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Big trout appear to be back in Louisiana waters in good numbes. Paul Fuselier of Covington caught this gator fishing with Capt. Jack Marino of Jack'd Up Charters out of Venice. Photo by Jack Marino.

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Outdoor UPDATE

WEST MONROE YOUNGSTER BOATS HUGE LARGEMOUTH

By Kinny Haddox

There's a campaign underway to get kids off the couch and back outside, enjoying the great outdoors.

But nobody has ever had to twist 7-year-old C.J. Colvin's arm to get out and go fishing. And it paid off on June 5 when the youngster from West Monroe reeled in a 13-pound bass from a private lake in Ouachita Parish.



C.J. Colvin caught this 13-pound bass in a Ouachita Parish pond.

"It was incredible," said C.J.'s father, Michael Colvin, who was in the boat along with fishing partner Bubby Brooks. "I mean, we had been catching a lot of small bass with kids and having a good time. The other kids all got tired and went back in, but C.J. wanted to stay with us.

"Bubby caught a small bass and was reeling it in when a huge bass hit it right at the boat. We weren't catching anything that big, so after a few minutes, we landed a real small bass and decided to try and use it for bait."

Brooks has caught big bass on live bait before, so he rigged up the small bass with a No. 2 circle hook through its tail. They cast the bait out, handed C.J. the rod and let the little bass swim around.

The rest of the story played out like a good fishing story.

LANDING THE LUNKER

Within a few minutes, C.J.'s rod started bending, and he started reeling. The big fish had taken the bait, but it didn't want to come to the boat. It didn't come to the top until it was almost back at the boat. In the meantime, Michael Colvin had grabbed his phone and started videoing, because he didn't know what C.J. had hooked. In fact, he said that, for a minute, he thought it might have been a baby alligator.

"They thought it was a gator, but I knew it was a big bass all along," C.J. said. "It was pulling just a tad bit for sure."

It wasn't long until the big fish swirled, and the adults knew it was a monster bass. It tried to jump and then, they knew it was a huge largemouth.

Excited, C.J. kept reeling, bringing the fish almost to the end of the rod, then around to the end of the aluminum boat where Brooks lipped the bass, and the three fishermen started shouting about the size of the fish.

"When the fish swam up to the boat, my dad jumped all the way from the front to the back with me," C.J. said. "He was pretty excited. But when Mr. Bubby grabbed the fish and held it up, it was really funny. He screamed like a girl."

SCALES? WHAT SCALES?

Then, the story got complicated. To get to the pond, Michael Colvin and Brooks had pulled their aluminum boat through a thicket with a 4-wheel drive vehicle. They had no scales and weren't close enough to get to one without risking the fish's life. They called C.J.'s mother, Danielle Colvin, and she brought two sets of digital bathroom scales to the pond. They weighed the fish, then the fish with Michael holding it, several times on both scales. Every time they weighed it, the scales showed 13 pounds.

The fish was 25½ inches long and had a 19-inch girth.

Its belly was bulging, and while it looked like it had eggs, Brooks believed it was just full of crawfish. They had cleaned several smaller bass, and all had crawfish in the stomach, and several other fish had spit out crawfish when they were being landed.

A FUTURE PRO

After the big bass was weighed, it was released into the pond and swam away. C.J., who has fished with bass pro Tyler Stewart of Dubach and declared on his school's career day that he wants to be a professional bass fisherman, wanted the fish back in the pond.

"We work hard to make sure our kids get outdoors, and I think this serves as a good example of why they need to put down those video games and go enjoy life," Michael Colvin said. "Bubby and I have been lifelong fishing partners, and now our sons, Bubby and Tate, do the same things we grew up doing. That's pretty special. And when you take them fishing, you never know what is going to happen." ▪



Fishing partners Bubby Brooks (left) and Michael Colvin (right) and their sons, Tate Brooks and C.J. Colvin, show off C.J.'s 13-pound bass, caught June 5.

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Steve Ruschmeier of Slidell fished the Big Bass Splash tournament at Toledo Bend on May 14 and landed this 9.87-pound largemouth bass.

SLIDELL MAN HITS JACKPOT IN TOLEDO BEND BASS TOURNAMENT

By Steve Himel

When Steve Ruschmeier of Slidell turned his boat's ignition key on Friday, May 14, he only had modest expectations: a great day on the water in one of Louisiana's most prolific bass fisheries, Toledo Bend. If things turned out better than expected, he might cash a check in the Big Bass Splash tournament he had entered so he could cover expenses.

At 7:45 a.m. everything changed. Fishing in a "community hole" that a friend had suggested, he tossed his favorite blue, soft-plastic lizard in an area where he had seen a big bass jump the day before. The strike nearly knocked the rod out of his hands, and it bent violently as the fish went deep, right under the boat.

"This can't be a bass," Ruschmeier shouted to a friend who was sharing his boat, "but get the net just in case."

The fish stayed deep, and after several trips around the boat, trolling motor and Power Pole, his partner slipped the net under it. When Ruschmeier finally saw the fish, his jaw dropped and opened wider than the 9.87-pound bass he had just landed.

"I was in shock; I knew it was between 8 and 10 pounds," he said. "I knew I had a tournament contender, so I rushed to the weigh-in station to get it recorded."

Ruschmeier caught this bass in the opening 2 hours of a 3-day tournament, so he had to wait two excruciating days to see if the weight would hold up.

"I only got two hours of sleep on Friday night after I collapsed from exhaustion," he confessed.

IN MEMORY OF A FRIEND

The days leading up to the tournament were difficult. Two days before, Ruschmeier's boss, a close friend, lost a battle with cancer.

"I was feeling very sad, but I knew (he) would have wanted me to fish the tournament, so I decided to dedicate the tournament to his memory," he said.

While prefishing on the day before the tournament, Ruschmeier saw a bass jump that he estimated to be at least 8 pounds.

"I knew (he) was trying to tell me something, so the next morning I started in that exact place, but the bite was not on, so I moved," he said. "A little later, something told me to go back, and on my fifth cast, I hooked up with the tournament winner. I guess (he) was right after all."

As the tournament progressed, many nice bass were weighed in, but all fell short of Ruschmeier's lunker. In the final hours of the tournament, Ruschmeier got nervous.

"I heard that there was a guy who had one in his boat over 9 pounds and was waiting for the 'bonus' hour to weigh it in," he said. "Right before the scales closed, he showed up with a fish that weighed 9.71 pounds — just .16 of a pound short of mine."

With that settled, Ruschmeier jumped into his new Triton bass boat and Ram 1500 truck and got his check for $11,000. Out of a total purse of more than $100,000, he hit the jackpot. ▪



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Paul Fuselier of Covington caught this big speck while fishing near Venice with his bachelor party on May 17.

ON THE COVER

Photo by Capt. Jack Marino

STORMY BACHELOR PARTY YIELDS HUGE TROUT

COVINGTON ANGLER BOATS ENORMOUS SPECK

By Will Martin

Paul Fuselier of Covington caught a 27¼-inch speckled trout while fishing near Venice on Monday, May 17. The fish weighed nearly 7 pounds, a giant given the size of trout caught in south Louisiana the past few years. Unfortunately, weather conditions were too rough for a more accurate determination of its weight.

The fishing trip was a bachelor party excursion in honor of Fuselier, a 38-year-old employee of Coca Cola Bottling Company. Fuselier had a friend and two family members with him, doing their best not to fall overboard. The motor whined as their guide, Capt. Jack Marino of Jack'd Up Charters (504-214-2946), made for calmer water.

"We went out, and the wind was blowing 25 mph," Fuselier said. "We thought the wind had killed the trout fishing, so we switched to redfish."

They caught three or four redfish and a big drum; it wasn't easy.

"We were struggling," Fuselier said.

After trying two or three spots, Marino said, "Let's take a ride."

It was the sort of move bass fishermen routinely make. Marino maneuvered the boat behind some rocks and into a narrow windbreak. He'd gotten the wind direction spot on, and they were somewhat sheltered.

On the Gulf side of the rocks, 8- to 10-foot seas were cresting, the leading edge of a storm system that would cause extensive flooding in Prairieville and other nearby towns by mid-week.

THE RIGHT CALL

They had caught 3 redfish in the 30- to 32-inch range, when the wind shifted. After each cast, the wind would immediately move their corks away from the rocks. The solution was to remove the corks and fish on the bottom, and three of the fishermen started to re-rig.

But not Fuselier; he left his rig alone, having a hunch, a feeling in his gut that told him to keep using the Four Horsemen cork. He threaded on the largest shrimp in the livewell.

Fishing with a Daiwa Procyon combo spooled with 30-pound braid, he heaved the cork and shrimp.

"I threw my bait as close to the rocks as I could get it," Fuselier said, "and as soon as the cork touched the water, it disappeared.

"I was thinking, 'Here's another one of those big, giant redfish,'" Fuselier said, "so I set the hook hard and reeled with my rod all down and crazy.

"When I got the fish to the side of the boat, and everybody saw what it was, they couldn't believe it."

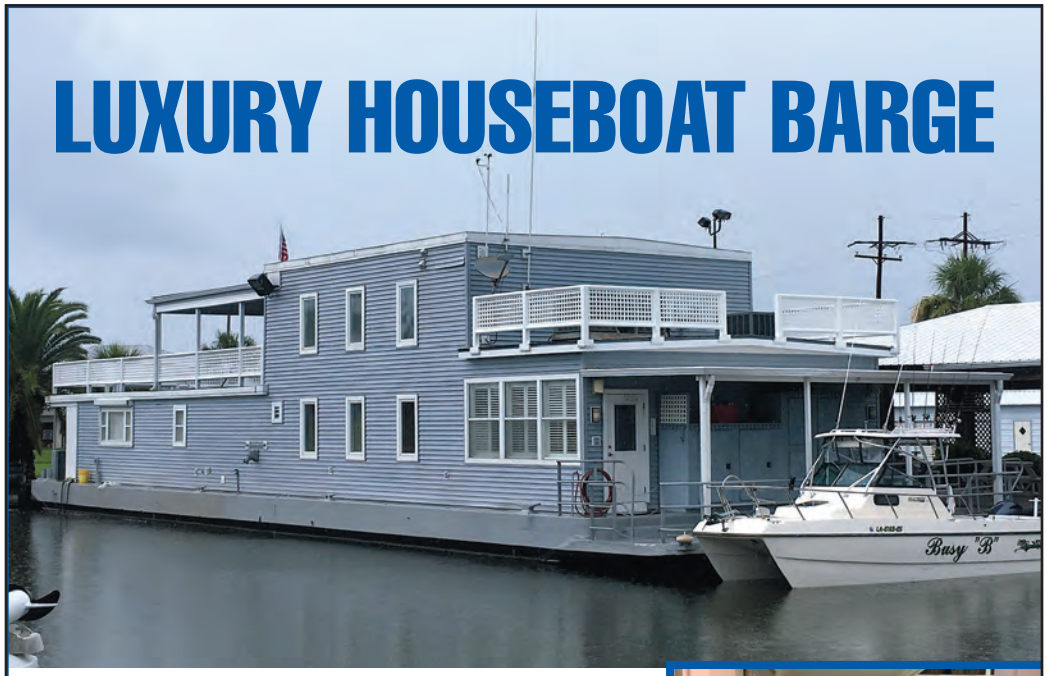
As the excitement died down, everyone got to work. There was a scramble for the net, but the fish was scooped into the boat without incident.

"But as soon as she hit the deck, the hook popped out," Fuselier said. "I mean, I had her by the skin."

Because of rough water and a questionable set of scales, Fuselier was hesitant to judge the fish's weight without a serious caveat.

"(The reading) bounced to 7 pounds, and I know that it weighed slightly more than 6½ pounds," Fuselier said. "I feel comfortable saying that the fish was 27¼ inches long and weighed somewhere between 6½ and 7 pounds." ▪

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J.R. Watson of Converse caught this 72-pound catfish on a trotline he'd strung near his house on Toledo Bend Reservoir.

FISHERMAN WRESTLES 72-POUND, TROTLINE CAT INTO TINY BOAT

By Will Martin

If someone said, "I caught a good-size shellcracker," you would have an idea about the size of the fish.

Occasionally, a comparison of a fish to a bit of human anatomy can help. For example: "That shellcracker was a 2-hander" or "That bass was as big around as your thigh."

As far as systems go, it works.

But from time-to-time, this custom is inadequate for the task. For instance, what if the fish is a 72-pound flathead catfish, and the closest anatomical equivalent is the breadth at the shoulders of a 5-foot-11, 240-pound man? Does "big catfish" cut the mustard when we're talking "like in the Bible" big?

J.R. Watson, a 42-year-old fisherman from Converse, knew that something strange was happening at night on the trotline he'd strung near his house on Toledo Bend Reservoir. Over the previous couple of weeks, many of his hooks had been straightened out and broken, so he added some beefier tackle, staging 500-pound braided lines and 12/0 circle hooks that he baited with bluegill.

The next day, May 13, Watson loaded his micro pontoon boat with his gear and set off to check his lines.

Within minutes, he was tugging on the end of his set.

"I could tell by where my markers were that there was something big on the other end," Watson said, "so I eased the line back down, and went back to my house to get my big net."

A few minutes later he was working his line, foot by foot, stage by stage, the way he always does. He assumed he had a giant gar on the line.

A BIGGUN ON THE LINE

As he drew closer, Watson thought he could make out a shape in the murk, but he wasn't sure what he was seeing. He kept looking for the long, powerful body of a big gar, but this was something else.

What in the world?

"When I saw what it was, I basically panicked," Watson said. "I knew the fish would hardly fit in the net, and I was out there in a Pelican 10E, a little plastic pontoon boat.

"I said, 'Lord, if it's meant for me to catch this fish, it's meant for me to catch it.'"

Watson played the giant flathead catfish for what must have seemed like an eternity.

"I just kept playing it and wearing it down," he said. "Finally, I got its head over into the net, and I just lunged over the side of the boat and grabbed the other side of the net and pulled it over into the boat.

"When I leaned over to cut the line, I happened to look down," Watson said, "and that black seam (where the two halves of the plastic pontoons are joined) was underwater, and I knew that if that seam was underwater, water was getting into the pontoons."

After he cut the line, he scooted as much gear and fish as he could to the other side of the boat to try to balance the weight. "I left its head in the net, because I knew if it started to kick, it would knock me, my seat, and everything out of the boat."

"Pelican says that the boat won't sink because the pontoons are supposed to have Styrofoam in them," Watson said, "but I didn't want to find out."

GETTING THE CAT WEIGHED

Luckily, he made it to shore with the fish, his gear and the boat, but Watson doesn't credit luck with what happened on the water that day. "It was just a God-gift is all I know," he said, "because there is no reason that I should have even got that fish into that little boat."

"The only way I had to weigh (it) was on bathroom scales, so I weighed myself, and then weighed myself holding the fish. I did the math, and it came out to 72 pounds."

Watson is 5-foot-11 and 240 pounds.

"The head of that fish is as wide as my chest," he said. "I told my wife that I'd have been upset if I had to throw back my fish to save my boat."

She said: "You would have sunk that boat before you turned that fish loose.'" ▪





Outdoor UPDATE

CONCORDIA PARISH HONEY HOLE BRINGS THE BREAM

By Will Martin

Kelvontae Scott, a 22-year-old fisherman from Jonesville, was touched by grace on May 26 while fishing in Concordia Parish.

He had one of those magical afternoons on the water that keeps us all coming back, again and again, to the sun, to the heat, to the bugs.

Scott's story begins like so many of the best fish stories do.

"I didn't plan on going fishing yesterday…." he said.

But plans change.

"I got me a little honey hole in Concordia Parish," Scott said, "and I decided that I was going to have to go down."



Kelvontae Scott of Jonesville caught these bream on crickets floated 2 feet under a cork in Concordia Parish.

Scott was surprised when he got to the launch.

"It's usually packed when I'm there, but (that day), I was the only boat out there." Scott said. "I didn't think the fish were biting."

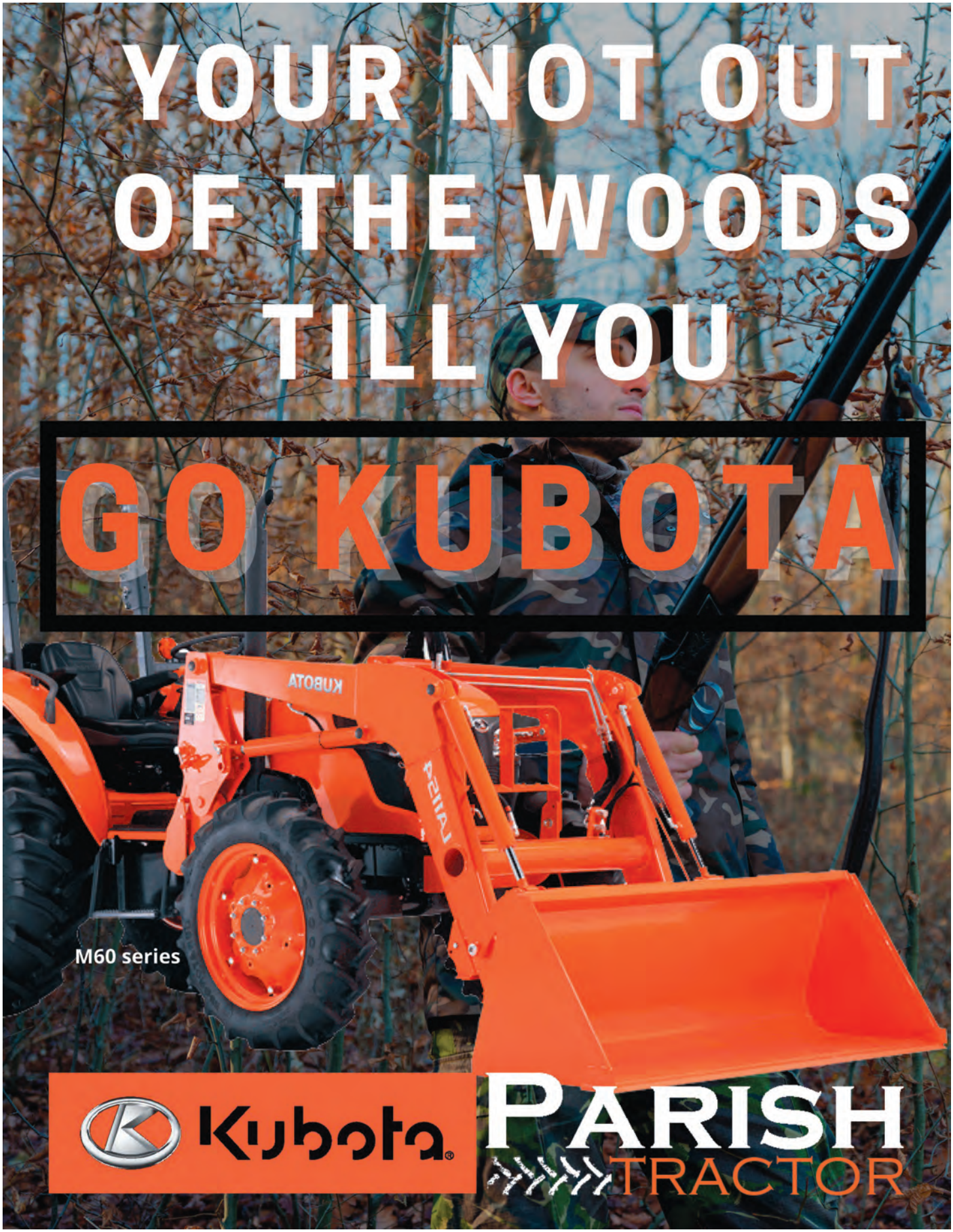
But if people stayed away from the water that day because they thought the bream weren't biting, the joke was on them.

"When I got down to my honey hole, the fish were hitting as soon as I put my line out," Scott said. "I was pulling it in, and putting it out, and pulling it in, and putting it out. It got to the point that I was leaving fish in the boat because I didn't have time to put them in the cooler."

Scott caught his fish on crickets floated 2 feet under a cork. They were all caught in the shade, between 3 and 6 in the afternoon.

"Fishing is my passion," said Scott. "It's what I love to do, and it's what I want to keep doing." ▪




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Derrick Dell, Jimmy Brown, William Tucker and Todd Merseal show off the big swordfish Dell reeled in on a May 8 trip out of Venice.

MISSOURI MEN HAVE HUGE TRIP OUT OF VENICE: TUNA, SWORDFISH

By Will Martin

While fishing offshore out of Venice with John and Katie Duplass of Pelican Charters on May 8, four fishermen from Missouri experienced nirvana on the water.

When the trip was over, Jimmy Brown, Todd Merseal, William Tucker and Derrick Dell posed for a picture on the Venice docks — to taunt the neighbors — with six yellowfin tuna, two blackfin tuna and a 168-pound swordfish they caught .

But they brought back more than a respectable haul; they brought back a story about how a hundred variables swung their way, about an experience so pure and fundamental that years later they might hum *Heart-Shaped Box* and taste the sea.

BAIT TROUBLE EARLY ON

"Nobody could get bait that morning," Katie Duplass said. "We had 30 or 40 pogeys after 45 minutes of throwing the net, and we were about to (give up)."

It was after 8 a.m., and the group needed to get offshore, but the Duplasses decided to give it one more shot. They moved closer to the beach, and spotted a school of baitfish.

"John threw twice and caught 200 pogeys," Katie Duplass said. "So we got pretty lucky on the bait side."

She said that fishing for tuna had been tough for several weeks because of terrible weather, rough seas and seasonal changes,

causing fishermen to look for swordfish.

"It's that transition period into summertime," she said. "Bait's hard to get."

Luckily, when the group arrived at the tuna rig, the bite was on, but sharks were also in a feeding frenzy.

"That made us angry," Katie Duplass said, laughing, "catching sharks in 3,000 feet of water."

But even the sharks couldn't break the bite.

"The water was calm, and when we got to the rig, we were hooking tuna left and right; it was a fantastic day of tuna fishing," she said.

TUNA DRIVEN DEEP

By noon, the boat had six yellowfins and two blackfins on board, but trouble had arrived in the form of a big, blue marlin.

"We marked the marlin really good two or three times," Katie said. "Usually, when the marlin come in, the tuna dive deep, and the bite shuts off, and that's exactly what happened."

"I was stoked about the six yellowfins and two blackfins because of the way the fishing's been," she said. "But it was 12 o'clock, and we couldn't go back to the dock at 12 o'clock, you know?"

The Duplasses suggested that the fishermen pivot to targeting amberjack or swordfish.

"None of them had ever caught a swordfish," Katie DuPlass said, "so we headed for the sword grounds."

BIRTHDAY REDO

The offshore trip was the 22nd birthday present of one of the fishermen, Derrick Dell of St. Clair, Mo., who was on the rod when the big swordfish bit.

"They told me that last year was his 21st birthday," Katie Duplass said, "and he was unable to do anything to celebrate because of COVID; that's why this year, they were trying to make his birthday a little more special.

"Good luck trying to top this birthday present."

They had baits down for about 30 minutes when the action started.

"We noticed that the rod wasn't bouncing (normally); it was a slower bounce; so John put the boat in gear to drag the bait," Katie Duplass said. "We literally hooked the swordfish with the boat. It was insane. Once we got the weight off, the swordfish made a killer jump about 20 feet from the boat and then dove straight back down.

"So I belted (Dell) up, and then he fought that fish for an hour-and-a-half."

The 168-pound swordfish was hooked 1,200 feet deep. ■





This red piranha was caught earlier this spring in University Lakes in Baton Rouge.

Photo courtesy LDWF

PIRANHA FOUND IN LAKES IN BATON ROUGE

From News Reports

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) has verified that a single, red piranha was caught in University Lakes in Baton Rouge.

Red piranha, also known as red-bellied piranha, are native to South America and found in the Amazon basin. While their reputation in popular culture labels them as a vicious predator, piranhas are more likely to scavenge for dead or dying prey, including fish or crustaceans.

The department advises the public to use caution if they encounter a red piranha. LDWF believes this was a pet that was released into University Lakes. LDWF is investigating if there are more piranha in the University Lake system.

All piranha species are illegal to possess or sell in Louisiana.

