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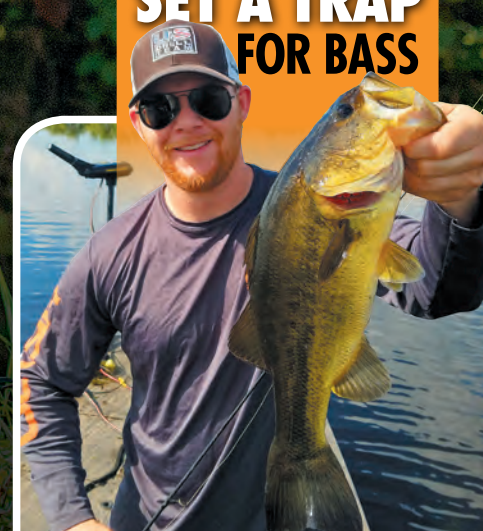
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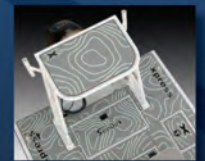
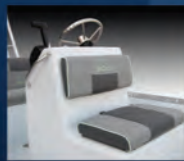


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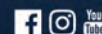
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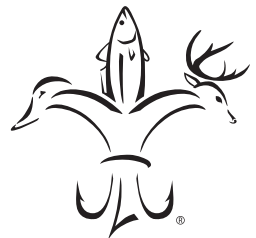
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GET REAL FOR TEAL



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Deer hunters across Louisiana should be jumping for joy as the 2020-21 season approaches. They can find great places to take a nice buck in the annual hunting forecast in this issue. Photo by Rick Small.

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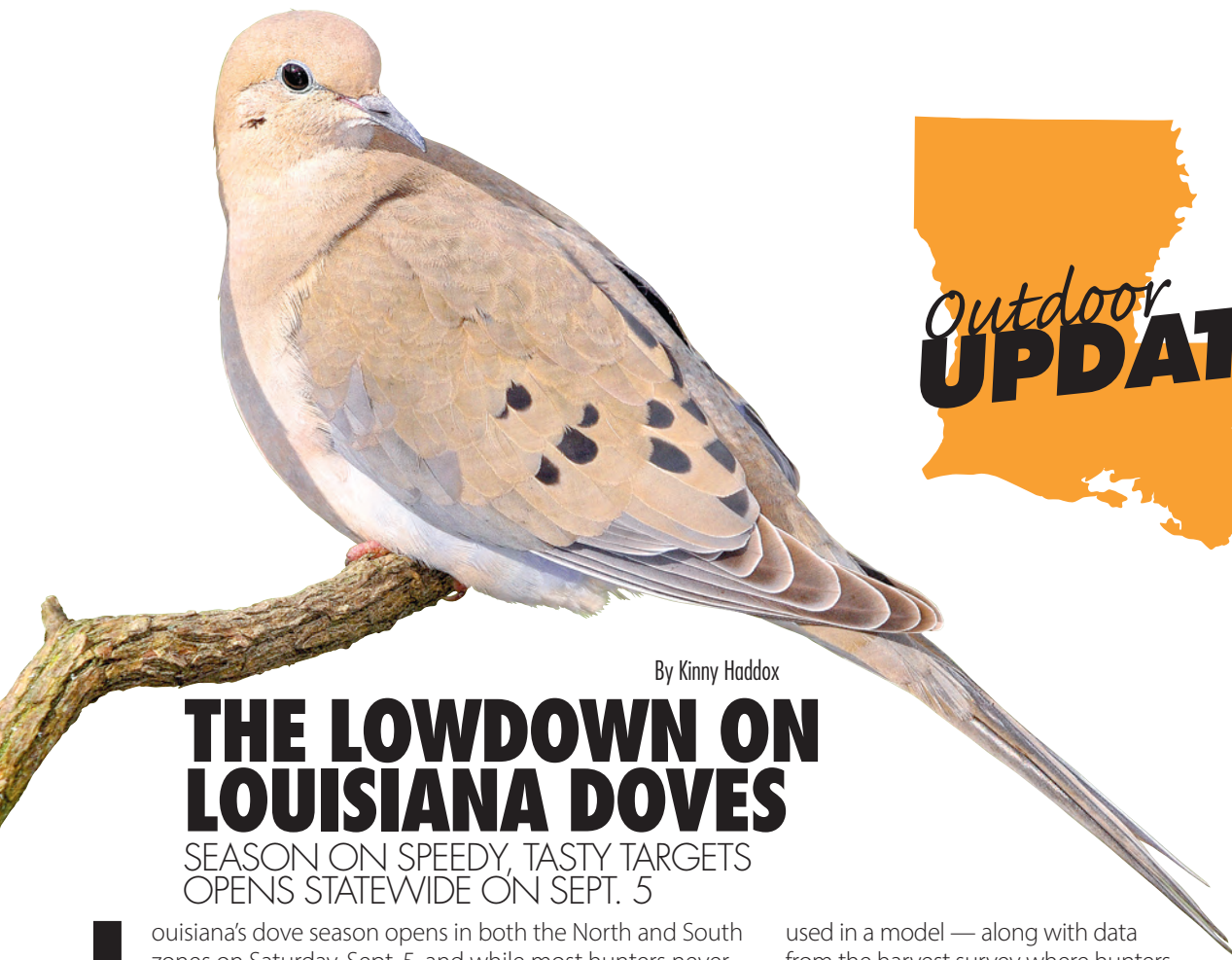
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By Kinny Haddox

THE LOWDOWN ON LOUISIANA DOVES

SEASON ON SPEEDY, TASTY TARGETS OPENS STATEWIDE ON SEPT. 5

Louisiana's dove season opens in both the North and South zones on Saturday, Sept. 5, and while most hunters never take advantage of it, the season in both zones actually runs into late January 2021.

It's too early to make a good guess as to whether this looks like it might be a poor, fair, good or great season, because dove estimates and surveys are difficult to take. But banding efforts

indicate a lot of birds in the state.

"We don't do population surveys of mourning doves in Louisiana, so it is always difficult to predict how many doves will be around," said Dr. Jeffrey P. Duguay, manager of LDWF's Research and Survey Program. "However, we have a dove-banding program where we band roughly 1,500 doves in the state annually.



Jeffrey P. Duguay's daughter, Emily, helps him band a dove for releasing to study dove movements and populations.

Based on our banding efforts, it looks like there are good numbers of doves across the state for this coming season."

The banding program is a national effort, Duguay said. Age specifics (adult birds or hatch-year birds), harvest and survival rates are determined from the banding data. From this band recovery, models are used to estimate annual survival. This information is

used in a model — along with data from the harvest survey where hunters turn in dove wings — to estimate population abundance. Harvest survey data from wings provides an index of recruitment; we can age doves based on wing feather patterns and can then, using models, determine annual recruitment."

RESIDENT BIRDS

One interesting fact about dove season is that even though doves are considered "migratory birds," that isn't always the case here.

"Most of the early season doves harvested in Louisiana are resident birds," Duguay said. "We have lots of birds that spend most or all of their lives in Louisiana. They are hatched here and remain year-round. Some do migrate, though. Our dove-banding efforts provide us good information on dove movements. We've banded doves that were recovered in the same general location (within 25 miles or less) three or more years later. We know that these particular birds have survived several years. Whether they remained in the same general location all this time or moved considerable distances is not known, though. We've also banded doves that have been recovered in other states, including Iowa, Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Illinois, Missouri, Florida, Nebraska as well as Mexico."

Rainfall is probably the biggest factor affecting early dove season. Too much or too little rain can impact crops planted to attract or concentrate doves for hunting. That also affects migratory birds as well as resident birds.

"Based on band-return data, it appears as though migrating birds begin to arrive in Louisiana in September and increase in numbers through October," Duguay said. Despite the fact there may be more doves later in the year, dove season traditionally puts more hunters in the field for opening weekend than any other time.



HIP surveys and other data collected by the LDWF show the numbers of dove hunters and doves harvested have dropped off dramatically.

targeted doves, with harvest numbers around 902,300. By last season, those numbers had dwindled by more than 50% to 19,800 hunters with a harvest of 332,700. Some of that could be due to lack of proper reporting, but it is hard to tell.

New Harvest Information Program (HIP) reporting that does not go through retail outlets selling licenses should help wildlife experts determine more accurately how real those numbers are. All migratory bird hunters, including dove hunters, need to be sure to get their HIP certification. This year, the HIP certification can only be obtained online at www.la-web.s3licensing.com/ or at LDWF Baton Rouge headquarters only.

Season	# of Hunters	# Doves Harvested
2014-15	48,900	902,300
2015-16	38,700	702,100
2016-17	35,900	660,700
2017-18	27,400	526,000
2018-19	22,700	366,400
2019-20	19,800	332,700

THE SPLITS

The North Zone splits are Sept. 5-27, Oct. 10-Nov. 15 and Dec. 26-Jan. 24. Dove hunters in the North Zone should take note: The state's hunting pamphlet has a printing error showing that the North Zone third split runs from December 26-Jan. 2. It should read Dec. 26-Jan. 24. The South Zone splits are Sept. 5-16, Oct. 17-Nov. 29 and Dec 19-Jan. 21.

"The structure for setting the season dates is the same this year as in the past," Duguay said. "However, in the South Zone this year, there were a few days added to the first split and second split. The South Zone now ends Thanksgiving weekend. A few days were removed from earlier October and late January in the South Zone to accommodate for this change."

Daily limit on doves is 15 in aggregate, either mourning, white-winged, fully dressed Eurasian and collared doves. The possession limit is 35 in aggregate. ■

HIP REPORTING

One thing that isn't hard to figure when it comes to Louisiana dove hunters and harvests is that numbers of both are on a steady decline.

In the 2014-15 season, LDWF estimated that 48,900 hunters

A GREAT SWORD DRILL



Cameron Dworak and Kelsea Watts caught this 238-pound swordfish on July 11, about 20 miles out of northeast pass in Venice. The swordfish was caught out of a 22-foot Sea Fox, so Dworak and Watts got a lot of attention at Venice Marina when they pulled up to get the fish weighed.

Charlie Gaston of Keithville landed this Caddo Lake bass on Friday, July 10, in less than 3 feet of water.

CHASING BREAM GETS CADDO LUNKER IN BOAT

KEITHVILLE ANGLER LANDS 11.60-POUND BASS

By Kinny Haddox



It was Friday, July 10, time for Charlie Gaston of Keithville and his younger brother, Alan, to go on their weekly fishing trip to Caddo Lake in the north-west corner of Louisiana above Shreveport. But his brother was busy, so Gaston just went ahead by himself. He was soon joined with another partner — an 11.60-pound largemouth bass.

It's the biggest fish Gaston has ever caught, by far, and his first double-digit bass. It came quite unexpectedly, because it isn't the kind of fish you typically see this time of the year.

"We normally fish every Friday that we can, but I went on this trip alone," Gaston said. "It was a beautiful morning with a light wind. It was hotter than blue blazes, and the water temperature was almost 90 degrees, so I didn't expect much. But I saw

a few bass running up in the shallows chasing bream, so I worked back and forth down this little stretch and caught some nice ones on topwater. But that bite went away when the sun came out."

THE BIG WORM

So Gaston switched to a 10½-inch Africa-colored, Shredder Custom worm, a lure made near his hometown. He was catching fish in less than 3 feet of water, but the shallow spot was close to a dropoff where the water went to 5 or 6 feet deep. That was the key to finding the big fish actively feeding, he said.

"I didn't really think there would be a really big bass up in that kind of water, especially with the temp so high, and it was just so hot," he said. "But on about my third cast with the worm, that big fish inhaled it. I was on for the fish fight of my life."

Gaston almost didn't catch the lunker, because of the heat.

"On that cast, as soon as the worm hit the water, I put the rod down between my knees and bent over to pick up a bottle of water to try and cool off," he said. "I had just picked it up when I felt the thump on my leg when the fish hit it. I barely grabbed it in time to reel up the slack and set the hook. It made a run in that shallow water, and I didn't know if I could even turn it."

Gaston was praying all that time that the fish on the end of his line was a bass. A few weeks earlier, he caught a big grinnel, aka choupique, in the same area, and he was thinking he had on another one. But

when the fish turned and came up, there was no doubt what it was.

ONE LAST BATTLE

"I finally got the fish to the boat, but I had to run from one end to the other to keep it from breaking my line," he said. "It came up again and tried to throw the hook, then just kind of gave up. When I slipped the net under the big bass, I knew it was the biggest one I've ever caught."

Besides going 11.60 pounds, the huge fish was 25 inches long and 17½ inches in girth. Its belly looked empty, and both Gaston and the folks that weighed it at Buzzard Bay Marina agreed it would have weighed 14 pounds if it had been caught in the spring, before the spawn. Gaston filled out the paperwork for the BASSLIFE Trophy Replica Program, eased the fish back into his livewell and took it back to the very tree he caught it next to and released it. He said only took a few seconds of holding the fish in the water before it swam off with a splash.

He landed the big fish at approximately 8 a.m.

Caddo Lake is a mostly shallow, cypress-lined lake that is partly in Louisiana and partly in Texas. It is a huge impoundment at 25,400 acres and was formed by the "Great Raft," a 100-mile long floating log jam, back in the late 1800s. It backed up water from the Red River into the shallow area to form the lake. The lake was later dammed up to consistently hold water and is a known producer for trophy bass. ■



Gaston's lunker largemouth fell for one of these 10½-inch Africa color plastic worms.

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Jeremy Cooper was first in at the “new” Bussey and, it paid off with some good bass like these he and his father caught flipping brush with plastics.

BUSSEY BRAKE RE-OPENING HAS PARTY-LIKE ATMOSPHERE

By Kinny Haddox

It was a fishing party. There’s not much better way to describe it. And if there was ever any doubt that fishermen are a crazy bunch, the re-opening of Bussey Brake Reservoir north of Bastrop on July 15 pretty much proved it.

The gates on the 2,200-acre reservoir were unlocked at 6 a.m. for public fishing for the first time in almost 10 years. At 1:05 a.m., 28-year-old Jeremy Cooper of nearby Beekman, and his dad, James, arrived at the gate to be first in line. They barely made it. Three more boatloads of friends showed up in the next few minutes.

“Us and some friends had started messing with each other about who was going to be first, and the time kept getting moved earlier and earlier. We finally decided we would get there at 1 a.m. so we could be first. We slept in the truck a little bit and then visited with the other early birds. It was worth it.”

THE FISHING

By the time the gates opened, an estimated 50 boats were in line, and around 100 boats visited the lake the first day. The procession continued all morning, in spite of nearly 100-degree weather and uncertainty about what the new lake would be like. Originally opened to public fishing 60 years ago, Bussey Brake had been closed for renovations for 8 years. Among those attending the re-opening that morning were biologist Ryan Daniel of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, who oversaw the lake’s redevelopment, and Dorothy Ford, director of the Bastrop-Morehouse Chamber of Commerce.

Fishermen were happy.

“It was better than I could even imagine,” Jeremy Cooper said. “There is so much structure out there: trees, lily pads, all kinds of grass and brush everywhere. We caught a lot of bass, probably five in the 4- to 5-pound range and 20 to 25 over the 16-inch slot

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Bussey is the first and only LDWF Fisheries WMA. You must fill out a WMA self-clearing permit before fishing; do it at the boat dock kiosk or through the LDWF app.

Know and follow limits and size restrictions. Take a measuring tape of some sort if you plan to keep any bass or crappie. Special fishing regulations have been put in place to protect the young and expanding fishery and to ensure a quality fishing experience for all anglers. These regulations are as follows:

- **Black bass:** 5 daily with a 16-inch maximum length limit with an exception: one bass longer than 16 inches may be kept.
- **Crappie:** 25 daily with a 10-inch minimum length limit.
- **Bream:** 50 daily with no size restrictions.

State regulations are in effect for all other species. Fishing gear other than rod and reel or cane pole are prohibited.

The reservoir has three marked boat lanes, one on each side and one in the center of the lake to improve access. There is also a new windbreak in front of the launch that protects anglers from winds while loading and unloading.

- The lake is still 2 feet below desired pool stage. Water only enters the reservoir through pumping from Bayou Bartholomew or by rainfall.

limit. We started off with frogs and were getting a lot of short bites. Then, we moved to flipping, and when we got up in the cover with them, we start catching them.”

Other anglers reported some good re-opening day catches as well, especially for bass and big bluegill. The crappie fishing was tough, but that could be expected this time of year. Fishermen also caught fish off the new fishing pier at the main dock and the two refurbished piers on the lake.

If you plan on fishing Bussey, here are some things you’ll need to consider, Daniels said.

THE NEW BUSSEY BRAKE

Bussey today looks nothing like the “old” Bussey. The water is much clearer, not muddied by overpopulations of rough fish. The old lake was full of stumps but appeared pretty much wide open.

The stumps remain, but much of the lake now resembles a maze of willow lined bayous and cuts like you see in the Atchafalaya Basin. In other spots, the huge lily pad fields look like some big Florida lake. And the brush and a wide variety of aquatic vegetation looks a lot like shallow areas of Toledo Bend in the early days. That's pretty good company for a fishing lake.

Daniel said the fishing at Bussey should continue to get better over the next three to five years. While it has been heavily stocked, including a big group of 3- to 5-pound hatchery brood stock of largemouths three years ago, upcoming spawns should really fill up the lake's expansive cover.

International Paper donated Bussey Brake to the LDWF on Nov. 5, 2012. It is estimated that the reservoir is worth as much as \$5 million. Bussey was constructed in the late 1950s as an alternative water source for the company's Louisiana Mill. ■



A new crop of young anglers got to fish the reservoir this time around, like Dylan Bachot, who caught this Bussey Brake brute.

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DOUBLE-DIGIT BASS MARKS 'NEW' BUSSEY BRAKE

By Kinny Haddox

Opening week at Bussey Brake Reservoir in mid-July meant a lot of things to a lot of people, but there's no doubt what the most-important moment of that week was for Sterlington's Brandon Johnston.

Johnston landed a 10.84-pound bass, the first double-digit largemouth reported out of the newly renovated 2,200-acre lake in Morehouse Parish.

Johnston had caught some good bass on Friday afternoon, July 17, and got to the lake at 5:40 a.m. the next day to fish with his son Landon and fishing partner Eric Whitlock. They had fished down a productive stretch of brush and grass and had turned around to make another pass when he caught the bass.

"We caught several smaller fish, and my buddy caught one about 5 pounds on our first pass down the stretch," he said. "I was throwing a 10½-inch Zoom Ol' Monster worm. I was using a watermelon/red worm but took it off and put on the same worm in black and blue. I didn't catch anything on it for a while, then switched over to a junebug/red color. On about the third cast with that worm, I flipped it up by a willow bush and felt a little tug.

"I set the hook, and when I did, she flashed up close to the surface. The water is pretty clear, and when I saw her I started yelling for my son to get the net. I knew she was big but didn't know she was going to be over 10 pounds."

SECURING THE FISH

The story got a little hairy at that point. Even though Johnston was fishing with a 5/0 hook and 20-pound line, he was in some pretty thick cover, and on the first pass when he got the fish by the boat, his son missed the fish with the net.

He had the fish halfway out of the water, and after another brief battle, the second swoop of the net was true, and the bruiser was in the boat — but it wasn't over. When Johnston picked up the bass, she flexed her muscles and jumped out of his hands, landing on the front deck, close to getting back in the water. For a moment, he thought she might be get away, but he grabbed her again.

"I was pretty excited, but when I turned around and saw my son and partner with their mouths wide open and their eyes as big as saucers, I got even more excited," he said.

GETTING A WEIGHT

Unfortunately, the big fish had gulped down the worm and had the hook back in its throat. They worked the hook out fairly easily, but when they put her in the livewell, she turned on her side, and they couldn't get her going again.

Johnston didn't have a scale, but a friend fishing nearby had a digital scale. Before that friend arrived, another man fishing nearby gave them his digital scale. They weighed the first twice;

Brandon Johnston's first double-digit bass, this 10.84-pound lunker, came from Bussey Brake on July 18. Johnston grew up fishing the Morehouse County lake.



10.84 pounds both times.

"I really wanted to turn her back, but the stress of being caught and having that hook so deep just did her in," he said. "We worked and worked with her, but couldn't revive her enough to get her to swim."

Johnston kept the big fish and will get a natural mount done. It wasn't his first choice but the only choice he felt he had. He said that he and his fishing partners have caught about 40 good bass since Bussey opened on July 15, and they have not kept any the others. At least 25 of those fish were bigger than the 16-inch minimum size, he said.

"In fact, I don't plan on keeping another bass from there for a long time," he said. "If we manage this resource like we should, this could be one of the top trophy lakes around."

BIG BASS AT BUSSEY

Johnston said that the bass they are catching are so healthy they almost look like prespawn fish. Two other anglers he knows caught pretty nice ones in the same area the same morning. Josh Thomas caught a 6-pounder, and his partner, John Carr, caught an 8-pounder within minutes of Johnston's big fish. ■



John Carr with an 8-pound Bussey Brake largemouth caught during opening week of the reservoir.



Josh Thomas caught several big bass on his first trip to the "new" Bussey, including this 6-pounder.

An advertisement for Arctic Ice coolers. The top left features a large blue and white logo with the text "ARCTIC ICE NO HASSLE. NO MESS. COLDER THAN THE REST." Below the logo, a person in a blue shirt is seen from behind, sitting in a boat and looking at a cooler. In the foreground, four different models of Arctic Ice coolers are displayed: a blue one, a green one labeled "ALASKAN SERIES", a purple one labeled "CHILLIN' BREW", and a purple one labeled "TUNDRA SERIES". At the bottom, the text "LIMITED LIFETIME WARRANTY" and "ARCTIC-ICE.COM" is prominently displayed in white on a blue background.

NEW HIP CERTIFICATION DOES HELP HUNTERS

IT COSTS A LITTLE AND REQUIRES EXTRA EFFORT, BUT PROGRAM WILL PROVIDE IMPORTANT INFO *By Kinny Haddox*

One familiar phrase is often greeted with sarcasm, but in many cases, it's on point.

"Hi, I'm from the government and I'm here to help you."

There's one governmental change this year for waterfowl hunters that kind of fits both sides.

Louisiana waterfowlers have always had to have a Harvest Information Program (HIP) certification with their hunting licenses. This year, all migratory bird hunters must complete the HIP certification process either online or in person at the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries headquarters in Baton Rouge. You can not add HIP to your license at retail vendors as you could in the past, simply because the process was not working.

Additionally, the online processing includes a \$2.00 "convenience fee"

whether you buy all your licenses online or just get a HIP certification. But before you get mad at the LDWF, this fee doesn't go to them. It's charged by the company that is handling this for several states for the 2020-21 season in a pilot program to improve HIP.

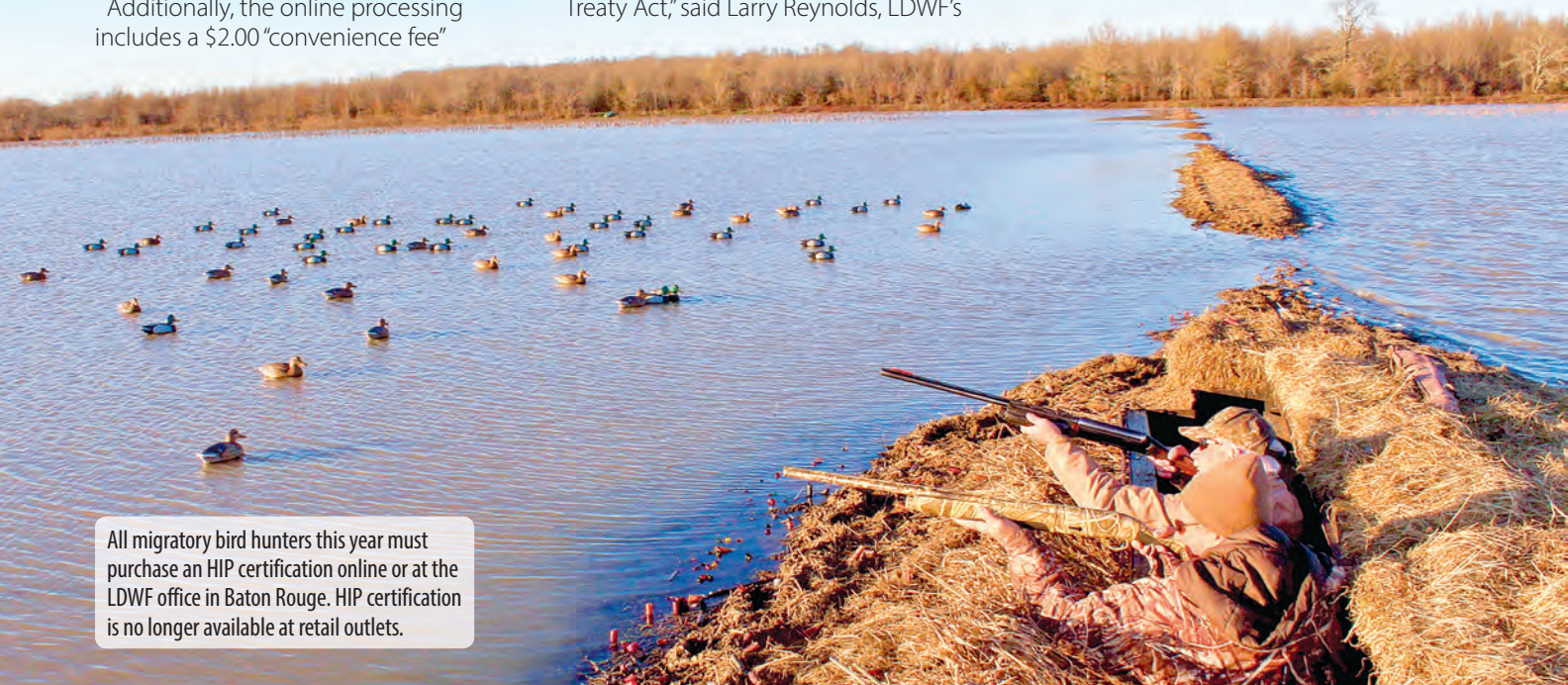
WHY HIP?

Now for the good news. HIP actually helps migratory bird hunters by providing the data to justify and maintain the best possible waterfowl seasons for hunters.

"The Harvest Information Program is designed to generate harvest estimates for migratory birds, which are necessary for justifying and maintaining open hunting seasons under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act," said Larry Reynolds, LDWF's

waterfowl program manager. "LDWF's role in HIP is to provide a list of names and addresses of migratory bird hunters in our state, along with information on which species they hunt, and whether they kill low, moderate, or high numbers of each species. This information is necessary for the USFWS to get a representative sample of hunters to receive the harvest surveys each year.

"To select woodcock or waterfowl or dove hunters, they need to know who hunts those species, and if they know the relative number each hunter kills, they can use a stratified random sample to estimate harvest each year in a more cost-effective way," he said. "That is the purpose



All migratory bird hunters this year must purchase an HIP certification online or at the LDWF office in Baton Rouge. HIP certification is no longer available at retail outlets.

of the registration questions each migratory bird hunter is supposed to be asked when getting a HIP certification. Unfortunately, that is not being done adequately by retail license vendors."

HIP'S BENEFITS

In a nutshell, while hunters are leery of sharing information with the government or having to spend additional time and money doing HIP, it does directly benefit the sport.

"Let me use a real-life example from our recent 2020 Louisiana Waterfowl Hunter Survey," Reynolds said. "My LSU research partners and I looked at the information for every HIP-registered hunter in the LDWF hunting-license database to make sure we were sending the survey to known waterfowl hunters and not woodcock, dove and snipe hunters. But we found that according to those data, 75% of our migratory bird hunters "did not hunt" the prior year. That is not reasonable at all and resulted from license retailers automatically entering "did not hunt" and not asking hunters the questions.

"Consequently, we had no idea what species were hunted by three-fourths of our HIP registrants and sent surveys to all that had valid e-mail addresses. We received 13,797 responses to the survey, and 3,152 (23%) of them were from hunters that had not hunted ducks in over 5 years, if ever. That might not be critical when you are doing an electronic survey via e-mail, but it is a big problem for the USFWS, which mails out hard-copy hunting logs and envelopes for wings to incorrect hunters.

"The retail-license vendors are contractually obligated to collect this information but have consistently refused to do so. DWF is part of a multi-state pilot study with a goal of improving the HIP data collection." ■

NEW REGULATIONS MANAGE AFTER-DARK TAKING OF OUTLAW QUADRUPEDS, NUTRIA AND BEAVER

From News Reports

As of Aug. 1, properly licensed Louisiana and non-resident hunters may take outlaw quadrupeds (feral hogs, coyotes and armadillos), nutria and beaver at night on private property the entire year with the landowner's permission.

Gov. John Bel Edwards signed into law a new regulation in June that allows for the nighttime take of these animals without a permit.

However, hunters are required to contact a parish sheriff's office within 24 hours before attempted nighttime take. Also, no one who has been convicted of a Class 3 or greater wildlife violation within the previous five years or who is prohibited from legal use of a firearm or participating in hunting activity can participate.



