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We need our community more than ever right now.

MELISSA PERRIER

Fourth Generation Norco Resident,
Campaign and Marketing Manager for United Way of St. Charles

Pictured in front of her hurricane damaged home in Norco

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Shell recently announced a **\$750,000** contribution to the United Way of St. Charles. And what I know firsthand, from seeing the people who are hurting right now, is that this money will be used in the upcoming months and years to help people rebuild. We truly are all in this together.”

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In the aftermath of Hurricane Ida, Shell will contribute more than \$5 million in combined community and employee relief and recovery initiatives.

United Way



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Catching a two-pound crappie is awesome, but Nick DeWolf of Bossier City catches them by the handful as he fishes the top crappie waters in Louisiana. Photo courtesy Wolf Pak Fishing.

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OUTDOOR 'PRIZES' SEEM TO COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES

Fishing and hunting forays usually fall under one of three categories — prize, consolation prize or surprise. And then, in the outdoors, there's the occasional "booby prize."

Being finely in tune with the signs of nature can help you avoid a booby prize adventure. See if you can pick up on the signs in this story.

It was a beautiful spring week, many moons ago. A group of family members and friends headed out for a long weekend of tent camping and fishing on a secluded hump in the Atchafalaya Basin, acting like we were French explorer Robert Cavalier de La Salle and company. The prize was to be big bunches of catfish and bluegills. We were prepared — an eight man tent, two lean-to tents, sleeping bags, two big cast iron skillets, three miles of rope and a grocery sack full of poor man's peanut oil (Crisco), cornmeal, potatoes and onions. Ice chests were full with 10 pounds of bacon and six dozen eggs. We also had Dr. Pepper and water. And of course, fish

bait, trotline hooks, poles, bobbers, lines, sinkers and almost enough cans of Deep Woods Off.

We had no AccuWeather forecast, no cell phones, not even a map. But we had good directions and permission to stay on the little dry spot of land poking right up from some camps on a lonely dead end canal.

BOUDIN AND DR. PEPPER

We hit the road early and had to stop and eat, of course. Our party included a Baptist preacher. He almost turned around and went home when we stopped at a Sportsman's Quickie Pack and I got a link of boudin and a Dr. Pepper for breakfast. Instead, he scribbled some written notations in his little black prayer book while muttering inaudible incantations.

A couple of hours later, we had launched our boats loaded down with gear at a tiny landing off Belle River. All was going well, but then... The preacher's

outboard motor wouldn't crank. There it was. A sign. A sign that all of us, except him, unfortunately overlooked.

Even though we had at least six expert mechanics who knew about everything from where to tap it with a screwdriver to blowing WD-40 into the intake to get it running, it didn't start. We had about a two mile boat ride into the swamp to camp. The boats were too full to tow one, so the preacher just loaded up and went home. We made sure he left critical supplies — like Off, the big black skillet, boudin and Dr. Peppers.

The next day was great. We caught a washtub full of nice catfish and bream and cleaned them right on the bank not far down from where the boats were tied up. We had a great night's sleep. The next



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.

morning, we got up and ate a big breakfast and took our time. We already had almost enough fish to fill up our ice chests. But when we headed down to the bank, one of the guys yelled, "Look at that big water moccasin! Shoot him." We did. Then we shot another. And another. Before it was over, we had killed 11 snakes and run off about 1.5 million more. Pretty stupid to clean fish that close to camp. I know now.

Then, suddenly, as if we had made the snake gods mad, the sky started clouding up like a scene from the Twilight Zone. Wind shook the tops of cypress trees. We went out and ran our lines, caught more fish, took up the lines and headed back for camp. Our fish to ice ratio was at the max. So we fired up the skillets and reduced the inventory of fish as much as possible. Mid-afternoon as we relaxed and kept an eye on the darkening sky, a local commercial fishermen pulled up and said, in his best Coach O voice, we better get out of there. Real bad weather was coming. Guys that live in the swamp almost never talk to outsiders. The fact that he took time to do it made us realize he wasn't kidding.

There it was. Hit us like a brick. If you go off on a wild outdoor adventure and the preacher's motor won't crank, you should go home.

TOO LATE

We tried to pack up. But before we could even take down the big tent, the northwest wind was churning up waves way too big for us to cross the big lake. Too late. We hunkered down on our hump. Remember that three miles of rope? We used all of it tying everything down.

I'll never forget two things from that night. One, the brutal wind filling our tent with air like a balloon and then the sudden poof of the tent deflating, all during a glorious and loud lightning and thunder show. Two, there was my former brother-in-law, who came despite thinking a rugged day outdoors was getting in 18 holes of golf after work. He "slept" wearing his life jacket over a borrowed yellow slicker suit, tied to a big tupelo tree.

Morning brought sunlight and calmer waters. Sadly, destructive tornadoes had claimed the lives of several people in the area, two in a boat on the very lake we had backed away from trying to cross. We got to the landing and hurried to a phone to call the wives and let them know we were okay and headed home.

Calling the wife. That's an important survival skill. It would have been a shame to live through that night only to be taken out by a cast iron skillet back home. ■



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OUTDOOR UPDATE

ROY WINS \$100,000 KENTUCKY ANGLER TOPS D'ARBONNE, CANEY, BUSSEY MLF EVENT

It By Kinny Haddox started with 80 elite professional bass anglers from around the country, included six days of

grueling fishing on three very different north Louisiana lakes and it was viewed live on the internet by thousands of fans around the world.

It was a grueling late-winter event, but Bradley Roy of Lancaster, Ky., made it a fun trip. Especially the last part, which included a walk up to the winner's podium to claim a \$100,000 first prize check in the B&W Trailer Hitches Stage One Major

League Fishing Pro Bass Tour event finals at Bussey Brake on Feb. 10.

The unique format of the tournament sent anglers to fish the first four days of the event on Lake D'Arbonne in Farmerville. The top 35 from those rounds advanced to a one day knockout round at Caney at Chatham. The top 10 then headed to the newly renovated Bussey Brake Reservoir in Bastrop for the championship. More than \$800,000 in prize money overall was awarded to

the field.

It was Roy who grabbed the biggest catch and the biggest check. Roy spent the day flipping bushes and isolated pieces of structure with a beaver-style bait, using a 7-foot, 6-inch Ark Essence Series flipping stick with a 7:1 gear ratio reel, spooled with 22-pound Seaguar Tatsu fluorocarbon line and a 3/8-ounce Ark tungsten weight.

"Man, this has been a long time coming. God gets all the glory for this one, because I tried every way in the world to mess this one up," Roy said in his post-game interview. "The third period for me was miserable. I just felt like I was taking blow after blow. Randy (Howell) catches a 12. Jordan Lee was coming — I knew he wouldn't quit. Then Alton (Jones) — I could see him. I could see (Bryan) Thrift. They were all catching them, and I couldn't get a bite.

"I think the baby pattern must be the deal," Roy said, of his new son Lucas who was just born in August. "Everyone always says — you have a new baby, and you win a tournament. Well, we just had Lucas, and now I win. I think there might be something to that."

Jones, of Lorena, Tex., finished second with 24-15 and won \$45,000; Lee, of Cullman, Ala. was third with 24-9 and won \$38,000 and Brian Thrift of Shelby, N.C. was fourth with 23-15 and won \$32,000. Louisiana's two anglers in the event, Cliff Crochet and Gerald Spohrer, didn't make the finals but won \$3,741 and \$10,000 respectively.

Overall, the final day on Bussey Brake was tough at first, but then turned incredible. One of the MLF announcers described it as being "like a home run



Photos courtesy Major League Fishing

Bradley Roy fought for six days through three Louisiana lakes and a field of 80 professional anglers to grab this trophy and the MLF championship on D'Arbonne, Bussey and Caney.



derby with the wind blowing in." Anglers knew big fish were there, but they couldn't get them to bite. In the end, the final 10 Bass Pro Tour anglers caught 31 scoreable bass on Bussey weighing 163 pounds, 2 ounces — an average weight of 5 pounds, 5 ounces. The catch included three 7-pounders, one 8-pounder, two 9-pounders and one 12-pounder, a day that had the professional bass fishing world buzzing.

For the second consecutive day, pro Randy Howell of Guntersville, Ala. broke the Bass Pro Tour record for heaviest bass ever weighed in. On Wednesday, he landed a 10-pound, 11-ounce giant from Caney Creek. On Thursday at Bussey, Howell backed it up with a new record-setting 12-pound, 14-ounce lunker, also a new lake record for Bussey.

"Overall, I didn't catch many bass this week, but I made it all the way to sixth place," Howell said. "It just goes to show you that one flip, one cast can change your whole life. Never give up, fish to the last minute and good things will happen."

There were several eliminations to get to the finals. Two anglers qualified for the championship with their catches on Lake D'Arbonne. Fishing there was brutal following a major cold front that left anglers with ice on their boats and fish sluggish from temperatures in the low 20's. One round of practice was even cancelled due to icy conditions.

Mark Daniels, Jr. of Tuskegee, Ala., and Jarred Lintner of Covington, Ga., earned automatic berths in the championship with their performance at D'Arbonne. Daniels caught 16 bass weighing 33 pounds, five ounces and Lintner caught 18 bass weighing 47 pounds, five ounces, both in two days of fishing on D'Arbonne. Jacob Wheeler then won the knock-out round on Caney with his personal best tournament catch, nine bass weighing 43 pounds, seven ounces. His largest was seven pounds, 11 ounces.

Each competing angler has a certified marshall who weighs each bass as it is caught, registers it in the computer and then the fish is immediately released back into the water. Each boat also has a camera

on board with live coverage of the event provided over majorleaguefishing.com every minute of the actual fishing tournament.

The tournament payouts go deeper than angler checks. MLF and the sponsoring Monroe West Monroe Convention and Visitors Bureau and Louisiana Department of Tourism estimate the regional economic impact of the event at around \$2.1 million, plus immeasurable long-term value based on the positive publicity the area lakes and businesses received. ■

Randy Howell was on fire with this 10-pound, 11-ounce Caney giant, setting an MLF tournament record. Howell then landed a 12-14 on Bussey the next day to break the record once again.



Photos courtesy Major League Fishing

LDWF: CWD SAMPLE FROM DEER HARVESTED IN TENSAS PARISH CONFIRMED AS POSITIVE

T From News Reports
he National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa, has confirmed that Chronic Wasting Disease was found in a sample from an adult buck harvested recently on private land in northeast Tensas Parish, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries announced.

This is the same deer diagnosed with CWD, which is always deadly in deer, in early February by the Louisiana Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory. The hunter-harvested deer is the first to be discovered with CWD in Louisiana.

After that earlier finding, LDWF, in accordance with a Declaration of Emergency order by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission, imposed a feeding and baiting ban as well as deer

carcass export restrictions in Tensas and nearby Franklin and Madison parishes.

What this order means:

- All supplemental feeding, including mineral or salt licks, is prohibited in Tensas, Franklin and Madison parishes. The purpose of this feeding ban is to reduce the potential for the spread of CWD in Louisiana by reducing the risk of exposure when deer are concentrated around feeding sites.

- The use of approved bait not normally ingested by deer for feral hog trapping will be allowed. All bait must be placed and contained within the trap itself. Backyard bird feeders are also exempt from this supplemental feeding prohibition.

- The export of cervid carcasses or part of a cervid carcass originating within Tensas Franklin and Madison parishes is prohibited, except for: meat that is cut and wrapped; meat that has been boned out; quarters or other portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached, antlers, clean skull plates with antlers, cleaned skulls without tissue attached, capes, tanned hides, finished taxidermy mounts and cleaned cervid teeth.

To see the complete declaration of emergency, go to <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/resources/category/commission-action-items>. ■



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'MACHO MAN' GOES DOWN

IT'S A LIFETIME BUCK AND AN EXCITING TIME FOR KNUCK AND KNOCKER

G By Adam Newton
raham Newton is a seventh grader at Saint Anthony of Padua Catholic School in Bunkie. He is a die-hard LSU sports fan and enjoys playing football, baseball and basketball.

Graham was nicknamed Knuck by his grandfather, Knocker. He also has a love for hunting and fishing. During the summers the two, along with Graham's younger siblings and cousins, enjoy spending weekends at Southern Comfort in Dulac, La., at Knocker and Big Mama's fishing camp. But when the weather cools off, Knuck trades in his fishing poles for shotguns and rifles. One of his all time favorites is squirrel hunting with a 22 rifle.

"My dad says it's one of the best ways to target practice while hunting," Knuck said.

All that practice paid off for Graham when he would be given the opportunity of a lifetime.

Knuck also deer hunts with his family on 200 acres of private land in Avoyelles Parish, much of which is in the Conservation Reserve Program. Their season started slowly, only seeing target bucks on trail cameras during nighttime hours. The main shooter, named "Boogar," was taken by one of the neighbors on Dec. 26, so Knuck was already looking forward to next season.

NEW YEAR'S SURPRISE

But the club members got a New Year's surprise that would shake up the season

READER REPORT



Graham Newton shot this giant 14-point buck on Jan. 5 in Avoyelles Parish.

and give everyone some encouragement as the rut was just kicking off. They captured a new deer on camera that was the biggest buck to ever step foot on this property. They named him "Macho Man."

"I told dad, I'm not going back to school until that deer is dead," Knuck said. The weather didn't cooperate. He hunted the next few days without any sign of "Macho Man." Knuck had to go back to school, which was hard since his Uncle Donnie spotted the big one on camera twice at 9 a.m. and at 4 p.m. He wanted to go to school late, but his parents said no.

What Knuck didn't know was that Knocker was checking him out of school that next day to bring him hunting.

Knocker and Knuck eventually made their way to one of their favorite box stands. Graham decided to spice things up with a loud mature grunt.

"I grunted with my Extinguisher grunt call around 4 p.m. and right after, I heard something walking through the bushes not far from the stand. I really thought it was a raccoon or something but all of a sudden I saw rack. I grabbed my gun and told Knocker it's him, I know it's him. "Macho Man" is right there. I got my gun out the window as fast as I could and waited for him to come out of the bushes. The deer's horns kept getting tangled in the branches. At 4:20 he finally came out into an open square about 35-40 yards in



Cody Holmes was hunting on family land in East Feliciana Parish when he took this big buck on Jan. 2.

THINKING HE MISSED THREE TIMES, HOLMES FINDS DOWNED BUCK NEARBY

C By Glynn Harris
 ody Holmes, 31, berated himself for believing he had missed the biggest deer he had ever seen. Not once; not twice; but even a third shot gave little indication that his aim was true. Incredibly, all three shots from his Thompson Center .308 were on target and the buck only ran 15 yards after the third shot.

"I hunt on family land in East Feliciana Parish near Clinton and had been seeing this big buck on my trail camera since early December, but I only had night photos of him," said Holmes, who

works for Southern Power as a Transformer Division Coordinator.

If you live in Louisiana, you no doubt remember that on New Years Day the weather was unusually warm with high temperatures approaching 80 degrees. Instead of sitting and sweating on his deer stand, Holmes pulled on his shorts and decided to head for a pond on his property near where he lives in the town of Ethel to give the bass a try.

"The fish were cooperative and I caught a good bunch of bass," he said. "The following morning, it was still warm so I headed back to the pond to fish for bass."

However, the weather was on the verge of a change to conditions more appropriate for January and Holmes was aware that a significant cold front was approaching the area.

STARTING TO COOL DOWN

"After fishing a couple of hours, I could tell it was starting to cool down so I left the pond, got my hunting gear and headed for my deer stand," he said. "The change to cooler weather plus the approach of the New Moon for January got me thinking that maybe, just maybe, the buck that had been moving only at night might make an appearance during daylight hours."

Soon after mounting his lock-on stand around 2 p.m., a stand that overlooks a food plot where a fall/winter mix had been planted, the cold front got cranked up in earnest with falling temperatures and winds beginning to pick up.

"The wind really started blowing and I felt like there was no way that deer would be out moving under such conditions," Holmes said. "Then about 4:45, a single doe stepped out into the food plot, milled around a minute or so and then left. Around 5:00, a couple more does came out. Then I spotted about seven does coming onto the plot. The does were acting skittish like they were alarmed and I wondered if maybe a buck was in the area. Looking down the plot, I saw the buck I had on camera standing at the edge of the wood line."

THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM

Afraid the buck might turn and head back to the woods, Holmes quickly got the scope on the vitals of the buck and squeezed off a shot. Nothing happened. The buck just stood there.

"I was afraid I had missed, so I jacked another round into my rifle and fired again with the same result," Holmes said. "He was still standing there so I got another round in and fired a third time. This time, the buck turned and ran back into the woods. By now I was a nervous wreck thinking I had just missed the biggest buck I had ever seen three times."

By then it had gotten dark and Holmes made the decision to not go down and look

for blood or a sign of a hit so he called his brother, telling him to bring a blood-trailing dog.

"I went back to my house to wait on my brother," he said. "When he finally got there an hour later we went back to where I had shot at the deer, turned the dog out and the tracking job took only fifteen seconds; the buck had traveled only fifteen yards before falling.

"When we skinned the deer later, we found where all three bullets had hit the deer, any one of which would have been lethal. I think if I had waited before firing the second shot, he'd have fallen right there."

The buck was a main-frame 8-point with an extra kicker giving him a total of 9 points. The buck weighed just over 200 pounds, was determined to be 5½ years old with lots of mass and an incredible 21 3/8 inch inside spread. The unofficial score of the rack was 153 inches. ■

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BUCK SHOWS UP AFTER GOING MISSING OVER A YEAR

It By Glynn Harris
was on Christmas Day, 2020, when Bubba Wiley last had a trail camera photo of a big buck that had been showing up regularly prior to that Christmas. He suddenly vanished without any evidence that he was still in the area.

"I had him on camera pretty regularly that season and then after the Christmas 2020 photo, he just dropped off the map," Wiley said. "I had no idea what happened to him, if he had ventured off the property, another hunter shot him or he had otherwise died."

As the 2020-21 season was nearing closure, the buck was a still no-show on cameras or actual sightings. But that all changed on the afternoon of Jan. 10, 2022 when he suddenly appeared out in front of the box stand where Wiley sat.

Wiley, age 26, lives in Jonesville and works derricks in the oil field in east Texas. He was home during the early days of January and decided to go sit on a stand on property owned by family members in Catahoula Parish.

"I got on my stand the morning of Jan. 9," Wiley said. "I saw a couple of does and saw three boar hogs, and I shot two of the hogs."

The following day, Wiley got back in his box stand at noon with plans to sit the rest of the day. This was the first time he had hunted that stand all season. The stand overlooks three shooting lanes where Wiley had scattered corn and bran.

"I sat from noon until around 4:30 when the first deer showed up, four does," he said. "Then some bucks began filtering out of the woods onto the lane and I counted eight different small bucks that walked out."



Bubba Wiley took this trophy 11-point buck on Jan. 10, 2022 on property owned by family members in Catahoula Parish.

ELUSIVE BUCK APPEARS

Twenty minutes later, out stepped a big buck at 40 yards and Wiley recognized him as the one he hadn't seen in over a year.

"We have an unwritten rule and understanding to not shoot a buck unless he's mature enough to mount," Wiley said. "I spent a good 30 minutes trying to make up my mind if this one was big enough to shoot. I decided he was a shooter so I put the scope on my Savage .308 on him and hit the trigger. When I shot, he

took off back through the woods.”

Giving the buck time to expire, Wiley sat on his stand until dark before walking down to where the deer was standing when he shot. He found blood as evidence of a good hit.

“I have blood trailing dogs and was thinking about getting them but I walked just a little way in the direction he had run and found him piled up at 20 yards,” Wiley continued.

The buck carried a rack of 11 points with an inside spread of 17 3/8 inches. Main beams were 24 inches with bases over five inches each.

“He was rutted down and probably only weighed about 190 pounds,” Wiley said. “He was aged at 4½ years.”

The buck was taken to two different sporting goods stores to be measured and entered into big buck contests. The rack measurement was 165 6/8 inches. ■

““” *I had him on camera pretty regularly that season and then after the Christmas 2020 photo, he just dropped off the map.*

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REFURBISHED RIFLE TAKES FIRST BUCK FOR SUGGS

A By Glynn Harris
year ago, Steve Minton ordered some parts and put together a refurbished rifle for his son, Tommy Suggs. The remodeled Savage .308 proved to be just the ticket for 15-year-old Tommy, an eighth grade student at Sicily Island High School. He had taken a couple of does with the rifle, but had not had a chance to down a buck. However, on the afternoon of Jan. 15, the stars were aligned for Tommy as he was successful in downing his first buck with the gun. And a fine one it was.

Tommy and his dad hunt on 250 acres of family land in Catahoula Parish and there was particular interest in trail camera photos of a big buck, photos that began appearing around the beginning of bow season. But all the photos were at night.

"The last two photos we got of the buck showed him starting to come out in late afternoon," Minton said. "The first one was just after legal shooting hours but the next one showed him on the food plot at 5:30. I told Tommy we had better get on our stands as it looked like he was starting to come out in time to see him before dark."

There were two cameras out in front of two different stands, so Minton elected to get on one stand while Tommy got settled in the other.

"Not long after I got on my stand," Tommy said, "a total of 11 deer— 10 does and a small buck— came out to feed. I was just messing around with my phone when at 5:00, I looked up and there was this big buck standing at 256 yards; I ranged him at that distance."

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

You might imagine what was going through his young mind as he tried to get prepared for a shot at the biggest buck he had seen.

