

A: The best depth is around 300 feet. You can fish any rig in those depths in any block from Main Pass, South Pass, and West Delta.

Q: How deep should you go down with your bait? How can you tell?

A: Go down to 150 feet or better. You do not have to be exact on depth; however, you can mark your line in 20-foot increments by using a permanent marker or using colored tape.



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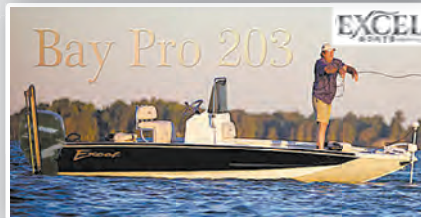
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Q: Is there a particular technique used to get them to bite (i.e. jigging up and down, etc.)?

A: No technique is really necessary for live bait. You just have to get it down to them. For jigging, it will take a fair amount of movement most days, but it has to be balanced. Most people barely bounce the jig, and do more reeling up and down than bouncing. So, there is some technique that has to apply in order to get the best bite.

Q: What general area do you fish/catch most of the amberjack?

A: We catch them in all of the West Delta, Main Pass and South Pass blocks. We do better fishing in an area that has weaker current and clean water. Amberjack schools do move from rig to rig, so you will usually have to do a little searching.

Q: What mistakes do most people make when fishing for amberjack?

A: The biggest mistake is not using heavy-enough tackle. The sure thing is to use the bigger stand-up equipment, with 250-pound test and big hooks. They are a powerful fish, so you really have to work to get them away from structure.

Q: What are some other things that people should know about fishing for amberjack?

A: Be ready to lose a lot of tackle if you are not prepared. Do not show up with 80-pound PowerPro on a small rod and reel with a couple of jigs: You will surely lose most fish that you hook. Go with the heavy tackle, and once you are hooked up

have the captain or person behind the wheel pull away from the rig or reef to give you a better chance of getting the fish than losing him. It will take some practice to get it figured out perfectly, but the key is to go heavy; they usually aren't line shy. ■

Damon McKnight can be reached at www.superstrike-charters.com.

Dan Love peered across the waters of Ross Barnett Reservoir, picked out a target and sailed a jerkbait to the spot. As he worked the lure back towards the boat, it darted back and forth until a monster bass smashed it and dove for the depths. Love instantly set the hook and drove it deep into the jaws of the massive bass. “Ka-Whoosh”

The bass exploded through the surface and thrashed wildly as Love used all of his faculties and equipment to keep it on the line. After wearing the fish down, Love boated it, quickly took a photo and released it to grow and be caught another day.

“I tend to go away from what everybody else is using these days,” said Love. “While most

people are going away from jerkbaits by midsummer, I’ll be switching to them, as I like to cast something different than everybody else.”

While many view hard jerkbaits as prespawn or cold-weather baits, Love utilizes them as finesse baits throughout the summer — or as long as they’re biting them.

“I’ll fish them from 3 feet deep to 18 feet deep,” he said. “A lot of fish suspend during the summer, and they’ll come up and get one from below. If there’s a thermocline, I’ll fish them all the way down to the thermocline but not below.” Love prefers using clear lures like the Strike King jerkbait in the IU color: clear with a green and blue back.

FINESSE EQUIPMENT >

IF IT'S HOT, GO SMALL

FINESSE-FISHING AND ALL THAT COMES WITH IT — LIGHT LINE, SMALL BAITS, SMALL WEIGHTS — CAN PLAY A BIG PART OF CATCHING SUMMER BASS ACROSS MISSISSIPPI.

■ By Mike Giles



FINESSE EQUIPMENT

Love is a talented tournament angler and custom rod-maker from the Jackson area who prefers building his own rods, tailored to his specific fishing techniques. In fact, he can design and manufacture almost any rod to fit your specific taste.

Love is currently fishing the Media Bass and Pride of the South trails on Ross Barnett, as well as other tournaments on the lake, and having very good success.

"We're currently leading the points race in Media Bass," Love said, "and we've also won five of the nine Thursday night tournaments on Barnett. The Thursday night fruit jars have a 3-fish limit, so you have to go for quality bites, and we've been able to succeed when the going is toughest."

When everybody is catching fish, it's usually a shootout, but when the going gets tough, Love seems to excel by doing things differently and by staying focused on the task at hand.

"I'll use braided line on everything I fish except crankbaits," he said.

"I'll use the braided line because of the casting distance I'll get and for the control of the lure. I also like it for the hook-setting ability, as there is virtually no line stretch.

"I'll use the braid as a main line, but I'll employ a fluorocarbon leader. I may use a 30-pound braid with a 12- or 15-pound fluorocarbon leader and still have enough power to set the hook, while utilizing the clear fluorocarbon to entice strikes from wary bass."

A caveat to the braid and fluorocarbon combo is that Love joins the lines with an FG knot, which is strong, durable and won't slip. That's the most-important part of the equation when you're tying braid to fluorocarbon or mono. If your knot won't hold, then you're going to lose fish needlessly.

Dan Love shows off the kind of bass he catches while using finesse baits and tactics during summer.



FINESSE WITH JIGS

While many think of Oklahoma bass pro Tommy Biffle as a power fisherman — and thus equate his Bifflehead jigs as power techniques — they can also be used in a finesse situation during hot weather.

"I really like to fish the ¼-ounce Bifflehead jig on a 15-pound braid with a 12-pound fluorocarbon leader," Love said. "I'll fish it on one of my custom 7-foot-3 rods with an ABU Garcia MGX

(reel) and tip it with a Zoom Ultra Vibe speed craw. You can cast long distances and get down to the fish without spooking them, and I find and catch a lot of fish with it too.

"Using a Bifflehead jig combo like that is one of my ways to get bites, especially when I'm traveling and trying to get bites to figure out where they are, if they're eating brown or purple, and what's going on with the bass."

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If it's hot, go small

Spooling braid but using a fluorocarbon leader gives Dan Love plenty of power for setting the hook and fighting big summer bass.

DROP-SHOT RIG

The traditional drop-shot rig has been around for a while and has been responsible for many bass tournament wins around the country in clear lakes and during hot weather. However, Love said they are a good choice for novice anglers or for anyone who hasn't finesse-fished.

"If I have a novice fishing with me, and the bite is tough, I'll put them on a drop-shot," Love said. "I prefer using them (over) a Carolina rig during tough conditions, because many bass will swallow the hook on the Carolina rigs, you'll end up killing some fish, and that can mean the difference between winning a tournament or coming up just a little short. A dead fish cost me \$600 in a recent tournament, and if you extrapolate that over a whole year, you could lose thousands of dollars."

Many fishermen think drop-shot rigs are only used with light tackle and light weights, small hooks and small baits, but that doesn't always have to be the case, according to Love.

"You can use a ½-ounce weight with a 5/0 hook and a 9-inch worm," Love said. "It's kind of like a reverse Carolina rig, but novice anglers can really feel the bass when they strike since the hook is above the weight, and they can set the hook before the bass swallow it. The sensitivity of the drop-shot technique allows anglers the ability to detect sensitive strikes and set the hook quicker, regardless of the size of hook, weight or worm, and that's important when finessing bass into biting."



LEDGE-FISHING SHAKY HEADS

"During July and August, I'm going to concentrate on graphing the deep ledges to find schools of bass," said bass pro Jay Mabry of Meridian. "Fish are like people; they're going to find somewhere to get out of the heat, whether it's in the shade or in deep water. I'll stay on the move until I find a ledge that has fish, and then I'll work them with a shaky head. I'm not going to fishing random ledges if the fish aren't there, I want to see them on my Humminbird Helix 12 graph before I start fishing."

"I always downsize when the fishing gets tough and throw a shaky head with a finesse worm rigged on 10-pound fluorocarbon line. I prefer Zoom trick worms when using a shaky head."

"I'll use the watermelon color in clear water and the redbug color in stained water. I don't care what I use this time of year, but the key is you have to locate the bass, and if you can find them, you can usually catch them some time during the day."

Mabry grew up fishing a variety of lakes and rivers in Mississippi and Alabama and spent a lot of time on the Tenn-Tom waterway system. He also learned how to catch hot weather bass during the dog days of August.

"When I'm on the river or fishing lakes, the key will always be hunting for and finding the bass on the ledges first, and then determining what they want," Mabry said. "If I find ledges with grass on them, I'll try working them with Carolina rigs and big worms, too."

Seeing bass and baitfish on your depth finder before you start fishing a spot will lead to better catches.

Jay Mabry of Meridian displays a lunker bass he caught while finesse-fishing ledges in the summer.



While Mabry likes finessing them with shaky heads when bass are lethargic and holding tight to the ledges, he'll also try some traditional deep-water ledge baits.

"I'll use a crankbait on the ledges if the bass are suspended just above the ledge or grass," Mabry said. "If I can trigger a reaction bite, they'll usually start feeding, and then you can catch them on a variety of lures. But my go-to bait will be that shaky head with a finesse worm if the bite is slow."

Bass will also congregate around bridges that have current moving through, and that's a favorite area of Mabry's no matter where he's fishing.

"I like to look for current, generally around the bridges or causeways," Mabry said. "If you can find current moving through a bridge, whether that's on the river or a lake, the bass will usually relate to the bridge and strike your lure when you put it on them. They'll stage by the concrete pillars or rocky points and ambush unsuspecting baitfish or lures that swim past."

If you want to keep fishing and catch fish during the dog days of summer then try a few of these experts tips and techniques and you should be successful at finding and catching hot weather bass. ■



Mike Giles of Meridian has been hunting and fishing Mississippi since 1965. He is an award-winning wildlife photographer, writer, seminar speaker and guide.

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4 BASS PROS, 4 FAVORITE BAITS

By Don Shoopman

varieties. Gleason likes a long, plastic worm, Rheem favors a plastic frog and Hackney chooses a creature bait for punching the mats seemingly found everywhere.

Those bass pros shared their reasons recently.

Bass anglers don't take days off during the hot, sultry days of summer, the period after the heliacal rising of the star system Sirius, which Greek and Roman astrologists connected to heat, drought, sudden thunderstorms, lethargy, mad dogs and bad luck.

Don't know about all that, but sometimes the oppressively high daytime temperatures make it tough on bassers. Four Louisiana bass pros conquer the rising thermometer and don't lose any sweat over it with their go-to baits.

Lucas Ragusa of Gonzales is partial to moving baits, specifically a spinnerbait. Darold Gleason of Many, Clark Rheem of Elm Grove and Greg Hackney of Gonzales prefer soft plastics, albeit different

HEAVY, BIG-BLADED DELTA SPINNERBAIT HELPS RAGUSA NAIL BASS IN AUGUST

Lucas Ragusa's father taught him early in his bass-fishing career one of the most-consistent ways to put bass in the boat when it's hot enough to fry an egg on the uncarpeted aluminum deck of a boat.

Ragusa, 42, remembers those 20-year-old lessons, and to this day, he relies on that artificial lure to catch bass in August. That's why when the locusts are humming, the sun's baking everything it touches and it's 100 degrees in the shade, the Gonzales bass angler picks up a ¾-ounce Delta Lures spinnerbait with a No. 6 gold Colorado blade to catch bass in and around the Spillway and elsewhere across the country.

He slow-rolls the heavy spinnerbait to entice lethargic bass that are cooling their fins into biting. It has been locked in his hand for numerous tournaments around his hometown.

Delta's big-bladed spinnerbait triggers bass to chase and eat, particularly in the Atchafalaya Basin, he said.

"I like to throw it in Big Pigeon and Little Pigeon because they have the cypress tree cover I'm looking for and depth," Ragusa said. "In some places where it's a little deeper, I throw to the bank and reel as slow as I can."



Photo courtesy Lucas Ragusa

He said he casts it “to dirt” and retrieves it out to 8-foot depths — if a nearby bass allows it to go that far.

About his preference for a No. 6 gold Colorado blade, he said, “It’s a little bit bigger, but what it does is, it thumps — extremely important in muddy water. If it’s just stained, I might go to a No. 5, but the No. 6 has been my confidence blade for 20 years.”

Ragusa, who fished the Bassmaster Open trail from 2013 to 2018, likes two colors: chartreuse/white and white/chartreuse. He said the Delta spinnerbait has quality components and a premium hook.

Ragusa also adds something to the spinnerbait to help prevent it from rolling over on the retrieve.

“I do like to pair it with a 3-inch, chartreuse/pearl grub to keep it stabilized, to keep it from trying to roll, also so I’m not tempted to reel too fast,” he said. “That gives a fish an opportunity to track it with its lateral line and find it and eat it.”

Ragusa ties the spinnerbait to 20-pound Sunline Sniper

fluorocarbon spooled on a 5:1 Shimano reel seated on a medium-heavy, 6-foot-8 Shimano Zodias rod with a fast tip.

His final tip may help many more anglers put bass in the boat. It’s about how he positions his fishing rod on the retrieve.

“I like to point the rod at the bait when I fish it so I can get a full load on the hookset,” Ragusa said. ■

POPPING FROG ➤



“It’s a little bigger, but what it does is, it thumps.”

Photo courtesy deltalures.com

REEHM STILL FROGGING AND CATCHING BASS WHEN IT'S HOT IN LATE SUMMER

Clark Reehm, a bass pro from Elm Grove, didn't hesitate recently when he named the artificial lure he'll fish the most during the dog days of summer.

Reehm's choice might surprise those who join the crowd probing a lake's deep waters with soft plastics and crankbaits, and really shock their systems when they learn he probes the shallows, no matter whether it's a 100-degree day or not, with a plastic frog.

Well, not just any shallows.

"All right, so the bait I would have in August, hands down, I'm always going to have a frog tied on. Look, I fish deep at (Lake Sam Rayburn), but it's a hookup and landing percentage deal. More times than not, you can go anywhere in the country in August and catch fish on a frog," said Reehm, a veteran of the FLW Pro Tour and Bassmaster Elite Series, noting that he throws various frogs, mostly popping frogs.

Reehm loves to have percentages on his side.

"I'm going to let you in on a secret," he said. "The key to targeting them is shade. Everybody's hung up on (fishing frogs) on grass. I'm going to look for shade ... no matter. If it's 100 degrees, it's 95 degrees in the shade," he said, explaining the dissolved-oxygen

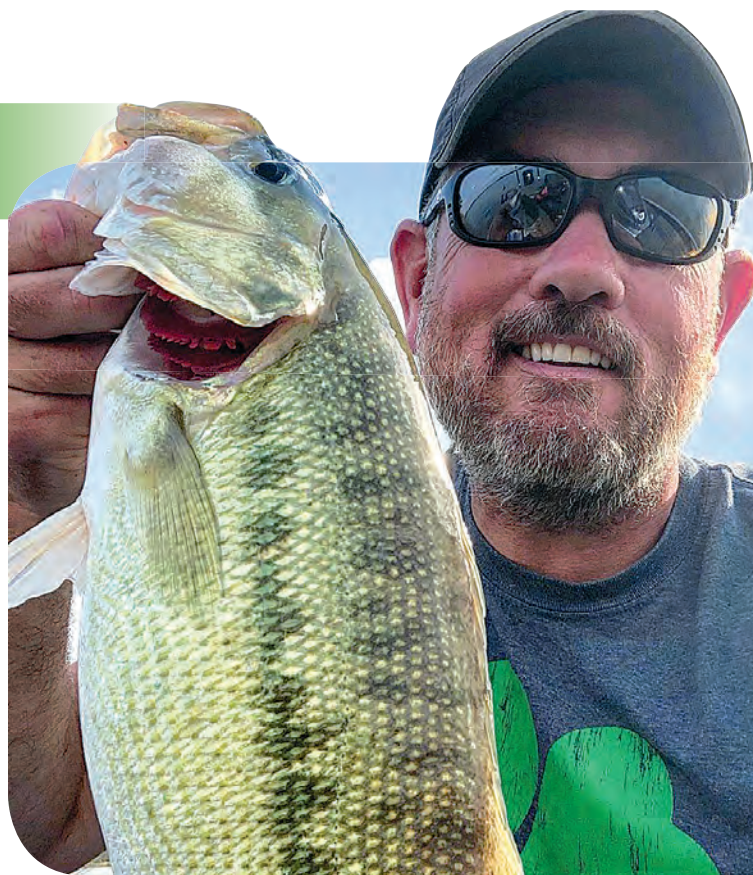


Photo courtesy Clark Reehm



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levels are typically higher in the shallows, sometimes better than they are in the deep water below a reservoir's thermoclines.

"It's something you can go and just target. After I get (the frog) out of the shade, I reel it in. When I'm done with the strike zone, I'm done," he said.

Reehm's favorite colors are black, white or "some sort of green. It's about the bluegill," Reehm said.

Reehm, 41, said, "Everybody else is dragging worms in deep water. That deep bite is so hit and miss. I can go frogging and typically catch the fish. I tend to like popping frogs, but every day is different."

For working plastic frogs in water with less cover, he uses a Dobyns 735C fishing rod, but for "the slop and heavy cover," he opts for a heavier rod, a Dobyns 736C. He ties the bogus hopper to 65-pound braid spooled on a high-speed Daiwa or Shimano reel.