To see the full regulation, go to <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/seasons-and-regulations> and refer to page 25 in the 2020-21 hunting regulation pamphlet. ■

The advertisement is divided into two main sections. The top section features a photograph of several ducks in flight against a green background. Below the ducks is a bright yellow starburst graphic containing the text "CALL US TODAY! 337-824-2176". Underneath the starburst is a large orange banner with the text "PIT BLINDS [IN STOCK!]". The bottom section shows four different models of pit blinds, which are rectangular structures with a hinged lid, set against a blue sky background with white clouds. At the bottom of the advertisement, the text "HUGHES MANUFACTURING" is displayed in large, bold, blue letters. Below this, the address "1300 AIRPORT RD. | JENNINGS, LA. 70546 | 337-824-2176" and the website "www.hughesmfg.net" are listed. There are also small icons for Facebook and YouTube.

FAMILY FINDS SILVER LINING IN PANDEMIC

By Brian Cope



For Noah Brown of Winnsboro, COVID-19 has a huge silver lining. A single dad with a grown son and a 7-year-old daughter, he's struggled to find a balance between work and family life since losing his wife four years ago.

Once an avid fisherman, Brown had never taken his daughter fishing until this past spring, when he was furloughed from his job due to the pandemic.

"She's grown up looking at pictures all around the house of her brother and me with big stringers of crappie, bass, catfish," Brown said. "She's always asked about going fishing. Her school let out about the same time I got furloughed, and on that first day, we went fishing in a friend's pond. She loved it."

Brown had a fishing boat in his back yard covered with vines. He cut the weeds away and tried to get it running. His 22-year-old son stopped by and immediately got his hands dirty on the neglected outboard.

"My son's helped me out a lot with his sister over the years, but we haven't spent much time together due to work and all. He loves to tinker with things. Before long, he had the motor purring like a kitten. All three of us headed to Bruin Lake the next day," Brown said. "We had an outstanding day. We caught about everything you can catch."

TURMOIL: BLESSING IN DISGUISE

Brown has been called back to work and furloughed again several times, so the three have continued to fish regularly

throughout the summer, with Brown and his son constantly working on the old boat. He gets choked up talking about it.

"You know, that part — me and him working together on that boat — I can't hardly explain it. I swear I'd have given up on that boat if it weren't for him," he said. "Just seeing that part of him and working with him on something to help us all spend more time together, it's been a bonding experience," he said.

The time with his daughter has been just as special.

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way you enjoy the outdoors? Please e-mail your story to images@louisianasportsman.com.

"Before COVID, I knew she was getting the short end of the stick since her mom died," he said. "I figured I was doing the right thing, working as much overtime as possible to pay bills and keep food on the table."

Between fish and their garden vegetables, Brown said their freezer and cupboards have remained fully stocked. He wishes his family's togetherness could have happened for a better reason.

"I feel bad for all the hurt that COVID has caused, but for the past

several months, since it all started, life has been so good for me and my family," he said. "The time spent reconnecting with my son and finally connecting with my daughter like I wasn't sure I ever would, while doing something we all love. What more a man can ask for? The whole thing has blessed me beyond measure." ■



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2020 RIDE THE BULL TOURNAMENT IS CANCELED DUE TO COVID-19

Ride the Bull 11, the kayak tournament originally scheduled for Aug. 29 out of Grand Isle, was canceled in mid-July. Rad Trascher, Ride the Bull tournament director, posted the following announcement on the Ride the Bull Facebook page on July 15:

"After an incredible amount of conversations with the tournament committee, sponsors, Bridgeside Marina and some participants, we have unfortunately decided to cancel Ride the Bull for this year. Throughout these discussions, safety and the ability to deliver the true experience of Ride the Bull was the main focus. Collectively, we do not believe we can offer the same outstanding tournament and festive atmosphere that anglers have come to expect from the world's largest kayak tournament, Ride the Bull, while keeping everyone safe." ■

SNAPPING THEM UP!

World War II veteran, Bobby Hebert, 98, of Lafayette, and his son, Joey, enjoyed a red snapper trip on July 19.

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READER REPORT

My girlfriend, Heather Ray of Winnfield, has been wanting me to take her saltwater fishing for a while now, as she has never been. Great, happy to bring her, because she is awesome to fish with. She was also in need of a break from paramedic school and full-time work as an EMT, and of course, that beautiful little red-haired daughter of hers. So we made plans for the weekend and the trip was on. She was so excited. My main goal was to get her to hook a bull red. With all the fighting and running they do, I knew it would challenge her 108-pound frame.

So, the odyssey began at 3 a.m. with a Winchester dispatch of two terrorist armadillos we surprised in my flower bed, one of which, of course, did a swan dive right into my pool. Ugh. Slightly delayed from fishing that inconsiderate armadillo from the deep end, we were off to Hackberry, thinking everything should be fine now. Right?

Of course, 20 miles from our destination, Bang, pffssffssffloploploplop — the dreaded sound of a trailer tire blowout. After a brief inspection, I continued on; Heather was so excited, I don't want to disappoint her. We miraculously made it on three tires, launched the boat and started idling towards the ship channel. Just as I thought the bad luck was behind us, vvvromp, the motor died. I started it again, vvvromp, it died again. Ugh, a bad suction line had the motor starving for fuel.

Richard Meaux, a local fisherman, and his beautiful wife, Susan, towed us back in, Richard suggesting I rig up a temporary tank. Ugh, not crazy about doing that, but one look at Heather's disappointed face prompted me to do so. I rushed to the nearest hardware store and they had everything I needed, including a trailer tire and mounting, too. Great, now back to the boat to rig up my temporary 6-gallon tank and then off to search for that big bull red at the Cameron Jetties. Two hours later, still no luck. Heather was still eager, and looking at me "that way" — if you know what I mean. . . .

With limited fuel now, I realized we couldn't make it back to Hackberry from Cameron. Thank God for shrimp boats and generous deck hands. With my temporary tank full again, I headed to Oyster Bayou for a much-needed siesta in calm waters. Heather continued to fish intensely while I dozed off on the front cushion of my 24-foot SeaPro, ahh, so peaceful, then, I was startled by the panicked sound of her voice. "It's taking it. It's taking it! I nearly cut a flip jumping up only to see a frantic and wide-eyed Heather about to be pulled over the side of the boat by what I immediately recognize as a big bull redfish! Perfect, and the battle is on! LOL, what a sight,



under the boat, behind the motor, then to the front of the boat and under the anchor rope, then back under the boat and to the side. That fish gave her everything he had — awesome! Twenty minutes later, victory! She landed the biggest fish she had ever seen and was so excited and proud. Wow.

After 100 fish pictures, what seemed like a gift from above appeared. An albino dolphin that hangs around in that area made a special appearance right next to our boat. Heather was in disbelief, utterly overwhelmed by this sight. "A pink dolphin," she squealed. "No way!" LOL. He graciously spent the next 20 minutes entertaining us.

It turned out, that fish was the only thing we caught that day, but wow, what luck and what a trip. I guess the moral of this story is, "Never say die," and you will catch the big bull red in your life, too. ■

David Clause
Eunice, La.

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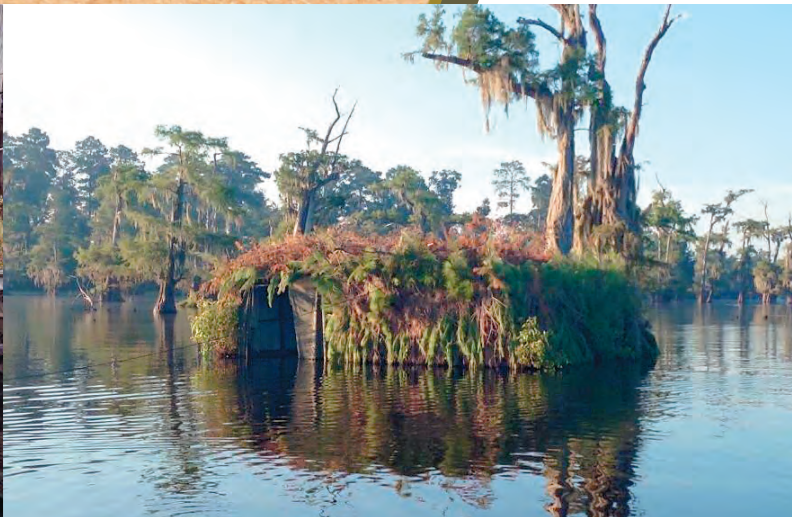
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LOUISIANA HUNTING 2020-21

■ By Don Shoopman

WHAT DOES THE SEASON HOLD FOR PUBLIC- AND PRIVATE-LAND HUNTERS WHO PURSUE DEER, DUCKS AND SMALL-GAME SPECIES? HERE ARE SEVERAL LOUISIANA BIOLOGISTS' IDEAS ON THE SUBJECT.

Combine the vast acreage of state-managed Wildlife Management Areas with an equally vast amount of private land, and you get an eye-opening 3 million-plus acres in Louisiana, the Sportsman's Paradise.

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries oversees more than 1.6 million acres on WMAs, with habitats varying from upland pine-hardwood to cypress tupelo to bottomland hardwood to brackish marsh. Adjoining much of that habitat are approximately 1.6 million acres enrolled in the LDWF's Deer Management Assistance Program, boasting more than 700 participants: hunting clubs, private landowners and managers.

LDWF biologists, hunters and others have been working, readying public and DMAP private lands for the 2020-21 hunting seasons for big game, small game, ducks, doves and woodcock. Overall, the pre-season has been fair to good as far as habitat conditions, food supply and the health of wildlife on DMAP private lands and WMAs.

Before hunting this season, check out the 2020-21 hunting seasons, rules and regulations approved in May by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission at www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/seasons-and-regulations. Hunters are urged to contact their local LDWF field office for assistance or clarifications of seasons, rules or regulations at www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/contact-us.

The deadline to apply for lottery deer hunts is Aug. 31; the deadline to apply for lottery waterfowl hunts is Sept. 30. Also, lottery hunts for deer and waterfowl are scheduled for outdoorsmen and outdoorswomen with disabilities on select WMAs. And lottery hunts for deer and waterfowl will be held for boys and girls between ages 10 and 17 on select WMAs. A youth under 10 may apply, provided he or she will be 10 on or before the date of the prospective hunt. All lottery applications are available <https://la-web.s3licensing.com/>.

Rick Small

LAFAYETTE REGION ➤

LAFAYETTE REGION

Tony Vidrine, Lafayette Region biologist manager the past 17 years and a LDWF biologist for 36 years, was confident about what awaits hunters in the woods and swamps on private and public lands in the his region.

"I expect an average to good season this year as far as deer and small game," said Vidrine, who is also confident that, unfortunately, the once-promising turkey population in the region hasn't bounced back.

The Lafayette Region's turkey numbers, particularly on Sherburne WMA, have been on a marked decline since the Morganza Spillway was opened and flooded in 2011. Turkey numbers also plummeted when spring flooding impacted Richard K. Yancey and Grassy Lake WMAs.

"This flooding is occurring on an annual basis, and we cannot get a break for a good turkey nesting season on these WMAs," Vidrine wrote in a lengthy report filed June 30. "We are beginning to see an increase in visual sightings on Sherburne WMA. With a couple of dry nesting seasons and an adjustment in season dates, hopefully we will see some improvements in the future."

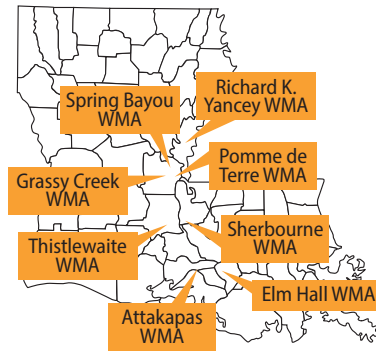
Mushrooming feral hog numbers compound the problem.

After this spring's flooding lasted into early summer, all roads were reopened July 16 on Grassy Lake WMA and nine roads reopened July 15 on Richard K. Yancey WMA. Other roads and trails on the latter area were scheduled to reopen when floodwaters receded and they were inspected and repaired.

HOW THE REGION'S TABLE IS SET

On DMAP private lands, Vidrine said there is no concern about drought conditions or flooding because rainfall amounts have been average this growing season. However, the Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers flooding well into summer for a third-straight year inundated land in the batture and forced wildlife to seek refuge on protected sides of levee systems, putting additional stress on adjacent habitat and agricultural lands.

When animals return to areas impacted by floodwaters, the amount of available food hinges on how much time remains in the growing season after the water recedes. Biologists have seen a lack of recruitment and a reduction in lactation in



the deer herd and have subsequently lowered antlerless deer harvest opportunities to avoid more stress on the deer herd. Overall, favorable browse conditions were found by biologists conducting DMAP browse surveys in the spring. However, keep in mind that the amount of browse on private land varies property to property, depending on the age of timber stands, whether timber stand improvements have been done, and whether flooding has impacted the property.

Sherburne WMA recently had three timber harvests, providing prime habitat for wildlife. Although the cuts were small, they still provide more food and cover, Vidrine reported. Mast crops on the WMAs were moderate last year on all red oaks and fair on white oaks.

Thistlewaite WMA continues timber harvests, creating excellent habitat conditions. Flooding has affected habitat on Richard K. Yancey, Grassy Lake and Attakapas WMAs, but high water receded in late June, and all should recover. However, fawn recruitment has been affected on Richard K. Yancey, Grassy Lake, Attakapas and Elm Hall WMAs due to the duration of flooding.

Reproduction has trended down on those areas with prolonged flooding during breeding and fawning seasons. Browse conditions are favorable on Spring Bayou and Pomme de Terre WMAs, where no major flooding occurred during spring and summer.

OVERALL DEER OUTLOOK

For DMAP private lands, Vidrine rates the overall deer-hunting harvest a seven out of 10, noting that deer are plentiful in the region, but not as much as in other regions. The region's upper parishes, with their bottomland hardwood habitat, support more deer than those with swamp and marsh habitat. Deer density varies between tracts, depending on how particular hunting clubs manage the deer herd. Most hunting clubs in the region's upper areas have a moderate to dense herd.

Vidrine rates the overall deer harvest on the region's WMAs at 6 or 7, noting that harvest numbers are based on only managed hunts around Thanksgiving, which aren't conducted during peak rut time. Deer movement always depends on weather conditions that weekend. Last season on Grassy Lake, one deer was taken for 6.4 hunter efforts; Pomme de Terre, one deer per 9.4 hunter efforts; Sherburne, one deer per 16; Richard K. Yancey, one per 18.7, and Thistlewaite, one per 22.6 efforts.

According to Vidrine, Richard K. Yancey WMA apparently has rebounded.

"Yancey always comes out with good deer out of that area," he said. "I'm expecting a good season there. We should see some good come out of there. They had nice deer, but the numbers of big deer weren't there as usual."

TOP 5 WMA DEER HARVESTS LAFAYETTE REGION, 2019-20

Sherburne WMA: 385 deer (223 bucks, 162 does) — one deer per for every 114 acres.

Richard K. Yancey WMA: 323 deer (222 bucks, 101 does) — one deer per 214 acres.

Thistlewaite WMA: 192 deer (124 bucks, 68 does) — one deer per 57 acres.

Grassy Lake WMA: 107 deer (72 bucks, 35 does) — one deer per 124 acres.

Pomme de Terre WMA: 75 deer (50 bucks, 25 does) — one deer per 86 acres.



Rick Small

DMAP DEER HARVEST, LAFAYETTE REGION, 2019-20

On 405,676 acres enrolled in DMAP, 2,547 deer were harvested: 979 bucks and 1,568 does — an average of one deer for every 159 acres enrolled.

Some portions of the Lafayette Region have the kinds of fertile soils and hardwood forests that help bucks realize their potential as trophies.

QUALITY DEER OUTLOOK

On DMAP private lands, Vidrine rates quality deer hunting an 8 out of 10, particularly in Concordia, Avoyelles, Pointe Coupee and St. Landry parishes. Those areas typically provide ample opportunities to harvest quality bucks due to extremely fertile soils, well-managed tracts of bottomland hardwoods and management practices targeting older age-class deer — which many private hunting clubs have done for several years.

A notable trophy last season was a 16-point, 5½-year-old Avoyelles Parish buck weighing 305 pounds. It had 8- and 10-inch bases, 21-inch main beams and a 17½-inch spread.

ESTIMATED PEAK DEER RUT DATES, LAFAYETTE REGION

Deer Management Area 1: Jan. 2-Jan. 15
 Deer Management Area 3: Dec. 8-Dec. 18
 Deer Management Area 5: Jan. 2-Jan. 15
 Deer Management Area 6: Dec. 20-Jan. 29
 Deer Management Area 7: Oct. 24-Nov. 6
 Deer Management Area 9: Dec. 5-Dec. 18
 Deer Management Area 10: Jan. 2-Jan. 15

Vidrine also rates quality deer hunting an 8 on WMAs, noting the region is known for big deer due to the abundance of nutrients the Mississippi River alluvial valley offers in available forage and mast on WMAs.

In recent years, Boone & Crockett, Louisiana Big Game and Pope & Young record books have entered many quality deer from WMAs, particularly Richard K. Yancey, Avoyelles Parish's WMAs — Grassy, Spring Bayou and Pomme de Terre.

DUCK HUNTING OUTLOOK ➤

DUCK HUNTING OUTLOOK

Vidrine reported there is no data available for private-land duck harvests in the region, but he said last season's hunting success was fair to poor on a majority of private lands. This region, however, offers prime duck-hunting opportunities, considering the number of flooded agricultural fields, moist-soil impoundments and lakes.

Habitat looks good in the WMA impoundments the state manages for waterfowl use. Hunter success will depend on weather patterns and how many ducks make it this far south. Top WMAs for waterfowl hunting are Richard K. Yancey, Sherburne, Pomme de Terre and Spring Bayou, he said, noting the first two offer greater opportunities because they are larger than the other WMAs. A general waterfowl lottery hunt will be held on Sherburne WMA. Deadline is Sept. 30. Go to <https://la-web.s3licensing.com/>.

SQUIRREL HUNTING OUTLOOK

"With the good mast crops we have observed the last couple of years, we expect the squirrel population should remain favorable to hunters on both private lands and WMAs this coming season," Vidrine wrote in his report.

Squirrel hunting's popularity has been high, with some areas reporting good bag numbers for the past few years, he said, noting more squirrel hunters are going into the woods with squirrel dogs.

"Those areas that did good with squirrels last season will do good again," said Vidrine, who listed Richard K. Yancey, Thistlethwaite and Sherburne, which experienced a good acorn crop last year, as the top WMA squirrel hunting destinations

RABBIT HUNTING OUTLOOK

Vidrine reported that rabbit populations are high on private and public lands wherever habitat is favorable. Areas with plenty of ground cover and/or thick understory cover likely will have better rabbit reproduction and hunting success.

LAKE CHARLES REGION >

Gage Maxwell killed his first squirrel with a .22 rifle while hunting with his father in Bastrop.



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LAKE CHARLES REGION

DEER

It's an age-old tradition that hundreds of southwest Louisiana deer hunters take advantage of on the opening weekend the season: managed gun hunts on four popular WMAs in the Lake Charles Region.

The either-sex deer hunts on Clear Creek, West Bay, Fort Polk and Peason Ridge start the last Saturday in October. Because they open on the same day, deer hunters are spread out and the woods are less crowded.

It wasn't always that way.

Wendell Smith, Lake Charles Region biologist manager the past 13 of 31 years he has worked for LDWF, remembers when the WMA openings were staggered in the late 1990s. When Clear Creek opened, an estimated 1,900 to 2,000 deer hunters filled the 52,559-acre WMA in Vernon Parish.

Similar crowds showed up to hunt the next weekend when West Bay opened, then the other WMAs. Something had to be done. "We decided to start having them all at the same time," Smith said.

The Clear Creek WMA opening weekend crowd now numbers about 900.

"It's the first time the season is open, the first time the public gets a shot. They show up opening weekend and do pretty good, unless the weather messes them up," he said, noting the consistently successful deer hunters scout ahead of time and learn the areas.

Some of the best bowhunting in the state could be at Zion Hills and Mill Creek on the Fort Polk WMA. Smith suggested scouting because the area is large.

Hunt clubs on private lands with solid deer-management plans can reach a level of success equal to WMAs in southwest Louisiana, Smith said. He urged landowners and hunt-club presidents to reach out to the LDWF's private lands biologists to help manage property for deer, turkey, quail and squirrels.

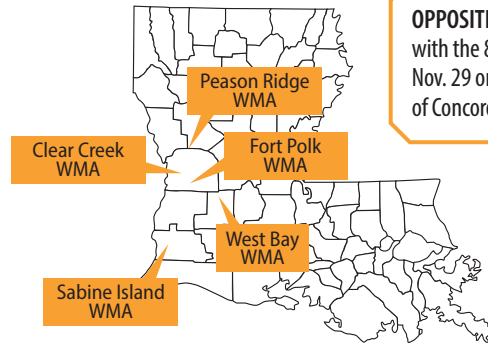
TOP WMA DEER HARVEST NUMBERS LAKE CHARLES REGION

Fort Polk WMA: Estimated average of 500 to 600 per season, depending on whether the area is open for hunting or closed due to military training. Average deer per hunter effort the past 10 seasons is 1-to-7, based on opening-weekend statistics for gun season.

Peason Ridge WMA: Estimated average of 250 to 300 per season, depending whether the area is open for hunting or closed due to military training.

West Bay WMA: Estimated average 250 of 300 per season. Average deer per hunter effort the past 10 seasons is 1-to-7 based on opening-weekend statistics for gun season.

Clear Creek WMA: Estimated average of 250 to 300 per season. Average deer per hunter effort the past 10 seasons is 1-to-7 based on opening-weekend statistics for the gun season.



OPPOSITE PAGE: Paul Sparacino with the 8-point buck he shot on Nov. 29 on public land in Area 1 of Concordia Parish.

ESTIMATED PEAK RUT DATES IN LAKE CHARLES REGION

The peak of southwest Louisiana's deer rut generally peaks the last week of October into the first week of November. Pre-rut deer behavior (movement) increases in mid-October into November.

HOW THE TABLE IS BEING SET

For DMAP private lands, browse surveys the past few years have been moderate. However, last year's mast surveys indicated low to moderate production. Smith and others are seeing lots of fawns on the ground.

For WMAs, a mild winter and abundant spring rainfall enhanced browse production, a good sign for healthy deer populations. Nut- and fruit-bearing red oaks, water oaks, etc., usually respond well to wet spring weather. Smith also reported most of the region's habitat consists of pine plantations, with hardwood creek bottoms transecting the areas as watersheds. Deer production can be high, but body weight and antler development might be limited due to low soil pH with poor nutrient qualities. Ditto for private lands.

OVERALL DEER OUTLOOK

On DMAP private lands, Smith and other biologists expect numbers similar to last year: one deer per 172 acres. Most DMAP hunting clubs are on pine plantations, with the exception of one being bottomland and a few in marsh habitats along the coast.

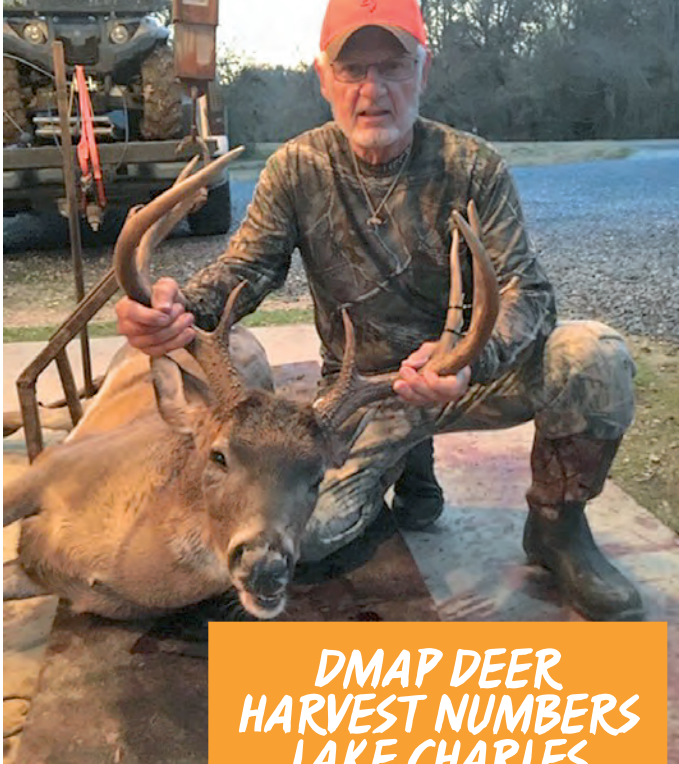
On WMAs, Smith rates the top four WMAs — Clear Creek, Fort Polk, Peason Ridge and West Bay — a solid 8 out of 10, while rating the region's other WMAs — Marsh Bayou, Sabine Island and Walnut Hill — a 3.

QUALITY DEER OUTLOOK

On DMAP private lands, good-sized bucks traditionally are taken along the more-fertile Sabine River Bottom.

On WMAs, Clear Creek borders the Sabine River bottom, and it is common for mature bucks to cross over into Clear Creek during the rut to give hunters a shot at a quality deer. The same can be said for Fort Polk and Peason Ridge, which have large hardwood bottom tracts, but on average, they yield bucks that score below the quality level.

Bucks in these areas won't compete with those harvested on the eastern side of the state. However, Smith expects to see 175-



**DMAP DEER
HARVEST NUMBERS
LAKE CHARLES
REGION, 2019-20**

to 185-pound bucks with 8- to 10-point racks and an average spread of 16 to 19 inches.

On 109,576 acres enrolled in DMAP, 636 deer were harvested, 303 bucks and 333 does — an average of one deer for every 172 acres.

DUCK HUNTING OUTLOOK

Year-in and year-out, Sabine Island WMA offers excellent hunting for wood ducks, which use the sloughs and ridges for feeding, nesting and roosting. Heavy, spring rainfall followed by a moderately wet summer means the freshwater marshes should be in great shape for ducks. Otherwise, good, old-fashioned, winter weather is a must, starting in the upper Mississippi Flyway.

SQUIRREL HUNTING OUTLOOK

While West Bay WMA's squirrel harvest numbers are higher than all others WMAs in the Lake Charles Region, the highest harvest per hunter is on Sabine Island WMA.

"There are cat squirrels all over there," Smith said Sabine Island, which is accessible by boat only. Squirrel hunters are urged to launch at Niblett Bluff Park off Louisiana 109. They also are advised to bring a GPS to navigate the island and to let people know where they are hunting before the trip.

RABBIT HUNTING OUTLOOK


"What's really got me is the number of rabbits I'm seeing in the mornings," Smith said. "It looks good for small-game hunters. There are a certain number of hunters who have rabbit dogs. Usually, they are the ones who are going to hunt. The ones who do show up should have a good season."

Smith points rabbit hunters to West Bay WMA and Sabine Island WMA, which typically have the region's most successful rabbit hunting.


MONROE REGION >

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MONROE REGION

DUCKS

If ducks head this far south in numbers this season, the sky is the limit for waterfowl hunting prospects on Russell Sage WMA.

Mitch McGee, an LDWF biologist, said much of the duck hunters' attention will be focused on Wham Brake, a carefully managed, 3,000-acre wetlands-restoration project acquired by LDWF in June 2013.

A drawdown for a third-straight year has been initiated there, and it has been successful, McGee said.

"It's doing good. Hopefully, we'll have teal water in there for (the special teal season in September)," he said.

Wham Brake will likely be extra crowded with waterfowlers during teal season, he said, because many of the region's private duck-hunting leases usually don't have water on them in September. By the time the regular waterfowl season opens, however, there's more water across the region, and that spreads duck hunters out across private lands, as well as Russell Sage WMA, particularly Wham Brake. Often, hunters bring down more ducks from mid-morning on, after the crowd thins out at the WMA, McGee said.

Most of the duck-hunting success is in potholes in the grass and coffee beans along the northern shoreline when the water's high, but when it's low, there are more ducks killed in the open areas of Wham Brake, McGee said.

HOW THE TABLE IS SET

On DMAP private lands, John Hanks, the region's private-lands biologist supervisor, said most of the region was 10 to 12 inches above average rainfall levels in July.

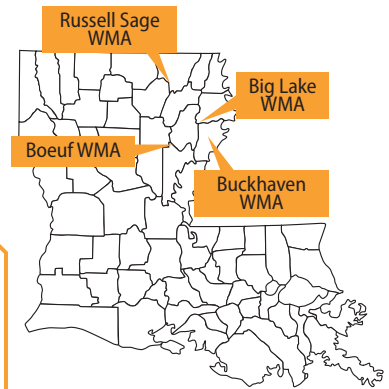
"A lot depends on rainfall throughout the summer," he said.

Deer browse availability and reproduction probably were impacted last summer by the Ouachita River, which was very high, and floodwaters that stayed for a record time on herds along the Mississippi River. Area 1's fawns were born in early July, because the rut is a little later than it is in Area 2, where he and others were seeing fawns on the ground several weeks earlier.

For WMAs, deer reproduction was down in the batture last year because of the height of the Mississippi River, McGee said. The Mississippi, Ouachita, Tensas and Boeuf rivers were high again this spring; the area has had average rainfall through mid-July.