"I started to get nervous; my heart was pounding and thankfully I had sand bags on the shooting rail to help steady my rifle," he said. "I got him in the scope, but he wasn't turned right and it took him a good five minutes, which felt much longer, to turn so I could take a shot. When he got to 225 yards next to our food trough, I hit the trigger and the buck fell between the trough and the camera we had there."

The first thing he did was to call his dad to tell him what he had done. After Minton came, the pair walked down to the fallen buck.



High school student Tommy Suggs downed this trophy 10-point buck on family land in Catahoula Parish on Jan. 15.

"I was still hollering and screaming from the time I called him until we walked up on the downed buck," Tommy said.

The buck was a dandy, sporting a rack of 10 points, a main frame 9 point with a kicker off one of the main beams. Inside spread was 18 inches with 24-inch main beams and impressive six inch bases. The buck weighed 220 pounds and was estimated to be 5½ years old.

Taking the buck to Simmons Sporting Goods to be measured and entered in the store's Big Buck Contest, the rack measured 151 inches. That put the buck just out of the top five in the Youth category.

"We haven't checked the camera next to the food trough yet," Minton said, "but I'll bet it has photos of the whole thing. That will just add more excitement to the story." ■

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BIG 9-POINT RICHLAND PARISH BUCK HARD TO BRING DOWN

If By Glynn Harris
ever there was a buck that refused to go down, it had to be an old 8 ½-year-old Richland Parish 9-point that survived not only being grazed last season by an arrow, but had his brisket creased by a bullet as well. This season, it took three well placed shots with 300 grain bullets to finally put him down for good.

Gordon Sorey shared the story of this big buck that he has known about for at least six years.

"I found his shed antlers for the past six years and the buck was estimated to be at least 8½ years old," Sorey said. "Last year, he came out on a neighbor who was bow hunting. He released an arrow that grazed his back. Then before the season ended last year, my daughter was on a stand when the buck appeared in a thicket out from the stand but she could only see his head and neck.

"Even though he was in brush, she estimated where his vitals were and took a shot. Her bullet clipped him just under his rib cage."

DECIDING TO WAIT

Ten days before the season ended last year, the buck was back on camera, so Sorey knew he had survived both the arrow and bullet. He had dropped one of his antlers, so Sorey decided not to hunt him since he didn't want to take a buck that big that had only one antler.

"I kept feed out this year until March and April and my neighbor and I started getting him back on camera," Sorey said. "I have two stands on the property, one on the south end and another on the north end. On Thursday, Jan. 27, I was hunting from my south stand, my phone 'pinged' alerting me to a photo of the buck at the feeder next to my north stand at 5:59."

The following afternoon, Sorey elected to sit on the north stand to see if the buck would make another appearance during shooting hours. His friend and long-time hunting buddy, Charlie



Thomason, sat on the south stand.

"I had a doe and two yearlings hanging around my stand," he said. "At around 5:30 I looked up to see a big bodied deer at 165 yards, but low-hanging limbs obscured my vision. I thought it was a big doe until he put his head down to nibble on oats on the food plot. Then I knew it was the big buck."

A RESILIENT DEER

Sorey shoots 300 grain bullets through a Knight KP1 rifle in .45-70 caliber. He first scoped the buck out with his binoculars to confirm it was the big one, laid a glove on the shooting rail and

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OPPOSITE PAGE: Gordon Sorey finally took down this 9-point trophy buck that survived being grazed by an arrow and creased by a bullet in Richland Parish.

readied for a shot.

"He had turned and was quartering away and was headed back into the palmetto and weeds so I shot," Sorey said. "When I did, he flipped over and, as I was reloading, the buck lunged into the palmetto. He fell on his belly but I could see his head and neck so I put another round into him."

Surely that was enough to put the buck out for good, but that wasn't exactly what happened.

"I got down, went to him, laid my rifle aside and was prepared to drag him out of the palmetto, but as I sent a photo to Charlie before I pulled him out, I turned around and the buck was back on his front legs trying to get up," he said. "It took a third shot to finish him off."

The buck carried a rack with an inside spread of 20 inches. He was not officially weighed, but Sorey estimated the deer weighed around 235 pounds.

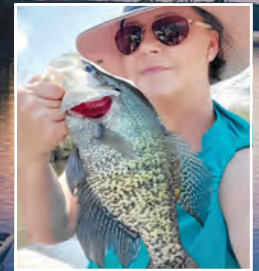
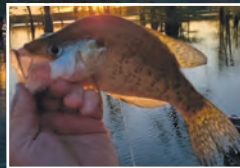
"It took all Charlie and I could do to get him loaded," he said.

Buck Master scorer, Cecil Reddick, put the tape on him and measured 158 5/8 inches.

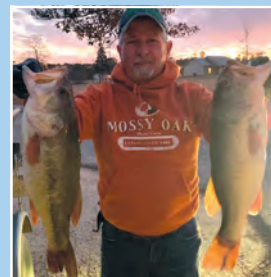
"I want to give Charlie Thomason credit for the fact that every time he and I hunt together, something good happens," Sorey said. Taking the buck to Poindexter Taxidermy in Mangham, the jaw bone showed the buck to be at least 8½ years old. ■



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'THE KING IS DEAD'

HOPEFULLY THERE'S NO SUCCESSOR FOR CORCORAN'S BIG HOG

A By Kinny Haddox

shon Corcoran was enjoying his recent graduation from the University of Louisiana-Monroe and getting ready to move to Seattle for a job in construction management when he decided to get in a couple of last deer hunts near his home in Washington Parish.

His hunt on the morning of Dec. 21 was a memorable one, but not because of a big deer. The 22-year-old from Franklinton killed a 260-pound boar hog with huge tusks. The hog had never been seen in daylight, but had shown up on trail camera pictures at night, prompting Corcoran's 4-year-old nephew Walker to nickname the monster hog "The King" while reviewing the trail cam photos.

Louisiana hunters who keep up with their French history would have to immediately think of King Louis XVI when his predecessor died and put him in power: "the king is dead, long live the king!" But this "King" may not have a successor. Most folks are hoping he doesn't. Corcoran and his hunting companions

haven't seen any sign of another one anywhere near this big.

"We had a cold front come through that week before Christmas and I thought it would be a good time to go after a big buck we had been seeing on camera," Corcoran said. "It was freezing and I got to the stand way too early — about 5:30 a.m. I sat there and at very first light I saw a big blob in the dark down the road to the right of the stand. I knew it wasn't a deer, but I couldn't tell if it was a bear or a hog."

BIG NUISANCE

Finally it got light enough to be sure and Corcoran recognized it was feral hog royalty. He took aim and shot and the hog ran about 20 yards and crashed. He shot it with a Remington .243. He stayed and hunted for a while, but his shot had pretty well messed up his deer hunt for the day.

"It took two of us to drag it out and three of us to get it in the back of the Ranger," he said. "It pretty well filled it up. We were going to try and use the backstraps and some of the other meat

OPPOSITE PAGE: Ashton Corcoran nailed this 260-pound wild hog while deer hunting in Washington Parish this season. **RIGHT:** A close-up of these tusks shows why hunters don't want to have a face-to-face run in with one of these monsters.

to make sausage, but when we tried to clean it, the meat just wasn't any good and had worms."

Cocoran was rewarded the next day when any other hogs that might have been around stayed hidden and a nice 8-point came out in his shooting lane and he nailed it. His brother, Micah Magee, also killed a big 6-point out of the same stand.

Feral hogs are a growing nuisance and problem in Louisiana's outdoors. A huge boar like that one is even causing some safety concerns among hunters.

"Yes, you don't want to be walking in the woods in the dark and come face to face with that thing," Corcoran said. "It's certainly something to think about." ■



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CHILDREN'S MIRACLE NETWORK TOURNAMENT SET MARCH 13 ON TOLEDO

R By Don Shoopman
andy Despino enjoyed an early fishing highlight to the new year during the last week of January, but he expects even more uplifting moments on March 13, the day of the Despino Tire Children's Miracle Network Bass Tournament at Toledo Bend.

It's motto, "Fishing for a Cause," which is emblazoned in the event's logo, raised \$24,000 for the two CMN hospitals in the state last year. Thanks to the fishermen and generous sponsors, the tournament supports critical care services for the tiniest of lives in the Sportsman's Paradise.

The fundraising tournament is ultra-popular for other reasons, including the guaranteed \$20,000 first-place prize.

This year's event starts with "lines in" at 7 a.m. and "lines out" at 3 p.m. at Cypress

Bend Resort on the lake southwest of Many. The "trailer" team tournament's entry fee is \$260 (including big bass). For more information about entering or sponsorships, call (318) 445-4561 or (318) 447-0102.

The Colfax pro bass angler, cattle rancher, propane gas dealer and tire dealership owner with stores in Louisiana and Texas is proud of the tournament that raises money for children's departments in both Alexandria and Shreveport CHRISTUS Hospitals. He praises the volunteers who help.

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Despino personally got his 2022 Major League Fishing Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit fishing season off to a great start the last week of January at Lake Sam Rayburn. Despino finished third with five bass weighing 16 pounds, 11 ounces, worth \$25,000. ■



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OUTDOOR
UPDATE

These youngsters, shown with their catch of bass, are among thousands who have enjoyed this annual event over the years.



NEW ORLEANS CITY PARK HOSTS ITS 73RD ANNUAL *BIG BASS RODEO*

F From Staff Reports

ishing rodeos and tournaments usually bring to mind fast and fancy boats, expensive fishing tackle and a mad dash to catch the big ones. But the annual Big Bass Rodeo and “Fishtival” in New Orleans City Park is anything but that. It’s just about old fashioned fishing and fun for the whole family. This year it will be held on Saturday, March 26.

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) and New Orleans City Park will host the event for the 73rd time this year, making it the oldest fishing rodeo in the nation. There is a category for every age and a free family friendly “Fishtival.” The day’s fishing also includes the Battle for the Bass, a student fishing tournament, as well as Boats on the Bayou, a kayak and non-motorized vessel tournament on Bayou St. John.

The Big Bass Rodeo is a catch-and-release shore fishing tournament for anglers targeting the largest bass. A recreational fishing license is required for participants 16 years and older. For junior anglers (ages 12 and under), the rodeo includes competitive categories for heaviest bass or heaviest cichlid, bream, or perch.

There are small entry fees for the Big Bass Rodeo, Boats on the Bayou and Battle for the Bass.

All lagoons in the Park are open to fishing except the Louisiana Children’s Museum campus, Bayou Oaks North and South golf courses, the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden at the New Orleans Museum of Art or any current construction sites. Bayou St. John is considered part of City Park and is open to fishing. No boating vessels are allowed in lagoons within the Park. If you plan on fishing, make sure you read and understand all the rules and get registered in the correct divisions.

The Battle for the Bass Tournament is for students in grades seven through 12 to represent their schools in teams of up to five anglers and battle it out for the heaviest two-bass combined weight. Boats on the Bayou is open to anglers with kayaks and

other non-motorized watercraft and offers two competitive categories: Bass and Trashbash. Registration is open and fees vary depending on division. Deadline to register is 5 p.m. March 24.

The “Fishtival” is free and will take place from 9 a.m. until noon in the grandstand area in front of Popp’s Bandstand on Dreyfous Avenue, featuring live music, hands-on activities for kids and LDWF mascot Robbie the Redfish.

For more information visit <https://neworleanscitypark.com/big-bass-fishing-rodeo-and-fishtival>

For more than 170 years, New Orleans City Park has provided a popular place to fish on the bayou, picnic, experience safe outdoor play, or engage in athletic pursuits — as evidenced by more than 16 million visits each year. ■

The City Park fishing rodeo is a bank-fishing only event, which makes it perfect for young anglers.





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THE GREAT FISH COVER UP

■ By Kinny Haddox

ARTIFICIAL HABITAT PROVIDES "HOME SWEET HOME" FOR CRAPPIE.

JOHN GODWIN KNEW RIGHT WHERE HE WANTED TO GO CRAPPIE FISHING.

And it didn't matter if there were any there or not. He was going to bring the fish to him, "Field of Dreams" style.

You know, "If you build it, they will come."

That was the first order of business this pretty spring day on Lake D'Arbonne in Union Parish as Godwin guided his 21-foot dark gray SeaArk off the channel to the edge of an underwater flat. We were officially crappie fishing, but there was work to do before we dropped the first jig in the water. And while Godwin is well known for his duck hunting, he also loves catching crappie. "See that little underwater hump right here beside the little depression?" John asked as he pointed to the screen of his Humminbird Helix electronics. "This is a perfect spot for crappie to stage going back and forth between the spawning areas and the deeper water. What it needs is a MossBack Fish Habitat to hold the fish here where we can find them easily."

SIGNATURE MODEL

And Godwin just happened to have one laying in pieces right on the bottom of the boat. And not just any setup, but the John Godwin Signature Crappie Tower model he helped design. You know you really believe in something when you let them put your name on it.

"One of the first things I liked about these is the fact that it comes in pieces and you can lay it in the bottom of your boat and take it anywhere you want to on the lake without anybody knowing you are about to put out a fish attractor," the West Monroe angler said. "The less attention, the better. And when you get where you want to deploy it, you can put it together in 10 minutes or less and you don't even need any tools unless you put the optional block adapter to help weigh it down."

But the artificial habitat isn't about convenience. It's about attracting fish. The design of this unit allows varying spaces



Godwin carefully approaches the underwater structure and fishes it thoroughly to catch crappie. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** John Godwin puts out a MossBack fishing habitat, then quickly marks the spot on his electronics.



between the v-shaped limbs and a main trunk. The limbs that are closer together help provide protection for baitfish and smaller fish. The larger spaces are great spots for gamefish to layup and hide in order to ambush an easy meal. The rough texture of the limbs provides fast growth surfaces for algae and the “v” actually captures silt and allows aquatic vegetation to grow on the limbs.

The best way to put out these artificial structures is to find spots like the one Godwin had located. It’s a spot that the fish already naturally travel, he said. Find the edge of a creek, a flat, or somewhere the fish use as a path while moving from place to place. When you throw it out, mark a way point on your graph. If you don’t have a graph, make sure and put the structure in a spot that is easy to relocate by using other landmarks.

“These structures work in any depth of water, but I like deeper water, especially in the bigger lakes,” Godwin said. “The magic number for me is 14. If I can find water off a point or on the edge of a flat that is about 14 feet deep, that’s just perfect. The tower is eight feet tall. The habitat holds fish from the bottom up to six feet under the surface. They can stay there almost any time of the year and bunch up where they are easier to find.”



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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FIND SPOTS FISH LIKE

The key is finding areas that fish already like to use. You don't want to just throw it out in the middle and hope for the best. Those best spots vary from lake to lake. In smaller lakes or ponds, the structures should just be put near some sort of change in depth to be more effective. On a private pond or lake, it doesn't even matter if the top of the structure is visible because fishing pressure is controlled. On a public body of water, the less people that know right where it is, the better, Godwin said. But he adds that if other fisherman find it, that's okay, too. It's good for the sport.

The amazing thing about these American-made manufactured fish habitats is that fish come to them quickly. When Godwin had assembled the first structure on this particular morning and tossed it in a "sweet spot," we came back less than an hour later and it already had crappie on it.

"See them there?" Godwin said, once again looking at the electronics. "Fish are naturally curious and they come to check out something new just like you would if somebody put something new in the middle of your house. Add in the fact that food starts showing up pretty quickly in the form of baitfish and it starts looking like a pretty good place to hang out for a while."

Then he tossed a bait out into the top, jigged it across a couple of limbs and set the hook on a big crappie.

FISH HERE

Fishing an artificial structure should be approached in much

the same manner as any structure. Godwin recommends approaching quietly and not getting right on top of it.

"In most of the areas I use the Crappie Tower, I like to get close enough to cast out passed the structure and reel the bait back by it," he said. "The Crappie Magnet Fin Spin is ideal for that. Fish the edges of the structure first from top to bottom and if you aren't getting any bites, try casting toward it from a different side or angle. Even if you can see fish on your electronics, it doesn't mean they will bite every time. When things are tough, I like to downsize my bait and slow down the presentation. The new Crappie Dancer on a jig head is a good option. If they won't hit a moving lure, just get as close as you can and present the jig vertically and just hold it still. Sometimes that will trigger a reaction strike if it is just sitting there in front of their nose."

Artificial habitat differs from natural brushtops and fish attractors in several ways, but the most important is that the artificial units will last forever.

"If you put out a brushtop of cypress or willow or something, it's going to be gone in a year or two and it's going to add a lot of silt to the water, which isn't always good," Godwin said. "With a MossBack, it will still be here when your grandkids' grandkids are fishing."

Congregating the fish makes it much easier on anglers, especially those that don't have a lot of extra time to spend on the water. If the fish are really biting, it can even give fishermen time to catch a mess of fish and still enjoy a ham sammich. ■

FROM THE GARAGE TO THE LAKE ➤



An hour later, the electronics clearly show the tree with two large crappie, one to the side and one above plus a large school of baitfish just to the right.

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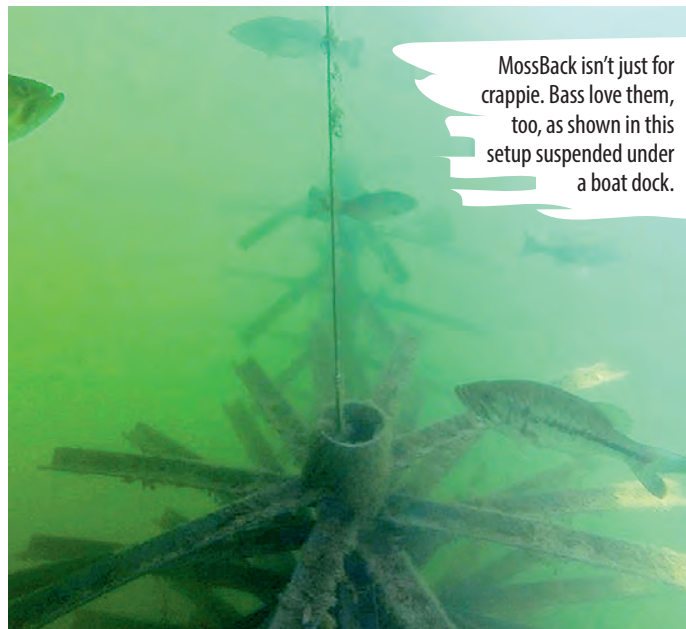
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FROM THE GARAGE TO THE LAKE

It's a story of the American dream and ingenuity, born from the simple desire to catch more fish. And like many ingenious devices, it began in the garage.

David King of Springdale, Arkansas, grew up on Beaver Lake and loved fishing for crappie among the vast standing timber of the lake. But he moved away and when he returned home, the trees were gone. He wanted to help draw fish to a good spot and tried all kind of habitat from cedar to PVC pipe, but none of it worked. So he got the idea for the v-shaped limbs on a trunk made of rough material to help grow algae. He saw the v-shaped design as a way to hold silt and grow more vegetation — all things that attract fish. And he wanted it to last a long time.

The MossBack fish habitat met all that criteria and King started fishing and catching around them. So did friends he gave them to. Soon he decided to heed their advice and start selling them. Today his product is in lakes all across the country. You can place them horizontally, vertically or hang them off a boat dock to



MossBack isn't just for crappie. Bass love them, too, as shown in this setup suspended under a boat dock.

provide great structure.

"It's just been a blessing and it's helped a lot of people catch fish," King said. "And it isn't just for crappie. It attracts bream, bass and catfish and of course, all kinds of baitfish. We've done electroshocking tests that show that, plus we've caught all those kinds of fish around the MossBack."

One of the most interesting stories about the habitat comes from Texas, where a landowner was having trouble growing big bass on a 120-acre private lake despite providing everything possible,

including a huge population of forage and bait fish. Finally, some students came and put tracking devices on the bass. They found out that every big bass was chasing baitfish up to a mile every day just to eat. There was no structure for the bait to hide, or for the bass to ambush it. After installing a whole network of MossBack structures, the bass started showing growth in a matter of months. It turns out that a bass swimming a mile for food every day is like a human running a marathon every day.

"You can't play hide and seek in an empty parking lot and that's what the bass were trying to do," King said. "They were working off every ounce they gained just chasing down their next meal. Adequate habitat changed that."

