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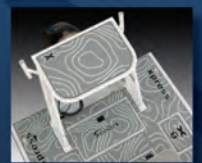
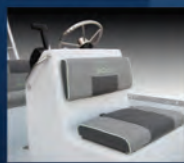


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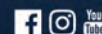
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UNDERSTAND, OVERCOME THE 'TRANSITION'



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Chris Felder of Ethel killed this massive, 10-point buck in full velvet on Oct. 1, 2020 in West Feliciana Parish.



THIRD TIME IS CHARM FOR BUCK

FULL-VELVET MONSTER FALLS IN WEST FELICIANA PARISH

By Glynn Harris

When Chris Felder, a 36-year-old home-repair worker who lives in Ethel in East Feliciana Parish, began cleaning the massive 10-point velvet buck he arrowed on Oct. 1, he discovered something interesting.

"The first thing I found was a mushroomed, high-powered rifle bullet in his shoulder area," Felder said. "When I was skinning in the neck area, I noticed some black spots, and on further examination, I found small shotgun pellets. The buck had survived being shot twice, first with a rifle and then with a shotgun, and his luck ran out when I put him down with an arrow."

The saga began a week before archery season when Felder found a single photo of the buck in full velvet on his trail camera. Getting off work early on Oct. 1, he decided to head to his stand on private property he has permission to hunt in neighboring West Feliciana Parish.

"I had hung a lock-on stand 20 feet up a tree, with big pines all around but adjacent to an oak flat with ridges on both sides," Felder said. "Before climbing into my stand, I had put out a pile of rice bran 20 yards or so from my stand. I also pulled the card from my camera to check and see if the big buck had been back. He hadn't, and all I saw was pictures of some smaller bucks."

THE WAITING GAME

As the afternoon wore on, just before 6 o'clock, Felder was alerted by footsteps in the leaves out from his stand. Whatever was walking would take a few steps and stop before proceeding.

"I began to see a deer's legs and figured it was probably one of the young bucks, so I reached in my bag and got my camera and began videoing," Felder said. "He took another step that put his head in a small opening, and I could see antlers through the brush and I saw enough to know it was the big one I'd seen on camera. At that point, I put away my phone and picked up my bow."

"It took, like, forever for him to come on out to the rice bran. He's standing 30 yards behind a little bush, and I could tell he was being very cautious; I'm getting really nervous waiting for him to come on out."

FALLING INTO PLACE

The buck finally stepped out into a clearing 5 yards from the rice bran, and Felder noticed he seemed to be sniffing it and licking his lips. He finally walked up to the bran, took a bite, and then



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Felder had only this single trail-camera photo of the buck before the season opened.

something alerted the buck.

"Something behind him broke a stick, and the buck turned to look in that direction," Felder said. "When he turned to look back, I drew my bow and was settling the pin on his shoulder when there was another noise in the thicket, and he took a couple of steps in that direction. I'm at full draw waiting for a broadside view, and what seemed like more than a minute I'm wondering should I continue to hold a full draw or release. I decided to hold my draw, and my arms began shaking, and I'm praying, 'Lord please let him turn back and get broadside.'"

The buck finally turned back toward the feed, presented a broadside shot, and Felder released his arrow. He shoots a Matthews bow, Easton arrows with Rage Extreme broadheads.

"He took off fast, but I felt I had a good shot placement, so I sat in my stand, calling my wife — and then my boss — letting him know I might be a bit late to work the next day, and he was fine with that," he said.

FINDING THE BUCK

Climbing down 20 minutes later, Felder went to the spot where the deer was standing and didn't find his arrow, so he decided to back out and come back later with some friends. The buck left only a small blood trail, but much to / relief, it was finally located around 11 o'clock that night.

The buck, in full velvet, had a rack consisting of 10 points with a double beam on one side with an inside spread of 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches and heavy bases. Estimated to be 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ years old and weighing around 185 pounds, the buck was scored with 152 inches of antler. ■

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Dustin Clouatre killed this 10-point buck at his hunting club in East Baton Rouge Parish.



BUCK TESTS FATE ONCE TOO OFTEN

TASTE FOR RICE BRAN IS TROPHY'S UNDOING

By Glynn Harris

A big 10-point buck pressed his luck one time too many on the afternoon of Oct. 1, opening day of archery season in most of Louisiana, and 33-year-old Dustin Clouatre, a St. Amant insurance agent, dropped him at 40 yards with his crossbow.

The saga began the day before the season opened when Clouatre drove his side-by-side to a food plot on a 3,000-acre private lease in East Baton Rouge Parish.

"We feed just about every day, so I went out that afternoon to fill the feeders and put out rice bran," Clouatre said. "As I returned to my side-by-side and sat down preparing to leave, I looked up, and this big buck — one we have had on camera a few times — emerged from the thicket and began feeding on the rice bran I had just put out.

"I always have my camera with me and was able to video him the whole time as he nibbled at the rice bran before he seemed to get suspicious and headed back the way he had come. I couldn't believe that he showed up so soon after I put out the feed."

TARGETING THE BUCK

Archery season opened the next day, and he and a hunting buddy headed out for an afternoon hunt. As they topped a hill near where the feed had been placed around 4 o'clock, they were surprised to see the buck at the pile of rice bran. When he saw the vehicle approaching, the buck ran back into the thicket.

"I usually hunt from my bow stand, which was next to the food plot, so I told (him) to drop me off at a box stand on the hill, because if I went to my bow stand, I'd have to cross where the deer had been feeding," said Clouatre, who hunts with a Raven crossbow with Raven bolts topped off with G-5 broadheads.

An hour after settling into the box stand, Clouatre looked up and, to his surprise, here came the buck, which obviously had a taste for rice bran and began chowing down on it.

"I was surprised to see him there once again, the third time in two days, and I got a bead on him and hit the trigger," he said. "When I did, the buck bolted, and I realized I'd shot just under him; the fletching on the bolt seemed to be messed up, because it made sort of a 'whoopy do' when I shot."

RICE BRAN ON THE BRAIN

An hour later, still in his stand, Cloutre felt that he had run out of chances to get his first buck with a crossbow. To his surprise, however, the buck came out again, apparently craving another taste of rice bran. This time, the bolt flew true, and the buck dropped in its tracks.

"I was thrilled to get him, but was a bit disappointed that he didn't run, because I have blood-trailing dogs and would have enjoyed watching them find him," he said.

The buck was taken to camp, where the camp scorer, Glen Redd, put the tape on the rack and measured the 10-point as having 145 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches of antler mass. The rack was impressive; its bases were more than 5 inches in circumference each, main beams near 20 inches each, with an inside spread of 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches. The 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ -year-old buck tipped the scales at 180 pounds.

"I would have liked to see what he might develop into in another year or two, but with his obviously having a death wish, he probably wouldn't have lived that long," Cloutre said. ■



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CLAIBORNE PARISH HUNTERS SCORE ON OPENING DAY BUCKS

By Dan Kibler

Opening day of Louisiana's archery season for white-tailed deer came was Oct. 1, and two Claiborne Parish hunters didn't waste any time filling tags with trophy bucks.

Matthew Hawkins of Denham Springs dropped a 10-point buck that scored 145 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches at 7 p.m., and 15 minutes later, Brandon Winters of Shongaloo slipped an arrow through an 11-point beauty. Hawkins, 35, was hunting from a lock-on stand in some pines



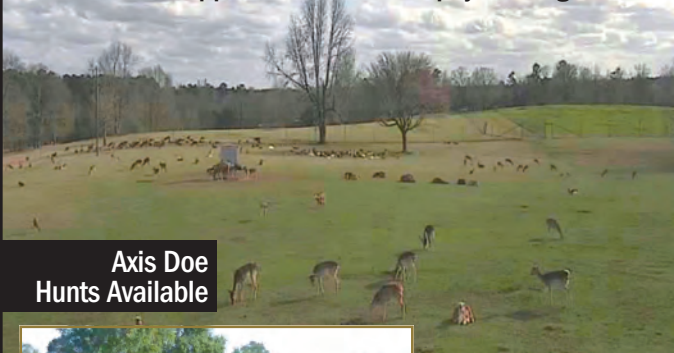
Matthew Hawkins killed this big, 145-inch Claiborne Parish buck, at 7 p.m. on opening day, Oct. 1.

that he considered a staging area where his big buck would feed on acorns from a couple of standalone white oak trees while waiting for nightfall. After dark, Hawkins said, he believed the buck was crossing a nearby highway to go into a field to feed.

"I had (trail-camera) photos of him in a couple of different spots," Hawkins said. "I had some photos of him in velvet, but after Sept. 8, he didn't have any velvet. I didn't have a lot of pics of him, but this spot was the most-recent spot where I had him on camera. I

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went in and had set up a stand.

"I didn't hunt in the morning because the wind was blowing the wrong way, but it was better for the evening."

NO TIME TO WAIT

Hawkins said a couple of does showed up about 6:30, and 30 minutes later, he said the buck "walked in and made a beeline to my salt block. He went right to it."

The buck gave Hawkins a broadside shot at 25 yards, and he took it with his Mathews bow and Easton Axis arrow, tipped with a Rage broadhead. The shot was true, and it wasn't long before he was standing over a trophy that featured a 16-inch inside spread, 9-inch tines and 21-inch main beams that scored 145%.

LET HIM GROW

Meanwhile, Winters was waiting for a buck that had made tremendous strides since the previous season, when he had several photos of him.

"I had trail-camera pictures of him this year and last year. Last year, he was a small 6; this year, he was an 11-pointer, with a split brow tine on the left side," Winters said. "He was a little, bitty trash buck last season, but he blew up from that."

Winters was hunting behind an old house, in an oak bottom next to a pond. The buck was regularly wandering in from a neighboring piece of property.

"The opening evening, he came in with two spikes," Winters said. "He came off the neighbor's place, right onto ours. He was watching the spikes.

"When I started out, the wind was shifting all around, but when he came out, it shifted to perfect, where it was coming right from him to me. He went right to a feeder, and I watched him for



Brandon Winters said the 11-point trophy he took Oct. 1 had "blown up" after being a "little, bitty, trash buck" in 2019.

a while, then he walked out. He was behind a tree, and I had to wait for him, but then he moved and gave me a shot."

At 7:15, the buck gave Winters, 23, a broadside shot at 20 yards, and he took it with a Mathews bow and an arrow tipped with a Rage broadhead.

"I hit him a little farther back than I wanted to, but it cut an artery, and he only went about 50 yards," Winters said. ■



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ARCADIA HUNTER: CROSSBOW BUCK IS A WINNER

FORMER BUS DRIVER FINALLY GETS HIS SCHEDULE IN TUNE WITH LINCOLN PARISH TROPHY

By Glynn Harris

Mike Chandler of Arcadia had a problem with a buck he was after on the 2,500-acre Simsboro Hunting Club in Lincoln Parish where he holds membership.

"I worked as a school-bus driver for the Lincoln Parish school system, which meant I was on the bus early mornings and late afternoons," said Chandler, 59. "I have had my eye on a good buck my trail camera had captured for the past four years. I had quite a few daylight photos of him, but when he was out in front of my stand, I was on the school bus."

Chandler recently retired from his job after 27 years of picking up and dropping off kids, so he now has early mornings and late afternoons free to do what he loves to do, and that's deer hunt.

"After I retired, I now work mowing cemeteries in the area, and I can pick and choose my hours, which lets me sit on my deer stand whenever I want to," he said.

The buck Chandler was targeting first showed up on his trail camera in 2016, and for four years, the buck appeared enough that he could recognize him.

"Over that period, the photos showed that his rack configuration stayed basically the same each year," he said. "I noticed that each year the rack would be a little wider

with a little more mass as he aged."

Having injured his back a year ago, Chandler was not able to shoot his bow, so he decided to go the crossbow route. Visiting McKinney Outdoor Super Store in Ruston, Chandler was outfitted with an Excalibur crossbow with Bolt Cutter fixed broadheads, a rig he felt comfortable shooting.

The afternoon of Oct. 2, Chandler climbed into his lean-up stand with a shooting rail that overlooked an opening between rows of young pines where he had scattered corn and rice bran.

FOREGO A FEEDER

"My stand is actually in the woods, with the little opening between the pines," he said. "I felt a deer might feel more comfortable there in the woods than in a larger, open area. Also, I don't use feeders, as I believe a mature buck will sometimes become leery about the feeder rather than just scattering feed on the ground."

"Some of my neighbors who hunt over feeders had never seen this buck on their cameras, which led me to believe he felt more comfortable feeding from the ground where there were no feeders."

Chandler looked up at 6:15 to see three bucks emerging from the woods to begin nibbling on the corn and rice bran. He



Mike Chandler took this Lincoln Parish 8-point buck taken on Oct. 2.

immediately recognized the buck he had been targeting as one of the three.

"The other two were nice bucks, but the one I was after was a better deer than the other two," Chandler said. "I waited until he turned just right at 43 yards — I had a marker for 40 yards, and he was just beyond that — so I touched the trigger and released the bolt."

THE QUEST IS OVER

The buck backed up at the shot and then collapsed on the spot. Chandler was elated that his four-year quest for this buck was finally over.

"When he hit the ground, after all these years of seeing him on camera and finally seeing him in the flesh, it's hard to explain how I felt knowing I finally had him," he said.

The buck with a symmetrical, 8-point rack with an inside spread of 19¼ inches, 5-inch bases and main beams measuring 23 inches each. Tipping the scales at 178 pounds, the buck was tentatively scored at around 140 inches and was determined to be at least 6½ years old. ■



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Tropical storms kept tides well above normal, plaguing hunters the whole teal season in St. Bernard Parish.



Darren Digby

LOUISIANA TEAL SEASON PRODUCES MIXED RESULTS

GOOD NUMBERS OF BIRDS OVERCAME WEATHER TROUBLES By Darren Digby

Louisiana's teal season is in the books, and much like the rest of 2020, it included a number of issues that led many hunters to struggle.

From the ongoing impacts of Hurricane Laura in southwest Louisiana to extremely high tides after hurricanes Sally and Beta in southeast Louisiana, the season had plenty of challenges. But a September aerial survey conducted by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries indicated that nearly twice the number of teal had made it down compared to 2019. As a result, reports across the state varied greatly from "best season ever" to the worst.

In southeast Louisiana's coastal marshes near Delacroix and Reggio, Mike Smith of Louisiana Marsh Guide Service managed to put together a decent season, despite storms that affected nearly all of the 16 days of hunting.

"Overall, we had an above-average season, saw more teal than we did last year," Smith said. "Even with the high tides, the birds started hitting smartweed in the area, and that gave us some areas to target them with good results."

FLOODING

Unfortunately for Smith and others, the persistent floods led to some cancellations in bookings due to access concerns, but for those that went, there was some success to be had.

On my own trips to the Delacroix marshes, we noted more birds than usual in our area to start the season, but they soon left for shallower waters once the tides started rising on persistent easterly winds. Success in the area was very spotty, at best.

The marshes of the northshore area, including Big Branch NWR and Pearl River WMA, suffered similarly from extremely high tides that flooded access roads and boat-ramp parking lots. Venice and the surrounding areas also took a hit from the two storms,

with significant impacts to key waterfowl habitat. However, for hunters able to locate the shallowest waters available — be they in the marsh or in flooded pastures — there was some strong hunting to be had on either side of the Mississippi River, with impressive reports coming from Pointe a la Hache as well as Myrtle Grove.

SW LOUISIANA SUCCESSES

In the rice country of southwest Louisiana, it was largely business as usual, with plenty of teal finding hunters' traps, in numbers some had not seen in recent memory. Haiden Richard with Southern Parish Outdoors had a very strong opening weekend, and the season stayed fairly consistent all the way to the end.

"We had 42 birds in 40 minutes on opening day, just unreal action," Richard said. "After that, we had a slow middle weekend but soon saw another push of birds, and it was on through the closing weekend."

Richard noted that it was the best season many could recall in the greater Gueydan area.

I was fortunate enough to take part in a lottery hunt at LDWF's White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area to close out the season and had a wonderful experience with plenty of birds for quick limits and a tour of the beautiful grounds the facility sits upon out in the marshes below Gueydan.

Others in southwest Louisiana made the best of what was left after Hurricane Laura's devastating impacts to coastal marshes. Some hunters even waited for overnight curfews to expire at 6 a.m. before heading to the blinds in and around Cameron Parish, with mixed results in the impacted marshes. For many, however, access to their favorite marshes was either physically blocked or denied by land management, thus keeping hunters out altogether. ■

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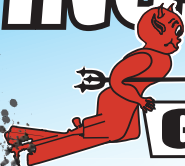
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SOLARI'S "GOAL STAR" TROUT

'YO, HOLMES, WE DID IT!'

By Kinny Haddox

When John Solari reeled in his 29-inch, 8.27-pound speckled trout somewhere off Calcasieu Point, he landed more than just another big speck. It was a "goal STAR" trout moment that had been a long time coming.

"Back in 2005, my best friend, Stephen Lanza, and I made a pact that we were going to catch the biggest trout and win the CCA's STAR rodeo one day, and we said no matter who caught the fish, we'd split the prize," said Solari, 36, from Jennings. "This has been a goal for 15 years, and even though not a lot has gone right in 2020, this is one thing that sure did."

If you happened to glance at Solari's Facebook page and saw the video he put together, you'll understand his message, "Yo Holmes, we did it."

Holmes is Lanza's nickname.

THE DREAM

The story actually started in 2005 when Solari and Lanza were college friends at McNeese State University. They started fishing together every chance they got and even coordinated class schedules to make sure they had plenty of time to fish.

They finally achieved their goal at 10:47 a.m., Saturday, July 18. It didn't come as an accident.

"Holmes can't fish in the STAR because he's an active guide now (Trout Mouth Charters)," Solari said, "so I was fishing by myself in another tournament, the Salty Catch. It's a two-day tournament, and you could start fishing at one minute after midnight, so I got to my spot, anchored and started fishing. I caught a few on top-waters, but I was really waiting on daylight

so I could use my cast net and get some bait. I just took a nap there in the boat."

"My goal was to try and catch a 6-pound-plus trout, because this time of year, the great big ones are rare. At 6:15, the sun came up, and I caught about 30 mullet. I caught a few good trout, but not what I needed. I stayed anchored on that one spot, and at 10:47, I landed the big one."

THE BIG WINNER

It wasn't as easy as Solari made it sound. First, he had to muster plenty of patience to sit on a spot he knew could produce a big, tournament-winning fish. It was near a deep spot with 60 feet of water where the fish laid up to cool off, but the trout would pull up onto a 2- to 3-foot deep flat to feed, and that's when he would catch them. He would see the big trout swim up into the shallows and feed and would cast to them.

"Oh my goodness, when I hooked the fish, I had to scramble around and get the net," he said. "I didn't see that one. I had seen a couple that would maybe go 6 pounds, but it was obvious he was bigger than that when he started splashing on the surface. Three times, it jumped out of the net, and I was afraid it would get off. But it didn't."

The trout won the Salty Catch tournament and held on as the biggest trout of the 108-day STAR (Statewide Tournament and Anglers Rodeo) as well. The STAR has more than 13,000 annual participants and is a major fund-raiser for the Coastal Conservation Association. For his catch, Solari won a fully rigged, 2140 Sport Nautica boat with a 150-horsepower Mercury outboard.



"We haven't exactly figured out how Holmes and I are going to split that, but I'm sticking to our agreement," he said. "We'll work something out."

BIG TROUT

Solari strictly targets big trout. In fact, he and Lanza were actually featured in *Louisiana Sportsman* in a July 2009 article, "Big trout tactics from two STAR contestants." He was also in the cover photo holding a 9-pound trout.

"I guess we've come full circle," he said. "We've always caught a lot of trout and done well in the STAR, but this is the first time to win. It's pretty exciting."

"As soon as I got it in the boat and calmed down enough to drive the boat, I headed to Calcasieu Point to weigh it on their certified scales," he said. "I was shaking so bad I could barely fill out the paperwork. I just knew that fish would win the STAR."

And when Lanza heard about it, he was, too.

"He was more excited than me," Solari said. "He had gone on a family vacation to Florida, but I couldn't wait to tell him."

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Speckled trout fishing is a family affair for Solari, his wife, Kerry, and sons Tripp, 7, and Phillip, 4, both of whom love to fish. They are pretty good at it. Tripp Solari even won second place in the Salty Catch youth division this summer.

For more information on the CCA or the STAR tournaments, visit CCA's Facebook page or website. ■

ANGLER CATCHES RARE FIREBACK GROUPER



Jacob Nosworthy caught this rare fireback grouper that measured 39 inches long while fishing Green Canyon out of Cocodrie in mid-August.

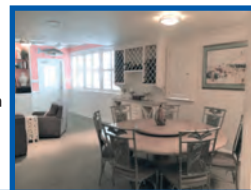
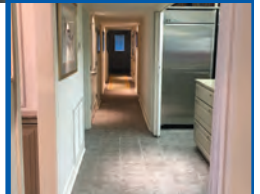
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FATHER, SON LAND BIG BASS LESS THAN A MONTH APART

By Ryan Arena

Matthew Gartner and his father, Tim, shared a unique bonding experience recently: the two each hauled in a whopper of a catch, virtually back-to-back, on fishing outings.

Tim Gartner caught a 10.21-pound, 26-inch bass on July 19. Less than a month later, on Aug. 16, Matthew followed suit, landing a 7.92-pound bass.

"To go back-to-back like that, it's kind of ridiculous, honestly," Matthew Gartner said. "There have been some big ones out of that pond in the past... When I caught it, I called him and said he needs to get over here with his scale to see this.

"I wasn't expecting anything. I was really just going out there to kill some time, so this was pretty cool to have happen."

A 10-POUND SURPRISE

Tim Gartner caught his fish during an outing at a private pond on the Northshore with family and friends. Just like his son, the big catch came when he was more or less killing some time.

"I had only caught a couple of eating-sized bass over an hour or so of bank fishing," Tim Gartner said, noting he used a green pumpkin big TRD Ned rig off the bottom as bait. "I made another cast and let the lure sink... while bouncing it back in I felt the bump of a fish and set the hook."

He knew immediately this wasn't like the usual hookup.

"It felt like I hooked a log at first," he said. "Then, she started to run. Almost immediately, she jumped, and my son's friend said, 'Good lord, Mr. Tim — that's a 10-pounder!' Four jumps and a lot of prayers later, we landed it by hand."



Tim Gartner's 10.21-pound bass was caught and released from a Northshore pond on July 19.



Matthew Gartner's 7.92-pound bass bit on Aug. 16.