"It seems like we're dealing with high water every year," he said.

Deer have been eating alligator weed in ditches and depressions because habitat has been wet. Deer ought to "really



Brecken Figueiredo of Ville Platte harvested this doe and three hogs on Dewey Wills WMA.

DMAP DEER HARVEST NUMBERS MONROE REGION, 2019-20

On 146,759 acres enrolled in DMAP, 1,034 deer were harvested (385 bucks and 649 does), an average of one deer for every 141 acres.



TOP WMA DEER HARVEST NUMBERS MONROE REGION, 2019-20

Big Lake WMA: 351 deer harvested by 3,870 hunters.
Buckhorn WMA: 191 deer harvested by 1,286 hunters.
Bayou Macon WMA: 186 deer harvested by 1,286 hunters.

respond” to browse conditions on Bayou Macon WMA, where a timber sale has been completed, he said, and over the past two to three years, habitat has improved “quite a bit.”

OVERALL DEER OUTLOOK

On DMAP private lands, Hanks anticipates something along the lines of last season, when 385 bucks and 649 does were harvested on 146,759 acres enrolled in DMAP.

For WMAs, McGee ranks deer hunting in the region an 8 for overall harvest numbers as a result of intensive management efforts and fair to good habitat. He pointed out the WMAs benefit from extensive forest cover in Area 2 and a large agricultural component in Area 1.

“We should have a good deer season shaping up,” he said.

QUALITY DEER OUTLOOK

For WMAs, McGee ranks the harvest of quality deer as high as 8 because of intensive management and fair to good habitat in the Monroe Region. Several Boone & Crockett-class bucks were harvested last season on Buckhorn WMA, he pointed out.

DUCK HUNTING OUTLOOK

One of the leading WMAs in north Louisiana is Russell Sage, which gives duck hunters access to more than 4,800 moist-soil units, including Wham Brake’s 2,767 acres of flooded agriculture areas and approximately 1,800 acres of passively managed natural swamp and sloughs, plus acreage typically not managed for waterfowl that has the potential to hold ducks given the WMA’s flood potential.

How many ducks were harvested on Russell Sage in 2019-20? McGee’s report indicated 4,831 hunters killed 7,500 ducks.

The other top duck destination in the region is Boeuf WMA, which provides access to more than 5,900 acres of moist-soil units, 1,900 acres of greentree reservoirs and about 5,000 acres of managed natural swamps and sloughs. Like Russell

Sage, Boeuf areas not specifically managed for ducks has the potential to hold waterfowl because of its flood potential. In 2019-20, 1,689 duck hunters harvested 3,012 ducks on Boeuf.

SQUIRREL HUNTING OUTLOOK

On DMAP private lands, last year’s mast crop was fair overall, which should lead to at least a decent season for squirrels, Hanks said.

For WMAs, the top squirrel hunting areas should be Big Lake, for sure, and Boeuf, according to McGee. Big Lake, a 19,231-acre tract, has some of the best squirrel hunting near Hog Lake, which is chock full of old stands of trees, the Buckshot Trail area and along Roaring Bayou. Boeuf’s 51,554 acres contain many soft- and hard mast-producing trees, plus a lot of cavity trees, which managers try to save to favor wildlife.

ESTIMATED PEAK RUT DATES IN MONROE REGION

Area 1 rut runs approximately one week before Christmas until about a week after.

Area 2 rut runs approximately one week before Thanksgiving until the week after.

MINDEN REGION >

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MINDEN REGION

DUCKS

Jeff Johnson, a veteran LDWF biologist, is well aware of the waterfowl hunting opportunities afforded in the Minden Region. He and his staff play an important role in making the waterfowl habitat as appealing as possible to ducks that make it that far south.

One of the more-popular duck-hunting sites on Bodcau WMA is a greentree reservoir that is approximately 1,600 acres when full, Johnson said.

"We generally try to fill it somewhere in the 50% to 70% full range for the first split, and then gradually increase the water level throughout the waterfowl season," he reported. "There are also other backwater areas, beaver ponds, etc., on Bodcau that provide some additional opportunity. Being a flood-control area, there can be lots of additional flooded area in years where we have high water earlier in the winter."

There's more to successful duck hunting in the region, Johnson reported.

"There is a small, greentree reservoir on Loggy Bayou WMA, as well as a couple of moist-soil impoundments and Swan Lake. Total acreage of waterfowl habitat is substantially less than at Bodcau, but it can provide decent hunting for a few folks," he said, adding that he hopes summer drawdowns will have desired effects on vegetation and make way for good forage foods. After that, it all depends on rainfall in the fall to fill the impoundments.

"All I can reliably say right now is we'll manage as best we can with the conditions nature gives us between now and then, and hopefully, things will work out to make for a good waterfowl season when the time comes," he said.

HOW THE TABLE IS BEING SET

On DMAP private lands, the region's above-average mast crop last year, he said, "got the deer (and other animals) through the winter all right."

For WMAs, Johnson reported, "We've had above-average rain so far this year, but not so much as to cause any serious problems for most wildlife species. Browse is currently in good condition and should remain so as long as we continue to get at least average rainfall for the rest of the summer."

ESTIMATED PEAK RUT DATES IN MINDEN REGION

According to biologist Jeff Johnson, the peak of the rut varies widely across the region, with deer on some areas breeding as early as the last week of October, while other areas' peak breeding regularly occurs from the last week of December into the first week of January.

Why? The wide range is due to the difference in breeding dates within source populations of deer used in restocking efforts in the 1950s. For an oversimplified average, he said, "You could say around Thanksgiving." He advised interested deer hunters to go to www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/deer-breeding-periods.

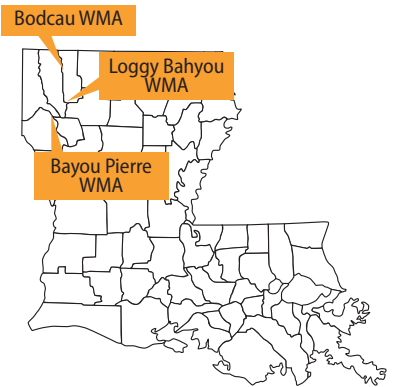
OVERALL DEER OUTLOOK

On DMAP private lands, the way the table was being set a few months before the season, Johnson believed deer herds will respond in a positive way.

"As long as we don't go into some bad drought or something, we'll have plenty of deer. If it's cold, we'll probably have a lot of happy deer hunters," he said.

On WMAs, the region's four public hunting areas historically boast "pretty good deer harvest numbers."

Loggy Bayou WMA leads the way during the three-day modern firearms either-sex hunt with one deer harvested for every 5.5 hunter efforts. Bodcau, a 33,766-acre WMA in Bossier and



TOP WMA DEER HARVEST NUMBERS MINDEN REGION, 2019-20

On Loggy Bayou, Bodcau, Bayou Pierre (bowhunting only) and Soda Lake (bowhunting only):

Bowhunting: one deer for 24.8 efforts.

Primitive firearms: one deer for 12.3 efforts.

Modern firearms: one deer for 10.6 efforts.

Highest harvest rate: One deer for 5.5 efforts during the three-day modern firearms either-sex hunt on Loggy Bayou WMA.



Corey Harwell killed this stud 8-point on Bodcau WMA on Nov. 9, 2019.

Ayden, 17, and Lance Cosgrove, 8, from Marrero enjoyed the youth duck hunt in Venice.



one and possibly several mast crops are available to squirrels, particularly on Bodcau WMA. Two seasons ago, LDWF staffers checked 1,429 hunters, who killed 1,655 squirrels there.

Webster parishes, is a good destination as well as an area to get away from the crowd. Many of the deer come from the transitional zones, the edges of different habitats.

QUALITY DEER OUTLOOK

On DMAP private lands, Johnson reported that while quality varies substantially across the region, deer hunters can produce “quality deer” on any of it if they manage their deer herd correctly, keeping their herd below carrying capacity, keeping sex ratios relatively balanced and allowing bucks to live a few years.

On WMAs, he said, “Some nice deer are taken on both public and private lands in this area every year, and last year was no exception.” Historically, Bayou Pierre WMA, which is bowhunting-only, gives up some of the biggest bucks in the region.

DUCK HUNTING OUTLOOK

Wood ducks, gadwalls, teal and mallards should be the dominant ducks gunned down this season in the Minden Region, particularly on Bodcau WMA. The degree of success depends on weather and how much it influences or doesn’t influence the fall flight. The other top pick is Loggy Bayou WMA. Bayou Pierre WMA’s duck hunting is limited to lottery hunts. In addition to regular and youth lottery hunts, a duck blind for wheelchair-bound outdoorsmen is available. For more information call the Minden Region office at 318-371-3050.

SQUIRREL HUNTING OUTLOOK

Because the acorn crop was “pretty good” last winter, squirrel reproduction success should have been high, thus providing hunters with “good” squirrel numbers — mostly grays with a few foxes — this season, Johnson reported.

With a large variety of tree species in the upland hardwoods, piney woods and bottomland hardwoods, at least

PINEVILLE REGION ➤

DMAP DEER HARVEST NUMBERS MINDEN REGION, 2019-20

On 165,171 acres enrolled in DMAP, 1,912 deer were harvested, 796 bucks and 1,116 does — one deer for every 86 acres.

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Harris Guidry of Raceland with his 165-pound, 9-point killed in Kentwood on Jan. 18, 2020.

PINEVILLE REGION

Cliff Dailey, a LDWF biologist is looking forward to the fall and winter as much as or more than hundreds of hunters.

They are keeping a close eye on some public areas impacted by spring flooding. Dewey Wills WMA in the lower part of LaSalle and Catahoula parishes in central Louisiana was one of those areas. All roads closed due to backwater flooding were reopened in June, according to LDWF.

HOW THE TABLE IS BEING SET

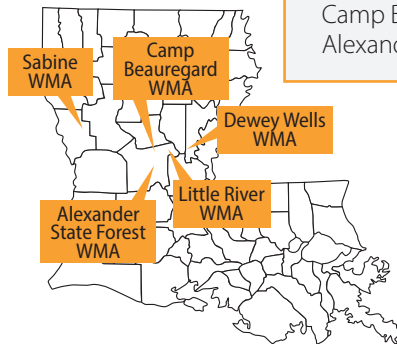
On DMAP private lands, the preseason has been encouraging after ample spring rainfall made everything brush up, according to Benjamin Holton, private-lands biologist supervisor. Catahoula Parish lands stayed flooded a lot longer than others, and parts of LaSalle Parish experienced some flooding near big bodies of water, but the high water receded in both parishes before the onset of summer.

On WMAs, it's a little disconcerting that 90% of Dewey Wills has undergone major flooding this past spring, which results in deer browse conditions not being up to snuff entering mid-summer, Dailey reported. Bottomland hardwood timber there has been stressed by the high water, and there is the potential for disease in some areas.



TOP WMA DEER HARVEST NUMBERS PINEVILLE REGION, 2019-20

Dewey Wills WMA: 279
Camp Beauregard WMA: 104
Alexander State Forest WMA: 84



DMAP DEER HARVEST NUMBERS PINEVILLE REGION, 2019-20

On 165,822 acres enrolled in DMAP, 748 deer were harvested, 313 bucks and 435 does. Deer harvest numbers fluctuate greatly because the region is so diverse, from one deer for every 60 acres up to one for every 120 acres.

OVERALL DEER OUTLOOK

On DMAP and private lands, Holton said landowners, deer hunters and managers have been working with LDWF to get ready. The deer reportedly have responded in many areas.

For WMAs, Dailey rates Camp Beauregard an 8 out of 10; Sabine a 7; Dewey Wills a 6; Alexander State Forest a 4, and Little River a 3. At Camp Beauregard, habitat conditions are favorable because of routine harvesting of pine plantations, according to Dailey.

Prescribed burns have been conducted on various pine stands. Also, lactation rates on mature does were good. At Dewey Wills, the mast crop was above average. The deer herd was in physical condition, including does within the desired range of the lactating process.

QUALITY DEER OUTLOOK

For WMAs, Dailey rates Dewey Wills and Camp Beauregard as 8s; Sabine a 7, and Alexander State Forest and Little River

4s. Camp Beauregard's success rate on quality deer during Thanksgiving managed hunts is among the best on any WMA in Louisiana.

Why? It has a mix of upland pine areas and lower, creek-bottom hardwood areas, as well as water oak and white oak abundant throughout to provide a highly sought-after food source in fall/winter. Spring rains and open canopy combined to create prime habitat.

Dewey Wills features many acres of well-managed upland pine with bottom hardwood creek bottoms. What's more, old, dying trees combined with timber harvesting have created canopy gaps that make "briar thickets" for the deer to use. The food's there, too. Nuttall, willow and overcup oak provide fall mast for the deer and squirrels.

ESTIMATED PEAK RUT DATES IN PINEVILLE REGION

Dewey Wills WMA: Jan. 4.
Camp Beauregard WMA: Dec. 15.
Alexander State Forest: Nov. 15.
Little River WMA: Nov. 25.
Sabine WMA: Nov. 25.

DUCK HUNTING OUTLOOK >



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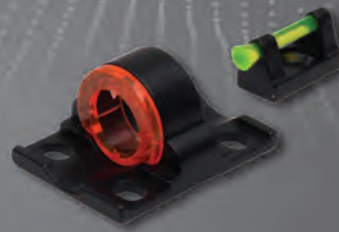
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DUCK HUNTING OUTLOOK

The region's top WMA duck-hunting destination continues to be Dewey Wills. According to Dailey's latest report, 2,999 ducks were harvested on Dewey Wills last season. Many came from an impoundment north of the Diversion Canal between Hunt Road and Louisiana 28 East, a 3,000-acre area designed to flood the Muddy Bayou watershed. An average to above-average season is forecast there, dependent on the fall flight. Another prime duck-hunting area covers the backwaters of the Little River WMA, where 229 ducks were killed last season.

SQUIRREL HUNTING OUTLOOK

It's hard to beat Dewey Wills WMA, one of the top squirrel-producing areas in Louisiana, where camping and squirrel hunting on opening weekend draws hundreds of hunters. To avoid the maddening crowd, go on weekdays early in the season. Last season was a banner season, when 4,168 squirrels were reported harvested. Dailey reported the past two mast crops were above average, which is good news for the upcoming season. However, the squirrel population may be impacted by prolonged flooding on the 63,901-acre area earlier this year.

Little River WMA offers fair to good squirrel hunting in its own right. Last season, 372 squirrels were taken on the area of upland pine and bottomland hardwoods. Most participation is opening weekend when hunters camp. Otherwise, there is some great squirrel hunting with little competition.

RABBIT HUNTING OUTLOOK

Sabine WMA, Camp Beaugard WMA and Little River WMA are shaping up to offer fair to good opportunities to bag rabbits in 2020-21. Sabine has clear-cuts in several areas that have been replanted and currently provide good rabbit habitat and food. Also, the pine plantations have been thinned, thus producing browse and cover. Camp Beaugard WMA also features several replanted clear-cuts offering prime habitat and plenty of groceries. Little River WMA has a good rabbit population in the thinned pine that has been burned in recent years and grow excellent ground level food such as greenbrier and dewberry. Old pine tops also provide welcome cover for the hares.

HAMMOND REGION >

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HAMMOND REGION

Jillian Day, an LDWF biologist, has been busy overseeing areas on public and private lands in the Hammond Region. Entering the 2020-21 season, Day realizes southeast Louisiana is so vulnerable to Mother Nature.

“All we can hope for is the storm season to spare us,” Day said. “As long as all that works out for us, we should be in for another average season” or even better.

Day said that an ongoing project at Maurepas Swamp WMA involves the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and that contractors and heavy equipment are on-site to work on the West Shore Lake Pontchartrain Levee Project on the lower part of the WMA. Day said the footprint of the levee was being cleared.

“There’s a lot of dirt that has to be moved, something users will have to deal with the next several years,” she said.

The project is scheduled to be completed in January 2024.

Day also said LDWF personnel planted the legendary dove fields earlier than usual this year on Sandy Hollow WMA.

Wheat didn’t produce as much as it has in the past, she said.

“The fields seem to be doing well. We got them in the ground when we needed to” and there was plenty of rain late that aided in the growth, she said.

Dove hunting is fair to good, mostly good, every year, particularly during the popular youth hunt.

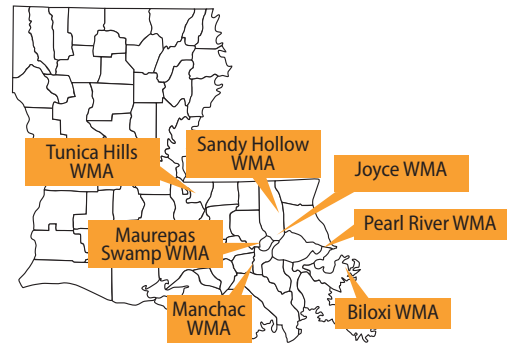
HOW THE TABLE IS BEING SET

On DMAP private lands, according to the browse survey this spring, habitat conditions appear to be stable in upland pine hardwood areas, Day reported. Lower browse availability and utilization in industrial pine habitats, coastal marsh and swamp hardwoods are stable. Browse surveys on private lands were delayed by coronavirus restrictions and protocols.

On WMAs, a wet start of the year impacted the region, as the 35,619-acre Pearl River WMA was inundated for several weeks by flooding. The area was closed, and lottery turkey hunts were canceled. Day reported that prolonged flooding delayed growth of understory vegetation and reduced browse availability. Mast surveys over the past two years have shown consistent production by red oaks, but low output by white oaks. Overall habitat across the region is more conducive to small game.

ESTIMATED PEAK RUT DATES IN HAMMOND REGION

Jillian Day, Hammond Region biologist manager, advises deer hunters who want to know more about rut dates to go to www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/deer-breeding-periods. Day pointed out that breeding periods vary annually, and that peak breeding times are not necessarily peak buck-movement times. In fact, bucks may be more active before or after breeding periods, as research shows peak buck movement is one to two weeks before or after peak periods.



TOP WMA DEER HARVEST NUMBERS HAMMOND REGION, 2019-20

Maurepas Swamp WMA: 147 deer for 2,330 hunter efforts.
Pearl River WMA: 64 deer for 2,575 hunter efforts.
Tunica Hills WMA: 58 deer for 1,634 hunter efforts.

QUALITY DEER OUTLOOK

On WMAs, Day reported that quality deer hunting depends on the habitat type on each WMA in the region, which covers 17 parishes, all with diverse habitat type. Over the years, the region has seen older age-class deer harvested off Maurepas Swamp WMA and surrounding areas. Tunica Hills WMA is another area that produces what many hunters would consider quality deer.

DUCK HUNTING OUTLOOK

For WMAs, Day reported that hurricane season, which got off to an early start this summer, could possibly impact the region. While some disturbances can help provide browse for deer and early successional-dependent species, the influx of higher salinity with storm surge and high water can suppress food sources for waterfowl and other wildlife associated with those wetlands systems.

The region’s top waterfowl WMAs are Manchac (1,594 ducks in 894 hunter efforts reported in 2019-20), Pearl River (1,471 ducks in 1,900 hunter efforts) and Biloxi (391 ducks in 182 hunter efforts). Before last season, she called Biloxi, which has numerous bayous, sloughs and potholes used by ducks, one of the premier duck-hunting destinations in southeast Louisiana.

“Barring any major weather events, those WMAs are on track for another average season in 2020-21,” she said.

SQUIRREL HUNTING OUTLOOK

Pearl River, Maurepas Swamp and Tunica Hills WMAs probably will provide most of the region’s squirrel-hunting action. According to Day, red oak mast production has been favorable in back-to-back years, starting in 2018, which bodes well for squirrel-hunting success.

How successful can it be? Last season, 1,876 squirrels were bagged in 1,354 hunter efforts at Maurepas Swamp. Also, Tunica Hills WMA had 384 squirrels taken in 331 efforts.

RABBIT HUNTING OUTLOOK

Some of the most successful rabbit hunting again this season should be enjoyed at the top producing WMA the past few years: Maurepas Swamp. It isn't the typical rabbit hunting mecca because of its habitat, but there remain 112,000 acres suitable for rabbit hunting. Others worth rabbit hunting are Pearl River WMA and Joyce WMA.

COASTAL LAFAYETTE REGION >

Connor Fruge, 11, shot this 8-point buck at 200 yards during the Richard K. Yancey WMA youth hunt on Jan. 12, 2019.



DMAP DEER HARVEST NUMBERS HAMMOND REGION, 2019-20

On 233,525 acres enrolled in DMAP, 1,229 deer were harvested (497 bucks and 802 does), one deer for every 179 acres.

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COASTAL LAFAYETTE REGION

Biologist Vaughan McDonald shared his views on habitat conditions awaiting the fall flight of migrating ducks across the Coastal Lafayette Region and was upbeat about them in mid-July.

“The table is set. It’s just whether they come to the table or not. The groceries are there. It’s whether they come down or stop” McDonald said.

Submerged aquatic vegetation was in good shape, he reported, on the region’s duck hunting WMAs.

HOW THE TABLE IS BEING SET

For WMAs, the lack of any major storm is a plus, as favorable weather conditions won’t negatively impact habitat conditions, McDonald reported. While deer can be found in marsh habitats, that terrain isn’t optimal to support a significant herd due to a lack of abundance of preferred forage plants, habitat deterioration and storm-related impacts.

Just like last year, the Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers remained above flood stage into late June, affecting submerged aquatic vegetation production on Pass-a-Loutre and Atchafalaya Delta WMAs. However, those areas should rebound once the rivers fall to normal levels and water clarity improves. Remaining WMAs are showing average SAV production, and barring any weather events, the status should hold throughout the growing season and into the early part of the hunting season.

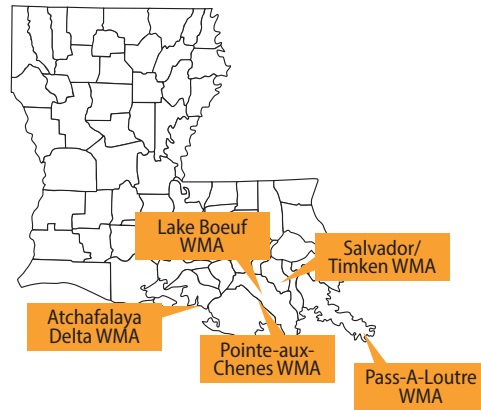
OVERALL DEER OUTLOOK

McDonald rates deer hunting in the region a 6 out of 10. While deer can be found in marsh habitats, McDonald points out that most of the public areas are relatively close to forested areas with higher natural ridges and spoil banks, but even those areas limited. At the Atchafalaya Delta WMA, where it’s archery hunting-only, 11 of the 57 deer killed last season were taken during the youth lottery hunts on the second and third weekends of October. The WMA’s five-year average harvest is

170 deer, a number that has been trending lower each of the past few seasons. At Pass-a-Loutre WMA, deer-hunting participation can be low because of its remoteness

TOP WMA DEER HARVEST NUMBERS COASTAL LAFAYETTE REGION, 2019-20

Atchafalaya Delta WMA: 57
Salvador WMA: 15
Pass-a-Loutre WMA: 8 (Bucks only can be harvested on this WMA).



ESTIMATED PEAK RUT DATES IN COASTAL LAFAYETTE REGION

Rut times vary across the coast, but typically, the peak for the Atchafalaya Delta WMA runs from late November into early December. The rut for Pointe-aux-Chenes WMA, Salvador WMA, Lake Boeuf WMA and Pass-a-Loutre WMA typically runs from early December through mid- to late December.



Lake Menard, 11, from Carencro with a cactus buck he killed with a 150-yard shot on Nov. 10 in Sabine Parish.

and accessibility, but it is a “great place to hunt deer” for those who are willing to put in the effort on an area where shooting lanes are maintained at the reservoir and wildlife openings across the WMA.

QUALITY DEER OUTLOOK

Some quality bucks are harvested every season on the Atchafalaya Delta WMA. Last season, an 11-pointer and two 10-point bucks were harvested. In 2018-19, six deer had at least one antler base circumference of 4 inches-plus, and 12 deer were 8- to 10-pointers. Pass-a-Loutre historically is the second-best bet to harvest a trophy deer; only bucks can be harvested there.

DUCK HUNTING OUTLOOK

McDonald reports that waterfowl hunting is by far the most-popular hunting activity on his region’s WMAs, namely Pass-A-Loutre, Salvador/Timken, Lake Boeuf, Pointe-aux-Chenes and Atchafalaya Delta. Overall, there have been few, if any, environmental events affecting the region this spring to have a significant impact in those areas, the biologist manager said.

SQUIRREL HUNTING OUTLOOK

Favorable habitat conditions continue to improve each of the past few years on Pointe-aux-Chenes WMA and Lake Bouef WMAs, the only coastal WMAs with significant squirrel populations. The squirrel hunting hotspot on the former is the Point Farm Unit, which covers almost 1,500 acres and features forested habitat and more than 500 acres of hardwood trees planted in previous mitigation projects. McDonald and other LDWF personnel also maintain shooting/access lanes to enhance conditions for squirrels and squirrel hunters. ■



Don Shoopman moved to the Sportsman's Paradise in 1976, and he and his wife June live in New Iberia. They have two grown sons.



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THIS DRY PRONG HUNTER HAS TAKEN A LOT OF TROPHY BUCKS OUT OF WOODS WHERE ANYONE CAN HUNT. HERE'S HOW HE SEPARATES HIMSELF FROM THE PACK.

■ By Glynn Harris

PUBLIC-LAND BUCKS, THE 'ZELL' WAY

When today's hunter makes preparations to head to the deer woods, he'll drive up to a gate, unlock it and stop at the camp to greet other hunters, pick up supplies and leave a tag on a peg signifying which stand he plans to hunt.

Heading to a box stand that sits on the edge of a food plot with a feeder out front, he settles down in carpeted comfort, props his gun in the window and picks up his cell phone to see what's on Facebook. He glances up occasionally to see if a buck has decided to step out to sample the plot's greenery or nibble on corn around the feeder. If that doesn't happen, he's not too disappointed, because he has snacks and his phone to while the time away.

Jonathon Zell, a 31-year-old employee of Union Pacific railroad who lives in Dry Prong, doesn't fit this scenario — not by a long shot. While the hunt-club member described above has access to a tract of land spanning a few hundred acres, Zell has access to a big tract, some 604,000 acres to be exact. "Wow!" you think. Zell must be rich to afford membership in a club of that size. No, he doesn't belong to a hunt club; the vast area he hunts is public land, the Kisatchie National Forest, which is

within a few miles of his Grant Parish home.

Some hunters would shy away from spending their hunting time on an area with no food plots, no feeders — just wide-open, never-ending woods. The hunt-club member joins with others in scouting, planting, stand setup, etc. Zell does what he does on the land he hunts in solitude; he figures things out on his own, and he has gained the reputation of being a master, as evidenced by the impressive trophy mounts hanging on his wall.

In 2014, Zell brought down a 10-point buck measuring 148 inches. In 2017, an impressive, 168-inch, 12-pointer bit the dust; in 2018, he downed a 138-inch buck, and in 2019, he dropped a 145-inch, 8-pointer. Of particular interest is that only one of those trophies was taken with a rifle; the rest were taken by bow and arrow.

Okay, so did he just walk into the woods, pick out a good tree to climb and have these four big bucks walk out on him? No, Zell is a student of deer behavior, figuring out a pattern of where and when each buck was travelling and living.

START EARLY >



START EARLY

“I start my season preparation each year in July, when I begin tuning my bow and shooting several days a week to get my muscles toned and prepared to be as accurate as I can when a buck steps out,” Zell said.

Once the season opens in October, typical weather in Louisiana can still be on the warm side, but that doesn’t hinder Zell.

“I tend to not let warm weather and the problem of scent control stop me, because I am a believer in using scent cover to mask my scent,” he said. “I like Dead Down Wind scent eliminator, but even so, I prefer to be downwind from where I expect a buck to step out.”

Once the season opens, Zell combines scouting and hunting, on the lookout for areas that have specific features.

DRAINS AND DOES

“I start my scouting after the season opens with my climber on my back and my bow in my hand,” he said. “There are features I’m looking for. I try to find small drains next to the thickest cover I can find. I’m also on the lookout for oaks that are producing acorns. All oaks don’t have acorns every year, so I look for the ones that have them now.”

The next thing Zell looks for is the travel pattern of does in the area, well-worn trails along with actual sightings. He knows that when the rut kicks in, does will be attracting bucks, and occasionally, they will be heavy-antlered bucks.

On the morning of Oct. 6, 2019, Zell hiked back three-quarters of a mile to an

Jonathan Zell didn’t do anything special to kill these trophy bucks on the Kisatchie National Forest. He started scouting in July, found places with the kind of habitat deer like, he found where does were travelling and set up shop downwind of those areas.

KENT
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area he had found that held his attention. He hunted the area in 2014 and waylaid a heavy-antlered 10-point buck that scored 148 inches. He hung his climbing stand 80 yards from where he'd taken the big buck and climbed 35 feet up in a big pine that gave him an elevated view of the area, which featured a convergence of three drains that were bordered by a dense thicket. Soon after settling down, he watched several does bed down on a ridge within sight of his perch.