If you have information, or if you think you caught a piranha, please do not return it to the water. Please contact Rob Bourgeois, LDWF Aquatic Nuisance Species Coordinator at rbourgeois@wlf.la.gov, 225-765-0765 or the LDWF aquatic invasive species hotline, 225-765-3977, or email at AquaticInvasives@la.gov. ▪

LWDF TICKETS TWO FOR BASS TOURNEYCHEATING

From News Reports

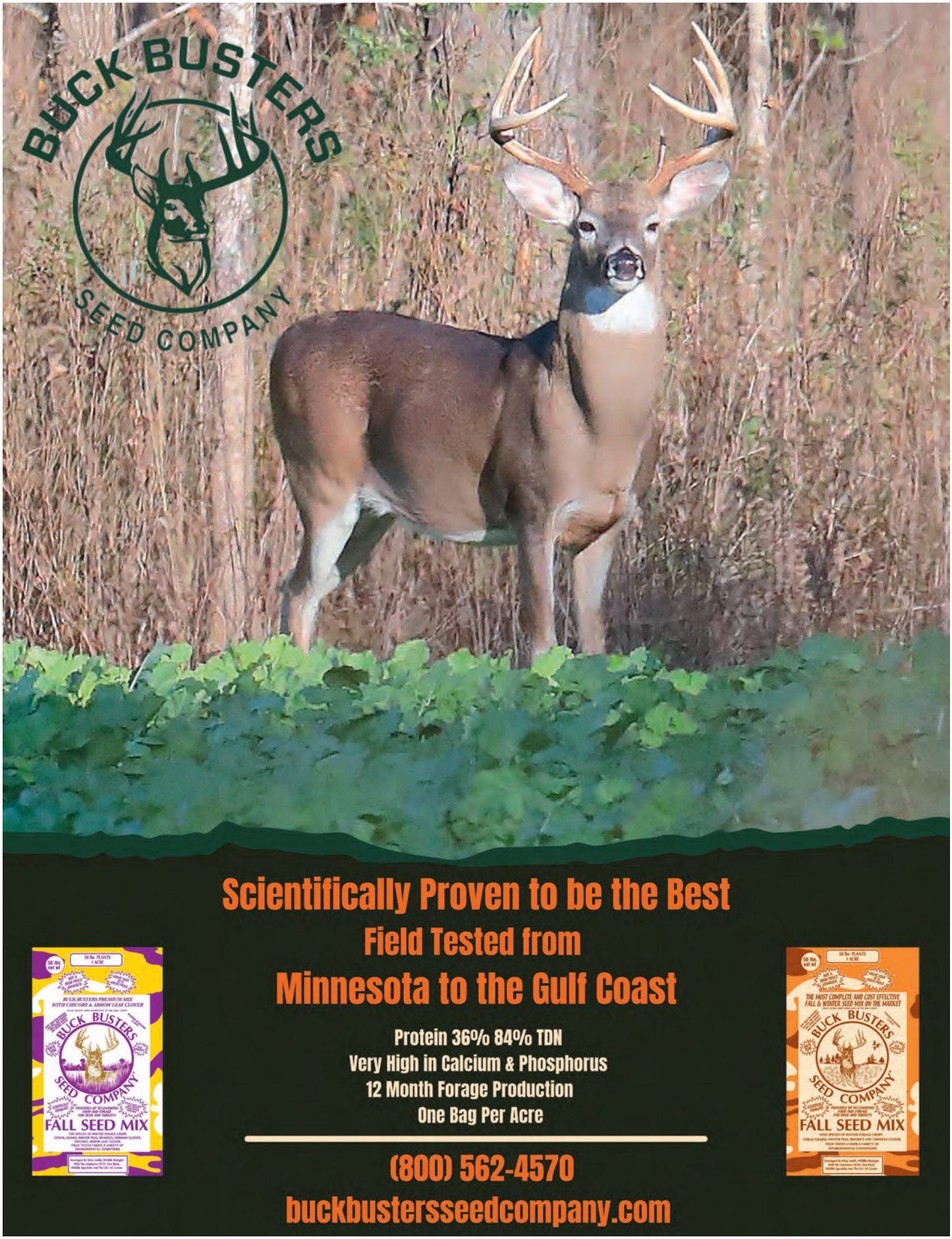
Enforcement agents from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries cited two Louisiana men for alleged contest fraud in Caddo Parish on May 29.

Agents ticketed Hunter Moss, 24, of Mooringsport, and Phillip Purcell, 30, of Oil City, for contest fraud in a bass tournament held on Caddo Lake.

Agents received a complaint that Moss and Purcell had committed contest fraud. During the investigation, agents learned that Moss and Purcell caught three bass previously during the week and kept them alive in a basket near a dock on the lake.

During questioning, Moss and Purcell admitted to retrieving the three bass from the dock when the tournament started. The three bass were then included in the five bass they weighed in for the tournament.

Contest fraud brings up to a $3,000 fine and one year in jail. ▪



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WEST ST. JOHN HIGH SCHOOL SENDS FOUR TO NATIONALS



Left to right: Vernon Silver (boat capt.), Khristian Rousseve, Devrin Harper, Jr., Shamar Pierre and Marvin Pierre (boat captain). Not pictured, Jermey Snyder.

By Will Martin

West St. John High School in Edgard is making waves in the high-school fishing world again, sending four students to the upcoming national championship.

Shamar Pierre, an 11th-grader, Khristian Rousseve, a 12th-grader, Devrin Harper, Jr., a 10th-grader, and Jermey Snyder, a 9th-grader, will be heading to Lake Hartwell in Anderson, S.C., for the 2021 TBF High School Fishing World Finals and National Championship on June 30-July 3.

Additionally, Pierre and Rousseve will compete in the 2021 Bassmaster High School Championship on Lake Chickamauga in Dayton, Tenn., July 29-31.

"This is the first time that they have ever fished in the national tournament," said Marvin Pierre, coach of the WSJ Anglers. "Hopefully, they'll fish hard, and we can come out of some of these top-spots and win these tournaments."

The team's road to the 2021 Bassmaster tournament began with a big win at the Northern Division Qualifier at San Miguel SRA Park on Toledo Bend Reservoir with a 13.39-pound bag. That victory over 140 other high-school teams allowed the WSJ Anglers to qualify for the state championships, where they finished 18th of 105 teams.

A LOT ON THE LINE

"They've got almost $3 million in cash, prizes, and scholarship money at the World Championship," Pierre said, "but with B.A.S.S., (in addition to) some scholarship money, they'll have colleges out there scouting."

Rousseve, recently put ink to paper, committing to fish for LSU Shreveport next year.

"Hopefully, they can all get scholarships out of this," Pierre said. ▪

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WHY ARE SOUTH LOUISIANA WATERS 'SUDDENLY' FILLED WITH ABOVE-AVERAGE SIZED SPECKLED TROUT THIS SPRING? IS DIRTY WATER TO BE APPLAUDED?

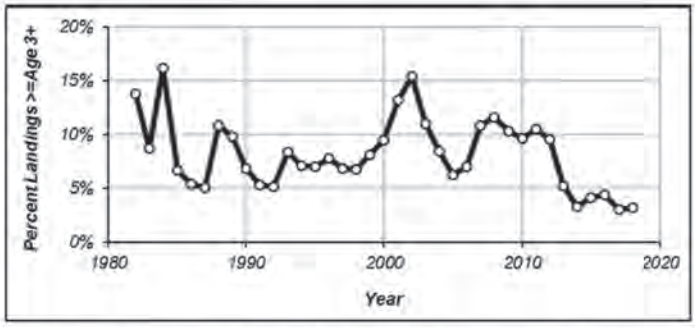
By Jon Miller

DON'T LOOK A GIFT TROUT IN THE MOUTH

Many anglers in southeast Louisiana have discovered that 2021 has come with a special gift for them, which is, on average,

A LARGER SIZE OF SPECKLED TROUT.

BELOW: The percentage of 3-year or older speckled trout in total Louisiana landings reached an all-time low in 2019, but it appears 2021 is a better year for anglers.



Data from the Assessment of Spotted Seatrout in Louisiana Waters 2019 Report showing the falling numbers of landed speckled trout which are 3 years of age or older.

Data from a 2019 survey reported that the percentage of the speckled trout population 3 years old or older had dropped to the lowest levels ever recorded. Not only were fewer older trout caught in the survey nets, but anglers' landings in this category had fallen below 5% of total landings.

According to aging data collected on speckled trout in the Gulf of Mexico, most 3-year-old female trout are between 15 and 23 inches long. Trout of this size can still be found in schools of similar-sized fish, whereas it is believed that 4- and 5-year-old trout tend to become more solitary. In southeast Louisiana, a 5-year-old trout is not going to have many peers anyway, so being a gator trout would be a lonely existence.

In 2021, the size of the speckled trout I've caught has increased noticeably; plenty of them are in that 3-year-old size range. Additionally, I have been catching these fish in quick succession, which indicates the presence of a shoal of trout. This is a change from the past few years, when I would typically only catch one or two 3-year-old trout from a single spot. Anecdotally, I am hearing many other fishermen say they are experiencing similar results.

The abundance of a 3-year-old class of female speckled trout in 2021 is likely not an indication that the spawning stock biomass has magically recovered, but it must surely be a sign of some positive change in the ecosys-

tem. Possibly data from the next trout assessment from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will shed light on whether we are seeing a significant change.

Seeing an abundance of these 3-year-olds makes me wonder whether they are here because of an improved spawn in 2018, a decrease in mortality or some ecological change. The measured spawning stock biomass when they were spawned in 2018 was near a record low, so the abundance of 3-year-old females today can hardly be attributed to a record high spawn in 2018.

I have not seen any indication that the harvest of speckled trout has decreased since 2018 and, in fact, it may have increased due to the spike in fishing during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Over the past few years, there has been a grassroots movement not to harvest large fish in an effort to improve the spawning biomass. It would be amazing if that was the cause of the abundance of 3-year-olds, but I suspect the number of trout released was small and could not have accounted for a large class of 3-year-olds already noted in 2021.

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

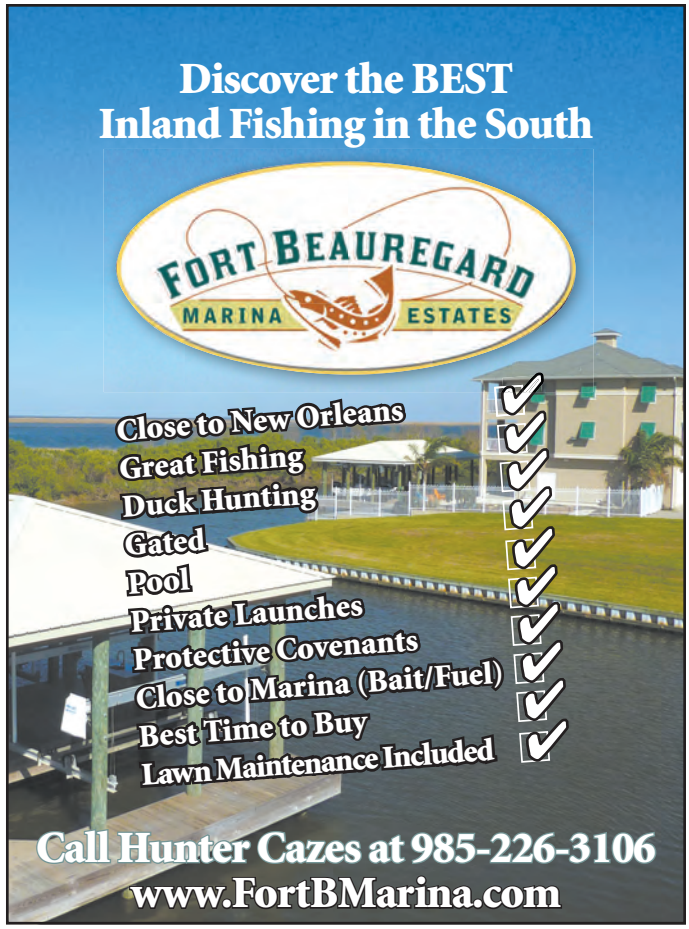
However, there has been a major ecological change since 2018 that directly affects speckled trout, and it is an increase in river water flowing into their habitat. While it would be hasty to attribute causation without having supporting scientific studies, I would like to explore the measurable and observable changes that have come with the increase in river water into south Louisiana marshes.



In the middle of May, I took a trip to Delacroix, an area I regularly fished until 3 years ago, in part because of the increased turbidity coming from Mississippi River water bleeding into the area. I recently talked with a friend who said that from January through April, he had caught more than 1,000 speckled trout in Delacroix, despite an abundance of river water stretching from the Mississippi River to Bayou Terre aux Boeufs. The trout landings included many female fish in the 3-year-old size range and a few that were even larger. He said that not only were the trout larger than in recent years, but the number of spring landings exceeded their record spring landings over the past 10 years.

In Delacroix, I found plenty of evidence of a long-term presence of river water, including abundant beds of widgeon grass and a slew of alligators. The water was also turbid from suspended particles, which looked like the silt I see in the Mississippi River at Baton Rouge.

GO WITH THE FLOW



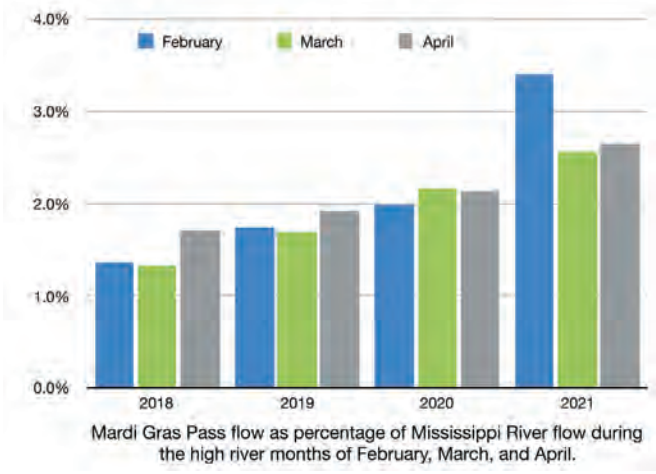


GO WITH THE FLOW

The largest flow of Mississippi River water into the Delacroix marshes is through the Mardi Gras Pass. This accidental levee breach in 2012 near East Pointe a la Hache has been growing each year, and its flow is now equivalent to a medium-sized river. When I stopped fishing Delacroix in 2018, it was having a substantial impact on water quality, and it has grown significantly in flow rate since 2018.

To understand how much it has grown, I plotted the Mardi Gras Pass flow rate as a percentage of the Mississippi River flow rate at Baton Rouge during the high-flow months of February, March, and April. The flow rate through the pass has doubled in 4 years and now discharges as much as 3% of the total Mississippi River volume.

In addition to the silt-driven turbidity, the freshwater from the river has been decreasing the salinity in the marshes around Delacroix. I pulled salinity data from the USGS water quality station in Crooked Bayou near Four Horse Lake from 2014 to May 2021, and the decreased water salinity is quite evident, especially during the lifetime of our current class of 3-year-old female trout.



Mardi Gras Pass flow as percentage of Mississippi River flow during the high river months of February, March, and April.

Let's not forget the mother of all river-water intrusions, the Bonnet Carré Spillway. This relief valve just north of New Orleans is opened when the Mississippi River height at the spillway exceeds 17 feet, and it can dump as much as 15% of the entire river volume into Lake Pontchartrain.

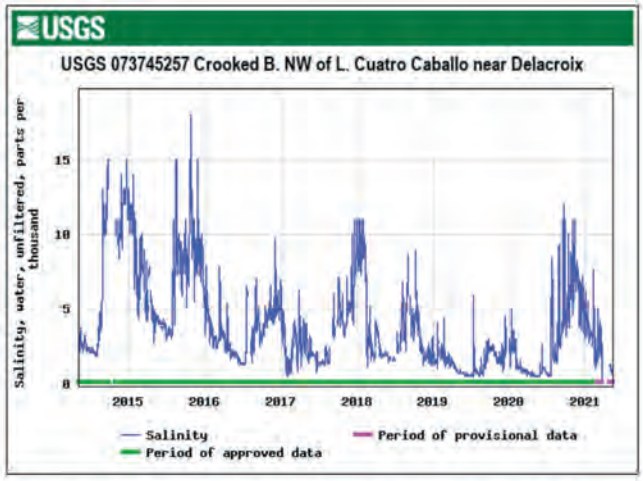
The Mississippi River has had a record string of high-water years, and the Bonnet Carré Spillway was opened in four of the five years from 2016 to 2020. By comparison, from 1931 to 2015, it was opened only 10 times. During the lifetime of our 3-year-old trout, it was open for 23 days



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







Salinity around Delacroix has been dropping steadily as the size of the Mardi Gras Pass increases and the seasonal volume of the Mississippi River remains high.

in 2018, 123 days in 2019 and 29 days in 2020.

The morning in May I spent fishing around Four Horse Lake in Delacroix turned out to be my most-productive trip in a month. Roughly 50% of the trout landed were in the 3-year-old size range, and that was from water with clarity of only a few inches. I measured the salinity, and it was around 5 parts per thousand, even though it looked like freshwater recently departed from the Mississippi River. The assumption that water with river silt has low salinity is not necessarily true, since river silt can suspend in brackish water even better than in freshwater.

The morning in May I spent fishing around Four Horse Lake in Delacroix turned out to be my most-productive trip in a month.

DOWN AND DIRTY



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Don't look a gift trout in the mouth



This trout with big egg sacks was caught in mid-May in low-salinity water of Four Horse Lake near Delacroix instead of higher-salinity water to the south.

DOWN AND DIRTY

My bias against fishing turbid water for speckled trout took a beating that day, because large numbers of trout were feeding there. Clearer water on the east side of Bayou Terre aux Boeufs was just a short swim away, but more trout were being caught in the turbid water of Four Horse Lake.

Similarly, Marsh Man Masson posted a number of videos this spring showing abundant landings of speckled trout in the area around East Pointe a la Hache that was inundated by river water.

We know that aquatic life flourishes on edges. Edges can be formed by structure, drop-offs, current lines, submerged aquatic vegetation and the point where river water and the Gulf water mix. This blending is occurring throughout the coast, including Delacriox and the waters near Pointe a la Hache.

I am left wondering if the recent abundance of 3-year-old female trout spawned in 2018 has any correlation to the river water that flooded into the marshes. At a minimum, we have seen evidence of trout flourishing on the edges of the river-water plume, so we know that the suspended silt is not forcing them away. In fact, some of the females from my mid-May trip were bursting with full egg sacks. They should have been in Breton Sound preparing to spawn, but instead, they were hanging around the edge of the river-water plume in Delacroix.

Are we seeing an abundance of 3-year-olds because they have experienced less natural predation than in previous generations? If they had spent more time in lower-salinity water because of the river-water plume, it would have provided them more protection from dolphins and most shark species.

I have many questions and fewer answers, but I will be watching the size of speckled trout over the next few years to see if we continue to catch larger fish, on average. And, while I wait for answers, I will enjoy fighting these yellow-mouths instead of their little sisters. ▪

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Nice speckled trout can be found out of Cocodrie this time of year, like this one that Capt. Tommy Pellegrin put one of his clients on.

By Joel Masson

Capt. Tommy Pellegrin finds great success catching speckled trout on the beaches out of Cocodrie this month, and the coolest part is, he generally leaves the expensive live shrimp swimming in the tanks at the marina.

"I fish live shrimp more in (June) and plastics more in July, just because the schools are tighter," he said. "When they turn on, it's just a madhouse."

Pellegrin fishes double rigs with ¼-ounce jigheads along the beaches, and he prefers curlytails in opening night color to draw hits from ferocious specks.

"The curlytail has a lot more action than a paddletail," he said. "You want any color that is going to be similar to what a shrimp is."

Pellegrin will also double rig Berkely Rattle Shrimp in a variety of colors. He constructs the double rig with a ⅜- and a ¼-ounce jighead.

"I put the heavier one on the bottom and the lighter one on the top," he said. "It just casts better and tracks better."

Every summer, the speckled trout go outside to spawn, and July is right in the heart of it, according to Pellegrin.

"There is major spawning going on," he said. "In early July, the brown shrimp are on their way out. Everywhere the shrimp are going to pass, that's where the trout are going to be waiting for them."

Fishing the vast beaches can be a little bit daunting. It's an open expanse of sand and waves, but if you get out there early enough, you can certainly find speckled trout under diving birds, making them very easy to catch.

Diving birds provide an easy visual for fishermen. They are feeding on the shrimp, and the trout underneath are feeding on the shrimp.

If no diving birds are found, Pellegrin said being able to read the intricacies of what's going on with water movement on the beach can really aid anglers.

"You have to learn how to read the beach," he said. "You need to find a current coming 90 degrees off the beach. All these waves are going over the sandbar and into the trough. Somewhere along there, that trough breaks, and it has to come out. There is a little eddy spot.

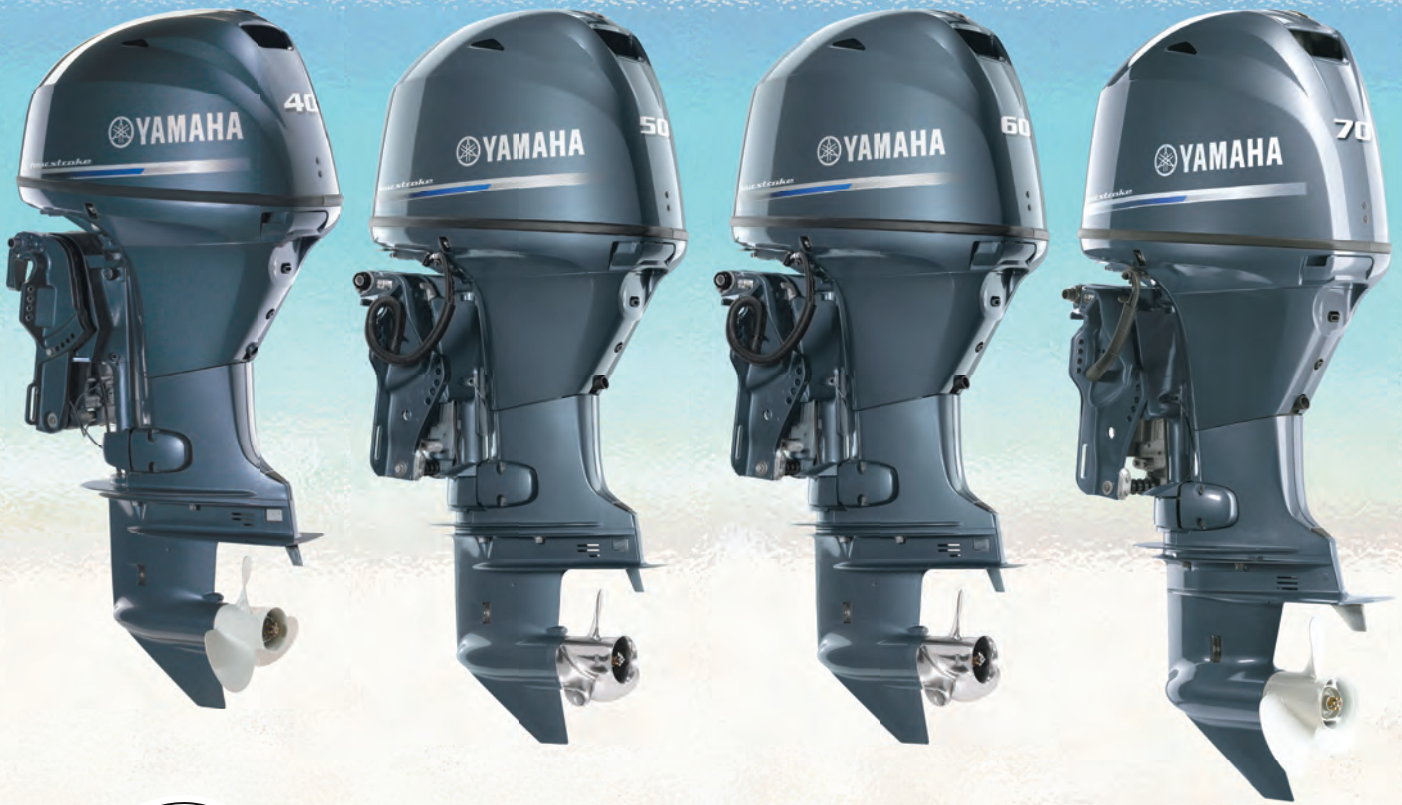
"That's going to be key, because the fish are going to be right there waiting for everything in that trough to come out with that tide falling."

Pellegrin suggests when you find those areas, make a note on your GPS; that way, if you happen to go on a rougher day where they're not seen as easily, you'll still be able to locate the area where the fish are holding. ▪

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Madison Dauterive boated this speckled trout at the MRGO Rocks on live shrimp.

SUMMER GUIDE TO BRETON SOUND

Look in deeper water for the best bite; these six spots will be worth your time

By Rusty Tardo

Summer has arrived with all its sweltering heat and humidity, and the fish have largely left the shallow marshes for the cooler climes of bigger, deeper waters. It's a cycle that repeats itself every year. Anglers know they have to shift gears from inside fishing to bigger-water fishing, and three things have to happen:

- You have to travel farther to get to the better bites;
- You have to get a wee-hours-of-the-morning start because the best bite starts and stops early;
- Live bait is essential, and keeping it alive is vital to success.

Then, you still have to know where to go to give you the best chance to put some nice fish in the box, and that's where our handy-dandy guide gives you an advantage.

BRETON SOUND HOTSPOTS

• Bay Eloi

Bay Eloi is loaded with a variety of structures — large, small and in-between. All potentially hold fish. Redfish, drum, sheepshead, trout, catfish and more lurk around the bottom of these wellheads and structure, and your live shrimp or live croaker fished on the bottom should put a huge bend in your rod. Give a spot 10 minutes, then bounce to another if nothing bites. You can do that all day and wind up with a really good box of fish. Just hop from one rig or structure to another, and don't ignore the small wellheads, because they sometimes produce more fish than the bigger ones. Many of these structures are in 7 to 10 feet of water, and while bottom rigs and free-lining a live shrimp or croaker is usually more productive, you can try fishing your live bait under a cork.

When fishing these structures you can hook on to them with a rig hook and then fish out and away from them, you can anchor upcurrent and fish back toward them or you can troll around them in a wide circle looking for fish. Once you get into some action, anchor so you can fish that spot.

• Comfort Island

Comfort Island can be hit-and-miss. Some days, it yields some nice trout, and other days, the action is spotty to non-existent. The past year or two, it was inundated by river water and mostly unproductive, but this year the water is much better, much cleaner, and there's much more salinity, so it should definitely be on your list of top places to try. For years, the trout have loved to hang out over the big reef on the southwest side of the island. Use your depthfinder, and when you see the bottom rise up from 6 feet to 3 or 4 feet, you are over the reef. Stop and fish live shrimp, Vudu shrimp or DOAs under a cork. Give the spot 10 to 15 minutes, and if nothing hits, move a hundred feet or so and try again. It's a large reef and a popular hotspot. If other boats are anchored and catching, you will, too. If no other boats are there its probably because the fish aren't there, either.

