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**35**

**ATTACKING THE RUT**



# Louisiana CONTENTS

Volume 40 | Number 12 | December 2020

## FEATURES:

### **35** ATTACKING THE RUT

As the peak of breeding season arrives in whitetail country, hunters can go on the offensive and use all the tools of the trade to connect with a buck.

> By Dave Moreland

### **51** HUNT. COOK. EAT.

Executive chef at Morehouse Parish duck club shares hunting, cooking tips.

> By Kinny Haddox

### **61** SPECKS BEFORE SANTA

These tips for December fishing should put more trout in your cooler and provide plenty of Christmas cheer.

> By Jon Miller

### **87** WHEN BIG WON'T WORK

Louisiana bass pro shares tips on downsizing baits, tackle as winter approaches and fishing gets tougher.

> By Jonathan LePera



**87**

**WHEN BIG WON'T WORK**

### **107** DEEP SIX SLAB TRICKS

Top pro teams share cold-weather trips for catching Christmas crappie.

> By Kinny Haddox

### **112** CHRISTMAS ON THE LAKE

St. Nick's visit frees the slabs and brings Christmas cheer to the bayou

> By Kinny Haddox

## FISHING HOTSPOTS:

**70** Big Lake reds, specks

**72** Sabine River reds

**74** Reggio/Delacroix reds, specks

**76** Leeville reds

**80** Venice tuna

**106** Toledo Bend bass



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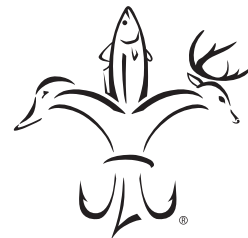
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**61**  
SPECKS  
BEFORE SANTA



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**Volume 40 | No 12**

## OUTDOOR UPDATE:

**10** PLENTY OF EARLY SEASON  
TROPHY BUCKS; HUGE  
SAC-A-LAIT; A BLUE,  
BLUE CRAB

PLUS

**34** DECEMBER'S  
RUT CALENDAR

### ON THE COVER:



Dr. Joey Barrios of Lafayette was rewarded for passing up a  
6-point "cull buck" on Nov. 1. He wound up tagging this 18-point,  
198-inch Avoyelles Parish trophy the same day.



**51**  
HUNT.  
COOK.  
EAT.

## COLUMNS:

- 42 STICKS & STRINGS** By Sammy Romano
- 61 MARSH MAN MASSON**  
By Todd Masson
- 78 SPECIES SPOTLIGHT**  
By Brian Cope
- 94 PADDLES 'N PUDDLES**  
By Chris Holmes
- 98 LURE REVIEW** By Don Shoopman

## DEPARTMENTS:

- 46** Holiday Gift Guide
- 100** Bassin' Best Bets
- 114** Sportsman Astro Tables
- 115** Sportsman Tide Guide
- 116** Hunting/Fishing Scrapbook
- 121** Hunting Regs
- 122** Sportsman Classifieds
- 123** Advertiser Index

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# Outdoor UPDATE

ON THE  
COVER



Dr. Joey Barrios took this 198-inch trophy buck at his Corbett Farms hunting club in Avoyelles Parish.

## PASSING ON CULL BUCK GIVES DOCTOR CRACK AT TROPHY

By Glynn Harris

**D**r. Joey Barrios, a general surgeon from Lafayette, had a chance to tag what his Corbett Farms hunting club in Avoyelles Parish had determined to be an old, 6-point buck that had been labeled as a “cull” and needed to be removed from the gene pool.

But he also had images of a genuine trophy buck on his trail cameras, a buck that has been hanging out in the area he was hunting. On the afternoon of Nov. 1, when the 6-pointer stepped out, Barrios made a decision that wound up with him getting to zero in on the real trophy, which carried an 18-point, 198-inch non-typical rack.

“Our bowhunt-only club is strictly managed for big, mature bucks,” Barrios said. “We take a good many does to keep the sex ratio in balance, and we only shoot bucks we determine to be at least 5½ years old, bucks that would score 150 inches or better.”

### GIVE HIM A PASS

Last season, the big buck was a good one, carrying perhaps 16 points on a big rack, but there was a question as to his age, whether it was 4½ or 5½ years old. The decision was to pass on him last year, hoping he’d be even better this season, when he would undoubtedly meet the age requirement.

“This past summer, I had him in velvet on camera, and he had really blown up into something special,” Barrios said. “The decision was made once the season opened that the buck would be

on our ‘hit list’ as hunters on neighboring property also had him on their cameras.”

Corbett Farms is a 6,500-acre piece of property bordered on the eastern and northern sides by the Red River and to the southern edge by the Lake Ophelia National Wildlife Refuge. The soil is rich and fertile, and approximately half the acreage is in farm land and some CRP land on the property.

### A CHANGE IN SCHEDULE

“Our trail cameras had photos of him mostly during mornings,” Barrios said. “Even though I thought my best chance at him would be mornings, a cold front was scheduled to move in, and bucks have a tendency to move around more when a front comes through that creates a change in barometric pressure. I decided to get on my stand Sunday afternoon to see what might happen. I got into my Maverick ground blind around 2 p.m.”

The blind sits on a 5-foot high platform since there are bears in the area, and because a ground blind would attract their attention more than one sitting up off the ground.

“I had put out a mineral block in front of the blind, and the deer had already eaten it down to below the ground,” Barrios said. “I also added rice bran as another attractant. A friend was hunting nearby, and he and I were texting back and forth when the 6-point ‘cull’ buck stepped out and stuck his nose in the rice bran. I knew I had to be back at work the next day and didn’t want to

spend no telling how long tracking a cull, so I texted my friend that I was looking at the 6-point."

## TROPHY APPEARANCE

The 6-pointer abruptly turned to look back in the direction from which it had come. With bears and coyotes in the area, Barrios thought maybe he had heard one of these animals.

"At around 5:10, I looked out a window in the direction the 6-point was looking and watched a big buck step out; I knew it was the big one I was after," he said. "I drew my bow, and the bow just let off completely. I was concerned my arrow might fall and the game would be over. The buck became alert, like he heard or saw something. Fortunately, the buck was looking in the other direction, and I was able to come to full draw at 25 yards and release my arrow. I could tell I had made a good shot as the buck took off."

Barrios shoots a Matthews bow, a Carbon Express Maxima arrow and Swacker broadhead.

Barrios only waited 10 minutes before walking to where the buck had been standing. He slowly and quietly followed the blood trail and spotted a white belly up ahead.

"I backed out, went back to the blind and called my buddy, who had shot a cull buck," he said. "We decided since I could see my deer was down to recover it before helping him find his deer."

Barrios's buck had 18 scorable points with an inside spread of 21 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches. Bases were 6 and 5 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches with 55 inches of mass that carried throughout the rack. The buck was a heavyweight, tipping the scales at between 250 and 275 pounds. The rack was unofficially measured at 198 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches. ■

---

# LAKE VERRET PRODUCES ENORMOUS SAC-A-LAIT

By Monique Roth

**W**hen Dickie Daigle of Thibodaux set out Oct. 1 to fish with his friend, Glenn Landry, he said nothing seemed to be going right.

At least not at first.

Even though they were targeting catfish, Daigle said he likes to always bring some sac-a-lait bait ... just in case.

"We left and were on our way to my camp, and I realized I left my night crawlers, so we turned back around to get them," Daigle said. "So we started off a little late, and the first area we went to we

caught a few fish, but they were small."

Daigle said he decided to take his chances and fish somewhere else.

"The first place we fished is usually a good one, but there weren't that many fish, and the size wasn't that big," he said. "So I said, 'Let's go to this place I know I'm going to catch fish.'"

It was around 9:30 a.m. when they stopped at an area near the Ike Canal with a sunken tree.

"There were a lot of branches coming out the water, and the first cast was that fish," Daigle said. "I was dumbfounded."

"That fish" turned out to be a 4.2-pound sac-a-lait that measured 17 inches long — almost a half-pound heavier than either of Louisiana's state-records for black crappie or white crappie.

"At first I thought it was a gaspergou because of the size," Daigle said. "But my buddy fishes sac-a-lait all the time, and he knew it was one. He grabbed a net, and we netted it on the first try."

## CATCH OF THE YEAR

Daigle said a 1-pound sac-a-lait and 22 catfish the pair caught the remainder of the trip paled in comparison to the big catch.

"Every time we looked at it when we went to put another fish in the ice chest we said, 'My God, this fish is big,'" Daigle said. "Neither one of us ever saw one that big. We were just amazed every time we saw it in the ice chest."

Daigle's trip back to get his night crawlers paid off.

"It was just a plain hook with a night crawler," he said of how he caught the fish. "It was my best catch of the year."

## STATE CERTIFIED

But even with a catch that impressive, Daigle said it never dawned on him to get it officially weighed and certified.

"I mean, I weighed and measured it," he said. "I have one on the wall at my camp, but this one could have ate that one. It never dawned on me that it could be a state record."

Mounting the fish was out of the question for other reasons.

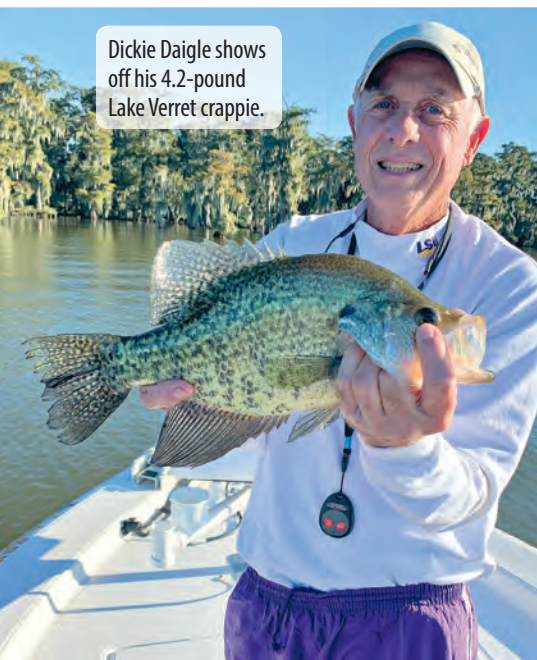
"I catch approximately 1,000 catfish a year, and I catch a lot of speckled trout during the winter," Daigle said. "I share of lot of the fish with my family and friends and my kids, but my sac-a-lait I do not share even with my kids — those goes straight on the frying pan."

Daigle said he and his wife ate the fish for two days.

"That's my favorite eating fish," he said. "I was more excited about the size of it because I knew I would eat good for a couple days."

Daigle said he may still submit information on the fish, which should rank as one of the top in the state.

"It's not too late ... I'm thinking about it," he said of submitting the paperwork. "But I'm going fishing again tomorrow." ■



Dickie Daigle shows off his 4.2-pound Lake Verret crappie.

# ANGLER CATCHES COLORFUL CRAB

By Ryan Arena

TRUE BLUE CRUSTACEAN  
CAUGHT OFF WHARF NEAR  
MORGAN CITY HOME

**T**hane Aucoin saw what he had caught, but he barely believed his eyes. Aucoin had been running a few crab traps off the wharf near his Morgan City home on Lake Palourde with typical results. But what he found the afternoon of Sept. 28 was anything but typical. He took a look at it and called his wife over. "I just stared at it... 'Hey, I just caught a blue crab,'" Aucoin said. "She says, 'Oh, okay,' probably thinking it was just a blue



Thane Aucoin of Morgan City caught this rare blue crab off his dock in Lake Palourde.

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claw or something. But then she sees it and goes, 'Oh my goodness' . . . it was a shocker. Neither of us have seen anything like that."

Nor have all that many others. The crab was blue from shell to claws, front to back, and that's a rarity, as the typical blue crab only has blue legs and a beige shell.

But a blue crab like Aucoin found, at least based on appearance, comes once in a blue moon. According to a 2018 report by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), two Virginia crabbers found one that year, and it was the first reported to the institute in 11 years.

There are also albino crabs and purple crabs. Those colorations can be caused by a parasite that affects the crab's muscles and shells. But a full blue crab is thought to be caused by a color variant and not an infection, according to VIMS professor Jeff Shields. Crabs have a trait allowing them to change color and fool predators.

## ONE IN A MILLION?

While different shades of blue yield different estimates on a crab's comparative rarity — for example, a very bright, dark-blue crab caught in North Carolina last year was called a "one in a billion" catch with a very rare genetic mutation — Aucoin's catch certainly stands closer to the very few than the many.

"My sister googled it, and said it came back as 'one in a million.' I don't know if that's the case, but I know it's pretty rare," Aucoin said. "I'm 59 years old, and this is the first I've ever seen. There were a couple of crabs I've caught that we had pictures of, and you can see the clear differential between this and one of the green crabs. It was pretty exciting. I got lots of calls about it. It's definitely exciting. It was just a regular crab trap we caught it in.

"We were both astounded. We kept it alive a day or two . . . I wasn't sure if someone was going to contact me about it. I posted the picture on Facebook and got 198 shares. And I'm not a regular Facebook participant . . . It's just one of those things where you're right place, right time."

Aucoin said he is having the crab mounted. It's a milestone for a man who said he's



crabbed throughout his entire life. Since he began setting the traps this year in July, the crop has been getting progressively better.

And, in this case, bluer.

"It's been a pretty neat experience," Aucoin said. ■



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# STARS ALIGN FOR YOUNG CHOUDRANT DEER HUNTER

By Kinny Haddox

**S**ometimes, the stars just align and, if you are ready, it's just your time. It's called preparation meets opportunity.

That's the way it worked out for 15-year-old Gray Worthey of Choudrant on Oct. 2 when he arrowed a huge, 14-point Hogue Island buck that scored 170. The huge deer weighed 240 pounds and was estimated to be 6½ years old. Worthey shot it the opening week of bow season. It was only his third deer to kill with a bow and by far the largest.

The final meeting between Worthey and the big buck wasn't by chance. He had been watching the monster on camera since it was in velvet back this-past summer. He and his dad and brother had seen the deer in previous seasons, but over this past year the buck just blew up in size and in spread.

The final chapter of the story started out when Worthey, his father, Jim, and his brother, Jed, were quarantined at their hunting camp due to exposure to COVID-19. Worthey and his brother were both wanting first shot at the monster and had a "shoot off" to determine who got first chance. That was his brother, and even though he saw the big deer on his hunt, he could not get a shot.

## HIS TURN AT BAT

The next day it was Worthey's turn. He got on the stand well before daylight, and about 7:30, the big deer eased out through the woods about 50 yards away from his Millennium lock-on. The deer made a big circle and started feeding but never offered a shot. After it had been there a few minutes, something spooked the buck. He didn't run off, but just slowly trotted off into the distance with Worthey helplessly watching.

Worthey texted his father and told him he saw the deer and almost had a shot, but it had walked off. He added, "I think I'm



Gray Worthey with his 14-point Hogue Island buck that scored 170.

having a panic attack." Who wouldn't?

So, he went back early in the afternoon and actually cut out a few more small shooting gaps in case the deer came back the same way again. He wasn't confident it would, but he was going to be ready. And sure enough, right before dark, here came the big buck back on the same path. This time Worthey was ready and took the shot before the deer could get behind that group of small trees.

"When I shot him, he was slightly quartered toward me and I thought I'd made the perfect shot," he said. "But the arrow only went in halfway, and I wasn't sure. With his size, we decided to just go back to camp and give him some time. After a while, we snuck back out and found a blood trail, but not a lot of blood. We found where he ran between two trees and broke the arrow off, so we decided to wait until morning and get some help."

It was a good decision. Another good decision was contacting local tracker Brad Whittington, who brought his dog, Boone,

and they tracked down the 14-point, 170-inch non-typical buck, which was dead in a patch of grass in the middle of a thicket.

## THE CELEBRATION

The deer had been showing up pretty regularly on the camera. The Wortheyes decided he must have been laying up close to the feeding spot, and whenever it got hungry, it would just get up and walk out to get a bite to eat. After he found the deer, Worthey was almost in shock. The best way he could describe it was "surreal." He killed the buck with a Hoyt Spyder bow shooting a Victory RIP arrow with a Rage broadhead.

The story wouldn't be complete without one more question answered. How did you sleep that night waiting to go look for the deer. Jim Worthey answered that question.

"He slept pretty good, but I didn't," he said. "We sat up late rehashing what had happened, and I couldn't wait to get back out there." ■



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SCAN ME

# TINY TRACT IS HOME TO HUGE AVOYELLES TROPHY

By Glynn Harris

**W**alt Bordelon doesn't need to join a hunting club of thousands of acres to be successful. He hunts a tiny, 15-acre piece of ground, land that he owns behind his home in Moreauville in Avoyelles Parish, and one mid-October afternoon, he dropped a 143-inch, 16-point buck there.

Bordelon, 39, works for Union Pacific Railroad, and after he got off work on Monday afternoon, Oct. 19, he sat for a while trying to make up his mind whether should walk out the back door and go to his stand.

"It was hot that afternoon, 86 degrees, and I knew the mosquitoes would give me fits," Bordelon said. "However, I checked the wind direction; (it was) out of the southeast, which would be just



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Walt Bordelon took this 16-point Avoyelles Parish buck on Oct. 19.



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right for my stand, so I decided to grab my bow and give it a try.”

Last year, Bordelon hunted the stand all season and never saw a deer. However, for the past two weeks, his trail camera had captured photos of a big buck — but only at night. He climbed into his lock-on stand around 5:20, and his prediction was spot on; mosquitoes began giving him fits, but at least the wind was right.

“My stand is on property my grandfather used to farm, but I’ve allowed it to grow up,” he said. “It overlooks a food plot that has a patch of trees on one side and tall grass on the other.”

## ON A MISSION

Bordelon had seen a few does on hunts earlier in the season but had let them pass because of the big buck that was captured on camera.

“Around 6:30, I saw movement on my food plot and looked to (see) three raccoons,” Bordelon said. “I watched them for a while, and then, suddenly, they all took off running. I knew they had seen or heard something. The right side of the food plot is blocked by limbs, so I looked through some limbs and saw the ears of a deer. I had no idea if it was a buck or doe. There is a little pinch point on the food plot where I feed rice bran, and when the deer walked around the point, I saw antlers and knew it was the one I had on camera. He stopped at 30 yards, and I decided to let him come on closer. When he got to 15 yards, I released my arrow, and he took off.”

Seeing the deer slow to a walk in the weeds some 60 yards away, Bordelon sat back down to settle his nerves and called a friend, Jade Lambert, who came with his son, Cole, to help track Bordelon’s buck.

“There was plenty of blood where I shot, with an easy blood trail to follow,” said Bordelon, who shoots a Matthews bow with a carbon arrow and Shuttle T-Lok broadhead. “We walked up on him, piled up right where I’d last seen him walking, 60 yards from my stand.”

“*I checked the wind direction; (it was) out of the southeast, which would be just right for my stand, so I decided to grab my bow and give it a try.*”

## BACKYARD BUCK

The buck was a dandy, sporting a rack of 16 points, with sticker points all over. The rough score was 143 inches, and in addition to all the points, the buck had massive bases of 6 inches each, with an inside spread of 14 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches. The deer tipped the scales at 225 pounds; Bordelon estimated he was 4 $\frac{1}{2}$  years old.

“This is the only place I hunt,” Bordelon said, “and to think I got the biggest buck I ever killed right here in my backyard.” ■

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# WALLACE DOWNS CALDWELL PARISH BRUTE

By Glynn Harris

**B**ob Wallace, 59, is the former owner of Spotted Dog Sporting Goods in Columbia. Having sold the business and retired to Choudrant in Lincoln Parish, his desire was to deer hunt as much as he could on a 450-acre plot in Caldwell Parish owned by his late father and himself.

After he took a 9-point, 170-inch monster on Oct. 21, who could blame him?

Wallace had booked a hunt in Kansas this season, and after he was settled in on his Kansas hunt, something made him wonder whether he had been premature in planning to head out of state to hunt.

"After the Kansas trip was arranged, I checked my trail cameras on my Caldwell Parish property and found photos of a really fine buck," Wallace said. "I figured somebody might get him before I got back from Kansas."

Before heading to Kansas to hunt, Wallace hung a bow stand to try for the big buck. A nice 7-point buck, not of the quality of the one that attracted his attention, had also shown up on the camera. By the time he headed out to his bow stand the afternoon of Wednesday, Oct. 21, he was aware that the buck had not shown up on camera in that area for a while, so he was focused on the 7-point.

"It was unusually warm for this late in October, with the temperature above 90 degrees but with the wind in my favor," he said. "I hung on and sweated it out that afternoon, with my plan to have a crack at the 7-point. I had stopped bowhunting since I was a kid, and this would be my first chance to try for a deer with my crossbow, a Mission with Mission bolt and Rage broadhead."

## A NICE SURPRISE

About 15 minutes before dark,

movement in front of his stand caught his attention. He watched four small bucks come out into his food plot, two of them putting on a show as they began sparring. Suddenly, they raced off as if something had alarmed them.

"I heard something coming through the woods and figured it was probably the 7-point, as the big one was no longer on camera in that area," Wallace said. "About that time, I looked up to see the big buck I had on camera step out of the woods onto the food plot. My heart started racing 90-to-nothing when I realized it was the one I had hoped to have a chance at before heading to Kansas."

"The buck stepped out at 30 yards, and I felt I had to shoot then or else my nerves would have been so out of control I'd have probably missed him," he said.

Releasing the bolt on his crossbow, Wallace was confident he had made a good hit because of the way the deer kicked and took off into the thicket.

"I was hunting alone, so I got out of my stand, left the woods and called a friend of mine, John McIlwain, to come help me track the buck," Wallace said. "After John got there, we went to the area where the buck was standing when I shot, found blood and there was a good trail to follow.



Bob Wallace and his big 9-point Caldwell Parish buck.

We found him piled up some 50 yards from where he was standing when the arrow hit."

## THE MEASUREMENTS

The big-bodied buck, which weighed 250 pounds, sported a massive rack of 9 points with two small kickers. Its inside spread was 19 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches and its main beams were over 23 inches each, with the most remarkable statistic being the mass. At the bases, the circumference measurement was 5 $\frac{1}{8}$  and 5 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches with the next three measurements all being more than 5 inches. Wallace took the trophy buck to his former business, Spotted Dog Sporting Goods, to have it measured. The tape read 170 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches. ■



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# BLOOD TRAILING DOGS FIND TROPHY RED RIVER BUCK



Rick Guillot took this 8-point, 142-inch Red River Parish buck on Oct. 24.

By Glynn Harris

**R**ick Guillot of Elm Grove, a 41-year-old registered nurse at Willis Knighton Hospital in Shreveport, has a pair of four-legged friends to thank for locating an 8-point, 142-inch buck he arrowed Oct. 24. He might not have been able to recover the Red River Parish buck without the expertise of two dogs trained to follow the trail of a wounded buck.

"I hunt on 2,000-acre Love Lake Hunting Club in Red River Parish," Guillot said. "Our trail cameras had revealed a nice 8-point buck last season that we passed on to give him another year because it seemed he had potential to be more impressive this year."

This year, Guillot's cameras had confirmed what he believed; the buck had matured to the point that he was on the "hit list" if he showed himself during daylight hours.

"Our club features a mixture of pines and hills on one side, and we are situated next to a hardwood bottom on the other," he said. "We back up to Loggy Bayou that borders us on one side with its hardwood habitat adjoining the high pine hills on the other.

