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23
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**WRANGLING BASS
AND BULLS**



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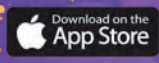
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ROW 2			
ROW 3			
ROW 4			
ROW 5			
ROW 6			
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Most fishermen don't set out just to catch flounder, but it's a treat when they do. Photo courtesy of Capt. Kyle Johnson with Coastal Waters Outfitters.

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Volume 42 | No 2



Together,
we're going to get through this.



"I think the road to recovery is just like the Rhythm of Louisiana. It shows the strength of not only this community, but the state. We're going to celebrate. We're going to eventually get back to where we were. It's not going to be easy, but with support and help, we will make it.

I'm always going to be grateful for the help that I received after the storm from Shell and my fellow employees, who also lost so much. This storm touched everyone. Together, we're going to get through this, and we're going to come out of it better."

MATTHEW LOOSEMORE

Production Team Lead, Shell Norco

Pictured with daughters Adrienne (left) and Allie (right) in his hurricane Ida damaged home in Norco

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WOW! DID HE HAVE BIG HORN! BUT SADLY, NOT THE RIGHT KIND

It was a perfect deer hunting day. Cold, but not too cold. Enough dew settling in predawn hours to allow a gentle, no-sound walk to what had to be the most perfect natural deer stand in all of West Feliciana Parish.

Scouting these 300 acres of prime whitetail habitat a month before turned up several prospects. Deer had carved an easy to follow meandering trail through the woods.

A hurricane had blown over an old red oak tree at just the right angle to allow a shinny to a spot about 20 feet off the ground, a spot with three perfectly north/east/west limbs and just far enough to support back and legs — and comfortably.

It was Mother Nature's easy chair.

Because a co-worker insisted we hunt his family's land — those 300 acres of upland hardwoods and 150 acres of pasture — our youngest son and I decided to build a tree stand for him along within range of yet another deer trail, the rewards of which was a case of poison ivy so virulent that it was a candidate for the Guinness Book of World Records and/or the American Medical Association's monthly journal.

WE HAD A CHANCE

Scouting also proved there were enough whitetails to give us a chance, like the buck spied 300 yards across a pasture, a buck whose rack could only be bettered by the Hartford elk (OK, young readers, look that one up).

And then there was the real prize. A month before, a package arrived with small bottles labeled, "Deer in Estrus/The can't miss lure for every deer hunter."

So, that meant asking veteran hunters about such buck lures. The best tip was to latch on to a dozen or so 35mm plastic film canisters (we had hundreds in our newspaper's photo department — that was back when cameras actually used film). The trick is to put a cotton ball in each container, then drops of buck lure,



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.

then spread them around your deer stand at various intervals. So off we went that morning: got in the woods well before daylight, made sure he was situated safely in his stand, then started for my tree by following a fence line to keep my scent from invading the deep, deer filled woods.

As said, it was perfect. And along the way I decorated the approach to the stand with the buck-lure canisters. (The plastic vials allowed for them to be picked up, capped, and carried from the woods as well.)

AFTER HORNS

The first rays of the sun brought an east breeze in my face.

Perfect, because the pasture was to my back and most of the deer appeared to prefer the deep woods. We'd seen doe grazing in the rye grass fields, but never a buck, and bucks were our quarry. We were after horns.

Sorta knew it might be a little early for the rutting season in this area, but it seemed it's never too early to wake any buck's senses to lamour, so a week or two didn't seem to matter much.

Perfectly situated in my perch with senses set on high, the first disturbance came from two chipmunks scurrying around the uprooted base of my tree. Both ran up the trunk, the lead crossing my left leg and sitting his good self on the branch two feet from my left ear. The second one saw me, jumped and in one move turned and ran, post-haste, down the tree.

That first chipmunk remained for minutes, almost frozen, until I asked him if he was going to stay there all morning. He jumped six inches then sprinted back the way he came and rejoined with his buddy, or was it his main squeeze, for more frolicking among the leaves.

By that time, the heavy scents of the forest filled the air.

Oh boy, it won't be long now before ol' Mr. Buck is going to walk the trail of canisters and within the crosshairs of my .30-06.

Man, was I ready, but not ready for what was to come.

I knew my friend had a bull for his cows, and that the bull had been enclosed in his own private acres, but didn't know my friend had let the bull out to take to handling his chores among his harem in the 150 acres of pasture.

As the primal scents wafted from the forest floor, the east breeze sent drifted of the Doe in Heat to, and across, the fence line.

And, the bull came running.

HERE HE CAME!

His bellowing rose to fever pitch, and I had a view of him tearing at the barbed wire fence with all his might.

After near two hours of increasing consternation, and concerned the wire might not hold this raging beast, it was time for me to leave, don the Hunter Orange vest, retrieve the canisters and hoof it back to the truck... all the while making sure I didn't come within gun range of our son.

And, just to make sure, I didn't walk the precarious barbed wire fence line trail to get out and risk the further intentions of this raging bull.

It did have big horns! ■

OUTDOOR UPDATE ➤



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OUTDOOR UPDATE

Photo courtesy Tommy Vidrine

POGIE BUFFER BATTLE CONTINUES

SPORTSMEN SAY MORE PROTECTION NEEDED FROM MENHADEN HARVEST

In From Staff Reports
its January, 2022 meeting, the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission voted to amend a previous Notice of Intent (NOI), reducing Louisiana coastal buffer zones to Gulf menhaden harvest regulations. The latest amendment removes the previously proposed ¼ mile buffer on the outside of the double-rig line within Breton and Chandeleur Sounds that was part of the NOI submitted at its October, 2021 meeting.

The direction of the buffer zone discussions concerns many of the state's leading conservation and fishing groups.

Fisheries Commission unanimously moved forward with an inadequate ¼ mile buffer where menhaden reduction harvest will be restricted and went further to remove any buffer from harvesting in Breton Sound.

"In effect, the results allow those foreign companies to legally strip mine Louisiana's surf-zones of hundreds of millions of pounds of forage fish and millions of pounds of bycatch — with no consideration for the ecosystem," Cresson's letter continued. "The commission took the side of the foreign pogie companies ahead of Louisiana, its people and its coastal resources. The vote to remove any restriction in Breton Sound was especially convenient for the Mississippi pogie fleet, which takes a significant percentage of their harvest from Louisiana."

A quarter mile is roughly the length of four football fields.

The LDWF defended Commission actions through LDWF Press Secretary Ed Pratt and LDWF staff, providing the following responses to questions posed by Louisiana Sportsman magazine.

"Currently, there is no buffer in place under state law or administrative rule, so this Notice of Intent proposes to establish a buffer zone for the commercial menhaden fishery off of the Louisiana coastline where one did not previously exist," the LDWF spokesman said. "The Notice of Intent proposes an administrative rule to place a ¼ mile buffer around the entire Louisiana coast, with larger buffers in some areas such as off of Grand Isle. The proposed buffer in the original Notice of Intent included an area in Breton and Chandeleur Sounds, as well as one further to the east off of the Chandeleur Islands. It was the portion of the proposed buffer within the Breton and Chandeleur Sounds that was removed from the Notice of Intent."

The LWDF spokesman said sportsmen's comments were not ignored.

"Sportsmen asked for a restriction of commercial



STRIP MINING POGIES

"Unsurprisingly, once again, you were ignored," Louisiana Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) CEO David Cresson said in a Jan. 7, 2022 letter to his group's members. "Despite hundreds of comments from anglers, legislators, charter captains, coastal businesses and conservation organizations, the Louisiana Wildlife and

menhaden fishing off of the Louisiana coastline,” he said. “Many of them requested a ½ mile restriction where currently no restriction is in place. The Commission has chosen to propose a ¼ mile restriction. The Sportsmen further requested that larger restrictions be placed on the waters off of the Grand Isle area, and the Commission agreed with that request, and has proposed expanded restrictions of between 1 and 3 miles in those areas. The bottom line is that without this NOI, there would be no restriction on menhaden fishing off of our coastline.”

MORE PROTECTION NEEDED

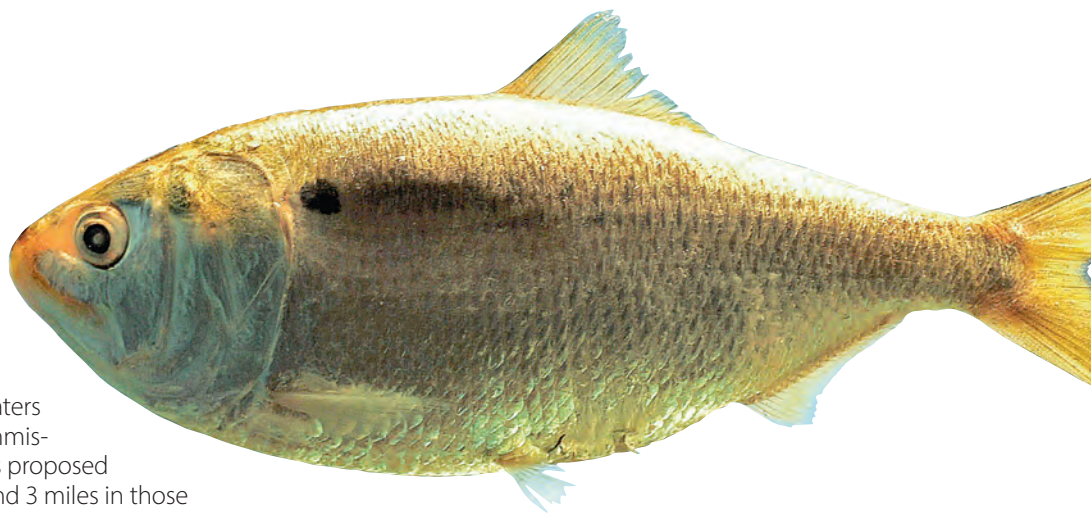
Cresson says more protection, not less, is needed.

“The menhaden industry uses large ships and enormous purse seine nets (up to 1500 feet long) to capture nearly a billion pounds of pogies annually from our waters, along with tens of millions of pounds of what they call by-catch — sport fish that are unintentionally caught in the nets,” said Cresson. “According to industry reps, their ships draw up to 12 feet of water, yet they operate in waters as shallow as 5-6 feet deep. On many occasions, they have been observed churning up sediment, and leaving countless dead redfish and other species in their wake.”

Cresson said biologists don’t even have any real scientific data on how the removal of so much critical forage and bycatch from such a small strip of Louisiana’s coastline impacts species that depend on menhaden. Species like speckled trout, redfish, cobia, tarpon, snapper, tuna and more as well as a wide variety of marine birds and mammals rely on pogies.

LDWF responded that they will be performing a bycatch study of the commercial menhaden industry and the results of that study could result in the Commission adding protections along the Louisiana coastline. No time frame for the study was given.

Other states have been aggressive in their protection efforts regarding menhaden harvesting. Florida does not allow any purse seines in state waters. Alabama has a one mile menhaden buffer zone. Mississippi has one mile buffers in some coastal



counties. Texas has a ½ mile buffer and a highly restrictive harvest limit, Cresson said.

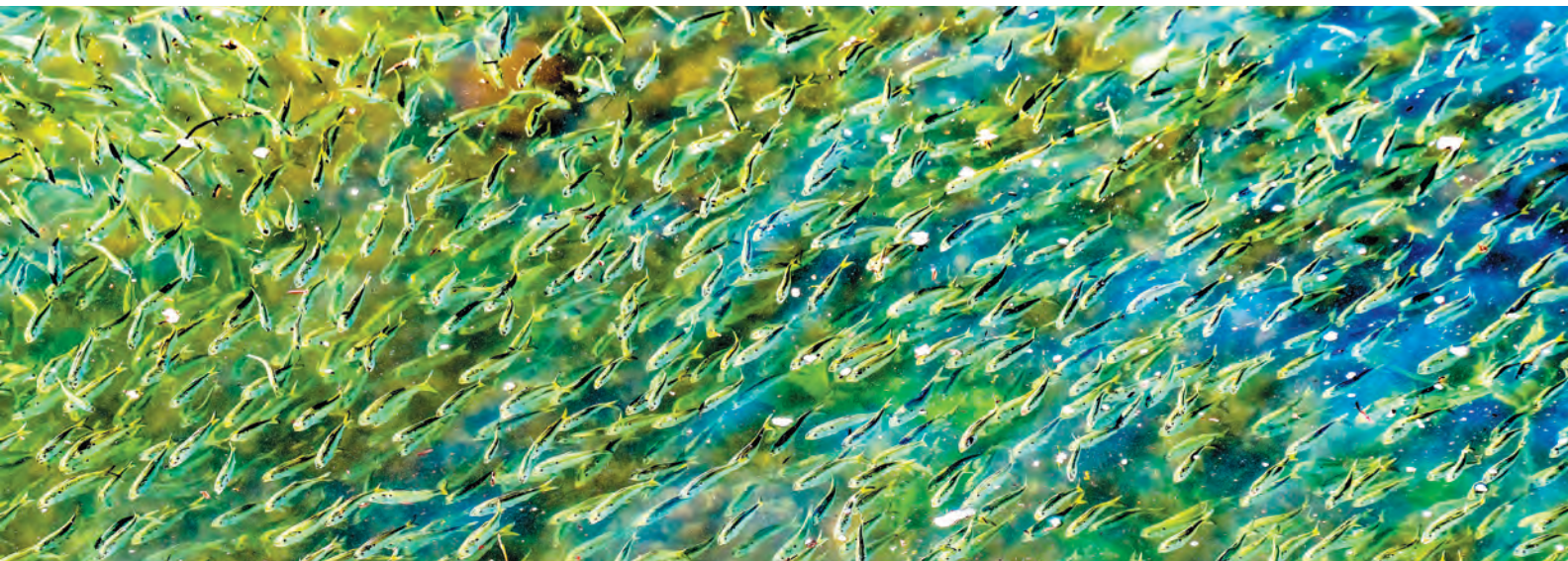
THE NEXT STEP

The next step involves a public hearing, scheduled for February 22, 2022, at 5:30 p.m. at LDWF headquarters in the Joe Herring Room at 2000 Quail Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70898. Results from the public hearing will be presented to the Commission on March 3. If the Commission chooses to move the latest proposed rule towards final promulgation at its March meeting, the proposed rule will move to Legislative oversight. Following the 30-day oversight period, the proposed rule could be published as a final rule as soon as April 20.

Cresson said more than 500 comments were sent in on the previous NOI. He urged sport fishing and conservation enthusiasts to not give up on this crucial issue. He suggested continuing to send in comments and to take it one step further and contact their legislators.

“If you love Louisiana’s outdoors, then you need to reach out to your state representatives and state senators and let them know this is an important issue for Louisiana’s coast,” Cresson said. “Even if you don’t live on the coast, your voice matters. It does have to go to legislative oversight and we need all the support we can get there. If the commission isn’t for the resource, let’s make sure our elected officials are.”

Louisiana Sportsman will continue to keep readers updated on the latest news in this continuing controversy. ■



DUCKS CAME LATE IN FEWER NUMBERS

OLSZAK: "NO RECORDS SET THIS YEAR OTHER THAN LOW RECORDS"

W By John Manion
With no place to go but up, the Bayou State's January duck numbers rebounded from the paltry numbers observed in the December survey. The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) estimated 2.1 million ducks were wintering in our coastal marshes and on Catahoula Lake mid-January. But that count is still 28% below the long-term average of the 2.9 million birds that are usually here in January.

Digging into the numbers, nearly half of estimated ducks are divers – 441,000 dos gris (or scaup), 333,000 ringnecks, and 157,000 canvasbacks. Worse yet, our bread-and-butter ducks like mallards, widgeons, and grey ducks all declined from the December estimates. On the upside however, the second largest number of blue-winged teal ever surveyed in January was strong at nearly a quarter million birds. In many areas, that was the best shooting of the season.



Christian Mire poses with a nice greenhead taken in Jonesville.

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LOWEST EVER

Jason Olszak, the new waterfowl program manager for LDWF, reflected on the season by concluding, "No records were set this year, other than low records. Our December survey was the lowest ever."

He also noted that the species composition has been different than the past years.

"In the November survey we had hardly any divers," Olszak said. "And gadwalls were way down in November as well. They have only just increased to respectable numbers."

Habitat issues in central and north Louisiana have been

difficult all season long. The season started dry and continues to be dry. Drew Mire who hunts the Louisiana Delta Plantation around Jonesville summed up his season as dry and slow. Due to the lack of rainfall, they were not able to hunt early on.

"We are just starting to see a few ducks after Christmas, but there are mostly ringnecks," he said.

Duck hunting success depends a lot on location. A few of our state's usually productive areas also produced some good hunts again this year. Kevin Ericson typically hunts down river in Venice and was able to find huntable numbers on a consistent basis.

"We had to work for them," Ericson said. "You were either on a group of birds and did well or it was tough. Pretty consistent number of teal and still seeing bluewings. The big ducks have been hit or miss all season."

On the other side of the state, Blake LeMaire hunts in the rice fields around Gueydan. In total, LeMaire felt like they ended up with a season that was on par with others.

"We had plenty of teal, pintail, and woodies," he said. "They really are our favorite eating ducks."

SLOW FOR MALLARDS

LeMaire typically sees the mallards getting pushed down when it begins to freeze around mid-January.

"It was slow all year on mallards, greys and the specks," he said.

Olszak speculated on two schools of thought which might

explain Louisiana's low duck numbers. First, December duck surveys from Arkansas and Mississippi also showed declining populations (their January figures are yet to be released). Conversely, Missouri and some of the higher latitude states are seeing increases in their long-term duck numbers, particularly late in the season. This year's dry and mild temperatures have not pushed birds down.

The other, a mostly anecdotal observation, is the condition of the summer nesting habitat, particularly for dabbling ducks.

Olszak said, "We don't have two years of survey data (cancellation due to COVID). Based on the dryness reported in the Northern prairie-pothole region, it's likely nesting habitat is not as good as it could be."

The lack of nesting habitat translates into fewer juvenile ducks making it to Louisiana. Unfortunately, that's something Louisiana duck hunters already know all too well. ■

“ We had plenty of teal, pintail, and woodies. They really are our favorite eating ducks. **”**

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CONSERVATION ORDER GOOSE SEASON IS ON

U By Kinny Haddox
nplugged shotguns. No limits. Electronic calls. Shooting allowed one-half hour after sunset.

Is it a duck hunter's dream? No, it's a conservation nightmare. And it involves the Conservation Order Goose Season, a special no holds barred season to shoot overabundant geese. And it lasts until just the last of the slowest geese heads back up north in March. The season is open through March 6 in both East and West zones.

The reason? There are too many geese and not enough habitat. Geese have overpopulated to the point they are destroying breeding and feeding grounds. Even the government admitted it and now, for more than a decade, hunters have enjoyed the Conservation season for light geese. Those are snow geese, blue geese and Ross' geese.

Surprisingly, not as many hunters as you think take advantage of it, at least not for long, according to Louisiana's Waterfowl Study Leader Jason Olszak.

"The data from this year obviously isn't available yet, but the previous season we had just over 3,400 participants in the season and harvested about 23,000 birds," he said. "But about 75% of the participants hunted six days or less. That suggests a lot of them were guide trips. While the season does help, it isn't really doing everything that they hoped for. We aren't hardly putting a dent in the population."

The availability and cost of shotgun shells and the cost of a big spread to hunt them is also a deterrent that keeps some hunters home.

"Just because there are thousands of them doesn't mean they are easy to hunt," Olszak said. "By this time, they are pretty wary."

Olszak said while these types of geese aren't the prime rib of waterfowl, they can be tasty. People are creative with the way they cook them and if there are a lot of tough older birds, they make great goose sausage when combined with other ingredients.

The program got started in the late 1990's when a Ducks Unlimited Committee drafted a plan to involve sportsmen in helping solve an almost catastrophic overabundance of snow geese, which was growing

by five percent or more each year. The committee members performed population modeling and developed a plan, which was approved by both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service. Relaxed hunting rules allowed educated hunters to help reduce populations while the program cost government and conservation groups nothing.

If you plan on taking part, check all the regulations and season dates for this special season. And as a reminder, the eased-up restrictions include:

- The ability to use electronic callers
- The ability to use unplugged shotguns
- Shooting hours extended to a half-hour past sunset
- No bag limit or possession limit
- Hunters must possess a valid hunting license from any state.
- Shooting hours during the Snow, Blue and Ross' Goose Conservation Order are one-half hour before sunrise (local time) until one-half (1/2) hour after sunset (local time).

The plan's official name is the Arctic Tundra Habitat Emergency Conservation Act. Although it was challenged by several major groups, including the Humane Society, it was eventually passed through Congress and has been praised by waterfowl leaders over its first decade. ■



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LDWF: NO CWD FOUND IN UNION, MOREHOUSE PARISH DEER

T From News Reports

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries reports that no chronic wasting disease (CWD) was detected in more than 300 white-tailed deer samples taken in Morehouse and Union parishes since December after the disease, always fatal in deer, was detected in an Arkansas location, nearly 8 miles north of those two parishes.

And, because of the findings, LDWF immediately lifted the baiting ban that had been implemented in the two parishes.

Since the discovery, LDWF set a goal of getting 300 samples to the LSU's Diagnostic Laboratory for testing. The laboratory has reported that no CWD was detected in the samples.

"The department is happy about the outcome, and we thank the deer hunters who brought in their harvested deer to be tested," said LDWF Secretary Jack Montoucet. "Their assistance helped shorten the time period that it would have taken to reach our goal."

CWD is a neurodegenerative disease found in most deer species, including Louisiana's native white-tailed deer. It is infectious, always fatal, and there is no treatment.

This season, because of the cooperation from hunters, processors and taxidermists across the state, LDWF has collected more than 1,100 samples statewide for CWD monitoring.

LDWF will continue working with adjacent states and hunters throughout Louisiana to monitor deer herd health. CWD has been detected in Arkansas, Texas and Mississippi along with a number of states around the country.

LDWF encourages hunters and the general public to immediately alert their local LDWF Field Office of any unusual acting deer they may encounter. Local field biologists will work with the landowners to collect appropriate samples to determine any health issue that may be arising in the area. ■



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LWFC APPROVES NOTICE OF INTENT FOR HUNTING REGS, SEASONS AND WMA RULES FOR 2022-23

T From News Reports
he Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission (LWFC) adopted notices of intent for the 2022-23 and 2023-24 hunting seasons, 2022-23 general and Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) hunting seasons and rules and regulations, 2023 general and WMA turkey hunting season and rules and regulations and 2022-23 migratory bird hunting season and rules and regulations at its January meeting Thursday, Jan. 6.

The notices of intent include proposed hunting season dates and regulation changes from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) for the upcoming hunting seasons and provide for a public comment period.

Some of the proposed changes include:

- Addition of electronic tag and validation procedures for hunting deer in Louisiana. This proposal would allow hunters to have either a picture of their tags or electronic tags while hunting to be legal.
- Addition of electronic tag and validation procedures for hunting turkeys in Louisiana. This proposal would allow hunters to have either a picture of their tags or electronic tags while hunting to be legal.
- Change in WMA camping regulations that will require a WMA camping permit for users that camp on WMAs.
- Establishing a limited use area on Bodcau WMA to provide a safety zone around the Bodcau shooting range.
- Addition of a primitive firearm

either-sex day on Camp Beauregard WMA.

- Addition of a youth lottery turkey hunting day on Clear Creek WMA.
- Elimination of either-sex primitive firearms days on Joyce WMA. It is proposed to eliminate nine either-sex primitive firearms days and make these days bucks-only.
- Elimination of either-sex primitive firearms days on Maurepas Swamp WMA. It is proposed to eliminate nine either-sex primitive firearms days and make these days bucks-only.
- Proposal to prohibit fishing, crabbing and cast netting or any other activities or trespassing on water control structures on Pointe-Aux-Chenes WMA.
- Elimination of seven days of firearms bucks only days for deer on Pomme de Terre WMA. This is due to concerns of declining deer population.
- Change archery season dates on Tunica Hills WMA to mirror outside deer area season. This will add 15 days of increased opportunity
- Addition of a youth lottery turkey hunting day on West Bay WMA.
- Proposal to open all of Caddo Parish to turkey hunting.