"I decided to give my grunt call a try to see how the does might react," he said. "I gave out a few grunts, and sure enough, the does got up and began making their way toward me. I heard some brush being disturbed in the thicket, and out charged this big buck. I knew if he kept heading the direction he was going, he'd wind up directly under the tree I was in. He stopped 20 yards away at full alert, and I was able to get an arrow in him. He ran only about 20 yards before falling.

The buck sported 12 antler points, weighed 220 pounds and was scored by his taxidermist at 168 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches.

WATCH THE WIND >

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Jonathan Dell killed this huge, 12-point, 168½-inch buck on the Kisatchie National Forest in 2017.



WATCH THE WIND

Among the considerations Zell makes before selecting where he hangs his stand is wind: the direction from which it is blowing and the velocity.

“Wind is a huge factor, and keeping it in your favor is extremely hard, especially this time of year when it can quickly change directions and velocity especially if a weather front is moving in,” he said. “This is one reason I scout with my climbing stand on my back; wise, old bucks are smart, and once you spread your scent like I do after a mile walk, that could keep the one you’re after in hiding until after dark. I’ll choose a different tree to favor the wind, a location that still gives me access to the drains and thicket.”

Once the rut kicks in, Zell has at least a couple of tools that enable him to improve his chances at a trophy buck.

“I’ll use my grunt call periodically, but I also have a set of Black Rack artificial antlers I’ll crash together to attract the attention of a good buck, especially when they’re looking for does during the rut,” he said.

DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

Are there certain days that seem to produce better for Zell? Given a choice, he keeps his eye on the calendar to see what the moon is doing.

“I seem to have better success when the moon phase is less than 10%,” he said. “That being said, that’s not the only time I hunt. I go when I can, but the dark moon has worked best for me.”

Is there a time of day Zell prefers to hunt?

“I spend every hour I can in a tree,” he said. “A lot of it has to do with being in the right place at the right time. The more hours you spend in a stand, the better your chances of being there when a big buck makes a move.”

Zell believes that Louisiana has a good many trophy bucks, with vast areas such as the Kisatchie National Forest having its share. You just have to spend a lot of hours on stand to cross paths with them.

One other belief that keeps Zell in the deep woods for hours on end — an extension of what being out in nature gives him.

“Hunting is not just the harvest of a mature whitetail, but the blessings of being out there and enjoying God’s creation,” Zell said. “I give all the honor and glory to God.” ■



Glynn Harris is a long-time outdoor writer from Ruston. He writes weekly outdoor columns for several north Louisiana newspapers, has magazine credits in a number of state and national magazines and broadcasts four outdoor radio broadcasts each week.

ZELL'S TIPS FOR PUBLIC-LAND SUCCESS ➤

Locating places that does are using to travel from bedding areas to feeding areas gives Jonathan Dell a jump on seeing bucks.





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ZELL'S TIPS FOR PUBLIC-LAND SUCCESS

- Begin scouting early; Jonathon Zell begins looking for trails, old rubs etc as early as July.
- Put on your walking boots; sometimes the most desirable spots to find big bucks involves walking a mile or more into the heart of the area.
- Even when scouting, use cover scent; Zell likes Dead Down Wind to cover his own scent.
- Once the season opens, Zell keeps his climbing stand on his back and bow in hand so he can hunt and scout at the same time.
- Look for small drainage areas near thickets. Acorn-bearing oaks are a big plus in deciding where to hang your stand.
- Figure out travel patterns of does in the area. When the rut kicks in, estrous does can attract trophy bucks.
- Climb as high as necessary for best visibility into thick cover.
- Grunt calls and rattling horns are keys to bringing big bucks from bedding areas during the rut.
- Test the wind. Always hang your stand downwind from the area you expect bucks to come from.
- Moon phase is important. Zell has better success, not on a full moon, but when the moon phase is less than 10%. ■



Jonathan Zell has consistently taken big bucks in Kisatchie National Forest, like this 148-inch 10-pointer he arrowed in 2014.

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■ By Kinny Haddox

SERIOUS SURVEILLANCE

A BIG PART OF THAT PREPARATION. HERE'S HOW ONE VETERAN HUNTER USES THEM.



Author George Orwell warned us in his famous novel, *1984*, when he coined the phrase “Big brother is watching you.” It meant your actions and intentions are being monitored by big government.

Unfortunately for Louisiana’s deer, “Big brother” is watching them, too, but nobody warned them. And it’s not the government doing the spying;

IT’S HUNTERS.

“Game cameras are game changers,” said Justin Turner of Mer Rouge, a deer hunter and farmer, “especially the satellite cameras. They have changed the way we deer hunt, especially in relation to big bucks. The key is to start using them early and often, especially archery hunters. A lot of people might think it’s crazy, but I’ve probably got 20 deer cams, and I use them everywhere we hunt to monitor where the big deer are, where they like to go and when they go there.”

The growth in archery hunting for big deer has been insane. Annually, the number of hunters who target trophy deer with archery equipment grows. If you are going to be that guy or gal, you better start your prep now if you haven’t already. Louisiana’s bow season is just a month away, and if you aren’t already on the trail of a big one, you are already a bit tardy.

Here’s how Turner goes about his prep and early season hunting.

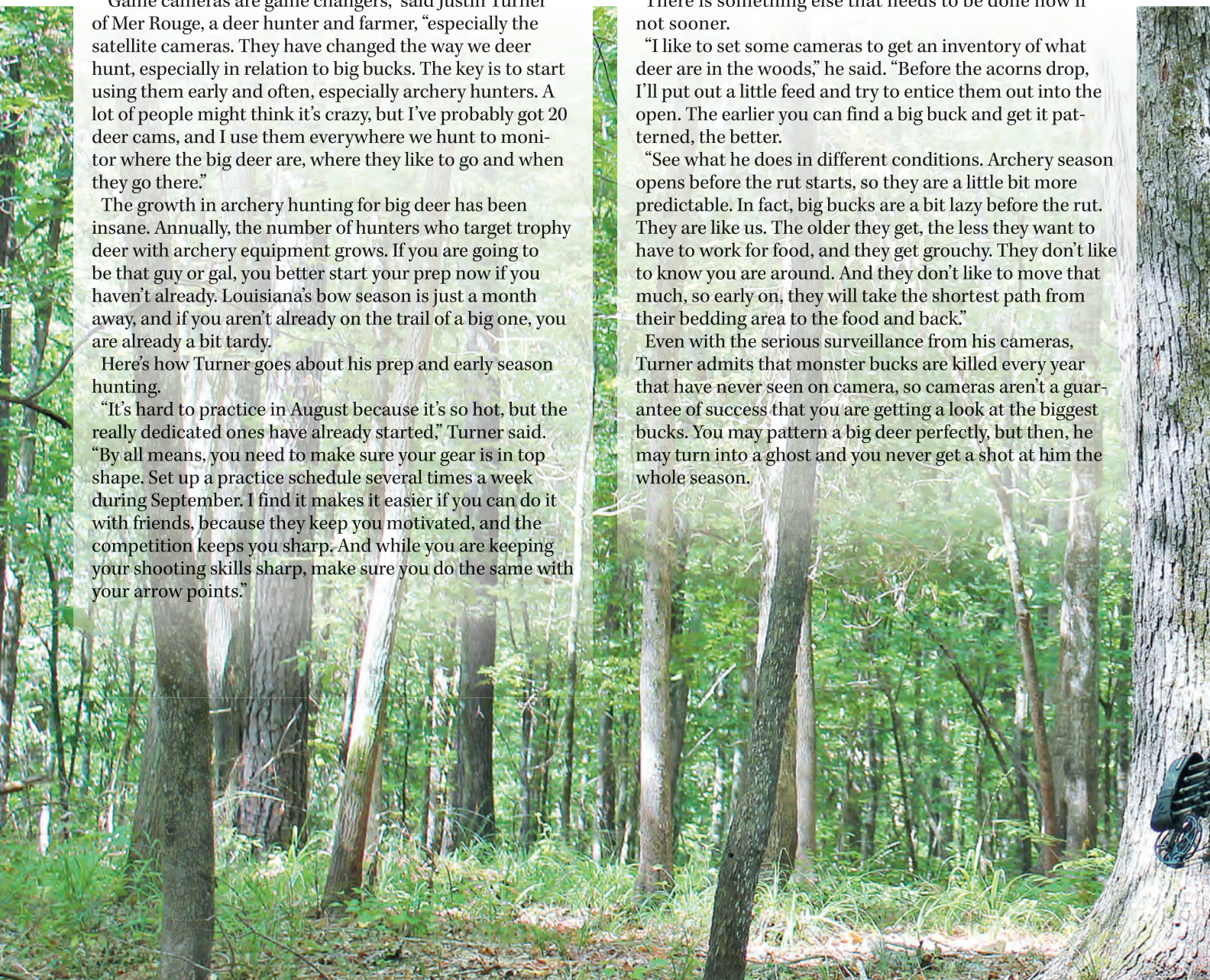
“It’s hard to practice in August because it’s so hot, but the really dedicated ones have already started,” Turner said. “By all means, you need to make sure your gear is in top shape. Set up a practice schedule several times a week during September. I find it makes it easier if you can do it with friends, because they keep you motivated, and the competition keeps you sharp. And while you are keeping your shooting skills sharp, make sure you do the same with your arrow points.”

There is something else that needs to be done now if not sooner.

“I like to set some cameras to get an inventory of what deer are in the woods,” he said. “Before the acorns drop, I’ll put out a little feed and try to entice them out into the open. The earlier you can find a big buck and get it patterned, the better.”

“See what he does in different conditions. Archery season opens before the rut starts, so they are a little bit more predictable. In fact, big bucks are a bit lazy before the rut. They are like us. The older they get, the less they want to have to work for food, and they get grouchy. They don’t like to know you are around. And they don’t like to move that much, so early on, they will take the shortest path from their bedding area to the food and back.”

Even with the serious surveillance from his cameras, Turner admits that monster bucks are killed every year that have never seen on camera, so cameras aren’t a guarantee of success that you are getting a look at the biggest bucks. You may pattern a big deer perfectly, but then, he may turn into a ghost and you never get a shot at him the whole season.



Turner comes from a family of hunters. His father, Barry, taught him, and he takes his whole family, including sons John and Jude — they are all bowhunters, and they all rely on cameras.

“I start early setting up cameras everywhere I plan to hunt,” he said. “A lot of people keep them up all year, but where they are in March or July isn’t as important as where they are and what they are doing this month.”

The beauty of bowhunting, Turner said, is that you can go to where the deer are, and you can move with them. You can pop up a ground blind, hang a climbing stand or a lean-to stand where deer are traveling.

When cameras start showing bucks coming to food or roaming a trail in the daylight hours, it’s time to find a tree for your stand.



OPENING DAY NOT FAR AWAY

Opening Day 2020 for Louisiana bowhunters isn’t that far away, even though the weather doesn’t necessarily feel like deer season. Here’s the breakdown of this year’s archery season in Louisiana’s 10 hunting areas. It’s either sex hunting unless otherwise noted.

Area 1: Oct. 1-Jan. 31

Area 2: Oct. 1-Jan. 31

Area 3: Sept. 19-Jan. 15

Area 4: Oct. 1-Jan. 31

Area 5: Oct. 16-Feb. 15 (Bucks only, Oct. 1-15)

Area 6: Oct. 16-Feb. 15 (Bucks only, Oct. 1-15)

Area 7: Sept. 19-Jan. 15

Area 8: Sept. 19-Jan. 15

Area 9: Oct. 16-Feb. 15 (Bucks only, Oct. 1-15)

Area 10: Sept 19-Jan. 15

Check the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries’ hunting regulations closely to make sure of season opening dates in the exact area that you will be hunting. Remember, it’s your personal responsibility to make sure you know and follow all hunting laws, regulations and requirements as well as season dates for areas that you are hunting. ■



Big bucks like this are mostly nocturnal, but game cameras help you pattern them for your best chance at a good shot.



“I like to look for pinch points on trails early and then scrapes and rubs later in the season,” he said. “If you can find where they are moving along a fence line, drainage ditch or thicket, it will eventually lead to a pinch point where it brings them to the same spot each day. If you catch them moving from bedding areas to feeding areas, they are much less likely to find you.”

“If you’ve ever hunted over food plots or feeders, you know how skittish they are all the time. That’s because they aren’t dumb. They know there isn’t supposed to be a pile of corn or rice bran or a big field of turnips out in the middle of the woods.”

Having gear in good shape and equipment you are confident in is crucial. Turner loves the Covert Black 20 LTE satellite camera, which comes in two models: one for Verizon and one for AT&T. It’s important to have good cell service in areas you put cameras if you want to get the pictures.

Turner hunts with a 7- or 8-year-old bow that is smooth, and he won’t change just for the sake of changing. He shoots lightweight arrows with mechanical broadheads. He recommends always having a bow hanger, a good pair of binoculars and a range finder. Two other things he never goes without are an Ozonics system to help cover his scent and a Thermocell to keep the mosquitoes from carrying him off. Mosquitoes probably save more big bucks’ lives than anything else.

One of the biggest mistakes Turner has made was trying to go into the deep woods right to where the deer live. That was a mistake.

“If they know you are coming in there, they won’t come out,” he said. “Find a spot where you won’t disturb them. Think about it. If somebody was coming in traipsing around your house, you’d know they were there. Find spots to bowhunt where you don’t leave a footprint in Mr. Buck’s neighborhood. You’ll do a whole lot better.” ■



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.







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Kimmy Haddock

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT

Justin Turner doesn't use an American Express credit card, but he never leaves home and goes to the woods without a game camera, whether he's deer hunting or just scouting.

"You never know when you are going to walk up on a spot and find a giant scrape or rub or a new deer trail where you've never seen one before," he said. "I always like to have an extra game camera with me so I can set it up and see what's making that sign. It's helped us find several big bucks over the years." ■

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Justin Turner carries a trail camera on every trip to the woods in case he stumbles onto some new, impressive deer sign and wants a camera to take a better look.

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HIGH TECH DISK TOOL

One frustrating thing that happens to almost every hunter is putting a disc in a trail camera or your computer only to find a message such as "disk failed" or "disk will not read".

Justin Turner learned an easy solution to erase a majority of those issues when you remove a disk from a trail camera. And it costs about 15 cents.

"The disk can get dirt or grime on the contacts and it just won't work. You can take a simple pencil eraser and lightly rub the eraser on the disk to clean it, and in most cases, the problem is fixed," he said. "The outdoor elements aren't exactly the type of area that delicate camera systems and discs were developed for."

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Having more weight toward the broad-head end of your arrow doesn't necessarily make for more accurate shooting or better arrow penetration on game.



WHAT F.O.C. IS, WHY IT MATTERS

'FRONT OF CENTER' MEASURES HOW MUCH OF YOUR ARROW'S WEIGHT IS IN THE BROADHEAD END. IT MATTERS A GREAT DEAL

Sammy Romano

Every sport has its trends, and the sport of bowhunting is no exception. The latest craze is shooting extreme "F.O.C." arrows.

Log onto to any online archery forum, and you won't have to scroll far to see a thread about it. Like most subjects on most forums, a lot of strongly opinionated people post, many of whom are not completely knowledgeable and a few who actually understand the topic well. It is important to be educated about the topic so you can read between the lines to glean helpful information without getting lost in opinions and pointless discussion.

You might wonder "What is F.O.C., and why is it important?" F.O.C. is an abbreviation for "Front of Center," which refers to the percentage of total arrow weight that is on the broadhead end of an arrow.

Having sufficient F.O.C. balance to any arrow is crucial to accuracy, but even more so when it comes to a broadhead-tipped hunting arrow. The best analogy for this is a badminton "birdie," where the heavy tip pulls the lighter rear through the air. By having a higher F.O.C., your arrow becomes more accurate, especially at longer distances, and also gains momentum, helping to increase penetration on game animals.

During the bow-speed craze of the 1990s and early 2000s, many hunters mistakenly switched to lightweight broadheads in an effort to reduce the total weight of their arrows. The result was often a loss of accuracy due to the "tail wagging the dog" effect and also poor penetration. In my opinion, the pendulum is starting to swing too far the

other way, as people are being led to shoot arrows that are excessively heavy in an effort to achieve extreme F.O.C. weights that are much higher than necessary.

Heavy F.O.C. is nothing new, having been around since the dawn of archery. Native Americans and other early archers used broadheads made of stone that were extremely heavy, on wooden shafts fletched with extremely light feathers. It is only recently with modern materials that archers have had the ability to shoot lighter tips, causing their F.O.C. to be too low.

MATERIAL CHANGES

With the addition of plastic vanes and heavier, lighted arrow nocks — which add weight to the nock end of the arrow — thus reducing F.O.C., the problem was exacerbated. Only recently have many archers started to worry about proper F.O.C. due to better education on the subject. The longer shots that today's equipment allows for has also increased the need for higher F.O.C. weights. This might lead you to think, "If a higher F.O.C. is good, a much higher F.O.C. should be even better!" Not necessarily; that thought process is a slippery slope

Determining F.O.C. %

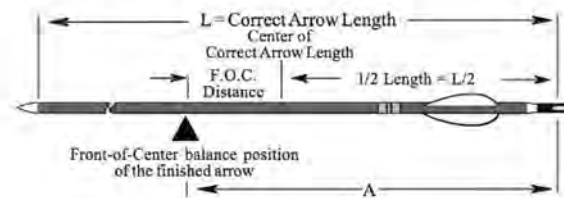


AMO-Standard F.O.C. balance formula

$$\text{F.O.C. \%} = \frac{100 \times (A - L/2)}{L}$$

L = Correct Arrow Length—Distance from bottom of nock groove to end of shaft

A = Distance from bottom of nock groove to finished arrow balance position (includes weight of point [+ insert], nock system and fletching)



that can lead to other issues.

Our society is always looking for the magic bullet or super pill that will instantly fix all of our problems. Extremely high F.O.C. has occupied that niche recently in the archery world. There are even people selling test kits with super-high F.O.C. online. Although it often helps correct poor arrow flight due to improper form or tuning, this correction comes at a cost. Extremely high F.O.C. weight leads to extremely heavy arrows, which drastically affect trajectory. Unless the archer has a range compensating sight, such as a Garmin Xero,



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.



Burris Oracle, or E-Z-V, this can result in missing shots due to a range misjudgment of only one or two yards.

ACCURACY OVER PENETRATION

I often hear people say, "I want to be able to penetrate both shoulders." According to the Ashby Foundation, which has done extensive scientific research on the subject, arrow weights of at least 650 grains are required for consistent penetration when encountering large bone. But this will have the trajectory of a lead balloon out of most whitetail setups. One absolute is that you must hit the animal to penetrate it at all. Think about it this way: if you hit the dirt with a very heavy arrow, all you do is to penetrate deeper into the ground. Shot placement and proper target angle helps eliminate the shoulder as an obstacle on whitetails. Like most things in life, it is important to find a literal balance when it comes to F.O.C.

Easton Archery recommends an F.O.C. of 10% to 15% for hunting arrows. Anything over 15% is extreme, with 10% to 12% being ideal. F.O.C. for your arrow can easily be calculated using a thin edge — such as a butter knife blade, a pencil, a tape measure, and a calculator. Simply find the balance point of your arrow by laying it across the knife edge. Mark it with the pencil, and measure to it from the bottom of your arrow's nock groove (where the string attaches).

Next, measure the total length of your arrow from the bottom of the nock groove to the end of the shaft itself. Then, plug these numbers into the formula to calculate your arrow's F.O.C.

MAKE ADJUSTMENTS

If your F.O.C. is too low, you can easily increase it by using heavier broadheads or weighted arrow inserts to add weight to the front of your arrow. F.O.C. can also be increased by removing lighted nocks and fletching your arrows with either smaller vanes or feathers to

decrease the weight at the rear. My personal whitetail arrow weighs 475 grains — which is fairly heavy — with an 11% F.O.C. This will kill any whitetail in the world with proper shot placement. My Garmin Xero sight eliminates worry about trajectory costing me an animal.

Hopefully, this has helped explain F.O.C. and why it is important. Check your arrow's F.O.C. and adjust it to get the most out of your setup this year. Do some research; keep an open mind, but be skeptical enough to verify the info in many forums. As always, if you have questions or need help, consult your local pro shop. Consider the source; when it comes to the subject of arrows, I would believe Easton Archery, the world's oldest and largest arrow manufacturer, before a keyboard warrior in most cases. Increase your F.O.C. — but not too much — and watch your shooting improve. ■

You might think, "If a higher F.O.C. is good, a much higher F.O.C. should be even better!" Not necessarily.

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GET REAL FOR TEAL

■ By Darren Digby

TEAL SEASON IS ON THE HORIZON FOR LOUISIANA HUNTERS; HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR GETTING MORE OF THE FAST, LITTLE DUCKS IN YOUR SIGHTS AND ON YOUR DUCK STRAPS.

Darren Digby

After a spring and summer of so much being taken away from us, we're overdue for something to count on. Despite ongoing restrictions in much of our daily lives for the foreseeable future, the show must go on.

Take, for example, the forefront of the 2020 fall waterfowl migration is already underway, as flights of sporty blue-winged teal make their annual trek, quarantine be darned.

Thankfully, for as much as has been turned upside down in our lives this year, the approach to putting teal on the straps remains the same. Louisiana hunters have long proven they're willing to brave the heat, bugs and snakes for the exhilarating experience that teal season can offer.

Location will be key, as all of the best equipment and calling will not make birds appear out of nowhere. From rice fields to shallow marshes, identifying areas birds will be using can go an awfully long way in ensuring a hot barrel on opening morning Sept. 12.

Above all things, shallow is the critical feature. Given their small size, teal prefer the shallows for feeding on an assortment of seeds or invertebrates without having to dive in deeper waters. Erring toward the shallowest waters you've got access to will ensure you are setting up on preferred habitat.

One telltale sign to be followed when scouting is locating

areas that various shorebirds are using before the teal show up. When they do show up, they'll be found dabbling right in with the local wading birds. Seeing mottled ducks, wood ducks or whistling ducks using these waters can also be a great indicator of where the teal will take.

A final note: never be afraid to set up on an area that has all the indications of being a promising locale — but without confirmation of teal being there. A hole that has only mottleds and egrets one day has the potential to be a fast-shooting teal bonanza for the next morning's opener. These birds are always on the move, so don't be disheartened if you haven't seen them while scouting promising habitat; you may well be pleasantly surprised the next morning.

There are a lot of schools of thought on decoy setups, and thankfully, these early birds leave a whole lot of room for variability — whatever you might have the most confidence in will probably work. One theme most early season teal hunters will agree upon, however, is use of motion decoys, specifically spinning-wing decoys. For whatever reason, these birds have proven that you can hunt over flamingo decoys so long as you've got the flash of a spinning wing decoy or two — or even more.

As you get later in the Sept. 12-27 season, you might find some birds not fully committing to the spinners after likely receiving an unpleasant education. Never be afraid to pull the spinners or simply turn them off via remote while birds are working in close. If they're balking on the approach, don't waste your morning hoping they'll eventually give in.

Don't be afraid to put out bigger, puddle duck decoys when trying to attract teal.



Darren Dighy

REMEMBER EARLY TEAL SEASON GEAR

With the season opening on Sept. 12, there are only a couple of weeks remaining to get your gear in order. A list of must-haves is below:

- Non-toxic shot in sizes ranging from No. 3 to No. 6 paired with an open choke such as Improved cylinder or skeet;
- Headlamp;
- Therma-Cell and/or fogger spray; they work great in tandem.;
- Bug repellent;
- Lightweight, breathable camo;
- State licenses and federal waterfowl stamp;
- Water bottle;
- Teal calls;
- Spinning wing decoys;
- Camo hat. ■



A headlamp and light, breathable camouflage clothing are must items for Louisiana's early teal season.

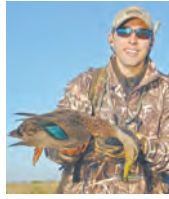
Darren Digby

An advertisement for Kent Cartridge TealSteel shotshells. The background shows hunters in camouflage gear in a field. In the center is a box of TealSteel shotshells, which is labeled 'KENT CARTRIDGE', 'TealSteel', 'PRECISION STEEL', 'NON TOXIC', '25', 'HIGH PERFORMANCE SHOTSHELLS', and '12ga 3"'. The text 'KENT CARTRIDGE' is at the top, and 'RISE & SHINE' is in large, bold letters. At the bottom, it says 'OVER 300 PELLETS IN EACH 12GA LOAD!' and 'www.kentcartridge.com'. There is also a small American flag icon in the top right corner of the ad.

GET REAL FOR TEAL

When it comes to standard, floating decoys, teal success is often more of a game of long-range visibility over realism. In short, don't get too concerned with only putting out hen decoys of various species in attempt to replicate early season eclipse plumage. Birds being unable to find your decoys is far more concerning than ensuring they don't spook off of a colorful drake blue-wing decoy. In fact, many hunters are shunning today's small, ultra-detailed teal decoys in favor of blocks of larger species, given the enhanced visibility.

To help turn passing flights, calling is a critical tool. A number of call-makers are offering calls tuned to the higher-pitched quack of a teal, and birds are typically very responsive. When it comes to getting the attention of a passing flight, there's no such thing as too loud. Just when you think you're sounding ridiculous and there's no chance of turning a distant flock, you might be surprised to see what getting even more raucous can do. Given these birds can be swayed elsewhere on a whim, it's just as important to stay on the call until you've got them right over the spread. ■



Darren Digby, an environmental engineer and USCG licensed captain, has been hunting and fishing the marshes of Southeast Louisiana since childhood. He lives in Baton Rouge with his wife Ella and their two kids.

Don't be worried about calling too loudly when you're trying to attract early season teal. Getting their attention is a key to success.



Hunt water as shallow as you can find; teal don't like feeding in deeper water, thanks in part to their small size.

GET HIP

Louisiana waterfowlers should note that the required HIP survey can now be obtained exclusively via LDWF's website <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/mandatory-harvest-information-program>; it is no longer available at your local retailer. Though it now comes at a \$2 charge, the convenience and expedience of the process is a welcome change. ■



Darren Digby



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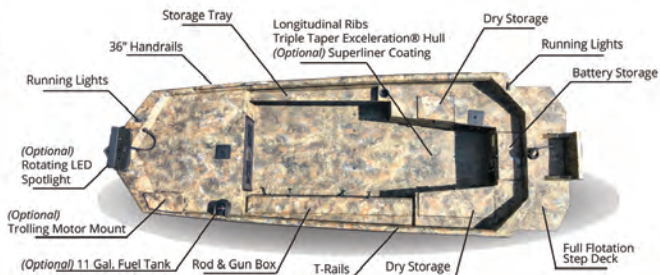


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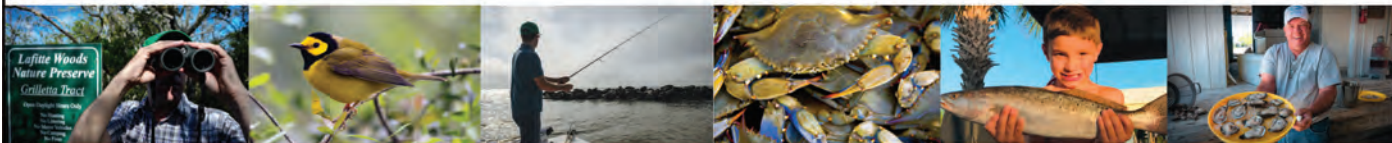


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SET A TRAP FOR SEPTEMBER BASS



LOUISIANA'S OWN RAT-L-TRAP REALLY SHINES WHEN FALL LARGEMOUTHS START TO GANG UP AND FOLLOW SHAD. ONE PRO SHARES HIS TRICKS FOR LURING BASS INTO A TRAP.

■ By Kinny Haddox

It's still pretty hot, but largemouth bass in Louisiana waters know that cooler weather is on the way. That means baitfish will start balling up, and the bass will be looking for plenty of food to stock up for the winter.

BUT BASS BEWARE:

it's an ideal time to get caught in a "speed trap." And anglers be aware, too. There's a Louisiana-made lure that is just the ticket for early fall bass —

THE RAT-L-TRAP,

a product of Bill Lewis Lures in Alexandria.

"The Rat-L-Trap is a bass bait that truly works all year long and in any kind of lake anywhere," said bass pro Cliff Crochet of Pierre Part. "But in the late summer and early fall, it is really in its element when the shad start bunching up and the fish start aggressively following them. You can fish it around structure; you can fish it around grass beds and you can fish it over and under schools of shad. It's not a bait they can easily say no to."

In other words, Crochet, a former Assumption Parish sheriff's deputy, it's time for anglers to put the Rat-L-Trap "10-8" — police code for "in service." And there's no better way for a Trap to go "10-8" than at full speed.

"Look, we all learned to fish the Rat-L-Trap by letting it rip," Crochet said. "The most-common way is to tie on a Trap and then throw and reel, throw and reel, usually as fast as we could. That still catches fish. I think it's a reaction strike that they just can't help. Between the action and the rattle, they just have to have it."