## SITE SELECTION

"I had figured out where the buck's bedding area was to the

east, just across a small stream that fed into Loggy Bayou. I usually hunt from a climber or lock-on stand, but the area I chose wouldn't give me the clearance I needed in case the buck left his bedding area, so I chose to set up a lean-to ladder stand that would give me a better view of the area."

Guillot had started putting out feed — rice bran and corn — just across the small stream, with his stand facing east, favoring either a north or south wind. On the afternoon of Oct. 18, he climbed onto his ladder stand to see if the buck would appear in daylight hours.

"Just before legal shooting hours ended, I saw movement, and the buck had stepped out of the thicket and headed to the feed pile," Guillot said. "It was getting pretty late and I couldn't see very well. I drew back on him, released my arrow and shot over him. The buck jumped and ran maybe 10 yards. A few minutes later, he returned to the feed. By then it was too late for another shot, so I sat in the stand maybe half an hour until I heard him walk away before I eased down and slipped out."

Guillot hunted the stand at mid-week without seeing anything. On Saturday, Oct. 24, he was back in his stand.

"I hunted that morning and saw a doe and fawn, but no buck

showed up," he said. "I was back on my stand that afternoon, and at 6:40, with plenty of light left to shoot, the buck came out again. I shoot a Matthews compound bow with a Carbon Express arrow and Muzzy Hybrid broadhead. He was quartering away, but I felt at 26 yards I had a chance at a good shot, so I took it. The buck took off, I waited half an hour or so before getting down. I got on his trail and followed blood for a while before losing it."


## DOGS SAVE THE DAY

What Guillot did next resulted in his being able to find his buck when there was very little blood to follow. He called a cousin who has a good blood-trailing dog and a neighbor who has a beagle adept at blood trailing.

"I had the beagle on a leash, and the other dog was running on its own," Guillot said. "After losing the trail and picking it up again, we followed the dogs and walked up on the dog that had been running loose sitting next to my buck with the beagle pulling me in that direction."

The buck's rack featured 8 points with a wide, 20 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch inside spread, main beams more than 22 inches long, with base circumference and the next two measurements more than 4 inches each. The buck was measured at 142 inches of antler mass.


"I have killed big deer over the years," Guillot said, "but thanks to these two blood trailing dogs, I was able to down the biggest one I ever got with my bow." ■



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# FRIENDS DOWN TROPHY BUCKS ON SAME DAY, ON SAME CLUB

By Glynn Harris

**T**he Hooks and Horns hunting club in Jackson Parish covers 6,300 acres, so it's no surprise that it's home to lots of trophy bucks, but having two of them killed the same day is a big deal.

Lance Kelpé of Ruston opened Oct. 25 by dropping a 145-inch, 11-point buck that morning. His friend, Aaron Wood of Ruston ended it with a 10-point buck that measured 157 inches.

All in all, quite a day on the club land, which used to be part of the Jackson Bienville WMA before Weyerhaeuser Co. elected to divide the property and offer it to groups interested in forming hunting clubs. Kelpé and Wood were among the first to come aboard and form a club.



Aaron Wood of Ruston with his big 10-point buck that measured 157 inches.

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## GOOD LUCK CHARM

Kelpé, 35, climbed into his box stand early in the morning on Oct. 25 and settled down with what he called his "good luck charm," his 4-year-old son, who took a seat in his dad's lap. He was looking for one buck in particular.

"This nice buck we estimated to be a 3½-year-old deer was a good one last season," Kelpé said. "We had several chances at him then but elected to give him another year. I'm glad we did because, he really improved between last season and this year."

As it started to get daylight, Kelpé looked through the trees where he had a corn pile and saw a big-bodied deer at about 100 yards.

"As it started to get lighter, I could see better and realized it was the big one we had on camera," he said. "I eased my

son down on the floor, told him to cover his ears, put the scope on my .35 Whelan on his shoulder and shot.”

Kelpe called Wood, who came and helped recover the buck, which weighed 240 pounds and measured 145 $\frac{5}{8}$  inches. It featured 11 points with an inside spread of 15 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches.

## IN TIME

That afternoon, Wood, 35, who has been Kelpe’s friend since the eighth grade, climbed into his box stand across the lease from where Kelpe downed his buck hours earlier.

“My stand sits in the middle of mature pines that have been designated a sanctuary for the endangered red cockaded woodpecker,” Wood said. “I had gotten word from Weyerhaeuser that they were going to come in and do some thinning in the protected woodpecker area. I had been getting photos of this big buck, but because of the thinning operation, I had not been able to trim shooting lanes or bush hog. Once Weyerhaeuser began their logging operation, there were no more photos of the buck, but soon after the operation was over, he started showing back up on my camera.”

Wood saw a couple of does and a small buck come to feed on the corn he had out. With the end of legal shooting hours approaching, he was worried that he wouldn’t get a chance at the buck.

“I looked at my phone and saw that legal shooting hours ended at 6:56,” he said. “At 6:50, I looked up to see the 6-point (buck) my big buck had been running with step out. Right behind him was the big boy, so I got my .35 Whelan on him, hit the trigger and heard him run off. I looked at my phone; it was 6:54, two minutes before legal shooting hours ended.

Kelpe returned the favor and came over to assist in the recovery of Wood’s buck; the deer went about 80 yards from where it was shot before dropping. The 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ -year-old buck sported 10 points with a 19 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch inside spread. It scored 157 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches. ■

Lance Kelpe and his son with the buck he killed at the Hooks and Horns hunting club in Jackson Parish.





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# JOHNSON DOWNS BIG 9-POINT SABINE BUCK

By Glynn Harris

**B**eau Johnson, a 46-year-old, off-shore petroleum employee, works so many days on, so many off.

On Oct. 27, during his off-work period, he made good use of his time when he had an encounter with a 9-point, 156-inch buck he had been after.

"I belong to Goodson Creek hunting club in Sabine Parish, a club I joined before last season," Johnson said. "This club practices good management for deer, and there are some quality bucks on the club. In fact, I was able to take two good bucks last season."

Last season, Johnson got photos on his trail camera of a really good buck, an 8-point, probably 4½ years old, that would have scored in the mid-140s. He actually had a chance at the buck a year ago.

"I was on my stand one day when a friend invited me to join him for dinner, so I got down an hour earlier than I wanted to," Johnson said. "As I was walking out, I jumped the big buck that likely would have come out by my stand had I remained there."

This year, Johnson's goal was to have an encounter with the big buck. He climbed into his two-man, lean-to ladder stand around 4 p.m. on Oct. 27 and settled down for the evening hunt.

## PERFECT TIMING

Sitting in his stand, Johnson has a view of thinned pines behind him, pines that connect with a clearcut with growth approximately chest-high, an ideal area for deer, especially mature bucks, to feel safe. In front of his stand is a long food plot next to one of five fingers of a creek with adjacent ridges that bucks like to travel during the rut when they're looking for receptive does.

"I was texting a buddy on another stand

who said he was watching some deer out from his stand and told me to get ready, because he predicted I would begin seeing some action around 6 p.m.," Johnson said. "At 6:05, I texted him back, kidding him that 6 p.m. had come and gone, and I hadn't seen my deer. At 6:06, I looked up, and there he was, with his nose to the ground, coming my way."

## GET OVER NERVES

The buck stepped into a clearing at 120 yards, and Johnson identified him as the big buck he was after. Nervousness and excitement created some problems for him, however.

"I was so nervous that it took what seemed like 5 minutes to get the hammer on my .350 CVA Legend cocked and to get it on the shooting rail," Johnson said. "The buck was still in the clearing, so I finally got a bead on him, hit the trigger, and he bolted and ran into the clear-cut. I saw him topple over and knew he was down. I looked at my watch, which read 6:07.

"I immediately went crazy and started texting everybody I knew, telling them what I'd done. I gave the buck 15 minutes to be sure he was down before leaving my stand and heading toward where I had seen him fall. The brush in the clear cut is about head high, and I'm only 5-foot-4, so as I walked toward him, I kept jumping up to see over the brush until I got to him," Johnson said.



## THANKFUL

When he got to the downed buck, he said he shed a few tears, hit his knees and said a little prayer of thanks.

The buck, sporting nine points with some stickers too small to measure, had an inside spread of 16½ inches, with the main characteristic being the mass, which measured at least 4 inches throughout the antler length. Main beams were more 24 inches each, and the buck, estimated to be 5½ years old, weighed in at 220 pounds. The antler measurements revealed 156⅞ inches of bone.

As a side note, Johnson's 15-year-old son, Tucker hunted a few days later on another stand and downed a 125-inch, 8-point. He shot his buck at 6:07 p.m., the exact time his father had bagged his big buck. ■



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# BRALLIER BATTLES HIGH WINDS FOR TROPHY BUCK

By Glynn Harris

**A** cold front was passing through Concordia Parish on the afternoon of Oct. 29, with winds that threatened to dislodge Ben Brallier, 35, from his climbing stand 20 feet up a tree.

He hung on, and when the big buck he had been getting photos of for the past three years stepped out, he was able to get the sights on his Horton Havoc crossbow on the deer's vitals and squeeze off a shot that resulted in the downing of a magnificent, 14-point, 172-inch trophy.

Brallier formerly worked in the oil field industry, but because of the pandemic, he was laid off. Now, he works part-time for the Concordia Parish Sheriff's office, which, as a consolation, gives him more time to hunt.

Brallier hunts on family land in Concordia Parish consisting of 3,050 acres of mixed swamp, thickets and hardwoods.

"I had been having this deer on camera for the past three seasons, and this year, I started getting trail-cam photos of him in June and July," Brallier said. "He had grown up a lot since last season."

Deciding to hunt the afternoon of Oct. 29 in spite of a cold front that was passing through accompanied by significant winds, Brallier elected to mount his climbing stand some 20 feet above the area where he felt the buck might show up.

"On one side of the stand was a palmetto thicket and small saplings," he said. "To my left are two big tanks of a saltwater disposal well. Straight out in front is an opening where I had placed a pile of corn."

## UP FOR THE CHALLENGE

When Brallier climbed into his stand around 3 p.m., the winds were swaying the tree back and forth, and he wondered if it was such a good idea to be sitting 20 feet high. Fortunately for him, he made the right decision and stayed put.

"I had sat up there rocking and rolling for an hour when some does and yearlings stepped out of the thicket to begin feeding on the corn," Brallier said. "They hung around for about an hour before they finally left."

"At 6:15, two small bucks came to the corn," he said. "Five minutes later, I looked up to see the big buck I was after step out of the woods and head for the corn pile."

Brallier wasted no time in getting his sights on the buck's vitals and squeezing off a shot that he felt was right on target.



Ben Brallier and his 14-point Concordia Parish buck that scored a whopping 172%.

"The buck took off, and when he ran between two saplings, his antlers hit the saplings and it sounded like a shotgun blast; I was afraid he might have broken one of his antlers off," Brallier said. "He ran over next to the palmetto thicket, stood there with his tail flicking, and I'm saying to myself, 'GO DOWN! GO DOWN!' Finally, he just fell over, and I was relieved that I had finally gotten him. When I got down and went to where he lay, there was no ground shrinkage; there was ground growth."

## A TROPHY BUCK

The buck was a genuine trophy, tipping the scales at a whopping 265 pounds and estimated at 6½ years old. His rack was a main-frame 10 with four measurable stickers. The inside spread was slightly more than 18 inches; the main beams measured 26 inches each and bases were an astounding 6 and 5½ inches in circumference, with measurements of four inches all the way out to the tips.

Taking the buck to Bastrop to enter it in Simmons Sporting Goods big buck contest, the rack scored a whopping 172% inches of antler mass. ■

# LAST YEAR'S CULL BUCK, THIS YEAR'S TROPHY

By Glynn Harris

Last deer season, Shawn Key and other hunters on his father's Union Parish hunting club had photographs of a buck that was notable.

The left side of the buck's rack was normal, but on the right side, there were some extra points and stickers that caused the guys to decide he was a cull buck and perhaps needed to be removed from the herd.

"His rack was weird looking, but after first thinking we needed to take him, we decided to give him another year to see what he'd look like," Key said. "I'm glad we did, because he turned out to be something really special this season."

Key, 28, works for his grandfather, who owns and operates the Big Star grocery store in Farmerville. Before the season opened, the strange-looking buck began showing up in trail-camera photos. Club members realized that this big buck with a weird rack that included an extra main beam was the one they called a cull last season.

"Once we realized it was the same deer, and he had really put on some impressive headgear, we had him targeted for taking this season if we got the chance," Key said.

## DAD KNOWS BEST

The buck was showing up regularly in daylight photos before the season opened, and then, he simply disappeared; there were no photos of him for some three weeks.

"We thought he had either relocated to another area of another hunter had shot him," Key said. "It was sort of a mystery in view of the fact he had been a regular on the club."

On the afternoon of Oct. 29, Key was getting ready to head for a deer stand, and since the big buck had become a no-show, he decided to hunt another club where he holds membership. However, his father talked him into going back to his club, feeling that the big buck could show up any day.

"I traveled to my dad's club and crawled into a stand where we had a camera out, along with feed, in front of the stand," Key said. "After sitting a while, a small, 4-point buck came out to feed. Then, here came a fox across the plot, and shortly thereafter, two does came to the feed. I watched them for probably an hour. Later, two more does came out way down the lane at 250 yards or so, and they came to the feed. However, they appeared nervous and kept looking back from the direction they had come."

## MOMENT OF TRUTH

Keeping an eye on the nervous does, Key caught movement far down the lane. He saw a big-bodied deer and picked up his binoculars to see it better.



"Once I got him in my binoculars, I saw it was the big buck with an extra main beam, so I picked up my .35 Whelan and watched as the buck continued on down the lane to where the does were feeding," he said. "The does left in a hurry as he approached, but he was more interested in the feed I had on the ground than the does, because he started feeding."

"He was facing me the whole time, and I started shaking as all I was looking at was him facing me. He finally turned a bit as I cocked the hammer on my gun. Then, he turned as if he was headed off the plot, which gave me a brief broadside look, and I shot."

The buck kicked as if he was hit and then took off. Key texted his father and a buddy and told them he had just shot the big buck. Then something happened that caused him to wonder if he'd made a good shot.

"I stayed in the stand waiting for Dad and my friend to come when I looked up and out stepped a doe," Key said. "Then a 6-point and a nice 8-point buck came out acting as if nothing had happened. I thought about taking the 8-point, assuming I had messed up on the big one, but I decided I didn't want to get in trouble with the law in the event I shot two bucks the same day, so I waited for them to come."

## THE PAY OFF

Waiting until near dark to begin the search, the search party followed a blood trail to where the big buck had expired. The buck weighed 205 pounds and was aged at 4½ years.

The rack carried 11 points, with an extra main beam measuring 17 inches and an overall score of 153% inches. ■

# TEEN SKIPS HALLOWEEN; COLLECTS GREAT BUCK

By Glynn Harris

**O**n Oct. 31, 14-year-old Daniel Chautin, a freshman at Westminster Christian Academy in Opelousas, had a big decision to make. All his friends had plans to head out for a night of trick or treating. Daniel gave it some thought and decided to go sit in the deer blind with his dad instead.

"We put a camera out a couple of days before deer season and found images of a really nice buck on our farm," said Daniel's father, Brady Chautin. "Daniel decided he'd rather go deer hunting than head out with friends to go trick or treating."

The Chautins, who live in Arnaudville, own a 10,000-acre farm in St. Landry Parish where they grow rice and soy beans. The farm adjoins the Atchafalaya Basin levee.

"The part of the farm where we hunt is in a swampy area, a portion of the land that was not cleared for farming," Brady said.

The father/son duo climbed into their box blind around 3:30 p.m., but as the afternoon waned, the temperature started declining, and it became chilly.

"We have hunted this stand off and on all season but had never seen a deer, not the first one," said Daniel, who was probably wondering about all the treats his buddies were hauling in while he sat in a chilly deer stand.

## THE RIGHT CALL

His luck was about to take a marked upward swing, far better than if finding his bag overflowing with Reese's Peanut Butter Cups and Three Musketeers. The first and only deer he had seen all season stepped out of the brush at 120 yards and began feeding on the Buck Forage oats planted in the food plot.

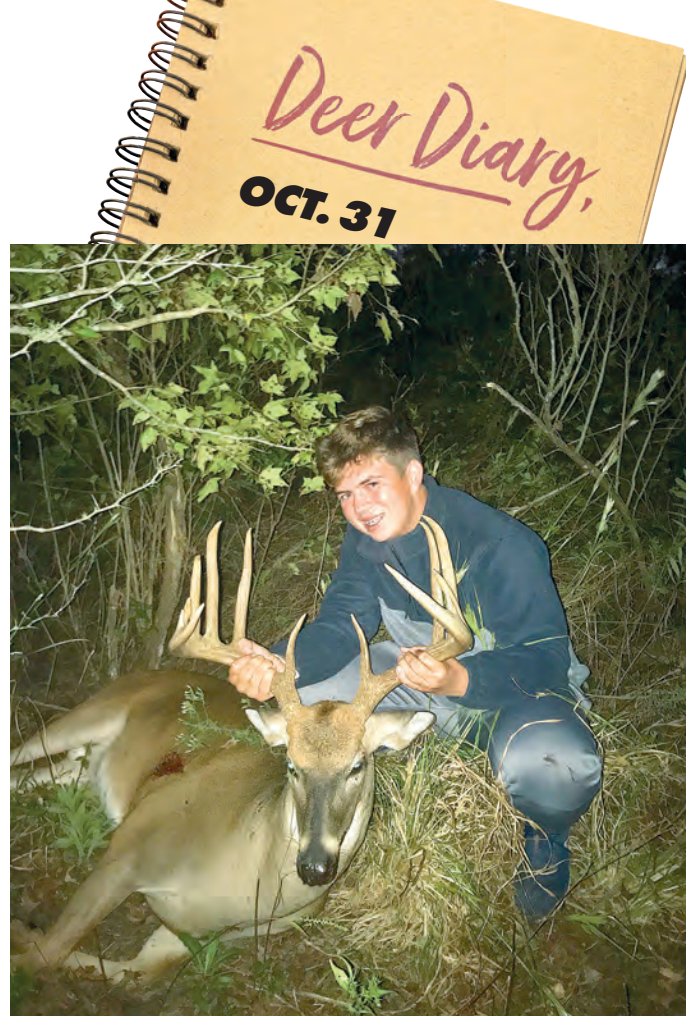
"When we first saw the buck, he was feeding on the oats but was facing away from us. I started getting so nervous and shaking. I was afraid the deer could see me shaking from that far away," Daniel Chautin said.

After feeding along some 30 yards, the buck finally turned broadside at 150 yards, giving the nervous teen a chance to settle down and get the scope on the buck's vitals. He was shooting a Browning 7mm Magnum and was finally able to calm his nerves enough to take the shot.

"When I shot, the buck jumped and took off into the thicket," Daniel Chautin said. "We thought we heard him crash down but decided to give him some time to be sure he was down for good."

After waiting 20 minutes, the Chautins left the stand and walked to where the deer was standing at the shot.

"We found a few drops of blood and started following the dim blood trail," Daniel said. "I was afraid I had not made a good shot



Daniel Chautin and the 13-point buck he took on Halloween in St. Landry Parish.



*I started getting so nervous and shaking. I was afraid the deer could see me shaking from that far away.*



and he'd get away. However, we followed the trail up to where he was laying, a distance of only about 40 yards. When we got to him, he looked a lot bigger than I thought he was."

## TROPHY BUCK

The buck was estimated to be 4½ years old and weighed 196 pounds. His rack carried 13 points with inside spread of 18 inches. Bases were 4½ inches each with circumferences of 4 inches running the length of the rack. Main beams were 23 inches each.

The Chautins took the rack and had it scored by Greg Hicks, a Buckmaster scorer, who put his tape on the antlers and came up with a score of 165⅞ inches.

"Getting a buck like that," Daniel said, "beats trick or treating any day." ■



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# 'HE WAS JUST A GOLIATH' – HUNTER, 11, BAGS HIS DREAM BUCK

By Ryan Arena

**K**olton Jones, 11, laid eyes on the deer, and then his aim — but before he shot, he had a message for dad.

"When that deer came out, his exact words were, 'Daddy, he's a freaking monster,'" said Justin Jones, Kolton's father. "I said, 'Don't tell me twice, son; shoot him.'"

Kolton Jones, from Franklinton, made good on his shot, and it was quite the accomplishment. The "monster" deer was a 210-pound, 9-pointer that scored 140.

"He made a perfect shot and dropped him in his tracks," Justin Jones said. "Around here, in our parts, it's really unheard of to kill one like that. He's killed deer before, but never anything like that. I couldn't believe how big he was. I usually don't trust cameras, pictures, because I think they tend to exaggerate ... but in this case, they don't do it justice.

"He was just a Goliath of a deer."

Justin Jones said his son Kolton's previous best was a 7-point buck taken in January 2018. He has been hunting for the past three years, and he and his father go regularly. In this case, it was an outing for a competition.

Kolton Jones said he knew this was a different kind of deer.

"I was so dang excited," he said. "That was the biggest deer I've ever seen before. I was kind of nervous."

He paused, then continued.

"I was real nervous, actually," he said.

But it didn't affect his marksmanship.

"The first thing that went through my mind was, 'God, thank you,'" Kolton Jones said. "I was so excited, I couldn't even think"



Justin Jones said it can be difficult to take a deer at all in a typical outing, as deer in their area tend to be quite wary.

"When the season opens up, they disappear, go nocturnal," he said, "but we go every chance we get."

Kolton Jones said hunting is about relaxing and enjoying the outdoors.

"My favorite part about hunting is being in that deer stand, in the peace and quiet," he said. ■



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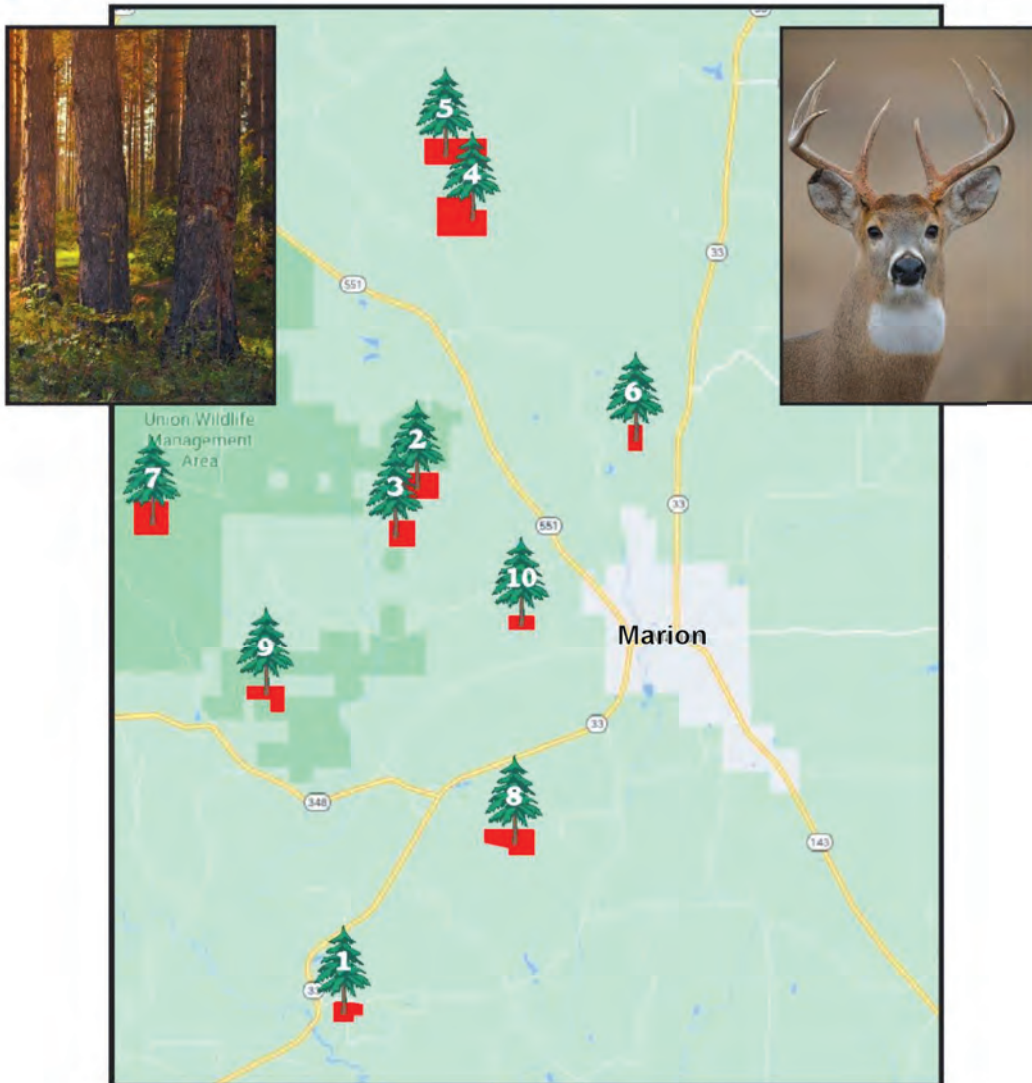
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Zach Jones took this 11-point, 212-pound buck on Nov. 7 at Ashbrook Island.