You can learn more about how the habitats work and see all the optional setups on the internet at MossBackFish-Habitat.com. ■

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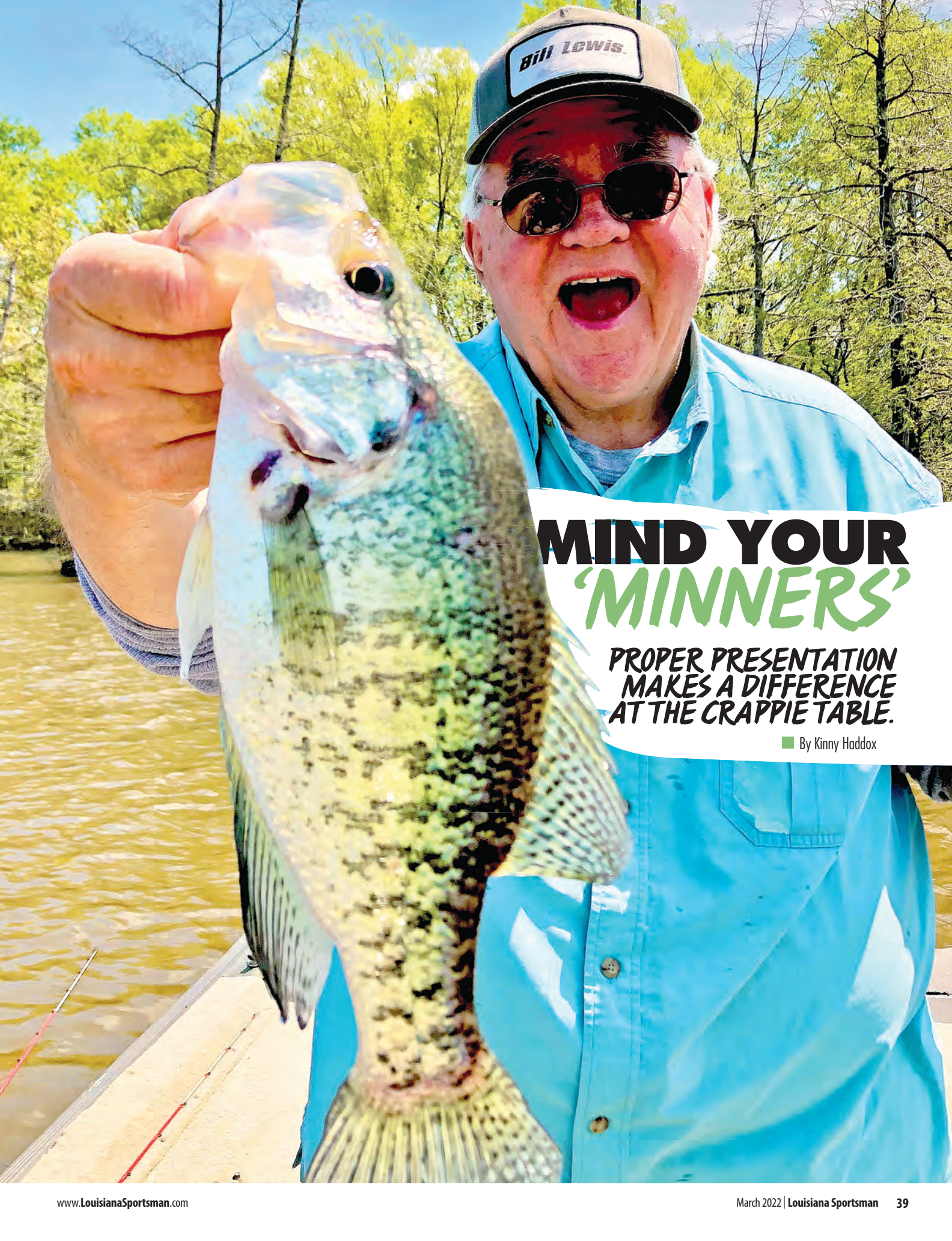
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MIND YOUR 'MINNERS'

**PROPER PRESENTATION
MAKES A DIFFERENCE
AT THE CRAPPIE TABLE.**

■ By Kinny Haddox

Fishing with live minnows, or shiners as some folks call them, *SOUNDS PRETTY SIMPLE.*

Net a slippery little bait, stick the hook through it and throw it in the water. But as popular college football analyst Lee Corso likes to say, "Not so fast, my friend..."

Think about this. There are literally hundreds of shapes, sizes, colors and actions of artificial crappie lures. Why? That would seem to strongly suggest that fish don't always like the same thing to eat and they certainly like different presentations on their plate.

That's why it's so important to mind your "minners."

Minners of course, being what are more properly referred to as minnows or shiners. And while some of us can remember when you used to buy minners for two cents apiece, now the popular live crappie baits cost \$12 or more a pound. That's about the same price as a ribeye steak!

So not only is it important that you take care of these critters, it's also good to know you are making the best use of them on the end of your hook.

For those who like to be scientifically correct, the most com-

mon minnow in our area is the golden shiner (*Notemigonus crysoleucas*). It is also the most widely pond-cultured fish in the United States. It usually grows to an average of two inches long for perfect use as fish bait. At certain times of year on certain lakes, smaller minnows work better, while at other times, larger ones do. This varies from lake to lake and season to season. Here are a few ideas to vary your minner minding presentation:

BELOW THE DORSAL

The traditional and most common way to hook a minnow is right below the middle of the dorsal fin. This allows the minnow to remain upright and still swim. When you hook them this way, be careful not to jab the point of the hook too low and go through the spine in the middle of the minnow. That will cause a very short life span and won't help if you want a little wiggle in your bait. This presentation will work just about any time the fish are hungry.

BACK OF THE EYE ➤

This isn't used very often, but rigging a hook through the minnow's gills will provide a unique presentation that resembles an injured and dying minnow.



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BACK OF THE EYE

If you are very careful, you can hook a minnow right behind the eye socket and bring the point out behind the other eye. The advantage of this rig is that it, too, allows the minnow to swim upright and actually keeps the head up a bit. Most fish attack bait from the front and that also puts the point of the hook right where the crappie is most likely to bite, especially if it isn't just on a feeding frenzy.

IN THE TAIL

Well, almost in the tail. You can run the point of your hook through the middle of the minnow right before the actual tail section. This hook strategy actually gives the minnow a chance to swim and wiggle more than any other setup and allows the minnow to swim away from approaching prey. Unfortunately for the minnow, that usually makes the fish

even bite more aggressively and with a hook in their tail, they can't swim fast enough to actually get away.

THE LOWER LIP

I don't know why, but hooking a minnow through the bottom lip and out the top lip often works to trigger strikes. When you use this method, the minnow sits pretty much vertically in the water. Sometimes fish like that.

MOUTH TO GILL TO BELLY

This one isn't a go-to for many people, but sometimes the fish aren't aggressive and the "dying minnow on it's side" appeals to them. When you slip the hook through the minnow's mouth and out the side of the gill, you can then hook it back into the bait's belly and the bait basically just sits there with a little



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.

motion every once in a while. Remember, even if the bait doesn't move at all, your motions holding the pole and even the slightest current or wind make the bait move at least a little bit.

SUMMARY

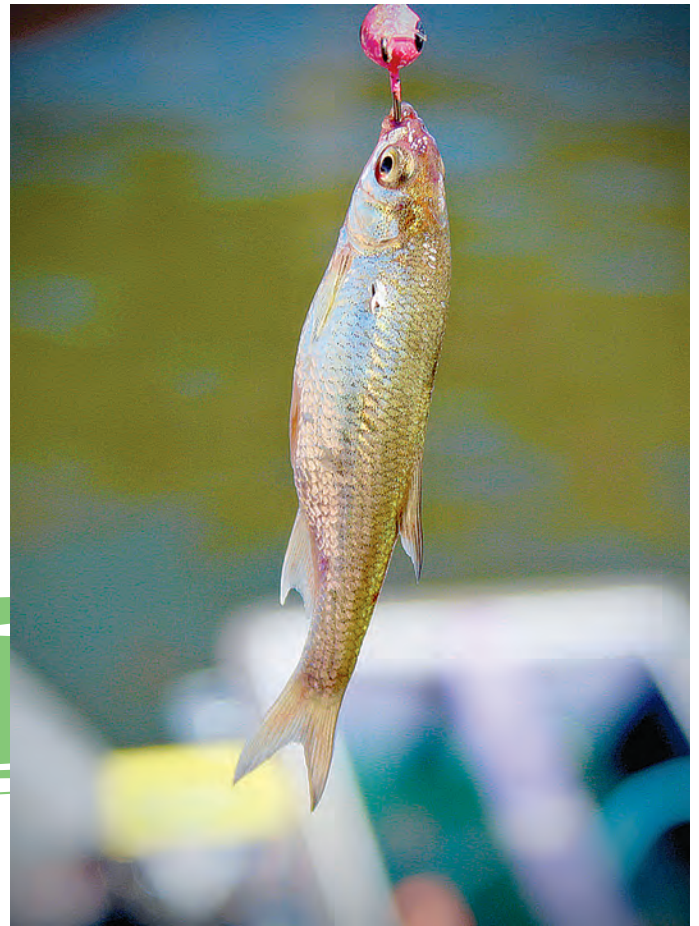
The real trick here is to be versatile.

Just like fishing with artificials, if you find something that is working, stick with it. You can hook minnows on regular crappie hooks or fish them on a bare jig head. Some people put a minnow as a trailer on a full plastic or hair jig, especially when the fish are wanting a big bite. One other tip — if you are fishing a plain hook, make sure your weight is on your line at least a couple of inches above the bait to give it maximum action.

If the fish aren't biting, never hesitate to experiment. "One size fits all" only works on cheap Cowboy hats. ■

There are lots of crappie baits out there, but sometimes a properly rigged minnow or shiner is hard to beat. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Minding your minners is important because at \$12 a pound, you don't want to let them go to waste.

CLAIBORNE CRAPPIE ➤





"TOP" NOTCH CRAPPIE

Crappie school is in session over Claiborne's deep water brush

Wesley Miller, right, and Dan Turner landed an ice chest of big Claiborne "top" slabs on a recent outing.

This is the time of year when crappie can be found from the edges of deep creeks and humps all the way up to the cypress and flats around Lake Claiborne near Homer. But until the spawn is in full swing, and sometimes even later, there's one "top" spot that anglers shouldn't pass up.

"When crappie get stacked in the tops and the fallen timber this time of year down by the dam, you can still rack up and catch an ice chest full of crappie in the deep water," said crappie expert Wesley Miller. "There's a large area out here that has a lot of structure and the crappie tend to stay bunched up on that structure until they head to shallow water to spawn. You can catch them from 20-30 feet deep all the way into March."

The thing about March is that you never know whether it will be 30 degrees or 70 degrees. The weather has an effect on them

for sure, but one thing people tend to forget is that all the crappie don't spawn at the same time. While some move up by Mardi Gras, others are more likely to move in closer to St. Patrick's Day.

With March winds always an issue, it can be a challenge fishing in the wide-open spaces down in front of the spillway, but Miller said it's worth the effort if you can do it safely. On calm days, it's just a matter of finding the right spot.

"With good electronics, you can easily find the tops and spot the ones with fish on them," he said. "Frankly, it's hard to find tops without fish on them most of the time."

Miller mostly fishes vertically in the deep water, positioning his boat almost directly over the structure and dropping the bait down to the depth the fish are in.

His favorite bait is a hair jig, preferably one of the dozens of colors he ties himself. The most popular ones are brown or grey

This pile of big crappie “tops” off a 48-quart cooler and the tasty fish are headed for a fish fry in the near future.

with black or pink jig heads. When you are on the fish, the bait doesn't matter as much as getting it in front of the fish's eyes. Shiners and plastic jigs also work.

There's a bonus way to catch them, here, too, and it can be done by anybody. Often schools of crappie will roam all over the area. Generally these fish are a bit more shallow and are chasing schools of bait-fish. When they are doing that, you can catch them spider rigging or by chasing the schools and casting jigs and spinners. And when they are on the move, they are aggressive feeders.

Claiborne also has a healthy population of hybrid bass and if you have one of them grab hold of your crappie bait, you'll be in for a treat.

"I'm not a big fan of the hybrids because they compete with the crappie for the same cover and food, but if you hook into one, you'll have a fight on your hands," Miller said. "That fight will either last about

CLAIBORNE CRAPPIE continued >



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CLAIBORNE CRAPPIE continued >

10 minutes on light gear if you land the fish...or about three seconds if you have your drag too tight, because they'll pop your line and be gone."

Some of the shallower tops or sunken trees can also hold fish in transition. They actually hang there on the way to spawn and when moving back out from spawning, especially the big females. One thing Miller reminds people, especially in the deeper water, is to keep the bait above the fish. Crappie feed up and if it goes below them even six inches, they'll never see the bait. You aren't as likely to catch a two or three-pounder at Claiborne as you are at some other north Louisiana lakes, but the action is fast and furious when you get on the right spot.

"One good thing about Claiborne is they don't just get pounded like on some lakes, so they are not as soft of a bite or as spooky under good conditions," he said.

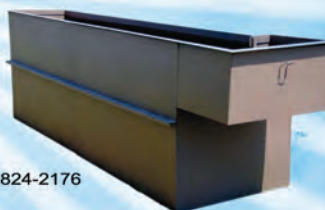
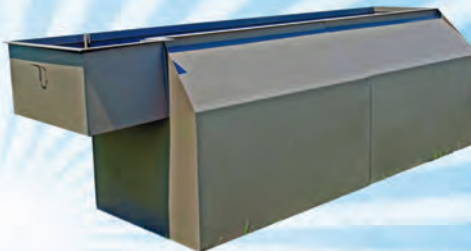
Miller guides on several north Louisiana lakes and you can get more information or book a trip through his Facebook page, Big Sasquatch Outdoors.

Claiborne is a manmade lake that covers 6,400 acres just south of Homer in Claiborne Parish. It was an excellent state park complete with tent, trailer and cabin camping plus an excellent boat dock and ramp area with plenty of parking. Additional ramps on the lake can be found at Port-Au-Prince area off Hwy. 146 and on the far north end off Hwy. 2 between Homer and Lisbon. ■



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■ By Keith Lusher Jr.

**TREK TO THE RIVER FOR
A COOLER FULL OF BIG OLD
CHINQUAPIN BREAM.**

TRY THE TCHEFUNCTE

FOR MOST FISHERMAN, a red and white bobber, freshly dug worms and a cane pole evoke memories of their earliest days of fishing.

Whether it was a neighborhood pond or a nearby creek, it's probably safe to say that the majority of anglers got their start catching bream.

Ray Miller of Madisonville can recall a time when he was introduced to fishing as a young boy in Henderson.

"My dad would take the family down to Bayou Amy and that's where I remember catching my first bream," Miller said. "It wasn't anything fancy, just some cane poles and worms that we dug out of the garden."

Miller's father was an avid rabbit hunter and kept beagles in the backyard.

"When he cleaned the kennel he would hose out all of the waste and it would drain into the garden," Miller said. "Needless to say, that garden was loaded with earthworms."

He recalls a time as a teen when he was invited to go fishing near Cow Island with John Louviere, who was a friend of the family.

"Mr. Louviere asked me to join him one day and I jumped at the invite," Miller said. "We must have caught nearly 100 bream that day and that was all it took for me."

MEMORABLE TRIP

After that memorable trip, Miller was hooked and started fishing for bream every chance he could. Fast forward 60 years and he is still chasing bream, but he's refined his strategy to target a certain type.

"For me nothing beats the chinquapin," he said. Otherwise known as lake runners or shell crackers, chinquapin are at the top of the list for most perch jerkers who turn their catch into table fare, the reason being because of their girth.

"Chinquapin are thicker than any other sunfish," he said. "I can fill my freezer faster with these filets as opposed to, let's say, bluegill."



Ray Miller points out the type of structure that is likely a good spot to find a mess of chinquapin bream bedding up on the Tchefuncte River. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** When you land a 10-inch plus chinquapin, you've not only had a good fight on your hands, but you've got two mighty fine eating filets coming up.

The fish are not only thicker but grow larger than an average bream. To put it in perspective, the state record for a chinquapin is 2.88 pounds as opposed to the state record of 1.83 pounds for a bluegill.

Miller's been fishing the Tchefuncte River for the past 20 years and has transformed his ability to catch these fish into a fine art. The Madisonville angler has been catching 35-50 fish on an average trip and said now is the time to target these delectable fish.

THE SPAWN

Like most spawning bream chinquapin move into the shallows to lay their eggs in the spring. Miller said he waits for the water temperature to reach 65 degrees.

"If you can find a few days where the daytime highs are in the 80s, that'll usually be enough to move them up into the shallows," he said. "After that — it's game on."

Miller targets dead end canals and cuts where the current isn't as strong.

"When these fish are spawning they're looking for shallow, still water," he said. "I like to look for cypress knees that mark the beginning of the shallow water. If there is more than 20 feet



of water in between the cypress knees and the bank — that's where they'll be more often than not."

PENCIL CORK >



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.

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PENCIL CORK

While a red and white bobber will do the job, Miller has graduated from the basics to a honed-in technique when fishing for chinquapin. He uses a pencil cork.

"I've found that there is nothing more sensitive than a pencil cork," he said.

Pencil corks are slender and measure approximately six inches long. The benefit to using these corks is ability to detect even the most subtle bite.

"With a normal cork I usually wait for it to shoot under before setting the hook, but with a pencil cork, when I see the slightest tap I'm setting the hook!" Miller said.

The 72-year-old adds that pencil corks have come a long way since he first started using them.

"I can remember my first pencil cork was made from a porcupine quill," he laughed.

GREEN WORMS

Admittedly, it's been a while since Miller has picked up a shovel to dig worms, but through the years he's found some-

thing far superior to the common earthworm.

"I've fished for chinquapin for over 60 years and in my opinion there is no better bait than green worms," he said.

It turns out that this resourceful angler has found a way to add a little color to what was thought of as an unimprovable bait. Miller starts with a small container of night crawlers and adds a tablespoon of a nutrient called Worm-Glo, a non-toxic worm food that the worms eat and ingest.

"I throw a tablespoon of this stuff into the container of worms three days before I go fishing and when it's time to use them, the worms are bright florescent green," he said.

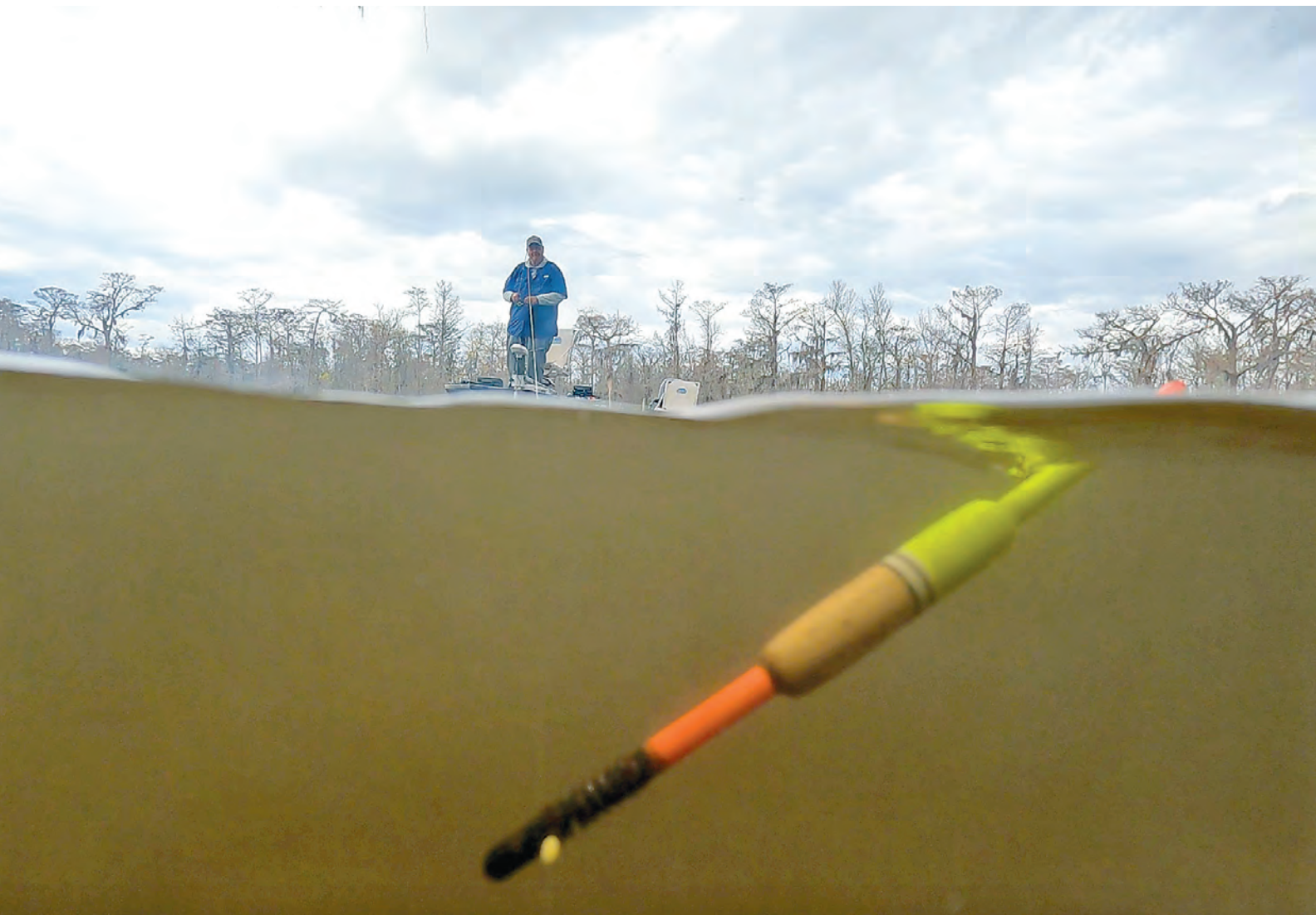
In addition to fishing advice the wise cajun felt it necessary to dole out marriage advice.

"Never keep the night crawlers in the kitchen refrigerator!" he said. "I made the mistake of keeping the worms next to the left-overs one time and I had to sleep on the couch that night."

PINCH A PIECE

When baiting his hook, Miller pinches off a 1-inch section of the worm and threads it on to a No. 6 cricket hook.

"It's important not to use too big a piece because those chin-



Using a little Worm-Glo with your nightcrawlers can turn a red wiggler into a green glow worm in a matter of days and the fish love them. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** No more red and white bobbers for Miller, who uses a pencil cork to help detect even the faintest bites from a hungry chinquapin.



quapin will rip it right off the hook,” he warned.