• Little Central

Little Central is actually a reference to a pretty large area, basically stretching between the large Block 18 rig just off the northeast side of the MRGO all the way to the Compressor Rig on the opposite side. Three larger platforms and numerous smaller satellite structures are in between, so it's a pretty big area, and it produces some nice trout and big reds, even in the heat of summer. Most anglers concentrate on the larger structures, but all potentially hold fish. The water is deeper farther out, so fish live baits on bottom rigs and be prepared to snag and re-tie often due to debris on the bottom.

• Central

The Central Rig itself is a huge platform, but it is surrounded by several nearby satellite structures that many anglers find even more productive. Hook onto any of them and drop your bait to the bottom. The water is 18 to 20 feet deep, and it attracts boaters from both sides of the river. Many of the satellite rigs are tall but not very wide, and they accommodate only one boat in the prime fishing spot. An early start is essential, because obviously, its strictly first-come, first-served.

Come prepared to re-tie your terminal tackle quite a bit, because there are a lot of big toothy critters in these waters and bottom debris to snag on.

• Gosier Island/Breton Island

Fish them while you can, because they are disappearing beneath the seas. The islands are a great summer place to fish, whether you climb out of the boat and wade or fish from the boat; either way is a blast. Breton Island still has actual sand to walk along, while Gosier has been reduced to only a shoal. But make no mistake, these islands do hold fish. Trout, reds, drum, flounder, sheepshead, ladyfish, spanish mackerel, cobia, jacks, sharks stingrays, catfish. It's all out there, and you can fish them in any variety of ways: sliding-sinker rigs, under corks, topwaters or soft plastics.

• MRGO Rocks

A perennial hotspot and a worthwhile destination in its own right, the 8-mile "Long Rocks" have produced trout, reds, sheepshead, drum, jacks and just about everything else that swims in these shallow waters for decades. Anglers either anchor and fish or troll along them, and fish them with live shrimp or plastics under a cork. Some troll and cast topwaters and crankbaits when conditions are favorable, and you can always expect a few surprises like bull reds, drum and big jacks. ▪



Ashley Tardo caught this big sheepshead at a small structure in Bay Eloi on live shrimp.

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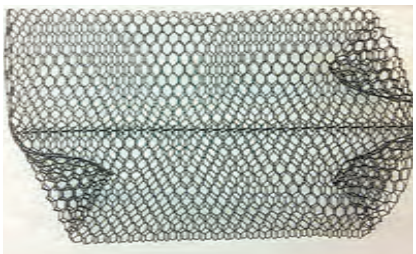
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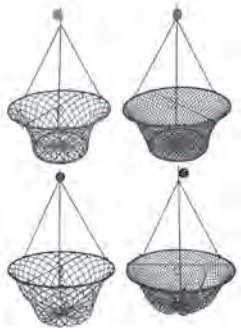
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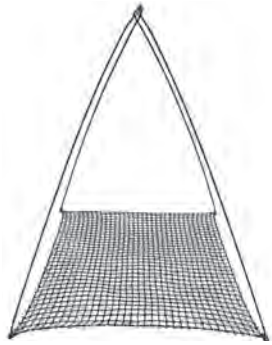
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Louisiana has several barrier islands, the most-famous being Grand Isle, the only remaining inhabited one. It is a popular fishing destination and can be accessed by vehicle. It is frequented by kayak anglers and is the closest thing to beach fishing many can get.

However, several other islands dot the coast and provide excellent fishing. Kayak anglers with a yearning to ply these remote waters need to plan a mothership trip to get their kayaks to these fishing spots.

The barrier islands are dynamic, changing in size and shape every year due to tides, waves and particularly, tropical weather events. The number and strength of recent hurricanes and tropical storms have reduced most to a fraction of their historical size. While some are still sizable, others are more like overgrown sandbars or are completely submerged.

Restoration of these islands is high on the list of coastal planning projects in order to preserve their role as barriers to reduce the strength and destruction when these storms make landfall. They also provide critical nesting habitat for many species of birds.

MAKING THE TRIP >

LOUISIANA'S BARRIER ISLANDS OFFER GREAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR KAYAK-BOUND ANGLERS. MAKE THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR A TRIP OF A LIFETIME.

By Chris Holmes

NO BARRIER TO KAYAKS



MAKING THE TRIP

However, "going to fish the islands" is a dream for many anglers, and kayak anglers are adding these trips to their bucket lists. It is not as difficult as you might think and also provides some distinct advantages. The vast majority of fishing around the islands entails wading, so many anglers wait until late spring or early summer, once water temperatures are warm enough to comfortably and safely wade. However, a few savvy anglers beat the crowds by using lightweight waders while the water is still cold. Kayak anglers have realized they too can get in on this early activity without having to get into the water.

All of the islands require relatively long trips over open water, and caution needs to be taken to pick the best weather days. A suitable boat that can handle the extra loads of the kayaks and gear must be available. Secure the 'yaks well so they don't bounce around, risking damage. The bigger, overnight operations often allow customers to bring a kayak as long as it is prearranged. A couple specialize in kayak island adventures, and there's always the private-boat option.

The typical practice is to anchor close to the island in water shallow enough to wade without swimming, but deep enough to account for tidal drops that could strand the vessel on hard sand until the water returns. However, if you are bringing in kayaks, anchoring in a water that's a bit deeper is not an issue.



Pay attention to areas where mothership operations set up; they have access to great fishing intel.

If most anglers wade-fish around the islands, what is the advantage of going through the trouble of bringing kayaks?

Mobility.

GETTING AROUND

When you leave the powerboat to wade, you are limited in the tackle and supplies you can carry, and you can't get very far from the boat. Typically, you can carry one rod and a few lures. Food and drink must be carefully planned and is limited. On the other hand, the kayak serves as a mobile base of operations and allows you to travel as far as you want, be self-sufficient and carry everything that you want — too much in many cases — including fish storage by way of a hard or soft cooler, food and water, plus several rods and tackle trays.

A second reason for a kayak is for those not comfortable wade-fishing. I love the experience of wade-fishing but am never truly comfortable. Sharks and stingrays are common around the barrier islands, and you will undoubtedly see them. Sharks also regularly take swipes at fish stringers hanging off the hips of wading anglers and precariously too close for my comfort. Also, if you want to fish live bait, you must also tow along a floating bait bucket, which adds to your load as well as providing additional shark-attracting scent. Fishing from the kayak allows you to ply the same waters and keep everything that might attract a shark in the kayak instead of in the water.

Plus, a kayak doesn't prevent you from wade-fishing. A stake-out pole allows you to hop out whenever you want and anchor the yak. It provides you a floating base that goes wherever you want. The stake-out pole should be firmly set in the sand to prevent wave action from pulling it out. One trick I learned from the late Capt. Theophile Bourgeois is to waddle the pole tightly back and forth as it sinks further into the sand. He used this method to stake out his seaplane on his many island adventures.

KEEP AN EYE PEELED

One tip for newcomers is to watch where the large mothership boat and barge operations are located. Although most provide small skiffs for their customers, they position themselves in generally calmer waters and close to the daily action. They have many years of experience fishing the islands under all conditions, and they get daily intel on where and how fish are caught. While this certainly is not an invitation to crowd them, it can give you a general idea of what to look for and where to look to find fish on your own. ▪

Another advantage of the kayak over wading is that the fish are sometimes out of wading range. Wading waist-deep or less is most comfortable. Any deeper, and you risk dunking your reels constantly, and on rougher days, getting face-splashed numerous times. And you may simply be out of casting range. A kayak can go in water shallow enough to wade but has no upper depth limit. Wherever the fish are, or move to, you can get to them.

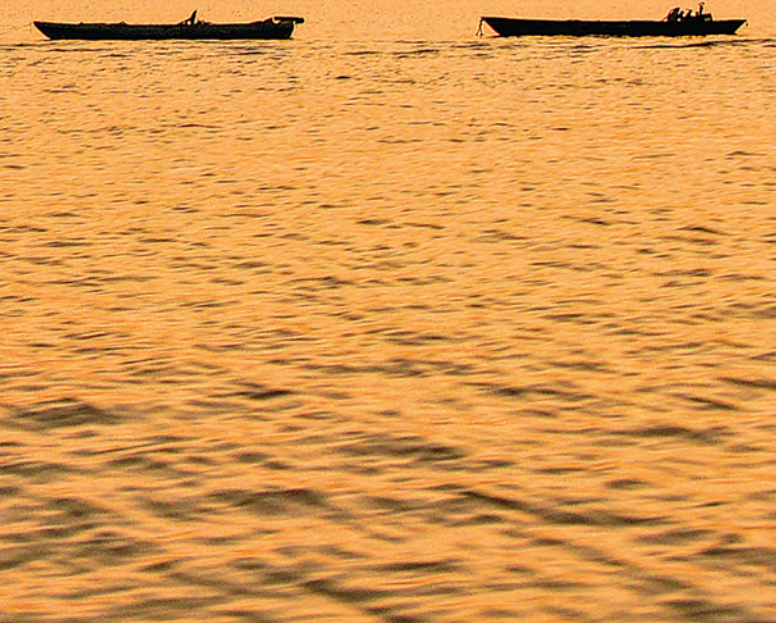
As they do anywhere, gamefish often follow closely to the schools of bait. These schools can move quickly, and most times, you can't wade fast enough to stay with or reach schools that are moving on. Being in a kayak allows you to quickly and stealthily keep up with the action. The same applies when you spot birds working in the distance.



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

BARRIER ISLAND CHAINS >











BARRIER ISLAND CHAINS

The main barrier island chains from west to east are the Isle Dernieres, Timbalier, Breton and Chandeleur. All were part of an entire chain of islands that once blanketed the coast. Though some are generically referred to by the singular term island, they are all part of the barrier chain and are broken up into many smaller islands and spits. Their makeup changes on an annual basis. That cove where you found fish last year could be a sandbar or open water this year, but there are usually some fishable areas, except in extreme conditions. The Gulf-facing sides are naturally rougher, but there are days when both sides are slick as glass. Many have spots where you can walk or even drag a kayak across the island and fish either side.

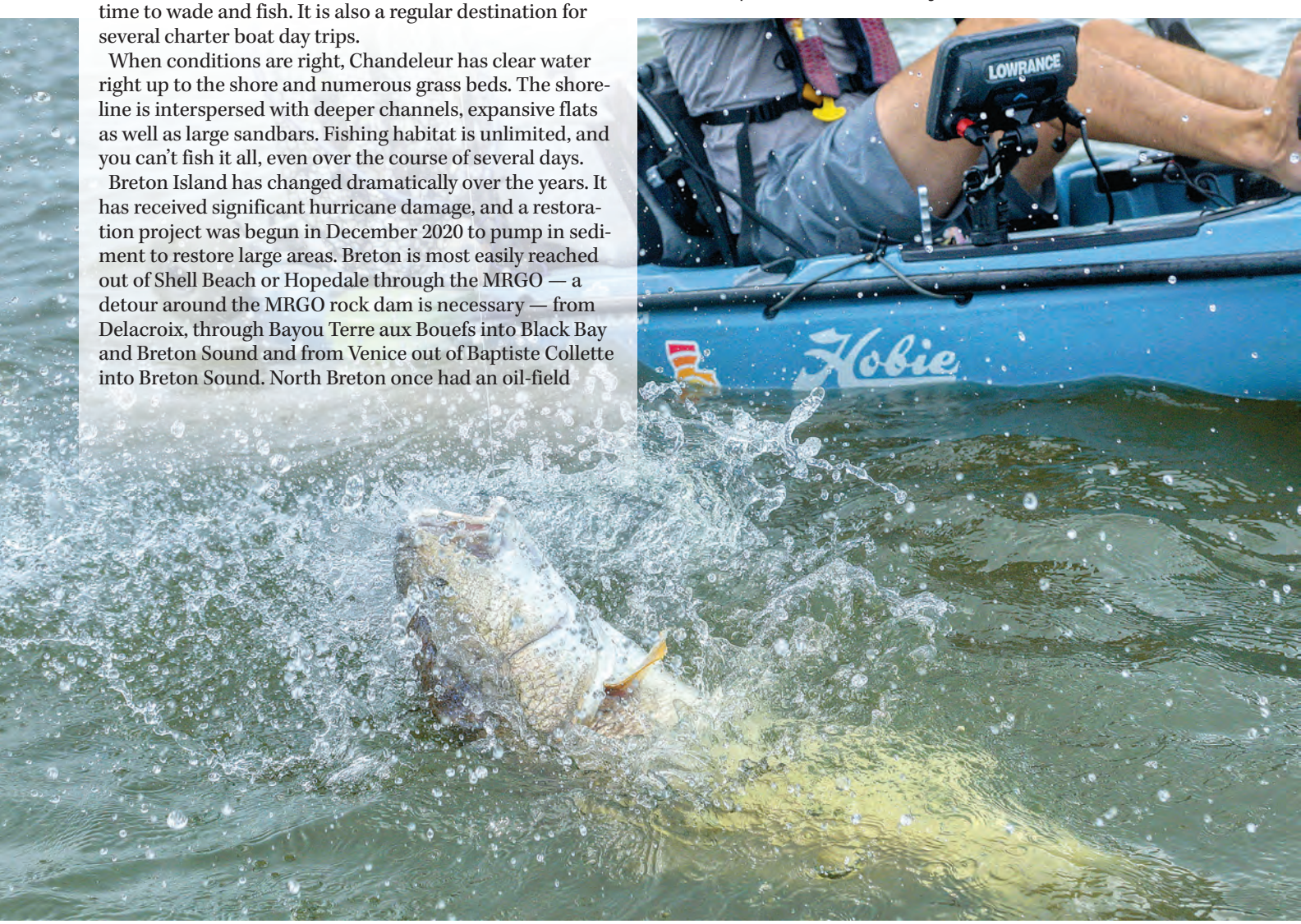
Chandeleur is by far the most-popular. It is the farthest east of all of the island chains. It is uniquely positioned, easily accessed from several places in Louisiana as well as Mississippi. There are several operations that offer guided fishing, as well as overnight accommodations for anglers wanting to extend their time on the island. Seaplanes regularly land, bringing fishermen by air so they have more time to wade and fish. It is also a regular destination for several charter boat day trips.

When conditions are right, Chandeleur has clear water right up to the shore and numerous grass beds. The shoreline is interspersed with deeper channels, expansive flats as well as large sandbars. Fishing habitat is unlimited, and you can't fish it all, even over the course of several days.

Breton Island has changed dramatically over the years. It has received significant hurricane damage, and a restoration project was begun in December 2020 to pump in sediment to restore large areas. Breton is most easily reached out of Shell Beach or Hopedale through the MRGO — a detour around the MRGO rock dam is necessary — from Delacroix, through Bayou Terre aux Bouefs into Black Bay and Breton Sound and from Venice out of Baptiste Collette into Breton Sound. North Breton once had an oil-field



Bull reds in a kayak never disappoint. Late in the summer, they get thick around the barrier islands. This one hit a Rat-L-Trap. **BELOW:** While trout are generally the main attraction, a wide variety of inshore species are available, including bull reds.



Clear water, hard sand and hefty stringers. Louisiana's barrier islands provide excellent fishing opportunities from a kayak.



facility in a large interior bay, but it was destroyed by a hurricane. Breton offers great fishing, and its proximity to several popular fishing ports makes it a great choice for day trips.

The Isle Dernieres and Timbalier chain has also undergone various protection projects over the years. Besides pumping in sediment for land-building, large sections of rock jetties were placed in hopes of offering wave protection, some which are now submerged. The rocks provide island protection, fish attracting habitat and — unseen hazards for powerboats. Several areas are also littered with sheet pilings and debris related to oil fields.

Another advantage the kayak offers is the ability to get close and even behind some of these structures and find fish. From Raccoon Island to the west and East Timbalier to the east, these chains are popular for anglers fishing out of Houma, Dularge, Cocodrie, Leeville and even Grand Isle. Some see more attention than others; even the tiniest of island remnants can offer good fishing.

While beautiful and often eerily peaceful, the islands are alive with the soothing sounds of waves lapping or even crashing the beach and the calls and cries of various bird colonies. They are fragile, and their future is uncertain, but the fishing is often fantastic. If you have a kayak-angler bucket list, this is one you should check off sooner than later. ▪

For an aerial view of the area from Raccoon Island to East Timbalier, check out this YouTube video: https://youtube/drbCej01uFM.

LURE REVIEW >



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LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman



Sam McCarroll of Slidell holds a nice-sized speckled trout after it bit on a Matrix X-Shad "Croaker" soft plastic while on the water with Chas Champagne.

MATRIX X-SHAD CROAKER

CHAMPAGNE'S LATEST LURE IS DEAD RINGER FOR SPECKS' FAVORITE SUMMER MEAL

Anglers fishing or speckled trout along Louisiana's coast know what to turn to when June turns to July: A live croaker or something that looks like a croaker.

Chas Champagne, who has spent many of his 38 years targeting speckled trout, has just the answer for the latter. The co-owner of Dockside Bait & Tackle who is well known for his Matrix line of soft plastics, feeds speckled trout the new Matrix X-Shad Croaker. It's made to catch yellowmouths — big speckled trout — when they are spawning.

"This is a specific design for Gulf coast fishermen for the middle of the summer, because croaker are some of the most sought-after baitfish," Champagne said.

There's more to it than speckled trout craving a meal of croaker. While he admittedly isn't a scientist, Champagne said he has heard often that croaker eat speckled trout's eggs during the spawn.

"That's why they hate them? Who knows?" Champagne asked.

NATURAL IMAGE

The 3-inch Matrix X-Shad Croaker is the natural follow-up to the lure manufacturer's Matrix X-Shad, introduced in 2020, known for presenting "a natural image, like we peeled the skin off a fish" and painted on a soft plastic, as he said.

Champagne believed he had the next big thing in soft plastics last spring when he introduced the Matrix X-Shad. He was spot on. He's confident his company has the "real" next big thing. He won't get an argument from the hundred or so saltwater fishermen who got their hands on about 1,000 bags of Matrix X-Shad Croaker late last year. Unfortunately, supply was limited at that time of the release because of pandemic-related issues.

"They liked them a lot," Champagne said. "By far, they are the most popular things we have right now, and coming into summer, everyone wants it."

Dockside Bait & Tackle had a couple thousand bags on hand in March. Champagne declared that the company should be able to keep up, and that many more pieces were expected to keep up with demand.

"They won't last long, but at least we can keep the manufacturing going now," he said.

Original Matrix X-Shads looked like menhaden (pogeys), mullet and glass minnows, but Champagne had something else in mind.



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.*



A COVID HOLD

"When I decided to do the croaker one, I wanted to do it as soon as I made the X-Shad, but COVID put everything on hold," he said. "That's really the only one I was interested in, because croaker are such a hot commodity in Louisiana. In my opinion, that's the closest replica of a croaker that I've ever seen."

Attaining that genuine croaker image took some doing. Dockside Bait & Tackle packed several freshly caught croaker in dry ice and shipped them to the designers in Guatemala.

"Those people in the factory had never seen a croaker. In order to replicate it, they had to see (one)," he said.

Apparently, the designers studied and learned well, because they nailed it right away. Their first, physically hand-painted job was on the money in prototypes Champagne received.

Just to make certain, there was plenty of field testing before the first substantial shipment was sent to Louisiana. The croaker paint job got a thumbs-up from Champagne and his business partner, Steve Wicks of Slidell.

While he hasn't been able to fish with them very often, Champagne's biggest speckled trout on a Matrix X-Shad Croaker has been a 22-inch fish.

BOTTOM-BOUNCING

The X-Shad Croaker is perfect for nearshore oil rigs, where he bounces the faux croaker along the bottom on a ⅜- or ½-ounce Golden Eye jighead, or in the deep passes of the Rigolets, particularly around the bridges, where he puts the bait on a ½-ounce jighead. If he's targeting fish over an oyster reef, he downsizes to a ¼-ounce model.

"The way we make our lures, when you put it on a jighead, (it) makes it look like a real fish. When you put this X-Shad on the jighead, it comes to life," he said.

Like a real croaker. ▪

For more information about the Matrix X-Shad Croaker and other Matrix products, call 985-707-9049 or visit www.matrixshad.com.



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FISH BY DAY, COOK BY NIGHT

By Will Martin

FISHING, COOKING, EATING: HOW AN EDEN ISLES COUPLE INCORPORATES THE MINDSET OF SUBSISTENCE FISHING TO GIVE MEANING AND PURPOSE TO MODERN LIFE.

Many of us strive for a better connection with nature, something fleshy and earthy to hold on to in this sterile, electronic landscape. We've gone to the moon and beyond, mapped the human genome and eradicated diseases that plagued humankind since the beginning.

But in exchange for what, I wonder. Nothing fundamental, I hope.

Humans are pack hunters, like wolves, and there is a spiritual void in us that the mammoth hunt once filled, a vacancy now haunted by the faces of happy tribesman, their hands straining to haul in their nets bursting with fish.

We half-remember a sense of fulfillment powerful enough to lift us and take us away from the mundane. You were a human being, performing your function on earth, an example of unity of purpose, of man not at odds with himself.

Christian and Colleen Orfanello live in Eden Isles, a neighborhood along the northeastern shoreline of Lake Ponchartrain. They are living proof that there is a middle way, a way between homesteading on the Alaskan frontier and living a life as soulless as a German automobile commercial. The recipes and methods the Orfanellos have shared are the touchstones of something much greater: a way of living in this century through which you can remain present, grounded, and functional as a human being.

SPECIAL SEAFOOD

One morning in May, Christian emptied one of his crab traps into a bucket. As he walked, the crabs — there were 12 — clunked into each other like animate turf stones echoing from the bottom of a well. He and his wife had invited some friends over for dinner.

The guests would not arrive until that evening, but it takes time to prepare dinner, especially in their home. The Orfanellos use only fresh, locally sourced foods, foods as beautiful after preparation as they are delicious.

Maybe they would stuff the crab into a flounder and broil it, or maybe they would make the crab dip that everyone seems to like.

His bare feet pad away on the weathered dock towards the back door of his house, the crabs marking each step with a crash, like the sound of a busy pool hall, but gritty, coming from the bottom of a bucket.

COOKING BACKGROUND

Except for Christian's father, a Sicilian who emigrated to Louisiana as a toddler, their families have been New Orleans stock for generations. Their mothers grew up in the 9th Ward in the 1950s and 1960s, when the 9th Ward was suburban and middle-class.

Colleen is the senior vice president for the Military Order of the Purple Heart Auxiliary, but when she's not in that role, she works for other charities and non-profits. Christian owns and operates Sea Tow, which provides a service not unlike AAA, but for vessels on the water.

Though their busy work schedules often pull them in opposite directions, their connections to the place they live and



A crab dinner? Where will they end up, stuffed in a flounder, as part of a crab dip? How 'bout steamed?



Christian and Colleen Orfanello love to incorporate fresh shrimp into meals, but they like it as bait, too.

each other, are strong, bound as they are by passion for a way of life that is their own. And then there's also the good food.

Looking back, they can't recall a time before cooking was a powerful ingredient in whatever mojo's at work in their relationship.

"We (met) at a party for a mutual friend," Colleen said. "Christian walked in the door, introduced himself and asked if he could help me cook; I was struck by how effortless and natural it was to him."

Ten months later, they were married.

"For Christian and me, shopping in our backyard is a way of life," Colleen said. "When we feel like trout almondine, tripletail or stuffed flounder, we venture off in our boat. But when it's rainy or we are too busy for a boat ride, we shop dockside, where the crab and redfish are plentiful."

"We catch mostly flounder, redfish, speckled trout, drum, sheepshead and blue cat," Christian said. "We'll use plastics when we can — usually Matrix Shad, a coastal Louisiana favorite — but there are times when you've got to use live bait; there's too much competition in the water for plastics."

The Orfanellos prefer to use live shrimp for bait, and there is very little waste.

"If you catch your fish, and you still have shrimp left, well, there's no shrimp fresher than live shrimp, is there?" Christian asked, laughing. "Sometimes, we'll fry the shrimp as a little snack, but we'll make stuffed flounder with it, too."

AN EARLY START >



AN EARLY START

Another thing that the Orfanellos have in common is learning to cook at a young age.

"My mother's family is full of amazing cooks," Colleen said, "and they were so eager to teach me the fundamentals that I can't think of a time when I didn't cook."

Christian has borrowed heavily from his father's Sicilian heritage in his cooking.

"We're from New Orleans, and we love butter, he said, "but I didn't grow up eating a lot of butter; it was always olive oil, wine and fresh vegetables. Garlic."

Christian hesitates to call his cooking "fusion food," saying only that there is a Sicilian edge to many of his dishes.

"For example, one thing that I do that's kind of a Sicilian thing I got from my dad, is I make my basting brush out of mint leaves held together with a bread-tie," he said.

When cooking redfish, Christian said, "We'll bring the oil and wine sauce up again and again with the mint brush, brushing the sauce over the meat several times while the fish is cooking, and when we're done, the fish will be rich and moist with the tiniest touch of mint that will interact with the flavor of the wine sauce."

Combined with the flakiness of the fish, the flavors will explode in your mouth.

"Little tricks like that from the Sicilian garden," he said, "are fundamental to my cooking."

Colleen's mother was Alsatian."She had a sweet tooth, and I blame her for my love for anything sugary," she said. When Colleen was a girl, the bus driver often delivered fresh pastries from her grandmother's bakery to her house. Although she couldn't understand how precious those deliveries would become as memories one day, she aches for them now.

"What I wouldn't give for her Riz au lait pudding!" she said.

When Colleen was young, she learned that food can speak about love when words fail.



Christian and Colleen Orfanello have been cooking together almost since the moment they met. **BELOW:** Almost nothing they harvest from the marsh in their backyard goes to waste, especially tasty crabs, which wind up in a number of recipes.