The weight was almost exactly what the friend had predicted. "And to top it off, after pictures, we got her back in the water and watched her swim away, hoping she keeps passing those big-girl genes to more generations of bass," Tim Gartner said.

DO IT AGAIN!

Matthew Gartner took to the same pond a few weeks later while fishing with his cousin. That afternoon, he said expectations weren't high.

"We'd just talked to a couple of guys who said they weren't really biting, that they'd just caught one, as they were leaving," Matthew Gartner said. "We were just out there about 5 minutes when it felt like I caught something on my second time casting one out."

Whatever he'd snagged wasn't really moving much, but then the prize was revealed.

"This massive head popped out the water. It kind of freaked me out, honestly," he said. "This huge fish explodes out the water and into the air. I was beyond shocked when I saw it."

Gartner tried to get the fish to shore as quickly as possible so the line wouldn't break to not break before the fish could wriggle free.

The family's fishing success wasn't unprecedented.

"My grandmother caught two 8-pounders," Matthew Gartner said. "It's funny, because she does the least amount of fishing than any of us. This was a different experience. ... My dad and I had done something kind of like it while hunting. He shot an 11-point deer, and I shot an 8-point in the same year, kind of back-to-back again. This was the first time for anything like that fishing." ■

READER REPORT

It was a last-minute decision to go fishing on Sept. 26, while my wife and daughter went shopping.

Once I hooked this monster in a lake near Tallulah, I realized my drag was too tight, and I had to walk into the pond to reduce the tension on the line. When he came out of the water and shook his head, my mind played tricks on me, and I thought it wasn't real.

My son saw the action, ran over and said there is no way that could be a bass. When he came out of the water, shaking his head and trying to spit the hook a second time, I knew I had a bass of a lifetime. I finally got him out of the water, took a few pictures and video and released him to fight another day.

Since catching this bass, which weighed 10.5 pounds, there hasn't been a day that goes by that I don't think of this great memory. ■

— Steven Guttuso





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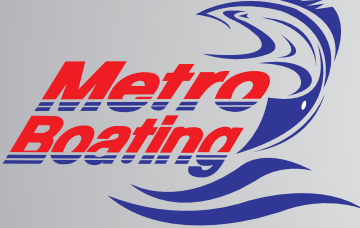


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Louisiana hunters can kill an extra specklebelly goose this season thanks to a regulation change that will allow three geese per hunter, per day.

Darren Digby

HOW 'BOUT 3 SPECKS?

INCREASE IN DAILY BAG LIMIT HAS LOUISIANA HUNTERS TALKING By Darren Digby

The Louisiana waterfowl season is only a few weeks away, and ducks and geese alike are steadily arriving at The Boot after a long journey from the breeding grounds.

A significant change will be put into play with the daily limit on specklebelly geese, aka "specks" increasing to three from the long-time limit of two, as announced this past March.

Haiden Richard of Southern Parish Outdoors in the heart of southwest Louisiana's storied specklebelly country, cites mixed feelings and concerns over the increased pressure and expectations from visiting hunters.

"There is certainly the potential for some big hunts, no doubt about it," Richard said. "When it's on, we will likely make some nice piles, but I'm afraid there are going to be some downsides to that limit change as well."

With higher limits, Richard and others have concerns about heightened expectations.

"We don't have the birds the area used to, so there will be plenty of days where the prospect of taking three specks per gun will be tough," he said. "On top of that, there's also the potential for hunts lasting

longer, with hunters wanting to stay in the blind late to wait out flights they hope will come to round out the larger limit, and I'm afraid that added pressure is going to be hard on our already pressured habitat."

SPECK NUMBERS

Telemetry data collected by state wildlife officials raises increasing concerns that specklebelly populations are staying further north than their historical wintering range, with north Louisiana and Arkansas holding more birds through the winter than previously.

Colby Daniels of Top Gun Guide Service near Mer Rouge is another guide who routinely puts guests on strong numbers of specks. He is coming off a very strong 2019 season and is optimistic that his area can support the limit change.

"Many days last year, we were done with our goose hunts really early, so adding another bird to the bag will give our hunters a little extra value for their money," he said.

This is particularly helpful in the early and late seasons when the hunts are goose-only because ducks are off-limits. Nonetheless, Daniels said he and his guides would have been fine with the

limit staying at two.

"The reduced number of days, however, may give the geese a rest at season's end before we start the snow goose conservation season, so that may help us with less late pressure," he said.

HUNTER'S ANGLE

From the average weekend hunter pursuing specks on his own, I'm optimistic at the prospect of being able to take full advantage for when that bunch does it just right. A particular hunt last season stands out, when a bunch finished beautifully at gimme range, and my limit was filled as quickly as I could pull the trigger twice. A third bird would have been just as easily taken in that particular instance, making up for many other times when the birds were too smart for our spread.

Only time will tell how this change impacts Louisiana's goose hunting. With ducks being fairly spotty in recent years, many are hoping to take advantage of the typically call- and decoy-friendly specks, but it may come at the price of additional pressure on an already-pressured resource. ■

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NOVEMBER'S RUT CALENDARS

The arrival of November means primitive firearms and rifle season gets under way in most areas of the state.

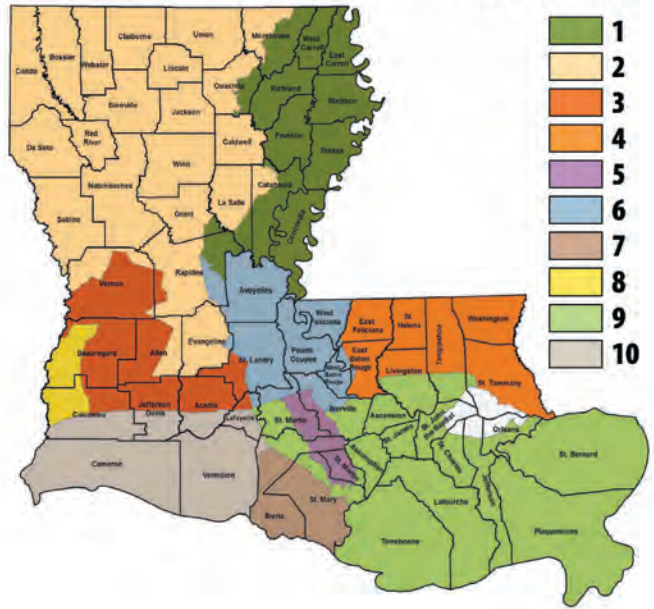
In southwest Louisiana (Areas 3, 7, 8 and 10), bucks will have finished up their second scraping period in late October, with the second breeding period forecast to take place from about Oct. 31 through Nov. 14.

Area 2 bucks will be wrapping up their first scraping period around Oct. 30, with the first breeding period running from about Oct. 31 through Nov. 14. The second scraping period will begin immediately thereafter, running through about Nov. 29.

Deer in Areas 4 and 9 will be in pre-rut through about Nov. 14, with the first scraping period lasting from Nov. 15 through Nov. 29, with the first rut starting immediately thereafter and lasting through Dec. 13.

In Areas 1, 5 and 6, deer will be in pre-rut beginning Nov. 15 all the way through about Dec. 13. ■

2020 - 2021 Deer Hunting Areas



NOVEMBER 2020 Areas 3, 7, 8 & 10

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14 2nd Breeding Period Ends
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

NOVEMBER 2020 Area 2

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14 1st Breeding Period Ends
15 2nd Scraping Period Starts	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29 2nd Scraping Period Ends	30 2nd Breeding Period Starts					

NOVEMBER 2020 Areas 4 & 9

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14 Pre-Rut Ends
15 1st Scraping Period Starts	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29 1st Scraping Period Ends	30 1st Breeding Period Starts					

NOVEMBER 2020 Areas 1, 5 & 6

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15 Pre-Rut Starts	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

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SCAN ME

POTENTIAL NO. 2 MUTTON SNAPPER IN THE STATE

By Monique Roth

When Lisa Schlitzkus booked her September charter fishing trip, she was planning on catching tuna, but storm-churned waters had something else waiting to be hooked: a 20-pound mutton snapper.

"We've been here before," said Schlitzkus, who hails from Lake City, Fla. "We come to Louisiana all the time to fish; we love it. We were originally coming to catch tuna, but because of the storm, we targeted bottomfish."

Schlitzkus said the change in plans had her and her crew searching for big grouper in the Gulf out of Port Fourchon Marina; she was shocked when she reeled in a massive mutton snapper.

"It's not the biggest fish I've ever caught," she said. "But it's definitely the biggest mutton snapper."

Joey Maciasz with Down the Bayou Charters facilitated the trip. He said paperwork on the catch is being processed, as it has the potential to be the No. 2 mutton snapper in Louisiana history at 20 pounds.

"She is from Florida, so it's cool because we caught a Florida fish," he said. "They're normally caught in Florida and the Bahamas ... really, any Caribbean area, because it's a reef fish. We caught it in about 250 foot of water."

Maciasz said the 7-minute battle Schlitzkus waged against the snapper yielded surprising results.

"It was such a big mutton snapper that we thought it was a hybrid," he said. "It was so large that we had never seen a mutton snapper that big. Once we got back to the dock and had a biologist identify it, we were pretty shocked."

UNIQUE CATCHES

Maciasz said it is probable that the hurricane season, which frequently churned Gulf of Mexico waters, brought the fish in.

"That's the cool thing about us," he said. "We go really far out west to areas untouched by fishermen ... the style we do and the places we go — it's far, but it's very rewarding."

Maciasz said many clients this year have had a chance to hook unique fish.

"They get a chance to catch a fish that really nobody in Louisiana has ever caught, and that's cool in itself," he said. "It makes it more exciting and keeps it interesting. Honestly, that's why,



This 20-pound mutton snapper caught by Lisa Schlitzkus is likely the second-biggest ever caught in Louisiana waters.

because I've been able to expand really quickly with the business ... The clients really get a kick out of it."

Schlitzkus said the trip was definitely not her last.

"It was a great time," she said. "We caught a ton of fish and everyone was really happy. It was a good trip. We want to come back and catch yellowfin." ■

Daniel Rainbolt, Josh Sparks, Micha Rainbolt, Chris Williams and Lisa Schlitzkus after their September trip with Down the Bayou Charters.



BLACK GROUPE ALMOST TWICE THE SIZE OF PREVIOUS STATE RECORD

By Monique Roth

Cole Thurman's first time fishing offshore in Louisiana was a trip he'll never forget — his catch made him a state-record holder.

With an official weight of 106.3 pounds, the black grouper Thurman hauled in was 56 inches long. The weight nearly doubled the previous state record.

"It surpassed the previous record by 51 pounds and was 18 shy of the world record," said Thurman, from Marble Falls, Texas. "I didn't expect that when I rolled out the driveway that morning. I was just excited to see my friends and go fishing. . . . I didn't expect to set a new state record."

The catch of a lifetime happened Sept. 3 when Thurman and some friends launched out of Port Fourchon with Down the Bayou Charters. Two boats were loaded down with anglers, with Thurman's boat guided by Capt. Ian Buzbee.

"It was my first time to go offshore fishing in Louisiana," Thurman said. "We were going out to fish some reefs about 90 miles offshore."

Thurman said the boats stopped off at a few rigs about 20 miles out to catch the bait fish

for the trip, and expectations were high. "I couldn't have asked for a more beautiful morning," Thurman said. "We just wanted to catch a lot of fish. With Louisiana being like the fishing capital — a complete outdoorsman paradise — I was just excited to be out here on the water."

After a morning of catching fish left and right, Thurman said Buzbee helped him get a Shimano Tiagra 50 reel with 300-pound monofilament and a custom, 5-foot-5 extra-heavy action rod situated with live bait and lots of sinkers.

It was set, and 30 minutes passed. "All of a sudden, that rod just doubles over, and I knew right from the moment I set the hook it was something huge," Thurman said, adding he initially suspected the catch was a shark or amberjack. "The fight for me felt like it was over in an instant."

Buzbee said the catch came in the middle of the trip. "We had just finished catching amberjack, and we were trying to catch some groupers a few miles away," Buzbee said. "The fight took about 15 to 20 minutes. We were not confident . . . we thought we were going to lose it."

Thurman said during the fight, he had a rush of adrenaline, but he still almost

gave the rod to someone else to finish the job until he looked down again.

"I looked back down, and I could see color," he said. "About 15 feet from the boat it rolled over, and I knew it was a grouper because of the large mouth and huge paddletail. I finished the job, but after that, I was exhausted."

As soon as the grouper was brought aboard the boat, Thurman said Buzbee radioed another captain and crew a few miles away and told them a state record had been broken.

"I obliterated the old (record)," Thurman said. "It was unreal. I was just blown into a state of disbelief for the remainder of the day."

Joey Maciasz with Down the Bayou Charters said the catch was unique and rare.

"It's definitely a fish of the year," Maciasz said. "Anything that doubles the previous state record is damn cool."

Thurman said the entire experience proved to be memorable, including the trip to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries office in Bourg to certify the catch.

"It's truly a fishing story," he said. "You would never believe it. In the back of my truck I have this fish in a hundred-gallon tub and it's covered in cardboard. Well, someone pulled out in front of me, and I had to slam on my brakes and the fish took out my window — the back window of my brand-new F150."

"I'd break out 10 more back windows for a fish like that," he said. ■



Capt. Ian Buzbee with Down the Bayou Charters holds the giant grouper caught by Cole Thurman. It measured 56 inches long and weighed 106.3 pounds.



Cole Thurman caught this 106.3-pound black grouper on Sept. 3.

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BETWEEN THE EARLY SEASON AND THE ONSET OF THE RUT, DEER BECOME HARDER TO PREDICT, ESPECIALLY BIG BUCKS. HERE ARE SOME TIPS FROM AN EXPERT HUNTER ON AVOIDING THE 'NOVEMBER LULL.'

**UNDERSTAND,
OVERCOME'**

THE 'TRANSITION'

■ By Sammy Romano

Hunting white-tailed deer, especially trophy bucks, is never easy. That being said, perhaps the most-difficult time to hunt them is during the transition between the early season and the onset of the rut. In the Midwest, it's often referred to as the "October lull," but across much of Louisiana and Mississippi, this transition period is in November.

In order to formulate a successful hunting strategy during this difficult time, it helps to understand what's going on in a white-tail's world. The shortening of days has caused bucks to shed their velvet and disperse from their bachelor groups of summer and early fall. These changes are naturally accompanied by a shift in home range for many bucks, as well as a change to more nocturnal movement.

Hunting pressure in many areas has also begun to affect deer, further changing their routines and making it even more difficult to predict their movements. They are still focused largely

on food sources, as they feed heavily to bulk up for the upcoming rut and winter, but these food sources are changing rapidly because acorns are falling.

Although this makes it difficult to pattern deer, by no means is it impossible. You just have to adapt your tactics. One hunter who understands is Slade Priest of Centreville, Miss., a veteran host of outdoors television shows and a licensed realtor who sells plenty of hunting properties for Realtree United Country Southern States Realty.

Priest has learned what it takes to be successful during this frustrating period of deer season. Although he exclusively bow-hunts, his tactics can be applied to gun hunting as well.

He said he does things differently when hunting public land, where baiting is not allowed, and private land, where deer can be fed supplementally.

PUBLIC-LAND CONCERNS >

PUBLIC-LAND CONCERNS

For the public-land hunter, Priest said nothing replaces what he calls “butt time” — time spent in a stand in the woods. When hunting public land, many factors are beyond a hunter’s control, especially hunting pressure. This makes it much more difficult to pattern deer and predict when they will move. The public-land hunter needs to spend every possible moment in the woods to increase the chance of being there when a buck is on his feet during daylight hours.

With so many people on public lands, a hunter can bump a buck from his bed at any time, causing him to wander past your stand and offer a shot opportunity. Priest also stressed the need to take care of smaller details, including scent control — scent-free soaps and odor killers — both before and during the hunt, and playing the wind.

“Do the little things right,” he said. “Consistently successful hunters do the little things right, and the best hunters are obsessive about this even to the point of being control freaks.”

Hunters not hunting over bait, especially on public land, should rely on information they can gather and past history, if they have any. With deer focused heavily on mast, particularly acorns, food sources change rapidly during November.

“Red oak acorns are often gone by now, and the deer have shifted their focus to white oak and water oak acorns,” he said, noting that nothing replaces “boots on the ground” when it comes to finding the oak tree favored by deer that day. If you are fortunate enough to be hunting a piece of

land where you have past experience, you can use it to shorten the learning curve by knowing which mast trees often produce and which are usually favored by local deer. Nothing beats finding a “hot tree” with lots of fresh droppings and the leaves “powdered underneath it.”

Priest said to maintain scent-control discipline and minimize noise while scouting to avoid spooking deer and changing their patterns. He also advised to “hunt from the outside in” meaning to hunt from the edge of an oak flat first — observing which trees the deer favor — only then moving your stand in for the kill.

“This way you avoid tipping your hand and spooking deer unnecessarily,” he said.

PRIVATE-LAND TACTICS DIFFER ➤





The appearance of white oak acorns on and under productive trees can change deer behavior almost overnight. **BELOW:** Don't ignore food sources like food plots or agricultural fields that haven't been harvested.



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PRIVATE-LAND TACTICS DIFFER

According to Priest, the private-land hunter should do just the opposite, minimizing his or her time on stand and limiting it to times when they feel they have the best opportunity to be successful, especially if hunting over bait or a food plot.

"Hunt smart, not hard," he said. "I always say it only takes one day to kill him or one day to spook him. Limit your stand sits to times when you feel the buck you are hunting will be on his feet, feeding. Other than that, you are just educating him and making him nearly impossible to kill.

"The passing of a big, November cold front is a prime time to hunt, because the rapidly rising barometer and the cooler temperatures often get bucks on their feet during shooting hours. You might only get one opportunity at a mature buck, and if you spook him, it's over until the rut. The best time to kill a big buck is the first sit in a stand. If you just have to get in the woods any other time, hunt somewhere else for a doe; don't cost yourself a future chance at a trophy by forcing the issue.

"Almost everyone is using scouting cameras and hunting apps these days; use them to your advantage. You can bet if you

see me headed to the woods with a bow in my hand during November in southwest Mississippi or Louisiana, that I have a big buck on camera during daylight hours or I have a huge hunch that he will move."

LIMIT HUNTING PRESSURE

Regardless of where and how you hunt, Priest stressed the need to minimize hunting pressure in order to be successful on big bucks.

"It all goes back to the offseason preparations you have made," he said. "You can't show up the week before the season and start cutting shooting lanes and not expect the deer to notice and change their patterns accordingly. Deer are creatures of habit, and there are only a few things that these habits revolve around: food, water, weather, and hunting pressure. Hunting pressure is one thing that can often be controlled."



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.

Hunting from a box blind gives deer hunters a little better concealment, both visually and as far as covering your scent, and it can be much more comfortable than a tree stand.

BOX 'EM UP

Priest has lately become a huge fan of bowhunting from box blinds.

“These boxes really help to minimize your exposure and therefore, the hunting pressure that you apply,” he said. “I don’t think you can ever be 100% scent-free, but if you follow a scent-free routine, use an ozone generator and hunt from a box blind, paying attention to the wind and only opening one window, you can get close. If you can access and exit the stand without spooking deer, every day is like opening day all over again.”

Priest regularly hunts a 2-acre food plot from a box blind. “I have the box blind positioned where I can easily access the stand without spooking any deer,” he said. “The nearby feeder goes off at 4 p.m., bringing deer close to the stand, but by dark, they have usually fed to the other end of this large food plot. That way, I can exit the stand undetected.”

“(Also), we have a lot of wild hogs in the area I hunt, and I have a hog sound app on my cell phone. Deer often avoid hogs, and by playing hog noises, I can usually get them to leave. Then, I climb down and make noise like a sounder (group) of hogs rooting around. This eases the deer off without panicking them.”

Priest also said a “drive-by” — having someone drive past or up to the field — is huge and is much better than climbing down in front of deer at a food source.

Although November can be a trying time when it comes to white-tailed deer hunting in much of the south, it is possible to have success. Attention to small details, patience, prior knowledge, and hard work all are keys to a successful outcome this month.

Slade Priest, who works at Realtree United Country Southern States Realty, can be reached at 601-888-0094, 601-250-0017 or at Hunting Land Man on Facebook. ■



Slade Priest believes hunters with private land should limit their time on stand to days when they feel their chances of taking a buck are best.

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GRUNTS & GOBBLES >



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THE LAWS OF THE DEER HARVEST

YOU CAN'T REAP GOOD RESULTS WITHOUT PRODUCTIVE WORK ON YOUR LAND

"For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Galatians 6:7b

Scripture is very clear about the principles of sowing and reaping. Good will come to those who sow the love of God, while trouble and strife comes to those who sow evil and hatred.

This same principle applies to the laws of the deer harvest. The success or failure of a deer-management program is directly related to whatever work is or is not applied to the habitat and the herd. Sit around and do nothing, and the harvest will be lacking; develop a plan and work the plan, and the harvest will be good.

DEVELOP A PLAN

Every successful deer program begins with a well-designed management plan. This may require assistance from biologists who are trained to do this work. It certainly will require a survey of the habi-

tat and forest to evaluate the good, the bad and the ugly of the landscape. It will also require background information on herd conditions. Harvest data that biologists have from surrounding areas is very useful for providing insight regarding the growth potential of the herd.

Develop realistic goals and objectives and allow time for the plan to work. This will generally take a few years and may require periodic tweaking of the plan. Do not change the plan in midstream or jump around trying to find a silver bullet that one thinks will make success happen over night.

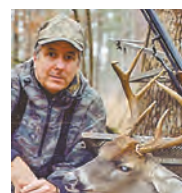
MAXIMUM BENEFIT

The key to a successful deer program is good nutrition. It is needed year-round, not just during the hunting season. It is required for body growth, antler development and reproduction. If it is lacking, animal quality and health will be mediocre at best.

If the plan calls for periodic timber har-

vests, harvest the timber. If year-round plantings are needed to supplement habitat, especially in spring or summer when protein demands are high, plant. If the habitat is poor and the ability to manage the landscape is low, bite the bullet and feed year-round if you can afford it. All of these activities should have been part of the plan and habitat needs already determined along with the capability of the manager to do the work needed.

Achieve harvest goals, especially does. The lack of either-sex harvest has always been a stumbling block for managers and programs. The mindset of most hunters is to pass on does because they produce the bucks. Too many deer on the habitat and landscape will reduce animal quality and



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

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spell doom for a program. Stay on top of the harvest, which can be impacted by bad weather and poor hunter effort. Don't forget to harvest low-end bucks that never reach the desired potential.