In September, baitfish start to gang up in the backs of canals, on flats or even along the edges of the channels. Wherever that happens on your favorite body of water, that's where the bass will go as well. Because they are actively feeding and in different kinds of cover, that makes the Trap a go-to lure. You sure shouldn't let it fly under your radar when it comes to lure selection.

"Anglers can upsize their Rat-L-Trap to a ¾- or 1-ounce size, downsize their line a bit to, like, 12-pound test and really throw this lure a mile," Crochet said. "That allows you to cover a lot of territory, and you can fish above the shad or below the shad. Most of the time, if you can get the bait below the shad, that's where you'll find the bigger ones."

He also likes what he calls the "yo-yo" technique.

"There's really no perfect equation for how to fish the lure," Crochet said. "I like to yo-yo or stop-and-go with the lure by

A Rat-L-Trap's natural action, plus an internal rattle, are tough for a bass to resist — not to mention the flash of chrome.



throwing it out, letting it get down to where the fish are, then pull it hard, stop it and reel up the slack, then repeat. A lot of times, the fish will hit it on the fall, and you have to be aware that when you feel like you are hung up, you may have a big, old bass that gulped that bait down.”

Sometimes, you have to let the fish tell you how they want it by trying different speeds, sizes and colors. But always pay attention to what you are doing, because when you catch one, that’s what you need to do to catch another one.

“The better fishermen are always doing something a little bit different, and they recognize what it is they are doing different. That separates the best from the rest,” said Crochet, whose favorite gear for Trap fishing is 12- to 20-pound Seaguar InvizX spooled on a KastKing Bassinator Elite baitcast reel with a 7-foot-3, medium-heavy KastKing Spirale rod, one he helped design.



Bass pro Cliff Crochet of Pierre Part shows off a big bass caught on a Rat-L-Trap, a lure manufactured in Louisiana.



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SET A TRAP
for September bass

In the fall, Crochet likes to stick to shad colors. Bill Lewis Lures really came “out of the box” this year with some amazing new colors. Among his new favorites are black crappie, white crappie, wintergreen shad, bright belly shad, sunrise shad, chrome red bones, chrome gold bones and gold mine shad. Traditional colors like the bleeding shad, silverado, chrome and smoky joe work well, too.

Two other baits Crochet said anglers need to tie on are trying floating Rat-L-Traps and also the tiny, ¼-ounce Trap. He recommends using the floater to give the fish a slower, different look. It runs only a few inches under the surface and can be cast into a school of bass, stopped, then eased along. He likes to use the smaller, ¼-ounce Trap around boat docks and trees, fishing it past the structure just like he would a spinnerbait. ■



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



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A large advertisement for Bill Lewis Fishing. On the left, a fisherman wearing a white cap, sunglasses, and a blue mesh shirt holds a large spotted bass. In the background, a Rat-L-Trap lure is shown in a body of water. The text "Bill Lewis FISHING" is prominently displayed in the center-right. At the bottom right, there is a testimonial and the website address.

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The last month of summer still brings a lot of heat to Louisiana and surrounding states, which often makes bassin' as tough as it was, at times, in August.

When Mother Nature brings the heat before the first welcome cool-downs of early fall, four Louisiana bass pros have what it takes to get bass to bite and don't mind sharing their choices for artificial lures in September. Billy Billeaud of Lafayette, Randy Despino of Colfax, Caleb Sumrall of New Iberia and *Louisiana Sportsman's* own Greg Hackney of Gonzales discussed their favorite artificial lures for the coming month.

Billeaud and Hackney favor throwing crankbaits of slightly differing sizes, Despino is partial to dropping a long plastic worm, while Sumrall punches with his favorite soft plastic creature bait.

4 BASS PROS, 4 FAVORITE BAITS

By Don Shoopman

BILLEAUD TURNS TO KVD 1.5 TO KNOCK ON COVER, TRIGGER BITES

If it's September, it's time for winding down, or better yet, cranking time with a Strike King KVD 1.5 squarebill crankbait.

Billy Billeaud of Lafayette loves to catch bass cranking. He retrieves the KVD 1.5 around any kind of structure, bouncing it off wood and such to get bit, especially when it counts in tournaments he fishes.

Billeaud has been fishing the KVD 1.5 the past several years and has plenty of bass to show for it, especially in and around Cajun Country — namely the Atchafalaya Basin and Henderson Lake — each September.

"It seems everybody in south Louisiana throws a creature bait," in late summer, he said. The KVD 1.5 triggers reaction strikes from bass apparently turned off by so many soft plastics.

Billeaud's favorite colors are natural shad and chartreuse/black.

"I have so much confidence in the crankbait, especially in summer and fall," he said. "When crankbaits fly by their noses, they can't help themselves but just jump out and grab it, just latch onto it. I like the way it's kind of erratic when you reel. It turns on its own, always kicks out trying to find center, takes off to the side every 3 feet or so and gets back on center."



Billeaud, 59, who fished the old Bassmaster Invitational circuit starting in 1996, then fished a couple of Bassmaster Opens each year until 2015, when he began fishing the full schedule as well as FLW events — wants the square-bill in his hand this month.

Billeaud fishes the KVD 1.5 on 17-pound Seagaur fluorocarbon



“I have so much confidence in the crankbait, especially in summer and fall.”

on a Daiwa Tatula reel with a 6.3:1 gear ratio. He said he found the perfect crankbait rod when he tried a 7-foot OCR medium-heavy rod made by Craig Olivier at Olivier Custom Rods in Lafayette. He was using his only one for a bladed jig, he said, but he liked it so much for cranking that he now has three.

He's partial to the Daiwa reel because he burns the crankbait through the water, mostly targeting 2- to 4-foot depths.

"You can reel them really fast and slam them into stuff. They don't tend to get stuck as much," he said.

Billeaud makes one modification to the KVD 1.5, changing out the treble hooks and replacing them with Mustad KVD 2/0 Triple Grip trebles. Those deliver solid hookups, he said.

If he isn't throwing a KVD 1.5, he's chunking a balsa crankbait, particularly around cypress trees, he said. ■

WILD THANG >

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SEPTEMBER'S THE RIGHT TIME FOR DESPINO TO FISH A WILD THANG AT TOLEDO BEND, RAYBURN

For the past seven or so years, bass pro Randy Despino of Colfax has relied on a long, plastic worm to catch bass in the stifling heat of September, especially when he's fishing at Toledo Bend or Lake Sam Rayburn.

"I'm going to be throwing a big worm ... if I had to have one" artificial lure in his hand, he said.



Photo courtesy Randy Despino

And it isn't just any long plastic worm that he'll tie on.

"I would throw a V&M Wild Thang," said Despino, an FLW Pro Tour veteran. "That Wild Thang, 8½ inches, is an awesome worm. I've won a lot, lot of money with that bait, won a lot of tournaments.

"I'm going to say we fish it a lot around brush piles and isolated stumps. If you can find an underwater stump, an underwater brush pile, that's what to concentrate on, some type of structure.

"Probably in September, fish are heading into creeks, so I'll be fishing creek bends, deep creeks with sharp turns, the back side, the deep ledge of the creek," he said. "I would concentrate on 8- to 12-foot depths. Shad start moving up into creeks that time of year, and fish take to them."

Despino started fishing a Wild Thang around 2013, he said.

"We were the first ones throwing it; I guess we've been throwing it seven years, I guess since they started making it," he said.

The Wild Thang has everything he wants in a long, plastic worm. What's more, it's very durable.

"It's got a good, big body on it, and doesn't tear up as bad. The worm actually looks bigger than it is. It's 8½ inches. The main thing on it is the tail.

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The tail is real wide. It's just got a lot of action. This one, when they hit it, they eat it, and they're ready to go. Set the hook and get on it," he said.

Despino fishes the Wild Thang Texas-rigged on a 4/0 Gamat-katsu worm hook under a 3/8-ounce Elite Tungsten weight, tying it to 17-pound Seaguar fluorocarbon. His favorite worm rod is a 7-foot Tommy Martin heavy jig and worm rod; he pairs it with a Lew's Speed Spool reel.

He's partial to two colors.

"A lot of times early in the morning, I start with South African black, then go to a blue fleck when the sun gets real high," he said.

"That South African black is a sleeper," he added. ■



D BOMB >

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D BOMB'S A BLAST FOR SUMRALL WHEN PUNCHING MATS IN SEPTEMBER

Caleb Sumrall is planning on another successful push to qualify for the Bassmaster Classic, and you can bet one artificial lure can make it happen during his stretch run on the oft-interrupted Bassmaster Elite Series circuit in 2020.

Sumrall's confidence bait is a Missile Baits D Bomb, a soft-plastic creature bait he's been using since it hit the market. For September, when he's punching mats under which bass are cooling their fins, he wants to use a D Bomb.

"Fish will be trying to stay in cover, trying to stay in the coolest water possible," said Sumrall, from New Iberia. "The D Bomb just has a good profile, just about anything bass'll eat: bream, crawfish. . ."

The D Bomb is effective pitching, flipping, fishing around docks and, of course, Sumrall's specialty: punching. Its oily body is built to slide in and out of vegetative mats, and he doesn't have to pick off annoying strands of grass between punches.

There are other good reasons to throw the soft plastic, which features an ultra-soft body and crawfish-like appendages. It has ringed ridges — ribs, if you will — tightly spaced to provide a solid body for the hook point; the rings are soft to expose the hook.

"I like to keep the bait moving fast. I don't yo-yo it too much. I keep it fast," he said.

When Sumrall feels a bite, he doesn't hesitate to lean into the hookset.

"You set the hook as soon as you feel a fish eat it, for sure," he said.

Sumrall fishes the soft plastic creature bait on a 7-foot-10 Kistler moderate rod with a Bruin Paul Elias Legend Series reel.

"You can't be doing it with a 10-pound rod; you know what I'm saying? Kistler makes a really good, lighter rod," said Sumrall, who Texas-rigs the D Bomb on a 4/0 Super Heavy Cover Gamakatsu hook tied to 70-pound Sunline Xplasma braid. Most of the time,



he uses a 1½-ounce Kajun Boss Tungsten weight.

"It all depends. I throw 2-ounce weight sometimes," he said.

Sumrall's advice for fishing the creature bait in and around the Atchafalaya Basin is to "just stay in muddy, current water. Try not to get stuck in the back end of dead-ends, real hot water," he said.

Sumrall's favorite colors are black/red and anything green pumpkin, he said. ■

“I like to keep the bait moving fast. I don't yo-yo it too much.**”**

**HACKNEY
DOWNSIZES >**



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DOWNSIZING IN SEPTEMBER PAYS BIG DIVIDENDS FOR HACKNEY

Throwing smaller crankbaits, spinnerbaits and buzzbaits is the key to what often can be a funky time of the year for bass fishing success.

"You can have good days downsizing in September," said bass pro Greg Hackney of Gonzales. "It's good to generate bites. You still just fish the same areas. When it's hot like that, keep your head in the game. As long as you do the right thing they bite."

"It's another month that sucks. Typically for us in Louisiana, the weather's just like August. September is probably the toughest month for fishing south of the Mason-Dixon line."

Hackney, a 15-time Bassmaster Classic qualifier in his second year on the Major League Fishing Bass Pro Tour learned the valuable lesson about downsizing long ago from Ron Shuffield, a veteran Arkansas bass pro. An Arkansas native himself, Hackney was a teen, fishing a club tournament at the same time Shuffield fished a Red Man trail event in September along the Arkansas River; he won with a big bag, including some 6-pounders. Hackney never has forgotten the interview in which Shuffield said he caught his bass on a 1/8-ounce buzzbait.

There are a few good reasons bass dine on smaller artificial lures in September, Hackney said. For starters, shad fry hatched earlier in the year have grown just big enough to make a good meal for bass. Those bass seem to be less aggressive, too, also pointing out that many anglers still throw the same stuff they always



Photo courtesy Greg Hackney

throw, which encompasses mostly larger artificial lures.

Don't believe for a minute that only small bass will bite smaller profile artificial lures.

Hackney's co-favorites are a Strike King KVD 1.0, a Strike King 3/16-ounce Mr. Lil Money Spinnerbait and a 1/8-ounce Strike King buzzbait. If he had to have one locked in his hand, it would be the crankbait, he said.

Shad-colored small artificials are the main meal ticket, he said. "Sexy Shad is probably the best all-around color ever made," said Hackney. He also likes Tennessee shad and is a big believer in chrome/black but shies away from chartreuse/white because he "leans away" from those colors from August to October.

Hackney casts the buzzbait and spinnerbait on the Strike King Hack Attack 6-foot-10 spinnerbait/buzzbait rod and the crankbait on a Strike King 7-foot Hack Attack cranking rod. ■



“You can have good days downsizing in September.”

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NATURAL DEADFALLS HOLDING DEEP BASS AT TOLEDO BEND

Look for deadfalls around bluff banks

What's trending at Toledo Bend from August to October is getting bit around the countless man-made brush piles in, say, 18- to 25-foot depths.

Think about that for a minute as you plan a trip in the dog days of summer. Everybody is targeting those brush piles, whether they strategically placed them themselves or found them with state-of-the-art marine electronics that are on nearly every boat on the water. Sometimes conflicts might arise.

There's a way to fish your own sunken wood if you put in the time. It'll be worth it.

Many years ago, when there was grass aplenty on the lake, I was guiding one spring day in the Texas Island area. There was a stretch of bluff walls that had eroded over the years, one that obviously sent trees cascading into the water when the edges crumbled for the last time.

I found a tremendous number of deadfalls on the bottom in front of the bluff wall, and we ran jerkbaits through the branches and around the tree trunks and had a great time hooking up with 2s, 3s and 4s the rest of the afternoon. I never forgot that,, and every now and then, I still fish eroded bluff banks along creek channels or the river, especially on the Texas side. Heck, there are miles of that from the Chicken Coop to Huxley Bay.

And I still get bit on those bass fishing trips. Guide Jack Hains of Rayne, the 1975 Bassmaster Classic champion who I shared that story with a year or two ago, gets bit, too. He's targeting those natural deadfalls in 10- to 25-foot depths and catching crappie. He makes the effort to find them, fishes them exclusively, and it pays off.

Natural wood is hard to beat, and there's plenty of it in this lake, which was once a national forest. Some of those trees have 3-foot bases and plenty of limbs; they're mostly in the 10- to 15-foot and 15- to 25-foot ranges, ideal for bassing in the heat. The hardwoods will be there forever.

Fish them with bruise- or pumpkinseed-colored jigs or Carolina-rigged and drop-shotted soft plastics, and, if the bass are suspended up some in the water column, deep-diving crankbaits. Try soft plastics in the prime colors for late summer: redbug, plum apple, junebug and junebug/red.

You might want to try that pattern to increase your chances of putting bass in the boat. It's an option that people might be overlooking.

It's a certainty the deep bite will be the best thing going 80 to 90% of the time in August. The two biggest bass caught in Bob Sealy Outdoors' Big Bass Splash reportedly were both caught deep during that July 11-12 tournament. The biggest was a 12.41-pound beauty caught by Branden Rannekleiv of Reeves. Imagine that; a 12-pound bass boated in mid-July was probably a 14-pounder in the spring.

If you want to have an opportunity to catch a big one now, you



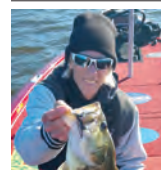
On a hot summer day when it was 95 degrees in the shade, this fisherman caught a 6-pound bass on a plastic frog in the lily pads while fishing with John Dean at Toledo Bend. Dean said they caught 16 and called it a "fun, fun day."

pretty much have to go offshore. Get out there on deep points and deep drains, turn on your marine electronics and try to find a school of fish.

I sure won't say you can't get bit shallow, but the window is very small, like an hour starting just before the sun comes up and the last hour of daylight. Go with plastic frogs and Delta's Thunder Jigs. And the nighttime bite should be fair to good.

Crappie fishing is going strong and should stay that way as anglers pull slabs from brush piles in 18- to 25-foot depths. Shiners, mostly, and artificial jigs will get those crappie in the ice chest. ■

— 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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SHALLOW BASS BITE AT CADDO LAKE IS NO PIPE DREAM

Shad will draw big fish into skinny water

Caddo Lake in northwest Louisiana is known for three things: cypress trees, oil platforms and lunker bass.

Caddo was formed by the “Great Raft” log jam in the Red River, and it spans the Louisiana state line into Texas. The 25,000-acre lake averages 8 feet deep; which is just deep enough to hide some trophy bass.

Angler Rex Moncrief of Bossier City has been on a hot, shallow-water bite for the past few weeks. The overall shallow nature of the lake causes bass to push shad into extremely skinny water, and knowing how to target these fish can result in double-digit catches.

“Any cast could result in a double-digit fish,” Moncrief said.

Catching monster bass on Caddo does not require any high-tech equipment. Moncrief uses Google Earth satellite imaging, combined with the Navionics Boating app to find productive spots that others may overlook.

“I like to watch for subtle changes in bank or tree-line contours,” Moncrief said. “Because Caddo is so shallow; even a change of 6 inches can be enough to hold fish. The bass even school up in the shallow water this time of year.

“Most of the time, my trolling motor is churning mud and silt. You would be surprised how shallow the bass can push shad this time of year. Do not be afraid to go really shallow.”

GO-TO BAITS

Moncrief utilizes three main baits.

In the early morning and evening, he depends on a Spro Bronze-eye Frog 65 in red ear color.

“Once the water temperature hits 80 degrees, these bass will try to destroy a frog,” he said. “Also, the frog can be worked through virtually any cover. The frog is one of my confidence lures, and (it) draws vicious strikes.”

When Moncrief sees a school of bass ripping through the shallow water; he switches to a 6-inch Slug-Go in silver pepper shiner.

“The Slug-Go creates a very realistic dying shad look,” he said. “I will throw it around trees using a jerk bait style retrieve.”

Moncrief’s favorite afternoon bait is a Wesley Warbird 1.0 in Sunfish Spawn color. He also attaches a Rage Baby Menace as a trailer.

“This is a great bladed jig with a distinct noise,” he said. “The blades actually hit the head of the jig and eventually beat the paint off — by design. It also tends to ride high in the water which makes it perfect for the shallows.”



Photo courtesy Rex Moncrief

Rex Moncrief said he can catch big, Caddo Lake bass in relatively shallow water this month.

CADDO LAKE NEWBIES

New anglers on Caddo should use caution when navigating the lake due to the shallow water and numerous hazards.

“Caddo has a lot of cypress knees, stumps, and other obstacles,” Moncrief said. “However, it is marked well, and all the major GPS units have great maps for navigation.”

Following these tips from Moncrief will give anyone a good start to catching fish on Caddo Lake. When in doubt; find some shallow water and start fishing.

“Do not let the shallow water and millions of trees confuse you, and do not be afraid to go really shallow,” Moncrief said. ■

— Justin Adkins

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OUACHITA RIVER CRAPPIE REMAIN A HOT, SUMMER BITE

Slabs move from lakes to main channel

For years, the Ouachita River's summer crappie fishing sort of flew under the radar. Some folks fished the river's lakes and the fallen tops and brush along the river channel with good success. But now, the river has become one of the go-to crappie holes in north Louisiana.

Meandering almost 100 miles from the Arkansas line to below Jonesville, the river's backwaters have been on fire with crappie the past couple of months. And with the river now dropped down to pool stage, the fishing has not let up. The focus has switched from the river lakes, many of which are cut off from the main-river access when it drops to pool stage, to the main river channel.

"One thing never changes, though: find the bait," said fisherman Jason Thomas of Monroe. "When you find the big wads of shad, the crappie are close by."

"This time of year, the river itself is a prime target. There aren't fish in every top, but it's something you can't pass by. You may pull up and find two or three on a top, or you might come up to a big fallen tree and find 200 on the electronics. It's the same for the river lakes. The deeper ones still have crappie in them."

Thomas loves to fish the river for fun, but he also competes in several major crappie tournament circuits. This time of year, he never heads to the river without shiners.

"My boat doesn't leave the landing without minnows," Thomas said. "We do fish with a lot of artificial lures, like the Jenko Mermaid in lucky leprechaun color or hair jigs like the Jimmy Watt

jigs, but we also put shiner trailers on sometimes. If the bite is slow, we'll try a bladed jighead like the Jenko Slasher Spin."

Two things are key to river fishing in September.

First, Thomas looks for something many people hate: wads of gar. "If you see the gar swirling around and feeding, there are probably crappie in the same place," he said. "I was skeptical until I saw it so many times for myself on the LiveScope."

"The second thing is the thermocline. It's hot now, and the thermocline is visible even on less-sophisticated depth finders. Never fish below the thermocline. Trying to catch fish below that would be like looking for somebody eating supper under their table instead of above it. It just doesn't happen."

The bigger, black crappie usually prefer the river itself. Fish aren't all on the tops there, either. Sometimes, crappie find big balls of shad off the sandbars along the river's big bends, and they will be stacked around them there as well. The white crappie, which run a bit smaller, like the river lakes this time of year, according to Thomas, who fishes the river "lock to lock" — from the Arkansas line to the dam at Columbia. He said there are crappie up and down the river; you just have to spend some time finding them, and this is a good time of year to do just that.

Improved public landings, including the Alabama Landing near Marion, the Sterlington ramp, Forsythe Park, Riverton and Columbia all offer multi-lane concrete ramps and good parking. ■

— Kinny Haddox

Late summer hasn't slowed down the spunky Ouachita River crappie, as these two 1.90-pound slabs held by Jason Thomas show.



UNDERSTAND SEPTEMBER SPECKS

POST-SPAWN TRANSITION AND DIETARY CHANGES ARE FACTORS LOUISIANA ANGLERS SHOULD CONSIDER WHEN TRYING TO HUNT DOWN A LIMIT OF TROUT THIS MONTH. ■ By Jon Miller

For people, most of whom are detached from agriculture, the profound impact nature's rhythmic patterns bring to life on earth goes largely unnoticed.

What we do notice are the seasonal changes in temperature and weather, and while this is significant, Gulf coast anglers will do well to look deeper into the patterns of nature for clues that can lead to increased success catching species such as speckled trout.

This is especially true during periods of the year when major biological patterns change, such as September.

SEPTEMBER: MONTH OF CHANGE >

■ Ian Lovell, 9, caught this speckled trout in Hopedale.

SEPTEMBER: MONTH OF CHANGE

In coastal Louisiana, September roughly marks the arrival of a new pattern for the inshore fishery. For anglers targeting speckled trout, it is not a pattern that typically helps them catch these fish.

September is generally an easier month to be on the water, because cooling temperatures have diminished the violent and dangerous thunderstorms characteristic of summer. The slight decrease in water temperature could be perceived to result in better fishing than in August, when trout generally feed in low-light conditions and retreat to cooler water during the heat of the day. However, it is the tapering-off of the speckled trout spawn that makes September a challenging month to fish.

A fundamental characteristic of September is that there are roughly 2 hours less daylight per day than in mid-summer, and this physical change is a dominant force informing the speckled trout that the spawn is ending. During the spawn, speckled trout form large schools in high-salinity water because they are a broadcast spawning species. Biologists say that most spawning activity occurs at night, so anglers rarely fish schools of trout engaging in the spawning function. However, the necessity to gather near the time of spawning makes locating trout easier for anglers and thus increases the catch.

Of course, speckled trout are fundamentally a schooling species, forming schools as a feeding strategy. So certainly, for small and mid-sized fish, schools will still exist in September. However, when female trout have stopped producing eggs, they are released from the necessity to form spawning schools and the need for high-salinity water. Male trout, which also school during the spawn and drum to attract females, will follow the same patterns of post-spawn behavior as females. Thus, trout transition from the requirements of spawning to a purely survival mode, which makes finding large schools of trout more difficult. This gives September the reputation of being a difficult month to catch speckled trout.

One bright spot for Louisiana anglers is that a new generation of female trout have reached 12 inches, the minimum

size for harvest. These trout were spawned in the previous year's spawning season and are forming shoals of hungry fish. Sometimes, schools of 12- and 13-inch trout form that are large enough to allow a relatively continuous bite for a few hours.

WHERE TO FIND TROUT

Most of Louisiana's spawning trout have spent the summer in the high-salinity water of coastal sounds, the mouth of coastal bays, around barrier islands and around nearshore rigs. Even though spawn ends in September, there is no rush for trout to leave these areas.

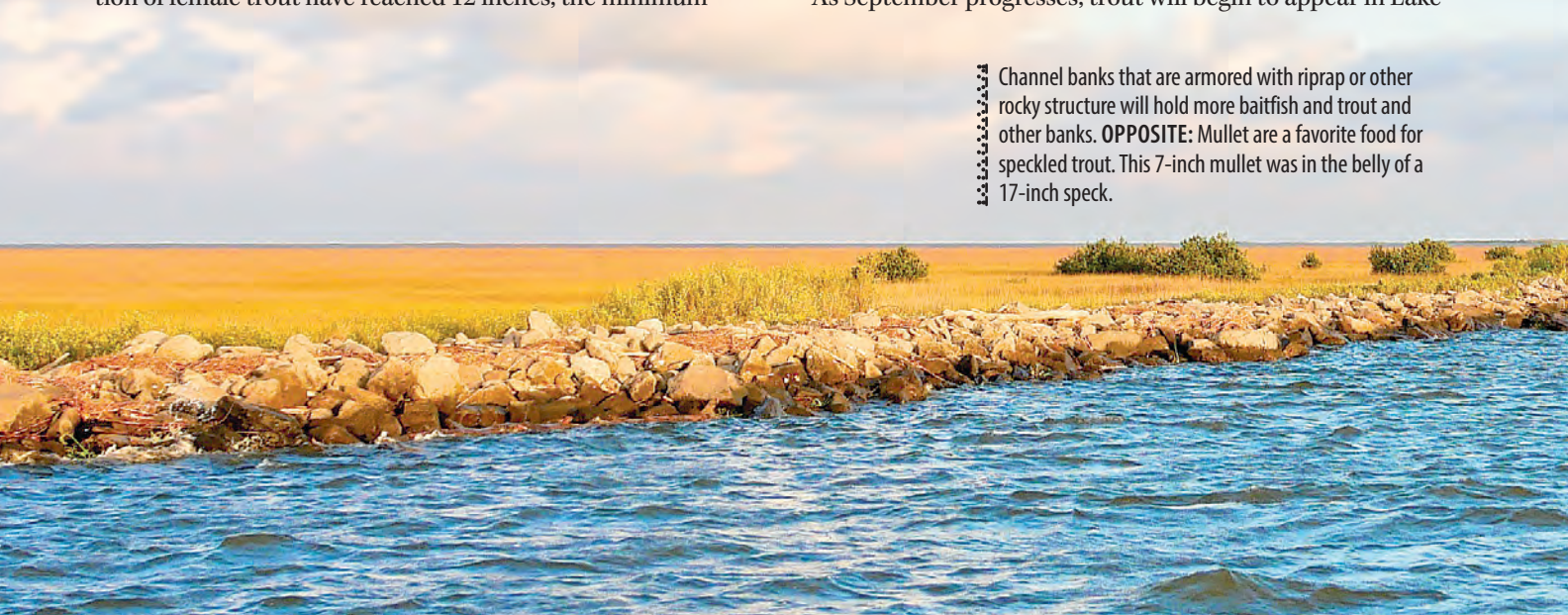
Since survival is now the primary objective, trout will be motivated to inhabit areas where they can moderate their metabolic rate with cooler water and where there is ample bait. A third consideration is areas where predators can be avoided, although this must be a lesser motivating factor than the other two. When considering areas during pre-tip planning sessions, start with areas where these three conditions intersect. Water turbidity and water flow remain important factors, since they are foundational to areas holding feeding speckled trout.

A type of area that often has the three conditions are the edges of deep channels and passes. The presence of rock armoring on channel banks seems to create a more-desirable habitat than sediment banks. In September, large schools of 12- and 13-inch trout take up residence in the MRGO channel. Oriented north/south, the channel provides continuous habitat stretching from where the trout spent the summer, to where they will be in October. Anglers fishing somewhere along this path in September will find success in waylaying trout that are on the move.

Speckled trout will also be found around structure in open bays, including oil and gas rigs and on the hardbottoms of oyster beds and shell pads. These areas easily supply two of the three critical conditions: moderated water temperature and protection from predators, but they must also hold a large amount of bait. The presence of bait is not assured, however, so don't spend much time there if you don't find trout.

As September progresses, trout will begin to appear in Lake

Channel banks that are armored with riprap or other rocky structure will hold more baitfish and trout and other banks. **OPPOSITE:** Mullet are a favorite food for speckled trout. This 7-inch mullet was in the belly of a 17-inch speck.



Pontchartrain, more often around shorelines than bridges. Shorelines featuring submerged aquatic vegetation are a particularly attractive habitat for speckled trout, which cruise shallow flats with eelgrass beds, feeding on baitfish until the sun rises high. In shallow water, you can see the eelgrass growing like a carpet on the water bottom, but it will also grow in depths of 5 or 6 feet, so it's worth canvassing areas to locate deeper eelgrass beds. Widgeon grass can also provide adequate habitat, so these areas should not be overlooked. Fortunately, the vegetation serves to clean particles from the water, so water quality is typically very good around the grassbeds in Lake Pontchartrain.