# STERLINGTON TEEN SCORES AGAIN; ANOTHER BIG BUCK BITES THE DUST

By Glynn Harris

**I**t all started for Zach Jones seven years ago, when the youngster, then 12, downed a trophy buck, a feat that found its way onto the pages of *Louisiana Sportsman*.

Since then, he has been featured twice more in the pages of the magazine. Now 19, he has struck again, laying claim to a big 11-point archery buck.

Jones and his father, both from Sterlington, are members of a top-notch hunting club whose land is along the Mississippi River. Bordering Arkansas and Louisiana, Ashbrook Island is physically located in Washington County, Miss.

The 6,000-acre piece of prime real estate has produced plenty of trophy bucks over the years, with Zach Jones collecting his share. The club has restrictions, with the minimum criteria for

bucks being 8 points, 5½ years of age and 140 inches of antler. Mess up, and you lose your buck privileges the rest of the hunting season as well as the next season.

## GREEN-LIGHTING

Jones, a recent graduate of Sterlington High School, where he played football and baseball, is working with his father, who is involved in oil and gas exploration with Delta Exploration. He plans to enroll in the University of Louisiana Monroe for the spring quarter. In the meantime, he spends as much time as he can on Askbrook.

"I was hunting a buck that ended up getting shot in October," Jones said. "I was hunting that morning and looked about 80 yards to my left and saw a big, wide-framed buck. I keep a camera with me, so I video'd the buck and sent it to my dad for his opinion. Dad agreed it was at least a 150-inch buck and told me if I wanted to go after him, I had his okay."

Sitting on his stand for more than a month, Zach saw the buck nearly every time he hunted, but since he was hunting with his bow, he almost never saw the buck closer than 100 yards, too far for a bow.

"I did have him at 28 yards one day, but a button willow bush blocked my shot," Jones said.

## THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

Getting into his stand before daylight the morning of Nov. 7, it didn't take long for the action to begin for Jones.

"Deer had been eating the leaves of cocklebur plants, but once they died off, they started working on greenbriar, and there was plenty of that near my stand," Jones said. "Just as it started getting light enough to make out movement, I looked up and recognized the buck I was after coming out of a button willow thicket, and he was traveling alone. I knew it was him, because I had lots of pictures of him with his split G2 and drop tine.

"Some trees had fallen between my stand and the willows, and I watched the buck hop over some logs and then start hooking his antlers on a bush, making a rub. Then, he popped out at 58 yards,

and since I have a pin on my bow set for 60 yards, I considered making a shot."

However, the buck made a move in Jones' favor, turning and coming straight toward his stand to his right.

"When he got to 30 yards, I got a bead on him and released my arrow," said Jones, who shoots a Hoyt Defiant bow, Easton FMJ arrows with Rage Hypodermic broadheads.

"The buck jumped the arrow, but he wasn't quite quick enough, as it clipped his spine and he dropped right there," Jones said.

The buck, estimated to be 5½ years old, weighed 212 pounds. The rack sported 11 points, featuring a split G2 and a 3-inch drop tine. Inside spread was 19½ inches with heavy mass throughout. The rack was measured at 152 inches. ■

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# DECEMBER'S RUT CALENDARS

**D**eer season is close to its halfway point, and while rutting activity has already wrapped up in some parts of Louisiana, it's slated to kick into high gear in other areas.

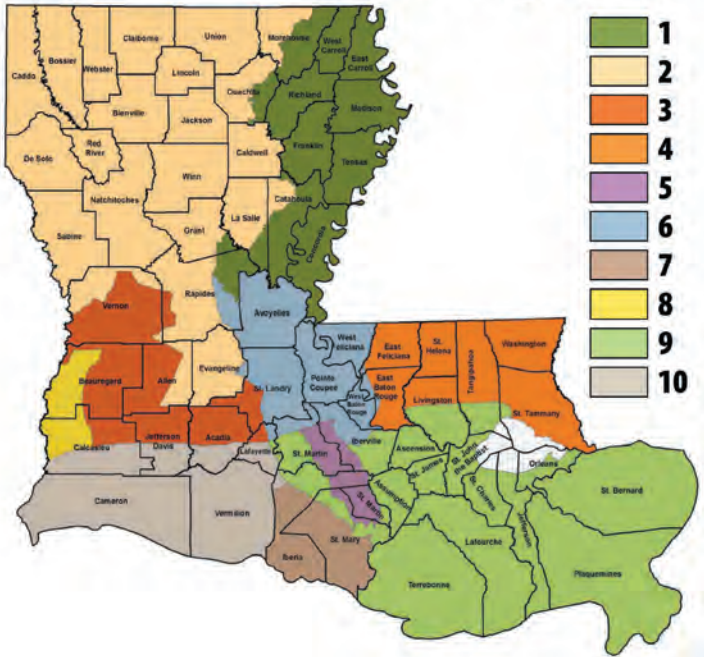
In Area 2, Northwest Louisiana, the second breeding period, which started Nov. 30, is forecast to end about Dec. 13.

After that, hunters will have to concentrate on food sources for any shot at bucks.

Deer in Areas 4 and 9 will be wrapping up the first rut on or about Dec. 13, with the second scraping period estimated to run from Dec. 14 through Dec. 28. The second breeding period is forecast for Dec. 29 through Jan. 12.

In the Mississippi Delta and upper and lower Atchafalaya Basin, the pre-rut is slated to wrap up on Dec. 13, with the first scraping period running Dec. 14 through Dec. 28, immediately followed by the first rut, Dec. 29 through Jan. 12. ■

## 2020 - 2021 Deer Hunting Areas



### DECEMBER 2020

#### Area 2

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13 2nd Breeding Period Ends	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

### DECEMBER 2020

#### Areas 4 & 9

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13 1st Breeding Period Ends	14 2nd Scraping Period Starts	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28 2nd Scraping Period Ends	29 2nd Breeding Period Starts	30	31		

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### DECEMBER 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 Pre-Rut Ends	14 1st Scraping Period Starts	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28 1st Scraping Period Ends	29 1st Breeding Period Starts	30	31		

# ATTACKING THE RUT



**AS THE PEAK OF BREEDING SEASON ARRIVES IN WHITETAIL COUNTRY, HUNTERS CAN GO ON THE OFFENSIVE AND USE ALL THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE TO CONNECT WITH A BUCK.**

■ By Dave Moreland

**If** a hunter wants to connect with a good, adult buck during deer season, what would he do?

- Start the feeding early and get one coming in to a bow site.
- Hunt over a late patch of beans during the early primitive season.
- Hunt the third day of a cold front that has just left snow on the ground as it moved through the Bayou State in December. These are some good answers, and they could spell success, but a hunter's best bet is to hunt the rut, when an adult buck

throws caution to the wind as it becomes involved in the annual breeding cycle of the whitetail. Most hunters would agree that the rut, the peak of the breeding period for deer in their areas, is a key time to be in the woods.

Count the Stafford clan from Franklinton in that group. Jimmy Stafford is best-known for his work as the wild-turkey biologist for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. He was mentored by his father, the late Dr. James Stafford, who hunted all over Louisiana. Jimmy Stafford's sons, David James and Brandon, have followed in his footsteps, excellent hunters who are working for wildlife agencies. They grew up hunting on Pearl River WMA and have learned well from their elders.

Jimmy Stafford and his son, David James, agree that the rut is, by far, the best time to kill a racked buck.

**UNDERSTAND THE RUT >**

## UNDERSTAND THE RUT

How does the rut work? *Louisiana Sportsman* annually publishes a prediction of where and when the rut will peak across the state. It generally occurs during a period of two months. The peak is the best time to hunt, because bucks are very active, and usually, around 80% of the does in a local population will be bred, the remainder being bred during the second month. If a local buck population is well managed, a hunter can still find good rut activity during the second so-called peak, as bucks compete for the remaining, unbred does. On several occasions I have seen as many as four bucks chasing a single doe during this period of time.

David James Stafford, who grew up hunting in Area 4, southeast Louisiana, moved to northwest Louisiana (Area 2) for a few years and saw first hand how different the rut was. He learned that when the Area 2 season opened, the rut was on, and it was time to be in the woods. In Area 4, the early pre-rut was still taking place, and deer activity was hit or miss. He believes hunting the period when scraping and chasing takes place is better than hunting when deer are breeding. When the actual breeding begins, deer just seem to disappear. How many times have you been hunting and watched a buck breed a doe?

David James Stafford now lives in Area 1, and you can bet that's where he will be hunting in January.

## WHEN SCRAPING IS SERIOUS

I think the scraping period is a great time to find an adult buck. A trail camera set near an active scrape will point out the buck activity. I have had good success setting up in areas near scrapes and calling up bucks with a bleat or grunt call. David James Stafford believes in using deer calls and said being vocal is a must. I generally will utilize several different calls and will call every 15 to 30 minutes. I'm not sure you can call too much unless the buck is watching you call. A buck will either be interested or indifferent to the call, depending on his activity status.

Both David James Stafford and Jimmy Stafford also incorporate rattling into their hunting efforts. The best time to use these tactics is when bucks are moving around, checking scrapes and looking for does that may be coming into estrus. David James Stafford likes to hunt well into the morning, especially if the temperature and barometric pressure are right: below 60 degrees and 30 inHg or higher.

Jimmy Stafford found scrapes this past October on family property in St. Helena Parish. No doubt these were pre-rut scrapes; scrape initiation takes place during the pre-rut, and

Times during deer season when bucks are actively chasing does differ across Louisiana, but hunters agree it's a great time to be in the woods. **OPPOSITE:** David James Stafford is an excellent hunter, as shown by this fine Area 1 bow buck.



bucks will make scrapes but won't bother going back and checking them. In November, bucks will become serious about scrapes, working and checking them. When you get photos of the same buck on the same day or the next day, the scraping activity is on. This activity will begin to wind down toward the end of November, and then, the chase is on.

**BE VOCAL, USE SCENTS >**



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## BE VOCAL, USE SCENTS

A buck will begin following a doe several days before she stands for breeding. The buck will be grunting as it follows the doe, and hunters can hear this. This is why grunting can be very effective, along with a bleat call. Can calls that imitate an estrus bleat can be used at this time, but one can use a regular bleat call and drag it out to imitate the sound a can makes.

This is also the time to use deer scents such as doe urine. Keep in mind that there are new regulations pertaining to the use of urine, so stay legal. All urine must have been tested for CWD, and it should say that



Rattling horns and deer calls, including grunt calls, are offensive-minded parts of a deer hunter's arsenal.

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on the label. I generally do not make fake scrapes; instead, I will just make scent bombs that I hang in various places around the stand I am hunting. This works extremely well, especially when a buck is on the prowl and looking for a doe.

When hunting, pay attention to wind direction and make your setup accordingly. Hunting the consistent winds, such as a north wind when a cold front passes, is a must. Keep in mind that a buck will often approach from downwind as it moves in to investigate. David James Stafford pointed out that deer travel transition zones as they move from bedding to feeding areas; keep this in mind when making your setup. Does will continue going to the feed trees, and where the girls are, the boys generally follow.

### FOLLOW THE WATER ➤



David Moreland is a former wildlife biologist with LDWF, having served as the state's deer biologist for 13 years and as chief of the wildlife division for three years. He and his wife, Prudy, live in Baton Rouge and own property in East Feliciana Parish.

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## FOLLOW THE WATER

Moving through bedding areas to reach your stand may disturb deer, so utilize a map when determining your best approach. The Staffords like to use waterways — sloughs and bayous — to ease into their hunting territory. Jimmy Stafford has been doing this for years on Pearl River WMA, and David James Stafford has used it to his advantage on Bodcau WMA and the Caney Ranger District in northwest Louisiana.

## TAKE ADVANTAGE OF DOES

Louisiana hunters can take an antlered buck and an antlerless deer on the same day. On several occasions, I have watched racked bucks following does, and for various reasons, I have shot the doe and not the buck. The bucks would approach the downed doe and paw and hook her. Apparently, the doe was close to her breeding time, and the buck did not want to leave. During the breeding period, the buck is focused on the doe and is oblivious to just about anything else. David James Stafford said when he hears chasing activity, he heads straight to them and doesn't worry too much about making noise. He believes the deer think it's just another deer moving in to investigate.

During the rut, when you see a doe moving through the woods, keep an eye open for a trailing buck. On a managed deer hunt, Jimmy Stafford and his father were walking to their stand when Jimmy spied a doe. Wanting his father to kill a deer, he pointed her out and told him to shoot. His father saw the



A watercraft like this canoe can help hunters access territories that are difficult to reach on foot. It can also be a quiet way to approach an area you're hunting.

deer but did not raise his gun. Jimmy told him to shoot before it ran off. Finally, his father raised his rifle and fired. The doe ran off, and Jimmy told his father he had missed. His father disagreed and walked to a nice 8-pointer on the ground. Jimmy Stafford's focus had been on the doe; he had not seen the buck that was trailing her.

The Area 1 and Area 6 ruts take place in January, so there is plenty of time to connect with a buck during the rut in these areas. The rut is on in Area 4 and Area 9, and the smart hunter should use all the tools in his bag to connect with a racked buck. The second round of breeding activity will be going on in Area 4 and Area 9 in southeast Louisiana in January. The true trophy bucks in Louisiana are in Areas 1 and 6, and hunter success in these areas is generally an indicator of how good the deer season was. Hunt hard, but be safe. ■

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Sammy Romano

When a crossbow's string is accidentally severed, the resulting decompression can cause serious damage to the bow and the person holding it.

# CROSSBOW CROSSUPS

WITHOUT PROPER SETUP, ACCESSORIES, TRAINING, A NEW CROSSBOW CAN BE A DANGEROUS WEAPON — TO THE HUNTER

*"It is rarely the violin that fails to perform, but rather, it is usually the violinist."*

Perhaps nowhere could this statement be applied better than to modern crossbows and deer hunters.

Every year since crossbows were legalized and became widely used, I am awed by how many people borrow one or buy one online and start shooting it with no prior knowledge or training. As you can imagine; this rarely ends well, often leading to high repair bills and even bodily harm.

Every Monday early in archery season, there is a steady procession of folks walking through the front door of our bow shop with their heads hung low and crossbows in shambles. In most instances this "walk of shame" could have easily been avoided by proper training and thus familiarity with their weapon.

Why hunters feel confident operating a crossbow with no prior knowledge is beyond me. These same people wouldn't climb onto a tractor seat or into the cockpit of an airplane without some operating instructions, yet they have no

fear when it comes to a crossbow.

Modern crossbows are complicated machines, and they become even more complex each year as manufacturers compete to make the fastest, most-compact models ever.

The first step for anyone looking at a crossbow is to buy one from an archery pro shop, not from a big box store or online. Most of the time, the price will be the same, but a pro shop will set up your new crossbow properly and instruct you on its safe and proper use.

## ACCESSORIZING

Furthermore, employees at a pro shop will match your new crossbow with the proper accessories, arrows and broadheads to guarantee the best shooting experience possible. If you have already bought one online or from a big box store, most pro shops will check your assembly, sight in your crossbow, and provide proper training for a reasonable fee. Get the training. Any time and money spent familiarizing yourself with your weapon will save a lot of money and grief down the road.

Most crossbows require a specific nock design, and failure to follow these requirements almost always leads to a train

wreck. This is because newer designs such as extremely narrow and reversed limbs cause the string angle to be extremely narrow at the trigger housing.

Failure to shoot a nock that captures enough of the string or shooting a nock that is not oriented properly will allow the string to "jump over" the arrow. The string often lands in the center of the arrow shaft, fracturing the carbon shaft, which cuts the string like a razor blade would. This causes the bow to explode.

If you've never witnessed a crossbow come apart, let me assure you, it is very violent. Modern crossbows store huge amounts of energy, and it's nothing nice when they explosively decompress. As a rule, it is best to stick with the manufacturer's recommended arrow at all times to prevent this from happening.

## ASSEMBLY WOES

Another common mistake I've witnessed is untrained individuals failing



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](mailto:samboka31@aol.com).

to properly assemble their crossbow. Not routing the cables correctly, not tightening the prod sufficiently or improper installation of cable slides can all cause excessive cable wear or total failure.

Restrunging a crossbow costs nearly \$200 in many cases, so this can quickly become expensive. Many crossbow owners fail to realize that the service interval for restrunging their crossbow is often 100 to 200 shots. Although they are extremely fun to shoot, it is best to treat them like a "hot" caliber rifle, strictly checking your sights, because paying to have your crossbow restrung can add up quickly.

## LIMB CLEARANCE

It is also extremely important to make sure there is clearance for the limbs of your crossbow. People often fail to consider the expansion of the limbs when the arrow is released. When hunting from a box stand or tight space, it is best to check for limb clearance while the bow is un-cocked. Remember, the limbs will return to this dimension as the arrow is released.

Perhaps the worst mistake of all is failure to ensure proper hand clearance. Each year, quite a few crossbow shooters amputate thumbs or fingers because they fail to do so. While crossbows can be repaired, this is often permanent. With training this could have easily been avoided.

Make sure you are totally familiar with your crossbow's operation, and if you do loan it to anyone, make sure they receive proper training before they use the bow. This is one case where prior training will definitely prevent total disaster. ■

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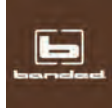
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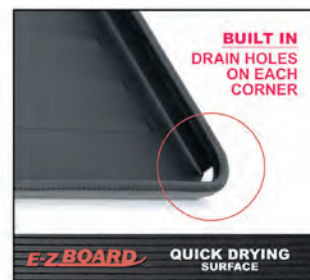
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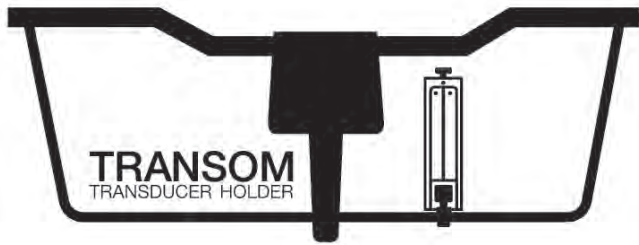
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## Symetre spinning combos

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# HUNT. COOK. EAT.

EXECUTIVE CHEF AT MOREHOUSE PARISH DUCK CLUB SHARES HUNTING, COOKING TIPS.

By Kinny Haddox



## ONE SIDE OF CHARLIE ZAUNBRECHER'S FAMILY CAME FROM GUEYDAN, THE PROCLAIMED "DUCK CAPITAL OF AMERICA."

## THE OTHER SIDE CAME FROM STUTTGART, ARK., WHICH CALLS ITSELF THE "DUCK AND RICE CAPITAL OF AMERICA."

We will let somebody else sort that out, but the affect of that heredity is obvious on Zaunbrecher. He and his younger brother, Lee, have been told all their lives they were born with duck blood in their veins. They further enhanced that by living in the Jones/Bonita area, just a few miles from the "Nature's Funnel" of duck hunting in north-east Louisiana.

Growing up on a rice farm, something else got in Zaunbrecher's blood.

"If you were too young to help out on the farm, you helped cook for the men working the harvest," he said. "I've been in the kitchen when I was way too young to be chopping up onions, bell pepper and garlic with a sharp knife, but that's how I learned to cook."

Today, Zaunbrecher does more cooking than hunting, but he still gets in the blind more than most folks. He is the executive chef at the renowned Bartholomew Club in Jones, a community in Morehouse Parish. To call it a

"club" is like calling an alligator a lizard. It's more like a resort, a two-story, antebellum-inspired lodge and 5-star restaurant rolled into one, complete with flooded rice fields and pit blinds for ducks.

"It's an amazing setup, and we have people who come from all over the country to hunt here, plus our regular members," he said.

Zaunbrecher pointed out that the area is a natural funnel for ducks coming down the Mississippi River all the way from Canada. When they leave Arkansas, heading south into Louisiana, they gather there because the delta narrows down



considerably. The Bartholomew Club's hunting grounds are on the Arkansas border, adjacent to the 14,000-acre Overflow National Wildlife Refuge, a magnet for ducks.

Funnel and magnet. A hard combination to beat.

"The ducks that leave (there) fly right over us," he says. "Like any hunting, it isn't always perfect, because it is wild birds we are after, but I've never seen any place consistently better."

Zaunbrecher has a lifetime of experience duck hunting, spends time with lots of duck guides and learns from hunters who visit the club. He has sound advice for duck hunters.

"One of the hardest things for duck hunters to do is swallow your call," he said. "I mean, don't blow it if you don't need to. You aren't arguing with the ducks; you are trying to entice them. Second, read and watch all you can about duck hunting. Know what to say and when to say it to the ducks when you are calling. Learn different calls and when to use them."

Zaunbrecher said to listen to a guide if you hunt with one. They guide for a reason. Never go to the blind without practice, either. And clean your gun. Many a trip has been ruined for a hunter with a dirty gun that malfunctioned.

A spent shotgun shell in the grass outside a pit blind is a hint at the action that happened in the decoys that morning.



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**HE** suggests finding a call that you are comfortable with and that works. Never be shy to ask good hunters for their help and opinion. They don't make the old cut-down Olt call that Zaunbrecher loves dearly, but his favorite call now is the Echo, which is almost like the old Olt. You want it deep and raspy. You are calling ducks, not competing in a contest. He doesn't carry a bunch of calls like some hunters, but he does carry a teal whistle.

"When you are duck hunting with a group, appoint a blind captain," Zaunbrecher said. "Somebody needs to be in charge. Obviously, on a guided trip, it's the guide. But on any hunt, somebody needs to be in charge of looking for the ducks where you don't have five or six heads bobbing up and down out of the blind. He needs to do most of the calling unless he asks for help. And he needs to be the one that calls the shots."

There is a lot of trial and error in duck hunting. The more you know for different situations, the more consistent you can be. And there is one important tip that hunters can't forget.