OTHER SPECIES

A good deer-management program is always beneficial for other game species. Turkeys greatly benefit from the creation of openings and food plot work. Quail benefit from prescribed burning and logging. Rabbits always benefit from cover development and clover patches. Year-round plantings provide food for many species; even squirrels benefit from the wheat that is allowed to seed out in the fields along the edges of the woods. Everyone benefits from control of nuisance hogs, especially the landscape.

DOWN THE ROAD ➤



A sound deer-harvest program benefits other game species, including wild turkeys, and provides additional hunting opportunity.

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GRUNTS & GOBBLES

continued

If the objective of the program is to produce older bucks that hopefully have nice antlers, then young bucks like this one must be passed this season and allowed to grow older for future seasons.



DOWN THE ROAD

It will take time for a management program to achieve the desired success. The oak trees planted this year will be food trees in 15 or 20 years. The desirable, young bucks passed up this season will be the quality adult bucks in two to three years. Age is a requirement for both quality and trophy deer management, and desirable yearling bucks must be passed up if this is the objective of the program. If you do not shoot the needed number of does to keep the herd in balance with the habitat, both the habitat and herd will suffer over time.

A FUN HARVEST

Hunting is recreation, and it should be fun. If you're not having

fun with your management program, something is wrong. This is why establishing goals and objectives that can be achieved and fits your purpose is so important. If you established goals to produce 160-class adult bucks on habitat that will only grow a 120-class deer, tweak the program and keep going.

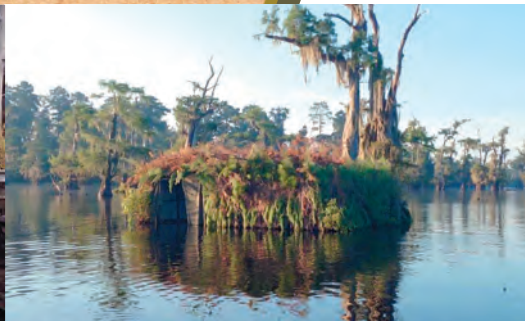
Don't be discouraged or upset about a poor season. In the Gulf Coast environment we have in Louisiana, winters can be warm, and a warm fall and winter make for poor deer activity. Deer sightings may be down, but that does not necessarily equate to low deer numbers. Keep working during the offseason with your observations and camera work which provides good insight into actual numbers.

As we move ahead toward the end of 2020, keep in mind those who have suffered loss and share with them whenever you have opportunity. Remember, whatever you sow, that will you also reap.

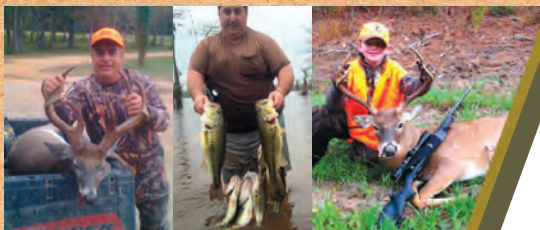
The Hunters for the Hungry Program is one way to give back to those who have suffered loss. Have fun but be safe during the hunting season. ■



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TOP 3 WAYS TO KILL A BUCK ON OPENING DAY

FOOD SHOULD DICTATE EARLY STAND LOCATIONS

If you're in one of the areas of Louisiana where rifle season begins this month, it's a sure bet you're staying up late dreaming about opening day. The thought of making a quick kill is just too exciting to allow for sleep.

That's definitely true for Port Barre's Blake Charles, who is antsy to get in a stand and put some lead in a deer.

But there's more to early success than just flipping a coin and climbing into a box stand on your lease.

Charles, who has killed his share of nice bucks, said there are three factors that go into deciding where he'll be sitting when that magical morning dawn.

Food is central to each:

1

"Look for oak trees that are producing acorns," Charles said. "White oaks are still dropping the little gold nuggets around the time rifle season starts."

Unfortunately, not every tree that drops mast is favored by deer. So it's important to know the signs that deer are frequenting a particular.

"A good feed tree with fresh acorn hulls and deer scat is a sure bet for opening weekend," he said.

2

If your lease borders some farm land, you should definitely key on game trails leading to these feeding areas.

"Agriculture fields are great for the season opener, even if the crops have been harvested," Charles said. "The farmer's combine always leaves enough grain on the ground after harvesting to draw deer from miles around."

There could even be more available to deer than grains and beans.

"If a soybean field has been harvested in early October, and good old Mother Nature is kind enough to bless us with rain, soybean grain left on the ground will start to germinate and produce tiny, tender, fresh soybean stalks that deer absolutely love," he said.

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Sometimes a hunter doesn't have access to either producing oak trees or agricultural fields, and that's when green patches really play into the opening-day formula.

But Charles said you want to choose one that hasn't been hunted on a regular basis during bow season.

"In a year when acorns are scarce, large food plots (two acres or more in size) that have had minimal hunting pressure from bowhunters are great places to catch a buck by surprise," he said. ■



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7 THINGS YOU SHOULD HAVE IN YOUR DEER PACK

By Phillip Gentry

THESE ITEMS MAKE HOURS IN A STAND MORE BEARABLE

Veteran hunters who venture into the woods during deer season typically have a standard list of gear they rely on, especially when hunting from an elevated stand or climbing tree stand.

Here's a list of items that are essential to success in the field to help ensure you have what you need during those long sits.

1 BINOCULARS

A good pair of binoculars not only lets you see far away, they let you see close up by focusing on areas behind obstacles like tree limbs and leaves. A pair with an objective lens in the 40mm or larger range will allow you to see better in low-light conditions.

2 SMART PHONE

A smart phone allows you to stay connected to hunting buddies, weather apps or post to Facebook. The end result is passing time and staying longer in the stand. In an emergency, you can even call for help.

3 SCENT KILLER SPRAY


No matter how much you spray on before going to the stand, carrying the bottle in your pack helps you add more protection once in the stand. The spray also doubles as a wind indicator.

4 LURE RETRIEVER, PARACHUTE CORD

These make an excellent device for retrieving items dropped from a climbing stand. You can make one with an 8/0 treble hook and a 6-ounce trolling sinker. The retriever can also be used to snag that limb that's just out of reach and pull it out of your line of sight and secure it with the rope.

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In 2003, Chef Williams sold the Cajun Injector portion of their brand to Bruce Foods. Chef Williams continued in the food business with a fast developing QVC business.

In 2017, Chef Williams noticed the injectable marinade category had completely drifted away from its original kettle cooked and hot filled quality. As the inventor/parent of this category, Chef Williams felt an obligation to bring back the quality and value that he and his dad used when they created the concept. Below are pictures of the current Chef Williams Original Injectable Marinades.



Making sure you have these items in your daypack makes long hours in a tree stand easier to handle.



5 POCKET KNIFE

A no-brainer. A serrated edge doubles as a limb saw in a pinch; other blades can be used for minor repairs or to field dress a deer.

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7 PACKABLE CAMO RAIN JACKET

Sometimes it rains. It can also be used as makeshift camo netting by securing with electrical tape. Fold it up and add padding to your seat. A rain jacket also has pretty decent insulating capabilities if it suddenly turns cooler.



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This photo of Josh Waters with an 8-point buck killed this season, checks plenty of boxes when it comes to setting up a good photo: It's in focus, the background doesn't detract from the subject, the subject fills the entire frame, it's shot at an angle that enhances the deer's size, and the subject is smiling.

7 TIPS FOR BETTER WHITETAIL TROPHY PHOTOS

TAKE PICTURES THAT REALLY CAPTURE THAT SPECIAL MEMORY



So you've killed a monster buck. Now what? You could just clean the deer and move on with your life — but how will you remember that special moment? Or, even better, how will you get your image to run in your favorite outdoor magazine (which you're currently reading, of course).

That's where a good photo comes into play.

But all it takes is a bit of planning to have an image you can proudly hang on the wall — and at least have a shot at the cover of *Louisiana Sportsman*.

Here are some tips to take better photos.

- **Plan ahead.** Make sure your battery is charged up and you have enough room on your memory card.

- **Know what the subject is.** I can't tell you how disappointing it is to receive a photo of a great deer only to discover that whoever took the shot apparently thought capturing the cleaning shed, the camp, the forest behind the camp and everyone's ATVs was important. The result is often that the deer head is so small that we can't use it.

So get up close and frame the shot so all that clutter doesn't show.

- **Pick your background.** It's related to the previous tip, but it only takes a minute or two to move a deer to clean up the background.

I like to drag the deer over to the woods next to the camp and use that as a background.

- **Clean up a little.** Deer hunting is a bloody sport, but you

don't have to take a photo with red stuff streaming from a deer's nose and gore pooled under the head.

You can use a rag, a paper towel or just use some leaves to clean off all that blood.

- **Don't just point and shoot.** There's secret to making that deer look impressive, and it's really simple.

What you want to do is get as close to the subject as your camera/lens will allow. The closer you get, the bigger the subject looks.

Of course, you have to balance a few things to ensure the image isn't just of deer head.

Make sure you can see the hunter's face. That might mean backing up a bit or repositioning the subject a little.

And for the love of all that's holy, don't have the hunter stiff-arm the anglers. Instead, ensure the angler keeps his elbows bent.

You want the image to look natural.

- **Get the right angle.** This is vitally important with deer. Never stand up when taking a photo of a proud hunter and his kill.

Instead, lay down so you are eye level with the deer. This makes the deer the center of attention.

- **Smile.** You enjoyed killing that deer, right? You smiled after you saw the beautiful sight of that deer piled up, I'm sure.

But for some reason, many people think they need to look serious in photos. That makes it look like their mad.

So smile big, and let everyone know how much you enjoy the sport. ■



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Hunters must think about many things before heading back to the deer woods or the duck blind. None are more important than a simple reminder from Matt Branch of Monroe, a former LSU football player who almost lost his life in a tragic hunting accident two years ago: “This could happen to you.”

It was 10 a.m. on Friday, Dec. 28, 2018, when Branch and a few friends had picked up their duck decoys to move to another spot on a family farm near Mississippi’s Eagle Lake. As he stood on a levee, a group of ducks came his way. He slipped a single shell into his shotgun, but the ducks never made it into range.

One member of his hunting party pulled up in a Ranger ATV, and Branch put his gun down in the cargo box and walked around to the side of the vehicle. The group’s Labrador retriever, Tito, finished retrieving a couple of ducks from the field and jumped in the back of the ATV. When he did, he stepped on the gun’s safety, disabling it. In another instant, the dog’s paw accidentally pulled the shotgun’s trigger, sending a load of No. 2 steel shot through the side of the ATV and into the inside of Branch’s left leg from 6 inches away.



A HARD LESSON

■ By Kinny Haddox

**FORMER LSU FOOTBALL
PLAYER PREACHING HUNTER
SAFETY LESS THAN TWO
YEARS AFTER ACCIDENT THAT
ALMOST TOOK HIS LIFE.**

“That’s something we all know: never leave your gun loaded,” Branch said.

“I don’t know of another time I ever left a shell in my gun. Any time I go to the deer stand or into the duck blind, 999 times out of a thousand, my gun is even going to be in the case. One time. That one time got me. I forgot that shell was in the gun, and it was just crazy what happened next.”

Being inside the back of the Ranger, the sound of the gun was muffled. It just sounded like a loud pop. Matt remembered someone yelling, “*What was that?*” and he looked down and saw a coffee can-sized hole in the side of the ATV, right by his leg.

“It’s so strange. I never felt a thing at first,” he said. “Obviously, when I saw the hole in the Ranger right by my leg, I figured I might be hit. When I tried to step back, my left leg didn’t move. I stumbled and fell. Then the adrenalin rush hit me. I knew I had been shot. Next came the pain, then the sudden drop in blood pressure. I don’t remember much else.”

Thanks to the quick thinking of his hunting companions, who called 911 and got him to the nearest highway to be picked up, quick actions by local first responders and medical teams at the hospital, Branch survived. He has only brief memories of the next 12 days as he struggled to stay alive from the tremendous

loss of blood and tissue damage.

Branch has had to make a lot of decisions since then, but none are more important than the decision to use his experience in a positive way, every chance he can, to reinforce hunting safety to others. He does every interview requested. He stops and talks about it with anyone who asks. He has made numerous talks to groups and, although he was interrupted by the pandemic, he plans to resume those talks as soon as it is safe for people to gather.

“I just want everyone to know that you can handle a gun correctly hundreds and hundreds of times, but one slip-up can change your life forever,” he said. “Know that once your gun fires a bullet, it can’t be called back. If there is a shell in the gun, anything can happen. Never be complacent.”

His other lessons for hunters? Always treat a gun like it is loaded. That’s just another basic hunter safety item. And when a gun is loaded, never leave it unattended. Never take chances and never lose focus long enough to even leave one shell in the gun even one time. Never be shy to be the guy or gal that reminds everybody to take extra safety precautions. Never take it for granted. It’s simply not worth it.

Matt Branch sits in a Ranger similar to the one where he laid his gun in and was accidentally shot two years ago.



Within a year of his near-fatal accident, Matt Branch was back in the woods and killed this big buck.



LESSONS LEARNED NOT GOING TO WASTE

We learn many lessons and grow in ways we often don't even understand from trips outdoors and hunting adventures. Matt Branch of Monroe has hunted his whole life and has learned those kind of lessons as well.

But he also learned a couple that he hopes nobody ever, ever has to learn the way he did.

When he was shot in a freak accident on a duck hunt almost two years ago, he was embarrassed by what happened. He knew better, and he had practiced better his whole life, but that one time was all it took to change his life.

"When I woke up and came to, I was embarrassed by what happened," he said. "It was my fault it happened, but I had a choice right there. I could have gone and hidden and told people I didn't want to talk about it again, or I could find ways to help benefit others so maybe it would not happen to them. I couldn't change what happened to me, but I couldn't help others if I didn't tell my story. I hope the impact is going to help somebody else down the road."

The second lesson was already one that he knew, but the accident renewed his beliefs and gave him strength.

"I just decided to trust God in this process and fall in line without question to what I feel like He is leading me to do. I can't tell you how many doctors and others told me I probably would never walk again. But I did. And it was my faith in Him and belief that I could do anything that helped me through this." ■

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As Branch shared his story, he has heard from other hunters who have had similar experiences but were fortunate because no one was hit by an accidental shot. He wasn't so lucky. His injuries almost took his life and have left him with a prosthetic leg. That followed an amputation called a hip disarticulation; a majority of people who have that surgery never walk again, but Branch was determined, and today, he uses that leg like he was born with it. He has conquered it, not the other way around.

There were days in the hospital bed when he wondered if he would walk again, hearing from many doctors that the prognosis was not good. But he fell back on the days when he was at

that into a disabled hunter event," Branch said. "They did a fantastic job. I plan on going back this year. They work with anybody with a disability: kids, adults, veterans. It takes these folks' minds off the everyday challenges of life. To see the smile come across their face when they really need it, that's something I feel drawn to now. I feel like I need to return the favor to them, because so many have done that for me. I'd encourage other hunters to try and help in this cause."

Branch is motivated because of his family: wife Liana, 3-year-old son Barrett and a new daughter, Charlotte Ann, born in August, his other family and friends and what he sees that he can do to help others.

Matt Branch and Westin Jenkins, founder of Disabled Outdoorsman USA with a limit of ducks from last season.



"I won't lie. It's been tough. It is tough," he said. "There were many, many mornings early on that I didn't want to get out of bed, but then I'd snap out of it. I realized I have a lot of things to do."

Nobody has watched and marveled at Branch's journey to his "new normal" more than his father, Mark Branch, who sat by his hospital bed and had to tell the strapping, former football star that doctors had to take his leg to save his life.

"Of course, we are all proud of all of our kids, but Matt's done something pretty special. I see a man who has worked hard, prayed hard and tried to do the very best he can under some very adverse circumstances," Mark Branch said. "The picture that was painted for us was bleak. Most people that have this surgery never walk again. They are bound to a wheelchair. Matt wasn't going to allow that to happen.

"Having a prosthetic leg is hard on anybody, but because of his size, it was an added challenge. He's done so well. He's had so many people praying for him and encouraging him. The bottom line through this is that I have seen what God can do.

What He has done is truly a miracle."

No chapter could document Branch's undying spirit more than a deer hunt last year, the year after his accident. He went out on his own and shot a full-sized buck. When his younger brother, Connor, rode up, he offered to help Matt get the deer and put it in the back of the truck, he was too late. Matt had already done it.

"I still don't know how he did that," Mark Branch said. ■

LSU as a 6-foot-6, 290-pound offensive lineman. Tommy Moffitt the conditioning coach, put them through rigorous drills, and as they lined up to do one more, he would yell, "Nobody's going to die out here today." So Branch kept working in rehab as he had football. And he focused on his family.

His story went viral, mainly because he was an LSU football player. Prosthetist David Rotter in Joliet, Ill., reached out and offered to help, building Branch a custom prosthetic leg that got him on his way to recovery.

Branch is committed not only to sharing his story, but also to working with groups that promote outdoor experiences for disabled hunters. One of those is Disabled Outdoorsmen USA.

"I got invited up to make a duck hunt with guide Jim Stafford and Central Kansas Outfitters last November, and we turned



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.

DISABLED HUNTERS GAINING ATTENTION

Numerous groups are dedicated to helping disabled individuals learn to hunt or fish, or to be able to continue to enjoy the outdoors after a terrible accident. Here are just a few:

Disabled Outdoorsmen USA: A non-profit organization created for the people who refuse to give up their dreams of living in the outdoors and use the outdoors as therapy to help cope with their disability. Learn more at <https://shop.disabledoutdoorsmen.com/>

Louisiana Hunters for Heroes: A non-profit organization that assists our veterans by taking them on guided hunting and fishing trips and offering fellowship and assistance to those in need. Learn more at <https://www.louisianahuntersforheroes.org/>

Wheelin' Sportsmen: Wheelin' Sportsmen is part of the National Wild Turkey Federation, which recognizes the need to help people with disabilities enjoy the outdoors by participating in hunting and shooting sports. Learn more at <https://www.nwtf.org/about/hunting-heritage/wheelin-sportsmen>

Kidz Outdoors: This group's mission is forming bonds by linking family and friends to pass on our passion for the outdoors to a new generation, and raising funds for hospitals and research centers in hope to find cures for cancer and other childhood diseases. Learn more at <https://www.kidzoutdoors.org/>

Outdoors Without Limits: Outdoors Without Limits promotes awareness and teamwork between disabled and non-disabled individuals through education and outdoor recreational activities. Learn more at <https://outdoor-withoutlimits.net/>

Buckmasters American Deer Foundation: Buckmasters is dedicated to aiding members of our outdoor community who are in need of assistance, whether it's putting food on the table, making the sport of hunting accessible to a disabled hunter or thanking our American military heroes for their service to our country. Learn more at <http://www.buckmasters.com/Resources/BADF> ■



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STICKS AND STRINGS

Sammy Romano

THE DEADLY BLACK WIDOW

MISSOURI COMPANY'S TRADITIONAL BOWS ARE AMONG ARCHERY MARKET'S BEST MODELS

After nearly 30 years in the archery industry, I've had the pleasure of shooting thousands of bows of nearly every make and model: compounds, crossbows and even traditional bows. So it's rare these days that I am surprised by how well a particular bow shoots.

A few months ago, a buddy, Billy, called to tell me that after shooting a mutual friend's Black Widow recurve bow, he immediately drove 12 hours to the factory in Missouri to buy one. He excitedly told me how he was able to shoot every bow on the wall at the factory and bought the one he shot best: a takedown recurve bow on which he spent more than \$1000.

Billy lives about three hours away, so when he drove down to purchase a Garmin sight for his Mathews bow, I asked him to bring the recurve so I could try it out. When I released the first arrow, I was blown away. The arrow shot into the 12-ring of the target from a distance of 20 yards, and my next two arrows did the same. There was absolutely no hand shock, and the bow was silent. The arrow flight was perfect, and the bow would even shoot a bare arrow shaft perfectly straight.

Over the years, I had heard about Black Widow custom bows, but I had never seen one in person. These folks have quietly been building traditional bows of unbelievable quality since 1957. Let me say they are the finest traditional bows I've ever shot.

COMPANY HISTORY

I recently spoke with Roger Fulton, one of the owners of Black Widow, about the history of his company and what makes its bows different from other custom bows. Black Widow opened in 1957 as Wilson Brothers Bows; Ken Beck bought the company and changed the name to



The Black Widow PCHII takedown recurve is a work of art.



Black Widow Custom Bows.

The current owners — Fulton, Toby Esbeck and John Clayman — bought the company in 2005; they continue to produce what I consider the finest recurves and longbows on the market. Although they have a few bows in stock from time to time, the vast majority are custom-built to order. They offer several models of recurves and longbows to fit the wants and needs of any hunter.

Many different woods are available, including exotics such as Honduras Rosewood, Tiger Myrtle and Bocote. Custom options such as laser-engraved bamboo overlays, spliced veneers and snakeskin overlays are available. Several grips are available, depending on your shooting style.

I asked Fulton what makes their bows feel and shoot so differently from other traditional bows. The model I shot and subsequently ordered for myself was the PCHII 58-inch takedown recurve. He pointed out that, unlike with other takedown bows, whose limbs screw into the front of the handle, Black Widow attaches the limbs to the back of the handle.

HANDLE-BACK ATTACHED LIMBS

This offers several advantages when it comes to accuracy and shootability. First, it places the grip forward of the limbs, leading to less grip torque, less string angle and higher brace heights. Although this makes the bow much more difficult to build, the advantages it offers the shooter are well worth the effort. Second, Black Widow offers four different limb lengths. This allows them to optimize the limb length to the shooter's draw length, making for a much better shooting experience. The longer limb and shorter handle design of Black Widows leads to less stacking, less finger pinch and a smoother draw and shot.

LIMBS MATCH DRAW WEIGHTS

Black Widow bow limbs are built different from most manufacturers in that they are laminated specifically to closely match the desired draw weight of the bow. Black

Widow has kept meticulous records since 2003 of laminations for all four limb-lengths it offers. This allows the company to build their limbs so that they require less sanding and material removal to reach the desired specifications, leading to more-consistent, better-shooting limbs. They also pay huge attention to detail, down to the way they seal their bows. The frosted finish prevents glare and looks great, while protecting the wood underneath. Black Widow also offers a complete selection of arrows, accessories, and traditional broadheads. ■

For more information, contact Black Widow Custom Bows, 1201 Eagle Crest, Nixa, MO 65714, 417-725-3113.



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.