Reehm doesn't count "1-2-3" or anything like that when a bass slurps, gulps or inhales the plastic frog he's casting and retrieving. Like other bass pros, he relies on muscle memory to get the slack out of the line and set the hook immediately.

"As soon as I feel them, I'm cracking it," he said. ■



Photo courtesy bassjunkiesfrogpond.blogspot.com

“More times than not, you can go anywhere in the country in August and catch fish on a frog.”

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V&M'S WILD THANG A MUST-HAVE PLASTIC WORM FOR GLEASON IN AUGUST

A time-tested approach that veteran bass pro Darold Gleason of Many catches bass with in August is to cover the depths with his favorite Texas-rigged plastic worm, a V&M Bait's Wild Thang.

"I like to throw the 8.5(-inch) version," said Gleason, explaining that V&M pro staffers have nicknamed the worm that features a huge tail "the box worm." As in, "Whenever you catch one on it, it goes in the box."

Gleason, who fished the 50th annual Bassmaster Classic this past March, is confident he can rely on the worm to be a fish-catching bait when the heat is on.

"If a Louisiana angler is trying to figure out how to catch fish in August, that's a good bait to use," he said "It seems like in the summer, they don't eat as often, but when they do, it's a bigger meal. I mean, it's a big-fish bait. That's one thing I always have tied on in the summer. It's a kicker thing.

"It's real versatile at lakes like Toledo Bend. You can fish deep brush piles with it, with either a 1/2- or 3/8-ounce weight. It's also a real killer at night at Toledo Bend."

Gleason, who also guides, said a few of his clients have gotten their hands on 10-pound class bass at Toledo Bend night-fishing with the Wild Thang. It's popular this time of year at Caddo Lake, too.

"A lot of guys fish it around cypress trees there with like a 1/4-ounce weight," he said.

Gleason's top two colors are redbug and blue flex, which resembles the purplish junebug hue.

"They both work in dingier water or clear water. Try each one to see which one they're preferring," he said.

A 5/0 Gamakatsu heavy wire, wide-gap hook gets the call when Gleason Texas rigs the Wild Thang. His line preference is 15- or 20-pound Hi-Seas fluorocarbon spooled on a high-speed reel mated with a 7-foot-3 Falcon Expert Amistad Series rod. ■

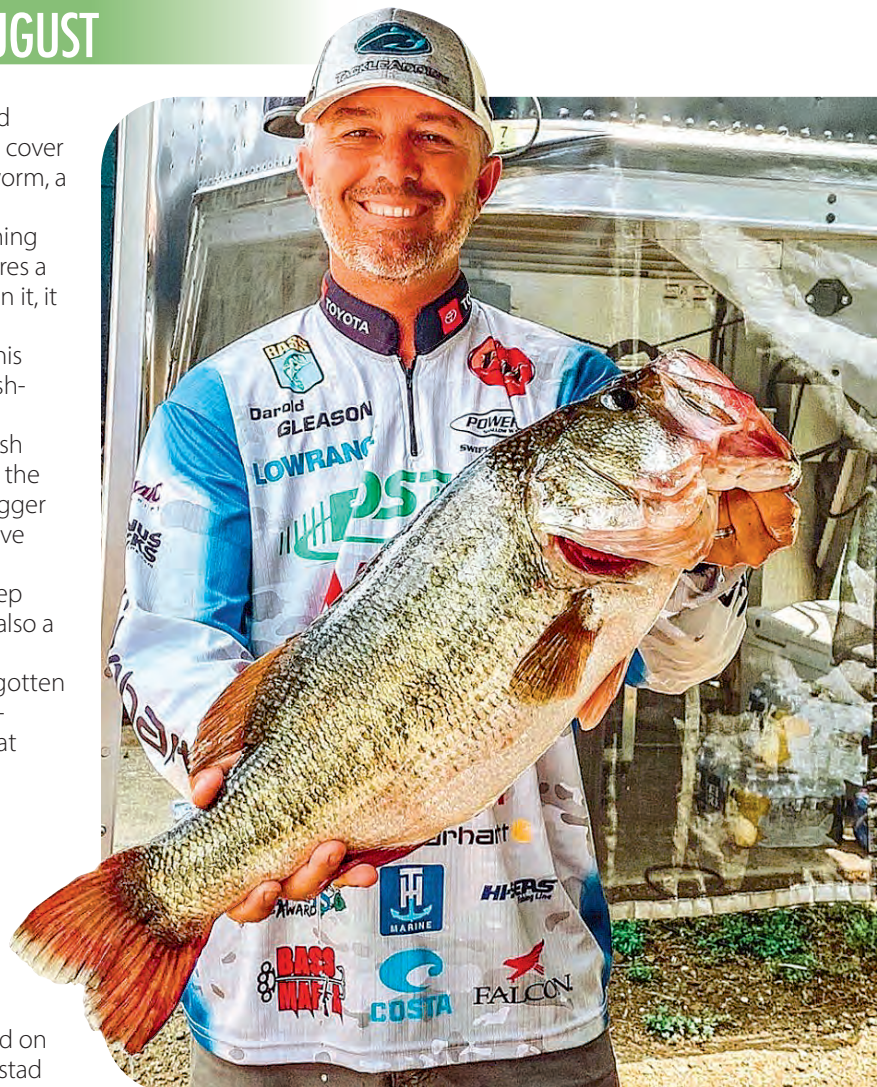


Photo courtesy Darold Gleason



“That’s one thing I always have tied on in the summer. It’s a kicker thing.”

Photo courtesy basspro.com

RAGE PUNCH BUG DELIVERS K.O. UNDER MATS IN AUGUST FOR HACKNEY

When August and its smothering heat arrives, bass pro Greg Hackney of Gonzales puts up his gloved hands and starts punching, trying to score a knockout.

He goes with a reliable technique and his favorite artificial lure for punching dense vegetation that creates mats: a Strike King Rage Punch Bug. The 3-inch, soft-plastic creature bait is fished under a heavy weight, usually a 1½-ounce Strike King Tour Grade tungsten weight, pokes through the roof, bass eat it and come out fighting.

"Punching mats is what I like to do," he said. "Punching mats is a year-round technique in our area. Before I got on the (pro) trail, I caught them punching mats ... prespawn and post-spawn. Probably my favorite time to fish mats is January and February.

"It's designed to (punch) mats. There'll be so many mats, so much vegetation growing up. Those fish like the shade in August. Lilies, hyacinths, grasses — it doesn't make any difference what it is. That's where fish spend so much of their time, under mats. I spend most of the day fishing the thickest cover I can find. It's natural for them to be there."

The Punch Bug, he said, is the best mat-punching soft plastic he's encountered because it penetrates mats easily due to its design. He chuckled and likened its shape to a "li'l weenie with crawfish claws." It's thick and has a ribbed body, a plus because it can be rigged on a big hook, and the point won't come out as sometimes happens because of all the rubbing and pulling when punching, he said. A 6/0 Hack Attack Heavy Cover flipping hook is important for a high hookup ratio, he said, because with a heavier weight, that isn't always the case.

Hackney's top colors are black/blue, which is hard to beat in Louisiana, he said, plus black neon, Okeechobee craw and blue. Occasionally, when there are shad present, he'll use white.

Hackney ties a Punch Bug to 65-pound Gamma Tourque Spectra braid with the 1½-ounce weight and 80-pound braid with a

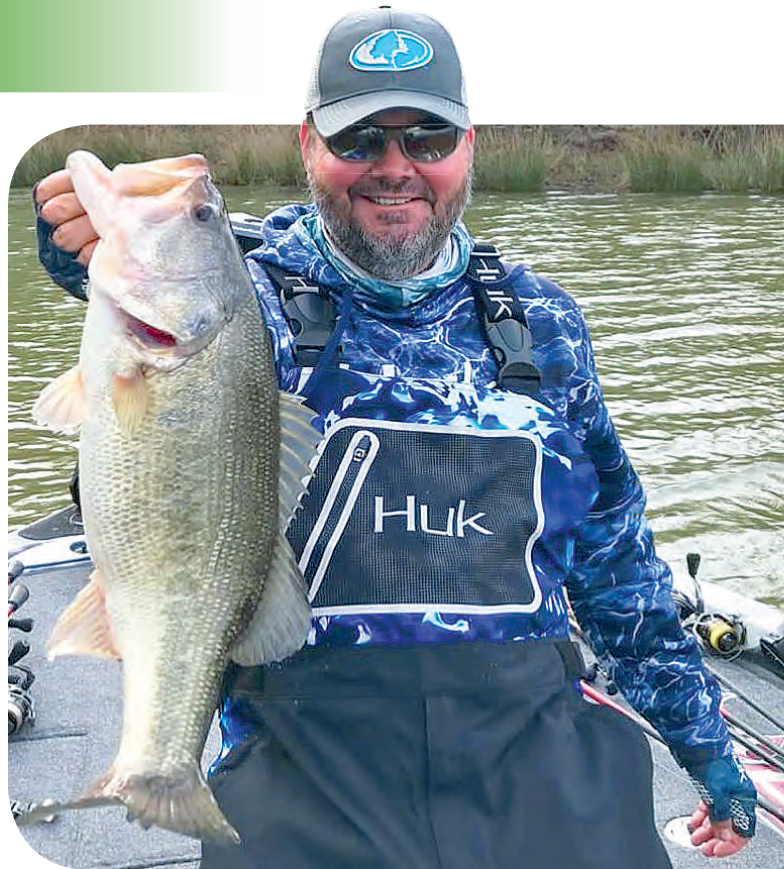


Photo courtesy Greg Hackney

heavier weight. He wants a fast fall in the summer, unlike during winter months when he wants a slower descent and uses a ¾-ounce weight.

The rest of his punching combo includes a 7-foot-11 Hack Attack flipping stick with a Lew's Super Duty 300 Speed Spool. ■

LURE REVIEW >

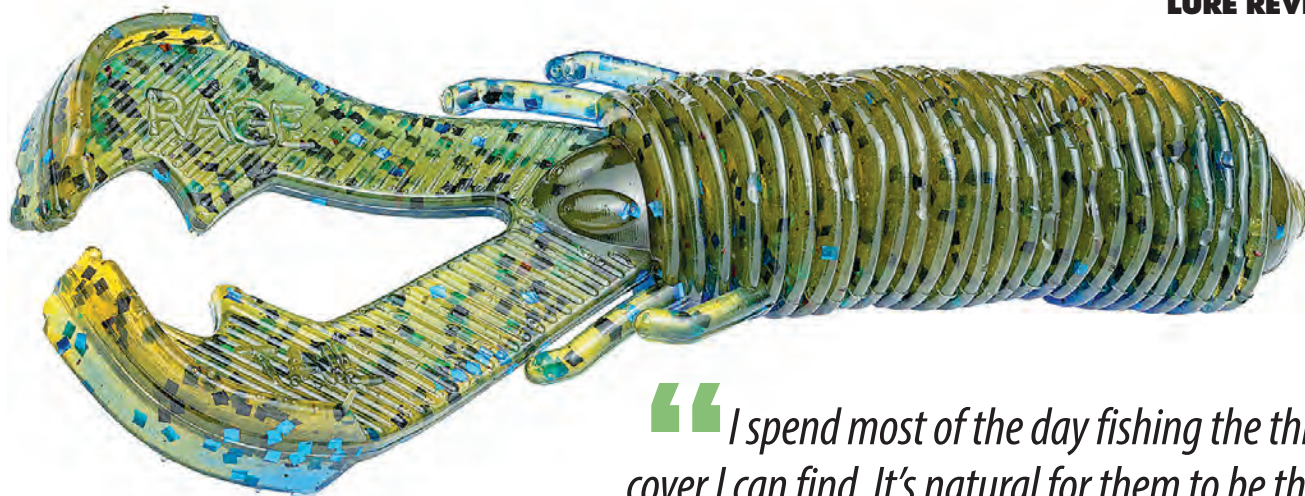


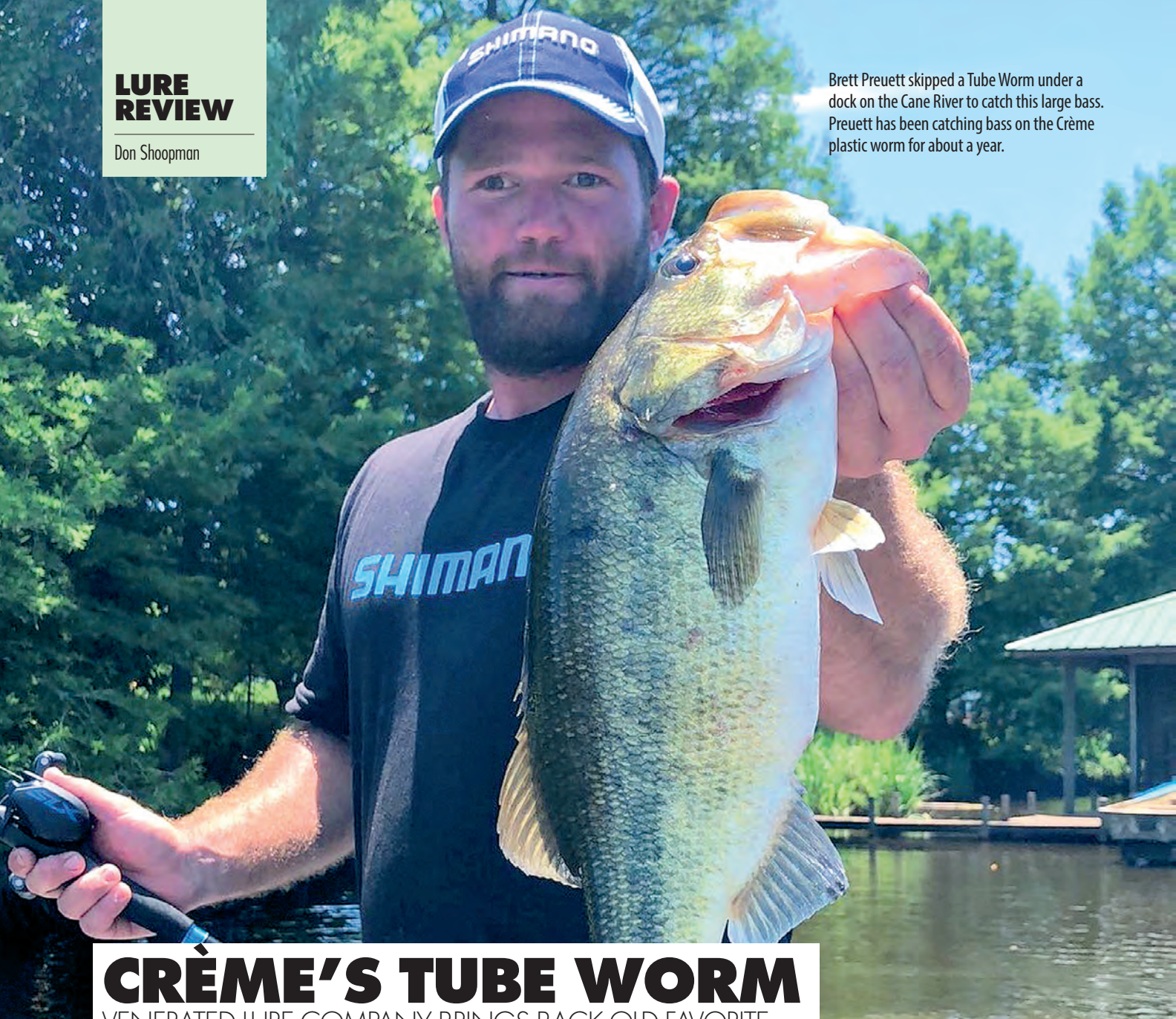
Photo courtesy fishusa.com

“ I spend most of the day fishing the thickest cover I can find. It's natural for them to be there. ”

LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

Brett Preuett skipped a Tube Worm under a dock on the Cane River to catch this large bass. Preuett has been catching bass on the Crème plastic worm for about a year.



CRÈME'S TUBE WORM

VENERATED LURE COMPANY BRINGS BACK OLD FAVORITE

Photo courtesy Brett Preuett

That Crème soft-plastic worm might have heard your grandfather talk about is catching on again since it was reintroduced last year by the Tyler, Texas-based manufacturer.

Crème's Tube Worm is a plastic worm that floats and "has that tube aspect to it," a deadly combination, according to Brett Preuett of Monroe, a Bassmaster Elite Series angler. That look gives it a unique presentation unlike other plastic worms.

"I think it's a really good bait. I think it's something different than the rest of the market.... There's just not that many that float. It seems like I definitely get some more bites," said Preuett, who has been using the Tube Worm to catch bass con-

sistently for about a year.

Preuett pointed out the solid head section above a hollow-body, tube tail that traps air in the cavity, that causes it to float and gives the tail's tube tentacles a chance to undulate even when the rest of the plastic worm is motionless.

NEW UNVEILING

The Tube Worm was unveiled at 2019 ICAST to rave reviews and sold out at the Crème booth during the 50th annual Bassmaster Classic in early March at Alabama's Lake Guntersville. Its success validates the 71-year-old company's decision, prompted by popular demand, to bring back the Tube Worm, according to Mike Clark, a Crème lure designer and

social-media manager who has been with the company since 1993.