"MeMere died when I was young, and the only recipe I have from her was written haphazardly on a torn piece of aged paper; some of it in English, but the rest in her version of shorthand French," she said.



Will Martin *is an adventure writer based in New Orleans, LA. He pens fiction and nonfiction stories at willmartin.info, and is a staff writer at Louisiana Sportsman. He can be reached at willm@lasmag.com.*

TASTY HOSPITALITY >





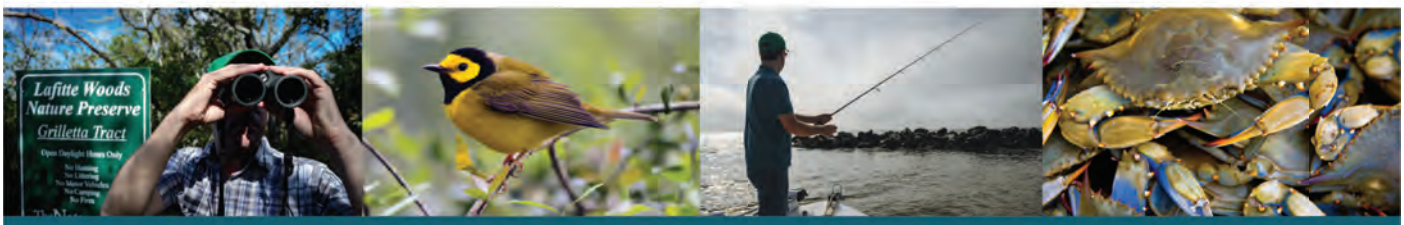
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TASTY HOSPITALITY

The Orfanellos love to entertain, so they do it often.

"We love surprising people with our food," Christian said. "Take bull redfish, for example. What are you supposed to do with a bull red? Well, you're supposed to throw them back because they're the baby makers, but sometimes after a long fight, they die — or will die. What then?"

The problem is that bull redfish, when cooked most ways, tastes like rubber, or the "sea" taste will be too strong.

"My wife and I add it to our turtle soup," Christian said. "We have always enjoyed turtle soup, but turtle meat is expensive, and you don't get enough when you buy it."

They cut bull redfish filets into nice-sized chunks and let them cook in the soup for the final 30 minutes.

"And oh, my goodness!" Christian said, "the turtle soup is absorbed by the chunks of redfish, and when we serve it, people go crazy. They cannot believe it's bull redfish.

"Another of our favorite recipes — and we reverse-engineered this one from a dish at a restaurant that we like — is a crab dip served over fried bowtie pasta. The dip is a thickened cream sauce with chunks of fresh crab in it, with lemon and wine for flavor. After you batter and fry the pasta, you spoon the sauce over them as you would crackers."

"We often catch our dinner directly off our dock," Colleen said, "and we plan our menus according to what we catch."

"Three-quarters of the year, we've got good crab," Christian said. "We could go into our back yard right now and pull up a dozen or two-dozen crabs if the traps were out. But when we have people over, I'll go down the canal to the bayous, and run my crab nets. It's the way the old-school crabbers did it, not like emptying crab traps: it's more work, less wait.

"We'll use our catch (in multiple offerings), for instance, crab meat…. The first thing I do with the crabs is boil them in a good, Louisiana seafood boil, and after we eat the boiled crabs, Colleen will use the leftovers to make a different dish or two.

"Also, if you're paying market price," he said, "you could be paying anywhere from $40 to $60 for a tub of crab meat, but because we catch so many crabs, we are able to give them to family; our parents love to get them."

The Orfanellos use crab in many different dishes.

"Even if we're having filet mignon, we'll top it with sautéed crab meat," Christian said. "Then, we'll make our corn and crab soup and crab cakes and crab au gratin, and other pasta and cream dishes."

The Orfanellos usually have fresh fish to give to friends and family when they visit.

"Nothing goes to waste, even the fish carcasses go into our crab traps." Christian said. "We just love the 'circle of life' that the bayou brings into our lives."





Cooking for big groups, or catering for charity events, is a favorite Orfanello pasttime.

COOKING FOR GROUPS

For the couple, catching and cooking food for friends and family is a passion, but they also enjoy catering charity events.

"We'll boil crawfish, make jambalaya or red beans and rice," Christian said. "We cater a lot of big events, but it's always for charity. There is a satisfaction that you get from catching fish, cleaning them, cooking them and eating them with people who matter to you; that's special.

"I think that's why many people who choose this lifestyle do it. You see the smiles it brings to people's faces; it feels good," he said. "When we go to a family function, and aunts and uncles ask if I have any fish for them, or when we can provide speckled trout to people who are eating tilapia all the time, it's nice."

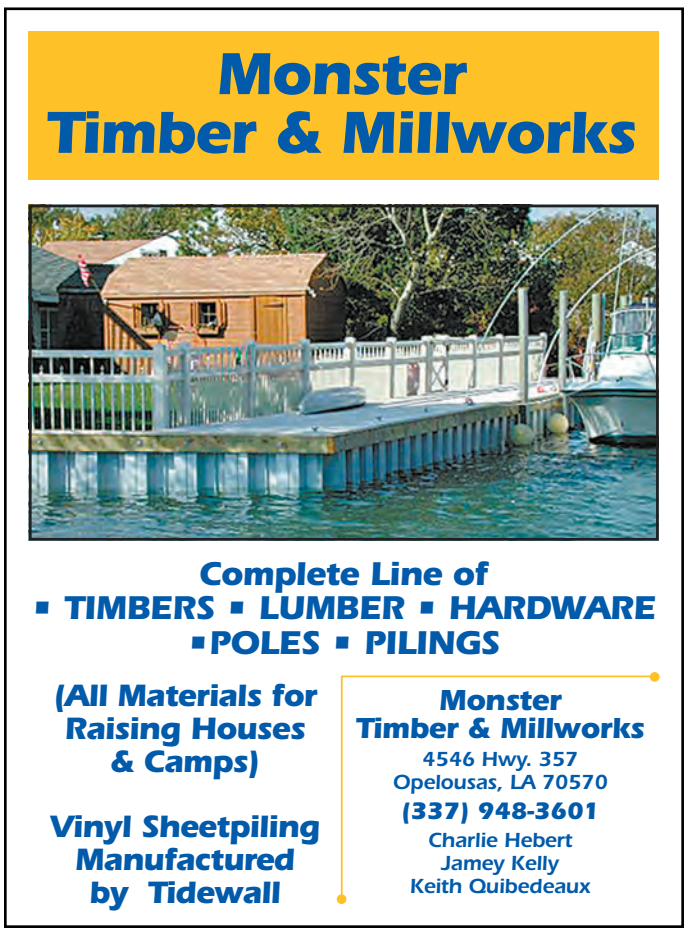
"For us, cooking allows us to unwind and really talk," Colleen said. "I like to think that we live simply, and love grandly."

Could a restaurant or professional catering business be in their future?

"I don't want to do anything that will keep me off the water," he said. "If somebody offered me a million dollars to spend three years getting a restaurant established, I'd turn him down. The first taste of the outdoors I got was as a kid, and I was hooked. I knew that's where I want to be." ▪

PADDLES 'N PUDDLES >





PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

Chris Holmes



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

GO FARTHER, STAY LONGER

KAYAK ANGLER BUILT HOUSEBOAT TO SERVE AS MOTHERSHIP AND REACH NEW AREAS

The limited range of kayaks for fishing is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing because it forces you to fish the conditions given and therefore, fish an area more thoroughly and become more familiar with it. However, it is a curse because there is always that nagging belief that the water may be cleaner or greener over there — too far for you to reach. Wendell Dietz of St. Francisville struggled with that desire to venture farther and came up with a personal solution — the *Delta Dawn*.

A self-described builder, Dietz said he's happy making things, be they furniture or boats. Having two beautiful aluminum vessels under his belt, Dietz's love of kayak fishing sparked another idea: a houseboat.

Dietz has been in the welding industry for 25 years and works as an aluminum products specialist for Miller Electric/Hobart Brothers. Though he's not a welder by trade, he developed a passion for it being in the industry for so many years. He wields an aluminum welding gun as precisely as Michaelangelo did with a paint brush — pure metal-working artistry.

The *Delta Dawn* is a beautifully crafted vessel — 30 feet wide and 10 feet long. It took about a year to build. Topwater Marina in Leeville is Dietz's home turf, and he knows the area like the back of his hand. He enjoyed kayak fishing out of the marina but could only cover so much water within a reasonable range of the launch. Knowing he could possibly catch more fish if he could get to here or there, Dietz came up with a solution: a mobile kayak launch.

The *Delta Dawn's* large front deck is great for mothershipping kayaks, and the cabin and bunk areas provide all the comforts of home. Sitting fairly low in the water, it is easy to load, launch and board the kayaks. The shallow draft also allows Dietz to anchor the houseboat in virtually any of his favorite fishing areas or new areas he wishes to explore. Literally fishing circles around the floating home base, it is easy to return to the houseboat for a rest, bathroom break or lunch. If the fishing is slow or the conditions are not perfect, the fully loaded and rigged kayaks are simply pulled aboard the deck, and it is off to a new area.

>



This shallow-draft houseboat is used as a floating marina to get Dietz close to where he plans to kayak fish and serves as a mobile base with all the comforts of home. With his generator and on-board chest freezer, 3-day trips are no problem.

On a recent trip to Leeville with Dietz, the wind was a bit high, so we decided not to venture out to the nearby islands as originally planned. After fishing the evening before, dining on fresh trout and enjoying a solo night sleeping in the marsh, Dietz motored the *Delta Dawn* back to Topwater Marina to meet me at 6 a.m. It took just a few minutes to load my kayak and gear, and off we went.

After a beautiful sunrise cruise to some nearby ponds, we staked out the *Delta Dawn*. I was eager to splash my 'yak and get to fishing. However, Dietz had some other hi-tech plans. "Why don't you go fish that big pond over there; I'm going to put up the drone and have a look around," he said.

EYE IN THE SKY

Wow, I've been around drones for filming, but I had never fished with one. I headed out and proceeded to beat the banks.

The water was a little choppy and a bit murky. I was unable to see any signs of fish or bait. I heard the drone buzzing in the distance a few times, but could never pinpoint the location of the miniature flying machine. I kept blindly chunking my weedless gold spoon at any spot that looked promising. No luck. A few minutes later, I heard Dietz calling my name. I failed to hear my phone ringing, so he pedaled out to find me.

"There's bait and a couple of reds in the back corner of that pond over there. Stay here, get your phone out and wait for me to call you," he said.

Wait, what?

Dietz headed back to the houseboat — now a floating drone airport — while I sat wondering why I wasn't heading to that pond to fish. After a couple minutes, the phone rang. "Okay, put your phone on speaker and lay it on the deck. I'm putting the drone up and will tell you what to do," Dietz said.

Again, what?

I heard the drone approach, and Dietz said "You there? Watch where I hover the drone and there will be a redfish under it. I'll raise it up and you can cast."

What is this, a video game? The drone marked the fish, and I made a cast. Spooked it. Dietz watching all on the drone monitor saying, "I see him. He's moved further down the bank, but he stopped again. Watch the drone and get ready."

He marked the fish with the drone again, and I made a cast. This time the fish bumped my spoon, but no hookup. So close. Another quick cast to the same spot and this time, the fish inhaled the spoon. Fought and landed, I gave a thumbs up to my drone pilot. Wow, that was cool.

We went back to the houseboat, took a leisurely break and watched the footage on a laptop. We loaded the kayaks on deck and made a move. We found a few more fish, including trout and a big black drum.





The Delta Dawn parked for an overnight fishing trip in the Leeville marsh. Wendell Dietz built the small house boat in order to maximize his fishing time and extend his kayak fishing range.

HOME BASE ESTABLISHED

The *Delta Dawn* served its purpose that day as a mothership, an airport, a break room, a bathroom, a camp and a boat launch. Dietz said his favorite things are the peace and tranquility, combined with the ability to go where he wants, move where he wants and fish from daylight to dark without ever being far from home base. Dietz summed up the trip perfectly.

"We didn't kill the fish, but that wasn't our intention. Mission accomplished." ▪

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A live shrimp fished under a popping cork can get you plenty of action from redfish in Big Lake this month.

David Brown

IT'S POPPING CORK SEASON ON BIG LAKE

Look for a calm day and clear water to tempt redfish, speckled trout on the beachfront

By Adam Jaynes

If you pass a boat on Big Lake, chances are you are going to see at least one popping cork rigged up, most likely several. Whether it is a $100,000 boat or a $5,000 boat, you are going to see some corks. They are effective at catching fish, period.

Lately, there has been an undeniable buzz on social media about the Four Horsemen Cork. According to the website, it was created by a couple of fishing guides from south Louisiana. One thing I do know; tackle that is created by fishing guides has got to catch fish. It is their livelihood.

According to Brian Windsor, who guides on Lake Calcasieu, they are a "game changer."

"They are heavier and much easier to cast farther than most of the other corks out there," he said. "They are really loud and have a very distinct, solid sound when you pop them."

Windsor (337-884-9748) fishes both soft-plastic and live shrimp under the cork, depending on how the fish are biting.

"I like both the Matrix Shad or a Down South Lure under them," he said.

It is undeniable how enjoyable it is to watch a cork go under. If you were brought up fishing, most likely a cork was introduced an early age, whether it was for bream or speckled trout. If you are fortunate enough to catch the conditions right, the gut between the first and second sandbar outside of the Cameron jetties is hard to beat for slinging those corks. There needs to be a special emphasis placed on the right conditions. Calm to slack winds are a necessity for being able to fish the beach by boat, and also for water clarity. Strong southerly winds keep the water close to the beachfront silted up and dirty. An incoming tide will assist in bringing in cleaner, prettier trout green water as well.

As always, when cruising the beachfront, it is important to keep your eyes open for schools of baitfish or shrimp being chased to the surface. Mud boils can also be dead giveaways for redfish. Diving seagulls and pelicans are also excellent indicators for baitfish and predatory activity.

There are two common errors I see on a regular basis when it comes to fishing popping corks. First, these corks are made to be popped, so pop them. So many times, I will see a cork cast out and left there to sit or just slowly reeled in. Pop that rod tip and make some noise; it is not going to break. Second, keep your slack in. When that cork goes under, and it will, if there is too much slack when you go to set the hook, you will most likely either miss the fish or end up with a very poor hookset and a fish that has a much better chance of coming off. Reel your slack in after you pop the cork and while the cork moves in the current or while your troll or drift. Avoiding these couple of simple errors will result in your cork going under more and better hookups. ▪

For information on fishing Sabine Lake or Lake Calcasieu with Capt. Adam Jaynes, visit justfishsabine.com.

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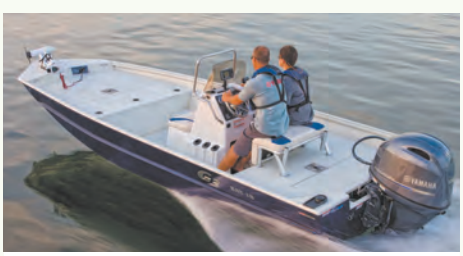
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GREEN MEANS REDS AT COTE BLANCHE AS JULY ARRIVES

Fish grass beds when water falls, clears up

By Don Shoopman

Green means go, and that's what one Lydia charter captain looks for to fill an ice chest with redfish in July.

"I fish against the grass beds. I look for green grass beds in Cote Blanche Bay, the west side," Drew Romero said.

Those waters have been his stomping grounds, so to speak, since he started fishing with his father, Brian Romero, who started Smokin' Reels Charters LLC in the early 2000s. Drew Romero, a crawfisherman who also works as a mechanic at Morton Salt, started guiding around 2010.

"Oh, yeah, that's what I grew up doing. I never went to Marsh Island. I fished Cote Blanche all my life. Me and my dad fish a lot over there," Romero said.

After the Atchafalaya River finally falls in late spring or early summer, water clarity and salinity start to improve in West Cote Blanche Bay and East Cote Blanche Bay. Romero targets the western side of the bay system from The Hammock, which is near



Drew Romero and anglers young and old on his boat catch redfish when he fishes the grass beds in West Cote Blanche Bay.





An ice chest loaded with nice-sized redfish is testament to another good trip by Drew Romero to West Cote Blanche Bay.

Cypremort Point, all the way to The Jaws between Hog Bayou and Bayou Bartholomew.

Romero catches plenty of redfish there and, he said, "some trout sometimes if the water's salty and green." The redfish usually measure 16 inches long but sometimes are as heavy as 25 pounds.

Most of the time, he's hooking up with and boating redfish in 1½- to 2-foot depths. He'll fish likely looking grass beds for 10 or 15 minutes, as well as any rock piles along the way, and he'll move on if he doesn't get any takers.

"If you catch one, you'll catch four or five in a spot, you know?" he said. "Sometimes, I'll start off the morning with a popping cork and shrimp on a leadhead. Then, a couple hours later, I'll switch to a ½-ounce gold spoon and a spinnerbait with a lemonhead or pink Matrix Shad — if the water's clear enough.

"Later, if the fish don't bite, I'll bounce shrimp on a leadhead on the bottom. Fish with one of those three, and you ought to start catching fish. They're going to eat something," Romero said.

If the water's high, he'll fish in and over the grass with the shrimp under a popping cork. If it's low, he'll fish along the edge.

"It's just plain and simple," he said.

A sandy-clay bottom mixed with a shell bottom is a haven for crustaceans and baitfish — delicacies for redfish and other species — that move in and out of the marshes around the bay as the tide rises and falls.

As for speckled trout, the stars need to align.

"You have to have perfect conditions, saltwater and no wind. You're going to catch them around rock piles, not grass. Some are off the bank and some are on the bank," he said.

Anglers fishing the area also pick up sheepshead, flounder and croakers, he said.

Last July, he said, "Was pretty decent. Sometimes, you have to wait a little longer to fish over there."

As he knows from experience, it's well worth the wait. ▪

OFFSHORE HOTSPOTS >



JULY IS A GREAT MONTH AT VENICE, INSHORE OR OFFSHORE

Reds, trout joined by tarpon; offshore action is a mixture of many species

By Will Martin

Venice offers the angler everything from the very best inshore fishing in the Gulf of Mexico to world-class offshore action on the continental shelf via Port Eads, the home port that boasts two of the three 1,000-pound-plus blue marlin ever caught in the Gulf. The angler is limited only by his aspirations and what he's willing to spend.

If you've been dreaming of that epic Venice trip you read about when you were a kid, consider making that dream a reality in the month that offers more accessible, in season, sportfish species than any other month of the year. Fish Venice in July.

INSHORE

At Venice, an angler can target redfish and speckled trout year-round, and July is as good a month as any to land that giant bull red or gator trout that will blow up Instagram, making you famous for the day. The flounder fishing is still good. The sheepshead and black drum bites are on also.

And then there are the tarpon.

They arrive at Venice in July, and with them, a fishing experience that gives Florida a run for its money in terms of quantity and quality. A 200-pound tarpon is possible in waters a stone's throw from Venice's marinas.

OFFSHORE

"July is one of our best months," said Katie Duplass of Pelican Charters (thevenicelodge.com), a popular charter service captained by her husband, John Duplass.

"Snapper season is on fire; we're going after the tuna and swordfish; the Mahi-Mahi start showing up; you get so much variety that you don't get in other months," she said. "It's calm weather, and it's pretty water. It's just that ideal summer fishing, and the variety — the boards are just so colorful."

BOOKING A GUIDE

The regular clientele of a prominent charter will sometimes book a year in advance, usually after an especially productive outing, and yes, there are often more would-be fishermen than available spots aboard the whole of Venice's fishing fleet, but it still never hurts to inquire about last-minute openings.

"Give the charter service a call, even if it's last minute," said Duplass. "Summer is just so hectic, that if you're in town, and you haven't booked, give us a call, even if you think it's hopeless, because even when (we're) not open, we can normally get a boat, find a boat.… We can work with people to make something like that happen." ▪



Photo courtesy Katie Duplass

Big yellowfin tuna are one of the offshore fish that often shows up for anglers fishing with the Venice charter fleet.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT >

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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope



Dolphin, aka Mahi-Mahi, are found throughout the Gulf of Mexico and the south Atlantic Ocean. They are aggressive, fast-growing and fast-swimming predators that are a favorite of anglers.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: MAHI-MAHI (AKA DOLPHIN)

COLORFUL, TASTY FISH ARE AMONG THE FASTEST SWIMMING AND FASTEST-GROWING SPECIES YOU'LL EVER RUN INTO

Mahi-Mahi *(Coryphaena hippurus)* are some of the most colorful fish in the sea. Their long, slender bodies are brightly colored in blue, green, and yellow. Their vibrant colors are very noticeable when the fish is underwater and immediately upon being caught, but they fade quickly once in the fish box. Death is not kind, leaving them a dull yellowish brown to olive green color.

These fish have a single dorsal fin that runs almost the entire length of their backs, starting above the eye and ending just in front of the tail. They have extremely forked tails. Their eyes are small and almost in line with their mouths.

Mahi-Mahi are often called dolphinfish or dolphin, and are not related to porpoises, which are also often called dolphins. Anglers call the smaller ones peanuts or bailers. They call adult males bulls, thanks in part to the blunt, aggressive looking forehead on bigger males. Large females are often called cows. They have a much more rounded head than bulls. Big fish are also referred to as "gaffers" because they must be landed with a gaff, instead of "bailed" at the stern like smaller fish

Dolphins are found throughout the open ocean in tropical and subtropical waters. Their population is abundant in the western Atlantic from Nova Scotia to Argentina, in the Gulf of Mexico, and in the Caribbean Sea.

The name Mahi-Mahi is often spelled as Mahi mahi, mahi-mahi, or mahimahi. Other nicknames for the fish include chicken dolphin and green dolphin. In some parts of the world, they are called dorado, which can be confusing because a popular freshwater fish species in some countries is also called dorado.

SELECTIVE DIET? NO!

Mahi-Mahi eat a wide variety of food. If it swims and is small enough to fit in its mouth, it's fair game, and that includes smaller Mahi-Mahi. The variety of their



Brian Cope *of Borden, 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.*



Mitchell Prokasy caught this nice Mahi-Mahi on baitcasting tackle.

diet is matched by the number of predators that eat them. Especially when small, they are preyed upon by just about every other fish that's bigger. It's not uncommon for anglers to catch some with holes pierced through them, presumably by billfish chasing them.

Humans also enjoy eating Mahi-Mahi. Aside from putting up a great fight on rod and reel, they are great eating.

These are fast-growing fish. A 1-year-old typically weigh about 15 pounds, but some have been known to grow as big at 32 pounds in their first year. A 4-year-old dolphin is usually around 75 pounds. They are also prolific breeders, and they spawn throughout the entire year. Females only 8 inches long will participate in at least one spawning cycle before they are a year old.

Anglers catch a lot of Mahi-Mahi around offshore grass lines and other floating debris, often by casting spoons, jigs or topwater lures. Trolling is another popular way to catch them. Billfish anglers often catch them while trolling big lures for marlin and sailfish.

Louisiana's state record Mahi-Mahi is a 71.25-pound brute in June 1976 by Robert Prest IV. Mississippi's state-record involves two fish that weighed 62 pounds each. One was caught in 1981 by D.L. Siegel and the other by Leo Muldoon in 1985.

The world-record Mahi-Mahi was caught off the coast of Costa Rica in September 1976. It weighed 87 pounds. ▪

SPORTSMAN OF THE MONTH >



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HUNTER OF THE MONTH

Benjamin Suggs

Benjamin Suggs, 8, killed his first buck, a 9-pointer, on the afternoon of Nov. 19, 2020 in Weyanoke, La. He also took these two coyotes while out looking for deer last season.

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ANGLER OF THE MONTH

Rod Williams

Rod Williams, at 89 years young, is still a student of the game. He caught this redfish and trout on plastics at Four Horse Lake in Delacroix on April 19.





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GET CRANKY FOR SUMMER BEND BASS

DEEP-DIVING CRANKBAITS CAN PUT ANGLERS IN TOUCH WITH BASS IN HOT WEATHER, ON TOLEDO BEND OR ANY OTHER MAJOR RESERVOIR.

By John N. Felsher

TOLEDO BEND RESERVOIR always ranks high on any list of lakes that produce big bass.

An excellent lake for bass numbers since it opened in 1967, the 65-mile-long impoundment straddling the Louisiana-Texas line on the Sabine River started producing numerous double-digit bass after both states began stocking Florida-strain largemouths in the 1980s.

"Toledo Bend is a great lake," said Kevin VanDam, a four-time Bassmaster Classic champion from Kalamazoo, Mich. "It has so much cover and so many bass that people have many options. Not many lakes in the country produce as many 10-pound bass. On any cast, someone could potentially land a double-digit largemouth or the fish of a lifetime."

The best fishing for giant bass occurs in late winter and early spring, when big females swollen with roe go shallow to spawn. The fall produces excellent numbers and some big fish as bass feed up for the winter and the spawning season that follows.

In the summer, however, the intense southern sunshine can swiftly bake anyone who stays on the lake too long. Many people just fish a few hours in the morning and then go to their camps or elsewhere to cool off. To beat the heat, some folks begin fishing a couple hours before sunset and continue working the lighted docks after dark, particularly on nights with a full moon.

Still, Toledo Bend can produce some monster bucketmouths, even on the hottest days. The lake record — Eric Weems' 15.32-pound bass — came on a sweltering July morning in 2000 in Six Mile Creek on the Texas side, just north of the dam.

"Toledo Bend has become one of those destination places for people who want to catch a 10-pound bass," said Darold Gleason of Many, a pro bass fisherman and guide. "Housen Bay and Six Mile Creek are always good places to fish. Patroon Creek and the Blue Lake area are also good on the north end."