To view the full notice of intent and all proposed hunting season dates and regulation changes for the upcoming hunting seasons, go to <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/resources/category/commission-action-items>.

Public comment will be accepted through 4 p.m. on March 3, 2022. It will also be accepted at LWFC monthly meetings from now through March 3. Comments may be submitted directly to Tommy Tuma, LDWF Wildlife Division, P.O. Box 98000, Baton Rouge, LA. 70898-9000 or 225-765-2349 or by e-mail at ttuma@wlf.la.gov.

LDWF will also hold a public meeting on the NOI either via Zoom or in person at a date and time to be announced at the February Commission meeting. ■

Faith Austin of Castor took this trophy buck with her Browning BAR MK3 30-06 in Mount Lebanon on Dec. 11, 2021.



OUTDOOR LESSONS WE LEARN FROM KIDS

C By Kinny Haddox
orey Harris has caught monster bass, killed trophy deer and done just about anything outdoors in Louisiana that one could do. But it was on a hunt with his two growing-up-too-fast kids, daughter Haven and son Harley, that he was reminded of what time in the outdoors and how it relates to life is all about. "I mean, this is as special as it gets," he said. "I just can't tell you how proud I was."



Haven Harris and a recent spike she harvested.



Harley Harris and his 8-point that Haven helped locate.

What was an everyday hunting adventure one afternoon in November is a lesson or reminder for us all.

"This little girl right here has huge heart," Harris said. "Yesterday while we were hunting her brother shot a deer. We hadn't been in the stand very long at that time. When I told her we needed to go help him find his deer she began to cry. I mean real tears running down her face. She just wanted to hunt but her brother needed help.

"So long story short, we lost the blood trail. I mean we couldn't find anything. That's when I look over and she has her hat in her hand and her head bowed. I asked what she was doing and she said, 'I was praying that we will find Harley's deer because I don't want him to be sad.'

"That made me smile the biggest smile," Harris said. "A few minutes later we had given up and we're walking back to the 4 wheeler, all of a sudden she said, 'Look there it is.' Low and behold the deer was laying within 20 yards of us. Her praying for us to find that deer and then her actually spotting it, that was more special than her brother killing it. Haven, I hope you never lose that good heart God has given you or the faith to stop and pray about things no matter how big or small."

And that's what it's all about. ■

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2021-2022 DEER OF THE YEAR

Deer season always takes a long time to get here, then it's gone before you know it. But in 2021, it left behind some awesome deer that made memories for a lifetime for Louisiana hunters. Since deer season cranked up last fall, Louisiana Sportsman writers have detailed the stories of 44 big bucks harvested across the Bayou State.

Some have been monsters, like two 190 class bucks taken by Daniel Sharkey in Tangipahoa Parish and Chris Temple in Catahoula Parish.

Of the deer profiled by the Sportsman, 31 cracked the 150-inch barrier, and of those bucks, 8 eclipsed the 170-inch mark. There are a lot more youngsters getting in on the act, too, and that's important for the future of the sport.

We reviewed all of the big buck stories and share a few of the best that rank at the top of the class as 2021-2022 Deer of the Year.

#1 NON-TYPICAL BUCK >



#1 NON-TYPICAL BUCK

FIVE-YEAR QUEST ENDS IN SHARKEY DOWNING MASSIVE BUCK



Dec. 12
Daniel Sharkey
Tangipahoa Parish
193 5/8

It was five seasons ago when Daniel Sharkey had his first encounter with his buck of a lifetime. He and his son, Rilee, were in a stand on property they hunt in Tangipahoa Parish when they noticed a cedar sapling being shaken as a big buck was rubbing on it. They weren't able to get a shot at the buck, but five years later on Dec. 12 it all came together and Sharkey was standing over the form of the biggest buck he had ever seen.

"I live in Kentwood and hunt on some 1,000 acres of land in Tangipahoa Parish, some of which I own and some I have leased," Sharkey, age 41, explained. "The land features a mixture of pines and hardwoods with thickets of yaupon giving deer a good place to hide and hang out."

The buck had been given the name "Ghost" because it was so elusive. In fact, except for the sighting he had five years ago, a few trail cam photos were the only evidence that the buck was still hanging around. Sharkey, a Lieutenant with the Tangipahoa Parish Sheriffs Office had been running trail cameras for the past few years hoping to be able to nail down where the buck was hanging out.

"We would get pictures three or four days in a row and then he'd be gone for up to two weeks before he'd show up again," Sharkey said. "On Dec. 4, he started showing up again on my camera."

ALMOST MISSED HIM

Sharkey was on his tripod stand Saturday, Dec. 11, and an hour later, a doe came rushing out of the woods. He felt like maybe it was about to happen.

"I got my H&R 35 Whelan up hoping the big one would pop out," he said. "Instead, it was a 7-point buck hot on the trail of the doe."

Sharkey had a feeling that with the estrus doe in the neighborhood, there was the chance that the big one might show himself. He decided to be in his stand the next morning, Sunday, Dec. 12, with the plan of sitting until 8 a.m. which would give him time to go home and go to church with his family.

"I was on my stand that morning and I could hear a lot of running and grunting as I knew the rut was on," Sharkey said. "My buddy, Seth, was hunting a nearby stand. We were texting back

and forth and I told him I was going to get down at 8:00 to head for church. At 7:47, I collected my gear preparing to get down when I looked to my left and saw a deer standing there. I picked up my gun, got the scope on it and could tell it was a good deer. A bush obscured most of the rack so I couldn't tell what it was except it was a good one and I decided I was not letting it walk.

"I knew there was a big 8-point in there and it could have been him. When it stepped into an opening quartering a little toward me, I took the shot and it took off."

A MONSTER BUCK

Texting his buddy with a BBD (big buck down) message, Seth came to help Sharkey and they noticed that the buck had run through, not over nor under, a 5 strand barbed wire fence, actually breaking two of the wires. This was evidence, he felt, that the buck was hit good since it didn't jump the fence.

"Seth and his brother Dale came to help me look and we could find no blood or any evidence of a hit," Sharkey said. "We decided to spread out, I took a trail to the left, Seth took the middle and Dale to the right. In a minute, Dale called out he had found blood. Seth joined him and then they hollered back at me, 'here's your deer and it's the big one!' I thought they were kidding me but when I walked over there and saw him, I knew it was the big one and the five year quest was over."

The rack almost defies description with 20 points, 18 of which were scorable. There was an extra main beam with the inside spread being 16 6/8 inches. Weighing in at 242 pounds, the buck was aged at 7 or 8 years old and perhaps 9.

"I called Wildlife and Fisheries to validate my tag and by the time we got the buck loaded and out of the woods, my phone was exploding as the word had gotten around about the buck," he said. "It was crazy."

The buck was taken to a big buck contest in the area where the rack was measured at 193 5/8 inches.

"You think Kansas, Iowa or some of those other states that produce big bucks, but Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana? That," he said, "is unheard of." ■

#1 TYPICAL BUCK

TEMPLE MAKES SURE SHOT ON "KING OF THE WOODS"

C By Kinny Haddox
Chris Temple of Vidalia has been hunting deer since he was 10 years old. He has killed multiple big deer and seen even more over the years in his long hours working outdoors as a farmer in Catahoula Parish.

But when a monster buck that hadn't been seen for two years by his hunting partners stepped out in daylight for the first time, the deer's rack was so impressive it even gave him the shakes. It should have. The 12-point deer weighed almost 300 pounds and the rack was officially scored at 190 7/8. That gross score is higher than the Louisiana State record for gun hunting in the Typical category. That is before deductions that could possibly be taken and the antlers have to dry out for 60 days and be remeasured to determine its place in the standings.

In the meantime, the deer is causing quite a stir among hunters and those who keep the record book. The Louisiana record is currently 186 6/8 held by Marshall McKay and killed in Madison Parish in 1939.

"We saw this deer on camera two years ago and he was big then, but then he just disappeared," said the 46-year-old Temple. "We thought maybe he had been killed. Apparently he moved off our area to another and hadn't come back until I saw him and shot him on Tuesday, Dec. 7."

THE BIG KAHUNA

Temple had been in the stand overlooking a food plot for a while when deer started to gather in the plot. He had counted 13 deer in the food plot including some smaller bucks that were grunting and running around fooling with the does. He was checking his watch and knew shooting time would be over fairly soon when something strange happened.

"All those deer, every one of them, threw their heads up and looked straight into the woods," Temple said. "Then they threw up their tails and ran off as fast as they could in every direction into the woods. I'd never seen anything like that before."

He looked around a little bit, then suddenly noticed the big bruiser had stepped out about 10 yards out in the field with his head down. Then Temple knew what was going on.

"All I saw was horns. Oh my gosh, I knew it was him," Temple said. "By the response of those other deer. He was King of the Woods."

Dec. 7
Chris Temple
Catahoula Parish
190 7/8



GETTING OVER THE NERVES

Temple raised his Ruger 270 armed with reloads by a friend, Larry Roark. He looked at the big deer through his scope about 170 yards away. But he couldn't shoot. He was shaking. Who wouldn't have been.

"I took a deep breath and told myself to settle down, but it didn't work," the veteran hunter said. "A couple of minutes passed and I took another deep breath and another. Finally I got a grip and told myself I had to do it. I had to make the shot. Time was running out. So I got him in the scope and pulled the trigger. He disappeared from the scope when I shot. I looked around but couldn't see him, but when I put the scope back on the spot he was standing in, there he was, laying on the ground right where I shot him."

Temple called his son and then some other friends and said he needed some help, he had killed the biggest buck in the woods. He went back to the camp to meet them, but they weren't real serious about it.

"I've played some tricks on them before and they were like 'we know better' but this time it was real," he said. "When we walked up to that big deer and the lights shone on his antlers, everybody was just stunned. They couldn't believe it."

Hard to top

Temple has been back in the stand a couple of times since then, but he told his son he didn't know if he could ever shoot another buck because it would be hard to top that one from the Cash Bayou area of Catahoula. And while he waits for the mandatory drying time and to see how many deductions there are before the final official scoring, he said sleep may be a hard thing to come by, too.

"I'm still in awe of its characteristics," said Greg Hicks, who scored the deer first. "Chris Temple's deer has a 20 4/8" inside spread, beams over 25" (one was over 26"), four tines over 11", and over 5" bases. The non-typical or irregular points total just a little over 7" together. ■

#1 PUBLIC LANDS BUCK ➤

#1 PUBLIC LANDS BUCK

LOGGY BAYOU HAPPY PLACE

SNODDY, BUDDY BAG TROPHY BUCKS IN SAME SPOT

T By Glynn Harris
here 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

Nov. 27
Dalton Snoddy
Loggy Bayou WMA
165



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." ■

#2 PUBLIC LANDS BUCK

TULL DOWNS TROPHY THAT NEIGHBOR GRAZED EIGHT DAYS EARLIER

Dec. 9
Austin Tull
Soda Lake WMA
164 7/8



On By Glynn Harris

Dec. 1, a hunter had shot at a huge buck in Caddo Parish. His shot only grazed the buck. On Dec. 9, Shreveport professional firefighter and paramedic Austin Tull found good fortune in his corner as he put an arrow into the big 12-point buck.

"The guy who first shot the buck earlier brought in a tracking dog and trailed the buck over a mile before giving up," Tull said. "When word got around that I had killed this big buck, the hunter who grazed the buck heard about it, came over and when he saw it was the same buck, I thought he was going to throw up."

Tull, age 36, was hunting with a friend, Luke Johnson, on Soda Lake Wildlife Management Area in Caddo Parish. The pair met at Tull's home early on the morning of Dec. 9 with plans to head to the management area for a deer hunt.

"I had put out a camera last year and found this big buck and got photos of him," Tull said. "I started getting photos of him in early November as the buck was working scrapes."

THE RIGHT TREE

After stopping off for breakfast, the pair headed to the area getting there well before daylight.

"We parked and had a pretty long walk back to where we wanted to hunt," Tull said. "Luke was set up not far from me and there was a particular tree where I wanted to climb and use my 'saddle' stand. One picture of the buck was a week ago when he walked right under my tree. I had shot at and missed a buck there earlier in the season. As I was only 15 feet up the tree, a doe busted me and the buck following her took off and I missed. This time, I decided to climb high enough to avoid being busted so I settled in at about 35 feet high."

Tull had a view of fairly open woods, although the longest shot he thought he could take with his bow was perhaps 30 yards. Around 7:45, a doe came running by with a little 3-point buck on her trail.

"My buddy called me to tell me the pair had just run by him," Tull said. "No more than a minute later, I saw something moving and made out the body, tail and an antler of a buck that was trotting along the trail where the doe and small buck had traveled. I picked up my bow and watched him, nose to the ground as he walked eight steps from the tree I was in.

"I stopped him with a 'meah' sound. He looked up and I prepared to shoot. There was a vine in the way so I had to lean back a bit and released my arrow. I watched him take off, I called my buddy to be on the lookout for the buck."

THE BIG REVEAL

Laying aside his bow – Tull shoots a Hoyt Nitrox with Viper VAP arrows and Grim Reaper Pro Series broadheads – he picked up his binoculars and watched the deer as it ran, then stop, stumble and fall over 80 yards from where he was shot.

"My buddy got to him before I did and he yelled for me to hurry over because I'd shot a moose," Tull said. "We hugged and high-fived when we saw just how big he was."

The buck sported a heavy symmetrical rack of 12 points with a 20-inch inside spread. Bases were 6 inches each. The estimated weight was 185 pounds. Tull and his friend put a tape on the rack coming up with a score of 162 inches.

"Several other friends who saw the rack estimated it could have scored upwards of 180 inches," Tull said. "I took the buck to Simmons Sporting Goods to have it measured and entered in that store's big buck contest. It scored 164 4/8 inches."

Confirming it was the same buck the neighbor had shot eight days earlier, the buck had a fresh flesh wound on its back. ■

#3 PUBLIC LANDS BUCK ➤

#3 PUBLIC LANDS BUCK

FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD WINS BIG BUCK LOTTERY WITH 13-POINT

Dec. 11
Kaitlyn Bolton
Floy Ward McElroy WMA
159



What are the chances of me winning a multi-million dollar lottery? Infinitesimal. What are the chances of a 15-year-old high school sophomore getting selected for a lottery deer hunt and proceeding to down the biggest buck ever taken on that area? Not likely, but Kaitlyn Bolton got it done on the afternoon of Dec. 11.

Annual deer hunts for young hunters are selected by lottery on a unique wildlife management area in Richland Parish. In 1990, Floy Ward McElroy donated her 681-acre property to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries with the requirement that she retain use of the property for cattle production the remainder of her life. She passed away in November 2000.

The primary stipulation of Mrs. McElroy's donation was the mandate that the wildlife management area honoring her name would be used for outdoor education and youth hunting activities.

Kaitlyn Bolton, a sophomore at Mangham High School, was excited when she learned her name had been selected for this season's lottery hunt on the McElroy management area, a hunt planned for the weekend of Dec. 11. The property features pastures where hardwood seedlings have been planted. The area also has scattered hardwood sloughs and backwater areas along the Boeuf River.

"My dad and I got on the stand they had selected for me that morning and saw a couple of does and a little 3-point buck," Kaitlyn said. "We went back at around 2:00 that afternoon and for the first couple of hours we didn't see anything."

SQUIRRELS CAUSE A RUCKUS

Squirrels had been making rustling noise in the woods as they moved about and about 4:15, Kaitlyn heard what she thought was another squirrel.

"I heard some noises like twigs breaking in the woods and I assumed I was hearing squirrels again," she said. "I looked over that way and saw something moving. I realized what I was looking at was a big set of antlers moving up and down. I whispered

to my dad, 'there's a buck!' He picked up his binoculars and told me to get my gun up and get ready."

Easing her gun out the window, the hunt was almost busted when a doe stepped out of the woods and stopped eight steps from where Kaitlyn and her dad were sitting.

"Daddy whispered 'don't move, don't blink, don't breathe' and that was so hard for me because I was so nervous," Kaitlyn said. "The doe hopped back into the woods and daddy told me to be looking for the buck to step out because he was probably interested in that doe."

The buck stepped out of the woods at 60 yards onto the food plot out from the stand. Kaitlyn got him in the scope on her Savage .308, hit the trigger and the buck ran some 25 yards before she watched him fall.

AN UNFORGETTABLE HUNT

The big bodied deer was aged at 6 ½ years, weighed 238 pounds and sported a rack containing 13 points, 11 of which were scorable. Inside spread was 16 5/8 inches with bases over 5 inches with a total of over 40 inches of mass. Main beams were 23 inches each. The rack was scored by official Buckmaster's scorer Cecil Reddick at 159 inches.

"The folks there with Wildlife and Fisheries told me that this was the biggest buck this area has produced," Kaitlyn said. "It was so exciting to have this happen to me with my daddy there to experience it with me." ■

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BEST BOW BUCK CROSSBOW HUNTER NAILS MONSTER BACKYARD BUCK

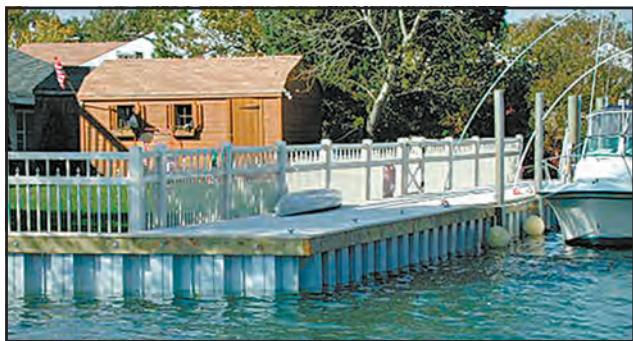
Nov. 14
Ross Wigginton
Concordia Parish
189 7/8



This has been a typical deer season where hunters downing trophy bucks have sometimes traveled across the state to hunting leases or tracts of public land in the thousands of acres. Many have been successful as well bringing down big bucks with rocking-chair headgear.

Ross Wigginton, of Ferriday, has done it entirely differently. The 25-year-old millright doesn't belong to hunting clubs nor does

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he travel to nearest public lands to deer hunt. He takes care of business on his own property near Ferriday in Concordia Parish.

His "own property" consists of his back yard containing less than one acre. Wigginton lives near the banks of the Tensas River with a tract of woods near the river and a levee separating his yard from the river.

"I like to take a doe for the freezer if possible so I put out corn in my yard," Wigginton said. "I also hung up a trail camera to keep up with any deer that might visit my corn pile."

On the morning of Nov. 14, Wigginton got up early, pulled up a chair on his back porch to see if something might show up. His camera had shown the images of a huge buck that had visited the corn a few times and always at night. In the back of his mind, he hoped he would have a chance at the buck but had his doubts in that the buck only showed up at night.

"At first, a doe stepped out and I could make her out even though it wasn't daylight yet," he said. "I watched her eat and then she walked off. I didn't shoot because it was not legal shooting time yet."

JUST IN TIME

While it was still dark, Wigginton could hear a deer walking in the woods over the levee and to his surprise, the big buck he had on camera accompanied by two smaller bucks, hopped over the levee and walked up to within 20 yards of where he was sitting. It was just starting to get light enough to shoot as he watched the buck turn and begin walking away. When it got to 40 yards, the buck turned broadside and Wigginton let a bolt fly from his Raven crossbow.

"When I shot, he kicked up real good so I knew I had made a good shot," he said. "I gave him a few minutes before walking over to where he was standing when I shot and could only find a couple of pin-sized drops of blood. I was starting to worry that I had made a bad shot and would never see the buck again."

Wigginton continued looking around the area and at about 70 yards, excitement welled up when he spotted antlers. The buck was down for good.

"The first thing I did was go wake up my wife, told her what I had done and we celebrated a bit," he said. "I dragged the buck to the levee and backed my truck up so I could slide him in. There was no way

I would have been able otherwise to load him up because of the size. He weighed 270 pounds."

NON-TYPICAL BRUTE

The buck sported a massive and gnarled rack containing 17 scorable points with an extra tine growing off the base, a tine that measured over 11 inches. Wigginton took the buck to Simmons Sporting Goods in Bastrop to be measured and entered into that store's big buck contest. Main beams were over 24 inches each, bases were 5 1/2 inches each and inside spread was 19 3/8 inches. The rack was measured at an astounding 189 7/8 inches, placing the buck at the top of the non-typical archery category.

"While I was sitting on the porch watching the buck and waiting for daylight," Wigginton said, "I'm just glad my wife didn't come to the door and tell me coffee was ready." ■

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THE BEST OF THE REST...

WILLIAMS RESISTS URGE TO FISH, BAGS BIG BUCK INSTEAD

While deer hunting on a parcel of property in Red River Parish, 58-year-old retired logger Kevin Williams of Winnfield watched a little 4-point buck come by where Williams sat 25 feet up a tree in a lock-on stand. The buck hung around awhile and then left.

"It was a pretty sunny day and I had an urge to get off my stand and go fishing instead," Williams said. "Something told me to stay in the stand awhile longer and I'm glad I did."

One reason Williams decided to continue his deer hunt instead of opting for his fishing rod was a photo he had gotten on his trail camera a few days before.

"I had an old trail camera that didn't work right so I ditched it and bought a new camera," he said. "The first picture I found on the new camera was of a really big buck with an impressive non-typical rack."

SMALLER BUCK ALERTS HUNTER

On the morning of Nov. 19, Williams left his home in Winnfield and drove to his camp in Red River Parish. He hung his stand and was settled in before daylight. Sitting in his stand, Williams was looking at a dense thicket near a creek. There was a little opening where he could see maybe 40 yards.

"After the little 4-point left the area, I watched another deer, a spike with one side broken off, come up and start eating the corn I had scattered out from the stand," Williams said. "The spike ate awhile and then suddenly stopped eating, looked back in the thicket as if he had heard or seen something. Then he went back to eating and

abruptly stopped eating again, raised his head and looked back in the thicket. I felt like something was about to happen.

"I was looking in the direction the spike had been looking and through the brush I saw a deer wading the creek and I could see horns."

NERVES TAKE HOLD

Williams had gotten earlier pictures of a 10-point buck hanging out in the area and felt like he was looking at the 10-point. Then the deer came out of the water and shook himself. Williams has a bracket he had made for his phone camera to do a video of the hunt, so he got the camera set up and turned it on.

"The little spike, which had walked toward where the big one was, returned and began eating corn again," he said. "I had an arrow nocked and was watching the big one when it turned and I was able to see the kickers on the back of the rack and I knew it was the big one."

"When I realized what I was looking at, I got really nervous; I wondered if the top of the tree where I was sitting might have been shaking," he laughed.

The buck took a step at 18 yards and Williams drew his bow. He was shooting a Bear Approach HC bow with a Blood Sport arrow and 100 grain Red River broadhead.

"I held the bow at full draw for what seemed like forever as the buck just stood there behind some brush," Williams said. "Then the little spike started walking toward me and I was afraid he might see me and the hunt would be over. When I noticed both bucks looking away, I let off on my bow."

Nov. 19
Kevin Williams
Red River Parish
185



The big buck turned as if to walk away but stepped into a narrow lane. Williams again drew his bow and released the arrow. The buck, hit in the spine, dropped on the spot. Getting down and walking to the deer, a second arrow finished him off.