"It was popular back in the '70s and '80s. It sold millions," said Clark, 56.

The original Tube Worm was designed by Wayne Kent, whose career began as a teenager in a bait shop in Tyler, then catapulted when he and his wife, Judy, made soft plastics in their garage while he was attending Tyler Junior College and sold them to Crème founder Nick Crème.

Crème and his wife, Cosma, started



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.

their business in their Akron, Ohio, home, then opened a second plant in Tyler in 1960 and a few years later relocated the entire company to Texas. The Crèmes and the Kents, who owned and operated Knight Manufacturing Co., became business partners and eventually merged in 1989, five years after Crème's death. Kent introduced his Tube Worm in 1976. He hired Clark in 1993, long after the production of the Tube Worm had been discontinued.

Clark said since the mid-2010s, the company has received countless requests for a comeback by the Tube Worm. Crème officials listened and brought it back in 2019. It features modern colors proven to catch bass today.

Preuett, who fished one year on the FLW Tour before joining the Bassmaster Elite Series in 2016, said he fishes it as a Carolina-rigged soft plastic and on a drop-shot. It has been effective in heavily pressured reservoirs such as Toledo Bend and Sam Rayburn, he said.

RIGGING METHODS

"It's really good with the shaky head, too, for spotted bass, so when I go to a spotted bass lake, I like to throw it on a shaky head," said Preuett, who also guides on Toledo Bend and Rayburn.

"It's a pretty versatile bait, a little bit different. Everybody should give it a try and see what they think," he said, noting it also can be Texas-rigged and fished on a Neko Rig.

The key is to avoid imbedding a hook point below the

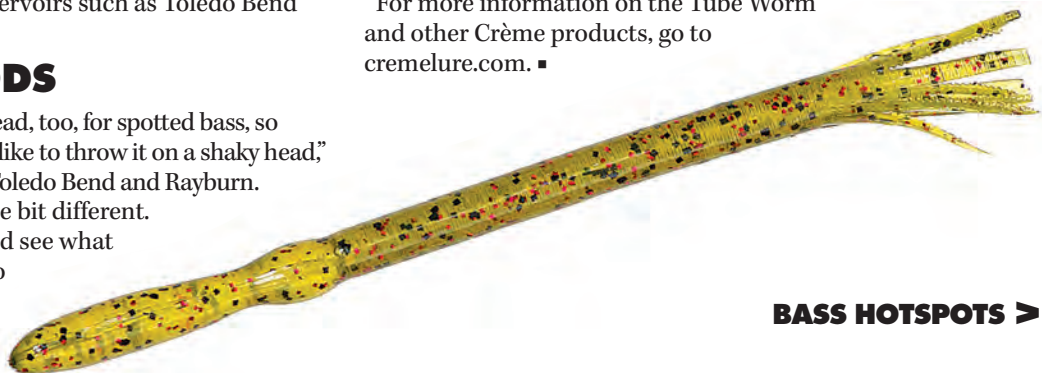
worm's egg sack. Preuett relies on a 3/0 Gamakatsu G-Lock hook for Carolina Rigs and a 2/0 hook for drop-shotting, while Clark recommends a 2/0 or 3/0 sproat hook.

Preuett's favorite colors are cotton candy and watermelon magic. Other popular colors are green pumpkin, watermelon/red and junebug/red, according to Clark.

Preuett fishes the Tube Worm on a drop-shot with 10-pound test Sunline Shooter fluorocarbon — 12-pound test if in heavy cover — about 18 inches above a ⅜-ounce weight. He uses a 7-foot-3 Shimano MH spinning rod and a Shimano Stellar spinning reel.

On a Carolina rig, Preuett uses 18-pound fluorocarbon for the main line and 15-pound test fluoro tied to a 4-foot, 15-pound leader with a Bayou Rattler Sonar Ballzz under a ¾- or 1-ounce Titan Tungsten weight.

For more information on the Tube Worm and other Crème products, go to cremelure.com. ■



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START SHALLOW, BUT KNOW BEST BITE AT TOLEDO BEND IS DEEP

Try shoreline cover early or late, as long as you understand most fish are biting deep

It's sometimes hard to get away from the shallow-water bite when you're chasing bass, but in August, it's almost a must at Toledo Bend.

Days with dark, cloudy skies and rain are favorable times to fish in 6 feet of water or less, especially if the lake level stays up through July and into August. Those are the weather conditions you want for a shallow-water bite. Otherwise, you're best bet for pulling bass out of the shallower depths is very early and/or very late in the day around lily pad fields and scattered grass if you can find it — there's some up north and in the back of some major creeks like Housen and Six Mile.

When the sun comes out blazing, and the water temperatures in the upper 80s and 90s, it'll be time to probe 20- to 25-foot depths with soft plastics on Carolina-rigs and drop-shots, deep-diving crankbaits and jiggling spoons. Modern marine electronics make it easier to find bass, but the key isn't just finding a concentration of bass, it's finding a bass in a school that wants to bite. I want to emphasize the importance of modern marine electronics. You've got to have them and know how to use them.

It's pretty cut and dried in this scenario. Fish those depths of 20 feet or better, and look for points off humps and ridges, as well as drains and ditches in original creeks like San Miguel, Indian Mound, Housen, Six Mile and Mill.

Or you can plan your late-summer trips between sunset and sunrise. Toledo Bend has been a good night-fishing lake for years, especially for the past decade. The best time to fish after dark-30 is during the full moon in August. Other than that, the best times to fish in the dark are two or three days before and after the full moon.

The opportunity to catch quality fish and quantities of fish is very good after dark. The chance is multiplied by the widespread construction of docks and piers around the lake. Plastic worms, topwaters, square-bill crank baits and glide baits can trigger bites at night.

When I get on the water as the sky lightens up, my first stop more than likely will be shallow, 6 feet deep or less, preferably around lily pads and scattered grass beds. I was catching fish up north into July, but the deadly sprayers on the Texas side targeted greenery in the region, so it remains to be seen how that pans out. Heck, lily pads and other vegetation were sprayed early this year in the back of Housen, and there's still a tremendous amount of lily pads there that are trying to make a comeback.

A lake level of around 170.75 is high water, in my opinion, so there is still water in the bushes and the shoreline stuff. That cover, as much as scattered grass and lily pads, is tailor-made for a shallow-water bite on plastic frogs, topwaters and bladed jigs like Delta Lures' Thunder Jig.

Photo courtesy John Dean



Hannah White of Baton Rouge smiles ear to ear as she holds a chunky bass she got to bite a Stanley Top Toad in the lily pads on a hot, summer day while fishing with John Dean at Toledo Bend.

Bass get under lily pads and can be caught on your favorite plastic frog and Carolina-rigged soft plastics. If they're stubborn and don't want to chomp on those, try flipping or pitching, especially with a Toyko-rigged soft plastic like a Speed Craw, trick worm or plastic worm. The Tokyo Rig is proving to be a major player on Toledo Bend.

What color for soft plastics? Redbug, plum apple, junebug and junebug/red are the choices every summer.

Offshore, I'll rely on a Carolina-rigged soft plastic, specifically a 7½-, 8½-, 9- or 10-inch plastic worm. If that doesn't trigger the bites I'm looking for, I'll put a 4-inch Senko on a drop-shot and feed them that. Other artificial lures that can get deep bass to open their mouth are jiggling spoons and deep-diving crank baits. ■

— John Dean



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

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MAGIC TRICKS FOOL BARTHOLOMEW BASS: YELLOW MAGIC

Topwater plug is go-to bait in August's heat

Sometimes, even with all the baits in the world, a tackle box full of bass angling knowledge in your head and a strong competitive spirit, you still need a little bit of help to land largemouth bass.

That's when you just might need to turn to some magic. While fishing wanes a bit in the heat of summer on some lakes, that isn't the case on Bayou Bartholomew in Morehouse and Ouachita parishes in north Louisiana. All you need to get things going is a little magic, as in "Yellow Magic" — a top-of-the-line topwater bait that gets rave reviews almost everywhere.

Plenty of good baits work on the old oxbow of Bayou Bartholomew near Sterlington, a body of water that is cut off from the main channel of the Ouachita River often called the "Cutoff." When fishing there this time of year, always keep a "Magic" lure close by.

"I'll tell you, it's hard to beat that lure in Bayou Bartholomew," says Greg Terzia, a veteran tournament fisherman and owner of Terzia's Bait and Tackle in Ruston. "What makes Yellow Magic



Greg Terzia with two Bayou Bartholomew bass that fell for a "Magic" trick.

so good here is that Bayou Bartholomew has high banks and is not affected by the wind. There's lots of good cover right by the banks, and it's just perfect. The Magic works best in still water, and that is what you have most days."

On a recent trip to the Cutoff, Terzia didn't waste a lot of time finding the bass. He saw a few wakes up in the dime pads along the shore and, on his third cast, he landed a 4-pounder. He caught fish for more than an hour, until the sun came up and changed the pattern. His bait of choice: Yellow Magic.

"I like two colors for Bartholomew," he said. "The Japanese Shad and the Smoking Shad are my go-to baits. There are other baits you can try, but as long as they are on the Magic, I'll stay with it."

When the sun comes up, fish will move out closer to the edges of the channel but will still hold close to trees or pads — something to give them shade and cover, Terzia said.

"When the fish get on the trees a little deeper, they are still going to suspend up fairly

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The Yellow Magic lure in Japanese Shad color.

At the top of Greg Terzia's list for plastics at Bartholomew is the Zoom Z-Craw in junebug color.



shallow, so I like to fish a square-bill crankbait like the Spro Little John," he said. "It's a flat-sided bait that fish just love. You have to really pay attention, because a lot of times when you toss it past a tree and start to reel it in, the fish have already hit it."

Plastics also work well, but again you need to be around the trees of pads. The lake used to be full of aquatic vegetation, but it was killed out several years ago, and that didn't help the fishing any. Fishing is good around boat docks and piers as well. The Cutoff is still loaded with largemouth.

"When I go to plastics, I have a number of baits I like to try, but there's a new one out that I absolutely love: the Zoom Z-Craw. It's thick like a Senko, but with a craw tail," he said, pointing to junebug as his favorite color.

Another go-to bait is the local favorite Wobble-head worm, a bent metal head with a straight-tail worm trailer that swims

through with an action like a little snake.

"Bartholomew basically all looks alike, but it has bass in it from one end to the other," Terzia said. "They key is to pattern the fish, then use that pattern anywhere you go on the bayou. If it works in one spot, it will work pretty much everywhere. And don't be scared if you find some muddy water in one area. There are probably fish there, you just need to go to a louder bait like a buzzbait or loud spinnerbait to let them find your lure." ■

— Kinny Haddox

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f i in t

When hot weather bears down on reservoirs, look for areas with noticeable current; the baitfish and bass there will be much more active than anywhere else.



FIND CURRENT, THEN FISH IT

By Dustin Wilks

MOVING WATER INVIGORATES HOT-WEATHER BASS

August is not the time to “camp out” on a spot, hoping bass will bite. You need to be fishing where they are biting, and that means moving water.

The water is hot, in the upper 80s, even low 90s. While it is true deeper water is not that hot, it gets tricky this month because a thermocline has most likely developed, leading to areas of cool water with no oxygen. The warmer, upper layer is where the fish and oxygen are. The depth you need to be fishing is dependent on the body of water you are fishing.

Growing up, fishing my home lake all the time, the thermocline would often be around 14 to 16 feet deep — relatively deep. There will be two thermoclines, however, one in just the first 6 inches up to a little more than 3 feet, again, depending on where you are fishing.

Here’s a case in point. If you jump in, the water will be hot from your head to your waist, then drastically cool below. This middle layer is still oxygenated and is where you need to be fishing. So on my

home lake this month, I want to be fishing between 3 and 16 feet deep unless I detect that the thermocline is different from what history tells me.

FISH CURRENT

In ponds with little wind or current flow, there will generally be no oxygen at all below about 3 feet, so you need to be fishing shallow. This gets me to my point — find current and find bass. Any current in the summer can generate feeding activity. Wind blowing under a bridge, a boat loading up, powering on the ramp, and obviously the river sections of lakes or rivers themselves are all forms of current.

Current moves and oxygenates the water, making bass and bait more active. It is very tough to fish deep water that is not moving. Always call ahead or look up on the Internet any power generations or water releases from dams and try to fit in your fishing around those times. We all have a limited amount of time to fish, so make it count and go when they’re biting. Current will make fish less likely to

suspend on deep structure, and it will make them position in predictable locations in shallow water as well. Bass like the current coming at them, bringing food, so bends in channels are important.

HIT THE BOTTOM

Since bass with current will get on the bottom, bottom-bouncing baits like big crankbaits, worms and jigs are the ticket on deep structure. If there is no current, you may need to fish higher in the water column with an Alabama rig. I really like to reel a crankbait really fast along the bottom — almost as fast a lipless bait — this gets schools fired up.

Don’t settle for fishing stagnation this month — find some moving water and find the bass. ■

*NOTE: Dustin Wilks is a former professional bass fisherman from Rocky Mount, N.C. He qualified for six Bassmaster Classics and now has a television show on the World Fishing Network (WFN), *Catching Bass With Dustin Wilks*.*



**TROTLINES OR STUMP LINES?
HERE'S HOW TO 'STRING UP'
SOME BIG OPELOUSAS CATFISH,
AKA FLATHEADS.**

■ By Kinny Haddox

Summer's **BLACK 'OPS'**

Dale Taylor took a 40-year vacation from catching Opelousas catfish, aka flatheads, but he found out when he returned last year that nothing has changed.

“My grandson, Daniel, wanted to put out some stump hooks last year and asked me to help,” Taylor said. “I told him it had been 40 years since I did it, but I’d be glad to show him what I know. It was early in the year, so I told him a trotline would work best. We started putting out some lines, and the results were remarkable.”

Some people may not consider setting out trotlines, limb lines or stump hooks as a regular fishing activities, but they’ve never played tug-of-war with a 50-pound flathead or tried to hoist one into the boat. And they’ve never patterned catfish just like they would a bass or crappie.

“I tell you what,” Taylor said. “You can’t just go out and drop a line in the water and catch a big Op. You have to know their feeding habits, and you can use electronics to help find the best spots, just like other fishing.”

Taylor should know. He’s an expert bass and crappie fisherman — and all-around outdoorsmen — and his grandsons Daniel and Dakota have picked up right behind him. What they know about catching big flatheads can help you enjoy this sport, too.

“This past season, we started early and got on some really big ops,” Taylor said. “Our two biggest were 50 and 54 pounds. We caught both of them on a trotline when the water was still cool on the bottom and the baitfish were hanging out there. That’s the key on what type of lines to fish and how deep to fish; it’s water temperature. In the early summer, they’ll feed deep. But as the summer warms up and the thermocline forms in the water, those fish will move up shallow and start feeding. They hang out in the same places, but they will go wherever to follow the baitfish to feed.”

Daniel Taylor (left) and brother Dakota, show off a double handful of flathead catfish.





No. 7/0 hooks are go-to for catfish limb and trotlines; they're big enough to hold fish and shaped to ensure a good hookset.

PATTERNING FLATHEADS

Taylor said catfish can live in oxygen-depleted water, and they often hang out deep where other smaller fish can't survive in the summer. But when the dinner bell rings, they are on the prowl.

Taylor finds ideal situations for flatheads — also called Ops (short for Opelousas), goujon, pied cat, Johnnie cat and shovelheads in different parts of the country — on his home water, 16,000-acre Lake D'Arbonne. But almost any large lake in Louisiana has a good population of these fish.

"We've got an ideal situation on a submerged creek right behind our house," he said. "The main creek has a well-defined feeder creek that is 3 to 4 feet wide and pretty deep. It's like a highway for those fish to migrate up and down, and they'll come out on the flats to feed. There's a lot of trial-and-error involved, but once you find where they are traveling, that's where you need to keep your lines."

Taylor said some fishermen give trotliners a bad name by putting out lines and leaving them unattended. That's irresponsible, he said. Never leave a line out that you are not actively fishing. And take them up, don't just cut them and let them sink to the bottom.

"The correct way to put out a trotline is to tie the line between two stumps and mark it on both ends with a highly visible float or white jug," he said. "Then, make sure you sink the line down far enough to keep it out of people's way. We put weights on each end, just a few feet from the stump and also in the middle. It keeps the line out of the way, plus puts the bait down where the fish are going to be feeding. When you aren't running your line every day, take it up and get it out of the lake."

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A BREAM BREAKFAST

Taylor said the best bait for big flat-heads is big bream. A flathead catfish will eat almost anything that moves and makes a vibration, but bream is the best and most readily available.

Taylor uses 21-gauge black nylon trotline cord and No. 7/0 Gamakatsu or B'n'M hooks. He doubles his drop lines and use swivels to keep big fish from twisting off. That's a must for big Ops, he said. Then, they bait the hooks with big bream and let the cat's appetite and keen senses do the rest. He always wears a good pair of gloves, because these cats have a mouthful of teeth that are like super-coarse sandpaper, and they can gnaw the skin right off your hand.

"Big Ops use those whiskers to feel for vibration, just like a bass does with its lateral line," he said. "They feel that vibration and then find where it's coming from and eat it. They like big bait because they want to feel like it's a mouthful."