As temperatures rise, big bass drop deeper, where water stays more stable and provides refreshing relief from the broiling sun. With the old Sabine River channel and numerous feeder creeks, the reservoir averages about 60 feet deep, but most people fish in water 25 feet deep or less.

"July can be one of the toughest months to fish Toledo Bend because it's brutally hot, but that also means fewer anglers on the lake," said Gleason (337-397-8860). "When fishing is slow in the summer, I look for little windows when they're feeding. Typically, that's early or late in the day. In the summer, we fish a lot of offshore structure we locate on our graphs. At that time, the majority of bass will be in 15 to 20 feet of water."

THERMOCLINE FACTORS >



Kevin Van Dam admires a big Toledo Bend bass that was fooled by a deep-diving crankbait.

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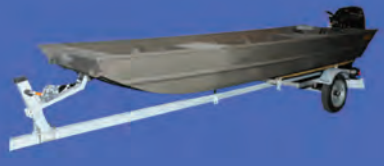
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THERMOCLINE FACTORS

Toledo Bend drops to 110 feet deep in places, but anglers don't want to fish too deep. During hot weather, the lake stratifies. The hypolimnion, a cold, dense layer with little dissolved oxygen, sits near the bottom, while the epilimnion, the warmer, more oxygenated layer, stays above it. A small third layer, the metalimnion, marks the transition zone where water cools dramatically. The thermocline, an invisible membrane, separates the metalimnion from the hypolimnion.

During summer, bass commonly seek the best combination of oxygen levels, cooler temperatures and food availability. In the summer, Toledo Bend bass primarily feed on abundant threadfin shad, but they also eat larger gizzard shad.

Find the oxygen, comfortable temperatures and shad to locate bass. Bass and baitfish both frequently suspend right above the thermocline. Quality depth finders can detect the thermocline, which usually develops at about 25 to 40 feet deep.

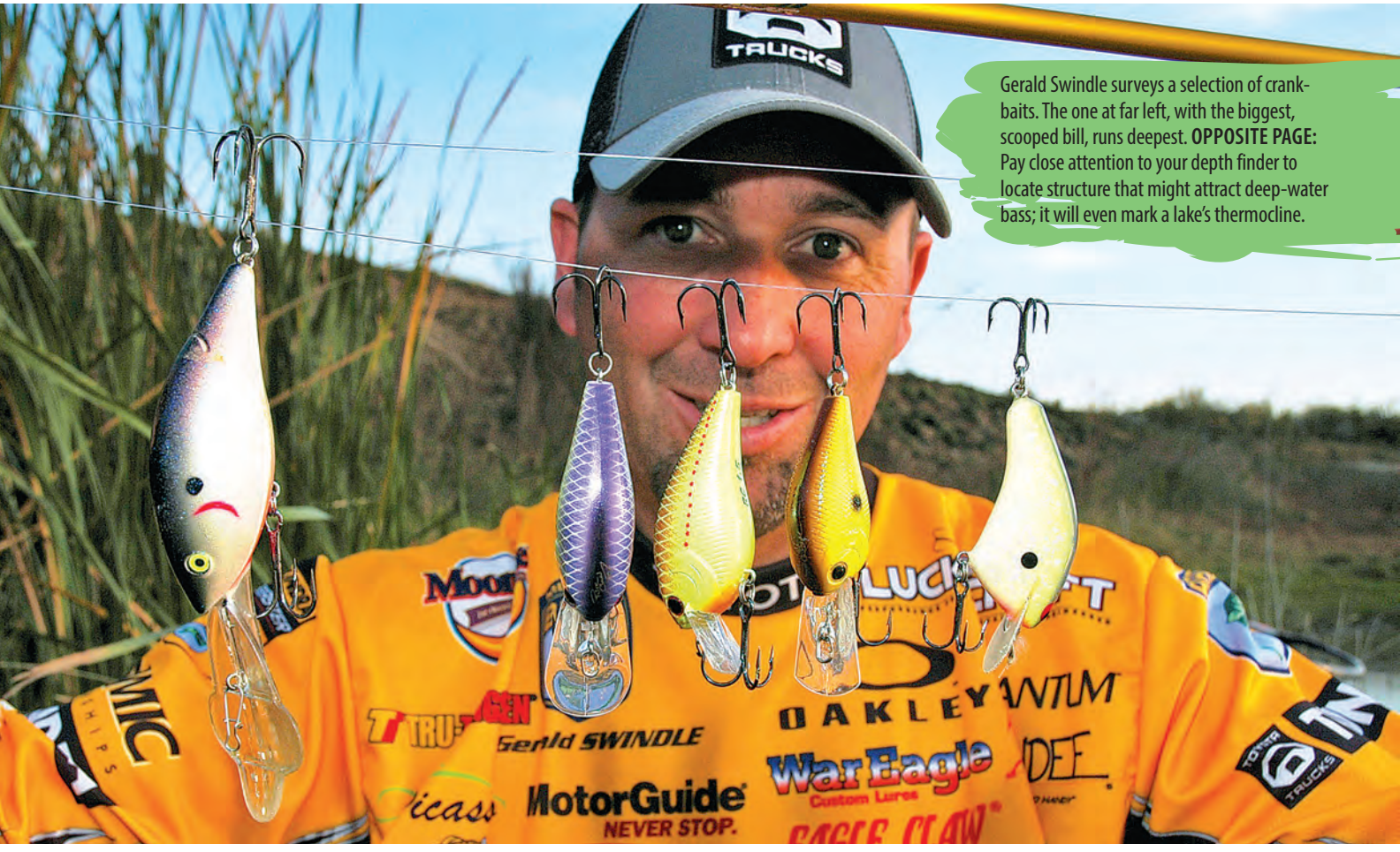
Many anglers traditionally use bottom-bouncing lures, like jigs, worms or drop-shots, but those baits won't work on bass suspended up in the water column. Many anglers throw short, fat, square-billed crankbaits. These lures resemble bream and can ricochet off objects, but they only dive to about 8 to 10 feet. They make excellent temptations for working shorelines and flats, but not the depths. Heavy, lipless crankbaits resemble shad and can quickly sink to the bottom. They sail long distances and work great for schooling fish.

GET CRANKY

For bass suspending at the thermocline, though, anglers need something that resembles a shad, but can ride that thermocline at the right depth on a hot July day. Long-billed crankbaits can run varied depths, some to 30 feet or more.

"Crankbaits mimic baitfish and are very versatile baits to throw all-year long," said pro bass angler Gerald Swindle of Hayden, Ala. "Baits with longer, rounder bills will always be better in super-hot water and really cold water. The longer the bill, the deeper the lure dives. A deep-diving crankbait has a longer, wider lip, rounded on the front. The tip will be much wider than the back of the lip because it's trying to scoop water and push the bait lower. The bigger the spoon on the tip, the deeper it goes."

Besides working the upper edge of the thermocline, anglers can use deep-running crankbaits to probe aquatic grasses and run parallel to sloping points or humps. Bass also hover over channel edges where they can drop into deep water or feed on the shallower ledges. Bass commonly hunt near brush piles established for crappie or suspend next to vertical structures such as standing timber, bulkheads and bridge or dock pilings during the summer.



Gerald Swindle surveys a selection of crankbaits. The one at far left, with the biggest, scooped bill, runs deepest. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Pay close attention to your depth finder to locate structure that might attract deep-water bass; it will even mark a lake's thermocline.



"Deep-running crankbaits are efficient tools for covering deeper water," VanDam advised. "In the summer, I like to crank ledges with a Strike King 6XD. It can be very effective at that time. It looks like a giant gizzard shad, bluegill or crappie to a hungry bass. That's what those big fish want to eat. They want a big meal."

When fishing ledges, use baits that dive slightly deeper than the water depth so the lip digs into the bottom. When fishing deep vegetation, run the bait so the lip tickles the grass tops. Around vertical structure, deliberately bang crankbaits into objects and pause your retrieve so the lure hovers a moment to simulate a stunned baitfish. Often, what looks like a wounded or incapacitated shad can prove too tempting for bass to resist.

"I like to do a lot of deep cranking around bridge pilings for suspended fish," VanDam said. "I'll throw different bait sizes to run at different depths until I find the right crankbait that gets to the best zone. I don't just run a crankbait in a straight line. I'll give it a little jerk to make it move more erratically. That erratic action triggers bass into biting."

When fishing deep water, stick to colors that mimic shad like pearl/black. Experiment with colors, shapes, depths and retrieves to determine the best combination for that day.

"Deep-running crankbaits are a great idea to use during the summer, especially when we find bass grouped up tight," Gleason said. "For colors, I keep it simple. My favorites are chartreuse/blue, citrus shad and shad-type colors, but deep-cranking is more about locating active groups of fish and getting a reaction than about the colors."



John N. Felsher *is a professional freelance writer and photographer with more than 1,700 articles in more than 117 magazines to his credit. He worked as the outdoors editor for several Louisiana newspapers.*

TACKLE NEEDS

To get baits deep it takes work. Use at least a 7-foot medium-action rod with a light tip. Fiberglass rods flex a little more than graphite, and that slight delay allows bass to grab baits better. Make the longest casts possible and use reels with wide spools that can hold plenty of line and are designed more for power than speed — with slower gear ratios, around 5:1 to 5.6:1.

"For deep cranking, a person needs a lower gear for more power, but the longest rod possible to create distance in the cast," said Terry Scroggins, a bass pro from San Mateo, Fla. "The longer the cast, the deeper the bait can run. I usually use 12-pound fluorocarbon for cranking, but sometimes I'll drop it down to 10-pound if I want to get a little deeper."

Fluorocarbon sinks and virtually disappears in the water. It doesn't stretch as much as monofilament, so it gives an angler better sensitivity. Thicker line creates more drag, so a bait doesn't dive as deep. Anglers can make the same lure run a bit deeper by using lighter line.

Long-lipped crankbaits catch bass, but they take great effort to fish. Even a fit angler can tire easily after repeatedly cranking big, deep-diving lures back to the boat. Most bass tournaments prohibit trolling, but anglers just out for fun can stick a couple rods in holders and troll deep-divers with either gasoline or electric power to cover large tracts of water. Troll baits along the channel drops.

Anglers throwing crankbaits in the right place at the right time can often put many giant bass in the boat quickly, particularly when bass feed ravenously upon shad or other baitfish. When temperatures rise, get a little cranky. ▪

NORTHSHORE TOPWATER BASS >



Trent Hill shows off a bass he caught on a deep-diving crankbait while fishing deep water. Note the long, wide bill that allows the bait to dive deeper.



Dustin Touchet counts on a Pop-R to take most of his Northshore largemouth bass.

Photos by Keith Lusher Jr.

TOPWATER BASS ACTION HEATS UP ON NORTHSHORE

Look for areas loaded with bait and make long casts

By Keith Lusher Jr.

July is here, and along with the heat comes an exciting way to fish for bass in the rivers and bayous that empty into Lake Pontchartrain. Bass fisherman Dustin Touchet of Slidell said out of the various ways to target bass, his favorite is using a topwater popper during the morning to catch aggressively feeding fish.

"Oh yeah. This is what I live for right here," he said.

Touchet has been catching a limit on every trip, using baits to mimic baitfish being ambushed by bass during the cooler, early morning hours.

While he fishes all over the Northshore, he admits he has a favorite bayou that he said "looks like a river but behaves like the marsh." Spanning 5 miles, Bayou Bonfouca originates near Highways 190 and 11 in Slidell and empties into northeastern section of Lake Pontchartrain.

The name Bonfouca dates to a time when the Boc Fouca tribe inhabited the land along the bayou. The name Boc Fouca translates to "bayou people," but it has changed from the 1700s to what is now called Bon Fouca which means "good people".

At its northernmost location, Bonfouca begins as a typical river with cypress knees and overhangs dominating the shoreline. However, it's the southern end of the bayou that Touche said is where the real action happens.

"The marshy section of the bayou is loaded with baitfish because of how close it is to the lake," Touchet said.

It's the proximity to the lake that allows the bayou to hold a variety of bait that isn't commonly associated with bass fishing, including pogies and shrimp.

LOCATING BASS

Bass and structure go hand-in-hand, but for Touchet, it's open water that screams, "Fish here."



"It's hard to ignore the balls of baitfish scattering on the surface as bass erupt on them out here," said Touchet, who scans the surface as he cruises south. When he spots an area of disruption, he shuts off the engine and drops his trolling motor. From there, it's all about approaching the school in stealth mode.

"Think speckled trout. It's just like fishing for specks under birds," Touchet said. "You don't want to disrupt the feeding."

He recommends keeping the boat around 20 yards from the nearest outer edge of the surface commotion and making a long cast as close as possible to the feeding frenzy.

TOPWATER LURES

When choosing a lure, Touchet said he has the most success with ones that mimic the baitfish in color and draw lots of attention due to the displacement of water. After trying out numerous lures over the years, he's decided on one that has both qualities.

"The 2½-inch Rebel Pop-R in the chrome color is my favorite," he said. "In fact, if I only had one lure to choose to fish with for the rest of my life, it would be that bait."

Touche prefers to work the bait in a sporadic fashion instead of the popular walk-the-dog manner.

TIME OF DAY

With the summer heat raising water temperatures, getting an early start is of the utmost importance. Touchet likes getting out on the water at first light because it allows him to find the scattering baitfish easier.

"The earlier you get out, the calmer the wind — for the most part," Touchet said. "It's so much easier to spot those bass busting on shad when it's dead calm."

Another reason is that the window of time to fish is shortened by the heat in July. Touchet said you are looking at 3 to 4 hours to fish before the topwater bite shuts down. After that happens, he said he turns his attention to the grassline.

"Bayou Bonfouca has a distinct grassline that is visible, even if though it's submerged," he said.

Touchet positions his boat about 10 feet off of the grass line and uses his trolling motor to cruise along the submerged wall of grass. He casts in front of him and retrieves his lure along the grass to maximize its time in the strike zone. He recommends using soft-plastic lures that can be rigged weedless to avoid hanging up.

"I have the most success casting into the grass and reeling it in until it reaches the edge. Then, I'll let it drop, and the strike will come when the lure sinks," Touchet said.

For fishing the grass line, he recommends Saltwater Assassin's curlytail in the chicken on a chain color on a No. 2/0 worm hook.

While the action is heavy in July on Bayou Bonfouca, Touchet warns that these are typical marsh bass, with the average size being under 2 pounds and an occasional 4- to 5-pounder mixed in. ▪

TOLEDO BEND >

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Mike Jimenez caught this 5½-pound, Toledo Bend largemouth bass on April 30, 2021.

IS GRASS BACK? TOLEDO BEND BASS COULD GET A HUGE BOOST THIS SUMMER

High, warm water offers perfect conditions for milfoil, hydrilla to take hold in lake

By John Dean

I am anticipating higher water than usual and warming water in June and July, which bodes well for a development that should put a smile on the face of all bass anglers who fish Toledo Bend.

I hope you're sitting down as you read this because grass, even hydrilla mixed with milfoil, is starting to materialize and prosper in many areas of the lake. Based on past experience, all it takes for the grass to take off is a higher water level and warm water. That, my friends, means there's a strong possibility we could be dropping and/or punching grass in late June and especially July.

There are many bassers who know grass is present and trying to secure a foothold or stronger. I want to put in my 2 cents and





share with all. There is grass growing in 12- to 15-foot depths, but in most cases 6- to 8-foot depths.

That comes on the heels of a report a few months ago that a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department official talked about the critical loss of grass on this lake since the mid-2010s and declared the TPDW would no longer spray grass south of Tenaha Creek.

Isn't that all great news?

I'm expecting the lake's pool stage to be at least above 170 feet, and in all likelihood higher, considering it was almost a foot above pool (172) as May turned into June. There have been several heavy downpours in the region and more to come, according to weather forecasts.

The lake's still inching up despite two generators running 24/7 and all 11 gates open 1 foot, recently reduced from 2 feet.

If Toledo Bend stays up, expect many bass to stay shallow as long as the bream and shad are using the shallows. It'll be full-blown post-spawn, for sure, because the last group of bass to spawn would have made the move at the full moon in late May.

I'll concentrate on the shallows, like I have for many years, until the baitfish leave. It's time to throw plastic frogs and topwaters. My favorite is a Top Toad, even in mid-day hours. A man and his son caught 5s and 6s all-day long two summers ago on that bogus frog; the water was high and in the bushes.

What else works? Pop-Rs, walk-the-dog type topwaters — whatever your favorite might be.

Of course, it's high time for the typical post-spawn pattern, which means fishing deeper water with DD22s, plus drop-shots and Carolina-rigged soft plastics. That could wind up being the most-dominant pattern in early summer

And fish the grass. If I can find hydrilla in 12- to 14-foot depths that has matted and formed a canopy, I'll punch it with soft plastics, usually a junebug/red Senko under a ½-ounce tungsten weight. It all depends on what happens with development of the underwater vegetation between now and then.

Fishing for crappie, aka white perch, should be red-hot. In late May, 100-plus fish days were common for anglers dropping artificial jigs around brush tops in 20- to 30-foot depths. They are plentiful and suspended around brush tops.

Have a happy and safe Fourth of July, everyone. ▪

John Dean has been guiding on Toledo Bend most of his life. For a guide trip or more information, call 936-404-2688.

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Jacob Andrews, who started bass fishing as a boy with his grandfather, has grown to love the sport and catch fish like this one.

Photo courtesy Jacob Andrews

ULM'S NIMROD, ANDREWS REACH THE PINNACLE OF LOUISIANA COLLEGE FISHING

TEAM FISHING TOGETHER FOR THE LAST TIME SEALS DEAL WITH 11-POUNDER IN LAST HOUR

By Don Shoopman

Jacob Andrews' first experience fishing a college bass tournament with Connor Nimrod — the 2021 Louisiana B.A.S.S. Nation College State Championship on March 14— was an eye-opener during.

With five bass estimated at 19 pounds in the livewell late in the tournament, the team went looking for "hawgs," the big girls, on beds at Caney Lake. Nimrod, a Kansas native, got the big bite and set the hook. Andrews turned to look and was aghast at the sight of an unhappy 11-pound bass connected by 8-pound fluorocarbon to, get this, a spinning outfit.

"It was ridiculous. I was thinking like, 'What are you doing? Down here we use 20-pound line for those big fish,'" said Andrews, a Monroe native.

"That was the most nervous I have ever been. I couldn't use a net in this tournament, so I knew I was responsible for grabbing the fish, getting her in the boat. All I felt was relief when I had my fist on it.

"I was, like, 'Did that just happen?' We tried to guess the weight. We couldn't. I never even saw a bass that big. We went to whooping and hollering and carrying on. We said if anybody beats us they deserve it. We knew we had around 30 pounds."

COLLEGE STATE TITLE

To be exact, the University of Louisiana-Monroe's fishing team members had 29.88 pounds, more than enough to top the 36-team field representing nine state colleges and universities. The 11-pound bass was the biggest of the day.

The nearest challenger was the ULM team of Wesley Banks and Luke O'Neal, with 21.60 pounds, followed by LSU's Taylor Knowles and Hunter Walker with 19.88 pounds, including a 9.27-pound beauty, and Louisiana Tech's Landon Meyer and Cooper Arthur with 18.99 pounds.

The effort marked the highlight of their college fishing careers for Andrews, a senior, and Nimrod, a junior from De Soto, Kansas. It also propelled ULM to the Bassmaster Series College National Championship, a prestigious contest set later this year.

"That tournament that we won was the first tournament we fished together. We started off with a good note, I'd say," Andrews said.

Nimrod, who was a freshman when he and teammate Morgan Jalaldin won the YETI FLW College Fishing Southern Conference Tournament in 2019 on Lake Texoma, said, "That win over there at Caney probably was the best one. The home crowd (ULM fans) was over there at Caney."

HIGH-SCHOOL START

Nimrod, a 21-year-old junior majoring in business marketing, is no stranger to big wins. He was a DeSoto High School senior when he and his younger brother, Dylan, won the 2018 Kansas B.A.S.S. Nation High School State Championship on Milford Lake.

Still, this one was special for a collegiate bass angler who has fished competitively ever since Rodney Kirk, who worked at Bass Pro Shops in Olathe, Kansas, invited him and his father, Steve Nimrod, to a youth bass club meeting. Nimrod was 7 or 8 at the time, he said.

"I liked the guys, and I just started fishing," he said.

He continued fishing and competed in bass tournaments the four years he attended De Soto High School. He also traveled to Toledo Bend several times to fish high school Opens.

"I liked that part of the country," he said.

His interest piqued, he looked at the university near Monroe. He toured the campus and made an easy decision.

"It was a nice fit. I'm not a person who liked a big college," he said.

Nimrod, who works part-time at EK's Marine in West Monroe, didn't get a scholarship.

"I wish I was that fortunate," he said, noting that he had several academic scholarships and joined ULM's fishing team as a freshman.

While prefishing one day for the state tournament, Nimrod nailed a 35-pound limit with the biggest a 10.48-pound, his personal best, until the state tournament.

He and Andrews pulled up to their first spot, some offshore grass, and immediately began catching keeper bass on a Chatterbait. They had their five-bass limit, estimated at 12 to 13 pounds, before 9 a.m., he said.

KICKER: 11 POUNDS

"We realized we needed to cull up a lot, so we went looking for bed fish. We culled everything we had with bed fish, and it started to come down to the wire," Nimrod told the *Topeka Capital-Journal* newspaper. "It was 2 p.m., and we were due in at 3, so we went looking for one more big bite in an area I knew big ones spawned historically. We eased back up in the pocket, and there were no other boats around, to our surprise.

"We looked for a little while until we finally saw her sitting on a bed in the middle of the pocket. The fish looked like a dang submarine she was so big."

The "hawg" bit on a drop-shotted 3-inch albino-colored Megabass Spark Shad.

"It only took four to five flips in there," he said. "The cast before I caught her, I wanted to make sure (she wanted to bite). I let her swim off, and she dropped it. I cast again. I wanted to make sure she had the whole thing."

He set the hook, and the fight was on.

Andrews timed the fight at 5 minutes.

"He was scared. He said, 'Don't break her off! Don't break her off!' (In Kansas), we're accustomed to 8-pound line, fluorocarbon," Nimrod said. "I had barely got her (hooked) in the tip of the nose."

That was enough to make a huge difference in the outcome.

What's in his future after one more year with ULM?

"I'd really like to be able to make it big time. I'm going to fish one year of (Bassmaster) Opens when I graduate and see where it goes from there," he said.

HOMETOWN STICK >



Connor Nimrod (left) and his younger brother, Dylan, show off four of five bass they caught while prefishing for the Louisiana B.A.S.S. Nation College State Championship at Caney Lake. Those five bass weighed 35 pounds. The Nimrods, both from De Soto, Kansas, won the 2018 Kansas B.A.S.S. National High School State Championship on Milford Lake.



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Jacob Andrews (left) and Connor Nimrod of Louisiana-Monroe hoist five bass weighing 29.88 pounds that won the 2021 Louisiana B.A.S.S. Nation College State Championship on March 14 at Caney Lake. Andrews, a senior, and Nimrod, a junior, enjoy fishing tournaments on the college level.

Photo courtesy Jacob Andrews and Connor Nimrod

HOMETOWN STICK

Andrews, 22, who has a semester left before graduating with a degree in criminal justice, cherishes the memories from four years of bass fishing with ULM.

"Oh, yeah, I've made some of my best friends on this team. Some of the best memories of my life are from this team," he said.

A graduate of Ouachita Parish High School, his other top career finishes were fourth with Luke O'Neal at a 2019 FLW qualifier at Lake Texoma and fourth with Taylor Kolb in March 2020 at Table Rock in Missouri.

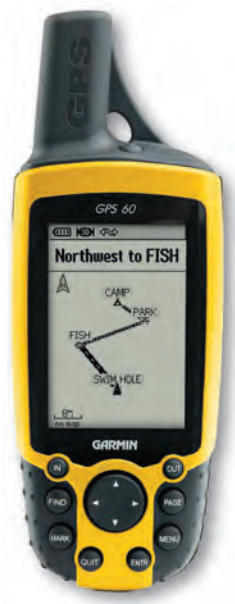
Andrews started bass fishing in elementary school with his grandfather, the late Ray Andrews, he said, and he later took his father, Greg Andrews.

Fishing with Nimrod has been rewarding, he said.

"Ah, he's cool. He teaches me a lot of stuff he uses in Kansas that we don't normally use in Louisiana," he said, particularly light tackle.

As for the future, Andrews said, "After I graduate ,I hope to maybe pick up a few sponsors and fish some (Bassmaster) Opens and BFLs and work my way up to being a professional angler. That's my hope." ■

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SOUTH LOUISIANA DUO HAS LEARNED MORE ABOUT SAC-A-LAIT BY FISHING PLENTY OF PLACES WHERE THEY'RE BETTER KNOWN AS CRAPPIE OR SLABS.

By Kinny Haddox

TIPS FROM THE CRAPPIE EXPRESS

THE CRAPPIE EXPRESS IS MAKING ITS MARK.

Maybe "splash" would be a better word.

Tim Hebert of Thibodaux and Andre Smith of Schriever have always been fishermen, but in recent years they have teamed up and taken on a new challenge — catching crappie — with remarkable results. In tournaments around the South, they regularly finish in the money, and they have challenged for Angler of the Year honors on several tours.

While they've had a tremendous impact on the sport, the two south Louisiana anglers still haven't been able to get tours like American Crappie Trail or Crappie Masters to follow their south Louisiana influence and change names properly to the American Sac-a-lait Trail or the Sac-a-lait Masters — but give them time.