Since chinquapin aren’t isolated and are often scattered among other bream, Miller recommends rigging the hook slightly deeper than normal since chinquapin are often found along the bottom, rather than suspended.

As the spawn heats up in March, Miller reminds fishermen that paying attention to the moon phases will help put more fish in the boat this spring.

“I find they are the most active during the full moon,” he said. “If you fish three days before and three days after a full moon, that’s when you’ll do the best.” ■



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HUNTER OF THE MONTH

Jonathon Zell

Jonathon Zell of Dry Prong consistently takes big bucks on public land. He put down this bruiser on Nov. 23, 2021.

ANGLER OF THE MONTH

Michael Boyne

Michael Boyne, 74, caught a redfish that's almost as big as he is in Pointe-Aux-Chenes on Nov. 23, 2021.





LOUISIANA'S STATE PARKS

■ By Kinny Haddox

EDITOR'S NOTE: Louisiana's State Park system is vast and varied like the Sportsman's Paradise itself. This is one installment in a Louisiana Sportsman series showcasing their facilities and appeal. Learn more at <https://www.lastateparks.com>.

STAYCATION?

LOOK NO FURTHER THAN A
LOUISIANA STATE PARK!

**THIS MONTH'S
FEATURED STOPS:**
CHEMIN-A-HAUT AND
LAKE D'ARBONNE

If you are making a list of things you'd like to do in the outdoors and looking for a place to do them, look no further than two northeast Louisiana state parks that are calling your name. Fishing, camping, hiking, kayaking and more... that's just the top of the list for visitors to Chemin-A-Haut State Park north of Bastrop in Morehouse Parish and Lake D'Arbonne State Park between Farmerville and Bernice in Union Parish.

CHEMIN-A-HAUT STATE PARK

Visitors to this 503-acre site located in northern Morehouse Parish take the "High Road." That's what Chemin-A-Haut means in French. One of the earliest additions to the State Park system, the area sits on a high bluff overlooking winding Bayou Bartholomew.

It's in that bayou that one of the most famous spots of the park is located.

The bayou boasts the "Castle Tree," one of the biggest and most unique cypress trees that you will find anywhere in the state. And when you talk about Louisiana, that's saying a lot. The popularity of the site has gone viral with rapid growth of kayaking and hundreds of social media posts.

"The Castle Tree has been core dated at over 1,500 years old. To paddle up next to a living organism that has been alive for that amount of time, has to make it a must see for any avid paddle sport enthusiast," said Rodney Hayes, a native of nearby

Bastrop who now lives in Harvey.

Hayes leads a group of up to 60 kayakers on an annual trip here. "The Castle is not alone," he said. "There are multiple very large cypress trees in Chemin-A-Haut Bayou. The big cypress are usually best visible from summer until early winter, based on Bayou Bartholomew's water level."

Visitors to the park may enjoy camping, fishing, hiking, picnicking and wildlife observation. Cabins, camper spots and primitive camping are all good ways to enjoy the varied woodlands of the park. It is an extremely secluded park and one of its drawing cards is the peace and quiet a visit here brings.

Big Slough Lake offers kayaking and fishing from the shore for bream, bass, catfish and crappie. When it comes to fishing, though, the park is seeing a big increase in the number of visitors who are taking trips to nearby Bussey Brake Reservoir. The 2,200 acre reservoir was recently opened and is giving up huge catches of fish, including several bass over 10 pounds and crappie over three pounds.

There is a eight-mile equestrian trail for horseback riders. During the hot summer months, guests cool off in the swimming pool. The picnic area includes 35 family sites with grills and tables, five group sites (for up to 24 people), and three shelters. A hard-surfaced trail goes through the picnic area and along the high, scenic banks of the bayou.

LAKE D'ARBONNE STATE PARK

There's no mistaking the big draw at this 655 acre park in the piney hills of Union Parish. Lake D'Arbonne is a 15,000 acre



Crappie, bass and catfish draw anglers to D'Arbonne from all over the country, many of them calling the State Park home on their vacations. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Sisters on the Fly campers Lynn Hill, Renee Usie and Charlotte Bleidiessel relax beside "LouLaBelle," one of the group's many classic campers.

reservoir that is one of the top fishing lakes in the state. It is renowned for the numbers and size of its crappie that not only attract recreational fishermen, but national crappie fishing tournaments. There are also abundant populations of bass, bream and catfish. In fact, there are few places in the lake that anglers can't catch catfish or bream.

And it's not just for folks with boats. This state park boasts six large fishing piers, three each in the Day Use area and the Campgrounds. There is a large improved boat launching facility and parking lot. Wide open areas of the lake, about five miles from the park, appeal to water skiers and pleasure boaters. The boat launch at the park opens up all of these opportunities to outdoorsmen.

Not everyone comes here to fish. Camping is available at 58 campsites, 16 cabins and two lodges. The campsites keep the focus on nature and they blend in with the natural landscape to enhance the outdoor experience. One group that makes an annual trek here is the Louisiana Chapter of the Sisters On the Fly, an all-female camping group. The ladies are also all about vintage campers. Member Lynn Hill camps in a 1965 Airstream.

"We love the feel of the old state parks like D'Arbonne," said Hill, who not only travels all year with the group, but also lives on the lake. "We aren't about concrete slabs. We are about campfires and woods and being away from busy places. This park has all that and nearby there is plenty of shopping, fine eating and things to do. Plus the fishing is pretty dad gum good. We have some ladies who like the geocache, too, and that's popular here, not to mention just walking and enjoying the trails and paths."






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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CHEMIN-A-HAUT, LAKE D'ARBONNE

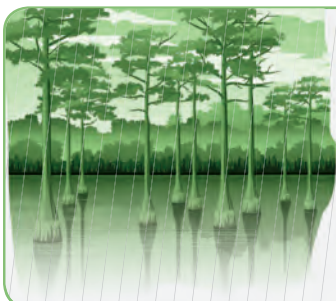
A network of hiking and walking trails go throughout the park and it is the only State Park in Louisiana with tennis courts. Wildlife is abundant in the mixed pine-hardwood forest at Lake D'Arbonne and deer sightings occur regularly. The winding roads into and out of the park are awe-inspiring all on their own.

This park is a favorite with wildlife photographers because of the backdrop of the lake and the diversity of wildlife and birds that make the park their home. Bring your binoculars and camera to capture the wonders of the natural world from our beautiful nature trails. Cyclists enjoy the challenge of the rolling hills as a starting point for biking excursions into the steep inclines and scenic beauty of North Louisiana. ■



Camper spots, tent camping and lodges like this one on the waterfront appeal to visitors to Chemin-A-Haut State Park.

LURE REVIEW ➤



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LURE REVIEW

Don Shoopman

Bass smash the Hula Popper 2.0, sometimes getting the topwater deep inside their mouth.



HULA POPPER 2.0

A LITTLE OLD, A LITTLE NEW COMBINE TO MAKE THIS TOPWATER CATCH BASS

Photos courtesy Pradco Outdoor Brands

Same size. Same action. Almost the same look. Same rave review on the results.

Arbogast hit a bass fishing home run last year when it marketed the Hula Popper 2.0, a spittin' image of the G760 model of the original Hula Popper introduced in 1948. The reintroduction was the start of something big, something exciting, and a college graduate from Iowa was in on it as the content specialist for PRADCO Outdoor Brands.

Ethan Butler of Knoxville, Iowa, graduated from the University of Northern Iowa (Class of 2018) and moved to Fort Smith, Arkansas, where the company is headquartered. He got in on the tail end of the Hula Popper 2.0 campaign, the first launch of a "next generation" artificial lure by Arbogast. It was followed by the new Arbogast Jointed Jitterbug 2.0. "I started in 2018," Butler said. "The Hula Popper 2.0 project was already in motion. I wasn't so much involved in the

actual decision on what it looked like R&D, colors, components and feathers."

But they handed the finished version of the Hula Popper 2.0 to him and he put his college double major — marketing/advertising and digital media, and business administration — to work successfully to help the revered topwater lure take off. Butler, 26, was one of the bass fishing enthusiasts who worked with the next project start to finish. It was a thrill to join a team that created the Jointed Jitterbug 2.0 and he was proud of his contribution to one of his favorite topwaters, he said.

Butler said the Hula Popper 2.0 "was the first one we really stepped out of the box with."

The Hula Popper 2.0 is two inches long and weighs 3/8 ounce. It has all the characteristics of the original model save one — there are rear-treble hook feathers instead of the rubber skirt on the original Hula Popper. The feathers, a touch added

by Scalish, accentuate the new model's movement on the surface to create a tail-like look, according to Arbogast.

The designers kept the traditional shape of the bucketmouth that serves as a huge popper. The two No. 6 black nickel treble hooks are attached to new split rings rather than the old "hook hangers" for enhanced strength and full range of motion.

And it features the same popping action that the topwater was known for for seven decades. That's what counts, according to Butler.

Hula Poppers are near and dear to the Iowan. The new one reminds him so much of the old one, the way it consistently trig-



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.

gers strikes, some that really get the blood pressure going. “Yeah,” he said. “I love it. It really fits my style of fishing a lot. I grew up in Iowa. We don’t have a lot of big bodies of water. I grew up fishing small lakes and ponds. This bait ... that’s its sweet spot right there.”

Butler said he adjusts the cadence of the pops to water conditions and cover. He’ll pop it more frequently if there’s a ripple on the water or around cover and less frequently (longer pauses between pops) in the spring if the water temp is in the upper 50s, he said, “when they’re not quite committed to topwater.”

The new topwater’s colors are spectacularly irresistible and feature the ultra-modern “crackle” paint job patterns. His favorite when he fishes in his home state is Blue Kill.” Other popular colors are Black Death, Coach Hog and White Zombie.

“It’s kind of crazy. Talk about a cool project just getting out of college and working on a project with Arbogast, launching such iconic products, first the Hula Popper and then the Jitterbug,” he told this magazine in June 2020.

Butler worked for PRADCO two and a half years before he and his wife moved back to Iowa for another job, but he rejoined PRADCO as regional account manager in mid-summer 2021. Chad Warner, PRADCO product director; Bill Jarboe, product development director; Frank Scalish, former pro bass angler and lure designer, and Justin Johnson were responsible for the Hula Popper 2.0.

Butler said he had the fun job, marketing the great product.

For more information about the Hula Popper 2.0 and other PRADCO Outdoor Brands products, go to pradcooutdoor-brands.com. ■

Ethan Butler of Iowa loves to catch bass of all sizes, particularly brutes like this, on the Hula Popper 2.0.



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A close-up look at the new Berkley Gilly in the large 130 mm size. **INSET:** Keith Poche targets big bass like this one with the Berkley Gilly and said more and more anglers will be, too.

GIVE 'EM A GILLY

LARGEMOUTH AND ANGLERS ARE GOBBLING UP THIS NEW SWIMBAIT

When you look at the new Berkley Gilly soft plastic swimbait in the package or in the water, it's hard to imagine anything looking or acting more like a real fish, other than a real fish itself.

The question is, do the bass feel the same way?

"The bait definitely passes the eye test and the fish catching test," said 40-year-old Louisiana native and Alabama angler Keith Poche. "It's still new to most fishermen, but this year it's going to be a bait that a whole lot of fishermen are going to be throwing, especially when they are looking for a big bite."

The lure isn't just a chunk of soft plastic, the pro bass angler said. It has a hollow head that allows the bait to float in an upright posture when swimming and also helps with the hook set on crushing strikes. The lure can be rigged vertically without a weight, sideways as a Texas rig

or on a jig head. It can also be used with a weighted swimbait hook, a line-through Stinger hook or even on a drop shot setup. The lure is also packed with Berkley's patented PowerBait flavor. It comes in three sizes, 90mm, 110mm and 130mm.

"Besides the natural look and action that the bait has, that is the biggest thing about it," Poche said. "It's so versatile. You can rig it to match just about any type of fishing. And while most swimbaits are only good in shallow water, this one can be used for just about any depth of fish you want. You can fish it weightless around the cypress trees or spawning beds. You can fish it on a jig head in lakes like Toledo Bend on deeper points and grass lines. It is great for staging fish in a situation like that."

"The thing just looks so realistic. It looks just like a real bream. Most swimbaits are



more narrow, but the profile of this bait is big. It's a big bass bait for sure. You can catch all sizes on it, but when you want a big bite, it's something you want to try. In Louisiana, we've got so many cypress trees, that's a great place to rig it Texas style and just fish it like a floating fluke. Flip it around the trees, in holes in the grass or around brush-tops and hang on."

He also says spawning bass are going to see this bait and immediately feel like it's a threat when you toss it on the bed. That means they'll grab it and move it off the bed at first glance. He said fishing it this way, you have to pay close

attention and be ready to set the hook quickly.

Which of the 12 colors should you try first?

"That depends on the clarity of the water and the type of baitfish or perch that are predominant in the lake you are fishing," Poche said. "Let the conditions guide you on which color to pick, or just go with the one that looks good to you first. If the lake has a lot of small bream, the HD Bluegill, Pumpkinseed or Warmouth colors are a good place to start."

You can also use this lure to cover a lot of water by casting at as many targets as possible when the bite is on. Or if the fish are sluggish, toss it in a good looking spot and leave it a few seconds — triggering a strike from curious or hungry largemouth.

Poche was born and raised in Natchitoches, where he learned to fish on the Cane River and nearby Toledo Bend. He left Louisiana to play football for Troy State University, but after an injury sidelined him, he funneled his competitive nature into fishing. He has won almost \$600,000 on the pro tour and placed in the money almost 70 times in BASS and MLF pro tournaments. He is sponsored by Pure Fishing, Fenwick, Gator Trax Boats, American Sport Fishing, Humdinger baits, Frogg Toggs, Garmin and Mercury.

The Gilly lure is available in standard injected colors or special HD Tru Colors that seriously look just like a real fish. The lure was designed by Bassmaster Classic Champion Mike "Ike" Iaconelli. It comes in packs of two to four lures per pack, depending on size, and generally sells for around \$8.00 - \$9.00 a pack. ■

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CADE FORTENBERRY

NICHOLLS ANGLER CONTINUES TO ADD TO HIS LIST OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Photo courtesy Bassmaster.com

By Don Shoopman

From getting close to a state championship in high school football, fishing national tournaments, being named a high school bass fishing All-American, 22-year-old Cade Fortenberry continues to add to his accomplishments as a member of the Nicholls State University Bass Fishing Team.

Fortenberry's highest finish as a collegiate bass angler was fourth with Cameron Gautreau in March 2019 at Toledo Bend at the B.A.S.S. Louisiana College State Championship. They were trying to become the second straight Colonels team to win a state title.

The Prairieville bass angler vividly remembers a near-miss in the Carhatt Bassmaster College Series opener the first week of March 2021 at Lake Hartwell near Anderson, South Carolina. He and Landon Baudoin, of Des Allemands, were in the hunt for a big win after the first day with a limit weighing 17 pounds, 6 ounces. At the halfway point they were in fourth place. However, Lake Hartwell's bigger bass didn't cooperate for them the second day and they weighed four for 6-3 pounds and a two-day total of 23 pounds, 9 ounces, for 48th in the 261-boat field. The Colonels caught those fish on a Delta Lures Thunder Jig. To this day, Fortenberry still thanks Delta Lures owner Fred King of LaPlace for supplying them with lures.

Baudoin, a Hahnville High School grad who owns Baudoin Bait Co., a small soft plastic lures business, has been his tournament partner for a year. Fortenberry said they make a good team.

"Yeah, we do. I'm more of a power fisherman. He's more of a finesse fisherman, so we complement each other," he said about

Baudoin, who's majoring in petroleum engineering and safety.

Fortenberry and Baudoin finished 12th on Jan. 21 at the MLF's Abu Garcia College Fishing Southern Conference Tournament at Toledo Bend. They just missed the cut to qualify for nationals with three bass weighing 10 pounds, 12 ounces, all from brush piles in 15-foot depths on Delta Lures football jigs.

As of mid-January, he had a light schedule of college bass fishing tournaments. Fortenberry miscalculated the deadline for entering Bassmaster events so was put on "wait lists" for that circuit. Baudoin and he will fish the Bassmaster College Series Wild Card tournament June 17-18 at Logan Martin Lake in Alabama, which has automatic entry for anglers unable to get into a regular-season event.

It's good timing with spring classes at an end for the Colonels.

"I'll be able to go scout," he said.

Four months after he started at offensive tackle in the St. Amant Gators' Class 5A quarterfinal state playoff loss to West Monroe, Fortenberry was named a Bassmaster High School All-Stater in Louisiana. The best was yet to come.

In April 2017, he was one of 12 named to the Bassmaster High School All-American Fishing Team. B.A.S.S. cited his off-the-water work representing the Ascension Anglers taking part in multiple cleanup days, providing relief aid for 2016 flood victims in south-west Louisiana and volunteering to help run the Angling Against Autism Team Bass Fishing Tournament.

Fortenberry became part of history that year for Louisiana. It was the first time the state boasted two All-Americans at the

OPPOSITE PAGE: Cade Fortenberry of Prairieville, a St. Amant High School graduate, fished with Bassmaster Elite Series pro Dave Kreiger of Alva, Florida, during the Bassmaster High School All-American Bass Tournament in May 2017 near Lake Sam Rayburn.

same time. He and Colby Miller of Elmer, who was a junior at Oak Hill High School, earned the distinction in 2017.

Fortenberry's All-American status also gave him a chance to fish with Bassmaster Elite Series pro Koby Kreiger of Alva, Florida, in a special Bassmaster High School All-American Bass Tournament held in conjunction with the 2017 Toyota Bassmaster Texas Fest.

His hobby is making custom fishing rods, mostly for family and friends. In early January, Fortenberry was building four of them for a University of Louisiana-Monroe softball player, senior Kennedy Page, who was a classmate at St. Amant. She planned to sell the fishing rods in a fundraising auction for the team.

Fortenberry, who won two high school state tournament qualifiers in his high school career, competed in three high school bass fishing tournaments with a national title on the line each time. He came close to winning it all in July 2015 when he and Braden Blanchard finished runners-up at the three-day 2015 Costa Bassmaster High School National Championship at Kentucky Lake.

Unlike many other teams, the St. Amant High School bass anglers ignored offshore ledges and fished shallow. They were 11 pounds off the pace going into Day 3, then rallied to finish second with 51 pounds, 15 ounces.

It was a proud day for the Sportsman's Paradise because Justin Watts and Alex Heintze led wire-to-wire. The Baton Rouge-based Livingston Parish Bassmasters team finished the deal with 22 pounds, 2 ounces, for a total of 66 pounds.

There were 132 two-man college teams representing 37 states and Ontario, Canada. They competed for \$75,000 in scholarships and prizes.

Fortenberry used his \$2,000 scholarship from B.A.S.S. to enroll at Nicholls State University.

He is scheduled to graduate in December. After that, he is hopeful of attending a Physician Assistant school.

He's certainly eyeing bass fishing post-college but said, "I want to get my schooling done first, then start fishing Bassmaster Opens. I'd love to get to the Elites. It's all depend on family first. If I was able to do it, I'd love to do it."

Fortenberry got hooked on bass fishing when he was a boy thanks to a neighbor, Garrett Strickland. Fortenberry's father, Gilbert Fortenberry, was an accomplished saltwater angler whose 8.65-pound speckled trout won a boat, motor and trailer in CCA-Louisiana's STAR Tournament in 2003.

The elder Fortenberry sold that boat and, after he, too, got hooked on bass fishing, then eventually sold his own 22-foot long Champion Bay Boat to buy a Phoenix with a 200-h.p. Yamaha SHO he and his son still run.



Cade Fortenberry has a firm grip on the lip of a 5.8-pound bass he caught in January during the MLF's Abu Garcia College Fishing Southern Conference Tournament at Toledo Bend.

The bass angler started fishing tournaments as a boy with the Junior Southwest Bassmasters of Denham Springs under the leadership of Jim and Cindy Breaux.

"They do a really good job setting you up for the future," he said. "I owe a lot of my success to Jim and Cindy Breaux. They do a good job over there. They've had multiple anglers do well."

Count Fortenberry as one of them. ■

TOLEDO BEND ➤

An advertisement for G3 Boats. It features a photograph of a teal G3 Bay 17 boat on a body of water. A person is visible in the boat. The text "G3 Boats" is written in a stylized font, followed by "NEW BAY 17 IN STOCK". At the bottom, there is a Yamaha logo, the text "1308 CANAL BLVD THIBODAUX 985-447-4156", and the Southern Outdoors & Marine LLC logo.

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HELP WANTED

Toledo Bend bass need more water in prime spawning spots

S By John Dean

itting here watching the wind-whipped waves on a really chilly day from the comfort of my home on the Louisiana side of Toledo Bend, I'm doing what many bass anglers do when it's still cold — dreaming about catchin' em here during the spawn in March.

I'm looking forward to it. I'm sure everybody on the planet is. The days of chunkin' and windin' moving baits, like lipless crankbaits and bladed jigs, give way to flippin' n pitchin' soft plastics. We've just got to get to that point because right now, it ain't yet.

We're all hopeful the lake rises in the next few weeks from the 168.86 level it's been at a long time. It's low, but has been inching up slowly. If we could even get to 170 (or higher) that would help a lot because we're a foot and a half away from where we can say there is more cover with water in the bushes. Many bass have been on the move transitioning in a prespawn mode. When it's time they'll sit down and spawn. The key to catching them and where to catch them then will hinge on water temperatures and water level.