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There's no counting the times duck hunters sit in a blind, anxiously awaiting legal shooting hours, when they are reminded to be safe, followed quickly by, "And remember, don't shoot the Mojo."

After all, nobody wants to ruin the magic with a misguided blast of No. 2 steel shot.

"It ain't magic if it ain't a Mojo," said Terry Denmon of Monroe, laughing while repeating the popular marketing slogan of Mojo Outdoors' spinning-wing decoys. Denmon helped found Huntwise Inc., the Louisiana company that manufactures them, almost 20 years ago. Today, the question isn't whether you have a Mojo in your spread, but how many and what kind.



SPINNING-WING DECOYS ARE NO LONGER A NOVELTY AMONG DUCK HUNTERS, WHO UNDERSTAND HOW AND WHY THEY ATTRACT DUCKS TO DECOY SPREADS.

DON'T SHOOT THE MOJO!

■ By Kinny Haddox

“WE STRUGGLED WHAT TO CALL THE FIRST DECOYS,” **DENMON SAID.**

“My dad used to have a crazy, motorized contraption on our family farm he called the Mojo, so that’s what we picked. Later, my engineering-firm folks developed a marketing strategy for the decoys. The head of the department walked in one day and she asked me if I even knew what Mojo meant. I didn’t really. She told me I’m the luckiest son of a gun in the world. I had basically named it, “Magic Mallard.” It couldn’t have been any better.”

Mojo has been magic in the marketplace and the decoy spread, so potent early on that the only sporting goods dealer that had limited production models, Simmons, in Bastrop, sold them one per customer in a brown paper bag; hunters had to come get it right before closing time so nobody else would see them. Denmon said the standing joke was that hunters were tossing expensive Benelli shotguns into the beds of their pickup

trucks to make room to lock up their Mojos in the cab.

To date, more than 4 million spinning-wing decoys have been sold by Mojo. There’s a full line of duck species, plus doves and turkeys. It might be surprising, but dove decoys are the highest-selling model by species. There are more duck decoys sold overall, but there are numerous species: mallard, wigeons, pintail, teal, etc. The use of turkey Mojo decoys is also growing. Denmon said an exciting new development is about to enter production for the 2021 season.

Mojo has evolved from clanky, rough-running, awkward decoys that someone else had designed to smooth-operating, high-tech duck attractors that show the breeding of Denmon’s engineering touch.

Migrating ducks have begun to catch on, but smart hunters are figuring out how to stay one step ahead.



Spinning-wing, Mojo decoys have become mainstays in decoy spreads all over the country.



A duck hunter from California visiting Louisiana gave sporting goods dealer Jeff Simmons the idea that eventually became the spinning-wing, Mojo decoys.

SOMETHING GOOD OUT OF CALIFORNIA

It's been slightly more than 20 years since a visitor from California came to duck hunt with sporting goods dealer Jeff Simmons in the fields of northeast Louisiana.

Hunting was terrible that morning; ducks just wouldn't work. They were about to give up when the West Coast guest pulled out a strange contraption with spinning wing-type blades on a stick and stuck it in the ground. Within minutes, ducks were falling from the sky, and the whole group limited out. After testing it a few more times, it became obvious that this magic trick was fooling the ducks every time.

The gentleman brought the "fan" with him because of something he'd seen in the strawberry fields near his home in the Sacramento Valley. When the weather got too cold, too early, the white fans were put out to keep air moving and keep frost off the berries. But when they were turned on, piles of ducks would start locking up and coming to the fields. It defied logic, but apparently, the strobe of the spinning "wings" was visible from a long distance, and to the ducks, it looked like more ducks.

Simmons got with a friend, Murray Crowe, a builder who could tinker with just about

anything, to build some spinning wings on a regular decoy body. The decoys they built worked, but they needed some more help. Crowe involved Terry Denmon, an engineer and avid duck hunter, to put the new, spinning-wing decoy into production. The first year, the goal was making and selling 7,500; they made and sold 15,000. They soon discovered the key to success was in getting the motor to spin the duck wings at just the right RPM. Other improvements have kept the decoys improving in looks and performance every year. The rest, as they say, is history. ■

— Kinny Haddox

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"Some hunters feel like Mojos are flaring ducks," Denmon said. "They still work. Ducks are still naturally attracted to spinning-wing decoys. They just don't always try to land on top of them every time like they did a few years ago.

That's where hunters have to adjust. It's my belief that the Mojo decoys still work as good as they ever did at attracting ducks, but the flashing wings have made the ducks more leery up close. The way we counter that is to keep moving the Mojo further from the center of the actual killing hole as that happens.

"The best tip I can give hunters is to not turn it off, but to move it as the season progresses. The rule of thumb is put it in



Spinning-wing dove decoys are the single-best seller among Mojos, outdistancing individual duck species.

the middle of the decoys early in the season, near the edge of the spread middle of the season and then 100 yards away in a bush if you have to late in the season. Heck, we've even put it on dry ground out behind the blind. It still attracts ducks. Use it to get ducks close, then rely on your other decoys and calling skills to get the birds in."

MOJO TV HELPS DENMON CONTINUE LIVING THE DREAM

From being past chairman of the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission to spending a lifetime hunting everything from ducks in the swamp to exotic animals all over the world to running one of the most-successful outdoor companies in the country, Terry Denmon is living the dream.

Part of that dream was also his induction into the Legends of the Outdoors Hall of Fame.

And there's more. Denmon continues to serve as host of the popular Mojo TV show, now in its 12th season. You can watch Mojo TV on the Sportsman's Channel; past seasons and episodes are available on YouTube.

"One of the things we do is always take somebody hunting with us that wouldn't ordinarily have the opportunity to go on

To understand that reasoning, it's good to have a solid understanding of what makes spinning-wing decoys work in the first place.

"People should always have at least one spinning-wing decoy; I don't say that just because we sell them," Denmon said. "The motion of properly functioning, spinning-wing decoys gets ducks' attention from a long way away. If you hunt, you know that sometimes, you can be walking out in the decoys and ducks continue to come right toward the spread but flare off 100 yards away when they see that there's a man out there making that motion instead of other ducks.

"Spinning wings give off a strobe affect. Ducks see it even before we see them. Speed is key. The wings have to spin fast to give off that strobe, at least 400 RPM or faster. The key is for the Mojo to get their attention, then the rest of the spread and calling gets them in range."

Denmon said not to turn off a Mojo while hunting to save the battery, because there are no telling how many ducks are so high and far that may miss your spread because they don't see the strobe. They can't see it if you don't have it on.

The longer you practice with Mojos, the more you learn and understand, Denmon said. One thing that hunters have picked up on is that multiple Mojos get the best reaction from new ducks, like ones coming in after a cold front. The first day, he said, they come to it like a magnet. The second day is pretty good; by the third day, they're leery. By the fourth, you may need to take up golf until another front brings in new birds.

"Weather is important when using a Mojo," he said. "When there is a real low cloud ceiling, birds get scared off by the motion, because by the time they are seeing it, they are right up on it. A cold, bluebird day after a front is a great time to have all the Mojo decoys you can spinning."



Terry Denmon's Mojo Outdoors branched into television 12 years ago and has never left.

hunts like we feature. We go from our own backyard to almost anywhere in the world."

Denmon says it's a teaching tool, too. If they can help people be more successful outdoors, that's a plus. But if they do something that doesn't work, they share that as well. ■

— Kinny Haddox



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DON'T SHOOT THE MOJO!

The Mojo is a natural for Denmon's favorite type of hunting. "The thing that moves me the most is watching big mallards come down through the flooded timber and head for the decoy spread," he said. "To me, duck hunting is all about decoying ducks. Even if we've got ducks working, and they aren't working like we expect, we'll hop out of the blind and reset this or that more than once during the hunt."

A new innovation for Mojo is the "Flock A Flickers," small spinning wings that you set up around in the decoy spread to provide momentary, random flashes or strobes. Motion in the decoys doesn't have to come directly from the decoys. You just need motion to make it look like the decoys are moving. A mid-size Mojo costs about \$90, and you can get a six-pack of Flock A Flickers for about the same price. Larger, top-of-the-decoy-chain King Mallards run around \$150.

The new, Elite series decoys are a step up in ease of operation and effectiveness. It's a Bluetooth, remote-controlled unit for the Mojos. There is a breast-mounted plug in a USB remote receiver that you can pair with an App and Bluetooth to control the Mojo with your cell phone. Denmon said you can turn each Mojo on and off, set how long you want each to run, even name each one in the spread and manage them separately while sitting in the blind holding your iPhone.

"It's high-tech redneck," he said.

But as any hunter will tell you, there are some days even



The Elite Series of Mojos have remote control and USB operation that allows hunters to manage decoys with an iPhone App.

magic doesn't work.

"No matter what you do, there are days that they just aren't going to come to you or any kind of decoy," Denmon said. "They are not going to let you kill them. No matter what. There's just nothing you can do but come back and try again another day." ■

Learn more about Mojo and their products at www.mojoooutdoors.com.



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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SMILE HUNTERS; IT'S SPOONZILLA

It started as a well-executed joke played on Terry Denmon during a Mexican duck hunt and ended up going viral. Hunters, meet "Spoonzilla."

"Some of the guys we hunt with love to shoot spoonbills, but I always tell them I'm a refined trophy duck hunter. I go after mallards," Denmon said.

The late Mike Morgan, former host of Mojo Outdoors TV, and Ramsey Russell, founder of getducks.com, got with renowned decoy carver Jason Chuley to make a hand-carved, spinning-wing spoonbill decoy — "Smiley" — and presented it to Denmon.

It turned out to be a good joke, but an even better seller.

The group took pictures of Spoonzilla and posted them on social media. It went viral. Orders piled up before they even got home and figured out how to produce them. Mojo made 4,500 spoonbills the first year and sold every one in two weeks. The same thing happened this year.

It's not the only venture into daffy ducks for Mojo, which is currently working on another pair of novelty ducks; Denmon just got the prototypes and isn't sure what they will do with them at this point.

Then, there's last year's "Sir Coot", a novelty for Ducks Unlimited banquets around the country. It sold out, too. Coots, aka "poul-deau" in Louisiana — are generally considered at the bottom of

Some of Mojo's novelty decoys, Sir Coot (below) and Smiley, aka Spoonzilla, are popular with hunters.



the pecking order of waterfowl. But not "Sir Coot" — also carved by Chuley — dressed in a tuxedo and top hat.

As Denmon said, "Hey, duck hunters have to have fun too, right?" ■

— Kinny Haddox

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NORMALLY A SOUTH-OF-THE-BORDER SPECIES, BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING DUCKS ARE BECOMING MORE OF A PRESENCE IN LOUISIANA MARSHES. HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THIS BIG, TASTY BIRD. ■ By Darren Digby

WHISTLE UP A BLACK-BELLY

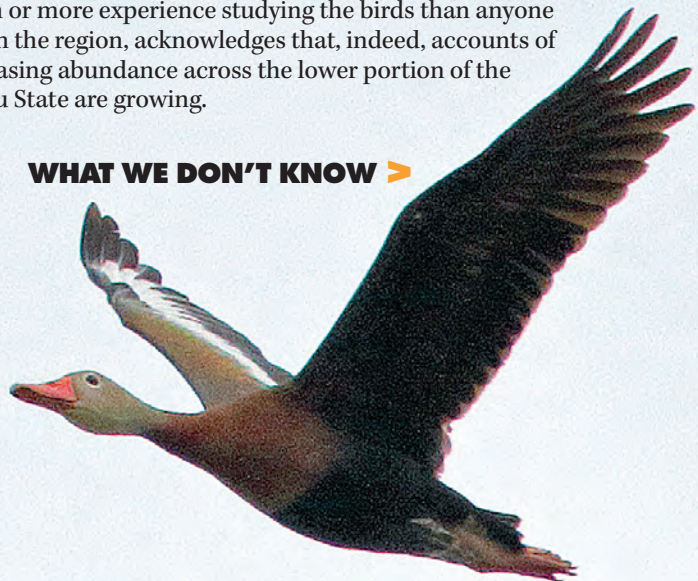
Their distinct cacophony of whistles broke the pre-dawn silence on a steamy September morning in coastal Louisiana. Though not our intended target, the sound nonetheless got us going as a sign of the marsh's awakening.

With a few notes on the whistle imitating their call, the wad of ducks descended on our decoy spread in its entirety, fluttering over the decoys before setting down gracefully. With a dumbfounded look on the dog's face, we could only sit and watch as the rowdy crew taunted us during a period when they were off-limits.

With increasing frequency, hunters are reporting sightings of black-bellied whistling ducks, commonly also referred to as "squealers," during their teal-season outings and beyond. With only limited hard data available, reports of these birds being seen and harvested across the lower half of Louisiana are on the rise, as it appears the birds are spending more time here than previously observed. Similarly, even non-hunters routinely report sightings of these birds in urban settings, rapidly becoming fixtures of neighborhood ponds and parks, among a variety of other locales.

Though more similar to a swan than a duck, these birds are often decoy- and call-friendly and are particularly suitable for table fare, making them a popular target when opportunities present afield. Paul Link, a waterfowl biologist with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries who has as much or more experience studying the birds than anyone else in the region, acknowledges that, indeed, accounts of increasing abundance across the lower portion of the Bayou State are growing.

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW >



John Flores

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

“Black-bellies are amazing birds for our area, but there’s just so much we don’t know about them,” Link said. “They’re very difficult to survey due to their propensity to use such a variety of habitats; that makes counting them a real challenge.”

Despite having banded thousands of the birds, Link said that the number of encounters with those bands through hunter harvest and reporting is extremely low, making data collection very difficult compared to other species.

“We only see an encounter rate of 2% to 3% for black-bellies, whereas other species might see rates from 15% to 25%,” Link said.

As a result, traditional means of data collection for the species is drastically reduced, making traditional management strategies for waterfowl difficult to apply.

Though previously a mainstay south of the border, input from Link’s colleagues in Mexico and beyond indicates that habitat displacement from their historic range may have led birds to spend more time in Louisiana, seemingly adapting well to the variety of habitats. According to Link, they are incredibly nomadic and very adaptable, nesting on the ground or in tree cavities. Reports of them taking well to wood duck boxes are also on the rise.

Link also notes how the bird’s opportunistic feeding

habits have drawn them to our agriculture lands, but also our golf courses just the same.

“It’s incredible as to what these birds will eat — just about anything they can fit in their mouth,” he said. “They love Bermuda (grass) seeds at our golf courses or rice in our fields, but (they) will gladly set up shop at a backyard bird feeder,” noting that they are quick to gorge on about any type of grain available.

HEARD, BUT NOT SEEN

However, despite observations of these birds being reportedly on the rise, many hunters insist that they’re not necessarily having proportionately higher success in harvesting them. Link’s observations of these wily birds may provide some key insight.

“These are very smart birds, with complex vocalizations and the ability to share information,” he said. “On top of that, they are very well-adapted to nocturnal behavior, doing much of their moving around and feeding at night.”

Link pointed out that black-bellies are equipped with additional rods in their eyes, thus are naturally well-suited to nocturnal movement. This would lend some credence to observations from many who have commonly seen or heard often-noisy groups before shooting time, only to have them disappear shortly thereafter.



Also, their affinity for urban areas is contributing to their reduced likelihood of encountering hunters.

CITY SLICKERS

"In 2016, 17 of my 20 birds equipped with transmitters converged in metro New Orleans from points dispersed all over south Louisiana," Link said. "One additional bird spent its days within a refuge and only left to feed elsewhere at night."

Within the city, birds were observed feeding in a variety of places, from parks to even a rail terminal, thus all but guaranteeing they would not encounter hunters hiding in the marshes just a few miles outside of town.

Despite their affinity for being in town, plenty of black-bellies are encountered in marshes and agricultural fields, but upping your odds of bagging the unique birds may take some specific efforts. For example, putting in the time to locate their preferred habitats is the best bet for success, though it may result in fewer chances at other waterfowl.

"These are birds you really have to watch from a distance and observe their patterns; you can't go running in with a boat and disturb them," Link said. "They can surely humble you, as they can be very difficult to hunt, and it requires patience to key in on their patterns and preferred flight paths."

GIVE 'EM A WHISTLE >

Biologists net black-bellied whistling ducks to band them so they can be better able to track their movements.



John Flores

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Black-bellied whistling ducks are not quiet; just mimic the cadence of their whistling and the decoys will get a look.

GIVE 'EM A WHISTLE

Many hunters have found black-bellies to be quite responsive to whistling calls run to mimic the cadence of the birds' calls. Not sure what they sound like? Just listen as they approach, as they're not known to be a quiet species. If a flight is passing by within calling distance, you'll know about it, and mimicking their sounds with any number of whistling calls is usually quite effective.

My go-to is the MP-90 from Haydel's Game Calls, which has put its share of squealers and other whistling species on the strap over the years. Haydel's has also introduced another whistling call tuned to mimic both the black-belly and fulvous whistling ducks, the W-19. In either case, replicating the cadence you hear from the approaching birds will usually bring them by for a closer look.

Similarly, decoys specific to the species are not something to sweat when hoping for a pass within range. Not only are such decoys not commercially produced, but squealers are just as apt to approach very close with no decoys whatsoever as with a large spread of the usual species in an area. Instead, putting your focus into thoroughly hiding and accurately imitating their calls are likely to be the two main keys to an opportunity for harvest.

If and when you are successful in strapping a few of these birds, up to six per person per day during our regular November-to-January waterfowl season, the real value of the species will show up on the dinner plate. Offering a milder breast meat than many species, squealers are a great fit for just about any of your favorite preparation methods.

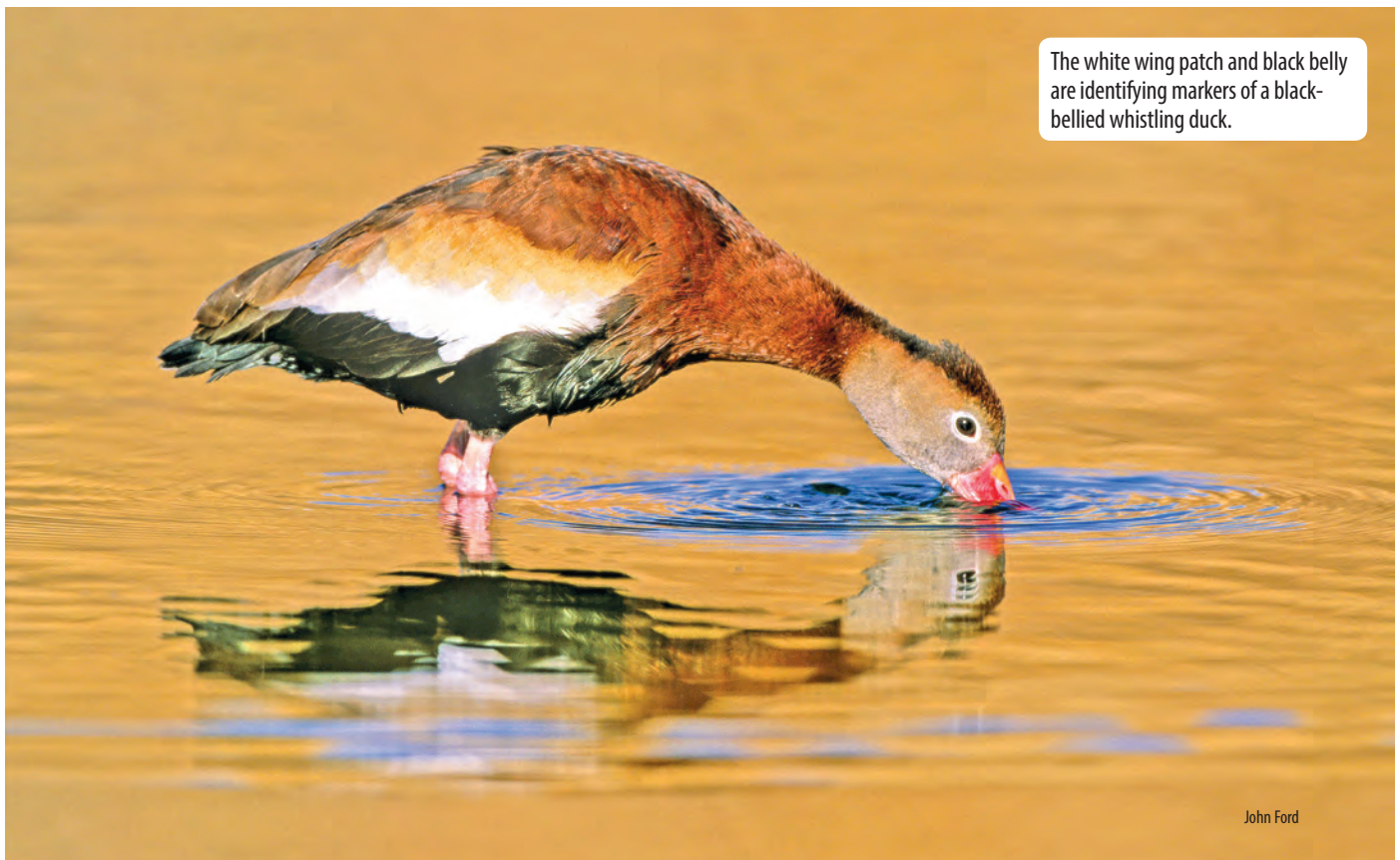


With a little shift in the mindset, black-bellied whistling ducks can bring a new twist to the Louisiana waterfowl seasons. Though they can be a challenge to target, they're propensity to be particularly vocal makes calling them a lot of fun and harvest that much more rewarding. Keep an ear out for these birds and be prepared with whistle at hand; they'll be great additions to your favorite waterfowl recipes. ■

NO EARLY SEASON BLACK-BELLIES? ➤



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.



The white wing patch and black belly are identifying markers of a black-bellied whistling duck.

John Ford

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BLACK-BELLIES NOT LIKELY TO BE ADDED FOR EARLY SEASON?

Larry Reynolds, the waterfowl study leader for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, said that while plenty of black-bellied whistling ducks are showing up in the Bayou State during the popular September teal season, federal game managers are unlikely to allow them to be taken then.

"Since the 2013 'Assessment of the Harvest Potential of North American Teal,' which provided justification to increase the bag limit during the September teal season from four to six and allow additional states to participate in those seasons, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has consistently held that they will not consider additional species in that season's bag limit," he said. "Additionally, they have specifically cautioned against allowing a 'big duck' in the teal season bag in Louisiana and Texas out of concern for the declining status of mottled ducks. As a result, that's forced us to consider an additional early season targeting only whistling ducks.