"You have to have the proper amount of snacks in the blind," Zaunbrecher said.

Coming from an executive chef, you'd maybe expect lox and bagels, ribeye steak biscuits, eggs Benedict? Nope, not even close.

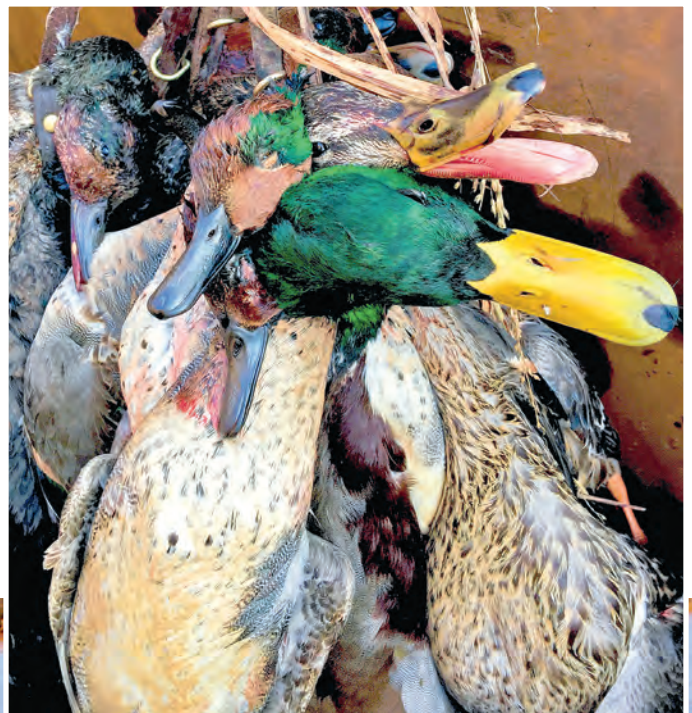
"The preferred blind snack of accomplished waterfowl hunters is well established. It's Little Debbie Christmas Tree Cakes," he said. "When they start hitting the shelves, hunters know duck season is around the corner. You have to grab some up. Oatmeal pies and Nutter Butter bars will do in a pinch, but nothing is better with a Thermos of coffee than a Little Debbie Christmas Tree Cake."

The pit blinds at the Bartholomew Club, plus good camouflage clothing offer hunters maximum hiding power for good shooting. **RIGHT:** Evidence of a good morning hunt is often a bunch of mixed ducks.

Most duck hunters pursue the sport on their own, but a growing number of waterfowlers take advantage of the guided opportunities like at Bartholomew Club, where all they have to do is enjoy. Either type of hunting is great, but having a couple of days to just get away and enjoy it all without any work is a special treat for hunters.

"Duck hunting is a social sport, and that's why I love being around the hunting, the cooking, the whole experience," he said. "It's so much fun to go out with a group and razz somebody when they miss, work the dog, call the ducks and see the joy on a hunter's face when a big mallard cups up over the decoys and they nail it. That's what duck hunting is all about." ■

## NEVER DUCK OUT ON DINNER >



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## **BARTHOLOMEW HUNTERS NEVER DUCK OUT ON DINNER**

The dining at Morehouse Parish's Bartholomew Club, according to executive chef Charlie Zaunbrecher, aims for a 5-star experience when guests sit down to a white tablecloth dinner.

"The food, the service, the whole experience is designed to be the best we can make it," Zaunbrecher said.

The club has a varied menu, but a favorite is seared duck breast appetizers, beef tender with crabmeat topping, smashed potatoes and grilled asparagus.

Here's how he prepares the meal:

### **DUCK BREAST**

"Being at a duck camp, we always have plenty of fresh duck breasts," he said. "I like to clean the breasts and let them soak in ice water two or three hours to remove any impurities. I marinate them in soy sauce, rice wine vinegar, honey and a little bit of sesame oil with a few flakes of red pepper. When it's time to eat, I put the whole duck breast on the griddle, as hot as I can get it, and sear them about two or three minutes on each side. The honey helps it caramelize quickly. I let it rest a few minutes, then slice it and serve."



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**OPPOSITE:** Seared duck breasts anyone? A great way to start the 5-star dining experience at the Bartholomew Club, where executive chef Charlie Zaunbrecher holds court.

## BEEF TENDER

"I clean the tenderloin to remove all the silverskin, sinew and excess fat," Zaunbrecher said. "Then, I cut the tenderloin into steaks and season it with salt and pepper. Cutting it into steaks ensures each one cooks and tastes the same, plus, with a crowd, it lets me manage portions.

"I seal the steaks in a bag and submerge it in the Sous vide at 120 degrees for an hour-and-a-half. Sous vide, which means 'under vacuum' in French, is vacuum-sealing food in a bag, then cooking it to a very precise temperature in a water bath. When I take it out, I make sure it is totally dry, then sear it on the hot grill one minute on each side. It's important to let it sit 7 to 10 minutes before serving so all the juices will reabsorb into the meat. When you cook it this way, every steak is the same: medium rare from top to bottom, whether you cook 10 or 40.

"I clean the crab meat and lightly warm it in butter with a dash of salt and pepper and place a generous portion on top of the tender."

## THE ACCOMPANIMENTS

"Smashed red potatoes with more butter and heavy cream in them than you want your cardiologist to know about are an excellent side for this dish. I leave the skin on, boil them and mash them with a wooden spoon. I just flash sear the asparagus on the grill with some light olive oil and then finish it with a good shot of fresh-squeezed lemon juice before serving.

"We serve several types of salads, but a favorite with this presentation is a strawberry, pecan and spinach salad with feta cheese and a homemade balsamic vinaigrette dressing." ■



**Kinny Haddox** has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 45 years. He publishes a daily website, [lakedarbonnelife.com](http://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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# THINK LIKE A DUCK

By Dora Lambert

## SCOUTING IS KEY TO PUBLIC-WATER SUCCESS

**P**ublic-land duck hunters have a job ahead of them before they head to the water, according to Owen Belknap, a veteran hunter from Ruston.

"If I can give any advice to public-land duck hunters, my advice is to scout. You can't just roll up to Upper Ouachita and go kill birds," Belknap said. "North Louisiana has some of the largest amounts of public land for duck hunting in the United States — massive, massive tracts of land, with lots of very viable places to hunt.

"For example, around north Louisiana, there's primarily teal, gadwall, spoonbills and every now and then, mallards and a couple of pintail. You can go online to websites like Ducks Unlimited,

which does a great job in telling you what birds eat. Gadwall eat naiad, pond weed and water milfoil, as well as smartweed, spike rush and certain aquatic invertebrates and crustaceans. Take that information and go walk around . . . and look for these grasses, look for these bugs. Look for the stuff that will be conducive of the right environment for those birds. This helps you eliminate areas that are not.

Belknap emphasized knowing what plants are not part of the duck's diet.

"What would otherwise look like a good environment for a duck may have no nutritional value for them. And you end up wasting

your time hunting there," he said. "In the summer, when scouting, I start eliminating these places that aren't going to have the vegetation that the ducks are looking for.

"When it comes time to scout in the winter and you are looking at your water levels, gadwall like a little deeper water, while teal like shallower water, where they can stand up in 2 or 3 inches of water. If I know I have a lot of teal in the area, I look around for vegetation that teal like to eat. I look at the water levels and pick out what areas will have what the teal are looking for.

"Strongly encourage people to understand the birds that they are hunting. If you understand what they like to eat, what they like to do, and where they like to go, and you put in a little extra effort throughout the year to find the places that are going to be conducive to creating the right conditions for these birds, then you are going to see success during the duck season and get more sleep for sure."

## DECOYS MATTER

Belknap isn't a fan of decoy spreads that don't match the anticipated ducks.

"Almost everybody rolls around with two- to four-dozen mallard decoys, maybe a couple of teal, a couple of gadwall, and maybe one mojo in their spread," he said. "You are much better off going and buying a dozen nice, fully flocked mallard decoys, a dozen nice gadwall, a dozen nice pintail and a dozen nice teal.

"If a hole is mainly gadwall and teal, don't run your mallard decoys. These birds aren't dumb. They get hunted all the time, and they know the typical-looking spread.

"If it is groups of 50 to 100, then we run a bigger spread. If we are hunting a hole, and most of them are flying around in groups of two or four and there are about 30 birds, then we will only run two-dozen decoys that are broken up into groups of two or four to make it look as realistic and life like as possible."

Belknap said motion is key.

"Ducks have great eyesight, and when they see things that aren't moving, they won't buy into it, especially on public land," he said.

"I don't run a lot of Mojos because these birds see them a lot. I run Lucky Duck agitators, jerk rigs or SOAB imitators. Basically, any product that will create water movement and mimic feeding behavior of ducks."

## PARTING WORDS

Belknap said it takes more effort from hunters to be successful these days.

"Hunting isn't what it was 20 years ago," he said. "Decoys are getting better; people are hiding better; birds are learning right along with us, and we have to be smarter than Mother Nature. It's a question of whether you want to put the work in, because there are birds to be found.

“

*If a hole is mainly gadwall and teal, don't run your mallard decoys. These birds aren't dumb.*

*They know the typical looking spread.*

”

"There are great hunts and great memories to be had. I would really encourage people to not give up on our WMAs and our hunting in Louisiana, because the more of us that hunt, the more money goes back into conservation and the protection of our WMAs. Which means, the more that they can do for our public lands and that's going to create a better environment for ducks, which will create a better opportunity for you to hunt, and that's going to create a better opportunity for future generations to hunt.

"My No. 1 tip: don't give up on Louisiana's public land duck hunting." ■

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**D**ecember arrives in south Louisiana with a hint of winter but still carrying the remains of fall. The white shrimp have mostly moved out of inshore waters, and many baitfish species, such as mullet, will see their breeding stock moving out as the month ages.

Water temperatures are dropping from the balmy 70s of November into the 60s and even the 50s when the winds of cold fronts descend on the marsh. December is a month of extremes, as the fronts can push air temperatures 25 degrees in either direction. Fortunately, there is still enough warmth coming up from the Gulf of Mexico that winter temperatures cannot settle in.

Two big changes that December brings to our inshore environment are falling water temperatures and a reduction of shrimp as the primary food source for predators. The change in water temperature is not just absolute, but also the deviation from mean. This is important to consider, because the deviations that drive water temperature up into the high 60s or down into the high 50s will move speckled trout from one habitat to another. This means that one week, they are stacked up at the Great Wall of Chalmette, and the next week, they are gone with the warm winds that blew through.

### THE FABULOUS 50s >

**THESE TIPS FOR DECEMBER FISHING SHOULD PUT MORE TROUT IN YOUR COOLER AND PROVIDE PLENTY OF CHRISTMAS CHEER.**

■ By Jon Miller



# SPECKS BEFORE SANTA

## THE FABULOUS 50s

I prefer the water temperature to be consistently in the high 50s. This is a perfect temperature to keep fish in deep holes and channels or around deep-water bridges. Consistent water temperature means I will find trout from weekend to weekend in the same general areas. By contrast, the warm fronts that roll through in December can send me searching far and wide for these rascals.

As a general rule, speckled trout go deep on water temperature extremes. Their metabolism is directly linked to water temperature, and the extremes of our range can be deadly. To avoid them, hot or cold, trout seek deep water. They may also be found in deep water in mild temperatures, but as a general rule, they stay shallow when the water temperature is roughly in the 60- to 80-degree range. They seek deeper water in temperatures outside that range.

The deeper water where I look for them in December is 6 to 25 feet, but mostly I will be targeting 10 to 15 feet of water. Their desire to feed when water is moving remains constant, whether they're in shallow or deep water, so fishing the tide conditions in December is important.

## DEEP-WATER GETAWAYS

I spend a lot of December fishing in and around the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet channel, aka MRGO. I'll fish everywhere from its intersection with the ICW to south of the rock dam near Hopedale. There is more than enough fishing in the channel to eat up all of December. Of course, speckled trout are found all over the coast, from the Lake Pontchartrain bridges to the lakes and bayous of the marsh. However, most anglers find success in areas where deep bayous or channels provide a nearby escape for the trout when strong cold fronts descend.

December is also a great time to find some of the larger speckled trout along our



December often sees large swings in water temperature, which will move speckled trout into and out of shallow areas. **BELOW:** December is a unique month when large speckled trout are plentiful in deep-water habitats.

coast. The cool temperatures and abundance of bait have brought them in from nearshore waters. In December, areas like Pontchartrain and the MRGO offer them food, optimal feeding conditions and protection. Large numbers of baitfish are hanging around, either there to overwinter — such as sheepshead minnows — or migrating out like mature mullet and croakers.

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**SPECKS BEFORE SANTA**

**SHORT DAYS,  
GOOD DAYS**

••••• MirrOlure's line of Paul Brown sinking baits are especially effective in the MRGO throughout December.

One of the other features I love about December is the timing of daylight. The winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, is Dec. 21. That means I do not need to hit the water as early nor drive as far from the launch. In December, trout often bite later in the day, once the sunlight penetrates and warms the water. This makes for a shorter fishing day, but the catching can be excellent from mid-morning to late afternoon.

When I target December trout in deeper water, I am fishing the bottom, which may be the channel proper or the rocks on the MRGO shoreline. Either way, I most often find the trout respond most favorably to slower presentations. I use baits that perform well when worked more slowly, such as soft plastics on jigs or sinking twitchbaits. I have had December days where jigging the bait produced few bites, whereas a steady, slow drag along the bottom drove the trout mad.

When I fish the rocky shorelines of the MRGO, I look for areas that have rocks extending into deeper water. Some of the best areas have rocks in 10 to 12 feet of water. These rocks, which are uncommon, can be found with sonar or by snagging them with your lures. When I find these rocks submerged in deep water, I set a waypoint on my chart so I can find them later.

I lose a lot of lures to rocks in December, but that is one of the necessary sacrifices to effectively fishing them. Trout seem to hold tight to rocks, whether they are submerged or on the shore-



lines. On many days, my jig had to hit the rocks or come very close to get a strike. You can cut down on the losses by anticipating the collision and pull up as soon as you feel the impact. The impact could also be a fish taking the bait as it nears the rocks, in which case you have set the hook with your response.

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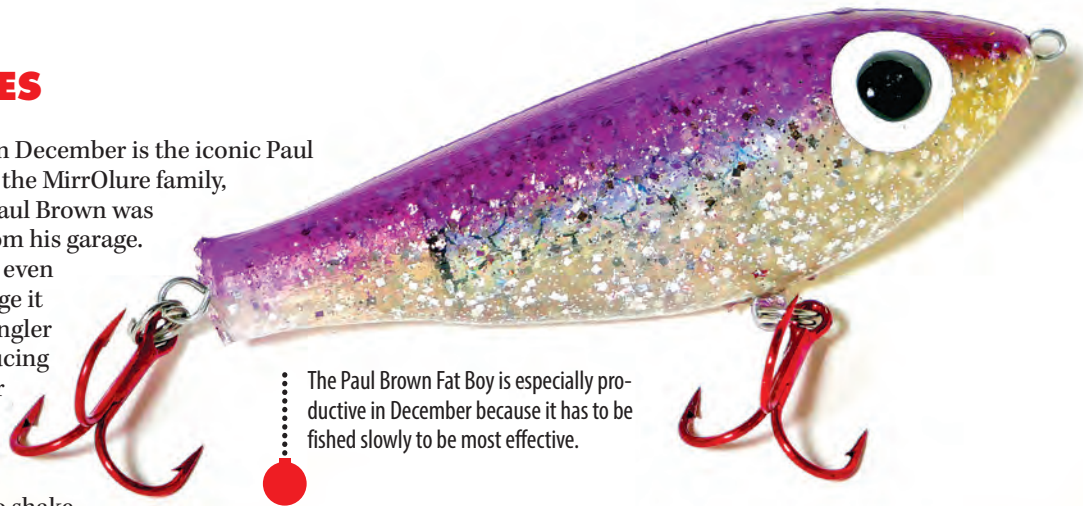
## THE FAT BOY RULES

One of my favorite lures to fish in December is the iconic Paul Brown Fat Boy, now a member of the MirrOlure family, but dating back to a time when Paul Brown was making lures and selling them from his garage. It may appear to be a simple lure, even unsophisticated, but the advantage it brings is the capacity to give an angler the freedom to deliver strike-inducing action in slow motion. I fish other twitch baits from MirrOlure and Rapala, and each lure has its own strengths, but the Fat Boy is unparalleled in its ability to shake and shimmy while sinking slowly to the bottom. This provides both the slow fishability I am looking for in December and an adequate amount of shake to convince a big trout it is seeing an injured baitfish ready to be gobbled up.

I know that the Fat Boy is fished in various ways, but I prefer to bring it up with a few sweeps and let it fall back to the bottom. It is also a large lure at 3½ inches and 7⁄8-ounce and thus has the promise of a hardy meal for a big trout. I primarily fish a Fat Boy along rock shorelines in 6 to 10 feet of water. I don't find it to be as effective in deeper or fast-flowing water. In a strong current, its big body gets carried too rapidly and never reaches the depths I need.

When I am fishing fast water, such as on a strong outgoing tide on the south side of the MRGO dam, my lure choices are a swimbait and jig. I primarily fish the original Matrix Shad swimbaits, which are baits with smaller profiles. This is a good choice for the optimal conditions at the dam, because the small lure profile on a 3⁄8-ounce lead head falls through the current more quickly to reach the trout that are waiting just off the bottom.

The dam has a steep gradient, so my target depth of 15 feet is only around 30 feet from the shoreline. Therefore, the swimbait must fall fast enough to reach the bottom



• The Paul Brown Fat Boy is especially productive in December because it has to be fished slowly to be most effective.

at a point where the trout are staged for feeding. You might suggest using a ½-ounce leadhead to get it down fast; however, I find that with the heavier weight, the lure is not carried enough by the current and simply digs into the rocky bottom.

The trick to hitting the jackpot on every cast is to float the swimbait down the gradient without burying it in the rocks or lifting it over the heads of the trout. I don't jig the lure any more than is necessary to keep it out of the rocks. It is not necessary to add more action to the lure than what is being imparted to the lure by the current. ■

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

## MARSH MAN MASSON

Todd Masson



The GoFish Cam captured video of speckled trout hitting this white, shrimp-colored Ghost Minnow.

# CORK CAM NABS FOOTAGE OF SPECKLED TROUT FEEDING

**A**ny coastal angler who has floated over a gin-clear duck pond has seen red-fish feed. The fish leisurely stroll through the water like flexible bulldozers, their powerful tails swaying methodically while their eyes and lateral lines stay attuned to their surroundings, hoping to run across something edible.

Once some bait enters their kill zone, the fish dart in a flash and open their gaping maws, flaring their gills to create suction. The crab, shrimp or baitfish is reduced to protein.

I've always wondered if speckled trout feed in a similar manner. Do they kind of meander past, think about it and lazily mouth their prey, or do they shoot in like a jaguar springing from its lair to attack before the victim can escape?

I always assumed the latter, that specks feed frenetically, reacting more than thinking, but I certainly wasn't positive — and getting one to hit on camera can be tricky.

Believe me, I've tried. For a while now.

A company called GoFish Cam sent me one of their underwater cameras a few months ago, and from the moment it arrived, I couldn't wait to put it to use. The package comes with a float that wraps around the camera, so it can function as a cork, the lens constantly peering down at the suspended bait.

The first time I used the camera, I got some footage of a sheepshead eating a live shrimp. That was cool, but I really wanted to see a trout feeding, so I made that my goal with the GoFish Cam. That should have been simple enough, but for a while, my efforts seemed doomed.

## CASTING TROUBLES

For one thing, the float that comes with the camera is designed to be gently placed in the water. Make a long cast with it, like you usually have to do to catch specks, and the camera slips through.

During a couple of successful trout trips when the camera would likely have gotten some great footage, I couldn't get it to stay inside the float. I reported

the problem to the company, and they suggested a work-around — tying the camera to the line below a plunger-style H&H cork.

I rigged it that way, and hit the water in eager anticipation of getting some eye-opening footage, but I couldn't find a really big school of trout. By the time I did — several trips later — the battery had lost its charge.

It was just one fiasco after another, but this long, tear-jerker of a story has a happy ending.

Last month, I went fishing with Capt. Lane Zimmer down in Lafitte, and brought a fully-charged GoFish Cam with me, hoping we might run across some good speckled trout action. Zimmer is one of the best fishermen



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

in south Louisiana, and the action has been good near Lafitte, so I definitely liked our chances.

Sure enough, we got on a hot bite, and I swallowed hard and broke out the GoFish Cam. On the first cast, the cork quickly plunged, and I reeled in a nice-sized speckled trout. Unfortunately, the camera had become tangled around the line and was pointing at the sky.

## AT LONG LAST, LOVE

This attempt also seemed destined for failure, but the next cast also produced a fish, and this time, the camera was oriented properly. I was ecstatic. I made several more successful casts before putting the camera away, and when I got home, I got to see what I'd been eagerly anticipating.

With about 18 inches of visibility, the water was clear enough to allow a good view of the white/shrimp-colored Ghost Minnow I was fishing. The bait would disappear from view only when I popped the cork to draw the attention of nearby speckled trout.

The camera showed one trout hitting the bait and pulling the cork down, but the fish grabbed only the back half of the lure, entirely missing the hook of the Deathgrip jighead.



Moments later, however, another larger speck inhaled the whole thing, and took a forced trip into Zimmer's Blazer Bay. The fish, much as I had anticipated, appeared out of nowhere, hitting the lure with lightning quickness.

It was one of the coolest things I've ever seen.

If you'd like to check it out for yourself, head over to [louisiana-sportsman.com/underwater-video-of-speckled-trout](http://louisiana-sportsman.com/underwater-video-of-speckled-trout) ■

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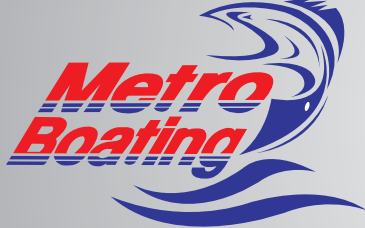
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# COOL-WATER TROUT TACTICS

## SPECKS PROVIDE CLUES THAT GUIDE WON'T MISS

By Patrick Bonin

**W**ith less and less daylight and cooler water temperatures starting to settle in, slowing down your presentation is often the key to catching speckled trout in December.

"I'm always telling my customers, 'Slow is the way to go,'" said Capt. Mike Gallo, of Angling Adventures of Louisiana. "And if you're not catching anything, go even slower."

Trout move deeper as the water cools, so Gallo likes to target shorelines with easy deep-water access that also feature flats with clear, moving water and signs of baitfish activity.

"If the water temperature is 55 and above, they like shallow water close to deep water," he said. "That way, if we get a cold front, they'll just drop down into that deep water without having to go very far."

But this time of year, especially, he takes his fishing cues from clues provided by the first trout he catches each day.

"If he comes straight to the surface and shakes his head, he's not cold," Gallo said. "But if you hook a fish and he's fighting — but it's a lethargic fight and he never comes to the surface and never shakes his head — he's cold."

"So if I change my technique, I need to change in a slower direction, not in a faster direction. Lots of things can be determined by catching one fish."

To that end, Gallo's first speck of the day doesn't end up on ice. It goes into the livewell to see if it will provide any more clues that might turn an average day of fishing into a good one.

"Every 10 or 15 minutes, I go and check the livewell; I'm hoping he pukes something up: a crab, a shrimp or a baby fish," Gallo said. "Then I get a clue to what he's feeding on, and I can mimic that."