It's a time when nearly every bass boat on the lake will be in five foot depths or less. But will the bass be around the bushes as they typically are? We still need three to four feet of water and we could easily get that. I've seen the lake rise a foot a day after some storm systems dump 7 to 8 inches of rain on the region and this is the time we often see cold fronts with that capability. We'll see.

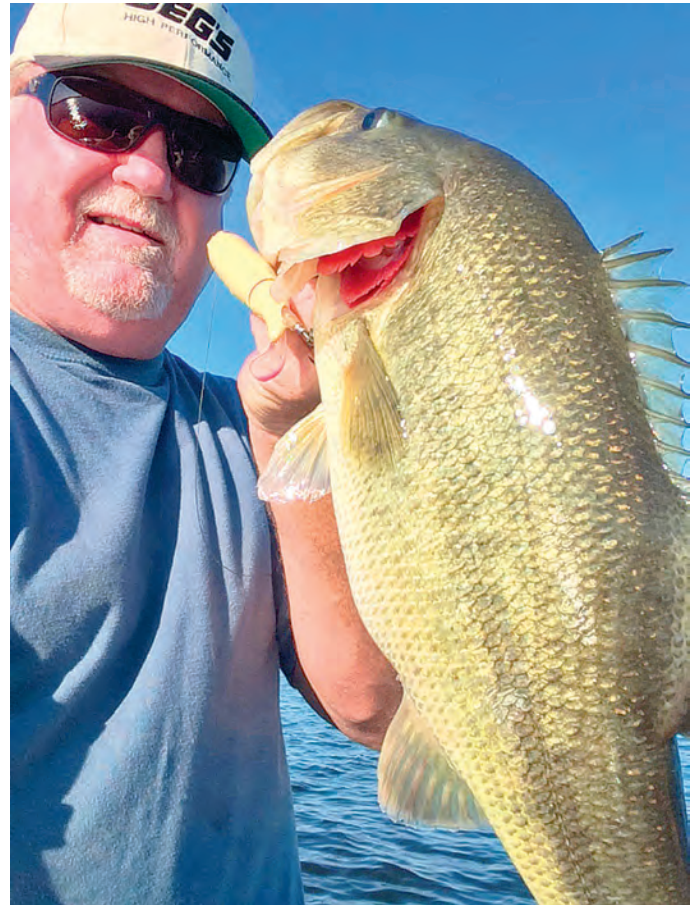
THEY'LL FIND A PLACE

Whatever water level the lake is at, when it's bass baby making time, Mother Nature takes over when it's time for the bass to spawn. They'll crawl up and go somewhere, even if it's on top of a stump or other cover on the bottom if the lake continues being lower than usual.

When the fish lock down for the spawn, it'll also be time to change from lipless crankbaits and bladeless jigs to soft plastics — Carolina rigged, Neko rigged, wacky rigged — like Flukes, wacky or trick worms and Senkos. Top colors should be watermelon or green pumpkin based colors. If there's a stain to the water you're fishing, switch to a darker color like black, which is effective in any water clarity.

I'll be throwing a lot of C-Rigs. I stay mostly with Power Pro 40-pound braid on the main line and three foot leader unless the water's clear, then I might switch to 15- or 17-pound fluorocarbon line. Generally, I use a 3/4-ounce weight even in three to four foot depths because a heavier weight is more of an attention getter, creating more of a disturbance as it is dragged over the bottom.

Speaking of weights, if you're dragging a C-Rig and get a heckuva hit, swing on it and come up empty handed, it might be because the weight gets on the bed before the soft plastic and the bass responds accordingly and goes after the weight. Either go back with the C-Rig or try dead-sticking a soft plastic where



Mike Randolph, a friend who fishes with John Dean, holds a 7.49-pound bass he caught Jan. 1 in the Solon's area on a Whopper Plopper. Dean said if the water temperature warms into the high 60s or low 70s in March, the topwater bite will be on again.

you had the bite.

TOPWATER TIME?

If, and it could be a big "if," water temperatures rise into the 70s in March, which could happen with lots of sunshine and fewer or no cold fronts, it's Katie bar the door — topwater time. Bass, particularly the big'uns, often crush a plastic frog, Spro or Top Toad, and other topwaters like Chug Bugs and Super Spooks. But it may be a bit early.

Speaking of big'uns, March and April should be a banner period for getting 10-plus-pound bass on the business end of your fishing line. Sure, there are lots of two to four pounders, but "trophy bass" time is fast approaching.

And crappie will be shallower right alongside the bass — big crappie full of roe. Tube jigs get the nod over shiners at this time. And if you're bass fishing and getting bit four or five times without connecting, pick up a crappie rig and catch a half-dozen or so because those misses usually are a tell-tale sign of crappie bites.

Have a great March! ■

I've been guiding on this lake most of my life and you're welcome in my boat. March is a high-percentage month to catch a bragging-size bass. Give me a call at (936) 404-2688.

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SPECKLED TROUT PUZZLE

**HOW TO PUT TOGETHER
THE PIECES FOR MARCH
SPECKLED TROUT SUCCESS.**

■ By Jon Miller

In most of the country, water is running away from you as it seeks its own level, but not so in Southeast Louisiana, where water from 40% of the U.S. is running right towards us. That has real consequences for Louisiana inshore anglers who live at the bottom level of a river system that in springtime dumps as much as 600 million gallons per minute of water into the Gulf of Mexico.

While I can not comprehend how much water that is, I am very grateful to the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers that it passes by my home without me even noticing. However, when I launch my boat into the marsh in March, I do notice the river water and have to make adjustments to effectively catch speckled trout.

COMMON RULE OF THUMB >

COMMON RULE OF THUMB

One common rule of thumb for finding trout in inshore Louisiana is to look for clean moving water. While this is correct as a general guideline, it may be interpreted to say trout are not found in dirty water, which is not true. The truth is that trout can feed in turbid water because they have sensory organs capable of locating prey even when visibility is low.

Certainly, there is a limit to the amount of suspended particles, especially silt, that a trout is willing to subject their gills to. But I do not believe that our trout are often faced with situations where the water turbidity is so high that it endangers their respiration function. Therefore, my current belief is that higher water turbidity alone will not cause speckled trout to evacuate an area if the salinity is acceptable and their prey is present.

We see the brown stain from particles brought by the river water, but we cannot see the more impactful change the river water causes, which is a decrease in water salinity. I believe that is the most critical water property that determines whether trout are present in stained water. This is especially true for larger speckled trout. Therefore, our

biggest challenge in March is finding the areas that hold bait, are structurally favorable toward speckled trout feeding patterns, but not too low in water salinity.

Southeast Louisiana is always impacted in March by increased river water flows. On top of normal flows, many of the Bonnet Carré Spillway openings have begun in March, so anglers often see fresh water draining into the marsh from all directions this month. That makes finding the trout complicated. On one hand they will not be found in freshwater, but neither will they abandon the upper estuary just because the rivers are running high. Trout do not need salinity over 5 ppt in March, and if feeding conditions are optimal, they will stay in the upper estuary in areas with 5-10 ppt salinity. Therefore we can't simply drive south into high salinity water and expect the trout to be there.

CRUISING THE SHALLOWS >



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



If the speckled trout are not hitting well on the typical lures, try a small twitch bait because it may match the bait better in March.



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CRUISING THE SHALLOWS

In spring, the trout routinely move from their deeper wintering holes to shallower water as the water warms from the 50's into the 60's, so in March we find them cruising shallow lakes and bays in the upper estuary. The complication of finding trout arises because of how river water flows through the marsh. Main bayous and channels drain the river water making them too low in salinity for trout, but a nearby body of water could have adequate salinity for the trout if it is somewhat protected from river water flow.

Therefore, in March I often look in ponds and small lakes away from the main river water drainage. Tidal flow will periodically increase salinity and keep these areas more insulated from low salinity. The best of these shallow bodies of water also hold submerged aquatic vegetation such as widgeon grass, which provides cover for bait and knocks sediment out of the water.

Too much wind in March can wreck a day of fishing in these shallow lakes, but there are strategies to find success despite the wind. The waves and the increase in turbidity is the obvious effect of strong, sustained wind, but I believe the major impact from the wind is the scattering or evacuation of the bait schools from the most turbulent water. To mitigate the wind effect we can fish the lake from the lee shoreline out to approximately where the wave intensity begins to cause visible turbidity. I would advise against just anchoring on the shoreline, because I often find that the trout will feed out further into



Solving the trout puzzle puts big ones like this in your hands, which is why fishermen love chasing specks.



The Mississippi River is a big part of the cultural heritage of Southeast Louisiana, but in March it can make finding speckled trout difficult as it flows through the marsh.





Photo by Todd Masson

the turbulent region of the lake.

I suspect that this is related to where the bait is feeding and we want to fish where the bait is located. It's possible some churning of the bottom is beneficial for bait fish feeding, so I always drift fish to find the trout starting on the lee shoreline and stopping when the waves are trying to throw me out of the boat.

There are some windy days when the orientation of a lake is just not compatible with wind direction and speed, so I will go to another lake which runs more perpendicular to the wind direction. You do not have to make this decision while on the water if you pre-plan your trip using online tools such as WindFinder, satellite images, and other weather apps.

HELPFUL REMINDER ➤



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HELPFUL REMINDER

In March there will also be trout feeding along the edges of the river water plumes where large volumes of tidal driven Gulf water raises the salinity to acceptable concentrations. This typically happens in larger inshore lakes and bays. The river-brown color of this water can test my faith, so I remind myself that it is salinity more than turbidity that impacts trout behavior. Since many of a trout's favorite spring prey species, such as mullet and pogies, are quite tolerant of low salinity water, the bait may very well be feeding in the turbid water.

These species are filter feeders and so plankton blooms driven by nutrient-rich river water will attract the bait fish. It makes sense that the trout would stay along the river water plume if the salinity is above 5 ppt and there is an abundance of food.

This month I will fish water as shallow as 12-16 inches, because in March big trout can be found in amazingly shallow water. Fishing shallow



The jig with plastic body is one our most versatile lures for speckled trout and it can be worked effectively even in shallow water. **ABOVE:** Putting together the puzzle means a nice mess of speckled trout that were fun to catch and will be great on the supper table.



Photo by Alicia LaFont



water strongly affects my lure selection, so I launch the boat with the appropriate array of baits, rods, and reels.

In short, when I am fishing this very shallow water and there is not excessive wave action, it is topwater stick baits first. This is the most productive time of the year to fish topwater baits in inshore waters, and a nice steady walk-the-dog action in 1-3 foot of water depth produces some of the biggest trout I will catch all year. These stick baits are also very effective along rocky shorelines in March. I have seen success on so many different stick baits models and colors that I am reluctant to recommend a model and color.

I do typically fish the MirrOlure SheDog and the Heddon Spook because they are designed to swing wide when walked. I have some confidence that darker colors are more easily seen in early morning and at sunset because they produce a more distinct silhouette, but otherwise I typically fish light colors.

Twitch baits are also big producers in shallow water. One of my favorites in March is the Texas Custom Lures' Double D. This is a float-ing twitch bait, which dives down when worked, but due to its buoyancy, it can be easily fished in shallow water and over submerged vegetation. While I normally fish larger twitch baits in March, I have discovered that in certain lakes tiny baits like the MirrOlure Mirrodine Mini are the preference for trout. This is logical if we consider that some species of bait are still early in their growth period and the small twitch bait is a good facsimile.

Last, but certainly not least, is the reliable jig with a swim-bait body. The versatility of this arrangement demands that I keep one rod rigged with a 1/8-ounce or 1/4-ounce jig. In the shallow water a hard jigging motion will pop the lure out of the water so I typically work the jig in small hops, swim it on a steady retrieve, or just drag it along the bottom. ■

DELACROIX SPECKS >

This month I will fish water as shallow as 12-16 inches, because in March big trout can be found in amazingly shallow water.

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DELACROIX ISLAND

March menu: Big baits for big speckled trout

G By Rusty Tardo
enerally once the water temperatures fall into winter ranges, anglers switch to smaller baits to entice the finicky fish to bite. So what Mike Herrmann does defies common logic, but it produces fish and big fish at that. Herrmann seeks big trout in the inside marshes with big swim baits that he manufactures himself.

"The marsh action gets good in February, continues throughout the month of March and on into April," he said. "The key is to pick your days between the fronts, fish lakes, lagoons and bays in 3-5 feet of water and preferably those with grass, because they'll have cleaner water."

Herrmann especially likes the areas off Delacroix's Twin Pipelines and all around Lake Amedee because they are grassy, clear, they hold some hefty trout and reds, and fishermen are few and far between.

This time of year most anglers would be tossing soft plastics under a cork or doing some slow tightlining with smaller baits. Herrmann breaks out 5- to 7-inch hard swim baits weighing an ounce or more. He ties them on a baitcasting reel loaded with 16# monofilament and mounted on a stiff rod. And he casts it far in front of his drifting boat.

MOVE AROUND A LOT

"This time of year the big fish are feeding on mullet, pogies, shad and even small speckled trout, so I make my baits to resemble that in size, shape and color," Herrmann said. "I switch baits a lot, I hunt around a lot, I'll fish the open water of the middle of a lake or up closer to the grass. In other words I move a lot."

But his efforts pay off, big time! For him, 18- to 20-inch trout are the norm and some bigger than that. And reds can range from barely legal to monster bulls.

Herrmann's baits have produced so well he started getting



Mike Herrmann lifts a big speckled trout caught on a big bait.

requests for them from fishermen all over the country.

He finally started his own custom bait company he calls Donkey Bay Swimbait and he ships the big baits all over and always with the same instructions: "Do not fish these baits with braided line or fluorocarbon, only with monofilament."

Why?

"Because a no-stretch line will throw a heavy bait right off, and you'll lose an expensive lure," he said.

For anglers content to catch smaller fish, Herrmann said you can toss store bought topwaters and suspending baits with success this month also. ■

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Fat, healthy trout like this one are what we are after when wading during March.



SEEK THE SABINE... AND MORE

Wading for trout should get your adrenaline flowing

If By Capt. Adam Jaynes
I could be outdoors only one month out of the year, I would pick November, hands down. However, if I were only allowed to fish one month out of the year, I would possibly choose March after weighing my options. There is more than one reason and more than one species of fish that would lead me to make that decision. I will address a few here.

For starters, I really anticipate March 15 every year as we gain access to fish over 100,000 acres in the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge. The past couple of years the bass fishing in there has been the best I have witnessed in my 35 years on this earth. The numbers of redfish that I am seeing in the refuge has been down somewhat compared to year's prior, but those bass are doing big things. If you are into catching bass, the fact that the spawn is going is just an adrenaline rush to a sight-fishing junkie like myself.

Second, if the weather allows you the opportunity to head to the blue water, the wahoo bite can be absolutely incredible during March. It sure is nice to switch gears every now and then from casting your arms off to doing some trolling. Better be in shape though. That action can get fast and furious!

WADE THE LAKE

Third, and the one I am most particularly excited about, is wading Sabine Lake this March for speckled trout. Things are lining up for this to be the best March we have had in the past handful of years over here on Sabine.

It is really looking good currently from the salinity, water clarity and both the size and number of trout that we are seeing. We will undoubtedly catch some of our heaviest trout of the year while wading in March. Catching them on topwaters is the icing on the cake!

The wind will likely blow most days so I opt for a larger, noisier

topwater lure. My favorites include the Super Spook and One Knocker from Heddon and the She Dog from MirrOlure. There are several colors that I like to throw, although I am most fond of the Clown color from Heddon. From MirrOlure I really like the red head, chartreuse back and chrome body.

I will change up the lure and color when I am getting short strikes. I find that sometimes it is the color. Other times it is the size of the lure. Then again, other times I will have to switch to something subsurface to hookup, although my preference is to catch them on top. I am at the stage of fishing where I want to catch them on what I want to throw.

Unlike other bodies of water, Sabine does not offer much wading opportunity other than along the main shorelines. Some areas you can wade a good ways out including parts of Coffee Ground Cove and Stewts Island. Other areas like Game Warden Cove and Blue Buck point you will not be able to get very far off of the shoreline before water starts to top your waders.

I definitely have my favorite locations that I like to wade fish. Coffee Ground probably tops that list, however I will key in on mullet activity and water clarity mostly this month. If I have my choice, I prefer to fish an incoming tide during March. ■



The Heddon Clown Super Spook stands out among the crowd and is a personal favorite of mine to cast for big speckled trout.

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NO MAN'S LAND

By Chris Macaluso

**FOUR LEAGUE BAY IS A
HIDDEN JEWEL FOR REDS,
SPECKS AND MORE.**



Photo courtesy Capt. Lloyd Landry

FEW PLACES ALONG LOUISIANA'S COAST CAN BE CONSIDERED TRULY REMOTE THESE DAYS.

Modern outboard motors are reliable and efficient and bass and bay boats are fast enough to make any body of water accessible.

Finding a place to fish where there aren't a half dozen boats piled on a productive oyster reef or point or pound—the same shoreline is difficult.

But Capt. Lloyd Landry has spent the last four years exploring and learning an area where, most days, he's got the place to himself. Four League Bay, near the mouth of the Atchafalaya River, has become one of his favorite places to fish despite it being square in the middle of no man's land.

"The reason I go there is simple, the fish just don't get pressured," the veteran Louisiana trout and redfish guide said. "Every so often I see some friendly crabbers and shrimpers but usually I have the place to myself."

Four League Bay isn't

close to any boat launch or coastal community. The western-most jumping off spots in Terrebonne Parish like Dularge, where Landry calls home these days, and Gibson, are a good 45-minute or hour-long boat ride from Four League Bay.

Leaving from Morgan City or Amelia and traveling down the Atchafalaya River is just as long of a boat ride.

BROWN SOUP

The lengthy stretches holding a steering wheel instead of a fishing rod plus the reality that sediment-rich, fresh-water from the Atchafalaya and adjacent Wax Lake Delta can turn large swaths of Four League Bay into a brown soup from the late winter through early summer can give even the most adventurous angler pause and reason to fish closer to the launch.

Landry said it's the dirty water and the fact it scares most others away that attracted him to the area when he moved his guide business from Buras and the lower Mississippi



Photo courtesy Capt. Lloyd Landry

**ATCHAFALAYA
BAY**

FOUR LEAGUE BAY

**LOST
LAKE**

River four years ago and settled in Dularge.

"I grew up and spent 20-plus years guiding in an area that got a ton of freshwater from the Mississippi River and I had to learn to adjust to it," he said. "I consider myself a river fisherman. So, I wasn't scared about heading to another area that gets dirty water and sediment to look for fish."

While the seasonal freshwater inundation is similar to what anglers find along the edges of Black Bay and Breton Sound on the east side of the Mississippi River, Landry said Four League Bay isn't an apples-to-apples comparison to his former home waters.

"Out of Buras, I had days where you could find a point or a pond and just sit there for hours and catch redfish, but I haven't found spots exactly like that in Four League," he said. "What I have found is miles and miles of shorelines and plenty of ponds and bayou banks that just don't get fished hard and the redfish are fat and healthy and very aggressive. While I haven't found

those spots where you sit on one point and catch 50, if I hit two or three shorelines, I am usually catching fish consistently as I move along."

His favorite way to approach fishing Four League is to pick an indentation or a drain along the eastern shoreline and throw spinnerbaits and soft plastics under a popping cork. Generally, it's not long before he finds a few fish. Because the water is often dirty, it helps to use Berkley Gulp or other scented baits or tip baits with some shrimp to add flavor. Opaque colors like glow, chartreuse, black and chartreuse and purple and chartreuse are go-to colors for Landry in the area because they stand out better in the dirty water.

**A LITTLE
PROTECTION >**



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

OPPOSITE PAGE: Fish may not stack up in the waters around Four League Bay, but Capt. Lloyd Landry says there are plenty of redfish, specks and even largemouth bass to be caught when you find the right spot.

A LITTLE PROTECTION

Adjacent areas like Old Oyster Bayou Lake, Fiddlers Lake, Bay Junop, Bay Castagnier and the bayous and ponds in between can be productive as well and offer a little more protection on the windiest days.

While the marsh in eastern Terrebonne Parish, and most other places along Louisiana's coast, is fragmented, broken and scarred from decades of subsidence, erosion and ravaging hurricane winds and storm surges, the annual sediment flows from the Atchafalaya River have kept the shorelines and wetlands around Four League Bay intact.

Ponds and shallow bays in the area are also usually full of submerged vegetation teeming with crabs, small shrimp and mullet, making them attractive to redfish but also difficult to fish for inexperienced anglers.

Capt. Travis Miller calls Dularge home as well. He said he doesn't spend as much time plying Four League Bay, Oyster Bayou and other adjacent waterways as he does the marshes and lakes closer to port, but he likes to make the long boat ride when his customers want a unique experience and he isn't hemmed in by having to be back at the dock early.

"Some folks who come to fish with me just don't want to take a 45-minute boat ride to catch redfish," Miller said. "But when I can convince them to go that far, it's usually worth it. I've had some incredible days along the shorelines by Lost Bayou and Carencro Bayou and along the eastern shoreline of Four League. The marsh in the far western parts of Terrebonne Parish is so fruitful and beautiful and intact. It's not like most areas where you watch shorelines erode every year or lose islands. That area is solid and productive."

Both guides said redfish are by far the primary target in Four League Bay because of their tolerance to freshwater and because they will eat a variety of forage including freshwater species like crawfish, shad and bluegill. Miller said Oyster Bayou, at the southern end of the bay, is one of the best places in the world to catch bull reds and giant black drum.