"Regardless of how we frame it, we'll need to provide justification for such a request in the form of estimates of population size, survival rates, harvest rates, and potential impacts to

non-target species which is going to be challenging," he said. "A large portion of black-bellied whistling ducks use urban or suburban habitats for much of the year and are difficult to survey over their range. Paul (Lynk) and our field staff have done a great job of expanding the banded sample of black-bellied whistling ducks, but with so relatively few recoveries, we are struggling to get a handle on survival and harvest estimates.

"We know even less about fulvous whistling ducks, and it would be impractical to have a black-bellied whistling duck season or add them to the teal season bag limit without also including fulvous whistling ducks. Lastly, any special season or addition to teal season bag limits would also require evaluation in the form of 'hunter performance surveys' aka 'spy blind studies.' The benefits of additional hunting opportunity for whistling ducks has to be weighed against the resources needed to justify and evaluate that opportunity, and the waterfowl section is continuing to work toward providing those benefits." ■

TEAL HUNTING SCRAPBOOK >

Despite increasing the number of black-bellied whistling ducks being banded in Louisiana, biologists still don't have a good grasp on species numbers and habits.

John Flores



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Teal Hunting SCRAPBOOK



Eli Hurst

Photo by Shane Fontenot

Eli Hurst, 4, on a teal hunt with Sportsman Charters in Gueydan. He's now hooked!



Aidan Thibodeaux

Aidan Thibodeaux 9, of Lake Arthur, with teal taken in Klondike on Sept. 12.



Lee Gervais Jr.

Lee Gervais Jr. with a stringer of teal taken on Sept. 12 in Plaquemines Parish.



Olivia Hurst

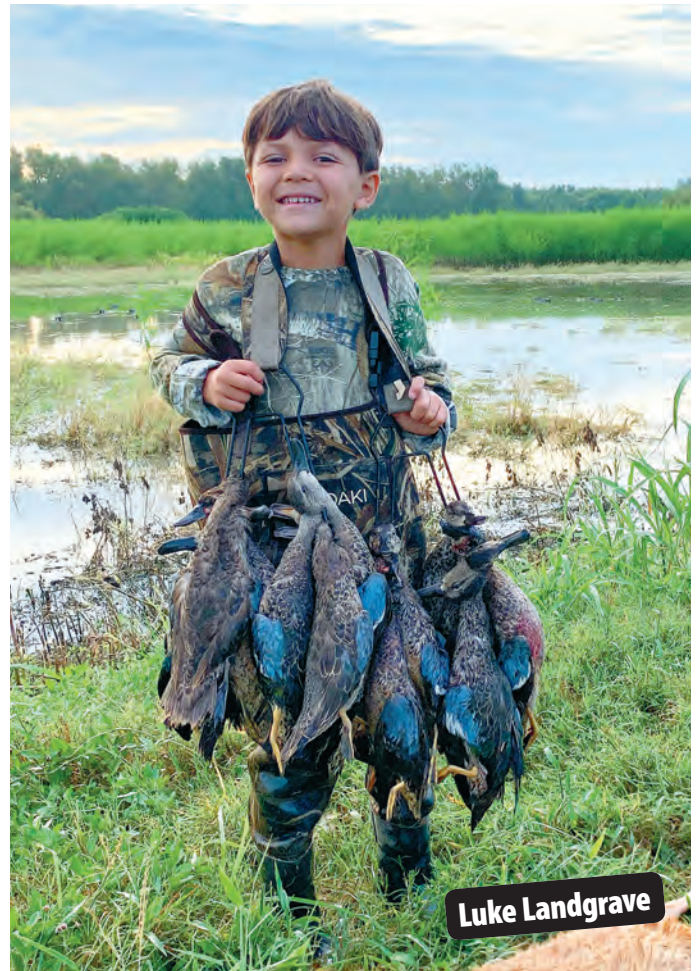
Olivia Hurst, 3, on a teal hunt with Sportsman Charters in Gueydan.

Photo by Shane Fontenot



Brecken Figueiredo

Brecken Figueiredo, 10, with a two-man limit of teal from a hunt with his dad, Tibby Figueiredo, on Sept. 12, 2020, on Catahoula Lake.



Luke Landgrave

Luke Landgrave, 5, shot his first teal with a .410 over the opening weekend in St. Landry Parish.



Zachary Gassie

Zachary Gassie and his buddies had very good success killing their limits of teal in Venice.



Jude, Brandon & John Devillier

Jude Devillier, 6, Brandon Devillier (left) and John Devillier after an opening morning teal hunt in the Pointe a la Hache marsh.



Photo courtesy of Viking



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have spent more seasons of the year catching speckled trout in the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) channel than in any other singular structural feature in southeast Louisiana, not surprising given that the MRGO is a 45-mile north-south channel that bisects the marsh.

It can give us spectacular trout action on a cold, rainy December day beside the \$1.1 billion Surge Barrier Wall, aka “The Great Wall of Chalmette”, or on a blistering July day along its southern jetties in Breton Sound. So many specific spots and structural features along the MRGO can be focused on that you may miss the fundamental advantage the channel brings to our fishery: edges.

To define the concept of an edge, consider one classic scenario, the marsh drain. One of the cardinal rules of inshore fishing is to cast baits in the vicinity of moving water. The marsh drain, also known as a cut or a crevasse, is an example.

Where a marsh drain allows a pond to empty tidal water into a bayou, you can effectively fish the flowing water by positioning your boat off the cut in the bayou about three-quarters of a cast from the junction of the cut and the bayou. This allows casting into the cut and either working the bait out with the current or simply letting the current float it out.

Most often the bait will be waylaid by a fish when it moves into the transition zone between the cut and

the bayou. The best of these spots have multiple transitions, such as a change in depth, a change in water velocity or a change in water clarity. We may think of these spots as regions of moving water because we can see the flow, but a more helpful mental model of such areas is to see them as edges.

PATROL THE EDGES >



■ By Jon Miller

**DISTINCT CHANGES
IN HABITAT, CURRENT
AND STRUCTURE
CREATE SOME GREAT
FISHING OPPORTUNITIES
ALONG THE LONG BOATING
CHANNEL THAT IS A
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**GET AN
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PATROL THE EDGES

Edges are the most-consistently productive features for catching inshore species, and most anglers fish them, although they may not think of them as edges. They are the transition between two or more distinct physical or water chemistry properties, and for various reasons, edges are more ecologically rich than the homogeneous features that form them.

This is also common for many terrestrial animals. For instance, hunters know that they are more likely to find deer moving near the edge of a forest or edges of a forest meadow than in the deepest, darkest parts of the forest. Edges teem with plant, insect and animal life, but inside a forest of tall, deciduous trees, the rich edge is not the forest floor but the canopy — the edge between the treetops and the sky. Therefore, deer mostly pass through the forest on their way to the edges to feed.

One type of obvious edge is the border between a line of submerged aquatic vegetation and open water or the line of rocks along many parts of the MRGO channel. These edges we instinctively understand because they are the plane between cover and open water or safety and danger. If you have ever been on an African safari or in a national park inhabited by

bears, you understand the cover your car provides you and the courage it gives you to step out to take pictures of the animals. The baitfish living in the weed bed act the same way, staying close enough for a quick retreat but venturing over the edge to feed on passing organisms. This type of edge will attract speckled trout and redfish, but the fish are more distributed along these edges than some other types of edges.

WATERY EDGES

The types of edges where you are more likely to find concentrations of speckled trout are not the transitions between structural cover and open water, but instead the edges between water characteristics, such as water draining through a cut.

A mental model describing the productivity of the marsh drain is bait swept out of the marsh pond by the fast water and into the grasp of predators waiting where the water slows. However, the more I have studied underwater videos, the less I see baitfish as helpless creatures easily swept along by the current. In fact, they are quite capable of maneuvering quickly through the current in all directions. So why would baitfish hang around in open water where they seem so vulnerable?

To understand, we need to establish a motive for these baitfish, and fortunately, the motivations of fish are rather limited. They are either eating, reproducing, escaping predation or resting. The only activity that seems to fit the bait in the marsh-drain scenario is feeding, so a better mental model is that of the organisms the bait fish are eating being swept helplessly out with the current, and the baitfish are there to consume these smaller creatures.



Wyatt Hayes holds up the beautiful 3-pound speckled trout. **OPPOSITE:** The rocks that line the MRGO channel are an obvious edge that baitfish and speckled trout will use on a regular basis.

The organisms in the current create a food chain, starting with the phytoplankton and increasing in size to the baitfish being eaten by the trout. This concept builds an entirely new model in my mind, where organisms in the ecological food chain flourish on the current created edges of that marsh drain. That means I benefit from harvesting greater numbers of trout at this spot because the tiny organisms and the baitfish are concentrated here as a result of the edge between different properties of the water.

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THE CURRENT'S ATTRACTION

To best grasp the richness the MRGO brings to the fishery, we need to talk about currents. Inshore anglers are very skilled at identifying tidal currents, referencing the tidal predictions and generally using conditions the tidal currents create to catch more fish. However, there is more water movement in the MRGO than just tidal-driven water. Where there is significant water-depth variation, water also moves vertically due to temperature and salinity, which are both products of a change in water density.

While not as strong as tidal forces, when lighter water — which is warmer or fresher — rises, it carries nutrients from the bottom. Water near the surface has more oxygen but fewer nutrients, and feeding nutrients into oxygen-rich water increases the growth of phytoplankton, which are the smallest organisms in the food chain. Increasing the phytoplankton, in principle, increases the potential of a greater amount of food for trout.

A strong current flow over shallow water in the Mississippi River estuary is interesting, but sometimes it makes the water too turbid for speckled trout. However, the gentle mixing of nutrient rich water near the MRGO channel's drop-off can create a rich habitat of life without the turbidity. I have often found trout staged near the edges of the MRGO drop-offs in 14 to 20 feet of water, possibly due to their food being concentrated where water with different properties is mixing. This is one

The south side of the MRGO rock dam is an ecologically rich area where birds feed on schools of baitfish, and speckled trout and redfish are often plentiful.

example of an edge that the MRGO creates.

One of the features along the MRGO regularly fished in the fall through spring is a flat southeast of the Wall. This section of water is a space between a large, 2- to 3-foot deep bay and the channel, and it tapers from 3 to 6 feet over a few hundred feet before quickly dropping into the 30-foot depth of the channel. It may seem like calling a flat an edge is a stretch of the imagination, but I believe the productivity of this flat is very much due to an edge created by the MRGO. The water of the nutrient-rich channel on two sides of the flat and the oxygen-rich shallow water of the marsh bay very likely increases the richness of life on the flat, making it an ideal cold-water hunting ground for specks and redfish.



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

ROCK DAM EDGES >

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Get an edge on the MRGO

The MRGO channel is well known as one of southeast Louisiana's prime locations for speckled trout, especially in November.

ROCK DAM EDGES

Another obvious feature of the MRGO is the rock dam near Hopedale, which produces multiple edges due to the complexity of the structure. The richness of life around the dam is often visible in an abundance of baitfish at the surface.

The south side of the dam is especially effective at creating edges on a falling tide. During many months, fresher water from the north side filters through the top of the dam and mixes with higher-salinity water on the south side. This area of the channel is also quite deep, so the water drops quickly from the exposed rocks to 40 feet. I have found that trout can be caught in large numbers without moving your boat due to fish congregating on the edges created by streams of flowing water.

Many anglers talk about the importance of boat position and casting location when fishing current, which I believe is an example of the existence of an edge. This certainly can happen



on the south side of the dam, where retrieving the bait down a particular line can produce a trout on every cast. I have found that casting a 3/8-ounce jighead with a paddletail swimbait up

to the rocks and letting the current mostly float the bait down the dam can be a recipe for non-stop action.

My approach to fishing the MRGO is to look for irregularities. These can be protrusions of rock along the shorelines, bayous intersecting with the channel, submerged rocks in 10 to 14 feet of water, breaks in the jetties and obvious features like the Wall and dam. I primarily fish the west side of the channel, but there are also excellent spots on the east side. When fishing around the Wall, the trout can congregate anywhere from 25 feet deep to tight against the Wall and the rock shoreline.

Despite the failure of the MRGO as a shipping channel, it has blessed our fishery because it is vastly different from the surrounding marsh. The many differences create edges, which enhance the richness of aquatic life and improves the fishing. When fishing this structure and others, remember to focus on the edges to increase your catches of speckled trout and redfish. ■

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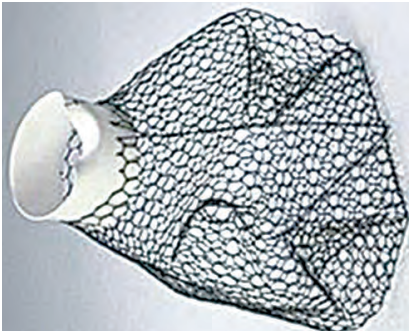
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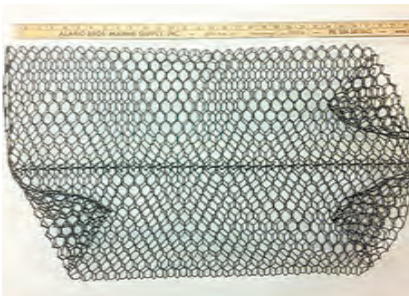
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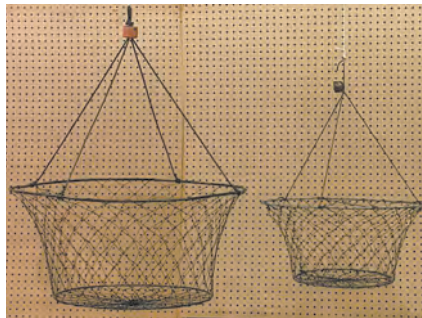
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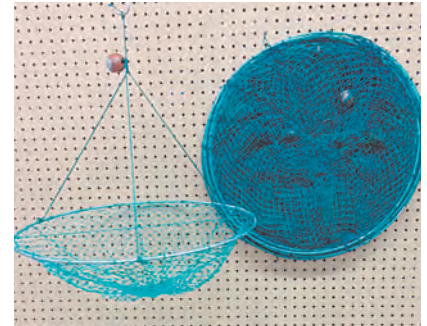


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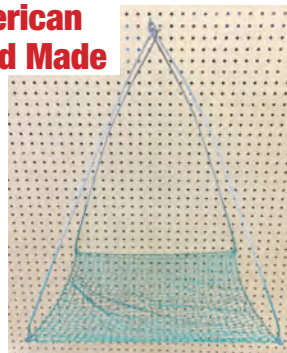
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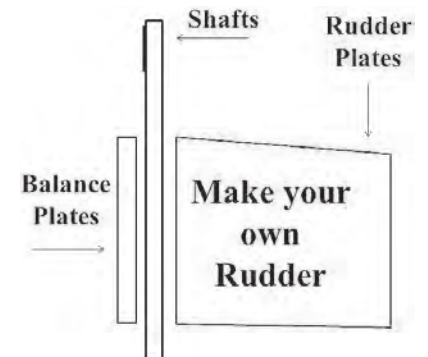


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MARSH MAN MASSON

Todd Masson

The autumn speckled trout run kicked off early this year, and has really gotten rolling in recent weeks.



Todd Masson

GOOD NEWS: LOTS OF SPECKS SURVIVED THE SUMMER

FALL SEASON SHOULD BE A BIG SUCCESS FOR ANGLERS WILLING TO PUT IN A LOT OF TIME AND COVER A LOT OF WATER

This summer wasn't exactly an epic one for south Louisiana speckled trout anglers, but that's actually great news for those who want to target their favorite fish close to home in November.

Many days in June and July, persistent west winds prevented anglers from accessing the fish-rich spawning grounds, so the preponderance of specks that were out there weren't caught and are still swimming and pumping water through their gills as you read this in the heart of the autumn run.

That blitz of action always takes place in inside waters — the lakes, ponds and bayous that offer more shrimp and bait-fish than a bazillion trout could eat in a year. And for whatever reason, the run this year began earlier than usual.

Back in mid-August, anglers started reporting speckled trout catches in interior marshes, at least a month before they usually show up, and as the weeks

have moved along, the number of inside fish has continued to increase.

I've been the beneficiary of that for months now, especially on a recent venture into the marsh, when I was hunting for whatever would bite but found far more speckled trout than anything else.

Best of all, the fish were keepers, with every one clearing Louisiana's generous 12-inch size minimum.

GREAT SEARCH BAIT

I used one particular lure to find them, and it's one that almost no one thinks of as a speckled trout producer — an H&H gold No. 4 spinner teamed with a ¼-ounce Deathgrip Jighead and a shrimp creole-colored Matrix Shad. That's normally a staple for me on bass and redfish trips, but for whatever reason, the combo has been a deadly search bait this year for speckled trout.

As with all my trips this fall, once I located the school with the spinner, I

switched over to another combo that's more effective for boating good numbers of eating-sized specks. On my first cast with a red ice-colored TKO Shrimp under a Versamaxx Bolt Pro-Series, my cork plunged. I eventually had to reposition the boat to present the lure most effectively, but once I did, specks flew over the gunwale on almost every cast.

As has been the case recently, I found the fish in a bayou leading from the outside to the inside. Some will likely still be there this month, but November is usually when the fish become entrenched in their fall patterns.

And that means hitting oyster reefs or grass beds in interior lakes with



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

Specks made an early showing this year in inside waters along Louisiana's coast.

topwaters, jerkbaits, paddletail soft-plastics or cork-suspended live or artificial shrimp.

Exactly where the fish will be thickest depends on bait migrations, which can be kind of random. You really have to go hunting to find which lakes and bays are best in any particular fall.

But that's half the fun.

DON'T SLOW DOWN

Until they locate the schools, anglers should fish this month like their pants are on fire, using the wind and their trolling motors to push them over oyster beds or within casting distance of grass beds in lakes with good clarity. They should focus on those near bayou mouths if the tide is falling. Autumn tides push and pull white shrimp from backwater marshes, and speckled trout get fat mauling the hapless crustaceans at the mouths of bayous on a falling tide.



Fifteen minutes is long enough to see if there are feeding fish in that area. If nobody's home, the whole Louisiana marsh is available as an alternative.

Some days, winds are too strong or tides are too meager to get on a good bite, but on all the other days, fast action is a reasonable expectation. There really isn't a better time to be a speckled trout angler in Sportsman's Paradise. ■

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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: SPECKLED TROUT

SPECKLED TROUT ARE AN ANGLER'S FAVORITE, WHEREVER THEY SWIM

Speckled trout, *Cynoscion nebulosus*, are inshore gamefish that are popular among recreational anglers along the Gulf Coast and the eastern seaboard. They are hearty fighters, and most anglers agree that they are very tasty.

These fish have elongated, streamlined bodies. Their lower jaws extend beyond the upper jaws. They are usually silvery gray to green and sometimes have blue and purple highlights on their backs. Their bellies are usually white. They have flat, unforked tails with black edges. Speckled trout have two sharp teeth at the top of their mouths, which are usually yellow on the inside.

Speckled trout have long dorsal fins,

which are made up of two sections. The long, rear section is soft and pliable. A deep notch separates this from the front section, which is spiny and sharp.

They are members of the *Sciaenid* family, which includes weakfish, sand seatrout, red drum and black drum. Like other members of that family, they have a lateral line that runs down the middle of their body all the way to the tail.

Speckled trout have prominent black spots along the upper section of their bodies, as well as on their dorsal and tail fins. On very rare occasions, a handful have been caught with no spots on their bodies. But all of those fish had spots on their dorsal and tail fins.

A HUGE RANGE

The speckled trout's range is Cape Cod to Florida and the entire Gulf of Mexico. They live along inshore waterways and from the shallows out to 30 feet deep in the Gulf. They are a schooling species for the most part, but the very large ones travel in smaller groups. Females can live up to 10 years in the wild, but males rarely reach 5 years old.



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.

Anglers catch these fish near sea grass and shellfish banks at a variety of depths. Live shrimp and a variety of baitfish are attractive forage for speckled trout, but anglers looking for a bigger challenge love catching them on a variety of artificial lures. Topwater “walk-the-dog” lures are popular choices. Plastic shrimp under popping corks are sure-fire ways of finding them, and swimbaits fished on jigheads throughout the water column are very effective.

These fish, while tough fighters on hook-and-line, are known as some of the most-delicate fish among their inshore cousins. They are prone to large fish kills during periods of extreme cold weather and are less tolerant of fresh or even brackish water than most other members of the drum family.

Along the east coast, they are often misidentified as weakfish. Along the Gulf coast, they are sometimes mislabeled as sand trout or white trout. The best way to distinguish speckled trout from any of those species is by the spots on the dorsal and tail fins, which only speckled trout have.

Nicknames include spotted seatrout, specks, spotted weakfish, yellowmouth, winter trout and trout. They are infrequently known as truite gris in some Cajun circles. Bigger ones are often called gators or gator trout.

Louisiana’s state-record speckled trout weighed 12.38 pounds. Leon Mattes caught the fish in Lake Hermitage in April 1950.

David Floyd caught Mississippi’s state-record speckled trout on April 8, 2013. This fish weighed 10 pounds, 10 ounces.

The world record speck tipped the scales at 17 pounds, 7 ounces and was caught in Ft. Pierce, Fla., by Craig Carson on May 11, 1995. ■

TROUT & REDFISH HOTSPOTS >

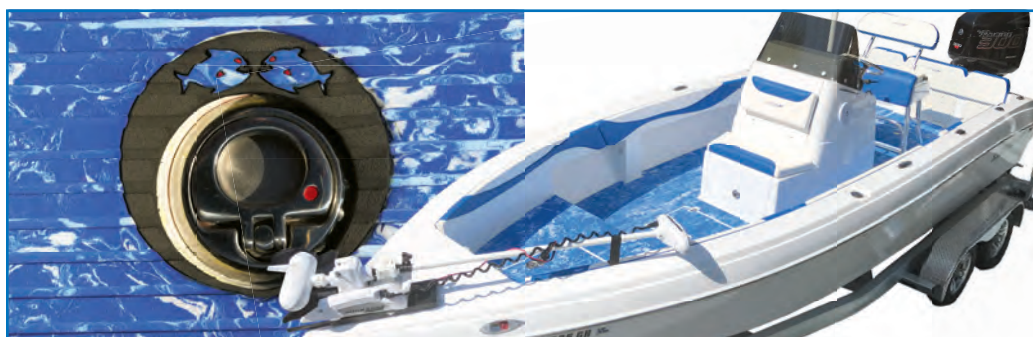
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**TROUT & REDFISH
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George Pope and his son, Jack, dusted their waders off from last duck season to try their hand at wade fishing. I believe they will be wading again soon after catching trout all morning.



