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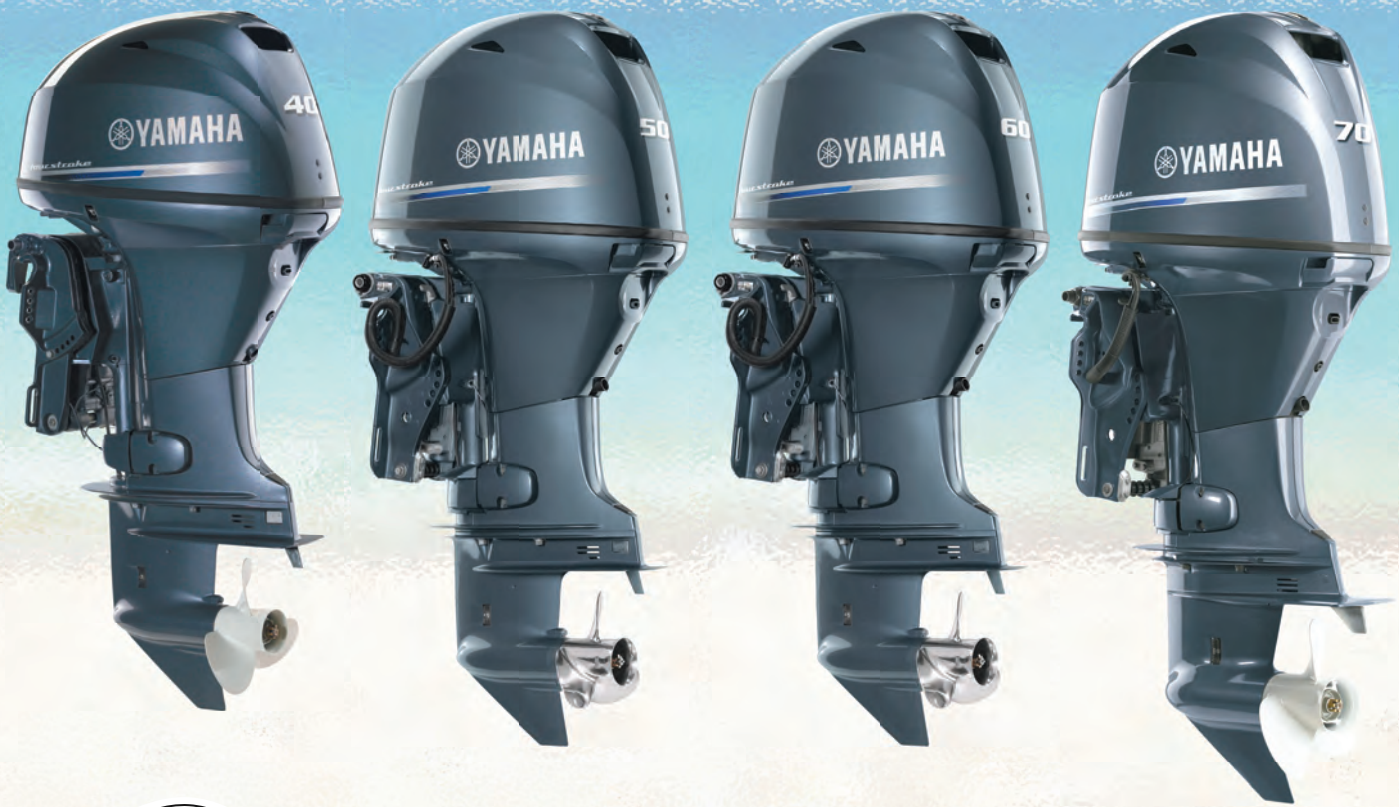
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Cade Clemons of Minden arrowed this 15-point buck on Nov. 12 in East Carroll Parish. **INSET:** Clay Clawson of Belle Chasse with a 4-pound largemouth bass caught in Lafitte.

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Terrebonne Parish President Gordon Dove (*right*) tours the Ducks Unlimited Island Road marsh terracing project on LL&E land with ConocoPhillips Coastal Wetlands Director John Harrington.

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Photo by Kinny Haddox

AS THE YEARS RACE PAST, OUTDOOR MEMORIES GROW FONDER

It's been decades ago, but seems like yesterday. I walked into the Pittsburgh Paint Store store where hometown fishing buddy Gary Cooper was at work. It was drizzling rain, a bit windy and generally miserable outside. Business was slow. There was only one customer in the store when I told him he should take off a few hours early and we could go fishing.

"Today? Fishing?," the lady customer asked, looking shocked as she brought her gallon of paint to the checkout counter.

"Today is a good day," I replied. It was not a good day for painting. But, yes, it was a good day to go fishing. There are very few days that aren't good for going fishing. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Over the years, I've often thought of putting all my stories together in a book. So far, I have only come up with the title — *Today's a Good Day*. I may never finish the rest. That's okay. I have been able to live my own book drowning crickets, bouncing jigs in treetops, splashing spinnerbaits at bass, calling ducks and sleeping in the stand waiting for a big buck. As time has passed, I have grown to love writing about the outdoors and fantastic people as much as I enjoy hunting and fishing.

I've been blessed to hunt and fish with some of the best. Some you have heard of; most you have not. I hunted with Duck Commander Phil Robertson. I fished with Bo Dowden the day he won the Bassmaster Classic. But the really special ones are friends and family. I camped with in the Atchafalaya Basin running trotlines for catfish. Or fishing Toledo Bend from one end to the other. I've reeled up snapper from the Gulf until my arms hurt. And I've paid the price. Yes, I get seasick. Can outdoor writers say that? I've caught a three-pound crappie and worked harder in the deer woods than I ever did in the office. I've run down the lake in a bass boat powered by a 250 horsepower outboard and I've been up the creek without a paddle. The list is many, many years long.

There have been beautiful days and nasty days, like we often have here in January. Even a bad day fishing or hunting is better than a good day at work. That's not necessarily true, but it sounds good.

And now as I get to enjoy the outdoors in a new way, helping edit the *Louisiana Sportsman* magazine, I'm blessed once again. Louisiana is lucky to have such a publication that shares outdoor articles and, photos, news and how-to information with its readers in print and electronic versions.

One new feature we've added is new outdoor columns, this one and another by veteran outdoor writer and editor Joe Macaluso. We'll be sharing the kind of



Kinny Haddox *has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 47 years. He and his wife, DiAnne, live in West Monroe.*

personal tales that we all love to tell while eating venison biscuits around the campfire or sitting on the boat dock as fresh fish are released into the fish cooker grease. These are the kind of tales that are rehashed numerous times and last a lifetime. Some of them are even true. And maybe, if we are lucky, they'll be repeated around campfires and boat docks even in the days when we are gone on from God's green Earth.

We want to highlight our people. One way we will do that is feature one of our state's Outdoor Legends each month. And we'll share what accomplishments got them there. People like them are what makes the Louisiana outdoors great.

People pursue outdoor activities because they are fun, entertaining and enjoyable. And it's all about sharing it with friends and family. We all want to know more about how, when and where to bring home a catch or take wild game, but we don't want to overlook the simple and pure pleasure of going and having fun with people we care about. Life is richer for it. And you don't have to be the best at it or famous for it, you just have to do it. Here's a great example of what I mean.

In 1957, John Ruark wrote a book called *Old Man's Boy Grows Older*. It has a line in it that is one of my favorites. I'll bet you know what the old man means:

"The best thing about hunting and fishing," the old man said, "is that you don't have to actually do it to enjoy it. You can go to bed every night thinking about how much fun you had twenty years ago, and it all comes back clear as moonlight." ▪

OUTDOOR UPDATE >

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ONE TOO MANY TIMES

BUCK GIVES CONCORDIA HUNTER ONE TOO MANY CHANCES

On Nov. 3, Richard Hennigan, who hunts in Concordia Parish, harvested this giant 11-point buck.

By Glynn Harris

There was a big buck hanging out in the same area constantly, a buck that visited his favorite hang-out one time too many. On Nov. 3, Richard Hennigan, 47, who works as a nurse and lives just outside Jonesville, couldn't believe his good fortune when the buck gave him one last chance and this time, the buck was down for good.

"I hunt on family land in Concordia Parish," he said. "I have had a particular buck on cameras for the past four years. I have had several chances at him but in watching him over the past four years, I saw that he had potential to become a real impressive buck, so I passed him up. This year I decided to take him as he had probably reached his maximum potential."

On Oct. 3, while sitting in his Red Neck blind, the deer approached what Hennigan calls his 'buck stump', an old stump on which he covers with rice bran. The buck was still in velvet when Hennigan got the shot he thought he wanted, hit the trigger on his crossbow and watched the deer run away.

"I looked the area over and never found any sign that I had made a good shot on the buck," he said. "A week later, I was back in my blind when to my surprise, the buck showed up again and presented the same broadside shot. I shot again and once again, the buck took off."

Someone with a blood trailing dog was called in and after a thorough search, the dog owner surmised that after finding so little blood to track, the buck was probably still alive.

"I was surprised again when my camera showed the buck was back on his old stomping ground on Nov. 1," Hennigan said. "I wanted to hunt the next day but I had to pick up my girlfriend at the airport late that afternoon so I passed on the chance to hunt that day."

On Nov. 3, Hennigan and his girlfriend climbed into his blind shortly after noon. This time, Hennigan laid aside his crossbow and picked up his Diamond Outlaw compound bow along with Carbon Express arrows tipped with Rage Hypodermic broadheads.

"A cold front had come through the day before and I felt like this would be a good time for a buck to move," he said. "I was once again surprised when the big one came onto the lane in front of my stand. He continued to make his way to the stump and started feeding on the rice bran. At 20 yards, I released my arrow and watched him run and fall after running 30 yards.

"When I got to him, I saw where I had hit him both times with my crossbow, with entry points of the bolt only inches apart. Both bolts had hit just below the spine and above the lungs, neither of which would have proved fatal."

The buck, which weighed 280 pounds was between 6 ½ and 7 ½ years old, carried a rack of 11 points with an inside spread of 16 inches. The mass was impressive with bases measuring six inches each with the last measurement being over four inches. Hennigan carried the rack to Spotted Dog Sporting Goods in Columbia where it was measured at 170 4/8 inches. ▪

HAIL TO THE CHAMPION!

ERATH'S RICHARD WINS COVETED DUCK TITLE

By Don Shoopman

Erath outdoorsman Haiden Richard had a world championship at his beck and call on Nov. 27 in Stuttgart, Arkansas.

Richard's Riceland Calls duck call, which was in his hands for three pressure-packed 90-second routines, and countless hours of practice the past decade or so, carried the day at the 86th annual World' Championship Duck Calling Contest. The 31-year-old waterfowl hunting guide became the first Louisiana resident since 1953 to win the title. Fred Parnell of Baton Rouge won in 1953.

Richard also won a $10,000 check, a War Eagle boat and trailer, a Benelli Super Black Eagle III shotgun, Gunner Kennels G1 Intermediate Dog Crate and YETI products.

"I've been chasing this since I was 19, when I started trying to qualify," Richard said. "I always wanted to win a world duck calling championship. I keep thinking about it. It's crazy. It is."

Richard called his wife soon after the coveted trophy was handed to him.

"She was crying. I was crying," he said. Richard's father, Ritchie Richard of Erath, watched the entire duck calling contest via live video feed. "Ah, my dad. That's probably the first time I've heard him cry on the phone."

It was Richard's fourth appearance in five years.

"You keep banging on the door and sooner or later you're going to win it," he said, proudly.

The contest is the marquee event of the annual Wings Over the Prairie Festival and the routine requires a hail call; two, four or three (Richard does three) series of ducks calls; feed call; step up call; three topper hail calls; another series of ducks; feed; three quacks, and a finishing duck.

Going into the third and decisive round, the field cut to 14, Richard was four points behind the co-leaders. He nailed it in his third routine.

Following an unbearable wait for the announcement of the 10th runner-up finisher on up, Richard said, ""When they called Jonathan's name as first runner-up, I knew it was me. That is crazy. I didn't think it would be me. Fifty-six people and, honestly, half of those people can win that contest."

He thanked his father for getting him started as a duck caller. He practiced often.

"My dad's always been a big outdoors guy, fishing and hunting" Richard said. "He's very much attentive to detail. That's what he's good at, making everything perfect. That's what it takes to win these things, right?" ■



A jubilant Haiden Richard of Erath lets loose his emotions as he hoists the coveted World's Championship Duck Calling Contest trophy high after winning the event Nov. 27 in Stuttgart, Arkansas.

OUTDOOR UPDATE

LOGGY BAYOU HAPPY PLACE

SNODDY, BUDDY BAG TROPHY BUCKS IN SAME SPOT



Dalton Snoddy killed a trophy 13-point buck at Loggy Bayou Wildlife Management Area in Bossier Parish on Nov. 27.

By Glynn Harris

There is one tree located on the Loggy Bayou Wildlife Management Area in Bossier Parish that proved to be the right spot for two deer hunters from south-central Louisiana. After Dalton Snoddy, 26, who is employed with utility companies constructing power lines, downed a big 165-inch buck, his buddy sat next to the same tree the next day and downed a fine 10-point buck.

Loggy Bayou is rather unique in that it contains one of the few remaining bottomland hardwood areas in northwest Louisiana. The 6,558-acre area located 20 miles southeast of Bossier City features lowland hardwoods that annually flood. It provides habitat for not only some big whitetail deer, but squirrel, rabbits and waterfowl are also in abundance there.

On Thanksgiving Day, Snoddy and eight friends left their homes in Turkey Creek and drove to a public camping area near the management area.

"We set up our camp near the area and spent the afternoon scouting to look for deer sign and places to be able to hunt the next few days," Snoddy said.

Finding deer trails, fresh rubs and scrapes in an area with



adjacent thickets gave Snoddy the feeling that he may have located an area with a chance to get a crack at a big buck.

"Friday morning, I went to the spot and because the area was too thick to put my lock-on stand up on a tree, I sat on the ground," he said. "I didn't see anything and that afternoon I came up with the idea of mounting my stand low on the tree so I'd have a place to sit with my feet on the ground. I shot a 5-point buck that came through on the trail of a doe."

LOW STAND PROVES SUCCESSFUL

The next morning, Saturday Nov. 27, Snoddy was back at his tree where he again mounted his stand near the ground.

"As I was walking in, I spooked a doe that was near my tree," he said. "Then after it started to get daylight, I had another doe hanging around me. At around 7:45, I was looking to my right and I happened to turn and look to the left and I caught a glimpse of a big-bodied deer with a nice rack at about 100 yards away. I shoot a Remington Ultra mag .300 and I put the scope on an opening ahead of the deer. When he stepped into it, I made a noise to stop him and hit the trigger. The deer took off at the shot."

Calling one of his hunting buddies, Snoddy told him he'd shot a buck but was not sure just how big it was.

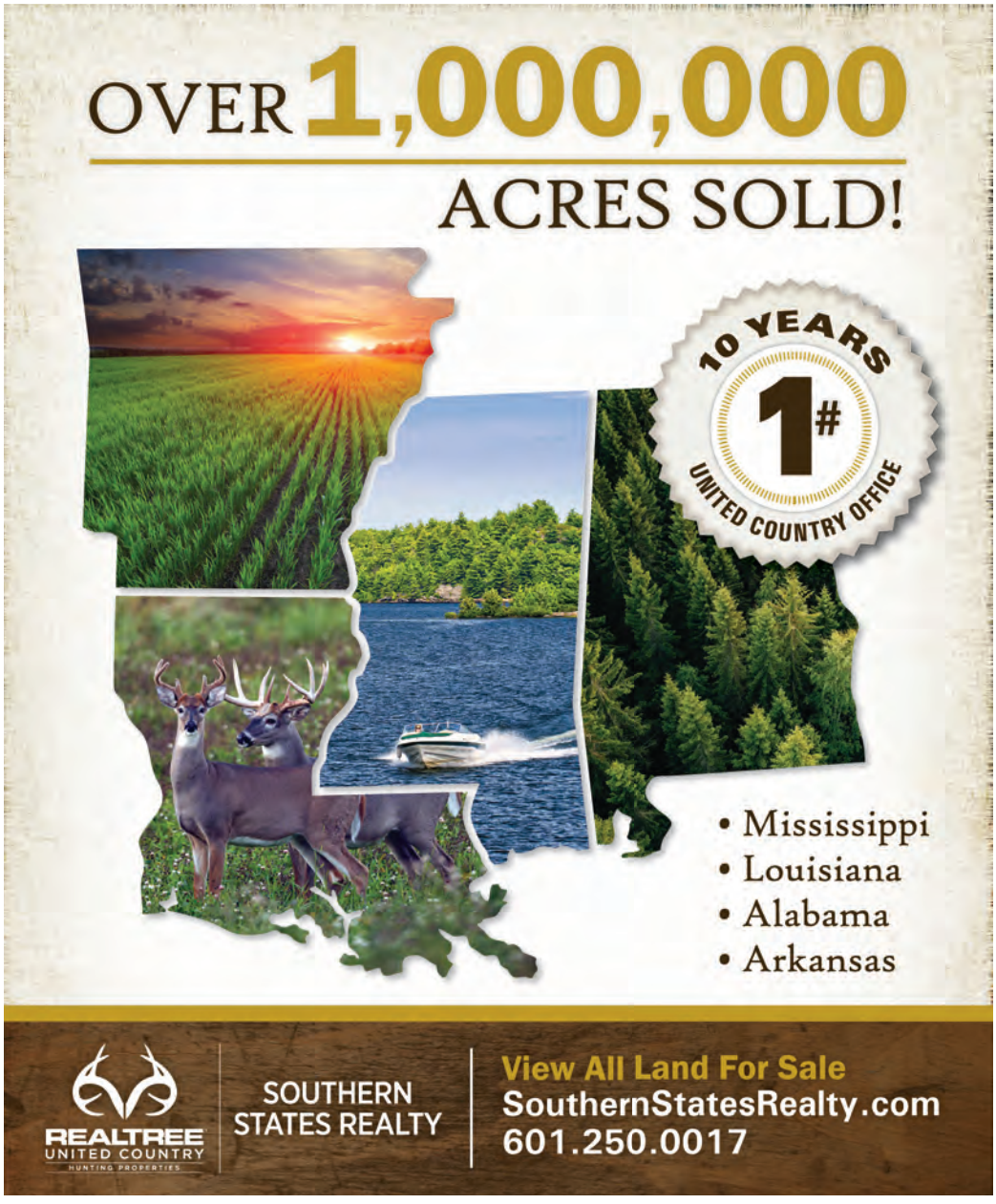
"I walked to where the deer was standing when I shot and didn't find any blood," he said. "Then I noticed that you could see leaves on the ground disturbed and I followed that line of overturned leaves and found the buck piled up 40 yards from where I shot him. When I got to him I couldn't believe how big he was; I had no idea he was this big."

IMPRESSIVE BUCK

The buck, which weighed 240 pounds, sported a massive rack that was a main frame 10 but with three sticker points gave him a total of 13 points. Bases were 5 inches each with mass that carried throughout the rack. Inside spread was 19 inches. A biologist checked the deer and estimated it to be 5 ½ years old. Taking the buck to K&K Taxidermy, the buck was unofficially scored with 165 inches of antler mass.

"My buddy went back the next day and sat where I had been sitting and got a nice 10-point," Snoddy said. "I guess that must have been a lucky tree to sit by." ▪

> *"My buddy went back the next day and sat where I had been sitting and got a nice 10-point. I guess that must have been a lucky tree to sit by.*



OUTDOOR UPDATE

MONSTER LASALLE BUCK

THORN'S BUCK 'JUST ALL YOU COULD EVER HOPE FOR'



Terry Thorn, Hank and the monster 10-point Olla deer.

By Kinny Haddox

Terry Thorn killed a deer of a lifetime on Monday, Nov. 15.

He was hunting just six miles from his home in Olla in central Louisiana's La Salle Parish. The day also seemed like a lifetime and then some. And as you'll read, he "lived 100 years that day before it was finally over."

The monstrous 10-point weighed 270 pounds and scored 182 7/8 and then 178 1/2 at two different sporting goods stores. Either way, it's by the far the biggest deer the 60-year-old owner of Terry's Glass Shop has ever seen.

The hunt was almost over for Thorn when coyotes started howling out in the cutover thicket beside his hunting spot. He looked down the shooting lane just in time to see the monster buck slip out into the open. It was the first time anybody that hunts the area had seen the deer in daylight hours in person or on a camera. They saw him on a couple of photos from deer cameras before the season, but only in the middle of the night, and they had been hunting the area for him hard.

"He was slipping away from those coyotes," said Thorn. "I think that's the only reason he came out. I zeroed in on him and shot. He fell right where I shot him about 140 yards from the stand. I waited a few minutes and I was pumped. He didn't move. I was so jacked. So I got down off my stand and was walking down the shooting lane calling my wife on the cell phone and suddenly, the deer just stood up and ran off. I was in shock. I couldn't believe my eyes. Then I was sick."

A LONG NIGHT

The lifetime hunter walked into the edge of the thicket where he saw the deer leave the shooting lane. He spotted the deer go down again, but it stood up and he couldn't get another shot, so he just watched. In a few seconds, a few bushes in the extremely thick cutover rattled and he heard a thump. The deer was down again. But Thorn wasn't taking any more chances, so he decided to just let it lie and come back the next morning. He marked the spot and "didn't sleep a wink."

He closed his business for the morning and went back to the spot he last saw the deer. He was there at good daylight. There were drops of blood all over the thicket, but no deer. The monster was gone. He realized quickly that he needed help, so went and got Hank, a seasoned tracking cur dog.

BRINGING IN THE TOP DOG

The deer had been all over a big area in the thicket, probably getting away from the coyotes again, so even Hank had a hard time as the trail criss-crossed and circled, but he finally got close to the deer. Thorn walked to where Hank was barking, eased around the edge of a big patch of briars and there laid the deer. But true to the story, the deer stood up yet again about 20 steps away.

Thorn had brought a shotgun with him loaded with buckshot because he knew it was too thick for a rifle. He aimed and fired. This time the deer went down for good. Thorn discovered that on his first shot the afternoon before, he had hit the deer high above the shoulder.

"I literally lived 100 years that day. I went from the lowest of lows to the highest of highs," he said. "After we got the deer, I rubbed all the hair off old Hank's head I was so happy he had helped me find the deer. I was exhausted."

The big deer was killed on a 250-acre plot of land that Thorn and his family lease for hunting each year. He felt like since no other hunters anywhere near had even seen the deer on camera, it had just homesteaded in that cutover the past three years. The big deer was estimated to be at least six and a half years old.

"Man, I'm still jacked," Thorn said. "I actually killed the deer on my son-in-law's stand while he was at work. But hey, he's pumped, too. Wow. The deer. The story. It's just all you could ever hope for." ▪

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Shell works in collaboration with our community to preserve the rhythm of Louisiana. Through a partnership with Shell, the Nicholls State University Biology Department is able to grow native Louisiana plants that help restore wetlands. Thousands of matrimony vines and black mangroves were recently planted on Queen Bess Island, just north of Grand Isle, to provide a critical nesting habitat for pelicans. The people of Shell know that coastal conservation, restoration and environmental responsibility are essential to the future for Louisiana. That's why we're working together, to ensure that Louisiana will remain a *Sportsman's Paradise* for generations to come!

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#MakeTheFuture

OUTDOOR UPDATE

RELENTLESS PURSUIT

"53RD TIME" IS THE CHARM FOR TECH STUDENT

By Kinny Haddox

Seldom do you read a story about a hunter killing a monster buck just by grabbing a bow or a gun, climbing up a random stand, and a big deer just walks out in easy shooting range in broad daylight.

It takes a lot of time, effort and patience to bag a big buck. But even at that, very seldom do you read a story about a hunter who put in the concentrated effort that Louisiana Tech student Cade Clemons of Minden did this season. But it paid off at first light on Friday morning, Nov. 12. He killed a monster 15-point that scored 167 1/8 with his Mathews VXR bow after hunting that specific deer 53 times since the season opened this year.



Cade Clemons of Minden killed this 15-point with his Mathews VXR bow on Nov. 12.

A VERY DETERMINED HUNTER

Clemons, a biology major at Louisiana Tech, scheduled classes this quarter to allow maximum hunting for the big buck he nicknamed "Old Nasty" because of all the kickers on the deer's rack. He saw the deer last year one time as a 10-point, but passed on the shot. It just blew up in the offseason and when it started showing up on trail camera pictures, Clemons made it his goal for the season at his East Carroll Parish hunting club near Transylvania.

"It's a crazy story," he said. "That deer started showing up at the corn pile at 4:30 a.m. just like clockwork the last few days before I got him. And he didn't stay long after daylight. I actually jumped him and ran him off a couple of times earlier this year going into the stand. So I knew I was going to have to beat him there. Here's the craziest part of all. I got up at 3 a.m. and got ready. It was so cold and foggy that morning. I got in my side by side and went to the building where we sign in and I almost ran over the deer crossing the parking lot at the camp. I kid you not, I got within a few yards of him when he came barreling out across in front of me. I didn't really expect to kill him that morning after that happened."

GETTING THE SHOT

But Clemons didn't give up. He eased down the road and got close to his ground blind, a temporary shooting spot he set up a few weeks ago after he partially tore a tendon in his ankle.

"When I was walking in, I ran off a big 9-point from the corn," he said. "I got settled in quickly and it wasn't long until I heard big deer walking through the woods and munching on the corn. It finally got light enough to see through my binoculars and there were four good bucks and one huge buck in the corn. But it was too dark to see through my bow's peep sight. I kept watching and I actually drew back three times, but couldn't get a shot. I was shocked that he had gotten there as quickly as he did, but he was there at 4:30 just like the days before.