SWITCH TO STUMPS

In late summer, the Taylors switch to stump hooks. They use the same gear but move up more shallow into 5 to 6 feet of water. They look for big stumps, favorites of big Ops.

"Those fish will find a big stump and start at the bottom, circle the stump and



Daniel Taylor shows off a 44-pound flathead. **BELOW LEFT:** Catfish and a lot of people have one thing in common. They both like to eat big bream.

eat anything they find around it all the way to the surface," he said. "You want to put your drop line about halfway up and leave some line between your weight and the baitfish so it can swim around freely and give off that vibration."

Safety is paramount when dealing with these big fish. When you grab one in the mouth, it's kind of like grabbing hold of an earthquake.

"It isn't for the faint or heart, that's for sure," Taylor said. "It's not quite as bad as noodling, where you can't see what you are grabbing, but it's a handful. In fact, I always keep a sharp knife right beside me, because if you get a hook in you while battling one of those big monsters on a line, it could be bad. You need to be able to cut the line. I always cut the drop line with the hook in it when I'm bring-

ing in one of those big ones."

Big ones, in this case, are really big. In just a few week stretch earlier this year, the Taylor trio landed more than 700 pounds of Ops. They don't go to waste. Taylor carefully skins and cleans the fish, removes all the fat and silverskin and cuts them into one-inch cubes to fry. He said the white flesh of these fish is the best he's ever eaten. ■



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

The 'other' CATFISH

Flathead catfish aren't for everybody. Plenty of Louisiana anglers think smaller, channel catfish are plenty of fun.

While big Ops aren't the target of rod and reel fishermen, some of the easiest fish to catch in the summer all across the state are blue and channel catfish. They can be caught on flats, around the banks, cypress trees and in almost any place you can catch bread. They provide great eating and lots of sport.

The typical way to rig for catfish in the 1- to 3-pound range is with 12- to 14-pound test line, hooks in the No. 6 to No. 10 range and with small BB shot weights to hold the bait down. Many anglers prefer longer-shank hooks, which allow the fish to get the bait in their mouth easier and make it easier to unhook fish.

Catfish are often picky eaters. You may see your cork begin to bob a bit, or feel a "tap, tap, tap" on your line if tight-lining without a cork. Don't pull too quickly. Wait a few seconds until the fish has it before setting the hook to reel him in.

One word of caution: even the smallest of catfish have sharp spines in the dorsal and pectoral fins that contain a weak venom that really hurts if they puncture your skin. Handle them with care and if you do get stuck, wash and medicate the wound. ■

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: FLATHEAD CATFISH >



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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

Drayden Lacoste and his grandfather, Gerard Mayon, caught this 25-pound flat-head catfish and 24 blue cats on jug lines in Morgan City.



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: FLATHEAD CATFISH

FLATHEADS ARE AMONG THE BIGGEST CATS THAT SWIM IN NORTH AMERICAN WATERS

The flathead catfish, *Pylodictus olivaris*, is one of the Big Three species of catfish that lurk in many American waterways.

Along with the Arkansas blue and the channel catfish, flatheads are highly prized by anglers.

Flatheads grow quite large, rivaled only by blues. True to its name, this fish has a very flat head. If you were to make an artificial flathead using a pile of junk, the head of a shovel lying upside-down, flat on the ground, would make the perfect head. The mouth of this fish resemble the rear drop-down door of a large cargo plane.

The flathead is native to the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio river basins, but they have been introduced to many other areas. It is highly adaptable to a wide range of waters and can live in very harsh conditions in terms of water quality.

Flathead catfish are highly skilled hunters. They begin their lives eating small

crayfish, freshwater shrimp and tiny fish. As they grow, their appetites get bigger, and their ability to eat larger prey does, too. The bigger a flathead gets, the bigger the prey it can eat. One of its favorite foods is sunfish: bluegills, shellcrackers and redbreasts. But they also eat plenty of bass and other catfish.

When it comes to diet, flatheads are not picky. However, they do prefer live prey over already dead fish. Unlike other catfish species, flatheads will ignore decaying fish and will hold out for quite some time, searching for live prey even when plenty of dead fish are around.

PREDATOR DAMAGE

In states where flatheads have been introduced, fisheries biologists believe they have played a big role in eliminating some prominent native fish. White catfish, along with yellow and brown bullheads — smaller catfish species — have virtually disappeared in almost

every state where flatheads have been introduced by anglers, Redbreast sunfish have also seen huge decreases in their numbers, due in large part to the introduction of flatheads.

Flatheads spawn around hollowed-out logs, undercut banks and any debris they can find. The males make nests that can range widely in depth. Females lay between 4,000 and 10,000 eggs at a time. Males aerate the eggs with tail movements and guard them from predators. Once the eggs hatch, the males continue guarding them until they have consumed their own yolk sacs. After that, the juvenile fish disperse.

Flatheads usually begin spawning



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.

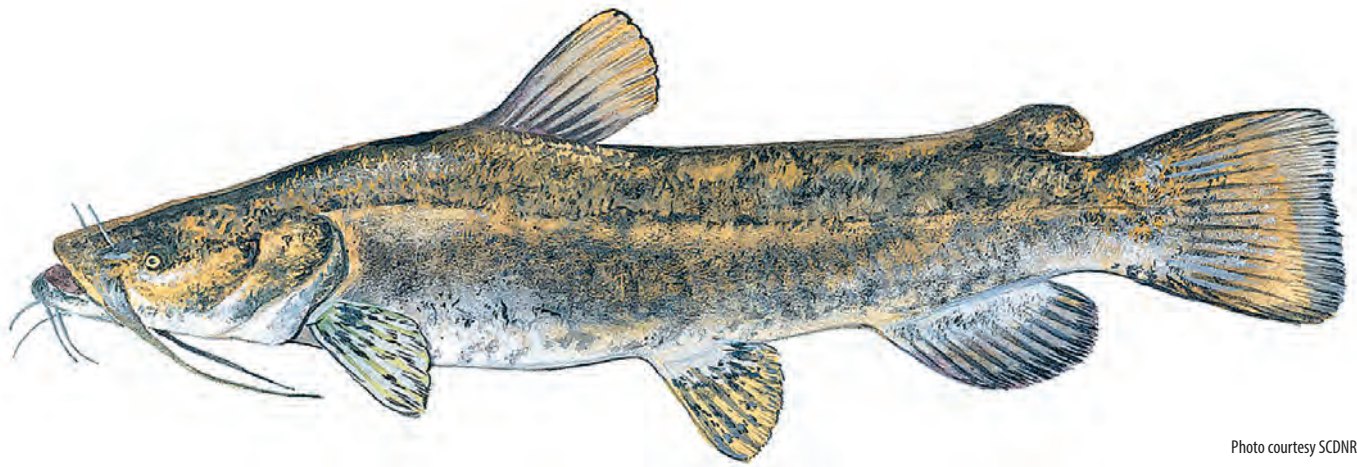


Photo courtesy SCDNR

between the age of four and five years. Their average life expectancy in the wild is about 20 years.

Flatheads are among the most solitary of fish, preferring to find a protected spot and hunker down, only mingling with others for the purpose of spawning. Anglers targeting flatheads look for sunken debris fields, undercut banks and partially-submerged timber.

Flatheads are identified by the fish's olive color, non-forked tail and flat head. These characteristics distinguish them from other catfish. However, some inexperienced anglers often mistake them for blues and/or channels.

NICKNAMES

Flatheads have many nicknames across the country, including: yellow cat, Johnnie cat, pie, pied cat, shovel head, flattop, Opelousous catfish (and Op, for short), Mississippi cat, mud cat, and flatty. In Louisiana, they are often referred to as goujon, tabby and tabby cat.

When it comes to table fare, most anglers agree that flatheads taste better than other catfish. Some anglers believe this is because of its insistence on eating only fresh, live food.

The world-record flathead weighed 123 pounds, 9 ounces and was caught in Elk City Reservoir in Kansas. Other, considerably larger flatheads have been caught by commercial fishermen

and were not eligible for world records.

Rolland Lasseigne caught Louisiana's state-record flathead in July 2007. He caught the fish, which weighed 95 pounds, in Wax Lake. Mississippi's record

flathead weighed 77.7 pounds. Matt Bingham of Memphis, Tenn., caught it from the Mississippi River in April 2012. ■

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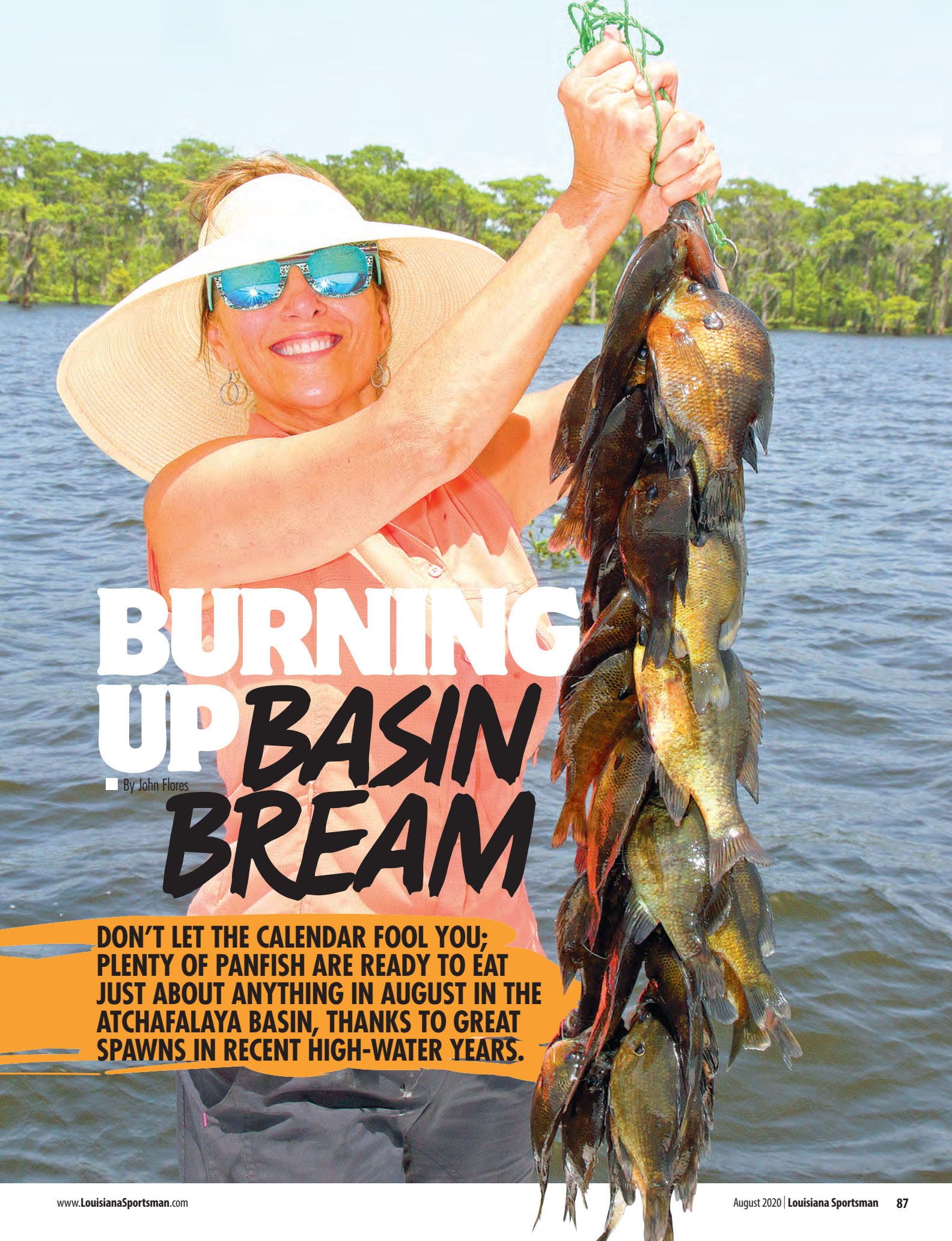
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BURNING UP BASIN BREAM

By John Flores

**DON'T LET THE CALENDAR FOOL YOU;
PLENTY OF PANFISH ARE READY TO EAT
JUST ABOUT ANYTHING IN AUGUST IN THE
ATCHAFALAYA BASIN, THANKS TO GREAT
SPAWNS IN RECENT HIGH-WATER YEARS.**

In 2011,

during the spring and early summer, the Atchafalaya River at Morgan City flooded low-lying coastal areas. Six feet of water is considered flood stage, and the river finally reached a historic crest of 10.35 feet on May 29; it took nearly three months before it fell below flood stage.

Since 2011, the Atchafalaya River has crested well above flood stage five times, including four times in the past five years.

In 2019, the Atchafalaya River crested at 8.29 feet in mid-March and crested again at 10.06 feet on July 13, when Hurricane Barry passed through. All total, the river was at or above flood stage for 235 consecutive days.

A number of years ago, Mike Wood, then inland fisheries director of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Inland Fisheries Director, discussed at a conference the impact of the 2011 flood event on local fisheries.

One of things he pointed out was the explosion of fish that would occur in subsequent years as a result of the flooding. Essentially, he explained how fish are able to spread out during the spawn, when the water is over the bank for long periods. As a result, there is less competition for bedding sites and less predation, ultimately creating a bumper crop of fish.

Most years, the lower part of the Atchafalaya Basin — in places like Flat Lake, Duck Lake, American Lake, Bear Bayou, the Orange Barrel Canal and the Shell Oil Canals — is typically teeming with panfish. Anglers often will head to

the region during the spring, usually starting in April, and they literally mop up on redear sunfish, aka chinquapins, bluegills, and goggle eyes, aka warmouth, during the spawn.

Brian Salyers, an LDWF biologist, pointed out that redear sunfish can actually spawn multiple times during the spring and summer, and even into early fall if the water remains warm. He said that research suggests the ideal temperature range for redears to spawn is 69.8 to 89.6 degrees Fahrenheit, with the peak temperature being 75 degrees.

What that means for bream anglers who enjoy fishing the southern portion of the Atchafalaya Basin is that the high-water trend has simply delayed catching a good mess of panfish until later in the summer. Furthermore, there still may be some spawning chinquapin and bluegills to catch, which no doubt will provide plenty of action due to their abundance.

WHEN THE WATER FALLS >





The author caught this bonus "goggle-eye" caught while bream fishing the southern lakes Atchafalaya Basin. **ACROSS SPREAD:** One productive August tactic is to fish cypress and tupelo trees where current is running.



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WHEN THE WATER FALLS

At some point, what goes up must come down. When high water begins to fall, it's time to be fishing the southern half of the Basin. Generally, that fall lasts only for a short period, often less than a couple of weeks. There is a sweet spot when the water falls below flood stage, usually between 4.8 to 5.3 feet according to serious anglers who pay attention to such things.

Essentially, all fish tend to like moving water for feeding purposes. Although bluegills and chinquapins are, in some regards, prey for bass and other large fish, they aren't any different. Panfish will dart in and out of cover and eat invertebrates and small minnows that pass within striking distance.

One of the better techniques is to look for locations where the water is moving through groves or groups of cypress and tupelo trees. Casting to the back or downstream side, using either live or artificial bait, typically produces larger fish, often as big as your palm from fingertips to wrist. The same holds true for patches of sub-aquatic grass close to the bank that water flows past. Bream will dash out to grab your bait and run back into cover.

Other good spots for chinquapins and bluegills are narrow bayous and ditches created by fishermen targeting crawfish that flow into larger bayous. The drains may not be large

enough for your boat, but they shouldn't be passed up.