Crappie fishing is a growing sport with new gear, equipment, techniques and competitions every day. Hebert and Smith have been in the middle of it, having taken their show on the road and found great success in competitive fishing.

FEELING THE "THUMP"

But they still love coming back to their home waters and feeling the "thump" of a slab crappie. And this Cajun Crappie Express can also take you to a new level of fishing success if you follow their tips and tactics.

"There are some obvious differences in fishing competitively and fishing just for fun in the way you approach it, but really, catching crappie is catching crappie," Hebert said. "You do the same things,



and you use the same baits. It's just a different approach."

Hebert and Smith are worlds apart in some ways, but tight-knit in others. Hebert is 42 years old; Smith is 22. They have bass backgrounds and have known each other for years.

"I've been fishing for years and was friends with his dad," Hebert said. "Since he was a little kid, he would always go with us, and he was the one that would always catch fish. You could take him to a mud hole, and he'd catch a fish. As he got older, he would always come fish with me. When I started talking about going to fish crappie tournaments, I wanted him to try it, but he was skeptical."

One of the main obstacles was that while they could catch fish in their shallow south Louisiana, most tournaments are held on big, deep reservoirs. Then something came along that changed things: the LiveScope.

GAME CHANGER >

"There are some obvious differences in fishing competitively and fishing just for fun in the way you approach it, but really, catching crappie is catching crappie.

Tim Hebert keeps his eye on the electronics while he and Andre Smith keep their baits in front of crappie they've spotted with electronics.



GAME CHANGER

"When I saw Tim using that, it was a game changer," Smith says. "I felt confident we could compete. Where we fish, we have no maps, no contour data. We just fish the bank and the run-outs. But with this, we can find fish anywhere."

"At home on waters like Lake Verret and Bayou Black, we know what to look for and where the fish will be. You don't have to have electronics to fish areas like that. My best tip is to just spend some time finding the areas that hold the fish and stay in the shallow water. The key for us finding fish around home is to find the grass. Find grass that is near a canal or a bayou that has a little cut running into the marsh."

When you find those spots, the best time and place to catch them is on a falling tide when the water is dropping out of the marsh and bringing all the food to that one place where the cut meets the bayou.

"They'll stack up there, and they'll be hungry," Smith said.

Hebert said that knowing each other makes them a good team, and that's important anytime you fish with someone, in a tournament or just for fun. You need to know what to expect from each other if you are serious about catching crappie.

"We give each other a hard time, but it's all in fun," Hebert says. "We are serious about catching fish, but we can't have the big head when we are in the boat together. Are we competitive against each other? Yes. But that brings out the best in both of us. He runs the trolling motor a lot because, hey, he's younger, and he's good at it. Sometimes I fish and he nets, and sometimes he fishes and I net.

"In practice, we do something that is really helpful anytime you are on the water. While we try to figure them out, I fish with one bait, and he fishes with another. Fishing different things allows us to figure them out a lot quicker. You have to know what kind of presentation they want, what kind of bait they want and how deep they are. And what worked yesterday may not work today."

When the duo is competing and spot a big fish on the electronics, one of them will try to catch it. If the fish doesn't spook or bite, the other one will take a turn. Maybe there's a little something different that one does. When the second man up catches the fish, the ribbing begins pretty good.

Hebert said that lets them cover a lot of water efficiently. Covering water quickly isn't necessarily good for catching crappie, but being efficient by making sure you cover your bases is.

Hebert said that's one of the biggest mistakes that some crappie fishermen make. You can't catch today's fish on yesterday's bait.



Andre Smith and Tim Hebert depend on their electronics to catch slab crappie like these on big, unfamiliar bodies of water.



When Andre Smith sees a big crappie on his electronics, he'll try for it first, then let partner Tim Hebert have a shot.

CHANGE SPOTS FOR BITES

"Look. Today, there are sometimes five or six boats in one little area," he said. "We may fish in some spots like that, but one of the biggest mistakes you can make is staying in one spot for a long period of time if you aren't catching. That's not healthy."

Smith and Hebert fish a lot of submerged structure using their electronics, and they catch big fish that way. But they still catch fish the old-fashioned way.

"Oh yeah, you can still catch fish the same way we used to," Hebert said. "We have changed, not the fish. At home, we fish places like Lake Verret, Grassy Lake, Lake Palourde, Bayou Black and Lac des Allemands, and we do that by sight-fishing — for the most part. You know what the fish will do from experience, and you've got to find them and give them what they want. When we approach laydowns or run-outs in our home waters, one of us will fish with a cork and one without a cork. The one without a cork will fish from the bottom up, and with the cork, we'll present it a couple of feet deep. You have to use different techniques and baits to get a bite."

The duo loves Bobby Garland Baby Shad and Slab Slayers. They go back and forth because sometimes, something as simple as a bait's profile can make a difference.

"Being one of the younger crappie fishermen, I see a lot of increased interest in the sport, and I'm trying to help promote that," Smith said. "We have a lot of competition from the saltwater fishing down here, but it is starting to grow. One reason is that more people are learning to catch crappie."

One thing Smith encourages fishermen to do is to just slow down. That's his No. 1 tip. No. 2: when you are fishing where a fish should be, keep your bait as still as possible; don't jig it up and down. You never see a live bait jigging up and down. Swimming slowly, yes, but not jigging up and down. ▪

DO CRAPPIE KNOW YOU'RE LOOKING? >

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Tim Hebert shows off a 3-pound crappie, the kind every angler wants to put in the boat.

DO CRAPPIE KNOW YOU'RE LOOKING?

Tim Hebert and Andre Smith depend on their LiveScope to catch bigger crappie most of the time, but especially in tournaments. But they have learned that just because you see a fish, doesn't mean you can catch them.

In fact, big crappie are getting more and more leery. If you don't catch them on the first presentation, most of the time, they will just swim away. Hebert has a theory about that, and he's talked to other competitors who feel the same way.

"Having LiveScope in the boat is like having a teacher with you," he said. "You can learn so much from it about fish behavior as well as catch them, but the fish are adapting. Trust me, I'm not just saying that. There's something about when you have them in the scope for very long, I think they sense it. I don't know if they can feel it pinging off them or what. But fish have a lot of sensory ability that we don't totally understand.

"We have started seeing fish out fairly far away, then taking the scope off them. When we think we are closer, we'll scope them again and get the bait to them as quickly as possible. That first cast is the money cast." ▪





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



The boat ramps at a marina are places to launch boats. Don't waste time doing anything else that makes others wait.

THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER DO AT THE MARINA

By Will Martin

We teamed up with Capt. Casey Brunning of Hurricane Bay Charters in St. Bernard to come up with a list of things that you should never do at a marina. He stopped at 11, depending on how you count.

• Do not back your boat into the water with your lights on.

• Do not yell at the man counting your bait. He is probably counting shrimp, and if you're not careful you'll wind up short on small shrimp.

Brunning said, "Don't interrupt the person counting your shrimp, unless you are a gambling man. You may get more, or you may get less."

• Do not pay your launch fee with a $100 bill.

"This ain't no bank," Brunning said.

BE CONSIDERATE

Know the Fight Club mantra: "You are not special. You are not a beautiful or unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everything else."

It follows that you:

• Do not block the fuel pumps with your boat after you've launched;

• Do not back your kayaks up to the launch and spend 20 minutes getting everything organized; do that mess in the parking lot;

• Do not block the launch to load your boat for 20 minutes; do that at the gas station or in the parking lot;

• Do not tie your vessel up to the launch side of the dock, it's in the way, and shuts down the entire launch for others;

• Do not straddle the yellow line if you are waiting for the launch on a lined road. Not everyone in the world is launching a boat; some folks are just passing through.

DON'T BE IMPATIENT

• Do not crank your motor before the boat is in the water.

"We get it, you have a 2-stroke, and it's awesome, but please, put the lower unit in the water," said Brunning (985-966-1735). "There are neighbors trying to sleep."

• Do not crank your duck boats in the parking lot and let them run until you are ready to launch.

• Do know your limitations and how to spot the limitations of others. Remember, one of the most reliable marks of manhood is a humble spirit. A man is humble when it's his time to be the student, and a man is humble when it's his time to be the teacher. If you are unsure about something, ask someone. Most people enjoy giving someone a hand when asked respectfully for help, and anglers are better than most people.

Do be kind. Be helpful. Be vigilant. ▪

GEAR CHECK: PFDS >



Make sure you know Louisiana's requirements for PFDs before setting out on a boating adventure.

GEAR CHECK: PFDS

THEY ONLY WORK IF YOU'RE WEARING THEM

By Will Martin

This time of year, sportsmen are hitting Louisiana's waterways, carrying on traditions and celebrating a way of life that is unique and something to be proud of.

The water binds people from disparate backgrounds together, and who said blood is thicker than water? Louisiana's creeks, rivers and bayous branch out across the land like a circulatory system, and is Louisiana not the beating heart of the Gulf?

Caught up in the excitement of fishing tournaments, offshore trips and the myriad other enticements of the Sportsman's Paradise, it's easy to miss news of the deaths that occur out there, too — deaths that are as routine as they are tragic. Maybe we choose to overlook such news.

More tragic than the loss of life is the sure knowledge that most of these deaths could have been prevented if better choices had been made by someone involved. The choice to remain sober or to designate a sober boater; the choice to practice the buddy system when you are on the water; to set check-in times with someone who knows your plans; and the choice to wear a life jacket are three that come to mind immediately.

Maybe you don't drink or smoke/vape, or maybe you would never think to go boating or wade-fishing alone. Many of you out there fall into these two categories.

But everyone who ventures onto Louisiana's waterways has the choice to wear a life jacket or personal flotation device (PFD).

MOST FATALITIES? NO PFDS

According to the BoatUS Foundation for Boating Safety and Clean Water, more than two-thirds of all boating fatalities are drowning incidents, and 90% of drowning victims were not wearing a life jacket.

A variety of flotation devices are on the market, each with a unique set of pros and cons. The appropriateness of a flotation device for a given activity is a matter of the device's maximum buoyancy, performance level and limitations. You should choose your life jacket based on your boating activities and conditions. One size does not fit all when it comes to PFDs.

Life jackets must be U.S. Coast Guard-approved to meet carriage requirements.

PFD REQUIREMENTS

Louisiana law requires that all children ages 16 and younger wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved Type I, II, or III PFD while underway on a vessel less than 26 feet long. The PFD must be fastened and properly sized for the child. Inflatables are not allowed for children ages 16 and under. A wearable U.S. Coast Guard-approved Type I, II, or III PFD must be readily available for each of the other passengers on board.

Everyone on a motorboat less than 16 feet propelled by a hand-tiller outboard motor must wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved Type I, II, III or V PFD while the motorboat is underway.

You must have a U.S. Coast Guard-approved Type I, II, or III PFD for each person on board a pirogue, canoe or kayak. The PFD must be properly sized and in serviceable condition.

If you're riding on a personal watercraft, you must wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved Type I, II, III, or V PFD.

Individuals engaged in watersports, including but not limited to waterskiing, being towed on a tube, wakeboarding, wake surfing, etc., must wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved Type I, II, III, or V PFD. An inflatable PFD is not permitted.

Remember, safety is your responsibility. Compliance with federal and state law is also your responsibility. This article is meant to be a reminder to check your safety equipment, and is not meant to be legal advice.

For information about Louisiana's PFD requirements, visit: https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/required-boating-equipment. ▪



IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME. KEYS TO FOOD-PLOT PLANTING SUCCESS WITH DEER SEASON ON THE HORIZON.

THE PLOT THICKENS

By Kinny Haddox

In a day when there is an app for almost anything, there are still a few things that you just have to do for yourself.

ONE OF THOSE IS TO "PLOT" YOUR DEER HUNTING STRATEGY.

This is the time to get started, if you haven't already.

"Plotting" for deer success, in this instance, involves more than studying the rut, setting up feeders and looking at moon phases. It means planting food plots to attract deer, keep them close by and maintain a healthy herd.

It's a simple fact. If you build it, they will come.

But there is a lot more to building successful food plots for deer than borrowing your hunting buddy's tractor, tilling up a few shooting lanes and grabbing a 40-pound bag of some sort of seed a couple of weeks before the season opens.

To know food plots, it helps to know deer and the land. Jim Rolfe of Oak Ridge certainly fits that bill. A sales agent for Brown Realty, which specializes in outdoor properties, he has been farming for more than 40 years. He killed his first deer — a spike — when he was 8 years old.

"I always plant winter stuff, and there are two keys to success that sometimes people skip," says Rolfe. "First, you need to get your soil analyzed, and second, you need to figure out the best fertilizer to really get it going.

"On our main food plots, we put out lime when the soil analysis calls for it. And we use nitrogen to really make it grow. We also mix fertilizer with the seed; you have to apply it as soon as you mix it, but it turns out great."

Rolfe is an early starter out of necessity. He can't get equipment through a wet area he has to cross to get to his hunting spot if he waits too long. But he cautions that armyworms can be a problem if you don't keep an eye on them. His general spread is to put two bushels of wheat and a bushel of oats per acre.

"Make sure it gets plenty of seed, " he said. "I always double-disk the area, too. We do it once in the summer to knock down a lot of the grass and weeds and then right before we plant. I always run a harrow over it before and after seeding to level it off and make sure it is spread evenly."

>



A well-maintained food plot deep in an otherwise dense forest is almost a sure thing as far as becoming a deer magnet.

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Rolfe's farming expertise comes in handy making sure the stand takes. He always cuts a small ditch around the edges of the food plots to get the water off before planting and keep it off. He also cuts water furrows across the plots to aid in keeping them dry.

"Food plots have to have water to grow," he said, "but they won't grow if it is standing in water or boggy. It's like anything else you plant."

Rolfe has some hunting tips for food plots, too.

"We don't shoot does, and we don't shoot coyotes or other predators over the food plot," he says. "It doesn't take much to scare a herd of deer off from coming out during daylight hours, even to a great food plot. They live with coyotes all day-long, but gun shots? That's a different matter. We also don't shoot does on the food plots. We find edges of the hunting areas to do that."

If you are careful getting in and out of food plots and don't make it obvious something is going on there besides the dinner bell ringing, even big bucks will come out to eat during daylight hours. They will often chase does across the open, cultivated areas during the rut if they don't know you are there.

Hunt the edges of food plots as well, especially later in the season. While big deer will chase does anywhere during the rut, when they are in their normal routine, they don't come out into the open very often during daylight hours. Rolfe only uses one corn feeder on a plot as well, so deer know where that sweet spot is — and so do the hunters. ▪



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



It won't take long before gun shots around a food plot alert deer to the dangers that await them. Try only to shoot big bucks in the greenery.



Do a good job scouting trails coming to and going from food plots. Those can be great ambush spots to take a big buck like this one Jim Rolfe killed.

THE CIRCLE OF TROPHY DEER LIFE

Some of the biggest deer in Louisiana are harvested each year because of flood plots, but not on food plots. That's because old, wise deer may only visit food plots at night, or sometimes not at all during the season. But because of all the deer activity there, they won't be far away.

When you are hunting food plots, take the time to circle the woods around the food plot and look for scrapes, rubs and recently used deer trails. You might just find that the biggest of the bucks are circling around you while you hunt, but never stepping out in front of you. Those deer may never be seen from a box stand, but you can move to a tree stand or ground blind and get within range for a good shot.

The food plots are crucial to holding the deer, though. And they offer nutrients to the big deer that they would otherwise not get. ▪

"FOOD NETWORK" FOR DEER

If there was a "Food Network" for deer, these are some of the best "dishes" they'd be preparing and when they'd be preparing the meal (recommended planting times in parentheses) to draw deer to the dinner table this fall. And remember, if you don't do a good job, you could get "chopped" from deer hunting success.

• **Austrian winter peas** (Sept. 1-Nov. 1)

Winter peas are expensive, but they add a whole new level of gourmet nutrients to your food plots.

• **Clovers** (Sept. 1 - Nov. 15)

Crimson clover is one of eight varieties of clover that can be planted in Louisiana, including subterranean and Ladino clovers.

• **Oats** (Sept. 1-Nov. 1)

Oats are great for early season but are not as cold tolerant as some other plot grains. But they are a favorite of deer.

• **Rye and rye grass** (Sept. 1 - Nov. 15)

Two of the easier food-plot regulars, these grasses are extremely cold tolerant and provide good hunting spots throughout the season. They can be planted alone or as part of a more nutrient based mix.

• **Wheat** (Sept. 1- Oct. 15)

Another staple crop that is easy to broadcast and grow. Mixed in with rye grass, it's one of the most common types of Louisiana food plots.

• **Greens, turnips, sugar beets, radishes** (Sept. 15-Oct. 15)

Deer hunters wanting to invest a few bucks can plant almost anything that deer will eat, from turnips, mustard greens and wild radishes to enhance deer food plots. Deer will eat them all season-long.

And, hunters, file this information away for next spring for full-year management of your deer hunting grounds. Some of the best attractants and good planting times for warm season food plots are:

• **American jointvetch** *(April 1 – June 1)*

• **Soybeans and cowpeas** *(May 10 – July 15)*

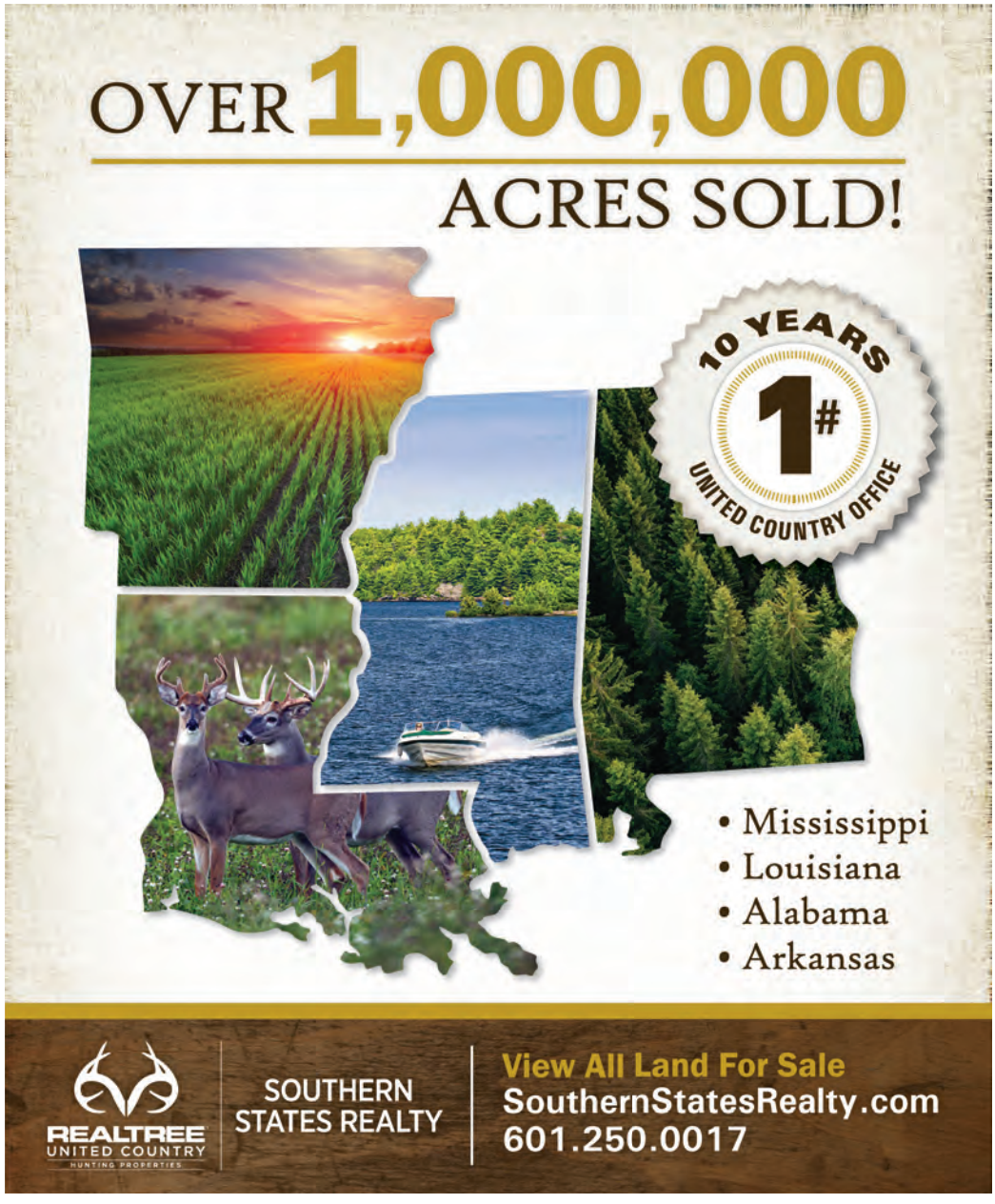
• **Corn** *(April 1-May 1)*



• **Alyce Clover** *(May 1-June 15)*
• **Lab Lab** *(April 15-June 15)*
• **Milo** *(April 15-June 15).* ▪

A thick stand of clover like this is like inviting a deer to the buffet table.

TIMING IS (ALMOST) EVERYTHING >



Schedule planting correctly, know what to plant and how to fertilize, and a food plot might turn into a succulent buffet for whitetails.

TIMING IS (ALMOST) EVERYTHING



Knowing what not to do is just about as important as knowing what to do when it comes to growing food plots for deer-hunting success. The most-common mistakes that cause food plots to fail are not taking into consideration soil types, available moisture and timing. In fact, timing is everything. Well, almost.

Experts at the LSU Ag Center point out that serious "plotters" should start early and get soil samples to ensure food plots can reach their maximum potential. Most don't do that, and it's a serious mistake. Getting samples and having them analyzed can boost a food plot's success; you know what to plant and if any added nutrients are needed.

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Food-plot plantings can offer year-round benefits for deer management. Warm-season food plots are planted April through June, and cool-season plots should be planted in September and October, even later if the weather is extremely hot.

Planting too early for hunting season, especially for cool-season plots like oats, rye, wheat and rye grass, can lead to poor production. When you plant certain crops before their time, it's too hot for cool-season forages to grow, and native grasses choke out planted species. You can also have issues with army worms and blast, a fungal disease, in the hotter months.

To maximize food plots for hunting success, hunters need to take inventory of what native browse exists for deer. Never overlook the help that Mother Nature has already given you. Simply fertilizing stands of Japanese honeysuckle, blackberry and dewberry will greatly enhance your efforts.

If you can, it's also good to plant when there is a good approaching rain, but not a flood. That helps secure the seed in the soil and get them going. ▪



HOME AWAY FROM HOME

AN OFF-THE-GRID DEER CAMP DOESN'T HAVE TO BE UNCOMFORTABLE AND PERMANENT. TRY THESE IDEAS FOR ADDING ALMOST ALL THE COMFORTS OF HOME FOR A RELATIVELY LIGHT HIT TO THE WALLET.

By Chris Holmes

FOR MOST HUNTERS,

especially those who live in larger, metropolitan areas, finding land to lease means having to travel a few hours from home, sometimes even out of state.

Having a comfortable place to stay and basic facilities are top priorities; however, leases are not forever, and building a hunting cabin can be an expensive proposition you can't recoup when it is time to go. But setting up a place to operate off-the-grid is fairly easy and inexpensive, and it can even be done with portability so you can move it to another location.

Two friends and I were excited to see a deer-hunting lease that was available a couple hours from home. The excitement grew when the owner mentioned that the 300-acre property featured a "camp house."

It sounded like the perfect place for the three of us. I had dreams of a cozy cabin with a white picket fence. We took a tour of the property and saw decent deer sign, good trails and roads, nice terrain mixed with hills, creek bottoms, pine plantations and a couple of small fields with shooting houses. It was just what we dreamed about.

However, when we came to the camp house, it more closely resembled a crack house. No utilities, rat-infested — and the previous group apparently lived like cavemen.

My hunting buddies, Steve Savoye and his son, Steven, are uber-talented carpenters and builders, so we knew converting the shack into a livable space wouldn't be a problem. However, we quickly found that paying to have electricity and water run to the property and installing a septic system was not economically feasible. The landowner was only holding the property for timber investment and had no interest in sharing the costs. We decided to go ahead and lease the property, even if it meant staying in a hotel room 15 miles away in a nearby town.

After a few weekends of hard work, the camp house was transformed into a clean, comfortable, livable space. We had the option of using a generator for electricity, but that meant carrying it back and forth, not to mention the maintenance, fuel and noise. After doing a little off-the-grid research, we added a 100-watt solar panel to the roof. Combined with a single, high-capacity, 12-volt, deep-cycle battery, power was supplied to several bright lights, interior and exterior. The 12-volt LED bulbs have lasted for years, and disposable aluminum baking pans were used as reflectors.

The same system also powers dual USB outlets at each bunk for charging phones and operating other small USB items such as laptops and small fans. The solar-controller installation is easy, and for wiring, you only need to know positive from negative. The solar panel and controller was about $150, and the battery another $100.

Water for drinking and cooking is necessarily brought in via 5-gallon jugs and cases of bottled water. However, an installed rainwater collection system was built from plastic gutters and a 330-gallon metal-framed plastic tote for storage. The tote was painted black to limit sunlight and is regularly treated with chlorine tablets to inhibit bacterial growth. The water enters and exits the tank through DIY gravel, sand and charcoal filters. The water from the tank is ***only*** used for the toilet, shower, and outside washing of the skinning rack and ATVs, etc. A small, 12-volt, pressure-sensitive pump runs off the solar system and carries water throughout simple PEX/PVC piping.