"Finally it got light enough and I drew on him, but one of the other bucks was standing in the way. When he walked away, the big one started heading for the edge of the thicket, too. I grunted three times with no result then I think I just yelled. He stopped for a split second and I took the shot. I had been so panicky. I knew if he walked in that thicket I might actually cry. I might have never seen him again."

PERSONAL BEST BUCK

There was no sadness, though. Only excitement. He waited a long time before checking the spot where the deer was hit, but he didn't find much blood. He was discouraged, but felt like it was a good shot, so he waited almost three hours before going on the blood trail. He found the deer in a bedding area about 100 yards away.

"I can't tell you how excited I was," he said. "That was great. It's the biggest deer I've ever killed or even seen in the woods," he said. "There were a lot of other people hunting him, too, so that made it even more exciting. And on those other 52 hunts, I've seen all kinds of big deer, but I was determined to wait on him." ■

TRUXNO BUCK

WALL HAMMERS SURPRISE SHOOTING LANE VISITOR

By Glynn Harris

Much of Union Parish consists of woods that feature lots of pine timber. While there are plenty of creek and stream bottoms with big hardwoods, pines tend to dominate the forests.

Just north of the village of Truxno, there is a hunting club of some 3,000 acres that borders the Arkansas state line where much of the timber is pine with a large portion being land where the pines have been thinned or harvested. The result is that big bucks find this sort of habitat where underbrush growing up in the cutover land provides plenty of cover to protect and food to attract them.

Randy Wall, 60, is a carpenter who lives in Downsville and is a member of the hunting club where habitat conditions are just right. On Nov. 11, he found a big Union Parish 10-point buck in his sight picture.

"I had never seen or had indication of this buck being on the property until two days before I got him when I had nighttime pictures of the buck on my trail camera," Wall said.



Randy Wall took this trophy 10-point buck at his hunting club in Union Parish on Nov. 11.

DOE'S BEHAVIOR IS RED FLAG

Arriving at the camp of a friend in the hunting club the afternoon of Nov. 11, Wall climbed into a box stand around 3:30 that afternoon. There are two shooting lanes out front of the stand and on one, Wall had placed rice bran and on the other, corn; he doesn't use a feeder but just places feed on the ground.

"For the first hour and a half I didn't see anything, but then around 5:00 a doe came out of the thicket onto one of the shooting lanes," Wall said. "I noticed right away that she seemed skittish and kept looking back the way she had come.

"I had my scope on her – I shoot a Ruger .270 – when I saw movement at the edge of the thicket at about 125 yards. The doe took off and the buck I had seen on my camera stepped out. I said to myself, 'oh, there he is'. I just moved my scope from the doe to the buck and squeezed the trigger and he hauled it out of there in a hurry."

Since the hour was getting late, Wall climbed down from his stand a few minutes later and walked over to where the buck was standing when he shot.

"I found blood where he was standing and was able to follow the blood trail to where he was piled up maybe 50 yards from where he was shot," Wall said. "As I walked up to him, I could quickly see there was no ground shrinkage. His rack was really incredible."

MATURE DEER

The buck sported a heavy rack of 10 points with an inside spread of 18 6/8 inches. Bases were an impressive six inches each with the next measurement being four inches with five inch measurement further up the rack. Main beams were in excess of 26 inches each. Estimated weight was 220 pounds and he was aged at between five and six years old.

Wall entered the buck in a big buck contest held annually for bucks taken in Union Parish and he was scored at 169 6/8 inches of antler mass, a score that initially puts him in first place in the contest.

"I guess," he said, "I was just in the right place at the right time." ▪



On Oct. 17, 2021, Tyler Bowen took an outstanding 10-point buck with a Mathews Mission Maniac bow on family-owned land in Catahoula Parish.

SOME KIND OF STAND!

BOWEN IS LOCKED ON TO BIG BUCK SPOT

By Glynn Harris

Tyler Bowen was sitting in his lock-on stand armed with a bow Oct. 17, 2020, when at 7:50 that morning a big 8-point buck stepped out and he downed it; the first buck he ever took with a bow.

Fast forward to Oct. 17, 2021 when Bowen was sitting in the same lock-on stand, at the exact location as the year before, when an outstanding 10-point stepped out and he released an arrow and downed the buck. Looking at his watch, he was astounded to see that he shot the 10-point a year later at exactly the same time, 7:50. Both bucks were taken with Bowen's Mathews Mission Maniac bow and Easton arrows tipped with Grim Reaper broadheads.

Bowen, 26, lives in Lafayette, works at the Student Support Service Office at the University of Louisiana Lafayette and hunts on a 550 acre parcel of family-owned land in Catahoula Parish.

"We had trail cam photos of a big buck last year and started seeing him on camera again this summer when he was in velvet," Bowen said. "I also found one of his sheds from last year that nailed down just what an impressive buck he was."

PREPARING FOR THE HUNT

Bowen had watched the weather and saw that a cold front was scheduled to come through that weekend, so he planned a trip and settled into a camp on the property on Friday, Oct. 15.

"I had the lock-on stand set up at the same spot as the year before," he said. "In order to reach the stand, I had to use my canoe to paddle across a lake on the property; the stand was only 18 yards from where I beached my canoe. The deer tend to feed in nearby ag fields and walk the edge of the lake headed for their bedding area and I'm set up between feeding and bedding areas."

Saturday morning produced plenty of sightings as he counted 16 deer that were moving through. However, they were does with a couple of small bucks. Bowen didn't hunt that afternoon as he worked on planting food plots on another part of the property.

Sunday morning, Bowen was up early, paddled across the lake and was in his lock-on before daylight.

"I had one deer come through and blow at me before it got light enough to see," he said. "Then soon after daylight, two does came through, spotted my canoe, checked it out and even looked at me as I sat motionless 15 feet up a tree."

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

While the two does and then a few others were milling around the area, Bowen said he heard movement in the brush

behind him. He spotted an antler and watched as a small 9-point buck came out and he watched him rub his antlers on a tree.

"The 9-point looked up at me but didn't spook; he just seemed nervous," Bowen said. "Then I noticed there was another deer standing in the shadows and as the 9-point moved on off, the following deer stepped out and I saw it was the big 10-point I was after."

Before the big buck stepped out, Bowen was able to slowly stand with his bow drawn when the buck stepped into a small opening. Bowen made a "meah" sound to attract the deer's attention and when he did the does feeding around took off running and he was afraid the buck would do the same.

"Instead, the buck stopped to watch the does leave and he happened to be in a small opening," Bowen said. "I released my arrow at 22 yards and watched him run off."

Staying in his stand for half an hour to calm his nerves, he got down and walked to where the deer was standing and found blood. Instead of following the trail, he called his uncle on whose property he was hunting to come help him. The deer ran about 100 yards when they found him where he expired.

The rack sported 10 points with a 19 1/8 inch inside spread, five inch bases and 24 inch main beams. The buck, estimated to be 4 ½ years old, weighed 242 pounds and was measured with 161 1/8 inches of antler. ■





SPORTSMAN'S BIG BUCK GALLERY



Dedria Brashear of Ruston bagged this big-bodied 12-point at her hunting club in Madison Parish on Oct. 12. Brashear had a hair-raising experience when a big bear beat her to her trophy. The buck was green scored at 145 1/8 inches.



Misty Wood harvested this big 9-point buck on Nov. 13 at her family's property in Lincoln Parish, an 80-acre tract located west of Ruston. The buck was scored at 142 7/8 inches.



On the morning of Oct. 31, Kevin Smith of DeRidder dropped this 200-pound-plus 10-point buck on property he hunts in Beauregard Parish. The deer was officially scored at 148 inches of mass.



Chad Landreneau took a big 11-point buck at his lease along the Sabine River in Vernon Parish on a foggy morning Nov. 9.



Cody Brown of West Monroe harvested this 9-point trophy buck on Nov. 12 in Madison Parish between Tallulah and Waverly. The rack was measured at 151 3/8 inches.



Jason Campbell of Shongaloo was hunting in Webster Parish on Nov. 14 when he killed a trophy buck that measured 155 3/4 inches.



Matt Downs proved persistence pays when he downed a huge trophy buck in Bossier Parish on Nov. 20. The deer was a huge 11 pointer that scored 147 5/8 inches and weighed 190 pounds.



On Nov. 23, Ruston businessman Mark Johnson harvested this Lincoln Parish 9-point trophy buck his son alerted him to. The rack was scored 142 2/8 inches of antler mass.



Tyler Roberts of Gonzales shot this 8-point deer that weighed 260 pounds and scored 140 in DeSoto Parish on Nov. 21.

To read full stories about any of these trophy bucks, visit **www.louisianasportsman.com** and visit the deer-hunting section.



Jared Phillips with his trophy "unicorn" deer taken in Vernon Parish on a hunting lease.

LEESVILLE HUNTER HARVESTS RARE "UNICORN" 9 POINTER

By Kinny Haddox

Is there a unicorn in your deer woods? Well, probably not. But for a short while last week, Louisiana hunter Jared Phillips of Leesville thought he'd bagged one of the mythical creature's descendants on his hunting club in Vernon Parish.

From C.S. Lewis novels like *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to My Little Pony toys, these mythical creatures have floated around our culture since the Ancient Greeks. And now, Phillips killed a big mainframe 8-point with a perfect 8-inch "unicorn" antler right in the center of its forehead.

"You know, I told myself before the season this year this was going to be my year," the 27-year old instrumentation tech for Valiant Integrated Services at Fort Polk said. "I couldn't believe it when I walked up and started to pull this big buck out of the bushes where he'd fallen. I didn't see the extra antler until then. I had never seen the deer before and nobody on our club had either. Nobody's even had a picture of him on a deer camera."

GRUNT GIVES DEER AWAY

The deer must have been exceptionally wise, because it was a very old deer. It could not even be aged because it had no teeth," Phillips said. "The deer weighed 186 pounds and was healthy."

Phillips got to his stand Thursday, Nov. 4 an hour before daylight as he usually does. He was thinking to himself that everybody else was seeing a lot of big deer and he wasn't. He started praying that he'd at least see one and he picked up his grunt call and gave three soft grunts. He then picked up his bleat can and shook it a couple of times.

"It wasn't 30 seconds later and I heard a soft grunt off to my right," he said. "I thought this might be my chance. And then he busted out of the thick bushes off in front of me like he was parting the Red Sea. I saw horns and could see the hair bristled up on his neck. He stopped and hooked a bush real, real hard. Then he stood up high and gave a loud snort wheeze. That was so cool. As he stepped out from behind the cover looking for that deer he thought he heard, I got an opening. I squeezed off the trigger and he tucked his tail and ran."

"As he stepped out from behind the cover looking for that deer he thought he heard, I got an opening. I squeezed off the trigger and he tucked his tail and ran.

LOCATING THE BUCK

Phillips sat for about 15 minutes and wanted to get down, but decided to wait a while longer because he knew that is what he needed to do. The deer had been last seen about 125 yards away.

"I walked to where the deer was standing and I couldn't even find a spot of blood," he recalls. "Then I walked to a big pine tree where I last saw him and picked up a blood trail. I went through the bushes and he was piled up in the brush. I didn't know how big he was, or about the unicorn horn until I pulled on his rack to get him in the open. I was shaking like a leaf."

We mentioned Phillips thought this would be his year. Four days after taking the unusual deer, he also killed a big 10-point in the same woods that is his biggest deer ever. Sounds like he was right on his prediction. And he's heading back to the woods for more.

According to game biologists, antler oddities in whitetail deer aren't that unusual. Unicorn deer are, however, pretty scarce. Hunters have bagged some pretty unusual racks over the years. These strange antler formations are labeled "non-typical" and consist of drop or forked tines, palmated beams, sticker points or point clusters. They are usually caused by some sort of injury, disease or a genetic abnormality, especially in older deer. ▪





OUTDOOR UPDATE

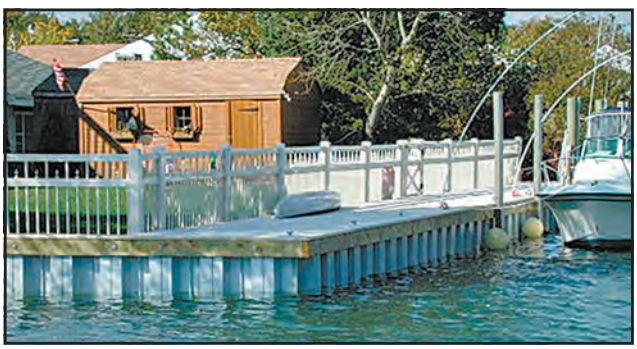
JANUARY RUT CALENDARS

As long as it takes deer season to get here, it sure doesn't seem to last. January marks the end of the road for most hunters, and rutting activity is pretty much limited to the eastern half of Louisiana.

Deer in Areas 4 and 9 in Southeast Louisiana are predicted to wrap up their second breeding period slated to run from Dec. 19 to Jan. 1.

In Areas 1, 5 and 6, in the Mississippi Delta and the upper-Basin parishes, 2022 kicks off during the first breeding period of the season, which is scheduled to wrap up on Jan. 1. The second scraping period is set to crank up Jan. 2-16, followed by the second breeding period from Jan. 17-30.

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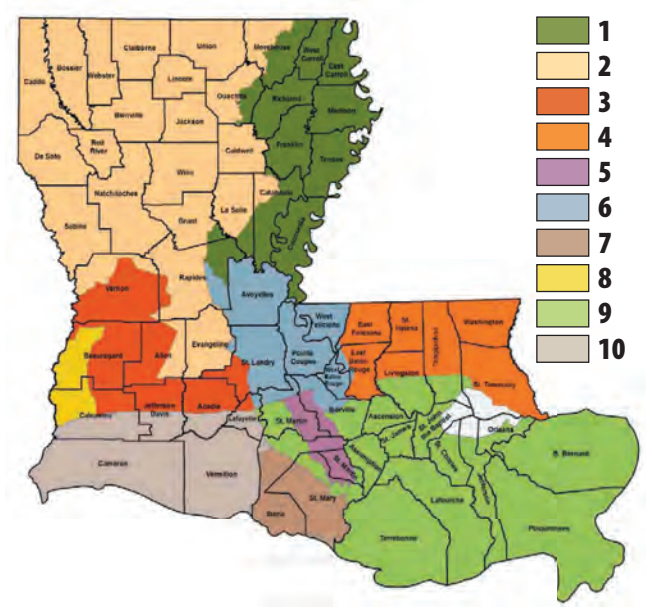
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2021 - 2022 Deer Hunting Areas



JANUARY 2022 — Areas 1, 5 & 6

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

JANUARY 2022 — Areas 4 & 9

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



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FIVE LOUISIANA ANGLERS TO FISH 2022 BASSMASTER ELITE CIRCUIT

By Kinny Haddox

The competitive field for the 2022 Bassmaster Elite Series tournament trail has been announced. Five Louisiana anglers have qualified for the circuit, which many consider the most prestigious of professional bass fishing tours.

Louisiana's anglers are Donald Gleason from Many, Greg Hackney from Gonzales, Derek Hudnall from Denham Springs, Tyler Rivet from Raceland and Caleb Sumrall from New Iberia.

One of the first-time qualifiers is not from Louisiana, but got there through Louisiana waters. Matty Wong of Culver City, Calif., joins the rookie class after winning the 2021 B.A.S.S. Nation Championship on the Ouachita River out of Monroe/West Monroe.

Last season drew over 12 million viewers to coverage of Bassmaster LIVE. The 2022 Elite Series schedule will begin Feb. 10-13 with the Bassmaster Elite at St. Johns River in Palatka, Fla. From there, the tournament trail will wind through eight states for nine events as anglers compete for cash and prizes and attempt to qualify for the 2023 Bassmaster Classic. There are no Bassmaster events scheduled for Louisiana. The closest the Louisiana anglers will fish to home is on May 19-22, on Lake Fork at Quitman, Texas.

Each tournament will begin with the full field of anglers on Days 1 and 2 before the field is cut to 47 for the semifinal round on Day 3. Only the Top 10 remaining anglers will fish the final day of each event with a $100,000 first-place prize on the line. ▪

NEW RULES IN EFFECT FOR 2022 ELITE REDFISH SERIES

By Kinny Haddox

Fishing tournaments are about a lot more than just catching fish and paying out prize money. And circuits like the Elite Redfish Series, which has a huge presence in Louisiana, are always looking for better ways to serve the fishermen and the communities where they handle events.

To level the playing field and help clean up the image of redfish tournaments in the marsh and bays, the series has announced several rule changes for this year.

"Mainly, tower boats will no longer be allowed during official practice times and tournament days on the Elite Redfish Series," said Pat Malone, the commissioner of the circuit. "The response has been positive for the most part and, of course, not liked by some. But we are about conservation and we want the communities where we hold events to welcome us there, not worry about what happens when we are there. These changes are in keeping with other key tournament series events in the country to help us clean up our act as far as image goes. It's a very positive change."

The circuit is also implementing a new 60 mile per hour speed limit for all boats during practice and competition days both for safety reasons and as a courtesy to other fishermen in the tournament waters.

The main issue has been that a small percentage of anglers with high elevated platforms don't actually pre-fish during practice, they just ride around the edges of the shallow ponds and marshes looking for fish," Malone said. "That stirs up the water and actually damages shallow water grass areas. That's not what we are about. We have nothing against those kinds of boats, but when anglers are doing that days on end, it causes a black eye for the sport. The Elite Redfish Series will no longer allow that.

The 2022 tour actually kicks off with the Berkley Bash presented by the Louisiana Northshore CVB in Slidell. It



will be held February 4-5 and is a partner event.

Registration for that event is open and will close Tuesday, Jan. 11 at 9 a.m. No additional registrations will be taken past that point, so reserve your team's spot early.

There are bonuses for fishing the circuit besides the cash and prizes offered at each event, Malone said. Fishing any Elite Redfish Series event automatically enters anglers in a drawing for a fully rigged boat, motor and trailer package at the seasons end.

You can learn more about the tournaments and how to participate at the circuit's website, https://eliteredfishseries.com/ where information about all tournaments, rules and news about past events is available. ▪



These two redfish were caught in the 2021 Elite Redfish Series tournament on Louisiana's Northshore last spring.



READER REPORT

A THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY TO REMEMBER

BATON ROUGE YOUNGSTER KILLS FIRST DEER; CATCHES FIRST CRAPPIE

My name is Clarke McRae Williams IV. I am 9 years old, and this is the story of how I killed my first deer. It was a nice fall afternoon and my dad took me out to a stand that my Papa had fixed up for me. After a boring 30 minutes, we saw two small does and I begged my dad to let me shoot one of them, but he said we should wait to see if a buck might come out. After those two does walked off I thought I had missed my chance.

After another 30 minutes, a bigger doe came out of the brush and since it was getting late, my dad said I could shoot her. We got the 300 Blackout rifle adjusted and ready to shoot. The safety was off, and we were just waiting for the doe to turn broadside for a perfect shot. All of a sudden, a big buck emerged from behind our stand and nearly ran in to the doe! So now we had





the buck standing right where the doe was standing, and it was already broadside. My dad whispered "Shoot! Shoot!" I took a deep breath and slowly squeezed the trigger. BOOM!!!

The buck jumped up in the air and ran off. When we got out of the stand, I was so nervous because I thought I had missed him! We walked over to where he was standing but didn't see any blood anywhere. After several minutes, FINALLY, my dad found a tiny spot of bright red blood! My heart was pumping so fast! One drop, two drops, three drops of blood… But then, we lost it! It was getting dark and I knew we didn't have much time. My dad told me to stand at the last spot of blood and let him make a "big loop" in the direction that he had run.

All of a sudden, I heard my dad say "Clarke! Hurry! Come quick!" I didn't know if it was good news or bad news but I ran as fast as I could. As soon as I got up the hill, I saw him laying in the middle of the road with his big antlers just staring at me! I was so excited! We went over to the buck and I could see that I had made a PERFECT shot, right behind his front shoulder.

My dad was screaming and hollering, giving me high-fives, and big hugs! Just then, my grandparents pulled up on their Ranger and they were so excited too! We all took pictures in the field before the sun went down. My friends, William and Stewart Haddox, were both at the camp, and I got to show them my first deer kill and tell them this story! It was a memory that I'll cherish for the rest of my life!

And to top it off… I also caught my first white perch on the same weekend! ▪

Clarke McRae Williams IV
Baton Rouge, La.



SCORING TROPHY BUCKS PUTS EVERYBODY ON A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD, BUT SCORER GREG HICKS SAYS EVERY DEER IS SPECIAL AND HUNTERS SHOULD ENJOY THEIR EXPERIENCE NO MATTER THE FINAL NUMBERS.

WHAT'S THE SCORE?

By Kinny Haddox

Hundreds of "140 class bucks" have walked out of a thicket, been harvested by a great shot and taken to town by proud hunters. Then something interesting happens.

The hunter takes the trophy to an official scorer and, suddenly, the 140 is officially a 132, or worse yet, a 128 1/8.

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF OFFICIAL DEER SCORING.

It's a world Greg Hicks lives in every week during deer season.

Hicks quickly points out two important facts about scoring deer. Every deer is special to the person who killed it. And it's not all about the score. There's much more.

"Oh, there's no doubt that every time I score a deer, there is high anticipation," Hicks said. "When it comes down to the final and it's a little bit less than what he or she wanted, I start pointing out the good characteristics of the deer. Every one is unique in tine length, color, shape — it's all part of the hunt. No matter which way it goes, I always want people to leave my table feeling positive about their deer. The score is just part of the experience that the hunter will remember for a lifetime."

Sometimes there is even a surprise for a hunter scoring a deer.

"Often somebody will bring one in and say what they expect, but they may have much more," Hicks said. "I've been doing it long enough to have a good idea when I look at it what they've got. There's not much more pleasing than to score a hunter's deer and them be ecstatic over the results."

Scoring deer has also taught Hicks a lot about the people who kill big deer. And the main thing he has learned after hundreds of big racks laying on the table in front of him?

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JUST GO HUNTING

"There are times when you can spot a big, healthy buck and watch it grow a few years, then harvest it," he said. "That's exciting. But the thing I've learned in my nearly 10 years of scoring deer is just go hunting. Just get out there. Find where deer are and hunt hard. And I know this will make some trophy hunters cringe, but when it is your time to kill a monster deer, sometimes it is just your time. I can't tell you how many people come up and tell me they didn't know that deer was in the world and 'Bam', it just walked right out in front of them. That's the most important thing I think I can tell people. Just to go out there and hunt. And if it is your time, it's your time. Always be ready and have hope."

There are highlights every season for Hicks, who was encouraged by Buckmasters Regional Director Cecil Reddick to get certified and begin scoring deer. Hicks followed up on that. The first local deer he ever scored and turned in was a bow kill by Dan Preaus that measured 150 inches.

Buckmasters scores based on inches of antler, Hicks said. The first thing tallied is the inside spread, then the main beams and the length of each tine. A tine has to be at least one inch to be considered a scoreable point. Lastly, you take the circumference measurements in four spots along the main beam. When you finish, double check the numbers and tally them up, you have the gross score. It's a process that an official scorer has to make with confidence and concentration much like a major league baseball umpire. You have to do it enough to trust yourself to do it right and make the right call. It means a lot to people and it means a lot to Hicks, too.

Sometimes a hunter may come in with a huge 8-point and another hunter have a smaller 12-point. To the naked eye, the eight looks bigger, but when you go through the process, the 12 may have more inches of antler and score higher. It's a consistent process that evens the playing field for everybody. The result of scoring a deer is much like putting a big bass on the scales. The numbers don't lie.

Hicks also points out that not all the racks he scores are recent kills. Sometimes people bring in deer they killed years ago that were never scored just to see how they fare. Recently, two men brought a deer their father had killed 30 years ago that had been in storage most of that time.

IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR

Hicks was raised in the rural Salem community near Farmerville and spent his time with his three brothers and grandfather talking about hunting and the outdoors. It's where he learned to tell stories and to love the outdoors. Today, he's the Environmental, Health and Safety supervisor at nearby West Fraser and he's the father of two daughters, Addison and Peyton.



This young hunter was thrilled with her trophy deer and having it scored by Greg Hicks to add to the memory of a lifetime. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** This deer was brought to Hicks for scoring after being in storage for almost 30 years.

They have grown up hunting with him and have both killed deer. That family experience also motivates Hicks to give back to the sport. He has a growing social media presence with his Antlers and Hicks stories, which you can follow on Facebook.

"There is no doubt about it," he said. "When a young boy or girl comes up to the table with a nice set of antlers, it's exciting to me because you know it is exciting to them. I usually talk through what I'm doing with them and want them to know exactly how we do this. I also love to talk to them about their hunt and how they killed the deer."

Recently Hicks was able to score a deer of a lifetime for local 9-year-old Abram Riser of Downsville. The buck was estimated at 4 ½ years old and scored a whopping 150 3/8". While the process of scoring deer and tallying the results is complicated, the tools of the trade are simple. Hicks starts with a wooden Mason's folding ruler to measure the inside spread. It goes straight across between the beams and is super accurate. He uses a regular soft measuring tape for the circumference of the beams and a regular retractable tape for the tines. Measuring the beams length can be done with a string from the lowest base of the antler, up the back side and right along the antler. Hicks puts an alligator clip at the end of the tallest point and then measures the cable with the Mason's tape. He always does the main beams twice just to double check. He then records the numbers on an official scoring sheet, signs it and has the hunter put his or her information on the official sheet. ▪

THE GREG HICKS SCRAPBOOK DEER >





THE GREG HICKS SCRAPBOOK DEER

Hicks said he could spend all day talking about the bucks he's scored and not even get close to covering all the stories. But three deer stick out more than any others since he began scoring deer. Lets call them his non-typical scrapbook deer.

First of all, the "Broadhead Buck."