BIG LAKE ANGLERS HAVE WADE-FISHING TO TRY THIS MONTH

Shell bottoms open up trout, redfish hopes

For anglers who target big trout, it is officially wading season, kind of like wedding season, only better. It is the time we wait for all year: temperatures are dropping, water is clearing and big, sow trout are moving in to the shallows.

I was first introduced to wade-fishing in my pre-teen years. Back then, we did a lot of wading on the shorelines of Sabine Lake, targeting flounder. My experience has expanded from Lake Calcasieu all the way to the Lower Laguna Madre. I was even able to get in a little wade-fishing in Hawaii this past January while I was there for a wedding.

At this point, wading on Lake Calcasieu, aka Big Lake, is still my favorite locale. Compared to Sabine, Big Lake offers many more opportunities for the wade-fisherman, mainly due to the significant amount of structure available to fish. There are only so many reefs to wade on Sabine, however, you can cast in nearly any direction at Big Lake and hit a piece of shell. It is a vital substrate that not only provides anglers excellent opportunities to catch fish but is essential to the overall health of the fishery.

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I take several factors into consideration when deciding where to fish, primarily bait activity and water conditions. If I do not see bait activity, such as mullet jumping, I am leaving. Fish are going to be where there is food, simple as that. Water conditions consist of salinity, clarity and movement.

In November, we usually still have a good amount of shrimp leaving the marsh, so I tend to target areas near drains, bayous and the mouths of rivers. The north end around Turner's Bay is one of my favorite places, especially when a north wind is blowing. West Cove offers an abundance of wading opportunities, regardless of wind direction. Take caution and watch the water level when fishing West Cove, especially if attempting to utilize the north entrance. I would recommend entering through the southern entrance if you are unfamiliar with the area.

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Gino Herrera showing off a solid trout he landed while wade during the fall.



When it comes to tackle, I prefer to keep my wading box rather simple. If I am wading in the fall or winter, looking for a trophy trout I will either be throwing a topwater, a tail or some type of suspending or slow-sinking lure. I will also mix in, on occasion, a floating jerkbait. A huge factor is to throw what you have confidence in, but also something that you can work.

Heddon makes my all-time favorite topwater lure, the Super Spook; I like to fish the clown color. It is rather easy to work, casts a mile, works well in rougher water and flat-out catches fish. Gold/pink and black are two other good colors, although a black Super Spook is nearly impossible to find unless you know somebody who has a stockpile.

I do not throw a tail nearly as often as I should while wading,

but if I do I lean towards the 5-inch Saltwater Shad. Color largely depends on water clarity, however I find that chicken-on-a-chain is generally a very good color. I keep two different slow-sink/suspending baits in my wade box, MirrOdines and Corky Fat Boys. Pink and chartreuse are a couple primary colors I throw, but the 808 and 21 MirrOline are both killers. When a jerkbait is thrown into the mix, I am going with a silver/black 5¼-inch Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnow. I do not catch a ton of fish on the Crystal Minnow, but they are big. ■

— 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

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IT'S ON: TROUT, REDS ROAMING THE INSIDE

Guide expects fantastic November fishing

This is the time of year for which we've waited long months, when we finally get cooler weather, and short runs from the dock can result in great catches of trout and redfish.

Interior waters are looking extra promising this year because of that continual influx of saltier water brought by the steady stream of storms in the Gulf. The high water inevitably brings bait with it, and the bait attracts the fish that attract us.

Capt. Marc Fradella (985-290-2908) said he had an excellent October despite dodging storms, and November, according to him, "should be outstanding — perhaps the best month we've seen in years. The best part, I'm not running far from the dock to get on the action."

Fradella said that in a good year — without the Spillway openings — great fishing usually breaks out throughout the southeastern Louisiana marshes in November, and this year the fishing should be off the charts everywhere.

"There's some really good fishing right now very close to the launches, in Hopedale Lagoon around Ameda, also in Lake Amedee and the bayou connecting to it, and I've been catching some nice fish in Lena Lagoon also," he said.

The Biloxi Marsh should teem with fish, from Stump Lagoon up



Mike Sambola caught this nice redfish on a recent trip to Hopedale.



in all the bays, bayous and passes, which should produce plenty fish whenever you find moving water, he said.

Fradella said the key is to find clean, moving water, especially when you see bait in the water. He prefers fishing a falling tide, but any moving water is going to produce.

"You're also going to want to bring live bait, because the fish do get finicky, and sometimes, that's all they'll hit," he said. "I do good in the fall with plastics, too, like VuDu shrimp in chartreuse, natural shrimp color or clear/red flecks, also on the curlytail Salt Water Assassins in chartreuse or clear/chartreuse and on the H&H tandem-rigged glass minnows or sparkle beetles. The trout have been gorging on shrimp and glass minnows in the marsh so if you match the hatch you'll catch fish."

Fradella said he's fishing mostly about 2½ feet under a popping cork, and his tactics are simple.

"I fish around the mouths of bays and at drains into the bayous from the marsh," he said. "I park and fish at good, flowing drains, and I like to drift in the bays until I find some fish. On windy days, I'll fish the lee shorelines of bays with live shrimp under a cork, and with those plastics if they'll hit them." ■

— Rusty Tardo

Capt. Marc Fradella expects November to be one of the best fishing months in recent years along the Gulf coast.

FLOUNDER RUN BUSY IN CALCASIEU LAKE

Big females on the move in November

The flounder run on Calcasieu Lake starts about mid-October when the first cold front pushes in, and the big fish will show up more in November.

"That's usually when they'll start running," said Capt. Brian Hachery of Louisiana Backwater Charters. "Males run in October first; they will be a little bit smaller. Typically, after the males make their run and the weather starts getting colder, the big females will start to go. This usually happens in November.

"People will come down and stay weeks at a time in their campers around Ellender Bridge, just to catch flounder. You will see a lot of RV's parked around the area. If you don't hear about the flounder running, you will be able to tell due to the amount of people fishing the channel."

Where should anglers targeting flounder look?

"The ledges, the dropoffs and the channels once you get to the south end of the lake when they funnel down are where you'll find flounder this time of year," Hachery said. "South around the Cameron Ferry area, a few areas around the north and south side of the Cameron Ferry, the bulkheads, and around the north end of the jetties on flats produce flounder during the flounder run."

What are Hachery's favorite lures?

"Typically, what people use are a normal Down South lure," he said. "I like to use chartreuse, glow and bone diamond. Another



Cold weather in November will get flounder moving in Calcasieu Lake, the smaller males first, then females.



one of my favorite lures is any color Gulp swimming mullet. I use a lot of pink, chartreuse, pearl and glow — basically, any color that will catch their attention.

"A lot of times, what I will do, if they aren't eating my plastic very well, is catch a croaker and use that for bait."

Hachery said the best conditions to catch flounder are when the tide goes out and the temperature drops.

"That is when they are supposed to eat," he said. "The flounder can run right after a cold front, but they'll typically do so a few days later. When it's still cold, but the wind lies down and the water clears up, that's when you will really catch them.

"It's better if the north winds pushes the water out after a cold front, too."

The flounder, most of the time, school good on a normal, outgoing tide.

"If it's too much tide, the flounder will just run," he said "You want a normal, outgoing tide, not too low of water, and decent water clarity. They'll also bite on a dead tide during the switch."

When asked what anglers should keep in mind while fishing the flounder run, Hachery said to pay attention to water clarity, tides, and weather.

"Temperature is critical, he said. "You never know if it will be 100 degrees or 5 degrees this time of year, so pay attention to what the weather is going to do. You want nice, semi-clean water. If it is dirty, it is harder to catch them." ■

— Dora Lambert

**PADDLES 'N
PUDDLES**

Flounder gang up better and can be caught in numbers on an outgoing tide in cold weather.

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.

DEAD SHRIMP ON THE BOTTOM

At a large kayak-fishing tournament in Louisiana a few years ago, the winning contestants proceeded to the podium in ascending order to tell the stories of their prized catches.

Various popular lures made the list, and each angler was rightfully proud of having tricked the fish into falling for their fake offering. Some wouldn't even divulge their secret weapon. Then it came time for the overall winner to give his details.

The tournament format was Cajun Slam, where top prizes went to the anglers who amassed the heaviest weight when a speckled trout, a flounder and a slot-sized redfish were put on the scales. Anglers could use live or natural bait and artificial lures. No doubt, thousands of dollars of artificial creations of all shapes, sizes and actions were dragged through the water that day, some with great success, others not so much. Fishing almost all artificial lures takes some skill and finesse. The goal is to mimic a living, prey creature and entice a fish that makes its daily living hunting for its food. It is not always easy.

It seems every day there is a newest and greatest lure introduced. Do they catch fish? Absolutely. However, as lure types, materials and patterns continue to change, fish do not. Many lures are as realistic as can be. New 3D printing and computer design has them as close to the real thing as they can get. Be it fish, shrimp, crab or even mice and spider imitations, these things look real. However, throw one out and let it sit, and it almost never attracts a fish. It must be retrieved, popped, wiggled, or jiggled in just the right presentation in order to fool a wise fish.

NO LURES BETTER THAN REAL THING

I have as many artificial lures as anyone, and likely more than most — an absurd amount, actually, and I keep buying more. I like the feeling I get when I successfully hoodwink a trout or red into falling for my fake offering. But there is one fact that can never be overlooked. Artificial lures are all designed to act like something real, but none are ever better than the real thing.

Many beginning kayak anglers are also beginning fishermen. Frustration often sets in as they come home with few or no fish in their cooler bag as they learn new waters and techniques for rigging and fishing artificial lures.





Using dead shrimp is a highly effective way to catch redfish. A popping cork with a jighead and plastic tail tipped with a piece of shrimp tricked this multi-spotted redfish.

PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued

You want to catch fish? Get some dead shrimp.

In my early days of saltwater fishing, I didn't know what it was to make a trip without dead bait (shrimp) or "market bait" as all the old-timers still refer to it. Simply put, there is not a fish in Louisiana that will not eat a real shrimp, and that goes for freshwater species, too. Live shrimp are certainly effective but are not always available, and keeping them alive can sometimes be a chore, especially in a kayak.

DEAD SHRIMP WORKS FINE

However, a couple pounds of dead shrimp are inexpensive and readily available at any marina, seafood market or local grocery store. In the rare instance that fresh is not available, frozen works almost as well. A chunk of shrimp dangling from a hook under a popping cork requires little skill. Cast it out to a likely spot and wait. A few pops of the cork here and there won't hurt, but the shrimp will be doing all the work. It is actually quite amazing how fast that scent spreads. It is almost a guarantee that something will find it.

That something is not always something desirable. When fishing dead shrimp, you have the added annoyance of dealing with your share of hardhead catfish and crabs, but that is usually

overcome by the reds, trout, sheepshead, drum and flounder it attracts. Some type of action is almost certain to happen.

RIGGED AND READY

Shrimp are also effectively fished on the bottom using a simple rig with the hook tied on about 6 to 12 inches above a sinker. Held with a tight line after casting, the smelly, tasty morsel dangles just above the bottom, and bites are readily detectable.

Ways to effectively rig and fish dead shrimp are endless. A small piece used to tip the hook of a jighead/plastic tail combo can be the spice that makes all the difference. Tied under a cork and tossed close to the bank or on a point is a most-effective way to catch a fish, especially redfish.

Fishing with dead bait is not something to be frowned upon or only for kids or inexperienced anglers. It makes good fishing sense. If your goal is to catch fish, using what fish eat almost daily is a wise move.

BACK TO THE WINNER

Back to that tournament-winning angler. His three-fish slam set him up to win thousands of dollars in cash and prizes. What secret weapon lure did he use?

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Dead shrimp or "market bait" is readily available at most marinas or seafood markets. Fished in a variety of ways, you're almost guaranteed to catch something.

"Well, I caught my trout fishing a dead shrimp under a cork," he said.

The crowd laughed and cheered. Okay, what did you use to catch your redfish?

"Well, it was a dead shrimp under a cork."

Again laughs and cheers. Let us guess, you also used a dead shrimp under a cork to catch your flounder?

"Nope."

Aha, so now we'll get the magic lure. So, what did you use?

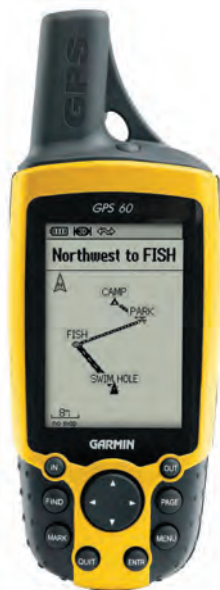
"Dead shrimp on the bottom."

He laughed all the way to the bank. ■

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3 TIPS TO BECOMING A BETTER INSHORE ANGLER

GET OUT OF YOUR ROUTINE — AND CATCH MORE FISH

By Devin Denman

Don't be afraid to try new tackle, new baits, new areas to improve your inshore fishing.

Photo courtesy Capt. Cami Mantilla

Are you launching from the same marina and fishing the same old spots?

That's what I used to do. See, I was interested only in short-term success — never long-term success.

I always fished the same handful of locations and always got the same results: Sometimes I limited out, sometimes I had little to show.

When my honey hole didn't produce, I didn't have a Plan B, and it cost me. When I struck out, I struck out hard.

But once I knocked that practice off, I started catching more speckled trout and redfish.

Here are three ways I did it:

FISH NEW AREAS

Now, I launch from marinas I rarely visit or have never seen.

Instead of driving my boat to the same spot, I'm forced to find fish using the fundamentals of inshore fishing.

In the process, I learned what really makes a honey hole a true "honey hole."

Now I feel confident I can go into any marsh and have a good day. It's a great

feeling you should have, too.

TRY NEW TACKLE

It's age-old wisdom that anglers should use lures they are confident in, and that's great advice that works.

But, in the same breath, I'll tell you, try something new.

Not a new color or lure, but something fundamentally different — like fishing line or a reel-type you're currently uncomfortable with.

For example, I always disliked anything that wasn't 20-pound PowerPro. Now that's changed; today, I use monofilament, fluorocarbon and braid, all on spinning and casting tackle.

Monofilament is cheap and neutral buoyant, fluorocarbon sinks with a jig-head, and 65-pound braid can yank any redfish out of a grass mat.

They're all valuable tools in the tackle box.

GO EXPLORING

Some days, I make the decision to "let go" of the fish. On these trips I tell myself long before launching the boat that today is not about catching a limit.

Then, I leave the dock to explore the marsh, try new spots and discover safe routes.

If that isn't feasible, I will at least go exploring after I catch a decent number of fish. Otherwise, I get stuck in the rut of needing to catch a limit — and never get to learn or see new things.

Interestingly enough, it's days I let go of the fish that I really smash them. It seems counterintuitive, but it really does work.

CONCLUSION

When you do these three things, you will improve your fishing trips over the long-term.

Think of these practices as your homework. Fish have tails, and it's just a matter of time before they use them to swim somewhere else. And when they do, you'll need what you learned from your homework to find them again. ■

Editor's Note: Devin Denman is an avid inshore fisherman who writes the Louisiana Fishing Blog. To read more of his articles, visit lafishblog.com

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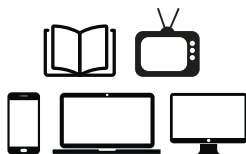
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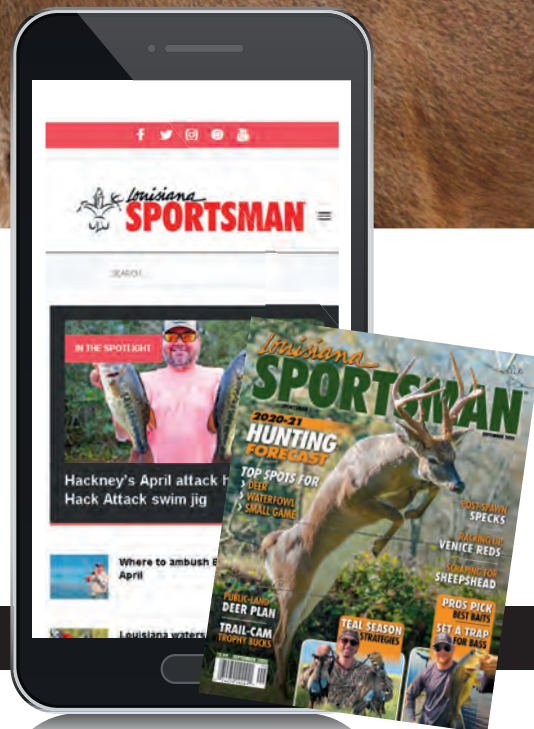


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COBIA INVADE GRAND ISLE

Capt. Chris Mowad of Whoo Dat Sportfishing has been fishing for most of his life, starting his career in Pensacola, Fla. He's adjusted from king-mackerel fishing in Florida to targeting cobia in Grand Isle, along with various pelagic fish.

"In November, there are a lot more fish around," he said, "not quite as big as earlier in the year, though. The average cobia caught is usually about 30 to 40 inches. That's why you should scale down the hook and tackle size, to adjust for the catch. Other than that, cobia fishing this time of year is no different than any other time of the year when the cobia are around.

"A few of the locals will say that cobia fishing doesn't get good until July or August. We started catching good sized fish in May. Our first 10 fish were over 50 pounds. It's been a decent year for cobia, and November shouldn't be all that different from earlier in the year aside from the size of the fish that will be caught."

WHERE TO LOOK

Mowad said he's had luck around the Grand Isle 40s, 20s; drill ships, the upcurrent sides near the anchor chains and the satellite platforms near the west Timbalier Block.

"We'll be hitting those throughout the fall, and we expect to find cobia still there," he said. "It's going to be the same for any structure off Fourchon and Cocodrie. They will have cobia, too.



Good numbers of cobia, some of them really big ones, will fill up Gulf waters in November.

"What I have found, is that cobia will be in similar water depths, usually along the range of more than 60 feet but less than 120 feet. The magic number is usually 80-90 feet."

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Mowad said cobia like greener water better than the murkier inshore water.

"Crossing over the tide line may produce more fish," he said. "Just make sure that the weather is right for doing that.

"If the conditions are perfect — a southeast swell, sunny weather, and not too choppy — you could see the cobia swimming on top. But this won't always be the case every time you are on the water."

NECESSARY TACKLE, BAIT

"Cobia like sticking together," Mowad said. "That's where having the extra rods rigged up, ready to toss out, comes in handy. It's best to be prepared and expecting it.

"I always have several rods rigged up with a Carolina rig, 60- pound fluorocarbon leaders, 7/0 to 8/0 hooks, and



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Oil rigs and platforms are great places to target cobia.

a 4- to 6- ounce lead weight. I keep a few other rods rigged with a free-line leader ready, too. Once that first cobia is hooked, another one will usually follow him up. You've got to be ready for that.

"As for bait, live bait and even whole squid work. Pinfish are my favorite live bait. Croaker are decent, but they're hard to come by right now.

"If you want to stick with artificial lures, bucktails are good for covering a lot of ground. I use them to locate the cobia when going from rig to rig."

TIPS TO REMEMBER

Mowad said part of successfully targeting cobia involves figuring out the current.

"The main key to remember is to stay on the upcurrent side of whatever structure you are fishing," he said. "If you see a cobia swimming around structure and he disappears, throw dome chum in the water. He will come back up. You don't always have to chum for them, but it helps."

— Dora Lambert



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ALLIGATOR ROLL: A TRUE CAJUN "LOBSTER" ROLL

SWAMP LIZARDS, CHICKEN OF THE SWAMP, GATOR... THE OTHER WHITE MEAT! By Nathan L. Judice

When you think of Louisiana, a few things should come to mind: great food, great people and alligator hunting.

Alligator meat has a truly unique flavor. The tail meat, tenderloin and cheek meat are the prized cuts with a mild, chicken-like or springy texture and a slight seafood flavor.

Some say the ribs resemble pork in taste and texture. They are great baked, smoked and glazed with your favorite sauce. The leg meat, considered a dark meat, is great for braising, grinding or cooked as wings of the swamp — if small and tender enough.

I was lucky enough to be drawn for public-land alligator tags through the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries' Lottery Alligator Harvest Program, and I successfully filled my three tags. After processing the alligators and trying a variety of dishes, I came up with the idea of an "Alligator Roll" due to its slight seafood flavor and springy texture similar to lobster. By no means is alligator a substitute for lobster, but this feaux lobster roll is packed with flavor and spiced up the Cajun way.

Yield: 6 servings

INSTRUCTIONS

- Cube the alligator tail meat into ¼- to ½-inch cubes.
- In a pan, melt the stick of butter and add the lemon zest.
- Poach the cubed alligator meat in the butter and lemon zest for approximately 45 minutes or until cooked through and tender.

- While the alligator is cooking, dice the celery and mince the fresh parsley and chives. Set aside a small amount of parsley and chives for garnish.

- Once cooked, chill the alligator meat in the fridge or freezer to get it to room temperature.

- Add the diced veggies and minced herbs, 3 tablespoons of melted butter, the blackening seasoning, lemon juice, and mayonnaise to the diced alligator meat. Mix thoroughly.

- Add salt or blackening seasoning to taste.

- Serve in a Hawaiian hot dog bun, top cut of course, and top with chives and parsley, a squeeze of a lemon wedge, and more melted butter.

- Enjoy! ■

INGREDIENTS:

- 1½-pounds alligator tail meat
- 1 stick plus 3 tbsp of butter
- 1 lemon, zest and juice
- 3 stalks of celery
- 3 tbsp parsley
- 2 tbsp chives or green onion tops
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 1 tbsp slackening seasoning
- 1 pack sweet Hawaiian Roll hot dog buns, top cut
- Salt and seasoning to taste

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



THE BIG, BASS MOVE

IF YOU SWAP THE DEER STAND ONE DAY FOR THE LAKE THIS MONTH, LOOK SHALLOW FOR SHAD SCHOOLS AND THE BASS THAT ARE FOLLOWING THEM. IT MIGHT SEEM BASS-ACKWARDS, BUT IT MAKE SENSE.

■ By Kinny Haddox

YOU WOULDN'T EXACTLY CALL IT A PICKLE,

BELOW: When the weather cools, keep your eyes and baits on the shallows in the backs of creeks. **OPPOSITE:** Cool weather, long-sleeved shirts and jackets and big bass are just part of the fall pattern for angler Dustin Gates of Jonesboro.

but fall is a time when Dustin Gates of Jonesboro often finds himself in a quandary, perplexed and uncertain over exactly what to do. He loves to pick up his bow and target big bucks, but he also loves to keep one hand on his fishing rods and a bait in the water, trying to fool a big, old bass.