NON-TYPICAL BEAST

The buck sported a non-typical rack of 18 points with 18 inches of sticker points. He had a 16 ½ inside spread and weighed 205 pounds and was aged at 5 ½ years old. Taking the buck to Simmons Sporting Goods to be entered in that store's big buck contest, the rack measured an even 185 inches, which put the buck in second place in the Non-typical local archery division in the contest.

"I'm sure glad I decided to stay in my stand that day and not get down and go fishing," Williams said. ■

LIKE CLOCKWORK, SIX-POINTER LEADS 13-POINT HAMMER TO DUGAS

Jy By Glynn Harris
Jacques Dugas, a Lafayette manager of parking lot security, has a dependable small 6-point buck to thank for accompanying a big 13-point velvet trophy buck to where the 37-year-old waited with his bow on Oct. 3. The hunt led to one of the earliest kills of the season and also one of the largest and most unique!

"All the trail cam photos I had of the big buck had this little funky-racked 6-point always showing up just ahead of the big one," Dugas said. "When the 6-point walked down the trail, I couldn't help but feel hopeful that the big one would follow. Fortunately, he did."

Dugas hunts on his family's farm in Avoyelles Parish and had knowledge of the buck as early as 2018.

"I actually saw him and got a photo of him with my phone camera one day in 2018, but didn't have a chance to take him," he said. "After season, I found his sheds and determined the buck would have scored in the 180 range then."

For some reason, the buck disappeared for the following two years and Dugas didn't get any photos of him in either 2019 or 2020. In the summer of 2021, he started showing up again on his camera.

"Once I saw the photo of him in early July last year, he started showing up occasionally," Dugas said. "From late September on, I was finding photos of him pretty regular. In planning to hunt him, I had two stands set up, one favoring a north wind and the other for a south wind so I could be in the best position should he show up."

A LOT OF ACTION

On the morning of Oct. 3, Dugas drove over from Lafayette to the farm and since there was a light north wind, he chose to sit on the north-favoring stand, which was a custom made 25 foot ladder stand.

"I got in the stand around 3:30 that afternoon and I hadn't been there long before a doe and two yearlings passed by on the trail I was watching," he said. "Fortunately, they didn't smell me and they continued on to a field of soybeans about to be harvested.

Oct. 3
Jacques Dugas
Avoyelles Parish
182 6/8



The trail where I sat was between a bedding area behind me across a slough and led to the soybean field out front."

Sometime later as the afternoon wore on, Dugas heard a deer coming down the trail and he got somewhat excited because it was the little 6-point with the funky rack.

"Once the 6-point passed by, I got my bow ready," he said. "I shoot a Bowtech Prodigy bow, Easton Full Metal Jacket arrow tipped with a Muzzy 100 grain broadhead. About twenty minutes after the 6-point passed, the big one showed up. In a matter of about a minute, he was standing at about 15 yards, I drew on him and released my arrow. He took off and I heard him hit the water in the slough behind me. He ran a ways and then it got quiet. I knew he had either come out on the other side of the water or fallen in the water."

WORTH THE WAIT

Waiting about 40 minutes as it was getting near dark, Dugas climbed down, found his arrow that showed a pass-through and followed the blood trail to the water. He walked in the direction he had heard the buck in the water and found him piled up some 50 yards from where he was shot.

The buck was a genuine trophy, his velvet rack being a main-frame 8-point with split brow tines and stickers giving him a total of 13 points. Inside spread was an impressive 21 inches with six inch bases. He was determined to be about 5 1/2 years old.

Dugas took the buck to Simmons Sporting Goods in Bastrop to be entered in that store's big buck contest where the rack was measured at 182 6/8 inches, enough to put Dugas' buck in first place in the store's archery division. ■

THE BEST OF THE REST...

LASALLE PARISH HUNTER TAKES DOWN MONSTER BUCK

T By Kinny Haddox
erry 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



Nov. 15
Terry Thorn
LaSalle Parish
182 7/8

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." ■

BIG WEBSTER BUCK GIVES HUNTER WAKE-UP CALL

M By Glynn Harris
any hunters, perhaps most, hunt on leases or public areas that are thousands of acres in size. Chad Allison, 45, a welder who lives in Shongaloo, also hunts on an area that he partially owns along with more acreage he has leased that totals a whopping 1,200 acres.

But when it comes down to his favorite places to hunt big bucks, it's on small tracts.

"One thing I have learned during my years of chasing big bucks is that you have the best chance in waylaying mature bucks when you get to hunt them on small tracts in places like just over the back fence," Allison said. "This is true especially when deer are pressured. They like to sneak in and lay up in thickets right behind someone's home."

Such was the case when Allison secured permission from a Webster Parish home owner who allowed him to hunt behind her home.

SIX ACRES

Size of the land she owns? Six acres.

"This lady gave me permission to hunt on her six acres and I felt like it would be a good spot to come to terms with a good buck," he said. "I put out cameras and feed last season and got photos of a really nice 8-point on the property. I felt he needed another year so I decided not to hunt him."

This season, the buck had blown up to be a genuine trophy. He had shown up only one time in September and Allison got no other pictures of him until Nov. 8, the day he had an interesting and frustrating encounter with the buck.

"My phone dinged around 3 a.m. the morning of Nov. 8 with his picture and I decided I'd hunt him that morning," he said.

Allison had used his bulldozer to clear a lane adjacent to an old fence on the property. Next to the fence, a cedar tree had fallen and instead of trying to put his lock-on stand up, he felt his best bet would be to avoid spooking the buck by climbing a tree so he opted for crawling into the fallen cedar to give himself a better chance.

"To get right to the point, I let the buck crap on me that morning," Allison said. "I was in the cedar when my phone dinged and the buck was down the lane I had made and then he was gone. Just as it started to get daylight, I saw something move, I looked up and there 10 feet from me stood the buck. He saw me move



when I looked up, spooked and ran and I figured I had really messed up."

THE BUCK STOPPED HERE

It wasn't over. That afternoon, Allison decided to head for his fallen cedar hideout again, getting there around 4 p.m. At 4:20, a doe walked out onto the cleared lane at 100 yards and right behind her stepped the buck. Putting the crosshairs of his Browning X-bolt .270 short mag on the buck's shoulder, Allison hit the trigger and the buck dropped on the spot.

Allison was not interested in statistics on the deer he had taken. He has 21 mounts hanging on his wall of deer, the majority of which were taken around Shongaloo.

My son's girlfriend had shot a nice buck with her bow and she wanted to take it to Simmons Sporting Goods in Bastrop to enter it in the store's big buck contest," he said. "They offered to take my deer's rack with them to see what it would score, so I agreed. My son asked me if I wanted him to enter my buck in the contest and I told him it was okay with me. I just wanted to know what it would score."

The scorer at Simmons measured 14 points on the buck with an inside spread of 17 inches. The mass was impressive, measuring 9 inches between the G2 and G3. The buck weighed around 175 pounds and had only 2 5/8 inches of irregular points and was scored at 174 2/8 inches and currently sets in fourth place in the men's division at Simmons. ■

BIG BUCK GALLERY ➤

DEER OF THE YEAR **BIG BUCK GALLERY**



Oct. 2
Hunter Brown
Bienville Parish
140



Oct. 2
Timmy Dillard
Webster Parish
158%



Oct. 9
Kody Hickman
Peason Ridge WMA
153%



Oct. 9
Dr. Michael O'Neal
Ashbrook Island
149%



Oct. 12
Dedria Brashear
Madison Parish
145%



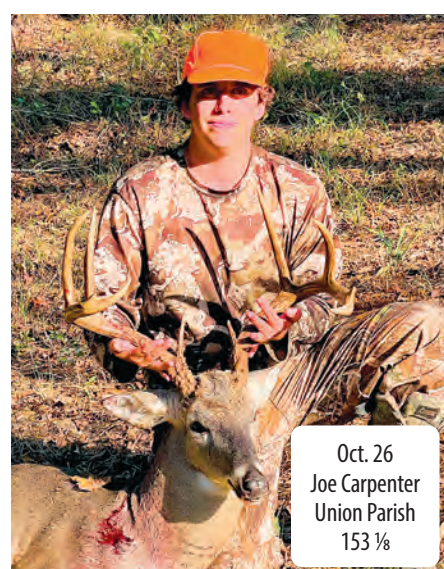
Oct. 17
Joshua Saucier
Allen Parish
149%



Oct. 17
Tyler Bowen
Catahoula Parish
161%



Oct. 20
Carson Bolyer
Webster Parish
160



Oct. 26
Joe Carpenter
Union Parish
153%

Oct. 30
Henry Barham
Morehouse Parish
151 3/4



Oct. 31
Mason Boudreaux
Allen Parish
144



Oct. 29
Stuart Baum
Caldwell Parish
147 3/4



Nov. 2
Doug Jones
Beauregard Parish
156 %



Nov. 3
Richard Hennigan
Concordia Parish
170 %

Oct. 31
Kevin Smith
Beauregard Parish
148



Nov. 5
Zach Jones
Ashbrook Island
160 3/4



Nov. 5
Zachary Gunter
Union Parish
152 3/4



Nov. 9
Chad Landreneau
Vernon Parish
145



DEER OF THE YEAR **BIG BUCK GALLERY**



Nov. 11
Randy Wall
Union Parish
169%



Nov. 12
Cody Brown
Madison Parish
151%



Nov. 12
Cade Clemons
East Carroll Parish
167%



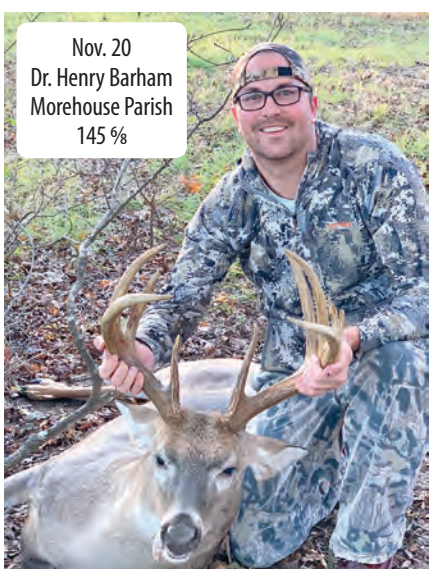
Nov. 13
Misty Wood
Lincoln Parish
142%



Nov. 14
Jason Campbell
Webster Parish
155%



Nov. 20
Matt Downs
Bossier Parish
147%



Nov. 20
Dr. Henry Barham
Morehouse Parish
145%



Nov. 20
Dr. Jack Cox
Tensas Parish
167%



Nov. 21
Tyler Roberts
DeSoto Parish
140



Nov. 23
Mark Johnson
Lincoln Parish
142%



Nov. 23
Lane Cox
Tensas Parish
157%



Dec. 2
Rilyn Taylor
Franklin Parish
152%



Dec. 4
Kendra Menard
Winn Parish
161%



Dec. 8
Wayne Magee
Bienville Parish
151%



Dec. 11
John Larkin
Turner
Morehouse
Parish
155%



Dec. 24
Haley Campbell
Catahoula Parish
152

To get all the details on every single deer Louisiana Sportsman has covered this season — and in past years — head to www.louisianasportsman.com/bigbucks.

GRUNTS & GOBBLES ➤

Mary Anderson killed this heavy horned buck with one shot from her 35 Remington in St. Mary Parish.



AFTER THE STORMS

REPLACING OUR MAST-BEARING TREES FOR WILDLIFE IS A MUST

Hurricanes in 2020 and 2021 greatly impacted the Bayou State. So what can a landowner do to improve the landscape for the wildlife?

The past two years have been tough for Louisiana. Covid has taken a toll on the human population. Hurricanes have taken a toll on the habitat and the forests. Hurricanes Laura and Delta swept into southwest Louisiana and left an immeasurable path of timber destruction as it moved northward from one end of the state to the other in 2020. Then in 2021, Hurricane Ida moved northward from the Gulf into southeast Louisiana damaging more than 167,000 acres of trees.

The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry along with the USDA Forest Service estimated that 4.9 million tons of pine and 6.5 million tons of hardwood were destroyed by the storm, resources with a market value of 181.2 million dollars.

While it is always desirable for landowners to salvage the downed timber, this is not always possible. During a normal timber operation, trees are methodically harvested. Cutting machines cut the trees

in rows and they are dragged to a logging site where they are loaded on trucks and hauled to the mills. Hurricanes drop trees in haphazard fashion across the landscape and logging downed timber is difficult and challenging.

SLOW PROCESS

A cutting machine that is able to cut a tree laying on the ground is needed and most logging companies do not have this expensive equipment. A salvage process is slow due to this challenging work and it is impossible to harvest the amount of timber secured during a normal timber operation. And then there is the problem with winter weather. Heavy rainfall will quickly shut an operation down.

Small landowners who experienced timber loss on their property are probably out of luck concerning salvaging downed trees for the timber market. There would be opportunity to cut the downed trees for firewood or for lumber for special projects and needs. The problem with cutting trees up for firewood is that everyone has downed trees and anyone who wants firewood can get all he

wants. On our small property we had two large oaks and a pecan fall in food plot areas; it took several weeks to cut and clear off the plots and, to date, only two and one-half truck loads of wood have been hauled off. Most of it, even though it is cut and ready to split, will probably be left to rot and decay.

Recovery from such a catastrophic event will be slow.

The Pearl River Wildlife Management Area was hit hard by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and for years it was extremely difficult for hunters to get into the woods and hunt. Hurricane Ida did not do the damage to the area that Katrina did, but the area did suffer loss of very desirable wildlife trees. Some of the large cow oaks that had survived Katrina did not fare well during Ida and are now on the ground in the area where I hunt. Cow



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

oaks are a very desirable acorn tree for deer. With Katrina, we found that trees that did not fall suffered heavy upper limb damage and within a few years had died. The same will happen after the latest storms.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

From a wildlife perspective, what should a landowner do? This first thing is to take inventory of the damage. How many acres were impacted and what species were involved. Heavy rainfall occurred in the state in the spring and summer in Louisiana and because of this, the ground was saturated with water and with the strong hurricane winds, many oaks and other hardwoods fell to the ground.

With regard to wildlife, replacement of mast bearing trees is a must. So, with this in mind, consideration should be given to determine if planting with some new oak species would be beneficial. If your property has mainly red oak species, now would be the time to consider white oak species such as white oaks or cow oaks. Chestnuts and chinquapins are also desirable mast species to have on the landscape. No doubt there is regeneration coming up from the mature trees that were dropping acorns and this would be documented by the inventory. If mature trees were heavily damaged and within a few years might die and fall, now would be the time to cut and put them on the ground so they do not fall and damage the regeneration. If the upper limb damage of a mast producing oak is greater than fifty percent, the tree probably will not be able to produce enough food to stay alive and could die within two to three years.

On the positive side downed trees do provide cover for wildlife. From a deer standpoint browse is a must for desirable growth and development. The damage from Ida was severe, but somewhat scattered across the landscape. If a one to three acre site was heavily damaged it might be beneficial to just leave it alone and let it provide food and cover. If your property is lacking in wildlife plantings, now would be the time to finish clearing and cleaning it up and put it into wildlife plantings.

Recovery from a storm is a slow process. Active involve-



This is a large cow oak blown down by Hurricane Ida on Pearl River WMA. Trees like this are vital to wildlife habitat, but have been decimated by recent storms.

ment from the landowner is a must to keep the property productive for wildlife. I will not live to see the benefit from the tree planting and restoration work that I am doing, but there are four grandsons living across the field from us who will! ■

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HOW SPORTSMEN COOK

Jason Thornton

GRITS AND VENISON GRILLADES

THIS ORIGINAL NEW
ORLEANS RECIPE IS GREAT
AND STICKS TO YOUR RIBS!



TIP!

The grits can be prepared with cheese, roasted garlic, or corn for variety. In a pinch instant grits can be used.

This is one of those meals that sticks to your ribs, is easy to master, and gives you another way to use some of your prime cuts, including backstrap from that deer you harvested this past season. Grillades (*gree-yahds*) originated in New Orleans and are typically served for either lunch or brunch. Traditionally, they are medallions of meats, but can be served in cubes.

Pork is also traditionally used for this dish and served over grits but it wouldn't hurt my feelings if you served it over rice or even mashed potatoes. The same combinations work for venison. A piece of French bread should be handy to sop up the gravy. Bon Appetite!

PREPARATION: Serves 4

1. Cut the backstrap into one inch pieces.
2. Cover the meat with white vinegar, and place into the refrigerator preferably overnight. This will help tenderize the meat.
3. Drain the meat and pat dry with paper towels to remove as much moisture as possible. Season to taste.
4. Heat oil in a dutch oven over medium heat.
5. Brown venison cubes on all sides in oil.
6. Remove backstrap with slotted spoon and reserve in a bowl.
7. Add onion, celery, and bell pepper and sauté until soft.
8. Add the backstrap, stock, Rotel, and bay leaves.
9. Bring to a gentle simmer.
10. Cover and cook for 40 minutes stirring occasionally.
11. Stir in cornstarch slurry to thicken.
12. Remove and discard bay leaves.
13. Season to taste.
14. Serve over grits.
15. Garnish with parsley.



Jason Thornton was born and raised hunting, fishing, trapping, foraging and gardening in south Louisiana. His personal belief is that all of nature's ingredients are better if you have to work for them. He can be found at EdibleOutdoorsCook.com.

INGREDIENTS:

Grits prepared according to the package

2 lbs of prime venison cut into cubes (I prefer backstrap)

Vinegar (enough to cover your meat)

2 tbs vegetable oil

1 large onion (chopped)

1 bell pepper (chopped)

1 stalk celery (chopped)

3 cups game stock (beef stock can be substituted)

1 (10 ounce) can of Rotel tomatoes

2 bay leaves

1 tbs of cornstarch mixed into ½ cup warm water

Your preferred seasoning and parsley for garnish

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

Dutch Oven





DEER HUNTING PRIZE

BACKSTRAP IS THE FILET MIGNON OF VENISON

S By Kinny Haddox
 Some hunters treasure trophy bucks with big racks. Some hunters just like spending time outdoors and enjoying nature. But if there's one thing almost every hunter can agree on, there's nothing more rewarding than enjoying a good meal of venison fixed up your favorite way. There's fried deer steak, deer chili, deer stew, grilled deer kabobs and a whole range of ways to fix it.

But the prize of the harvest is the select cut off a deer — the backstrap. Deer season is over, but the benefits of a successful season go on. It's time to consume your harvest and claim your prize.

Backstraps run along the length of the spine. The backstrap is one of the most tender cuts because the muscle itself isn't really used. The more a muscle is used, the

tougher it becomes. For the record, backstrap refers to a length of loin on the back of a deer like the ribeye in beef. Tenderloins, on the other hand, are the two strips of very tender meat under the loin. Those are like the filet mignon in beef.

In Louisiana, we use lots of ways to season and cook venison, but here's a way to grill venison backstrap like a "Hard Core Carnivore" that is appealing and has trophy taste.

MEAT PREP

Place the backstrap on a piece of foil and sprinkle all sides with meat tenderizer, Montreal Steak seasoning and then a good coating of Les Pryles Hard Core Carnivore Black seasoning. This seasoning contains sea salt, spices, sugar, dehydrated garlic and activated charcoal. Pat it in with

your hand. Place the meat in a Ziploc or vacuum sealing bag and pour one-half cup of Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce mixed with 10 drops of Tabasco sauce over it, seal the bag and place in the refrigerator overnight. When you are ready to cook it, let it sit out about 30 minutes before grilling, remove meat and discard the marinade.

GETTING FIRED UP

Heat your grill up to 400 - 450 degrees. Before you place it on the grill, drizzle the entire straps with olive oil and then another good coating of the Hard Core Carnivore until the meat is black. A big backstrap should cook about 5-7 minutes on each side. Because none are the same size, use a meat thermometer and cook to medium rare, about 120-125 degrees

internal temperature.

When finished, let the meat sit for 8-10 minutes before slicing so the meat will retain its juices.

TIME TO EAT

Serve with french bread or rolls and a green salad. You can add sides like grilled asparagus or mashed potatoes for a meal if you like, but the more simple, the better. Slices can even be served alone on a tray as an hors d'oeuvre. ■



A hot grill that allows the flame to kiss the backstrap is best for sealing in the savory flavor of the meat. **OPPOSITE PAGE:**

When your backstrap is done and rested for about 10 minutes to keep the juices in the meat, slicing up the strap leaves you with morsels like this.



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HUNTER OF THE MONTH

Chase Duncan

Chase Duncan of Catahoula Parish killed this big buck on Nov. 26 at his camp in Natchitoches Parish. The deer scored 144 7/8 and his G2 was 14 1/2 inches long.

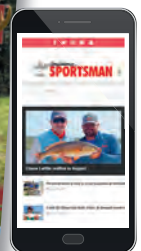
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ANGLER OF THE MONTH

Ambrose Barwick

Ambrose Barwick, 12, caught his biggest largemouth on Thanksgiving Day using a rigged artificial crawfish. The personal best bass was caught on the Tchefuncte River near Highway 21 in Covington.



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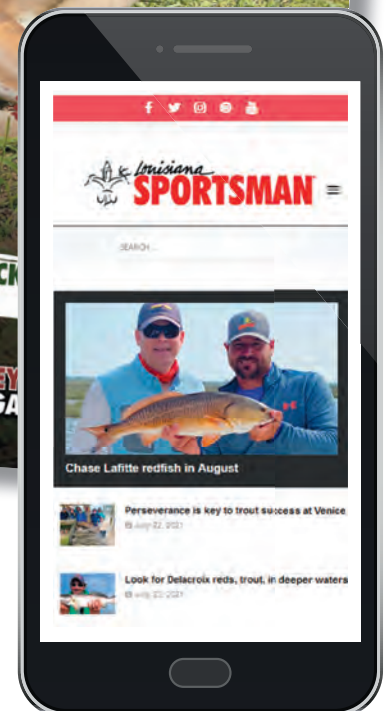
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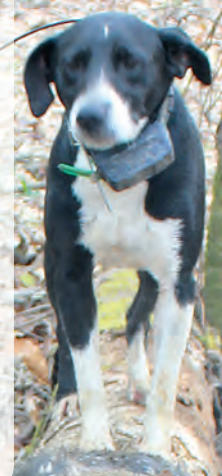
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Many hunters got their start chasing squirrels through Louisiana's oak bottoms. The thought of squirrel hunting takes hunters back to their youth, sitting on the ground, scrutinizing every leaf movement and hoping it would materialize into the flicker of a bushytail. That's an early "thrill of the hunt" moment.

That initial hunting exposure was often the springboard into what now-seasoned hunters would consider a more complex hunting challenge, like the pursuit of whitetail deer or waterfowl. But if you are removed from your last squirrel hunt, you might be surprised to learn that chasing bushytails ain't just for the kids. Running dogs for squirrels is work, but it's still one heck of an exciting hunt.

BREEDS AND TRAINING >



**IT'S A DOGGONE GOOD TIME
IF YOU'RE WILLING TO PUT
IN THE WORK. ■** By John Manion

RUNNING OF THE SQUIRRELS

BREEDS AND TRAINING

Michael Park has spent his formative and adult years hunting the upper and lower oak bottoms of the Pearl River around Slidell. In addition to his hunting hobby, Park spent his youth on his grandfather's farm in upper St. Tammany.

"My grandfather had over 100 head of cattle for about 20 years when I was growing up," he said.

Working with ranching dogs eventually developed into training and competing with Border Collies. Park's efforts earned him a spot in the National Cattle Dog Finals in 2015 and again in 2016. As competition for time limited his hobbies, it eventually pushed Park into training and running squirrel dogs. He started with his first dog, "Satchmo," a registered Treeing Feist.

"When I bought the dog, the breeder said he named him because of his 'million-dollar mouth' and the breeder was right on," Park said laughing.