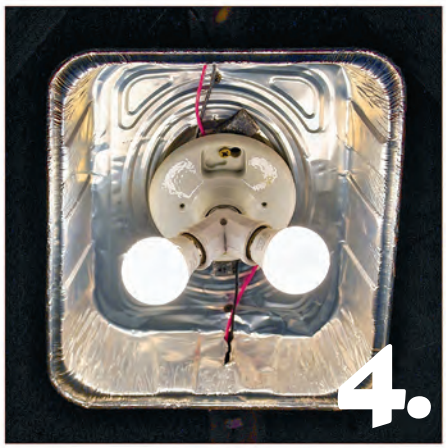
Chris Holmes *is a lifelong Louisiana resident and has hunted everything from squirrels to bear across numerous states in the continental United States and also Hawaii, Canada and Mexico.*



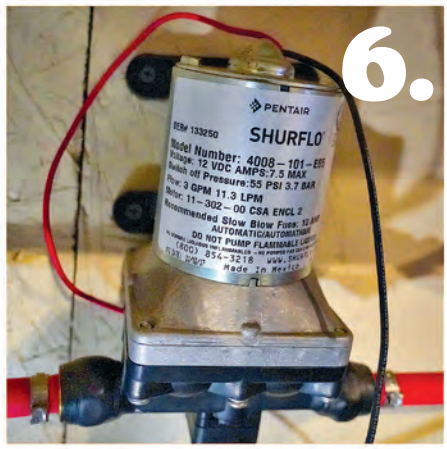


















CAMP ITEMS LIST

1) Urinal from 5-gallon, plastic water jug

2) Solar controller and 12-volt fuse panel

3) Propane Mr. Heater wall heater

4) Porcelain fixture; 12-volt LED light bulbs and aluminum pan reflectors

5) Pet-food container for food storage

6) 12-volt, pressure sensitive water pump

7) Rain water collection/ storage system

8) Dual outlet USB phone charger

9) On-demand propane water heater

For the shower, a three-walled plastic enclosure was an easy install. A small, on-demand propane water heater provides instant hot water. It is certainly nice to have access to a shower after a hot October bow hunt or hours working in the sun planting food plots.

Time to go? No buckets or outhouse needed. A urinal fashioned from a cut-out, 5-gallon water jug and a fully functional indoor toilet connects to a small, nearby D-I-Y septic waste system. The system is easy and inexpensive to build; the hardest part is digging the trench for the piping, the holes for the two 55-gallon plastic waste barrels and the gravel leach field. Instructions and detailed plans are available on the internet for about $30. We bought used, plastic drums for $10 each, and the PVC pipe was about $50 — about $100 for a simple, easily maintained septic system.

Although I believe the camp solar panel could handle extra lighting, a voltage drop running wire from the camp out to the skinning rack caused the lights to be dim. A second solar panel and smaller battery was added to power a large LED light for unloading the trucks upon arrival, and two LED spotlights are plenty bright enough to clean deer.

For cooking, a combination of a flat-top griddle, single gas burner and a seafood burner all run on portable propane, as does the large wall heater. Battery operated smoke and carbon monoxide detectors add a level of safety. Any food not in cans or jars is stored week-to-week in a heavy duty, air-tight, plastic pet-food container. Although not a single rodent has been seen in the camp, it is better not to do anything to attract them.



Steve Savoye cleans a doe shot on an evening hunt. A separate solar panel and battery was installed to light the skinning rack.



A solar panel and 12-volt, deep-cycle battery powers indoor and outdoor lighting, water pump and phone chargers.

Additional outdoor lighting comes from stand-alone solar/LED rope, wall and even Christmas lights. A couple of motion-sensor LED spotlights activate upon loading up in the morning or walking or riding up after an evening hunt. A couple of game cams are strategically hidden to monitor for any unwanted visitors while no one is there.

We were lucky and had a rudimentary building to work with, but many leases are property only. When it is time for us to go, almost everything can be removed and re-used. However, these same systems can be added to portable sheds and shipping containers and made into small camps that can be moved off the property if you lose the lease or decide to go elsewhere.

When you walk into the camp and flick the switch, the lights come on just like at home. The 12-volt system can't run an air conditioner, but a small generator can power a compact window unit for those few early season hunts where it may be a bit warm. Inexpensive, removable, portable and off-the-grid. Pretty much all the comforts of home and no utility bills. ▪

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COVID & ARCHERY HUNTING

YOU'LL NEED TO REALLY PLAN AHEAD THIS SEASON TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS



Sammy Romano

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the first quarter of 2020 saw perhaps the greatest changes to the way we live our lives in the United States.

The shutdown of businesses, both nationally and worldwide, affected nearly every aspect of our lives, especially as consumers. Shortages of raw materials and missing employees led to much-longer lead times in the manufacturing of many products. This was very evident in the archery industry, which faced the double-edged sword of reduced supply, as well as a huge increase in demand.

Most archery products, including bows, crossbows and accessories, were affected, with lengthy back orders the norm. Especially hit hard were arrow manufacturers and custom string builders, with lead times of often up to several months.

THE EARLY BIRD....

As is often the case, success favors the well-prepared, and these supply issues were living proof of that old adage. Archers who had regularly maintained their bows' strings and had an ample supply of arrows and broadheads were able to capitalize on the extra time afforded in some cases by fewer hours of work, by shooting their bows or hunting more often.

Those who rode their strings until they were unravelling or broken and brought them to bow shops the customary 3 weeks before the season opened were left waiting for strings that often took several months to arrive, forcing them to hunt with questionable equipment — if at all. Many hunters had to tune and sight their bows in mid-season because they ran out of arrows or broadheads, both stressful and time consuming.

Both retailers and consumers will have to adjust their buying habits to avoid this situation in the future, but we are still in a huge hole when it comes to product availability. I think it will be well into 2022 before things seem at all normal again. As a retailer, nothing is more frustrating than a customer trying to spend money with you and not being able to obtain the products they wish to purchase. We have increased both our order quantities, as well as our forecast lead times, to try to get ahead of these issues. That being said, the consumer still plays a large part in the scheme of things.

As a bowhunter, here are several things you can do to avoid being inconvenienced by high demand and short supply. First and foremost, plan as far ahead as possible. Bring your bow or crossbow in to have it checked over or serviced right away, so it will be ready for fall hunting seasons. That way, if there are any unforeseen issues that require parts, you are allowing plenty of time for those parts to arrive.

When purchasing arrows, lighted nocks, and broadheads, buy **TWICE** as many as you think you will need. Arrows and broadheads are not perishable, and you will eventually — hopefully — use them anyway. Once you find an arrow/broadhead combination that flies well from your bow setup, it pays to have plenty of them, because these are the foundation of your tune. The last thing you want is to have to retune and resight mid-season. Again, I predict these issues will continue through the winter, and the middle of hunting season is no time to need "a few more arrows".

If you have your bow in for service or items on order, don't call the shop every day to "check on it." The retailer or



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.*

OPPOSITE PAGE: Bowhunters probably shouldn't expect to see pre-COVID inventories at their favorite bow shops until sometime in 2022. **BELOW:** Manufacturing slowdowns dating to the spring of 2020 left shelves empty of many archery accessories.

service center is already doing everything they can to get your bow back to you or items you wish to purchase in stock. They only get paid when they deliver, so they are trying their hardest. Calling constantly only further stresses the situation by tying up an employee who could be working on the other end to find inventory or do repairs. Remember, we are all in this together, let's work together to make the best of a tough situation and get everybody into the field this year. ▪

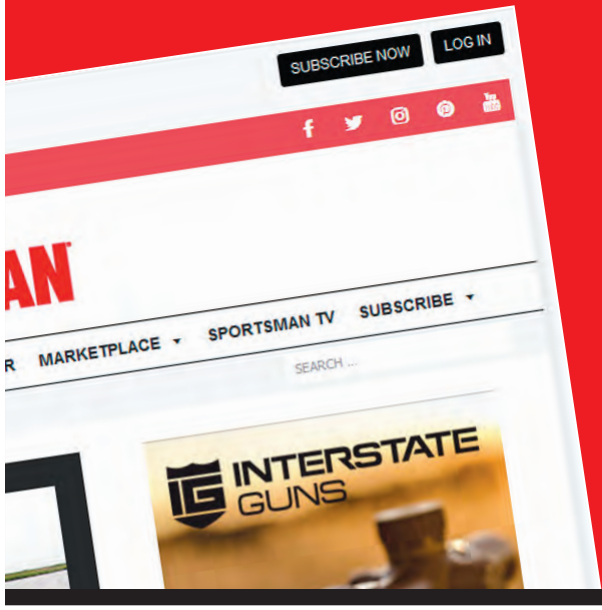


SNAKE I.D. >

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SNAKE I.D.

LOUISIANA'S SNAKES IDENTIFIED, PART IV

By Kevin Hood

Think about all of the products you have seen or been told will keep snakes off of your property. I'll wait. Okay, now forget about every single one of them. I'm back to share helpful information with our fellow outdoor-loving friends.

With temperatures rising, our cold-blooded compadres are becoming more and more active. Why are snakes more active during spring and summer? For the same reason that, on warmer winter days, you may see them "sunning" or hiding somewhere the sun has warmed up. Reptiles are cold-blooded and therefore, unable to regulate their own body temperature. They need an outside source, like the sun, to stay at a healthy temperature. So as the weather warms, these necessary and beneficial helpers are more likely to be out and about.

Since we can't stop the seasons from changing, many are wondering, "Is there anything I can do to keep snakes away?" We love to see them, because snakes are natural predators of the pests and rodents we're already trying to rid our property and gardens of. Smaller snakes take care of tiny pests like snails and slugs, while larger snakes eat the disease-spreading mice and rats that wreak havoc on our homes and crops. They are, in turn, a food source for other animals in our irreplaceable environment.

REPELLENTS? WRONG

We'll get to some tips for keeping snakes at bay, but let's eliminate some that don't work first. Snake-A-Way, Snake Be Gone, lime, sulphur, garlic, mothballs, other various chemicals or spices, and yes, even human hair. You've probably heard of at least one of these as a snake repellent. We have conducted tests with the most-popular products and old wives tales, but NONE of them deterred the snakes.

I know, I know, many people swear by them, but snakes don't smell the way we do. They "taste" the air with their tongues. Then, their Jacobsen's organ helps determine if those moisture particles represent friend, foe or food, all while their forked tongue tells them if the "smell" is to the left or right. Most so-called "snake repellents" claim the "bad smell" keeps them away. Well, snakes don't know if something "stinks," so they won't even know it's there, unless it hurts them physically.

Sadly, the most-awful options — glue traps and mothballs — are also the most-common, thereby earning them a special mention for those who love to enjoy Louisiana's beautifully unique and diverse ecosystems.

Glue traps are nothing more than actual torture devices for any animal that happens to get ensnared in them. Many animals will literally rip themselves apart struggling to escape or succumb to a slow, agonizing death due to starvation. Mothballs, no matter who told you they work, do not work. Even worse, they're a toxic pesticide that is dangerous and illegal to use in any way other than intended and directed, which is to place them, still sealed in their original packaging, in an enclosed storage space with clothing to deter moths. Please, never put mothballs, or suggest they be put, outside or loose in your home. The humidity in our air is enough to dissolve them. Once broken down, this noxious chemical seeps into the ground, contaminating plants and the groundwater that wildlife, even your pets, will drink. Remember, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." They may pilfer an egg now and then; just consider it a small price to pay for their pest-control services. No avid nature lover would choose such vile methods to exterminate innocent animals.

DISCOURAGE THEM

Since there's no 100% foolproof way to keep snakes away, here are a few tips that may at least help you to see fewer snakes.

Keep your grass cut low, remove debris and stick piles where snakes or their prey, could hide, and keep standing water at a minimum. Snakes seek two things: food and shelter. By making your yard less desirable to them and their food sources, snakes won't want to hang around. There are safe and humane ways to gently encourage a snake to move along. If they feel attacked, they'll get defensive and possibly strike. This is why most people who get bitten do so while trying to kill the snake. As people who love and respect the outdoors, we have an incredible obligation to preserve and protect these animals and their environment. Now let's take a look at five of the most-rarely seen and hardest to find out of the 48 snake species that live in Louisiana.



Photo by CJ Hillard

RING-NECKED SNAKE
(DIADOPHIS PUNCTATUS)

These snakes are typically solid grey or black, with a yellow-orange belly with small black spots, usually in pairs. They have a thin white or yellow band around the neck, giving the species its name. Due to their small size, they mostly feed on earthworms and smaller insects, salamanders and lizards. Most of their life is spent under logs, tree bark and other cover objects, so they're rarely found on the surface. They prefer to live in bottomland forests but can be found in upland pine forests. Ring-necked snakes get to be 8 to 12 inches long. The maximum length known is around 18 inches. They occur in the eastern and central parts of Louisiana but aren't found in the southwest region of the state. Although this species is mildly venomous, it is considered harmless because its venom is medically insignificant to humans.

COMMON WORMSNAKE & WESTERN WORMSNAKE
(CARPHOPHIS AMOENUS & CARPHOPHIS VERMIS)

Both have smooth, glossy scales. Common Wormsnakes tend to be tan to dark brown along their backs with a pink or reddish belly that extends up one to two scale rows along the sides. Western Wormsnakes are more dark purple or black along the back with a pink or reddish belly that goes up to the third scale row along the sides. These will reach on average 7½ to 11 inches long. The record is almost 14 inches. They do have venom, but it won't bother most humans more than a little swelling near the bite. Their "rear-fangs" are elongated, grooved teeth on the back of their upper jaw. These require them to "chew" on prey to deliver venom, unlike the quick bite of front fangs. Their diet can include slugs or other small creatures that fit in their mouth, but it's almost exclusively earthworms. Wormsnakes live mostly underground in moist woodlands or swamps and forested habitats near the coast. They're usually found in rotting logs, under rocks or leaves or in loose soil, but not in the same area. Commons are located in the Florida parishes and Ascension Parish, while Westerns are in only a few parishes in North Louisiana. If you happen to hold one, they may poke you with their pointed tail-tip, but this is to hold down prey so they have time to eat, and it is completely harmless to humans.



Photo by CJ Hillard



Photo by Jake Bagley

EASTERN HOG-NOSED SNAKE >



Photo by CJ Hillard

EASTERN HOG-NOSED SNAKE
(HETERODON PLATIRHINOS)

These interesting snakes, with their keeled scales and upturned snout, are active mostly during the day and found only in the United States. Their "background" color can vary from yellow, gray, brown and olive green to orange or red. Some look "spotted" or have a pattern of dark rectangle, or eye-shaped spots down their backs. The underside of the tails is usually lighter in color than their bellies, which could be yellow, light gray, or pink with some grey. These guys can be 2 to 3 feet long. The longest on record was slightly longer than 4 feet. They, too, are rear-fanged snakes with prey-specific venom for invertebrates and small mammals, birds, frogs and salamanders, but their favorite is toads. "Hog-gies," as we like to call them, live in sandy soil, woodlands, fields, farmland or coastal areas, and they can be found almost all over the state. They're less common in the south-eastern region. They rarely bite, and when threatened, these melodramatic over-actors will suck in air, flatten their heads, spread the skin around their necks like a cobra, hiss and lunge, pretending to strike and emitting a foul smell. If that display doesn't work, they'll flail around and flip over with their mouth wide open to "play dead". This extraordinary performance has earned them nicknames like "spread-head moccasins" or "hissing sand snakes".

PINE WOODS LITTERSNAKE
(RHADINAEA FLAVILATA)

These little guys have smooth scales, and along their backs, they are golden brown, reddish orange or brown. The top of the head is noticeably darker than the rest of the body, and they'll have darker lines on each side of the face that go through their eyes, similar to the "zorro mask" that cottonmouth water moc-casins have. A Pine Woods snake's belly can vary from white to pale yellow or yellowish-green. This lighter color extends to their second or third row of scales. While usually 10 to 13 inches, the record length is slightly less than 16 inches. Their toxic saliva can subdue prey such as small frogs, salamanders, snakes and lizards, but it is not harmful to most humans. They enjoy a habitat with damp woodlands, wetlands and coastal islands, but are mostly in piney, flatwood areas. They too can be found under tree bark and leaves, in rotting logs, in loose soil pretty much statewide, except in southeasternmost parishes. Pine Woods Littersnakes have yel-lowish or cream colored upper lip scales, so if you come across a "yellow-lipped snake", as they are often called, you know what you're looking at. ■



Photo by CJ Hillard

Thanks for being willing to take time to learn important facts about snakes that you, or someone you know, could encounter during almost any outdoor activity in Louisiana. Come back next time to see some stunning snakes that are considered to be the most remarkably beautiful in the state, and even the country. Until then, be sure to check out our Facebook page, Louisiana Snake ID, for lots of snake facts, fun and family friendly videos. You can find us on YouTube as LA Snake Boyz. Our goal is 1,000 subscribers so we can stream videos there. We love living the Snake Life, and snake education is our passion.

ESCORT 22LR



With small-game seasons approaching in a handful of months, it's time get that rimfire rifle that's been gathering dust in your gun cabinet back in shape — or replace it with the latest.

Hatsan, the Arkansas-based company that offers shotguns and high-level air rifles, has entered the rimfire market with a bolt-action .22 rifle, simply named the 22LR.

The little rifle, which is only 41 inches in total length and weighs 6.1 pounds, comes in two stocks — Turkish walnut and synthetic — and with some great features at an affordable price. It has classic, functional lines.

The 22LR has a hard chrome-plated steel alloy receiver and barrel, plus a smooth, chrome-plated bolt. It comes with 5- and 10-round magazines to suit the squirrel hunter or just a farm boy or girl out plinking or on the range. It also features studs for the addition of a sling. The receiver has dovetail grooves for scope mounting.

MSRP: $219-$249.

For more info, visit: escortshotgunsusa.com



NOSWEAT CAP LINER

I have a couple of favorite caps I wear fishing, and they have something in common; they are a bit stained where the bill meets the cap, and they all have a lingering, ahem, scent.

My next "fishing cap" won't have those problems. The reason: NoSweat's cap liners: disposable, moisture-wicking performance liners that stick inside any hat, cap or visor. The patented SweatLock technology is engineered to instantly absorb sweat, keeping the cap's material dry and odor-free — and free of any of those aforementioned stains.

That is a big help if you wear eyeglasses, as sweat won't fog them up, and it won't find a way down your forehead into your eyes.

The liners have a peel-and-stick adhesive that attaches them to the inside of the cap's crown. No only will the liner absorb sweat, it will wick it away from the head, keeping you drier.

MSRP: $9.99 (pack of three)

For more info, visit: www.nosweatco.com

PLANO FIELD LOCKER ELEMENT BOW CASE

Flying somewhere to hunt something that's not among your normal targets or just rolling down the highway to your regular tree stand, you can protect your compound bow from the rigors of travel with Plano's new Field Locker Element compound bow case.

The Field Locker Element has Easy-Glide wheels for dragging it through the airport, and it is airport-approved. It features reinforced, molded construction, watertight seals that feature a Dri-Loc gasket similar to the Field Locker rifle series cases, double-density foam and industrial, draw-on latches.

The case is tough enough to meet or exceed Mil-Spec requirements, so it will accept pad locks, remain dustproof and waterproof, and has room inside for accessories including arrows and arrowheads. Interior dimensions are 44x15x6.4 inches. Included is a pressure-relief valve that will handle pressure changes at any altitude.

MSRP: $219.99

For more info, visit: www.planosynergy.com/new-products/





PFDS: CHOOSE THE RIGHT SIZE

DON'T TRUST THE SIZE LABEL ON A WEARABLE PFD

By Will Martin

We all know to try on off-the-rack clothing to check the fit. Those "Small, Medium and Large" tags are helpful, but often misleading. If you want a perfect fit, go to a tailor; otherwise, you've got to try on the garment.

It's best to think of wearable PFDs as if they are clothing, which is why I will always prefer to call them "life jackets."

For our purposes, "life jacket," "PFD," and "device" should be understood to mean "wearable PFD."

Be aware, however, that the new labeling system categorizes PFDs into two groups: wearable PFDs and throwable PFDs. "Throwable PFD" means a PFD that is intended to be thrown to a person in the water. Under the old labeling system, a PFD marked as "Type IV" or "Type V with Type IV performance" is considered a throwable PFD.

Because humans come in all shapes and sizes, there is no one-size-fits-all PFD, and it's necessary to check the fit of each device on its user before engaging in activities on the water. When fitting the device, adjust every strap; buckle every buckle and zip every zipper.

Never assume a device will fit because of



When buying PFD's "off the rack," make sure to try them on yourself or the intended user.



its labeling, even if you've worn a different device of the same size in the past. The cut could be different, or you may have "grown" since then.

"One-size-fits-most" labels are a handy way for manufacturers to dodge paying big settlements when someone's corpse is found floating. "Well, did he/she try it on?" will be the second question asked by investigators.

THE RIGHT FIT

Once you've got the device on, give it a good, hard tug in the directions it could shift in an impact: up and down the trunk, left and right around the torso. The device should not shift much; if it does, it needs to be tightened or replaced with something smaller.

If a life jacket is uncomfortable or too tight, choose a larger one. You are less likely to wear a life jacket that's uncomfortable, so invest in something that you can wear all day.

Try out new PFDs in the water. Learn what to expect from them before there is trouble.

Be careful when fitting children with PFDs. Never buy an oversized device to account for the growth of a child from season to season. People in oversized life jackets have drowned. But remember, if the device is too small, the child is less likely to fasten it correctly.

Make checking snaps and zippers an instinctual part of supervising activities.

FIND THE SIZE LABEL

A PFD's size is expressed as a measure of weight (mass). Sometimes, a chest measurement and height are also given. Look for size labeling behind the neck of the wearer or sewn inside the device. ▪



PFDS: WHAT DO THE LABELS SAY?

Read the labels before purchasing a PFD. Labels will point you to the type of life jacket you need.

By Will Martin

When it comes to PFDs, look for size labeling behind the neck of the wearer or sewn inside the device. Never trust the labeling; always try on the device you intend to wear, and have others try on the device they are intended to wear.

Three other labels provide information that you need to know. Please note that sometimes the three are condensed into one or two labels, but the following information must be on the label(s) for the device to be U.S. Coast Guard compliant.

- The "Performance, Buoyancy, and Turning Information" label;
- The "Warnings, Intended Activity, and Limitations of Use" label;
- The "Manufacturer, Certification, and Approval Information" label

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

The performance level on a device's labeling indicates the conditions in which it was designed to be used.

Several factors are considered when designers are assigning a performance level to a device, but the ones every user should know are: buoyancy, turning, stability and visibility.

There is a bold-faced number on the label; it could be 50, 70, 100, 150 or 275. It indicates the buoyancy of the device. The higher the number, the greater the potential for flotation.

Most life jackets you'll see are Level 70 devices, which have similar performance to the Type III life jackets of the old labelling system. PFDs rated lower than 70 or Type III are not U.S. Coast Guard-approved.

On a Level 70 label, you'll see a dock and an extended hand with some slightly wavy lines, indicating calm water. This means this life jacket is suitable for nearshore use in relatively protected water where rescue is likely to be near at hand. You'll note that the higher the number is on the icon, the farther away the dock and background will be and the bigger the waves.

The curved arrow indicates the turning ability of the life jacket. Turning ability is whether or not a life jacket is capable or designed to turn an unconscious person face up, unassisted. A Level 70 life jacket will not turn a person right side up; that's what the curved arrow with a slash through it indicates.

CERTIFICATION INFORMATION

In the United States and on navigable waterways, a Coast Guard-approved life jacket, properly fitted for the intended wearer, must be aboard for each occupant. Therefore, knowing your life jacket is approved by the Coast Guard to meet carriage requirements is important. You'll find this information, as well as testing approval numbers and manufacturer information in this section of the label.

MAINTENANCE INSTRUCTIONS

You should care for your PFDs the way you care for everything else aboard your vessel that must be maintained and kept working. The label and manual that came with your life jacket will detail cleaning and care instructions.

PERFORMANCE LEVEL ICONS

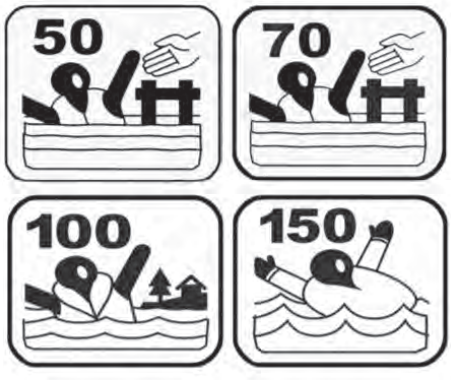
Level 50
- Device is not recommended for weak or non-swimmers;
- Device users should remain close to shore and immediate assistance;
- Device has no turning ability.

Level 70
- Device is designed for use in calm or sheltered waters;
- Device is to be used close to shore or with help nearby;
- Device has no turning ability.

Level 100
- Device is designed for use in calm or sheltered waters;
- Device can be used farther from help;
- Device has some turning ability.

Level 150
- Device is designed for offshore waters with waves;
- Device has turning ability.