It's prime time for both.

"I love to go out and catch bass this time of year, because they are really gorging themselves on shad, trying to get fattened up for the winter and prepped for the spawn," Gates said. "But if I've got a big, old buck on the (trail) camera, and I think he'll come out in the daytime, I always feel like I need to be in the woods."

Gates isn't alone. Plenty of other Louisiana outdoorsmen face the same decision.

But when he does choose to head for the lake, there's no doubt what he'll do to target Mr. Bass, whether it is to catch a mess

of 1- and 2-pounders for a fish fry or land a monster lunker fit for a Facebook brag-board photo. Gates is known for that, and while some anglers think bass head deep this time of year, they go the wrong way first.

"Once we've had a couple of cold fronts and the days start getting shorter, you are going to find the bass doing two things," he says. "First, they are going to be starting to gang up more and start staging on the edges of creeks in the coves. And second, they are going to start pushing big balls of baitfish up into the shallows where they can go on a feeding frenzy."

Gates said there's something in the DNA of a bass that lets them know that baitfish are going to be gathering up, too, and heading for shallow water. The natural inclination is to believe that bass are going to start moving out to deeper water at the first sign of cold weather, but that theory is bass-ackwards. The





fish are going to make a shallow run, then go deep.

The reason? That's what the shad will do, and bass will follow the shad.

"The hot summer has come to an end, and it seems like a switch goes off," Gates said. "All the fish start gathering up, and where they have been lethargic, they get aggressive in a hurry. The good news is that when the weather is right, you can catch bunches of bass as they chase the shad in shallow — and then again on the way out before they scatter into deep-water holes."

They key is following "fish highways" as he calls them: channels, ditches or edges of ridges that baitfish and bass seem to follow.

Everybody has a favorite bait this time of year, but Gates has two go-to lures he seldom puts down. The first is a Rat-L-Trap in Tennessee shad color. He has one trusty, old favorite that he has put a half-dozen sets of hooks on and barely has any paint left, but the fish love it. He also likes the chrome/blue back color. His second choice is KVD Perfect Plastics Swim'n Caffeine Shad in smoky shad color.

"You've heard this before, but I really try hard to match the size of the bait I'm fishing to the size of the shad (bass) are chasing," he said. "A lot of times, they'll be after 1- or 2-inch shad, but other schools of shad have 4- and 5-inch shad in them. I think it's important to match that. And if I'm ever in any doubt, I'll up the size a bit. They aren't ever going to go after a smaller meal than the other ones in front of them."



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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THE BIG, BASS MOVE



ates does fish his swimbaits a bit differently. Most people put a weight on it and do as the bait's name suggests — swim it. But he uses a weighted hook and hops his along the bottom — if the fish will let it get to the bottom. With the Rat-L-Trap, he just tries to keep it in the strike zone where fish are showing up on his electronics.

There are a couple of reasons that shad make this erratic trip. First, they are very sensitive to temperatures, and while they like it cool, they can't stay shallow too long, because when it gets too cold, they can't survive. They head into the shallows to feed on phytoplankton and zooplankton, stuff fishermen can't even see. But once it gets too cold they head out. This pattern lasts through November and often into the December days of deer season.

"I have to tell you, if I'm on the deer stand and not seeing anything, or just seeing a bunch of does, my mind wanders back to the lake, and I start thinking I should have gone fishing instead of wasting the day in a tree," he said. "It's a tough call when I know fish are biting. And if the mosquitoes get too bad, I'll leave the deer woods and go back to the lake in a heartbeat." ■

ABOVE, RIGHT: Bass will congregate around baitfish in the fall, tracking their movements, so catching multiple big fish in an area is not unusual. **BELOW, RIGHT:** Moving baits account for a lot of big bass in the fall; for Dustin Gates, that usually means a Rat-L-Trap or a swimbait.



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With fall in firm control of the calendar and winter — or what they call it everywhere else — on the horizon, bass anglers turn to their go-to artificial lure to stay in tune with the season.

Four Louisiana pros have their favorites they fish with in November. Their choices are diverse, and in one instance, kind of surprising for Louisiana bass fishing.

Tyler Stewart of Ruston, for example, ties on a spoon to feed the bass when he's fishing some of his favorite lakes. Gilliam's Randy Allen, takes a different approach and goes up top with a sputtering topwater bait. Two other pros choose more conventional artificial lures: Brent Bonadona of Port Allen prefers a bladed jig, while Greg Hackney of Gonzales goes with a big spinnerbait.

4 BASS PROS, 4 FAVORITE BAITS

By Don Shoopman

SPOON FEED THE BASS DEEP WHEN NOVEMBER ROLLS AROUND; STEWART SURE DOES

Tyler Stewart's favorite artificial lure for November may have anglers scrambling to add one or more to their arsenal, particularly those who fish Caney Lake and other lakes around Louisiana.

Stewart, 26, favors the 6th Sense Crush Magnum Flutterspoon when the water cools and bass suspend in the timber, — usually 15 to 17 feet deep in November and 25 to 30 feet in December and January. The 6-inch, 2-ounce metal chrome model he fishes triggers bites when bass ignore other traditional artificial lures.

It's his go-to November bait one that consistently catches bigger bass in Caney Lake, where he does some guiding. It is highly effective in other bodies of water, too.

"Our strong point is fishing deeper as opposed to someone in south Louisiana," Stewart said. "Any time there's a tournament where there's fishing offshore, I've got that on my deck. It's just a



Photo courtesy flwfishing.com

good reaction bait.”

Stewart, a Ruston resident who was an elite college bass angler before graduating from Louisiana-Monroe, realizes some anglers might be intimidated by throwing a slender hunk of metal with a treble hook on the tail end. Some may balk big time when it comes to casting it around wood the way he does. Sure, he admitted, there are going to be hang-ups, and you’re going to lose some spoons.

“When you fish it in timber and get the fish fired up, they’ll eat it before it gets hung up,” he said. “Sometimes, I’ll throw it all day depending what position the bass are in. If they’re suspended — all day.”

After he casts the spoon, he’ll let it fall once and then tries to keep it off the bottom. He’ll jig it up twice and let it fall on slack line, then repeat.

“I’ll do that 10 or 12 times in one cast,” said Stewart who fishes the spoon on 20-pound test Seaguar Invesik fluorocarbon spooled on a Shimano Curado reel (7.4:1 ratio) on a 7-foot-6 Favorite Hex rod.

“Usually, they’ll knock slack in it on the fall. Your line will jump,”



Photo courtesy 6thsensefishing.com

“*Usually, they’ll knock slack in it on the fall. Your line will jump. Usually, when you hook them, they’ll come straight up and try to throw (it).*”

he said. “Usually, when you hook them, they’ll come straight up and try to throw (it). You do lose a bunch of (bass) because it’s got that one treble hook.”

Stewart said that Hunter Freeman, another ULM bass anglers from West Monroe, is another angler who relies on the Flutterspoon. ■

WHOPPER PLOPPER >



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ALLEN RELIES ON SPUTTERING WHOPPER PLOPPER IN NOV.

It takes a special bait to catch Randy Allen's fancy, not to mention bass in November.

"I think whenever I'm going to go in November, especially in north Louisiana and Arkansas, it'll have to be a topwater, a Whopper Plopper or a Chug Bug. I'd probably have to start with a Whopper Plopper. It really is a special bait," Allen said.

Allen, an accomplished veteran on the FLW Pro Circuit who lives in Gilliam, was introduced to the River2Sea Whopper Plopper several years ago when he fished a Bassmaster Elite Series tournament on the California Delta. Gary Dobyns, a veteran pro who manufactures Dobyns Rods, showed Allen around the Delta and sent him home with two bags filled with Whopper Ploppers.

Allen described them as "the greatest thing since sliced bread," but didn't throw them for a while. When he eventually reached into his new bag of tricks, he won two tournaments back-to-back and he was hooked.

"I used to think you had to have grass," he said. "It helps, but it's not required. They'll eat it around rocky points and in coves."

Allen varies the speed of retrieve on the sputtering topwater, which has a uniquely designed, pliable tail that acts as a propeller. When a bass hits, he "feeds" it line before setting the hook.

Allen's favorite colors are munky butt and black. Of munky butt, he said, "It's a great color. Take that thing to a place they haven't seen it this time of year, it's just stupid."

Allen has an early November event on Table Rock Lake and said, "I can assure you you'll see one of them on the front deck, munky butt or black, over the next three months."

Most of the time, he ties on either a Model 90, which is 3½ inches, or a Model 110, which is 4¾ inches.

"You know, I tell you, though, that larger one, the 130 (5 inches), in the spring time, when they're starting to move up, big 'uns will hit it," Allen said.



Photo courtesy Randy Allen

Usually, he said, he throws a Whopper Plopper on 40-pound Power Pro braid. Sometimes he switches up the presentation and uses 15-pound P-Line monofilament.

His Whopper Plopper reel is a Shimano Metanium reel (7:1 ratio), which he seats on a Power Tackle Casting Rod designed for heavy spinnerbaits and topwaters.

"It's a great rod," he said, praising the tip that allows him to feed line when a bass smacks a Whopper Plopper. ■

THUNDER JIG ➤

“I used to think you had to have grass. It helps, but it's not required. They'll eat it around rocky points and in coves.”



Photo courtesy river2seausa.com

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If you're not wedded to targeting one species year-round, you'll love the freedom offered by Plano's new Weekend Series Softsider soft tackle bags.

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The 100-gallon and 50-gallon dual-output aerators are for anglers who carry their bait in coolers or livewells. The 100-gallon model has two aeration stones and a special diffuser that can filter up to 100 gallons of water. It can be

plugged into a generator or standard outlet. The 50-gallon model can filter up to 50 gallons of water and is perfect to turn any cooler into a livewell. It connects to any 12-volt power source.

MSRP: \$99.99 (Bait Station), \$59.99-\$69.99 (aerators).

For more info, visit: www.frabill.com/bait-station-bucket



THUNDER JIG PUTS BASS IN BOAT IN NOVEMBER FOR BONODONA

November is a time to concentrate on 3- to 7-foot depths, and at least one Louisiana bass pro knows there are several artificial lures that fit the bill.

Brent Bonadona of Port Allen said, "If I had to pick one, it'd probably be a bladed jig, preferably a shad color. That'll probably be the bait, because it's real versatile."

Bonadona, 45, who has fished the BASS and FLW Toyota Cup Series circuits since 2010, chooses a Delta Lures Thunder Jig, which he described as "probably the best price-wise and the most versatile on the market."

Bonadona fishes the 3/8-ounce model, which has a weedguard, and he seldom strays from two colors: white with a white blade or white with a silver blade. Why?

"The main thing is, shad are going to be shallow. That's standard wherever you are," said Bonadona, who said bass are in transition from main bayous into dead-end canals in the Atchafalaya Basin, as well as up in the water column. He focuses on the front ends of those canals. As the days get chillier and the water cools this month, he also searches out the warmest water he can find.

Bonadona adds a soft plastic on the Thunder Jig.

"Probably, for that time of year, it'll be a big-bodied, white Mister Twister grub, or a (white) Buzz Bug," he said.

Thunder Jigs with a weedguard allow him to fish deadfalls and similar cover more thoroughly. He fishes the bait on either 15- or 17-pound Seaguar Invesik fluorocarbon, depending on the cover. If the water's muddy or heavily stained, he uses 50-pound Power Pro braid. He spools it on a Lew's Super Duty reel (6.3:1 ratio) and mounts it to a Lew's 7-foot, medium-heavy rod. ■

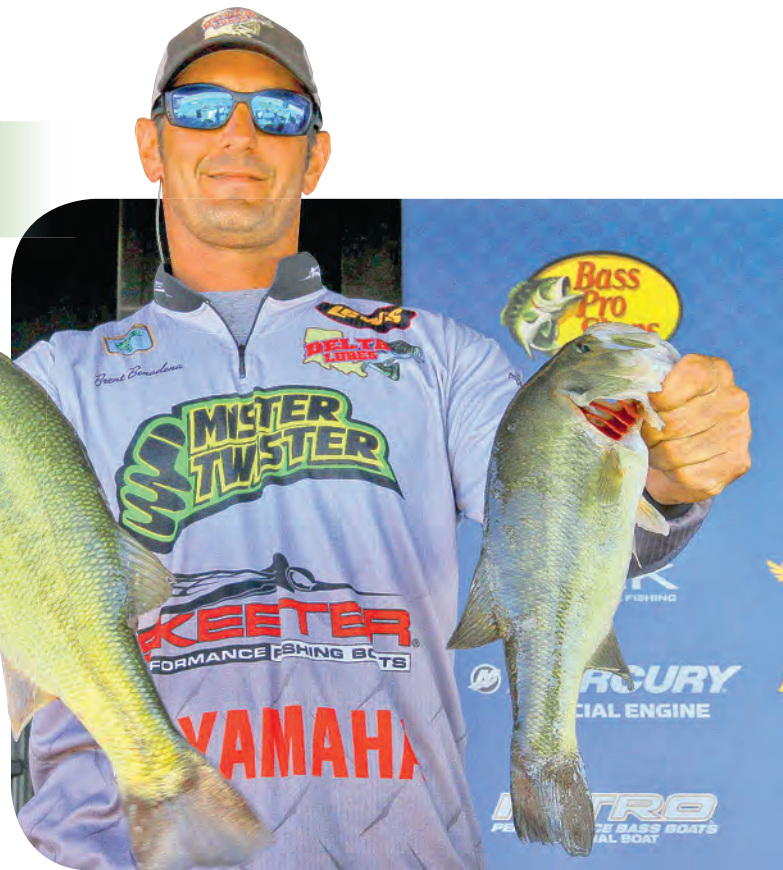


Photo courtesy bassmaster.com

“The main thing is, shad are going to be shallow. That’s standard wherever you are.”



Photo courtesy deltalures.com

THINK BIG SPINNERBAIT; HACKNEY WILL IN NOVEMBER

If it's November, it's time to throw a big spinnerbait with two big blades or a single, big blade, according to pro Greg Hackney of Gonzales, host of Louisiana Sportsman TV.

"You know, honestly, my favorite bait in November is a spinnerbait. By far, that's our best choice in November," he said.

Hackney said there are a few good reasons he prefers a spinnerbait on the business end of his 6-foot-10 Lew's Hack Attack spinnerbait/buzzbait rod between late October and early December.

For starters, Hackney said, November is Louisiana's fall season.

"The other thing we have is, our fish are in prespawn. A lot of fish, especially in the marsh, spawn (as early as) January," he said.

Plus, Hackney, a 15-time Bassmaster Classic qualifier, said a Hack Attack spinnerbait with a big profile generally catches larger bass.

"One of my biggest bags was caught out of Henderson Lake, mostly on a spinnerbait, some on a jig, but mostly on the spinnerbait. Again, I was just looking for quality bites. They eat big stuff in November," he said.

Now's the time for a ½-ounce spinnerbait, either double- or single-bladed. If you want to go deeper in the water column, use a model with two big Colorado blades (Nos. 4 and 5), higher in the water column, two willow-leaf blades (Nos. 4 and 5). If you want a single, big willow-leaf or Colorado blade (Nos. 3 and 5). If it's overcast, throw gold blades; if it's sunny, use nickel.

"You can keep a bait up high in the water column and don't have to reel fast" Hackney said of the double willow-leaf models.

Hackney prefers "mouse-colored" skirts, aka shad-colored, in clear or blackwater and chartreuse/blue/white in water that's somewhat stained. If it's really muddy, he said, he'll go to lime/chartreuse or chartreuse. He'll sometimes add a soft-plastic trailer.

"I'll tell you this, I'll use a trailer if I need to slow-roll the bait.



Photo courtesy majorleaguefishing.com

Otherwise, no," he said, choosing a curlytail for slow-rolling and a split-tail in other situations.

Hackney's ties his spinnerbaits to either 20-pound Gamma Edge fluorocarbon or 20-pound test Gamma co-polymer monofilament, the former if he's fishing grass beds, not targeting anything specific and making l-o-n-g casts.

"But if I'm up close, what I call 'plinking' (targeting nearby wood structure and cypress trees), I use the monofilament," said Hackney, who uses a Lew's BB1 Pro Speed Spool (6.4:1 ratio) reel because it has a wide spool. ■

“You can keep a bait up high in the water column, and you don't have to reel fast.”



Photo courtesy strikeking.com

LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

The Mischief Minnow combines the action of a standard topwater bait with the flash of a blade.



THE MISCHIEF MINNOW

IS THIS THE ULTIMATE BAIT FOR ANGLERS WHO JUST WANT TO CAST AND REEL?

It's been a while since a revolutionary topwater bait — one that makes a difference for bass pros and recreational anglers alike — has been introduced to the fishing world.

Freedom Tackle has stepped to the front with a product that has drawn much attention: the Mischief Minnow.

The Mischief Minnow's difference-maker is a blade called a "Kilter Blade," attached to the belly between two treble hooks. The blade isn't symmetric and doesn't spin like a regular blade. The color matches the lure body most of the time but can be a different hue.

When retrieved, it has unique thrashing action combined with a clacking sound, wake vibration and blade flash, what the manufacturers call a true triple-threat.

The body is made with ABS (acrylonitrile butadiene styrene), which is known for its strong resistance to corrosive

chemicals and/or physical impacts.

"The Mischief Minnow brings innovation to topwater by combining all the advantages of sound, wake and blade flash in a pencil bait design," wrote Mike Tamburro of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, president of Freedom Tackle. "Two years of design and product testing has given us feedback from the biggest critics we have: the fish. They don't just eat it, they want to destroy it and that's the kind of mischief we want to create when topwater fishing."

Freedom Tackle products are among six brands under the umbrella of American Baitworks Co., based in D'Iberville, Miss., which features fishing lures and products including Freedom Tackle, NetBait, Halo Fishing, Snag Proof, Scum Frog and STH Bait.

The Mischief Minnow hit the market in late summer. Tamburro, who started the

business, is one of the proud designers.

Jeremy Lawyer, a bass pro from Sircoxie, Mo., who fishes a Mischief Minnow, also helped with the design.

"We put our heads together. It wasn't easy to say, 'There it is,'" Lawyer said.

Lawyer fished regional tournaments for 15 years, winning the All-American in 2016, earning an FLW Cup berth and qualifying for the FLW Pro Tour, which he has fished for the past five years.

Experienced anglers and those with much less experience should be able to catch fish on the new artificial lure, Lawyer and Tamburro said.

Tamburro said the idea was, "Let's cre-



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.

ate a bait where all the angler has to do is cast and reel. We wanted a bait that would trigger fish on its own."

Lawyer said, "We tried to make it easy for the angler that's maybe not real seasoned."

"It's kind of like two or three different baits rolled into one. It's just got a lot of unique action all rolled into one. It's just something the fish haven't seen," he said. "It's just really a fun bait to throw. It's going to catch all kinds of different species."

Lawyer started throwing the Mischief Minnow's early versions about 1½ years ago. In one bass tournament in Wisconsin, Lawyer lost both of the Mischief Minnow prototypes he had to big, ravenous, toothy northern pike.

"Of course, I didn't have a wire leader," he said. After all, he was targeting bass.

Tamburro and Lawyer agreed the hardware is top-of-the-line, front to back.

"I said, 'Whatever you do, let's put good hooks on them,'" Lawyer said.

Tamburro listened. The new topwater lure has black nickel Gamakatsu short-shank trebles that Lawyer described as "sticky sharp" right out of the box.

The Mischief Minnow is available in 15 colors. Lawyer has two favorites.

"You know, bone is a pro's favorite color," he said, "and just clear shad with a silver blade." ■

For more information on the Mischief Minnow and other Freedom Bait Corp. products, go to <https://americanbaitworks.com/> or call (844) 466-5738.



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BASS HOTSPOTS >

TOLEDO BEND BASS ARE IN TRANSITION

North end could be real hotspot this fall

The key word to putting Toledo Bend bass in the boat this month is transition.

Summer to fall. For bass, deep to shallow. For me, who fishes so much on the south end of the lake, it's spending more time on the upper half of the lake in November.

I can't wait.

Keep those things in mind, particularly the last two, throw moving baits most of the time, and you should have a lot of fun on Toledo Bend. Bladed jigs such as golden bream, black/blue or black Thunder Jigs will be my first choice, followed closely by shad-colored spinnerbaits, Rat-L-Traps, jerkbaits, swim jigs and topwaters such as buzzbaits and plastic frogs. I'm so ready for that after dunking drop-shot rigs and throwing Carolina-rigged soft plastics and deep-diving crankbaits throughout the summer.

This is a seasonal transition period for bass, one that more than likely begins in October. Many, many bass leave the 18- to 22-foot depths and follow the bream and shad to shallower water. I will focus on water 7 feet deep or less this month for a few reasons: that's where the food is, and that should be the cooler water — just the opposite of spring.

I won't forget the south end, but I plan to fish a lot on the north end — basically above Pendleton Bridge — based on my success up there this past spring. There still is some vegetation to the north and plenty of lily pads in many areas. Some potential hotspots are around Blue Lake, 1215, San Patricio, Rogers and even San Miguel. I really believe that's where most of the action will take place first. Like I said, I had plenty of good times up there this spring and expect to enjoy a repeat until the fish tell me something different.

On the lower end, the best bet is to move to the back end of Housen, Hurricane, Six Mile and Mill creeks to fish into 5- and 6-foot depths. Shallow ridges, flats and ditches in those areas should give up bass.

Fall is a lot like the spring, with the exception that bass aren't moving up to eat and make babies. They are there to feed. Whatever your favorite moving bait is, tie it on and use it.

If for some reason the bass bite slows and fish aren't chasing, go to a Texas- or Carolina-rigged Zoom Super Fluke or a Neko Rig (wacky worm). The top two colors as far as I'm concerned are watermelon/red and green pumpkin/red. It doesn't get any better than that this time of year. Also try black and junebug.

One of the most appealing aspects for bass fishing this month is often, it will seem like you have the lake to yourself and sometimes, you just might be alone wherever you stop your boat. Many outdoorsmen turn to hunting deer and ducks and forget about fishing for a few months. ■

— John Dean



Gene Ledet of Lafayette holds a chunky bass caught on a Carolina-rigged soft plastic fishing at Toledo Bend with guide 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.

Daron Bonz Goyne with a chunky Bussey Brake largemouth.