"Several years ago a guy brought in a big rack and said 'ya'll be careful with this one' and he pointed down to the main beam," Hicks said. "There was an expandable broadhead from an arrow stuck in the main beam. A bowhunter had apparently been looking at the rack when he shot and the arrow hit dead center in the main beam on the inside part. It was still pretty sharp and a little bit tricky to handle."

Hicks also treasures the first buck he ever scored and posted to social media in 2014, a 194 class buck taken by a hunter in Mississippi. And the largest free-range deer he ever put a tape to was entered in the Big Buck contest at Simmons Sporting Goods. It was a 231 3/8 buck harvested from Kansas. In between, he's lost count of how many bucks he has scored. ▪



Kinny Haddox *has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 47 years. He and his wife, DiAnne, live in West Monroe.*

STICKS & STRINGS >



Greg Hicks' first officially scored deer. A lot of things have changed since 2014, but not Hicks' love for scoring deer.

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FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME



Hicks carefully checks every measurement because it is important.

Greg Hicks is always prepared for the question and he never wavers on the answer: "How much do I owe you for scoring my deer?" The answer is nothing. He does it for the love of the game.

"I don't get paid a dime to do the scoring thing," he said. "That's 100% my contribution to hunting."

"People try to pay me all the time and I don't like taking it. Heck one man wanted to give me something so bad one time because I wouldn't take his money, so he reached in his truck and gave me a big bag they put cotton in. I still have it today as a reminder of good people in the world. Too many people today are using hunting and fishing as a way to promote themselves. We need more people doing things strictly to promote hunting and fishing. That's my whole thing with scoring. It's why I do it. To promote the lifestyle I love." ■





MY FIRST RECURVE DEER:
THE CULMINATION OF ONE YEAR'S HARD WORK


The author's first recurve kill was this doe taken in Arkansas.

I remember when I first started bow hunting over thirty years ago like it was yesterday. Deer were scarce, and compound bows didn't have near the technology that they do today. It was difficult enough to take a deer with a compound bow, and I scoffed at the thought of going into the woods carrying only a bare wooden bow and a few arrows. It has been said that time changes everything, and that is certainly true in this case. Over the last thirty years, not only have deer populations increased significantly, but I've been blessed to take many animals with my compound bow, including some nice bucks.

The next step was that I found myself wanting to increase the challenge again and tip the odds more in favor of my quarry. Regular readers of this column know that in an effort to do so, a little over a year ago I picked a recurve bow up with the goal of taking a deer with it. This is the story of my journey down that rabbit hole, or should I say deer trail. Hopefully it will inspire some of you to do the same, as well as shorten your learning curve compared to mine.

Working in the archery industry afforded me the opportunity to meet many incredible people and be invited to hunt some amazing places. Many of my closest friendships have been formed through archery. Two years ago, my buddy Scott had me order him a recurve bow and, in the process of setting this bow up, I rediscovered how much fun they are to shoot. In fact, I enjoyed the simplicity so much, that I purchased one of my own and began playing around shooting it in our range. Scott dug in and got it done on a nice 10-point buck at his place up in Arkansas later that year from the same stand that I killed a beautiful 9-point buck out of with my Mathews bow in that November. This was when I made up my mind that I was going to do this thing! Although I shot that bow fairly well, I just wasn't consistent enough to feel confident taking it into the woods.

One Saturday in August of 2020, a friend brought a Black Widow bow in and I was able to try it out. The following Monday I was on the phone with the factory ordering one of my own.

My new Black Widow bow arrived in January of 2021. I was able to become accurate with this bow very quickly, and in early February I made a quick evening hunt in the marsh close to home. I saw several deer, but the only one in range was a young buck that I elected to pass. Even though I was accurate most of the time, I still would have the occasional "Where the hell did that go?" flyer. Scott and my other friends were having similar problems, and none of us could explain these misses. This led us to search for answers, and the solution was a weekend archery clinic in March with Rod Jenkins,



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.*

a three time world champion and world class coach. Rod was quickly able to put us on the path to proper form and increased accuracy, probably saving us years of struggling. In late spring I buckled down and put in my time doing drills and then practicing each morning for at least 30 minutes. Traditional archery requires you to put in the time almost daily to maintain both the strength and form required for consistent accuracy.

A great way to keep out of the woods is to run an archery shop, and this fall was no exception. Early bow season was even busier than usual, and it was looking like I wouldn't have the opportunity to hunt until late in the year again. A last minute invite to Scott's property in Arkansas was extended, and I jumped at the opportunity. It was going to mean a lot of driving for only three sits in the stand, but I didn't mind at all. The first evening, I only had a cull buck come in and I elected to pass him hoping one of the younger hunters would get an opportunity at him. The next morning I saw several bucks and does, but the only deer I had a shot on was a young spike buck. I practiced hard the entire morning and early afternoon, as it was all coming down to this last evening hunt.

We went into our stands early because many of us bumped deer on the way in the evening before that were on their feet early due to the full moon. I was hunting from a ladder stand on the edge of a 15 acre wheat field. As soon as I settled into the stand, deer began popping out into the field. Although I saw a bunch of deer including two really nice bucks, at 5:15 p.m. none of them had been within range yet. I was thinking my hunt was over and reflecting on how great both my time in the tree and camp had been when I spotted a lone doe standing 40 yards down the field edge.

Things quickly shifted into overdrive as she started to walk my way. I readied myself for the shot and everything was going smoothly until she spotted a rice bran pile put out earlier that afternoon. She immediately stomped and began to "stiff leg" away. I was able to quickly crouch and find a hole in the limbs on a branch in front of me. I drew back, focused on her quartered away vitals and let the string slip smoothly off of my fingertips. As soon as the arrow left the string, I knew it was a perfect shot.

I heard that satisfying "whack" sound, and as the doe wheeled around to run off, I could see my turkey feathers sticking out of the back of her ribs. She made a mad dash across the wheat field and into the woods where I heard her pile up! After a bit of blood trailing we recovered a beautiful doe. All of my hard work over the past year had paid off when it counted most. Because of this, this deer was one of my most satisfying bow kills ever! If you enjoy the process and challenge of bow hunting, traditional archery enhances both of these elements.

You owe it to yourself to give it a try. ▪



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LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

By Kinny Haddox



HUNTING LATE SEASON DUCKS IS A WHOLE NEW BALLGAME AND THERE'S A LOT TO CONSIDER IN ADJUSTING YOUR GAME PLAN, INCLUDING DUCK LOVE, TO MAKE SURE YOU ARE IN THE RIGHT SPOT.

You don't have to be duck hunting very many years before you realize early season duck hunting and late season duck hunting ARE NOT NEARLY THE SAME.

If you haven't learned that, you probably wonder why other duck hunters are still killing ducks at the end of the season and you are not.

Finding and shooting late season ducks is all about location, location, location — the same key factor your local realtor will tell you is the most important thing about buying a house. Some duck hunters don't have the luxury of going to other spots, but there are other things that you can do.

Late season ducks are picky about their real estate for a number of reasons. First of all they've come a long, long way in a relatively short time. Many of the ducks that migrate to Louisiana each fall and winter come from the prairie pothole region of Canada. That's a trip of more than 3,000 miles. You have to think that they ask the question "are we there yet" more than your kids on summer vacation.

Along the way, they've encountered all kinds of weather conditions and threats from natural predators. They've been called, decoyed, shot at and harassed at almost every good looking spot they've stopped along the way.

DUCK LOVE

And by January there is an even more serious reason for them to be a bit cantankerous. They are in love. Well, at least duck love. They have a chosen a mate and have become a couple. Experienced duck hunters and biologists will tell you that changes everything.

One reason that ducks, especially dabbling ducks like mallards and gadwalls, respond to calls differently and seek out different kinds of territory is that by this time of year, they have paired off. And that isn't an easy relationship for the ducks to maintain, according to former LDWF Waterfowl Study Leader and avid duck hunter Larry Reynolds of Baton Rouge.

"It is important to note that ducks have chosen a mate by this time and there are several biological reasons," he said. "First and most obvious, it's for reproduction. There are a lot more males than females and just because ducks have chosen a mate doesn't mean the others back off entirely. Take mallards for instance. A hen takes a mate to try and fend off all the other aggressive drakes. The drake often has to fight off other suitors constantly, but it saves the hen from having to do that. It allows her to rest, feed and start the pre-basic molt process and start getting nutrients after the breeding and southern migration season."

Ducks also sometimes have to contend with losing that mate. Often the hen or drake is taken by a hunter, natural causes or a predator and the process has to start all over.

What does that have to do with successful duck hunting?

"It totally changes what ducks are looking for and how they act," Reynolds said. "Early in the season, the ducks are new to the area and fairly easy to call and decoy. They are just glad to be here. They fly in bigger groups. Big spreads of decoys in open marshes or big reservoirs will attract ducks. But now that



If you can see this in front of your blind, so can the ducks. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Sometimes a simple place like the flooded low end of a corn field will hold late season ducks.

they are paired off, they are looking to get away from the crowd. They start looking for alternate habitats. The drake is much more leery of where they go. They have seen enough pit blinds in rice fields during their migration to last a lifetime. Duck hunters have to start keeping their eyes open and watch for what the ducks are doing. When they start heading to the smaller spots, you better head there, too. The one key above all others in duck hunting is that you better be duck hunting where the ducks want to be."

Hunters begin to see large groups of ducks right out in the middle of big bodies of water, trying to get away from anything that can harm them. Or they stop seeing many ducks at all, which usually means either they have left the country or they are in smaller groups in smaller bodies of water. Reynolds said more times than hunters want to admit, that is the case.

"Late season ducks, especially mallards, love the little holes in the woods," he said. "The ducks love the little WRP (Wetlands Reserve Program) lands that are set aside and flood. Old sloughs and river lakes, anywhere they can find to get away from hunters and bunches of other ducks makes them more comfortable."



Kinny Haddox *has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 47 years. He and his wife, DiAnne, live in West Monroe.*

WORK ON THAT BLIND >



WORK ON THAT BLIND

Concealment and hiding movement also become much more important for hunters during the later parts of the duck season. It's time to take your efforts to conceal yourself to a whole new level.

"We all get tired later in the season and we love to go to our blind on Jan. 20 and we know it needs some work, but we decide we've killed plenty of ducks there so it won't make a difference," Reynolds said. "We convince ourselves it will be fine and then we don't kill any ducks and we blame it on something else. But it's much more important to have your blind in good shape at the end of the season than it is early in the season."

Reynolds points out that no matter where you hunt in the state, things outdoors look differently in January than they do in November.

"I don't know about you, but where I hunt it turns from green to brown to kind of decayed looking as the season progresses," he said. "And it starts changing colors from higher to lower levels. If you don't match your blind to the natural conditions, you are not helping yourself."

Cleaning up around the blind is a must. If you don't think ducks can see 100 empty shell casings of all colors laying out in the shallow grass in front of your blind, maybe you picked the wrong sport, Reynolds said.

Decoy spreads definitely need to change late. Fewer decoys matches what ducks want. Many hunters change their spreads to relate to the ducks mating up, too. They'll put a mallard drake and a mallard hen together all through the spread. But fewer decoys is a key to keep from discouraging ducks to come your way.

"I'm not a fantastic duck hunter, but I do know that those spinning wing decoys need to be in the closet by Christmas," he said. "They are fantastic early, but late, they need to be gone or at least set far away from your spread so they can still at-tract ducks from long distances, but not scare them away from you





A big fancy blind may not be as good as a good spot in the reeds along the bank for late season birds. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Instead of big open water, small patches of open water in a field of corn or soybean stubble may be a good spot for ducks late.

when they get close."

Setting up a small spread and hiding away from the blind in trees, the edge of a corn field or along the edge of a slough or flooded hardwood bottom is a great place to hunt. If you have to stay in the rice field blind, try setting up a big "fake" spread about 50-70 yards away from you, then scatter just a few decoys out right in front of you. They'll come look at the fake spread, but then they'll slide off and come to that small number of decoys more times than not. Ducks are in full plum-age by this time of year, so make sure you use big decoys or at least have yours clean and looking sharp.

Reynolds also said now is the time to back off on your calling. Ducks sometimes don't need any prodding at all. At best, just hit the call a few times to get their attention, then let your decoys do the rest. That also helps restrict movement.

There is one time when all the extra effort the's talking about may not be necessary, but it won't hurt, either. If a massive slow moving cold front moves across the migration path and gets bunches of ducks on the move, they are not going to be as leery. They are just looking for a place to get ahead of the brutal weather.

NEW DUCKS >



NEW DUCKS

"When we have a big cold front moving ducks down here in droves, all bets are off," Reynolds said. "Anything goes. When new flight ducks come our way, that's when you need to be out there. A big influx of new ducks is always a great thing."

Even with a cold front, it doesn't guarantee all the ducks will head further south. Sometimes they will just decide to sit it out where they are. And that led Reynolds and others to a disturbing discovery last year even here in Louisiana.

"When we had the deep freeze across the state in early February last year, a large number of ducks stayed here instead of heading further south," he said "It got down to zero in north Louisiana and as low as 20 down in Baton Rouge. We had a lot of birds with GPS collars on that died. When we tracked them and went out to pick them up, we found literally hundreds of dead ducks and geese that had also perished due to the freeze. Banking on late movement of birds based on a storm is not a successful strategy for duck hunters in Louisiana in my opinion."



It's not easy getting to and wading through flooded backwater, but if it is where the ducks want to be, you better be there, too.

And one thing Reynolds said to do is never mess with success. If what you are doing is working, don't quit doing it. If it isn't working, change tactics. That's simple, but effective. ▪



2021-22 LOUISIANA HUNTING REGULATIONS

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

HUNTING SEASONS

SPECIES	SEASON DATES		BAG LIMIT	POSSESSION LIMIT
	(South Zone)	(North Zone)		
DOVES+	Sept. 4 - 18 Oct. 16 - Nov. 28 Dec. 18 - Jan. 17	Sept. 4 - 26 Oct. 9 - Nov. 14 Dec. 24 - Jan. 22	15	45
WOODCOCK^	Dec. 18 - Jan. 31		3	9
TEAL (blue-winged, green-winged, cinnamon)	Sept. 11 - Sept. 26		6	18
RAILS*				
King & Clapper	Sept. 11 - 26	Nov. 13 - Jan. 5	15	45
Sora & Virginia	Sept. 11 - 26	Nov. 13 - Jan. 5	25	75
GALLINULES*	Sept. 11 - 26	Nov. 13 - Jan. 5	15	45
SNIPE	Nov. 2 - Dec. 5 Dec. 18 - Feb. 28		8	24
QUAIL	Nov. 20 - Feb. 28		10	30
RABBIT	Oct. 2 - Feb. 28		8	24
SQUIRREL	Oct. 2 - Feb. 28 May 7 - 29**		8 3	24 9

*An extended falconry season for ducks, rails and gallinules will take place from Nov. 2 - Jan. 31. ^An extended falconry season for woodcock will be Nov. 2 - Jan. 31. +An extended falconry season for mourning doves will be Sept. 15 - Oct. 1.
**Spring squirrel season is CLOSED on the Kisatchie National Forest, some National Wildlife Refuges, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers property and some Wildlife Management Areas. (Check WMA season schedule)

WATERFOWL SEASONS

	EAST ZONE	WEST ZONE
DUCKS*, COOTS & MERGANSERS	Nov. 20 - Dec. 5 Dec. 18 - Jan. 30	Nov. 13 - Dec. 5 Dec. 18 - Jan. 2, Jan. 10-30

The daily bag limit for ducks is 6 and may include no more than 4 mallards (no more than 2 females), 3 wood ducks, 2 canvasbacks, 2 redheads, 1 mottled duck, 1 black duck and 1 pintail. Only 1 scaup may be taken for the first 15 days of the season with 2 per day allowed for the remainder. Daily bag limit for coots is 15. Daily bag limit for mergansers is 5, only 2 of which may be a hooded mergansers. The merganser limits are in addition to the daily bag limit for ducks. The possession limit on ducks, coots and mergansers is three times the daily bag limit. Youth and Veterans only: EAST - Nov. 13 & Feb. 5. WEST - Nov. 6-7.



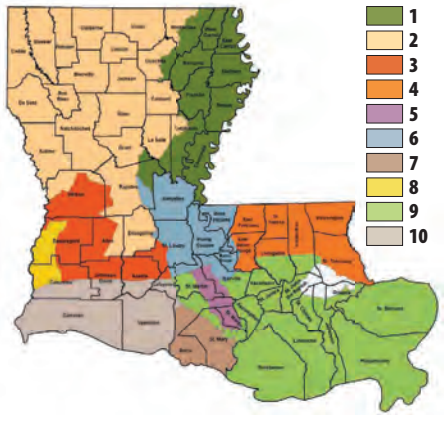
	EAST ZONE	WEST ZONE	
GEESE (snow, blue, Ross & white-fronted [specklebelly])	Nov. 6 - Dec. 5	Nov. 6 - Dec. 5	Daily bag limit for light geese (snow, blue, Ross') is 20, with no possession limit. The daily bag limit for white-fronted geese is three, with a possession limit of nine.
CANADA GOOSE SEASON	Dec. 18 - Jan. 30	Dec. 18 - Jan. 2 Jan. 10 - Feb. 6	The daily limit for Canada geese is one per day, with a possession limit of three.

	EAST ZONE	WEST ZONE	
CONSERVATION ORDER FOR LIGHT GEESE	Dec. 6-17 Jan. 31 - March 6	Dec. 6-17 Jan. 3-9 Feb. 7 - March 6	No bag or possession limit. See pamphlet for more detail.

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

DEER SEASONS

2021 - 2022 Deer Hunting Areas



AREA	ARCHERY (Either-sex)	PRIMITIVE FIREARMS (All either-sex, except as noted)	STILL HUNT (No dogs allowed) (All either-sex, except as noted)	WITH/WITHOUT DOGS (All either-sex, except as noted)
1	Oct. 1 - Jan. 31	Nov. 13 - 19 Jan. 24 - 31	Nov. 20 - Dec. 10 Jan. 3 - 23	Dec. 11 - Jan. 2
2	Oct. 1 - Jan. 31	Oct. 23 - 29 Jan. 17 - 23	Oct. 30 - Dec. 7	Dec. 8 - Jan. 16
3	Sept. 18 - Jan. 15	Oct. 9 - 15, Jan. 3 - 9	Oct. 16 - Nov. 28	Nov. 29 - Jan. 2 (certain areas)
4	Oct. 1 - Jan. 31	Nov. 13 - 19 Jan. 24 - 31	Nov. 20 - Dec. 10 Jan. 3 - 23	Dec. 11 - Jan. 2
5	Oct. 1 - 15 (bucks only) Oct. 16 - Feb. 15 (either-sex)	Nov. 13 - 19 (either-sex) Jan. 24 - 31 (bucks only)	Nov. 20-21, Nov. 26-28 (either-sex) Nov. 22-25, Nov. 29 - Dec. 10 (bucks only)	Dec. 11-12, Dec. 18-19 (either-sex) Dec. 13-17 (bucks only) Dec. 20 - Jan. 23 (bucks only)
6	Oct. 1 - 15 (bucks only) Oct. 16 - Feb. 15 (either-sex)	Nov. 13 - 19 Jan. 24 - 31	Nov. 20 - Dec. 10	Dec. 11 - Jan. 23
7	Sept. 18 - Jan. 15	Oct. 9 - 15 Jan. 3 - 9	Oct. 16 - Nov. 28	Nov. 29 - Jan. 2
8	Sept. 18 - Jan. 15	Oct. 9 - 15, Jan. 3 - 9	Oct. 16 - Nov. 28	Nov. 29 - Jan. 2
9	Oct. 1 - 15 (bucks only) Oct. 16 - Feb. 15 (either-sex)	Nov. 13-19 (either-sex) Jan. 24 - 31 (bucks only)	Nov. 20-21, Nov. 26-28 (either-sex) Nov. 22-25, Nov. 29 - Dec. 10 (bucks only)	Dec. 11-12, Dec. 18-19 (either-sex) Dec. 13-17 (bucks only) Dec. 20 - Jan. 23 (bucks only)
10	Sept. 18 - Jan. 15	Oct. 9 - 15, Jan. 3 - 9	Oct. 16 - Jan. 2	

LEGENDS OF THE OUTDOORS

By Kinny Haddox

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is the first in a monthly series honoring the six most recent inductees into the Louisiana Chapter Legends of the Outdoors Hall of Fame.*

DALE BORDELON



Kinny Haddox *has been writing magazine and newspaper articles about the outdoors in Louisiana for 47 years. He and his wife, DiAnne, live in West Monroe.*

PRESERVING WATERFOWL HERITAGE IS A PASSION FOR DALE BORDELON.

A dugout pirogue hand carved from an old cypress log. Duck decoys carved from cypress stumps. Duck calls made totally by hand from cane. It's the old way for Louisiana waterfowl hunters and a current way of life that is being preserved and promoted by Dale P. Bordelon from the small community of Effie.

Because of that and other contributions to the Louisiana outdoors, he is one of six new inductees in the Louisiana Chapter Outdoor Legends Hall of Fame. Bordelon is the owner of Bayou Beast Duck calls, where he makes many different kinds of duck calls from scratch. He is also one of the most enlightened educators of waterfowl history in the state.

In a day when hunters can go after ducks in all kinds of vehicles that offer comfort and convenience, Bordelon still finds pleasure in going out in his hand carved dugout pirogue. He made it from a 5,000 pound cypress log the same way his ancestors did. And it will last forever. He has already willed it to his young grandson. It's only one way he incorporates tradition into his hunting experience and passes along knowledge to anyone willing to listen.

As for duck calls, he does the same.

"Duck calls came about in general around 1850," he said. "Back then, millions of ducks migrated to Louisiana and stayed. When people came from other places they brought some of the first calls with them and the people here picked up on that. The first calls were made from bamboo. For starters, it already had a hole in the cane so it didn't require any drilling. And it also made a good sound. Back in the day, everybody had a bamboo cane call. They carved the sound boards by hand and made reeds out of different kinds of plastic, like filing down old Ace hair combs."

He also loves passing on history about duck decoys and continuing to make them like in the old days.



> "Decoys in those days didn't even look much like ducks. They weren't made to be pretty, just to help kill more ducks.



"Years and years ago in the market hunting era, Louisiana got millions and millions of ducks and people killed them to eat," he said. "They were sold in the French Market in New Orleans and were for rich people, not the poor people. In the mid 1880's when ice was introduced, duck decoys took off because you could kill ducks, sell them at market and they could be shipped to other places on ice. Decoys in those days didn't even look much like ducks. They weren't made to be pretty, just to help kill more ducks."

The first duck decoys in Louisiana were made from cypress trees and done strictly with hand tools. He does that today. That is important to Bordelon as is the fact that he has never bought a piece of wood. Everything he uses is wood and other material he collects while running the swamp.

What he does is not easy. It's time consuming and takes a lot of dedication. To make sure his stories are passed on, he has also made a series of videos telling the details of how he preserves the state's waterfowl history.

"It's so important to keep a close connection with the past and with your equipment when you are hunting," he said. "That's why history and the old way are so important to me. It is not just about killing ducks."

There's a lot more to his story as well. For instance, he lets nothing go to waste. He still makes pillows from duck feathers he saves. And he uses old trotline string that he saved from when his dad fished as lanyards for his personal duck calls.

The Legends Hall of Fame was originally founded by Garry Mason in 2002 in Tennessee. Louisiana became the first state to have it's own chapter in 2019 under Peyton McKinnie of Marion. You can learn more about Bordelon on Facebook at Bayou Beast or the Hall of Fame at Louisiana State Chapter Louisiana Legends Hall of Fame. ▪



MUDDY PAWS >

MUDDY PAWS

Bryan Beatty



Photos by Bryan Beatty

A GREAT HUNTING DOG IS THE ICING ON THE CAKE FOR WATERFOWLERS

You've recently been bitten by the duck hunting bug, or maybe you were bitten long ago, and thankfully never got over it. I've been "suffering" from it for over 40 years and luckily, the diagnosis is terminal.

Louisiana is known for its waterfowl hunting, and though some may argue it's gone downhill in recent years, there are still plenty of birds to be had. When you do put them on the water, what better way to have them delivered to the blind than by man's best friend — your own duck dog. I got really serious about duck hunting in my teens and early twenties. The next logical step after the decoys, guns, gear, and everything else was to get a dog to make the whole thing even better. It's the icing on the cake for waterfowlers.

It has gone from the dog being just part of the experience to being ever increasingly about the dog. I, along with a large group of others probably get more pleasure and enjoyment out of watching the dogs work than other aspects of the hunt. Don't get me wrong, watching a bunch of greenheads helicopter down through the timber so close you could smack with the gun barrel is one of the greatest sights in the hunting world. Now this is just my opinion, but it's a close second to watching your best friend happily and efficiently fetch them then get ready for the next flight.

The intent of this column is to cover what it takes to develop an accomplished retriever from the point the little fur ball comes home to the payoff in the blind. I have trained two really good dogs and am now training my third with the help of some outstanding trainers I've gotten to know over the years in addition to what I've learned. In the future, I will share some of their best tips and ideas, too. Have I made mistakes? Yes. Will I make more in the future? Smart money says yes, but that's just part of it and how you get better.

If you are thinking of getting a duck dog, where do you start? The answer is with the puppy, of course. Before you start looking for your next "hunting partner," here are a couple of things to consider:

- Barring unforeseen accidents or illnesses, the average life expectancy of most duck hunting breeds is 12-14 years. That's a long term, major commitment that needs serious thought and consideration by you and your family.
- Duck season in Louisiana is 60 days. Say you get to hunt 20 of those days, that still leaves 345 days where you own a dog and have responsibilities to it.
- Dogs aren't cheap in terms of food, vaccinations, flea/tick/heartworm preventatives, check-ups and the unexpected bumps and bruises. Make sure you are prepared for the financial investment. Plan on $1000.00 to $1500.00 a year on food and routine medication alone.