Satchmo was a "started dog," which generally means a younger dog who's completed fundamental training like obedience and retrieving, but is still working predominately off its natural drive to hunt rather than following specific hunting commands. Although Satchmo had barking down to a science, Park had to work on stretching Satchmo out. He worked to push the dog to hunt at 150, 200 or more yards out away, instead of just hunting the immediate area within sight.

Branch is Park's other dog. Branch is an original Mountain Cur bought as a puppy in 2020. Michael started Branch off with one toy — a squirrel tail. He would let the dog smell it and play with it, then hang the tail just off the ground from a nearby tree. He'd send Branch out to try and find the tail. Gradually, he would raise the height of the tail off the ground and increase the starting distance between Branch and the squirrel tail.

"You don't want to teach them to keep their nose down," he said. "They can start on the ground but need to learn to get that nose up in the air to catch the wind of a squirrel."

Seasoned dogs typically catch a scent on the ground. But then work back and forth with their nose in the air to figure out which tree the squirrel went up. The dog's initial bark is a chirp like "locator" bark, indicating just a hint of scent. Once the dog settles on a tree, they let loose (and Satchmo was a pro at that).

"Satchmo's been pack hunted his whole life and the minute he hears another dog tree or a gun go off, he comes running to pot-lick," Park said. "Ideally, it's better to train a dog by himself and when I'm training, I hunt Branch without Satchmo."

The Cur breeds ("Feist" is the German word for "Cur") are a multiple purpose dog breed. Both the Cur and the Feist have some amount of hound in their lineage, but the breeds work and hunt in slightly different ways. Among squirrel dogs it's the classic Ford or Chevy debate; it comes down to preference. That's why Michael chooses to hunt with both dogs at a time.

A "father-son" moment for Michael Park and Satchmo as they show off the teamwork that results in a job well done. **INSET:** Changes in the tone of the dog's barking usually signals they've treed a squirrel. Michael checks his handheld GPS tracker to confirm the dogs aren't still barking on the run.





then Branch followed.

“Oh, they on’m,” Phil Maguire, one of Park’s regulars confirms. “That much barking. They on’m.”

And with that, the group picks up the pace to get to the treed squirrel.

Squirrels aren’t different than most game, with regular morning and afternoon movement. Park explained that action tends to be more consistent throughout the morning. As the sun is rising, the squirrel’s movement seems to be spread out until things start shutting down, usually around 9:30 or 10:00. Afternoon hunts, on the other hand, can start slow and then get exciting in that last hour of daylight; and when the sun goes down the action heats up.

FINDING THEM IS HALF THE BATTLE ➤

THE HUNT

In contrast to solitary still hunting, which generally means sitting quietly and patiently waiting, dog hunting is the complete opposite experience. Dog hunts are fast paced and put miles on your feet. It’s a loud hunt because hunters are continually chasing the echoing barks in the swamp. It’s a group hunt and generally the more, the better. It takes several to surround a big oak and sometimes four to five hunters still aren’t enough to bag a fleeing squirrel. Park typically hunts with three regular buddies who also share a camp with boat access only on the upper Pearl River system.

As soon as the group unloads, the dogs start immediately with noses to the ground and begin pushing out in advance of the hunters. The entire morning the dogs are doing “out and backs” — running out of sight of the hunters and then working their way back to rendezvous as hunters walk toward the sounds of barking. “I’d say we usually do about 10 to 13 miles for the dogs and seven to eight for us,” Michael said while checking the GPS receiver. “They’re just under 100 yards now.”

Satchmo began to sound off,



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FINDING THEM IS HALF THE BATTLE

It is truly remarkable how the dogs can work out which tree the squirrel is actually in. Both dogs circle, they bob and weave, they run out and come back. All the while they are letting out little barks as they catch whiffles of our quarry. There are no real discernible pattern to the dog's movement, but the squirrels are quick to recognize the risk and immediately hunker down and hide.

"Watch," Park said, nodding at Satchmo. "He's winding something. He starts hoping like an antelope, trying to get his nose up in the air. He's trying to wind."

Park then does some confidence coaching, "Where's it at? Where's he at? Get'm! Get'm boy!" Satchmo locks onto a tree, again followed by Branch.

And for the record, the dogs are better than the hunters.

"Man, I'd say if you see one out of five treed squirrels, you're doing good," Park said.

When you're on a treed squirrel, nine out of 10 times the squirrel has to move for the hunters to find it. These little guys are ghosts in the canopy. Shaking branches, through sticks, even walking closely around the tree trunk can elicit a movement needed to find a hiding squirrel. And once you see them it really comes down to the shooting. They can instantly duck into a hole or nest.

THE MATRIX

After walking what felt like miles between treed squirrels, suddenly both dogs were barking on separate trees — multiple squirrels. The group quickly bagged the first treed squirrel and moved over to the next. Park began to shake the tangled rat's nest of vines dangling from the canopy when at the very tip top of this ancient oak, a squirrel's silhouette appears. Just before the first shot rings out, this squirrel full-on Superman dives out of the top of the tree. In brief amazement, everyone just watches. This grey squirrel does a full extension outstretch trying to make an adjacent tree; nothing between him and the ground but 200 feet of air.

After the squirrel barely makes the next tree, it pulls a "Triple Lindy" Rodney Dangerfield would have been proud of. He literally springs off multiple branches, does one handed Tarzan swings off limbs, all while changing directions like a Plinko game until he ultimately makes it to the ground, seemingly unscathed. Keep in mind, the squirrel's doing all this while five hunters are taking multiple shots at him from every direction.

When the squirrel hits the forest floor, he takes off like he's been shot out of a cannon. Dogs tear off, hunters follow suit. Neo (from Hollywood's *The Matrix*) has nothing on this squirrel! We can't keep up and only catch a fleeting glimpse of him back up in the treetops jumping across a small bayou too deep for hunters to cross. Count this one a win for the squirrel.

Running with the dogs is not the squirrel hunting of your youth. If you have access to squirrel dogs, get in shape and get to hunting these tree top acrobats; you won't be disappointed. ■



The squirrels stay locked down once the dogs locate their tree, but moving and shaking branches usually pushes them out of hiding.

Phil Maguire is quick to recognize the dogs have one treed and holds up one of many bushytails from the morning.



PEARL RIVER: EASY ACCESS; GREAT HUNTING

The 35,619 acre Pearl River Wildlife Management Area in St. Tammany Parish is a great place to squirrel hunt. Much of it is hard to reach, but not all of it.

The tract's Old Highway 11 road located on the North end of the management area northeast of Slidell allows for easy access into the Pearl's thousands of acres of hardwood bottoms. And it's open to the public.

It is important to familiar with all rules and regulations of the Pearl WMA, so be sure to review the LDWF's annual hunting pamphlet. On the WMA, squirrel dogs are only allowed toward the squirrel season. Also, if you are using squirrel dogs, hunters' orange or other blaze color is required. It's a great time to hunt because there is a liberal bag limit. So go with several hunters and you'll fill up a black pot quickly! ■



John Manion is an LSU graduate and has been writing about the Louisiana outdoors since 2009. He can be reached at jemanion4@gmail.com.

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Few Gulf Coast anglers intentionally leave the dock hoping to stack a mess of flounder on ice, but nobody objects when they land a bonus “flattie” or two. Anglers who target flounder usually fish with live shrimp, minnows and other natural baits. However, artificial temptations can catch flounder and the finicky fish can’t strip them off the hooks as easily.

Since flounder obviously must spend most of their time on the bottom looking skyward, sinking lures traditionally make the best presentations. Many salt-water anglers fish jigheads sweetened with soft-plastic trailers.

“For flounder, some people like smoky curled-tail grubs, but I like brightly colored plastics,” recommended Mike Gallo of Angling Adventures of Louisiana, (985-781-7811, www.AAofLA.com) of Slidell, La. “I throw white, pearl or chartreuse grubs. I just drag it along the bottom. Flounder are very much scent oriented, so sometimes we tip jigs with a piece of shrimp. Gulp! baits and other scented lures also work very well.”

When specifically targeting flounder, use the least amount of weight possible, just enough to get the offering to the bottom. During a strong tide, upsize the weight, but not too big. Ambush predators, flounder commonly face into the flow to watch for prey drifting or tumbling naturally along the bottom, like an injured shrimp or baitfish caught in the tide.

LOOK FOR MOVING WATER >

FLAT OUT FOR FLOUNDER

FISHING AN ARRAY OF
ARTIFICIAL LURES WORKS
TO FOOL THE BIG ONES.

LOOK FOR MOVING WATER

“I definitely look for moving water,” said Tom Adams with Fishing Tom Guide Service (318-675-9114, www.fishingtom.net) in Hackberry, La. “Normally, I use a 1/8-ounce jighead, but I go to a ¼-ounce if necessary. I don’t want anything too heavy. I throw a bait upstream so it bounces along the bottom with the current. That’s when flounder pop it. I like a 3-inch Berkley Gulp! Swimming Mullet. My favorite flounder colors are pink or chartreuse.”

During a falling tide, small marshy ditches draining ponds pull bait out to deeper water. When fishing a falling tide, toss a soft-plastic shrimp imitation or similar temptation as far upstream as possible. Hold the rod tip high to let the bait barely bounce over the bottom. As necessary, gently lift the rod tip to keep the bait off the bottom and in the flow. Use the reel only to take up slack.

“I’ve caught flounder on a plethora of lures,” said Kyle Johnson with Coastal Waters Outfitters (228-669-3553, www.fishcoastalwaters.com) in Biloxi, Miss. “The great thing about artificial lures, flounder don’t play with it like live bait. When they want

it, they hit it and swallow it.”

“My favorite flounder lure is a Down South Lures soft-plastic shad on a 1/8- or ¼-ounce jighead,” Johnson revealed. “I like a jighead with a short-shanked hook in 2/0 or 1/0. The shorter shank gives a soft-plastic bait more action because the body can wiggle and move around more. A person can also get a better hook set with a shorter shank. I also like a 3.5-inch Egret Baits Mambo Mullet swimbait in Cajun Pepper color with some red and gold flakes. It has a ¼-ounce internal weight. With the swimbait, I let it touch bottom occasionally, but try to keep it swimming just off the bottom. Flounder come off the bottom to smack it.”

THEY SMASH BASS BAITS

Besides jigheads and swimbaits, flounder smash many other baits. Any bass angler who regularly fishes brackish marshes and river deltas probably caught flounder on practically every bait type in the tackle inventory.

“While targeting bass on the Sabine River system around Sabine Lake, we absolutely catch flounder on worms, jigs and many different kinds of baits,” Adams said. “Flounder are a lot

Most people catch flounder on live minnows or shrimp, but flounder might strike a number of artificial baits, such as this jighead tipped with a soft-plastic trailer. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** An angler shows off a flounder he caught with a soft-plastic crab imitation. Flounder hit a variety of artificial baits.

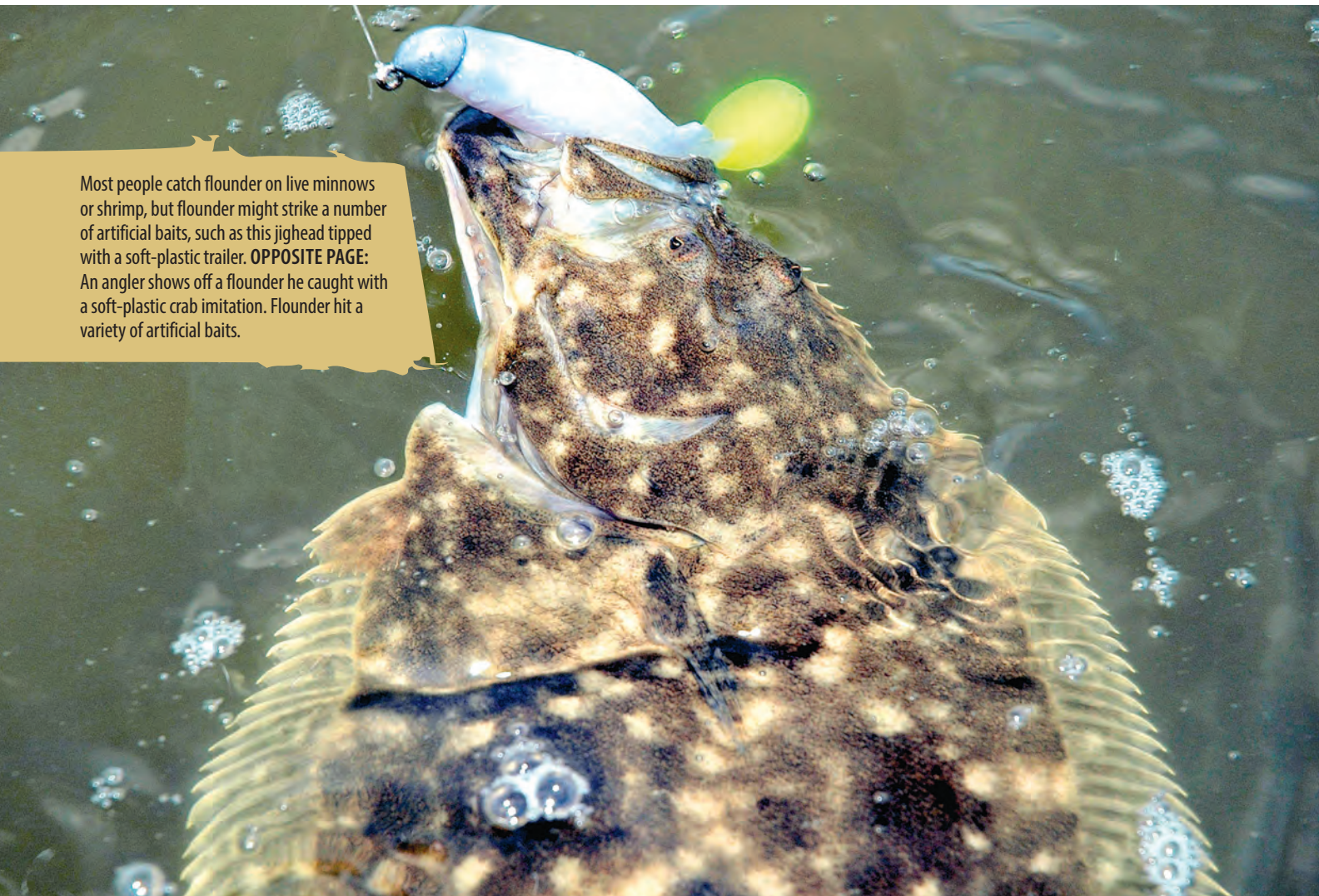


Photo by John N. Felsher



more aggressive predators than most people think. I've had flounder hit lures so hard it almost ripped the rod out of my hands. Once, I saw fish busting baitfish and thought it was redfish. I threw a topwater out and caught two flounder."

Favorite bass busters turned flounder finders, Texas-rigged worms, weedless jigs and similar attractants can put fish in the boat. A weedless bass jig tipped with soft-plastic craw imitates a crawfish or crab. Worms and weedless jigs can slip into thick cover where flounder often lurk. For fishing weedy shorelines, jetties, bridge pilings or similar places, flip weedless jigs as close to cover as possible and fish them vertically. The sudden invasion of its lair might trigger a reaction strike even from a flounder not feeding aggressively. If the bait hits bottom with no bite, jig it up and down a couple times. Then, drop it into another likely hiding spot.

Another bass technique, a wacky worm with a hook inserted into the middle rather than at the head slowly sinks like a dying shad or shrimp. Drop a wacky worm next to weeds or other cover and let it sink without additional action. A flounder sees a tantalizing silhouette slowly descending to its hiding spot with the tips quivering seductively. That prompts a predatory instinct. If nothing hits, drop it into another nearby pocket. This way, anglers can probe all along a shoreline, reef edge, jetty, bulkhead or other places that might hold flounder. Watch how the line moves for subtle bites.

TYPICAL BITE IS SOFT ➤

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TYPICAL BITE IS SOFT

“A typical flounder bite is a very soft, sensitive bite, just a nudge” Adams said. “Someone must have a feel for it.”

Flounder frequently slurp soft plastics, but these toothy predators can attack prey more aggressively. Anything that might interest a speckled trout or redfish could entice a flounder. Many anglers throw spinnerbaits or shallow-diving crankbaits for redfish. These baits imitate shad or other baitfish and might tempt larger flounder looking for a bigger meal.

Toss a spinnerbait to a shoreline, jetty or other cover. Let it sink to the bottom. Barely turn the reel handle to keep the blade flickering just off the bottom. Anglers can also fish wobbling gold or silver spoons the same way. With either bait, anglers

might add a sliver of shrimp or cut bait for flavor and scent.

“I catch a bunch of flounder by slow-rolling spinnerbaits,” said Sonny Schindler with Shore Thing Fishing Charters (228-342-2206, www.shorethingcharters.com) in Bay St. Louis, Miss. “I’ll just dig it across the bottom. When flounder want a spinnerbait, they crush it.”

Use smaller crankbaits that generate good wobbling action and resemble pogies, mullets, croakers or other salty morsels. Run crankbaits parallel to shorelines, jetties or other structures. When fishing flats, use lures with bills that make the bait dive slightly deeper than the water. As the bill hits bottom, it digs up a silt trail. This commotion could attract fish.

Any brackish to salty system along the Gulf Coast should hold flounder. With low profiles and high tolerance for fresh water, flounder even enter coastal rivers. The marshes between Sabine and Calcasieu lakes near Lake Charles offer some of the best waters to catch big flatties in Louisiana.

GOING DEEP

“Flounder use some deep bayous off the Calcasieu Ship Channel when running to or from the marsh,” Adams said. “Some deep bayous at the south end of Calcasieu Lake, Kelso Bayou and the Salt Ditch areas around Black Lake are good places to look for flounder.”

People can also find flounder in the Terrebonne-Barataria



Photo by John N. Felsher



Photo by John N. Felsher

These flounder hit plastic worms in the marshes near Venice, La. In coastal waters, flounder often hit various lures intended for bass. INSET: Flounder, like this one caught by Jeff Bruhl in the marshes of the Pearl River delta near Slidell, La., often bite soft plastic baits, particularly Texas-rigged worms, intended for largemouth bass

Estuary, particularly around the Grand Isle area. Marshes, bayous and passes associated with eastern Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Borgne out to the Gulf of Mexico and south to the mouth of the Mississippi River offer unlimited excellent places to catch flounder.

Mississippi anglers catch flounder in the Pearl and Pascagoula River deltas, around the barrier islands and in the marshes surrounding Back Bay or Biloxi Bay. The Old Fort Bayou area near Ocean Springs can produce good flounder action. Many people fish the Bayou Caddy area and the marshes bordering Mississippi Sound between Waveland and Pearl River.

“Back Bay is a good place to catch flounder,” Johnson said. “We often go out to the Chandeleur Islands. Running a 28-foot boat with twin 200-horsepower engines, it takes less than an hour to reach the islands from Biloxi. In late winter or spring, I fish from the main island to the north.”

Situated in Louisiana waters, but accessible by boat from Mississippi, the Chandeleur Islands run in a giant crescent for about 50 miles off the southeastern Louisiana coast. The low, sandy uninhabited chain of barrier islands create excellent habitat for flounder and other species.

“We’ve caught some big flounder in the Chandeleurs while wade fishing,” Johnson recalled. “I am very conservation-minded. I say just take what you need and release the rest. If we really get into flounder, each person can take a good one home and we release the rest. We don’t want to overdo it, especially considering the population has taken a real dip in recent years.”

For the past decade or so, flounder populations plunged across the Gulf Coast due to various reasons, but they seem to be making a comeback. Larger females generally remain in inshore waters while smaller males prefer deeper waters offshore. Therefore, the overwhelming preponderance of fishing pressure greatly impacts reproducing females more than males.

Keep some flounder to make a few delicious meals, but release the rest, especially the biggest ones. ■

SPORTSMAN SHOWCASE >



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.

Photo by John N. Felsher



Elizabeth Eustis shows off a flounder she caught while fishing with Capt. Tom Adams of Fishing Tom Guide Service in the Calcasieu Estuary near Lake Charles, La.

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When not in use, it folds, and folds, and folds until it's out of the way. When it's time to cook, the design allows the full use of both burners, thanks in part to windscreens that do their job without getting in the way.

The dual starters are a nice touch, and the flexible braided propane hose allows the propane bottle to sit behind the stove, saving valuable food prep area.

The 11,000 BTU dual burners will have the whole camp fed pronto. The retracting legs and space-saving design mean you'll take it along everywhere.

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Gamakatsu's Wacky Head jig is a uniquely-designed jig that will entice even the wariest of biters into striking. The side-to-side rolling action created by the flat-shaped head is too much for fish to resist.

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This air rifle is a squirrel hunters dream. Shooting .22 caliber pellets at 1300 fps, and featuring its Whisper Fusion noise-dampening technology and Rapid Reload 10-shot pellet magazine, you'll be shooting your limit of bushytails quickly and quietly.

It's got high-visibility iron sights, but also comes with a fog-proof and shockproof 3-9x40 scope with mounting hardware.

cells, ensuring comfortable shooting. And the Recoil Reducing Rail absorbs shock waves, virtually eliminating recoil stress to the scope.

This gun weighs less than 7 pounds and is a dream to shoot.

MSRP: \$320

For more info, visit:
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The ShockWave Absorber recoil pad features three removable absorption

Veteran Lafitte speckled trout and redfish guide Maurice d'Aquin took a break from cutting sheetrock and clearing debris from his house in early August, 2021 to have a look at what Hurricane Ida had done to some of his favorite fishing spots.

What he found stunned and upset him almost as much as the three feet of mud left by Ida he was trying to shovel and till in his yard.

"I went to a shoreline on the west end of Little Lake, a spot where I had caught nice redfish all spring and summer and it was completely gone," d'Aquin said. "I went to the exact mark on my GPS where I was casting to redfish along a shoreline and had to go across about 700 yards of open water before my trolling motor even touched mud."

What d'Aquin has found by boat across the upper reaches of Barataria Bay, especially on the western

and northern stretches of Little Lake, has been confirmed by aerial surveys by Louisiana's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and satellite images gathered by the United States Geological Survey. Hurricane Ida's 150 mile per hour-plus winds scoured and decimated Louisiana's coastal marshes in ways not seen since Hurricane Katrina removed an estimated 200 square miles in 2005.

Early indications are 106 square miles of marshes washed away or were displaced by Ida's savage winds and 10-foot storm surge. The damage was spread across areas of Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parish east of the Mississippi River all the way west through Terrebonne Parish.

BEARING THE BRUNT >

VETERAN ANGLERS STILL STUNNED OVER FISHING HABITAT DESTROYED BY HURRICANE IDA.

■ By Chris Macaluso

"IT WAS COMPLETELY GONE"

Photo courtesy Chris Russo

BEARING THE BRUNT

The Barataria Basin bore the brunt of Ida's fury. Marshes west and south of Empire in lower Plaquemines and Jefferson Parish that never recovered from Katrina were decimated again by Ida, taking what little was left in areas closer to the Gulf of Mexico and damaging recently-restored barrier islands. It's the extensive damage in the northern reaches of the Barataria system, however, that has coastal wetlands experts and fisheries biologists most concerned.

"The whole Barataria Basin is only about 700 square miles, so to lose about 100 of those in one event like Hurricane Ida is significant and stunning," said Brian Lezina, Louisiana's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority's Chief of Planning. "There's a chance some of it will come back. The marsh can heal itself in time if the resources are there and vegetation regrows. But we



Chris Macaluso is the Center for Marine Fisheries Director for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. He is also an avid angler and duck hunter.

won't know how much will recover for a few years."

Lezina said much of the marsh damage was in areas where organic materials and lighter silt make up the soils. Some of it was floatant, which is marsh that roots in decaying vegetation floating above the organic soils beneath. Ida scattered the uprooted marshes and light, organic mud, filling in nearby canals and fouling Lake Salvador and Cataouatche and shoving mud and grass into and under houses from upper Plaquemines Parish west into Jefferson and Lafourche.