**A TROUT'S
SEPTEMBER DIET >**



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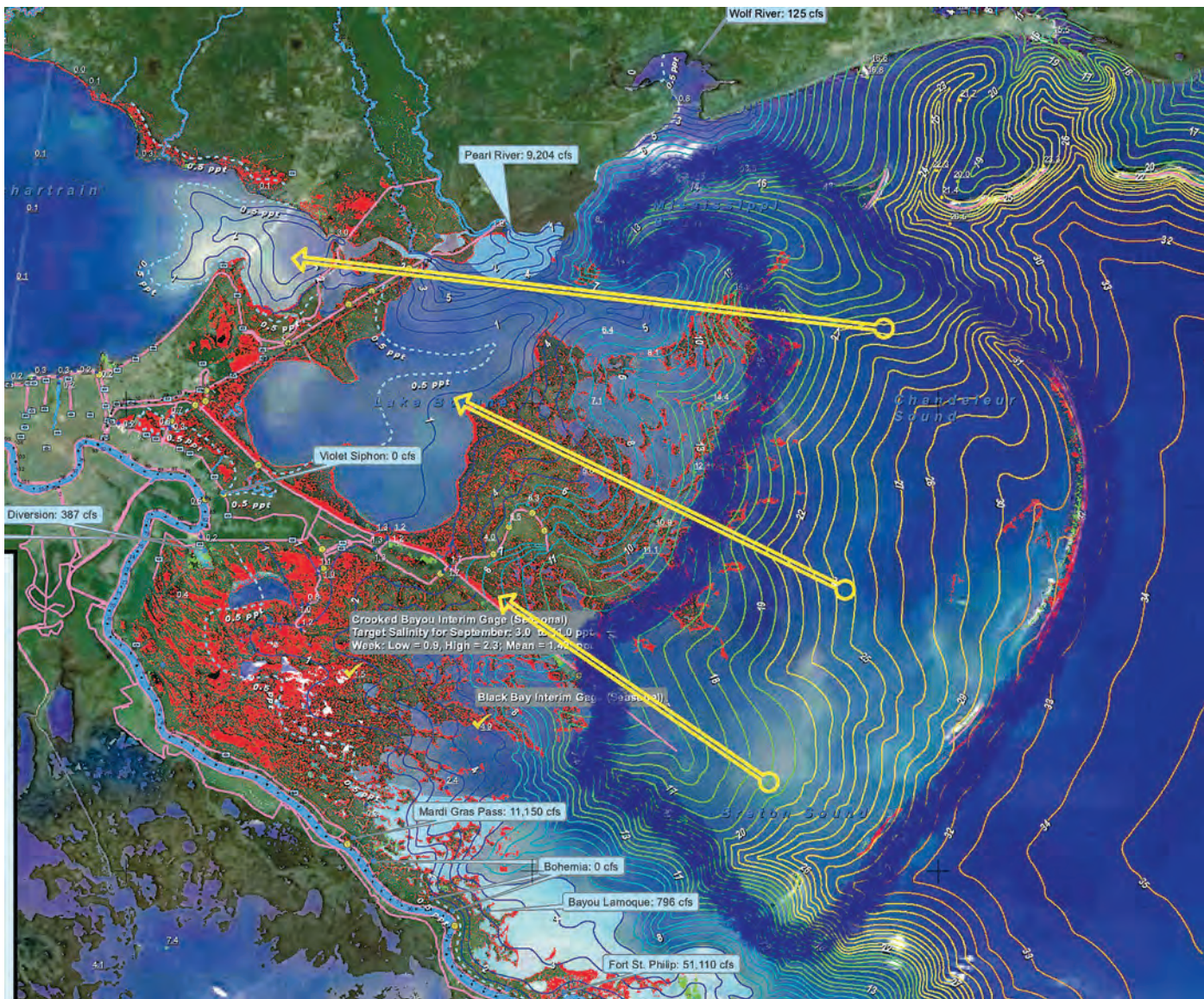
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A TROUT'S SEPTEMBER DIET

For several months preceding September, most of the legal-sized trout have been eating a diet consisting largely of white and brown shrimp. According to biologists from the University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, a diet high in shrimp is beneficial for optimal reproduction.

Adult shrimp are plentiful in high-salinity areas where trout have been spawning, but the numbers of shrimp decrease by September due to predation and human harvest. Shrimp are destined for a short lifespan in modern times. They can grow quite large, up to 12 inches, but very few have the chance to do so. Almost everything in the water eats shrimp, and humans harvest them in large numbers. In Louisiana, annual harvests are in the range of 100 million pounds. While early in the summer, most speckled trout are primarily eating shrimp; with the spawning period over and the shrimp population diminished, trout will turn to schools of finfish like mullet and menhaden.

Many speckled trout leave spawning areas (within blue border) for waters east of the Mississippi River and begin moving into estuaries in September.

This transition, from trout feeding on massive groups of shrimp to feeding on schools of finfish will reduce the number of fish in a shoal of trout. There must be a relationship between the number of trout in a school and the size of a school of baitfish they target. If there are too many trout for the amount of bait, some fish will expend energy to feed without gaining an adequate caloric intake, and this could cause some trout to leave a large shoal. Observations generally supports this theory, because many anglers catch more trout in a short period of time when the trout are feeding on shrimp than when they are feeding on mullet or menhaden. If the average number of trout in a school is reduced due to the available food, it could explain why "run-and-gun" is a commonly used fishing strategy for liming out in September.

SEPTEMBER STRATEGIES

For September success, target structures along a path from the lower estuary to the inside waters. Expect to find fewer trout at each spot you fish, so you often fish more spots and spend less time at each spot. There are certainly exceptions to this, but the size of the trout in these large September shoals are juveniles and just legal fish.

Artificial baits that are effective in September are not much different from July and August, but tight-lined swimbaits on jigheads are often more useful in September than in previous months, especially when targeting less-aggressive trout located in deeper water.

Hard baits for September are typically suspending or deep-diving jerkbaits and suspending twitch-baits, plus 3-inch paddletails on 1/8- to 3/8-ounce jigheads. The swimbaits should be fished on the bottom with firm twitches to lift the bait. For fishing grass beds in September, floating jerkbaits are often better choices. ■



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



Big baitfish tend to attract more trout as the fall progresses, so lures that imitate them take center stage for Louisiana anglers.

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Smart anglers treat September more like summer than fall.

WORST SPECKLED TROUT MONTH OF THE YEAR?

FISH ARE IN TRANSITION, MOVING IN SMALL GROUPS AND FRUSTRATING ANGLERS WHO WANT SCHOOLING ACTION

Poll a thousand Louisiana anglers about their favorite month of the year for speckled trout fishing, and September would barely make the top 12. It's not that speckled trout fishing what July is to Burlington Coat Factory.

It's not that NO speckled trout are caught in September; it's just that the number is closer to zero than in any other time.

There are a number of reasons, but the biggest is that September is the heart of the speckled trout transition. This month, trout are absolutely everywhere, which would seem like a good problem to have, but it can actually be really bad news for anglers.

Fishermen like the fish to be grouped up in certain areas, in schools that are so insanely large they seem limitless. We like to cast, feel that hard tap, reel in a fish and repeat until our limits are rapidly reaching the temperature of the ice that surrounds them.

We don't care that there aren't a handful of speckled trout scattered in the middle of the lake we crossed to get to the honeyhole. We seek the big schools, not the rugged individuals.

But in September, speckled trout are about as sociable as Antifa members at a Trump rally.

PODS, NOT SCHOOLS

They don't really group up anywhere, preferring to make their way to inland waters in twos and threes. That means, more times than not, September anglers who think they've gotten on a hot bite often watch it dissolve to absolutely nothing with only a pittance in the box.

Another problem with September is trout stocks aren't all that great this time of year. The fish have been pounded on by every swinging Richard with a plug that floats for the last 5 months, and all that pressure has taken its toll.

Certainly, new specks are being

recruited into the fishery every day, as youngsters clear the 12-inch minimum, but it takes time to overcome the attrition of the summer. That's why it always seems a higher percentage of fish caught in September are undersized.

But none of this means September is a month when you should keep the cover on the boat, waiting for the dry skies and crisp air of October.

If you manage your expectations, you can actually have some decent September success. You just have to move like a Jazzercise instructor. When a good bite wains, give it two or three more casts, and that's it. Don't wait for the school to turn back on. It probably wasn't



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

a school to begin with. It was just a handful of punks on a street corner looking for easy marks.

AUGUST, AGAIN

Also, successful anglers fish September like it's an extension of August rather than the beginning of October. Outside areas that held specks throughout the summer are more likely to be productive than the inside spots that will attract them next month. Think oyster reefs, beaches and wellheads rather than bayous, lakes and grass beds.

The only exception to that rule is if we have a tropical event or a significant southeast wind sometime during the last two weeks of the month. Specks ride that influx of clean, green water like a conveyor belt, and at the other end are white shrimp that spent the past several warm weeks getting long and fat in the nutrient-rich marshes.

High water toward the end of this month can often lead to action that will make you swear September is something other than the 12th best month of the year for speckled trout fishing. ■

SPECKLED TRUTH >

Reese Thompson enjoyed a fishing trip in Venice, catching this 3-pound trout.



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SPECKLED TRUTH

Chris Bush

A 28-inch speckled trout and a Corky Fat Boy have a story to which the author listens.

THE FAT BOY'S LESSON

WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM A FAVORITE BAIT? IT HELPS YOUR MEMORY; THAT'S FOR SURE

Christopher Bush

The teeth marks tell the story. Hopefully, the bourbon helps communicate that story.

Under a glowing lamp in my home, I'm surrounded by stories. Personified in various shapes, colors and profiles, these artificial lures bear the brunt of a deep, fishing underbelly located just below the surface. Through epoxied eyes, we've exposed them with good intent to some of the most savage and violent things. They wear the scars.

One bait in particular stands out: a very colorful Floating Corky Fat Boy, aptly named Texas Turnip. From the faint pink presence on its upper half to a glowing yellow chin, this bait looks fishy. However, its most notable feature is the distinct violet stripe running down its

dorsal. To a big-trout angler, profile and capability generally wins over color — at least from what I've seen — but this one is a little different. The Corky's famous exaggerated eye glares emotionless, and the blend of colors command a presence, so off she goes to the business end of a loop knot.

We often hear that fishing transcends time; I wouldn't argue otherwise. I still remember my dehydrated fingers configuring that knot and the gentle easterly breeze kissing my cheeks. Although nautical twilight was well under way, the cloudless sky made you question whether it was Texas or some flat located on the west side of heaven — jaw-dropping being the understatement.

FAT BOY FINDINGS

For years, I've fished Floating Fat Boys and, more often than not, I've considered them a complimentary bait to wary fish uncommitted to topwater baits. That day, however, I learned their distinct and precise capability: big profile, skinny water and super-aggressive fish.

In the days leading up to this trip, life's questions started to mount. A pandemic environment with social unrest loom-



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

ing, it was only fitting that a distant hurricane located in the northern Gulf brought water levels up, well beyond their mean. Bugged down by my own personal thoughts, I yearned for clarity, so off I went.

As I slid into my waders, I debated whether I should target deeper structure or focus my efforts up shallow. Remaining indecisive, a small slick out deep was the apparition I needed. The searing smell of watermelon quickened the pace of my pursuit, and my lure choice of a small soft plastic was the investigator for hire. Admittedly, I'm no stranger to this area, but given the fact it was early summer, my decisions went fully uncommitted. After almost an hour, with a few dink trout and an eager, young redfish, I quickly thought that the previous apparition was some sort of twisted joke crafted by the devil himself. Unlike him though, I remained true to my convictions to a higher power and believed that some big fish were up skinny — I had faith.

For years, I've always wade-fished with two rods. I keep telling myself that it's easier and more efficient to wade with just one, but year after year, I feel that subjecting myself to such clumsiness is worth the effort. In short, today was that day. As I abandoned the deep stuff, I swapped my finesse gear for something with a little more power. Now, soundly wedged between me and my wade belt, I unsheathed the Texas Turnip.

Corky Fat Boys are so unique. Their pliability, density and hardware are unmatched in the saltwater world. Nose and tail bends applied by anglers up and down the coast from Virginia to Texas match not only their persona but the fish's as well. On this day, I chose a slight downward tail bend with a perfectly straight nose so I could keep the bait just above the grass in the water column. As I gave her one more quality check, her eyes and bright, shiny red hooks screamed, "Put me in, Coach!"

TAKE STOCK OF SURROUNDINGS

With the wind at my back, I methodically threw onto a shelf lined with lush sea grass. Mullets skipped happily nearby, but as the sun sank, carefree quickly turned to a matter of survival. Dinner-plate sized slicks earmarked those less fortunate, their oily residue a target for my lure to explore.

With more and more falling victim to a roaming wolf pack, the thump that followed made me question my bait's willingness to subject itself to such a savage world. Although it came back empty, the back hook neatly placed above the loop knot certainly remains one of the angling world's great mysteries.

Now realigned and my slack reeled in, I made another cast, 10 feet to the left of the previous one. A two-twitch cadence and a slightly elevated rod tip, I hear her trash-talking on the descent. This time not so lucky, a healthy 28-inch trout finds extreme offense to her communication style. With remarkable dissent, she hits the bait so hard that the braided line jumps, sending a shock wave all the way to your spine.

For more than 30 years, I've targeted trout, getting more serious with every passing day. I can assure you that the "thump" is the apex of a trophy trout fishing world. A myriad of lures in my fishing kingdom try to emulate, with some getting close, but my Corkys, both active and retired, stare down their counterparts with undeniable bravado. After all, they've been exposed to the meanest of the mean without backing down.

FACE THE TURBULENCE

With sunlight completely gone and multiple fish over 25

inches to include that 28, mosquitos encourage my retreat to fully functioning air conditioning. No doubt I found my clarity that evening. Even in the waves of the smallest bay, turbulence both in life and in fishing is always overcome by standing tall, being honest and always trusting that something larger than yourself is in control — trust being the key word.

As for the bourbon? It's a smooth Texas single barrel that has a great finish, but sadly, the ice has melted, and it's all but gone, minus one sip. As I look around, peering through the downward light, the lures hanging on my wall all have stories to tell. This one in particular, though, was not just about big trout pulled up on a shallow flat, or a Floating Corky Fat Boy, but about courage and how we navigate this unsettled world. The parallel here is that we share many of the same scars from our earthly life: ours being above and theirs below. It's when we go fishing that our worlds collide, and we gain greater perspective as to our purpose in life. Even though I don't envy my lures and the situations I put them in, they may argue the same — it's all about understanding. This day was all about clarity and the teeth marks communicate that. Hopefully, the bourbon found the words. ■

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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.

THE COVID KAYAK EXPLOSION

THE PANDEMIC HAS PUSHED KAYAK SALES HEAVILY





An unexpected effect of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a huge uptick in sales of kayaks. Although not specifically related to kayak-fishing, there is no doubt that segment of recreational kayak users accounts for a large portion of the overall sales increase.

With people searching for ways to escape the depressing constraints of social-distancing mandates, turning to outdoor activities fits the bill. Nature, exercise and safe space add up to make kayaking more appealing. Kayak fishing is an additional bonus.

Kayaks, and particularly fishing kayaks, have been on the radar of the NPG Group for years. This research and data company tracks consumer trends, sales and changes within a variety of retail industries. Kayaks' presence in the retail fishing industry has been a continuing growth segment over the last decade, and while many people and industries have suffered the devastating results of the Corona outbreak, kayak sales have been an unusual bright spot.

According to the NPD Group, "For the 12-month period ending in May 2020, including a period when everyone found it hard to look at their sales numbers, recreational kayaks racked up more than \$405 million in sales throughout outdoor retail channels."

The numbers could have been much higher. However, the unexpected sales surge combined with retailer and manufacturer shutdowns com-

pletely disrupted supplies of both new kayaks and related accessories. Retail customers found scant inventory and long waiting periods, keeping some from being able to make a purchase. While it is getting better, reports among kayak fishermen are still showing the need to pre-order, place deposits and sometimes shop far and wide to get the particular kayak they desire. The availability is getting better, but still nowhere near back to normal.

The outdoor retail industry is realizing that recreational kayaking continues to become a more significant sales opportunity than traditionally assumed. From those looking for exercise, a casual float or dedicated fishing-specific kayaks, the industry is moving from regionally specific markets to mainstream participation.

According to 2019 industry figures, just 10 short years ago, more people mountain biked than recreationally kayaked. However, with current numbers estimated at 8,690,000 to 11,017,000 respectively, the trend is obvious.

Much has changed in the kayak-fishing industry over the past few years. Once dominated by traditional paddle-propelled kayaks — with only one or two major brands offering pedal kayaks — virtually all major brands now offer some form of pedal-drive system. Additionally, electric propulsion is working its way into the mainstream kayak-fishing market.

V

The ultimate social distancing. These kayak anglers head out together, but separate, on a calm morning engulfed by a beautiful Saharan dust infused sunrise. Corona virus? What Corona virus?

PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued

From traditional electric trolling motors to specifically designed compact units, the evolution of lighter, longer-lasting lithium batteries makes adding electric power to kayaks more practical and efficient. Even some of the major kayak-fishing tournaments now allow participants to sport electric power while competing.

The kayak-fishing accessories market is also keeping pace. About the only thing I have not seen on a fishing kayak yet is radar — and doing so would not surprise me. Livewells, sophisticated fish finders, Power Poles, adjustable rod holders and on and on. If you can think of it, someone likely makes a kayak-version or some type of adapter to add it.

If you are looking to buy your first kayak, the multitude of choices can be daunting. The best advice is to figure your budget, and then try as many different brands and models that fit. Stability, comfort and fishability are major factors to strongly consider. What works for others may not suit your particular needs or style of fishing. Utilize kayak demo days offered by local dealers to compare numerous models in real time, on a side-by-side basis. There is no substitute.

Paddle, power, electric? There are options and accessories that actually allow you to have all three in one kayak if that fits your needs. Paddle kayaks are the least expensive, but many find that soon after buying, they are looking to upgrade. “Buy once, cry once,” may

be a smarter financial decision to get a kayak that will serve you well for years without the hassle of the buy, sell, buy-again process and potential loss on resale value.

You may already have fishing gear and most all will be suitable for kayak fishing. However, plan your budget to include some kayak fishing-specific gear that will make your trips more comfortable and productive. Safety should be top priority with a quality, comfortable personal flotation device as number one item on the must-have list. Louisiana gets hot. Get a PFD that is comfortable to wear in all conditions and wear it. Inflatable and new hybrid designs provide life-saving flotation combined with all-day comfort.

If you are new to kayak-fishing, you will find fellow kayak anglers helpful and supportive. Join a local kayak fishing club and participate in social media groups and forums. *Louisiana Sportsman's* report section has a dedicated kayak-fishing thread where you can get the latest fishing reports as well as advice and even meet up with other kayakers on fishing trips.

In these uncertain times, kayak-fishing can provide the perfect, safe respite from the craziness that surrounds us. You can actually participate in a social, group activity, yet still be alone. There is also no arguing about wearing masks— kayak anglers have been voluntarily doing that for years. ■

LURE REVIEW >



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Brian Stauffer shows off a beautiful speckled trout. Using the kayak to get into remote areas, Stauffer maintained proper social distancing with just himself and the fish. His “selfie” photo was taken remotely with his GoPro camera.



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LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

Egret's Vudu Shad are made in 3-, 4-, 5- and 6-inch sizes, pre-rigged with a hook.



EGRET BAITS' VUDU SHAD

For about a year, saltwater fishermen have been using Egret Baits' Vudu Shad to put fish after fish after fish in the boat.

The 3-inch, ¼-ounce and 4-inch, ⅜-ounce models are tapping the triple crown of speckled trout, redfish and flounder consistently, primarily in shallow flats and bays in inshore waters, as well as over reefs and in the surf. The 5-inch, ¾-ounce and 6-inch, 1-ounce baits are sticking fish in near-offshore and offshore waters.

What's more, bass fishermen are using the two larger sizes to catch striped bass, and the biggest Vudu Shads have been effective in the Northeast around New Jersey.

Ken Chaumont of Lake Charles, CEO of Egret Baits and a veteran in the artificial lure manufacturing industry, said he and others who contributed to the design were

counting on the soft plastic to "really go after a much broader saltwater market."

Mission accomplished.

With its "Tough As Hell" TPE (thermo-plastic elastomers) body, it's following in the ultra-successful, fish-catching footsteps of the Original Vudu Shrimp.

BEACH BITE BAIT

In mid-July, Chaumont was well aware just how well the 4-inch Vudu Shad was triggering a speckled trout bite along the beach at Johnson Bayou in southwest Louisiana.

"We're getting some good beach activity on the 4-inch because you can throw it a mile," he said. "When the tide's way up and they're in the first gut, I think it'll be a good surf bait, probably the best surf bait we've built. It has done very well in the surf."

Plus, he said, the 4-inch bait is expected to get larger speckled trout to bite when the water's a little bit cooler this fall.

What each of the four Vudu Shads have going for them — in addition to the TPE — is the serrated rear portion of the body with a nylon mesh weave and a boot tail that adds lift and thump to the soft plastic. Chaumont said that lift is a key to keeping the 3-inch model up in the target zone in the shallows, 2 feet of water or less.

Vudu Shad are well-armed. The 3-inch model has a 1/0 2X Strong

saltwater-grade hook. The 4-inch model has the same hook in 3/0 2X; the 5-inch in 5/0 and the 6-inch in 6/0.

JERSEY SHORE?

The call to build a big, soft-plastic shad originated a few years ago in New Jersey, Chaumont said. His biggest distributor there and fishing guides worked with him on the design. "Up there, they throw bigger baits," he said.

Several prototypes followed the first prototype; pre-rigged soft plastics must be precise, and this was no exception. Once Egret had the desired look, natural action and appeal, Vudu Shads hit the market six months later, in 2019. The bait was an instant hit in the Sportsman's Paradise.

"Ninety percent of the 3- and 4-inch sales are in the South — the Gulf Coast from Tampa to Corpus Christi," Chaumont said. "What comes out of Louisiana sweeps across to Texas and Mississippi, all the way over to Florida, real quick," he said. "We (Louisiana anglers) have so many miles of marsh and estuaries. We have so much developing ground to prove a bait."

For more information on the Egret Baits Vudu Shad and other Egret Baits products go to www.egretbaits.com. ■



The huge, 6-inch VUdu Shad is liable to food big fish like this bull red; in the Northeast, it's a killer bait for big striped bass.



Don Shoopman fishes for freshwater and saltwater species mostly in and around the Atchafalaya Basin and Vermilion Bay. He moved to the Sportsman's Paradise in 1976, and he and his wife June live in New Iberia. They have two grown sons.

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SEPTEMBER MEANS RIVER REDS IN VENICE

Slot reds take over as guide's No. 1 targets

Guide Pete Miller of Rodbenders Charters said he'll continue targeting bull reds until Labor Day, then switch gears and target slot reds in the Mississippi River system.

"In July and August, we focus almost exclusively on catching bull reds out of Venice," said Miller (225-921-9457). "Customers come to Venice from all over to catch the biggest redfish of their lives, and we have a blast putting them on the big, bronze rod-benders.

"That's our usual game plan every year until Labor Day. This year, Labor Day is Sept. 7, a bit later than usual, so that's when we'll switch from hunting bull reds to hunting slot-sized reds, fish up to 27 inches, in the river. The bulls get scarcer by then, and we always hope the river will fall, which brings saltier water into the branches and those slot-sized redfish along with it.

"The last couple years, the river stayed exceptionally high, but this year, we have a low river, which means the reds will move all the way up into the river system, and we (will) catch them in all the passes and the spillways."

Miller said September is not a great trout month in Venice.

"I consider September a transition month for trout, which makes it tougher to find fish consistently" he said. "Our best



Caden Jolie poses with some reds caught in Venice.

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months for trout come just a little later, in October and November, so I generally encourage our trout customers to wait until then to chase specks. But if they really want to go in September, I'll make the run out to the barrier islands — Breton Island, Gosier and Little Gosier, Curlew and Freemason — and typically catch specks and reds and toothy critters like Spanish jacks and sharks, and the acrobatic banana fish, occasional jacks and just a myriad of other stuff. It's a bit of a long haul and you need a decent day to make the run."

Miller said if present conditions continue — if the tropics stay quiet and the river stays low or falls further — the entire river system will be ripe with redfish: in all the passes, along the rock jetties at the end of the passes and in the spillways.

"The river is low, the water is green and the reds are already moving in," he said. "It looks like it's going to be a fantastic month."

Best baits: market shrimp fished 18 to 24 inches under a High Water popping cork, or Matrix Shad soft plastics in lemonhead, LSU or green hornet colors, he said. ■

— Rusty Tardo

Tiffani and Charlie Ferguson had a blast fishing out of Venice.





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UPPER MUD LAKE'S SEPTEMBER REDFISH BITE IS CONSISTENT

Overlooked water gets little fishing pressure

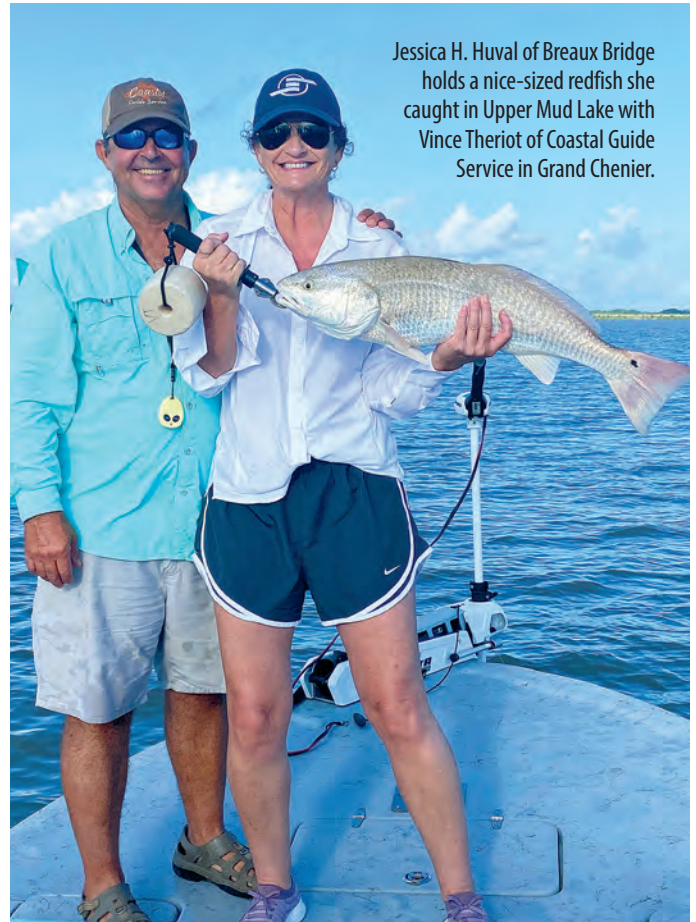
For most of his life, Vince Theriot has headed upriver from his home near the Mermentau River bridge to catch redfish and speckled trout, mostly redfish, in a place that rarely lets him down, water and weather conditions permitting.

The personable all-around outdoorsman from Grand Chenier, who has been a guide since 1997, cites Upper Mud Lake along the Mermentau River as his hot spot for September. It covers between 200 and 300 acres along the river where it meets with Little Pecan Bayou coming in from the eastern shoreline in Cameron Parish.

"Right there, it makes a lake. It's not a very big lake," Theriot said. "August is when it starts firing up. It goes all the way into October. September's kind of a transition period," he said.

One of the best things about fishing for redfish then is there is little fishing pressure.

"You will seldom see other boats," he said.



Jessica H. Huval of Breaux Bridge holds a nice-sized redfish she caught in Upper Mud Lake with Vince Theriot of Coastal Guide Service in Grand Chenier.

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Guide Vince Theriot clutches a redfish he caught in Upper Mud Lake on the Mermentau River.

Theriot said water clarity is the key to catching speckled trout, if they're up far enough to be in Upper Mud Lake. Redfish action can be fair to good most of the time, even in dirtier water conditions.

Some of the best fishing is on and around several oyster reefs on the south side that once were islands; only one of them is visible now; three are underwater.

"When the tide's moving, redfish get on there," he said. "It's easy to see the one island. Besides the shell islands and the reefs, there are a lot of hard, sand bottoms along the bank. If they aren't on the flats, fish the channel edge where it drops off. Whenever you see oyster shells on the banks, ease along and throw a swimbait around and pick up some real nice redfish, 16-inch legal size up to 30- to 40-inch redfish."

Some top areas include where the river enters the lake, especially the west and north-west side.

Early in the morning when the water's calm, anglers often can see schools of redfish chasing mullet. Those fish can be caught on Carolina-rigged live mullet fished on a Kahle hook. Theriot catches mullet with a cast net when he sees they are traveling upriver.

The artificial lure he'll have in his hand most of the time during September is a Vudu Mullet, either a black/chartreuse or a mullet-colored, grayish model, Theriot said.

He expects the Lake to give up more and more redfish this month.