Bryan Beatty *is a native of New Roads and is an avid hunter and fisherman. He resides in Baton Rouge with his black lab, Molly Bee.*

After you've considered the points above and decided to pull the trigger, what's next? You've got to settle on breed, color and sex of the puppy you want. Labs are the most common but Goldens, Chesapeakes, Pointers and Spaniel breeds are all very capable. Breeders you'll want to get a puppy from will have a social media presence so that's a good place to start as well as those in your own hunting circles. Well bred, capable dogs cost money, so don't skimp here. That extra $500.00 to $1,000.00 dollars for a top notch puppy is a pittance over that 12-14 year life expectancy. Another way to put it is a good semi-auto shotgun runs upwards of $1,900.00, duck boats $25,000; plus, leases: going up every year and we're not getting into the ammo, decoys and other gear. Bottom line is that dog, once trained and experienced, is going to be the MVP of the team. Go out and get a first round pick!

Now the fun starts: getting a puppy. Look for reputable breeders where the parents are health tested, the litter is registered, references are furnished and the breeder has a solid reputation. Top notch litters go quickly so putting down a deposit on a litter you're interested in is a good idea to reserve your pick. Titles from AKC or UKC events such as hunt tests or field trials are proof that the puppy comes from lines with the desire and trainability to do the work even though that may or may not be of interest to you and your pup. If possible, visit the litter before the pups are ready to go home to get an idea of your top picks "personality." Other considerations such as health guarantees, breeding rights, and initial vet visits/vaccinations should be spelled out in a contract. Good luck and happy hunting! ▪

HOW SPORTSMEN COOK >



It all starts with the right puppy like this healthy young black lab.



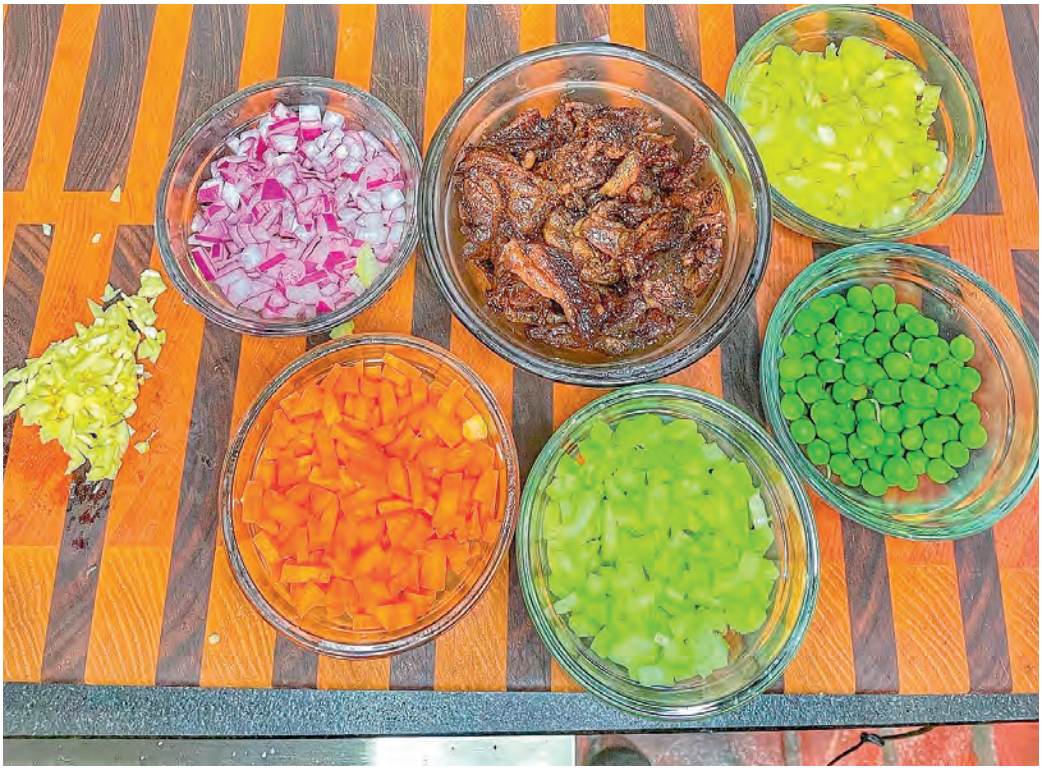
Nathan Judice

CELEBRATE DUCK HUNTING SUCCESS WITH A DUCK POT PIE



Crisp mornings, sunrises, and the smell of gunpowder are a few of the things about duck season in Louisiana I find enchanting. My first dive into duck hunting was at a young age during a "coot shoot." It was at this infamous roundup of pouldeau where I got hooked on duck hunting. Throughout the years, I always longed for recipes and dishes other than duck poppers. Now, don't get me wrong, I love a duck popper just as much as the next person, but there's something rewarding about transforming wild duck into a dish that everyone will love. As my duck hunting evolved, so has my cooking.

With the cold weather setting in, there is nothing better than a flavorful rib sticking meal with the star of the meal provided by duck season success. Duck pot pie is a comforting dish that is sure to warm your soul on the cold nights.



The ingredients for a duck pot pie are simple, but come together for a rib sticking meal!

INGREDIENTS:

Duck Fat Pie Crust (Makes 2 Pie Crusts):

½ Cup Butter
½ Cup Duck Fat
2 ½ Cups All Purpose Flour
1 Teaspoon Brown Sugar
1 Teaspoon Smoked Sea Salt
½ Teaspoon Smoked Paprika
¼ Cup Ice Cold Water
1 Egg, Whisked

Roasted Duck:

2-3 Whole Ducks
2 Tablespoons Duck Fat
½ Teaspoon Salt
½ Teaspoon Pepper
½ Teaspoon Smoked Paprika
1 Pinch Cayenne

Pot Pie Filling:

3 Cups Roasted Duck
2 Tablespoons Olive Oil or Duck Fat
½ Cup Onion
½ Cup Carrot
½ Cup Celery
¼ Cup Peas
4 Cloves Garlic
¼ Cup Flour
2 Cups Stock
¼ Cup Half and Half
1 Tablespoon Herb de Provence
Salt and Pepper to Taste

PREPARATION: Serves 4

1. Preheat oven set to 350°F.
2. (If you prefer to use store bought pie crust, skip to step 7.) For the pie crust, cut your butter into pieces, measure out the duck fat, and place both in the freezer for 15 minutes to chill.
3. Place the flour, smoked salt, sugar, and smoked paprika into a food processor and combine.
4. Add the chilled butter and duck fat to the flour mixture and pulse the food processor until the mixture resembles coarse sand.
5. Drizzle the ice-cold water into the food processor and pulse until just combined. Do not overwork the dough.
6. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and refrigerate until needed.
7. For the roasted duck, quarter the ducks and place in oven safe pan or roasting dish. Toss the quartered ducks in the duck fat, salt, pepper, and smoked paprika then roast in the oven set at 350°F for 30-40 minutes.
8. Remove the roasted duck from the oven and let cool. Once cool, debone the duck quarters and chop or shred the duck meat. 2-3 medium sized ducks should yield 2-3 cups of cooked meat. Increase the oven temperature to 375°F to preheat for the pie crust.
9. For the pot pie filling, mince the onions, carrots, celery, and garlic into 1/8" or smaller size pieces. Add the olive oil or duck fat to a Dutch oven. Sauté the minced veggies and the peas in the dutch oven until tender and translucent (3-5 minutes) at medium to high heat.
10. Sprinkle the ¼ cup of flour into the Dutch oven and cook with the sautéed veggies until it is fragrant and a light tan color (5-10 minutes).
11. Add the stock, roasted duck, herb de Provence, and half and half to the Dutch oven. Simmer for 20-30 minutes until thickened. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Remove from heat to come to room temperature.
12. While the pot pie filling is coming to room temperature, remove the pie crust dough from the refrigerator. Split the dough into two pieces and roll one out into a 13 inch circle. You can rewrap and freeze the other piece of dough for future use.
13. Fill a 9-inch pie pan with the pot pie filling. Place the pie dough on top of the pie pan and trim the excess.
14. Brush the top of the pie with the egg wash and cut 3 slits in the center of the pie.
15. Place the pie in the oven and bake for 40 minutes at 375°F.
16. Serve piping hot and enjoy.



Nathan Judice *is a wild game food blogger who lives in Baton Rouge. An environmental scientist by day, Nathan has a great appreciation of wildlife, conservation and sustainable harvesting. He can be found at Raisedonwild.com.*

OKUMA HAKAI DT BAITCASTING REEL



Okuma has had a series of low-profile baitcasting reels on the market for years. But its latest offering, the lightweight Hakai DT, is a reel that was literally built from the bottom up.

The LiteCast magnesium frame and a corrosion-resistant coating on the frame and side plates gets things started. The reels start at 5.9 ounces with a 6BB+1RB precision stainless-steel ball-bearing drive for smooth casting and a Quick-Set anti-reverse bearing for solid hooksets.

Okuma introduces its Flite Spool with patented Flite Shaft hollow, stainless-steel main shaft and C-40X carbon injected star, offering the ultimate in free spool and castability.

Six of the 10 models in the Hakai DT line have gear ratios of 6.2:1, 7.3:1 and 8.1:1. Two additional pitching reels come in at 6.2:1 and two finesse reels with an 8.1:1 gear ratio. A universal line diameter indicator lets you know what line you have on the reel at all times.

MSRP: $169.99-$184.99

For more info, visit: www.okumafishingusa.com.

DAIWA J-FLUORO SAMURAI FLUOROCARBON



Fluorocarbon is here to stay. There was good reason for the line's explosion on the market. Saltwater anglers were first to discover its advantages over mono, including smaller diameters, improved sensitivity, abrasion-resistance and invisibility. Freshwater anglers piled in for the same reasons.

Daiwa has jumped into the market with its J-Fluoro Samurai fluorocarbon, which comes in 13 different sizes between 2- and 25-pound test, for anglers chasing anything from bream to bull reds.

Line from 2- to 12-pound test was formulated stouter for better sensitivity, while 14- to 25-pound test was formulated softer for better spool management.

The 220-yard filler spools are marked with a DVEC sticker at the midway point, giving you an exact count when spooling two reels.

J-Fluoro Samurai main line brings invisibility, strength, reliability, and unrivaled overall performance to anglers of all walks.

MSRP: $20.99-$23.99

For more info, visit: www.daiwa.us.

SPRO POCKET TAIL MINNOW

Lots of soft-plastic swimbaits look alike, but the similarities end there.

SPRO has offered fishermen a unique, boot-tail swimbait, the Pocket Tail Minnow, which is a great choice to thread onto the back of a jighead or fished on a weighted swimbait hook.

At 3¾ inches long, the Pocket Tail Minnow comes in 16 colors and is made from a highly resilient elastomer and infused with Amino Bite Scent, which mimics the smell and taste of a baitfish and creates a scent trail that bass, redfish, speckled trout, snook and flounder can key on.

The hard-thumping tail contains a small pocket that provides a different sound profile than any other lure. And the heavily ribbed body pushes a ton of water. So it calls fish from a distance, in clear water and dirty water alike.

MSRP: 5-pack, $6.99

For more info, visit: spro.com





LEARN FROM A WIZARD BEHIND THE LENS

FOLLOWING CHRISTOPHER LECOQ'S TIPS CAN TURN YOUR OUTDOOR MOMENT OF A LIFETIME INTO A TREASURED MEMORY THAT YOU CAN SHARE FOR A LIFETIME.

By Chris Holmes

Christopher LeCoq is a wizard behind the lens. While most of his work is videography and production, his still images are equally amazing. He's shot and produced several Louisiana hunting and fishing shows for many years. He's also a regular in LSU sports productions. LeCoq has won numerous awards in broadcast media and even received a Suncoast Regional Emmy Nomination. He is regularly recognized by his peers from within the industry — even those not in tune with hunting and fishing.

He knows his stuff. The Louisiana Sportsman recently picked his brain to get tips for hunters and fisherman that want to take and produce high quality photos and videos to preserve and share their adventures in the outdoors.

"It is a lot easier these days," he said. "Virtually everyone carries a smartphone so they always have a great tool to get high-resolution photos and videos right in their pocket. Gone are the days of needing a $5,000.00 camera to get stunning content. GoPro's and smartphones fill the need for most. Other specific video equipment is constantly getting better, easier and less expensive."

LeCoq regularly gets compliments on his work and they usually go something like this: "Your images are always awesome, that camera is so good."

His answer and advice is, "Become familiar with the basics of image composition. Basic photography and videography lessons teach terms like headroom, rule of thirds, leading lines, negative space, diagonals, depth of field patterns and symmetry. This may all seem pretty technical, but are all simple concepts to understand. We have a psychological reaction to seeing an image. Knowing what makes it 'pleasing to the eye' greatly improves the quality of your work, no matter if you are using a cell phone, action cam, drone, consumer or professional camera. Strive to be creative and look at, and document things from unique perspectives and angles."

TIPS FROM THE WIZARD >

TIPS FROM THE WIZARD

TIP 1: Don't set out to be Steven Spielberg. Stay creative. Are you documenting this for personal memories or the general public? Keep your audience in mind and give them something they want to see.

TIP 2: Practice with your equipment to get familiar with all functions. Before going on an actual trip, photograph the kids and dog in the yard. Outdoor activities aren't scripted and you need to prepare and be able to quickly adapt for when that special moment comes. Filming from a kayak or deer stand produces many more challenges that have to be met.

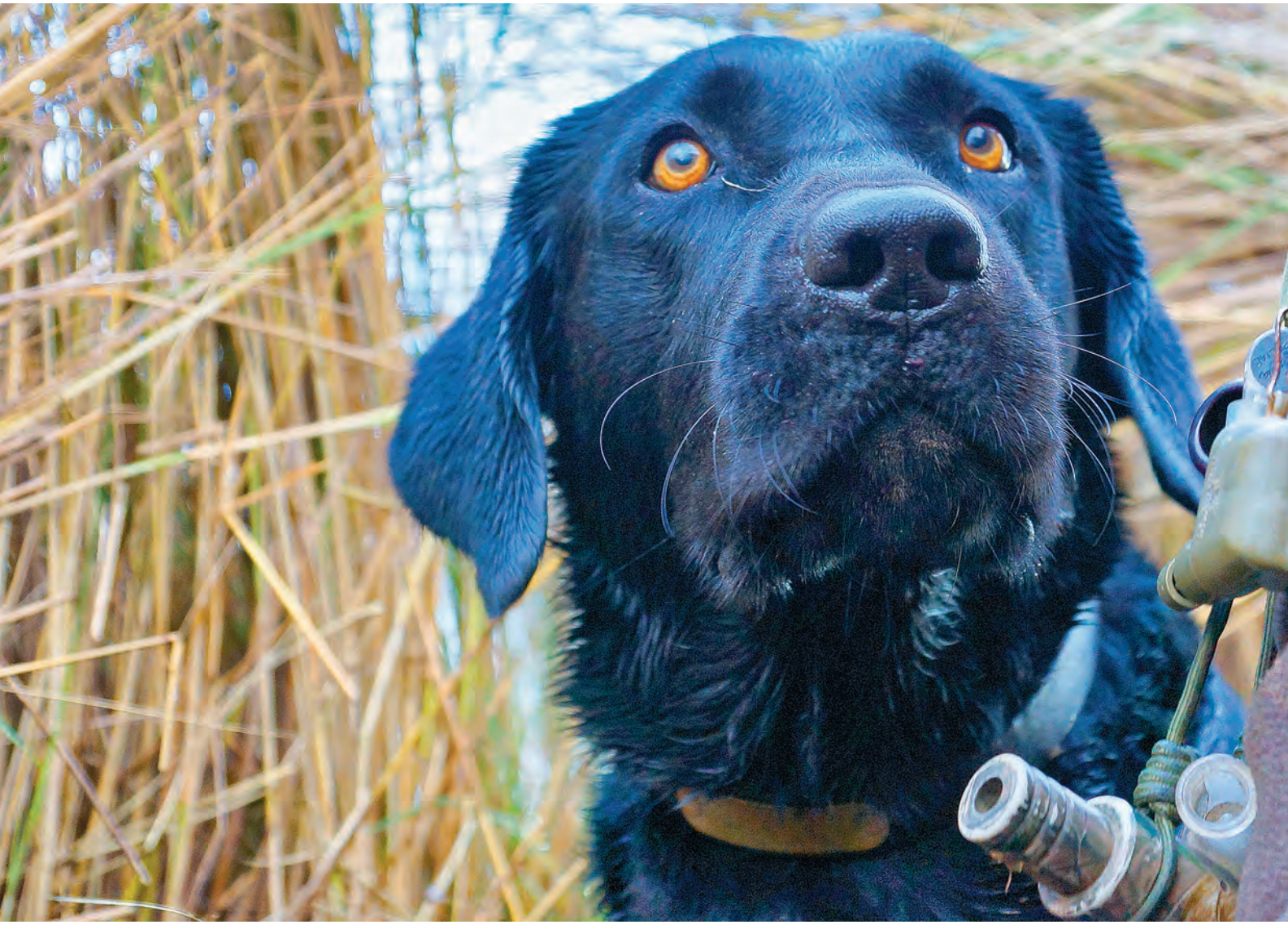
TIP 3: Before investing, you may want to rent a drone or GoPro to see if it is something you want to buy. Combining video from several different sources can make for a better production. If considering a drone, keep in mind there are strict restrictions on where they can legally be used.

TIP 4: Make sure to have several ways to attach your camera(s). This is especially important if self-filming. It is hard to hold a rod or gun and a camera all at the same time. You also do not want your video to all be from the same angle. Change positions several times. If you have more than one camera, all-the-better. Different perspectives can be edited in production and give the viewer a better experience.

TIP 5: Editing is the most time consuming part of final production. Don't just turn the camera on and let it run all day. Know what you want and be specific in your filming. That provides much less footage to have to review for editing. YouTube is a great resource to learn the technical side of production. Watch and learn. It is also a good source to get equipment comparisons and help make informed choices before you purchase.

TIP 6: Managing data takes some planning. Today's cameras are much higher resolution and therefore the files are larger and require more storage space. Always save files from your memory cards to multiple locations to have back-ups in case one copy gets damaged or accidentally deleted. Cloud-based storage and external hard drives keep your data safe and also free up your computer's memory for editing purposes.

TIP 7: Keep in mind that not every outing will work out as



BELOW: This great photo of a lab in the blind almost makes the viewer feel like they can see the ducks up in the sky that the dog is looking at.

planned. Don't frustrate yourself if things are not working out. You cannot control the weather, the fish, or the animals. Take whatever footage you can to save and perhaps use at a later date.

TIP 8: If you can pre-scout an area, you will be much better prepared. Knowing where the sun rises and sets helps get in better position for camera angles. This is not a movie set so you need to control what you can and be prepared to adapt as needed.

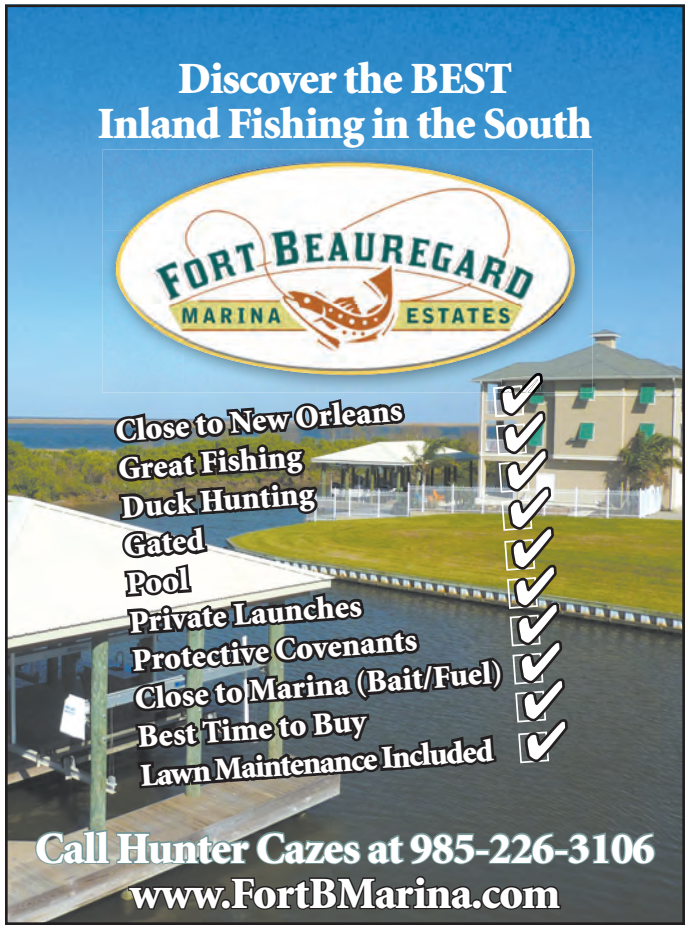
TIP 9: B-Roll. This is video footage that is not the main subject of your film. Take B-Roll in 10 second increments. (Turn the camera on and literally count to 10) You may only use a few seconds of that clip, but it is there if you need it. This is footage that you edit into your final film to add tension, make it more interesting, and tie things together. It can also come in handy to cover any gaps and to even hide errors. Take B-Roll footage in a variety of perspectives of wide, medium and close-up. For instance, shoot a deer stand full wide, zoom in half way and then zoom as close as you can.

FOCUS ON LIGHT, SUN >









FOCUS ON LIGHT, SUN



TIP 10: When a subject is talking, the camera should always be on them. The sound will be much better. Always keep light and the sun in mind. Avoid heavy face shadows. Change shooting angles and subject position if possible. When shooting video on a cell phone, always turn the phone sideways to shoot in landscape mode. Think of how your eyes are oriented — they are aligned horizontally, not vertically.

TIP 11: Plan out what you want to document. What are your expectations for the beginning, middle and the end? Having the story laid out in your mind helps the flow and ensures you get all the video necessary to edit into a smooth flowing, interesting video.

TIP 12: Always have multiple batteries and memory cards. Even the best camera is useless if a battery dies or you run out of storage.

TIP 13: For devices that have voice control like newer GoPro's, use manual operation as it is more reliable and can be done silently if the situation requires. Once you capture a special moment — fish strike or landing, deer or duck shot, etc. Stop recording. It will be easier to locate that clip when editing as you know it will be located at the end of the clip.

TIP 14: Get a dry bag. The outdoors are hard on equipment and the weather can change at any moment. Electronics and water do not mix. A quality, dedicated dry bag is a great investment to keep your gear protected. If you don't have one, carry a large Ziploc or even a garbage bag for use in a pinch.

TIP 15: We as sportsman understand the harsh realities of taking fish and game. Yes, there is blood and death. We respect



Getting the sun and lighting and a great background is the key to making this a good outdoor photo. **OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP:** A closeup of the hog and happy hunter help illustrate the successful hunt very well. **OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM:** Whether it's an expensive camera or just a quality iPhone you take photos with, always have a waterproof bag to protect your equipment.

our quarry, but sometimes that is hard to explain to those that do not participate. The hard parts of what we do is sometimes best left out and the story told with images and words to best promote our heritage.

At the end of the day, this is supposed to be fun and help encourage others to participate or at least better understand what we do as sportsmen. The chance of becoming a YouTube star is remote. The most important result is the story. Producing quality, interesting and informative video, whether it is for your personal memories or sharing with the world is the best way to explain what we do, how we do it, and why we do it. It may even encourage others to give it a try and, importantly, helps keep the traditions alive. ▪

Christopher LeCoq can be reached through his Facebook page, Full Frame Media Productions.



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

DEER PHOTO TIPS >



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DEER PHOTO TIPS

With deer season in full swing, we've all seen terrible photos with blood everywhere, tongues hanging out, shadowed faces, etc. Taking a little time to think and prepare for your photos shows respect for the animal and produces a shot you will be proud to share and show off for years to come. You will be amazed at how much better your photos turn out using these simple tips:

- Carry a small pack of baby wipes or moist towelettes in your pack. Wipe away as much blood as possible. Use the used wipes to pack the hole to stop/limit more blood from coming out. Move the deer to a spot with less blood on the ground and/or use leaves and grass to cover ground blood.
- Select a site for the photo that is representative of your hunt. Natural settings are much better than the bed of a truck, on an ATV, or hanging from the skinning rack.
- Tuck the tongue back in or hide it — tongues hanging out look terrible.
- Position the deer with legs tucked or on a rock or stump to get some elevation if possible.
- Take the photo from a low angle looking up at the hunter and the deer.
- Take shots from many different angles and positions — digital photos are free and you can simply delete the ones you don't want.
- Talk to the hunter. Get them to smile, turn their head for different angles.
- Position the deer where the light will be to the photographer's back.
- Place the hunter seated behind the deer and have them hold with as few fingers as possible.
- Move the antlers up/down, left/right to see where they show off the best.
- Tip the hunters cap up high to lessen shadows on the face.
- Use fill flash, even in bright sun.
- Be aware of the background to avoid objects that take away from the photo — sticks/branches that appear to be coming out of the hunters head, trash, etc.
- If using the gun/crossbow in the photo make sure it is unloaded and pointed in a safe direction.
- To avoid that dead white or green eye look (flash), carry a pair of high-quality taxidermy glass eyes. Pop the eyes in over the natural eyes and align the pupils horizontally.
- You don't have to get the whole deer in the frame for a good photo.
- And finally, take photos of just the deer and perhaps with your gun or bow. ▪

BELOW: Both of these photos made sure that all blood was cleaned away, the tongue was tucked in and the natural-setting area was clean. While the first is not bad, the second one has the hunter smiling and the glass eye took away the dead-eye shine. It is these little things that greatly enhance the photo's appeal.