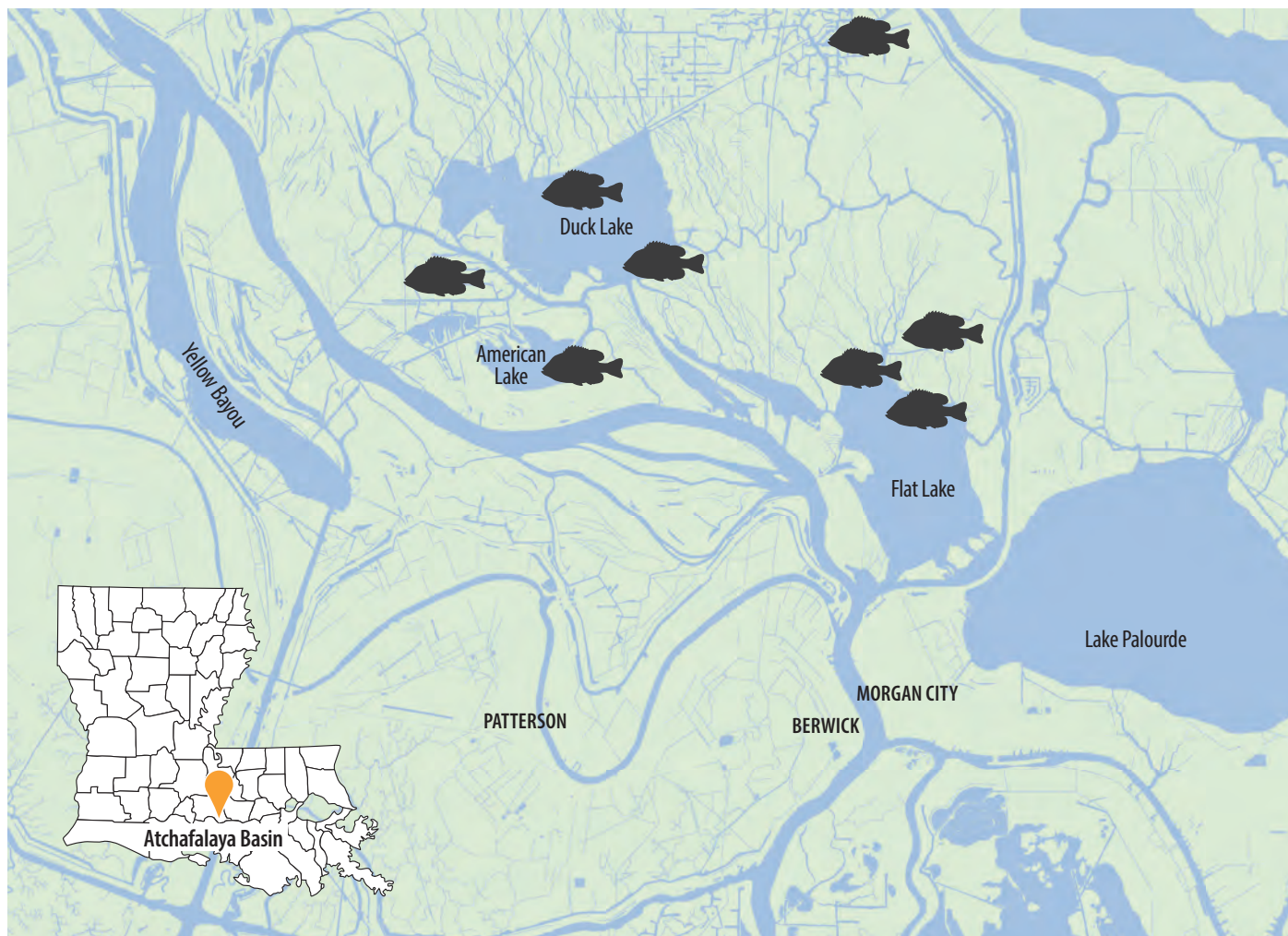
It's a matter of anchoring your boat near, but not on top of the mouth of the drain, and casting as far back into it as you can. If fish are there, your float should drop below the surface before the current pushes it back to you.

If a perch bites immediately, the action should be steady, with one caveat. A couple of weeks after Hurricane Barry passed in 2019, my wife and I fished Bear Bayou above Flat Lake. We set up on a drain with a thick patch of grass that had water flowing around it and caught fish on nearly every cast. The problem was, with subsequent years of high water, we had to cull through numerous smaller, bait-stealing fish to get the keepers we wanted to fry.

Wood's explanation of bumper crops of fish in subsequent years after flood events held true. When the water dropped below flood stage, lots of panfish, big and small, came off the bank and could be caught with ease.

On the web, visit <https://water.weather.gov/ahps2/hydrograph.php?gage=mcgl1&wfo=lch> to get the National Weather Service's graph and 8-day river stage prediction. The information is accurate and important for making a successful trip into the Basin.

AFTER THE FALL TECHNIQUES ➤



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AFTER THE FALL TECHNIQUES

During the latter part of the summer, when the water in the Basin is stable and down to the 4-foot range, the bite tends to slow a bit. Quite often, it comes down to technique and taking advantage of what the location has to offer.

In places like American Lake and Duck Lake, where there is clear water and lily pads, you can fan-cast and cover a broader area to help you locate fish. Once you find them, you can use whatever bait that you prefer, live or artificial.

If the area is grassy, look for holes that you can drop a bait down into and try jigging without a float.

It's the same with groves of trees. Try jigging around cypress trees without a cork at various depths. This technique always produces a few fish on the toughest days.

Gerald Foulcard, a local angler, grew up fishing for bream and sac-a-lait with his father in the Basin. Foulcard said his father taught him to use tube jigs in various colors: blue/white, chartreuse, black/pink and white. However, when the fishing was difficult, father and son would spice it up a bit.

"When the bite was tough, we would add a piece of grass shrimp or night crawler to the hook and 1/16-ounce leadhead," he said. "It worked a lot of times when it was tough catching them. We'd also use the small grub-style Beetle Spins but substituted a gold blade for silver. The gold seemed to work better for us."

A sensitive float, a small, Aberdeen bronze hook and a split shot are the bare necessities for bream fishing in the Basin.



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Foulcard mentioned preferable Beetle Spin colors being yellow with black lines, orange with black lines, white with a red dot, or chartreuse with yellow or black lines.

“All worked real well at the edge of grass and cypress trees,” Foulcard said. “We would also fish them underneath corks, usually about a foot to up to 2½ feet, depending on the depth we would catch the first fish in. You’ve got to let the fish tell you where they are through trial and error, but once you find a few, the rest will most likely bite the same.”

Most any float — round plastic, Styrofoam bullet-shaped or balsa — will work for bream, but my preferred float is a premium balsa spring float. Thill also makes a premium weighted spring float that works well.

When the bluegill bite is finicky and they barely suck in your bait, often the cork you’re using will hardly move. Balsa floats twitch with the slightest of bites and often make the difference.

Another year of high water may have delayed your trip into the southern portion of the Atchafalaya Basin to fish for bream, but don’t let that stop you from going now. The summer months can be spectacular.

TAKE SUMMER PRECAUTIONS

During the summer, it’s wise to fish early mornings and late afternoons, but when the bite is on, you need to take extra precautions against the sun. Be sure to bring sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher. Hats with wide brims are recommended, along with UV protection apparel.

When there is plenty of action, you often forget to hydrate. Be sure to ice down plenty of water. A good, quick substitute is pieces of watermelon iced down in a container. Watermelon provides a source of water and has some nutrition value as well. ■



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

**PADDLES ‘N
PUDDLES** ▾



A blue/white plastic tube on a jighead spiced up with a worm makes a deadly combo when fishing bream in the Basin.

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PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

Chris Holmes



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

ENJOY A BLAST FROM THE PAST

PANFISH, KAYAKS GO TOGETHER JUST FINE

For many anglers, especially if they started fishing as a child, their first fish was likely caught on a cane pole. Simple and inexpensive, this highly effective way of fishing has generally lost out to technology and more-expensive fishing tackle. However, for kayak anglers looking to have a blast and get back to their fishing roots, a modern cane pole provides all-day action for a pile of tasty, hard-fighting panfish.

Old, natural bamboo poles still work well but are a bit difficult to manage in a kayak. Modern, telescopic fiberglass poles provide the same thrilling action, but are easy to carry in a 'yak and cost less than \$20. Rigged with a simple, adjustable cork, a split-shot and a small, long-shank hook, you have all you need for a day of bream-busting that conjures up memories of days gone by. Collectively called panfish, bream, perch, bluegills, sunfish or a host of other colloquial names, Louisiana has a variety of species, and these hand-sized fish are voracious eaters and fight like mini bulldogs.

Kayaks are well suited for chasing panfish. Found in fresh and brackish waters across the state, kayakers can get you to virtually un-fished areas that teem with these tasty morsels. Be it a lake, bayou, canal or ditch, if it has water and little salinity, you can bet you'll find some action. Another factor many anglers don't realize is that as many areas in south Louisiana turn fresher due to diversions and hurricane protection projects, panfish have spread into many areas that were more recently home to only saltwater species. If you have a spot where you catch reds and bass, rest assured that panfish are there also.

For cane poles, a pile of earthworms — buy or dig your own — is all you need for bait. With the worm threaded on the hook, bites generally come in mere seconds if you're in the right spot. Look for logs, pilings, trees or any nearshore structure where these fish congregate. Even overhanging brush or tree limbs provide shaded areas that also produce fish. You can generally pull several fish off of one spot before moving to the next. Start off setting the hook about 18 inches deep. This generally gets the bait down to where the larger fish are, and you can easily raise it up several inches if necessary. Once the larger fish play out, simply move to another spot and repeat.

▼





An ultralight spinning combo and a small Beetle Spin led to a great day of bream fishing in this long, drainage canal. These areas are great for kayak fishing because they cannot be reached by anglers on the bank and are often off-limits to powerboats.

PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued

Rig the line so that it barely reaches the bottom of the pole. This makes it easy to simply lift the rod and precisely place your bait, as well as swing the fish right to you for removal. Other baits such as live crickets, grass shrimp and small bits of shrimp also work well, but there is just something about that earthworm wiggle and smell that make them the No. 1 choice.

If a cane or fiberglass pole is not your style, a small, ultralight spinning outfit or a 3-weight fly rod work well also. Tiny artificial baits like a Beetle Spin or mini-crankbait are great for catching larger panfish, as well as the occasional bass, crappie or catfish. If you choose the fly rod, small floating bugs and poppers are easily gobbled up by aggressive fish.

The ease of catching panfish is enhanced by the kayak. You can easily and quietly move into areas where no one has ever fished for them. Look for popular roadside fishing spots as keys to areas that hold good concentrations of fish. Launch and head away from the bank, and you'll likely find fish in areas they cannot reach. In addition to your favorite baits and lures, a small pair of forceps or needle nose pliers comes in handy for removing those tiny hooks.

Many areas also have now seen an insurgence of invasive Rio Grande cichlids. They are fun to catch and also hard fighters. They hit all the same baits and lures as the native species, and

odds are that you may catch a few during your trip. However, due to concerns that their aggressive nature could displace native species, special rules prohibit catch and release of Rios or possessing them live. Therefore, if you use a stringer or a basket to keep your catch, you should dispatch Rios first by sticking them in the head with an ice pick or cutting through the gills. However, it's easier to carry a small ice chest for keeping the Rios in accordance with the law. They are tasty and really shouldn't be discarded. They are quite pretty fish, dark colored, sometimes almost black, with iridescent spots. They can grow much larger than native panfish, and the males often have a large hump on their forehead.

Chasing panfish is best in the early morning or late afternoon, which is great for fishing on hot, summer days. It is also a great way to introduce others to kayak fishing, especially kids. No long paddles are necessary, and they are mostly found in protected waters. The action is usually fast and nonstop and easily keeps up the interest. Fighting these fish on a cane pole or other light gear is a challenge and quite exciting. If you haven't tried it in a while, you owe it to yourself relive the memories of days gone by. Doing it up close and personal in a kayak simply adds to the fun. ■

CRAPPIE HOTSPOTS ➤



This mixed basket of panfish was caught on a cane pole with live worms. Simply use the kayak to move from structure to structure, catching a few fish at each. Pilings, logs, trees and rocks all make good areas where the fish congregate.



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BRING 'EM BACK FROM BAYOU BLACK

Hot-weather sac-a-lait are on August menu

This time of year, one of the favorite things south Louisiana crappie fishermen do is catch a good mess of fish for a fish fry, and maybe a few packs for the freezer. If you aren't sure where to go, this is a good time to be bringing 'em back from Bayou Black south of Amelia.

"I'm telling you, this time of year Bayou Black is on fire," said Clyde Folse, a fisherman, guide and owner of Crappie Psychic. "The bite is good, and it will continue on through September if nothing dramatic happens. They key for the Bayou Black area is pretty simple. Look for cuts coming out of the marsh, especially if the water

is falling.

"Where that beautiful, dark, marsh water is coming out and mixing into the more muddy water; that's where you'll find fish. It's where the baitfish will end up, and the sac-a-lait won't be far behind. Those cuts are especially good if there are grasspiles in the cuts," he said.

Dead-end canals are always good for sac-a-lait in this area, but late summer, they seem especially good, he said. If you don't know what to fish with, he has some good suggestions. In fact, it's not a hard choice for him. It's as simple as black and white.



Clyde Folse with two summer crappie from Bayou Black.



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BAYOU BLACK continued >

"That's it. Black and white," he said. "Everybody who knows me knows that I start out with black and white. I just think it is the top color, bar none," he said. "A lot of times on guide trips, I'll start with black and white and let my clients pick colors they like. Usually, it isn't long until we are all fishing — you guessed it — black and white".

Folse is partial to his Crappie Psychic Crappie Weapon, Petite Minnow and rejuvenated Iddy Bidy Shrimp hair jig. He tips them with chartreuse Crappie Ammo and trailers. He puts them to the test in a lot of different places, but right now, it's Bayou Black. He depends on a technique and some time-tested tips to put sac-a-lait in the boat.

"Grass," Folse said, "that's the key. Any of the main canals that hold grass also hold crappie unless the water is just too muddy. I love the dead-end pockets with grass, but I don't fish them like most others. You'll see people come up in the canal and go down one bank, then the

other. I like to turn around and cast to the middle. If I see one stem of grass sticking up, I know there's crappie around it. And if there is one stick of grass, I'm sure there is a lot more down there that I can't see."

Folse said sac-a-lait love to hide in the grass and ambush bait as it comes past. They also hide in the cover to keep from getting eaten by big catfish.

"Don't cast right at the grass," he said



Iddy Bidy Shrimp



Crappie Weapon

"Cast beyond it, and bring it back by the grass as close as you can. Another thing: be quiet. Don't run up in the canal. Ease up in there, and be quiet. I don't even use my trolling motor any more than I have to. They spook so easily."

Folse doesn't do a lot of jig-pole fishing; he likes to cast, and his favorite technique is putting his bait under a cork. He prefers

a 2-inch, weighted Mr. Crappie clip-on cork. The weight helps him cast accurately and into a wind, and the splash of the cork seems to help attract fish. On occasion, he's had sac-a-lait hit the cork before the bait. And any color cork is okay, as long as it is chartreuse.

"Some folks may laugh, but that does make a difference," he said. "Get in the boat with me and you use an orange cork. We'll see how long it takes you to swap over."

Two good places to launch in Bayou Black are Bob's Bayou Black Marina in Gibson and Cannon's Boat Launch off Highway 311 closer to Houma. A word of caution at Cannon's — you have to go through a tight water-control structure, and in a tall boat, you may have to take down some gear to pass through. ■

— Kinny Haddox

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■ By Kinny Haddox

Tiger Bend Outdoors is in the middle of Louisiana's best deer hunting woods in Union Parish, but the past three or four years, water-cooler talk hasn't been as much about trophy deer as it has been something else.

"The talk is more about feral hogs than it is deer now," said Peyton McKinnie, who owns and runs Tiger Bend along with partners Bryan Tucker and Nathan Pilgreen. "More and more people come up and talk about how they didn't see any deer, because once the hogs showed up, the deer were gone. It's driven some people away from deer hunting, and it's not getting better. It's getting worse."

The Tiger Bend trio decided to do something about it; they became high-tech hog hunters. Feral hogs are tearing up property, destroying deer plots and wreaking havoc. It doesn't appear that anyone from wildlife officials to land-owners really have any proven, effective way to slow down the explosion of the destructive porky pests.

Until now.

"We've hooked up with Cory Gilbert of Hogg Boss in Bastrop and used his system this year with remarkable success. It's fun, and it's helping improve our deer woods. And it's actually as addictive as turkey hunting," McKinney said.

The Hogg Boss system isn't easy, but it's simple. First, you

locate an area where hogs are hanging around. Second, you start baiting the area, and after they have come to it for a few days, you set up a portable fencing system and leave the gate open. You set up the trail cameras, connect them to your cell phone and then wait.

Here's the high-tech part. When a sounder of hogs starts coming, trail-camera photos are texted to your phone in real time. When they get comfortable and are feeding in the pen, you just dial a number, and the electronics closes the gate.

Hogs caught.

And unlike hunting hogs with dogs and getting one or two, the Tiger Bend team has been getting them 15 to 20 at a time. They've taken out almost 1,000 already this year. They removed 70 from a single 1,000-acre hunting club.

"Here's the deal," McKinney said. "You just set it and go about your business. When the camera activates, your phone dings just like a text message coming in. I've gotten dinged at 3:30 a.m. and shut the gate on them without having to get out of bed."



Baiting in an area being used by hogs is the step before a pen is set up with an open gate that hogs can enter. **INSET:** The Hogg Boss electronic control box and solar charger operates by cell signal to drop the gate and lower the hammer on unsuspecting hogs.

HOGS WINNING = HUNTERS LOSING

Despite the extensive and growing damage caused by feral hogs, little is being done to really deter the destruction.

By the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' own numbers, Louisiana hunters are not only losing the battle, they're getting stomped in the mud by feral hogs and the lack of an effective effort to control them.

Feral hogs roam every parish; Louisiana's population is estimated at 500,000. Statistics have determined that 75% of the population must be harvested to even maintain a static population. In Louisiana, recent reported harvests have been around 135,000 annually; that's only 27%. So the pests here have literally gone "hog wild".

"The leadership of the LDWF has got to be more aggressive in promoting this kind of effort to control these feral hogs," McKinnie said. "It's expensive for an individual to have to do it. They need to come up some sort of grant to help provide these traps and get them to people who are interested."

McKinnie believes there could be some kind of bounty, and that local governments or the state would reap economic benefits by providing this type equipment and hiring people to use it.