Organic soil marshes and floatant are much more susceptible to wave action and erosion than marshes east of the Mississippi River and closer to the mouth of the Atchafalaya River that get annual sediment deposits with heavier clays and sand. They also lack the ability to repair themselves in the same way as areas that get sediment replenished annually from the rivers.

Resources to repair the marsh are often hard to come by in areas far removed from water and sediment from the rivers. Lezina said the CPRA and federal partners are evaluating the best options to try to repair some of the damage. He's optimistic some regeneration will occur through a combination of natural processes and dredging projects.





Photo courtesy Theophile Bourgeois

Water and mud from Ida's storm surge inundated homes and camps in Lafitte. **ACROSS SPREAD:** Hurricane Ida's 150 mph winds devastated coastal communities from Plaquemines Parish through Terrebonne Parish, like this camp in Dulac.



“You have the Davis Pond Diversion nearby and the Intracoastal Canal that both can carry some water and sediment into the badly-damaged areas,” he said. “The sediments are being reworked all the time by waves and current. If the submerged vegetation grows back in shallow areas, it can help capture some of that sediment. And we’re looking closely at what resources can be directed into the area to help recapture some of the sediment.”

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EFFECT ON FISHERIES

Chris Schieble, a marine fisheries biologist with Louisiana's Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, said the exact long-term effects of the dramatic marsh losses from Ida on fisheries production are hard to predict. However, as more organic soils and marsh "edge" are lost to storms, daily wave action and sinking of the land below the water line (called "subsidence") that is eating away at the Barataria and other basins across Louisiana, fisheries production is certain to decline.

"It's the organic materials and rotting vegetation called detritus that feeds the food chain in areas that don't get a lot of sediment and freshwater input from the Mississippi River," Schieble said. "Areas where the fresh and saltwater mix more east of the river and near the Atchafalaya River, the food chain starts with phytoplankton. But, in organic soils, the ones that look like coffee grounds, it's the nutrient leeching out of the soil that makes up the base, feeds the forage fish and ultimately the predators like speckled trout and redfish."

In the short term, marsh loss from storms can cause an increase in fisheries production and lead to more catches of speckled trout and redfish as fish orient to newly created and exposed edge habitats, shallow flats and washouts where tidal flows concentrate baitfish.

D'Aquin said he's seen that firsthand in areas damaged by Ida. "The storm opened up some new cuts along the shoreline in Lake Salvador where water is flowing in from the Intracoastal Waterway," he said. "We caught a lot of redfish in the early fall in those washouts."

In the long-term, however, the profound loss of marsh and organic materials will inevitably lead to a decline in fisheries production as nutrient levels drop and vital nursery grounds for juvenile shrimp, crabs, mullet and other forage is lost. Lezina and Schieble both said the Barataria Basin and other areas hardest hit by wetland loss over the last century will reach a tipping point where the benefits of new edge habitat created by storms will be outweighed by the habitat and nutrient loss and the conversion to open water.

"We may already be at that tipping point in the Barataria Basin," Schieble said. "If you look at the time of year when Ida hit, it's a time where we would be seeing redfish larvae recruit into the marsh and white shrimp developing in those marshes. The redfish might have been displaced or not recruited into that marsh at all. Ida's path and destruction couldn't have been worse for our recreational and commercial fisheries. Productivity and access have taken a big hit."



Capt. Joe DiMarco and Jaclyn Higgins on a recent trip to marshes east of the Mississippi River where DiMarco has been catching 27-inch plus redfish in the marsh since Hurricane Ida passed.

ANGLERS HAVE TO ADAPT

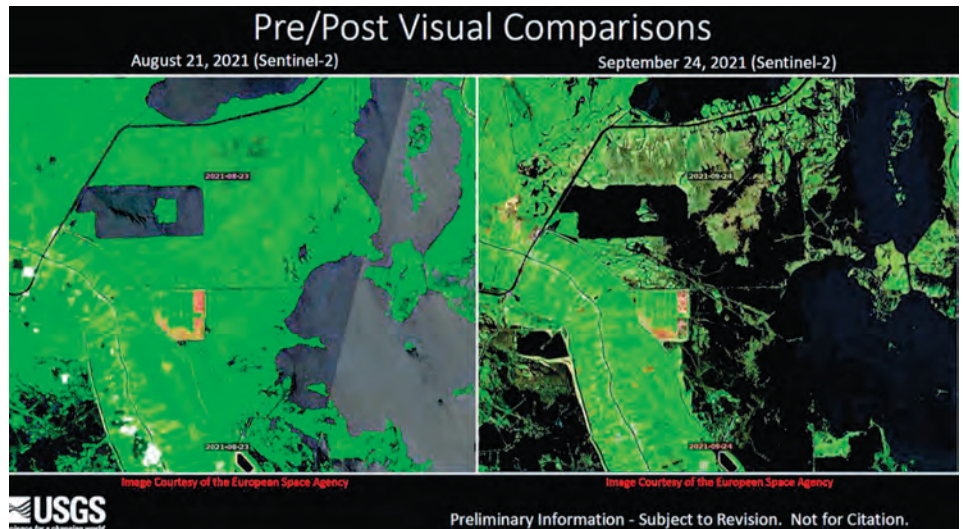
The extreme changes in habitat have also altered where anglers and guides have had to focus their efforts since the storm. Many guides and recreational fishermen have also noted a change in the size and number of fish they've been catching.

Capt. Joe DiMarco has been fishing east and west of the Mississippi River out of Buras for more than three decades. He said the habitat loss and the fishing on the east side of the river is far different than what he's seeing west of the river after Ida.

"The east side didn't take nearly the beating we are seeing to the west where a lot of the smaller cane islands and humps where we caught trout last year are now gone," DiMarco said. "We see some damage on the east side on the edge of Black Bay, but nothing like on the west. The storm seems to have pushed in a lot of big redfish too. Seems like we are catching many more 27-35 inch redfish way up in the marsh than we are 16-27 inch fish."

D'Aquin said he's having to relearn to fish his home waters around Lafitte in the same way he did after Katrina 16 years ago.

"Canals where we caught speckled trout during the winter are almost completely filled in and islands and peninsulas where we were catching trout and reds in the past are gone," he said. "Just like after Katrina, we are seeing fish that are stressed and we are having to make adjustments. The fish and the marsh suffered just like the communities hit by the storm. But just like the communities are coming back slowly so are the fish. Each day gets a little bit better." ■



This satellite image courtesy of the USGS shows the damage to the Little Lake area in the wake of Hurricane Ida.

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GO DEEP AT DELACROIX

Pay attention to changing patterns for the best trout action

T By Joel Masson
he fishing in Delacroix this time of year can be really good, but the speckled trout patterns shift with the ever-changing weather. Thirty degree temperature swings are not uncommon and Delacroix fishing guide Capt. Lane Zimmer knows paying attention to weather is crucial for success this month.

"We're hoping that we get some colder weather for February where these fish actually transition into their winter spots — Twin Pipeline, False River, Oak River," he said. "All those deeper holes should hold trout if the weather cools off."

FOCUS ON BAYOU BENDS

When fishing these areas, Zimmer often fishes in the bayous around these places.

"I'll try to focus on deeper bends in the main bayous — something where if there's any amount of shrimp or minnows in there, they'll get funneled through there," he said. "The fish are going to be cold and lazy, so they'll set up to where it's easiest for them to feed and not have to move too much."

In those deeper bayous, Zimmer ties on 3/8 and 1/2-ounce Deathgrip jig-heads, teamed with chartreuse Mad Mulletts if the water is dirty. If the water is clean, Zimmer opts for a different color scheme.

"If we have decently clean water when it's cold, I like to focus on something with some purple in it," he said.

Zimmer has a strong preference for the Fat Tuesday color of Mad Mullet and Ghost Minnow in clean, winter water.

When fishing the deeper areas, Zimmer suggested trying all depths in the bayou.

"They might be dead on the bottom or up on the ledge," he said. "That's just something you're going to have to figure out."

LAKES CAN PAY OFF

On the warmer weather days, Zimmer has an entirely different approach.

"If it stays mild, then you will still catch fish in places like Round Lake, Four Horse Lake, Lake John — stuff like that that has some shallower water with access to deep water," he said.

When fishing these major lakes, Zimmer likes to fish with a 1/8-ounce or 1/4-ounce Deathgrip jighead tightlined. However, he also said a popping cork can be effective.

"If we do go to a cork, it's not going to be a very aggressive pop like we do in the summer time," Zimmer said.

Leader length under the cork is also very important, according to Zimmer.

"In the wintertime, I'll set my leaders a little bit deeper — around 3 feet — just because I want that bait to hang closer to the bottom for those cold, lazy trout so they don't have to move as far," he said.

Capt. Lane Zimmer puts clients on lots of speckled trout this month on both warm and cold days.



Photo courtesy Capt. Lane Zimmer

Many anglers use 1/4-ounce jigheads underneath corks, but Zimmer feels like they could be hurting the number of bites they get by doing so.

"Everything is going to be moving slow in the wintertime — baitfish and shrimp included — just because the water is cold," he said. "I don't want that bait moving fast if the water is cold. It just looks a lot more natural when that bait falls with a 1/16-ounce jighead compared to a heavier jighead." ■

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WADE RIGHT IN THERE!

Worm your way to cold water trophy trout action

By Capt. Adam Jaynes

Imagine most normal people will be staying warm somewhere this month, recovering from hunting season perhaps. The rest of the crazies and myself will be looking at solunar calendars and functioning on hardly any sleep while living on caffeine looking for the next tug from a trout at the end of our line.

Let's face it, fishing in February can be downright miserable especially if you are not adequately prepared for the wind and cold. Make sure you are wearing plenty of GORE-TEX type clothing with high quality layers underneath to help prevent from having a shortened or uncomfortable experience on the water.

If you are willing and able, I would strongly encourage you to wade if you are chasing after speckled trout this month.

I personally believe that it will increase your odds of catching a true giant as well as more and higher quality fish overall. However, if you are determined to fish from the boat, then proper utilization of a drift-sock, PowerPole or anchor of your choice may increase your odds of success as well.

In any trophy trout fishing article, you will undoubtedly read about the Corky Fat Boy or a Super Spook and rightfully so. Lures such as those have assisted anglers in landing many trophy trout and making memories to last a lifetime.

UNSUNG HERO

However, there is an unsung hero when it comes to landing

quality trout on a consistent basis. Affectionately referred to as tails or worms, simple soft plastics rigged on a jig head, have most definitely caught more trout than any other lure there is.

For some reason they are often overlooked when it comes to targeting higher quality fish in the winter. They are cheap, relatively simple to fish and they catch fish, albeit, not as glamorous as the newest and shiniest hard plastic to hit the market this year. But they work and any angler that can cast can learn how to use them.

Bass Assassin makes my favorite tail when it comes to chunking them in the winter for big fish. In my opinion they have the best colors. My gripe with them is that they tear up easily and you may have to change out soft plastics often, but I believe their softness is an advantage during wintertime fishing. Fish tend to hold on to them longer giving the angler a greater opportunity to detect the strike and set the hook.

PULL THEIR CHAIN

I particularly like their 5-inch Shad in the colors Morning Glory and Chicken on a Chain. Jig head size is critical — too heavy and the sink rate is too fast and you will spend more time hung up on oyster shells. A 1/16-ounce or 1/8-ounce will typically do the trick, but the fish will tell you which they prefer, you can count on that. Working that tail with a medium light fast action rod such as the Smooth Dog from Sarge Customs will step up your game



Roy Crush with a nice, quality speckled trout while wading near Turner's on Big Lake.

to the next level and increase your odds even more of landing that next trophy trout.

I would guess I have spent more time wading in Coffee Ground Cove than any other location on Sabine or Big Lake.

It is relatively easy to wade, which is nice. A large percentage of the bottom is sandy and is easy to walk. The cove tends to stay relatively salty and with good water clarity. Most importantly for me is the consistency.

We can consistently catch fish there whether it be winter, spring or summer. It also provides a somewhat close proximity to deeper water, which in my opinion is a must for any quality trophy trout location. ■

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HOPEDALE IS HOPPIN'

Trout, redfish bite has been steady thanks to plentiful shrimp supply

C By Rusty Tardo
apt. Marc Fradella
(985-290-2908) said he's been on a good, steady trout bite for the last couple months and he expects it to continue through this month and well into March and April. That's good news for fishermen in the Hopedale area. "People have been catching trout and reds all along the MRGO, from the Hopedale Dam to the Wall in Chalmette since October," he said. "The shrimp have been plentiful and the specks have stayed to eat them."

"The winter has been slow arriving and the milder weather has contributed to the steady bite."

But colder weather is inevitable in late January and throughout February, traditionally our coldest months of the year. Depending on how cold it gets, the shrimp may vanish with the cold fronts or they might hang around until spring if our winter stays mild.

Fradella said he's been staying close to the dock, fishing the deeper bayous around Lena Lagoon.

AVOID DEAD WATER

"Basically I'm fishing from Bayou Guyago to Bayou Mussolini, over to Bayou Alphonse and up to Bayou St. Malo," he said. "I fish the cuts and washouts where I find moving water. That's the key. Here's an important tip. Dead water = dead action. It doesn't matter whether the tide is rising or falling as long as it's moving."

And while many anglers are switching to bottom rigs for the colder months, Fradella fishes under a cork all year round.

"I'm fishing about 2 1/2 feet under a popping cork, mostly with the 3 1/2-inch VuDu shrimp in the glow/chartreuse, purple/chartreuse, and pink or orange colors," he said. "That's all I've been using and the trout and reds are not turning it down."

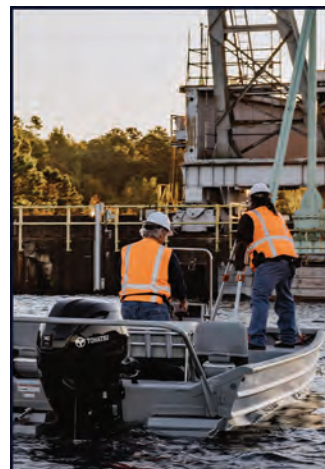


Capt. Marc Fradella caught this 12-pound redfish on a glow/chartreuse VuDu shrimp in a washout off of Bayou Alphonse.

Fradella said he fishes the drains and cuts and washouts into the bayous and has been catching nice sized trout with few throwbacks. There are also a few good reds in the mix.

"And the bonus about February fishing is that you can leave the dock later and still catch fish," he said. That's a really good bonus, especially when the nippy weather has a "bite" of its own. ■

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SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Brian Cope

Troy Helwig caught this 114.2-pound beast back on March 18, 2011 out of Ocean Springs.

Photo courtesy Troy Helwig



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: GREATER AMBERJACK

Greater amberjack (*Seriola dumerili*) are long, heavy-bodied fish. They are one of numerous members of the jack family. They are close cousins to lesser amberjacks and banded rudderfish. Greater amberjacks are commonly called simply “amberjacks.”

These fish vary widely in color depending on their surroundings. Their backs are usually bluish-brown to dark olive and their sides are often silvery white with a wide amber-colored stripe running down each side from head to tail.

Many members of the jack family look very similar. One feature that sets the amberjack apart is a dark band extending from the mouth, through the eye, and to the front of the dorsal fin. Their tails are more crescent-shaped than forked.

Amberjacks can grow to more than 150 pounds, but are more commonly caught by anglers in the 20- to 40-pound range. Most catches of amberjack are incidental catches by anglers targeting snapper and grouper while bottom fishing with cut bait.

These fish are found throughout the

world in subtropical and temperate waters. Those caught by American anglers range from off the coast of New England to the Gulf of Mexico. They are typically found around natural and artificial reefs and wrecks. Offshore oil platforms are also common areas to find them.



Brian Cope of Edisto Island, S.C., is a retired Air Force combat communications technician. He has a B.A. in English Literature from the University of South Carolina and has been writing about the outdoors since 2006. He's spent half his life hunting and fishing. The rest, he said, has been wasted.

WORLD RECORD AMBERJACK WEIGHED 163+ POUNDS

Their diets consist mainly of smaller fish, crabs and squid. They are one of the few fish that rarely eat shrimp, even when large populations are present. They spawn in large groups in the late spring/early summer and don't travel far to spawn.

Nicknames for amberjack include reef donkey, donkey fish, amber donkey, wreck donkey, amber fish, AJ and big jack.

Amberjacks are the most sought after members of the jack family and are known for striking fast, fighting hard, and going on long, drag-pulling runs. In some parts of the world, they are known as carriers for various species of tapeworms. Many anglers shy away from eating them because of this, but plenty of anglers do eat them.

The Louisiana state record amberjack weighed 140 pounds and was caught by Chris Legrand at Horseshoe Lump in January 2017. Don Wheeler caught the Mississippi state record, a 126-pound fish, in March 2014 at Horseshoe Rigs.

The world record weighed 163 pounds, 2 ounces and was caught out of Zenisu, Tokyo, Japan by Tadashi Yamanaka in June 2015. ■

Holden Martinolich went on his first offshore fishing trip with his dad Jason on Aug. 4, 2019 about 80 miles southwest of Dulac, La. Holden reeled in his first amberjack that weighed 107.6 pounds.



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PUTTING TECHNOLOGY IN ITS PLACE PUTS FISH IN THE BOAT. ■ By Kinny Haddox

SET UP FOR

SUCCESS



With today's available fishing technology, setting up for success on the front end is a must. The front end of the boat, that is. But there's more to it than that, said touring crappie pro Dan Dannenmueller, a frequent visitor to Louisiana waters from his home in Alabama.

Crappie anglers who fish for fun and in pro crappie tournaments all have an ever-changing amount of technology available to them to help catch more fish. That is key for the Crappie Mates, Dannenmueller and his wife Sue.

Dannenmueller is an Air Force veteran and it's no surprise that the front end of his boat looks a lot like an open air cockpit on an airplane. But like a well-tuned aircraft, there's more.

"When you set up your boat, either for bass fishing or crappie fishing, the first thing you have to do is know the techniques you are going to be using fishing and match your setup to that," Dannenmueller said. "The more techniques you will use, the more versatile you have to make your setup. For instance, if you are going to crappie fish by trolling crankbaits, single-poling and spider rigging, you've got to have all that gear in the right place where it's effective, easy to use and safe for you to get around on your deck."

The next step, according to him, might surprise you. It's not depth finders or trolling motors.

"Today's electronics and motors and accessories have to have substantial, dependable power to run," he said. "Whether you fish just for fun or in tournaments, you want everything to run all day and then your big motor crank to get you home. The old days of one cranking battery and one trolling motor battery are gone."



Dannenmueller uses MTech Lithium batteries, the newest technology available. He also depends on a reliable onboard charger which you can plug in when the boat is not in use and know the batteries will stay charged. One tip he has is to make sure all your electronic equipment has an on-off switch on the boat. All this new gear comes with a GPS built in and even if it isn't in use, there's a slow battery drain.

That's the bones of the setup, now for the meat. "Make sure you match the size of your trolling motor to your boat," he said. "If it's a real small rig, you can use a 12 volt motor, but not if you have a lot of accessories. The minimum I would recommend is a 24 volt system and if you fish big lakes where wind is an issue or rivers that have current, look at the 36 volt motor.

"Next is your depth finders. I would go with a minimum of one unit on the console for mapping, basic depth and occasional side scanning on a split screen and one larger unit up front on the deck. I use two on the console and since Sue and I both fish up front, we have two with big screens. You need a 10-inch, preferably a 12-inch, to be able to see and target fish and structure."

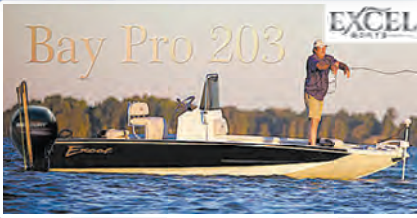
He also likes to use the hands-free remotes for most of his equipment, but that is a personal preference.



Dan Dannenmueller has remotes for his trolling motor and PowerPoles so he can operate them hands-free anywhere in the boat. **BELOW:** Dan and Sue Dannenmueller, the Crappie Mates, depend on their front deck setup to keep them on fish.



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Critical to that setup is a good mount and bracket. Dannenmueller has his units set up high where he can see them easily while seated or standing. He also has them mounted on a reinforced plate. He uses a Procise bracket with a Beat Down adjustable mount that makes it easy to use, plus it folds down securely for those rough boat rides.

Two of the most popular techniques for crappie fishing are pulling crankbaits or spider rigging, so rod holders are needed. Dannenmueller uses Driftmaster individual Stalkers, but the most popular model



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is the T-bar unit. He also uses Power Poles and paddles to anchor and slow drifting down in the boat.

Finally, there's one more element to a proper setup and it's the anglers comfort.


"We've got two great choices for adjustable, comfortable seats," he said. "I use Millenium seats and Dub-L-Seat also makes a good setup."

One thing is for sure, you can rig out your boat just about as plainly or as fancy as you want it, but Dannenmueller has one last piece of advice.

"Spend your money on things that fit your fishing style and nothing else," he said. "Get the stuff you need, not just the pretty stuff that everybody else wants." ■



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.

A man with a beard, wearing a white cowboy hat, sunglasses, and a yellow long-sleeved shirt, is sitting on a boat. He is holding a large, yellowish-green bass fish with both hands. The background shows a body of water and green trees under a blue sky with light clouds. The man is also wearing grey shorts with a bright green stripe on the side.

**TAKING A BREAK FROM
FISHING THE PRO TOUR
REMINDS BASS PRO
BRETT PREUETT THERE'S
NO PLACE LIKE HOME.**

■ By Kinny Haddox

**WRANGLING
BASS &
BULLS**

Sometimes the best thing you can do to move forward is to just stop and see where you are.

That applies to a lot of things in life. Brett Preuett figured it was a good philosophy to apply to his professional fishing career.

In 2021, the Monroe angler traded wrangling bass for wrangling cows and bulls on his farm and made hay while the sun shined. Now he's focused on returning to competition in 2022 on the BASS Open trail with a renewed enthusiasm and some skills he honed fishing right around his home area. His ultimate goal, make the Bassmaster Classic again.

While the thought of fishing all the time for a living, driving a big fancy matched bass boat and truck and getting all kinds of free bass baits and tackle sounds pretty glamorous, there's a lot more to it than that. It's work. In all kinds of weather, starting at 3 a.m. in the morning and going into the late night hours. Over and over again. All week long.

Preuett's layoff has given a hidden benefit for Louisiana fishermen, too. We were able to catch up with him and ask him how we can catch more fish here at home. On his year off, Preuett spent a lot of time on

Louisiana lakes just fishing for fun. He was glad to share his favorite techniques and tricks to catch more bass.

THE COWS KNOW

For starters, Preuett addressed perhaps the biggest axiom in freshwater fishing. You know. I bet you've heard it. It's one he says is 100 percent true....and, with a laugh, "*at least 90 percent of the time.*"

"Yes, there is no doubt," he said. "When the cows are up and feeding, the bass usually are, too. There's something about Mother Nature's clock that ticks all across the outdoors. There's something about the weather and the barometric pressure - things we don't always see or feel - that affects cows and bass.

I use that to my advantage. If I head for the lake and see the cows up and feeding and being kind of frisky, I know the fish will be the same way.

Likewise, if everything is still and the



Chunks like this one are the goal of off-season fun trips or a day in a pro bass tournament. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** No doubt about it, the fish are biting.

whole herd of cows are laying up, I start mentally preparing for having to fish with a little more finesse when I get to the lake. It's a real thing."

In his time off, Preuett focused on several lakes, from giant Toledo Bend to lunker incubator Caney Lake to cypress-filled Iatt Lake, where he actually learned to fish starting at age three. Here are his best bets to help you be a better February bass wrangler.