John N. Felsher

BACK SEAT BASSIN'

CATCHING FISH FROM THE REAR OF THE BOAT CAN BE A PLEASANT SURPRISE WHEN YOU PAY ATTENTION AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR OWN LARGEMOUTH FISHING STRENGTHS.

By John N. Felsher

Most anglers, especially tournament bass anglers, prefer to occupy the front of a boat because they control the action. However, practically everyone who ever fished, including most legendary pros, spent some time fishing

FROM THE BACK OF A BOAT.

For example, one young angler joined a local bass club and fished as a "co-angler" or "non-boater" — tournament parlance for someone without a boat who fishes from the back of another person's craft. This young fellow watched the "boaters," the people who used their own boats and fished from the front. He learned everything he could from them as he fished in the back of their boats.

The next year, the 17-year-old angler showed up to tournaments with his own boat and won the club Angler of the Year title, the first of many accolades he would accumulate over the years. Perhaps you've heard of him. He goes by the name Kevin VanDam.

"At 16, I joined the Kal Valley Bass Club and fished as a non-boater for the first year," recalled VanDam, who won four Bassmaster Classics including two in New Orleans. "We never went more than 30 miles from my home in Kalamazoo, Mich., but fishing the club was a great experience. What really helped me most in the beginning was that we fished with a different club member in every tournament. That's the best way to learn. Fish with as many different people as possible."

Fishing in front holds many advantages, like controlling the boat position and getting the first cast at bass. However, controlling the boat can turn into a nightmare, particularly on a windy day. As the boater struggles to maintain position with the trolling motor, the co-angler can concentrate on catching fish.

BATTLING THE WIND

"As a boater, wind can be your friend or it could be a curse," explained Donny Davis of Livingston, who fished numerous tournaments as both a boater and co-angler and won an American Bass Anglers event at Toledo Bend as a co-angler. "The boater needs to control that boat. In a big place like Toledo Bend on a windy day, that can be challenging. The co-angler doesn't need to worry about controlling the boat or anything else, but catching fish."

As someone without a boat who spends considerable time fishing from the back of a boat, I know that spot can also hold some advantages. From the back of the boat, co-anglers can watch everything the boater does. Observe how the boater fishes, what lure and color that person throws. Watch how that person works the bait. Everyone loves their favorite lures and



John N. Felsher

techniques, but an observant co-angler might learn something completely new.

"For me, the advantages of fishing out of the back of the boat outweigh the disadvantages," Davis remarked. "People can learn a lot by watching how other people fish. We get to see their strengths, which might not be our own strengths. I'll ask them questions and watch how they read the water. I like to see how they work through certain situations."

Of course, the boater sets the pace, picks the spot to fish and determines the technique of the day. Both anglers might enjoy completely different fishing styles, but the co-angler must adjust to whatever the boater wants to do. That also can become an advantage at times.

"People who fish from the back of the boat need to learn how to adapt to fishing with the different styles of various other people," VanDam advised. "One person may fish like I do — burning up the water. The next person might like to drag a worm over the same spot for a long time. Both techniques can be very effective. People who fish together share ideas and learn new techniques from each other."

One day, Davis watched his boater throw a Spybait, something he had never tried. Somewhat like a suspending jerkbait, but with front and rear props, it makes an excellent presentation in clear water for enticing non-aggressive fish.

"My boater was seeing fish out in open water with his electronics," Davis noted. "He would say, 'The fish are 50 feet out and 10 feet deep.' He'd drop the Spybait on the spot and count it down."

On another occasion, Davis fished a Toledo Bend tournament as a co-angler. On this frosty day, bass stayed in deep water and didn't want to chase anything fast. Also, in the frigid conditions, they wanted small, subtle offerings.

LEARNING THE HARD WAY >


John N. Felsher



Mike Wurm, a professional bass angler, and Jonathan Newton, another professional bass angler, fish near a dock. People fishing from the back of a boat can hit cover from various angles. **ABOVE, RIGHT:** Keith Lott, owner of Lott Lures, shows off a bass he caught on one of his buzzbaits while fishing from the back of a boat. Although most people fish from the front of their boats, the back seat can offer some advantages. People without boats must rely upon invitations from other anglers to fish.

LEARNING THE HARD WAY

"I'm a power fisherman," Davis revealed. "I like to go fast, but the co-angler is at the mercy of whatever the boater wants to do. My boater started throwing a little open-hook jighead tipped with a 2.5-inch swimbait. He was dragging it very slowly, something I hardly ever do. He was smoking me with that little bait! Eventually, he gave me one and I caught my limit, but if I had been a boater or fishing by myself, I probably would never have caught those fish."

Even when a boater gets hot on fish, never duplicate exactly what that person does. Try a similar bait, but maybe a slightly different size or color variation. Even with identical baits, just a subtle change in the retrieval cadence could produce better action. Sometimes, fishing with a bigger or smaller weight changes how a lure sinks, which could make a difference.

When the boater isn't catching bass after bass, try something completely different. For instance, if the boater fishes a spinnerbait, throw a jig or worm. Putting dissimilar bait types or colors in the water can help determine patterns. Forced to do something different, a co-angler might even discover a new pattern few other fishermen considered.

"I never want to duplicate exactly what the other person is doing," Davis said. "I always try to do something a little bit dif-



John N. Felsher

John N. Felsher



John N. Felsher shows off a bass he caught on a topwater bait while fishing with Keith Poche, a professional bass angler who grew up in Louisiana. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Shaw Grigsby, a professional angler and national television show host, lands a bass he caught while fishing from the back of his boat around weedy cover. Note the Power-Pole anchor poles holding the boat in place.

ferent. I'll throw a different kind of bait or work it a different way. No matter how good a fisherman is, nobody is going to catch every bass."

Regardless of bait selection, always look for "new water." Watch where the boater places a bait, then hit a different spot. When fishing a shoreline or shallow cover, boaters typically throw forward and hit one side of an object. For whatever reason, bass might favor a different spot. Perhaps the sun hits that spot a certain way or a little current creates a tiny eddy that holds fish. Maybe underwater structures attract bait. Bass on the other side of that cover might never see the boater's lure.

"People could fish the best lures in the world, but if they fish in the wrong place, they won't catch anything," quipped Bill Dance, a legendary angler. "Even a bad lure fished at the right depth will catch some fish."

In tidal south Louisiana, water flow changes direction frequently. Current might position fish on one side of an object in the morning and the reverse a few hours later. With the entire back deck as a casting platform, a co-angler can make repeated casts at various angles without disturbing the boater.

TRY A DIFFERENT ANGLE >



John N. Felsher *is a professional freelance writer and photographer with more than 1,700 articles in more than 117 magazines to his credit. You can contact him at JohnNFelsher.com.*

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TRY A DIFFERENT ANGLE

"Boaters throw at certain angles as they approach cover," Davis explained. "If we're coming up to a fallen tree, I will throw something from the back of the boat at a completely different angle. Whether fishing from the front of the boat or the back, casting at different angles has helped me over the years. If I'm catching fish by hitting cover from a different angle, often, the boater turns around to fish that stretch of bank from the other direction."

When fishing Louisiana bayous and canals, most anglers toss at the shorelines or visible cover, but they could literally turn their backs on the best honey holes. Fish commonly stay in deeper water, particularly during temperature extremes. Bass holding in the middle of a bayou might seldom see lures. While the boater beats the banks and blowdowns, work a worm or jig along the deep bottom contours or reel a deep-running crankbait through the middle of the bayou. Simply dragging a Carolina rig, Texas-rigged worm or similar bait behind the boat can cover huge tracts of rarely fished water and catch fish few others think to tempt.

When fishing in deep water, boat position doesn't matter as much. Over a hump or a ledge or when probing a deep brush pile and other structure, the boat stern could just as likely sit over the best spot as the bow.

Besides controlling the boat and everything else, boaters also owe some things to their co-anglers. Front-enders need to leave their back-seaters some room to fish. Good boat partners communicate with each other so they can both catch their share of fish.

"We get to see all kinds of different personalities when fishing tournaments," Davis commented. "I've had some great boaters, but some want to hog the water. For the most part, I've gotten along with my boaters and I'm still friends with many of them. Fishing as a co-angler has been a great experience and that's why I still do it." ▪

TOLEDO BEND >

Becky Smith lands a bass that hit a crankbait while she fished from the back of a boat. Not everyone can afford to own a boat so they depend upon someone else taking them fishing.



John N. Felsher



TOLEDO BEND BASS ARE GETTING READY

But low water levels limit spawning areas

By John Dean

Bass are getting biologically ready for the spawn, which for the most part usually occurs in late January, February and March at Toledo Bend. And when that happens this year it's possible this border lake won't be ready for them in the shallows. That will change the way we fish.

Toledo Bend was low, 4.36 feet below full pool of 172. Last month, lake level was at 167.64, which is what it's been around for the fall with little rainfall in each early cold front. It's setting up a lot like it was going into January 2021 when the lake level was at 167.80 two days after Thanksgiving 2020.

With the lake mostly devoid of aquatic vegetation in the traditional spawning areas, higher water levels inundate the bushes and wood, providing more cover for the migrating bass. Wihout that, it'll be a challenge without a serious rise in the water level.

NERVOUS ANGLERS

Yeah, I'm nervous. If we don't get some heavy rain events associated with the inevitable cold fronts that roll through this region in early winter, the lake stays low. So no grass. No bushes and no wood to speak of in the water (with the exception of a little up north). That's not good. When there was an abundance of grass over the past 65 years, there was cover for the bass to go to, get on and stay on throughout the process from pre-spawn to post-spawn no matter the water level. And that grass provided protection for the subsequent fry and fingerlings.

We'll have to hope for the best and deal with what we've got when that time comes. Hopefully, we've had another four feet of water before the spawn is ready to begin. If we don't and the lake level is around what it is now, we'll be catching most of our fish like we are catching them now. That's by staying on the move and throwing Alabama rigs, the No.1 deal, lipless crankbaits like Rat-L-Traps, and bladed jigs.

Really, the bass bite has been above average fishing that way in 12- to 20-foot drains where the bass and baitfish have been hanging out throughout the fall. The doesn't change that much if the water remains low in January. And, I believe, the bite could be even better.

FISH THE EDGES

Concentrate on the outside waters, the main lake, and probe the migratory routes, the creek channels, this month until the water level rises. If something changes, i.e. the water rises, the bass will follow and it'll be traditional January-February bass fishing slugfest.

Fish with red ½-ounce Rat-L-Traps, ½-ounce red and baitfish-colored bladed jigs, such as Delta Lures Thunder Jigs, and red square bill crankbaits. If the water stays down and the water color doesn't stain, anglers might want to exchange red for chrome and shad-colored lipless crankbaits and square bill crankbaits.

Stay on the trolling motor, cover water and hold on. Like I wrote last year about January: It's a time when bass that bite can be a 2-pounder or a 10-pounder … or heavier!

As for the grass situation here, the lack of it, the state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries started a project in November to investigate the loss of submerged aquatic vegetation at Toledo Bend. State biologists are addressing the program and that's encouraging. They know what vegetation means to fish.

Experimental enclosures, unfenced planting sites and control plots have been installed at Cow Bayou, Blue Lake and Pirate's Cove.

I'm behind that project all the way. It's time to restore this lake's bass fishing to its glory.

I've been guiding on this lake most of my life and you're welcome in my boat. Give me a call at (936) 404-2688. ▪



Scotty Reynolds of Many holds an 8 ½-pound bass he caught on an Alabama rig last winter while fishing with John Dean at Toledo Bend.

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PUNCH YOUR BASS TICKET

It's a great time for a Tchefuncte trip

By Nick Vaccaro

Don't trade in that trusty baitcaster for a blanket and fireside rocking chair just yet. Bass fishing finds a punch of excitement in late December and January, with the bass stacking up for the pre-spawn activity, which brings a big bite. For anglers who know how to read the conditions, a massive catch of big numbers and size is an attainable reality.

"Late December and January are my favorite time of year to fish the Tchefuncte," said Sam Jenkins, local angler.

Jenkins has been fishing the Tchefuncte and local waterways for many years now. He has even ventured further north to take advantage of big bass fishing on Toledo Bend and Sam Rayburn Reservoirs. He has done his homework, carefully studied the areas he fishes, and is meticulous in his approach to landing fish. I recall him telling me a long time ago when discussing Tchefuncte River fishing that anyone can cast and reel any bait. It takes patience and a keen understanding of what the fish want and mimicking that desire with perfection.

While conditions change throughout the year, so does the plan of attack when it comes to locating and capitalizing on the largemouth gulpers. During this pre-spawn, it can take some effort, but outer flats can be the sweet spot.

"A good indication of pre-spawn bass is about 4 feet of water," said Jenkins. "They seem to like the flat bottom."

Photo courtesy Sam Jenkins



Sam Jenkins hits the outer flats for chunky river bass like this one.

TRY THE LILY PAD STICKS

So as fishers search for those flats in primarily 4-foot water depths, a bonus can be found in the leftover sticks from lily pads. That extra structure can provide a sought-after cover along with a grassy bottom.

"You want to work that bait along the bottom," said Jenkins. "Cast and let it drop just far enough down where you can reel it through the grass and bump it along without getting snagged. They should swallow it hard."

The deep swallow has certainly been my experience. The bite is not necessarily a hard strike with a dramatic splash on the water's surface, but instead what feels like a snag. Once the hook is set, the fight initiates. Experience reveals after landing the bass that even though the strike was not violent, the bass inhaled the lure.

So, what lures seem to make bass anglers hearts skip a beat during December and January? While I have been partial to the Chug Bug with a gold belly, Jenkins gives thanks to a tried and true selection of specifics for the time of year.

"It all depends," said Jenkins. "I love to throw a square bill crankbait or a Rogue, and I'll throw into the trees and reel it back over the drop where that flat bottom is."

It takes getting on the water and exercising patience to capitalize on the December and January pre-spawn mecca of fishing. Scan the banks for some decent cover and utilize electronics in search of those flat bottom beds. When it comes to real estate, they say that it is all about "location, location, location."

That same business model applies to Tchefuncte River pre-spawn bass fishing. ▪

TRY THE LOWER BASIN

The bass are in pre-spawn, spawn mode

By Don Shoopman

Derek Hudnall has many favorites to choose from when he wants to catch bass during January within a reasonable driving distance from his home in Denham Springs.

Unfortunately for Hudnall, one of his most choice options got scratched from his list when the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service announced that Okhissa Lake would be closed through March 15, 2023, while a drawdown and other efforts are made to improve the lake in southwest Mississippi. The 1,100-acre lake is 1 hour, 20 minutes from his home.

The Bassmaster Elite Series pro about to embark on his fourth-year on the circuit took the lake's elimination from consideration in stride when he talked about top bodies of water for bassin' in January. He ticked off some of his perennial go-to places like False River, Tickfaw River, Amite River, Henderson Lake, Lake Verret and the lower Atchafalaya Basin. However, Hurricane Ida caused fish kills on the Tickfaw and Amite rivers, he said, which further narrows the field for this month.

Each of those bass fishing destinations usually come into play in the offseason when he conducts "educational" guide trips for young bass anglers, many who fish on junior and high school bass fishing circuits that are so popular.



On an Indian Summer day in January, bass anglers can get their hands on a bass of a lifetime in the lower Atchafalaya Basin or on the other side of the levee around Lake Verret.

FISHING AND TEACHING

"I like teaching the educational aspect of it," Hudnall said, noting his on-the-water lessons are based on a youth's skill set and what he or she wants to get out of the trip.

Hudnall, 41, really warmed to the subject of January bass fishing when he discussed Lake Verret and the lower Atchafalaya Basin, where he's been targeting bass during winters most of his life. He narrowed it down to the Spillway, if the Atchafalaya River stage isn't higher than 4-foot at Morgan City.

"Anything below 4-foot and falling the lower end of the Basin will be at its best. I'd concentrate on the south end between Flat Lake and Bayou Pigeon," he said, adding his go-to spot in that area would be Bear Bayou.

Preferably, he likes to fish Bear Bayou on an outgoing tide in the morning with a chartreuse/white Humdinger or Delta Lures spinnerbait and a red or chartreuse Spro Little John MD 50 crankbait. He works those moving baits around the edges of grass beds and cypress trees.

The same patterns often work around the northwest corner of Flat Lake, he said.

"Keep the baits wet because the bites won't come as frequently as you want them to, but this time of year you can catch the fish of a lifetime," he said. "Those fat females want to eat."

How's that? Fish of a lifetime? Sure, he said, as locals and others know the bass in this region spawn early.

GETTING IN SPAWN MODE

From Bayou Black to the lower Spillway and the Lake Verret area bass are in pre-spawn and spawn modes.

"They're really wanting to feed (pre-spawn)," he said. "They start moving up. You can have some incredible days. You can catch really good fish in that area."

Henderson Lake, another potential hotspot farther north along the West Atchafalaya Basin Protection Levee, is another viable hotspot, even if the Atchafalaya River stage is around 14 or 15 feet at Butte La Rose. In fact, Hudnall prefers it at that height in January.

"I like it when it's really high. When it's 14 or 15 foot high, there's three feet of water on the ridges (banks of canals). I like to punch them because fish position themselves on the ridges. The treelines … that's where the lilies raft up," he said, noting he punches a black neon Missile Baits D-Bomb under a 1 ½- or 1 ¼-ounce weight.

Hudnall goes into January on a high note after finishing second with Ron Hueston of Naples, Florida, in the Yamaha Bassmaster Redfish Cup Championship held Nov. 12-14 out of Port Aransas, Texas. They finished the three-day tournament with 40 pounds, 8 ounces.

"The rest of the offseason has been pretty quiet other than the Redfish Cup," he said. "I had a good time up there. I'm back home and I've got to get through January and hit the ground running for the Bassmaster Elite Series opener Feb. 11-14 on the St. Johns River at Palatka, Florida."

But, first, he'll tap the bass at some of his favorite hotspots in January, starting with the lower end of the Atchafalaya Basin. ▪

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HIGHS AND LOWS

NSU'S ALYSSA TAYLOR LOVES BASS FISHING THROUGH THEM ALL

By Don Shoopman

That an accomplished high school bass angler from Tennessee earned a special scholarship to fish at Northwestern State University in Louisiana is part of the story behind Alyssa Taylor.

There are chapters before and during her days as a collegiate bass angler that may make people laugh and cry. Taylor loves her family, including a close "second family" in Natchitoches, home of NSU, and friends even more than she does bass fishing (and that's a ton).

The young woman from Charleston, Tennessee, and Kolton Splettstosser of Jasper, Texas, both were awarded the Dylan Kyle Poche Memorial Fishing Scholarship this past fall.

Taylor, the first female bass angler to receive the scholarship started after Dylan Poche's death in 2016, and Splettstosser each received $4,500. Poche was on the NSU Fishing Team following a sterling four years with the Natchitoches Central High School Fishing Team.

The NSU Fishing Team competes on B.A.S.S., Major League Fishing (formerly FLW) and Collegiate Bass circuits.



Tennessee native Alyssa Taylor, sophomore on the NSU Fishing Team, is at home in her Triton bass boat on the water in Louisiana, Tennessee, Alabama, anywhere tournaments take her.

TRAGIC EVENTS

Two tragic events rocked Taylor's life before she left Walker Valley High School in Cleveland, Tennessee, to attend NSU.

While fishing the 2018 Mossy Oak Bassmaster High School National Championship at Kentucky Lake near Paris, Tennessee, about 4 hours from Charleston, Taylor stayed next to high school anglers and their respective families from Natchitoches. She got to know two Natchitoches Central High School bass anglers, Hunter Owens and Wes Rollo, and, especially, Owens' parents, Rusty and Becky Owens.

Rollo and Owens finished fourth in the 300-plus boat field when the prestigious three-day tournament ended. Taylor and the NCHS Fishing Team members became close friends.

Five months later, Owens died in a one-car wreck in Robeline, southwest of Natchitoches. That crushed Taylor's heart. She reached out to the Owens family and stayed in touch with the Louisianians.

"I met Hunter's parents (again) at the next nationals. It's like we'd known each other a whole lot. They were super sweet," she said, noting they treated her like family.

Taylor also kept in touch with Rollo. She visited Natchitoches in January 2020 on her way to fish a high school tournament at Toledo Bend in western Louisiana. She toured the college campus. She and Rollo made plans to fish on the NSU Fishing Team.

Rollo, who beat leukemia during a 31-month period before his freshman year in high school, died in May, 2020, after he was injured in a fiery one-vehicle wreck. The NCHS graduate was in his first year on the NSU Fishing Team.

With a heavy heart, Taylor stayed with her plan to go to NSU.

"That's been hard on me, down here alone," Taylor said about the loss of two friends, both an only child.

HELP AWAY FROM HOME

However, Owens' parents have helped her tremendously and constantly have her out to their farmhouse, she said. They are like her parents away from home.

"They made the process so much easier for me coming down here," she said.

For the past year at NSU, Taylor has worked cleaning houses and businesses while studying and fishing bass tournaments and planned to do the same — earn money cleaning — when she returned home in December.

"I look forward to making your house/business spic and span for the holidays," Taylor posted on Facebook.

Taylor misses her father, Jamey Taylor, her bass fishing mentor since she was a young girl and her biggest backer, who also was her boat captain while she fished four years with the Walker Valley Bass Club. He still travels many hours to help his daughter fish collegiately.

"My dad was always there to boat captain for me. He made sure I had everything," she said.

"All my life, basically, it's been me and my dad. We always went fishing. He had a john boat and we went below Watts Bar Dam. We'd fish for everything."

About half dozen years ago, she got hooked on bass tournaments.

Taylor said, "I didn't start competitive bass fishing until I was a freshman in high school. I like participating, trying to catch bass in a six to eight hour span. I wake up at 3 in the morning to go fishing. Not many girls do that."

Her collegiate bass fishing career has been a challenge the first 1 ½ years for another reason. The sophomore has had to fish all but two tournaments in her trusty Triton bass boat by herself, including her first derby in 2020, at Lake Guntersville in Alabama.

DOING IT ON HER OWN

Taylor, who is pursuing a degree in nursing, said she has trailered her boat, launched it, loaded it, alone sans help from a



NSU Fishing Team member Alyssa Taylor smiles while showing two nice-sized keeper bass, a smallie in her right hand and a largemouth caught during a collegiate bass tournament in September 2021 at Lake Pickwick.

tournament partner most of the time during her freshman year and early as a sophomore.

"It's aggravating" she said. "I had to learn to deal with it. I'm out here to fish. The only way I can do that is by myself. As much as I have a bad day, I look forward to it and don't think negative about it. If you're in a tournament and have a negative attitude … you have to take it and be positive. I have to be positive because not everybody has this opportunity."

Taylor did have an NSU teammate in the boat for two collegiate school tournaments last spring. She said it was temporary.

NSU Fishing Team member Luke Iles, who fished in high school bass tournaments with the Ascension Anglers, a club with members from high schools across Ascension Parish, teamed up twice last spring to fish with Taylor. Taylor and Iles finished 70th in a 171-boat field at Pickwick Lake near Florence, Alabama, and 196th in a 225-boat field at Lake Cumberland near Jamestown, Kentucky.

Taylor's two solo collegiate bass fishing excursions this past fall took her to Lake Pickwick and then to Chickamauga Lake, which she considers her home lake. She was disappointed in her outing on "the Chick," as bass anglers call it, in late October.

"I didn't do so hot," she said about the Kentucky lake where she finished second on a cold, rainy day in April 2018 with 20.62 pounds while fishing with Luke Fraley in the Watts Bar High School Tournament. "I was hoping to have better results than I did but fall fishing on Chickamauga is rough."

She planned to fish at least two Bassmaster collegiate events this semester starting with the Jan. 21-22 tournament at the Harris Chain of Lakes, Leesburg, Florida, then March 25-26 at Lake Norman near Cornelius, North Carolina.

TYING ON AN ALABAMA RIG

She'll throw an Alabama rig when she can because, she said, that's her favorite artificial lure but she is plenty adept with a football jig, topwater lures and a dropshot rig.

Much of her focus will be back in Tennessee, where she mentors two girls, Lainie Holbert and Sarah Swindle with the Riverside Junior Bass Team.

"One of the reasons I do what I do, I have two girls who I've taken under my wing," she said. "They're from Parsons, Tennessee. These two girls fished together the last couple of years. They look up to me a lot. These two girls are like my sisters. They are hammers. They can fish, I tell you. They beat the boys multiple times."

Holbert and Swindle caught 14 pounds, 2 ounces, June 19, 2021, to win the Mossy Oak Bassmaster Junior Series tournament on Saginaw Bay in Bangor Charter Township, Michigan, to qualify for the 2021 Mossy Oak Fishing Bassmaster Junior National Championship for second- through eighth-graders held Oct. 8-9 on Carroll County 1000-acre Recreational Lake near Huntingdon, Tennessee.

Taylor left Natchitoches and drove eight hours to support the girls in Huntingdon, where they were 29th in the 61-boat field. She made signs and held them up for the blastoff and weigh-in.

Like family and friends have supported her bass fishing efforts, she supports those girls. ▪

GOIN' ROGUE >





This big winter bass fell hook, line and sinker for the Suspending Rogue.

Photos courtesy PRADCO

GOIN' ROGUE

A BASS BAIT YOU CAN 'STICK' WITH EVERY YEAR

By Kinny Haddox

In a world consumed in having the latest and greatest of everything, it's nice to look in your fishing tackle box and find an old friend that almost never lets you down year after year.

January is time for Louisiana bass anglers to "Go Rogue." It's time to get out that Smithwick Rogue and toss it in front of big, sleepy largemouth. It works on the big lakes like Toledo Bend, Cross Lake, D'Arbonne and False River. It also works in smaller natural bodies of water from Caddo Lake to the Calcasieu River.

Smithwick Lures introduced the Rogue in 1969 in Shreveport, where former business machine salesman Jack Smithwick was cutting the ends off of his wife's brooms and whittling fishing lures. He soon found himself in the lure business full-time and one of the main reasons was the Rogue.