If he's fishing with a 3-inch Sparkle Beetle but sees the trout in his livewell just spit up a 2-inch minnow, Gallo will typically downsize his lures.

"I'm going to go more in that 2-inch range, because that may be what's down there on the bottom," he said. "I happened to catch one, but if my lure really mimics what down there, I have a better chance of catching more."

"That's just matching the hatch. And if you can actually make out what it is they spit up — let's say it's a pogie — then salt-and-pepper is a great imitation for matching a pogie."

He also pays particular attention to his electronics this time of year to try to identify the good, hardbottom trout prefer, and he



Todd Masson

Let winter trout tell you what they're doing by observing how lethargic they fight, and maybe seeing something spit up in the livewell to show what they're eating.

notes how the images are displayed on his screen.

"Let's say you have one line showing the bottom that's an 1/8-inch thick," Gallo said. "What that's telling you is the signal going down from your transducer and bouncing back up is bouncing back up quickly because that bottom is firm."

"But when it draws a bottom that's an inch-and-a-half thick and real fuzzy, it's telling you that's a soft mushy bottom, and it takes a while for the signal to bounce back. So there are clues that you can see on your depth finder. Areas with a hard bottom and a gradual slope are a gold mine for trout to hang out in." ■

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Redfish are a reliable fish in December on Big Lake, whereas trout fishing can be hit or miss.



Photos courtesy Buddy Oakes/Hackberry Rod & Gun

# BIG LAKE GETTING BACK TO BUSINESS

Redfish, speckled trout action should be good at West Cove, Joe's Cove on west side

**W**ith a devastating hurricane season behind them, Kirk Stansel, his brothers and the staff at Hackberry Rod and Gun are looking forward to fishing for speckled trout, redfish and flounder again in Calcasieu Lake.

Speckled trout fishing was good soon after Aug. 27, the day Hurricane Laura pulverized southwest Louisiana after making landfall near Cameron with 150 mph winds. Hackberry, a small community of about 2,000 residents, felt the storm's wrath along with everything in its path.

Speckled trout fishing had returned to its high level again less than a month later when Delta, the 25th named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, crashed into the coast just 13 miles from where Laura entered the Sportsman's Paradise. Hackberry received 17 inches of rain in four hours.

Stansel, who has been a guide for more than 40 years, and

A camouflage-patterned boat is shown on a lake. The boat has a Pro-Drive outboard motor. The background is a lush green shoreline with trees. The text 'Pull Up to Your Blind in Style' is overlaid in large, semi-transparent letters. The Pro-Drive logo and 'TIMBER-DECK SERIES IN STOCK' are also visible.

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# CORMORANTS, REDS, DREDGING: SABINE RIVER SPECIALTIES COME DECEMBER

**W**ith so much of the focus during the winter on wading for trophy trout, chasing ducks or climbing up a tree for a shot at a deer, there are many opportunities that do not get much pressure.

Enter the dredge bite on the Sabine River. Few anglers take advantage of the easy and rather lazy way of getting bit; however, once figured out, it can be highly addicting.

Photo courtesy Johnny Cormier



Capt. Johnny Cormier with a massive bull redfish weighing more than 30 pounds caught recently on Sabine Lake while fishing the birds.

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When I refer to dredging as a means of fishing, I mean one of two things. There is the dredging that we do on the Causeway Reef, when we cast our lines in the opposite direction we are drifting and literally drag our lures across the bottom. We are not reeling at all, only keeping the line tight to stay in constant contact with the lure to be able to detect a bite. The other type I refer to in the river is very similar but requires us to reel. We cast upcurrent with a heavy enough jighead to get down to the bottom and then let the current bring it back towards the boat. We reel just enough to keep the slack out of the line and occasionally twitch the rod tip to skip the lure across the bottom. I will typically have the boat "anchored" with the trolling motor in the current, which necessitates the reeling.

This style of fishing works in areas with a strong-enough current. The key is to find current breaks where the fish are waiting to ambush their unsuspecting prey. Quality

electronics and time on the water are necessary to perfect this technique, or you could hire a guide and gain a wealth of knowledge in a short time.

Cormorants can also be key to giving away some hotspots — or at least areas with bait. They are absolutely fish-eating machines. If they are there, then so is the bait. We use them to help locate schools of baitfish the same way we use gulls to locate schools of trout and redfish. Areas like Burton's Ditch and the Dupont outfall are good places to start. Redfish gang up by the thousands in these areas when conditions are right. Strength of the current dictates the size jighead we throw; commonly, a ¼- or ⅜-ounce chunk of lead will get the job done.

Targeting redfish, I do like to take advantage of their keen sense of smell in deeper water, so I will frequently rig up with GULP shrimp, especially if the water is off-colored. I like the new penny and natural color the most. We drag them across the bottom in 6 to 14 feet of water. If you hit them right you won't need anything other than a jighead. It is absolutely incredible when you find them stacked up as thick as thieves, and this month is when it really gets started. Also, do not be surprised if you come across a striper in the mix. As the mercury continues to fall, our chances at catching stripers on the lower Sabine River go up exponentially. They are a welcome surprise when you're catching redfish after redfish. It is an addicting bite that does not require much fuel, as there are many spots within a short run of the Orange public boat ramp



Dr. Kim Arguelles with her first Sabine River striper mixed in with a pile of redfish.

on Simmons. With a little assistance from the cormorants and you'll be catching fish in no time. ■



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](http://justfishsabine.com)

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# REGGIO, DELACROIX GREAT IN DECEMBER FOR SPECKS, REDS

**G**uide Darren Schaff of Reggio said December is shaping up to be an excellent month for anglers who fish the waters of Reggio and Delacroix.

"The fishing has been steady these past few months, and cooler weather usually turns our action up a few notches more," he said. "This year, it looks like winter may actually show up, which means the fish will head into deeper water. I like to fish the bayous and rivers that connect bigger bodies of water on cold mornings and throughout the colder days: Bayou Robin, Bayou Batola, Middle Bayou, Sister Bayou, Bayou Fongera, the pass between Lake Ameda and Hopedale Lagoon, and on down to False River and Oak River when the real cold sets in. Generally, I'll fish them in the turns and bends of the bayous where the water gets pretty deep, but I find the fish aren't always right on the bottom but rather holding on ledges in 6 to 10 feet of water.

"You may have to experiment by casting into varying depths before you give up on a spot. My preference is to fish Carolina rigs with live shrimp on the ledges, or I toss H&H cocohoes or beetles in black/chartreuse or purple/white, double-rigged, using 3/8-ounce jigheads in fast-moving water or 1/4-ounce jigheads on slower-tide days."

Schaff (504-400-2466) said on milder days, those fish will leave the deeper holes and spread out over the flats and reefs in nearby bays and lakes, in 3 to 4 feet of water.

"That's when you can cast tandem rigs, with or without a cork, or live shrimp under a cork," he said. "I'll fish points and reefs and flats in Lake Robin, Lake Amedee, down to Four Horse and Pato Cabello, using those same baits and also the Matrix in shrimp creole when I'm fishing clear water, and the lemonhead color when I'm fishing in off-colored water."

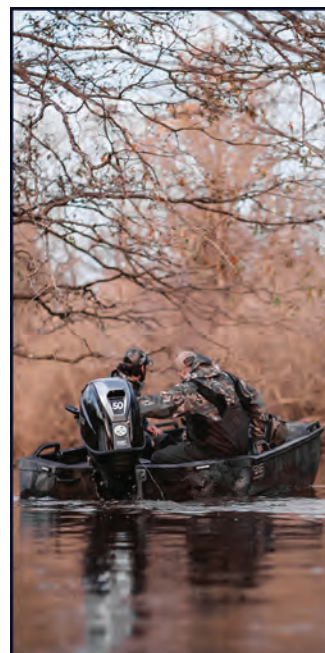
Schaff basically uses the same tactic to catch reds year-round.

Adelyn Brock was fall fishing in Delacroix when she caught her first redfish.

"Fish points, cuts and drains under a cork with live or market shrimp, or with those same plastics on a 1/4-ounce jighead," he said. "If the water is normal to high, fish lagoons and bays. If fronts have blown the water out, then the fish will stack up those same bayous in the deeper holes and you can fill your box using those same baits.

"And the great thing about colder weather fishing; you don't have to leave so early." ■

— Rusty Tardo



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# LEEVILLE REDS HAVE DECEMBER FEED ON

## Interior bays, moving water key the bite

**A**ccording to Max Plaisance of Plaisance's Tidewater Charters, this time of year is when it gets easy around Leeville.

"Redfish begin to pop up in the interior bays and along the big banks," he said.

Plaisance has been guiding full-time for six years with his partner and father, Kip Plaisance, who has been guiding around Leeville for 30 years.

"There's going to be a different pattern day-to-day, but there's a few constants we know, such as where they will likely show up, how the weather effects the bite, what they will eat and when they'll eat," he said.

Where are the redfish?

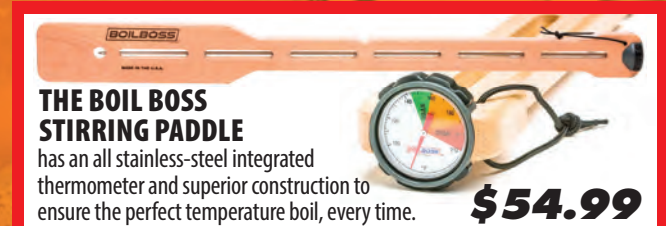
"Usually, at the end of October, we get a large shrimp crop in the marsh, and that's when things really turn on for us," said Plaisance (fishtidewater.com). "You will start to notice shrimp boats pushing within the interior bays. And when the shrimp really moves in, you will see the seagulls diving, which we will pattern. The birds haven't shown up, yet, so we do what we know. We fish along the big banks of the interior bays and along the deeper canals.

Redfish are very active in December in the Leeville area; live minnows are the ticket.



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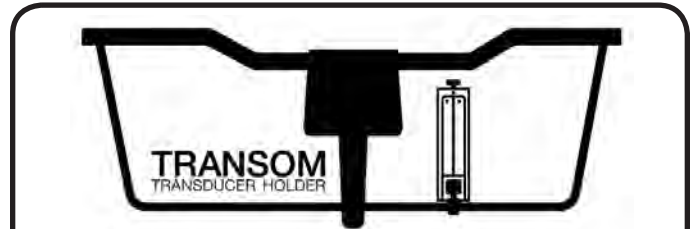


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Boat owners admittedly derive a great deal of pleasure from their water crafts but are also aware that they are very high maintenance possessions. There are numerous complications and problems that can arise from a boat's heavy use. One of these is the exposure of the craft's transducer, which is located on its underside, to the salt water. Over time this can cause it to become damaged and in a simple yet very effective alternative by inventor Robert Gene Waller. Mr. Waller began to conceive of the idea in approximately 1998 through his own experience of owning a boat for 51 years and having to clean his transducer constantly.



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"When the sun comes out, and the water is moving, around 9 or 10 in the morning, the fish will push up along the stretches of banks in the interior bays. If you take your time, and work your bait/lure along the big banks you will find them. If that's not working, you can always check out the canals."

Plaisance said with all the oil-field companies, they have a lot of pipeline canals and dead-end canals to explore.

"These areas will be a little deeper than other places in the marsh," he said. "The redfish will school in these areas, especially as the water starts to cool off. Look for current lines; that's where a few will usually be hanging out."

Plaisance said to keep your gear simple.

"A Four Horsemen popping cork, 18-inch fluorocarbon leader, and a 2/0 circle hook tipped with a live coahoe minnow is what we use," he said. "I don't fish with dead shrimp this time of year. In the winter, it's all live minnows in the marsh."

"Not every fish you will catch will be a keeper. There will be a lot of 12- to 14-inch redfish in the marsh. Sometimes, they are mixed with the keeper redfish, but other times, you will go into a pocket and catch 15 to 20 throwback redfish."

Does tide and weather matter?

"Everybody has their opinion on whether an incoming or outgoing tide is better for fishing," Plaisance said. "But as long as the water is coming or going, the fish will be feeding."

"Each day I go out, I have to work with the tide I have, and I have been able to do that. Just find the moving water, and that's where the fish will be. That's the dinner bell. Flowing water makes the fish want to eat."

"If you go fishing on a day without a lot of current, focus on the current lines, choke points and pockets."

As for weather, Plaisance said it does matter this time of year.

"You will need to watch out for the cold fronts that push through," he said. "Fishing before the front will be good, even a few hours before the

front will produce fish. But the day of the front and a day after the front can be harsh due to the high pressure. It's best to wait until two days after the front for the bite to turn on again." ■

— Dora Lambert

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## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

Southern flounder are a prized inshore fish wherever they are caught.



# SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: SOUTHERN FLOUNDER

**T**he southern flounder, *Paralichthys lethostigma*, is a flat, oval-shaped fish native to the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. It is the biggest of the flounder species found throughout the Atlantic and Gulf.

Commonly referred to as simply “flounder,” the southern flounder is distinguished from other flounder by the numerous dark and light spots and blotches present on the dark side. While other flounder have ringed or ocellated spots or blotches, the southern flounder’s markings do not have these characteristics.

Fisheries biologists refer to southern flounder as being “left-handed,” because when held vertically with the eyes facing forward, it’s the left side of the flounder that is dark. The right side is white. On very rare occasions, a “right-handed” flounder is caught. Also, on very rare occasions, the white side can be either as dark as the other or be partially brown.

Southern flounder spend most of their lives in estuaries, rivers and shallow, coastal waters, including in and around the surf zone. They are most abundant in and around the mouth of tidal creeks in water with shallow, muddy bottoms. They also spend time in flooded salt marshes at high tide. Most adult southern flounder head offshore for a few months during winter.

### ANNUAL MIGRATION

Juvenile southern flounder stay in those same areas, but they stay inshore during winter until they are old enough to spawn — typically in the fish’s second or third year.

While these are saltwater fish, they sometimes venture above the saltwater dividing line and into freshwater in some rivers. They seem to tolerate freshwater fairly well and find their way back to brackish or saltwater with no trouble.

The average southern flounder is 12 to

14 inches long and weighs 1 to 2 pounds, but they can get considerably larger. Most males live about 5 years in the wild, while females often live to be between 7 and 8 years old. Females are usually larger than males simply because they outlive them.

Both male and female southern flounder begin spawning during their second or third years. By then, males are usually between 11 and 13 inches in length. Females are typically 14 to 16 inches long.

During late fall/early winter, adults head offshore to spawn. They return in the spring, usually to the same inshore waters, year after year.

Flounder larvae spend their first 60 days



**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.

traveling ocean of Gulf currents, which push them into inshore estuaries in late winter or early spring. As the larvae settle inshore, they change into their flat body forms.

Southern flounder are predatory fish, ambushing their prey using camouflage to blend into the muddy bottoms. Adults eat a wide variety of fishes and also shrimp and crabs. Their mouths are deceptively large, and they can eat much bigger meals than most people realize. Anglers targeting large flounder often use baits or lures that are quite large.

Anglers throughout the southeast have a few nicknames for flounder, including: fluke, flatfish, flatty, and plie (pronounced pleh).

The world-record southern flounder was caught in 1983 in Florida's Nassau Sound, by Larenza Mungin. The fish weighed 20 pounds, 9 ounces.

The Louisiana state record, caught by Gary Hargis, weighed 13.06 pounds. Hargis caught the fish East of South Pass in June 1998.

Mississippi's state record weighed 10 pounds, 4.66 ounces, and was caught by Karen Good during March, 2007. ■

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Alan Thomas caught this nice southern flounder in Big Lake.



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## VENICE YELLOWFIN UNMATCHED IN 2020

### Captain looking for great December action

**C**apt. Martha Spencer of Southern Catch Outfitters and co-host of Bayou Wild TV said 2020 has been a banner year for yellowfin tuna out of Venice.

"The last two years, the loop current didn't push in," she said. "People were trying to figure out why. We weren't finding any tuna. This year, they have been anywhere from the shelf rigs to the floaters, abundantly. There has been more bait around and fish to be found. We've noticed, month by month, the fish getting bigger and bigger and bigger.

"Shrimp-boat season was okay. It didn't last very long, in contrast to past years where people shrimp-boat fished. The difference this year is that the rig fishing has been better, and that's been the focus. There has been a lot of triple-digit fish caught on the rigs this fall thus far."

Spencer ([southerncatchoutfitters.com](http://southerncatchoutfitters.com)) said this has been the best year she has seen in 5 or 6 years.

"It's been a good, solid year, all year," she said. "There were tuna caught every month. What's really neat about this year, also, is the big-eye tunas that migrate through came in a bit earlier. Several were caught in October, when they usually start getting caught in November."

### PREDICTIONS FOR DECEMBER

Spencer said December is the transition out of live bait and onto cut bait.

"Live bait will start to thin out around this time, so you can start thinking about cut bait and chunking again," she said. "Barracuda, bonito, blackfin all work. There's still mullet around, but I really wouldn't use those on the rigs. That's not to say you can't have success with mullet, but always have a Plan B in terms of bait.

"Have a few pink MirrOlures on hand. We start to use those more in the winter. They are always a go-to and a good lure to use. Always carry a popper, too. Have a rod ready, just in case you come across open-water fish. Be on the lookout for open water fish when you are heading to rigs. Pay attention to the birds. A lot of times in the early season, the tuna are just migrating around and aren't at a rig."

Spencer said in December, people start thinking about Lump fishing again.

"They have been caught as early as December, so it is a place to consider, but there are no guarantees," she said. "We've caught them as early as late December, early January there. So it is

always a place to check out. After all, it's only 24 miles or so from the Northeast Pass. There's a chance they can come in early since the big-eye tuna came in early."

Spencer said weather is going to be your biggest concern in December.

"In terms of fronts, the fishing has been pretty good ahead of the fronts," she said. "The days that we fished before weather comes in, the fish have been pretty good. Post-front fishing is tricky. With the pressure change, they will lock up.

"You have to get a good weather window. I would look for a 3- or 4-day window where it looks like it is starting to calm down. I wouldn't try to fish a 1- or 2-day window, because it can change so quickly this time of year, and you don't want to be caught out in that. Make sure that you are confident in your equipment, your radar. These are the months it matters more.

"And remember, you need to think about yourself in addition to fishing. It's going to be colder, so bring layers." ■

— Dora Lambert

### WINTERIZE YOUR BOAT ➤



Capt. Martha Spencer said triple-digit yellowfin tuna are a common catch out of Venice in December.

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A little TLC before putting up your boat for the winter will ensure you're set to go in the spring.



## 6 TIPS TO WINTERIZE YOUR BOAT

By Patrick Bonin

**T**emperatures are steadily dropping, which means lots of folks will be spending less time on the water.

Only the most diehard anglers typically venture out in late December and January, so now is the time to take care of some key maintenance to make sure your boat cranks up and is ready to go next spring.

Eric Reilley and Dale Witkowski of Mercury Marine suggest six winterization tips that will not only keep your boat protected during the winter but make sure it's ready to hit the water next year.

• **Change the oil and oil filter on inboards and four-strokes.** Most owner's manuals recommend at least an annual oil and filter change, and Witkowski said doing it before storing your boat for the winter makes sense.

"I would suggest doing it before you put

it away," he said. "Run it and get it warm so that it drains out, and then fill it with fresh oil so that any contaminants like water, dirt or anything that's in the crankcase that's not supposed to be there gets cleaned out.

"Then let fresh oil run through the engine before you put it up."

• **Examine your water pump and the water pump impeller.** "Most guys just look back to see if the pee tube is flowing water, and they think the water pump impeller is fine," Witkowski said. "But if you're dealing with saltwater, brackish water and shallow water — where things might get sucked up into your engine — on an annual basis it wouldn't hurt to make sure your engine is getting all the water that it needs to keep cool."

Reilley also said the rubber veins of the

impeller can set, which can cause water flow issues.

"They can conform to the shape they've been used in because the rubber is stiffening," he explained. "The diameter of the rubber just gets hard and brittle, and it can just freeze in that state."

• **Stabilize your fuel and change your fuel filters.** Witkowski and Reilley recommended a three-step approach for year-round fuel maintenance.

First, use a product like Mercury's Quickare to stabilize the fuel and prevent water from being attracted to it inside your tanks. And once a month, use Quickleen that will get into your combustion chambers and clean up any carbon deposits that might be built up after running, especially under low-rpm conditions. Finally, Quickstor should be added to your tank to

protect internal fuel systems during the winter storage period. "We do recommend having the fuel tank full, with a stabilizing product in it," Witkowski said. "And we suggest that they run the engine after they put the Quickstor in it so the fuel circulates throughout the fuel system."

Also, consult your owner's manual and change your fuel filters. "A rule of thumb is every 100 hours, is what you'll see in the literature," Reilley said. "So if you have a fisherman that's putting a lot of hours offshore, he would have to do this more often than you're weekend warrior who's going out once a month."

• **Check your anodes.** "They're called sacrificial anodes for a reason," Witkowski said. "The rule of thumb is when they're 50% gone, they need to be changed."

"Saltwater eats up everything. (Anodes) give up their lives to save the more-expensive components on the engine."

• **Check your gear lube or drive lubricants.** "One of the main things we recommend is to drain this to get out any emulsification that might have happened or water that might have gotten in," Reilley said. "If you don't drain it before winterization, what happens is — if it freezes — the water expands and it could burst your gear case or drive."

• **Disconnect your battery until the spring.** "Just make sure it's not touching anything," Witkowski said. "That way there's not the chance of anything drawing it down, so on the off chance if you do hook the boat up and go down to the dock, you'll have juice." ■

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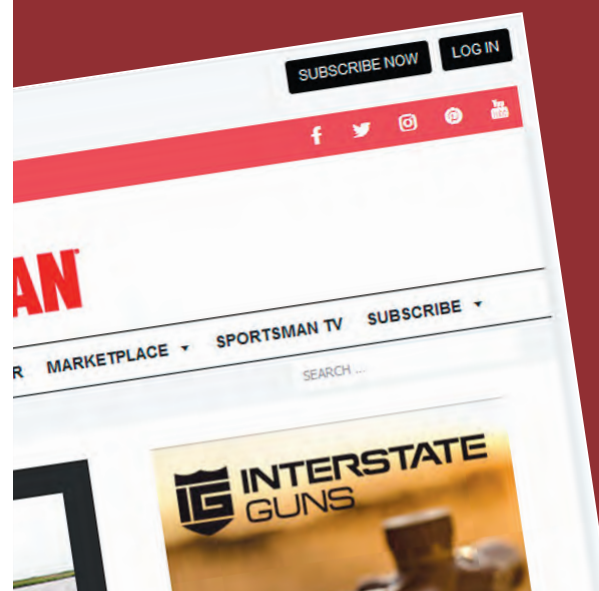
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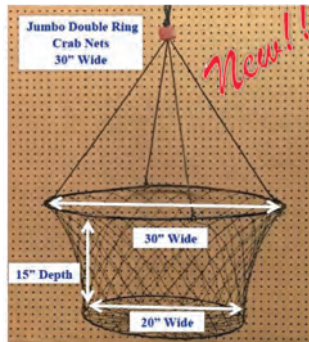
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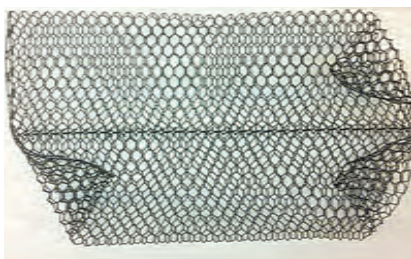
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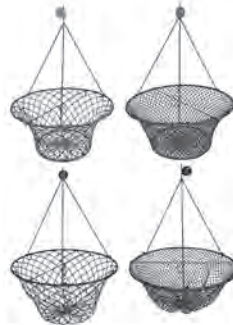
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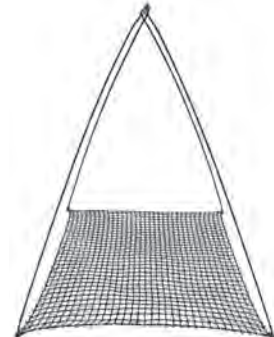
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TOUGHER.**

# WHEN BIG WON'T WORK

Photo courtesy Greg Hackney

■ By Jonathan LePera

**G**reg Hackney, a pro bass fisherman from Gonzales, said Louisiana largemouths have taught him some valuable lessons that have helped him excel on national bass fishing circuits.