"All the time, we hear the PR about wanting to get more people hunting," he said. "Well, letting this problem go unchecked is leading to less people going hunting. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that. And the damage to the economy is getting worse and worse every year." ■

Feral hogs can do plenty of damage in a single night.



Kinny Haddox

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Once alerted, McKinnie, Tucker and Pilgreen will go to the pen, put down the hogs, clean them and get the meat to somebody who will use it. They have a waiting list.

McKinney summarized the “how-to” for using a system like Hogg Boss. First, find where the hogs are feeding. Bait them up with corn and rice bran. He also uses Delta Magic Hawg Attractant in strawberry or green apple scent to get the aroma out to the hogs. He also uses a strawberry scent spray on the gate and where he walks so the hogs won’t be alerted to the presence of humans. Then, you keep your phone by your side and, when the whole group of hogs is in the pen; drop the gate remotely.

They are now using a drone to fly low over hunting areas and clearcuts to look for fresh hog sign. They can cover a 600-acre clearcut and pinpoint hog activity from the tailgate of a pickup truck by using the drone.

“Don’t get me wrong. This isn’t easy,” he said. “But if we don’t do something to stop the explosion of these big, nuisance hogs, not only are our outdoors going to be ruined, but they are going to start taking over yards and gardens in these small rural communities. We’ve already trapped hogs in the city limits and saved several people’s large yards from being totally destroyed by the hogs rooting for worms, soured acorns and the like. They will totally destroy a garden in a single night. They are hurting farmers and livestock producers’ fields and pastures.” ■



For more information on the Hogg Boss system, you can check it out online at <https://hoggboss-gates.com/>



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



Large groups of feral hogs like this are called a “sounder” and cause terrible damage. But this group has had it’s last piggy party. **ABOVE:** The Tiger Bend crew is doing their share of keeping the swine in line, as shown in this photo of piles of feral hogs taken using the Hogg Boss.

QUASIMODO: THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

"Quasimodo" shows up to eat but disappears when any sign of a trap appears. Big hogs like this one are old and wise like trophy bucks.

Feral hogs are like deer and fish. The big ones have been around a while, and they are smart. There's one hog that has shown up on Peyton McKinney's trail cameras several times, but once the traps are set, he disappears. He's a big humpback hog pushing 300 pounds. They call him "Quasimodo" because he's kind of like the monstrous fictional character in the novel, *Hunchback of Notre-Dame*.

"Of all the hogs we have caught, none have been the great big boars with tusks," he said. "We know they are out there, because they've been on camera, and other people hunting hogs with dogs are killing them. But they are very leery of the traps. They are like 150-class bucks. They don't take chances. They'll walk by the pen, but they won't go in."

McKinnie said they've come close on Quasimodo and aren't going to give up,

but he has turned out to be a tough opponent. He will feed with the others, but once the panels go up, he's not going inside. ■

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LOUISIANA: IN A STATE OF DEER MEDIOCRITY?

ARE HABITAT, HUNTER HABITS KEEPING HIGHEST-CLASS BUCKS FROM THEIR POTENTIAL?

I retired from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in 2007. At that time, I made the statement in an article in this magazine that the state record for a typical whitetail taken by a gun would be broken in 10 years. Now, 13 years later, the Broadway Buck, killed in 1943, is still Louisiana's state typical record.

Every year, there are a handful, and I mean a handful, of deer that qualify for the Boone & Crockett and Pope & Young club's record books. Of that number, one or two reach the magical 170 mark for listing in the B&C all-time record book.

When I retired, the deer situation in the state was great, and I just knew that

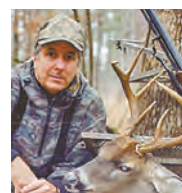
within a few years, a new state-record typical would be killed. I even predicted it would probably come from Avoyelles Parish. Here we are in 2020, and not much has changed on the Big Game Record List for Louisiana.

LOOK AT THE BOOK

A look at the 2007 list reveals that the top 10 deer on the list are the same as they were back then. The 1943 Broadway Buck is No. 1, scoring 184%, followed by the 1961 McCoy Buck, scoring 184%. At No. 3 is the 1914 Womble Buck, scoring 184%, and in fourth place is the Riviere Buck, killed in 1998, that scored 181%. If I remember correctly, that buck had three

abnormal points that deducted from the final score and kept it out of first place.

The No. 5 deer is a buck killed on Thistlethwaite WMA in 1975 by Shawn Ortego; it scored 180%. If you recall, this WMA was doing so well growing big bucks that a special, big-buck season was established, but it proved unsuccessful.



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

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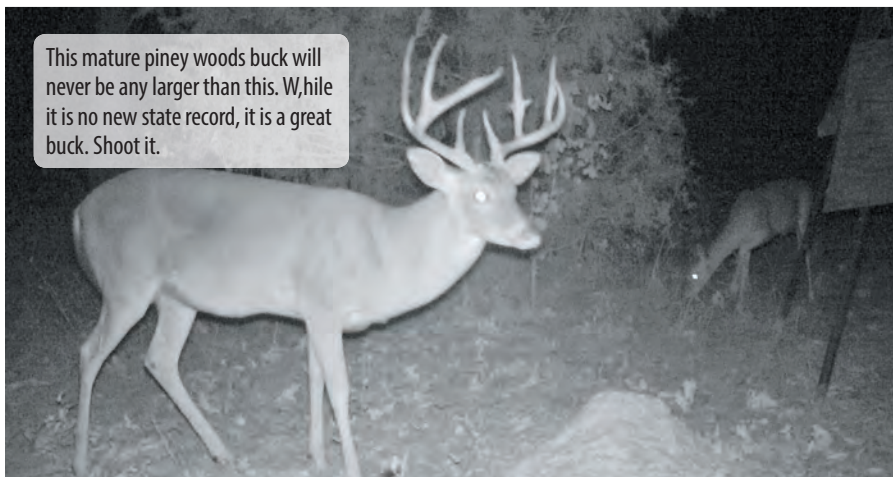
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This mature piney woods buck will never be any larger than this. While it is no new state record, it is a great buck. Shoot it.



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A glance at the top 25 deer on the list of top typicals by gun shows that four deer killed after 2007 have been added. The most recent was the 175% McPherson Buck killed in Avoyelles Parish in 2019. In 2011, Kevin Breaux killed a 176% typical buck in St. Mary Parish. In 2015, Donald Forbes killed a 173½ typical in East Baton Rouge Parish, and in 2016, Charlie Lusco killed a 173% typical in Madison Parish.

All of these are great Louisiana deer, but they fall short of the No. 1 mark, even though many were promoted as a new state record when they were originally killed. Abnormal points and deductions for lack of symmetry are a hunter's worst nightmare.

I contacted two of the state's top deer gurus and asked for their thoughts on this subject: Scott Durham, director of the Deer Research and Management Program and Jonathan Bordelon, a biologist who is the deer-project manager. Both agree that nutrition is the key for growing a trophy class buck, and I think all deer biologists would agree.

CHANGING HABITAT

Habitat that provides high-quality nutrition is the key, especially during the spring and summer growing season. If protein is lacking in a deer's diet during the growing season, body growth, antler development and reproduction will suffer. Durham pointed out that much of the habitat in this state has changed, especially in the mixed pine/hardwood forests.

Forests dominated by pine trees do not grow real trophy deer; a 130-class buck is probably the best this habitat can do unless land managers are really supplemental feeding in a big-time way. Pine trees are being grown on sites where once only hardwood timber grew. Farmland with bottomland hardwoods along our major rivers is still the best habitat for trophy deer.

LETTING THEM WALK

Bordelon pointed out that many hunters are shooting only adult bucks and allowing the younger ones to get older, but he suggests that many hunters would not pass up a 150- or 160-class buck, so they may not be getting that extra year or two that it takes to be a new No. 1. Durham believes there are a few areas that have the nutrition and age class that could produce a new state record in few years.

Age, of course, is important, but I am seeing that some are carrying this to the extreme and passing up all adult bucks, thinking that they will all get better. This is simply not the case. Only a minute percentage of adult bucks in the wild have what it takes. It just seems that these bucks have the correct genetic

make-up to be big, which is why they are so rare. In any population, there are bucks in the low-end category, the average category and the high-end category. I suspect that the low-end and average category bucks will never be 180-class animals and will die of old age or disease if they are not harvested. If a buck is only going to be a 130-class buck, and hunters are looking for a 170-class buck, that buck will never be

harvested and will simply be wasted. Hunters need to learn to recognize these mediocre adult bucks and harvest them.

Combine a high buck population with a high doe population, and chances are the habitat will never produce a 180-class buck; there are simply too many mouths to feed. I have observed that many baby boomers who were dropping deer right and left in the 1970s and 1980s have dramatically reduced their kill. Many hunters often brag about how many adult bucks they saw but did not shoot. A deer population that is below carrying capacity of the habitat has the best chance of growing a trophy deer, if quality nutrition is available.

Durham is somewhat optimistic that a new state record is around the corner. Bordelon believes it could happen if the stars all line up for a deer to grow up and to become a 180-class and if they line up for a hunter to kill it. I believe that if the stars, moon, sun and all the other galaxies come together in proper fashion, it might happen. Who knows, it could happen to me, but I don't think so. ■

STICKS & STRINGS ➤



This 170-class buck showed up a few years ago in Desoto Parish; it was slightly larger the next year, but the nutrition was not there to move it up to the 180s. This buck probably would have been harvested at this age by any hunter with good sense.

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STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano

A hand-held release usually requires a lower anchor point; this archer shows proper form.



A RELEASE THAT'S HANDY

HAND-HELD RELEASE AIDS ARE BECOMING MORE AND MORE POPULAR IN THE ARCHERY WORLD, AND FOR GOOD REASON

The majority of bowhunters shoot using a mechanical release aid, and most of them here in the Southeast use a wrist-caliper design that secure around the wrist of the archer's draw arm with a wide strap, allowing the archer to draw the bow by pulling from their wrist.

When used properly, the index finger is hooked around the trigger at the first or second crease from the tip. The archer then flexes his shoulder blades inward, using "back tension" to cause the release aid to fire unexpectedly.

In a perfect world, this is how it should work, but in my experience, a vast majority of bowhunters don't use their release aid correctly. Most archers incorrectly pull the trigger of their wrist caliper with their index finger. In the worst cases, archers jerk or even slap the trigger, round-housing it and causing the bow to move at the shot. This malady commonly progresses into severe target panic, robbing the archer of accuracy, and leading to blown shot opportunities or even worse, wounded game.

TARGET PANIC

I have suffered from target panic myself, and it is both extremely frustrating and de-motivating. One common treatment for target panic involves the use

of a hand-held release aid, especially a hinge-style, back-tension model. These releases force the archer to pull through the shot and follow through properly. Bowhunters, however, often need to release the arrow in a shorter time frame, both to allow for the animal's movement and narrow shooting lanes.

RELEASE STYLES

Although this often rules out the use of a hinge-style release while hunting, other hand-held release aids will help increase accuracy by promoting better form and can be fired using proper back tension more easily than wrist-caliper models.

The most popular and easiest hand-held releases to use are thumb releases. These hand-held releases are triggered by either back tension, thumb pressure or a combination of both methods. This allows the archer to practice good shooting habits by using back tension to trigger the release, but also to fire more quickly when necessary.

Hand-held releases are available in many configurations, and these are usually described by the number of fingers used to grasp the release. Also available are 2-, 3- and even 4-finger releases. Four-finger releases provide the most-secure grip but are notorious for allowing the shooter to torque the string more easily.

One notable exception is the Hardcore 4-Finger release by Tru-Fire. This model uses a fully swiveling head to eliminate string torque. I shoot this model personally and really like it. Three-finger releases are the most popular, but lately, 2-finger models have been quickly gaining ground. I recommend trying several different styles and models when possible before purchasing a hand-held release. Since these releases are actually held in your hand, the fit and design matters more than with a wrist release. Also, hand-held releases are generally much more expensive, so it helps to purchase the right one the first time.

MAKE ADJUSTMENTS

One common mistake when switching from a wrist caliper to a hand-held release is a failure to make the necessary adjustments in order to guarantee success. In most cases, a draw-length adjustment of one-half inch longer draw is required. The peep sight needs to be raised both to adjust for both this new,



Sammy Romano is a lifelong hunter who has worked in the archery industry for more than 25 years. His expertise includes compounds and crossbows. He can be reached at samboka31@aol.com.

longer draw length, and because hand-held releases usually call for a lower anchor point.

Many archers want to “try out” a hand-held release aid without making these adjustments that are necessary to ensure success. This transition is best made before beginning to practice for hunting season, because it not only requires the archer to modify his or her form, but requires the bow to be re-tuned — and often new arrows. Trying to change releases with only a short practice window is a recipe for disaster. It takes many practice shots to develop the muscle memory required to shoot consistently, and anything less is cheating yourself.

Because of their design and the fact that they help promote proper form and release, thereby increasing accuracy, hand-held releases are growing in popularity every day. In fact, one of the most frequently asked questions at our bow counter is “Will a hand-held release help me shoot more accurately?” The answer is a resounding yes.

But like a lot of other things in this world, changing your release aid requires both practice and commitment to get the most benefit from it. As with any change to your bow setup, a good pro shop can make this process much easier. If you’ve ever considered switching releases, stop in your local pro shop and try out a hand-held release aid soon. ■

Two-finger, hand-held releases are gaining in popularity among archers.



GATOR SEASON TIPS >

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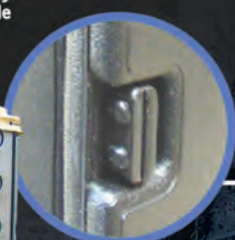
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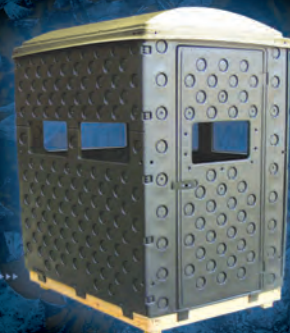
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GATOR HUNTING TIPS

By Dora Lambert

For Walter Heathcock, owner of Fin Twisters Fishing Guide Service out of Venice, the process leading up to alligator hunting season is year-long. It involves constantly scouting and opening new canals on his property with his daughter before the last Wednesday of August. It's tiring but enjoyable work.

Alligator season is geographically dependent in Louisiana. There is the West Zone and the East Zone. The West Zone opens the first Wednesday in September, and the East Zone opens the last Wednesday in August. Lines cannot be set more than 24 hours before the opening of each season.

WHERE TO SET LINES

"Scout, scout, scout. Pay attention to detail," Heathcock said. "Look for slides on the bank. Look for places on the bank where these big alligators will be sunning. If you are coming off the river where there is deep water and current, big gators will be hanging out there."

The presence of wildlife around a potential area where you plan to bait lines is important, too.

"If there are lots of birds, that's a good sign," he said. "When the herons have nests, the gators will hang out under these areas, waiting for the little birds to fall out of the nests."

SETTING LINES

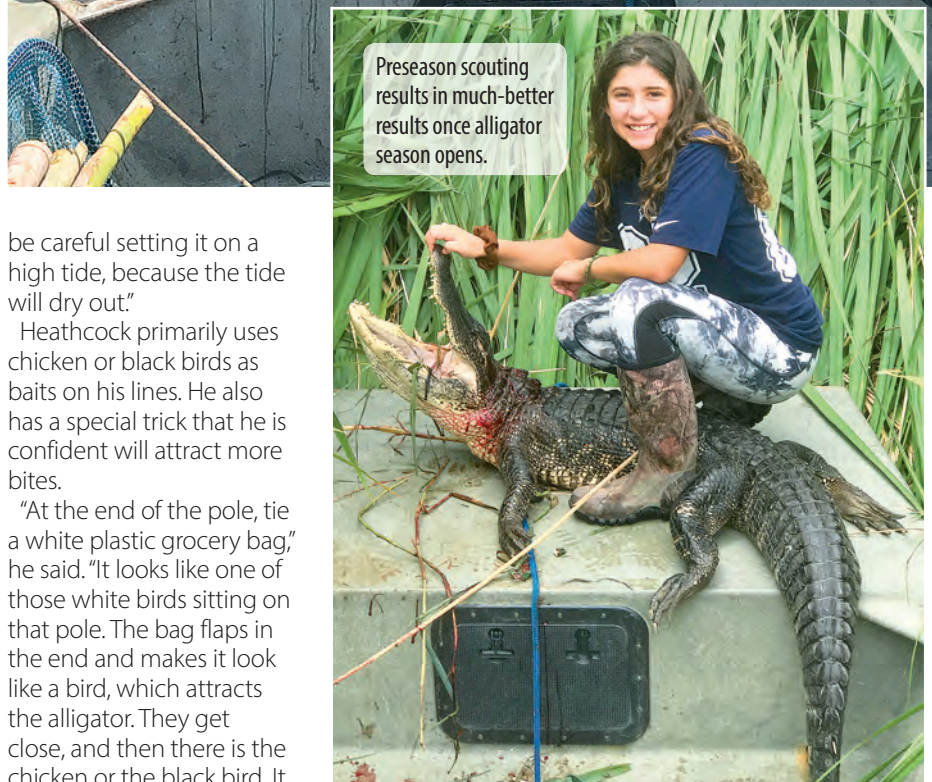
"You usually go out the day before to set out a few lines out," Heathcock said. "You can anchor that line to anything. If there are no trees around, take a bamboo pole and shove it down as far as you can down in that line, so nothing can move it."