TOUGH ON TOLEDO

There's no question about it, the bass fishing on massive Toledo Bend can be tougher this time of year than ever, especially with changing weather and hardly any grass left in the lake. But the rewards of spending time to find them pay big dividends. Bass are there in numbers and in huge sizes.

"I like to start on the northern end of the lake because that is where they move in and spawn first," he said. "That end of the lake warms quicker and once the water temperature gets to 62 degrees, you know they will be shallow. I like to just keep it simple and grab a flippin' stick, put on a 3/8-ounce Creme Speed Scremer and toss it in the heaviest cover I can find. My favorite colors are black and blue or green pumpkin. They will be up on the bank, in the bushes and around cypress knees. They will get up in places you think a bass couldn't get, but don't let them fool you."

Preuett has a simple technique for that lure. He pitches it in the cover, pumps it about three or four times and if he doesn't get a bite, he reels it in and goes to the next cast. He covers water fast until he finds an area where he gets bit, then he slows down and works it thoroughly.

"If the weather moves them out deeper again, I'll move out to the creek channels near the bank or the points and throw a Rat-L-Trap or one of Bill Lewis' new MR-12 crankbaits," he said. "The new Strawberry Craw color is amazing. Those outer areas are also a great place to fish an umbrella rig out on the deepest end of shorter points."

BE SNEAKY ON CANEY ➤



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.



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BE SNEAKY ON CANEY

It sounds odd, but Preuett's approach on Caney Lake this month is to stay as far away from the bass as he can, sort of. But he still pitches his bait right up on their head.

"Caney is so clear that I stay back as far as I can and still see the beds," he said. "Sight fishing is awesome here this month and when you spot a bed, you want to make sure the fish doesn't spot you. I cast a Creme Whacky Stick right up in the bed. When the big ones are on the bed, you can see them. But sometimes they ease off to the side especially when the bed is surrounded by grass."

When fish scatter or stage deeper, he likes to throw a traditional chrome, blue back or red color Rat-L-Trap along the grass beds, barely tapping the grass tops and then ripping it away to earn a reaction strike.

Preuett said just because you see bass doesn't mean they will bite. It's a tough way to fish. Sometimes he has to make a dozen casts to the bed to trigger a strike. Sometimes he throws it in the bed and just lets it sit. Often a smaller male bass will run up and try to move the bait off the bed.

"You just have to pay real close attention all the time," he said. "And you can't always rely on feeling the bite. You better keep your eye on the bait and if it moves or disappears, a big one probably grabbed it and you didn't feel it. You have a fraction of a second to set the hook or it is all over."



This bass ate a Creme Speed Screamer for lunch. **BELOW:** A closeup of Lewis' new MR-12 in one of Preuett's favorite colors, Strawberry Craw.



HIT THE CYPRESS >



Brett Preuett holds up a chunky tournament largemouth.

A STORY THAT ALMOST NEVER HAPPENED

Brett Preuett was one whiffle ball game away from probably never being a professional bass fisherman.

He had just graduated from high school and was headed to play baseball in college when he gathered with a group of friends for a game of whiffle ball, the game played with plastic bats and balls. The ball got hit to him and instead of throwing the ball at the runner, he playfully dove and tagged him out. But in the process, the other player's elbow slammed perfectly into Preuett's right eye. The terrible accident tore the optic nerve and left him permanently blind in that eye. His baseball career was over.

He was not in a good place, but a coach invited him to go fish in a bass tournament. He did. And he funneled his energy back into the sport he loved as a kid.

Even on the water, Preuett met with adversity. While fishing for a spot in the Bassmaster Classic as a member of the University of Louisiana Monroe fishing team, Preuett put a little extra into a long cast for schooling bass. Only the bait never reached the fish. The back treble hook hit him square in the back of the neck and buried to the point of needing on-the-water medical attention. He stayed. He fished. He won the Classic berth and he was off on his pro bass career.

Preuett is sponsored on the pro tour by Bill Lewis Lures, Creme, Shimano, Lowrance, Tree Shaker Tackle, Falcon Boats, JPS Ford, Power Pole, Bob's Machine Shop and Bayou Rattler. ■

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Brett Preuett coerced this winter lunker out from a cypress tree root.

HIT THE CYPRESS

If there is one thing Louisiana waters are known for, it's cypress trees. Lakes all across the state are full of cypress trees, knees and roots and they are prime bass territory this month.

"I grew up on Lake Iatt in Grant Parish and it is full of cypress trees," Preuett said. "It fishes just like other cypress lakes like Caddo, Bistineau and Saline-Larto. They are going to be spawning on those trees in the flats in one to four feet of water. I always pay close attention to what depth I'm fishing and if I catch a bass in three feet of water, then I concentrate on the cypress in three feet of water. I hit the left side, the middle and the right side of the tree every time. And if one boils up or ticks the bait but misses, I'll stay there until he gives up and bites or finally I do."

Iatt has battled vegetation issues, but is still very fishable. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries stocked Iatt with more than 550,000 Florida largemouth bass fry in late 2019 to improve fishing.

Preuett fishes jigs, swim baits and hard plastics here also. And if the fish move off the trees due to weather fronts, he'll find them on the flats near grass with a Bill Lewis SB-57 crankbait in red or crawfish colors. ■



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TOLEDO BEND DOUBLE TAKE!

It's big bass time in Louisiana. And there's no bigger or better place to go to chase a trophy largemouth than the 65-mile long, 185,000 acre lake on the Louisiana-Texas border. Weather and water conditions have made the lake's value and challenge greater in early 2022. Whether you are after numbers or whoppers for the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program, check out these two views of how to approach the monster body of water this month!

Early February usually finds Gonzales bass fishing pro Greg Hackney pulling bass off trees in waters near his hometown but he'll concentrate this year on Toledo Bend. He likes to fish the 1215 area.

HACKNEY STARTING EARLY FOR WHAT HE SAYS WILL BE "A REAL GOOD SPRING"

Where does one of Louisiana's most recognizable pro bass fishermen go to catch bass in February?

Greg Hackney of Gonzales has several destinations that deliver — weather and water conditions permitting. Much of the time he fishes close around his hometown, or hauls his Phoenix bass boat to his favorite area at Toledo Bend.

This year his choice probably will be more of the latter than the former for several reasons.

"Typically, when I start back fishing in January, I usually fish close to home. I'll probably venture a ways in February," Hackney said, warming up to the subject during his valued offseason from the Bassmaster Elite Series.

Why? Blame Hurricane Ida, which ravaged many of his potential bass fishing hotspots when it made its destructive landfall in August of last year near Port Fourchon.

"Fishing took a powder after that storm," he said, noting at least the Atchafalaya Basin, one of his go-to places, was spared.

ADVERSELY IMPACTED

"Everything else around here was impacted adversely," he said. It's caused a lot of fishermen to re-evaluate where to go and how to fish.

The 16-time Bassmaster Classic qualifier, including securing his spot for this year's event March 4-6 at Lake Hartwell in South Carolina, is confident he can catch bass at the big lake shared by Louisiana and Texas. Specifically, Hackney plans to frequent the Hwy. 1215 area on the Louisiana side north of Pendleton Bridge.

"Well, February's probably my favorite time to go to Toledo Bend," he said. "I expect it to be a real good spring over there."

Hackney calls fishing the lake in February a chance to beat the

Photo courtesy striking.com

HACKNEY STARTING EARLY *continued* >

crowd of bass anglers that covers the lake in March and April, the height of the bass spawn on Toledo Bend. There's a reason he's fired up to fish February with the water well below pool level heading into the new year. Sure, he and so many other bass anglers like to fish the lake when it's high (hopefully the pool level goes up this year) with water in the bushes in March and April. But Hackney prefers it low very early in the year because he believes there is more bass habitat north of Pendleton Bridge on the Louisiana side. That's especially true around Hwy. 1215 and branching out to nearby San Miguel Creek, San Patricio Creek and, even to Lanan Creek.

He favors three to five foot depths and targets the expansive flats — like those at Hwy. 1215— with drains (or ditches) that act as highways for the bass as they move in to spawn. Find a ditch with grass, if that's possible these days, and it's icing on the cake. If there is grass, it'll usually be found in the center of the ditch or at the back of the ditch, he said. Grass, when you can find it, is key to catching fish.

"I like it (lake level) when it's even lower," he said. "A big reason is you can see everything. You can catch them pitching stumps on sunny days."

USE THE RAMPS

Areas in the places he likes to fish are exposed to north winds, which are common the second month of the year. Rather than cranking up and running his boat to the other creeks, he'll head for the nearest boat ramp.

"They all have boat ramps in the back of them," he said. "I do that when it's so rough you don't want to run the lake. I'll take out and drive to the next one."

No matter where he's at in February at Toledo Bend, bass usually bite one or more of his three favorite artificial lures — a ½-ounce Strike King Thunder Cricket, which is a bladed jig; a ½-ounce Strike King Red Eyed Shad, which is a lipless crankbait and a Strike King KVD 1.5 Squarebill crankbait. Color depends on the water clarity, he said, but it's hard to beat red hues (like Delta Red, his preference) for all and chartreuse/black or sexy shad for the KVD.

Red is the primary color to start with this time of year, he said, especially when you don't have anything else to go on.

The 48-year-old Hackney enjoyed talking about bassin' in February but make no mistake he enjoyed his offseason, which included deer hunting in Mississippi and Illinois, where he shot a nice buck. He got in some dove hunting at Honey Brake near Jonesville, and took one of his daughters to Disney World for Christmas.

"It's the offseason, but I started thinking about the Bassmaster Elite Series opener Feb. 10-13 at St. Johns River in Florida on Jan. 1. That's when I start getting a little antsy, even though I'll probably still be in the hunting mode," he said with a chuckle. ■

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DEAN SAYS WATER LEVELS WILL MAKE ANGLERS ADAPT TO FISHING NEW AREAS

We By John Dean
all wait for February bass fishing on Toledo Bend. We know it's a magical month as the pre-spawn and, even, in some instances, the spawn itself gets underway.

What we don't know this year is how much water will be in the lake by the end of February. That's critical to how we'll target bass up and down the lake. It's still low, like it was back at the end of the year on Dec. 30 when it was at 168.24 feet, 3.76 feet below full pool of 172.0. The pool stage has been this low or a little lower since the first week of September. The lake level has frustrated many bass fishermen, especially those who are used to higher water in the fall and early winter.

The amount of water in the lake is going to make even more of a difference as February rolls around. If the pool stage stays around what it is now, we can forget targeting bushes and woods with 14 or so inches of water around them.

HOPING FOR RAIN

I'll be the first to cross my fingers hoping this region gets significant rainfall early this year. That just hasn't been happening with the typical cold fronts we've been experiencing in western Louisiana and eastern Texas. We haven't been getting enough measurable precipitation to fill a birdbath. I know. I've been putting water in both of the birdbaths on my lawn on the shore of Toledo Bend.

If rains don't push up the water level, we'll have to resort to catching bass on flats holding stumps we can't see. Generally, the flats that give up many of the bass this month will be those at the back ends of creeks where the water temp is two to three degrees higher than at the mouth of the creeks.

It's chunk and wind time with moving baits when the water's low and you're fishing the flats. Time to throw Alabama rigs with shad-colored soft plastics for sure; lipless crankbaits like Bill Lewis crawfish-colored Rat-L-Traps; bladed jigs like Delta Lures Golden Bream Thunder Jigs; and Carolina-rigged soft plastics in watermelon/red, black or June Bug. Also try gold/orange Rogues and reddish color square bill crankbaits.

"CIRCLING" BACK FOR BASS

One of the best areas to fish with the lake level so low is Circle Drive. It has more water depth around cover than anywhere on Toledo Bend. Bassers will find lots of wood cover in the water, places that attract bass wanting to get on beds. That's the north end of the lake and some nearby areas just as appealing to bass in low water include from the "Government Ditch" down to Cow Bayou.

Kerry Stanford of Dallas has a good lip grip on a 4-pound class bass he caught last winter about this time on a Carolina-rigged Fluke at Toledo Bend while fishing with John Dean.



Hopefully, the water will be 3 1/2 to 4-feet or so higher in February than it was at the end of 2021. If that's the case the patterns are more obvious as the bass follow the water and we can see the inundated structure — like bushes, wood and vegetation (bank grass and hay grass that has been growing).

It's on, then, for pitchin' and flippin' soft plastics. It's a visual thing. Bass anglers can see what they want to fish. The big girls, the double-digit bass, the 3- and 4-pounders, they all fall hard this time of year for wacky worms, Senkos and Flukes. Watermelon/red, black and june bug typically are the top colors.

Of course, soft plastic creature baits, crawworms and lizards and other "old school" stuff are still effective and will account for many bass of all sizes in February.

I'll have a Senko or a Fluke on a Neko Rig, or fish with an unweighted (or with a very tiny weight) Fluke. Deadsticking a Fluke is very effective in February. For sure, whenever the biological clock strikes the right time, the big girls will be ready to do their thing in February.

And there's a bonus this time of year. The crappie move up to spawn with the bass. They can be caught on pink/white Road-runners and tube jigs or hair jigs.

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. ■

TOURNEY BASS DISPERSAL ➤

These proud anglers caught these bass 35 miles from the tournament weigh-in and release site. Recent science says they will swim back toward their capture site.



DISPERSAL OF TOURNAMENT-CAUGHT BASS

THE SLOW ROAD HOME

F By Hal Schramm
 isheries managers have long been concerned with “stockpiling,” the accumulation of bass near tournament weigh-in and release sites. Multiple studies have assessed the post-release movement of tournament-caught bass. The results have been inconsistent, some studies finding rather rapid dispersal, others finding bass languishing near release sites. A recent Canadian study compared the dispersal of tournament-caught largemouth and smallmouth bass across seasons.

IS STOCKPILING AN ISSUE?

Biologists have been concerned about the continual addition of bass to a small area (the release site) for a couple reasons. First, while the tournaments may

be catch and release events, harvest-oriented anglers can exploit the concentrated bass. This is an old and largely outdated argument. The increased adoption of live release reduces this affect. However, tournaments are size selective — the anglers are trying to weigh in the largest fish they can catch. Thus, the bass released from the tournament are larger — sometimes much larger — than the average fish in the population. Even low removal by harvest-oriented anglers could reduce the abundance of larger bass.

A second concern is the depletion of forage fish by the increased density of bass and, in turn, impaired health of hungry bass. Because, as just noted, the released fish tend to be larger bass, this potential problem could become serious. Big bass eat a lot of forage.

MEASURING DISPERSAL

The study was conducted in Big Rideau Lake, Ontario. Big Rideau Lake has a large main basin where the fish were caught. Weigh-in and release was at the north end of the lake approximately five miles from the main basin; this five-mile section of the lake is narrow. Tournaments occurred in early June (water temperature 64 to 68 °F), late June (72 to 75 °F), August (75 to 79 °F), and October (54 to 57 °F).



Hal Schramm is an avid angler and veteran fisheries biologist.

Largemouth (average length 16 to 18 inches among seasons) and smallmouth (average length 16 to 19 inches) were implanted with sonic transmitters prior to their release after weigh in. Fixed receivers monitored the fish's movement beyond 330 yards from the release site and their return to the main basin where they were caught.

Some fish left the release site immediately. All largemouth had dispersed from the release site in four to forty days among the four tournaments. The more mobile smallmouth left the release site in three to 18 days.

Return to the main basin was much slower. Fifty percent of the largemouth returned to the main basin in 3.6 to 7.8 months; all largemouth returned to the main basin in 18.5 months. Fifty percent of the smallmouth returned to the main basin in 13 days to 3.3 months; all smallmouth returned to the main basin in 20 months. Note that return to the place of capture was not measured.

All bass left the release site and eventually returned to the main basin. The return times differed between species and among seasons. Largemouth from the October tournament returned fastest, those from the August tournament had the slowest return. Most of the smallmouth returned faster than the largemouth, but the October tournament fish were the slowest to return.

INTERPRETATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Scientific studies have found that both largemouth and smallmouth exhibit homing — the ability to return to a previously occupied area — so their movement back to the main basin where capture is expected.

The wide variation in the return times, which also has been observed among previous studies, doesn't really surprise me. As every angler knows, bass live where they have good habitat and good forage. They also know that at least some bass follow the forage. The long return times for some of the released fish can be attributed to the displaced, tournament-caught bass finding good habitat and abundant forage along their way home.

The conservation concerns of stockpiling of tournament-caught bass — increased harvest and local forage depletion — may have merit on some



Good livewell care and releasing healthy fish will help them disperse from release sites.

waters. But the increased practice of catch and release would reduce harvest of concentrated fish, and the bass' instinct to move to find forage would minimize the consequences of forage depletion, at least on the bass.

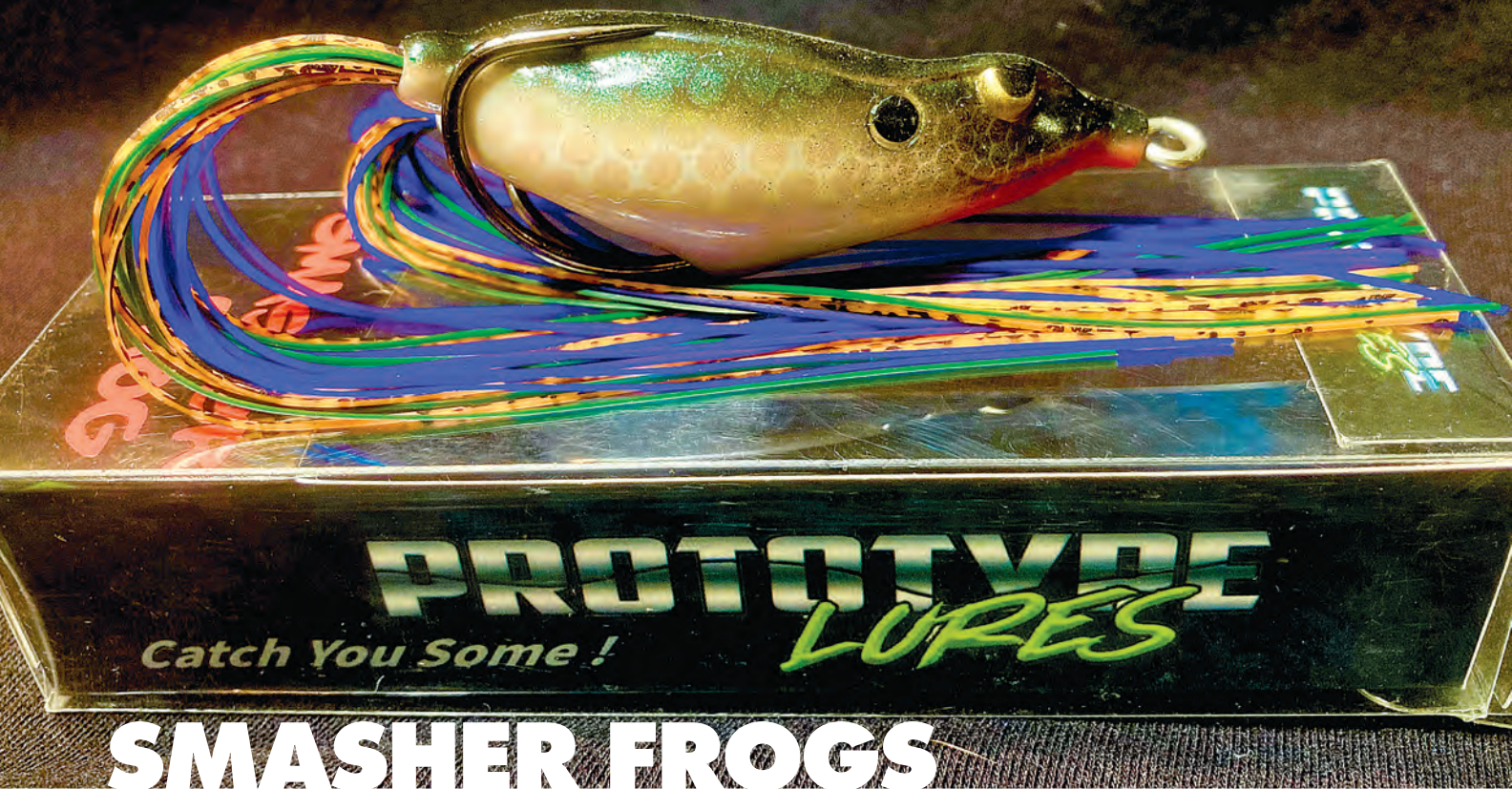
As an angler, I have an additional concern — removal and displacement from the area of capture. My observations on Pickwick Lake support certain areas “turning on.” Tournament anglers are quick to learn where the hot bite is. The fish are caught, transported many miles,

and weighed. Most survive and disperse from the release site. But, according to the Big Rideau Lake results, it may take a year or longer for the fish to return to their area of capture. With well over 100 tournaments on Pickwick each year, it is likely that some formerly productive areas become depleted of bass.

Fortunately, part of the fun and challenge of bass fishing is finding the bass. ■

SMASHER FROGS ➤

Prototype Lures LLC's Smasher Frog has been making waves in the bass fishing market since it was introduced last spring.



SMASHER FROGS

BASS ARE BLOWING UP ON THIS LIFE-LIKE SOFT PLASTIC TOPWATER BAIT

A top notch soft plastic, hollow-body plastic frog twitched and walked across the surface of a bass angler's favorite fishin' hole usually winds up deep in the throat of a good-sized bass.

There are no two ways about it. When Prototype Lures LLC's Smasher Frogs get eaten, they often wind up far back in the mouth of self-respecting, hungry "hawgs". Derward Mauldin, creator of the Smasher Frog, is proud he has brought an angler-friendly soft plastic to bass anglers from his home state of Arkansas across the south, where the plastic frogs are romping across the thick mats and the bass are chomping.

Mauldin's first claim to fame as an artificial lure designer was the Prototype Lures LLC Guerilla Buzz, which was introduced in 2016. The buzz bait found its way into many tackle boxes over the past four years.

The West Helena, Arkansas, bass angler said he designed and oversaw construction of the plastic frog for the same

reason he made the buzz bait. He loves fishing with topwater lures, a passion ignited when he was young and fished with his father and brother.

"I have been a topwater man my whole life," Mauldin said. "There's nothing more exciting than a fish blowing up on topwater."

MAGIC NUMBER: 55

When water temperatures get to 55 degrees and up, that's his time to start casting the Guerilla Buzz and Smasher Frog. He'll rely on them from that magical mark in late winter and early spring.

"I'm an Arkansas man that loves Louisiana-type fishing, so I try to fish a lot of grass and a lot of mats," he said.

He welcomed input from pro bass anglers about three years ago when he began designing the frog. His goal was to make a properly weighted hollow-body soft plastic frog with a 5/0 double hook custom-built to fit the body for a more consistent hookset.

"I wanted a frog that was easier to

work," he said. "I wanted a frog to come through the grass ... not roll over on its side, not get hung up, not roll on its back. I wanted to make a frog to where it is more affordable for everyday fishermen to tournament fishermen. I wanted it to be more affordable for a college kid or a high school kid, so they could afford a good, quality bait."

The Smasher Frog hit the shelves, catalogs and online stores last spring. Tackle Warehouse took them on in April 2021. It became extremely popular in Virginia, where thick grass mats are targeted in slow pools of the Shenandoah River and Rural Retreat Lake. The ½-ounce Smasher Frog is 2 ½ inches long and weighs ½-ounce. Its has twin tails rubber strands, each 4 ½ inches long. Mauldin



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.

purposefully made the tails long so they can be cut to fit a bass angler's preference. The weight's placement and the special hook make the biggest difference, he said.

IT'S AN EASY WALKER

"By far it's the easiest walking frog on the market because of the way it's weighted," he said.