"We are lucky in Dularge to have so much marsh in all of that area around Lost Lake and Four League Bay," Miller said. "It gives us places to fish when the wind is blowing too hard to trout fish in the summer and it's awesome in the fall and winter. Cocodrie and areas east of Dularge have great trout fishing in the summer but they have nowhere to hide when the winds are up and they don't have nearly the redfish we find out west."



Big redfish like this make it worth spending some time learning about Four League Bay and its surrounding waters.

Photo courtesy Capt. Lloyd Landry

SPECKS, TOO

The speckled trout fishing in the area can also be excellent at certain times of the year, especially in the fall and winter when the Atchafalaya drops well below flood stage.

“The oyster reefs in the lower parts of the bay closer to Oyster Bayou and the Gulf of Mexico are loaded with trout at times,” Landry said “They aren’t always big fish and sometimes you have to pick through them to keep a few. But just like the redfish, they don’t get pressured in there. I’ve caught trout in those areas from October all the way through the following March and they’re feeding on huge schools of mullet, pogies and shrimp.”

Western Terrebonne’s marshes also offer excellent fishing for largemouth bass, sac-a-lait and a variety of other panfish as well as sheepshead, puppy drum and freshwater catfish. Stops along points, drains and grass beds north of Lost Lake and around Carencro Lake on the return trip to Dulac from Four League Bay can turn a world-class redfish trip into a great bass and sac-a-lait trip as well.

“I feel like I can fish the area adjacent to Four League Bay for 10 years and never come close to hitting all the fishy looking spots and, unlike other places east of Dularge, I feel confident the marsh by Four League will be around to explore for a long long time,” Landry said. “This year, I’m going to push it even farther west, see if I can find other areas near the Atchafalaya River that have big, healthy redfish that don’t see a lot of baits.” ■


VERMILION BAY REDS ➤



Photo by Chris Holmes

This jumping redfish is the kind of action anglers can find from the right spot in Four League Bay.

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Brooks Amy, standing, looks over the shoulders of his fishing buddy, Jeff Fisher, right, and his son, Hayden Amy, as they get redfish ready to weigh after a trip last summer for a Southcentral Fishing Association tournament at Cypremort Point.



VERMILLION BAY REDS

Look for pockets of good water and plenty of active baitfish

S By Don Shoopman
 altwater fishermen like Brooks Amy make the most of oft-subpar water and weather conditions during March to catch redfish in the Vermillion Bay area out of Cypremort Point. The 42-year-old Broussard angler has a spot — a long, long stretch of shoreline — that usually pays off regardless of the conditions and he milks it for all its worth, whether fishing for fun or fishing “slot” redfish tournaments. He’ll be fishing the latter for a

seventh straight year when the Southcentral Fishing Association season gets underway in mid-March. It’ll also be his first tournament as SFA president after he took the reins from Gerrit “T Blu” Landry of Lydia after the SFA Classic last July. In all probability, Amy will launch from Quintana Canal Boat Landing and head to Bayou Michael on the western end of Marsh Island. He’ll fish around the mouth then head west fishing the shoreline into Southwest Pass.

“Look for pockets of good water and look for bait like mullet, shad or little crabs swimming along the banks.”

POCKETS OF GOOD WATER

“Most of the time in March the water’s not that good anywhere,” Amy said. “Look for pockets of good water and look for bait like mullet, shad or little crabs swimming along the banks. That’s what they forage on in March. March is a really, really tough month, but if you get on them it’s a fun thing.”

Amy was born and raised in New Iberia and started fishing as a boy for redfish with one of the best redfish fishermen around, his uncle, the late Jeff Brooks of New Iberia. He learned about the redfish fishin’ holes in Vermilion Bay, inside Marsh Island, around the reefs on the Gulf of Mexico side of Marsh Island and both sides of Southwest Pass.

The Overhead Door Co. of Lafayette owner and president learned even more on his own as he grew up. He fishes mostly with his young son, Hayden Amy, and his father, Perry Scott.

To get redfish in the boat this month, Amy relies on fresh shrimp fished under a Four Horsemen Popping Cork most of the time, but also fishes with fresh shrimp on the bottom. He ties the line to a No. 5 hook and weights it with a 1/8-ounce BB shot when he uses a popping cork.

“Get about three boat lengths from the shore of the bank and cast as far as you can and bring it back to the boat,” he said.

MOUTHING OFF

The bite often is “pretty slow,” he said, with the redfish mouthing the shrimp sluggishly and moving off.

“It’s kind of more ‘feel’ fishing in March,” he said. “That’s what we found out.”

Amy will stay on the trolling motor and troll miles of shoreline. If he sees a likely looking spot, he’ll give it 10 or so minutes and if he doesn’t get a bite, he says, “We’re moving on.”

He also prefers to fish an outgoing tide. Incoming tides make it tougher to catch fish, he said.

Most of the time the redfish are 20 to 30 inches long with occasional 25-inch redfish mixed in.

“If you’re really lucky (in a “slot” tournament) you’ll get a 26 7/8-inch” redfish, he said.

SFA is trying to increase its membership, Amy said. Membership is \$25 for adults and \$10 for children. The first of five regular-season tournaments, all held on Saturdays, is tentatively scheduled for March 19. For more information call Amy at (337) 316-8175. ■

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PADDLES 'N PUDDLES

Chris Holmes

GRANDDADDY OF THE KAYAK

FERRY RIDE TO BETTER FISHING TURNED LIGHT ON FOR 80-YEAR-OLD PADDLER



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.

Mike LaFleur shows off a nice redfish caught in the marsh near Galiano. At 80 years old, LaFleur remains an avid kayak fly fisherman.





How long have you been kayak fishing? Do you think you will do it for 20 years or more? Mike LaFleur of Baton Rouge has ticked that mark and is still going. Sure, several in the sport have hit that milestone, but how many of them are 80 years old?

LaFleur has a rather unique story. He grew up on the California coast and started body surfing at age six. He and his friends were too small to carry big balsa wood surfboards. He was in the water every chance he got. While in high school, Hobie Alter from a few miles down the beach invented light, foam core boards and LaFleur continued surfing through college. Despite his affinity for water, he never fished.

In college, he was heavily involved in rugby, but also took up sailboat racing in San Fran Bay. A few years later, work transferred him to Spokane, Washington. No rugby or surfing there, but he bought another racing sailboat and also took up snow skiing. Still no fishing.

FLY FISHING SCHOOL

In 1980 he was sent to the wilds of Alaska as a mining executive to open up the Red Dog Zinc Mine above the Arctic Circle. The air transport company used by the mine put together a fishing trip for several of the mine's staff members. At age 42, LaFleur helicoptered down to the Kenai area for his first ever fishing trip. Of course they caught fish and of course he had fun. Near the end of the trip, one of the guys pulled out a fly rod and wore out the salmon. Intrigued, LaFleur asked how he could learn to fly fish.

"Fly-fishing school, the guy said, and told me that the only one he knew of was in West Yellowstone, Montana. Two weeks later, I was in that school. I was hooked," LaFleur said. He continued fly fishing and traveled back to Montana for at least a week every year for the next 35 years. After moving to Albuquerque, he also fly fished New Mexico, Colorado, and Alaska. Not bad for someone that waited so long to try fishing.



When LaFleur moved to Baton Rouge where his wife is from, he joined the Red Stick Fly Fishing Club where they only use fly gear and refer to everything else as “Commie Tackle.” He wanted to wade fish, but learned that much of south Louisiana is not conducive to such. However, a group of club members headed to Grand Isle to surf fish the Gulf — his first saltwater fishing experience. He became a regular in the surf at Grand Isle, the marshes of nearby Elmer’s Island and also added road fishing to his repertoire.

He caught plenty of fish, but LaFleur was dismayed at regularly seeing redfish tails out of reach of his 100-foot casting distance with no way to safely wade or walk closer.

One day while bank fishing along Hwy 1 with fellow fly angler Marc Pinsel, Grand Isle ladies Ann Smith and Lecta Bourgeois arrived to fish out of their kayaks. What? True kayak fishing pioneers they were. They suggested that LaFleur and Pinsel should be fishing deeper water and offered to ferry the anglers out to a nearby marsh island next to a deep hole. Bourgeois had a tandem kayak and ferried the anglers off the roadway.

“This was my first kayak ride,” LaFleur said. “A light went off in my brain about kayaks.”

FIRST KAYAK AT 60

A few months later, his kids bought him his own kayak for his 60th birthday — a Wilderness Systems Ride. A few of his Red Stick friends also got kayaks and so it began. They found kayak fishing nirvana. Getting to places untouched by boats, LaFleur recounts fishing the glory days.

“For many years, I never blind casted,” he said. “I would see fish, cast to them, and they would eat. We were in heaven.”

“From five of us fishing the marsh to now having the Bayou Coast Kayak Club with nearly 500 members and the Ride the Bull Tournament with nearly 750 participants, my how Louisiana kayak fishing has progressed.”

LaFleur believes recruitment is the key to fishing’s future and consequently, that of kayak fishing. While acknowledging that youth are a key component, LaFleur speaks from experience when he



says that targeting adults is being overlooked.

“There are many efforts to recruit youth and that is great,” he said. “But look at me, I’m a prime example. We need clubs and individuals to target older men and women who will also get hooked on kayak fishing if only provided the introduction and opportunity.”

But LaFleur won’t just hand out information. He will take you with him in order to get the full experience. Mentoring at its finest.

LaFleur went from fishing school to schooling fishermen. Twenty years, two new knees and a new hip later, he’s still out there doing it.

“I’ve come full circle from my first Hobie surfboard in the 1950s to my newest kayak, a Hobie Compass in 2020,” he said. “You’re never too old to learn and you’re never too old to teach.”



Capt. Paul's

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- Calcasieu Lake
- Myrtle Grove-Lake Hermitage
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Some of the “EDGE” positions are underwater reefs, 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

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Fly casting from a seated position in a kayak takes a lot of practice, but Mike LaFleur has the knack for getting his fly right where it needs to be, even in windy conditions.

AN AMAZING COMEBACK

A few months after the trip for this article, Mike LaFleur sustained a serious stroke. He had lost the use of both legs and the doctors told him he would likely never walk again. His insurance cut him off of a rehabilitation program stating that he would not recover and therefore it was a waste of money. Convinced otherwise, LaFleur spent months in the hospital and would wheel himself to the gym and self-exercise. When he started, he could not even lift his toes. With six weeks of 20 minutes a day determination, he saw minor, but incremental progress.

However, due to his unwavering spirit and tenacity, he progressed to moving his legs again. He was finally released with the use of a walker, but continued his workouts at home. He no longer relies on the walker.

"I'm proud of my progress and tenacity," he said. "I have

not yet been able to fish, but it is one of my biggest goals. I'll be back in the kayak for both physical and mental therapy."

LaFleur is quite an inspiration to all. Besides being an avid kayaker at 80 years old, he defied all medical odds and is on his own way to being able to do it again. The light still burns. ■

LADYFISH SPOTLIGHT >

<p>MARCH</p> <p>WATER LILIES PLANTED</p>	<p>JULY</p> <p>ADULT LILIES FULLY GROWN</p>	<p>OCTOBER</p> <p>POND FULL OF DUCKS</p>	<p><i>"My son and I followed Mr. Hills' instructions for planting the shipment of banana water lilies...And within 5 months, we had new ducks feeding in our pond" - Chris B.</i></p>
<p>See Us On Amazing Banana Water Lily, Reborn.mp4</p> <p>DYNAMITE DUCK FOOD (843) 240-0530</p> <p>www.BANANAWATERLILIES.com www.FROSTWATERFOWL.com</p>			



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: *LADYFISH*

Ladyfish (*Elops saurus*) are long, cylindrical shaped fish that live primarily in tropical and subtropical waters. In the U.S., they are found along inshore waters along the Atlantic seaboard and the Gulf of Mexico. They are very tolerant of low salinity levels and sometimes travel up freshwater rivers.

These fish are usually silver in color, but may appear white or gray depending on the waters they inhabit. They have deeply forked tails and small scales that run the entire length of their bodies.

Ladyfish are related to tarpon and bonefish, and are often misidentified as either of those species, but most commonly as tarpon.

Their mouths are shaped much differently than both other species, however, and the lack of a long, filamentous dorsal ray sets them apart from tarpon. The scales of a ladyfish are also much smaller than those of a tarpon and tarpon get much bigger than ladyfish.

When young, ladyfish are translucent and can look like clear eels. They lose these features shortly after birth. They eat small fish and shrimp, with shrimp making up the majority of their diet when available. They have very fine, sharp teeth.

NOT ALL "LADIES"

Like tarpon, ladyfish spawn offshore, hatching huge numbers of eggs which float with the currents, usually ending up in inshore waters before hatching.

Anglers catch ladyfish on a variety of baits, most often live or cut pieces of shrimp. They are acrobatic fish, and are known for leaping far above the surface when hooked. They are usually released or used as bait for sharks or tarpon. The food quality of ladyfish is quite poor, and very few anglers eat them.

Ladyfish are known in some areas as tenpounders. Other nicknames include poor man's tarpon, lady tarpon, little tar-

pon, she-tarpon and she-fish. Contrary to their name, all ladyfish are not females. Adult ladyfish average 2 to 3 pounds, or about 18 to 24 inches in length.

The Mississippi state record ladyfish weighed 5 pounds, 6.06 ounces and was caught by Doug Borries in May 2020. Louisiana's state record ladyfish was caught by Royden Lynch Jr. in Sept. 2015 and weighed 4.82 pounds. Lynch caught the fish in South Pass.

The world record ladyfish weighed 8 pounds and was caught out of Sepitiba Bay, Brazil in February, 2006. ■

KEEP YOUR CATCH COLD ➤



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.

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.wlf.louisiana.gov

SALTWATER

STATE REGULATIONS (0-10.357 miles[^])

FISH Species	Minimum Length	Bag Limit (per person)
Greater Amberjack*~	34" FL	1/day*
Lesser Amberjack, Banded Rudderfish*	14-22" FL	5/day (aggregate)
Yellowfin Tuna	27" CFL	3/day
Bluefin Tuna	73" CFL	1 per vessel per year*
Bigeye Tuna	27" CFL	None
Blue Marlin	99" LJFL	None
White Marlin	66" LJFL	None
Sailfish	63" LJFL	None
Swordfish*	29" CL or 33 lbs. DW	5 per vessel per trip
Cobia (ling or lemon fish)	36" FL	2/day
Drum, Black	16" TL	5/day#
Drum, Red (redfish)	16" TL	5/day#
Flounder, Southern	None	10/day
Groupers* Gag [^] & Black [^]	24" TL	4/day (aggregate)*
Scamp [^]	16" TL	
Nassau & Goliath	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS	
Yellowfin [^]	20" TL	
Red [^]	20" TL	2 of 4 grouper total
Atlantic Sharpnose & Bonnethead shark@	None	1/day
Shortfin Mako Shark@	Males 71" FL / Females 83" FL	1/day/vessel/aggregate
Other sharks (except prohibited species)@	54" FL	1/day/vessel/aggregate
King Mackerel*	24" FL	3/day
Spanish Mackerel*	12" FL	15/day
Striped mullet	None	100 pounds/day
Black seabass	None	None
Seatrout, Spotted (Speckled Trout)	12" TL*	25/day*
Red Snapper*	16" TL	2/day*
Other Snapper		5 mutton in 10 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, & Bluefin 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&scampgrouper from Feb. 1-March 31.-Greater amberjack season is open May 1-31 and Aug. 1-Oct 31. Closed season on gray triggerfish Jan. 1 - Feb. 28 and June 1 - July 31.

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Once you clean and fillet fish, it's important to still keep them cold and sealed waiting for the fryer, broiler or grill. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** An ice chest full of fresh fish, like these crappie, deserves a good ice bath to preserve the delicate flavor.

CHILL OUT FOR TASTIER FISH

KEEP YOUR CATCH COLD TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR PISCATORIAL PLATTER

S By Kinny Haddox
ome fishermen catch fish for fun, enjoy admiring their catch, then release them back into the water to fight another day. Other fishermen catch fish for fun, but like to keep them and take them home to release them into hot grease at a fish fry.

Conservation is important, but so is proper nourishment.

And there's nothing better to eat than fresh fish, especially this time of year. When the fish are fat and healthy from the winter and the water's good and cold, it's the best time to catch fish to eat. If you do keep fish to eat, pay attention to three stages of the process that are important to making the most of your piscatorial platter. It applies to any species of fish you catch.

Many decades ago, a famous French chef said, "In the hands of an able cook, fish can become an inexhaustible source of perpetual

delight." I think that means it's hard to beat a good fish fry, especially if proper care has been taken with the prime ingredient.

COLD IS KEY

The first step to a good fish fry (or whatever preparation you choose) comes when you first catch the fish. Keep your fish alive in cool, fresh water or ice them down. Keeping them cold is the key. Two dollars worth of ice is a good investment to preserve the flavor of your catch.

Second, take time to have a proper cleaning station and handle your fish with the same respect you give a \$30 cut of filet mignon. Keep it clean and keep it cold during and after cleaning. This isn't just an old wives' tale. Keeping fish cold keeps the blood inside their organs. In warmer conditions, the blood spreads throughout their body. The blood in the fish flesh gives them a

strong, fishy taste.

Getting fish cold has an added benefit. A really cold fish is much easier to clean than one that is still flouncing.

If you are eating the fish in the next 24-48 hours, you can keep the cleaned fish in the refrigerator in a covered stainless steel bowl or a sealed plastic freezer bag. For later use, there are several ways to freeze fish. Many people like to freeze them in water, but when you do that, make sure you dry the fish completely after thawing and before cooking.

VACUUM SEALING

Today, a popular way to keep fish tasting fresh is by using a vacuum sealer unit to secure them in an air-tight heavy duty plastic bag. Two tips here: make sure the fish is dry and also it doesn't hurt to double seal the bag, just to ensure you prevent frost burn.

For species with a more "fishy" flavor like catfish, it doesn't hurt to soak them overnight in a bowl of cold water with the juice of one fresh lemon stirred in. The lemon flavor isn't strong and helps

cleanse the meat of some of the wild flavor.

There are just about as many favorite ways to fry fish as there are lures to catch them. The basic fish fry only requires that you season the fish, cover it well with cornmeal or a commercial fish fry mix and cook it in hot oil. Here in Louisiana, we have lots of great seasonings to choose from. Peanut oil is the prime choice for frying. Frying fish at 350 - 375 degrees for 3-4 minutes for quarter pound filets is a good baseline. Thicker fish require a bit longer, but it's easy to overcook fish, so timing is important.

For crispier fish or fish with a thicker coating, dip fish into an egg/milk mixture and then the coating. Some cooks repeat that process for a thick crispy batter. Another way to make fish extra crispy is to coat the fillets with plain mustard, then cover with meal or fish fry. The mustard holds the coating and only gives a faint taste of mustard to the finished fish.

Nothing beats fresh caught fish. Develop your own favorite method and stick with it for consistent results. And remember, the preparation for a good fish fry starts long before you fire up the cooker. ■



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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.

GLYNN HARRIS

**“ZEKE FROM BEAVER CREEK”
STARTED IT ALL FOR THIS WRITER.**

Glynn Harris has always loved to write and spin an outdoor tale or two, all in an effort to spread good news, teach folks something or just get a laugh or two. It didn't come easy at first, but he wouldn't take no for an answer and folks that love the outdoors are sure glad he didn't.

He first discovered his love for writing when he played around with words and phrases to pass a few courses back in college.

“I really didn't know much about my ability to ‘blow smoke’ up the teacher's britches leg, but it must've worked,” Harris recalls of those early days some 50 years ago. “My initial trial balloon came crashing to the ground when I wrote a fictitious account of a deer hunt. It was an amazing piece of work to me, so I sent it to famed outdoor writer Grits Gresham for his suggestions as to which magazine the story should be sent to — Outdoor Life, Field and Stream or Sports Afield. Grits actually took the time to respond and, as gently as he could, informed me I might have a little trouble placing that story. I go back today and look at the story I sent him and I still get a little red-faced that I was so naive as to send it.”

NO RED FACE TODAY

There's nothing to be red-faced about today for Harris, a resident of Vienna near Ruston, unless it's because he's out of breath from doing weekly radio shows, writing newspaper columns or researching features for magazines. Because of his life-long contributions to outdoor communication, Harris was inducted into the Louisiana Chapter Outdoor Legends Hall of Fame in 2021.

While making a living at his day job as a social work administrator in nearby Homer in 1972, he approached the

Guardian Journal newspaper about writing. Again, he got “no” for an answer. But later, the editor decided to give him a try.

“Uncle Zeke” from Beaver Creek was born.

Harris was nervous about people knowing who he was, so he came up with the pen name. He owned a lot on Beaver Creek at Lake Claiborne, so he used that. As he gained confidence, he started using his own name, but today some folks in Homer still call him “Uncle Zeke.”

DEDICATION NEEDED

Glynn does have some important advice he'd like to pass along. “I was blessed with parents who were connected to the outdoors,” he said. “Dad taught us to hunt and fish while mom introduced us to the softer side of the outdoors like song bird identification, lightening bugs, spider webs covered in dew....”



stuff like that. Sadly, there is so much out there for kids that compete for their time and many of those things are just the opposite of what I got to experience.

“It will take serious dedication and resolve on the part of parents to want to introduce their kids to the outdoors. It’s easier to give in and let them plug in, turn on and tune in to the latest gadget. Makes me sad to think that these kids’ offspring will not know or even be interested in the outdoors. Parents....take the time and make the effort to get your youngsters involved in nature’s classroom. It’ll pay dividends for sure.”