"Usually the higher you put it up, the bigger the gator. But, if you set it too low, you will catch small gators. Set it too high, and you won't catch anything."

"Pay attention to the tide, because, it will come up on your bait. Now your bait isn't where you thought it needed to be. Also,



Walter Heathcock catches plenty of gators for customers of his guide business.



Preseason scouting results in much-better results once alligator season opens.

be careful setting it on a high tide, because the tide will dry out."

Heathcock primarily uses chicken or black birds as baits on his lines. He also has a special trick that he is confident will attract more bites.

"At the end of the pole, tie a white plastic grocery bag," he said. "It looks like one of those white birds sitting on that pole. The bag flaps in the end and makes it look like a bird, which attracts the alligator. They get close, and then there is the chicken or the black bird. It does not work every time, but it works sometimes."

MORE GATORS NOW?

"The difference from when I was a kid to today is the price. People used to make good money catching gators commercially. Now, it's almost like you are killing them for no reason," Heathcock said. "The price you can sell them at has dropped

terribly. It used to be \$20 to almost \$30 a foot, and now the same gator is going for \$10 a foot. This is the same thing that happened with the fur industry."

There is more money to be made guiding than commercially hunting alligators. Besides that, the enjoyment of the hunt is not there if it becomes a tedious job.

Heathcock normally will get seven tags annually for his customers. ■

TECHNO SCOUTING

By Taylor Pardue

TRAIL CAMS, MAPPING SOFTWARE PROVIDES HUNTERS EARLY EDGE

An aerial photo of a hunting property from mapping software can offer plenty of preliminary indications of possible places for deer movements and stand sites.

Hunting has definitely entered the 21st century, with range-finding rifle scopes, night-vision binoculars for predator and hog hunting, and apps for our smartphones that tell us exactly when the sun rises and sets.

And with new technology comes new ways to scout off-site, preventing you from putting down any scent that might disturb the deer you're targeting.

Modern trail cameras allow hunters to keep an eye on deer trails without physically checking them. Transmitters can email images directly to your laptop, letting you stay away for days or even weeks.

Several camera manufacturers are beginning to offer this service, although some require subscription fees. But photos come stamped with time, date, moon phase and temperature to let you pattern specific deer.

But digital scouting doesn't end there.

Software programs like Google Earth (www.google.com/earth) allow you to check terrain features in areas you haven't physically seen. Newer satellite offerings can bring you current imaging that enables you to see whether a tree has fallen or a bait pile has been eaten near your favorite blind or stand.

Looking to lease a new property? Check a parcel without having to walk every

square inch of it; find water and cover locations to get an idea of where to set up.

Many counties operate websites with property lines and other tax information available. Hunters can use these sites' ARC GIS maps to find out who owns particular pieces of land and contact them for hunting permission.

Technology also means never again having to guess about tree-stand placement.

Websites like Intellicast (www.intellicast.com) give wind speed and direction for an area with up-to-the-hour information, so hunters can keep track of prevailing winds for several days or weeks to choose which direction to face, rather than guessing the direction of the wind and placing your stand haphazardly.

Overlooking price and politics, drones are an option, too. Ethical uses exclude following or harassing animals, but new civilian models can carry a video camera into the woods and check out areas you might consider hunting. Hunters could use the drones to follow game trails through the woods — all without leaving scent on the paths.

Technology gives and takes. And each hunter has to make a decision about how traditional or modern they want to hunt — but ethics ultimately have to be the priority of either choice.

Choose wisely. ■

SNAKE I.D. ➤



Trail cameras have changed deer scouting forever. Some advanced models can transmit photos to a hunter's laptop or even his or her cell phone in real time.

SNAKE I.D.

Photo by Kyler Hood

LOUISIANA'S SNAKES IDENTIFIED

By Kevin Hood

Is it venomous? Is it non-venomous? Are you still not sure? Let's spend a little more time discussing some of the snakes you may see in and around where you live, hunt or fish. Louisiana is home to 48 species of snakes in Louisiana, only seven of them venomous.

Let's focus on some of the non-venomous species you may encounter.

Because they have no venom on which to rely, these species use different methods to subdue their prey. Constrictors bite and wrap their prey with their bodies, squeezing tighter and tighter until blood flow is cut off to the brain and they can no longer feel a heartbeat. Other snakes overpower their prey and quickly swallow them alive.

Snakes have nostrils to breathe, but they aren't used to smell prey as most people assume. So how do they hunt? They actually smell with their tongue. Snakes use a special organ called the Jacobson's organ to sense chemicals in the environment. It

is a patch of sensory cells in the main nasal passage that detects heavy, moisture-borne odor particles. As the snake flicks its moist tongue in and out, it collects odor particles and small organisms from whatever it touches and from the air around it, carries them back into the mouth, then presses the tongue against this organ in the roof of its mouth. A nerve connects the Jacobson's organ to its brain, which tells it what it is smelling.

Snakes are natural predators, so killing them will only increase an area's pest population. Venomous and nonvenomous snakes eat countless disease-carrying rodents each day, and those rodents are often covered in disease-carrying fleas and ticks that spread diseases to humans, pets, deer, squirrels, other wild game animals and even farm animals. Snakes will also eat sick and injured animals, keeping them from dying and contaminating water sources. The bottom line is, if you like to hunt and fish, you should want to see snakes to know that they are there to help keep your area healthy.



Photo by Kyler Hood

DEKAY'S BROWNSNAKE (STORERIA DEKAYI)

One of the most-commonly encountered snakes in Louisiana is also one of the smallest. Found across nearly the entire state, these tiny snakes are typically a grey-brown color, but sometimes deep reddish-brown, with alternating rows of dark spots along the back. They have incredibly tiny heads that are often slightly darker than their bodies. Adults typically measure about 12 inches long, with the record being slightly more than 20 inches. They consume common pests like snails and slugs, so they are often found by people who are working in their flower beds and gardens. They're very beneficial and should always be left alone to do their work keeping pests in control. Commonly misidentified as "ground rattlers," these snakes will often vibrate their tails on leaves to mimic the sound of a rattlesnake, but they are completely harmless to humans and pets.



Photo by Kevin Hood

WESTERN RIBBON SNAKE (THAMNOPHIS PROXIMUS)

Two of the six subspecies of western ribbon snakes (gulf coast and orange-stripe) can be found in nearly all of Louisiana. Ribbon snakes are relatively thin, quick snakes that have three cream/white or sometimes light green stripes that run the length of their bodies. Often confused with garter snakes, which are in the same genus, ribbon snakes' side stripes are located on the third and fourth row of scales on each side of their body. They typically have a distinct white spot in front of their eyes and also lack the dark vertical lines along the side of their mouths that garter snakes have. Most of their lives are spent near water because their diet consists of minnows, fish, tadpoles and small insects. Ribbon snakes eat their prey live. Adults typically average 2 to 3 feet long, with a record length of nearly 50 inches. These snakes are very common and are easy to identify as nonvenomous since they look nothing like any of our venomous species.

EASTERN GARTER SNAKE (THAMNOPHIS SIRTALIS)

Of the many types of garter snakes found around the United States, only the Eastern garter snake resides in Louisiana. These small to medium-sized snakes found nearly statewide, except for the southwest portion, are cousins to ribbon snakes but are typically thicker, with larger heads. They have three pronounced stripes that run the length of their bodies that are typically white, yellow or orange and are found on the second and third row of scales. Adults average 1½ to 2 feet long with a record of 54 inches. Like most non-venomous snakes, they will flatten their head into a diamond shape when threatened, as the one pictured has done. As live-prey eaters, garter snakes use their camouflage to blend into their surroundings and catch frogs, toads, tadpoles, fish, small birds and rodents. While extremely rare, some bites can cause a mild allergic reaction to the skin from their saliva. Unlike ribbon snakes, garter snakes typically have the dark vertical lines along the side of their mouths. Although differentiating between a ribbon snake and garter snake can be difficult at times, they are easily identifiable as nonvenomous.



Photo by Kyler Hood



Photo by CJ Hillard

RED CORN SNAKE (PANTHEROPHIS GUTTATUS)

Found in the Florida parishes and between the Mississippi River and Atchafalaya Basin, corn snakes are cousins to rat snakes and are often called "red rat snakes." These orange/red-orange snakes with darker colored blotches are often confused with copperheads because of their "copper" color, but actually look very little like the venomous species. They typically have a distinct black and white "checkerboard" belly that is visible when they are in their defensive posture. Averaging 3 to 4 feet long, with a record of 72 inches, these snakes are great climbers and constrict their prey before eating. Their diet consists mostly of rodents, but they will also eat small birds, eggs and amphibians. Corn snakes are very good to have around because they are frequent eaters and pose zero risk to humans or pets.

WESTERN, GREY RAT SNAKES & NORTH AMERICAN RACER ➤



Photo by Tyler Hood

WESTERN, GREY RAT SNAKES

(PANTHEROPHIS OBSOLETUS,
PANTHEROPHIS SPILOIDES)

These account for two of the 48 species in Louisiana and can be found across the entire state. The specific type of rat snake depends on their location in relation to the Mississippi river. Westerns are found West of the river, and East of the river you will find greys. Rat snakes are long and slender. They vary in color from nearly black without much of a visible pattern to pale brown, yellowish, or even orangeish with black or brown blotches. Averaging around 4 to 6 feet long with a record of 7-feet-2, these snakes can climb virtually anything including walls, poles and trees. They're often called "chicken snakes" because they spend time around chicken coops eating mice and rats that are stealing the feed, but they'll also eat eggs when the opportunity arises. These constrictors also eat birds and other rodents. Adults can annually consume more than 100 disease-carrying rodents, which also includes the thousands of fleas and ticks in which they are covered. Rat snakes will often display a "kinked" appearance and will coil up in a defensive posture when cornered, but they pose no danger to humans.

NORTH AMERICAN RACER

(COLUBER CONSTRICTOR)

Five subspecies of the North American racer can be found in Louisiana.

- **SOUTHERN BLACK RACER:** Florida parishes; solid black with a prominent white chin.

- **BLACK-MASKED RACER:** Mississippi River floodplain; grey with distinct black mask just behind the eyes.

- **BUTTERMILK RACER:** Central and North Louisiana; bluish, grey or black with whitish or pale blue scales scattered on body.

- **TAN RACER:** few parishes in west-central Louisiana; tan/brown.

- **EASTERN YELLOW-BELLIED RACER:** southwest Louisiana; olive on top, fading to green with a bright yellow belly. These very fast and curious snakes, have excellent vision and are often seen "periscoping" or standing up.

These constrictors eat rodents, small mammals and other snakes, including venomous ones. You'll hear stories about people being chased by racers because they often flee in the same direction of humans while trying to get to their safe spot, which can be misinterpreted as "chasing." Sometimes they're incorrectly called blue racers, though that subspecies is actually found in northern states near Illinois. ■



Photo by Tyler Hood

Stay tuned next month for information on more of our amazing snakes. The ever popular and beloved king snakes are next! Until then, don't forget to check us out on Facebook for lots of snake facts and fun. We are Louisiana Snake ID and LA Snake Boyz on YouTube. We love living the Snake Life, and snake education is our passion!

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Astro Tables is far more effective than "moon tables," because it takes into account critical solar energies as well as lunar.

The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black bars). The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Noon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each... 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)

Astro Tables is a quick-reference version of its parent publication, the **PrimeTimes Wall Calendar**, which is recommended for those wishing more complete data on the best days and times to go fishing and hunting for the entire year (see "Available Products" below).

PrimeTimes forecasts are based on solar/lunar research at a leading college of astrophysics and our own research pond/wildlife area. Annual data is supplied by the U.S. Naval Observatory. All times are adjusted to the center of your time zone and for Daylight Saving Time.

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Book: "How to Know When to Go" by Rick Taylor. \$14.95 (plus \$4 s&h). 100 pages, 43 illustrations. A comprehensive look at the main factors influencing fish and game activity periods, plus how to devise an effective when-to-go game plan using any year's PrimeTimes calendars. Individual assessments of bass, panfish, deer, turkey, and more.

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2020 AUG		BEST DAYS			VALUE
POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL.		
Sat 1					49
Sun 2					57
Mon 3					62
Tue 4					53
Wed 5					44
Thu 6					35
Fri 7					33
Sat 8					35
Sun 9					39
Mon 10					46
Tue 11					59
Wed 12					53
Thu 13					50
Fri 14					53
Sat 15					64
Sun 16					75
Mon 17					85
Tue 18					88
Wed 19					76
Thu 20					64
Fri 21					52
Sat 22					43
Sun 23					39
Mon 24					40
Tue 25					47
Wed 26					34
Thu 27					27
Fri 28					26
Sat 29					26
Sun 30					36
Mon 31					46

25 50 75
AVERAGE

LUNAR PERIODS				
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED				
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
7:09 pm	11:41 pm - Midnight	4:08 am	11:10 am - 12:02 pm	☉
7:58 pm	Midnight - 12:33 am	5:07 am	12:06 pm - 12:58 pm	☉ FULL
8:40 pm	12:32 am - 1:30 am	6:09 am	12:57 pm - 1:55 pm	☉
9:16 pm	1:19 am - 2:27 am	7:10 am	1:44 pm - 2:52 pm	☉
9:48 pm	1:59 am - 3:21 am	8:10 am	2:24 pm - 3:46 pm	☉
10:17 pm	2:36 am - 4:14 am	9:08 am	3:01 pm - 4:39 pm	☉
10:44 pm	3:09 am - 5:05 am	10:05 am	3:34 pm - 5:30 pm	☉
11:10 pm	3:43 am - 5:55 am	11:00 am	4:08 pm - 6:20 pm	☉
11:37 pm	4:14 am - 6:44 am	11:55 am	4:39 pm - 7:09 pm	☾ Apogee
	4:47 am - 7:33 am	12:51 pm	5:12 pm - 7:58 pm	☾
12:05 am	5:23 am - 8:23 am	1:47 pm	5:48 pm - 8:48 pm	☾ HALF
12:37 am	6:01 am - 9:13 am	2:45 pm	6:26 pm - 9:38 pm	☾
1:12 am	6:44 am - 10:06 am	3:44 pm	7:09 pm - 10:31 pm	☾
1:54 am	7:31 am - 11:03 am	4:43 pm	7:56 pm - 11:28 pm	☾
2:43 am	8:23 am - 11:59 am	5:40 pm	8:48 pm - 12:24 am	☾ HIGH
3:39 am	9:22 am - 12:54 pm	6:34 pm	9:47 pm - 1:19 am	☾
4:42 am	10:22 am - 1:48 pm	7:23 pm	10:47 pm - 2:13 am	☾
5:50 am	11:24 am - 2:40 pm	8:07 pm	11:49 pm - Midnight	☾ NEW
7:00 am	12:28 pm - 3:28 pm	8:46 pm	Midnight - 3:05 am	☾
8:11 am	1:31 pm - 4:11 pm	9:22 pm	12:53 am - 3:53 am	☾
9:21 am	2:34 pm - 4:52 pm	9:56 pm	1:56 am - 4:36 am	☾ Perigee
10:31 am	3:36 pm - 5:34 pm	10:30 pm	2:59 am - 5:17 am	☾
11:41 am	4:37 pm - 6:15 pm	11:05 pm	4:01 am - 5:59 am	☾
12:50 pm	5:40 pm - 6:58 pm	11:42 pm	5:02 am - 6:40 am	☾
1:58 pm	6:40 pm - 7:46 pm		6:05 am - 7:23 am	☾ HALF
3:05 pm	7:41 pm - 8:37 pm	12:24 am	7:05 am - 8:11 am	☾
4:07 pm	8:40 pm - 9:32 pm	1:11 am	8:06 am - 9:02 am	☾ LOW
5:04 pm	9:36 pm - 10:28 pm	2:03 am	9:05 am - 9:57 am	☾
5:55 pm	10:28 pm - 11:24 pm	3:00 am	10:01 am - 10:53 am	☾
6:38 pm	11:14 pm - 12:20 am	4:00 am	10:53 am - 11:49 am	☾
7:16 pm	11:56 pm - Midnight	5:00 am	11:39 am - 12:45 pm	☾

ANY LUNAR PERIOD IS ENHANCED WHEN IT OVERLAPS A KEY SOLAR PERIOD. THE BEST OF THESE OVERLAPS ARE DESIGNATED BY THE SUN SYMBOLS:
 ☀ = DAWN ☀ = HIGH NOON ☀ = DUSK
 WHILE THE LESSER MOONRISE AND -SET OVERLAPS (ABOUT 30 MIN. BEFORE AND AFTER THE LISTED TIME) ARE DESIGNATED BY BOLD BLACK TYPE.