Anglers who don't recognize that Louisiana's bass feed on smaller baits, experience significant fishing pressure and are heavily affected by unstable weather, they're going to struggle.

"Just because you downsize your lure doesn't mean you're downsizing the size of the fish, because you are generating bites," Hackney said.

The Louisiana waters that Hackney fishes feed on smaller baitfish and crustaceans, especially this time of the year.

"The first baitfish to move shallow are the shad born this year," Hackney said. "If you go to Venice, you'll catch one hundred 3-pounders a day when the conditions are right. Even to catch 5-pounders, you have to downsize your lure, not because of fishing pressure or weather, but because of the size of what they eat."

Early in the year, when the Blind River doesn't have matted vegetation, Hackney will target cypress trees on breaks, parking his boat in 15 feet of water but casting to bass living 2 to 4 feet deep.

**TIME TO GO SMALL >**

## TIME TO GO SMALL

This time of the year, Hackney turns to smaller lures to match what bass are eating. He loves to fish a buzzbait, and in December, it will be a 1/8-ounce Strike King Mini Pro. He crimps the rivet to make the blade squeak as it's retrieved and discards the skirt in exchange for a Strike King Baby Menace grub to mimic a small baitfish fluttering on the surface.

Because he's throwing a smaller bait, he drops from a longer rod to a 6-foot-8 Lew's Hack Attack baitcaster paired with a Lew's BB1 reel spooled with 14-pound monofilament. If he needs to fish a spinnerbait, he also goes small, with a 1/4- to 3/8-ounce Strike King Money Maker rigged with a small trailer hook, fished on 14-pound Gamma Edge fluorocarbon on a 6-foot-10 rod.

"Some places in the marsh are where our biggest fish live, but it doesn't matter, because it is about what they eat," said Hackney, who refined his skills cranking dead-end canals in Blind Creek during the early spring with a red, 1/4-ounce Strike King Red Eye Shad or black back/chartreuse KVD 1.0 square-bill on his 7-foot, medium/moderate action crankbait rod. The rod's slower action allows bass to really eat the crankbait without fear of pulling it away from them.

Matted vegetation doesn't exist in all canals since the hyacinths are sprayed for navigation purposes. Hackney cranks the coontail that grows in the middle for bass that pull off the bank and nestle in. He keeps his lipless crankbait just above the vegetation growing on the bottom.

"When you find the grass, I just pole down and make repetitive casts," said Hackney, who moves to 12-pound fluoro on his buzzbait outfit to get better action out of the bait. "That is the key to cold-water fishing. You move angles and want that bait to hit the grass. That's a reaction time of the year."

Hackney also targets suspended bass on bridge pilings with a drop-shot rig fitted with a 1/16-ounce weight and a Strike King Half Shell, a small, soft-plastic bait.

When choosing bait colors, common sense prevails. The color of the water will influence the color of the baitfish and crustaceans.



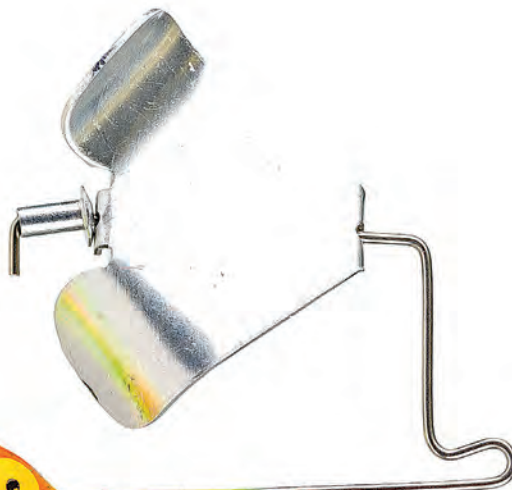
Photo by Jesse Schultz

The rate of retrieve is critical.

"A lot of time, it's the speed that gets the bite in those weather conditions. You are trying to get a reaction bite, and it seems like that little bait moving fast generates a bite," Hackney said.

The same basic rules apply; reel slower in colder water and more quickly in warmer water.

### UNSTABLE WEATHER ➤



Greg Hackney squeezes down the rivet on a 1/8-ounce Strike King Mini Pro buzzbait to improve the blade's ability to make squeaking noises. **ABOVE:** Even when fishing small baits, a slow retrieve is the most-important factor when trying to get reaction strikes.



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## UNSTABLE WEATHER

Weather greatly influences fish activity, as does barometric pressure. Those days, when nature is active and birds are chirping, anglers grin, knowing a great day is ahead. When faced with minimal wind and blue-bird skies, Hackney knows to downsize.

Cold fronts can throw a monkey wrench into the best-laid plans. The first day after is always best; bass can be caught the same way as the previous day. The second day provides the toughest conditions because the sun is out, the wind has subsided and the skies have cleared, Hackney said.

There are exceptions to every rule; on a body of water that doesn't see much fishing pressure, totally throw this out, he said.

## FISHING AND MENTAL PRESSURE

Tough fishing conditions are no time for ego or stubbornness; getting spun out won't help your cause, either.

"You have to fish what's in front of you. If you go to a body of water where 10 pounds is a big bag, you fish for 10 pounds. You can't make something out of what doesn't exist," said Hackney, who won the FLW's Forrest Wood Cup in 2009 by junk-fishing with downsized lures.

Growing up fishing in Arkansas, Hackney doesn't remember ever needing to downsize, due to big fish, big forage and manageable fishing pressure. By contrast, his home waters in Louisiana are chock full of anglers.

"They have a Wednesday night tournament at the St. James Boat Club, and a big bag is 8-6. You have to fish that size of fish."

Not only are bass fishermen getting better, the fish are getting wiser.

"The average angler is so much better," Hackney said. "It seems that bass never get accustomed to small plastics because they're so natural and are the closest baits we throw to matching Mother Nature like they do certain crankbaits and rattles, knowing not to bite them."



Photo courtesy Strike King/Lewis

## FISHING A BIG STICK

Hackney fishes several situations where he can still go big, just not as big as normal. He will pitch and flip dead hyacinths with familiar sticks, his 7-foot-6 and 7-foot-11 signature series rods, but his bait is still small, a 3-inch Strike King Baby Rodent that fits perfectly on a 4/0 hook. It's the only bait he needs. A 4-inch bait simply won't get bit.

Soak the bait, and don't move it quickly.

"I'll flip it in, let it go to the bottom, then pull it back up and hold it," Hackney said, noting that bass are most-often sus-

Vegetation is a great place to find cold-weather bass; just know where in the vegetation to locate your lure.



pending, just under the mat. "Very few times do I catch them on bottom under a mat."

The day after a cold front, when winds might move the mat around, he'll suspend his bait. When fishing standing grass, those bass will be on bottom.

Let the bass tell him what fall rate they want.

"When you're flipping mats, and you think you saw you line jump or twitch, or you feel a bump and you don't get the fish, downsize your weight," Hackney said. The fish might be turned off by the quicker fall when paired with a smaller plastic.

When the water is colored, bait colors like black/blue, Okeechobee craw and candy craw excel, while California craw is best in flat, clear water. Black neon is Hackney's favorite during the winter, as crawfish are usually black and red.

**CRACK 'EM ON A JIG ➤**

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A Strike King Bitsy Flip is a small jig that can still stand up to some awfully big winter bass.

## CRACK 'EM ON A JIG

Even when he fishes a jig, he goes smaller. He uses a compact Strike King Bitsy Flip which has a sturdy Mustad hook that won't flex on a hookset. Add a Baby Rage Craw to keep his offering compact. Especially useful in colder weather, he can also fish behind other anglers and pick off fish they missed.

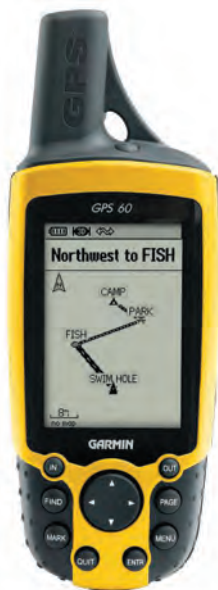
The Blind River is the closest body of water to Hackney's home, and he can't remember the last time he caught a bass on a full-sized jig. After all, their average size is only a pound.

"Occasionally in the spring, you'll catch a 6-pounder, but they are few and far between," Hackney said. "Most of those fish are marsh bass and not very big." ■



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

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## PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

Chris Holmes

# CHILLY YAK BASSIN'

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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](mailto:cholmes@att.net).

**I**nterest in bass fishing from kayaks is exploding. Several national tournaments have organized that mimic tour-type pro bass tournaments that hop from state to state. Prizes have risen to unheard of amounts, and tournaments are even attracting professional bass tour anglers.

Kayak bass anglers from many parts of the country have shut down for the winter, but not Louisiana anglers. We have excellent year-round fishing, except for those few, extreme-winter days we may get each year with a bit of ice or even snow. All that is required to be successful catching bass from a kayak in the winter are a few extra safety precautions and a determination to change your fishing habits.

Fortunately for Louisiana anglers, bass are available throughout the state, from northern lakes to southern marshes. The only exception is the extreme coastal areas where the salinity is too high. However, even many of those areas are becoming more brackish, and saltwater anglers are more and more finding some nice fat bass to add to their coolers.

Safety is always the No. 1 precaution. Wearing a quality PFD is a must, because entering cold water greatly reduces reaction and survival time. Kayak fishing greatly exposes anglers to the elements. There is no protection from wind or rain. You are going to get somewhat wet due to the close proximity to the water, and there is always the chance of entering the water unexpectedly. Windproof and waterproof clothing is the best bet to avoid deadly hypothermia. This goes for several body layers, as well as hats, footwear and gloves. Dress for the worst-case scenario with the ability to adjust layers as conditions may change.

Although a good idea for any season, a survival kit in your kayak is essential for winter fishing, because hypothermia is the biggest danger faced when fishing in cold weather. The basics included should be a solar blanket and a fire starter (waterproof matches, butane lighter, flint/striker, etc.), which can be used to provide life-saving warmth. The kit should also include a flashlight, first-aid supplies and a marine radio. High-protein snacks such as beef jerky, trail mix or energy bars and some water should also be included. A dry bag with a towel and extra clothing is also a good idea. There is no reason to fear fishing in cold weather; just take the proper precautions and use some good, common sense.





Using a variety of lures helped put together this nice bass stringer on a cold December day. Covering the water column with lures with different actions, at different speeds, can trigger strikes from otherwise cold, lethargic bass.

## PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

continued

Using a fish finder is a great aid for winter bass fishing. Both the bait and fish tend to pack tighter and hold in specific areas as the water temperatures drops. Finding them doesn't always mean catching them, but you know where they are when they decide to eat. Slow and deliberate should be the motto. Of course, kayaks are great platforms from which to do this.

Although you do not need a yak-full of lures, you should be prepared to cover the entire water column. Frequent lure changes can be very productive in providing something just different enough to trigger a strike from lethargic bass. Don't overlook covering the same spots using a different lure. If you've caught a few on a spinnerbait and the bite slows, tie on a jerkbait or lipless crankbait to change the menu. The best thing about these styles of baits is that they can be fished at varying depths and speeds, and changes in action can easily be imparted with variations of rod movements. Find what works and repeat until it doesn't.

As the day wears on, slight increases in water temperatures can be the difference in a bass watching your lure swim past or inhaling it. However, cold-water bites can be slow and subtle. Try using braided line to greatly improve your chances of feeling the fish strike your bait. When in doubt, set the hook. It may be a slight change in pressure from a fish hitting the lure, or it may be a branch. There is only one way to know for sure.

Although revered for its giant bass during the spawn, Toledo Bend offers some great winter fishing. Fish the back of pro-

tected coves where bass tend to gather on warmer days. This keeps you out of the wind and cold and makes for more comfortable fishing. On colder days, use a depth finder to locate submerged grass. Smaller baits and slower presentations are often the key to catching winter bass on Toledo. These same techniques work well in similar lakes across Louisiana.

If fishing the brackish marsh in coastal areas, depth is a relative term. Five feet can be a deep spot in an area that is mainly 2 to 3 feet deep. Search out-cuts between lagoons and bays as well as the outside turns of bayous where the current cuts a deeper edge. Jerkbait work well in these areas. They can be rigged weedless and worked extremely slowly. Line watching is a great way to detect subtle bites. Braided line floats, and if you keep a keen eye where it drops below the surface, you will see the line twitch or move slightly — set the hook.

Unlike fishing non-tidal lakes, the winter marsh is affected by cold fronts causing low water. This can be an advantage to kayak bass anglers. You will likely be able to access some areas that boat anglers cannot. Even if you don't find fish stacked up, you can usually find one here and there as you slowly work all of the most likely areas.

Don't put the kayak away in the winter if you like to catch bass. Make some changes to your wardrobe and pack a few safety items. Make accommodations to your techniques, and you can have some hot fishing even on cold days. ■

**LURE REVIEW** ➤

Lipless crankbaits like this Rat-L-Trap are great for cold-water presentations. They give off lots of vibration and sound even when retrieved slowly.



## MILLENNIUM SHOOTING CHAIRS

Ground blinds, box blinds, duck blinds — all hunters need to sit somewhere during deer, duck and turkey season, even Labor Day weekend for doves.

Millennium Outdoors, a Mississippi-based company, has added a couple of hunting chairs — the G100 and G200 — to its top-drawer line of hunting stands and accessories.

The shooting chairs have adjustable tripod legs, a folding design and a full-back seat. Both can be adjusted in height to give hunters the perfect view out the

window of a box blind or a from a pit blind in the marsh. Seats are 17x20 inches on both stands and feature 360° swivel capability. Weight capacity is 400 pounds.

Both stands are pre-drilled to hold an optional shooting stick for a more-stable shooting platform when long-range accuracy is needed — or an optional bow-holder.

**MSRP: \$159 for the G100, \$209 for the G200.**

**For more info, visit: [www.millennium-stands.com](http://www.millennium-stands.com).**



## BIG LAKE'S PINTAIL PASSION

Rolling a perfect pintail trill out over the marsh is a talent that a lot of duck hunters can't master. Now, thanks to the Pintail Passion that has been added to Big Lake Calls' lineup, you don't have to do much more than blow the call.

According to owner Hugh McLaurin, a roller ball within the call's body allows just about anybody using the call — just by blowing into it — to make the beautiful trills and peeps that make pintails sit up and take notice. In addition, the call has two ports that allow you to alter the

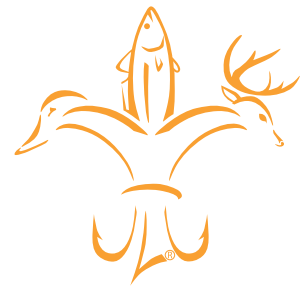
sound of the calls from high to low to mimic multiple ducks. It will also produce a very good widgeon whistle and a passable call for teal.

Big Lake partners with Maurilio, a Brazilian company, to produce the calls in Jatobé and Rosewood models.

"You get a very soft, mellow sound," McLaurin said.

**MSRP: \$40 (Jatobé wood), \$50 (Rosewood).**

**For more info, visit: [www.biglakeoutdoor-products.com](http://www.biglakeoutdoor-products.com).**



## G.LOOMIS IMX-PRO ROD SERIES

If you're not a full-time, professional bass fishermen, choosing the right rod for specific fishing situations might not be as easy as others make it seem.

Enter G.Loomis, with its line of IMX-PRO rods, which are made and marketed with specific lures and situations in mind. Now, the line of 74 rods features rods made specifically for fishing bladed jigs, swim-baits, "micro" swimbaits, Ned rigs, lipless crankbaits and ledges. Just match the rod to the technique and situation, and you're ready to go.

The entire IMX-PRO series features G.Loomis' multi-taper design to reinforce potential stress points on the rod blank, Fuji "K" frame Alconite tangle free guides and a

larger palm swell in the full-cork grips.

Three rods in the line address swimbaits — including a spinning rod for smaller baits on lighter, ballhead jigs — two for bladed jigs, two for Ned rigs, two for ledge fishing and one for fishing lipless crankbaits.

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## LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman



# DELTA LURES' RATTLING JIG

Photo courtesy deltalures.com

**W**hen Fred King and Ray LaBorde, both of LaPlace, took matters into their own hands to make three different artificial baits, one of them was a little more of a challenge than the other two.

That lure evolved into the Delta Lures Rattling Jig, one they're proud of today. "At first, we had the eye with a little lip on it. It would hit (something) and roll over," said King, who helped found the company in 2011. "I encased the eye, which was a more smooth transition from the eye to the hook where it wouldn't roll over and get snagged."

The transition was enhanced by the mold used by Cliff Pace of Petal, Miss.,

the 2013 Bassmaster Classic champion, whose offerings include a line of jigs in V&M's Pacemaker series. The tweaking of the jig went back and forth before it got the go-ahead from King and LaBorde, bass tournament partners intent on filling a niche in the market with high-quality artificial lures at affordable prices.

King believes they have a winner with the Rattling Jig, as well as the other two products the company introduced: a spinnerbait and buzzbait.

"That was our bait we liked to use the most. It's been real nice to see (the company) grow," King said.

Each Rattling Jig features a 55-strand silicone skirt and double rattle chamber. It also has a streamlined head, horizontal

recessed line tie and oversized fiber weed guard, plus a trailer keeper to keep a piece of soft plastic in place.

## HOOK 'EM UP

The Rattling Jig is armed with a 4/0 Mustad Ultra Point Hook on the ¼-ounce model and a 5/0 Mustad Ultra Point Hook on the ⅜-, 1.2- and ¾-ounce models. King wanted a larger hook on the ⅜-ounce model, which he uses most of the time, and he got it.



**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.

David Cavell holds up a 6-pound bass he caught on a Delta Lures Rattling Jig and Cliff's Craw skirt while prefishing the first week of November for the B.A.S.S. Nation Championship on Pickwick Lake.

Those five sizes are available in 22 colors. King said the most popular locally are black/blue/orange, black/blue/purple (bruise) and black/red.

However, he said, "My favorite colors are black/brown/orange in the spring time."

The jig's success seems to be seasonal, with the beginning of the year the peak season. If it warms up quickly, spring arrives early, the jig's popularity sometimes wanes among bass and bass anglers.

"I like to fish it. One of the reasons is if I'm fishing Venice, and fishing the roseau canes, you can go back and forth and don't have to change (soft plastics like worms, creature baits, etc.) out. In the wintertime, that's all I throw," he said.

King prefers to throw the jig on braided line. Most of the time, he said, bass anglers fishing the jig in grass use braid. But in and around the Atchafalaya Basin, anglers like to throw it on fluorocarbon line because of the oft-increased clarity.

The Rattling Jig is one of bass pro Logan Latuso's top-three artificial lures in December. He favors a 3/8- or 1/2-ounce black/blue Rattling Jig.

Bass pro Brent Bonadona of Port Allen uses a Rattling Swim Jig and Rattling Jig.

"I find Delta jigs have got a big-enough hook, (and the weed guard) deflects the bait in cover. Really, the only modification I do to that weed guard sometimes is spread it out," Bonadona said. ■

*For more information on the Delta Lures Rattling Jig and other Delta Lures products, go to [deltalures.com](http://deltalures.com) or call 504-559-1689.*

**BASSIN' BEST BAITS >**



Photo courtesy deltalures.com



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If you tie on these four artificial lures before Christmas and the week after Christmas, chances are good, extremely good, you'll hook up with a bass.

Four pro bass fishermen from Louisiana believe in their respective baits. For Logan Latuso, it's a Delta Lure's Double Colorado spinnerbait. For Tyler Carriere, it's a Strike King Hack Attack structure jig. For Nick LeBrun, it's a Producer Swimbait's Swiminator. For Greg Hackney, it's his own Strike King Hack Attack jig.

Two jigs and two moving baits get the nod in what usually is the first really cold month of the winter in Louisiana.

## DELTA LURES' DOUBLE-COLORADO SPINNERBAIT IS DECEMBER CHOICE

Logan Latuso, a bass pro from Gonzales, loves Delta Lures' Double Colorado spinnerbait this month.

"It's definitely a go-to fish catcher in December," he said, pointing to a  $\frac{3}{8}$ - or  $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce bait from the company headquartered in LaPlace. It's highly effective when the water temperature drops into the 50s.

"I like the spinnerbait pretty much everywhere I go. It's pretty much my go-to," he said.

Sure, Latuso also favors a Delta Lures Rattling Jig or a Delta Lures



Photo courtesy dellalures.com

## 4 BASS PROS, 4 FAVORITE BAIT'S

By Don Shoopman



Thunder Jig in December, especially in Louisiana waters.

"Otherwise, when the water temperature gets below 60 degrees, I like that spinnerbait," he said. "I like a bigger spinnerbait (with Nos. 4 and 5 blades), because in the winter, bass are kind of lethargic, and you can thump it and slow-roll it."

Latuso is partial to an orange No. 4 and gold No. 5 blade much of the time, particularly in water with a little color. It's all about those Colorado blades thumping on the retrieve, he said, which is why he favors a reel with a 6:3.1 ratio on a 7-foot Fitzgerald MH for the  $\frac{3}{8}$ -ounce model and a 7-foot-3 MJH for the  $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce model. He throws both on 16-pound Sunline FC Sniper fluorocarbon.

While his favorite skirt is the chartreuse/white H&H rubber skirt, he also throws the Delta Shad-colored 44-strand silicone skirt.

"I like all of it. It's got a good hook (Mustad Ultra Point) on it, a high-end ball bearing swivel, trailer keeper and custom stainless steel wire frame. It's true running and you can feel a lot with it," he said.

Mostly, Latuso fishes the spinnerbait in 1- to 5-foot depths, which he sees a lot of when he's fishing his home waters. It triggers strikes around wood, rocks and on grassy flats, he said, which is where he was when he won a Louisiana B.A.S.S. Nation tournament in 2019 at Toledo Bend. ■

## CARRIERE FINDS BLACK/BLUE STRIKE KING JIG HARD TO BEAT

**T**he cooler the water gets as December arrives, the better his bassing success is when pro Tyler Carriere of Youngsville fishes with a Strike King Hack Attack structure jig.

"A jig is always good in December. It depends on how cold it is. I just use it when it starts getting cold," Carriere said, noting it doesn't take much of a cold snap to cool off the mostly shallow, fishable waters in and around the Atchafalaya Basin, including Henderson Lake.

That's when it's time to tie on a black/blue model because, he said, that color is always good when the water's cold.

When he flips it around a deadfall or treetop in the water, he targets the outside parts of the structure before the interior.

"I try to work the outside edge first, then I start working the inside of the tree. Fish the outside edge first, then go to the heart of it," he said, explaining that by fishing it that way, it's possible to pick off two or three bass on a single piece of structure.