Glynn’s work includes weekly outdoor columns appearing in several newspapers; articles in Louisiana Sportsman magazine; Louisiana Game & Fish and he has written for North American Whitetail, BassMaster, Turkey Call, Field and Stream, Outdoor Life and Sports Afield. He penned a book, “Talking Outdoors” and is one of the founders of the Sportsman’s Jamboree in Ruston. He is a long-time member of the National Wild Turkey Federation and an avid turkey hunter that has completed a Wild Turkey Grand Slam. He is a member of the Southeastern Outdoor Press Association (SEOPA) and the Louisiana Outdoor Writer’s Association (LOWA), receiving the group’s Arthur Van Pelt Lifetime Achievement Award. He has more than 50 Excellence in Craft Awards for writing, broadcasting and photography from those groups and served as guest speaker at dozens of wild game banquets. More importantly to him, he is a Christian and Deacon at First Baptist Church in Ruston.

“I want to thank my family, especially my wife Kay, who has stood by me and encouraged me every step of the way in this process of writing and broadcasting stories about our great outdoors,” he said. “Kay and our three daughters and grandchildren have encouraged and supported me as well. I wouldn’t be here without them and I thank them from the bottom of my heart.”

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



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.



“It will take serious dedication and resolve on the part of parents to want to introduce their kids to the outdoors.”

THE TOUGHEST CHALLENGE?

MORELAND GIVES HIS ANSWER ABOUT BUCK DEER VS. TOM TURKEYS

■ By Dave Moreland

I have been richly blessed over the years to have harvested both adult buck deer and adult tom turkeys.

Hunting has always meant adventure for me and the pursuit of a heavy-rack mature buck or trophy longbeard turkey enhances the degree of difficulty to the adventure. I was asked a few years ago which one is the hardest to kill?

No doubt there are many hunters that would choose the adult buck and probably just as many that would choose the adult tom.

There is probably no correct answer, but from my experience one is harder to out-smart than the other.

2021 TURKEY SEASON >





2021 TURKEY SEASON AND "SILENT TOM"

During January of 2021 pictures of a few longbeards and a nice group of hens got me excited. A couple of weeks prior to the 2021 spring season, I observed the group of 13 hens in the camp field with a strutting longbeard. The week before the season photos revealed only two hens but the longbeard was still around.

When the season opened I was out early listening for a gobble. But the woods remained silent for the first week. The woods remained silent during the second week, but I was still getting pictures of the tom in the camp field. During the third week, a hen answered me when I was in the turkey patch, but it came in without a tom. I was out at different times of the day. Being retired one can do that. But I never heard a gobble. I was trying all the different turkey calls I had in my bag of tricks; loud calling, soft calling, aggressive calling, everything! During the start of the last week of the season I saw the tom in the east field one afternoon and the next morning was there bright and early, with a few decoys and what I thought was quality calling.

I was fooling around in the blind and looked up and there was the tom about 60 yards away looking at the set-up. It put its head down and disappeared behind an uncut lane and I began some soft calling. The head came up, still too far for a shot, and then went back down.

After 15 or so minutes I crawled out to the edge of the field and the tom was gone. I discovered it was in the camp field when I walked out.

The next afternoon I hunted the camp field until dark and heard and saw nothing. The next morning I hunted the camp field until 9 a.m. I had to go somewhere and left without seeing



There's no question that gobblers are wary birds, but a good blind setup like this one, a little calling and some patience can usually lead to success against Mr. Longbeard.



or hearing anything. Looking at the camera that afternoon I discovered the tom was there at 11a.m.

Back in the camp field the next morning, I decided not to call at all, but just to sit and wait. At 10 a.m. a squirrel started scolding something in the field, and knowing from experience what that meant, I got the gun up and ready. The tom stepped out of a strip of tall clover and rye grass into an open lane of Mayhaw trees at 40 yards. It was his last mistake. "Silent Tom" was in the bag!

Sure, it wasn't easy, but the end result was turkey hunter 1, longbeard 0.

THE 2020/21 DEER SEASON AND "PEAR BUCK"

During the 2018/19 deer season a really nice buck showed up on my game camera eating pears for two weeks and was never seen again. I aged the buck at 4 ½ years. I never saw any pictures of him during the 2019/20 deer season.

But prior to the 2020/21 deer season, a buck showed up that looked real similar to the "Pear Buck" and if it was that same buck, that would make it a 6 ½-year-old. It was a real mature buck. Unlike the 2018/19 season I kept getting photos of the buck. His regular appearances got my hopes high and my sights were set on bagging it.

The month of November went by and all I had for my efforts were photographs of the buck at night. I wasn't too upset because our rut is basically in December, so there was still plenty of time. In mid-December I went out early one morning and shot a 3 ½-year-old, 6-point that was out feeding early. This buck had been on camera and was with the "Pear B" at night on several occasions. There was still hope. He had to be near.

December gave way to January, the last month of the season. We were into the final stretch. And I was still getting photos of the buck, but only at night. I just knew that my time would

come at the end of the month when the rut was over and the deer would go back to feeding. That's usually what happens, even with the biggest of the bruisers.

He wasn't alone. I had pictures of another adult 6-point and a crooked beam 7-point traveling with the "Pear Buck"

The last week of gun season the 6-point came out one evening with some does, but I did not yield to temptation. The next evening the six was out early and then came old crooked beam. I had aged this deer at 3 ½ years old.

The young crooked beam buck presented me with all kinds of good shots, but I was holding out. I just knew the "Pear Buck" would soon be out.

As shooting time ended I watched crooked beam and the 6-point follow the does into the woods. The "Pear Buck" and its nocturnal schedule had beaten me fair and square.

And that is why my vote is with the adult buck being the most challenging!

I have discovered that if I observe turkeys without disturbing them both prior to and during the season, I can figure out where and when to bag a tom. But when it comes to adult bucks, my best plans and strategies often never work. It probably has something to do with the nocturnal habits of white-tails. If you get a little too close, infringe on their territory and let them see you first — they only come out at night. And sometimes not at all! ■



David Moreland is a former wildlife biologist with LDWF, having served as the State Deer Biologist for 13 years and as Chief of the Wildlife Division for three years. He and his wife Prudy live in Baton Rouge and own property in East Feliciana Parish.

MUDDY PAWS ➤

Hunters often see lots of deer on trail cams at night, but actually getting the big boys out in daylight hours during the season is a challenge, and sometimes it never happens.



Starting out with proper pup training is necessary for your retriever to grow into one of the most pleasurable parts of your hunting experience.



THE QUESTION FOR NEW PUP OWNERS:

SHOULD YOU TRAIN YOUR OWN DOG OR USE A PROFESSIONAL TRAINER?

You did your homework and found the perfect pup. Now what? That's a really big "what" and I'll admit it can be a little overwhelming. You and your dog have a long journey ahead, from the little fur ball you have now to the experienced and capable dog you want as the end result. Now the work begins!

In terms of training your pup to reach that level, you really only have a couple of options: training the dog yourself or sending the dog to a professional trainer. We'll take a look at both. No matter which way you go, expect these results with your dog at a minimum:

- Steadiness, meaning it won't break at gunfire (it only goes when told).
- Marking multiple downed birds and remembering their locations to pick them up.

- Handling via voice, whistle and hand signals to a bird that the dog did not see fall (a "blind retrieve" where all that training pays off).

- Honoring another dog who may be hunting with yours.

- Good temperament and disposition around other hunters and dogs; generally, a pleasure to hunt with.

If you're considering training your dog yourself, let me share a little of my experience. My first one was with a book, "Water Dog" by Richard Wolters 25 years ago. I go back to it today. It worked for me. That book is 60+ years old and technology has changed the landscape, but the basics are still the same. In today's digital age, there is a wealth of info such as videos, subscriptions and such online. Soak up all you can and if you pick a subscription, for example, stick with that

one as methods may differ between the trainers publishing them.

Luckily, Louisiana has retriever clubs across the state that can be found on the American Kennel Club (AKC) and United Kennel Club (UKC) websites. Check into them and trust me on this, you'll meet lots of great folks with tons of experience eager to help. I'm a member of the Amite River Hunting Retriever Club near Baton Rouge. I've gotten to know some incredible pro and amateur trainers who've helped me immensely. The clubs hold seminars and training days outside



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

of duck season geared to all experience levels of dogs and handlers alike. You'll learn more than you imagined from some great people and have lots of fun. These clubs also train for, and hold tests.

If training your dog yourself sounds like a little too much, and believe me, I get it, the other option is to send your pup to a professional. Louisiana has many great trainers, so finding one will be easy. Start with your hunting circles and social media. From there, reach out to the trainers mentioned. Ask for references and ask questions such as how long they've been in business, how many dogs they are training at a time, who will be training your dog (assistants) and costs. Once you've narrowed down your choices, meet them at their facilities and have them work dogs currently in training.

Pay attention to the kennels and grounds. They should be clean, safe and in good condition. All dogs should be healthy and in good shape. Once satisfied, discuss what you want out of your dog, agree on price, duration of training as well as anything not covered, like vet bills and medications. If all goes to plan, you should have a good feeling about the trainer you choose. It's a serious decision with long lasting implications, so leave no doubt.

So what should a trainer expect from you? Steve Riggins is owner of Bear Creek On The Bayou Retrievers in Slaughter. He was kind enough to share his insights.

"Formal training starts at five to six months of age when the adult teeth are set," he said. "If the trainer offers a puppy program, seriously consider it. Puppies start it at 14-16 weeks and will be introduced to bumpers, live birds, gunfire, shallow water, socialization. It builds trust with the trainer and sets a solid foundation for starting formal training."

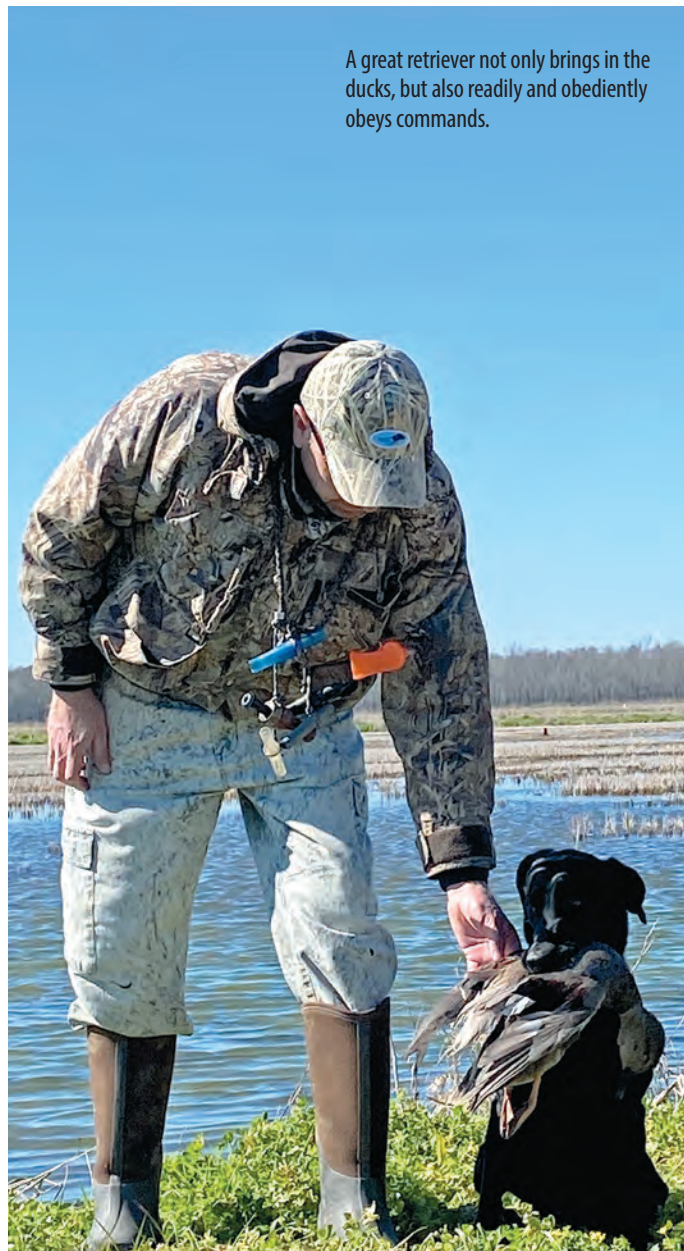
He also offered a few tips you and your pup can start on from 7-14 weeks before going to a trainer, or if you choose the DIY route:

- Acclimate the pup to its new home: housebreaking, kenneling, boundaries and learning that you're the boss.
- Teach basic obedience such as sit, here and holding eye contact.
- Introduce the pup to wings/feathers, and if you can find some, live clipped pigeons. This builds prey drive.
- Practice short, easy retrieves with a small bumper. Make it fun. Worry about "stay" later. Quit while the pup is still excited. They wear out quickly, so too much turns into work.
- Take the pup anywhere you can. It builds confidence and trust and gets them used to traveling and being in different environments.

This is a marathon, not a sprint, so at first, let the pup settle in and bond with you. Keep it fun in this early stage, and then they'll be ready to "go to work!" ■

Steve Riggins can be reached at 225-324-6948 and on Facebook.

HOW SPORTSMEN COOK ➤



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Nathan Justice

RABBIT AND JALAPENO CORNBREAD DUMPLINGS

SMALL GAME HARVEST PROVIDES
BIG TASTE IN THE KITCHEN

Small game hunting is the best way to introduce kids or someone new to hunting and the great outdoors. It is faster paced than deer hunting and you don't have to sit still like you do for waterfowl hunting.

Putting miles on your boots, small game hunting will make you an overall better hunter because you are likely to find new game trails, bedding areas, scrapes, rubs, or new flooded areas to hunt wood ducks, to name a few. An added bonus of being in the woods during small game season is finding wild mushrooms. Oyster and lion's mane mushrooms can be found clinging to the same trees that are hiding the small game you're after.

Rabbit and squirrel meat have a clean mild flavor, can be used in a multitude of dishes, and are great game meat to introduce to the picky eater. So bust out your Dutch oven and take on this dumpling with cornbread twist recipe.



PREPARATION: Serves 4

1. Preheat oven to 325°F.
2. For the dumplings, place the flour, cornmeal, baking powder, sugar, and salt into a mixing bowl and whisk until combined.
3. Add the melted butter, milk, and diced jalapenos to the flour mixture and whisk until the dumpling batter is smooth.
4. Wrap the mixing bowl in plastic wrap and refrigerate until needed. The mixture will thicken as the flour becomes hydrated.
5. For the shredded rabbit meat, quarter the rabbits and season with salt, pepper, cayenne, dried thyme. Sprinkle with flour after it is seasoned.
6. Sear the quartered rabbits in the olive oil. Then, pour in the stock and roast in the oven at 325°F for 1 to 1.5 hours or until the rabbit is tender.
7. Remove the rabbit from the oven and let cool.
8. Reserve the stock for the rabbit and dumplings. Once cool, debone and shred the rabbit meat (2 rabbits or 6 squirrels should yield 2-3 cups of cooked meat).
9. For the Rabbit Soup, mince the red onions, bell peppers, carrots, celery, fennel, and garlic into 1/8-inch or smaller size pieces. Add the butter and flour to a Dutch oven and stir

continuously to make a peanut butter colored roux (8-12 minutes). Add the minced veggies to the Dutch oven and cook until tender and translucent (5-10 minutes) at medium to high heat. (Adding the veggies to the roux will cool down the roux and prevent it from burning.)

10. Add the stock, roasted rabbit, parsley, thyme and heavy whipping cream to the Dutch oven. Simmer for 15 minutes until thickened. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

11. Use a large cookie scoop and drop the dumplings into the Dutch oven making sure they don't touch. Place the lid on the Dutch oven and place on low heat for 15-20 minutes until the dumplings rise and they're cooked through.

12. Serve piping hot and enjoy.



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



INGREDIENTS:

Jalapeno Cornbread Dumplings:

- 1 ¼ Cup Flour
- ¾ Cup Cornmeal
- 2 Teaspoons Baking Powder
- 1 Teaspoon Sugar
- ½ Teaspoon Salt
- 2 Tablespoons Melted Butter
- 1 Cup Milk
- 1/8 Cup Diced Pickled Jalapenos

Shredded Rabbit or Squirrel Meat:

- 2 Rabbits or 6 Squirrels
- 1/8 Cup Flour
- ½ Teaspoon Salt
- ½ Teaspoon Pepper
- ¼ Teaspoon Dried Thyme
- ¼ Teaspoon Cayenne Pepper
- 2 Tablespoons Olive Oil
- 1 Quart Stock (Chicken, Beef, or Vegetable)

Rabbit or Squirrel Soup:

- 2-3 Cups Shredded Rabbit or Squirrel Meat
- 1/8 Cup Flour
- 1/8 Cup Butter
- 1 Cup Red Onion
- 1 Cup Bell Pepper
- ½ Cup Carrot
- ½ Cup Celery
- ½ Cup Fennel
- 6 Cloves Roasted Garlic or 2 Tablespoons Minced Garlic
- 1 Quart Stock
- ½ Pint Heavy Whipping Cream
- 2 Tablespoons Parsley
- 1 Teaspoon Thyme
- Salt and Pepper to Taste



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

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

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

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

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

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The 2022 PrimeTimes Wall Calendar. \$13.95 (plus \$4 s&h). Know the best days, best times, and their relative strengths for all of 2022 with this information-packed, full-color, 11-inch by 17-inch, graphic peaks

and-valleys forecaster. Includes rise and set times for the sun and moon, space to log your catches, "Timely Tips," plus fish and game symbols showing you each month's don't-miss periods. Also includes exclusive summary charts revealing the best and worst days of 2022, the year's best periods, a look ahead at 2023, and more. Comes with FREE 2022 Astro Tables pocket calendar, which sells separately for \$8.95, plus \$3 s&h.

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

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BEST DAYS					
2022	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCEL	VALUE
MAR					
Tue 1	██	██	██	██	58
Wed 2	██	██	██	██	66
Thu 3	██	██	██	██	58
Fri 4	██	██	██	██	50
Sat 5	██	██	██	██	42
Sun 6	██	██	██	██	39
Mon 7	██	██	██	██	41
Tue 8	██	██	██	██	42
Wed 9	██	██	██	██	48
Thu 10	██	██	██	██	58
Fri 11	██	██	██	██	48
Sat 12	██	██	██	██	44
Sun 13	██	██	██	██	44
Mon 14	██	██	██	██	43
Tue 15	██	██	██	██	52
Wed 16	██	██	██	██	61
Thu 17	██	██	██	██	72
Fri 18	██	██	██	██	75
Sat 19	██	██	██	██	63
Sun 20	██	██	██	██	50
Mon 21	██	██	██	██	38
Tue 22	██	██	██	██	32
Wed 23	██	██	██	██	31
Thu 24	██	██	██	██	34
Fri 25	██	██	██	██	43
Sat 26	██	██	██	██	32
Sun 27	██	██	██	██	29
Mon 28	██	██	██	██	28
Tue 29	██	██	██	██	40
Wed 30	██	██	██	██	52
Thu 31	██	██	██	██	65

25 50 75
AVERAGE

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LUNAR PERIODS					
TIMES OCCURRING AT NIGHT ARE SHADED					
MOON RISE	PRIMARY MOON OVERHEAD	MOON SET	PRIMARY MOON UNDERFOOT		
6:24 am	11:04 am - 12:20 pm ☀	5:08 pm	11:29 pm - Midnight	☾	☾
6:59 am	11:45 am - 1:21 pm ☀	6:16 pm	Midnight - 12:45 am	☾	☾ New
7:30 am	12:23 pm - 2:19 pm ☀	7:21 pm	12:10 am - 1:46 am	☾	☾
7:58 am	12:59 pm - 3:15 pm	8:24 pm	12:48 am - 2:44 am	☾	☾
8:25 am	1:33 pm - 4:09 pm	9:26 pm	1:24 am - 3:40 am	☾	☾
8:52 am	2:07 pm - 5:03 pm	10:26 pm	1:58 am - 4:34 am	☾	☾
9:21 am	2:43 pm - 5:55 pm	11:26 pm	2:32 am - 5:28 am	☾	☾
9:53 am	3:22 pm - 6:48 pm		3:08 am - 6:20 am	☾	☾
10:29 am	4:05 pm - 7:41 pm ☀	12:25 am	3:47 am - 7:13 am	☾	☾
11:09 am	4:52 pm - 8:34 pm ☀	1:23 am	4:30 am - 7:16 am	☾	☾ High
11:56 am	5:42 pm - 9:24 pm	2:19 am	5:17 am - 8:59 am ☀	☾	☾ High
12:48 pm	6:33 pm - 10:15 pm	3:11 am	6:07 am - 9:49 am	☾	☾
2:46 pm	8:29 pm - 12:01 am	4:57 am	6:58 am - 10:40 am	☾	☾ Begin DST
3:46 pm	9:23 pm - 12:45 am	5:39 am	8:54 am - 12:26 pm	☾	☾
4:48 pm	10:17 pm - 1:27 am	6:15 am	9:48 am - 1:10 pm	☾	☾
5:52 pm	11:14 pm - Midnight	6:48 am	10:42 am - 1:52 pm	☾	☾
6:55 pm	Midnight - 2:04 am	7:18 am	11:39 am - 2:29 pm	☾	☾
8:00 pm	12:10 am - 2:40 am	7:46 am	12:35 pm - 3:05 pm ☀	☾	☾ Full
9:05 pm	1:07 am - 3:15 am	8:14 am	1:32 pm - 3:40 pm	☾	☾
10:13 pm	2:06 am - 3:52 am	8:44 am	2:31 pm - 4:17 pm	☾	☾ Spring
11:23 pm	3:05 am - 4:31 am	9:16 am	3:30 pm - 4:56 pm	☾	☾
12:48 am	4:07 am - 5:15 am	9:53 am	4:32 pm - 5:40 pm	☾	☾
1:44 am	5:10 am - 6:06 am	10:36 am	5:35 pm - 6:31 pm	☾	☾ Perigee
2:51 am	6:14 am - 7:00 am ☀	11:28 am	6:39 pm - 7:25 pm ☀	☾	☾ Low
3:50 am	7:18 am - 8:00 am ☀	12:27 pm	7:43 pm - 8:25 pm ☀	☾	☾ Half
4:40 am	8:17 am - 9:03 am	1:34 pm	8:42 pm - 9:28 pm	☾	☾
4:40 am	9:11 am - 10:07 am	2:43 pm	9:36 pm - 10:32 pm	☾	☾
5:23 am	10:00 am - 11:08 am	3:53 pm	10:25 pm - 11:33 pm	☾	☾
5:58 am	10:43 am - 12:09 pm	5:01 pm	11:08 pm - 12:34 am	☾	☾
6:29 am	11:21 am - 1:07 pm	6:06 pm	11:46 pm - Midnight	☾	☾
6:58 am	11:56 am - 2:02 pm	7:09 pm	Midnight - 1:32 am	☾	☾

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

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

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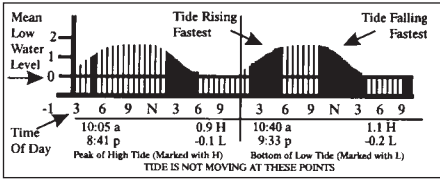
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How to use the **SPORTSMAN** Tide Guide



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

Tide Corrections

	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	1	2	NM	3	4	5	
	6	7	8	9	10	FQ	11
	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	26	27	28	29	30	31	

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Calcasieu Pass Lighthouse Wharf	1	2	NM	3	4	5	
	6	7	8	9	10	FQ	11
	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	26	27	28	29	30	31	



GOT PHOTOS? WE WANT 'EM

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



Pierce Fry

Pierce Fry, 13, of Central, killed his first trophy buck in West Feliciana Parish.