BASS COMING IN BUNCHES AT BUSSEY BRAKE

Cool weather gangs-up shad, bass love it

When the “new” Bussey Brake opened to public fishing on July 15, conditions were hot and downright miserable. The 2,200-acre Morehouse Parish lake had been closed for almost 10 years while being drained and renovated, trying to turn it into a new lake. The re-opening brought major attention, and when two 10-pound largemouths were caught the first week, things were hopping.

Well, guess what? They still are. In fact, one fisherman who grew up fishing Bussey Brake thinks things are only getting better.

“When that first cool front came in, it started bunching up the shad, and the bass have started bunching up with them,” said Daron Bonz Goyne. “Fish are following the shad. You can see them busting the water chasing them up in the lily pads, and you can see them on the graph when they aren’t busting the water. I can tell you this; it’s just going to get better and better the next two months.”

Goyne said what he has found is, if you can get in a little cut or opening between lily pad fields and the wind is blowing through the opening, fish will be there. If there is hydrilla in the pocket, so much the better.

“The wind is your friend at Bussey,” he said. “The water is so clear, it gives you a chance to fish without the fish seeing you. When they start chasing the shad through the pads, it’s amazing. I’ve seen them knock big 3- and 4-inch shad up on the tops of the lily pads. Then they will come back, and they will blow up and eat the pad and all like Jaws.”

There isn’t one bait that seems to be working for everybody, but Goyne has two go-to baits for November. He loves throwing a junebug or plum trick worm with a ¾-ounce weight. He also has had great success with suspended jerkbaits in the same colors, plus watermelon red. He prefers to cast a jerkbait, reel it down a couple of turns and then use a “jerk-jerk-pause” retrieve. He said they nail it on the pause.

“I found one spot where I saw the fish feeding and caught seven on seven casts on a jerkbait,” he said. “Then, on the eighth cast in the same spot, I caught an 8-3. That’s my biggest so far out of the new lake.”

Goyne said Bussey Brake bass are super-aggressive and haven’t adjusted to fishing pressure yet, but they will. As time goes on, fish will get smarter and smarter, but they’ll still be there to catch. Bussey is still a little more than a foot below the expected pool stage; water is collected only through rain and water pumped in from Bayou Bartholomew.

Special regulations have been put in place on Bussey Brake to protect the young and expanding fishery, and to hopefully ensure a quality fishing experience for all anglers. Anglers can keep five bass per day with a 16-inch maximum length limit with



Finding lily pad fields like this one with plenty of shad seems to be the key to finding fall bass at Bussey Brake.

the exception that one bass longer than 16 inches may be kept.

Things are already good and just getting better on their own, but fisherman can help things out, too, Goyne said.

“Right now, most of us aren’t even keeping a bass, and that is very important for the future of Bussey,” Goyne said. “If we protect this fishery, there’s no doubt in my mind that it will be the next Caney Lake the next two or three years. It’s got lots of fish, but it’s in no way overpopulated. It’s amazing the numbers of 8-pounders that have been caught and released. They’ll be 10-pounders in two years if we treat them right.” ■

— Kinny Haddox

HENDERSON LAKE SAC-A-LAIT ACTIVE DESPITE DRAWDOWN

Target canals, channels with spider rigs

Come one, come all to set your hook on sac-a-lait in November, a prime time for fishermen at Henderson Lake.

"November's pretty good, because it's still not cold. It'll be good with the water low. Fish concentrate in the main areas," said veteran angler Laurette Mequet.

It's time to fish dropoffs and deadfalls in South Lake Bigneux as well as Pelba Bay and the main channels — oil-field canals — in the Phillips Canal, according to Mequet, who, along with her husband, Mitch, owns Cypress Cove Landing along the West Atchafalaya Basin Protection Levee.

A drawdown at Henderson Lake that began Aug. 17 was scheduled to end Nov. 2. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and St. Martin Parish government planned the drawdown as part of a management plan to control submerged vegetation.

Water was supposed to be lowered at a rate of 2 to 4 inches per day, but heavy rainfall interrupted those plans. The lake was dropping again when October arrived.

Mequet said an average of 18 to 20 sac-a-lait per angler, most of them ½- to 1 pound, can be the norm this month. She advises anglers to fish about 3 or 4 feet deep with ½- or ¼-ounce hair jigs or tube jigs in red/blue/chartreuse, red/black/chartreuse and red/olive/chartreuse. Tight-line or fish under a small cork.

No matter the water level, dropoffs and laydowns are the No. 1 places to fish as the waters continue to cool.

A tactic fairly new to south-central Louisiana is paying dividends in deeper waters, particularly North Lake Bigneux. Mequet said anglers can troll "spider rigs" — multiple poles — and slowly move across the water with the trolling motor and fish with similarly colored tube or hair jigs. Try one or more poles at 6- to 8-foot depths and others at about 4 feet.

Another perennial hot spot is the railroad pilings that run east-west and parallel to I-10 along the Texaco Canal just before North Lake Bigneux. She suggested fishing with shiners about 4 feet deep along those pilings.

Wherever anglers choose to fish, the water color should be favorable.

"Water clarity should be pretty good," Mequet said.

The private landing with easiest access during low water is Basin Landing, said Mequet, who advised anglers to be mindful of and to respect duck hunters, particularly on Lake Bigneux. ■

— Don Shoopman



Brad Breaud holds a fat sac-a-lait caught at Henderson Lake. Sac-a-lait fishing success should be fair to good in November.



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-Moon, 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).

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	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL. VALUE
Sun 1	██	██	██	55
Mon 2	██	██	██	49
Tue 3	██	██	██	42
Wed 4	██	██	██	39
Thu 5	██	██	██	39
Fri 6	██	██	██	40
Sat 7	██	██	██	46

Sun 8	██	██	██	55
Mon 9	██	██	██	44
Tue 10	██	██	██	37
Wed 11	██	██	██	45
Thu 12	██	██	██	52
Fri 13	██	██	██	59
Sat 14	██	██	██	62

Sun 15	██	██	██	49
Mon 16	██	██	██	36
Tue 17	██	██	██	24
Wed 18	██	██	██	18
Thu 19	██	██	██	17
Fri 20	██	██	██	22
Sat 21	██	██	██	33

Sun 22	██	██	██	24
Mon 23	██	██	██	21
Tue 24	██	██	██	22
Wed 25	██	██	██	24
Thu 26	██	██	██	24
Fri 27	██	██	██	36
Sat 28	██	██	██	48

Sun 29	██	██	██	60
Mon 30	██	██	██	67
Tue 31	██	██	██	67

25 50 75
AVERAGE

LUNAR PERIODS				TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED	
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
6:10 pm	10:57 pm - 1:57 am	7:22 am	11:22 am - 2:22 pm	☉	End DST
6:44 pm	11:35 pm - 2:47 am	8:20 am	12:00 pm - 3:12 pm	☉	
7:24 pm	12:15 am - 3:41 am	9:17 am	12:40 pm - 4:06 pm	☉	
8:09 pm	1:01 am - 4:33 am	10:14 am	1:26 pm - 4:58 pm	☉	
9:01 pm	1:50 am - 5:26 am	11:09 am	2:15 pm - 5:51 pm	☉	HIGH
9:58 pm	2:43 am - 6:19 am	12:00 pm	3:08 pm - 6:44 pm	☉	
11:00 pm	3:39 am - 7:11 am	12:47 pm	4:04 pm - 7:36 pm	☉	

12:05 am	5:37 am - 8:43 am	2:06 pm	6:02 pm - 9:08 pm	☉	
1:13 am	6:36 am - 9:26 am	2:41 pm	7:01 pm - 9:51 pm	☉	
2:21 am	7:38 am - 10:08 am	3:14 pm	8:03 pm - 10:33 pm	☉	
3:31 am	8:40 am - 10:48 am	3:48 pm	9:05 pm - 11:13 pm	☉	
4:43 am	9:44 am - 11:30 am	4:23 pm	10:09 pm - 11:55 pm	☉	
5:56 am	10:49 am - 12:15 pm	5:01 pm	11:14 pm - Midnight	☉	NEW & PERIGEE

7:11 am	11:57 am - 1:05 pm	5:44 pm	Midnight - 12:40 am	☉	HALF
8:25 am	1:03 pm - 1:59 pm	6:33 pm	12:22 am - 1:30 am	☉	
9:35 am	2:09 pm - 2:57 pm	7:29 pm	1:28 am - 2:24 am	☉	
10:38 am	3:10 pm - 3:58 pm	8:30 pm	2:34 am - 3:22 am	☉	LOW
11:32 am	4:03 pm - 4:59 pm	9:33 pm	3:35 am - 4:23 am	☉	
12:18 pm	4:54 pm - 5:56 pm	10:36 pm	4:28 am - 5:24 am	☉	
12:56 pm	5:36 pm - 6:52 pm	11:38 pm	5:19 am - 6:21 am	☉	HALF

1:28 pm	6:13 pm - 7:45 pm	12:37 am	6:01 am - 7:17 am	☉	
1:57 pm	6:48 pm - 8:36 pm	1:34 am	6:38 am - 8:10 am	☉	
2:24 pm	7:20 pm - 9:26 pm	2:29 am	7:13 am - 9:01 am	☉	
2:49 pm	7:52 pm - 10:14 pm	3:24 am	7:45 am - 9:51 am	☉	
3:15 pm	8:23 pm - 11:03 pm	4:19 am	8:17 am - 10:39 am	☉	Apogee
3:42 pm	8:57 pm - 11:53 pm	5:15 am	8:48 am - 11:28 am	☉	
4:12 pm	9:33 pm - 12:43 am	6:13 am	9:22 am - 12:18 pm	☉	

4:45 pm	10:14 pm - 1:36 am	7:11 am	9:58 am - 1:08 pm	☉	
5:23 pm	10:58 pm - 2:28 am		10:39 am - 2:01 pm	☉	FULL

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

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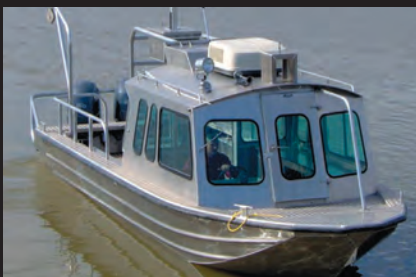
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Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK

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

Digital images must be at least 500KB and in jpeg format. Print photos cannot be returned.



Sophie Bonnet

Sophie Bonnet caught this big redfish in Pointe Aux Chenes along with several others, proving she could outfish her dad and grandfather.



Hunner Domangue

Hunner Domangue with a 4.9-pound trout caught in Cocodrie.



Langston Thomas

Langston Thomas killed this deer in the St. Mary Parish marsh during the 2020-21 youth hunt.



Jessica Lonatro

Jessica Lonatro shot her first pig on Sept. 13 in St. Tammany Parish at 100 yards with a thermal scope.



Bryan, Jordyn Mannino

Bryan Mannino and his daughter, Jordyn, brought in this nice redfish in Delacroix.



Marcia Barton

Marcia Barton caught this 7½-pound, 26-inch redfish in Lafitte back in August.



Lane Maxwell

Lane Maxwell killed these two squirrels on Oct. 3 in Morehouse Parish with a .22 rifle on his first squirrel hunt.



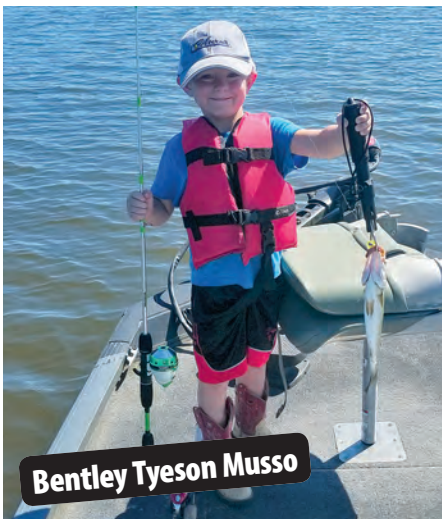
Ty Wilkinson

Ty Wilkinson, 11, killed this hog on Nov. 23, 2019, in Amite.



Kyle Smith

Kyle Smith with a tagged fish he caught out of Myrtle Grove in Lake Laurier.



Bentley Tyeson Musso

Bentley Tyeson Musso was fishing at the MRGO with his father, Kyle, and uncle, Michael Woolfolk, when he caught this fish.



Brody, Bradley & Bryce

Brody, Bradley, Bryce and their PaPa had a blast over the Easter weekend catching fish on Lake D'Arbonne.



Lori Mier

Lori Mier holds a huge Grand Isle redfish.



Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



Allison Primeaux

Allison Primeaux of Maurice caught this beauty on Aug. 15 at South Timbalier Island out of Fourchon. It was 30 inches long, weighed 9.8 pounds and had 29 spots on one side and 36 on the other.



Reggie Legendre

Reggie Legendre with a flounder caught from the bank in the Golden Meadow.



Chad Lee

Chad Lee was hunting in Nekoosa, Wis., on Sept. 30 when he took his 12-point that scored 166½.



Harley Mayberry

Harley Mayberry, 11, of Gonzales with her first crossbow kill and first buck. The 6-pointer was taken at 30 yards on Oct. 4 in Livingston Parish.



Walter Sambola

Walter Sambola released this big drum on a trip to Hopedale.



Keith LeBlanc

Keith LeBlanc was fishing on Lake Verret on Oct. 3 when he landed this feisty 4-pound largemouth bass on a Zoom Ol' Monster red-glitter worm.



Terence White

Terence White took this 16-point, which scored 178%, in Nekoosa, Wis., on Sept. 30, 2020.



Carson Clark

Carson Clark, 11, caught his first mangrove snapper out of Grand Isle while fishing with Mary-Beth and John Clark.

McGowen Harlin and Daniel Harlin pose with an alligator taken at Little Lake on Sept. 13, 2020.



McGowen & Daniel Harlin



Courtney Bender

Courtney Bender was fishing in Delacroix with her dad and uncle when she caught her first redfish.

Not an official document. Refer to LDWF's official hunting regulations pamphlet or www.wlf.louisiana.gov

HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT	
DOVES+	(South Zone) Sept. 5 - 16	(North Zone) Sept. 5 - 27	15	45
	Oct. 17 - Nov. 29 Dec. 19 - Jan. 21	Oct. 10 - Nov. 15 Dec. 26 - Jan. 24		
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	Nov. 14 - Jan. 6	15	45
	Sept. 12 - 27	Nov. 14 - Jan. 6	25	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	8	24	
	May 1 - 23**	3	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

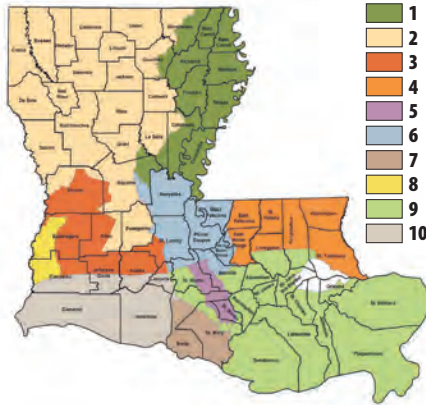
	EAST ZONE	WEST ZONE	COASTAL ZONE
DUCKS*, COOTS & MERGANSERS	Nov. 21 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 31	Nov. 14 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 24	Nov. 14 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 24
The daily bag limit for ducks is 6 and may include no more than 4 mallards (no more than 2 females), 3 wood ducks, 2 canvasbacks, 2 redheads, 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

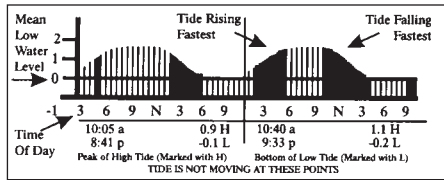
2020 - 2021 Deer Hunting Areas



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	



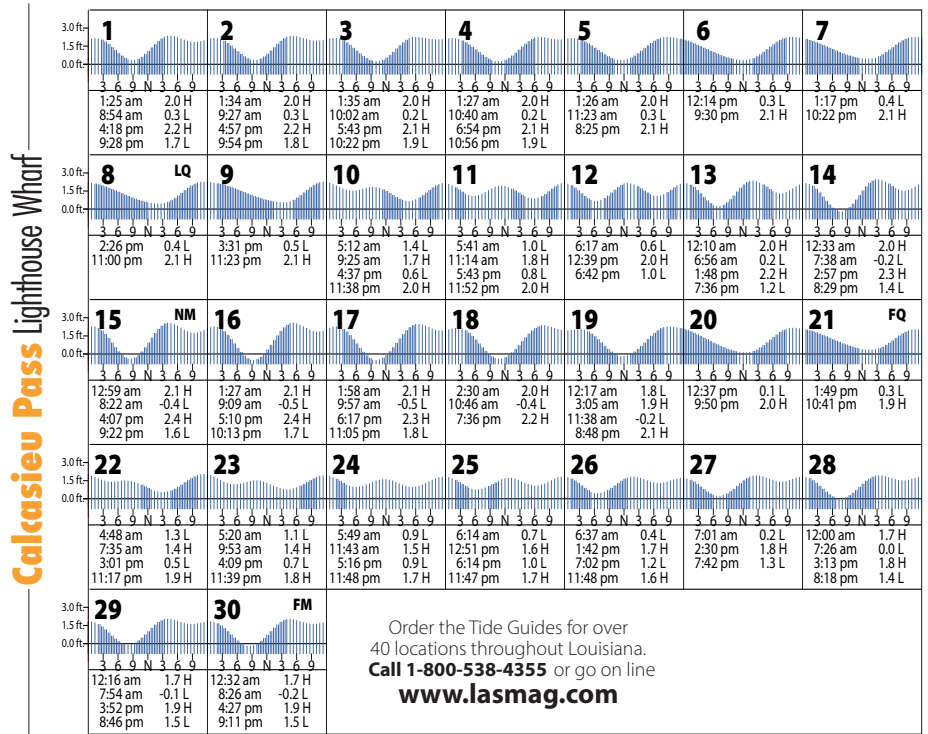
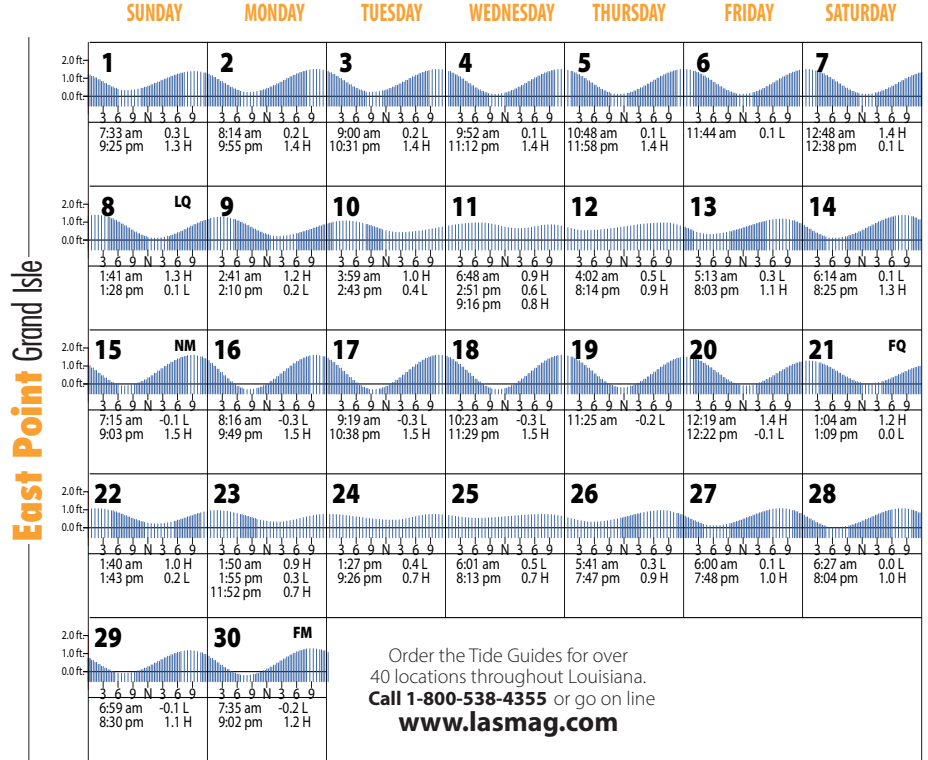
How to use the **SPORTSMAN** Tide Guide



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

Tide Corrections

East Point, Grand Isle	HIGH	LOW
Barataria Pass	+1:00	-0:10
Bastian Island	+0:41	+0:12
Bay Gardene	+2:51	+2:44
Bayou BonFouca	+9:59	+10:11
Breton Islands	+0:54	+0:48
Caillou Boca	+0:40	+0:48
Caminada Pass	+0:20	+0:12
Chandeleur Light	+0:37	+0:34
Chef Pass	+5:17	+5:07
Cocodrie	+1:22	+1:33
Comfort Island	+1:34	+0:54
Delacroix Island	+3:42	+3:31
Empire Jetty	-1:03	-1:45
Four Bayou Pass	+2:18	+0:17
Gardner Island	+0:40	+0:47
Grand Pass	+1:48	+1:16
Head of Passes	-0:48	+0:00
Hopedale	+4:17	+4:56
Independence Island	+2:29	+1:59
Jack Bay	+1:59	+1:28
Joseph Bayou	-0:36	-1:37
Lafitte	+1:45	+2:51
Long Point, Lake Borgne	+2:28	+2:11
Manila Village	+2:32	+3:13
Michoud Substation	+5:24	+5:02
New Canal (Bucktown)	+10:34	+10:49
North Pass	-0:31	-0:37
Paris Road Bridge	+5:53	+5:58
Pelican Islands	+2:26	+2:26
Pointe a la Hache	+3:12	+3:01
Port Eads	-0:17	-1:37
Raccoon Point	-0:03	-0:20
Shell Beach	+4:32	+4:25
Ship Shoal Light	-1:54	-1:50
South Pass, Miss. R.	-1:13	-1:20
Southwest Pass, Miss. R.	-0:38	-1:33
Tchefuncte River	+10:23	+11:01
Timbalier Island	+0:19	+0:23
Wine Island	+1:08	+1:02
Calcasieu Pass, Lighthouse Wharf	HIGH	LOW
Cote Blanche Island	+4:33	+3:40
Eugene Island	+1:49	-0:39
Lighthouse Point	+0:58	-0:53
Mermentau River ent.	+0:20	+0:25
Point Au Fer	+1:53	-1:02
Point Chevreul	+3:16	+0:30
Rabbit Island	+2:01	-0:36
Shell Island	+3:08	+0:45
South Point	+1:55	-0:33
Southwest Pass, Vermillion Bay	+1:42	+0:51
Weeks Bay	+3:58	+3:56



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