"Water color means a lot on the river, and at that time of year, it's got clean water," he said. "Find clean water. Barring big floods or a hurricane or big, heavy rains where they have to open the Catfish Locks, you can still catch redfish." ■

— Don Shoopman



Photos courtesy Vince Theriot

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Parker Hanks put his bass fishing gear to the test with this oversized red caught in only 2 feet of water while swimming a sea shad!



BIG LAKE'S FALL RUN IS ON THE HORIZON

Let birds point out the shrimp and trout; reds, flounder won't be too far away

September is such a difficult time to be an outdoor enthusiast. Do I go fishing, teal hunting, alligator hunting or scout and prep for deer season? Or do I worsen my sleep deprivation and attempt to do all of the above? We are so blessed to have so many opportunities at our fingertips.

Fall is easily the best time to be on the water chasing trout, redfish and flounder; however, like many outdoorsmen I do find myself being pulled in several directions.

If we can continue to stay on the drier side of things, this may potentially be the best fall we have had in the last five or six years. Shrimp are moving out of the estuary, and the big three are hot on their tails, literally. It has been nice to see the number of shrimp being chased by fish already, a bite that should continue to improve.

The number of boats in Turner's on Big Lake will be ever increasing, and for good reason. The trout will be in there, waiting to

gorge on shrimp as they pass through, attempting to avoid becoming a tasty snack from above or below. On calmer days, shrimp can easily be spotted, skipping along the surface, fleeing the jaws of hungry trout. When it is a little on the rough side, some assistance from seagulls and terns is appreciated in locating trout and redfish feeding on shrimp.

If you would rather throw an anchor instead of drift or troll, the mouth of nearly any bayou will be productive on an outgoing tide, as they are easy ambush locations. The mouth of Black's Bayou can be exceptional; do not be

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surprised to find birds working there as well and throughout East Pass headed into Sabine Lake. Middle Pass and just south of Rabbit Island are also hot spots to check for bird activity over feeding trout and redfish. West Cove on Big Lake is another area to keep your eyes peeled for plenty of bird activity.

Bring a pair of good binoculars; they will save you a good amount of running time and help your wallet out at the gas pump. If you can see trout popping shrimp on the surface, one good way to judge their size is by the size of the foam ring left on the surface. If there is not much of a foam ring, you are most likely chasing trout that are too small to keep. Many times, you will hear trout slurping down shrimp before you see them. The sound is unmistakable, a result of the vacuum the trout makes by extending its jaws.

As speckled trout and redfish begin to gorge, they become much easier to fool with soft plastics. I highly recommend lighter colors in clearer water and darker colors in muddy or off-colored water. I use mostly 4-inch soft plastics in an effort to match the size of the shrimp they are chasing. A glow/chartreuse tail sea shad is a real moneymaker on a 1/8- or 1/4-ounce jighead. Fishing a Vudu Shrimp under a cork is also a deadly combination! If you are a topwater fanatic like myself, I recommend going with a bone-colored Spook Jr. The smaller profile and color mimics a shrimp relatively well, and hungry trout and redfish will compete with each other to swallow it whole. Whatever decision you make have fun and enjoy the great outdoors. ■

— Capt. Adam Jaynes



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



Oversized redfish like this one are a hoot on light tackle. Eric Saxe released this one to fight again another day.



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OFFSHORE ACTION OUT OF COCODRIE SHOULD BE GREAT

Grouper, tuna, AJs all on the menu

Offshore is going to be the main focus in September, according to Todd Black, a charter captain and owner of Fish Heads LA out of Cocodrie.

"Grouper fishing is going to be real good," Black said, "and the mangrove snapper are moving in closer. They have been relatively easy to catch this year, which isn't always the case."

Mangrove snapper are notoriously finicky biters, but this year, they have been fairly easy to fool, possibly because of the greater pressure on inshore fish this summer.

"Not only that, the cobia will be migrating back through," he said. "It won't be uncommon to see them patrolling around the rigs."

"Amberjack season opened up in August and should be in full swing. So amberjack will be game to keep, and they're always a great fight."

Amberjack season will be open until Oct. 31 — or until the annual quota is met.

Trophy pelagic fish will begin showing up as well. Black mentioned that they have to travel further offshore to target these species.

"It will be the start of shrimp-boat season, and the tuna will not be far behind," he said. "Tuna will typically follow the shrimping boats around. In September and October, the big yellowfin come in. This will be in about 200 feet of water off the coast of Venice.

"The blue marlin should be showing up, too, around the deep waters of the continental shelf."

They are a highly migratory species that can be found along the rip lines at this time.

"Typically, swordfishing is good year-round," Black said. "They're in about 1,200 to 1,500 feet of water."

INSHORE

September inshore fishing may come with difficulties, Black revealed.

"The water was so hot this year that it pushed the fish out quicker than normal," he said. "The bigger trout have been offshore in the 20 to 30 feet of water. Closer inshore, the trout have been relatively small, but there's been a good number of them."

"We would have 100 trout within hours of leaving during May. We even had 29 days in a row where we met the speckled trout limit, but there would be about 200 other boats ripping in trout, too. A typical Wednesday would look like a July 4th weekend out of Cocodrie.



Grouper should be a popular September target for offshore anglers out of Cocodrie.

"Honestly, we got killed by (the coronavirus) this summer. Everyone was off work. When I would normally see 15 to 20 boats out when I am taking a charter, I started seeing 200 to 300 boats almost every day. And this was through the entire summer.

"This isn't sustainable. This year, had the hardest July I've had on the water in eight years."

When the speckled trout start to transition into their fall behavior, it may get better, though.

"During September, the speckled trout are going to follow the mullet," said Black. "Especially, once the water starts cooling off. Where you find a bunch of mullet, that is where you will find the bigger trout."

"I've found more success using live croakers towards the end of the second shrimping season than any other bait for speckled trout." ■

— Dora Lambert



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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: ATLANTIC TRIPLETAIL

THIS UNIQUE FISH APPEARS TO HAVE THREE TAILS; IT'S FOUND FROM OCEAN TO OCEAN

The Atlantic tripletail, *Lobotes surinamensis*, is a warm-water fish that, despite its name, lives in many parts of the globe other than the Atlantic Ocean, including the Pacific Ocean. They are plentiful from Chesapeake Bay south, around Florida, and into the Gulf of Mexico.

Tripletails have rounded dorsal and anal fins that extend back almost to their tails, giving them the appearance of three tails, hence their name. They vary in color from silver to yellow to mottled black, and they can change their shade of color based on their surroundings.

These fish have disproportionately small eyes and large mouths, and as they grow, the fish's head becomes concave.

Commonly referred to as simply "tripletail" or "blackfish," these fish are somewhat migrational and are found in big numbers along the Gulf Coast from summer through late fall. Fisheries biolo-

gists believe almost all tripletail head offshore during the winter and stay there until late spring/early summer.

While scientists know little about how tripletails spend their winters offshore, the behavior of these fish along inshore waters is highly documented and witnessed by biologists and anglers alike. Anglers find them floating sideways under structure, which they use as shade and to ambush prey. From a distance, they look like leaves or submerged weed mats. Up close, they appear very lazy, but anglers see otherwise once a tripletail takes their hook.

Tripletails are easy to spook, but they quickly take a well-placed hook, especially one baited with shrimp.

STRUCTURE SPECIES

Crab-pot markers, buoys, surface weeds, or any floating structure are good places to look for tripletail. One

Mississippi angler reported catching a tripletail he spotted under a floating tennis ball with one eye in the shade of the ball.

Tripletails have hearty appetites. They eat a wide range of foods, including small fish, crabs, shrimp, and other crustaceans. They are very quick to take a baited hook, but anglers find these fish spook easily if their cast lands too close to the fish.

SUMMER SPAWN

Throughout the summer and into the early fall, tripletails spawn along the inshore and nearshore waters of the



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.

As the fish grows, its head stays the same relative size but the body grows, giving it a concave appearance. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Tripletails are commonly found floating just under the surface around buoys of all kinds or junk.

Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. Little is known about their spawning habits, other than it is the only time these fish gather in large numbers. When not spawning, tripletails are mostly solitary, but they sometimes travel in groups of three or four fish.

Due to their unique body shape, tripletails are rarely confused with other fish species. However, some inexperienced anglers have misidentified them as black sea bass and black drum. They have numerous nicknames throughout their range, but are most frequently known as tripletails or blackfish along the Gulf Coast.

Louisiana's tripletail state record is a long-standing one. Caught by Mrs. Jimmy Toups in July 1959, the record fish weighed 39½ pounds.

B.G. Gibson caught Mississippi's state record, a 37¾-pound, tripletail, in 1972.

Steve Hand caught the world record for the species in Zululand, South Africa, in June 1989. That fish weighed 42 pounds, 5 ounces. ■



Photos courtesy Fisher-Man Guide Service

SCRAPING FOR SHEEPSHEAD >



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Photo by Dora Lambert

Sheepshead feed mostly on crustaceans, so shrimp or fiddler crabs are great baits. **BELOW:** Fishing vertically around pier and dock pilings or seawalls after scraping off barnacles and oysters is a great tactic.

SCRAPING FOR SHEEPSHEAD

ON-SITE CHUMMING WORKS

By Dora Lambert

Joshua Bourg of Larose suggests that “scraping” for sheepshead is the way to catch them.

“I started scraping for them around 20 years ago,” he said. “I noticed that it worked really well, so I started sharing my technique with other people who target sheepshead regularly.”

The process involves scraping barnacles and other crustaceans off pier posts or sea walls, in effect, chumming.

“Before you start, you will need a garden hoe or a shovel for this to work,” he said. “Either one will do the trick, as long as the handle can reach where the barnacles and/or oysters are. You don’t need any specialized equipment other than what can be found in your shed.

“The next thing you want to do is to look for a piling or bulkhead that has barnacles and/or oysters. The deeper the water is, the better, and the more pilings in a small area, the more sheepshead that will gather,” he said. “The sheepshead will already be hanging around the area scanning for food, such as small crabs. Once scraping begins, they will all gather in the cloud of debris coming from the pilings

or bulkhead. It’s basically like chumming them with the existing food source.

“Once you locate a good spot, you should start to scrape a couple of pilings in an area. I prefer to put out a couple of baits at different depths. Once you figure out the depth they are, then you can adjust the other lines. Sheepshead will usually come to the spot you scraped, so you need a rod rigged to pitch. The more you scrape, the more sheepshead that will show up and the better bites you will get.

“I prefer to use fresh shrimp with a long-shank hook, when I target sheepshead when scraping,” Bourg said. “Other places swear by fiddler crabs. Fiddler crabs are a little difficult to get around here, unless you catch them yourself.”

Bourg said if you want to use them, fiddler crabs can be found along the beaches and saltwater islands where there is a good bank and marsh grass. But shrimp is king in Louisiana, and it’s the easiest local bait to get.

OTHER SPOTS TO TRY

“Not everyone is going to want to put in the time to scrape for sheepshead,

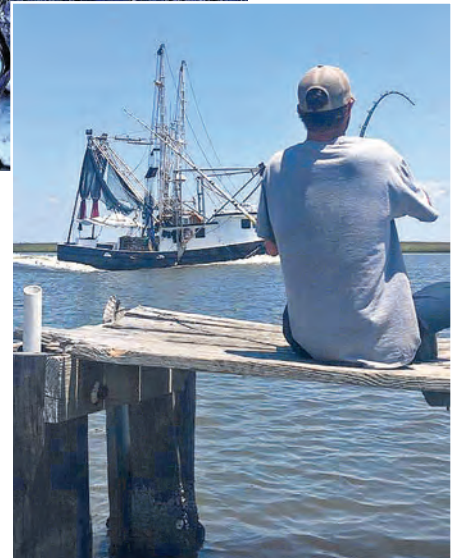


Photo courtesy Joshua Bourg

and that’s fine,” Bourg said. “These fish are found everywhere in the marshes, channels, and offshore.

“The platforms in the bay really produce! I’ve seen giant schools of them on some days. Several hundred will be podded up in the summer months. You would have to try not to catch one, if you come across these schools.”

“I’ve also seen sheepshead tailing a lot in the marshes when fishing in really shallow water. They can sometimes be mistaken for redfish.

“Oyster reefs are a great place to fish for them, as well. Look for bank lines with oysters and a little current running through. This will be like a highway for them. Again, shrimp and a long-shank hook will work. I prefer using long-shank hooks, because of their teeth. It’s easier to unhook them.” ■

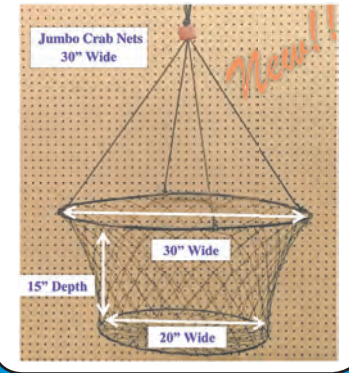
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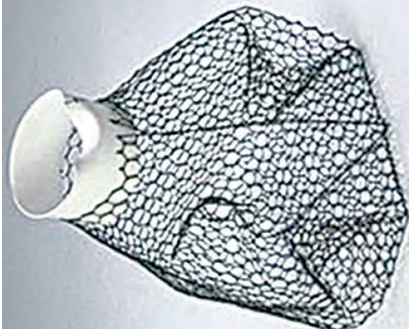


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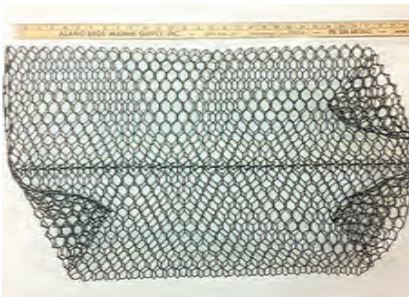
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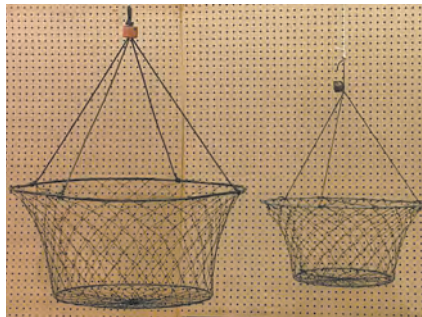
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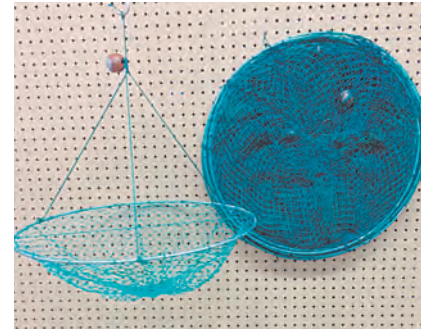
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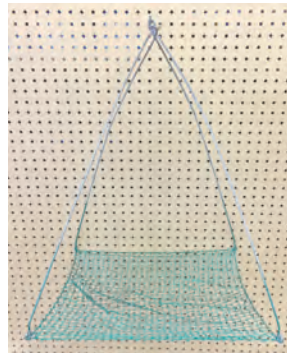
Crawfish Nets



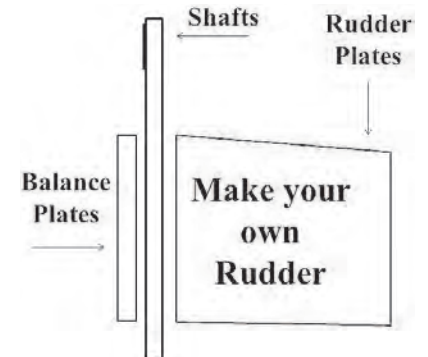
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Photo by Kevin Hood

SNAKE I.D.

LOUISIANA'S SNAKES IDENTIFIED PART II

By Kevin Hood

"Perception is based on many things, but not least your expectations. Lose them and you'll see things differently." –Unknown.

This is Kevin Hood with the Louisiana Snake ID Facebook page back to share more information about our native snakes in Louisiana. Our goal is to offer knowledge that can bring your expectations about snakes in line with the truth and hopefully shift the perspective that snakes are inherently "evil."

Out of the 48 species that live in Louisiana, we've looked at the seven venomous ones, along with seven that are non-venomous. We will continue with nine more of our non-venomous species.

Non-venomous snakes do not use venom to conquer their prey. Constrictors bite, wrap up and squeeze their prey with their bodies until they no longer feel a heartbeat. They literally constrict blood flow until it stops. Common prey for them would be some type of rodent or bird. Live-eaters conversely will sneak up on their prey, overpower it, and then quickly consume it while it's still alive. These types of snakes eat things like frogs, lizards, skinks, fish, minnows, worms, slugs, etc.

One of the most-common and incorrect myths many people have been taught is that "a diamond-shaped head means a snake is bad/dangerous." When they feel threatened, snakes will flatten their bodies and heads to look wider or larger. When this happens, their head takes on a "diamond" shape, so relying on head shape as a key indicator often ends with a harmless,

beneficial snake being killed. It's also important to note that there are non-venomous snakes that do have diamond-shaped heads and venomous snakes that have round heads. Snakes will also often vibrate (rattle) the end of their tails on leaves and sticks to appear more dangerous to a would-be predator. These defense mechanisms are important because snakes are vital to healthy hunting and fishing grounds.

With all of that being said, one of the most-important things to remember when identifying a snake is to use multiple indicators. Many characteristics can be considered when looking at a snake, including color, pattern, pupils, head shape, body size, the end of the tail or the presence of dark lines on their jaw. With all of the possible variations of these different indicators, along with the fact that different people can have different interpretations of any of these features, only using one of them is not an effective way to get the correct ID. For example, many snakes have jaws that are wider than their nose; that could be, and is often, misinterpreted as a "diamond" shape.

Three of this month's species fall in the rarely seen category, while the other six are seen very often and are some of the best snakes you can hope to find on or around your property. Be sure to keep in mind that the colors, patterns, width of bands and other characteristics can vary among individual snakes. The descriptions I'm giving are the most common, but they are not set in stone.

SLOWINSKI'S CORNSNAKE (PANTHEROPHIS SLOWINSKII)

These typically have a light, grey background color with pale red or light-brown, saddle-shaped markings regularly spaced down their back. Their heads will have an arrow-shaped marking pointing towards the top of their snout, and they will have a thin dark stripe that extends from the top of the head and through the eye towards the back of the jaw. Their belly pattern will be mostly white with dark markings that resemble a checkerboard. Their diet mostly consists of small birds and rodents, but they will occasionally eat lizards as well. This is a large constrictor that reaches an average length of 3 to 4 feet with a maximum length of 5 feet. Slowinski's cornsnake is only found in west-central Louisiana and typically lives in long-leaf pine forest habitats. They are skilled climbers and are often found in trees searching for prey.



Photo by CJ Hillard



Photo by Kyler Hood

RED-BELLIED MUDSNAKE (FARANCIA ABACURA)

These beautiful snakes, distinguished by their vibrant red and black bellies with iridescent black back scales are rarely encountered alive because they're mostly nocturnal. Mudsnares have a diet consisting mostly of amphiumas (large salamanders often mistaken for eels), and they spend their lives in the mud of swamps and low wetlands as their name suggests. Adults average between 3 and 4½ feet in length but with a record length of 81½ inches. They are live-eaters and have acquired the nickname "the stinging snake" because the tip of their tails is very sharp to hold down slippery prey, so when grabbed, they will poke predators with their tail with the goal of being let go. There are eastern and western Mudsnares; however, in Louisiana, we only have the western sub-species. Though they are found throughout the state, most people have only seen these guys dead on the road as they move at night and blend in with the asphalt. If you find one of these alive, please post some pictures on our Facebook page!

GRAHAM'S CRAYFISH SNAKE (REGINA GRAHAMII)

This relatively plain-looking species of snake is actually a very cool find. They are typically a medium brown or brownish-grey color with a light tan/yellow belly. They also have a distinct single row of black scales down the center of the belly. These guys are often confused with glossy swampsnakes, which we will cover in an upcoming article. Crayfish snakes are considered to be medium-sized and average 1½ to 3 feet long with a record of 47 inches. As the name suggests — though the spelling may drive us Louisianans crazy — these live-eaters feed almost primarily on crawfish and prefer them to be freshly molted. If you find one, it will most likely be around a swamp, bayou or wetlands area. Their coloration allows for great camouflage while basking in the sun on branches and when slithering away in grass and leaves. They are found throughout the state but are mostly absent in the Florida parishes and the far west/central portion of Louisiana.



Photo by Kyler Hood

KINGSNAKES & MILKSNAKES >

SPECKLED KINGSNAKE & EASTERN BLACK KINGSNAKE

(*LAMPROPELTIS HOLBROOKI*/
LAMPROPELTIS NIGRA)

One of the most easily recognizable snakes in Louisiana is the speckled kingsnake. They are very visually distinct, with bright cream/white speckles covering their dark bodies. Juveniles appear to have stripes, but their bodies are so small that many of their speckles are closely located in rows that will spread apart as they grow and shed their skin. These constrictors eat countless rodents and even other snakes, including venomous ones, because they are immune to the venom. They don't really have a specific type of habitat. I have seen them in all kinds of areas. Speckled kingsnakes are larger than some of our other native kingsnakes, as they average 3 to 4 feet long and have a record length of 6 feet. In Louisiana, we officially have speckled kingsnakes west of the Mississippi River and eastern black to the east, but they appear nearly identical.



Speckled kingsnake

Photo by Tyler Hood



Western milksnake

WESTERN MILKSNAKE & EASTERN MILKSNAKE

(*LAMPROPELTIS GENTILIS*/*LAMPROPELTIS TRIANGULUM*)

These snakes have alternating bands of red, black, and white/cream. The red bands are usually wider than the other colors and have a black band on each side. Those black bands then kind of sandwich the white bands between them. There is a white/yellow band around the back of the head, which is typically black, and sometimes they have white/cream spots on the nose. The belly is mostly yellow, or a pale orange or red, with the black bands extending onto it. Milksnakes, although small, grow to about 18 to 24 inches long. These constrictors often hide until nighttime, when they come out to eat lizards and small snakes. They're found mostly in forests under the bark of dead trees, or inside of them, and under fallen logs. While there are a couple of exceptions in central Louisiana around Alexandria, and in north Louisiana around Monroe, western milksnakes are found mostly in the parishes bordering the Mississippi River and in those along our Texas border. The very similar eastern milksnakes are only found in the northeast corner of the state near Arkansas.

Photo by CJ Hillard

PRAIRIE KINGSLAKE & NORTHERN MOLE KINGSLAKE

(LAMPROPELTIS CALLIGASTER & LAMPROPELTIS RHOMBOMACULATA)

Prairie kingsnakes range from a light grey to a dark brown base color. Across the body are dark brown or black, irregular-shaped, oval-like spots that are regularly spaced down the back, and more smaller dark spots are along each side. The belly will usually be white with irregular black markings. Their pattern typically shows more of a contrast in colors as juveniles, and then darkens with size and age. They constrict rodents and lizards, and occasionally small snakes. These are larger snakes that typically reach 36 to 44 inches. Prairie kingsnakes are relatively secretive and spend much of their time underground in forests or open prairies. They live in most of the western half of the state, excluding the coast, and are typically found crossing a road or under logs and other cover objects. Because they're closely related, I'll briefly mention the northern mole kingsnake here, however this species has not been seen in Louisiana since the 1970s, so it is very unlikely that you will come across one. ■

I hope you are learning some information that will help you or your family and friends correctly identify snakes. In the next article, we will be learning about the most common family of snakes you will come across in Louisiana: watersnakes!

Don't forget to check us out on Facebook at Louisiana Snake ID for lots of snake facts and fun. We can also be found at LA Snake Boyz on YouTube and louisianasnakeid.com. Snake education is our passion!



Prairie kingsnake

Photo by CJ Hillard

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FRESH TUNA SALAD, CAJUN STYLE

By Nathan L. Judice

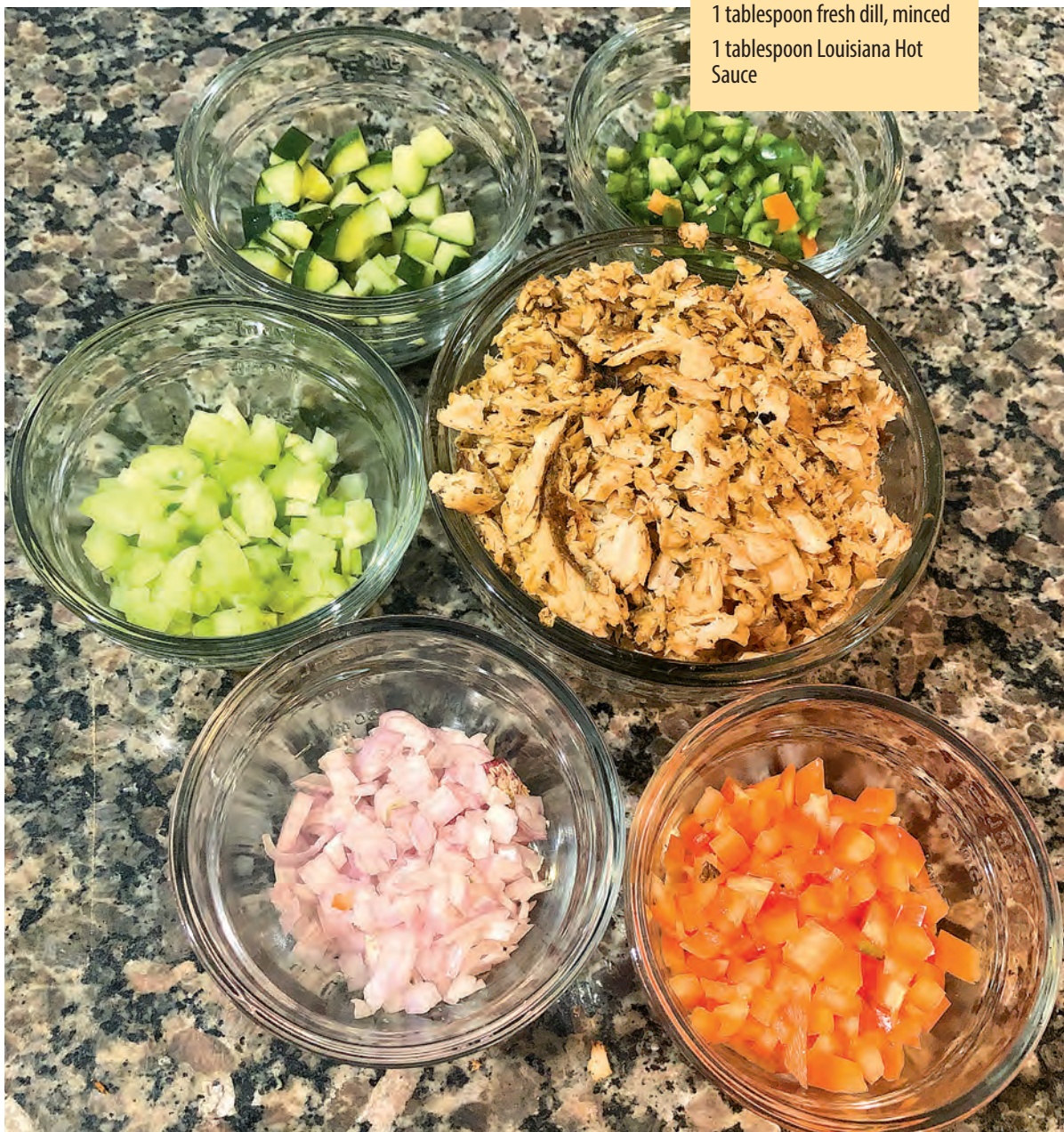
Tuna salad. Words that every school-aged child dreads to hear. Well, this isn't your cafeteria tuna salad. This version is made with fresh or frozen yellowfin tuna.

The Gulf Coast has some of the best tuna-fishing opportunities, with a relatively short run offshore. There's nothing that I love more than fresh tuna straight off the fish with a splash of soy sauce, but sometimes you just want a quick lunch or an elevated dip.

Don't count out other saltwater fish for this recipe, I have made it plenty of times with mahi mahi, amberjack and redfish with the result being just as tasty.

INGREDIENTS:

½ pound tuna (mahi mahi, amberjack, cobia, redfish, etc.)
 ¼ cup bell pepper
 ¼ cup shallots
 ¼ cup jalapeno or ½ large jalapeno
 ¼ cup celery
 ¼ cup cucumbers
 ¾ cup mayonnaise
 ¼ cup sour cream
 1½ tablespoons blackening seasoning
 1 tablespoon fresh dill, minced
 1 tablespoon Louisiana Hot Sauce





PREPARATION: Serves 4

- Season the tuna with a tablespoon of the blackening seasoning and cook until cooked through and let cool.
- While the fish is cooling, dice all of the veggies to a uniform size (pea size). If the jalapenos are hot or if you prefer, remove the seeds. I love the texture that cucumber peels add to this dish so I leave the skin on.
- Once your fish is cool or at room temperature, add the diced veggies, the remaining blackening seasoning, and the remaining ingredients.
- Serve immediately with crackers, on sandwiches, with a salad or place in the fridge for future tuna salad sandwiches that are sure to knock your Crocs off.