Mauldin weighted it so the body is half-submerged in the water. He pointed out some other plastic frogs float on top, which results in many of those models bouncing out of the bass' mouth on a strike. Also, he said, its position in the water moves more water.

The two-pronged hook doesn't have to be bent upward or out to improve the hookset as many bass anglers do to hooks on other plastic frogs. That technique does make for a better hookset, the artificial lure designer admitted, but also increases the likelihood of snagging the plastic frog more frequently.

"We use a 5/0 hook we designed for that because we couldn't get a manufactured hook" to do the job, Mauldin said.

"It's designed where the hook comes over his back, not out to the sides, so when a bass mashes down on it the hooks are exposing themselves," he said. "We designed it so it collapses on the sides, too."

Mauldin believes the colors are first-rate.

"We have a range of proven fish-catching colors," he said.

"Fishermen can confidently select a color for every situation. They are good, life-like colors."

There are 10 colors available now and five more on the way for 2022. Some of the current favorites are Giller, Sun Perch, Pinkie, Flyswatter and Crawl Frog.

THE FAMILY GROWS

Smasher Frog will have a brother soon. Finishing touches were being made in December 2021 to the Smasher Popper, Prototype Lures LLC's newest lure. It should fit nicely in the plans of bass anglers who want to target bass with a popping frog.

The Smasher Popper features an "air evac escape" system bassers won't find anywhere else on any other plastic frog on the market. Air escapes faster than when a bass clamps down on it because of a pattern of air holes on the popping frog's back.

"Even with a Smasher Frog there's only one place on the frog when the bass hits and squeezes for the air to

Derward Mauldin, owner of Prototype Lures LLC, says the Smasher Frog he designed usually gets inhaled deep in the mouth whenever bass try to eat it. That's what happened to this flyswatter-colored Smasher Frog.



escape," Mauldin said, noting that model's vent is at the bottom and rear of the bait.

For more information on the Prototype Lures LLC Smasher Frog and other Prototype Lures products, go to prototypelures-llc.com. ■

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

BO KNOWS BASS AND HIS CLASSIC TITLE PROVES IT.

BO DOWDEN



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.

Only two Louisiana residents have ever won the prestigious Bassmaster Classic. Willis P. "Bo" Dowden is one of them and he had to go a long way to do it. He won the 1980 world championship on the most northern waters to ever host the event, the St. Lawrence River in New York.

He is also a member of the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame. Dowden is a former marine dealer and now real estate agent on Toledo Bend. He qualified for and competed in a total of 14 Bassmaster Classics, including finishing in third in 1982. When he retired from competitive fishing in 2001, he had collected career winnings of \$235,261 in sanctioned B.A.S.S. events. ESPN Outdoors and B.A.S.S. named him among the 35 greatest anglers of all-time in 2004.

Because of profound contributions to the legacy of our Louisiana outdoors, the Natchitoches fisherman was recently inducted into the Louisiana Chapter Outdoor Legends Hall of Fame.

"I've always loved fishing and I was just lucky enough to be good at it," said the slow-talking, always serious sounding Dowden. "But you know, we've got so much to be thankful for in this country, I think it's important that we all look at what is going on in this world and make sure we keep this nation free so people can make their own choices. I'm just glad that one of my choices was to fish. I don't know how I ended up standing here, but I thank my family for their support and the good Lord for letting me be here."

A CROWD FAVORITE

Dowden was a crowd favorite at tournament weigh-ins because of his down home steady pace and country slow talking. B.A.S.S. Founder and President Ray Scott frequently embellished Bo Dowden's life story to fire up weigh-in crowds, sarcastically claiming that the slow moving angler was once a silver medalist in track in the 1956 Olympics.

Dowden's Classic win is one of the most talked about in competitive bass fishing lore. He led the Classic from Day 1 and the final day was anything but easy. He was one fish short of his limit the final day and worried as he was barely leading another fairly well known angler, Roland Martin.

Bo made a classic move and tried new waters to get the last fish he needed to win. He wrestled his Ranger bass



“I've always loved fishing and I was just lucky enough to be good at it.”

boat across the worst waves New York's St. Lawrence River could summon. Doubt began to roll like whitecaps through his head. He was frazzled. Bo had finished second and third in previous Classics. He didn't want that again.

Every fishermen in the tournament had a press angler who observed the day's fishing, snapped photos and covered it for various media. I was blessed to be his Press Angler for that last day. Press Anglers usually fished out of the back of the boat to pass the day. On this day, with the weather and the waves so bad, I did not fish. I didn't ever let go of the passenger side handrail except to snap pictures of Bo flopping fish on the deck.

SEEKING THE 'QUEEN BEE'

Bo finally found a calm inlet. He got some bolts back in the Motor Guide trolling motor bracket, which had literally been ripped off the deck during the tempestuous ride down the St. Lawrence. He calmed his nerves by retying the only lure he fished with that day, a black jig-and-pig, and focused on one more good bite. There was no talking. No questions. No posing for pictures. Just the subtle "plink" of the lure hitting boulders and then the water.

Then Bo stood upright and set the hook.

Frazzled turned excited, then fearful, then hopeful. His Lew's Speed Stick bent double. The drag gave line. Bo fell to his knees, as if trying to see underwater.

"Please don't be a pike," he said. "Dear Lord, please don't let this be a pike".

It wasn't. It was a 6-pound, 6-ounce largemouth. He trembled as he held the big bass high in the air, then kissed her and called her "Queen Bee." More like "Money Bee." He didn't know, but it had given him a 10-pound lead over Martin. Bo Dowden was a Bassmaster Classic champion.

Back in those days on the water, there were no camera boats, no cellphones, no fan flotillas... but Bo Dowden's legend still lives.

The Legends Hall of Fame was founded by Garry Mason of Springville, Tennessee, in 2002 and the Louisiana Chapter of the Hall of Fame is headed up by Peyton McKinnie of Marion. You can find out more about the groups on their Facebook pages. ■



BASS CLASS >

LEVI THIBODEAUX GOT HOOKED EARLY

IT'S ALL ABOUT LEARNING EVERY DAY FOR HIGH SCHOOL BASS ANGLER

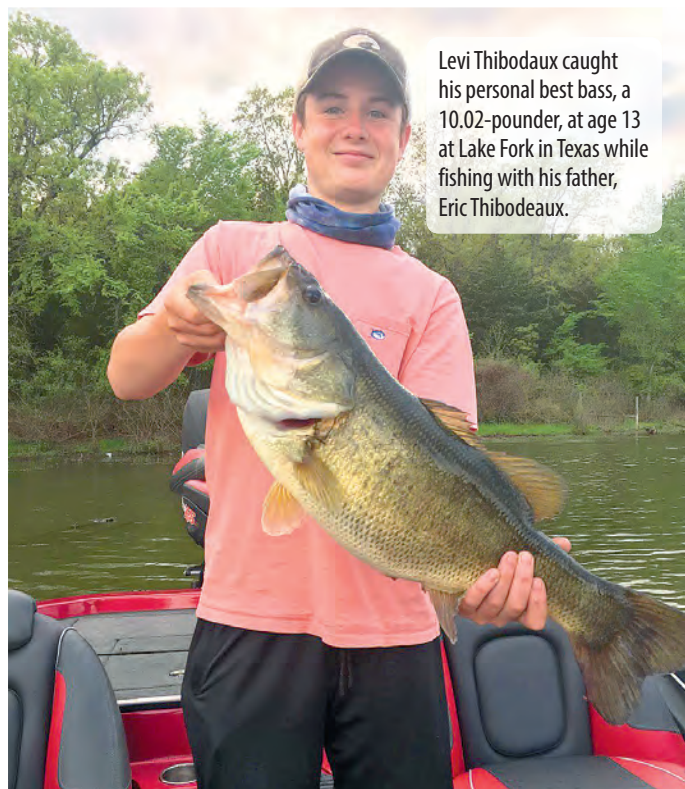
By Don Shoopman

Levi Thibodeaux's father, Erik Thibodeaux of Chackbay, said in so many words a few weeks ago about his son's bass fishing success: It's all about learning, every day, on and off the water.

For example, the elder Thibodeaux said, the boy he took in his boat for the first time at age eight yearned to learn how to catch big bass on what became an annual spring trip to Lake Fork in Texas. Levi Thibodeaux was 13 when he hooked and boated his personal best bass, a 10.02-pounder at Lake Fork.

He also learned from his mistakes. At the two-day Mossy Oak Fishing Bassmaster High School National Championship at Chickamauga Lake in July 2021, Thibodeaux located a large number of good-sized bass, drew a late takeoff number and didn't take into consideration how late he'd get to his fishin' hole with 309 boats.

"We learned it too late. He was on early fish and didn't realize they'd have 300 boats. They bit from 7 to 8 a.m. He didn't get to fish till 8:15. He learned to find a place close to the landing (and target the other bass later in the day)," Erik Thibodeaux, who has been his son's boat captain in high school, said.



Levi Thibodeaux caught his personal best bass, a 10.02-pounder, at age 13 at Lake Fork in Texas while fishing with his father, Eric Thibodeaux.

Levi Thibodeaux of Chackbay was 7 when he won his first tournament. The accomplished high school bass angler captured first place in July 2011 at the Knights of Columbus Council 10800 Garland "Slick" Usea Memorial Youth Fishing Rodeo.



BASS FISHING SCHOLARSHIP

Levi's acquired skills in casting distance, knot tying and casting accuracy paid off in mid-October, 2021 at Decatur Lake in Alabama, where he topped the 80-angler field in the inaugural Abu Garcia Bassmaster High School Combine. The Lafourche Bassmasters standout, a senior at Thibodeaux High School, also used the opportunity to sign a bass fishing scholarship with the Louisiana State University-Shreveport Pilots. Coaches from 20 championship-caliber colleges were on hand to recruit and sign the top prospects based on the skills competition, plus personal interviews to evaluate character, academic goals, etc.

Thibodeaux took the national recognition he earned in stride. "It was pretty cool to go up there and get the trophy," he said. "I was hoping I would win, but didn't know how I'd stand up against everybody. It was definitely stout competition."

HE'S VERY GOOD

The elder Thibodeaux said there's another good reason Thibodeaux won the Abu Garcia Bassmaster High School Combine, finished first in 2021 on the highly competitive Louisiana High School B.A.S.S. Nation East Trail, qualified for the state championship tournament his freshman through senior campaigns and, just recently, teamed with Chance Shelby of Watson and Live Oak High School to win a Bass Tactix TBF on Ross Barnett Reservoir in central Mississippi.

"Oh, he's very good. He can stand up with just about any of us in any boat. He's very intelligent, too, when it comes to changing baits and reading water," the elder Thibodeaux said about his son.

The Thibodeauxs' residence was damaged by Hurricane Ida when the Category 4 storm made landfall last summer in lower Lafourche Parish.

One of his role models, Bassmaster Elite Series pro Tyler Rivet of Raceland, who lives five minutes from the Thibodeaux home had his home destroyed by Ida as well. Hank Cherry of Lincoln, North Carolina, a two-time Bassmaster Classic winner and



Out of 80 high school bass anglers from 28 states, Levi Thibodeaux was crowned No.1 in mid-October 2021 at the inaugural Abu Garcia Bassmaster High School Combine in Alabama.

“We’ve got the ball rolling pretty good but we’ve got to keep it up,” Thibodeaux said, looking ahead to LHSBN tournaments Feb. 5 at Toledo Bend, Feb. 19 at Stephenville and March 5 at Toledo Bend. And he’s looking forward to the LHSBN State Championship, his final appearance, April 30-May at the Ouachita River out of Forsythe Park. He’ll also fish two tournaments with Shelby at the Harris Chain in Florida. Shelby, also an accomplished high school bass angler, was profiled in the December issue of the Louisiana Sportsman.

Thibodeaux’s late winter through early summer schedule is full with bass tournaments every weekend, including a Louisiana B.A.S.S. Nation Spring Qualifier as a Co-Angler on the Red River on Feb. 27 after a stint as Co-Angler in a Major League Fishing Toyota Series stop Feb. 12 at Lake Sam Rayburn in Texas.

Previously, Thibodeaux fished his freshman, sophomore and junior years with Holden Delatte. They cruised to the highly competitive LHSBN East Trail title for 2021. He tipped his fishing cap to his former partner, who wants to

concentrate on a career in welding, and said, “He (Delatte) was a great partner.”

He has beaucoup bass fishing highlights to be thankful for, but the most important?

“I guess spending time with dad and friends,” he said. “There’s nothing like it.” ■

another role model for Thibodeaux, and other Elites sped to the region with supplies and elbow grease to help Rivet and others across Lafourche Parish.

He eased back into bass tournament fishing in time for a highly rewarding fall 2021. In addition to the win on Ross Barnett, where Levi Thibodeaux and Shelby won the Bass Tactix TBF on a rainy day Dec. 11 with 17 pounds and boasted the biggest bass in the 60-boat field, the future Pilot and Caleb Cortez also won the JaBoomasters Classic.

OFF TO A FAST START

Thibodeaux served three years as president of the Lafourche Bassmaster and is fishing his senior season with Andras. Fall 2021 was a time to remember as they surged to 14th Sept. 11 at Toledo Bend, followed up with a fifth place finish Oct. 2 at the Red River and another fifth Oct. 30 out of Doiron’s Landing in Stephenville.



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2022 LOUISIANA FISHING REGULATIONS

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

SALTWATER

STATE REGULATIONS (0-10.357 miles^Δ)

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

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

FRESHWATER

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

* see exceptions in pamphlet. ** no more than two may exceed 30 inches.
*** catfish limit is 100 in aggregate; however, 25 fish in aggregate may be undersized.
only one fish may exceed 27 inches. @Shark season is closed between April 1 and June 30.
^ Closed season for gag grouper Jan. 1 - May 31. Closed season for black, red, yellowfin, yellowmouth&scampgrouperfromFeb.1-March31.-GreateramberjackseasonisopenMay1-31andAug.1-Oct.31.*Closed season on gray triggerfish Jan. 1 - Feb. 28 and June 1 - July 31.



LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN'S
CATFISH PROVIDE A
COLD WATER BONUS.

WINTER BLUES

H By Keith Lusher Jr.
aving been born and raised in south Louisiana and being a sportsman here in bayou country there's one thing I know about the fishermen of this state: They do not acclimate to change very well. And perhaps no body of water has changed for fishermen in recent years as much as Lake Pontchartrain.

After hurricane Katrina blew through in 2005, the Army Corps of Engineers began construction on a rock dam across the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet to protect Chalmette from another storm surge. After completion it soon became clear that blockage reduced the circulation of salt water to Lake Borgne which feeds into Lake Pontchartrain.

In addition to that, the 630 square-mile lake has seen an increase in fresh water via numerous openings of the Bonnet

Carre' Spillway, which diverts river water into the lake when the Mississippi River levels reach flood stage. The transition from salt to fresh is not only changing how anglers fish the area but it is also changing what species inhabit it. So, among other things, Mother Nature is bringing on the blues. Blue catfish, that is. Whether for better or worse, those that fish the lake are learning to just hang on and enjoy the ride.

Carl Schmidt of Abita Springs is doing just that, both figuratively and literally. Schmidt runs jug lines along the northern shoreline of Pontchartrain. He's been fishing the lake since the 50s and said he's never seen as many blue catfish in the lake as he's seeing now. In addition to the numbers, the sizes are also increasing. On Schmidt's latest trip to the lake he caught a personal best 45-pound blue cat.

THE WAY IT WAS ➤

THE WAY IT WAS

Schmidt was born in New Orleans in 1943 and was an avid saltwater fisherman by age 12. He can recall days of catching speckled trout in Pontchartrain along the rocks near the Seabrook Bridge.

“The trout were so thick along the rocks that you could catch them from the bank,” he said.

Schmidt recalls numerous times when he would stop and catch a dozen speckled trout and ride home with a stringer of fish draped across his handlebars.

In addition to trout he would catch large sheepshead in the lake. By age 30 he belonged to a select group of anglers that called themselves the City Limits Tarpon Club.

“The only way you could get into that organization was to catch a tarpon within the city limits of New Orleans,” the 78-year-old said. Schmidt became a member by catching a 156-pound tarpon and five years later he caught one that weighed 188 pounds, which ranked No. 2 in the state.

Some 40 years later Schmidt is still catching big fish, but a lot has changed.

Schmidt moved to Abita Springs in 2012. It’s then that he started running jug lines for catfish in the rivers and certain areas of the lake on the Northshore. With every year that goes by, Schmidt said he is seeing more and more catfish being caught.

THERE’S A SYSTEM

On his latest trip, Schmidt was running jug lines in the Lake near Bayou Lacombe. He baited 30 lines and systematically tossed them out near the shoreline.

“I like to pattern the floats so that if one is missing from the

line of floats, I know to look for it nearby,” he said. “It’s usually not far and very obvious because the float is moving across the surface causing a ruckus.”

After tossing his last line overboard he made his way into Bayou Lacombe in an attempt to try and catch a few bass to pass the time. After a few hours of fishing he decided to make a run and check his jug lines. He passed a few floats and noticed one missing, immediately turning to scan the water surface for the missing float.

“It’s exciting to see one missing because you know it’s missing for a reason,” Schmidt laughed. He soon spotted the float away from the shoreline about 50 feet away. He excitedly gunned the motor and steered his 16-foot flatboat toward the float that was cutting through the water.

“That’s when I knew it was a big fish,” he said. “That thing was moving!”

Schmidt was able to track it down after a 5-minute chase and grab the float. Schmidt ties a loop knot near the float which allows him to connect a separate line that he keeps in his boat. The spare line is approximately 20 feet long and contains a latch which he uses to connect the lines together in order to give him more slack to fight a big fish. Schmidt connected the latch to the float line and the battle began.

“That thing liked to pull me over the side,” he said.

After a 15-minute fight he managed to tire the fish out and was able to net him. Schmidt quickly assembled his slide-in pole that he uses to weigh fish on his boat and after lifting the fish onto the hook the scale read 45 pounds. This was the biggest blue catfish he caught in the lake to date.

“I’m 78 years old and fighting big fish has yet to get old for me,” he said.

THE SCHMIDT SETUP ➤

Carl Schmidt pulls in a nice blue catfish into his aluminum boat, which is just the right size for running down hungry catfish.





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THE SCHMIDT SETUP

Schmidt's lines consist of one main line that ends with a one pound bank sinker. He ties a separate line that measures two feet onto the main line. That line ends with a 5/0 hook. The short line serves as a tension free line so that the fish is able to eat the bait without feeling the float or weight on the bottom. For floats, Schmidt uses swimming noodles. He said he sees those noodles in the trash all the time so he just stops and throws them in his truck. He feeds the main line into the bottom of a two-foot-long noodle. This allows the float to stand up in the water when a fish is hooked.

While most people don't consider catfish picky eaters, Schmidt has a preference as to what he uses as bait for blue cats. He buys a pack of chicken livers and mixes in a cup of sugar into the package. Then he lets the livers soak over night. The sugar makes the livers more firm, and the livers stay on the hook better after soaking in sugar.

TABLE FARE EXTRAORDINAIRE

There are various opinions on which type of catfish taste the best. And everyone agrees that the muddy taste that is experienced on occasion can ruin a fish fry. Anglers who fish the lake for blue cats are in agreement that these fish very rarely taste muddy due to the clean water and partially sandy bottom of Lake Pontchartrain.

While Schmidt enjoys catching big blue cats it's actually the smaller ones that he prefers to keep because of the quality of meat.

"The perfect sized catfish are from 14-18 inches," he said. "I find that meat on the larger ones can tend to be mushy."

Schmidt fillets them and then cuts them into chunks about three inches long. When they are ready to go into the oil he skips the egg wash and goes a different route.

"I like to pat the fillets dry before tossing them into the batter," he said.

When battering the fish, he uses a half mixture of Zatarain's Fish Fry and corn starch.



Keith Lusher Jr. owns and operates NorthshoreFishingReport.com. He is the outdoor writer for the Slidell Independent Newspaper and host of the Northshore Fishing Report on WWL Radio. Lusher can be reached at Keith@NorthshoreFishingReport.com.



This big blue catfish from Lake Pontchartrain will provide several good meals. **INSET:** Schmidt has to chase down a float with a fighting catfish swimming away full speed after swallowing one of the Abita Springs fisherman's baits.



“Get in my boat!” seems to be the call from Carl Schmidt as he slides a nice blue catfish into the boat.

WINTER IS PRIME TIME

Anglers will be able to catch blue cats in the lake with ease this month. But Schmidt warns to stock up your freezer now because the majority of the catfish move back into the rivers when the temperature begins to warm up. Reports show that the catfish are plentiful in the lake from October to March, but this is prime time.

“Those catfish are forced to move out of the rivers during the winter months because of scarcity of food,” he said. “Lake Pontchartrain is full of clams that serve as food for them until the shad return to the rivers. The clams that the catfish feed on are called Rangia Clams. Every winter the blue cats scavenge for them along the bottom of the lake. After swallowing the clams, their digestive juices in their stomachs dissolve the membrane holding the shell closed at the same time dissolving the meat. They then pass the shell.”

Schmidt is one of a growing number of anglers who have turned their attention to catching catfish in the lake. The humble fisherman said that he’s by no means a pro and he’s learning from others how they catch blue cats.

“I feel I’m just scratching the surface,” he said. “There are guys out there catching three times as many fish.”

While Schmidt misses the old days of catching tarpon in Lake Pontchartrain he welcomes the change and is appreciative to still be able to catch fish on the lake that has brought him so many memories.

“Whether it be tarpon or catfish — I’m just thankful that I’m able to get out here put fish in the boat,” he said. ■

PADDLES ‘N PUDDLES ➤

PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

Chris Holmes



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

KAYAKS AND CATFISH?

ANGLERS FINDING SMALLER CRAFT ARE JUST RIGHT TO BRING MR. WHISKERS HOME FOR DINNER

Mix up some near freezing temperatures, howling winds, extreme low water and you have a recipe for a miserable kayak fishing day. That is what often greets anglers in late winter. Often, the best thing you can do on those days is to stay home. If it is miserable outside, build up some hall-pass credits by checking items off the honey-do list or take care of those kayak mods or repairs you put off while the fishing was good. Of course, when you get a couple good weather days, be ready to get out and fish.

Catfishing is a specialty in many areas of the country, primarily in freshwater areas. Although not as glamorous or specialized as other species like bass, it has legions of dedicated anglers. Although there is a growing market of specialized rods, reels, baits and lures, catfish can still be caught with basic gear and methods.

Kayak anglers are also realizing that their craft are quite suited for catfishing. Catfish can be caught in almost any freshwater river, lake or pond across the state. However, another reason for the rise in interest in catfishing by Louisiana kayak anglers is that freshwater species have spread into many areas of coastal Louisiana that were formerly inhabited by only saltwater fish. This is due to many areas becoming more brackish than saline due to hurricane protection and coastal restoration projects. The two main saltwater species are hardhead catfish and gafftops (sailcats) and both have generally been considered trash or nuisance fish by saltwater anglers chasing after speckled trout, redfish and flounder.

MORE COMMON



Using jug lines tied off to a tree, Steven Savoy caught several big catfish out of the kayak.

MORE COMMON

Incidental catches of blue and channel catfish are becoming more common by inshore saltwater anglers and have piqued the interest of kayak anglers wishing to learn how to specifically target these species. Bow fishermen, pursuing primarily redfish, are also getting into to act with some big catfish being arrowed.

The fact is that catching catfish is fairly simple. While live or dead natural bait is a primary means of catching catfish, they are often aggressive and are incidentally caught on spoons, spinnerbaits, soft plastics and even hard lures. For kayak anglers, getting set up is easy and inexpensive. Gear you use for redfish works well for catfish. A variety of lead sinkers from one to three ounces, circle hooks (4/0 to 10/0 depending on fish size targeted) and some heavy leader is all you really need. Catfish are bottom feeders, but using corks also works well in shallow marsh areas.