TWO AREAS OF FOCUS

"There are definitely two areas that I concentrate on in January and into February," said Greg Terzia, a tournament angler, director and owner of Terzia Bait and Tackle in Ruston. "First off, definitely look for deeper docks and they are best on sunny days. Fish that shade line. Cast the bait out and reel it fast until you get it to the max depth, then twitch it and pause. Just dead stick it. After a few seconds, do the same thing again. The pause is really the key to getting hits."

Terzia recommends finding deeper docks all by themselves near shallow flats or areas if you can. That seems to hold more fish. Those docks act as kind of secondary points. Which brings us to area No. 2 — secondary points.

"They will set on those secondary points away from the bank waiting to move up to spawn," he said. "Those are the two best spots to fish."

Terzia recommends fluorocarbon line in 12 pound test because it casts easy, sinks and holds the bait down. He also likes a seven-foot rod with a limber tip so you can fight the fish better and cast further.

You have to spend some time learning this lure, because it moves differently and has a different action according to the way you fish it. A sharp jerk and a slow pull provide different looks for the bass. As Terzia mentioned, the pause is also most often the difference in triggering a bite or not. Be willing to experiment with different retrieves and different pauses.Then when you get a bite, repeat that over and over. You have to fish it like they want it, not like you want to present it if you want to catch them.

In January and on into February, the fish will often have a very light bite on the lure even though it has nine hooks. Anglers



When you fish a Rogue in chrome blue back orange belly color for bass in January, keep the net close by.

will throw it out, let it sit, then retrieve it and pause. Often on that pause a big bass will slowly suck it in and just hold it. You may not even know you had a bite until you begin your retrieve again and feel that mushy feeling like you are hung up. When that happens, use a slow sweeping motion to set the hook. And get the net.

"CLOSET BAIT"

The Smithwick Rogue isn't a bait you hear folks talk about much, but it's kind of like a "closet bait" for a lot of successful anglers. They fish it this time of year, especially when fish are staging and holding right off grass beds or thick brush and may even be on bare points and other holding spots. That is where it is easy to get the slow-rolling Rogue and it's three sets of No. 6 size treble hooks to find bass and not get hung up in structure.

The most popular colors are still old standbys: the Golden Rogue with its gold body and black back with scale pattern and the chrome, black back Rogue with an orange belly. There are newer colors like Tiger Roan, Clown, Avocado Shad and Foxy Shad as well. Rogues also come in floaters, suspending models, the Super 10, a smaller Super Rogue, Jr and deep-diving sizes.

One of the Rogue's most recent claims to Fame was when Oklahoma pro Jason Christie made a run at winning the 2013 Bassmaster Classic on his home state Grand Lake. Although he fell short, he landed most of his big bass on the Rogue. He credited being able to fish the lure's exposed hooks around the lake's big bass, which were in the process of transitioning to the spring spawn.

Smithwick was purchased by PRADO Brands in 1992 and has some hot new colors, but the basic lure has never changed. Neither has the way you fish it or the way that fish gobble it up this time of year. ▪

LURE REVIEW >



LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman



Matrix Shad artificial lure manufacturing company gave saltwater and freshwater anglers a crossover design when the company made the Matrix Spin. The blade is on a clevis affixed to the shaft.

NEW MATRIX CREATION LEAVES BASS, SPECKS HEADS SPINNING

When Chas Champagne took one of his artificial lure manufacturing company's newest creations for a spin, he really took it for a spin.

Actually, the prototype for the Matrix Spin was the star of the Dockside TV video released late last summer. The Matrix Spin video (matrixshad.com/shop/matrix-spin/) was actually shot before the spinnerbait arm hit the market.

The Slidell outdoorsman and entrepreneur obviously enjoyed every minute of that fishing trip with the spinnerbait arm that has a different, albeit catchy, look.

"What we're showcasing today is the new Matrix Spin. Awesome little lure. Awesome design. … Brand new to the Matrix family," Champagne said early in the video.

"It's a neat little design," he said as he showed the arm and a specially designed No. 3.5 Colorado gold blade. "Free motion at all times. It can slide back and forth and this clevis goes around and around. It gives perpetual motion of this blade no matter what the lure is doing. It's a really, really high-quality. Spins very easily and it's a fantastic bait."

Champagne proved the latter statement by catching multiple bass on it while fishing the shallow, windy, marshy areas off the Pearl River system.

"It's a fantastic fishery," he said.

"The spinnerbait is extremely effective and very easy to fish. When I reel it, it never binds up on me. It does a good job cutting through grass," he said later in the video, noting, "It's a very, very good lure for a beginner."

The spinnerbait's arm is the flagpole, you might say, for the blade on a clevis.

"Instead of (the blade) being clipped on the end in a fixed position, it can slide up and down the arm bar as it's attached to a clevis. The arm bar is relatively short



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.*



Chas Champagne, artificial lure manufacturer from Matrix Shad, lips a real chunky marsh bass he just caught on a Matrix Spin with a Golden Eye Jig Head.

to where the blade isn't a far distance from the hook. I find that gives it a better hookup ratio," Champagne said during a phone conversation while he was targeting speckled trout late in the year in and around a very fresh Lake Palourde. Hurricane Ida dumped 30 inches of rain on the immense lake, which had yet to get right and salty as of November, he said.

Champagne got the idea from a spinnerbait arm made by the late Rick Googins who worked at the bait shop at the marina when it was under Champagne. Googins, he said, liked to make spinnerbaits and had one with a different look for the blade placement.

Last year the artificial lure manufacturer followed up on it, sent a sample to the factory and got a prototype to fish with during the video.

"It's just we make anything," Champagne said. "Anything we like to use we make it here. I like spinnerbaits."

Champagne's Matrix Spin uses heavy wire that handles redfish but isn't too heavy for the bass that inhabit the marsh across coastal Louisiana.

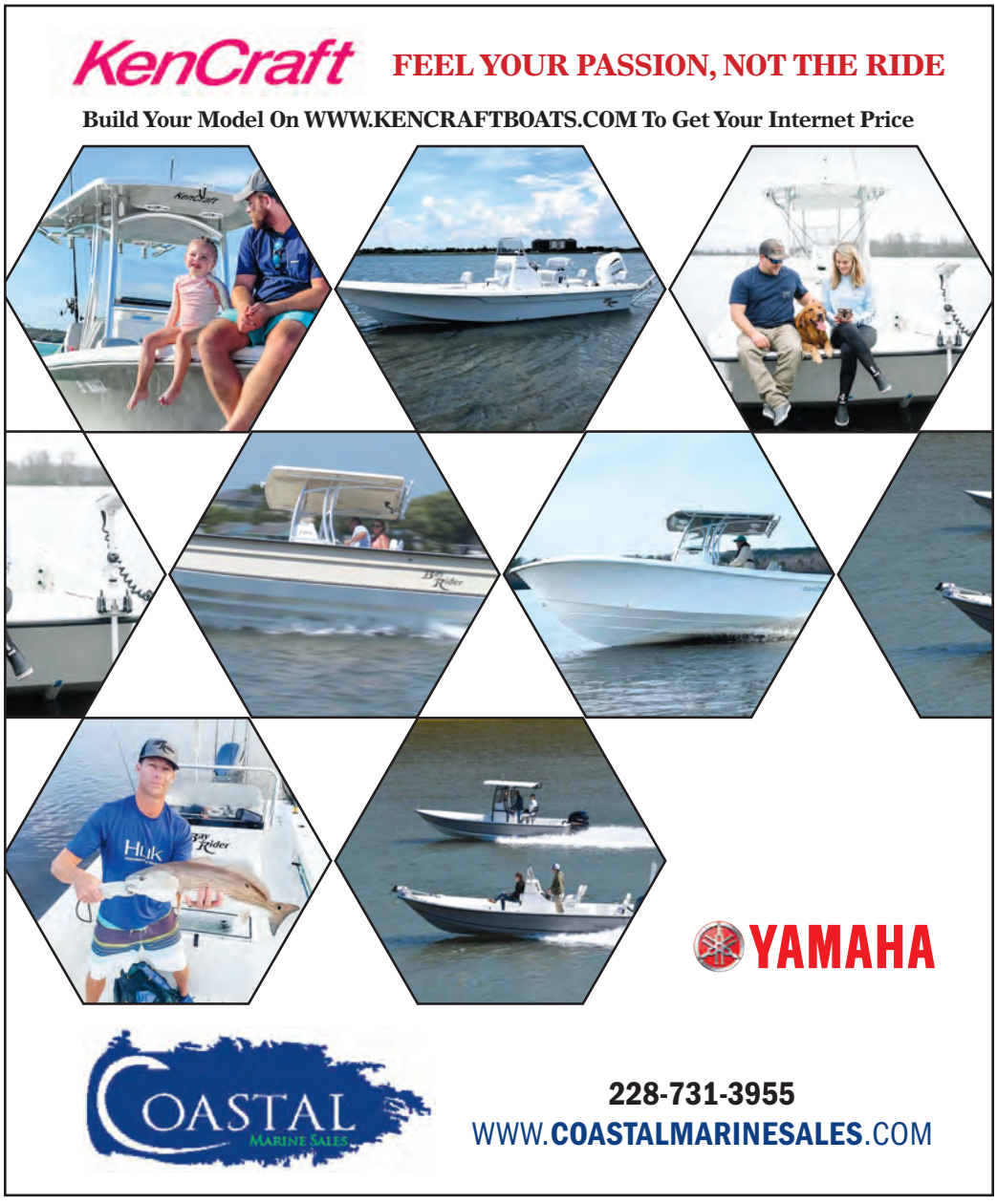
"We wanted to make a lure that'll catch anything. We just don't have bass that big (average 12 inches) to have all the overkill," he said, explaining why the designers eschewed light wire.

He fished that day while the video was shot with the Matrix Spin on a ¼-ounce Goldeneye Series Jig Head. Because he was using a 3-inch long glow Matrix Shad, that 3/0-hook was perfect for the soft plastic paddletail swimbait.

"But if you're using bigger baits, you can put on whichever (size) jig head you prefer," he said.

For more information about the Matrix Spin and other Matrix Shad products, go to matrixshad.com. ▪

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HUNTER OF THE MONTH

Barbara "Barbi" Rains

This Vernon Parish trophy 8-point nicknamed Hoops was taken by Barbara "Barbi" Rains. The big buck weighed 185 pounds.

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OF THE MONTH



ANGLER OF THE MONTH

Tucker Bell

Tucker Bell, 7, is proving that there is something to the old adage "like father, like son." Tucker recently landed his personal best 20 1/2-inch speckled trout on Nov. 21 fishing out of Shell Beach. He's going to be giving his dad, Chris, a run for his money. Chris, known as "Fish Man Chris," is a regular on social media and it looks like he's going to have to make more room for family photos.



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COLD-WEATHER CRAPPIE

LOTS OF ANGLERS KNOW THEY NEED TO SAVE PLENTY OF JANUARY DAYS TO TARGET CRAPPIE. HERE ARE SOME PLACES TO GO AND TACTICS TO USE.

By David Hawkins

The year 2021 is finally behind us, and one way to get the year off to a proper start is to wet a line and catch crappie, aka sac-a-lait, milk-fish, white perch, slabs, papermouths, car-tags or just plain crappie. After a successful outing, just call them delicious.

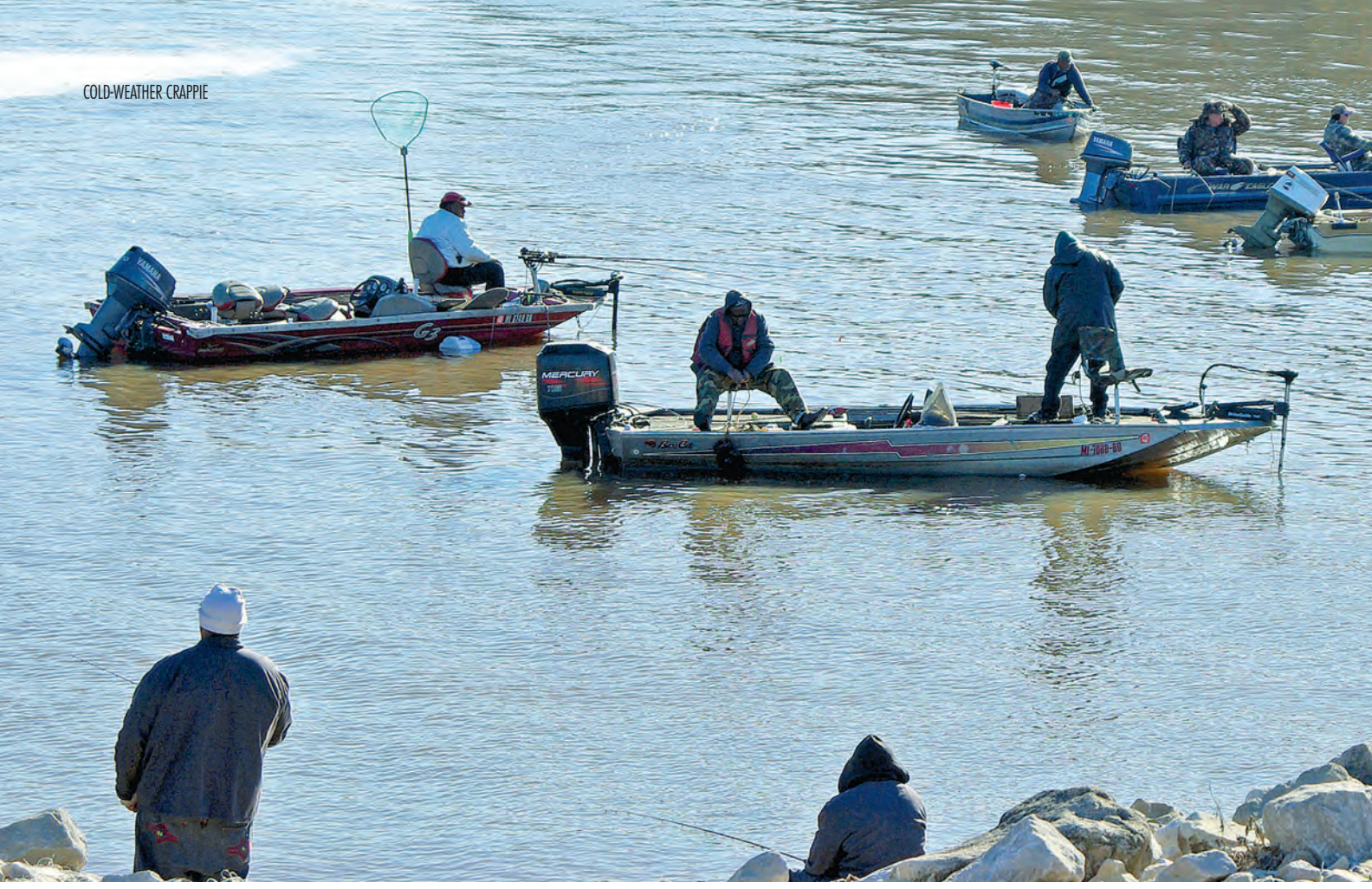
The habits of these delightful fish remain the same as the seasons pass. There is a winter holding pattern, prespawn, spawn and post-spawn that anglers can follow like clockwork. In January, the winter holding pattern gets our attention.

Does it get too cold to fish for crappie? Somewhere far north of Louisiana and Mississippi, a man is sitting in a little shack on a frozen lake fishing through a hole in the ice. You know what he's catching? Crappie.

Southern waters seldom freeze over, thank goodness, and in the colder months, crappie are easy to find. They will be deeper, in most cases, underneath shad balls. Shad are less tolerant of colder water and seek the warmest, most-oxygenated water they can find to survive. Crappie stack up right under them and pick off the dying shad as they fall from their schools.

Modern electronics will display these shad balls and often the larger crappie suspended close by. It then becomes a matter of finding which bait the fish want. They will take live offerings readily but will also inhale jigs and crankbaits. Fishermen should be prepared to experiment with colors and patterns to find just the right one.

I-55 RESERVOIRS >


COLD-WEATHER CRAPPIE

I-55 RESERVOIRS

Mississippi's I-55 corridor lakes have long gotten nationwide attention from serious crappie fishermen. Grenada, Enid and Sardis are well known on professional crappie tournament circuits, and locals hold their perennial sweet spots. Lots of structure, including Christmas trees, crappie fences, pallets and the like has been added to the lake over the years. The fishing there is what some describe as intense. Every year, anglers from surrounding states come to Mississippi to fill their freezers. Every year, the fishery doesn't disappoint, and the crappie are there.

D'ARBONNE LAKE

D'Arbonne Lake in the north-central portion of Louisiana is getting a similar reputation. There is a wide variety of structure in the lake, and crappie are plentiful.

"D'Arbonne is getting a reputation among serious anglers as a go-to crappie lake," said Ryan Daniel, a fisheries biologist with Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. "Our crappie outlook statewide looks to be as good as it has ever been. Two-pound fish and the occasional 3-pound-plus slabs are common in our state lakes."

Poverty Point is another lake he points to as a popular crappie fishery. Toledo Bend, according to Daniel, can be a little intimidating; especially for the occasional visitor.

"There is just so much water to cover that it becomes a hit-or-miss proposition unless you have an inside track," he said. "Those who fish the lake regularly learn the places to go and do well."

ROSS BARNETT SPILLWAY

It has long been a standing joke that a warming spell in January could be attributed to the Mississippi legislature starting a new session, what with all the "hot-air" being tossed about.

But the warmer days entice some of the first anglers to try their luck in the Pearl River just below the spillway. Consider first why the crappie are there, and second, what anglers can do to recharge their larders with fresh fillets.

"The discharge may be slightly warmer; it has a higher oxygen content than the water in the main lake," said Tom Holman, a fisheries biologist with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. "A good number of the fish there are as a result of being pulled through the gates into the river. Some others may have wintered in the river and are coming upstream to find improved water conditions."

Being somewhat lethargic during the colder months, the bite can seem slow, but these are the same crappie our northern buddies are pulling out of holes in the ice. A crappie just doesn't care how cold the water gets.

"There are eddy currents below the spillway where the (crappie) like to hold," said Vance Anding of Flowood, Miss., a regular to the winter fishing scene. "Minnow-tipped jigs work fine here. Some of the more-popular colors include white/chartreuse, red/yellow and yellow with a silver thread. I like to use a small minnow, because I think the fish will hold it longer, allowing

When the cold weather crappie congregate in deep water, fishermen do the same thing, especially on big reservoirs in Louisiana and Mississippi. **RIGHT:** A good mess of winter crappie is every angler's dream: fun to catch, fine to eat.



me to get a good hookset."

Anding said there is no question where the currents are; on any given day, if the fish are there, boats and anglers will be there as well. The spillway has long held a Siren's song for early crappie anglers. Shore-bound fishermen line the rocks at the water's edge and cast into the current with every size and type of gear. The only boat ramp is on the west side of the river, and is accessible off the eastbound lane of Spillway Road.

"I've seen the time when there were five or six corks between two boats that were scarcely 10 feet apart," Anding said, "but tempers seldom flare the few times lines get fouled. As long as everyone is catching a few fish along, everyone is happy. If the river starts a fast rise or fall,you may as well go home. I catch my best fish on a river that has a slow rise."

SOUTH LOUISIANA CANALS >



A minnow-tipped jig may just be the most-popular crappie offering in the Southeast, and for good reason; it catches fish.



Lilly Hawkins, 13, of Pearl, Miss., displays a crappie she caught on live bait at Ross Barnett Reservoir.

SOUTH LOUISIANA CANALS

Canals in south Louisiana are generally a little warmer than the lakes to the north and provide a different fishing experience, according to Milton Gaspard of Golden Meadow, La.

"The crappie I find are in the deepest holes they can find in January," Gaspard said. "They pull out of the shallows and go deep in December, and that's where they remain until they start moving up to prepare for the spawn. Keep in mind that deep water is a comparative thing. Sometimes only a few feet makes all the difference."

Gaspard pointed out that hurricanes last year blew a lot of trash into the canals, and that may hinder some anglers who fish multi-pole spider rigs. He prefers a single pole when searching for fish and switches to two or three poles once he is on them. He also fishes primarily with shiners but admits his largest slab came to the boat on a Road Runner.

"Water clarity is important to me," Gaspard said. "Clear or black water is the best for winter crappie. I tried to fish Sardis Lake one time to mark it off my bucket list, but it was so stained. We caught a few fish, but I can't figure how they found the bait. I guess it's what you get used to."

Gaspard also points to Lake Buffet and Indian Creek as good places to catch crappie.

ROSS BARNETT RESERVOIR

On the main-lake side of the Ross Barnett Dam, the assault on schools of fish takes a slightly different approach. The spider-rigs and deep-running baits are brought into play.

"As simple as it may sound, finding the crappie is the easy part; getting them to take bait is a little more difficult," said Larry Anderson of Grenada, Miss. "I find the fish with the aid of a Humminbird fish finder. They have been as deep as 18 feet and as shallow as 8, depending on the weather. Warmer days like we had last winter kept the shad up, and the fish were right there with them. I caught a lot of fish last January in 10 feet of water or less."

Anderson slow-trolls his jigs and crankbaits at various depths parallel to the rip-rap along the dam until he finds a depth/lure/presentation the crappie like.

"As I understand it, the rocks warm faster than soil and remain warmer longer than surface air," he said. "That's why the fish gather here along the dam. I've seen the same thing happen at Grenada and Enid. That's closer to home, but I have folks here in the Madison area, and fishing new water is a good reason to make a visit."

SARDIS LAKE SPILLWAY

Anderson has also found cold-water crappie in the spillway at Sardis Lake, in an area called the "Lower Lake," which is part of the Tallahatchie River. Access is good there, and water flow is consistent, as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers manages the lake at winter pool level.

Being retired, Anderson can watch the weather and water conditions to choose the best days to fish.

"The two things wrong with retirement are: you never get a holiday, and you can't call in sick," he said. "Seriously, consider a day when the (Lower Lake) is steady or on a very slow fall or rise. Get as close to the rip-rap as you can or fish the points just downstream of the spillway. On more than one occasion, I've tied on a ⅜-ounce red/yellow Road Runner and worked the edges of the current with a spinning rod. If the crappie are in there, they will take the bait." ▪



David Hawkins *is a freelance writer living in Forest, Miss. He can be reached at hawkins2209@att.net.*

LET'S GO CLUBBING

To become a better crappie angler is a simple matter of becoming social. Crappie-fishing clubs — the Magnolia Crappie Club being one such organization in Mississippi — hold monthly tournaments, and members are usually willing to share their secrets.

Many husband and wives fish as teams and enjoy the social aspect of competition and frequent fish fries.

In the absence of such a club or organization, local tackle shops often have a good handle on popular baits and techniques. Don't be too shy to ask questions. Other anglers putting in and taking out at boat ramps are also good sources of up-to-date information. ▪

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To keep hefty crappie like this one coming in the boat, Forrest Green says eliminate shallow water.

Photos by Keith Lusher

FINDING THE PATTERN FOR BAYOU LACOMBE CRAPPIE

By Keith Lusher

In the world of crappie fishing, finding a pattern is oftentimes the key to figuring out the fish. How the fish react to certain conditions can be vital to knowing where and how to catch them. Conditions like current, temperature, barometric pressure, and sunlight can drastically affect the way these fish behave.

Forrest Green of Lacombe said the sac-a-lait are following their normal pattern for the month of January in Bayou Lacombe.

"Hurricane Ida spared Bayou Lacombe but I can't say the same for some of the other rivers and bayous on the Northshore," he said. "When Ida came through, it took an uncharacteristic path that placed tributaries to the west in the eye-wall. Areas like Pass Manchac, the Amite River, Tickfaw River, and Tangipahoa River, all suffered fish kills. Thankfully, things are slowly getting back to normal."

Green said it's a safe bet to fish the rivers east of the Tchefuncte River. This is a complete flip-flop of what areas are normally affected by storms.

"Normally the areas like the Pearl River, Bayou Liberty, and Bayou Lacombe suffer from tidal surge, but this storm was different in that the rivers that feed into western Lake Pontchartrain suffered more with the surge," he said.

ELIMINATE THE SHALLOWS

Born and raised in Lacombe, Green has been fishing Bayou Lacombe for over 60 years and said the cold temperatures in January make things easy because the fish group together tighter.

"Where I find one, there's likely more to come so I don't have to do as much running like the rest of the year," he said.

Green recommends eliminating shallow water and all shoreline fishing.

"In January it's very rare to see these fish in less than 5 feet of water so my normal spots near the bank will be vacant of fish," Green said.

While shallow water is off limits for him, it still factors into the cold weather equation.

"Some of the shallow laydowns that I normally catch sac-a-lait in the warmer months still hold value because those fish will often find deep holes which are nearby," he said. "Those deep holes are sometimes as close as 10 feet from where I normally catch them in the shallows.

THE MAIN BAYOU

When targeting sac-a-lait in January, Green said he primarily fishes in the main bayou.

"That's where I find the deeper holes where they stack up," he said. "Plus the main bayou tends to be cleaner after a heavy rainfall."

The only reason he'll move out of the main bayou is because of current. Green said the sac-a-lait in Bayou Lacombe don't react well to heavy water movement.