"I just kind of work it slow. I let it hit the bottom and bounce it back. I flip cypress trees and everything else, stumps, whatever."

Carriere said he uses braided line a majority of the time.

"Around our house, you should put on braid, depending on the color of the water. Mainly around our house, I usually use braid. If it's real clear, I like to use fluorocarbon," he said.

When he does choose braid, it's Sunline 50-pound braid. If the water conditions call for fluorocarbon, he chooses Sunline FX Shooter 20-pound.

"Some like to throw 25-pound. I use 20," said Carriere, who uses a 7-foot-2 Sixgill MH rod and a Sixgill Wreath reel to fish with jig. ■

### SWIMINATOR >

“It depends on how cold it is. I just use it when it starts getting cold.”



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## LEBRUN: IN DECEMBER, PRODUCER SWIMINATOR TRIGGERS COLD-WATER BASS

**A**bout 2 years ago, bass pro Nick LeBrun of Bossier City got a tip on an artificial lure from a co-angler who's now a buddy.

"He kept telling me, 'You need to try one of these baits.' (But) I hear that all the time," LeBrun said.

Eventually, he decided to try one of those baits. He contacted John Bailey, the owner of Producer Swimbaits, who sent the FLW pro some of his small, Georgia company's Swiminators. LeBrun has been catching bass on them ever since, particularly when the water temperature is in the mid-50s.

December is prime time for the Swinator, LeBrun said.

"Any time the water gets around 55 degrees, and they're feeding on big shad, it's hard to beat," he said. "I catch on it all over the country and, at that time of year, on Caddo when the bass are feeding on flats and eating gizzard shad.

"It's also accounted for many big bass at Lake Sam Rayburn. It's really good at Rayburn."

LeBrun said the Swinator's design and makeup can't be matched. The difference-maker, he said, is that it's developed with a "top pour."

Bailey said he was frustrated when he first started making soft-plastic swimbaits because he was unable to get color schemes he preferred via injection, so he tried a method that allows him to make three or more colors in each soft plastic.

LeBrun's favorite colors are blue crack, blue minnow and T2.

Swiminators are available in 3½, 4½, 5½ and 6½ inches.

"They make it in different sizes. I throw the 4½-inch," LeBrun said.

"That seems to be the most versatile to me. When you start seeing gizzard shad, or see a tail sticking out of a gullet, it's time to throw it.

LeBrun fishes the Swinator on a ¾-ounce, 7/0 Hayabusa WRM 958 Wide Gap Screwlock weighted hook, tied to 20-pound Sunline FC Sniper flourocarbon. He uses a 7-foot-6 Fitzgerald MH Stunner Series rod matched with a Fitzgerald VLD10 reel.

"You can reel it extremely slow," LeBrun said. "You want to keep it right in the middle of the water column. If it's 4-foot, you want to reel it in 2 foot. After you fish a while, you'll see if it's too fast, it'll rise to the top." ■

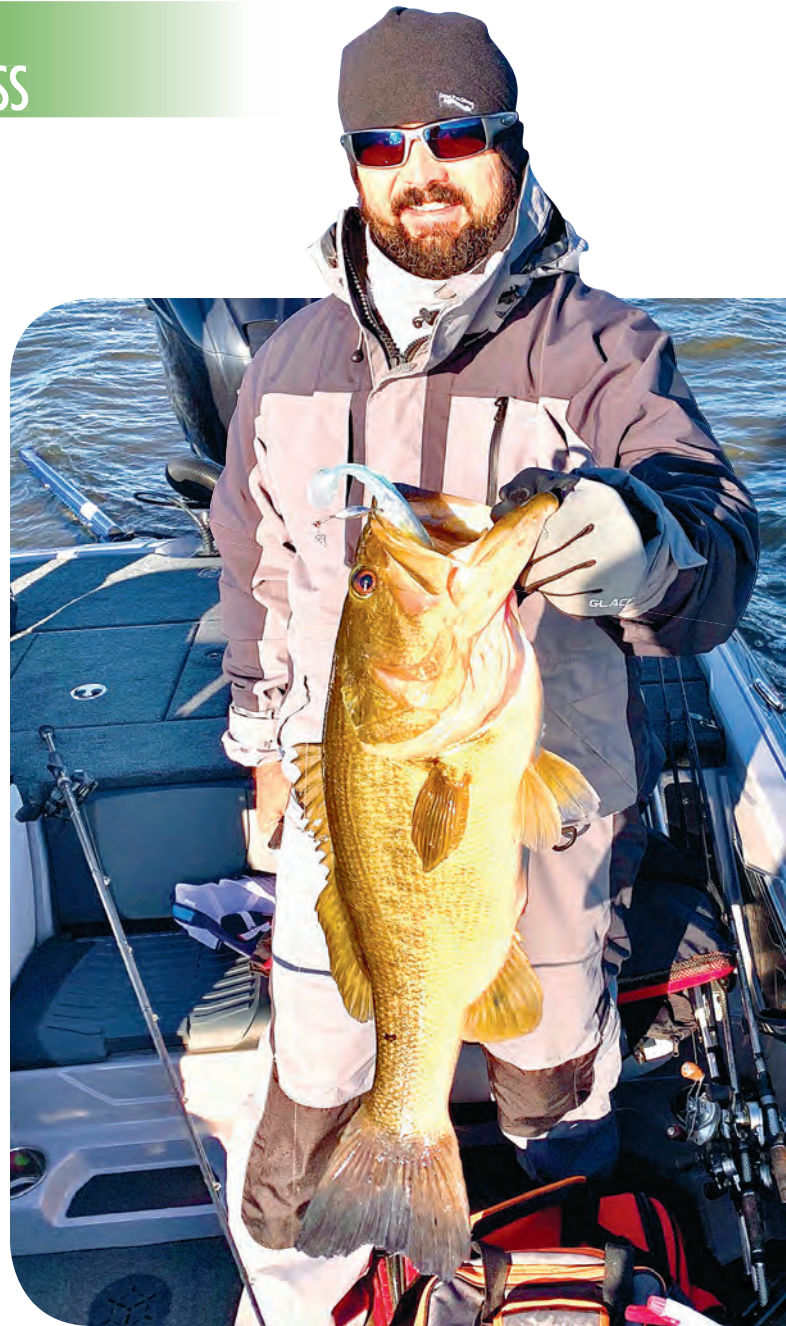
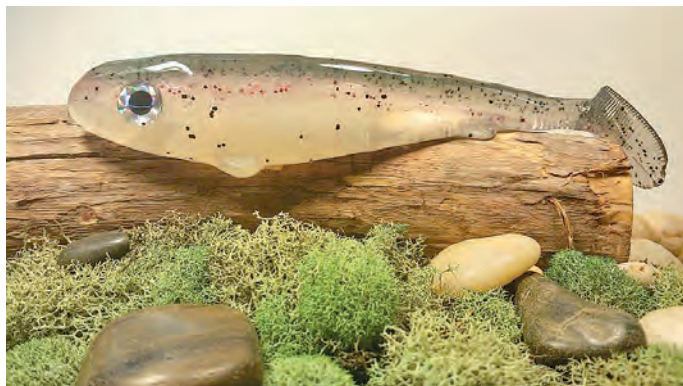


Photo courtesy Nick LeBrun



“Any time the water gets around 55 degrees, and they're feeding on big shad, it's hard to beat.”

## HACKNEY'S HACK ATTACK JIG GETS HIM THE RIGHT BITES IN DECEMBER

**A** Strike King jig that bears his name is the go-to bait in December for veteran bass pro Greg Hackney of Gonzales.

Hackney relies this month on a ½-ounce Strike King Hack Attack jig for several reasons.

"By then, to me, there's enough cold weather to put them on the bottom. It's really the first month I find them to be on the bottom," Hackney said, explaining that longer periods of cold weather, with cold nights, tends to put bass over a hard bottom, on hard cover and even in grass. "You want a hard bottom. They don't like to sit in muck, don't like to sit in silt, where the bottom's soft."

It's also a time when bass typically are fat and healthy after having the feedbag on in October and November. Once it gets cold, they don't eat as much, and when they do, they'll grab a well-placed jig worked through the strike zone along a hard bottom and wood.

"That's another thing that makes a jig so good in December," he said. "If you're fishing a tournament in December, that'd be the pick."

Hackney said bass tend to migrate to dead-end canals to get out of the current and get along the deeper holes along the shoreline. That's when it really pays off to fish slow and thorough, keeping in constant contact with the bottom, he said.

One other thing about December. He said bass aren't seeking out shade.

Hackney prefers to throw a black/blue/purple, black/neon or green pumpkin jig and a full-sized Rage Craw trailer in the same colors.

"I just match it to the water color," he said.

Hackney, host of Sportsman TV, T ties the jig to 50-pound Gamma braid spooled on a Lew's Super Duty reel with an 8.3:1 retrieve mated to a 7-foot-3 Hack Attack Special jig rod.

Hackney usually throws a jig on a 7-foot-6 rod, but in the winter when he wants to slow the retrieve, he finds it easier with a 7-3. He wants to crawl it over hard bottoms and wood. ■



### TOLEDO BEND >

“By (December), to me, there's enough cold weather to put them on the bottom.”



# TOLEDO BEND WOES

## Water low, no grass, bass not acting right

**T**his year's just about gone, and I really ain't sorry to see it go.

Virus and other issues aside, it's been a tough year, overall, for bass fishing on Toledo Bend. The past 2 or 3 months have been extra frustrating, worrisome really, as we wonder what the heck is going on in a lake that, for the most part, has lost its vegetation, and where bass haven't been where they were supposed to be. Take September and October, for example.

I've never seen a fall like this, a time when the transition from deep water to shallow water should be in high throttle, and still so many people can't find concentrations of bass offshore or in the shallows, despite the enormous number of shad that have moved shallower. Besides spring, this perhaps is traditionally the best season for bass fishing, and, sure enough, there are huge shad balls everywhere like they normally are — but disappointingly fewer connections on bass.

Based on past experience — but who knows what'll actually happen — December fishing should be fair to good, much better than it has been the past few months. I believe when the vegetation inexplicably disappeared, the results changed the where-to and how-to in most areas.

This December, bass ought to be pulling the trigger. I'm thinking they'll finally go to where the baitfish are and take advantage of a chance to fatten up before the pre-prespawn. Mother Nature has to intervene sooner than later. Biologically, egg-carrying females have to start putting on fat and should start making significant signs of moving up.

When November arrived, Toledo Bend's pool stage was 168.12. There are many "bare spots" showing now with the water so low, and vegetation is growing on them. And when the lake rises sometime before the end of the year, as I expect it will, that will offer some more habitat for bass.

A mild winter forecast is what I've been hearing, so I believe the water temperature probably will be in the mid-50s. I don't think there will be any low to middle 40s, but you never know about Ol' Man Winter.

Double-digit bass were few and far between in late summer and early fall. However, we should see more 8s, 9s and 10s in December, and even more in late January and February. I probably will spend 90% of my time in December trying to catch a double-digit bass. They've got to be showing some fat, and roe is growing in the females, a combination that ought to contribute to catching big bass when they put on their feed bag.

Starting in late November, finding baitfish is the key to catching bass. The first thing I would fish with is any kind of moving bait: a Thunder Jig, a swim jig, a plastic frog, a buzzbait, any kind of topwater bait or a suspending jerkbait. It's also hard to beat ½- or ¾-ounce chrome/black Rat-L-Traps — something that makes noise and moves water to trigger a bite.

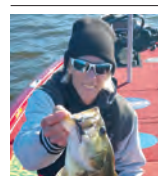
Kinder resident Marcus Norris shows off one of three big bass he caught on a 3-day trip to Toledo Bend.



I still remember one winter several years ago when the water temperature was 55 to 57 degrees. Myself and two bass anglers fished with suspending Rogues and caught numbers of bass in 5- to 7-foot depths. On two separate trips, we hooked and boated 30 to 35 bass averaging 2 pounds, but up to 4 pounds. That shows the effectiveness of moving baits.

And if that doesn't work, get a drop-shot and try to find bass deep ... but no guarantees.

Crappie fishing has been soooooo good for so long and doesn't show any sign of slowing down. It's been that way for 2 or 3 years now. Shiners and jigs are accounting for countless slabs up and down the lake. Most of them are suspended in 15- to 18-foot depths over brush piles in 25-foot depths. ■



**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.



# Deep SIX slab TRICKS

By Kinny Haddox

**TOP PRO TEAMS  
SHARE COLD-WEATHER  
TRIPS FOR CATCHING  
CHRISTMAS CRAPPIE.**

**D**ecember isn't the most-popular month to catch crappie. The good fish aren't always easy to find. Hunting, football and the holidays have everybody busy. Many anglers just have too much to do. But stalking crappie in December can be one of the best fishing gifts anglers can give themselves.

Crappie tend to gather up in deeper water along channels and old river beds. In smaller bodies of water, they try to find the deepest water. In other lakes, crappie aren't far from where they

are caught most of the rest of the year. It boils down to the fact that crappie will go wherever baitfish take them. They head to wherever they hear the dinner bell ring.

We talked to Santa, and he doesn't have time to crappie fish, either, but he told us to talk to some of his favorite crappie fishermen on his "nice" list and get their take on Christmas crappie. Here's their present to us — tips and seasons greetings for December crappie fishing.

**CAPPS AND COLEMAN >**

## CAPPS AND COLEMAN

In the world of crappie fishing, Ronnie Capps and Steve Coleman, both from Tiptonville, Tenn., are like peanut butter and jelly. Everybody's heard of the most-dominant duo in the history of competitive crappie fishing.

You've heard the line, "We're gonna need a bigger boat?" Well, Capps and Coleman must often find themselves thinking "We're gonna need a bigger trophy room." They won just about every tournament and angler title there is out there.

"Through the winter, it's a fun time to catch fish" Capps said. "People get cold hands and don't want to fight the weather, but it's great fishing. The fish get a little more lethargic, which is good, because they won't run from you as bad — and they'll still bite. The electronics today is so good you can go to an area, and if you don't see fish in just a few minutes, you probably need to crank up and go somewhere else.

"With the new (electronics), we are learning every day. My newest tip is that you need to watch fish closely and figure out how far they can see the bait," he said. "They'll make a little

reaction when they see it. When they do, stop the bait. Don't get any closer. If they see it, make them come to you. When you do that, you'll get close to 110% hookups. If you drop it too close, you'll spook them or be in an awkward spot and maybe not get a good hookset."

Capps also said you need to figure out the optimum bait size, too. For the most part, he downsizes everything, but sometimes when it's cold, they'll like a big bait. Above everything else, he said, learn your equipment and how to fish it. That takes time. And learn pinpoint boat control. Without it, you won't catch nearly as many.

Coleman said fishing deep requires getting your bait down where the crappie are and keeping it there. There's no better way to do that, he said, than fishing a double-minnow rig with a big weight.

"Most fishermen set their bait the right depth, but a lot of them don't have enough weight to keep the bait where the fish are," he said. "When you move your bait, it is going to come up a foot or two, especially spider-rigging. Don't take yourself out of the game by doing that.



“And as with almost anything, two is better than one, so we fish the double-minnow rig a lot anytime we are in deeper water. You can set one bait a foot or 18 inches apart from the other and cover a lot more water.”

Nobody knows this technique better than Capps and Coleman. B'n'M even sells a pre-rigged, double-minnow rig named for the two. It comes in several choices, with different size weights for different depths.

## THE 'CRAPPIE MATES' >




*Kinny Haddox has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 45 years. He publishes a daily website, [lakedarbonnelife.com](http://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.*

When crappie gang up in deep water, so do fishermen. Anglers have to learn to concentrate on their fishing, not the other fishermen, to be successful.



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Dan Dannenmueller fishes lots of baits, but one that many anglers could use more in deep water is a Road Runner with a minnow trailer for a bigger profile.

### THE 'CRAPPIE MATES'

Dan and Sue Dannenmueller of Wetumpka, Ala., are one of several husband/wife teams fishing pro crappie circuits. They are among the top crappie anglers and active ambassadors for the sport. He is a past national champion and a regular presenter at Crappie University and other seminars. He and his wife teamed up to form Crappie Mates and fish together professionally.

Experience on all kinds of lakes has taught Dan Dannenmueller to be versatile. When the water is cold, he has five techniques he uses to catch crappie:

- Vertically jigging small spoons like a Thundermist Singnose in gold or silver;
- Fishing blade baits like Johnson Thinfishers;
- Vertically jigging small jigs like Bobby Garland Itty Bitty heads and jigs;
- Drop-shotting Blakemore's Live Shotn's;
- Casting a Road Runner Classic Marabou.

Of those, casting and winding the Road Runner is the easiest for inexperienced fishermen. Dannenmueller fishes all of these baits close to stumps, brush or contour breaks with a slow presentation and very little movement. He finds the right spot using his Garmin Livescope.

"When casting the Road Runner for deep fish, you just find the depth fish are at, then cast the bait, count it down a second per foot, and slowly retrieve it. The fish will nail it in 20 feet of water just like they will in two."

Sue Dannenmueller said she and her husband have the best luck in the warmest water in the lake, even in the winter. That's her tip.

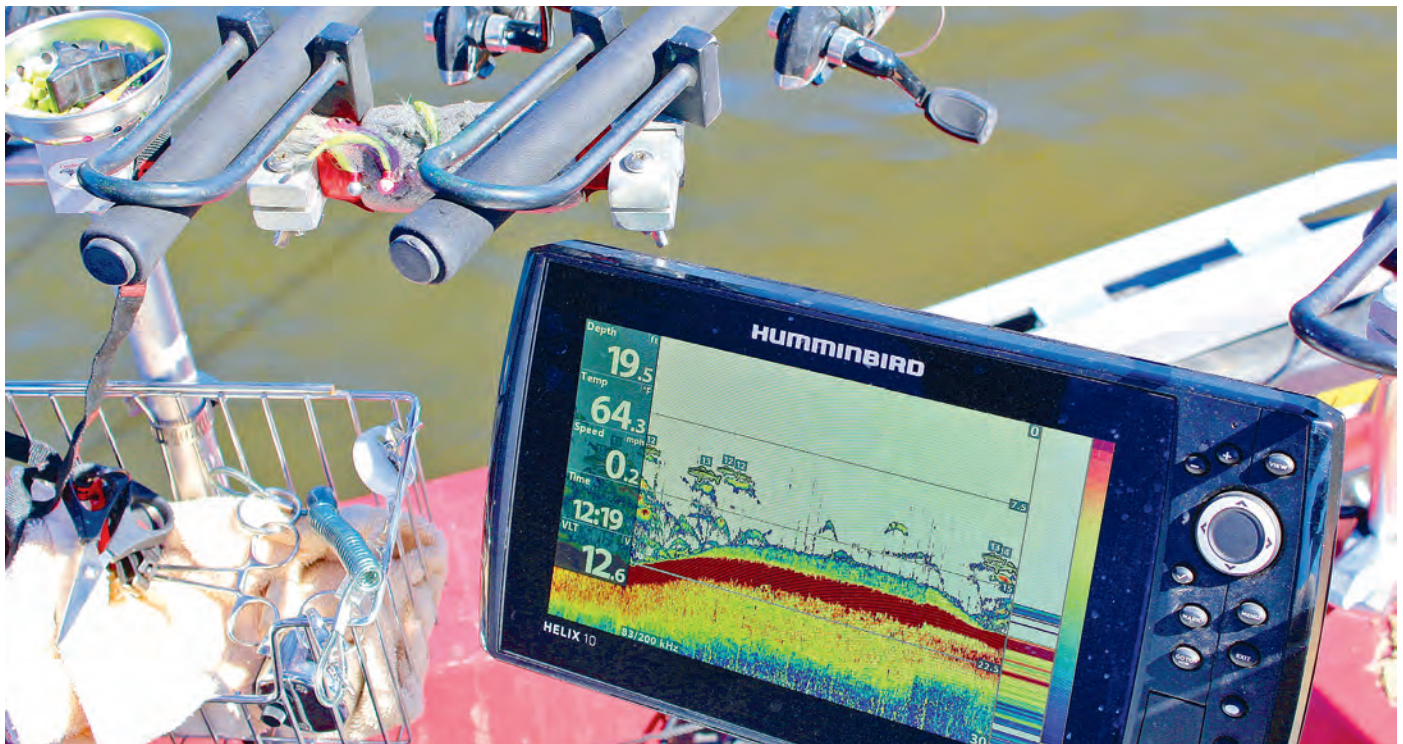
"Lakes cool from the shallower, upper reaches first, to the deep southern areas last," she said. "The more-active fish will be in the higher water temperatures. Look for areas with lots of



baitfish. You can do that (with) electronics or watch for water birds that feed on shad. They will also give these areas away. The fish will be roaming with the schools for shad."

One more good tip. If your lake has bridges, they are crappie havens in the winter.

Electronics play a major part in locating crappie when they are in deep water, especially when the fish are suspended.



## LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Father/son crappie-fishing teams are also growing in numbers. One that is unique is the team of Trey and Tucker Underwood of Ruston, La. They catch fish like two seasoned veterans, but Tucker is only 8 years old. Recently, they finished in the top 10 in two national tournaments and in the top 25 in the Crappie Masters National Championship. If you think Tucker is just the “net man,” think again.

“The highlight of my national championship was watching Tucker catch their biggest fish of the tournament about 30 yards from me,” another crappie pro said. “He did it all by himself while dad was at the other end of the boat.”

Tucker Underwood is already driving the boat, sitting up front and watching the electronics. The big fish he caught in the national championship tournament weighed 2.02 pounds — his first 2-pound slab. He also landed four of the team’s 7-fish limit by himself.

“That was the most exciting thing for me,” Tucker Underwood said. “It’s the first 2-pounder I ever caught, and it came in the national championship.”

He was single-poling on that fish, but his favorite technique is spider-rigging. In fact, that’s his best tip to other fishermen.

“I like to spider-rig, because you have more than one bait in the water at a time. I like to hold the pole in my hand when I can, because you feel the bite better and you miss fewer fish,” he said. “I also like fishing the double-minnow rig, too. I caught that big fish differently. I saw the fish out from the boat on the electronics, and I cast a small purple/chartreuse tail bladed jig out past the fish and reeled it right in front of the fish. The fish nailed it. They had been spooky, so I thought that was the best way to get him. He nailed it.”

Trey Underwood said that when the fish go deep and congregate, there is usually a crowd. He likes to go fish in those areas when he’s after numbers, but when he goes for big fish in colder months, he eases away from the crowd and tries to find fish in deeper sloughs off the main area everybody else is fishing.

“Two things I like to do is get away from where the bigger schools are, and I like to upsize my bait,” he said. “I use bigger jigs and get away from lighter, hair jigs and go big like 2½- and 3-inch tails. Sometimes, I’ll even tip it with a minnow. This time of year, the fish are wanting to eat. The bigger fish like bigger baits.”



Tucker Underwood of Ruston shows off a slab crappie the size that not many anglers his age, 8, catch very often.

He also uses bigger weights in cold weather. “I’ll even go to a ¼-ounce jighead sometimes, because I want to get the bait down there as quickly as I can, keep it down there where the fish are and then quickly move to the next spot and do the same thing over again,” he said. ■



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**T**was the night before Christmas  
and all across the lake  
Only two ducks were still stirring,  
a hen and a drake.

The yo-yo's were hung on the boat dock with care,  
In hopes some slab crappie would soon swim  
up there.