Bottom fishing for catfish is primarily a waiting game, so having a couple of stout rod holders on the kayak allows you to fish two lines with ease. A wide variety of bait can be used to attract catfish. Chunks of cut mullet, pogy or shad work well, but any type of natural bait is good. Of course, several big nightcrawlers threaded onto a circle hook works well. In the coastal areas, dead shrimp are also a favorite.

It doesn't take long to fill the kayak when you catch a mess of big blue cats. More and more, Louisiana's coastal kayak anglers are finding these freshwater beasts near their favorite saltwater fishing spots.



CATFISH RULES CHECK

Make sure you check on the rules, regulations and limits for catfish. They are pretty simple, but do vary by species and areas.

Louisiana Freshwater Catfish Regulations*:

Blue - 12" minimum length

Channel - 11" minimum length

Flathead - 14" minimum length

Limit: 100 per day in aggregate. A fisherman may possess up to 25 undersized catfish of the three species combined.

*Caddo Lake, Sabine River and Toledo Bend Reservoir have specific regulations. See LDWF pamphlet for details.

GET CONTROL

A large net or small hand gaff is necessary to get control of these powerful fish once you get them to the side of the kayak.

In addition to rod and reel fishing, kayaks make it easy to set and run jugs, limblines and even trotlines. Many kayak anglers like to combine some of these methods.

“At the beginning of the trip, we’ll tie out a few jugs or even set a trot line. We let that sit while having some fun with the fishing rods. At the end of the trip we pick up the other lines and usually have several nice bonus fish to add to the pot,” said James Kellum who regularly kayak fishes for catfish.

Free-floating jug lines also provide some great kayak fun. As long as you are in an area without a lot of current or boat traffic, the jugs can be set where you can keep an eye on them. When a fish is hooked, the jugs are chased down with the kayak to retrieve the fish. It can often be a bit chaotic when several get hooked up at the same time and it becomes a jug-wrangling rodeo. The jugs can also be used stationary by tying them off to trees, branches or pilings.

The good news for coastal kayak anglers is that inland areas where freshwater cats are proliferating are all the popular spots near their favorite saltwater launches. In southeast Louisiana, Hopedale, Delacroix, Shell Beach, Buras, Venice and even Lake Pontchartrain all boast healthy populations of freshwater cats. Docks, pilings, rock jetties and bridges are all good places to look for catfish. Also, they are known to pile up around camps and marinas where fish cleaning tables see tons of scraps and carcasses discarded into the water.

Catfish make great table fare and can be cooked the same way as any other fish. They have liberal creel limits and are easy to catch. Their spread into areas across coastal Louisiana is provid-

ing kayak anglers the opportunity for great action and great meals. ■



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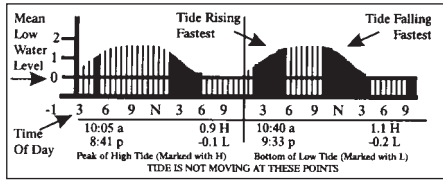
Some of the "EDGE" positions are underwater reef's, shoals, structures, and honey holes

Capt. Paul Titus is Louisiana Sportsman's GPS expert. Need to ask him a question? Go to www.louisianasportsman.com

Find at shop.sportsmannetwork.com



How to use the **SPORTSMAN** Tide Guide



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

Tide Corrections

East Point, Grand Isle HIGH LOW

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

Calcasieu Pass, Lighthouse Wharf HIGH LOW

Cote Blanche Island	+4:33	+3:40
Eugene Island	+1:49	-0:39
Lighthouse Point	+0:58	-0:53
Mermentau River ent.	+0:20	+0:25
Point Au Fer	+1:53	-1:02
Point Chevreul	+3:16	+0:30
Rabbit Island	+2:01	-0:36
Shell Island	+3:08	+0:45
South Point	+1:55	-0:33
Southwest Pass, Vermillion Bay	+1:42	+0:51
Weeks Bay	+3:58	+3:56

SUNDAY MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY

East Point Grand Isle

2.0 ft. 1.0 ft. 0.0 ft.	1 NM 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 8:34 am -0.8 L 10:19 pm 0.9 H	2 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 9:20 am -0.6 L 11:10 pm 0.7 H	3 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 9:55 am -0.4 L 11:58 pm 0.5 H	4 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 10:07 am -0.2 L	5 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 12:47 am 0.3 H 9:13 am 0.0 L 3:46 pm 0.1 H 11:00 pm 0.1 L		
2.0 ft. 1.0 ft. 0.0 ft.	6 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 2:37 pm 0.3 H	7 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 1:44 am -0.1 L 2:46 pm 0.5 H	8 FQ 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 2:31 am -0.3 L 3:19 pm 0.6 H	9 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 3:16 am -0.4 L 4:04 pm 0.7 H	10 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 4:02 am -0.5 L 4:58 pm 0.7 H	11 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 4:49 am -0.5 L 5:56 pm 0.8 H	12 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 5:37 am -0.5 L 6:54 pm 0.8 H
2.0 ft. 1.0 ft. 0.0 ft.	13 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 6:21 am -0.5 L 7:47 pm 0.8 H	14 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 7:02 am -0.5 L 8:33 pm 0.8 H	15 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 7:37 am -0.5 L 9:16 pm 0.8 H	16 FM 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 8:07 am -0.4 L 9:58 pm 0.8 H	17 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 8:29 am -0.3 L 10:44 pm 0.6 H	18 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 8:41 am -0.2 L 11:40 pm 0.5 H	19 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 8:27 am 0.0 L 2:29 pm 0.1 H 5:25 pm 0.1 L
2.0 ft. 1.0 ft. 0.0 ft.	20 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 1:09 am 0.2 L 7:11 am 0.2 L 1:02 pm 0.3 H 9:22 pm 0.0 L	21 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 1:05 pm 0.5 H 11:44 pm -0.2 L	22 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 1:38 pm 0.7 H	23 LQ 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 1:13 am -0.4 L 2:29 pm 0.8 H	24 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 2:26 am -0.5 L 3:34 pm 1.0 H	25 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 3:34 am -0.6 L 4:49 pm 1.0 H	26 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 4:38 am -0.7 L 6:08 pm 1.1 H
2.0 ft. 1.0 ft. 0.0 ft.	27 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 5:39 am 0.6 L 7:24 pm 1.0 H	28 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 6:35 am -0.6 L 8:34 pm 1.0 H	Order the Tide Guides for over 40 locations throughout Louisiana. Call 1-800-538-4355 or go on line www.lasmag.com				

Calcasieu Pass Lighthouse Wharf

3.0 ft. 1.5 ft. 0.0 ft.	1 NM 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 12:48 am 1.5 H 8:44 am -1.2 L 5:01 pm 1.4 H 9:26 pm 0.9 L	2 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 1:44 am 1.4 H 9:34 am -1.0 L 5:29 pm 1.3 H 10:12 pm 0.7 L	3 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 2:47 am 1.3 H 10:20 am -0.7 L 5:52 pm 1.2 H 11:00 pm 0.5 L	4 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 3:59 am 1.1 H 11:04 am -0.3 L 6:10 pm 1.1 H 11:53 pm 0.3 L	5 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 5:19 am 1.0 H 11:48 am 0.1 L 6:25 pm 1.0 H		
3.0 ft. 1.5 ft. 0.0 ft.	6 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 12:54 am 0.1 L 7:14 am 0.9 H 12:40 pm 0.4 L 6:40 pm 1.0 H	7 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 1:56 am -0.1 L 9:27 am 0.9 H 2:15 pm 0.7 L 6:59 pm 1.0 H	8 FQ 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 2:49 am -0.3 L 11:49 am 1.0 H 4:17 pm 0.9 L 7:22 pm 1.0 H	9 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 3:36 am -0.4 L 1:09 pm 1.2 H	10 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 4:23 am -0.5 L 1:57 pm 1.3 H	11 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 5:11 am -0.6 L 2:39 pm 1.3 H	12 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 5:58 am -0.6 L 3:13 pm 1.3 H 8:01 pm 1.1 L 10:04 pm 1.1 L
3.0 ft. 1.5 ft. 0.0 ft.	13 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 6:41 am -0.7 L 3:36 pm 1.3 H 8:03 pm 1.1 L 11:06 pm 1.2 H	14 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 7:21 am -0.7 L 3:55 pm 1.2 H 8:03 pm 1.0 L 11:58 pm 1.2 H	15 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 7:59 am -0.7 L 4:12 pm 1.2 H 8:23 pm 0.9 L	16 FM 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 12:41 am 1.2 H 8:36 am -0.6 L 4:29 pm 1.2 H 8:58 pm 0.8 L	17 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 1:25 am 1.2 H 9:13 am -0.5 L 4:43 pm 1.2 H 8:58 pm 0.6 L	18 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 2:15 am 1.2 H 9:50 am -0.3 L 4:54 pm 1.2 H 10:19 pm 0.4 L	19 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 3:19 am 1.1 H 10:27 am -0.1 L 5:03 pm 1.2 H 11:02 pm 0.2 L
3.0 ft. 1.5 ft. 0.0 ft.	20 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 4:34 am 1.1 H 11:06 am 0.2 L 5:13 pm 1.1 H 11:50 pm 0.0 L	21 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 5:59 am 1.0 H 11:51 am 0.6 L 5:26 pm 1.1 H	22 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 12:46 am -0.3 L 8:18 am 0.9 L 12:53 pm 0.9 L 5:43 pm 1.2 H	23 LQ 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 1:47 am -0.5 L 10:43 am 1.2 H 2:40 pm 1.1 L 6:06 pm 1.2 H	24 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 2:49 am -0.7 L 12:23 pm 1.4 H 4:50 pm 1.3 L 6:55 pm 1.3 L	25 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 3:50 am -0.8 L 1:19 pm 1.5 H 6:03 pm 1.3 L 8:15 pm 1.3 L	26 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 4:54 am -0.9 L 2:05 pm 1.6 H 3:13 pm 1.3 L 9:30 pm 1.4 H
3.0 ft. 1.5 ft. 0.0 ft.	27 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 5:56 am -0.9 L 2:48 pm 1.5 H 7:08 pm 1.2 L 10:49 pm 1.5 H	28 3 6 9 N 3 6 9 6:53 am -0.9 L 3:23 pm 1.5 H 7:43 pm 1.0 L	Order the Tide Guides for over 40 locations throughout Louisiana. Call 1-800-538-4355 or go on line www.lasmag.com				



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



Porter Arteaga

Six-year-old Porter Arteaga killed this buck in Natchez, Miss., on Nov. 26.



Raleigh Rouse

Raleigh Rouse, 11, took this 8-point buck with a 16 1/2-inch spread with a .243 in Kosciusko, Miss., on Dec. 30.



Donnie Ortego

Donnie Ortego harvested this West Feliciana Parish giant opening day of rifle season on Nov. 20. This main frame 8-point scored 143 inches, and tipped the scale at 215 pounds.



Robin Newby

Robin Newby took this buck still in velvet on the morning of Nov. 19 in Folsom with a .35 Whelen.



Laura and George Burch with Lloyd Laconsay had a good day with specks, red and mangrove snapper out of Dulac.



Four-year-old Maria Gomez poses with her first catch from Bedico Creek Preserve.



Sam Brenner and Gil Perez of Okuma Fishing Tackle Corp. with a pair of Venice bull reds caught while fishing with Home Run Charters.



Baylor Allen hauled in this 22-pound catfish on a tree limb line in March.



HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK



Shannon, Mitchell, Blake & Jeff

(Left to right) Shannon Prokasy, Mitchell Prokasy, 14, Blake Robertson, 14, and Jeff Robertson from Mandeville were fishing 40 miles offshore out of Grand Isle on June 1, 2019 when they caught 50 mahi mahi on Matrix Shad soft plastic lures and 8 big red snapper on fresh cut hardtails.



Jacob Sciortino

Jacob Sciortino was 5 when he reeled in this huge catfish all on his own using fresh worms at a pond in Mandeville. His dad, Michael Sciortino Jr., holds up the fish.



Hayden Thibodeaux

Hayden Thibodeaux of Houma had a good catch at Bayou Black with his Papa.



Drake Stelly

Drake Stelly harvested his first deer, a beautiful Beaugard Parish 8-point, on Oct. 29, 2021. It was two days before his 6th birthday.



Although Jacques Holloway, of Labadieville, has taken numerous Texas deer, his first Louisiana deer was a spike taken on the opening day of the youth season in October 2021. A 100-yard shot sealed the deal.



Luke Michel holds up his first bull drum. It was caught in Delacroix on fresh shrimp.



Alton Carney, 10, with a beautiful buck taken in Madison Parish on Nov. 27, 2021.



Ray Fischer caught this 52-inch Seward, Alaska, Lingcod the last week of July 2019. It weighed 52 pounds, just 3 pounds short of a state trophy certificate.



TWO POUND CRAPPIE, LUCKY FALSE FRUIT AND CRICKETS GOING BANANAS

Unless you are a fan of ground-hogs, there isn't a lot exciting about February other than remembering Valentine's Day. And if you forget it, it can really get exciting.

The weather is usually a little funky, but it's a good time to get revved up for the coming fishing season. Charge your batteries. Get your gear in shape. Spend some time learning about the newest baits, techniques and hot fishing spots.

It's also a good time to catch up on some old, tried and true lessons of fishing that you might have missed — like how to weigh crappie, lucky false fruit and how to energize your crickets.

TWO POUND CRAPPIE

It's amazing, but all spring all crappie, sac-a-lait or white perch — whatever you call them — seem to weigh two pounds. Have you noticed that? Let's go down to the lake and check.

Did you catch any?

"Yep. About a dozen two pounders."

That's great.

"Well, all but one. He got away. He weighed nearly three pounds."

(I forgot to mention if a two pound crappie gets away, it weighs almost three pounds.)

There are crappie that occasionally show up that don't weigh two pounds. Let's ask someone else. Hey how about you. Catch any big ones?

"Naw, but we got some good eaters."

Good eaters? Those weigh about a pound apiece, or maybe half a pound. But had they gotten away, they would have weighed two pounds. Never, ever, has a "good eater" gotten away.

LUCKY FISHING "FRUIT"

I can't say how far back this superstition goes, but at least among sport fishermen there exists a belief that bananas on a

boat are unlucky. Usually this rumor takes the form of the fish not biting, but bananas can also cause mechanical breakdowns and other mishaps. Bananas have been known to make fishermen leave the plug out of their boat. Honest. Some in the fishing charter business don't even allow snacks like dried banana chips or banana muffins. Even items bearing the word "banana" or anything evocative of it, like Fruit of the Loom underwear, Banana Republic apparel, and Banana Boat sunscreen can be trouble.

But there is hope. There is a lucky fishing fruit. Apples. Although to be perfectly scientific, apples are a "false fruit". I don't



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.

know why. I don't care why.

Some lessons are easy to learn. I was out with a fishing buddy and fishing was kind of slow. He pulled a big red apple out of his lunch bag. Every time he took a bite, we caught a big crappie (all two pounders, by the way). One time he got excited grabbing the net for one of my many slab crappie and almost got choked.

"Don't spit it out. Don't spit it out," I yelled.

I was talking about the apple, not the fish. He didn't spit out the lucky apple. And the fish didn't spit the bait. And we kept catching fish that day until he ate the last apple. Then the bite suddenly ended. It may be a mystery to some, but I know what it was.

DRIVING CRICKETS BANANAS

Cooter Anderson is a legend on Lake D'Arbonne, mostly because of his nearly 50 years operating Cooter's Bait & Tackle. Cooter has more stories and advice than Carter's has liver pills. Some of you younger folks will just have to Google that to understand.

Cooter taught me that not all banana fishing applications are bad.

One day, I bought 100 crickets and six little orange and white styrofoam bream corks, which I just dropped in a red plastic

cricket box so I wouldn't misplace them. By the time I got ready to go fishing, the crickets had almost devoured the corks. I told Cooter about it and he reminded me to put lettuce leaves or small cut potatoes in there to provide food and water for the crickets. And they like to chew on stuff. He said as long as you feed them and keep them from freezing, they'll stay healthy for a week or longer.

Then he let me in on a little cricket secret.

"I ran out of potatoes one day and had some overripe bananas," he said. "I've got three thousand crickets in here, so I've got to keep them fed. I put those bananas in the cricket bin and the next morning they were gone, peelings and all. And the crickets were more lively than ever. I don't know. They just seemed more chirpy than usual. I heard it when I came in the front door. I gave them more and they loved it."

So February isn't a total loss, no matter what that groundhog does, or if you get candy for Valentine's Day. You now know how much your crappie weigh without using scales. You know to keep an apple or two in your boat cooler. And the tip of the day: Put ripe bananas in your cricket box. The crickets will be fat and chirpy. And that, according to Cooter, makes the bream go bananas! ■

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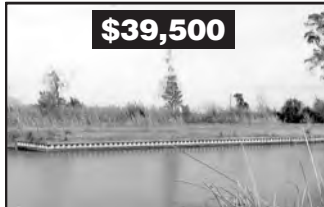
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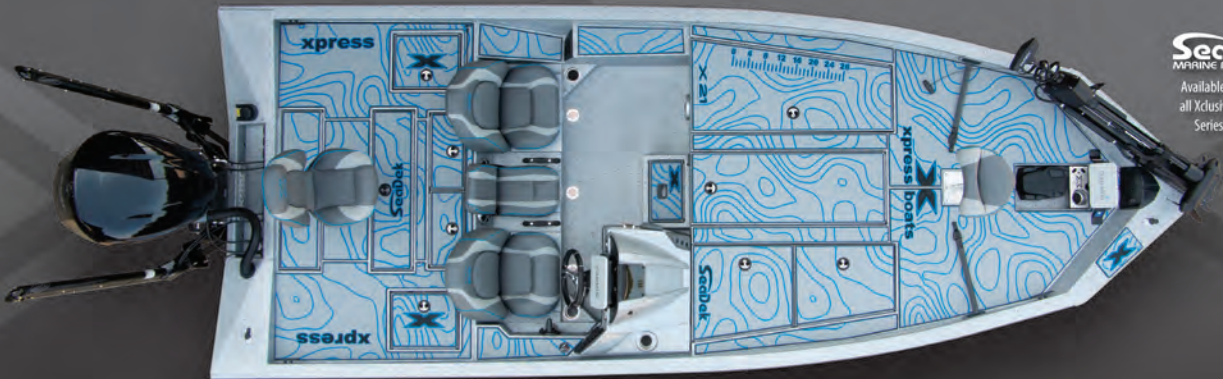
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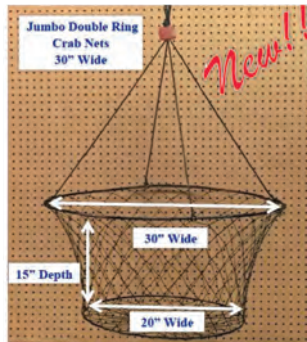
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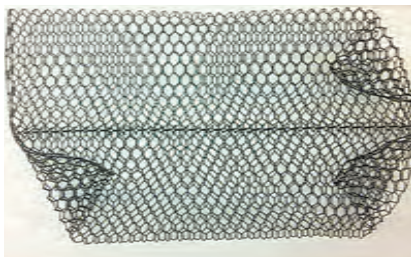
Crab Traps



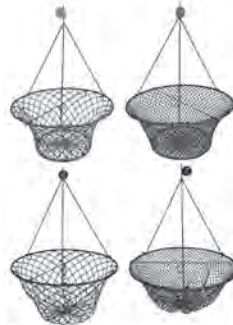
Trawls



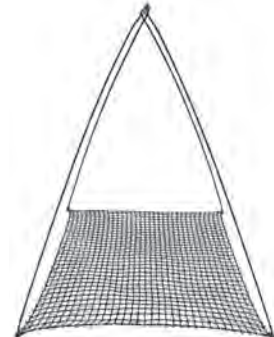
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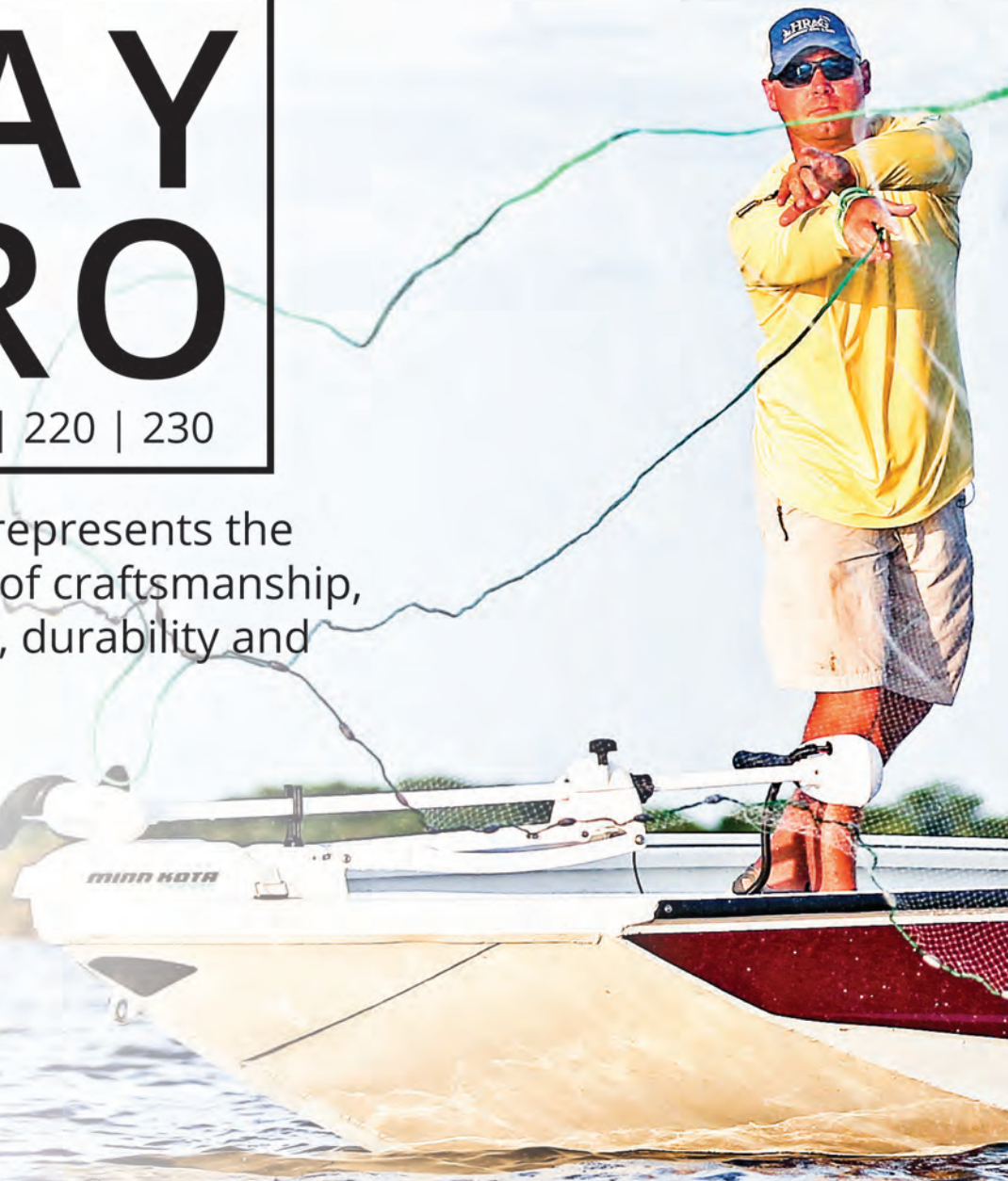
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