John Luke & Jack

Cousins John Luke Lauve and Jack Lauve with a red caught fishing Lake Pelto out of Cocodrie back in July 2020.



Brandt "Trey" Dufrene III

Brandt "Trey" Dufrene, III killed this 8-point buck in Amite on Jan. 30, 2022.



Kayden Goudeau

Kayden Goudeau of Denham Springs had just turned 11 years old when she killed her first ever hog in Norwood on Nov. 14, 2020. The hog was estimated to be about 350+ pounds. Kayden blood trailed the hog herself and found it about 40 minutes after shooting it.



Jake Fowler

Jake Fowler sizing up a bull red caught in Grand Isle.



Tate Buquoi

Tate Buquoi caught this redfish in Delacroix on Oct. 3, 2020.



Eloise Bourgeois

Eloise Bourgeois harvested her first deer on Jan. 17, 2022 while hunting with her Pop, Ricky Naquin, in Walthall County, Miss. The 10-point buck had a 20-inch spread and weighed 175 pounds. Eloise placed a perfect shot on the deer at about 50 yards.



Caroline Russo

Caroline Russo had a great day nailing reds in Delacroix.



HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK



Jerry Driskill

Jerry Driskill with a Caddo Lake lunker caught using a Whopper Plopper.



Jackie Hay

Jackie Hay harvested this palmated deer on Dec. 20 while it was chasing does on private land in East Feliciana Parish.



Ali Martin

Ali Martin of Minden was 15 when she took these ducks on Nov. 14, 2020 at Bayou Dorcheat.



Dustin Armand

Dustin Armand harvested this 12-point buck Jan. 15, 2022 on private property in Avoyelles Parish. This beauty had an approximate gross score of 140 3/4 and weighed in at about 190 pounds.

Noah Landry



Noah Landry, 12, harvested his first deer on Oct. 30 in St. Mary Parish.



Bellamy Sylvester

Bellamy Sylvester went looking for catfish on Nov. 14, 2020. After not having much luck for most of the day, he pulled in a young sturgeon from the Mississippi River down in Sunshine. He took a couple photos and released it.

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HUNTING/FISHING SCRAPBOOK



Casey Forshag

Casey Forshag caught this beautiful 28-inch redfish with a radiant orange color and blue tail on fly off the Intracoastal Waterway on April 8. He stuck a tag in the red for someone else to enjoy its beauty.



Connor Wallace

Connor Wallace was 11 when he caught this 7.1-pound bass at a neighborhood pond in Picayune, Miss., on Oct. 15, 2020.



Nicholas Tarver

Nicholas Tarver took his first deer, a doe, on Nov. 21, 2020, the opening day in East Feliciana Parish.



Rachel Henry

Rachel Henry took her first deer with her .308 while hunting in Clinton with her dad, Keith, and brother, Reid.

GOT PHOTOS? WE WANT 'EM

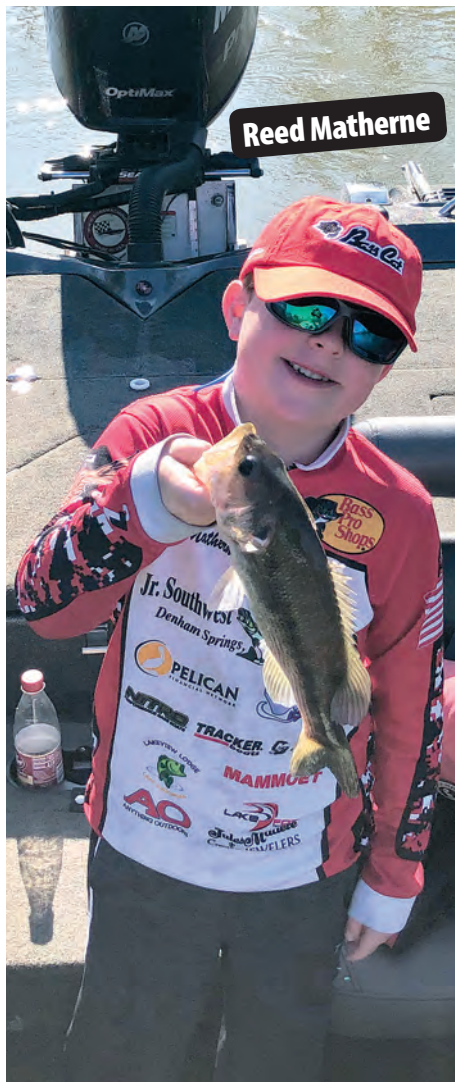
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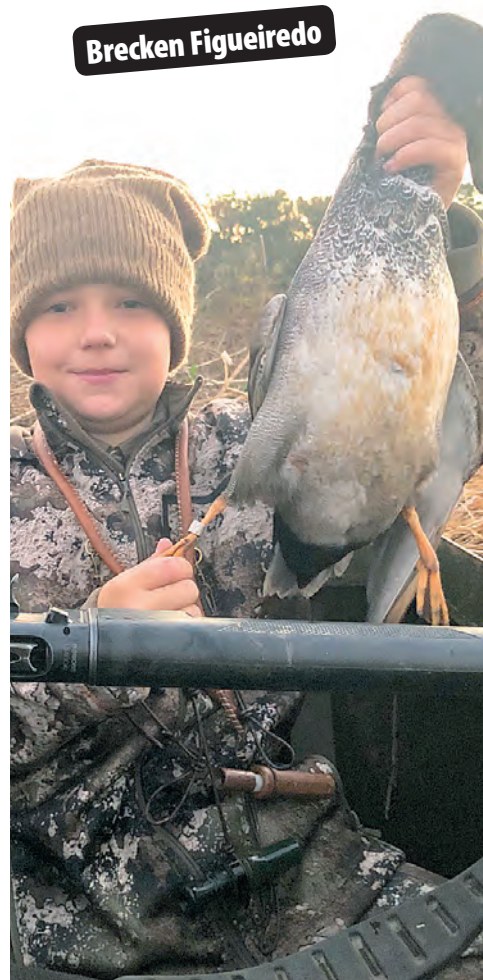
Keith & Tabby Bauer

Keith and Tabby Bauer had a great time fishing in Shell Beach.



Reed Matherne

Reed Matherne working on a limit in the Jr. Southwest Bassmasters of Denham Springs club tourney held out of Belle River Public.



Brecken Figueiredo

Brecken Figueiredo killed his first banded duck in Whiteville on Nov. 23, 2020.

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AH, SPRING! WHEN A YOUNG MAN'S FANCY TURNS TO MORE THAN LOVE

Ah, spring, and a young man's fancy turns to — what else? — *fishing!*

Thought it was gonna be “love” didn't you!

Ha!

And when it comes to fishing, a young man's next fancy turns to buying a boat. It's the next natural step, right?

Next come the headaches, the certain uneasiness with their significant other about the expense and the always inevitable question — What's next?

For the experienced, the veteran boat-owning angler, these new entries into the world of fishing and boat ownership often present a problem at launches and on the water.

See, it goes like this: a guy goes fishing with a buddy maybe two or three times a year, or he's been on a charter trip a couple of times in the last two summers.

He's caught fish, brought them home

and provided a wholesome fish dinner for his wife and family.

That's great, but that's about the time when he deep-into-his-soul believes he's ready to own a boat and provide even more days of enjoyment on the water, and provide more of those wonderful meals.

Understand, too, the annual run between February and late April is the boat-buying season, a time when dealers across the country run specials so solid as to entice the no-boat guy into that first I-finally-have-a-boat venture.

The next step, after signing all those papers, hitching that new prize to the tow and finding out how how much gas and oil his new water chariot sucks from his paycheck, he's ready. Or so he thinks.

He knows where he's going. His first trip produces five fish.

And the second trip yields two barely-long-enough keepers.

Back home, the wife asks the inevitable

question, “Where are all those fish you were supposed to catch in YOUR new boat?” Uh, oh.

His next trip is a little better. Six keepers barely enough for supper and the wife fixes on the next question, “How are you gonna fill that new freezer to hold all those fish you were gonna catch? Guess I better find chicken, pork chops and a couple of rump roasts to put in it just so those five fish don't get lonely.”

The pressure is on. That's what sets up on-the-water confrontation.

The newbie just can't go home empty handed again. When he and his buddy have failed to produce on their first two stops, they see a guy anchored and the



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.

three guys a hundred yards away are hauling in speckled trout on darned near every cast — and, it looks like they just released a couple of keepers.

So, the slow water creep begins, yard by yard, to a spot the rookies know will put them smack-dab on top of the mother lode the guys in the other boat are mining.

Then it happens, the shot across the bow. If you've done this long enough, you've had one of these guys cast a line over your in-the-water lines, and the ensuing tangle begins a war of words the likes of which would curdle milk, even make a sailor blush.

There have been times when, in cooler moments, one would tell an intruder to wait five minutes and they could have the spot. There have been times one would be offering these guys the same lures.

It happens in freshwater, too, mostly on sac-a-lait trips (crappie or white perch for non-South Louisiana folks) — on more than one occasion, and usually fishing well behind another boat, on a brushtop or other structure the boat ahead has passed up.

The guy couldn't help notice one slab after another coming into the boat — shutting the ice chest lid was the giveaway — and within minutes the guy's inching up to the same spot. Worse still, he washed the spot with his trolling motor. And the bite stopped! Not good.

Now that we're coming up on the best fishing there is in most places in our country, novice fishermen need to understand there are enough resources to elevate their game and get them off the hot seat at home. The best advice: be patient.

Use the Internet. There are enough books on most any fishing subject and most every species they want to target. Time spent off the water with veteran fishermen is a big help. Most will share their knowledge. Get on a Facebook page dedicated to a particular angling group. Ask questions.

One reason you often don't see real-time reports in newspapers and magazines these days is because the information is posted on websites and Facebook daily.

It's also time to make sure your boat is ready and to make sure your equipment is ready when it becomes time to strike when the iron is hot.

Boats of various lengths have different equipment legal requirements. There's always the need for serviceable life jackets and a throwable device on all boats. And please, make sure the occupants in your boat wear them when underway.

And, remember, you need a Safe Boating Course Certificate to operate a boat or personal watercraft with an engine larger than 10 horsepower in Louisiana.

Happy fishing! ■



The advertisement features a row of five Louisiana Sportsman magazine covers at the top. The covers show various fishing scenes and headlines like 'FRESHWATER REST SAC-A-LAIT', 'GET READY FOR BASS', 'BULL'S-EYE BREAM', 'SPECKLED TROUT', and 'BIG BASS HANGOUTS'. Below the covers, the text 'Louisiana SPORTSMAN' is written in a stylized font. The main headline 'BACK ISSUES' is in large, bold, white letters. A red call-to-action box contains the text 'LIMITED QUANTITIES WHEN THEY'RE GONE, THEY'RE GONE!'. At the bottom, the website 'shop.sportsmannetwork.com/collections/louisiana-sportsman' is listed.

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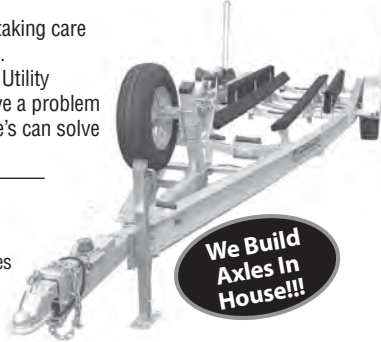
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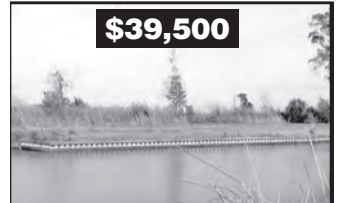


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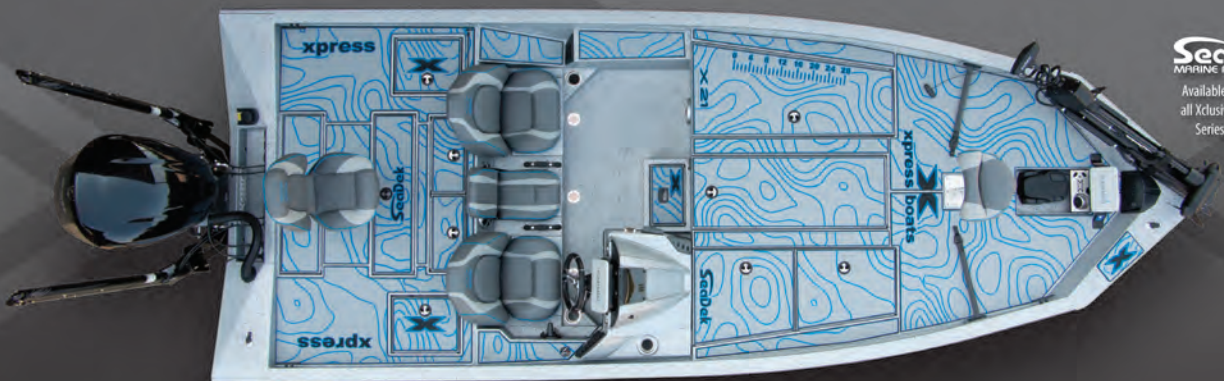
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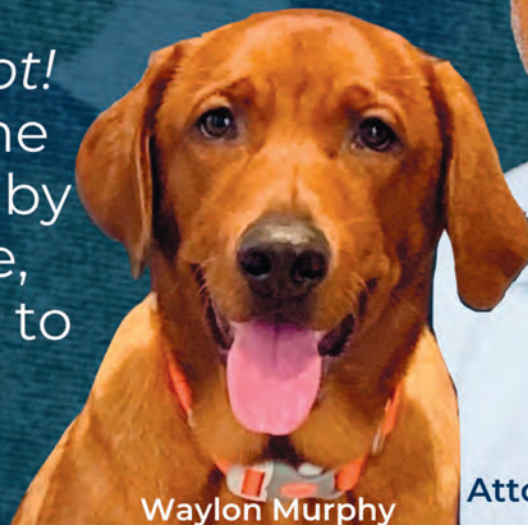
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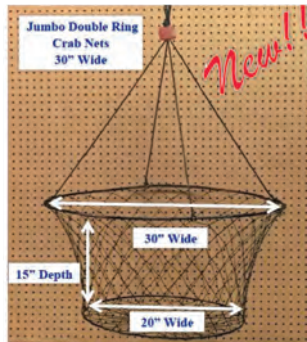
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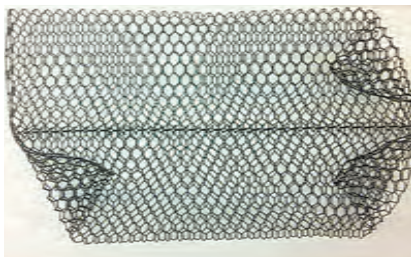
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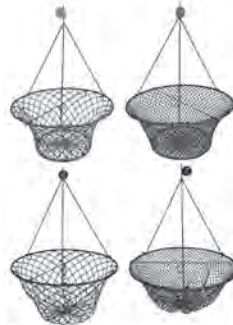
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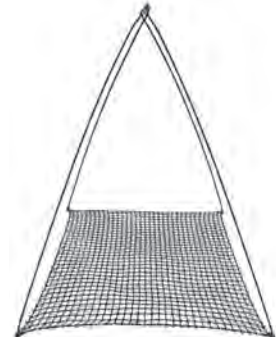
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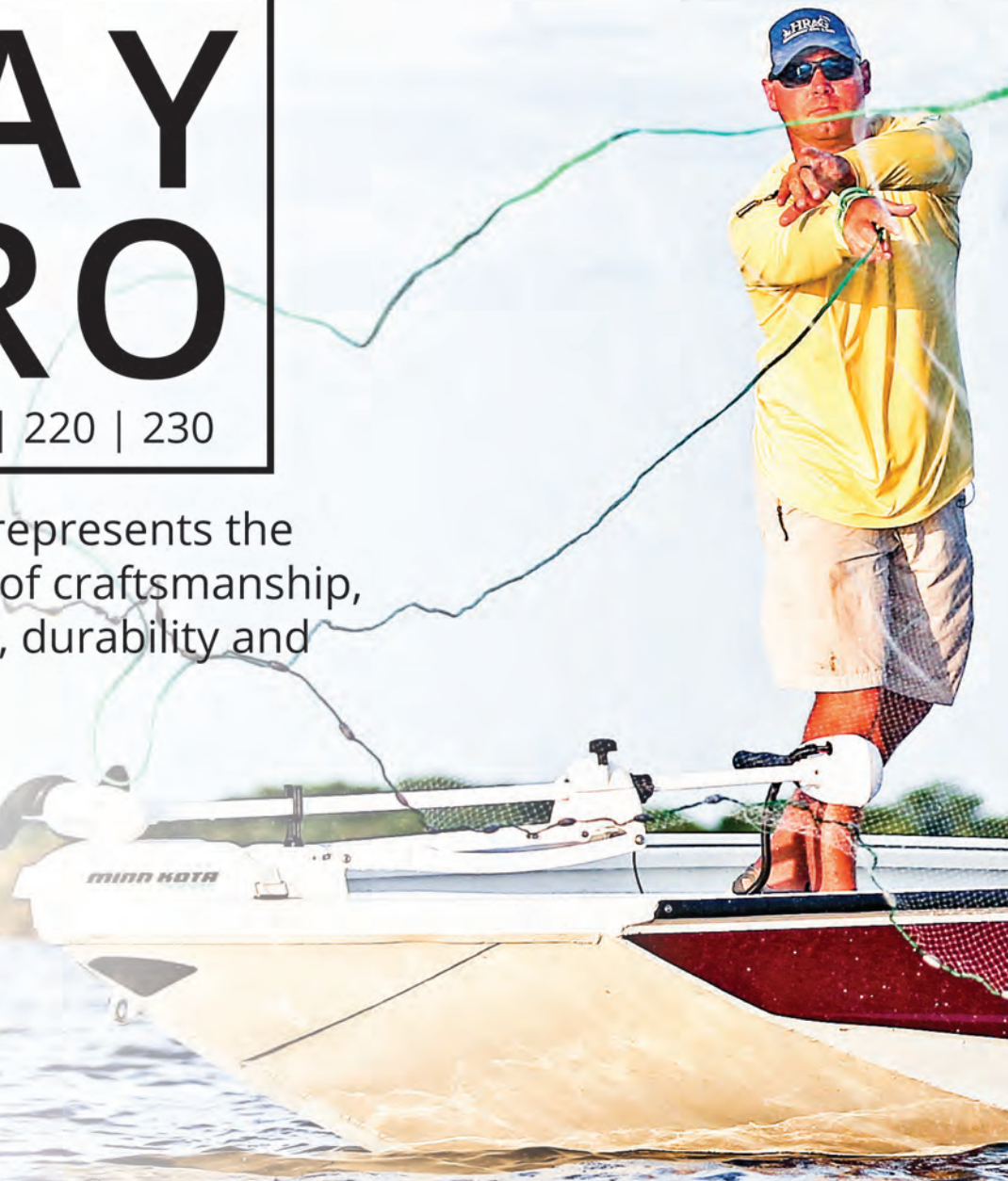
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