Level 275
- Device is designed for offshore emergency situations;
- Device can support the weight of extra tools, equipment, or clothing. ▪



2021

These regulations are unofficial. For official regulations, always check the Department of Wildlife & Fisheries pamphlet and/or the federal pamphlet. www.wlf.louisiana.gov

SALTWATER

STATE REGULATIONS (0-10.357 miles^)

FISH Species	Minimum Length	Bag Limit (per person)
Greater Amberjack*~	34" FL	1/day*
Lesser Amberjack, Banded Rudderfish*	14-22" FL	5/day (aggregate)
Yellowfin Tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin Tuna	73" CFL	1 per vessel per year*
Bigeye Tuna	27" CFL	None
Blue Marlin	99" LJFL	None
White Marlin	66" LJFL	None
Sailfish	63" LJFL	None
Swordfish*	29" CL or 33 lbs. DW	5 per vessel per trip
Cobia (ling or lemon fish)	36" FL	2/day
Drum, Black	16" TL	5/day#
Drum, Red (redfish)	16" TL	5/day#
Flounder, Southern	None	10/day
Groupers* Gag^ & Black^	24" TL	4/day (aggregate)*
Scamp^	16" TL	
Nassau & Goliath	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS	
Yellowfin^	20" TL	
Red^	20" TL	2 of 4 grouper total
Atlantic Sharpnose & Bonnethead shark@	None	1/day
Shortfin Mako Shark@	Males 71" FL / Females 83" FL	1/day/vessel/aggregate
Other sharks (except prohibited species)@	54" FL	1/day/vessel/aggregate
King Mackerel*	24" FL	3/day
Spanish Mackerel*	12" FL	15/day
Striped mullet	None	100 pounds/day
Black seabass	None	None
Seatrout, Spotted (Speckled Trout)	12" TL*	25/day*
Red Snapper*	16" TL	2/day*
Other Snapper		5 mutton in 10
Mutton Snapper	18" TL	snapper aggregate
Cubera, Yellowtail, Gray (mangrove)	12" TL	10 in aggregate*
Queen, Blackfin, Silk, Wenchman	None	
Vermilion Snapper	10" TL	
Schoolmaster, Dog, Mahogany	None	None
Gray Triggerfish"	15" FL	1/day in aggregate
Lane Snapper	8" TL	20/person/day in aggregate*
Almaco Jack, Goldface Tilefish, & Blueline Tilefish	None	
Blackline Tilefish, Anchor Tilefish	None	
Tripletail	18" TL	5/day
Hogfish	14" FL	5/day

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

FRESHWATER

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

* see exceptions in pamphlet. ** no more than two may exceed 30 inches.
*** catfish limit is 100 in aggregate; however, 25 fish in aggregate may be undersized.
# only one fish may exceed 27 inches. @Shark season is closed between April 1 and June 30.
^ Closed season for gag grouper Jan. 1 - May 31. Closed season for black, red, yellowfin, yellowmouth & scamp grouper from Feb. 1 - March 31. ~ Greater amberjack season is open May 1-31 and Aug. 1 - Oct. 31. " Closed season on gray triggerfish Jan. 1 - Feb. 28 and June 1 - July 31.

RICK TAYLOR'S
ASTRO TABLES

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

• The "Best Days" column is based on the ever-changing positions of the sun and the moon, rating each day on a scale of 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more solar/lunar influence that day is experiencing (see "Value" column or corresponding black bars).

• The two Primary periods (Moon Overhead and Moon Underfoot) vary in length from one hour to three-and-one-half hours, depending on a number of important lunar cycles, such as how close the moon is to the earth that day and how high its orbit is. The solar symbols alert you to when a Primary period overlaps a major solar period (eg: Dawn, High-Noon, and Dusk). The secondary periods of Moonrise and Moonset last about one hour each . . . 30 minutes before and after the listed time. (See key at bottom of each month for more detail.)

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

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

AVAILABLE PRODUCTS:

The 2021 PrimeTimes Wall Calendar. **$13.95** (plus $4 s&h). Know the best days, best times, and their relative strengths for all of 2021 with this information-packed, full-color, 11-inch by 17-inch, graphic peaks-and-valleys forecaster. Includes rise and set times for the sun and moon, space to log your catches, "Timely Tips," plus fish and game symbols showing you each month's don't-miss periods. Also includes exclusive summary charts revealing the best and worst days of 2021, the year's best periods, a look ahead at 2022, and more. Comes with FREE 2021 Astro Tables pocket calendar, which sells separately for $8.95, plus $3 s&h.

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

2021 Ultimate PrimeTimes software for PCs. $29.95 (plus $3 s&h, or no s&h if downloaded from web). The world's best forecaster allows you to fine-tune the peak times to your exact location, quarry, and even weather. Too many features to list here, including making your own App. For more details, please call us or visit our web site (see below).

SPECIAL PACKAGE OFFERS:

#1: ***Wall Calendar, Astro Tables and "How to Know..." book.... $19.95*** (plus $5 s&h).

#2: ***Same as #1, plus Software...$47.95*** (plus $6 s&h).

#3: ***Same as #2, minus book...$38.95*** (plus $5 s&h).

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For more information and samples of PrimeTimes products, visit our web site: **www.primetimes2.com**

2021 JUL

BEST DAYS (POOR · FAIR · GOOD · EXCL · VALUE)

LUNAR PERIODS — *TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED*

	VALUE	MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT	
Thu 1	59	1:01 AM	5:58 am - 8:04 am	1:08 PM	6:23 pm - 8:29 pm	Half
Fri 2	50	1:27 AM	6:31 am - 8:53 am	2:05 PM	6:56 pm - 9:18 pm	
Sat 3	47	1:53 AM	7:02 am - 9:44 am	3:01 PM	7:27 pm - 10:09 pm	
Sun 4	48	2:19 AM	7:35 am - 10:35 am	3:58 PM	8:00 pm - 11:00 pm	
Mon 5	50	2:48 AM	8:12 am - 11:24 am	4:55 PM	8:37 pm - 11:49 pm	Apogee
Tue 6	61	3:21 AM	8:50 am - 12:16 pm	5:53 PM	9:15 pm - 12:41 am	
Wed 7	72	3:58 AM	9:36 am - 1:08 pm	6:50 PM	10:01 pm - 1:33 am	
Thu 8	83	4:41 AM	10:22 am - 2:02 pm	7:45 PM	10:47 pm - 2:27 am	High
Fri 9	89	5:30 AM	11:14 am - 2:54 pm	8:37 PM	11:39 pm - Midnight	New
Sat 10	78	6:25 AM	12:09 pm - 3:45 pm	9:24 PM	Midnight - 3:19 am	
Sun 11	68	7:25 AM	1:05 pm - 4:31 pm	10:05 PM	12:34 am - 4:10 am	
Mon 12	57	8:27 AM	2:01 pm - 5:17 pm	10:42 PM	1:30 am - 4:56 am	
Tue 13	50	9:31 AM	2:57 pm - 5:57 pm	11:15 PM	2:26 am - 5:42 am	
Wed 14	49	10:35 AM	3:53 pm - 6:35 pm	11:45 PM	3:22 am - 6:22 am	
Thu 15	47	11:39 AM	4:50 pm - 7:12 pm		4:18 am - 7:00 am	
Fri 16	49	12:44 PM	5:49 pm - 7:47 pm	12:15 AM	5:15 am - 7:37 am	
Sat 17	57	1:50 PM	6:48 pm - 8:26 pm	12:44 AM	6:14 am - 8:12 am	Half
Sun 18	45	2:59 PM	7:48 pm - 9:10 pm	1:16 AM	7:13 am - 8:51 am	
Mon 19	38	4:10 PM	8:52 pm - 9:58 pm	1:52 AM	8:13 am - 9:35 am	
Tue 20	47	5:23 PM	9:58 pm - 10:50 pm	2:33 AM	9:17 am - 10:23 am	
Wed 21	57	6:33 PM	11:04 pm - 11:50 pm	3:22 AM	10:23 am - 11:15 am	Perigee
Thu 22	67	7:37 PM	Midnight - Midnight	4:20 AM	11:29 am - 12:15 pm	Low
Fri 23	71	8:33 PM	12:07 am - 12:55 am	5:25 AM	12:32 pm - 1:20 pm	Full
Sat 24	61	9:19 PM	1:04 am - 2:00 am	6:35 AM	1:29 pm - 2:25 pm	
Sun 25	51	9:58 PM	1:56 am - 3:02 am	7:44 AM	2:21 pm - 3:27 pm	
Mon 26	42	10:31 PM	2:40 am - 4:02 am	8:51 AM	3:05 pm - 4:27 pm	
Tue 27	38	11:01 PM	3:21 am - 4:59 am	9:55 AM	3:46 pm - 5:24 pm	
Wed 28	40	11:28 PM	3:55 am - 5:53 am	10:56 AM	4:20 pm - 6:18 pm	
Thu 29	42	11:54 PM	4:29 am - 6:45 am	11:54 AM	4:54 pm - 7:10 pm	
Fri 30	49		5:01 am - 7:37 am	12:52 PM	5:26 pm - 8:02 pm	
Sat 31	60	12:20 AM	5:34 am - 8:26 am	1:49 PM	5:59 pm - 8:51 pm	Half

25 50 75 AVERAGE

For more, visit primetimes2.com

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

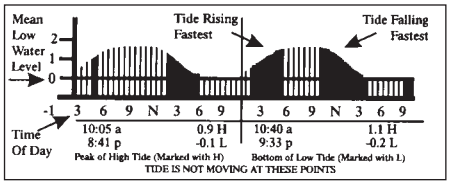
*WHILE THE LESSER **MOONRISE** AND -**SET** OVERLAPS (ABOUT 30 MIN. BEFORE AND AFTER THE LISTED TIME) ARE DESIGNATED BY **BOLD BLACK TYPE**.*



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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

East Point Grand Isle

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 LQ 12:11 am 0.3 L 10:15 am 0.7 H 10:13 pm 0.4 L	2 7:55 am 0.7 H 6:23 pm 0.3 L	3 7:05 am 0.9 H 5:54 pm 0.2 L
4 6:59 am 1.0 H 6:08 pm 0.0 L	5 7:16 am 1.1 H 6:35 pm -0.1 L	6 7:44 am 1.2 H 7:07 pm -0.2 L	7 8:20 am 1.3 H 7:43 pm -0.2 L	8 8:59 am 1.3 H 8:22 pm -0.2 L	9 NM 9:39 am 1.4 H 9:00 pm -0.2 L	10 10:19 am 1.4 H 9:36 pm -0.2 L
11 10:57 am 1.4 H 10:10 pm -0.2 L	12 11:34 am 1.3 H 10:39 pm -0.1 L	13 12:10 pm 1.2 H 11:02 pm 0.0 L	14 12:41 pm 1.0 H 11:12 pm 0.2 L	15 12:55 pm 0.8 H 10:53 pm 0.3 L	16 7:57 am 0.7 H 8:55 pm 0.5 L	17 FQ 6:04 am 0.8 H 4:25 pm 0.3 L
18 5:48 am 1.0 H 4:44 pm 0.0 L	19 6:10 am 1.2 H 5:28 pm -0.2 L	20 6:52 am 1.4 H 6:18 pm -0.3 L	21 7:45 am 1.5 H 7:12 pm -0.4 L	22 8:42 am 1.6 H 8:07 pm -0.4 L	23 FM 9:39 am 1.6 H 9:01 pm -0.4 L	24 10:33 am 1.5 H 9:50 pm -0.3 L
25 11:21 am 1.4 H 10:32 pm -0.1 L	26 12:03 pm 1.3 H 11:03 pm 0.1 L	27 12:36 pm 1.1 H 11:13 pm 0.3 L	28 12:50 pm 0.9 H 10:40 pm 0.4 L	29 9:24 am 0.7 H 8:37 pm 0.5 L	30 5:31 am 0.8 H 4:57 pm 0.5 L	31 LQ 5:00 am 0.9 H 4:31 pm 0.3 L

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Calcasieu Pass Lighthouse Wharf

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 LQ 2:56 am 0.8 L 10:07 am 1.7 H 4:42 pm 0.9 L 10:51 pm 1.4 H	2 4:11 am 1.1 L 10:16 am 1.7 H 5:21 pm 0.6 L	3 12:47 am 1.6 H 5:32 am 1.3 L 10:22 am 1.7 H 5:56 pm 0.4 L
4 2:00 am 1.7 H 6:56 am 1.5 L 10:33 am 1.7 H 6:29 pm 0.2 L	5 2:53 am 1.9 H 7:59 am 1.6 L 10:51 am 1.7 H 7:02 pm 0.0 L	6 3:39 am 2.0 H 8:51 am 1.7 L 11:14 am 1.7 L 7:36 pm -0.1 L	7 4:20 am 2.0 H 9:33 am 1.7 L 11:45 am 1.7 L 8:10 pm -0.2 L	8 4:55 am 2.0 H 9:57 am 1.7 L 12:21 pm 1.8 H 8:46 pm -0.2 L	9 NM 5:25 am 2.0 H 10:00 am 1.7 L 12:56 pm 1.8 H 9:24 pm -0.2 L	10 5:55 am 2.0 H 10:13 am 1.7 L 1:28 pm 1.8 H 10:03 pm -0.2 L
11 6:26 am 2.0 H 10:44 am 1.7 L 1:59 pm 1.8 H 10:43 pm -0.1 L	12 7:01 am 2.0 H 11:24 am 1.6 L 2:36 pm 1.8 H 11:23 pm 0.0 L	13 7:37 am 1.9 H 12:12 pm 1.5 L 3:29 pm 1.7 H	14 12:04 am 0.2 L 8:08 am 1.9 H 1:11 pm 1.4 L 5:00 pm 1.5 H	15 12:49 am 0.4 L 8:30 am 1.8 H 2:20 pm 1.1 L 6:48 pm 1.4 H	16 1:46 am 0.7 L 8:46 am 1.8 H 3:19 pm 0.8 L 9:15 pm 1.4 H	17 FQ 3:00 am 1.1 L 9:03 am 1.8 H 4:08 pm 0.4 L 11:54 pm 1.6 H
18 4:20 am 1.3 L 9:25 am 1.8 H 4:57 pm 0.0 L	19 1:28 am 1.9 H 5:49 am 1.6 L 9:54 am 1.9 H 5:49 pm -0.3 L	20 2:29 am 2.1 H 7:10 am 1.7 L 10:32 am 1.9 H 6:42 pm -0.5 L	21 3:24 am 2.2 H 8:05 am 1.8 L 11:21 am 2.0 H 7:34 pm -0.6 L	22 4:18 am 2.2 H 8:49 am 1.8 L 12:19 pm 2.0 H 8:24 pm -0.7 L	23 FM 5:06 am 2.2 H 9:31 am 1.8 L 1:15 pm 2.1 H 9:14 pm -0.6 L	24 5:47 am 2.1 H 10:13 am 1.7 L 2:07 pm 2.1 H 10:04 pm -0.5 L
25 6:23 am 2.0 H 10:57 am 1.5 L 2:59 pm 2.0 H 10:52 pm -0.2 L	26 6:56 am 1.9 H 11:42 am 1.4 L 3:59 pm 1.8 H 11:37 pm 0.1 L	27 7:26 am 1.8 H 12:32 pm 1.3 L 5:10 pm 1.7 H	28 12:20 am 0.4 L 7:50 am 1.8 H 1:33 pm 1.1 L 6:32 pm 1.5 H	29 1:06 am 0.8 L 8:08 am 1.7 H 2:41 pm 0.9 L 8:46 pm 1.5 H	30 2:06 am 1.1 L 8:23 am 1.7 H 3:35 pm 0.7 L 10:53 pm 1.5 H	31 LQ 3:47 am 1.4 L 8:40 am 1.6 H 4:18 pm 0.5 L

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David Gaurino caught this 7-pound, 12-ounce bass was caught in False River in mid-January. It hit a Rat-L-Trap.

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Olivia Broussard, 11, hooked her biggest catch, this crappie, fishing with night crawlers next to a wellhead in a bayou off of the Exxon Canal on Feb. 13.



Kaleigh LaPrairie, 13, of Deville killed this turkey in Rapides Parish with her Remington 20-gauge shotgun on April 11. The gobbler had a 9 ½-inch beard and 1-inch spurs.



Cody Roddy with a big bull red he caught in Cocodrie.



Kellianne Meaux, 10, of Kaplan killed her first deer in Blackhawk, Miss., over Thanksgiving vacation at her dad's hunting camp.



Ross Borne spent his 11th birthday fishing with Douglas Borne Jr. on Lake Verret. He caught this nice sac-a-lait.



Paul Cummins with some nice speckled trout that were caught jigging plastics in marsh cuts going into Lake Borgne back in November.



Remi Byrd, 4, had a great afternoon at her family camp in Zwolle on April 17, 2021.



Paul "Bear" Sewall, 9, loves to catch different fish and find out all about them in his field guide. This bass, his first, was caught in \ Danny Mooney's pond in Rayne.



Greg Ikerd took this monster 5×5, 600-pound bull elk with his bow on Sept. 16, 2020, during a public land hunt in the Teton Range outside of Dubois, Wyoming.



Malaina Kuhn, 12, shot her first deer, a 10-point, in Duck Hill, Miss., on Jan. 3, 2021. She was with her father, Michael Kuhn, who stood by and watched proudly.



Graham Higgins,11, of Lafayette killed this 10-point buck while hunting with his family in Aliceville, Ala., on Dec. 27, 2020.



Matthew Graffagnini, 11, caught this beautiful, 4-pound bass in a large pond they call "Big Bass Lake" near Bayou Sauvage.



Brice Humphreys, 16, struck gold in Delacroix with this red.



Tristan Autin hooked this 26-pound, 40-inch bull red on May 7, 2021. He was fishing a Matrix Shad under a Four Horseman cork in Happy Jack, La.

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Brian Peters shows off some nice reds from a recent trip.



Gunner Staten killed this 11-point buck on Christmas afternoon. The deer had an 18½-inch spread, 24-inch beams and measured 146 ¼ inches. He said it was the best Christmas ever.



John Leblanc holds up a nice marsh redfish he caught out of T-Irvs Marina in Dulac.



Brie Baudier, 11, poses with her big drum.



Elliot Wanersdorfer, 7, took his first deer in Avoyelles Parish on Nov. 30, 2020.



Max Barbier was on a trip to Bayou Lacombe with his paw paw, Buddy Melancon, and Anthony Cyprus Jr., when he caught these bass.



Cy Landry captured this awesome photo while he was fishing in Pointe-aux-Chenes.



After chasing specks the day after Thanksgiving in Grand Isle, Braden Rodrigue latched onto a 33-inch bull red on his 2500 reel and Ugly stick. His dad, Brad, was very proud of him. and they released the fish to fight another day.



David DeLuca III, 12, of Metairie, went hunting with friends and dropped this buck with his first shot.



After two missed opportunities and many hours of hunting, 7-year-old Conner Caldwell killed his first buck while hunting with his Paw Paw.



Jolee Riera caught her first bass of the 2020 spring season in a private pond in Iberville Parish.



Elizabeth "Lizzie" Adams shot her first buck with a 7mm-08 on family land near Liberty, Miss., on Dec. 20, 2020, while hunting with her father and uncle.



Jeremy Locke shot this Pineville buck on the last hour of the last day of the season with a muzzleloader. It scored 132 and had a 22-inch spread.



Kaitlin Kopsco with a red snapper caught out of Port Fourchon on July 4.



Josh Provenzano took his son Gionni, 3, alligator hunting with family friend Ronnie Adams from Swamp People this past September. They harvested a 9-foot-6 alligator.



Kelley Thomas of Morgan City pulled in this nice flounder from the Calcasieu Ship Channel.



Kami Solet and Tate Rogers had a blast catching mangroves out of Grand Isle.

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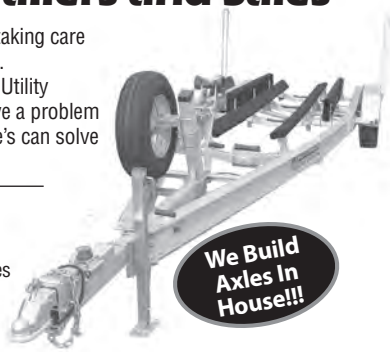
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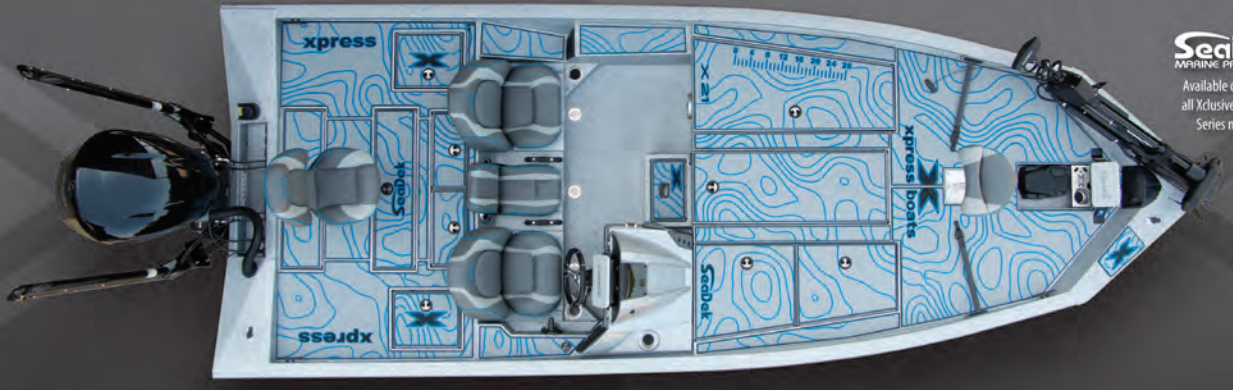
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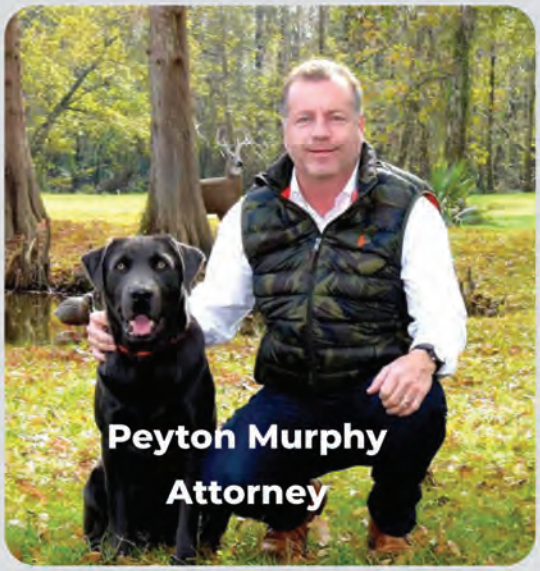
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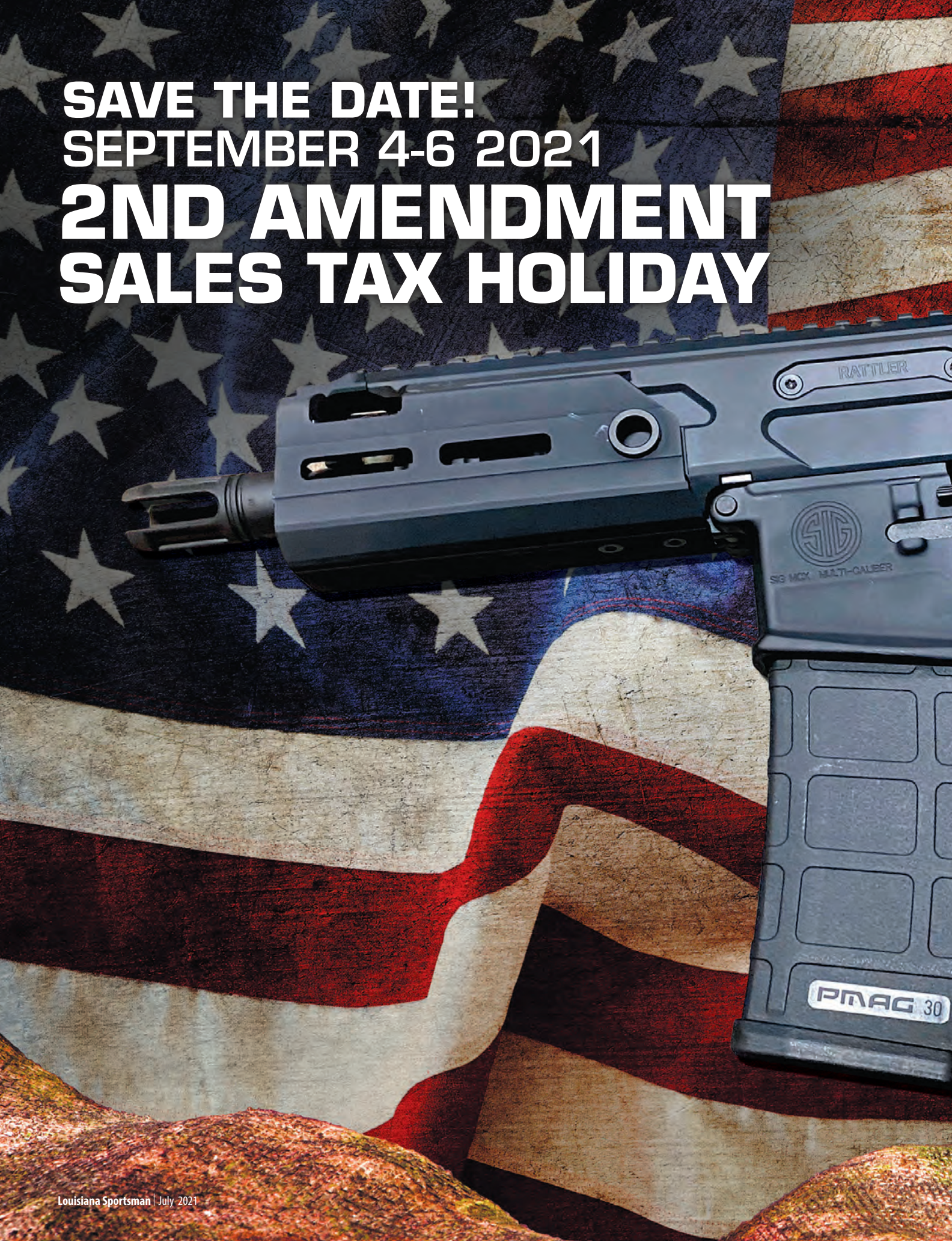


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