The coots were nestled, all snug by the shore,  
They were there by the dozens; three, no...  
maybe four.

Mamma in her LSU sweatshirt and I in my  
fishing cap,  
Threw the ball to the puppy (when he wasn't  
on our lap).

When out on the boat dock there arose such  
a clatter,

I sprang to my feet like I saw a big seafood  
platter.

Away to the back porch, I flew like a flash,  
And saw one of the yo-yo's with a big fish,  
splash, splash.

The moon on the crest of the slow-rolling  
waves

Shined on a giant sac-a-lait that would make  
anyone rave.

When, what to my wondering eyes did I fix,  
But a whole bunch of crappie — four, five,  
no... now six!

But I stopped in my tracks from walking so  
quick,

There in a big cypress pirogue sat jolly St. Nick!

His little log boat moved to the dock just the  
same,

Pulled by eight big fish that he all called all by  
name:

“Now, CATFISH! now, BREAM, now LARGE-  
MOUTH BASS!

On, SHINER! on CRAPPIE! on CARP of the  
grass!

Go empty those yo-yo's. Now get on the ball;  
Now swim away, swim away, swim away all!

It was truly a great sight, the blessings of lake  
life

That put big smiles on the faces of me and the  
wife.

They had flown in a circle then came down  
from the blue

With the boat full of presents and old St.  
Nicholas, too.

And then, in a twinkling, like something from  
a wish

I heard splishing and splashing from each of  
his fish.

As I drew in my hand, and was turning  
around,

Across the screen porch St. Nicholas came  
with a bound.

He dressed in red plaid flannel with green  
camo boots

His clothes covered with moss just like those  
old coots.

He said with a smile, “Sorry, I turned loose  
your fish”

But it's Christmas for them, too, and it was  
their wish.

His eyes — how they twinkled! It was such a  
sight

Like a fresh new bottle of chartreuse glitter  
Crappie Bites.

I wasn't really sure what he was fixing to do  
With that big old beard white as a 48-quart  
Iglloo.

# CHRISTMAS ON THE LAKE



**St. Nick's visit frees the slabs and brings  
Christmas cheer to the bayou**

He looked first to the left, and then to the right  
He smiled at the Viennas and cheese we left for his flight.  
He stood tall as he walked, you might say that he swaggers,  
Even with a belly that shook like black grape Jelly Wagglers.

He was chubby and plump, like my old fishing buddy,  
And I laughed out loud though his old boots were all muddy.  
Then I saw on his back a big sack of fish bait,  
To catch fish plenty of fish, if I could just wait!

He spoke not a word; put them under the tree,  
Road Runners, Rat-L-Traps, an LSU-colored Balsa B;  
A new minnow bucket and a new rod and reel,  
Now I'd be able to catch us plenty a meal!

Then he sprang to his pirogue, to his fish gave a holler,  
And headed across the lake but he said, "Now don't you follow"  
They splashed down the channel, down the boat lane to  
the right,  
And called out with a jolly laugh,

"Merry Christmas to all and to all, a good night!"

— Kinny Haddox



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**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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BEST DAYS				
2020 DEC	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCL. VALUE
Tue 1	██	██	██	58
Wed 2	██	██	██	50
Thu 3	██	██	██	40
Fri 4	██	██	██	36
Sat 5	██	██	██	36

Sun 6	██	██	██	40
Mon 7	██	██	██	48
Tue 8	██	██	██	36
Wed 9	██	██	██	29
Thu 10	██	██	██	26
Fri 11	██	██	██	34
Sat 12	██	██	██	42

Sun 13	██	██	██	49
Mon 14	██	██	██	51
Tue 15	██	██	██	40
Wed 16	██	██	██	29
Thu 17	██	██	██	19
Fri 18	██	██	██	15
Sat 19	██	██	██	16

Sun 20	██	██	██	23
Mon 21	██	██	██	34
Tue 22	██	██	██	26
Wed 23	██	██	██	22
Thu 24	██	██	██	24
Fri 25	██	██	██	26
Sat 26	██	██	██	37

Sun 27	██	██	██	50
Mon 28	██	██	██	63
Tue 29	██	██	██	69
Wed 30	██	██	██	60
Thu 31	██	██	██	51

25 50 75  
AVERAGE

LUNAR PERIODS				
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED				
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
6:06 pm	11:47 pm - Midnight	8:09 am	11:23 am - 2:53 pm	☉
6:56 pm	Midnight - 3:23 am	9:05 am	12:12 pm - 3:48 pm	☉
7:52 pm	12:40 am - 4:16 am	9:58 am	1:05 pm - 4:41 pm	☉ HIGH
8:53 pm	1:35 am - 5:07 am	10:46 am	2:00 pm - 5:32 pm	☉
9:56 pm	2:31 am - 5:57 am	11:29 am	2:56 pm - 6:22 pm	☉

11:02 pm	3:30 am - 6:42 am	12:07 pm	3:55 pm - 7:07 pm	☉
	4:28 am - 7:24 am	12:42 pm	4:53 pm - 7:49 pm	☉ HALF
12:07 am	5:25 am - 8:05 am	1:14 pm	5:50 pm - 8:30 pm	☉
1:14 am	6:25 am - 8:43 am	1:46 pm	6:50 pm - 9:08 pm	☉
2:22 am	7:26 am - 9:22 am	2:18 pm	7:51 pm - 9:47 pm	☉
3:32 am	8:29 am - 10:05 am	2:53 pm	8:54 pm - 10:30 pm	☉
4:44 am	9:33 am - 10:51 am	3:32 pm	9:58 pm - 11:16 pm	☉ Perigee

5:58 am	10:39 am - 11:41 am	4:18 pm	11:04 pm - Midnight	☉
7:10 am	11:46 am - 12:38 pm	5:10 pm	Midnight - 12:06 am	☉ NEW
8:18 am	12:50 pm - 1:38 pm	6:09 pm	12:11 am - 12:49 pm	☉ LOW
9:18 am	1:49 pm - 2:41 pm	7:13 pm	1:15 am - 2:03 am	☉
10:09 am	2:43 pm - 3:41 pm	8:19 pm	2:14 am - 3:06 am	☉
10:51 am	3:31 pm - 4:39 pm	9:23 pm	3:08 am - 4:06 am	☉
11:27 am	4:10 pm - 5:36 pm	10:25 pm	3:56 am - 5:04 am	☉

11:58 am	4:46 pm - 6:28 pm	11:23 pm	4:35 am - 6:01 am	☉
12:26 pm	5:20 pm - 7:18 pm		5:11 am - 6:53 am	☉ HALF & WINTER
12:52 pm	5:52 pm - 8:08 pm	12:20 am	5:45 am - 7:43 am	☉
1:18 pm	6:24 pm - 8:56 pm	1:16 am	6:12 am - 8:33 am	☉
1:44 pm	6:56 pm - 9:46 pm	2:11 am	6:49 am - 9:21 am	☉ Apogee
2:12 pm	7:31 pm - 10:37 pm	3:07 am	7:21 am - 10:11 am	☉
2:44 pm	8:11 pm - 11:27 pm	4:03 am	7:56 am - 11:02 am	☉

3:20 pm	8:52 pm - 12:22 am	5:01 am	8:36 am - 11:52 am	☉
4:02 pm	9:40 pm - 1:16 am	6:00 am	9:17 am - 12:47 pm	☉
4:50 pm	10:33 pm - 2:09 am	6:58 am	10:05 am - 1:41 pm	☉ FULL
5:45 pm	11:28 pm - Midnight	7:53 am	10:58 am - 2:34 pm	☉ HIGH
6:45 pm	Midnight - 3:04 am	8:43 am	11:53 am - 3:29 pm	☉

ANY LUNAR PERIOD IS ENHANCED WHEN IT OVERLAPS A KEY SOLAR PERIOD. THE BEST OF THESE OVERLAPS ARE DESIGNATED BY THE SUN SYMBOLS:  
 ☉ = DAWN ☉ = HIGH NOON ☉ = DUSK

WHILE THE LESSER MOONRISE AND -SET OVERLAPS (ABOUT 30 MIN. BEFORE AND AFTER THE LISTED TIME) ARE DESIGNATED BY BOLD BLACK TYPE.

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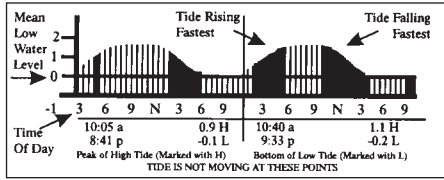
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## How to use the SPORTSMAN Tide Guide



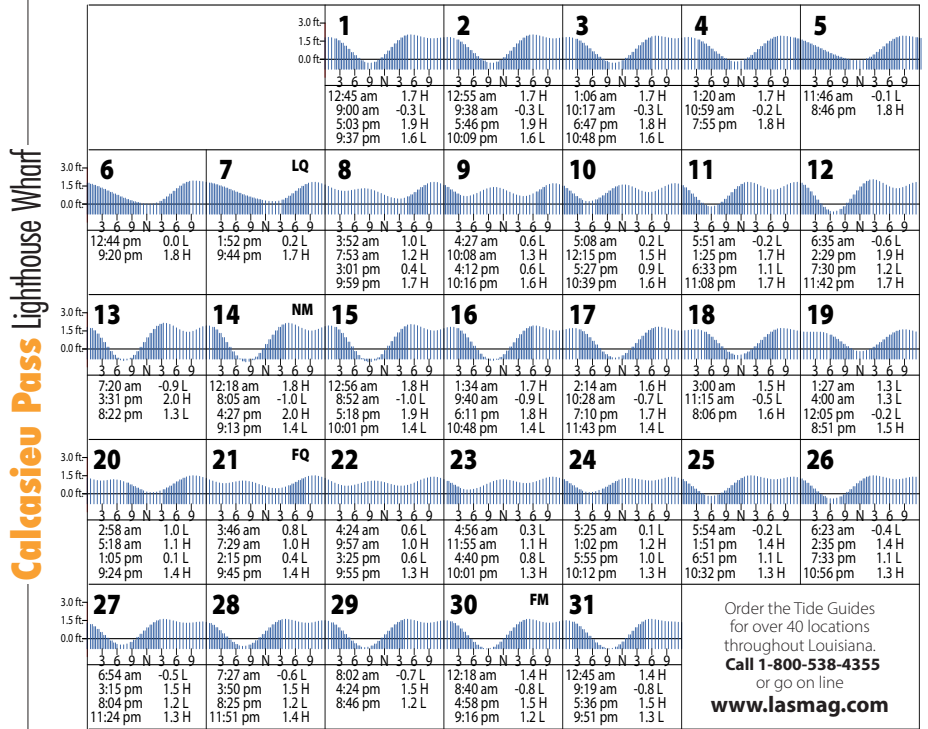
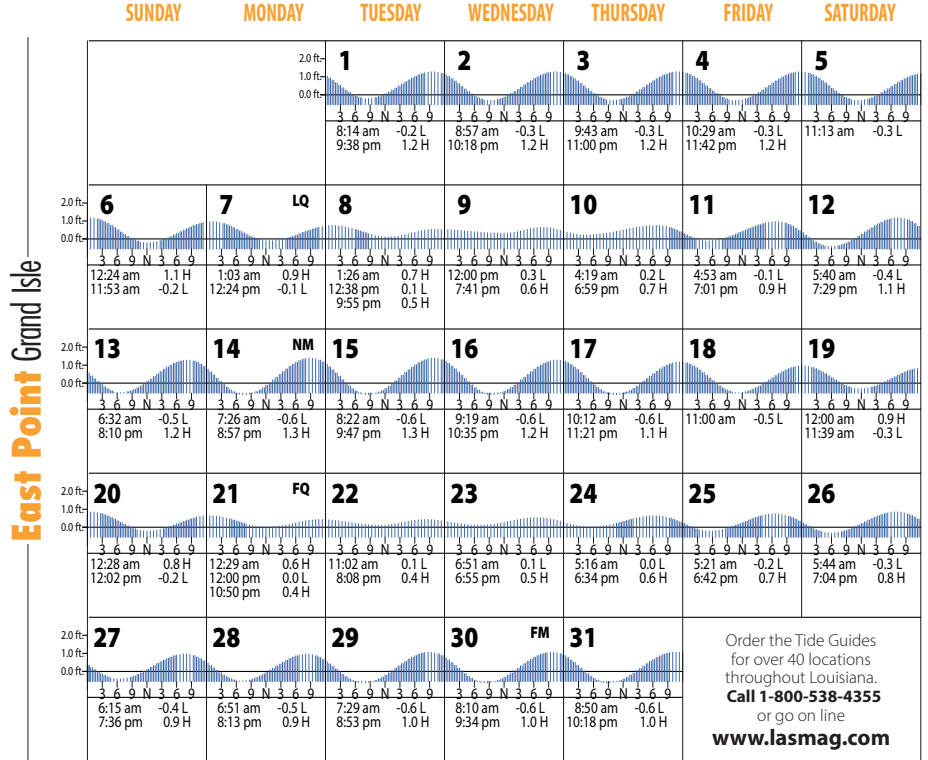
Fish feed most actively when the tide is moving. Louisiana Sportsman has made it simple to spot the most-active feeding periods each day in the Tide Guide. Just fish those times indicated in black. To find the best time to fish your favorite honeyhole, find the spot under Tide Corrections that is closest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

### Tide Corrections

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





# Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK

Taylor Lamkin and Josh Bradbury caught this 22-pound, 34-inch redfish off of Little Lake on Aug. 31.

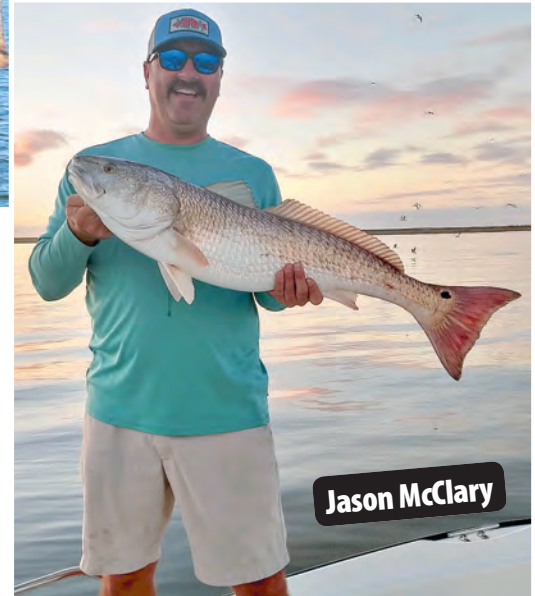
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Send us your photos, and you may appear on the pages of the most widely read outdoor magazine in the Bayou State. Send clean, sharp shots of you with your fish, deer, ducks, rabbits, squirrels, etc. to [images@LouisianaSportsman.com](mailto:images@LouisianaSportsman.com)

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



**Taylor Lamkin & Josh Bradbury**



**Jason McClary**

This 34-inch redfish was caught on live shrimp under a popping cork by Jason McClary of Covington while fishing Lake Borgne near Chef Menteur Pass.



**Ashley Rivet**

On Oct. 16, Ashley Rivet scored her first bow kill on a hunt with her husband, Matt Rivet, at a hunting club in Fardoche.



**Madison Sheppard**

Madison Sheppard, 20, took her first buck from 120 yards using a CVA .35 Whelan, while hunting with her grandfather in Franklin Parish.



**Owen and Ellie Guilliot**

Owen Guilliot, 11, and sister Ellie Guilliot, 13, were fishing with their grandparents for bream in Henderson on July 2.



**Neal & Shane Laws**

Neal Laws and his son, Shane Laws, show off the best two out of the five redfish they caught while fishing out of Cocodrie.



**Tucker Johnson**

Tucker Johnson, 15, downed this 125-inch, 8-point buck in Sabine Parish.



**Donna O'Brien**

Donna O'Brien with a red snapper caught out of Port Fourchon on July 4.



**Logan Gautreaux**

Logan Gautreaux with a late-spawn sac-a-lait from Lake Martin. He and his crew caught their limit that day.



**Terry Decoux**

Terry Decoux with fish caught in a ditch that connects to Lake Fausse Pointe.



**Tom Sternberg**

This big Lafitte redfish was caught by Tom Sternberg on Sept. 27 during a Sunday morning fishing trip with friends.



# Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



**Michael & Thomas Guthrie**

Michael and Thomas Guthrie with a nice catch of blue cats while running jugs in Shark Bayou.



**Anslie Blalock**

On Oct. 10, Anslie Blalock killed her first buck of the season and personal best to date hunting just outside of Jonesboro. She shot the 8-point buck from 98 yards using a Ruger American .300 Blackout loaded with Hornady Black 110-grain V-Max ammunition.



**Winston Lambert**

Eight-year-old Winston Lambert shows off his first bull red.



**Coleman Inzerella**

Coleman Inzerella boated his first king mackerel fishing out of Cypremont Point.



**Bobby, Chris & Gary**

Bobby Nunol, Chris Smith and Gary Nunez, Jr. pose with some gators on Sept. 5 at Pass A Loutre WMA.



**Chase Bourgeois**

Chase Bourgeois caught this 24¾-inch bass fishing a kayak tournament on Oct. 1.



**Lillie Price**



**Gracie Price**

Ten-year-old twins Lillie and Gracie Price both killed bucks in Union Parish within a two-week period. Lillie killed her 10-point over the youth weekend in Area 2 on Oct. 11, and Gracie killed her buck on opening day in Area 2 on Oct. 31. They both were assisted in finding their bucks by their uncle, Gary Cobb, and Blackmouth Cur dog Scout.



**Barrett Williams**



**Liam Shields**

Barrett Williams of Choudrant killed his first buck, a 6-point, in Jackson Parish on Oct. 24.

Liam Shields, 5, caught his first redfish out of Shell Beach in June.



# Hunting/Fishing SCRAPBOOK



**Matthew Michelli**

Matthew Michelli killed this 17-pound turkey, his first, on Bogue Chitto National Wildlife Refuge during the youth weekend. The gobbler sported a 10½-inch beard and 1¼-inch spurs.



**Isabel Nassar**

Two-year-old Isabel Nassar had a successful first fishing trip on the Amite River on March 19.



**Makayla Lee**

Makayla Lee with an Opelousas catfish caught on fresh bream while night fishing on the Ouachita River in West Monroe.



**William Bass**

Six-year-old William Bass proudly displays a beautiful red snapper.



**Charlotte Thibodeaux**

Charlotte Thibodeaux after a nice day catching reds near the Sulfur Mines in February.


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

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

**WATERFOWL SEASONS**

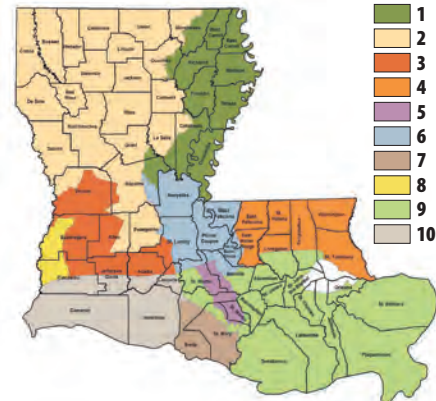
	EAST ZONE	WEST ZONE	COASTAL ZONE	
<b>DUCKS*, COOTS &amp; MERGANSERS</b>	Nov. 21 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 31	Nov. 14 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 24	Nov. 14 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 24	
	The daily bag limit for ducks is 6 and may include no more than 4 mallards (no more than 2 females), 3 wood ducks, 2 canvasbacks, 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 merganser. 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.			
<b>GEESE</b> (snow, blue, Ross & white-fronted [specklebelly])	<b>NORTH ZONE</b> Nov. 7 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 31	<b>SOUTH ZONE</b> 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.	
<b>CANADA GOOSE SEASON</b>	<b>NORTH ZONE</b> Nov. 7 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 31	<b>SOUTH ZONE</b> Nov. 14 - Dec. 6 Dec. 19 - Jan. 7	The daily limit for Canada geese is one per day, with a possession limit of three.	
<b>CONSERVATION ORDER FOR LIGHT GEESE</b>	<b>NORTH ZONE</b> Dec. 7-18 Feb. 1 - March 7	<b>SOUTH ZONE</b> 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**

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	

**2020 - 2021 Deer Hunting Areas**



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ALARIO BROTHERS.....	84	DOUG RUSHING REALTY, INC. ....	43	REALTREE OUTDOOR PRODUCTS .....	128
ALAS OUTFITTERS.....	34	DUVIC'S BOATS.....	73, 111, 124	REED'S METALS, INC.....	25
ASCENSION EQUIPMENT & RENT ALL .....	125	EMERY EQUIPMENT SALES & RENTALS .....	41	SCULLY'S.....	64, 114
BAKER AGRI-FOREST PROPERTIES.....	43	FIRST SOUTH FARM CREDIT .....	127	SEA TRAC OFFSHORE SERVICES .....	60
BLACKWELL OUTDOOR, INC.....	38	GATOR TAIL OUTBOARDS.....	55	SERVICE CHEVROLET.....	3
BLANCHARD'S REFRIGERATION .....	13	GATOR TRAX .....	89	SHIMANO AMERICAN CORP.....	91
BLUE WAVE BOATS .....	9	H&H MARINE.....	70	SMITH SHANKLIN SOSA LLC.....	INSERT
BOIL BOSS .....	76	HANKO'S.....	40	SOUTHERN OUTDOORS & MARINE,LLC....	13, 59, 77, 99
BOLLINGER ENTERPRISES LLC .....	37	HENDERSON.....	12	SOUTHLAND DODGE .....	39
BOND ARMS .....	23	HOUSEBOAT OUTLET .....	53	STERLING'S UPHOLSTERY .....	56
BREAUX AND DAIGLE MARINE.....	4	HUGHES WELDING AND MFG.....	22	TAYLOR MADE AUCTION & REALTY .....	31
BROWN REALTY COMPANY OF RAYVILLE, LLC.....	43	HYDRO GLOW, INC.....	79	TERREBONNE MARINE.....	71
BRYAN'S MARINE .....	53	HYDRO TURF.....	72	TIM'S MARINE .....	63, 81
CAJUN KOOLING.....	37	INTERSTATE GUNS.....	INSERT	TOHATSU AMERICAN CORPORATION .....	74, 75
CAJUN OUTBOARDS .....	57	JERRY'S MARINE .....	69	TRANSDUCER LIFT MOUNTS .....	76
CAPTAIN PAUL TITUS.....	92, 109	KITTERLIN CREEK OUTFITTERS .....	126	UNITED COUNTRY-SOUTHERN STATES REALTY .....	17
CAROLINA COMPOSITES, LLC.....	INSERT	LEMANN'S FARM SUPPLY, INC. ....	86	WHITETAIL PROPERTIES .....	19
CASUAL CREATIONS .....	81	LOUISIANA LOTTERY .....	5	WILD HOG RIDGE HUNTING CLUB.....	30
COURTESY GMC - LAFAYETTE.....	29	MCM LUMBER .....	109	WISE EYE TECHNOLOGY .....	16
COVER'S UNLIMITED .....	77	METRO BOATING .....	67	XPRESS BY ALUMA-WELD, INC. ....	2
CRESCENT CITY MEAT.....	33	MIKE GERALD'S TRAILER.....	21		
CUSTOM CORRUGATED AND SUPPLY .....	65	PARISH TRACTOR.....	15		
CWP PROSERIES.....	109	PEOPLE WHO THINK, LLC .....	21		
DAGATE'S MARINE .....	93	PUGLIA'S SPORTING GOODS .....	44		

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