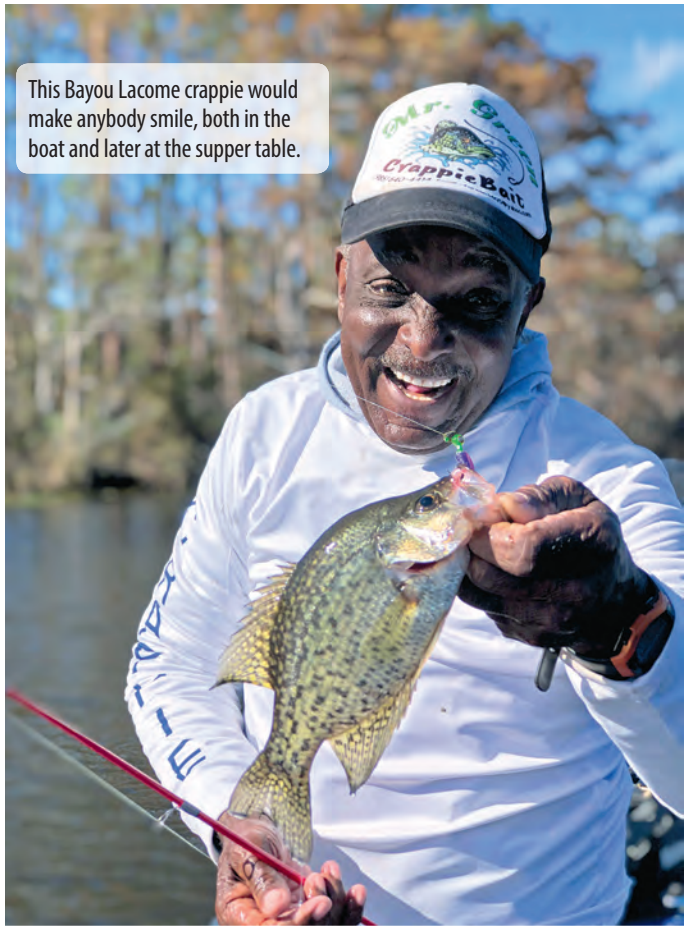
"If I see that water falling too hard, I'll have to find calmer water back in a dead-end canal somewhere which Bayou Lacombe has plenty of," he said.

COLD WATER TECHNIQUE

As far as baits go, Green likes to keep multiple ultralight rods with 8-pound monofilament line on the bow so he can try different colored jigs. He'll try different jigs until he finds what the fish want. In his younger days, Green fished the Bass Anglers Federation and the Louisiana Pro-Am so having six rods lined up on deck isn't anything out of the ordinary.

"I take care of all that the night before so I can reach down and grab a pole with a different color jig tied on," he said.

He uses a 1/16-ounce jighead and slowly bumps it on the bottom in 10-12 feet of water. Green prefers a homemade shad-style jig he pours himself calls Grasshopper, which is a combination of black and chartreuse. Bayou Lacombe is loaded with fallen trees and submerged cypress stumps so the sac-a-lait veteran recommends bringing multiple bags of jigs and heads to replace the ones that you'll lose to the bottom structure. ▪



This Bayou Lacome crappie would make anybody smile, both in the boat and later at the supper table.

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BABY, IT'S COLD OUTSIDE, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN'T FIND AND CATCH BIG OLD REDFISH STACKED UP AND WAITING FOR YOU TO OFFER THEM A BITE TO EAT.

By John N. Felsher

Hunting frosty REDFISH!

John N. Felsher

Biting north winds pushed water from the already shallow marshes, turning many ponds into little more than squishy mudflats. Tiny ice particles sparkled like diamonds against the black delta mud when hit by the brilliant, but chilly, post-frontal sunshine.

On those cold January days, most Louisiana sportsmen would probably either head to their favorite duck pond or stay home by the heater. Such days, though, can produce good fishing for hardy

SPOT-TAILED MARSH MARAUDERS.

"Cold water doesn't bother redfish as much as it does trout," stated Troy Nash with South Louisiana Redfishing (337-412-5950, www.southlouisianaredfishing.com) in Lafayette who fishes the Vermilion Bay area. "They're pretty resilient. We seldom see a fish kill for redfish after a severe frost. We find them up in the shallows on the coldest days."

"Finding" becomes the crucial word when chasing Louisiana redfish during the chilly months. First, anglers must locate warmer water and bait. Both remain scarce during the coldest months, so any honey hole with the right combination of water temperatures and prey for the spot-tailed predators could offer excellent cold water action. In the right place, redfish stack up in huge numbers on the coldest days.

"In January, redfish aren't as active as they are in the warmer months," Nash said. "When it's chilly, the fish are just trying to find a place to stay warm. Often, redfish hunker down in the mud and don't want to move. There isn't as much bait in the winter so when people find bait, redfish will find it too. I look for bigger mullet."

"Warmer" water doesn't mean bathtub refreshing. To cold-blooded creatures like redfish, a temperature change of just a few degrees could make an enormous difference in how they act.

REDFISH FEEL THE WARMTH

"To a redfish, one degree of water temperature change is like a 10-degree ambient temperature change for us," explained Charlie Thomason with Bayou Charters (504-278-3474, www.bayoucharters.com) who operates out of lodges in Hopedale. "Redfish get really lethargic when water temperatures drop below 48 degrees, but if the temperature rises five degrees, that's like a 50-degree change for us. That feels warm to them. Even though the water is still super cold, when the temperature moves up a few degrees, the fish start feeding more actively."

During the coldest times, many redfish drop into the deepest water they can find. Where a depth of three feet constitutes a hole, a canal can seem like a bottomless pit. Thousands of miles of canals slash across southern Louisiana. Many lead to petroleum wells or other struc-

>



Hooking into a big redfish like this one will warm up an angler at least for a little while on the coldest of days.

Photo courtesy Capt. Troy Nash



Wearing warm clothes and a sturdy face covering keep anglers in good shape while boating so they can fight big cold-weather redfish when they find them.

Photo courtesy Capt. Troy Nash

tures. In addition, weirs and dams cap some of them. These hard structures absorb solar heat and radiate that energy into the water, which could raise the adjacent temperature a few degrees. Thousands of redfish might congregate around these structures in the winter.

"Those hard objects hold heat, especially rocks," Nash detailed. "Anytime someone can find a structure big enough to hold heat, that's a great place to fish in the winter. People need to be accurate casters because the fish hug right up against those structures. I like to get close to the structures and throw down the length of them."

Fish these deeper canals during the coldest part of the day when the tide falls. Lowering water levels concentrate fish in the deepest channels. In the frigid water, lethargic redfish typically won't chase baits far or fast. Drop baits as close to the structures as possible and work them painfully slowly along the bottom.

"The winter slows everything down," Thomason commented. "Mostly, we fish slow moving baits, like plastics on a jighead. Those fish are on the bottom, not swimming around or chasing anything. Rub that bait on the bottom, causing a commotion by hitting shells or the mud. When it causes a bit of commotion, fish get curious. If it sees what it thinks looks like a crab or minnow going along the bottom, a redfish will instinctively grab it."



John N. Felsher *is a professional freelance writer and photographer with more than 1,700 articles in more than 117 magazines to his credit. You can contact him at JohnNFelsher.com.*



HOW REDFISH FEED

Redfish normally feed more by smell or feel than sight. Some people tip a lure with a piece of shrimp for flavor or soak it in commercial fish-attracting scents. Since it gives off its own scent, a Gulp! bait makes a wonderful temptation. Unlike a regular artificial lure that anglers must keep moving, people can catch reds on Gulp! baits sitting perfectly still on the bottom because redfish react to the scent like they would to a natural bait.

A live cocahoe minnow on a jighead makes a superb winter redfish enticement. Hook it through the eyes or up through the bottom lip and out the top lip. Toss the jighead toward the shoreline and let it sit for a few seconds. Pull it over the drop-off edge. Redfish frequently hover just over the drop-off lip and might snatch a bait as it sinks. Then, drag it a foot along the bottom. The jighead creates a mud trail that redfish can follow. Let the bait sit still for excruciatingly long periods. The struggling minnow frantically swishing its tail creates all the action necessary.

"Fishing around those hard structures is a good place to start in the morning," Nash advised. "Then, I fish the deeper parts of the channels and the mouths of little bayous."

Redfish wait at the mouths of tributaries or passes connecting canals to deeper waterbodies or draining marshy ponds. Facing into the flow, redfish wait to pounce on anything the tide brings them to eat. Some people tip a popping cork rig with shrimp, crab pieces or artificial baits. Toss the rig as far upstream as possible so it drifts naturally downstream.



John N. Felsher

Good tidal movement periodically pours through the deeper canals and passes. The flow commonly carries small crabs swimming along near the surface. Few redfish ever pass up an opportunity to crunch a crab, but they especially rely on the crustaceans during the winter.

"In the winter, redfish eat a lot of crabs because there isn't much shrimp or baitfish around," Nash said. "When crabs move, the redfish are on them. If we catch a crab, we take off the top shell, crack the body in half and use the halves for bait. In the winter, redfish will more likely hit smaller baits because their metabolism is low."

DON'T PASS UP SHALLOWS >

Kendra Maness shows off a redfish she caught while fishing along the north shore of Lake Borgne by Slidell, La. In the winter, look for shallow flats sitting in the sunshine. Even on a cold day, sunshine hitting the water can warm it a few degrees.

ABOVE: Often used during warmer months, a popping cork can make an effective winter tool for catching redfish. A popping cork rig essentially consists of a float holding up a natural or artificial bait. When an angler jerks the rod, the cork makes a commotion on the surface like a fish attacking prey. Anglers can use many natural and artificial baits, such as live or fresh shrimp, live bait, crab pieces or soft-plastic shrimp imitations.

John N. Felsher

DON'T PASS UP SHALLOWS

Redfish don't always stay in the deep water, even on icy days. The fish move from the depths to the shallows and back to find the most comfortable temperatures and food. As the sun warms the water, fish become more active. The most aggressive redfish regularly cruise sunny flats to hunt prey. When darkness cools the water, fish return to the depths.

"Redfish are in the deep water, but there's many more up on the flats," Thomason confirmed. "It all comes down to water temperature. The fish might stay on the bottom at night or during an overcast day. When it's sunny and pretty the next day, they move up to the flats because that's the place to eat."

In January, many Louisiana sportsmen hunt ducks at first light and return to the camp by mid-morning. Then, they venture out that afternoon for the "cast" portion of a "cast and blast" adventure. Even on a chilly Louisiana day, temperatures can become quite comfortable by late afternoon.

"In the winter, it doesn't make sense to head out at first light to fish," Nash said. "Fish become most aggressive during the warmest part of the day. I like to fish from about 10:30 a.m. until 3 p.m. On a good bluebird afternoon, redfish will probably be in the sunny shallows warming up and looking for bait."

Cold winds routinely blow water out of the marshes during the winter, creating extremely low tides. That leaves black Louisiana mud exposed to the sun where it continues to heat up throughout the day. Even on the most bitter freezing days, sunshine beating down on the water can raise the temperature several degrees. When the tide comes back in and covers those mudflats, redfish roam around looking for prey.



Jason Rucker shows off a big redfish he caught while fishing south of Venice, La. Redfish can tolerate cold water better than many other fish, but anglers still need to find them. Look for warmer water and bait.

John N. Felsher

"January is one of my favorite times to fish because of the water falling out," Thomason said. "All through the coldest months, I'll run around spooking fish. They are scattered around those flats sunning themselves. Baitfish also move up on those flats to feed and redfish follow them."

In the spring and fall, many anglers watch for diving birds that could indicate the presence of shrimp or baitfish. The same occurs in the winter, but anglers need to adjust to the season. During the winter, pay the most attention to diving brown pelicans. Ignore migrant white pelicans on the shorelines.

"The key to catching redfish in the winter is to be patient," Nash summed it up. "People need to fan-cast an area and spend more time at a good spot. Sometimes, we almost need to knock redfish on the head to make them bite. Redfish are opportunistic feeders. They just sit there trying to warm up, but if a shrimp or a piece of cut bait crosses their faces, they'll take a swipe at it." ▪

SABINE REDFISH >



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Photo by Capt. Adam Jaynes

TOO MANY REDFISH?

That's a good problem on Sabine

Redfish stack up thick in the winter. You can catch redfish cast after cast until your arms are sore.

By Capt. Adam Jaynes

The daily marauding schools of redfish have been dominating the scene on Sabine and I expect that to continue into January with the mild "winter" we have experienced so far. Some will complain about their abundance. Heck, I've even had customers cast in the opposite direction of schooling redfish because they didn't feel like fooling with them.

I suppose I enjoy the tug on the end of my line too much to deny a redfish an opportunity to eat one of my lures.

Personally, I hope I never get to that point. If I do, I should be golfing instead of fishing. If you're chasing after that new personal best speckled trout those pesky redfish can absolutely get in the way but they are still a hoot to tussle with.

In the coming month I do suspect they will begin to make their transition from chasing bait in more open, deeper water to perusing the flats in Coffee Ground Cove and around the Gator

Hole and any shell pad they can find. In my opinion this is the absolute easiest time to target redfish as they become ever so predictable and reliable unlike open water schooling fish.

TRY SHALLOW SHELL PADS

These shallow water shell pads and humps should be one of your go-to locations in January as the sun gets overhead. Generally, they will not be picky. If you have some new crazy lure that you have wanted to try, now would be a good time to either build some confidence with it or realize that you should hang it back up on the shelf!

I would recommend sticking with single hook lures if you are on them hot and heavy. It'll make it easier and quicker to unhook them so you can get back out there and also lessen the chances of hooking yourself. A good day of fishing can go bad real quick when that happens. Using tougher soft plastics that last longer is also advisable. It's not very fun watching your buddies reel in fish after fish while you are spending more time replacing plastics. Egret makes a pretty good one called the Wedgetail.

The plastics that Down South Lures is turning out hold up pretty good as well. The weight of your jighead will likely play a larger factor in how productive your catching is. As the water temperature falls the rate at which your lure descends will generally need to decrease. This means opting for a lighter jighead in most cases. Using an 1/8-ounce or 1/16-ounce instead of a ¼-ounce jighead may significantly increase the number of strikes that you receive.

As always, be safe and enjoy your time out on the water. Let someone know your float plan as things can change in a hurry on the water during these cold months. While we are out there let us remember one of our own that we lost at the end of October, Capt. Dickie Colburn. He passed away after succumbing to his injuries sustained in an auto accident. Dickie was highly regarded by many in the fishing world and will be sorely missed. ▪

In my opinion this is the absolute easiest time to target redfish as they become ever so predictable and reliable unlike open water schooling fish.

CHALMETTE SPECKS >



COLD MEANS HOT IN CHALMETTE

Look for the trout to start stacking up

By Rusty Tardo

The action in Chalmette has been red hot since October, and it's unlikely to taper off anytime soon. Generally, as the weather chills in these coldest months of the year, the action there usually heats up. It's one of the few places that fishing actually heats up as water temps chill down.

The locals say the trout showed up in big numbers a bit earlier than usual this year, but no one's complaining. All you have to do is look at all the trailers parked in the marina parking lots along Paris Road, and that's when you know the fish are biting.

Charter Captain Mike Gallo (504-259-3474) said the specks have been numerous throughout the area, but they really haven't stacked up in the deep holes yet like they've usually done by now.

"It's because we haven't had any real cold weather yet, but I'm sure we will," he said. "And when the water temperatures cool down, the trout will gang up in the deep holes and you'll load the boat when you find them."

Gallo said its not just the cold that drives the trout deep, but its also the diminishing daylight period in the winter months.

"The colder months are the darkest months," he said, "and I think the shorter period of daylight triggers some instinct that drives them to the deeper water even if it isn't all that cold yet.. It's a survival instinct because if they got caught in a freeze in shallow ponds they'd die. And that's why this whole Chalmette area, the Wall, the MRGO, the ICW, all provide that deeper water for the fish to retreat into if temperatures plunge. That whole area is a wintertime magnet and the fish converge there, fanning out over shallow shorelines and flats on mild days and sunny conditions, but always with the deep water nearby to flee into."



Capt. Mike Gallo caught this 25-inch speckled trout on a shrimp-colored soft plastic lure fished off the bottom.

CHECK WATER TEMPS

To know where to fish, Gallo said to pay attention to the water temperatures, which have been in the mid to high 50's and lower 60's.

"When the temperatures are in that range, the fish will be scattered all over," he said. "You'll find them in shallow water and in deeper water, in deep holes or over flats. But once the water temperatures drop into the lower 50's, those fish are diving to the bottom, and to catch them you'll have to fish slow off the bottom."

If it stays mild, Gallo said anglers are finding trout and reds along the rocks of the MRGO, from the Wall all the way to Violet and beyond. Anchor off at least a long cast distance from the rocks, and fish all directions, both under corks and using bottom rigs.

As winter deepens, you'll want to fish the deeper waters along the Wall, Michoud Slip, and at the down-current sides of the Floodgates. The Violet area is also producing some good catches around the Castle and the bulkheads, and along the washouts and rocks of the MRGO in Violet.

Gallo said soft plastics fished under corks, tightlined or jigged should be all the bait you'll need, but he suggests you take some live shrimp with you as additional insurance for those days when the fish are finicky and won't touch plastics. ▪



SHRIMP + COLD WEATHER

The recipe for Dularge sheepshead, redfish and drum

By Joel Masson

Southeast Louisiana has mild winter weather compared to a lot of other parts of the country, but still, January is littered with cold fronts bringing in strong winds, high pressure and frigid water temperatures.

This might sound like a nightmare for fishing, but Dularge's Capt. Marty LaCoste said the sheepshead, redfish and drum fishing can be phenomenal even under horrible conditions.

"You can still put a good box together fishing shrimp on a day where you think you might not catch anything," he said. "Sheepshead, redfish and drum are the three main fish you're going to catch while fishing shrimp. There are certain areas where the sheepshead are just piled up, and that's all you catch."

In the Dularge area, Lacoste fishes canals with structure like pilings as well as drains in the marsh.

"A corner on a point with some pilings with current moving through can be good, or you might have a dam and that has oysters on the bottom," he said.

LaCoste also likes to fish dams in the area, particularly ones with oysters on the bottom.



Photo courtesy Capt. Marty LaCoste

Sheepshead, redfish and black drum are easy to come across this month fishing with dead shrimp in the Dularge area, according to Capt. Marty LaCoste.

OLD SHRIMP WORK, TOO

LaCoste targets the sheepshead, drum and redfish with dead shrimp on a ¼-ounce jighead, and said having freshly dead shrimp isn't necessarily important.

"Sometimes, I've got some old shrimp that may have been in the boat a couple of days, and they'll still bite it," he said. "They will hit a old, nasty rotten shrimp."

Typically, LaCoste fishes the jighead tightlined, especially in the deeper areas, but he employs a different method when fishing shallow water.

"We might pull up to a point over an oyster reef that's 1-to 2 feet of water, and in those circumstances, we're fishing under a cork," he said.

Although sheepshead, drum and redfish are more powerful than speckled trout, LaCoste doesn't change his rod, reel or line setup. He uses 7-foot medium-power rods, 2500 series Penn spinning reels and ties the jighead straight to braided line.

Sheepshead have a bad reputation as being difficult to clean, but according to LaCoste, that infamous characteristic isn't warranted.

"The No. 1 reason we never used to keep a lot of sheepshead back in the day was because we had to clean them by hand, and they were hard to clean," he said. "Now that we use the Ridgid Sawzall (knife), I'll keep 50, 60, 70. It's basically the same exact thing as if you were cleaning a redfish." ▪

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

JANUARY JACKPOT

DROP A SHRIMP AND PULL THE LEVER

When you pull the lever on a slot machine, you never know what will come up. The same goes for dropping a dead shrimp in January.

Due to salinity and hydrology changes over the last several years, many areas in coastal southeast Louisiana now offer kayak anglers an un-precedented diversity of species. The lower salinities in these areas are the byproduct of coastal restoration and hurricane protection projects which have caused a mixing of fresh and saltwater species.

While many areas across southeast Louisiana are experiencing this diversity of fishing, the marshes of St. Bernard and east Plaquemine parishes are particularly flourishing. Shell Beach, Hopedale, Delacroix and east Pointe-a-la-Hache are all prime destinations for kayak anglers and each offer easy access via commercial marinas. Winter fishing in these areas is as good as it gets. All have mixed features offering ponds, bayous, lagoons, canals and pipelines for a variety of bottom structure and water depths.

On a recent trip in St. Bernard Parish, a total of seven species were caught all within a one mile stretch of marsh. Fishing a simple bottom rig with a small treble hook and a one ounce lead sinker, dead shrimp proved to be the ticket for a tasty mixed bag. The species caught were speckled trout, redfish, bass, channel catfish, sheepshead, croaker and a black drum. Same rod and reel, same technique, and the same general area.

>



Sheepshead are hard fighters, delicious, and can be easily caught around docks, pilings and rock piles using a simple bottom rig and piece of dead shrimp.

Slowly worked artificial lures are certainly effective in winter, but fishing in cold months like January can sometimes be slow. Fish are cold blooded and therefore more lethargic in the lower water temperatures. Soaking bait on the bottom is as slow a presentation as you can get, and is often the ticket for getting bites in the winter. Live cocahoes also work, but dead shrimp is a universal attractant and draws bites from any fish, be it fresh or saltwater species.

You can try to target specific species by concentrating on certain features and structure, but what bites is always a gamble. Want more sheepshead and catfish? Fish docks, pilings and rock piles. Bass? Stake out in front of small drains where water is falling into a bayou or pond. Trout and reds? Anchor up near the outside turns of a bayou and fish the ledges and deep holes. While these are general tactics, rest assured that sending down a bottom-rigged natural bait at this time of year has a chance of catching any of the above mentioned species — and others.

THE KEY IS PATIENCE

The key is patience and slowly fishing an area. Use an anchor or stake-out pole to get the kayak in position to fish a specific area, Using dead bait relies on smell rather than movement to attract the fish. The bait has to sit for enough time for the fish to locate it. As you catch fish, more and more smell is added to the water column as the action of the fish biting the bait squeezes oils and bits of flesh from the bait. Also, fighting fish often spit up other prey they have recently eaten. This all acts as a chumming effect to stimulate and attract fish to the area. When a fish is caught, work as quickly as you can to get a line back in the water. Long lulls between casts can often cause the bite to slow or even turn off. This is common on solo kayak trips where there are no other anglers to constantly keep the fish interested.

For consistent hook-ups, using a small, strong treble hook is key. All of these different species have different mouth structures and the small treble has proven universally effective for each. Sheepshead have a relative small mouth that is full of teeth. They are notorious bait stealers, but can easily be hooked on a small treble using a small piece of shrimp.

Winter bottom fishing is great for kayaks due to the minimum gear required. Since little casting is needed, two rod and reel combos are all that is needed. The second one is really only as a backup or in case you want to fish both at the same time.

Pre-make several bottom rigs and place them in small Ziploc bags for storage. Make up a few with one and two ounce sinkers to account for different current flows. Bottom fishing inevitably leads to snags, so you need to have replacements handy to retie and quickly get back to fishing. If you commit to a day of bottom fishing, this and a couple pounds of dead shrimp are all you need.

If you are looking to put a mixed bag of tasty fish in the kayak, head out to southeast Louisiana for a day of winter fishing that can't be beat. The technique is simple and the gear is basic, but the rewards are delicious. ▪



SHEEPSHEAD TIP

Sheepshead are hard fighters and make delicious table fare. However, their sharp fin spines will poke holes in and ruin your ice chest — especially the soft coolers that many kayak anglers prefer to use. A simple, but effective tip is to clip off all of the sharp, hard spines on the front top dorsal fin and the first few on the anal fin. Carry a small cutting pliers or pair of kitchen shears to make this task quick and easy.

It's a winter wonder WAHOO LAND!

By Don Shoopman

LARRY DOIRON CAN'T WAIT TO START THE YEAR OFF RIGHT CHASING WAHOO, GETTING MULTIPLE HOOKUPS AND BRINGING HOME SOME TASTY FISH FOR THE TABLE.



Will Drost

Winter time is the right time for catching wahoo consistently —

one at a time, two at a time, three at a time and, even, four at a time — in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico, Larry Doiron Jr. knows from experience.

The Morgan City outdoorsman realizes first-hand how exceptional wahoo fishing can be each winter on The Reel Deal, his 37-foot Freeman or frankly for any fishermen that's willing to target these fiesty fish this time of year. He and three other family members each had a hookup all at once last winter, the drag on four fishing reels screaming and quasi-(albeit blissful) chaos ensuing.

"We went four-for-four one day last year, my 14-year-old daughter, my wife, my son and me," Doiron said about his youngest, Molly Doiron, his wife, Angela Fuller Doiron, and his son, Joseph Doiron. "Yeah, that was good. That was funny. One line went off after the other one (and so on). We were crossing (each other) to get four of them in the boat at the same time. You've got to be doing something right to get four at once."

A FISH WITH A BAD ATTITUDE

A friend, J.J. Tabor of Baton Rouge, formerly of Thibodaux, was at the wheel of The Reel Deal. Tabor, a widely known charter boat captain who owns Double J Sportfishing, handled Doiron's boat expertly to get a valuable assist on landing the four wahoo, among the fastest fish in the sea (up to 50 mph), known for long runs after hookup, doubling back after the run, overall strength and a very bad attitude. Those traits and others, such as being delicious to eat, are reasons they are a highly sought-after species related to the king mackerel.

"They're crushing the wahoo right now. (But) we haven't been yet this year," Doiron said recently, citing business obligations as owner of Doiron's Landing and convenience store in Stephensville. Not to mention he has been tied up building a new house.

As of mid-November 2021, Doiron had yet to steer his 37-foot Freeman out of port toward his favorite wahoo waters in the Gulf. He did take his family on a red snapper trip soon after the state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries reopened the season and raised the creel limit to 4 per person starting Sept. 24, 2021.

Doiron is looking forward to take The Reel Deal and family out to catch wahoo around the Christmas holidays and into January and February.

"Hey, I'll end up going," he said. "Don't get me wrong. I l-o-v-e to go. It takes my mind off everything. At Ship Shoal Reef, like I said, they're running right now. They're crushing them."

The Reel Deal motored offshore three times last winter to target wahoo specifically. Their first of three highly successful outings was the day after Christmas 2020.