You'll find more great dishes from the Recreational Chef on Instagram at [instagram.com/recreationalchef/](https://www.instagram.com/recreationalchef/)

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MILLENNIUM R500 ROD HOLDER

Pontoon boats are increasingly being used and recognized as great fishing platforms, with anglers targeting a variety of species from their relative comfort.

Millennium Marine has taken a big step to try and help them out, debuting this year its R500 rod holder, specifically designed for pontoon boats or other boats that have existing rails. The rod holders mount seamlessly to round or

square-tube rails from 3/4- to 1 1/2 inches.

Constructed of anodized aluminum, the R500 has the company's patented Spyderlock technology that allows 360° rotation and incremental locking angles, allowing for drifting, trolling or still-fishing on anchor.

The R500 weighs 2.2 pounds and has rubber-coated contact points to protect your rods from damage. **MRSP: \$44.99**

For more info, visit millenniummarine.com/



SHIMANO'S VANFORD SPINNING REELS

Shimano has taken another big step toward providing fishermen with some of the best tackle on the market, this time with a spinning reel, the Vanford series, that combine light weight, strength and many of the brand's top-draw features.

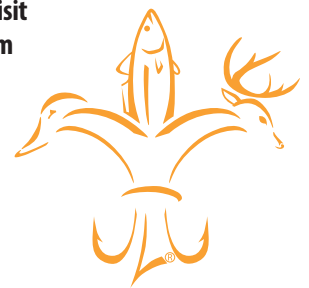
The Vanford series includes seven reels of different sizes, from the tiny VF500F, which weighs less than 5 ounces and handles 2-, 4- and 6-pound test, to the VFC500XGF, which weighs almost 8 ounces and handles up to 14-pound test mono or 40-pound braid.

The Vanford has a Ci4+ body that's light,

but with carbon-fiber strength, plus a MagnumLight rotor that provides almost 50% less rotational inertia, plus the HAGANE gear, Silent Drive and Micro-Module Gear for smooth performance. The Long Stroke Spool allows for greater casting distance. Its X-protect technology insures that it will repel the potential problems that the toughest saltwater environment can provide.

MSRP: \$229.99

For more info, visit fishshimano.com



WILDGAME INNOVATIONS RIVAL 20

Trail cameras have revolutionized the scouting aspect of deer hunting, and Wildgame Innovations' Rival 20 Lightsout camera is a great example of the hows and whys.

This camera will carry a 32GB card, allowing hunters to log thousands of photos, and it runs on 8 AA batteries. It comes with an adjustable strap and alligator clips to make it easier to attach to a tree, a stake — however you mount your trail cams.

The Rival 20 carries two lens, for daylight and nighttime images, it's a quiet camera with an infrared LED flash that won't alarm animals

when the shutter opens and closes. Images are of high quality, and the camera can be set to take photos at intervals of 5, 15 or 30 seconds, plus videos.

A bright, LCD screen allows for quick and easy selection of settings; it takes only a minute to set up once it's mounted.

RSPV: \$159.99

For more info, visit: wildgameinnovations.com



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

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

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

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

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:
The 2020 PrimeTimes Wall Calendar. \$13.95 (plus \$4 s&h). Know the best days, best times, and their relative strengths for all of 2020 with this information-packed, full-color, 11-inch by 17-inch, graphic peaks

and-valleys forecaster. Includes rise and set times for the sun and moon, space to log your catches, "Timely Tips," plus fish and game symbols showing you each month's don't-miss periods. Also includes exclusive summary charts revealing the best and worst days of 2020, the year's best periods, and look ahead at 2021, and more. Comes with FREE 2020 Astro Tables pocket calendar, which sells separately for \$8.95, plus \$3 s&h.
Book: "How to Know When to Go" by Rick Taylor. \$14.95 (plus \$4 s&h). 100 pages, 43 illustrations. A comprehensive look at the main factors influencing fish and game activity periods, plus how to devise an effective when-to-go game plan using any year's PrimeTimes calendars. Individual assessments of bass, panfish, deer, turkey, and more.

2020 Ultimate PrimeTimes software for PCs. \$29.95 (plus \$3 s&h, or no s&h if downloaded from web). The world's best forecaster allows you to fine-tune the peak times to your exact location, quarry, and even weather. Too many features to list here, including making your own App. For more details, please call us or visit our web site (see below).

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2020 SEP		BEST DAYS			
		POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL VALUE
Tue 1					56
Wed 2					62
Thu 3					53
Fri 4					45
Sat 5					38
Sun 6					36
Mon 7					40
Tue 8					43
Wed 9					51
Thu 10					62
Fri 11					54
Sat 12					50
Sun 13					51
Mon 14					60
Tue 15					69
Wed 16					77
Thu 17					79
Fri 18					66
Sat 19					52
Sun 20					38
Mon 21					30
Tue 22					32
Wed 23					40
Thu 24					28
Fri 25					23
Sat 26					23
Sun 27					23
Mon 28					34
Tue 29					45
Wed 30					55
		25	50	75	AVERAGE

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LUNAR PERIODS					
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED					
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
7:49 pm	Midnight - 1:14 am	6:00 am	12:21 pm - 1:39 pm	☀	☾
8:18 pm	12:35 am - 2:07 am	6:59 am	1:00 pm - 2:32 pm	☀	☾ FULL
8:46 pm	1:10 am - 2:58 am	7:56 am	1:35 pm - 3:23 pm	☀	☾
9:12 pm	1:42 am - 3:48 am	8:52 am	2:07 pm - 4:13 pm	☀	☾
9:38 pm	2:15 am - 4:37 am	9:47 am	2:40 pm - 5:02 pm	☀	☾
10:06 pm	2:47 am - 5:27 am	10:42 am	3:12 pm - 5:52 pm	☀	☾ Apogee
10:36 pm	3:20 am - 6:16 am	11:38 am	3:45 pm - 6:41 pm	☀	☾
11:09 pm	3:57 am - 7:07 am	12:35 pm	4:22 pm - 7:32 pm	☀	☾
11:47 pm	4:38 am - 7:58 am	1:33 pm	5:03 pm - 8:23 pm	☀	☾
	5:22 am - 8:52 am	2:31 pm	5:47 pm - 9:17 pm	☀	☾ HALF
12:32 am	6:11 am - 9:47 am	3:28 pm	6:36 pm - 10:12 pm	☀	☾ HIGH
1:23 am	7:05 am - 10:41 am	4:22 pm	7:30 pm - 11:06 pm	☀	☾
2:22 am	8:03 am - 11:35 am	5:12 pm	8:28 pm - 12:00 am	☀	☾
3:27 am	9:05 am - 12:27 pm	5:58 pm	9:30 pm - 12:52 am	☀	☾
4:36 am	10:09 am - 1:15 pm	6:39 pm	10:34 pm - 1:40 am	☀	☾
5:48 am	11:12 am - 2:02 pm	7:16 pm	11:37 pm - Midnight	☀	☾
6:59 am	12:15 pm - 2:45 pm	7:52 pm	Midnight - 2:27 am	☀	☾ NEW
8:12 am	1:20 pm - 3:26 pm	8:26 pm	12:40 am - 3:10 am	☀	☾ Perigee
9:24 am	2:24 pm - 4:10 pm	9:01 pm	1:45 am - 3:51 am	☀	☾
10:35 am	3:28 pm - 4:54 pm	9:39 pm	2:49 am - 4:35 am	☀	☾
11:47 am	4:32 pm - 5:40 pm	10:20 pm	3:53 am - 5:19 am	☀	☾
12:56 pm	5:34 pm - 6:32 pm	11:06 pm	4:57 am - 6:05 am	☀	☾ Fall
2:02 pm	6:35 pm - 7:27 pm	11:58 pm	5:59 am - 6:57 am	☀	☾ HALF
3:01 pm	7:33 pm - 8:21 pm		7:00 am - 7:52 am	☀	☾ LOW
3:54 pm	8:24 pm - 9:20 pm	12:54 am	7:58 am - 8:46 am	☀	☾
4:39 pm	9:13 pm - 10:15 pm	1:53 am	8:49 am - 9:45 am	☀	☾
5:18 pm	9:57 pm - 11:09 pm	2:54 am	9:38 am - 10:40 am	☀	☾
5:51 pm	10:36 pm - 12:02 am	3:54 am	10:22 am - 11:34 am	☀	☾
6:21 pm	11:11 pm - 12:53 am	4:52 am	11:01 am - 12:27 pm	☀	☾
6:49 pm	11:45 pm - Midnight	5:50 am	11:36 am - 1:18 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
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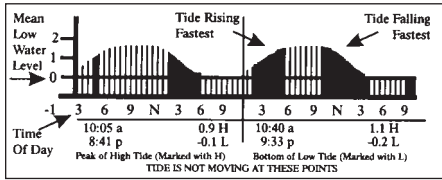
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How to use the SPORTSMAN Tide Guide



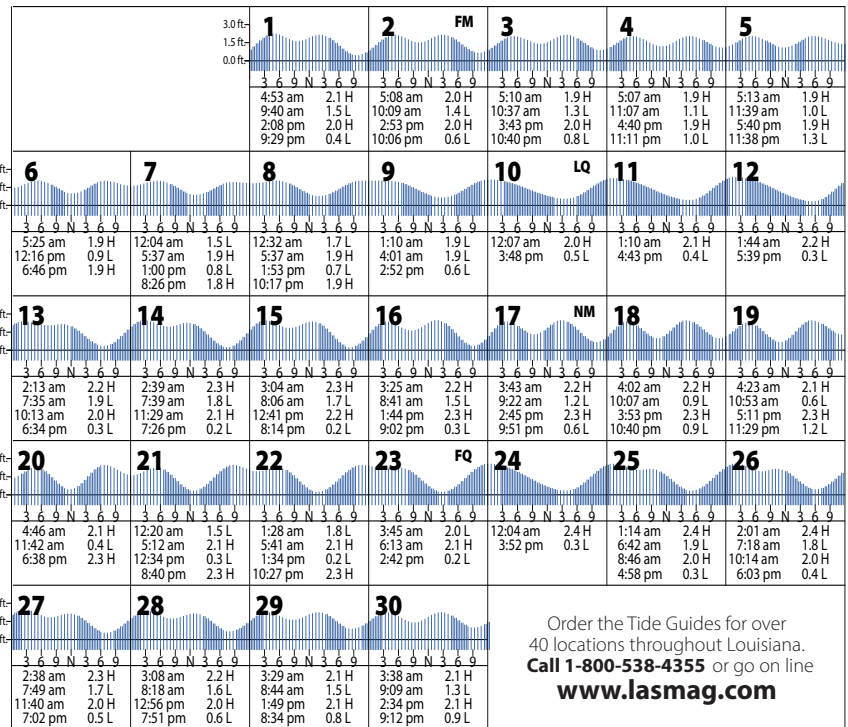
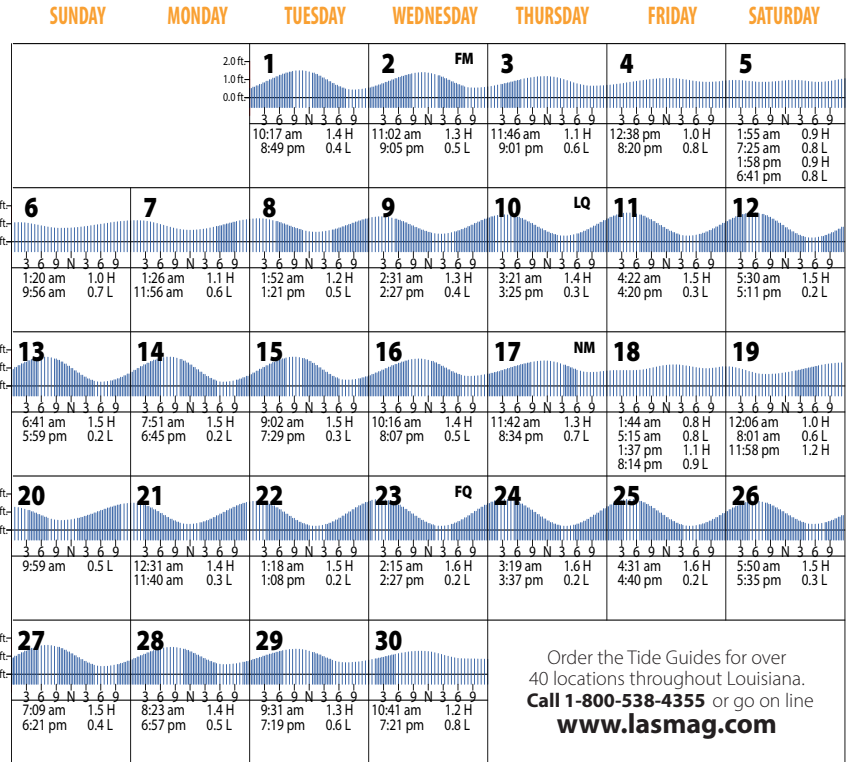
Fish feed most actively when the tide is moving. Louisiana Sportsman has made it simple to spot the most-active feeding periods each day in the Tide Guide. Just fish those times indicated in black. To find the best time to fish your favorite honeyhole, find the spot under Tide Corrections that is closest 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

East Point Grand Isle

Calcasieu Pass Lighthouse Wharf





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HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT	
DOVES+	(South Zone) Sept. 5 - 16 Oct. 17 - Nov. 29 Dec. 19 - Jan. 21	(North Zone) Sept. 5 - 27 Oct. 10 - Nov. 15 Dec. 26 - Jan. 24	15	45
WOODCOCK^	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31	3	9	
TEAL (blue-winged, green-winged, cinnamon)	Sept. 12 - Sept. 27	6	18	
RAILS* King & Clapper Sora & Virginia	Sept. 12 - 27 Sept. 12 - 27	Nov. 14 - Jan. 6 Nov. 14 - Jan. 6	15 25	45 75
GALLINULES*	Sept. 12 - 27	Nov. 14 - Jan. 6	15	45
SNIPE	Nov. 2 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Feb. 28		8	24
QUAIL	Nov. 21 - Feb. 28		10	30
RABBIT	Oct. 3 - Feb. 28		8	24
SQUIRREL	Oct. 3 - Feb. 28 May 1 - 23**		8 3	24 9

*An extended falconry season for ducks, rails and gallinules will take place from Nov. 4 - Jan. 31. ^An extended falconry season for woodcock will be Nov. 2 - Jan. 31. +An extended falconry season for mourning doves will be Sept. 17 - Oct. 3. **Spring squirrel season is CLOSED on the Kisatchie National Forest, some National Wildlife Refuges, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers property and some Wildlife Management Areas. (Check WMA season schedule)

WATERFOWL SEASONS

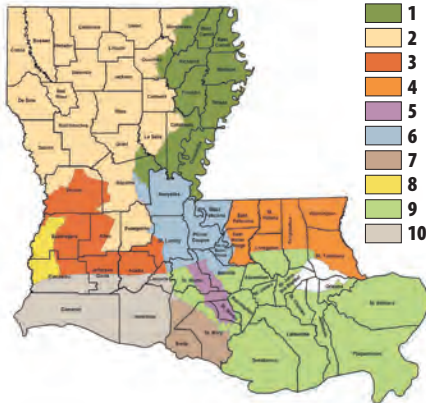
	EAST ZONE	WEST ZONE	COASTAL ZONE
DUCKS*, COOTS & MERGANSERS	Nov. 21 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 31	Nov. 14 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 24	Nov. 14 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 24
The daily bag limit for ducks is 6 and may include no more than 4 mallards (no more than 2 females), 3 wood ducks, 2 canvasbacks, 2 redheads, 1 mottled duck, 1 black duck and 1 pintail. Only 1 scaup may be taken for the first 15 days of the season with 2 per day allowed for the remainder. Daily bag limit for coots is 15. Daily bag limit for mergansers is 5, only 2 of which may be a hooded mergansers. The merganser limits are in addition to the daily bag limit for ducks. Possession limits for ducks, coots and mergansers is three times the daily bag limit. Youth only: EAST - Nov. 14 & Feb. 6. WEST - Nov. 7 & Jan. 30. COASTAL - Nov. 7-8.			
GEESE (snow, blue, Ross & white-fronted [specklebelly])	NORTH ZONE Nov. 7 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 31	SOUTH ZONE Nov. 14 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Feb. 7	Daily bag limit for light geese (snow, blue, Ross) is 20, with no possession limit. The daily bag limit for white-fronted geese is three, with a possession limit of nine.
CANADA GOOSE SEASON	NORTH ZONE Nov. 7 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 31	SOUTH ZONE Nov. 14 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Feb. 7	The daily limit for Canada geese is one per day, with a possession limit of three.
CONSERVATION ORDER FOR LIGHT GEESE	NORTH ZONE Dec. 7-18 Feb. 1 - March 7	SOUTH ZONE Dec. 7-18 Feb. 8 - March 7	No bag or possession limit. See pamphlet for more detail.



Only snow, blue and Ross geese may be taken under the terms of the conservation order, which allows the use of electronic calls and unplugged shotguns, and eliminates the daily bag and possession limits. Shooting hours begin one-half hour before sunrise and extends until one-half hour after sunset.

DEER SEASONS

2020 - 2021 Deer Hunting Areas



AREA	ARCHERY (Either-sex)	PRIMITIVE FIREARMS (All either-sex, except as noted)	STILL HUNT (No dogs allowed) (All either-sex, except as noted)	WITH/WITHOUT DOGS (All either-sex, except as noted)
1	Oct. 1 - Jan. 31	Nov. 14 - 20 Jan. 25 - 31	Nov. 21 - Dec. 11 Jan. 4 - 24	Dec. 12 - Jan. 3
2	Oct. 1 - Jan. 31	Oct. 24 - 30 Jan. 18 - 24	Oct. 31 - Dec. 9	Dec. 10 - Jan. 17
3	Sept. 19 - Jan. 15	Oct. 10 - 16, Jan. 4 - 10	Oct. 17 - Nov. 29	Nov. 30 - Jan. 3 (certain areas)
4	Oct. 1 - Jan. 31	Nov. 14 - 20 Jan. 25 - 31	Nov. 21 - Dec. 11 Jan. 4 - 24	Dec. 12 - Jan. 3
5	Oct. 1 - 15 (bucks only) Oct. 16 - Feb. 15 (either-sex)	Nov. 14 - 20 (either-sex) Jan. 25 - 31 (bucks only)	Nov. 21-22, Nov. 27-29 (either-sex) Nov. 23-26, Nov. 30 - Dec. 11 (bucks only)	Dec. 12-13, Dec. 19-20 (either-sex) Dec. 14-18 (bucks only) Dec. 21 - Jan. 24 (bucks only)
6	Oct. 1 - 15 (bucks only) Oct. 16 - Feb. 15 (either-sex)	Nov. 14 - 20 Jan. 25 - 31	Nov. 21 - Dec. 11	Dec. 12 - Jan. 24
7	Sept. 19 - Jan. 15	Oct. 10 - 16 Jan. 4 - 10	Oct. 17 - Nov. 29	Nov. 30 - Jan. 3
8	Sept. 19 - Jan. 15	Oct. 10 - 16, Jan. 4 - 10	Oct. 17 - Nov. 29	Nov. 30 - Jan. 3
9	Oct. 1 - 15 (bucks only) Oct. 16 - Feb. 15 (either-sex)	Nov. 14-20 (either-sex) Jan. 25 - 31 (bucks only)	Nov. 21-22, Nov. 27-29 (either-sex) Nov. 23-26, Nov. 30 - Dec. 11 (bucks only)	Dec. 12-13, Dec. 19-20 (either-sex) Dec. 14-18 (bucks only) Dec. 21 - Jan. 24 (bucks only)
10	Sept. 19 - Jan. 15	Oct. 10 - 16, Jan. 4 - 10	Oct. 17 - Jan. 3	



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Carter Barnett, 7, fished with his grandfather, Charlie Barnett, in Venice for some bull reds.

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



Carter Barnett

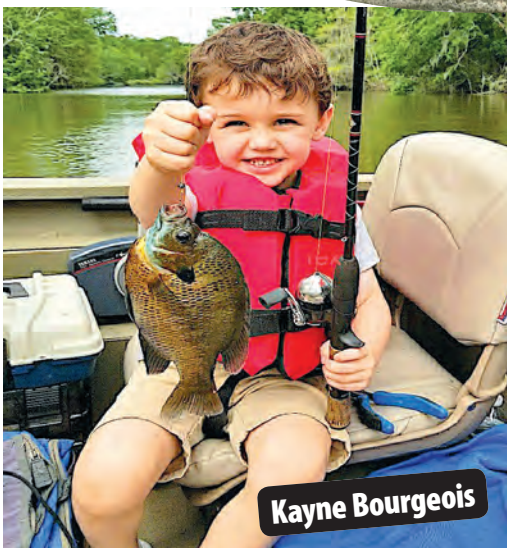


Caden & Koby Bruce

Caden and Koby Bruce duck hunting with their grandfather in Larose.



Scott Stefanski and crew after a good snapper trip out of Pecan Island.



Kayne Bourgeois

Kayne Bourgeois, 3½, caught his first fish in Four Mile Bayou near Lake Verrett, while fishing with relatives Travis Bourgeois and David Gautreaux.



Connor Wallace

Connor Wallace, 11, caught this 4½-pound speckled trout on July 30 in Pass Christian, Miss.

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Noah Dauzat

Noah Dauzat was on a hunt with his dad, Gabe Dauzat, when he used a Winchester 12-gauge with his dad's hand-loaded No. 6 shot to take his first turkey.

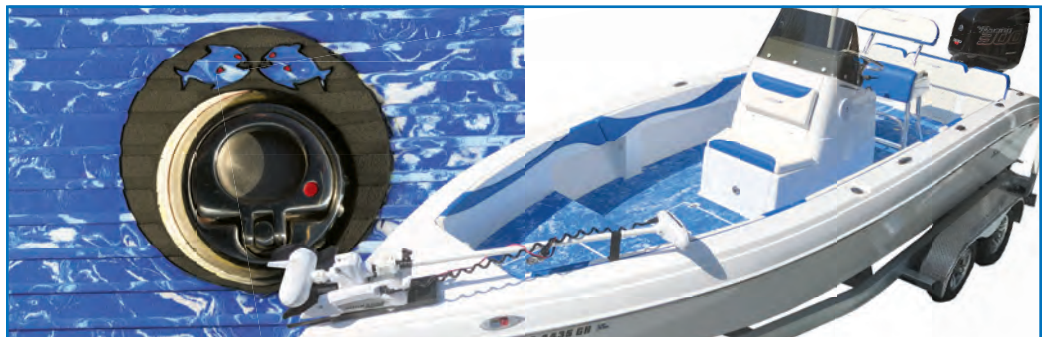


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Charlie Webre

Charlie Webre killed his first deer on Oct. 13, his seventh birthday, in Eden, Tex.



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Jim, Jolie, Jesse & Jace

Jim O'Banion and his grandkids, Jolie, Jesse and Jace, caught this nice batch of sac-a-lait on Lake Larto.



Jay & Teri Forrest

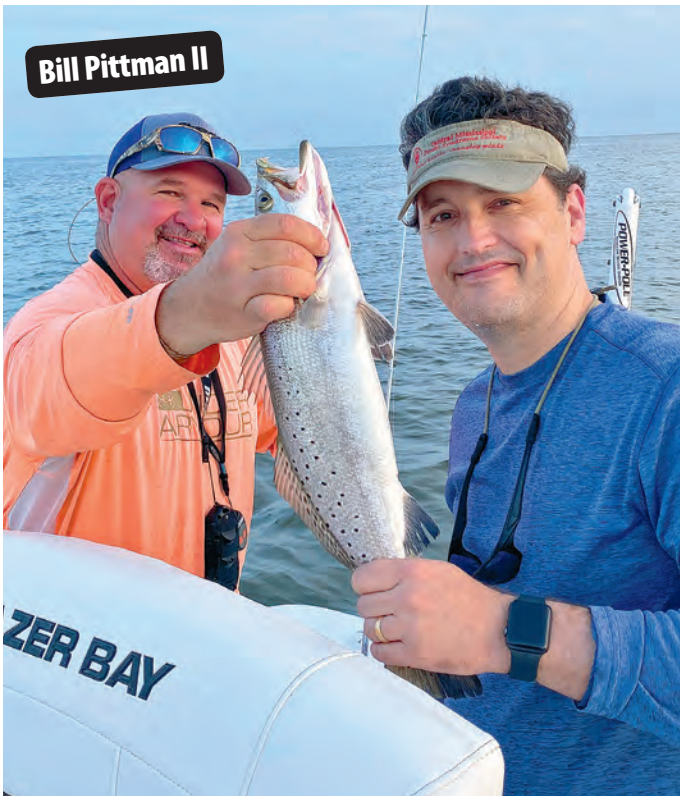
Jay Forrest and wife Teri in Timbalier Bay with a big drum.



Chance Pierce

Chance Pierce killed a giant oryx on Dec. 5 during a hunt made available by the Dream Hunt Foundation in Morgan, Tex.

Bill Pittman II (right) and Keith Crawford with the speckled trout Bill caught off the coast of Pass Christian, Miss., on July 30.



Bill Pittman II



Hadley Grace

Hadley Grace, 5, tagged out for the 2020 season with one bird in Washington Parish and one in Tangipahoa Parish.



Mary Barwick

Mary Barwick started fishing this July after a move from Atlanta. She caught this bluegill on July 25 in Madisonville near the drawbridge.



Reid Caro

Reid Caro, 7, hooked his first red at I-10 over Lake Pontchartrain on July 31, 2020.



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Reece Hardee

Reece Hardee's first 50-pound yellowfin tuna was caught out of Venice.



Phan Vo, Travis & Evan Clark

Phan Vo, his son-in-law, Travis Clark, and grandson, Evan, after a fishing trip on May 30 out of Venice fishing the West Delta rigs. Both Phan and Travis brought a big red into the boat, but as you can see, Phan had him beat. His bull red was 44 inches long and broke a little hand scale when they tried to weigh it.

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Lisa Daigle

Lisa Daigle caught specks and reds on her birthday on June 16 while fishing in Montegut around the Lake Barre area. All were caught on plastic under a cork.



Jared & Rhett Campbell

Jared Campbell and his son, Rhett, with crappie caught from Cypress Lake, near Benton in north Bossier Parish.



Joni Boudreaux

Joni Boudreaux of Raceland went on a 4-day getaway fishing trip. This was the first of two bull reds she caught on crab in Barataria Pass.

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Abbie, Halie & Makinzie

Abbie Bayham, Halie Rivet and Makinzie Maurer had two awesome days of offshore action out of Grosse Tete South, a camp in Cocodrie.



Kate & Matt Fontenot

Kate and Matt Fontenot pose with their catch after the Louisiana Junior State Bassmaster tournament in Toledo Bend on July 25. Kate's 4.11-pound fish was the Big Bass for the Junior division. They both fish for Lafourche Junior Bassmasters.



Maddie Howell



Dalton Diez

Maddie Howell and her boyfriend, Dalton Diez, had a great Aug. 9 fishing trip out of Venice.

Kane Lalanne shot this 200+ pound boar hog in Hecker.



Kane Lalanne



Ryan Kunert

Ryan Kunert with his Dec. 28 bow kill, a 180-pound 7-pointer, taken on Tensas River NWR.

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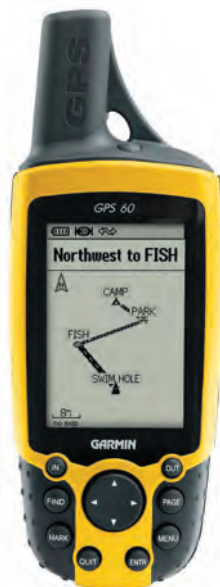
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Martine Bergeron

Martine Bergeron, 7, caught her first fish while fishing in a small pond on June 6 in Mandeville.

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This Month On SPORTSMAN TV, we've got all the info you need to prepare for fall fishing. Captain Charlie Thomason will be giving detailed advice on how to target transitioning trout and fall pumpkin redfish. Greg Hackney will be breaking down what makes bass bite and how to get it done. Come go with us!

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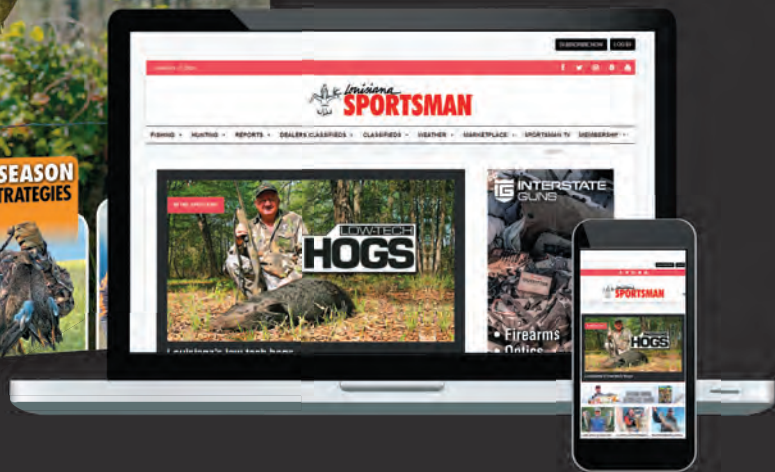
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