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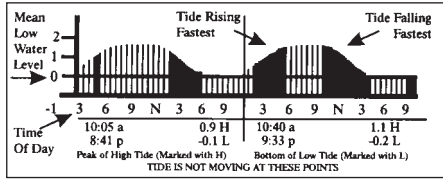




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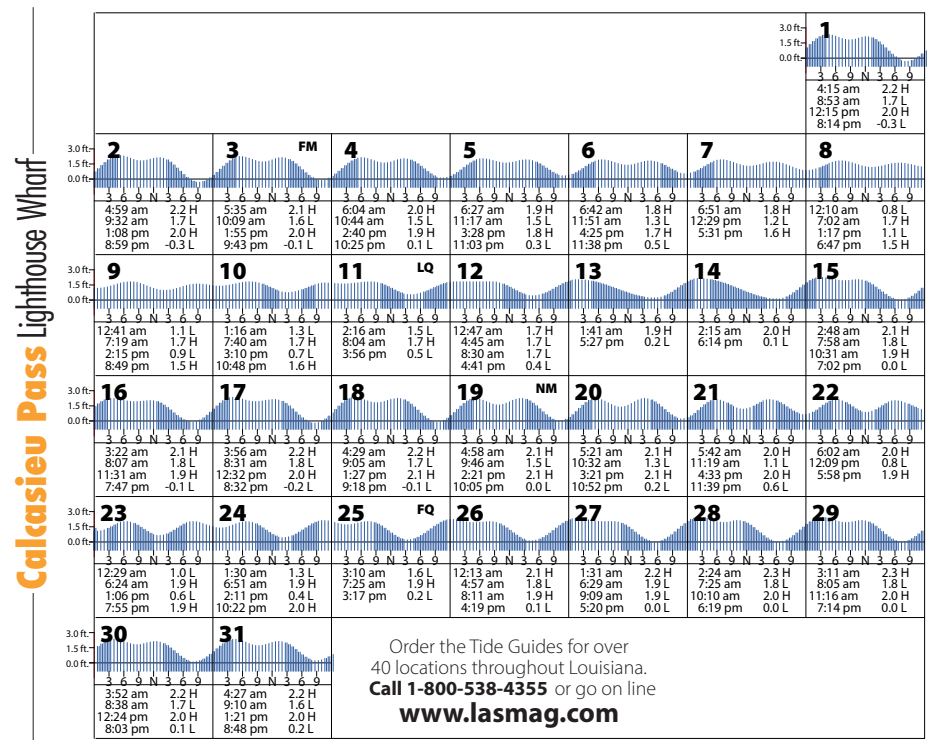
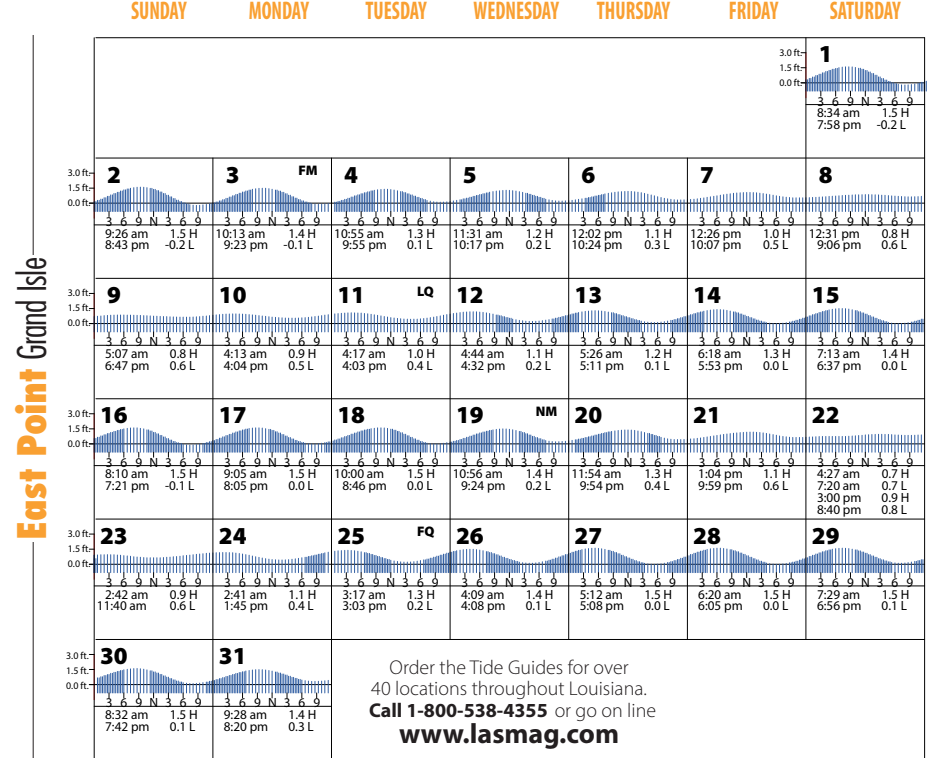
How to use the SPORTSMAN Tide Guide



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





Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



Justin Webb

Justin Webb with a redfish from Delacroix.

Jessie Randall, 7, who attends Episcopal elementary school in Baton Rouge, enjoyed catching bream over the holidays. She used worms and caught 14 bream.



Jessie Randall



Kelsie Naquin

Kelsie Naquin, 8, killed her first deer, a 5-point, on Dec. 15 in Joaquin, Tex.



Braden Merritt

Nine-year-old Braden Merritt holds up his biggest red so far. This 41-inch, 33-pound beast was caught at the end of the long rocks out of Hopedale.



Katilyn Naquin

Katilyn Naquin, 8, poses with her first deer, a spike, taken on Nov. 17 in Joaquin, Tex.



Michelle Jeansonne

Michelle Jeansonne downed this 150-pound, 8-point buck in West Feliciana Parish on Jan. 12, 2019.



Ty Robards

Ty Robards, 7, killed his first doe while hunting in Red River with his dad on Nov. 23.



Loyd Hicks

This 230-pound 8-point was killed by Loyd Hicks (right) of Lake Charles on Dec. 14 in Avoyelles Parish. Also pictured are his brother Brian (left), his father Gordon and his brother's Texas Lacey dog Hardbottom Hunter Bayou Dindy.



Kristin Smith

Kristin Smith of Olla hooked this bull red with live shrimp out of Cocodrie on a fishing charter with Capt. Anthony Kyzar.



Kim Palmertree

Kim Palmertree of Farmerville caught this mahi mahi fishing offshore of Venice with Capt. Steven Otwell of Tuna Tails LLC on July 4.



Justin Blais

Justin Blais, 12, of Forest Hill caught this 4-pound, 12-ounce bass on March 25 at Toledo Bend.



Roddy Gisclair

Roddy Gisclair sharing his love for hunting with his grandsons, Roddy John Gisclair, 8, and Caden and Koby Bruce, both 14, in Larose.



Cole Rios

Cole Rios, 10m was using yo-yo's to fish at Bayou Bonne Idee in Morehouse Parish.



Baleigh McKinney

Baleigh McKinney of Livingston hooked her first bull red in Leeville on May 1 with the help of her grandfather, Gerald McMorris.

GOT PHOTOS? WE WANT 'EM

Send us your photos, and you may appear on the pages of the most widely read outdoor magazine in the Bayou State. Send clean, sharp shots of you with your fish, deer, ducks, rabbits, squirrels, etc. to images@LouisianaSportsman.com

Digital images must be at least 200KB and in jpeg format.

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Circulation Director @ 985-859-7744 -or- rickyn@lasmag.com

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Olivia Waguespack

Olivia Waguespack, 7, of Geismar with a sac-a-lait caught March 9, 2020.



EJ White

It was love at first sight for EJ White with his first red snapper out of Fourchon.



Grant & Jim Knipe

Grant Knipe and his dad, Jim, caught this large jack crevalle while fishing off Calumet Island.

Andrew Jeanise poses with his first deer, a 152-pound 4-point buck, taken on a private lease in Bossier Parish.



Andrew Jeanise



Jase Savoy

Jase Savoy hooked his first flounder on Big Lake at the end of April.



Capt. Paul's FISHING EDGE

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- Hopedale to the Mississippi Sound
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- Delacroix to Point a la Hache
- Bayou Bienvenue
- Port Sulphur
- Lakes Ponchartrain & Maurepas
- Calcasieu Lake
- Myrtle Grove-Lake Hermitage
- Empire to Buras
- Pearl River WMA
- Lafitte
- The Rigoulets
- Vermillion Bay
- Bayou Sauvage NWR
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Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



Gavin Trosclair

Gavin Trosclair, 10, with the first of his three squirrels he killed on May 2 while hunting at his family's lease north of Greensburg. All three were head shots with his Paw J's .17HMR.



Ashton Graff

This 19-inch trout was caught in Hopedale on April 25 by 8-year-old Ashton Graff.



Lanson Foster

Lanson Foster caught and released this large catfish on Bayou Lafourche in Larose on Feb. 29, 2020.

Five-year-old Sophia Grace's first bass was caught in her poppy's pond.



Sophia Grace

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Aadyn Payne

Aadyn Payne caught this beautiful rainbow trout on the Karta River in Alaska.



Rene Quebedeaux

Rene Quebedeaux killed this 3½-year-old, 9-pointer at 25 yards while heading back into the pine thickets in Catahoula National Wildlife Management Preserve on Nov. 29, 2019.

Take your camera **TO THE WOODS!**

Send us your photos, and you may appear on the pages of the most widely read outdoor magazine in the Bayou State. Send clean, sharp shots of you with your deer, ducks, rabbits, squirrels, doves, etc. to

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or to
images@LouisianaSportsman.com**

But hang on to the negatives, because the photos cannot be returned.



Peyton Bohling

Peyton Bohling, aka "the cricket wrangler," 5, of Belle Chasse caught a bream for her mom on Sept. 29 in celebration of National Hunting and Fishing Day. She was visiting her Aunt Diane in Baton Rouge.

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Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



Kyle LaCombe

Kyle LaCombe caught a 121-pound alligator snapping turtle in the Mermentau River on May 23, 2020.



Jace LaCoste

This 36-pound Opelousas cat was caught by 10-year-old Jace LaCoste in the Vermilion Bay marsh. He was using a fresh shrimp on a Zebco 606.



Jamie Yeager

Jamie Yeager's first redfish wasn't too big, but it had a lot of spots!



Jake Davidson

Jake Davidson of Lafayette had a successful Memorial Day weekend taking this hog at his camp in southern Mississippi.



David Gary Jr.

David Gary Jr. with a bass caught in St. Francisville on a farm pond. It was his first topwater bass and his first cast with a tiny torpedo. Now he's hooked!

BARNETT EXPLORER CROSSBOWS

Barnett, one of the industry leaders in crossbow production, has added three models in a new Explorer series this year for hunters who want high-dollar performance in an affordable package.

The XP370, XP380 and XP400 come ready to hunt with a single-bolt assembly, 4x32 scope, a side-mount quiver, rope-cocking device and two 20-inch carbon arrows.

Two important features are the Soft Lok Floating Bristle Arrow Retainer, which holds arrows securely in place, an Anti-Dry Fire trigger system. The three crossbows propel arrows at 370,

380 and 400 feet per second, respectively, based on draw weights of 165, 185 and 200 pounds, with weights between 6 and 6.2 pounds. Overall lengths are 32¼ to 33¾ inches and all three bows are 19 inches wide.

MSRP: XP370 \$329.99;

XP380 \$399.99; XP400

\$449.99

For more info, visit:

www.barnettcrossbows.com.



MILLENNIUM L105, L110 LADDER STANDS

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The L105 is an 18-foot, single-seat ladder. The L110 has a fold-up seat and larger platform that makes it bowhunter friendly, as well as a double-rail rigid ladder system that allows the stand to be

placed anywhere from 8 to 21 feet off the ground.

Both stands feature an anti-flex support system that eliminates the need for a tree brace, and both come with 35-foot Safelink Safety lines and carabiners that allow you to raise and lower your weapon safely. Both have 300-pound capacities and weigh between 90 and 92 pounds.

MSRP: \$299.99, \$339.99.

For more info, visit: millenniumstands.com

PLANO AW2 RIFLE CASES

Plano Molding, the Texas-based company that has provided the fishing market with hundreds of great products over the past several decades, has moved some of its tackle box technology to its line of protective gun cases, introducing the All-Weather 2 Rifle Cases with the Rustrictor waterproofing technology.

Perfecting on the company's tackle boxes, Rustrictor makes the rifle cases, 36-, 42- and 52-inch models, perfectly waterproof and able to withstand any of the rigors or travel.

The cases feature the Dri-Loc seal that is waterproof and dustproof, so there's no chance of rust or corrosion developing, even if the case sits through a downpour on a baggage carrier somewhere. By the way, the cases are lockable and airline approved, including a pressure-release

valve to equalize pressure changes while in flight.

MSRP: \$119.99-\$199.99

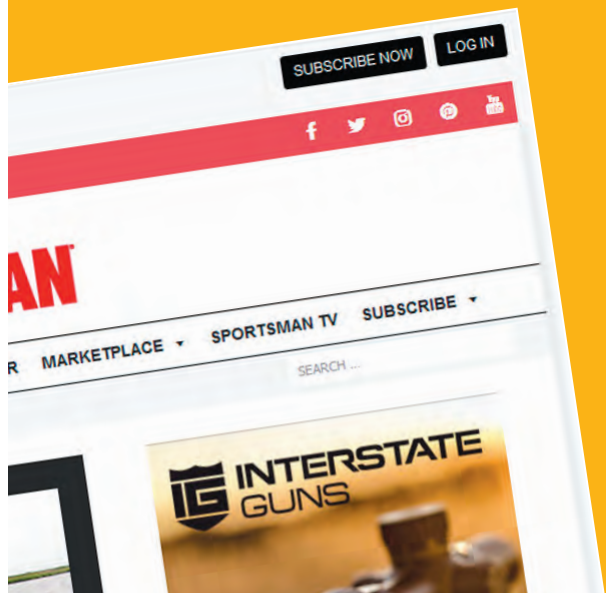
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FISHING REGULATIONS

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
Groupers* 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	
Atlantic Sharpnose & Bonnethead shark@	None	1/day
Other sharks (except prohibited species)@	54" FL	1/day/vessel/aggregate
King Mackerel*	24" FL	3/day
Spanish Mackerel*	12" FL	15/day
Striped mullet	None	100 pounds/day
Black seabass	None	None
Hogfish	14" FL	5/day
Seatrout, Spotted (Speckled Trout)	12" TL*	25/day*
Red Snapper*	16" TL	2/day*
Other Snapper		5 mutton in 10 snapper aggregate
Mutton Snapper	18" TL	
Cubera, Yellowtail, Gray (mangrove)	12" TL	10 in aggregate*
Queen, Blackfin, Silk, Wenchman	None	
Vermilion Snapper	10" TL	
Schoolmaster, Dog, Mahogany	None	None
Gray Triggerfish*	15" FL	1/day in aggregate
Lane Snapper	8" TL	
Almaco Jack, Goldface Tilefish, & Bluefin Tilefish	None	20/person/day in aggregate*
Blackline Tilefish, Anchor Tilefish	None	
Tripletail	18" TL	5/day

CFL = curved fork length LJFL = lower jaw fork length CL = carcass length
DW = dressed weight LJTF = lower jaw to tail fork FL = fork length

FRESHWATER

FISH Species	Minimum Size Limit	Bag Limit (per person)
Crappie	None	50/day*
Buffalo Fish	16" TL	25/day
Freshwater Drum (Gaspargou)	12" TL	25/day
Channel Catfish	11" TL*	***
Blue Catfish	12" TL*	***
Bowfin	16" TL	None
Flathead Catfish	14" TL*	***
Crawfish	None	150 lbs./day
Paddlefish	30" max LJFL	2*
Shad	None	50 lbs./day
Black Bass (largemouth & spotted)	None*	10/day*
Striped Bass or Hybrid Striped Bass	**	5/day*
Sturgeon	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS	
White Bass	None	50/day*
Yellow Bass	None	50/day*

* see exceptions in pamphlet.

** no more than two may exceed 30 inches.

*** catfish limit is 100 in aggregate; however, 25 fish in aggregate may be undersized.

only one fish may exceed 27 inches. @ Shark season is closed between April 1 and June 30.

^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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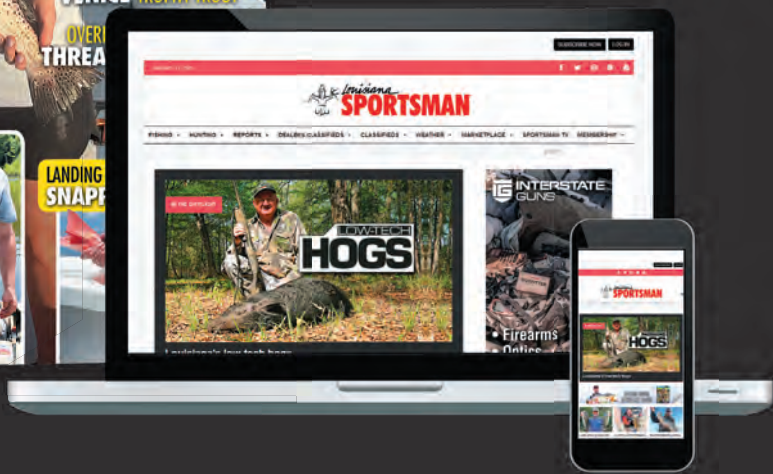
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