"When they're running (in the winter), I try to go three, four times," Doiron said. "It just depends with the weather. It's hard for me to go during the week."



Larry Doiron Jr. of Morgan City has his hands on a wahoo nearly as big as him on an offshore fishing trip last winter in the Gulf of Mexico out of Morgan City. Doiron says December, January and February are great months to go out and bring back wahoo, weather and water conditions permitting, in his 37-foot Freeman.



Ah, big, freshly caught wahoo in the boat's large ice chest, soon to be cleaned, cut just right and put in a poke bowl. It doesn't get any better than that on a winter time offshore fishing trip in the northwestern region of the Gulf of Mexico, according to The Reel Deal's skipper and owner, Larry Doiron Jr. of Morgan City.

IT'S TIME TO TARGET THE BIG ONES

Perhaps one of the best times to target wahoo is around Mardi Gras, he said. Average weight of the wahoo he puts in the ice chest on winter trips is 30 to 50 pounds.

"Every now and then we get a bigger one," he said.

Doiron has fished wahoo many years but not as often each winter, he said, until he bought the Freeman in 2019. True to the name, it's The Reel Deal for fishing offshore in the northwestern Gulf.

"I used to go but not as much. Since I got the Freeman, it makes it a little easier to get out there. It changes the way you fish, just makes it easier to get out there. The cruising range out of Morgan City makes it easier. It's fuel efficient. We can pick our days," he said, pointing out it's all about finding weather windows to fit.

Doiron enjoyed having a "professional" on board last winter whenever he took his friend, Tabor, and Andre LeBlanc, who runs charter boats for Double J Sportfishing.

"You always learn different techniques from different people," he said.

While the sun shines just as brightly November through February as July, the rays are far from a real warm embrace on a winter offshore fishing trip compared to summer. The boat rides can be down-right bone-chilling.

"Yeah," Doiron said. "It's kind of cool on the boat ride downriver (the Atchafalaya River from Berwick Boat Landing to Atchafalaya Bay). You've got to dress warm."





It's a winter wonder Wahoo land!

From left, Joseph Doiron, Angela Doiron, Molly Doiron and Tanner Theriot, a friend of the family, each hold wahoo caught during a winter 2020-21 offshore fishing trip aboard The Reel Deal, a 37-foot Freeman.

His wife and daughter, he said, each bring their sleeping bag, put their fishing rod in place and often sleep on the back deck during the 90-mile ride from the coast to the Ship Shoal Reefs.

"We wake them up when we get out there," he said. "It's nice (weather-wise, typically) when you get out there."

Doiron has proven artificial lures for wahoo right at his fingertips, so to speak, and he puts them to work when he gets to the Ship Shoal Reef. Ballyhoo and Nomad DTX Minnows 200, particularly the red-hot hot pink model wahoos love to eat, are top choices. The squid, pogeys and Spanish sardines that red snapper and other offshore species dine on have been added along with deep drop weights to the fishing tackle and bait lineup inside his store at Doiron's Boat Landing.

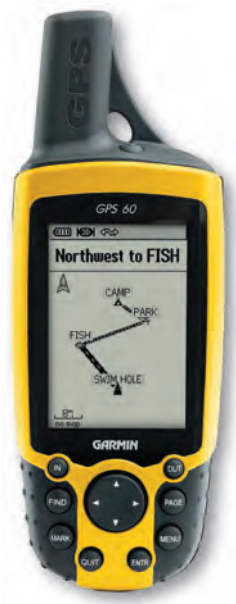
Make no mistake about it, he said, the hot pink Nomad DTX Minnow 200 is the number one choice as a premium trolling lure for wahoo in this part Gulf. He doesn't leave without them on board.

TROLLING GETS REWARDED

Why? Doiron prefers to troll at 35- to 39-foot depths, which the Nomad DTX Minnow 200 does with precision while staying on a straight track. Pulled at 10 knots (11.4 mph), it triggers some vicious, rewarding strikes at that depth across the Ship Shoal Reef, he said.

"Most of the time that's the spot I usually troll at with a 200. You can use a 220 Nomad. It goes deeper. It's got a bigger bill," he said, adding the Nomad DTX Minnow 220 dives to 50 feet and can be trolled effectively from 4

Capt. Paul's
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- Myrtle Grove-Lake Hermitage
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knots to 14 knots.

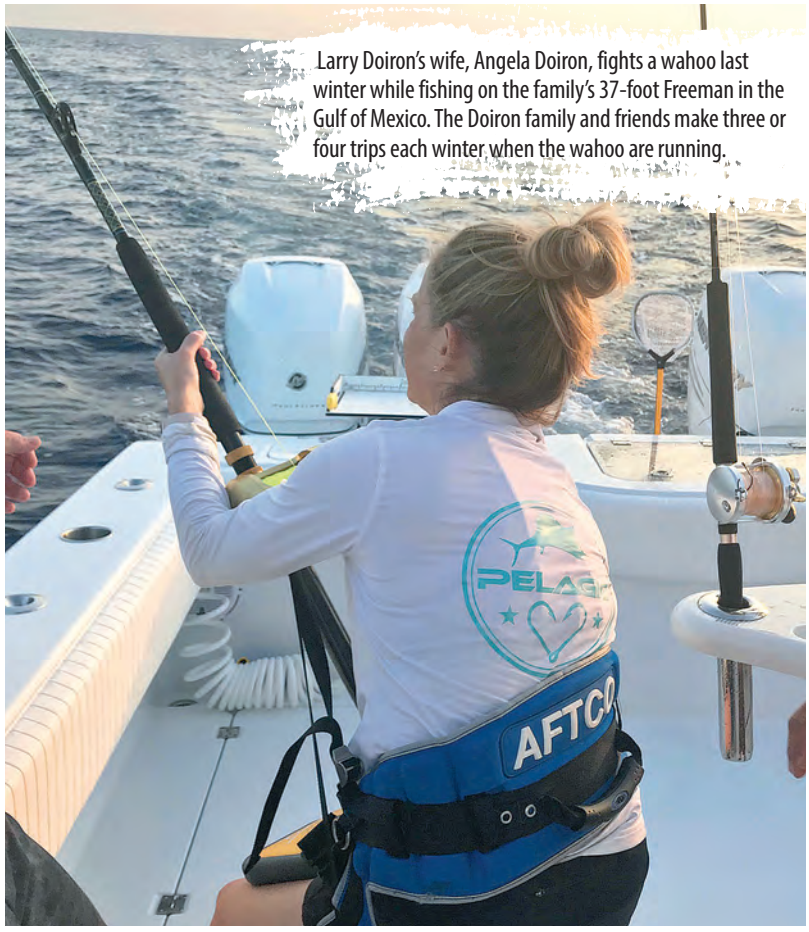
No matter what wahoo bite on, it's always good to take a bite of freshly caught wahoo, arguably the best-tasting fish in the mackerel family. In Hawaii, it is called ono, which means "good to eat.". Low in fat and low in sodium, it's an excellent source for niacin, B6, B12, phosphorus and selenium.

The Doirons serve theirs raw much of the time in a "poke bowl," sashimi-style, he said, which is similar to sushi. It can also be grilled, broiled, blackened, sautéed and poached.

They prefer wahoo in the poke bowl.

"It doesn't have to be pretty (compared to sushi in a roll) in a bowl," Doiron said. "We like them better than tuna,"

For sure, they will have plenty of wahoo to dine on after their 2021-22 winter trips. ▪



Larry Doiron's wife, Angela Doiron, fights a wahoo last winter while fishing on the family's 37-foot Freeman in the Gulf of Mexico. The Doiron family and friends make three or four trips each winter when the wahoo are running.

TOADFISH SHRIMP TOOL >



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





The shrimp peeling tool in action — it peels, deveins and butterflies in one motion.

TOADFISH SHRIMP TOOL

GRANDMA'S GADGET MAKES FAST WORK OF PEELING, DEVEINING

Photo courtesy Toadfish

By Kinny Haddox

Thank goodness for Grandmas.

If you love fresh shrimp, but wish there was an easier way to peel and devein a big pile of them, Casey Davidson's grandmother may have saved the day for you. Davidson is the CEO of Toadfish, a South Carolina business that manufactures the Frogmore Shrimp cleaner.

"We grew up in the Lowcountry and wanted to solve a problem. Peeling shrimp is not a fun process and can be tedious," said Thor Scott, vice president of sales for the company. "One day our CEO, Casey Davidson, was with his grandmother and she was using a cheap, plastic shrimp tool that only peels the shrimp and she mentioned it would be great to have a blade in the tool. That was where the idea was born and Casey designed the only high quality shrimp tool that can peel, devein and butterfly the shrimp in one smooth, easy motion."

In a three-year period, the company has sold tens of thousands of the product and are working furiously to keep up with demand. Here's how it works.

First, you insert the tool right below the top of the shrimp's shell. Then you push the tool forward, while at the same time sliding the shrimp upwards towards the handle. The entire shrimp peel will be left on the Frogmore cleaner. And the peeled, deveined, and butterflied shrimp will be left in your hand. A quick rinse and you're done.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

The company also has a video online that shows the process:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LWjoeuSZjE

After watching Scott demonstrate the tool and then have others sample it, it was amazing to see how quickly people who had never peeled a shrimp picked up on it.

Toadfish also makes a whole range of kitchen products designed to be sturdy and effective for fishermen and cooks to make seafood prep easy. The shrimp tool is by far the most popular, but their oyster knives, crab cutters and the "Ultimate Spatula" are also top sellers.

The company also has a strong commitment to coastal waters and the seafood that are an essential part of the ecosystem.

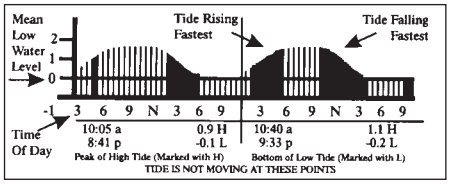
"Toadfish is committed to cleaning coastal water by replanting new oyster habitat across the country," Scott said. "Oysters are the centerpiece of healthy saltwater ecosystems. They filter toxins from the water and provide nursery grounds for hundreds of marine species. The more oysters we plant the cleaner and healthier our coasts become. The Toadfish 'Put 'Em Back' mantra comes from the goal of recycling all oyster shells so they can be reintroduced into the water, where more oysters will eventually grow. An acre of oysters can filter up to 24 million gallons of water per day. Toadfish has planted enough oysters to filter 82 million gallons of water daily. The more oysters we plant, the cleaner and healthier our coasts become."

To date, 210,643 square feet of oyster beds have been replanted by the company. ■

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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 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 6:40 am -0.9 L 8:13 pm 1.2 H
2 NM 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 7:39 am -0.9 L 9:11 pm 1.2 H	3 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 8:39 am -0.9 L 10:08 pm 1.2 H	4 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 9:35 am -0.8 L 11:00 pm 1.0 H	5 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 10:26 am -0.7 L 11:47 pm 0.9 H	6 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 11:05 am -0.5 L	7 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 12:22 am 0.6 H 11:24 am -0.3 L	8 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 12:23 am 0.4 H 10:55 am -0.1 L 8:02 pm 0.2 H
9 FQ 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 7:41 am 0.0 L 5:38 pm 0.3 H	10 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 4:12 am -0.1 L 5:09 pm 0.5 H	11 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 4:19 am -0.3 L 5:21 pm 0.6 H	12 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 4:47 am -0.4 L 5:50 pm 0.7 H	13 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 5:22 am -0.5 L 6:29 pm 0.8 H	14 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 6:00 am -0.6 L 7:12 pm 0.8 H	15 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 6:41 am -0.6 L 7:57 pm 0.8 H
16 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 7:23 am -0.6 L 8:40 pm 0.9 H	17 FM 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 8:02 am -0.6 L 9:21 pm 0.9 H	18 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 8:38 am -0.6 L 9:58 pm 0.8 H	19 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 9:09 am -0.6 L 10:33 pm 0.8 H	20 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 9:33 am -0.5 L 11:08 pm 0.7 H	21 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 9:50 am -0.4 L 11:43 pm 0.5 H	22 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 9:52 am -0.2 L
23 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 12:16 am 0.3 H 9:19 am -0.1 L 5:09 pm 0.1 H	24 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 6:52 am 0.0 L 3:44 pm 0.3 H	25 LQ 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 2:14 am -0.2 L 3:45 pm 0.5 H	26 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 2:57 am -0.4 L 4:19 pm 0.7 H	27 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 3:49 am -0.6 L 5:10 pm 0.9 H	28 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 4:46 am -0.8 L 6:12 pm 1.0 H	29 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 5:45 am -0.9 L 7:18 pm 1.0 H
30 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 6:44 am -0.9 L 8:22 pm 1.1 H	31 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 7:41 am -0.9 L 9:23 pm 1.0 H					

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Calcasieu Pass Lighthouse Wharf

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 7:12 am -1.3 L 3:49 pm 1.8 H 8:20 pm 1.3 L 11:54 pm 1.6 H
2 NM 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 8:02 am -1.4 L 4:40 pm 1.8 H 9:03 pm 1.3 L	3 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 12:43 am 1.6 H 8:53 am -1.4 L 5:27 pm 1.7 H 9:47 pm 1.2 L	4 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 1:32 am 1.6 H 9:44 am -1.2 L 6:14 pm 1.5 H 10:34 pm 1.1 L	5 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 2:26 am 1.5 H 10:34 am -0.9 L 7:00 pm 1.4 H 11:30 pm 1.0 L	6 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 3:32 am 1.3 H 11:24 am -0.6 L 7:41 pm 1.3 H	7 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 12:46 am 0.8 L 4:52 am 1.0 H 12:16 pm -0.2 L 8:12 pm 1.2 H	8 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 2:10 am 0.5 L 6:46 am 0.9 H 1:21 pm 0.2 L 8:34 pm 1.2 H
9 FQ 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 3:08 am 0.2 L 9:27 am 0.8 H 2:40 pm 0.5 L 8:45 pm 1.1 H	10 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 3:54 am -0.1 L 11:39 am 1.0 H 4:07 pm 0.7 L 8:54 pm 1.1 H	11 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 4:35 am -0.3 L 1:02 pm 1.2 H 5:43 pm 0.9 L 9:08 pm 1.1 H	12 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 5:14 am -0.5 L 2:00 pm 1.3 H 6:54 pm 1.0 L 9:27 pm 1.1 H	13 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 5:52 am -0.6 L 2:50 pm 1.4 H 7:47 pm 1.1 L 9:53 pm 1.1 L	14 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 6:28 am -0.7 L 3:33 pm 1.4 H 8:29 pm 1.1 L 10:30 pm 1.1 L	15 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 7:04 am -0.8 L 4:06 pm 1.4 H 8:53 pm 1.1 L 11:15 pm 1.2 H
16 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 7:41 am -0.8 L 4:32 pm 1.3 H 8:53 pm 1.1 L 11:56 pm 1.2 H	17 FM 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 8:18 am -0.8 L 4:56 pm 1.3 H 8:54 pm 1.1 L	18 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 12:30 am 1.2 H 8:55 am -0.8 L 5:20 pm 1.3 H 9:20 pm 1.0 L	19 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 1:03 am 1.2 H 9:32 am -0.8 L 5:45 pm 1.2 H 9:59 pm 0.9 L	20 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 1:39 am 1.2 H 10:08 am -0.6 L 6:11 pm 1.2 H 10:44 pm 0.8 L	21 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 2:28 am 1.0 H 10:44 am -0.5 L 6:33 pm 1.2 H 11:34 pm 0.7 L	22 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 3:44 am 0.9 H 11:22 am -0.2 L 6:50 pm 1.1 H
23 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 12:34 am 0.4 L 5:16 am 0.8 H 12:06 pm 0.1 L 7:03 pm 1.1 H	24 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 1:37 am 0.1 L 7:19 am 0.8 H 1:06 pm 0.4 L 7:19 pm 1.1 H	25 LQ 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 2:32 am -0.2 L 10:08 am 0.9 H 2:29 pm 0.7 L 7:40 pm 1.1 H	26 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 3:23 am -0.6 L 12:15 pm 1.1 H 4:01 pm 1.0 L 8:09 pm 1.1 H	27 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 4:16 am -0.9 L 1:16 pm 1.4 H 5:45 pm 1.1 L 8:48 pm 1.2 H	28 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 5:11 am -1.1 L 2:10 pm 1.5 H 6:43 pm 1.2 L 9:40 pm 1.3 H	29 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 6:07 am -1.3 L 3:02 pm 1.5 H 7:23 pm 1.2 L 10:44 pm 1.4 H
30 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 7:01 am -1.4 L 3:49 pm 1.5 H 8:01 pm 1.1 L 11:49 pm 1.4 H	31 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 7:53 am -1.3 L 4:29 pm 1.5 H 8:41 pm 1.0 L					

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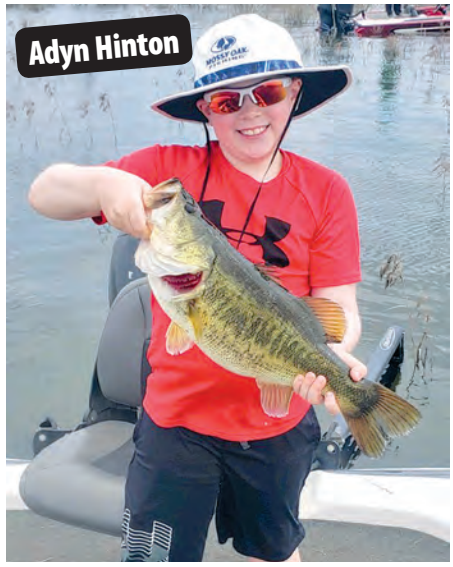


Stacy Welty Owens of Covington took this trophy buck with a crossbow on a trip to family land near Natchez, Miss., on Nov. 14. The buck, a main frame 9-point with a kicker, green scored 167 inches, had a 20-inch spread and was aged at 5 ½ years old.

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Adyn Hinton, 8, with a 6.06-pound largemouth bass caught in a lake in Morehouse Parish on March 12, 2021.



Evan McGehee, 6, killed his first deer on Nov. 28 at Deer Bayou Island.



Dodds Hymel of Covington was 7 ½ when he shot this beautiful 9-point buck weighing in at 230 pounds in Brookhaven, Miss. He shoots his very own Daniel Defense .300 blackout with Leupold Rifleman 3-9x50.



Matthew Book, 12, killed this trophy buck in Area 1 on Nov. 27. It weighed 250 pounds, had 5 ½-inch bases and scored 142 4/8.



In early November, EJ Russell was fishing the edges of Lake Borgne and a 3-inch H&H cocahoe minnow (with a spinner) produced this beautiful trout.



Jacob Koepp, 9, caught this freshwater catfish with a grub from his grandmother's pond in Goodbee, La.



Patrick Patton of Choudrant got his first buck in Lincoln Parish on Thanksgiving morning in 2020.

DOWN ON THE DOCK

Joe Macaluso

WHAT HAPPENS AT DEER CAMP, STAYS AT DEER CAMP

Most of us know about the Las Vegas thing, the thing about "What's done in Vegas, stays in Vegas."

What about hunting camps? Same rule, and that's where this story takes us.

Years ago, our camp's senior hunter made me take a vow of silence.

He was a fine gentleman, a reasonably good bouree player, a man who loved deer dogs, loved to be in the swamp, reveled in his time on a deer stand, and combined all that with a weekly commitment to his church.

Revealing his name is not important here. He was a World War II veteran, a man who cherished his deep roots in south Louisiana's Cajun heritage, devoted to his wife in sickness and in health, and was good enough, when prompted, to share stories of his young life growing up along the Mississippi River during the Great Depression.

He told us about his father turning to market hunting for ducks to send to New Orleans and Baton Rouge restaurants. A few dollars a day and raising a big garden helped his family through those days when finding work often took fathers away from their homes, and he said his dad didn't want to leave home.

He told us about the spring teal season, a time in late March and early April when teal came back to south Louisiana on their northward migration from Mexico and Central America. He said his dad got 25 cents for a pair of teal.

Then came that morning: you don't have to wake early to run deer dogs through a swamp, and being that day was between the splits in the East Zone waterfowl season, there was no reason for me to beat the crack of dawn other than my internal at-the-camp alarm went off and coffee needed to be made. So, it was a surprise to see the lights on his truck turn into the drive leading to the dog pens.

He was early.

"*Comment ca va*?" (how are you?)

"*Bien. Tres bien.*" (well, very well)

"*Tu us en avance.*" (you are early)

"*Oui. Lapins.*" (yes, rabbits)

My French exhausted, he explained the early morning frost was perfect for a walk along the headlands, stretches where rabbits would venture to breakfast on lush greenery before hawks and our resident pair of eagles had enough light to find them in those open areas.

Now this man loved to eat rabbits, and before we go into the Forrest Gump/Bubba Blue-like recitation of recipes, he said he knew at least 12 ways to prepare rabbits. Most of them came from his upbringing when "lapin" fed his family at least twice a week.

Coffee made, and it was time to take in first light on the deck. The crack of a 22 rifle came a minute later. Then another, and another, and another. Knowing he seldom missed, it was easy to figure he had three, maybe four lapins, and he would come through with his promise of rabbit stew later that Saturday.

Next I knew, he was skinning four rabbits under the shed, and feeding edible innards to awaiting Walker hounds.

The freshly prepared rabbits went into his ice chest, but there was much more to this process than usual, and prompted a question — why was he rearranging so much in what should have been an otherwise empty ice chest?

There was something in that ice chest other than ice. He lifted a bag, then the bag of ice, and put the rabbits on the bottom of the chest, then the ice, then the other bag.

What? What's the story?

"Joe, you know how much I like rabbit. My wife does, too, and these are going home with me later today. We won't freeze them and we'll have rabbit for Sunday dinner. I can't wait."

But he had promised rabbit for the camp! What's in that other bag in his ice chest?

"Joe, you have to promise never to tell, not as long as I'm alive. This has to go to the grave with me."

Promise made.

"It's nutria. When I came to feed the dogs yesterday, when nobody was around, I went back off the road and got four nice sized ones, took them home, skinned them and cut them into quarters. Then I soaked them overnight and brought them back today."

Now if you do that, it's difficult to tell rabbit from nutria. It's pink meat, and after its in a big cast iron pot for a couple of hours with a dark roux, the trinity, garlic, salt and cayenne pepper, nutria can taste a whole lot like rabbit.

And how long has this been going on?

"For a while, Joe. For a while, and nobody's caught on yet."

My friend passed away last year, and I miss him. And what happened at the camp, stayed at the camp. ▪



Joe Macaluso *is a native of New Orleans, but has lived most of his life in Baton Rouge with his wife Cheryl. He is a well-known outdoor editor and writer.*



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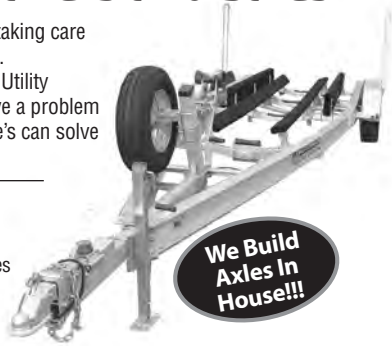
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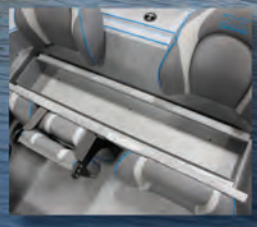












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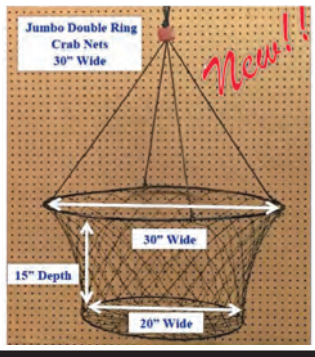
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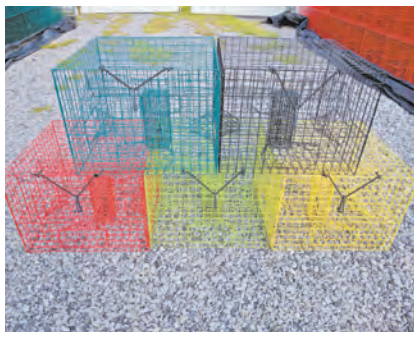
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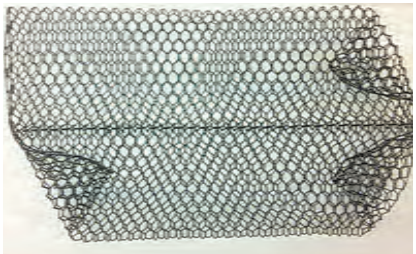
Crab Traps



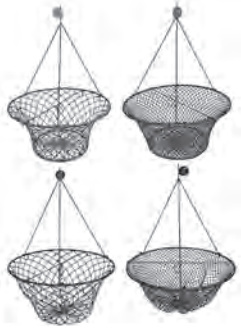
Trawls



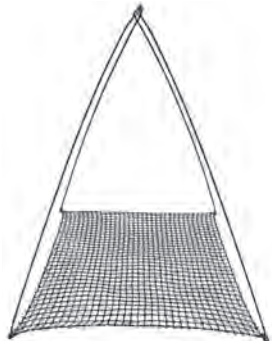
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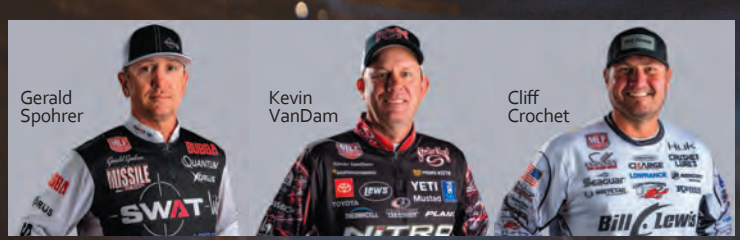
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